

NORTH WESSEX DOWNS LANDSCAPE TRUST

*Increasing awareness of the North Wessex Downs
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and securing
its long-term protection and enhancement*



Welcome to our Autumn 2023 newsletter, keeping you up to date with our current projects, their progress, and thoughts for the future.

Having been alerted to the further decline of the United Kingdom's native wildlife by September's *State of Nature* report, it is particularly pleasing to have our guest article written by Matt Prior, Chair of Wiltshire Ornithological Society, on the increased knowledge of the birdlife in the North Wessex Downs AONB.

The Society is a recipient of a North Wessex Downs AONB Sustainable Development Fund grant for a thermal imaging camera, which has been a tremendous success and has introduced members of the society, the public and most importantly, the farming community, to the wonders of our wildlife at night.

Without your much appreciated support, examples such as the above, would not be possible. Further information on Sustainable Development Fund grants may be found on page 6.

Please note that we are repeating our ever-popular Quiz Night on Saturday 9th March, 2024 and if you would like to reserve a table ahead of the January invitation mailing, please let us know on info@nwd-landscapetrust.org.uk. We much look forward to seeing you.

Donald Sherlock, Chairman
Registered Charity Number 1168708



The NWD AONB covers 668 square miles, taking in 173 parishes and stretches from Swindon and Didcot in the north to Devizes and Basingstoke in the south, Calne in the west and Reading in the east. It is the third largest AONB in the country. Over 80% of the world's chalk streams are in the south of England and the AONB includes the rivers Kennet, Lambourn and mighty Test amongst others.

WILTSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY THERMAL IMAGING PROGRAMME

In 2019, the North Wessex Downs Landscape Trust, The Marlborough Downs Space for Nature, and a private landowner, granted/donated funds to enable the Wiltshire Ornithological Society to buy a thermal imager. We have put this to very good use surveying farmland birds at night on many farms on the Marlborough Downs, Pewsey Downs and Salisbury Plain.

I have been working with farmers on the Marlborough and Pewsey Downs since 1999, conserving Tree Sparrows which have suffered a 94% national decline over the past 40 years. I am a bird ringer, and the data resulting from my work gives vital information related to survival, breeding productivity and movements. This has been instrumental to my work in educating farmers about farmland birds and guiding conservation efforts.



Over the years, two species of bird have proven virtually impossible to study. Grey Partridge are our only native resident gamebird, they declined by 83% between 1960-2000 but have slightly increased since then. Grey Partridges are very hard to survey due to their low numbers, cryptic plumage, and secretive nature. Since the purchase of the thermal imager, we have ringed 106 Grey Partridge whereas in the previous 20 years we ringed a total of 27.

we know very little about them. They breed in good numbers across the downs, large numbers migrate south over our area in the autumn and reasonable numbers can be seen in stubble fields in the winter. We know nothing about whether the larks we see in the winter are the same as those that breed in the summer, or where the migrating birds are from. Skylarks fly slowly and have large eyes which makes them very difficult to catch by traditional methods and so very few Skylarks have been ringed each year.

Skylarks are one of our most emblematic farmland birds with their beautiful distinctive song and display flight, but





Over the last few decades, I have studied Corn Buntings. Having never really known where they roost, we have found a surprising number roosting on the ground in stubble fields and short grass. One juvenile Corn Bunting that we ringed at night at Ogbourne Maisey in October 2021 was resighted 64km away at a Game & Wildlife Conservation Project near Winchester the following summer! This shows that if we implement positive conservation measures for Corn Buntings and create suitable habitat, they have the potential to recolonise areas.

Landowners are always advised of their bird populations and sightings in the hope that it may help them make good choices for nature in the future. Several farmers and their families have joined me at night to see for themselves how birds use their land. On one notable occasion, three generations of a family joined me; and Grandfather saw the first Grey Partridge on his farm for over 20 years.

I am now over-subscribed with bird ringers wanting to join me from all over the country to learn my techniques using the thermal imager. The more people I can inspire to use the method, the more accurate counts of farmland birds will become across the country, and hopefully we may start to generate recoveries of some of those migrating Skylarks.

Last winter I led three public walks on fields at night demonstrating the thermal imager to small groups. Not only did we manage to show them Skylarks, Corn Buntings, Grey Partridge and Meadow Pipits but they were able to see harvest mice feeding on the tops of cover crops, plenty of roe deer, hares and rabbits.

We now need a second thermal imager to help with public demonstrations and to enable us to have two teams surveying farmland. We need to fundraise again!

Matt Prior
Wiltshire Ornithological Society
www.wiltshirebirds.co.uk



PAST & FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Marlborough College Summer School 2023



Inside the Crofton Pumping Station boiler house. Built in 1812 by Boulton & Watt, it is the world's oldest working beam engine in its original building and performing the job for which it was installed.

After the success of the Marlborough College Summer School course "Getting to Know the North Wessex Downs" last year, the 2023 course was, once again a sell-out with a range of participants from near and far. The challenge this time was the weather. One very rainy afternoon, we were luckily being hosted by Peter Lemon, one of our trustees, at his farm in Wilton. Ever resourceful Peter gathered us in his old thatched barn for what turned out to be a most interesting discussion on the history of the area and the challenges faced by farmers today. As in the past the surplus funds generated have gone to support the Landscape Trust. Plans are being made to repeat the course in 2024 so why not join us? [Click here for more information.](#)



Morgan's Hill Nature Reserve, managed by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The reserve marks the hydrological triple divide of Great Britain: rainfall drains into the English Channel (via the River Avon), the Atlantic Ocean (via the Bristol Channel), and the North Sea (via the River Kennet).

NWD AONB Walking Festival 2023

The Landscape Trust was invited to lead one of the walks for the North Wessex Downs AONB Walking Festival. Conditions were good for the relatively easy going walk from Ramsbury to Littlecote, a circuit of some 6 miles. For those unfamiliar to the area there was a lot to see and hear about, including the village of Ramsbury; one of the village's two Second World War airfields; Littlecote House and the parts it and the owners have



The Littlecote Roman Villa site, looking north towards the roof built over the mosaic.



The exceptional Orpheus mosaic at Littlecote Roman Villa, restored in 1980.

played in history, ancient and modern; and the Littlecote Roman Mosaic, which is described as one of the best in England. The walk was oversubscribed and those who took part had many positive comments on the afternoon, with suitable publicity given to both the AONB and the Landscape Trust.

Ted Hiscocks
Trustee

Quiz 2024

Save the Date. Saturday 9th March 2024 at 6.30 p.m. in Ramsbury

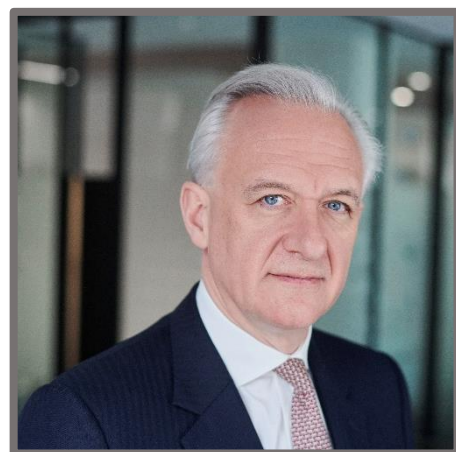
If you would like to join us, please email us at info@nwd-landscapetrust.org.uk

MEET OUR NEW TRUSTEE

Jamie Cayzer-Colvin

Having always called the North Wessex Downs home, work has taken Jamie all around the world, first in military service with the Grenadier Guards and then in the investment management world. Today he runs a family office and investment company based in London and over the past three decades he has served on the boards of several well-known City companies.

Outside of commercial activities, gardening, British architecture, and history are passions of his, whether it be a five-year restoration of The Manor House at Milton Lilbourne or being chairman of The Heritage of London Trust, a body that helps preserve the buildings and monuments of London. He has also worked with many other charities, including Fine Cell Work, Great Ormond Street Hospital, and The Royal Horticultural Society.



PEWSEY VALE LEADS THE WAY WITH ON-DEMAND BUSES

Situated less than one hour from central London, the Vale of Pewsey can boast the very best public transport links, making it easy and convenient to get to. Having a joined-up rail and bus network is generally the preserve of cities and urban areas. But now the Vale of Pewsey can also boast integrated public transport!

The introduction of an on-demand bus service has transformed the public transport service across the villages of the Vale. The service links Marlborough, Devizes and Pewsey (plus Hungerford from the end of October 2023) and the villages in these areas, as well as providing scheduled routes to Swindon and Salisbury.



You can use the app (look for Wiltshire Connect) to book a bus or, if you prefer, you can call 01225 712900. There are lots of designated pick up and drop off points across the Vale for you to choose from, making the service extremely convenient.

Connecting to your train arrival or departure couldn't be easier. The Vale of Pewsey is well served by having two railway stations – Bedwyn in the east and Pewsey station at the heart of the Vale. The train service makes

it easy to get from London and Reading to the Pewsey Vale, which is at the heart of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Once you are in the Vale, you can also use this service to take you to the start of a walk, or to meet you at the end of a linear walk to take you back to where you started. This new bus service opens-up all sorts of possibilities to walk anywhere in the Vale when you arrive by train!

The buses are wheelchair accessible, have air conditioning and will (at some point in the future) have free passenger wi-fi. Wiltshire Connect really is a fabulous service – it's the easy and convenient way to get around!

Susie Brew
Trustee

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND

On behalf of the North Wessex Downs AONB, the Trust manages the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) to deliver environmental, social, and economic benefits for our landscape and the people living and working here.

The Fund supports small-scale projects promoted by local communities and charities. For further information on the Sustainable Development Fund, please go to our website

www.nwd-landscapetrust.org.uk or click [here](#) where details will be found under the table "Our Work". We are delighted to have been able to support the following projects recently:

Saving St. Andrew's Church, Boxford

St. Andrew's Church, Boxford is an historic building of particular significance in the story of the Boxford area which will be preserved, made more useful to the community and more welcoming for visitors. This building and its grounds are one of the jewels of the NWD AONB. St. Andrew's has a proven record of working cooperatively across the local community, and with specialist partners, to preserve, record, and present the historical development of the region, both as it is recorded in the building itself and as it has been discovered in local excavations.



During Covid restrictions, water ingress problems worsened when the tower's lead roof totally failed. Water penetration has damaged the main supporting oak beams which puts the structure at risk, including the historic bells (some dating from 1601).

The laying of a drainage scheme across the church grounds will be completed and we will be able to concentrate on consolidation, protection, development, and the natural environment of which we are stewards. This ground drainage scheme will channel all rainwater from our various roofs into the adjacent River Lambourn, at the point where we are developing our Peace Garden, facing directly onto the Boxford Water Meadows (SSSI), and already a massive attraction for locals and visitors alike.

The safe, dry, and welcoming building will become a more effective welcome centre for community use and for visitors to the region, and will serve as a 'Green Room' for events in church and the Heritage Centre.

Pewsey Vale Bike Repair Stand – Pilot Scheme

The Pewsey Vale is a very popular cycling area and has several national and local cycling routes available, both off road and on road. Many cycling towns and villages in the UK have installed bike repair stands and they have proved to be well used. They provide some confidence to experienced and new cyclists in that they can access basic repair equipment whilst out cycling. The stands also holds the bike steady, whilst it is fixed.

The Pewsey Area Board (Wiltshire Council) is very much behind installation of the repair stands as it contributes to 3 of the local priorities: Reducing carbon footprint and protect the environment; improving public transport and encourage walking and cycling; improving the health and wellbeing of local communities.