Wessex Water is one of 10 regional water and sewerage companies in England and Wales. We provide sewerage services to an area of the south west of England that includes Dorset, Somerset, Bristol, most of Wiltshire and parts of Gloucestershire, Hampshire and Devon. Within our region, Bristol Water, Bournemouth Water and Cholderton and District Water Company also supply customers with water.

What area does Wessex Water cover?

**ABOUT WESSEX WATER**
OUR COMMITMENT

Wessex Water is a long-term business committed to providing high quality, sustainable water and environmental services at a price our customers can afford.

We have a long history of supporting wildlife, protecting archaeological remains and working to preserve geological features on our land. We also provide facilities for the public to access our sites, enjoy the outdoors and take part in recreational activities.

Our conservation, access and recreation work helps us meet our goals of conserving and enhancing our land to ensure there is no net loss of biodiversity, whilst also improving the experience for visitors.

This report summarises some of the progress we have made towards meeting our long-term conservation, access and recreation goals during 2019-20.

OUR DUTIES

We have conservation, access and recreation duties under the Water Industry Act 1991 to:

- conserve and enhance wildlife, geology and archaeology
- maintain public access to places of natural beauty
- make water and land available for recreational purposes.

These duties are combined with additional responsibilities under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 which requires us to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity when carrying out our work.
Our land

We own or lease many sites and landholdings, ranging from small pumping stations to large treatment works and reservoirs, amounting to nearly 3,000 ha.

Our region is environmentally and archaeologically rich, including:

- significant populations of locally, nationally and internationally important species and habitats
- more than 3,000 scheduled ancient monuments
- three world heritage sites
- more than 40,000 listed buildings
- more than 6,000 regionally important wildlife or geological sites
- tens of thousands of archaeological sites of local or regional importance.

Delivering our duties

As a landowner, we are very aware of our responsibilities to conserve and enhance wildlife and heritage, and to provide access to the public where possible.

From operations and engineering to our estates, environment and sustainability teams, many core areas of our business work together to meet our responsibilities in respect of conservation, access and recreation.
Our conservation programme is set out in our Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), through which we aim to halt or reverse biodiversity loss on our land. Biodiversity 2020, the biodiversity strategy for England, sets national targets of maintaining 95% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in favourable or recovering condition, with at least 50% in favourable condition. Currently almost 93.2% of our 293 ha of SSSI-designated land is in favourable or recovering condition, of which 62.7% is in favourable condition.

Although 2019 was announced as the Year of Green Action, it marked 21 years since Wessex Water became the first water company to publish a biodiversity action plan (BAP). Our BAP sets out our aims to conserve and enhance the environment in our region and we thought it would be timely to reflect on what has been achieved since that date.

Our new report, Wild Working at Wessex Water – 21 years of green action looks at the outcomes we have delivered for nature over this period. These range from improving habitats on our sites for wildlife and access through 60 Site Environment Plans, to checking more than 7,800 development schemes for environmental impacts. From mapping habitats across 2,150 hectares of our land to investing £1.5 million in 60 partnership projects; and recording and submitting more than 85,000 records of species found on our sites.

If you would like to find out how we have helped Iron Age hillforts and chalk streams, used newt detecting dogs and many other aspects of the amazing environment across our region, find out more within our report.

We gratefully acknowledge the invaluable time, expertise and enthusiasm given by volunteers who have provided us with species records from their surveys and helped us to complete a range of tasks, from habitat and heritage conservation to running stands at events.

This year we continued work to achieve a company performance commitment to assess 100% of our eligible landholding for its biodiversity value by 2020. By the end of the financial year we had brought the total land assessed to 99.5% of over 2,000 ha of eligible land. This means we have now mapped more than 2,000 ha of terrestrial habitats and documented over 400 ha of Priority Habitat at more than 100 locations.

The fourth year of our biodiversity project at Clatworthy reservoir has yielded some very exciting results. The project is part of the National Environment Programme and aims to restore and enhance the grassland and woodland surrounding the reservoir, improving connectivity for species across the local landscape.

Last year we reported the creation of natural nest boxes at the reservoir. These are made by ‘veteranising’ semi-mature trees, creating holes and crevices in the trunks and branches to provide nesting and roosting opportunities for birds and bats. This was very successful: there was uptake of the natural nest boxes in the first season following their creation and, significantly, they were used by the red-listed pied flycatcher.

Habitat management for greater broomrape was another of the great successes at Clatworthy reservoir this year. This plant, which grows as a parasite on the roots of common gorse and common broom, is classified as vulnerable on the England Red List and had not been recorded on site – or indeed in Somerset – for 18 years. Following consultation with specialists at Natural England and the Natural History Museum, management to create suitable conditions for this plant was implemented at its last known location. Following this, the plant was found growing at two locations within the managed area. We collected seed from the broomrape to be deposited at the Millennium Seed Bank at Kew Gardens in order to conserve the genes of this rare plant.
The fifth and final year of our biodiversity project at Clatworthy Reservoir has continued to produce some fantastic results. The project is part of the National Environment Programme and aims to restore and enhance the grassland and woodland surrounding the reservoir, improving connectivity for species across the local landscape.

The enthusiasm of volunteers from the Milverton Conservation Group has been instrumental in increasing the population of pied flycatcher, a scarce summer visitor that breeds in mature woodland, from no confirmed breeding pairs in 2012 to 11 successfully fledged nests in 2019.

With funding from Wessex Water, the volunteers have made, erected and monitored 44 nest boxes at Clatworthy Wood.

A total of 84 pied flycatcher were ringed in 2019 as part of this project. These small metal identification rings are attached to the bird’s legs by a volunteer from the British Trust for Ornithology and allow surveyors to identify any ‘Clatworthy Birds’ that return following their winter in Africa. To date, returning birds from previous years have been recorded as far afield as Devon and Shropshire.

Further surveys to monitor the effectiveness of conservation management of the grassland and bracken habitats have recorded an increase in the bats on site to at least 11 species, increased the number of bird species recorded on site to 132, and recorded increases in invertebrate diversity in all areas surveyed. To date, more than 1000 invertebrate species have been recorded, with further surveys planned for 2020.
Work also continued to remove over 0.6 ha of invasive rhododenron and laurel at the site, with volunteers from EuCAN working to protect the natural regeneration of birch, holly and rowan within the recently cleared areas, from deer browsing. A first flush of foxgloves gave some good spring colour to the regenerating woodland.

Although the biodiversity project has now come to an end, the management trials and monitoring has enabled us to establish the most beneficial habitat management at the site. This will be taken forward as part of a 2020-2025 management plan for Clatworthy.

The Open University Geological Society and EuCAN continued to clear vegetation and soil from rock exposures to improve the condition of a Local Geological Site (LGS) and worked with us to design new information boards explaining some of the interesting geological features now visible to visitors.
We were delighted to hear from SERC that an area of grassland supports an interesting population of waxcaps. Species identified included the scarlet, fibrous, parrot and snowy waxcaps, as well as blewits.

Waxcaps are standard shaped fungi that are often brightly coloured with a waxy or slippery-looking cap. They are found in late summer and autumn in grasslands that are generally poor in nutrients, such as old pasture, sand dunes, heathland, lawns and cemeteries. The waxcap grasslands of the UK are among the most important in the world for grassland fungi.

Following their findings, SERC has recommended that an area of grassland at the reservoir be designated as an LWS due to the grassland fungi interest.
The current phase of our Partners Programme will end in March 2020. It is a key strand of our BAP, and funds projects to conserve and enhance wildlife and our catchments throughout our region. This phase has supported four large projects:

- **Dorset Wild Rivers Project (Dorset Wildlife Trust)**
- **Wessex Chalk Stream Project (Wiltshire Wildlife Trust)**
- **South Wiltshire Farmland Conservation Project (Cranborne Chase AONB)**
- **North Somerset Levels and Moors Grazing Marsh Project (Avon Wildlife Trust)**

In addition to our major projects, we also provide funding through our small grants scheme, which is designed to fund short-term, smaller scale practical projects which address catchment, ecosystems, and science and research issues. This has supported three further projects.

We are supporting **Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group South West (FWAG SW)** to enable them to deliver the first phase of the **Devil’s Brook multi-benefit project**. The aim of this project is to gain a greater understanding of fish and invertebrate populations within Devil’s Brook catchment in Dorset, in addition to assessing the hydromorphology of the channel.

This will allow the project to implement measures to improve current numbers of species (including trout on the perennial reach of the river), mitigate against the need to support river flows, and in the long term, improve water quality for phosphate, nitrate and sediment. The project has already held a community river walkabout event which was well attended by the local community and farmers within the catchment. A community river group may be formed as a result.

**Avon Wildlife Trust** have won support for the **Gordano Bats Project**. Our funding will allow the purchase of specialist bat detectors and staff time to improve understanding of how bats use the Gordano Valley (located between Portishead and Clevedon). This area is a known stronghold for greater and lesser horseshoe bats, two of the UK’s rarest bat species, but there is limited information on how they are using the wider landscape. The project will carry out surveys to identify the most important features for bats and landowners will be offered the opportunity to collect data on bat activity on their land. The information will then be analysed to plan more joined-up management activities in the area.

We have funded **Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre** to deliver its **Curlew Call Project**. The curlew is a bird species in severe decline in the UK and considered the nation’s most pressing bird conservation priority. Wiltshire has historically been a key breeding site for curlew but has suffered an 80% decline in the population, with only 10-15 breeding pairs now estimated to be present in two areas - Salisbury Plain and the Braydon Forest (a former royal hunting park between Malmesbury and Swindon).

The project aims to support a self-sustaining population of curlew within Wiltshire by obtaining better information on the existing breeding population, safeguarding existing breeding sites, and engaging with the local community to raise awareness and increase support. Our funding will be used to support the first year of radio tagging of the five remaining breeding pairs in the Braydon Forest, to identify locations used by the species and discuss curlew friendly management strategies with landowners.
In addition to our proactive conservation programme, our BAP provides a framework to minimise and mitigate the impact of our engineering and operational activities on the environment.

Before any construction project starts, our environment and planning services team investigates any potential impacts on the environment, wildlife, archaeology and geology. The team uses an ISO14001-approved system of procedures to assess many schemes each year, ranging from small projects, such as the replacement of a pumping station roof, to major pipeline schemes and water recycling centre extensions.

The team undertook ecological surveys for 152 schemes in 2019. For each scheme an assessment was made of its potential impacts on the natural environment which included checking for the presence of protected and rare species, and BAP habitats. Appropriate methods are used to mitigate impacts on habitats and species when required, and landscaping plans are implemented to compensate and enhance, as well as to reduce, the visual impact of new sites.

The team uses a wide variety of survey techniques, including the use of camera traps to monitor badger setts, DNA analysis to identify bat species from their droppings, and environmental DNA analysis to identify great crested newt presence in ponds from water samples. The UK’s first in-house great crested newt detection dog (Freya), has also been deployed on mitigation projects to help safely move this protected species from construction zones. Research trials are currently underway to determine the effectiveness of the great crested newt detection dog against an experienced hand-searcher. Results will be published in a scientific journal once research trials are completed in 2021.

Compensation for these works has included regrading banks during reinstatement to create improved burrowing opportunities, and habitat management further along the watercourse to improve water vole habitat. Bankside scrub was cleared along a brook at Three Brooks Local Nature Reserve, South Gloucestershire, to reduce shading and create more favourable habitat as compensation for temporary damage to banks when constructing a new sewer. Training on future conservation management and survey techniques was also provided to the local friends group.

Ecologist/dog handler Nikki Glover and Freya searching for great crested newts
A CATCHMENT-BASED APPROACH

We continue to invest in our catchment-based approach to find alternatives to traditional engineering schemes where possible. We aim to find solutions which are cost-effective and sustainable, delivering additional environmental and social benefits which would not be possible through a standard engineering scheme.

Our catchment coordinators are supporting local catchment partnerships and helping to implement action plans to deliver improved water quality and protect and restore the water environment. To deliver improvements we need to work collaboratively at a local catchment scale and provide a clear understanding of the issues in the catchment. Local communities and stakeholders are involved in decision-making and greater efforts will be made to share evidence, listen to their ideas and work out priorities for action. Ultimately the catchment-based approach aims to deliver integrated actions that address local issues in a cost-effective way and protect local resources.

CASE STUDY

New large-scale wetlands have been created upstream of Durleigh reservoir, near Bridgwater, to trap and remove heavy suspended soils which otherwise wash down through the catchment, siting up the reservoir.

DURLEIGH NEW WETLAND

Using solutions based on natural based processes we have also incorporated a number of additional benefits.

- The new river channel has increased the length of river by 50m, creating habitat improvements which include enhancements for fish populations, such as removal of barriers, creation of riffle-and-pool sequences for brown trout and consolidated sediment for brook lamprey.
- Reconnected one hectare of new floodplain with the new river channel. The floodplain area allows the flows to be ‘pushed out’ onto the floodplain where the velocity of water will slow down. This allows the river sediment to settle out before the water enters the reservoir.
- 24,000 plants were planted to create habitat and help trap sediment, with a further one hectare of floodplain seeded with a native wetland grass seed mix.
- Within the new floodplain, six seasonal pools were created to facilitate further sediment capture, while also providing habitat for amphibians and pond invertebrates.
- A second wetland was constructed to create a sequence of lagoons to improve the quality of canal water. This water is pumped into the reservoir at times of high demand. The integrated constructed wetland will remove sediment and reduce nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphate, as well as being an area that will benefit wildlife such as dragonflies.
- Enhanced public access is being installed in and around the new wetlands.
- Within the catchment we are turning seven kilometres of buffer strips into nectar-rich buffer strips to enhance and expand wildlife networks as well as returning eight hectares of our own land to neutral grassland to benefit wildlife.

The new wetlands upstream of Durleigh reservoir will provide an environmental solution to the problem of sediment loading in the reservoir.
The dam effectively cuts off the supply of gravel from upstream and this has led to an overly incised channel and poor ecology. The invertebrate community is being monitored to assess how quickly it colonises the new gravel substrate and to see if the project results in improved ecology.

We have added 84 tonnes of gravel to the stream below Sutton Bingham reservoir to replace material eroded since the dam was constructed in 1955.

Mapping the mesohabitats, eg, submerged plants, silt beds, gravel, both before and after the project, has allowed the benefits to the aquatic plant and invertebrate communities to be quantified.

On the western arm of the upper Hampshire Avon we have undertaken a variety of river habitat enhancement work. This includes regrading the riverbank, reconnecting the river to the floodplain, creating an offline pond and installation of woody debris, brushwood berms and flow deflectors.

Creating an offline pond alongside part of the upper Hampshire Avon.
**INVASIVE SPECIES**

We continue with our programme of controlling Himalayan (Indian) balsam and Japanese knotweed. Control of balsam at our surface water reservoirs continues to show success, with plant densities considerably reduced at Clatworthy and Durleigh this year.

We were also pleased to see a reduction of balsam on our land at Lytchett Minster Water Recycling Centre, which forms part of Poole Harbour SSSI. As we survey more of our land for our biodiversity performance commitment, we identify further sites on which these species are present. Discovery of previously unknown locations of Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed this year brought the total number of known sites to 72 and 22 respectively, emphasising the scale of this ongoing task to control the spread of these species.

We continue to survey for invasive crayfish, mussels, shrimp and plants at 23 sites where recreational activity poses a risk of them spreading. Currently, invasive fauna appear to be restricted to zebra mussels at one reservoir and signal crayfish at three other sites. New Zealand pygmyweed has also been found recently at Durleigh reservoir where it had not previously been recorded.

AMP7 scopes for implementing biosecurity at all 23 sites have been completed and we are currently investigating washdown facility options suitable for sailing clubs and anglers at six of these sites. We will also be assessing the risk and identifying mitigation options for eight raw water transfers, one of which is between catchments and so poses a higher risk of transferring invasive species.

We anticipate working with partners and contributing to research in AMP7 by hosting biocontrol trials for New Zealand pygmyweed and Himalayan balsam, undertaken by the Centre for Bioscience and Agriculture International. We are also investigating the feasibility of controlling signal crayfish at one of our reservoirs.
There was high demand from staff for environmentally focused volunteering during the year. This is part of the wider Water Force volunteering programme run by our community engagement team.

The programme enables every permanent staff member at Wessex Water to spend a day volunteering with an environmental or community focused charity or group.

Two hundred and eighty-four staff, representing more than half the total number of Water Force volunteers this year, volunteered to carry out a variety of environmental tasks. They gave more than 1,700 hours to groups such as Avon Wildlife Trust, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Somerset Wildlife Trust, Bath City Farm and B&NES council.

Our staff helped complete tasks including:
- removal of an incredible 100kg of plastic waste from Chesil Beach in one week
- a river-based canoe litter pick at Salford
- bridge building at Kilwood Nature Reserve, Dorset
- scything at Hengrove Mounds, Bristol
- bird hide painting, river clearing and bench making at Langford Lakes Nature Reserve near Salisbury
- ditch clearing at Green Lane Woods in Trowbridge
- scrub clearance at Newbridge slopes in Bath.
ACCESS AND RECREATION

Our reservoirs and lakes continue to provide many opportunities for access and recreation in some of the most beautiful surroundings in the West Country, including fishing, walking, water skiing, sailing, kayaking and birdwatching.

By working closely with the community clubs and volunteers who enable many of these activities to take place, we aim to increase participation in the coming years and deliver several events which will promote the benefits of a healthy and active lifestyle within the natural environment.

Following the completion of access audits at all our key sites in 2018, we have been working to provide more inclusive access for the widest possible variety of potential users through targeting significant barriers or restrictions identified within the audits. Wherever we make improvements to our facilities we ensure that the design considers ease of access, ease of understanding and that all visitors are able to benefit from a positive and enjoyable experience.

At Clatworthy reservoir, the audit noted that multi-terrain mobility buggies, such as the Tramper, could access the entire site provided buggy riders were willing to ‘ford’ two streams. Following liaison with the Disabled Ramblers, the replacement of the two narrow footbridges with fully accessible structures has enhanced future access for a range of users, including mobility buggy users and pushchairs. Following advice, the fords have been retained and reprofiled to allow more of a challenge to those who wish to take the wet route!

Two visitor access routes at the reservoir, the woodland trail and the southern reservoir return, have also been made more accessible through the installation of benches and ‘perches’ at 300m intervals.

The year has also included the continued maintenance of visitor infrastructure at a number of our sites, including footpath improvements at Sutton Poyntz and the enhancement of the coastal path sea wall steps, visitor benches and hides at Bleadon Nature Reserve.

In late 2019 we created an online survey which received more than 270 responses from users and non-users of our publicly accessible reservoir sites. This information has been used to inform future development aspirations across our sites. It has identified a need for simple comforts such as picnic shelters, additional benches, improved car parking areas, and for younger visitors, improved play equipment in keeping with each site, whilst also maintaining the environment and creating sanctuaries for people to visit.

Just had a brilliant day at Clatworthy...very impressed that both bridges at each ford had been sorted out and [the] scooters could go across [the] bridges no problem. From the dam, the first ford has a brand new bridge, very wide, very strong, lots of space for Trampers. Fantastic. This is superb, will advise Disabled Ramblers about these improvements. A big thank you to all involved.

An email received from a Tramper rider

Before

and after
Wessex Water offers some of the best value-for-money fishing in the country, set within beautiful landscapes and immersed in nature.

We pride ourselves on ensuring our reservoirs are well stocked with high quality fish and ensuring everyone can take part by offering accessibility and competitive prices plus support and tuition from our expert team of rangers.

Currently we operate five fisheries which received more than 20,000 combined visits in 2019 and have delivered introductory days for new anglers and hosted angling competitions, as well as offering open days, guided walks, and volunteering opportunities to local people.

Additionally, we work closely with third parties so that they too can deliver community events from our sites. In 2019 the first public running event was hosted at Clatworthy reservoir – the Woods and Water race was delivered by Flying Fox Running and attracted 235 entrants across a five-mile and 10-mile evening trail race. Combining internal and external events, our reservoirs have hosted 53 days of activity to the public, with more than 1000 people attending.

**Clatworthy**
- Clatworthy Family Fun Day.
- Woods and Water running race.
- Troutmasters competition.
- The Alan Duke’s Memorial Cup.
- Fishing For Life presentation.

**Hawkridge**
- 1 x Open day/coffee morning for anglers.
- 8 x Community club fishing matches.
- 2 x Water Industry Game Fishing Championship qualifiers.
- 4 x South West Fishing For Life days.
- 1 x Open day/match (sponsored by Torre Trout Farms).

**Durleigh**
- 17 x coarse fishing matches.
- 2 x Angling Trust family days.
- 2 x sailing club open days.

**Sutton Bingham**
- 2 x guided walks
- 1 x week of parent/child learn to fish
- 9 x club match days.
- 24 individual tuition lessons
- 2 x corporate days
**Conservation, Access and Recreation Project 2015-2020**

In addition to delivering our conservation, access and recreation (CAR) duties through core work across the business, we have a dedicated CAR Project which provides capital funding for conservation, access and recreation projects across the business.

It also provides for a part-time project officer to oversee and co-ordinate the projects, ensuring a balanced approach to implementing all three elements of CAR: conservation, access and recreation. Information on the projects undertaken this 2019/20 financial year are shown in the table below.

This five-year dedicated CAR Project is now drawing to a close. Between 2015-2020, a total of 67 new projects were carried out across our region. Some projects focused purely on wildlife and conservation, but most involved some form of access improvement or the production of interpretation information for visitors to our sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Project location</th>
<th>Project description</th>
<th>CAR Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New viewing platform</td>
<td>Backwell Lake</td>
<td>Design and installation of a new viewing platform at Backwell Lake to improve the visitor experience and safety. The ducks and swans are well loved and well fed at Backwell Lake, and this new platform – which incorporates a small wildfowl only platform – should make interactions between people and birds more pleasant and safer.</td>
<td>Access and recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access Improvements</td>
<td>Backwell Lake</td>
<td>Installation of more benches and passing places along the footpath that circles the lake to provide a resting place at least every 100 m along the route to make it more accessible.</td>
<td>Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water vole surveys</td>
<td>Bleadon Reserve</td>
<td>Survey of water voles in and around the Bleadon Levels reserve to update initial surveys conducted in 2007.</td>
<td>Conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bat project</td>
<td>Various Wessex Water sites across the region</td>
<td>Continuing the work done in previous years: more buildings have been surveyed and roosts identified. Data from all periods of this project have been collated and disseminated, to further inform our work through the business. Improvements made to a significant Bechstein’s hibernation roost.</td>
<td>Conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service reservoir meadows</td>
<td>Various Wessex Water sites across the region</td>
<td>Review of the possibility of creating wildflower meadows on service reservoirs.</td>
<td>Conservation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Surveys for water vole were undertaken at Bleadon Levels.
**ACHIEVEMENTS DELIVERED BY THE CAR PROJECT 2015-2020**

**Bats**
52 buildings, 7 tunnels, 1 dam & 2 alarm boxes surveyed; status of 54 roosts confirmed; 10 species; 57 DNA samples analysed

**Community events**
More than 100 people attending 8 free community events at Wessex Water sites.

**Accessible recreation**
14km of footpath made more accessible with 303m of new footpath & 104 steps installed.

**1 scheduled monument**
Taken off the Heritage at Risk register, visitor experience improved.

**Visitor facilities**
106 visitor information signs & 53 pieces of visitor infrastructure installed.

**One breeding pair of beavers**

**Collaborative working with more than 20 organisations**
Including RSPB, Disabled Ramblers, EuCAN, and several universities.

**Access**
17 staff trained in inclusive access & equality legislation. Access audits of more than 17km of paths at 8 sites.

**185 surveys**
More than 20ha of Wessex Water land surveyed.

We worked with the Somerset Geology Group and the Open University Geology Society to improve the understanding and visibility of a Local Geological Site.

**Photo: Tom Buckley**

One of the Ssshh! Bats sleeping! signs installed at a known roost site

One of the many visitor information signs installed across the Wessex Water region

Children’s playground installed at Sutton Bingham

We worked with the Somerset Geology Group and the Open University Geology Society to improve the understanding and visibility of a Local Geological Site

New accessible footpaths constructed at Bleadon reserve

Orange Tag, one of the resident beavers at Otterhead Lakes

The Disabled Ramblers visit to Clatworthy Reservoir

Early spider orchids surveyed at Swanage Water Recycling Centre

One of the Ssshh! Bats sleeping! signs installed at a known roost site
In 2012, in collaboration with the Backwell Access Group, we undertook substantial works to improve accessibility at the lake and provide more inclusive access for the widest possible variety of potential users. Since then, the site's popularity has grown enormously, and the increased number of people using the site has highlighted the need for further improvements.

This year, in conjunction with feedback from users of the site, we submitted a planning application for further improvements. These include:

- a new accessible viewing platform to take in the view across the lake to the island
- improvements to the existing circular footpath, with additional resting places around the lake
- cycle parking
- additional native planting, including several trees.

We hope to start construction work during 2020.
Part of Wessex Water’s landholding at Tucking Mill, near Bath, are two steep south-facing fields, long noted for their biodiversity. Originally part of the 18th-century Midford Castle estate, they were cut off from the rest of the estate by the railway, which opened in 1874.

These fields have been left isolated like a habitat time capsule, subject only to light grazing and cutting, and as such have retained much of the biodiversity that was once abundant in the local area.

Professional and amateur invertebrate specialists have surveyed Tucking Mill for nearly 40 years, with in excess of 400 species recorded, including 43 of conservation interest. Their work has led to the site being noted as a local hotspot for rare invertebrate species. In 2017, marsh fritillaries were found to have returned to the site after a 35-year absence. This is currently the only known site for this species in Bath and North East Somerset.

Recent invertebrate surveys at Tucking Mill have focused on the woodland, in particular the ground, arboreal and dead wood communities, as well as focusing on surveying in the very early spring and very late autumn, the best times of year to find some uncommon species.

As expected, this most recent tranche of surveys has produced numerous additions to the site list, including:

- the rugged oil beetle
- the spider Atypus affinis
- the huge shiny green necklace ground beetle, thought to be the UK’s most rapidly declining ground beetle species
- the rove beetle Siagonum quadricorne with horns similar to stag beetle
- the uncommon tree-dwelling false blister beetle Oedemera femoralis, and
- the brown tree ant Lasius brunneus that nests in standing dead wood.

Some common species found at Tucking Mill have not been recorded in the Bath area for more than a century. Additionally, the site was the only one in Bath on which all four common species of reptile could be found: adder, slow worm, grass snake and common lizard.

The survey findings will be used to inform the future management of the site and local habitat creation and restoration projects in order to provide more suitable habitat for the rare species found at Tucking Mill. This year new fencing was erected to reduce the impact of informal recreational access on this grassland habitat.

We would like to thank Mike Williams for his survey work at Tucking Mill.
Goosard Batch lies on the site of a spoil heap from two historic collieries and close to the partly restored Somerset Coal Canal. The nature reserve covers part of the Paulton Colliery and Canal Basin Local Geological Site and the Cam Brook and adjacent land Local Wildlife Site.

Local volunteers, the Cam Valley Wildlife Group (CVWG), have been managing the varied habitats of this 1.3 ha site for several years. In 2019, the habitat management plan was due for an update and the CAR team have been working with CVWG to draw up ways to enhance the value of the reserve for both wildlife and people. This includes cutting regimes that allow the flower-rich grassland areas to flourish and be alive with insects, and ensuring people can safely access the site to enjoy the natural and historic features of this distinctive little reserve.