

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Spring 2019



Part time assistant appointed

Earlier in the year we went through a recruiting process to find a part-time assistant to help with the running of our sites. We were overwhelmed by the standard of applicants and are delighted to say that we have been joined by Ben Rees, working Thursday and Friday mornings. Ben's role will include general site maintenance, carrying out surveys and writing management plans as well as helping in the office.

Pruning and hedge laying workshops

As part of our 20th Anniversary we have held two workshops funded by Severn Waste Services through the Landfill Communities Fund. A pruning workshop was held in January in Stocken Orchard, our ten-acre cider apple orchard near Pershore. Participants were able to have a go themselves after local orchard consultant John Edgeley showed them how and why to do it. The day proved very successful with people feeling more confident about pruning their own trees and some have become volunteers for VLHT.



Learning the art of pruning

In February we held a hedge-laying workshop at North Littleton Community Orchard. This gave people hands on experience of this traditional way of managing a hedge.

The hedge-laying training was carried out by Paul Simmons of Willowcraft & Woodland whilst he was laying our 150metre roadside hedge (assisted by Mike Dunning). Hedges were originally laid to keep livestock in (or out of) a site, and Hawthorn was the most popular species as it provided a thick, spiky barrier which is almost impenetrable. This hedge was almost entirely Hawthorn with just a couple of Ash trees and Field Maples which had self-set in the line. To thicken up the hedge and to increase the diversity of species, our volunteers planted 300 young hedging plants behind the newly laid hedge. These included Field Maple, Guelder Rose, Spindle and Cherry Plum which will provide nectar, seeds and berries for wildlife.



Learning the art of hedgelaying



Many of our projects are funded by Severn Waste Services through the Landfill Communities Fund. Without SWS, VLHT could not own, or protect, anywhere near as many acres.



Planting hedging whips at NLCO

Stocken's fickle Frog

Over the last few years a frog has insisted on laying its spawn in a small amount of water in a wheel rut in Stocken Orchard. This gets left high and dry as the rut dries out. Being fed up with having to translocate the spawn or tadpoles to a nearby pond every year we decided to dig a shallow spawning pond in the Frog's chosen spot. We added some deadwood piles for the amphibians to shelter under when they emerge and we planted some nectar giving shrubs around the edge for the orchard pollinators. Creating this really nice habitat on the edge of the orchard we thought would be a much better spawning site. Needless to say, this year the Frog did not return!



Scratching posts for sheep and pollinators

In an attempt to reduce any damage to our new trees at North Littleton Community Orchard we introduced some sheep scratching posts made re-using old pallets. It is hoped that the sheep will use these rather than scratching on the plastic tree guards which occasionally results in the guards opening up and the trees getting eaten. To make extra use of the scratching posts we filled them with deadwood from Naunton Orchard. A huge number of pollinating insects need deadwood for their larvae to live in or live under, so this will hopefully build up the pollinators ready for when our young orchard starts to produce blossom.



Stocken apple trees and mistletoe

We have carried out a lot of work restoring Stocken Orchard since its purchase in October 2014. This has included the removal of trees to create four sections and to open areas up for grassland wildflowers and pollinators. This spring our volunteers counted the trees in each section and also noted any Mistletoe that was present. They found there to be 1,339 trees in the managed orchard and a row of about 50 unmanaged trees adjacent to the Public Right of Way. They also noted 22 gaps where new trees can be planted. In spring 2016 we counted 3 small Mistletoe plants in the whole orchard. This year (2019) we counted 21 trees with Mistletoe (one of which had 6 plants growing in it). This gives us an excellent starting point to be able to monitor the spread of this fascinating but sometimes troublesome plant, allowing us to make an informed decision about any need to manage it.

Meadows partnership

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has restarted a meadows partnership in the county. This brings together meadow owners and managers to share knowledge, experiences and local seed. Identifying the best 'donor' meadows where seed (or green hay) can be gathered and 'receptor' meadows where it can be spread, will allow the use of local seed to recreate or enhance local meadows. This will help to safeguard this special but rapidly declining habitat in Worcestershire. VLHT have joined the group to enhance some of our sites, bringing them up to a standard where we can become donors in the future. It is very encouraging to see so many people from differing backgrounds joining the group. We now have conservation charities, local authorities, single-meadow owners and large-scale farmers all working together to conserve our marvellous meadows.

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust (VLHT) is a registered charity, number 1080109. We work to protect and preserve the environment in and around the Vale of Evesham and Pershore. We work with volunteers, funders, farmers and the government to secure the future of, so far, just over 300 acres.

Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan

VLHT have been working with partners to feed into the new Plans to guide the restoration of the county's wildlife and wild places. The following information is available at Worcestershire County Council's web site:

http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20252/environmental_policy/1155/biodiversity_action_plan

In common with the rest of the UK, and indeed the planet, Worcestershire has suffered huge losses of natural habitats and species. The 2018-2027 Worcestershire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) identifies 17 habitats and 26 species, or species groups, which are of particular conservation priority in the county. The Worcestershire Biodiversity Partnership is an association of local government, statutory, voluntary and public bodies committed to working together to deliver the BAP.

Each individual Action Plan gives an overview of the current status of the habitat or species in Worcestershire, identifies threats to it and current areas of work or activity being undertaken by partners. The plan then presents aims and objectives for the conservation of that habitat or species over the ten-year lifespan of the BAP.

Amongst the many plans which concern VLHT we have one of the very few colonies of Grizzled Skipper butterflies remaining in the county. We have agreed to monitor and manage habitat specifically for this endearing little butterfly and are looking for volunteers to help with this. If you would like to get involved, please get in touch with Gary at the VLHT office.

Farmland bird feeding

Through the winter we continued to feed a small flock of farmland birds. The winter and early-spring feeding help birds through a period when natural seed is hard to find. This year we were really pleased to be joined by a group of RSPB members who worked on a rota to make sure our feathered guests didn't go hungry. The feeding will continue to the end of April by which time the birds should have dispersed to their breeding territories. We are also now working with trained bird-ringers to catch and fit leg-rings to some of the birds to see if we can find out where they are breeding. We are now looking forward to the spring and hearing the beautiful aerial song of Skylarks and the "little bit of bread and no cheeese" from the Yellowhammers knowing that we have helped them through the winter months.

A Pear Mystery

Wade Muggleton

An ancient pear found in Worcestershire has been the subject of some conjecture and confusion. The pear which looks like a Perry pear originates locally at least, from an ancient tree in Jennet Tree Lane, Callow End, near Worcester, though specimens have been found elsewhere, notably in Wales. Perry pears are difficult to identify and it was thought it might be another name for a Welsh Perry pear variety called Welsh Gin. As such the Welsh Cider & Perry Society grafted up some for their museum orchards across Wales. But before they could be planted the DNA results showed it was not a match with Welsh Gin, so after all was not a Welsh variety. The young trees in the nursery were offered to The Three Counties Orchard Project, and we took delivery of 15 young trees. Four have been donated to VLHT for our collection orchards at our Naunton Beauchamp orchard and at North Littleton Community Orchard. Two have gone back to an orchard in Jennet Tree Lane, 2 have gone to the Glos Orchards Trust, and 3 to Colwall Orchard Group, thus spreading them around. Whilst the DNA did not match Welsh Gin it did not match any other pear variety ever DNA'd either so remains a mystery.



It was given the working name Jennet Pear by TCTOP, but bizarrely this has led to considerable potential confusion as there are Gennet Pears which are a type of early ripening pear of which Jennet is not one, a strange coincidence. Whilst it would not be allowed to be accredited with the name Jennet due to the Gennet, if no further matches or information is forthcoming it may have to be given a new name entirely.

Restoring North Littleton's hovels

Nina O'Hare, Community Project Officer, Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service

Last summer, we shared plans with you for a project to record, preserve and share the unique market gardening heritage of the Vale. We're delighted to say that the two-year project was awarded funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic England, and is now up and running. Between last autumn and summer 2020, the Market Gardening Heritage project will record the buildings and people who made the Vale, through a survey of surviving market gardening buildings, restoration of three as heritage sites and oral history interviews.

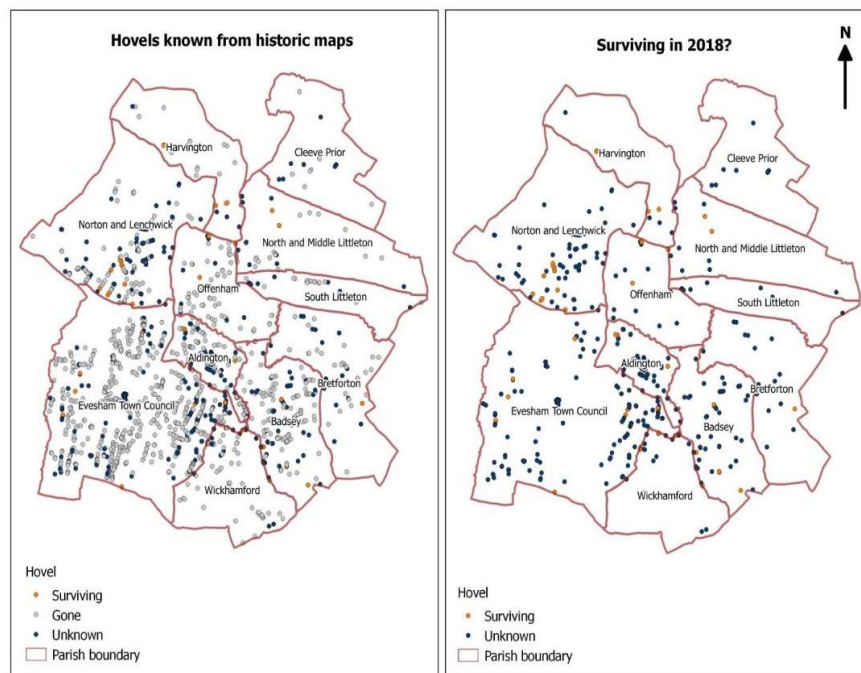


Reminders of the Vale of Evesham's market gardening past, which employed much of the local population until the mid-20th century, can be found all over the region; including within the VLHT orchard at North Littleton. This area was formerly market gardening grounds, used to grow a wide variety of vegetables, fruit and herbs that were sold up and down the country. In order to provide shelter and



somewhere to store tools, growers built themselves a small building (locally known as a hovel). Two survive within the North Littleton orchard – one small, simple structure of corrugated iron and a larger wooden construction with lean to toilet. Over the spring and summer, they will be physically restored and their history researched for inclusion on interpretation panels.

As well as restoring the hovels, a survey is underway to create a permanent record of those that survive within Evesham and ten surrounding parishes. A map search revealed that around 1300 hovels were built in the area, of which at least 70% have gone and the survival of another 25% is in doubt. A wonderful group of volunteers are compiling a detailed photographic and written survey of those that remain. This information will be accessible to the public in the Historic Environment Record for Worcestershire (based at The Hive).



A FEW DATES FOR YOUR DIARY.

Hovels Project

Over the spring and summer, walks, drop-in events and open days are being held to share and celebrate the region's market gardening heritage. We're keen to hear from anyone who owns a hovel within the survey area or is happy to share their memories, so that personal stories and recollections can be preserved for future generations. Anyone can take part, you don't need to have been a grower – just come along to one of our drop-in events.

Badsey Walk – Sat 27th April, 1-4pm

3.4-mile circular walk, free (booking required)

Explore the historic heart of market gardening within the Vale. Along the way, we'll see several 'hovels' – unique structures built by market gardeners – and take a look at the area through the eyes of children in the 1930s, before going back in time to the villages' medieval origins and local prehistoric settlements.

Pensham Walk – Thurs 30th May, 1-4pm

3.5-mile circular walk, free (booking required)

Starting from Pershore Bridge, we will explore the medieval settlement of Pensham to discover how the lives of villagers and their relationship with the land changed over time, from 17th century tobacco growing to the rise of market gardening and future of horticulture at the neighbouring Pershore College.

Market gardening memories – Sat 6th July, 11-2

Evesham Town Hall, drop-in event

Bring along photographs and memories to share, or drop in to find out more about the industry that shaped the Vale's landscape and history throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

For full events list, further details or to be added to the project mailing list, contact Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service, directly via explorethepast@worcestershire.gov.uk or phone 01905 766352.

Tiddesley Wood Open Day Sunday May 5th

This **Worcestershire Wildlife Trust** event is a great day out for families. VLHT will open Stocken Orchard next to the woodland where there will be horse-logging demonstrations and we'll have some cider and honey produced from our orchard for sale. For more details go to -

<https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/events/2019/05/05/tiddesley-wood-open-day?instance=0>

VLHT Events

Hipton Hill open days Friday 14th and Saturday 15th June (times to be confirmed).

As part of our 20th Anniversary celebrations we will open Hipton Hill orchard for two days in June - This will be instead of our popular evening walks and will give visitors more time to enjoy the wildflowers and butterflies, as well as the wonderful views. **Contact VLHT.**

Littleton Pastures Saturday 6th July

As part of **Evesham's Inaugural Walking Festival** and to tie in with **National Meadows Day** we will be leading a walk around our lovely ridge and furrow site at South/Middle Littleton.

Starting from The Littletons Village Hall, School Lane, Middle Littleton WR11 8JH

Map grid reference: SP 077 469

Approximate finish time: 3.15 p.m.

A guided walk and talk, looking at traditional meadow management with members of Vale Landscape Heritage Trust (VLHT). **Contact Evesham Rambling Club** at <https://eveshamramblingclub.org.uk/walkfest-2/> or **01386 443234**

Birds of Lower Moor and Haines Meadows January to March 2019

Rob Prudden

For the second year running the winter period was generally mild with very little rain. With no flooding on the river meadows, wildfowl numbers remained static throughout the period with up to 145 **Teal**, 10 **Shoveler**, 43 **Wigeon** and 14 **Gadwall**. A male **Red Crested Pochard** was more unusual and unexpected just for the day on 1st January.

Up to 250 **Lapwings** and 75 **Golden Plovers** fed on nearby arable land and visited the river flash daily to wash and brush up. Although **Snipe** numbers remain low, birds were present throughout the period, but never numbered more than twenty. It's difficult to imagine that in the 1980s up to 200 would regularly be seen around the river meadows.

Woodcock are similar in appearance but are secretive dwellers of dense woodland during the summer months, moving to more open areas with scrubby copses in the winter period. During this period UK breeding birds are joined by large numbers that arrive from Scandinavia and Northern Europe. Unusually this year, four birds were located and seen regularly on site as they ventured out at dusk from their daytime roosting areas to feed on nearby arable land before returning at dawn.

Barn Owls are deemed to be birds of the night and are not normally seen before dusk. This year during late January and February birds were seen regularly hunting throughout daylight hours on numerous occasions, even on bright sunny days. The first two months of the year are difficult times for Owls as small rodent numbers are at their lowest, while worms and other invertebrates are hidden away either well below ground or in deep cover, inclement weather also hampers hunting, many birds succumb at this time. Other Owls included a very confiding **Tawny Owl** regularly seen on the edge of a small copse at Haines meadows, while a **Little Owl** was heard calling and then seen nearby in late March.

By late February it became apparent a pair of **Ravens** were nesting alongside the site and were seen noisily attacking any large birds deemed to be a threat as they overflew their territory.

On 23rd January a female **Merlin** dashed through over the flash field and across the river to Wick, panicking and scattering feeding Finch flocks in every direction, a ploy used on many occasions. An adult male **Peregrine** was seen on 11th January, then a juvenile male on 1st March.



Stonechat

A pair of wintering **Stonechats** were resident throughout the period, while Up to 7 **Chiffchaffs** were present around the small reedbed alongside the anglers' carpark.

A single **Shelduck** was back on the very early date of 2nd January and was then joined by a mate from 20th, similarly an early **Oystercatcher** was present on 6th February then joined by a mate on 20th. A male **Curlew** on 26th February was followed by 3 males together on 27th, these were all presumed to be northerly bound passage migrants, but a male on 2nd March was then faithful to the site and had paired up by 22nd, the pair were still present at the end of March. The first **Swallows**, **Sand Martins** and a single **House Martin** were back by 31st March.

Five **Roe Deer** were seen regularly, while an **Otter** was seen feasting on a large fish on the island alongside the river at Wick. First signs of real spring came with **Frogs** spawning in the temporary pools on the meadows from 22nd February.



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