



Backwell Environment Trust

Bulletin 32 - Spring 2016

www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org



A very warm welcome to our latest spring bulletin

As ever, the trusty BET volunteers have been working extremely hard over the autumn and winter seasons scything our ever-expanding wild flower meadows, clearing around the two ponds in Jubilee Stone Wood as well as significantly expanding the fabulous 'coupe' meadow.

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



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It's Membership Renewal Time!



Well, it's that time of year again when we hope you will consider renewing your BET membership for another 12 months, so with your Bulletin you should receive a 2016/17 membership renewal form. When BET was established way back in 2004, we set the annual membership fee at £5 per person or £10 for a family and I am pleased to say that our subscriptions haven't increased in all that time.

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

You can hand deliver your form to any of three addresses on the form or post it to Andy Smith who is our membership secretary (1 Manor Court, West Town, Backwell, BS48 3BS).



Membership Renewal



The membership year runs from April 1st to March 31st and renewals for 2016/17 are now due. We really hope you will complete and return the enclosed form.

Membership subscriptions and donations are BET's only source of income, we do not receive annual grants.

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.



Thank you for your continued support



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/coffee and biscuits. Meet close to the lower entrance to Badgers Wood outside the Cabin just before 10am, or telephone in advance to find out where we'll be working (01275 463315).

Woodland Report

Wintertime for the trusty BET volunteers is usually the most physical time of the year because with the woodland effectively shut down for the season, we have the chance to make improvements to our already fabulous nature reserves. You may remember that last year BET held its extremely successful 'BioBlitz' nature event where, amongst a whole host of events, a diverse and extremely knowledgeable group of wildlife experts descended on us and offered their thoughts for some future projects. From this advice, we formulated our somewhat ambitious (!) winter work programme and I'm very pleased to say we completed *almost* all of it before the onset of springtime.

So just what have the hard-working BET volunteers been up to over the past six months?

Scything the Meadows

Every year, at the end of the summer, BET's wildflower meadows are cut by our volunteers, using traditional hand scythes. So the autumn season was pretty well taken up with scything our meadows but with each passing year, we're getting just that bit quicker and last year we managed the enormous task in under four months (12 sessions).

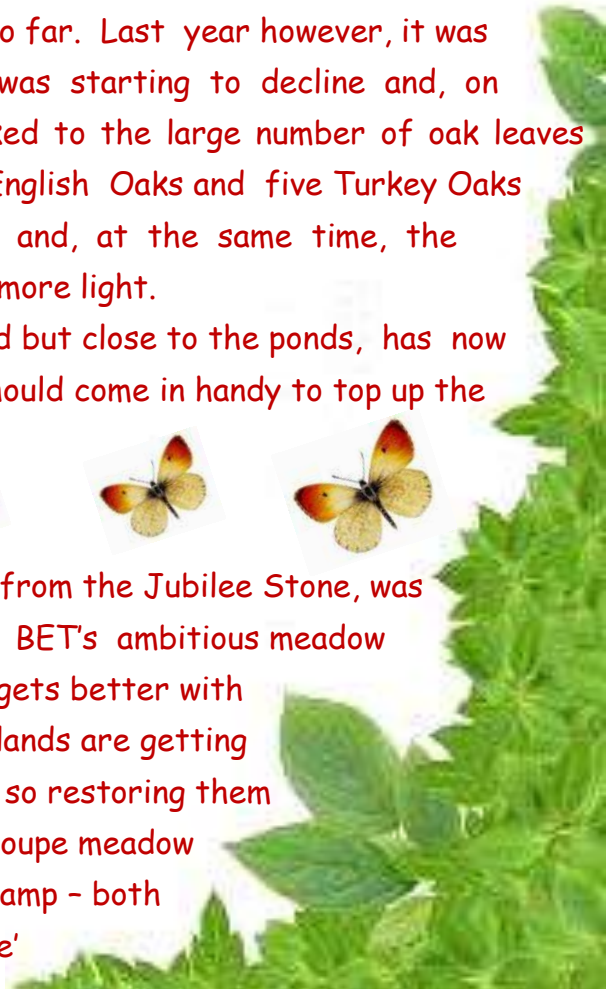
Pond Coppicing

The two ponds in Jubilee Stone Wood and the clearing surrounding them, were created in the winter of 2007/8 and they have been very successful so far. Last year however, it was noticed that the number of species living in the ponds was starting to decline and, on closer investigation, the decline was suspected to be linked to the large number of oak leaves accumulating in the sediment. So, during the winter, two English Oaks and five Turkey Oaks were coppiced to stop their leaves polluting the ponds and, at the same time, the surrounding scrub was coppiced for a second time to let in more light.

The pond-water storage reservoir, hidden in the woodland but close to the ponds, has now been increased to around 2000 litres of capacity, which should come in handy to top up the ponds during the long hot summer to come (!).

Expanding the 'Coupe' Meadow

The wild flower meadow known as 'the coupe,' just downhill from the Jubilee Stone, was restored some ten years ago, and was the first of BET's ambitious meadow restoration projects. It has been a great success and just gets better with every passing year. However, traditional limestone grasslands are getting pretty rare (over 97% have been lost in the last 70 years), so restoring them has become a big priority for us. The lower part of the coupe meadow however, is even rarer still as the soil is both acid and damp - both very unusual features on limestone. So this year, the 'coupe'



meadow was enlarged to join up with another glade, some 20 metres downhill. Most of the scrub trees have been removed and a living hedge laid around the lower boundary. So now it's just a case of waiting to see what long-dormant seeds germinate over the next few years.



Bell Heather



Tormentil



BET Volunteers Restoring the Meadow

BET Volunteers

Both the Monday and Saturday volunteer task mornings are doing extremely well at the moment with volunteer numbers typically in the region of 15 - 20 per session. BET achieves 99% of its woodland management using our ever-enthusiastic volunteers, which is the sole reason we are able to achieve so much. So once again, a **BIG BET** thank you to you all.

Ian Chambers

BET's Big Meadow Restoration Project 2016

The Early Stages



Half Way Through



Hedge Laying



**BET Volunteers
Hard at Work**



To see more pictures - visit the BET website home page and click on 'photo gallery'

Limestone Heath

Limestone heath is a term used to describe the heathland vegetation that grows on leached mineral soils or surface deposits (eg. glacial deposits from the last ice age) overlying a limestone bedrock. It mainly develops on plateau sites and north-facing slopes where rain has leached the carbonate from the surface soil, rendering it acidic enough to support typical lime-intolerant species such as heather and gorse. Regions of limestone heath are rare and are often found in isolated, small areas surrounded by rich limestone grasslands leading to an intriguing mosaic of plants. The main area of acidic soil that we know of on our nature reserves is in Jubilee Stone Wood in the lower 'coupe' meadow and in the newly restored section of it, downhill from the Jubilee Stone.



BET's Nature Reserves - Ten Years On

Some ten years ago when the prospect of purchasing a nature reserve for Backwell was just a twinkle in the trustee's eyes, we had a lot of help with surveying the woodlands from a wide range of extremely knowledgeable wildlife experts. One of these was botanist Lindsay Moore who returned to our now established nature reserves last year, during our BioBlitz weekend.



As you may know, the original botanical survey was done by me to accompany the funding application to raise money to purchase Jubilee Stone Wood. In this survey, two particularly

important vegetation types were identified - Limestone Grassland and Limestone Heath. A number of the plants present in these communities are scarce in the Bristol Region.

Regarding the reserve, I think some of the most important changes have been in the great work done to expand these communities, especially the nurturing and expanding of the tiny patch of surviving Limestone Heath that was identified by me



Gorse



Slender St John's Wort

in the first survey. Limestone Heath is very localised and uncommon and occurs where acid soils have developed. The Heather (Ling) had once dwindled to a single surviving bush, but is now solidly re-established and shares the community with Bell Heather, Gorse, Tormentil, Slender and Trailing St. John's Wort, Flea Sedge and Common Gromwell amongst other species. There are now areas of both wet and dry Limestone Heath.

Another main thing of note has been the increase in ancient woodland indicator species, especially the great expansion of Sanicle.

Also, in the newly cleared meadow areas there is a transition occurring from woodland back to the original meadow habitat and there has been an explosion in the number of Violets, which is so important to Fritillary butterflies.

I would like to thank the Trustees and volunteers whose hard work over the years has brought these special flower-rich communities back from the brink here to both delight us and to play a robust role in the ecological functioning of this reserve.

Wishing you further great successes in the future,

Lindsay Moore



Pollinators and Conservation

Pollinators are very much a 'buzz' topic at the moment as we become more and more aware of their role in relation to us. Their decline is an environmental issue of grave concern but we can do something to help. Most people love bumblebees and butterflies, and knowing what to plant to attract these and other pollinators to their gardens can bring a

great deal of pleasure as well as helping replace the habitats that are rapidly disappearing from our countryside. Even those without gardens are likely to have space for a tub or window box that could be planted with nectar and pollen rich flowers - the more people that do this in a neighbourhood or street, the more difference it makes.



Bristol has already taken a lead in this with initiatives such as 'Get Bristol Buzzing' and Avon Wildlife Trust's 'My Wild City', but at present there is nothing comparable in North Somerset.

However, BET member Gill Brown (gill@brownfamilymail.co.uk) has recently embarked on a Community Pollinator project, focused initially in Nailsea, but with aspirations to percolate into the wider community of North Somerset.

Professor Jane Memmott, from the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Bristol, gave a very interesting talk on 'Pollinators and Practical Conservation' to the Abbots Leigh Wildlife Group in January. She was such an inspiring speaker that I made a few notes:

- Apparently fifty percent of all nectar is gathered from just four species - white clover, marsh thistle, bell heather and heather.
- Most of us are familiar with the honey bee, but this is just one species. There are twenty four of bumble bee, and over two hundred and seventy of solitary bees, not to mention all the hoverflies, butterflies and moths. Not so much is known about the solitary bees but they are acknowledged to be very important pollinators.
- Because of changes in agricultural practice, the importance of the urban environment, allotments and of nature reserves is growing. Her studies show that honey bees produce more honey in urban Birmingham than in the surrounding countryside!



Things she suggests we can do to help pollinators:

- It is helpful to get the right flowers - the RHS has lists of recommendations, and the plants don't have to be native.
- Timing is important - aim for a succession of suitable flowering plants to cover as long a season as possible.



- Leave the lawn a little longer so the clover and other plants can flower.
- Anyone can do it - you don't need to have a big garden, a window box can contribute.
- Provide solitary bee nest sites.
- Avoid insecticides - all pollinators are insects!
- Engage in Citizen Science through Nature's Calendar - the collection of long term data is valuable in the monitoring of climate change.

- Be kind to dandelions - they are very important to bees, especially early in the year when not many other nectar sources are available.

Lastly, remember that for the fruition of every raspberry, blueberry, courgette, and many, many other foods that we eat, a visit from a pollinator is needed!

Carrie Riches

NEST BOX REPORT 2015/16

Clearing the nest boxes is a bit like a lucky dip - you never quite know what you are going to find. In past years there have been indignant yellow-necked mice, a wasp nest, squirrel nests, a wad of wax moth cocoons, and always a selection of huge spiders, countless woodlice and fat slugs. We do also find bird nests and dormice nests and, as Gill will attest, fleas! This year's surprise was finding that one of the owl boxes was not stuffed with the dead leaves typical of squirrel occupation, but dry green leaves indicating that a dormouse had been in residence.



Nuthatch

Jubilee Stone Wood has 26 boxes and Badgers Wood 30. In both reserves about 50% had bird nests. On looking inside, what one hopes to see is a nest from which it is evident that all chicks have successfully fledged. Occasionally we find abandoned clutches of eggs, or, sadder still, little

skeletons. This year there were 4 obviously failed broods. The usual occupants are great or blue tits, but we did find 2 marsh tit nests and one which was most probably that of a nuthatch. There are always a few yellow-necked mice, wood mice and dormouse nests. This year there were at least 5 boxes which had both bird and dormouse nests, with a



Great Tit

further 3 with just a dormouse nest. Many thanks to the rest of the team comprising of Brian Campbell, Gill Brown and Bill Charnock. Special thanks to Bill for all the refurbishment work that he does on the boxes during the year.

Carrie Riches



Marsh Tit

The Garden Butterfly Survey

Volunteering on the reserve may be difficult for some so why not sign up to the **Garden Butterfly Survey** and help record and report the butterflies that visit your garden over the course of a year. Create a free account with Butterfly Conservation, submit your sightings and help learn more about how butterflies are faring in UK gardens. There are more details at:

<http://www.gardenbutterflysurvey.org/faq.php>

To set you on your way, here are the FAQ's downloaded from the website:

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Garden Butterfly Survey?

The Garden Butterfly Survey is a project aimed at understanding how butterflies are faring in the UK's gardens. We'd like to establish the importance of gardens as a habitat for butterflies and determine how people can make the best of their gardens to help boost butterfly populations. Sightings and information submitted about gardens will help answer these questions. Sightings will also be used by our network of county Butterfly Recorders and form part of local and national recording schemes that help inform conservation research.



How do I take part?

We want to know which butterfly species are in your garden, how many of them are present and at what times of year they are seen. Make a note of the butterflies seen throughout the year and log your sightings through this website. Check your garden at least once a month in reasonable weather. You can submit records as often as you wish. When counting, please note the maximum number of each species present in the garden at the time. Butterflies can be very active so try not to count the same individual more than once.



What if I already record garden butterflies?

We don't want you to enter your butterfly sightings more than once. Not only is this extra effort for you, but it also creates duplicate records. So, if you take part in the Garden Butterfly Survey you do not need to put the same sightings into other recording systems. Your Garden Butterfly Survey records will be passed on to Butterfly Conservation's local branches and to County Recorders. There are several different schemes, locally and nationally, to record garden butterflies. Our advice is to choose one and don't submit the same sightings to several.



What should I do if I can't identify a butterfly?



Butterflies are relatively easy to identify compared to many other types of wildlife, but can still prove a challenge, especially if they are very active and if you are new to butterfly recording. If you are not completely sure of the identity of a butterfly that you see in the garden it is best not to enter the sighting. If in doubt, leave it out! Clicking on the species on this website will take you to more information about them, or you may wish to borrow or buy an identification guide to take out into the garden with you.



I have seen a butterfly that is not listed - how do I record it?



If the butterfly is not listed in any of the forms on the 'submit sightings' page then you cannot record it directly. If you are certain of your identification then you can include details in the notes section of the sightings form.

How do I enter sightings from more than one garden?



At present the Garden Butterfly Survey website can only allow sightings from a single garden per user account. If you wish to carry out GBS in another garden as well, you will have to open a second account and this will require a different email address (that is used to login).

When I click 'show me' for the grid reference of my garden on the registration form, the pin is in a different place



This will be because the pin shows the south-west corner of the map square defined by the grid reference you have selected. As long as the pin is still close to your garden then the grid reference is fine. If you select a more detailed grid reference for your garden (i.e. one with 8 or 10 digits) then the 'show me' pin should appear closer to your garden.



What will you do with the records I submit?



As well as the Garden Butterfly Survey your records will also be made accessible to the UK butterfly recording scheme (Butterflies for the New Millennium) run by Butterfly Conservation and, through this, to Local Environmental Records Centres, other conservation organisations, scientific researchers and others. As part of this process, your sightings will be checked by experts associated with the Garden Butterfly Survey and Butterflies for the New Millennium recording scheme, including Butterfly Conservation staff and volunteer BNM Local Co-ordinators (also known as County Recorders). You may be contacted via the email address you provide if there are any queries about your sightings.

North Somerset Nature Net

The county of North Somerset is very lucky to have numerous small volunteer groups such as BET looking after and conserving the wildlife in their own locality. I personally was aware of about five such groups but was really surprised to learn the number is probably nearer twenty! BET has links to NEWT (Nailsea Environment & Wildlife Trust) and YACWAG (Yatton and Congresbury Wildlife Action Group) but for years now there was a feeling that we should strengthen the ties between all the local groups. So 'Higgy' from YACWAG, set up a meeting recently of all interested groups to form the 'North Somerset Nature Net' which will enable local groups such as BET and others to help each other and share their knowledge and experiences. Other collaborations might also include:

- Shared training opportunities
- Social Events
- Calls for help or advice or physical resources
- Joint events
- Media/publicity opportunities
- Any other interesting local news or information.



It's very early days at the moment, but it looks like this initiative may well turn out to be a big help for all interested local groups in the future.



Spring Bird Walk

◆◆◆ Saturday 30th April ◆◆◆

BET will be hosting a spring bird walk through our nature reserves, led by Trevor Riddle of YACWAG. Trevor is a local ornithologist, an Avon Wildlife Trust warden, a local RSPB Committee member and a British Trust for Ornithology recorder with a special interest in raptors. For many years now he has conducted the breeding bird surveys on the YACWAG reserves and encouraged garden surveys of birds in the local community.

Places will be limited, so please book in advance by emailing or telephoning Carrie Richards carrieriches@gmail.com 01275 462908.

Meet at the BET Cabin in Badgers Wood for a 9:00 start. The walk should last approximately three hours.

