

Helping to support and protect the lower Otter valley

# OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION



October 2024

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## Our Cover Photo

A Snow Bunting - easily approached, but a very scarce winter visitor and much more at home in the Arctic. (Credit: David R. White).

# Chairman's update

*Author: Haylor Lass, Chairman*

Welcome to another edition of news from the Otter Valley Association. Here you will find a wealth of interest with everything you always wanted to know about Historic buildings, climate change, river water quality, planning the built environment, birds on the Otter estuary, aphids, ospreys, talks – both by the OVA and at Fairlynch, plus the photo competition and usual listing of walks in all directions.

There are even pictures of the Aurora Borealis from as far south as Budleigh – though I have to add that whenever celestial phenomena are predicted – meteor showers, eclipse of the moon, aurora – and I make the effort to stay up late/get up early, the sky always has 100% cloud cover!

In the last month I have represented the OVA at two well-attended workshops:

- The first organised by the East Devon National Landscape (formerly AONB) now under new management and developing a five-year plan for the organisation. About 30 people from a wide range of organisations from the County Council through tourism and wildlife trusts to the conservation societies of the Axe and the Otter. A very useful day and much sharing of ideas and priorities – leaving Dan Wynn, the new EDNL manager, with the task of knocking it all into a manageable and affordable plan.
- The second was a 'Heaths to Sea' workshop organised by Clinton Devon who are developing a Landscape Recovery project for their land area from the Pebble beds to the estuary. This first two years is a planning/scoping stage to assess the present state and define the changes/improvements needed over the next twenty years. Also, a gathering of about 30 people from a wide variety of interests and plenty of worthwhile exchanges of ideas. It'll be a few weeks before we see the distillation of all our ideas into a framework plan. Explanatory talks are being given to Parish Councils– Colaton Raleigh and Newton Poppleford have had theirs.

Footnote on walks. I was due to lead a walk riverside near Ottery in early October. It had rained heavily the whole weekend before I did my recce, and the forecast was awful. I had visions of mud-covered walkers sliding commando-style down steep slopes into knee-deep water. H&S said No!

The rain duly arrived torrentially at the appointed start time. The walk has been rescheduled for 15th January when my wet-seaweed predictor promises fine weather. See you there!

Haylor Lass  
Chairman, Otter Valley Association

# The role of Historic Buildings in Climate Change

Author: Jacqui Best, MRTPI

## Climate change

The recent, rapid changes of our climate have been well documented in previous editions, including 'Out of sync – Climate Change' July 2024, detailing the effects and impact on our natural environment within the Otter Valley area.

In the UK, there have been increasing policy responses, to both adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change which include increased temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, rising sea levels, severe weather events and flooding.

These events touch on all aspects of our lives, and the UK Government have committed to a target to reduce greenhouse gases to 'Net Zero' by 2050. Following this, East Devon District Council declared a climate emergency, aiming to be carbon neutral by 2040.

## Buildings and embodied carbon

Earlier this year, the Office of National Statistics reported that, despite reductions, buildings remain the UK's second highest greenhouse gas emitting sector whilst in occupation, largely from the use of natural gas and other fuels. In 2022 the sector\* was estimated to account for 20% of greenhouse gas emissions (92% carbon), with 67% of this attributed to fuel combustion in residential buildings.

These figures emphasise the crucial role of buildings in addressing climate change. Not only do we need to *adapt* our buildings to be resilient to events such as flooding and higher temperatures, but to *mitigate* the effects, by reducing carbon emissions during the lifetime of a building.

Further, the statistics above do not account for the 'embodied carbon' that is released during a building's lifetime, particularly by the materials, transport and processes needed for construction and demolition. Indeed, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors estimates that more than half of the 'lifecycle carbon' from a typical residential dwelling is emitted before it is occupied.

**“The greenest building is the one that already exists”**

*(Carl Elefante, former president of the American Institute of Architects, 2007)*

## Historic buildings and heritage assets

Finding ways of retaining our existing housing stock and other premises, including those of historic importance, is therefore vital to reduce the substantial amount of carbon needed to produce new buildings. Our historic buildings also make a valuable contribution to our economic and social sustainability, making it even more important that we protect them carefully, for this and future generations to enjoy.

*Note: \* This is the 'buildings and product uses' sector. Estimates do not include emissions from electricity use in buildings, which are counted separately.*

## 'Recycling' historic buildings - adapting, maintaining and upgrading

This can be achieved through:

- careful maintenance and sensitive renovation to extend their lifetime and reduce the need for new build
- sensitive energy efficiency measures, reducing emissions whilst reducing bills and increasing comfort for occupiers



In the UK, about a quarter of building stock is over 100 years old, and in East Devon, this includes more than 3000 buildings nationally listed by Historic England, 34 conservation areas and a wealth of other non-designated heritage assets, contributing to our housing and other premises.

Within the Otter Valley area, for example, are the East Budleigh, Otterton and Budleigh Salterton Conservation Areas, all of which are also contained within the East Devon National Landscape (former AONB).

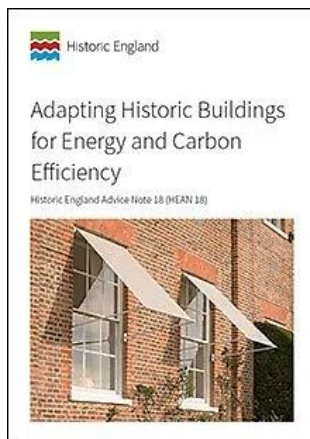
***Above: High Street, East Budleigh conservation area; Grade II listed cob and thatch cottages from C16th with traditional rendered front walls***

Historic England considers that “most traditional buildings... have an innate ability to offer greater resilience to our changing climate than their modern counterparts” where they are well maintained and adequately heated and ventilated.

Traditional materials used such as clay and lime are breathable, absorbing moisture during wet weather and releasing it when the sun and wind dry a building. Energy efficiency measures that are not breathable can affect this balance, so care is needed. Adapting an historic building for climate change needs an even more sensitive approach to ensure protection of the heritage ‘significance’ that makes the building important.

Despite these challenges, the organisation believes it is possible to improve the energy efficiency of all buildings without unacceptable harm to their significance, and has recently published Advice Note (HEAN 18): [Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency](#).

***(Right: The front cover shows a Grade II\* listed house with reinstated external awnings to reduce overheating).***



The guide sets out approaches, clarifies policy and details the permissions that may be needed. It also offers typical ways of adapting historic buildings for climate change that may be acceptable, whilst prioritising interventions and minimising harm.

## Grading and Significance

It is essential to understand the ‘significance’ of a designated (nationally listed) or undesignated heritage asset for it not to be harmed unacceptably when adapting to climate change.

The latest national planning policy framework (NPPF) December 2023 describes ‘significance’ as:

***“the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest – archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic (or combination of any of these)”***

The policy requires ‘great weight’ to be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset and advises that the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Details of designated ‘national’ listings can be found on the Historic England website, and undesignated ‘local listings’ on the East Devon District Council website.

Gradings as described by Historic England:

- Grade I buildings have the highest significance being of ‘exceptional special interest’,
- Grade II\* are particularly important buildings of ‘more than special interest’
- Grade II, which make up 92% of listed buildings are of ‘special interest’.



***Above: East Terrace, Budleigh Salterton  
Late C18 Grade II Listed buildings***

For non-designated heritage assets (including those locally listed) the NPPF advises: *“a balanced judgement having regard to the scale of harm or loss and the significance of the asset”.*

This highlights that there is generally a balance to be found between protecting heritage assets and adapting them for the future, with adaptations not causing unacceptable harm. Each case is different, for example, there may be works to a listed building that are so harmful to their significance that they should not be allowed.

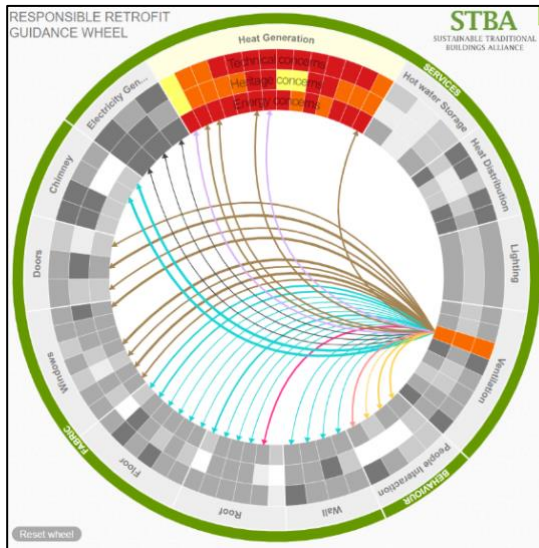
## The Whole Building Approach

As each building performs differently, the ‘whole building’ approach is described in the guide. It is a holistic method which explores a building in its context to find a range of ‘balanced and effective solutions’ that in summary:

- save energy and carbon based on an understanding of the building and how it performs,
- sustain the asset’s heritage significance whilst avoiding or minimising harm,
- provide a safe, healthy and comfortable indoor environment for occupiers

Some useful principles on adaptations to note from the guide, are:

- **Low risk (often low cost) work should be started first** - before more potentially harmful work. Low impact interventions on significance, such as adding thermostat controls or insulating an unused chimney flue, reduce energy loss at little cost.
- **Start small scale** - and continue in stages and make changes that are reversible where possible.
- **Tried and tested** repairs and improvements are preferable.
- **Energy efficiency improvements can be aligned with other works** - such as draft proofing whilst carrying out repairs to windows and doors.
- **Lifespan should be considered** - for example, well maintained historic windows may survive for over 100 years, in comparison with PVCu windows for less than 25 years.
- **Maintenance and repair are essential, reducing damp** - there are many small jobs that can be done every year to keep properties in good condition, including:
  - cleaning gutters and other rainwater goods
  - removing weeds from masonry
  - retouching paintwork on doors and windows
- These can help to prevent damage, maintain value and save costs in the long term. Some tasks could be organised as a community project, for example within a conservation area.
- **Checks can be outlined** - using the whole house approach to ensure adequate ventilation to prevent damp. However, a careful balance must be struck as excessive draughts can waste heat.
- **Be aware of the potential risks of common retrofit mistakes.**



**The Responsible Retrofit Guidance wheel (left)** by the Sustainable Traditional Buildings Alliance is an excellent free interactive tool.

It depicts more than 50 measures that can be used for the *retrofitting* or refurbishing of traditional buildings and highlights the possible risks associated with those measures.

Each measure has a number of advantages and concerns, categorised into technical, heritage and energy. For example, installing photovoltaics indicates 3 heritage concerns, including 'loss of original external detail' – a 'high' concern and 'planning consent within a conservation area - a 'major' concern.

## **Common interventions outlined in the HEAN 18 guide**

- Although each building must be assessed on a case-by-case basis, the document provides useful guidance on works that are generally acceptable, and for which works listed building consent may be required.
- Details are given for works relating to windows, doors, insulation, mechanical ventilation and heat recovery systems, heating systems and heat pumps, photovoltaic and solar thermal panels, solar slates, wind power and the addition of electric vehicle charging points.
- For each measure the guide indicates what is likely to be acceptable, for example:

### **Windows:**

- Draft-proofing: almost always acceptable and unlikely to need listed building consent (LBC)
- The installation of secondary glazing or slim profile double glazing within historic frames: both are generally acceptable, with the latter likely to need LBC
- The sensitive replacement of windows which do not contribute to a building's special interest: this may be acceptable but is likely to need LBC.
- **Insulation:**
- Insulation between or under floors and in lofts is also generally acceptable, with internal or within external wall insulation described as acceptable in some cases. Whilst external wall insulation is unlikely to be acceptable, the reinstatement of an historic render finish is almost always desirable.

### **Low carbon heating alternatives:**

- Such as heat pumps may be acceptable with careful siting, design and screening, as may solar panels if hidden from view, or incongruous. This includes careful consideration of their potential impact on significant views of the building, and where harm is avoided to the building's special interest.

### **Other external works:**

- May be suitable, to help buildings adapt to changing weather patterns, subject to permissions. Acceptable examples given in the guide are external awnings, shutters or blinds to reduce overheating, and careful improvements to rainwater goods to take increased rainfall.

### **Useful links:**

- **HEAN 18** - <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/adapting-historic-buildings-energy-carbon-efficiency-advice-note-18>
- **HE's 'Energy Efficiency and Retrofit' webpages**, which include a series of more detailed advice notes - <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/retrofit-and-energy-efficiency-in-historic-buildings>
- **HE's 'Your Home' webpages** provide more general advice for homeowners - <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/your-home>
- **The Responsible Retrofit Guidance wheel** - <https://www.responsible-retrofit.org/greenwheel>



# OVA Photo Competition - Results

Author: *Chris Boorman*

We are delighted to announce the winners of our photo competition. The competition was judged by David R. White (Naturalist), Rick Lockwood (our local Otter Estuary Ranger) and Lucilla Phelps FRPS (Photographer)

The winner of the children's competition is **Thomas Franklin** aged 12, with this wonderful picture of a common frog.



A keen environmentalist and naturalist. Thomas particularly enjoys taking photographs of all the flora and fauna where he lives beside the river Otter and in the surrounding countryside.

He works hard to keep the area natural by doing regular litter picks and removing invasive Himalayan balsam from the river.

The winner of our adult competition is **Tegan Davey** with this delightful shot of a hare taken in Otterton.



Second place in our adult competition went to **Luca Vaughan** with this stunning photo of a heron.



# Wetlands Weekend

*Author: Chris Boorman, Vice-Chairman*

The Otter Valley Association were delighted to be invited by Pebblebed Heaths to join them and Clinton Devon Estates to showcase our work at their gathering on Saturday at the Budleigh Salterton Cricket Club as part of their "Wetlands Weekend".

We were showcasing:

1. Our water quality work on the river Otter.
2. Our Flora & Fauna group.
3. Our upcoming talks.
4. The amazing walks team and their program.
5. The history group and our work on Blue Plaques with the Fairlynch museum.
6. Our work on aligning the planning expertise of the OVA with the East Devon District Council planning programs.



It was great to see so many people coming along to learn what we are doing – and as a result we now have more Facebook members, more OVA core members and several more volunteers – so thankyou everyone for your interest in what we are doing.

# Communication Update

*Author: Chris Boorman, Vice-Chairman*

The OVA uses a combination of printed newsletters, online website, Facebook groups, WhatsApp and email to help ensure everyone knows what is going on:

Our Website ([www.ova.org.uk](http://www.ova.org.uk)) :

This is where all information is posted. We are now starting a new project to update and modernise areas of the website – starting with the Natural Environment section. Our goal is to provide source of pictures and information about the different Flora & Fauna that we see here in the Otter valley. If you are interested in helping, please do get in touch.

Our Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ottervalleyassociation>):

This is where daily discussions occur, and interesting articles are shared. A few of the recent articles that have garnered significant attention are:

- Mike Simcox sharing pictures of the Hunters Moon across the Otter Estuary.
- David White regularly showing incredible local sightings of wildlife.
- John Wokersien sharing photos of the kingfishers in the valley.
- Chris Townend sharing amazing pictures of a bearded Tit on the new Reserve.

- Simon Wakely sharing wonderful pictures of Snow Buntings on the beach.
- Lynn Jones sharing views of sunrise over the Otter.
- Lorraine Read asking a question about Shelducks on the new Reserve.
- John Burdett sharing pictures of the moon above the Valley.
- Ian Simpson sharing incredible drone pictures across the valley.
- ... And many, many more updates, discussions and comments.

### WhatsApp on Smartphones

This is used by the walkers to share information

### Email Updates

These are used to provide monthly updates and other communications.

Please do consider joining the Facebook group – we now have 790 people on our group. There are many interesting articles that are shared on that which don't make it into our printed newsletter.

## Swift Boxes at Budleigh Town Hall

*Author: Bob Wiltshire, Budleigh Salterton Representative*

For the last two years we have contributed seeds to establish wild flower meadows or, as I have been corrected, were in fact wild flower gardens. These were located in public spaces, where everyone could enjoy them, rather than in private gardens.

This year we have turned our attention to nesting boxes, insect hotels and hedgehog houses, their supply organised by Chris Hodgson of the OVA Natural Environment Committee. These have been mainly presented to schools; however, some have found their way to more public places. To enable this to take place, we have availed of the advice of our local ranger, Rick Lockwood. The most recent siting has been to locate nesting boxes, high up, on a western facing wall of the Public Hall at Budleigh Salterton. We employed a local decorator who secured them to the wall. He also plugged them with cloth to prevent them becoming home to local house sparrows. We had a little difficulty finding a suitable spot, as the boxes have to be high to avoid predators and to enable the birds to make a vertical flight into the boxes. We also installed an electrically operated gadget to emit suitable 'swift enticing calls'.

Swifts are having a hard time these days, finding suitable nesting sites and we hope that this will tempt them back. We hope to see them next year, looking for suitable affordable housing. Watch this space.



# OVA Talks Programme

Author: Keith Grundy, Talks Organiser

The Otter Valley Association continues its winter program with a series of talks that we hope you will enjoy. These talks are aligned to the initiatives that we focus on as a charity – water, flora, fauna, history. We hope you were able to attend the October talk on Climate Change. We have the following talks scheduled and hope to see you at Peter Hall. Entrance fee for everyone is £4, payable by card or cash on the door.

## **November 20<sup>th</sup> – starting 7pm at the Peter Hall in Budleigh Salterton 'London's New River'**

Speaker: John Polley

Abstract: John's talk tells the story of how in the early 17th century a project was undertaken to bring fresh drinking water to London's expanding population and where parts of it still exist

John Polley was born and brought up in North London. He has a variety of interests, including local history, transport, and industrial archaeology. John is also keen walker and has walked the New River many times in over 30 years. He organises and leads walking tours and introduces people to this fascinating and relatively unknown waterway.

## **January 22<sup>nd</sup> – starting 7:30pm at the Peter Hall in Budleigh Salterton 'Farming Practices – how they affect river quality'**

Speaker: Iorwerth (Yog) Watkins

Abstract: Iorwerth is an experienced farm advisor and catchment officer. In this advisory role Iorwerth can draw on experience gained from working for the Environment Agency, FWAG and growing up on a farm. Iorwerth has already worked on several of the farm clusters work and is currently actively involved as a technical advisor on both the Heaths to Sea and Luppitt Landscape Recovery projects. Being joint lead on the East Devon CaBA means Iorwerth is known by many of the stakeholders involved here and aware of how this project will fit within/alongside other active projects in this area.

This experience has provided him with in depth knowledge of best farm practice and the measures to address diffuse pollution as well as an appreciation of the financial and environmental benefits from the farmer's perspective. Iorwerth has considerable experience in engaging and delivering advice to farmers through one-to-one visits, developing whole farm plans, running farming workshops and presentations to wider stakeholders including private companies, community interest groups and students. Iorwerth currently sits [amongst others] on the following committees and steering groups; East Devon CaBA, Devon LNRS Farming Working Group, NBS / NFM Strategic Group, South West England Soils Discussion Group.

**February 19<sup>th</sup> – starting 7:30pm at the Peter Hall in Budleigh Salterton  
'Otters – coming to a river near you'**

Speaker: Stephen Powles

Abstract: In 2005 the discovery of otter spraint on the stream not far from my house was the inspiration to learn about (and try to photograph) one of our most charismatic but equally elusive British mammals. My otter journey (or, more accurately, 'obsession!') has continued to this day. From 2013 to 2018 I was immensely privileged to be able to study, film and photograph one female otter's life in incredible detail as she went on to have five litters of cubs. Hammer Scar, as I called her (after the hammer-shaped mark on her nose), allowed me to follow her night after night. On several occasions she even had the confidence to take a twenty-minute sleep only a few metres from me.

Formerly a vet, I changed career to pursue a lifelong passion for wildlife, wildlife photography, filming and conservation. My material has made a number of TV appearances. I have a keen interest in photographing and filming challenging wildlife subjects, many of which are in and close to my home. I have a special interest in otters, tawny owls, hedgehogs and hornets. I am based near Tiverton

**March 23<sup>rd</sup> – starting 7:30pm at the Peter Hall in Budleigh Salterton  
'Wildlife'**

Speaker: David R. White

Abstract: The Lower Otter Nature Reserve celebrated it's one year anniversary in October 2024. The flora and fauna seen across this and the broader Otter valley is evolving as the tidal flow changes the habitat. New migratory species such as Osprey's are now being observed using the local habitat while Spoonbills, Snow Buntings, Bearded Tits join the local habitat. Meanwhile the Beavers and Otters continue to enjoy the environment.

David will share his perspectives on the Nature Reserve and provide a glimpse into the wonderful and changing species adapting to take advantage of this new environment.

David is an accomplished photographer who lives in East Budleigh. His photographs came to national prominence in 2018 when he won the competition for the BBC Countryfile 2019 calendar. A keen naturalist, David continues to amaze with his knowledge and photography.

# Fairlynch Museum: Talks Programme

*Author: Phil Ashworth, Fairlynch Museum*

I think it was Socrates who said “all that I know is that I know nothing”. But perhaps if he lived in Budleigh Salterton and had the Fairlynch coffee talks to go to all that would change? On the other hand,...

I've learnt a lot from the coffee talks and the first two of the new season have been no exception.

Our first speaker, in September, was Andrew Canning a former Marines commander who now lives in East Budleigh. I avoided using the phrase retired Marines commander because I know he's far from retired. Andrew and his wife Angie are actively involved in helping make life under constant Russian attack as bearable as possible. We heard how the trips began. As a former marine he knew the troops on the front-line fighting Putin were living through the bitter winter months without the right protective clothing. In the lofts of many ex-marines was plenty of Arctic survival gear no longer in use. If that could be collected and taken out to the Ukraine it would be a real contribution towards freedom. But getting the equipment there was another matter entirely and so Andrew became part of an aid team driving overland from England to the Ukraine to deliver the vital equipment.

Angie works in the medical world here in Devon and she knew how much equipment, supplies and pharmaceuticals had to be replaced only because they were past their use by dates. If you're a Ukrainian soldier on the front line and you need drugs and dressings, you're not going to turn round to the field medics and say “oh no, you can't use that Elastoplast on me because it's two weeks outside its sell by date”. So it was that husband and wife both became involved in helping the Ukrainians even though it was Andrew who made the gruelling cross-country trips. It's not an easy task to make a topic as chilling as his as uplifting as it was.

October's talk proved to be equally fascinating. We all know the story of Robert Maxwell, the Czech born World War II officer, who went on to run of the country's largest media and publishing organisations before falling, quite literally, from grace. His was, in 2024 money, a billion-pound fraud.

David Kerr was in a unique position to tell the story and to judge whether Maxwell fell or was pushed from his luxury yacht Lady Ghislaine in 1991. David, a former Daily Mirror journalist who now lives in East Devon, has the dubious honour of being sacked by Maxwell. His talk was fascinating. We heard from someone who was there, about the outrageous acts and downright deceit practised by Maxwell.

The questions and answer session was just as rewarding. I've always thought that one of the great strengths about Budleigh Salterton is you can mix and rub shoulders with all sorts of fascinating people from all walks of life and because everyone tends to be so unassuming and modest the true stories of what they “used to do” before coming to Budleigh remain unknown to all but their closest friends and family. You'd

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imagine it was difficult for somebody as infamous as Maxwell to have had much to do with the people who live in Budleigh but that wasn't the case. In addition to David delivering the talk there were several in the audience who knew Maxwell first hand too and had suffered from his immorality as well. I won't name names, that's not the Budleigh way of doing things, but there was someone who was able to tell the story of how Maxwell bought the wrong firm because the name was too similar. How he searched for firms to take over, not because of their profitability, but because of the size of their pension pot. There was a former member of the legal profession who knew only too well what Maxwell was like. And of course, along with thousands of others, including members of my own family, those he swindled out of the pension they worked so hard to earn. It was both chilling, thought-provoking and enlightening in a way we couldn't have predicted.

By the time you read this we may well have had the November talk! I can't guarantee similar revelations for the rest of the season, but I hope I've said enough to encourage those lucky enough to have been there to return and those who've given us a miss so far, to make sure they come to the rest of the coffee talks for the 2024/25 season.

- 6th Nov. Bungle in the Jungle, a Devon take on the world's great gold swindle.
- 4th Dec. Jackie Moggridge was one of the unsung heroes of WW2, delivering planes to keep the war effort going. Her daughter Candy Atkins has researched her mum's amazing story.
- 8th Jan 25. The Lower Otter Nature Reserve. What we've learned so far.
- 5th Feb. We turn our attentions to Budleigh's own film star Belinda Lee who died in a road accident in California in 1961 at the age of 26.
- 5th Mar. We welcome the acclaimed writer and historian Rosemary Griggs, who lovingly plays the part of Katharine Champernowne, Sir Walter Raleigh's mother.
- 2nd April. Devon's part in the Battle of Britain.

We meet in St Peter's Hall for coffee at 10:30 and the talks will begin at 11. £4 for Friends and £6 for non-members .



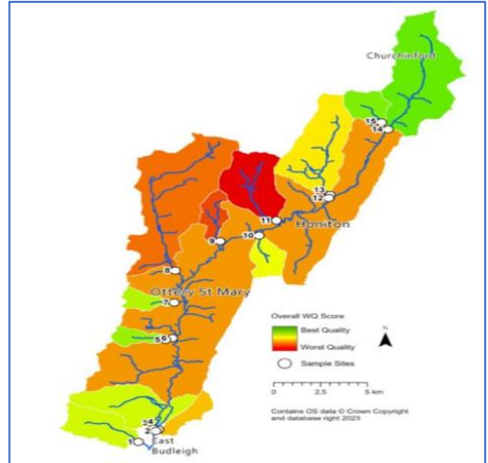
# Time to breathe new life into our polluted river

Author: Peter Williams

Starting life in the Blackdown Hills, the River Otter flows 40 miles through classic Devon landscapes, winding its way to emerge on the Jurassic Coast at Budleigh Salterton. With just two small towns and a few villages along the route, the Otter should epitomise England's ecologically rich and diverse river habitats.

The EA identify the main pollutant types & key sources:

- Sewage discharges coming from South West Water's (SWW) sewage systems
- Pollution from 'Agriculture and Land Management', specifically livestock, soil and nutrient management. These are defined as 'Diffuse' in nature.



© West Country Rivers Trust

**As a passionate local community group, we're committed to restoring the Otter to its natural habitat.**

**Please join us in our mission, and together we can make a meaningful impact on our wildlife and environment**

Our first objective for this project is to identify the relative ecological impact of SWW's sewage discharges compared to agricultural run-off, and identify specific locations or general areas causing the greatest harm.

We plan to achieve this through a structured program of water quality testing, using both automated systems and Citizen Science volunteer testers.

Achieving this, and supported by a credible data set, would help us to:

- Focus SWW on addressing specific polluting assets
- Identify sections of river where the most agricultural pollution is occurring and work with partner organisations to help improve land management

## **What we know already: South West Water sewage discharges**

In 2023, South West Water discharged untreated sewage into the Otter on at least 830 occasions for a total of 6,391 hours. That's 3x times the total sewage hours dumped into Exmouth Bay. In fact, the real total is likely to be closer to 8,000 hours,



as the monitor at Honiton sewage works (which discharges the most untreated sewage into the river), was broken for the first 6 months of the year.

Site Name (EA Consents Database)	EA Permit Reference (EA Consents Database)	Asset ID Refer to Permit	Storm Discharge Asset Type	Outlet Discharge NR (EA Consents Database)	Latitude	SHOWN		Total Duration (hrs) all using 12- month method	Counted spills using 12- month method	Long-term average sewage seepage hours	% of TOTAL sewage seepage hours	Cumulative No. of years EDM operational	EDM Operation Reporting Rate (%)	EDM Operation Status (e.g. Resolved, Planned, Review)	High Spill Frequency Action Planned Status (Review, Planned, Status)	High Spill Frequency Action Planned Status (Review, Planned, Status)	High Spill Frequency Action Planned Status (Review, Planned, Status)	
						WFD Waterbody Category (Cycle 2)	Receiving Water Name (EA Consents Database)											
HONITON WASTEWATER TREATMENT WORKS	NFA-SW-3959	A2	Storm tank at WwTW	ST 1522 0094		Middle River Otter	RIVER OTTER	1758.57	164	137.00	28%	28%	4 (installed)	52.69	Resoloved	N/A - Ong N/A - Ong Other ive	SWW0575	
HONITON WASTEWATER TREATMENT WORKS	NFA-SW-3959	A3	Head SO at WwTW	ST 1522 0094		Middle River Otter	RIVER OTTER	1681.27	148	101.25	17%	48%	4 (installed)			N/A - Ong N/A - Ong Other ive	SWW0574	
TIPTON FARM PUMPING STATION	NFA-SW-3706	A1	Storm discharge at pumping stat	SV 1242 9637		Lower River Otter	TRIBUTARY OF RIVER OTTER	1011.53	86	63.25	17%	41%	4 (installed)			N/A - Ong N/A - Ong Other ive	SWW0468	
FENTON WASTEWATER TREATMENT WORKS	NFA-SW-3706	A2	Storm tank at WwTW	SV 1157 9889		Lower River Otter	RIVER OTTER	669.56	66	57.50	10%	71%	4 (installed)			N/A - Ong N/A - Ong Other ive	SWW0423	
EAST BUDLEIGH PUMPNG STATION	201871	A1	Storm discharge at pumping stat	SV 0774 8419		Lower River Otter	RIVER OTTER	411.11	114	41.33	6%	78%	6 (installed)			N/A - Ong N/A - Ong Other ive	SWW0377	
FLUTTON WASTEWATER TREATMENT WORKS	SWWA 944	A2	Storm tank at WwTW	SV 0899 9256		Lower River Otter	TRIBUTARY OF THE RIVER OT	335.41	31	24.50	5%	63%	4 (installed)			N/A - Ong N/A - Ong Other ive	SWW0440	
FLUTTON WASTEWATER TREATMENT WORKS	SWWA 944	A3	Head SO at WwTW	SV 0899 9256		Lower River Otter	TRIBUTARY OF THE RIVER OT	314.98	75	63.00	5%	63%	4 (installed)			N/A - Ong N/A - Ong Other ive	SWW0439	
GASTLE COSE PUMPNG STATION	201379	A1	Storm discharge at pumping stat	SV 0748 9432		Lower River Otter	TRIBUTARY OF RIVER OTTER	291.84	21	6.63	5%	93%	6 (installed)			N/A - Ong N/A - Ong Other ive	SWW0201	
TIPTON ST JOHN PUMPNG STATION	201651	A1	SO on sewer network	SV 0889 9174		Lower River Otter	RIVER OTTER	111.37	21	12.43	2%	94%	7 (installed)				SWW1204	
OLBEE FARM PUMPNG STATION	201641	A1	Storm discharge at pumping stat	SV 1272 0040		Lower River Otter	TRB OF THE RIVER OTTER	111.29	60	42.17	2%	96%	6 (installed)				Performan N/A - Ong Stage 1b	
WESTON PUMPNG STATION	202181	A1	Storm discharge at pumping stat	SV 1422 0066		Lower River Otter	RIVER OTTER	97.68	16	15.63	2%	96%	6 (installed)				SWW1308	
WEST BANK PUMPNG STATION	201380	A1	Storm discharge at pumping stat	SV 0929 9508		Lower River Otter	TRB OF RIVER OTTER	42.16	7	4.71	1%	96%	6 (installed)				SWW1289	
CHURCH-INFORM STW	002728F01	A2	Storm tank at WwTW	ST 2202 1250		Upper River Otter	RIVER OTTER	40.35	13	10.50	1%	99%	2 (installed)				SWW0259	
THE GREEN COMBINED SEWER OVERFLOW	201942	A1	SO on sewer network	SV 0799 9529		Lower River Otter	RIVER OTTER	23.47	11	8.75	0%	99%	4 (installed)	28/97	Instalator Resolved - Oct		SWW0185	
FENTON WASTEWATER TREATMENT WORKS	NFA-SW-3706	A3	Head SO at WwTW	SV 1157 9889		Lower River Otter	RIVER OTTER	19.44	7	4.25	0%	100%	4 (installed)				SWW0422	
CHARLENE COMBINED SEWER OVERFLOW	201382	A1	SO on sewer network	SV 1014 9551		Lower River Otter	TRIBUTARY OF THE RIVER OT	9.12	28	15.00	0%	100%	4 (installed)	57.34	Season fail Resolved - Jun		SWW0222	
MILLREET CSD	201381	A1	SO on sewer network	SV 0939 9511		Lower River Otter	RIVER OTTER VIA SW	8.70	5	8.00	0%	100%	4 (installed)				SWW0753	
MALMOOT LANE CSD	201944	A1	SO on sewer network	SV 0696 9561		Lower River Otter	TRB OF RIVER OTTER (VA SW)	8.04	7	9.67	0%	100%	3 (installed)				SWW0756	
BATTS LANE COMBINED SEWER OVERFLOW	201383	A1	SO on sewer network	SV 0966 9545		Lower River Otter	TRIBUTARY OF RIVER OTTER	3.44	8	10.00	0%	100%	4 (installed)				SWW0266	
BUCKERELL PUMPNG STATION	201642	A1	Storm discharge at pumping stat	SV 1223 0065		Lower River Otter	TRIBUTARY OF RIVER OTTER	0.00	0	1.00	0%	100%	3 (installed)				SWW0168	
COLATOR RALEIGH COMBINED SEWER OF	201682	A1	SO on sewer network	SV 0844 8704		Lower River Otter	TRB OF THE RIVER OTTER	0.00	0	0.00	0%	100%	3 (installed)				SWW0283	
WATERLIFT FARM PSCSDO	202180PC01	A1	Storm discharge at pumping stat	SV 1699 9016		Middle River Otter	TRB OF RIVER OTTER	0.00	0	0.00	0%	100%	3 (installed)				SWW1277	
WALLOWEAD PSCSDO	202182	A1	Storm discharge at pumping stat	SV 1556 9089		TRB OF RIVER OTTER (S)		0.00	0	0.00	0%	100%	1 (installed)				SWW1379	
<b>Total DURATION of discharges (hrs) - 2023</b>									<b>6,391</b>			100%						
<b>Total COUNT of discharges - 2023</b>									<b>830</b>									
<b>Long term average COUNT of discharges</b>									<b>639</b>									
<b>Number of discharge points in Otter Catchment (above estuary)</b>									<b>23</b>									

06:20 analysis of discharge locations  
 8 of the 23 locations discharge 88% of total sewage hours  
 Honiton Sewage Treatment Works: % of TOTAL Discharge hours 46% 30%  
 GTFHSA Pumping Station: % of TOTAL Discharge hours 17% 10%  
 Share of total sewage discharge hours from GTFHSA SPS - Honiton STW 61% 30%  
 Share of total sewage from GTFHSA SPS - Honiton STW + Flutton STW + East Budleigh SPS 88% 75%  
 Hours Count

SWWs top five polluting assets discharged 88% of the total sewage into the river Otter, mostly within a six mile stretch of the middle Otter between Honiton and Tipton. Whilst this demonstrates just how bad those assets are, it does indicate the potential for South West Water to discharge dramatically improve their overall sewage discharge record, if they can focus resources on improving those five units.

Recent research by the University of Oxford indicates sewage discharged into rivers has a greater impact on water quality, and the animals and plants that live in rivers, than surrounding agricultural land use.

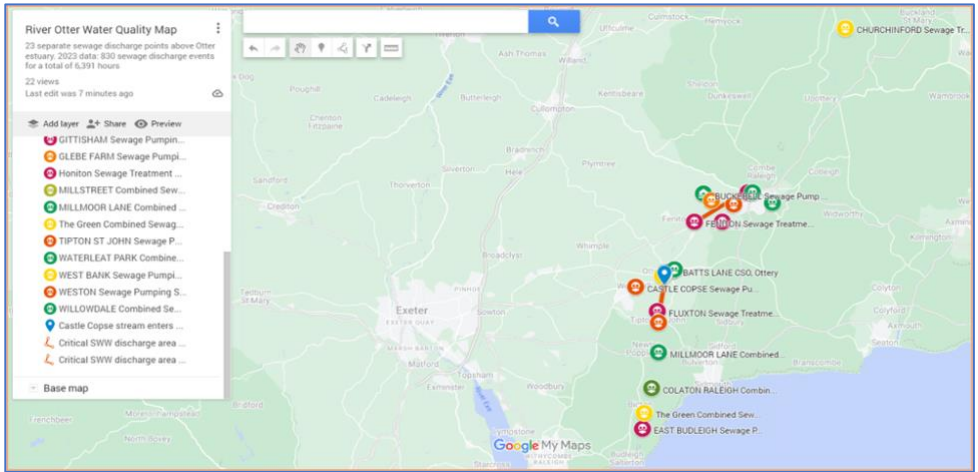
Key findings of the Oxford University report include:

- Sewage pollution was found to be the primary driver of increased nutrients (including phosphates), algae, and sewage fungus in rivers.
- Sewage discharge also radically altered plant, animal, and microbe communities, increasing the abundance of harmful species.

To help people visualise the problem and locate the SWW overflows, we have created **an interactive public Google map** showing each EDM location, and adding the specific amount of sewage discharged in 2023. Each EDM unit is also colour coded with a RAG status, Red for Poor through Green for those units which have not discharged in 2023.

You can find the map by clicking this link:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1DWVtUm02Fau5aHd-aa6WzOhRzdkE1Z8&usp=sharing>



## What's next?

We need to fully develop our plans on test locations and methods, and we will be validating the program with experts before launching the project.

In the meantime, if this sounds like something that you would like to be involved with, please get in touch, or look out for more information and full training over the next few months.



*Spoonbill on the Lower Otter Nature Reserve (Credit: David R. White)*



*Flying Spoonbill, Cormorant and Swan on the Lower Otter Nature Reserve*

*Snow Bunting on the Lower Otter Nature Reserve*



# The Aurora Borealis Over Otter Valley

*Author: Chris Boorman*



Credit: Chris Boorman

# Walks: Programme [Nov – Jan]

Author: Jane Connick & the walks team

Many of you might know that I am stepping down from the Walk Team and my final walk programme is in this newsletter.

I would like to say a huge thank you to all the Walk Leaders, past and present, who have given their time and knowledge to lead such a great variety of walks and their willingness to share their expertise. I now know this area, with its numerous footpaths, so much better because of the walks I have joined and have enjoyed them all: short ones / long ones / sunny and hot / wet and cold / Otter Valley / Dartmoor / Dorset. You name it - we have walked it.

The Walk Team of Jon, Penny and Paul would welcome new faces to join them with enthusiasm and fresh ideas. So, if you would be interested either speak to one of us or we can be contacted via email on [walks@ova.org.uk](mailto:walks@ova.org.uk).

Jane

## **1st week of November – 10.00am – 5.5 miles. 3 hours (check website) 'From Valley to Beacon'**

Meet: Newton Popleford Recreation Ground car park, Back Lane, Newton Popleford (OS115, SY 088 899) what3words ///wisely.amazed.configure

A walk from Newton Popleford to Tipton and then up towards Fire Beacon Hill returning via Harpford Woods. This is a moderate walk, with one significant ascent. Some sections may be wet and/or muddy after rain. There will be a coffee stop part way round (so bring a flask).

**Walk Leader:** Ross Hussey [rdandamhussey22@gmail.com](mailto:rdandamhussey22@gmail.com) or 01395 227991

Mobile for contact n the day only: 07902 255915

## **Tuesday 12 November – 10.30am – 6 miles. 3 hours. 'Coastal walk: Exmouth to Budleigh'**

Meet: Exmouth Train Station (OS 115, SY 000 812) what3words ///counts.merit.bets

We will walk from Exmouth to Budleigh Salterton. Buses run regularly back to Exmouth. Bring a flask.

**Walk Leader:** Iain Ure 07597 921007

**Week commencing 18 November – approx. 3-4 miles. (Check website)  
'Reserve and Reservoir'**

Details to follow

**Walk Leader:** Ross Hussey

**Wednesday 27 November – 10.45am – 2 miles approx. 1.5 – 2 hours.  
'A Heritage Walk Around East Budleigh'**

Meet: Public car park in East Budleigh (OS115, SY 065 848)  
what3words ///rinsed.habits.composters

A slow wander around the historical village of East Budleigh, including a short tour of All Saints Church with its medieval pew ends etc. Find out more about the picturesque cottages which line the High Street, other historic buildings and how the village has changed over the years.

Bring a flask for a coffee stop. The Sir Walter Pub is open for lunches – if you would like to have lunch there after the walk, please contact Paul by Friday 22 November so he can book enough places.

**Walk Leader:** Paul Kurowski 01395 742942 or 07792 619748 pandp@kurowski.me.uk

**Friday 6 December – 10.00am – 5.6 miles. 3 hours.  
'An early winter walk'**

Meet: Joney's Cross car park (OS 115, SY 057 897) what3words ///nail.obligated.rear

A lovely and varied walk which will include Monks Lane, Naps Lane and Stoneford. There will be a coffee stop so bring a flask.

**Walk Leader:** Sarah Westacott 0770 6078143

**Tuesday 10 December – 10.00am – 5.5 miles - 3 hours.  
'Otterton Ledge circular walk'**

Meet: Otterton Green (OS115, SY 081 852) what3words ///ranted.fork.prune

A familiar walk which will hopefully have lovely views in winter sunshine. There will be a coffee stop so bring a flask.

**Walk Leader:** Iain Ure 07597 921007

**Friday 13 December – 10.45am – 6.5 miles. 4 hours including lunch stop  
'Exeter Green Circle – Part One'**

Meet: Topsham Road, Exeter bus stop just past the Crematorium entrance (OS 115, SX 939 907) at 10.45am, please wait for the walk leaders in case their bus is late!

what3words ///sketch.begun.arena

Explore the green outskirts of Exeter, including the Exeter Valley Parks, now managed by Devon Wildlife Trust. This walk takes us from Topsham Road to a coffee stop at the community cafe in 13th Century St Katherine's Priory. We then walk on to Iron Bridge in the city centre through a succession of parks and open spaces.

You can then either travel straight home or pop into the city centre for a bit of Christmas shopping. Bring a picnic lunch unless the weather is awful, in which case we will find a cafe.

The start point of the walk is on the 57 bus route. You can take the 9.44am number 157 bus from Budleigh Salterton Library and change at Exmouth for the 57. Alternatively, take a bus from East Devon towards Exeter and change at the Livery Dole stop in Exeter for a bus to the Crematorium.!

**Walk Leaders:** Penny and Paul Kurowski, 01395 742942 or 07792 619748 [pandp@kurowski.me.uk](mailto:pandp@kurowski.me.uk)

**Thursday 2 January – 10.00am – 5 miles. 3 hours  
'A New Year's Walk'**

Meet: The shelter beside Rockfish Café, Budleigh Salterton promenade (OS115, SY 0691 8192)  
what3words ///verdict.fulfilled.liberated

Start the year as you mean to carry on with a good walk! We shall wend our way through the back streets of Budleigh Salterton and then up to Knowle to join the old railway cycle track as far as Castle Lane. We cross the golf course to West Down beacon and hope to get stunning views from the coastpath on our way back to the start. Optional lunch at the Brook Kitchen.

**Walk Leader:** Jon Roseway 01395 488739 / 07887 936280

**Wednesday 15 January - 10.00am 6 miles about 3 hours  
'Ottery's River'**

Meet: Land of Canaan long stay car park, Ottery St Mary (OS115, SY 095 955) what3words ///cavalier.villas.orchestra. (£2 winter rate for all-day parking so why not stay on afterwards to explore Ottery, have a pub lunch or both).

We will walk on the east side of the river southwards as far as possible (part of path has been closed for some years due to river erosion) then divert uphill to look at Wiggaton and join minor roads and tracks, have a coffee stop, and rejoin the river at Tipton Mill. Cross the footbridge and return to Ottery along the west side of the river. Some rocky tracks and mud after rain, so wear stout footwear.

**Walk Leader:** Haylor Lass 01395 568786 / 07709 214089 mobile on the day

**Wednesday 22 January – 10.50am – 6.5 miles. 4 hours including lunch stop  
'Exeter Green Circle – Part Two'**

Meet: Underneath Iron Bridge in Lower North Street (OS 114, SX 915 928) at 10.50am. Please wait for the walk leaders, in case their bus is late!. what3words ///animal.engage.sing

Following on from Part One, we explore more of the green areas and parks surrounding Exeter. We leave the city centre for Redhills and then skirt the western part of the city before crossing the canal and river to arrive back at Topsham Road.

We can then travel back to Exmouth by the 57 bus, with connections to onward journeys. Please bring a picnic lunch – if the weather is awful, we will find a pub instead.

The start point of the walk can be reached by taking the 9.30am number 356 bus from Budleigh Salterton Public Hall (arrives Exeter city centre 10.38am), or the 9.47am number 57 bus from Exmouth (arrives 10.30am), and then walking to Lower North Street, which is under the Iron Bridge.

**Walk Leaders:** Penny & Paul Kurowski, 01395 742942 or 07792 619748 [pandp@kurowski.me.uk](mailto:pandp@kurowski.me.uk)

**Wednesday 29 January – 9.30am start finish around 12.30pm. Booking req.  
'Birdwatching walk in the Otter Valley with the Ranger'**

Meet: details will be given on confirmation of booking.

Led by the Otter Estuary Ranger, Rick Lockwood and assisted by Colin Randall, local resident, and Devon Birds member. This is a popular walk and we are limiting numbers to ensure everyone can enjoy the commentary. Binoculars useful if you have them, but definitely not necessary. Warm clothing as lots of stopping

**Walk Leader:** Rick Lockwood supported by Colin Randall.

Booking opens Monday 20 January via email: [walks@ova.org.uk](mailto:walks@ova.org.uk). You will receive confirmation plus details of the meet point. The website will indicate if the walk is fully booked.



*Stormy seas at Otter head (Credit: Ian J. Simpson)*



# Built Environment: October Update

Author: Dee Woods, OVA Built Environment Co-ordinator

The Executive Committee has considered and commented on a number of planning applications recently. Where applications are considered to be harmful and detrimental, and not in accordance with National, Local and Neighbourhood planning policies, objections have been submitted to the District Council's Planning Department.

The OVA also submitted comments on the recent community consultation about the new settlements proposed as part of the emerging Local Plan 2020- 2040. These are set out below:

*"The Otter Valley Association (OVA) has considered this consultation on two masterplan concepts via the Commonplace website, but wishes to respond in writing with its views on this proposed new settlement. EDDC are proposing a self-sustaining new settlement, wherein it seeks to change people's behaviours, and get them walking and cycling to school, the shops and to work. In theory this sounds all well and good, better than just adding to and overwhelming existing settlements. However, will it really work? Will there be sufficient jobs, shops, medical centres, community facilities and schools all built at the same time? Or will the residents just get in their cars and make congestion of the main roads into Exeter even worse.*

*Our main concern is that the existing road network, sewage treatment, and other infrastructure we currently have cannot cope at the moment, so any new settlement will only make the situation worse. Where will the waste leaving the sewage works be piped to?*

*The OVA notes that 8000 houses are proposed, and would like assurances that the majority of these will be affordable for local people. All the necessary supporting infrastructure, and essential facilities, such as new sewage treatment works, electricity, roads, schools, doctors, dentists and community facilities must be built before the houses are occupied or provided in a timely manner. This is key to the success of such a new settlement. We consider that it is essential that the EDDC imposes conditions that ensure that development is phased and proceeds in a certain sequence. Conditions should be used to ensure that a particular element in a scheme is provided by/at a particular stage or before the scheme is brought into use.*

*It is important that the local planning authority and the applicants discuss and seek to agree any such conditions before planning permission is granted. This is in order to understand how the requirements would fit into the planned sequence for developing the site, impacts on viability, and whether the tests of reasonableness and necessity will be met.*

*In addition, the area proposed for the new settlement straddles tributaries of the river Clyst, which has serious flooding problems. Any new large-scale development in this area will exacerbate flooding downstream, and has the potential to cause further pollution."*

# Did you know? All about Aphids!

*Author: Chris Hodgson, OVA Natural Environment*

This series of short articles will discuss facts about animals and plants that are perhaps less well known but which are amazing. In this issue, I conclude my commentary about Aphids ...

## **Did you know? Aphids part 2. Honeydew, defence and clones.**

Aphids feed on plant sap but most of this sap is composed of sugars, with only about 5% or so being amino-nitrogen and other nutrients (the part of the sap the aphids need). They eliminate the rest (mainly sugar) through their anus. This excess material is called honeydew and is very important, as the sugar is a major source of energy for many organisms. When you see ants attending aphids on your plants, they are actually harvesting the honeydew. Because this food source is so important, the ants will defend the aphid colony from predators and parasites that attack the aphids. Indeed, this relationship is so close that the aphids do not feel threatened by the ants and the latter can solicit extra drops of honeydew from the aphids by gently rubbing the aphids' abdomen! If you see ants running up and down a plant, almost certainly you will find that the plant has an infestation of aphids or of some other sap-sucking insect. So, in order to give the parasites and predators a good chance to control the outbreak on your plants, all you need to do is control the ants!

Most insects that suck sap from phloem produce honeydew and are attended by ants. In many warmer areas, the ants will even build shelters of mud and plant debris over the top of honeydew producing insects, making it much easier for the ants to defend their food source. Some ant species take this further. Several species of ant that live inside plants – such as in the hollow stems of bamboo – even take the honeydew producing insect with them when they move to a new site, ensuring a continuous supply of honeydew.

Honeydew is not just important to insects. The story goes that, when Abraham was leading the Israelites through the desert, they survived on manna. Manna is believed to have been the dried honeydew produced by a scale insect (an insect closely related to aphids) which is found on desert plants. And even today, honeydew is worth millions of Euros in some Mediterranean countries, such as Greece and Turkey. Here there is another scale insect that produces copious honeydew which is collected by bees to make their honey (which may be where the name honeydew came from!). This insect is found on the trunks of pine trees in the highlands. Beekeepers in these countries have large lorries with many hives which they move round the countryside to coincide with the peak time of this bounty. So, when you next eat Greek honey, it is highly likely that it is made from the honeydew of these insects – you could say from 'insect faeces'!

Aphids look completely defenceless - the colony appearing to be easy prey for predators and parasites, such as ladybirds or parasitic wasps. However, they have several ways of defending themselves. All aphids have a pair of tube-like structures (known as cornicles) that stick up from their rear end. When an aphid is disturbed,

they secrete a drop of liquid from these tubes. This liquid has two functions. The first is to act as an alarm pheromone. Pheromones are “scents” that are wafted around in the air and their presence carries a message. There are pheromones for many situations but in the case of aphids, this is an alarm pheromone. It is detected by the neighbouring aphids who respond by withdrawing their mouthparts from the plant and moving away. If the pheromone concentration is very strong, they will even throw themselves off the plant! The second function is to help defend the actual attacked aphid. When threatened, the attacked aphid withdraws its mouthparts and wags its body around vigorously. If the droplet on the end of the cornicle hits part of the attacker, the liquid spreads quickly and becomes very tacky. This is particularly significant if this fluid ends up on the mouthparts of a ladybird or on the “sting” of a parasitic wasp. Whilst the attacker is trying to clean this off, there is a chance that the aphid might get away – at the very least, it gives time for other members of the colony to move away.

Ants and bees are known for their complex social lives. For ants, one of these is the presence of soldier ants, whose sole function is to defend the nest. In the last 50 years or so, it has become clear that some gall-inducing aphid species also have colony members modified as soldiers. These have evolved to defend the colony and, unlike other members, they cannot reproduce. Their sole function is to protect the other members of the colony. Indeed, they sacrifice themselves for the good of the colony. So, in both of the examples above – soldier aphids and the attacked pheromone-producing aphid – the aphids are sacrificing themselves for the good of the colony. From a human point of view, this seems ridiculous. Very few of us would sacrifice ourselves for others under most situations. However, from the aphid *colony's* point of view, so long as at least one member of a colony survives such an attack, this is satisfactory. This is because most aphid colonies are clones – i.e., they are all female and are all genetically identical - and so the colony's particular combination of genes will be passed on to later generations *so long as at least one of their sisters survive*. If you have heard of “the selfish gene”, this is a good example – the genes of the colony are protected by these apparently selfless acts, even though many members of the clone may die!

The next essay will discuss aphid colony structure, reproduction and life. For instance, how is it that aphids can reproduce so quickly and where do they go to winter?

# Ospreys

*Author: David R. White, Naturalist*

An osprey is a large bird of prey, with a wingspan of 4.5' to 6', & it's a bird generally seen over or near water. Their diet is almost exclusively fish & it makes an impressive sight to see one hovering or plunging into water, feet first, when trying to catch a fish; & when flying away with their prize. They can live for 15-20 years, migrating to overwinter in places like Senegal & Gambia in Africa to overwinter; covering a distance of some 3000 miles. Autumn migrating birds stop off part way to refuel on migration & its these birds we see on the lower otter estuary.



*An Osprey catching fish on the Lower Otter Nature Reserve*

A juvenile birds first migration is hazardous. They don't learn to fish until they migrate, so have to work this out for themselves. Easterly winds can blow the birds into the Bay of Biscay where they can be lost at sea. They risk illegal killing when passing through the Mediterranean & they must cross the Sahara Desert alone & taking 4-6 days without food.

Adult birds have bright yellow eyes. These start in the nest as blood red, & change to orange yellow in juveniles. Adult birds pair for life, but unsuccessful mating can lead to divorce. They lay 2 or 3 eggs which may hatch up to 5 days between the first & last chick. The oldest hatchling dominates its young siblings & can monopolize the food brought by its parents. When food is abundant, chicks share meals & generally all is well. In times of scarcity the weaker chicks may starve.

In 2017, in nearby Dorset, a project was started to reintroduce ospreys to the Poole Harbour area. The first egg was laid in a nest provided by the project in 2022. Two chicks hatched in June 2022. One of the chicks died after a predation attempt by a goshawk! In 2023 3 chicks were hatched & they all fledged in August 2023.

Legal protection is provided for ospreys because they are a species listed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act. Offences under this Act include taking or owning its eggs. Damaging birds or their nesting site, & " intentionally or recklessly " disturbing the birds while it is building its nest, or is in it, on or near the nest containing eggs or the dependent young of such a bird.

Ospreys returned to Scotland to breed for the first time in 1954 at Lock Garten near Aviemore. This was a natural recolonization from Scandinavian stock. They have needed a huge amount of help & protection to breed there successfully. The latest estimate in 2023 for UK ospreys is nearly 300 breeding pairs, with the majority of these in Scotland.

## Recent Wildlife sightings on the Otter Estuary Nature Reserve

*Author: Rick Lockwood, Otter Estuary Ranger*

July is generally a quiet month in terms of bird movements as birds are settled in for the breeding season. Numbers of breeding Shelduck have increased markedly this year with between 6-9 broods recorded, compared to 1 or 2 in previous years and overall numbers remained high.

Numbers of little egret have also continued to increase with a new high count of 50 on the 18th, as have grey heron and cormorant – an indication that there has been an increase in fish populations in the new tidal area – more of which below.

The first returning waders began to pass through in late July with small numbers of whimbrel, curlew, dunlin, black-tailed godwit, ringed plover, green and common sandpiper all being seen. These early autumn migrants are often made up of birds that have experienced failed nesting attempts on their breeding grounds further north.

August saw a significant and hoped for development as large numbers of wading birds were recorded feeding at the northern end of the reserve. Ringed Plover numbers peaked at 180 birds, smashing all previous records, whilst Dunlin counts of around 60 birds were also exceptional. These flocks also contained rarer species including little stint, curlew sandpiper, and ruff. This demonstrates how the habitats are naturally transitioning from terrestrial to marine and indicate that the mud must already support good densities of marine invertebrates.

August is a good month for checking through the roosting gulls for less common species. There were at least three yellow-legged gulls during the month, and a juvenile Caspian gull on the 8th.

Like last year, August and September sightings of osprey added splashes of awe and wonder to peoples walks around the reserve. The first birds on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> August didn't linger but then in September a juvenile bird appeared on the 11<sup>th</sup> and was seen almost daily until the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Easily distinguished by a gap in the primaries of the right wing, this bird had previously been observed on the Axe. Remarkably it was joined by a second juvenile, and both were seen together over the

weekend of the 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, sometimes alighting in the dead tree and fishing together over the north of the reserve.

At the end of September, a fish survey of the new tidal area and the river estuary was facilitated by Steve Colclough and Iain Turner from the Institute of Fisheries Management ably assisted by a team of committed volunteers. This followed up on previous surveys of the river estuary in 2021 and 2022.



Sein nets were pulled through different areas of Big Marsh, both above and below South Farm Road and evidenced what we already suspected – that these new habitats were already teeming with nursery fish. Around 90% of these were thin-lipped grey mullet, together with good numbers of young sea bass, and golden-grey mullet of all age categories including this year's fry. Other species found included flounder, common and sand goby, European eel, sand smelt, sand eel, and a single specimen of corkwing wrasse, together with lots of shrimp and 'peeler' shore crabs. The survey has aided our understanding of how the new tidal areas are functioning and illustrates nicely how the restoration scheme has significantly increased the importance of the lower Otter as a haven for nursery fish.

Rick Lockwood, Otter Estuary Ranger  
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OVA News October 2024

# Birdlife on the Lower Otter

A small selection of birdlife recently seen across the Otter valley.



Credit: Simon Wakely



Credit: Chris Townend



Credit: John Wokersein



Credit: David R. White



Credit: David R. White

# The Otter Valley Association

**Web:** [www.ova.org.uk](http://www.ova.org.uk)

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

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