



NEWSLETTER Summer 2025

CHAIR'S NOTES

Moving Forward and a Call for Help

Once again, we have a varied, informative and engaging series of events planned for the coming months. First up we have TV presenter George McGavin opening the 2025/6 indoor programme with "What have Insects Done for us?". Subsequent talks include white-tailed sea eagle reintroductions in the South-West, an exploration of the topic "are our gardens better for birds or birdwatchers?", a dive into the fascinating world of lichens and the chance to learn why one man believes that "big cats" (such as the "beast of Exmoor") really do exist. Where possible, we encourage you to attend the meetings in person to enjoy "being in the room" with fellow members. However, for those unable to attend we will continue to offer a "Zoom option".

MDW is flourishing! Membership is steadily increasing and now stands at very close to 100. Attendance at indoor meetings is steadily on the rise (both in person and on Zoom) and the outdoor visits attract 8-15 on a regular basis. The WhatsApp group, now numbering 38, continues to engage members with interesting posts and some fascinating requests for help with species identification, drawing on the wide depth and breadth of knowledge available within the group. The Facebook page has seen a steady increase in engagement.

In an interesting development, MDW is now 'home' to the Junior Wildlife Warden (see later for more details). However, we do have an important challenge that needs addressing. The running and success of MDW depends, in large part, on the committee. It is they, who beavering away behind the scenes, make things happen. Without them, MDW would not be able to put on a varied and busy programme of activities. After many, many years on the committee, for we which we must all be very grateful, several committee members will be retiring at the up-and-coming AGM in April.

We have been fortunate to have had Clare Moughton and Colin Williams join the committee relatively recently, but the committee will need to recruit two or three new members by the time of the AGM. We are particularly interested in finding someone to coordinate (but not necessarily run) the outdoor events. Colin joined the committee and kindly stepped up to become treasurer at the last AGM but would very willingly

hand this over to someone else so that he can concentrate on other committee related activities.

Liz Redfern, who will in all probability will be chair next year, and the rest of committee, would be delighted to hear from anyone who would consider joining the committee or getting more involved in supporting it. Please get in contact if you would like to know more about a possible role on the committee or in another position.

Stephen Powles

FEATURES

Let's hear it for the humble Cockchafer, aka May-bug , Doodle-bug (*Melolontha melolontha*)

Despite its unfortunate name the poor old **cockchafer** (a large plant-gnawing beetle) has had a very bad press over the years. It is not exactly a handsome insect but as it regularly appears in our moth traps in May and June, sometimes in great numbers, it is worthy of more attention. They fly at night and are attracted to light (we had about 60 – yes, 60! – in our traps one night). The only other chafer we have come across during our moth trapping is the summer chafer – *Amphimallon solstitialis* – though of course we do get a variety of other interesting, night-flying invertebrates.

The cockchafer is a member of the Coleoptera order and the largest beetle of the Scarabaeidae family. The larvae, large white grubs, can live underground for 3-5 years feeding off the roots of crops. The adults start to appear in late April and live for only 5-6 weeks, feeding off the leaves of trees and shrubs. The female can lay up to 80 eggs during this time. The adult is about 20-30mm long, with a black pronotum (back of the thorax), pointed abdomen, brown legs, and rusty-brown wing cases. It has fanned antennae and, should you get close enough, you will see that the male has 7 feathers to each antennae and the female 6 (see photo).



Photos above (male) by Chris Hill



It can be a little frightening as it whirrs and buzzes during its clumsy and ungainly flight, often banging into objects such as windows and street lights. As it prepares to fly it quivers its wings under the cases for a few seconds before taking off vertically like a Harrier Jump Jet. Until the mid-1900s cockchafer soup was a delicacy in Germany and France. Hint: you will need to catch about 30 beetles for the soup.

Photo on left (female) by Jeni Fulton-Price

Chris Hill

Chiffchaffs

Back during lockdown in 2020, I started to do a daily walk down the Exe Valley from Tiverton to the sewage works and back, a round trip of approximately 6km. Five years on and I am still doing the walk; admittedly, I usually stick to dry days. I have turned into a fair-weather walker. This daily walk down the valley has enabled me to watch the changing seasons, the coming and goings of the migrants as the seasons change. The first swallow is always a landmark event and for me signifies the start of real spring. The arrival of the first winter thrushes signals that the dark, damp days of winter are on their way. A more subtle winter visitor is the meadow pipit, they start arriving sometime in October and depart in early March. They arrive from higher latitudes, whether from Exmoor, Scotland or abroad, I don't know where, but they spend the winter in the milder valley bottom, frequenting the grassy fields close to the sewage works; when disturbed they emit a high pitched sharp "ist". Their numbers are small, probably at a maximum of 20 birds, then one day in early spring they are gone.

One of the interesting facts about sewage works is that they are a fraction warmer in winter than the surrounding countryside, and there is an endless supply of bugs all year round. Several species have noted this and use the area around the sewage works as a good place to spend the winter. One species that is quite easy to pick up is the chiffchaff. Although we think of them as a summer visitor, they have for many years, decades now, been overwintering in the south-west of England and are slowly spreading north due to climate change. Until I started to do my morning walks I might come across just one or two during the winter months, but now I will come across them at least once or twice a week and sometimes daily if the weather is fine. For the last three years, I have recorded chiffchaffs every month of the year. In winter, there have been up to five individuals wintering in the hedges around Tiverton sewage works. They are usually within 800m of the works, calling "hweet" from the hedgerows. Sometimes they will start singing, which is a welcome sound as I associate the song with the start of spring and warmer weather, although last year (2024), they started singing in the first week of January while it was cold and misty. Chiffchaff call:

<https://xeno-canto.org/293515>



Chiffchaffs always seem to be about, but there is a brief period in March when they disappear. It is subtle; you suddenly realise that you haven't heard any for a few days. This happened to me last year (2024). I noted a comment from a fellow sound recordist colleague in Germany who stated that his chiffchaffs had just arrived back. I then realised that I hadn't heard any for about 10

Chiffchaff singing at sunset

(photo taken near Killerton by Malcolm Randle)

days. We know from ringing recoveries that our wintering chiffchaffs and blackcaps are not our own homegrown birds but birds from central Europe, Germany and Poland. So this nicely ties in: my wintering birds left Tiverton around the first week in March, and the continental birds turned up about 10 days later. A few days after that, our summer chiffchaffs start appearing. I can hear you say, "How do I know?" Well, they appear in totally different locations. Wintering chiffchaffs set up territories; you will always hear one calling from a particular hedgerow or small group of trees. They seldom wander far from their chosen area. When the first spring migrant chiffchaffs start appearing, they are all over the place, most in locations never frequented by any of the wintering birds.

Interestingly, this year 2025, there was no gap between wintering birds and incoming migrants. I just noticed that there were more chiffchaffs singing, some in places where wintering birds had been and some in new locations.

In autumn, the changeover is a lot more subtle. Young birds hang around calling or singing from hedgerows and from the tree canopy. The numbers slowly dwindle over a month or so, from maybe a dozen birds to just a handful. Then it's not until a mild day in November or December that you realise that you can hear just four or five birds calling from different locations on my route and they will be in these locations for the rest of the winter.

It is always worth keeping an ear open or eye out for wintering chiffchaffs; they can turn up almost anywhere. I occasionally hear them calling from my garden. The characteristic "hweet" call is a good one to learn. They are easily overlooked as they flit and skulk in bushes but will give away their presence by their call.

Paul Pratley

Nature and Wildlife Activities in Uffculme

(photos are by author and relate to the paragraph in which they are located)

Uffculme's Wildlife Group has a natural home as part of **Uffculme Green Team**, a volunteer-run and led community organisation focussed on environmental issues. Nature enthusiasts in Uffculme are trying to do their bit within our own Parish to help connect people with the natural world, link up with other like-minded individuals locally, increase our own knowledge and



to take on projects that make a contribution to support and improve biodiversity in Uffculme. We know we're not unique – many other folk in Mid Devon Wildlife are similarly involved with their own communities. We really appreciate the connection with other MDW members – benefitting from expertise, enthusiasm, swapping ideas as well as joining MDW events and outings.

We thought other members might be interested to know what's going on in our tiny corner of the planet, so here's a bit of a round-up of some of Uffculme Wildlife Group's activities:

Parish Magazine Articles: Chris (and an anonymous Correspondent) writes a wildlife column for the Parish Magazine (published 10 times a year). This gives a summary of what's been seen recently and invites readers to make contact to share information or ask questions. It's been a really successful way of engaging many people and Chris frequently receives photos, requests for help with



identification, reports of an interesting sighting or people just telling their own nature stories. It's also unearthed a number of qualified ecologists living in the Parish or people with a particular nature-based interest or expertise.

Annual Wildlife Report: to date, five annual wildlife reports have been published. As well as making it available electronically, a number of paper versions are produced with copies sent to Uffculme Library and various interested individuals or groups and toted around for stalls or displays. The report pulls together the Parish Magazine wildlife columns for the year; several articles on activities of particular note that have happened during the wildlife year in the Parish or species studied and Chris's assiduously-kept spreadsheets of sightings of flora, fauna and fungi, which is building into a considerable

<https://uffculmegreenteam.org.uk/uffculme-nature-and-biodiversity/>



Village Wildlife Pond: a group of volunteers has been

maintaining the village pond as a small wildlife site since June 2023. This is in partnership with the Parish Council, which leases the pond and surrounds from a local housing association that owns the area where the pond is situated. There's some 'light touch' maintenance to keep some of the more invasive vegetation manageable and habitats are being created for creatures of the air, ground and



water. A record is kept of how the area is developing and the volunteers involved, as well as people passing the pond as observers, are excited watching its



evolution. It's – perhaps inevitably – a bit of a balancing act keeping it 'wild for wildlife' whilst also looking cared for (especially around the publicly visible edges) to, at least trying to pacify some of the 'tidy brigade' who would probably be much happier seeing regimented rows of begonias and busy-lizzies growing through weed-proof membrane! We have had a couple of Duke of Edinburgh Award students from the local academy school doing their community volunteering work with us, which has been really positive, plus an Environmental Science student who has led a couple of pond dip surveys.

What's really notable is how volunteers so often say they love these weekly Sunday morning sessions and how working together there has made them notice and appreciate so much that they might previously have overlooked. Naturally, there's a WhatsApp group sharing pictures, IDs and ideas afterwards and we try to post highlights on the Green Team Facebook page as well a more conventional method of communication in situ. This board displays our Devon Wildlife Trust nature-friendly gardening award plaque.

Moth Surveys on Tour: there's a small group of us who have been carrying out regular moth surveys for the last five years – originally in our own gardens/patches, but in the last three years taking the equipment 'on tour' to different gardens or patches of land whenever anyone is interested. It's been fantastic to see the surprise and delight this generates as people see the huge variety of macro- and micro-moths that inhabit their gardens when they're sound asleep. It helps them understand even more how important these plots can be when nature is allowed to thrive. We've deployed the moth traps at the village wildlife pond a number of times, going through them with the Sunday morning volunteers (and random passers-by!) as part of our mission to open up the wonderful world of moths to more people. We've also gone on tour to Spiceland Quaker Meeting's summer camps, to a local retreat/events centre and are hoping to do a community event at Coldharbour Mill this summer. As other MDW moth-enthusiast members do, we submit our reports to the County Moth Recorder to contribute to local and national databases. To date we have recorded over 300 species of macro-moths and 150 species of micro-moths – a respectable number, but only about 20% of all those found in the UK!



'Wildflower Warriors': in another collaboration with the Parish Council the group of volunteers asked that toxic chemical use against 'weeds' should stop in public areas in the village. The volunteers asked to be allowed to manage a section of the main road through the village to let wildflowers thrive but keep it tidy enough so that it didn't obstruct pedestrian access or offend people who prefer to see things neat and 'weed' free. This has been happening successfully since 2023 and the group is hoping to have some notices put along a wall giving information about the wildflowers and creatures which survive in these tiny spaces.

The Planters Project: the Square in the centre of Uffculme (actually a triangle!) had



some large, ugly concrete planters around the historic Shambles structure. In a collaboration between Uffculme Green Team, the local gardeners' group and the Parish Council, one of our volunteers offered to create wood surrounds for the very unsightly planters and add some other improvements. As part of this, Green Team volunteers agreed to undertake the ongoing maintenance

and planting, focussing on pollinator-friendly species and some edible herbs. Our ardent hope is that some better parking arrangements can be made for the many cars which pack (and largely obscure) this historic area, leaving it more open for people to enjoy. One day, perhaps!

Swifts: there's a very active Swift group – linked to a wider Mid Devon Swift network (itself part of the national Swifts Local Network of over 175 Swift groups across the UK). For four years we have organised summer Swift watch evenings at Coldharbour Mill (where there is a significant colony) and we've encouraged people to put up swift boxes and decoy callers – at least 40 boxes have been installed in people's homes locally in the last four years or so, in addition to eight new boxes to bolster the existing natural nest sites and boxes at the Uffculme Primary School colony. We also monitor these two colonies (at the school and Coldharbour Mill) and a local Swift expert has given talks to children in Cubs and Beavers groups at the school. We're hoping to build on this next year doing other activities with the Primary School (including perhaps a 'welcome' parade round the school grounds when their special birds return!), in addition to having stalls at the PTFA summer fairs, which we've done now for two years. Last year our Repair Cafe hosted a couple of swift box assemblers who were able to chat with people about these wonderful summer visitors. As well as giving expert advice about swift box and decoy caller installations they also distributed information.



And not forgetting ...

Ad hoc wildlife and nature events get crammed in somehow during our wildlife year – we facilitated this Spring's **introduction to lichens walk** (lead by an expert from Devon Wildlife Trust) and were delighted to welcome several MDW members to it; we organised a 'nature friendly gardening' pop-up at our local garden centre during Great Big Green Week in June in collaboration with local beekeepers who brought their observation hive and we'll



once again be showcasing our wildlife activities on stalls at this summer's village fete and community picnic.

We're very fortunate to have four small areas of **community woodland** – in the guardianship of a local charity – and we make use of





them as much as we can. Similarly, at the edge of some disused quarry land on the margins of the Parish, we were successful in persuading the quarrying company to create a **small viewing area**. It has some wetland and areas of land being left to go wild – more places we like to visit as often as possible, to see how they're developing and monitor what's to be found there.

Our 'Uffculme Wildlife Sightings' WhatsApp group thrives and increases in number as we connect with more nature-enthusiastic people in the Parish. If fungi, lichens, mosses, botany, birds, butterflies, moths, hoverflies or other invertebrates are people's particular interest, there are definitely folk in our wildlife group who share those passions – and more! Through this group we've picked up a number of first sightings for the Parish and even some of wider significance. People in the group are – like so many MDW members on that WhatsApp group – generous in sharing their knowledge and expertise.

We all know that connecting with nature promotes wellbeing – improved physical and mental health, but we never forget that nature is constantly threatened by the climate crisis caused by human activity. For that reason, Uffculme Wildlife Group tries to take an active role – as well as just appreciating and learning more about the pleasures of local nature and wildlife.

Please keep in touch or contact us if you'd like to know more: email us at uffculmegreenteam@outlook.com and we also have a website in development at the moment uffculmegreenteam.org.uk

Jeni Fulton Price and Chris Hill

MDW to host the Junior Wildlife Warden Scheme

I am pleased to report that at the committee meeting in May we agreed to host the Junior Wildlife Warden Scheme within MDW.

The Junior Wildlife Wardens project began as a pilot with children aged 5-11 in the Bampton area who attended out of school events and worked independently through wildlife related tasks. From this it was clear the scheme would work more effectively with regular interaction and guidance in the school environment.

The project for the last nine months has been working with Silverton and Brampford Speke schools. Students have opted into the project and are working with 65 others aged 6-11. The junior wardens receive a booklet of seasonal project ideas and tasks to help them to learn about and protect the local environment and inspire others to do the same. They are awarded points and eventually a sticker and badge for their progress across the year. Schools are visited each season to check the students' progress and to work on some of their tasks with them.



Spore prints recorded by the Junior Wildlife Wardens

In schools so far they have made plastic free bird feeders, constructed and found ways to protect various habitats in their school grounds, looked for waxcaps, made spore

prints, collected and catalogued leaves, had a fungi foray, planted tree seeds, analysed lichens, identified bird calls, used a footprint tunnel, drawn and labelled plants of interest, made posters to share information about an aspect of wildlife they want to protect and been on a Bioblitz in both schools.

During this time, the project work was done under the umbrella of New Prosperity Devon (NPD). NPD also hosted the Mid Devon Wildlife Warden scheme and Peter Bowers and Andrew Birnie sat on their steering group. Earlier this year, there was decision to wind up NPD and they agreed with Devon Wildlife Trust that the Mid Devon Wildlife Warden Scheme, but not the junior scheme, could be incorporated into their Wilder Communities Project. (more of this later in this Newsletter)

So, the Juniors were looking for a home...several discussions later, we received a formal proposal from Laura Grant at our May meeting that MDW host them. Laura is a member of MDW, along with her son Eben, and some of you may have experienced his enthusiasm and expertise on last year's Fungay Foray. Laura works with Bethia Stevenson-Paul and they can support 2 schools each term. It costs about £1200 per school for the booklets, resources and Laura and Bethias time. The committee are very impressed with the work that had been completed so far and once we had explored more of the detail we were delighted to agree to the proposal. The work will be overseen by a subcommittee comprising Liz Redfern, Andrew Birnie, Colin Williams, Clare Moughton and Laura Grant. Please contact Liz on midedevonwildlife@gmail.com if you have any questions The main task for MDW is to provide banking facilities for the funds raised by Laura for the work. This will be kept separately and MDW has no responsibility for raising funds. We are also developing with Laura, other ways we could support the work and will be letting members know more about that in the future, as you may want to lend your expertise from time to time.

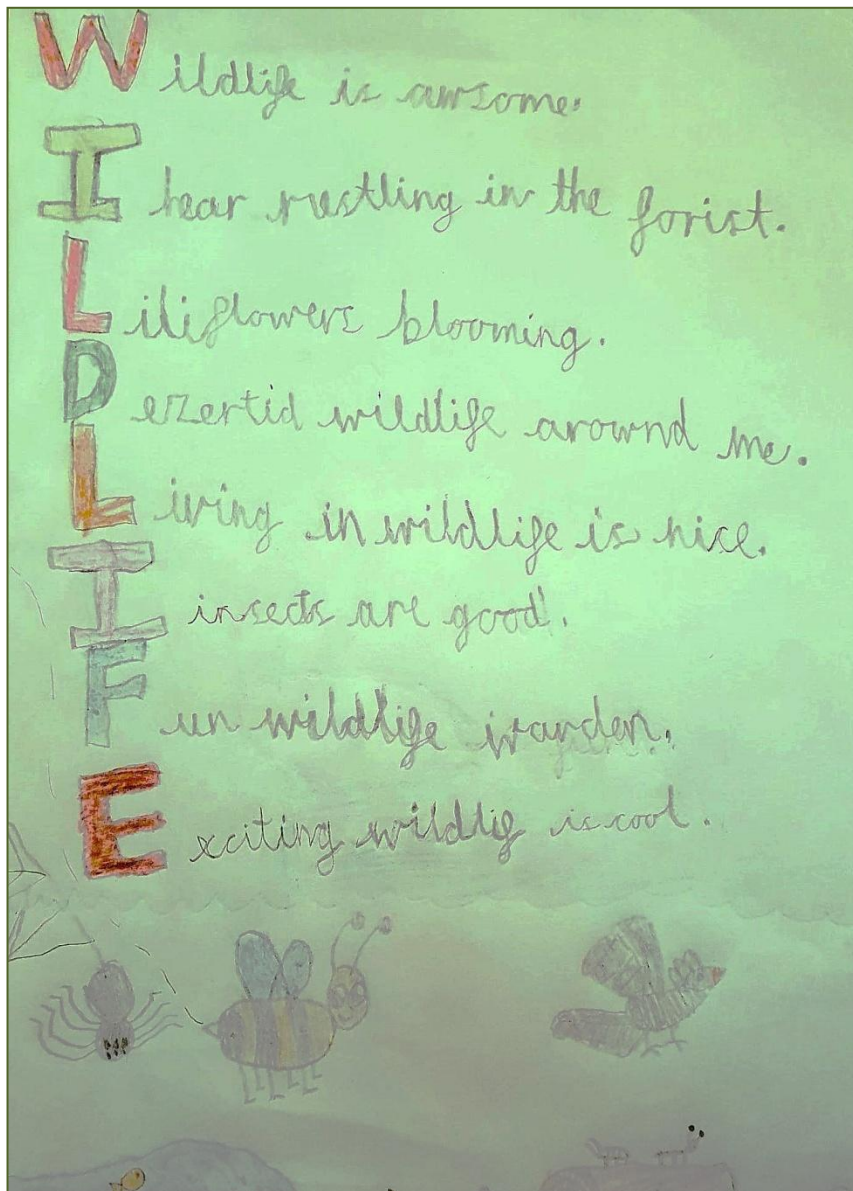
The committee saw this as an ideal opportunity to contribute to developing future wildlife enthusiasts and the work matches several of our aims. Many of us were

inspired when we were younger to be curious about the natural world around us and this work certainly does that.

Each term Laura writes a Newsletter for the schools and parents and here is Laura's report from the summer term:

Junior Wildlife Wardens Newsletter Summer Term

It's been a brilliant summer term for our junior wardens, with new recruits, final badges earned and some brilliant wildlife discovery and learning. The new wardens, class 2 at Bickleigh and the current students from Brampford Speke, have been working on summer tasks to support wildlife at home and



A poem by junior warden – Peter

hedgehog) completing their remaining booklet tasks and setting up their own wildlife wardens club independently. We had some lovely feedback from them about the project, and we wish them every success in their continued learning!

in school. They loved building bug hotels and drawing and identifying plants and wildflowers in their schools. We had a brilliant time bio-blitzing in their churchyard and community orchard recording 80 and 96 different species in each. We also had huge success setting up footprint tunnels in which both schools recorded hedgehog footprints, which was very exciting!

The 50 students from Brampford Speke School finished the scheme this term, earning their badges through their hard work and learning. They have made plans to continue with the project beyond this by fundraising for a wildlife trail camera for their school (to hopefully film their

We look forward to returning to Bickleigh in the autumn term to review their summer progress and work on autumn wildlife tasks. Over the summer we will be applying for further funding to work in more local school and support more wildlife and the environment through the students learning.

Thank you, Mid Devon Wildlife, for your support!

Liz Redfern

Mid Devon Wildlife Warden Scheme – Incorporated into Devon Wildlife Trust - What happens now?

Bampton Wildlife Wardens had been part of the Mid Devon Wildlife Wardens Scheme (MDWWS) since January 2023 and had grown from an initial membership of three to our present contingent of nine. So, it was with some sense of unease that we learned of the imminent demise of the parent body New Prosperity Devon. We were told that any Wildlife Wardens were invited to join the Devon Wildlife Trusts 'Wilder Communities Scheme' (see <https://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/wilder-communities>.) The Junior Wildlife Wardens were not part of this invitation, and you will have read previously in this newsletter about the MDW decision to host their work.

The Bampton Wardens, along with others from Mid Devon, attended a meeting in Tiverton in June with Katie Wilkinson of Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT). She explained the ethos of the Wilder Communities Scheme, which turned out to be remarkably similar to the MDWW Scheme. People getting together in local communities to deliver projects that benefit the local wildlife. We were delighted to discover that DWT were willing to visit our projects and lend their expertise to the work, and we promptly invited them to do so.

In early July, Dr Cathy Horsley visited us in Bampton and we were able to show her two of our current projects; the Bampton churchyard conservation area and our wildflower meadow in Clayhanger. Luckily Cathy is an expert botanist (her Phd was in controlling the spread of Himalayan Balsam) and so she was able to help us identify a number of plant species and guide us on our next steps towards promoting a wildlife rich habitat. She spent over two hours at Bampton Wildflower Meadow with us and will be sending a written report on her visit – all at no cost!!

We are delighted to have become part of the Devon Wildlife Trusts 'Wilder Communities Scheme'. If you are thinking of doing something similar in your locality, I'm sure you will learn a lot and have fun whilst doing it. Their website has much more information about the scheme, how to set one up and blogs from other groups trying to do the same thing..

See www.devonwildlifetrust.org



Bampton Wildlife Meadow
(photo by a group member)

If you want to find out more about what our Bampton group are doing, then contact Colin Williams on colintheframer@gmail.com

Colin Williams

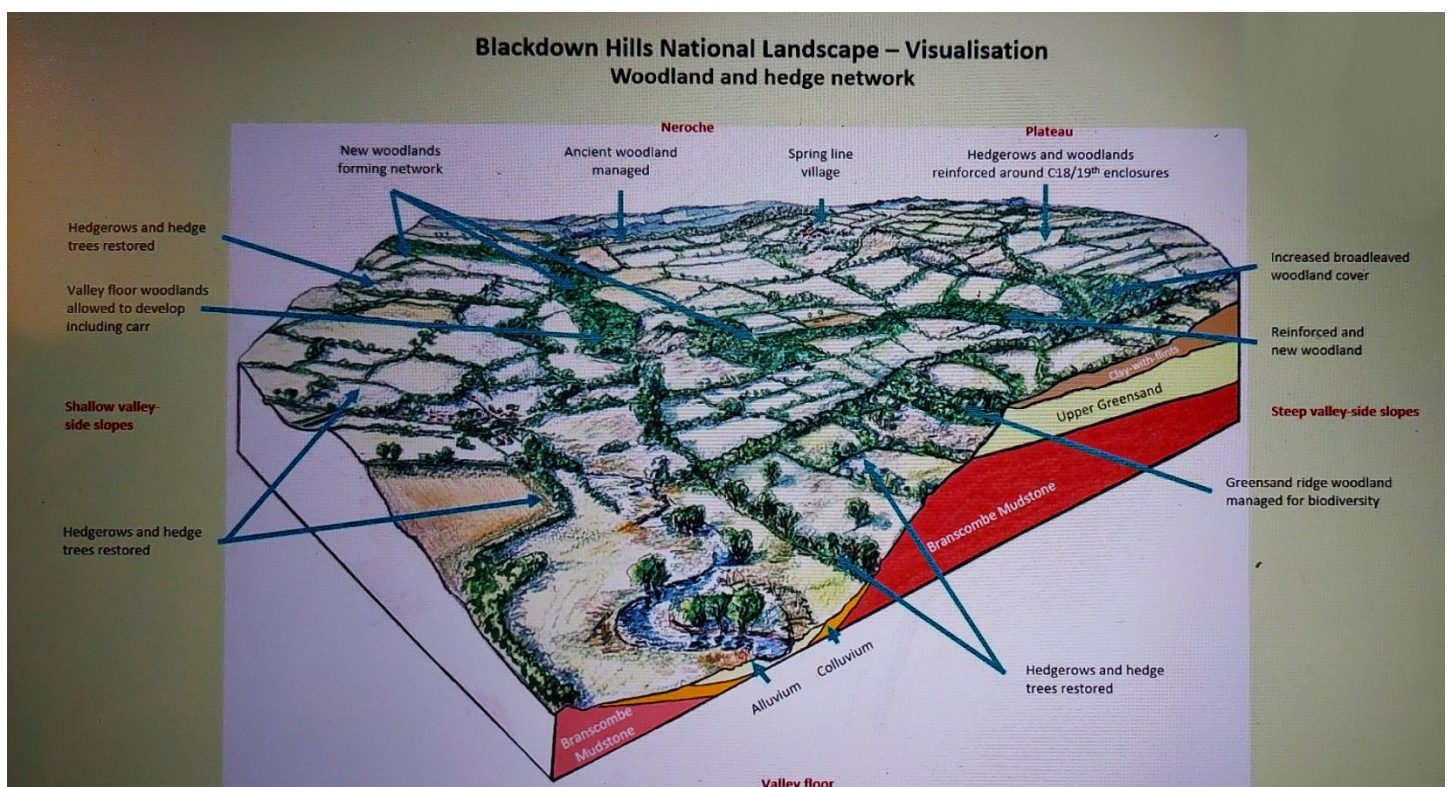
MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Blackdown Hills National Landscape; - Nature Recovery Plan and Connecting the Culm - Thursday 24th April 2025

We were treated to a very interesting talk and presentation by Tim Youngs, Manager at the Blackdown Hills National Landscape (BHNL). Tim has been working at the BHNL for the past eight years and has acquired a detailed knowledge of the ecology and history of the Blackdown Hills and surrounding area. Delivered at Cherith Hall, Tiverton, Tim spoke about two core aspects of the work of the BHNL which he and his small team of five undertake:

1. Creating and implementing a nature recovery plan
2. Connecting the Culm

Before guiding us through these two key components of work, Tim went on to explain what comprises the BHNL. Designated in 1991, as the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Beauty, it was renamed in 2023 to the BHNL. This was to better reflect the national importance of such landscapes and create a national identity. Tim also explained the geography of the BHNL area which covers 370km² with approximately one third located in Somerset and the remainder in Devon. The landscape comprises a steep wooded north-facing scarp which dips southwards as a flat-topped plateau dissected by deep secluded valleys. The hilltops are open windswept spaces and below, villages and hamlets are located within a patchwork of small enclosed fields lined with high hedge-banks.



Blackdown Hills National Landscape –Visualisation Woodland and hedge network

The area is characterized by a unique outcrop of Upper Greensand which was formed during the Cretaceous period and comprises clay, chert bands and flints. Tim further explained that the Upper Greensand in the western part of the landscape lacks calcareous material which contributes to a diversity of plant species and habitat structure. These include heathland, ancient broad-leaved woodland, springline mires, hay meadows and unimproved grasslands, hedgerows, wet woodlands, rivers and streams.

The varied landscape supports a rich assemblage of wildlife including many species of bat, butterflies and meadow flowers. A network of ancient semi-natural woodland linked to hedgerows provides food and shelter to the dormouse population.

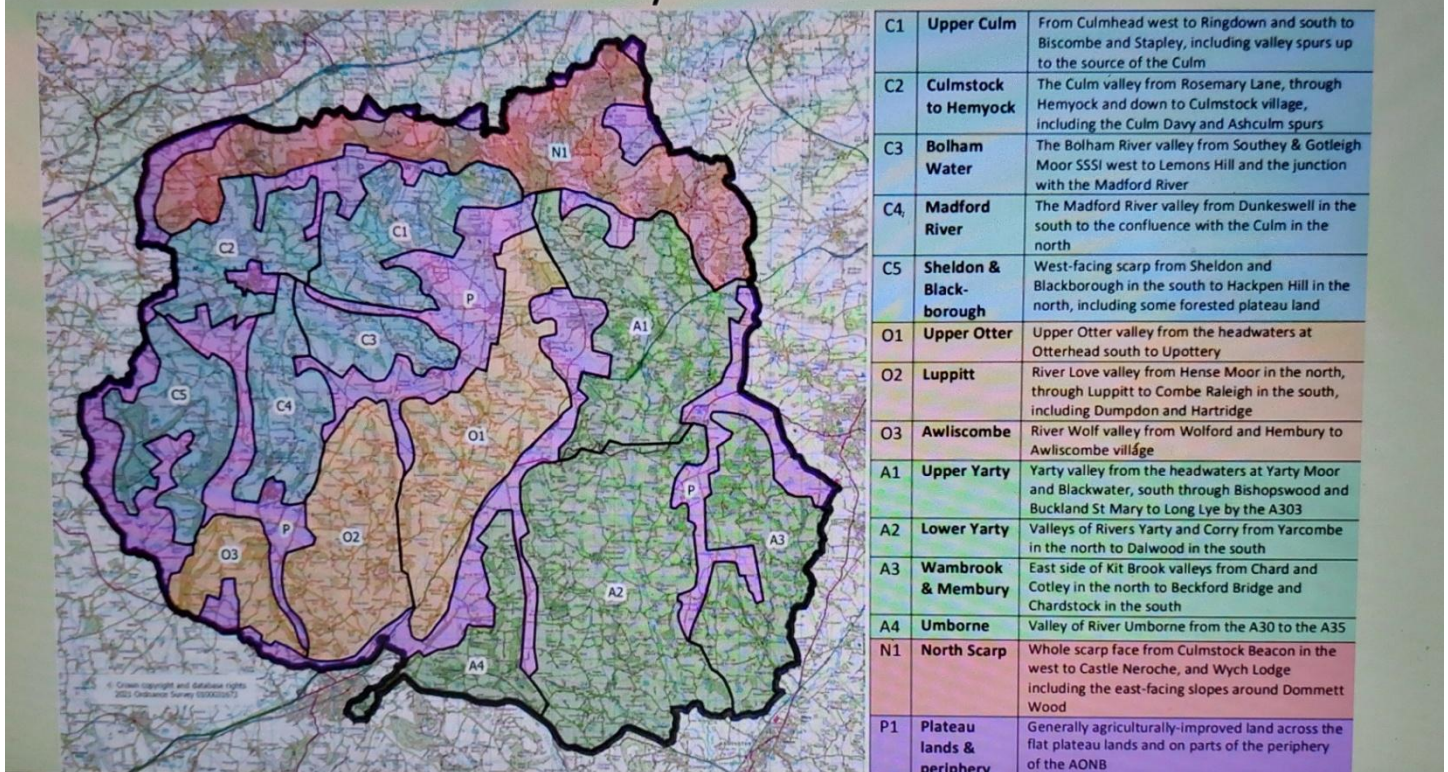
Nature Recovery Plan

A key element of the BHNL team's work is developing and implementing a nature recovery plan. This comprises 14 nature recovery areas which include – the river catchments of the upper Culm, upper Otter, upper Yarty together with the north scarp covering the area from Culmstock Beacon in the west across to Castle Neroche in the east. Each of these areas has been surveyed and mapped to assess their current conservation status and identify priorities for action. To help achieve landscape improvements the team's approach is to work in partnership with farmers, local authorities and wildlife conservation organisations.

Tim explained how the team and partners are working to improve key habitats which have champion species such as hazel dormice, brown hare, long eared brown bat and brown hairstreak butterflies. Using the example of the upper Yarty catchment landscape, Tim mentioned the following priority interventions that included:

- Slowing the flow of water off the land into the River Yarty, and improving water quality, soil structure and infiltration
- To conserve springline mire, wet heath, unimproved neutral grassland, ancient semi-natural woodland and associated priority habitats in the valleys around Birchwood/Bishopswood, Buckland St Mary and Marsh.
- Create more natural, woody vegetation along the river corridor. Interventions which improve hedge structure and condition.

Nature Recovery Areas



Nature Recovery areas

Benchmarking has an important role in measuring changes over time and the upper Culm is being regularly assessed. This includes priority habitats such as deciduous

woodland, traditional orchards, good quality semi-improved grassland, lowland fens and meadows and purple moor grass and rush pastures.

Another facet of Tim and his team's work is monitoring soil carbon stocks in partnership with Cranfield University. The intention is to measure carbon emissions and, in particular, levels of carbon stored in the soil. It is estimated that the BHNL has around 7m tonnes stored in the soil, especially peat lenses. Connecting the Culm is another core programme that the BHNL is very much involved with and Tim spoke about how it's progressing. It is very much partnership driven with the National Trust, Environment Agency, Mid Devon District Council and Devon County Council participating. The project covers 300 sq km and is a blueprint for the River Culm catchment which looks ahead 25 years. This vision of how the Culm Valley might look includes the following – improved resilience to flooding, drought, improved water quality, wildlife conservation, reduced CO2 emissions, community access and heritage.

The approach very much adopts a whole catchment model and is designed to identify where best to focus interventions via a management plan. Potential Areas of Improved Resilience (PAIRs) are included. These comprise temporary water storage and floodplain reconnection, improved soil infiltration, riparian tree planting/hedgerow reinstatement.

Tim also mentioned the work they have been doing with Network Rail and partners, concerning the increased flooding events at Hele Crossing. Using nature based solutions such as woodland creation, floodplain reconnection and water storage features, the peak flow has been reduced by up to 21% so far at the crossing. Apart from flood resilience, further developments are being undertaken to maximise benefits such as improved biodiversity, water resource resilience (drought), better water quality and 'locking up' carbon stores.

For more information please see www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk
and also www.connectingtheculm.com

Andie Birnie

NB Both the above photos are screen prints made during the talk. You might need to enlarge them when viewing online using the Adobe magnifier at the bottom right.)

Dawlish Warren - Wednesday 21st May 10.00 with Rod Lawrence

A slightly apprehensive group was greeted with love and encouragement by our leaders Rod and Sue Lawrence on the margin of Dawlish Warren nature reserve but why apprehensive? The weather forecast was for light rain all morning!! Sure enough, it was light rain all morning, but an amazingly good time was had by all.



Southern marsh orchids at Dawlish Warren (photo by Stephen Powles)

Just beyond the car park huge stands of hemlock water dropwort greeted us as we gathered, whilst towards the promenade were clusters of yellow lupin. Rod told us this is a native of California, and was introduced to Britain as a garden plant. The tree lupin really liked the Warren habitat and in the absence of any predators had gone rampant, threatening the ecology of the whole site. It became so serious in the 1980s that dozens of volunteers, including our Rod, were employed to pull it all up and burn it away on the beach. Since that clearance it has not been a problem but is now spreading rapidly and could become a problem again.



Evening primrose
(*Oenothera parviflora*)



Sand cat's tail
(*Phleum arenarium*)

Another favourite, and in plentiful supply on the Warren, is the evening primrose. The large yellow (*Oenothera biennis*) and the beautiful smaller version, which is delightfully flecked with splashes of orange (*Oenothera parviflora*), open in late afternoon and they do it very quickly. A bit further on we were treated to masses of southern marsh orchids (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*). Also, looking like swathes of white clover, were exquisite fluffy sand cat's tail (*Phleum arenarium*).



Goat's-beard
(*Tragopogon pratensis*)

Most of the sandy pathways included vetches and restharrow (*Ononis repens*) in the grassy humps making up the margins of the path. On the more overgrown part of the route we saw burnet rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*) with beautiful white flowers and wonderful shiny black fruits plus bittersweet nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*). At one point well on the journey, when the sun was breaking through, we found a solitary goat's-beard (*Tragopogon pratensis*) which had not yet opened its flower head, so we couldn't confirm it as being 'Jack goes to bed at noon' (goat's-beard) which only opens its

(The above three illustrations are by Gavin Haig)

flower head in the morning sun then closes at midday. It is usually found on rough grassy habitats but occasionally on sand dunes such as Dawlish Warren. It is also known as meadow salsify, showy goat's-beard or meadow goat's-beard and is in the family Asteraceae.



Cirl bunting (male)

We were also treated to some fabulous bird encounters with cirl buntings calling in the gorse and skylarks 'singing their feathers out' before dropping down to their nest sites on the ground. Flocks of linnets also coloured our journey and we saw a small flock of sanderlings at the tide edge. These amazing little birds had flown all the way from Greenland.



Skylark

(both above photos by Malcolm Randle at other locations)



Common blue

(Photos by Wendy Mills)



Red Campion



Speckled wood

(Photo by Malcolm Randle)

Butterflies were minimal, but we did see a common blue in full display in the filtered sun of the early afternoon. We also saw a speckled wood by the woodland margin. We then left the Warren through a woodland area with many mature trees looking elegant and majestic. Both Rod and Sue emphasised the enormous value trees are to our threatened wildlife in all its forms. At one point we saw a splendid display of red campion (*Silene dioica*). There was also meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and lovely early plants of gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*).

But finally, the most special plant of the Warren is the sand crocus. Now known as the Dawlish Warren sand crocus (*Romulea columnae*), because this is now its ONLY known site in the UK, this tiny plant with beautiful blue flowers is a treat to see. Sadly it had finished flowering.

Gavin Haig FRCS



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

A friendly group interested in all aspects of the natural world.
Join us at our meetings held at CHERITH HALL, BLUNDELLS RD
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THURSDAY 25 SEPT 7.30
WHAT HAVE INSECTS EVER DONE
FOR US?
Dr George McGavin
Entomologist & TV Presenter

THURSDAY 23 OCT 7.30
BADGERS
Sarah Tingvoli
/ Devon & Somerset Badger Group

THURSDAY 27 NOV 7.30
RETURN OF THE WHITE TAILED SEA EAGLE
Zoe Smith
Raptor Biologist

THURSDAY 18 DEC 7.30
Members presentations and reflections
Social time

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