

Living the Levels

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September 2019 • Autumn Issue

www.livinglevels.org.uk



Welcome to the third edition of our 'Living the Levels' newsletter which will keep everyone who has expressed an interest in the Living Levels Landscape Partnership up to date.

The Partnership aims to recapture, enhance and celebrate the unique Gwent Levels and has successfully been awarded a £2.5 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

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Stone Age Stags, Rowdy Romans and Moody Monks!

Discover how the Gwent Levels were created, meet the people who helped shape this unique landscape, learn some 'Levels Lingo' and explore some of the amazing artefacts pulled from the Severn Estuary mud at the Living Levels History Open Day.

There will be activities for all the family plus demonstrations, displays, guided walks, talks and you can find out how to get involved with many of the projects being delivered by the Living Levels programme. There will also be an opportunity to meet many of the different history and heritage groups from across the Gwent Levels and discover the valuable work and research they do, which continues to keep local history alive.

We are also encouraging people to bring along their very own Levels 'treasure' including items pulled from the mud, old photographs or maps of the Gwent Levels and to tell their own fascinating stories. Experts will also be on hand to try and explain the origins of visitors' finds and maybe cast new light on them in a style loosely akin to Antiques Roadshow!

As well as activities for all ages in the Newport Wetlands Education and Environment Centre, there will be the opportunity to view the Gwent Levels from one of its few high points – the Church Tower and Spire of St. Mary's in Nash, once described as the 'cathedral of the moors'. Following a short-guided walk, the many steps ascending the medieval tower will reward our intrepid climbers with stunning views of the surrounding fields and their historic drainage features, the wetlands reserve with its abundant birdlife and the stunning Severn Estuary. There will also be guided walks throughout the day to discover the unique landscape features of the Gwent Levels and the history of East Usk Lighthouse, as well as a chance to find out about how to get involved in the Living Levels programme.

Saturday 29 September 10am – 4.00pm Newport Wetlands, West Nash Road, Nash Newport NP18 2BZ Cost: Free – Please note there is a £3 parking charge at this venue



Des Williams, one of the first wave to be trained, receiving his card and certificate!

Construction Plant Competence Scheme training underway with 12 local contractors participating

Thanks to Heritage Lottery funding, we are proud to announce that we have been able to support 12 agricultural contractors local to the Gwent Levels to take part in the Construction Plant Competence Scheme (CPCS).

At the end of their training, they will be issued with a CPCS card which is an industry standard identification card certifying that an individual has the necessary knowledge and competence to work as a plant operator within the field of construction. The objective of the scheme is to ensure that employers and plant operators can have confidence that they are meeting the required standards in health and safety legislation.

Many of the smaller local contractors, often those who have been operating on the Gwent Levels for many years, do not possess the necessary competency certificates that are required for certain jobs, particularly public-sector contracts requiring specific construction design management standards to be met. Most plant operators on the Major Contractors Group and National Contractors Federation sites must be CPCS cardholders to be considered for these positions. Thanks to our training programme, our contractors will have their competencies certified in health and safety awareness and the operation of 10 tonne excavators. These are the machines which will need to be used to carry out essential habitat restoration works as part of the Living Levels natural heritage restoration project.

As a result of this training, the contractors will be able to bid for more construction based work requiring the CPSC card, helping to ensure that the project has a strong legacy and supports the building of locally skilled workforce. So far, six of our contractors have received their CPCS card with another six well on their way. Some will also be trained in Cable Avoidance later, details to follow.

Volunteer!

Events

We are looking for as many volunteers as possible to help with the events that the partners are running at the hub sites of Magor Marsh and Newport Wetlands.

We need enthusiastic people who can engage people in the various aspects of the Gwent Levels.

You will learn more about the natural heritage and historical aspects of the sites. You will have access to the GWT, RSPB and National Trust induction procedures apply depending on the site chosen.

Education

We have committed to delivering 39 outdoor learning sessions for Primary School children (18 at Magor Marsh, nine at Tredegar House/Park, six at Rogiet or Black Rock, six at Parc Tredellerch or Hendre Lakes) over three years.

We are looking for volunteers who already have some experience of working with children to assist in designing and delivering these sessions so that the children can learn as much as possible when they are at the sites.

With your experience and skills, we know we can plan more complex and interesting activities than we could come up with on our own!



Mind your Bees and Peas! - Shrill Carder bee training with the Pollinators project

Intrepid Pollinator volunteers were put through their Bee Identification paces by Bumble Bee Conservation Trust's Sinead Lynch on a windswept Gwent Levels day!

Coming face to face with our rare species, the Shrill Carder bee, were Krysten Walker, Elliot Waters and Chloe Jones. Spotting the difference between these elusive nectar gatherers and their sun-faded cousins, the Common Carders, did sometimes swing from initial excitement to some disappointment as our volunteers competed for the accolade of 'first to spot' the Shrill Carder.

The strong summer sun has caused some Common Carders to fade - or get surfer-highlights, whichever way you want to look at it - and therefore closely resemble the grey/white tinged fur of their rare cousins. However, once the team 'got their eye in', they were finding them on a range of 'pea' species such as vetch, everlasting long-leaved pea and bird's foot trefoil.

If you would like to volunteer for the Pollinator Project then please contact:
sinead.lynch@bumblebeeconservation.org



Living Levels glad to Bee in Nash...

Saturday July 7th saw over 100 people descend on the playing field in Nash for the annual fete - and Living Levels were there too! Local children had the chance to experience the trials and tribulations of our rarest bee on the Levels, the Shrill Carder. So as the saying goes 'To appreciate a bee, you must become a bee...' - which is exactly what they did as they discovered the daily relationship between pollinators and flowers in the 'Battle of the Shrill Carder Bee' game.

A summer's evening unlocking Newport's secrets

Despite the searing heat of a balmy Bishton summer's evening and the lure of a World Cup semi-final, visitors turned up to hear author and historian Andrew Hemmings present chapters from his book 'Secret Newport' at Bishton Village Hall on Tuesday July 10th. Not only did Andrew share his very personal views of the Gwent Levels as a secret treasure full of history (and his appreciation of Bishton's tiny road tunnel or 'magic gateway') - he also presented a selection of tales of Newport's heroes and villains ranging from Shackleton stowaways (and their cats) to a near - international incident at Newport Docks during a VIP visit to a warship...



Chris Packs-'em-in despite threat of Alien Invasion...

'BioBlitz the Wetlands' on Saturday July 21st attracted visitor numbers of 1,217 to Newport Wetlands with the promise of the Chris Packham UK BioBlitz team touching down from its whirlwind tour of Wales sometime in the afternoon...

In the meantime, our budding brave 'BioBlitzers' were tasked with completing an 'Alien Hunt' around the Newport Wetlands reserve in search of those pesky critters and creeping veggies which could pose a real threat to the 900 miles of reens and ditches of the Gwent Levels in the future.

However, to hunt an alien, our budding 'Alien Hunters' first had to undertake a crash-course in Invasive Species ID amidst the 'Bio Hazard' boxes and creepy sounds of the 'Living Levels Gazebo of Doom' training ground. Deprived of using their sight, our Alien Hunter recruits were subjected to 'trial by touch' as they attempted to identify three potential invasive species sealed in Bio Hazard boxes by placing their hands through narrow slits and studying images of various invasive villains at the same time.

This did produce some hilarious results and having endured this tough recruitment, our intrepid 'Alien Hunters' then completed a trail around the reserve hunting for other species of plants and animals via bug hunts and pond dips. They left with a new found knowledge of Invasive Species (with an identification fact sheet to remind them) and a glimpse of the great man himself, as arriving with Iolo Williams in tow, Chris Packham rallied the troops in aid of UK wildlife and met the many volunteers and experts who had brought their knowledge and expertise to this busy day.

At the end of the day we had 320 records submitted to SEWBRc - the local biodiversity records centre - a fantastic achievement!

It was a wonderful way to celebrate the fantastic diversity of the Gwent Levels, and a great example of the Living Levels Landscape Partnership in action. Our thanks go to all who were involved in making the event such a success

Prehistoric fun as we get 'Messy with the Mesolithic'!

A chance for children (and adults) to experience life as our ancestors did on the Gwent Levels up to 10,000 years ago went on tour over the summer via Newport Wetlands, Caldicot Castle and Cardiff's Glamorgan Archives, with a series of 'Get Messy with the Mesolithic' activities. Budding young Stone-Agers literally came face to face with the skulls of extinct (well on the Gwent Levels at least) beasts, discovered the limitations of prehistoric painting (with only four colours), made mud tracks like our returning cranes and long extinct Gwent wolves, sculpted pots and fashioned mud huts. There was also a chance to make and take home a willow crane for the garden!

Summer fun at Magor Marsh!

On Saturday 14th July 200 local people descended upon Gwent Wildlife Trust's Magor Marsh Nature Reserve to enjoy an afternoon of activities for all the family. The day was a celebration of Gwent Levels heritage and traditions and saw people taking part in a range of hands-on activities. Perhaps the undisputed hero of the day was Rudi the otter whose cheeky personality captivated audiences all afternoon long as he dived in out of the trousers and blouse of his equally captivating keeper Daphne Neville from the UK Wild Otter Trust!



Rick Turner

It is with great sadness that we announce the loss of our great friend Rick Turner over the summer.

Rick was instrumental in the development of the Living Levels programme from the early days and many of you would have had the pleasure of meeting him, or indeed recognise him from our 'Discover our Living Levels' video, enthusiastically describing the development of the unique drainage network of the Gwent Levels. A pioneer at CADW, Rick was passionate about bringing the heritage, history and archaeology of the Gwent Levels to life and introducing it to the wider public, as illustrated by his 'stick' showing the different water levels recorded through history (pictured).

A great supporter of local historical societies, as many of you will testify, he was also responsible for highlighting the incredible Thomas Morris 1830 Commissioners of Sewers Maps for the Gwent Levels, which never fail to capture the imagination of local people and visitors of all ages.

As a result, he helped to devise a project based on these fantastic documents, which we will be launching very soon and hope will provide a fitting legacy for Rick and his work.

Help spread the word

If you think of someone, or a group of people, who might be interested in finding out more about Living Levels and getting involved, please do pass this newsletter on.

If you do not wish to receive further updates about Living Levels, then please let us know to unsubscribe you from this list

We'd love to hear from you!

If you've any questions about the programme or getting involved, drop us a line on: info@livinglevels.org.uk or call us on: 01633 292982

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