

# Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Autumn 2017



## Apples

Would you know Betty Geeson, Captain Tom or Lord Hindlip if you came face to face with them? Well, these are just three of the many apple varieties first propagated in Worcestershire, each with their own story to tell. Over 30 varieties can be traced back to their Worcestershire origin while over 2000 varieties are recorded from the UK. It is this extraordinary number of apple varieties which makes them so fascinating; the fact that a single species of plant *Malus domestica* can be crossed and bred (naturally or by design) to produce such a diverse mix of colour, size, shape and flavour. With the help of John Edgeley we have been identifying the varieties in our old orchard in Naunton Beachamp to help us decide on varieties to plant at this and other sites now owned by VLHT. A few of the varieties can be found on our website <http://valetrust.weebly.com/apples>.

Planting an orchard is a long-term commitment and we need to balance the need to bring in income to the Trust in the future and the wish to conserve local varieties. The Marcher Apple Network have recently produced a really useful little book (The Apples and Orchards of Worcestershire – A County Pomona by Wade Muggleton) which is helping us with our planting plans. There is an increased awareness and interest in heritage apples and the many 'Apple Days' around the country are becoming very popular with families wishing to find out more about fruit heritage and discovering 'new' apple flavours. So why not visit an apple event or a local farm shop and find your favourite apple and then find out more about its history. There aren't many research topics that taste so good.

## Stocken Orchard Cider



Some of last year's bumper harvest of cider apples from Stocken Orchard have been put to good use and now Avonbank at Pershore College have produced a second single-variety cider, using our apples. Dabinett single-variety proved very popular and so has remained in production and now Somerset Red-streak single-variety is available. Both varieties are proving very popular so hopefully stocks will last as this year our orchard is resting after the excessive crop of last year.

The cider can be purchased locally, so ask in farm shops or contact Avonbank at Pershore College for more details or visit <https://www.wcg.ac.uk/page/349/pershorecollegejuice>

## Friends of VLHT

Friends of VLHT pay a regular amount each month or each year, which supports the important work saving and renovating old orchards and hay meadows and woodlands. For more details, please contact Gary Farmer at the office.

## Plum festival 2017

Congratulations to all involved in the running of another incredibly successful Pershore Plum Festival. Thousands of visitors flocked to the town to celebrate our plum heritage while enjoying the beautiful Bank Holiday weather. We are grateful as ever to our own volunteers who helped to pick and sell the fruit through the month of August. It didn't go without its hitches though, as our Land Rover broke down on the way back from the Plum Races at Worcester Races; the plums in our orchard looked like they would be over too soon so we ordered plums from another orchard only to find that ours were perfectly ripe ready for the Bank Holiday and then to cap it all the road was dug up right outside the entrance to our orchard at Hipton Hill. This made it very difficult for volunteers to get to the orchard and resulted in coach-trips cancelling the orchard walk! But it worked out very well in the end and here's looking forward to next year's Plum Festival.

## The Great De-Composers

As the green of summer gives way to the gold and brown of autumn, the ground is soon covered with fallen leaves, decaying fruit and deadwood. We may choose to clear this up from our gardens and formal parks, but nature has an army just waiting to get stuck into the task of breaking down the summer's cast-offs. Some of the primary recyclers of all this nutrient-rich material is a group of very familiar invertebrates, the woodlice. These grey armour-plated mini-beasts are so familiar that they are known by many different names from Chisel-pigs to Cheesy-bobs, Monkey-peas and Slaters amongst others. Most of these names have lost their meanings through the years but the woodlice continue to carry out their essential nutrient recycling regardless.

There are five very common species in Britain and if you move a pile of dead leaves or a fallen branch in the autumn you will be sure to find some. The Shiny Woodlouse *Oniscus asellus* has a wide, shiny exoskeleton (that's what an invertebrates skin is called) and they clamp themselves down, so it's difficult for predators to pick them up. The Rough Woodlouse *Porcellio scaber* ambles away to cover when disturbed, while the Striped Woodlouse *Philoscia muscorum* (with its go-faster-stripe) races off at speed. The tiny pink Common Pygmy Woodlouse *Trichoniscus pusillus* swiftly bury themselves in loose soil or leaf litter if exposed to light, while the Common Pill Woodlouse *Armadillidium vulgare* rolls into a tight ball in defence. It was this habit which made them popular with medieval herbalists as they are high in calcium and easy to swallow, so were used as an early-day Rennie (other indigestion tablets are available).

There are three other less common species which may be encountered in the Vale. The Southern Pill Woodlouse *Armadillidium depressum* is a larger, slightly more flattened version of its common cousin and has been found in Evesham and on old walls in Cleeve Prior, so is likely to be in other places around the Vale. The Plum Woodlouse *Porcellionides pruinosus* is a compost and dung-heap specialist and gets its name from its purple waxy bloom, similar to that found on ripe plums. In plums, this natural wax or prunesence is water-repellent which helps to limit moisture loss and reduces water entering the fruit, so this is likely to be the same with the woodlice that live in such hot and wet environments. There is also a small white species which has given up the light altogether and lives in ant nests. The little blind Ant Woodlouse *Platyarthrus hoffmannseggii* can often be seen if an ant nest is disturbed under rubble. However, they are usually overlooked as they resemble ant eggs at first sight and quickly scurry back in to the dark.

So why not spend a little time to discover some of nature's great de-composers this autumn.

Southern Pill  
Woodlouse



Plum Woodlouse  
Compost heap specialist



Ant Woodlouse  
Resident of ant nests



## Volunteers

Our volunteers continue to grow in number and enthusiasm (partly helped by the increase in cakes at our work parties!). We have been mowing areas of grasslands to reduce the coarse grasses and brambles and help increase the wildflowers. Fences have been repaired at Hipton to ensure that grazing can continue, as well as spending several weeks picking plums and removing the never ending invasion of young Hawthorn from around the plum trees.

We are now planning our autumn and winter work including pruning, fruit tree planting and scrub management.

We are very grateful for their enthusiasm and commitment, turning out in any weather to get the job done. It really would not be possible for VLHT to manage so many sites without the help of volunteers. Thank you!

## Pollinators on the Farm

During the summer I was invited by Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) to help with judging farms in Gloucestershire for their annual Silver Pintail Award. This year the theme was 'pollinators on the farm' reflecting national awareness and concerns about the conservation of these important invertebrates. All of the farms visited were inspirational in the work they do for wildlife and the understanding of issues affecting pollinators. It's just a shame that there can only be one winner. At the Awards evening in November I will be giving a talk about VLHT's orchards and the importance of deadwood before announcing this year's winner.



(image credit – N Farmer)

The picture shows a Cardinal Beetle, a pollinator found on deadwood.

## Events and Promoting the Work of VLHT



In early October VLHT held their first evening event, with talks and snacks to let people know about the work being done in the local area. It was held in the Littletons where we own three sites and are working with residents to manage a fourth. There was a good turn out and a lot of interest, so we hope to make this an annual event, promoting the work of VLHT through the Vale and surrounding area.

We also had a stall at the new Hampton Flower Show at the end of September, another very successful event and a lot of positive feedback about our work in the local area.

We moved a little out of our area to attend Hanbury Hall's Apple Weekend which allowed us to reach a new audience. It was a very busy weekend and we were able to talk to lots of people about our work and the wildlife our sites support.

Thanks to one of our volunteers we were able to take information and fruit to the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project's (TCTOP) first Stone Fruit Conference. This was another opportunity to publicise the work we do to conserve traditional orchards in the Vale and surrounding area. TCTOP held an apple identification day at Worcester Woods Country Park, led by Wade Muggleton (local apple expert and enthusiast) where we were able to find out more about local varieties, their origins and how to identify them. This will help further with our own orchard planning.

*Vale Landscape Heritage Trust (VLHT) is a registered charity, number 1080109. We work to protect and preserve the environment in and around the Vale of Evesham and Pershore. We work with volunteers, funders, farmers and the government to secure the future of, so far, nearly 300 acres.*

## Bird Highlights from Lower Moor and Haines River Meadows July – September 2017

Rob Prudden

Work during the 2016/17 winter period designed to maintain water on the wetland area proved to be a success and due to this, a succession of waders were seen during the period.

A pair of **Oystercatchers** that bred at the nearby leisure park produced 3 juveniles, the family were seen regularly on the meadows till the end of August. A pair of **Little Ringed Plovers** also bred in the same area and fledged 2 youngsters, these remained until the late date of 28th September.

Passage **Black Tailed Godwits** tend to be early returning migrants, this proved to be the case this year with the first 7 birds seen on 28<sup>th</sup> June, followed by several more small groups, totalling 24 birds by the end of September.

Three moulting male **Ruff** were of note on 13th July, then on 11th September 3 juveniles arrived, these were then joined by several others throughout the month, at least 6 individuals were seen during the period.

Other scarce wading birds included an **Avocet** and a **Little Stint**. More expected species included 3 **Greenshank**, 3 **Green Sandpipers**, 4 **Dunlin**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Ringed Plover**, **Snipe** and **Curlew** while the resident Lapwing flock peaked at just over a hundred.

Several **Little Egrets** fished along the river in July as did up to 3 **Common Terns**, while a much scarcer juvenile **Black Tern** remained in the area for 10 days in mid-September.



The first returning **Teal** and **Shoveler** arrived in the last week of July, with a lone **Mandarin** a week later and a family party of 6 juvenile **Shelduck** 15<sup>th</sup> August. On 19th September, thick mist shrouded the river meadows and as this lifted a male **Common Scoter** was seen briefly on the river. Although these birds travel across country to reach wintering coastal waters, sightings are scarce inland.

Passage **Black Headed Gulls** moved through at the beginning of August and were joined by 2 juvenile **Mediterranean Gulls**.

**Barn** and **Little Owls** were seen occasionally while **Hobbies** were scarce and only seen on 2 dates.

**Yellow Wagtails** were seen regularly in small numbers with a pair breeding in the area, a single **Wheatear** and 3 **Stonechats** were seen on passage.

### Haines Meadows Extension

At the point of finishing this newsletter we received confirmation that another meadow has been successfully purchased by VLHT, adding another 10 acres to our Haines Meadows land. This area will be managed as hay meadow with a late summer cut and aftermath grazing the traditional management of these meadows. This will further increase the chances of Curlew returning to breed while the wildflowers will provide important nectar for our pollinators and other insects.

We are once again very grateful for the support of Severn waste Services, making this purchase possible.



*Many of our projects are funded by Severn Waste Services through the Landfill Communities Fund. Without SWS, VLHT could not own, or protect, anywhere near as many acres.*

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