

STROUD VALLEYS PROJECT

People and nature thriving together



Welcome to our Spring 2024 newsletter

How's your spring going? Damply?

By Clare Mahdiyone, CEO

We're delighted to bring you the first newsletter of the year – but you'll have to forgive us if we mention the weather once or twice! Rain is important to our ecosystem, of course, but there's a limit, and muddy ground has hampered progress on one or two projects.

SVP began when our community united to solve a specific problem, and here we are again. We are now an integral part of the Heavens Valley Action Group (HVAG), which has come together to protect this part of our district that means so much to so many people. You can read more about the plans on the HVAG website and Facebook page and we hope that the community can together raise the money to buy, and therefore protect, this unique corner of Stroud: www.heavensvalley.org.uk

You may also have heard that the building which houses the Long Table has been sold. We have been involved in various ways with the organisations who make their homes at Brimscombe Mill, including dropping excess Clothes Swap items to Kidstuff, and creating a beautiful willow fence along the riverside. We will be watching with interest and playing our part where we can.

We were selected by Midcounties Co-op members as their charity partner (thanks again if you voted for us!), and we welcomed their team including CEO Phil Ponsonby a couple of weeks ago. They were impressed with the site we showed them, the Sensory Garden in Stratford Park; they were even more impressed with our volunteers, who were chatty and informative, and really gave them a sense of the work we do here at SVP.



Speaking of impressive projects, our biodiversity management project at Frome Banks Nature Reserve is underway, and we are seeking more funding from a range of sources to achieve everything there that we want to. Our Big Give Green Match Fund runs from 18-22 April. This means that if you donate £5, we receive £10! If you can donate even the smallest amount during this time, please do. Find full details on our website and social media accounts or pop in to see us.

Finally, we're also a part of the Stroud Great Green Partnership, and you'll find our Wild About Nature brochure in a shop or café near you soon. It lists many of our spring and summer events, as well as those of other local nature-focused organisations. You'll also find many of these on the newly launched website, GreenSeen, which you can find at: greenseen.info

I hope you enjoy our newsletter. As ever, I read all these stories and marvel at all the good we do here at Stroud Valleys Project – with your support.

So thank you, Friends of SVP, for continuing to support us; we couldn't do all this without you.

Event Dates

Sunday 21 April

Earth Day at the Museum in the Park



Sunday 28 April

Spring Skylarks



Saturday 4+18 May

Pollinator Patch Planting



Monday 6 May

Hawkwood May Day Festival



Thursday 16 May

Early Morning Birdsong



PROJECT NEWS

Catching up at Capel's Mill by Fred Miller

The focus over the winter was to clear the sloping canal bank, near the viaduct.

The SVP team cut back bramble, Buddleia and Goat Willow. With all these prunings, they wove a dead hedge for wrens and toads.

The dead (or is it sprouting?) hedge



The aim is to make this area more varied, allowing sunlight into the ground for wildflowers and at the same time opening up the space, so that there is a view of the canal and it feels safe and welcoming for people and wildlife.

With the spring came tool maintenance and reorganising the tool store. Our volunteer Al spent three hours' hard work to give it a facelift.

There is now space and clarity! Thanks, Al.



New steps in the Gully and improvements to the Badger Path are also transforming the area.



Tony fixing steps

We are purchasing some equipment with funding from Gerry Robbins (our long-term supporter and former chair) to pump water from the canal to the pond using solar power, and we plan to work with Nailsworth Rotary Club to make this happen.



PROJECT AND EVENT NEWS

Boosting the borderlines *by Ruth Powell*

The Canal Project team spent January and February replacing the stock fencing around the outside of the grassland and scrapes at Whitminster, aiming to complete all the work before nesting season.

This involved cutting back scrub and removing the old stock fencing and installing new. In some cases, the team had to simultaneously keep the area stock-proof and make the improvements, with around 80m of hedge-line to work on.

Work continued in some atrocious weather conditions and deep mud! Newer volunteers learned some new skills, such as removing old staples with hammer and fencing pliers, and ramming in posts, plus using power tools to modify Blue Tit boxes to suit other species of birds.

Some of us have learned how to tension a fence using widgets called 'gripples'. Two students and support staff from the National Star College joined us for a couple of sessions and have also been learning new skills and enjoying working in the outdoors.

We have installed four Swift nest boxes in the bell tower at Eastington Church, with great support from the parochial parish council, along with various songbird nest boxes around the Whitminster area. During March, the group planted a new hedge along the edge of the field below Highfield Garden Centre, providing connectivity with the existing and new hedges in the Fromebridge Mill area.



Events cont...

Saturday 25 May

Welcome Back the Swifts



Thursday 30 May

Pond Dipping



Friday 14 June

Walk with the Blues



Sunday 28 July

A Short History of Rodborough Common



Saturday 17 August

Scything Workshop



FUNDRAISING/SHOP/PROJECT NEWS

Above par(snips) at Bisley Old Road *by Tamsin Bent*

The Bisley Old Road Allotment group stopped for the winter, but before we broke up we harvested lots of vegetables to take home for our Christmas lunches. We had a particularly good crop of parsnips.

We started back again in mid March this year and started seed sowing straight away.

This year we're trying some of the new tomato varieties from the SVP eco shop, which is very exciting and of course we have planted parsnips.



Double your donation!

We're chuffed to announce we've again been selected for the Big Give Green Match Fund. This time, we're raising money to protect and revive the riverbank as it runs from Capel's Mill to Wallbridge. This is a rich site for nature, and we want to make it work harder for wildlife and for our community. We're planning to build a boardwalk and have already begun making improvements to the water flow.

Please do donate during the Green Match Fund period, if you can, from Thursday 18 April to Thursday 25 April – for every pound you donate, we get an extra pound! The Big Give will match funds up to £2,500, and if we go over, we still get to keep any extra money; it just won't be match funded.

Visit our website or pop onto our social media to find out more.



Talking shop *by Emily Helsby*

Since the previous newsletter, the eco shop has been continuing to thrive thanks to the support of our customers and our SVP eco shop team!

I am looking forward to the year ahead, hopefully bringing some new products to the shop. It's lovely getting to provide people with good, useful, ethically-produced and environmentally-friendly products... and interesting how needs change with the seasons: more firelighters, woolly blankets, and SVP kindling in the winter months.

Then the nest boxes, organic fruit and vegetable seeds, and field identification guides as spring has started to appear.

And always, lots and lots of biodegradable sponges, soaps, socks, cards, and REFILLS!



A very easy and sustainable way to raise funds for us

See the back page, or our website here:

www.stroudvalleysproject.org/recycling

or call into our eco shop to see what we can recycle which will then raise very valuable funds for our charity.

Simply drop your recycling items into our eco shop at 8 Threadneedle Street where you will find a box for them and pick up a leaflet showing everything we can currently accept.

FUNDRAISING/PROJECT NEWS

Having fun raising funds by Kerri Tyler

Our second Big Quiz at Stroud Brewery was so well received, we're going to do it all over again. Our Big Summer Quiz will be at the Prince Albert pub on Rodborough Hill on Wednesday 26 June.

Assemble your team and come along – let's see if someone can finally defeat those Wild Things! Booking will be up on the SVP website closer to the time.

Busy times ahead

We have a packed schedule of events over late spring and into summer, including well-loved favourites such as our Marking Day event, and new ones such as A Ramble in Radical Randwick with Radical Stroud's Stuart Butler.

We're part of Stroud Great Green Partnership and many of our events are also in the *Wild About Nature* booklet and on the new eco-forward events website, greenseen.info – if you haven't been on there yet, pop on and have a look.

If you enjoy going along to our events, please remember you can use your special discount code if you're a Friend of SVP if you wish to!

Street life

We're also going to be doing some on-street fundraising during the summer, so look out for us on the High Street, and please chuck a few coins in the bucket if you can.

Every pound helps us keep doing what we do best: keeping people and nature thriving together, here in Stroud District.

Partners at Rackleaze by Richard Lewis

Stroud Valleys Project continues to work in partnership with Cam Parish Council at the Rackleaze Wetland site. At the end of last year, we had been able to clear the large growth of Comfrey that had grown up over the summer months. Onsite, we try to leave the Comfrey to grow as long as possible giving much needed feed to insects in the last summer and autumn months. This annual buildup of Comfrey has once again been composted in our large recycling compost bays on the nature reserve.

During these colder and wet months leading up to spring and summer, we have focused some of our time cutting back bramble scrub. If left unchecked, the bramble would out-compete some of the smaller flowering plants found around the boggy edges of the wetland site.

Also another of the group's tasks has been the continued management of hedgerow project that SVP created, laid and enhanced. This season, volunteers had the creative opportunity of laying in new Hazel bindings (heatherings), once again giving the hedgerow further support and structure for the season ahead.

What was great about this season's work on the hedgerow is that the group were able to source all the bindings from a number of Hazel clumps onsite that SVP has been managing over the last few years – a really truly sustainable bit of habitat management.



PROJECT NEWS

Soggy work at Sarah's Field *by Fred Miller*



The winter was so wet that you needed to be amphibious! But luckily there are animals who thrive in this: the shallow pond/marsh had copious tadpoles wriggling by March. Newts have been seen in the deeper ponds, and there will be a newt survey here in May, with our

own Richard and John, to assess the species present and their numbers.

Willow wonders

This winter, the team at Sarah's Field gave the Osier Willows a good prune back which looks rather drastic, but, of course, the willow will regrow quite happily. They then replanted some of these stems to create new growth. The plan is for this to be woven and bent into a living, chaotic jungle of tunnels and dens for young and old to explore!



Apples to apples

We grafted (attached) some apple stems onto root stock with a new tool: grafting pliers. Grafting like this gives you a nice neat fit between the two sections of wood: the scion (the fruit you want) and the root stock (the vigour of root you want). We chose the variety of apple called Arlingham Schoolboys to graft, as we particularly like its juicy sweetness, but we also hope to propagate by 'air layering' – an almost magical-sounding method – to create new apple trees!

Emergency hedge repair



the hedge with hawthorn and field maple; the result will be a wider hedge.

There was a gap in the hedge that needed blocking; the council had decided that this informal entrance to the site was not safe. And, being SVP, we took this as an excuse to plant more trees! We thickened up

Part of our community *by Ruth Powell*

In January, the Wild Shed gang created a woven willow fence along a path by the river at the Long Table, under the guidance of willow expert Norah Kennedy. The fence was really well received by staff at the Long Table and they did some lovely social media about it.



Making a willow fence at the Long Table

Although the Long Table's future at Brimscombe Mill is currently under threat, we are continuing to work with them and will be helping clear land at Aston Down for herb and vegetable gardening to supply the kitchen.

In February, we helped Katherine and her team to dig over some of the vegetable and herb beds at Prinknash walled garden, and while Susie was on leave, some of the team joined the canal project work parties at Whitminster, which they really enjoyed, despite the weather and mud! They learned some new skills here like cutting back large branches and small trees and post ramming - they've also helped carry the tools for the 1/4 mile walk across the fields!

Our third visit to Westonbirt saw the group planting trees in Silk Wood as part of a community-based project to replace an area of Ash trees that had to be felled due to Ash dieback disease and, with the start of spring, the group have been busy sowing veg seeds and potting on plants in the polytunnel at the Beeches.

PROJECT NEWS

Preparing for the season ahead by Katherine Hallewell

We have been working hard all winter in the garden at Prinknash, dodging the wet weather to get the beds ready for the new season. In midwinter we dug out our leaf mould bay for the first time, spreading the crumbly rich harvest on the grateful beds. In January we were clearing out the shed and greenhouses to make space for the spring sowings.

Ruth brought the Wild Shed group to Prinknash over the winter months and



Bob reclaiming ground

their help with reclaiming some overgrown beds was much appreciated. There has been one upside to all the rain – the newly created wildlife pond is full to the brim and eagerly awaiting the arrival of new pond plants! Fred will be joining us at the end of April to assist with planting it all up.

Martin Hayes of the Gloucestershire Orchard Trust joined us once more to continue teaching the art of restorative pruning – both the volunteers and the apple trees were very glad to see him. The heated and cold

greenhouses are now full of baby plants, just waiting for a break in the weather to take their places in the garden. Our next exciting project for the spring, with the help of Richard and his group, is to build a hot compost bay that will turn our pernicious weeds into delicious compost.



Lindsay shows off a mighty horseradish root

We are looking forward to the season ahead.



Making memories at Kingswood by Richard Lewis

SVP's work at Kingswood newt ponds has continued over the last few winter months with the group completing another hedgerow project onsite.

The group have become quite confident with their experience at hedge laying and I have been really impressed and encouraged with their attitude towards our most recent hedgerow project. This last piece of work has been probably the hardest bit of hedge laying that we as a group have taken on, due to the fact that the hedge line was mainly made up of aged Elm, the majority of which were deadwood standing. The now newly laid hedge has also been planted where needed with over 100 hedgerow plants that have included Blackthorn, Hazel, Hawthorn and Guelder Rose. The group has also planted a number of native trees, Silver Birch and Rowan (Mountain Ash). The new trees and hedgerow plants will further increase biodiversity on an already thriving wildlife area.



The group at Kingswood also recently installed a new Oak bench in remembrance of John Robbins, one of the first group members from Kingswood who passed away just before Christmas. John, along with his grandson Charlie, helped out with the annual Great Crested Newt surveys for a number of years as well as being involved in the habitat management onsite. The new bench is sited next to the main breeding pond looking out across the grassland and laid hedgerows that John helped manage; a nice place to sit and take in nature and the wildlife space.

I know that John would have approved.



PROJECT NEWS

Going deep into nature by Fred Miller



With the aim of enjoying time out in nature, at Longfield Wellbeing Centre, and at Stratford Park, our Carers in

Nature group have been exploring bird life through 'deep listening' to bird calls and songs. Sitting and noting the direction of different sounds is quite meditative and absorbing.

At Stratford Park, thinking about the navigational skills of birds, we walked a trail

and left a feather as a 'sign' at different 'landmarks', then found our way back, like a migrating



bird. We each explained why our chosen landmark was a good one: a tree with incredibly smooth bark, a view of the lake, a very prickly tree, an orangery with good memories. But one mysterious sense some migratory animals have that we cannot feel directly is the magnetic field that surrounds us!

And sharing nature at Longfield, in the gardens, we are now benefiting from the involvement of gardener and photographer Shelley Everett, who shows us



seasonal delights such as flowering currants, bursting buds and her close-up photography of insects.

Tree planters branch out! by Stuart Roweth

The tree planting group have been learning new skills over the winter.

We braved the cold and wet, back in November, collecting hundreds of soil samples in the stony fields near Sapperton. These samples help Sapperton Wilder, a regenerative farming group, gather evidence about improving soil quality.

After planting trees on several sites, encountering frosty and frozen ground, but also muddy saturated ground, we embarked on another unusual activity for us: wildflower seed sowing.

The land we were working on is next to the runway at the Cotswold Gliding Club. Once the grass had been cut short and harrowed, we spread out in a long line and carefully shook our precious wildflower seed across the 7.5 acre field.



It's going to be fascinating to see how the flower seeds will develop and what density of wildflowers will be achieved. The glider club have invited us back to take a look in May or June; this will be a good excuse for a tree group get-together.

We are also lucky to have been involved with seven different tree planting projects this season, which will also be fascinating to catch up with, once the trees are in leaf and growing up and away.

Hopefully there will be some rain in the warmer months, otherwise we'll be visiting again but with watering cans!



Getting deep down at the Cotswold Glider Club



The team looking justifiably proud of their work!

PROJECT NEWS

Weather woes by Tamsin Bent

Our Tuesday volunteering group, Wild Work, has been very busy over the winter, stoically struggling on through the wet and gloomy weather. However, on some Tuesdays, the weather has been just so bad that we've had to cancel more sessions than usual.

So far in 2024, we've been out and about all around Stroud revisiting our regular sites. We started the year carrying out maintenance on the willow tunnel in Stratford Park that we helped plant last winter. For once it was a fine day, and the tunnel looked really smart after we'd finished.



The Tuesday group with willow worker, Norah Kennedy, next to the rejuvenated willow tunnel

We've also been back to Arundel Millpond, Rowcroft Medical Centre and QE2 Field, Dudbridge. At QE2 Field, we worked on a bank where we've been planting wildflower seeds and plugs.



Planting Salad Burnet plugs at QE2 Field, Dudbridge

Last year we tried planting plugs in biodegradable tree mats and the plants have survived the winter well and, if they continue to thrive, it might be an approach worth trying at other sites.

We've also been planting some more wildflower plugs, with seed sowing and plug planting set to be one of our main jobs this spring, which is such a lovely, positive thing to look forward to.



Earning commissions!

by Richard Lewis

The work of the Tuesday group volunteers has continued with the team being commissioned by the Cotswold Canals Trust to build a number of different types of bird and bat boxes.

This work has given the group an opportunity to learn a new range of skills working with marine plyboard; at £90 per sheet, it's material with which we can ill afford to make many mistakes.



It has been a really good learning experience for the volunteers and myself as we have learnt how to work with more skill and detail.

We have created a new design for a Starling box along with our 'Classic' box design and this



photo shows Anthony putting the finishing touches to a large Tawny Owl box.

As we move into the spring season, the team will be starting to propagate seeds for planting out into the garden as well as tomatoes and cucumber for the polytunnel.



PROJECT NEWS

Springing into 2024 with Garden Guardians!

by Sharon Gardham & Tamsin Bent

Since our last newsletter, the Garden Guardians have continued to work with communities across Stroud to improve shared green spaces for wildlife.

Although a lot of wildlife was hibernating over the winter, we held various community events, including a bird box building workshop and a hedge planting day at Cashes Green.

We also ran training sessions for various town and parish council members about managing their own spaces for biodiversity, as well as our annual Seed Swap... which was busier than ever.



Our monthly pre-schoolers' group, Mini Beasties, relocated temporarily to Victory Park while the Museum in the Park was closed for its annual maintenance. The children (and the adults!) have enjoyed

some festive wreath making, learned all about garden birds and hibernating mammals, and delved into the wonderful world of frogs and toads!

As the weather starts to (hopefully) get warmer, we have lots more chances to get involved. We will be at the Museum in the Park on Sunday 21 April to celebrate this year's Earth Day, making planters out of plastic waste.

We also have two bioblitzes coming up in June and July, where we will be finding out the plants and animals that make their homes at the King George V Playing Fields in Nailsworth and at Stratford Park in Stroud.

It would be great to see you there!



A community endeavour by Tamsin Bent

Over the winter we've been busy working on planting plans for the Sensory Garden with garden designer Sarah Watts. She's now come up with a great list of plants we can grow from seed or from cuttings as well as plants we may need to buy.

We've now been getting the polytunnel at the Beeches ready to start sowing the seeds at a special seed sowing workshop run by Julie Dolphin from Exedra Nursery in Painswick. There has been lots of cleaning and disinfecting of polytunnel and equipment in preparation!

Meanwhile, at the garden itself, we've been working with a couple of community groups. 3rd Stroud Brownies used the parsnips harvested from their vegetable bed at the garden to make soup, which was apparently delicious!



Spring cleaning the polytunnel at the Beeches ready for seed planting



Thomas Keble students busy at the Sensory Garden

Year 11 Horticulture students from Thomas Keble School have been working on creating a colourful bed from their own designs.

Over the spring, the Brownies will be back to plant their vegetable beds, as will Selsley Cubs.

BarBar Nursery will be out with us again to plant up their pergola beds, this year hopefully including some everlasting flowers to dry and take home and Sunflower Suicide Support are planning to outdo themselves with an amazing display of different sunflowers.

It's going to be a really exciting year for the garden and hopefully you will all pop along to see the progress.



PROJECT NEWS

Sensory Garden progress by Richard Lewis



Protective edging for orchard tree

As the Sensory Garden project moves into its seventh year of work at Stratford Park, the Wednesday Group of volunteers have spent several weeks building wooden guards to protect



The protective edging in place

the linear orchard trees from accidental damage by brush cutters or mowers.

Once again, the group upcycled the timber for the guards from weathered and broken wooden struts, replaced when the team refurbished the pergola next to the tool shed (the old ice cream shop).

The Linear Orchard lines the footpath at the far end of the sensory garden, and it is made up of old Gloucester apple varieties purchased from SVP's friends at Days Cottage

Orchard in Brookthorpe several years ago. We're sad to report that one of the dozen trees has disappeared and/or been vandalised, but we hope to replace the missing tree as soon as we can.

However, on a positive note, the group also spent time planting in a further 40 more Beech saplings into the Labyrinth, filling in gaps that will give the hedge more density and structure.

As SVP has received further funding from the Big Lottery Reaching Communities fund, part of the project work will also be focused on propagating then planting seedlings in the sensory flowering beds. The propagating of these plants will be done at the Beeches in Cainscross, where we have really great facilities to start and try to produce plants for the garden. This also gives Wednesday's volunteers the opportunity to learn to firstly seed, then grow and then plant produce they have grown themselves.

ESHO on track by Alison Willis

This year, our Employment and Skills Hub Outreach Coordinator, Alison Willis, working as part of the Gloucestershire Council-funded ESHO programme, supported 24 people who were facing barriers to work.

The programme provides up to six months of intensive one-to-one support to people who are currently unemployed and facing a range of challenges including health, disability, long periods out of the workplace, or simply lack of skills and experience.

Eleven participants were successful in finding paid work in a range of areas from hospitality and manufacturing to care work and office-based roles and nine found voluntary roles and are playing a vital role in supporting our local community.

The programme has now received funding for a further year and, with an additional coordinator coming on board, we hope to provide support to around 50 people in the coming year.

Anyone currently struggling to find work, whether paid or unpaid, is welcome to email for an initial chat:

alison@stroudvalleysproject.org

**GLOUCESTERSHIRE
EMPLOYMENT
AND SKILLS HUB**

gfirst LEP
Gloucestershire
Local Enterprise Partnership

THIS NEWSLETTER is a team effort by Clare Mahdiyone, Carolyn Buckley, Deb Coleman, Kerri Tyler, and all our Project Officers and lots of volunteers who proof-read, prepare and stuff envelopes - thanks to you all!

Produced using renewable energy and sustainable paper



STROUD VALLEYS PROJECT

Recycling Information



Donate the items below to us for recycling
which **RAISE FUNDS** for us!



FLEXIBLE PLASTIC PACKAGING RECYCLING

Biscuit, snack bar, and cake wrappers - *just the outer flexible wrappers, but not chocolate bar / sweet wrappers*

Bread packaging - *any sort inc. e.g. muffins, crumpets, garlic bread, etc*

Cheese packaging

Plastic toothbrushes, toothbrush heads (*not electrical bodies*), **floss sticks, interdental brushes and floss containers** - *NOT toothpaste tubes*

Personal Care Product Packaging - *only packaging that can't be recycled via council, no aerosols or non-personal care related packaging*

Household disposable gloves - *not those used with harsh or unhygienic substances*

Coffee packaging & plastic outer branded teabag pouches (*no silver inner bags*)

Plastic pens and pencils - *raises funds for local school*

Ink cartridges - *but not laser / toner cartridges*

Any unwanted / damaged gold and silver items

All the following can be working or not:

- **Mobile phones** - *remove SIMs*
- **Cameras inc. video**
- **Sat Navs**
- **Electronic gaming devices, games and accessories**
- **Ipods, MP3 players, Ipads**
- **Tablet computers -not laptops**

Any unwanted jewellery - *odd earrings, broken chains, costume jewellery - in all materials including plastic, wood, bronze, gold, silver and metal.*

Watches - *working or not*

Banknotes and coins - *old or current, of any currency from any country*

Stamps - *loose, collections, albums, presentation pack*

First Day Covers

Please note that we can **ONLY** accept the above gadget / electrical items - **WITHOUT** their accessories/cables/cases

Drop off your items at our eco shop during our opening hours only -

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www.stroudvalleysproject.org

