

Backwell Environment Trust
Bulletin 30 - Spring 2015
www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org



A VERY WARM WELCOME TO
OUR TENTH ANNIVERSARY BULLETIN

Well, it's difficult for me to believe that BET has been going for ten years this springtime, so it's maybe a good time to look back to how it all began and to celebrate some of the fabulous milestones that the Trust has achieved along the way.

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

How BET Started
Wildlife Wonders

Nest Box Report
Woodland Report



Wildlife Family Celebration 6th June 2015

How BET Came About - Ten Years Ago

In this article we look back at BET's origins and how it managed to acquire its two fabulous woodland reserves. It is a fascinating story and a great tribute to some very dedicated volunteers who overcame many obstacles as they arose. The acquisition process involved hard work and persistence - not to mention an understanding of various little-known sources of grant monies. The story starts following the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 and the associated Agenda 21, with the creation of local volunteer groups aimed at preserving and sustaining biodiversity. The North Somerset Parish Wildlife Wardens group was formed, with Backwell being one of the largest and most active parishes.


Jubilee Stone Wood

In October 2004, the Jubilee Stone Wood (JSW) came on the market and the Wildlife Wardens combined with local Backwell residents to try to buy the 10 acre wood for the community. And so, in early 2005, the Backwell Environment Trust (BET) was set up with a Charity Commission model constitution and with the aim of raising the necessary funds to buy JSW.

**DAVID
JAMES
& PARTNERS**
Rural Chartered Surveyors

**Woodland at Cheston Coombe,
Backwell Down**

Bristol 7 miles M5 Jt 19 3.5 miles






FOR SALE BY PRIVATE TREATY

Cheston Coombe Woods North, Backwell Hill
10.18 acres (4.12ha)
NG7090

A combination of broadleaf and semi-mature softwoods, including pine and spruce with road frontage and public footpath

Price Guide: £36,000 ono

The Cross, Congresbury, North Somerset BS49 5DY Tel: (01934) 876777
Fax: (01934) 830000 Email: congs@davidjames.org.uk Website: www.davidjames.org.uk

  
Agents for the Agricultural Mortgage Corporation

Flyers were distributed to every house in Backwell, articles placed in the local papers and a series of fundraising events held. Support from local councils was secured and invaluable advice was offered by the Yatton and Congresbury Wildlife Action Group (YACWAG) which had been formed five years previously.

On May 10th BET became a Registered Charity, with Bill Charnock as Chairman and a group of 9 enthusiastic trustees. BET made a number of offers for JSW, starting from £20k, which were rejected. Eventually, at a chance meeting with the owner, an offer of £34k by Barbara Charnock was accepted! By then around £7k had been raised leaving a rather large gap. Luckily a

source of funding became available in the form of a tax on local quarrying - the Local Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund (LALSF). BET made a strong application for a grant and was successful - but the money would not be made available for some time. BET was incredibly fortunate that local residents Gary and Nicola Lake stepped in to buy wood and hold it in trust for BET until the grant came through.

This happened in the September and then the legal process took a further three months to complete, with great support by Backwell solicitors Wadge, Rapps and Hunt. BET finally received title to JSW in January 2006!



BET then embarked on surveying the wood and building plans for its management, with the support of a keen band of volunteers on twice-monthly work sessions. BET's first 'coupe' or grassland meadow area was created, non-native species reduced, hedges laid and wildlife ponds created. An additional LALSF grant was obtained to enable the creation of the first length of the easy-access trail to the Jubilee Stone plus construction of a small car park with farm gate, after planning permission was secured.



Some of BET's Campaign and Publicity Material



Charitable status pending
BACKWELL ENVIRONMENT TRUST
BET **HELP TO BUY A WOOD FOR BACKWELL**

- ▲ The first project of the newly-formed Backwell Environment Trust is to buy 10.18 acres of woodland.
- ▲ This woodland, which is of historic significance and contains the Jubilee Stone, will be managed by members of BET to preserve and enhance its wildlife and the environment.
- ▲ The wood is easily reached from the village and has a public right of way through it.
- ▲ The Trust will also organise woodland-related activities, walks and educational events.
- ▲ To achieve this, **WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT.** Become a member now, subscriptions: £5 single or £10 family, donations also gratefully accepted.

For more information contact:
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 Phil Noad, 12, The Old Rectory, Backwell, Somerset, BA20 3JG
www.backwellenvironment.com

Edge Rapps and Hunt, Solicitors

BACKWELL ENVIRONMENT TRUST.
GRAND LAUNCH DAY
 May 14th Backwell Parish Hall
 10am to 3pm

COME AND FIND OUT ABOUT B.E.T.

11.00 am CHRIS SPERRING MBE, OF THE HAWK AND OWL TRUST WITH HIS LONG-EARED OWL "OTIS MENDIP" WILL BE PRESENT TO OPEN PROCEEDINGS

ALL DAY. INFORMATION, PRESENTATIONS, STALLS, DISPLAYS PLANT SALE, BIRD BOX MAKING OR BUYING, REFRESHMENTS & HOME MADE CAKES.

AFTERNOON. TONY MOULIN CHAIRMAN OF YATTON AND CONGRESBURY WILDLIFE ACTION GROUP WILL BE PRESENT TO OPEN PROCEEDINGS



Fund-raising campaign to buy beauty spot

BRANCHING OUT INTO OWNERSHIP

by John Thompson

VILLAGERS in Backwell have launched a fund-raising campaign to buy 10 acres of woodland.

The wood at Clonot, a former village hall site, is a regional wildlife reserve which was once part of the Marquis of Bath's estate. It is up for sale by private treaty with a guide price of £100k.

Trust chairman Bill Chavakis said: "Thanks to the generosity of Backwell...

...and a regional wildlife reserve, which was once part of the Marquis of Bath's estate. It has been put up for sale by private treaty with a guide price of £100k.

The group's spokesman, Dave Baker, said: "We have already enrolled more than 200 villagers who have generously raised £2,000 to help buy the site."

The Trust has also just been granted charity status, which enables us to bid for grant funding which would be a great help.

"We staged the official launch day to encourage more people to be involved and to...

Fund-raising campaign officially launched to save wood

Villagers aim to buy beauty spot

by John Thompson

VILLAGERS in Backwell have officially launched a fund-raising campaign to buy one of the village's most popular beauty spots.

The ceremony was carried out by Backwell and Owl Trust conservation officer Chris Sperring with his long-eared owl, Otis Mendip.

The 10 acres of woodland at Clonot,combe provide magnificent views of the surrounding countryside and are home to a monument built to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee.

A group of residents set up the Backwell Environment Trust in January specially to protect and improve the local landscape.

The woodland is part of the Forest of Arden...

Launch: Chris Sperring with his long-eared owl Otis Mendip and pupils David Vossanyi, aged 10, and Leah Sperring, nine, at the opening of Saturday's fund-raising and membership drive by the new Backwell Environment Trust at the parish hall in Backwell. Photograph: Chris Baker

Badgers Wood

All these good works and improvements helped to establish BET's track record and reputation - in readiness for the next acquisition challenge! The owners of the local quarry, Cemex UK Ltd - a Mexican company - had been approached and in early 2007 indicated that they might be prepared to sell 15 acres of Cheston Combe Wood South to BET. BET was keen to acquire and look after this land as it was home to a wide variety of wildflowers, ancient trees and a prehistoric cave. This wood was later renamed by BET as Badgers Wood.

Following a period of negotiation, a price of £5k per acre was agreed - and local fund raising began. BET made a successful application for a grant from YANSEC - the Yanley and North Somerset Environmental Company. This distributed revenues from taxes on landfill to support environmental problems caused by landfill. Having apparently secured most of the necessary funding, the real fun started! Cemex realised that, of the 15 acres they were selling, they didn't actually own the 2 acres at the top of the hill. They were owned by Lee Stewart, who did then agree to sell them to

www.thisisclevedon.co.uk

Grant could save these old woods

By Katie Leaming

newsdesk@clevedon.co.uk

AN ancient woodland is one step closer to being bought by a preservation group thanks to a £70,000 grant.

Backwell Environment Trust, established in 2005, already owns one nature reserve in the village.

The new land BET wishes to purchase is next to its current reserve, Jubilee Stone Wood.

Jubilee Stone is renowned for its diversity of flora and fauna, and several rare plant and animal species have been discovered there.

BET trustee Ian Chambers said the neighbouring land is of such special interest because it is home to a fantastic wildflower meadow with a number of rare orchids, ancient trees and a prehistoric cave.

When the cave was excavated in 1938, 30 skeletons were discovered inside.

After purchasing the land, BET hopes to restore the overgrown wildflower meadow, create better access to the cave and build a path suitable for wheelchairs.

BET received the grant from Yanley and North Somerset Environmental Company (YANSEC), a non-profit organisation that receives contributions from landfill operators to finance projects.

BET has raised a further £3,500 and Bristol International Airport has also donated £500.

However, BET is still £3,000 short of funds and is turning to businesses in



HISTORY TODAY: BET Trustee Liz Davy and member Diane Zimmer surveying the woodland from the quarry edge. Inset: The prehistoric cave

Backwell for support.

It is holding an activity session in Jubilee Stone Wood Nature Reserve on Saturday.

Members and non-members are welcome to join in with various woodland tasks, meeting just before 10am outside 17 Church Town, Backwell.

BET. The contract with Cemex was drawn up for the remaining 13 acres but at the eleventh hour they wrote to say they were selling the old quarry and the new owner wished to keep the 3 acres of wood containing the cave. YANSEC agreed to maintain the full grant so that BET could acquire those 3 acres from the new owner in due course - something BET is still very keen to do! It then

It then transpired that the terms of the YANSEC grant required that 10% of the purchase price should come from an independent third party. So BET appealed to local members and the Parish Council for further donations. This progressed well but their generosity was not needed as another



grant for this 'seed' money was secured from the LALSF aggregates fund. After grappling with all these ownership and funding issues, BET finally received title to the 12 acres of Badgers Wood in August 2009. Since then, BET has energetically worked on restoring the woodland, opening up several grassland meadows and creating a network of delightful trails for the local community to enjoy.

The Queen's Award



On Saturday, 11th Sept 2010, about 60 people attended a presentation by the Jubilee Stone. The award was formally presented by Brian Tanner representing the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, Lady Gass, to Bill Charnock, Chairman of BET.

In recognition of the tremendous work done by its many dedicated volunteers, BET was awarded the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the MBE for voluntary groups, in June 2010.

Four trustees represented BET at a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace with The Queen, Prince Philip, Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall.



Well, I'm sure you'll agree, the first 10 years of BET has been pretty amazing, but none of this would have ever come about without the unstinting dedication of the founding trustees, BET's members, the Parish Council and of course, all our volunteers who have taken BET forward and made the Trust what it is today.

A BIG BET THANK YOU TO YOU ALL



NEST BOX REPORT 2015

One of the December/January tasks is checking and clearing out the 50 or so nest boxes located throughout the reserves, so off we went, well wrapped up and clutching the ladder. Of the 24 boxes now in Jubilee Stone Wood, 14 contained bird nests, 5 had dormouse nests and 9 were unused. Four contained both bird and dormouse nests. In Badgers Wood, 27 boxes were checked of which 12 had bird nests, 4 dormouse nests and 11 were empty. The percentage of occupied boxes was a little higher than last year but sadly, in both reserves there were several nests containing tiny skeletons, indicating that those nests had failed. It isn't just birds and dormice who make use of our nest boxes; last year we found a box that had been taken over by a wasp colony and this year our unusual occupants were wax moth larvae! Bumble bees may well have been nesting in the box which attracted the attention of a wax moth, a bee and wasp parasite, who laid her eggs there. The resulting caterpillars feed on the wax cells and detritus in the bee nest and later the young bee larvae. This was a popular box as there was also a mouse nest in there with two indignant residents!



The boat-shaped, thick silky cocoons of the wax moth larvae. The same shaped indentations had also been bored into the wooden lid of the nest box.

In addition to the nest boxes used mainly by tits, there are 4 owl boxes, none of which have ever been nested in by an owl, but which are often occupied by grey squirrels.

Thanks to Brian Campbell, David, and to Gill Brown, our licensed dormouse handler who now comes out with us to check the bird boxes - in spite of our providing many dormouse boxes on our

reserves, some it would seem, prefer a loftier location! Thanks also to Bill Charnock who, as in previous years, has done a fantastic job refurbishing and replacing boxes so all are hopefully ready for occupation again this season.

Carrie Riches



Wildlife Wonders

I can't remember when I joined BET, but I became actively involved in 2008 when, with freshly minted licence in hand, I offered to monitor the dormouse boxes that had been installed in Jubilee Stone Wood. I was delighted to find a healthy population, and I have been checking the boxes



ever since with a number of different assistants and onlookers, including photographer Nick Upton who's delightful pictures won the Documentary Series in



the 2014 British Wildlife Photography Awards.

My interest in the BET reserves isn't restricted to dormice. Every time I visit I listen out for the ravens, and stop to admire the quarry, and the landscape beyond, from the viewpoint in Badger's Wood. I love the meadow by the quarry and always make time to linger there and take photographs of the wild flowers and the insects which visit them. One picture turned out to be rather surprising, I thought I had captured a beautiful image of a female common blue butterfly, but more knowledgeable friends were quick to point out that it was a brown argus a much scarcer species and, as far as I can tell, a new record for BET.

Another lovely butterfly I look for on my visits is the silver washed fritillary. For years it evaded



my attempts to photograph it, but eventually one co-operative individual stayed on a bramble leaf long enough for me to take shots of both sides of its wings. When you look at the



underwings the reason for its name becomes apparent, the delicate silver wash markings are a real contrast to the bold colours seen when it's in flight.

When I'm not monitoring dormice, or chasing butterflies, much of my time is absorbed by otters. I first caught a glimpse of one of these elusive animals on Backwell Lake nearly ten years ago. It was a warm May evening and David, my husband, had come home with a bat detector which, in my view, was rather too expensive. I had two options, to make my disapproval felt, or to share his enthusiasm and go with him to try it out. I'm glad I chose the latter! When we arrived at the lake we walked round to the bridge opposite the car park and stood waiting for the Daubenton's bats to start skimming the water. As it was beginning to get dark a broad head surfaced about 8 metres ahead of us. I remember doing a mental check list and very calmly stating that it was an otter. Then, as the significance of what we had seen sank in, and a wave of elation swept over me, it porpoised, showing the broad base to its tail, and



slipped into the water leaving hardly a ripple. We waited for a while to see if it would reappear, then checked the other side of the bridge. We could see a trail of stirred up mud showing where the animal had swum up the outflow under the bridge we were standing on, and into the lake. It had been right beneath our feet!

I wondered who to tell about the sighting, as up to that point I had no idea that there were otters living in North Somerset. I had been fascinated by them since I was a child, and



Otter Footprint

searched for them fruitlessly on a holiday in Shetland, but it never occurred to me that they might be this close to home. The first people I approached were very dismissive, but eventually I made contact with James Field of Avon Wildlife Trust, who told me that otters were regularly seen on Backwell Lake by employees of Wessex Water, who worked there early in the morning. James asked me if I would like to become a member of The North Somerset Otter Group and learn how to conduct surveys, I now co-ordinate YACWAG Otter Group!

Otters may have come back from the brink of extinction but they are still very elusive, and many surveyors have never been lucky enough to spot one. Fortunately they leave their droppings (spraint) in very predictable places, and their footprints are quite distinctive once you get your eye in.

For many years I relied on 'poo and prints' to build up a picture of local activity, but eventually with the help of a trail camera I was able to see my quarry for the first time. Checking video footage always brings a thrill of expectation. Often there is a sense of disappointment as the screen



Otter Spraint

shows nothing more interesting than a moving branch or a passing pigeon, but I will never forget the image of a female otter that I had been monitoring for some time scrambling up the bank of a stream with two small cubs at her side. It was the briefest of glimpses, but I was almost as excited as I was on that warm May evening in 2005 when I was first enchanted by the wild, beautiful, creature that sometimes seems to have taken over my life.

Gill Brown



Woodland Report: The First 10 years

Jubilee Stone & Badgers Wood Nature Reserves

BET purchased what we now know as Jubilee Stone Wood, in the spring of 2005 with the intention of transforming what appeared to be a somewhat neglected, scrubby woodland into a nature reserve for the village. At the time, not everyone honestly thought that it could be done, but here we are ten years on, with nationally important wildlife sites to our name. Four years later, BET was signing the documents to complete the purchase of the 12 acre Badgers Wood and BET's second nature reserve was born.

The most visual change BET has made over the past 10 years is to reduce the woodland area from approximately 99% at the time of purchase, to around 90% today in order to open up the woodland and start the restoration of the long-lost limestone grasslands that once covered the whole of Backwell Hill. The BET volunteers have been involved in so many projects over the past ten years, it's tricky to single out any particular one but here are some of my personal highlights



**Two Acres of Wildflower
Meadows Restored**



**400 metres of Wheelchair
Friendly Trails Created**



Two Ponds Created and One Restored



Two Parking Areas Created



Bird, Bat & Dormice Boxes Put Up Throughout the Woodlands



Over 500m of Hedges Laid



Rustic Seats & Benches



Over 1Km of New Trails Created

The Cabin Restored



Of course, none of this would have ever come about without the fabulous commitment from BET's loyal band of volunteers and for that, we can never thank them enough. Since BET started, those trusty volunteers have put in the astonishing total of over

16,500 Volunteer Hours

The Next Ten Years?

If you had asked me way back in 2005 what I thought BET would have achieved in its first ten years of operation, I for one, would never have predicted that BET would be capable of achieving so much in so short a time frame. But what of the next ten years? Well, finally acquiring Backwell Cave and the 3 acres of land surrounding it would be top of my wishlist as well as maybe expanding our nature reserves out into the surrounding countryside. Of course, these aspirations are closely tied into what eventually happens with the ongoing Coles Quarry development so I suspect we shall just have to wait and see.

Ian Chambers

And finally....BET has a thriving volunteer group that meets every Monday and the fourth Saturday morning of each month. Absolutely no experience is necessary and it's great fun, so why not come along and give it a try?

Volunteer Activity Mornings - on **EVERY MONDAY** and the **FOURTH SATURDAY** of every month starting at 10 am on both days and continuing for about 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.

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

Meet at the lower entrance to Badgers Wood at the Cabin just before 10am, or telephone in advance to find out where we shall be working (01275 463315).

BET's Volunteers over the Past Ten Years

Alex Arthur, Dot Baker, Annie Ball, Martin Bell, David Bossanyi, Ervin Bossanyi, Sarah Bossanyi, Tim Bossanyi, Di Bramall, Martin Brasher, Liz Brasher, Debbie Brittan, Jeremy Brittan, Gill Brown, Brian Campbell, Ann Chambers, Ian Chambers, Phil Chapman, Barbara Charnock, Bill Charnock, Charlotte Compton-Williams, Jackie Condran, Jennie Crocker, Tabitha Collins, Phil Davies, Sheila Davies, Pete Davies, Liz Davy, Mark Davy, Celia Dooley, Cheryl Flynn, Vivien French, Sue Gould, Olwyn Gillespie, Maureen Gillet, Rob Gillet, Emily Gladstone, Rachel Gladstone, Daniel Gough, Jean Glasson, Jenny Greenslade, James Griffiths, Marion Griffiths, Caroline Hatcher, Charles Hatcher, Anne-Francoise Hayman, Chloe Hayman, Elio Hayman, Brian Hips, Ian Hayman, Luc Hayman, Jon Hibbs, Josiah Hockett, Phil Hockett, Erica Hogg, Caroline Houtt, Chris Houtt, Henry Houtt, Monty Houtt, Andy Hull, Sandy Hydes, Richard Ivens, David Jones, Norma Knight, Kean Lamb, Robin Lambert, Dennis Lewis, Bob Leigh, Diane Lee, Pat Lloyd, Tony Medland, Avril Marks, Michael Marks, Steve Matthews, Keith Matthews, Lindsay Moore, Alex Minter-Swannell, Phil Noad, James Norman, Richard Penny, Christine Pring, Richard Pinnel, James Preston, Steve Pratt, Keith Riches, Anne Richards, Chris Richards, Carrie Riches, Trevor Riddle, Christine Rodgers, Angie Seddon, Derek Seddon, Alex Shearer, Anne-Marie Smith, Jas Smallbone, Ted Smallbone, Andy Smith, Janet Stone, Peter Speight, Terry Smith, Don Steadman, Tony Smith, Johanna Suomela, Verner Suomela, Lauri Suomela, Amanda Swannell, Paul Tainton, John Tarkanyi, Andrew Town, Ray Url, Carl Upshon, Alan Vivian, May Vivian, Mary Webb, Steve Webb, Alan Webb, Chris Webb, Lucy-Jane Whitehead, Mike Woodley, Gerald Wilcox, Peter Ward, Tessa Wilkinson, Brian Wilson, Gordon Wilson, Diane Zimmer.



FAMILY WILDLIFE CELEBRATION : 6th June

So how are we going to celebrate our tenth anniversary?

We've given a great deal of thought to this and have decided to hold an open-air 'Family Wildlife Celebration' event when we can enjoy all that has been achieved so far and also look forward to the future.

We're still working up the details, but what is definite is that it will take place on the BET reserves on Saturday 6th June. So make a note in your diaries and be sure to come along and enjoy a warm welcome and a fun-filled day.



One of the main activities will be a 'Bioblitz', which will actually start the day before and then run through the Saturday as well. There's more information about Bioblitzes below, but basically it is an informal and fun way to find out exactly what wildlife we have on our sites. For example, there will be pond-dipping, moth walks, bird and tree identification sessions, and a host of other conservation activities (perhaps even some worm-charming?), with nature experts on hand to help identify what we find.

If that all sounds too much like hard work, there will be local craft displays, and tea and celebration cake, back at base (at the Horsing at the top of Jubilee Stone Wood reserve). So, if you've always wondered what wildlife we have on our doorstep, or if you just fancy some tasty refreshments in beautiful surroundings, just come along anytime on **6th June** - the activities will go on all day, and the celebration party will be running all afternoon. We can't guarantee a sighting of a weasel or a peregrine falcon, though you never know (both are definitely possible), but we can certainly guarantee you a friendly welcome. Come and join us!



SO WHAT IS A BIOBLITZ?

Well, 'Bio' means 'life' and 'Blitz' means 'to do something quickly and intensively', so the idea is to get naturalists, volunteers, school groups, and members of the public working together to discover as many species of plants, animals and fungi as possible within a specific location over a defined time period (usually about 24 hours).

Bristol has been something of a Bioblitz pioneer within the UK and has now hosted full-scale events in each of the last six years - in the grounds of Ashton Court, Blaise Castle, Tyntesfield, Arnos Vale cemetery, Kings Weston, and Three Brooks Nature Reserve. The idea has caught on nationwide and this year the National Trust is organising 25 Bioblitzes at coastal locations around the country to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Enterprise Neptune. But Bioblitzes don't need to be on a large-scale. They can take place anywhere there is wildlife, including your own garden. The objectives are simply to:

- find out what wildlife you have on your site, however large it is;
- involve people, particularly young people, in learning about the diversity of the wildlife around them
- have fun while doing it.

So in a typical Bioblitz, the start might be at 11.00 on Day 1 (Friday), when school groups would be shown around the reserve by nature experts and encouraged to take part in activities such as



pond-dipping, a butterfly walk, or 'Spot the Ladybird'. In the evening there might be bug-hunting and a bat walk and then on the Saturday, activities might include a dawn chorus walk, wildlife story-telling, and 'Nature Detectives', as well as more pond-dipping, etc. And all the time there would be naturalists on site, identifying what people have found and adding it to the overall tally.

Meanwhile, back at base camp, there would be refreshments available and local crafts to observe. Everything would then culminate in an announcement on Saturday afternoon, of how many different species have been found on the site. Judging from others in the Bristol area the total is likely to be up around 600-700!



We will have more information about the detailed programme nearer the time, but do put the date (Saturday 6 June) in your diaries now. It should be a really enjoyable day and a great way to celebrate BET's first 10 years.