

**“Sandy Heath Quarry is a great example of how mineral operations and conservation organisations can join forces, securing the products needed for our day-to-day life and having a positive impact for nature. It is very exciting to see how the site keeps evolving and new species establish there.”**

Enrique Moranmontero, National Restoration Manager at Tarmac

# Planet

## Environmental Stewardship

### Conservation at Sandy Heath

Tarmac has been working on a large-scale conservation project at Tarmac’s Sandy Heath Quarry in Bedfordshire, to turn a working sand quarry into land that will support an array of wildlife and nature.

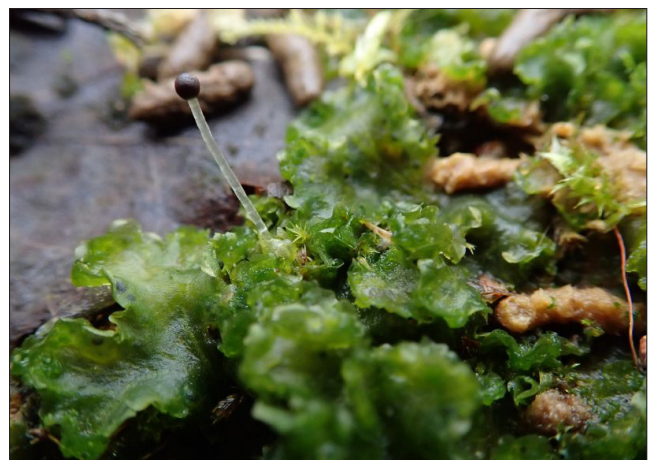
For the first time in Bedfordshire, a liverwort (a small flowerless plant with lobe like leaves) called weedy frillwort, so called due to its ‘frilly’ yellow green leaves, has been recorded, along with other rare species of mosses, liverworts, lichens and fungi. This tiny plant is easily overlooked at just 5mm long but represents a huge achievement in conservation work.

This exciting discovery was made by local expert plant surveyors in restored areas at Sandy Heath Quarry, which is managed by Tarmac and the RSPB as part of The Lodge nature reserve. Tarmac is working in partnership with the RSPB to gradually restore the quarried areas into 80 hectares of wildlife friendly land, providing a home for a diversity of species and allowing nature to reclaim the land.

Progressive restoration of Sandy Heath Quarry started in the 1990s, and since the early 2000s, both organisations have been working on this project together. The restoration of this site has and will continue to create a selection of wildlife friendly habitats, including:

- Large swathes of bare sand, rocks and cliffs, ideal for species such as spider hunting wasps and solitary bees - one cliff face provides a nesting site for a colony of sand martins
- Acid grassland (including damp grassland areas where the weedy frillwort was discovered), a place for pollinating insects to feed and breed
- Woodland, home to a wide variety of birds
- Heathland, where linnets breed amongst the gorse bushes

Each habitat will encourage insects, birds, reptiles and mammals to move in.



RSPB is gradually converting some of the woodlands there from conifers to native broad-leaved woodland, which will support more native wildlife such as the spotted flycatcher, woodpeckers, nuthatches and tawny owls. Arable land is planted with winter seed crops which form a ‘living bird table’ to help feed birds through the winter, including reed buntings, linnets, chaffinches, bramblings, meadow pipits, skylarks, and grey partridges.

The topography of the site has also been changed to create structure and give wildlife and nature places to live and hide, including forming huge U-shaped valleys, a dry riverbed, ‘sink holes’, shallow cliffs, and drumlins (small hills).

On the edge of the working quarry, Tarmac has created a sand cliff for sand martins who return to the site each year to breed. Sand martins nest in burrows excavated into sandy cliff walls, and the colony, which can consist of several hundred birds, return to Sandy in the spring to breed from their wintering grounds in Africa. They then migrate back to Africa in the autumn. The sand martins are not disturbed by the sound of nearby quarrying and can be seen swooping in and out of their burrows as they leave to catch flying insects then return to feed their young.

The vertical cliff face they nest in is tens of metres tall and the different coloured layers of strata clearly show different points in time as the land formed over millions of years. The rock in the cliff face formed in the Cretaceous era, the time of the last dinosaurs, 60 million years ago.