

GENERAL / POLICY

- **The abolition of set-aside** last winter 2007/8 could have negative impacts on the breeding population trends of many farmland birds. Introduced in 1988 by the EU as a production-control measure, since 1994 it has accounted for on average 10% of arable land. A wealth of evidence suggests it has had benefits for farmland biodiversity as it provides valuable foraging and nesting habitat. A number of suitable options are available under current Environmental Stewardship but there are concerns that these will not be sufficient to compensate for set-aside loss. To address the issue farmers in the UK receiving EU subsidies will now be required (under cross-compliance measures) to dedicate a small fraction of their land (4-6%) to wildlife friendly habitats. This small area, if managed to be 'high quality' for wildlife, could provide a key resource (p50).
- **Front gardens and paving** - from Oct 1st 2008 planning permission will be needed to pave over more than 5m² of domestic front garden; permeable surfacing must be used (p65). LBAP concern over loss of gardens remains however! See www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pavingfrontgardens.
- **Environmental assessment update** – following a landmark ruling in 2006 it was found that the UK was in breach of EU environment assessment law because it did not require EIA at all stages of a planning application. Now consideration must be given to those requesting an EIA during all stages, from outline to reserved matters and conditions (p66).
- **Electronic smog** – research suggests that electrical fields from mobile phones and power lines are overwhelming the natural background of electro-magnetic fields and disrupting the navigation of birds and bees. It could be responsible for colony collapse disorder in bees and the decline of the house sparrow (p66).
- **River-basin planning and restoration programmes** - EA staff are studying how the requirements of the *Water Framework Directive* can be met, particularly the need to set *Biological Objectives*. A general objective of the WFD is to achieve 'good status' for all surface waters by 2015 but where disproportionately costly, e.g. some urban watercourses, no deterioration in quality will be acceptable. A programme for each River Basin District must be developed as part of River Basin Plans, due in draft form by the end of 2008 (p70).

CLIMATE CHANGE

- **How will land be used in the future?** – the findings of the Government's Foresight programme on climatic, demographic and global economic changes are due in January 2010 (p69). See www.foresight.gov.uk
- **Nitrogenous zones** – areas of England designated as Nitrate Vulnerable Zones were increased in September and now cover 70% of the country. The changes come into force in January 2009 but farmers will be given up to 3 years to adjust their farming practices and invest in storage facilities for organic manures (p69).

SPECIES

- **The Database of British Insects and their Foodplants** – RM Smith and DB Roy 'open a window on the wealth of bonds forged between the worlds of insects and plants' and introduce a new web-based resource (p17-25). See www.brc.ac.uk/dbif.
- **Whirligigs in Britain and Ireland** – G Foster describes this ancient beetle group, famous for collecting in rafts and moving very fast thanks to a surfactant on their exoskeleton. They can achieve a top speed of 6cm/sec, the middle and hind legs working like a paddle steamer wheel! (p28-35).
- **Dragonflies (New Naturalist 106)** by PS Corbet and SJ Brooks (2008) – a synthesis of the new thinking about dragonfly biology. An academic style of text but recommended as a rewarding and inspirational read (p72).
- **Identifying Ferns** - we have relatively few species in the British Isles so the *Fern Guide (Aidgap series 2007)* by J Merryweather should make you an expert, particularly if you buy his DVD *British Ferns* as well (£15 from www.UKferns.org.uk) A cheaper laminated key is from the Field Studies Council for £2.75 (p73).
- **Butterflies' response to this year's weather** – *Small Tortoiseshell* numbers remain reduced for the second year, *Wall* shows no sign of recovery in southern counties and immigration of *Painted Lady* did not happen (p53).
- **Birds** – the latest results from the RSPB Breeding Birds Survey put woodland birds at the top of the list of declining species, with those with the most specialist habitat requirements showing the most dramatic declines - *willow tit*, *spotted flycatcher*, *wood warbler* and *pie flycatcher* - due not to loss of habitat but to changes in tree composition and age structure of our woods. Species showing the biggest increases are *stonechat*, *nuthatch* and *buzzard* (p48-49).
- **Rare sightings** – visit the Rare Breeding Birds Panel website at www.rbbp.org.uk to find out about the family of *spoonbills* (p52). In Warwickshire for the first time we have had a *golden-ringed dragonfly* (p52) and the *large hoverfly Volucella zonaria* (p57). An adder found swallowing a yellowhammer chick! (photograph p51).
- **Controlling wetland invaders** – so far 2 foreign insect species have passed safety testing for control of their host *Japanese Knotweed* while *Water Fern* can be eradicated by introduction of a native species of weevil (p67). See www.cabi-bioscience.org and www.t-c-m-rd.co.uk/invasive-weeds/

HABITATS

- **Sustainable habitat management – composting for conservation** – a booklet by the RSPB to solve the problem of the disposal of arisings from maintenance or restoration work gives instructions for producing soil conditioner from reed, rush and grass cuttings (p26). From the Advisory Coordinator at The Lodge, email: Conservation-advice@rspb.org.uk