

Dear Members,

We wanted to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Thank you for your support this last year – it's incredible to think we are already at the end of the year!

We are planning to deliver our next newsletter (which will be called "Winter 2024") by the end of January. Within it, we will have all your favourites such as upcoming walks and talks, plus a variety of articles looking at topics such as the local thatching industry, a study of the behaviour of our local beavers on the river Otter, an overview of the thorny topic of water quality & sewage, and lots more besides. Watch out for it in late January!

With best wishes from

Haylor Lass (Chairman) and the OVA executive committee

Since the last newsletter, a lot has been taking place...

OVA Walks

We have been busy with our walks program. Over 40 people joined us for the very popular bird-watching walk around the lower Otter estuary. Other walks we have enjoyed included the Sid Valley Ring (both East and West), Woodbury Salterton, Around the commons, and more. Here are a few pictures from a selection of these – more will be in the newsletter, on Facebook and our website.



Our next walk is planned for the 2nd of January – please join us at the longboat Café Budleigh Salterton for a 10am start.

Partnerships

Since our last newsletter, the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has been rebranded to the East Devon National Landscape in line with the national renaming of AONBs'. We continue to work closely with local authorities such as East Devon District Council, as well as local groups such as Pebblebed Heaths and Clinton Devon Estates.

BT Phone Box on Marine Parade (Budleigh Salterton)

It has come to our attention that BT are looking to remove the iconic phone box on Marine Parade. Some years ago, the same proposal was made, but it was decided that, for reasons of safety, i.e. advising the Coastguard if anything untoward was taking place on the sea, that it should remain.

The Planning department of EDDC are acting as a channel for public consultation, so we ask you (our members) to contact them to support objection because of emergency need to call a coastguard/lifeboat when the mobile phone signal is poor or non-existent. To do this, please contact: Ed Freeman, Assistant Director - Planning Strategy and Development Manager. His email is planningcentral@eastdevon.gov.uk, and he can also be contacted by calling the EDDC switchboard on 01404 515616.

Bird Boxes to Local Schools

We have recently started a new initiative to work with local schools on providing bird boxes to their school grounds. Depending on the success of this program, we will look to expand this next year to the broader community. Alongside the bird boxes, we are also producing guideline leaflets that will also be made available to everyone on our web.

Talks Program

The Fairlynch museum have been running a series of excellent talks that OVA members have been enjoying. We are looking to help promote their talks further in the new year, as well as add some of our own again. The next talk scheduled through Fairlynch is on January 3rd and will feature David White, photographer, who is going to talk about wildlife on the Otter. Hope you can make it - it's at the Peter Hall in Budleigh Salterton.

The OVA on Facebook

We have been busy growing a community of people on Facebook. The OVA group has now grown to over 440 members. If you have not seen this, we do encourage you to participate - you will find regular updates on local history, weekly snapshots of the flora and fauna, plus many updates and comments from our growing community. A few of the recent postings include:

- Birdlife sightings – including Short Eared Owls, Dunlins, Lapwings, Brent Geese, and Redshanks.
- Some history of the area – combining 1000 years, King Harold, Walter Raleigh, and the Abbots of Mont St. Michel.
- Drone video footage of the estuary.
- Appeals to save the iconic BT phone box on Marine Parade in Budleigh Salterton.
- An analysis of water level predictions across the lower Otter Estuary.
- Purple alder catkins and other fauna.
- Walk reports on Sid Valley (East) and (West).
- Announcement of the temporary closure of the Otterton Footpath No. 1

If you are reading this on your computer or mobile phone, do click on this [link](#) to go straight to the Facebook group and explore. We hope to see you there - liking and contributing.

LORP & the Elizabeth Bridge

The new Elizabeth bridge has now been fully opened. If you have not had a chance to visit yet, the entire LORP development is now settling in. We have seen Ospreys and other migratory bird life. The first Avocet has been seen by local photographer David White. The Beavers and Otters are firmly established on the river, and the water levels are rising and falling inline with expectations. It will be very interesting to see how this evolves in the coming years as the vegetations changes, and the river dynamics change. Here are a few photographs showing a variety of the birdlife – more on the web, Facebook and in our next newsletter.



Volunteers

We are looking for volunteers to help us. If you, or someone you know, has some spare time then we would be delighted for the help. We are specifically looking for:

- Events manager
- Talks co-ordinator
- Parish representatives for East Budleigh, Colaton Raleigh and Newton Poppleford

Volunteers are the lifeblood of every charity – without your help we cannot achieve our growing program of activities we are planning for 2024. You can find details of these vacancies on the web (www.ova.org.uk) or by contacting us through the contact forms on the web.

2024 initiatives

As we enter 2024, the OVA committee have been reviewing what major initiatives to focus

on, and we'd like your thoughts. Are there specific programs that YOU would like the charity to focus on - aligned of course with our charter. Please share your thoughts over the new year period. Here are a few initiatives being considered now:

1. Expanding the bird-box program from local schools to a broader audience, with a photographic competition.
2. Expanding our existing focus on water quality - and how to help drive this agenda across our local water companies and the local farming community. Key to this is how we all can help.
3. Looking at the subject of climate change - and helping everyone understand what they can do to understand the issues and potentially do "their bit for the planet".
4. Continuing a focus on the heritage of our area. Looking for "blue plaque" candidates across the regional villages, and helping people understand our history - as well as continuing to record and document in OVAPedia.
5. Looking at how to help protect the flora and fauna of our valley - while also continuing to campaign for full access via walkways and paths.
6. Looking at new publications and reprinting existing publications.

We will of course continue with our walks program and our regular newsletters. We also want to restart our talks - focusing on many of the above topics.

As you can hopefully see, we have been busy with a range of different programs. We are now looking at how we ramp up our activities in the new year. To do this, volunteers are essential. Please do consider helping – we like all charities can only survive and flourish through your help.