

# Biodiversity Training Project News and events

newsletter 3 – February 2010



The Biodiversity Training Project is a 5 year project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Field Studies Council. Our aims are to enhance, encourage and promote biological recording amongst volunteers in Shropshire and the wider region by the provision of training to volunteers, recording and community groups

## Welcome to the final countdown!

“It’s the final countdown – der-der der der, der der der der der” – so the cheesy piece of Euro-pop goes and as we enter into the final year of the Biodiversity Training Project maybe we can reflect on those words, left to us by Joey Tempest of the band Europe. Or maybe Sinatra’s “regrets, I have a few, but then again too few to mention” – is more your cup of tea? Whichever, we hope that our final year will be full of fun and inspiration. We look forward to welcoming you onto our training and recording events, as first time attendees or regulars. You will find our 2010 events list at the back of this newsletter, which I hope you will enjoy reading. Events book up quickly so please get in touch if you would like to reserve a place.

I would once more like to thank everyone who has contributed so far and thank all volunteers, steering group members, tutors and helpers who continue to make this such a great Project.

If you would like further details about the Project, or to book on our events, then please get in touch.

Pete Boardman – Biodiversity Training Project Officer



Rain drops on The Long Mynd (Pete Boardman)



Raft Spider *Dolomedes fimbriatus* at Fenn’s, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses NNR (Pete Boardman)



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## *Improving skills - Annie Hazlehurst writes*

“For me biodiversity training started at the beginning of the programme in 2006. As a Shropshire Wildlife Trust volunteer I needed to know what was going on around me and the BTP seemed to be a good way of doing that. I think this is important because greater understanding makes for a more effective volunteer. Year on year my identification skills have improved, and that improvement is due to the goals that I have set myself and the courses I have attended in order to achieve these goals. The biodiversity courses have played a very important part in that progress!

I sometimes feel that volunteers don't always get the acknowledgement that they deserve, however the biodiversity programme does acknowledge their value by providing courses to improve their id skills. The programme achieves this by employing superb tutors and providing interesting and appropriate venues. On each course I have met people that I have seen on other courses, and not only do I feel that my skills have improved but it is obvious that theirs have too.

There has never been an occasion when I've felt embarrassed by my lack of knowledge and this is mainly due to the teaching skills of the tutors and the attitude of the other students. We are all so keen to learn!

I am now a member of a group of Saturday volunteers who are working on Llyncllys Common, a Shropshire Wildlife Trust reserve in the Oswestry Hills. We've been working together for over 2 years and all our hard work is starting to pay dividends. In 2009 we submitted plant, butterfly, bird, dragonfly and newt surveys to the Trust. Interestingly most of the volunteers attend the biodiversity courses. So thank you Pete and your biodiversity team!!!!!!”

### *A partnership in learning*

As well as our own courses we are happy to highlight other courses that our tutors are running. Ruth Dawes and Mark Duffell are leading a course on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> July looking at the aquatic plants of the Montgomery Canal, whilst Mark is leading a trip to explore the flora of Snowdonia and the Welsh coastline of Anglesey, also in July. These courses are available through Keele University and more information can be found at [www.keele.ac.uk](http://www.keele.ac.uk). The University of Birmingham continue to offer a great range of quality day courses held at The Gateway Arts and Education Centre in Shrewsbury run by Sarah Whild and a variety of other tutors. Further details can be found by contacting Linda Marsh on 01743 355137 or through the University of Birmingham biosciences department webpage at [www.biosciences.bham.ac.uk](http://www.biosciences.bham.ac.uk)



Photo : Annie Hazlehurst identifying a rush on Chris Walker's sedge and rush day (Pete Boardman)

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A Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa* makes an appearance during Kat Parkes dragonfly identification day for the Whitchurch Water Vole Group (Malcolm Monie)

## *Not just what is advertised?*

As well as the events listed at the back of this newsletter the Project has run, or funded a number of other courses each year in association with recording groups and community groups. During 2009 we helped out with funding for Fiona Gomersall and Tess Pearson to deliver plant identification training to volunteers in the Upper Clun area of south Shropshire. Similarly Leo Smith led several bird identification courses in the same area, targeting Lapwing and Curlew distribution, amongst other projects. I was able to work with the Ironbridge Green Gym to examine some of the green spaces in which they regularly work to improve the environment whilst Kat Parkes led a dragonfly event for the Whitchurch Water Vole Group.

## *“One day like this”*

...So wrote Guy Garvey from Elbow in what was probably one of the best pop songs from 2008. I could apply the same sentiment to the event that John Handley ran in 2009 at Alveley Country Park near Bridgnorth – where I witnessed volunteers working together to tackle the identification of the bounteous botany of the site. Many of the attendees were beginners or had only just started to look at plants at the start of the Project. Some joined mid-way through, whilst others were new to botany and the Project. During the day the different ability levels drifted into groups where beginners were accompanied by mentors and overseen by John. It was fantastic to watch and see how far some volunteers had come with their botanical skills in the past couple of years. This is of course testament to their hard work and persistence. *“so throw those curtains wide – one day a year like this will see me right!”*



Photo: Volunteers assess the botany of Alveley Country Park near Bridgnorth (Pete Boardman)



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## *Bite-sized botany*

During 2010 we hope to run a number of evening botanical sessions in and around Shrewsbury with regular tutor Mark Duffell. Depending upon interest and opportunity we hope to run between 5 and 10 of these events. They will take place from 6.30 pm until around 9.00 – 9.30 pm (depending upon light conditions and time of year) and will be aimed at beginners and improvers who wish to get more field experience with recording the unexpected. Many of our courses have been and continue to be themed towards a certain group of plants – giving people the opportunity to learn about this group on the day. The idea of these courses is to give people experience of going to a site and recording what is there. All records (once compiled and verified by Mark) will go to the Shropshire Botanical Society and ultimately end up in the Shropshire Environmental Data Network (SEDN) database. As described elsewhere in this newsletter, the SEDN is vital in providing information to planners, naturalists, recording societies and the public in Shropshire.

If you wish to find out more about these events or register for them – please let the Project Officer know. As with regular events there will be a maximum of 15 places available for each date.



Arable weeds in the sunshine near Whixall Moss (Pete Boardman)

## *Timetable to the end*

Funding for the Biodiversity Training Project runs out officially at the end of March 2011 and whilst this isn't the end of the world as we know it, it will be the end of an era for some. The plan is run a full set of events during 2010 – (see back two pages for events list for details). Following the final event a celebration will be held at Preston Montford to recognise our achievements and thank all the people who have been a part of this project since we started back in May 2006.

One of the most important jobs still to be done is to disseminate our findings and I shall be doing that through 2010 into the start of 2011 by delivering presentations at major regional and national biodiversity conferences. Also a final newsletter will be published detailing an evaluation of what we have learned.

## *Your experiences*

As ever we are always interested in hearing your experiences of our courses and events. We are really keen to know how the knowledge you have gained through our events has led to experiences elsewhere or opened up further opportunities. Are there hints and tips you feel other volunteers would gain from knowing? Whatever your experiences of our courses – please let us know.

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## *What we have achieved so far*

Training events run so far?

**153 (to the end of 2009), with a combination of public courses and bespoke courses organised with recording and community groups.**

Number of individual people who have attended a training day?  
**716, thanks to everyone who has attended one or more of our events!! 109 new people attended training during 2009. These figures do not include our annual celebration events.**

Total number of individual training hours / days so far ?

**11110 hours or 1588 days in total. (3345 hours or 478 days during 2009). These figures are based upon a 7 hour day for a full day event or 3.5 hours for a half day event.**

Resources produced?

**Features of the Shropshire Hills: The Stiperstones and Long Mynd fold out chart. FSC Publications.**



Common poppy *Papaver rhoeas* at Crudgington, Shropshire. (Pete Boardman)

## *Collecting the evidence*

We continue to collect evidence of how the Project is helping people in their personal progression in biological recording and species identification. Some of you will have received questionnaires a while back, around 150 were sent out to regular attendees of our courses. Of these we had 58 responses (39%) and this information has enabled us gain an appreciation of what “you” feel about what we are doing (though we are always interested in hearing more!).

The figures show that 98% of respondees felt that they had developed their knowledge by attending an event – the remaining 2% were already avid bird recorders who felt their skills were already in the maximum category.

On a 4 point progression scale the average distance people felt they had travelled was 1.25 over all courses. This is probably a slight under-estimate owing to the modesty of attendees. Encouragingly a good proportion of people claimed to have submitted biological records; attendees of lower plant training 50%, higher plants 42%, birds 100% and invertebrates 37%. There was evidence of a progression of interest between groups with 6 people moving from birds to invertebrates, 2 from birds to botany, 2 from botany to invertebrates and 1 from zoology to botany.

A very big thank you to everyone who spent the time filling in our questionnaires and especially to Jennie Comerford, our grants officer – who designed and interpreted the results!!! Form filling can seem pointless but it really helps us enormously to monitor what we do and provide real evidence of what we have achieved. It also helps us to get in a position to attract further funding to continue to provide these kinds of events.



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## *Biological Recording - your experiences*

Have you made and submitted biological records during the tenure of the Biodiversity Training Project that have been influenced by our training? Has the training you have participated in helped you to improve your record-making? Are there things you can record now that you couldn't before you attended one of our events? If the answer is "yes" to any of those questions we would love to know about it as we want to disseminate the Project results as widely as we can during the winter of 2010 / spring of 2011 and it would be fantastic to include your experiences.

Your name .....

How many records (approximately) have you submitted and in which taxonomic areas?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Please tell us how your experiences on our training courses have helped to improve your identification skills?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Please return to : Pete Boardman  
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Cut out, photocopy or email your results to : [pete@field-studies-council.org](mailto:pete@field-studies-council.org)



# Shropshire Environmental Data Network (SEDN)

In last year's newsletter I introduced the concept of the SEDN following Alex Lockton's talk at our celebration event in 2008. Since then a lot has happened and by the time this newsletter is circulated a good number of biological records will have been accumulated (at least 100,000). This work has been done by several 'Tsars' who have been awarded small contracts, funded by Natural England via Shropshire County to verify and validate biological records that will form the basis of the SEDN database. These records will then also be submitted to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and will include invertebrate, fungi, and lichen, bat and plant data. It is hoped that there will be some 200,000 records in the database by the end March 2011 – all of them verified and validated – meaning the compilation of a high quality data available to end users. These end users may be planners but equally they could be recording groups and county recorders, students or members of the public.



## *Go on - make a species record!!!*

It is now even easier than ever to make a biological record using the species record form on **The Natural Shropshire** website ([www.naturalshropshire.org.uk](http://www.naturalshropshire.org.uk)). Follow the link on the home page to the 'make a species' facility where you can enter your data. There are lots of hints and tips if you are new to this process. The website is a great way to get all those casual records into the system. Whilst you are there check out the list of Shropshire County Recorders via the 'species groups' page. All are friendly people who are only too willing to receive biological records and will help guide you through the process.

Bird records can easily be submitted on the BTO website using a very easy to use online recording form.

Don't forget – if you are making biological records for the first time there is a minimum of information that you need to put together. This is often summed up as 'who, what, where & when' – 'who' being 'your name & contact details', 'what' being the organism you are recording – 'where' being the location you are recording it from (a place name and a six figure grid reference is generally accepted as the minimum requirements) and 'when' being the date the organism was recorded. County Recorders will advise on any other information that would be helpful. If you do nothing else in this Year of Biodiversity – help us to understand our environment better by making some biological records.



Top left: attendee at the Ironbridge Green Gym (Pete Boardman)

Bottom left: attendee on 'Why Farms are hot-spots for Invertebrates' course (Pete Boardman)

## *When Project Officers go bad*

Which on the face of it sounds like a good subject for one of those late night Channel 5 documentaries and thinking about it - it might just be what it comes down to once the BTP funding comes to an end!

I had a dream the other night - I had asked a regular volunteer to teach a course for us and it began ok - until his nervousness took over and he jokily insulted his wife in front of everyone. She told him to "stick it up...." - well you can guess where, and stormed out. Then several people arrived late - they hadn't booked but just turned up - and walked in. They all claimed to know me and smiled, patted me on the back with recognition and one even hugged me and said how wonderful it was to see me again. I didn't recognise any of them, however much I wracked my brains!!! The event continued and I nipped out quickly to see how the tutor's wife was to find her racing her car around the car park and tearing up the grass. She'd already bumped into someone else's car. I went back into the classroom and it was tea break to find there was no milk or biscuits. I ran back to car park to retrieve them and when I got back I found that there had been some sort of incident (I know not what it was) - and the leviathans of the press were there - namely a reporter from the Whitchurch Herald, one from the Market Drayton Advertiser and a radio reporter from Radio Shropshire all trying to get the gossip. I hadn't a clue what had gone on whilst getting the biscuits!!

OK, so everything went wrong that could go wrong in the dream (and at least I'd remembered my trousers) - and I suppose it is a fairly standard, if a little extreme, anxiety dream. Most people at some point have them - connected to their work or home lives. But it made me think - what if something did go badly wrong? Could I cope? Then I thought of how wonderful, resourceful and keen all our attendees are, and how protective of me and their time out they always are. I thought of the systems we have in place, the risk assessments and health and safety training we do, the regular contact with my line manager, steering group and HLF monitor - all supporting and strengthening my ability to cope with the unexpected or just the normal situations that arise on a day to day basis.

So, as a Project, I think we do okay. Occasionally sometimes emails do go astray, I often can't get back to people as quickly as I'd like to during our busy times. The weather intervenes and makes things awkward. People get ill or pull out of events at the last minute leaving gaps that are sometime difficult to fill at short notice. These things happen but generally we all get on with it and do the best we can for which I wanted to say a great big thank you - but please - if you must drive your car and tear up the grass in a nature reserve car park - do it in your own time.



Photo: Carabid beetle through a hand lens (Pete Boardman)

## *Beetlebum*

Know your carabids from your cantharids? Want to? We will be launching the Shropshire Beetle Recording Group at the Shropshire Entomology Day at Preston Montford on February 20<sup>th</sup> 2010 - and are looking for people with a similar interest to get involved - please join us!!!!

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## Wordsmith in the woods

Recent volunteer Nadia Kingsley was moved to write the piece of prose below following her attendance on Mark Duffell's fern identification event during the soggy summer of 2009. Nadia, through Fair Acre Press, is looking for both Poets and Image Makers (Art and Craft) for a book on Shropshire Butterflies that will be published in 2011, with donations to Butterfly Conservation. If you are interested in finding out more - please email Nadia Kingsley via [fairacrepress@btinternet.com](mailto:fairacrepress@btinternet.com)

### In Benthall wood by Nadia Kingsley

there's no sign of rain, as our group of varied individuals head along the track of Ironbridge's long lost trains. Essential equipment: fern key guide, times ten lens, nature notebook and a pen are juggled as we're handed an example for our first attempt: it's narrow and undivided, these dark-green fronds classify it as England's Ginkgo, God's hair, or as it's more commonly known the Hart's Tongue fern - named, by some keen Victorian. As we turn into the wood itself, there's the first few drips, a pitter-pat, our guide brings us bracken, we have no problem identifying that: branched triangular fronds, twice or thrice divided. Witches apparently detest it, now farmers too, but they've forgotten that when burnt it can ward off mozzies, and it treats worms. It can heal wounds, it's bedding for cattle, and its potash is a great addition for the soil. From high above, comes the fine sound of spitting. Next we find a cluster in an invisible vase: two to three foot tall, these are broad, twice divided fronds which guide us through to the name of Lady fern - a misnomer if ever there was one, but folklore shows people thought that these plants must flower, they must, but not often. I feel a cold trickle, neck getting wet, as we peer at its sori of elongated kidneys, matched by the cross-section of its vascular bundles. Large well-made wooden steps, shining like metal: we're sliding upwards, plop, drop, drip, spit, spill, spout, surge, souse, the forecast was for light rain and some showers. Over soggy sandwiches we carry on: a bipinnate, broad and lanceolate, taller than the last, with a brown scaly bearded stalk, the Common Male fern is left behind as our boots are whelmed by a coursing of water. We skid past the Buckler fern, and some unremembered others, my brain is filled with facts, as the rain is gushing and rushing, racing us down a slope, it's pelting and pounding, the guide is now shouting to be heard through its drumming - the next one, quite small, used for coughs, for kidney cures, its Greek name: 'not wetting', Maidenhair completes our day, too soon.



Top : Herb Paris at Benthall Edge Woods (Pete Boardman)

Middle: Nadia Kingsley examining a fern at Benthall Edge Woods (Pete Boardman)

Bottom: close up of fern sori (Pete Boardman)

# The inaugural **Shropshire Entomology Day**

(organised by The Biodiversity Training Project & The Shropshire Invertebrates Group)

## **“The current state of invertebrate recording in Shropshire”**

Preston Montford Field Centre

20<sup>th</sup> February 2010

10.30 am – 4.00 pm

Hot lunch provided



Please book your place by contacting Pete Boardman with your details and dietary requirements.

### *Into Entomology?*

Entomology is the study of insects and invertebrates, the creatures that underpin most habitats on earth and which we ignore at our peril. Those people who have ever spent time looking at them and tried to get to grips with their identification will recognise that time and commitment is needed to get anywhere with these groups. We are currently therefore working on a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to try to enable volunteers from our region to further study and identify these animals. Obviously we are totally reliant upon potential funding to carry out our plans – and in this day and age – attracting funding is not as easy as it once was. However if we are successful the subsequent Project would offer opportunities for detailed help and mentorship by experts with the identification of a number of groups of invertebrates using up to date identification materials and high quality equipment. Watch this space and keep your fingers crossed for us!



Top: Hoverfly *Helophilus pendulus* at Rue Wood near Wem (Pete Boardman)

Bottom: Ant on the skin (Pete Boardman)



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## 2010 events

- 15/04/10 (Thursday) – *Shropshire Beetle Recording Group (SBRG) trip the World Museum Liverpool to view the Beetle collections* with Don Stenhouse (Bolton Museum) and the curator of the entomology collection Guy Knight.
- 24/04/10 (Saturday) – *The identification and recording of shield bugs (part 1)* with Pete Boardman and Ian Cheeseborough at Merrington Green Nature Reserve near Shrewsbury.
- 05/05/10 (Wednesday) – *Bumblebee identification on heathland* with Ian Cheeseborough at Preston Montford and The Cliffe, near Ruyton-XI-Towns.
- 08/05/10 (Saturday) – *Bryophytes around Shrewsbury* with Martin Godfrey at various sites around Shrewsbury (as part of The Flora of Shrewsbury project)
- 12/05/10 (Wednesday) – *How to record plants* with Mark Duffell at The Quarry, Shrewsbury
- 15/05/10 (Saturday) – *Shropshire Beetle Recording Group (SBRG) – a guide to beetle families* with Don Stenhouse at Acton Scott Historic Farm, near Craven Arms
- 18/05/10 (Tuesday) – *Identifying conifers* with Ruth Dawes at Leighton Redwoods (courtesy of the Royal Forestry Society) near Welshpool
- 22/05/10 (Saturday) – *Petals, tepals, sepals and all that gubbins – botanical terminology for beginners or forgetful improvers!* With Mark Duffell at Colemere Country Park near Ellesmere.
- 05/06/10 (Saturday) – *Micro-lepidoptera identification* with Godfrey Blunt, the Micro-lepidoptera County Recorder at The Stiperstones NNR.
- 09/06/10 (Wednesday) – *Plants of wet flushes* with Mark Duffell at The Stiperstones.
- 12/06/10 (Saturday) – *Water vole and field vole tracks, signs and survey techniques* with Malcolm Monie at Tilstock near Whitchurch.
- 15/06/10 (Wednesday) – *The wetland plants of Brook Vessons and The Hollies* with Fiona Gomersall at those Shropshire Wildlife Trust nature reserves near the Stiperstones.
- 16/06/10 (Wednesday) – *An introduction to butterflies and day-flying moths* with Pete Boardman at Fenn's, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses NNR near Whitchurch.
- 18/06/10 (Friday) – *Beetles of wetlands and the Mosses* with Don Stenhouse and the Shropshire Beetle Recording Group at Fenn's, Whixall & Bettisfield Mosses NNR near Whitchurch.
- 22/06/10 (Tuesday) – *Improver's moth identification* with Dave Grundy at Alveley Country Park, near Bridgnorth (places split between the Alveley Country Park moth group and the BTP).
- 23/06/10 (Wednesday) – *Identifying flies of wetlands* with Nigel Jones at Colemere Country Park near Ellesmere.
- 25/06/10 (Friday) – *Arable weed identification* with Fiona Gomersall at Pimhill Organic Farm near Clive.
- 29/06/10 (Tuesday) – *An introduction to grasses, rushes and sedges of wetlands* – with Chris Walker at Colemere Country Park near Ellesmere.
- 10/07/10 (Saturday) – *Identifying Umbellifers* with John Handley at Alveley Country Park near Bridgnorth
- 14/07/10 (Wednesday) – *Identifying dragonflies and damselflies by their larvae and exuviae* – with Ian Cheeseborough at the Discovery Centre, Craven Arms
- 21/07/10 (Wednesday) – *A grasses, sedges and rushes of wetlands master class* with Sarah Whild at Preston Montford then Colemere Country Park near Ellesmere or Brown Moss Nature Reserve near Whitchurch.
- 24/07/10 (Saturday) – *An introduction to ferns* with Mark Duffell at Benthall Edge wood, Ironbridge.

## 2010 events (continued)

- 28/07/10 (Wednesday) – *More plants of the floodplains* – with Kate Thorne around Molverley near Oswestry.
- 04/08/10 (Wednesday) – *Plants of the River Vrynwy* – with Kate Thorne by the River Vrynwy near Llanymynech.
- 07/08/10 (Saturday) – *An introduction to water plants* with Mark Duffell at Attingham Park near Shrewsbury.
- 15/08/10 (Sunday) – *Introducing charophytes* with Clare O'Reilly at Preston Montford Field Centre, near Shrewsbury.
- 08/09/10 (Wednesday) – *The identification and recording of shield bugs (part 2)* with Pete Boardman and Ian Cheeseborough at Wenlock Edge
- 30/09/10 (Thursday) – *White-clawed crayfish: identification and survey techniques* with Nick Mott of the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust at Cannock Chase, Staffordshire.
- 09/10/10 (Saturday) – *Fungi at Colemere Country Park* with Neville Walters at Colemere Country Park near Ellesmere.
- 23/10/10 (Saturday) – *Bryophytes under the microscope* with Martin Godfrey at Preston Montford Field Centre, near Shrewsbury.
- 28/10/10 (Thursday) – *Slime moulds and micro-fungi in the field* with Professor Bruce Ing – venue to be confirmed nearer the time.

All courses are free of charge but **must** be booked in advance with the Project Officer. Priority will always be given to volunteers, though professional attendees may attend subject to a fee if there are spare places (call the Project Officer for further details). Courses are subject to change at the discretion of the Project Officer and all bookings will be confirmed before the event. Event details will be sent out approximately a week before each event by email.



Soldier beetles at Alveley Country Park  
(Pete Boardman)

Red kite soaring over Oxfordshire  
(Pete Boardman)

Bumblebee's eye view of a foxglove flower  
(Pete Boardman)

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