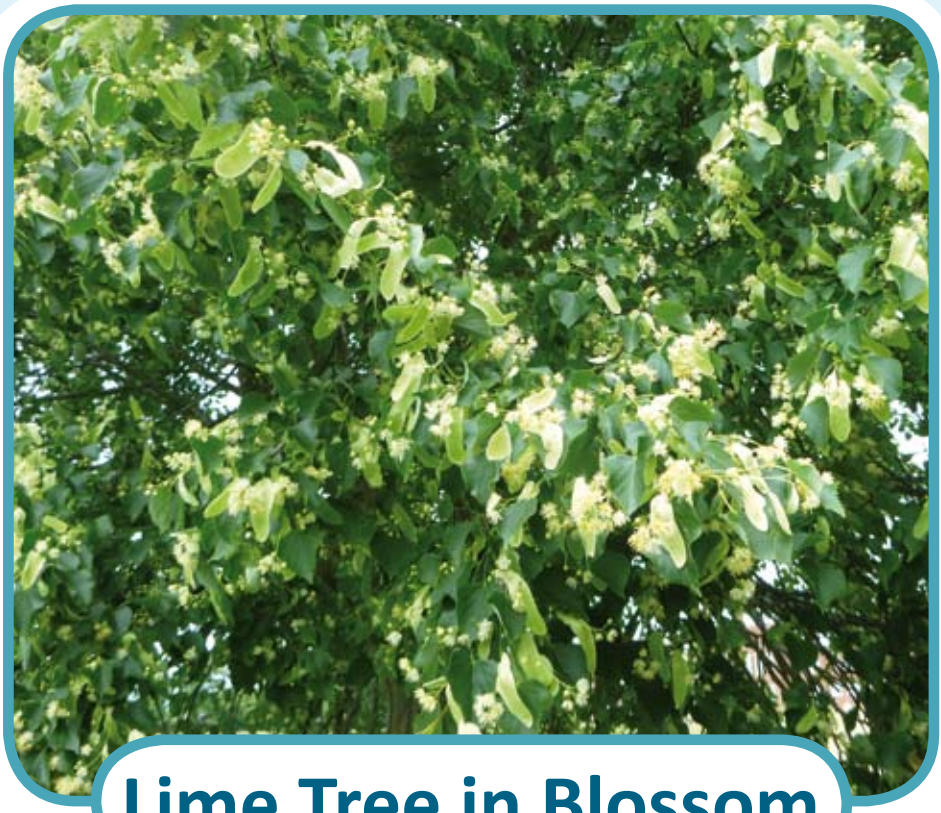
Marston's Wildlife

"...enjoy the Outdoors"

These flashcards feature some of the flora and fauna that can be seen when people are following the Marston Green Health Route. This waymarked route has been established in Marston, Oxford, to enable local people to take exercise outdoors and to reconnect with their local environment. It is part of the NHS Forest - an exciting charitable project enabling hundreds of communities to use green spaces to benefit their health and wellbeing.

Marston Green Health Route



Lime Tree in Blossom

This tree is very popular with pollinators. The paler 'leaves' are actually flower bracts that help with seed dispersal as they seem to launch the ripened seed-clusters just a little beyond the parent tree. Despite its name, it is not related to the plant that bears the citrus fruit called lime.

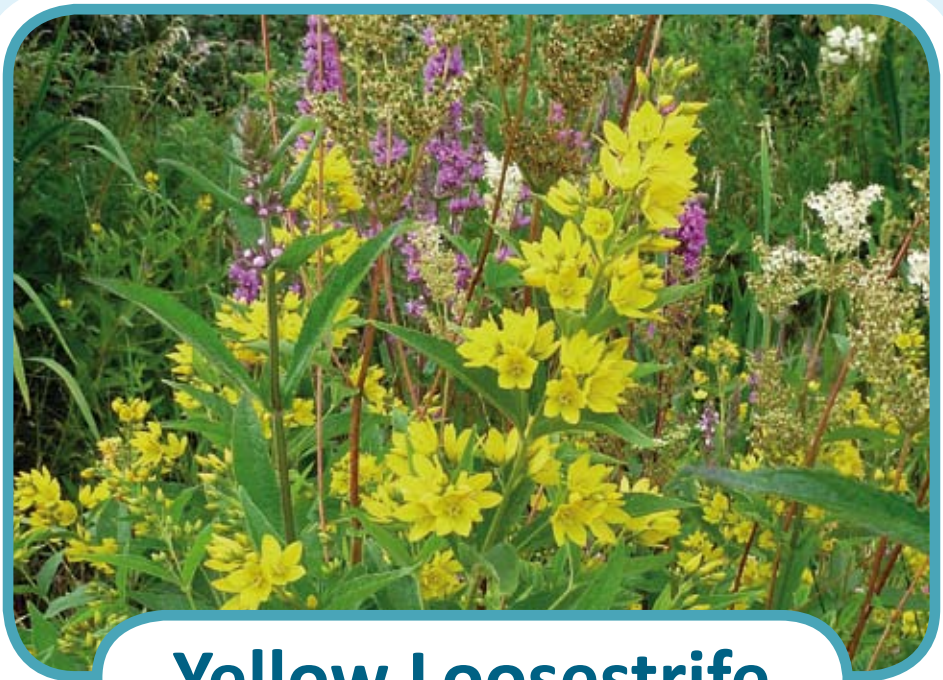
Photo by Marilyn Cox

Hazel Tree

Hazel is a deciduous shrub that grows up to about six metres high. The male flowers of the hazel are long drooping catkins, the female flowers look like small upright red buds. Hazelnuts are a tasty source of food and in the past were an important source of protein – they were often ground up and mixed with flour to be made into nourishing breads. Hazelnuts are also relished by squirrels, mice, pigeons, pheasants and jays.

In Scotland, an old custom of love divination still takes place on Halloween. Two hazelnuts are placed on burning embers, if they burn quietly and remain side by side the two people they represent are well-matched.

Photo by Julie Norris



Yellow Loosestrife

The common name of Loosestrife is a very old one, and refers to the belief that the plant would quieten animals - making them 'lose strife'. It was thought to appease oxen at the plough and was often placed around their yokes. The plant seems to drive away gnats and flies and so may have relieved the animals of being irritated by insects, making them tractable. The dried herb also used to be burnt in houses to prevent insects, particularly in marshy districts such as 'Marshtown' - or Marston, as we now know it.

Photo by Judy Webb

Yellow Loosestrife Bee

The mother Yellow Loosestrife Bee digs a burrow on the ground and then, using an oil created by the Yellow Loosestrife plant and collected by her, she lines the walls with the water-proofing oil. The larvae, in their little cells stocked with Yellow Lossestrife pollen and nectar, can then sit out the winter safe from the floods.

Photo by Judy Webb

Betony

Betony was held in high repute as a medicinal plant for many complaints by the Greeks and later in the Middle Ages and beyond. It was cultivated in physic gardens, both by apothecaries and in monasteries, and may still be found growing about the sites of these ancient buildings. The plant was thought to help cure headaches and nervous problems, although one ancient herbalist stated that it was a useful herb to prevent people from becoming drunk, or to address the after-effects of over-imbibing. It is also reputed to prevent sorcery ... !

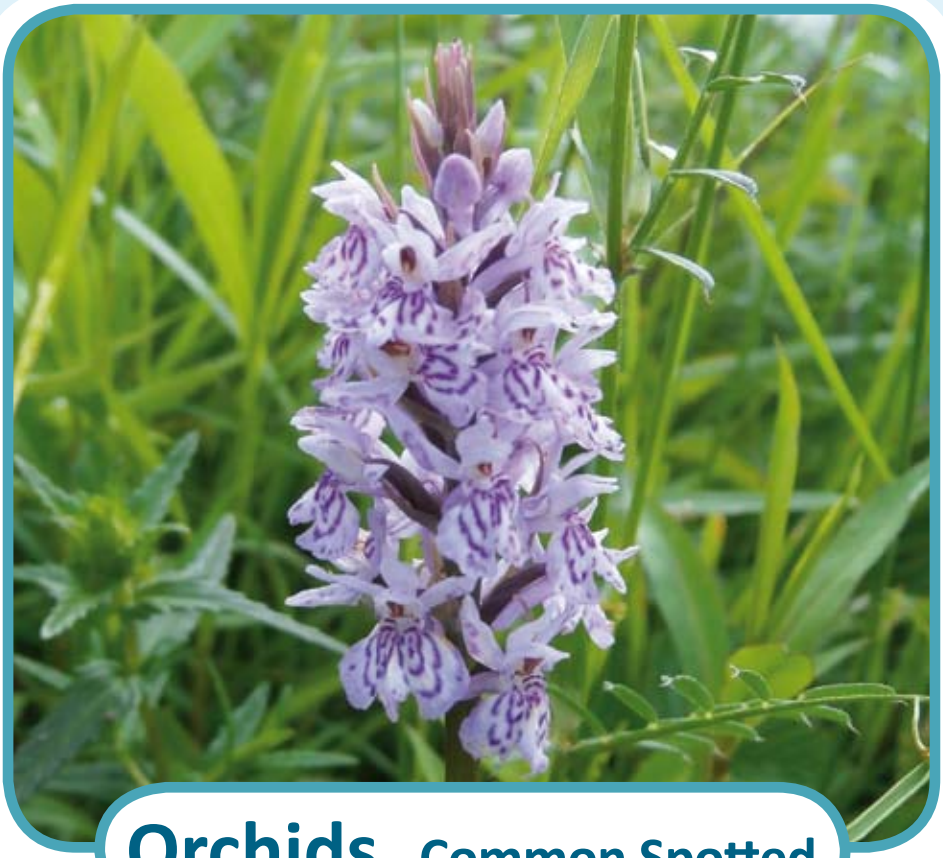
Photo by Johanna Heath

Knapweed

The pink Knapweed, shown here in the foreground, is a firm favourite of our pollinating insects, being a source of good quality nectar. As well as supporting our bees, butterflies and beetles its seeds provide food for many birds. Also known as "Hardheads" or "Black knapweed", this wild flower is one of our toughest meadow plants.

In days gone by, eligible young women would put a plucked knapweed in their blouse. When as-yet unopened florets began to bloom it would tell them that the man of their dreams was near!

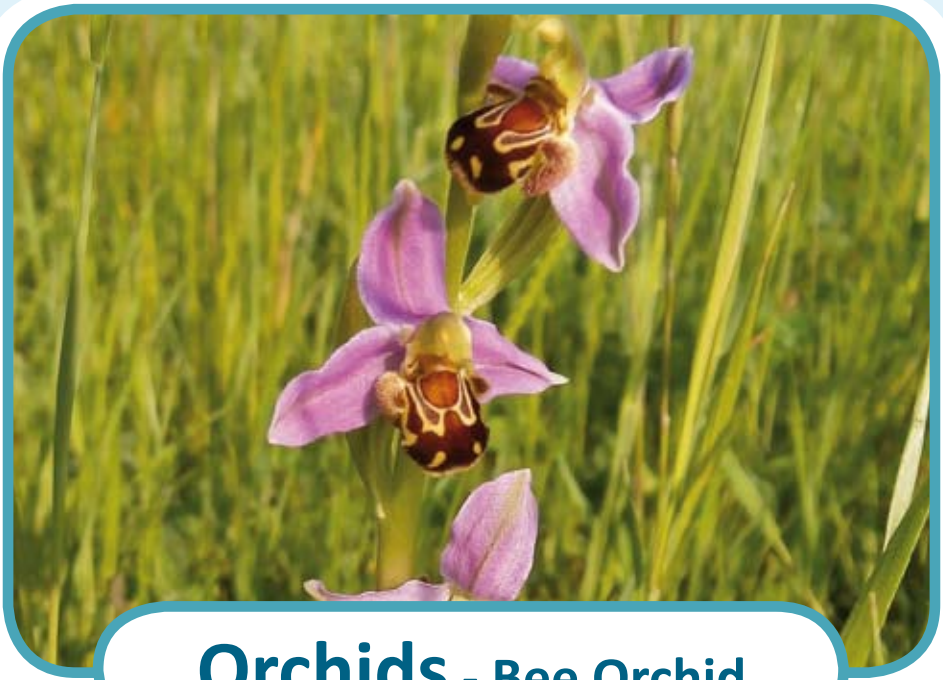
Photo by Johanna Heath



Orchids - Common Spotted

Milham Ford Nature Reserve is home to several species of orchid, including the common-spotted orchid and the bee orchid. The common orchid is the UK's most numerous orchid (as its name suggests), and its spires enliven many wild places, particularly chalk and limestone downs.

Photo by Ellen Lee



Orchids - Bee Orchid

Small but flamboyant, the bee orchid is one of nature's great mimics. Perched within the large pink sepals are petals shaped and coloured like a visiting bee. This mimicry attracts male bees, who are deceived into pollinating the flower. In Britain, however, bee orchids self-pollinate so the deception is not really required.

A couple of other facts about bee orchids: in Roman times, women used the plant to darken their eyebrows; and the plant was once called the "Humble Bee" orchid (Humble being a variation of the word Bumble).

Photo by Ellen Lee

Bee on Red Clover

Butterflies and bees enjoy feeding on the nectar and pollen of red clovers. This perennial native herb has now escaped worldwide to naturalise in nearly every country, and can even be found in the Arctic Circle. In the middle ages, the clover was considered a charm to ward off evil spirits and witches.

Photo by Johanna Heath

Small Skipper on Clover

Small Skipper butterflies are insects of high summer. They are marvellous flyers, manoeuvring expertly through tall grass stems. The four-leaf clover is a rare variation of the common clover. Traditionally, such plants bring good luck. Each leaf is believed to represent something: the first is for faith, the second is for hope, the third is for love, and the fourth is for luck.

Photo by Johanna Heath

Common Blue Butterfly

The Common Blue is the most widespread blue butterfly in Britain and Ireland and is found in a variety of grassy habitats. The brightly coloured males are conspicuous but females are more secretive.

The yellow plant is bird's-foot trefoil, which is an important source of food for many creatures. Pollinating insects such as the common blue butterfly find it a perfect source of nectar and it is used as a forage plant for livestock. The 'bird's-foot' of its name refers to the shape of its seed pods.

Photo by Johanna Heath

Bird’s-foot Trefoil

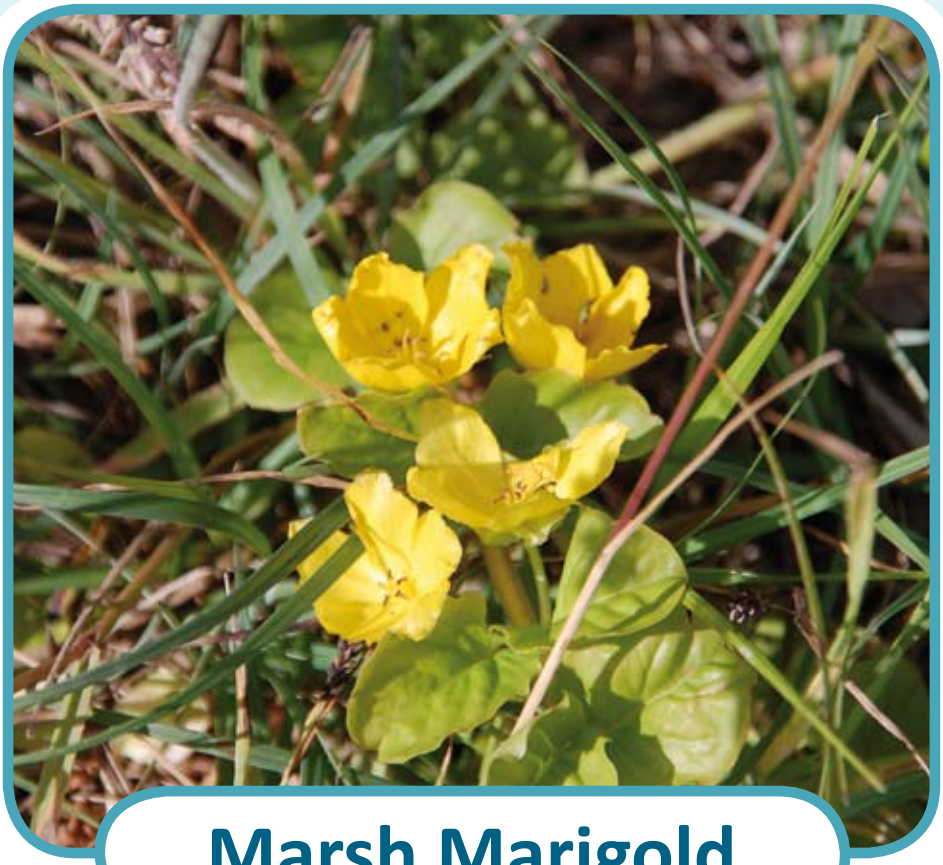
The Victorians used flowers as a code to express hidden emotions. Some symbols of this "language of flowers" are still with us - for example, red roses are a well known emblem of true love. Bird's-foot trefoil, however, was one of the few to denote darker thoughts: it symbolised revenge.

Photo by Marilyn Cox

Marsh Thistle

There are a number of plants that thrive in Marston's local area, such as the tall marsh thistle. This sports large dark purple flowers that are visited by a variety of pollinators, and is particularly common in marshy areas and fens.

Photo by Johanna Heath



Marsh Marigold

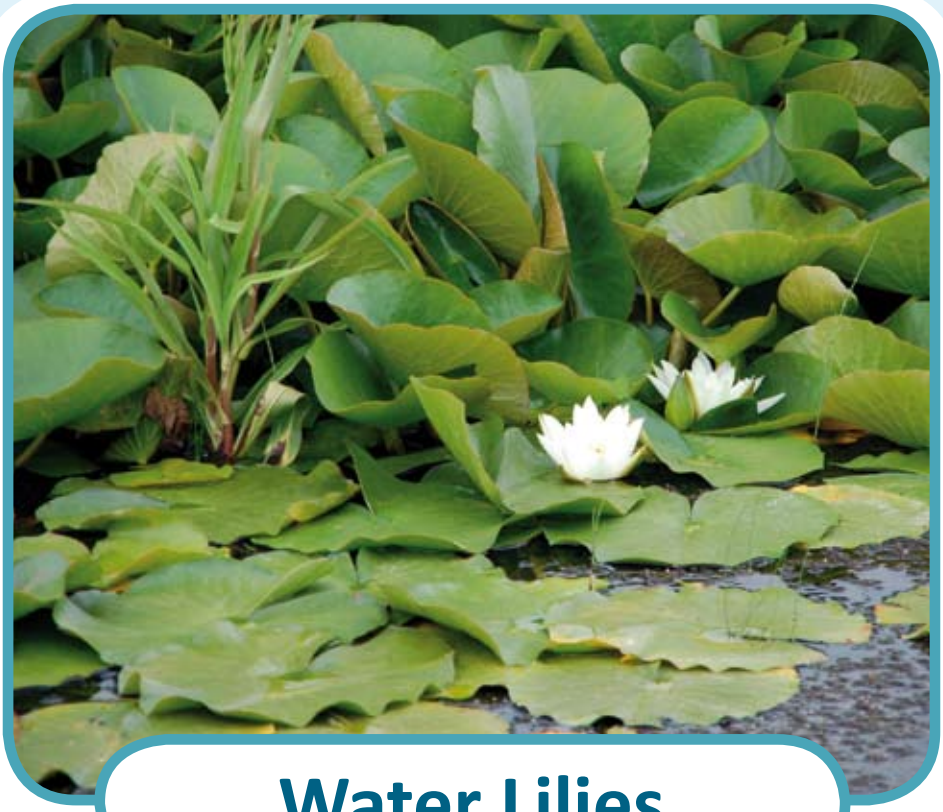
A member of the buttercup family, the marsh marigold is a stout wildflower which could be one of our most ancient plants. Also known as 'kingcups', it's thought it was growing here before the last Ice Age.

Photo by Johanna Heath

Marsh Woundwort

Although the marsh woundwort has little fragrance, it is very attractive to bumblebees. In olden days, it was a plant used medicinally. As its name suggests, this wildflower was used as a herbal remedy. Its bruised leaves were said to alleviate bleeding.

Photo by Johanna Heath



Water Lilies

At Milham Ford Nature Reserve, the water lilies are beautiful when in flower and their leaves act like stepping stones for water-borne insects. However, they have to be controlled to prevent them covering over the ponds. They thrive in boggy areas, but can become overgrown and block light reaching other aquatic plants.

Photo by Johanna Heath

Bluebells

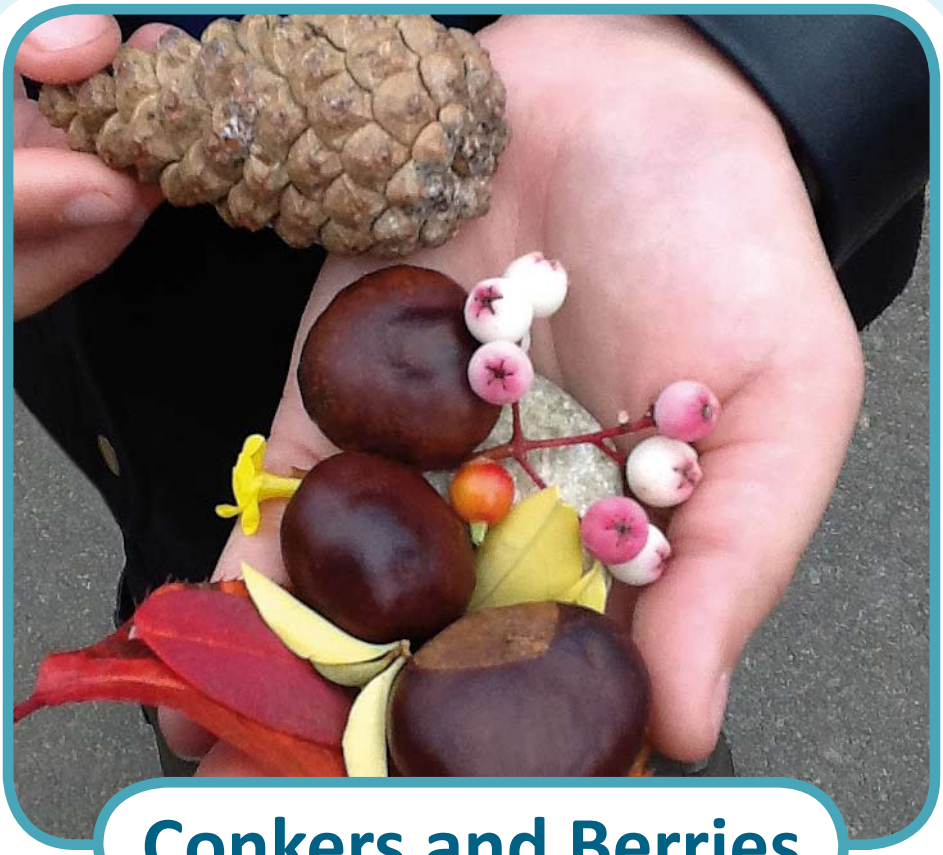
Many of the residents at Marston Court care home have fond recollections of bluebell woods. There are bluebells at Milham Ford Nature Reserve, but not yet a carpet as in these other Oxfordshire woodlands. In folklore, bluebells are also known as ‘fairy flowers’. It was believed that fairies used bluebells to trap passersby particularly small children! Bluebells are an important early food flower for bees, hoverflies and butterflies which feed on nectar. The bulbs produce an extremely sticky substance which was once used to stick the pages in books and the feathers on arrows.

Photo by Julie Norris

Fritillaries

Fritillaries are common in Oxford, and some of the residents at Marston Court care home remember seeing these on their childhood nature walks. Snake's head fritillaries are easily identifiable in spring by their bell shaped, drooping flowers and chequered patterns, often in purple, pink and occasionally white. In folklore it is said that the flowers droop because they witnessed Jesus Christ's crucifixion and hung their heads in sorrow. Coming more up to date, work by scientists at Kew has uncovered that fritillaries have 15 time mores DNA than humans!

Photo by Julie Norris



Conkers and Berries

Local children in Marston collected these pinecones, berries, conkers and autumn leaves when walking the Marston Green Health Route. The residents at Marston Court care home also have fond memories of collecting similar ‘finds’ on their childhood nature walks.

Photo by Local Children

Autumn Leaves

Ice crystals can make autumn leaves sparkle as if they are frosted with sugar. Gardeners see the leaves falling as a time to harvest a beneficial crop. Coloured leaves chopped into soil will create humus by spring, an important source of nutrients for flowers and vegetables. Brown leaves have lost their nutrients but are still valuable. They take longer to rot but help break up soil and make it more absorbent. Leaves are excellent in compost heaps, decomposing over winter and producing rich black leaf mould that turns to humus in the soil. There are billions of beneficial microbes in every tablespoon.

Photo by Julie Norris

Wild Birds

Marston is home to a wide variety of wildlife, including many species of birds. In spring, the baby birds hatch out – including stock dove chicks and baby great tits which have both been spotted nesting in Milham Ford Nature Park.

Other species include the pied wagtail - a small, long-tailed and rather sprightly black and white bird. When not standing and frantically wagging its tail up and down it can be seen dashing about over lawns or car parks in search of food.

Photo by Debbie Kelsey

A big thank you ...

This project is coordinated by the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare which runs pioneering programmes to engage health professionals, patients and the wider community with the common ground between personal wellbeing and wider environmental concerns. For more information please visit the website: **www.sustainablehealthcare.org.uk**

The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare gratefully acknowledges funding from the Lottery's Awards for All programme for these flashcards, and for funding the Marston Green Health Route.

We would also like to thank all of the individuals and organisations who have kindly let us use their photographs, especially Johanna Heath, Marilyn Cox, Judy Webb and Ellen Lee at the Friends of Milham Ford Nature Park, Julie Norris at East Oxford Primary School and pupils at New Marston Primary School.

We especially wish to thank the residents at Marston Court care home for sharing their inspirational reminiscences and the staff for arranging the sessions for this to happen.

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