

Backwell Environment Trust
Bulletin 47 - Autumn 2023
www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org



A Very Warm Welcome to our Latest Autumn Bulletin

Ash dieback disease has, once again, continued its steady progress across the BET reserves but hopefully the worst is behind us now as significantly fewer trees will need to be felled this year. The BET volunteers have been very busy over the spring and summer months keeping our network of footpaths clear of vegetation, hedge-laying, removing diseased ash tree timber and scything our fabulous wildflower meadows.

BET Membership

AGM

Ash Dieback

New Species

Wildlife Surveys

Reserve Report

Donations



Membership Renewal

The membership year runs from October 1st until September 30th and renewals for 2023/24 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 11th 2023** **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 wildlife photographer Colin Higgins who will be giving an illustrated talk on wildlife gardening for insects.



Agenda



Annual Report from 2022

The Chairman's Report

Treasurer's Report

Secretary's Report

Reserve Report

Election of Trustees

Any other business



Printed copies of the 2022 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'.

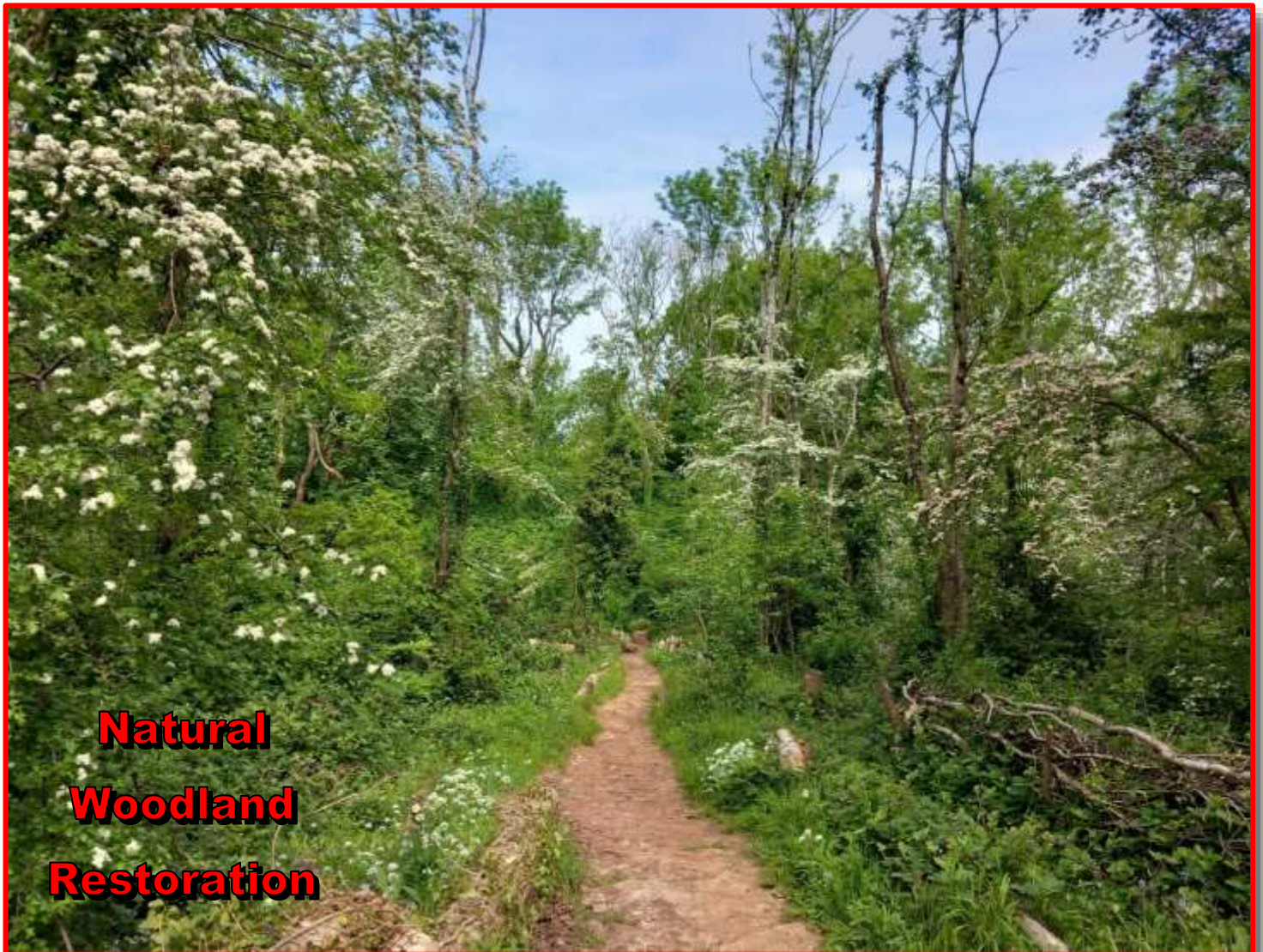


If you would like to consider becoming a BET trustee, please do get in touch via email to Betwoods@yahoo.co.uk



Ash Dieback Disease

Sadly, ash dieback disease is continuing to kill many of the ash trees on our reserves. However, with the removal of the most heavily infected trees overhanging the houses, roads and footpaths during 2021/2, this year will see a considerable reduction in the number of trees scheduled for felling. In line with the current scientific advice, we are removing ash trees close to the roads and footpaths when they lose 50% or more of their canopy, the consensus being that at this advanced stage of decline, there is no realistic hope of recovery. However, the good news is that with the additional light now reaching the woodland floor, our woodlands are recovering very rapidly with all the other tree species putting on a surge of growth to take full advantage of the extra sunlight.



**Natural
Woodland
Restoration**

As we have had to remove a considerable number of diseased ash trees from our reserves, it inevitably has left us with the problem of what do with the excess timber. Whilst we will be leaving some of the felled logs on the reserve to rot down naturally, leaving all of the cut timber on site would have a detrimental effect on the reserves and create a health and safety risk. So we have

formed a partnership with Backwell Logs who have been taking the timber off site and have also given BET a generous donation for the wood. However, getting the timber to the road for collection has been a major challenge for us but, as usual, the BET volunteers together with some imaginative thinking have solved the problem. We have used a combination of heavy horses, small tractors, a logging arch (brilliantly designed and constructed by Andy, BET's treasurer) and sheer volunteer muscle to get most of the timber to suitable road access points.



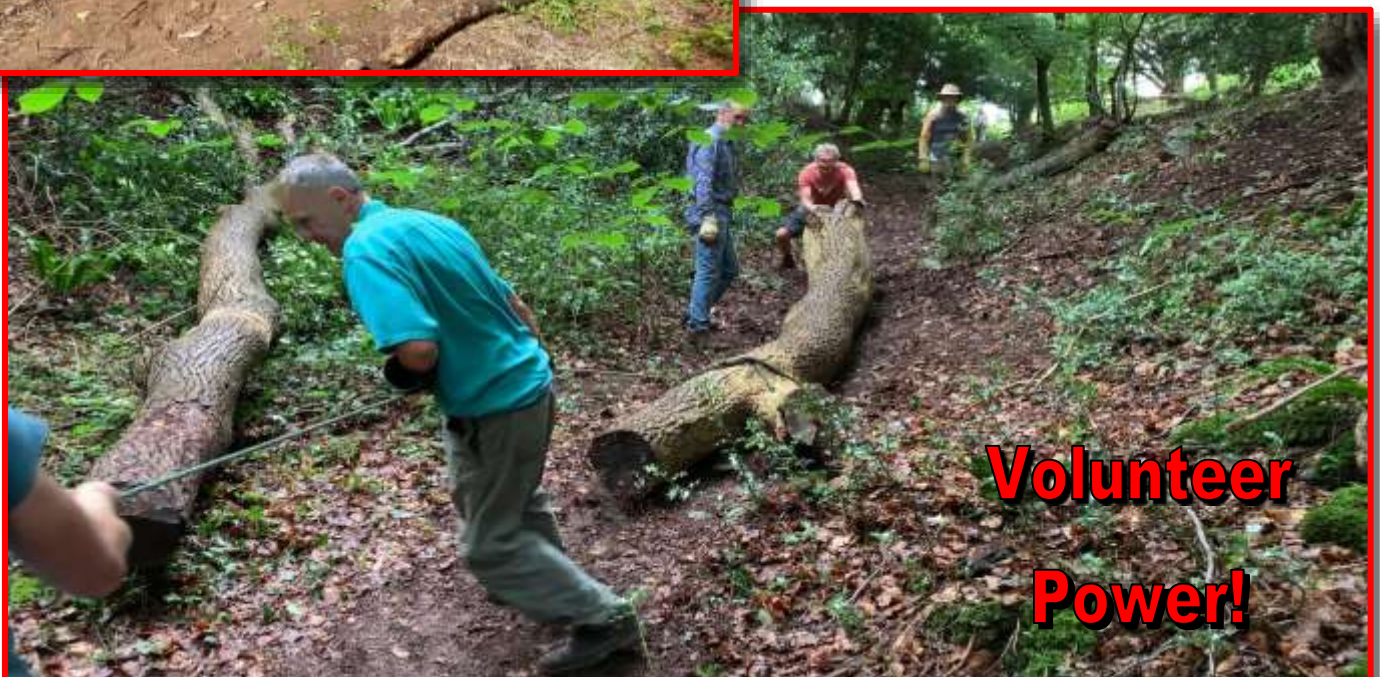
Heavy Horses



**Mini
Tractor**



Logging Arch



**Volunteer
Power!**

Rare New Species Discovered

The BET reserves never cease to amaze me on the number and diversity of animal and plant species they contain, and then once in a while, an incredibly rare species turns up and shows us just how unique the BET nature reserves really are. This summer we were astonished to spot a very rare Wall lizard sunning itself on a tree stump in Badgers Wood.

Common Wall Lizard



This very agile lizard is well named as it can often be seen basking, hanging from walls or rock faces. It is either green or brown with mottled marking along its flanks and reaches a length of about 20cms with the tail making up to two thirds its overall length.

In the British Isles in particular, this lizard is associated with man-made habitats; particularly stone walls, buildings or quarries. It can also be found on cliff faces and strongly favours south facing sites. There has been some discussion as to whether the Wall lizard is a native species as it is found on Jersey in the Channel Islands. Although it cannot be ruled out with complete certainty, all scientific evidence suggest that the Wall lizard is an entirely introduced species to the United Kingdom with many documented releases across the nineteenth century.

Identification

The Wall lizard is very agile and, uniquely for British reptiles, can be seen running up vertical surfaces such as rock-faces or walls.

There are two forms of Wall lizard within the UK: the brown-backed form which originated from western continental Europe and the one found on the BET reserves, the green-backed form which originates from Italy.

Both forms exhibit a mottled pattern along their flanks, often with black and white reticulations and an occasional blue scale along the edge of the black and white mottled belly.

Compared to native lizards, the eyes are set high on the head and the snout is set high and rounded, resembling a small alligator.



Distribution

There are less than twenty separate colonies of the Wall lizard recorded within the UK. These colonies are for the most part isolated and reasonably well self-contained. All these colonies are either associated with human habitation, such as Ventnor on the Isle of Wight or with south-facing sea cliffs, such as most of the Dorset colonies.

The only native populations within the British Isles are on the Channel Island of Jersey. All introduced colonies are within England, with the overwhelming majority located in the south of the country.

UK distribution of the Wall lizard is shown in red - filled dots are current colonies & hollow dots are historic colonies.

How the colony in Badgers Wood got there remains a mystery, although the adjacent quarry rock faces and ample food supply within our wildflower meadows will be a near-perfect habitat for them. From photographs we have taken, numerous individuals have been identified suggesting a reasonable sized colony exists.

The Wall lizard is a diurnal animal and a lover of strong sunshine. It has only the loosest concept of hibernation and can be seen basking on bright sunny days, even in December and January. Similarly, it disobeys the usual concept of a mating season, with two, three or even four clutches of eggs being laid across the year.

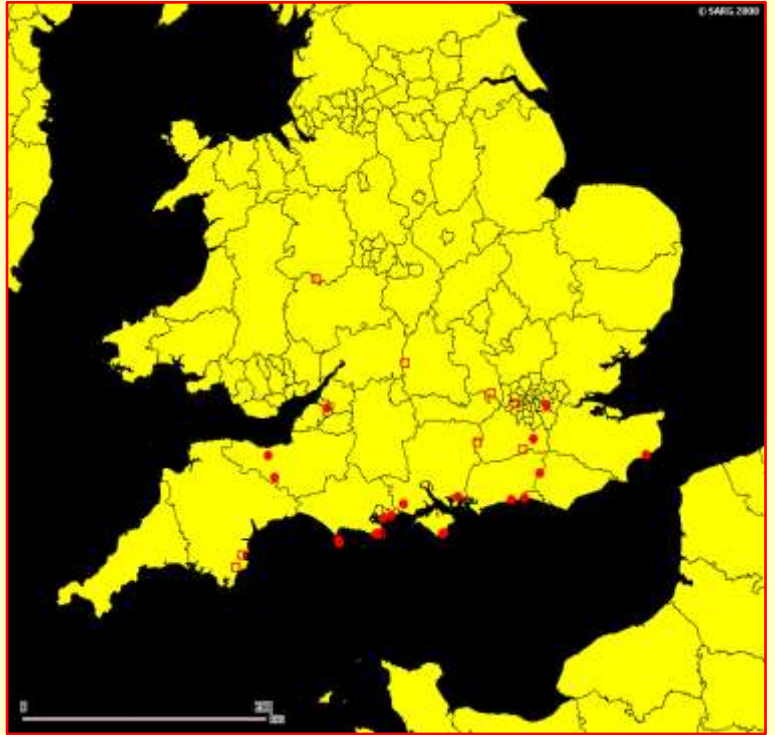
Food

The wall lizard is adept at catching all sorts of invertebrates, with particular favourites being crickets and grasshoppers, spiders, caterpillars and woodlice.

It will eat flying insects such as flies, moths and butterflies and can often be seen athletically jumping to attempt to catch a passing meal.

When prey is caught, the lizard will thrash the item from side to side to subdue its meal, before eating the animal, head first, then carefully wiping its jaws along the ground to remove any remaining legs or antennae.

Although the Common wall lizard is a European protected species, as an introduced species to the United Kingdom it has no legal protection here.



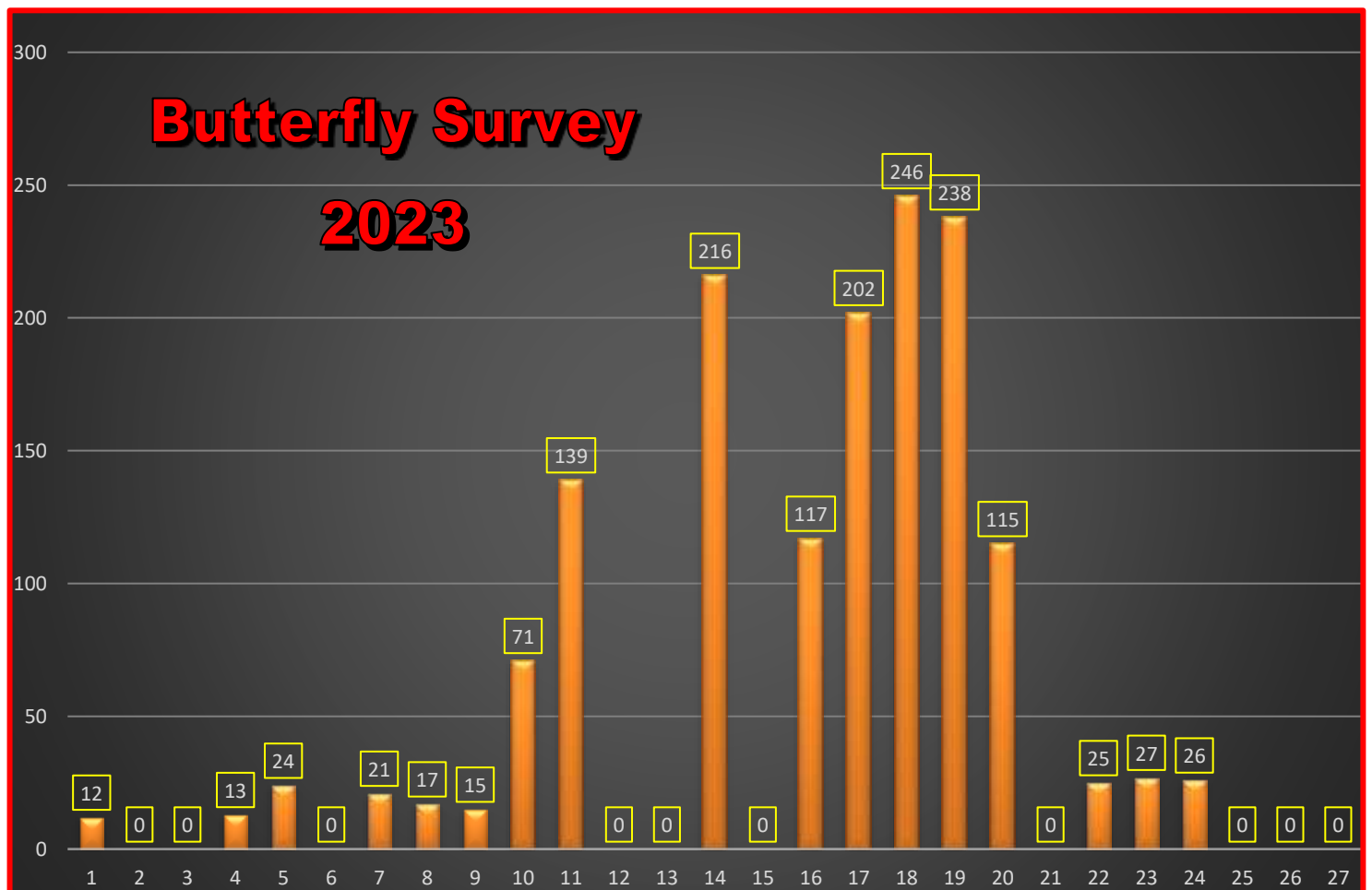
BET Wildlife Surveys

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 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.



April

May

June

July

Aug

Sept

Between the beginning of April and the end of September (27 weeks), a total of **20** butterfly species were recorded (22 last year) with **1,524** individual butterfly sightings logged. However, because July and August turned out to be cooler and wetter than normal, 10 surveys could not be undertaken this year. If these missing surveys are estimated from the graph trend, a total of



2,166 sightings could have been expected which would equate to a small (2%) decline from last year's figures - not bad considering the very changeable summer weather.

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
Gatekeeper	517	Small Copper	3
Meadow Brown	309	Green-veined White	4
Speckled Wood	129	Comma	6
Common Blue	97	Brown Argus	11
Holly Blue	80	Orange Tip	12

The two butterfly species that experienced the largest change from last year were the Holly blue which recorded a 320% rise in numbers and the Ringlet which declined by 79%.

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.



Reptiles

It's been a particularly good year for reptiles, especially with our amazing discovery of the incredibly-rare Common wall lizard. Slow worms have been in abundance as well as numerous sightings of grass snakes and adders - the latter not having been recorded for a good many years.



Fungi

The wet and cool summer months of July and August may not have been to everyone's taste, but the conditions turned out to be perfect for an explosion of fungi on our reserves.



Reserve Report

Over the last six months the BET volunteers have been very busy working on a wide variety of tasks from hedge-laying, replacing steps, cutting back the encroaching vegetation next to the footpaths, moving cut timber and scything the wildflower meadows.

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

Hedge-laying

The removal of diseased ash trees from the BET reserves has generated a lot of small branches which the volunteers have used to create hedges. These should give good shelter for wildlife and in the longer term will be good for fungi as they slowly decay over time.

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.



Diseased Timber Removal

Both Jubilee Stone and Badgers Wood had considerable amounts of felled timber left after last winter's felling programme which had to be removed off site. The task was complicated by the very difficult access routes to the road, but by a combination of horses, machinery and sheer volunteer muscle, most of the timber was moved safely to the road for collection.



Scything the Wildflower Meadows

BET's wildflower meadows have very done well again this year even under the challenging hot and dry conditions of May and June followed by the wetter weather in July and August. BET started the scything of our wildflower meadows in the late summer and hopes to finish well before the winter sets in.



Excavating the Badgers Wood Cottage

We have continued with our excavation of the ruined cottage in Badgers Wood with the hope of finding the property's outside privy that is clearly shown on old maps. To date, we've found no evidence of any structures, but have uncovered more stone steps leading up to the rear garden and the interesting stone floor of the house. However, for me, the most exciting discovery was a large ornately carved keystone of a green man found in the excavated soil.



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 3,606 volunteer hours has been recorded. Since the Trust began, an astonishing 39,269 hours have been volunteered so, once again, a **BIG BET** thank you to you all.



Free Donations!



Did you know, you can raise free donations for BET by simply shopping online using Give as you Live?



Sign up to Give as you Live, make your purchases online as normal and BET will receive a small percentage, typically around 1%. You will incur no additional cost.

Over 6,000 leading stores support the scheme including John Lewis, Waitrose, Tesco, Halfords, Argos and Booking.com.

Support BET and create a free Give as you Live account in seconds using the QR code above or this link: <http://www.giveasyoulive.com/join/backwell-environment-trust>