

Backwell Environment Trust

Bulletin 23 - Spring 2012

www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org



A very warm welcome to our latest spring bulletin

The BET volunteers have once again been very busy over the winter season working to extend the wildlife corridor further on into Badgers Wood, hedge laying, coppicing and restoring yet more sections of long-lost wildflower meadow. The notice boards have now been installed at the top and bottom of Badgers Wood so hopefully we're now all set for spring!

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

The Chairman's Jottings

BET Trustees

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BET's Winter Walk



The Chairman's Jottings



Membership Renewal Time

Well, it's that time of year again and with your Bulletin you should have received a membership renewal form. We try to make renewal as easy as possible for you, so if there is no change in your circumstances please write 'No Change' across the form. But please confirm your gift aid status.

If you want to pay by electronic transfer please identify the payment with your name and again write 'Gift Aid Yes' or 'Gift Aid No' in the message space.

You can deliver your form to any of four addresses in the village or post it to member Vivien French, a regular BET volunteer, who has offered to look after our membership records.

Unsung Heroes

Four or five years ago, due to illness, our financial affairs were in a bit of a mess, which for a Charity Commission regulated body is a very uncomfortable place to be. Into the breach stepped our current treasurer John Tarkanyi, who is very well known to Tennis Club members. Chartered accountant John, completely sorted out our somewhat tangled affairs and, as well as keeping a firm control of day to day expenditure, saw us through the accounting and auditing process for the two very large grants we were lucky enough to obtain to buy our nature reserves. **So on behalf of us all, many, many thanks.**

The Queen's Jubilee

The Queen reached her diamond jubilee on February 6th this year and the country will be celebrating on June 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th. The Parish Council is organising a 'Picnic on the Playing Fields' on Saturday June 2nd and, along with many other organisations, BET will be there. We are also intending to hold our own family day in the woods on the Monday, combined with a blessing of the new inscription by the Rector, Margi Cambell. We hope as many members as possible will come.

Backwell Cave

This is still a live issue although the planning application for the development of Coles Quarry, expected before Christmas, has still not been submitted. I am told that there may be an impediment to development in that the quarry is in the green belt.

Note though that this did not prevent the establishment of the recycling centre.

However there is some good news. The owners of the quarry and the cave have given us permission to clean up the cave area and do basic management in the surrounding woodland area so long as we do so at our own risk



Backwell Residents Association

You may have noticed that Backwell Residents Association (BRA) is conducting a recruitment drive and I have to declare an interest in that I have volunteered to be membership secretary for them. The drive is in response to the new planning regime which will soon be upon us and to the number of areas in Backwell where developers are known to be interested.

But the Association is about much more than this. Less well known is that it has been supporting the Youth Club following North Somerset Council's decision to withdraw funding at the end of March with the Youth Workers being made redundant. Furthermore, BRA has supported the Youth Club's application to the Parish Council to provide interim funding to ensure its continuation and give it time to plan for the future.



The Association continues to make representations on other matters including the need to mitigate the effects of the overhead 400KV line at Nailsea, in the noise arising from the Amenity Site, and on Council policies such as those on delivery of Affordable Housing - particularly in Backwell. BRA is also helping the Parish Council in the preparation of the.....

Neighbourhood Plan

A dedicated group of volunteer residents is working hard on this project which could bring practical benefits to the village. Please respond to any requests for information or views the Steering Group may make and if possible get along to one of the numerous briefing sessions which are planned.

Old and New Trustees

At the last AGM we said goodbye to three of our trustees Avril Marks, Ann Chambers and Diane Zimmer and I would like to record the thanks of all members for their work over the years. Avril has been involved from the very start and remains a holding trustee for the land. I know that they will all continue to be involved with BET in the future at events and as volunteers and indeed Ann is going to continue in her role as publicity officer.

So we now welcome our new trio of trustees Anne-Marie Smith, Peter Speight and Don Steadman. They are all regular and frequent volunteers and you will find a picture of them at a work session near Backwell Cave elsewhere in this Bulletin. Peter has also contributed an article on green woodworking (see page 14 & 15).

Bill Charnock



Membership Renewal



The membership year runs from April 1st to March 31st and renewals for 2012/13 are now due. We really hope you will complete and return the enclosed form.

The size of our membership is a very important factor when applying for grants etc, so although we seem to be very well established, we do still need to demonstrate a wide base of support across the community.

Gift Aid is also a very important source of income for us so, if possible, please tick the relevant box and don't forget to sign the form.

If you have joined or rejoined since November 2011, please ignore this notice as your membership will go to March 31st 2013. Thank you for your continued support



BET Trustees 2012



Following the AGM in November 2011, the trustees are now as follows:

Bill Charnock, chairman and membership secretary, 462083, 17 Church Town,
bill.charnock@btinternet.com

Ian Chambers, bulletin editor and woodland team leader, 463315,
24 Backwell Hill Road, chimpychambs@yahoo.co.uk, Avon Wildlife Trust volunteer leader.

Jenny Greenslade, indianajen@tiscali.co.uk Local archaeologist.

Caroline Hoults, houltsfamily@btinternet.com.
Activity morning volunteer & children's activity co-ordinator.

Michael Marks, paintermike@btinternet.com, Avon Bat Group

Carrie Riches, carriches@btopenworld.com, Hawk and Owl Trust Member

Anne-Marie Smith, anne-marie@electricbubble.co.uk Activity morning volunteer.

Peter Speight, p.speight@o2.co.uk Green woodworker, Activity morning volunteer.

Don Steadman, 01934 838718 Activity morning volunteer.

Amanda Swannell, doug.minter@blueyonder.co.uk,
Activity morning volunteer & children's activity co-ordinator.

John Tarkanyi, treasurer, john.tarkanyi@jci.com Activity morning volunteer

Andrew Town, Avon Wildlife Trust, Stockway North Nature Reserve, local naturalist

Also, the Trustees couldn't get by without the tremendous help of:

Barbara Charnock, acting secretary/events co-ordinator and Ann Chambers, publicity officer.

BET's New Trustees (Left to Right) : Peter Speight, Don Steadman & Anne-Marie Smith



Woodland Report

The winter working season in the BET woodlands see the most dramatic changes taking place as the dormant landscape allows us to work without disturbing the reserve's many plants and animals. As ever, the BET volunteers have been working extremely hard on both reserves to make the woodlands even more wildlife (and people!) friendly than they are today. So keep a lookout over the coming months in our newly landscaped areas as you never know what long dormant plants may suddenly appear!

Coppicing & Hedge Laying

This winter season has seen yet more coppicing and hedge laying carried out in both Badgers and Jubilee Stone Wood and as most of the work has been performed close to the footpaths, you'll be able to get a bird's eye view of how the newly cleared areas regenerate over the coming months.

Both reserves have superb, large patches of bluebells which were unfortunately getting heavily shaded by the ever-thickening tree canopy. Some of the trees in these areas have now been selectively thinned to give the bluebells more light and also to make them more visible to passing visitors.

We have laid yet more hedgerows this year which will be extremely beneficial to wildlife as well as reinforcing our boundary with Coles Quarry. As ever, our winter woodland work inevitably can look somewhat harsh just before the coming of spring, but rest assured that in one or two season's time these areas will be extremely beneficial to wildlife once more.

Backwell Cave Area Restoration

Although we do not own the land surrounding Backwell Cave, in February of this year we were kindly given permission from the owners to do some restoration work around it. So a start has been made in re-establishing the long-lost wildflower meadow immediately above the cave. This old meadow area appears very similar to 'The Layers' meadow close by, which we have successfully restored over the past two years, so hopes are high that this area will turn out to be just as spectacular over the coming years.

Benches & Stones

One of BET's new trustees is green wood-worker Peter Speight who has been busy designing and installing 'rustic' benches in both Badgers and Jubilee Stone Wood. Everyone I have spoken to has said how well they blend into the landscape, which is probably not surprising as they have been



constructed out of carefully selected trees growing very close to them!

Read Peter's article on pages 14 & 15 to get the full story.....

If you find yourself visiting the top of Badgers Wood you will notice a large shaped stone has now been erected which contains a superb steel plaque which thanks everyone who made the purchase of the nature reserve possible.



Volunteers

The BET volunteers continue to go from strength to strength and now meet every Monday morning as well as the usual second Thursday and fourth Saturday of each month. Thank you all for all your hard work over the winter season - turning out whatever the weather!

Notice Boards

New notice boards have now been put up in Badgers Wood at both the top and bottom entrances to the reserve. BET is *extremely* grateful to long-term volunteer Andy Smith who expertly put the complicated display graphics together for us.

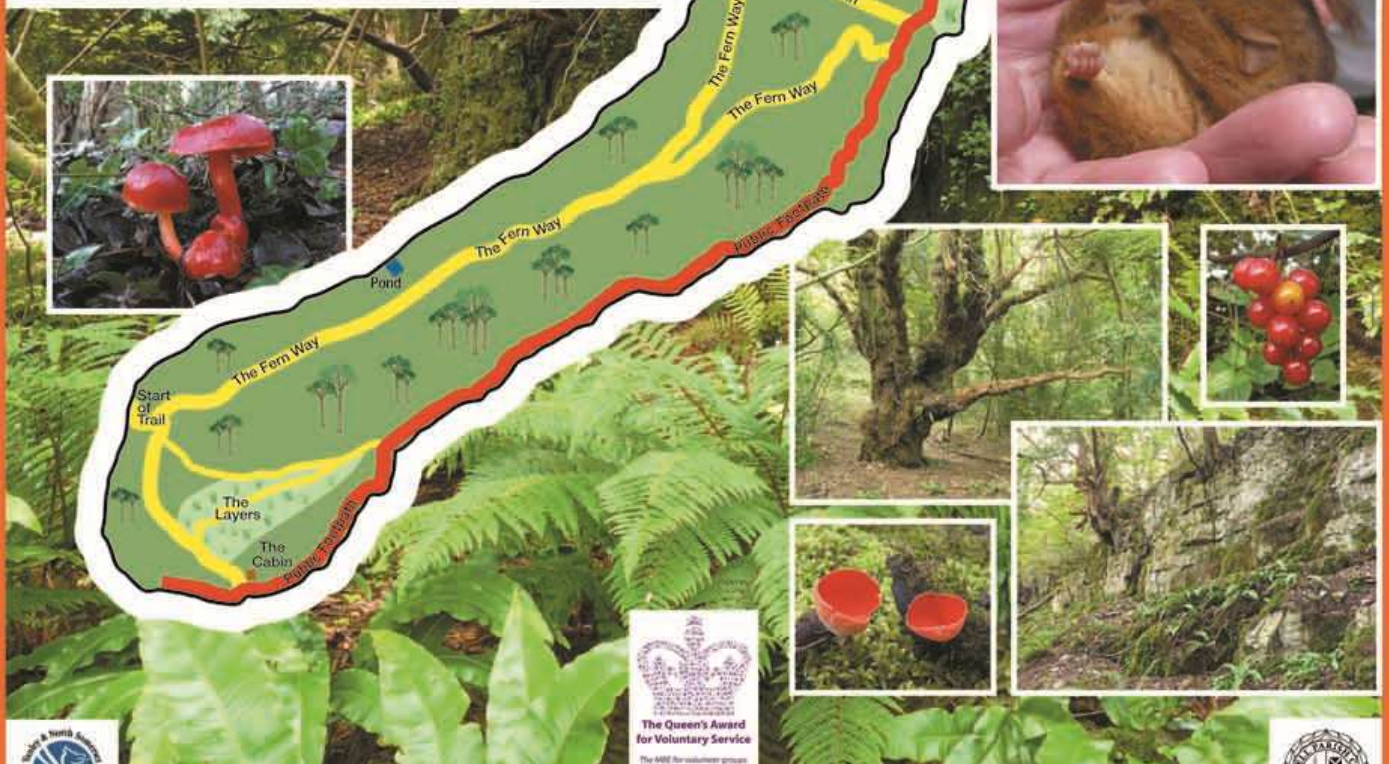
Badgers Wood Nature Reserve



Badgers Wood Nature Reserve is situated within an historic landscape made up of patches of ancient woodland, semi-natural woodland and edged with wildflower-rich limestone meadows. The 4.8 hectare (12-acre) reserve climbs to almost 150 metres at its highest point, giving spectacular views over the old Coles Quarry, the Bristol Channel, Exmoor and the Welsh hills beyond. It is a haven for wildlife containing many fascinating geological features as well as being in an important archaeological region where man has lived and worked for at least 5,000 years.

The reserve is home to many plant and animal species, the rarest being the yellow bird's-nest plant and the nocturnal hazel dormouse. Rooks and ravens are frequently seen soaring over the old quarry cliffs whilst many species of songbird nest in the woodlands. The quarry and surrounding meadows make attractive hunting grounds for birds of prey; and buzzards, kestrels and even peregrine falcons can be observed from the viewpoint.

Whilst the majority of the trees in the woodland have grown up over the past 50 years or so, there are areas of hidden ancient woodland on the reserve that have been left relatively undisturbed for many centuries. On this steeply-sloping, north-facing hillside where the sun rarely penetrates, thousands of lush-green ferns carpet the ground beneath the moss-covered limestone cliffs. In the spring, the woodland floor is transformed by the emergence of large swathes of bluebells, complemented by the intense white flowers of the wild garlic. A woodland trail ('The Fern Way') was completed in 2011 by BET volunteers to lead you through this hidden, magical landscape.



Badgers Wood Nature Reserve was purchased with the kind assistance of YANSEC (Yanley and North Somerset Environmental Company), Backwell Parish Council and members and supporters of Backwell Environment Trust

Spring & Summer Projects

I think the northern slopes of Badgers Wood are simply stunning with literally thousands of lush-green ferns and exposed limestone cliffs surrounding you everywhere you look. With the successful completion of 'The Fern Way' in 2010, this area has now become much more accessible to the average walker, however if this trail has one slight drawback it is the numerous steps that lead you up through the woodland. So this year we are planning a stunning new trail with *far* fewer steps which will run along the base of the magnificent limestone cliffs, high above the Fern Way. Also, we are proposing a new trail to give an alternative, safer route to the very narrow road section where Church Town drops down to the recycling centre, just past the junction with Cheston Combe Road. We are also planning to continue on with this trail to the newly restored pond on a very easy path, so that walkers of any ability can get to this tranquil woodland glade.

Ian Chambers



Food, Glorious Food!

Many people today have a shop within walking distance of their homes, from which to buy bread, milk and other necessities of life, but from prehistoric times to at least the Roman period,



however, food was not so easy to come by. It had to be hunted, trapped, fished, poached, picked or collected from the wild, with a choice of over 300 edible plants. For the wealthy few, about 1% of the population, they merely presented themselves at the table, and a sumptuous meal would be served. Food at Roman banquets is well-known, perhaps beginning with olives, then dormouse in poppy seeds and honey, followed by beef, pig, goose, chicken or hare with vegetables, and finally fresh fruit, or fruit in pastries and honey cakes - all washed down with wine. Anglo-Saxon feasts were similar, though I think that

dormouse, thankfully, was off the menu by then.

A typical meal for the majority of people from the 6th century onwards consisted of soup (leek, cabbage, nettles, bones and herbs), followed by cereal-based porridge, bread and cakes, with sauce or jam, accompanied by beer (barley). Wealthy people always ate meat, but for most, it was only a treat on feast days, and even then just scrag ends with little protein, vitamins or iron. Naturally enough there was much malnutrition, and physical deformities were common, with skeletal evidence showing bone dislocations and poorly-healed breakages. Some caught infections from bad food storage, contaminated by insects, rodents, poisonous weeds, moulds and animal viral or bacterial diseases. Others suffered from rheumatism, malaria and osteoarthritis, and were treated with herbal medicines, using honey or wine as a base and decoctions of belladonna, opium, henbane and wormwood (still recognised by pharmacists today). A Greek, Dioscorides, in the 1st century AD identified and drew from life over 600 plants with healing properties.



FIG. 1.—Opium Poppy (*Papaver somniferum*, L.)

Wild animals hunted for food included deer, hogs/boars, hares, and game birds like guinea fowls, pheasants and peacocks, though later these were protected and only a privileged few were allowed



to hunt them. Hungry people therefore had to steal bird's eggs, ducks, pigeons and geese to survive. Fishing was fairly easy, with eels a major part of the diet, though salmon, pike, trout, and octopus and shellfish were also eaten, dried, smoked or preserved in fat or salt. As for the wild plants, in addition to food, they were used for drink, dyeing - and medicine. Herbs were grown at early Christian monasteries eg. at Jarrow (home of historian Bede AD673-735) and given to the sick and poor who visited there for succour. Popular herbs included greater plantain (*plantago major*) to soothe stings, bites and as an infuser for bronchitis, coughs and lung problems, whilst coriander

(*coriandrum sativum*) and dill (*anathum graveolens*) were used in cooking and for treating wind, flatulence and diarrhoea. The monks themselves suffered from these, due to a diet high in insoluble fibre from grains, fruit and vegetable skins (too much praying, not enough exercise?). They made and drank their own wine, with 48 known vineyards of theirs planted across from Somerset to Suffolk in the late 10th century.



By that time much of the woodland had been cleared away, partly because of high demand for timber in the Roman period, for buildings, army forts, kilns, furnaces, bridges and boats, and also for creation of open land for crops and pastures. There were literally hundreds

of small farms which over the years provided a more regular source of food for the people, in addition to some imported food. Meanwhile the number of sheep kept for meat and wool rapidly increased, and though they were lower food value than cattle, could be kept in rougher, higher pastures without water, as they took in moisture from damp vegetation.

Although cattle provided 7 times more meat, and fresh milk, they needed a source of water, as



they drank huge amounts about twice a day. There were many pigs around too, who were vital to the economy, being efficient 'living machines', who converted substances into protein. They were just as happy in woodland or in cropped fields, eating acorns and other detritus, gobbling up offal or old dairy products, whilst getting fatter all the time! Rooting deeply, they turned over and broke down the soil, manuring it at the same time - it is easy to see why pigs today are still a very popular animal.

We all go to shops and supermarkets for convenience, but now more people are discovering the delights of growing fruit and vegetables in their own gardens or allotments, some even keeping chickens or ducks. When we finally sit down to a good meal with our own produce, after all that hard work and exercise, it is one of life's small pleasures, and the food always tastes better, too!

Jenny Greenslade

BET Bird Box Survey 2012

A big effort has been put into nest boxes this year. Firstly, 19 new boxes were assembled by the cubs under the expert supervision of Mike Marks. These were then completed by Gerry Wilcox and Don Steadman while Caroline Hoults and Amanda Swannell applied the finishing touches with a messy coating of a benign preservative.

Most of the new boxes have now been deployed in the woods, some in new locations and others as replacements for boxes put up in earlier years and now showing distinct signs of deterioration.



In early February I accompanied member Trevor Riddle of the RSPB on his annual inspection of the boxes in Jubilee Stone wood. Of the 17 boxes only 8 had bird's nests but two had mouse nests and two contained roosting material. One was too high for us to reach with our ladder and the rest empty and in some cases too decrepit to be of use! The decayed boxes have now been replaced and two new boxes have also been erected in the woodland.

Neither of the two owl boxes in Jubilee Stone Wood contained nests but Trevor was convinced that the 3 inches of dried leaves in one of them was not a squirrel's nest but was evidence of the roosting of a large bird.

The Badgers Wood Survey was undertaken by four of the regular Monday morning crew - Dan Gough, Don Steadman, Gerry Wilcox and Bill Charnock and also involved renovation or replacement of some of the boxes and erection of new ones.

Over the winter a couple of extra boxes had been put up making a total of 14 ordinary boxes and one owl box. For the last two years we haven't been able to find the No 4 box but fortunately, Gerry didn't know where he should be looking and so found it! And it had been well used with one nest on top of another. However this year we couldn't find the No 7 box. More searching required or maybe we should get a GPS!



Of the rest, 8 contained nests and two contained roosting material. The others were empty and we were surprised to find no mice. Last year we had a nuthatch in number 8 but this year the occupant was definitely a great tit as evidenced by a fledgling corpse we found there. All the nests found this year in both woods were of the tit family but even our RSPB advisors cannot tell which kind the nest belongs to unless there is other evidence.

We failed to inspect the owl box again because our ladder was too short so we will have to make another visit. During this year's inspection, 7 boxes were renovated with roofing felt, two were replaced and three new ones erected. Seven more new boxes are available and these will be put up in the top part of Badgers Wood during the next few weeks.

Bill Charnock

Why Don't Toads Cross the Road?

The answer to this conundrum is simple. They get squashed by passing cars. Because they are cold blooded they are only able to move slowly on chilly nights. It doesn't help that the males often sit in the middle of the road waiting for a likely passing female. Not a very sensible dating strategy when there is a good volume of passing traffic. Sometimes he will clamber



on the back of a female and take a ride down to the spawning grounds in the Gordano Valley. Typical male really! Why make the effort yourself when you can get a woman to carry you.



Volunteers have formed a toad patrol on an ancient toad migration route that crosses Norton's Wood Lane in Clevedon as the toads migrate from Norton's Wood to the Gordano Valley to spawn. The main objective is to help the toads safely across the road to reduce the numbers that are killed by traffic using the lane. Records of numbers are also kept to provide important data on the fluctuation of the toad population. The site is officially registered with Froglife, a national organization, and data is submitted to them annually to feed into countrywide records.

At present there are 21 volunteers. The patrol work involves walking the lane from dusk onwards for up to two hours on relatively mild wet evenings during January, February and part of March. Volunteers pick up the toads and carry them across the road to safety on the other side. In 2010 over a thousand toads were helped across the lane with more than three hundred on the busiest night.

As volunteers return cold and wet to their cars they get great satisfaction from knowing they have done their bit to help the dwindling toad population survive. Every one carried across the road increases the odds of long term survival. It is also nice to get so close to and make contact with an animal you don't often see at close quarters.



Volunteers are always welcome!

Please contact patrol coordinator Andrew Town on 01275 858064 if you are interested in helping.

Andrew Town



Notes From Colby Cottage

- Across the Pond!

Our good friends Diane Zimmer and John Tarkanyi introduced us to the BET Badgers Wood Nature Reserve just about a year ago. Almost immediately, Mary and I felt a great affinity with your project. For almost 33 years we have been living in and nurturing our own 22 acre woodland so we came to Backwell with a heartfelt belief that forests need to be preserved. How pleasant it was to be introduced to your reserve.

Colby Cottage, as we call our little home, is in south-central Wisconsin, nearly a quarter-turn west around the globe from Backwell and located at N42.800095, W89.0908. I have put a Google map at <http://g.co/maps/nknxg> to which I will refer below.



Zooming out a bit on the map will illustrate that our "reserve" has the Rock River as one northerly boundary and is a relatively large wooded parcel in a rather narrow river corridor remnant of forest which has been carved away by the agricultural use of land nearby. As our property is a significant part of that corridor, its maintenance is extremely essential to wildlife habitat in a number of ways. Its value is particularly notable in early May when literally dozens of migrating warblers and other bird species frequent our birdbaths and ponds on their way north, some well into Canada. As well, our woodlands have been the notable birthing place and subsequent home to our native deer species, the eastern whitetail, to barred owls, red foxes and of course, to numerous other birds and creatures.



To accomplish our attempt at preservation, we have been working with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources through a woodland management plan over these many years. The plan is designed to nurture wildlife, provide recreation for us and produce harvestable timber for wood products. As part of this plan, we maintain about a mile or so of trails around the acreage. These trails serve as walking paths, provide "edge" between forest and open spaces for wildlife and provide us access to gather firewood with which we primarily heat our home. The gathering of our fuel serves as an opportunity to improve the woodland as we primarily remove trees that have naturally died, are diseased or have been damaged by storms.

Our first harvestable timber will be 17 mature, furniture-grade Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) trees in the fall. One lesson learned over the years is that with judicious selection, the forest thrives and provides!

Finally, a recent BET newsletter has a picture of invasive bracken being removed. Some of the most invasive species we have here are of European origin. Dames Rocket, (*Hesperis matronalis*) and Queens Anne's Lace (*Daucus carota*) we find quite lovely. However, Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), brought here as a potherb, is raging out of control here and is most despised (<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/alpe1.htm>). We first noticed it a mere 15 or so years ago but it has now almost completely overrun the woodland. It came as quite a surprise when we visited that it seemed of little concern to the locals in the UK even though it is abundant there.

Enough for now, except to say that we are already planning our next trip to Backwell. Please feel welcome to visit!

Hal and Mary Schlais

maryandhal@gmail.com



Badgers

For thousands of years, and long before Britain became an island, badgers have been continually rooting around in the vegetation of our woodlands and meadows. The European Badger is a social, burrowing mammal which lives on a wide variety of plant and animal food. Although ferocious when provoked, the badger is generally a peaceful creature, and has even been known to share its burrows with other species such as rabbits.

If you are lucky enough to see one of these extraordinary nocturnal mammals in the daytime, it will become immediately apparent that they have been designed for digging with their wedge-shaped appearance and short, powerful legs. The badger's main digging abilities are employed in creating a home for itself and its offspring by the construction of a large underground burrow system known as a **sett**.



In constructing a sett, badgers will first loosen the earth with rapid strokes of their forelimbs and then use their claws as rakes to winkle out any stones. The loose earth collects underneath their body, but by arching its back it is able to bring its hind legs forward to sweep the earth backwards. When enough soil has collected behind it, it moves backwards using its behind as a bulldozer until it reaches the entrance - when the soil is unceremoniously ejected by a series of aggressive kicks.

Badger setts can often be traced back many years as they can be handed down from generation to generation. In most setts, badgers tend to use a single chamber for breeding and separate ones for sleeping. Out of necessity, they also enlarge the tunnels every few metres to form passing places. Tunnels can go as deep as 4 metres but most are less than 1 metre underground, often following the contours of the surface. Ancient setts can get extremely large; one well-established one in the Cotswolds had 12 entrances with a maze of tunnels and chambers totalling 310 metres long. From the length and diameter of the tunnels it was estimated that over the years, the badgers had excavated 25 tonnes of soil! Jubilee Stone Wood has a large active badger sett

hidden deep in the woodland, its many entrances made especially noticeable by the large mounds of excavated earth piled up outside. However, many badgers from neighbouring setts also regularly use both of BET's nature reserves for foraging; look out for their well worn paths and boundary latrines when walking in the woodlands.



The diet of Badgers can be quite variable but earthworms are by far their most important source of protein. They will also eat insects, small mammals, eggs, carrion, cereals, bulbs, fruit and your garden vegetables - if you let them! Badger cubs are born in the first few weeks of February in our part of the world and initially weigh in at around 100grams and are about 12cms long. For the first five weeks or so, they are blind but are born with the badgers' characteristic head stripes. The cubs are weaned in summer and start to play and feed above ground, so summer is probably your best chance of observing them. If you aren't lucky enough to see a badger in the wild, keep a sharp eye out for their tracks in soft mud, or better still if we get another harsh winter, their paw prints can be clearly seen in the snow.



It is thought that a badger's stripes are a warning colouration which would lead any potential predator's gaze firmly in the direction of its very powerful jaws. Consequently badgers have few natural predators, other than man. The stripes are also easily seen at night when badgers are most active which may help to keep badgers from other setts at a distance as they can be very territorial.

(By the way, Badgers Wood was so named by BET because prior the excavation of Coles Quarry, there existed a valley called 'Badgers Combe').

Badgers and Bovine TB : Politics vs Science ?

Bovine tuberculosis (bTB) has become a major issue facing England's cattle farming industry and cost the taxpayer £63million in compensation payments in 2009 alone. Additionally, over 25,000 cattle were also slaughtered in an attempt to control the disease. There is evidence of a link between badgers and bovine TB as badgers can carry and



transfer the disease, although it is not a major source of mortality in badgers. Between 1998 and 2007 a comprehensive, government commissioned study into the impact of badger culling on bTB was undertaken by the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) in the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT). The study found that the total eradication of badgers from an area was extremely difficult and that culling provoked disturbed behaviour (eg. territorial disputes, fighting) as well as significantly increased movement between populations. All of these factors led to an increased transference of the disease between infected and healthy badgers - the so called 'perturbation effect'. The final report of the ISG in June 2007 concluded that culling badgers would not solve the bTB problem and could potentially make it worse. In response, the government of the day decided not to pursue a badger cull, however the current government has now announced plans for a fresh cull. This time around, the cull will be carried out by farmers and landowners and is due to start in the south-west of England in August/September 2012 and should continue for six weeks.

The good news though is that in 2010, a new, injectable bTB vaccine for badgers was approved which in trials, led to a 74% reduction in the incidence of the disease in wild badgers. A more easily employed oral vaccine is predicted to be available by 2015. The vaccination of cattle against bTB is however likely to play a crucial role in achieving the ultimate goal of eradicating the disease, although numerous changes to EU legislation would be required to permit its use.

Ultimately the answer to controlling bovine TB will be probably come from a variety of sources but it's worth getting the facts for yourself on this highly emotive issue and the Wildlife Trust's website (www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/2011/07/19/culling-not-cure) might be a good place to start.

Jan Chambers



Green Woodworking

This is the first of a series of articles about Green Woodworking, which involves a number of traditional woodland crafts. Green Woodworking is all about using fresh timber to make items such as tool handles, utensils, sticks and furniture, and it is 'green' in many ways:

- The timber is freshly felled, unseasoned and wet, which actually makes it a pleasure to work with but does add some challenges as it dries.
- The work is all done by hand - or foot - so is environmentally friendly, with no power consumed nor mechanical noise generated.
- The timber is produced and managed on a sustainable basis. Parts of woodland used to be coppiced on a regular basis and the wood used for many purposes. The supply would have regrown and be ready to cut again in 7-10 years, depending on the size required. It is interesting to note that in 1791, Backwell had "*coppice wood one mile long, and two furlongs broad, worth eight pounds*".

Green woodworking uses an enticing range of traditional tools and methods which you will see mentioned in these articles.

As part of the management of our woods, we need to fell some trees - to thin them out and to let in light. It seemed to make good green sense to put a little of the felled ash wood to use and to make some rustic benches for the benefit of visitors to the woods. Certainly, using our own raw

materials would be better than buying and importing planked timber from outside BET! So here's the story behind the bench construction.....

The selected trees were felled using bowsaws and axes and suitable lengths cut from them.



The Froe

These logs were then split or 'cleaved' in half along the grain using wedges and a traditional 'fro^e'. This is surprisingly easy to do when the wood has just been felled. The leverage you can get with the handle on the froe helps to steer the split, particularly when cleaving smaller log sections.



The Adze

An 'adze' was used to shape the half logs for the seats and cut the mortices underneath, ready to fix to the upright posts. Digging the holes to sink the posts into the limestone bedrock proved to be the hardest part of constructing the benches - I really didn't expect to be spending hours breaking rocks when I retired!



We had to resort to some nails and screws in our construction to make sure the benches cannot be dismantled or removed easily. Once fixed, the seat tops were trimmed and smoothed using a 'drawknife'.

Green wood is a natural material and presents challenges. Even a nice flat split is likely to show a twist along the length of the half log. Positioning the seat carefully gives people a choice of seat angles along its length. Everyone seems to like a different height or angle! The variation of thickness of the uprights and crosspieces doesn't make construction easy. It is amazing that with all the trees we manage, it is very hard to spot the ideally shaped raw material, especially when a potential candidate component is 20-30 feet up in the air.

Our bench design is evolving with experience, and the latest two have backs made from split logs fixed to forked uprights, to support the more-weary walker. Hopefully, the resulting benches are full of character and fit in with the surroundings. We hope they give you the opportunity to stop, rest, and enjoy the woodlands. **Do let us know what you think.** We plan to make one or two more benches; we don't want to add too much furniture into the woods, so we aren't currently planning picnic tables or timber-framed shelters!

In addition to these large rustic items, ash is great for making stools, chairs and smaller household items or 'treen'.

The smooth finish one can achieve with green ash is quite amazing and satisfying. Making these items starts with the same techniques: cleaving a log into smaller sections and roughly shaping



them with an axe or drawknife. Then the fun really begins, with two pieces of traditional equipment used by the chair leg maker or 'bodger': the 'shave horse' and the 'polelathe'. These will be looked at in future articles.

In the meantime, if you want to read about green woodworking tools, materials and techniques, have a look at www.bodgers.co.uk. This website is packed with fascinating articles and advice, together with links to local groups and events, including the Somerset Branch of the Association of Polelathe Turners and Green Woodworkers, which meets monthly.

I am aware that we have some BET members with many years' experience in green and other woodworking, and I hope they will be tolerant of these endeavours - or come and help us. I would also like to thank Ian Chambers for his support and encouragement as we worked on the benches together - in all weathers!

Peter Speight



BET's Winter Walk

This was our winter walk in January, about 5 miles through varied terrain.

Several of the footpaths go through fields so once the grass starts growing you could get damp feet and some parts can be muddy!

Starting at Sores Court at the top of Hillside Road, continue along the road to Chelvey Farm and follow the footpath which skirts the farm, then straight across the fields to join Chelvey Batch. Turn left, then quite soon, left again up the former 'Ambassadors' road until you reach the bridleway which branches off to the right, leaves the tarmac and branches off to the right. Almost immediately you come upon a mini crossroads of paths. Go straight across and follow on through to the stoney slope down to Brockley Combe Road. Just before joining the road, turn right alongside the road and find a safe place to cross to reach the Fountain Forestry parking area at the triangle. Go up the steep, often slippery bank and along the path for about 100 metres until you find a dilapidated stile on the left. Follow the track through the trees to the 'cinder track' where you turn right and continue for about 3/4 mile whereupon you reach a gate. Shortly after the gate, the footpath branches off to the right (yellow way marks) which eventually takes you down to the A370 at Cleeve. Cross with care and head towards Backwell as far as St Nicholas Way where you turn left down towards the church. At the bottom of the road, turn right, into the field then diagonally across the field to a stile. Go right and follow the edge of the field to another stile onto a road, turn left then bear right at Brockley Elm triangle, to turn right down Chelvey Lane. At the junction by the pumping station, cross the road to follow the footpath across three fields to Grove Farm, keeping the farm buildings on the right. Pick your way with care through the farm machinery to find a footpath gate, cross the farm track to the new gate which goes through the field with a lone tree, (avoiding the very muddy higher track). Continue along the ridge for two more fields, then turn right towards Westleigh School and then to the Scout Hut. You can cross the playing fields and reach the bottom of Hillside road to complete the circuit!



Carrie Riches