

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Autumn 2022



Events round up

It was wonderful to see the Pershore Plum Festival back to full strength back in the summer. It is such an important event for us, giving us chance to sell plums and promote our work. It started back at the end of July when we sold Black Prince plums at the Plum Festival Races at Worcester Racecourse, and then there were plum sales each Saturday with various plum varieties on sale including Czar, Victoria, Purple Pershore and Yellow Egg, leading up to the Bank Holiday weekend at the end of August. The main event on Bank Holiday Monday was very busy but plums are ripening earlier every year and our Victorias were all over-ripe by then. We still managed to bring a selection to sell including Warwickshire Drooper and Belle de Louvain.

The whole event was a great success and congratulations must go to the small, enthusiastic Plum Festival committee for all their hard work (and it is a *lot* of hard work). If you fancy getting involved to support next year's Plum Festival get in touch with the committee: <http://www.pershoreplumfestival.org.uk/contact.html>.

During August we also attended the wonderful Battle of Evesham Medieval Festival. This was the first time we have been at this very popular event and so we were able to reach a new audience and promote the work of VLHT, and sell some Stocken Orchard cider. At the end of September we found ourselves spending three very pleasant days in the Orchard Pavilion at the Malvern Autumn Show. We took along information and a display of about 80 different apple varieties to highlight the huge variety that there is and yet retail shops stock just two or three different kinds. Apple varieties from Worcester Pearmain to the Bloody Ploughman, Cats-head to Winter Banana attracted many people to talk about fruit and orchards. And to cap things off nicely our bottled apple juice won third place in the show's juice competition.



Our award-winning apple juice at the Malvern Autumn Show

We could not have attended these events without the help of our amazing volunteers. Thank you All.



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 special places in the beautiful Vale.



Littleton Pastures

We have been busy at Littleton Pastures this autumn. After such a dry summer our volunteers were able to get into the Littleton Brook to clear debris. The branches and vegetation build up next to our bridge, blocking the brook so it is important that we keep it clear, and it was a good job done just in time as the brook soon filled up with the autumn rains.



Bridge blocked by debris



Volunteers clearing the debris

Volunteers have also been busy clearing the permissive path around the ridge and furrow field to encourage dog walkers to walk around the outside rather than through the field, especially when sheep are grazing. Ben has also been cutting back the bramble that has grown very rapidly in recent years. This permissive path has had problems with flooding over the years and we thought we had solved this when we had drainage pipes installed to reconnect the underground spring with the pond and ditch. For a couple of years this worked very well, keeping the path dry while providing habitat for frogs and aquatic invertebrates. Unfortunately, underground springs have a mind of their own and the path is getting very wet again, so we are waiting for specialists to come back to sort this out.

In the far corner of the site we planted some native trees and shrubs a few years back with the help of local school children. This area is now establishing nicely so volunteers have been helping with mowing some of the grass and coppicing some of the mature Blackthorn to increase the habitat diversity. This work will hopefully improve the site for nesting birds. Wildflower seed has been spread in a few patches to provide more food for pollinators.

And now the bad news

It's not all good news, we have had an increase in the number of gates being smashed down by vehicles. For some reason several of our gates, particularly around the Littletons have been destroyed in this way in recent years. Each time this happens it costs between £300 and £500 to replace, and this soon adds up (six gates in the past two). Our time and money could be spent doing far more productive things.



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, over 320 acres.

Fire at Hipton

Back in the hot, dry summer (now just a distant memory) there was a constant worry of grass fires, especially while we were mowing with the tractor. This meant that some areas didn't get cut and others took a lot longer to do to avoid overheating the cutters and starting fires. Unfortunately, our efforts were undone when someone decided to start a fire at our orchard at Hipton Hill. We are very grateful to our neighbours who spotted the smoke straight away and contacted the emergency services, who in turn responded immediately so the damage was kept to a minimum.

Evesham Abbey Trust

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust was set up as a distributing body for Severn Waste Services' (SWS) Landfill Communities Fund (LCF) monies. So part of our role is to administer funds for some projects run by other organisations. One such project is the Evesham Abbey conservation project run by the Evesham Abbey Trust. This ambitious scheme aims to preserve what remains of the abbey and its archaeology, involve and educate the local community and create a series of gardens to represent different areas of the historic abbey. Funding for most of this work has come through the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage, along with individual contributions. Through the LCF, SWS are funding an area known as the cloister garden, so we have been keeping an eye on this exciting project. When completed the gardens will be open to the public. Both the physical works and education and engagement work carried out so far has been very impressive. If you want to get involved in some way get in touch with Trust Chair, Barrie Baldelli, telephone 01386 442910. Lots more information can be found on the Evesham Abbey Trust's website:

<https://www.eveshamabbey.org.uk/Project.html>

Valley volunteers

We are always keen to promote local conservation initiatives and The Valley on the edge of Evesham is looking to set up a group to "support the conservation of local wildlife sanctuaries, meet new people and develop new skills" to look after its beautiful old orchards. Please note this is not a VLHT event so if you are interested in joining, or for more information, please contact The Valley directly: admin@thevalleyshopping.co.uk.

Wildflower seed

This year we decided to step up our attempts to increase the number of wildflowers in our meadows. Various surveys have shown that many meadow species are missing from our sites and after many years of getting the management right we felt it was time to give the wildflowers a helping hand.

We had collected a large amount of Yellow Rattle seed from Littleton Pastures and we were able to buy Lady's Bedstraw, Knapweed, Meadowsweet, Cowslip, Great Burnet and a few other species that would have been found in the floodplain meadows in the past, thanks to funds from Severn Waste Services. Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) also kindly donated harvested seed from one of their special meadows.

Preparation involved mowing areas, raking of the cut grasses, raking in the seed and running the mower over again to help shake the seed to the ground and press it in. To help with sowing larger areas, we purchased a small chain-harrow to drag behind the Land Rover. This helped to open up the sward, exposing some bare ground giving the seed a better chance of establishing. Lots of factors will affect the rate of success and it is a waiting game now to see if the seeds will germinate and grow. Seeds will be eaten by many things from insects to mice to birds; some seeds will not germinate unless we get frosts during the winter; a warm, damp spring could mean that the grasses grow quickly and out compete the new seedlings; a hot dry summer could kill the seedlings before they get chance to put down deep roots. It will take a year or two at least before we know if this has been successful, so fingers crossed.



New woodlouse update

I reported in our previous newsletter about a species of woodlouse that I found at Haines Meadows. I got more excited than most people I have to confess but I can now confirm that this little purple Isopod is actually a new species for the UK !! It doesn't have an English name but goes by the scientific name of *Hyloniscus riparius* and is known from eastern and central Europe but has been expanding its range across Europe in recent years. This woodlouse has also been accidentally introduced into the USA. According to the iNaturalist website, *Hyloniscus riparius* is strongly associated with flood plains and can tolerate periods of up to eight weeks submerged under water. But how did they find their way to the floodplains of Worcestershire?

Tree Ogham



Ogham
Holly



Ogham
Mistletoe



Ogham
Travellers' Joy



Ogham
Yew



Ogham
Spindle



Ogham
Blackthorn

The Tree Ogham (pronounced Oh-Am) has its roots (no pun intended) in Celtic traditions from centuries gone by, and is steeped in myth and magic with links to the Druids. It is a tree alphabet and different sources illustrate this with differing numbers (and species) of woody plants. It is also a really nice way to learn about trees and other woody plants; their growth, their uses, their place in folklore, and their identification. My chosen source of wisdom is a little book simply titled "The Tree Ogham" by Glennie Kindred, but book shops and the internet are full of references.

I started making a collection following the book but soon found that this includes species not really found in these parts such as Gorse, Fir, Holly and Heather. So I collected local species including Spindle, Wayfaring Tree, the scrambling Traveller's Joy, Pear and Plum. Although these may not have their own recognised Ogham symbols it made more sense to have a more complete picture of the local woody community.

Making a collection is fairly simple: First find a tree or shrub and "get to know it": How does it grow, where does it grow, when does it flower and come to leaf, when does it drop its leaves (if at all), what is the bark like? When you have identified the species, you should then "ask" the tree if you can take a cutting (I don't often get an answer!), and then cut a piece the size and length you wish. If you are lucky to have trees in your garden or place of work then that's ideal, or a local accessible woodland or area of scrubland will do, but ideally somewhere you visit regularly so you really know the place where the cutting comes from.

The size of your cuttings will be dictated by the type and age of the tree and where you get it from. But it's best to stick with something the size of your little finger so you can cut it with a small pair of secateurs, rather than roaming the countryside with loppers and a bowsaw! Taking cuttings between 6" and 8" in length (that's 15cm to 20cm in new money) should be plenty long enough. You then need a sharp knife and a steady hand (and a sturdy glove to protect your fingers if you are not used to using tools) to scape a third to half the length

of the cutting to remove the bark. If your chosen species has its own Ogham symbol you can scribe this into the exposed pale wood.

Some don'ts: Don't use cuttings from a felled tree, as taking the cutting from such a violent act will not be good if collecting for the spiritual side of the Ogham. An exception to this could be coppiced Hazel, where the work has been done to encourage new, healthy growth. Don't cut the growing tip from a young tree. Don't cut specimens from a private garden without permission. It doesn't take long to build up a collection of neat woody cuttings. What you choose to do with them then is up to you but you will have learned quite a lot about your local trees and shrubs while collecting. Enjoy.

Pallet Guards

Wade Muggleton

One of the great challenges with grazing orchards is the never-ending battle with the sheep to get some good grassland management of the orchard sward, but not have them eat the trees, as yes sheep find apple trees in particular utterly irresistible. There are a range of guarding options like weld mesh, plastic mega mesh, etc. All have a cost and a resource implication, so in times of austerity it's also perhaps a time for innovation. I give you the pallet guard. Cost virtually nothing and just requires 4 non-returnable pallets and bit of trimming with a jig saw and a few screws or bolts. I think they are actually attractive and work well on trees that branch too low down to accommodate a tall weld mesh or mega mesh tube. The pointed picket fence look makes for an eye-catching tree guard whilst keeping the pesky sheep at bay, well so far.



Orchard tree guards – Left: Pallets. Middle: Weld-mesh. Right: Plastic Mega-mesh.

DNA reveals yet more pear mysteries

Wade Muggleton

DNA testing is still throwing up the odd ancient pear that seems to have no match, suggesting it could be one of the many hundreds of varieties recorded in the past, but seemingly unknown today. One such pear was found in Upper Rochford, Worcestershire that proved to be only the second record ever, matching a previously unknown pear from Weston Park in Shropshire, submitted in 1958 and held in the national fruit collection at Brogdale.

In autumn 2020 when visiting a farm in Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire, several large old pear trees that could not be identified were sent for DNA testing and low and behold two of them matched the Rochford / Weston Park trees. So, from only a single record from back in 1958, we now have 3 other trees that DNA match it, one in upper Rochford and a pair of trees in Chaddesley Corbett.



The Rochford Pear is a DNA match for the (2019111) Chaddesley Pears, which in turn match a 1958 record from Weston Park, the only four known records of the mystery pear.

This is enough evidence to categorically state that it is a 'variety', most likely one of the Warden types, those hard cooking pears, but as to actually which one of the many historically lost Wardens, it is hard to say; there simply isn't enough available information to go on.

Among the missing are Parkinson's Warden, Godbault's Warden, the Bell Pear, the Red and White Wardens, the Canterbury Pear and the French and Spanish Wardens, to name but a few, but which, if any of them it is, we will likely never know.

As it does not match anything known today, we have the opportunity now to accredit it and give it a name of our choosing, something I am reluctant to do, for I would much prefer that it is one of the historical pears, but that sadly seems it maybe a piece of evidence too far.

Waitrose funding

We were delighted when the Community Matters Team from Waitrose, Evesham contacted us recently to confirm that they were donating £600 towards our work in our old orchards. Donations like this help us to continue to manage our sites, keeping some of the Vale's very special heritage alive. We are hoping to arrange to plant trees with the Waitrose team early in 2023. Thank You!

Legacy

Please consider leaving a Gift in your Will to Vale Landscape Heritage Trust. Leaving a Legacy will help us ensure that the heritage sites we own will be there so future generations can benefit from a flourishing and diverse landscape. No matter how big or small, every single Gift counts. As a small charity, even a small Gift can make a large, positive impact. All Gifts will be used to directly support the work of the Trust, from the acquisition of more special places in the Vale to funding the work required for the care of these precious places, and the purchase of the tools and equipment that make it possible. We are lucky to have lived through a time where the local landscape was dominated by orchards and flower-rich meadows, help us save a small part of that for generations to come. If you wish to leave us a Gift in your Will, all you need to do is instruct your solicitor or professional Will writer to include us, and they will do the rest.

They will need:

Full name: Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Registered Charity Number: 1080109

Our address is at the bottom of this newsletter. Thank You.

Bird Records from Lower Moor and Haines Meadows July to October 2022

Rob Prudden

With weeks of continuous hot, dry weather throughout July & August the normally wet River Flash remained empty, hence most wetland species deserted the site. **Lapwings** remained faithful with c175 loafing & roosting on the dry mud most days, then flying off each evening to feed overnight wherever damp conditions could be found. Numbers rose slowly to a peak of 260 in late September. The local breeding **Oystercatchers** were still present with 3 fledged juveniles from 1st – 12th July, one of the youngsters then remained alone until 16th. A pair of **Common Terns** were fishing along the river on several dates at the beginning of June.

A male **Cuckoo** continued to sing till 4th July while a fledged juvenile was present on 26th & 27th, this was the first youngster recorded on site for several years. A juvenile **Shelduck** was present from 25th July until 4th August. The first real sign of the changing season came with an early returning **Snipe** on 28th July, numbers then rose to around 20 by mid-September. Wintering wildfowl started to arrive in August with the first 2 **Teal** on 24th with c60 by mid-October. Four **Wigeon** arrived overnight on 12th September followed by 3 **Shoveler** on 28th. An unusually early returning **Water Rail** was squealing loudly from a reedbed alongside the Lench Ditch on 30th August.

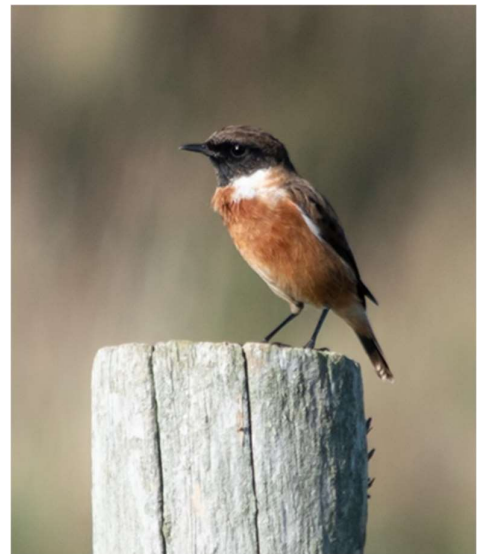
Although passage wading birds were scarce, there were highlights, these included 9 **Green Sandpipers**, 7 **Black-tailed Godwits**, 2 **Common Sandpipers**, 4 **Dunlin** and a **Greenshank**. A **Wood Sandpiper** was present on the evening of 26th August, being seen to leave into low, early morning mist at dawn on 27th after being flushed

by the mass exodus of c250 **Greylag Geese** noisily leaving their overnight roost. **Little Egrets** were present on six dates while a juvenile **Mediterranean Gull** dropped in very briefly mid-morning on 16th September. **Sparrowhawks** and **Kestrels** successfully bred locally hence juveniles of both species were regularly seen hunting over the meadows during July and August. **Red Kites** are now a relatively common sight in the county with large numbers congregating around Bredon Hill to roost each evening. Birds then leave each morning to roam over large areas in search of food, single birds were seen over the meadows at Lower Moor on 10 dates.

Barn Owls were hunting over rough grassland at dusk or dawn on 5 dates. A **Peregrine** Drifted over the meadows on 29th October. **Yellow Wagtails** were scarce during the mid-summer period with the only record a single female seen from 15th to 18th July. Autumn passage birds then started to arrive from mid-August and collected daily around the cattle from 22nd, numbers peaked at 18 from 28th August until 14th September, a pair of **Grey Wagtails** also joined the group on several occasions. **Redstarts** were scarce this year with only 3 birds located. Single passage **Whinchats** were typically noted on field margin fenceposts on 2nd August and 17th September. Passage warbler numbers were generally poor, although damp grey conditions from 7th to 9th August were favourable with 20+ Chiffchaffs feeding in river meadow hedges, also present were small numbers of **Blackcaps**, **Common Whitethroats**, **Lesser Whitethroats** and **Willow Warblers**.

A much scarcer **Cetti's Warbler** was churring alongside the Lench Ditch near the carpark on 21st and 23rd September. Without doubt the highlight of the period came on 21st September when a smart, juvenile **Curlew Sandpiper** spent the day feeding around the fast-receding River Flash alongside 20 Snipe, but it could not be relocated at dawn next morning. Curlew Sandpipers breed on tundra in Arctic Siberia, wintering in sub-Saharan Africa. Migration involves many thousands of miles and occurs on a wide front throughout mainland Europe. With the UK being on the western fringe of their passage they tend to be scarce most years, although when persistent easterlies prevail, birds may be widespread, but never in large numbers.

A juvenile **Ruff** dropped in late afternoon on 23rd September and was still present next morning. Pairs of **Stonechats** were feeding from riverside fenceposts on 24th September & 31st October. Winter thrushes had started to arrive by the first week of October, with small numbers of **Redwings** feeding in the hedgerows from 3rd. After 36 hours of easterlies from 16th huge numbers of migrants were picked up on radar over The Netherlands heading out to sea, the results of this were apparent early morning on 19th when large numbers of **Redwings** and **Fieldfares**, and about 100 **Meadow Pipits** had arrived overnight.



Male Stonechat



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