



Main photo: Finley Dennison

## All along the backwaters

**M**eandering through the marshy backwaters of Slapton Ley is a new piece of craftsmanship courtesy of Eddie Church and our merry band of volunteers.

It is not easy installing a structure like this in such a boggy environment. Removing the old board walk and building the new one without one's feet sinking into the ground presented quite a challenge. Having extracted and processed the required materials from Slapton Woods in line with the Woodland Management plan, construction of the 200 m walkway took place last summer.

Gradually and bit by bit the old board walk was removed, and in its place a new shiny one took its place. 'The team increased in size as we began the construction phase' says Tony 'there was much transporting and carrying to be done with both the deconstruction of the old boardwalk and putting the new one into place. Overall, we offset the physical challenges by much banter, humour and above all, teamwork. We all acquired or improved on our individual

skill sets whether it be nail guns, post slammers, keeping the whole construction on the level, interpreting Eddie's instructions correctly, or just doing our best to keep our feet dry!

Every one of the volunteers relished working as a team on this project 'Contributing towards the mammoth task of replacing the boardwalk was very rewarding; seeing the progress, as it was happening bit by bit, and then seeing the finished product, we all had a great sense of accomplishment' says Theresa.

Having completed this project successfully, there are now plans on the cards to look at and replace some of the other ageing infrastructure around the reserve. If you are interested in coming and joining our team to help out on the nature reserve, please do get in touch at [volunteer.sl@field-studies-council.org](mailto:volunteer.sl@field-studies-council.org) or phone 01548 580466.

**Alice Henderson** Volunteer Co-ordinator

# A glimpse into the Reserve

## Helpful habitats

Tucked away in a valley behind Slapton woods is a sanctuary area of meadows and thick scrubby hedgerows. The perfect area to encourage the expanding populations of Cirl Bunting.

Once known as 'village buntings' due to their abundance, these birds have overcome many challenges to reverse the massive decline that they suffered in the mid to late 1900s. Education and subsidies helped landowners to provide more habitats for these wonderful creatures. But just because their numbers have been increasing, it does not mean we should stop helping them.

Our plan this year is to create even more habitats for them at Loworthy. New hedgerows and areas of dense scrub will be planted to recreate the dense network of wildlife corridors and small meadows that would have been common in the early 1900s, before machinery grew larger and the push to produce more food for humans began. New fences will subdivide the large meadows to allow for intensive conservation grazing using local dexter cattle. This grazing will help the development of the invertebrates that are so vital to the Cirl Bunting's survival.

For this project we will need as much help as we can get. While we have quite a few volunteers we are always looking for more and this project would be fun to get involved in. There will be tree planting, hedge laying and many other activities.



Mike Langman



## Relocating the memorial

Plans are underway to move the memorial from its precarious home on the shingle ridge to the more sheltered site inside Strete gate picnic area. Having been moved once before, when storms washed away its foundations, the idea is to re-home the memorial (a dedication to the villagers that gave up their homes for the practice D-Day landings) to somewhere it will be protected for many years to come.

## Careful coppicing

Biodiversity benefits from a variety of different habitats. When managing a woodland, coppicing is a method that can be used; cutting down certain trees allowing them to produce fresh growth to create different kinds of woodland habitats. By carrying out this work in small areas each year a range of different aged growth develops, providing the perfect homes for a range of woodland dwellers.



Mike Langman

One of the many species to benefit from this kind of management are Dormice, a tree-dwelling rodent that uses the branches of young trees as highways to get about and find food. Work to create these fresh habitats has been taking place last winter. You might see evidence of this in the scrubby areas of the shingle ridge, between Slapton turn and Strete Gate. Look out for areas that have been cut and areas where young fresh growth has sprouted up from work in previous years.

**Unusual visitors** Slapton is often used as pit stop for some of the more unusual migrant birds. We are used to seeing the odd Great Northern Diver on the sea or spotting a Bittern lurking in the reeds, but this last winter saw a pair of Snow Buntings take up residence on part of the shingle ridge. These birds usually breed in the Arctic, migrating south to northern and eastern England to over winter in coastal areas, so maybe this pair were feeling particularly adventurous and wanted to check out the West Country. The best time for spotting unusual birds is from autumn through to spring when migrating birds pass through and spend some time here enjoying the milder climes.

## Marvellous murmurations

Last year the Starlings did us proud. After a few years with low numbers, Starlings joining us and displaying last year were some of the highest ever seen here at Slapton. Many people came from all over to enjoy the spectacle, hundreds of thousands of birds dancing in the sky, swishing, swirling and diving.



## Welcome to the new Ranger

Hello I'm Kieran – the new Ranger. I was previously working to enhance and protect Urban Nature Reserves and Green Spaces in Plymouth, involved in releasing a pair of beavers within the city and working to re-wild verges and increase the number of wildlife corridors. I'm really interested in habitat restoration, woodland management and wildflower meadows. I'm really excited to be here at Slapton, I can't wait to meet everyone, learn more about the site and get stuck in!

# Events at Slapton Ley

# 2022

**Booking essential where required.** Please book online by visiting:

[www.field-studies-council.org/locations/slaptonleynnr](http://www.field-studies-council.org/locations/slaptonleynnr)

Scroll down and click on 'Walks and nature experiences'. If you do not have the facilities to book online, please contact us on 01548 580466.

## Slapton Sands Beach Clean

**Saturday 9th April 9.30am-12.30pm**

Join us to help clean up Slapton Sands, part of our beautiful coastline.

Meet in Slapton Sands Middle Car Park (free parking) • Please bring gardening gloves if you have them • Sensible outdoor clothing and footwear recommended • No booking required

## Wild Food Forage

**Sunday 10th April 10am-1pm**

Taste your way through the National Nature Reserve on a wild-food themed walk, searching for edible plants of the hedgerow and woodland.

Adults £8 Children £5 • Meet at Slapton Ley Field Centre • Sensible outdoor clothing and footwear essential • Bring a basket • Sorry, no dogs • **Booking essential**

## Dawn Chorus

**Saturday 23rd April 6-8.30am**

Listen to the sound of birds waking at dawn on a quiet morning stroll around Slapton Ley. Afterwards you have the option to enjoy a wholesome breakfast at the field centre.

Adults £8 Children £5 • Breakfast provided at £6 per person (optional extra) • Meet at Slapton Ley Field Centre • Sensible outdoor clothing and footwear essential • Binoculars useful but not essential • Sorry, no dogs • **Booking essential**

## Wild Food Forage

**Sunday 24th April 10am-1pm**

Taste your way through the National Nature Reserve on a wild-food themed walk, searching for edible plants of the hedgerow and woodland.

Adults £8 Children £5 • Meet at Slapton Ley Field Centre • Sensible outdoor clothing and footwear essential • Bring a basket • Sorry, no dogs • **Booking essential**

## Bat Watch

**Monday 30 May 9pm-11.30pm**

Explore the night-time world of these magical creatures. Watch them emerge from their roost, follow their foraging routes and use our bat detectors to hear their weird and wonderful calls.

Adults £8 Children £5 • Meet at Slapton Ley Field Centre • Sensible outdoor clothing and footwear recommended • A torch is advisable • ID guides available for purchase • **Booking essential**

## Balsam Bashing

**Tuesday and Wednesday July 19th and 20th 9am-12.30pm**

Come and explore how the nature reserve is managed with our Ranger and learn the importance of its habitats to the wildlife that lives here. Then get hands on with some conversation tasks to help our wildlife have some where great to live.

Tea and Cake included • Free event • Meet at the Slapton Ley Field Centre • Sensible outdoor clothing and footwear recommended • **Booking essential**

## Bat Watch

**Monday 1st August 8.30pm - 11pm**

Explore the night-time world of these magical creatures. Watch them emerge from their roost, follow their foraging routes and use our bat detectors to hear their weird and wonderful calls.

Adults £8 Children £5 • Meet at Slapton Ley Field Centre • Sensible outdoor clothing and footwear recommended • A torch is advisable • ID guides available for purchase • **Booking essential**

## Celebrate Start Bay

**Sunday 21st August 11-5pm**

Do you love the outdoors and environment? If so, this mini festival is for you! And what's more it is free entry! Music, stories, demonstrations, and talks will be on throughout the day. Local sustainable stall holders will be selling their products, Free hands-on environmental activities will be put on by local charities, with food and drinks available to keep you refreshed throughout the day.

Free entry to the event • Parking £5 • Get in touch for more details • No booking required

## Bat Watch

**Monday 29th August 8pm-10.30pm**

Explore the night-time world of these magical creatures. Watch them emerge from their roost, follow their foraging routes and use our bat detectors to hear their weird and wonderful calls.

Adults £8 Children £5 • Meet at Slapton Ley Field Centre • Sensible outdoor clothing and footwear recommended • A torch is advisable • ID guides available for purchase • **Booking essential**

## Slapton Sands Beach Clean

**Saturday 17th September 9.30am-12.30pm**

Join us to help clean up Slapton Sands, part of our beautiful coastline.

Meet in Slapton Sands Middle Car Park (free parking) • please bring gardening gloves if you have them • Sensible outdoor clothing and footwear recommended • No booking required



# Exploring with some Nature Friendly Schools

With plenty of wildlife and natural environments to be discovered at Slapton, we have been thrilled to get involved with the Nature Friendly Schools project and welcome students from some of its participating schools.



Thousands of children have been given the chance to get closer to nature, thanks to the funding by the Department of Education along with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with support from Natural England. The project aimed to improve teachers' confidence and widen their opportunities to deliver outdoor learning to their students, benefitting their learning, mental health and wellbeing and care and concern for the environment.

The project has funded 33 residential visits to FSC centres including five at the Start Bay Centre at Slapton. Children from one primary school and four special schools took part in overnight

stays at the centre and spent time exploring the local area and National Nature Reserve through a variety of activities.

We had many, many adventures with some fabulous teachers and students involved in the project and we hope they will use their experiences to continue to use and further develop outdoor learning back at their schools.

## Nature Friendly Schools

“ We splashed about in the stream and found some cool creatures... We completed individual and team challenges to improve working together and to discover how brave and resilient we could be... We explored the ancient woodland to find colours, shapes and textures and discovered who else might live in this fantastic place... We found wiggly worms and speedy centipedes and used their skills to help us improve our own skills... We sifted the strandline at the seashore and watched seabirds... We made our own beds and spent time with friends... We sang songs and reflected on our days around the campfire.

Maryanne Wills Former Education Team Leader



## A well-deserved award

We are pleased to announce that the Geographical Association has named the field centre here at Slapton as a centre of excellence in the provision of teaching secondary school level geography.

This international award celebrates the teaching carried out at FSC Slapton Ley and recognises the impact on learners of the in-depth fieldwork that the centre provides for visiting schools and colleges for both A level and GCSE students.



The centre was praised for use of local case studies to improve the learning and understanding of students, and the transformational impact on both visiting students and teachers. Having the beautiful Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve on our doorstep provides an excellent area for young geographers to experience many elements of the curriculum but also many wider experiences that benefit their awareness and connection with themselves, others and the natural world.

The Geographical Association highlighted that even during the pandemic the centre staff managed to develop innovative and creative ways to bring high quality fieldwork to an even wider audience... a live fieldwork lesson was streamed about Slapton Sands and was participated in by thousands of students from all over the world including from Norway, Kenya, India and Australia!

During the pandemic a new digital package of coastal geography sessions were also created and made available to schools across the country. Staff contributed to #FieldworkLive creating a variety of webinars covering fieldwork skills, but also maths and statistical skills for geography students and a series of professional development sessions for teachers to build skills and confidence in the delivery of outdoor teaching and learning.

All in all the awarding of the Secondary Geography Quality Mark and centre of excellence status to Slapton Ley demonstrates the continued determination and efforts of all the staff and volunteers who provide excellent and rewarding educational spaces and experiences to all our visiting learners.

Jon Read Tutor

Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve (NNR) is owned Wild Planet Trust and managed by the Field Studies Council's (FSC) Slapton Ley Field Centre.  
Editor: Alice Henderson  
Centre Manager: Kate Payne  
Regional Site Manager: Lee Dennison  
Designed and produced by FSC Publications



Field Centre and National Nature Reserve

In partnership with:



Printed on 100% recycled paper