



The mosaic under construction

A year of celebration

Established in 1943, Field Studies Council celebrated its 80th year in December. Each of our Centres were encouraged to commemorate the occasion, doing something that would involve all the staff and our volunteers.

Using recycled tiles and pottery, we decided to create a large mosaic featuring our Slapton Field Studies Council logo, expertly assisted by local artist Michelle McQuinn. We'd like to thank her for her time and patience over the two days she was with us, (especially with the fiddly bits!)

Our 1990s compost toilet was fantastically revamped and de-spidered by local genius Eddie Church, assisted by our volunteers. We love to encourage visitors to use our compost toilet, helping to save water and challenge our modern-day thinking. This helps us to reduce our negative climate impact, one toilet trip at a time. So far, visitors have loved the fresh new look, plus the lack of spiders really helps to encourage more people to use it!

Pilates and Zumba classes were enthusiastically attended by Field Centre staff at the Slapton Village Hall. Thank you to Lara Christopher for embracing our questionable dance moves. This was followed by a celebratory lunch with invited honorary guests,

Field Studies Council President Tim Burt and his wife Elizabeth. It is always great to share our events big and small with wider supporters of the charity.



Staff at the zumba and pilates session



Kieran and some of the volunteers tree planting

Field Studies Council planted trees at each of the Centres in the UK, with 80 planted in total. Kieran, our ranger, and our volunteers planted five trees within Slapton Ley Nature Reserve – including native species Oak, Silver Birch, Poplar and Rowan. Once mature these trees will complement a recently planted hedge and provide habitat for rare species including Cirl Buntings and Dormice.

As Centre Manager, I feel a great sense of pride, not only being associated with the 80-year celebration but honoured to be a part of such a wonderful group of people, employees and volunteers. Each play a vital part in the day to day running of a continuing successful Centre.

Kate Payne
Slapton Ley Centre Manager

The revamped compost loo



A catch up on the Reserve

There have been some exciting sightings on the Reserve this year...

- At the end of August Osprey could be seen fishing on the Ley, stopping to re-fuel before their long migration back to West Africa.
- Norfolk Hawker dragonflies, first spotted on the Reserve in 2022, returned in 2023, suggesting that they are now breeding here at Slapton.
- The incredibly wet and mild weather has had a mixed impact on the Reserve. Dormice have been one of the species that have struggled, while Cirl Buntings appear to have done quite well, possibly also due to conservation works over at Loworthy.
- Across the country Ash Dieback continues to threaten Ash trees, with the Reserve seeing its fair share of diseased trees requiring work.
- A personal highlight has been watching the Hobbies hawking for dragonflies on the Ley – watching high-speed dogfights in the air.
- Looking forward to 2024, there's lots to get excited about whether it's the return of migrants like Osprey or seeing our resident birds like Great-crested Grebes – there's always something worth watching.



As ever looking after the Reserve is made possible by the help of our incredible volunteer team who are involved in maintaining and monitoring the site.

Kieran Shaw-Flach Nature Reserve Ranger

Working with local young people

With an area of over 490 acres, composed of coastlines, freshwater, woodlands and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, managing Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve is no small task! The management and preservation of this unique area is made possible through our dedicated teams of volunteers and Care Farming initiatives. Assisting our ranger, these groups have allowed us to undertake a variety of projects across the reserve aimed at conserving the natural environment and engaging our local communities.

Recently, we have been joined by students from Kingsbridge Community College as part of the Care Farming initiative. Across the reserve, the students have helped

manage rare habitats such as wet meadows and woodland, a vital habitat for Marsh Orchids at Slapton Ley. In the ancient woodlands of Slapton Woods, freshwater stream habitats were enhanced with natural dams, creating a patchwork of still and flowing water areas to increase our freshwater biodiversity. As the festive season arrived last year, the students' creative side shone through as they used painting, drawing and pyrography to create our Christmas Trail decorations around Slapton Ley.

Care farming allows school pupils to visit farming and countryside sites to learn, understand and become engaged with farming and the environment. The activities have helped participants to develop confidence, learn new skills and explore career opportunities.

Greg Bowes Tutor, Slapton Ley Field Centre

Our year at Slapton



Being an apprentice at Slapton Ley is a special experience, living and working a stone's throw away from the National Nature Reserve and the beach.

There have been many highlights over the past year, from seeing the Milky Way reflected in the Ley to Ospreys hunting metres away and giant Tuna leaping just offshore!

Being able to develop and pass on our passion for nature and the outdoors to school groups, universities, adult groups and families that visit the Centre is one of the best things about the job.

Ana, Chris and Luke
Tutors, Slapton Ley Field Centre



Why we volunteer

It is not just bright sunny days which bring a group of volunteers out every week to meet at Slapton Ley for a morning of volunteering. It is stony grey and a brisk breeze as we stand in all our outdoor clothing, with rucksacks, flasks and an occasional dog at heel whilst catching up on all the events of the past week before we head out.

This day we will be heading out to identify flora growing along the shingle ridge that borders the Ley. We found more than 50 plant species last time, but the season has changed so we are on a mission to see whether we can beat that number. It is a welcome change from last week which required long wellies to pull out swathes of invasive Himalayan Balsam before they set seed. Next week we will be cutting back overhanging branches and brambles around the boardwalk and nature trail and tidying the bird hides. These varied jobs keep this beautiful and sensitive area in shape for locals, visitors and the wildlife that live here. Volunteering really does make a difference.

Gail Addison Slapton Ley volunteer

Join our friendly volunteer team

Want to learn new skills, meet new people and really contribute to our charity and its conservation work?
To find out more please email:
volunteer.sl@field-studies-council.org



Events at Slapton Ley

2024



We are excited to announce our events on and around Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve for 2024. This year all events will be free. Please book online at www.eventbrite.com/cc/nnr-events-2024-2909499 or scan the QR code.

If you do not have the facilities to book online, please contact us on 01548 580466 or email enquiries.sl@field-studies-council.org. More details of where events are held and what you need to bring can be found on the website.

April

What Lurks Beneath

Tuesday 2nd April 10am-11am

Dive into the mysterious depths of the unknown at 'What Lurks Beneath?' and uncover the secrets that lie beneath the surface, if you dare!

Wild Food Forage

Sunday 7th April 10am-1pm

Join us for a wild food foraging adventure, where we'll explore nature's pantry and hunt for delectable treasures.

What Lurks Beneath

Friday 12th April 10am-11am

See 2nd April for details.

Bat Walk

Friday 12th April 8pm-10pm

Join us for a thrilling Bat Walk, where we'll explore the mysterious world of these fascinating creatures under the moonlight!

Slapton Sands Beach Clean

Saturday 13th April 9:30am-12.30pm

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

Rocks of Start Bay

Saturday 13th April 12:30pm-2.30pm

Get ready to rock your way through a family friendly exploration through time along the Start Bay coast at the Rocks of Start Bay event.

Stargazing

Sunday 28th April 8:30pm-10pm (date may change due to weather)

Come join us for an evening under the stars, exploring the sky and seeing what we can find through our telescope. Hot chocolate provided!

May

Bioblitz: Moths and Invertebrates of Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve

Tuesday 28th May 9am-10.30am

Come join us at Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve for a Bioblitz, we'll be exploring the fascinating world of moths and other invertebrates.

Bioblitz: Freshwater Invertebrates of Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve

Wednesday 29th May 9am-10.30am

Come join us at Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve for a Bioblitz, we'll be exploring the fascinating world of aquatic insects, crustaceans, molluscs and more.

June

Bioblitz: Flora of Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve

Saturday 1st June 9am-10.30am

Come join us at Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve for a Bioblitz, we'll be looking for wild flowers, ferns and mosses.

July

Birds of Slapton Ley

Saturday 27th July 7:30am-9am

Come join us at Slapton Ley for some birdwatching fun. We'll observe our feathered friends to learn more about our Nature Reserve.

What Lurks Beneath

Monday 29th July 10am-11am

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

August

Between the Tides

Friday 2nd August 9:30am-11.30am

Dive into a seaside adventure where we'll explore the wonders of the ocean!

Slapton Ley Festival of Nature

Sunday 4th August 11am-5pm

Join us to celebrate the area of Start Bay and beyond. 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, activities, workshops and demonstrations 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

Slapton Ley Guided Walk

Saturday 24th August 11am-12.30pm

Join us for a stroll through Slapton Ley NNR, where we'll guide you through the stunning nature reserve and share fascinating insights.

Bat Walk

Friday 30th August 8pm-10pm

Join us for a thrilling Bat Walk, where we'll explore the mysterious world of these fascinating creatures under the moonlight!

September

Slapton Sands

Great British Beach Clean

Saturday 21st September 9:30am-12.30pm

Join us to help clean up Slapton Sands, as part of the Marine Conservation Society's Great British Beach Clean citizen science event.

Fungal Foray

Sunday 29th September 10am-Midday

Join us for a wild and exciting Fungal Foray, where we'll explore the fascinating world of mushrooms!

October

Slapton Ley Guided Walk

Friday 25th October 9am-10.30am

Join us for a stroll through Slapton Ley NNR, where we'll guide you through the stunning nature reserve and share fascinating insights.

November

Research Seminar

Saturday 9th November 9am-4pm

The seminar is a great opportunity to learn about and discuss the incredible research that has been done to monitor our unique environment and wildlife, on and around the National Nature Reserve. Refreshments included.

All events free!



Current research

Importance of fieldwork

I recently gave a talk in Slapton as part of the annual Research Seminar, highlighting the invaluable work that Field Studies Council do in supporting students.

Not all students have experience of the outdoors and for some it is an alien landscape. Fieldwork can also present physical challenges as well as unseen barriers such as mental health or students simply not seeing themselves represented in these environments. A recent project (CULTIVATE), led by Dr Lynda Yorke at Bangor University, focussed on inclusivity and accessibility in fieldwork. The project produced a useful booklet, which provides food for thought and some very useful pointers. For more information please visit www.cultivate-project.com

Other recent research by colleagues at Northampton University has specifically addressed the issues surrounding GEM students and fieldwork. It is our responsibility as educators to ensure that all students are able to partake in field-based activities to enhance their learning of the natural world, and therefore, should be mindful of the challenges faced by young people.

I have been coming with my students to Slapton for over eight years and found that students are often inspired to carry out further research on data collected. None of this data and research would be possible without Field Studies Council Centres. They are a one stop shop in terms of accommodation, location and accessibility, not to mention amazing food, wonderful people and bountiful resources which should be embraced by education providers. I must also mention that the people of Slapton Village, faced with hoards of students all year round, are nothing but welcoming and tolerant. Not to mention the wonderful hospitalities of the two pubs!

Ruth Copeland-Phillips
University of Northampton

Find out about the research

We welcomed around 70 people to our annual Research Seminar in November 2023 to listen to eight different speakers discuss a wide range of research around the Reserve and local area. Here is just a flavour of the day.

Paul Naylor explored the fascinating lives of three marine animals found along our shores. Combining his research and wealth of knowledge, with his incredible photographs and videos of each of the species, he captured the audience's attention and has certainly inspired many of us to take to the water and explore the depths more often.

Shirley Ellis and Tony Hulatt, both Reserve volunteers, described local monitoring of Great-crested Grebes and Dormice. Discussing the work they carry out on the Reserve and the consideration of factors influencing the species' populations, they highlighted how important it is for the Reserve to be supported by a volunteer team. We hope to include at least one presentation from volunteers at every Seminar.

This year we are planning to film all presentations, with recordings can be uploaded to Field Studies Council YouTube channel, further expanding the audience we can connect with. If you know any individuals or organisations who could assist with this, please do get in contact with the centre.

This year's Seminar will take place on Saturday 9th November 2024.

Em Kendell Senior Tutor, Slapton Ley Field Centre

Start Bay sediments

The well developed shingle beaches of Start Bay are demonstrably rich in flint pebbles (typical >60%), despite the fact that the nearest outcrops of Chalk (and therefore flint) lie some considerable distance to the east of the bay. The origin of this flint and related non-local rock types has been attributed to onshore transport of sediment from what is now the bed of the English Channel (but what under low -glacial- sea level conditions would have been the floodplain of a major "Channel River" system) by a process of "roll-over" of beaches during sea level rise.

Since 2018 I have been working to present systematic analyses of the lithological make up and shape (roundness)

characteristics of Holocene and earlier Quaternary shoreline sediments in Start Bay and the surrounding area of south Devon. This work has demonstrated that whilst flint is present in all of these shoreline sediments, it is particularly prevalent in the modern (Holocene) beaches of Start Bay itself; the reasons for this are currently being explored.

The excellent laboratory facilities at Slapton Ley Field Centre, allied to the restricted range of rock types present in the beaches of Start Bay make these sites very valuable as a teaching resource to train future field scientists in the rigour of sample collection, processing and analysis and to test different approaches to this type of work.

John Sinclair University of Northampton

Join us on the Reserve

At Field Studies Council we are passionate about engaging people from all walks of life with nature. We believe that everyone should have access to green spaces where they have the opportunity to learn and be inspired. Through these opportunities we can have hope that future generations will understand the world that we live in, respect and protect our beautiful surroundings. We are so fortunate to have Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve on our doorstep to utilise whilst engaging with the local community. As part of this desire to share this incredible space, we are running a number of free events in which our team of tutors will offer opportunities to dive deeper into this incredible place. Over the last year we have run a number of these sessions as well as other community initiatives, 15 were 'free' education sessions to local schools which has benefited those students who thrive out of the classroom. We would love to offer these opportunities for local groups, not just schools. Fortunately, we qualify for funding to support this endeavour. If you would be interested in finding out more information, please get in touch at enquiries.sl@field-studies-council.org or call 01548 580466.

Grace Phillips Senior Tutor, Slapton Ley Field Centre

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

Editor: Grace Phillips

Centre Manager: Kate Payne

NNR Manager: Lee Dennison

NNR Ranger: Kieran Shaw-Flach

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Field Centre and National Nature Reserve

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