

## Education through fun!

Children of different ages were recently brought together to learn through experience at the Binevenagh AONB, which hosted pupils from the five post-primary schools in the 'Roe Valley Learning Community' in the Borough of Limavady.

The five schools involved were Limavady High, St Mary's, Limavady Grammar, Rossmar and St Patrick's College.

Year 8 pupils were encouraged to explore their historical and cultural heritage at St Aidan's Church and graveyard, Tamlaghtard Church and Downhill Demesne. With the help



of staff from Magilligan Field Centre, Year 9 pupils completed interactive science and geography studies at the Upland Bog on Binevenagh Mountain forestry area, and the base of the scree slope and Nature Reserve.

Stunning artwork resulted from Year 11 pupils given the opportunity to draw and photograph the beauty of the natural and built environment at St Aidan's Church and graveyard and Downhill Demesne. Skills were learnt and improved that will aid their on-going GCSE course.

Rachel Cassidy, co-ordinator of the field trips to the AONB said: "The field trips provided pupils with opportunities to meet and work with others from different schools, alongside developing their appreciation of their local environment and the significance of the area as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty."

Left: Science Geography Trip at Binevenagh AONB Upland Bog.

Right inset: History Trip at ruins in St Aidan's Church, Binevenagh AONB.

Right: Sketching at Mussenden Temple, Binevenagh AONB.



## PAWS restoration in Howardian Hills

No, the Howardian Hills AONB hasn't decided to train volunteers in the art of canine pedicure! PAWS, in this case, are Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites.

Many areas of plantation forestry are planted on sites which were once covered by native deciduous tree species. The Forestry Commission is aiming to restore several of these sites to deciduous tree cover. Once the conifer crop has been removed from these areas they will be left to regenerate naturally.

However, Western Hemlock is spreading under some of the commercial conifers. This naturally regenerating conifer species is unusual in that it can become established even in the shaded environs of plantations. It spreads vigorously and, once the crop conifers have been removed, it would be the first species to colonise, taking hold before birch and eventually oak and ash have the chance to re-establish. This means that it is essential that the Western Hemlock saplings and young trees are cleared before the conifer crop is felled.

Although the Forestry Commission has the capacity to carry out large-scale works, it is unable to undertake hand-clearance of the young Western Hemlock. At the current time, volunteer groups provide the only means for the completion of this stage in the restoration process for PAWS in the AONB.

AONB and North Yorkshire County Council Countryside Service Volunteers had their first go at tackling the saplings when they started work at Park Wood, Gilling East earlier this year. They cleared a substantial block and the Forestry Commission's Conservation Officer for the area commented positively on the work achieved by the group.

There is still, however, plenty of work to be done. If you would like to join the group call Liz Bassindale, on 0845 0349495.

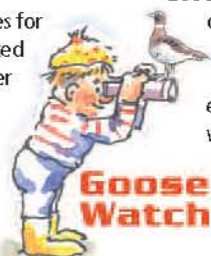


Top: Volunteers working together to clear Western Hemlock. Above: A young volunteer admires a finished area of Western Hemlock clearance.

## Goose Watch gets off to a flying start

With more than 10,000 Dark-bellied Brent Geese overwintering in the AONB, Chichester Harbour is a key location for this species holding approximately five percent of the UK population.

The Brent Goose is one of the species for which Chichester Harbour is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the European Birds Directive and as a Ramsar site under the International Convention on Wetlands. Good data has been collated over the years with regular counts linked to the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS).



However, when the tide comes in or when the birds take a fancy to a different location, they are lost from the usual bird count areas.

To fill the gaps in the data a new scheme called 'Goose Watch' was set up in autumn 2008. Data is gathered by volunteers on the Brents' use of inland fields within the AONB.

No previous bird watching experience is necessary and when the scheme was launched nearly 40 volunteers signed up. All have been assigned one or two fields in an area that they regularly use.

Where necessary the new Goose Watchers receive basic training in identification, so that the Brent isn't confused with the larger Canada Goose. Training is also given in identifying crop types and those preferred by the geese as well as in being able to quickly count a large group of birds without disturbing them.

The scheme has been kept informal so the volunteers can report back on an ad-hoc basis. This information will be useful when commenting on planning applications and working with landowners.

Right: Dark-bellied Brent Goose.



## Going batty in East Devon

East Devon AONB has been awarded a £61,000 grant for a three-year initiative, 'Looking out for bats', to survey rare Greater Horseshoe bats and enhance roost areas in the AONB.

Of the 17 species of bat found in the UK, seven hibernate at Beer Quarry caves, East Devon. One of these species – the Greater Horseshoe Bat – is safely protected behind bars at the caves while hibernating in the winter months, but when they leave in the spring, little is known about where they go to feed or have their young. They have been known to roost in large roof spaces such as old barns and older houses.



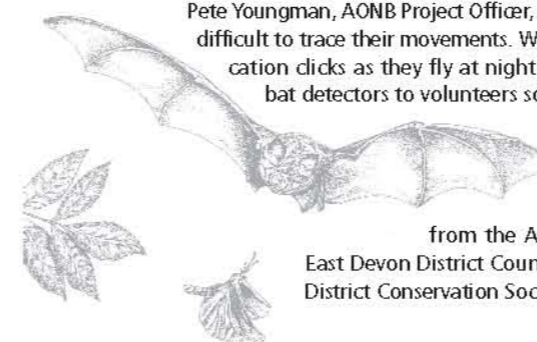
Calling all bat-men and women 'Looking out for bats' aims to:

- Find out more about the resident bats in the East Devon AONB
- Work with land managers to improve their bat habitats and roosts
- Encourage people to learn more about bats in their neighbourhood.

The initiative will run a series of walks, talks and even mountain bike rides about bats, as well as visit local schools to help pupils find out more about bats. Volunteers will be recruited – real-life 'bat men' and 'bat women' – to help detect Greater Horseshoe Bats while they are flying beside key landscape features such as woodland edges and then tracking them to their roosts.

Pete Youngman, AONB Project Officer, said: "With bats being nocturnal, it is very difficult to trace their movements. We have to rely on picking up their echolocation clicks as they fly at night so we will provide training and special bat detectors to volunteers so they can help us with this survey."

Funding has been provided by the SITA Trust, who make awards through its Landfill Communities Fund, with additional contributions from the AONB's Sustainable Development Fund, East Devon District Council, Devon County Council, Axe Vale and District Conservation Society and the Sid Vale Association.



## The people's wish

'Explore Braunton' is a new community-led interpretation project built on the wish of local people to create self-guided walks which explain the amazing variety of wildlife and the unique heritage assets of the Parish.

The state-of-the-art project uses portable multimedia GPS devices, called Node Explorers, that are frequently seen at the Eden Project, London Zoo and Kew Gardens delivering exciting multimedia experiences. It is hoped the software will encourage exploration of the area.

The community played a vital role in the creation of the multimedia walks. Some marvellous local characters were interviewed, a great variety of pictures was sourced and archive films were unearthed, all culminating in the creation of three inspiring tour routes.

'Braunton on the Move' covers the village's industrial past and how it has evolved through farming, shipping and the railway. It describes the Braunton Great Field – one of only two surviving medieval open

field systems in England. 'Shifting Sands' covers the north end of the Burrows and highlights North Devon's Biosphere Reserve. The third tour highlights the centre of the Braunton Burrows, developing information about the biodiversity of the area and highlighting the remains of practice landing craft used in training for D-Day, including some superb recently discovered archive film of training in process.

Throughout 2009 the Node Explorers will be based at Braunton Community College for use by schools. During the holidays they will be available for hire from Braunton Countryside Centre. You can download the films, walks, archive film and interviews from [www.explorebraunton.org](http://www.explorebraunton.org)

Explore Braunton is part financed by the North Devon AONB's Sustainable Development Fund and contributions from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Devon Renaissance and Devon County Council.

