

# One small step for our grassroots community

**It might just be me, but sometimes I feel as if I have seen too much nature, too much wildlife, too many amazing wonders of the natural world**

When I say this, I'm not talking about the nature I have experienced first hand, the nature I have actually heard, seen, smelt, touched and yes, even tasted.

I am talking about the images of nature seen during hours of exquisite wildlife documentaries, within the glossy pages of premium wildlife magazines and countless other exceptional photos, capturing creatures at their most lovely, their most beautiful, and dazzling us with their finery and finesse. The message is clear: nature is extraordinary, beautiful in the extreme, complex, at times perplexing, but always surprising and infinite. But it is this word 'extraordinary' that bothers me.

It is the subtle message of all these fine productions that nature is 'extra-ordinary', outside and beyond our ordinary, everyday lives? And what's worse is, the

## NatureNotes



**Rupert Evershed's monthly diary of the natural world**  
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more I watch, the more 'ordinary' this 'extraordinary' becomes. The once exotic unknown has been revealed up close and personal, again and again, thanks to our camera technology.

It's as if the bride has bared all, leaving no surprises or mystery for her wedding night. And yet, in reality, nature makes us wait, makes us go on a journey of discovery, allowing us only glimpses at a time. It is this process of persevering, of waiting, of uncovering, that makes wildlife watching so rewarding and ultimately deeply personal.

Of course, I'm not against the incredible wildlife programmes we enjoy on TV – they serve an important purpose – but what we

see is served on a plate that we never had to wait or work for. It is a meal consumed for which we were never hungry.

Almost two years ago to the day I wrote about the closure of Butterfly World in St Albans. At the time there was a thin thread of hope that it might reopen as Butterfly World 2.0, but two years on, this is not to be. It appears Butterfly World was a meal for which we were not hungry, at least not enough to see it through some rocky financial times.

The closure was a sad moment for it was hoped it would be an oasis for butterflies and in its short lifespan, had already become just that for the small blue butterfly. Absent from Herts for



A small blue butterfly (Cupido minimus)

Picture: ANDREW WOOD

nearly five years, this little butterfly is now enjoying not just one, but two broods in a season thanks to the ideal habitat created at Butterfly World.

But I can't help wondering that had Butterfly World gone ahead in all it's glory, it might have served us up a feast that dulled us to the nature all around us?

I suggested that the story of Butterfly World provided a good illustration of the journey we must all go on when it comes to conserving (and enjoying) our natural world.

I said there must "be a grass roots movement, one that has the ownership of the local community expressing its own care for its own local nature". It was therefore exciting to meet Malcolm Hull, chairman of Herts & Middlesex Butterfly Conservation, at Greenwood Park in St Albans where this has been happening.

With the support of St Stephen Parish Council and funding from the lottery Heritage Fund a

purpose-built chalk bank has been dug out and is being seeded and planted with chalk-loving plants that it is hoped will provide the perfect habitat for butterflies. A particular target species is the small blue butterfly that will, hopefully, colonise the area, cleverly designed to provide warmer microclimates and planted with the small blue's favourite food plant, kidney vetch.

While this is a relatively small-scale project, it has pulled together local volunteers and organisations, including the local primary school. It is a truly grass roots project that could be replicated across Hertfordshire, even on a miniature scale in our own gardens.

Butterfly World may be closed, but it lives on in community action like this. And I was equally heartened.

To get inspired by the project at Greenwood Park, go along to the public launch event at 10.30am on Sunday, May 26 at the Greenwood Park Community Centre.