

Helping to support and protect the lower Otter Valley

# OTTER VALLEY ASSOCIATION

April 2025



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## Our Cover Photo

A selection of wildlife observed in recent weeks from local photographers – for full attribution, please refer to our Facebook group where all these pictures have been shared publicly by their authors.

# Chairman's update

*Author: Haylor Lass, Chairman*

I've enjoyed the early spring weather of more than two weeks of wall-to-wall sunshine and clear starry nights – primroses have carpeted the banks, along with celandines, stitchworts, daisies, dandelions and Devon violets, to be followed by bluebells in the woodlands and along the verges. Recent heavy rains are welcomed by gardeners and farmers looking for fresh grass for the spring lambs; also by all the shrubs along the hedgerows freshening up their new leaves. Now is one of the best times to be out-and-about in our lovely Otter valley.

The past few months have been marked by lots of planning matters for your executive team to consider and respond to:

- there's been the East Devon National Landscape 5-year management plan (for which the OVA is part of the Partnership),
- East Devon District Council's Local Plan,
- the government's Land Use Framework,
- etc.

All of these have been well summarised by Dee Woods on pages 5 & 6. And our own examination of the best use of our generous legacy (in a turbulent investment market) – Martin Smith's note on page 4.

This has inevitably meant a lot of sedentary paperwork, but without neglecting the active side of the Association. I'm delighted that the Water Quality Group has got the important systematic testing programme up and running, and with many new volunteers. We're always pleased to get new blood into the OVA, so I'm also delighted to welcome volunteers from Ottery St Mary on board, and hoping to build on contacts with Tipton St John and their active Eager Beavers. Volunteers are key to our organisation – see 'wants list' on page 5, and 'plastic-free Budleigh' on page 18. And time to 'put your hand up' for the AGM!

Not forgetting the Nature for which our area is deservedly famous: the FFF Group (Flora, Fauna, Fungi); the piece on insects by our Natural Environment Co-ordinator; the article on hedgehogs (insect-eaters!) from our new Ottery representative; and the Estuary Nature Reserve by its warden.

Time now to get your diaries out and note, and decide to join, lots of walks over the next three months, with a wide variety of places, lengths, and terrain. And to look forward to the autumn/winter series of talks as the nights draw in.

Haylor Lass  
Chairman, Otter Valley Association

# Annual General Meeting

*Author: Jane Kewley, Secretary*

**NOTICE is hereby given that  
the 46th Annual General Meeting of the Otter Valley Association  
will be held  
at 7.30pm on Tuesday 17th June 2025  
at the Peter Hall, Budleigh Salterton**

## **AGENDA**

- 1. Apologies**
- 2. Minutes of the Previous AGM held on 11th June 2024**
- 3. Matters Arising**
- 4. The Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 25.**
- 5. Appointment of the Independent Examiner**
- 6. Election of Trustees as Officers**
- 7. Election of other Trustees**
- 8. Any Other Business**
- 9. Proposed Date of next AGM - to be confirmed.**

**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.

The draft Minutes of the AGM held on 11th June 2024, together with the Trustees Annual Report and Accounts will be available on the OVA website prior to the meeting or on written request to the Secretary.

### **Post AGM Speaker:**

We are delighted that **Dr David Smith** from South West Water will give a presentation on "**SWW's Natural Resources Programme**" covering the work of the SWW Natural Resources Team including the Award-Winning Upstream Thinking Programme and other investments in biodiversity, bio security, fish and eels with a focus on the Otter catchment area

Dr Smith has worked for SWW since 2010 leading investment programmes on Peatland Restoration, Catchment management (Upstream Thinking) and Biodiversity. Before this he worked for both Exmoor and Peak District National Parks as an ecologist and peatland restoration specialist.

# Bequest from Anita Jennings estate

*Author: Martin Smith*

The OVA has recently received a substantial bequest from the estate of Anita Jennings. This sum of money is roughly equivalent to all of the membership subscriptions the OVA has received in its existence over the past 46 years.

Many of you will know that Anita Jennings was the founding force behind the creation of the OVA in 1979. She had discussed a planning application that would replace the Church Institute behind the Public Hall with new flats, with other like-minded people. This group then arranged a public meeting to 'lay the foundation for a civic society'. The result was the Otter Valley Association. Anita Jennings held various roles within the OVA for many years and always maintained a great interest in planning matters, as some of the files in the Fairlynch Museum testify.

The OVA trustees have decided to place this legacy in a selection of Charity Aid Foundation investment funds. As we start to receive income, we will look for opportunities to use this money for our aim of protecting and supporting the lower Otter valley and in a manner that is a fitting tribute to the memory of Anita Jennings. The growth of the capital invested will provide for the long-term future of the association.

# Expanding up to Ottery St Mary

*Author: Chris Boorman*

We are delighted to announce the expansion of the OVA into Ottery St Mary. This has come about as a result of being approached by a very dynamic group of volunteers who are interested in helping improve the water quality of the river Otter, but are also interested in many other ways of enhancing and supporting the environment in and around Ottery St Mary. You will hear more from this group over time – especially on Facebook, and in Ottery St Mary itself. Please join us all in welcoming this group to the OVA.

## **OVA Awareness**

Do you ever ask your friends and family if they know about the OVA?

Do you have any ideas about how to better promote the OVA and raise awareness of the programs we are running?

**Please do spread the word and help us grow our membership**

# Volunteers – can you help?

Author: Chris Boorman

We are still looking for additional volunteers to help the OVA:

## **Events Organiser**

This part-time role requires someone with a few hours a month to help us arrange some of the events we participate in. For example, when we attend a local event with a small pop-up stand or when we run our own events.

## **Natural Environment Coordinator**

Geoff Porter, who has acted as the Natural Environment Coordinator, will be stepping down at the AGM. We thank him for everything he has done in this capacity.

This part-time role requires someone with a few hours a month to help co-ordinate the natural environment working group, report back to the executive committee, and to share information across the group and our members on projects and progress being made.

## **Parish Representatives**

We are looking for two people to join our group of 6 parish reps to help us in Budleigh Salterton and Tipton St John. Again, this part-time role is for someone with an hour to two per month availability. The role acts as an interface between the OVA and the local town or village – helping to promote what the OVA is doing (such as talks or walks), encouraging memberships, and ensuring the OVA is aware of priorities, plans and activities being organised within the town or village.

## **Publications Manager**

This part-time role requires someone with a few hours a month to help us with the process of creating and managing new publications, and also managing distribution. For example, we have recently been working on a new walk's booklet, and are looking to create some new leaflets for children and families to read.

If you are interested in helping, please do get in touch by either talking to a member of the committee (full details including phone numbers are on the back cover) or by emailing [info@ova.org.uk](mailto:info@ova.org.uk).

# Built Environment Update

Author: Dee Woods

Consultations are like buses, whilst you wait for one, three come along at once, or so it seemed at the start of the year.

## **East Devon Local Plan:**

The Regulation 19 Consultation from East Devon District Council on the Emerging Local Plan was expected, and the OVA duly considered it in detail and responded. Many of us were dismayed and surprised by the large housing allocations to the eastern side of Exmouth. The next stage will be for the Council to consider all the comments submitted, and then produce the final version of the plan, which will be considered by a Planning Inspector. The Inspector will check that the Plan is sound and in compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework and government legislation and policy. If it is, then the Local Plan will be adopted by the Council, and guide development in East Devon for the next ten to twenty years. If you wish to read the OVA's responses to this consultation look on the website, or go to the OVA website and choose the [Built Environment] menu item.

## **East Devon National Landscape Management Plan 2025 – 2030**

Another recent public consultation was on the East Devon National Landscape Management Plan 2025 – 2030. The aim of this was to get public opinion on the new statutory 5-year management plan for East Devon National Landscape (EDNL). The plan set out the broad aims and objectives of the EDNL Partnership over the next 5 years. The Plan is for everyone and lays a framework for protecting, conserving and enhancing the landscape. The strategic themes are nature, climate, people and place, and each of these has sub-themes. One of these, under Place, is Development, and the EDNL propose a long-term target that planning policy, guidance and new development enhance the landscape character and qualities of the area. So, the Partnership is developing advice and guidelines, in close liaison with planning policy staff; responding to planning applications; ensuring high quality Biodiversity Net Gain delivery with new developments; developing guidance and designs to tackle nutrient neutrality within the River Axe catchment; and develop a land use framework for the area. We would like the River Otter and other rivers in the EDNL to be considered for nutrient neutrality protection, not just the Axe.

Although the closing date for this consultation was on 18 April, it is worthwhile have a look at this draft document.

## **Land Use Framework**

Another consultation that came along this Spring was the government's Land Use Framework. This sets out the government's vision for land use in England, and how to deliver it. The government recognises that land is our greatest natural asset, as it is the place we live, work and rest. The Land Use Framework will interact with other strategies they are developing in DEFRA; the Environmental Improvement Plan, a 25-year roadmap for farming, and a food strategy. Across government, the Land Use Framework will support sustainable growth, interacting with the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan as we accelerate to clean power by 2030, and drive their ambition to build 1.5 million new homes. The government states that 'The land can do so much at once. Growing fresh produce and

rearing animals, storing carbon and creating habitats for precious wildlife, providing homes and community spaces, siting the infrastructure that supports our society - a single plot can contribute in so many ways. There are increasing opportunities and demands on our land, requiring land use to be more dynamic than ever. Across both rural and urban landscapes, we must maintain food security in a time of global uncertainty, protect communities from the impacts of a warming climate, host growing infrastructure networks and settlements, and make room for healthier natural ecosystems to reverse nature's decline.'

That is why this Government has launched a national conversation about land use, to minimise trade-offs and optimise the use of our land.

We would urge you to take a look at this draft document as it contains a wealth of detail and data about the competing land uses in this country. Full details on the OVA web.

The OVA has also responded to a number of recent planning applications, and these can be found on the website, under the [Built Environment] menu option.

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*A few recent photos from around the Otter Valley – credit as per postings on Facebook*



# Water Quality Group Update

Author: Felicity Christie

We remain focussed on tackling untreated sewage discharges and farm pollution in the Otter. Extensive algae growth has been noted on the river bed in recent weeks, this is a sign that the water quality may not be good. Too much algae and the oxygen in the water decreases making it difficult for other aquatic life to survive.

Water bills have also increased – 60 % of the bill is for sewage treatment and yet we know that untreated sewage discharges are far more frequent than they should be. We will continue to question South West Water about how they are delivering the sewage treatment and using the additional funds generated from these latest bill increases.

On a much more positive note, we have now launched our systematic water testing programme. Two in-depth training programs took place for our volunteers at Otterton Village Hall on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March and Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> April. We have also now run two official test cycles at 12 locations on the river – and plan to continue every 2 weeks, with 4 teams of fantastic volunteers. Thank you to everyone involved with the testing programme. We will be publishing the first summary of the test results on the ORCA page at end April, and update this regularly throughout the year.

We were delighted to receive a grant from Lord Clinton's Charitable Trust to cover the cost of our first set of testing equipment. We express our heartfelt thanks to the trustees for their kind generosity in helping us drive this important initiative forwards.



Training of volunteers on process and safety

- *We hope to expand our testing to include invertebrate sampling and continuous water quality measurements using Sonde devices in due course.*
- *At the start of May we are meeting with Richard Foorde MP, to show him our testing programme and discuss the issues affecting the Otter*
- *Recently we have also discussed dog flea treatments, especially imidacloprid and fipronil. These are extremely toxic to river life in very small quantities. Insect larvae such as mayflies and dragonflies are particularly vulnerable, and these are crucial to the ecology of the whole river. If you own a dog, please consider if you can reduce the use of these chemicals and not let your dog into the river for 3-4 days after applying flea treatments. We would be interested to hear from any vets who can advise further on this issue.*

You can find all the latest information about this, including published articles, on the OVA Website ([www.ova.org.uk](http://www.ova.org.uk)).

# Restoring the Otter – Removing barriers

Author: Bruce McGlashan ([sec@riverotterfisheriesassociation.org](mailto:sec@riverotterfisheriesassociation.org))

In my article in the last OVA Newsletter, I highlighted the types of weir and other barriers to fish movement in the river Otter catchment and their impact on fish and the aquatic ecosystem. In this article, I will discuss why weirs and other barriers were constructed, the acknowledged best practices for their removal or modification and some of the obstacles to that process.

Weirs, bridges and dams have been constructed in rivers in this country since pre roman times in an effort to control or manage water flow, support industry and agriculture, aid navigation and more recently generate electricity. The ecological impacts they have are therefore not a new issue for the country's rivers. The number and size of weirs has however increased drastically in the last 100 to 200 years and so therefore has the magnitude of their impacts. Historically little consideration was given to these. Otterton Weir is a prime example as from its construction in the late 19th century until 1999, when a fish pass was constructed on its western side it remained largely impassable to salmon and sea trout returning to the river to spawn. It fish each year managed to find their way up stream of via the mill leat. The weir therefore effectively restricted salmon and sea trout spawning in the river in that period to around a mile or so of the lower river. This is almost certainly the main reason why the Salmon population of the river crashed, and it has never recovered even with the installation of the pass. Prior to the weirs construction in its present form the Otter was a renowned salmon river. Sea Trout number have however partially recovered since the fish passes construction.

Thankfully our understanding of the impact of weirs and other barriers on river ecology and hydromorphology has grown considerably in recent time together with interest in their removal. Unfortunately, removal is not always an option and even if it is, it's often nor a straight forward task due to factors such as:

- *Cultural and Historical Significance. Many weirs are protected structures, valued for their historical importance.*
- *Ownership Issues: Determining responsibility for weir maintenance or removal can be complex.*
- *Funding Constraints: River Restoration and weir removal projects usually require substantial financial investment from either the private or public sector or both.*
- *Local communities and landowners may resist changes due to perceived impacts on their land, such as bankside erosion or flooding if the weir is removed. These fears are usually unfounded; indeed, these issues may be reduced if a weir is removed. But there is a need to demonstrate this*
- *Landscape aesthetics or recreational uses. The fast waters below weirs are for example frequently used by canoeists*
- *The weir is still in use. E.g. Proving water to a watermill via a mill leat upstream whose inflow is found upstream of the weir or more recently water to hydro electrical schemes such as the case at Tipton weir*

Fish passes where the chosen option is many cases in the past, but their installation is no longer considered best practice as they're expensive to construct, need to be maintained, which raises issues around ownership and responsibilities and they're also not ideal for some fish species such as lampreys and shad which can find even modern designs of fish

passes difficult to ascend. They also do not resolve other issues created by weirs such as restriction of downstream gravel movement and the impacts of impoundment.

The preferred approach in the UK is ideally the removal of the weir/barrier completely or, if this is not possible, the modification of the structure. However, if both options are impracticable or too expensive then a fish pass may still need to be considered.

On the Otter the problems caused by weirs has been known for some time and my own organisation ROFA has been leading efforts with partners to improve fish passage on the river for over 30 years. Much of the initial work involved the installation of fish passes, most notably the construction of purpose-built concrete fish passes at Otterton, Tipton and Head Weir. And a more basic boulder step arrangement at Tracey Weir. These passes have allowed migratory fish, primarily Sea Trout to return to much of the middle and parts of the upper catchment and tributaries.



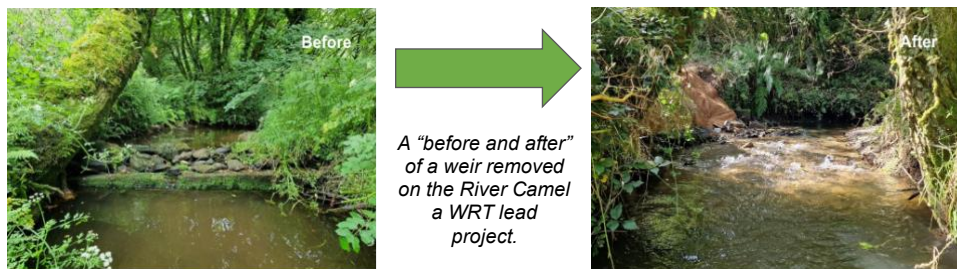
*Otterton Weir and Fish Pass on its Western Edge.*

However, to fully open up the river, more needs to be done due to the number of barriers that still exist. Little work has unfortunately been done to address the issue since 2012 despite a lot of effort on other rivers. This was something I wanted to address when I took over the role as ROFA's secretary in 2023. We are however a small body and do not have the resources to fund and then manage this work by ourselves.

Our first step was therefore to contact the local EA fisheries team to try and raise the profile of this issue in an effort to coordinate with them a barrier removal program on the river. They were

supportive and we agreed that the first step in this process was to develop a prioritised list of barriers/obstructions still remaining on the river. To do this we used a 2012 EA list of barriers on the river as a starting point and after consulting our members and using the EA's own records and a series of site visits, we produced an updated list. When doing this we found that several barriers on the list could be removed as they were no longer considered to be a problem, or had been removed. The list was then prioritized by the EA's experts primarily on the basis of their impact, but also how easy or difficult they thought removal or mitigation would be. The update list is now completed but maybe subject to change if any additional barriers are identified. Something we did recently with the discovery of a barrier on the River Git.

The next step in the process of removing them is the requirement for a detailed assessment to be carried out of the physical impact of removing or modifying a barrier on the river's channel and nearby fields or structures. This is because patterns of erosion and gravel deposition both up and downstream will be altered after a barrier is removed or modified both in the short term during and immediately after work to remove the barrier and in the longer term as flow and sediment movements in the river shape the newly opened section of watercourse. Another requirement at the stage will be to clarify ownership as this is not always obvious or indeed known.



Following this assessment, the development of costed options for the actual work required can then be produced. These assessments may be relatively straight forward for some barriers but complex at others. Carrying out these assessments are projects in themselves which inevitably involves some cost. The EA therefore put in a bid for funding earlier this year from its National Environmental Program to cover the cost of this work for a number of the priority barriers on our list. Unfortunately, the bid was unsuccessful for this round of bidding. We are however now exploring other options with the EA and other partners including the West Country Rivers Trusts, who are involved in barrier removal programs on a number of other in the SW for how we can get these assessments done.

We have already had one success as a bid made by the Blackdown Hills Natural Landscape team with our and WRT support, for money from the newly created Water Restoration Fund to fund several of these assessments was successful. It's been agreed between us that our initial priority should be the removal of a weir on the River Wolf near Awliscombe that acts as a complete barrier to fish movement. The Heaths to Sea Project also provides an opportunity to remove several barriers within the project area and we are in contact with the project team about this. Frustratingly but also encouragingly the EA have advised that if we can get the assessment done then bids for the capital work to actually remove the weir are more likely to be successful. We are also in touch with other river associations most notably those on the Teign and the Exe which have ongoing barrier removal projects.

## **Conclusions**

Hopefully after reading this article, you will have a better understanding on the impact of weir and others barriers in the River Otter on its ecology and why removing them should matter to everyone with an interest in the Otter and not just anglers. If you wish to know more about this issue and/or get involved in our efforts to tackle it please drop me a line at [sec@riverotterfisheriesassociation.org](mailto:sec@riverotterfisheriesassociation.org).

# Flora, Fauna & Fungi Group Update

*Author: Chris Boorman*

We have held a couple of meetings of the Flora & Fauna group since our last newsletter – and we will continue to post updates on our Facebook group. Below are a number of initiatives that we are working on. Please do let us know if you would like to be involved, or if there is anything else you think we could work on.

## **Website Updates**

We continue to update the OVA website with articles, pictures and news regarding the flora, fauna and fungi of the Otter valley. If you haven't seen it, please do check it out – it is shaping up nicely as a showcase of the nature around us. We would like to thank all the local photographers who have been contributing to the site.

## **Local school engagements**

We are actively looking at how to engage with local schools in the area. We want to help fund materials and provide volunteers to go to the schools and help with their curriculum delivery. If you are linked in to any schools in the area, please do get in touch with us.

## **Families & Children**

We want to provide some fun ideas and educational materials for families and children. We are thinking about producing some leaflets, made available ideally through local community shops and information centres. These can then be used to help identify common birds / insects / plants as families walk around the villages, heathlands and nature reserves.

## **Geocaching & Letterboxing**

Have you ever tried a geocaching walk? The idea behind these are to go on a walk and find specific locations along the way – a little like Orienteering. We are investigating ways in which we could do this with our new walk's booklet – more on this in the future.

## **Biodiversity & Climate change**

We are discussing the potential to run surveys of wildlife in the area – as a way of understanding how species are being affected by the climate change affecting us all.

# A fascination with insects

*Author: Geoff Porter, Natural environment coordinator, Otterton Parish Rep & Trustee*

*This month Geoff is sadly stepping down from his role as Natural Environment Coordinator. He has been a champion of the natural world for many years. So, we asked him to tell us a little about his lifelong passion for insects. (Geoff will be staying on as a trustee and parish rep for Otterton!)*

Like many toddlers I found collecting snails irresistible and I quickly discovered that they loved eating hollyhock leaves. So my mother was happy to go along with my mop bucket collection. However, Mums enthusiasm waned when she discovered that our friendly vegetable growing neighbour Ben had generously agreed to my collecting as many snails from his garden as I liked, an offer I couldn't refuse. I then became absorbed in watching ants and was fascinated by the fact that they were so clever at leading others to food. But snails were still much easier to catch and some had very pretty shells.

A chance meeting with a holidaying second cousin introduced me to moths. Whilst butterflies were very attractive I soon discovered that moths and their caterpillars were far more varied and plentiful. No need for a trap, by simply leaving open the bedroom window, moths would fly in. Like an infant Compo, I was seldom found without a matchbox containing some creepy-crawly.

Another important influencer was our infants teacher. Miss Rudkin was allowed to take out her class, hand in hand, two abreast on nature walks. She knew her wildflowers and soon, so did I. What she didn't appreciate though was that hungry snails will eat paper. Her classroom collection, left hungry over the summer holidays made their escape by chewing through their newspaper cover and in the absence of anything else had eaten large holes in the educational wall charts.

Having grown up on a farm in a very small village, I'd learnt to occupy myself. The stream in our village became a major amusement. Its crystal clear water pumped from the local mine was alive with sticklebacks, bullheads, catfish and water voles. That stream embedded a love for water in all its forms. Where there's water there's life.

I learnt how to creep up to the stream, tempt out the voles with pieces of apple and enjoy watching them feed. Trying to get close to mad March hares also became a rewarding challenge. This required stealth and patience, skills that are now regularly seen on TV as wildlife photographers spend hours trying to capture a few minutes of film. The small area of wild clay common hosted a large colony of great crested newts. Something we were then allowed to collect. Sadly, this unprotected 'useless' land became a housing estate. The newts disappeared.

Later in life, my wife and I moved to rural S.W. France where we lived for 12 years. Our ancient water mill sat in the flat Lizonne valley. The river was similar in size to the Otter. The Moulin came with 15 acres of ash wood, 2 wet meadows, mature oaks and peaty land that for years had been mono-cropped with maize requiring artificial fertiliser, insecticides and herbicides. The soil was lifeless. We took the decision to no longer cultivate our land without having heard of the term 're-wilding.' Our neighbouring farmers were understandably bemused.

Within a few years, the increase of wildlife was remarkable. We were already fortunate in having a variety of birds; nesting nightingales, resident kingfishers, visiting golden oriels,

cuckoos, wryneck, black redstart but numbers increased. Most exciting was the boom in insects. Flashy common and scarce swallowtail butterflies were already established species but others appeared that I'd never seen; map butterflies, lesser purple emperors, large coppers, black veined and wood whites and various varieties of blues and fritillaries. Moths again entered our bedroom window including a grande paon de nuit (giant peacock) the size of a small bat.

In the two wet meadows sang out with grasshoppers and crickets, longhorn beetles emerged from the wet woodland and there were numerous dragon and damselflies, wasps, bees and flies. Our two ponds, along with most of the wetland valley were rich in amphibians and reptiles. The dead soil started to recover.

My childhood interest in insects was re-ignited and I set myself the challenge of photographing as many as possible so that I could identify them. New digital cameras made photography so much easier. The skills of walking slowly, looking closely and being patient came back into play. New skills also developed; being very aware of your own shadow especially in bright sunlight, trying to ignore the bites of unwelcome mosquitoes, turning over branches and leaves and rightly or wrongly, avoid wearing reds and yellows; being bland. I also found that providing I moved slowly, I could get my camera very close to most insects. My theory, rightly or wrongly, is that once the camera blocks you out, they don't feel so threatened.



*Late one summer evening, I watched this clouded yellow butterfly circling in a recently cropped grass field. It finally chose to settle on an old clover plant. The butterfly was so confident in its disguise that I got so close I could have touched it.*

Being at the bottom of the food chain, insects have to hide or present themselves as dangerous. I came to appreciate how clever many were at camouflaging themselves and trying to photo them became a fresh challenge. Those photos are among my most treasured.

Returning to Devon, I was immediately struck by the sparsity of wildlife in general compared with our previous home, especially the huge decrease in both variety and number of insects. Finding and recording them is an even greater challenge not because there's so many but so few. That's especially the case when trying to discover anything new or unusual. This is in East Devon, a relatively

environmentally rich area of England. It makes those rare moments of photographing something unusual, especially if camouflaged, even more special. It very much saddens me that my grandchildren are unlikely to ever get the chance to experience the nature rich England of my childhood but it's still down to all of us to do what we can to reverse the decline.

And so, what have I learnt along the way? Water is the key to wildlife. If possible, introduce some to your garden. The countryside needs more ponds. Fight to reduce pollution in rivers and streams. Wild scrubby areas are often nature rich, not useless. Stop making things so 'tidy'. Don't needlessly mow roadside verges and flail the life out of hedges and

leave wild areas in your garden. Stop using herbicides; most 'weeds' are native plants many of which are essential to native wildlife. Appreciate mini-beasts; many have fascinating life cycles. Stop using insecticides; most insects are not 'pests.' They are the basis of the natural food chain. Soil is finite; it takes millennia to develop and minutes to wash away. Move away from intensive farming toward organic food production. Looked after, barren soil will recover and so will the life it supports.

When you can, walk slowly, notice and appreciate the little things. It's not just fast walking that's good for your health. What you learn to value in childhood can last a lifetime.

## The Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*)

*Author: Denise Melhuish, Ottery St Mary Village Rep*

The hedgehog is on the British endangered species red list. Hopefully making people more aware of their vulnerability we can help improve the environment for them.

I've become fascinated with hedgehogs since I moved to Ottery St Mary two years ago and discovered that they were frequent nighttime visitors to our garden. We discovered that several other Ottery residents had also seen them in their gardens or walking along the street. We started feeding them and started to use a wildlife camera to see more. We were surprised how often they turned up, almost every hour there has been one or more visiting the garden, eating slugs, hedgehog biscuits or having a drink of water. The most we've seen at the same time is six hedgehogs. They seem to be more successful in towns than rural settings.



*Credit: David R. White*

Hedgehogs are nocturnal and are around just as it's getting dark from mid-March to November (usually). They visit several places every night, with males often travelling up to 4 square miles and always on the lookout for a female hedgehog. It is important to have a hole in fences or gates -13 cm to allow hedgehogs to move from garden to garden. This is the same size as a CD box if you need a template to cut around.

Hedgehogs have about 6,000 cream or brown spines and a softer fluffy "skirt" around the lower part of their belly. They also have a very short tail and their skeleton is said to be like a dog's in shape. Their back legs are longer than their front - which means they can

run very quickly. Their feet are quite big, almost like hands with long toes. They often make snuffling noises - particularly males if they're sniffing around a female. Their main mean of defense is to curl up in a ball, which is why we often see dead ones on the road. Cars, strimmers and badgers are their main attackers.

### **Food**

In the wild they will eat slugs, worms, snails, caterpillars and a range of insects so they are great for our gardens. They do sometimes eat frogs or baby rodents. But they do like a top up of hedgehog or kitten biscuits or wet dog food.

- *Don't give them milk*
- *Dried insects (they love them but they're not good for them)*

### **Hedgehog breeding**

This is done very carefully! The female can soften its spines. The main breeding season is usually May to June but this year the males are already checking out the females, which involves a lot of sniffing and encircling the female, even when she'd feeding! It's not unusual to see a female roll up into a ball to avoid the attention of the male. Although hedgehogs are not territorial males can be aggressive if another male tries to interfere in their courtship. Hoglets are usually born between June and July although some later in the year after the summer.

### **Wildlife Cameras**

If you're interested invest in a wildlife camera to see if you have hedgehogs. Nature Spy or Browning have a range of cameras and there are many others. But be warned: you get obsessed by checking out what's been visiting your garden. The cameras also show how many cats are also enjoying the hedgehog biscuits.

### **Hedgehogs Houses**

These can be used as feeding stations or for shelter. After a year one of the hedgehogs in our garden chose to have her hoglets in it. I was very happy. There are instructions for making or buying them on line.



### **Supporter Poll on Facebook:**

We ran a poll on the OVA Facebook group asking supporters if they were doing anything for local hedgehogs. The results were incredible – over 218 people voted to say:

- *24% of people said that "Yes" they have hedgehogs in their garden*
- *18% of people said that they cut holes in their fences to allow hedgehogs to travel more freely.*
- *17% of people said that they provide hedgehog hotels for them*
- *15% said that they leave good quality food out for their hedgehogs*
- *9% said that sadly they had not seen a hedgehog for years.*
- *7% said that they used to have hedgehogs, but not anymore*

We would like to encourage all of our members to think about investing in hedgehog hotels, and to provide suitable food for them. If you would like to know more about this, please do get in touch with us by emailing

[editor@ova.org.uk](mailto:editor@ova.org.uk).

## How you can help

1. *Always put fresh water out at night*
2. *Help create highways between gardens by having a gap in the bottom of your fence 13cm high*
3. *Check long grass before strimming, don't use slug pellets or chemicals like weedkiller. If you have a bonfire, try and check for hedgehogs and light from one side only.*
4. *Drive carefully at night in hedgehog area*
5. *Allow your garden to have wild areas where the hog can search for slugs and insects, and even to sleep overnight or even buy or make a hedgehog house.*
6. *Plant native hedges that contain prickly hawthorn and blackthorn. If you can, let older ones grow, and then cut and lay them on a five- or ten-year rotation. The thicker and less tended the hedge the more of a safe snuggle (old English or Devon word) for the hogs to breed and forage in bad weather, safe from predators.*
7. *Remove any hazards broken glass, loose netting or plastic and pick up rubbish particularly in streets where hedgehogs live*
8. *Make sure a hedgehog can get out of your pond by providing a ramp or stones or even some netting.*
9. *If you find a hedgehog at during daylight and you think it's sluggish phone the helpline below for advice.*

## To find out more:

Helpline for advice on injured, ill hedgehogs ring: 01584 89081

Check out various Facebook sites such as:

- *British Hedgehog Preservation Society BHPS*
- *Ross on Wye's Town Council Hedgehog hub*
- *BIG hedgehog map bighedgehogmap.org.*
- *A community hedgehog street site: <http://www.hedgehogstreet.org/>*
- *PTES Peoples Trust for Endangered Species <https://ptes.org>*

## **The Otter Valley Association**

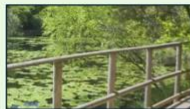
*to celebrate and safeguard the Otter Valley as a truly wonderful part of the world, ensuring it remains a source of joy and inspiration for both locals and visitors alike.*



*"To champion for clean water in the river Otter and its tributaries"*



*"To encourage sustainable and appropriate development"*



*"To encourage thriving biodiversity across our Parishes, Heaths, Valley & Estuaries"*



*"To encourage our local communities & visitors to adapt to better ways of living"*

We have different working groups that our volunteers participate in – from water quality programs to enhancing the natural environment, to recognising our incredible heritage and the people who helped create it. We work with our parish and regional councils and collaborate with like-minded organisations to encourage sustainable change. We organise talks to support these programs, and regular walks to encourage health and wellbeing. We have a thriving social community.

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

For more information, please visit [www.ovala.org.uk](http://www.ovala.org.uk)

# Becoming an Ally for Plastic Free Budleigh

Author: Sue Glover, Plastic Free Budleigh

*The Otter Valley Association has applied to become an "Ally" for Plastic Free Budleigh. We asked Sue Glover, leader of this group, to tell us a little about what this is all about:*

The aim of Plastic Free Budleigh is to reduce single use plastic and become an accredited Plastic Free Town. It is a nationwide initiative by Surfers against Sewage who see plastic pollution damaging our beaches, rivers and sea, towns, countryside and wildlife.

We are supported by the Town Council (we are restricted to the Town Council area), Shop Budleigh and Love Budleigh, and aim to sign a minimum 5 Business Champions and 15 organisations as Community Allies by the year end.



We are asking businesses, organisations and individuals to reduce single use plastic use. There are many examples of best practice in Budleigh, such as avoiding take-away plastic cups and lids, researching best alternatives, bringing re-usable cups and refilling water bottles. Charity and second-hand shops re-use and re-purpose all kinds of items.

- *Budleigh Unwrapped, a zero waste shop in the High Street encourages customers to bring and refill empty jars and bottles. Thanks to Amanda who has signed up as our first, well-deserved Plastic Free Business Champion!*
- *The Cosy Teapot is another example reducing single use plastic and supporting Plastic Free Budleigh, do check out the loo!*

Plastic Free Community Allies are encouraged to remove 3 single use plastic items from everyday use and help spread awareness. Budleigh Food Market and Craft Fair has signed up, as have Budleigh in Bloom, Budleigh Flower and Produce Show, the Art Club, and Budleigh Lions, with more to come.

Plastic Free Budleigh joins beach cleans and litter picks with Clean Beach Budleigh Salterton, the Marine Conservation Society, Budleigh Lions, our friends at Plastic Free Exmouth, and recently with deep cleans on the Otter Estuary and Liverton Business Park with Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust, OVA and Clinton Devon. Do come and join us!

Let's do even better!

See us at Gala Week fete 24 May, Wildlife and Wellbeing Day Lime Kiln 30 May, or contact via Facebook, myself (sue) on 07720 711513 or Chris Boorman at the OVA.

# Otter Estuary Nature Reserve Update

Author: Rick Lockwood, Otter Estuary Ranger [Rick.Lockwood@clintondevon.com](mailto:Rick.Lockwood@clintondevon.com) [07976 06270]

January saw both the single snow bunting and spotted redshank remain through the month. Other wader highlights included a greenshank, up to 3 avocet and 8 black-tailed godwit, whilst a count of 26 redshank was double the high count from last winter. A high count of 39 curlew at the end of the month was equally impressive. A few brent geese dropped in on several dates but didn't linger, and duck numbers were down slightly from earlier in the winter, with over 300 teal and 150 wigeon still present. The lone gadwall was seen. Records of 4 shoveler and 4 tufted duck were noteworthy.

February was a quiet month as birds and other wildlife with few arrivals or departures. Wader highlights included up to 12 black-tailed godwit, 22 redshank, around 30 curlew, and single spotted redshank, greenshank, and common sandpiper. Shelduck numbers increased to 32, whilst around 130 wigeon and 200 teal were spread across the reserve. 3 shoveler on the 9th were nice as were the two drake goosander seen on the river from time to time, along with water rail and little grebe giving good views to the lucky few. Some early movement of lesser black-backed gulls were evident with 15 on the 21st. Good numbers of black-headed gulls throughout the month also included several mediterranean and common gulls.

Spring migration was well under way by the end of March with the first swallows, sand martin, wheatear, and several little ringed plovers all passing through. An osprey feeding on Big Marsh on the 30th and a red kite on the 19th were also notable. The spotted redshank and greenshank remained through the month as did a few curlew, including the colour-ringed bird from the Dartmoor re-introduction project. These were supplemented by small numbers of dunlin, ringed plover, and oystercatcher. A high count of 30 redshank on the 18th was impressive. By the month's end many of the ducks that spend the winter had left to return to their breeding grounds, with around 180 teal and 50 wigeon remaining. A flock of up to 17 brent geese were seen on several days feeding on the saltmarsh at the river mouth.

There are six species of wader in this picture – how many can you identify?



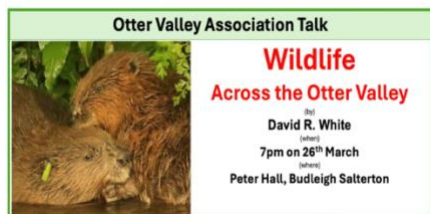
Credit: David R. White

# OVA Talks Programme

Author: Keith Grundy, Talks Organiser

The Otter Valley Association has now completed its winter series of talks. Thankyou everyone for your participation – we closed the season with a full-house listening to David White sharing stories and photographs from around the Otter Valley.

We have completed our draft program for the coming year. Please find it below – we hope you like it and look forward to seeing you at future talks. In the meantime, we wanted to share this report on David's wildlife talk:



David presented to a packed full house on Wednesday 26th March. His presentation provided an incredible glimpse into the wild life that one can see when enjoying the Pebblebed heaths, rivers or new Nature reserve.

My big takeaway is that there is an amazing variety of wildlife to be seen - but one has to observe - and that's the difficult part!

He started by looking at the water coming in and out of the nature reserve by the Elizabeth bridge – varying from low tides to high spring tide flooding. The volume of water moving in and out of the reserve is incredible and as David highlighted “the wildlife had no idea that this was about to happen”. Clearly the channels are deepening and widening, while the nature reserve is receiving large amount of salt water. This means that the wildlife is changing and adapting.



David shared stories and insights about animal behaviour – explaining, for example, why observing the Ospreys is probably easier in the autumn than the spring (because they are at the start of their winter migration as opposed to almost at the end of their spring migration).

His stories of the beavers and their kits were delightful – particularly when talking about the five kits one year being fed by a mother with just four teats ... one ending up as the runt of the litter and then continuing to be fed the following year. Incredible stories supported by incredible pictures.

The fish stock in the river and nature reserve clearly supports a growing population of birdlife. I for one had no idea that crows would feed so voraciously on small fish, or that the Curlews & gulls take crabs, or that the kingfisher takes shrimps. I was also surprised to

hear that eels are thriving in the river – witnessed by a cormorant catching and swallowing an eel that must have been 2 or 3 feet long!

Another surprise was to hear that our area is one of the best places to view butterflies. David shared some of the butterflies that are already beginning to be observed across the heaths. So do keep a keen eye out for them - and please do share what you see with us on Facebook or by emailing us.

## **2025 / 2026 Talks Schedule**

We are busy finalising our schedule of winter talks for the coming winter. Please mark your diaries. This is our schedule so far. If you have ideas for additional talks, please do get in touch.

Wednesday 10 <sup>th</sup> September	John Goss Custard on "Birds and people: resolving the conflict on estuaries"
Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> October	Talk still being scheduled.
Wednesday 19 <sup>th</sup> November	Tom Hynes on "Devon Hedgerows"
Wednesday 21 <sup>st</sup> January	Rick Lockwood on "Update on Otter Estuary Project"
Wednesday 18 <sup>th</sup> February	Ken Atherton on "Have you seen my little rubber Duck " (ocean pollution)
Wednesday 18 <sup>th</sup> March	Talk still being scheduled.

**Please check the OVA website for full details of all talks**

# Fairlynych Museum 2025 season

*Author: Trevor Waddington, Chairman Fairlynych Museum*

We are delighted to announce that the Fairlynych museum has reopened for the 2025 season. The exhibition Coastal Threads was opened by Ben Honey, Chairman of the Budleigh Salterton Art Club, who described it as “An outstanding exhibition of textile art by club member Brenda Thomas whose work is nationally acclaimed”. Brenda responded, “I am delighted to have been asked to display my textile pictures at Fairlynych Museum. The pictures are usually created on a felt background and built up, collage style, starting from the top and working down. I use a range of fabrics, very often recycled clothing, scraps and other pieces collected at various sales.



The detail is added after the basic background is in

place and the stitching brings it all to life, as well as securing the fabric pieces. You could describe me as a ‘late starter’ because I didn’t begin creating textile art until a year or two into my retirement after a long career in Children’s Social Services”. Brenda continued, “During Lockdown I was contacted by a couple asking if I would make a picture for their daughter ‘who has everything, except a textile picture of her country house’. I don’t normally take commissions but the photos they sent of the beautiful, thatched cottage were tempting and I had time on my hands. When I met the couple to hand over the finished piece, they said they had better tell me who their daughter was - television presenter, actor, and singer, Amanda Holden! The picture was for her 50th birthday and I’m told she wept and said she loved it”.



This year’s local history exhibition features the Old Shops of Fore Street, displaying items sold in bygone times and recording the many and sometimes unusual incarnations of the buildings over the years. Local history expert Roz Hickman cited the Old Clink in Mackerel Square as an interesting example; “built on the site of the demolished Exeter Inn around 1810, it was a drapery shop in 1831, the West of England Bank in 1867 and the Police Station with a lockup cell for miscreants in 1897, hence its name today”.

The Environment Room exhibition has a superb display of Otter Valley wildlife photographs by local naturalist David White of BBC Countryfile Calendar distinction. The Costume Room celebrates the elegance of costume for both ladies and gentlemen in the Georgian era. Jill Salen, head of department, explained “The silk from which the dresses and embroidered waistcoat were made was most likely woven by Huguenot refugees in Spitalfields, London, who had fled France because of religious persecution.”



Fairlynych Museum and Arts Centre is open from 2:00 to 4:30pm Tuesday to Sunday from Easter through October. Admission is £2.50 for adults, children under 16 are free.

# Walks: Programme [May – July]

*Author: Paul & Penny Kurowski, and the walks team*

Welcome to our walk programme for May, June and July - there's a wide variety of walks to choose from ... a huge thanks to all the walk leaders who have come up with varied and interesting walks.

With the hoped for good weather, several of the walks are further afield, e.g., Teignmouth, Taw Valley, part of the Templer Way and Yarnier Wood, and Broadhembury; however, many of the walks are within the Otter Valley and close-by, e.g., Bystock, Newton Popleford, Sidmouth, and Exmouth. There will be an interesting evening walk in Tipton St. John.

For most of the walks, there is no need to book, you can just turn up. For one or two more distant walks we do ask you to book - this is just so we can let you know if we have to cancel due to bad weather etc.

Over the next couple of years we are hoping to walk the length of the Templer Way, which runs from Haytor to Teignmouth and follows the route of the Haytor Granite Tramway and the Stover Canal, and then on to the coast, a route used by various enterprises of the Templer family. Rather than doing linear sections which involve complicated public transport or car-shuffling, we will offer it as a series of circular walks. The first one, starting and finishing at Haytor Visitor Centre, is in this quarter's programme.

We may also be offering pop-up walks later in the programme, e.g., to fill in the weeks without a walk, and these will be advertised on the website as well as the various OVA media – so keep your eyes open.

Information about the walks is posted on Facebook and WhatsApp; however, the website will always have the most up-to-date information : <https://www.ova.org.uk/ova-diary/category/walks>.

We hope to see you at one or more walks ... enjoy your time with us taking in the wonderful villages, towns, coast and countryside.

**Below you will find details of the various walks planned. Please refer to the OVA website for full details.**

**Saturday 03 May – 10:00 – 5 miles. 3 hours.**

***'Bystock Discovered'***



**Meet** by Knowle Village Hall, Knowle, EX9 6AP, on the B3178.

OS 115 053829; what3words ///smaller.bedsread.credited. Please car share where possible as there is not much street parking.

A walk almost entirely on footpaths gently climbing through woods and heathland to the beautiful Bystock Fishponds. After a break, we return across East Budleigh Common to Knowle. There will be a coffee stop so bring a flask.

**Walk Leader:**

Steve Hagger 01395 442631 / 07868 889260

**Thursday 08 May: 10:00am – 5 miles. 3 hours.**

***'Hamlets around Newton Popleford'***



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

Our route takes us into Harpford from where we take the old railway track to Tipton. Then via footpaths and quiet lanes we go through the hamlets of Metcombe, Venn Ottery and Southerton. The walk has minimal hills with less than 500 feet of accumulated ascent. There will be a coffee stop so bring a flask.

**Walk Leader:** Ted Swan 07848852463

**Week beginning 12 May - see website, walk may be cancelled due to rain**

***'Victorian Pier & Black Swans'***



**Meet:** Exmouth train station at 9.15am to catch the 9.24am train arriving in Teignmouth at 10.19am. Then start at 10.45am from Teignmouth Pier ([what3words](#) [///reservoir.breezy.kickbacks](#)).

Walk the coastal path to Dawlish Warren stopping for lunch in Dawlish. The walking is mostly on flat ground but does follow the sea wall and there are a couple of descents. The intention is to walk to Dawlish Warren which is about 5 miles but the train stops at Dawlish, Dawlish Warren and Starcross if you wish to return earlier or later.

If you don't have a railcard, you can travel in groups of four to take advantage of a "Groupsave" train ticket – buy a return from Exmouth to Teignmouth but you all must travel together on both legs of the journey if you take this option. Either bring a packed lunch or visit one of the many cafes in Dawlish.

**Walk Leader:** Heather Fereday, 07484 627312.

**Week beginning 19 May: 10.00am – 6.5 miles. 3.5 hours plus bus ride**

***A Riverside Ramble'***



**Meet:** Newton Popleford, Recreation Ground car park, Back Lane, Newton Popleford (OS 115, SY 088 899); [what3words](#) [///wisely.amazed.configure](#).

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, 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. Bring a flask for a coffee break and a packed lunch.

**Walk Leader:** Ross Hussey: 01395 227991 / 07902 255915 mobile on the day.

**Tuesday 27 May: 10.00am – 5 miles. 2.5 to 3 hours**

***'Water and Woodland: A Countryside Loop in the Otter Valley'***



**Meet:** New Estuary Car Park, South Farm Road, Budleigh Salterton (SY070829); [what3words](#) [///deed.walnuts.loopholes](#).

A scenic 5 mile walk starting from the New Estuary Car Park on South Farm Road, up the river beside the Otter Estuary following the riverbank, then quiet lanes and tracks through East Budleigh up to Shortwood Common with woodland before looping back to Budleigh Salterton along the old railway line.

Event in partnership with Pebblebed Heaths and You; Connecting Communities with Nature and Wellbeing encompassing estuary, river, heathland and town. Bring a flask for a coffee break

**Walk Leader:** Iain Ure - Tel on the day 07789 670297

## Thursday 05 June - 10.00am – 6.5 miles – 3.5 hours

### ***‘Combes combo’***



**Meet:** Grammar Lane car park, Weston (OS Explorer 115, SY 1663 8898); what3words [///sometimes.zooms.fracture](#).

This hike through the series of impressive combes/valleys that cut through the cliffs east of Sidmouth follows a circuitous route in order to avoid the steepest slopes. Still fairly strenuous, though, and plenty of steps down and up. Bring a packed lunch.

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

## Week beginning 09 June – 10.00am – 6 miles. 3 hours

### ***‘Otter to Peak’***



**Meet:** The Green Fore St, Otterton, parking in nearby roads (OS 115, SY 081 852); what3words [///ranted.fork.prune](#).

We walk northwards beside the Otter then eastwards to North Star and Seaview Farm. After a long gradual ascent we reach the top of Peak Hill. We then follow the coast path south through Ladram Bay before returning to Otterton.

We'll pause on the coastal section for coffee, so bring a flask.

**Walk Leader:** Ross Hussey: [rdandamhussey22@gmail.com](mailto:rdandamhussey22@gmail.com) or 01395 227991 / 07902 255915 mobile on the day.

## Tuesday 17 June 10.00: 6-7 miles 3.5 - 4 hours

### ***‘A Different Exmouth Loop’***



**Meet:** Douglas Avenue by the Public Footpath opposite Mayfield Drive; what3words [///precautious.feed.zealous](#)

Taking the Public Footpath through two fields and across a brook, we get to Maer Lane and then along the seafront to arrive at the South West Coast Path. We walk either across the cliffs from Orcombe or along the beach if the tide is out. Then carry on along the cliffs to West Down Beacon so some uphill, inland across the Golf Course to Castle Lane and to follow the old railway track to Littleham, up Donkey Hill in Plumb Park as it is quite interesting to get a completely different perspective of a new development and then along the footpath which comes out at the starting point.

**Walk Leader:** Claire Read 07866 435333

## Tuesday 24 June 10.00am: 6.5 miles 3.5 - 4 hours

### ***“Taw Valley”*** taking in Coldridge, Brushford and Nymet Rowland and their Churches”



**Meet:** Coldridge Square, near Village Hall and St. Matthew's Church, EX17 6AX; (OS 113 SS697076). What3words [///woodstove.sapping.stadium](#).

Please car share where possible as we are unsure how much parking space there is.

A scenic 6.5 miles taking in a section of the Tarka Trail along the secluded valley of the winding river Taw, this route links three fine churches in Coldridge, Brushford and Nymet Rowland. The scenery is typical of Mid Devon, with its rolling hills, patchwork fields and deep lanes. We will visit the three fascinating, historic churches.

Bring a flask for a coffee break and a packed lunch.

**Walk Leaders:** Fran and Paul Dike, 07977057546 or 07968155817 or even 01297 20695 before the event.

**Tuesday 08 July - 5.30pm - 4.5 miles. 2 hours.**

**'Ghost Train'**



**Meet:** Tipton St John Level Crossing (OS 115 SY 091 917) a roadside bench between the Golden Lion Inn and the Playing Fields memorial clock. what3words: ///stove.manifests.today  
Car parking in the playing fields car park (donation) or at the pub if staying on for the meal.

An illustrated (old photos) walk with memories of the steam trains in the Otter Valley. Across the fields to look at the 5-arch bridge and Tipton Mill, then footpath, road and track following the Sidmouth branch route as far as the Knapps Lane bridge, Harpford. Across the Otter to look at the site of Newton Poppleford station and the camping coaches siding, then follow the Budleigh branch route back along the river to Tipton St. John Junction.

Finishing by 7.30pm by 'whetting your whistle' at the pub with take-away fish & chips, or stay on for an evening meal together - book your own place(s) by ringing the Golden Lion 01404 812881 (ask to join Haylor).

**Walk Leader:**

Haylor Lass 01395 568786

Photo Credit: L. F. Folkard, from 'Steam on West Country Branch Lines' by Peter Gray

**Week beginning 14 July - there will be a walk this week: check the website**



If the walk "Victorian Pier & Black Swans" scheduled for week beginning 12th May was cancelled, the plan is to have it this week (see details above); if it took place, there will be another walk posted on the website.

**Tuesday 22 July, 10 am – about 7 miles - allow 4-5 hours. PLEASE BOOK**

**'The Templer Way and Yarnar Wood – industrial archaeology and natural history'**



**Meet:** Haytor Visitor Centre car park (OS OL28 765 772), what3words  
///leave.accent.summaries at 10 am. The car park charge is £5.30 for the day; there are toilets at the Visitor Centre. The drive from Budleigh Salterton takes about 50 minutes.

We will walk towards Haytor, and follow the Granite Tramway for a while before turning off to walk through Yarnar Wood, which is part of the East Dartmoor National Nature Reserve. Our circular route re-joins the Granite Tramway and takes us back to the Visitor Centre. Expect some mud if it has been raining, and wonderful views on a clear day. Please bring a packed lunch.

**BOOKING REQUIRED** - please book with the Walk Leaders, in case we need to cancel due to bad weather etc. We may also be able to help with sorting out lifts. Any time up to 8am on the day of the walk is fine.

**Walk Leaders:**

Penny and Paul Kurowski, 01395 742942, 07792 619748  
pandp@kurowski.me.uk

**Wednesday 30 July - 10.00am – 6 miles - 3 hours**

**'Chasing the Tale'**



**Meet:** Broadhembury village centre, opposite the Drewe Arms (OS 115, ST 101 048), roadside parking; what3words ///mysteries.slams.submitted.

We make a thorough inspection of the beautifulcombe that sources the River Tale, a tributary of the River Otter. There is a long pull up at the start as far as the Gliding Club, rewarded by panoramic views. A traverse around the head of thecombe is followed by a descent back to Broadhembury. Optional lunch at the Drewe Arms pub.

**Walk Leader:**

Jon Roseway 01395 488739 / 07887936280

# Blue Plaque ceremonies

Author: Dee Woods

The Otter Valley Association has been working with Michael Downes, local historian, and the Fairlynch museum to investigate and arrange for new blue plaques to be installed in celebration of local historical figures in the valley. You can find a map of current blue plaques on the OVA website [ [here](#) ]. We were delighted to see a great turnout for the two ceremonies that took place in March:

- **Robert Warington FRS, Sunday 16 March at Poplar Cottage on Fore Street Hill.**



There was an excellent attendance at the unveiling ceremony for Robert Warington in Poplar Cottage. Robert was the founder of the Chemistry Association - setup 185 years ago. This was the predecessor of the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC).

These photos, taken by Peter Bowler, were shared with us by Trevor Waddington (chair of the Fairlynch Museum). The lady on the right in front of Poplar Cottage is Prof Gill Reid, past president of the Royal Society of Chemistry, and the other lady is Sheila Salmon, the great great granddaughter of Robert Warington. Both gave a short address.

It was a very pleasant occasion. Thankyou to Trevor for all the hard work behind the scenes in planning, organising and liaising to bring this to fruition.

The ceremony was also covered in Chemistry World.

- **Joan Bannister, Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> March at Green Mews near the Public Hall**  
This article was contributed by Michael Downes.

'A fabulous teacher.' 'An amazing woman.' 'A legend!' 'Taught us everything from writing, good manners to how to play cricket.'

These are just some of the memories that former pupils have of a Budleigh teacher who taught in the town for sixty years. This included a period from 1979 when the Linhay became a schoolroom, a move described by Priscilla Hull as 'of great assistance financially' to the Museum.



And now Miss Bannister has a blue plaque to honour her at Green Mews near the Public Hall, the former site of the Church Institute where she set up her school.

Funded by a Devon County Council Locality Budget, the plaque was unveiled on Thursday 20 March 2025 by Councillor Christine Channon who held this Budleigh teacher in high regard.

Also at the unveiling was ex-pupil Andy MacMullen: 'All six MacMullen brothers had the benefit of being taught by

Miss Bannister,' he wrote. 'As well as reading, writing and arithmetic I have very clear memories of being taught to tie my shoe-laces correctly, and of making baskets with long strips of cane which were softened by soaking in water and the whole finished off by being wrapped in coloured raffia.'

Actress Belinda Lee and composer Sir Richard Rodney Bennett, both brought up in Budleigh, were among Miss Bannister's pupils but it was for the love of books that many of them remember her with gratitude.

'An absolutely terrific teacher and a wonderful woman,' is how Sarah Harrison remembers Miss Bannister. The best-selling novelist's passion for writing goes back to her schooldays in Budleigh as a 'daydreaming, scribbling child'.

At the unveiling, reference was made to the forthcoming film 'Mr Burton' which was released in UK cinemas a fortnight later. The film, starring BAFTA winner Toby Jones, tells the story of the teacher from Glamorgan who took a young Welshman called Richard Walter Jenkins under his wing, having spotted the future actor's talent for drama. Better known as Richard Burton, the young Welshman received numerous accolades and became one of the highest-paid actors in the world.

Many of Miss Bannister's former pupils view her as a similarly inspirational teacher who encouraged them in a love of learning. A good teacher can make all the difference, it is said. Yet today, there are many voices claiming that the teaching profession is failing to attract in sufficient numbers, that few in Britain appear to want to be a teacher any more.

A recent article published by the Royal Society suggested that reforming education should start with boosting the status of teachers. It is hoped that the latest blue plaque in Budleigh Salterton represents a tiny step towards that aim.

# Web & Social Media 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:

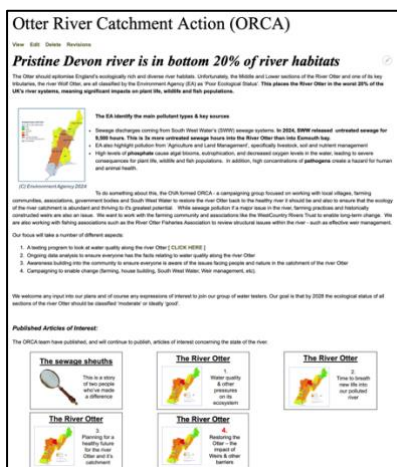
## Our website ([www.ova.org.uk](http://www.ova.org.uk)):

This is where all information is posted. Please do bookmark the site – we have been updating many sections including:

- *Our Home page – now more dynamic and enticing*
- *Walks page – including all previous walk reports shown in a dynamic and engaging manner*
- *Talks – including a summary of this year's talks*
- *Local Events – including links to local village sites and highlighting some of the bigger events happening near you.*
- *Built Environment – including our strategic responses to major initiatives such as the East Devon Plan*
- *Natural Environment – with a major overhaul of the Flora & Fauna section, and a significant update on "Water Quality Issues of the River Otter".*



*Our new homepage*



*Water Quality Campaign site*

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

This continues to grow with 918 supporters joining the group. This is where daily discussions occur, and interesting articles are shared. Please do consider joining the Facebook group – there are many interesting articles that are shared on that which don't make it into our printed newsletter. A few interesting facts for you about the group:

- 63% of our Facebook supporters are female, and 38% male.
- Top locations of Facebook members are Budleigh Salterton followed by Exmouth, Sidmouth, Exeter, Otter St Mary, Honiton, Lymington, Newton Abbot and Topsham.

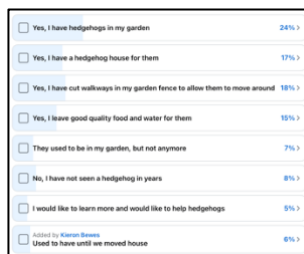
- While the UK is the overwhelming country of supporters, we also have supporters located in France, United States, Canada, Belgium and South Africa.

A few of the recent articles that have garnered significant attention are:

- BBC South West reaching out for sewage comment **16,878 people viewed this.**
- A poll about Hedgehogs, 988 people viewed this.
- Beavers building a dam, 744 people viewed this.
- Heaths to Sea feedback 644 people viewed this.
- Countryfile commentary about Beavers, 583 people viewed this.
- Barn Owl sightings, 463 people viewed this.
- Blue Plaque for Rober Warrington, 390 people viewed this.
- Recent Wildlife photo's, 314 people viewed this.



*We were contacted for BBC comment*



*Our Hedgehog Poll took centre stage*

## OVA Archive & Storage

*Author: Martin Smith*

We are in the process of passing to the Devon Heritage Centre our entire archive of Executive Committee minutes, AGM minutes and trustee reports, as well as a complete set of newsletters and other historic paperwork. This material will be available to us in the search room at the Heritage Centre.

The old newsletters, dating from 1979, are currently being scanned and will be posted on the OVA website in due course.

If you have any documents in your possession which you feel should, or could, form part of the archive, please contact the OVA at [info@ova.org.uk](mailto:info@ova.org.uk).

We are also moving all of our materials and equipment, which for years have resided in various garages locally, to a storage facility in Exmouth. If you have any OVA property which you have been storing for us, and would like to regain your space, please contact us at [info@ova.org.uk](mailto:info@ova.org.uk).

# 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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## Otter Valley Association

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