

Backwell Environment Trust
Bulletin 50 - Spring 2025
www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org



A Very Warm Welcome to our 20th Anniversary Bulletin

Amazingly, BET has been going for twenty years this springtime and so we are planning a special event to mark our 20th anniversary in July. Having reached this significant milestone, it's a good time to look back to how it all began and to celebrate some of the Trust's achievements.

BET's 20 Year Anniversary Celebration

BET's Beginnings

BET's Achievements

Ash Dieback

Reserve Report

Bird Box Survey

Charity Walks



**BET's 20th Anniversary
Celebrations Saturday
July 12th 11am – 3pm**

Quiz Trail around the Reserves

Wildlife Walks (12 & 2pm)

**Refreshments, BET Displays,
BET Merchandise**

**All activities will start from
the BET Cabin**

(what3words:revolting.makes.tapers)

**Come and meet the BET Trustees and
find out what we've been up to.**

**Taking part in the quiz
will involve some steep hill climbs!**

**Limited parking on Church Town
or Church Lane**



We are pleased to be able to offer a range of garments bearing the BET logo. Our aim is to celebrate BET's 20th anniversary and to enable our members and friends to show their support for BET. Full details of the range and how to order can be found on the BET website home page under Support BET, Merchandise.





BET's Beginnings



It's been twenty years since BET was born so let's look back to our origins and see how we managed to acquire and create two fabulous nature reserves. It is a fascinating story and a great tribute to those very dedicated volunteers who overcame many obstacles to make it happen. The acquisition process involved hard work and persistence – not to mention a good understanding of the various little-known sources of grant monies.



Jubilee Stone Wood



In October 2004, the woodland which became Jubilee Stone Wood (JSW) came on the market and members of the Wildlife Wardens combined with local Backwell residents to attempt to buy the 10

acre woodland for the community.

And so, in early 2005, Backwell Environment Trust (BET) was formed 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

AMC
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 2005 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 there was a catch - the money would not be made available for some time. BET was therefore incredibly fortunate when local residents Gary and Nicola Lake stepped in to buy woodland and hold it in trust for BET until the grant money came through.

This happened in the September - and then the legal process took a further three months to complete, BET finally received title to Jubilee Stone Wood in January 2006.



BET then embarked on the task of surveying the woodland and making plans for its future management, all with the support of a keen band of volunteers on twice-monthly work sessions. In the first year alone, BET's first grassland meadow was restored, 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 wheelchair-friendly trail to the Jubilee Stone, plus construction of a small car park with a farm gate, after planning permission was secured.





Badgers Wood



As BET was now well on the way to transforming Jubilee Stone Wood into a thriving nature reserve, this 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. We were very keen to acquire and manage this additional land as it was home to a wide variety of wildflowers, ancient trees and a prehistoric cave. This woodland was later to be renamed by BET as Badgers Wood.

Following a period of negotiation, a price of £5k per acre was agreed - and local fund raising began again in earnest. BET made a successful application for a grant from YANSEC - the Yanley and North Somerset Environmental Company which distributes revenues from taxes on landfill to support

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.

environmental projects. Having apparently secured most of the necessary funding, the real fun started! Cemex came to realise that of the 15 acres they were selling, they didn't actually own the two acres at the top of the hill. They were owned by a local landowner, who did kindly agree to sell

them to 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 three acres of woodland containing Backwell Cave. YANSEC agreed to maintain the full grant so that BET could (hopefully) acquire the three acres from the new owner in due course - something BET is still very keen to do.

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 worked hard to turn this woodland into a thriving nature reserve, restoring several wildflower meadows and creating a network of stunning trails for the local community to enjoy.

BET's Achievements 2005 - 2025

Two Acres of Wildflower Meadow Restored

Over 500 metres of Hedges Laid

Over 1 Km of New Trails Created

Over 400 metres of Wheelchair-friendly Trails Created

The Cabin Restored

The Queen's Award

The Warrener's Cottage & Lime Kiln Excavated

The Limestone Pavement Exposed



Two Ponds Created & One Restored



Bird, Bat & Dormouse Boxes put up

Seats & Benches Installed

Four Notice Boards put up

Ash Dieback Disease Managed

Over 40,000 hours of Volunteer Time Recorded

Ash Dieback Update

BET is now in its fourth year of grappling with the many problems caused by ash dieback disease, but the good news is that this winter has seen a significant reduction in the number of ash trees that have needed to be felled. Most of the infected trees were able to be felled by BET's volunteers and we only required the services of our tree surgeon for three days to tackle some of the larger trees or those located in precarious locations. In line with the current scientific advice, we are only removing ash trees within striking distance of roads and footpaths when they lose 50% or more of their leaf canopy, the consensus being that at this advanced stage of decline, there is no realistic hope of recovery.

It's sad to say but we haven't observed even a single ash tree on either of BET's nature reserves that isn't showing signs of the disease. However, we are forever hopeful that some of our trees will be able to fight off the fungus and, over time,



re-populate the woodland with disease-resistant saplings. In the meantime, all other tree species are thriving with the extra sunlight and we've supplemented the natural regeneration by planting locally grown tree saplings.

As in previous years, we have had to remove a quantity of diseased timber from our reserves. Our partnership with Backwell Logs has been, once again, very beneficial to us with our volunteers taking on the arduous task of moving the logs to a suitable road-side location for collection.



Reserve Report

Our volunteers have once again been very busy on our nature reserves during the last six months completing the hand scything our two acres of wildflower meadows and removing some of the smaller ash trees close to the footpaths with advanced ash dieback disease. We've also been cutting back vegetation along our network of footpaths, creating hedges and excavating the Warrener's Cottage.

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

Jubilee Stone Meadow Hedging

The lower section of meadow, just downhill from the Jubilee Stone, was extended and restored in 2016. This parcel of land is particularly valuable to us as it contains rare sections of acid soil overlaying the limestone bedrock which has allowed many acid-loving plants such as heather to thrive there. Nine years on, what started as a muddy field has become an amazing wildflower meadow with a very rich diversity of flora. At the time, we also laid the hedge adjacent to the meadow. However, over the years, this had grown very tall, blocking out the sunlight so this winter, we took the opportunity to lay it for a second time and in the process open up the fabulous view up the meadow to the Jubilee Stone.



Ash Tree Coppicing

Over the winter months, our volunteers and BET's tree surgeon have continued to coppice ash trees in an advanced state of decline within striking distance of our footpaths. Whilst we've found natural



tree regeneration occurs very rapidly with the extra sunlight reaching the woodland floor, we have also supplemented this by planting some locally-sourced English oak saplings donated by BET members to increase the diversity of the woodlands.

Inevitably, the felling process results in a considerable amount of excess timber being produced. Whilst we shall be leaving some logs on the reserves to rot down naturally, it wouldn't be feasible, safe or desirable to retain it all.

Fortunately, our mutually beneficial partnership with Backwell Logs means that we have an outlet for the wood where it can be used locally with minimal transport miles.



Warrener's Cottage Excavation

The interior excavation of the Warrener's Cottage, close to the Jubilee Stone, has made remarkable progress over the last six months with almost all the soil now excavated. BET volunteers



have been working steadily on this project, but we should give a special mention to one of BET's long-standing volunteers, Brian Smith, who has single-handedly performed the lion's share of the



work, removing and sifting through, many tonnes of accumulated soil. There are still some very large tree stumps remaining in the interior and we are looking at ways to remove them without damaging the structure. Compared to the excavation of the external areas of the cottage, there have been remarkably few finds unearthed during the interior excavation. The one exception - and the most prized so far - was a George the Third penny dating from 1806.

Cabin Vandalism

It's sad to report that some of the laminated windows in the BET Cabin came under attack during the early part of this year. This was the very first aggressive act since the Cabin was refurbished in the autumn of 2014, but luckily the ever-handy BET volunteers were able to quickly secure a replacement and fit it themselves. After much discussion, the decision was reluctantly taken to fit metal grids to both windows to deter this kind of vandalism from reoccurring in the future.



Dormouse Surveys

Over the past few years, we haven't been regularly surveying our numerous dormouse boxes as we've not been able to secure



a licenced dormouse handler. However, we're very pleased to report that we are now working in partnership with Avon Wildlife Trust who have been replacing our



old, decaying boxes over the winter period and will start dormouse surveying during the coming months.



Winter Bird Box Survey

Every winter, a dedicated group of BET volunteers survey the considerable number of bird boxes in our woodlands, recording usage and any other observations. At the same time, the opportunity is taken to clean out any old nesting material from the boxes. Removing the old nest is an essential task as it removes any possible parasites and/or fungal spores which could have a detrimental effect on the chicks of the coming season. When our wooden nest boxes finally become irreparable, we are replacing them with 'Woodcrete' boxes made with a mixture of concrete and woodchip. Whilst these boxes are typically twice the price of the wooden boxes, they could last for up to 50 years and also offer better insulation for the nesting birds, protecting them from the extremes of hot and cold.



The 2024/5 the bird nest survey recorded 27 bird nests, 10 dormouse/mouse nests and 9 boxes containing moss but with no proper nest structure. Out of the 58 boxes surveyed, 79% of them had been occupied which is a slight increase over the results of the last few years.

Generally, quite a lot of the nests had one or two skeletons, but this year, very few failed eggs. One nest had five almost fully feathered Bluetit fledglings. There was a hornet's nest in one box - a first for our bird boxes.

One notable change this year seems to be an increase in use of the boxes by Nuthatches, although it's difficult to ascertain if they have been successful. Some have more



bark nest material than others and the degree to which they have been sealed with mud also varies.



Bird Box Nests 2013 - 2025



NAILSEA CHARITY WALKS & RUNS 2025

Raise money for your favourite charity

Walk or Run 5k, 10k or 20k

Sunday, 15th June
or any day up to 31st July



Rotary  Nailsea and Backwell

NAILSEA CHARITY WALKS & RUNS 2025 (organised by Rotary Nailsea & Backwell) will take place on **Sunday 15th June**. If that date doesn't suit you then you can do it at any time up to the end of July. Each year over £20,000 is raised for local organisations and BET is pleased to support the event. There are three routes to choose from - 5km, 10km and 20km. The day is a great opportunity for people to get together, enjoy the local countryside and raise money for deserving causes.

Full details, registration and sponsorship forms can be found on the Rotary website:

<https://tinyurl.com/msktxmn8>

We would be particularly pleased if you nominate BET as your charity of choice on the registration form, in our 20th Anniversary year.