

Picturesque

Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty newsletter

Edition 24 *Autumn 2010*



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Welcome

to the Autumn edition of Picturesque.

We are now rolling on down to the end of 2010 which has been a busy one for AONB staff.

During this International Year of Biodiversity a successful Bioblitz event was organised see *adjacent article*, our volunteer programme expanded and forest schools in Gloucestershire developed. As well as events, walks and courses we have made appearances at shows and events including book signings at Chepstow with Simon King, David Attenborough and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall; the Univesity of the Great Outdoors at Hampton Court, Monmouthshire and Chepstow Shows.

Several projects have been developed including undergrounding of electricity, canoe access, guidance for wind turbines and the farming awards see *page 18*. Grants have been secured for several exciting new projects for next year including Offas Country in collaboration with Brecon Beacons National Park, Shropshire Hills and Clwydian Range AONBs.

A new Walk this Wye has been produced, insideOUT has opened a new site at Whitestone in Monmouthshire see *news pages* and we are developing our brand new website which will be online in January 2011. Added to that the Overlooking the Wye team have been working hard to progress the forty projects throughout the Wye Valley see *pages 10-13*

Next year sees the 40th anniversary of our AONB designation and the culmination of the Overlooking the Wye scheme which we intend to celebrate in a big way so please look out for news of the events which we will be organising throughout the year.

www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk

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Cover Picture: Exploring during Forest Schools event at Tutshill



Top: Gamekeeper Adrian Hanks leads an estate walk Upper middle: Volunteer Chris McFarling helps the schoolchildren identify plants Lower middle left: Katherine Owen from the Woodland Trust leads a walk to examine veteran trees Lower middle right: Simon Dereham, Andrew Nixon, Peter Clay, Perrystone Estate owner with Spikey the dog and Sarah Sawyer Bottom left: Searching for bugs and spiders Bottom right : Nigel Hands demonstrates the beauty of grass snakes



BioBlitz

18 and 19 June 2010

The International Year of Biodiversity provided a spring board to launch Herefordshire's first ever BioBlitz, a wildlife recording event.

The event was held at the Perrystone Estate near Ross-on-Wye, and offered a unique opportunity for the general public and school children to experience the natural history of Herefordshire, and meet professional and amateur naturalists dedicated to conserving it.

Mr Peter Clay, the estate owner, granted permission for the event to take place in Yatton Wood, a predominately broadleaved woodland. Naturalists and estate workers joined together to offer a unique opportunity to explore the woodland, glades, rides and ponds and promote a greater understanding of the management of a large estate.

On Friday June 18 three schools from Herefordshire; Mordiford, Holme Lacy and Ashfield Park brought 120 pupils to the estate and were led by environmental

education specialists from the Forestry Commission, RSPB, What's That Snake Project and the AONB. They explored the woodland and had a go at identifying species, ranging from insects, flowers, trees, pond life and reptiles. Staff from the Estate produced an interesting display for the young visitors, which included live ferrets. Head keeper Adrian Hanks and his assistant, dressed in striking traditional shooting attire, explained how wildlife can thrive on a carefully managed shooting estate. One of the many highlights for the children was their close encounter with reptiles, courtesy of Nigel Hand from the What's That Snake project. A student from Ashfield Park echoed many others 'There were so many things about snakes we had no idea about. Getting a chance to hold them was out of this world.'

On Saturday the event was open to the public and a range of themed walks was arranged covering subjects from spiders, woodland flora, bumblebees to ancient trees, woodland management and archaeology.

Naturalists combed the woodland recording species. A range of countryside organisations were represented, and the Herefordshire Records Centre staff were on hand to explain the role natural recording plays in conserving Herefordshire's biodiversity. A highlight was the walk with Adrian Hanks. Visitors unanimously declared this tour 'informative and thoroughly entertaining. Young visitors delighted in a close encounter with pond life thanks to Herefordshire's Amphibian and Reptile Team and enjoyed the superb range of activities on offer from the Herefordshire Nature Trust 'Wild Play'.

This event was possible through the kind permission and support of the Perrystone Estate, Herefordshire Biodiversity Partnership, and a range of voluntary and charitable groups and volunteers. A skilled team of AONB volunteers worked tirelessly alongside the groups, our thanks go to them all for making the event such a success.



the flight of the **kingfisher**

Barry Embling RSPB Forest of Dean Manager describes the fascinating bird.

A flash of electric blue along the riverbank is quite often the way most people see the Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis*

People new to birdwatching often say that this is the bird that they most want to see. This perhaps comes from the familiarity that we all have for seeing this beautiful bird, depicted on crockery, book covers, calendars and Christmas cards...though not ever seeing it in real life.

The kingfisher has an astonishing electric-blue pale sheen that can be seen both at rest and when flying. Roughly sparrow-sized, it has a dagger-like bill and a very short tail with vivid blueish green upperparts which are beautifully complemented by rich orange under parts and bright red feet.

Our kingfisher is a Northern outlier of a mostly tropical family, as evidenced by its exotic looking plumage that would not look out of place

in a rainforest. The closer one gets to the equator the more types of kingfisher there are, with 86 different species worldwide. The largest and perhaps even better known kingfisher is the Australian kookaburra, but it has no association with water and feeds mainly on reptiles and insects. In Europe, our non-migratory British populations are the most important in the whole of Northern Europe, as we are generally spared the fiercely cold, continental winters which can decimate numbers.

The breeding season lasts from late March to August. The nest is found at the end of a metre long tunnel that is excavated by both the male and female, drilled into a vertical bank usually by slow moving water. An enlarged nest chamber is at the end that rises slightly from the entrance. The 6-7 eggs are incubated by both parents, and in common with nearly

all hole-nesting birds (such as owls and woodpeckers), the eggs are white – as there's little need for camouflage in a dark nest chamber. No nesting material is used, though there is an accumulation of regurgitated fish bones, accompanied no doubt by a pungent odour. The young are fed by both parents, and fledge in a little over three weeks, often becoming independent within days and leaving the parental territory. This is the time of high mortality, with young birds often becoming waterlogged and drowning whilst learning to dive. This is also the time of long distance dispersal due to youngsters having to seek a territory of their own. Once this is established they become very sedentary.

The habit of feeding almost exclusively on freshwater fish is one shared by the grey heron, both birds employing the 'wait and see' hunting

technique. The kingfisher however, before swallowing, usually hits its prey against the perch to knock it out and then the fish is swallowed headfirst. Hunting involves patient spying for prey from an open or concealed perch or hovering over water. Prey species typically caught include bullheads, roach, minnows and stickle backs. Studies have shown that when feeding young, the parents are able to bring back as many as 80 small fish in just one hour. A fish-only diet leaves a vulnerability to severe winters. Before the hard winter of 1962/63 some 32 pairs inhabited a 16 km section of the River Thames, this was reduced to a single pair in the following summer. Large clutches, multiple broods and good dispersal ability when young are adaptations that allow a rapid recovery after a hard winter.

An interesting occurrence in the Wye Valley concerned the peregrines at Symond's Yat Rock, as reported by one of the RSPB volunteers. The adult male peregrine took to spotting the kingfishers flying along the river and from the lofty cliffs of Coldwell Rocks and swooped down to river level and successfully hunted them, teaching the juvenile peregrines to do the same. That summer, four different kingfishers were seen to be taken – certainly a recently fledged family.

So, how can we find a kingfisher? As with most birds, and all wildlife viewing, it boils down to lots of time in the field and luck. The way I detect the kingfisher initially is hearing its 'chee' call, then looking up and down a water body to see the blue streak shooting along above the water, with whirring wing beats, briefly jinking sideways before landing on an often concealed perch, or more usually, disappearing around the next bend.

Whilst having tea on the Dean Heritage Centre roof terrace that overlooks the beautiful millpond, a kingfisher landed on the sculpted metal dragon that rises proudly from the centre of the pond. This allowed me breathtaking views, especially when it took off and briefly hovered before dashing away. Views such as this can only leave one with a sense of privilege and awe.



Kingfisher Facts

The Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) has two outer toes partly fused together or webbed.

A family of Kingfishers can eat up to 100 fish a day

Before swallowing fish they usually hit it against the perch to knock it out. The fish is swallowed headfirst

Kingfishers are very territorial and will fight to protect their stretch of the river

The Kingfisher colour is iridescence not pigment which is actually dark brown. Interference between different wavelengths of light reflected from different layers of feathers produces blues, greens and oranges. The feathers can seem blue or green depending on the angle they are viewed at

The average life span of the kingfisher is only two years. However the oldest one on record was 7.5 years

The courting ritual involves the male trying to win female approval by bringing her food

The kingfishers' association with mankind goes back into ancient times and it was once considered harmful to the eyes to look at its brilliant plumage. Carrying a single feather was once regarded as a talisman against lightning... no doubt connected with its electric blue plumage. The 19th century naturalist Yarrell, wrote that kingfishers were regularly killed and hung by a thread in country cottages, in the belief that the dangling corpse could indicate the direction of the wind.

For further information about Kingfishers go the RSPB website www.rspb.co.uk



controlling water pollution

Water quality has improved significantly due to increased legislation since the 1970's, also because of better control of point source pollution which enters rivers through a single point such as discharge from a sewage works. However, in recent years another serious malaise of water quality has become an issue in the form of 'diffuse pollution'.

Diffuse pollution is often more serious than point source pollution, because it is harder to detect and prevent. It is often the case that those causing diffuse pollution are unaware of their actions.

High water quality is an important factor in maintaining the aquatic habitats and species of the river Wye. Acidification, nutrient enrichment and fine sediment (silt) loads are significant factors affecting water quality.

Nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) affect sensitive aquatic plants, which are displaced by the vigorous growth of nutrient-demanding plants such as filamentous algae. At times of low flow and high water temperature this can also

lead to oxygen depletion, to which juvenile salmon are particularly sensitive.

Sediments containing high phosphate levels can also cause heavy mortality to salmon at the egg stage by causing oxygen depletion within spawning gravels.

Agriculture is the most significant source of nitrogen pollution on the Wye including fertiliser run-off, livestock manure, silage effluent and soil erosion. Phosphates not only enter the watercourse from agricultural land but also from poorly maintained domestic septic tanks.

The nature of diffuse pollution means that it is difficult to tackle and a large number of individual landowners need to be

approached to cover significant areas. Face-to-face delivery with landowners is particularly important.

To aid this work the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative (ECSFDI) has been established. Fifty catchments across England (including the Wye) were identified as priority areas for action.

These were targeted under a range of measures aimed at improving farm practices and reducing water pollution from agriculture. Newly appointed advisers are working on a one-to-one basis with farmers, as well as leading a series of initiatives, including workshops and farm demonstrations to encourage best practice.

Grants have been available to carry out activity that will



benefit water quality and on the Welsh side of the Wye Catchment, the Environment Agency have a Catchment Initiative which works along the same lines as the ECSFDI, offering advice and guidance to farmers on reducing diffuse pollution.

Locally, Ioan Williams has been working with farmers on both sides of the border, and has recently been joined by Kirstie Richardson working for the Environment Agency. Since 2006 over 300 farmers have had on-farm advice, and numerous farmer meetings and events have taken place, this has helped raise the level of awareness of diffuse pollution, as well as improving the relationship between the EA and farmers.

Any farmer or landowner who wishes to find out more about the initiatives mentioned can contact either Ioan or Kirstie on 02920 582754 or visit www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/farming/csf/default.aspx

For the love of WELLS

Water is essential to life, and civilisations have always been founded on reliable sources of water.

In the history of our own Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) communities will have been originally sited on or near a spring, well or watercourse. The village well would become a natural meeting place, and water sources would also often have a holy aspect. Many churches were founded on such sacred sites and it is believed that over 1,100 holy wells were known of in Wales in the 1950s.

Nowadays most of us depend on piped water brought from reservoirs often many miles away. But somehow people and communities still show a basic need to appreciate and preserve ancient water sources that have long ago lost their practical importance.

A well is defined as a spring that man has adopted for water supply and often there is some form of structure, which may include a basin or trough. Often the structure has fallen into decay but some communities have ensured their wells are preserved.

Throughout the Wye Valley AONB we can still find wells that are cared for and visited. The Virtuous Well in Trellech, the St John the Baptist Well at Staunton and the Holy Well in Hole-in-the-Wall are just three of the many venerated.

The Wye Valley Society www.wyevalleysociety.org.uk in partnership with the Wye Valley AONB is now starting a project to encourage communities to locate, log, look after and love their wells. The project aims to raise the profile of wells as historic parts of communities and wherever possible restore and revitalise well sites. The parish and community councils of the area are being contacted, and help sought from local authorities, English Heritage, Cadw, Forestry Commission, water companies, local history and archaeology societies and the Wellsprings Fellowship.

But the success of the project will depend on the enthusiasm and energy of local communities. Is there a water source near you that you believe was the supply for the community? Would you like to see it restored and appreciated by everyone? We'd like to include water fountains and locations where communities collected water from streams.

Then contact the Wye Valley Society and tell us what you know on press@wyevalleysociety.org.uk

You can view a list of known wells and springs in the AONB on the Wellsprings Fellowship website on wellspringsfellowship.wordpress.com



Deer Management in the AONB

Andrew Blake, Wye Valley AONB Officer explains the need for appropriate deer management

The most common deer species in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is the Fallow Deer *Cervus dama*. Their impact on the landscape can be significant.

Fallow deer were present some 400,000 years ago in Britain but were displaced by various Ice Ages. They were re-introduced probably by the Normans and were usually kept in parks, for both food and ornament. The present wild populations are largely escapees as many parks were broken up during the Civil War and again in the two World Wars.

In woodlands deer at the right density can be of benefit, but at higher population densities, as in the AONB, and over a long period they can eat most of the woodland plants within

their reach. They will then disperse to seek further food outside the woodland bringing them into conflict with surrounding farmers and landowners and increase the probability of road accidents.

Most damage is caused by grazing, browsing and bark stripping, which adversely affects woodland regeneration, commercial crops and the long term structure and composition of woodland flora. Acceptable grazing levels depends on site specific circumstances and objectives (eg timber, conservation or recreation). The key issue is not actual deer numbers but their level of impact.

Recent surveys estimate that there are over 900 Fallow deer in the lower Wye Valley

and over 300 in the Woolhope Dome. This compares with 1000 and 500 deer respectively seven years ago when the Wye Valley AONB Unit first helped set up Deer Management Groups in the two areas. With the help of The Deer Initiative, small exclusion plots are being installed throughout the AONB to help measure the impact of deer more accurately.

Both Deer Management Groups consist of a broad partnership of statutory, voluntary and private interests and follow the accord developed by The Deer Initiative 'ensuring the delivery of a sustainable, well-managed wild deer population in England and Wales'. Both groups remain concerned about the impacts

of deer on the internationally important woodlands in the Wye Valley AONB. Co-operating on a landscape scale is recognised as a more efficient way to manage Fallow deer as a herd (often over thirty animals) will move freely across boundaries. They are even known to cross the Wye near Symonds Yat and Redbrook.

However, it should be remembered that in Britain the deer's main predators (such as wolf and lynx) no longer exist and man's intervention is necessary in ecological terms. Sufficient numbers of does (females) have to be culled to prevent over population. As Fallow does can produce ten fawns or more over a lifetime, culls of 20% of the female population may be required just to keep the population stable. The consensus in the Deer Management Groups is that we have a healthy population of deer with few diseased or unhealthy animals.

Muntjac and Roe deer are also starting to impact on the area. Roe deer is a native species which is more reclusive than Fallow and lives in small family groups or as a solitary animal rather than within herds.

Muntjac were introduced from Asia and are much smaller with a hunched appearance. Normally living singly or in small family

groups, they are unique amongst UK deer in that they breed all year. In reasonable conditions adult does will produce a single fawn every seven months over a breeding life which may last into their teens.

Muntjac are difficult to cull because they are small, inhabit thick cover and are constantly on the move.

All the deer species are excellent to eat. Venison, properly cooked, is good, healthy meat that is leaner than chicken per 100g and full of omega oils. However as the meat becomes more popular poaching is on the increase. Poachers respect neither the season nor the deer they kill, including fawns and pregnant does and may use dogs to bring the prey down. Any suspicions that poachers are in your area should always be reported to the police. With a varied landscape and landownership there are always natural refuges for the deer to escape to.



The Fallow Deer one of our most common Wye Valley species of deer

Types of Deer found in the Wye Valley

Fallow Deer *Cervus dama*

Our most common deer in the area. They were introduced into Britain by the Normans in the 11th century. They live in single sex herds for most of the year only coming together in autumn for the rut when the woods echo with the males distinctive grunt.

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

One of our native species which became largely extinct in the 1700s. They are found as solitary animals or in family groups not in herds.

Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Small deer introduced into Woburn Park in the early 20th century. Escapees then established a feral population which has led to a widespread increase in numbers.

Sika Deer *Cervus nippon*

Intermediate size between red and roe deer. Introduced from the Far East in 1860s. Tend to be solitary for most of the year. The major threat is the genetic integrity of the red deer as the Sika will interbreed with reds.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*

The largest native deer species in the UK. There are only a few in the Wye Valley. The stags are known for their spectacular autumn rut.

For more information visit www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk or the British Deer Society www.bds.org.uk

Overlooking the **wye**

Dros Ddyffryn Gwy

Overlooking the Wye is a £2.8 m Landscape Partnership Scheme supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund within the Wye Valley AONB.

The aim of the scheme is to improve and promote enjoyment and understanding of the historic environment in the landscape of the lower Wye Valley. This involves projects at forty sites.

Timeless Beauty of Lancaut

For one of the most Picturesque locations within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Lancaut really does take some beating.



Lancaut Church remains

The Lancaut Peninsula in Gloucestershire is tucked in below the high limestone cliffs of the lower Wye Valley gorge. This quiet idyll was once home to an early monastic settlement and a leper colony. All that remains today is a shell of the 12th century church and its surroundings.

St James is a small early church positioned to look out over the River Wye and together with the surrounding area is designated as a Scheduled Monument.

During the spring of 2010 the 'Overlooking the Wye' scheme undertook works to

repair the wall around the churchyard which was falling down. Originally repaired as a drystone wall some years ago the new work was to put it back as a mortared wall with a 'turf' top. This is a traditional living solution which will protect the wall from rain penetrating the stonework, provide a different habitat and will be in harmony with the landscape. It is also much easier than sourcing matching stone which can be very expensive.

In the first year the turf is expected to suffer die back but we anticipate that it will regenerate next spring. This work will be finished in the autumn 2010.



Work on the turf top wall

the **team**



The OLW team of from left: Victoria Oaten, Outreach and Interpretation Officer, Kate Biggs, Project Officer, Julie Godfrey, Finance Officer and Sue Middleton, Scheme Manager (pictured above)

Overlooking the **Wye**

Dros Ddyffryn Gwy

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The **WYE TOUR** and its **ARTISTS**

Chepstow Museum has brought back over 70 watercolours of the Wye Valley by great artists from the late 18th and early 19th centuries to the source of their inspiration.

This was the Golden Age of British watercolour painting and also the heyday of the Wye Tour, a two day boat trip from Ross-on-Wye to Chepstow, probably Britain's first 'package' tour. These first tourists followed in the wake of the Rev William Gilpin, whose book popularised the tour and the scenery. Many amateur as well as professional artists came to seek out and capture the 'picturesque' scenes.

The exhibition brings together works from museums throughout the UK and the national collections in London (Tate, V&A, British Museum and British Library) as well as in

Wales. Masters from that great age of watercolours, including JMW Turner, Paul Sandby, Michael 'Angelo' Rooker, Thomas Hearne, Edward Dayes, John & Cornelius Varley, Samuel Palmer, David Cox, John Sell Cotman, John Martin and Joshua Cristall are shown.

Guest curator, Julian Mitchell, known as playwright and screenplay writer (Another Country, Wilde, Inspector Morse etc) and also as a Monmouthshire historian who has studied the tour and its artists for twenty five years, has selected 'his best and most interesting' watercolours.

The exhibition was made possible through a grant from Cyfoeth Cymru Gyfan – Sharing Treasures scheme from the Welsh Assembly Government, administered by CyMAL, Museums Archives and Libraries Wales.



Top: J M W Turner, Tintern Abbey, West front; the ruined abbey, c 1794 © The Trustees of The British Museum

Bottom: Thomas Hearne, Symonds Yat on the River Wye, © The Whitworth Art Gallery, The University of Manchester

Don't miss this exhibition of 'national significance'

Chepstow Museum, Bridge Street, Chepstow until September 5

Open: Mon-Sat inc Banks Hols 10.30-5.30, Sun 2-5.30

Admission FREE



Angidy furnace

The remnants of an historic industrial landscape, which once dominated the surrounding areas of Tintern can be discovered amongst the woodland tranquility

Angidy Furnace is located in the Angidy Valley lying above Tintern. This valley was once an important industrial hub with furnaces, forges and wireworks utilising the water power from the Angidy River.

The site has had problems with flooding for a number of years due to leaks from the river and blockages in the underground culvert which has led to deterioration of the site. The Overlooking the Wye Scheme is currently working to resolve this and conserve the monument.

The site was used for smelting iron from 1590 and went out of industrial use in about 1828. The remains on

site relate to the latest phase of industrial activity. Industrial sites are always complex archaeologically, modifications to buildings and processes were often made, with structures being reused and changed. Angidy Furnace is no exception; we know how the site worked and the functions of the buildings, but understanding how these have evolved from earlier workings is difficult.

The current work involves trying to unblock a culvert that runs from the wheel pit on the site. This pit once housed the wheel that generated power to blow the blast furnace. We will also be removing the cement mortar from the remains of the walls and replacing it with lime mortar which is much less harmful to traditional buildings. The work is being done by Ascend Ltd who have been working with Dr

Neil Phillips (archaeologist) and the Overlooking the Wye Project Officer, Kate Biggs. Neil hopes that new clues discovered during the works will help us to understand more of the history of this important site.

The work has also involved digging a deep hole in the neighbour's garden so we are very grateful to Janet and Barry Saunders for their help and tolerance! More updates later!



Dr Neil Phillips and Darren Richardson investigating culverts

For more information contact:

Angidy Furnace: Kate Biggs
Kate@overlookingthewye.org.uk

Overlooking the **wye** NEWS

Dros Ddyffryn Gwy

Overlooking the Wye Minibus Tours



One of the successful mini bus tours

The Overlooking the Wye team have started running guided minibus tours around some of the historic sites in the scheme in order to explain the works being done. There are two routes and each trip takes a whole day as it includes lunch and tea stops at a subsidised cost of £15 per head. The tours are available to tourism businesses, local councillors, local interest groups and the general public.

If you wish to find out more, please contact Julie Godfrey (tel: 01600 891 527 or email julie@overlookingthewye.org.uk)



Llandogo bridge and footpath

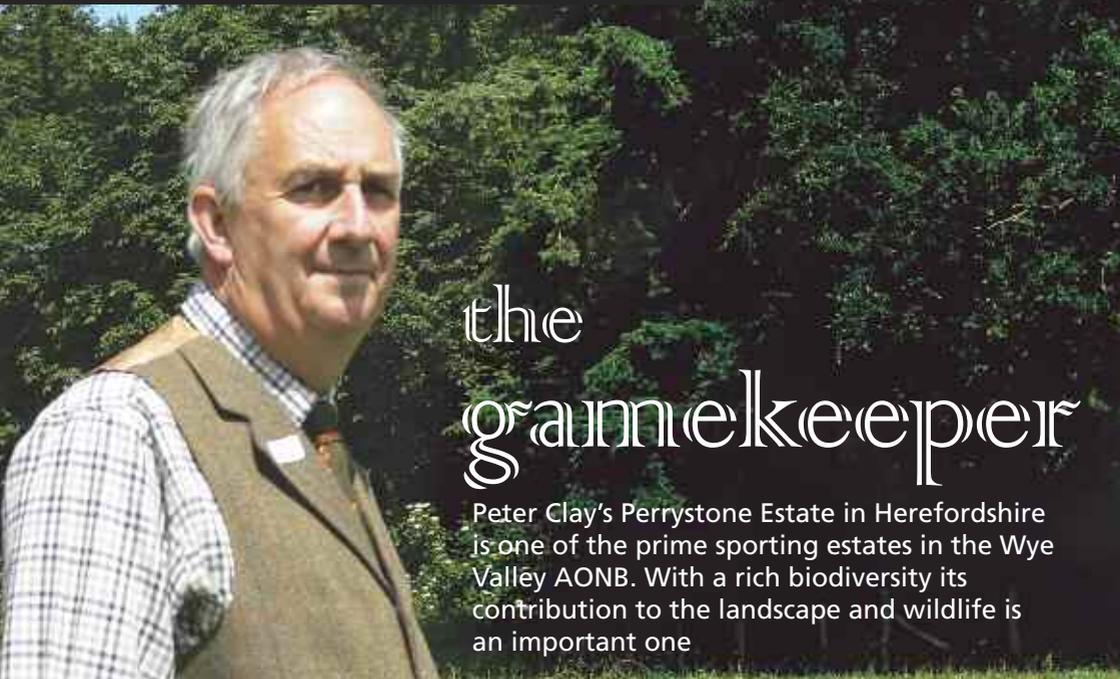
Llandogo Footpath

The works to improve the footpath down to the riverside completed another link in the circular route around Llandogo. These works were done by Monmouthshire County Council Rights of Way department.

Old Station Tintern re-opens



Old Station, Tintern was officially re-opened on Fri 16th July by Peter Clarke, the chairman of Monmouthshire County Council, ably assisted by Giles Howard and Ann Webb (MCC County Councillors) and Margaret Jones (Countryside Council for Wales). This marked the completion of the refurbishment works with the provision of the all ability access ramp so that all visitors can now enter the Destination Wye Valley Exhibition.



the gamekeeper

Peter Clay's Perrystone Estate in Herefordshire is one of the prime sporting estates in the Wye Valley AONB. With a rich biodiversity its contribution to the landscape and wildlife is an important one

Adrian Hanks, Head Keeper at the Perrystone Estate in Herefordshire explains about the job and its importance in nature conservation.

Adrian is now in his 26th season at the 2,200 acre Perrystone Estate which provides pheasant and partridge shooting. Originally a stockman with pedigree Herefords he started out by helping lady keeper Rosie Tristram at Upton Court. He went as a keeper/stockman at Ingstone Foy with Jimmy Ferrard, then was sent to train for twelve months under Henry Fanner and Peter Masters at Perrystone. He went from there back to

Ingstone to start a brand new shoot. From there he went to Northwick in the Cotswolds. Whilst there he beat all the records for pheasant and partridge on the estate.

Returning to Perrystone he became head keeper after two years, a position he has held ever since.

A natural countryman, Adrian is heartfelt in his love for his birds and the Herefordshire countryside. ' I love the wildlife. This is not a job but a way of life. I look after the birds and when I present them well at the shoot I know I have done my job. However I do get a bit of a kick to see birds beat the guns and get through.'

A gamekeeper's job involves long hours and complete dedication. There are a lot of things that predate the birds and in the run up to the season Adrian and under keeper Aaran are out from dawn to dusk feeding birds, running vermin traps for crows, magpies and squirrels, checking pens and ensuring the birds are kept in the best of health in the run up to the shoot.

One of the essential parts of establishing and maintaining a good shoot is to ensure the birds have shelter and warmth, pheasants do not stand up well to the cold and coverts are established with trees and crop areas where

the birds can shelter and feed. Perrystone Estate has planted 130 acres of covert crops which not only provide seeds for the pheasants but for a variety of songbirds which are now on the increase on the estate. Larks particularly seem to be benefitting from this type of management and the songbird population has increased by 70%. Added to this the forestry workers have planted 20,000 native oaks in the last two years, firs are being removed and native trees and shrubs replanted. The site is classed as an original ancient forest site and contains some really good specimens of ancient oak and some fine examples of field maple.

The relatively untouched land now boasts a very healthy Brown Hare population but all in the garden is not rosy. Poaching is now on the increase and has seen the rapid decline of the fallow deer on the estate. The arrival of the goshawk has seen large numbers of birds

including sparrow hawk declining. Goshawks have even been predated on barn owls and have decimated the grey partridge that were being raised in a specially constructed 450 acre area. The reintroduction of the partridge is important and poults will be introduced to restock the area.

The Perrystone pheasants are a source of pride to Adrian and they rear several species for game shooting. As well as the Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* the estate runs an exotic species the Reeves Pheasant *Syrnaticus reevesii* If guests shoot these they pay a forfeit which goes to named charity each year. Several thousand pounds have been raised this way for local charities.

Game shooting and conservation are working together to reverse the decline of some of our threatened native species and should be viewed as an important contribution to our environment in the Wye Valley AONB.



Above: Adrian Hanks and beat keeper Aaran Hocking patrolling the pheasant pens
Left: The Reeves Pheasant at Perrystone

Game Season

For a variety of species the shooting season has closed and open seasons. The closed season, the periods they cannot be shot, generally coincides with the breeding season to ensure a healthy and sustainable population is maintained

Game Open Seasons (England and Wales)

Pheasant	Oct 1 - Feb 1
Partridge	Sept 1 - Feb 1
Grouse	Aug 12 - Dec 10
Ptarmigan	Aug 12 - Dec 10
Snipe	Aug 12 - Jan 31
Woodcock	Oct 1 - Jan 31

For further information please go to the following websites

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
www.fwag.org.uk

Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust
www.gwct.org.uk

British Association for Shooting and Conservation
www.basc.org.uk

National Gamekeepers Organisation
www.nationalgamekeepers.org.uk

Countryside Alliance
www.countryside-alliance.org.uk

Countryside Land and Business Association
www.cla.org.uk

HELP STOP POACHING

Keepers are now asking for the general public's help in reporting any strange lights or activities they see at night in the countryside to the police. The more eyes out there the better.



TRADITIONS and CUSTOMS in the Wye Valley



Above: St Mary's Church and the Castle at St Briavels

The Forest of Dean is a place full of ancient customs and tradition one of these being the 'St Briavels Bread and Cheese Dole'

Every Whit Sunday after evensong has been heard in St Mary's church a crowd gathers beneath a high wall in the pretty Gloucestershire village of St Briavels, high above the Wye Valley. They are waiting for bread and cheese, but not a nice ploughman's supper or sandwich. They soon get it, or the chance to grab it, as two figures lob small pieces of bread and cheese at them from above, picking the food from large baskets. There is a scramble, as these morsels are said to have special properties: to last without spoiling; to bring good luck (local miners used them as charms to prevent underground accidents); or to help the holder see into the

future if kept beneath their pillow.

The scramble today is said to be more sedate than it used to be, but then Wagon Wheels are smaller and it doesn't snow as much in winter does it? At one time the event took place in the church itself, but the rowdiness was felt to be unbecoming to a place of worship, so long ago it moved to the lane outside.

These days some claimants dress in medieval garb, reflecting the belief that the custom dates back many centuries. It is said by some to have originated at the time in the 12th century when Miles de Gloucester, subsequently made Earl of Hereford, commanded the castle in the village, guarding the land against incursions by marauding Welshmen. Those

who paid a penny 'dole' to this lord were granted the right to gather firewood in Hudnalls Wood in the district, though quite how this is linked with the distribution of bread and cheese nobody is sure. Alternatively, the custom could date from a visit by King John to the village, and the grant of a large area of land to the villagers, though this seems entirely out of character for that financially embarrassed monarch.

St Briavels is in the Forest of Dean, an area with more than its fair share of traditional rights – the use of common land for grazing, the rights of those born locally who have worked for a year and a day in certain trades to mine where they please in the forest, and so on. People in the area are keen to retain their traditions, which in many cases convey economic benefits, so it is likely the bread and cheese will continue to be thrown to the waiting crowd every Whitsun in this lovely part of the country, much to the delight of visitors.



Above: Bread and Cheese Dole in action

St. Briavels (pronounced 'Brevels'), was once known as 'Ledenia Parva' (Little Lydney) and stands on the edge of a limestone plateau above the valley of the River Wye, just on the English side of the Welsh border, above an ancient ox-bow of the river.

Project Lemur

Kat White's training with the Wye Valley AONB through Project LEMUR is providing her with vital skills for working in the environmental and conservation sectors

Finding jobs in today's recession is difficult enough and many environmental graduates are finding that they may have the academic qualifications but without the practical skills they are unable to find work.

Kat White from Barry, South Wales was in such a position, until help came from Project LEMUR (Learning Environments in Marine, Urban and Rural areas) in partnership with the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Graduating in 2004 in Environmental Biology and with a Masters degree in Conservation and Utilisation of Plant Genetic Resources from the University of Birmingham, Kat was finding it tough to get a job in conservation. 'I had great difficulty in getting any work other than two six month periods as a countryside seasonal ranger' she said. 'I



found that my lack of knowledge in species 'identification let me down.' Funded through the Heritage Lottery Fund and run locally by the Herefordshire Nature Trust for the rural hub, LEMUR is an initiative providing a lifeline of training in practical wildlife conservation skills with conservation bodies like the Wye Valley AONB. Kat joined the AONB unit in April and will be training for nine months in surveying of veteran trees, grassland habitats, bats and working on a High Nature Value Farmland survey. She will also get hands on experience with the courses, events and

activities run throughout the year. Andrew Nixon, Wye Valley AONB Development Officer was pleased to welcome her to the team. 'With her past experience she will make a valuable contribution to the important survey work we need to carry out this year.'

With her new skills Kat will be in a much stronger position to nail that conservation job she is dreaming of and which the Wye Valley AONB will have paid a strong part.

For more details about LEMUR log onto www.projectlemur.org

Farming Awards 2010

The judging has finished for the 2010 farming awards for large farms over 100 hectares. The award was presented at the Monmouthshire Show in August

From this years competition three farms were selected for the final presentation at Monmouthshire Show on Thursday, August 26.

From the finalists Brookes Dairy, Panta Farm, Devauden Pencoyd Court Farm, Herefordshire and Caplor Farm Fownhope, the judges chose Gareth Williams from Caplor Farm as the outright winner. It was a difficult task judging three strong contenders for this year's awards

Andrew Nixon, Wye Valley AONB Development Officer, said " the Judges were very impressed by the diverse initiatives at Caplor Farm. Gareth Williams has developed a forward thinking approach to farming that reduces carbon emissions, maintains a high quality landscape and supports wildlife. Gareth is also very supportive of his local community as well as helping communities in Gambia through Concern Universal.

Caplor Farm is quite an old hand at winning awards. This

year alone it was named as one of the top 50 Green Leaders in the West Midlands in a competition run by Sustainability West Midlands and awarded first place in the category for small business in the Carbon Reduction Cost Saving award, as part of the West Midlands Low Carbon Economy Awards. Caplor also picked up a highly commended award for its exceptional level of environmental commitment from the Hereford and Worcester Chamber of Commerce.

The family business has operated from Caplor since 1923, originally run by Gareth's grandfather. Initially the 323 hectare farm was for dairy production but Caplor has diversified into arable farming, which now has 170 hectares of combinable crops including wheat, oilseed rape, oats and beans. The farm also has over 80 hectares of grass and contracts 60-80 hectares of potatoes annually. A partnership with Phocle pedigree Herefords has resulted in a new enterprise with this award winning herd.

One of the passions fuelling the farm is Caplor Energy which has been designed around the farm's ethos for environmentally sustainable farming. The farm undertakes an annual carbon footprint to monitor improvements and identify areas for further carbon reduction. This has enabled them to set up a company for renewable energy installation . Caplor Energy provides energy systems for households, communities and small businesses specialising in solar hot water systems, solar electric systems. air source heat pumps and ground source heat pumps.

Caplor seems to be a force for the future of farming in the Herefordshire area and we congratulate them on winning this prestigious award.



Background image Hereford herd at Caplor
Above: Gareth with son David

book reviews

A regular feature of book reviews concerning the Wye Valley area, conservation and the environment

The Wild Life: A year of Living on Wild Food

John Lewis-Stempel

Publisher: Black Swan

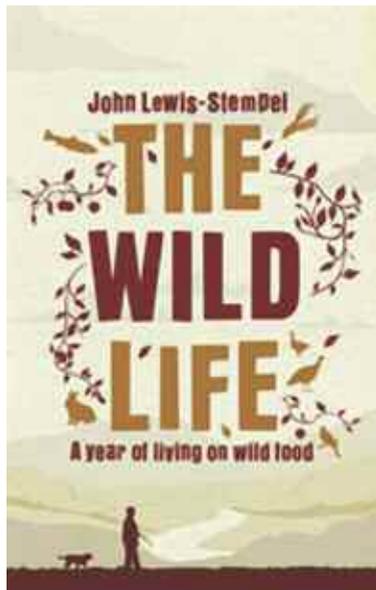
ISBN-055277460X

Price: Softback £8.99

John Lewis-Stempel is a writer and farmer living near Ross on Wye in Herefordshire. The Wild Life is his account of twelve months he spent eating only food that Nature provided for free. He existed on food he shot, found or foraged from fields, trees, hedges, copses and the brook running through his fields. His account details the highs and lows of this existence and together with interesting recipes conjures up a real taste of the history of his 500 year old farm.

This book is a celebration of the countryside, earthy, passionate, honest and funny and with a beautiful writing style that is a lesson in living off the land for us all.

From all local bookshops



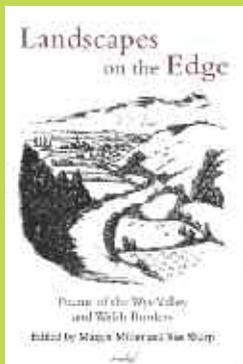
Landscapes on the Edge

Publisher: Fineleaf Editions

Price: £10.95

This anthology of poems reflects many aspects of the magical landscape of the River Wye and the Welsh Marches. The work of over thirty writers including local poets features work by Frances Horovitz, Anne Stevenson National Poet of Wales, Gillian Clarke, Edward Thomas, John Drinkwater and Billy Collins US poet laureate

Available from all local bookshops or ordered directly from Fineleaf Editions, Moss Cottage, Pontshill, Ross-on-Wye HR9 5TB
www.fineleaf.co.uk



If you have a book for review in our next issue please contact Nikki Moore, AONB Information Officer Tel: 01600 710846

KIDZ *stuff*



Beastly and Beautiful Badger

Wild Events in the Wye

Beastly and Beautiful event

A group of young storytellers gathered at the Manor Wood on July 27 and took part in a woodland adventure; a quest to find the key to the golden casket. En-route they encountered woodland creatures some real, a badger and a tawny owl, some imaginary, fairies and a wood wizard. At the end of the magical trail the golden casket was unlocked and everyone shared the secrets of storytelling.

There are always childrens events going on in the Wye Valley AONB. Keep a lookout for Wye So Special or go online www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk

Some really useful kids sites

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds www.rspb.org.uk

World wildlife fund – gowild.org.uk

Cbbc – www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/wild/index.shtml

Wildlife watch – www.wildlifewatch.org.uk

Insects – www.bugslife.co.uk

Nature Detectives – www.naturedetectives.org.uk

events

Any of the events below can be booked using the details below each event.

Chepstow Museum's Big Draw Event Framed

Get hands on with the art and nature of the Wye Valley - and put it all in a picture

Date: Sunday October 10

Time: 10:00am - 4.00pm

Location: Chepstow Drill Hall

Contact: 01291 625981

chepstowmuseum@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Halloween Walk at Old Station Tintern

Join us if you dare for a 'ghoulishly good' early evening walk for all the family on All Hallows Eve. Pass the haunted station and continue along the creepy railway line with spooky stories and terrifying tales. Come in fancy dress but wrap up warmly and expect mud underfoot.

Date: Sunday, October 31

Time Call for details

Contact: Monmouthshire
Countrywide Service 01291
6895661

Do you have any photos or artwork of the Wye Valley, its wildlife or landscape? Maybe pics of you and your friends and family having fun or maybe a joke or two.

If you would like to see them on the **KIDZ *stuff*** page then send to:

The Editor, Picturesque, Wye Valley AONB, Hadnock Road, Monmouth NP25 3NG

or email them to information@wyevalleyaonb.org.uk

Spot the Difference

Sean and Lucy are planting seeds in the garden. Can you spot 10 differences between the two pictures?



courtesy of www.thekidsgarden.co.uk

I have no eyes, legs or ears and I help move the earth. What am I?

A WORM

NEWS

from the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

insideOUT opens new site in Wales

The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) project *insideOUT* has been going from strength to strength at its Forestry Commission site at Bracelands in the Gloucestershire section of the Wye Valley AONB.

The project delivered workshops to over 100 users from a wide variety of groups who find difficulty in accessing our superb landscape. Our aim to get



From left: Roger Drury Soundworks, Sarah Goodey Gwent Arts and Health, Andrew Nixon Wye Valley AONB Development Officer, Ashley Thomas Chairman Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee, Jane Spray creative artist, Councillor Ann Webb, Stephanie Poulter rep/Trellech Community Council, Louise George Health and Social Care Facilitator GAVO, Richard Gable Forestry Commission Wales, Matthew Lewis Monmouthshire County Council Countryside Manager, Heidi Vaughan Head of Learning Oxford Playhouse, Andrew Blake Wye Valley AONB Lead Officer, Linda Steiner Alzheimers Society and Sarah Sawyer Wye Valley AONB Community Links Officer. Front: Justine Wheatley Arts Alive and Sharon Seymour Wye Valley AONB Finance and Administration Officer

sites established in Herefordshire and Monmouthshire has taken a step forward. In July representatives from local government, social services, care providers and arts practitioners came together to officially open a new site at Whitestone, a Forestry Commission Wales site.

With support from Richard Gable, Forestry Commission Wales and in partnership with Arts Alive, a creative arts organisation from Crickhowell, the *insideOUT* site will enable groups to work creatively in the landscape with specialist arts workers.

Justine Wheatly, Director of Arts Alive felt that the project

would reflect her organisation's ethos of working with under represented and vulnerable groups. ' Arts Alive is delighted to partner the Wye Valley AONB in this exciting new project for Monmouthshire. I hope that many groups will be able to access the landscape that we all take for granted'

The project intends to develop links with community and voluntary groups particularly from the NHS and social care sector. For further information please contact:

Nikki Moore Wye Valley AONB Information Officer at information@wyevalleyAONB.org.uk or tel 01600 710846



Carrie from Grapevine Care admires her wind sculpture

National Association News

Ashley Thomas, who has served for several years as Chairman of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty AONB has just finished a successful three year period as Chairman of the board of the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty NAAONB. He will still continue to serve as a member of the management board.

Ashley Thomas (left) is pictured below at the National Conference presenting the Bowland Award to Sam Ellis from the charity Butterfly Conservation. This award was gained for work on Denge Woods butterfly conservation project in Kent.



World Heritage Status bid

Tourism and Heritage Minister John Penrose has published the UK's Tentative List of 38 sites for World Heritage status which includes the Wye Valley and Forest of Dean. The area will be up against such iconic UK landscapes as The Lake District and the Broads as well as historic towns of York, Bristol and Lincoln. The others in for consideration for the next round also include the Island of St Helena and the Carribean Turks and Caicos Islands. Places finally winning through will join the Taj Mahal, the Great Wall of China, The Statue of Liberty and more than 800 other sites on UNESCO's list of the most iconic and important parts of the planet's heritage. An independent expert panel will now be set up to assess each bid with a new list of potential sites drawn up for submission to UNESCO in 2011.

Wye Valley AONB Calendar and Annual Review

Our extremely popular calendar for 2011 will be produced in August 2010. Copies will be limited so we are organising an order service.

Order your calendar, priced at £5 inc post and package, from the Wye Valley AONB Unit, Hadnock Road, Monmouth NP25 3NG by May 31st to ensure your copy and please make cheques payable to Herefordshire Council.

40 Years On

a celebration of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

In 2011 the Wye Valley AONB will be celebrating its 40th Anniversary. It was designated in 1971, the same year as Britain went decimal and the Italian Job hit the big screen.

The primary purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance the beauty of the Wye Valley including its physical, ecological and cultural landscape. It has secondary aims of meeting the needs of quiet enjoyment of the countryside and have regard to the interests of those who live and work in the Wye Valley. In practice this means the AONB unit together with its Joint Advisory Committee and partners are responsible for managing and protecting the area recognising this is a living and working landscape.

We have plans to celebrate not only the 40 years of partnership working but also the culmination of the Overlooking the Wye scheme with events throughout 2011. So do watch out for information on our website www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk and here in Picturesque



your feedback.

Please let us know your views on this issue and win a copy of Landscapes on the Edge published by Fineleaf
All replies will be entered in a Prize Draw to be drawn February, 2011
Congratulations to G Purrier from Lydbrook winner of the Spring draw. A copy of The Railway Story by Eric Rawlins is on its way to you.

Name:

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