

# Your countryside

The newsletter of the Conservation and Ranger Team

- Helping people shape the future of where they live •

## Open Access Land

Shropshire's Open Access Land Walking on access land gives you the chance to enjoy vast areas of England's outdoors without the need to stick to paths. Commonly known as the 'right to roam', this right covers some of England's most wild and dramatic landscapes, heaths, moors, down and areas of registered common land. The Open Access symbol is used to mark the boundaries of land available for area-wide access.

The right of public access to 'Access Land' began in Shropshire in 2005. Members of the public are now able to walk, climb, bird-watch, sightsee, picnic and run on land where they see the access symbol. In Shropshire we have 6998 hectares of Open Country and Registered Common Land, 2.2% of the total land area of the County. Shropshire County Council is the first local authority in the country to dedicate their own sites under Section 16, with 8 Countryside Heritage Sites, covering 184 hectares now being dedicated; from Brown Moss near Whitchurch to Lyth Hill near Shrewsbury. The Forestry Commission have also taken the lead and have dedicated over 3000 hectares of woodland in



Mitchell's Fold Bronze Age Stone Circle, Shropshire.

Photo by John Baines

the county. Natural England hold the responsibility for Open Access Land and have provided the Countryside Access Team with grants to undertake the day to day management in conjunction with the Ranger Team and landholder. Grants have also enabled the Access team to produce leaflets, improve furniture such as gates and fingerposts, improve path surfaces and create new all-ability routes with better signage.

Before venturing out, please remember that with these new rights of access come new responsibilities. From time to time access may have to be restricted in certain areas to protect wildlife,

farm livestock or yourself, this includes keeping dogs on leads at certain times of the year. Motor vehicles, cyclists and horse riders have no additional rights and must keep to legal rights of way. Take care out there, let someone know where you're going and when you'll be back.

If anyone has any queries relating to Open Access within the County please visit Natural England's website [www.openaccess.gov.uk](http://www.openaccess.gov.uk) or contact the Open Access Contact Centre on 0845 100 3298.



## CONTACT US :

**Conservation & Ranger Team,  
Shropshire County Council  
Countryside Service,  
Swan Hill, Ellesmere,  
SY12 0DQ.**

### **Angela Jones**

Countryside Manager

### **Gareth Egarr**

Countryside Heritage Sites Manager

### **Clive Dean**

Conservation & Community Officer

### **Shaun Burkey**

Conservation & Community Officer

### **Peter Dunhill**

Llanymynech Limeworks Community Project Officer

### **Sian Edwards**

Countryside Ranger

### **Harvey Morgan**

Countryside Ranger

### **Lynne Dean**

Countryside Ranger

### **Wendy Salter**

Site Attendant, Ellesmere and there is a

Vacant Estate Worker post

### **Noela Smith**

Administrative Assistant

T: (01691) 624448

E: [countryside.conservation@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:countryside.conservation@shropshire.gov.uk)

W: [www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk)

## OTHER USEFUL SCC NUMBERS

### **Countryside Access Team**

T: (0845) 678 9000

### **Shropshire AONB**

T: (01588) 674090

### **Biodiversity Officer (Dan Wrench)**

T: (01743) 252562

### **Shropshire Archives**

T: (01743) 255350

### **Museums**

T: (01694) 781306

*Your  
countryside*

## Shropshire Ancient Tree Hunt Update

The project continues and shall for several years to come. With volunteer and landowner input the list of veteran and ancient trees we have in Shropshire continues to grow. From a national perspective Shropshire is a real hotspot for these green treasures. From a biodiversity perspective they are jewels, islands of rare, miniature and endangered life. Visit the interactive map on the Woodland Trust site at [www.ancient-tree-hunt](http://www.ancient-tree-hunt) to find your nearest Veteran tree, input your own sightings and even comments about the trees; a tree with a history, with stories attached which fits into a local community is much more likely to be protected in a rapidly changing world. For further details call Shaun Burkey, T: 01691624448.



## Forthcoming Family Events

**Ifton Meadows Local Nature Reserve, St Martins. 10th May 2008. 12.00 – 5pm.** 30th Anniversary Celebration. A spring fair with stalls, Birds of Prey, May Queen, Maypole, Skylarks, Music and Dance. **Llanymynech Limeworks Heritage Area Discovery Day - 17th May. 12.00 – 5.00pm.** Stalls, exhibitions, interactive craft displays, donkey rides, music and dance, food and bar, guided walks, canal boat trips, extracts from Oliver!, lime kiln demo. **In the Limelight - Community Play. 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th July, 6.30 – 9.30pm.** History of, and stories from, Llanymynech Limeworks + music + Firework finale. Llanymynech Heritage Area. Tickets in advance (120 per performance) no price set yet (£5-£10). Outdoor promenade event, bring picnic, Victorian stalls and cider/beer tent, Wear suitable clothes. Very wet weather option will be use of Hoffmann Kiln (bats permitting). Parking in field if weather permits otherwise no on-site parking. There will also be daytime events organised in association with the church. Contact Peter Dunhill for further information' at end of Llanymynech events.

## Parish Environmental Action Projects

The following is a list of parish projects currently running in northern Shropshire. If you would like to get involved with any, you are most welcome, contact Shaun Burkey. **Prees** – 2 School Wildlife Gardens, pond construction and wildlife habitat enhancement. **Loppington** – Churchyard Conservation, grassland management and wildflower planting. **Welshampton & Lyneal** – Woodland Management, tree and wildflower bulb planting. **West Felton** – Churchyard Conservation Project. **St Martins** – Local Nature Reserve Management and events. **Kinnerley** – Common land restoration and wildlife surveying. **Whixall** – Common land nature reserve management, barn owl conservation. **Bayston Hill** – community woodland including pond, orchard and flower rich meadow. **Great Ness** – restoring a sheep pound, waterpump and well house. **Market Drayton** – a series of walks in the Tern Valley. **Baschurch, Gt Ness, Ruyton XI Towns** – wildlife surveys. **Broseley** – Penn's Meadow and Haycop projects

## Shropshire Walking for Health Contacts

Additional details of short guided health walks throughout Shropshire can be gained from the following contacts : North Shropshire **Ellesmere**; David Farncombe 01691 622497 **Wem & Market Drayton**; North Shropshire District Council 01939 238595? **Shawbury**; Margaret Cook 01939 250539 **Hadnall**; Tom Slack 01939 210253. **Oswestry and area**; Sarah Arden 01743 255059. **Shrewsbury & Atcham**, Shrewsbury; Sabrina Court 01743 249145 **Pontesbury**; Sarah Arden 01743 255059 **Bridgnorth and area**; Mark Newman 01746 713190 South Shropshire, **Craven Arms & Ludlow**; Mayfair Community Centre, **Church Stretton** 01694 722077 **Worthen**; Tony Payne 01743 891915

## Whitchurch Community Water Vole Project



Water Vole, Staggs Brook, Whitchurch. Photo: John Harding



Swimming Vole

The water vole is the largest and most famous of the British voles. Once a very familiar mammal of the British countryside, the population has undergone one of the fastest and most serious declines of any British mammal. A national survey in 1996-1998 showed that the water vole had been lost from a massive 94% of sites. There is a need to address this decline, to concentrate on relatively healthy populations as found in the Whitchurch area and to ensure riverside 'development' is strictly monitored to ensure no further loss of habitat.

The Whitchurch Community Water Vole Project has been running since early in 2006. The project started with aims to check that Whitchurch is still a hotspot for water voles and to secure this by raising public awareness of water voles and their habitat requirements. The survey work has involved about 30 volunteers some of whom appeared on television when the project was featured in one of the programmes in the BBC1 series "Nature of Britain".

The Project continues to be involved in the development of the Greenfields Reserve Nature Trail. A pond has been constructed and

an interpretation board erected at the water vole viewing point beside Staggs Brook.

The project has become a key participant in the updating and delivery of Shropshire's Species Action Plan for water voles. The project is currently focussing on the area between Whitchurch, Prees and Whixall, looking at the distribution of water voles and whether corridors of suitable habitat exist to link colonies together. Other activities include the production of a leaflet to provide landowners with information on how ponds and water courses can be managed to the advantage of water voles.

Along with habitat fragmentation, predation by the american mink is a major cause of water vole loss. The project is keen to gather information about the scale of the mink problem in the area. It is also interested in the local distribution of the otter, the presence of which tends to reduce mink numbers. Sightings or signs of water vole, mink and otter can be reported via any of the contacts given below and will be much appreciated. Survey work will also continue, including some just over

the border in adjoining parts of Wrexham and Cheshire. The dates of the main survey days will be published on the website. Anyone interested in helping should contact the Project. Experience is not necessary since training will be given. Malcolm or Anne Monie  
T: 01948 663069  
E: [watervoles@monies.me.uk](mailto:watervoles@monies.me.uk)  
[www.woodlanereserve.co.uk/watervoles.htm](http://www.woodlanereserve.co.uk/watervoles.htm)



Survey team work: Anne Monie, Carole & Albert Griffiths photo: Malcolm Monie

## Shropshire Rookeries Survey 2008 / Orienteering



Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)



Rookery



Peter Dunhill installs a marker post

### Shropshire Rookeries Survey 2008 – Putting Shropshire's rookeries on the map

John Tucker, renowned Shropshire bird expert has initiated a 2008 re-survey of all rookeries in Shropshire - the last major survey in 1975 reported 455 rookeries containing an estimated 12,004 nests. John can't possibly find them all on his own and so is looking for help with this survey. A Rookery is a place where rooks nest and breed, they are recognisable as clusters of nests high up in the canopy of trees, there are usually 3-5 rookeries in each parish, but since no surveys have been undertaken in over 3 decades who knows what their status is. The first question is "Are the 1975 rookeries still active and how many nests have they?" The second is "Where are the new rookeries and how many nests do they have?" It is as simple as that – can you help please? As we go into the summer the trees will obscure the nests with their leaves and counting of nests will become difficult, however, John would still like to know where the rookeries are, the nest count could then occur in the winter. If you would like to help please contact John and he'll send you a map of the sites in your area in 1975 – you can then check them out and note any new ones. John will acknowledge all helpers in the final report, copies

available upon request. Additionally, all 1975 sites will be on a Google Map aerial photograph of the county, go to [www.lanius.org.uk](http://www.lanius.org.uk) and follow the links to open Shropshire Rookeries Survey 2008 found within Research.

John Tucker, Oakerley, Clun Road, Aston on Clun, Craven Arms SY7 8EW.

T: 07791 657 216

E: [john.tucker@lanius.org.uk](mailto:john.tucker@lanius.org.uk)

[www.lanius.org.uk](http://www.lanius.org.uk)

### Orienteering - a trail leading from the past to a healthy future

Thanks to the combined efforts of the Shropshire wide Wrekin Orienteers Club and the Llanymynech Limeworks Heritage Project there is now another Permanent Orienteering Course (POC) to join the six already established Shropshire courses. Orienteering involves teamwork, map reading, decision making and physical activity and, in the case of Llanymynech's new course, the opportunity to explore an environment rich in historic and natural heritage. This development is part of the move to satisfy the recent and welcome educational requirement for children to engage in outdoor participatory activities, especially practical learning. Part of the Llanymynech Heritage area is also a nature reserve managed by the Shropshire and Montgomery

Wildlife Trusts. The Trusts were equally keen to see the site used more by families, young people and the Walking for Health Initiative. Under the guidance of Tony Callow, the British Orienteering Development Officer, an official map was designed and marker posts or 'controls' were installed – some easy, others partly hidden and all within easy reach of clearly defined paths. 'It's amazing how simple it was to establish this course. We have already had one family event and bookings from schools are coming in thick and fast solely through word of mouth', said Peter Dunhill, Llanymynech Limeworks Community Project Officer. The Llanymynech course also offers the opportunity to test what participants have observed during their circumnavigation with a number of quiz questions at the end to ensure it is not just the fastest that 'win'. The course has also been designed to accommodate group events such as 'team building exercises', due to be trialled in June. Cryptic clues and challenges will feature around the course, and activities such as making a plaster-cast of a fossil will add an extra dimension to orienteering at Llanymynech.

Contact : Peter Dunhill

on 01691 624448,

E: [peter.dunhill@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:peter.dunhill@shropshire.gov.uk)

# Walking for Life! / Health Project Gets the Green Light



Scouts evening stroll at Ifton Meadows LNR



Improving the floral display & getting fit, everyone's a winner

For those of you who haven't heard of the Walking for Life! project, it is all about using the countryside as a way to help people to improve their health. The project is aimed at those of us who currently don't do the recommended levels of physical activity required to protect our health.



Walking for Life! aims to help people to get out into the countryside through developing opportunities in 3 main areas:

'Walking the way to health'. A national initiative designed to provide short walks (under 1 hour) in people's local areas. The walks are aimed at people who may either be completely new to walking, or may face certain health barriers which have prevented them from joining walking groups in the past. Contact Sarah Arden for more details of guided group walks in your area. Independent Walking Leaflets; Over the past year a series of leaflets called 'Walks from your Doorstep' have been developed to try to encourage people to get out and about into the countryside

independently. For those of us with children wanting to get out there, get in touch for the new Shropshire leaflet 'Family Friendly Walking Guide'. Active Volunteering Walking for Life is looking to provide people with other opportunities to be active in the countryside; one such opportunity is through 'active' volunteering. There are many different opportunities to get involved in volunteering in Shropshire whether it be with Shropshire County Council's Countryside Service, The Wildlife Trust or local community projects, look out for Walking for Life's 'Guide to Volunteering'. Sarah Arden, Walking for life! Project Officer T: 01743 255059 E: sarah.arden@shropshire.gov.uk

## Health Project Gets Green Light

This month sees the launch of 'Shropshire Outdoors', a new project that uses practical conservation as a means to complement mental and physical health care.

Some people find traditional exercise, such as going to the gym or playing sport, difficult because of mental or physical health problems. Shropshire Outdoors will respond to the needs and abilities of participants' by providing a range of 'green

exercises' and conservation tasks that gradually challenge levels of fitness in a safe and supportive environment. Outdoors is one of the first projects in the county that links health services with countryside services. This is because the project partners (Shropshire Primary Care Trust, Shropshire Countryside Services and Shropshire Wildlife Trust) are committed to providing more opportunities for users of health care services to get involved in 'mainstream' conservation volunteering. The countryside will also benefit as the activity programme is likely to include tree planting, hedging, woodland management and access improvements at a variety of Wildlife and Countryside Heritage sites. Joe Penfold, the Shropshire Outdoors Project Officer, says, "The Shropshire countryside is a wonderful, natural and free resource that offers all sorts of opportunities for people to build skills, confidence and creativity. It brings people together in a healing and restorative environment".

For further information on Shropshire Outdoors please contact: Joe Penfold, Countryside Access Team, Shropshire County Council on 01743 255059

## Featured Site - The Bog Mine & Visitor Centre, Stiperstones



A view from the Stiperstones



Visitor Centre

The Stiperstones uplands are located in the Shropshire Hill Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. If you have visited the Stiperstones before, you will know that it is a fantastic place with access to some of the most wild and scenic landscapes in Shropshire.

Tucked below the Stiperstones ridge is the Bog Mine & Visitor Centre, the perfect place to start or finish your day out. The Visitor Centre provides a 'gateway' to the Stiperstones and is probably the only Visitor Centre in the country that still has gas lighting.

The Centre is run by local volunteers who provide a warm Shropshire welcome and are keen to help people enjoy their visit, having local knowledge about the area, as well as providing a wonderful array of home made cakes and other refreshments.

The Countryside Service is currently working with the local community and the volunteers to improve the access and interpretation at the site. A £60,000 project supported by Your Heritage Lottery, European Regional Development Funds and Shropshire County Council, will be completed in the next few months.

The Bog Mine, is one of the oldest mine sites on the Stiperstones. Commercial mining started here in

the 1730s, extracting lead ore from the underlying mineral rich veins. It wasn't always successful though, with times of boom and bust. The site, as its name suggests was very wet and boggy and mining companies had to spend a great deal on pumping machines, which left little in the way of profits.

Miners came from all over the country to work the Bog and other mines on the Stiperstones, making it one of the most productive lead mining areas in the country by the mid 18th century. Soon a thriving community was established at the Bog. Lead mining, however, ceased in the 1880s and the mine was last used from the 1900s to the 1920s to extract barytes, after which, the Bog village went into decline and was finally abandoned with the last miners cottages being demolished in 1970. The old school, which is now the Visitor Centre, is one of the last remaining buildings of the Bog village.

Today, the site has been reclaimed by nature and provides a habitat for bats, dragonflies and newts, and is one of the best sites in Shropshire for the grayling butterfly. So, come along and enjoy the Stiperstones and The Bog Mine and Visitor Centre. We hope to

see you soon! For more information visit: [www.bogcenter.co.uk](http://www.bogcenter.co.uk) or [www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk)

Mark Blount, Countryside Development Manager



Visitors using the Centre

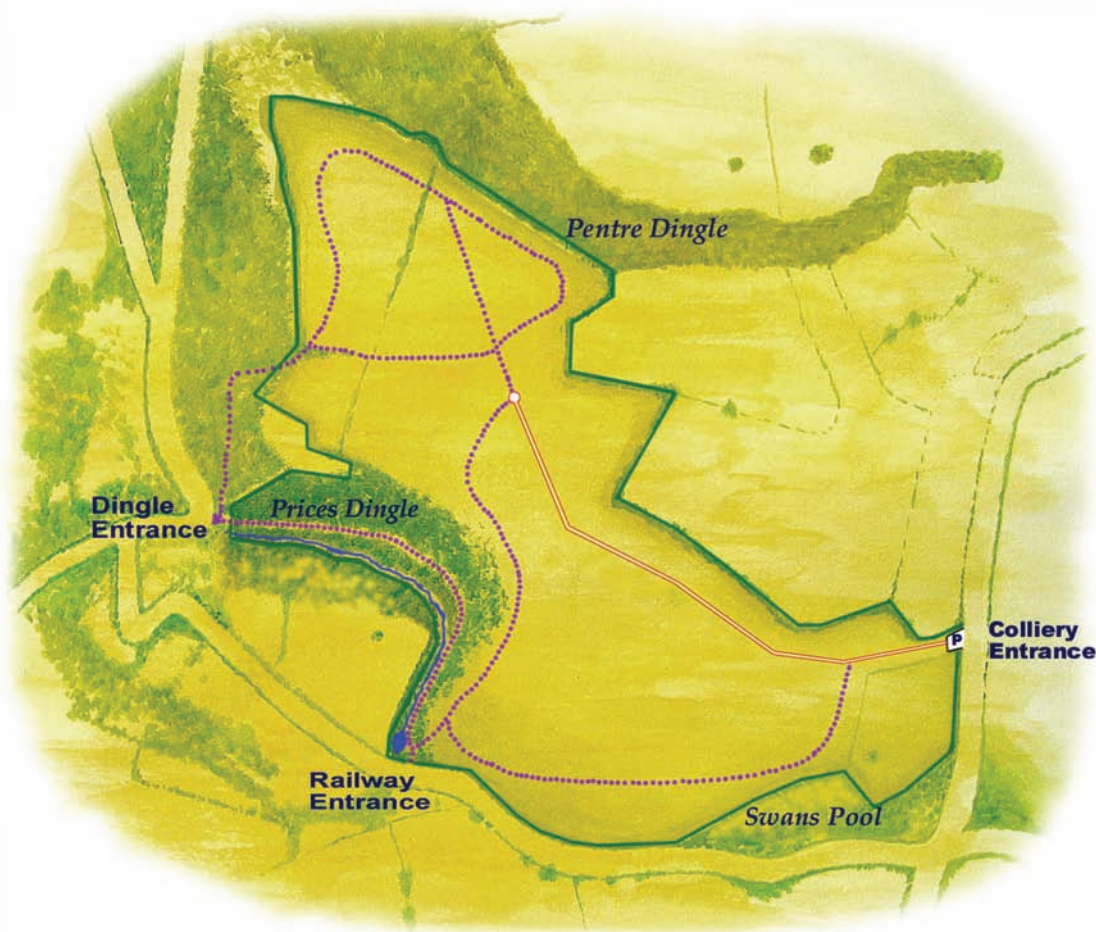


Grayling Butterfly (female)

# Ifton Meadows Local Nature



- 1: Skylark
- 2: Cinnabar Moth
- 3: Dingy Skipper
- 4: Dog Violet
- 5: Kite
- 6: Ifton Colliery C.1948
- 7: View West
- 8: Skylark Ascending
- 9: Price's Pond
- 10: Mini Beast Hunt
- 11: Price's Dingle
- 12: Price's Stream



# Reserve

Ifton Meadows is a Local Nature Reserve on the edge of the village of St. Martins near Oswestry. The reserve extends to approximately 20 acres and includes differing habitats in a close-knit mosaic. Open grassland supports breeding Skylarks and Price's Dingle, a semi-natural ancient woodland has one of the best spring displays of wood anemone, snow drops, wild garlic and bluebells in the county. The stream at Prices Dingle cuts through the steeply dipping sandstones and siltstones and creates ideal conditions for mosses, liverworts and saxifrages.



Coed yr Allt Sandstone, a prized local building material used in the construction of Chirk church, can be seen outcropping on the bank. A pool at the top of the dingle acts as buffer for water run-off from local fields is home to dragonflies and moorhens. The grassland is mown annually and encroaching scrub is removed to provide the ideal habitat for summer nesting skylarks. The ascending song of this delightful bird, inspiration to both poets and composers is now a rare and welcome addition to a summer stroll.

Visitors are welcome to wander throughout the site enjoying panoramic views of the western Clwydian hills, fly kites, picnic, find swathes of common spotted orchid and enjoy the many species of butterfly benefiting from the scrubby edges of the grassland. The plant ragwort is maintained in a small area on site for the benefit of the threatened cinnabar moth caterpillar, now a U.K. biodiversity priority species.

### The History of Ifton Meadows

300 – 350 million years ago, during the Carboniferous era, Shropshire was near the equator and on the edge of a shallow tropical sea, rainforests and swamps dominated the landscape. Over many millennia, the pressure of deposited sediments, heat and bacteria converted this decaying material into coal, the fuel of the industrial revolution.

During the 16th Century mining commenced and Ifton Meadows and St. Martins began to evolve rapidly. The first mine shaft opened in 1771 and by 1838 coal was being mined at Pen-y-Banc above Price's Dingle. By 1868 Lord Trevor's Colliery & Brickworks operated at Pentre Dingle. The onset of the 20th Century brought a rapid expansion and by 1912 there were 5 shafts at Pentre with No. 3 shaft being renamed Gertrude Mine and was known as Ifton Colliery. Nine years later in 1921 Gertrude was extended to join the Brynkinalt mine in Chirk Green which closed as a mine in 1928 becoming a ventilation shaft for Ifton. By this time Ifton was employing 1357 men and producing 1000 tons of coal per day. The mine was gradually deepened to a depth of 1500 feet and was nationalised by the Clement Atlee government in 1947. Modernised mining at Ifton by 1960 was producing 1780 tons of coal per day with 1250 men employed. The mine was eventually closed in 1968, nearly 200 years after the first shaft was opened. Oswestry Borough Council took ownership of the site in 1975, regrading and covering the colliery spoil tips and opening it to the public three years later. Once nature had been allowed to reclothe the site with Her beauty the site was designated a Local Nature Reserve.

This reserve was born from the need to deal with the legacy of a once great coal industry. Now, reclaimed by man and reclothed by nature it is an asset to the local community and is enjoyed by visitors from near and far. In 2003 the Ifton Meadows Management Committee was established to look after the site. Made up of local residents with support from Oswestry Borough Council and Shropshire County Council's Countryside Service the committee have improved access around the site, organised regular events and produced a leaflet. On the first Sunday of the month there is a conservation task that allows locals to come and lend a helping hand keeping the place rich in wildlife and beautiful for visitors.