

Living the Levels

Newsletter of the
Living Levels Landscape Partnership

~ Winter 2022 ~



Lefelau Byw
Living Levels

www.livinglevels.org.uk

Welcome...

to the Winter 2022 edition of Living the Levels, the newsletter of the Living Levels Landscape Partnership.

It's been a busy year for Living Levels as we wrap up elements of the original Lottery-funded project and prepare for the next phase of Living Levels.

Over the last 12 months we've said goodbye to a number of colleagues. In December 2021, Gavin Jones, our Community Engagement Officer, left to join the Newport Transporter Bridge team as they begin an exciting project to build a new visitor centre. In January 2022, Alison Boyes, who has managed Living Levels since the start, left on maternity leave and has since gone on to join the Wildlife Trusts. In March, Beccy Williams, our Orchards Officer, left to join Gwent Wildlife Trust, and Sian Hawkins retired as Finance Officer. To all our past colleagues we say a huge thank you! Without their dedication and hard work, the Living Levels would not be where it is today.

Chris Harris, formerly Access and Interpretation Officer, took over as Project Manager, and Jemma Rees returned as Finance and Admin Officer. In June, Sam Willmore and Flow Mascord joined the team as Community Engagement Officers.

Thanks to additional funding from some of our project partners and continuing support from Lottery Heritage Fund, we have been able to extend the project until Autumn 2023, allowing us to continue delivering projects on the Levels and plan a longer-term future for the project.

We have an exciting year ahead, so read on to see what we've been up to and what's planned for 2023.

Merry Christmas.

Gwent Levels: Our vision for the future

The overall aim of the Living Levels Landscape Partnership (LLLLP) programme was to reconnect people and communities to the Levels' landscape and to provide a sustainable future for this historic and unique area.

With funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Rural Communities Development Fund, the Partnership has invested £4m in the Gwent Levels, delivering management and engagement projects, including habitat conservation, orchard restoration, access improvements, events and activities, and volunteer programmes.

One of the main achievements of the project has been the mass engagement with people from across the region, including residents, landowners and farmers, visitors, business owners, volunteers, and politicians with influence over important policy decisions affecting the Levels.

This has created a real revival of interest and enthusiasm in the Levels and sustained pressure for policy change, which is beginning to lead to a change in the way the Levels is being valued, managed and protected.

As the project neared the end of the Lottery-funded phase, it was recognised that, although much had been achieved, there was still more to do to ensure the future of the Gwent Levels. Considerable thought was given towards how to extend the life of the project, to capitalise on extensive public interest and political support, and build on the successes already achieved.

Support for a legacy project was demonstrated by RSPB, Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council, who each contributed funds to enable an 18-month transition phase. Further funding was given by NRW, and National Lottery Heritage Fund agreed to extend their support by allowing us to access the original projects underspend.

Throughout 2022, the Living Levels team, alongside partners and other stakeholders, have been developing a plan to ensure a long-term sustainable future for both the Living Levels project and the Gwent Levels.

Much has been achieved over the last four years, but there is still more to do to realise our goal of protecting this extraordinary landscape.

Some key achievements:

- **26km** of open field ditches restored, allowing the recovery of aquatic plant and animal communities
- **150+** willows pollarded
- **160+** fruit trees planted and traditional orchards restored and restocked
- **27ha** of land managed for the shrill carder bee and other pollinators
- **30+** fly-tipping cases investigated, and 7 prosecutions made
- **75,000+** unique visits made to the website
- **10** gateway and visitor hubs created
- New **pre-history display** at Newport Museum and **Levels display** at Caerleon National Roman Legion Museum
- **5** 'People of the landscape' sculptures installed
- **8** walking and 4 cycling routes created
- **PROW network** upgraded and improved with new bridges, stiles and way marking
- **17** community hubs funded
- **110+** events and activities delivered with over 10,000 attendees
- **37** history RATS volunteers recruited
- **52** oral histories recorded
- **73** schools, **1000+** primary pupils and **150+** college students reached
- Over **600** volunteers contributed **£150k** of volunteer hours

The **future of farming** on the Levels

In July 2022, Welsh Government published its proposals for a new Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) to replace the Basic Payments Scheme following the UK's exit from the EU.

Alongside promoting sustainable food production and strengthening the rural economy, the scheme will provide support for farmers to meet the challenges of the nature and climate emergency.

A baseline payment will be made to farmers undertaking a set of Universal Actions, such as managing land for wildlife or creating new habitats, ensuring biosecurity, and carrying out self-assessment to improve business performance.

Additional payments will be available for farmers who choose to undertake Optional and Collaborative Actions, such as restoring wetlands, and working with neighbours to improve water quality.

To help farmers carry out the actions, support will be offered through an advisory service, training opportunities, and by networks of farmers and landowners sharing good practice and information.

Payment rates are still being

calculated and, following further consultation with farmers and others, a final decision on how the scheme will look will be made in 2023.

In September, around 40 people, including farmers, Living Levels partners and members of the local community, met for a conference at Redwick Village Hall to discuss Welsh Government's new scheme and the Sustaining the Gwent Levels project, which ran alongside Living Levels.

A series of talks was followed by a Q&A. After lunch, a group of local farmers sat down with Dave Ashford, Engagement Manager for Land Management Reform at Welsh Government, for an in-depth discussion about the new farm support scheme.

The response from attendees was overwhelmingly positive and Living Levels hope that this event will be the start of a project bringing together farmers and the local community to create a vibrant local farming economy that supports farmers and promotes nature and climate friendly farming.

■ For more information, visit: <https://bit.ly/3FXfZtS>



What's on in 2023

26th January

All that Glisters...

Dr Mark Lewis from Caerleon Roman Museum shares some of the amazing archaeological discoveries reported to the National Museum and the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

7th February

The Newport Ship

Dr Toby Jones recounts the history of the Newport Ship, one of Europe's most important medieval ship wrecks.

22nd February

Guided walk

Join us for a circular walk from Caldicot Castle to Black Rock.

5th April

Living Levels at Chepstow Castle.

Join us at Chepstow Castle.

11th-16th April

Chepstow Walkers are Welcome Walking Festival

Living Levels are leading some walks as part of the CWWW festival.

28th April - 1st May

City Nature Challenge

Look out for local events across Newport, as we take part in this international event to document the wildlife in cities globally. Help us put wild Newport on the map.

[\(https://citynaturechallenge.org/\)](https://citynaturechallenge.org/)

In addition to the above, we also have some other exciting events in the pipeline, such as a guided tour around Newport Museum and a community archaeology event in early summer.

We are adding new events all the time. Check out our website for details.



Lighthouse Inn

Visitors to the Wentlooge Levels can now access the sea wall courtesy of a new 'gateway' site at Lighthouse Inn, near St Brides.

Working with our colleagues at Newport City Council, Living Levels purchased a section of the car park at the Inn to create a free parking area, along with picnic benches, interpretation, and improved access to the sea wall and the Wales Coast Path. The Inn car park has also been resurfaced.

Alongside the car park is the latest in our series of sculptures celebrating the people of the Levels; The Centurion. The 2.4m tall figure of a 2nd century Roman centurion is composed of 3000 pieces of weathering steel and was designed and built by sculptor Sebastien Boyesen.



We are very pleased to announce that Professor Martin Bell and his team from Reading University have secured funding from the National Geographic Society for a new project investigating the Mesolithic landscapes of the Severn Estuary and the Kennet Valley.

Professor Bell, who has been one of Living Levels historical advisors, will be leading further work to investigate the remarkable archaeology of the foreshore at Goldcliff during summer 2023.

We are hoping to run another of our popular guided walks along the foreshore with Martin and a community archaeology event in association with Dr Mark Lewis from Caerleon Roman Museum (see our website for details).

Artefact boxes

The Living Levels artefact boxes contains a selection of items that help to tell the story of the Gwent Levels through themes which remain relevant here today.

The boxes can be borrowed, FREE of charge, by schools, Scouts, Guides, etc., and are available from Magor Marsh (Gwent Wildlife Trust), Tredegar House (National Trust), and Newport Wetlands (RSPB). Contact us for details.

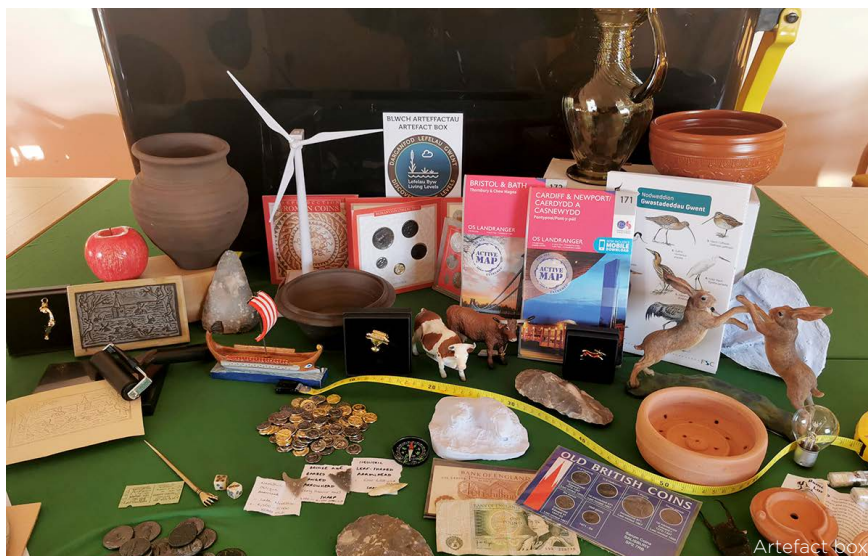
For more information, visit: <http://bit.ly/3PwN2rT>

Online Talks

Have you missed any of our excellent online talks? Well, we now have a selection of recordings available on our website, including talks on 'Hunter-gatherers in the Severn Estuary: Ice Age to 4000BC', the 'Morgans of Tredegar', 'The Newport Ship', and the 'Origins of the Gwent Levels'.

There are more interesting talks planned for next year, but in the meantime, head over to our website and take a look.

For more information, visit: <http://bit.ly/3HMZmlQ>





The Engineer, Black Rock



The Fisherman, Black Rock



The Brinker, Magor Marsh



The Centurion, Lighthouse Inn

'People of the Levels' sculpture trail

Over the past few years, Living Levels has commissioned a series of sculptures representing people of the Levels.

At Black Rock picnic area stands **The Fisherman**, a giant oak sculpture of a lade net fisherman wading through the grass pursuing a leaping salmon. He celebrates all the traditional fisheries that once operated along the Levels' coastline, most of which no longer operate.

Nearby is **The Engineer**, who represents the engineers and workers who constructed the sea wall, the Severn Tunnel and the bridges that span the estuary. The figure is based on Thomas A Walker, who undertook the completion of the Severn Tunnel and built Sudbrook village for the tunnel workers.

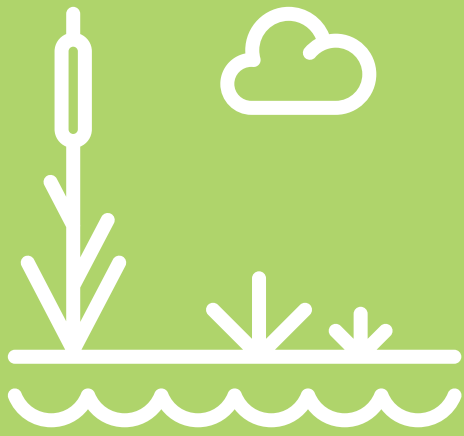
At Magor Marsh is **The Brinker**, a woven willow figure representing the ordinary landowners, farmers

and labourers who fashioned the Levels' landscape over many centuries.

At Lighthouse Inn is **The Centurion**, a 2nd century Roman soldier constructed from 3000 pieces of weathering steel. The Romans began the creation of the Levels as we know them almost 2000 years ago.

For more information, visit: <http://bit.ly/3FjqwqPL>





Lefelau Byw Living Levels

Help spread the word

If you know 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 or recommend our website: www.livinglevels.org.uk.

We'd love to hear from you!

If you have any questions about the programme, how to get involved, or would like to share a story or images, email us at: info@livinglevels.org.uk or call us on: 01633 292982

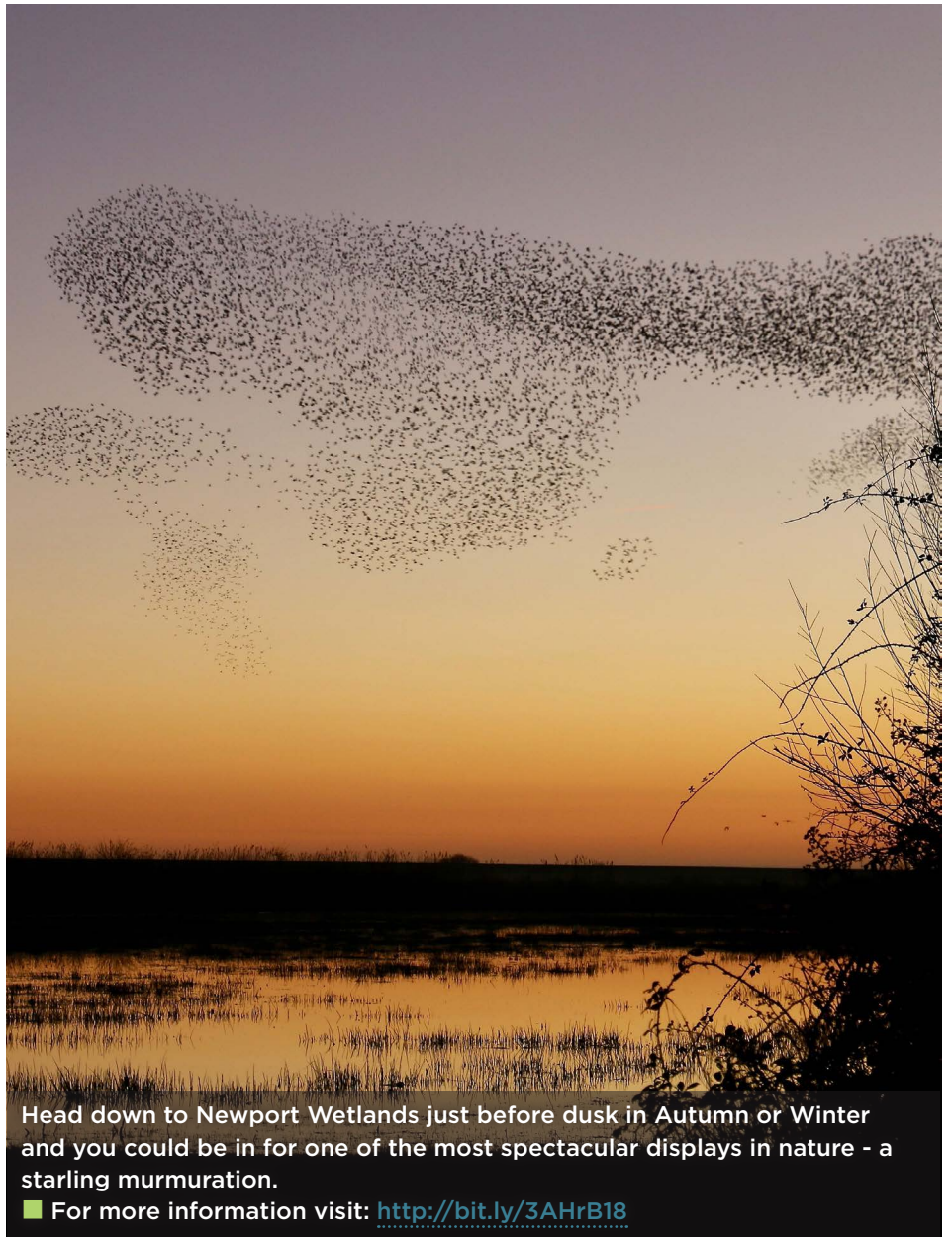
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The Living Levels Partnership was formed in 2014 to promote and protect the Gwent Levels. We are a cross-organisational partnership, spanning administrative boundaries, working closely with communities and other stakeholders towards the sustainable management of this landscape.



Head down to Newport Wetlands just before dusk in Autumn or Winter and you could be in for one of the most spectacular displays in nature - a starling murmuration.

■ For more information visit: <http://bit.ly/3AHrB18>

Wild**Watch** 2023

Be our 'eyes on the ground' and help us record the wonderful wildlife on the Gwent Levels.

During 2023, we are once again teaming-up with South East Wales Biological Recording Centre (SEWBReC) to run our popular WildWatch wildlife recording training days.

There will be three sessions at locations across the Levels where participants will be able to learn how to identify and record a range of species.

Recording wildlife is essential to help give us a clearer picture of how wildlife numbers and distribution are changing over time, particularly in response to climate change.

Sessions will focus on the identification of 12 key species, including barn owl, water vole, otter and shrill carder bee.

Through a combination of talks, field walks and 'hands-on' practical sessions (e.g. analysing owl pellets) we will give you the confidence and knowledge to record your sightings. There will also be training in how to submit records using record cards, online, and with the SEWBReC recording app.

■ For more information, visit: <http://bit.ly/3Xs4zoJ>