



*The*  
**Dartmoor**  
*Society*

# Newsletter

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## **Photo credits**

*Front cover* | Higher White and Longaford Tors from  
Devil's Tor © Steve Mason

*Inside front cover* | Watern Tor © Steve Mason





## Introduction

By Bill Murray | Chair

A great deal has happened on Dartmoor in the six months since our last newsletter the most significant of which has been the publication of the Independent Review of Protected Site Management on Dartmoor on 14 December 2023.

The recommendations of David Fursdon's panel are simply common sense, changes need to happen to prevent the extinction of what is becoming one of the rarest breeds in our area, the traditional Dartmoor farmer. Appendix 1, a summary of the recommendations of the review, has been included in full within this newsletter.

What I find difficult to understand is that in April last year, when Sir Geoffrey Cox won his independent review into the management of Dartmoor, we were calling it The Grazing Review and yet on 8 June, when the Defra press release announced that David Fursdon would lead the review, the title used was the Independent Review of Protected Site Management on Dartmoor. Reading through the comprehensive three-page report on the debate that

appeared in The Moorlander on 28 April, the only mention of Sites of Special Scientific Interest was by Anthony Mangnall MP, late in the debate.

I am pleased that David Fursdon and his panel members have covered a far wider field than the title of the review suggests.

The next stage is for the Government to consider the Fursdon review, and then to publish a response. David Fursdon and his team were put under considerable pressure to carry out their work rapidly and I hope that the Government will do the same and issue their response soon. There is then the possibility that Sir Geoffrey Cox will seek another debate in Westminster before we know the outcome.

Also included in this newsletter are The Dartmoor Society submission to the Fursdon review which was composed by Caya Edwards, and Tom Greeves' response to the review which appeared in the Western Morning News on 19 December.

In addition to the reports on the events that we have held since August last year, Caya Edwards has written a fitting tribute to our former Honorary Secretary Tanya Welch.

Many of you will have in your memories, the happy picture of Tanya and Barry Welch standing behind a table at The Dartmoor Society bookstall at Chagford Show or Widecombe Fair. If any member would like to take over the running of our bookstall, which does raise a great deal of money for our research fund, please let me know as soon as possible.

There is a very interesting report about dunlin on Dartmoor by Mike Sampson on page 50, and one of the places where dunlin can be spotted, Cranmere Pool, is the subject of our meeting at Belstone Village Hall on 20 March. One of the proposals for the ongoing rewetting works on the high moor that South West Peatland Partnership will be undertaking in the autumn, is for Cranmere Pool to be filled with water that will stand throughout the year. I would like to have your thoughts on whether you would like to see Cranmere Pool flooded all the year round. Further details of our future events can be found on pages 54-56.

On 10 January, I heard that The Supreme Court were allowing the Darwalls to appeal the Court of Appeal ruling that permitted backpackers to camp overnight on Dartmoor without the permission of the landowner. We do not yet know the date of the appeal hearing or the names of the judges who will hear the appeal. We do not even know the grounds for the appeal that The Supreme Court has endorsed. Dartmoor National Park Authority will have to spend more time and money in responding to the latest arguments

advanced by the Darwalls. But for those who enjoy the freedom that backpack camping offers, for the time being, the Court of Appeal decision still stands and there exists the right to camp in the designated areas of Dartmoor, without the permission of the landowner.

My grateful thanks go to Gill Povey for the considerable amount of time and effort that she has put into the production of this newsletter. Gill offered her services when we really needed them, organising the content, seeing that all the articles were in on time, proof reading and writing.

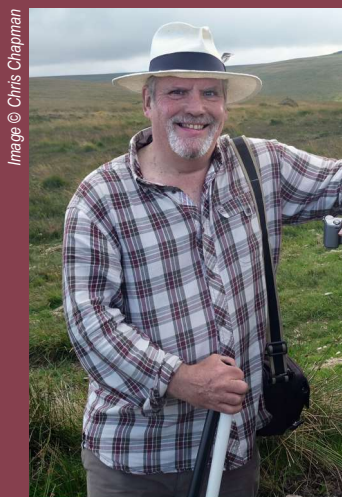
I am very pleased to inform you that Steve Mason is now our Newsletter Editor. He has been co-opted onto the committee and will be seeking election as a full member of the committee at the AGM in April. Steve is also compositing the newsletter and you will see that some of his excellent photographs are also being used to illustrate the content.

And some very late news ...

#### The 2024 Dartmoor Society Award

I am very pleased to let you know that the 2024 Dartmoor Society award will be presented to Alan Endacott at our AGM at the Two Bridges Hotel on Saturday 13 April.

Alan was born and bred on a Dartmoor farm. He has spent his life researching, writing, and talking about the unique archaeology and history of this wonderful area that he has every right to call his home. Alan founded the award winning and exciting Museum of Dartmoor Life in Okehampton which opened in 1981, and in 2008 he discovered the Sittaford stone circle on Dartmoor. Some of us feel very fortunate to find a shard of flint, or better still an arrowhead, but to find an entire stone circle comprising thirty monoliths is undoubtedly an amazing achievement. For more information on Alan's discovery visit <https://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/our-conservation-work/heritage-projects/sittaford-stone-circle>



Alan Endacott

*It will be a pleasure to write Alan's citation, but it may take some time!*

Bill Murray | Chair

# Independent Review of Protected Site Management on Dartmoor

by Steve Mason

**In December 2023 the much anticipated 'Fursdon Review' was published. In his Chairman's foreword David Fursdon stated that 'the many challenges that Dartmoor faces are deep rooted and hard to resolve. However the climate emergency and the alarming decline in biodiversity set out in the recent State of Nature report means that we can't afford to wait any longer. The way Dartmoor is managed needs to change radically and urgently to address these issues', hence his panel's review.**

The following article on the review comprises three parts. Part 1 is a reproduction of The Dartmoor Society's submission to the review.

The most important part of the review itself is its 'Section 5: Recommendations and conclusions'. Unfortunately these are too lengthy to include in the newsletter, however, they are summarised in 'Appendix 1' of the review and are reproduced in full in part 2 of this article.

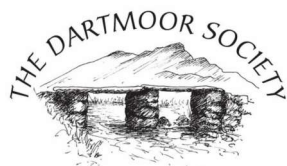
In addition to the recommendations, the appendix also states which organisations are responsible for implementing them and we have summarised these 'actions by' at the end of part 2.

The society's founder, Tom Greeves, responded to the review with a letter which was published in the *Western Morning News*. Tom's letter largely reflects the society's position on the review and has been reproduced in part 3.

The full review can be viewed online at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-protected-site-management-on-dartmoor>

At the time of going to print the Government has yet to respond to the review. Such response is expected soon and we anticipate it forming the basis of a further article on the review in the September issue of our newsletter.





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*'an independent voice for those who find Dartmoor a source of livelihood or inspiration'*

The Dartmoor Society  
PO Box 105  
Okehampton  
EX20 9BA

#### Submission to the Dartmoor Independent Evidence Review. October 2023

Dear Mr Fursdon

**The Dartmoor Society believes that the targeted use of grazing animals and support for farmers is the most cost-effective and efficient way of facilitating ongoing landscape-wide conservation work.**

The Dartmoor Society was founded in 1998 by Tom Greeves and others with support from many people who have a deep attachment to this landscape. We have taken a keen interest in the grazing of stock on Dartmoor and we advocate conservation initiatives based on high quality data that consider nature, archaeology and our *living* farming culture in an integrated manner.

#### **The value of grazing to the archaeological landscape**

One result of a closer grazed vegetation on parts of Dartmoor in the 1970s was that it revealed an archaeological landscape of international significance that was easily accessible on foot. Dartmoor's Bronze Age remains, as well as tinworking, stonecutting and peatcutting features are unparalleled elsewhere in Europe and they should continue to be available for study, enjoyment and to stimulate imaginative thought. The Environment Act of 1995 states that aims of UK National Parks are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife *and cultural heritage* and promote opportunities for the *understanding and enjoyment of the area by the public*.

Many significant monuments and features are currently disappearing under vegetation as can be seen in the photos in our Gidleigh Common Report 2018.

<https://www.dartmoorsociety.com/files/GidleighCommonDayReport.pdf>

#### **Ecological benefits of grazing animals**

In 2016 we commissioned Footprint Ecology to carry out a habitat survey of Gidleigh and Throwleigh Commons, <https://s3.eu-west-1.wasabisys.com/dartmoorsociety/wp-media-folder-dartmoor-society/wp-content/uploads/GidleighAndChagfordHabitatSurvey.pdf>

Our 2018 report is the result of a day on Gidleigh Common with stakeholders, discussing the 2016 survey and the changes that have occurred in vegetation in this area, from a relatively close-cropped diverse heather community in 1994 (English Nature Survey) to the Molinia and gorse dominated sward surveyed in 2016 and seen again at the Gidleigh Common Field Day in 2018. There are a number of good comparative photos in the report.

Examination of archive photographs, taken a century or more ago, suggest that the situation in 1994 was representative of the ecological balance on many Dartmoor commons prior to the advent of agri-environment schemes and that the assumption that the whole of Dartmoor was overgrazed preceding their introduction was based on the poor state of a minority that were demonstrably overgrazed.

The benefits of targeted grazing as a conservation tool are widely held. Adrian Colston cites two projects, the Wicken Fen Vision and Knepp Wildlands Project that *'rely on herds of grazing animals to deliver their conservation outcomes'*. He goes on to say, *'by contrast on Dartmoor, the extensive areas of under-grazed Molinia, which are almost universally considered unappealing from a wildlife, archaeological and amenity perspective, have developed as a result of significant declines in stock, particularly cattle and ponies'*. Adrian Colston 2021.

In the Autumn of 2022 we organised a botanical walk on Belstone Common, following the course of a similar walk made 100 years earlier. We found a surprising number of the same plant species and this diversity of flora was pleasing to find on what would perhaps be considered a fairly heavily grazed common.

<https://s3.eu-west-1.wasabisys.com/dartmoorsociety/wp-media-folder-dartmoor-society/wp-content/uploads/Botanical-Walk-PDFs.pdf>



### **Reasons for the unfavourable condition of Dartmoor SSSIs and SACs**

Despite the 2000 SSSI improvement programme to bring 95% of SSSIs into a favourable or recovering condition by 2010, the Dartmoor Commons that fall within the SSSI and SAC designations show little sign of recovery over 20 years later and in 2021 only 16% of the designated Commons were deemed by Natural England to be in favourable condition.

Reasons for continued unfavourable conditions may not be all due to the current levels of grazing which have been consistently reduced over recent years, but may also be the result of atmospheric pollution, climate change and Heather Beetle infestation and other environmental pressures, not specific to Dartmoor or upland areas, that result in species decline. Further reductions in grazing would have negative consequences and would undoubtedly increase the likelihood and the extent of wildfires in the future.

### **Grazing to facilitate peat formation and suppress *Molinia***

Personal observations by Alan Endacott, our former vice-chair who was born into a Dartmoor farming family, are that grazing and occasional fast burning are part of a healthy regenerative cycle. He has observed that vegetation remained healthy, with good heather re-growth after swift burning events and subsequent grazing. *Molinia* soon covered adjoining areas that were formerly covered by heather but which escaped burning. Objective studies of such phenomena would help understand these processes.

### **Wildlife friendly farmers – the best conservators of our landscape**

Dartmoor farmers have adapted from being paid to graze large numbers of animals in the recent past, to grazing very few now and within tight seasonal parameters. These animals require managing to ensure that they graze specified areas. Graziers know where their animals like to go and why, because often their parents and grandparents have managed the moor. Targeted grazing can most effectively be achieved by a thriving

hill-farming community, experienced in stock management and husbandry, who have the resources to shepherd their animals effectively.

Dartmoor farmers also instinctively understand the holistic connections between a balanced vegetation, wildlife and insect management, again, developed over generations of families managing their farms and commons. This understanding has been enhanced by working with environmentalists through government-run management schemes. When environmentalists who design and develop policies value this farming knowledge and engage in debate with farmers the desired outcomes are usually much easier to achieve.

### **A living farming culture at risk**

Farming undoubtedly adds vitality to our local communities, grazing animals animate the landscape and the whole contributes to the local economy and to social cohesion. We are acutely aware of the unbroken continuity of hill-farming families on Dartmoor and how the cultural significance of dwindling traditional communities in all parts of the world seems realised only when they are past saving.

One of the joys of Dartmoor, and a reason that it is attractive to visitors, is its traditional farm buildings set within a grazed landscape and associated field systems. These are farms with commoners' rights on the high moor that must be sustained.

Some farmers are making great efforts to farm with wildlife in mind, and we hope that new arrangements will ensure that the farmers who carry out wildlife-friendly farming as a matter of course are rewarded for their efforts. Farmers face a range of challenges and we argue for greater focus on their individual needs, especially as we are dependent on them to deliver the required outcomes.

Yours sincerely

**Bill Murray and the Executive Committee of The Dartmoor Society**





## Appendix 1: Summary of recommendations

### Vision and governance

1. Need for a Dartmoor-wide vision at landscape level, supported by a clear delivery strategy.
2. Recommend DNPA Partnership plan as setting that vision.
3. Reinforce Dartmoor's governance through creation of Land-use Management Group.
4. The Land-use Management Group should be tasked with developing a Multi-Functional Land Use Framework and a land-use plan for Dartmoor.
5. Central library of protected site monitoring data to be created, potentially to be held by the National Park.

### Protected site management

6. Protected site legislation should be simplified, to improve clarity and implementation without losing rigour (see the 'Nature recovery green paper: protected sites and species').
7. Concept of SSSIs to be reviewed, to ensure they are compatible with a vision to be delivered at landscape/eco-system level.
8. More scientific monitoring and evaluation required to assess condition of Dartmoor's SSSIs and to understand the influences impacting on them.
9. Designation and notification of Dartmoor's SSSIs to be refreshed, to ensure features are still relevant and no new features need to be added.
10. Uncertainty over legal position of commoners to be treated as 'owners and occupiers' for the purposes of WCA [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981] needs urgent clarification.

### Land-use, ecology, and biodiversity

11. Top ecological and environmental priority for Dartmoor is to improve hydrological function and re-wet blanket bogs and peatlands.
12. The second priority should be to control *Molinia*, using a combination of active management practices, including grazing.

13. Encourage development of wood pasture and tree growth in suitable locations, particularly along valley sides, as part of an agreed land-use plan.
14. More research and monitoring should be undertaken to understand full range of environmental factors impacting growth of heather and dwarf shrubs on Dartmoor.
15. Local scale initiatives to create habitats and restore biodiversity should be promoted and supported.

### Future of A-E [Agri-Environment] schemes on Dartmoor

16. The relationship between A-E scheme prescriptions and the management of protected sites must be transparent and an agreed balance struck between achievement of different objectives in the future.
17. There is a need for a Dartmoor-wide A-E scheme to encourage strategic improvement and link commoners together.
18. Commoners should have the possibility to participate in both a local A-E scheme on their common and a Dartmoor-wide scheme.
19. The possibility of introducing a Dartmoor-wide grazing scheme should be considered.
20. Dartmoor Farming Futures should be used as an example of what can be achieved through collaboration and empowerment. Also the current Test and Trials Project taking place on Dartmoor.
21. Dartmoor's Hill farmers and commoners will need to commit to this new way of working.
22. Where farmers with moorland or commons grazing have an A-E agreement on the home holding, the possibility of introducing a prescription to reward integration of farming operations between inbye land and moorland grazing should be considered.
23. Need to develop a 'safe-space' to encourage risk-taking, innovation and experimentation by agreement holders.
24. The capacity of Dartmoor commons associations to administer A-E agreements need to be increased and made more resilient

### Communications

25. Defra and ALBs [Arms Length Bodies] should be tasked to identify ways of communicating more effectively with individual Dartmoor commoners.

## Grazing and vegetation management

26. Dartmoor needs more cattle undertaking conservation grazing to combat the spread of Molinia. A-E schemes should include options to incentivise this.
27. Dartmoor's pony population is genetically important and invaluable for conservation grazing. Ponies and cattle should not be linked for the calculation of A-E agreement stocking rates and NE should not take actions likely to result in a decline in pony numbers.
28. Maintaining three species grazing and recognising the contribution that sheep make to Dartmoor's heritage and biodiversity should be an integral part of the vision for Dartmoor.
29. Reducing the area of Molinia and ungrazeable gorse to play a central part of a strategy to increase the palatable area of the moor for sheep (and other livestock) and address the localised over-grazing of heather and dwarf shrubs.
30. Immediately, sheep keepers need to demonstrate they can shepherd their flocks to protect heather and dwarf shrubs from being over-grazed. If this isn't successful, we recognise there will be pressure to remove sheep from affected areas, for at least part of the winter.
31. If sheep do need to be removed over-winter, the possibility of creating a service to match those offering sheep-keep with those requiring it should be considered. Also more support for providing sheep accommodation on home-farms.
32. Positive action needs to be taken to address the issue of livestock straying.
33. The future role of swaling needs to be fully debated.
34. Wild-fire control and prevention needs to be afforded a high priority on Dartmoor and the central role played by commoners in managing this recognised.

## Roll-over of HLS [Higher-Level Stewardship] agreements

35. The current one plus four extension formulation should move to default two plus three. Three plus two should also be considered.
36. Our recommendations for the conduct of negotiations over HLS extensions should be adopted.
37. Discussions over the roll-over of HLS agreements should be broadened to include future options for the affected commons.

## Recommendations for NE's [Natural England's] future operations on Dartmoor

38. NE must recognise the scale of the challenge it faces to re-build trust and confidence on Dartmoor. Significantly increased staffing resource will be required to achieve this.
39. There will also need to be a complete change of approach to the way in which NE engages on Dartmoor. Openness and the creation of partnerships are the key to successful delivery. Protocols will need to be established for visits and inspections.
40. NE should have a dedicated and senior communications lead for Dartmoor, at least as an interim measure.
41. NE will need to consider how SSSI condition monitoring can be made more transparent and fit for purpose.

## Dartmoor statutory bodies

42. The structure and operation of the Dartmoor Commoners' Council should be reviewed to identify ways of reinforcing its effectiveness.

## Appendix 1 also included 'actions by' against each of the recommendations which are summarised herewith:

Natural England (NE) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41.

Dartmoor and Commons stakeholder organisations (principally DNPA and DCC, but others too) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 37, 42.

Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and relevant Defra Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35, 36, 37, 42.

Rural Payments Agency (RPA) 1, 2, 3, 4, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 35, 36, 37.

Research Bodies 5, 11, 14.

Commons Associations 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 37.

Commoners 21.

Dartmoor Commoners' Council 42.

South West Peatland Partnership (SWPP) 11.

Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service 34.



**The following is a copy Tom Greeves' letter published in the *Western Morning News* on 19 December 2023.**

Review chairman David Fursdon and his panel are to be congratulated on the timely production of their detailed and impressive report, which reviews protected site management on Dartmoor. At last we have an official document which reinforces what the Dartmoor community has known for more than 25 years - that the policies and actions of Natural England have been, at best, inappropriate and, at worst, damaging to the commons of Dartmoor.

Reading between the lines of the polite language, it is a remarkably hard-hitting report. In the words of the chairman: 'The way Dartmoor is managed needs to change radically and urgently'. Natural England has been the dominant negative influence, and must completely change its approach to Dartmoor, but the Dartmoor Commoners' Council is also criticised for its lack of 'effectiveness'.

A strong defence is made for the continuing presence of sheep, cattle and ponies grazing the moors, and for the right of skilled Dartmoor farmers to continue producing livestock for the benefit of the nation. In particular, 'Dartmoor needs more cattle' to combat the spread of *Molinia* grass.

The panel's remit was to look at Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the two largest of which were designated only for nature conservation or geological criteria as long ago as 1952 (not 1989 as the report states), and it is refreshing that they have recommended that the very concept of SSSIs should be reviewed, in order to be 'compatible with the concept of a landscape delivering a 'mosaic' of public benefits'. Although not explicitly stated, this opens the door for a radical rethink of land management, balancing culture and nature. It is also good that sheep are recognised as being beneficial for both cultural heritage and biodiversity. The suggestion that wood pasture should be encouraged is welcome too.

However, there is one aspect of the report that is disturbing, namely the statement that 'The absolute top priority for Dartmoor is improving its hydrology and rewetting its blanket bogs' and this must be challenged. The panel has clearly been seduced by the language of the South West Peatland Partnership and have not looked beyond the pronouncements of involved academics and scientists.

No evidence has yet been produced to show that the condition of peat on Dartmoor is degrading compared to its condition 50, 100, 200 or 500 years ago. Peat has been exploited in the past, but the growth of sphagnum in pre-existing pools can be seen across the moor, and the revegetating of bare peat with grassland in the past fifty years such as on Cut Hill, without any direct human intervention, is remarkable.

The panel may not have had a chance to read the report dated 10 November by Pia Benaud and Naomi Gatis of the University of Exeter titled 'Results from peatland restoration' (IUCN Peatland Programme Newsletter Winter 2023). This quantifies monitoring at Flat Tor Pan between 2012 and 2018. Despite work done by expensive and intrusive machines there has been 'minimal impact on both fluvial and gaseous carbon exports' and the creation of numerous pools has 'led to an increase of methane emissions'. Methane is eighty times more damaging than carbon as a potential climate-changing gas. Thousands of pools have now been created across Dartmoor, mostly without any monitoring of methane emissions.

Moreover, despite a promise at a public event in Okehampton in November 2021 (Dartmoor Society Newsletter 70), and a written request since, no quantification of the carbon footprint of the rewetting projects since 2009 has yet been produced. Might it be possible that the millions of pounds spent on 'rewetting' peat on Dartmoor has contributed more to global warming than ameliorated it?

Natural England will be reeling from the Fursdon report. It begs the question as to why Natural England, with only 'one and a half advisers' and limited funds, could ever have been given such authoritarian powers regarding Dartmoor, and to have had such a damaging influence not only on the landscape but on hillfarming culture as a whole.

Reform is urgently needed. It is probably wishful thinking to imagine that Natural England will be given sufficient funds and staff to rise to the task ahead. This is probably why the panel suggests the creation of a Land-use Management Group. If this has a brief to embrace holistically biodiversity and culture in equal measure then there is some hope for the future of Dartmoor's commons. SSSIs, managed by Natural England, are no longer an appropriate protective measure for Dartmoor. The Fursdon report sets this out unequivocally. Let us hope that good outcomes will now follow.



## A Tribute to Tanya Welch Secretary of The Dartmoor Society 2011 to 2020

by Caya Edwards

**I**t is with sadness that we report the death of Tanya Welch in August 2023. Tanya served as our respected and tireless secretary for nine years from 2011 to 2020. She contributed so much more to the Society than her committee role and to the ever-growing knowledge of Dartmoor with her husband Barry.

As well as performing all the duties of Secretary, Tanya was tireless in her support of The Dartmoor Society and in her enthusiasm for everything Dartmoor. Tanya and her husband Barry took charge of organising The Dartmoor

Society stand at events and fairs and they were unparalleled ambassadors for the Society. Behind the scenes these events involved long days and carrying merchandise and equipment to and from the venues. They approached this, like everything

else, with a thoroughly organised attitude and a cheery smile.

Tanya was also present for just about every Society event that was held throughout her time as Secretary. She made a point of greeting and chatting to all those who attended, making everyone feel welcome, as well as masterminding many of the tasks that must be carried out prior to a public event. Tanya and Barry were also involved in site visits and field work and relished every opportunity to discover more about Dartmoor and to pass on that knowledge.

Unstinting in her support of the Society, Tanya took up the challenge of producing newsletters for a time when



the Newsletter Editor's role was vacant. Everything she tackled was carried out with faultless attention to detail and with a great zest for the job in hand.

She provided unfailing administrative support to Chairman Tom Greeves and later to Acting Chairman Alan Endacott, and she was held in high esteem and affection by members. Her practical contribution, surveying skills and field work in company with husband Barry was known and appreciated Dartmoor wide and closer to home. Tanya's readiness to tackle any job that required attention to detail made her highly valued and respected by colleagues on the Society committee.



Image © Rachel Van der Steen



Great Ensworth

## Memories of the Summer Barbecue 2023 at Great Ensworth with a Walk up Buttern Hill

by Caya Edwards

**I**n 2022 The Dartmoor Society members were hosted by Bill Murray at Little Ensworth for our summer barbecue and in August last year we moved next door to Great Ensworth where we were hosted by Allen and Rachel Van der Steen. I always get a thrill when I see a beautifully restored Dartmoor farmstead which retains an atmosphere that tells me I could only be on Dartmoor. This sense of place, or *genius loci*, is found in the cluster of buildings at Ensworth and I think we all felt it. Allen Van der Steen, founder of Van der Steen Hall Architects has spent a lifetime involved in the care and conservation of old buildings, and in developing ideas that enhance their appeal and allow continuity of use; it is no surprise that his home Great Ensworth retains such charm.

On this occasion our walk was led by Alan Endacott and there really is no-one better placed to guide a walk in this area than our former Vice Chairman. Born and bred just a stone's throw away and with a lifetime of accumulated knowledge, Alan's family and Dartmoor farming roots can be traced back many generations.

As some members will know, Alan was an avid collector of artifacts from a very early age, setting up his own small museum at home which later became the founding collection of Okehampton Museum. He is the Director of the Dartmoor Ritual Landscapes Project and with his breadth of knowledge and sensitivity to the landscape he is an antiquarian in the best and truest sense of the word.

Alan led us up Buttern Hill from Great Ensworth, where we enjoyed panoramic views across the north-eastern side of the moor over North Tawton and towards Exmoor. Some of the best-preserved Bronze Age settlements are situated here on the sloping ground above Throwleigh and we saw some spectacular round house remains and associated field systems.

Our Society's members have such a wide range of interests and specialisms and on this warm summer's day we heard a variety of views, conversations and insights as we walked and as Alan stopped and talked about the antiquities, their management and the changing uses of the landscape.

We returned to Great Ensworth and enjoyed a delicious barbecue that catered for every taste. Thanks to Hayley and Steve Alford for again serving delicious food to so many so quickly and to Rachel Van de Steen, Bill Murray and everyone who helped make the afternoon such a success.

See the events section on page 54 for details of this year's barbecue that will be held somewhere that we have never been to before, on the southern side of Dartmoor.



Image © Julian Edwards

Members enjoying the views on Buttern Hill



Image © Steve Mason



## Current Approaches to Peatland Restoration on Dartmoor

by Annabel Crowley

**M**embers of The Dartmoor Society gathered in Belstone Village Hall on 20 September 2023 to hear an interesting and topical presentation by two Dartmoor Headwaters Officers of South West Peatland Partnership (SWPP) on the current approaches to peatland restoration on high Dartmoor.

SWPP is made up of 22 organisations, of which The Dartmoor Society is one. It is funded chiefly by Natural England, with significant additional funding from South West Water (SWW), the Duchy of Cornwall, the National Trust and Cornwall Council, to undertake peatland restoration on parts of Bodmin Moor, Exmoor and West Penwith, as well as on Dartmoor.

Jonathan Robinson-Noades (Jonny), SWPP Dartmoor Headwaters Officer (Peatland Restoration), is overseeing work at Ockerton Court, a Site of Special Scientific Interest owned by the Duchy of Cornwall. The site is situated north of Cranmere Pool, near the sources of the Taw, West Okement and East Dart Rivers. Jonny began his talk by describing the process of peat

formation, whereby the surface layer of sphagnum moss and other bog species gradually decomposes to form the acrotelm, or aerobic layer, beneath which lies the water table which in turn sits above the catotelm, or anaerobic layer, with bedrock at the base. Peat forms at the rate of one millimetre per year and the deepest peat on Dartmoor is up to seven metres deep.

Jonny showed the meeting a lidar (light detection and ranging instrument) image of an erosion gully where exposed peat is washing away, contributing to a lowering of the water table and emitting carbon in the process. By blocking such features, he said, SWPP aimed to arrest erosion and raise the water table, thereby creating the right



Image © Bill Murray

Martin Gillard and Jonathan Robinson-Noades

conditions for sphagnum to colonise re-wetted areas.

The carbon stored in UK peatlands is equivalent to that stored in all the woodlands of the UK, France and Germany combined. But where peatlands are in poor and degrading



Image © Steve Mason

Series of leaky wooden blocks in Vergyland Combe



Image © Steve Mason



Peat hag at Ockerton Court

condition, they are emitting carbon. Moreover, eroding peat has various adverse effects on water quality including raising acidity, increasing metal concentrations, discolouration, levels of nitrogen, sulphur, dissolved organic carbon and particulate matter. This is a matter of obvious interest to SWW, 45% of whose supply originates on Dartmoor.

Peat restoration work aims to hold more water on the high moor for longer and to slow its flow in flood conditions. Simultaneously, this is expected to improve the habitat of invertebrates and increase the diversity and population of wading birds.

Jonny explained that at Ockerton Court he uses lidar to produce a map of the different areas and decide on suitable techniques. The site is a mixture of blanket bog and valley mire,

with some historic damage from MOD mortar shells. Work is done in winter in order to avoid disturbing ground-nesting birds and, contrary to what a casual viewer might expect, the vehicles are specially designed excavators that exert less ground pressure than a human being. They also have moveable buckets that mean movement of the polymer tracks is kept to a minimum. The contractors also need to scan the site for unexploded military ordnance, which is logged and mapped.

Jonny went through the many and various techniques for restoration used by the team according to the specific conditions of each site. The vegetation in the area is mostly *Molinia caerulea*, commonly known as purple moor grass:

1. Arc bunds made of peat: these tend to be in areas without erosion features but

where the peat is growing out. The bunds create small pools that allow sphagnum, bog-cotton, bog asphodel mosses and other species to colonise.

2. Peat bunds: mounds that trap water in peat cuttings.
3. Wool bunds: some sites possess little peat and are in poor condition. In these cases, the project is trialling the use of wool, often from sheep that have grazed the same common. The wool is scoured and cleaned and made into a bolster which is stuffed with more wool. This is either laid under turf or sometimes left visible so that its effectiveness can easily be assessed.
4. Peat blocks: peat is 'borrowed' from adjacent intact areas to block gulleys. Sometimes isolated hags are

used in this way since they have limited futures on their own.

5. Wooden blocks: these are used on slopes to withstand an expected flow of water. The timber is harvested by the Woodland Trust at Fingle Woods, where conifers are being removed.
6. Leaky wooden blocks: where water will flow too fast and in gulleys too deep to allow for water to spread out behind blocks, leaky blocks slow down the flow.
7. Timber bunds: one or two logs deep, these are used to widen standing water in peat cuttings.
8. Willow faggots: roots sprout naturally from green wood and spread to create natural barriers and eventually scrub.



Sheep wool bunds being installed

Image © SWPP



Image © Steve Mason



Huggaton Peat Pass at the south-east edge of the restoration area

9. Stone blocks: these are planned for the south moor, where there is no peat and the base is bedrock. Over time, the stone is expected to catch sediment.
10. Re-profiling: where peat hags are eroding, this method aims to cover up exposed peat and top it with turf.

Martin Gillard, SWPP Dartmoor Headwaters Officer (Historic Environment), continued the presentation with an account of the Ockerton Court works from an archaeological point of view. His job is to walk over the site to check known features and map new ones, consult the Historic Environment Records, liaise with Historic England,

Dartmoor National Park Authority and Natural England.

Long lines of turf ties at Ockerton Court fall into both 'known' and 'new' categories, since their full extent became evident only recently, thanks to lidar surveys. Worked in some places on Dartmoor up to the middle of last century and cut to run downhill so the peat cutters did not need to stand in water while at work, these ties have exposed peat faces that are drying out. They are now being mapped and put on record before being rewetted, their edges remaining visible to preserve the record.

Tin streaming, the earliest and easiest way of extracting cassiterite eroded from veins in

Dartmoor granite, also took place on the Ockerton site, in Vergyland Coombe. Here, again, lidar surveys and follow-up mapping show the extent of the worked area to be greater than revealed in aerial photographs in the Historic Environment Records. Well-preserved spoil heaps remain, as well as the remains of a building. However, some areas are being obscured by eroding peat and gravel, a process that may be slowed by restoration.

At the south-east edge of the site lies Huggaton Peat Pass, its sides slumped in places but still used by Commoners, and here SWPP

may do some restoration and block the gulleys feeding into it.

Martin explained that SWPP contractors work to maps marked with 'no-go' areas and their drivers are carefully briefed on the necessity for great care, since areas of eroded peat may reveal evidence of early human activity, such as the stone row discovered in an eroded area on Cut Hill by Tom Greeves almost a decade ago. Areas of erosion are checked as part of the walk over; those at Ockerton Court did not reveal any early features.

A question and answer session followed the presentations.

Image © Steve Mason



Willow faggots blocking a gully



Caya Edwards asked if coir bunds settle in better than wool. Coir is less than ideal because of the air miles involved in bringing it from Sri Lanka. Jonny felt it was better at bedding into the surrounding substrate than wool. However, he said a more formal analysis over time will be made of the wool bunds at Ockerton Court. Wool has to be cleaned

regardless of how local it is to the site, because of current Environment Agency concerns over leaching from unwashed fleeces; the discussions are ongoing on this.

Tony Hill asked if trees could make a difference to peatland restoration and Jonny replied that trees may have a place at the edges and in valley bottoms,



Image © Steve Mason

Shallow pools formed behind wooden blocks covered with peat, raising the water table within the peat surrounding an eroding gully



Image © Steve Mason

Willow carr in Vergyland Combe

since they are better naturally than humans at blocking watercourses, but not on the top or middle of blanket bog.

Anthea Hoey asked if SWPP expects more sphagnum and less Molinia grass to result from the project. Jonny said that monitoring is ongoing at Ockerton Court, using vegetation and aerial surveys. Molinia is tough and it is not yet clear whether submersion will kill it. It will, however, become suppressed by the more acid conditions sphagnum can create.

Chris Chapman asked how willow stands can develop on the open moor where stock can eat the young plants. Jonny replied that SWPP has acquired permissions to fence such areas for up to five years in order to protect the willow while it establishes.

Asked about the likelihood of reprofiled areas being poached by cattle, Jonny said the project would aim to repair any damage where they were still operating in the site. Future maintenance will be the subject of discussions with the landowner and/or the graziers.

David Hill asked if restoration work will result in water levels being lower in Dartmoor's rivers. Jonny said the amount of water overall would be the same but the aim was to help the high moor to hold it for longer and release it more slowly.

At the end of the session, I asked Jonny about the optimum depth of pools for sphagnum regeneration. He said that shallow water was best but that sphagnum would gradually grow out from the edges of deeper pools too.



# A Revelatory Eye - Dartmoor Photography from the 1850s to the 1870s

by Gill Povey

**D**r Tom Greeves, our Society founder and former Archaeologist for Dartmoor National Park, gave a fascinating talk showing many historic photographs from across Dartmoor. His talk took place on 5th October 2023 at Ashburton Arts Centre and was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Over the past 25 years, Tom has collected some of the earliest landscape photographs of Dartmoor, dating back over 160 years. Many are by some of the finest national and local photographers of the era, such as Francis Bedford of London, William Spreat of Exeter, William Merrifield of

Tavistock, Henry Hayman of Launceston and Way and Sons of Torquay.

Tom took us on a fascinating photographic journey starting and finishing at Ashburton, both circumnavigating the moor in a clockwise direction via Buckfastleigh, Tavistock, Lydford, Okehampton, Chagford and Moretonhampstead as well as taking a trip through the middle of the moor showing photographs of Princetown, Widecombe and Buckland in the Moor. This is naming only a few of the many places that Tom has gathered photos of, mainly via detailed internet searches.

In the 1850s photography became a popular pastime, but it is a long way technically from the digital cameras we have today, where photographs are instant, can be copied, saved and sent to other people. When these early photos were taken, photographers needed

their own dark room and laboratory on site, with chemicals and access to clean water, shown in the picture of a photographer's van on Dartmeet Bridge. Taking a photograph involved heavy glass plates which were sensitised and then exposed to the scene for up to three seconds. The picture was developed, fixed and varnished in the laboratory on site, the whole process taking 15 to 30

minutes to complete for one photograph.

Some of the photographs show places or a way of life that are unrecognisable to us now, but most of the images show places that have little changed and are recognisable and comparable to what they look like today. For example, the photograph of Moretonhampstead with a flock of sheep being driven past the White Hart Hotel. What has of course changed in the 160 years are our clothes as shown by the people wearing their top hats or crinolines for a picnic at Shaugh Bridge.



*Ashburton from the South by Francis Bedford c1870 (Tom Greeves Collection)*

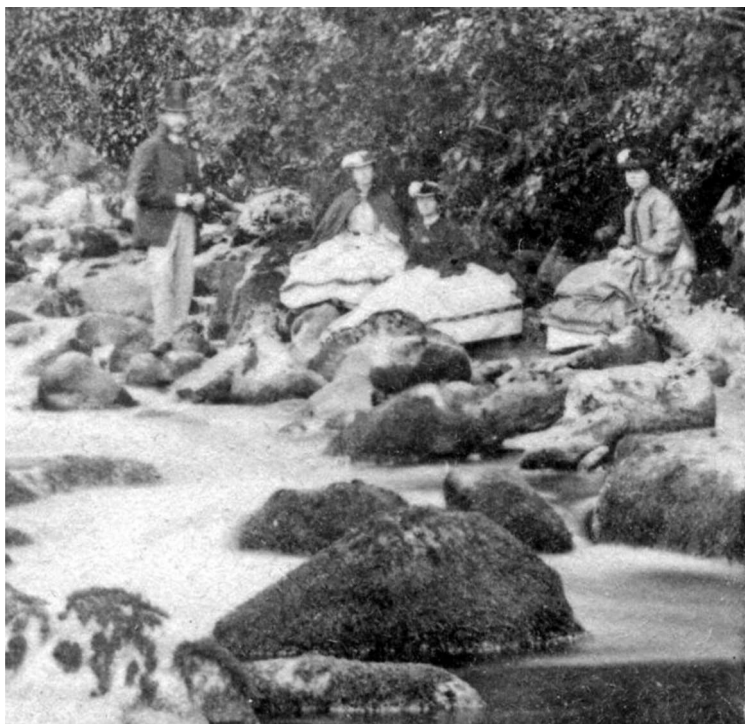


*Dartmeet Bridge with Photographer's Van by William Spreat c1865 (Elisabeth Greeves Collection)*



*Moretonhampstead Street Scene by William Spreat early 1860s (Tom Greeves Collection)*

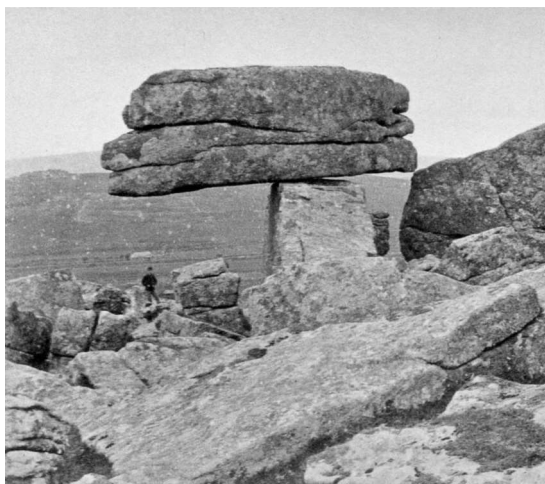




*Shaugh Bridge Figures on Rocks c1865 Unknown Photographer (Tom Greeves Collection)*

Evidently Victorians had our sense of adventure and love of the moors, shown by the figure at Rippon Tor, near Widecombe in the Moor. The logan stone is no longer in position and the New House Inn can be seen in the valley on the Ashburton Road. The inn was once a resting post between Chagford and Ashburton but is now a ruin.

Many of Tom's photographs showed the industrial workings of the time for example the wool factory at Ivybridge, working water wheels at Fingle Bridge and



*Rippon Tor Logan with New House Inn above Figure by Francis Bedford c1870 (Tom Greeves Collection)*



*Man Fishing on River Teign near Chagford by Way and Sons c1860 (Tom Greeves Collection)*

the Vitifer mine workings near the Warren House Inn, to name but a few.

Tom also showed us via his photographs the lovely sense of humour the Victorians had, shown in the photograph of the man intently fishing on the River Teign near Chagford despite there being no water in the river!

A lot of the audience were interested in the obvious increase in the amount of tree cover in recognisable and well-known views between current and Victorian photographs. Tom explained that trees were felled for burning to produce charcoal and for building 160 years or so ago. This was especially evident in photographs of Lustleigh Cleave and the River Teign near Fingle Bridge as shown in the photographs.



*River Teign and Hunters Tor from Puddledown by William Spreat c1865 (Tom Greeves Collection) and by Tom Greeves 21st Century*







Wistman's Wood

## The Dartmoor Society Conference 2023

### **Dartmoor's Temperate Rainforests: Past, Present and Future**

**The Dartmoor Society held their conference on November 17 at Fingle Bridge Inn, Drewsteignton. The event was fully booked with 100 guests attending to hear the expert speakers discuss all aspects of Dartmoor's rainforest. A summary of each talk is given below.**

Elizabeth-Jane Baldry reviewed the conference in *The Moorlander* dated 8 December 2023, the final paragraph of her report says:

*I came home feeling optimistic that so many passionate people are working with unwavering dedication to support nature recovery on the Dartmoor we all love so much - this wild and wonderful region ... of hills, mysterious, shadowy ... of rock-crowned heights on which the cloud forever rests; and wilds stupendous swept by mightiest storms.*



## An Ecological and Cultural Appreciation

(Speaker Guy Shrubsole)

report by Caya Edwards

**G**uy is an environmental campaigner, author, public speaker, and a winner of the 2023 J James Cropper Wainwright prize in the conservation category for his book *The Lost Rainforests of Great Britain*.

Guy had the ability to enthral audiences with images and stories about the fragments of the rare climate-specific woodlands that are found on Dartmoor. These mysterious and beautiful forests are host to bryophytes, lichens and ferns that cling onto the twisted limbs of old oak trees, dripping with water. What makes these woods 'temperate' is the need for a wet climate where temperature fluctuations vary little from summer to winter. On Dartmoor

such conditions exist, not only in the river valleys but in some upland areas such as Black-a-Tor Copse and Wistman's Wood.

He acknowledged Arthur Rackham and Peter Marren as early influences. Separately they first used the words temperate 'rainforest' to describe these fragments of once more extensive wet oak woodlands, now only found on the western reaches of the British Isles. Tony Juniper, Chairman of Natural England, and champion of the Amazon rainforests in the 1980s, now talks about our own 'rainforests'. This subject is gaining momentum and Guy is one of those influencers, creating enthusiasm in the popular imagination whilst changing attitudes at government level.

On Dartmoor it's not just our oak woods that can be categorised as temperate rainforest. Coppiced hazel in the Walkham Valley has the same indicator plants. Through a

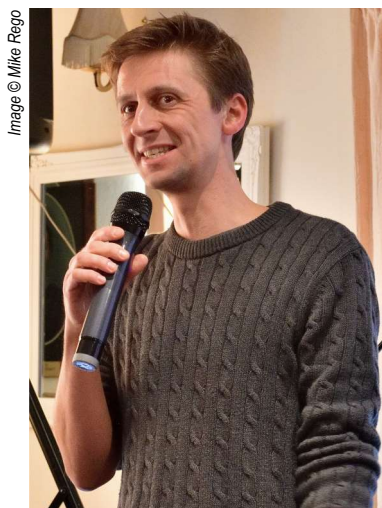


Image © Mike Rego

Guy Shrubsole



Image © Guy Shrubsole

Hazel Gloves Fungus *Hypocreopsis rhododendri*

series of maps to illustrate their range, we learned that just 1% of Britain is now temperate woodland. Clues to so-called 'ghost woods' can be found at Piles Copse where bracken surrounding the oak woods is believed to signify wider tree cover, bracken is found on woodland edges. Where 'bear' or 'bar' is found in a place name this can indicate a former tree covered landscape.

Inevitably sheep browsing on the commons discourages the growth of trees and stunted oaks no more than 30cm high, sometimes mistaken for saplings, can be found on the woodland edge never having had the chance to become trees. Attempts have been made to try

to extend woodland on the high moor with varying success. Sheep exclusion fencing was erected along the northern edge of Black-a-Tor Copse some years ago and oak saplings began to flourish. The fencing was not maintained and by five years later, the part grown trees had disappeared. This proved that fencing could work but needs to stay in place for longer until the trees are large enough to sustain sheep browsing.

Guy showed examples of bryophytes and lichen growing on trees. These 'charismatic' species may be diminutive but are every bit as deserving of our protection as the megafauna and megafauna that are endangered worldwide.

## A Long-term View

(Speaker Ralph Fyfe)

report by Annabel Crowley

**Ralph is Professor at Plymouth University's School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences. His work involves reconstructing the past environment over millennia.**

At the height of the Ice Age, some 20,000 years ago, there were no rainforests in Britain and oak woods existed in Europe only in 'refuges' in Iberia, southern Italy and the Balkans. Their range expanded as the climate warmed and genetic data indicate that they migrated to Britain from Italy about 8,000 years ago. By about 4,000BC, just before the advent of agriculture in Britain and Scandinavia, woodland was at its densest in the continental

climate of central Europe, while in Britain's oceanic conditions it covered some 70% of the land.

On Dartmoor, Ralph extracts peat, using a coring device, which is examined in the laboratory for micro-fossils. While he can identify trees, grasses, sedges and higher plants in the peat, he cannot always identify species or tell grasses apart. Neither can he see interesting indicators such as lichen, fungi and insects which he readily acknowledged was a limitation in his ability to separate temperate rainforest from other woodland.

Not all plants produce the same amount of pollen. Tree flowers release lots of pollen high in the canopy and distribute it across the landscape, unlike herbaceous species which attract organisms that move their pollen for them. Oak produces about six times as much pollen as grasses, while hazel produces about twice as much, meaning that deciduous trees are over-represented in the record.



Image © Mike Rego

Ralph Fyfe

In the period of 'peak oak', between 6,000 and 4,000 years ago, oak provides as much as 15-20% of recorded pollen, while hazel provides 30-35%. Hazel arrived in Britain earlier than oak and dominates at first before falling away. Ralph indicated that tree species respond individually to environmental change, rather than as communities.

The peat samples from Cut Hill have identified a couple of dramatic declines in woodland over short periods in prehistory. One in the late Neolithic period is characterised by a huge increase in fungal spores that grow only on animal dung, indicating an intense grazing episode lasting about 130 years. The other period extends over 200-300 years in the middle Bronze Age, when the moor was transformed by extensive field systems and more than 5,000 round houses. Peat samples show that both periods were followed within 200-300 years by rapid woodland recovery.

Ralph finished by describing the work of his colleague Richard Bradshaw at Wistman's Wood. Radiocarbon-dating of pollen samples collected there reach back to about 800AD and suggest a mixed, open and diverse woodland before 1000AD. After this, oak persists



Image © Ralph Fyfe

Ralph extracting peat cores

at lower levels but with fewer other tree species and lots of grass, suggesting open woodland rather than the character the wood has today.

An increase in oak from about 1850 onwards created Wistman's Wood. Evidence from central Europe suggests that as early as the Bronze Age, when fields and huts were built on the hill above the wood, people would have used, managed and valued woodland, but when human pressure is released, there can be strong positive change. Ralph concluded that maintaining and developing sites of high conservation value is possible even in areas with a long history of human impact.



## The Need to Protect, Restore, Create and Collaborate

(Speakers Eleanor Lewis, April Windle and David Rickwood)

report by Caya Edwards

**The Woodland Trust's remit is to protect existing fragments, restore damaged areas and strategically create new woodlands especially where smaller areas can be connected. Eleanor is an Outreach Manager in the Southwest, April is a Naturalist specialising in lichens and David is a Site Manager on Dartmoor.**

Eleanor explained how The Woodland Trust carry out their own restorations and has awarded ten landowners £100,000 for vital restoration work that has resulted in 79 hectares of ancient woodland restoration. This Moor Woods scheme funds up to 90% of the cost to create new woodland. Also, The Woodland Trust and Plantlife started the Woodland

Alliance in the Southwest in March 2023 which comprises 20 separate organisations and hopes to successfully integrate landscape restoration projects. She concluded that 'Rainforests appeal to our imaginations, engage our senses and speak to our souls, events like this are important, as are the conversations that flow from them'.

April showed a photographic tour of sites in Devon that are nationally significant. The first a 260 hectare site along the River Bovey where lungwort and shingle lichens, extremely rare indicators of good quality woodland, are found along with crust forming pin lichens that inhabit ancient dry bark in the crevices of veteran oak trees.

April surveyed all the woods along the Dart Valley corridor in 2020. She discovered loop lichen *Hypotrachyna endochlora* that is very



Image © Mike Rego

Eleanor Lewis



Image © Mike Rego

April Windle

sensitive to its environment and found only in high quality temperate woodland and *Lobarina scrobiculata*, another rarity that is lost from almost all of its former locations across the county, but still inhabits Grey Park Wood along the River Dart. She finished at a site in north Devon, Buck's Wood, an exposed location where the trees run right down to the beach. This site supports more rare lichens such as green satin lichen and kidney bean lichen that are designated as plants of international responsibility; Britain and Ireland have 10% or more of the global/European population of these species.

David stated that the long-term objective in many woodlands is to replace the conifer canopy with broadleaf woodland. He uses

Alastair Hotchkiss' five-part conservation strategy to make management decisions. The first step looks at historical information and archaeology on the ground to identify 'hot spots': native species within conifer woodland, areas of green in rocky outcrops, or relic trees associated with old linear features. Once identified, restoration focuses on maintaining humidity. Threats to these precious starting points in the restoration process come from changes in the global climate and from site specific threats such as clear felling, which changes the surrounding microclimate leaving relic trees exposed. David described the process as evidence is gathered and a strategy for restoration is developed that results in a gradual transition and continues to protect the trees from the elements, but allows them space to grow and expand.



Image © Mike Rego

David Rickwood

## Lichens and Bryophytes, and What Plantlife is Doing to Protect and Restore Them

(Speaker Dave Lamacraft)

report by Rachel Van Der Steen

**Plantlife is a global charity working to enhance, protect, restore and celebrate the wild plants and fungi that are essential to all life on earth. Dave has been a bryophyte specialist for 20 years and worked for Plantlife throughout the UK since 2013.**

Temperate rainforests translate to a small percentage of the earth's surface (1%) and they occur in particular conditions ie averages of 1400mm rainfall per annum, 16 degrees mean July temperature, wet summers with 10% of annual rainfall and very little variation in year round temperatures and rainfall. The

south-west of Britain also hosts oceanic woodland requiring drier conditions and sunnier weather eg the Bovey Valley compared to Wistman's Wood and Black-a-Tor Copse which are temperate rainforest. The species differ between the habitats with the lowland woods supporting a variety of hardwoods which in turn support different species of bryophytes, lichens and ferns.

Dave explained the predominant rainforest tree is the sessile oak, a pioneer species which has travelled from southern Europe over the last 6000 years. Sessile oak woods support many bird species such as wood warbler, redstart, alpine dasher, although these are not specifically rainforest species. Nothing defines rainforest as much as the bryophytes, lichens and ferns and Dave likes to compare their uniqueness and global importance with the lions of the Masai Mara.



Dave Lamacraft

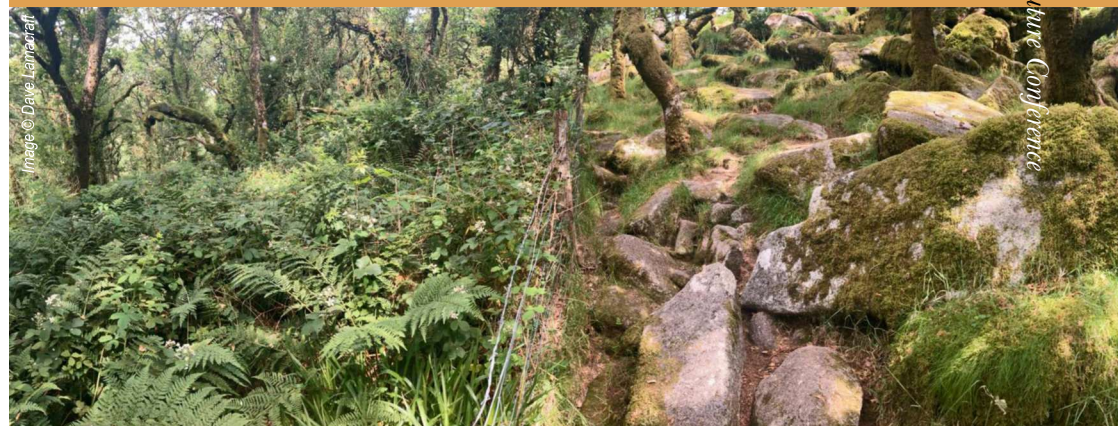
A Plantlife team has spent seven years undertaking research at Black-a-Tor Copse, for Natural England, into the *Bryoria* species or horsehair lichen, *B.smithii*, *B.bicolor*, *B.fuscescens*, which are only found in Wistman's Wood and Black-a-Tor Copse in the South West. It is thought their life cycle is around 15 years, the *Bryoria* will colonise a rock but is then swamped by common moss which in turn gets oversized and too heavy and falls off allowing the *Bryoria* to flourish once again. It was found that *B.fuscescens* was almost extinct.

Dave believes that bryophytes and lichens have existed in the UK for thousands of years. These organisms are only found in long standing ecological conditions where trees have existed for many thousands of years and the light conditions

and humidity levels have remained relatively stable.

Evidence of grazing from the 1880-84 Ordnance Survey maps of north-western Scotland show that moderate grazing allowed the rain forests to expand. Grazing is an essential tool in managing the rainforests, but it requires the right grazing, the right way and with the right stock. Photographic evidence of Wistman's Wood shows how no grazing allowed an abundance of vascular plants ie bracken and brambles. The wood has also suffered damage from excessive tourist presence.

Dave mentioned his colleague Angie Cruise who is project managing the Rainforest Lichen Recovery (South-West) project with £150,000 funding from Natural England which is focusing on 21 priority species.



Wistman's Wood: fenced area to the left and grazed area to the right



# The Role of Temperate Forests and Other Nature-based Solutions to Deliver Integrated Catchment Management

(Speaker Laurence Couldrick)

report by Annabel Crowley

**L**aurence has worked for Westcountry Rivers Trust (WRT) for 20 years and is dedicated to achieving integrated catchment management to deliver what is required from the land.

His talk started with an image of a fictitious West Country river catchment, stretching from the high moor to the mouth of the estuary, to give an idea of all the demands made on it, from growing food to providing drinking water, carbon sequestration and habitat for many species. The entire system is affected by climate change, and we saw the effects and how the

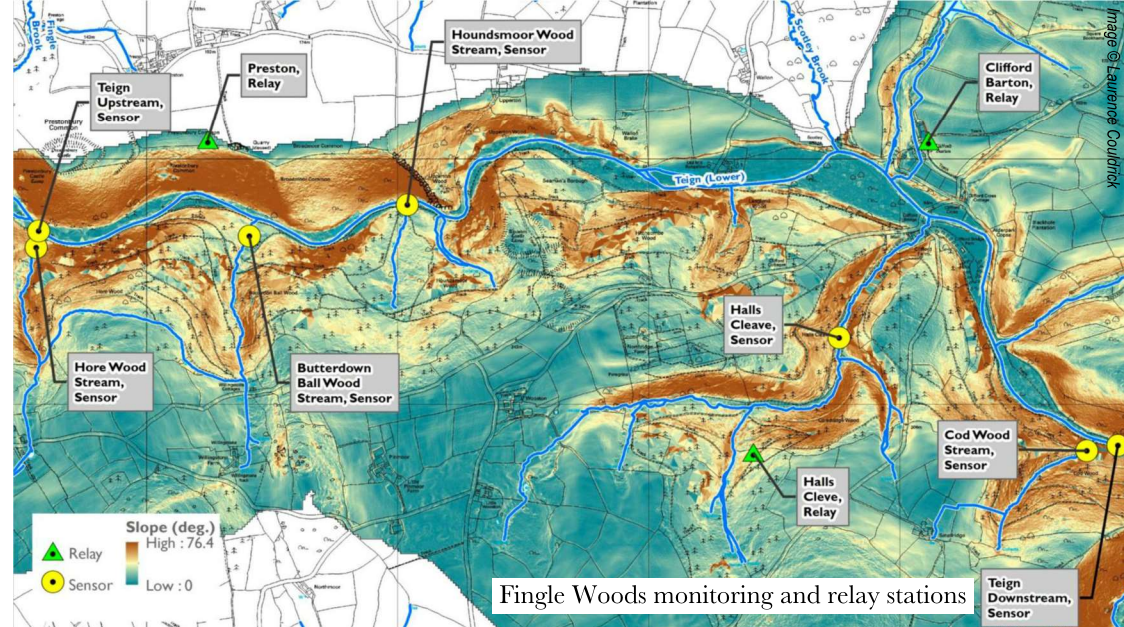
rain is arriving in different ways, often in sudden bursts. Pressures across the catchment, in both rural and urban settings, cause a complex variety of problems such as algal bloom in reservoirs, pesticide run-off that creates toxic fish kills, the flooding of towns and villages and the expensive dredging of estuaries.

The key to meeting all these challenges, Laurence said, was to integrate catchment management methods rather than keep our responses to different elements in separate silos. Historically we have created reservoirs as a solution to drought, flood barriers to counter floods, sewage storage to protect water quality and hatcheries to deal with the challenge of aquatic biodiversity. All are engineered, single-issue solutions which can deliver far greater benefits if integrated with nature-based solutions such as woodlands, ponds and wetlands.



Image © Mike Rego

Laurence Couldrick



Fingle Woods monitoring and relay stations

Examples might be working on soil restoration in a denuded catchment area, looking at common land grazing numbers, the aeration of lowland soils, the creation of more ponds, lakes and wetland areas and the restoration of rivers to reverse the effects of historic narrowing, straightening and deepening.

Laurence gave us an idea of the complexity of monitoring rivers. A sample is only ever a snapshot of what is happening at that time, in that specific place. Long-term datasets are therefore extremely important. Due to budget cuts, the Environment Agency's monitoring has decreased over recent years both in terms of numbers of samples taken and of sites sampled.

As a counter to this reduction in data, interest in citizen science is

growing and has the added benefit of involving local communities. WRT also does its own detailed monitoring and is currently working in Fingle Woods with the Woodland Trust, National Trust and Environment Agency to monitor several sites on the Teign and several of its tributaries for phosphates, turbidity and PH levels.

Laurence summarised by describing temperate rainforests as prime examples of natural assets in the landscape that hold and purify water as well as providing habitat and biodiversity. Their wide cultural benefits attract public interest, which helps promote understanding of nature-based solutions to catchment management. He invited anyone interested in being involved in data collection to get in touch with the WRT ([www.wrt.org.uk](http://www.wrt.org.uk)).

## What is the Future for Temperate Rainforest on Dartmoor – Maintain, Extend or Expand?

(Speakers Tim Ferry and Helen Aldis)

report by *Anthea Hoey*

**Moor Trees is an independent charity dedicated to restoring native woodland on Dartmoor and surrounding areas. Since 2000 they have been germinating and growing local provenance trees in its community tree nurseries, offering advice on woodland creation to the local community, and planting trees and monitoring them. Tim is a Trustee of Moor Trees, who devotes his retirement to helping to restore nature on Dartmoor. Helen is the Chief Executive of Moor Trees.**

Tim described key examples of sites on Dartmoor under different ownerships, private, public and institutional, where woodlands were becoming established because of changes in land management. For example,



Image © Mike Rego

Tim Ferry

the Erme Valley, in private hands since the 1970s, High House Waste, owned by the Dartmoor Preservation Association, and Hawns and Dendles, owned by Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA). In all these sites woodland was extending from a limited coverage of pioneer species, such as holly, hawthorn and willow, followed by slower growing trees such as oak and rowan due to changes in the grazing regime, and the introduction of deer control.

He then turned to common land, where land use issues are more challenging, because of the multiple interests involved. The examples were Holne Moor and the Becca Brook on Haytor Down; both owned by DNPA since the 1970s. Here, due to

both better funding and its ownership role, the authority was able to set up management agreements with the commoners, designed to encourage diversity of vegetation, including more trees. These agreements form the basis of ongoing management to this day, and both sites now have woodland expanding from local seed sources.

Helen examined seven actions that Moor Trees have identified to support their vision for more trees on Dartmoor. She emphasised that this would take much discussion with many parties. The actions were:

1. Look after what we already have, by spreading best practice as well as researching innovations. The forthcoming report by the South West Temperate Rainforest Alliance will provide focus.
2. Educate the public by spreading the word, through days such as today, and key advocates, including Guy Shrubsole and David Attenborough.
3. Make space for new woodland by identifying candidate sites and potential partners.
4. Think of the future, particularly focussing on climate resilience by bolstering the genetic strength of woodlands, through local provenance seeds.
5. Targeting land use changes with two possible future targets: covering a third of Dartmoor with trees, or tripling the area of temperate rainforest.
6. Finding long term incentives to get support for these targets, by emphasising the massive potential benefits, such as genetic biodiversity or natural flood management.
7. Evaluate and understand what makes the best habitats, by tapping into key sources of good information and research, eg local universities and exemplar practitioners like the Eden Project and Westcountry Rivers Trust.



Image © Mike Rego

Helen Aldis



## Conference Discussion Session

report by Anthea Hoey

**F**ollowing the talks a discussion session took place which is summarised below.

**1.** Caya Edwards referred to photographs from 160 years ago which showed more trees now, with the change the result of natural regeneration, and asked 'is this a good cause for optimism?'

Tim Ferry confirmed that the beginning of the 20th century was the low point for woodland cover. Whilst there is much to be optimistic about, we are still working up from a low base.

**2.** Audrey Compton asked about how to get fungi and lichen into these woodland habitats to make true temperate rainforest.

David Lamacraft said fungi can be transplanted on a small scale. It is important to target where to do this, and to control alien

species, such as rhododendron, in parallel. Research on scaling up is being done, but it is not possible to translocate lichens.

**3.** Lisa Schneidau from Moor Meadows (MM) suggested that woodlands might be promoted amongst landowners in the same way as MM does for wildflower-rich grasslands.

Helen Aldis agreed that clusters of landowners could help to promote woodland, and referred to the East Dartmoor landscape recovery area which has a dedicated project officer. Bill Murray added that The Dartmoor Society was keen to play its part in mediating groups such as this.

**4.** Peter Norman pointed out that despite the political consensus about the value of planting trees and their management, government action is slow, particularly in view of the timescale needed to regenerate woodland.

Guy Shrubsole agreed and encouraged us all to talk to our local political candidates to raise the profile of nature, and woodlands in particular.



Green satin lichen *Ricasolia (Lobaria) virens*

David Rickwood added that centrally set targets were often counterproductive. He cited the slow response to the Woodland Countryside Stewardship schemes and the English Woodlands Grant Scheme.

Helen Aldis said Moor Trees was working with private landowners to promote the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest and a small group near Moretonhampstead. But it was a matter of getting the right site for the right trees, and large-scale commercial nurseries to provide the trees.

**5.** David Lamacraft spoke about Plantlife's project to count deer using drones which was throwing up interesting results. The surveys show the local deer population is skewed with a higher proportion of females to males, demonstrating that current management practices maybe weakening the genetics. There is also increasing interest in squirrel management, although this is not easy and positively squirrel damage can create ecological niches.

Tim Ferry put forward Piles Copse as an example, fenced enclosures surround it, but animals are still able to get into the wood to keep the brambles down.

Bill Murray said that The Dartmoor Society wants to



Lungwort *Lobaria pulmonaria*

encourage debate and to be involved in the dialogue.

**6.** Anthea Hoey asked whether there was a role for coppicing in the management of woodland.

Guy Shrubsole said coppicing has been the traditional management practice over many hundreds of years in most large woodlands such as the Teign Valley, mainly as a source of firewood. Today it is ecologically driven, but less widely used. The Devon Coppice Group is looking for opportunities to offer the practice in woodland management.

David Lamacraft cautioned against coppicing on a large scale as it is not good for bryophytes growth. Ralph Fyfe emphasised the importance of managing woodlands after they have been planted, so that the trees are encouraged to thrive.

Image © Chris Chapman



Chair Bill Murray presenting the award to John Walters

## The Dartmoor Society Award 2023

### Presentation to John Walters

by Caya Edwards

**We were delighted to be able to present John Walters with the 2023 Dartmoor Society Award at the Fingle Bridge Inn last November.**

John is such an outstanding and multi-talented ecologist that it is, in fact, quite difficult to point to just one area where he excels, because he is able to communicate his observations on wildlife through so many different mediums. He has published and contributed to numerous books and he is also a consummate public speaker. His carefully observed, yet lively, illustrations are delightfully informative and he is often called on to participate in TV and radio programmes. His broadcasting credits include

David Attenborough's *Life in the Undergrowth*, *The One Show*, *Hugh's Wild West* and Radio 4's *Living World*.

On film his exciting and informative short videos can be found on his YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/@johnwalters9176](http://www.youtube.com/@johnwalters9176)

John is perhaps best known to us for his talk in Ashburton at our Secret Life of Dartmoor Birds Conference in 2019, where he described a detailed study of long-

tailed tits roosting in woods near his home. This involved many long, cold nights over one winter in uncomfortable observation locations! His images of lines of these charming little birds roosting and shuffling for pole position on a twig will stay with anyone who has seen them!

The qualities that we think makes John outstanding as a naturalist and conservationist, and a most worthy winner of his award, are his dedication to sharing his work so that the information is available to all, and his ability to do this in such an engaging and accessible way.

John's connections with the south-west of England go back to 1987 when he studied Graphic Information Design at Falmouth School of Art. After graduating in

1991, he took up a post as a graphic designer for Dartmoor National Park Authority. Since 1999 he has worked as a freelance ecologist. Much of his work is accessible through his website [www.johnwalters.co.uk](http://www.johnwalters.co.uk)

A handcrafted plate made by potter Penny Simpson ([www.pennysimpsonceramics.co.uk](http://www.pennysimpsonceramics.co.uk)) and inscribed by calligrapher and artist Michael Edwards, both of Moretonhampstead, is made for each recipient of the society's annual award, and John's was presented to him by Chairman Bill Murray at our temperate rainforest conference at the Fingle Bridge Inn.

John will be talking to us on 26 November at Bovey Tracey Methodist Church. Please see the events section for more details.



Long-tailed tits in Hembury Woods

Image © John Walters



Image © Mike Sampson



Two Dunlin on Maiden Hill

## Dunlin on Dartmoor, Summer 2023

by Mike Sampson

**D**artmoor Society member Mike Sampson has been recording the weather on Dartmoor for over 50 years and more recently, since retiring, has set up trail cameras on the peat restoration pools, and in other previously recorded locations, to record the bird activity, especially breeding dunlin. Mike climbs up to the high moor regularly to identify the birdlife and to download the information on his cameras and he has kindly sent us his 2023 report.

*The summer 2023 was an extreme period for the dunlin's habitat on Dartmoor. The early cold and wet period changed to a long, dry, sunny and windy spring which dried out the moor, 1mm of rain was recorded in the period from May 16 to June 12. The sunshine and strong winds dried up or reduced the water in most natural and mire restoration pools. At the end of the season the rain in July*

*broke records with up to 400mm recorded.*

*My trail cameras were set up in early May, at previously used locations in the northern moors around Cranmere Pool and Hangingstone Hill. The weather was a problem for my camera locations, they were all on water at set up but most finished on mud pools. I found crows came onto the mud to pull out*

*water creatures and this kept the dunlin away. I moved cameras to pools with water as much as possible.*

*Jude Dinham-Price was probably the first person to see dunlin in late April, on Hangingstone Hill, when a low helicopter flushed one out. My first sighting was at Maiden Hill where one flew up on the May 13 from a pool where I had set up a camera, it turned out to be the only time that a dunlin was recorded at this former dunlin location. My second dunlin sighting was on June 12 south of Cranmere Pool which has always been a hot spot for them. There were a pair that were agitated with my presence, showing broken wing display, brief flying display and calling suggesting they had young. Following this on the June 19, another pair was located north-west of Cowsic Head. Morag Angus, working on Hangingstone Hill, saw a dunlin on June 23 although my camera at the site only recorded one dunlin during the filming period.*

*Tavy Head proved to be my best camera site in 2023 with dunlin recorded on nine different dates, on some days several times and occasionally a pair. There would have been more sightings had my camera not failed at this site. A young dunlin was recorded on June 25 and 30 and July 2, proving breeding birds.*

*My other cameras only recorded dunlin on a few dates, once at*

*Winneys Down and twice at West Dart Head. The cameras at West Dart Ridge and Cranmere Pool did not record any dunlin although in recent years the same pools have attracted dunlin many times.*

*In conclusion dunlin came to the north moor to breed although possibly in reduced numbers in 2023. I recorded one breeding and three probable breeding pairs. The mire restoration work has provided more pools for dunlin, but the increase in Molinia vegetation is offsetting this, in my opinion. Also, this year the crows in the mud pools were keeping the dunlin away.*

Image © Mike Sampson



Dunlin near Cut Hill



The Two Bridges Hotel

## The Dartmoor Society Annual General Meeting 2024 Notice

**The committee are pleased to announce that the 2024 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of The Dartmoor Society will be held at the Two Bridges Hotel on Saturday 13 April starting at 2.00pm. We look forward to welcoming members to this event. In addition to the formal proceedings we have invited Jon Avon to speak to members about the Dartmoor Curlew Conservation Project. Please see the forthcoming events pages for more details.**

After the meeting there will be refreshments and you will have the opportunity to have a chat with members of the committee and to buy Dartmoor related books from our book shop. If you have books that you would like to donate, you are welcome to bring them along.

Please book in advance to attend the AGM via The Dartmoor Society Website or by contacting Bill Murray on [chair@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:chair@dartmoorsociety.com) or 01647 231297.

### Election of Officers

The maximum number of committee members allowed by The Dartmoor Society constitution is 12 society members. The committee is looking to fill five vacancies at the AGM and has had three nominations so far from Caya Edwards, Steve Mason and Steve Alford.

The committee needs two new members, one of whom to take on the now vacant office of Honorary Secretary and one as a committee member. Caya Edwards, who has been the society Secretary for the last three years, is nominated for the new role of Website Editor and this has created the vacancy. If you are interested and would like to know more about what the position of Honorary Secretary entails, please contact Bill Murray on 01647 231297.

Annabel Crowley, who has been the Newsletter Editor for the past three years, has now retired from the committee and is not seeking re-election. Steve Mason has agreed to take on this role and he will be standing for election to the committee at the AGM.

Steve Alford is required to retire as a committee member at the AGM, he is seeking re-election and his nomination has been received.

### The Committee

Chair – Bill Murray

Vice Chair – Nick Fennemore

Honorary Secretary – **Vacant**

Honorary Treasurer – Tom Orchard

Membership Secretary – Andrew John

Newsletter Editor – **Vacant** (nomination received for election of Steve Mason)

Committee Member, Publicity – Anthea Hoey

Committee Member – Bridget Cole

Committee Member – Rachel Van der Steen

Committee Member – **Vacant** (nomination received for election of Steve Alford)

Committee Member, Website Editor – **Vacant** (nomination received for election of Caya Edwards)

Committee Member – **Vacant**

If you are interested in joining the committee, please contact Bill Murray on 01647 231297 / [chair@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:chair@dartmoorsociety.com) for a nomination form and further information.



## Calendar of Forthcoming Events

For more information and to book any of these events please visit our website or contact Bill Murray on 01647 231297 or [chair@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:chair@dartmoorsociety.com)

**Talk on The Future of Cranmere Pool** • Village Hall, Belstone, Okehampton EX20 1RB • Wednesday 20 March 2024 • 2.00pm

Image © Steve Mason



The famous letterbox at Cranmere Pool

Dr Martin Gillard, Historic Environmental Officer for South West Peatland Partnership will speak about the conservation and future of Cranmere Pool.

The pool may be just a small depression in the blanket peat, but it is one of the most revered features of the high moor. It lies near the source of the River Okement in an area of peatland restoration works, see the article on our previous talk in this newsletter.

Martin will share insights into the restoration works and give an update on the research into the area.

Ticket price is £5 and includes refreshments.

**The Dartmoor Society Annual General Meeting (AGM)** • Two Bridges Hotel, Two Bridges, near Princetown PL20 6SW • Saturday 13 April 2024 • 2.00pm

The formal details of the AGM are given on pages 52-53. Following the meeting the society's annual award will be presented to this year's recipient Alan Endacott. After the presentation Jon Avon will speak on the Dartmoor Curlew Conservation Project. Jon manages this project in his role working for the Duchy of Cornwall and he also leads the Dartmoor Wader Project. The aims of the Curlew Conservation Project are to breed and release curlews to re-introduce breeding populations on Dartmoor. There will also be a chance to buy books from the society book stall. All Dartmoor Society members are welcome.

**Farmers' Forum Discussion: The Outcome of the Dartmoor Evidence Review and Related Topics** • Village Hall, Postbridge, Yelverton PL20 6SY • Wednesday 22 May 2024 • 7.30pm

The Dartmoor Society is interested in how Dartmoor's historic and living farming culture can be reconciled with the need to accommodate concerns about climate change and species decline. Dartmoor farmers are being asked not only to produce food but to deliver the environmental outcomes. These environmental outcomes are driven by English Nature which is

legally required to deliver government driven targets. It is a difficult balance and during this forum we will endeavour to unpick some of the issues.

Ticket price is £5.

**Farm Visit to Bowden Farm, Buckfastleigh TQ11 0JG** • Saturday 15 June 2024 • 2.00pm

On our farm visit this year we will be the guests of Russell and Sandy Ashford who farm Bowden Farm near Cross Furzes, West Buckfastleigh. Russell is Chair of the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project which is actively involved in promoting and supporting Dartmoor farmers' role in food production, land management and public services. At Bowden Farm organic milk, beef and lamb is home-produced and naturally reared to British Soil Association standards. The beef is from South Devon, Welsh black and continental cross cattle, and the lamb from Scottish blackface and crossbred ewes. Ticket price is £5.

Image © Iskamedia



Ayrshire cows grazing at Bowden Farm

**Celebrating Dartmoor Day** • Gidleigh Village Hall and Church, near Whiddon Down TQ13 8HR • Saturday 13 July 2024 • 9.30am and 2.00pm

**Morning Session: Wool Workshop and Felt Crafting** • Gidleigh Village Hall • 9.30am

Bridget Cole and Barbara John will lead a wool workshop, including making your own felt stitched landscape. Bridget is a Dartmoor livestock farmer who will share her interest in Dartmoor wool and her ideas for developing markets for this product. Barbara has taught embroidery and stitched crafts for many years and will lead the stitched landscape session. Ticket price is £12 including materials.

**Afternoon Session: A Celebration of the Spirituality of Dartmoor: how man has shaped the moor in poetry, song and literature** • Holy Trinity Church, Gidleigh • 2.00pm

Following the success of last year's spiritual celebration at Lydford Church we are holding a similar event at Gidleigh Church. Led by our Vice Chair Nick Fennemore, the afternoon will be an appreciation of the various ways people, through the years, have expressed their feelings about Dartmoor. If you have prose, music or song to contribute to this celebration please contact Nick on 01647 433749 or [canonfennemore@btinternet.com](mailto:canonfennemore@btinternet.com). There may be a chance for an informal walk to Scorhill stone circle, following the service. There is no charge for the afternoon event.

**Annual Barbecue and Walk •  
Coombe Meadow, Ashburton  
TQ13 7HU • Saturday 17 August  
2024 • 2.00pm**

Our hosts for the annual barbecue are Mike and Angela Walker who live at Coombe Meadow. Since 2016 the Walkers have restored the garden to how it was laid out in the 1970s and stabilised its archaeological features. The afternoon will include free exploration of this unique garden, a guided walk in the wooded valley to see the tin mine workings, followed by the barbecue. Members and friends are welcome. Ticket price is £12 including food. Please bring your own drinks.

**Guided Walk to Vitifer Mines and  
Birch Tor • Meet at Bennett's  
Cross, near Warren House Inn on  
B3212 PL20 6TA • Saturday 14  
September 2024 • 9.30am**

Inga Page will lead a walk to explore the Vitifer Mine, Headland Warren and Birch Tor area. Many of the industrial features can still be identified in this extensive former tin mining landscape. It is a beautiful and accessible area with a lot of wildlife and folklore stories. The walk will be 3-5 miles long. Please bring a packed lunch, drinks and waterproofs. Inga is a Dartmoor Moorland Guide and founder of Dartmoor Walks This Way who has many years of experience leading walks on Dartmoor. Ticket price is £8.

**Talk on The Glaciation of  
Dartmoor • Venue and date to be  
confirmed**

In late 2012 Stephan Harrison of Exeter University gave a research lecture on this subject. The society would like to revisit this and are making the arrangements as this newsletter goes to print. Information will be in our September newsletter, and on the website when available. Ticket price is £5.

**Talk on Dartmoor Wildlife • Bovey  
Tracey Methodist Church Hall  
TQ13 9AD • Tuesday 26  
November 2024 • 7.30pm**

The Dartmoor Society Award 2023 was presented to John Walters for the engaging way that he communicates his passion for wildlife through the written word, public speaking, illustration and film. John is a freelance ecologist and always in demand, so we are delighted that we have now agreed a date for him to talk to us. Ticket price is £8.



Cuckoo and meadow pipit

Image © John Walters

## Membership Matters

### New Members

Veronica Morriss  
Emma Delow  
Sarah Chaddock  
Barry Welch  
Martin Cherrett  
Diana Wackerbarth  
Ann Waterfield  
Maeve Leith (Student)  
Virinia Brand  
Katrina Powell  
Tim Legood  
Sarah Young  
Jeff Wookey  
Roger White  
Adri Peter Slootweg

### Honorary Secretary

Caya Edwards is standing down from the Honorary Secretary role at the AGM in April, though she is standing for election as Website Editor on the committee. The committee is looking for someone to undertake the role of secretary for the society. This involves taking minutes at meetings, writing news updates and liaising with the events and publicity organisers and Newsletter Editor to help ensure the smooth running of the society. If you are interested in this role and would like to know more, please get in touch with our Chair Bill Murray on 01647 231297 or [chair@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:chair@dartmoorsociety.com). Prior to any commitment you are welcome to attend one of our committee meetings and be co-opted on to the committee during the current year to get a feel for the role.

### Volunteer Opportunities

The committee would like to establish a group of members who are willing to help at the society's events, but without the need to attend committee meetings or read society papers etc. We would be pleased of help with:

- Setting up the room for society events, serving tea and refreshments during events, and helping to clear the room afterwards (separate tasks).
- Setting up the society gazebo at Widecombe Fair and Chagford Show, doing a stint selling Dartmoor books and talking to members of the public, and taking the gazebo down afterwards (separate tasks).
- Help with preparation, serving, and clearing up at the annual barbeque (separate tasks).

If you would be interested in helping us, please send your contact details to the Secretary at [secretary@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:secretary@dartmoorsociety.com). We will be very grateful for any help you can offer.

### Subscriptions

Current subscription rates are:

- Single £17.00
- Family £25.00
- Life £340.00
- Student Membership is free

Details can be found on the society's website on the 'Join Us' page. If you pay by standing order, please check you have updated the amount you pay which can be done via online banking.



# *The* Dartmoor Society

***Contributing to the well-being of Dartmoor and  
its communities***

President: Peter Beacham OBE | 01392 435074

## **Executive Committee**

Chair: Bill Murray | 01647 231297 | [chair@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:chair@dartmoorsociety.com)

Vice Chair: Nick Fennemore | 01647 433749 |  
[canonfennemore@btinternet.com](mailto:canonfennemore@btinternet.com)

Honorary Secretary: Caya Edwards | 07971 916662  
[secretary@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:secretary@dartmoorsociety.com)

Honorary Treasurer: Tom Orchard | 01822 853826 | [tlorchard7@gmail.com](mailto:tlorchard7@gmail.com)

Membership Secretary: Andrew John | 07472 662250 |  
[membership@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:membership@dartmoorsociety.com)

Newsletter Editor (co-opted): Steve Mason | [manavalins@gmail.com](mailto:manavalins@gmail.com)

Website: Caya Edwards | 07971 916662 | [secretary@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:secretary@dartmoorsociety.com)

Events: Bill Murray | 01647 231297 | [chair@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:chair@dartmoorsociety.com)

Publicity: Anthea Hoey | 01626 362003 | [anthea\\_hoey@fastmail.fm](mailto:anthea_hoey@fastmail.fm)

Committee Member: Layland Branfield | [laylandbranfield@gmail.com](mailto:laylandbranfield@gmail.com)

Committee Member: Steve Alford | [dartmooralfie@outlook.com](mailto:dartmooralfie@outlook.com)

Committee Member: Rachel Van der Steen | [ensworthy@gmail.com](mailto:ensworthy@gmail.com)

Committee Member: Bridget Cole | [bridgetcole200@gmail.com](mailto:bridgetcole200@gmail.com)

Committee Member (co-opted): Gill Povey | [gill.povey@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:gill.povey@hotmail.co.uk)

**[www.dartmoorsociety.com](http://www.dartmoorsociety.com)**

**[info@dartmoorsociety.com](mailto:info@dartmoorsociety.com)**

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