



13th July 2020

Covid 19 Lockdown – Issue 6



Photo by Becky Power Photography

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## Quantock Mires

By Iain Porter

Quantock Hills AONB Development Officer

While walking, cycling or riding over Quantock Hills there is a special type of habitat, which if you blink, you will miss. These are the fascinating acidic mires often found at or near the springs or next to the small streams which cascade through the combes.

According to Natural England there are eight of these acidic mires on Quantock Common but in fact there at least double that number. They are often small in size but have a wonderful array of plant species.



Sundew, a carnivorous plant feeds on insects



Acidic mires are one of the few places where you can find the wonderful Round-leaved Sundew, a carnivorous plant which gets its nutrients from unfortunate insects. Other great species include the Bog Pimpernel, Bog Asphodel and Star Sedge. At this time of year, the mires can be awash with colour as the different plants flower and this attracts and supports a huge community of insects from hoverflies, spiders, crane flies and beetles.



**Cottongrass, another plant that can be found in acidic mires**

These habitats are fragile though and can be easily damaged. Over grazing by deer or livestock, which are attracted to the water, especially in the drier summer months, can reduce the number of plant species. They are also easily damaged by pollution or eroded by inappropriate activity such as vehicles driving through them.



**Fencing around a key acidic mire**



**An orchid recently discovered in an acidic mire on Quantock Common**

Friends of Quantock own part of Quantock Common and have a wonderful acidic mire on their land.

In an effort to protect and enhance it they have just erected a temporary fence, which was agreed by the commoners who graze this area.

The purpose of the fence is to reduce the grazing pressure on the mire, especially in the summer months, giving the plants more chance to flower and reproduce.

They will be monitoring the mire over the next few years to see how it responds but it is hoped that visitors will get to see a wonderful riot of colour in the summer months from the mire plants as well as the purple heathers.

# Quantock Quiz – Wildlife 2

1) One of the spectacles of summer is the night time churring of Nightjars on Quantock Common but do you know what ancient folklore called these birds?

- a. sheepsucker
- b. horsesucker
- c. goatsucker

2) By now you know I am mad about bats and one of our most common species is the pipistrelle but do you know how many small flying insects they can eat in one night?

- a. 300
- b. 3,000
- c. 300,000

3) The acidic mires of Quantock Common are home to many different species of plant, one of which is carnivorous (eats meat!) but what is its name?

- a. Sundew
- b. Moondew
- c. Butterdew

4) The heathland of the Quantock Hills is special because of the mix of different heather plants found here. Ling and bell heather are two of the species but what is the third?

- a. Cross-leaved
- b. Star-leaved
- c. Western

5) The Pied Flycatcher is a small bird that visits the UK to breed in the summer migrating up to a massive 4,000 each way. But where do they go during winter?

- a. Mongolia
- b. The Ascension Islands
- c. Sub-Saharan Africa

6) During June and July bats give birth to live young called pups. Each mother will usually only have one pup a year but when born what percentage of a mothers weight are they? – humans baby's in the UK are on average 4.7% of the mothers weight.

- a. 2 – 3%
- b. 5 – 10%
- c. 20 – 30%

7) There are two species of gorse (a evergreen spiky shrub) that can be seen on Quantock Common. They are quite hard to tell apart with one of the easier ways to do with when they are in flower. Together both species flower for eleven months of the year so which month do you commonly not see any yellow flowers on the gorse bushes?

- a. August
- b. November
- c. February

8) Wall, Speckled Wood and Gatekeeper are all found on the Quantock Hills at this time of year but what are they types of?

- a. Butterflies
- b. Bees
- c. Spiders

9) Adders are secretive snakes that live on the Quantock Hills. They are the UK's only venomous snake but will usually try and slither away as soon as they sense any large animals, such as humans. Which is NOT an old myth about the adder?

- a. Female adders swallow their young to protect them
- b. Snake hypnotise their prey
- c. Adders will not die until sunset

10) The Quantock Hills is home to all five of the UK owl species, though some only visit us, and if you are lucky on summer evenings you may see them hunting over the farmland or through woodland. How far can they turn their head to help them hunt? – most people can turn their heads 90 degrees from the front.

- a. 90 degrees – ok its head would be facing over its shoulder
- b. 180 degrees – ouch it's head would be facing over its back
- c. 270 degrees – really ouch, its head would be facing over its opposite shoulder



# True Stories That Hide The Truth

Bill Jenman, Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Manager



Popular myth is that Dead Woman's Ditch is so-called because John Walford dumped the body of his wife, Jane, there after he murdered her in 1789. Walford, a charcoal burner and broom maker, lived in Over Stowey. He was a contemporary of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Poole and known to all of them. He was well thought of, as was his childhood sweetheart Ann Rice who also lived in the village.

Unfortunately John had a liaison with Jane Shorney, whom history has not left us with such a good impression of. Whatever the truth, Jane was clearly not thought of as respectable when in 1785 she gave birth to John's son. By the time she was pregnant with his second child in 1789 the pair had been forced to marry. Allegedly, Jane taunted John with talk of his true love Ann, while within days of the marriage John was in the pub discussing plans to disappear to London.

Three weeks later Jane was found dead, supposedly in the ditch, beaten and with her throat cut, and John soon confessed to her murder. An equally pregnant Ann evidently forgave him and kissed him goodbye on his way to the gallows. His body was then hung in irons for a year and a day at a place since known as Walford's Gibbet, about a mile west of Nether Stowey on the fringe of Dowsborough Hill.

It's a sad story that combines a lurid historical tragedy with more contemporary themes such as perpetual social ills (Jane's story is hardly a sympathetic feminist account of the victim) and even forced marriage. Perhaps there is some comfort in the knowledge that, for once, it wasn't only the women who paid the price of John's philandering.



After the murder the name Dead Woman's Ditch would forever be associated with the unfortunate Jane Walford. The name has contributed to the storytelling, and it's a fitting name to associate with a desperate man in need of a place to dispose of a corpse. For new visitors, at least, the name of the car park must draw the eye when they're thinking of where to stop.

But this (mostly) true story of John Walford, Ann Rice, and Jane Shorney doesn't explain the name of the Ditch. The first problem with this account is that Jane's body was in fact found near the turnpike road (now the A39) just above Doddington Mines and not at Dead Woman's Ditch at all. As many have pointed out dragging her heavy corpse over a mile uphill would have been heck of a lot of effort.

More significantly, the name appears on a 1782 map, seven years before the murder, and it was clearly very old even then.

This very contemporary story – you can imagine this plot in a soap opera – has masked the real mystery, which is why on earth was the Ditch dug and how old is it? It was a huge undertaking, about a kilometre long (2/3 of a mile) and originally perhaps 2m deep in places. It's probably from the latter half of the Bronze Age, but was perhaps reused in the Iron Age if it is related to Dowsborough Hillfort.

However it is impossible to date beyond being associated with a very general prehistoric period. It is thought to have served as a boundary marker of some kind, but this is a very general description of its purpose. There must have been an element of prestige involved to go to so much trouble.

The Landscape Partnership is planning on doing a bit of restoration work on the Ditch, removing some of the trees that obscure it and whose roots are damaging its ancient banks. But for now, the best view is from the south side where tree felling in Great Wood has exposed a huge stretch twisting down the hill to Ramscombe. Next time you're in Great Wood, have a look for yourself.

## Reflecting In An Acrostic Poem

**Lisa Turner, Blackdown Hills AONB Planning Officer**

The AONB teams have been working at home throughout the lockdown. For some of us this has meant juggling child care and home learning alongside our 'day jobs'. The end of term brings an opportunity to reflect on the experience of the last few months, and to look back on what has been achieved in these unusual times.

Have you heard of acrostic poems? In an acrostic poem, the first letter of each line spells a word or short phrase. That word or phrase is the subject of the poem. Back in May, one of my children was tasked with writing a poem related to lockdown and chose to do it in this style, reflecting on negative and positive aspects of lockdown, and it is shared with you here. Like Haiflu poetry featured in the last newsletter it's very simple to do, it can be about anything and you can make it as light-hearted or more serious as you wish. It would be lovely to see some examples related to the Blackdowns or Quantocks.

**L**onely

**O**n my own

**C**an't go out

**K**icking my heels, don't know what to do

**D**rinking too much tea

**O**n my own still

**W**hy can't we go out

**N**o pasta, no toilet rolls

**L**earning new things

**O**utdoor living

**C**ountryside walks

**K**ickabout in the garden, swing ball up too

**D**rawings of rainbows

**O**ppportunity to do amazing things

**W**ith my family

**N**ever losing hope

# What did you see?

By Iain Porter

Quantock Hills AONB Development Officer

Lockdown restrictions are easing and more people are venturing out to both the Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills. This year seems to be great for wildlife with lots of unusual species turning up on the hills, such as a red-footed falcon on Cothelstone Hill or lots of sightings of glow worms.

We are getting lots of photos and messages from people we know with wonderful wildlife sightings which we love. If we get enough details, we will pass these onto the Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC).

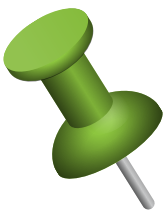
SERC collate all environmental records for the county of Somerset as well as organise direct surveys and training themselves. The AONBs have worked with SERC for a good number of years and have found the data they provide invaluable when doing our planning or land management work. The more SERC and ourselves know the better our work can be for the special animals and plants found in the AONBs.



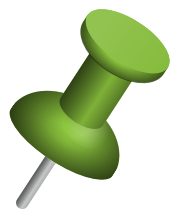
Anyone can submit a wildlife record to SERC. In fact, most of our staff do it when they spot wildlife while doing their jobs. It can be done online through the SERC website

**<http://www.somerc.com/submit-your-sightings/>**

It is easy to do, you can even upload a photo to aid in identification if you are not sure what species it is.



## Job Vacancy



We have a 22.2 hours per week opportunity for a Project Support Officer on a fixed term contract basis until March 2025 to join our team delivering the Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme (QLPS).

The partnership includes Friends of Quantock, South West Heritage Trust, National Trust, Halsway Manor Society (The National Centre for Folk Arts), Forestry England, Quantock Commoners Association, and LiveWest Housing Association as well as the relevant local authorities.

For more information or to apply visit:

**<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/jobs-and-careers/our-vacancies/job-details/?jobId=1583>**



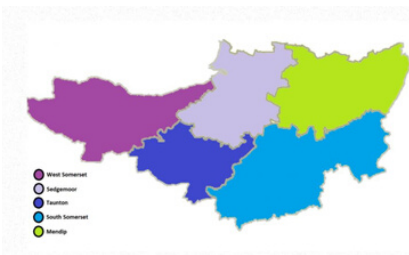
# New, Online Nature & Wellbeing Map

By Kristen Lambert

Nature & Wellbeing Project Officer, Somerset's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

As part of the Nature and Wellbeing Project – delivery partners from across the county have come together to share the different services and opportunities on offer for people to access to support connections with nature for wellbeing. Somerset Wildlife Trust are hosting the map on their website and have worked hard during lockdown to get it up and running. It's now live and can be found in one place at the address below, you just need to copy and paste this into your browser:

<https://www.somersetwildlife.org/wildlife/wildlife-wellbeing/somerset-nature-and-wellbeing-opportunities>



*"Please share this with anyone who may find it useful, but please be aware that some services are not running as they usually would due to current Covid-19 restrictions"*

## Word Search – Coronavirus



Find the following words in the puzzle.  
Words are hidden → ↓ and ↘

CORONAVIRUS	LOCKDOWN	RESTRICTIONS
FACEMASKS	MENTALHEALTH	SCHOOLCLOSURES
FURLOUGH	PANDEMIC	SOCIALDISTANCING
HOMESCHOOLING	QUARANTINE	WORKINGFROMHOME
ISOLATION	REDEPLOYMENT	

## Quiz Answers from page 3

1c) goatsucker  
2b) 3,000  
3a) Sundew  
4a) Crossed-leaved  
5c) Sub-Saharan  
Africa  
6c) 20-30%  
7b) November  
8a) Butterflies  
9) Trick question –  
they are all myths  
about adders ☹️  
10c) 270 degrees -  
really ouch, its  
head would be  
facing over its  
opposite shoulder



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