

## Building a haven for bugs



**I**nsects and other invertebrates play a vital and often invisible role in supporting healthy ecosystems. But their numbers are in serious decline.

Fortunately South Devon National Landscape have responded to this invertebrate biodiversity crisis. Life on the Edge is a 5-year project making a difference for rare and endangered invertebrates within the South Devon Biodiversity Line, a 3 km wide zone around the coast between Plymouth and Torbay.

Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve is, of course, an important area within this zone. The pioneer plants colonising bare shingle, like Yellow-horned Poppy and Viper's Bugloss, support many scarce invertebrate species. Major storms and scrub growth threaten these plants, so each year we create new scrapes, opening up the space for wildflowers.

Habitat piles and bug hotels can also be beneficial for insects like bees and butterflies by providing a place to live and hibernate. Using funds raised at the raffle of Slapton Ley Festival of Nature 2024, our volunteers and staff have created a bug haven within the grounds of the Field Centre.

Join us at this year's Festival of Nature on Sunday 10th August, to see our Bug Haven in its full glory.

Amanda Smile Volunteer

Amanda Smile describes what happened...

"We wanted to build a permanent structure out of as many recycled things as we could: old bricks, bits of metal kitchen worktop and fill it with natural materials. All surrounded by a wildflower meadow with habitat piles dotted throughout.

"One sunny winter's day we began foraging for materials, collecting bamboo and wood from fallen trees from around the nature reserve. Then while Maintenance Officer Brian and Countryside Apprentice Fran lay the foundations, we set about preparing our materials. We cut the bamboo and wood to size, scraped old mortar off the recycled bricks and drilled holes into logs to make nesting spots for solitary bees.

"Once the work on the main structure was complete, we filled the inside with the prepared materials along with scavenged pots, cones and even disused shingle sieves, providing areas for bees, bugs and hibernating butterflies. It has been finished off with a lovely pitch roof where we will encourage moss to grow.

"Finally, with turf removed, wildflower seeds were scattered around the area and we built habitat piles with stones and logs."



Bug haven construction in progress



## Herbert's legacy: Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve

**P**aignton Zoo founder Herbert Whitley purchased Slapton Ley in 1921 to protect the area from development. One hundred and three years later, the Ley remains protected thanks to his foresight and a partnership with Field Studies Council that has lasted over sixty years.

Slapton Ley is the largest freshwater lake in the southwest, separated from the sea by a narrow shingle ridge that stretches four kilometres along the coastline. The lake, the ridge and the surrounding wetlands and woodlands provide a remarkable variety of habitats, home to nationally important populations of birds, bats and other wildlife.

When Herbert died in 1955, at the age of 69, he made a provision in his will for a scientific and educational trust to be



Staff from Wild Planet Trust use quadrats to record plants on the shingle.

established. This led to the formation of the Herbert Whitley Trust, which later became the Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust and more recently the Wild Planet Trust in 2019. The Trust is a wildlife conservation charity responsible for Newquay Zoo, Primley Park and Clennon Gorge Nature Reserve as well as Paignton Zoo. As the land owners at Slapton, Wild

Planet Trust lease the reserve to Field Studies Council who manage the land alongside operating the Field Studies Centre. Oversight is provided by a committee that also includes Natural England and South Hams District Council.

Zoo-based staff contribute directly to the conservation work at Slapton. The botanic team has cultivated Strapwort, a critically endangered plant only found in the UK on the shores of the Ley. Plants grown at the zoo were used to reinforce the last remaining natural population at Slapton and also for reintroduction at a new site in Cornwall. Staff from the Conservation Department support the Reserve Ranger with ecological monitoring, including rare plant communities growing on the shingle ridge and nationally declining Hazel Dormice.

The partnership between Wild Planet Trust and Field Studies Council is unique in its longevity and success. The continued stewardship of nationally significant geological and ecological features over one hundred years is demonstrated by Slapton Ley's status as a National Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Home to iconic wildlife like Otters and Great Crested Grebes, the reserve will provide future sanctuary to returning species such as Osprey and Water Vole. Our partnership ensures that Slapton Ley continues to be a place where diverse habitats thrive and successive generations are inspired to engage with the natural world.

**Dr Andrew Bowkett**

Projects and Partnerships Manager  
Wild Planet Trust

## Community compost

**Save our soil!** One gram of soil can contain up to 10 billion organisms and more than half of the Earth's species live in the soil. We depend on it for mitigating climate change, preventing drought and flooding, and 95% of food production relies on soil.\*

Each year there is opportunity for us at Slapton to apply for funding to carry out a small scale eco project. This year we decided to focus on improving soil by turning green waste generated on site into beautiful compost, rich in organic matter and earthworms. The green waste will be sorted and processed with the help of a chipper, then matured in large bays and finally sieved before being ready to use on the land. The flowers and herbs in the centre gardens will benefit from the rich soil and members of the community will also be invited to take for free what they can use in their gardens and allotments. The project is designed not only to improve soil health, but to reduce carbon emissions from burning green waste, and also engage with the community.

In order to prepare for the new composting system, volunteers, members of the reserve and education teams got stuck in to shift timber and existing compost across the centre grounds.



Left: Field Centre staff moving compost.

Above: Students from South Devon University Technical College were a great help wheelbarrowing material for the new project.

Keep your eyes peeled in local newsletters and on social media for the first free compost collection session in spring 2025.

**Let's work together to save our soil!**

**Fiona Adie** Seasonal Tutor

\*source: Soil Association

# Slapton Ley Events 2025

We are excited to share that we are running a range of free and premium events again in 2025 on and around Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve.

Wild food forage • Pond dipping • Dawn Chorus walk • Conservation days • Wild flower walk  
Birds of Slapton Ley • Rocky shore • Bat walks • Fungal Foray • Stargazing • Guided walks

Plus our **Mindfulness in Nature Course** will be back in the spring.

**All events require booking.** This years events will be available to book about a month before the event.

Keep an eye on Eventbrite and our social media for more details. You can follow us on Eventbrite for notifications of events as they go live.

[www.eventbrite.com/cc/slapton-ley-nnr-events-2025-4011363](https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/slapton-ley-nnr-events-2025-4011363) or scan the QR code.

If you do not have the facilities to book online, please contact us on **01548 580466** or email: [events.sl@field-studies-council.org](mailto:events.sl@field-studies-council.org)



These dates are set, so get them in your diary.

## Great British Spring Clean

**Saturday 29th March 9.30-12.30**

Join us to help clean up Slapton Sands, part of our beautiful coastline.

## Slapton Ley Festival of Nature

**Sunday 10th August 11am-5pm**

Join us to celebrate the area of Start Bay and beyond. If you love the outdoors and the environment, this mini festival is for you – and what's more entry is free! Hands-on environmental activities will be put on by local charities, and there will be music, activities, workshops and demonstrations throughout the day. Local sustainable stall holders will be selling their products, with food and drinks available to keep you refreshed.

No booking required • Free event • Parking £5

## Slapton Sands Great British Beach Clean

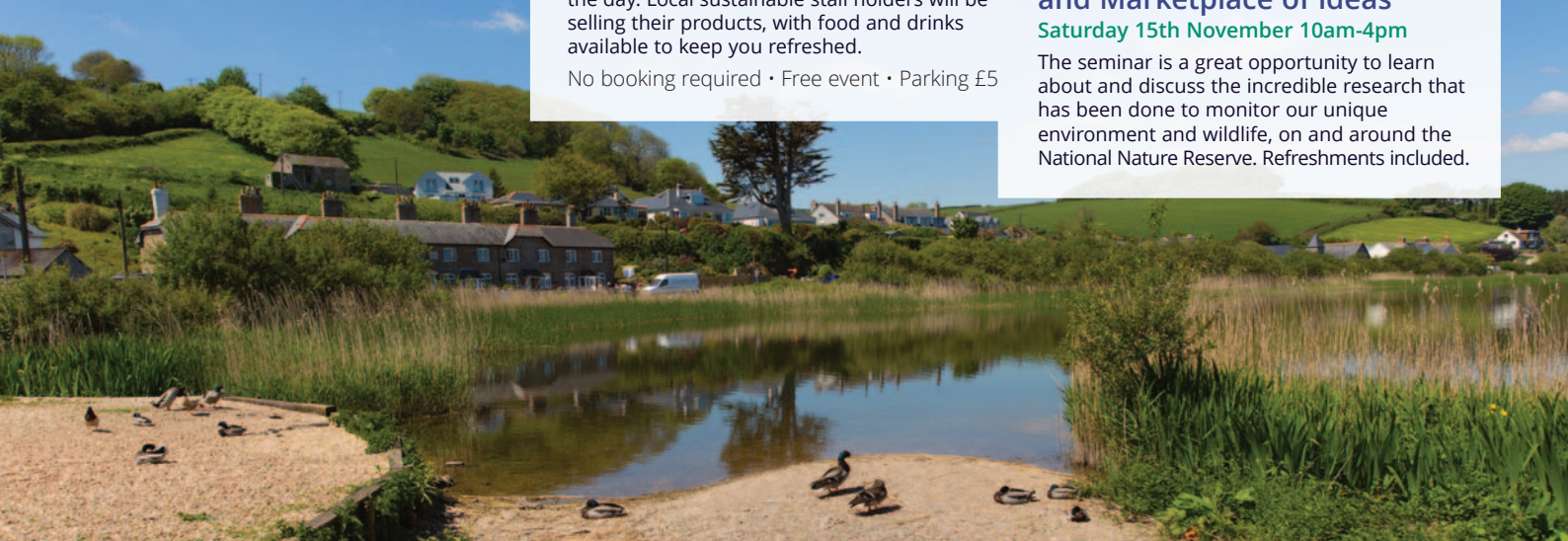
**Saturday 20th September 9:30am-12.30pm**

Join us to help clean up Slapton Sands, as part of the Marine Conservation Society's Great British Beach Clean citizen science event.

## Slapton Ley Research Seminar and Marketplace of ideas

**Saturday 15th November 10am-4pm**

The seminar is a great opportunity to learn about and discuss the incredible research that has been done to monitor our unique environment and wildlife, on and around the National Nature Reserve. Refreshments included.



## A feathery update

**2024** was a relatively quiet year for rare birds on the reserve. Nevertheless nearly 100 species were seen and Slapton Ley remains a popular stop off on many migration routes.

• **Lesser Scaup** was seen in January, along with the **Ring-necked Duck**, which has become a regular visitor in recent years. • All 3 species of **Divers** (Red-throated, Black-throated, and Great Northern) were present in the bay over the winter, and the summer sighting of a **Curlew** was noteworthy, given their virtual absence as a breeding species on Dartmoor. • **Marsh Harrier** and **Bittern** were seen at the beginning and end of the year respectively. • Once again all 3 species of **Egret** have been seen, with maximum counts of 15 **Cattle Egret** and 5 **Great Egret**. • Perhaps the two most notable rarities this year were the **Purple Heron** seen in May, and the **Little Gull** seen in August.

**In 2025...** we have been lucky enough to receive funding to install two Osprey nesting platforms around Slapton Ley, and hope to welcome Osprey back to the nature reserve and encourage them to breed here. There is also a plan to install some Kingfisher perches near Slapton Bridge. Look out on social media for updates of their installation and use.

Graham and Angela Webb Slapton Ley Volunteers

# Welcoming new staff to Slapton Ley



Introducing **Fran Rix, Countryside Worker Apprentice** at Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve

I inherited a love of nature and gardening from my parents. Growing up in an old house with a huge garden, there were plenty of wild areas to build dens, trees to climb and farmer's fields to get lost in. When we weren't mucking about in the pond or bramble bashing in the paddock

we were on my dad's boat, whatever the weather. Last year, while dragging my own body weight in dirty laundry down a corridor in a field centre in South Wales, a phrase popped into my head "*find a job you enjoy, and you'll never work a day in your life*" ...sounded like a good plan to me! I hope to learn from everybody here: colleagues, volunteers, locals, researchers and the wildlife itself, to enable me to support the Ranger Kieran and the Nature Reserve the best I can.

Welcome to **Matt Hawes, Nature Recovery and Estate Manager** for the Field Studies Council

I attended Holme Lacy College, where I studied Forestry, Arboriculture, Land and Environmental Management and have since

had various roles within Field Studies Council and the environmental education sector. Last year I took on the new role of Nature Recovery and Estate Manager, which includes oversight of the management of Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve. I have a passion for nature recovery and the sustainable management of all habitats. I look forward to continuing with the fantastic work of past reserve managers and volunteers to look after this special part of Devon.

Hello to **Gemma Edmonds and Marble, Fundraising Manager** for the Field Studies Council

I am passionate about making a difference to people's lives and having a positive social impact. Having lived locally

in the South Hams most of my life, joining the Field Studies Council in 2024 as Fundraising Manager has provided a great opportunity to support my local area, as well as working on a national scale. I love that I get to combine my passion for the outdoors and nature with my drive to generate income for this fantastic organisation. I have had such a warm welcome from the team at Slapton and I am lucky enough to be based at the centre a few days a week along with my dog Marble. When I am not at work, you will often see me running the coast paths and green lanes as well as sea swimming all year round.



## Volunteering at Slapton Ley

**Our volunteers had a great time working on the nature reserve last year. We welcomed a host of new volunteers to our established teams, and were able to create a whole new Thursday team.**

Some of our volunteers' favourite activities from last year... ✓ creating new nature reserve displays for our outreach stand (pictured left) ✓ helping to make pizzas at our fun summer festival ✓ dismantling and burning a rotted shed ✓ taking part in our Summer bioblitz nature surveys ✓ learning how to survey plants on the shingle ridge ✓ carving wood to create rustic signposts ✓ restoring garden hedges.

Not only have our volunteers helped us but others have joined in to do their bit, with teams such as the Force 4 Nature Team led by Gary Joliffe coming in to help with the big task of raking the wet meadow. Young adults staying with us on Duke of Edinburgh residentials and science camps joined in too, helping with habitat management and path clearance.

For those interested in learning more about being a Ranger, we have re-started our winter volunteer ranger placement. During this 3-month experience, the volunteer ranger learns about nature reserve conservation and the practical skills that go with it.

Do get in touch if you are interested in volunteering: [volunteer.sl@field-studies-council.org](mailto:volunteer.sl@field-studies-council.org)

### Work experience is back!

Last year saw the re-introduction of hosting work experience students at the field centre, with one week in July being dedicated to a group of young people keen to learn more about working in the environment sector. If you are interested in joining our work experience week, please contact us on: [enquiries@field-studies-council.org](mailto:enquiries@field-studies-council.org)

Alice Henderson Volunteer Co-ordinator, Field Studies Council



Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve (NNR) is owned by Wild Planet Trust and managed by the Field Studies Council's Slapton Ley Field Centre.

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 **Field Studies Council**  
Slapton Ley

Field Centre and National Nature Reserve

In partnership with:

