

Backwell Environment Trust

Bulletin 22 - Autumn 2011

www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org



A very warm welcome to our latest autumn bulletin

Over the summer months we have been working hard to complete our brand new 500 metre woodland trail through one of the most beautiful parts of Badgers Wood, as well as hand scything our ever expanding wildflower meadows.

To help you find your way around our action packed bulletin the contents are listed below :

The Chairman's Jottings

BET AGM 2011

Annual Report

Woodland Report

**Cattle, Corn &
Countryside**

Backwell Lake

Autumn Magic

BET's Springtime Walk

Seeds, Seeds, Seeds

Autumn Thoughts



The Chairman's Jottings



**With this Bulletin you receive notice of our Annual General Meeting to be held on
Saturday November 19th in the Parish Hall at 2.00pm.**

Last year our guest speaker was local historian Norma Knight who told us all about the history of Backwell Hill. Continuing our commitment to high quality, this year trustee Andrew Town will give an illustrated talk on Backwell Lake which he has been studying and photographing for many years.

Please attend the AGM if you possibly can. We need at least 10% of members to be present to make us quorate and as our membership is quite large I worry annually that we are going to make it.

Colin Pope

Members will be saddened to hear of the death of our long serving Parish Council Chairman and member Colin Pope. He gave great encouragement to BET from the very start and was a constant support and help in our struggles to secure the woodland areas above Backwell for the community. He will be greatly missed.



Volunteers

What a year for volunteering! We received our Queen's Award for volunteering last year but even more volunteer hours have been donated this year and with spectacular results. I wonder what the secret is. The short sessions with sociable breaks? The tea, coffee and biscuits, sometimes cake and other treats? Much of it surely due to the leadership of our woodland manager Ian Chambers. Honourable mentions again to Don Steadman, Gerald Wilcox and also to Anne-Marie and Andy Smith, Peter Speight, Jenny Greenslade, Ann Chambers, David Jones and apologies to all the many others I haven't named who also turn up and get stuck in to *whatever* needs doing.

Website

Our new website has been up and running for nearly a year now and I would like to thank Chris Hoult for all the hard work he has put into creating and maintaining it and coping with all the problems that arise. If you haven't already done so, I recommend you visit www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org to keep abreast of what is going on.

Backwell Neighbourhood Plan

Backwell Parish Council has been given funding to write a neighbourhood plan covering the next fifteen years. The initiative stems from the draft Localism Bill and the new Draft National Policy Planning Framework. As far as I understand it, the benefit to the village is that if a plan is written and approved in a local referendum it will trump any other planning proposals and thus prevent unsuitable and unwanted development in the village. The possible downside is that the plan must not be simply an expression of nimbyism, but must contain solid proposals for 'sustainable development'. However, 'sustainable development' in the framework is so broadly defined as to simply mean 'development'.

Backwell is very well placed to write a neighbourhood plan in that it already has in place an excellent Community Plan (2010), based on solid evidence, thanks to the hard work and dedication of concerned fellow villagers. The CP shows that most Backwellians support a reasonable and targeted degree of development in the village.

The purpose of this note is to alert members to the initiative and to encourage them to help the project in any way they can and, in due course, to take part in the referendum.



Backwell Cave

Well the saga continues. Much depends now on the planning authorities and local councils who must decide whether the proposals by the owners of Coles Quarry for its development are acceptable. These were described in some detail in Bulletin 21 and will involve a great deal of infilling of the quarry and the creation of a small industrial estate. The planning application has yet to be submitted but I understand that the company will do so before the year-end at the latest. Another complication is that the government is in the process of reforming planning regulations (see above).

Backwell Lake Path

Backwell Access Group are still not quite there in their long and determined struggle to get a wheelchair friendly path around Backwell lake. They have surmounted many difficulties and now have the necessary planning permission. However the latest, and we hope the last snag, involves how to give the adjacent River Kenn its periodic dredging without damaging the path. The landscape architects working on the design of the path and the Land Drainage Board are working towards a solution.

Bill Charnock

BET Annual General Meeting

Saturday November 19th 2011

Backwell Parish Hall

The hall will be open from 11am with displays and information about BET & other local related organisations.

Your trustees will be on hand to serve refreshments and to answer any questions you may have on BET, its activities past, present and future.

The AGM will start at 2pm and after the short official business there will be a break for tea, coffee and cakes followed by an illustrated talk by trustee Andrew Town entitled

'A Celebration of the Wildlife of Backwell Lake'



Agenda



- ❖ Minutes of the AGM held on November 27th 2010
- ❖ Treasurer's Report
- ❖ Chairman's Report
- ❖ Election of officers and trustees
- ❖ Any other business

The Annual Report for 2010 - 2011 and a nomination form for trustees and officers are included with this bulletin. The minutes of our last AGM and the annual accounts will be available at the meeting.

Volunteer Activity Mornings - on the **SECOND THURSDAY** and **FOURTH SATURDAY** of every month starting at 10am on both days and continuing for about 2 hours - or as long as your energy lasts!

The tasks will change as the woodland year progresses and can vary according to your strength and interests. Please wear stout footwear and suitable old clothes.

We **always** break at about 11am for large amounts of chat, tea and biscuits.

Meet at the lower entrance to Jubilee Stone Wood outside No17 Church Town just before 10am or telephone in advance to find out where we shall be working (01275 463315)

BACKWELL ENVIRONMENT TRUST

ANNUAL REPORT

OCTOBER 1ST 2010 TO SEPTEMBER 30TH 2011

REGISTERED CHARITY 1109406

Summary

This year has been one of consolidation and routine management of the Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve and significant improvements in Badgers Wood Nature Reserve both made possible by a regular, enthusiastic and growing volunteer effort. The trust has still not secured the Backwell Cave area despite strenuous efforts but there have been encouraging developments.

Formally the trust changed its charitable objectives to cover history as well as natural history. The trust is solvent and has discharged all its reporting obligations to the Charity Commission.

The scheme of this report is as follows. Section 1 deals with our extended objects (to use Charity Commission terminology) while Section 2 summarises cave acquisition issues. Sections 3 and 4 deal respectively with the many activities we have undertaken over the reporting year and the work done on the nature reserves. (A more detailed account of the latter can be read in the Woodland Manager's Report). Finally there is a fifth short section that covers administration of the trust and related items.

1. Extension of BET's Charitable Objects

BET's nature reserves contain numerous historical features. There are the lead mines, a warren's cottage, the limekiln and, although we do not as yet own it, there is of course the prehistoric Backwell Cave. Surveys of nearby land have also confirmed the location of ancient barrows. The value of these assets to the community is apparent but there was also a worry that our charitable objects precluded us from spending on projects specifically dealing with history.

Accordingly, a BET member proposed at the November 2010 AGM that our objects which read:

- 1) To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment by promoting biodiversity.
- 2) To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment.



Be extended to:

- 1) 'To promote for the benefit of the public the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment by promoting biodiversity **and the understanding of past and present human activity and its impact on the environment.**'
- 2) 'To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection, improvement and history of the physical and natural environment.'

This motion was passed unanimously by the 2010 AGM and the proposal submitted to and approved by the Charity Commission.

2. Backwell Cave and Adjoining Woodland

At the start of the reporting period, Cemex UK Ltd who owned the Cave and adjoining 3.25 acres of woodland, had withdrawn their offer to sell to BET and had sold instead, along with the whole of Coles Quarry, to the directors of Hosier Griffith Estate Agents and Lancer Scott, a national building company. The intentions of the new owners were unclear although they indicated in preliminary contacts that the cave woodland would eventually come to BET.

In July 2011, plans for the quarry area were outlined to BET by the owners and in August a presentation was made by them to Backwell Parish Council. They intend to create an industrial estate for light industry on the site of the existing quarry buildings and to infill and landscape the lower parts of the quarry with excavated material from their building sites. This infilling and landscaping will allow them to create a three acre playing field to donate to a local school. The rest of the quarry, the cave woodland and adjoining fields they will donate to BET.

The downside for Backwell of course is that there will need to be significant movement of heavy lorries through the village and up Dark Lane for two or three years. All these proposals have to be negotiated with local councils and the planning authorities before they are implemented and in the nature of things may change, but it means we may eventually come to own Backwell Cave on behalf of the community.

3. BET Events and Activities

We have continued our regular sessions of woodland management by BET volunteers held on the second Thursday and fourth Saturday of each month. However, our activities have been greatly increased by the gradual development over the reporting period of a weekly Monday morning session. On average, 12 volunteers now turn up each week and this has boosted the volunteer input to BET, including time spent on educational and administrative activities from **2,254** hours last year to **3,489** in the current reporting period. We are very grateful to all our many dedicated and energetic volunteers.

Events include a presentation by Norma Knight, local historian on 'Backwell Hill; Its history and development' at our AGM in November 2010. In January, student Philip Chapman gave an illustrated talk on his ornithological researches in Israel. Guided autumn (October) and spring (April) nature walks were led by trustee Carrie Riches while trustees Caroline Houlton and Amanda Swannell led a winter walk (February). February also saw a highly successful hedge laying course in Badgers Wood led by trustee Ian Chambers and member Malcolm Dowling. There were more than 40 attendees, some of whom have since become regular BET volunteers. Gill Brown assisted by trustee Ian Chambers have continued their monthly dormouse surveys and demonstrated the importance of the reserves for this rare, nocturnal mammal.

Trevor Riddle of the RSPB and colleagues, once again did their annual springtime inspections and refurbishment of nest boxes in Jubilee Stone Wood while trustees Mike Marks and Bill Charnock did the same in Badgers Wood.

Trustees Ian and Ann Chambers, Amanda Swannell, Caroline Houlton and Bill Charnock organised activities in the woods to assist Backwell School in an enrichment week in June. Junior and infant children from local schools used the woods on various Tuesday mornings throughout the school year under the supervision of North Somerset Playrangers.

Trustee Jenny Greenslade has organised geophysical surveys of the field adjacent to the Jubilee Stone by the Clevedon Environs Archaeological Team (CLEAT) and confirmed the location of ancient barrows.



BET continues to support and collaborate with the North Somerset Parish Wildlife Wardens, the Backwell Fairtrade Café, Backwell Access Group (of wheelchair users), TENONS (The Environmental Network of North Somerset) and Nailsea Environment and Wildlife Trust (NEWT). It also now supports Sustainable Backwell in its activities on transport, energy and food.

4. Work in Badgers Wood and Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserves

Badgers Wood has again been the main focus of activity this year. There have been two major developments. The first is the completion of a wheelchair access from Cheston Combe to a spectacular viewpoint overlooking the Bristol Channel. We are grateful to the Parish Council for a grant making this possible. The second is a creation of a 500m permissive path, the Fern Way, climbing from Church Town practically to the top of the hill. This was the concept of our woodland leader Ian Chambers and constructed wholly by volunteer labour. It traverses an area which receives little sunlight and the flora is thus unusual with many ferns. There have also been clearances both at the bottom ('The Layers') and the top of Badgers Wood to restore wildflower meadows.

In Jubilee Stone Wood the emphasis has been mainly on maintenance and consolidation. This has involved grass cutting and bracken control in the Horse-ring, Jubilee Stone area, new coupe and bridleway areas, mostly by hand scythe.

4. Trust administration Trustees' meetings

The trustees have met on five occasions during the reporting period usually on a weekday evening at Backwell School. Note that since its inception, the trust has allowed and encouraged all members to attend and participate in these meetings.



Bulletins

Three bulletins have been issued in the reporting period (numbers 19, 20 and 21).

Membership

On September 30th 2011, there were **303** members compared with **284** in 2010, **294** in 2009 and **263** in 2008.

Formal reports to the Charity Commission

BET has submitted to the Charity Commission as required, formal reports and audited accounts for the period from October 1st 2009 to September 30th 2010.

Conclusion

I believe this annual report demonstrates that Backwell Environment Trust continues to achieve its objectives.

Bill Charnock ~ 30th Sept 2011

Acknowledgements

BET gratefully acknowledges the help and support of Backwell Parish Council and of our numerous members, supporters and donors.

Woodland Report

The summer weather may not have turned out quite as warm and sunny as we were hoping, but at least I can take comfort that it has finally turned out to be a good season for the restoration of our wildflower meadows. That very British combination of sunshine and showers from June onwards has been pretty well perfect in tempting many of our long dormant wildflower seeds to germinate turning the bare, brown soil into vibrant green foliage and colour once more. Whilst the meadows restored last winter have got off to a good start with many species of trail-blazing wildflowers covering the ground, it is the meadows opened up two years ago that have stolen the show in a riot of colour and biodiversity that will only get better as the years unfold.



The 'Fern Way' Woodland Trail (BW)

After 4½ months of intensive new path construction in Badgers Wood, the trusty BET volunteers finally completed the last section of the 500 metre long trail in early September. In true BET style, there was an unfeasibly large sticky chocolate cake waiting for them at tea time which all too quickly vanished along with the usual lashings of tea and coffee. The enthusiasm and sheer hard work of our many volunteers never fails to amaze me and it is true to say that BET has only got where it is today by their consistent dedication and loyalty - whatever the weather!

◆◆◆◆◆ A BIG BET thank you to you all ◆◆◆◆◆

The trail passes through a spectacular woodland landscape of ancient trees, exposed cliff faces and, of course, literally thousands of lush, green ferns. So you can take a break and soak up the

peaceful atmosphere of the wood, rustic benches have now been installed at suitable points along the way. There is so much to see in this secret area of Badgers Wood that it's worth taking the time just to marvel at a landscape that has probably changed very little for hundreds of years.



The Final Bit of the Trail...

Wildlife Pond Water Storage (JSW)

As you know, the last two springs in our part of the world have been notable for their very low rainfall values. This has caused some problems with the water levels in our two wildlife ponds in Jubilee Stone Wood as the pond evaporation rate far exceeded the rainfall flowing into them. So to permanently solve this predicament, a bank of 13 plastic dustbins has now been hidden in the woodland which will collect water over the winter ready to be siphoned into the ponds when needed. Our 13 bins are now able to store just over a tonne of water between them which will be a great help in topping up the ponds during any future spring or summer droughts. Once again, a big thank you to all our members who donated their spare plastic bins - they will come in very useful over the coming years.



Wildflower Meadow Scything (JSW & BW)

Every year at the end of the summer, BET's wildflower meadows are cut by our volunteers, mainly using traditional hand scythes. In the short term, the annual grass cut removes invading brambles and tree seedlings which would quickly swamp the grassland if left unchecked and, over the long

term, the removal of the cut material from the meadows will slowly reduce the soil's fertility. Lower fertility soils are good news for wildflowers because they can survive quite happily in them



Scything the Jubilee Stone Meadow

whilst the less welcome plants often struggle so, over time, the native wildflowers begin to multiply and dominate once more. To date, BET has restored something like $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres of wildflower meadows which now all have to be cut, so we are especially grateful to our loyal band of volunteers who have been busy swinging their hips scything our fledgling wildflower grasslands.

Wood Treatments (JSW & BW)

Our four woodland sculptures in Jubilee Stone Wood and the wonderful seat overlooking the Badgers Wood viewpoint had just started to show a bit of fungus distress over the past year. This summer they have been painted with a wood stain/preserver to keep them looking pristine for a few more years to come.

Central Heating! (BW)

BET member and volunteer, Richard Pinnell, has very kindly loaned BET a wood-burning stove to heat the BET 'clubhouse' in Badgers Wood when we need to make use of it during the winter months. The stove itself is 'home-made' but has been very professionally done with all the usual air control ports, etc, together with many horse-rings welded to it making it very visually appealing as well as practical.

BET Volunteers

Over the past year, the trusty BET volunteers have put in the incredible total of **3489 volunteer hours** into the running of BET and managing our two nature reserves. It is no exaggeration to say that the success of BET is exclusively due to the quality and hard work of our volunteers, so yet another **BIG BET THANK YOU** to you all.



Ian Chambers



Cattle, Corn & Countryside

(but no poisonous creepy things!)

The view across the valley towards Wales from BET's lookout point at Badgers Wood is magnificent, especially if one ignores the modern buildings and visual 'clutter' of 21st century Britain. With its patchwork of gentle hills and layout of ancient fields, trees and hedgerows, it is the epitome of the English countryside. When the Romans arrived over 2,000 years ago to exploit the rich lead seams at Charterhouse, the land in Somerset was already densely settled with Iron Age farmsteads and fields. The only available space was by the coast, with salt marshes, inter-tidal mudflats and freshwater bogs, so it was important to first drain the land in order to settle there. The success of these schemes can be seen from construction of the M5 motorway, when traces were found of farms, ditches, and/or pottery, roughly every two and a half miles, but no Iron Age finds at all.



At least 9 villas were eventually built on this reclaimed land, the most palatial being the 15-roomed Wemberham villa at Yatton, excavated in 1884, complete with a possible boathouse/dock beside the River Yeo. At another riverside villa at Banwell, timbers of a Roman boat were found there in 1974, showing the importance of water transport to move goods around - pottery for example, from the kilns at Venus Street, Congresbury. Roman roads were rarely built in the countryside, only between towns and military units. Excavations at Gatcombe, Flax Bourton, a Roman walled settlement, (small town/industrial estate/munitions works?), revealed a cellar which contained 2,403 large, un-weathered, broken pieces of pottery, much of it from Congresbury and possibly the result of a cart accident on a muddy country lane!

One of the main industries by the coast were Salterns - salt production, made by heating seawater to high temperatures in large pans. Two sites at Dolemoor, Puxton and Banwell Moor were excavated with 165 others known in Somerset. Salt was the chief method of food preservation (no fridges!), allowing meat and fish to be eaten in the winter months when cattle and sheep were reduced in numbers due to feeding problems, and bad weather made sea fishing hazardous.

Cattle were the most important domestic animals, producing meat, milk, leather for clothing, whilst heavy oxen also pulled ploughs and carts. Cattle and horses were smaller than today, but Roman breeding programmes helped increase both size and longevity leading to increased profit and better quality meat. Pigs too, were tiny, though goats and sheep were the same size. Mendip wool was extremely popular especially when made into hooded heavy woollen cloaks and thick travel rugs - very necessary here after hot, sunny Italy! The Romans also hunted wild animals for meat, and sadly helped denude the forests of some big beasts with bears being killed at Colchester, Essex, and Richmond, Yorkshire. Reindeer also became scarce, although they were still in North Wales and Cumbria in the 17th century. One writer described our fauna as boring - *'no giant beasts, nor poisonous creepy things, but incalculable numbers of flocks and herds full of milk and laden with fleeces!'*



In Roman Britain, 90% of the people lived in houses of mud, timber and straw in the countryside, 1% of the farming elite in villas, and the rest in towns or military units. The country was self-sufficient in food, growing traditional crops of oats, barley, flax for oil and fibre, spelt and bread-wheat and Roman investment developed crops with a tolerance for damp soil (historian Tacitus declared our weather 'most foul!'). Each grain field was rotated annually with Celtic beans, *Vicia falsa minor*, which was a staple crop - the beans were eaten, the stems and

foliage went for fodder and, as a bonus, nitrogen nodules on the roots helped fertilise the soil. Other benefits for farmers included rotary querns for grinding corn - more efficient than rubbing 2 stones together - corn-driers, and better ploughs.

We know what crops were grown from seeds in the soil or from waterlogged sites, like the well at Chew Park Villa, just one of many buildings now beneath Chew Valley Lake. Of the 1,500 environmental items, 150 were identified, including plums, apples, cherries (still with the flesh on), cabbage and barley, plus wooden buckets, ropes, a copper jug and a rare wooden writing tablet with several lines in ink and part of a legal document for transfer of land.



We are lucky to be living in an area with archaeological sites of most periods, and their excavations have given us glimpses of everyday life all those many years ago. Backwell has a Cave with some Neolithic burials 5,000 years old, Bronze Age barrows, Iron Age hillfort(s), and farmsteads, but no identified Roman site as yet. Beneath St Andrews Church (Norman), lies an

earlier Saxon one and there are Medieval buildings and much more. My favourite period is still that of the Roman one and how many of us can recall the immortal lines in Monty Python's film 'Life of Brian' - "What did the Romans do for Us?" The reply is (of course) - 'Only sanitation, medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, freshwater systems, public health - and Peace!'.

Jenny Greenslade

Backwell Lake

Backwell Lake was created in 1975 as a flood prevention balancing pond. It has since become a wonderful haven for a wide variety of wildlife and has been granted Local Nature Reserve status.



It is also much used and loved by the local community.

In 1995, with support from the wildlife wardens and others, BET approached Wessex Water about the management of the lake grounds. The purpose of this was to encourage them to recognize the huge wildlife value of the lake and grounds and to protect their Local Nature Reserve status. Since then I have been privileged to be the group's representative in

discussions with Wessex Water to create a five year plan that includes the management of the grass, marginal vegetation and trees.

The first step was to put together a mowing regime that balances the needs of wildlife with the value of amenity areas for walking, picnicking, sun bathing, etc. The outcome agreed with Wessex Water is that only half of the grounds are now cut regularly through spring and summer and the other half is



left to grow except for an annual late summer cut. This has had a big benefit for wildlife including



the re-appearance, after many years of absence, of good numbers of southern marsh orchids in the wet grassland on the north side of the lake. This type of habitat is generally rapidly disappearing.

The lake has a wide variety of wildlife but worth special mention are dragonflies (19 recorded species), winter migrant birds, bats, orchids and a large breeding toad population. For the past two winters a bittern has spent several weeks in the reed beds. In 2008 and 2010, I found a number of scarce chaser dragonflies, well named as they are officially designated as 'rare' in Britain. The striking blue eyes seen in the photograph are one of the keys to the identification of the male.

Planning permission has just been granted for an all-abilities path around the lake. This project has been driven forward by the Backwell Access Group with support from Wessex Water and our local authorities. On behalf of BET, Bill Charnock has made a major contribution to the project planning process and I have had some input with my knowledge of the lake and its wildlife.

At the AGM in November, I will be giving an illustrated talk on the wildlife of the lake - lots of pretty pictures with some background information.

Andrew Town



Autumn Magic

Every year I greet the onset of autumn with mixed emotions; on the one hand slightly sad that the warmer days of summer have started to fade but also looking forward to the ever changing



displays of colour as our woodlands prepare for the winter ahead. The colours of autumn can be a spectacular sight but have you ever stopped to wonder just exactly what is going on way above our heads?

Well, a leaf is green due to the presence of a pigment known as **chlorophyll**. During the growing season, this chemical is so

abundant in the leaf's cells that it masks out any other pigments that may be present in the leaf - hence we see leaves as green. Chlorophyll performs a vital function in nature, capturing the sun's rays and then using the trapped solar energy to manufacture food for the plant, usually simple sugars produced from the combination of water and carbon dioxide. These sugars then form the basis of the plant's nourishment needed for its growth. During the food manufacturing process however, the chlorophyll in the leaves is being continually broken down but during the growing season, the plant constantly replenishes the chlorophyll so the leaves can maintain their bright green colour.



In late summer, as the daylight hours begin to shorten and temperatures cool, the veins that carry fluids in and out of the leaf are gradually closed off as a layer of special cork cells form at the base of each leaf. As this cork layer develops, water and mineral intake into the leaf is reduced, slowly at first, and then more rapidly. It is during this time that the levels of chlorophyll begin to decrease. As the chlorophyll degrades, the hidden yellow and orange pigments begin to be revealed and the red pigments, so evocative of autumn, begin to be produced. The precious amino acids released from the breakdown of the chlorophyll are not wasted, but are stored in the plant until spring when they can be recycled to be used once more.



The yellow, orange and brown colours of autumn are produced by chemicals known as **carotenoids**. These pigments have always been present in the leaf but were masked during the growing season due to the intense green of the chlorophyll. Carotenoids are common in many living things and give the characteristic colour to carrots, canaries, egg yolks, buttercups and bananas.



The red and purple pigments of autumn foliage come from another group of chemicals altogether and are known as **anthocyanins**. Unlike the carotenoids, these pigments are not present in the leaf throughout the growing season, but are actively produced towards the end of summer. They develop in late summer in the sap of the cells of the leaf and their development is the result of many complex chemical interactions. Their formation depends on the breakdown of sugars in the presence of light, the brighter the light during this period, the greater the production of anthocyanins and the more brilliant the resulting color display. When the days of autumn are bright and cool, and the nights are chilly but not freezing, the brightest colourations usually develop. Anthocyanins are common in fruits and are responsible for giving the characteristic colour to red apples, cherries, strawberries and plums.

Ian Chambers



BET's Springtime Walk

In April, in what turned out to be some of the best summer weather (!), BET organised a highly successful ramble through some spectacular scenery right on our doorstep. So for those of you who were unable to join us, this was our springtime walk. In all it is about 4½ miles and takes around 2-2 ½ hours to complete and would be fantastic in any season.



Take the bus (any bus - but not an X1) and get off at the stop which is just past the cricket ground at Flax Bourton. Carefully cross the road and walk along in the direction of the cemetery, just before which there is a public footpath. Bearing right here, follow the path across the field to the diagonally opposite corner. Immediately on the left there is a stile into another field. Keeping the hedge on your left, go straight across two more fields, coming out onto Bourton

Combe Lane. Turn right, and at the top by the cottages, take the left hand footpath, keeping the hedge on your right until you reach a stile, then follow the path diagonally towards Barrow Court through three more fields. As you walk keeping the Court on the right, follow the boundary round



and you will find a stile which comes out in the lane leading to the church. Turn left down to the road, then right for about 400 metres until you reach a footpath on the left. Having passed through what seems like part of Home Farm garden and over another stile, you go downhill through a lovely open valley. Just as you reach the bottom, you will need to bear right and head uphill to a stile, then on over two more fields to come out on Slade Lane. Turn left and after a few metres, turn right into a bridleway with the hedge on your left. Continue on through fields, passing

Batches Wood on the right. On reaching a crossroads of bridleways, keep straight on with the wood on your left to Water Catch Farm where you take the left hand track which will eventually bring you out on Hyatts Wood Road (Backwell Hill). Turn right, then first left, and about 100 metres down the road, turn into Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve to descend into the village.

Carrie Riches

Seeds, Seeds, Seeds!

The many different ways plants find to distribute their seeds can be very interesting, especially at this time of year.

The Barterers

These provide food in return for the dispersal of some of their seeds. There are many examples of fruit bearing plants in the BET woodlands and grasslands, including blackberries, raspberries, wild strawberries, haws, rose hips, sloes, cherries, as well as ivy and holly berries. There are also wild-grown apples (not all of the many varieties seem that popular with the birds!), and cotoneasters, as well as a few gooseberries and currants which probably arrived from birds feeding in local gardens. All of this rich harvest appeals to a wide variety of birds and animals. The seeds are not digested and will be deposited later in far-flung neighbourhoods, spreading the potential area for the plant to establish itself. Some seeds such as yew berries are eaten many at a time by thrushes which separate the juicy flesh from the poisonous seeds in their crops and then eject the sticky mass of seeds. These small, gooey piles can sometimes be seen by the paths in the woodland. Similarly, mistletoe berries are not swallowed whole, but the white pulp is eaten whilst the sticky residue with the seed in it is wiped off on a convenient branch by the mistle thrush. Some small seeds with fleshy surrounds may also be gathered by ants and stored underground.



Nuts have a rather different means of dispersal. They are usually produced very abundantly so although many will be eaten, squirrels, jays and crows store hoards in the ground or in cracks in the bark of trees. Those that are mislaid then have a chance of germinating in the spring. Hazelnuts, acorns and beech mast are all common examples.

The Hitchhikers



Should you happen to have hairy dogs or woolly clothing, you are bound to meet up with some of these sooner or later! Goosegrass, agrimony, burdock, upright hedge parsley, herb bennet and other plants have tenacious little hooks which attach firmly to rough surfaces which will be pulled or scratched off later and be discarded some distance away from the original plant. Spiky grass seeds can also be caught in fur (and your socks) which can then be dispersed free of charge.

The Wind-surfers

Many of the thistle family produce thousands of plumed seeds which can result in clouds of down taking to the air when the wind blows. The fine patches of spear and creeping thistle near the Jubilee Stone are good examples. Dandelions (and all their numerous relations) produce the familiar 'clocks', whilst groundsel, ragwort, willowherbs, old man's beard and valerian and the trees of the willow and poplars all make use of the wind to disperse their seeds. Traffic and rail movements can also provide draughts which can carry seeds to new, far off, sites.

Another way of using the wind is to have winged seeds. These fly down from the trees, helicopter fashion, spiralling with the angle of their wings - field maple, sycamore and ash are good examples.



The Artillery

Some plants fire their seeds to aid distribution. These include gorse



which can be quite noisy on hot afternoons as the capsules snap open with a jerk sending the seeds flying in all directions. Most of the vetches such as bush vetch and tufted vetch as well as the cranesbills, similarly throw out seeds as their pods dry out, suddenly flying open, leaving their twisted capsules still attached to the plant.

Seeds may also be dispersed by water (not that relevant to BET - as yet!) otherwise hard seeds such as poppies, can be shaken or knocked from their dried capsules by animals or the wind.

The end result of all this shenanigans is to try and get the plant's seed as far away from the parent plant as possible so each plant can have the best chance to spread out and colonize new ground.

Jean Glasson



Autumn Thoughts

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. Such an evocative line from Keats, and as I write this, a thick morning mist hangs atmospherically over Backwell Hill so that it resembles a rainforest. I recently strolled through the two nature reserves to get some fresh air and to check on what was happening in the woods. As soon as you enter the path up to Jubilee Stone Wood Nature

Reserve the air is cool and crisp - refreshing after the heat of summer (or early autumn!) and the smell of damp earth and leaves, a reminder of the shorter days to come. I could hear birdsong, the gentle sound of wind blowing high up in the trees and my own footfall on stones and through the leaves.

The sun, now lower in the sky, casts a softer light which accentuates the warm tones of the leaves - ochres, oranges, reds, browns and various greens. Look out for the red of rosehips, hawthorn and yew berries. I also saw those of black bryony draped over hawthorn, sycamore and ash.



Summer is alive with insects and birds but if you look for it there is much to see now. Banded snails cling to various trees. On my walk, I stopped by a tall ash tree after spotting another snail. As I looked up, I could see two cone shaped tree snails attached to the trunk at a height of five feet, a woodlouse at five and a half feet and two flies at ten feet. There was also a textured covering of moss, particularly on the north side of the trunk. Moss and lichens spread over other trees and ruined stone walls.



Leaving the path for a short time, I discovered some rotting mushrooms being feasted on by slugs and another with small flies on it. There are many fungi in the woods - earth stars, candle snuff, horn of plenty and jelly ear. Seek and ye shall find!

Walking down Cheston Combe Road showed evidence of another species - polystyrene cups and burger boxes, drink cartons, bottles and cans, plastic bags, crisp packets and chocolate wrappers. The detritus is cleared up, sometimes by BET, sometimes by local people and is generally confined to the road rather than the woods.

On entering Badgers Wood, you get a different feel with the yews and a lot less greenery around them. An amazing viewpoint on a clear day, across the valley and the open areas where the wildflower meadows are now being restored. Then down along the path and onto the new Fern Way which has been created to show a very different character to the woods. There are some new benches to rest on and enjoy the scenery. As I descended, I stopped at a rock face where water trickles out and it is permanently damp. The moss that grows here is thick and luxuriant and the green is added to by the numerous hart's-tongue ferns proliferating in that spot. On the rock face, I could see more tree snails, a woodlouse, lichens and many spiders' webs.



So when you go for a walk in the woods, feel free to take your time. The slower you go the more you will see and there are places where you can sit and take in the scenery, the sounds, smells and colours. If you are with children, you may have to go at a faster pace but you can open up this amazing world to them, pointing things out as you whizz past. Enjoy!

Caroline Hoults

