

HELPING PROTECT & SUPPORT THE OTTER VALLEY

OTTER LIFE

Winter 2026
£1.00 (free to members)

SEWAGE SPILLS

How they are affecting the River Otter

LOCAL HERITAGE

Our Maritime Trading Heritage on the River Otter

HEALTHIER LIVING

Outdoor walks & pollution-free



Contents

Our Maritime Trading Heritage on the River Otter	03
Q and A with David R. White	07
The Natural World of the Otter Valley	09
Sewage Spills affecting the River Otter	11
The Housing Dilemma & the EDDC Local Plan	18
Recent wildlife news from the Otter Estuary Nature Reserve	21
Healthier Living: Outdoor walks & going pollution-free	23
What's On - Walks and Events	25



Otter Life Magazine

Produced by the Otter Valley Association
Editor: Chris Boorman
Subscriptions: Martin Smith
Distributor: Heather Fereday
Cover Photo: "A touch of Frost" by Geoff Porter



OVA, PO Box 70, Budleigh Salterton, EX9 6WN

Reg. Charity No. 278266

info@ova.org.uk

www.ova.org.uk

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ottervalleyassociation>

Welcome

Welcome to another edition of the OVA printed magazine.

Your committee have had extensive discussions of how we can best communicate with our members. At present we have a monthly e-newsletter which goes to those members who have given an email address, together with a quarterly A5-size news, which goes to all members to fulfil our obligations to keep all of you informed. Many of these quarterly issues are delivered locally by volunteers, but quite a large number have to be posted – and postage charges have increased and are still rising.

Our desired objective was to continue with the monthly e-newsletter to keep active members up to date, and to change to an A4 magazine twice a year (Spring and Autumn), which would not only go to all members, but would be available at local shops and in doctor/dentist waiting rooms etc. to improve our 'public image'. We also sought a new editor for the magazine, to spread the volunteer workload and bring fresh ideas. The Trustees have met with a potential new editor. We shared a lot of interesting ideas, but in the end agreed to part amicably. So, your vice-chairman and present editor, Chris Boorman, has stepped up and produced this attractive A5 "Otter Life" as a first step on the road to improvement. I anticipate that another issue may be out before the end of May, in time for the AGM, (see page 29), but this depends on how busy Chris is and whether we manage to recruit a new magazine editor.

Our long-term aim is to move all our communication online, so if you have an email address but have not yet sent it to us, please send to info@ova.org.uk as soon as convenient. We don't want you left out in the cold! Meanwhile, enjoy reading this issue, with some important happenings in both Planning and River Water Quality, and I'll see you at a talk, or out and about in our wonderful countryside.

Haylor Lass
Chairman, Otter Valley Association



From the **OVA**pedia Archives

OVApedia is a free online catalogue of historical articles available on the OVA website.



Henry II of England married Eleanor of Aquitaine on 18 May 1152

Our Maritime Trading Heritage on the River Otter

Credit G Millington edited by Maria Malinowska

At the Domesday Survey, (East) Budleigh was held by the King and Otterton, with Sidmouth, by the Abbot of Mont St. Michel, Normandy. In 1125 King Henry I granted much of Budleigh Manor to the Abbey.

The Abbot now had control of the whole of the Otter Estuary. Thirty-two years later (1157) Otterton Priory has a Prior appointed - Robert (Calendar Documents, France). The Abbot then had a small community of monks and a prior to manage and develop the Manor lands and harbour facilities in the Otter and Sid Estuaries.

No doubt the Abbey officials encouraged trade, especially with France. With Henry II's marriage to Eleanor in 1152 brought Aquitaine to the English Crown and trade was encouraged with Bordeaux - importing wine etc. By the 1300's vessels from the Ottermouth and Sidmouth are shipping in wine to the merchants there.

No bridge existed from (East) Budleigh to Otterton and it was not fordable. A ferry probably existed, remembered in the name of a field on the hill – Firry Anchor. While anchorages above the Otter Estuary were silting up during the Middle Ages, maritime activity in the Sid Estuary was increasing.

The Exon Domesday Survey lists a market on the Lords Day for Otterton, each Sunday. By 1214, Sidmouth had a Charter establishing a market. The markets would have been dealing with many commodities besides fish.

The *Famine* of 1315-1322

During 1315 England suffered torrential rain and widespread flooding in Spring and Autumn causing a terrible famine through failed harvests. The price of grain soared. It was the worst recorded famine in European history and lasted to 1322.

The Customs Accounts of the Port of Exeter 1266/1321 reveal the large quantities of commodities imported into the ports of the River Exe, westwards to the River Teign and eastwards to the River Axe, Ottermouth and Sidmouth included.

Between 1296 and 1321 there were ten landings from Ottermouth vessels and 27 from Sidmouth vessels.



The Devon Page from the Domesday Book, Credit Open Domesday

The *vessels*



Model of a cog (about 1380), National Maritime Museum

These Ottermouth landings were made by three boats:- Le Godyer; La Margarete and Le Welyfor. La Margarete's master was Stephen Crabbe. Her cargo was wheat - on 4th March 1318, 40 quarters and on 27th April, 80 quarters.

The earlier cargo included figs, raisins, garlic, onions and oil. Both trips carried commodities for the wool and cloth trade - weld, potash woad, alum, canvas, also cloth from Rouen. In June 1321 she carried mainly wheat and woad.

She was probably a medieval barge of 50 to 100 tons, of shallow draft, with a single mast, square sail and propelled by sweeps. Le Godyer, a similar vessel, made six journeys. Her master was Nicholas Hok or Holt of Budleigh. Her cargo included wheat and the commodities already listed plus almonds, licorice, and cumin. On 28th August 1318 she carried 120 quarters of coal. The Welfor, whose master was Robert Bowey of Budleigh, was carrying iron and may have been a larger vessel probably an early cog. Cogs were the “bulk carriers” of their day and capable of carrying 100/150 tons of cargo, with a crew of 10/20 men. T

he early cogs were some 90ft long, 24ft. wide, and 9ft. draft with a single mast and square rig sail. Sweeps were also used. There was usually a forecastle and aftercastle which made them easily adaptable for sea warfare – hence the call to take them out of trade for military use. They had a large capacity and were easy to handle. During the 14th century their design increased in size and took on the appearance of a caraval which later succeeded them, with as many as three or four masts and lateen sails.

Local Merchants

The Customs Accounts show the Sid as a deep water port able to take vessels as large as a heavily laden cog. Two cogs are named – La Godyer or Bon An (Good year) and Seynt Gylys (St.Giles) between 1296 and 1321, with owners, John Irysh and Ralph Le Sangere, both of Sidmouth. Sometimes they discharged their cargo at Topsham or Exmouth, and usually carried wine between 35 and 116 tuns (ie 8,800 and 29,000 gallons) plus coal, iron and provisions on ten voyages. Other smaller vessels were trading out of Sidmouth.

From the large number of importers/merchants named in these Accounts it is evident that they were using vessels from all the ports in the Exeter area for delivery at any port. The Prior of Otterton is importing wine using the Bon An of Sidmouth for delivery there in 1299. Only Nicholas Holt and John Lukeys (Lucas) among the many merchants named were importing into their home port, Ottermouth.





VOLUNTEER

WE NEED YOU!

Passionate about where you live? Why not help preserve it? We're looking for volunteers to joins us and make a real impact together.



Events Organiser

To help arrange OVA talks and events; To organise OVA into partner events



Budleigh Salterton Rep

To promote the OVA into Budleigh Salterton, and to feedback local issues to the OVA



Editor

To produce our "Otter Life" magazine and help with social media promotions



Vice-chairman

To help drive engagement across our campaigning groups and operational teams



Get in Touch



Campaigners

To help drive our campaigns across our different focus areas

info@ova.org.uk

Q&A

With David R. White

A lifetime's Fascination with the *Natural World* around us



We sat down with local naturalist / photographer David White to learn a little more about his passion for photographing the natural world around us.

Q

When did your love of wildlife & photography begin?

I grew up in the countryside near the southern edge of the Cotswold escarpment. It was here that I gained my lifelong interest in the natural world. This eventually developed into photographing what I saw and then sharing those images with others who had, or encouraged to develop, similar interests.

Back in the 1950's I innocently collected wild bird eggs because I didn't know any better. It was a popular hobby among the village lads. We never looked for bird nests, but always the habitats and locations where birds were likely to nest.

Many decades have now passed without me intentionally finding any birds nests. However, I do use the knowledge I gained at that time to seek out areas where I might find birds which would be interesting to photograph.

I am self-taught. My guiding principle is to try to be very observant and allow nature to be my teacher.

Q

What is your advice to budding photographers?

Photographing wildlife is not easy. The key reason is in the name. "Wild" means easily startled, shy and wary. Most wildlife species are potential prey items, and their primary priority is not to become "dish of the day"! Potential predators include foxes, badgers, stoats, weasels, otters, mink, buzzards, hawks and falcons too. Even cats and dogs (for ground nesting birds) and people with guns. In addition, there is likely to be an order of dominance (the pecking order in birds). There is the real risk of being bullied by more confident individuals or having your food stolen.

It's vital a photographer is never seen as a threat. Being wary, they move fast and can be difficult to get in focus. Many show a preference for dense cover or shade. They won't let you get close enough to them. In addition, the light may be frequently changing.

All this confirms that good shots need patience, practice and good luck. You also need to know how to use your camera effectively in a wide range of different weather conditions. It becomes vital you control what you can!



Large Red Damselfly
Credit: David R. White

Q

How do you add interest to a wildlife photograph?

I started with first aiming to capture pleasing portrait shots. So colour and plumage – especially in the birds breeding season – are worth aiming to capture.

I always aim for sharp eye focus and with catchlight in the eye. I think this gives “life” to the subject. Consider will it look sideways or towards you? If it looks away, I ignore that shot. The background has two options. Either:

- a blurred background which makes the subject stand out - this seems to be preferred by most people new to the hobby, or still developing their skills.
- or include the background to show the subject its habitat. This option is frequently preferred by more experienced people. This needs considerable care to avoid clutter in the foreground or background which can easily detract attention from the subject.

Once I felt comfortable with most of my portrait shots I next aimed to try and capture some natural behaviours. This might include feeding, hunting, singing or calling, courtship, bathing or wading. Consider too birds in flight and reflections. Note that birds in flight are a real challenge. My experience suggests any natural behaviours trumps a pleasing portrait almost every time.

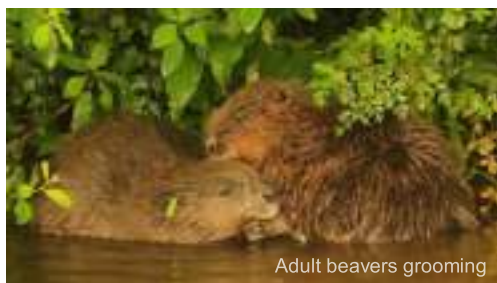
At this stage, on my own journey, I chose someone whose wildlife photos I really enjoyed looking at. I set myself the challenge to eventually achieve at least 1 per 100 of my shots to match that quality. It took me a long time. Eventually 2, 3, 5 or even 10 per 100 were a match in my mind. I then knew that I was making real progress.

In summary:

To take an interesting wildlife shot, consider the light, the story the image will tell, the pose and the background. It will require you to use the four “P’s”:

Passion, **P**atience, **P**erseverance and **P**ractice

The *Natural World* of the Otter Valley





Pair of red damselflies



Well grown Cygnets



Female blackbird enjoying ivy berries



Family of Polecats



Sewage Spills *affecting* the River Otter

The River Otter, which should epitomise England's ecologically rich and diverse river habitats, is now classified by the Environment Agency as having "Poor Ecological Status"—placing it among the worst 20% of UK rivers. The ORCA Programme, launched by the Otter Valley Association, aims to restore the river and its tributaries to "Moderate or Good" ecological status by 2030 through scientific monitoring and community action.



***Community* Monitoring**

Over 50 local ORCA volunteers have been testing 12 locations affecting the Otter catchment, every two weeks since the end of March 2025. This program provides by far the largest dataset on River Otter water quality. The first nine months (18 test cycles) has revealed that Phosphate pollution is the river's most serious problem.

The ORCA campaign is based on the insight derived from this data, and without the dedication of all our testers, none of this would be possible.

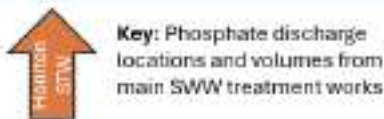
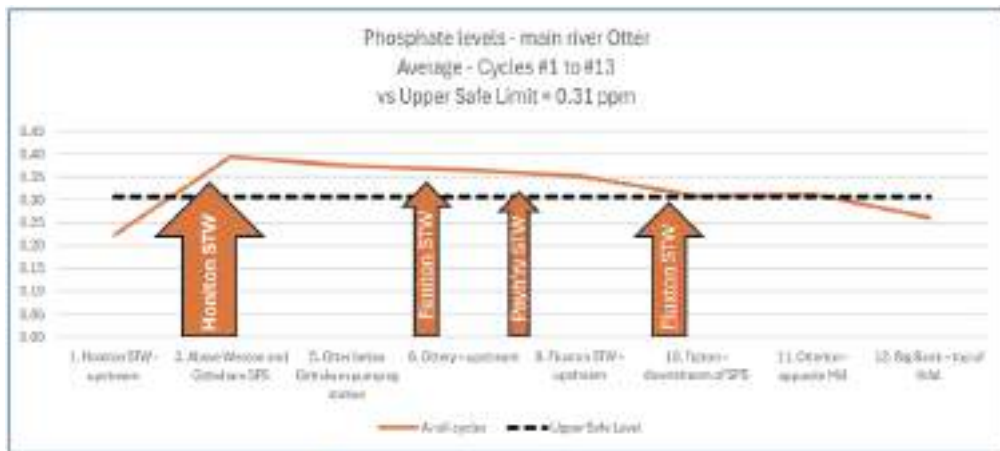
At a glance ...

- ORCA test data shows phosphate levels above safe level, and doubling below Honiton sewage works. Approx 70% of the Middle and Lower Otter's total phosphate is from sewage works treated effluent.
- Clear evidence of environmental harm captured by ORCA test teams
- In series of joint meetings with OVA/ORCA and Richard Foord MP, South West Water (SWW) finally committed to a limited program of improvements to reduce untreated sewage discharges - but only after public outcry. Far more action required.
- CEO Susan Davy publicly commits SWW to "reduce untreated discharges to no more than 20pa average", and "to reduce phosphate in treated effluent", by 2030. However, SWW also confirmed that they have NO current schemes to remove any Phosphorous from treated effluent by 2030. OVA/ORCA will hold SWW to their public commitments.
- Honiton treatment works, the source of half the phosphate from all sewage works, has been in breach of its permit condition on phosphate for three of the last six months.
- SWW state that a Phosphate reduction scheme had been proposed for Honiton STW, which would have removed 35% of all SWW-sourced Phosphate before 2030, "but in discussion with the Environment Agency it had been removed from 2025-2030 plan"
- EDDC commissioned a 'Water Cycle Study' that shows Honiton treatment works (largest on the river) is already operating at 40% above capacity – which is why so many discharges into the river occur. This is projected to rise to **73% over capacity** when future building plans are taken into account.
- Chair of EDDC's Strategic Planning Committee commits to reject further planning applications in Honiton "until SWW deliver sufficient treatment capacity".



Phosphate. The **CENTRAL** issue

The ORCA test data shows average phosphate concentrations double immediately below Honiton Sewage Treatment Works (STW), the largest STW on the river, and remain above safe limits downstream as far as Tipton.



Permitted levels of **Phosphate in treated effluent (the primary source of Phosphate in the river)** from Honiton STW, are over three times higher than that recommended for discharging into a river already designated as 'UWWTR - Sensitive Area (Eutrophic)'.



Honiton, July 2025



Dotton, April 2025



Tipton, July 2025



Ottery, May 2025

High phosphate levels cause algal blooms, blanket weed and filamentous algae, promoting eutrophication and decreased oxygen levels in the water. This pattern leads to severe consequences for plant life, wildlife and fish populations.

Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) and the Westcountry Rivers Trust (WRT) have sampled many of the key catchments in the southwest, and their 2024 data show **the Otter's phosphate levels are at least twice as high as any other South West river which they surveyed.**



Pollution *sources* in **the Otter**

ORCA sampling data supports the latest Environment Agency modelling (source: 'National Forward Runs Project 2024', which shows:

- Above Honiton: 75% of phosphate comes from agriculture.
- Below Honiton: higher Phosphate concentration, of which **70% comes from South West Water (SWW) sewage works** —both untreated overflows and treated effluent.

Honiton treatment works is the source of half of the phosphate from sewage works, and **has been in breach of its permit condition on phosphate for three of the last six months** (source: *SWW monthly reporting data*).

ORCA in the news

#ReviveTheRiverOtter



ORCA's primary methodology is to collect and analyse data which identifies the scale and source of pollution in the Otter catchment. It is sometimes necessary however to work with news organisations and social media to present that information and story to the public.

“ It’s a sad fact that sometimes only the pressure applied by **public sentiment** and voices drives big business to take issues seriously and do the right thing. ”

Engagement and ...

SWW Response

ORCA and local MP Richard Foord have met twice with SWW and the Environment Agency (EA). While SWW initially stated no investment was planned before 2030, public pressure and media coverage—including BBC and local press—have since prompted commitments from Susan Davy, CEO of SWW, to “tackle storm overflows spilling more than 20 times per year” and to “lower phosphate in treated discharges” by 2030.

Although **SWW have now provided an initial schedule of works to limit some of the worst untreated discharge locations**, SWW also confirmed the **no phosphate-reduction schemes are currently planned before 2030, directly contradicting SWW’s public rebuttals to the press and media in July.**

During the meeting on 20th October, SWW stated that **a comprehensive Phosphate reduction scheme had been proposed for Honiton STW**, which would have removed 35% of all SWW-sourced Phosphate before 2030, **“but in discussion with the Environment Agency it had been removed from 2025-2030 plan”.**

East Devon District Council’s (EDDC) ‘Water Cycle Study’, November 2025

In this key report, commissioned as part of the East Devon Local Plan to identify constraints that may limit planned housing growth, we find that:

- Honiton has the second highest number of wastewater vulnerability indicators and is **already exceeding its treatment capacity by 40%** - and that’s just in dry-weather.
- Three of the regions four RED-status sewage works discharge directly into the River Otter.
- Honiton is projected to see the largest proportional increase in housing in the region, with 838 new homes, with significant growth also planned for Fluxton and Feniton.
- To accommodate the planned development, **Honiton will require a 73% increase in treatment capacity** (the greatest deficit in the region); and Fluxton and Feniton will require 25% and 20% respectively.

The study therefore concludes: **No additional housing load should be applied to the key Honiton, Feniton, and Fluxton catchments, without first addressing the clear deficits in treatment capacity and phosphate removal.**

Referencing OVA/ORCA's presentation to the council, **Chair of EDDC's Strategic Planning Committee** reiterated this commitment at the council meeting on 25th November. "As I said to the gentleman from the Otter Valley Association ... **the evidence shows that the Honiton works are not coping and is well over capacity**. We need to talk to SWW and understand the timing of when they are going to be expanding that plant's capacity. If the answer is "not soon enough" then **development in that catchment will be delayed until that investment is made**".

A further round of public consultation on the East Devon Local Plan is currently running, ending on 26th January 2026. Please **add your voice to request adequate sewage infrastructure is in place before further housing is approved**.

2026 *Focus*

- Continue bi-monthly water testing and begin biological surveys (Riverfly Programme) to provide an irrefutable evidence base.
- Maintain public pressure on SWW and EA to **deliver SWWs public commitments to "limit untreated discharges to less than 20 pa at any CSO", and to "lower phosphate in treated discharges by 2030"**
- Push for tighter phosphate discharge permits, especially at Honiton and Fluxton.
- Ask SWW and EA for details on why the proposed Honiton Phosphate-removal scheme was removed from the 2025-2030 plan, and request that this scheme be re-instated
- **Leverage EDDCs commitment to reject further housing applications** in Honiton area, to pressure SWW into expanding Honiton treatment capacity and installing the highest levels of phosphate removal
- Highlight the need for upgraded sewage capacity in areas of housing growth, particularly Honiton and Payhembury where SWW identified as 'approaching capacity limit' in 2023

Summary

Scientific evidence from the ORCA Programme supports the Environment Agency view that **sewage discharges—especially from Honiton STW—are the primary cause of phosphate pollution in the River Otter**, threatening wildlife and the broader river ecosystem. The community-led effort is driving accountability and pushing for urgent action from South West Water and regulators to **significantly reduce untreated discharges and the amount of Phosphate discharged into the Otter from sewage works by 2030**, and restore the health of this vital Devon river.

The Housing Dilemma & the EDDC *Local Plan*

There are always many applications going through the planning process in relation to housing development. The Otter Valley Association monitors such applications and will object to proposals that are not sustainable or in line with national and local policies. We know that development, particularly for social and affordable housing, is required. However, we will use our voice to campaign for development that is sustainable and has the necessary infrastructure. We are also concerned about plans to develop on, or alongside, National Landscapes which we believe should be reserved for the natural environment.

People Growth in East Devon:

It is important to understand the growth projections that are being made for East Devon. East Devon projections⁽¹⁾ suggest a growth of 33,200 people by 2042. This equates to a need for just over 17,000 new homes. The local plan calls for the building of 20,909 homes which is 3,900 over the population growth estimates. This suggests that the housing plans are allowing a significant buffer.

Source (1): <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/ojafpln0/hou-002-rev-east-devon-local-housing-needs-assessment-2025.pdf>

Affordable (and Social) Housing:

The creation of both affordable AND social housing is clearly needed. Social housing, which used to be called Council housing, is still required for those who cannot afford the 'affordable housing'. When looking at the affordable housing estimates, the overall need for East Devon would comprise a total of 11,324 households over the 22-year period 2020-2042, which is equivalent to an average of 515 households per annum. This indicates that almost 1/2 of the demand from now to 2042 is in the 'affordable housing' category.

It is concerning that the requirement for Affordable housing has been reduced from 50% to 35% which equates to only 4,477 (of the planned 20,909 homes). In addition, with an above average older population, more smaller and adapted homes are required for the elderly. Further many more small homes are also required for first time buyers, who are often priced out of the market.

The protection of National Landscapes:

It is our opinion that building new housing developments within the National Landscapes in East Devon is both deeply inappropriate and potentially contrary to national planning policy. These areas are protected for their exceptional natural beauty, biodiversity, and cultural value. Page 222 of the Local Plan Strategic (Policy OL02) states strongly that “the highest level of protection will be given to the landscape and scenic beauty of the National Landscapes (NLs) in East Devon”.

The Otter Valley Association therefore objects to the extensive use of National Landscapes as land for property developments within the plan since they risk causing irreversible harm to cherished landscapes, damaging wildlife habitats, and eroding the rural character that these designations exist to safeguard. It is surprising just how many developments are planned within our National Landscapes:

- EXMO 17: Inside the NL boundary.
- HONI 07 and HONI 13: smaller developments but inside the NL boundary.
- SIDM 01 : 160 new homes - inside the NL boundary.
- Two other smaller SIDM plots - within the NL boundary.
- BudL_02: 35 new homes at Barn Lane, inside the NL boundary.
- Dunk_05: 43 new homes inside NL boundary.
- SD16: 16 new homes at East Budleigh - inside the NL boundary.
- Newt_04 and NEWT_05: 20 new homes at each location at Newton Pop, inside the NL boundary.
- Otto_01: 10 new homes at Otterton (Behind Hayes), inside the NL boundary.

Infrastructure timing versus the plan:

Large-scale housing development across East Devon raise serious concerns about the underlying infrastructure of the region. Roads are already congested, public transport is limited, sewage capabilities are stretched and essential services such as GP surgeries and some schools are struggling to meet existing demand.

It is our opinion that the local plan is very weak on requiring the availability of services in sync with development of new homes. As an example, page 46 of the Local Plan states: "***Delivery of services shall be co-ordinated with providers to ensure that adequate capacity can be provided to service future phases/parcels without the need for retrofitting***". This 'requirement' could be a lot stronger and more specific since adding thousands of new homes without first delivering substantial infrastructure upgrades will only intensify problems. The recent focus on sewage infrastructure in advance of building permission by EDDC is an example of how these other infrastructure challenges may be handled.

Road quality

Additional large-scale housing development in East Devon would place even greater pressure on an already strained road network. Many routes in the area are extremely narrow – requiring careful navigation and passing places. Adding hundreds, or thousands, of new car-dependent households would inevitably increase congestion. Without significant investment in transport infrastructure, extra housing would translate directly into more delays for residents, commuters, and local businesses.

Doctors, Dentists & Schools

Additional housing in East Devon would inevitably increase pressure on essential public services, particularly doctors' surgeries and many local schools. Many GP practices in the area already face long waiting times and limited appointment availability, and adding hundreds (if not thousands) of new residents would stretch those resources even further. Without significant investment in new facilities, more housing would deepen the strain on services that are already struggling to keep pace with demand.

Sewage Wastewater infrastructure:

South West Water is already struggling to meet the demands of existing housing across East Devon, and the situation makes it clear that any further large-scale development would only worsen the problem. Towns such as Exmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Honiton are experiencing regular sewage overflows and pollution incidents, with ageing infrastructure unable to cope even under current conditions. When wastewater systems are already breaching capacity and harming local rivers, beaches and ecosystems, it is unrealistic to assume they could absorb the additional pressure created by thousands more homes. Until these failures are resolved and the network is demonstrably fit for purpose, expanding housing numbers will risk compounding an already unacceptable situation.

Summary:

It is the considered view of the Otter Valley Association that the emerging East Devon Local Plan (2020 – 2042) for building 20,909 new homes in the next 20 years has significant issues including the lack of truly social housing, the extensive utilisation of National Landscape land, and the lack of investment committed to relevant infrastructure and services.



The Otter Valley Association **objects** to so many housing sites in National Landscapes; and insufficiently strong policies to ensure that the necessary infrastructure and relevant services are provided.



Without this, we believe that if approved it will cause **irreparable harm** to the natural beauty of the environment and the **well-being** of the community that lives here.

Recent wildlife *news* from the Otter Estuary Nature Reserve

We asked Rick Lockwood, Otter Estuary Ranger, for an update on what has been seen recently on the Otter Estuary Nature Reserve ...

Highlights during September included a **Baird's Sandpiper** on the 20th-21st, a North American wader and a first for the site. There were several **glossy ibis** records early in the month, including a flock of 7, a **marsh harrier** briefly on the 22nd, and the juvenile **osprey** seen daily through September, finally departed on the 5th October.

October began with a **Caspian gull** on the 2nd, and other highlights included a **great egret** on the 17th-18th, and several **cattle egret** through the month, including 7 on the 11th. Counts of **black-tailed godwit** reached 39 and other waders included around 10 **common redshank** and a single **spotted redshank**. Duck numbers continued to build as many **teal** and **wigeon** arrived, and other duck species included **pintail**, **gadwall**, and up to 7 goosander. Cormorant numbers reached an impressive 39. By the month's end **starlings** were roosting in reasonable numbers with around 500 on the 26th and a few **redwing** had started to arrive.

In November the rare bird of the month award went to a **pallid swift**, found by Chris Townend on 12th-13th and subsequently seen over Budleigh and the estuary by a few lucky individuals. Usually found in southern Europe, this individual arrived as part of a mini-influx of birds pushed north by strong southerly winds.



Osprey in flight
Credit: Chris Boorman

A juvenile **spoonbill** on several dates, and a drake shoveler early in the month were also nice. A fly-through **marsh harrier** on the 5th spooked all the wildfowl enabling a record count of 754 **teal**. A German-ringed **Caspian gull** on the 22nd was interesting. Up to 7 **cattle egret** were notable. Peak monthly counts for wading birds were up to 62 **black-tailed godwit**, 10 **dunlin**, 6 **oystercatcher**, 12 **curlew**, with single **grey plover** and **common sandpiper**.

December brought another new bird for the reserve when a **slavonian grebe** was found on the 27th, continuing to be seen into the first week of January. The two immature **spoonbill** that arrived on the 10th also hung around for the rest of the month. An unseasonal **little stint** from the 28th was also notable. Good numbers of **black-tailed godwit** remained through the month with a high count of 62 on the 2nd. **Redshank** numbers peaked at 27 on the 11th.



Cattle Egrets in flight
Credit: David R. White

Other waders included single **spotted redshank**, **grey plover**, and a **common sandpiper**. Cold weather movements of **lapwing** included 10 on the 14th and 65 on the 27th. There were up to 6 **cattle egret** early in the month and at least one **water pipit** around Big Bank. **Shelduck** continued to increase with 31 on the 27th, and there were approximately 350 **teal** and 200 **wigeon** throughout the month.



Spoonbill
Credit: David R. White



Slavonian Grebe
Credit: Chris Townend

HEALTHIER LIVING

Outdoor walks & going pollution-free

Living a healthier life doesn't require dramatic reinventions—small, intentional choices can transform your wellbeing over time. One of the simplest and most powerful habits is getting outside for regular walks. Whether you wander along a coastal path, stroll through a local park, or take a gentle loop around your neighbourhood, outdoor walking strengthens your heart, boosts circulation, and supports joint health. Just as importantly, it lifts your mood, reduces stress, and reconnects you with the natural world. Even a short daily walk can sharpen your focus, improve sleep, and create a welcome pause from screens and indoor routines.

A healthier lifestyle also begins at home, and striving to be as “pollution free” as possible makes a meaningful difference. Many everyday household products—cleaning sprays, synthetic air fresheners, scented candles, and certain plastics—release chemicals that contribute to indoor pollution. Over time, these can irritate the lungs, trigger allergies, and reduce overall wellbeing. Choosing low-toxicity alternatives helps create a cleaner, safer living environment. Simple swaps such as using vinegar-based cleaners, opting for fragrance-free laundry products, choosing beeswax candles instead of paraffin, or replacing disposable plastics with glass or stainless steel all reduce chemical exposure and household waste. Opening windows regularly to improve ventilation is another easy step toward cleaner indoor air.

Nutrition plays a central role in living well. You don't need strict diets—just a focus on whole, nourishing foods. Fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, and lean proteins provide the nutrients your body needs to function at its best. Reducing ultra-processed foods, sugary snacks, and excessive alcohol can stabilise energy levels and support long-term health. Staying hydrated throughout the day helps digestion, concentration, and overall vitality.

Managing stress is equally important. Modern life can feel overwhelming, but small moments of calm make a real difference. Mindfulness practices—deep breathing, journaling, or simply stepping outside for a few quiet minutes—help reset your mind.

Nature is especially powerful here; green spaces have been shown to lower stress hormones and improve mental clarity. Even tending to a few plants at home can bring a sense of grounding.

Sleep is another pillar of wellbeing. Creating a consistent bedtime routine, reducing screen time before bed, and keeping your bedroom cool and dark can dramatically improve sleep quality. Good sleep supports immunity, mood, and cognitive function, making it one of the most valuable investments you can make in your health.

Finally, connection matters. Sharing a walk with a friend, joining a local group, or volunteering strengthens your sense of belonging and purpose. Social wellbeing is deeply intertwined with physical health, and nurturing relationships is a key part of living well.

A healthier life isn't about perfection—it's about choosing habits that support your body, mind, and environment. Walking outdoors, reducing household pollutants, eating nourishing foods, managing stress, sleeping well, and staying connected all work together to create a lifestyle that feels balanced, energising, and sustainable.



WHAT'S ON *walks*

Welcome to the OVA Walks Programme for February, March and April; our walk leaders have provided interesting walks locally on the Commons, along the coast and in the Otter and Exe Valleys as well as a few further away - thank you to all of them.

We are continuing our circular walks based on the Templer Way, with the final Stage 5. There is a later start time due to the tides - we will be walking from Newton Abbott Quay to finish at the New Quay Teignmouth.

You'll notice that as well as the usual "bring a flask" coffee stops, several walks include the optional extra of lunch venues at the end of the walk, a great way to continue socialising.

There may be further 'pop-up walks' offered during this quarter; these will be advertised on the various OVA media – so keep your eyes open.

Also, all walks are subject to change nearer the time, bearing in mind weather, time of year, etc – it is always worth checking the website which will always have the latest information. We try to also update Facebook and WhatsApp.

You will notice a format change to the walk descriptions in this magazine; there are full details of every walk, including the Walk Leader's contact details on the website: <https://www.ova.org.uk/ova-diary/category/walks>.

Everyone is welcome to join any of our walks. We would like to ask that if you have never been on a walk before, please do contact the walks leader beforehand and they can chat to you about the route, conditions and suitability.

We hope to see you at one or more walks as we explore this wonderful part of the country.

Paul Kurowski & the walks team



Thur Feb 5, 2026 @ 10:00am 5 miles, 3 hours

Walk to the Exe Estuary at Exton

A leisurely, mostly level, walk to Exton to view the estuary. We will stop for a coffee break in Exton and return via a different path to Woodbury.

Meet at Woodbury Village Car Park.



Tuesday February 10, 2026 @ 10:15am

5.5 miles, 3 hours

Puffing Billy (Old Railway Line not the team), Budleigh to Exmouth

From Budleigh we take the coastal path a short distance before going inland over the golf course. We then join the old railway into Exmouth, walking around the northern side of the town before reaching the estuary where it is a short walk to our destination; The Powder Monkey for lunch for those that want to socialise further.

Meet at Budleigh Library, Station Road, in Budleigh Salterton.

Tuesday February 17, 2026 @ 10:00am [BOOKING REQUIRED] 7.5 miles, 4-5 hours

The Templar Way part 4 – Stover Country Park and Stover Canal

This leg of our walk follows the Heritage Trail south through Stover Country Park and then explores the River Teign and Stover Canal before heading back to our start point. By now the Tramway is left behind, with the granite loads being moved on by canal. In addition to the historical interest, if we are lucky there should be plenty to tempt the wildlife enthusiast with a variety of wildfowl at Stover Lake and the River Teign.

Meet outside the Visitor Centre at Stover Country Park.
[More details for this walk are on the OVA website]

Wednesday February 25, 2026 @ 10:00am

5.5 miles, 3 hours

Birds and Snowdrops

We'll walk through Goosemoor up to Joney's Cross, then across Aylesbeare Common RSPB reserve, returning via Snowdrop Corner at Southerton. Hopefully weather conditions beforehand will make the snowdrops flower at the right time for us!

Meet at the Recreation Ground car park in Newton Poppleford.

Latest information about all walks are documented on the OVA website
(including OS coordinates, What3words, pictures and walk leader details).

Please contact the walk leader if you have never been on an OVA walk before.



Sat March 7, 2026 @ 10:00am 6 miles, 3 hours

Otterton Ring

A walk that circles the village of Otterton with not too many hills! Visiting First World War memorials, a football ground and surprise pop up refreshments stall will make for an interesting morning's walk.

Meet at East Budleigh free car park.

Tuesday March 10, 2026

7 miles, 3.5 hours

Harpford Common and Hawkerland Valley

We walk north for a short distance before joining the East Devon Way (EDW), we then go West over Harpford Common and the Hawkerland Valley. Leaving the EDW we turn east along Naps Lane to Yonder Hill before turning North adjacent to the River Otter.

Meet at Newton Poppleford Recreation Car park.



Thursday March 19, 2026 @ 10:00am

6 miles, 3.5 hours

Uplyme, Lyme Regis and the Viaduct

From Uplyme we head down the River Lym to Lyme Regis, along the front then up to Ware cliffs, Horseman's Hill and the Cannington viaduct and then back to Uplyme.

There is the possibility of lunch at The Talbot Arms in Uplyme at the end of the walk or bring a picnic if you prefer, to eat at the end of the walk as there are plenty of seats around the cricket field which adjoins the village hall.

Meet at the overflow car park at rear of Uplyme Village Hall.

Latest information about all walks are documented on the OVA website (including OS coordinates, What3words, pictures and walk leader details).

Please contact the walk leader if you have never been on an OVA walk before.

WHAT'S ON

walks

Tuesday March 24, 2026

8.5 miles, 4 hours

A Circular Walk from Otterton to the Eastern Commons

Proceeding north along the River Otter, we then turn west through Colaton Raleigh to Stowford, Uphams and Yettington. Having then walked through Hayes Wood we return via East Budleigh.

Meet at Otterton Green, Fore Street, Otterton.

Tuesday March 31, 2026 @ 10:00am

8.5 miles, 4 hours + bus ride

Downstream to the Sea

This is a linear walk down the Otter, from Newton Popleford to Budleigh Salterton. We'll break for coffee along the way, so bring a flask. Also bring a packed lunch to enjoy on the sea front when we get to Budleigh Salterton before getting the bus back to Newton Popleford, or make your own way back by bus straight away.

Either way, bus 157 leaves from outside Budleigh Public Hall at about 20 minutes past the hour. For those without passes, single fares are currently capped at £3.

Meet at the Recreation Ground car park, Newton Popleford.

Thur Apr 09, 2026 @ 10:00am 5.5 miles, 3 hours

Stowford and the Edge of the Commons

A walk to the edge of the Commons via Stowford with a coffee stop en-route.

Meet at Church Road in Colaton Raleigh.



Latest information about all walks are documented on the OVA website
(including OS coordinates, What3words, pictures and walk leader details).

Please contact the walk leader if you have never been on an OVA walk before.

Tuesday April 14, 2026 @10:00am

5 miles, 2.5 hours

A Stroll in the Neighbouring Sid Valley

We walk up Buckton Hill, pausing half way up to enjoy the view. We then join the East Devon Way on a flat stretch before dropping down to Lower Sweetcombe Farm.

The return is through a mixture of woods and sloping fields with views of the valley. We work our way along a muddy track and a tarmac road passing Knowle House and Boswell Farm.

Meet at Harcombe Lane in Sidford.

Thursday April 23, 2026 @10:00am 6.5 miles, 3.5 hours

Ever Walked on a Swan's Neck?

This walk is based around the so-called Swan's Neck section of the Grand Western Canal at Halberton. More than half of the route is on flat canal towpaths, and the remainder crosses gently undulating countryside on quiet lanes and tracks.

Optional lunch at the Swan's Neck cafe beside the farm shop in Halberton.

Meet at Greenway Bridge carpark in Halberton.



Thursday April 30, 2026 @10:00am

5.5 miles, 3.5 hours

Shaldon and The Ness

Walk part of the South West Coast Path then down through Shaldon, through Ringmore and Stokeinteignhead before heading back to the car park which has fabulous views of the coastline. This is a moderate walk but with two steep descents and two long ascents.

Possibility of lunch at the Church House Inn at Stokeinteignhead or bring a picnic to eat back at the car park at the end of the walk.

Meet at Labrador Bay Nature Reserve car park, Teignmouth Road, Shaldon.

Latest information about all walks are documented on the OVA website (including OS coordinates, What3words, pictures and walk leader details).

Please contact the walk leader if you have never been on an OVA walk before.

WHAT'S ON

events

May 13, 2026

Annual General Meeting

7:30pm, Budleigh Salterton

NOTICE is hereby given that the 47th Annual General Meeting of the Otter Valley Association will be held at 7.30pm on Wednesday 13th May 2026 at the Peter Hall, Budleigh Salterton. Full details, including the Agenda, will be shared nearer the time.

Nominations are invited for Trustees to join the Executive Committee in accordance with the Constitution and should be submitted to the Secretary, Otter Valley Association, PO Box 70 Budleigh Salterton EX9 6WN, to be received not less 14 days prior to the AGM.

Otter Valley Association TALKS

February 18, 2026

Doors open: 7pm

Have you seen my little rubber duck
Speaker: *Ken Atherton*

Our oceans form a critical part of planet life, yet unfortunately pollution is extensive. Whether it be plastics, chemical, sewage, oil spills or industrial waste – the impact on marine ecosystems can be profound.

Please join us in welcoming Ken Atherton to our programme. He will discuss the state of our oceans in light of these ecological challenges.

March 18, 2026

Doors open: 7pm

Water Quality in the river Otter
Speaker: *Felicity Christie and team*

The OVA formed a water campaigning group called ORCA (Otter River Catchment Action). This group comprises over 50 volunteers who are testing the river Otter at 12 locations every two weeks. The data is continuously analysed and shared with the Environment Agency, South West Water and other like-minded groups.

Please welcome this team who will provide a profoundly disturbing update on pollution in the river Otter – and what is being done to resolve it.

Fairlynch Museum TALKS

March 4, 2026

Doors open: 11am

The SW Coastal Footpath
Speaker: *David Westcott*

There'll be a chance to enjoy the cherished South West coastal footpath without getting out of breath, sunburnt or soaked! It's a route that will be gathering hundreds of new fans as the film "The Salt Path" introduced it to a new audience.

David Westcott who's walked it, all along with his camera, will be joining us to take us on the journey from Exmouth through Budleigh Salterton and on to Swanage.

April 1, 2026

Doors open: 11am

Mythos & Antediluvian Envisaging
Speaker: *Prof. Flo Priolo*

The Fairlynch Museum has been lucky to secure the services of Flo Priolo, who is the emeritus professor of mythos and antediluvian envisaging at the University of Newton Abbot. It's going to be a fascinating talk as she looks at the history, mythology and conventions that have surrounded this day from the 14th century and from all over Europe.

Get involved today!

And help protect the future of the beautiful Otter Valley.



VOLUNTEER

Help make a difference by getting involved

SUBSCRIBE

Join for just £10 a year and help support our nature programs

CAMPAIGN

Help lay a vital role in giving local issues a real voice

ATTEND AN EVENT

Come along to one of our walks or talks

Photo Credit: David R. White