

History of Masons Field and Green Lane

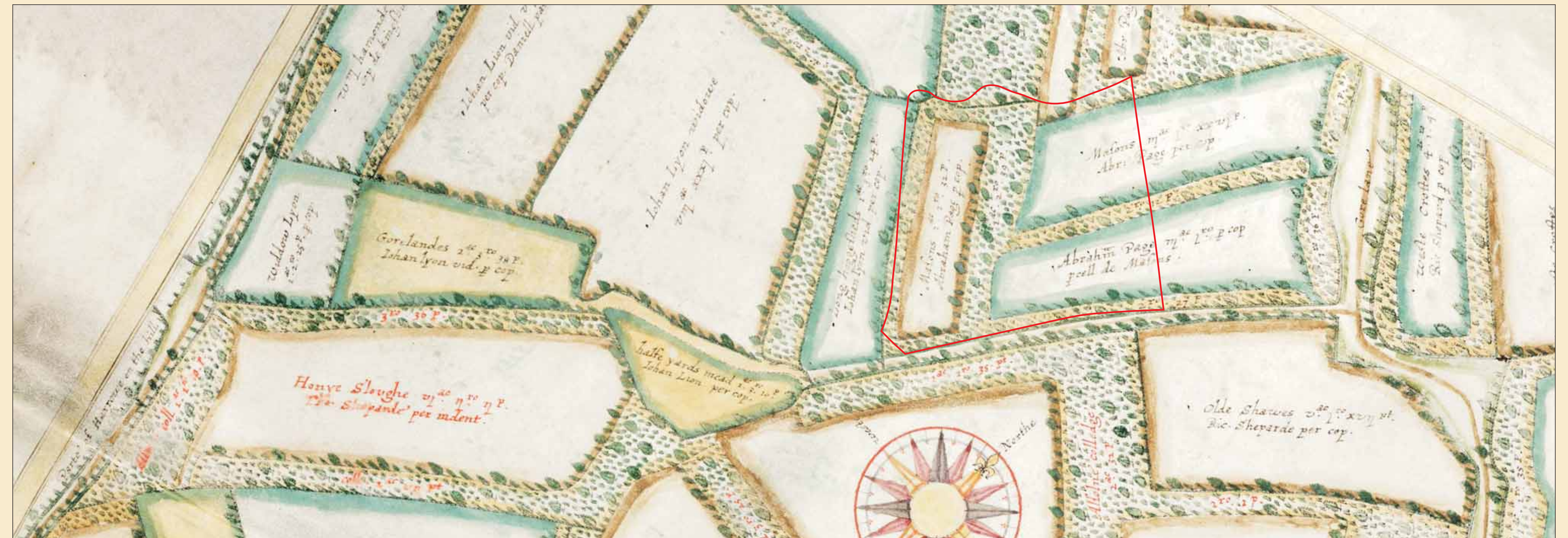
Masons Field was once part of woodland that covered much of Middlesex and the London area north of the River Thames. Fields were made by clearing areas of woodland, a process called assarting. Masons field was mentioned in 1426, when it was rented by John Lyon, a mason. In 1597 a map of Kingsbury was produced by the land-owner, All Souls College, Oxford. 'Masons' was then two main fields and a smaller field to the west, separated by woodland. These were located between what is now Valley Drive, and Old Kenton Lane (then, Gore Lane). The tenant farmer was Abraham Page.

East of Masons Field, a green lane served fields on either side, providing an access route for people, livestock and produce. This lane ran from Old Kenton Lane until it reached a field near to the parish boundary of Kingsbury and Harrow (later, Wembley). The parish boundary, also a green lane, can be walked on the far side of Frynt Way.

By 1865, Masons Field covered 12.5 acres (about 5 hectares) of the earlier fields and woodland. It was one of only two arable fields in the whole of Kingsbury, the rest being pasture. A smithy was located by the junction of the green lane with Old Kenton Lane.

In the 1920s and 1930s, much of Wembley and Kingsbury were developed for suburban housing. Masons Field was bought in 1927 by the London General Omnibus Company as a sports ground for its employees. Frynt Way was constructed in 1934/35, while what is now Frynt Country Park was acquired by the County Council, to preserve it as open space and countryside.

In the mid-1990s, London Transport sold part of the field for housing development, with new roads at Larkspur Close and Sedum Close. The remainder of Masons Field became public open space and joined Frynt Country Park.



The green lane and fields in 1597



The green lane and fields in 2014

Acknowledgements

Barn Hill Conservation Group.
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Common Oak

Green lanes once connected fields, while some provided longer routes between hamlets. The section of the green lane here is a remnant of a green lane that served fields from Old Kenton Lane (Gore Lane as it then was), westwards to near where Frynt Way is today. Though much of the original lane has been lost as a continuous route, many of the hedgerows or boundaries still exist.

Green lanes typically had a sunken lane with hedgerows along either side. While much of this green lane has been lost, sections of the two bounding hedgerows survive for much of the route. The green lane bounding Masons Field and the main part of Frynt Country Park has been restored to show how the green lane may have looked. The ramp on the path between Masons Field and the other



Common Hawthorn

fields is of recent construction, to enable access.

Green lanes and hedgerows are important for wildlife. Trees here include Common Oak (*Quercus robur*);

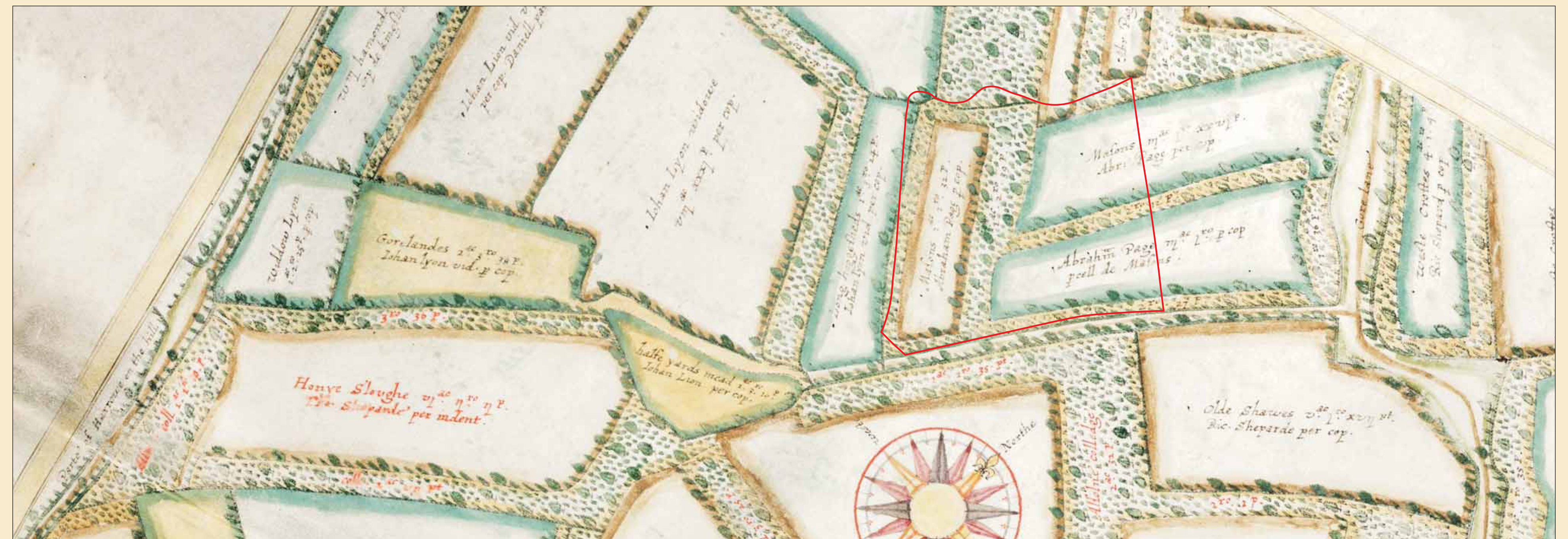
English Elm (*Ulmus procera*), Blackthorn also known as Sloe, and Common Hawthorn.

On Masons Field itself, a new path has been opened alongside one of the original hedges of the green lane and a more recently created hedge. Along this new 'Bramble Lane' path, note Dog Rose, and several old varieties of the cultivated Apple. Alder Buckthorn is the larval food-plant of the Brimstone butterfly. Speckled Wood butterflies may be observed too.

A longer green lane, locally known as Hell Lane or Eldestrete can be walked from the south to the north of Frynt Country Park. Originally that lane could be used from the Thames and then through London, Willesden, part of Salmon Street, and then as Eldestrete and Hell Lane to the Moot site of the Hundred of Gore (near Kingsbury Circle) and north as Honeypot Lane towards Stanmore and to Hertfordshire.



English Elm



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Masons Field Meadow and Wildflowers

Records of the agricultural use of Masons Field exist for only some years of the many centuries of farming.

Grassland was probably present for much of that time, with short periods of arable use. Typically local grasslands were harvested for hay in the summer. After the grass had started to regrow, the fields were used for 'aftermath' grazing until the early autumn. However, if the ground became too wet, animals may have been removed to prevent the fields from being heavily poached by hooves.

There are few if any records of the flora of these meadows. However some of the more common species that were present probably included those characteristic of grasslands on London Clay soils. The local soils were relatively thin and contained high proportions of the London Clay that starts a short distance below the surface. These soils can dry out in the summer, but the clay swells during the winter with water sometimes lying on the surface. That is why the soils were difficult to cultivate for crop growing and more suited to permanent grassland. London Clay soils though very slightly acidic are practically considered as neutral on the pH scale.

The ecology of these grasslands suggest that they may have included species such as Meadow Buttercup, Meadow Vetchling, Common Bird's-foot Trefoil, Great Burnet, Common Sorrel, Red Clover, Ox-eye Daisy and Lesser Knapweed. Other species may have included Lady's Bedstraw, Cowslip, Selfheal and Cat's-Ear. Grasses are important in meadows and include Rough Meadow Grass, False Oat Grass, Crested Dogstail, Meadow Barley, Bromes, Yorkshire Fog, Bent grasses, Red Fescue, Meadow Fescue; and Sweet Vernal Grass which has a sweet 'freshly-cut' grass smell. There would possibly have been rarer species that are no longer present.

Towards the scrape, a seasonally wet area, you are more likely to see Lady's Smock, Marsh Bird's-foot Trefoil and Meadowsweet.



Hay Meadow Management and Wildlife

Hay meadows were once typical on many farms in England but the large majority have been lost since the mid-20th century, due to more intensive agriculture, built development, ploughing, draining, and the use of herbicides. At Masons Field the local community have worked together to attempt to restore the meadow. Three main techniques have been used: reintroduction of plugs of perennial species; sowing of seed onto exposed soil; and by reintroducing hay meadow management. It is hoped that the insect wildlife will follow, in some cases from the meadows from elsewhere on Fryent Country Park. The field is now a Local Nature Reserve.

Traditionally, hay harvesting was undertaken in the early summer. The meadow would first be cut; then the plants would be allowed to dry for a day or so, then gathered into windrows of material, baled, followed by the lifting and transport to a dry storage area. This is the management that we are attempting to restore here.

In the past the meadow grasses and plants would have been allowed to regrow for a few weeks, before livestock were grazed for the remainder of the summer and into the early autumn.

Meadows do need to be cut - and preferably harvested, or they will succeed to rough grassland, after which Creeping Thistles, Brambles and then scrub may succeed.

The Meadow Brown butterfly does best on hay meadows cut once (or at most, twice) a year. The eggs of the Meadow Brown are laid on grass. The caterpillars hatch and move up the leaves of the grass stem at night to feed but return to near ground level during daylight. This helps the caterpillars to avoid predators and any further harvesting. The butterflies emerge in the following summer. Gatekeeper butterflies, also known as the Hedge Brown, may be seen too, along the hedgerows.

Common Frogs and Common Toads are present at Masons Field, and there are areas of habitat suitable too for the Field Vole and for the Field Mouse. Habitat for farmland and woodland birds is provided in the hedgerows.



Green woodpecker
(*Picus viridis*)



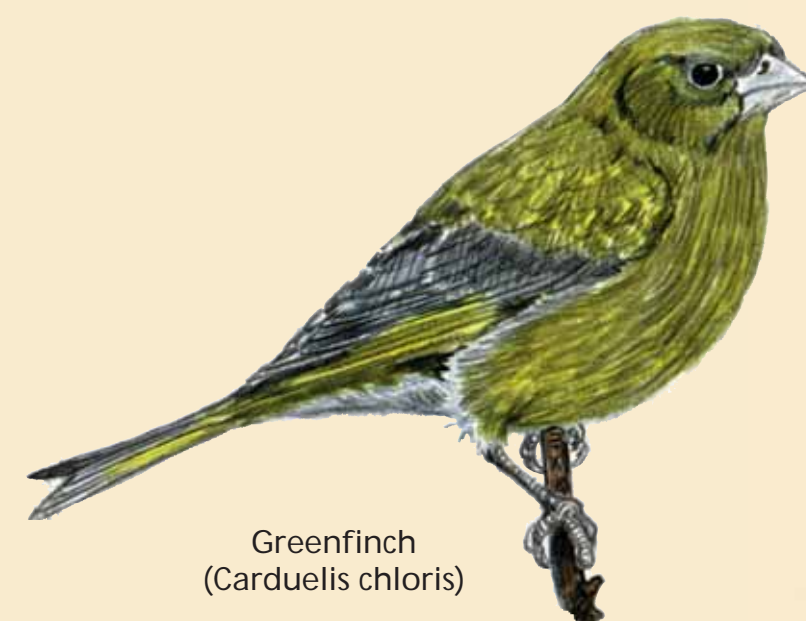
Goldfinch
(*Carduelis carduelis*)



Wren
(*Troglodytes troglodytes*)



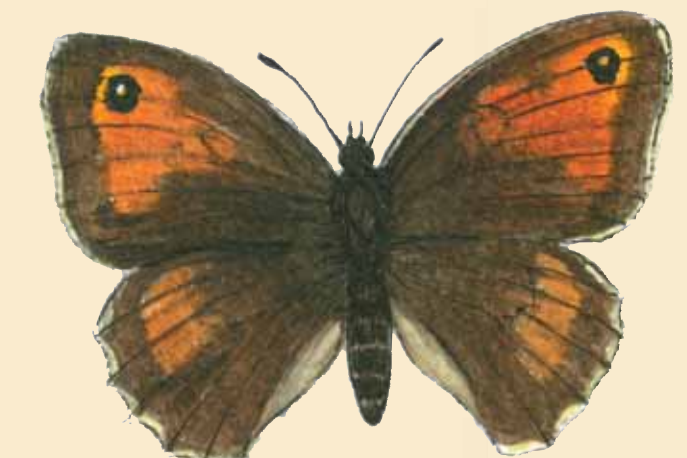
Robin
(*Erithacus rubecula*)



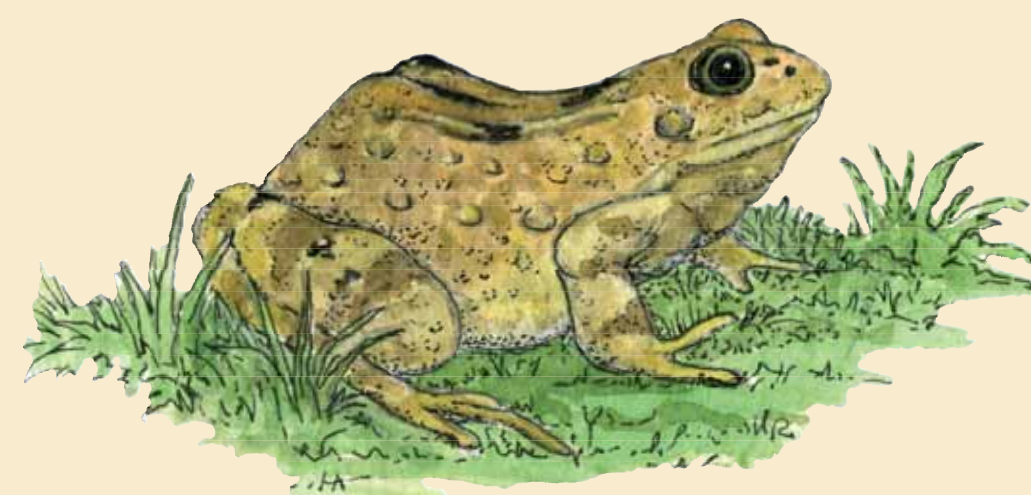
Greenfinch
(*Carduelis chloris*)



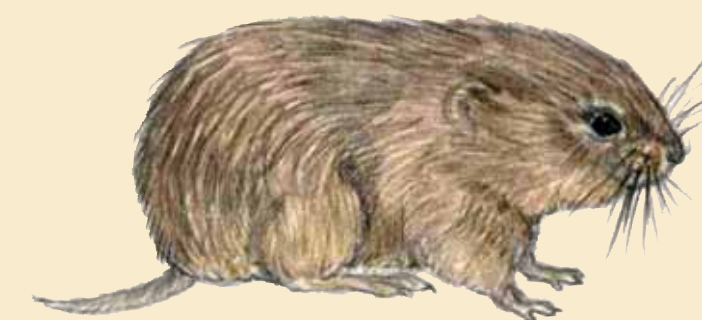
Gatekeeper
(*Pyronia tithonus*)



Meadow Brown Butterfly
(*Maniola jurtina*)



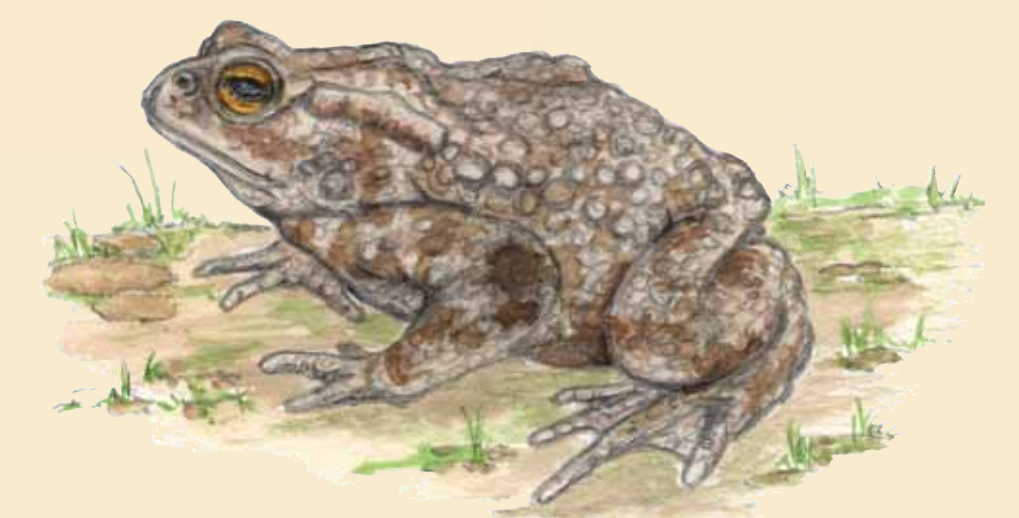
Common Frog
(*Rana temporaria*)



Field Vole
(*Microtus agrestis*)



Wood Mouse
(*Apodemus sylvaticus*)



Common Toad
(*Bufo bufo*)