

# Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Summer 2022



Rattle seed

Welcome to our (rather late) summer newsletter. It's been a busy few months in the office as well as on the land. In June we had a visit from ENTRUST, the regulator of the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF) to carry out a compliance audit. We receive LCF monies from Severn Waste Services (SWS) which has allowed us to purchase most of our sites as well as funding ongoing enhancements, so we have an audit most years to make sure we are following the rules and keeping our paperwork up to date. Preparation for the audits takes up a lot of time but without the support of SWS and the LCF we would not be able to secure the future of so much of the Vale's landscape heritage. This year's audit included a site visit to a small parcel of land purchased to extend our North Littleton site and to turn an eyesore into an area for wildlife and for quiet recreation. We have started to tidy up and have secured the site with a barrier but are waiting for the end of the bird nesting period before we can continue the work. So a little imagination was required on the part of the auditors to see what the site will look like. I was able to lead them round the existing North Littleton site with the community orchard, hovel restoration project and interpretation boards and they were happy that the new site would be an ideal extension given time.

We are also on the last legs of submitting our remaining land into a Countryside Stewardship agreement. As with the previous applications, information has been at best confusing and the process is somewhat tedious but it will bring in some funds to help with the continued management of our orchards and grasslands. We have also been busy compiling all the evidence we need to show we are carrying out the required works, this includes photographing all the trees in our orchards.

## Welcome to Judith

We are very pleased to welcome a new trustee, Judith Ciotti, a volunteer for VLHT since 2020, including helping with plum sales and joining our Wednesday volunteers. She moved to Evesham in 2019 from a small organic farm in Herefordshire which is run co-operatively where she was part of the fruit tree group, helping to maintain and improve two small orchards. We look forwards to Judith's input in guiding the Trust.

## Volunteers

A massive thank you to our volunteers again. We had the extremes of weather during the last few months from cold and wet to hot and dry and even hotter and drier. Pulling and raking thistles, trimming back trees and shrubs and removing an electric fence were all completed with a smile. We also carried out our annual Greater butterfly Orchid count at Hipton Hill, and after a couple of years with fewer than expected plants, our volunteers counted over 2,500 Greater Butterfly Orchids which is an amazing number of this scarce plant.



*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.*



At Little Pastures we had a large area of Yellow Rattle in seed so volunteers helped to shake the seeds out and collected some for spreading at other sites. This is an important plant to establish in wildflower meadows and the seed is very expensive to buy so a collection of about 8kgs was fantastic.

If you want to find out more about volunteering with VLHT please get in touch.



Volunteers collecting rattle seed

## Events

We had mixed successes with our events this year. It was difficult to know how people would respond following two years of lockdowns. We held two evening walks and three pre-booked groups at Hipton to see the orchids, and all visits were very enjoyable and well attended. Thousands of orchids were in bloom including Greater Butterfly, common Spotted, Pyramidal, a few Bee Orchids and a token Twayblade. We then opened Hipton for a day to allow people to wander at their own speed and photograph the orchids and butterflies. It was a very hot day which might have put a few people off but we had fewer than expected during the day; just one man and his dog both of whom enjoyed their walk!

We joined walkers around Cleeve prior when two of our sites featured in the Cleeve Prior walk as part of the Evesham Walking Festival (EWF). We visited Littleton Pastures and North Littleton Community Orchard as part of this delightful and very successful walk and were able to explain about the management of the sites. We then opened our meadows at Fladbury for two days as part of the Fladbury Walk-a-bout. A few people popped into Mill Bank Meadows for a chat but nobody walked the meadows.

## Forthcoming Events



Pershore Plum Festival is back this year. We will be at Worcester Races on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> July hopefully with a few plums to sell. And then every Saturday Morning in August in 'Plum Alley' near Asda in Pershore. More details from Pershore Plum Festival <http://www.pershoreplumfestival.org.uk/whats-on.html>

We will be looking for volunteers to help pick and sell the plums so let us know if you have any Fridays and weekends free in August

We are looking forwards to the Battle of Evesham Medieval Festival where we will have a stall with information and some Stocken Orchard Cider to sell. Pop along and say hello.

Date: Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

Place: Crown and Corporation Meadows, Evesham.

Plus other locations around the town.

Further information from [https://www.battleofevesham.co.uk/Medieval\\_Festival/About.html](https://www.battleofevesham.co.uk/Medieval_Festival/About.html)

*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.*

## Water for cattle



Water for cattle

Our wetland at Lower Moor has all but dried out during the hot spell, despite our volunteer's best efforts to manage the water levels in the ditches. This meant we could get the hay taken promptly from a couple of the fields but the cattle have struggled to find water. Thanks to a local farmer we were able to set up troughs and water tank and carry water to site with our bowser. It was hot work but it is important to keep the cattle grazing to help manage the coarse grasses and maintain the varied sward which is so important for insects.



Thirsty cattle at Lower Moor

## Surveys and species recording

Surveying and monitoring sites is very important to inform future management and check that management objectives are being met. Yet finding time to carry out the surveys is difficult, so we were pleased to welcome members of Worcestershire Recorders to Naunton Court Orchard at the beginning of June. The group spent the day looking round our beautiful old orchard and the adjacent meadows now owned by Heart of England Forest. It was cool and a little damp in the morning but a good list of species was compiled, from grasses to Grass Snakes.

One very small, odd-looking beetle caused some excitement, and was confirmed as a Pear Longhorn Beetle. It goes by the scientific name of *Glaphyra umbellatarum* and is a rather scarce species associated with old trees and shrubs in orchards and hedges. The larvae develop in the dead wood of such trees and take two years to mature. We have now found several scarce beetles at Naunton, associated with deadwood so it is very important that we retain as much of the deadwood in the trees as we can.



Pear Longhorn Beetle



Members of Evesham u3a enjoying a carpet of orchids at Hipton Hill

Members of Evesham u3a natural history group have visited a few of our sites and they send us any sightings that they have made during their visits which helps build up a picture of the importance of the sites for wildlife.

Flood Meadows Partnership surveyors have visited several of our sites this year as part of their Floodplain Meadow Restoration Project 2021-2023. This will give us a lot more information about the wildflowers and grasses on our sites as well as soil condition. They will also give us advice on further restoration work to improve our floodplain meadows for wildlife.

Severn Trent Water's ecology team have been carrying out surveys at Lower Moor to see how their filtration systems affect our wetland. They have been looking at the wet grassland and the ditches to assess how changes to their systems might affect our site and how they can mitigate for changes. When we get the survey results it will help us decide which fields are better cut for hay or grazed with cattle.

During one of the site meetings at Lower Moor I noticed an Otter dropping at the edge of one of the ditches. On closer inspection it was full of the remains of Signal Crayfish. Not great news that these invasive crayfish are in the area but good news that the Otters are eating them!



Otter spraint from Lower Moor containing crayfish remains

### Further afield

We have been helping with surveys in our area including a project to create a wildflower area in a small part of the grassland adjacent to Pershore Abbey. A few local people are managing an area to encourage wildlife; the grass was allowed to grow over the summer to see what plants and insects are already there. We helped with the initial survey, recording the wildflowers and grasses as well as a few beetles and hoverflies.

The grass will be cut and collected and will then have a few wildflower seeds added to help increase the number of species over time. It will be interesting to watch this develop.



Ben and trap

We have carried out more surveys for Noble Chafers in old orchards using pheromone traps to catch the adult beetles. The chafers fly into the traps attracted by specially formulated pheromones and remain unharmed in the traps where they can be checked and released. We were delighted to find these wonderful beetles to be present at an old orchard near Norton and at an orchard in Badsey, where we caught two together in the same trap. The owners of both sites are really pleased to know that their orchards contain Noble Chafers and they will ensure that the old trees are left for the beetles to breed in.



Noble Chafers 22.06.22  
Badsey Orchard

Ben also helped a couple of our volunteers with their continued monitoring of Barn Owl boxes, mostly set up on private land close to our sites in various places across the Vale. Accompanied by a licenced Barn Owl surveyor they were able to put rings on young Barn Owls in several nests. These wonderful birds need a plentiful supply of Field Voles and other small mammals to feed on. All of our sites have areas of rough ground, hedgerows and old hollow trees ideal for small mammals, so the owls benefit from having their homes in quiet locations but nearby areas where they can hunt for food.

### Purple Woodlouse



New woodlouse at Haines Meadow

Earlier in the year while moving some flood debris at Haines Meadows I noticed some small deep purple woodlice under several pieces of wood. They were very fast moving and didn't look familiar to me, so I caught one for a closer look. When I identified the species, it appeared that it had not been found in England before so I searched the internet for images. It didn't look quite right so I sent my photos to the National woodlice expert (there really is such a thing) and he immediately responded requesting a site visit. A few days later, Haines Meadows was visited by no fewer than four experts. We quickly found more of the unusual woodlice and they were fairly sure that the reason I couldn't find the correct identification was because it isn't in the English books, it is probably a European species. So at

the moment we are still unsure which species it is but it was definitely new for Worcestershire, had almost certainly never been found in England before and was probably new to the UK! Hopefully we will get a positive identification soon, watch this space.

## Friends/donations

We continue to receive regular contributions towards our work from our Friends and we are very grateful for this. As well as the regular donations, two of our Friend have made sizable individual donations this year and again we are very grateful for this. Thank you all very much.

Please consider making a donation to our work. You can make a one-off donation or regular (monthly) or annual donations by requesting a Standing Order form or by using our online giving page:

<https://donate.giveasyoulive.com/charity/vale-landscape-heritage-trust>



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Fundraise for VALE LANDSCAPE HERITAGE TRUST

## Birds at Lower Moor and Haines Meadows April – June 2022

Rob Pruden

Wintering wildfowl were slow to move off with the last two **Teal** leaving towards northerly breeding areas on 28<sup>th</sup> April, surprisingly a pair of presumed failed breeders were already back by 6<sup>th</sup> June. The last **Wigeon** were seen on 7<sup>th</sup> April with three **Shoveler** on 15<sup>th</sup>. A pair of non-breeding **Shelduck** were resident throughout the whole period and were joined by up to four others on several dates, this leading to many aggressive territorial skirmishes. Three **Snipe** were still present till 27<sup>th</sup> April.

A pair of **Oystercatchers** bred at the leisure park and were regularly seen feeding at the wetlands, by mid-June it became apparent they had fledged two juveniles. All four birds found the river flash to their liking and visited most days till the end of June.

The only **Curlew** seen were a pair on 1<sup>st</sup> April with the female again next day. In recent years non-breeding **Avocets** have taken to favouring the site for loafing & feeding. This year the first six birds turned up on 2<sup>nd</sup> April with varying numbers then seen daily till 1<sup>st</sup> May with the highest count of 10 on 15<sup>th</sup> April. One or two pairs were again present from 15<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> May and 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> June. The first **Little Ringed Plover** arrived on 7<sup>th</sup> April then three were present daily from 10<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup>. Return passage began in mid-June with an adult & juvenile on 19<sup>th</sup>, both then remained till 24<sup>th</sup> with the adult continuing its stay until 29<sup>th</sup>. After early morning rain on 30<sup>th</sup>, five adults had dropped in for the day but were gone by early next morning.



Oystercatcher bathing

Spring wader passage was particularly poor this year with just a single **Green Sandpiper** from 23<sup>rd</sup> March-12<sup>th</sup> April, **Common Sandpiper** on 24<sup>th</sup> April, **Ringed Plover** on 12<sup>th</sup> May and two **Black Tailed Godwits** on 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> May. A single **Wheatear** was seen on 1<sup>st</sup> May while three **Whinchats** passed through with males on 30<sup>th</sup> April & 2<sup>nd</sup> May and a female on 16<sup>th</sup> May.

The first male **Cuckoo** was heard on 25<sup>th</sup> April then two males and a single female were present from 1<sup>st</sup> April through to mid-June. The last bird was still singing on 30<sup>th</sup> June although by now its voice was way less than perfect.

Four pairs of **Lapwings** bred in the area producing at least five fledged juveniles by early June. Failed breeding birds from further afield had already started to arrive by the second week of May with 18 on 11<sup>th</sup>, and numbers then rose daily to a peak of 85 by mid-June. On 25<sup>th</sup> June a pair was seen with two c4 day old chicks, presumably from a late replacement clutch.

Numbers of **Red Kites** continue to rise in the county so sightings on seven dates during the period were not unexpected. Scarcer birds included an **Egyptian Goose** from 3<sup>rd</sup> April – 5<sup>th</sup> May, male **Mandarin Duck** on 30<sup>th</sup> April & 1<sup>st</sup> May. Two **Great White Egrets** were seen flying over east just after dawn on 1<sup>st</sup> May, and then a single bird was present on the wetland on 7<sup>th</sup> May. **Hobbies** were seen hunting over the river flash on 24<sup>th</sup> May & 16<sup>th</sup> June. A **Common Tern** was seen either fishing along the river or roosting on the river flash on several dates from 8<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> June, disappointingly the only **Yellow Wagtail** was a male which was seen on 1<sup>st</sup> May.

**Ravens** bred successfully adjacent to the site and were regularly seen over the meadows with three fledged juveniles. Territorial and presumed breeding passerines included four **Sedge Warblers**, seven **Reed Warblers**, 10 **Whitethroats**, two **Willow Warblers** and six **Skylarks**. A pair of **Barn Owls** were seen hunting during daytime hours on several occasions, so almost certainly had a hungry young family to feed nearby. Although once a common passage wader **Redshanks** have become scarce, the only bird so far this year was a juvenile on 26<sup>th</sup> June.



Redshank

**Green Sandpipers** are always early southerly bound autumn passage migrants, so three on mid-summer's day 21<sup>st</sup> June were not unexpected, small numbers were then seen daily until the end of the month. Green Sandpipers are an interesting species, summering in wet woodlands across sub-Arctic Europe with the old nest of another species being utilised for raising their family. The chosen platform is often the nest of a Fieldfare or other thrush species but also Wood Pigeon, Crow or even a Squirrel's drey and can be anything up to 20 metres above ground level. On southerly passage birds stop off at freshwater wetlands while on route to sub-Saharan wintering areas, although a few remain in southern Europe including the south of the UK if wetlands remain unfrozen. Midsummer arrivals in the UK are mostly female, having left breeding areas as soon as a clutch of eggs have been laid, leaving the male to incubate the eggs & carry out all parental duties.

### Beauty or beast?



North Littleton Community Orchard has been a great place for watching butterflies this summer. The grassland there has been alive with Marbled Whites, Meadow browns, Small Heaths to name but a few. While watching a Small Skipper flitting from one Pyramidal Orchid to the next I noticed a visitor in one of the orchid flower-heads; a changing crab spider *Misumena vatia*. It sat motionless waiting, and suddenly the skipper landed within striking distance and in a split second it was in the spider's jaws.



This species of spider is white but if it sits for a time on yellow flowers it changes to yellow itself. I had seen this same species earlier in the year nearby, lurking in Laburnum blossom, beautifully camouflaged.



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