

Backwell Environment Trust

Registered Charity No. 1109406

Bulletin 16 - Autumn 2009



Annual General Meeting

Saturday November 28th 2009, 2:30pm
Backwell Parish Hall

The hall will be open from 2pm with displays and information about BET and other local organisations. Your trustees and some of our consultants will be on hand before and after the meeting to answer any queries and to listen to your suggestions for BET, its activities, past, present and future

There will also be two illustrated talks on Jubilee Stone & Badgers Wood by Ian Chambers of BET and 'Dormice in the Woodland' by Joe McSorley of the Avon Wildlife Trust

BET AGM November 28th 2009 - Agenda

- Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on November 15th 2008
- Treasurer's Report
- Chairman's Report
- Election of officers and trustees
- Any other business

The Annual Report for 2008 – 2009 and a nomination form for trustees and officers is included with this bulletin

The minutes of the last AGM and annual accounts will be available at the meeting

Introduction & Contents



A very warm welcome to our latest Autumn 2009 bulletin. In this edition we report on the ongoing progress being made with the purchase of Badgers Wood and, as we are hopefully very close now to finalising the purchase, an introduction to the wood itself. There are also articles on fungi, dormice and mistletoe as well as the fascinating archaeology of Backwell Cave.

To help you find your way around, the contents are as follows:

- i) **Formal Notice of AGM and Agenda**
- ii) **BET's Official Annual Report**
- iii) **The Hazel Dormouse**
- iv) **A Brief History of BET**
- v) **An Introduction to Badgers Wood Nature Reserve**
- vi) **Mistletoe**
- vii) **Fungi on the Nature Reserves**
- viii) **The Archaeology of Backwell (or Badger) Cave**
- xi) **Beginning Bird Watching**
- xii) **Jubilee Stone Wood Word Search**
- xiii) **Nomination Form for Trustees & an Appeal for Help**



BACKWELL ENVIRONMENT TRUST **ANNUAL REPORT** **OCTOBER 1ST 2008 TO SEPTEMBER 30TH 2009**

BET's formal objectives as they appear in our Charity Commission registration are shown in the box at the end of this report. In practical terms we have to manage our holdings to promote biodiversity and environmental good practice and to create a valuable recreational and educational resource for Backwell and the public in general.

This report is divided into four sections. First, management of the Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve; second, progress on extending the reserve by acquisition of the southern part of Cheston Combe Wood which we have called Badgers Wood; third, an account of the activities we have undertaken in the reporting year and fourth, a short section that covers administration of the trust and related items.

1. Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve (JSWNR)

The management and development of the reserve has continued over the reporting period. The main changes this year have been the creation of a 100 metre wildlife corridor, woodland glades and wildflower meadows expanded, the establishment of a second pond, 45 metres of hedge laid, dry stone walls restored, further reduction of invasive species such as bracken as well as continued

progress with the archaeological features in the woodland namely the limekiln, lead mines and warrener's cottage.

2. Badgers Wood

At the start of the reporting period we had agreed to buy the wood from Cemex UK Ltd and had secured a generous grant from The Landfill Levy through its local agent YANSEC (Yanley and North Somerset Environmental Company). This meant that with a substantial contribution from BET's own funds we were in a position to buy the woodland.

In addition, our members and Backwell Parish Council had underwritten the 10% 'seed money' necessary to release the YANSEC grant and we also had two applications for the seed money lodged with the Aggregates Levy via Natural England and North Somerset.

Our applications were successful and we accepted the North Somerset Aggregates Levy seed money and were thus able to return members' seed money donations to them. This also meant that we did not have to call on the Parish Council for the back-up funds they had so generously offered.



In December 2008, Cemex UK Ltd discovered that they owned only 13 of the 15 acres they were offering to us and so we had to identify and negotiate the purchase of the stray 2 acres with another owner. Fortunately he was willing to sell to BET at practically the same unit price and YANSEC agreed to maintain their grant in spite of increased legal costs.

Another delay then occurred because of an internal reorganisation within Cemex UK Ltd, the upshot of which was that they withdrew their offer to sell 13 acres and instead offered 9.75 acres retaining the 3.25 acres adjacent to the industrial buildings in Coles Quarry. Unfortunately these contain the historic Backwell (or Badger) Cave. They hinted however that these 3.25 acres might become available to us at a later date depending on the outcome of their reorganisation.

We had another patient and generous response from YANSEC. Although in absolute terms a reduced grant was now required because of the reduced acreage, they agreed to increase their grant per acre so that no contribution to the purchase price was required from BET's own resources. This allows BET to be almost in the position of buying the 3.25 acres when they become available without recourse to a grant.

During all these twists and turns we were also negotiating with Cemex UK Ltd about responsibility for the fences which protect the cliff edge, not all of which are actually at the cliff edge. After much discussion they have, at the end of this reporting period, at last agreed to accept responsibility. We believe this is the correct decision since the quarry which they created is the hazard at the root of the problem. This outcome is also consistent with Health and Safety Legislation on disused quarries.

Thus at the end of the reporting period everything is agreed with the two vendors and all the finance is in place. Ostensibly all that is required is for the legal mechanisms to operate. However as many know from personal experience in property transfers, anything can happen and we will not be satisfied until the Land Registry confirms our title.

3. BET Events and Activities

We have continued our successful and enjoyable twice-monthly activity sessions performing practical tasks on the reserve. During the reporting period, BET members have recorded the incredible total of **1,876 man/woman hours** of volunteer activity. This total includes over **400** hours which has been spent on activities relating to the purchase of Badgers Wood.

In addition, a workshop to construct owl boxes was held in the Parish Hall and a lecture by Andrew Town on the natural history of Backwell Lake was organised. We held our traditional early morning bird song walk in March and, in April, there was a guided wildflower walk. June saw a training day on identifying slugs and snails and, in August, there was a walk around both Jubilee Stone Nature Reserve and Badgers Wood to acquaint members with the possibilities for future developments. We

assisted the Wildlife Wardens at their lake evening in August and in September arranged a talk by our ornithological consultant, Philip Chapman, on his research work in Costa Rica.

Work on the excavation of our historic sites namely the lead mines, warrener's cottage and limekiln has continued, often on the regular activity days when other woodland demands were low.

BET continues to support the North Somerset Parish Wildlife Wardens (NSPWW), the Backwell Fairtrade Café, Backwell Access Group (BAG), The Environmental Network of North Somerset (TENONS) and Nailsea Environment and Wildlife Trust (NEWT).

4. Trust Administration

Trustees' meetings

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

Bulletins

Three bulletins have been issued in the reporting period.

Membership

On October 1st 2009 there were 294 members, compared with 263 at the same date in 2008.

Backwell Lake

BET remains part of a loose association of local naturalist groups which negotiates on biodiversity management issues with Wessex Water who own the Lake.

BET is supporting the Backwell Access Group which is aiming to persuade Wessex Water to make the lake perimeter accessible to wheelchairs. Wessex Water has now given permission for this development and BET is helping and advising on obtaining planning permission and finance.

Formal reports to the Charity Commission

BET has submitted to the Charity Commission, as required, formal reports and accounts for the period from October 1st 2007 to September 30th 2008. Accounts for the current period will not require independent examination and certification prior to submission because income for the year is below the stipulated threshold value.

Conclusion

I believe this annual report demonstrates that we are achieving our formal objectives.

Bill Charnock ~ 30th Sept 2009



BET's Constitutional Objects

(selected from model objects suggested by the Charity Commission)



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



The Hazel Dormouse

Jubilee Stone Wood's rarest mammal is the impossibly cute hazel dormouse. Should you ever be lucky enough to spot one of these elusive, nocturnal creatures you'll immediately understand why they're so popular with their big, bulging black eyes and thick furry tails. Unfortunately, you will need to be incredibly lucky to spot one of these sleepy little creatures as they are only active at night, very shy and sleep for seven months of the year. They're also quite rare -

studies suggest that they've disappeared from over half of their historic range due in part to the loss of ancient woodlands, the decline in coppicing and the destruction of our hedgerows.

In Jubilee Stone Wood, where we already know that dormice are present (we've found three nests & one live, hibernating dormouse), we've put up around thirty purpose-built dormice boxes in the most suitable areas of the woodland.



These boxes are very similar to bird boxes, but differ by having the entrance hole at the back of the box facing the tree trunk. They can be useful in providing a secure shelter for dormice (and other wildlife) and can boost populations as they will often raise their young in them. They're also very helpful for licensed dormouse



inspectors in surveying dormouse populations in woodlands.

Autumn is the time of year when dormice seriously need to fatten up before the winter, in fact any dormouse that is not looking seriously obese by the end of October may well have real problems in surviving their extremely long hibernation period. At this time of year almost anything they see in the hedgerows could get eaten but blackberries and hazelnuts are always a firm favourite. In our woodland, we have been working hard over the past few years to increase the variety of habitats for the dormouse and other wildlife and in so doing, increase the supply of food that the woodland can produce.

For the full facts on dormice why not come along to our AGM on Saturday 28th November at 2:30pm when Joe McSorley of the Avon Wildlife Trust will be giving an illustrated talk

A Brief History of BET

2004

Oct Jubilee Stone Wood (JSW) comes up for sale.

Dec Informal meeting of the Backwell Parish Wildlife Wardens and interested residents to discuss buying the woodland.

2005

Jan 26th BET sets itself up as a local organisation with a Charity Commission model constitution with the aim of buying JSW.

Jan – Apr House-to-house leafleting, membership drive, fund raising and publicity.

May 10th BET becomes a registered charity (No. 1109406) regulated by the Charity Commission.

May Bulletin No 1 Issued.
May 14th Launch day rally of Backwell Members and supporters. £2,500 raised towards the purchase. 267 signed up as members.
Aug Wood purchased by local resident to hold for BET.
Sept 15th North Somerset Local Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (LALSF) makes grant to BET for purchase of JSW.
Oct 29th First BET AGM.

2006

Jan 21st BET obtains legal title to JSW from local resident who also makes a large donation. Work begins on surveying, clearing, planning and woodland management.
 Twice monthly activity sessions introduced.
May 6th Jubilation Day. Members' celebration in JSW.
Nov 11th Second AGM with presentation to members of detailed Management plan for JSW based on maximising biodiversity.



2007

Jan-Dec Woodland activities over the year included among other items, creation of the 'New Coupe' below the Jubilee Stone, hedge laying, elimination of the invasive garden plant, box honeysuckle (*Lonicera nitida*), reduction in Turkey oak numbers, reduction of bracken areas, grass cutting, creation of a pond and refurbishment of bird boxes.
Jan Indication from Cemex UK Ltd that they may sell Cheston Combe Wood South (CCWS) to BET.
Mar Completion of first stage of access trail to Jubilee Stone under a grant from North Somerset LALSF including erection of farm and equestrian gate, construction with planning permission of a small car park and laying the first 50m of limestone path.
Apr Environmental film 'An Inconvenient Truth' shown in the Parish Hall.
Sep BET Tree Logo adopted.
Oct Site meeting and survey of CCWS with Cemex UK land agent.
Nov 10th Third BET AGM.



2008

Jan -Dec Woodland activities over the year included bracken and ragwort pulling, cutting by scythe of grassy areas, erection of benches, information boards, notice boards, way markers and Forest of Avon sculptures, further work on limekiln and warrener's cottage.
March Completion under a North Somerset LALSF grant of the 300 metre easy access trail to the Jubilee Stone.
April 2nd Formal offer from Cemex UK to sell CCWS to BET. Dormice boxes put up in woodland,
June 21st Grand opening of Access Trail in conjunction with Backwell Access Group and Backwell Parish Council.
July 14th Landfill Levy (YANSEC) makes grant to BET for purchase of CCWS.
Aug 17th to 20th Charcoal burn in JSWNR.
Sept Members and Backwell Parish Council together guarantee 'seed money' needed to underwrite Landfill Levy grant for CCWS.
Sept CCWS renamed 'Badgers Wood' by BET.
Nov 15th BET's fourth AGM preceded by an owl box construction workshop.
Dec Cemex UK discover they do not own all of Badgers Wood. BET agrees the purchase of the two acres not owned by Cemex UK with a local resident.



2009

Jan-Dec Woodland activities include completion of wildlife corridor, hedge laying, improvements to east entrance, hawthorn clearance with owner's permission in Badgers Wood, creation of a second pond, further work on limekiln and warrener's cottage and renewal of interpretation boards.
Spring North Somerset LALSF makes grant to pay YANSEC seed money. Seed money donations returned to members.

July Cemex revise their offer to sell 13 acres to 9.75 acres. They wish to retain 3.25 acres close to the quarry.

August YANSEC agree to pay the new full purchase price thus relieving BET from making a contribution from its own resources.

Summer/Autumn Negotiations on positions and responsibility for fences and boundaries continue and (fingers crossed) are finally resolved.

October Bulletin 16 issued.

Bill Charnock

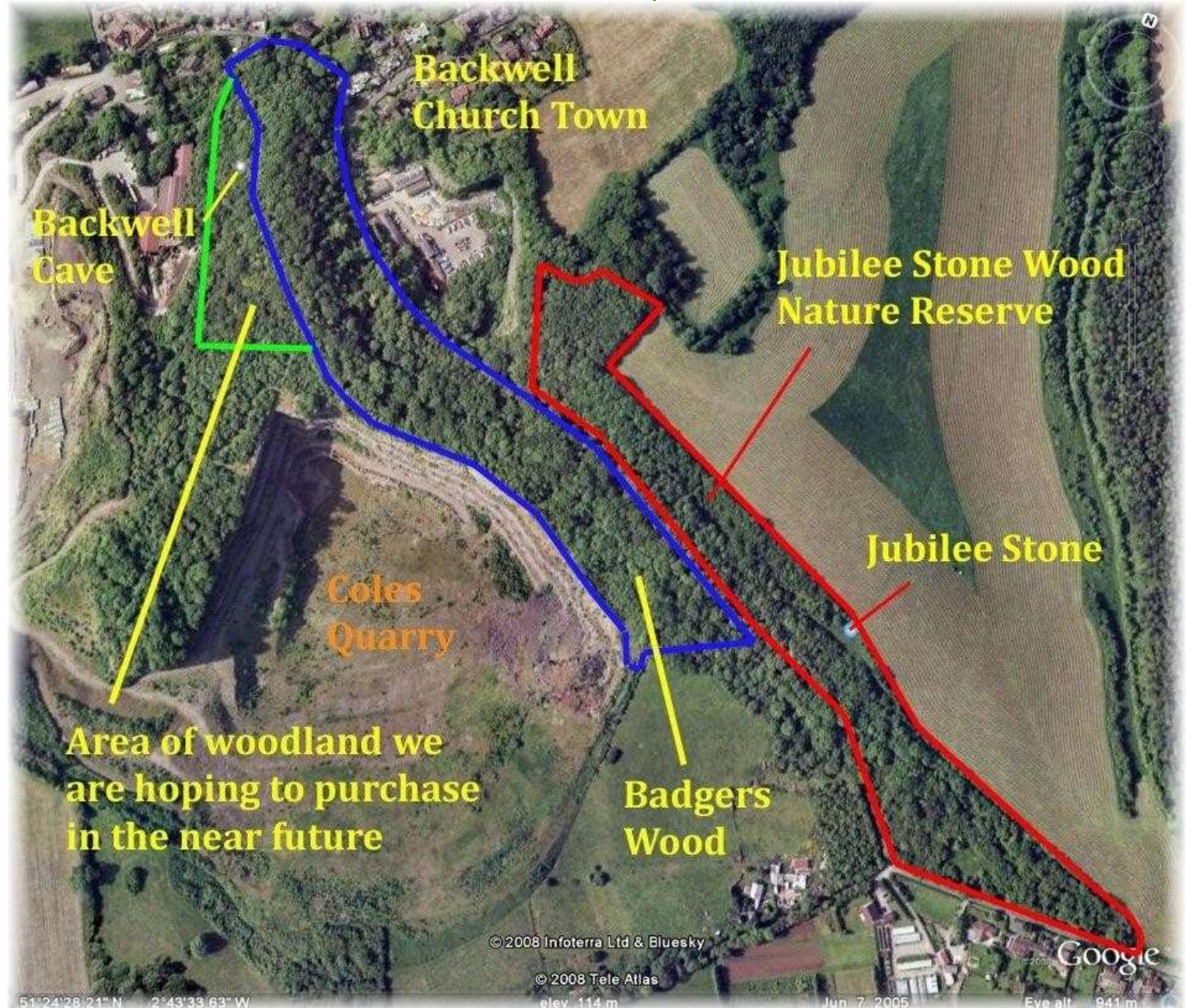


Badgers Wood Nature Reserve

Hopefully we are now in the home straight with our purchase of Badgers Wood so here is a summary of just some of the highlights our newest reserve will have to offer.

Location

The 11.75 acre/5.3 hectare woodland is bordered by Cheston Combe Road to the east, Church



Town to the north and the disused Coles Quarry to the west. It has a public footpath running through the entire length of the reserve together with several other minor trails.

Ecology

The ecology of Badgers Wood's can be divided into two distinct areas roughly by the line taken by the public footpath through the reserve. To the west of the path the land is predominately flat with dry, thin soils overlying the hard limestone bedrock. These areas, up to about 15 years ago, were once extremely rich wildflower meadows but over recent years, most have



been lost to encroaching scrub. However, the small area of meadow that survives shows an amazing diversity of flowering plants and within a few hundred metres of the reserve boundary can be found the increasingly rare bee and pyramidal orchids. These spectacular flowers would have almost certainly been present on what is now Badgers Wood and hopefully they can be encouraged to return some day. The reserve already contains large numbers of early purple and common spotted orchids although these plants are struggling to survive under the ever increasing scrub invasion.



To the east, large areas of the woodland face steeply in a northeasterly direction leaving large sections of the reserve in a state of almost permanent shade. This has led to a magical landscape full of ferns and fungi nestling under the exposed limestone cliffs to be found here. Probably because of the steepness of the landscape in this area it has been largely left untouched by man over the centuries allowing an ancient woodland to develop. The oldest trees in the woodland are both to be found here

with a 5.1 metre circumference English Oak tree estimated to be 300 years old and a 4.5m Yew estimated at around 600 years old.

Rare Species

Badgers Wood Nature Reserve, as well as Jubilee Stone Wood, contains the locally rare yellow bird's-nest plant which are the only recorded specimens in the whole of North Somerset. Dormice may also be present on the reserve and we shall be putting up summer nesting boxes to help this rare, nocturnal mammal spread through the woodland.

Peregrine falcons have been seen on many occasions and have probably nested on the many vertical rock faces of Coles Quarry.

Archaeology

The most obvious archaeological site on the reserve is the remains of an old cottage, abandoned some 70 years ago, situated close to the boundary with Church Town. However old maps show a possible five other buildings within the reserve as well as the many 'humps & bumps' visible which, I'm sure, will come under close scrutiny over the coming years.

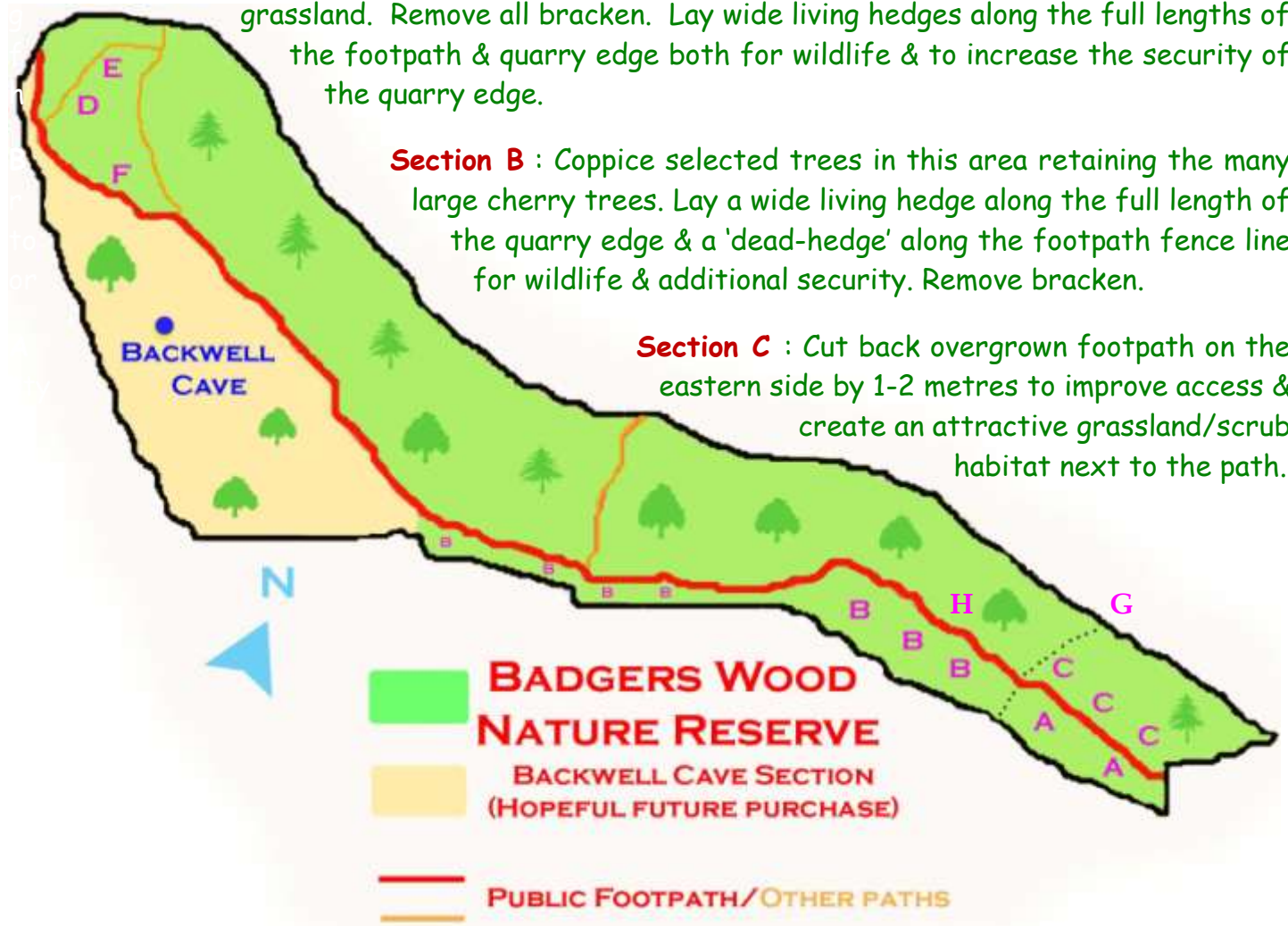
Proposals for Future Woodland Management Projects

Our proposals for the future management of the reserve are primarily concerned with the restoration of overgrown sections of rare limestone grassland, improving access and creating new hedgerows both for wildlife and as an additional barrier to secure the quarry cliff face.

Section A : Remove most of the common small trees in this area to restore the rare limestone grassland. Remove all bracken. Lay wide living hedges along the full lengths of the footpath & quarry edge both for wildlife & to increase the security of the quarry edge.

Section B : Coppice selected trees in this area retaining the many large cherry trees. Lay a wide living hedge along the full length of the quarry edge & a 'dead-hedge' along the footpath fence line for wildlife & additional security. Remove bracken.

Section C : Cut back overgrown footpath on the eastern side by 1-2 metres to improve access & create an attractive grassland/scrub habitat next to the path.



D : Remove some of the small trees in this area to restore the rare limestone grassland.

E : Coppice selective trees in this area to let in more light for the spring flowers & to make the rock face more visible.

F : Replace rotting wooden steps along the footpath.

G : Subject to planning permission, create a small car park and wheelchair-friendly path with benches to the stunning viewpoint over Coles Quarry.

H : Remove the garden escape, box honeysuckle, from the reserve.

General : Erect bird, bat and dormice boxes at appropriate locations throughout the woodland.

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

The tasks will change as the year progresses and can vary according to your strength and interests. Please wear stout footwear and suitable old clothes and, if possible, bring garden gloves. We ***always*** break for vast amounts of tea, coffee and biscuits.

Meet at the lower entrance to the wood outside No17 Church Town from 09:50 for a 10:00am start or telephone in advance to find out where we shall be working (01275 463315)



Mistletoe ~ *Viscum album* (*Loranthaceae*)

In the autumn and winter, when the leaves have dropped, it is easy to see that some of our trees are hosts to the common Mistletoe. Numerous large spherical growths of this evergreen hemiparasite are often confined to a single tree in a grove. Since it contains chlorophyll, this plant is capable of photosynthesis, and needs light for growth. It is not dependent on the tree for carbohydrate, though it must derive its water, nitrogen, and minerals from the host. The rate of growth of the Mistletoe is very slow but some of the 'spheres' might be up to one metre in diameter. It can take up to five years for the white berries to be formed, and even then their production depends on the presence of a nearby male plant since this species is dioecious (male and female flowers are on separate plants). There are 1350 species of mistletoe in the world; the name *Viscum* being derived from the sticky 'glue' that fastens the seed to the bark of the tree, and *album* referring to the white berries. It grows as far north as Yorkshire.



Mistletoe is good for wildlife; the berries are eaten by birds, especially the Mistle Thrush, and the evergreen foliage gives good winter protection for a variety of wildlife. Since it is rarely detrimental to the tree, it is best that it is not eradicated without good reason, or unless it is obviously harming the tree.

It is thought that mistletoe was first associated with kissing at the Greek festival of Saturnalia (a festival later adopted by the Romans), when it was thought to aid fertility. Large quantities are sold at Christmas to supplement the seasonal decorations and often used as an excuse for affectionate greetings.

It is apparently rare for mistletoe to kill a tree, though it undoubtedly can weaken it. Richard Bland in a survey of host trees in North Somerset published in *Nature in Avon* found it growing on 12 different species, but it was not recorded on Oak, Aspen, Ash, or Elm. The most common hosts were Black Poplar, Common Lime, Apple, and Hawthorn, in that order. It also grows on False Acacia, a notable specimen being found close to the Goblin Combe Environment Centre. The fairly small Hawthorn on the field belonging to José McDonald to the north of Nailsea also supports it. The decline in records on Apple is probably related to the loss of so many of our orchards.

The berry has viscous mucilage that clings like glue to the beaks of birds that eat them. Birds find it difficult to remove this and rubbing against the bark, they are able to deposit the seed in a suitable germination site. Meanwhile the mucilage causes the seed to be secured on the bark. After a few weeks, the seed develops one to three haustoria (from Latin *haustus* = drinking) or root-like growths that turn towards the bark and eventually penetrate it. Last year I tried to propagate it on the trees in

my garden, so far with some success, as many of them have produced haustoria. Whether they will reach maturity remains to be seen.

In propagating mistletoe, the literature suggests that berries should be used fresh, preferably in February or March. Seeds that have dried on twigs over Christmas in a warm room have usually lost viability. There seems to be no advantage in cutting the bark since this may introduce fungi that can antagonize germination. It may be best to propagate it onto the same species on which the parent plant was growing, on a branch that is at least 10 cm in diameter.

Dr Terry Smith



Fungi on the Nature Reserves



As a young lad I can still remember the thrill of walking through my local woodlands in autumn and stumbling across a group of colourful toadstools majestically rising from the damp earth. Many years have past since then, yet they still seem to hold a magical fascination for me, maybe because their myriad of strange shapes seem to be so fundamentally different from all the other plants to be found growing in the woodland. BET's nature reserves are of course great places to find fungi, especially with the coming of the cooler, damper days of autumn. So to start you off on your very own fungus foray, here are four of my favourite fungi to be found on our nature reserves.

Scarlet Elf Cup (*Sarcoscypha austriaca*)

These bright scarlet, shallow cups often appear singularly or in small groups on damp, rotting wood in either broad-leaf or coniferous woodlands. The cups themselves can range from 1 - 5cms in diameter and usually stand around 1cm tall. They can be found throughout the winter to spring period and are considered not particularly common.



Stagshorn or Jelly Antler Fungus (*Calocera viscosa*)

This intense, bright yellow fungus can occur either singularly or in groups on soil with only a short covering of grass. Their stems are typically about 5cms high and are often repeatedly branched, particularly towards their tips - hence their common names. They first appear in early summer and can be found up to the first frosts of autumn. Uncommon.

Fungi are a very distinct group of organisms and are now considered to occupy their very own 'kingdom' within the natural world. As fungi lack the green pigment chlorophyll, they are unable to utilise the energy from sunlight and so must obtain their nutrients from other sources. How they obtain these nutrients has enabled mycologists to classify these into three groups:

1) Fungi that feed on dead or decaying material such as a fallen tree or dead animal. This form of obtaining nutrients is known as saprophytism and the fungi in this group are known as *saprophytes*.

2) Parasitic fungi that feed on living plants and animals which can often result in the ultimate death of the host species.

3) Fungi that live in harmony with their living hosts, often to the benefit of both species. This is known as a *symbiotic* relationship and has been found to occur in many species of flowering plants. In fact, with species such as orchids, their entire survival depends on an interaction with fungi to enable their seeds to germinate.

Scarlet Wax Cap (*Hygrocybe coccinea*)

These 'agaric' fungi have a blood red, domed cap and stem, pale yellow or red gills and are usually to be found on soil amongst mown or cropped grass. They typically stand between 2 - 5cms high and have a cap diameter of 2 - 4cms. They occur from late summer through to the autumn and are often found with other brightly coloured related species. Uncommon.



Common Earthstar (*Geastrum triplex*)

These bizarre fungi have a creamy-white 'bulb' surmounting a star-shaped base, which raises the spore sac above the level of the soil. They are often found in groups amongst leaf litter in broad-leaved woodlands. When fully open, the 'stars' are between 5 - 10cms in diameter whilst the central spore sac is between 3 - 5cms. They occur in late summer to early autumn and are considered uncommon.

Without fungi, our planet would quickly become full to the brim with dead material. Consider for a moment BET's nature reserves, which will cover some 10 hectares after we purchase Badgers Wood. Estimates suggest that the trees in our woodlands may contain some 1,800 million leaves weighing in at just under 30 tonnes! However, within six months of the autumn fall, most of this huge mass of organic material has started to disappear as it is silently broken down by fungi into the nutrients that all other species of plants can use.

Five Fantastic Fungus Facts

1) Worldwide, it is estimated that there are probably between 1.5 and 9 million species of fungi, whilst only around 100,000 species have yet been formally recorded.

2) DNA analysis of a single honey fungus in America confirmed that it was between 1,500 and 5,000 years old, measured 5 kilometres in diameter and weighed an estimated 10 tonnes.

3) The largest giant puff ball ever recorded was discovered in Canada and measured 2.64 metres in diameter and weighed in at a whopping 22kg. It has been estimated that it was capable of releasing over 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 spores.

4) Orchid seeds are usually far too small to store nutrients for the plants to develop. They overcome the problem by allowing micro-fungi to invade their seeds which, as they grow, supply the necessary food allowing the orchids to successfully germinate and thrive.

5) The *ascomycete* fungus 'ergot' has been responsible for countless deaths ever since man first cultivated cereals thousands of years ago. It largely infects rye and when injected in flour can cause the hands & feet of the victims to turn black and fall off followed by seizures and eventually death. Historical research has also shown a strong link between 16th and 17th century witchcraft trials and the prevalence of ergot poisoning in both Europe and North America. In the 1940s, medical research on ergot isolated the infamous psychoactive drug, D-lysergic diethylamide, better known to the hippies amongst you as LSD!

Ian Chambers

Quickies

A BIG BET thank-you to YANSEC, North Somerset LALSF, Barbara Hunt (our solicitor), the Parish Council and of course our members for all the patience & support they have shown us with the purchase of Badgers Wood.

BET has recently been nominated for the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS). This scheme was set up in 2002 to recognise voluntary groups that have significantly benefited their local community. The winners will be announced in June 2010 so we'll let you know how we get on.

Special thanks go to The Backwell Art Group and the Backwell Village Show who have both made very generous donations to BET over the past year.

Did you know that you can show your support for BET by wearing T-shirts, fleeces, etc with the BET logo embroidered on? Just call into Peaks of Backwell on 22 West Town Road or look online at www.propeaks.co.uk.

BET signed up its 300th member on the 10th October 2009

The History of Backwell Cave

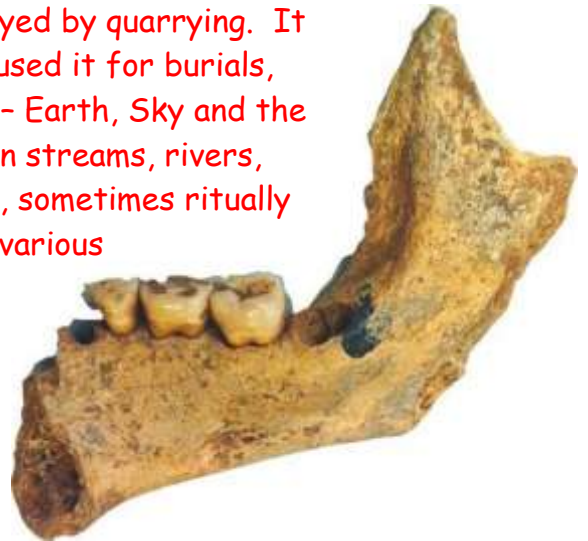
In 1936, quarry owner Joseph Coles wanted to clear out Backwell Cave (also known locally as Badger Cave), situated high up in Cheston Combe woods. More of a recess than a cave really, the debris of stones and sticky red clay was 2.40m (8 feet high) and spread 3m - 4.50m (10-15 feet) down the hillside. When pieces of bone first appeared in the soil, the digging-out was halted and, in 1937, an excavation was started by E. K. Tratman. Remains of 18-30 individuals, including men, women and 3 children were uncovered along with animal bones and several sherds of late Iron Age and Roman pottery suggesting a date of circa 100B.C. - A.D.100.

If the human remains had been from early or middle Iron Age, they would have been buried with grave goods, such as swords or shields for men, and mirrors, necklaces or jet beads for women. It was believed that jet (fossilised wood) had medicinal properties both for anaesthetising and as an antidote to poison. Two Roman spindle whorls ('pixies grindstones' in folklore) which were small circular discs with central holes of 2-5cm diameter were also found, designed to be threaded onto a spindle or wooden stick to enable wool or flax to be spun. Being so small, they could be tucked into the waist to allow women to continue with other tasks. Unfortunately these whorls were lost when Bristol Museum was bombed in World War Two.



The cave was a sacred site, possibly lying beside the track that led to the hillfort itself where the people would have lived, but this has now been destroyed by quarrying. It was of great significance to the several generations who used it for burials, situated where features of the landscape came together - Earth, Sky and the Underworld. Water also had special properties, whether in streams, rivers, underground pools or stalagmites in caves. Many weapons, sometimes ritually broken are found in water, deposited as offerings to the various gods who played a large part in their lives.

Much more information could be obtained from the cave and its contents, so we hope that in the near future BET will be allowed to purchase it from Cemex Ltd. Some scientific analysis could then be done to discover more about the environment, and also of the men, women and children who lived in the area over two thousand years ago.



Jenny Greenslade

In October, BET members had a fascinating and informative visit to the Bristol Speleological Museum to view and photograph the bones & other artefacts removed from the cave during the 1937 excavation.

❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ BET QUIZ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖

Answer these two cunningly cryptic conundrums and the first out of the hat will win a large bar of Fairtrade chocolate!

- 1) Can you identify what this picture is a part of ?
- 2) If all the spores in the world's largest giant puffball (page 12) grew into yet more giant puffballs of the same size; stacked end to end, where could they easily reach :

A: the moon, B: neptune, C: our nearest star, Proxima Centauri

Send your answers to chimpiychambs@yahoo.co.uk



Beginning Birdwatching Part 1 : Going Out, Watching & Enjoying

Many people like birds, but find themselves daunted by the prospect of Bird watching. Perhaps it's the perceived need to go out and buy lots of confusing and expensive optical equipment. Or the strange jargon. Maybe it's the obsessive, exclusive habits of birders who speed up and down the country hunting rarities. Or even simpler : there are a lot of birds, and you may not know very many of them. I'm going to write a few articles illustrating how incorrect much of these worries are, and try and give some advice on turning a passing interest into an enjoyable and absorbing hobby.



The key thing to get started with enjoying birds is simply to go out and look. You don't, after all, have to go far to see some kind of bird in Britain. It doesn't matter how little you think you know : everybody can recognise a robin, or a seagull, or a swan. The key is to actively look for them when you're going about your day to day business. There is no need to go far and wide, as there are birds in gardens, in hedges, on ponds. The more you look, the more you see. That may sound obvious, but it works on



another level, as what I really mean is you start to get attuned to looking out for birds. You'll start knowing where to look, for example, the more you see. Watch what they're doing. See the patience of the swan on its nest, or the skill with which that blackbird hunts for worms on the lawn. Maybe stop for a moment when you see a Kestrel, as it hovers into the wind, maintaining its position over the ground to the centimetre.

Perhaps you could try going a bit further afield, and visit a large, well-known nature reserve, like Slimbridge in Gloucestershire. Unlike small, remote reserves, large reserves are full of people and most people are willing to help an enthusiastic beginner. Even if you have no optical gear and no clue about what you are seeing, there is often someone who will let you have a look through their big telescope at that distant wader or flock of geese, etc. Like many, I benefited hugely from this as a child and do my best to give this chance to others. Another advantage of big reserve is that they often run courses for beginners or guided tours or walks. It is nice to all be in the same boat, and share the experience of learning about birds with other like-minded people.



The basic thrill of birds is profound. They are varied in their shapes, their colours and their habits. Importantly, they are one of the most accessible types of wildlife to people. We can relate to things like birds-they appeal to our eyes and our ears. While equipment, knowledge, travel and experience all add to the appeal and enjoyment of bird watching, beneath it all is an appreciation of this essential joy of appreciating the natural world. So my advice is this : look for birds, see them, watch them and enjoy them.

Philip Chapman



Backwell Lake



The Backwell Access Group of wheelchair users (BAG) has been campaigning hard to improve access to both Backwell and Nailsea shops with some considerable success. One of its current projects is to improve the access around Backwell Lake by providing a hard surfaced path (probably using crushed limestone) which would be suitable for both wheelchair users and pedestrians whatever the weather. BAG has asked BET to advise and help because of our experience in creating a similar path at Jubilee Stone Wood. Wessex Water, who own the lake and kindly allow public access to it, has agreed to let the scheme go ahead subject to possible planning permission being required by North Somerset Council. So at

present, possible sources of funding are being explored by BAG, BET and Andrew Town of Stockway North Nature Reserve in Nailsea. We'll keep you informed of their progress.



Jubilee Stone Wood Word Search

Can you find the words shown below?



L	I	M	E	K	I	L	N	O	B
B	A	D	T	H	C	H	I	R	L
B	K	O	R	C	H	I	D	C	U
A	O	A	P	M	P	C	R	H	E
D	B	O	T	M	P	U	S	N	B
G	L	A	P	N	U	O	T	P	E
E	O	K	B	A	U	S	N	Q	L
R	O	R	T	P	O	Y	L	D	L
D	B	A	T	O	W	P	F	I	P
Y	U	R	B	X	L	T	U	L	M
X	D	O	R	M	O	U	S	E	C

orchid bluebell owl oak dormouse badger pond bat



Amanda
Swannell

Always keep yourself up to date
by visiting the 'events' section
of www.bet.btik.com



BET AGM 2009



Nomination Form for Trustees

All members are entitled to stand for election as officers and trustees of the Trust. So if you would like to get involved please complete the nomination form below and return it to the current chair as our constitution does not allow nominations to be made at the AGM. Your proposer must of course be a member.

If you would like to discuss the prospect of becoming a trustee and/or if you have no one to propose you, again please contact the chair or another trustee. The trustees meet about every six weeks to discuss and decide the Trust's plans and activities. We are limited to a maximum of 12 trustees but non-trustees are welcome to attend and participate in our meetings without the right to vote on decisions.

Position: Chair, Secretary, Treasurer or Trustee	Name of candidate:	Name of proposer:	Signature of proposer:	Candidate's acceptance of Nomination: (Signature)

If you would like to say something about yourself and why you are standing for the committee, then please do. This could be read out at the AGM if there is an election.

AGM Motion 1 : To discuss whether BET should accept donations from Bristol International Airport.

If you would like to get involved in other ways there are of course our twice monthly activity sessions in the woods. We could also use help on administration, for example booking meeting rooms, taking minutes, keeping membership records, dealing with correspondence, etc.

If you can help in any way at all then please contact me or any trustee

Bill Charnock, BET Chairman
17 Church Town, Backwell, BS48 3JQ
Telephone : 01275 462083