

Dorset Coast & Countryside

Beautiful & diverse

Looking after Dorset's stunning wildlife

Restoring reedbeds

The RSPB brings life back to a rare habitat

River scenes

Creatures and recreation



dorset coast & countryside magazine

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FRONT COVER:
View toward Fontmell Magna
by Mark Simons

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DORSET COAST & COUNTRYSIDE

Dorset Coast & Countryside magazine is produced jointly by Dorset Countryside, the Dorset AONB Partnership, the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Team and Dorset Coast Forum.



Dorset Countryside's Ranger and Access teams support the sustainable use and management of Dorset's unique environment. Working with a range of partners we manage country parks, sites, public Rights of Way, trails and other facilities to promote greater awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the countryside.

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Dorset AONB Partnership brings together 20 organisations to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of this nationally important protected landscape. The Dorset AONB covers over 40% of the county and is one of a family of 41 AONBs in England and Wales.

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The Jurassic Coast is England's first and only natural World Heritage Site, inscribed by UNESCO in 2001. This 95-mile stretch of coastline in Dorset and East Devon includes geology of global importance and beautiful coastal landscapes. It is managed by a partnership of public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

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The Dorset Coast Forum encourages cooperation and dialogue between all the different interest groups living and working along the coast and promotes a sustainable approach to the management, use and development of Dorset's coastal zone.

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editorial

What better time of year, and what better county to celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity than Dorset in summertime?

Our theme complements this international celebration of biodiversity with a look at the county's range of species and where to go to make the most of the summer and the wildlife. Even the Seasonal Highlights section focuses on creatures that rarely get a mention and are often misunderstood; reptiles. Unusually, all six species of UK native reptile can be found in one county - here in Dorset, proving the importance and diversity of our local habitats and wildlife.

This must be one of the best seasons to explore the rivers of the county. The Frome and Stour have past and present, served an important role in the county's landscape, ecology and heritage. We delve into the part that these, and other rivers in the county, play in supporting some very special and threatened species and some alien ones that are less welcome! River corridors are once again home to the curious water vole and the enigmatic otter. Take a meander down our riverside wander and soak up the tranquil atmosphere and stunning scenes of the Wareham Two Rivers Walks; pages 17 and 18 guide you there.

At the very heart of the magazine you will find a RSPB special feature that brings news of all the hard work being carried out at the Weymouth Wetlands Nature Reserve at Radipole Lake, to restore the reedbeds at this amazing site. Turn to page 14 to find out more - it makes fascinating and inspiring reading!

As ever the Events' Guide provides a handy summary of the activities and fun going on across the county including the full programme for Autumn Bird Week.

We hope that this edition will inspire you to take a close look at the wonderful wildlife and biodiversity all around us in Dorset's coast and countryside!



coast and countryside news

The South Dorset Ridgeway Festival 16th - 31st July 2010

Join in and celebrate the wonders of the South Dorset Ridgeway in July 2010!

The South Dorset Ridgeway Heritage Project is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Natural England to help local people and visitors to the area discover and celebrate this outstanding ancient ceremonial landscape, wildlife and stories. Located in South Dorset, between Weymouth and Dorchester alongside the Jurassic Coast this area is unique in the country for the number of historic monuments along its ridge. Not only does it present incredible evidence of past lives it has also provided more recent inspiration for art and literature.

The festival programme includes open air theatre, archaeology, guided walks and tours, story telling, film and poetry. Join archaeologists who have recently studied the South Dorset Ridgeway for a day symposium on 17th July. Take the Ridgeway Challenge and walk or run 18 miles along the Ridgeway from Osmington Mills to West Bexington on 25th July to support the British Heart Foundation. Explore the Ridgeway with poets, historians, artists and geologists for a very special experience. Record and tell your own stories at digital storytelling workshops.

MORE INFORMATION

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©Sid Jones/Dorset AONB

Pebbles, Boats & the Sea



©David Carter

The Chesil Bank & Fleet Nature Reserve has launched a photographic competition as part of their contribution to Weymouth and Portland's annual maritime festival; Spirit of the Sea.

The competition will run from 3rd to 16th July with a theme of Pebbles, Boats and the Sea. All images must be taken between Abbotsbury and Portland and should evoke the special qualities of the coastline and sea, be it the physical environment itself or those people or creatures that live, work or play there.

In addition to the Open category there will be individual sections for Natural History, Underwater Photography and Juniors, plus a special class for camera-phones so that people who suddenly see that special view can also take part. Winning entries will be displayed at the Chesil Beach Centre, the Mulberry Gallery in Weymouth Library and on the Reserve website, where details and entry forms can be obtained.

MORE INFORMATION

CHESIL BANK & FLEET NATURE RESERVE

Phone 01305 760579

Click www.chesilbeach.org

Spirit of the Sea: 3rd - 16th July

Weymouth & Portland's maritime festival has proved so successful over recent years that the 2010 extravaganza has been extended to 14 days that will feature 50 maritime themed events. The ever popular Dorset Seafood Festival will again form part of the celebrations over the weekend of 10th -11th July.

MORE INFORMATION

SPIRIT OF THE SEA

Phone 01305 785747

Click www.spiritofthesea.org.uk

New bus service for Durlston

During the summer, Dorset County Council and local transport operator Discover Dorset will be providing a new bus service between Swanage town centre and Durlston Country Park. It's only a mile between Swanage and Durlston but the steep hill means many visitors to Swanage want a frequent and accessible way to explore the nearby stunning coastline. This one-year trial will help decide whether to develop a future service. During 2010 and 2011, extensive renovation work will be carried out on Durlston Castle as part of a £5.5m restoration project. The Castle is expected to re-open in summer 2011, housing the new Visitor Centre and comprehensive catering and function facilities. There's still plenty to see and do at Durlston this summer, with the Visitor Centre and café open 10am-5pm every day. The bus service will run every day until Sunday 26th September with a fare of just £1 one-way for adults and 50p for children, with under fives travelling for free.

MORE INFORMATION

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Click www.durlston.co.uk

Get involved!

Would you like to get more involved in looking after your local countryside? Dorset Countryside has a wealth of opportunities open to all ages and abilities. Whether you can offer a day of your weekend to join an organised volunteer day or want to really get stuck in and become a longer term volunteer through the Volunteer Ranger scheme.

Volunteer Rangers have a whale of a time

Successful recruitment to the Dorset Countryside Volunteer Ranger Service has seen the first Volunteer Rangers of the scheme deployed in Weymouth & Portland, Thorncombe Wood and Dorchester. The Volunteer Rangers carry out a broad range of tasks including looking after the British Primitive Goats on Portland, butterfly surveys, whale and dolphin watches, surveying trails and sites and undertaking practical works such as scrub clearance and drystone walling. If you would like to take on the challenge and reap the rewards of volunteering, there are a number of opportunities on offer from everyday practical countryside tasks to helping in visitor centres; assisting with school groups and guided events to interpretation.

MORE INFORMATION

DORSET COUNTRYSIDE VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

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©Lyn Cooch

Beyond the fringe

Many are familiar with the suite of characteristic heathland species; heathers, native reptiles, Dartford Warbler to name a few. The conservation needs of these species are fairly well understood and catered for on Dorset heathland reserves. Indeed all of them have thriving populations at Avon Heath.

Beyond the areas of pure heather, there was at one time a world of marginal farming. The farmers of these small holdings tried to coax crops from the unforgiving soil. On the farmed poor sands other species, annuals or biennials, lived and seemed to thrive on the disturbance. Among these are two lovely members of the pink family; the Deptford pink and Maiden pink, which once had a foothold at Avon Heath and, with any luck, will one day flourish again. Unlike the heathers, their needs are poorly known and consequently much harder to manage for. They certainly don't appreciate the competition of mature heather or even seem to like well-grazed acid grassland. One theory is that it's possible for the soil to be too acidic. After all, often these areas 'on the edge' were once regularly limed. Could this be the missing component?

Following a suggestion from Natural England, a bold experiment is being attempted at Avon Heath. Trial areas where these plants once grew, but have since vanished, have been limed and chain harrowed to see if any remaining seed bank responds. This is bound to raise eyebrows as it seems totally counter to all heathland management, but the alternative seems a passive acceptance that the plants have been lost. What the outcome may be only time will tell.



©Ian Cross

Celebration of Stone

A whole host of events, activities and exhibitions to celebrate the very substance for which the World Heritage Site was designated the only place in the world of its kind, is taking place this summer. The stone that forms the Site's 95 miles of cliffs captures 185 million years of Earth history and maps three mass extinction events, past climates, and the rise and fall of the dinosaurs.

The fun will include:

- Rock Around the Coast walks
- stone carving courses including those run by Burngate Stone Centre
- festivals like the Fossil Festival
- Performances of new commissions Perpetual Light and Desert Crossings
- activities at museums for example the location of the Cabinet of Curiosities
- exhibitions that will include Earthscapes curated by Sherborne House Arts

MORE INFORMATION

JURASSIC COAST WORLD HERITAGE SITE TEAM

Click www.jurassiccoast.com/arts

Trailway volunteers push on to Stourpaine

Volunteers working with Dorset Countryside Rangers took the first steps toward extending the Trailway from Sturminster Newton to Stourpaine. Over 50 volunteers spent a weekend helping to cut back trees and bushes along the route of the old railway line near Shillingstone.

Giles Nicholson, Senior Ranger for Dorset Countryside said; "Having this many volunteers helping clear back the old railway line shows the public support for the continuation of the Trailway project." It is hoped that this summer, a bridge will be built spanning the River Stour at Stourpaine, allowing Sturminster Newton, Shillingstone and Stourpaine to be connected by a well surfaced trailway perfect for cycling, horse riding and walking.

The route from Sturminster Newton to Shillingstone has proved immensely popular with just over 78,000 recorded journeys along the Trailway in the last year.

MORE INFORMATION

GILES NICHOLSON, DORSET COUNTRYSIDE

Phone 01258 456970



©Giles Nicholson

With high summer under way this is the season to soak-up the sights and sounds of the countryside. Listen out for bird song, buzzing insects and let your eyes feast on the colourful flora. You may even be lucky enough to spot some of our more unusual creatures...

seasonal highlights

Fierce creatures?

Dorset is rightly famous for uniquely being host to all six species of native reptile. Reptiles are defined as cold-blooded, air-breathing vertebrates which move on their bellies or with the help of small, short legs. Thanks to the fabulous fossilised remains of creatures such as ichthyosaurs found along the Jurassic Coast we know that the reptiles of the pre-historic past were fearsome giants.

The evolved reptiles of today however, are much less obvious and certainly far from fierce. Even with a reputation for a venomous bite; adders would rather scarp than strike and attack. Whilst they are our only poisonous snake, adders are not aggressive with more people being hurt or killed by lightning strikes, golf balls and wasp stings!

Many of our reptiles are not only elusive but are decidedly rare; often requiring special habitats to survive. Take heathland for example where sand lizards and smooth snakes lay their eggs in the sandy soils. Heathland once covered vast swathes of Dorset but was considered to be 'wasteland' in the days of Thomas Hardy. Now recognised as internationally valuable habitats, the fragile remnants of heathlands left in Dorset are vital for some reptiles to maintain a sustainable population.

Although dry heathlands make the best wild habitats for reptiles, they can be spotted in semi-natural, less disturbed places such as railway embankments, walls, churchyards and sites with south-facing slopes and open vegetation. A sunny aspect is ideal for these cold-blooded animals which make easy prey for foxes, raptors and badgers when cold and sluggish. Lizards are a favourite meal of the Red-backed shrike. Once warm, a move to a shady spot helps to regulate body temperature as reptiles are unable to sweat.

Populations have declined dramatically alongside the destruction of sandy heathlands for agriculture and building developments. In rural areas changes in farming practices have destroyed the habitat of the Grass snake too.

Given the precarious numbers of many snakes and lizards all British reptiles are protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) and due to their rarity Sand lizards and Smooth snakes are also protected under European law. However, protection in law is not enough by itself and Natural England, supported by organisations such as Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, are initiating recovery programmes to help conserve these rarest of UK reptile species. These conservation plans aim to support populations by managing habitat and providing connecting sites to link populations, reintroduce animals where appropriate, surveying and increasing ecological understanding.

The super six

Grass snake (*Natrix natrix*). Britain's biggest snake averages 120cm in length but can reach well over a metre long. They lay their eggs in June – July; often in rotting vegetation, making compost heaps ideal. The eggs hatch in September and seek long grass in which to live. Grass snakes are dark green-grey with distinctive yellow and black collar markings. They are good swimmers which facilitates the search for their main source of food; frogs, newts and small fish.

Sand lizards (*Lacerta agilis*), can grow to 20cm but are typically around 15cm long. They depend on well-managed heathland or dune habitat for good cover and sandy soils to lay eggs in shallow hollows. Sand lizards consume large quantities of food when it is freely available and will eat most types of insects, worms, slugs but also their own young, if necessary. The males sport striking green sides during the breeding season in early summer. In general Sand lizards are grey-brown with ocellated markings along their backs and two bold dorsal stripes.

Adders (*Vipera berus*); also known as 'vipers' are our only snake with a poisonous bite. As adults they are usually up to 66cm long. It is readily identified thanks to a strong, dark zig-zag pattern the length of the back, although completely black adders have been found. Of all of the UK snakes the adder is the least fussy eater; happily feeding on field voles, mice, lizards, birds, eggs and amphibians. Preferring open ground adders like heathland, open woodland and sea cliffs and give birth to live young during August.

Smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*); thought to be Britain's rarest reptile and is a secretive animal brilliantly camouflaged against the heather around which it entwines when basking. It also likes to hide under stones and logs. Small and slender, the Smooth snake grows to 60-70cm and is grey-brown with black markings on the head and under the eye. Its scales are flat and smooth (unlike those of the Grass snake and Adder whose scales feature a ridge or 'keel' down the middle), giving rise to its name. The young hatch from eggs buried in sandy soil in September. Living on heathland the Smooth snake eats other reptiles and small mammals.

Common lizards (*Lacerta vivipara*) are seen in various shades of brown, grey and green and reach 14cm in length. They like warm, sunny, open sites and although are usually found in dry habitat they oddly have a penchant for boggy wet heaths! Their diets consist of insects, spiders and small snails. They give birth to jet-black live young in August that slowly turn a copper shade for adoption the adult colouration.

And finally ...



Slow down

Slow worms are the gardener's friend; by eating slugs and snails they perform a natural pest control role. These slinky little critters can be seen slithering around compost heaps or hiding out in a quiet corner of the garden but Slow worms are neither 'slow' nor 'worms' and are often overlooked. These legless lizards are shy, wary and partly subterranean making burrows in loose soil and compost heaps.

This is the best time to look for them and August offers the opportunity to see heavily pregnant females as they bask in the sun of the early morning or late afternoon. Favoured sites include bare soil at the base of a hedge or the top of a south-facing bank. The young are born in late August or early September and are ovoviviparous which means that the new Slow worms emerge from soft-egg membranes at birth or within minutes. Eight is a common brood count but there may be as many as 26! The newly born Slow worms look like wriggly needles measuring 70-100mm long and just 3-5mm thick. Youngsters move much faster than adults and swiftly slither into long grass if disturbed.

Slow worms are silver-grey or golden-brown on their upper bodies and black along their sides and bellies. They are different from snakes in that they have eyelids and can blink. However, in common with other lizards and, as their Latin name; *Anguis fragilis* suggests, they can 'eject' their fragile tails when the need arises. This dramatic but effective escape tactic is termed 'autotomy' and is deployed to distract predators when under attack. They can shed their tail section – sometimes as much as a third of their entire body length – which continues to thrash around by reflex nerve action for several minutes before its energy reserve is depleted, giving the Slow worm time to take cover.



©Ken Dolbear

Reptile Fact File

- Reptilian bodies are covered with scales or horny plates
- Reptiles shed their skins at least once a year depending on species, and you may find a discarded, colourless skin in summer months. Shedding or 'sloughing' allows the reptile to grow, and helps dispose of parasites and dirt
- They are cold blooded which means they control their body temperature by getting their heat directly from the sun, rather than from the food they eat
- Snakes and lizards have teeth which are continually replaced throughout their life
- The Adder and the Common lizard give birth to live young, but other reptiles lay eggs
- All British reptiles hibernate, spending the winter in burrows or under logs protected from the cold and predators
- All snakes can eat their prey whole with upper and lower jaws able to move independently and covered with stretchy skin
- Grass snakes often play dead when caught, by rolling on their backs, becoming limp and letting their tongues hang from their mouths

Summer specials

At this time of year you may also see...

Small copper butterflies (*Lycaena phlaeas*) – are flitting around open country sites until September; their upper wings decorated with orange and dark brown.



©Peter Moore

Privet hawkmoth (*Sphinx ligustri*) caterpillars – look on privet and lilac in your garden for these funky bright green caterpillars with purple and white diagonal stripes and a dark tipped horn at the tail end.



©Ken Dolbear

Green woodpeckers (*Picus viridis*) – can be difficult to spot so venture into their favoured deciduous woodlands and listen out for the loud and distinctive 'yaffling' call.



©northeastwildlife.co.uk

Roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) - the smaller of our two native deer, this graceful animal can be glimpsed if lucky, in areas of scrub and woodland.



©Peter Moore

Off the wall

The Common (or European) wall lizard (*Podarcis muralis*) is an introduction to the UK which now has a well-established population on Portland where it thrives among the isle's rocky environment where it can scurry between rock, rubble and buildings.

Although many of the native reptiles we have featured can be hard to find, the Common wall lizard is a more likely bet to spot and are plentiful on Portland.

This small, thin lizard can grow to 20cm long, tends to be brown-grey and may be tinged with green with varying patterns of spots and stripes.



©Ken Dolbear

MORE INFORMATION

AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE CONSERVATION

Phone 01202 391319
Click www.arc-trust.org

URBAN HEATHS PARTNERSHIP

Phone 01202 642787
Click www.dorsetheaths.org.uk

DORSET FOR YOU

Click www.dorsetforyou.com/dorsetheaths

Dorset's Biodiversity

2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity and Dorset must count as one of the UK's most diverse counties for wildlife and landscape.



Byword for biodiversity Wildlife Projects Grants

The words 'biodiversity' and 'Dorset' are practically synonymous, but what makes Dorset so special when it comes to biodiversity?

It all starts with the very rocks beneath our feet. It is the range of geology; or what is termed 'geodiversity', that gives rise to various soil conditions across the county. From the fertile clays of the Blackmore Vale; chalk downlands in the middle and the east of the county; acidic, low nutrient sands that form the heathlands in the south and east to the limestone grassland in coastal areas like those found at **Durlston Country Park**. Each provides a different habitat, sometimes a rather specialised habitat where unusual plant life can get a foothold. Take for example Bog myrtle and interesting little fungi called Devil's matchsticks; both of which do well in the boggy heathland mosaic behind Studland's sand dunes.

In turn, these specialised and diverse habitats are home to a wide range of species. As we discovered in Seasonal Highlights, reptiles rely on heathland and, as our RSPB special feature starting on page 14 reveals, the reedbeds of wetland areas are vital to species such as Bearded tit and Cetti's warbler.

So, our landscape and habitat diversity are the life support of Dorset's biodiversity and this translates into numerous areas that are designated for the protection of wildlife and plants. Dorset is host to around:

- 141 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- 1,260 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNClS)
- 15 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- 49 Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and
- 4 Special Protection Areas (SPAs)/RAMSARs (wetlands of international importance), which covers Chesil and the Fleet, Dorset heathlands, Poole Harbour and the Avon Valley

And this just covers the wildlife; 41% of the county's landscape falls within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the coastline sports three Heritage Coasts and a World Heritage Site!

Some of the best places to appreciate the quality and diversity of the countryside and wildlife are the county's country parks, such as **Avon Heath Country Park**. Having gained a prestigious Green Flag award – which recognises high standards of presentation and management - last year, the Park continues to expand its ecological and visitor horizons. 2009 was quite a year for the Park which saw the launch of its newly revamped visitor centre in the autumn. The Park's habitat management has resulted in most of the site designated as a SSSI. The value of such is borne out in a recent bird survey of 34 heathland sites in east Dorset which highlights the increase in the number of Woodlark, one of the UK's rarer birds, in the Park.

The recent success of the grassland restoration Pastures New Project in Dorset has netted a 'reward grant' from Government. Part of that grant is funding a new environmental project aimed at improving the condition of Dorset's Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNClS). The project will focus on bringing between 40 and 60 SNClS into positive conservation management to maintain or enhance the features of interest of each. These sites face a number of pressures from a lack of management to inappropriate use, and the uncertain impacts of a changing climate.

Based with the Dorset AONB team the project will work closely with the SNCl Project team at Dorset Wildlife Trust. In January this year, Jake Hancock was recruited as Wildlife Projects Officer to deliver grants to improve the management of important wildlife sites in Dorset. Jake has been hard at work ever since and says "The job got off to a good start, with an early commitment of over £8,000 for five sites and discussions with further landowners underway. I am keen to deliver action on the ground and given the clear remit of the grant and eligibility criteria, SNCl managers will find grant approval refreshingly straightforward, and I might add, enjoyable!"

An SNCl at Owermoigne was one of the first to receive a grant, where gorse cutting and fencing enabled the reintroduction of grazing to the valuable acid grassland site. Another grant will improve a wet heath habitat at Wareham by clearing two hectares of rhododendron.



© Jake Hancock/wessexconservationgrazing.co.uk

Places to go

Across the county there are visitor centres and country parks that have something for everyone including numerous events and activities for all as well as remoter areas for those after a solitary walk along the coast and into the countryside. Here are a few to try.

Steamer Point Visitor Centre, Christchurch

Located within Steamer Woods, overlooking Friars Cliff it is the main information point for Christchurch Countryside Service. Tel: 01425 272479

Kimmeridge Marine Centre, Kimmeridge Bay

Explore the rich marine life of the rocky ledges that run across the bay and the wider marine environment within the Purbeck Voluntary Marine Nature Reserve. Tel: 01929 481044

Chesil Beach Centre, Weymouth

Find out about the Chesil Beach & Fleet Nature Reserve, one of the most important wetland sites in Britain. View the prolific bird life of the tidal and semi-tidal waters through the centre's telescopes. Tel: 01305 760579

Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre, Charmouth World famous for fossils the centre also highlights the rich marine environment contained within Lyme Regis and the Charmouth Voluntary Marine Nature Reserve. Tel: 01297 560772

Avon Heath Country Park, Ringwood

580 acres of valuable heathland and woodland is managed as a partnership between Dorset Countryside and the RSPB. The visitor centre contains information and displays and the Rangers offer walks and events throughout the year. Tel: 01425 478082

Moors Valley Country Park, Ashley Heath

Managed by the East Dorset Countryside Service, the Park covers some 750 acres of woodland and lakes and offers plenty to see and do. Tel: 01425 470721

Upton Country Park, Poole

Run by the Borough of Poole, the Park consists of woodland, parkland, salt marsh, gardens and farmland habitats by the shores of Poole Harbour. There is a bird hide with disabled access and a 'hide screen' suitable for wheelchair users. Tel: 01202 672625

Durlston Country Park, Swanage

The cliff top location offers magnificent views and contains cliffs inhabited by sea birds, wildflower meadows and woodlands of great nature conservation interest. The visitor centre houses the Durlston Marine Project. Tel: 01929 424443

River scene

Water is an undeniably important resource. One that may become scarcer as the climate changes into the future. Whether you are a farmer or gardener, water is the life source of our green and pleasant land and is necessary for all life. It is crucial to the survival of our wildlife and a diverse range of creatures at that; from mammals to crustaceans. You can be sure that the rivers and streams of Dorset are home to some special animals and plants.

But our rivers and streams play a much larger role than purely survival. They shape our landscape, divide valleys and dictated the pattern of villages and settlements established in past times. Historically and culturally the county's waterscape is fundamental to life in Dorset. The River Frome gave rise to the characteristic landscape feature still visible from the working of streamside pasture as water meadows. The practice provided early grass for grazing sheep and additional lambs for the market. This had a significant positive economic impact in the county for over 200 years from the 1700s up to the mid 1970s.

Today, people are still drawn to spend their leisure time near water and the value of rivers in our lives has even been highlighted and recognised in a recent report into the provision of 'green infrastructure' in the south east region of the county.



A partnership of local authorities and environmental organisations are looking at how to plan for future green infrastructure in an area that has been earmarked for major housing development. The idea behind green infrastructure is to provide an enhanced environment for local people, visitors and local business and increase the natural environment's resilience to development. This is in-line with Government policy, which notes that when planning development local authorities should take into account '.... existing and new opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity'. More specifically the report's section on recreation points to a number of possibilities to enhance the experience in relation to rivers and lakes including:

- the provision of access links to Longham Lakes, south of Ferndown for bird watching
- increased angling availability on the River Stour by giving greater access to the riverbank and associated lakes
- the promotion of environmentally sensitive water-sports along the River Stour, such as 'wild swimming' spots
- join forces with Natural England and their promotion of the idea of 'blue gyms' in Dorset
- consultation with angling clubs and canoe clubs
- ensure greater provision of facilities for fishing and boat moorings
- support proposals for commercial water-sports providers for boat hire and fishing expeditions
- the possibility of a visitor centre along the Stour as an education resource and facility for boat and equipment hire



©Both Images Mark Simons

River rest & play

So, what can you do to experience the rivers of Dorset? Here is a rundown of the river scenes in the county; from quiet tranquil riverbanks to picnic or stroll along to fishing and boating opportunities.

River Allen – this pure chalk stream is a tributary of the Stour that rejoins the river near Wimborne; it runs through some of the county's finest countryside for a total of 13 miles.

River Frome – rising on chalk near Evershot, it flows through Dorchester and eventually to Wareham where it confluences with the River Piddle in Poole Harbour. The Mill Stream in Dorchester provides a peaceful diversion just off the busy town centre.

River Stour – stretching for around 65 miles the Stour rises in Wiltshire at Stourhead Gardens, passes through the Blackmore Vale before entering the sea at Christchurch with a number of notable tributaries along the way including the River Tarrant near Spetisbury. A hotspot for quality fishing the Stour is renowned among anglers everywhere.

River Piddle & west Dorset streams – include the River Brit, Asker, Bride and Char. These are quite short, steep water courses with good populations of brown and sea trout. The River Piddle rises at four major springs near Alton St. Pancras and finishes in Poole Harbour. This stream offers excellent fishing for brown trout, salmon and sea trout and coarse fish in its lower reaches. The Environment Agency operates a salmon and sea trout rod fishery.

Wareham Royalty – covers the tidal beds of the rivers Frome and Piddle as they pass through Wareham enroute into Poole Harbour. Recreational fun includes boating, public boat trips, fishing, walking, bird watching and canoeing with disabled access from the quay in Wareham and along the south bank of the River Frome. Boat moorings and rod fishing licences are available from the Environment Agency. A number of footpaths along the riversides offer visitors wonderful views over fantastic floodplains and reedbeds of this internationally significant conservation site.

Moors Valley Country Park – near Ringwood, issues day tickets to fish for pike, roach, dace and perch, from its visitor centre.

The Winterbournes streams of Dorset

Dorset is rich in wetlands, with 5% of England's reedbeds and some stunning rivers and streams. Other important wetland habitats include wet grasslands, fens and marshes. Wetland wildlife includes the elusive otter, the rare water vole, trout, salmon and freshwater crayfish, plants like water crowfoot and many birds and invertebrates. As well as supporting a wealth of wildlife, rivers and wetlands add much to the landscape beauty of the area.

Some of Dorset's rivers are particularly special as they are chalk streams – a globally rare habitat. Winterbourne streams are a very rare habitat and Dorset is home to a significant number of them. The Dorset Winterbournes Project was set up to research, conserve and promote these poorly understood streams.

Winterbourne streams are mostly fed by ground water held in the chalk rather than surface water. The water bubbles up in springs which feed the streams. As the water table drops during the summer, the springs dry up and the streams gradually stop flowing. Only when winter rainfall recharges the groundwater supplies will the streams flow again - which is why they are known as 'winterbournes'. Because the water has been filtered through the chalk, it is crystal clear and stays at a fairly constant temperature, making it an ideal home for wildlife.

Looking after the Winterbournes

The ecological value of a winterbourne stream relies on responsible water use and good management by landowners and gardeners. Soil or pollution from nutrients contained in soil running into the stream is a risk to most watercourses and needs to be considered when planning crop management or mowing grass next to the stream.

On chalk soils, pesticides and nutrients can easily get into the ground water through the free-draining soils. These risks can be minimised through good practice management for any type of land adjoining a winterbourne stream, be it a farm or a garden. One option could be to consider using natural alternatives to pesticides and other harmful pollutants.

A wildlife survey card was created by the Winterbournes Project team for local residents to record of the number, variety and location of wildlife they see along the winterbourne streams. The survey card includes images of the winterbourne wildlife and a map to mark their location – it is a great way for children and adults to find out more about local wildlife.

The results are to be sent back to the project team to be collated and passed onto the Dorset Environmental Records Centre. The results should show if wildlife travels along the streams or stays in one place, and where the biggest or smallest populations of certain species are found. They will also show where there are undesirable species such as Himalayan balsam or mink which invade and destroy the native wildlife. The results received so far include sightings of water vole, kingfisher, Little egret, mayfly, frogs and water crowfoot.



Common Frog

©Ken Dobson



Mayfly

©northeastwildlife.co.uk



Little egret

©Peter Moore

Winterbourne wildlife

Winterbourne streams have a regular, annual pattern of alternating dry and flowing periods. These flow patterns create extreme environments for invertebrates and as a result only a few specialist species can thrive. Some invertebrates which are likely to be found in winterbourne streams include the larvae of caddis flies, mayflies, stoneflies and crustaceans including the freshwater shrimp and water hoglouse. One species which can survive these extreme environments is a rare mayfly called *Paraleptophlebia wernerii* which hatches into larvae when the winterbourne begins to flow. They grow into adults and forage as terrestrial flies before the winterbourne dries up. The adults then mate and lay drought resistant eggs in the dry river bed that can survive until the winterbourne flows again.

Other species found in winterbourne streams are adapted to living in damp and semi-aquatic habitats. Examples of such invertebrates include the diving beetle *Agabus biguttatus*, which inhabits gravel beds in streams, especially winterbournes. The adults of these beetles retreat into the gravel in summer when the winterbourne stops flowing.

Studies have been carried out on the River Winterbourne and South Winterbourne River over the past few years and both winterbourne streams have supported rare invertebrates including the mayfly *Paraleptophlebia wernerii*.



Kingfisher

©northeastwildlife.co.uk

Flowing into the future

The Winterbourne Project has been running since February 2005 and was first piloted in the River Winterbourne area. The success of the project was recognised at a national conference on chalk streams last year and now, plans are in place to develop a wider Dorset Wild Rivers programme using the Winterbournes a model for action.

Funding and delivery of the overall project has been co-ordinated by the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) team. Other partners involved include Environment Agency, Natural England, Wessex Water, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Dorset Countryside Service, Dorset County Council's Historic Environment Team and North Dorset District Council.

Tales from the riverbank

If there is one countryside scene that is best enjoyed on a hazy summer day it has to be a trip to the riverside. River corridors provide a vital lifeline for species; some make the soft sandy banks their home, others navigate whole stretches in search of food and mates. Many of these creatures are among the UK's most endangered wildlife and this, coupled with a naturally timid nature, mean that you are probably unaware of the amazing animals, birds, reptiles and fish that may be close by and practically under your feet! To catch a glimpse of a resplendent kingfisher as it flashes along the river or a scurrying water vole you will need patience, quiet and luck!

Water vole patrol

An independent survey of the UK carried out by the Vincent Wildlife Trust shows that overall numbers of water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*) are declining. However, in Dorset the population is in reasonable shape and will remain so as long as their habitat is looked after and maintained. The numbers of water vole took a massive hit when mink were introduced into the countryside. Water voles are now fully protected under UK law and are benefiting from a bid by the Dorset Wildlife Trust to control mink in the south west.

Water voles are vegetarians who build complex burrows in riverbanks with at least one submerged entrance. They are good swimmers at the surface and underwater and will dive into the water if they detect danger approaching.

It is hoped that this year the Mill Stream in Dorchester will see water vole habitat creation on the urban fringe, similar schemes such as one in Salisbury city centre have proved successful.



©Graham Chase



©northeastwildlife.co.uk

Clash of the crayfish

Native white clawed crayfish (*Astacus pallipes*) used to be common and widespread but in Dorset can now only be found in four riparian areas and are considered endangered.

Reaching up to 40mm in length they require very specific habitat conditions which are largely determined by geology and water quality. They favour water that is alkaline, relatively hard, fast flowing and clean with a pebbly riverbed that creates well-oxygenated eddies, where they can live among the vegetation and hide beneath stones.

These freshwater crayfish are sensitive to disturbance and pollution from which their numbers have declined. They also suffer from a fungus called crayfish plague which has proved to be a big killer, as has their nemesis; introduced non-native crayfish species.

Otter facts

Protected by both European and UK legislation, otters (*Lutra lutra*) are our largest wild carnivore ranging between 1 and 1.3 metres long and up to 10kg in weight. Otters like a varied diet which can include water voles, frogs, crayfish eels and sea urchins.

Otters suffered badly from persecution with numbers falling in the 1950s due to hunting which was not banned until 1978. Their serious decline was also hastened by the use of pesticides; again in the 1950s, which was not addressed until 1982. Modern day threats to the otter population include habitat degradation and destruction and road traffic - although here innovative solutions including otter tunnels and ledges by bridges are proving successful - and illegal netting and snares.

Males range widely; between 30-40km and are very territorial meaning they need plenty of space and suitable habitat in order to accommodate a healthy population. Otters are beautifully adapted to an amphibious lifestyle, can dive for several minutes at a time and are at home in coastal waters, lakes and rivers. They are often spotted in the most unlikely places including sightings on Weymouth seafloor, on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour and passing through urban areas.



©Peter Moore



©Ken Dolbear

River ready for spawning salmon

Salmon and brown trout are expected to spawn again on the Upper Frome, following river improvements last autumn. Surveys had confirmed the fears of fishermen and conservationists that fish were no longer spawning on the 1km stretch of the River Frome between Nunnery Mead and Samways Bridge, near the Millennium Green at Frampton. The Upper Frome Enhancement Scheme has been undertaken by Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT), with the co-operation of all seven owners of land or fishing rights on this key part of the river, as well as the Frampton Millennium Green Trust. The scheme has been funded by the Environment Agency, the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Sustainable Development Fund and the Wild Trout Trust.

The work, undertaken by contractors and volunteers, has improved gravels on the river bed, which had become too compacted for fish to spawn. They now provide a suitable site for fish nests ('redds') and for aquatic invertebrates. Current deflectors have also been placed in the river to improve water flow, reduce erosion of the banks and at the same time provide further invertebrate habitat in the woody debris used for the deflectors.

Kingfishers will also benefit from new fishing posts and protection of a nesting bank from erosion. Work continued over the winter to thin the tree canopy on the south bank to let in more light on the shallows, allowing aquatic plants to grow and provide food and shelter.

Dorset Wildlife Trust is also working with the Environment Agency on an investigation of the fish pass at Nunnery Mead to see if it can be modified to allow more migratory fish to access the upper stretches of the Frome.

DWT Rivers and Wetlands Conservation Officer, Sarah Williams, said: "This has been an excellent example of everybody working together to make the Frome better for wildlife. The improvements to this small part of one of Dorset's iconic chalk rivers will benefit the whole river and we hope to see the return of spawning salmon and brown trout this winter."

The river improvements can be seen at Dorset Wildlife Trust's Nunnery Mead nature reserve near Maiden Newton or at Harry's Wood at the western end of Frampton.

Alien invaders

Non-native plants and animals present an interesting and sometimes quite thorny issue. As we have seen in Seasonal Highlights the introduction of species from abroad, such as the Common wall lizard is not always a bad thing. These migrants are often colourful and do little, if anything, to harm our native wildlife. However, more often than not there is a price to be paid when the foreign species becomes so successful it out-competes native flora or fauna.

Take for example, the success of the grey squirrel, brought to our shores from North America in the 19th century; they are so at home here in Britain that the native red squirrel is now a much less common sight. The red squirrel requires coniferous tree cover to thrive, whereas the grey squirrels are adapted to a variety of woodland types and where they have entered into coniferous or mixed woodlands they have triumphed.

In terms of riparian habitat, the numbers of water vole declined dramatically as a result of escapee mink farmed for their fur. Water voles are not the only river species under attack from unwelcome alien invaders. The UK's native crayfish is well and truly outnumbered by four non-native species of crayfish; one from Europe and the others originating from America.

But it's not just animals; plants too are taking over great swathes of Britain's riverbanks, one of the worst alien offenders is Himalayan balsam.

Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens balsamifera*)

Himalayan balsam is a garden escapee and a rapid coloniser. It is an annual plant which grows to over two metres high in just one summer and has white to pink sweet scented flowers between June and September. The mature seed pods explode when touched, sending the seeds up to seven metres away from the plant - often the seeds land in the river and travel downstream to colonise a new stretch of river bank. If left to grow, the plant can become so dense that grasses and other native plants are shaded out and subsequently die. This leaves the river banks bare in autumn and winter and prone to erosion from higher river flows.

Volunteers have worked on the River Winterbourne to hand pull the Himalayan balsam from the stream. Ten large sacks were filled with the invasive plant from Winterbourne Stickland alone; the plants are then composted. Controlling Himalayan balsam is easy, but time consuming. It can be controlled in a number of ways including by hand or by grazing. If a winterbourne stream runs through your garden or property and Himalayan balsam is present, you can do your bit to control this invader by hand pulling the plants over the summer and composting or burning them.

MORE INFORMATION

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STOUR VALLEY WAY

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RINGWOOD & DISTRICT ANGLERS ASSOCIATION

Click www.ringwoodfishing.co.uk

MOORS VALLEY COUNTRY PARK

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Click www.moors-valley.co.uk

THE DORSET WINTERBOURNES PROJECT

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DORSET WILDLIFE TRUST

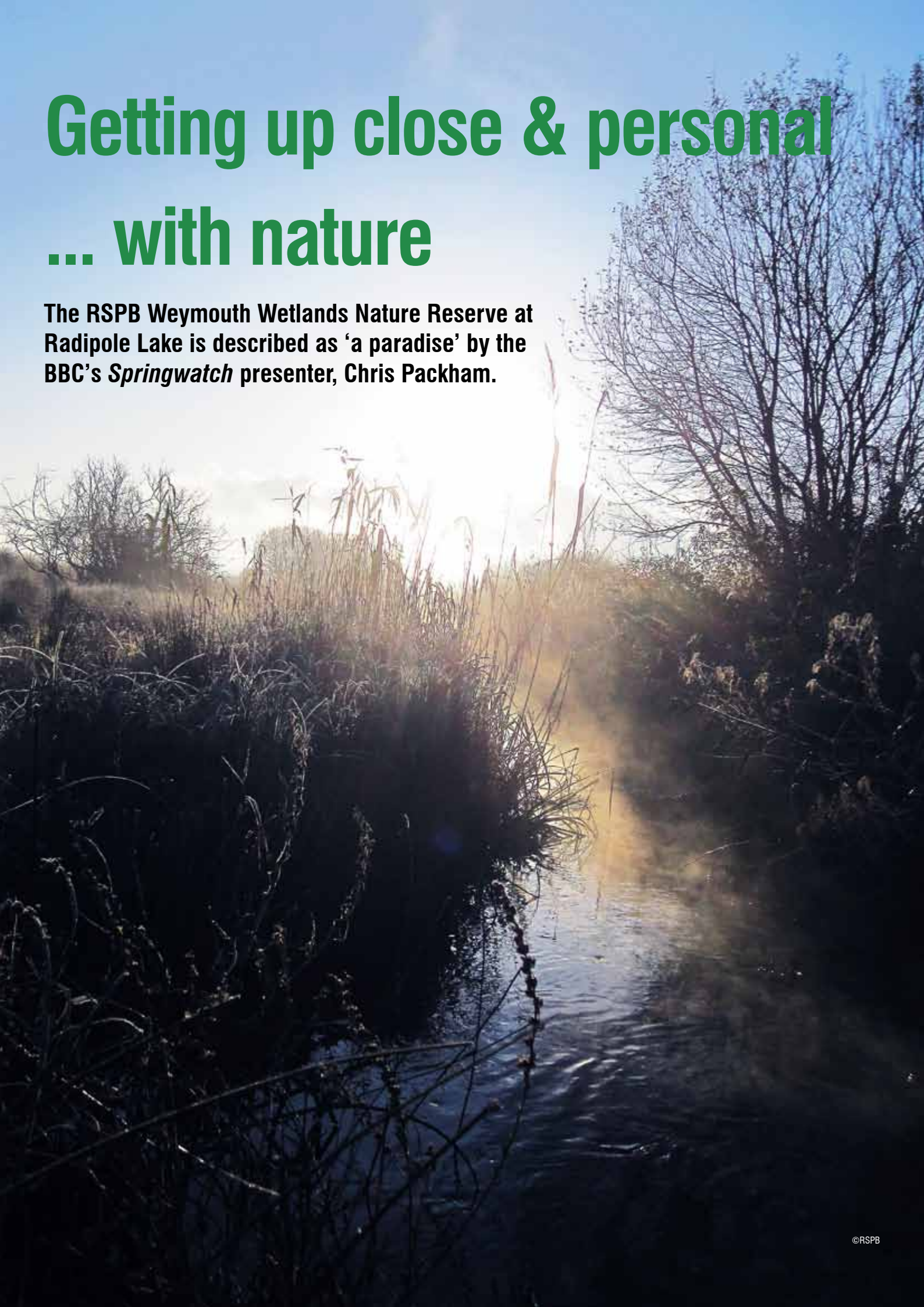
Phone 01305 264620
Click www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org

DORSET ENVIRONMENTAL RECORDS CENTRE

Click www.derc.org.uk

Getting up close & personal ... with nature

The RSPB Weymouth Wetlands Nature Reserve at Radipole Lake is described as 'a paradise' by the BBC's *Springwatch* presenter, Chris Packham.



Fed by the River Wey, the **Weymouth Wetlands Nature Reserve**, at **Radipole Lake**, represents the bustling town's tranquil heart, a peaceful oasis in the middle of a busy tourist resort, just five minutes' walk from the beach and town centre.

Following the completion of the first phase of a two-year restoration project at the reserve, it is also set to become one of the best urban sites in the country for people to get up close and personal with nature.

Radipole Lake has a sister reserve; **Lodmoor**, off the Preston Road. Together, they host more than 1,000 species of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, fish, butterflies, moths and wild flowers. That's not counting the wide range of smaller insects, and the list just keeps growing. The restoration project means the transformation of the reserve is now well underway, from roadside café to first-class hotel and restaurant - all for wildlife.

Work already completed is about 60 per cent of the total, which will create or restore around 6km of ditches and nearly a hectare of open water. These are the biggest changes the reserve has seen since the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds took it over in the mid-1970s and will create the best mosaic of wetland habitats the site has seen in living memory.

Natural England is funding the work, with £185,000 for the first two phases, which will also improve public access to the site, and another £500,000 for further restoration and maintenance over the next 10 years.

The reserve manager is Nick Tomlinson who comments, "Food and homes are what wildlife need. We reckon we're now at the two or three stars mark in terms of quality of both and by the end of the second phase later this year, we should have five stars. The reserve will be a premier destination for migrating and breeding birds and other wildlife as well as year-round accommodation for our resident creatures and a great experience for people."

Weymouth Wetlands is already home to bearded tits and a range of warblers and wildfowl. Last year, it also had the first breeding Marsh harriers in Dorset for 50 years. When the restoration work is complete, the reserve will become even more of a biodiversity hotspot. As well as providing better feeding and breeding areas for existing residents, it is hoped to attract new breeders, including the UK's most threatened species; the Bittern, and other rarities such as the Spotted crane and Garganey.

Other creatures are thriving too, including water voles and bats - with around 50 per cent of the UK's bat species recorded here, including the rare Nathusius's pipistrelle - butterflies and moths and a whole host of other wonderful insects and plants. And otters recently returned to breed on the site for the first time in more than 30 years.



©Andy Hay / rspb-images.com

The RSPB also wants to make sure that human visitors benefit from the works, enhancing their experience, whether they're dedicated birdwatchers or people who just want a quiet walk in the countryside. The visitor centre in the Swannery car park at Radipole Lake is already a hive of activity, offering everything from hot drinks to all manner of bird-related products, with family events and guided walks and enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff and volunteers on hand to give information and advice.

Improvements will upgrade footpaths for wheelchair users and people with mobility problems and provide raised viewing platforms giving better views across the reserve and platforms for pond dipping and duck feeding.

"We want people to have a great experience and to be able to get up close and personal with wildlife," says Nick Tomlinson. "The Environment Agency has built an otter holt on site. We've also built a special artificial wall for Sand martins, the first of its kind in Dorset, where we hope they'll stay and breed in the spring. We'll be installing cameras at both of these places and elsewhere on the reserve so that we can beam live footage back to our visitor centre – our very own spring and autumn watches."



©Allan Neilson / rspb-images.com

The reserve currently brings in about £1.5 million a year to the local economy and it is expected that the restoration and improvements will at least double that. Nick adds: "Restored areas have now 'greened up' and are looking amazing. The end result is, without doubt, worth all the investment and will leave a significant legacy for generations to come."

Chris Packham echoes this: "Weymouth Wetlands is a great asset to the area and a brilliantly placed reserve for people."

".. a premier destination for migrating and breeding birds and other wildlife..."



©RSPB

Managing threatened reedbeds

Once common throughout the UK, reedbeds like those at Weymouth Wetlands are now Britain's most threatened wildlife habitat.

Human activities – chiefly drainage for agriculture and land reclamation – have caused their dramatic decline, with as much as 40 per cent being lost in the last half of the 20th century. As a result, the diverse wildlife populations dependent upon reed have also declined.

Thankfully, with just a few exceptions, Britain's reedbeds are now protected. They are unlike any other kind of habitat because they are transient and ephemeral. In prehistoric times, they were created and destroyed by natural events like floods but preserving them in today's landscape requires constant management. Without it, they would dry out, resulting in 'succession' vegetation replacing reedbeds and displacing the birds and animals that depend upon them for survival.

One of the main management practices the RSPB uses at Weymouth Wetlands is annual reed cutting on a long rotational cycle. This promotes differing age structures within the reedbed to accommodate the varied requirements of different birds and other wildlife. It helps to reduce the rate at which the reedbed would naturally dry out and ensures that reed remains the dominant species. It is also hoped to re-introduce the practice of cutting reed for thatching within the next five years.

The RSPB owns 12 per cent of the UK's total reedbeds and has set itself the target of doubling the area it manages by 2030. It is currently in the middle of a two-year project called **Bringing Reedbeds to Life**, surveying insects, fish and other wildlife to try to work out how they can be better protected.

There is such small area of reedbed left in the UK – if we lose it; many of the species it supports would become extinct in this country.

Here's how the hard work has paid off...
Before



Both images ©RSPB

... a stunning transformation!
After



Both images ©RSPB

Star species

The range of star species at the Weymouth Wetlands Reserve is wide and varied. Here is selection of the wildlife wonders that await you!

Bittern - one of the rarest and most threatened of the UK's birds, up to four Bittern now over-winter at Weymouth Wetlands. A combination of persecution and loss of its reedbed habitat rendered it extinct in the UK in the 1880s and it again almost disappeared as recently as the 1990s.

Marsh harrier - last year, a pair successfully raised three young, a first for Dorset for nearly 50 years and the first ever on the reserve. There are under 400 breeding pairs in the UK, making it rarer than the Golden eagle and Weymouth Wetlands is the most urban breeding site in the country.

Bearded tit - this is an iconic, colourful little bird, rare in England and entirely dependant on large reedbeds. People come from far and wide to see them as the reserve is home to at least 40 per cent of all the Bearded tits in Dorset.

Cetti's warbler - an unobtrusive warbler, the Cetti's is confined to the south of England and Wales, with very particular habitat needs in marshes and reedbeds. It is very difficult to see but Weymouth Wetlands is a prime spot to hear its explosive and distinctive song.

Otter - these animals were in massive decline around 30 years ago, due to persecution and loss of habitat. Since then, they have made a steady recovery and there are now signs that they are breeding at Weymouth Wetlands for the first time in decades.

Nathusius's pipistrelle - only discovered to be breeding in the UK in the last decade, this small bat is still very rare. Two years ago, it was found to be feeding and courting on newly restored ditches at Weymouth Wetlands.

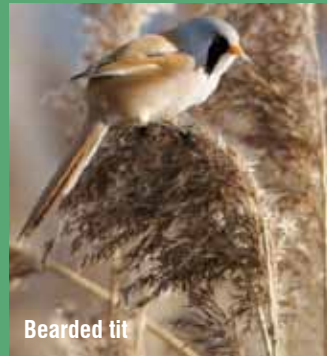
Golden dock - very rare in the south west, this lovely plant is again flowering on the ditch edges after an absence of nearly 50 years. Weymouth Wetlands is the only place in Dorset where it can be seen.



Bittern



Marsh harrier



Bearded tit



Cetti's warbler



Otter

Funder's delight

Natural England is funding the entire restoration project. John Stobart is the organisation's site advisor for Weymouth Wetlands and stated:

"We are absolutely delighted with the progress of the work. It has taken a fairly uniform-looking site and transformed it into a wonderful mosaic of waterways and ditches, stuffed with wildlife. The reserve is looking fantastic now; on its way to becoming one of the country's finest urban wetlands."

It is breathtaking to think that within the heart of the town, visitors can experience exceptional creatures such as otters, bats and water voles as well as very rare birds like the Bittern and Marsh harriers."

".. a significant legacy for generations to come."

Reserve Manager; Nick Tomlinson



MORE INFORMATION

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Blog site www.rspb.org.uk/community/groups/weymouthwetlands/default.aspx

Walk, read, take part

Fitting nicely with our biodiversity, riverscape and RSPB reedbed restoration stories are a few highlights of the season's events, news of an exciting publication showcasing the vast range of species to be found at one of the county's premier country parks; Durlston, and a wander around the riverside at Wareham.

Terns, toads & Tardibears - the Durlston 'Black Book'

An amazing new work, published this year highlights the rich wildlife of **Durlston National Nature Reserve**.

The 'Black Book' is the culmination of more than 30 years of wildlife recording at Durlston Country Park. It provides a snapshot of the Park's flora and fauna, with more than 4,000 species recorded. Records include 413 species of wildflower, 261 species of bird - that's 47% of all species recorded in Britain - and 34 species of breeding butterflies; to name just a few.

Although birds, plants and butterflies are among the best recorded groups, the less obvious species haven't been forgotten. From fungi like the Scurfy twiglet, to Lesnes earwig, the Wrinkled snail or the Swollen-thighed beetle, years of records by Rangers, volunteers and visiting experts have been drawn together to create a unique picture of one of the country's best sites for wildlife.

The book has also revealed a few surprising facts such as in 30 years, a hedgehog has yet to be spotted on the Park, and has helped identify areas where further research is needed - any Tardibear experts out there, please get in touch!

The book will provide an invaluable resource, to help the Rangers balance the often conflicting needs of different species and over 250,000 visitors a year. It should help to identify species which are threatened or declining, so that management work can be carried out to protect them.

Excerpts from the Black Book can be read on-line on the Durlston website (www.durlston.co.uk), or pop into the Visitor Centre if you'd like to read all 468 pages!



Both images ©Mark Simons

Tumbling terns at RSPB Lodmoor

Terns are fantastic species to watch. They are vocal, acrobatic and very elegant flyers. Lodmoor is a superb place to watch them raising their families. July is the time when the chicks are getting larger and start to explore their surroundings; some might even be attempting their first flights.

The RSPB has created special islands at Lodmoor for the terns to nest on but for years they didn't nest there. But eventually they decided that Lodmoor was a great place to nest and the colony has grown year on year. A second island was installed and in 2003, the two tern islands were enlarged further and now have a thriving colony of Common terns.

These migrant birds travel vast distances across the world. In fact a tern species has the longest migration distance of any bird. An Arctic tern that had a uniquely numbered ring placed on its leg on the Farne Islands in the north east of England was recovered just three months later in Australia!

So come along to see the long distance travellers in all their glory at RSPB Lodmoor on **Sunday 11th July**.



©Steve Bennett

MORE INFORMATION

10am - 12pm

Meet at the Lodmoor Car Park

£3 for non RSPB members, £1.50 for members

Phone Visitor Centre on 01305 778313

Riverside Ramble

The **Wareham Two Rivers Walks** offer a number of route options and the chance to see a variety of landscapes and wildlife.

The wetlands and flood plains around Wareham support a rich and diverse ecology, making the area of particular conservation value and international importance.

Here the River Frome and the River piddle flow into Poole Harbour and in one walk you can take in the rivers, reedbeds, flood plains, salt marshes and mudflats and the range of plant and animal life that inhabit these environments.

In the summer the area is a-buzz with insects like Pondskaters, Whirligig beetles and beautiful dragonflies such as the Banded demoiselle and Ruddy darter which are on the wing from June to September. There is also the chance to see elusive reptiles and amphibians including Grass snakes, Slow worms, frogs and toads.

Among the mammals that call the riverbanks home are water vole and otters and you will often see deer quietly grazing in Wareham Meadows. There is also an abundance of bird life to keep an eye out for including Water rail, Reed bunting, Water snipe, kingfishers and curlews.

For those wanting a short stroll or requiring a flat route the Priory Meadow, opposite the quay, has a surfaced path from where you can look out across the wavering reeds, use the hide to quietly watch for birds, deer and other wildlife of the marshy grasslands, at any time of year.

Just outside the Priory Meadow is a small open-air performance space where entertainment including story telling takes place. There really is something for everyone with walking, angling, bird watching, boat hire and sailing all on offer nearby.



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MORE INFORMATION

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WAREHAM & DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT TRUST

Click www.wddt.org.uk

WILTS & DORSET BUS COMPANY

Phone 01202 673555

Click www.wdabus.co.uk

Autumn Bird Week 28th August - 5th September

The Dorset bird week events take place every spring and autumn and are a week-long series of walks and talks that showcase the county's colourful avian life. Led by some of Dorset's top birders, under whose guidance the week promises the opportunity to see some real highlights.

Full details of all the week's activities are listed in the Events' Guide (centre pages), but here is a taster of what's on offer:

- **There's much birding on the marsh;** on Sunday 29 August join this guided jaunt around Stanpit Marsh, with an expert from the Christchurch Harbour Ornithological Group
- **Birds of Ferrybridge;** on Thursday 2 September come along to this reknown bird site to watch waders and migrants



©Peter Moore

meander

Dorset is a county of outstanding natural beauty, with rolling hills, market towns and picturesque villages. It is famous for its craggy coastline and pebbled beaches which stretch from Lyme Regis in the west to Highcliffe in the east.

Dorset and East Devon's coast became England's first natural World Heritage Site in 2001 because of its unique geology.

So with a little help from this magazine and the accompanying Walks and Events Guide booklet, you will find plenty to enjoy in Dorset this summer.

This publication can be made available in audio tape, large print and Braille on request.

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