

Backwell Environment Trust

Bulletin 41 - Autumn 2020

www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org



A Very Warm Welcome to our Latest Autumn Bulletin

Inevitably the restrictions arising from the coronavirus pandemic have limited some of the projects we had intended to complete this year, nevertheless, work has still continued on our nature reserves. We've seen unprecedented numbers of visitors over the spring and summer months and so path maintenance and step repairs have been a priority for us, as has the annual scything of our fabulous wildflower meadows.

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Elephant Hawk Moth Caterpillar

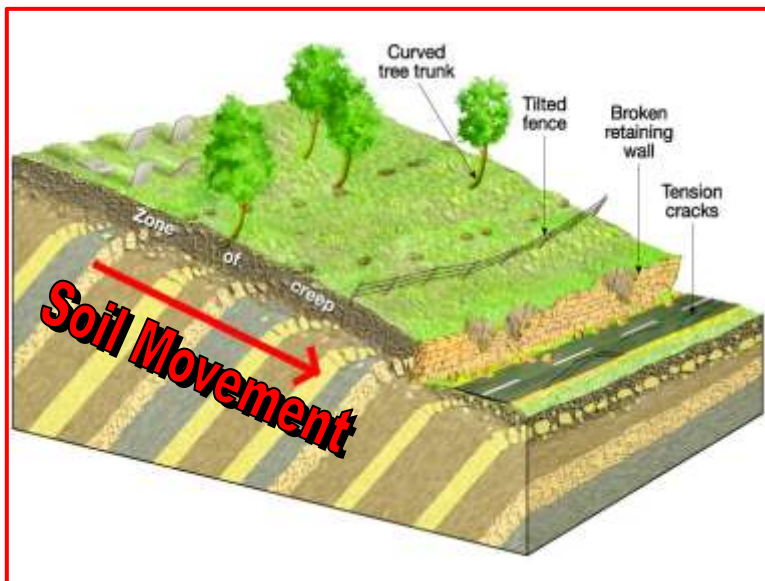
BET has pre-booked the Parish Hall for our Annual General Meeting on November 14th. However, at this stage, we are uncertain whether it will be possible to go ahead with an indoor meeting and so we are presently exploring other possibilities in line with the latest government advice.

Woodland Crisis

Over the past few years, BET has been monitoring closely two potentially serious health and safety issues relating to some of the trees in our woodlands. Both of these issues have been deteriorating steadily but have now reached a stage where action will have to be taken.

1. Soil Creep

Soil creep occurs when soil moves slowly down a slope under the influence of gravity. It typically occurs on gradients over five degrees but can become much more marked as the angle of slope



have a large influence on the speed of movement. Heavy rain or winter freeze/thaw conditions can speed up the process, but averaged over the year, the speed of soil movement would seem to be in the range 1 to 5cms per year.

Soil creep only becomes a problem for us when trees start to lean close to houses, roads or footpaths. This year, the risk of trees potentially falling over has reached a point where action has to be taken. Unfortunately, any trees leaning close to houses cannot simply be felled but will have to be taken down in sections which is a much more expensive process.

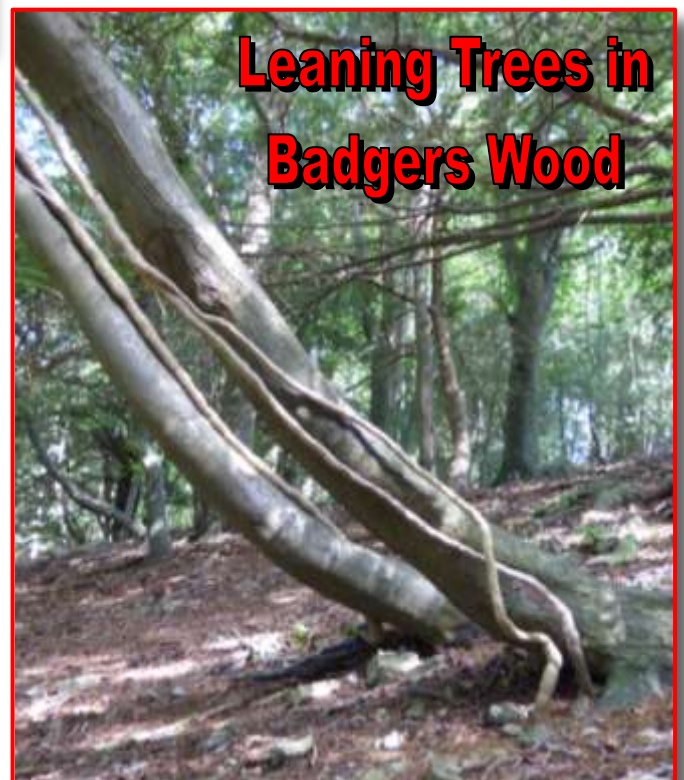


2. Ash Dieback Disease

It's incredible to think that it was only in the spring of 2017 when we first saw the early signs of ash dieback disease affecting some of the smaller ash trees in our woodlands. Just a few years on and the situation has become much more serious with many of the more mature ash trees now showing signs of the devastating effects of the fungal infection. Unfortunately, when a tree



increases. The lower sections of the woodland in Badgers Wood are the most affected areas on our nature reserves in part due to the steepness of the slope and possibly because of the smoothness of the underlying bedrock (the super-smooth limestone pavement is very close by). In this area, around 50% of the trees are showing signs of movement and the effect can be quite dramatic as the tree tries to keep itself upright. The weather can also



**Leaning Trees in
Badgers Wood**

becomes infected, it is simply a matter of time before the tree succumbs to the disease and eventually dies. Whilst trees in the deeper woodland can be safely left to decay and fall, those close to houses, roads or footpaths, as with the trees affected by soil creep, will need to be made safe. During the summer months, BET has had the vulnerable leaning and diseased trees in our woodlands professionally assessed and a plan of action has been drawn up. Unfortunately, deferring the felling of diseased trees can have major financial implications for us; felling a moderately diseased tree will incur a modest cost but felling a seriously diseased tree will require specialist equipment and personnel, whereupon costs will inevitably rise dramatically.

The scale of the problem facing BET is severe and unprecedented.

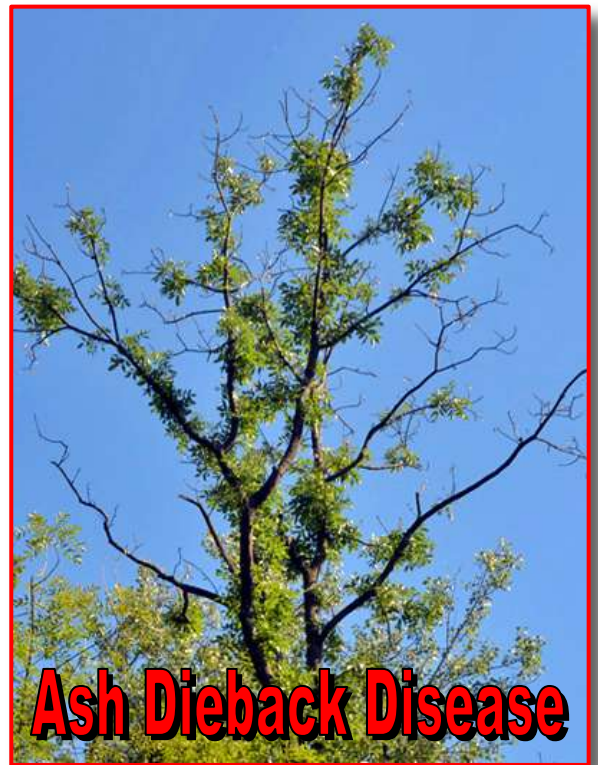
The total cost to BET to make our ash trees safe could be in the region of £30,000.

It will not only take most of our available funds, but will require us to start fund-raising urgently to secure the additional money to complete the project.

However, if it is of any consolation we are not alone. Many of the woodlands in the UK are facing the same problems and it is predicted the final cost to the UK from ash dieback disease will be in the region of £15 billion.

This coming winter, if funds allow, reluctantly we shall be commencing on a programme of felling all leaning and diseased trees bordering public roads and the following winter, all diseased trees close to footpaths.

Ash Dieback Symptoms



Ash Dieback Disease



Diamond-Shaped Lesions



Dark Patches on Leaves



Wilting Leaves

BET's Peregrine Falcons

It's not unusual to see (and hear) Peregrine Falcons flying over the old Coles Quarry and Badgers Wood and it's at this time of year they often choose to nest on a precipitous ledge in the sheer rock face. In the spring, BET was approached with a view to possibly ringing the falcon's chicks next year which would be carried out by the naturalist and BBC presenter, Ed Drewitt, who is also an experienced BTO licensed ringer. The nest would be accessed by abseiling down the cliff using experienced climbers from the British Mountaineering Council, the chicks brought to the top of the cliff, ringed with high visibility rings and then returned to the nest.

Ringling can provide essential information that can help conserve the species. In fact, a Peregrine ringed by Ed on a church in Taunton collided with a car and was killed - in Morocco! This was the first recorded evidence that Somerset Peregrines actually flew to this North African country.

Four eggs were laid this year from which two chicks successfully hatched and we're pretty sure both successfully fledged from the nest site. By chance, we were lucky enough to meet up with local photographer and naturalist Henry Kirkwood who was visiting the BET reserves in the spring. Henry went on to monitor and periodically photograph the nest site for BET from a long-distance vantage point using some extremely impressive camera equipment.



Peregrine Incubating Eggs



Peregrine Leaving the Nest



Peregrine : Worle Quarry



High Visibility Ring



Two Peregrine Chicks at the BET Nest Site

Old Photographs

A family in Canada came across this old photograph and managed to decipher some of the inscriptions on the stone monument. They could make out 'Backwell' and with the help of Google, tracked down the Jubilee Stone and the BET website. They emailed BET to double-check they had found the correct monument as most online photos show the opposite side of the stone, but we were able to confirm the details of the inscription on this side.

It transpires that the photo shows the great grandmother, Edith Ford (nee Maunders) who was born in 1895 and died in 1975. The three boys are her sons James, Ted and David born in 1916, 1923 and 1926. Apparently they were trying to re-create Nelson's Column! The family lived in Warmley, north Bristol. This old photo capturing their fun day out must have been taken in the early 1930s.



If you have any old pictures of the BET reserves we would love to see them

Archaeological Find : Bridgwater Farthing

BET has two metal detectorists working for us who periodically inspect our nature reserves for buried archaeological artefacts. This recent discovery of a 'Bridgwater Farthing' dated 1666 I found particularly interesting, so here's a brief history.....

Trader's tokens were issued illegally by merchants in England, Wales, and Ireland during the seventeenth century. They came about because the silver coinage in circulation at that time was of a relatively high value and there was a great reluctance by the government to issue coins of any metal less valuable than silver. They were first issued in 1648 and were only in circulation until the 1670s when the government finally agreed to issue lower denomination coins in copper.



Our farthing was issued by the traders of Bridgwater in 1666 and shows the town's coat of arms; a castle on a bridge of five arches. This token is the oldest, dateable find we've discovered so far and it's intriguing to speculate just how it made its way on to our nature reserves.



BET VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY MORNINGS - EVERY MONDAY and the THIRD SATURDAY of each month from 10am – 12:15pm on both days.

Absolutely no experience is necessary and it's also great fun, so why not come along and give it a try?

The tasks change as the year progresses but usually include country crafts such as hedgelaying, coppicing, wildflower meadow scything and dry stone walling.

We meet close to the lower entrance to Badgers Wood outside the BET Cabin just before 10am - or you can join us a bit later on at the work area. We take a break at 11am for large amounts of chat, tea/coffee and biscuits.

New Species Found on the Reserves

Jersey Tiger Moth

The diagonal white/cream stripes and the conspicuous 'Y' shape on the forewings differentiate this fairly-rare species from all the other tiger moths. The hindwings range from bright red to yellow with black spots on the outer half. It flies between July and September, often during the day in open areas feeding on plants such as hemp agrimony and bramble. Initially only found in the Channel Islands, over recent years with the warming of the climate, it has now expanded its range to most of southern England.



Weasel

The weasel is the UK's smallest carnivore and one of the most numerous - although rarely seen. It looks like a small stoat but lacks the stoat's distinctive black tail tip. Its brown fur meets its white underparts in an irregular line along its flanks and there are small brown patches on its throat. It hunts mainly at night, voles and mice being its primary prey although it will take larger animals such as small rabbits or birds. Young weasels are usually born in April or May in a nest of grass or leaves in a shallow hole, tree stump or grass pile.



Spotted Longhorn Beetle (*Rutpela maculata*)

Generally common throughout the UK and Europe, this impressive spotted longhorn beetle occurs between May and August. Its typical habitat is the woodland edge where decaying timber is left undisturbed. They feed on nectar and pollen and are most noticeable on umbellifers such as cow parsley. The larvae develop in moist, decaying wood and the entire life-cycle takes between 2-3 years. They are approximately 20mm in length, typically gold and black in colour, although many other colour variations are possible.



Elephant Hawk Moth

The pink and green coloration make this moth simply unmistakable. It flies from May to August, often visiting honeysuckles at dusk. The caterpillars can be seen from July to September and their main food plants are willowherbs and bedstraws. The insect gets its name from the trunk-like front end of the caterpillar (see the photograph on the front page). When alarmed, this region gets pulled back into the front of the abdomen causing the 'eye-spots' to swell up. At the same time, the front end of the caterpillar thrashes about - both strategies are highly successful in deterring predators.



BET has now recorded 827 species on our nature reserves



Woodland Report

Since I've been involved with BET, I can't remember a time when so many people have been out visiting and enjoying our nature reserves. At the same time, with the warm spring/summer weather, our wildflower meadows have been truly spectacular again this year. In difficult times like these, having such amazing nature on our doorstep has clearly been a great comfort to the many people I've spoken to.



Work has carried on unabated during the pandemic, initially by individuals using their exercise time to carry out specific tasks and then with the easing of restrictions, our volunteers returned working in small groups. With the high number of visitors, it was imperative to keep the footpaths cut back and steps repaired to keep the reserves safe for visitors.

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

Dry Stone Walling



If you've been out and about walking in Jubilee Stone Wood recently, one of the main changes you'll have noticed is the construction of a new dry stone wall lining the entrance to the Warrener's Cottage and along the permissive path. When the outside of the Cottage was first excavated in 2018/9, a large quantity of stone, which once made up the building's walls, had to be removed and ended up, rather unceremoniously, in a huge pile close by. As the Cottage has been classified as an important archaeological site, we were not allowed to restore the walls of the building so we had to come up with other ideas to use up all that leftover stone. So an ornamental wall surrounding the seating area was initially constructed followed by a 20 metre restoration of the Cottage garden wall - but that still left a rather embarrassing pile of stone behind. So now around 40 metres of low dry stone wall has been constructed making a much grander entrance to the archaeological site which has also now used up all that remaining stone!



Bridleway Drainage Channels

During periods of heavy rain, considerable amounts of water can flow down the bridleway in lower Jubilee Stone Wood and onto the road at Church Town. In an effort to reduce this flow, drainage

channels have now been cut into the bridleway and filled with crushed stone which will direct at least some of the excess water away from the road.



Pond Water Storage

BET's two ponds in Jubilee Stone Wood can be prone to drying out during long periods of drought such as the weather we experienced during this spring and summer. To counteract this, we have the ability to store approximately 2½ tons of rain water which we collect over the winter months in plastic tanks hidden deep in the woodland. This year, we had to use almost 1½ tons of rain water to top up the ponds and so during the summer, we increased our water storage capacity to approximately 3 tons just to be on the safe side for the future.



Scything the Wildflower Meadows

BET's wildflower meadows just seem to get better every year and the warm, settled weather has suited them this year particularly. BET started the scything of our wildflower meadows in the



late summer but with slightly fewer volunteers venturing out at the moment, it's possible that we won't be able to cut all of our 1.9 acres this year. So we're focusing our efforts on cutting the wildflower meadows that still have invasive species such as bramble and tree seedlings present to keep these unwanted plants in check.



Volunteer Time

Every year, the BET volunteers freely put in a staggering amount of time and effort, both in the day-to-day running of the Trust, as well as the huge amount of practical work needed to maintain our nature reserves. Over the last eleven months, even in these difficult times, the fantastic figure of 2,001 volunteer hours has been recorded. Since the Trust began, an astonishing 30,071 hours have been volunteered - so, once again, a **BIG BET** thank you to you all.



The BET trustees are always on the lookout for potential new recruits, especially if they have additional skills or experience that could be of benefit. So if becoming a trustee is something you might be interested in, please do get in touch.



Geology Trail Figures

If you've been walking along the Badgers Wood's Geology Trail recently, you couldn't help but notice that one of the more unusual things that have happened since the lockdown began has been the proliferation of numerous plastic figures and ornaments taking up residence in the many rock alcoves along the trail. The notion of placing statues and offerings in alcoves close to a trail to bestow good luck for the journey has been around for thousands of years and I think it's quite fitting that this practice is being reborn along Badgers Wood's spectacular Geology Trail in our own time of crisis.



It's Membership Renewal Time!

BET usually sends out its membership renewals in April but this year, we decided to postpone them until now to allow time for the coronavirus situation to improve. Luckily we had been thinking of moving the renewal date to October anyway so this gave us the perfect excuse!



We hope you will consider renewing your BET membership for another 12 months so if you receive a membership form with your bulletin, it means your membership is due to expire. 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.



Please remember to confirm your Gift Aid status – either yes or no.

Because of the on-going situation, if possible, cheques would be preferable to cash. 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 now runs from October 1st until September 30th and renewals for 2020/21 are now due. We really hope you will consider renewing your membership for another year and complete the enclosed form.

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

Gift Aid is 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