

AONB UNIT REPORTS

Purpose

To advise members of activity of the Wye Valley AONB Unit.

FOR INFORMATION

Below are update reports on the following AONB Unit & partner initiatives: -

- a. AONB Species Action Plans***
- b. Wye Invasive Species Programme (WISP)***
- c. Wye Valley AONB Villages signage***
- d. Farming in Protected Landscapes***
- e. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & and Herefordshire Community Foundation Wye Valley AONB Fund***
- f. Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects***
- g. National Association for AONBs Conference***

a. AONB Species Action Plans

Ellie Baggett, Lower Wye Nature Recovery Officer, has been progressing with the first two AONB Species Action Plans. There are 5 species or assemblages identified by the AONB team and partners in response to the Colchester Declaration pledge to adopt species and reverse their decline. The species are Nobel Chafer beetle in relation to orchard habitats, Hedgehog as a locally iconic species, Water Crowfoot as an indicator for water quality, Woodland butterfly assemblage with special interest in the Wood White and Pearl Bordered Fritillary in relation to woodlands, Bumblebee assemblage with particular focus on Shril Carder, Brown Banded Carder, Redshank Carder and long horned bees in relation to grassland sites. The Plans aim to increase public engagement to highlight what people can do help nature recover.

The Noble Chafer (*Gnorimus nobilis*) is a rare and beautiful beetle that can be found in traditional orchards. The adult is approximately 20mm long and has a metallic-green iridescent body, speckled with white. The key habitat for Noble Chafers is inside hollow open-grown mature fruit trees between 50 and 80 years old, especially cherry, plum and apple. These trees and traditional orchard habitats are vulnerable to removal or clearance, particularly if the trees are reaching the end of their productive life. Fragmentation of these old-tree landscapes is a key issue, producing smaller and less viable populations which are increasingly isolated from each other. The species is currently classed as Nationally Scarce in Great Britain, and has an IUCN status of Vulnerable. The main national distribution today is in the old orchard country of the 'Three Counties' (Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire). Within the Wye Valley AONB there are only current records of Noble Chafer in Herefordshire, but it is still likely that Noble Chafer beetles may be present in Monmouthshire due to the close geographical proximity to other population strongholds.

The largest distance that Noble Chafers have been recorded to fly is 700m. Hence the Species Action Plan is based on a buffer zone of 700m around each traditional orchard site with potential within the AONB. The Plan then examines the constraints and opportunities to expanding and reconnecting priority orchard habitats, thereby creating more opportunities for the Noble Chafer to expand its population size and range. The key Actions in the Plan for 2022-2027 are:

- Raise the profile of the Noble Chafer, its ecology, and how to manage orchards for Noble Chafer, amongst orchard owners.
- Encourage suitable sites to be managed to create, maintain or otherwise provide good habitat for Noble Chafer.
- Promote survey work to better understand the current condition of traditional orchards in the Wye Valley AONB.
- Promote survey work to reinforce our understanding of the Noble Chafer's population and distribution within the Wye Valley AONB.
- Expand survey effort to include, where practicable, the investigation of non-fruit tree species for evidence of the Noble Chafer.
- Support and encourage the expansion of current orchard habitats, planting new trees to replace old ones and leaving standing deadwood for Noble Chafer habitat.
- Support and encourage the creation of new orchards (or the creation/provision of suitable deadwood habitat) in locations that will form habitat stepping stones between known or likely Noble Chafer orchards.
- Promote the planting of fruit trees generally, including within hedgerows, in particular where trees can function as habitat stepping stones between known or likely Noble Chafer orchards.
- Produce habitat boxes to trial the effectiveness of using artificial deadwood habitat as replacement orchard habitat/stepping stones between known or likely Noble Chafer orchards.
- Monitor all Noble Chafer habitat boxes after three years to assess effectiveness of trial
- Develop a programme of surveying to better establish populations and monitor population changes following action.

The Wye Valley AONB Nature Recovery Plan considers orchard habitat enhancement and expansion in more detail. The Noble Chafer Action Plan will be published on the AONB website shortly.

Through June, Ellie has been running pheromone lure trapping surveys to monitor for the Noble Chafer. Working with a range of traditional orchard owners across the AONB, noble chafer traps, fitted with a (harmless!) chemical pheromone lure, are closely monitored to give us a better idea of the population here in the AONB. This will also help us identify sites which may act as bridges between known populations. This will be the next phase of the project, where we can work with landowners to create the right habitat or mimic the right conditions by installing beetle boxes.

Hedgehogs are the subject of the next AONB Species Action Plan which is being drafted. The 'Wye Hedgehogs' campaign was launched on AONB social media – see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/wye-hedgehogs-priority-species-project/>. This highlights individual and local actions that people can take to help conserve and enhance this emblematic species.

b. Wye Invasive Species Programme (WISP)

Nickie Moore, AONB Lower Wye Project Officer, has been busy leading work with local communities and stakeholders to stop the spread of four Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) – Japanese Knotweed, American Skunk Cabbage, Cherry Laurel and Himalayan Balsam – see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/our-projects/wisp/>. A range of public events and training days have been organised, including community ‘Balsam Bashing’ and the production and promotion of a Himalayan Balsam Action Toolkit <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/our-projects/wisp/balsam-action-toolkit/>.

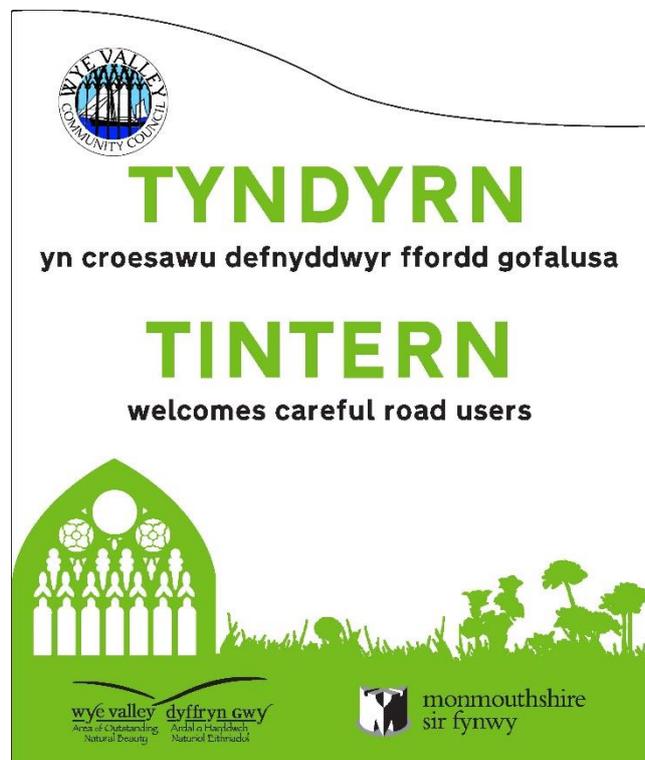


Meanwhile surveying continues for the presence of INNS, - see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/our-projects/wisp/wisp-report-sightings/>. Nickie uses these records, adding to previous years, to co-ordinate contractors using chemical control particularly of Japanese Knotweed and American Skunk Cabbage in the lower Wye Valley.

c. Wye Valley AONB Villages signage

Final arrangements are being made for the production and installation of the new village gateway signage in the 9 villages in the AONB in Monmouthshire; Devauden, Llanishen, Trellech, The Narth, Penallt, Catbrook, Llandogo, Tintern and St Arvans. This is one of the outcomes from the Wye Valley Villages Strategy & Action Plan produced earlier in the year by Monmouthshire County Council, the Wye Valley AONB Partnership and the four Community Councils of St. Arvans, Devauden, Tintern and Trellech United, funded through the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) programme.

This is an example of the style of the new signs:



d. Farming in Protected Landscapes

All Year 1 (2021-22) project work is complete with a total grant expenditure of £96,525. The Year 2 (2022-23) allocation from DEFRA for the Wye Valley AONB is £220,110 of which £132,194 has already been committed. Therefore remaining available budget for grants in Year 2 is £87,915.60. The Year 3 (2023-24) final allocation is £219,490 of which £70,295 has already been committed and £149,195 available for grants. For further information see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/farming-in-protected-landscapes/>.

The recently recruited Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer joins the AONB Unit in August. They will take over the day to day running of the programme from Nick Critchley, AONB Development Officer.

e. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) & and Herefordshire Community Foundation Wye Valley AONB Fund

Welsh Government have confirmed that the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) for 2022/23 will remain at £100,000 per annum up to March 2025. Currently £52,153 has been committed to projects meaning that £47,847 remains available for grant applications. For further information see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/grants/grants/>.

The Herefordshire Community Foundation (HCF) Wye Valley AONB Fund latest balances were £839.97 remaining in the immediate impact fund and £59,838.79 in the Endowment Fund, meaning that there is about £10,000 available for grants. For further information see <https://www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk/caring-for-wye-valley-aonb/grants/aonb-fund/>

The new AONB Community Links Officer was recently recruited joins the AONB Unit in early July. They will be the main point of contact for SDF and HCF AONB Fund applicants, among other duties.

f. Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places (SLSP) projects

Welsh Government have confirmed that the SLSP offer for 2022/23 is £175,000 per AONB, rising to £200,000 for both 2023/4 and 2024/5. The Wye Valley AONB proposed projects for SLSP are being finalised in line with the programme criteria:

Nature Recovery

Lower Wye Valley Nature Recovery Initiatives:

- Invasive non-native species (INNS) control
- Landscape Connectivity
- Species Action Plans esp. Orchards project

Sustainable Tourism

Lower Wye Valley Tourism & Access Improvements

- Wye Valley Walk enhancements: Wyesham & Piercefield
- Integrated Access Strategy

Decarbonisation & Supporting Communities

Lower Wye Valley Village Halls Energy efficiency & Hub development

g. National Association for AONBs annual Conference, 13th to 15th September.

For full details see <https://landscapesforlife.org.uk/events/landscapes-life-conference/landscapes-life-conference2022>. The AONB Unit intend to have a good presence at the conference, and will report back to the next JAC.