Backwell Environment Trust

Bulletin 53 - Autumn 2026

www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org

A Very Warm Welcome to our Latest Autumn Bulletin

The BET volunteers have been busy over the spring and summer months keeping our network of footpaths clear of vegetation, removing diseased ash tree timber, scything our fabulous wildflower meadows and starting on a long-term programme to control our vigorous bracken. We've also had all of our trees close to houses, roads and footpaths professionally surveyed once again to ensure everyone's safety on our reserves.



Membership Renewal

Our membership year runs from October 1st until September 30th and renewals for 2026/27 are now due. We really hope you will consider renewing your membership for another year.

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

If you have received a membership renewal form with your bulletin, your BET membership is due to expire. The form and payment details can also be found on the BET website under 'About BET/Membership'.

Gift Aid is a very important source of income for us, so please tell us if there is any change to your Gift Aid status.

Please contact us on Betwoods@yahoo.co.uk if you have any queries.

Thank you for your Continued Support

BET Annual General Meeting

Saturday November 14th 2026

Backwell Parish Hall

The AGM will start at 2pm and we will break for tea, coffee and cakes before an illustrated presentation by BET member Martin Brasher on the illegal wildlife trade.

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

Agenda

- Annual Report from 2025
- The Chairman's Report
- Treasurer's Report
- Secretary's Report
- Reserve Report
- Election of Trustees
- Any other business

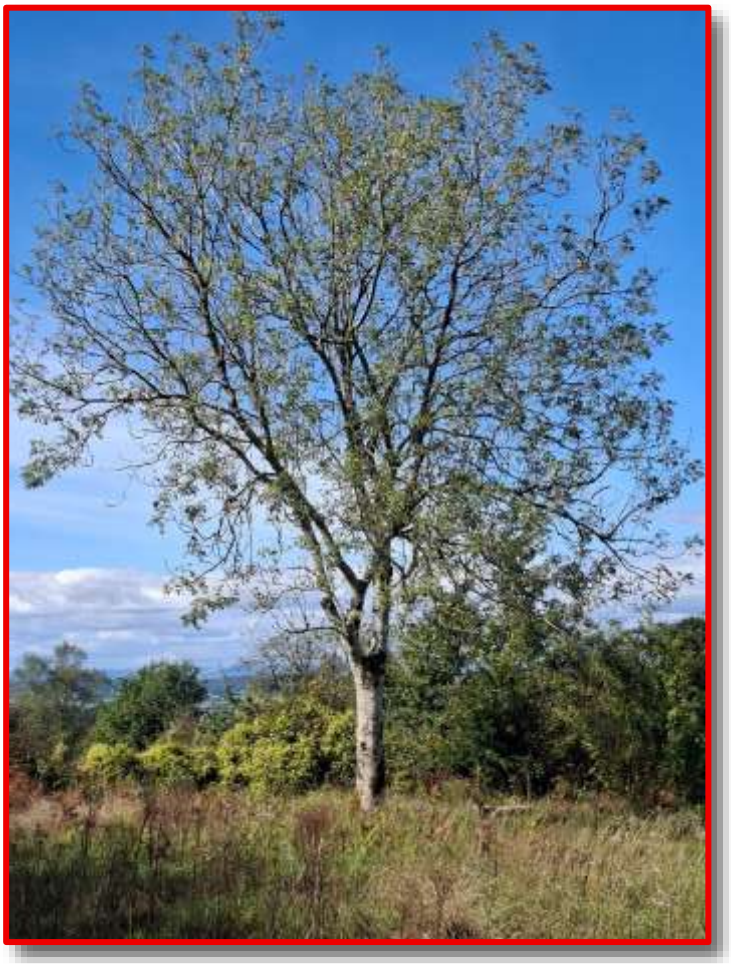
Printed copies of the 2025 annual report and the accounts will be available at the meeting.

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

We are now approaching our sixth year of dealing with the consequences of ash dieback disease, but it looks like we can finally say the battle is almost over. However, our record-breaking hot and dry summer has unfortunately put even more stress on our remaining trees and has accelerated the demise of trees that may have survived in a more 'normal' British summer. This year we have had all our trees close to houses, roads and footpaths re-assessed and those deemed to be unsafe will be removed over the winter months.



Whilst virtually all ash trees on the reserves have the disease, some trees appear to be in a steady, slow decline whilst others may be holding the fungus in check and holding on to a larger proportion of their leaf canopy.

As in previous years, we have left some of the felled logs on the reserve to rot down naturally whilst the excess has been taken off site by Backwell Logs. BET and Backwell Logs entered into a mutually beneficial partnership where we are able to offload our excess timber in return for a donation for the wood.

BET Scything Workshop

In September, BET visited Chew Valley Community Farm for the fourth year to run a scything workshop for their volunteers. The organic farm is worked by volunteers and they are keen to manage their field and orchard margins using traditional eco-friendly methods. The participants soon got into the swing of scything and moved from a nice grassy patch to a tough and very brambly strip. We were all rewarded with delicious organic vegetable soups and crusty bread!

After the hearty lunch we sat and talked about sharpening and peening. The volunteers then tackled long grass in a wildflower strip along apple trees laden with juicy fruit. Overall, we were very impressed by their energy and the results they produced.





It is always a pleasure to help the Farm and to enjoy the beautiful setting above Chew Valley Lake.



Summer Butterflies

Butterfly numbers in the UK have shown significant signs of improvement this summer following a particularly poor year in 2024. Monitoring data showed that 2024 was one of the worst years for butterfly abundance since records began. In contrast, 2025 was a more average year, with many species increasing in number compared with the previous year. In England, butterfly numbers increased in abundance, while a similar pattern was recorded in Wales.



The warmer conditions experienced in recent years can benefit butterflies because they are cold-blooded insects and depend on suitable temperatures for feeding, breeding and flying. Good weather can also encourage the growth of flowering plants, providing butterflies with more nectar. Some species, such as the Painted Lady,

are also affected by migration. Their numbers in the UK can vary considerably from year to year, with populations often reaching their highest levels during August.

However, an increase from one year to the next does not necessarily mean that butterflies are recovering overall. Long-term monitoring shows that many UK butterfly species have declined significantly in both numbers and distribution since the 1970s. Habitat loss, pollution, changes in land use and climate change continue to threaten many species.



The annual Big Butterfly Count also helps scientists understand how butterfly populations are changing. During the count, members of the public record butterflies and day-flying moths that they see in gardens, parks and other outdoor spaces across the UK. This provides valuable information about which species are common and where they are being found.

Overall, the increase in butterfly sightings this summer is encouraging. However, it is important to remember that butterfly populations can change considerably from year to year. Continued monitoring and the protection of suitable habitats will be essential if the UK's butterfly populations are to recover in the long term.

BET Wildlife Surveys

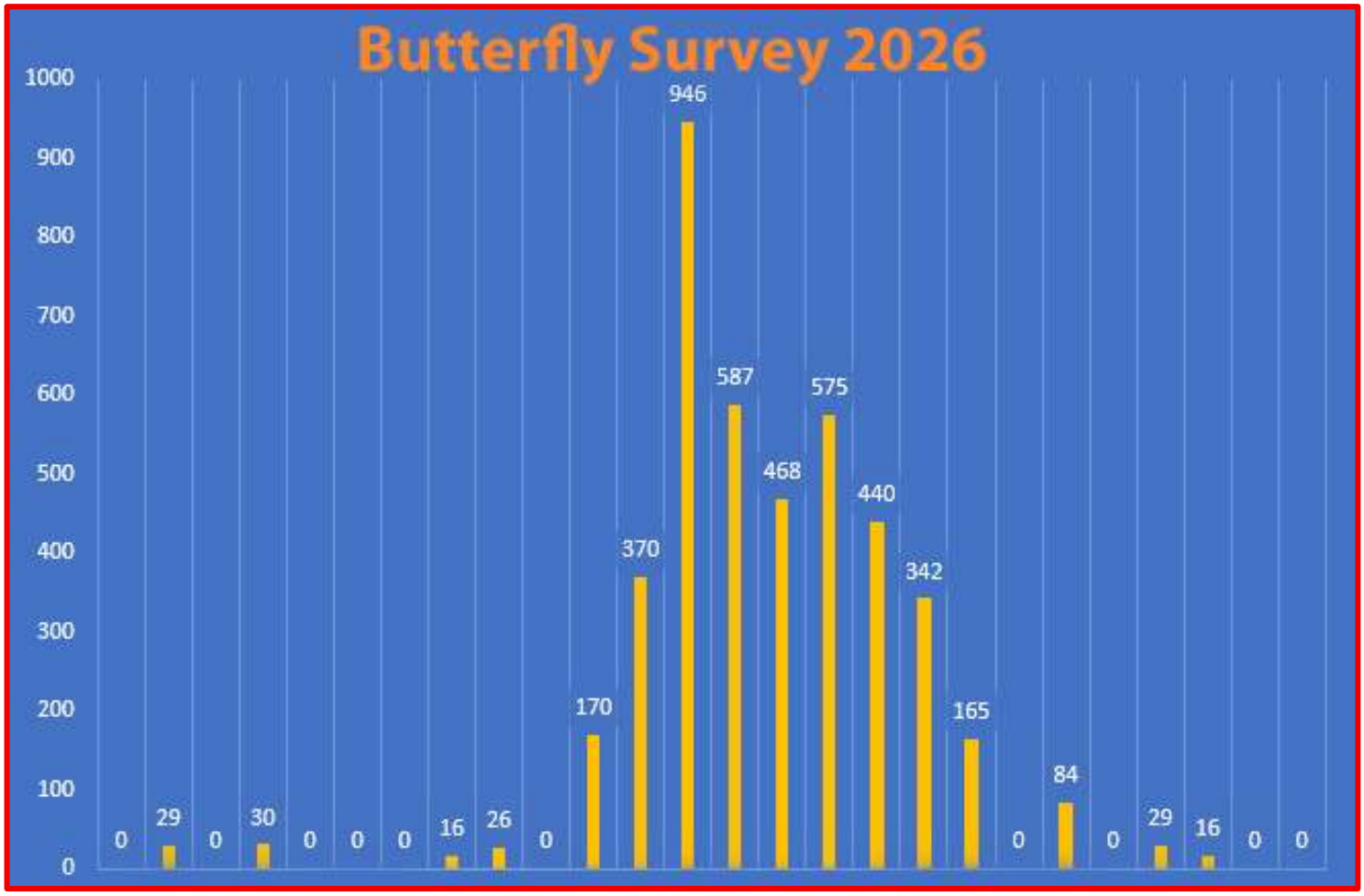
The BET volunteers carry out regular wildlife surveys on the nature reserves during the year to monitor and record numbers of butterflies, birds, bird nests, dragonflies and reptiles. This data can be invaluable to us and helps ensure we are continuing to manage the reserves in a wildlife-friendly manner.



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 April and September. 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.



From the beginning of April until the mid-September (24 weeks), a total of **16** butterfly surveys were undertaken. Although the summer was predominately warm and sunny, the spring weather was far more unsettled leading to surveys being missed due to unsuitable weather conditions.



In total, **4,293** individual butterfly sightings and **23** species were recorded. However, if the missing surveys are estimated from the graph trend, a total of **4,691** sightings could have been expected, which would equate to a very significant doubling of the numbers from last year's figures (**2,221**). Butterfly numbers in 2024 were universally poor, whilst the 2025 numbers were

pretty average right across the country, so it's somewhat intriguing why we've seen such a large upturn this year - even with our record-breaking summer.

Most Abundant Species	Sightings	Least Abundant Species	Sightings
Meadow Brown	1644	Brown Argus	1
Gatekeeper	922	Small Tortoiseshell	2
Ringlet	494	Orange Tip	5
Marbled White	373	Silver Washed Fritillary	7
Common Blue	350	Clouded Yellow	11

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.



Reserve Report

Over the last six months the BET volunteers have been busy cutting back the encroaching vegetation next to our network of footpaths, repairing steps, moving cut timber, controlling the bracken growth, hedgelaying and scything our wildflower meadows.

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

Tree Survey

Every year, BET performs a visual inspection of all our trees close to houses, roads and footpaths in conjunction with our tree surgeon. However, every five years, we commission a Chartered Arboriculturist to perform a more detailed survey to ensure our trees are safe for both our neighbours and visitors. As we go to press, we are still waiting for the full report, but diseased trees have already been marked up across our reserves.

Bracken Control

Bracken is a native British species but if left unchecked, can very quickly overrun wildflower meadows with its dense, heavy shading. BET's bracken has made an unwelcome resurgence over the last few years after many years of control by the BET volunteers, and so this year we have started a long-term programme of control measures. Based on trials carried out by the National Trust, we shall be scything bracken in both June and August which was found to be the optimum times to weaken the plant. Our plan is not to eradicate it, but just to reduce its vigour and give our wildflowers a better chance to thrive.


Bracken Scything

Step Replacement

The BET volunteers have been replacing steps as they reach the end of their useful life using either split ash tree trunks left over from ash dieback felling or treated wood donated by BET members.



Litter Removal

Virtually every work morning we carry out a litter clearance on Cheston Combe Road. This road seems to be a particularly bad hot-spot for rubbish in Backwell as we presume drivers must discard their packaging out their windows as they drive through.



Scything the Wildflower Meadows

BET's wildflower meadows have done reasonably well this year but the high summer temperatures and drought resulted in shorter flowering times. However, in September after the first rains, some wildflowers had a second flowering which was very beneficial to insects. The BET volunteers started the scything of our wildflower meadows in the late summer and we hope to finish well before the winter sets in.

Footpath Clearance

During the spring and summer months, vegetation growth rates have been very high so keeping our footpaths clear of encroaching vegetation has been a high-priority task for the BET volunteers.



Hedgelaying

We've been re-laying some of our hedgerows to thicken them up and make them more attractive for wildlife. Thick hedgerows can make fabulous safe wildlife corridors, especially for small mammals and amphibians.



Bat Survey

BET will once again be taking part in the North Somerset Bat Survey when we shall have ultrasonic recording equipment installed on our nature reserves for a week in early October. We'll report the results of the survey in our spring bulletin.



Future Projects

In November, BET will be bringing in contractors to repair the section of path that runs from the road to the viewpoint in Badgers Wood. The wooden side sections will be replaced and the path will be resurfaced using aggregate kindly donated by Tarmac.



Our recent run of hot and dry summers has put considerable strain on the two ponds in Jubilee Stone Wood. Hidden in the woodland are 12 plastic ashbins that collect the rainfall over the winter months which we then use to top-up the ponds during periods of prolonged dry weather. These were installed nearly 20 years ago and are no longer doing the task they were designed to do. So, this autumn we are hoping to replace them with two large water containers which should be sufficient to supply water to the ponds whatever the summer throws at us.

Volunteer Time

Every year, the BET volunteers freely put in an amazing 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 **2,405** volunteer hours has been recorded. Since the Trust began, an astonishing **46,547** hours have been volunteered so, once again, a BIG BET thank you to you all.

New Species on the Reserves

The **Clouded Yellow** is a striking butterfly that can be seen in the UK, particularly during the warmer summer months. It is easily recognised by its bright yellow or orange-yellow wings, which have dark edges. The underside of its wings is paler, helping it blend into vegetation when it rests. Clouded Yellows are migrant butterflies. They do not usually survive the UK's cold winters, so many individuals arrive from mainland Europe during the summer. Their numbers can vary greatly from year to year, depending on weather conditions and the success of migration. In warm, sunny summers, they can sometimes be seen in large numbers, particularly in southern and coastal areas of Britain.



The butterfly is a fast and powerful flyer, often travelling quickly across grasslands, fields and open areas. It feeds on the nectar of flowers such as thistles and clovers. The caterpillars feed mainly on plants from the pea family, including clovers and vetches.



Although Clouded Yellows are not considered one of Britain's most common butterflies, they can provide an exciting sight for wildlife watchers because their appearance is unpredictable. A good summer can result in a noticeable increase in sightings. Their presence also demonstrates how weather conditions and migration can influence butterfly populations in the UK.

Dormouse Surveys

BET's dormouse boxes are surveyed twice a year by Avon Wildlife Trust and this is their report for this year.



Jenny, Clare and I did the annual clean out of the dormouse boxes at the beginning of the year and replaced a fair few of the old boxes. During this time, we put up five new boxes in the lower section of Jubilee Stone Wood bringing the box check survey number across both reserves to 40.



Although lower Jubilee Stone Wood had not previously been surveyed for dormice, changes to the tree canopy brought about by ash dieback disease, has made this section of the reserve more dormouse-friendly so we are hoping they will expand their range.

The three of us surveyed in July and September. On both occasions we found dormice nesting in the boxes and found empty dormouse nests across both reserves. The highlight of the survey was seeing a female with seven young, which is a record for all of us as average litter size is usually between 4 and 5. We haven't found any nests in the new survey area as yet.



Other occupants in the boxes were blue tits, wrens, yellow-necked mice and wood mice with young.

Hannah