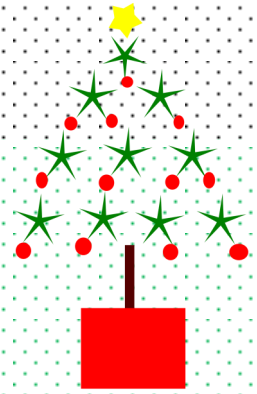




# Cotswolds Volunteer Newsletter

## December 2018



### In this edition:

May Hill Cattle  
Whole Team Portfolio Meeting  
Volunteer Survey Results 2018  
Back from the Brink  
News from Cheltenham & Gloucestershire NT Centre

### By special request - May Hill Cattle

Well, it's definitely been an interesting year at May Hill this year. The cold, snowy and long winter led to concerns that we were going to run out of grass on the Hill – luckily a neighbouring farmer dropped a few bales of hay out for the Belties. We managed to remove the 11 youngsters just in time to avoid the Beast from the East, leaving only the five old girls to feed in the long, snowy period. We persevered through a miserable March and April and were greeted with a lovely May – when all the flora and fauna suddenly sprung to life. Unfortunately, this was also the time that one of our beloved Belties, Bluebell, moved on to pastures new.

A lovely May soon transformed into a scorching June, July.... and August – resulting in the hottest summer for many decades. Luckily, all the ponds managed to retain some water to keep the four girls happy. Apart from the weather, we have faced a TB challenge this year – in which we are now restricted with the movements of cattle between our base at Ebworth and May Hill. This meant that we were not able to move any additional young stock on to the Hill this summer to help with the grazing. It is at this point that I would like to say a huge 'thank-you' to the cattle checkers on the Hill, as I appreciate how difficult it can be to find four cattle on 30 hectares! We would not be able to continue this grazing without your support.

Now... for a bit more on the four ladies of the Hill; Vetch (number 3) is 16 years old, Burdock (number 21) is 13 years old, Bramble (number 23) is 13 years old and Widecombe Dale (number 26) is 18 years old! Every year, we name the cows after flora and fauna from a different letter of the alphabet, some

years we have to get quite creative! Our letter for next year is 'M', so if anyone has any suggestions please feel free to send them our way.

The Belties are not only enjoying their retirement, they're having a big impact on the flora of the hill. Wildflowers are popping up everywhere. The well-established bluebells and wild daffodils are rapidly spreading across the Hill and yellow rattle flowers that were a rare sight seven years ago are now common. Heath bedstraw is also now so well established it can appear as though there's been a shower of hail and common spotted orchids are becoming a familiar sight. In addition, the green winged orchid appeared



for the first time a few years ago. In 2007 the team of volunteers recorded 31 clumps of heather, and just ten years later they mapped 109 clumps, with many merging to form larger mats. This is encouraging for our conservation grazing efforts, as it shows that the girls' hard work is definitely paying off. Thank-you again to all the volunteers who help keep the Belties on the Hill.

**Kate Jones**

## Whole Team Portfolio meeting - what goes on

I was one of the lucky volunteers whose name came "out of the hat" and was invited to join the end of year Portfolio meeting at Chedworth Village Hall at the beginning of December.

The meeting was arranged for all staff who work in the Cotswold region (plus a few volunteers). During the "welcome" coffee session the room was full of animated conversation as colleagues caught up with the latest news and gossip (helped by the particularly delicious biscuits).

The first session was a review of the year given by Jonny Loose the General Manager for the region. He ran through the many achievements in the year as well as some of the (mainly) weather related challenges. Jonny also reiterated the overriding objectives of the Trust and how the Cotswold region fitted into that. Finally, he showed an excellent video showcasing highlights (people as well as landscapes and buildings) from each site.

The next session set out the importance of high quality member/visitor experiences when visiting

sites and how much of a difference this makes to how individuals feel post visit. It was explained that the Trust has decided to give this theme increased focus and that it was a topic we will hear much more about in the future.

The final talk was given by Matthew Oates on Butterflies. Matthew retired from the Trust earlier this year but he has clearly lost none of his passion for the subject- nor his ability to be both humorous and yet deadly serious about the multiple threats that face butterflies and by association all wildlife in an increasingly toxic world.

We then broke for a buffet lunch and another great opportunity to mingle before everyone left early afternoon to return to their own sites.

I would recommend this event to all volunteers- it's an opportunity to hear what's going on in the rest of the region, great for getting to know people outside your own site with the bonus of some very interesting talks.

**John Petrie, Volunteer Ranger**

## Your Voice Matters - results of the Volunteer Survey 2018

**THANK YOU** to everyone who took the time to complete the volunteer survey in September. I know it can feel like survey fatigue at times with nearly every organisation you come into contact with asking for your feedback. It means a lot to us that you found the time to complete ours! Every completed survey really does help us to improve your volunteering experience.

You may have heard on the grape vine that the survey results came out a few weeks ago. We're still going through a lot of the detail but overall it's fantastic news. All of the key drivers scored higher than they did last year. However, we're not going to rest on our laurels – you've told us that there are still things we need to get better at.

More surveys were completed this year which is great as it means the data is more accurate. In total 33 were returned, compared to 25 last year and just 13 the year before that.

The really good news is that compared to last year,

you told us that you're enjoying your volunteering more, volunteering with us feels better organised and managed and we're getting better at communicating too. When asked whether you'd recommend volunteering with the Ebworth team a massive 76% strongly agreed, compared to 68% last year.

So, what do we still need to do better at? We need to involve you more with the decisions we make. You also said that we need to listen to your views and ideas and give you opportunities to have a voice. Although we've got better at it, you'd still like more opportunities to meet and share ideas with other volunteers.

There's definitely lots for us to get stuck into and we'd love your help. We'll be inviting you to join us to share ideas about how we can do things better and improve your volunteering experience. More details will follow in the New Year so watch this space!

**Lisa Edinborough**

## End of Season event 2018

Fun and games were had at the End of Season event at Ebworth. Long service awards were presented by Jonny Loose; James Gomery gave a talk about adders in the Cotswolds; there was a quiz and a delicious buffet luncheon followed by a walk in Workmans Wood. Look out more details and photos in the March 2019 issue.

## Back from the Brink Project

In summer 2017 Butterfly Conservation's 'Limestone's Living Legacies' project launched here in Gloucestershire. This four year Heritage Lottery funded project is one of 19 'Back from the Brink' schemes running countrywide.

The £7.7m Back from the Brink project is one of the largest and most complex conservation schemes ever attempted. Bringing together seven species conservation organisations including Butterfly Conservation, Plantlife, RSPB and Bat Conservation Trust alongside Natural England, it aims to bring 20 of England's rarest and most threatened species back from the brink of extinction and secure the futures of over 200 more.

As the name suggests, Limestone's Living Legacies is focussing on the special unimproved limestone grassland habitat here in the Cotswolds. This particular type of grassland has undergone a dramatic decline since the 1930s which has in turn had a knock on effect on those species that rely on this habitat. Working with several local partner organisations, the aim is to restore and connect up a network of limestone grassland sites within the Cotswolds and in turn help the conservation prospects of 30 rare and threatened species.

These species include the Large Blue, Duke of Burgundy and Marsh Fritillary butterflies as well as other species such as the Red-shanked Carder Bee, Greater Horseshoe Bat, Rugged Oil Beetle, Adder, Pasqueflower and Fly Orchid. Each of these species relies on the limestone grassland to provide them with somewhere to grow, reproduce and feed, without which they would continue to decline.

Alongside vital habitat management work, a large part of the project involves surveying and monitoring for our

target species so we can track how they fare as the project progresses. However, we can't do this alone! We need the support of volunteers to help us do this and are therefore providing training to teach people how to identify and survey for these species.

Since the start of the project we have provided training on the Rugged Oil Beetle, Duke of Burgundy, Adder, Rock-rose Pot Beetle and our bumblebee species with new volunteers taking on surveys following the training. Although most of our surveying has finished for the year, one species is still active over the winter months. The Rugged Oil Beetle emerges in late September and can be surveyed for until the end of March. Following a training workshop in October, volunteers have since been out surveying grassland sites after dark on mild nights for this nocturnal beetle, providing us with further insight into where this beetle is currently found. It has been fantastic to see the amount of interest in helping with species surveys already but we can always use more help. The more people we have monitoring these species the more we will learn about them and in turn how we can help conserve them.

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If you are interested in getting involved or would like to be added to our mailing list please contact me at: [jgilbert@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:jgilbert@butterfly-conservation.org) or 07483 039321.

For more information on Back from the Brink visit [www.naturebftb.co.uk](http://www.naturebftb.co.uk) or follow @NatureBftB.

**Jennifer Gilbert**

**BftB Cotswolds Community Engagement Officer**

## The latest ... from the Cheltenham & Gloucestershire NT Centre

### Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from the Cheltenham & Gloucestershire Centre

#### Talks 2019

We've got the following afternoon talks 2.30pm at Bethesda Church Hall, GL50 2AP

- 3 January - Helen Roberts on James Wyatt, Architect
- 7 February - Simon Nicholas on BBC Naturewatch at Sherborne
- 7 March - Sally Gillespie on National Star College

Evening talks 7.30pm at Woodmancote School, GL52 9HN

- 17 January - Simon Tapnell (Director Nature in Art) on Looking at Pictures
- 21 February - Ted Wilson/Paul Drinkwater on The Siege of Gloucester 1643

NT volunteers very welcome at our lectures. Cost £3 for a Centre member, £4 otherwise. No need to book, but the afternoons at Bethesda are quite popular so it's advisable to get there by 2.15pm. Bethesda is very close to the Bath Terrace Car Park which can also get quite full!

For more information go to : <http://www.cheltglosntc.org.uk> and click on Lectures info in the Outings and Lectures link



**Seasons Greetings from us all at Ebworth**

