

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Winter 2016/17



Dabinett apples from <http://valetrust.weebly.com>

Happy New Year and welcome to our first Newsletter of 2017.

The latter part of 2016 was dominated by apples – too many of them! We had a bumper crop of Somerset Redstreak and Dabinett at our Stocken Orchard and were hopeful that the sale of these apples would go a long way towards paying for the continued restoration of this beautiful orchard. Unfortunately this didn't go according to plan as many of the other local growers had the same size crop and were better placed for selling their produce. One company who were due to take a large quantity of our apples called to say that they were unable to take them from us this year as they had "a queue of vehicles bringing more apples than they had ever seen". So, unfortunately our sales were down considerably. We did supply a few local producers as well as Wrenbury Cider from Cheshire who made their annual journey to collect some of our Dabinetts.



Apples galore

Pershore College took both Somerset Redstreaks and Dabinetts to make more of their excellent Stocken Orchard Cider to sell at local outlets. The wintering Fieldfares and Redwings are also making the most of the uncollected apples, so nothing is wasted.

With the help of local horticultural consultant and VLHT volunteer, John Edgeley, we have been identifying apple varieties at our old orchard at Naunton Beauchamp. This will help us decide the best varieties for planting to fill some of the gaps in the orchard over the coming years. Amongst the varieties identified so far are Worcester Pearmain, Ellison's Orange and Laxton's Superb.

See our website for more varieties and links for more information -<http://valetrust.weebly.com/apples.html>

Orchard planting with the De Montfort School

The next round of orchard planting at our North Littleton site started in December when students from the De Montfort School joined us to plant 20 Victoria Plum trees. The planting went very well and was a positive note to end 2016. The Victoria plum is one of the most popular varieties and these trees will provide us with fruit for the Pershore Plum Festival in future years. We plan to plant another 64 plum trees of different varieties this winter and to erect sheep guards to eventually allow grazing within the new orchard. We are grateful to Severn Waste Services (SWS) for funding the trees and materials for the guards through the Landfill Communities Fund. This new orchard will be a mixture of local apple, pear and plum varieties to recreate a small part of the old farmed landscape.

Ladybirds



Ladybird larvae
14-spot ladybird 2-spot ladybird



24-spot ladybird



22-spot ladybird



10-spot ladybird taking flight

Ladybirds are some of the most familiar of insects with their bright coloured, shiny bodies and they are rightly known as the gardener's friend with their appetite for eating aphids. But did you know that in Britain there are actually 46 different species of ladybird, 20 of which are very small and some are very un-ladybird-like. Many species are restricted to certain parts of the UK or to certain habitats such as heathlands or wetlands and some are new arrivals in to the country.

Here in the Vale you can expect to find at about 15 different species, some of which are very common and others are quite rare. The most familiar is the Seven-spot Ladybird which can be very numerous in some years and is found in our old orchards. Not all ladybirds are red and black, some other common species are bright yellow with black spots such as the 22-spot and the 14-spot Ladybirds which are more often found in long grass. Another grassland species is the 24-spot Ladybird which is a small hairy, orange ladybird with black spots and is unusual amongst ladybirds as it is vegetarian.

Ladybirds hibernate during the winter under fallen leaves, in tussock grasses and log piles or in hollow trees or some species even enter our houses in winter. One species which does this is the Harlequin Ladybird, a species which only arrived in the country in 2004. This is a large ladybird which is very variable with different patterns from red with black spots to black with red spots and varying numbers of spots. The rarest ladybird that we have found at our sites so far is a small orange/brown species which does not have an English name, *Rhyzobius chrysomeloides*.

Did you know?

The number of spots a ladybird has does not tell its age, but can help identify the species.

Not all ladybirds are red and black, some are orange and some are bright yellow with black spots. These bright colours warn potential predators that they are poisonous.

Ladybirds are beetles not bugs.

Ladybirds fly very well and some can actually migrate across the channel from Europe.

When threatened by a predator, ladybirds bleed from their knees. This 'blood' contains a cocktail of chemicals that smell and taste bad.

Baby ladybirds (larvae) look like long-legged caterpillars.

The large Harlequin Ladybird will eat any soft-bodied insects including the larvae of other ladybirds.

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, nearly 300 acres.

Volunteers

You've heard it all before, but our volunteers really are the life-blood of Vale Landscape Heritage Trust. Our regular work parties have contributed greatly to the management of our sites from tree planting, to path clearing, coppicing to fence repairs, plum picking to clearing flood debris. We have also started to manage the high scrub at our Littleton Meadows site. This bank has been left almost untouched for about thirty years and is now covered by closed-canopy high scrub. This limits the wildlife value of the site as it is very dark and wild flowers are unable to grow. A ride was cut through about five years ago and various species returned including Common Spotted and Pyramidal Orchids as well as butterflies and bumblebees. We hope that by opening up small areas along the bank while leaving other parts untouched, this area will become more valuable to wildlife again. During 2016 our volunteers carried out 51 different tasks at our sites involving a total of 24 people. Our smallest turnout was just one and our biggest was 15 volunteers. In total our volunteers contributed 277 mornings in 2016. If you don't feel that the practical work is for you there are other ways to help such as site surveys or even regularly walking a site to keep an eye on things. If you would like to find out more about volunteering opportunities please get in touch.

Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project

VLHT have continued to work with the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project in our area. We helped at a very successful apple day at The Valley where local people picked apples from the Valley's old orchard, which we then turned in to wonderfully refreshing juice for them to take away (with the message "do not drink it all at once!"). We have also been busy planting trees in some of the Project's chosen orchards at Pershore, Chadbury and Wood Norton. Pruning sessions are being planned and a wildlife survey will be carried out in the spring. This means that by the end of 2017 some of the area's neglected orchards will be looking a lot healthier and should remain part of our landscape for the future. For more information contact: 01684 560616 or khumphries@worcestershire.gov.uk



Apple pressing at The Valley

Fencing

One important, part of the traditional management of our meadows is appropriate grazing. Too much or too soon and the rare communities of wildflowers will be unable to flower and set seed and will be lost. But too little, too late and the grasslands will become dominated by tussock grasses and scrub, which are valuable in the 'right place', but will smother the finer, rarer plants and reduce diversity. So we work with local graziers under the guidance of Natural England to ensure our meadows are grazed at the right times with the right number of sheep or cattle to increase the number of wildflowers. These in turn increase the number of insects which pollinate our crops as well as providing food for declining numbers of farmland birds. In order to graze our sites we need to ensure that they are securely fenced, which is an ongoing, expensive job, repairing and replacing old fences and installing new fences. In the last two years 2015 - 2016 contractors installed over 3.5kms of fencing for us thanks to funds from Severn Waste Services and our volunteers replaced posts and made repairs along a further kilometre of old fencing. That's a lot of fence!

Friends of VLHT

Someone once sang "we'll get by with a little help from our friends". And VLHT are very lucky to have a small number of Friends who donate regular amounts to support the work that we do in protecting parts of the beautiful Vale. However, we do need to reach out to more people to increase this form of income over the coming years. Please consider becoming a Friend of Vale Landscape Heritage Trust to ensure we can continue to care for the beautiful Vale. A Standing Order form can be downloaded from our website: <http://valetrust.weebly.com/friends.html> or contact Gary at the office.

Friends of VLHT

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

Birds at Lower Moor and Haines Meadows wetlands October – December 2016

Rob Prudden

The start of October saw the last few summer migrants moving through south, including the last few **Swallows** on 3rd and a late **Hobby** on 9th. A juvenile **Ruff** joined the local **Lapwing** flock from 14-19th. At the same time winter visitors from the north had started to appear with the first **Redwing** arriving as early as 21st September. The first **Fieldfares** always arrive a little later and this year were first seen on 10th October, the numbers then rising daily to a peak of (630) on 23rd November while Redwings peaked at c525 on 15th November.

Thirty migrant **Meadow Pipits** were around the river meadows on the 3rd October. The first **Golden Plover** arrived on 5th October, with more seen daily and rising to a peak of (475) towards the end of the year, these closely associating with the wintering flock of up to (650) Lapwings.

Snipe numbers were low this year with (24) being the highest count in early December, this low number in part due to the relatively dry autumn and early winter. With the lower water levels the river flash was drier than would normally be expected at this time of year, this led to unexpected boggy areas with emergent annual weeds which proved attractive to two **Jack Snipe** from 29th October – 16th November. This species is rarely seen at Lower Moor and is the diminutive, and much scarcer, close relative of the common Snipe.

A pair of **Stonechats** found a rough scrubby area at Haines Meadows to their liking and were present from the end of September right through till the end of the year. Due to the low water levels, wintering Duck numbers were less than spectacular with highest counts of only (150) **Teal** and (57) **Wigeon** and a roaming flock of (14) **Shoveler** which were seen overhead on several dates.

Four **Goosander** were seen flying north high up over the site on 4th November, while a female of this species found the area to its liking and was seen fishing along the river throughout the whole of December.

For several decades, huge numbers of Gulls have fed daily at the nearby Landfill site, with several thousand spending the daytime loafing on the river meadows at Lower Moor. From October 2016 all general waste has been taken to a nearby incinerator. This led to an almost instant dramatic drop in Gull numbers and by the beginning of December no more than 30 birds were present and an almost eerie silence was apparent.

Other birds of interest included a **Little Owl** calling at dusk for a week or so at the end of October, while a **Barn Owl** was seen hunting on several evenings. **Kingfishers**, **Water Rails**, **Grey Wagtails**, **Bullfinches** and **Treecreepers** were resident and seen regularly, while a small flock of mixed **Redpolls** and **Siskins** fed in Silver Birch trees along the Lench Ditch from the beginning of December.

A female **Peregrine** visited on several dates at the beginning of December causing mass panic amongst the winter Plover flocks on each occasion. A **Little Egret** roosted on the river flash on a single date at the end of October.

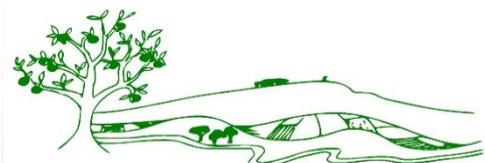
Linnets have become scarce in recent times with changes in farming practices, so a flock of 70 around Wick throughout the period was good to see.

With the relatively mild early winter period during December, up to five wintering **Chiffchaffs** were managing to find enough food around the small reed bed alongside the Lench Ditch to sustain themselves.



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

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