

Living the Levels

[@ourlivinglevels](#) [Our Living Levels](#) [Our Living Levels TV](#)



www.livinglevels.org.uk

Winter Issue



Welcome to the fourth 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.

Inside:

- >Krysten and the Queens (Bees)
- >SORT it out! Sprucing up the Apples n' Pears
- >Get down with the Sewers RATS!
- >Long walks, tall tales and Big Skies
- >Life on the Levels - Stories from the Levels
- >Wild Watch!
- >More volunteer opportunities

Volunteer with us in 2019!

To round off the year, we are looking forward to the many opportunities for you to get involved with Living Levels projects over the next weeks and months.

In this edition, you will discover how our programme of natural heritage restoration has created the chance for you to develop some great conservation skills including how to manage an orchard. You'll hear from Living Levels volunteer Krysten Walker about her adventures learning to record our rare pollinator, the Shril Carder bee and learn how you could follow in her footsteps.

You'll also find out about a unique opportunity to discover some surprising secrets about the Gwent Levels landscape and the people who lived and worked here (and still do!) as part of our major community research projects which will enable historic mapping, documentary research and oral history recording.

There is also the chance to claim a free wildlife calendar celebrating 12 of our iconic Gwent Levels' species and at the same time, sign up to be one of our 'Wild Watchers', helping to record the wonderful wildlife found on the Gwent Levels. More detailed role profiles can be found on the 'Volunteer with us' pages on our website.

So, if you like history, wildlife, conservation work or fancy helping with our events programme, then you are sure to find something here to get involved with in 2019!



Krysten and the Queens (Bees)

So, what's it like learning a new skill volunteering with the Living Levels Partnership? Krysten Walker reveals her experience of getting to know one of the UK's rarest pollinators right here on the Gwent Levels...

When thinking of an endangered species, I tend to think of tropical islands, rainforest or vast desert plains. Do you? So, what if I told you that we have one right on our front door step? The Shrill Carder bee is an endangered species found right at home on the Gwent Levels, but in only a handful of other locations in the UK, making this little bumblebee one of our most endangered insects.

This wetland landscape makes the perfect place for the Shrill Carder bees to call home. With the species being extremely rare and location specific, surveying them whenever possible is essential to log their population numbers.

As part of the Living Levels 'Pollinating the Levels' project lead by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and Buglife Cymru, I had the opportunity to go out with Sinead Lynch and a few selected others to learn about surveying these precious insects. The task sounded simple: Identify the bee through its classified characteristics and simply tally the amount we could see.

As someone who has never identified insects in the field, let alone flying insects, it's fair to say that it was rather challenging! However, perseverance is key and after an hour or so it became relatively easy to spot the species as they busied themselves amongst the flowers.

Shrill Carder bees have a distinctive dusty grey lower abdomen with a black line running between its wings. Once this feature has been identified we noted where we had found the bee and the species of plant that it was found on. This is important to note as a depletion of their "favourite" species of plants could lead to a reduction of the bees themselves in the area. Bees are vital pollinators, so the protection of all bee populations is extremely important, and so too is their habitat, without which they could be lost.

With winter now closing in and temperatures dropping, the Shrill Carder bees themselves are no longer to be found in the area, it's simply too cold and they will have found a safe hiding place to hibernate. However, if you have a simple love of fresh air and would like to donate some time for the vital conservation of this unique habitat and its occupants, keep an eye out for projects requiring the monitoring of plants and animals throughout the year under the Living Levels Partnership.

If Krysten's experience has got you interested in volunteering for the 'Pollinating the Levels' project then please have a look at the volunteer profile on the website for more information and contact Sinead Lynch at the Bumblebee Conservation Trust: sinead.lynych@bumblebeeconservation.org



Black Spots to Bright Spots!

As part of our Black spots to bright spots project, nearly two tonnes of fly-tipping and litter was removed from Green Lane, Marshfield over two days in November.

On Thursday November 8th, teams from Natural Resources Wales cleared 1.5 tonnes of commercial waste, some of it hazardous, from along the Lane.

The following day, volunteers from Fly-tipping Action Wales, Keep Wales Tidy, Natural Resources Wales, Marshfield Magpies as well as local Councillors Richard White and Tom Suller from Marshfield Ward joined in the clean-up operation with 25 volunteers picking up 96 bags of litter from along the lane.

No fly-tipping signs warning of cameras that will soon patrol the area were erected at the end of the clean-up. These cameras will be used to help gather evidence which could lead to criminal proceedings.

Fly-tipping enforcement Officer Pamela Jordon from Natural Resources Wales will be increasing the levels of surveillance and monitoring of fly-tipping as a result of the Living Levels programme.

The project aims to tackle the huge problem of fly-tipping through the combined actions of enforcement and awareness-raising activity. For more information contact flytippingactionwales@cyfoet hnaturiolcymru.gov.uk



SORT it out! Join our Special Orchard Restoration Team and help spruce up the Apples n' Pears

Over 8000m² of bramble has been removed from a large orchard in Goldcliff revealing some very old apple, pear and walnut trees as our natural heritage restoration project starts its winter programme of works to restore wet field ditches, pollard willows and prune overgrown orchards. We are very excited to be returning to this site in the spring to carry out DNA testing and to take cuttings for propagation which will potentially give us home-grown stock to enhance existing orchards and plant new ones on the Gwent Levels.

Some of our recently restored orchards across the Gwent Levels need careful pruning and clearance work by hand, to help them on their long road to recovery. So why not volunteer with our Special Orchard Restoration Team (SORT)? The tasks will be a mixture of clearance work, pruning and in autumn potentially fruit picking. So, if you fancy some exercise, team working, satisfaction in restoring an important habitat, learning about the Levels heritage and accessing training then get in touch. No previous experience necessary just an enthusiasm to learn and use hand tools and the ability to listen to instruction!

For more information see the detailed role profiles found on the 'Volunteer with us' pages on our website or contact Gemma Bodé Gwent Wildlife Trust gbode@gwentwildlife.org 01600 740600

Ditch Restoration Project

With the long hot summer and dry autumn of 2018 creating favourable conditions, we were able to clear scrub, desilt, cast and re-wet over 5km of double-hedged ditches across the Caldicot Level. This will help maintain and increase the amount of habitat needed to sustain the important fauna and flora for which the Gwent Levels SSSIs are designated, as well as creating greater water storage capacity in the field ditch network. In addition to the ditch works, 12 large trees have been successfully pollarded, helping to guard against splitting, falling and blocking of vital field ditches. **The wood left standing creates not only a fantastic home for many species of insect, bugs, small mammals and reptiles but also returns a once common feature to the Gwent Levels skyline.**

We need orchards, willows, ditches and grips on the Wentlooge Level!

Early next year we will be looking for old orchards, doubled-hedged, dry field ditches, old willows, fields to re-grip and areas to manage as 'flowing meadow' on the Wentlooge side of the Gwent Levels.

If you are a landowner and are interested in any of these elements please contact our Natural Heritage Officer Mark.Stokes@rspb.org.uk

Fancy learning a traditional craft?

In days gone by willow weaving was a by-product of the annual pollarding of trees on the Gwent Levels. Local willow used to be used for many local crafts including making fish traps, baskets and other decorative items. As part of our skills revival courses which will focus on specific crafts, traditions and heritage of the Gwent Levels we're hoping to bring some of this traditional craft back to the Levels.

So, if you or anyone you know are interested then please get in touch! We'll be producing a skills training brochure for 2019 which will be available on our website shortly. **Details will also be on the website and social media so keep an eye out as places will need to be booked in advance.**



Get down with the Sewers RATS!

In our autumn edition, we remembered our great friend, archaeologist Rick Turner OBE, who thought that our history volunteers should be called the Sewers RATS (Research and Transcription Service), in recognition of the Monmouthshire Court of Sewers and their important role in maintaining the Levels landscape for many centuries- so here we are!

So, what does it entail? Well we are looking for volunteers to explore the story of the Gwent Levels through the records of the Monmouthshire Court of Sewers as part of the 'Recapturing the Historic Landscape' project. The records you will be investigating will help reveal the impact of tidal and fluvial flooding, the continuity of land tenure, settlement patterns, local government in action, and much, much more. Sewers in this instance are watercourses (in our landscape the reën and ditch network), either natural or manmade, and Commissioners of Sewers throughout England and Wales held jurisdiction over drainage and sea defence in low-lying coastal lands including the Gwent Levels beside the Severn Estuary. The records are therefore brimming with personal names and place names. Potential research topics for interested volunteers have been carefully chosen and include such topics as the Gwent Levels 100 and 200 years ago, the impact of the railways, the 1883 and 1947 floods, place names and who lived where and many more!

There will also be opportunities for volunteers to extend their own existing research projects. It is hoped that the RATS will share their work with a wider audience - be that through story boards at Living Levels events such as History Days, within a Living Levels publication, on the website or a short talk. Don't be daunted - you will be fully supervised and supported throughout the research and writing up processes! You can commit as much or as little time as you'd like to dedicate to your research project - this project will cater for those with no experience of this type of research and those with existing research interests which they want to deepen.

If documentary research is not so much your thing, there will be a second strand of the project which will focus more on studying changes in the landscape by compiling historic map layers, LIDAR data, aerial photographs and transcribed records from the documentary research strand. Tasks will include field surveys, archaeological test-pit investigations, map transcribing/geo-referencing, and GIS analysis.

For more details see the volunteer role on our website or contact Alison Boyes at Alsion.Boyes@rspb.org.uk to sign up for updates about the project and to register an interest in being involved

Volunteer Assistant Education Officer

We want children to discover the Gwent Levels and with your skills and experience, we know we can plan engaging and interesting activities!

Do you have some experience of working with children and would like to assist with designing and delivering outdoor learning sessions at key sites on the Gwent Levels? Over the next three years we will be delivering outdoor learning sessions for Primary School children across the Levels at Tredegar House, Magor Marsh, Rogiet Countryside Park, Black Rock Portskewett, Newport Wetlands, Parc Tredellerc and Hendre lake in St. Mellons.

You will be fully trained in all aspects of delivering outdoor learning and discover the natural heritage and historical aspects of these sites, therefore helping us deliver engaging sessions - even choosing which venues best suited to you.

A teaching/coaching qualification or relevant experience for this primary school age group would be great as would Welsh but this is not essential to the role. DBS check required and references.

If you're the person to help us bring history and heritage to life for our next generation then contact Kathy Barclay on 01633 889048 or magormarsh@gwentwildlife.org



Long walks, tall tales and Big Skies!

We have a packed calendar of events across the Gwent Levels in 2019 and you can help us deliver an exciting programme of activities...

Throughout the year we will be running a full events calendar delivering something for everyone from guided walks and talks to history days, theatrical events and family activities. If you want to gain some valuable experience in helping to organise and run an event, then this could be a great opportunity for you to get involved!

Living Levels events range from large-scale open days to small intimate talks and we are always in need of extra help from stewarding, setting-up and even helping to deliver some of the activities. Our 2019 events brochure will soon be available and with 2019 being the Visit Wales 'Year of Discovery', we hope there will be something for everyone to enjoy. We want you to be involved and are creating a variety of roles which may interest you - a few examples are set out below but you can also contact us if you have an interest or talent to offer. Depending on the role, some activities may require a DBS check.

Newport Wetlands celebrates 'Big Skies'!

Over 100 people braved inclement weather and even a spectacular burst water main to enjoy the inaugural 'Big Skies' event at Newport Wetlands performed by Newport's Tin Shed Theatre! Visitors were invited to roam and discover just one of the many different places to visit on the Levels, exploring what the Wetlands and the Gwent Levels mean to people, focusing on the themes of winter bird migrations, wildlife, the unique landscape, the significance of water and the natural phenomena of the starling murmurations...

Donning hats and scarfs and clutching warm drinks, visitors took a 'wander in wonder', enjoying the surprises lurking around each corner in the form of pop-up performances and intriguing installations, including a Bug Hotel with a Bell boy checking in snails, slugs, bees and other bugs for a night of respite, culminating in a moody twilight finale at the historic East Usk Lighthouse, complete with an actual starling murmuration! There was also the opportunity to make 'starlings on sticks' and see the creative writing of Year Five pupils from Bishop Childs School in St. Mellons, Crindau Primary school in Newport and Tredegar Park school in Duffryn.

We want to invite schools and communities to participate in, witness and create beautiful things in 2019. There are lots of ways to get involved from taking part in the celebratory events by being a participant, stewarding or taking part in the workshops throughout the year! Contact Tin Shed Theatre tinshedtheatre@gmx.com or Gavin Jones Gavin.Jones@rspb.org.uk 01633 292981

Are you a Levels 'walker' or 'talker'?

Do you enjoy strapping on your walking boots and enjoying the stunning landscape of the Levels? Do you have a real interest in the history and heritage of your surroundings and would love to impart that knowledge to local people and visitors alike?

We are looking to recruit some walking guides or leaders to help us bring the Gwent Levels to life, promoting some of the great routes that can be found here. It can be long distance walks or short, interesting circuits - we want to make this an accessible destination for all visitors and enable people to discover hidden walking gems!

The Gwent Levels are blessed with fantastic community venues for presentations and talks. We would love to use as many of these as possible and to bring our events into those communities.

So, if you have a passion about history, heritage or anything Gwent Levels related then we would love to hear from you - and so would the public!

If you would like to get involved with our events then contact Gavin Jones
Gavin.Jones@rspb.org.uk
01633 292981





Living Levels: Wild Watch!

Be our 'eyes on the ground' and help us survey the wonderful wildlife on the Gwent Levels - and claim your free 2019 calendar!

Through an exciting programme of training days and online resources, we are hoping to train up a new cohort of biological recorders. Thanks to our introductory programme, you can get the confidence, skills and knowledge to help survey and record wildlife through our 'Wild Watch' project.

Wildlife on the Gwent Levels is currently under-recorded, so you will be helping to give us a clearer picture of how wildlife numbers and distribution are changing on the landscape.

We have chosen 12 target species, one for each month of the year featured on our 2019 calendar. As a Wild Watch recorder, you will be looking out for one, a few or all the target species including Barn Owl, Water Vole, Mistletoe and Shrike Carder Bee. A special field recording day for volunteers will be organised towards the end of the summer in each year.

A series of training days are planned at venues across the Gwent Levels delivered by SEWBReC (South East Wales Biological Recording Centre) where you can get to know each species and gain basic survey skills. Sessions will focus on the identification of the 12 species, through talks, field walks and 'hands-on' practical sessions (e.g. analysing owl pellets). There will also be training in how to submit records using record cards, online and with the SEWBReC recording app.

If you would like to get involved in the Living Levels Wild Watch project please go to our page on www.livinglevels.org.uk or contact Chris Harris Chris.Harris@rspb.org.uk to register your interest.

Learning Events Volunteer

Get involved with our Learning events at Magor Marsh, Newport Wetlands and Tredegar House!

We want enthusiastic and energetic people who can engage people with the fantastic Gwent Levels and help visitors discover its fascinating heritage.

A teaching or coaching qualification or relevant experience that can apply to this primary school age group would be advantageous for this role.

You can also explore the natural heritage and historical aspects of our key sites of Magor Marsh, Newport Wetlands and Tredegar House, with access to training.

Gwent Wildlife Trust, RSPB Cymru and National Trust induction procedures apply depending on the site chosen.

If this is the role for you then contact Kathy Barclay on 01633 889048 or magormarsh@gwentwildlife.org





oto property of Carole Newton

Life on the Levels - Stories from the Gwent Levels

Sign up now and be part of this exciting project recording living, local history!

'Stories from the Levels' is a new oral history project recording the rich heritage and social history of this fascinating landscape and the people who live here.

We are looking for people to help collect and record the stories, memories and experiences from the communities and people who live in and around the Gwent Levels area.

You will play a role in creating a historical body of work and a touring exhibition inspired by the interviews.

We will equip you with the right skills to do this through training sessions that will be accessible to all levels of experience. These will include: oral history interviewing skills, reminiscence session work, using digital media, transcribing, video filming and editing techniques; and collating, designing and organising displays and exhibitions.

Please be aware that due to the nature of this role, this role requires a DBS background check as part of the recruitment process.

This is your chance to be part of this exciting and fascinating project that will create a historical record with a human voice. Get in touch now.

Marsh



We're looking for your stories...

We know there's loads of fascinating stories from the Levels as some of you have told us some great ones already—we'd like to share them as they are a great insight to the history of the Levels.

So, if you have any outstanding memories or you would like to help collect these tales, then please get in touch.

This is your chance to be part of this exciting and fascinating project that will create a historical record with a human voice.

Get in touch now.

Marsha O'mahony

marsha.omahony@gmail.com

07989 733870

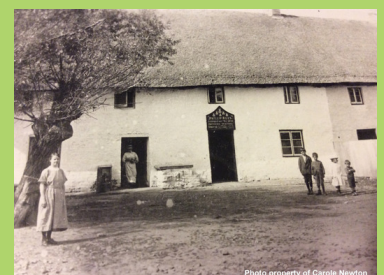


Photo property of Carole Newton

