

WINTER 2021

Picturesque

WYE VALLEY AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY



wye valley dyffryn gwy
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol

**CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF THE WYE VALLEY
AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
1971 - 2021**

In this issue:

- WISP - Tackling Invasive Species
- Natural Flood Management
- Documenting the AONB during the Pandemic
- Farming in Protected Landscapes

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Photo: Emma Drabble



Photo: Adam Fisher

Welcome to Our 50th Anniversary Edition of Picturesque

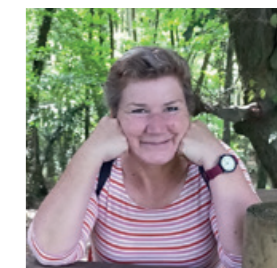


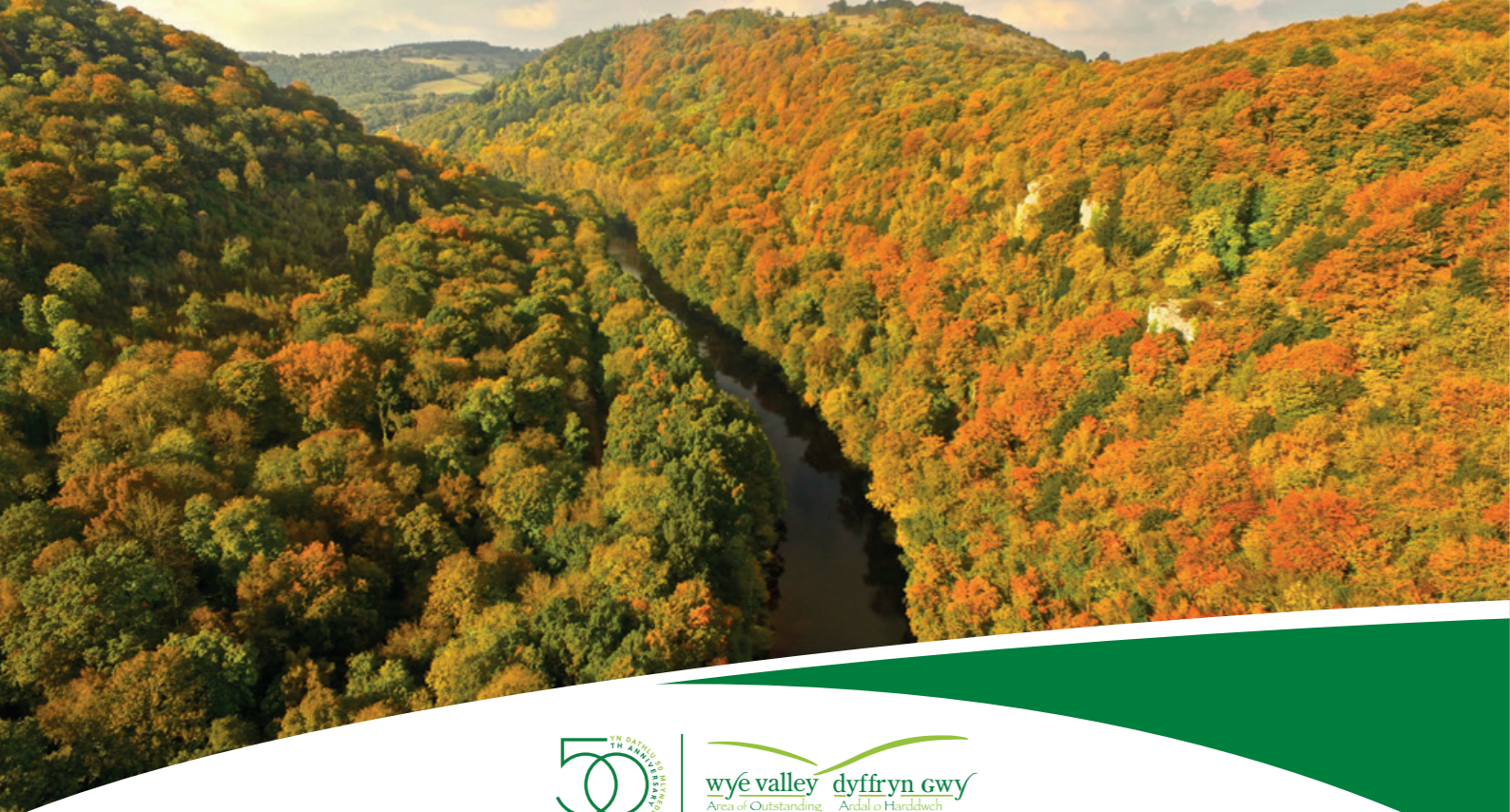
The Wye Valley AONB's 50th Anniversary is an amazing achievement. I have lived almost all these years in this nationally recognised, outstanding landscape, how fortunate am I? Well done to all those associated with the AONB, to the staff and members for all their hard work in getting to this landmark age.

Cllr Ann Webb, Chair, Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

As Vice Chair of the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), I have come to appreciate how much work is done by the Team with so few resources, and how we rely on the generosity of volunteers for their time and energy to preserve this unique landscape. If the AONB is to survive another 50 years, central government must put legislation in place to protect it from being polluted or overpopulated. We mustn't be complacent. We all have a part to play in preserving the Wye Valley AONB for future generations.

Best wishes, Cllr Yolande Watson.





GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES ON OUR GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

The Wye Valley AONB was officially designated on 13th December 1971, making it the UK's 28th AONB at the time. There are now 46 AONBs in England, Wales & Northern Ireland covering 18% of the countryside, in addition to 13 National Parks. The achievements of the Wye Valley AONB Partnership over these 50 years have been many and varied, from the days of the Wye Valley Countryside Service to the activity of the AONB Unit today.

Meanwhile nationally, AONBs have grown in prominence and, with the recent lockdowns, so has recognition of their importance. Natural Beauty has intrinsic value and means so much to people, with 66% of the population living within 1/2 hr of an AONB. With the climate emergency AONBs also offer some of the most powerful solutions to the challenges of climate change and nature recovery through their remit to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

The 2019 Glover 'Landscapes Review' of AONBs & National Parks in England, noted that AONBs have "vastly less money, but sometimes greater pressures; and yet cover areas that are more visited, sometimes more biodiverse and are just as beautiful" as the National Parks. One of the proposals was for "AONBs strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources, renamed as National Landscapes". We understand the Government will be launching its formal response before the end of the year, possibly with a consultation period. Similar discussions are on-going on the Welsh side of the Wye. Consequently early in 2022 we will circulate a



The AONB Team at Bigsweir

Perceptions Survey to gain feedback and insight into what people think of the AONB designation, the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and the actions of the AONB Unit. So keep tuned in to our social media, website and future editions of Picturesque to see where this might take the Wye Valley AONB over the next 50 years.

Andrew Blake, Manager, Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

NATURE POSITIVE CARBON NEGATIVE

The chair of the National Association for AONBs, Philip Highgate, recently stated "Climate change is one of the primary challenges facing us, and nature-based solutions are the most cost effective way to tackle it." Elsewhere in this edition of Picturesque we cover some of the 'nature positive' activities of the Wye Valley AONB Unit. Below we outline a number of the 'carbon negative' initiatives.

AONB OFFICE DECARBONISATION

The AONB Office has had a complete refurbishment to help decarbonise our operations. The old, cold, damp port-a-cabin has gone, replaced by a new meeting room incorporated into the revamped office, which is now super insulated, double glazed, fitted with reactive LED lighting, a hydrogen ready gas boiler and a shower-room for cyclists, along with a bike stand outside. We've also replaced our diesel van with an electric van and installed a twin EV charger.



Photo: Phil Powell

AONB UNIT CARBON AUDIT

A comprehensive carbon audit is being undertaken of our operations, examining activities and energy usage over the last 3 years. Office heating and vehicle use were responsible for our highest CO2 emissions. We can now benchmark our progress and consider further recommendations in our move towards being carbon negative. This is part of a joint commission for all the Welsh AONBs & National Park Authorities.

AONB CARBON FOOTPRINT

Another part of this joint commission is a carbon footprint analysis for the whole Wye Valley AONB landscape – the designated Area rather than the AONB Unit. The methodology is a carbon footprint model developed for the National Parks in England, based predominantly on consumption-based estimates of activities for Residents, Visitors and Industries. The study commences in January and we look forward to the results and seeing how &/or where we can influence and collaborate on carbon reduction initiatives.

OLD STATION TINTERN DECARBONISATION

Monmouthshire County Council are leading on a programme of work to upgrade and decarbonise operations at this popular visitor attraction. Works include secondary glazing to the Listed station building, upgrading heating systems in the carriages and café, refurbishing the café and camping facilities, installing photovoltaic cells (in curved sheets) on the railway carriages and public EV chargers.

All of these projects have been supported by the Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) funding.

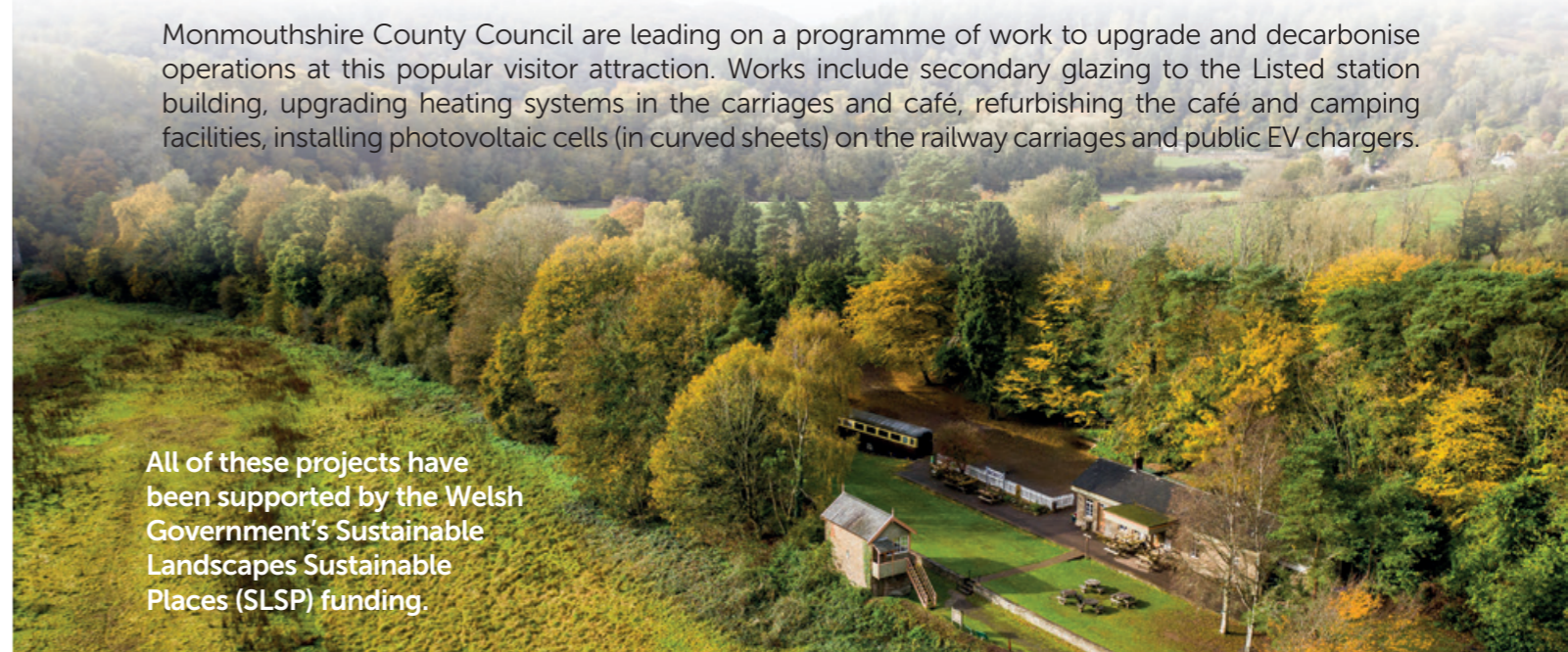


Photo: Visit Monmouthshire /James Harries Multimedia

PROVIDING GRANTS FOR WYE VALLEY COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND

Since 2001 Welsh Government have provided the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) to support projects and communities that conserve and enhance the landscape of the Wye Valley AONB. Local communities have come up with a creative mix of ideas and ambition, delivering inspiring events, activities and practical conservation of the landscape during uncertain times. Here are two recent projects funded through SDF:



MONMOUTH CLIMATE FUTURES FESTIVAL

Led by Laura Mac and her team of loyal volunteers, Monmouth Climate Futures Festival addressed the burning issue of our time, painting a positive vision of a future where communities transition to carbon net zero.

During the week-long festival held in September, 99 events engaged audiences through a lively mix of debates, presentations from inspirational speakers, thought provoking films and discussions, children's activities, ways

of protecting the natural environment, ways of working with and communicating with nature, ways in which we can ensure a sustainable food supply, ways of attending to our own well-being and ways of repairing, recycling and upcycling.



THE GREAT NARTH WALL

There are nearly 1000 km of traditional drystone walls in the AONB and their unique style makes an important contribution to the distinctive landscape of the lower Wye Valley.

Sadly, many walls are in a state of disrepair, so when local resident Jon Dunkelmann approached us with a project to save a tumbledown drystone boundary wall at his hillside home in the Narth we were delighted. Jon's fortunate discovery of a local talent in Ernie Phillips, local builder turned drystone waller, enabled him to create what has come to be known as 'The Great Narth Wall'. Bordering one of the many historic footpaths linking The Narth with Whitebrook, the restored wall is enjoyed every day by passing walkers.

The combination of Ernie's craftsmanship and Jon's passion for the countryside of the Wye Valley, along with their desire to keep traditional skills and heritage features conserved for the future, has created a wall of beauty that will stand the test of time.

Listen to Jon and Ernie in conversation in The Great Narth Wall podcast and find out how to create a successful SDF project for your community.

Download here: <https://bit.ly/3gRlxqV>

AONB - WIDE FUND LAUNCHED THROUGH HEREFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

In 2020 the Wye Valley AONB had great pleasure in launching another grant scheme that applies in both England and Wales.

Small grants of £1,000 are available within the AONB for projects that conserve and enhance the landscape. The grant scheme is hosted by Herefordshire Community Foundation.

More information can be found here <https://bit.ly/3c1loAp>.

To apply first talk to the Community Links Officer community@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk.

Recent grants include Dynamis Adventures who help young people learn countryside skills in local woods and hills and rock climbing venues and on the Wye. Interpretation on the Dragon Path in Mordiford, hedgerow restoration in Fownhope and a Pine Marten project run by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust have also received grants.



Photo: Dynamis Adventures

THE NATURE NETWORKS FUND

The Wye Valley AONB Unit has secured £258,400 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Nature Networks Fund (NNF) towards the Lower Wye Nature Networks project in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust, and in collaboration with Monmouthshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales. The project runs until March 2023 and will deliver:

- Conservation and enhancement of 7 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 2 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs); ancient woodland, species-rich grassland and riverine sites, to improve condition and resilience and enable safer public access.
- Targeted nature conservation and habitat connectivity advice for landowners, working at landscape scale to improve connectivity to and from designated sites. Activities include hedgerow restoration, Natural Flood Management activity, tree planting and species rich grassland creation.
- Breaking unwanted connections in and around designated sites through the management of Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) and working with volunteers and contractors reducing the current extent of INNS and building capacity to prevent further infestation.



NLHF launched the Nature Networks Fund in March 2021 with Welsh Government, to give a helping hand to Wales' protected natural sites and wildlife habitats.

FARMING IN PROTECTED LANDSCAPES

Farming in Protected Landscapes is a new DEFRA programme, launched in July this year. Administered by the AONB team, farmers and landowners on the English side of the AONB can apply for funding for work in the farmed environment under the four main themes of Nature, Climate, People and Place.

The programme is a great opportunity to deliver work to conserve and enhance the landscape. Interest from farmers and small holders has already been good with some exciting and innovative projects in development. The programme runs until March 2024.

More information, including how to make contact to discuss projects and apply for funding, can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3DzfzGI>.

Photo: Gemma Wood



MINDSCAPE

An inspirational project enriching the lives of people with dementia and their carers

Despite challenging circumstances, the mindSCAPE project continued throughout 2020 and 2021. Originally an AONB funded project, ArtSpace Cinderford works with people living with dementia and their carers, using art and the landscape to benefit health and wellbeing.

Unable to meet at the Orchard Trust in Lydbrook during lockdown, ArtSpace quickly realised activities were needed more than ever. A series of 10 video tutorials were produced, with step by step instructions to do activities at home.

These tutorials are available at <https://bit.ly/30JX0B8> along with downloadable resource guides.

The group met fortnightly on Zoom to participate in artist led activities that connect to nature (including a virtual woodland walk, facilitated by a 360 cameraman and viewed online). They also communicated daily on a group Facebook page, where they post pictures

of their artwork, gardening projects and wildlife. In May 2021 face to face meeting started again outdoors, followed over the summer by indoor meetings in a larger venue.

The mindSCAPE in care homes project, part of the Foresters Forest Heritage Lottery scheme, also continued through 2020, via video communication with care homes and the delivery of resources and instructions to the homes for residents to continue participating. Copies of the community and care home resource guides are available as downloads from the link above, or as hard copies from the AONB unit.



WINNING WAYS

In 2020 the mindSCAPE project was awarded the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) Gloucestershire Award "for an inspirational project which has enriched the lives of people with dementia and their carers by engagement with the natural environment through art". The award was presented to Hannah Elton-Wall, Manager of ArtSpace Cinderford.



#15 MINUTE HERITAGE MONMOUTH PROJECT

When people were isolated during the pandemic lockdowns, and missing the familiar things in their neighbourhood, we started the #15 Minute Heritage project to connect communities around Monmouth with the hidden history in their area. We talked to people about their favourite places and collected their stories of Monmouth. We recorded interviews on Zoom during lockdowns and filmed socially distanced when freedoms returned.

Weaving together interviews with archive images from the collections of Monmouth Museum, the result is a series of short films and podcasts which tell a personal history of Monmouth. The past shapes our present. And in the fullness of time these photographs, films and podcasts, cared for by MonLife Museums Service, will become the archive images of the future.

You can watch all the films at the Shire Hall in Monmouth, where you can also pick up a #15 minute Monmouth heritage trail leaflet.

You can also watch the films and download the podcast here: <https://bit.ly/3oHl5ki>



#15 Minute Heritage Monmouth is a Wye Valley AONB project in partnership with Monmouth Rotary Club and Cycling Without Age, Monmouth Museum / MonLife Heritage. It was funded by the Heritage Fund / National Heritage Memorial Fund and Cadw. We would like to thank all those people whose enthusiasm made this project happen during difficult times and Anne Rainsbury and the Museums Service for the use of archive images from their collections.

DOCUMENTING NOW

Life in the AONB during the pandemic

'Documenting Now' is an AONB project which has been capturing people's feelings, fears and hopes as they live through the pandemic in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Monmouth-based photographer Emma Drabble has created a series of audio portraits, documenting the impact of Covid19 on rural lives and businesses, revealing an incredible web of human spirit.

We know how lucky we are to live and work in an area of outstanding natural beauty, with nature all around and green space on our doorstep. These audio portraits show just how much this is valued and how it has helped to boost our mental and physical health during lockdowns.

We would like to thank all the participants who allowed us into their lives and shared their stories. More than a few have said how therapeutic it has been to have the opportunity to talk about their circumstances: 'We were having a bad day, but talking to Emma turned it around'. You can find all the photos and audio portraits here: <https://bit.ly/3Fs89W8>

Emma will be continuing to collect stories until March 2022, so if you would like to be involved please email information@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk.



'An hour in nature around here has done so much for our mental health...it's allowed us to explore beauty at a time when things look very bleak and stark.'

Reverend Sean Semple



'You walk and get this incredible aroma of relaxation and calm. However terrifying everything feels this will still be here, the wild garlic will still grow, the bluebells will still bloom regardless of what else is going on.'

Dr Rowena Christmas



Photo: Mathieu Wilcocks

Local residents in Llandogo said they had never heard the rumble of rock being swept downstream so loudly as the night of Storm Bella. Properties were flooded when the trash screen in The Sloop carpark was blocked by debris. This is the sort of flooding Natural Flood Management measures can help to reduce.

WORKING WITH NATURE TO HELP REDUCE FLOOD RISK

As a lowland AONB with the River Wye running through its heart, we are acutely aware how our changing climate is bringing increased rainfall, greater frequency and intensity of storms and flooding. Recent storms - Ciara, Dennis, Jorge, Bella and Christoph have damaged property, paths and infrastructure, needing a massive diversion of resources to put right. The need to help our natural river catchments and our local communities become more resilient has never been more urgent.

Natural Flood Management (NFM) is the principle of working with natural processes to slow the flow of water down a river catchment and reduce the flood risk. By working with nature, NFM has the extra benefits of helping nature recover, boosting biodiversity and improving water quality. These natural measures are low cost to implement and maintain compared to traditional flood engineering.

Official guidance is becoming more readily available as NFM schemes are monitored, measured and proving effective. This means that private landowners, large and small, who are keen to help 'slow the flow' and reduce localised flooding, can install NFM schemes, and increasingly they are.



Leaky dams, help to slow the flow.

SLOWING THE FLOW

Chapel Hill Road Pilot Natural Flood Management Scheme

The Unclassified County Roads (UCR's) in the lower Wye Valley are century-old routes with a distinct character and rich history. These 'jewels in our landscape', are under threat from the ever-increasing intensity of rainfall we are now experiencing.

Water pouring off the hillsides is funneled down these lanes, picking up speed and carrying rock and debris with it, which accentuates erosion. Debris then blocks the downstream trash-screens, causing localised flooding. Erosion makes access difficult, putting these important links between rural communities at risk of being lost.

In April 2021, after 18 months of surveying and development, we installed our first pilot Natural Flood Management scheme in Chapel Hill Road, Tintern. The scheme was managed by the AONB team on behalf of Monmouthshire County Council, with funding from the Welsh Government through the 'Sustainable Landscapes, Sustainable Places' programme.

This Natural Flood Management scheme incorporates a series of compacted earth cross-drains and log water-bars embedded into the road's surface. It is vital we assess how well the run-off is diverted and slowed, and whether the lane's surface is more resilient to traffic than before.

So far these natural measures are successfully diverting springs and the flow from high rainfall events into Limekiln Brook. The lane is now generally drier underfoot and flood flows no longer cascade down the whole width of the road. The surface is less uneven and rutted, with fewer steep steps and drop-offs, making walking and riding easier and enabling more people to enjoy this route.



To be really effective, Natural Flood Management interventions need to be little and often, holding back and slowing the flow of as much water as possible. The 19 cross-drains installed on Chapel Hill Road will not solve flooding issues on their own, but when complemented by other work with landowners in the catchment above the road (installing natural leaky dams, tree and hedge planting, farmyard drainage) this little and often approach can lead to a significant amount of water being slowed during storm events. It is still early days but every small scheme installed helps to slow the flow and reduce the flood risk. With climate change increasing heavy rain events, we will continue to seek funding for this work to help local communities and the landscape adapt and become more resilient.

Further info & answers to FAQ 's at: <https://bit.ly/3pPKecP>



GETTING THE RIGHT BALANCE ON THE WORDSWORTH WALK, CLEDDON FALLS

At last, the fencing has been taken away at Cleddon Falls, above Llandogo, revealing the hard work undertaken over the summer to improve both access and the visual appearance of this historic beauty spot and seasonal waterfall.

The technical access team from iBEX (Nick, Darren, Mike and Pete) have transformed the gorge-edge viewpoint path beside the Falls, which now looks gorge-eous! Whilst roped-up they also cut and hauled out the invasive cherry laurel growing at the base of the waterfall, treating it to stop regrowth. At the same time the landowner cleared the stone steps leading to the viewpoint, revealing old stonework, and coppiced undergrowth obscuring the path. It really has been a team effort.



A beautiful handcrafted handrail created by Ross at @Anvil Forge Blacksmithing, now curves around the natural features beside the steps. Requiring a mix of vertical posts and brackets set into the rock Ross used traditional blacksmith joinery techniques, giving the handrail lots of lovely character. The AONB Volunteers have also been getting creative with natural materials, building a sturdy drystone wall to provide a seat with a view, to discourage access up the streamside which is suffering from erosion.

With help from local residents and the landowner we're continuing to map and control Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, Cherry laurel and American skunk cabbage found growing



within the SSSI. Further path improvements and interpretation work are also planned for the Wordsworth Walk in 2022, with funding from Welsh Government's Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places and AONB Sustainable Development Fund.

As much of the Wordsworth Walk is along permissive paths (not Public Rights of Way) we are indebted to the landowner for, not only enabling public access, but for wanting to work so positively to enhance it for all our enjoyment. And thanks also to Natural Resources Wales, who monitor SSSI's, for their guidance.

For its short length, the short Cleddon Falls viewpoint path packs a punch in terms of adventurousness and quirkiness and now you can enjoy it in all its restored glory!

BEFORE



AFTER



WYE VALLEY RIVER FESTIVAL HAS A NEW HOME

With four Wye Valley River Festivals, including a re-imagined virtual one, under our belt it's time to pass this much-loved event over to a new home. A Community Interest Company (CIC) has recently been set up to provide a new governance, management and delivery body to take the festival forward.

The River Festival has been an innovative way to use outdoor arts to engage a much wider audience in our activities and to raise awareness of the issues affecting the nationally protected landscape. It has proved phenomenally successful – winning the National AONB Bowland Award in 2018 – but we realised as it grew that it needs to stand on its own, outside the AONB team, fully embedded in the local communities. Passing management over to the CIC will create opportunities for new funding partnerships and give the festival more freedom and flexibility to develop, taking it to amazing, new, creative heights!

The River Festival began in 2013 as a project between the AONB Partnership, Festival

Director Phill Haynes and outdoor arts company Desperate Men and over the past 8 years created some extraordinary memories: Luke Jerram's Museum of the Moon at Tintern Abbey, the flaming torch parades at Llandogo (and the fireworks!), Johny Easterby's night time musical walk through the woods at Symonds Yat, Cuckoo Time (when we went digital), a show trial at the Shire Hall, a tightrope walker crossing the Wye...

Phill Haynes, Rachel Adams (Wyldwood Arts) and Jon Beedell are the directors of the new CIC and we wish them all the best and look forward to future events. Make sure to follow Wye Valley River Festival on Facebook and Instagram to find out what is happening!



WYE INVASIVE SPECIES PROJECT - WISP

This year saw the launch of WISP, our Wye Invasive Species Project, with its distinctive Himalayan balsam logo. Underlying WISP is a marrying of successful funding bids to Welsh Government, Environment Agency, Severn Trent and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This has enabled us to cover both sides of the lower River Wye, which is critical for success; if one of our invasive species can grow through concrete it won't be constrained by administrative boundaries!

What are Invasive Non-Native Species?

- A non-native species is any species which is outside its natural range, but which is present and capable of surviving and reproducing here. There are thought to be around 2,000 non-native species in the UK.
- An Invasive Non-Native Species is any species falling under the above definition which causes damage to natural ecosystems or human economic, social or health interests by threatening native biodiversity.
- Around 10-15% of non-native species fall under the 'invasive' category, yet their control has been estimated to cost the UK economy £1.8 billion annually.

WISP's Aims are:

1. To raise awareness about Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) as widely as possible to prevent the spread. Prevention is better than cure.
2. Detection and monitoring to understand current distribution and to detect new sites early. The sooner action is taken, the lower the cost to biodiversity and other resources.
3. To support land and property owners in the lower Wye Valley to control or eradicate INNS by coordinating volunteer action, contractor teams and providing advice. We use the word 'support' because the responsibility to ensure these plants do not spread onto neighboring land lies with land and property owners.

Invaders of the Wye Valley

Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, and American skunk cabbage are currently the three worst offenders within the AONB. Their seeds or plant fragments are spread readily by water along our river network, but also by humans and wildlife.

These species threaten the native plants, insects and animals which live in and along the River Wye, designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). They can increase flood risk, reduce water quality, damage infrastructure, alter vistas, restrict access and reduce house prices.

Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed

are listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which makes it an offence to plant or cause it to grow in the wild. This can include moving contaminated soil or plant cuttings. If you do you can be fined or sent to prison for up to 2 years. Experts are pushing for American skunk cabbage to be Schedule 9.

Another species we keep a close eye out for is Giant Hogweed. This is not on our 'hit list' because the Wye & Usk Foundation have done such an incredible job of eradicating it from the Wye. If you do come across this giant in the AONB please report it to us immediately.

LET'S FAMILIARISE OURSELVES WITH OUR KEY SPECIES:



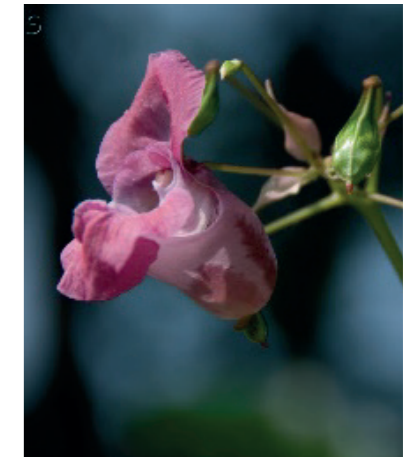
American skunk cabbage

With its giant leathery leaves and bright yellow (smelly) flowers in early spring it looks like it should be in the tropics! Commonly found in bog gardens and ponds, its seeds spread along streams and into neighbouring land. It takes 3 years to mature, and once it flowers a large seed bank builds up in the soil around it. Seeds are viable for 8-9 years. With deep tap roots, chemical control is recommended. Live-heading the flowers in early spring is critical to stopping its spread. The cut flowers must be dried out and disposed of by burning. Never compost them.



Japanese knotweed

This tall plant has bamboo like stems and creamy white flowers. Its extensive root system of rhizomes can extend 3 metres deep and 7 metres laterally, burrowing underneath walls and pushing through foundations, roads and pavements. Its success lies in the fact that it can regrow from a small fingernail-sized fragment of rhizome or stem, spread primarily by humans relocating plant fragments deliberately or accidentally. Fragments are also conveyed easily along our river network. Control is a task for a professional with a herbicide licence. Cutting or strimming it can spread it further and permission is needed if you're planning to dig it out or bury it.



Himalayan balsam

With distinctive sweet-smelling pink flowers, this is highly invasive, reaching 'pest status' in many countries. Now established along our river network and expanding into the countryside along roadside ditches and verges away from streams and rivers, it poses the greatest threat to our biodiversity.

Explosive pods fire seeds up to 7 metres and one plant can produce up to 2,500 seeds, which are viable for 2 years. The good news is it is easy to pull up with all roots intact and, when left on site with its roots in the air, it breaks down quickly. The pulling, aka 'balsam bashing', needs to happen before it flowers in early May and repeated in early September.

To eliminate it from the Wye strategic action is required at a catchment-scale, working from the headwaters to the sea. The scale of the problem is daunting, but work at a sub catchment scale is proving successful.



Detailed identification guides are available on our website.



WORKING TO TACKLE INVASIVE NON NATIVE SPECIES

Since we began tackling these species in 2018, we've made great strides in:

- Reducing head-high Japanese knotweed in Tintern and culverts to a few manageable sites
- Supporting 87 (and rising) different landowners across 127 Japanese knotweed sites
- Supporting landowners to stop the spread of skunk cabbage at 14 sites in 3 sub-catchments
- Supporting local community groups in The Narth and Llandogo to take action against balsam
- Working closely with 5 local contractors
- Developing a detailed mapping and monitoring system that feeds into national records
- Reaching thousands of readers via social media and newspaper articles
- Organising 4 volunteer work parties in Brockweir to demonstrate balsam bashing and clearing nearly 3km of riverbank and pasture to save the species-rich meadow and woodland.

We're pleased with these achievements, but we're under no illusion, the task in the Wye Valley is huge. We can only achieve so much in the AONB, however committed and driven. Invasive Non Native Species control is long-term, yet WISP is currently short-term and area based. So, we need to ensure that WISP leaves a legacy - our landholders and communities working together are key to that.



Looking ahead

WISP 2022 will be dominated by campaigning and supporting local action. We will be appealing to communities to follow the examples of The Narth and Llandogo, to rally together to eradicate Himalayan balsam.

Our new Community Toolkit will be launched during Invasive Species Week (16 - 22 May) when we will be coordinating balsam bashing events, both community and corporate, and inviting partner organisations and local action

groups to join in with their own events. We'll be publicising the work underway in the lower Wye Valley with a plea to communities upstream to 'step up' and do their bit. We will continue mapping and monitoring, liaising with land owners and working with contractors and volunteers to carry out control work. We will be linking up with national initiatives and funding programmes, remaining ever alert to potential new INNS threats.

If you'd like to get involved contact us via projects@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk. Report new sites to naturerecovery@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk with a photo and grid reference or What3Words address. Read more about WISP here: <https://bit.ly/3CMC3Tp>

RESTORING OUR AMAZING RIVERS – THE ROAR PROJECT



The Restoring Our Amazing Rivers project is working across the Wye catchment in Herefordshire to improve water quality, reduce flooding and improve the riparian habitat. It is a collaboration with the Wye Valley AONB Unit, Wye & Usk Foundation, Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and Herefordshire Rural Hub funded through the Water Environment Grant (WEG).

Ben Nott is a Farm Catchment Advisor, employed by the Wye & Usk Foundation and hosted by the AONB Unit. He has been focusing his efforts on agricultural land in the AONB and the nearby catchment of the Garren and Gamber. Agriculture is one of many contributors to declining water quality and the project has been targeting reducing diffuse pollution from sources such as farm yards and from catchment scale areas of farm land. Countryside Stewardship schemes have been used to fund infrastructure improvements where slurries and effluents posed a risk to water quality and to encourage lower input farming practices to reduce nutrients and chemicals entering the water cycle.

Whilst walking footpaths in the AONB you may be able to spot two examples of the field scale practices that aim to reduce soil erosion and the associated nutrient leaching; undersowing of maize and companion cropping of cereals. These practices are designed to reduce the time soils are left bare and therefore vulnerable to the erosive forces of water. These practices also help to reduce flooding as the roots provide channels for water to flow down, thus improving water infiltration rates. The plant roots also help to store carbon in the soil as organic matter, which helps to reduce global warming and reduce flooding by further increasing the water holding capacity of the soil.



The image left shows grass and clover that was planted into a living maize crop to provide a green soil cover when the maize crop is harvested to help prevent soil erosion.

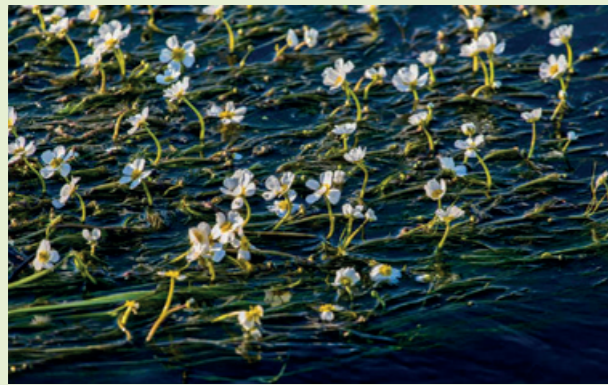


The image right shows a winter wheat crop that was planted with a companion crop of buckwheat and mustard to help improve soil organic matter.

PRIORITY HABITATS AND SPECIES IN THE WYE VALLEY AONB

Set against a backdrop of unprecedented concern for the natural world, the National Association for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty's Colchesteer Declaration is increasing the scale and pace of nature conservation activity in AONBs. Each AONB has committed to adopting a threatened species and delivering a Species Action Plan.

The hope is that by 2030 at least 30 species, relevant to AONBs, can be removed from the threatened list. Our Species Action Plan will be published in 2022 and here we introduce our 5 Priority Species. Each one represents a habitat or a special feature of the AONB which will greatly benefit from positive landscape-scale management. We hope you will get involved in activities to save these special species, and their unique habitats in the Wye Valley.



Water Crowfoot

Flowing fields of Water crowfoot flowers, carpeting the river's surface in spring and summer was, until recently, one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Wye.

Why does it need protecting?

Water crowfoot is common in the UK, but an estimated 95% of it has disappeared from the river Wye in the last 5 years. In recent summers severe algal blooms have turned the Wye green, smothering much of the Water crowfoot. It supports diverse populations of water life so its loss has a knock on effect on other species. Its rapid decline is an alarming wake-up call.

Where is it found?

In the Wye down to the tidal limit at Bigsweir and in ponds, ditches and streams.

Why we chose it?

Water crowfoot is a good indicator of the overall health of the Wye. Whilst local restoration projects can have an impact (as on the River Lugg), we are largely unable to control water quality which so affects river species. We can use Water crowfoot's highly visible decline to galvanise discussion and action to address water quality issues on a landscape scale.



Shrill Carder Bee

This is one of the rarest bees in the UK and also one of the smallest. It is straw-coloured with a reddish-orange tail, a black band between the wings and black stripes on the abdomen. It also has a high-pitched buzz.

Why does it need protecting?

It is one of the UK's most threatened bumblebees, having declined dramatically in the 20th century. It is now found in only a very few areas in southern England and Wales, one of which is Monmouthshire. It is identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan as a Priority Species requiring conservation action.

What habitats does it need?

It needs flower rich grassland. The loss of traditional meadows is contributing to its decline, although many wildflower meadows remain in the AONB.

Why we chose it?

The Shrill Carder Bee is an excellent way to open up discussions about meadows, flowers and pollinators. Bee surveys are already used by Herefordshire Meadows members to show the success of meadow restoration projects. We can also link to the Buglives B-lines project in the lower Wye and on the Woolhope Dome.



Photo: Ross Bower PTES

The Noble Chafer Beetle

The Noble chafer is a gorgeous metallic-green beetle found in traditional orchards and wood pastures.

Why does it need protecting?

It is classed as Nationally Scarce in Great Britain, is 'Vulnerable' and a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

What habitats does it need?

Veteran fruit trees and decaying wood provide vital habitat and a safe place for larvae to live, as they take up to three years to develop into adult beetles. Traditional orchards are a feature of the AONB landscape, but they reduced dramatically during the 20th century. Despite this the Wye Valley AONB still has 1% of England's orchards while 6% of orchards in Wales are found in the Welsh part of the AONB.

Why we chose it?

People are drawn to the metallic, jewel-like colours of this beetle, making it a great conversation opener to talk about orchard management and habitats, the creation of new orchards and the importance of veteran, decaying and dead trees.

The Wood White Butterfly

The Wood White is a delicate and dainty, slow-flying woodland butterfly.

Why does it need protecting?

It has declined by 88% since the 1970's and is classed as High Priority for Conservation in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

What habitats does it need?

It needs sheltered habitat, such as open woodland glades or scrubby vegetation, where there is partial shade and tall grassland.

Why we chose it?

Butterfly work is already taking place in some parts of the AONB so there are opportunities



Photo: Ali Taylor PTES

Hedgehog

The hedgehog is our only native spiny mammal and is covered with 6000 spines!

Why does it need protecting?

Although hedgehogs are still relatively common around a third of the national population has been lost since 2000. Hedgehogs are listed as a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and are identified as 'Vulnerable'. No legislation currently addresses the causes of decline in hedgehog populations.

What habitats does it need?

Hedgerows are important for hedgehogs (hence the name) as they often follow linear features when foraging. They have a range of habitats, but are not found in conifer plantations, marshes & moorlands. Suburban and urban gardens are increasingly important habitat.

Why we chose it?

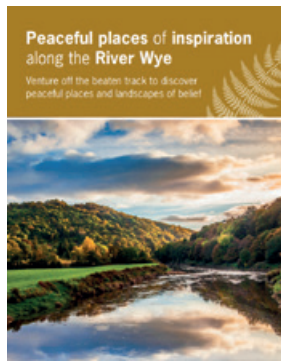
Threatened in both rural and urban environments, the nation's favourite animal has been chosen as a species which will engage the public to actively contribute towards conservation work. It is also the emblem for Archenfield and Ross-on-Wye.



Photo: Herefordshire Wildlife Trust

for beneficial habitat work and reintroductions in other areas, which can assist other Red List species.

WHAT'S NEW?



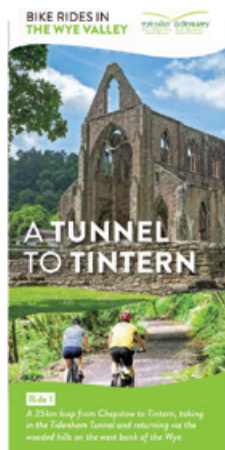
Peaceful places of inspiration along the River Wye

Download a copy of our latest leaflet and venture off the beaten track to discover landscapes of belief along the Wye.

The river is dotted with historical sites linked to the early Celtic Church and in the 6th century a Bishop called Dyfrig ensured that the early Celtic Church flourished in the borderlands beside the Wye.

'Llan' is the old Welsh word for a cemetery or church, suggesting early Christian activity at places such as 'Llandogo', 'Lancaut' and elsewhere, whilst dedications to a Celtic saint hints that a church was there before Norman times. Slightly raised, circular churchyards and nearby springs and holy wells are also thought to indicate early Christian activity.

Download the leaflet: <https://bit.ly/3pNPygV>

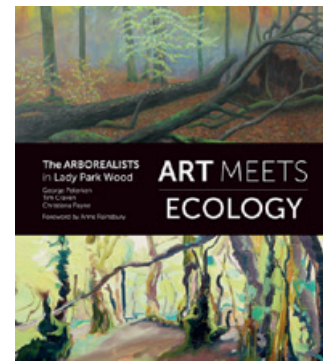


A Tunnel to Tintern - cycling leaflets

This summer we teamed up with Jack Thurston, author of the popular 'Lost Lanes' cycling guides. Jack has been producing some new cycling routes for us and A Tunnel to Tintern is the first in the series.

Download the leaflet and view our gorgeous new cycling video here: <https://bit.ly/3ILP2z1>.

The route is also available via RideWithGPS and Komoot.



Art Meets Ecology: Arborealists in Lady Park Wood

Featuring paintings and drawings by The Arborealists, (a group of professional artists inspired by trees) this fascinating book provides an artistic response to the ancient Lady Park Wood National Nature Reserve, parts of which have been left to grow naturally for 150 years. Each artwork has a commentary by Dr George Peterken, a woodland scientist who has been studying Lady Park since the 1970s.

Order copies at:

<https://www.arborealists.com/press>



For our 50th anniversary we have been challenging you to take part in our 50walks@50 campaign. Are you up for doing all 50?

Check out the walks so far here:

<https://bit.ly/3EEj675>

FAREWELL

Sarah Sawyer is leaving the AONB Unit this month. She has been the AONB Community Links Officer for the last 13 years.

She will be greatly missed having been the



driving force behind many AONB successes including creating and leading the Youth Rangers, running the AONB Volunteers and the Sustainable Development Fund and delivering 4 Wye Valley River Festivals – and winning the national AONB Bowland Award in 2018. She has also inspired many with her botanical knowledge as well as her dedication and enthusiasm, making our work in the AONB richer and more meaningful. We wish Sarah all the very best for the future.