



Cemex & RSPB Partnership Blog September 2026



Welcome to the September 2026 edition of **Earthly Matters**, the blog dedicated to the partnership between Cemex and the RSPB.



Partnership Update

By Carl Cornish

RSPB Senior Business Conservation Adviser

In last month's blog I mentioned Berkswell Marsh SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), which is adjacent to Cemex's Berkswell Quarry. My RSPB colleague Alistair Smith, Team Leader for Ecology and Land Management, returned in early September. This time, he was operating a Softrak machine to cut and collect the fen and marsh vegetation. The Softrak is a specialist piece of equipment: an ultra-low-ground-pressure tracked vehicle designed for use in wet and sensitive habitats, reducing soil compaction and damage. A front-mounted cutter cuts the vegetation, which is then conveyed to a hopper and tipped out for removal.

Cutting and removing the tall vegetation helps to reduce competition and shading for lower-growing plants, while also preventing a build-up of

dead plant matter. The work is carried out in late summer or autumn, allowing plants to set seed and avoiding the bird breeding season.

The cut material has been taken off-site for composting. Thank you to Paul Holland, Quarry Manager, and his team for their help and support.

I attended the RSPB's Reserves and Protected Landscapes Conference in Nottingham with colleagues from the Business Conservation Advice team. We ran a workshop on working with stakeholders and enhancing sites for wildlife. The aim was to raise the profile of our work among colleagues who manage RSPB sites and to highlight the similarities and differences between our respective roles.



Photo by Carl Cornish.

Image left: Softrak in action cutting and collecting fen vegetation at Berkswell Marsh SSSI.

Action for Nature

Give Wildlife a helping hand this Autumn



As summer comes to an end, many species are preparing for the challenges of winter. Birds are searching for seeds and berries, hedgehogs are building up energy reserves, and insects are looking for sheltered places to spend the colder months.

This month, why not leave a small area of your garden or outdoor space a little wilder? Seed heads provide food for birds, while fallen leaves create valuable habitat for insects and other wildlife. These simple actions can make a big difference and help nature thrive through the winter ahead.

If you spot interesting wildlife as the seasons change, we'd love to hear about it and see your photos.

Focus on Fens

Fens are wetlands where the ground is permanently or seasonally waterlogged. They are usually fed by groundwater or streams and can support a rich mixture of reeds, sedges, rushes, grasses and wildflowers. Some fens occur alongside rivers and lakes, while others form on peat soils.

Fens are extremely important for wildlife. Their combination of shallow water, wet vegetation and open areas provides food, shelter and breeding sites for a huge variety of insects, plants, fish and birds. Particularly special species include the crane, fen raft spider, swallowtail butterfly and fen orchid. Wetland birds such as snipe, lapwing and redshank also depend on suitable fen and wetland habitats. Some fen sites support species found in very few other places in Britain.

A large area spanning Cambridgeshire, South Lincolnshire and West Norfolk was once covered by a vast tract of wetlands and is still known as the Fens. Sadly, most of the UK's original fenland has been lost. Drainage for farming, peat extraction, development and changes in water management have reduced these once-extensive wetlands to isolated fragments. Less than one per cent of the original fen habitat now survives in the Fens.

Protecting the remaining fens is therefore vital and requires active management, as unmanaged fens would eventually become overgrown with scrub and develop into woodland. Grazing by cattle or ponies and carefully timed cutting help to prevent shrubs and trees from taking over, while established scrub may need to be removed. Management also includes maintaining the water supply, monitoring water quality and controlling invasive plants such as Himalayan balsam.

New wetlands containing fen habitat can be created through mineral extraction in areas where the soils and hydrology are suitable, helping to restore fens across the landscape. Creating new areas and improving the management of existing ones have helped the crane, a bird once extinct in the UK, to return and breed again.



Image above: Crane with chick at Willow Tree Fen, Lincolnshire.
Photo: Carl Cornish.

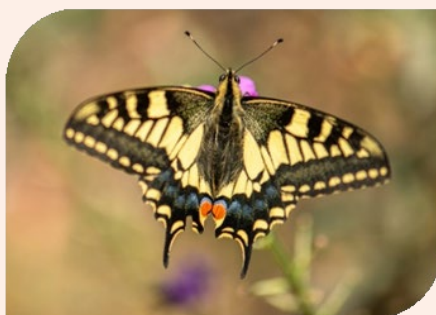


Image above: Swallowtail butterfly at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen in the Norfolk Broads. © Ben Andrew, RSPB.

One to Watch

The second series of *Sam and Ade Go Birding* returns to Channel 5 on 1 October at 7pm. Actor Samuel West, an RSPB Ambassador and seasoned birdwatcher, teams up with actor and comedian Adrian Edmondson, a novice birdwatcher. Together, they visit excellent birdwatching sites, including the RSPB reserves at Bempton Cliffs on the Yorkshire coast and Ynys-hir in West Wales. Expect spectacular scenery, footage of birds and musings on birdwatching and life.



Contact Carl

If you would like advice or a visit from Carl Cornish, our RSPB Senior Business Conservation Adviser for the Cemex Partnership, please get in touch: carl.cornish@rspb.org.uk

Send us your stories and photos

We are looking for staff stories to include in upcoming blogs, these can be experiences from work or home. We would love to share them in an upcoming blog.

Send them in to: gb-communicationsandpublicaffairs@cemex.com