

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Winter newsletter

December 2015

A Volunteer Special

During the short time that I have worked at Vale Landscape Heritage Trust (VLHT) it has been obvious that the people of the Vale are passionate about their heritage and landscape and the wildlife that depends on it. So I thought I would let local people put their words in print to show what makes the Vale so special.

Special Places – A Friend's View

Sylvia Melville, VLHT Friend.

Without Vale Landscape Heritage Trust there would be no special body to protect this fine distinctive orchard landscape and its agricultural history. Nor would there be much hope of treasuring its particular plant and wildlife species, including its orchids, its birds and its beetles, for people to love and enjoy in the future.

It's a delight to learn about and a privilege to support VLHT

Practical Tasks – A Volunteer's View

Mike Dunning, VLHT volunteer

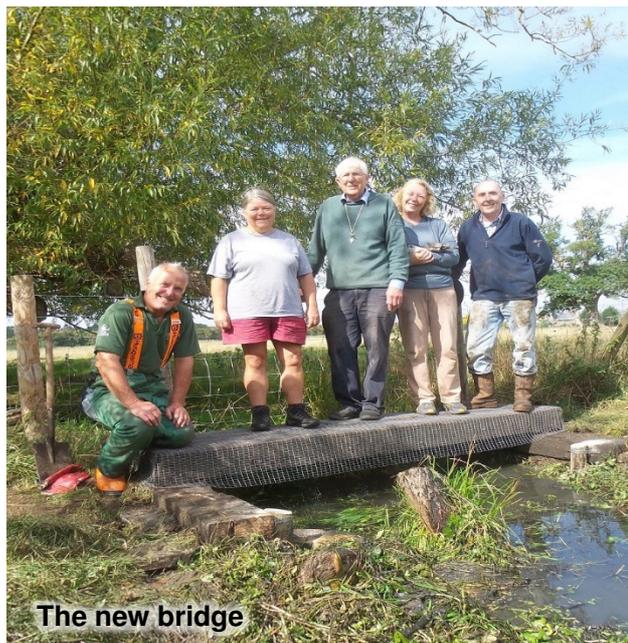
Being recently retired from a stressful desk job in the Ministry of Defence spanning some 43 years I am delighted to have found Vale Landscape Heritage Trust with opportunities for volunteering. It is both rewarding and educational.

Having a love of the outdoors, beautiful scenery and an interest in conservation it didn't take me long after moving to Fladbury to locate a group of interesting people who meet once a week (Wednesdays) to carry out tasks in this beautiful environment of ours. Unlike the work in my professional life which could take 10 years or more to come to fruition, the assignments performed by the group have almost instantaneous results, be it some simple grass cutting or weed pulling through to building a footbridge over a stream, orchard maintenance and pruning, fruit picking or fence repairs. As well as the physical involvement I am constantly amazed at the wealth of knowledge the other members of the team display and there is hardly any subject relating to nature and conservation that someone doesn't know something about. This is what provides the basis for good team working within our group.



One recent task for the volunteers was to build a footbridge for a permissive walking route around Littleton Pastures. The materials (i.e. railway sleepers) had to be retrieved from a pig pen owned by a lady in the village who kindly donated them, provided we collected them. The sleepers were extremely wet and dirty and took three people to carry them through deep mud and inquisitive rare-breed pigs. It took us a while of slipping and sliding and befriending the pigs just to get the sleepers out onto the trailer and back to the field.

Once on site, we made quick work of cutting one up with a chainsaw and commenced the construction. This provided an opportunity for those of us coated in pig slurry to wash our boots in the stream and construct the foundation for the bridge. Posts were hammered in and the sleepers made secure before the final act of stapling on a wire anti-slip tread. This proved to be a good example of recycling materials and saving the cost of buying new sleepers and we hope to add a couple more sleepers to widen the bridge in the future (when the pigs have moved!). In the meantime, other volunteers who had helped clear the stream of fallen branches embarked on spreading Yellow Rattle seed in the nearby meadow in the hope this wildflower would begin to establish itself in subsequent years. A welcome cuppa and bikkies was had by all before we all went home for a well-earned rest (and shower)!



The new bridge

I am really looking forward to working on other VLHT sites over the coming months (and years – Ed.) as they are special places, conserving a little of our precious natural heritage. But they need to be managed, so if you have considered volunteering but have doubts please be reassured that you need no prior knowledge or experience of working outdoors and in no way will you be pressured to do anything you are not capable of doing. I certainly look forward to the assignments as it's a great way of meeting like-minded people and doing something really rewarding and worthwhile.

Caring For The Beautiful Vale - A Trustee's View
Colin Grove, VLHT trustee

I volunteer in two ways for VLHT, one as a trustee and one as a practical volunteer at the Wednesday work parties. Wildlife conservation is something that I am passionate about and I am fortunate to be in a position where I can make a real difference. As a member of various conservation charities, the first thing I do when magazines arrive is to look for news of land acquisitions – little gems that have escaped modern day pressures that will be protected for their wildlife value, for future generations to enjoy.

Being a trustee of VLHT allows me to have influence on conservation land in the Vale – my local patch. Old orchards and meadows have disappeared from the Vale at an alarming rate, this is the reason I was so committed to forming VLHT back in 1999 and it is this that keeps me going, knowing that the land that VLHT hold will be conserved for its heritage and landscape value and that wildlife will continue to thrive there. There is nothing more rewarding than working with the other trustees to identify a vulnerable piece of the Vale's natural heritage and be able to find funding to secure it for future generations. A big thank you to Severn Waste Services for their financial contribution through the Landfill Communities Fund, without which most of what we have achieved would not have been possible. There are presently 6 trustees with varied backgrounds, from land management and conservation to business and accounting. We would welcome interest from others with appropriate backgrounds especially in fruit production and the legal profession.

Our Wednesday work party volunteers also contribute greatly towards the running of costs of VLHT; if 8 people turn out and work for 2 ½ hours, this equates to 20 hours or half a week's work for an employee. There is more about volunteering in Mike's article in this newsletter.



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

The Holly and the Ivy and the Mistletoe – A Bug’s View

Arthur Pod, VLHT dependent



These three seasonal evergreens seem to only enter our thoughts (and homes) for a brief period around Christmas and then most of us forget all about them for the rest of the year. Yet they are important for all kinds of wildlife. So I wondered what these plants have to offer insects and which one should really bare the crown.

Lots of insects are found on these plants but most are generalist and are not specific to the individual plant species. There are lots of Scale Insects which live on evergreens for instance but one in particular, the Cushion Scale *Pulvinaria floccifera* is found on Holly and Ivy. These exude honey dew after feeding on the sugar-rich sap of the plants and their presence can be noted by black, soot-like mould which feeds upon the sticky honey dew and is especially noticeable in the autumn on Ivy.



Another insect that these two shrubs share is the Holly Blue butterfly; a species with two generations each year, the first generation of caterpillars feeds mainly on Holly but the second generation feeds on other plants especially Ivy.

Then there’s the little green Ivy Spider *Nigma walkenaeri* which weaves its small sheet webs on the leaves of Ivy but also regularly uses Holly and even Mistletoe.



Ivy is a fantastic plant in autumn when its flowers are open. It attracts huge numbers of insects including butterflies, bumblebees and wasps. In the last two or three years these have been joined in Worcestershire by a species new to the UK, the Ivy Bee *Colletes hederæ*. This attractive bee emerges late in the year and feeds only on Ivy flowers. There is also a very rare, tiny ladybird *Nephus quadrimaculatus* which you might find on Ivy (if you look very carefully).

Holly has its own leaf-mining fly *Phytomyza ilicis* whose larvae feed inside the leaf blades leaving distinctive blotches on the leaves. Holly even has its own aphid *Aphis ilicis* which feeds at the base of the leaves making them curl into unusual spiky shapes.

It is the Mistletoe however which has the most insect species only found on one of these plant species. It has its own leaf-mining moth, the Mistletoe Marble Moth *Celypha woodiana*, there is a Mistletoe Weevil *Ixapion variegatum*, at least three species of sap-sucking bugs which feed only on Mistletoe (*Cacopsylla visci*, *Pinalitus viscicola* and *Hypseloecus visci*). There is even a predatory bug *Anthocoris visci* which specialises in feeding on these bugs.

So remember, as someone once put it “*Mistletoe is for life, not just for Christmas*”.

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.

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 of heritage land.

Birds of the Vale – A Volunteer Reserve Warden’s View

Lower Moor and Haines Meadows October to December 2015

Rob Prudden, VLHT volunteer reserve warden

Early October began slowly with the only sign of autumn movement being a scattering of **Meadow Pipits** around the meadows and 4 **Lesser Redpolls** feeding on Willowherb along a central ditch, small numbers of the latter remained till the end of the year. Also at this time **Greenfinches** fed on remnant blackberries in the bottom of thick overgrown hedges near the river. On the muddy edges of the river flash the last **Green Sandpiper** of the year fed on the first few days of the month, while up to 10 **Common Snipe** remained all month.

The first real sign of winter came on 15th October when the first 4 **Fieldfares** and 20 **Redwings** arrived. Two wintering **Water Rails** were regularly heard along the Lench Ditch from 31st October.

Golden Plover numbers were better this year after several poor years, this presumably due to several wet summers which had led to many failed nests on breeding sites well to the north. The first ten birds turned up on 21st October with numbers rising daily to c240 by the end of the month. Numbers then continued to rise to a maximum of c675 by 3rd December. Two days later they had all gone, having probably moved further south to more suitable feeding areas around the Severn estuary. **Lapwings** associated loosely with the Golden Plover flocks throughout the period and peaked at c525 on 3rd December.

The very mild conditions over the UK and Europe led to many waterfowl staying on the continent, hence migrant wintering duck numbers were low with a maximum of only 64 **Teal** and 7 **Shoveler** with the first 25 **Wigeon** arriving particularly late in the second week of December, although this quickly rose to 65 by 17th. **Feral Goose** numbers peaked at 342 **Greylags** and 271 **Canadas**.

A **Barn Owl** was seen hunting and perching on perimeter fence posts at last light on 27th October, while on the Wick side of the river a **Little Owl** was heard calling at dusk from 27th till 30th. A very late **Swallow** briefly flew around high over the site on 3rd November before continuing its lonely southerly passage, while a lone elusive female **Stonechat** took up residence around the low hedges and fences at Lower Moor from 6th November – 14th December. Small numbers of **Bullfinches** and a pair of **Grey Wagtails** were often seen along the Lench Ditch, while in the same area a large roaming flock of small birds on 26th November included 36 **Long Tailed Tits**, several **Blue & Great Tits**, a **Coal Tit** and a **Tree Creeper**. In early December large numbers of winter Thrushes greedily stripped meadow hedgerows of the remaining berry crop, they included up to 350 **Fieldfares**, 475 **Redwings** and 6 **Mistle Thrushes**, the latter favouring this winter’s heavy hedgerow Mistletoe crop.



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