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COTSWOLD LION

The magazine of the Cotswolds National Landscape

Climate Change and Community
Wetland Wonders
Going the Distance
Dam Neighbours!
...and more



Cotswolds
National
Landscape

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Welcome

Welcome to Cotswold Lion issue 53. This issue looks at community-led climate action – with Alice Whitehead, our Climate Action Coordinator, (page 6); and a look at two exciting projects which benefit both nature and climate (pages 8 and 14) by creating habitat and building soil health. Following a recent change in law, we look at the pros and cons of reintroducing beavers into the Cotswolds (page 18), and we catch up with Tea Smart – a filmmaker working on a very special project to celebrate the Cotswolds National Landscape in 2026. Not forgetting a quick look at some summer and autumn walking highlights.



Courtesy of Campden House Estate



Nicole Daw



Tea Smart



Caroline Farrow

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The Cotswolds National Landscape is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), managed and looked after by the Cotswolds Conservation Board. The two key purposes of the Board are to:

- conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB
- increase understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB

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If you are interested in sponsoring the Cotswold Lion, please contact alana.hopkins@cotswolds-nl.org.uk

Front cover: Read more about healthy soil on page 14. Image by Tea Smart.

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Bulletin

Top stories from the Cotswolds National Landscape team

FiPL programme – extended

Defra has extended the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme until March 2026. The extension to the programme is fantastic news for farmers in the Cotswolds, and our FiPL team is looking forward to welcoming new applications from the farming community to help build more resilience and beauty for this treasured landscape. Contact Olivia.blackwell@cotswolds-nl.org.uk for more information and advice.



New team members

We recently welcomed Cerian Brogan to the Glorious Cotswold Grasslands team as our new Programme Officer. Cerian has been a volunteer for the programme for some time, so she already has lots of experience with the work, and with the team. Having completed his term as Head Cotswolds Voluntary Warden, Mike Cripps has handed the reins to Sarah West, with Douglas Calkin as our new Deputy Head Warden. Mike has been fantastic in his time as Head Warden – and it's been a pleasure to work with him in the role.



Cerian Brogan



Sarah West

Management Plan adopted

At our last full CNL Board meeting, the Board formally adopted the new 2025-2030 Management Plan. Our next task is working with local authorities to seek their endorsement of the plan – it is only by working together, as much as we can with other organisations and partners, that we can all deliver the outcomes detailed in the plan.



Shorter walks in time for summer

We have been working hard behind the scenes to produce a fantastic online series of 15 short walks, ranging from 0.5 miles to 3 miles. These walks have been specially curated for people with babies, toddlers, and young children, and are suitable for those using pushchairs and wheelchairs. The shorter length and inclusion of details around amenities (like loos and cafés) makes them great for people who may have health issues, or are recovering from being unwell, or for people who may experience anxiety about walking or exploring the countryside. Look out for more news on these routes, coming soon.

Dark Skies guidance

We have worked with Darkscape Consulting to produce a Technical Lighting Design Guide for the Cotswolds. We hope this will be used by local authorities, parish and town councils, homeowners, landowners, and business owners. The guidance pack will help advise on how we can all work to reduce light pollution, through a variety of methods. This work was made possible by funding from National Highways Designated Funds. Read more about this on page 12.

Summer events

Don't miss our wildflower events this summer! We're hosting a Wildflower Identification Day on 30 June, and running a National Meadows Day demonstration event on 5 July! Come along to see our brush seed harvester in action, and learn about our Glorious Cotswold Grasslands programme – creating and restoring a vast network of wildflower-rich grassland habitat across the Cotswolds. More info on the Events page online at www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk



People, place and pragmatism

Katie Jarvis speaks with CNL's new chief executive, Rebecca Waite.

Recently, Bex Waite – chief executive of Cotswolds National Landscape – had an interesting conversation with one of her education team.

About poo.

Yes – you read correctly. And, yes, it was an eye-opener for Bex, too.

Jennifer Lanham, community outreach officer, was showing Bex a sample of badger droppings she'd been taking around primary schools. 'It was a weird conversation,' Bex laughs. 'But what Jennifer was doing was great. She was using it to get children to work out which animal had produced it; what the animal had eaten; where it had been; what it had been doing.'

The children were – it goes without saying – mesmerised... (Point proven.)

But climate change is happening; it's real. If we don't do something about it, we could lose what makes this place so special – regardless.'



Welcoming attendees at an event to celebrate FIPL.

Tea Smart



Bex Waite.

'If you can find a hook for children – which might be poo; it might be getting them onto their bikes so they've more independence and freedom; it could be anything – that's how you gain access to their minds.'

But there's a wider point Bex is making here. One that provides a fascinating insight into her leadership qualities; and also into Bex, as a person. She values the passion she finds throughout the Cotswolds: people who are fiercely emotional about their environment; the landscape; the beauty of nature.

'But if you were to go into a school and just wax lyrical about all the things you love, you'd be wasting an opportunity. It's all about finding ways to connect with people.'

Don't get Bex wrong: she's happy to describe how moved she is by stunning Cotswold views: 'When I drive from my home in Cheltenham to the office, the scenery is fantastic; amazing.'

But she rarely walks or drives without a specific purpose.

And it's that kind of pragmatism; that focus on strategic thinking that is going to help protect the Cotswolds as it moves through one of arguably the most difficult periods in its history as a designated landscape. A period when environment will struggle against the carbon footprint of vital tourism; when house-building targets will push against the desire to 'protect' views; when areas of special character might have to flex to mitigate global warming; when a whopping 86 percent of the Cotswolds is farmland.

'There are going to be tensions that we'll need to work through. But climate change is

happening; it's real. If we don't do something about it, we could lose what makes this place so special – regardless.'

Ask Bex a question, and she'll answer with refreshing honesty and directness. 'I could try saying something I didn't mean, but I don't think I'd be very good at it.'

Her openness also means she has an empathetic understanding of barriers to access in the countryside: emotional as well as physical. 'Barriers can be practical, like not having the kit: wellies; a waterproof and windproof jacket. But they also might be: *'Well, the countryside is not for me. When I imagine the Cotswolds, or when I see photographs online, I don't see me.'*

'So I really want to address that and make the Cotswolds accessible for anyone: physically, and from a hearts and minds perspective.'

Bex's own children – Hayden, 11, and Hetty, 9, are cases in point. A favourite family walk with the children and husband Andy is up on Wistley Hill in Charlton Kings: 'Once the children are out, they absolutely love it. It's getting them there (off screens, away from books and TV) in the first place!'

Just like the Cotswolds, Bex's job – taking the National Landscape into a secure and valued future – is going to be uphill at times. And not



At a volunteer tree-planting day with the team in March.

just strategically. 'When I tell people what my job is, I often see a surprised reaction in their faces: I don't know if it's because I'm a woman, or maybe I don't fit their expectations somehow.

'But I do think there's a role for me to support other women: whether they're within the organisation; our volunteer body; or beyond.'

In other words, Bex's Cotswolds comprises every open and hidden corner of the community: in her view, no matter how we as individuals experience the landscape, the Cotswolds is for us all.



Bex took up her role leading the CNL team in December 2024.

Climate change and community

The effects of climate change are being felt right across the Cotswolds National Landscape. We speak to Alice Whitehead, CNL's Climate Action Coordinator, about how all parts of the community can help.

"The Met Office suggests that the CNL is likely to experience warmer summers and milder winters" says Alice, "and this will pose threats to human health, agricultural productivity, and infrastructure." Flood risk is a particular concern, as Alice explains that extreme weather events linked to precipitation will probably become more frequent and intense. By 2050, winter rainfall is expected to be 8% higher than that between 1981 and 2000, with flood risk threatening homes, infrastructure, and local economies.

By contrast, summer months could expect increasingly extensive dry periods, with 19% less rainfall expected in 2050, compared to 1981 to 2000. As a result, climate change poses a challenge to food production within the CNL; threatening crop yields, affecting livestock health, and increasing the prevalence of pests and diseases.

But it's not all doom and gloom, and Alice is hopeful, "in the face of these dramatic predictions, we can all take steps to help slow down climate change, reduce our emissions, and develop resilience."

What can our communities do?

Climate change is likely to have an impact on communities across the CNL. This could be increased disruption from extreme weather, risks to public health, and economic disruption. These impacts are likely to put strain on local resources.

Tackling climate change with practicality combined with innovation may be a solution. "St Michael and All Angel's church in Withington is a great example. The installation of solar panels and energy efficient measures including LEDs have significantly reduced emissions" Alice explains. The church is Grade 1 listed, so drilling into the roof for the solar panels wasn't possible. Instead, a clever self-weighting system was used. As no drilling took place, at the end of its working life, the installation is reversible. The church is now generating 754 kW/year of renewable electricity back to the grid.

Schools can help

"Our young people will live with the effects of climate change in the future, so it's essential that they play a role in influencing behaviours now." Alice says. Schools, nurseries, and universities provide plenty of learning opportunities encouraging children and young people to bring their climate change knowledge to life – and to act as facilitators for change. But, expected shifts in weather mean teaching is likely to be increasingly disrupted, for example by reduced concentration prompted by extreme high and low temperatures.

Let's Go Zero is a national campaign working to unite students, teachers, pupils, parents, and schools to make positive change towards net zero. There are also national funding opportunities available to support journeys to net zero. Cranham Church of England Primary School took advantage of a recent Salix funding scheme, replacing old boilers with heat pumps. Since their installation, the project has inspired lively conversation among children regarding their carbon footprint.



Alice Whitehead

The cleverly-fitted solar panels on the church at Withington can't be seen from ground level.



Nick Turner/Cotswolds Tourism

The Wetlands Ecological Treatment System at Cotswolds Distillery – an aerial view shows the series of filtering 'cells'.

Better business

Climate change presents challenges and opportunities for businesses. By taking proactive steps, companies can help mitigate risks, improve local biodiversity, and potentially reduce financial costs. Being more climate conscious can also benefit the 'green' credentials of a business, enticing environmentally conscious consumers.

Cotswolds Distillery, in Shipston-on-Stour, took an innovative approach to reduce their reliance on an off-site anaerobic digester to deal with waste effluent: mostly liquid left in their stills after alcohol has been taken off. By implementing a natural wetlands processing system, they increased biodiversity, reduced the number of tankers driving

through the village each week, and created habitat including 2,000 willows, 14,000 wetland plants, and a whole host of insects, birds, and small animals. Now, three-quarters of the waste water from whisky making will be processed naturally through the wetland ponds.

Climate-positive actions can be scalable – using collected rainwater instead of mains is a great example.



Nick Turner/Cotswolds Tourism

"in the face of these dramatic predictions, we can all take steps to help slow down climate change, reduce our emissions, and develop resilience."

Climate-positive actions are scalable too: businesses can consider smaller steps like switching to LED lightbulbs (which use 60% less energy and last longer than halogen or fluorescent), or reducing freshwater consumption by using rainwater collected in water butts (a cost-effective solution to reduce surface water flooding and aid plant irrigation), or sourcing food and drink from local farms (reducing air miles and supporting local producers).

Alice admits, "challenges posed by climate change are undeniably significant, but they also present opportunities for innovation", and "by embracing sustainable solutions, communities in the Cotswolds will play a vital role in addressing climate change and protecting this precious landscape for future generations."

More information:

Net zero church: search for the project online churchofengland.org/

letsgozero.org/

Salix: www.salixfinance.co.uk/news/gloucestershire-primary-school

Cotswolds Distillery: www.cotswoldsdistillery.com



Wetland wonders

Just a few years ago, the historic former bathing lake at the bottom of the watercourse running through Campden House Estate was described, in the words of a visiting ecologist, as “a rank fen carr”. Estate owner Tom Smith admits to Siân Ellis: “It was certainly not as healthy and vibrant as it could be.”

Now, following an ambitious wetland creation project along approx. 1.25km of river, covering around 1ha of flushes and pools plus a 4ha buffer area, the scene has been transformed. “It’s very attractive and when you go down there [...] you really feel the hum of nature,” Tom says.

Funded by the Environment Agency and the estate alongside a Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) grant of £185,890, the project was an opportunity to tackle several challenges, Tom says: in particular to help mitigate flood risk – the estate is on the outskirts of Chipping Campden, where flooding occurred in 2007 after a very heavy rainfall event – and to boost biodiversity.

The bathing lake that was an impetus to the project had been used for leisure from the 1900s by townsfolk and the Guild of Handicraft which came to Chipping Campden under C R Ashbee

(a great believer in nature’s positive effects on wellbeing), but it later became silted and was abandoned.

Working out how to manage the deposition of silt and to slow the flow of the water on such a large scale was made possible through lots of collaboration, Tom says – an ecologist, specialist contractors who put ideas into action, the Cotswolds National Landscape team who “shepherded” the project through the FiPL funding application process, to name a few.

Interventions included the building of timber leaky dams, and causeways punctuated by culverts, to reduce the speed of water flow and erosion. Some 10,000 reeds and 5,000 oxygenator plants were introduced to act as biofilters and enhance habitat. Meanwhile material and stones from a dam and sluice gate on the old lake were removed and repurposed



Courtesy of Campden House Estate

Opposite: An aerial view of the wetlands.
Below: During the construction phase.



Courtesy of Campden House Estate

Tom says, relating how he has watched water fill the wetland and attenuation ponds and then slowly dissipate again.

Divisions effected by causeways have enabled the creation of different water habitats, including marsh and reeds, a shallow “beach” with water lilies, and an island that offers a haven to birds away from predators. Kingfishers have returned and wildlife has noticeably increased. “We’ve got mandarin duck, teal, and we are pretty confident we have sighted a green sandpiper,” Tom says, adding, “We regularly see great white egret, little white egret and snipe.”

Numerous groups have been given tours of the project to learn first-hand about the benefits of wetland creation and natural flood management, and Tom hopes to engage local schoolchildren in “understanding the interaction between farming and conservation practices that sit around it”.

Kingfishers have returned and wildlife has noticeably increased.

During project works, thousands of tonnes of material were moved and incorporated into adjacent, floristically enhanced field margins; large buffer zones along the river and ponded areas trap sediments and runoff from surrounding farmland, improving water quality. As such the wetland is part of a much larger programme of habitat restoration and creation on the estate that includes wood pasture and species-rich grassland, while farming practices have been moving in the direction of regenerative agriculture.

Tom is excited for the future, and hopes to see a dramatic “step change in bird life and insect life” as wetland plants continue to grow, flourish – and make a significant contribution to nature recovery on the estate.

The CNL FiPL team are very interested in applications for large scale projects, or for similar wetlands projects to help manage flooding and help with nature recovery. Applications are open now – details online at cotswolds-nl.org.uk

to form a rill from which water flows out of the marsh area and downstream. “We didn’t import anything for the project, save for a few culvert pipes and the plants,” Tom says.

The wetlands now add to Chipping Campden’s flood risk protection by reducing water flow before it has a chance to even reach the town’s flood bund (completed 2012). “It is undoubtedly having a positive impact at times of high rainfall,”



Courtesy of Campden House Estate

The Farming in Protected Landscapes team were shown around the project during construction.

Going the distance

The 102-mile Cotswold Way; the Monarch Way (the escape route taken by hunted Charles II); the Wardens' Way through honeyed villages; the Windrush Way via green hills... Katie Jarvis explores long distance routes.

The Cotswolds is delightfully striated by long-distance footpaths: ancient tracks; pilgrimage trails; routes workers once took – snow, wind or rain – to trudge weary miles to factories and mills.

And nowadays? These are the leisurely paths where nature supplants the noise of traffic; where phones are quieted; where the calls of birds or the low of cattle are the only sounds. And many are defined by spectacular vistas allowing mind – and body – to roam free.

Nicole Daw can clearly remember the first time she climbed the steep hill from woods below Cam Long Down – 750 feet above sea level – up, up onto the open hilltop above: one of the fabulous viewpoints along the Cotswold Way. “Suddenly, you find yourself on this prominence, with 360-degree vision. It’s a ‘wow!’ moment.”

The contrast is startling. On one side, the rural tranquillity of the Cotswolds stretches as far as the eye can see; on the other lies the M5. Ancient and modern in one sweeping vista.

There’s another contrast, too.



Accessibility can be improved with lots of features, including wider gates to allow more access.

Nicole Daw



Among walkers, you’ll find a whole spectrum of age and ability; a community as diverse as the landscape through which they’re passing.

A diversity Nicole and colleagues are actively seeking to increase. As Access and Volunteers Officer for Cotswolds National Landscape, she’s well aware of how valuable long-distance footpaths can be: tranquillity, healing, health, balm.

But regular walkers may not even notice the steps, the stiles, the narrow gates that stop some from accessing large sections.

With that in mind, a recent feasibility study – conducted in partnership with Experience Community consultancy – looked at removing barriers on a 30-mile test-stretch between Chipping Campden and the National Star College at Leckhampton.

A non-disabled and disabled team coded the route into red, amber and green; the red suggested that, even without steps or gates, the route could not be made fully accessible. Other sections could potentially go fully green: useable by everything from specialist mobility vehicles to manual wheelchairs and pushchairs; by people

Nicole Daw



Path surfacing, signage, and amenities are all considered when assessing routes.

The contrast is startling. On one side, the rural tranquillity of the Cotswolds stretches as far as the eye can see; on the other lies the M5.

with specific physical and mental challenges.

"There also had to be an understanding that having a 10-mile stretch with no amenities would not help anybody, even once all possible barriers had been removed. So it was a case, too, of looking at where there are already toilets and a café, for example."

It won't be an overnight solution: there's plenty of work to be done; but it's a move – literally and metaphorically – in the right direction.

Other barriers exist, of course: such as logistical ones. Each year, Cotswold Voluntary Warden Linda Blackwell organises a multi-stage, guided walk along the Cotswold Way, beginning in May in Bath; and ending the next March in Chipping Campden.

The 25 participants lucky enough to secure places (there's always a waiting list) are taken by bus to that month's starting-point, and returned to their cars at the end of each day.

"You start off passing some of the most

well-known landmarks in the country, such as Royal Crescent," Linda says. "Then you go by Dyrham Park; Belas Knap; Broadway Tower – right through history – as well as lovely towns and small villages: Wotton-under-Edge, Painswick, Winchcombe..."

For Nicole, the experience is one everybody should have the option to enjoy. "A long-distance path gives you a chance to slow down and take notice; to immerse yourself in nature; to look at the guide book a little more..."

"We tend to walk on autopilot when we're on familiar territory. What you want is to spend more time enjoying a view than you would if it was just your local patch you see all the time."



A test-stretch of the Cotswold Way has been assessed for accessibility.

For more information about the multi-stage, long distance guided Cotswold Way walk, contact Linda at north.guidedwalks@gmail.com

Forever dark skies

Looking up to the night sky, its inky darkness studded by glinting stars and planets, the Milky Way Galaxy a swirling haze – who doesn't feel their heart quicken with curiosity and awe? Who doesn't wonder how many people have looked up like this before us? Or think of wildlife going about its secret business by moonlight? Magical moments. Siân Ellis explores how we protect our dark skies.

We are becoming very good at spoiling our dark skies experiences: through light pollution, the pervasive glow of urban development, poorly aimed street lighting or security lights, to name just a few culprits. And it's doing us no good. Research repeatedly shows that night-time light pollution disrupts the human body clock, natural sleep patterns and melatonin production, adversely impacting on health and wellbeing.

Wildlife, too, can suffer, even in quiet countryside if intrusive artificial lights are present that interfere with Nature's rhythms. Species in the Cotswolds depend on dark skies for feeding, for example, bats, night-flying moths, dormice, and glow-worms.

And isn't it preferable to be able to appreciate ancient places and historical sites by moon – and starlight as their builders intended?

Everybody has a role

Dark skies are identified as a special quality of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL). However there are growing 'pockets of light' within the Cotswolds as well as 'sky glow' from urban areas around it. Fortunately there is plenty that we can do to halt and reverse this, says CNL Land Management Lead Mark Connelly:

"Everybody has a role to play: local authorities through planning and highways, developers and designers of housing and malls, local communities, businesses and individuals. There are massive benefits to reducing light pollution, for health, wildlife and heritage, and it can reduce bills and carbon footprint."

The CNL team has recently published technical design lighting guidance, which includes mapping of areas with good (and less good) dark skies – data from the countryside charity CPRE reveals CNL currently ranks 13th within National Landscapes in England for dark sky quality. Among places to enjoy good stargazing experiences are the Rollright Stones ancient monument on the Oxfordshire/Warwickshire border and Aunt Phoebe's Recreation Ground at Long Compton, both recognised as Dark Sky Discovery Sites.

The guidance information, downloadable from the Dark Skies page on CNL's website, promotes the principles of responsible outdoor lighting: "Basically, the right light in the right place at the right time with the right controls," Mark says.

There are practical ideas that everyone can put into action to lessen impacts on our night skies: whether making sure that outdoor lighting is targeted, downward angled and shielded, or by using dark-sky-friendly warmer, softer colour temperature lights. And we can all close blinds and pull curtains to prevent light spill!

Businesses lead the way

The CNL guidance has been produced with help from National Highways Designated Funds, which also enabled a report on light pollution levels surrounding the A417 corridor (the A417 and Missing Link scheme themselves follow unlit design principles). Further National Highways funding has allowed a programme of retrofitting on premises and commercial properties to upgrade to more dark-sky-friendly lighting.

Projects have included replacement of the floodlights at Fosse Cross Recycling Centre, from 'cool-white' LEDs that were left on from dusk until dawn, to lower temperature alternatives set at improved downward angles and controlled to be used only when needed. Warmer colour temperature, down-light-designed units and fit-for-purpose timers complimented by a passive infra-red movement sensor were installed at Compton Business and Craft Centre.

At The Highwayman Inn, Elkstone, new lower colour temperature car-park lanterns with shielding, and building mounted down-lighter units have got rid of harsh upward light spill, also enhancing the cosy feel of welcome.

Such practicalities may sound prosaic but the conservation and restoration of our dark skies promises their magic can continue to enthrall and benefit us all, and generations to come.

We're planning a special dark skies event for the autumn – keep checking online for details.

...There are massive benefits to reducing light pollution, for health, wildlife and heritage, and it can reduce bills and carbon footprint."

Soil is Sacred

"Few can deny that as a society we are failing to tackle the climate, biodiversity and human health challenge," says local farmer Jonty Brunyee, speaking to Siân Ellis. "We need some game-changers!"

Jonty Brunyee leads the Regenerative Agriculture Accelerator Programme in the Cotswolds.

"One such game-changer is regenerative agriculture," he continues. "After decades of depletion, we must deploy farming practices and principles that *enhance* soil health, *improve* biodiversity, *rebuild* water and nutrient cycles, and *reconnect* our landscapes and communities. Conserving and sustaining is not enough. We need to regenerate."

It is with this in mind that Jonty, an agroecological facilitator, has devised and managed the Regenerative Agriculture Accelerator Programme Cotswolds (RAAPC), hosted by Cotswolds National Landscape and funded by a Farming in Protected Landscapes grant. Running from April 2024, the first 12-month programme brought together

25 locally based farmers and advisors to share skills, collaborate and learn about regenerative farming from experts and each other. Following its success, a second programme is already underway this year.

"The Cotswolds is a hot bed of regenerative farming," Jonty says. "There is an exciting ecosystem of farmers, growers, advisers, researchers, demonstration farms and food system leaders in our region with an interest. Real step change is occurring."

Beginning – and sustaining – the journey to a regenerative farming future can nevertheless be daunting, with high levels of motivation, confidence and knowledge needed to put key principles into practice. RAAPC aims to support and speed up the transition, welcoming participants of different ages and experience, and at different stages of their journey.

For those grappling with the basics, Jonty explains: "The core principles of regenerative farming focus on minimising soil disturbance (respecting our top soil and the life within it), diversity (of crop, stock, habitat and rotation), keeping the soil covered and functioning in the winter (using cover crops and living mulches), promoting living roots (deploying regenerative grazing and good soil nutrient management techniques) and the integration of livestock (cycling nutrients and removing crop pests).

"Regenerative agriculture done well (very important!) and at scale can sequester carbon (helping our move to net zero), reduce inputs and increase profit. It can be positive for nature. Food grown in functioning soil is more nutrient rich, and increased diversity of crop, habitat and



The RAAPC programme has included farm visits, training days, a conference and more.



Tea Smart



Squashed Robot Films

Consumers can help by buying from local farmers and producers who embrace regenerative practice.

"There is an exciting ecosystem of farmers, growers, advisers, researchers, demonstration farms and food system leaders in our region with an interest. Real step change is occurring."

enterprise leads to resilience and thriving farm business.

"Regenerative agriculture and organic farming share many principles and practices," Jonty adds. "Pairing the two is the ultimate solution. But not all farmers want to be fully organic and regenerative agriculture allows more flexibility to try things that deliver the aims of improving, enhancing and rebuilding. All farms and farmers are different, and we must respect this, supporting them to find practices that work for them."



Tea Smart

Healthy soil leads to more nutritious food, and can help store carbon.

RAAPC, which Jonty describes as "unique, fun and high impact", includes farm walks, guest speakers, technical workshops, agronomy clinics, mentoring, and meet-ups at Groundswell and other events, as well as sessions on project management and media and communication. Participants, who were offered over 120 hours of learning in year one, "all felt more confident and connected, and had new knowledge and skills," Jonty says. The group continues to meet and develop.

Aside from core participant activities, key elements and events of the 2025 programme are open to other farmers and advisors from across the region, engaging a wider audience; and following the successful Cotswolds regenerative agriculture conference earlier this year, another is planned for 2026.

Food production affects us all and consumers, too, have a role to play in supporting farmers on their regenerative agriculture journey, Jonty says. "Start by buying from local farms that follow a regenerative ethos. Get to know them and ask questions. Then seek regional and national brands that are promoting regenerative practice. You can find regeneratively produced vegetables, flour, bread, pulses, grains, meat and milk on the internet and shop shelf."

It was farming that shaped the Cotswolds landscape and farming practice is crucial to keeping it (and us) in good health.



Tea Smart

Well managed livestock are an important part of the regenerative journey.

Sign up online to the CNL Farming mailing list for updates about FiPL, events, and the RAAP.



Cotswolds: Field & Folk

It's an early start. Tea Smart is in wellies and every layer of clothing she owns. Snow is falling heavily as a sheepdog disappears into the white mist. Tea and fellow filmmakers Ben and Joe are standing in the middle of a field, interviewing Abby Cook – a shepherdess – about the impact of climate change. They're shivering – partly from the cold, but mostly from the excitement. This was the beginning of their journey: capturing the real stories of those working the land, in all weathers, across the Cotswolds. Tea gives us a glimpse behind the scenes of the filming process.



Abby Cook features in the film, with her flock of sheep.

"Field & Folk is a documentary celebrating the people and landscapes at the heart of a quieter kind of revolution – one rooted in soil, community, and care. It's not just about farming, but about how we live, how we work with nature, and how we look after ourselves and each other. We look at the past – how our landscape was originally shaped and how it has changed – and focus on the steps towards regenerative agriculture that are helping to shape a more resilient future.

I feel incredibly grateful for the scale and depth this project has reached. We've interviewed around fifteen individuals across the region – from Dame Fiona Reynolds, to Ian Wilkinson at FarmED; from the glorious grasslands of Andrew Bullock's organic farm, to the young voices

Opposite: Tea Smart and crew member Joe Morgan on location.

at Jamie's Farm. Each has brought their own perspective to the fore, and all are deeply rooted in this place.

Every time I talk to someone who lives and breathes the Cotswolds and farming, my world opens up a little more, and I learn so much. The resilience that's required – and built – over time is a true testament to the care and dedication it takes to look after our landscape. I've had the privilege of sitting down with Lucy Robbins, her mum, and her gran to talk honestly about the trials and tribulations of running a smallholding with 800 easy-care sheep, a handful of cows, and a patch of arable land – all while balancing the life of a young person today.



Tea Smart

Tea has thrown herself into the project and is covering as much ground as possible in the Cotswolds.

National Landscape team. They believed in it from the beginning, and two years, and countless conversations and filming days later, we're continuing to work in close partnership. I'm incredibly proud to be stepping into 2026 with them by our side as we prepare to share *Field & Folk* with the world.

We're aiming to bring the film to the festival circuit in spring 2026 before sharing it across towns and villages in the Cotswolds that summer and autumn. Until then, we'll keep walking muddy paths, chasing light, and capturing the quiet, honest stories that make up this remarkable region."

It's not just about farming, but about how we live, how we work with nature, and how we look after ourselves and each other.



Ben Arthur is working alongside Tea and Joe to make the documentary.

I've also spent time with Lydia Handy, who runs a diverse smallholding with her husband Clive. Together, they manage livestock, grow produce, and run a much-loved community shop – all well into retirement. Their honesty about the challenges, and how they keep things going through on-site holiday lets, really brought home the realities behind the charm.

While this may be my directing debut for a feature documentary, filmmaking is a collaborative effort – and by my side is a core crew of Ben Arthur and Joe Morgan. Ben has an impeccable eye for detail, especially when it comes to lighting – he's managed to make a cow shed look immaculate. Joe brings a calm, steady presence and a notebook full of ideas that help us respond to every twist and turn with confidence.

This entire project started as a small idea back in 2023, and it wouldn't have grown to what it is now without the support of the Cotswolds



Tea Smart

Lydia Handy talks to the crew.

You can follow the documentary journey online at cotswoldsfilm.co.uk and on Facebook and Instagram @CotswoldsFilm

DAM

NEIGHBOURS!

building a future with beavers

1948. Idaho, USA. Elmo W. Heter had a problem: 76 beavers. He knew they created vital wetland habitat, but locals weren't keen on their supposed talent for flooding. Translocation was the ethical choice, but days on horseback wouldn't suit aquatic rodents. The solution? Parachuting them into wilderness areas. A test beaver, Geronimo, successfully billowed from the heavens. In the end, all but one survived translocation. Matt Brierley explores the pros and cons of reintroducing beavers.



Around 2008, on a tranquil Devonshire river (confusingly called the Otter), there was a surprise episode of “beaver bombing”. Once you’ve heard Geronimo’s story, it’s tempting to imagine military shenanigans. In fact it was straightforward skulduggery; an illegal beaver release.

The beavers thrived. No surprise, they’re as British as fish and chips. In fact, medieval Christians, forbidden from eating fish on Fridays, claimed that beavers were fish to get their meaty fix. But it was their fur and scent-marking castoreum, thought to cure hysteria and toothache, that sealed the fate of Britain’s beavers. In 1789, a Yorkshire church warden accepted a beaver head as payment. That was the last English record of them, until Devon’s big surprise.

In recent times Britain has had two beaver types: bombed beavers and their descendants, and those in enclosures, like at Lower Mill Estate in the Cotswold Water Park. Then, this year, the government changed the game. The first wild release happened in Dorset in February.

Bombed beavers – or their descendants - have colonised the Avon, and Frome (in Somerset). They’re cameoing in Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The genie’s out of the bottle. Releases will accelerate our need to co-exist. So what does all this mean for the Cotswolds?

Releases will be licensed – and there are serious boxes to tick. Habitat must be suitable, landowner permissions granted, beaver monitoring planned, and mitigation for potential issues considered.

Will beavers flood us out? Their dams raise and stabilise water levels to a height that would allow them to escape ancient predators. They slow and spread water out over a larger area. They don’t totally block rivers, especially not during peak flows. Think kids building moated sandcastles, they’ll never stop the tide. In climate change Britain, beaver dams are natural flash flood defences. Pipes – nicknamed ‘beaver deceivers’ – are an easy fix to keep water flowing if necessary.

Their dams settle out pollutants – good news for kingfishers, who struggle to hunt in murk, and for sensitive aquatic invertebrates. Where bugs prosper, so do bats, amphibians and birds.

Despite the beavers in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* serving up trout, beavers don’t eat fish. Studies of the River Otter showed fish increased in their presence, and beavers were reintroduced to USA rivers to bolster migratory salmon. Athletic fish and leaky dams mean life finds a way.

Interestingly, unlike American beavers, Eurasian beavers don’t supersize dams. Where a river is too big – typically ten metres – they’ll seek sanctuary by burrowing into riverbanks. That’s a potential pitfall for livestock – quite literally. Another problem for farmers is crop-raiding. Maize and beet are favourite foods. Releases will consider conflicts like this ahead of time. In Germany they’ve found the solution is to establish buffer zones, rather than having agriculture sitting directly alongside rivers.

Their dams raise and stabilise water levels to a height that would allow them to escape ancient predators

Will beavers destroy trees? It’s tempting to think of tree-felling as destructive, but riparian trees, like willow and alder, regrow from stumps. Beavers are coppicing. In fact, beavers and rivers are very good at tree planting. Cut a willow branch and stick it in mud and you’ll get a new tree. If there are trees we’d rather not have beavers getting their teeth into, mesh protects them. In any case, dead wood is a boom to nature. Beavers build biodiversity from the bottom up.

But what if beavers colonise somewhere they really aren’t welcomed? The Beaver Trust explains translocation is an option, even for a protected species. With eager conservationists ready to parachute in to help, pragmatism will be key as we jump into a brave new beaver era. Geronimo!



Caroline Farrow



Caroline Farrow

Guided Walk Highlights

Summer and autumn are beautiful times of the year to explore the Cotswolds. This season's guided walks are a wonderful mix of history, nature and wildlife, and heritage – and a fantastic way to discover the charms of the Cotswolds. Visit the Walking and Exploring section online at www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk to find a guided walk for you, as well as a huge selection of self-guided routes.

All guided walks are free, but we welcome small donations to cover costs.

Monthly guided walks:

Colerne Tuesday Tramp – around the footpaths of Colerne and the surrounding picturesque countryside.

Box Tramp – around the footpaths of Box and the surrounding area. Walks start at Box Recreation Ground, which is accessible by bus.

Shorter and Steadier – These walks are taken at a gentler pace. They are great for people who may be rebuilding fitness after a health setback, for those shorter on time, or for those who fancy a gentler walk rather than a challenging hike.

Guided walk reminders:

- Always wear weather-appropriate footwear and clothing for walking
- Remember a drink, a snack, and sunscreen
- Just turn up – no booking required
- The day before a walk, please check to ensure it is still running – and for any exceptional weather forecasts/warnings
- All walk leaders are appropriately trained, and have basic first-aid skills
- Assistance dogs (on short leads) are welcome

JULY

Friday 4 July • 10:00am

Shorter and Steadier: 7 Chedworth

Difficulty: Easy
Duration: 2.5 hours
Distance: 3.5 miles

Start point: OS Grid Ref – SP 0405 1322.

What3Words: ///relieves.repair.amps

This walk follows a figure-8 shape. The first part is a fairly short circuit into the nearby woods where the remains of World War II RAF Chedworth can be seen, including the control tower, a slit trench, and a bomb shelter. The second, longer, circuit takes us back to our start-point and across the old runways and onto a bridleway which eventually joins the Macmillan Way down into Chedworth.

Sunday 6 July • 10:00am

Trees in Full Leaf

Difficulty: Easy
Duration: 2 – 2.5 hours
Distance: 2 miles

Start point: Old Sodbury Church of England Primary School, Old Sodbury.

Branch out in the best way with this weekend short walk – a brilliant opportunity to get out and really connect with nature, with the trees in full leaf at this time of year. Join Richard and Pauline Wilson, who will show how to identify trees by their leaves, and will share their encyclopaedic knowledge of trees and plants along the way.



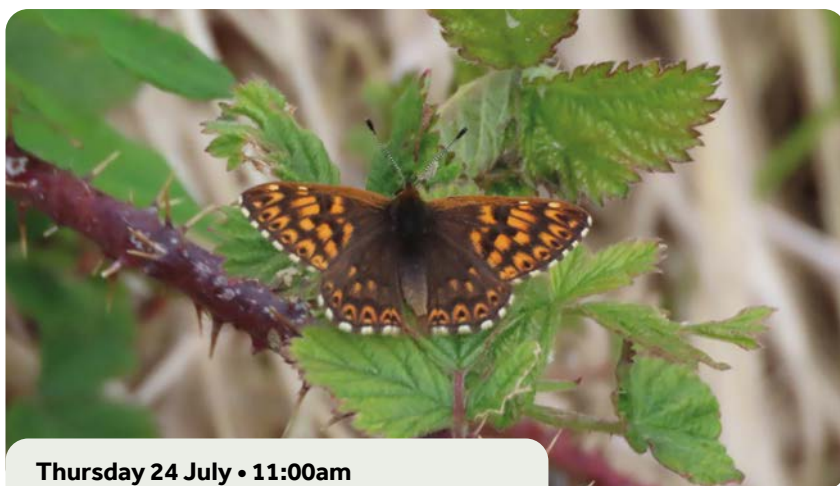
Tuesday 22 July • 10:00am

Walking the Ways 5 (of 5)

Difficulty: Moderate
Duration: 5 – 5.5 hours
Distance: 9 miles

Start point: British Legion Hall car park, Lansdowne, Bourton on the Water, GL54 2AR. Please note parking costs £3 all day (cash only).

The last in a series of circular walks exploring the Wardens' and Windrush Ways, which both end in Bourton-on-the-Water. Follow Windrush Way out of Bourton along the river Windrush, and then head to the lovely village of Lower Slaughter. Return to Bourton on the Wardens' Way before walking back through an Iron Age site and nature reserve, across fields to the village of Wyck Rissington, Rissington Mill, and several lakes.



Thursday 24 July • 11:00am

A Butterfly Walk

Difficulty: Easy
Duration: 3 hours
Distance: 5 miles

Start point: Chapel Road, Chadlington, Chipping Norton OX7 3NA.

Late July is when the Big Butterfly Count takes place across the country. Some of this walk will be taken very gently to spot the butterflies along a leafy lane, with a butterfly expert on hand to help with identification. The section of the walk across open fields will be taken at a brisker [but not too brisk] pace. Bring a picnic to enjoy after the walk or visit the nearby Café de la Post where good food can be bought to take away. Please bring £1 for car parking.



Chavenage House.

Search for all guided walks and self-guided routes online at www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk

AUGUST

Wednesday 6 August • 10:00am

Coffee Morning Walk 'Roundheads and Cavaliers'

Difficulty: Moderate
Duration: 3.5 miles
Distance: 5 miles

Start point: Barn Café at Chavenage House.

The walk begins with a coffee at 10am, with the walk starting at 10:30am. The routes take you from historic Chavenage House to Beverston Castle, against the background of the English Civil War.

SEPTEMBER

Wednesday 3 September • 10:00am

Sodbury Fort and the Horton escarpment

Difficulty: Moderate
Duration: 3.5 – 3.75 hours
Distance: 5 miles

Start point: Old Sodbury Church of England Primary School, Church Lane, Old Sodbury, Bristol BS37 6NB.

A walk along and beside the Cotswold escarpment through an ancient fort and a pretty village. Starting from the ancient church at Old Sodbury, you'll walk up to the escarpment for views across to the River Severn, then on to Sodbury Fort, dating from the Iron Age. Then downwards to the pretty villages of Little Sodbury and Horton, where there's a stop for elevenses. The return to Old Sodbury is through open fields and part of the Jubilee Way, before climbing back up to the church and the start point.

Tuesday 30 September • 10:00am

An energetic scenic ramble with Commons and Beechwoods

Difficulty: Moderate
Duration: 3 – 3.5 hours
Distance: 6 miles

Start point: Ebworth NT Centre, The Camp, Stroud, GL6 7ES.

This walk runs through woodland and open areas with extensive views. After a descent through the Ebworth Estate woodland (the Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods National Nature Reserve) we climb Sheepscombe Common with fine views over Sheepscombe and Painswick, and then continue into woodland and farmland with views over Cranham to the Severn, and Wales. Some paths are rough and stony. 200m of ascent and descent. **Suitable for robust off-road mobility scooters (e.g Trampers).**



View towards Painswick.

Neil Morgan



**Cotswolds
National
Landscape**

Glorious Cotswold Grasslands

Our Glorious Cotswold Grasslands team is on a mission to restore as much wildflower grassland as possible, right across the Cotswolds!

This vital work is improving biodiversity, and helping wildlife – from beetles and butterflies, to birds and bats. It's great for livestock too!

If you are a landowner, land manager, parish or town council, school, farm, or conservation project, and you're interested to know how the GCG team could work with you, take a look online to find out more, or email: grasslands@cotswolds-nl.org.uk

**Events coming this summer!
Check the events page at
cotswolds-nl.org.uk**





Cotswolds
National
Landscape

HELP SHAPE

THE FUTURE OF THE COTSWOLDS

The **Caring for the Cotswolds** grants scheme is a way for businesses and their customers to give something back to the environment in the Cotswolds. We use donations to support projects that conserve vital habitats, preserve our heritage, and improve access to the countryside for everyone.

The more contributions we receive, the more we can do. Want to get involved? Being a member boosts green credentials with customers, and shows that your organisation cares for the environment. Donating as a customer is a great way of helping us look after the Cotswolds National Landscape now – and into the future.

**Funding applications
open in September 2025**

For more information, please see
the Grants & Funding pages online at
cotswolds-nl.org.uk