

What's new in Phil's toolshed

In this occasional series we discover some of the secrets of Phil Powles' toolshed, which is a treasure trove of essentials for the well-equipped countryman. This time we meet the Pottiputki.

Phil says: "This tree-planting tool for cell-grown trees saves a lot of time, and a lot of bending down. You simply drop the tree down through the shaft, push down with your foot to make the hole, pull down the handle and job done."

"It makes planting a lot easier and efficient on difficult terrain and it's possible to plant over 1,000 trees a day. I recently used it on a job where I had to plant 6,000 trees."

The Pottiputki is a Finnish design, and the 63mm model costs £135 from Cheviot Trees, cell-grown tree specialists in the Scottish borders, who also supplied the 6,000 trees.



Revised aims and objectives

Following discussion at last year's AGM, the PGP committee has produced this updated version of our aims and objectives.

The parishes of St Briavels and Hewelsfield & Brockweir contain important sites for wildlife and historic landscape features of national and international importance recognised by national designations. Many people choose to live here or visit because of these special features. They are also places where some people need to make a living.

Although the Parish Grasslands Project was originally established to help conserve one of the important features of the parish – the network of small fields on the

Objectives:

- to raise awareness of nature and the historic landscape features of the parishes among residents, managers and visitors;
- to prevent the further loss of habitats and species and promote their conservation, sustainable use and restoration to enhance biodiversity;
- to maintain the natural and historic landscape features of Wye Valley National Landscape (formerly the AONB);
- to contribute to carbon neutrality, food security, health and well-being and the local economy;
- to gather evidence to show the state of the parishes' wildlife and inform national monitoring programmes;
- to foster and develop a community of knowledge, practice and capability.

Commons – the project has increased in scope to address a wider range of the issues.

The committee now proposes a broader aim for the project: to raise awareness and promote the conservation, sustainable use and restoration of nature and the historic landscape features of the parishes and adjacent areas, including their grasslands, woodlands, orchards, trees, waysides, fields and field boundaries, wetlands and water courses, and the wildlife that they support.

The committee recognises that this aim must be met in the wider context of the global challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and food security.

Activities:

- Talks, field visits and information exchanges
- Informal advisory services (eg animal husbandry, grassland management advice, help with grant applications)
- Training (plant ID, hedge laying, scything etc...)
- Skills, contacts and equipment sharing
- Surveys, inventory, monitoring
- Newsletter, walks leaflets, flower guides, information about local wildlife and history
- Advice and information sharing with public bodies: parish councils, the district council, Wye Valley National Landscape, Natural England, Historic England, the Environment Agency



NEWSLETTER

www.parishgrasslandsproject.org.uk

COMMITTEE

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Two owlets born in Andy and Gill Stott's barn last year. See pictures of Operation Barn Owl Box on centre pages **Photo: Andy Stott**

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NATURE WATCH What to look for now



Chiffchaff



Peacock butterfly

We will launch the main phase of our Homes for Wildlife initiative at our meeting at the Mackenzie Hall at 7.30pm on Thursday March 21. Under this we are providing materials and advice to enable local residents to provide some of our wild creatures with a place to live.

Last month we installed five barn owl boxes in a variety of barns across the two parishes. Now we are targeting three more groups: swifts; reptiles (slow worms, grass snakes and lizards); and pond dwellers, including frogs, toads, and newts. The underlying object is to record and monitor local wildlife, to help us understand over a period of years whether these species are thriving or declining.

The materials will be provided, at least initially, from PGP funds, and we will ask for volunteers to sign up to help with one or more of the groups. We will have a number of swift nesting boxes to distribute, and we are keen to form a group of swift champions to help with finding out where locally these summer visitors nest. We will also be providing

Our Homes for Wildlife initiative will aid long term monitoring

reptile refuges, pieces of corrugated bitumen roofing sheet that provide cover from predators, making them perfect places for reptiles. And to encourage the creation of more ponds we also have pondliner to distribute.

During the evening Richard Clark, a barn owl expert and volunteer with Gwent Wildlife Trust, will give an illustrated talk about his work with barn owls on the Gwent Levels. Richard advised and assisted in the installation of the local barn owl boxes. The evening will also include our annual general meeting, and there will be an opportunity to renew your PGP membership – it still costs only £5 per annum per household.



Operation Barn Owl Box took place in February, with five boxes installed in barns belonging to PGP members. From left, top row, meeting the current barn resident, hoisting the first box into position, the box in place. The bottom row gives an indication of the wide range of barns, ancient and modern, that exists in the two parishes.

Photos: Sally Secrett, Andy Stott, Mike Topp



A biodiversity action plan for our parishes

Biodiversity is the variety of all life on Earth. It includes all species of animals, plants and fungi – everything that is alive on our planet. And biodiversity is an important aspect of the 2021 Environment Act. Under the act parish councils (and other administrative bodies) must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Based on those considerations they must agree policies and specific objectives and act to deliver and achieve these. Parish councils were required to complete their first consideration of the matter by the end of last year, agree their policies and objectives as soon as possible and review selected actions within at least five years.

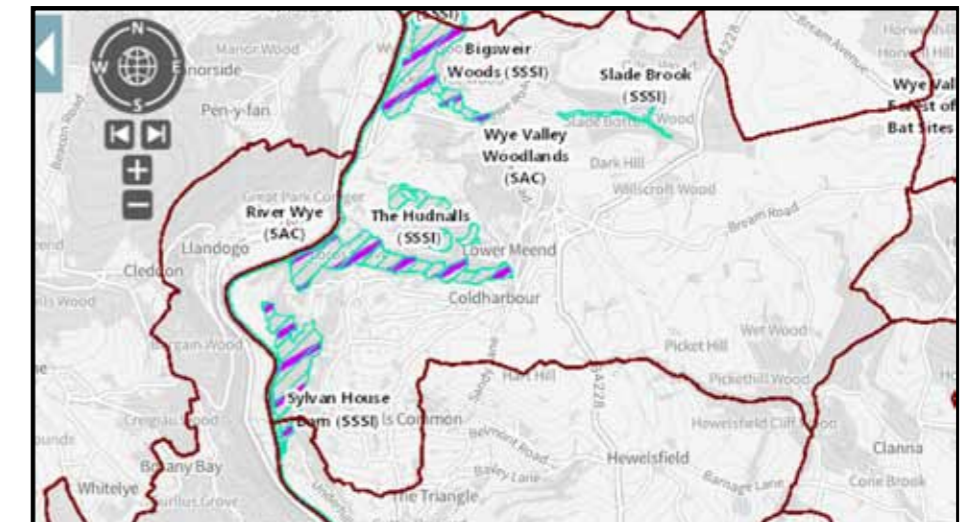
Biodiversity is important for its own sake and has its own intrinsic value. It is worth underlining the vital role it plays in all our lives. It is the building block of our “ecosystems”, such as woodland, meadows, hedges and water bodies, that support our economic and social wellbeing. These include essentials such as food, fresh water and clean air, but also protection from natural disasters, carbon sequestration, purification of water and pollination of crops. Biodiversity enriches our lives and contributes to physical and mental health. Our parishes have sites that are nationally and internationally important for biodiversity but nationally and globally our biodiversity is under severe threat and we know some of our

cherished habitats, such as the River Wye, are in rapid decline.

Following proposals by Chris McFarling, our local district and county councillor, St Briavels and Hewelsfield & Brockweir Parish Councils have agreed to develop a biodiversity action plan jointly for the two parishes. They agreed that Chris should go ahead and establish a local working group to develop a plan which would be subsequently considered and hopefully adopted by both councils.

The guidance suggests that councils could review what biodiversity actions or nature recovery plans are already in place in the parish, make contact with local voluntary groups, carry out a biodiversity audit of council landholdings and/or the whole parish, gather expert advice on possible actions in support of biodiversity and draft an action plan that covers action that the council will take as well as support for the actions of other local bodies. Members of the committee of the Parish Grasslands Project have already volunteered to join this working group to share their knowledge of biodiversity in the parishes and consider how the work of the PGP contributes.

Email parishgrasslands@gmail.com if you have any ideas on what you'd like to be included in the biodiversity action plan for St Briavels, Hewelsfield & Brockweir or if you can help in its preparation.



Local biodiversity hotspots... nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) overlain by internationally important Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) magic.gov.uk