

**Backwell Environment Trust**  
**Bulletin 45 - Autumn 2022**  
**[www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org](http://www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org)**



**A Very Warm Welcome to our Latest Autumn Bulletin**

Ash dieback disease has continued its steady progress across the BET reserves with the very dry and warm summer months only adding to the stress on our infected trees. Diseased trees bordering our footpaths have been professionally surveyed and, unfortunately, those most heavily infected have been listed for felling this coming winter. The BET volunteers have been kept very busy improving our reserves by restoring old dry stone walls, hedging our boundaries, replacing benches and scything our wonderful wildflower meadows.

**BET Membership**  
**AGM**

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# Membership Renewal

The membership year now runs from October 1<sup>st</sup> until September 30<sup>th</sup> and renewals for 2022/23 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 main 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



If you have received a membership form with your bulletin, it means that your BET membership is due to expire.



**Please remember to confirm your Gift Aid status – either 'YES' or 'NO'**

If you would like 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 one of the two addresses shown, or post it to Andy Smith who is our membership secretary.





# **BET Annual General Meeting**

## **Saturday November 12th 2022**

### **Backwell Parish Hall**

The AGM will start at 2pm and we will break for tea, coffee and cakes before the final presentation.

Your trustees will be on hand to answer any questions you may have about BET and its activities, past, present or future.

Our guest speaker will be Gil Martin who will be giving an illustrated talk on nature rewilding & restoration on the Belmont Estate.



## **Agenda**



Annual Report from 2021  
The Chair's Report    Treasurer's Report  
Secretary's Report    Reserve Report  
Election of Trustees    Any other business



Printed copies of the 2021 annual report and the accounts will be available at the meeting.  
The link to the report can also be found on the BET website under 'About BET/AGM'.



If you would like to consider becoming a BET trustee, please do  
get in touch via email to [Betwoods@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:Betwoods@yahoo.co.uk)



# Ash Dieback Disease

With almost all of the diseased ash trees bordering the road and houses now safely removed, we've been able to turn our attention to the ash trees bordering our extensive network of footpaths. In the summer, ash trees on both reserves were inspected by an experienced arboriculture consultant and all heavily infected trees whose canopies had thinned by 50 - 100% were marked to be felled this winter. The present scientific consensus is that when the disease progresses this far, these trees will have no realistic chance of long-term survival. Trees exhibiting canopy reductions of less than 50% will be left for the time being and re-assessed on an annual basis. Trees in the



## Spring 2022



deeper woodland will be left to decay naturally without felling.

In the areas where diseased ash trees were removed last winter, the recovery has been both swift and dramatic. The additional light now reaching the woodland floor has resulted in the rapid growth of existing plants and has also allowed many dormant tree seeds to germinate. Additionally, we have planted around 280 tree saplings during the spring, and even with the

challenging dry conditions of the summer, most have grown exceptionally well and will quickly colonise the spaces left by the removal of the ash trees.



Since the spring, BET has changed its main contractor for our ongoing tree works to Nuthatch Trees, a tree surgery and arboriculture consultancy based in Bristol.



We have also formed a partnership with Backwell Logs where BET will supply timber from our felled ash trees and the Backwell Woods Restoration Project/Backwell Logs will contribute 50% of our felling costs. This arrangement will be beneficial to BET as it would be difficult and unsightly for us to store large quantities of timber on our reserves and it will also ease the strain on BET's finances during this difficult period.



# Somerset Rare Plants Group Visit

On the 18<sup>th</sup> June, the Somerset Rare Plants Group made a return visit to the BET reserves. The group is made up of highly experienced botanists who aim to continue the long tradition of plant recording and conservation in the county. A member of the group visited BET three years ago and was so impressed she arranged a follow-up field trip.



Nine members explored both reserves with their species-rich limestone grassland - and weren't disappointed. During the day they recorded **185** plant species in Jubilee Stone Wood and **118** in

Badgers Wood, twelve of these had not been previously recorded on BET land and have been added to our species list.

Of particular note were the plants in the acidic limestone heath area of the Coupe Meadow - including Heathers, Pill Sedge and Flea Sedge. Nearby they spotted specimens of Common Gromwell.



The Fern Way footpath lived up to its name with its splendid Soft Shield-Ferns and Hard Shield-ferns. One plant proved to be a bit of a puzzle to the group and turned out to be *Polystichum x bicknellii*, an unusual hybrid of the two species.



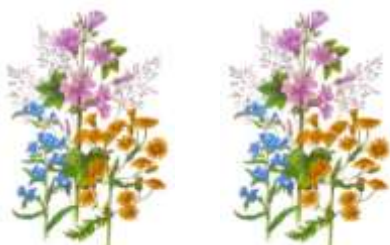
Common Gromwell (*Lithospermum officinale*) Photo © Helena Crouch

Over in Badgers Wood, on the meadows near the quarry, the group was accompanied by numerous Marbled White butterflies and they took this splendid photo of one on a Common Spotted Orchid.

The group thoroughly enjoyed their day and complimented BET on the well-managed reserves.



Marbled White on Common Spotted Orchid Photo © Helena Crouch



# Reserve Report

Over the last six months the BET volunteers have been very busy working on a wide variety of tasks from securing our boundaries with hedging, dry stone walling, replacing old seats and benches, cutting back the encroaching vegetation next to the paths, replacing steps and scything the wildflower meadows.

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

## Dry Stone Walling

Over the spring and summer, the BET volunteers have restored two sections of dry stone wall in Badgers Wood next to Cheston Combe Road. Dry stone walling is one of those tasks that looks fairly easy - but in reality is quite difficult to do well.



Luckily we have some very proficient 'wallers' in the group and the end result looks stunning and we have had many positive comments from passing visitors.

## Boundary Hedges

The boundaries of both Jubilee Stone Wood and Badgers Wood adjacent to Cheston Combe Road are demarcated by old, largely collapsed, stone walls, typically located between one to two metres in from the tarmac. As previously mentioned, we have restored two sections of this wall this year and we will almost certainly restore more in the future. Walling is by nature a slow process, so in the



meantime, long sections of our boundary were hedged with previously cut material. This not only secures our boundaries but also can be a great safe corridor for wildlife.



### Pond Restoration

Jubilee Stone Wood has two ponds partially hidden in the woodland but, over the last few years, they have gradually silted up and been heavily shaded out by nearby vegetation. So during the late summer, the BET volunteers thinned out some of the overhanging trees to let in more sunlight and enjoyed the muddy task of removing the accumulated debris to improve the water quality and increase the depth of water. The ponds are a very important habitat for newts and this restoration should secure their future for the next few years.



### Scything the Wildflower Meadows

BET's wildflower meadows have done well this year even under the challenging conditions of the very high summer temperatures and the lack of rainfall. BET started the scything of our wildflower meadows in the late summer and hopes to finish well before the winter sets in.



### Seats & Benches



Over the years we have installed numerous benches and seats using material harvested from our woodlands to give visitors a chance to take a break and soak up the beautiful scenery. This year, a number of these were starting to decay and so were replaced during the summer months. The benches were replaced with ash taken from our



woodlands with the exception of a newly installed seat in the Layers Meadow where we used a recycled plastic design. Whilst our untreated ash benches will probably last around 7 to 10 years, the recycled plastic should have a 50+ year lifespan.



### Step Replacement & Footpath Clearance

During the spring and summer months, keeping our footpaths clear of encroaching vegetation is almost a constant task for the BET volunteers as well as replacing any steps that have become unstable.



### 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 twelve months, the fantastic figure of 3,225 volunteer hours has been recorded. Since the Trust began, an astonishing 35,734 hours have been volunteered - so, once again, a **BIG BET** thank you to you all.



## **BET Wildlife Surveys**

The BET volunteers carry out regular wildlife surveys on the nature reserves during the year to monitor and record numbers of butterflies, birds, bird nests, dormice and reptiles. This data can be invaluable to us and helps ensure we are continuing to manage the reserves in a wildlife-friendly manner.



### Butterfly Surveys

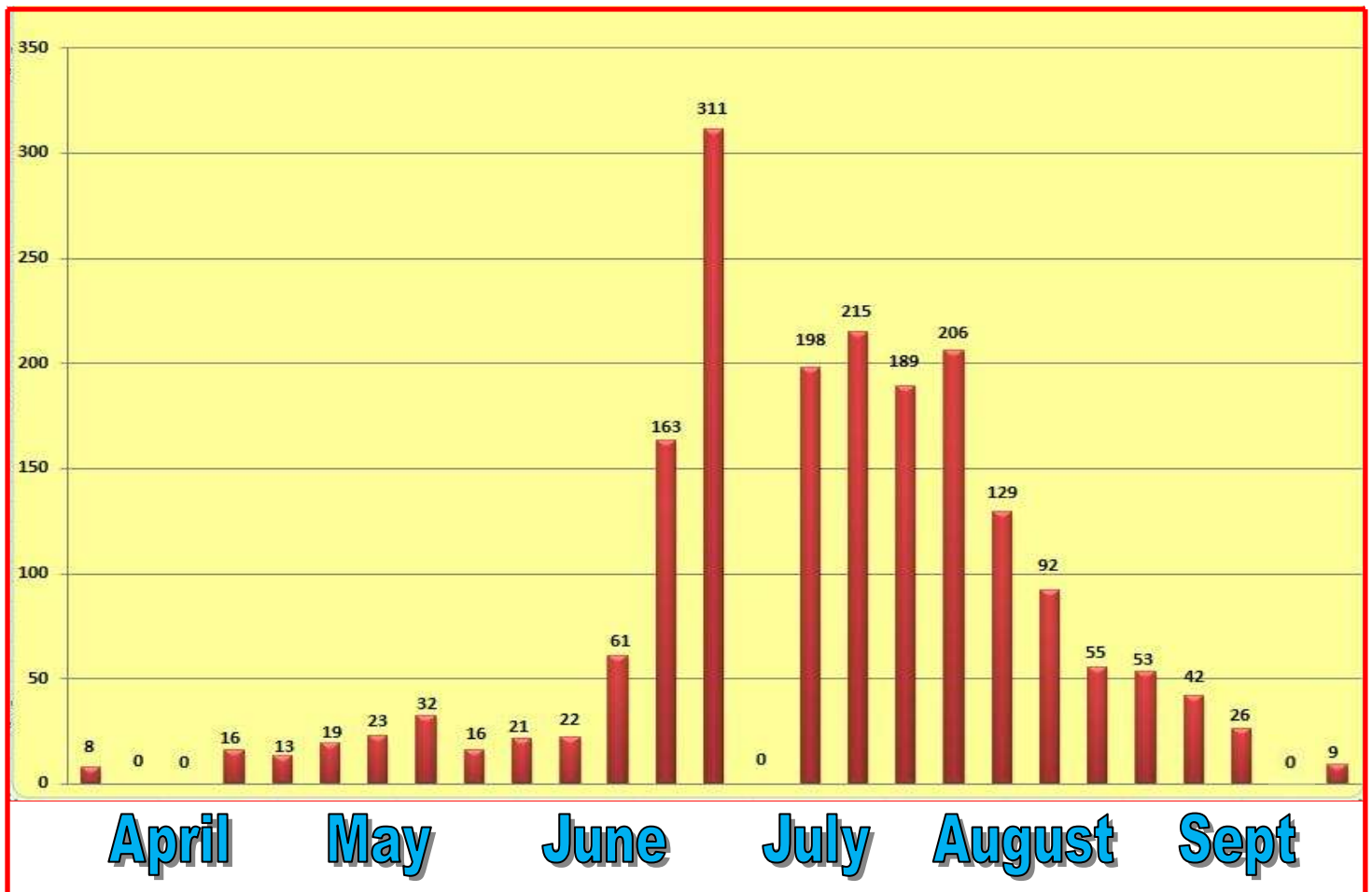
BET is one of around 2,000 sites across the UK submitting annual butterfly records to the United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) which is one of the longest running insect monitoring schemes in the world. BET volunteers perform the monitoring of butterfly numbers and species present on our nature reserves every week between late March and early October. The same route is walked at a slow pace as long as the ambient temperature is 13°C or above and





the weather is not too wet or windy.

Between the end of March and the end of September (27 weeks), a total of **22** butterfly species were recorded with **1,919** individual butterfly sightings logged. Preliminary evidence suggests that 2022 may not be a good year for British butterflies but the BET reserves have been spectacular with a 93% increase in butterfly numbers on last year and with two more species recorded. The graph shows the number of individual butterfly sightings for each week of the survey. If a survey was missed due to inclement weather, it has been labelled '0' on the graph.



Most Abundant Species	Sightings	Least Abundant Species	Sightings
Meadow Brown	400	Orange Tip	1
Ringlet	340	Small Tortoiseshell	2
Gatekeeper	282	Painted Lady	2
Speckled Wood	169	Green-veined White	3
Common Blue	148	Comma	12

Whilst taking part in the survey is undoubtedly a big commitment and requires a fair degree of butterfly identification skills, it's also a fabulous opportunity to see just how our nature reserves change with the passing of the seasons.



## Bird Surveys

BET has been conducting regular bird surveys on the reserves since 2006. The results are included in the annual Avon Bird Survey report which helps to monitor changes to bird populations in the area. Viv French has been bird surveying around North Somerset for 13 years and teamed up with another regular BET volunteer, Graham Woods, to take over BET surveys from Carrie

Riches three years ago. I joined Viv French to find out how the surveys are carried out.



The surveys are normally completed three times in the winter and twice in the spring, to focus on counting only established and breeding birds. However in order to see the route and to how the surveys proceed, Viv and I headed out for an extra survey on a rather wet September morning.



The surveyors follow the same route every time, which is a transect within a 1 km square. The route heads up the bridleway to the top of Jubilee Stone Wood, leaves the reserve and crosses Cheston Combe to the far side of the quarry and then returns to and descends Badgers Wood. This covers 3km and takes typically 2 hours - walking slowly and carefully listening and watching for birds. Since part of the survey route exits the woods, two separate records are kept to ensure accurate and useful survey figures for the BET reserves alone.

Normally 70-90 birds are counted over the 3 km, but being a soggy, early autumn day, far fewer birds were visible or singing. Robins and Jackdaws were the first to be heard, followed by Blue Tits and Blackbirds. Jays, Long Tailed Tits and a couple of Nuthatches made a late appearance. Deep in winter, it is usual to also hear or spot Wrens, Goldfinches, Great Tits, Goldcrests and, of course, the ever present Woodpigeons. Around the quarry the Corvids increase significantly in number with the croak of the Ravens echoing in the background whilst deep in the woods one or two Great Spotted Woodpeckers can often be heard. With spring comes the added song of the Chiffchaffs and the Black Caps as all the bird song increases at breeding time.



It was interesting to learn that fewer birds are evident deep in the woods than in the clearings and hedgerows. The tragic loss of many of our ash trees will result in more light and understorey growth, and may actually be beneficial for our bird population.



I can't say that my ability to identify birdsong improved - I need to get myself a good phone app!  
We are very grateful to Viv and Graham for carrying out these surveys for BET.

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# Footpath Closures

The BET Trustees are very sorry to report that the gate into the field by the Jubilee Stone was removed by the field's owner in June, and the path closed. This path across the field has been used and enjoyed for decades but has never actually been a designated public right of way. The landowner is therefore within their rights to close and block off the path.



In view of the length of time the path has been used, Backwell Parish Council is leading an application to North Somerset Council for it to be designated as a public right of way - and to include the frequently-used unofficial paths around the edge of the field. The application process will take some time. In the meantime, we would ask walkers to use the official public footpaths and not to tamper with the boundary fence.



There are two public footpaths into the field from BET's land, as shown on the Ordnance Survey map. One can be accessed via the stile next to the field gate at the top of the bridleway and heads to the kissing gate in the top corner of the field. The other is over the stile lower down the bridleway and heads over the field, down to Cherry Wood. The map has been adjusted to reflect the location of the stile, installed around 1961.

Unfortunately, we also need to advise our members that vehicular access to the off-road disabled parking spaces at the top of Jubilee Stone Wood is no longer available, permission having been withdrawn by the field owner. The reserve can still

be accessed via the bridleway gate, now on the road.

We are very sorry for any inconvenience caused by these changes, over which BET had no control.

# New Species Found on the Reserves

## Oak Eggar Moth

This moth, despite its name, does not feed on oak but is so-called because the shape of its cocoon is acorn-like. Its food plants are mainly heather and bilberry but also bramble, willows, hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel. The red-brown males fly during the day, whereas the larger, paler females are nocturnal. The flight period in the south of the UK is July to August and they have a wingspan of 45 to 75mm. In the north of the UK, development takes two years but is completed in one year in the warmer southern climate.



## Beautiful Demoiselle

The male of this stunning species has a metallic blue body with slightly darker blue wings, whilst the female has a metallic green-bronze body with translucent pale brown wings. They are usually found along streams and rivers, especially those with sand or gravel bottoms. The majority of their populations are to be found in south-west England and Wales although there are some scattered populations in northern England and western Scotland. The adults are about 45mm in length and can be seen flying from spring until the autumn. They are voracious predators and will feed on most small insects that they are able to catch on the wing.



## Box Tree Moth

This accidentally introduced Asian species of moth was first recorded in the UK in 2007 and since then has spread out over most of southern England. The adult moth is very striking with a silver and brown colouration and a wingspan of 40mm. It typically flies from late July until mid September. Where its caterpillar numbers are high, they can do serious damage to ornamental box hedgerows and can sometimes defoliate plants completely. The moth is considered a serious pest in parts of Europe and may soon become one in the UK. They can be found in gardens within southern England, especially where species of box are present.

