



SUSTAINABLE WOOTTON COURTENAY Newsletter No 22 March 2026



Soil Your Undies Challenge!



Image on left: 5 weeks buried in a 12 year no-till garden.
Image on right: 5 weeks buried in monoculture of a fertilized lawn.

Have you ever wondered how healthy your soil is? The “Soil Your Undies Challenge” provides the answer!

How does it work?

Just bury an item of cotton underwear and dig it back up after at least 60 days. It's the quick and dirty way to test the microbial activity in your soil. The more the underwear is deteriorated, the healthier your soil!

What are the steps?

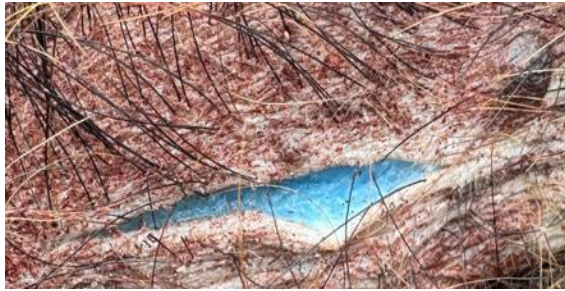
- 1. Plant** the 100% cotton underwear. Start in May-June since the temperature of the soil is warm enough that the microbes wake up. If you wait too long and it isn't under irrigation it can get too dry and not much happens.
- 2. Wait** at least 60 days. This gives your soil microbes time to do their magic!

Microbial Action!

Undies won't break down in just any soil. Healthy soil contains billions of microbes that consume the cotton. In fact, one teaspoon of healthy soil contains more microbes than there are people on the planet. In addition to breaking down organic matter like cotton, they also help soil resist erosion, cycle nutrients, and store water.



CALIFORNIA ISSUES WARNING AFTER TRAPPER FINDS PIGS WITH “SLUSHIE BLUE” COLOURED MEAT



This strange blue meat has been found in wild pigs on a farm in California, USA. The fatty tissue of the meat was a fluorescent blue and this was reported to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. An investigation was undertaken involving tracking the pigs at night to see what they were doing. They



discovered that the pigs were targeting squirrel bait stations, hitting them with their snouts and trying to knock them off the fences where they were secured. Several pigs were then shot and their bodies examined. Unsurprisingly, they tested positive for rodenticide bait which contains anticoagulant poisons which prevents blood from clotting in animals that consume them. The squirrel traps had oats covered in the blue poison but it was unclear whether the pigs had become addicted to the rodenticide or if they were hooked on the oats.

Hunters and the general public were warned to keep a lookout for contaminated meat in pigs and other wildlife such as deer, bear and geese. In the meantime, the farm has installed tamper-resistant squirrel bait traps.



A Robin and a Sticky Glue Trap

Believe it or not, this is a photograph of a robin!

Folly Wildlife Rescue in Kent recently had a robin brought into them after it had been caught in a glue trap intended for rats. These glue traps are illegal to use in England, Scotland and Wales without a licence (this came into force in England on July 31st 2024).

However, despite this legislation, they are still available online! The person who found the robin was mortified as they were unaware that these traps were illegal to use due to the prolonged suffering, pain and severe injury caused to anything that comes into contact with them, not just the intended target.

The Rescue Centre warmed the robin and rehydrated it and once it was more stable they carefully bathed it to remove as much glue as possible, working quickly to minimise stress to the bird. Sadly, despite their efforts it was all too much for it and he passed away over night.



How Long did Sewage Spills Last? Figures for England, 2025.

A table showing the number of sewage spills, average duration of spills in hours and total duration of spills by water companies based in England. South West Water is at the top of the table with the highest total duration of 544,439 spill hours in total. Northumbrian Water had the fewest with 246,587.

Water company	Number of sewage spills	Average duration per spill, hours	Total duration of spills, hours
Anglian Water	16,779	6	101,598
Northumbrian Water	27,776	4	123,521
Severn Trent Water	36,471	5	200,361
South West Water	46,164	9	407,006
Southern Water	15,554	7	114,868
Thames Water	9,189	12	107,822
United Utilities	60,843	5	327,453
Wessex Water	24,442	8	190,666
Yorkshire Water	51,431	6	285,931

Source: Environment Agency. Note: Data covering Welsh Water operations in England not included



Holland and Barrett will stop selling krill to protect whales, penguins and seals in Antarctica.



Holland and Barrett have decided to stop selling tablets made from krill oil. It has responded to concern over significant sustainability issues in 2025 relating to **overfishing in crucial Antarctic feeding grounds** and the vital role of krill in the Southern Ocean ecosystem.

Krill are tiny, shrimp-like crustaceans and a keystone species in the Antarctic ecosystem, serving as the primary food source for whales, penguins, seals, and other marine life.

Industrial fishing takes vast quantities of krill from the Southern Ocean. In 2023 alone, around 500,000 tonnes were trawled – primarily by Norway (67.2% of the total catch), followed by China (17.1%), South Korea (8.4%), Chile (4.4%), and Ukraine (2.8%). **Much of this harvest is turned into feed for pets and farmed fish, as well as omega-3 supplements.**

The health and wellness retailer has instructed all suppliers that it will no longer source or sell krill-based products. From January 2026, the company will sell through existing stock, completing its full exit by April this year. **Throughout the transition, Holland & Barrett plans to guide customers toward sustainable omega-3 alternatives that offer the same benefits without threatening Antarctic wildlife.**



“Our decision to exit krill products is part of our ongoing journey to become a more sustainable, nature-positive business that protects the ecosystems we all depend on,” said Jessica Long, Sustainability & Impact Director at Holland & Barrett.

CLEANUP BRITAIN

Challenged National Highways over a failure to comply with their legal duty to ensure the motorways are kept clear of litter.	Pushed for enforcement reform by exposing that 21% of councils issue zero fines for littering, and demonstrating that private firms outperform councils.	Submitted FOI requests to all 318 councils in England to uncover weak enforcement, inadequate bin provision, and lack of accountability.
Launched a 10-point Motorway Action Plan calling for tougher fines, camera enforcement, and lane closures to clean up and deter littering.	Called out the dumping of roadwork debris by contractors, pressuring National Highways to monitor and manage their operations properly.	Demanded powers for motorway traffic officers to fine drivers who litter, boosting enforcement and increasing on-the-spot accountability.
	Advocated for a national dashcam reporting system, making it easier for the public to submit evidence of drivers who litter.	Exposed lack of coordination between councils, highlighting how verge cutting without litter clearance causes widespread shredded roadside litter.



RoadVlog

Roadside Verge Condition Logger

Help us collect data! Location, road/street and local authority will be auto-logged. Passenger use only!

Total reports: 6068 [View](#)

3843 poor condition reports [Wall of Shame](#)

Latest Reports

7 hours ago

Grade B

Sturry Road

Kent County Council



Got something to report? Take a photo (optional) and choose Grade A-D



Take Photo

AI Photo

Dashcam Mode

Grade A - Clean

Grade B - Some small items

Grade C - Widespread litter/debris

Grade D - Serious accumulation

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Good News Story – Renewable Energy in the Lead

Renewable energy has overtaken coal as the leading source of electricity for the first time. Analysts at the energy think tank Ember reported that in the first half of 2025 solar and wind power generated more electricity than coal and met 100% of the extra global electricity demand. China led the charge, adding more renewable energy capacity than the rest of the world combined.



Good News Story – Dissolving Plastic

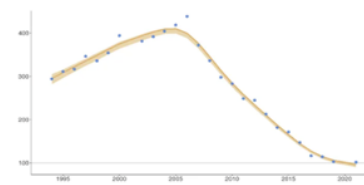
An environmentally friendly type of plastic that fully dissolves in seawater has been developed by scientists in Japan. When it's placed in salt water it breaks down within hours and generates no harmful microplastics which currently pollute the sea and soil and find their way into the food chain. This new plastic also degrades completely in soil over a ten-day period.

BIRDS ON THE ENDANGERED RED LIST

The Greenfinch



Greenfinch population UK 1994-2021



Greenfinches - 66% decline in last 10 years
 Chaffinches - 30% decline
 Bullfinches - 40% decline

Populations have plummeted due to the disease trichomonosis. It affects the gullet, preventing swallowing of food and water. It's spread through contaminated food and drinking water and when the adults regurgitate food to feed young chicks or fledglings they become infected. Affected birds often become emaciated and may die of starvation.



In response to growing concerns about disease transmission among garden birds from supplementary feeding, the RSPB has stopped selling any products with flat surfaces such as table and window feeders.

Fat Balls/Suet: These can melt in the heat, spoiling quickly and potentially coating feathers, which impairs their waterproofing. They can also turn rancid in the sun, which can harm birds.

Whole Peanuts and large seeds: These are a major choking hazard for young chicks and fledglings during the spring and summer breeding season. The advice is that they should only be in rigid mesh feeders to prevent large, dangerous pieces from being removed.

The Cuckoo



Since the early 1980s Cuckoo numbers have dropped by 65%

Only about half of tracked birds survive the dangerous journey via Spain to and from their wintering grounds in the Congo. Spain has experienced droughts and climate-related food shortages and reduced habitat for their prey, preventing them from refueling enough for the Sahara crossing. Welsh and Scottish Cuckoos migrating via Italy have a much higher survival rate.

A new study reveals that due to climate change cuckoos face the choice of setting off on their annual migration across the desert perilously early or risking their hosts having already bred by the time they arrive.

The south of England breeding grounds have seen a decline in caterpillars in recent years. Cuckoos are specialist predators of large, hairy, often toxic caterpillars that other birds avoid, such as:



Magpie moth



Fox moth



Drinker moth



Oak Eggar moth

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Sponsor a Cuckoo



Arthur.



Ashok.



Cleeve



The BTO's cuckoo tagging project has now entered its third year.



Jim



Joe



Norman

Cuckoos are satellite tracked to reveal migration routes, stop-over and wintering sites. The BTO has been tracking cuckoos for around 10 years to better understand how their migration affects the bird's chances of survival.

The Swift

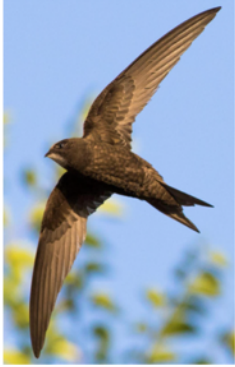
Key Reasons for Swift Decline:

Loss of Nesting Sites: As older buildings are converted, demolished or insulated, the small gaps and cracks where swifts nest are lost.

Declining Food Sources: Swifts are insectivores that feed on aerial insects and a sharp decline in insect populations caused by pesticide use and pollution has reduced their food supply.

Environmental Changes: Climate change and unpredictable weather patterns have impacted on their breeding season in Europe, as well as during their migration to and from Africa, making it harder for them to survive.

Disturbance: Building work, including scaffolding and netting during the breeding season, can block access to nests.



Helping Swifts

Advice from the RSPB

- 1) **THE RSPB GUIDE "HELPING SWIFTS" - online information guide**



- 2) **SWIFT NEST BOXES** If conditions and the location of your garden are suitable, maybe consider putting up a swift nesting box under the eaves. It can take a little while for Swifts to adopt a new nest site, they may not be used straight away. Swifts are long lived and creatures of habit, so once they do find a box, they keep returning to it year after year.



Sustainable Wootton Courtenay has a Swift Box information sheet and has made and erected swift boxes on a number of houses in the village. Fingers crossed that the swifts will use them this year. If you're thinking of having one, please let us know – we can make one for a donation to SWC.

- 3) **SWIFT BRICKS.** Consider installing Swift bricks where renovations or new building works are planned.



- 4) **INCREASING THE INSECT POPULATION.**

Although we can't provide food directly, making our gardens more wildlife-friendly will help to encourage more insects.

Cease, or seriously reduce, the use of pesticides – they're having a major impact on insect life.

Growing wild flowers provides food and shelter for insects, which will in turn provide food for Swifts and other wildlife.

The Biodiversity survey provides the names and photographs of our local wild flowers (Pages 63-71 of the survey booklet).

- 6) **PONDS and WATER TUBS** serve as critical breeding grounds for flying insects, providing essential, high-protein, on-the-wing food source for swifts.