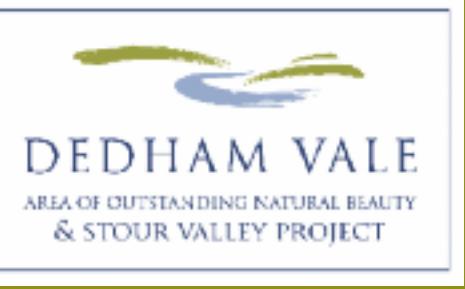


DEDHAM VALE & STOUR VALLEY NEWS

News and Visitor Information for the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley



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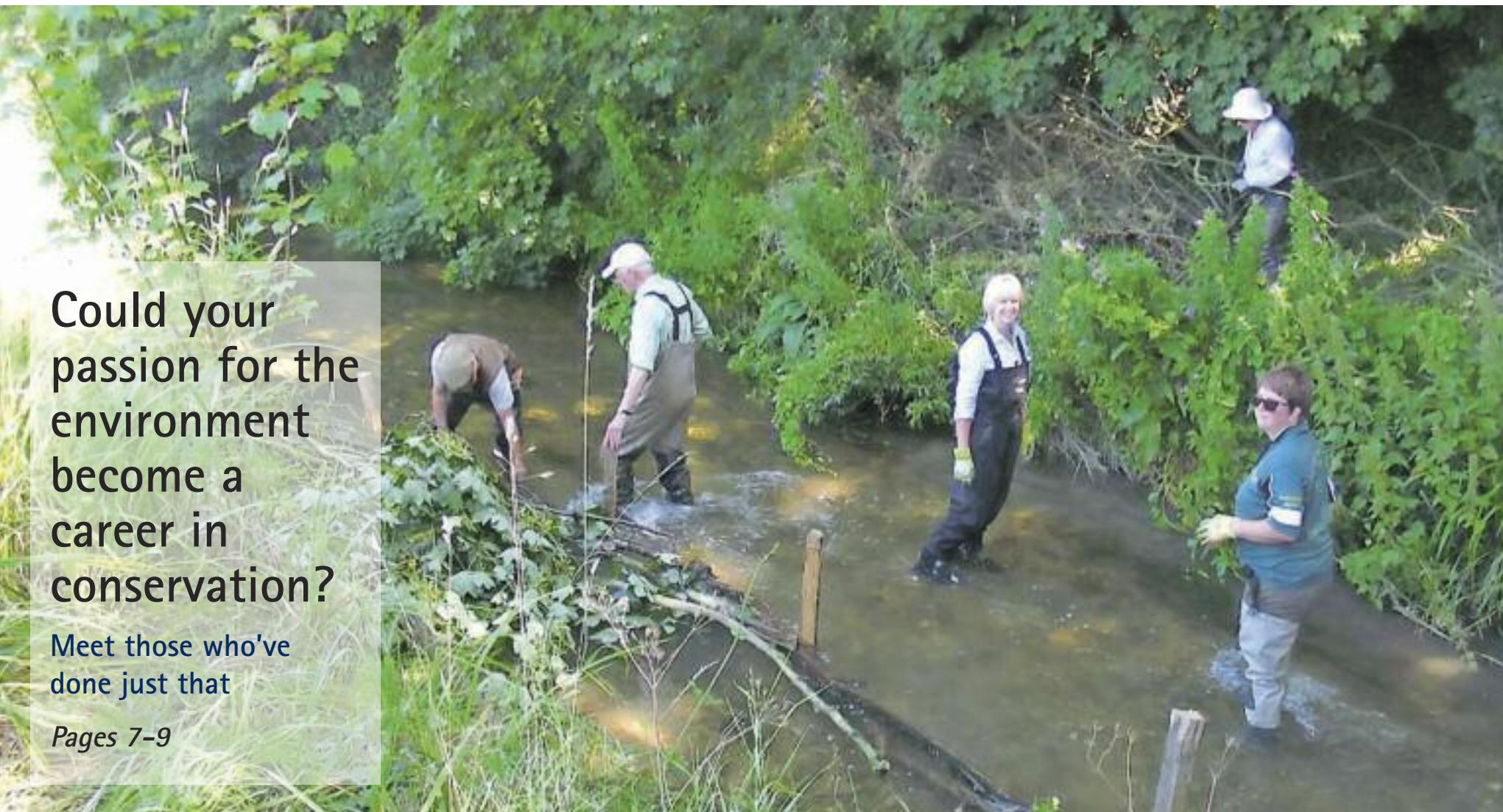
Spring/Summer 2017

Could your passion for the environment become a career in conservation?

Meet those who've done just that

Pages 7-9

Stour Valley Volunteers and Environment Agency staff enhancing river habitats for fish and invertebrates in the upper Stour - see page 13.



Rural skills and crafts
at Assington Mill in the
heart of the Stour Valley Page 4



Communities at work
Hedge laying in Steeple Bumpstead
Page 14



Getting to grips with nature
The Stour Valley Educational Network
(SVEN) shares ideas Page 5

Messages from the Chairmen



Councillor Nigel Chapman

Chairman, Dedham Vale
AONB and Stour Valley Joint
Advisory Committee (JAC)

The value of tourism in the Stour Valley in 2015 was £96m, a significant contribution to its economy and, as the AONB Team, we are proud to contribute to that. A metaphor I sometimes use for the valley is that of a swan swimming serenely on the river itself. It is a thing of natural beauty but under the surface much hard work goes on to maintain it!

Much of that work is undertaken by volunteers, which I was pleased to recognise at a recent event for our own group. I was also privileged to see the sterling work undertaken by locals at the archaeological dig in Nayland in the autumn.

A wonderful example of what we do well is the combination of volunteers with external funding from Essex & Suffolk Water that will see over 500 trees planted throughout the valley this winter.

In addition to our core funders, District and County Councils and Defra, we receive generous donations from a number of parish councils and from our two stalwart amenity societies for specific projects which this year will go towards further river enhancement.

I recently attended an interesting conference in London on Landscape post Brexit. We were told that legislation regarding the historic environment is largely enshrined in UK law but a lot of that relating to the natural environment will need to be repatriated.

The future of the UK's Agricultural Policy is the challenge and quite how the Government will shape that waits to be seen. However, there is no doubt that 'natural capital' will be a key concept as far as the future management of our countryside is concerned - this may disturb those tranquil waters!

The Mayor of Colchester, Councillor Julie Young, and I invite you to join us on 22nd April for a sponsored walk along the Stour Valley across the Ward I represent on Colchester Borough Council. I'll be accompanied by Councillor Tim Young, the Mayor's Escort. We are raising money for her charities (Beacon House, Open Road, Signpost, The Rob George Trust and The Invicta Foundation) and for our own Stour Valley Environment Fund. Full details are on the AONB website.



Robert Erith TD DL

Chairman, Dedham Vale
AONB & Stour Valley
Partnership

Lord Gardiner has been appointed as the Defra Minister responsible for landscapes, which include Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty such as the Dedham Vale. He is a hardworking and effective countryman and knows Suffolk well. He will be principal guest speaker at our Annual Forum at Shrubs Farm Barn, Lamarshe on Friday 16th June 2017. Book early as we expect a high level of interest.

The Project recently organised a meeting with local MPs to ask Lord Gardiner why reviews to AONB boundaries were taking so long to determine. The Minister asked how they knew whether large numbers wanted the extension. A brief survey was circulated to people living in and working in the valley, asking if they want the Dedham Vale AONB extended up the Stour valley towards Sudbury. A large number responded, almost all entirely in agreement. This response in favour of a boundary review will be forwarded to Natural England to encourage them to look at the application at the earliest opportunity.

The Project's new five year Management Plan was launched last December and it has been reviewed very positively by the *East Anglian Daily Times* and other media. It sets out the aims and objectives of the Project, how they will be achieved, and certain policy initiatives which will ensure the whole Stour valley is managed in a way which will maintain and enhance its natural beauty and special qualities.

Examples of this are the river restoration projects which will benefit wildlife and restore some aspects of the river which have been neglected in recent years. There is also emphasis on the importance of sensitive use of land by farmers, aided by a high proportion of the area currently in Countryside Stewardship and Higher Level Stewardship. We must hope that the replacement to these schemes after Brexit will be as environmentally attractive.

The plan also stresses the importance of flourishing rural communities and supports the establishment of community owned facilities such as pubs and shops. Tranquillity and dark night skies are also key aspects to be treasured and preserved.

The future of the natural environment

In the wake of the EU Referendum, the House of Commons Environmental Committee has produced a lengthy report entitled *The Future of the Natural Environment*. Post-Brexit, the environment's future will be determined by Defra (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) and DexEU (Department for Exiting the European Union).

The report's authors emphasise that Defra must ensure that the links between agriculture and the environment are given sufficient prominence within DexEU. Recommendations include:

- The Government to commit to legislation for a new Environmental Protection Act, ensuring that the UK has an equivalent or better level of environmental protection as in the EU
- The Government to assess resources necessary to replace existing EU environmental funding to ensure that farm businesses remain viable, and that animal welfare, food security and food safety are protected
- That the EU negotiations address the impact of international issues, including future trade arrangements, on the UK environment and agriculture
- That Government establishes the environmental objectives and governance model to be used for any future land management payments
- That Defra ensures that plans for post-EU environmental co-ordination between the countries of the UK see funding allocated fairly and transparently.

In the AONBs we have many sites that have EU designations to help conserve their special qualities. These designations recognise their value, not just locally, but as internationally recognised habitats. Continued legislation is essential for the future of the UK's environment. In 2015 Suffolk's Nature Strategy was produced, setting out the vision for the future where its "intrinsic value, as well as its importance to our economic growth, is increasingly understood, whilst the people of Suffolk and our visitors are able to gain better access to enhanced enjoyment and a deeper understanding of its unique qualities."

Outstanding Landscapes – invitation to 2017 Forum

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Forum is our annual celebration, where we discuss issues affecting the area and showcase AONB Project achievements. This year it is titled *Outstanding Landscapes: Good for the environment, health and economy*.

Leading the day of discussions will be Lord Gardiner (Minister responsible for AONBs) and the CEO of the National Association for AONBs, Howard Davies. The Forum is held in Lamarshe on Friday 16th June 2017. Email dedhamvale.project@suffolk.gov.uk to book your place.



On the front cover: Braintree MP James Cleverly; Councillor James Finch, Suffolk County Council; Robert Erith, AONB Partnership Chair; Councillor Nigel Chapman AONB JAC Chair; Simon Amstutz, AONB Manager; South Suffolk MP James Cartlidge.

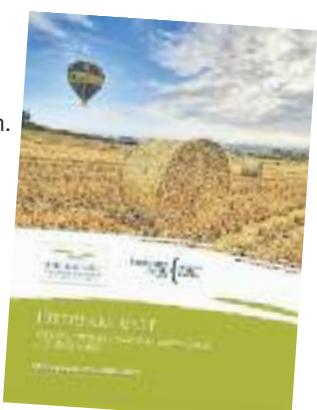
Blueprint for beauty and balance

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Management Plan for 2016-21 was launched at Flatford in late 2016. At the launch, attended by a wide range of partners, James Cleverly, Braintree MP, said he saw the Plan as a "good springboard for collaborative working," and James Cartlidge, South Suffolk MP, said: "It is incredibly important for future generations that we look after... the best parts of our countryside."

The Plan guides the work of the fifteen organisations who make up the AONB Partnership, and seeks to balance the need of the different sectors, ensuring that the AONB and Stour Valley remains an example of the finest landscape in the country. It sets out a vision for the area and strategic topics offer guidance on how the area should be managed: Countryside; Residents and Villages; Enjoying the Area; The River & Its Tributaries; Climate Change; and Working Together.

It is an aspiration of the Partnership to work together to secure a high quality landscape in the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley underpinned by sustainable economic growth.

Copies of the Plan are available from the AONB website or office.



UK Power Networks
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Flatford views revealed

One of the most famous landscapes immortalised by artist John Constable has been improved thanks to a £180,000 project by UK Power Networks to remove 1.5km of overhead power lines. More on this in the next edition.



Image supplied by Gainsborough's House

Wooded Landscape with Herdsman Seated, by Thomas Gainsborough, 1746–47, oil on canvas

New landscape trail

Gainsborough's House in Sudbury has launched an innovative new trail focussing on the art and landscapes of Thomas Gainsborough and John Constable, to coincide with the exhibition Constable at Gainsborough's House, open until 11th June 2017. This project explores important works created by Gainsborough and Constable in Suffolk, linking them to the geographical sites that still exist today.

As two of the country's most influential artists, Gainsborough and Constable are key figures in the heritage of Suffolk. This project will focus on the landscape of the Dedham Vale AONB, highlighting ten locations of

historic significance including Gainsborough's House, Christchurch Mansion and Flatford, and featuring a range of parish churches, parks and rural villages.

Gainsborough's House has partnered with Colchester & Ipswich Museums on the creation of this trail, which will be available as a leaflet and a map, alongside a series of illustrated exhibition panels placed at various sites on the tour. Collaboration on this exciting initiative aims to develop a stronger sense of place in the region, exploring the lasting influence that Gainsborough and Constable still have in their native Suffolk.

Louisa Brouwer, Keeper of Art and Place, Gainsborough's House

Stour Valley Tourism Action Group

We had great success with establishing a Tourism Action Group for the Shotley Peninsula area, and are now delighted that we are achieving similar interest for the Stour Valley and the newly formed Stour Valley Tourism Action Group. There is already a Facebook page: www.facebook.com/groups/1225965827481564.

Central to the group are the artists Gainsborough, Constable, Munnings and others inspired by the Stour Valley. The group is already developing a range of group tours or itineraries, and have identified areas where businesses could collaborate around events and itineraries.

If you'd like to find out more about the groups and how you could get involved, please contact me or follow the Facebook pages! Email: tracey.brinkley@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk; website www.babergh.gov.uk/business/economic-development/tourism-development-babergh-and-mid-suffolk

Tracey Brinkley, Tourism Development Officer, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils

The river runs through us

Over the course of a year (April 2017 – April 2018) painter Ruth Philo and sound recordist Stuart Bowditch will capture the unique landscape, inhabitants and communities that live on or along the River Stour, the border between Essex and Suffolk. Travelling the length and breadth of the river, they will collect and record using moving image and sound to create an immersive film that paints a portrait of the river at different times of day, year and its life cycles. Rather than following a historical timeline or physical trajectory, the film will draw on walks, conversations, exchanges of knowledge, ideas and memories, and documentation of current events to make a sensory work resonant of place.

They will screen the work along the River Stour in the summer of 2018, supported by an exhibition at the Boat House Gallery, Flatford, run by the National Trust. For the screenings they will use pubs and other venues by the river, and will transport audiences from Suffolk and Essex by boat to see the film.

For more information contact Ruth Philo on ruthphilo@btopenworld.com

Do you have memories of Flatford?

The National Trust is starting an oral history project to record the memories of the people who lived or worked at Flatford in the past.

This is part of a Heritage Lottery funded project to re-interpret the interior of Bridge Cottage, the iconic thatched building by the bridge at Flatford. The aim of the reinterpretation is to tell the story of the people who lived in the cottage, with a focus on the social history of Flatford in the late 19th century.

The team behind the project have already discovered that Bridge Cottage was the home of the Clarke family in the 1880s. Through their research, they have discovered the names and roles of all the family members and what work they did at Flatford.

If you know of anyone who has memories of the site, particularly pre-1960, please contact Sarah on 01206 297201 or email sarah.milne@nationaltrust.org.uk

The iconic Bridge Cottage: do you know anyone who lived or worked here?



Photo supplied by the National Trust



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LIVING AND WORKING IN THE STOUR VALLEY

Enjoy a slice of the good life! CATHY SHELBOURNE meets Anne Holden and Bob Cowlin, owners and creators of Assington Mill, an idyllically-located short course centre specialising in rural skills and crafts

A great piece of heaven

When Anne Holden and her husband Bob Cowlin were heading for retirement in 2005 and 2016 respectively, they didn't just rest on their laurels. As a former conservation officer and still practising chartered surveyor, they decided to build on their joint experiences, literally, and set out to "create somewhere nice to run country courses."

"We recognised a gap in the market," recalled Anne. "I had previously run my own furniture restoration courses and traditional building skills as a sideline, but when I retired I wanted to include courses not being offered anywhere else."

The result is the Assington Mill Craft and Rural Courses programme – over 70 day and residential courses annually, taking place in beautifully renovated farm buildings nestling in a hidden valley on the outskirts of Assington, in the Stour Valley.

Everything you've ever wanted to know more about – and plenty you've never dreamed of – is on offer. How about a practical workshop on tortoises? Or dowsing for beginners? Discover how to unearth the secret green pharmacy locked in our hedgerows.



Learn about keeping chickens (by practising on some cuddly resident hens!). Build a clay oven. You can do anything you want at Assington Mill.

And it's not just the courses that make so many people return (there are usually at least two people on every course who have been before). "Wonderful welcome, fabulous location, fresh organic food and learned a new skill," wrote one participant. "Great piece of heaven," said another.

There is no particular reason for the choice of courses. "It is just serendipity," says Anne. "It depends who I meet and what they suggest. We have no trained lecturers here, just practitioners who love their subjects." The beekeeper is the person who replaced all the doors and windows during the renovation of the farmhouse. "He makes everyone laugh all day." The tutor for the taxidermy workshop was a student on another course. "She suggested teaching how to stuff a white mouse in a day."

"We aim to make the workshops as much fun as possible. Everyone gets a great welcome from the minute they arrive in the car park. We want to avoid any anxieties about 'going back to school'! All the ingredients for lunch are locally sourced – much of it grown and prepared here, and we both bake cakes for afternoon tea."

After the course is over, people are very welcome to wander around the pond and woodland. "We have 86 acres here," says Bob. "When we were searching for the ideal location for our courses, we looked at four different water mills. The farm was a surprise!" Although they had no farming background, they set out to farm organically, and with help from a number of sources including the AONB team, they drew up a management plan for wildlife. To encourage dormice, they applied for grants, planted up 11 acres of arable land with dormice-friendly species and named it Cowlin's Wood after Bob. Such was their achievement that they came second in a national competition run by the People's Trust for Endangered Species on the theme of Reconnecting the Countryside. Barn owls are another success story, and 22 chicks have been ringed since 2009 by Neil



How to enjoy Assington Mill

- Assington Mill is open for courses all year round, except during August and December. See www.assingtonmill.com
- Camping is possible. Contact info@assingtonmill.com or ring 01787 229955
- Public footpaths run through the site, around the mill pond, and into the woodland
- The Mill Cottage is available to hire www.grove-cottages.co.uk/MillCottage



Catchpole (during and after his time with the AONB team), when environments conducive to barn owls were introduced.

Unsurprisingly, with a mill at the heart of the farm, there is a large mill pond and five acres of wetland. The Mill Cottage has been renovated to provide top quality accommodation, with wonderful views across the mill pond and frequent sightings of kingfishers. For those who like to be even closer to nature, the Forest School run camps here three times a year, and bring around 100 children each time to experience the joys of living outdoors, singing around campfires and even swimming in the mill pond.

Bob and Anne have been keen to ensure that the land supports the courses and that people of all ages and inclinations can share in their piece of heaven. The old kitchen garden that fed the occupants when the Mill was working is now a landshare scheme. The six landholders pay no rent, and their produce is used in the preparation of the delicious meals enjoyed by course participants.

The willow grown in the wetlands and the coppiced wood from the hazel copses are used on the courses. And the wonderful storytelling hut and cart lodge are testimony to the skills of the people on the straw bale building workshops – using straw from barley grown in their fields.

Anne and Bob actually lived in the straw bale classroom for a year while the farmhouse was being restored. Having done a number of restorations previously, and being in the position of setting up the courses and still having full-time jobs, they decided this time to involve locally-based professionals. "We chose first class people – and got a first class job." Judge for yourself!

Left: Bob Cowlin and Anne Holden in Anne's Folly, the storytelling hut that was built from straw bales during a workshop at Assington Mill; centre: Hands up! A permanent record of the many hands making light work of the construction of the classroom, using straw from barley grown on the farm. Right: water wheel outside the renovated Mill Cottage; below: Assington Mill renovated farm house with Anne and Bob standing outside the conical Anne's Folly.



STOUR VALLEY EDUCATIONAL NETWORK (SVEN)

The Stour Valley Educational Network (SVEN) brings together organisations involved in the delivery of environmental education in the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley, across both Suffolk and Essex. It is a forum for sharing ideas and best practice, and encourages wider involvement in environmental education and outdoor learning in the area.

SVEN has produced a series of Stour Valley Fact Sheets, with information on Landscape, Heritage, Culture and Wildlife, especially aimed at 7-11 year olds. These are FREE to download from www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/get-involved/stour-valley-educational-network-sven.



Throughout 2017 SVEN are working together to hold a series of family environmental learning events. Full details are on the AONB website; here are some of the events.

11th April, 30th May, 18th and 25th July, 1st, 8th, 15th 22nd and 29th August - Flatford Nature Day; 10th June - Animal Antics on Bures Common with Fulibroch Dairy and Gainsborough's House; 14th July - Night time Nature at Eden Rose Coppice; 27th July - Nature Explorers at Arger Fen with Suffolk Wildlife Trust; 30th August - Woodland Arts & Crafts at Little Ropers Wood; 8th September - Art on the Meadows with Gainsborough's House; 8th October - Bush Craft Walk at Little Ropers Wood.



What might you do at one of these events?

Nature Explorers at Arger Fen will go on a family friendly activity walk to hunt for bugs, explore colour and texture, look for signs of animals and make a jumping grasshopper. At the Woodland Day event at Little Ropers the SVEN partners will provide free activities, including the pop-up art tent from Gainsborough's House in Sudbury, examining locally found pottery and encouraging people to become an archaeologist with Travels in Time Archaeology, plus there will be willow weaving and communal rug-making.



Back to nature

SVEN members Little Ropers Wood, at Bures, is a 'back to nature' woodland camp where you can pitch your tent beneath the spreading branches of an ancient oak tree or set up camp beside a bank of bluebells, enjoying the stunning views and walks in the Stour Valley. Families with children find that the wood provides a safe and stimulating environment in which to explore and learn about the natural world as it goes through seasonal changes. Badgers have their setts nearby and you may well see deer, hares, bats or even the resident barn owl hunting over the meadows. There are only a few pitches in the wood, each with its own fire pit or homemade log burner. The woodland is also used by Forest Schools and bush craft groups. See www.littleroperswoodlandcamping.com for more information.



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A photograph of the exterior of Mr Wheeler's Wine Cellar. The shop is a brick building with a large wooden barrel on the left side. A sign on the left says 'MR WHEELER Since 1883 wine cellar'. A sign on the right says 'MR WHEELER wine cellar'. The entrance is a wooden door. The sky is dark, suggesting it might be evening or night.

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Volunteer placements

The AONB team has always worked alongside a dedicated team of volunteers. Since 2015 we have been making available a slightly different opportunity to those wanting to get more experience in working in the conservation sector, offering longer term voluntary placements or internships as a great way for recent graduates or career changers to get that much needed work experience. Volunteer placements are now becoming a firm part of our offer for volunteering with the AONBs. Usually lasting six months, placements are a way to really get stuck into project delivery whilst working alongside and being supported by an experienced and dedicated team. Keep an eye on the vacancies page on the AONB websites or call Paula Booth on 01394 445225 for more information.



Above: Sam Weir at work near Aldringham church; right: Danny Thorrington sorting plants for Pollinator Patches deliveries; below: Sam (left) and Danny delivering pollinator patches, bulbs and wildflower plugs to community sites

Gradually growing skills

I graduated from my BSc Wildlife Conservation course at Nottingham Trent University in July 2016. While at home pondering on what to do next I saw the advert for a 10 month graduate placement at Suffolk Coast & Heaths and Dedham Vale AONBs and thought it would be a great opportunity to get some practical experience.

I am now part way through my placement and I have learnt so much - coppicing, creating dead hedges, managing woodlands, rivers, ponds and meadows. The volunteers, who form a major part of the work, made me feel welcome and were all very kind and interested to know about my degree. It has been great fun working with them and getting to know them and their backgrounds as well.

While I have been here I have been able to go out with people from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, attain first aid training and attend other courses which will aid me in the future.

The diversity of habitats across the AONBs is incredible and the variety of projects that I have been a part of is truly great - such as restoring the River Box, by adding various woody debris structures to help increase flow and provide fish habitat. I have been involved with the Beachwatch survey which was eye-opening, due to the amount of waste found along the beach.

Involvement in these projects will have a positive impact on my CV, which is why doing internships is important as the experience gained is invaluable. I would like to work in the conservation sector; I haven't decided in which area, but I hope to work this out by the end of my placement.

Sam Weir

A career for life

If you're thinking of what career to pursue, or perhaps looking for a second or even third career, working in conservation is for many people an opportunity to combine a passion for wildlife or concern for the environment with a means to earn a living. And there's nothing like some practical experience as a volunteer for boosting your CV! On this page, we look at opportunities within the AONBs, and on the next two pages, people working within the AONB share their experiences.

Area of Outstanding Work Experience (AOWE)

My time as Volunteer Officer with Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB and Dedham Vale AONB & Stour Valley Project is coming to a close and I wanted to take the opportunity to share my conclusions. I believe the title of the article sums it up perfectly. At my induction when first coming into post I was promised diversity, special qualities, character - and that was just the staff in the team. I am not sure they delivered on the natural beauty front; however, the SCH & DV & Stour Valley landscape certainly did. I feel extremely privileged to have been able to visit and work at some truly wonderful sites and to be part of such a small yet dedicated and passionate group of professionals happy to share their workloads, I mean knowledge and enthusiasm, about protecting and enhancing our wonderful countryside and surrounding areas.

The projects, topics, sites and people that have been part of my role have been the perfect mix. It is very difficult to pick a highlight, however my fellow volunteers have got to be right up there for making me feel so welcome and part of a team. Their openness towards me, their continuous drive, energy, good humour and company has been very good for the soul and I hope I contributed to providing a safe and positive experience for them all. I have developed many skills and increased my knowledge whilst completing many practical conservation tasks including habitat creation and management, managing woodlands, meadows, hedgerows, rivers, ponds, heathland, parkland and green spaces.

The team have also recognised my personal skills and given me the autonomy to work alongside and lead on some amazing projects working with communities, including Scattered Orchards, Pollinator Patches, the Stour 500 Trees and Beachwatch surveys. Other projects have also included the Black Poplar Clone Bank and Nursery, River Box



restoration and numerous access and recreation tasks including footpath, fencing and step construction, footpath surveys, way marking, and a feasibility study around accessibility along the Dedham Vale.

Communication has been key and I have thoroughly enjoyed promoting the work I have been involved in, creating information boards, writing articles and liaising with partners, volunteers and the general public. What has also been evident is the teams' flexibility and willingness for me to work alongside other partners, such as the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Ipswich Borough Rangers, amongst others.

I have also taken advantage of various training opportunities including hedge laying, first aid for outdoor workers and barn owl monitoring.

Finally I would like to thank the AONB and other partners for enriching my skills, knowledge and life. With over 500 hours of experience now under my belt this will hopefully put me in good stead for future opportunities. I urge anyone considering a career in landscapes, wildlife and conservation, or looking to improve their wellbeing, to don those wellies and volunteer for change with the AONB.

Danny Thorrington



Environment correspondents on regional newspapers are a rare, and perhaps endangered, species. CATHY SHELBOURNE meets the *East Anglian Daily Times'* own award-winning journalist, John Grant, and discovers how his passions shaped his career

Conservation: a career for life

John Grant is a modest man. As the *East Anglian Daily Times'* environment correspondent, he was covering the Greenest County Awards at Snape in 2015, and diligently noting down the preamble to the announcement of the winner of the newly created Derek Moore award to recognise outstanding service to Suffolk's environment. "The winner comes from Portsmouth..." said the presenter. "That's a coincidence," thought John, who grew up there (and remains a lifelong fan of Portsmouth Football Club). Next moment, to his complete astonishment, it was him shaking Chris Packham's hand as the first recipient of this prestigious award.

He may have been surprised, but to his legion of admiring readers of the *East Anglian's* weekly environment section, and friends in the conservation world, it was a richly deserved award. "His articles are always well researched, beautifully crafted, and full of hope for the future," says Ian Bartherope, Visitor Experience Officer at the RSPB's Minsmere nature reserve. "He has proudly promoted conservation projects from small community schemes to huge European funded programmes."

"John's knowledge of Suffolk birds is legendary, and his ability to identify gulls is second to none – while most of us struggle to muster the energy to check through a flock of gulls, John will pick out the intricate plumages that allow him to not only identify a Caspian gull, but to accurately age it too."

- Ian Bartherope, RSPB

John trained as a journalist in Portsmouth, doing a one year National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) course at the local college. With typical enthusiasm, he recalls "I loved every minute, I love the written word." But although he had always wanted to be a journalist, at the back of his mind lurked a thought that East Anglia was the place for birding, a passion of his since childhood days when he and friends roamed the marshes and harbour at Portsmouth, watching wildlife.

He wrote to the EADT, applying for post of trainee reporter, thinking that birds and Ipswich Town Football Club made a good combination! His first post was in Clacton, where he worked closely with the Chief Reporter, who taught him the golden rule of journalism: contacts. "He knew everyone. He was a brilliant example of a local journalist, and an exceptionally good writer." When John later moved to the Sudbury office, he spent every day off birdwatching at Abberton Reservoir or on the coast. His longstanding association with the Minsmere RSPB reserve began in 1975, and he has been a volunteer guide there too. Moving to the Leiston office, on the doorstep of Minsmere, was opportune. "I was, and still am, utterly beguiled by the coast in general, Minsmere in particular." Proximity to the *Eels' Foot Inn* was another attraction; as a real ale aficionado, it has become his second home.

His next move was to the Woodbridge office, where he became sub-editor, involved in the design of the newspaper, choosing stories, commissioning photos, and collating international and national news. "I am very interested in international affairs and politics; it was a big responsibility. I have an eye for design too, and this post gave me the freedom to be creative."

So perhaps it wasn't surprising that he was appointed environment correspondent on the retirement of David Green, "an absolute hero of mine. He was a top writer, particularly on nuclear matters." John has never shied away from exploring issues affecting not just Suffolk but the whole world. While



he has a few subjects very close to his heart, as a professional journalist he adheres to the three As: Accuracy Above All. He will always treat a subject fairly, and maintain a good working relationship with all protagonists. He is particularly interested in Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ), and neonicotinoid insecticides. "Suffolk is one of four counties who had permission to use them on flowering crops. My coverage of the issues was fair, but didn't shy away from how people felt about their use."

John considers himself very fortunate to have been able to combine his career in journalism with his passion for the environment. He has seen many colleagues in journalism who have been consumed by their career. "If I didn't have an interest in environmental matters, I would have been out of work years ago." The EADT is very supportive, and knows that environmental tourism is vital for Suffolk and north Essex.

Over the years, he has also been aware of an increasing level of enthusiasm and professionalism amongst environmental organisations. "This has made my life much easier. The AONB, for example, know what I want and are a joy to work with! The RSPB, BTO, SWT, NT and many others are brilliant."

He is also pleased to note that there is a fundamental awareness of issues amongst young people. "There is still a lot to be done, and there are far more pressures on the environment now. I do think that natural history should be a core curriculum subject."

And what's in store for John himself? He is due to retire in 2018, and is already planning to spend more time working for the Suffolk Ornithologists' Group, 'the voice of Suffolk birdwatchers'. He recently became President, and wants to increase membership and appreciation of its activities.

On Twitter (how appropriate), John goes under the tag @BirderGranty and describes himself as suffolk birder/environmental journalist/bigpompey fan/loves real ale. We can expect to hear much more from John Grant in the future as he explores new media to broadcast his views and love for the Suffolk countryside.

"Being environment correspondent is paradise for me, writing about what I love."

- John Grant



Photo by Cathy Smith

What was the defining moment in your passion for the environment?

What led you to a career in conservation? We asked a selection of people in the AONBs for their responses – and we'd love to hear your answers too!



Simon Amstutz

AONB Manager

At the end of my first year studying Geography at Leeds University, a friend and I went travelling around Turkey. It was an amazing trip, but I got very ill. I wasn't fit enough to go straight back to university and was encouraged to take a year out. By Christmas I was physically better and I spent the next eight months as

a Conservation Officer with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) in West Yorkshire. I had a fantastic experience, and when I did finally graduate, I couldn't imagine working anywhere but in conservation.

Bob Cowlin

Assington Mill
(see full article on page 4)

When I was 18 years old, a friend took me badger watching in June. Badgers are shy animals, so when two adults and four cubs appeared, within ten feet of us, my heart was thumping with excitement. This wake-up call to the power of nature came just at the right moment for me, as I was leaving school and considering the future. My interest in badgers led me to join The Mammal Society, and for 20 years I was badger recorder for Essex.



Emma Black

Countryside Project Officer, Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley

Even though I grew up in London, my parents were keen walkers and holidays were spent outside, walking. I've always loved animals, and collecting bones – my bedroom was full of them, and my son is exactly the same! My grandfather bought me my first pair of binoculars and I joined a young ornithologists' club. I did a degree in environmental science at Queen Mary College, University of London, and went off travelling to discover more about the world. After a postgraduate diploma in conservation management at Otley College I was sponsored by the Field Studies Council at Epping Forest before becoming Schools Liaison Officer for the London Borough of Havering's Countryside Service. I gained good practical experience as a volunteer field officer for BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) in London, and joined the Dedham Vale team after having children.



Emma Hay

Land Management & Conservation Adviser, Natural England

I was always fascinated by wildlife and between the ages of 8 and 11 I spent most of my spare time in the garden, fields and ditches around my home, hunting for creatures, exploring and building hide-outs. Dutch elm disease meant there were a lot of trees being felled and one den was deep in a huge pile of logs. Behind my house was a working sandpit where I would often play after hours. It had ponds (and quicksand) that were teeming with newts, dragonflies and birdlife and tall cliffs with martin colonies. It was a health and safety nightmare of course! I realise now that I was blessed with so much nature on my doorstep as a child and how influential it has been on my conservation career.



Nick Collinson

Head of Natural & Historic Environment, Suffolk County Council

One of my most vivid childhood memories was my parents waking us up in the middle of the night to listen to nightingales in the woods next to our garden. My grandfather had been quite involved in setting up the Ipswich group of Suffolk Wildlife Trust and he was a great countryman. They lived on the river Gipping at Bayham, and I remember him relaying stories of kingfishers and otters. I left school with little idea of a career, but four years into travelling around the world, I was in a mango orchard in Israel watching kites and shrikes hunting over the edge of the Negev desert, and at that very moment I decided to pursue a career path in environmental conservation. The following September I started at Oxford Brookes University as a mature student. I haven't looked back since!



Karen Thomas

Project Manager, Eastern Drainage Boards

I have always been drawn to the sea and in particular, estuaries. I grew up on the Exe in Devon and we were always in the sea or the sand and mud. My grandfather was a fisherman and my dad enjoyed diving so we had plenty of fresh seafood and I was spoilt early in life with warm cockles and winkles straight from the pan which we ate in sandwiches! Following my degree and Masters at Bangor School of Oceanography I travelled the world with offshore survey companies, then inshore work and finally settled in Suffolk in 1999 where I have been working in flood risk management ever since. My current job is with the Drainage Boards. I work with communities, landowners and partnerships particularly in the Suffolk estuaries, Kessingland, Lowestoft and the Broads. My passion is still the estuaries, working on pioneering approaches to funding and restoring saltmarshes which are so important for fish, birds and as natural flood defences. In my spare time I enjoy wild swimming and exploring the AONB estuaries in my canoe. It's true what they say though – if you love your job you will never work a day in your life!!



Katherine Rushen

Student and Dedham Vale Youth Ranger

As a family we always enjoyed walking; we are lucky to have lovely countryside and be near the seaside. My Dad is a very keen birdwatcher so I was used to hides from an early age.

I have always enjoyed studying science in general, and took three sciences at A level. When I was at school I would hear the news of climate change and environmental degradation. It frustrated me that our world was affected by human activity.

I volunteered as a Dedham Vale Youth Ranger from when it started until I left for university. I made

friends with people of similar interests, and learnt about local area conservation needs and issues. Every month we would be given the opportunity to help with different conservation tasks. As a bonus, I definitely think it helped me when I applied to study Environmental Science at the University of East Anglia.

When I graduate I would really like to work abroad, which is the great thing with an environmental science degree. I want to experience different cultures and landscapes and play a part in those societies.



Deborah Cadman

Chief Executive, Suffolk County Council

I feel fortunate to live somewhere with many fantastic open spaces and beautiful landscapes. Long walks along Southwold beach are a particular favourite of mine. I would urge everyone to be outdoors and active, as it really does help keep us healthy and support our general wellbeing.



John Grant

Environment Correspondent, East Anglian Daily Times (see full article on page 8)

I can't remember a time when I wasn't fascinated by birds. Even as a five-year old, growing up in Portsmouth, I was explaining to a neighbour the difference between a male and female house sparrow. In the 1950s and '60s, children roamed for miles. We'd be out all day, with just a lump of cheese and an apple, watching the over-wintering birds on the marshes or down at the harbour.

From dawn until dusk we were immersed in natural history.



Richard Wrinch

Farmer, Shotley peninsula

My interest in conservation was quickened by joining the ornithological club at school. We captured and ringed birds. Now we have someone at Hill House Farm who records the list of birds caught, and where. A black-tailed godwit ringed on Hare's March in 1999 was found dead in Iceland in June 2014 – over 15 years later.



OUT AND ABOUT IN THE AONBS



Suffolk Walking Festival

Suffolk has a wealth of natural assets to offer walkers of all abilities, and the county's two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are surely the jewels in its crown. The AONBs and the Suffolk Walking Festival 2017 offer not only picturesque landscapes but also many linear and circular walking routes ranging from two to 61 miles. So, whether you're a seasoned long-distance walker or just fancy a short wander around the countryside, there is certainly something suitable for you.

Walking is a great way to get more active, lose weight and become healthier. It is ideal for people of all ages and fitness levels, and also provides the opportunity to explore our environment, from an urban stroll to a rural ramble.

Walking is also great at boosting one's mood. It releases feel-good endorphins while reducing stress, fatigue and anxiety. It also increases self-esteem and self perception, mood and sleep quality. In older people, walking is thought to reduce the risk of cognitive decline and dementia, as well as improving memory.

Suffolk's Year of Walking is proud to include the 10th annual Suffolk Walking Festival in May-June 2017. Take a look at www.suffolkwalkingfestival.co.uk to see the wonderful and diverse programme of led walks designed to give you a choice which will suit your needs and interests, whatever they may be.

Included within the festival are mindfulness walks, charity walks, history walks, short beginner walks, or the long distance challenge walks along the Stour Valley Path. We look forward to seeing you!

For more walking opportunities in Suffolk, visit www.suffolkyearofwalking.co.uk



Two walks in the Stour Valley!

Help raise money for the Stour Valley Environment Fund and the Colchester Mayor's Charities on Saturday 22nd April, with a 14 mile walk between Bures and Dedham (see the AONB website for details).

As part of the Suffolk Walking Festival the AONB team have organised a challenge walk for Saturday 3rd – Sunday 4th June 2017. The challenge is for participants to walk 63 miles in less than 30 hours. The route is the Stour Valley Path, a regional route that runs from Newmarket to Manningtree. It is a tough challenge including long stretches walking on unpredictable surfaces and through the night in the dark.

The rewards are superb, as the Stour Valley Path criss-crosses the Essex and Suffolk border, the area that forms the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Stour Valley Project. The route opens up opportunities to enjoy the nationally important landscape, its wildlife and supportive communities.

The event will be led by Simon Amstutz, AONB Manager, with several experienced co-leaders. This is a tough challenge both physically and mentally and organisers are grateful for the backup provided by volunteers. Walkers will be encouraged to raise money for charities, including the Stour Valley Environment Fund. Sign up at www.suffolkwalkingfestival.co.uk

Alex and Rosie re-visit the AONB



Autism and Nature has published a 48 page colouring book for children with autism and related disabilities. It was designed for younger children (5-11 years), but children of other ages, and even parents may want to join in the colouring. Readers may be familiar with *Alex and Rosie's Adventures in Suffolk*, published in 2016; this year Alex and Rosie revisit their favourite places, to colour pictures of landscapes characteristic of the Suffolk and Essex AONBs and the wider countryside.. At each special location, Alex and Rosie give children the opportunity to join them in colouring some of the amazing wildlife that they discovered; for example, along the Stour Valley Path they coloured pictures of a mallard, cows and a lot of buttercups.

The book is free of charge and available from Activities Unlimited. Our other publications for families and special schools in Suffolk are also free of charge and available from the same organisation. For more information about Autism and Nature and its publications for adults and children, please visit our website www.autismandnature.org.uk.

Alex and Rosie's Suffolk Colouring Book was supported by Dedham Vale AONB and Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB Sustainable Development Fund and Suffolk Community Foundation.

David and Tharada Blakesley, Autism and Nature

RSPB fighting pygmy weed

New Zealand pygmy weed, Australian Stone crop, *Crassula helmsii*: call it what you will. This aquatic invasive non-native plant is a rampant, tenacious thug that, if left unchecked, will effectively choke the life out of any water course, pond, ditch or scrape it grows in, so a certain amount of despondency was felt by RSPB staff when it was discovered growing on Cattawade Marsh Reserve during the summer of 2015, on the part which annually supports, amongst other species, around 100 pairs of breeding lapwing, an unprecedented number for such a small area. Livestock grazing is an important part of creating grassland suitable for lapwing breeding, but allowing cattle or sheep onto the *Crassula* infested marsh would simply spread the *Crassula* further afield with the potential for spreading much further up Dedham Vale.

Conventional weedkillers have limited effect but one proven method of killing the weed, which was pioneered at RSPB Old Hall Marshes, down on the Blackwater estuary, is to inundate it with sea water. Fortunately Cattawade marsh is right next to the south channel, the upper limit of the tidal reach of the Stour estuary, so the solution, at first, seemed quite simple: pump saline water from this channel over the sea wall onto the affected area.

As the project developed, it became clear that it wasn't going to be quite as simple as that, the main consideration being the EU Eel Regulations. These were introduced to help reverse the dramatic decline of European eels. When abstracting water from a river, the eel regulations stipulate the use of a mesh screen over the intake, no larger than 2mm, to prevent migrating elvers from being sucked in through the pump to a certain death. A screen with such fine mesh would certainly block with debris so a special self-cleaning filter was used.

The filters worked faultlessly and the *Crassula* has been covered with saline water since October last year. We need to keep it covered for as long as possible but already large areas of *Crassula* are either dead or dying. We won't really know how successful it's been until the water has dried up and exposed the ditches and scrapes.

Jonathan Rapley, Assistant Warden, RSPB Stour Estuary & Wolves Wood Reserves



No hiding place: portable CCTV enables the inspection of a barn owl nest box

Portable CCTV inspects barn owl nest boxes

Dene Harding and I happily volunteered a year ago to monitor barn owls in the Stour Valley. This means looking inside their nest boxes and counting eggs and owls, for which we were trained and licensed. I enjoy seeing barn owls, and helping them thrive.

We found that several boxes were out of reach of even our long 4m ladder. So instead of climbing up, we lashed a smartphone to a long incliner pole (used to block the nest box entrance to ensure that wildlife in the box stay in the box), and gained a good view of the inside of the box without leaving the ground – much safer too, and no ladder to lug over fields. On our next visit we monitored all our boxes much more quickly.

The Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project liked the idea a lot: it is safer and reduces disturbance to birds. The equipment has to cope with remote countryside, which means being portable, reaching high up (4-6m) and without mains power or internet. As there was nothing already suitable with infra-red available for less than £1,000, I continued significantly improving my prototype in stages, adding live video, photos, remote control, cable-free, iPhone and Android. I've named it Portable CCTV, and colleagues have tried it out successfully.

Our next step is to make the Portable CCTV simple, rugged, and rainproof, as 40 plus volunteers are expected to use it. By emitting infra-red, a GoPro camera may be the answer. It will then be subject to a pilot trial. The whole project is seeking further funding.

Adrian Silvertown, Volunteer Monitor, Suffolk Community Barn-Owl Project (SCBOP)



Fight for clear water: a pump and filter set up in the infested marsh

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Eleventh hour find at Court Knoll

In the last edition of this newspaper we reported that permission had been given by Historic England to excavate seven trenches on the listed Ancient Monument at Court Knoll in Nayland. With the help of many village residents and members of the Colchester and the Stour Valley Archaeology Groups and under the firm but friendly guidance of Jo Caruth and Linzi Everett of Suffolk Archaeology, the dig started on 2nd September 2016 and continued for six weeks.

During this time a rectangular building was revealed which appears to have been replaced at a later stage by a building with an apse or tower (see picture). A high status ecclesiastical tile was recovered and a substantial amount of brick and tile was also found. On the final day of the dig, in the last trench to be opened and with only a few hours left before closure of the site was to commence, evidence of a grave was revealed. The remains were left in situ but a small piece of bone was taken for carbon dating analysis.

The result of the analysis was extraordinary; it is estimated that there is a 65% probability that the bone dates from between 969 and 1018 AD ie the late Saxon period. However this factor is not conclusive evidence that the site is of Saxon origin and substantial further analysis of the many other finds from the site must be undertaken before any firm conclusions can be made. Nevertheless this is an exciting first step in interpreting the history of Court Knoll and in due course it is hoped that the full story can be told. This project would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Dedham Vale AONB Sustainable Development Fund.

Mike Hunter, Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society



Aerial view of the trench excavation at Court Knoll in Nayland

Village grant supports the AONB

Little Horchesley is one of the smaller parishes within the Dedham Vale, with a population of 170 souls and just half of the village within the AONB. The advantages of living within the Vale are obvious: we enjoy splendid views across the Stour to Nayland and Stoke by Nayland and upriver to Wormingford.

Some years ago the Parish Council debated what could they do to protect the idyll in which we live – the answer was very little as an independent entity because the Dedham Vale AONB & Stour Valley Project are charged with protecting and enhancing the countryside and carry out a wide range of projects to safeguard the area, improve facilities for those visiting the countryside and organise a wide range of educational programmes for all ages. It was therefore a mutual interest between the community's interest in protecting the countryside and the work being done by the Project.

It was known that the financial support for the Project was under pressure during a period of cutbacks in central



Black poplars live on

A few years ago the Dedham Vale AONB & Stour Valley Project set up a native black poplar clone bank and nursery to combat further decline and near extinction of such a special tree. The plan was to repopulate the River Stour. Unfortunately the nursery came under attack from a marshland disease and constant barrage from the local rabbit population so urgent action was needed.

Last year a new site was identified in Alphamstone, kindly provided by landowner John McGlashan, to enable the AONB Project and its dedicated volunteers to re-establish the Black Poplar Clone Bank and Nursery.

Why is the native black poplar so important?

The native black poplar was once a common sight along our floodplain woodlands that covered the river valleys. It was grown for its special properties. The gentle curve of the tree made it ideal for cruck framed buildings. The wood is fire resistant and was widely used as floor boards, and it is a spongy shock absorber ideal for carts and wagons. Many of the remaining native black poplars date back from the middle of the 19th century. In the 18th and 19th centuries new strains and hybrids were introduced from abroad and the native black poplar ceased to be planted.

Today there are thought to be less than 8,000 mature native black poplars remaining, many of which are coming to the end of their lives so we need to act fast. Native black poplars occur as separate male and female trees. The female produces masses of fluffy white seed which can be a nuisance. Consequently they were rarely planted and today there may be fewer than 800 left in Britain.

Many of the surviving trees in East Anglia have been identified and their owners are being encouraged to look after them. We have taken 83 cuttings from trees locally, and planted and cared for them on this site. This special collection is known as a clone bank and will provide a source of new trees long after the parent trees have died. I am very pleased to report that we achieved a 62% success rate. These trees had new cuttings taken earlier this year, which were nurtured in our fenced nursery.

Hopefully the future is looking a little brighter and the regeneration and planting of native black poplars will soon be underway as we hope to have new tree saplings ready in two years' time, to plant in places where they traditionally occurred, thus maintaining and enhancing the special qualities of the AONB and Stour Valley.

Danny Thorrington, AONB Volunteer Officer

and local government expenditure and this reduction in financial backing threatened the work of the Project. Therefore, the Little Horchesley Parish Council allocated £1/head of the population to an annual grant to support the work of the Project.

This amounted to 0.04% of the Village Rate and 0.0005% of the Council Tax on a D Band property – a minuscule amount but one, if followed across the parishes in the Dedham Vale area, could make a real difference to protecting and enhancing our beautiful countryside.

Roger Drury, Little Horchesley Parish Clerk

VOLUNTEERING IN THE STOUR VALLEY

Working in partnership

The Environment Agency is really pleased to continue to work in close partnership with the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project supporting the River Stour Project and the work of the Project Officer, Alex Moore da Luz.

The River Stour Project undertakes a wide range of projects that enhance the special landscape and wildlife value of the Stour Valley by improving river habitats for fish, invertebrates and aquatic plants. Projects include river habitat enhancement and riverside tree planting projects as well as work to control invasive non-native species in the Stour catchment. These projects are undertaken in close collaboration with local people, volunteers, communities, businesses, local landowners and managers. River habitat enhancements and further improvements in river water quality contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the special qualities of the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley for people and wildlife.

Will Akast, Catchment Delivery Manager – Suffolk, Environment Agency



For more information on these two projects please contact the River Stour Project Officer Alex Moore da Luz on Alex.MooreDaLuz@suffolk.gov.uk

River Stour 500 Trees

Riverside tree planting is well underway for the River Stour 500 Trees project. We are delighted to be working in partnership with the Environment Agency to plant over 500 riparian trees on the rivers Stour, Brett and Box. The project has been made possible due to a grant of £3,500 awarded by Essex and Suffolk Water through their Branch Out Fund.

Interest in the project from landowners has been fantastic, resulting in over 20 sites on which trees will be planted. Numerous volunteers are helping to plant the trees including children from three local primary schools – Wells Hall Primary, Hintlesham and Chattisham Primary, and Bildeston Primary. Seventeen different species of broadleaved trees native to Essex and Suffolk are being planted including the black poplar which is the UK's rarest native timber tree.

The results of the River Stour Enhancement Project's Walkover Surveys (completed in 2015) have shown that the target areas for tree planting suffer from high levels of inadequate tree shading (less than 30%). This is detrimental to fish and other riverine species, particularly in the summer months when river temperatures are rising to levels that are stressful for them.

The planting of riparian trees will help to benefit the ecology of the River Stour and its tributaries in numerous ways and add to the quality of the nationally protected AONB. It will help to increase levels of leaf litter and woody debris which are so important in providing energy to the flow of the river and increasing the diversity of habitats. Tree planting will also help to improve water quality by contributing to the reduction of sediment and pollutants entering the river. In those locations that require it, river banks will be fenced off to protect newly-planted trees from grazing. This will bring added benefits such as enabling bankside vegetation to naturally regenerate and help prevent the negative impacts of livestock poaching.

Alex Moore da Luz, River Stour Project Officer

Far left: Stour Valley Volunteers and Environment Agency staff enhancing river habitats for fish and invertebrates in the upper Stour. Left: Volunteer Officer Danny Thorrington planting trees at Withindale Mill in Long Melford.

Volunteering goes from strength to strength

With so many opportunities now to get involved in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project's work it's no wonder our volunteer numbers have increased. 2016 was a record year for volunteer involvement, with over 1,000 volunteer days roughly equating to £50,000.

The Stour Valley Volunteers regularly undertake practical conservation work to help conserve and enhance the landscape, increase biodiversity, and improve access. Last year 35 tasks were undertaken. With over 20 volunteers regularly involved we now have a waiting list for new volunteers.

We have Promoted Route Volunteers who survey and report problems on either a section of the 60 mile Stour Valley Path or

one of the six walks off the Stour Valley Path twice a year. With more walks being created there will be more opportunities for others to be involved.

The Constable Country Volunteer Rangers, which was run as a pilot project last year, was so successful that it is now an established group. This is wonderful as they help keep Constable Country looking great and engage with visitors about the local area so improving their experience. Their role is being expanded to include a more practical element which will involve things such as footpath maintenance and sign cleaning. This will help keep the paths safe and accessible for all to enjoy.

The Dedham Vale Youth Rangers (now regularly numbering eight)

enjoy the monthly practical conservation tasks. It was great to see them being praised by walkers along the Flatford to Manningtree footpath as they cleared back scrub to widen the footpath. Involving young people in conservation is so important. It's wonderful that the team has been able to offer a graduate work placement opportunity and other work experience opportunities for local schools and colleges.

Volunteers also help on guided walks, events such as the Flatford Nature Days, and at our annual Forum. Some of our smaller scale funded projects, such as the Scattered Orchard Project and Pollinator Patches, could not have been achieved without the support of volunteers who have surveyed sites, delivered trees and plants and supported community groups in the planting out.

We're always looking for innovative projects to conserve and enhance our outstanding landscape for future generations to enjoy. There will always be new volunteer opportunities so keep a look out on our website for more details.

Emma Black, Countryside Project Officer

Left: Dedham Vale Youth Rangers showing off their new dead hedge at Flatford. Below: Youth Rangers cutting back scrub from the Flatford to Manningtree footpath.



Photos by Emma Black



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Steeple Bumpstead Wildlife and Environment Group

Our group was formed just over a year ago, following a hedge laying course run for the village Scouts and including other interested villagers. Since then we have had a variety of tasks and activities.

We've had a moth night, been badger watching, made apple juice from village apples, listened to a dawn chorus, foraged for fungi, visited a nature reserve and had an evening talk with a speaker from Essex Wildlife Trust. We have built and distributed seventeen hedgehog boxes, maintained some areas to allow bee orchids and other plants to flower and set seed before we've cut and raked them.

We've also assisted the Scouts in planting and maintaining a new hedge on the green space known as Camping Close (our playing fields), which we hope to lay in future years. The Stour Valley Volunteers joined us for a day, and vastly improved the river walk in the centre of the village. And we have taken delivery of half a dozen fruit trees as part of the Scattered Orchard Project, with one of us funded to attend the tree pruning course.

Check out our facebook page: www.facebook.com/sbweg

Dominique Wallace



Steeple Bumpstead at work, constructing a hedgehog box; and below, making hay while the sun shines.



Photo by Simon Perry

Photo by Dominique Wallace

Foxearth Volunteer Appeal

Foxearth Stour Meadows is a 4.18 hectare site purchased in February 2015 by A Rocha UK, a Christian charity working for the protection and restoration of the natural world. We now have a unique opportunity to develop a wetland nature reserve in an area of intensively managed farmland (and former gravel extraction) on the Essex/Suffolk border. The nature conservation efforts at Foxearth, whilst benefitting a wide range of native wildlife, will focus on the creation and maintenance of habitats suitable for dragonflies and damselflies. To date, 21 species of these insects have been recorded on the site including a recent colonist in England, the willow emerald damselfly.

So far we have secured planning permission for a small car park at the reserve entrance, laid a roadside hedge, reopened the public footpath across the reserve, cut further paths to access the series of ponds, restored and opened up some of the ponds and removed balsam. Mowing and grazing of marshy and drier neglected grassland is planned, along with scrub control.

To realise our vision for Foxearth we are in need of a regular band of volunteers to carry on with practical conservation work.

If you would like to help please contact the reserve manager, Mark Prina on 07548 209652 or email: mark.prina@arocha.org

Open day on 13th May

The official opening of A Rocha UK's Foxearth Meadows reserve will be held on Saturday 13th May 2017 from 12pm-4pm. Visitors will be able to view the only reserve in Britain managed primarily for dragonflies and damselflies. A quiz trail, pond dipping and aquaculture, bird ringing, guided walks, wild art workshop, moth and small mammal trapping, wood carving – even model dragonfly making – are among activities planned. Foxearth Meadows Nature Reserve, Foxearth, near Sudbury, Essex CO10. Grid reference: TL 8331 4598

Foxearth Stour Meadows needs volunteers!



COMMUNITIES AT WORK IN THE STOUR VALLEY



Photo supplied by Roger Finbow

Higham's medieval church, with the South door giving views of the Stour Valley as Constable would have seen it.

New life for old church

The village of Higham, on the Suffolk/Essex border, has no village hall, public house or shop – but the development of new facilities at the medieval church of St Mary will enable it to be used for community activities.

From the banks of the rivers Stour and Brett, just below St Mary's church, Higham, John Constable drew *Hyam Church, Suffolk*. A copy of his drawing (only rediscovered in 2007 in the British Library) hangs in the vestry.

Now, thanks to funding and renovation works, that view is visible from the church. Skilful conversion of the space at the base of the tower has enabled the installation of a cloakroom and servery, and the opening up of the south door allows light to flood in and create much-needed disabled access. The oak frame of the new door was specially designed by the architect to reflect the stone tracery around the East window above the altar, and

the water meadows can be viewed through its glass panels.

The work has been made possible by grants from the Cory Environmental Trust in Britain, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust, the Ganzoni Trust, the Leslie Carter Trust and the Diocesan Centenary Fund, and by the generous donations of many individual members of the local community.

The Rector, Reverend Rosalind Paul, says, "We are delighted to have achieved a long-held ambition to create a space for the whole community to use. In a small village such as ours, it is important that the church should be able to provide a facility that benefits everyone. Members of the Parochial Church Council are to be congratulated on having the foresight and determination to bring this beautiful little church back into its rightful place at the centre of village life."



Valley Farm pond clean up

After a lot of research carried out with the assistance of field tutors, the RSPB and ecological experts, the Field Studies Council at Flatford Mill have been assisted by volunteers and funding from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund to help redevelop the pond at Valley Farm. The pond was in a very poor condition, overgrown, filled with mud and not really accessible to wildlife or students! The work carried out stopped it from leaking whilst encouraging an increased range of freshwater invertebrates and wildlife. The pond has improved access and platforms to enable more ecology students to learn about the natural world.

The volunteers will also reinstate appropriate plants to encourage wildlife back to the area. Once the work is complete, the area will be left to recover and then children and adult learners from Flatford Mill Field Studies Centre will be able to apply their field skills to identify and study various species that will make full use of the natural habitat.

John Blair, Head of Centre, Field Studies Council Flatford Mill



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Exploring Constable Country and the Stour Valley



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Bill Jenman – Project Officer

Cathy Smith – Communications, Funding & Development Officer

Emma Black – Countryside Project Officer Dedham Vale

Lucy Oldham – Partnership Officer

Lynn Allen – Countryside Project Officer Suffolk Coast & Heaths

Matt Jones – Suffolk Estuaries Officer

Neil Lister – Countryside Project Officer Dedham Vale/Suffolk

Coast & Heaths

Paula Booth – AONB Officer

Richard Brockman – Project Support Officer

Danny Thorrington – Voluntary Officer

Sam Weir – Graduate Volunteer Placement

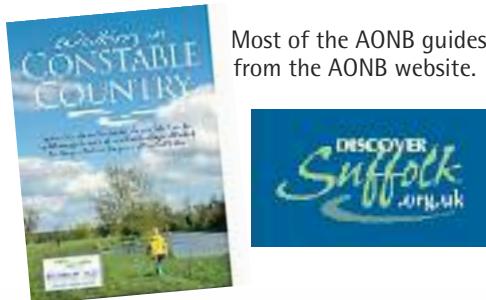
Edited by Cathy Shelbourne, Sea Shell Communications

www.seashellcommunications.co.uk

Four new walking guides join the 'family' of guides produced by the AONB team to encourage people to explore Constable Country and all along the Stour Valley. The area is fantastic at all times of year, and experiencing the changing seasons and discovering different landscapes and villages are more than enough reason to return again and again.

Explore Dedham, Flatford, East Bergholt, Stratford St. Mary and Langham with the Walking in Constable Country guide – thanks to Discover Suffolk for supporting this guide! Or take a little more time to visit Dedham, Nayland and Stoke by Nayland with the other three.

Most of the AONB guides are free to download from the AONB website.



Also available to help you explore the area (and perhaps get ready to join in the Suffolk Walking Festival challenge walk in June) is the Stour Valley Path guide. This footpath guide, sponsored by Suffolk Cottage Holidays, details the full length of the 60+ miles from the Upper Stour to Manningtree, divided up into ten sections. It is free to download or the full Guide Pack costs £5 from the AONB or selected shops in the valley.

If cycling is your preferred outdoor experience, then we also have seven Cycling Through a Masterpiece guides exploring the full length of the Stour Valley, free to download. They range in distance from about 10 to 20 miles, with some short cuts for a more leisurely ride or can be joined together to take you further.



Make 2017 your year to Explore the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley! You'll feel healthier and you'll open your eyes to our Outstanding Landscape!



Celebrating our Outstanding Landscapes

Every year the National Association of Areas of Outstanding Landscapes (NAAONB) holds a week of events nationwide. This year it will be Saturday 16th – Sunday 24th September.

