

WildAvon

Fungi foraging

If you go down to the woods today, should you take what you find?

THE POWER OF PEAT

Nature's carbon-storing hero

HONK!

Swans, geese and herons



Avon
Wildlife Trust

Welcome



to your autumn *Wild Avon* magazine, helping you to make the most of what this season has to offer. After this summer's General Election, I'm interested to see how the new government and those in power locally will prioritise nature. The Wildlife Trusts will be here to hold them to account, and it's thanks to members like you that we're able to raise our collective voice and speak up for wildlife.

While golden hues are starting to colour our landscapes as the season's changes unfurl, at Avon Wildlife Trust our eyes are fixed firmly on the horizon. We know that there is so much potential for habitat creation and restoration in our region – you'll be able to read more about the important environmental role peatland plays, and why we want to protect and restore it, on page 6 and in our feature starting on page 18.

In order to focus on connecting and creating more habitats across the region, we will be channelling our resources towards nature reserves and areas of land where we can make the most impact. We need to hone in on those areas which need our attention and expertise the most, rather than those which could be equally well managed for nature by their original owners. I'm excited to take you on this journey with us, which you can read a bit more about on page 23.

This doesn't take away from the importance of everyday actions. I love seeing what members of the Team Wilder community have been doing for the nature on their doorstep – you can see some for yourself on page 26. It's truly inspiring, and the perfect example of the growing Team Wilder movement, with people taking action for wildlife in their day-to-day lives across our region. Every action, big or small, makes a difference – why not log yours on the Team Wilder map, at avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/team-wilder

I hope to see you at this year's Annual General Meeting, you can find the details on page 22. In the meantime, thank you for your continued support of local wildlife as a member of Avon Wildlife Trust.

Ian Barrett

Chief Executive of Avon Wildlife Trust
Follow me on X @IanBarrettSW



© GEORGE COOK



© VAUGHN MATTHEWS

Avon Wildlife Trust

Wild Avon is the membership magazine for **Avon Wildlife Trust**, your local wildlife charity, working to secure a strong future for the natural environment and to inspire people to care for it. With the support of over 18,000 members and 400 active volunteers, the Trust cares for over 30 nature reserves, runs educational and community programmes, advises landowners and campaigns on issues that threaten wildlife habitats.

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Follow us on social media for the latest news and events. Please share your wildlife pictures and experiences! You can also subscribe to our monthly newsletter online through our website to hear about our latest news and events.



Facebook, X, Instagram @avonwt

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© NEIL ALDRIDGE



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© FRANKIE CLINCH

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A special tribute to some volunteers and founding members who have recently passed



6 ways to get involved with your local Wildlife Trust

Help us to bring wildlife back across 30% of land and sea by 2030 by increasing your membership donation today, so that we can all benefit from nature on our doorstep: avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/increasedonation

Be part of Team Wilder
Become a part of our growing community of local people who take action for nature as part of their everyday lives: avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/team-wilder

Campaign We need your voice to raise awareness for urgent local issues such as fighting the ecological emergency, reversing insect decline and creating a connected network of habitats for wildlife: avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/campaign

Fundraise Set yourself a challenge or organise an event to fundraise with family and friends to help wildlife in our region: avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/fundraise

Give the gift of land
Help to secure 30% of land for wildlife by 2030 by contributing land or the money to make a purchase: avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/gift-land

Include a gift in your will
Celebrate your love for local wildlife by giving a gift that could last for generations. A gift in your will, no matter how big or small, can make a real difference: avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/giftinwill

Your wild autumn

The best of the season's wildlife and where to enjoy it across Avon

A close-up photograph of a beaver standing in a shallow pond. The beaver has thick, brown, wet-looking fur and is looking down towards the water. The background is filled with dense green ivy leaves. The water in the pond reflects the beaver and the surrounding foliage.

Beavers are a keynote species, playing a unique and critical role in creating thriving ecosystems from which a wealth of wildlife benefits



Thank you

Thanks to your support, we're able to encourage our local beaver population and make sure everyone follows The Beaver Code. Find out more at avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/beavers

AUTUMN SPECTACLE

Brilliant beavers

In the autumn, beavers will be busy creating a food cache in preparation for winter, to ensure they have enough to eat over the colder months. This will consist of branches and twigs, stored underwater by pushing them into the floor at the bottom of a waterbody, close to the entrance to their lodge.

Known as nature's engineers, beavers can create natural solutions to some of the environment's biggest problems. Their dams have the potential to protect against flooding, help prevent drought, hold back silt which captures carbon, and clean our water supply by filtering out sediments and pollutants. Even the act of creating a dam, by gnawing down trees, encourages new growth among light-seeking plants, boosting botanical diversity and attracting a host of invertebrates.

SEE THEM THIS AUTUMN AND WINTER

Look out for the following signs along our region's waterways:

- A beaver lodge, which is a large pile of branches beside a watercourse
- Gnawed wood, particularly a log or branch that has been gnawed to a "pencil tip" point
- A large, long footprint, clearly showing the outline of their webbed hind feet

Precious lowland peat

Peatlands are among the most carbon-rich ecosystems on Earth, storing twice as much carbon as forests. These slow-forming wetland wonders are incredibly important as they support a huge array of wildlife, as well as capturing and storing carbon and acting as a flood defence.

When peatlands are drained for use, they degrade and shift from a carbon store to a carbon emitter. England's lowland peat soils are among the largest sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the land-use sector, accounting for 3% of England's GHG emissions overall.

SEE IT THIS AUTUMN

➤ **Weston Moor and Gordano Valley National Nature Reserve (NNR)** Neighbouring one another, these nature reserves provide a tranquil backdrop for an autumn stroll. Follow the public footpath through Weston Moor and into the NNR to take in the views across the peatland, glowing in the autumn light. The winter splash-flooding created by the raised water level system within the reserves supports an abundance of invertebrates, which in turn provides a valuable food source for an array of birds and small mammals.

© FRANKIE CLINCH



Wonderful water vole

PLOP! The unforgettable sound of a water vole entering the water. These elusive little creatures can be found in some urban wildlife sites across the region, with their glossy brown/black fur, small black eyes, blunt muzzle, round ears and dark furry tail. Gorging themselves on the culinary delights of a bankside wildflower buffet, they're known to eat around 230 different species of vegetation.

Like beavers, they're 'ecosystem engineers'. Their nibbling habits enhance flower-rich bank habitat, benefiting many insects, which in turn provide food for birds. Their complex underground burrows are also used by other small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects as a refuge.

How to help a water vole

➤ Monitor

Report your water vole sighting to our local environmental records centre, the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre. You can even report their footprints, latrines (poo and wee) and their food larders (little collections of grass cut at a 45 degree angle, left in a pile).

➤ Advocate

We know that river health is a massive concern locally, for us and for wildlife. Contact your MP to advocate for cleaner rivers or get involved in a local river monitoring scheme. Visit [avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/team-wilder-resource-rivers](https://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/team-wilder-resource-rivers) for more inspiration of how we can take action for rivers.

Amie and Eric, our two expert ecologists, answer some of your most asked questions!

Ask an
Ecologist



I've got cats but I want to help the birds in my garden. What can I do to keep them from harm's way?

Placing bird boxes high up in trees and on fences is a great way to provide a protected area for chicks to develop away from the reach of cats. Having a bell on your cat's collar is also a hugely helpful way of giving birds a chance to escape if there is a cat on the prowl. If you know of a nest with fledglings, try to keep the cat inside for a couple of days, as fledging is when chicks are at the highest risk of predation!

I've noticed there is some wildlife with mange in my area. Is there anything I can do to help?

Mange is a skin disease common in urban wildlife, caused by microscopic mites. If you see an animal suffering in your area, you can contact either Fox Angels Foundation (for foxes) or Secret World Wildlife Rescue, and they will be able to either advise or sometimes issue medication you can leave out for the animal. When treated, animals can make a full recovery from mange and stop spreading it.

There are lots of bats flying at night around where I live. Is there anything I can do to encourage them?

All bats are protected in the UK and are fantastic hunters of flying insects. Bats are towards the top of the food web, so having them nearby indicates there is a healthy ecosystem in the area. To support bats, consider adding a bat box to a tree in your garden, about 6 feet high and on a south facing side of the trunk. You can also plant more night-scented plants, such as honeysuckle, tobacco plant, evening primrose and white campion, to attract moths and other insects that bats feed on.



Visit our website for more actions you can take to help wildlife this autumn:

[avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/team-wilder-at-home](https://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/team-wilder-at-home)

Our pick of your photos

We're lucky that so many supporters are also talented photographers! It's been such a joy to see the wonderful wildlife you've been able to capture and how nature has caught your eye. Sharing photos like this is a great way to take action for nature and be part of Team Wilder, as it's a sure-fire way to inspire others:



◀ **Damselfly on the back of an emperor dragonfly**

© Hugh Purvis



Squirrel ▶

© Oli Polhill @olipolhill



◀ **Lesser stag beetle**

Elizabeth Cooksey
@Elizabe77372721



Swan ▶

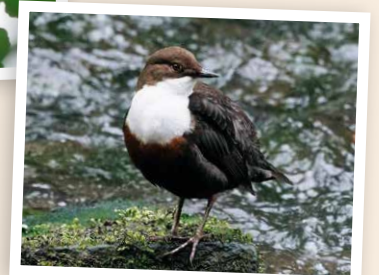
Toby Pickard

@Tobypickardphotography



◀ **Tawny owl chicks**

Amy Collyer
@amy.louphotography



Dipper ▶

Dave @Daves_Wild_life



Send us your ecology questions and photos to **@AvonWT** on social media or to communications@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk



SEE THIS

Mistletoe's distinctive white berries will appear in November and December. They are a favourite of blackcaps but poisonous to humans

DO THIS

Visit our wildflower nursery at Grow Wilder, where the team will be able to help you find the perfect additions to plant in your green space, ready for spring

© ZSUZSANNA BIRD

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Grey heron

The grey heron is a distinctive, tall, prehistoric looking bird with long legs and beak and covered in grey, white and black feathers. Look out for them standing very still along the edge of ponds, rivers or lakes as they wait to catch their next meal.



A long, pointed beak that lets them hold on to their slippery fish dinner!

Adults in breeding plumage have a dark black stripe above the eye and a long black plume that extends from their head.

Long legs let them wade into water without getting their body wet

© TERRY WHITTAKER / 2020 VISION

Diet

The majority of a grey heron's diet is made up of fish so you will most likely see them near water, standing on their long, thin legs and waiting, still as a statue, for fish to swim past. Looking for an easy meal, they can be drawn to people's gardens and ponds to hunt for a quick snack. Depending on the time of year and food availability, however, they can be tempted by other food sources. They have been known to eat small birds, ducklings, amphibians and even small mammals like moles and voles. Sometimes they can be spotted in fields after they have been harvested, looking out for small rodents.

Ecology

Despite grey herons spending most of their time alone, they will come together to breed and build large nests made of twigs in the tops of trees. The communal colony of nests is known as a heronry. In some places, heronries have been used by the birds for many decades and can contain up to 40 nests. Herons will lay 3-4 eggs that will hatch between March and April each year. Therefore, visiting your nearby heronry in early spring can be a great time to see the young chicks before the leaves block the views.

History

In medieval times, the meat of a grey heron was considered very high status and was often served at banquets. However, the birds were all considered property of the crown, so there were heavy fines for anyone caught poaching them. Herons were also popular quarry for medieval falconers who would send their birds after them. They were considered a good catch and valued for their good flying skills and ability to evade the falcon's stoops.

Anglers used to believe that heron's feet released a scent that would help attract fish. They would often carry a heron's foot with them to bring them good luck.

WHERE TO SEE THEM THIS AUTUMN

➤ **Cleeve Heronry** A small woodland that is home to a heronry of 40 nests! There is no access to the reserve but there is good viewing from the layby, so bring your binoculars and you can watch the fledglings being fed each spring.

➤ **Eastville Park** Herons are a common sight around the lakes at Eastville Park and on the River Frome that runs through it. Used to the hustle and bustle of the park, these confident birds allow for good views and photographs. Also keep a look out for the kingfisher!

THREE SIMILAR SPECIES TO SPOT

Great white egret

Once a rare visitor to the UK but becoming increasingly more common. Almost as large as the grey heron, but completely white with a yellow beak and black feet.



© GEORGE COOK

Little egret

A bright white bird, about half the size of the grey heron, with a dark beak and distinctive yellow feet.



© GEORGE COOK

Cattle egret

A small white heron that is often spotted around cattle. Slightly smaller than the little egret with a stockier build and a shorter yellow beak.



© JIM HIGHAM



Did you know? A heron is likely to be one the largest birds that might visit your garden. They stand at around one metre tall and have a six foot wide wingspan!

SPOT THIS

If you see a tell-tale trail of bubbles near a reedbed, it might mean that an otter has seen you before you've seen it!

HEAR THIS

The unmistakable crunch of leaves underfoot, as you take a walk through the woods this autumn. Why not pick one up and try one of the crafts from this page?

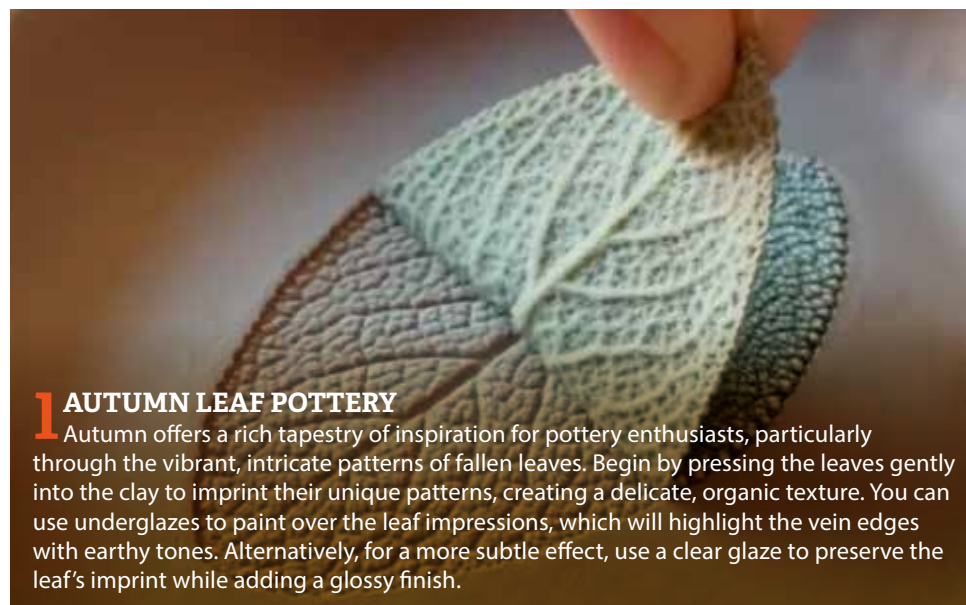


© TOM MARSHALL

NOT JUST FOR KIDS

Five ways to enjoy autumn

Why should kids have all the fun? Reignite your love of nature with these random acts of wildness.



1 AUTUMN LEAF POTTERY

Autumn offers a rich tapestry of inspiration for pottery enthusiasts, particularly through the vibrant, intricate patterns of fallen leaves. Begin by pressing the leaves gently into the clay to imprint their unique patterns, creating a delicate, organic texture. You can use underglazes to paint over the leaf impressions, which will highlight the vein edges with earthy tones. Alternatively, for a more subtle effect, use a clear glaze to preserve the leaf's imprint while adding a glossy finish.

© PIPER POTTERY

2 Nature-inspired fabric painting

Leaves offer a natural and creative way to dye and eco-print fabric. To start, gather an assortment of freshly fallen leaves and boil them to extract their pigments. Strain the mixture to create your dye bath. Pre-treat your fabric with a mordant, such as alum, to help the dye adhere better, and then immerse the fabric in the dye bath, simmering gently until the desired colour is achieved. For a more artistic touch, try eco-printing by arranging leaves directly onto the fabric, rolling it tightly, and steaming it to transfer the leaf patterns and colours onto the material.



© KALICO.CO

3 Deer rutting in Bristol

Each year from late September to early November, Bristol's green spaces, such as Ashton Court Estate and Leigh Woods, become a stage for the deer rut. This dramatic natural event involves the stags competing for the does' attention and is marked by powerful displays of strength and vocalisations known as roars or bellows. To fully enjoy this spectacle, visit these parks during the early morning or late afternoon when the deer are most active. Bring binoculars for a closer look and keep a respectful distance to avoid disturbing the animals.



© EMMA FENNEL HODSON



4 Attend a local apple pressing day

Attending a local community apple picking and pressing day offers numerous benefits, enriching both individuals and the community. In the autumn, apple days are hosted across the region, with participants gaining hands-on experience of harvesting and processing apples and getting to celebrate with a fresh glass of apple juice or cider at the end! Apple days foster a sense of camaraderie as neighbours work together, strengthening community bonds and creating lasting memories.

5 Forage local ingredients to make tasty meals

Head to the countryside, woodlands, or even hedgerows to gather blackberries, elderberries, sloes, wild apples and mushrooms (though more about them on page 16!). When foraging, always carry a reliable field guide to ensure safe and accurate identification. With your foraged treasures, you can create a variety of seasonal dishes; blackberries and apples make a crumble or jam, while hawthorn berries can be turned into ketchup!



© CANVA

Discover Goblin Combe

Close to Bristol Airport, Goblin Combe is a woodland full of character and diversity, with patches of airy grassland on clifftops with stunning views, connected to woodland pasture, and a valley bottom featuring deeply dark, dense yew groves and bright open woodland rides.



© MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION

Goblin Combe is a wonderfully varied site, with areas of rare limestone heath grassland designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the interesting species abundance that alkali calcareous grassland with small pockets of acidic heath brings. Over 30 species of butterfly have been recorded here, including grizzled and dingy skippers, and brown argus.

On your visit you'll find patches of bare stone scree, rock outcrops and cliffs; a small ancient area of woodland in the valley bottom, dominated by the deep dense shade of yew trees and veteran oaks; newly created woodland pasture; and large swathes of comparatively low-diversity plantation woodland.

It is these areas of low-diversity plantation woodland that we are now working to dramatically improve through the Wilder Woodlands project (previously mentioned in the Spring 2024 edition of *Wild Avon* magazine), supported by the Natural England Species Recovery Programme Capital Grant Scheme



© JON HAWKINS - SURREY HILLS PHOTOGRAPHY

and The Halpin Trust. Through the Wilder Woodlands project, we want to permanently increase the populations of dormice, greater and lesser horseshoe bats and barbastelle bats within the woodland and surrounding areas.

The beauty of improving an area for these species is that, as a consequence, we'll be improving the entire web of life. We cannot benefit the life chances of dormice or bats without giving them more places to rest, nest or hibernate, and increasing their food sources to allow them to sustain themselves.

By selectively felling plantation trees and bringing in more light, we create a



© GEORGE COOK



© MARIE JULIEN

knock-on effect which in turn brings more plant diversity and plant health, providing more flowers throughout the year, and leading to more nectar and pollen, fruit and nuts. As well as being food for dormice, these food sources also provide for an abundance of insects within the woodland. The dormice also eat these insects, and flying insects are the food sources for the bats.

DID YOU KNOW The woodland of Goblin Combe was planted in the late 1950s and 1960s. Prior to that the area was rough open pasture and heath, grazed heavily by rabbits and livestock, with a small number of large trees inhabiting the steep sided valley bottom. The stunning grassland of Goblin Combe is a remnant of that former landscape, further examples of which might become apparent during the course of future management.

Thanks
to your support,
Goblin Combe is becoming
more accessible, with
improvements to the
steps and footpaths
planned.



© L. BERSWEDEN

The Wilder Woodlands project has created open rides, glades and woodland edges at Goblin Combe, which will soon become a thriving network of interconnected areas, bursting with insects, birds, butterflies, bats and dormice.

Goblin Combe is one of Avon Wildlife Trust's oldest reserves, with 15 hectares that has been leased to and managed by the Trust since the early 1980s. The site in its entirety (76 hectares) was generously gifted to us in 2018, and was dominated by non-native plantation trees. This reserve is not only stunning to visit, but a brilliant example of how your support has allowed us to make a real difference for wildlife.



© VAUGHN MATTHEWS

NOW YOU DO IT

1 Visit Goblin Combe

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

A free car park in Cleeve followed by a 1.5km walk up the combe through our neighbours' woodland brings you to the reserve entrance at the old parish boundary wall. The site has steep uneven steps and cliffs, rough ground and bare earth footpaths that can become very muddy in wet weather. Walking boots or wellies are strongly advised.

Grazing animals help us manage the reserve and wildlife likes not to be disturbed, so if you decide to bring a dog, please keep it on a lead.

TOP WILDLIFE TO SPOT

- **Greater horseshoe bat** – Looking up on a mild late evening walk may reveal one of the UK's largest bats foraging for flying insects in the newly opened up woodland rides/footpaths.
- **Autumn lady's-tresses** – This diminutive yet beautiful orchid thrives in the areas where the local rabbit population keeps the grassy sward at its shortest.
- **Green and great spotted woodpeckers** – Green woodpeckers can be seen feeding on the insects on the grassland, while the great spotted woodpeckers flit between the trees throughout the woodland.
- **Roe deer** – Most easily spotted early in the morning or late in the evening, roe are a largely solitary, medium-sized deer regularly spotted at Goblin Combe.

THINGS TO DO

- Climb the steep steps to reach the viewpoint that takes in the surrounding woodland and fields, and which reaches out to the sun setting over the Severn estuary
- Appreciate the stunning veteran oak tree with a large gaping hole in it, just as you enter the reserve through the boundary wall, on the left-hand side just up the slope
- Wander the newly widened woodland rides, take a mental snapshot at this early stage, and revisit the reserve in the coming years to see how the rides develop with more and more vegetation and wildlife.

More nature sites to explore for an **autumn day out**



2 Folly Farm

Why now?

Autumn is a great time to visit. Climb to one of the viewpoints on Round Hill or East Hill as autumn hues envelope the Chew Valley and the Mendip Ridge beyond and witness a stunning sunset over Chew Valley Lake below.

Know before you go

Location: Stowey, Bishop Sutton, BS39 4DW

Open: Open at all times, no dogs allowed. Some paths are steep and can be extremely muddy. The access for all trail provides a level walk suitable for both wheelchairs and pushchairs, whatever the weather.

Wildlife to spot: Badgers, barn owls and our conservation grazers, six Exmoor ponies.

Find out more:

avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/folly-farm

The lowdown

Visiting Folly Farm at this time of year can offer you the chance to enjoy its 250 acres of woodland in a spectacular array of autumnal tones. You may also catch sight of a badger



© ALEX PRESTON

preparing for the winter ahead or to see a barn owl quartering the rough grass in search of a meal!

Folly Farm has largely escaped the intensification of agricultural practices that have led to the loss of some of our most precious habitats over the last one hundred years or so. Evidence of this can be seen in the numerous anthills and scattered scrub across the species-rich grassland. It is located near Chew Valley Lake and the village of Bishop Sutton, and as well as woodland the reserve includes unimproved neutral grassland, hay meadows and pasture, much of which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Managed by Avon Wildlife Trust since 1986, the site still offers glimpses of its past as a medieval deer park and later a ferme ornée which formed part of the pleasure grounds of the Sutton Court estate.



© ERIC SWITHINBANK

3 Lockleaze Sports Centre

Why now?

Local residents and volunteers dug ponds, planted trees and sowed meadows over winter and early spring. Now is a great time to enjoy the fruits of their labour as the whole area is full of wetland wildflowers and buzzing with life.

Know before you go

Location: Lockleaze Sport Centre (LSC) is at Bonnington Walk, BS7 9XF. The nature trail runs from the Filton Abbey Wood cycle path, around the back of the sports pitches to the top of Landseer Avenue.

Open: The nature trail is open at all times.

Wildlife to spot: Starlings, dragonflies and newts.

Find out more:

lockleazehub.org.uk/really-wild-lockleaze

The lowdown

The attenuation pools at Lockleaze Sport Centre have become a valuable wetland habitat, full of purple loosestrife, marsh woundwort, dragonflies and newts. Volunteers and residents have come together to enhance this site for wildlife, planting 250 wetland wildflowers (from Grow Wilder), eight apple trees, 160 native trees and 140m of hedgerow. The alder buckthorn they planted has successfully encouraged brimstone butterflies into the area and created bumblebee nesting sites.

A local resident initially got in touch with the Really Wild Lockleaze project to highlight the potential for the land around the sports centre to be enhanced for the benefit of nature. Lockleaze Green Gym had already created a fantastic wildlife garden close by, so the Really Wild Lockleaze team have been working hard with the local community to push back some of the brambles that were encroaching on the wetland.



If you're interested in getting involved in work to further extend the nature trail, contact reallywild@lockleazent.co.uk or sonia.parsons@tcv.org.uk



Rhiane Fatinukun MBE

 @rhianesworld



Finding Your Feet

 I am a person who cannot stay still for very long. Hiking and going on adventures are part of my DNA. Whether it's discovering new corners of the world or right here at home in the UK, getting outdoors is so good for our physical and mental health. Plus, there is so much to see and learn about; we share the planet with so many amazing flora and fauna.

As a child, I would spend time playing outside with my friends at the park, running down alleys to the brook behind my house. We used to go looking for black and white caterpillars and frogs, and we would leave water out for the hedgehogs living in our garden. Sadly, you don't see them anymore, which is one of the reasons I am so excited to be working with The Wildlife Trusts, to find ways to inspire young people to connect with and save nature. Hopefully, we can bring our spiky friends back from the brink.

In school, I always enjoyed spending time outdoors doing sports: cross-country running, rounders and netball. But when I started work, I lost that connection to the outdoors and nature. This is something I hear from people all over the UK – they are desperate to connect with the environment but not sure how. That used to be me.

If you live in an urban area, it's hard to find like-minded people who want to experience the outdoors. When you do find groups, most people are white. It's not that those groups are all unwelcoming to a Black woman, it's just that there are shared cultural experiences that only Black women experience. I find strength, security and bonding in those situations.

But we needed to challenge stereotypes in outdoor adventure and within our community. So, I started Black Girls Hike, a small weekly meet-up group of nine or 10 people so that we were among like-minded and non-judgmental people. BGH is owned by the members, and collectively we challenge the norms and break down barriers for future generations. Now Black Girls Hike is a multi-award-winning national organisation with tens of thousands of members.

I love exploring different terrains, from mountains, hills and forests to coastal walks. I absolutely love the Peak District. I took Clare Balding there for the first time, which is really strange because she has been to loads and loads of places. I remember thinking that's like when people say they've never seen Sister Act or Dirty Dancing. But my favourite walk is from Robin Hood's Bay to Ravenscar in Yorkshire. It is so beautiful.

My top tip: a waterproof jacket is essential. But when I get my foam sit mat out, people often say, 'Oh, that's so handy, I'm going to get one of those.'

The Wildlife Trusts believe that everyone should have the opportunity to experience the joy of wildlife in their daily lives and are committed to putting equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of our movement. Find out more about our Wild About Inclusion approach, which includes ensuring more people from across society have better access to nature.



wildlifetrusts.org/commitment-to-edu

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE

Your Wildlife Trust is part of a movement of 46 Wildlife Trusts across the UK, Alderney and Isle of Man – so whether you're looking for a local stroll or setting off from home in search of a serious hike, The Wildlife Trusts have lots of great suggestions of walks to take:

wildlifetrusts.org/visit/choose-your-adventure

Rhiane Fatinukun MBE

shares how her desire to reconnect with nature led her to become a globetrotting hiker, adventurer and founder of the UK's largest outdoor collective, Black Girls Hike, dedicated to empowering Black women and girls to explore the great outdoors.

6 places to see **swans and geese**



The honking calls of these large birds in flight is a clear signal that winter is on its way. Necks outstretched and beaks to the wind, swans and geese in a v-formation skein is an iconic sight.

There are three species of swans, the mute swan, whooper swan and the Bewick's swan in the UK. The large, majestic and pure white mute swan is most recognisable and stays with us all year round in village ponds and waterways. Contrary to the name, the mute swan honks and snorts, while the whooper swan 'bugles' when feeding and in flight.

During the winter migration gaggles of geese flock together on UK wetlands. They graze on grassy banks, farmland, saltmarshes and seagrass meadows. The familiar Canada and greylag geese are joined by visitors such as pink-footed, white-fronted, barnacle and brent geese. Here are six of our best nature reserves for spotting swans and geese.

See the spectacle for yourself



1 Montrose Basin, Scottish Wildlife Trust

The Montrose Basin is a large intertidal estuary, attracting tens of thousands of pink-footed geese every autumn. As well as being internationally important for pink-footed geese, the reserve is a wintering site for whooper swans and mute swans.

Where: Montrose, DD10 9TA

2 Holywell Pond, Northumberland Wildlife Trust

The nature reserve consists of a large pond surrounded by grassland, mature and semi-mature areas of woodland and scrub. Greylag, pink-footed, brent and Egyptian geese visit together with whooper swans, wigeon and tufted duck.

Where: Holywell, NE25 0LQ

3 Parc Slip Nature Reserve, The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales

The wetlands and surrounding ponds at Parc Slip Nature Reserve are a fantastic haven for watching swans and geese during the autumn and winter. Its bird hides are perfectly positioned to keep an eye out for heron, teal, mallards, visiting lapwing and the resident Highland cattle that patrol the fields.

Where: Bridgend, CF32 0EH

4 Nature Discovery Centre, Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust

Take a seat in our shipping container bird hide or stay cosy in the 'hide in the sky' in the visitor centre. Both overlook the lake which is home to mute swans, Egyptian geese, Canada geese and greylag geese during winter.

Where: Thatcham, RG19 3FU

5 Blue House Farm, Essex Wildlife Trust

Flocks of over 2,000 dark-bellied brent geese travel from Siberia to graze on the marshes and wetland areas of this coastal reserve through winter. Joining them, you could spot Egyptian geese, Canada geese, brent geese and barnacle geese, alongside hundreds of waders.

Where: North Fambridge, CM3 6GU

6 Chesil Beach and The Fleet Nature Reserve, Dorset Wildlife Trust

The Fleet Lagoon in Dorset hosts a fabulous spectacle of up to 4,000 brent geese when they return from their Siberian breeding grounds. These handsome grey, black and white geese come for the winter to feast on the eel grass that grows here alongside a fabulous herd of mute swans.

Where: Weymouth, DT4 9XE

Did you spot any swans or geese?

We'd love to know how your search went. Please share your best photos with us!



@wildlifetrusts



@thewildlifetrusts

A 'shroom

Fungi are a varied group of enchanting species, from the beautiful to the downright sinister. As research into these fascinating life forms deepens, it feels as though we are just scratching the surface of a boundless and mostly invisible web of symbiotic connections that are so integral to our natural world.

Fern Elias-Stagg, Nature Reserves Officer, tells us more about the ancient practice of fungi foraging and how to safely admire these complex, captivating curiosities.

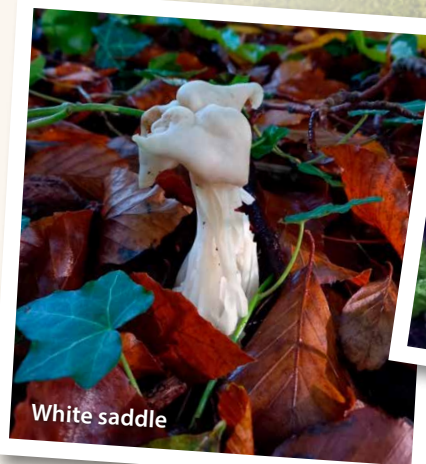
Fungi foraging is a practice that has been exercised for millennia, with fruiting bodies harvested for medicinal, culinary and spiritual purposes. Archaeologists suggest that humans were consuming fungi as far back as the palaeolithic period. Skip forward to today, in some cultures it is a celebrated annual activity, a custom in which families pass down knowledge from generation to generation. Here in the UK, fear has dominated much of the discussion around eating wild fungi. In recent years, however, more and more people are taking up fungi foraging as a wholesome pastime and food practice.

There are some compelling benefits; it can be a free activity, accessible to people who have low or no disposable income. It can be a very powerful pathway to deep nature connection. There are also a multitude of benefits associated with wellbeing, which include getting outside, being physically active and being mindfully immersed in the seasons. People become observers of minute changes around them, such as the appearance of a particular plant coinciding with precise weather conditions. It can also foster a curiosity and focus on the importance of local food, a keenness to lessen the burden of our diets on the natural world. Through these shifts in ways of thinking, a profound interest in and care for nature is bound to develop.

On the other hand, fungi foraging can be demonised as a reckless and destructive activity. This is due to the disrespectful approach taken by those who remove much more than they personally need and do not pay due consideration to the wildlife that depend on it. That said, the negative impacts associated with the unreasonable few pale in comparison to the challenges brought about by land use change. The biodiversity loss associated with the rampant development industry and pesticide use in agriculture far outweighs the impact of fungi foraging.



Ballerina waxcap



White saddle



Blackening waxcap



Common inkcap

with a view

Some food for thought

As a nature conservation charity, it's important for us to talk about some of the elements of this practice that we would like people to know if they already take part or are interested in foraging as a hobby.

There are well known risks resulting from consuming misidentified wild food. It is imperative to behave responsibly to protect yourself and your loved ones from illness. We'd encourage you to embrace learning through field guides, fungus groups and courses with experts, and remember that you can never be too cautious.

We follow the guidelines from the British Mycological Society and ask our visitors to respect all nature reserves by refraining from foraging wild mushrooms in them.

We'd encourage you to celebrate the fungi you spot by photographing or drawing them instead. In areas suitable for mushroom hunting, where there are few fungi fruiting, we'd advise you to leave them to execute their ecological function.

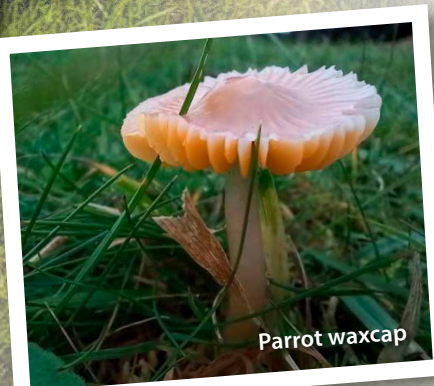
Fungi are not only fascinating but are vital in the life cycles of invertebrates. In turn, they are an important resource that trickles up to mammals, bats and birds. If you are harvesting fungi for personal use elsewhere, focus on benefitting from natural abundance, ensuring that plenty of immature and mature specimens are left to sporulate and for the insects.

It is imperative to behave responsibly to protect yourself and your loved ones from illness... Fungi are not only fascinating but are vital in the life cycle of invertebrates.

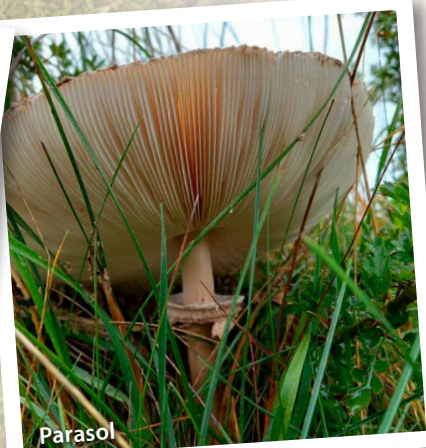
On all nature reserves, we encourage people to limit disturbance to the wildlife that we support by sticking to the footpaths and assigned routes. Straying off the path risks trampling rare plants and disrupting the peaceful habitats that much of the wildlife we protect relies on. So even if you are mushroom spotting, please stick to the paths.

Learning about fungi is a pursuit that could keep you captivated for a lifetime. There is opportunity to delve into their complex ecology, make records for scientific contribution and forage with consideration.

Thanks to your membership, we are able to look after habitats that support fungal populations to thrive across Avon, advise landowners on how to do the same, and work collaboratively with other organisations to connect these special landscapes.



Parrot waxcap



Parasol



Fly agaric

FUNGI PHOTOS: © FERN ELIAS-STAGG

© ABBIE HALL



Protecting our

You've probably heard of peat or peatlands. You may even have visited some of our lowland peatland reserves, such as Weston Moor or Clapton Moor in the beautiful North Somerset Levels and Moors. In recent years, there has been a new focus to protect and restore peatlands across the UK. This includes calls for a government-based ban on sales of peat, and a raft of peatland conservation projects being announced. Here at Avon Wildlife Trust, we're playing our part in protecting peatlands. Jen Robertson, Nature and Climate Officer, tells us all about our new, exciting project: **Somerset Moor Futures**.

What's so special about peat?

There are two things it is essential to know about peat. Firstly, it forms very, v-e-r-y slowly (more on that later). Secondly, due to the particular way it forms, it is among the most carbon-rich ecosystems on Earth, storing twice as much carbon as the world's forests. These precious peatlands occupy only 3% of the global land surface but cover a whopping 12% of the UK land area, meaning we have a lot of them!

In good condition, peatlands have a net cooling effect on climate and support biodiversity. Healthy peatlands can

reduce flood risk by slowing the flow of water from the uplands and providing floodplain storage in the lowlands. They also provide important nesting and feeding grounds for many wading birds, as well as important habitats for rare insects, amphibians and plants.

However, when peatlands are drained and start to degrade, all these benefits are lost, and they shift from being a carbon store to a carbon emitter! This issue has been recognised by the UK government, through the establishment of the Lowland Agricultural Peat Taskforce.

The Taskforce is charged with finding

viable, economically sound ways to protect peat. In their first report, published in June 2023, they said that:

"Peat is one of our most important natural assets. Healthy peatlands store carbon, help to control flooding, reduce the risk of wildfire and drought, act as a natural water filter and provide habitat for rare and unusual plants, birds and insects. However, England's lowland peat soils are among the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the land-use sector, accounting for 3% of England's overall greenhouse gas emissions and 88% of all emissions from peat in England."



© FRANKIE CLINCH

powerful peatlands

© MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION

How is it formed?

Put simply, peat forms when waterlogged ground conditions prevent dead plant material from fully decomposing.

It's also a recent(ish) thing. At the end of the last ice-age, 10,000 years ago, there wasn't any peat in the UK at all. Here, on the North Somerset Levels and Moors, it all started when the final glaciers melted, leaving behind wide, clay-lined valleys. As sea levels dropped and stabilised (around 6,500 years ago), saltwater reeds began to colonise the wetter valley bottoms. Over time, these became huge reed swamps, and as plants died and fell into the water, the anaerobic (oxygen-deprived) and acidic conditions prevented the plants from decaying completely, which also locked-in the carbon within them. This was the start of the peat forming. The reed swamps eventually gave way to freshwater habitats, supporting mostly sedges and sphagnum mosses. In drier areas, some trees and shrubs also began to colonise, over time adding layers and layers (and layers) of dead organic matter to the peat.

However, peat formation is a sloooooow process – it takes about 1,000 years for a depth of 1m to form! It will

also only form if there is enough water present to maintain the anaerobic and acidic conditions. It is a specialised, sensitive and rather particular habitat.

Peat's problem

Humans have recognised the value of peat for centuries. In many areas peatlands have been drained for agricultural use and extracted for fuel or as compost for gardeners.

Whilst commercial peat extraction for fuel is quite rare nowadays, the UK does still have large-scale peat extraction for peat compost or peat-containing products, despite calls for a total ban.

As peatland exists in areas which are prone to waterlogging, it has to be drained to keep it dry enough for use as agricultural land or for peat extraction. This is mainly achieved through digging ditches and pumping out the water. These ditches (known as 'rhynes' in Somerset or 'dykes' in East Anglia) act like wet hedgerows and are emblematic of these areas – below you can see the elaborate and

extensive watery networks criss-crossing the North Somerset Levels and Moors landscape.

Unfortunately, herein lies the problem. Draining the peat lowers the water table, allowing oxygen into the soil, and this restarts the process of decomposition. As the plant matter rots away, the stored carbon is released as CO₂, methane (CH₄) or nitrous oxide (N₂O), all of which are major greenhouse gases and causes of climate change.

© GOOGLE EARTH

Ditches and rhynes

What we're doing to help

Central government funding for lowland peatland protection is a welcome addition to the current range of environmental programmes on offer.

Our new project, **Somerset Moor Futures**, is one of 13 'Lowland agricultural peat water discovery pilot' projects being delivered across the country, funded by the Environment Agency. Working alongside our partner FWAG (Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group) SouthWest, the project will focus on five deep peat moors in the North Somerset, Axe-Brue and Parrett catchments.

Our overall aim is to bring together farmers and landowners into groups known as Moor Associations. These farmer-led groups create a space for the members to discuss key issues and make decisions, as well as communicate with key partners across the farming, water and environmental sectors. With collaboration and consensus-building at the centre, the Moor Associations can explore how land management could change

across a whole moor (or hydrological block), to enable farmers to access new public and private finance opportunities, with particular emphasis on peat preservation and emissions reductions.

This will be a great opportunity for farmers and landowners to learn about new funding streams, develop techniques for collaboration that suit their needs, and most importantly, contribute to the national discussions about the future use of their peatland.



If you are a farmer or landowner working within these catchments and you are interested in getting involved, please contact: **Jen.Robertson@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk**

Thanks to your membership, we are able to care for and protect our peatland nature reserves and work with neighbouring landowners to enhance these vital habitats.



Our overall aim is to bring together farmers and landowners... to discuss key issues and make decisions... with collaboration and consensus-building at the centre.



FOCUS ON... Cache your cash for wildlife



**We need
your help**

to establish our very own
'cache' to make Avon a
wilder and more
nature-friendly place.



© MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION

© ALAN PRICE

This autumn, we're asking you to plant the seeds for a brighter, biodiverse future for your local wildlife and wild spaces. Donate today and your gift could be worth up to 10x its value!

Whilst you're out and about in the woods this autumn, you might spot a busy jay burying acorns in the ground for its winter larder. These colourful corvids create 'caches' across their territory, which they can then dig up when food is scarce during the winter months.

Like jays, we are also hard at work foraging for ways to build a wilder future for the wildlife you love. One of the routes we take to do this is through applying for charity grants, which fund our projects and ensure that we are able to continue our vital work with wildlife and the community. There's a lot of competition for grant opportunities, and many grant funds are unlocked by public donations from the community.

That's where you come in. Like a jay with its winter stash, donations from generous supporters like yourself will be gathered to ensure that we can act quickly to unlock funding for future projects. Whether that's inspiring the next generation of nature-lovers or securing land to restore local wildlife, your donation will bring us closer towards a wilder future for people and wildlife.

Your donation could be worth 10x more!

Donate today and your generosity could unlock as much as 10x the amount of your gift!

£25 could unlock £250. This

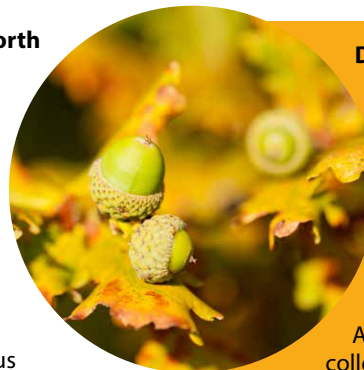
could help create buzzing, biodiverse wildflower corridors so that our precious pollinators can move from place to place.

£50 could unlock £500. This could help provide young people with the skills needed to take action for nature in their local communities.

£100 could unlock £1,000. This could help secure new land for the benefit of wildlife, creating connected, resilient habitats where some of our most threatened species can thrive.

Your gift could help build a wilder Avon for people and wildlife

Our vision is to secure **30% of land and sea for wildlife by 2030**. With a little over five years to go, it is vital that we **act together now** to make this goal a reality.



Did you know that a single jay can bury as many as **5,000 acorns** over the autumn months!

And they remember where they've left their stashes by recognising nearby landmarks.

But not all the acorns they bury get retrieved.

Acorns that don't get collected may grow into oaks, which support an incredible **2,300 species** – including 38 species of bird and the endangered barbastelle bat, which likes to roost in crevices in the bark of old trees.

Please join us today in planting the seeds of a future where the wildlife we love can thrive. Every gift saved for a rainy day will make a difference for generations of wildlife to come. **Thank you.**



Donate today at
**[avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/
cache-your-cash](https://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/cache-your-cash)** and your gift could
be worth up to 10x its value!

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Join us for our 2024 Annual General Meeting



Join us in celebrating the progress for wildlife that members, volunteers and supporters like you have helped make.

It was a pleasure to meet members at last year's event which was supported by Triodos Bank and took place in central Bristol. You are warmly invited to join us for our Annual General Meeting on 6 November at 6pm, taking place at:

The Create Centre, B Bond, Smeaton Road, Bristol, BS1 6XN

Please book your place at avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/AGM2024. Come and meet the team and hear about the work across the region that your membership supports.

Our Annual General Meeting highlights different areas of work and plays an important part in running the charity. The formal AGM meeting is for the following purposes:

As Ordinary Business

1. To receive the Annual Report of the Board of Trustees and Audited Annual Accounts, together with the Auditors' report, for the year ended 31 March 2024.
2. To elect as Trustees any persons duly proposed for election.

The board is proposing the re-election as an Elected Trustee of Nathan Rutter, whose first three-year terms of office comes to an end at this AGM.

Under the Companies Act 2006 the serving Auditors, Messrs Burnside, are deemed re-appointed and continue in office. Audited Accounts and Trustees' Annual Report will be available on our website 28 days before the event and are also on request from: agm@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk

Notes

Members are entitled to appoint a proxy to attend, speak and vote at the meeting on their behalf. A proxy need not be a member. To be a valid proxy, an appointment form must be received by the Trust not less than 48 hours before the time of the meeting. For a proxy form please contact agm@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk

New Elected Trustees (ie Trustees elected at the AGM) can be nominated by the Board of Trustees or by four members of the Trust by way of formal written proposal delivered to the Trust office at 17 Great George Street, Bristol, BS1 5QT no later than **23 October**, together with the written consent of the candidate to act as a Trustee. Candidates are required to provide verification of identity and a declaration of suitability and personal interests.

Without in any way restricting the members' rights to propose new Trustees in this way, members will note that the Board has not carried out a Trustee recruitment exercise this year as we are not anticipating any vacancies in elected Trustee positions after proposed Trustee re-elections.

Come to our AGM

Members, volunteers and friends of Avon Wildlife Trust are welcome to attend, only members will be invited to vote. Please confirm your attendance by visiting avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/AGM2024

AUTUMN AND WINTER EVENTS

The weather may be turning colder, but there are still plenty of ways to connect with nature! Here's an example of some the events that you can get involved in over the next couple of months. For the most up-to-date information, please visit avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/events

Wilder Waterways – The Land Yeo

Friday 25 October, 7.30pm – 9.30pm
Folk Hall, Portishead, BS20 6PR

An illustrated talk by Jen Robertson, Nature

and Climate Officer for Avon Wildlife Trust, about the Wilder Waterways project which is aimed at increasing the natural capital of the Land Yeo River. Hosted by the Portishead Local Group, entrance is £2 for adults and £1 for children and students, non-Avon Wildlife Trust members welcome. **For further information, call 01275 843160 or 07853 248476.**

Gordano Valley Conservation Group

Sunday 27 October – Weston Moor (Taggart's Wood), BS20 8PZ, W3W: [tempting.mural.running](https://www.tempting.mural.running)
Sunday 24 November – Tickenham Hill, BS21 6RQ, W3W: [talkative.barstool.window](https://www.talkative.barstool.window)
10am – 12.30/1pm

The conservation group's monthly practical volunteering morning, taking on land management tasks such as scrub control and hay-cutting to maintain and restore these stunning nature reserves. **For further information, call Sarah Kennedy on 07853 248476.**

Haven on the Avon - Lamplighter's Marsh

Friday 8 November, 7.30pm - 9pm
Baptist Church Hall, Keynsham, BS31 1DS
A talk by Stephen Judd, Friend of Lamplighter's Marsh, which forms part of an important wildlife corridor along the tidal river near the Bristol Channel. **For further information, call 07850 508702.**



Our land acquisition ambition

To realise our vision for a wilder future, we have a renewed focus on strategic land acquisition, alongside being a driving force behind community-led change for the benefit of wildlife.

In order to do more to protect, restore, connect and create more habitats across the region, we will be channelling our resources towards areas of land which need our attention and expertise. To do this, we will be handing back those reserves which could be equally well managed for nature by their original owners.

One such reserve is Dolebury Warren, where the National Trust is more than well placed to continue to care for this former Iron Age hill fort and its carpet of wildflowers. We'll be continuing to work closely with them as part of the Mendip National Nature Reserve.

An example of how we are forging ahead to make our vision a reality is through our leading role in the North Somerset Levels and Moors Partnership. Consisting of coastal and floodplain grazing marsh – designated a priority habitat by Natural England – these 8,000

hectares of land hold huge potential, which we're currently exploring.

By taking on land in key areas that represent the best opportunities to connect green spaces, we will be tackling two of our goals for 2030: seeing 30% of land and sea managed for the benefit of wildlife, and restoring 1,000 hectares of habitat to provide nature-based solutions.

We hope to be able to share further updates with you on this in upcoming editions of Wild Avon magazine, and are excited to take you on this journey with us.

Habitat havens for woodland wildlife

Thank you to everybody who has supported our work to regenerate local woodlands. Together, we have raised over £20,000 to build a blooming, biodiverse landscape that can stand up to the challenges of the climate crisis. Your support will provide wildlife-rich woodland homes, where threatened species like dormice and greater horseshoe bats can thrive.

The incredible support of our members and donors to our Woodland Homes for Wildlife and Help out Hibernators Appeals has helped to create **875** metres of sunlit woodland rides, where a flourishing understorey can provide sheltered

corridors for dormice to move safely from place to place. Through your continued support, you have helped to 'veteranise' **30 trees**, creating valuable nooks and hidey-holes that bats may use as roosts.

Thank you.

At Goblin Combe this winter, our dedicated volunteers gave an amazing 365 hours of their time to monitor bat populations, check dormouse boxes and undertake woodland management tasks such as hazel coppicing. Hibernators like bats and dormice have been our priority and we're looking forward to seeing how their populations use the extra resources we've been putting in place.



© TERRY WHITTAKER/2020VISION



The work to restore our woodlands doesn't stop here. To learn more about how your support is helping to create habitat havens for woodland species both now and in the future, visit [avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/wilder-woodlands](https://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/wilder-woodlands).



Farms to get wildflower habitat management support through Pollinator Pathways

© AMY LEWIS

We're embarking on a new project to create more connected habitats for our local bees, butterflies, moths, beetles and more! Pollinator Pathways, funded by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, aims to reverse the decline of pollinators in Avon by focusing on the 'B-Lines' – Biodiversity Lines – which are a national network of pollinator-friendly habitats, envisioned by the charity Buglife.

Pollinators provide a vital role in plant fertilisation, without which plants would not be able to produce fruits, seeds

and nuts, including those we eat like strawberries and apples.

Likewise, pollinators need plants. Flowers rich with pollen and nectar are needed throughout the entire season to keep pollinators fed – so a variety of wildflowers, crops and garden flowers are vital within the landscape to sustain our pollinators, and therefore sustain us. When one part of this interconnected web fails, it can create ecosystem collapse and catastrophe for our farmers and food production. Our actions have

consequences for both wildlife and our own food security and livelihoods.

We can offer farmers and other land-holding businesses support including surveys, habitat management advice and assistance with agri-environmental stewardship applications. We can provide small grants and volunteers' time for scrub control and fencing, for example.

Contact **Kerri.Watson@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk** for more information.

Wildlife Gardening Competition results are in!

The Team Wilder Wildlife Gardening Competition is a celebration of what real wildlife gardening looks like. It acknowledges the beauty and enjoyment of wildlife-friendly gardens, allotments, community spaces and school grounds. Finalists were selected from 100 entries according to how they use and enjoy the space available to them.

Entrants were asked questions which target the heart and soul of wildlife gardening, with a view to sharing their invaluable advice.

Peter in Bath has "tried to create a little wildlife paradise with diverse habitats in a really small space, balancing beauty and interest."



Emma in Paulton said: "We have transformed our garden from a bland, lacklustre, new-build garden into a

buzzing, colourful, wildlife-friendly garden. We have year-round interest and provide habitat, food and shelter for wildlife. Our garden is a wonderful, peaceful and tranquil place to sit and enjoy the sounds of wildlife, with a cup of tea."

And Emily in Emersons Green shared advice to "have some water, however small in the garden – even a pebble pool for bees to drink from will help. Don't be tidy, leave seed heads on and both you and the wildlife will be rewarded!"

Find out more and get inspired at **avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/team-wilder-wildlife-gardening-competition-2024**

© STEPHANIE CHADWICK

MY WILD LIFE

Rhea Warner

Rhea is the Community Organiser for the Nextdoor Nature Somer Valley project, and she is passionate about changemaking in communities.



My Steiner education embedded a love of all that grows, blooms and changes in our world; the Steiner curriculum is led by the changing seasons, so even though I studied in a city, everything from maths to geography was intertwined with the landscape around me.

I then went on to spend my early adulthood living and studying in eco-village communities in Sweden, Scotland and Brazil. Working with Elos Institute in Brazil to build a community garden on a derelict landfill site in São Paulo taught me the real power that communities have for changemaking. I learnt that generosity and kindness are mindsets that are infectious; they spark a sense of possibility and joy which can be a catalyst for bringing ideas to life. There's something very powerful about giving, whether it's time, skills, food, child-care, or money, everyone has something they can share with others.

In my work now, I find the most powerful practice is to inspire confidence and a feeling of abundance in people. My work focuses on listening to community needs and encouraging people's dreams, so I spend a lot of time getting to know individuals in rural Somer Valley. Then I work to connect people together and support groups to set up projects that matter to them.

I am passionate about working with the intersections of social changemaking and environmental work, acknowledging that the climate crisis is rooted in the same problems that feed social injustices. So, in my work I ask, can we live with eyes open to the global realities and crises we face, whilst leaning into local communities for inspiration and support? After all, community organising is a movement of people reimagining and acting together for healthier, abundant change.

My encouragement for you would be to have a go – if you have an idea, get started

and have fun with it. Don't take yourself too seriously, even if your motivations are. Whether it's starting a community garden, improving a patch of land on your street, or sharing your passion with local people in another way, put your intention out there – tell people your ideas and find something small to do today to move towards making it happen. There will never be a perfect moment to start, but you might just be surprised with what comes your way once you do.



To hear more about Rhea's project, you can subscribe to the Somer Valley Newsletter by visiting avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/nextdoor-nature-somer-valley



You can get in touch with Rhea to share your passion for community at Rhea.Warner@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk

ACTIONS FOR NATURE

All over the region, members and supporters just like you are doing brilliant things for nature as part of **#TeamWilder**. Together these actions add up and make a real difference for wildlife. Thank you for everything you do for nature! Here are some of your fantastic actions for nature.



◀ Hannah and Scott have been busy in Lockleaze, creating a mini pond and stumpery in their garden. The space balances exotic plants that remind Scott of home, with wildlife installations such as a nettle bed, native trees and poppies.

BA1 Wildlife Champion Alison Harper and the Grow Batheaston Group organised and ran the UK's first beaver festival: *The River, the Willow and the Beaver's Tail (Tale)!* This festival celebrated the return of beavers to the River Avon, by highlighting the insects that share their riverside home and their favourite food, the willow. ▶



◀ Team Wilder's Community Ecologist, Amie, went to visit the Nextdoor Nature Somer Valley group in Paulton to inform a planting plan for several spaces around the town, including a community garden at The Red Lion. Here they are next to some of the thousands of crocuses the group helped plant!

A dusty access track in BS3 might look like a wildlife desert, but upon closer inspection, residents found countless cinnabar moth caterpillars coating every ragwort plant in sight! The group are looking to make the shared alley a wildlife haven for birds, bats and pollinators, following advice from the Team Wilder Ecological Advisory Service. ▶



◀ BS35 Wildlife Champion Emma Young has set up a seed library at her local library in Thornbury, as part of the Fair Share permaculture principles. Emma is part of the Thornbury Community Permaculture Project and has been involved in developing and maintaining a permaculture garden at a local retirement home. They run volunteering sessions every Friday morning at Alexandra Way Care Home, Thornbury, from 9:30-11am.

🌱 Get in touch

Are you doing something wonderful for wildlife? Fundraising for frogs? Planting for pollinators? Whatever you are up to, we would love to hear about it. Send in your **#ActionsForNature** to **Communications@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk** or tag us on social media **@avonwt**

VOLUNTEERING



We'd like to take the opportunity in this edition of Wild Avon to pay tribute to some of our members, volunteers and founding supporters who have recently passed, and whose loved ones contacted us to share their stories. We wouldn't be where we are today without the dedication shown by people like these, and we hope you find inspiration in their lifelong love of nature. If you're interested in volunteering for nature, you can get in touch at volunteer@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk

Harry Williams joined Avon Wildlife Trust in 1981 when, with his wife Joy and daughter Helen, he became involved in the Long Ashton local group. He became Chairman of the group in 1986, with Joy as Secretary from 1983 until her death in 2009.

Led by Harry and Joy, the Long Ashton group flourished, with monthly talks and field trips around the region. They held many fundraising events, becoming famous for their homemade mince pies and Christmas puddings sold at their Christmas Bazaar.

As well as running the Long Ashton group, Harry spoke to other local organisations about Avon Wildlife Trust's work, giving presentations

and spreading his love of wildlife.

Harry was a member of the Long Ashton Parish Council, endeavouring to ensure that environmental impact was at the forefront of any decision made. An active member of his local community, he organised footpath clearing, tree planting and led nature walks.

Harry passed away in January 2024, just three days short of his 90th birthday. His daughter, Helen, says: "My Dad had such an influence on so many people's lives and always did his best to support Avon Wildlife Trust and the local wildlife. We will all miss him terribly, he really was an inspiration to so many, especially me."



Cynthia Wilson was a dedicated and loyal supporter of Avon Wildlife Trust, spending almost 20 years as a key member of the Keynsham local group.

Known for her astonishing energy, enthusiasm and wealth of new ideas, as Minutes Secretary, Field Outings Secretary and Speakers Secretary, she galvanised the group into new levels of working. She recruited some of the current committee members and started the group's regular article in the *Keynsham Voice* newspaper.

She organised many speakers, talks and walks, including a River Walk Exhibition in St John's Church. She listed some of her personal highlights as being a talk and visit to a bee-rich

garden, Jerry Dicker's expert talks on trees and visit to Tortworth Arboretum, observing Woodchester roosting bats on TV monitors and seeing great bustards on Salisbury plain. Cynthia retired from the committee in autumn 2020, and throughout her time remained cheerful, positive, supportive and patient.

David Sage, chair of the Keynsham local group, said: "Thank you so much, Cynthia, for everything you did to promote our knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of wildlife locally, nationally and worldwide. We will be eternally grateful for your outstanding contributions and will greatly miss not sharing with you our passion for all things wildlife."

Shirley and **Simon Woods** joined Avon Wildlife Trust at the very start, when it was formed by members of the Gloucestershire and Somerset Trusts who lived in the 'Avon' area.

As a founding member, Shirley ran our internal and external sales, including buying stock, pricing and selling at events such as flower shows, country fairs and open garden events held by another early supporter, Jan Barkworth. She wanted to spread her love of wildlife – with a particular soft spot for owls – and selling at events where she could speak with others was one of the best ways she could do this. She also loved running the two shops at Jacobs Wells Road and Willsbridge Mill, fetching and carrying in her Morris 1000.

Simon helped Shirley with sales and, using his professional expertise, carried out the land surveys for our Folly Farm reserve. Simon sadly passed away suddenly in 2000, but Shirley continued to support the Trust for many years after. She continued to sell at events until 2016, when she had to give up driving due to her advancing illness. However, she still made jams, marmalades and cakes to be sold at Jan's plant sales until 2020.

Both were active members of Stockwood local group, and their son Stephen – a member of AWT for as long as he can remember – continues to support us by selling plants from Jan's impressive garden collection.





It's a jolly Folly Christmas!

The festive season is almost upon us. Where better to celebrate than at the Folly Farm Centre?



A private venue to celebrate with family, friends or colleagues, our environmentally sustainable site overlooks the stunning Chew Valley - your own winter wonderland.

You'll be left with a festive glow, safe in the knowledge that all profits are gift-aided back to Avon Wildlife Trust.

A festoon-lit courtyard. A fire pit. A bar full of tinsel-ating tipples and cocktails. And a dancefloor with speakers for your music. What more could you want this party season?

Holly lunch or dinner

A two or three course festive feast.

From £26.99

Ivy half day event

Morning meeting space, guided nature walks or traditional board games and festive lunch.

From £36.85

Mistletoe day event

All day meeting space, guided nature walks or board games, with festive lunch or dinner.

From £45.00

Poinsettia party night

More fun than formal! Street food pie and mash boxes.

From £16.50

Christmas Rose residential stay

All day meeting space, guided nature walks and board games. Festive lunch, evening cheese and snacks, fire pit, overnight stay, and farewells over breakfast the following day.

From £170.00 per person

For more details and to book a Christmas party that helps local wildlife, contact info@follyfarm.org