

The hills are alive

WHILST work continues to secure future funding and identify new ways of delivering projects that will conserve and enhance the AONB, work continues on the ground. January and February have been busy months:

Conserving Black Down Project

Further work has been undertaken to progress this project that is being co-ordinated through the Black Down Advisory Group. New lift-out bollards have been installed at two locations on Stony Lane in Upper Langford as part of measures to prevent illegal 4x4 vehicle use of the Black Down. The bollards are the last step in blocking vehicle access points to Black Down following the installation of vehicle barriers last year.

Signs have been ordered and will be installed in March to waymark bridleways and footpaths on Black Down and Burrington Ham. Work will also begin in March to construct a durable stone-pitched surface on the Beacon Batch barrow. The work will protect the archaeology of the Barrow while allowing

visitors on foot to enjoy views from the highest point in the Mendip Hills AONB. The Black Down Advisory Group will hear in March if their Heritage Lottery Fund grant application has been successful.

The **AONB Advanced Young Rangers** spent a day replacing tree guards in the **Rickford Community Orchard**. Working with a group of village volunteers they removed the old tree guards that the apple trees have outgrown and replaced them with new larger guards that will protect the trees from livestock and deer for many years to come. The new tree



Advanced Young Rangers replacing tree guards at Rickford Community Orchard

guards were part funded by the AONB Partnership.

AONB Volunteer Rangers have been out and about undertaking regular site visits and litter picks. Updates on the Rangers activities are included on the AONB web site including comments from the site visits they undertake. We urge all dog walkers to note this one:

Burrington Ham Wednesday January 26th.

Well, today's site visit seemed to be all about picking up discarded dog litter bags....or not.

Why, we asked ourselves, do the dog-walkers take the trouble to pick up the waste and place it in a polythene (non-biodegradable) bag, tying neat little knots or bows in the top and then throwing it into the brambles or hedge or actually leaving it on the wayside.

I can only reiterate our eternal plea to the dog walking public:- PLEASE CLEAR UP AFTER YOUR PET so we can all enjoy Mendip at its best.

Osprey Outdoors is running a project 'Building Confidence through Conservation Volunteering'.

The aim of this project is to get people who are isolated, because of physical disabilities and infirmities due to old age or drug and alcohol abuse, into the outside environment so they feel they are contributing again.

Osprey arrange transport from Weston super Mare to bring volunteers out to undertake conservation tasks.

The group undertake land management tasks for some of the not-for-profit organisations who manage land on the Mendips, specifically the Somerset Wildlife Trust, the National Trust and the Avon Wildlife Trust, and Fernhill Farm who have educational facilities for local groups.

The pilot project is running one day a week until the end of March part funded by the Mendip Hills Sustainable Development Fund. Each week they undertake a task such as: footpath clearing, scrub management, cutting back of trees and hedgerows, clearing weeds, mulching trees, checking tree posts and tubes, tree planting, hedge planting, creating steps and pathways, building drainage channels, building stiles and many other activities.

The **AONB Young Rangers** joined **Chris Sperring of the Hawk and Owl Trust** for a small mammal training day to survey and record the food supply of Barn Owls in the Mendip Hills. The day began at 7.30am with the group checking eight small mammal traps that had been set in an area of rough grassland. Six voles and one woodmouse were recorded before being released back into their natural habitat. Later the group dissected 10 owl pellets to find and identify the remains of 23 voles, three shrews and a rat. The Young Rangers learned that the best way to conserve barn owls is to manage the habitat of their food supply and how the Hawk and Owl Trust are encouraging landowners to maintain prey-rich unimproved grassland.



Volunteer hedgelaying at Cheddar Gorge on Osprey led task

Photo courtesy of Osprey Outdoors



AONB Young Rangers dissecting owl pellets

Photo courtesy of AONB Unit

The Mendip Hills AONB Unit is the voice of the protected landscape, working with landowners and the local community to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk
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