

Hi everyone,

Welcome to the June email update to all OVA members. This email comprises two parts – a quick one-page overview, and then more detailed information on each point for reading at your leisure. We appreciate that a lot of information is being shared, and you may not read every item in detail, but we hope that this shows the growing momentum of activities and programs that the OVA is undertaking. If you would like to help and volunteer for any of these it would be lovely to speak with you. Do let us know.



This email update contains the following items:

Report-out from the OVA Annual General Meeting

- We held our AGM on June 17th in front of a full house at Peter Hall. Read below a summary of what happened at the AGM.

Your trustees, committee and representatives

- Following the official business of the AGM, we have voted in the 2025 set of trustees, committee members and representatives to drive the OVA forward this year.

The OVA vision and 2025 focus areas in more detail

- Following a review of our strategy, we have outlined a new vision for the OVA, and our chosen set of campaigns for 2025.

The Otter Valley Walking Companion

- We have just published a new walking guide covering the lower Otter Valley called 'The Otter Valley Walking Companion'. Find out below how you can obtain your complimentary copy.

OVA Membership dues:

- If you have not paid your membership dues for this year, please do so! Details below.

OVA Winter Talks schedule:

- We have now completed our schedule for the 2025 winter series of OVA talks. Please mark your diaries. We are also looking to start talks in Ottery St. Mary – more information below.

OVA Walks Update – weekly walks:

- We have a great line-up of weekly walks scheduled through to August. Details below – everyone is welcome.

OVA Built Environment:

- We wrote to MP David Reed expressing our concerns about the planning & infrastructure bill. Read below for why, and the letter sent.

OVA Water Quality Group:

- Meetings with South West Water, the Environment Agency, Councils, and members of Parliament. River testing going well. Key issues highlighted. Read more below.

OVA Flora, Fauna & Fungi Group:

- River-fly (invertebrate testing) being planned. Invasive species program starting. Leaflets & booklets to build. Can you help?

Plastic Free Budleigh

- The OVA has become an ally for Plastic Free Budleigh. Checkout what this means below.

Clinton Devon Estates Update: Heath to Sea project

- The team over at CDE wanted to provide our membership with a brief update on the Heath-to-Sea project. Read about it below.

OVA Website & Social media update:

- We continue to update the OVA website with new sections and additions. Please do keep it bookmarked (www.oval.org.uk).
- We now have 977 members on our Facebook group. Here you will find regular updates from the OVA, as well as amazing photographs, village updates and community programs across the valley. Please do login to Facebook and engage, or simply view what is going on.

We held our AGM on June 17th at 7:30pm in the Peter Hall in Budleigh Salterton. The committee would like to thank everyone who attended. We had a fabulous turnout with a full Peter Hall of over 50 members.

The evening was split into three parts - the formal AGM, an overview of our go-forward strategy and an “upstream thinking” presentation from Dr. David Smith from South West Water.

This proceeded smoothly and all resolutions were passed. We now have an approved set of trustees and officers to execute our programs. You can find the trustee reports, financial statements and other relevant materials on the OVA web

We have recently been reviewing our strategy as a charity - ensuring we remain relevant and engaged with the community around us. We presented an overview of the strategy and our chosen focus areas. We were delighted with the positive feedback to this during, and after, the meeting.

Quite simply, your OVA wants 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. We also believe that climate change is very real and, while we may not be able to influence countries like China and America to change, we believe that it is possible to live our lives in a way that allows us to do our bit for climate change and to reflect on the footprint we ourselves leave around us. So, in thinking through this, we have identified 6 focus areas that we hope you agree are a fitting testament to how we can help our community protect and enhance the lower Otter valley.

1. To champion for clean water in the river Otter and its tributaries.
2. To encourage sustainable and appropriate development.
3. To celebrate the incredible heritage of our Valley.
4. To encourage thriving biodiversity across our Parishes, Heaths, Valley & Estuaries.
5. To encourage our local communities & visitors to adapt to better ways of living.
6. Helping the younger generation to care for our planet.

We believe these focus areas enable us all to make a difference. We will be sharing more about these areas in the coming weeks and months - please do watch out for them. We will also continue to update our web, arrange talks and walks and work with like-minded partner organizations.

PART3: UPSTREAM THINKING

Dr. David Smith gave an excellent presentation looking at the work his team are doing to work with farmers and like-minded organizations to improve soil management, reduce runoff into the rivers and improve the catchment area and ensure quality drinking water is always available to us all. It is incredible to think that we in the UK use on average twice the amount of water to any of our European neighbours!

We are of course campaigning for a cleaner river Otter - and SWW have a massive role to play in sorting the sewage issues. You can find out more about this campaign by joining the ORCA Facebook campaign group. While acknowledging this, David focused on the delivery of quality drinking water and the catchment programs around the river Otter

Following our AGM, we have voted in our trustees, the executive committee and various roles relating to village reps & projects. You can find full details on the OVA web [[here](#)] which have been repeated below.

(All members are trustees of the Otter Valley Association, appointed at the AGM, and are registered with the Charity Commission except where indicated with a *)

Chair	Haylor Lass
Vice Chair	Chris Boorman
Secretary	Jane Kewley

Treasurer/Membership	Martin Smith
Group Co-ordinators	
Natural Environment	Geoff Porter & Jan Kershaw
Built Environment	Dee Woods
History	Vacancy
Events	Vacancy
Publicity	Vacancy
Talks	Keith Grundy *
Parish Representatives	
Budleigh Salterton	Vacancy
East Budleigh	Olly Watts*
Otterton	Dee Woods & Geoff Porter
Colaton Raleigh	Michaela Manning*
Newton Poppleford	Ted Swan *
Ottery St Mary	Denise Melhuish *
Tipton St John	Lisette Johnston *
Other Contacts	
Website	Martin Smith
Walks Organiser	Paul & Penny Kurowski *
Newsletter Editor	Chris Boorman
Social Media	Chris Boorman
Newsletter Distributor	Heather Fereday *
Water Quality Team	Felicity Christie *
Flora & Fauna team	Jan Kershaw *

As you can see from the above, we are looking for some people to help us. If you are interested, please do get in touch with any of the people above who would be happy to share what they do and how much time it takes.

3. The OVA Vision and 2025 focus areas in more detail

Within our strategy discussions, we have framed a modern vision for the OVA as follows:

Our Vision for the Otter Valley Association is 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. We strive to be recognized as a proactive champion for this extraordinary area, fostering change that enhances its beauty and vitality, respecting the past whilst encouraging appropriate progress.

In the face of climate change, we are dedicated to promoting ecology, nature conservation, and the wellbeing and health of our community. Guided by the rich heritage of this region, we advocate for appropriate and sustainable development that addresses the modern needs of society with necessary infrastructure - including water, sewage, healthcare, education, transportation, and vibrant community spaces.

The Otter Valley Association is committed to helping nature and people in the region adapt to, and live successfully with, the pathway of climate change. Our vision is to understand and address impacts and change, and to embrace innovative approaches. We want to empower our community to adopt healthier practices, reduce harmful habits such as pesticide and plastic use, and champion sustainable choices like peat-free composts.

We aim to achieve clean water in our rivers and seafront, thriving biodiversity, and enjoyment for our communities. We will partner and collaborate with like-minded groups and communities. Together, we will inspire progress that honours the unique identity and future of the Otter Valley.

Our focus areas are as follows:

1: To champion for clean water in the river Otter and its tributaries.

We want to work with all interested parties to improve the quality of the river and ensure it is a thriving habitat for flora & fauna – as well as ourselves.

This means, for example:

- To understand and raise awareness of the root causes for river pollution
- To test the quality of the river
- To work with relevant bodies such as the farming communities and South West Water to drive change and reduce pollution
- To be a visible champion for addressing water quality issues and solutions.

2: To encourage sustainable and appropriate development.

Building on our amazing heritage, we want to encourage the need for sustainable and appropriate development in tune with climate change.

This means, for example:

- To influence planning decisions that ensure the correct infrastructure is developed
- To champion for development that does not impact our rivers and natural habitats
- To use our planning expertise for sustainable development
- To champion for the wellbeing of our town high streets

- To encourage communities to use bikes & public transport versus cars
- To help the towns and villages to thrive

3: To celebrate the incredible heritage of our Valley.

We want to showcase the amazing heritage of the Otter valley – from historical churches and buildings; to incredible design; to wonderful people who have paved the way for where we live today.

This means, for example:

- To showcase through the web, social media and other ways the buildings, churches, design and people of the Otter valley.
- To find new examples of blue plaques
- To partner with like-minded organizations (eg: Fairlynch museum).

4: To encourage thriving biodiversity across our Parishes, Heaths, Valley & Estuaries.

We want to celebrate the incredible flora, fauna and fungi of the area, and help local communities and associations to control the spread of invasive species.

This means, for example:

- To audit the biodiversity of our area, highlight key species and features, and develop knowledge of impacts and change.
- To work with local communities on ways of enhancing wildlife and diversity (from hedgehogs in gardens to butterflies in fields)
- To campaign for the removal of harmful pesticides and bad practices that destroy biodiversity
- To showcase the beauty of our local environment

5: To encourage our local communities & visitors to adapt to better ways of living.

People are at the heart of every community. We want to help promote a healthy way of life with our community

This means, for example:

- To work with other groups (eg: Seachange) to promote healthier living and positive change.
- To champion more sustainable living Eg: move away from plastic, pesticides, harmful dog flea treatments and other harmful issues.
- To encourage engagement with members, towns and like-minded associations.
- To communicate the different things that happen elsewhere (through other associations)
- To help communities with areas such as community gardens, encouraging self-help

6: Helping the younger generation to care for our planet.

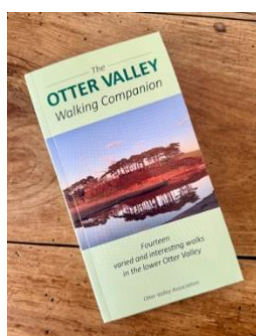
We are all custodians of the area for our younger generation. We believe it is important that the younger generation understands the importance of nature, clean water, choices they make and at one with the outdoors.

This means, for example:

- To work with local schools in helping them in their curriculum (eg: bringing in experts, bird-boxes, books)
- To work with like-minded organisations (Eg: Pebblebed heaths) to help younger people to learn about nature.
- To understand the impact of chemicals in detergents, dog flea treatments, peat-based composts etc.
- To aspire to enjoying the outdoors, to see nature and to learn about the countryside around us
- To champion more sustainable living within their family and community areas.

We hope you like these focus areas, and we would like to ask for your help in achieving them. Please do let us know if you have time and would like to know more.

4. The Otter Valley Walking Companion



The Otter Valley Association have just published a new walking guide covering the lower Otter Valley, 'The Otter Valley Walking Companion'. The book has detailed walk descriptions and Ordnance Survey maps for seven of the 'old' favourite walks and seven new walks. There is also a large map showing the routes of all the walks in the book.

The production costs were covered by a legacy received from an OVA member in 2023. As a gesture the OVA have decided to offer a complimentary copy of the book to all current paid-up members of the OVA.

To obtain your copy of the Otter Valley Walking Companion:

1. Members living in Budleigh Salterton, East Budleigh, Colaton Raleigh, Otterton and Newton Poppleford or attending an OVA walk please Email info@ova.org.uk with your name, address and membership number (on your newsletter label) and we will arrange hand delivery.

2. Members living further afield please send your name, address and membership number (on your newsletter label) together with a £2.00 stamped addressed A5 envelope to:

Otter Valley Association,
PO Box 70
Budleigh Salterton
EX9 6WN

We hope that you will enjoy this new publication. Please promote it along with the OVA to your friends and family. If you would like further copies, the Otter Valley Walking Companion is available to purchase for £5.00 plus £2.00 post and packaging via the OVA website and will also be sold via a number of local outlets in the lower Otter Valley.

Haylor Lass
Chair

5. Membership Dues

OVA membership runs from 1st April to 31st March. We are still collecting dues from several members. If you have not paid yet, could we please remind you to pay at your earliest convenience. You can do this online by visiting the OVA web and clicking here: <https://www.ova.org.uk/about-us/join-ova>. If possible, we would ask that you please use standing orders to ensure automatic membership renewal.

Please do also share membership details with friends and neighbours. For just £10 per annum, you can get the £5 walks booklet and four quarterly newsletters – a bargain! Remember - your membership dues help us fund our programs.

6. OVA Talks: Winter Schedule

We have now finalised our talks schedule for the coming winter. Please do mark your diaries for the following talks:

2025

- September 10th Birds v People by John Goss Custard
John has carried out scientific studies on the effect of human population on river estuaries
- October 15th Organic Farming - Recovering the Landscape and Producing food by Sam Walker (local organic farmer)
- November 19th Devon Hedges by Tom Hynes

2026

- January 21st Update on Otter restoration project by Rick Lockwood (Chief Ranger)
- February 18th Have you seen my little rubber Duck by Ken Atherton
A story of the Plastic Pollution of our Oceans
- March 18th Water Quality update on the river Otter – by Felicity Christie & Peter Williams

We are also looking forward to starting talks in Ottery St. Mary. We will be sharing details of these in future newsletters and via the OVA website. Please do keep an eye out for these.

7. OVA Walks Update: Weekly walks

We have some incredible walks scheduled through to August. Why not come out and enjoy the scenery, meet friends and learn about our local surroundings? Everyone is welcome.

These walks are all posted on our facebook group, and on the OVA website. Please **always** check the OVA website for last minute updates, cancellations or changes – one can never be sure what weather awaits us next week, let alone next month!

- Tue 08 July: '**Ghost Train**' – 5.30pm – 4.5 miles. 2 hrs.
- Wed 16 July: '**Combes Combo**' – 10.00am – 6.5 miles. 3.5 hrs.
- Tue 22 July: '**The Templer Way and Yarnar Wood – industrial archaeology and natural history**'
10.00am – 7.0 miles. 4.5 hrs. (Please book).
- Wed 30 July: '**Chasing the Tale**' – 10.00am – 6.0 miles. 3 hrs.
- Tue 12 Aug: '**Advanced warning – walk to come**'

We have been approached by a number of people asking if we do shorter walks, or more nature walks. To cater for this, we have been talking to the team at Seachange who offer regular shorter walks. You can find out more information about Seachange walks on their web [[here](#)].

We also work very closely with the team over at Pebblebed Heaths. They also do regular ranger walks. Again, you can find more information about their walks on their web [[here](#)].

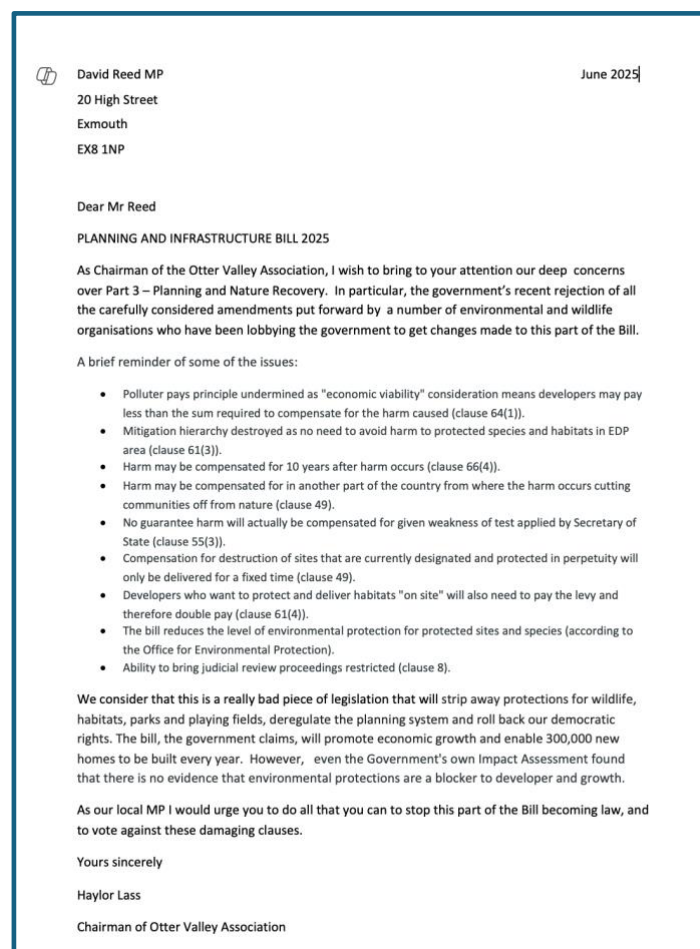
8. OVA Built Environment

Members will be aware of the government's aim to speed up the planning process, and the introduction of a new Planning and Infrastructure Bill in March 2025. This has gone through the usual stages in the Commons and is now being debated in the House of Lords. One of the significant reforms concerns nature recovery on development sites, and proposes the formation of a Nature Restoration Fund (NRF). This will give a more strategic approach to habitat mitigation, and enable Natural England to produce Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs), that set out strategic mitigations to address the impact that development has on a protected site or species. Where an EDP exists, the developer would no longer have to undertake their own assessments, or deliver project-specific interventions, for issues addressed by the EDP but could instead pay a contribution to the NRF.

The government states this approach "will facilitate a more strategic approach to the discharge of environmental obligations and result in improved environmental outcomes being delivered more efficiently. By reducing delays to development, this new approach may also facilitate faster delivery of housing across England".

The OVA, along with a number of Wildlife and Conservation organisations, are very concerned about resourcing this at a national level, and the need for this to be done on a habitat or landscape scale. The main concern is that this will significantly weaken the priority given to nature protection on development sites, to speed up the development process. It has been called "cash to trash", and the organisations have worked hard to get amendments, which the government have ignored.

The Otter Valley Association has raised our concerns about this Planning and Infrastructure Bill with the two local MPs. Below is a letter that was sent to David Reed MP recently:



9. OVA Water Quality Group Update

The Orca water quality group continues to go from strength to strength. The team has recruited and trained a group of over 40 water testers. Testing of the river continues on a bi-weekly basis at 12 locations along the river. Meanwhile, data analysis has continued of both the Environment Agency (EA) and South West Water (SWW) data.

The team met officially with MP Richard Foord, the EA and SWW. In this meeting all parties agreed that the data we presented was correct, and the EA has asked for our river testing data to be shared with them.

The key data that concerns us most are the phosphate levels – which are approximately 3 ½ times the upper safe limit defined by the EA. High levels of phosphate cause algal blooms, eutrophication, and decreased oxygen levels in the water, leading to severe consequences for plant life, wildlife and fish populations. According to the Environment Agency, approximately 70% of the Phosphate entering the river is a result of sewage discharges from SWW.

From our analysis of the ORCA data collected during the first six test cycles, there appear to be two key conditions which result in high Phosphate levels:

- When it rains, SWW's sewage system becomes quickly inundated, resulting in the discharge of high volumes of untreated sewage into the river. This sewage includes high concentrations of Phosphate.
- When it is dry, the water levels and flow in the river are lower and the phosphate concentration from treated sewage discharges are higher.

As well as the ecological damage caused, this untreated sewage also includes high levels of pathogens, which create a hazard for human and animal health. As a measure of this, E.coli level at the top of the River Otter tidal range is five times the EA's 'safe' level, all of which emerges at Otter Mouth, right next to Budleigh's Blue Flag bathing beach.

It is with great disappointment that we learnt that SWW have no plans to improve the sewage treatment works on the river Otter until at least 2035-40. Our goal has been to demand two specific things that need to be improved by South West Water:

- Action to reduce the number and length of untreated sewage discharges from "combined sewer overflows" (CSOs). Since over 90% of these discharges are from just five of SWW's sewage assets, they can address the vast majority of the issues by focussing on just these few units, including Honiton, Fluxton and Payhembury.
- Action to remove Phosphate from the continuous flow of treated sewage effluent at SWW's largest sewage treatment works, including Honiton, Fluxton, Otterton and Feniton.

Our plan is to write to SWW requesting that these two points are prioritised. In parallel to this, we will work with local MP's (Richard Foord and David Reed) and councillors, together with like-minded organisations and local parish councils to build a publicity campaign highlighting the poor state of the river and SWW's role in this. We hope you will support this and join in when the time comes.

You can find all the latest information about this, including published articles, on the OVA Web [[here](#)]. Please also join the ORCA Facebook group to learn more [[here](#)].

10. OVA Flora, Fauna & Fungi Group Update

We had a great meeting in Otterton on Thursday 26th June. We have reduced our scope to focus on three specific areas:

- Working in collaboration with the water quality group and other like-minded organizations (such as the Heath-to-seas team) we want to start a river Otter river-fly testing program.
- Working in collaboration with other like-minded organizations (such as the west country rivers trust, devon wildlife trust and local parishes) we want to catalogue the common invasive species encountered in the valley. Then, where possible work with teams to remove them from the tributaries and parishes.
- We want to continue sharing the incredible flora, fauna and fungi of the valley – by continuing to update the OVA web, encouraging local photographers to share on our Facebook group, and to produce suitable leaflets and booklets for sharing through community shops and information centres.

You can find all the latest information about this, including published articles, on the OVA Web [[here](#)].

11. Plastic Free Budleigh

The OVA has become an Ally to “Plastic Free Budleigh”. We have done this because we believe it is important that we all care for our planet – and reducing our reliance on plastics is a good approach for everyone to engage. As an ally, we are making the following pledges:

- Asking our membership to work to remove at least three single-use plastic items from their day-to-day activities.
- Commit to include our stance on single-use plastic in our communications
- Raise awareness and support plastic-free initiatives in the community



There are many things that we can ALL do to reduce the amount of plastic we use. On Facebook we put a poll asking how people deal with different types of plastic. The results were interesting – 23% of respondents never use plastic shopping bags anymore. BUT only 8% have stopped using plastic bags to store food.

Are you doing any of these things? How can YOU reduce your use of plastic? We would be interested to hear from you.

<input type="checkbox"/> I have switched to reusable water bottles - I instead of buying plastic.	20% >
<input type="checkbox"/> I never use plastic shopping bags anymore	23% >
<input type="checkbox"/> I've stopped using plastic bags to store food	9% >
<input type="checkbox"/> I buy more "in bulk" to avoid reduce packaging waste	9% >
<input type="checkbox"/> I say "No" to using plastic straws	18% >
<input type="checkbox"/> I try to avoid using plastic coffee cups - from anywhere	16% >
<input type="checkbox"/> Added by Peter Williams I shop at 'bring your own container' shops	5% >

12. CDE Update: Heath to Seas Project

Contributed by Beth Humphrey, Heath to Seas project support officer

Clinton Devon's ambitious Heaths to Sea Landscape Recovery Project is set to reach a key milestone this month as the project team share draft high-level plans for how land management, public access, and community engagement with nature across the lower Otter valley might look over the next 20+ years.

Heaths to Sea aims not only to support the recovery of wildlife but also to create a more stable and sustainable landscape for future generations. The challenge of managing and restoring land for both people and nature is discussed in our latest blog - <https://www.heathstosea.com/rising-to-the-challenge-restoring-landscapes-for-nature-and-people/>

Over the past year, the Heaths to Sea team has been working closely with local stakeholders to understand their priorities, while also teaming up with technical experts to look at the area's current biodiversity, soil health, and water quality – and to explore how things could be improved. This is being brought together into long-term plans – spanning 20 years or more – which are due to be submitted to Defra in December 2025 for review.

Following the public engagement in earlier this year, Heaths to Sea team would like to share their progress, draft plans and next steps.

On Thursday 17 July at Bicton College's EaRTH Building, Heaths to Sea team will host a public forum, providing an opportunity for members of the public to read about project progress, hear about high-level plans and speak with topic specialists. The forum will be open exhibition style from 12pm – 8pm, with two sessions of talks and Q&A panel at 1pm to 2.15pm and repeated at 6.30pm to 7.45pm. If you'd like to attend the talks, please register

here - <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/public-forum-heaths-to-sea-landscape-recovery-of-the-lower-otter-valley-tickets-1412062319409?aff=oddtcreator>. Everyone is welcome.

Members of the team will also be taking part in Heaths Week with a stall on 26 July at Heath Week Festival Day, 10am to 3pm at Model Airfield, Woodbury Common.

To find out more visit: www.heathstosea.com/events

13. OVA Website & Social Media

We are continuing to update the website. Please do check it out and bookmark it for quick access. Here are a few updates you may not be aware of:

- We have a new home page – check it out [[here](#)]
- We continue to update the Blue Plaques map in our history section [[here](#)].
- We have been updating the “local area” section of the web [[here](#)].
- We have overhauled the “old walks” section to allow easier viewing of past walks [[here](#)].
- We add all strategic responses to Built Environment areas – such as the East Devon Plan [[here](#)].
- We add photos gathered from members of our beautiful landscapes [[here](#)]
- Our river quality program (ORCA) maintain updates and published articles of interest [[here](#)]
- Our Flora, Fauna & Fungi group gather photos and updates from members and share them [[here](#)]
- We have updated our newsletter section – check out all the past issues. Amazing history [[here](#)]

Our Facebook group of supports is continuing to grow. We now have 977 members – if you have not seen it, please do check it out. Please also add your own articles, comments and like anything ... we'd love to hear from you!

We are averaging a couple of posts a day over the last month, with about 100 different people contributing articles. Here are a few popular articles that you may have missed on our Facebook group:

- Kevin Wills posted an article on “A few images from a walk up from the LORP to Otterton last week. Beavers, Juvenile Kingfisher and an elusive Reed Warbler”. 464 people have viewed this.
- Paul Jenkins posted “A few [photographs] from today around the otter estuary nature reserve”. 357 people have viewed this.
- Geoff Porter posted “Mini beasts; along riverside and lanes”. 323 people have viewed this.

We now have an OVA Instagram account – please do post pictures to it.

We have a number of active WhatsApp groups that we wanted you to be aware of:

- ORCA leadership team.
- ORCA Water testers.
- OVA Flora & Fauna group.
- OVA Walkers.
- OVA Town and Village Reps.
- OVA Leadership team.

==== End of Email Update (June 2025) ====