


# February Newsletter

Written by Lorna Shale

Canterbury Road, Monkton, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 4LH  
01843 822 666    [contact@monkton-reserve.org](mailto:contact@monkton-reserve.org)  
[www.monkton-reserve.org](http://www.monkton-reserve.org)

 @monktonreserve

 Monkton Nature Reserve







**Events**

This month we are offering many exciting activities that you can join in with! These include:

- Springtime Celebration [1st Feb] ~ Joey offers this day-retreat focusing on traditional folk festivals, featuring yoga, guided meditations, educational talks about 'Ancient Influence on Modern Minds', and more.
- Forest Bathing [9th Feb] ~ Here, Vicki provides a solution to the 'tech-boom' burnout and to inspire people to reconnect with and protect the country's forests.



•Heart Opening Yoga and Journalling [15th Feb] ~ Ease into your day with a slow movement sequence to open up your body and relax your mind. There will be a focus on balancing your nervous system.

•Tai Chi Movements for Wellbeing [23rd Feb] ~ TMW is a specially developed sequence of movements taken from Tai Chi, and Qi Gong and made more accessible to promote physical and mental health and wellbeing. Lesley offers this as a drop in-session or as a course.

Please ensure to head to our website's events page - <https://monkton-reserve.org/events/> - to book your places and discover details for the various fun children's activities we have planned for the February half term.





### Education News

January saw a wonderful start to 2025 for our Education Department: GlobalGiving, in partnership with Cummins Power Systems, has generously supported our educational work! Cummins, based at the Discovery Park, Sandwich, is a long-time supporter of our reserve and its Community Involvement Team have been regularly sent to help with volunteer tasks across our site. Working in partnership with Bayliss Executive Travel, this funding will help us remove some of the existing barriers of transport costs to the Reserve for local schools. More than 600 local children will be offered outdoor learning opportunities with this initiative through subsidised transport.



Alistair Bayliss, Managing Director, Bayliss Executive Travel says:

"We're delighted that we can contribute in a small way to ensure more children have the opportunity to visit this very special venue, it's our pleasure and a privilege to be able to do so and we hope everyone thoroughly enjoys the experience!".

For details, please contact the Education Officer at Monkton, Anna Nicholls, on [education@monkton-reserve.org](mailto:education@monkton-reserve.org)

*Bayliss*  
EXECUTIVE TRAVEL LTD.





### A Busy Month...

February is going to be an incredibly busy month as we have various improvements and new infrastructure projects beginning; apologies in advance for any disruptions this will cause! Some of this work will go to improving the muddy surfaces in the picnic area and the Willett garden – as these areas have been used more often, the grass has turned into a sea of mud so hopefully our solution will enable it to recover and, as a bonus, lead to fewer muddy footprints in the building!

Towards the end of this month, major works will begin to install wheel-friendly paths from the Visitor centre to the Dome and into the middle of the Reserve's lower level: this will help more people enjoy the Reserve, such as anyone in a wheelchair and those with buggies and prams.

Overlooking the Dragonfly Pond and the chalk grassland, two wooden observation decks will be added – this work will take up to four weeks and some footpaths will unfortunately have to be closed while this project is being carried out.



### Sparrowhawk Wood

We have had some unfortunate news about our woodland, Sparrowhawk Wood. There are a good number of Ash trees around 40 years old growing there which were planted in the early days of the charity by pioneer volunteers. This tree species has been sadly affected by a fungal disease (see below) and now many of ours are in a poor condition. In February, we estimate that around a week's worth of felling and pruning must be done before the plants and animals awaken for spring so Sparrowhawk wood will be closed until further notice. On a lighter note, reducing tree cover in this way will create space for new growth of shrubs, flowers, and herbs – keep an eye on this space to see what emerges!







### Conservation

More positive news was received in January: we were awarded a grant from the Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust for conservation work! This project is titled 'Save our Orchid Oasis' and is set to begin in late autumn with a focus on improving our chalk grassland habitats to encourage more growth of rare plant life.



### Nature Notes

The first flowers and plants of spring have begun emerging, including the sweet violet and some of our man orchids!

The sweet violet emerged in January: this beautiful plant can usually be found growing on woodland edges and hedgerows and its flowers – with five delicate oval petals – provide nectar for butterflies in early spring, a vital part of the ecosystem. They have heart-shaped, hairy, deep green leaves and while they are most commonly a blue-violet colour, they can have white or lilac flowers. These edible flowers are quite widespread but are unfortunately becoming increasingly uncommon as they are being over-foraged for their culinary purposes.

Legend says that the sweet violet steals your sense of smell so a person can only smell it once: this is just a myth but it is rooted in truth as the flower contains beta-ionone, a chemical which shuts off smell receptors temporarily.

Image on the right found on 'Adobe stock'





The first Man Orchid (*Orchis anthropophora*) has been spotted on the reserve. This plant is extremely rare in the UK, despite being common and widespread in the Mediterranean–Atlantic areas of Europe. Its name refers to the human shaped lip of the flower – its sepals and petals form a hood above the lip giving it a strong resemblance to a tiny human figure. These plants can grow to around 40cm tall and have 5–10 basal leaves which, while unmarked are clearly veined. The Man Orchid is usually greenish bronze or pale yellow and they tend to grow in short alkaline grasslands, often either in full sun or mid shade. Occasionally, this plant can be found growing along the edges of open woodland and in scrubby areas. They flow from the end of March to the end of June.

Image on left found on 'Adobe stock images'



At the end of January, a female Blackcap Warbler was seen on the Reserve! This is an interesting change in migration patterns and now some birds stay in the UK all winter. These birds are distinctively greyish and the top of the male's head is black (giving it its 'black cap' name) while the female's head is a chestnut brown. Nicknamed the 'northern nightingale', the Blackcap Warbler is primarily a summer visiting bird from Germany and North–East Europe, but they have been increasingly spending their winters in the UK. They eat insects and berries and live in woodland, suburban, urban, and farmland areas. Image on the right found on 'Adobe stock images'.







The disease that has unfortunately infected our Ash trees in Sparrowhawk wood is named 'Ash Dieback'. First officially recorded in the UK in 2012, this disease is rapidly spreading with only a small fraction of trees able to resist it. In September of 2018, the forestry commission found in a survey of Ash Dieback that 49.2% of UK landmass had been infected. Ash Dieback is a serious disease caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* and it causes leaf loss and crown dieback and can even lead to the death of the infected tree. There are various signs of the disease including infected saplings usually displaying dead tops and / or side shoots and often lesions on its subtending branch or stem. These lesions girdle the branch or stem and can cause the foliage above to wilt.

Image to left found on 'adobe stock images' of some ash trees that had to be felled due to disease.

