



Annual Report 2012-2013



Chairman's Foreword



The National Association for AONBs has the tagline 'Landscapes for Life' and it is striking when looking at the overview of work achieved during the course of last year, how relevant this tagline is. A great deal of work has been carried out to understand more about life, particularly wildlife on a landscape scale.

By working with our partners and a legion of dedicated volunteers; nest boxes were monitored, trends of deer populations were looked at through the annual deer count, further understanding about the allusive adder was gained and we now understand a little more about the numbers of dormice and their habits in the Quantocks.

Defra's strategy for strengthening British wildlife' Biodiversity 2020' identifies AONBs as key delivery units, and we hope that the results from our year on year wildlife monitoring schemes help to validate this statement.

However, work this year has not just focussed on recording current 'life' in the Quantocks, but also how habitats have changed over the years, and what impact that change may have today. Bristol University are our partners in a fascinating new orchard project, which aims to understand more about how significant orchards were to the Quantocks, and what affect the (dramatic) decline in numbers has had in terms of the economy, biodiversity and cultural identity of the hills. The project continues into this year, and we look forward to the findings.

Cothelstone Hill is another story worth celebrating. The good management of the area carried out over the last 20 years has meant that the hill is now eligible for a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and will have a particular focus on managing the land for farmland birds.

Chairman's Foreword



Change is also theme that runs through this report, and much change has taken place within the AONB team. As Chairman of the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee I would like to take this opportunity to thank, Andy Harris who left the AONB Service in November after 16 years as a Quantock Ranger

Andy's commitment to his role was second to none and I hope he knows how grateful we are to him for his hard work and dedication. We wish him every success in his new role with the Forestry Commission.

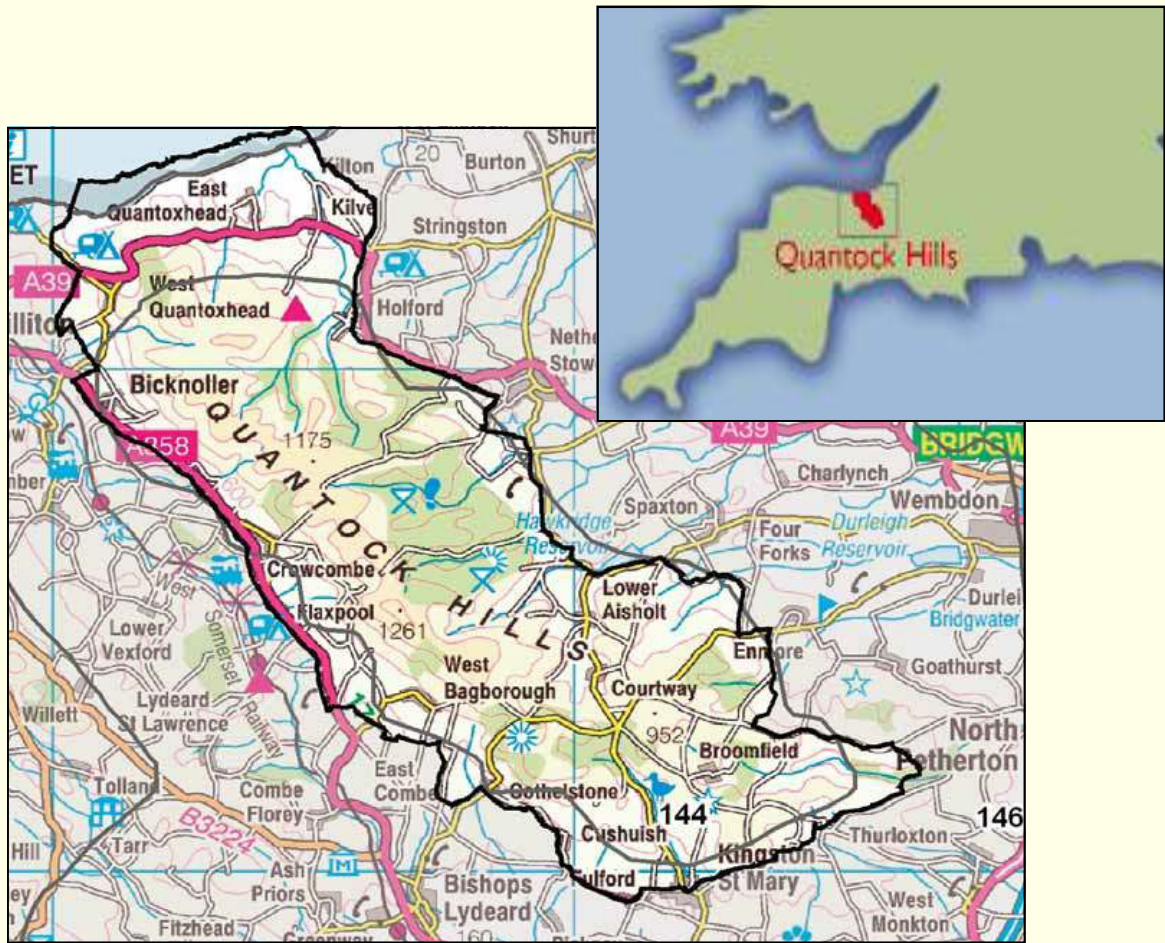
We also welcome back Chris Edwards as AONB Manager after nearly 3 years on secondment at Somerset County Council, Owen Jones became our new Partnership Ranger and we congratulate our Landscape Planning Officer Emma-Jane Preece on the birth of her baby daughter in February. Thanks also go to Iain Porter for Managing the team so well during Chris's absence.

Thanks must also go to our committed volunteers who often brave freezing temperatures and driving rain in the name of conservation. Collectively they worked over 500 working days, undertaking tasks such as wildlife monitoring, scrub clearance and event management.

The Quantock Commoners Association is another group who deserve our thanks, they were instrumental in the success of the Quantock Common Stewardship Agreement which has now ended after a productive 10 years, and a new Scheme has been agreed this year. Without their help a coordinated approach to conservation work on the Common would not have been possible.

Indeed very little would be possible without the help of all our partners within the AONB partnership, pooling knowledge and expertise for the good of conserving and enhancing one of our finest landscapes. So on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee I would like to extend my thanks to all those who helped the Quantock Hills to continue to be an outstandingly beautiful 'Landscape for Life'.

The Quantock Hills



The Quantock Hills AONB was designated in 1956, making it the first in England. The AONB's distinctive identity is formed by the dramatic ridge of Devonian sandstone rock, interwoven with deep wooded combes, open heathlands, forest, rich farmland pasture and characterful villages.

Situated between the urban areas of Bridgwater, Taunton and Minehead, the AONB represents a haven of tranquillity for wildlife and people alike.

The Joint Advisory Committee



The primary duties of the Quantock Hills AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. The JAC must also increase the public's understanding and enjoyment of the area, and foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities.

In 2012 all Local Authorities signed Statements of Intent. These cover the period April 2011–March 2015 and commit partners, to the best of their ability, to provide contributions for the period to match the commitment shown by Defra.

Angela Lamplough (WSC) became chair of the OWG and the dates of JAC meetings changed to Tuesdays.

The Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee Members are:

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|-------------|
| Somerset County Council (3 reps) | Defra (1 rep) | CLA (1 rep) |
| Sedgemoor District Council (3 reps) | Friends of Quantock (1 rep) | |
| Taunton Deane Borough Council(3 reps) | Forestry Commission (1 rep) | |
| West Somerset Council (3 reps) | Countryside Landowners Association (1 rep) | |
| Commoners Association (1 rep) | Somerset Local Access Forum (1 rep) | |
| Parish Councils (4 reps) | FoQ (1 rep) | |
| Somerset Local Access Forum (1 rep) | Defra (1 rep) | |

Highlights 2012-2013



Quantock Volunteers



Nest box monitoring



Cothelstone Hill

- 3,749 hours were worked by volunteers, which equates to over 500 work days given
- 11 new Volunteer Rangers appointed, making 14 Volunteer Rangers
- 150 woodland nest boxes monitored
- 66 dormice boxes monitored, 33 dormice recorded
- 386 Red Deer recorded on the annual deer count, the lowest count on record
- Awarded a new 10 year Agri-Environment Scheme for Cothelstone Hill. Cothelstone Hill Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)
- 20 adders sighted during 2012 Adder Survey, conducted over 3km² of Quantock Common
- New Invasive Species Control programme with £45,000 spent tackling Rhododendron

Highlights 2012-2013



Stepping up to the Market



Orchard Project



Quantock events

- **Quantock Orchards Project underway; research carried out by Bristol University showed 1,506 orchards in 1842 compared to just 11 in 2013**
- **Stepping Up to the Market initiative launched, to connect local food producers, helping them supply bigger outlets**
- **40 Fly-tipping incidents recorded helping the AONB Service identify hotspots.**
- **4 Illegal vehicle use prosecutions in October 2012**
- **16 AONB events with 294 people attending**
- **129 Planning Applications recorded, 30 comments submitted to Local Authorities**
- **9 Sustainable Development Fund projects supported. The total budget of supported projects £46,000**

AONB Service Team



There has been a great deal of change within the Quantock Hills AONB Service over the last year: AONB Manager Chris Edwards returned to the AONB Service from Somerset County Council where he was on secondment since 2010. Special thanks go to Iain Porter for managing the two posts concurrently for last 2.5 years so well.

Andy Harris left the AONB Service after 16 years to move to new Forestry Commission post, and the AONB Service would like to extend our deepest thanks to the commitment and expertise provided by Andy and wish him luck in his new role. Congratulations to Owen Jones, previously our Volunteer Coordinator who is now in post as our AONB/Forestry Commission Partnership Ranger post.

Emma-Jane Preece, our Landscape Planning Officer is currently on Maternity Leave and due to return in January 2014. Her role will be covered by AONB Manager while she is away.

Lastly, we welcome to Nichola Penn our new Volunteer Coordinator, who comes to us from her previous post at Bridgwater College.

Future Directions



The future directions working group is a group set up in 2011 to look at options on future funding and delivery models for the Quantock Hills AONB Service. In July the group produced a report which was presented to the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) outlining potential income sources.

The recommendations of the report, agreed by the JAC were:

1. To not pursue a separate membership organisation
2. To forge closer links with existing groups, namely Friends of Quantock
3. To undertake further work, including outline business case of a separate trading organisation which could undertake land management and other activities and put any profits from the activities back into the AONB - a circular economic scheme, and
4. To continue discussions with SCC over the proposed Somerset Heritage Trust.

Since then the AONB Service have taken a seat on the Friends of Quantock committee and are investigating joint working, including the setting up of a Service Level Agreement. A draft outline business case and investigation into a trading organisation is has been drafted and a draft report has been produced into the Business Case for the Somerset Heritage Trust outlining the opportunities and threats for the AONB Service.

Volunteering



Nichola Penn



Quantock Conservation Volunteers



Volunteer Steve Bone

The AONB Service welcomes our new Volunteer Coordinator Nichola Penn who started in April 2013. Nichola previously worked at the Field Studies Council and at Bridgwater College.

3,749 volunteer hours were completed over the report period which equates to over 500 work days given by volunteers.

The Quantock volunteers are split into groups:

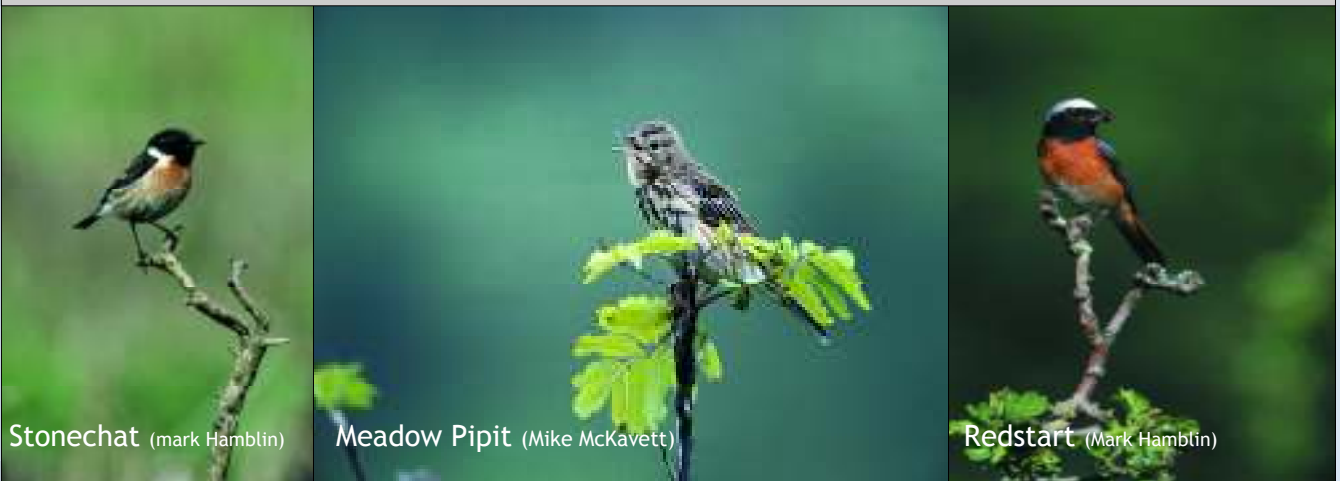
The Quantock Conservation Volunteers are a group of 30 shared with the National Trust. In 2012 they completed 12 tasks for the AONB Service including scrub clearance, footpath maintenance, litter picks, swaling, step building and fence and stile restoration.

The Estate Team is a group of 3 volunteers who work particularly on amenity land sites including Cothelstone Hill. They met 45 times over the year and completed tasks such as grass cutting, flaying, auditing of promoted routes, removing the old corral and repairing the bender sited at Cothelstone Hill.

The Volunteer Rangers are a group who are particularly focussed on visitor management and public engagement. 11 new Volunteer Rangers were recruited in January 2013 making a total of 14 Volunteer Rangers. Over the course of the year they worked a total of 240 hours (equivalent to 32 days) at local events or engaged in visitor management on the hills.

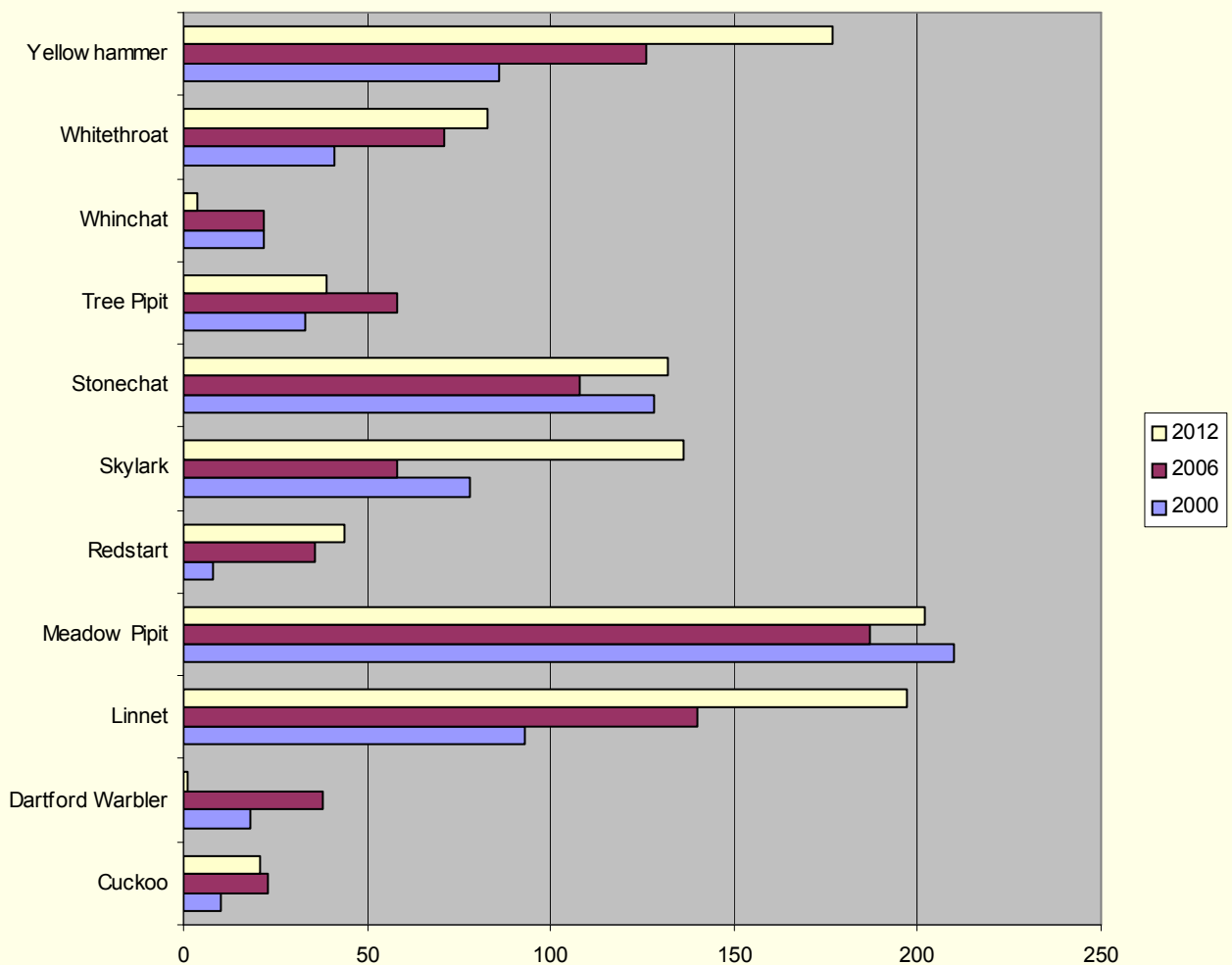
Nick Howell, our Full Time Volunteer, started in October 2012. We share Nick with the National Trust, and he works for the AONB Service 1 day a week. He has been running the Quantock Conservation Volunteer tasks, and also helps the Estates Team carrying out tasks such as the maintenance of gates and stiles, way marking promoted routes and also wild-life monitoring.

Wildlife Surveys



Heathland Bird Survey

The survey has been conducted in partnership with RSPB and others to ascertain populations of birds, both heathland specialists such as the Dartford Warbler and generalists, such as the Yellowhammer on the Quantock Common SSSI. The results can be compared to previous surveys in 2000 and 2006 and allow general trends in species to be ascertained;



Wildlife Surveys



Dormice survey



Adder Survey



Pied Flycatcher chick

Dormice Survey

66 dormice boxes were monitored over the year in partnership with National Trust. 33 dormice were counted by volunteers Shelley Saltman and Keith Edwards. Extreme weather prevented counting during 3 months and results indicate numbers down from last year. The numbers in boxes were very low and there was no apparent sign of breeding.

Adder Survey

Adders have long been thought to be uncommon on the Quantock Hills, so the object of the survey was to map the distribution of assemblages of the species across the range of hills and to identify hibernation sites. The AONB Service is keen to identify hibernation sites so that they can be taken into account when preparing swaling plans for the Higher Level Stewardship Programme.

The information gathered from all the surveys which started in 2008 will inform future Management Plans for the Quantock Common and surrounding agricultural land.

In spring 2012 the adder population and hibernacula survey was carried out on 4 sites where little data currently exists. Lydeard Hill, Triscombe Stone, Wills Neck and Bicknoller Post. 23 surveyors were divided into 6 groups and each given 1km². A total number of 20 adders were sighted of which 5 were eliminated due to ambiguity making 15 new records.

Pied Flycatcher monitoring

The monitoring of Pied Flycatchers on the Quantock Hills has taken place for over 30 years. Since 2010 the results have fed into a regional research project carried out by Dr. Malcolm Burgess of Exeter University. This research aims to decipher how climate change affects indicator species. This year 150 boxes in key locations were monitored.

Projects



Cothelstone Hill



Community Supported Woodland

Invasive species Conservation Enhancement Scheme

Approval from Natural England was received in late December to undertake invasive species treatment, mainly rhododendron control, on private / public land adjacent to the SSSI. £45,000 has been spent on rhododendron treatment across 5 sites adjacent to SSSIs.

Cothelstone Hill

Cothelstone Hill entered a new Higher Level Stewardship Scheme in December 2012, which is a 10-year agri-environment scheme. Because of the good management of the hilltop over the last 20 years the AONB Service was able to go for a higher scheme type which means the land is being managed for the farmland bird assemblages found on the hill. Rangers and volunteers have begun to undertake works such as scrub management.

The AONB Service has also started on a 10 year management plan for the 43Ha woodlands which fringe the hilltop. The plan will manage the woodlands primarily for biodiversity and works such as sycamore removal and hazel coppicing have taken place this year.

One of the Exmoor ponies was humanely dispatched in October 2012 as her health was deteriorating due to old age.

Community Supported Forestry

Starting in April 2012, this project involved the AONB Service working with other protected landscapes as part of a Defra pilot. The Quantock Hills pilot will explore the scope of 'community' forestry on public land. The AONB Service is currently investigating potential for Community Supported Forestry to manage public woodlands using good practice from other protected landscapes.

Projects



Orchards Project

In 2012 Quantock Hills AONB Service collaborated with Bristol University's Environmental Histories Department on a project which aims to establish the importance of orchards to the physical, cultural and economic landscape of the Quantock area, and whether the link between the orchard rich Somerset Levels and the Quantock Hills goes further than most people think.

The project has been split into phases. Phase 1 was map based analysis using aerial photographs from 1946 - 2007 and OS maps to identify current and former orchard sites to chart their decline.

Phase 2 mapped orchards of the Quantock area from digitised 19th Century Tithe Maps which date back to c. 1840. These maps show 1,403 orchards dating from this time, compared to just 11 today.

Phase 3 will take place in October 2013 and is a community event 'Heritage Apple Day, and a possible phase 4 might culminate in the creation of a Quantock community orchard or orchard restoration project.

Western Somerset Woodlands Project

This project was re-launched in June 2012, with Louise Kennedy and Steve Fox appointed to provide advice and support. 46 people attended the launch event and included the launch of a new website: <http://www.somersetwoodlandassociation.org.uk/>

The project is being run jointly with FWAG South West and works closely with Forestry Commission, Blackdown Hills AONB and Blackdown Hills and East Devon Woodland Associations. The project aims to provide support for woodland owners and workers to strengthen local supply chains and maximise biodiversity and business opportunities.

Projects



Stepping up to the Market



New village signs at Broomfield

Stepping up to the Market - new project (Dec2012 - Aug 2013)

This is a joint project with West Somerset Council to promote collaborative working in the food and drink sector. The project aims to allow businesses to realise opportunities in larger scale trading (e.g. with wholesalers and larger companies such as EDF etc.) Partners include Sedgemoor District Council and Taunton Deane Borough Council and includes the majority of the Western Somerset LARC area.

Village signs

Traditional style village signs have now been installed for the settlement of Broomfield. The signs were funded by the Sustainable Development Fund with a contribution from the Parish Council.

Visitor Management



On patrol



Attending local village shows

Visitor Management Patrols focussed on bank holidays and weekends, and also included some evening patrols. Rangers have engaged in 31 patrols over the year, including 12 with the Police. These patrols help to ensure on the ground presence during busy periods and to engage visitors and provide information. Joint working with the police helps the AONB Service to provide information on issues such as illegal activity, which can assist the police with successful prosecutions.

The AONB Service also attended 4 local shows, with input from Volunteer Rangers who also providing two additional 'Volunteer Information Points' at various locations on the hills. These were pilot sessions where Volunteer Rangers can give information and advice to members of the public. Further sessions will be carried out during the summer of 2013.

Track repair works took place on Black Hill in February 2013 in an attempt to keep vehicles to the permissive spine track. Volunteers have assisted with cutting drainage grips on the main tracks.

New promoted routes

There have been 2 new circular walks created at Hawkridge Woods and Nether Stowey, which total 5km of new promoted trails. This totals 5 promoted trails within the AONB, each one having a refreshed printout card to help visitors explore the area.

Visitor Management



Quantock Hills events

The AONB Service Provided 16 events, with 294 people attending throughout the year. These events included stargazing, bushcraft days, Jurassic coast walks, bat walks, owl prowls and fungi forays.

Creation of events database

A Quantock Hills Events Database is now being used, which records all events that take place within the AONB, and is communicated to landowners and interested parties quarterly using an excel spreadsheet. During the course of the year 73 events were recorded as taking place. This database helps the AONB Service to monitor what types of events are happening over what locations and how often.

Working with others



1SW Cycling Project



Fly tipping

1SW off-road cycling project

This year the AONB Service provided support to the 1SW off-road cycling project. The Quantock Cycle Hub had a soft launch in October and now has hire facilities up and running. 10 routes have been produced and leaflets are available. There is also a regional website up and running <http://www.1sw.org.uk/experience/>.

Fly-tipping database

Completion of fly-tipping database with hotspots provided to local authorities and negotiate an enhanced level of service to ensure waste is cleaned quickly. Over the course of the year 40 incidents of fly-tipping were recorded.

Exmoor Tourism Partnership

In July the AONB Service joined the Exmoor Tourism Partnership. This group consists of public and private organisations looking to promote the 'Greater Exmoor' area for sustainable tourism. The AONB Service hopes to influence policy as well as ensure that future projects benefit the Quantock Hills area.

Working with Police

In September 2012 there was a successful prosecution for illegal vehicle use in Peppercombe. The incident had taken place in April 2012. The defendant was charged with 'using a motor vehicle upon common land, not being land forming part of a road' and fined £165.

Another successful prosecution also took place in regarding theft of holly from the Quantock Common SSSI. This was the first prosecution for 'damage to a SSSI' on Quantock Common.

The Countryside Stewardship Scheme

The scheme for the Quantock Common finished at the end of September 2012 ending a very successful 10 years. Excellent results have been achieved through this scheme including Rhododendron and bracken control. Bracken control over the last 4 years of the scheme has covered 1,000Ha. This scheme has been led by Quantock Commoners Association, Natural England with support from landowners, National Trust and the AONB Service.

Landscape Planning



Wind Energy Position Statement

A Wind Energy Position Statement was drafted and sent out for consultation to the JAC, the statement awaits ratification.

Landscape Character Assessment

An integrated Landscape Character Assessment has been produced that will set the framework for the next Management Plan based on the latest guidance on NCA assessment from NE.

Hinkley Point C

The AONB Service made further representations to EDF with regard to the Landscape Impact Assessment as there were a number of areas where the AONB Service did not agree with EDF's assessment of impact. These representations went forward to the Infrastructure Planning Committee to assist them in making informed decisions about the true impact of Hinkley Point C on the landscape. The Quantock Hills AONB has been identified as a delivery partner under the landscape and visual schedule (sch 10) of the Site Preparation Works Sc106.

There are currently two proposals being considered for delivery:

Landscape Improvement Scheme

This scheme would deliver area wide landscape improvements that would provide habitat corridors and links between woodlands on the north and south commons. The improvements may also include heath reversions, to provide links between all the heathland areas on the Quantocks. These woodland and heathland links would help wildlife to adapt to climate change.

Quantock Hills and Vale Landscape Development Fund

This would be a fund to support projects that developed in conjunction with District and County Councils. The fund would support projects that help to restore or develop landscape features in the Quantock Hills and Vale, and may include projects such as hedge laying and planting, traditional orchard restoration, small woodland management, wild flower meadows, willow pollarding, dry stone wall restoration, pond restoration and planting native trees.

Sustainable Development Fund

| | |
|---|----------------|
| SDF Pot: | £22,000 |
| SDF Grant Awarded: | £21,371 |
| SDF Grant Claimed: | £20,592 |
| Project costs of supported projects: | £37,549 |

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Project Title | Quantock Beekeepers Association |
| Brief Description | To establish, layout and plant a 3/4 acre plot of former landfill site which will become a honeybee breeding and teaching area. The site will provide a wildlife corridor from Durleigh Reservoir to Cannington Plain |
| SDF Grant | 2,724 |
| | |
| Project Title | Broomfield Parish Council |
| Brief Description | Installation of locally distinctive cast metal village signs for Broomfield |
| SDF Grant | £830 |
| | |
| Project Title | Bicknoller Bumblebee Conservation Group |
| Brief Description | The development of the Bicknoller Bumblebee Conservation Group. This project has trained local residents to carry out monitoring of bee species as well as raise the awareness of issues affecting bees and their importance in horticulture, agriculture and gardening |
| SDF Grant | £1,861 |
| | |
| Project Title | MIND |
| Brief Description | Go Wild Stay Well—The project aims to offer positive volunteering opportunities on natural areas for people experiencing mental ill health. Based on an ‘ecotherapy’ approach it is based on groups of 5-10 participants who take part in 10-12 day sessions |
| SDF Grant | £3,646 |
| | |

Sustainable Development Fund

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Project Title | Kilve Village Hall |
| Brief Description | To improve the land adjacent to the village Hall. WITHDRAWN BY APPLICANT FEB 2013 |
| SDF Grant | £3,000 |
| | |
| Project Title | Nether Stowey Community Woodland |
| Brief Description | Nether Stowey Millennium Wood Extension. This project aimed to double the size of the community woodland to improve linkages to existing wildlife habitats (woodland and hedges) |
| SDF Grant | £1,000 |
| | |
| Project Title | Woodland Explorers CIC |
| Brief Description | Woodland Explorer Conservation Project. This project aims to resource and run a number of activities to reconnect people with nature. The project has targeted young people and families. |
| SDF Grant | £755 |
| | |
| Project Title | Robert Coate |
| Brief Description | Pond Creation. To create a pond where one has been identified on historic mapping using tradition methods such as clay puddling. |
| SDF Grant | £652 |
| | |
| Project Title | Quantock Hills AONB Service |
| Brief Description | Cothelstone Hill Access Enhancement. To improve access provision onto this very busy local amenity site, allowing access for wheelchair users, pushchairs and those with mobility impairments |
| SDF Grant | £1,000 |
| | |
| Project Title | Friends of Little Viking |
| Brief Description | Quantock Mountain biking Group. The setting up of courses open to families of Little Vikings Children's Centre which will promote responsible mountain biking through bike maintenance, navigational skills, awareness of the special nature of the Quantock Hills and promotion of good practice guidance. |
| SDF Grant | £3,033 |
| | |

Financial Statement

Total Expenditure £261,790

Total Income £335,702

Income (2011/12) £285,299

Income (b/f from 2010/11) £50,403

Carry Forward:

The following carry forward is allocated towards areas of work that span financial years.

Earmarked Reserves £37,000

(requirement of Statement of Intent)

Amenity Land (SCC ring fenced) £7,279

Future Directions £5,000

Project Budget £9,840

Unallocated carry forward £14,793 (4.4%)

AONB Service Core Expenditure

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| Salaries, NI, SA, Training | 166,742 |
| Travel & vehicle costs | 16,442 |
| Accommodation | 11,114 |
| Partnership Running Costs | 8,384 |
| Partnership Budget | 6,646 |
| Other Costs | 8,014 |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURE | 217,343 |

Financial Statement

AONB Project Expenditure

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| SDF | 18,991 |
| Wildlife Monitoring | 1,103 |
| Interpretation & Access | 2,079 |
| Volunteer Development | 1,898 |
| Planning | 5,515 |
| Quantock Cycle Hub | 5,597 |
| Quantock Arts Project | 2,150 |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURE | 37,334 |

Other Expenditure

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Expenditure for SCC amenity Land | 2,637 |
| Old year expenditure | 4,475 |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURE | 7,113 |

AONB Service Income

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Income brought forward from 2010/11 | 50,403 |
| Defra | 186,877 |
| Somerset County Council | 21,000 |
| West Somerset Council | 11,575 |
| Taunton Deane Borough Council | 12,000 |
| Sedgemoor District Council | 11,550 |
| Forestry Commission | 17,300 |
| Mendip Hills AONB (recharge) | 12,505 |
| RPA (Amenity land ring-fenced budget) | 9,916 |
| Event Income | 1,276 |
| Misc Income | 1,300 |
| TOTAL INCOME | 335,702 |

The Quantock Hills Team:



Iain Porter

Acting AONB Manager to Jan 2013
Project Development Officer from Jan 2013



Emma-Jane Preece

Landscape Planning Officer



Tim Russell

Ranger



Chris Edwards

AONB Manager from Jan 2011/3



Katy Coate

Support Assistant



Owen Jones

Volunteer Coordinator to Jan 2013
Partnership Ranger from Jan 2013



Georgie Grant

Communications Officer



Andy Harris

Partnership Ranger to Nov 2012



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The AONB Service is funded by:

