

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Autumn newsletter

2015



August was just plum crazy

Once again we thank everyone who picked, packed, stored, moved, sold and bought plums this year. The weather tried to dampen the spirits again for the bank holiday Pershore Plum Festival but it didn't stop the crowds from turning out. We had a stall in the town for four Saturdays in August and the whole of the bank holiday weekend. We were also joined at Hipton by coach loads of fruit pickers during the month. Thank you to the Pershore Plum Festival organisers for their support again.



To end the plum season, the Plum Festival Princesses from this year and last year each planted a Purple Pershore plum tree at Hipton as part of our Heritage orchard restoration work.

Say "hello" to a new (old) orchard



Naunton Orchard – new orchard

Earlier this year we purchased another lovely old orchard; this time near Naunton Beauchamp. The purchase was made possible by a very generous grant from Severn Waste Services through the Landfill Communities Fund. This is a mixed orchard of apples and pears on ridge and furrow. The fruit trees are home to many different birds, especially those which require holes for nesting and the orchard is also known to have a population of the rare Noble Chafer beetle. The grassland may also prove to be interesting as the old ridge and furrow suggests that the land has not been cultivated for decades if not hundreds of years. We will be monitoring the wildlife on the site to see what else lives there. In the meantime we will be

filling some of the gaps with traditional fruit tree varieties to ensure the site remains a valuable landscape feature into the future.

Wave "goodbye" to one of our Trustees

In July this year John Edgeley decided to stand down as a Trustee. John's extensive knowledge of horticulture, especially fruit growing has been of real value to the Trust and amongst many other things, he has guided us through the purchase and early management of Stocken Orchard, from our first harvest to restoration pruning and the production of Stocken Cider in partnership with Pershore College. We thank John for his time over the last few years and appreciate his continued support with our volunteer activities and specialist advice.



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.

Lights, Camera, Hipton

Hipton Hill Orchard has received more than its share of attention this year. ITV's Central News visited in spring to film the blossom. They also interviewed the Plum Charmer as he set about waking the blossom to ensure a good harvest. Then, during the plum picking season on the lead up to the Pershore Plum Festival we were joined by Sarah Falkland from BBC Midlands Today. She joined fruit pickers to find out why plums are so important to people in the Vale and she also looked into the history of plums in the area.

In the spring we were joined by non-other than Sir Terry Wogan as part of his new food programme *Terry and Mason's great food trip*. This was shown on BBC 2 during September and included various places around Evesham looking at food that is grown in this part of the country including Hipton's plums. Mr Wogan also found time to delve into the rot holes of some old plum trees in search of beetle-pool!



Stocken Orchard, Wasps and Cider



During the summer we allowed the grass to grow at Stocken orchard so we could survey the flora of the grassland there. We found five different species of orchids growing beneath the trees including several of the unusual form of the Bee Orchid, known as Wasp Orchids. This beautiful little wildflower grows at various sites in the Vale but the Wasp Orchid form is not often found so to have so many at Stocken is really special. Unfortunately Bee orchids are notorious for disappearing as fast as they are found so we can't be sure that the Wasp Orchids will be back next year but we will give them every chance.

We have also had more exciting news from Stocken. We have been working with Pershore College to produce our own cider and the first bottles are ready! This is a cider made from Dabinett apples from Stocken and will be sold by the college with VLHT's logo and information about the orchard. We can't sell the cider ourselves due to licence issues but we hope that the partnership with Pershore College will continue and that they will be producing Stocken orchard cider for years to come.



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 280 acres.

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project update

This three-year project is coming to the end of its first year and has started to make a real difference to orchards in the three counties. VLHT are involved with orchards in the Evesham and Pershore area as well as further-a-field in Worcestershire. We have already carried out work at an orchard near Alfrick with the help of Worcester Orchard Workers and are working with Worcestershire County Council officers in the Tenbury area. We have produced initial wildlife surveys for the Alfrick site and for a small orchard near Pershore. We also held an orchard wildlife workshop, hosted by Cleeve Prior Heritage Trust where we looked at the kind of wildlife likely to be found in orchards and discussed management to attract wildlife (the underlying message was “don’t be too tidy”).

We are now looking for volunteers to help restore a riverside orchard on the edge of Pershore. This orchard has become very overgrown and we need to remove much of the bramble and other vegetation to ‘rescue’ the fruit trees while retaining some of the bramble as wildlife habitat.

The first practical session will be on Saturday 17th October from 10:30. If you can spare an hour or two and would like to help make a real difference to this orchard please get in touch.

Volunteers and Friends

It was great to see a few new volunteers at our regular Wednesday work parties during the summer. They helped to control thistles, remove fallen branches and picked and sold plums amongst many other things. Work parties are held most Wednesdays from 10:00am until 1:00pm at our sites in the Vale. Just bring appropriate footwear and we will bring the tools, materials and tea and biscuits (but we won’t complain if you bring cake!). If you want to come along to try a session please get in touch.

We have also had a few new ‘Friends’ join us this summer, which is excellent news. Friends contribute a monthly or annual amount towards the upkeep of our special sites which helps us to continue to protect parts of the beautiful Vale.

River Dragons

Anyone who has walked along a river during the summer will have noticed numerous dragonflies darting, skimming and hawking along the watercourse. However these aerial acrobats need more than just a bit of water to survive; they need good habitat nearby to feed and rest in. Dragonflies and damselflies spend much of their lives as aquatic predators feeding on underwater-insects, small fish and even tadpoles. When fully grown (several years in the case of some of our bigger dragonflies) they emerge as the beautiful aerobic insects that we know as Devil’s Darning Needles, Horse Stingers or Dragonflies. Some species are restricted to clean rivers and they need areas of scrub, hedgerows and woodland to move to until fully mature when they return to the river to breed. Our sites at Wick and Lower Moor lie adjacent the Avon and we allow vegetation to grow along the river as well as around the field edges offering ideal corridors for the dragonflies to feed.



White-legged
Damselfly



Scarce Chaser
Dragonfly

The most familiar species will be the butterfly-like Banded Demoiselle, a damselfly seen in large numbers as the males display along the riverside vegetation, flashing their dark coloured wings. White-legged Damselflies are less showy and fly some distance to feed in woodlands and along overgrown hedgerows with a plentiful supply of their insect prey. The males have obviously broadened white legs which they use in display. The Red-eyed Damselfly will breed in rivers where water-lilies are allowed to grow. The adults stay within the confines of the river, resting on the lily leaves. An Avon speciality is the Club-tailed Dragonfly, a secretive species which emerges from the river and immediately flies off to woodlands where it stays until it is ready to breed. Meanwhile a more recent addition to the Avon in Worcestershire is the Scarce Chaser in which the male has a blue body and the female is orange. This rare dragonfly can be found at our Lower Moor site patrolling the river banks and has also been seen away from the river at Hipton Hill.

So next time you see a dragonfly, check to see if it is from a local pond or if it is a true river dragon.

Birds at Lower Moor and Haines Meadows May – September 2015

Rob Prudden, volunteer reserve warden.

An unseasonable **Teal** and a **Shoveler** were still present in early May and remained until the 21st. More expected was the continuation of northerly bound wading birds represented by a **Ringed Plover**, several **Dunlin**, 3 **Redshank** and a **Black Tailed Godwit**. Other notable resident summer visitors included 5 **Little Ringed Plovers**, a pair of **Shelduck** and two male and one female **Cuckoos**.

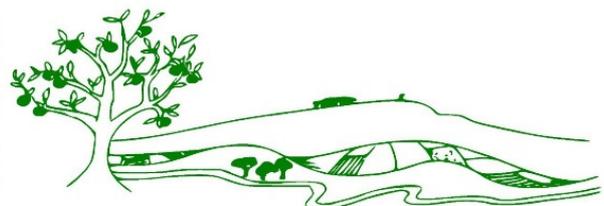
A wet day on 6th May brought up to a hundred **Swallows** down low over the flash to feed on insects, two **Hobbies** were quick to take advantage of this situation and spent an hour continually scything through the feeding birds and were seen to take several unfortunate individuals. Two summering **Common Terns** were seen fishing along the river on several dates from 9th May to 22nd July.

May was particularly rain free leading to the river flash being all but dry by the beginning of June, although a very early returning southerly bound **Green Sandpiper** found the muddy conditions to its liking on 12th as did a male **Yellow Wagtail**. The long dry spell continued through June giving ideal conditions for breeding passerines which did well, with probably ten pairs of **Reed Warblers** along the Lench Ditch, other breeders included four pairs of **Sedge Warblers**, **Garden Warbler**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Whitethroat**, **Willow Warbler**, and good numbers of **Chiffchaffs**. Cuckoos were busy at this time seeking out hosts for their eggs.

The channels at Wick remained wet till the end of June and a pair of **Oystercatchers** that had bred at the Leisure Park were seen daily, over flying the meadows and river on feeding sorties with their three fledged juveniles. Also at Wick a displaced pair of **Curlew** were present on 11th June and had probably lost juveniles to hay making activities between Wick and Pershore. A passage **Redshank** was here on 15th June. A family of **Little Owls** were seen for a week at the beginning of August, but dispersed from the area shortly after. Ten pairs of **Skylarks** held territories through the breeding season in rough grass around the channels. Heavy rain at the end of July filled the river flash at Lower Moor and shortly after huge numbers of **feral Geese** had started to build up, peaking at 340 **Greylags** and 260 **Canadas** by mid-September. Green Sandpipers were also seen daily from this time till late September and peaked at eight in mid-August. Two juvenile **Dunlin** also passed through as did several **Redshank** and a **Little Egret**. Post breeding **Redstarts** annually utilise the river meadow hedges for feeding, this year the first bird arrived on 30th June, birds were then present daily till the last male was seen on 16th September, highest count of twelve individual birds was recorded on several days in late August. An impressive nine hundred **House Martins** had massed to feed low over the flash in damp windy conditions on 21st August, this after the poor weather had forced huge numbers of insects down to the warmer and less turbulent air over the water. A **Mandarin Duck** was present on 14th August. Two juvenile **Yellow Wagtails** were seen on 16th + 17th August with another single bird on 16th September. A **Hobby** and a migrant **Spotted Flycatcher** passed through on 18th August.

Friends of VLHT

Friends of VLHT pay a regular amount each month or each year, which supports the important work saving and renovating old orchards and hay meadows and woodlands. For more details, please contact Gary Farmer at the office.



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