

Newsletter No. 88
Winter 2022

Dorset Environmental Records Centre

Just occasionally it is good to update people not just on the work we do at DERC but also the staff involved. I have been very lucky to work with a well-established team over many years but in the last nine months there have been several changes in the DERC office. After working as our Admin and Finance Officer for the last 20 years, Rhiannon decided 2022 was the year for change and she left DERC in April – we all wish Rhiannon well for a future

with less spreadsheets and emails more time to spend with her husband, Steve (our former web designer).

Meanwhile, we have recruited new people to the DERC team. Silvia joined us in January and is helping with data input; Jo is working on the Ancient Woodland Inventory and website; and Fiona joined us in March as a habitat surveyor.

With the new team we have also launched our new website (www.derc.org.uk) with updates on our projects,

Restoring Silverlake's Heathlands



Of particular note were the wasps *Argogorytes fargeii* and *Cerceris quinquefasciata*, both of which are rare in Dorset...



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A century ago, the area now known as Silverlake encompassed parts of Empool Heath, West Knighton Heath, Outer Heath and Woodsford Heath. In the first half of the 20th Century the area was visited by the local entomologists C.D. Day and F.H. Haines and up until the 1960s by G.M. Spooner. Collectively they recorded 318 species including 158 bees, 144 wasps and 16 ants. This represents 55% of the British Hymenoptera and 69% of the Dorset fauna including several species now extinct in the British Isles. By the 1980s virtually all the heathland had been destroyed by sand and gravel extraction.

Part of the site is now being restored to a complex of heathland, acid grasslands, wetlands and scrub. With funding from the Silverlake Conservation & Community Fund, 50 ha in the east of the site has been surveyed for Hymenoptera and the results have been encouraging. A total of 98 bees and wasps were recorded including 32 not found previously. Of particular note were the wasps *Argogorytes fargeii* and *Cerceris quinquefasciata*, both of which are rare in Dorset and not recorded from the

newsletters and links to local recording groups. We have created a Resources Library with recording forms, enquiry forms, notable species lists and checklists as well as back issues of Recording Dorset. A website is never complete, and we will continue to add and update but I hope you will enjoy the change.

**Carolyn Steele
(Records Centre Manager)**

area since 1910 and 1950 respectively. These are not strict heathland wasps, they nest in sandy ground and are often found in flower-rich habitat on umbellifers such as Wild Parsnip and Hogweed. Thirty of the species recorded are strongly associated with heathland and sandy grassland. The restored heath area supports specialists such as the bees *Andrena fuscipes* and *Colletes succinctus* that forage solely from heather flowers and the Nationally Scarce Heath Potter Wasp *Eumenes coarctatus* that constructs distinctive clay 'pots' on heather stems then stocks them with lepidoptera larvae. These species are likely to have re-colonised the area from Warmwell Heath SSSI to the south.

While the current bee and wasp fauna is still limited compared with nearby heathlands it is very encouraging that the area is beginning to be re-colonised by heathland and sandy ground specialists including a number of nationally uncommon species.

**Bryan Edwards
(DERC Ecologist)**

An Ancient Woodland Inventory for Dorset

Some of you may be familiar with earlier versions of the Dorset inventory, compiled by the NCC in 1988 or the DERC update in 2001. At a time when ancient woodlands were being recognised as irreplaceable biological and cultural habitats, the national inventory addressed the need for a better understanding of the distribution of ancient woodland in Britain and was a landmark achievement.

Since then mapping technology has advanced and evidence for studying ancient woodland history has improved so Natural England are keen to enhance the accuracy and precision of the AWI. This also provides an opportunity to include smaller woodlands (0.25 – 2 ha) and ancient wood pasture and parkland sites which were not part of the original inventories.

But what is ancient woodland? The formal definition is land that has been continuously wooded since 1600 AD. It was uncommon for woodlands to be planted prior to this date so woodlands appearing on earlier maps have probably developed naturally. Most woods will have been managed over the course of their history, with blocks of woodland felled at different times. They will have experienced minimal disturbance to their soils, which can result in a rich and specialist woodland ground flora. Finding and recording the presence of these ancient woodland indicator plants provides supporting evidence for the age of a woodland.

Ancient woodlands are categorised as: Ancient Semi-natural Woodlands (ASNW), usually with native trees not obviously planted or Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). PAWS may

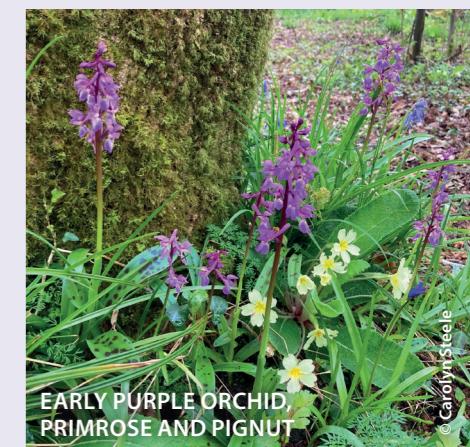
not have the same ecological value as ASNW, but they can be important for ecological restoration.

The AWI project was initiated by Natural England and is supported in Dorset by The Woodland Trust, Dorset Council and Dorset AONB. The update methodology is extensive but falls into five phases:

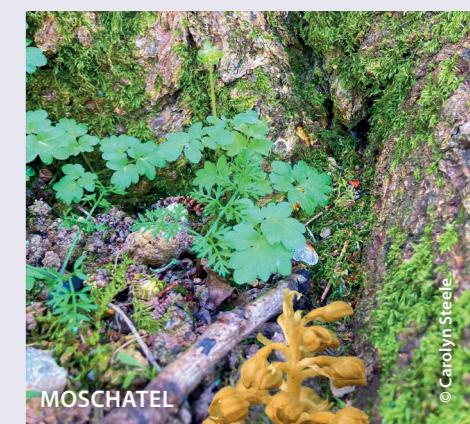
- **Phase 1 Creating a study area by comparing current aerial photography with Epoch 1 OS maps from 1885 to map a long-established woodland layer.**
- **Phase 2 Comparing this to the current AWI.**
- **Phase 3 Further research into the history of every candidate woodland using old maps, manorial records, and field survey for ecological and archaeological evidence.**
- **Phase 4 Evaluating the evidence and deciding to include or omit each woodland.**
- **Phase 5 Creating a report and final mapped layer that will be freely available to the public.**

The project has a timeline of two years and there will be opportunities to get involved with volunteers needed to undertake historical research, investigating woodland history, or conducting field surveys of local woodlands. This might appeal to local historians, landowners, students or any interested members of the public. If you would like to find out more, please contact me directly.

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BRITAIN HAS ONLY 13% WOODLAND COVER WITH JUST 2.5% CLASSED AS ANCIENT WOODLAND.

Research has shown that ancient woodlands sequester significantly more carbon than other woods making them an important habitat to help address climate change.