

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Spring 2016

Water, water, everywhere

Avon Valley flood plain



The winter of 2015/16 was to say the least dull and wet and water was the theme of the first part of 2016. Water came from the skies during far too many Wednesday volunteer tasks, but we managed to carry out many important jobs with thanks to our dedicated group of volunteers; water formed part of our contractor's work at Littleton Pastures, rescuing an old pond which had been filled in with rubble; and water came up from the Avon and its tributaries as several of our sites were flooded a couple of times.

Many of our sites lie within the Avon flood plain and our traditionally managed flood meadows play an important role in holding back flood water which would otherwise add to flooding of residential areas further downstream. In the past this annual flooding would have been exploited by farmers; water would have been deliberately held back on the land with a system of ditches and banks, allowing the nutrient-rich silt to settle and feed the meadows. This can still be seen at our sites at Lower Moor and Wick. This kind of natural process which has a benefit for wildlife and people is part of something now called eco-system services. But whatever we call it, wildlife depends on it and we hope that by allowing natural processes to continue on our flood meadows we will attract even more wildlife, much of which is declining because of habitat loss and changes to land management elsewhere.



Littleton Meadows - dry



Littleton Meadows - flooded

Fencing

During the winter contractors have been busy installing fencing (when weather permitted). Our sites at North Littleton Community Orchard & Nature Reserve (NLCO), Littleton Pastures and Naunton Court Orchard are all now securely fenced to allow better grazing which will help improve the grasslands for wildflowers and associated pollinators. Fencing areas also reduces disturbance to wildlife and will hopefully mean that Skylarks and other ground-nesting birds will be able to breed on our grassland sites. This work was made possible by the generous support of Severn Waste Services through a Landfill Communities Fund biodiversity grant.

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

Littleton Pastures pond



As part of our enhancement work at Littleton Pastures we have removed tonnes of stone and other rubbish from an old pond. The spring-fed pond had been filled in using material from an old stone wall many years ago but is now holding water again and has already been visited by Grey Wagtails, a Kingfisher and a pair of Mallards!

Frogs breed on site in some of the small ditches so by re-opening the pond these amphibians will have even more places to breed in future.

Deadwood, dead good



Noble Chafer Knapp



Cramp ball fungus weevil



Wasp beetles

On many of our sites we deliberately leave deadwood; either as standing dead or decaying trees or as trunks, logs and branches on the ground. Deadwood is a very important part of the natural cycle providing homes and food for a great many invertebrates, birds and small mammals. Many beetles depend on decaying wood to breed, laying their eggs into decaying trees. The elusive Noble Chafer beetle is known to live in some of our orchards. Some of the spectacular longhorn beetles also start off life in deadwood including the Wasp Beetle and they then need to find pollen to feed on when they are mature. Deadwood is also very important for nature's great recyclers, the fungi and some beetles even feed in the fungi that feeds on the deadwood including Cramp-ball-fungus Weevils, weird looking beetles that look like tiny pieces of deadwood themselves. Many creatures nest in or store food in holes in trees, while others live under the fallen branches feeding on the decaying wood on the ground or feeding on the creatures that feed on the decay. All are an important part of the natural food-chains and in the recycling of nutrients.

We occasionally sell timber for wood turning or as firewood but prefer to leave it on site when we can. So we would ask that visitors to our sites leave deadwood where it is and, as tempting as it may be, don't take it away for burning. This not only takes away potential financial income for VLHT but also takes away habitat vital to an extraordinary variety of wildlife.

Just remember that there can be more life in deadwood than in living wood, so really there is no such thing as dead wood!



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.

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project (TCTOP)



We continue our partnership with TCTOP. In February a group of volunteers joined us to finish clearing bramble from a small orchard on the edge of Pershore. When we started last year there was hardly a sign of any trees but when we had finished we had rescued quite a few young fruit trees and the site was beginning to look like an orchard again.

For more information about TCTOP visit their website

<http://tctop.org.uk/>

or contact Karen Humphries on

khumphries@worcestershire.gov.uk



VLHT Volunteers

Our regular Wednesday volunteers have been busy over the winter, despite the weather. Tasks have included pruning some of the apple trees and building bird boxes at Stocken Orchard (although we had to take shelter in a near-by barn for this due to the torrential rain!), planting fruit trees and a 100 metre long native-species hedge at NLCO and clearing flood debris from the brook at Littleton Pastures.

We have about twenty volunteers; some turn out every week, others every other week, some come along when tasks are at their local site. So if you can spare just a few hours occasionally, it all makes a real difference to the work of VLHT.

If you'd like to help out on any of our sites please get in touch. Contact details are on the back page.



Events for 2016

We will be attending Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's (WWT) open day at Tiddesley Wood on Sunday 1st May. This is a really popular event and gives VLHT the chance to promote our work to a large audience. This year we will open Stocken Orchard where visitors to WWT's event will be able to see a demonstration of horse-logging in the orchard.

We will also be attending the award-winning Pershore Plum Festival in August and we will open some of our sites for guided walks during the summer. We will have more details of these events soon so keep an eye on our website <http://valetrust.weebly.com> or contact us for more information.

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.

Birds at Lower Moor/Wick flood meadows – January to March 2016

Wintering wildfowl remained in reasonable numbers throughout January and into the beginning of February, extensive flooding from 7th – 23rd then saw numbers swell with up to 190 **Wigeon** and 160 **Teal** at this time. Scarcer duck species included a female **Red Crested Pochard**, 8 **Pintail**, 14 **Shoveler** and 21 **Gadwall** while 8 **Goosander** flew down river on a single date in January and a full summer male stayed on the river one afternoon. Also enjoying the feeding opportunities afforded by the flood conditions at this time were up to 320 **Lapwings** and 550 **Golden Plovers**.

Birds of Prey in February included a female **Peregrine** which made a half - hearted attack on a small flock of **Teal** on 10th, while a stunning wintering female **Merlin** was seen hunting **Skylarks** and other passerines on four dates between 4th January and 23rd March.

A **Barn Owl** was seen at dusk on three dates while a **Little Owl** was seen sunning itself in an ancient Willow one afternoon.

Three **Water Rails** were resident and most days could be heard squealing along the Lench Ditch throughout, while a **Kingfisher** was seen on several dates.

Up to two thousand Gulls loafed at Wick most days and included small numbers of the scarcer misnamed **Common Gull** and a handful of **Great Black Backed Gulls**.

Notable passerines included a pair of **Stonechats** that wintered on a rough scrubby area at Wick. Several wintering **Blackcaps** and up to 6 **Chiffchaffs** could be seen catching insects around the meadow hedges on warmer sunny days.

Snipe numbers had been disappointingly low in the early part of the year but by the second week of March, what were presumably northerly bound passage birds arrived in better numbers with up to sixty on 20th March.

A feel of spring was apparent from 22nd February when three **Shelduck** arrived, a pair were still present by the end of March. The imminent spring feel continued with two **Oystercatchers** on 29th, Lapwings were displaying at Wick from 4th March, a pair of **Curlew** were bubbling daily from 10th and the first **Redshank** arrived on 23rd.

A pair of **Kestrels** were seen nest making in a purpose built box during mid - March.

The first long distance passage waders of the year were two long billed winter plumaged **Dunlin** briefly on 19th March, these birds probably heading for breeding sites further north.

A reminder that winter was not long gone came in the form of a juvenile **Iceland Gull** which was present with other large Gulls at both Lower Moor and Wick from 9th – 21st March. This bird being a long way from its probable birth site in Greenland. This was a fairly late date for this species and presumably it is now on its way back to spend its summer well north of Britain.



Curlew



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