



27th July 2020

Covid 19 Lockdown – Issue 7



Photo by Andrew (Flickr)

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Tunnel Vision

By **Chris Edwards**
Quantock Hills AONB Manager

In 1856 the Clifton Suspension Bridge was partially complete and the SS Great Eastern – unmatched for length and weight for the next 40 years – was nearing completion. Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the second greatest Briton of all time (according to a 2002 poll – 350,000 votes for IKB), nevertheless found time to attend a meeting at the Egremont Hotel in Williton (and a second in Taunton).

There were many proposals to build a West Somerset Railway, and this meeting on 9th July 1856 was called by local land owner Sir Peregrine Fuller Palmer Acland of Fairfield House, Stogursey. A favoured route at this stage connected Watchet with Bridgwater via a tunnel under the Quantocks, the tunnel was to enter the hills at Triscombe and emerge on the eastern side for the line to continue to Bridgwater. Brunel gave the initial calculations on the required tunnel at the meeting: 70 to 80 chains in length (1.5km) requiring 50 shafts to be sunk, he advised that it would be very expensive although it was suggested that it might turn up commercially viable coal reserves.

In what some consider a lucky escape for the landscape of the Quantock Hills (there have been a number over the years) the tunnel was considered too long and costly compared to a direct route following the Quantocks and accessing the Bristol & Exeter railway at Taunton. The group had Brunel survey the route and plans for broad gauge railway were submitted in November after a second meeting with Brunel, this time held at Taunton in August 1856.

The West Somerset Railway Company started construction on this route 7 April 1859 at Crowcombe Heathfield overseen by engineer George Furness of London, Isambard Kingdom Brunel who was engineer initially died of a stroke in September of that year.

Taken over by the Great Western Railway in 1874 and converted to standard gauge, the railways were nationalised January 1948 and this line was axed in January 1971 under the Beeching cuts. It was bought by Somerset County Council and in 1976 a short length of the railway line was re-opened as a heritage route. In 1979 the West Somerset Railway <https://www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk/> became the longest standard gauge heritage line in the country running 20 miles from Bishop's Lydeard to Minehead.



Crayfish Surveying on the Sheldon Stream, Blackdown Hills AONB

By Verity Jones

Quantock Hills & Blackdown Hills AONB Volunteer Coordinator

After a slight Covid related delay, it was wonderful to be getting out again with a small team of volunteers and a licenced crayfish specialist to survey for crayfish on the Sheldon stream in the Blackdown Hills AONB. This work follows on from the Culm Community Crayfish Project which looked to assess if there where crayfish on the River Culm and its three main tributaries; one of which being the Sheldon stream which is where we have begun to survey.

White-clawed are the UK's only native crayfish and were once widespread in England and Wales; in Devon they occurred on the rivers Clyst, Creedy/Yeo, Culm, Axe and Otter. They have declined by 80-90% since the 1970's through the effects of the invasive American signal crayfish competing for food and habitat and spreading disease (crayfish plague!)



The River Culm supports one of two remaining populations of white clawed crayfish in Devon. It had been believed to be extinct on the river but was 'rediscovered' in 2006 and was found to be present near Culmstock. The invasive American signal crayfish was recorded at the upstream end of the white-clawed crayfish population in 2008 and has been slowly expanding since then. This makes it very important to understand the spread and locations of the signal crayfish so we can to plan how best to secure the future of the native white-clawed in Devon which is under serious and imminent threat of extinction.

Source: Crayfish Survey Report, Culm Community Crayfish Project, Nov. 2018.



Butterflies, Bee's & Beetles

By Iain Porter

Quantock Hills AONB Development Officer

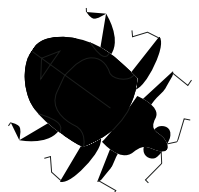
Over the last few weeks the butterflies, bees and beetles have been emerging and flying and fluttering around our gardens and the countryside. These wonderful little insects are great to see but also undertake a very important role in pollinating our flowers, crops and trees.

There is great concern nationally at the loss of pollinator species, such as butterflies, bees and flies. Since the 1930's over 97% of species-rich grassland have been lost – an area the size of Wales – which has led to less pollen and nectar sources. With less food sources insects and animals which rely on nectar and pollen will decline.

Nationally there is so much concern about the loss of pollinators in our countryside that in 2014 the Government launched the National Pollinator Strategy. The strategy aims to deliver across five key areas including supporting pollinators across towns, cities and the countryside and raising awareness of what pollinators need to survive and thrive. It was also realised that not enough was known about how well pollinators are doing, what the threats are and what actions would be most effective.

More recently an organisation called Buglife have produced what they call B-Lines. These are a series of 'insect pathways' running through towns and the countryside along which organisations aim to create flower rich habitats for pollinators. The Somerset B-lines were only launched last week and more information can be found on their website- <https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/>

What are we doing locally? On the Quantock Hills the team and volunteers have been undertaking butterfly monitoring to compliment monitoring undertaken by Butterfly Conservation. There are also grants for landowners, farmers and community groups to plant of wildflower meadows. This has led to over 11Ha of new wildflower meadows across the AONB.



Quantock Quiz – Literature & History

1) When Ada Lovelace, mathematician and Byron's daughter visited the Quantocks to stay with pioneer electrician Andrew Cross in 1844 where was he living?

- a. Halsway Manor
- b. Kilve Court
- c. Fyne Court

**2) "May 6th, Sunday: ...Went with him to Stowey; heard the nightingale; saw a glow-worm."
– Who was keeping a journal in 1798?**

- a. Dorothy Wordsworth
- b. William Wordsworth
- c. S.T. Coleridge

3) Which of these was one of two MPs for the Borough of Taunton in 1529?

- a. Oliver Cromwell (Lord Protector)
- b. Thomas Cromwell (Chief Minister to Henry VIII)
- c. Sir Richard Cromwell (Knight)

**4) There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night --
Ten to make and the match to win --
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in.
Which poet, later to be an Aisholt resident, wrote this in 1892?**

- a. Alfred Edward Housman
- b. Sir Henry Newbolt
- c. Thomas Hardy

5) Which film were the Beatles making on March 2nd 1964 when they took a trip on the West Somerset Railway and asked for their ball back at Crowcombe Heathfield Station?

- a. Help!
- b. A Hard Day's Night
- c. Magical Mystery Tour

6) Fraudster William Forbes-Leslie founded a company in 1924 to do what?

- a. Extract high quality sharpening stone from the southern Quantocks
- b. Mine for copper in the area
- c. Extract oil from shale at the Quantock coast

7) Which hugely important author in the English language was

- a. Forester at North Petherton Park (part of the old Royal Quantock Forest) at the time of his death in the year 1400?
- a. W Shakespeare
- b. G Chaucer
- c. J Milton

8) Which beautiful Quantock location houses the Kennedy Grant Library, a nationally important collection of about 10,000 books and recordings of folklore, customs, traditional folk music, dance and song

- a. Fyne Court
- b. Kilve Court
- c. Halsway Manor

9) Who used to stay in Bicknoller in the 1950s as a peaceful refuge from the public eye?

- a. Elizabeth Taylor
- b. Princess Margaret
- c. Cary Grant

10) Which Romantic poet had a daughter named Ianthe Eliza who married Edward Jeffries Esdaile of Cothelstone Manor, in 1837?

- a. Percy Bysshe Shelley
- b. Robert Southey
- c. John Keats

11) One of Alfred the Great's network of military roads ran from Over Stowey to Crowcombe Park Gate, then south along the ridge, to Triscombe Stone and beyond. What did Alfred and the West Saxons call this type of road?

- a. Stratified Way
- b. Hwalrad
- c. Harepath

**12) "That summer under whose indulgent skies,
Upon smooth Quantock's airy ridge we roved, ..."
– Who wrote this?**

- a. William Wordsworth
- b. Dorothy Wordsworth
- c. S.T. Coleridge

The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme is recruiting the team (at last!)

Bill Jenman, Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Manager



Readers will recall that the QLPS started in April. First order of business should have been recruiting a skilled team of new people – we're supposed to have Natural and Historic Heritage Officers, a Community Engagement and Volunteering Officer (CEVO), and a Project Support Officer. But as you know, things have been a bit difficult lately, so recruitment was put on hold. I've been getting on with the things that don't require a lot of face to face contact.

Meantime I've been putting some thought into what we can do while the pandemic continues over the coming year, and how we can help the recovery. Having money to spend, and supporting the local economy, is helpful in itself right now, but its increasingly clear that lockdown has had a major adverse impact on a lot of people's health and wellbeing. So as things ease up (fingers firmly crossed) it's time to restart recruitment and do what we can to help.

The plan is to have everyone in post by the end of October at the latest, starting with the Project Support Officer who we'll be interviewing for in a couple of weeks' time. The Natural Heritage Officer and CEVO will be advertised next week in <https://www.countryside-jobs.com/jobs/> and the Historic Heritage Officer the week after in <http://www.bajr.org/Employment/>. The heritage sector has been hard hit economically and there has already been a first wave of redundancies, so I'm expecting to get a lot of good applications.

Having spent the last two years planning the project I'm excited to be getting back on track. We will do important heritage conservation work of course but it is also going to be fun! Planting a tree that will long outlive me, pulling out a flint blade that's not seen daylight for 4000 years, and watching the wonder on a kids' face when they watch a hornet pump its body to breathe, these are all different kinds of magic. Time to get going!



Maximising The Benefits Of Nature To Improve mood

**Kristen Lambert, Nature & Wellbeing Project Officer
Somerset Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

On the Quantock, Blackdown and Mendip Hills, nature-based activities such as gardening, conservation volunteering and assisting with animal care have been used for some time to support people to manage their own mental wellbeing. However, the Coronavirus pandemic has led to many more of us reaching out to local nature and wildlife in order to help us manage the additional stresses and anxiety that lockdown brought with it.

A recent BBC report (Kasriel and Provornava: 2020) highlighted evidence from scientists around nature connections aiding our mental wellbeing. Within this report it outlined key points/ideas that might help us to maximise these benefits to our health. One of these is to try and spend at least two hours a week connecting with nature in some way (White et al: 2019) and another is around involving as many senses as you can. Here are some ideas of things you might like to try, also highlighted in this report. Most of these are accessible to all, regardless of where you live.

- Visit a tree near your home on a regular basis and notice changes in the leaves, seeds, blossoms. Do certain species of birds visit while you are there? Does the bark have any lichen, moss or insects on it?
- Go to a window and listen to the sound of leaves blowing in the wind, bird song or even the smell of freshly cut grass or rain during a downpour.
- Take a walk very early in the morning or just before the sun goes down when light, textures and colour are often at their most spectacular.
- While cooking think of nature – taking notice of colours, flavours and smells – for example fresh fruit smells.
- Try and bring some natural design into your home. Use things you have collected from your walks – such as twigs, driftwood or stones to keep you connected with nature even though you aren't always able to be in it.

Coronavirus Lockdown: Can nature help lift our mood?

Emily Kasriel and Kate Provornaya 3rd May 2020:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-52479763>

Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing

Dr M,P White et al June 2019:

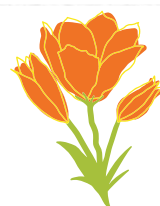
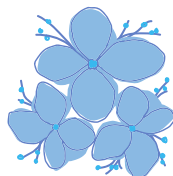
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3>



Word Search

H	F	A	R	T	R	R	P	A	H	O	T	J	R
A	Y	U	R	M	A	A	O	I	O	R	E	L	A
I	A	T	E	D	J	A	P	H	L	Y	E	O	L
R	T	A	W	R	T	I	P	T	I	S	W	A	N
S	O	Y	O	K	H	A	I	O	D	I	S	R	S
T	A	E	L	W	G	Y	E	M	A	A	W	E	D
R	D	L	F	A	I	L	S	K	Y	D	O	H	I
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S	H	C	P	D	S	D	F	R	W	H	A	S	F

HAWKMOTH
 DRAGONFLY
 GORSE
 MEADOWSWEET
 OYXEYE DAISY
 COW PARSLEY
 HAIRSTREAKS
 NIGHTJAR
 WASPS
 APHIDS
 POPPIES
 TOADLETS
 HOP
 HEATHER
 CORNFLOWER
 HOLIDAYS
 FLAX
 SUNDEW



Quiz Answers from page 4

- 1: c. Fyne Court
- 2: a. Dorothy Wordsworth
- 3: b. Thomas Cromwell (Chief Minister to Henry VIII)
- 4: b. Sir Henry Newbolt
- 5: b. A Hard Day's Night
- 6: c. Extract oil from shale at the Quantock coast
- 7: b. G Chaucer
- 8: c. Halsway Manor
- 9: b. Princess Margaret
- 10: a. Percy Bysshe Shelley
- 11: c. Harepath
- 12: a. William Wordsworth



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