

Mendip



From the Chair

After many requests for new people to come forward to help the committee fulfil the some of the roles and expand our expertise, I am pleased to say that is now taking place, you will be able to read about the new and existing members and how they are they are becoming involved further in the Newsletter.

There is still much to build on to keep the Mendip Society relevant and moving forward to broaden the aims and objectives of the Society, namely, to protect the rich and diverse landscape wrapped in history and changing cultures through the centuries.

The Mendip Society's first challenge was to halt the rapid expansion of quarrying across the Mendip Hills. The Society also led the way for the Mendips to become 'An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. Since it's designation in 1972 the 'Mendip Hills AONB Warden Service' later becoming the 'Mendip Hills AONB Unit' has contributed to the increased management of the land for landscape conservation.

Much has changed in recent years, the term, 'An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' is applied only to matters relating to Planning, it has now of course become known as the Mendip Hills 'National Landscape'. The Mendip Society will be here to keep the Mendip Hills protected for future generations.

Tina



And from the Editor



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Cover Photo. - by Sue Gearing.

Priddy Hurdle Stack. This picture has been on file for ages, just waiting for the right time to use it - which is now! Please do keep sending in your pics.

More than ever, I am grateful to all those of you that have written articles or contributed photographs for this edition. As some of you will know, I have had an enforced break while I convalesced from surgery, and so have not been able to attend many events in person.

Nevertheless, much has been going on - and plenty more is to come. Which is really encouraging for those of us who strive to make our society ever more attractive to all those people who love Mendip and all that entails. Particular thanks then to Roger Harvey for his photographs, and to Roger White, Ian Dagger, Steve Down, Nick Haskins, Richard Frost and indeed Tina, for articles and write-ups on the some of the highlights since our last edition.



We have had a very positive response to our appeal for people to put themselves forward and offer to help run the society and its activities. Within these pages you will find an introduction to our new planning officer, Roger Willmot, we now have the luxury of two suitably qualified and experienced planning officers, with a third joining them shortly, each covering their own part of the Mendip area. We also have a new manager for Slader's Leigh in the form of Jemima Rose, who has big boots to fill, but jointly with her husband Phil, is up for the challenge, I have to say it is all very encouraging stuff to be able to report.

Of course we would welcome still more of you coming forward to help out. To assist those already in various roles, to offer your skills and services, to organise walks, talks and events. Staff our stands at shows and events, or simply spreading the word about all we strive to do. I therefore make no apology for including a "Vacancies" feature on page 15 once again.

Cheers, Mike.

themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com

Mendip Society AGM 2026

The 2026 Annual General Meeting was held on 11th April at Draycott Memorial Hall. 35 members attended, which constituted a quorum. The Chairman's and Treasurer's reports were read out and may be seen on our website, other reports were printed in issue number 176 of the Newsletter. The following appointments were made to the Management Committee:

Chairman – Tina Bath* was elected unopposed by show of hands (no dissenting votes).

Treasurer – Marilyn Cattell* was elected unopposed by show of hands (no dissenting votes).

Secretary – Peter Janes* was elected unopposed by show of hands (no dissenting votes).

The following were elected all together and unopposed by show of hands (no dissenting votes):

Peter Janes* - membership secretary

Mike Harvey* – newsletter editor, on-line publicity

Mike Rolfe* – planning lead

Jo Bradshaw – events coordinator

Steve Down – rights of way.

Roger Willmott has been co-opted to the committee to undertake a planning role for NE Somerset.

* Trustees of the charity along with Judith Tranter.

After the meeting was concluded, a guest speaker, Richard Ellam, gave a most interesting and entertaining talk on the early history of railways in Britain showing how they were essential to the success of the Great Exhibition of 1851 and to Britain's industrial development. He made the interesting observation that the price of a ticket from Bristol to London, as a proportion of an average weekly wage, has not greatly changed since the mid nineteenth century despite the journey time being roughly one third of what it was."



*Society President Les Davies MBE, FRGS.
Photo: Mike Harvey*



*The hall gradually fills ahead of the meeting.
Photo: Mike Harvey*



*Guest speaker Richard Ellam.
Photo: Mike Harvey*

Life in Dry Stone Walls

Ravens fly upside down when they squawk "Gronk"!

This was one of Nathan Orr's less scientific quotes, but nonetheless a real observation which was witnessed by us on Sunday 23rd March around 11.20 at Deer Leap. This was the second walk/talk Nathan had done for the Mendip Society in recent months, and it took us to Deer Leap Reserve South of Priddy.

It focused on four species, three of which are Mendip Hills Nature Recovery Champion Species. This was interspersed with Nathan's hugely entertaining commentary on conservation.

Deer Leap is the site of an abandoned medieval farmstead, and it has not been intensively farmed for many years. I can remember it being home to a beautiful array of wildflowers. Sadly, these have decreased due to a tick-borne cattle disease. Although the tick disease is no longer thought to be a threat, local farmers are still reluctant to graze their cattle there, so it has been grazed by sheep for the last 30 years. Sheep graze differently to cattle, cutting the grass short to the detriment of wildflowers.

The first champion species that Nathan talked about, was the Black Oil Beetle. It is a prime indicator of a flower-rich and healthy ecosystem. Easiest to spot in early spring when both adults and larvae are active. The adults can be found trundling through meadows and woodland edges. Larvae are found on yellow flowers, particularly lesser celandine and dandelion (two of the early flowering yellow flower species) as the larvae, called triungulins, gather there to await their unwitting victims. They are parasites with a fascinating life cycle, the larvae emerge from their eggs, which were laid in clutches of up to 1,000. These tiny things, no more than 1-2mm in length, climb up onto the flowers and wait. When a solitary mining bee comes along to collect nectar and pollen from the flower, the larvae hitch a ride back to the solitary bee's hole. Once there, the triungulin drops off and waits for the bee to complete its nest. It then proceeds to eat the contents of the nest, including the developing bee larvae!



Black Oil Beetle
Photo: Wikipedia



Adder - basking
Photo: Mike Harvey

The next species to come under Nathan's spotlight was the adder. Stopping at one of 15 hibernacula ("a gert pile of stones"), with a tube going down to its base, from which moisture and temperature readings are taken for a study Nathan is conducting into Adder hibernation habitats. Nathan explained how the adder frequented the dry-stone walls as they were the homes for small rodents which the adders feed on, and a refuge from the predatory birds such as buzzards that will take adders.

Adders are in serious decline, but the Mendips are a stronghold for them. The best times to see Adders are during the 'lying out' period in early spring, from as early as February through to May, close to their hibernaculum, and late autumn at their hibernaculum sites, as they prepare to hibernate. It is important not to disturb them. Heliothermic means they absorb the heat of the sun directly by basking in sunny spots. The dark zigzag patterning assists in this process and on Mendip there are a high percentage of melanistic examples (this means black/dark blue). They give birth to live young (viviparous, a trait they share with the common lizard), an adaptation for our colder climate. The females produce eggs but keep them inside their body until the young hatch.



Nathan and one of his Hibernacula
Photo: Liz Dagger

Not a champion species but an important part of the Deer Leap ecosystem is the humble ant. Look carefully at the site and you can see lines of ant mounds that denote the lines of old dry stone wall field boundaries. The stones now buried in the ground act as a heat sump and this attracts ants whose excrement builds up into the mounds we see now. These mounds are good habitats for wildflowers, which in turn attract pollinators which spread wildflowers and are themselves predated. Maybe the ant should be a champion species but not because it is endangered but because of its role in the complete ecosystem. Three cheers for the ant!

Special Report by - Ian Dagger.



One of many anthills
Photo: Roger Harvey

While on the subject of the eco system, Nathan pointed out it is important to remember, when commemorating those who have passed away, human or canine, that scattering ashes in wild places, such as Deer Leap, is not as harmless as one might assume.

Most often the ashes do not 'scatter' they end up as a clump on the ground, and in these nutrient poor, but wildflower and wildlife rich sites, this can have a negative effect. Harming the plants and animals who live in those spaces. The nutrient load can lead to a change in the soil composition and change the plants that use these spaces. Favouring the species who love nitrogen and phosphorus, like nettle and hogweed, and harming the plants that love nutrient poor, limestone soils.

As a background soundtrack to Nathan's talk, we were accompanied by the song of the Skylark. The third champion species. They have an amazing song and display flight, which has inspired poets and songwriters throughout history. Their song is incredibly complex, composed of 'syllables' (a series of notes) which are not repeated, and last two - three minutes on average but have been recorded as up to an hour long. The song is sung as the bird makes a fluttering ascending flight and ends when the bird 'parachutes' back to the ground. The skylark makes its nest on the ground, in a small delve that it lines with grass, feathers and fur. Due to the high mortality rate of chicks and eggs with this breeding strategy, skylarks may have as many as four or five broods a year to ensure population survival. They are a champion species because they are on the Red List – UK numbers have declined by over 60% in the last 50 years with localised extinctions, but Mendip is still a stronghold.



Skylark
Copyright: TheOtherKev / Pixabay



Nathan points out places where creatures may reside
Photo: Liz Dagger



Nathan holds court - amongst the anthills...
Photo: Liz Dagger

Not to be outdone by the skylark we saw the first swallow of the year and, as we walked back to the car park for a welcome hot drink, a red kite came over the reserve passing to and fro looking for carrion.

Our thanks to Nathan Orr, MHNL's Nature Recovery Ranger, to Liz for arranging the walk/talk and making the drinks, plus of course all those who attended.

Yeo Valley Visit - Steve Down

Yeo better believe it!

The Society's recent visit to Yeo Valley Farms was blessed with a dry day, but a biting wind reminded us that Spring was not long sprung as we assembled in the car park. A swift transfer to the Organic Garden Café for hot drinks was in order, to meet our guide for the day, Farm Manager, Jon Wilson.

Jon explained the history of Yeo Valley from its original purchase in 1961 through to the first yoghurt production in 1972 and then onto its current position today as a top 100 UK food producer.

Whilst the Company allows the Yeo Valley Organic brand to be used by Arla for butter, cream and milk, the rest of the products are produced at their Mendip factory and at five other sites in the West Country.



In the feed sheds...
Photo: Jo Bradshaw.

The three farms that Yeo operate have plainly been through some major changes through the years with an increasing focus on striking a balance between productivity and methods that are sensitive to the environment. It was interesting to see how concepts such as mob grazing and the importance of trees on pasture reflected similar ideas to those in use at Ebbor Beef farm which we visited last year, albeit on a very different scale.

The members attending were full of questions which Jon was happy to answer, and more were prompted during our tour around the farm. We saw the feed sheds, grazing pure bred Friesians and the milking unit and housing that is used when pasture is unsuitable.

After our tour concluded, we adjourned to the Yeo Valley HQ Canteen for a delicious lunch with a fantastic view. I for one will be visiting the canteen again as soon as possible. Thanks to all involved in arranging this interesting and informative visit.

If you are at all curious about Yeo then there's a chance to hear the founder, Sarah Mead speak to the society about the Organic Garden and the Marketing of Yeo Valley at Bishop Sutton on 20th November. Bookings are already being taken.



A picture speaks a thousand words! Sue Gearing seems unsure...
Photo: Jo Bradshaw.



...And inspecting the organic pastureland.
Photo: Jo Bradshaw.

Open morning at Batch Farm - Christine Gray and Roger White

"Treat the earth well: we borrow it from our children"
counselled Crazy Horse, the Sioux Chief who defeated General Custer at Little Bighorn in 1876.



Roger White. "Treat the Earth well".

Photo: Roger Harvey

The notion that land owners have a stewardship responsibility is gathering momentum, thanks to efforts of conservationists and the "Rewilding" movement. At Batch Farm we are conscious of being one small strand in a web of life that has inhabited Mendip for thousands of years.



Maturing deciduous trees surround Batch Farm.

Photo: Roger Harvey



activities that sustain the whole enterprise. We were delighted to talk with Society members as we walked round restored dew ponds, through the



Roger with some of his guests.

Photo: Roger Harvey

maturing woodland of English deciduous trees containing the searchlight site of the WW2 defence of Bristol, across wildflower meadows, past the camping areas created for young people to enjoy, and beside the recently-laid hedgerows that adjoin the prehistoric track leading from Dolebury to Uphill.



Pete Lane and Ewan Hunt from Weston College with Roger White

Photo: Roger Harvey



Coffee time - and a chance to talk about the project.

Creating a haven for wildlife, and encouraging young people and adults to visit and enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of this ancient land has been one of our aims for 50 years, alongside managing the business

We are grateful to the Mendip Society, Mendip Hills National Landscapes, and students and staff from Weston College who have helped us create this very special environment.

A visit to Wilkins Cider Farm - Nick Haskins

Good views, Great company and Strong cider. What's there not to like?

After several days of unsettled weather, it was a pleasure to enjoy a truly sunny day. As so often with Mendip Society visits, we had access to a very interesting venue and in a beautiful setting. On this occasion, 13 members took part in a walk to Wilkins Cider Farm in Mudgley.



Great company for a walk on a sunny day.

The walk was led by Ian and Liz, who kindly stepped in at short notice. Starting from the centre of Wedmore, we climbed quickly to higher ground above the village and followed the hilltop. This offered an unusual panoramic view of the familiar ridge of the Mendip Hills. As we traversed to the far side, we were rewarded with further views, this time over the Somerset Levels.



Great views across the levels.

Photo: Nick Haskins



Roger Wilkins and some of his product.

Photos: Wilkins Cider

Together, we arrived at the rustic farmhouse, set within its own orchard on the hillside. Once seated, our host welcomed us with cider and introduced us to a wide range of cider varieties, cheeses, chutneys, and the largest jars of pickled onions and eggs that many of us had ever seen. However all too soon, it was time to set off again. On the return, we were once more compensated with long, peaceful views across the levels to the sea before descending into the village, where the familiar bustle of this attractive village quickly returned us back to the everyday.



And a great range of ciders to sample!

Photo: Nick Haskins

Wildlife and Flowers at Blagdon Lake - Ian Dagger

On the 12th and 15th May we had two sell-out walk/talks led by Nigel Milbourne.



Nigel briefs the group on what to look out for
Photo: Roger Harvey

It would be pointless for me to write here anything about the history of the lake, what was seen on the two trips or the pressures the site currently faces. Instead, I would recommend anyone interested goes to Nigel's website:

www.blagdonlakebirds.com

Just wandering around this website gives the reader a sense of the passion, dedication and knowledge Nigel has for this special site.

If you want to know a little more about Blagdon Lake then go to:
www.blagdonlakebirds.com/the-lake

And for the details of our trips on the 12th and the 15th go to:
www.blagdonlakebirds.com/diary

What I would like to do through these pages is to draw attention to the fragile nature of sites like this. For me it is simple, if we ruin them, we deprive future generations of the privileges we have to go, and marvel, to engage, unwind and to reset.

Rant over, here are some pictures of a few rare items well worth preserving!

Firstly, the Narrow Bordered, Bee Hawk Moth. Nigel was excited to see this saying that a moth group had been coming to the site for 15 years and had not seen one.



Narrow bordered Bee Hawk Moth
Copyright: Marcin Kutera. <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

The Marsh Fritillary. This butterfly has been recently classified as endangered but is now making a recovery.



Marsh-Fritillary
Photo credit: Iain H Leach

Black Poplar. around 7000 left in the UK but only 600 of these are female.



Southern marsh orchid
Photo: Roger Harvey

Black Poplar
Photo: Ian Dagger



A glorious view across the lake.
Photo: Roger Harvey

Small Grants

You may recall that last year our Small Grants Scheme supported a wide range of good causes in and around Mendip. Including a door repair at St Hugh's, Charterhouse, the refurbishment of fingerposts around the area, the ongoing exploration of Gully Cave, Wrington and Burrington Hedging Society, Winscombe Community Festival, Mendip Young Rangers, Mendip Ploughing society's annual competition, Bats without borders and of course, Mendip Rocks. In all, we donated £5,860.00 to eight community organisations - All of which we reported on a year ago in edition 174.

This year we have received a similar number of applications, many of which have been approved, although the committee do carefully examine each application to be sure it meets the criteria laid down. Boiled down these are*:

- The project should be in accordance with our principal aims of preserving the landscape, ecology, or history of Mendip, and should primarily be local in scope.
- There should be an appreciable benefit to the public / society in general and not just the applicant e.g. a landowner.
- It should be clear what the grant will be used for.
- The applicant should provide assurance of sufficient resources to give confidence that the project is viable.

*These criteria are currently under review and should be seen as a set of guiding principals, not rigid rules.

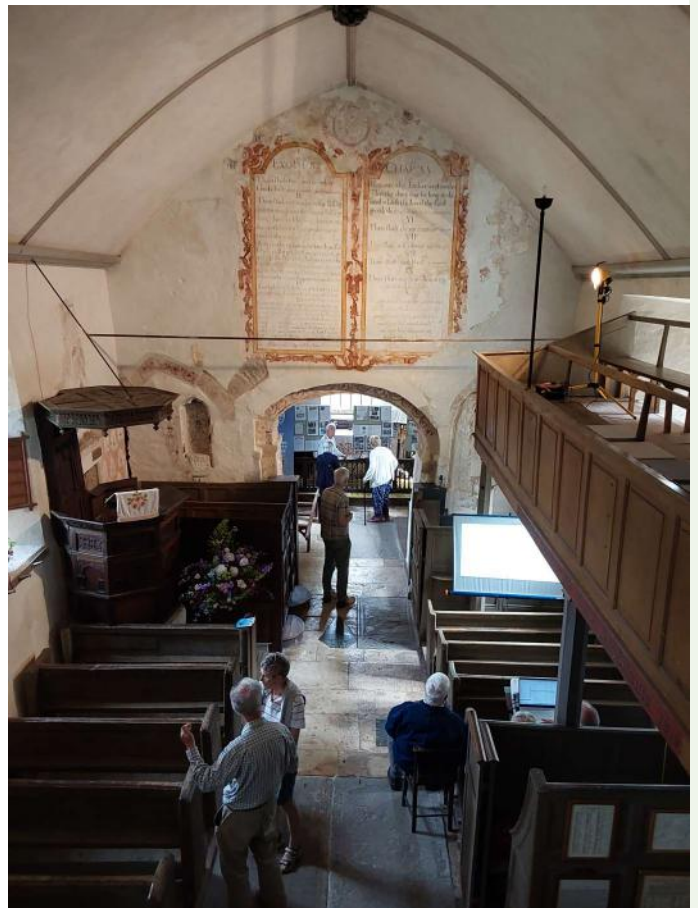
This year, we have, as in previous years, agreed to support the hedging and ploughing societies and Mendip Rocks. These are all ongoing Mendip events with which we have had a long association. We have also supported Shipham Community Allotment who needed to install new metal raised beds to replace rotting wooden ones. At the time of writing, two other projects are under review, while two others have been declined as the committee felt they did not meet the criteria. to find out more, or apply for a grant, go to: <https://www.themendipsociety.org.uk/small-grants>

The results of one other grant, part of a much larger project, was recently visited by members who wanted to see the project for themselves. St James's Church, Cameley, has some very rare Medieval wall paintings that were in need of serious conservation. As their treasurer, Martin Horler explained; The aim was not improvement, but simply restoration and stabilisation, to prevent these rare works deteriorating and being lost. Judith Tranter, who was Small Grants officer when the grant was made, and Peter Janes, our current Secretary went along to an open day once the work was completed.



Left: Judith Tranter, Martin Horler and Peter Janes at Cameley Church.

Photos: David Tranter.



Right: A view from the gallery of one of the main paintings.

Ubley Warren Reserve with Avon Wildlife Trust - Tina Bath

As much as we try and organise different events for members and non-members alike, one thing we can't fix is the weather. This was the case on Thursday the 11th June for the walk across Ubley Warren Nature Reserve, a well-known Somerset Wildlife Site, which was led by Chris Billingham, Chris has been involved with the site for nearly 50 years.



Setting off the weather held off...
Photo: Tina Bath

The forecast depending on where you looked was for either rain clearing after 3pm, or prolonged heavy rain, and strong winds, it appeared the latter was the case and the walk was cancelled at the 11th hour.



No shortage of species to look at.
Photo: Tina Bath

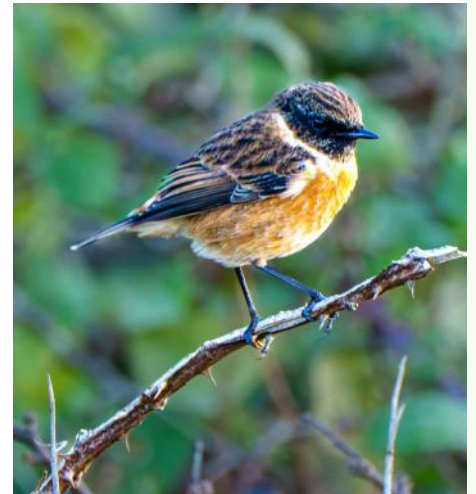
I for one didn't see the message until late, and so I was unable to contact Chris in time to say I would head over to Charterhouse. As it turned out, four people who had booked didn't see the message at all, Chris and Graham also came to meet whoever might have missed the email.



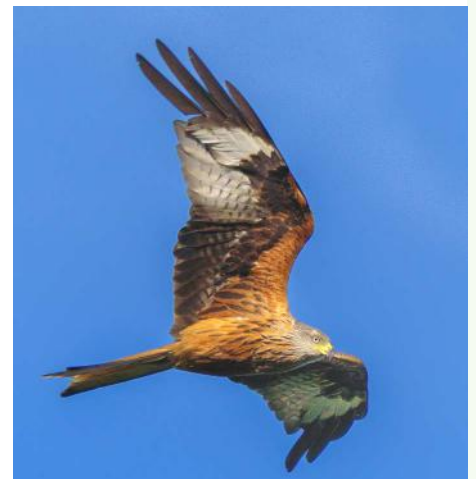
And dogs don't mind the weather!
Photo: Tina Bath

It was agreed collectively that as it wasn't actually raining at that time we may as well take a shorter walk. The site is host to many flowering plants, ferns, reeds and rushes, these species thrive on Limestone rich and peaty soils. Despite it being wet and slippery underfoot, we ventured to the far side of the Reserve. We were able to hear Stonechats, and Skylarks, we also saw a Red kite and more common Magpies, and Pigeons. This is where our luck ran out, the rain returned along with the increase wind, it made for a sharp exit with hoods up and heads down.

We have booked another walk, on July 23rd (See [What's on page. Ed.](#)) when hopefully the weather will be kinder.



A Stonechat
Stock photo: Mike Harvey



A Red Kite
Stock photo: Mike Harvey



... And a Skylark - all taken under better weather conditions!
Stock photo: Mike Harvey

The Mendip Hills & You. Mendip Hills User Survey

The Mendip Hills National Landscape Team is calling on residents and visitors to share their views this summer as part of an important new survey aimed at shaping the future of access and recreation across the Mendip Hills.

Over the coming months, there will be researchers engaging directly with people at key visitor locations throughout the Mendip Hills, inviting them to take part in a user survey. In addition, an online version of the survey is now available, making it easy for anyone who enjoys the Mendip Hills to have their say. To make sure our members don't miss the opportunity to take part, we are including details of how you can make your thoughts known as well. There are various ways to do this.

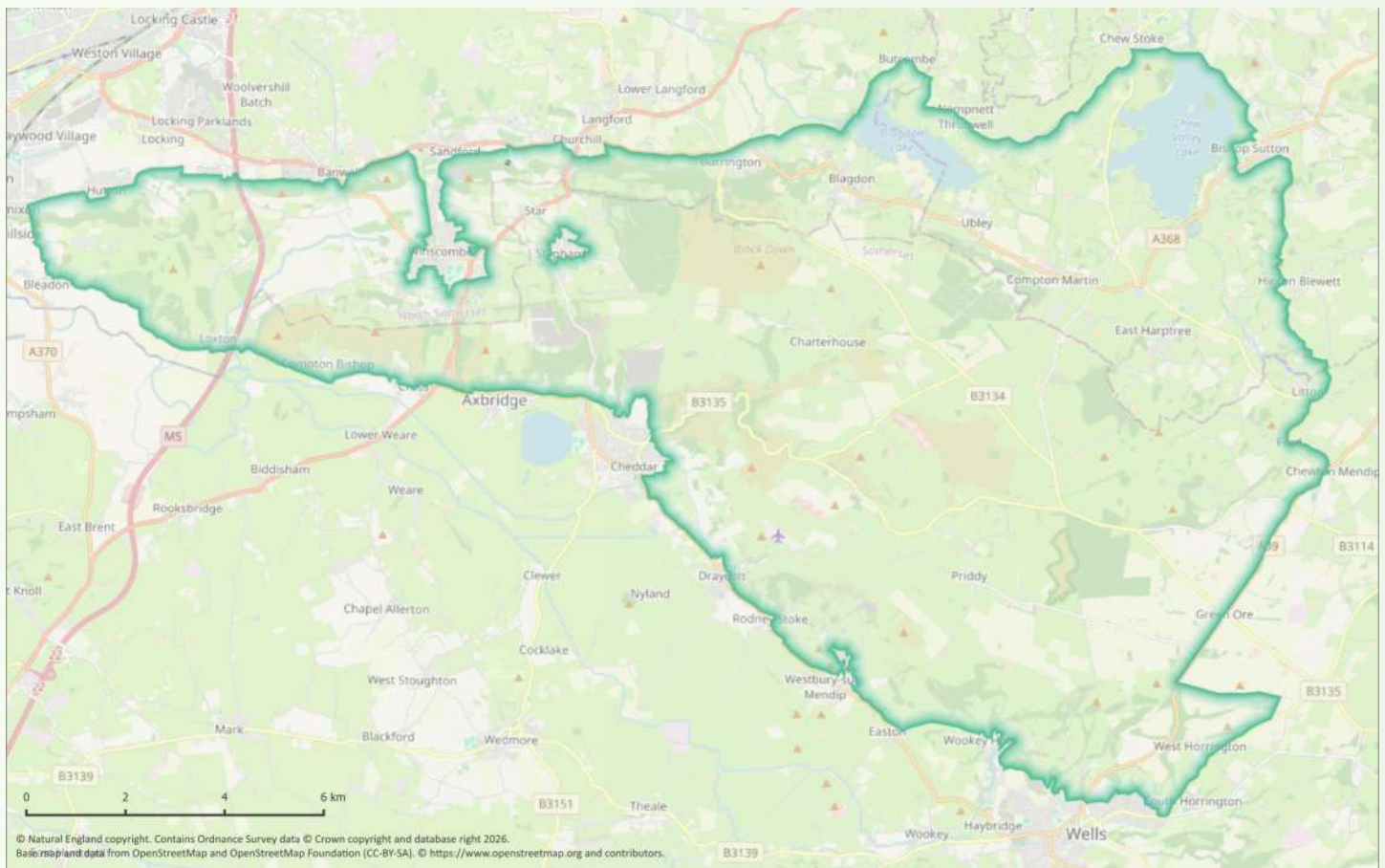
1. Scan the QR code to the right, this will take you straight to the online survey.
2. Enter this link into your PC, laptop, tablet or phone. <https://tinyurl.com/MHNL-Survey>
3. E-mail mendip@mendiphills-nl.org.uk or call **01761 462338** and request a printed copy.



Paper copies of the survey will also be available at key local outlets.

The survey seeks to better understand how people use the landscape — including who is visiting, where they go, and why — as well as gathering feedback on what people value most about the area and what they feel could be improved. By taking part, respondents will help the MHNL team build a clearer picture of recreational use across the landscape. This information will inform the development of a new Recreation Strategy, ensuring it reflects the needs and expectations of those who know and love the area.

The survey will run until 31st August 2026 and should take about 5 minutes to complete. Obviously the society will be representing our membership and making our joint voices heard, but this is an opportunity for everyone to have their say and potentially make a real difference to the future management of our hills.



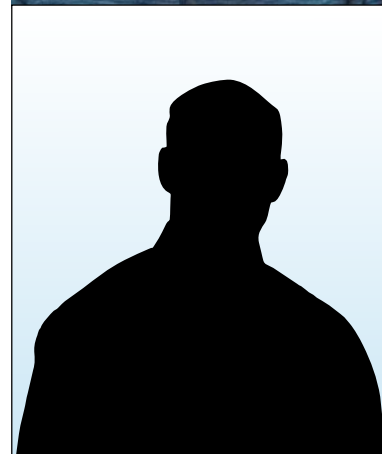
New faces on the planning team - plus a quick look at the role.

Please Welcome Roger Willmot, who has taken on the role of planning adviser for the society, covering the North Somerset area. In his professional career he worked initially for the former Woodspring District Council, having qualified with a Diploma in Town and Country Planning at what was then Bristol Polytechnic (now UWE) and became a Chartered Town Planner, working briefly in the Conservation team from 1978 and then for a number of years in the Local Plans team before switching to Development Control in 1984. He then served in what became the Development Management team at the unitary authority of North Somerset Council, as a team leader and then Service Manager for strategic developments until retirement in 2025.

Planning matters aside, Roger is a member of the coaching team at Winscombe Cricket Club. He apologised for the rather serious photograph; we asked him for a head shot and this one is also used for his passport! Having met him we can confirm he does smile much more in person.

...**And**, as we go to press, we are sworn to secrecy - but hopefully can soon introduce another new team member to cover the area of Mendip that comes under BANES for planning matters. This individual is potentially a multi-tasker, also willing to become an archivist for our somewhat fragmented 60 years worth of records, photographs and other documentation.

This will bring our planning department up to full strength, with Mike Rolfe, our long-serving and, at times, overburdened principal planning officer getting the help he needs to act on behalf of the whole society to ensure we can always act in the best interests of Mendip and hold all our local authorities accountable when they make decisions that potential could affect the future of the National Landscape area.



So, just what does a planning officer do? As we are talking about the role here, it seems only right that we should throw some light on the work our planning officer(s) do on your behalf.

In a nutshell, the role involves keeping an eye on significant planning applications and submitting comments / objections to the planning authorities as necessary. Large local developments, public works and infrastructure projects certainly feature, but smaller applications of concern also get attention. Below is a simplified list of what Mike Rolfe has been working on of late. Each case requires the officer's background in planning to enable them to "speak the language" and communicate our concerns to the authorities in the most appropriate form, representing us all at local authority level.

App No	Description	Date of Application	MS Response	Our Observations	Status
44/25/00019	5 Dwellings, Shipham	Dec-25	Object	Nil	Refused
21/25/00002	2 Dwellings, Cross, Axbridge	Feb-25	Object	Nil	No Decision
2/25/00030	Gypsy Site, Axbridge	Apr-26	Object	Huge number of Objections	No Decision
17/25/00037	70 Dwellings, Draycott Rd, Cheddar	Oct-25	Object	Many Objections	No Decision
17/25/00051	Lidl, Upper New Rd, Cheddar	Oct-25	Comment	Nil	No Decision
2026.0531 OUT	73 Dwellings, Wells	Apr-26	Object	Hundreds of Objections	No Decision
None	Land North of Axbridge	Feb-26	Notice to Enforcement	Nil	Contractor to cease work by Enforcement Officer and make formal application. No application yet made.

Slader's Leigh

We have a new manager for Slader's Leigh - and I suspect, someone who will offer the society much more besides in time. However, she is only just getting started, so I suggested that for this edition an introduction to her, by her should replace our normal round up of activity on the reserve. Ed.

Hello! My name is Jemima and I am a yoga teacher, creative writer, naturalist and naturopath student.

I am excited about taking on the management role at Slader's Leigh, though it is really a whole family affair, with my husband and our two children also on the team!

We are passionate about nature, spending time outdoors, cooking wild food feasts, learning new skills, and being involved within the community.

Having discovered what we call 'the meadow' several years ago, we've been visiting Slader's Leigh throughout the seasons on a weekly basis.

Not only do we love the peacefulness it offers, but as keen naturalists and nature enthusiasts, and soon to be herbalist (my current vocation) we enjoy the vast array of fauna, flora and wildlife that help to make this nature reserve so special.

In May we were lucky enough to spot badgers emerging from their established sett in the bridleway adjacent to the meadow. We know they use Slader's Leigh as their foraging ground, because there are badger tracks leading from the mammal doors that have been installed in the fence.



An orchid in Slader's Leigh.
Photo: Jemima Rose

We've spotted nuthatches, robins, wrens, song thrushes, two types of bat - most probably the common pipistrelle and noctule bat. We have also heard green finches and even little owls!

Slader's Leigh is home to a diversity of plant species. Spring is a wonderful time to visit and spot cowslips, primroses, wild garlic, the cuckoo flower, nettle, ground ivy, pignuts, yellow rattle, emerging plantain, red campion, hogweed, speedwell and the vibrant purple carpet bugle.

In late Spring and early Summer, the gentle orchids glitter the meadow with their magnificence, and don't seem to be overwhelmed by the abundance of meadowsweet (currently going into flower), also known as 'Queen of the Meadow'.

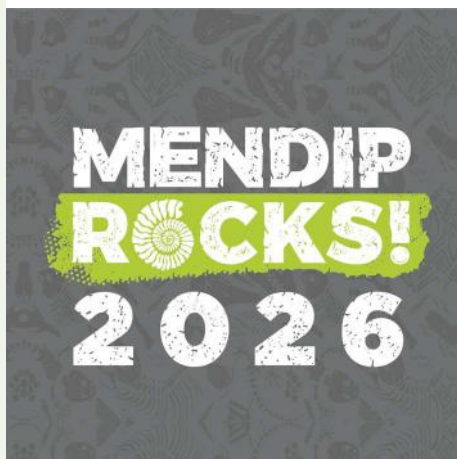
There are also an array of different trees - birch, hazel, oak, beech, maple, elder and of course the large and imposing small leaved lime, which has recently been coppiced.

Our wish is to document and learn more about what is already residing at the meadow, as well as find ways in which we can encourage more wildlife.

We would also love to find ways to involve the local community in events, including the annual grass cut, bat walks, children's nature days (like building bug hotels). I also hope to lead more wild herb walks in the future and many other lovely things to enable Slader's Leigh to continue to flourish and bring joy to the local community.

Mendip Rocks 26 - and an appeal for help

The Mendip Rocks! festival returns this October with a full month of events celebrating the remarkable geology and landscapes of the Mendip Hills. Developed in partnership by the Somerset Earth Science Centre, the Mendip Hills National Landscape Team and The Mendip Society, this year's programme features guided walks, talks, quarry tours and creative workshops that introduce visitors of all ages to our fascinating and diverse geology.



The festival will begin with a series of immersive activities at Ebbor Gorge, offering a chance to experience the Mendip Hills' Ice Age past. Visitors can enjoy The Mendip Wolves, an atmospheric lantern-lit performance after dark, as well as a family open day featuring guided walks that explore the gorge's cliffs, caves and nationally significant archaeological heritage.

Throughout Earth Science Week, the programme will highlight the deep connections between geology, landscape and human history across the Mendips. The week culminates in a dedicated Geo Lecture Day at the Somerset Earth Science Centre on 17 October, bringing together specialists to share new insights into the region's ancient past.

The festival concludes on 24th October with a lively Museum Open Day at the Earth Science Centre. Visitors will be able to explore displays of fossils, rocks and minerals, take part in family-friendly activities, and

bring along their own geological finds for identification by experts.

For more event information and ticket sale dates: Scan the QR code to the right, or use this web link. <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/mendiprocks>



Vacancies

"Ask not what the society can do for you, ask what you can do for the society."

We have had a great response to our request for new planning officers and reserve managers thank you all - but we still need...

- **A Small Grant's Officer.** To oversee the requests we get for financial assistance from other groups and individuals, responding, bringing applications to the committee and communicating with applicants. The process has been largely automated and put online these days, but only simple computer knowledge is required and support / training will be given. In 21 years of running the scheme we have processed 88 applications to date, that's only around five a year, but we have given almost £50,000 to good causes.
- **East Mendip Rights of Way Officer.** Steve Down has stepped up for the Western side of Mendip, but we are still looking for East Mendip cover. The role involves checking out reports from members and others about problems with rights of way by a physical visit and communicating our concerns to the relevant authorities where appropriate. Full training, advice and support is available, so no previous experience is required, just a willingness to do your bit to keep Mendip running as it should.
- **Reserves Manager - Tania's Wood.** As you will see elsewhere in this edition, Jemima and Phil Rose are taking on Slader's Leigh for us, but Tania's Wood still needs a regular manager to oversee it. Mainly the role involves organising work parties to do the necessary maintenance, plus being a point of contact for members and the public to report problems to. As with other roles, support and training is available.
- **IT support.** As things stand, I (Mike / Editor) have control of the newsletter, Social Media, Website and all things IT. Because I set up most of the IT we use I also get to look after the online Small Grants system, e-mail allocation for the other officers and Zeffy, the online membership and ticketing system. I'm not complaining, and love being the interface between the society and the outside world, but I am not really an IT specialist - and am sometimes working at the very edges of my knowledge. So if any of our members have a background in e-mail systems or other IT areas, I would be very happy to have a bit of help.

Plus, of course, anyone who can help out in any way whatsoever would be welcome to make themselves known - many hands make light work! If you think you can help by getting stuck in, even only occasionally, please contact Peter Janes at: secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk

Weston College students celebrate their hedge laying achievements

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step" wrote Laozi, a Chinese sage, who lived 500 years BC. Great things can happen if only we make a start and put our best foot forward.

Five years ago, when the idea was first mooted of involving students from Weston College's Faculty of Inclusive Practice in outdoor learning activities at Batch Farm, the first major obstacle was the understandable requirement that they had access to a proper toilet with handwashing facilities. Thanks to a grant from the Mendip Society, we were able to construct a composting loo that met all the criteria. This was our first step.

Students from Weston College then started to arrive, engage in outdoor activities, plant trees that they can watch grow throughout their lives, clear undergrowth to create seating areas around fire-pits, build hibernacula to support adders (one of Mendip Hills champion species), renew derelict dew ponds, lay boundary hedges alongside the 3,000 year old track that leads to Dolebury Hill to the east, or Uphill on the coast to the west, feed our flock of sheep, cuddle lambs, gather in hay, and camp under canvas as part of their D of E expedition training.

In the process, under the skilled leadership of Pete Lane from Weston College and his team of tutors, many meaningful conversations and discussions took place about conservation and re-wilding related issues, extending the students understanding of the countryside and its importance for all living creatures – including us humans!

Laying hedges proved especially popular as an activity. With funding from Mendip Hills National Landscapes FiPL programme, and input from Tina Bath, Will Feay, Mike Reed and Brendan Halahan, around 30 students have taken part at different times over the last three years. Three of the students displayed such promise that we approached Mendip Hills NL for an additional grant to enable them to join the Burrington and Wrington Hedging Society training at Hedgers Farm in February.

Ben Pople-Hughes, Harvey Greig and Ewan Hunt joined the beginners' cohort and demonstrated sufficient prowess, with further mentoring from Colin Clutterbuck and Tina Bath, to be invited to take part in the Hedge laying competition on March 14th. Although Ben had to withdraw at the last minute, Ewan and Harvey both competed, and were thrilled to receive their trophies and certificates from Ian Ford at the end of the day – as were their parents who came along to watch.

"It was such a great thing to do," said Harvey, a sentiment echoed by Ewan who vowed "to see if we can win it next year".

Both young men have had their appetite whetted for involvement in rural employment and are looking at possible apprenticeships as a next step. Whatever happens, they have had a fantastic experience on this adventurous journey, thanks to the support of all those who have given so generously of their time to help them, including the Mendip Society who provided what was needed to make the important first step.



Left: Ewan's competition hedge



Centre: Harvey works on his entry
Photos and article: Roger White



Right: with their trophies

Wrington and Burrington Hedge Laying Match

MATCH REPORT WRINGTON & BURRINGTON HEDGING SOCIETY 194th MATCH

at Hedgers, Row of Ashes, Redhill, Bristol, **by kind permission of Jo Vowles and the Vowles Family.** 14th March.

It is a tribute to committee member, Tommy Vowles who sadly died last year to have the 194th match at Hedgers (Cider Barn that he and his wife, Jo set up a couple of year ago). Tommy was a craftsman in many areas, as a hedger having won this event and other competitions many times, cider maker, builder and a musician. We sincerely thank the Vowles family for having us at Hedgers to lay the same hedge last laid in 2013 in the 181st match. After a wet and stormy week, we were fortunate to have a perfect day for the match, and we were rewarded with a near record number of hedgers – 38 and as is usual several hedgers from the Blackdown Hills and Devon took part. Hedgers competed in 4 classes - Champions, Open, Improvers and Beginners. Refreshments were provided by Sally Gulliford and her team and a bar by Hedgers. We had 14 beginners to lesson in the weeks preceding the match also held at Hedgers and we were pleased 11 trainees took part in the match. Thanks to Jackie Hawkins for selling over £600 worth of Raffle tickets for the many raffle prizes kindly donated.

Judges/Stewards: Colin Risdon, from the Blackdown Hills and Mike Ford from Nempnett Thrubwell judged the Champions and Open classes and Martin Pitman from Dundry and John Hawkins from the Mendips judged the Improvers and Beginners Classes. Stewards Kirsty Sturmey, Chris Claxton and Chris (Fred) Chivers oversaw the work and made sure the day went smoothly. Produce judge Peter Yeats, First Aider - Duncan Massey was in attendance again, thanks to all. Special thanks to Joe Cornish for providing a slasher for the best beginner.

Hedging entries 38 (28) last year's entries in brackets. Numbers up by 10. Competitors did a great job particularly the Beginner's on the mainly hazel and thorn hedge along Row of Ashes,

Class 1	Champions	- 5	(7)
Class 2	Open	- 13	(10)
Class 3	Improvers	- 9	(7)
Class 4	Beginners	- 11	(4)

Results:

Class 1 Champions: **Sponsored by Chew Valley Trees and Mendip Hills National Landscape.** 5 hedgers. 1st Colin Clutterbuck, 2nd Paul Gulliford 3rd Alex Bown, other hedgers: Steve McCulloch, Alex Hannam.

Class 2 Open: **Sponsored by Alvis Bros. Ltd.**

13 hedgers. 1st Will Feay, 2nd Samuel Jeddere Fisher, 3rd Rob Sturmey, 4th Matt Knight and best over 60, other hedgers: Brendon Halahan, Andy Burrough, Dave Brackley, Simon Watts, Kirk Ruddle, Dan Ford, Josh Pearce, Nigel Moore and Davin Foster.

Class 3 Improvers: **Sponsored by Kelston Sparkes Group.**

9 Hedgers. 1st Benjamin Smith, 2nd Andrew Whitcombe, 3rd Paul Galpin, other hedgers: Zach Bartlett, Bobby Crabb, Malcolm Dowling, Hannah Carding, Josh Case and Rohan Smith

Class 4 Beginners: **Sponsored by The Mendip Society & Tibbs and Simmons.**

11 Hedgers. 1st Rory Morgan, 2nd Joanna Gulliford 3rd Joe Keppie Bray, other hedgers Alex Preston, Sam Martlew, Peran Treen, Ewan Hunt, Dan Sweeney, Harvey Greig, Andrew Ford (not to be confused with committee member Andrew Ford!) and Gabriel Vowles who fittingly won the U25 cup.

Produce: 28 entries (23) from 14 (12) exhibitors.

Winners: - Meadow Hay – B Wear, Big Bale Hay - Creed & Dole, Haylage – A Bown, Pit Silage – R Baber, Big Bale Silage – P and L Carnell, Maize Silage – Bown and Son, Collection of Fodder – R Baber. Most points – R Baber.

Thanks also to the other sponsors. **Bristol and Avon CPRE, Hunt Forest Group, A E James Barrow Mill, Barrow Gurney, and Dave Addicott Engineering**, who provided plasma cut steel emblem/bottle openers as mementos for the day.

Report supplied by Ian Ford

SHOULD WE ALL BE CONCERNED BY THE BRISTOL AIRPORT EXPANSION?

An opinion piece by Richard Frost

Richard Frost will be well known to many members as an ex-Chairman and committee member who has been an active society participant for many years. He is also resident under the flight path in to Bristol Airport and therefore, understandably, has strong views on the subject of its expansion. We asked him for an opinion piece as we feel sure it will be something that many members will also feel strongly about.

Located in the Northern area of the Mendip Hills, this site has been allowed to expand and grow as the flight and tourist industry has developed to 10 million people to the level we have today. The latest expansion plans are seeking to raise this figure to 15 million.

To achieve this, requires the growth into the Common Land of Felton Common, and the continued use of the current infrastructure, already at breaking point. The airport wishes to use Felton Common to install extra landing lights, which they say are needed for safety in order to facilitate larger aircraft to fly to N. America & the Middle East. These destinations are already serviced by Exeter & Cardiff Airports. A few landing lights may not sound a lot, but the maintenance roads to the zone will split the Common in half and those powerful lights will be on 24 hours a day, to the inconvenience of local residents and wildlife. A Freedom of Information

request shows that there has been no consultation between the Airport and the Civil Aviation Authority about the need to extend the runways or make changes to lighting. Economically, for every passenger that flies into Bristol, five passengers fly out and spend their money abroad. Business flights have decreased over the last 20 years. Air pollution alone costs the NHS about £500m a week and is responsible for over 30,000 deaths in the UK.

Much is made of reference to the Bristol Mass Transport Plan which has been around for decades. There is only the A38 road to it, and its single lane route is hopelessly inadequate at existing levels. The geography excludes any rail connection, and the M5 motorway is about 10 miles away with no talk of making a spur or connection. Car parking on site is so expensive that the local fields have become car parks, along with the local villages now plagued by on street parking. If we all lose the Felton Common Land, then this act will open the planning doors to every house builder and expansion idea to go ahead throughout the Country! The on-site Public Transport Hub is, in reality, a 2,000 multi space roof car park generating £75 million and is the Airports largest income stream.

The present owners are the Macquarie Asset Group, who are an Australian Company already well known for loading Thames Water with £billions in debt while paying out huge dividends. They can be seen in the spotlight in Channel 4's "Dirty Business" about prioritising profit over Health and the Environmental safety.

These plans also make a mockery of the Government's plan for Net Zero approach to our climate and future health for the future generations. In February 2024 the EU climate monitoring service reported that Global Warming had exceeded the 1.5 deg. C threshold over the preceding 12 months. This was the limit set the Paris Agreement in 2006. With the anticipated rise in passenger levels to 20 million in 2050, if all this goes ahead, what chance is there of the Government achieving the aviation industry levels of "Jet Zero"? More flights = more pollutants and particulates like soot, which impacts on the local ecology causing water and air pollution. The UK emissions limit is around five times higher than Worlds Health Organisation guidelines in spite of many illnesses being linked to the many different health issues endured today.

I fear that Democracy is also under attack with well over 90% of the Local regional population totally against this planning application, which even if it is turned down by the local offices stands every chance of being agreed by The Regional Planning Executive!

How will we be judged by future generations, if this expansion plan is allowed to proceed?

Richard Frost.



Walks, talks and events, organised by The Mendip Society

Wednesday July 15th. A Patch Wilder - Our second visit.

Charlie and Rachel have been amazed at the speed at which nature has thrived here, we have asked for a second visit for those who missed out on the first. Following the tour, you are welcome to stay and enjoy a picnic (bring your own) in delightful surroundings. Members free, non-members £5.00. Limited to 15 places. Sorry but NO dogs. Use the QR code, or visit our website to book.

Meet at: Shipham Rd, Winscombe Near LillyPool Café.

NGR: ST 445 565. What three words ref: ///enchanted.attitudes.bonnet



Thursday July 23rd. 2:30pm. A walk at Ubley Warren Reserve with Chris Billingham & Graham Allen.

A short walk on uneven ground, looking at the flora and fauna found on this reserve which is owned by Somerset Wildlife Trust. Free car parking can be found at The Blackmoor Reserve Car park or along the roadside beside the reserve.

Use the QR code, or visit our website to book. Members free, non-members £5.00 Limited to 15 places.

ADVANCE BOOKING ESSENTIAL.

Meeting at: The Ubley Warren Reserve Sign Post, by the kissing gate.

NGR: ST 506 554 What three words ref: ///accompany.cubed.pupils



Saturday August 1st. 10:30 - 1:30 (approx.). Folly Farm Walk - led by Ian Dagger.

A Walk around the Avon Wildlife Trust Reserve at Folly Farm.

A lengthy uphill stretch at start, climbing on path through woodland, which can be muddy after rain. Steep rough descent. (walking poles useful). therefore graded **Hard**. Members free, non-members £5.00. Limited to 12 places. Sorry but NO dogs on this walk. Use the QR code, or visit our website to book.

Meeting at: Car Park, Folly Lane. Off of A368, Stowey-Sutton, BS39 4DD (nearest)

NGR: ST 606 604. What three words ref: ///unsigned.mimics.playing



Tuesday August 11th. 9:30am - 1:00pm. Walk around South side of Bladon Lake with Nigel Millbourne

A short, level walk around the South side of Bladon Lake with Nigel Milborne, looking for summer waders.

Bring a drink & a snack, and please dress to suit the weather forecast on the day.

Limited to 10 places. £7 per head to cover the cost of a Bristol Water Day Permit.

Please note that this is a **members only event**. Use the QR code, or visit our website to book.

Meeting at: South side of Bladon Dam, near Park Lane, East End, Bladon, North Somerset. BS40 7UL

NGR: ST 504 597. What three words ref: ///multiple.pinging.latches



Friday August 14th. 10:30am - 12:00pm. A walk around Priddy Mineries with a Chartered Geologist.

Nick Hawkes describes himself as a "Semi-retired" geologist. However, a career in geology worldwide makes the chance to walk around the Mineries with him an un-missable opportunity. We will be walking on Uneven Terrain, so stout footwear is required. Please also be aware that the car park at Stockhill now has a charging machine in place, so car share if you can and bring a card to make payment.

Use the QR code, or visit our website to book. Members free, non-members £5.00 Limited to 15 places.

Meeting at: Stockhill Wood Car Park. (Forestry Commission)

NGR: ST 548 513. What three words ref: ///regrowth.hardens.flag



Saturday September 5th. 2:00pm - 6:00pm. Somerset V Hitler: A WW2 walk on Blackdown.

A moderate walk of around six miles in total (3+ hours duration). with some uphill sections and potentially rough, wet ground to cover. Suitable clothing and footwear essential. Ending at St Hugh's Church where teas and a welcome toilet facility will be available. (Small donation appreciated). Limited to 20 places.

Members free, £5 for non-members. Use the QR code, or visit our website to book.

Meeting at: The Charterhouse Centre (Car park) At 2pm.

NGR: ST 501 557. What three words ref: ///gong.shaky.facelift.



Friday November 20th 7:00pm.* Yeo Valley Organic Garden and Marketing.

An evening with Sarah Mead. Followed by a Christmas social with coffee and mince pies.

This is a very special occasion organised by Liz Dagger. A rare chance to hear about Sarah's vision for all things Yeo. Free to Members, £5 for guests.

Entry by pre-booked ticket only. Use the QR code, or visit our website to reserve a place.

AT: Bishop Sutton Village Hall, Wick Road, Bishop Sutton BS39 5XQ.

NGR: ST 583 593. What three words ref: ///lamp.youths.reclusive

* Doors open 6:45pm



Please note that The Mendip Society often organises other walks and events between newsletters that cannot, for obvious reasons, be included here. For the latest information and to be made aware of any late changes please visit www.themendipsociety.org.uk/walks-and-events

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Would members please ensure they bring a valid membership card to all events. Organisers have been asked to check membership before starting events in order to be fair to all. Those who fail to show a valid membership card will be treated as non-members.

A Presidents' View.

A brilliant comment from someone that I met today, who told me that technology is speeding up the way we do things...Oh yes, it's doing that alright and I'm wondering where the year is going. In truth we need to keep up to speed with this technological world and thankfully there are now people coming into the Society who know how to do just that. Yet again the Societies Newsletter is a shining example of how 'branding' works. It's the showcase of the Society. Not only to the members but also to those who would think about coming to join us.



In line with that aim, we are now looking to update the 'shop window' with new information boards and gazebo. The old system owes us nothing and has done sterling work at local shows and Society meetings. To this end I would like to call for help in staffing the days when the show is on the road. Local shows and events are just the opportunity we need to sell the Society. Next year will be the 250th Anniversary of the Royal Bath and West of England Society. As I tell my American Students from the University of Georgia USA, this Society was established a year after the USA gained its independence. I will push for the Mendip Society to be a part of that 2027 show. This will mean tickets for those who are willing to give some time in supporting our shop window.

This and many other opportunities are being pursued by the Society's Management Committee. To repeat a comment that I have made many time before, (and make no apologies for doing so again) we are not just a group of people who go for walks and listen to talks, we are Society who have an influence on the future of the Mendip Hills in its broader geographical sense.

When I came to the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, (AONB) as the Assistant Countryside Warden to the late Tom Elkin MBE, back in 1990, my first impression of the then Mendip Society was of an organisation that said 'No' to everything. Times have changed and this Society has changed with it!

No doubt like all of you, I waited all winter for the clocks to change and now we are at mid-summer. I make no predictions as to the future weather patterns here, but I have found that nature will maintain a balance somehow in the seemingly unpredictable world in which we live.

My photo for you this time is a sunset at St Hughs Charterhouse, another worthy cause which this Society has been able to support during recent restoration work. Thank you all for your enthusiasm and support.

My kindest regards.

Les



THE MENDIP SOCIETY Registered Charity Number 262867 www.themendipsociety.org.uk

For the secretary, e-mail: secretary@themendipsociety.org.uk

For membership write to, 'The Cottage, Harptree Hill, West Harptree, BS40 6EJ'.

For newsletter content and pictures, e-mail: themendipsociety.photos@gmail.com