

## What a Hawker!

A male Norfolk (or Green-eyed) Hawker • Dave Smallshire

**A**n exciting and most unexpected discovery was made at Slapton Ley in the summer of 2022. Far beyond their known western range, a Norfolk Hawker was spotted zooming around the fringes of the Ley in June.

With many eager eyes looking out for it, subsequently a further eight were seen, all within 100 metres of Slapton Bridge. Most sightings were of the males patrolling reed-fringes, and mating pairs were seen egg-laying into floating reed debris.

Both Southern and Migrant Hawkers are very common at Slapton, but unlike these species that glimmer in blues and greens, the Norfolk Hawker is a rich brown colour with stunning green eyes which might explain why some call it the Green-eyed Hawker.

Norfolk Hawker was once confined to the Norfolk Broads and north-east Suffolk. Here it is threatened by coastal inundation resulting from rising sea level and increased storminess caused by climate change. It is currently classed as endangered in Britain, it is a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and is protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

That said, the range of Norfolk Hawker has increased dramatically in the last decade, with thriving colonies establishing in the surrounding eastern counties. Range expansion may have also been aided by their immigration from the expanding populations on the continent, with sightings as far north as Yorkshire and one previous sighting in east Devon in 2018.

In East Anglia the Norfolk Hawker has long been associated with the presence of Water Soldier *Stratiotes aloides*, an aquatic plant that floats on the water. However, as the dragonflies have expanded beyond the range of this plant, they have found that reed swamp habitat has provided a suitable alternative. It would seem that the extensive reedbeds at Slapton could be very much to its liking.

The presence of multiple individuals at Slapton suggests that Norfolk Hawkers may have reached here in an earlier year, having slipped in and laid eggs without being noticed. Hawkers typically have a two-year life cycle, spending most of this time living as carnivorous larvae underwater. Maybe we won't see any Norfolk Hawkers for another two years?

The origins of the Slapton Norfolk Hawkers remain a mystery. The ranges of many dragonfly species have increased in Britain in recent decades, most likely as a result of a warmer climate. In fact, two other species made their first appearances at Slapton in 2022; the Scarce Chaser and Small Red-eyed Damselfly, which brings the total number of dragonflies and damselflies recorded at Slapton up to a very respectable 22 species.

Dave Smallshire Dragonfly Conservation Trust

# A glimpse into the Reserve



Tony Hulatt

## Dormice success

It has been a tough few years for dormice on the Reserve with very few nests and even fewer individuals seen. However, I'm delighted to report that during the course of one of my last box inspections of the year, we found a total of 10 dormice across the various sites: three on the backslope; two at Loworthy; and importantly, a lactating female and four young in one of the new boxes at Southgrounds. Encouragingly, and other than the nest at Southgrounds, all the individuals were juveniles indicating that although they weren't using our boxes to breed, they are breeding in the respective areas of the Reserve.

**Tony Hulatt** Slapton Ley Volunteer

## Unusual visitors

Slapton Ley, Start Bay and its unique shingle ridge, continued to attract both rare and unusual creatures in 2022.

At the beginning of the year a Snow Bunting was regularly seen close to Memorial car park unperturbed by the intrigued humans walking by. Across the ridge and frequenting the Ley; Black-necked and Red-necked Grebes, a Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup mingled amongst other waterfowl.

For the second year running, a Black-crowned Night Heron took up residence for several weeks in April by Slapton Bridge, and an Osprey flew over the Ley on its return to breeding grounds further north.

Local ringing volunteers caught and ringed an Aquatic Warbler in the summer, and amid the heat wave and while water levels were low, a Spotted Crake took up residence by Slapton Bridge.

In September a juvenile Black Tern was seen over the Ley briefly. Throughout the year Cattle Egrets have been seen, and it may not be long before they can be confirmed as a new breeding species for the reserve.

Norfolk Hawker dragonflies were a rare invertebrate sighting in June, and Blue-finned Tuna were occasionally seen in the bay.

**Graham and Angela Webb** Slapton Ley Volunteers



Black-crowned Night Heron • Angela Webb



## Prickles in a Pickle

Prickles in a Pickle

Since the 1950s, the number of hedgehogs in Britain has dropped by 75%, from approximately 38 million to about 500,000 today. This is a shocking statistic. This year we were able to help a family of hedgehogs in distress: with the support of Prickles in a Pickle, a local hedgehog rescue and wildlife sanctuary, the lives of three young hedgehogs were saved. The hedgehogs (known as Flash, Monty and Pip) had been separated from their mother, who could not be found. They were out in the midday heat and all were severely dehydrated, but we sought advice from Prickles in a Pickle who nursed them back to health. We have all learnt a lot about what hedgehogs need to thrive and will be well prepared to support any in peril in the future. If you would like further advice on how to support hedgehogs, please do visit [www.pricklesinapickle.co.uk](http://www.pricklesinapickle.co.uk).

**Bella Moor** Slapton Administrator

Jayne Thomas



## Thank you to our volunteers

Whatever the weather you all give your time, with a smile and a laugh, and never a whine.

You transform the gardens, the hides and the paths, and by the end of the day are ready for your baths.

With comrades and friends that you are bound to make, nothing spurs you on quite as much as Darren's cake.

To those others that help us simply because we ask, no matter what the job is, the project or task.

We would not be here if it wasn't for you, hard working, lovely, gorgeous people, so cheers and **thank you!**

**Alice Henderson** Regional Volunteer Co-ordinator

## Loworthy fencing update

It's been a busy year on the Reserve, with viewpoints that needed replacing and paths that needed clearing. But the most challenging project was installing over 2km of fencing and planting a 300m long hedge. This was all in aid of one of the Reserve's iconic species: the Cirl Bunting.

Historically Cirl Bunting populations have suffered due to changes in land management, but thanks to conservation efforts the UK population is now on the up again and they have spread from South Devon to further afield. With the advice of Natural England and working with a local grazier, we are delivering a conservation grazing programme which allows these small but impressive birds to flourish, providing them with adequate scrub, winter seed and summer food (insects).

The fencing in our meadows had seen better days, and needed replacing in order to allow grazing animals on site, without them escaping into the woods! Thanks to the efforts of our volunteers, Eddie Church and

the NNR Team we were able to deliver this project on the challenging steep ground. We now have a brilliant hedge for wildlife and our four-legged habitat managers have been able to get in and start to do their thing.

**Kieran Shaw-flach** Nature Reserve Ranger



Cirl Bunting • Mike Langman

# Events at Slapton Ley 2023

Unless otherwise stated **booking is essential** and events are £8 per adult and £5 per child. Please book online by visiting:

[www.field-studies-council.org/whats-on-at-slapton-ley](http://www.field-studies-council.org/whats-on-at-slapton-ley)

Click on 'Walks and Nature Experiences'. More details of where events are held and what you need to bring can be found on the website.

If you do not have the facilities to book online, please contact us on 01548 580466.

## April

### Pebbles on the Beach

Monday 3rd April 10am–Midday

Have you ever wondered what the pebbles on the beach are?

### Between the Tides

Good Friday 7th April 1pm–3.30pm

From giant kelp fronds to miniature anemones, every rock pool holds a secret ecosystem waiting to be discovered.

### Tremendous Trees

Monday 10th April May 2pm–4pm

Experience life in the slow lane: how trees grow, make decisions, and communicate in our amazing woodland.

### What Lurks Beneath?

Wednesday 12th April 10am–Midday

Get ready to explore Slapton Ley and discover anything from damsels to dragons.

### Horrible History

Saturday 15th April 5pm–7pm

Explore the horrid history that has shaped Slapton, and delve into the lives of the people who lived here.

### Slapton Sands Beach Clean

Saturday 15th April 9.30am till 12.30pm

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

• No booking required • Free event

### Wild Food Forage

Sunday 16th April 10am–1pm

Taste your way through the National Nature Reserve on a wild-food themed walk.

### Dawn Chorus

Saturday 22nd April 6am–8am

Listen to the sound of birds waking at dawn on a quiet morning stroll around Slapton Ley.

### Poetry Workshop

Saturday 22nd April 10am–1pm

Can poetry, folklore and fables help us care for the land? Join our beginner's poetry workshop.

### Flowers of Walks and Waysides

Sunday 23rd April 9.30am–11.30am

Explore the hedgerows and lanes of Devon as they burst into a riot of wildflower colour.

### Wellbeing Course (6 weeks)

Tuesday afternoons from 18th April until 23rd May • Free event • Book by email: [events.sl@field-studies-council.org](mailto:events.sl@field-studies-council.org)

## May/June

### Bat Watch

Tuesday 30th May

Approximately 9pm–11.30pm (TBC)

Explore the night-time world of these magical creatures.

### What Lurks Beneath?

Wednesday 31st May 10am–Midday

Get ready to explore Slapton Ley and discover anything from damsels to dragons.

### Reclusive Reptiles

Thursday 1st June 10am–Midday

Join us for a reclusive reptile ramble along Slapton Sands.

## July/August/September

### Bat Watch

Monday 31st July

Approximately 8.30pm–10.30pm TBC

Explore the night-time world of these magical creatures.

### Celebrate Start Bay

Sunday 13th August 11–5pm

If you love the outdoors and the environment, this mini festival is for you – and what's more entry is free! Hands-on environmental activities will be put on by local charities, and there will be music, stories, demonstrations and talks throughout the day. Local sustainable stall holders will be selling their products, with food and drinks available to keep you refreshed. • No booking required • Free event • Parking £5

### What Lurks Beneath?

Wednesday 16th August 10am–Midday

Get ready to explore Slapton Ley and discover anything from damsels to dragons.

### Bat Watch

Monday 21st August

Approximately 8.30pm–10.30pm TBC

Explore the night-time world of these magical creatures.

### Pebbles on the Beach

Tuesday 29th August 10am–Midday

Have you ever wondered what the pebbles on the beach are?

### Between the Tides

Saturday 2nd September 2pm–4pm

From giant kelp fronds to miniature anemones, every rock pool holds a secret ecosystem waiting to be discovered.

### Slapton Sands Great British Beach Clean

Saturday 16th September 9.30am–12.30pm

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

• No booking required • Free event

## October

### Fungal Foray

Saturday 7th October 10am–Midday

Join a guided exploration of the local area around Slapton and discover which fabulous fungi are flourishing this year.

### Birds of Slapton Ley

Monday 23rd October 4pm–6pm

Join us for a birding exploration of Slapton Ley NNR.

### Horrible History

Saturday 28th October 5pm–7pm

Explore the horrid history that has shaped Slapton and delve into the lives of the people who lived here.



# The wetter the better?

**W**et woodlands were once a common habitat in the UK but only around 50-70,000 hectares remain.

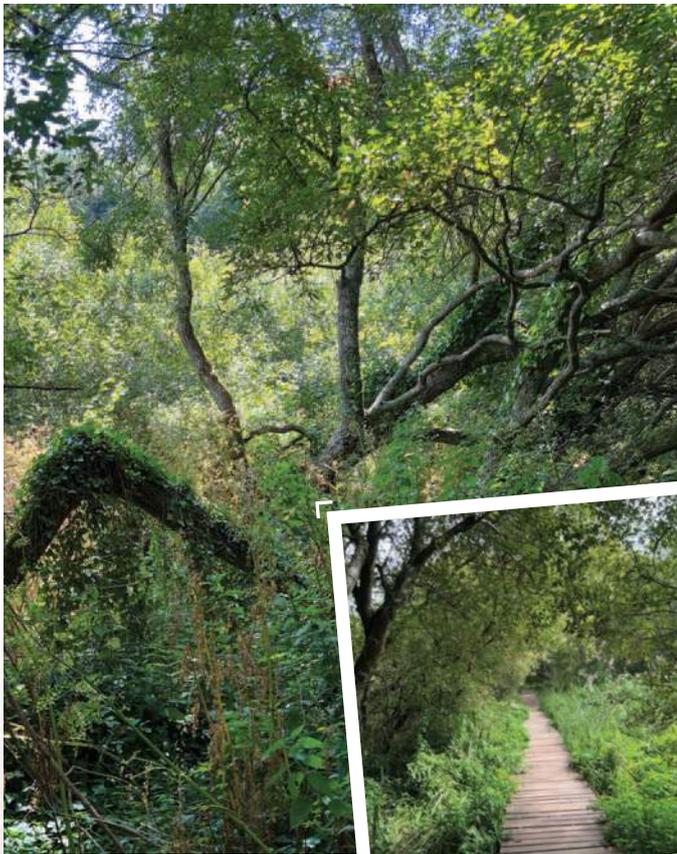
Like many wetlands, but unlike other woodlands, wet woodlands can be peat-forming. However we do not currently know much about their carbon cycles. To date there is no data on the carbon stocks, fluxes or eco-hydrological dynamics of wet woodland in the UK. Potentially they could be long-term carbon sinks, making them a significant nature-based solution to climate change.

We have recently established a research site at Slapton Ley NNR. Our project will assess the vulnerability of wet woodland ecosystems (and their carbon storage potential) to future climatic and land-use change including sea-level rise and land management activities. The project will also provide opportunities for undergraduate and postgraduate students to develop independent research projects.

The benefits of preserving these ecosystems are likely to be substantial, given what we know about organic-rich environments. Understanding more about wet woodlands and their potential for carbon accumulation above and below ground will help us improve decisions around land-use and afforestation for climate change mitigation, and their role as a nature-based solution to climate change.

**Dr Scott J. Davidson**

Lecturer in Ecosystem Resilience at the University of Plymouth



## Wellbeing in the wilderness

**O**ne sunny day in May a group of strangers met up at Slapton Bridge for a free introductory course in Connecting with Nature. We set off on a journey to help our wellbeing by immersing ourselves in the wild environments at Slapton Ley.

Our first stop afforded a beautiful view of Slapton Ley. Here I asked the group to choose a natural thing to observe, like an

animal, a plant or something else. I chose a Great Crested Grebe feeding nearby. Looking closely, we studied our chosen natural things for details. Did you know that Great Crested Grebes have red eyes?

Moving further into the nature reserve, we closed our eyes and focused on sound. Listening to nature has been proven to significantly reduce stress hormones. I asked the group to think about whether then sounds were calm and soothing or harsh and loud, before trying to draw the sounds they could hear.

Entering the woods, we turned to texture, carrying out leaf and bark rubbings using wax crayons on paper. We meandered on,

breathing in the smells of the reserve, until we reached a bank of Pennywort, a succulent edible plant. Here we tested our sense of taste. Finally we made our way back to Slapton Bridge, enjoying our surroundings as we went.

In 2023, our 6-week course of guided walks, conservation sessions and outdoor crafting are all aimed to help participants: keep learning, take notice, be active, connect and give back: the 5 ways to wellbeing. It will start on Tuesday 18th April in the afternoons. For more details and to book please email: [events.sl@field-studies-council.org](mailto:events.sl@field-studies-council.org)

Alice Henderson Regional Volunteer Co-ordinator

Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve (NNR) is owned by Wild Planet Trust and managed by the Field Studies Council's (FSC) Slapton Ley Field Centre.  
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