

Mendip

the
mendip
society

Caring for the Mendip Hills

The Newsletter of The Mendip Society

Issue No. 153 • July 2018

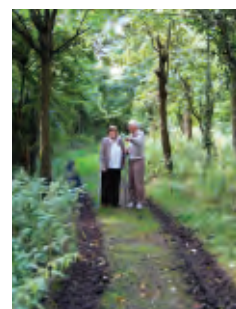


The Chairman, Secretary and Membership Secretary, as Trustees, sign the Deed of Transfer

TANIA'S WOOD BECOMES THE SOCIETY'S NATURE RESERVE Judith Tranter

Four years ago Glyn England, Society President in the 1990s and then over ninety years young, asked me, without telling me why, to meet him in his family woodland on Woodbridge Farm near Ubley. When he had shown me around he said – “Do you like what you’ve seen – will you and the Society take it from me as a gift and keep it safe as an English wood? What could I say but ‘of course we will’?”

The rest, as they say, is history! The committee went to visit, along with Les Davies, not yet then our President, but whose opinion we valued highly, and the outcome was that we voted unanimously to accept Glyn’s offer. Find out the rest of the story in Tania’s Wood page 8



First visit

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Leigh** p10 & 11

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The views and opinions of our contributors are not necessarily those of the Mendip Society. We are always happy to receive items for publication if they are signed; although we will withhold the name if asked

In the News this issue

Head says Well done everyone

What a success our first Forest School at Tania’s Wood has been. Our Year 1 is a split cohort, so the opportunity for them to come together as a Year group has been invaluable. The benefits of our first Forest School have certainly been felt.

Well done to our Year 1s.

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The Levels they are a’booming

May is a wonderful month on the reserve with many species rearing young so there is much activity and sound all around. The boom of the bittern, once heard is easily recognised and the group was very pleased to have sight of this rare bird too. Thank you, Bob and Giles for a great visit.

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Naturally Healthy in May

I was made very welcome, drank lots of tea, munched biscuits and had a big fire. I went home happy, smelling of smoke, had had some physical exercise, also mentally it was a tonic, I ate and slept well that evening. Being ill has really changed my life in many ways – for the better”.

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Talks and events we have enjoyed

FRIDAY 23RD MARCH 2018 – We held our Society AGM in Draycott village Hall. Although attendance was not as high as in the previous year, the atmosphere was relaxed and business went briskly. The society had enjoyed a good year, running many events together with other partners including the AONB, the N.T., the SWT, and the Earth Science Centre, and there was much discussion on our walks programme which is bursting at the seams. The date of the next AGM was proposed as Friday 29th March 2019 – we were informed by several from the floor that this was also the date of 'Brexit', although no-one could say whether it would make any difference to our A.G.M.! Refreshment time filled with conversations all round; a lovely tray bake and a plate of homemade biscuits were donated by Sue Ivens and thoroughly enjoyed and many helped with the serving of drinks and later the washing up.

Steve Eggington then gave a most interesting and humorous talk on his life in journalism and on the decision to start a Country Magazine with his colleague Mark Adler ten years ago. Who but a journalist could remember ten years of dates and happenings – with absolutely no notes at all? Members who missed the AGM don't know what a treat they also missed in Steve's talk. So see you all next year?

SATURDAY 14TH APRIL **"YESTERDAY, TODAY and TOMORROW"**



The President's Walk on The Ham, was enjoyed by a goodly crowd and Les found that the only way to address them – was from the bonnet of his Landover



The real thing – On a quiet country road?



FRIDAY 4TH MAY **"PANTHER BRITANNICA"**

A few words from our speaker Rick Minter

Panther Britannica? "From what I know about leopards, anything is possible," said TV big cat expert Jonathan Scott in a 2011 BBC documentary on leopards. He was referring to the black form of leopard and the potential for these panthers to live undetected in Britain. Could Bagheera be naturalising here after various episodes of irresponsible releases of trophy pets? I write this a day after the latest report of a black panther reaches me. A stable owner in the Home Counties has had scratched horses and found eviscerated deer nearby. She and family members have seen a black panther three times – her husband thought she was mad at first. After a call out from the police armed response unit and the forensics team, I am asked to follow up. She is the latest property owner to seek my advice after struggling to be believed, while also keeping it quiet to avoid press invasion and vigilantes. Like virtually all other such witnesses she wants no harm to the animal. Welcome to the parallel countryside of Britain's secret panthers. Perhaps rewilding has begun by accident?

Rick Minter (pictures left)

SATURDAY 19TH MAY **FAMILY WILD DAY OUT IN SLADER'S LEIGH**

The weather was perfect for the families who had booked to come to Slader's Leigh to get outside and enjoy a bit of nature in wild countryside in a relaxed way. The event was part of Naturally Healthy Month that encourages people to step outside to improve their health and wellbeing; there are proven benefits to being outside and we could see the smiles on people's faces as they got close to nature with us.'

*For more on the event –
and the value of the outdoors to our
members, see the article on
page 10 and 11*

WEDNESDAY 23RD MAY HAM WALL SPECIAL INTEREST VISIT

On a cloudless day in May, ten members of the Mendip Society arrived at the reserve to meet RSPB guides Bob and Giles for what proved to be a fascinating and informative bird watching morning.



See Judy Newberry's report on page 12

Plus a guided winter visit to Ham Wall for the Mendip Society is being planned and details will be in the November programme. Apart from aiming to see the numerous wildfowl that overwinter on the reserve, the visit will hopefully include the starling murmuration.

TUESDAY 5TH JUNE 2018 A RETURN VISIT TO THE BBC STUDIOS AT BRISTOL
**A poetic report,
on the walk on 31st March
by Terry Gifford**

15 plus me
and not a drop of rain,
through mud, and water
over some delicate boots,
but a turning back
on a high green field
at a gathering of the group,
gave several vistas,
(and no blisters
but the usual arthritis
in some old shysters
like the leader)
into the blue ridges
beckoning Glastonbury
beyond
and beyond us
before a kindly lane
(still without rain!)
carried us back
to Croscombe
and a Full Moon
in Wells, with wine
and a fire, divine,
and seats, replete.



By popular demand, we revisited the conducted tour of the T.V. and radio studios at Whiteladies Rd offered by the "The Beeb". This is where many programmes are made and sold worldwide. Notable of course, are the very popular wildlife and nature series which have become "a must viewing" for the whole UK; the sheer amount of professional, patient work it takes to produce these films is amazing. Our party was shown all aspects of the production process, even while the studios were actually broadcasting. The efficiency and technical standards it takes to bring our daily programmes into our homes is quite something to see.

Whilst there, we met Ali Vowles, our local TV presenter who was happy to show us just what timing and skill it takes, with the help of those "back room boys", to bring us our news bulletins. Then it was our turn!

Into a radio studio, we were shown how to record a session of "The Archers". Never has this popular radio soap been murdered so well by a bunch of amateurs who seemed to be having the time of their lives. Then onto the TV studio where we tackled the news and then onto the "weather girl". We had a real laugh trying to do it correctly proving that this is much more difficult than it looks-the Professionals can make it look so easy; truly a day to remember. Richard Frost

**WEDNESDAY 6TH JUNE 2018
A SPECIAL INTEREST VISIT TO CHANCELLORS FARM**


It was a glorious summers day for our visit to the Somerset Wildlife Trust's reserve; we were greeted by Kate and given a short history of the place, which had been up until recently, an ordinary working farm.

It too has changed with the times, as a great deal of Mendip has done and Kate is still working on getting the best regime to manage the many fields that are like the old time flower meadows, whilst being self sustaining. The meadows had the WOW factor as you walked through their gates and Kate told us about all the different species we saw. We were lucky in that there was no live firing that day so we could roam over the publically inaccessible unimproved areas of the range, which Kate said could be just like their flower meadows if managed in the same ways. We are indebted to Kate and the SWT for a lovely visit (we walked quite a long way too!) **JT**

ED: Looking back on all the walks, visits and events of the year so far it has become increasingly apparent that because most are run by volunteers things can, and sometimes do, have to change – date, times or venues, or even be cancelled or postponed. It is impossible for us to let everyone know about these, often at short notice, happenings by any other means than that of our **website**. **John Moore**, our webmaster works to keep it bang up to date so we ask if members will please do their bit by checking the site as often as they like and ideally before going to an event or on a walk or visit. The address is **www.themendipsociety.org.uk** Thank you.

AND NOW, TO LOOK FORWARD TO –



MENDIP ROCKS! FESTIVAL EVENTS

Friday 6th JULY to Wednesday 31st OCTOBER 2018

This year's Mendip Rocks! will offer a season of events running from July to October all put together thanks to the effort and funding contributions of the Festival partners; Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), **The Mendip Society** and Somerset Earth Science Centre (SESC). The programme celebrates the 450 million year geological history of the Mendip Hills with events for all including:

- cave visits; • family fundays • guided walks • tours of working and disused quarries
- practical drystone walling • arts workshops • geology field visits.

We will celebrate the festival finale on Sunday 28th October with a day of inspiring geology talks to discover "Geo Resources in our Lives" in Wells Museum; our President, Les Davies will be Master of Ceremonies.

All events are listed on www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/events/ and booked via Eventbrite.

You will see our gazebo & banner at the LAUNCH ON SATURDAY 7th July 10am-4pm – "Rock On Mendip" at Burrington Combe FREE Family Funday.



**Everyone Welcome
No Need to book today**

Parking in lower car park of Burrington Combe/
Burrington Inn. BS40 7AU.

Our volunteers, Royette & Jean will be making their own paints from rocks and soils for the cave art; you will be able to grind up the best colour rocks you can find yourself. The society badge maker will also be on the stand. Great for children – and parents too!

THURSDAY 19TH JULY

A SPECIAL INTEREST GUIDED WALK TO SEE /HEAR NIGHT JARS ON MENDIP – 8PM-LATE



*A beautifully camouflaged night jar
nesting on the ground*

Meet at The Swan Inn, Rowberrow BS25 1QL by 8pm (Go inside if you arrive early)

Chris Sperring will lead this walk to see these elusive nocturnal birds. The walk to the habitat will be about 1.5 miles of up hill, steep in places and the same steepness coming down in the dark afterwards to return!

Torch and suitable clothing are essential. This event is limited to 15 able bodied walkers! Cost £4 per person. In the event of bad weather you will be notified by mid afternoon.

Must be booked using the RESERVE button on the website and please leave a phone number where we can contact you on the day - Contact Judy 01749 672196 (Mobile on the outing day only 07443639048)

SUNDAY 22ND JULY A VISIT TO GULLY CAVE, EBBOR GORGE

As in previous years, we are invited to visit the cave on the hillside above Ebbor Gorge where the team from the Royal Holloway, University of London, are conducting their summer dig; on our last visit we witnessed the break through into the long anticipated lower cave section. Professor Danielle Schreve will bring us up to date with the results of all the work carried out on the huge amount of material extracted last summer as well as outlining future plans.

Meet in the N.T. car park for Ebbor Gorge at grid ref. 521 485 (Expl.map 141) at 10.30am to walk up to the cave; the path is quite steep, although the last section to the cave has been improved by the team. (anyone who wants to take part but is worried about holding up the group, can walk up with me (I'm slow!), the others will have a competent leader in charge.) Max no. 20, **places must be booked after July 10th** by ringing Judith 01275 874284/e-mail judith.tranter1@btinternet.com See page 13 for report by Danielle.



SATURDAY 11TH AUGUST
A TASTER INTRODUCTION TO
CHARCOAL BURNING ON A SMALL
SCALE
10AM-2PM, IN TANIA'S WOOD,
WOODBIDGE FARM, UBLEY

With our charcoal maker, Chris Claxton, we will explore the leisurely process of producing charcoal in a small wood like ours, as part of its sustainable management system. For all the details see the Tania's Wood Nature Reserve page 8. Pictures – the start – and end – of a 'burn' in our home made kiln.



FRIDAY 17TH & SATURDAY 18TH AUGUST – 9.30AM-4PM
DRY STONE WALLING TRAINING SESSIONS WITH TINA BATH
AT CHANCELLOR'S FARM, PRIDDY



A slumped wall

In August it may be raining but is also likely to be hot and sunny, think hat and sunscreen; strong footwear is essential, ideally with hard toe caps but walking boots are good too- but NO trainers. Bring strong gloves if you have them, we have spares if needed. Bring a packed lunch, we can make hot drinks if required. **Places must be booked after July 10th** by ringing Judith 01275 874284/e-mail judith.tranter1@btinternet.com, there are a maximum of 8 places on both days. Cost £25 for members/ £30 for non-members for two days. You will be working in quite lumpy open ground – which has been proved to be good for health and well being, and enjoyable too! Plus you will be learning a much needed skill to keep Mendip as Mendip. (see our page in the July Mendip Times and 'From the Chair').

TUESDAY 21ST AUGUST – FROM 6.30PM ONWARDS
THE SOCIETY SUMMER SOCIAL at CHARTERHOUSE CENTRE

It worked out so well last year that everyone involved with the evening decided to go with the same venue again – fingers crossed for the same glorious weather! The Committee invites all members, their families and any friends you would like to bring to join in so they can see we are a friendly bunch.



Barley Rye at Charterhouse last year

There is no charge for this evening but donations to the group will be welcomed. There is no need to book, just come along, more information – ring 01275 472797

As before we are planning an 'American Supper' whereby you bring some food and/or drink of your choice and add it to the table. Plates, cutlery and cups are available and we will be making hot drinks if wanted. We will be joined again by our friends from the Barley Rye Choir who will be singing at intervals through the evening. They will be supported by some of our members who play an instrument and there will be an 'open mike' spot for you if you fancy joining them, for a jamming session?

ADVANCE NOTICE FOR THE NEXT PROGRAMME:

SAT JANUARY 5TH 2019
Mendip Society Wassail

They had such a great time last year they want to do it all over again! Based on the orchards of Worth and The Pheasant, Wookey. For info contact Terry 01749679128 And t.gifford2@bathspa.ac.uk

THURS 22ND NOVEMBER –
Talk at Winscombe by John Dickson of the Reptile & Amphibian Group

"Amphibians & other Inhabitants of Mendip Dew Ponds" – 7.30pm

"The habitats found on the Mendip Hills provide homes for a diverse array of reptiles and amphibians. John Dickson will be introducing these creatures, discussing their ecology and the challenges they face, with particular reference to the annual toad migration and efforts to help them safely across the road in Winscombe'.

NATURALLY HEALTHY MONTH

May was Naturally Healthy Month 2018 – a month long campaign bringing together some of the area's leading health, wellbeing and outdoor activity organizations to offer people a variety of opportunities to get active, and enjoy the benefits of spending time outdoors and in nature. The programme provided additional help for those individuals and groups who find it more difficult to get out and about and enjoy the health benefits of nature. It was co-ordinated by Somerset Wildlife Trust and throughout the entire month of May, over 30 participating organizations collectively offered a range of over 150 events and activities that celebrate our green spaces and beautiful landscapes and in turn improve the sense of health and wellbeing felt by those who get involved. Whether it was yoga, Nordic walking, practical conservation tasks, looking at butterflies, singing, buggy walks, mindfulness, family beach days, listening to the dawn chorus or simply going on a de-stress walk – there was something for everybody, regardless of age or physical ability. Activities took place across the counties, from Exmoor to Frome and from the Mendips to the Blackdowns and everywhere in between.



What better than a cup of tea, somewhere nice for a picnic and a place to run to run with friends?

The society was asked by the AONB to hold an open day in Slader's Leigh as part of the Naturally Healthy Month and as the meadow looks quite wild and beautiful whilst all its flowers and trees are bursting into full life, the event was naturally called "A Wild Family Day Out". And it certainly was – read about it on the Slader's Leigh page 10.

As well as the 'official evidence' of the surveys and health organisations we, in the Society, can testify that being and working in the outdoors really does work its magic. Over the years we have had help in our nature reserves from people on recovery programmes, and those with all sorts of disabilities and problems – they bloom in the open air, revel in the roughness of the land and weather and the toughness of the tasks. One of our newest volunteers, we call him Tucksey', wrote this piece for this special month.

BEING ILL HAS REALLY CHANGED MY LIFE by TUCKSEY

"Having always enjoyed the outside, it was a great shock to me and my family to very quickly contract an illness that changed my life, physically and mentally, from the simple pleasures of going for a walk, cycling and attempts at gardening(not too tidily)! To a prolonged stay in hospital and the best part of a year's rehabilitation, my confidence was shattered but the thought of being stuck indoors with daytime television was the spur to try to move on.

Slowly starting in the garden then with a short walk around the block was all that could be managed, I decided to try a 'Wellbeing Through Nature' course, being very apprehensive of coming out of my safe zone, meeting new people and trying new things, I was made very welcome, gradually my confidence and to a certain extent my fitness slightly improved, it felt so good to be outside in the fresh air and all winds and weathers.

Then another initial phone call was made for volunteering. I again turned up rather nervously and slightly apprehensive at Tania's Wood on a cold November morning, the first hurdle had been crossed by just turning up!"



I was made very welcome, drank lots of tea, munched biscuits and had a big fire. I went home happy, smelling of smoke, had had some physical exercise, also mentally it was a tonic, I ate and slept well that evening.

This was a great way to exercise, and to be outside with nature with supportive like minded people I have no doubt have helped with my physical and mental wellbeing. I now volunteer on a regular basis, there's nothing like being in a muddy ditch or cutting down some over hanging branches.... the banter's not too bad either!

Being outside in nature has helped my recovery and rehabilitation with increased physical activity and mental wellbeing, reduced stress and anxiety, giving me a greater awareness of our surroundings and the part that nature plays, I now also 'buddy' for 'Wellbeing Through Nature' to try and support those who may be going through a similar process to show empathy; I also act as a Volunteer Ranger (just learning the ropes at the moment) to give something back for the great support that I have had.

Being ill has really changed my life in many ways – for the better”.

Dave Tucker

Another very hardworking organisation which aims to get as many people as possible out into the countryside and enjoying learning about the things they see and do –is the Somerset Earth Science Centre, founder of the 'Mendip Rocks Festival'. This year, partnering with the Society and the Mendip Hill AONB the Festival is less packed into a short space but spread over several months to give 'festival addicts' the chance to sample more of the events they simply couldn't fit in before.

The public launch this year is on **SATURDAY 7TH JULY** in Burrington Combe, with a FREE day called



ROCK ON MENDIP AT BURRINGTON COMBE

Designed as a family fun day – do come and learn how Burrington Combe and the Mendips were made, make a piece of limestone rock, try 'fossil fun', a geo time trail, pebble painting, cave art using natural pigments and hunt in the limestone grassland for bugs and butterflies. Bring in fossils for identifying and view the Mendip Rock box.

Parking in lower car park of Burrington Combe/Burrington Inn. BS40 7AU.

Visit our gazebo to try your hand at cave art and design and make yourself a badge with our two lovely volunteers Jean and Royette, who were the AONB Volunteers of the year 2107. They are there from 10am – 4pm, look for the banner to find them.

THERE IS NO NEED TO BOOK FOR THIS LAUNCH EVENT

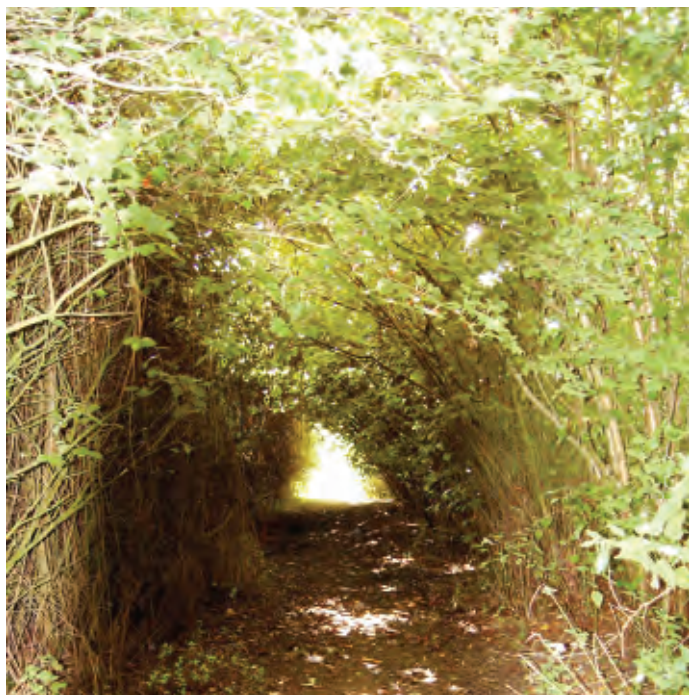
For more information please ring Somerset Earth Science Centre **01749 840156**



Cave Art 2017

TANIA'S WOOD NATURE RESERVE

After reading the front page you will know that over four years ago, one of our previous Presidents, Glyn England, offered to deed to the Society the long thin strip of woodland on the edge of his smallholding in the Chew Valley – well, we are very glad to announce that the Society finally became the legal owners on Friday 11th May this year; sadly Glyn did not live to see his gift transferred to us but his two daughters have carried out his wishes to the letter. Legal wheels turn very slowly and it has been frustrating for them to say the least. But we are very grateful for their continuous support and for the fact that they have very kindly allowed us to work in the wood for all this time; we would like to assure them that it will be lovingly looked after by the Society, to the best of our ability. By doing this we not only fulfil the object and aims of our Constitution, but also justify their father's trust in the Society – that it would protect and manage the wood he planted, as he would have done himself. It had no name in the beginning, but his daughters asked for it to be named after their mother who, like their father, had loved it greatly. So Tania's Wood it is now officially on the Land Register records.



I know who would like this tunnel!

year management plan tailor made for us. We have a member who is a champion hedger, we have nearly a mile of hedges of antiquity which need special care, put the two together with a batch of beginners and you have the hedges and the hedgers of the future. So much small wood is generated when hedging – what to do with it? A useful person to know is a



Emptying a kiln once it is cold is messy and dirty but fascinates all ages.

On our first visit I took this picture of a magical place full of promise of exploration and delight down every avenue and so it has proved to be. Every season changes its character; we have of course made changes ourselves. Woods have to be managed to stop them growing old and out of shape (a bit like humans really!); quite often this means cutting some things down, so others can flourish, replacing others with new stock and often we may seem to be a bit brutal about it. But living things have a habit of surviving and regenerating, we especially see this in the hedges we have laid and the groves of hazels we have coppiced on our training courses.

From the 'official' handing over ceremony – which was actually over three years ago now, we have networked with several other groups and organisations and individuals who have helped us enormously, in return we have been able to help others achieve what they want to. One of the Ubley Parish Councillors came to the hand over, her children go to Blagdon School and she mentioned that of all the schools in the area only they had no place they could use for a 'Forest School', which is considered a most valuable experience for children nowadays. What better place than our wood? Another Blagdon parent works with the Forest of Avon in Bristol and facilitated our putting in for a grant to have a Forestry Commission ten

year management plan tailor made for us. We have a member who is a champion hedger, we have nearly a mile of hedges of antiquity which need special care, put the two together with a batch of beginners and you have the hedges and the hedgers of the future. So much small wood is generated when hedging – what to do with it? A useful person to know is a charcoal burner looking for somewhere to put his kiln and who doesn't mind showing others how to make the product.

Now is a good place to expand on the "Introduction Taster to the making of charcoal in a small wood with Chris Claxton" included in the forthcoming programme on page 5. Charcoal making is of necessity a leisurely process but whilst the kiln is starting a burn is the opportunity to see how this country craft fits into the management regime of our wood, with all its resulting wood products. Chris will make 'willow sticks', much favoured by artists – we will provide the drawing paper for trying them out. Tea and coffee will be provided at break time, (and the biscuits), made with water boiled with the charcoal from the kiln you empty, (but do bring something yourself if you want). Before leaving, we'll package up some charcoal to take home.

Charcoal made like this is sweeter, not covered in chemicals to make it burn and lasts longer than shop bought brands and is much sought after by those in the know. Chris is a working hedger and stonewaller so we will have to charge for the session, with a max of 8 participants; members £8 and non-members £10. Keep an eye on the website for any places which become spare or any changes due to bad weather etc.

The school term starting after Easter saw the first Blagdon Primary Forest School classes, although several woodland days have been held over the past year during holidays and weekends and for the 'Blagdon Week' organised by parents during the summer holidays. These have served to get the site cleared and made ready and fit for purpose although vegetation grows so quickly, especially with the rain we have had this year that a constant cutting regime is necessary. The heart of the 'camp' is a log square with a small fire pit in the middle, used for storytelling, cooking soup or vegetable dyes in a big pot and just sitting round talking to each other. A large tarpaulin is slung between four big pine trees to provide shelter from the rain. The camp is surrounded by trees some with low branches which are good for climbing and some high enough for fixing swinging ropes on to. Sounds good enough for a group of children to enjoy? And enjoy it they do.



Using the
sawhorse
with teacher
Nicky Orr



Volunteer
Malcolm
making their
sawhorse



Making small
animal
shelters
between logs



Wood of all
shapes and
sizes is very
useful

This is the report from Headteacher, Claire Golding, on their first term.

Forest School at Blagdon Primary School

What a success our first Forest School at Tania's Wood has been. Our Year 1 is a split cohort, so the opportunity for them to come together as a Year group has been invaluable. The benefits of our first Forest School have certainly been felt. Next year, they will be brought together as Year 2s. Having the opportunity to work together as a team means that bonds have already formed and next year feels less daunting to them.

Our Year 1's have been able to practise skills in real life settings that we just cannot show them in the playground. The variety of wildlife, flora and fauna, whilst encouraged, does not exist in school.

It has been pleasing to see the children have access to tools and understand how they are used in real life settings. They build, explore and discover. The activities they do have meaning. It has improved social skills as they come together to work on challenging projects. Their enthusiasm and willingness to learn and question is evident. The understanding of risk that the children have has increased – they talk about risk and assess situations more readily.

*As they explore and discover they begin to lead their own learning – which can only be a good thing as we strive to produce citizens of the future who can be the best they can be. **Well done to our Year 1s!***

SUMMER IN SLADER'S LEIGH FLOWER MEADOW



The New Strawberry Line – you can see clear through the tunnel now, even at this distance – note the buried drainage system to the left of the path, no more flooding!

the meadow to prevent use by motor bikes and motorised vehicles but still accessible to wheelchairs and pushchairs as well as cyclists and pedestrians. In the next few weeks all these will be removed – but the path they were guarding will be staying. This was made of the recycled grass grids which we used on the wheelchair path from the Line to the seat and pond, however a liner was not put down underneath them so in time the meadow will grow over and through the grids, with a bit of help from our volunteers of course. But it will remain a firm base for the path everyone uses down through the meadow so that in winter especially, it will not become worn, boggy and waterlogged.



shone with health. The orchids, for which the meadow is known, were only just beginning to appear, it was just a week or so too early, but it didn't seem to matter. There was so much to try the parents couldn't keep up with children wanting to do everything, but they were helped by the fourteen Young Rangers who showed the youngsters how to build dens, make bug hotels, identify insects and make flower prints. Four Advanced Young Rangers helped the older ones coppice hazel trees and plant Ragged Robin plants around the pond, cleared last November of all its invasive weeds. Because Great Crested Newts were found in the pond this spring, with the females laying their eggs, there could be no pond dipping but John Dickson, of the Reptile and Amphibian Group, who has a licence, caught a pair of both newt species and put them in a tray for the children to look at. They were safely restored to their home afterwards, as was a lovely golden slow worm found in a heap of old vegetation warming in the sun; the latter was the star of the show with the children who couldn't believe how dry and smooth he was, not slimy as they imagined him to be. *Picture right – John Dickson*

For a whole year Slader's Leigh Local Nature Reserve has served as the way around the Shute Shelve tunnel, shut whilst the Strawberry Line, from Winscombe to south of the tunnel, had a vital water pipe laid underneath its surface. But in time for the second May Bank Holiday, the barriers came down, the mud was cleared away and the Line quietly re-opened; a few days later it was shut again for a short while by a landslip along the line, caused by a couple of days of torrential downpours. What a chequered history this project has suffered what with environmental issues, bad weather and the underlying rock structure of the tunnel.

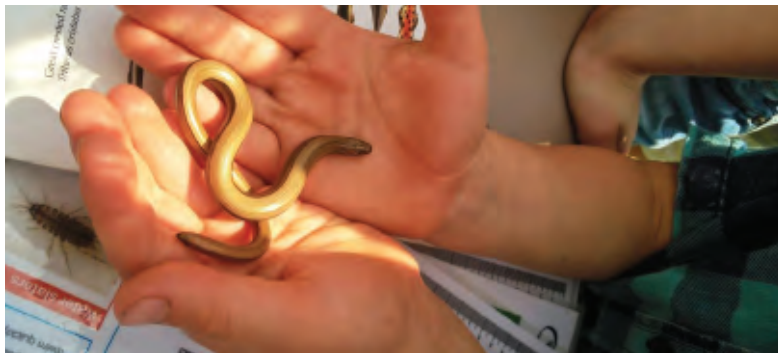
The footfall on the path through the meadow has reduced dramatically and the process now begins to return Slader's Leigh to how it was before the start of Bristol Water's huge improvement scheme. Regulations said we had to have an array of gates across the top of

The late and wet spring delayed the start of growth of everything from trees to flowers, but once the temperature rose for more than a couple of days at a time the change was explosive with a fantastic primrose and cowslip show followed by bluebells, windflowers and of course the garlic. It was even warm enough for a few branches of the Small Leaved Limes to carry flowers, most rare, we will see if they result in fertile seeds. *Picture left – garlic soup anyone?*

In May for the Naturally Healthy Month, together with the AONB we held a 'Wild Day Out' for families, as mentioned on page 6. Luckily the weather was great, warm and sunny, and everything



Right – making bug hotels in the shade of an oak tree. Below – the beautifully warm slow worm and flower printing and the pond



The Society badge maker was so popular we ran out of badges and there were some really cleverly designed creations – one in particular, by a Young Ranger showed good observation of the AONB logo.

As well as cold drinks we made nettle and garlic soup for visitors to try – most were pleasantly surprised by how nice it was; because it was such a lovely day and many picnics were enjoyed, it was quite late before we could pack the equipment and the tents away and leave the meadow to itself again. Ironically, the orchids bloomed – profusely – the very next week and people walking through stopped to marvel at the entire meadow covered from end to end with them – the best show we have ever seen.



Society Roundup

FROM THE EDITOR AND NEWS FROM MEMBERS

Thank you very much to those who have sent me reports on events, both gone and to come, and who have submitted planning comments for us, and of course – 'From the Chair'.

Firstly, Katie Lewis, our N.S. planning Scrutiniser gives us her round-up of matters pending of which we should be aware.

PLANNING MATTERS

Whilst we have been preoccupied with proposals for extensive new housing developments close to the boundary of the AONB other large-scale projects are also taking place. They are at different stages of the planning process and include new power generation and airport expansion proposals which will have impacts on this beautiful rural landscape.

Bristol Airport Expansion

Perhaps the most significant of these is the proposed expansion of Bristol Airport. Public consultation on its latest Master Plan and new document titled 'Your airport: your views. Towards 2050' runs until 6th July 2018 – see <https://www.bristolairportfuture.com>

Given the scale of the new built development it will be highly visible over a large area including the AONB.

The Mendip Society will be reviewing these documents and submitting comments and would like to hear from you if there are any specific issues you consider we should address. Please send to lasgarn@btinternet.com. The airport authority will be taking account of the comments it receives from this consultation exercise and undertaking further analysis and studies before producing the Draft Masterplan later this year. If you miss this deadline there will be another opportunity to comment on these proposals in late 2018/2019.

Wind Turbines on the Mendip Plateau

As members will know, the Mendip Society considers much more of the Mendip Hills deserves designation as an AONB than was accepted by the Countryside Commission in 1972. Part of the proposed extension area includes the Mendip plateau between Chewton Mendip, Shepton Mallet, Stratton on the Fosse and Leigh on Mendip, which is an extensive area of high ground from where there are stunning panoramic views. Unfortunately, this elevated, exposed landscape is also suitable for wind energy and several new turbines now operate across the area. The presence of new anemometers, which are used to test wind speeds and look like a scaled down version of the Mendip transmitting station near Priddy, indicate other sites for wind farms are being assessed.

At present, these wind energy developments comprise a single small (30-50 metres high) turbine, most of which are pale grey and blend into the landscape. However, there is very little planning guidance available from Mendip District Council regarding the number/height of turbines and the locations where they could be sited. Poorly sited wind turbines can have a significant impact on the landscape and can be particularly significant if they are too large for the receiving landscape, especially in this location where they will be very apparent.

Although it is accepted that renewable energy development is an appropriate means of mitigating climate change, its impact on the landscape and views, particularly in relation to AONBs, must be a deciding factor in the siting of wind turbines.

Fracking

Finally, fracking. CPRE are opposing the government's recently announced plans to streamline the process for fracking because of the potential environmental damage to our landscapes, loss of tranquillity in rural areas, and because it overrides local people's power to influence the process. Details at <http://www.cpre.org.uk/what-we-do/energy-and-waste/fracking>. The good news is that Somerset County Council does not have any current planning applications for exploration, technical appraisal or production of shale oil and gas but that could change. If you are concerned about the harm fracking will cause, it is well worth following CPRE's campaign.

ED – to lighten the situation somewhat – if you have access to the internet to raise a smile – do try this link <https://windfarmaction.wordpress.com/2014/05/07/the-wurzels-the-mendip-wind-farm-song/>

From the Chair

By Richard Frost

I recently spent a pleasant few days in the Yorkshire Dales and although it's a nice enough area, I feel I must contradict the claim of the Locals that it's "Gods Own Country", as we all know that title is reserved for The Mendips ! However, I must congratulate them on their dry stone walls, which are in abundance and put ours to shame. They are obviously a well maintained and useful working asset for the local farmers; I suspect that this may be due to the fact that they have more sheep than us.

Take a look at the Mendip Hills AONB logo and you will see on it, it has a very prominent stone wall. Our limestone hills would be a sad place if cheap barbed wire fencing replaces them to the detriment of an important visual feature and useful working tool.

The Society welcomes and would support any of the initiatives that are addressing this issue and hopes that local feeling will get behind them with positive action and not just words. As a step in the right direction we are holding a two day course in August with the expert help of Tina Bath, and hope this will appeal to some of our members to get stuck in. On a different note - how nice to see the reopening of the Shute Shelf Tunnel on the Strawberry Line; at the time of writing, I have not seen the work carried out by Bristol Water but I am aware of the many technical problems they have had to overcome to achieve these results; our Nature Reserve, Slader's Leigh runs adjacent to the Line and we are happy that we were able to provide the best route for the diversion during the long period of works.

Richard Frost



A visit to Gully Cave in Ebbor Gorge in July

To go with the notice of the forthcoming visit to Gully Cave, on page 4, in the progress of which we take great interest, the leader of the dig, Professor Danielle Schreve, sent in this report.

"The team from Royal Holloway University of London will be returning to Gully Cave in Ebbor Gorge in July 2018. Last summer's visit by the Mendip Society coincided with the discovery of a second, lower entrance to the cave, which the team had been searching for in the previous days. The sudden appearance of a small void that quickly expanded to become the top of a rock arch indicated the point of access for early humans and fauna (including spotted hyenas, brown bears and prey such as reindeer) between 40-50,000 years ago. The team came back last December for a couple of days to prepare the ground for excavations this year, which will focus on carefully excavating the upper deposits in the southern half of the cave and exploring more of the area in front of the new, lower entrance" We will see you all when you visit the excavations on Sunday 22nd July



The upper entrance is gated up for safety.

The lower, newly found entrance is now much larger showing the rock arch

A very muddy, but happy digging team this last December in Ebbor.



And lastly, hot off the press of Janet Hellier, (and just in the nick of time, Janet); she has sent a very pleasing account of our visit to Chancellor's Farm. (I had written a short item on page 3, just so there was something there, but this is much better reading – thanks Janet)

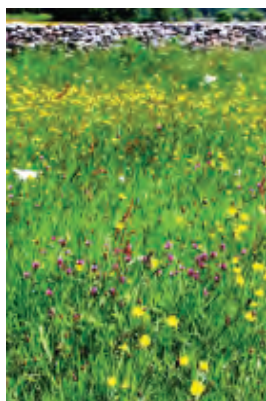
Special Interest Wild Flower Walk to Chancellors Farm, Priddy

Chancellors Farm is a 34.2 hectare SSSI just north of Priddy, adjacent to the Yoxter Military Range. Now managed by the Somerset Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve with restricted access, the farm presents a quintessential Mendip scene – a combination of old farm buildings, dry stone walls, old mining areas, traditional wildflower meadows and grazing cattle. The land is an unusual mixture of lime rich, neutral and acidic areas which consequently support a wide range of over 180 flowering species.

The focus of our visit, led by manager Kate Lawrence, were the virtually unimproved, undisturbed meadows. It was a glorious Mendip day and a privilege to tread carefully through the grasses, pignut, yellow rattle, birds foot trefoil, betony and purple and blue milkwort. Remnants of bluebells lay underfoot, rare outside their usual woodland habitat in Somerset. Common and heath spotted orchids flowered in abundance, sporting many hybrids though sadly, a treasure hunt for bee orchids proved fruitless.

To those of us normally frustrated by the block of MOD land devoid of Public Rights of Way, the visit provided an opportunity to enter normally prohibited territory. Permission was granted to enter and explore the rakes, spoil heaps and depressions, evidence of early lead mining.

As always, the sharing of knowledge by experts enriched our visit and once again I was reminded what a wonderful area this is. – Janet Hellier L to R – traditional wildflower meadow; part of the traditional management regime, Devon Reds; the old mining area, now the rifle range.



Four-legged reasons why we don't have enough homes

By Matt Ridley – reproduced from an article in *The Times*.

'Green bureaucrats cannot continue to use great crested newts, or bats, as a way of stopping useful development'

Natural England, the government body charged with protecting Britain's wildlife, is currently consulting on reforming the way protected species are rescued from the bulldozers. The rethink is focused on the great crested newt, the bane of developers everywhere, and it sensibly suggests giving the newts new ponds so their populations can expand, rather than the futile gesture of surveying, trapping, deporting and excluding them from development sites one by one.

This might seem a trivial tale to disturb you with but don't be fooled. Newts are big business and very, very controversial. There are about 1,200 licences issued each year to fence newts out of development sites and then trap those inside and remove them to safety, though they hate being moved and often don't survive. Such fencing and trapping directly cost business about £60million a year. The actual cost is much higher if you add in the delays that newts directly cause because a developer must trap newts on a development site for at least 30 days after the newt-exclusion fence goes in and then for 5 clear days of zero catches, which might take weeks or months to achieve.

Yet, in spite of this, Natural England is frequently taken to court both domestically and in Europe by people in the green movement who have too much money and not enough to do, for not being zealous enough in enforcing the law on newts. Greens see newts, precisely because they are so common, as a useful weapon to stop people engaging in economic activity. I tell you compared with newty politics, party politics is tame! Until recently, Natural England itself was split down the middle between the pragmatists and the dogmatists. Aided by new DNA technology, allowing ponds to be tested for newts before trapping, the pragmatists may now have the upper hand.

Great crested newts are common. You find them in every part of England, as well as much of Wales and Scotland. They inhabit Northern Europe as far east as the Urals, but are scarcer on the continent, which is where these things are decided. (Yes, we are being punished for success again.) In 1994 Britain implemented a European directive defining great crested newts as a "European protected species" (EPS), meaning that you can go to prison for 6 months for harming them. This means, because they are so widespread, that house builders and other developers go to great lengths to ensure that any newt living on or near their development is excluded or rescued so that it is not run over by a bulldozer.

Developers live in terror of breaking this rule. In one case in Milton Keynes, a householder incurred £1million in costs and a year's delay just to remove 150 newts from a site. There's a vigorous industry selling solutions to developers. These include fences lined with heavy plastic sheets partly buried in the ground to prevent newts entering sites. The fences can be miles in length and are often cruel barriers to the movement of wildlife. When lapwing mothers are calling plaintively to their babies that are stuck on the wrong side of a fence, you have to wonder if we have our priorities right. Lapwings are of much more urgent conservation concern than newts.

The incentives from this policy are perverse. One water company spent tens of thousands of pounds on newt fencing to keep newts out of a natural habitat. No wonder similar legislation is known in the United States as the "shoot, shovel and shut up" act. Nothing has done more to alienate business people from wildlife than this sort of newty-statism.

Suppose, Natural England says, that a minerals company wants to extend a quarry into what is now farmland, but the extension comes within 200 metres of a newt-infested pond. The pond will not be affected and the farmland is currently useless for newts, so what's the problem? Indeed, the quarry expansion will turn the farmland into something much more attractive to newts, with scattered ponds to breed in and heaps of rocks to hibernate in, so the newt population might rise despite the odd bulldozer accident. Yet if newts move in, the quarry owner faces a choice between going bust and going to jail. So he keeps them out.

Natural England suggests reducing the need to exclude and relocate newts so long as compensatory habitat is provided elsewhere; allowing that habitat to be built off site rather than immediately nearby, allowing newts to use temporary habitats on site that will be developed at a later date, and reducing the cost of and the need for surveys for newts and other EPSs. All very sensible ideas.

Newts are to be the pioneers.

Ed: There are pictures of newts elsewhere in this newsletter so here is a picture of one habitat of which they are particularly fond -, the restored ponds of Mendip. This is one of those included in the recent 'Mendip Ponds Project' - the walls rebuilt as with the original lime mortar for the most part by Tina Bath. For our stone walls building days see page 5.



News from the Hills

*From Jim Hardcastle
Manager of the Mendip Hills Unit*

We said goodbye to Andy Mallender, our Project Development Officer, in July.



Andy has been with the AONB unit for 9 years and has worked especially well with the Mendip Society over the years. He has left to start up his own gardening business which has been a dream of his. At the time of writing, the recruitment process has been started and we look to appoint as soon as possible. A key role for the new Development Officer will be to look at how we support our existing volunteers better and make more opportunities for people to help out. This will tie in with the expansion of our Volunteer Coordinator role to be a full time post instead of just the two days at present.

We have exciting plans to run practical tasks at weekends, double the number of volunteer rangers, have an intake of Young Rangers every year and create a 'Mendip Shed'. This will be a new workshop big enough for groups to work indoors on projects like building owl boxes during the winter months, but also for volunteers to use as a base and drop in centre. This model has been successfully run elsewhere in particular to help create a sense of community and combat loneliness.

The Mendip Hills Fund is open for applications during September and October. We welcome applications from groups across the area, right over to Frome, for projects that will improve the environment or help the community. Full details can be found here <http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/caring-about-the-aonb/mendip-hills-fund/>



Andy Mallender (left) with the Young Rangers having a taste of walling at Deer Leap, Priddy

A President's View



Dear all,

Half the year gone already but with plenty more good weather to come, I hope! As always the Mendip Society programme is packed full with activities, so I hope you are finding time to enjoy some of them. Life is however a very busy place, and there seems no sign of it letting up at the moment. All the more important to grab some 'you time' when you can to relax and enjoy.

Not only is the programme full, but this edition of the Society's newsletter is pretty busy as well. Updates on the reserves and what has been going on there, as well as the walks and talks. I found it very interesting when I attended a recent talk in Winscombe about wild big cats...." Yes they are there but won't be interested in us", was quite reassuring!

Looking ahead, Mendip Rocks will be taking place this Summer and Autumn. Yet again the Society will be playing a lead role, working with the AONB and the Earth Science Centre in the organisation and delivery of this very popular hardy annual. All this takes time and effort, so I would as always like to thank the management committee for the huge amount of time and effort they expend, in order for us to enjoy the results.

Oh, and by the way – that time when you can 'relax and enjoy, 'what better occasion than the Summer Social, which this year is on Tuesday August 21st, when we are returning to the Charterhouse Centre. Have a great summer!

As ever, with kind regards – Les

Note from the Editor: - Les will not blow his own trumpet, so it's left for me to tell members that for continued service to the community he was invited to

Prince Charles' 70th birthday in Buckingham Palace gardens. I have the photo to prove it. Nice one Mr President.



INTRODUCING OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS

Editor's Notes – I hope you enjoy reading the newsletter, which this time seems to be all about ourselves and what we are doing. I am very aware that we, in fact, should be more aware of what is going on in the wider area of the Mendips and what we should be doing about that. I think that maybe your editor has got into a bit of a rut after three years and that it would do us good to have another's perspective on the Society and life on the Mendip Hills. What we need is a kind volunteer who would love to have a shot at writing the next newsletter as a 'guest editor' and if they get the bug, to settle down for a year or so in their own style of editing. Lots of help available if wanted, plus a supply of pictures and contacts. If you are interested at all please talk to me via the details at the bottom of the page.

NEXT ISSUE IS DUE ON 1ST NOVEMBER 2018



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Wookey Hole Resort is now the leading destination for short-breaks and days out in Somerset and the South West. Bringing in over 200,000 visitors per year to the caves alone, Wookey Hole has become a mecca for families seeking adventure and fun, couples seeking relaxation and breath-taking scenery and groups wanting a base to explore the area. Rich in footpaths and cycle routes, the Mendip Hills offers something for everyone. The Wookey Hole Hotel provides a comfortable night's stay for visitors wishing to explore the caves and attractions, as well as taking in the beautiful countryside, offering secure storage for bikes and welcoming walkers with muddy boots!

Also on site are luxury lodges with bubbling hot tubs and The Bistro dining experience with homemade specials and family favourites. Local ales and a desirable wine list provide the perfect accompaniment. We welcome one and all to come and enjoy some down-time in our sleepy village that is secretly packed with adventure!



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