

# Victory for Wildlife through planning at St Leonard's SNCI



Silver-studded blue

One of our roles as part of the SNCI team is to respond on planning issues that might affect these precious sites. Wherever possible we look to secure wildlife gains whilst ensuring any impacts are minimised. This might include exploring ways to improve the surrounding habitat for wildlife, to create additional habitat or to incorporate wildlife features into a new development. We are aided by the fact that there is a presumption in the Planning Framework to look for biodiversity gain with any development.

One example that is currently underway is the Victory Oak development at St Leonards to provide 210 dwellings and a care facility on the site of an old wartime rehabilitation centre for American servicemen. The grounds surrounding the old buildings form part of an SNCI important for its acid grassland and heathland habitats with an array of uncommon plants and animals. Having suffered neglect for many years however much of the interest was being lost to encroaching Rhododendron, Pine and Birch. A condition of the planning consent is the clearance of a large area of Pine and Rhododendron (over 12ha) and the removal of the thick carpet of needles that has collected beneath, to encourage a return to a mosaic of grassland and heath that will cater for the needs of the many specialists associated with the site including sand lizard, nightjar, bats – with a bespoke bat house created from an old building - invertebrates, a rich assemblage of which includes 22 nationally scarce species, and the many notable heathland and grassland plants.

Areas of rich acid grassland on the footprint of the development – where there was already existing planning permission – were identified and translocated to surrounding carefully selected areas. The signs are promising that this has been successful with many of the notable plants including various lichens and green-winged orchid flowering happily. Although translocation should be a last resort, this does have the advantage of bringing together formerly isolated patches of turf into one large area, making it easier to manage and protect into the future.

In the long-term, the restored SNCI along with the translocated areas will be handed over to Dorset Wildlife Trust to be managed as a nature reserve with a management fund from the developers and hopefully with input from the new residents. The adjacent Forestry Commission land will provide a walking area for the residents and will be opened out to create a mosaic of woodland and heath that will link the reserve to nationally and internationally important areas of heath to the south providing a continuum of important habitat, along which these scarce species can spread, overall a potentially significant wildlife gain.

Amanda Marler - Wildlife Sites Officer



Nightjar

Green-winged orchid

Sand lizard

Photos © Steve Davis, Ken Dolbear, MBE, Mark Heighes, Amanda Marler

**For further information on SNCIs:** Amanda Marler & Sharron Abbott  
01305 264620  
Dorset Wildlife Trust West Dorset  
Team Office: 01300 321329

**For advice on Environmental Stewardship:** Initially contact our West Dorset Team. They can advise you as to the best person to contact within Natural England for further help.  
Forestry Authority for: West Dorset & Weymouth & Portland - Chris Gibbard 01392 834278 and for the rest of Dorset - Ian Briscoe 01392 834259  
FWAGSW: Alex Butler 07557 094029



# The Green Linnet

The Newsletter for owners of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest



Issue 22 : January 2018

## Gillingham Royal Forest Project

The vision for Gillingham Royal Forest project is to collaborate with the local community, including SNCI owners and managers, to investigate the potential to restore; recreate and reconnect a historical landscape whilst making an increasing contribution to the sustainable development of Gillingham.

One of the main drivers for the project is that Gillingham has the potential to grow from a population of 11,000 to 20,000-30,000 in the next 30-40 years and although North Dorset District Wide Local Plan recognises that trees, woodlands, water and wildlife already play an important part in Gillingham's quality of life, environment and economy, it also realises that without action, Gillingham's historical landscape will decline and Gillingham will see a decrease in the contribution that the "Royal Forest" has to offer, which will be crucial for the growth of Gillingham.

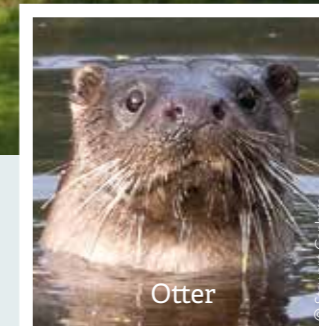
The project has the potential to deliver other local, regional and national objectives, such as; improving access to the countryside, helping to deliver natural flood management, restoring ecosystems at a landscape scale, aiding sustainable economic growth, working with landowners to improve water quality, combatting climate change through mitigation and adaptation (including carbon abatement), and promoting and engaging the history and culture of Gillingham Royal Forest to the local community.

Dorset Wildlife Trust will be applying to Heritage Lottery Fund "Our Heritage" shortly and are hoping to initiate the project later this year.

For further information about the potential project please contact **Emma Tomlin** via [etomlin@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:etomlin@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)



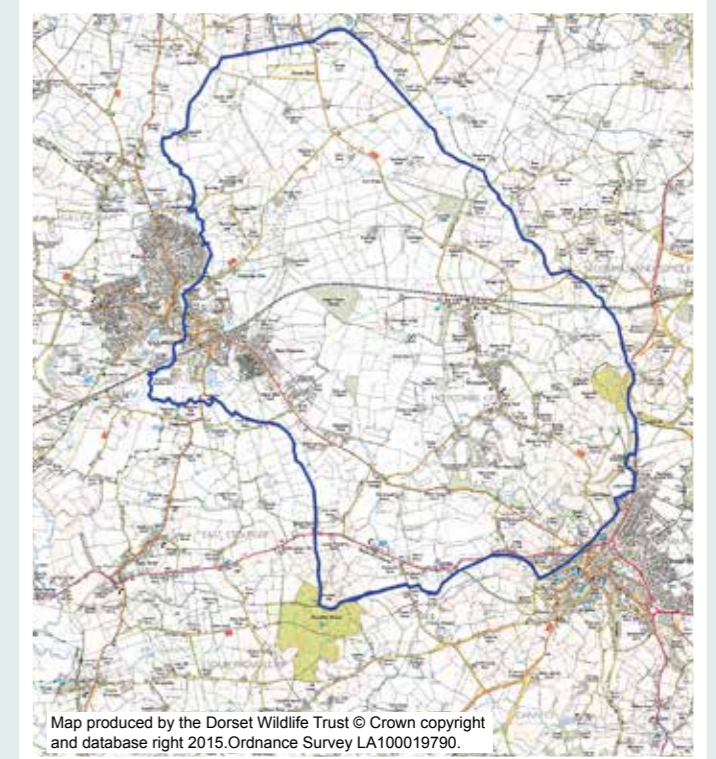
Part of a nationwide network of Wildlife Trusts



Otter



Water vole



Map produced by the Dorset Wildlife Trust © Crown copyright and database right 2015, Ordnance Survey LA100019790.

# Magical Marshwood project – hedgerow oaks and wild daffs

Thanks to the farmers and landowners of the Marshwood Vale, a new habitat restoration project is about to begin in far West Dorset. The work will be funded by the National Grid and aims to improve the landscape around their high-powered electricity lines. DWT and the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) have collaborated to pull together the Magical Marshwood Landscape Enhancement Initiative with the help of 25 landowners along the pylon line between Lambert's Castle and Salway Ash; (start date is subject to final approval, expected sometime this year).

We've incorporated some stunning and species-rich SNCIs along the way, and identified some new sites that landowners might like to submit for survey and possible SNCI designation (with no obligation of course). Both within and outside of SNCIs, habitat and species conservation endeavours, including hedgerow tree planting, are planned to enhance a landscape impacted by imposing, industrial pylons. Of course, in the age of electricity, we mostly benefit from this infrastructure, but as conservationists we are also very grateful for these funds made available by the National Grid for the benefit of wildlife.

Hedgerow tree planting is a measure of great value to wildlife and landscape and the idea came from landowners in the Vale where hedgerow trees are an iconic feature of the landscape – an old name for the area is the Vale of the Oaks. We consulted many farmers during the application process for this Landscape Enhancement Initiative - including the Chideock Discussion Club - and we were met with much enthusiasm. Another intervention we've included is a wild daffodil nursery to nurture locally collected seeds of another archetypal Marshwood Vale species.

Much of the work will be ably undertaken by volunteers, and if you know of anyone who would like to join in, please put them in touch. Dorset Environmental Records Centre will also coordinate the monitoring and recording that will flow from all this hard labour. Getting stuck in to this exciting suite of restoration works is an altogether attractive prospect – bringing on a new generation of Marshwood Vale oaks, creating new flower meadows and re-populating the area with wild daffodils will be a hearty and honoured job.

Nick Gray, DWT West Dorset Conservation Officer

- All in all, our target is to:**
-  Plant 126 three-metre oak trees in boundaries within sight of the pylons
  -  Lay 1800 metres of hedgerow
  -  Plant 60 new orchard trees
  -  Re-create 7 Ha of wild flower meadows
  -  Restore 150m of river habitat
  -  Take on 7 Ha of scrub clearance on species-rich grassland
  -  Enhance 7 ponds for wildlife
  -  Establish a wild daffodil nursery in the Vale



Wild daffodil

Main photo © Nick Gray

## Changes to Road Verge Management to Benefit Wildlife

Species-rich road verge



Species-rich road verge



Overgrown road verge

Photos © Mark James

Dorset County Council's Coast & Countryside Service now has overall responsibility for cutting Dorset's road verges, either by using their own labour, via agency agreements with other local authorities, or using contractors. So there is now an opportunity to try new approaches to verge management through reduction in fertility of verge soils which will lead to an increase in their biodiversity. The aim is to reduce the cost of managing the verges whilst maintaining high safety standards, and to look after the wildlife and landscape values of the roadsides that contribute so much to the character of the Dorset countryside.

A key difference will be to remove the cuttings wherever possible, so that they do not rot down and smother the wildflowers. This also reduces the fertility of the soil by continually removing nutrients locked up in the grass, helping a wider variety of grasses and flowering plants to establish themselves, competing for the fewer nutrients available. In and around Blandford, they are already trialling 'cut and collect' techniques using a Rytec flail collector on wide verges on the bypass, and within the town itself raking up the arisings by hand and removing them. The wildflower richness of the bypass has gradually improved to the point where it has recently been recognised as an SNCI. The grassland there supports a beautiful show of Pyramidal Orchids in summer along with abundant Ox-eye Daisy and Knapweeds. The reduction in fertility also reduces the number of times the verges need to be cut, thus saving money.

In some urban areas, working with local communities, the Countryside Service is also introducing Conservation Verge Trials. The existing grass is removed and wildflower seeds

sowed which once established produce colourful shows of flowers for most of the summer and autumn. These areas are also a source of nectar for insects, and the County Council has recently adopted an Action Plan for Pollinators to encourage this approach ([www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/pollinators](http://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/pollinators)).

DCC has a long-established partnership with Dorset Wildlife Trust to maintain a suite of roadside verges which are particularly important for wildflowers. There are over 120 of these 'Blue Post' verges spread across the county, and a small number are so botanically rich that they are also recognised as SNCIs. Each verge has a mini-management statement produced by DWT to indicate when, from the wildlife viewpoint, it would be best to cut, but almost invariably in previous years the contractor has cut too late. The conservation verges will now be cut by DCC in-house staff, rather than by contractor, so that they have direct control of when they are cut, which should gradually bring them back to a better condition. DCC are keen to work with volunteers in the most suitable areas to help rake the cuttings away from the verges into the hedge, again to reduce soil fertility over time, and remove the deep grass thatch which prevents the wildflowers from germinating and thriving.

We at DWT welcome the positive changes that are being made to manage Dorset's road verges which are so important in defining the character of different parts of the county and in supporting its wildlife. It gives the opportunity for DCC to work more closely with DWT and local communities to help conserve these important wildflower verges.

Sharron Abbott



A new initiative in 2017 involved volunteers in monitoring SNCIs. After a training workshop in June, 15 surveyors scattered to the far corners of Dorset to carry out their surveys. Together, we surveyed 44 sites so a big thank you goes out to these volunteers and to the landowners that kindly allowed us to re-visit these interesting sites.