



OTTER VALLEY  
ASSOCIATION

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[www.ova.org.uk](http://www.ova.org.uk)  
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Reg. Charity No. 278266

SPRING  
2021  
Newsletter

**This issue's cover "A much-loved path" was photographed and produced  
by Mo Bowman**

## From the Editor

It is a full year since I sat down and wrote my last magazine introduction – and what a year! The word ‘unprecedented’ has been used an unprecedented number of times but let’s hope that some semblance of normality will soon return and we can start to enjoy coming together again for walks, talks and other events. This issue should bring you up to date with ‘Otter Valley’ news and I have included articles submitted by members during lockdown for which I am very grateful. There are also some wonderful images on our website contributed by David White, Mo Bowman and others.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention that this will be my final year as ‘editor’ and if anyone would be interested to get involved in the magazine production through this year, so that I can pass on the baton in March 2022, I would be delighted to hear from you.

*Jacqui Baldwin*

### Gift Aid

We are updating our Gift Aid records and would like your help in completing the latest version of the Gift Aid declaration. If you are a UK tax payer we can claim 25p for every £1 you pay in membership subscriptions and donations in past, present and future tax years.

Please complete the Gift Aid declaration enclosed with this newsletter and return to us at: **OVA, PO Box 70, Budleigh Salterton EX9 6WN**

Alternatively complete and scan the form and e-mail to: [info@ova.org.uk](mailto:info@ova.org.uk)

Or, you can complete the form online (please note a signature is not required) by going to Gift Aid on our website <https://www.ova.org.uk/news/ova-gift-aid>

## Chairman's Musings

This is the first copy of our Newsletter since Spring 2020. Maybe a reason for jubilation for some of our members, but I hope not. Our Editor goes to great pains to produce an interesting journal for the delectation of our readers. I have tried to keep you updated with a couple of e-newsletters as the cost of publishing a magazine, when there was so little in terms of news, made it unviable.

Perhaps the most controversial event recently has been the passing of the plans for the Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP). With a membership as large as ours, it was inevitable that there would be a degree of disagreement on the line that the OVA should take. Two of our members made submissions favouring the project and we know that there were some who were vehemently against it. The Executive Committee held several discussions about the whole issue and not all were fully in favour of the submission that we presented as the view of the OVA. It would have been most unlikely that this view would have been a total reflection of all our members. However, we respected the views of those who objected. Sadly, I am aware that there was one resignation, and possibly others, as a result of the position that we took. I hope that members will remember that the OVA stands for much more than the future preservation of our beloved Otter Valley. The walks, talks, Himalayan Balsam eradication project, events, the monitoring of planning applications within our area of benefit and the many other things that the OVA does. All this is carried out by a large band of volunteers who believe in what we stand for. If you are in any doubt, our Constitution may be found on our website, where all our objectives may be found. It may be felt that new blood on the Executive Committee would be beneficial to our association, existing EC members strongly feel that this is the case. Of all our members, there must be some who feel that they can devote a little of their time to join us and bring in new ideas. We don't want table bangers, but folk who can discuss the many issues that are raised at our monthly meetings and also fill some of the vacant posts which you will see inside the back cover of this edition.

On this subject, I would like to welcome Chris Hodgson who has taken over the chairmanship of the Natural Environment Sub-Committee following the departure of David Hatch. You will find more about him elsewhere in this issue. Also, I would like to welcome Rosemary Jerrard who has taken up the position of Minutes Secretary.

As the restrictions that have blighted us for so long are becoming more relaxed, we hope to resume the activities that we have previously enjoyed or planned. The walks will be able to resume within government guidelines. Previously postponed events may be rescheduled; the new Members Party, the Bat Expedition, the Pebblebed Safari, the Estuary Litterpick and the popular Christmas Party.

***Bob Wiltshire, Chairman***

**Notice**  
**The 41st Annual General Meeting of the Otter Valley Association will be held at 7.30pm on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2021 via video-conference**

**AGENDA**

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the 40<sup>th</sup> AGM held on 9th May 2019 and the virtual Executive Meeting cancelling the 2020 AGM scheduled for 13<sup>th</sup> May
3. Matters Arising
4. Annual Report including the Trustees Report and Accounts
5. Election of Officers
6. Election of Executive Committee Members
7. Appointment of an Independent Examiner
8. Any other business
9. Date of the next AGM

***The formal business will be followed by a presentation on the progress of LORP by Dr Sam Bridgwater, Clinton Devon Estates***

***To register your attendance please go to the OVA website or copy the address below into your web browser***

**<https://www.ova.org.uk/news/ova-annual-general-meeting-2021>**

The 2020/21 Trustees Report will also be available on line but should you wish to have a printed copy of the report you should contact Haylor Lass, with your full postal address, either at [haylor@lasses.me.uk](mailto:haylor@lasses.me.uk) or by telephone 01395 568786





In January East Devon's Planning Committee gave unanimous approval for the Lower Otter Restoration to proceed. Since that time the project team has been working hard to fulfil the associated planning conditions and to finalise the works contracts necessary to enable the scheme to commence. The primary project works will be delivered by Kier under contract to the Environment Agency.

Behind the scenes, during February and March archaeological surveys were undertaken of those fields to be used as temporary works compounds and of the new proposed cricket ground. The results of these surveys will be shared with the public in due course once any finds have been analysed. In addition, the location of key notable plant species that will be translocated as part of the scheme have been marked out (look out for wooden stakes with their tops painted red!). The approach and scope of environmental monitoring of the long-term impacts of the project has been further refined. Monitoring will cover a range of things and include habitat creation, wading birds, morphological change of the valley, carbon storage, marine and freshwater fish. Studies will also evaluate the success of habitat mitigation planned to replace those that will be lost and the long-term socio-economic impact of the scheme. The first major activity the public will see on the ground will be from mid-March when ground investigation works will be undertaken to inform the detailed design. These will involve mobile drilling rigs and excavators digging cores and trial pits across the site. Access of machinery will be via temporary aluminium tracks. This work is due to last about six weeks.

The *Otter Valley Association* are key stakeholders in LORP and members will have the opportunity to find out about and be involved in the scheme, including monitoring its environmental success. Anyone with an interest in project progress has a number of ways of staying well-informed, with the first port of call being the project's website. Please visit [www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk](http://www.lowerotterrestorationproject.co.uk). By visiting the website, you can sign up for updates should you wish to receive them. In addition, quarterly newsletters are planned to provide more detailed information on the varied aspects of the scheme. More regular information will be put out via social media feeds of the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, Clinton Devon Estates and other project partners.

Climate change is real and is impacting on society worldwide. LORP is part of a wider international scheme funded by the European Interreg VA France Channel England programme called Promoting Adaptation to Changing Coasts (PACCo). Together with a sister project in the Saône Valley, Normandy (France), PACCo's aim is to highlight the impacts of climate change on coastal communities and to demonstrate that pre-emptive adaptation to climate change is far better and less costly to society than inaction. The lower Otter and Saône valleys hope to lead the way in showing how communities can evaluate climate change risk and adapt to current and future risks and highlight the benefits that might result from doing so. A PACCo website and social media platforms will be launched very soon and this information together with regular updates throughout the project will be shared in local print and social media as well as through on-site interpretation. Engagement will also be face-to face as soon as it is safe to do so.

Finally, we are delighted to announce that In December the Estate's team was strengthened by the arrival of Kendal Archer as PACCo Project Manager. Kendal brings strong experience in the fields of sustainability and behaviour change and she will be ensuring that the Estate meets its obligations under the PACCo initiative. Once lockdown is eased, we hope that many of you will get to meet her; she is looking forward to telling you about her role and what we hope to achieve.

***Dr Sam Bridgewater, Head of Wildlife and Conservation, Clinton Devon Estates***

## **Heritage Project update**

Members may recall that In October 2019 the Otter Valley Association organised a very successful two day training event in East Budleigh as part of East Devon District Council's first Heritage Strategy for 2019 – 2031. It was supported by funding from the East Devon AONB's Sustainable Development Fund, the Norman Family Trust, and EDDC. Volunteers found the training enjoyable, informative, inspirational and excellent.

Based on the work done by the volunteers, in December 2019, the group helped prepare a conservation area appraisal review and management plan for the village of East Budleigh. This impressive document was adopted by the District Council on 20 October 2020, and can be viewed at:

**[eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-services/conservation-and-listed-buildings/conservation-areas/](http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-services/conservation-and-listed-buildings/conservation-areas/)**



Unfortunately due to the COVID19 outbreak no further meetings or training has been possible. However, it was possible last year to make some more progress on the local listing of some of important local heritage assets in East Budleigh and Budleigh Salterton.

As part of the Heritage Strategy the District Council approved a Guide to Local Listing of Local Heritage Assets. All these documents can be viewed on the Council's website at:

[eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/east-devon-heritage-and-local-heritage-assets/](http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/east-devon-heritage-and-local-heritage-assets/)

EDDC have now started a 'list of local heritage assets' which is used by planners when development proposals are being assessed for planning permission for, or adjacent to, locally listed buildings. This list can also be viewed on the above web information page by following the links.

*Dee Woods, Project Coordinator*

## Introducing our new Natural Environment Committee Chair



### **Chris Hodgson**

On leaving University, Chris taught for two years in a small public school, then went out to Rhodesia (as was) as an agricultural entomologist, returning 5 years later and lecturing for 30 years at Wye College, the agricultural college of London University.

On 'retirement', he worked as a research scientist in the National Museum of Wales for 17 years before 'retiring' again and relocating to East Devon.



## How long is the River Otter?

One of the questions at a pre-lockdown village quiz evening was "How long is the River Otter in kilometres?" I wrote down my best guess. On these occasions, the quiz master's decision is final so, when he gave the answer as 32 km, I limited myself to a raised eyebrow. My thoughts, however, were barely printable. Fake news - in the Otter Valley! Something must be done.

Tactful enquiry revealed that the source of this heresy was Wikipedia. Like millions of others, I use Wikipedia regularly and find it very useful, but the entry for the River Otter was clearly wrong. Who writes Wikipedia, and how can errors be corrected? To quote Wikipedia itself, "anyone can be bold and edit an existing article or create a new one". So I decided to be bold.

Using OS Maps route planning app, I plotted a route using waypoints along the course of the river from source to sea. The length of this route was 42.9 km. In the top right-hand corner of any Wikipedia page, there are links to create an account and log in. Once logged in, I clicked on the edit tab and made the correction together with a note explaining my estimate. My new length appeared immediately on the page for all the world to see. Was it really as easy as that?

Not quite. About a day later, I received a helpful email from an editor. After welcoming me to the Wikipedia community, she explained that information should come from published sources and accredited experts. She had taken some trouble to find an authoritative source for the length of the River Otter, but it had been more difficult than expected. "A System of Modern Geography" by Archibald Sinclair published in 1843 quoted 25 miles, or about 40 km. There was also a 2019 paper entitled "River Otter Catchment Overview" published by the Devon Biodiversity Records Centre. The author seemed to be a qualified expert with access to modern data, but the paper gave a total length of 65.15 km! What did I think of these estimates, and could I produce a better source?

Haylor Lass came to my rescue by producing an Environment Agency leaflet "Enhancing the River Otter" which quoted 44 km. My original estimate of 42.9 km had been based on straight lines between waypoints. This method puts a lower limit on a river's length, but inevitably under-estimates since it glosses over some of the twists and turns. I was therefore happy to settle for the EA's 44 km.

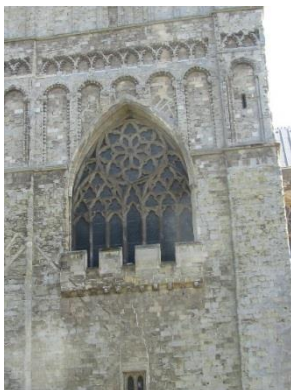
It is more difficult to put an upper limit on a river's length. The DBRC length estimate of 65 km was therefore still a problem. After a little research I discovered that rivers have a sinuosity index. Who knew? This is defined as the channel length divided by the straight-line length from source to mouth. The conventional classes of sinuosity are

- less than 1.05 almost straight
- between 1.05 and 1.25 winding
- between 1.25 and 1.50 twisty
- over 1.50 meandering.

The straight-line length of the River Otter can be calculated from the grid references of its source (ST 225 152) and its mouth (SY 077 820). It is 36.3 km. The EA length of 44 km gives a sinuosity index of 1.2 (winding). The DBRC length of 65 km, in contrast, gives a sinuosity index of 1.8, well into the meandering category. The Otter is not a meandering river. It follows a winding but purposeful course from source to sea. Whatever the DBRC measured, it was not the length of the River Otter. I logged in again to my Wikipedia account and told my editor what I had discovered. Gratifyingly, she approved. So now, if you look up the River Otter on Wikipedia, you will find that its length is 44 km (27 mi) with a citation linking to the Environment Agency leaflet. I can't wait for next year's quiz!

### ***Brian Turnbull***

I read Dee Woods' account of John Allen's presentation about the construction of Exeter Cathedral in the 2020 Spring Newsletter with interest, not least because I was present at the lecture, and am an Exonian with a lifelong interest in buildings.



Mention was made of the two Norman towers, with their 'blind arcading' – decorative arches without openings. I wonder how many people walk past the north elevation of the North Tower without noticing the less than subtle insertion of a Gothic Decorated Period window with its ornate tracery? One can imagine that – had the OVA existed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century – there would have been howls of outrage from OVA Planning Committee traditionalists at a proposal to punch a window opening through the Romanesque blind arcading that had been there for over 200 years!

### ***Tony Venning***

## OVA Gazebo

The OVA has had a gazebo for quite some years which was used at events such as the Litter Pick, Lambing Sunday at Bicton, East Budleigh Scarecrow Festival and Pebblebed Heath Week where there were frequently other, far smarter gazebos and so we looked very much like the poor relation.

Although it only took two people to put it up and was quite light, once up, it was very much open to the elements and sometimes the people manning it have got very cold and very wet.



We are delighted to report that we have been given a brand new, very smart gazebo through the sponsorship of Iorwerth (Yog) Williams of the West Country Rivers Trust to whom we are extremely grateful. This is a much sturdier structure and is protected on all sides from the elements. It is also very smart as you can see from the picture above, sporting the OVA name and logo on three sides. It should look very professional alongside those of other organisations. Sadly, due to lockdown, it has yet to be used but, hopefully, in the not too distant future (!), we shall be able to show it off in all its glory

We still have the old gazebo, which is now looking for a new home. Should anyone think they have a use for it, please contact Bob Wiltshire to make arrangements for collection.

*Chris Hodgson, NEC Chair*

## Feeling Blessed

I know I am not the only person living in the lower Otter Valley who appreciates this wonderful part of the world in such difficult times. As we shout from a social distance everyone says “we are so lucky to live here, it is getting us through”.

As dog owners, my husband and I have to walk regularly. We have done so first thing in the morning, before the visitors arrive. Walkers and runners alike respect each other’s space. We press into hedges if necessary. We live in Budleigh Salterton and, from the Lime Kiln carpark, walk along the river Otter. Last spring,

at the first lockdown, entering the hedge-lined footpath we were welcomed by a chorus of birdsong and the overwhelming scent of blackthorn and later dog rose. Very few cars were on the road so the walk along South Farm Road still continued with bird song ringing in our ears. But entering the Little Banks the chorus and scent was mind blowing. With the early morning sun on our faces this experience set us up for the day.

During the second lockdown, we have been most grateful to the East Devon Golf Club for allowing residents of Budleigh Salterton to enjoy walking over the course. We have a new rescue dog and walk in the afternoon. On a sunny day, the views over the coast and countryside are breathtaking. Yes, we have walked on the footpaths around the course before but I do envy golfers the wonderful terrain they play in.

All of us, wherever we live in the valley, have the most inspiring walks on our doorstep. No need to get the car out. Just go to the nearest footpath and soon we are immersed in the East Devon countryside.

*Nicola Daniel*

## **Feeling Frustrated**

Having to cancel last April's Estuary litter-pick due to Covid-19 was most frustrating especially because both tides and weather conditions were perfect. Sadly, continuing restrictions mean that this year's litter-pick has also had to be cancelled. The good news was that for the first time, under very tight conditions, a pick took place in September. If restrictions are relaxed again it is hoped to plan another event this autumn though numbers may have to be restricted once again.

Recently, much attention has been focused on litter being left on our beaches, and it's easy to forget that a lot of the litter deposited in the Estuary comes down the Otter rather than coming in from the sea. This won't come as a surprise to those who walk along the river because following every flood, the sight of rubbish caught up in the trees and vegetation on the banks is there for all to see. Whilst it's not difficult to pick this up from the path-side bank, it's annoying that much of the most visible litter gets caught on the far bank much of which is not accessible. Last year, I discussed with Clinton Devon Estates the feasibility of collecting rubbish from the far bank during periods when river levels are low. This idea is

being considered although care would have to be taken not to disturb wildlife which uses the far bank as a refuge from walkers and dogs.

Like many others, I'm a committed litter-picker. I'm always saddened by its abundance and can never understand why people who walk along the river or visit the beach leave their rubbish behind. It was quite an eye-opener when last September's pick discovered so many drinks cans and bottles in the parking spaces on South Farm Road and around seating areas beside the river. Equally unfathomable is the mindset of dog-walkers who go to the trouble of picking up their dogs waste only to then discard the bags.

As an Otterton resident, I'm very aware of litter that's introduced either purposely or accidentally into the village Brook. This is then washed into the Otter. The same thing must happen in other villages that have tributaries that feed into the river. It's ironic that on occasion, when strong wind and rain coincide with re-cycling collections in Otterton, the contents of bags and boxes that haven't been weighed down end up in the Brook. Much more annoying is the litter dropped by or in the Brook by visitors. Face masks are now regularly discarded as people get into their cars!

Outside the village rubbish is regularly thrown from vehicles. This is mainly fast food packaging, tins and bottles. Discarded agricultural plastics also litter roadside hedges. Collecting litter from these busy narrow lanes can be quite hazardous. There no longer appears to be any systematic collection of this litter by any of our councils. Some of this litter inevitably finds its way into the Otterton Brook and the longer it is left the more it degrades. My concern is that we are beginning to accept this situation as normal. Whilst annual verge and hedge cutting is intended to tidy verges in reality it serves to reveal previously hidden litter.

Following one flood last year I collected litter from the river-bank between Otterton and Clamour Bridge. Not surprisingly, much of the litter comprised various forms of plastic. I also picked up rubbish accumulated at and around Otterton weir (right). Along with the usual cans and plastic items it was concerning to see how many small pieces of plastic





were deposited among the natural debris, broken down during the passage down-river (below). These smaller particles, (micro-plastics), are no doubt being ingested by fish, birds and animals using the river. This is of real concern.



In 2019, Greenpeace instigated research looking at the quantity of micro-plastics that existed in 13 English rivers including the Exe. Samples were analysed by Exeter University and they found substantial quantities of micro-plastics consisting mainly of polyethylene, polystyrene and polypropylene used to produce food packaging, milk and water containers and plastic bags.

The research discovered plastics being ingested by water voles, used as nesting materials by swans and incorporated in caddis-fly larval casings.

Perhaps our focus should not be just on beach cleans but also on what's taking place along the whole course of the river and its environs. Whilst it's reassuring to see resident Dippers on the Otter, (one indicator of a healthy river), it's apparent that we must focus much more on the overall problem of littering.

***Geoff Porter, Natural Environment Committee***

## **Treading lightly on our special spaces**

The conservation teams that manage the commons of the *East Devon Pebblebed Heaths* are proud that these areas provide such an important resource for local communities. Finding space for air and exercise during the pandemic has been much welcomed. But with so many other facilities closed and leisure options restrictions this has increased the pressure on these special places. Thankfully, countryside areas in East Devon were lucky to avoid the levels of abuse that Devon's National Parks and some urban green spaces have suffered. Generally, those coming to the heaths were respectful, but this highly protected landscape did experience some increased visitor pressure as did footpaths, farmland and local communities in the Otter valley.

Data gathered by East Devon AONB from a section of the East Devon Way, which crosses the heaths, indicated a five-fold increase in walkers, during some months in 2020, compared to 2018. In lockdowns, most people exercised near to home, but we know most visitors come to the heaths by car and more than half of them bring at least one dog.



*Colaton Raleigh Common - John Drover*

The Otter Estuary also soaked up its own share of recreational pressure. Boats such as kayaks and paddleboards can legally navigate on tidal waters, taking them up to White Bridge. But the sheer number of individuals exercising this right in the warmer months contributes to a significant conflict with the wildlife designations of the site. With another spring and summer of staycations ahead and the growth and popularity of watersports we might expect the use of the estuary in this way to rise. So will bird and habitat disturbance. The estuary is an internationally important winter stop-off for migratory birds but in the summer other species breed and raise young here too. Preventing access is not in our power. Land managers can restrict access from the land but without a change to the bylaws covering public right of navigation anyone can launch onto the sea and then use the river channel to access the estuary.

In an ideal world, more visitors might choose not to exercise their right, if it is going to cause a negative impact but instead give wildlife more space and find alternative places for certain types of recreation. Education about the site's significance and providing locals and visitors with information about the impact of their choices, might change behaviour if people care about more than their own enjoyment. In the long term we are exploring the likely impact of watercraft and other disturbances ahead of the restoration of the Otter when a larger area will be tidally inundated. Monitoring activity and any disturbance to provide sound science will be a big part of that decision making.

An unfortunately common response is "I didn't know" or "where's the sign?" Targeted signs are effective if people read them but who wants to clutter up every

view with a list of do's and don'ts? Natural England are responsible for promoting the *Countryside Code* and are currently reviewing and updating the guidance to cover not only countryside areas but also parks and green spaces in the urban environment. But even if the Countryside Code and our individual recreational responsibilities are more widely understood and followed, would many of the issues and conflicts just evaporate?

Regrettably, I think not. Ignorance is often cited as justification for certain behaviours. I don't actually believe there are many who think dropping litter isn't a problem or those who feel leaving dog waste behind is ever acceptable. The individuals who do this are not ignorant, but sadly they are selfish or think they are special in some way. They make conscious choices to visit beautiful places but then take an equally conscious decision to show little care when they get there.

We should all be thankful for access to these open spaces, to the many who follow the guidance without necessarily being told and thank our rangers, volunteers and countless unsung local people who do their bit to keep these places safe and healthy for our wildlife and all visitors. Life will hopefully revert to more normality in the coming months. However, this pandemic has given us a glimpse of the future when East Devon's countryside will be threatened and vulnerable from a larger population, less aware of the responsibilities and possibly less inclined to care. Calls for an increased access or for more car parking, signage or litter bins won't necessarily serve our conservation sites best for the future. It may seem that a single paddleboarder, one dog off its lead or a cyclist taking a shortcut has a limited impact but unless we can help all users of the countryside appreciate the collective impact humans have, managing the countryside in the future is only going to get more challenging.

**Kate Ponting *Countryside Learning Officer***

## **Wildlife Encounters 2020**

I was sitting on my patio enjoying the warm Spring sunshine last year, when I saw how popular the Allium flowers were with honey bees. I took some photos of the bees in action and noticed a white blob on one flowerhead. This turned out to be a crab spider in hunting mode. They are ambush predators and you can see where their name comes from, as they strike up an offensive and defensive pose with their legs that is similar to a crab with its front claws raised up. As the spider

remains frozen in this position until a victim gets close enough to grab, it's very easy to photograph, unlike the bees that are never still for a second!

To me, the spider stood out like a sore thumb, so why didn't the bees see it and keep well clear? Some wonderful videos of crab spiders hunting bees were shown on David Attenborough's recent 'Life in Colour' documentary. It shows sequences of crab spiders changing colour from bright yellow to pure white to blend in with the colour of the flower they were occupying.



This isn't the case on my purple flowers, possibly because bees don't have receptors in their eyes for the red end of the spectrum. To a bee, the spider would look blue-green and the flower blue, so not very different. However, the documentary also suggested that the spider might not be trying to camouflage itself (other than from its own predators) as it carries markings that reflect ultraviolet light. We can't see them but bees can. The spider's markings mimic and are even brighter than those on the flower's petals that guide the bees to the nectar they seek, a bit like runway landing lights for planes. The spider just has to sit tight and be patient.

The bird in the photo (not mine) is a red kite. I used to live in the Chilterns where they were re-introduced thirty years ago. It was a joy to watch them hovering, circling and diving down to delicately pick up scraps of meat (yes, I know buzzards can do the same, but not with such finesse!). I've been waiting ten years for them to spread to East Devon, so was excited to get two sightings in one week of probably the same kite, initially at Woodbury Castle and then over East Budleigh. However, the Devon Birds website assures me that although sightings are common and increasingly so, the kites are not breeding in Devon yet. The birds seen in Devon are young adults out to see the world "on their gap-year travels" as David White described it to me, before returning to their birthplace to settle down and breed.



**Jon Roseway, East Budleigh Parish Rep**

## Patrick Hamilton - Our Countryside Champion

Congratulations to Patrick Hamilton who has been named Countryside Champion in the Radio Exe Pride of Devon Awards, for his tireless conservation work.

Patrick was nominated by Clinton Devon Estates Countryside Learning Officer, Kate Ponting. In her nomination, Kate said: “Patrick plays a huge part in the Otter Valley Association running worthwhile projects and practical conservation work including annual litter picks and extricating Himalayan balsam – a plant that threatens the native biodiversity of the Otter Valley”.



“This year, despite restrictions on group sizes, Patrick’s efforts have not been diminished. He and a team of volunteers have still managed to win the fight against this invasive plant. The landscape and communities of the Lower Otter Valley are much indebted to Patrick’s tireless efforts. He is a true countryside champion.”

## #SavingSpecialSpecies

Devon is rich in wildlife and important for the conservation of many species. At least 1,600 species that occur here are considered to be either threatened with extinction in the British Isles or are nationally scarce. Our wildlife is in crisis and the East Devon AONB has pledged to act now to support our native species and habitats.

With the intention of increasing the scale and pace of their work in response to nature’s decline, in 2019 the National Association of AONBs pledged to protect what remains and recover what has been lost in our natural environment. A key part of that commitment was that, by each AONB immediately adopting a species on the threatened list and by preparing and delivering a Species Action Plan, at least thirty species relevant to AONBs will be taken off the list by 2030

The first step in this changing approach was consulting the Devon Local Nature Partnership (LNP) ‘special species’ list. The long list details 1,600 species known to



be rare in Devon, but within this there's a short list of 96 species for which Devon has a particular responsibility for their UK survival.

Following consultation with various parties the AONB team has established a short list of 8 species for focused action: Heath Lobelia, Devon Whitebeam, Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Brown Hairstreak (pictured) and the Grey Long-Eared, Greater Horseshoe and Bechstein's bats. The conservation of this endangered group will be the focus of the **#SavingSpecialSpecies** project.



The next steps will be to liaise with a range of individuals, partners and agencies to confirm and develop an individual Species Action Plan (SAP) for each of the 8 species – the Elusive 8 – with a view to linking these with proposals for a Nature Recovery Plan for the AONB as a whole. The plans will seek to layout a path to delivery and reference resource requirements. Planning for this will take place across 2021 and up to 2024 and the next AONB Management Plan review. For full details of the project and how you may be able to help please visit [www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk](http://www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk)

***Editor***

## **'Saving Devon's Treescapes' Project**

Devon's treescapes are stunning and crucial habitats for so much wildlife. But they are under threat from ash dieback which it is estimated will kill at least 90% of Devon's ash trees in the coming years. It will affect everyone, but everyone can be part of the solution. The Saving Devon's Treescapes project is asking volunteers to monitor trees as well as key species to help better understand the health of Devon's treescapes. Devon Biodiversity Records Centre, a partner in the project, has developed a web-based app to allow you to record notable trees whilst you're about and about. You can use this app on your mobile phone, or on your computer. Visit the Devon Wildlife Trust website to download the app.

# Poem written at Grimspound Settlement on Dartmoor

## *The Story told by a Stone*

*I, still standing tall  
though battered by the storms of years,  
granite from native hills hewn,  
micah embedded, which when Sun or moon alight glitters and flashes in the rays.  
Crusted upon me lichen grows,  
as tree trunk rings it tells my age,  
a mere millimetre spans ten years,  
those I bear stretch back in time.  
Entry to an ancient dwelling,  
encircling granite walls surround,  
safety from marauding men and hunting beasts, with pens to guard our precious  
flocks.  
Here families were born, raised and grew old.  
Built upon a hilltop setting,  
alert to those who come from either side we lived our now forgotten lives, and  
landscape changed as woodlands fell.  
In the silence of the night, a drumming, new followers of an ancient faith, or  
hooves as moorland ponies pass, tossing manes and snorting nostrils seeking  
water or fresher grass.  
And when chill sets in, or sun scorches  
roaming sheep find here some shelter.  
Learned minds still seek some information of those who raised me aeons ago, but  
you rest here and feel my heart beat, and the presence of those long past.*

**Di Bagshawe**  
**May 2020**



## A year of ups and downs on the 'Hill'

Having Anchoring Hill backing onto our garden in Otterton has been a real plus over the past 12 months and many Otterton residents have appreciated being able to walk through the meadows around the Hill. These are some of my observations from the past year:

Over recent years, Orange Tip butterflies have emerged in early spring alongside blooming Lady's Smock/Cuckoo flowers. The butterfly lays its eggs on the flower. However, last spring many of these butterflies were seen flying in the meadows a good 2 weeks before the Cuckoo flowers emerged. Could this be an example of warmer spring days causing insects to emerge ahead of the plants on which they depend? Sadly, just after the flowers on the Hill opened, someone picked them - no doubt making a pretty little posy - totally oblivious to the fact that they might also be taking away Orange Tip eggs. Thankfully, there were also a number of Garlic Mustard plants growing locally providing an alternative food source for the butterflies.

Spring saw numerous rampant rabbits romping on the Hill. As rabbits are no longer caught for food their only natural control is foxes - although one or two were seen to have myxomatosis. Two years ago a pair of foxes had 3 cubs in a den just a few meters from one of the main footpaths. On the sunny south face of the Hill just above the den grows a large area of Bird's-foot Trefoil, food plant of the Common Blue butterfly caterpillar - but also enjoyed by the rabbits. The foxes deterred the rabbits which enabled the plants to grow, supporting the Blues. However, last spring the foxes relocated to a site away from the footpath and its regular dog walkers; very wise. It was noticeable that the rabbits returned, feeling safer, devouring the trefoil plants and leaving the hillside almost bare. However, further along the hillside, above the new den the trefoil was flourishing as were the Blues. Locally as elsewhere, opinion is divided on the resident foxes but it appears that no foxes = too many rabbits, a barren hillside and less Common Blues.



We are very lucky to have several raptors on the Hill. I was bemused in early summer to see a large Buzzard-like bird hovering over the meadows Kestrel-like - but much larger. A discussion with the font of knowledge, David White, revealed

that this was a juvenile Buzzard that had yet to master the art of wheeling. I have to say I hadn't seen this behaviour before. So, if it looks like a Buzzard chances are it is a Buzzard! One of my great joys is watching Barn Owls hunting over the meadows. Sadly, their first nesting site was battered by spring storms but it was good to see them hunting again later in the year, so hopefully they succeeded in breeding the second time around. House Sparrows are quite numerous in Otterton and so, recently, are Sparrow-hawks. They must know the site of almost every birdfeeder in the village. A quiet moment in our garden surrounded by birdsong can instantly change as the hawk swoops up the path hoping to catch a small bird unawares. After brief shrieks of alarm every small bird dives for cover in nearby shrubs then followed by an eerie silence. One clear mid-summer morning, bird-call overhead made me look up. Three Peregrine Falcons were circling overhead, two close together and the third a little more distant. It appeared to be a pair and their juvenile youngster. The pair put on a wonderful aerial display for several minutes before flying off together over the Hill. What an unexpected spectacle. Had they not called I wouldn't have looked up.



2020 was the year of the Meadow Brown. In early summer, the Hill meadows were aflutter with hundreds of them and these large numbers were replicated in many other areas. Not long after their emergence the meadows were cut for silage so vast numbers of eggs must have been removed.

Thankfully, wide margins were left around the fields and the Browns took refuge there along with many Gatekeepers. It will be interesting to see how many survived to re-emerge this summer. Large clumps of nettles in some of the meadows were also cut and bailed. Many of the nettles had been black with Red Admiral, Peacock and Small Tortoise caterpillars now also in the silage. These butterflies seem to prefer laying their eggs on nettles in the sun mid-field rather than by shadier hedgerows. This year, I may try moving some of the caterpillars to nettles in sunny spots on the margins before mowing which will hopefully preserve them.

Overall, it appeared to be a good year for butterflies on the Hill, but there were exceptions. Following a bumper year for Small Coppers in 2019 there was barely one last year. The same applied to the migrating Painted Ladies that were numerous the previous year but very scarce last. It's difficult to understand quite why numbers fluctuate so much from one year to the next.

It also appeared to be a good year for the village's Swallows and House Martins. Large numbers fed over the Hill well into the autumn, eventually congregating on power cables over the meadows before migrating south. Others from the north stopped off en-route to have a feed over the Hill before they too left the country. It was also good to hear and see swifts screaming over Otterton. They appear to prefer the higher part of the village but visit the Hill to feed, especially in the evening. It was a bumper year for blackberries. A couple of years of no hedge cutting and enough rain between the sunny periods meant that they just kept growing and ripening. The hedgerows had a bumper crop of fruit and berries last autumn providing lots of winter bird-food. This inevitably results in fewer birds needing to visit our garden bird-feeders.

Yet another year has passed and I'm looking forward to another years walks on Anchoring Hill. It's already so uplifting to hear robin, blackbird, wren and song thrush welcoming in the warmer longer days.

***Geoff Porter, Natural Environment Committee***

## **Walks programme update**

As the beginning of 2021 dawned, we thought we'd get a flying start with the walks programme by rolling over into January the walks we'd had to cancel during November's second lockdown. That didn't happen of course, as along came the third lockdown and it was back to walking singly or in pairs.

With the easing of regulations through March, we plan to let the Easter rush subside and re-start our programme of local walks from April 12. Initially there will be a maximum of six people in each group and places must be booked beforehand. All the details are on the website.

The situation may change rapidly and flexibility from all of us is essential to maintaining our safety, but we hope to see you out walking soon.

### **The Walk Team**

**Jane Connick, Penny and Paul Kurowski, Jon Roseway**





*The following walks took place in accordance with the guidelines and restrictions in place at the time. All Walk Reports appear on the website - many thanks to contributors.*

## **Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> August “Coast and Country”**

As planned a total of 12 walkers met on The Green in Otterton and assembled into two groups of 6 following brilliant signs a bit like being met by a taxi at an airport. It was warm and humid but dry with a few pools of sunshine. We quickly set off in a direction which I had not expected, a pathway north heading between number 6 and 8 The Green. What a wondrous place Otterton is, the last leg of the return was almost due south a few yards to the east.

I was in the group led by Iain Ure with the majority using poles, mostly two each. I found the poles particularly helpful in areas where storm water had eroded the centre of some tracks. The route initially travelled east of the Otter beyond Anchoring Plantation where we turned more easterly towards Mutters Moor. It was as we approached Mutters Moor car park I asked Iain where we were and I think he was amused to point out the car park signs.

A break for lunch followed and we then skimmed the sides of Peak Hill with some lengthy climbs which we all seemed to handle well and in good humour. The return leg was very enjoyable with some fine views, we stopped occasionally to look at the best bits. We mostly avoided roads and even did a surprising diversion near the bus turning point in Otterton which took us behind the northern fringes of the village and directly into the pub garden, Iain clearly knew that bit well.

Thank you Iain and Dee for a grand day out.

***Andrew Beresford***

## **Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> October “The Long View From .....**

Our leader Paul with his wife Penny bringing up the rear, led 7 intrepid walkers for this 11 mile walk. We started out from East Budleigh Car Park near All Saints Church and made our way to the River Otter by road and footpaths. It was cloudy, windy, fairly warm but rain was probably on the cards. We then walked in social distance along the River Otter towards Colaton Raleigh where we took the footpath next to The Hall.



We crossed a bridge over the Otter towards Ashtree Farm and then uphill towards Keble Seat. We stopped there for our picnic lunch and were partly sheltered under trees. I think Paul got the timing exactly right since the heavens opened at this time, and we watched the grey clouds coming towards us from Newton Poppleford. We then continued mountaineering uphill towards Mutter's Moor, Peak Hill and Ladram Bay before returning to East Budleigh via Otterton. The walks were wet and very slippery and especially down towards Ladram Bay from Peak Hill. According to my app I did 26,500 steps 15 kilometres and 54 floors. An enjoyable walk well organised.

***Lucilla Phelps***

## **Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December "Along the Lanes"**

The walk was fully booked, but when the weather took a turn for the worse the group surprisingly reduced from 12 to 6 people. We nearly got our first swimming lesson when wading through deep puddles from the carpark to the walking path. After that, the path was quite muddy but still reasonable for December. We started with a bit of rain, but luckily it eased during the walk. At one point, we even managed to have a dry tea break.



We went through Monkey and Naps lanes, Dotton and Stoneyford. During our walk our leader, Sarah Westacott, told us about the amazing views along the way - due to the weather, however, we could not work out if her narrative matched up to reality!

***Gabriele Stevens***

## **Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> December “Combes Combo”**

Twelve OVA members gathered on a rather grey day at the small car park in Weston to be led by Jon Roseway through the Donkey Sanctuary just as it was feeding time for a large group of those furry friends. Then we headed across the fields to Salcombe Regis.

After walking down to the village we made it to the coast for good views and a



coffee stop at the Toposcope. Then it was a rather slippery descent down the coast path and up the other side. Jon very kindly found some routes that zig zagged up the steep hills, and most of us managed not to fall over in the mud. After a bit more down and up we got to Dunscombe and climbed down to Weston Mouth and the beach before following an easy track all the way back to the

start point. Thus we managed to avoid the worst of the afternoon rain. Many thanks to Jon for leading us on a strenuous walk which helped work off the Christmas excesses.

***Dee Woods***

# The Otter Valley Association

## Executive Officers (01395)

Chairman	Bob Wiltshire	444395
Vice-chairman	Haylor Lass	568786
Hon Secretary	Roger Saunders	443248
Hon Treasurer	Martin Smith	442333

## Executive Committee Members

Natural Environment Chair	Chris Hodgson	01404 815604
Planning Chair	<i>vacancy</i>	
Membership Secretary	Clive Bowman	446892
	<a href="mailto:membership@ova.org.uk">membership@ova.org.uk</a>	
	George Maddaford	446077
	Jon Roseway	488739
Talks Organiser	Peter Baldwin	567599
Events Organiser	<i>vacancy</i>	
Minutes Secretary	Rosemary Jerrard	442050
Newsletter Editor	Jacqui Baldwin	567599
	<a href="mailto:jacquibaldwin@btinternet.com">jacquibaldwin@btinternet.com</a>	
Natural Environment	Geoff Porter	567055

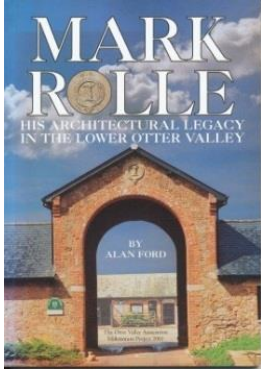
## Parish Representatives (to whom concerns should be addressed initially)

Budleigh Salterton	George Maddaford	as above
East Budleigh	Jon Roseway	as above
Otterton	Pat & Geoff Porter	as above
Newton Poppleford	Haylor Lass	as above
Colaton Raleigh	<i>vacancy</i>	

## Other Contacts

Webmaster	Martin Smith	as above
History Advisor	David Daniel	445960
Walks Organisers	Jane Connick	233614
	Jon Roseway	as above
Publications	Jon Roseway	as above
Newsletter Distributors	Peter & Wendy Youngworth	07718582535

## OVA Publications

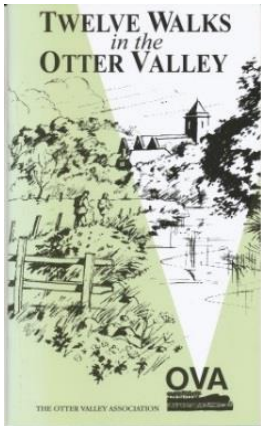


### **Mark Rolle**

#### **His Architectural Legacy in the Lower Otter Valley**

Ever wondered about the many improved farm buildings and cottages in this area? This lavishly illustrated book gives a very readable overview of how a large landed estate was managed in the last 40 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

£4.95 from Budleigh Salterton Tourist Information Centre  
Or visit [www.ova.org.uk](http://www.ova.org.uk)



#### **Twelve Walks in the Otter Valley.**

The area of the Lower Otter Valley is covered by a network of footpaths, mostly waymarked and in good condition. OVA members have compiled these walks, each with clear directions and illustrated with a sketch map. They range from 4 mile easy walks to a more energetic 9½ miler. There are notes on places of interest to whet your appetite for further exploration.

£3.00 from Budleigh Salterton Tourist Information Centre  
Or visit [www.ova.org.uk](http://www.ova.org.uk)

### **Leaflets**

The OVA also publish a number of leaflets about the history, flora & fauna and walking in the lower Otter Valley. They can usually be found in the Tourist Information Centres and in other outlets around the valley.