

January - June 2024/Issue 50

**FREE**  
ONLINE ISSUE

# COTSWOLD LION

The magazine of the Cotswolds National Landscape



**Cotswold Gold  
Teamwork to Dreamwork  
We Are Family  
On the Grapevine  
Fantastic FiPL  
Sisters Doing It For Themselves  
Enraptured by Raptors  
Walking Highlights**



**Cotswolds  
National  
Landscape**



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## Welcome

Welcome to the 50th issue of the Cotswold Lion! Beginning as a newspaper many years ago, the Cotswold Lion has grown into the online magazine we're so proud to share with you today. Our mission with the magazine is to celebrate the many things that help make the Cotswolds a special place to be: in this issue, that's from the golden limestone that has shaped the landscape throughout history, to the farmers and communities working to help nature and wildlife, to the volunteers helping out across the area.

Remember to spread the word that the Cotswold Lion is free to download from our website, including plenty of back issues.



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The Cotswolds National Landscape is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), managed and looked after by the Cotswolds Conservation Board. The two key purposes of the Board are to:

- conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds AONB
- increase understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB

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### Sponsorship

If you are interested in sponsoring the Cotswold Lion, please contact alana.hopkins@cotswolds-nl.org.uk

Front cover image by Russell Sach

# Bulletin

Top stories from the Cotswolds National Landscape team

## Attention landowners!

We are looking for landowners with one to seven hectares of grassland which might be ready for restoration! With funding available from National Highways Designated Funds, we are continuing to develop our grasslands restoration work by aiming to create or restore another 120 hectares of wildflower-rich grasslands by 2025. The funding guarantees annual management payments to help support sites fully establish as restored habitats. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact [lorna.baggett@cotswolds-nl.org.uk](mailto:lorna.baggett@cotswolds-nl.org.uk)



## Farming in Protected Landscapes – apply now

The FiPL programme has been extended until March 2025. Great news if you are seeking funding for innovative projects in a farming context across the Cotswolds. The funding we have has also been topped up, so we have around £790,000 left to allocate and to be spent before the 31st March 2025. The FiPL advice team in the Cotswolds continues to grow with the addition of Olivia Blackwell as Farming Engagement Officer, and Ellie Robinson as Admin Support. Early applications are encouraged, to get the ball rolling in good time. Visit the Farming pages online at [www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk](http://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk) for more information.

## School field trips

Our Everyone's Evenlode team now has a wealth of resources, including equipment, to help with GCSE Geography fieldwork. Our expertly trained team can help students learn by taking part in river surveying experiments on channel profiles and water velocity with hydro-props, measurements on limestone aquifer water storage capacity, infiltration on different soil types and interception across a variety of varied woodlands. If you are a teacher and would like to offer students local river fieldwork sessions, rather than the expense and time involved in coastal fieldtrips, do get in touch! We also do A-level catchment tours. Contact [Rosalind.marsden@cotswolds-nl.org.uk](mailto:Rosalind.marsden@cotswolds-nl.org.uk) for more information.



## New team members!

As well as Ellie joining the FiPL team, we welcome Jonathan Rogers as our new Management Accountant. Jonathan joins us from Severn Trent Green Power, where he held financial responsibility for three main recycling plants. He has worked across the world and has gained huge experience in many varied commercial businesses during his 30+ years working in finance. He has a real enthusiasm for the work we do, and is keen to contribute to our future goals and ambitions.



# Fantastic FiPL Funding

Since it was launched by Defra in 2021, the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme has supported countless projects in protected landscapes across the UK. In fact, it's been going so well, Defra topped up the available funding, and extended the programme to March 2025.

Here in the Cotswolds, the programme has been embraced with open arms by the farming community, who have approached it with a generous helping of both creativity and ingenuity. The goals of the programme have been to help farmers and land owners/land managers help nature and the climate, as well as improving access and understanding for people.

So far, over 100 projects have been approved in the Cotswolds – a wonderful milestone. Funding allocated is in excess of £2.7m and the projects' total value is more than £4.3m – a huge investment in the farming community across the Cotswolds. The variety of funded projects has been truly impressive, here we shine a spotlight on just a few...

## Rehoming owls and kestrels

Gloucestershire Raptor Monitoring Group installed 175 new nesting boxes on multiple farms across Gloucestershire – to offer birds new homes following the loss of ash tree habitat due to ash dieback tree felling. Their project also includes annual monitoring and habitat management advice.

Putting up a nesting box (left), barn owl chicks (right)



Anna Field



Henry Astor of Bruern Farms (above), the farm set up (below)

## Resilient farms

Bruern Farms purchased grain processing equipment, a flour mill and a game larder to enable direct sales of produce from their regenerative farm. In the onsite shop and café, customers can find slow-grown, pasture-fed beef and lamb, free range pork, pastured eggs and wild venison, farm-grown heritage flour, and more.



## Homegrown at Hampen

Healthy soils, abundant wildlife, sustainable nutritious food and the highest animal welfare standards are at the heart of the regenerative farming system at Lower Hampen Farm.

Their veg box scheme provides a year-round supply of fresh homegrown vegetables, fruit, and other produce. The box scheme is one of many Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes across the country.



## Restoring icons of the Cotswold landscape

At Upton Estate, FiPL has funded the repair of 80 metres of dry stone wall. Dry stone walls are a classic landscape feature across the Cotswolds – harking back to sheep farming methods which helped shape the landscape we know and love today. Traditional dry stone walling is skilled, heavy work which takes many hours of craftsmanship. Over time, many of these walls across the countryside have fallen into disrepair – this project will revive a heritage landscape feature much loved by locals and visitors alike.

## Cotswold Farm Park

Cotswold Farm Park has introduced people to farming and rare breed animals for many decades. The team received funding to improve accessibility and develop further opportunities for visitors from under-represented audiences, including those with additional needs and from deprived backgrounds.

## Gawcombe Farm

Nature has been a priority at Gawcombe for over 40 years. The farm has diverse habitats, including extensive areas of species-rich grassland. Grazing livestock help keep these



*Fencing at Gawcombe will assist conservation grazing*

meadows in good condition. FiPL helped fund 3000 metres of fencing and gates to improve the strip-grazing system on the grassland, plus scrub clearance and habitat management.

## Eggcellent ideas

Sandy Hill Farm have launched a pastured egg enterprise with their funding. They have put up a polytunnel for avian flu lockdown housing, which will be used for a diversified horticultural enterprise when it is not occupied by chickens. This allows the farms to continue to use all areas of land to their maximum potential, all year round.



*For more information about funding eligibility and the application process, visit: <https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/looking-after/farming-in-protected-landscapes/>*





Volunteer rangers will continue to look after the Circuit of Bath route

# TEAMWORK TO DREAMWORK

**Volunteering in the Cotswolds is booming. There are so many opportunities to get involved and give a little back. Katie Jarvis talks to a handful of volunteers to find out more.**

The beautiful Cotswolds National Landscape hugs the compact World Heritage city of Bath in a tight embrace. Which is why – within a mere 15 minutes – you can walk from the bustling centre out into open reaches of countryside.

It's a path a group of Ukrainian refugees – newly arrived in Bath – took under the guidance of the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens: from the imposing church of St John the Evangelist, past the cricket ground, across a busy road. Then, once over the canal, up a steep flight of steps...

And, suddenly – unfolding in front of them – were Bathwick Fields: wildflower meadows teeming each summer with buttercups and buzzing bees; orchard trees dripping with fruit in autumn.

In the near distance, the graceful city – with its defining abbey – was stretched out like a distant memory: views over and beyond its Georgian charm to the country the far side.

'The Ukrainians were amazed,' says Nicole Daw, who accompanied them. 'All we could hear was, 'Oh my goodness: we had no idea! This is beautiful.' And then they took a million photos!'

For the local volunteer wardens who guided them along these paths – paths obvious only when you know them – the experience was equally thrilling.

'There was such enthusiasm to continue offering these walks to the group,' Nicole says. 'A real level of passion.'





*Volunteers have helped throughout the Bathscape project*

Nicole is trails and access officer for Cotswolds National Landscape, the body tasked with looking after the designated Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB). For the past few years, as part of her role, she's been working on the Bathscape Heritage Lottery Fund project, encouraging and enabling all sorts of different people to engage with the landscape around this historic city.

But none of this would be possible without the help of volunteers, who know and love the area. Together, they've created a series of self-guided walks for all abilities, all with points of interest, geographically spread around and outside the built environment.

Nicole has also waymarked and written instructions for the 20.5-mile Circuit of Bath, a walk originally created in 2000 as a fundraiser by the city's Julian House homeless charity.

Today, 18 volunteer Circuit of Bath rangers each maintain their own sections of the trail, cutting back vegetation, litter-picking, checking routes are well marked, and reporting problems that need escalating.

Ian and Sue Garland are amongst them: their gloriously up-and-down five-mile section runs from the suburb of Lansdown, through the villages of Woolley and Swainswick, up over Little Solsbury Hill and into Batheaston.

'We can look out of the study window and see part of our route!' Ian says.

The couple have lived in the city for 21 years; but, since becoming rangers 18 months ago, they've learned things they never knew.

Such as the fact that Woolley is a Thankful Village – one that didn't lose any men to fighting in the First or Second World Wars; that Bath's famous architect, John Wood, is buried Swainswick. And that the church there has tea-and-coffee-making facilities for walkers, with an honesty box.

*'It feels very satisfying to help look after the view we can see from our study window.'*



*Team volunteering days are now a regular fixture in the CNL calendar*





*The Horizon Energy Ventures team getting stuck into some volunteer conservation work (above and below)*



'You can take a seat in the churchyard overlooking the valley, make yourself a cup of coffee, give a donation, and have a bit of respite before you go off over Solsbury Hill.

'I've found out so much about my route just by talking to local people, and going into the churches and reading the information sheets.

They're both retired – Ian as a business development manager for a bank; Sue an architect – and both keen mountain- and hill-walkers. 'We enjoy being out in the countryside and we thought: volunteering gives a purpose to our walks. An opportunity to give a little back to looking after the footpaths we regularly use.'

Volunteers who help look after the Cotswolds National Landscape come in all forms. Corporate team-days are becoming ever more popular as the connection between mental and physical health, and working outdoors in nature, is more and more understood. A group from EDF Energy recently spent time clearing a bank, clogged with



*An EDF team member helps clear scrub*

scrub, on Rodborough Common, near Stroud: a 250-acre grassland site of huge biological and geological importance.

Horizon Energy Ventures combined team-building and volunteering during a day at Combe Mill, Oxfordshire, clearing fallen trees from river and footpath. Many more businesses are following suit.

The work they all do is invaluable. But, as Nicole Daw points out, that work isn't just about preserving and maintaining the priceless Cotswold landscape – vital as that is.

'It's also about our planet in general,' she says. 'Without a connection to something, you're not going to really care about it. And, if you don't care about it, you're not going to worry so much about looking after it in the future.'

It's a sentiment echoed in a very real way by Ian and Sue Garland.

Only last week, they were sitting on top of 'their' Little Solsbury Hill, with a flask of coffee, looking down on Bath: 'Chatting and pointing out the architecture; the hills. You can see the changes of the seasons and Baths landscape.'

Sometimes, above, they'll see buzzards and hawks riding thermals.

In the summer, their fellow visitors include the hill's famous skylarks: 'Up high in the sky, singing their alarm as you come wandering past,' Ian says. 'It feels very satisfying to help look after the view we can see from our study window.'

*For more on volunteering with Cotswolds National Landscape, visit:  
[www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/looking-after/volunteering/](http://www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/looking-after/volunteering/)*

*You can find maps of Bath walking routes mentioned in this article at [bathscape.co.uk](http://bathscape.co.uk)*



# Sisters Doing It For Themselves



**A few weeks ago, Aysha Randera was in Kosadi, on the west coast of India, some four thousand miles from her home in Gloucester: 'It's a village so tiny, I'm not even sure it's on the map!' she says. She explains to Katie Jarvis about connecting with the landscape in India and the Cotswolds.**

She and her husband had taken their children to see the place where he'd spent the early part of his childhood. 'It's where his father, too, had grown up,' she explains. 'It was beautiful. Behind the small house where they'd lived, the land stretched almost as far as the river.'

As she stood drinking it all in, she could see cows roaming amongst trees; she could see sheep and chickens.

'Later, I asked my father-in-law, 'Why did you ever move away?' He told me, 'I moved to a bigger village for the betterment of my children.'

That anecdote contains a truth that stretches all the way back home.

Aysha is women's development worker at the Friendship Café, a diverse community charity on the outskirts of Gloucester. 'Many of the women I support are from families who came from farming villages; from the countryside in India. When they came over [to the UK], they ended up settling in cities for the betterment of their children, or for jobs.

'But that craving for the countryside is still there; it doesn't go. You remember those feelings.'

For the past six years, Aysha has been partnering with Cotswold Voluntary Wardens, organising guided walks for these women, deep in a Cotswold countryside where the majority had never before ventured.

They've explored fields around Stanway; ascended Stinchcombe Hill; admired villages from Bibury to Coln St Aldwyns. They've climbed stiles, followed rivers, negotiated fields of cows. A recent four-mile trek along the canal between



*'Whenever we go out together, we all come back having had a terrific day. We enjoy their company and their enthusiasm. We always sit down and have lunch together – we've talked about cooking; about the importance of Ramadan; about going on Hajj. Proximity leads to understanding.'*



Russell Sach

*Funding has helped provide the group with walking equipment*

Stonehouse and Stroud was a surprise success: 'It was flat, which was perfect for me, and for others with knee problems. I couldn't stop raving about it!

'The textile connection was really important, too. The Friendship Café runs sewing workshops, so it was fascinating to see the mills along the way.'

And yet, important as the change of environment might be, the walks are about far more than geography. These all-female groups, of all ages, have found a sense of wellbeing out in nature; they've built trust; prompted deep conversations; and led to a sharing of cultures.

The wardens ('who are so considerate; we're all now part of a walk family') have taught the women essential skills – from how and when to face traffic on narrow winding lanes, to understanding footpath signs.

'And there are things the wardens didn't at first know about our culture or our beliefs, which we've been able to explain,' Aysha says.

The wardens also helped the group secure a grant from DEFRA to buy walking gear – raincoats, poles and rucksacks. Practical equipment that makes all the difference to an outing: 'This is the UK so we often get caught in the rain!'

Margaret Reid is one of the wardens who regularly accompanies the walks. In fact, the liaison with the Friendship Café was her idea in the first place. A retired academic, she spent most of her working life in multi-cultural Glasgow. 'When I moved down here, I missed the mix of different cultures and finding out about them,' she says.

Working and walking with the group has helped change that.

'Whenever we go out together, we all come back having had a terrific day. We enjoy their company and their enthusiasm.'

We always sit down and have lunch together – we've talked about cooking; about the importance of Ramadan; about going on Hajj. Proximity leads to understanding.'

Aysha agrees. 'We do have a good old laugh. I think, to begin with, Margaret and the ladies were a bit shocked at the openness that comes out from the women! And I think that really helped to break down barriers.

'Because it's women only, there is a special connection and a feeling of safety which there isn't in the same way when it's a mixed group: you can talk about things you wouldn't in front of men.'

Certainly, confidence has blossomed in all sorts of ways. One Friendship Café member has begun organising her own group walks, with family and friends. 'That was so rewarding to see,' Aysha says.

'I've also suggested to Margaret that we should have a map of the Cotswolds, where we could colour in every single walk we've done over the past six years.

'I thought how wonderful it would be if we could see where the gaps are. Then we could explore new things and open up those areas we haven't yet seen.'

Margaret agrees: 'The goal is that they eventually to plan it all themselves... But once that happens, there's no way we're going to stop seeing them!'

#### **More information:**

*For more information on the Friendship Café:  
[www.thefriendshipcafe.com](http://www.thefriendshipcafe.com)*

*For Cotswold Voluntary Warden guided and self guided routes throughout the Cotswolds: [www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk](http://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk)*



Russell Sach

*Friendships have developed between members of the walking group*



# We Are Family



The Landscapes Review commissioned by the government and published in 2019 recommended that England's 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) be "strengthened with new purposes, powers and resources; and renamed National Landscapes." Siân Ellis takes a look at how the renaming is progressing.

The Cotswolds quickly adopted the rebrand and now our AONB neighbours have done so too. More than simply a new name, the move marks a reinvigorated sense of collective identity and scope: each landscape is special in its own right, but as a family together they have even greater potential, whether tackling challenges like climate change and nature recovery or offering leisure and wellbeing opportunities for all. You can read all about the National Landscapes' revitalised vision at [national-landscapes.org.uk](https://national-landscapes.org.uk).

Two thirds of people in England live within half-an-hour's journey of their closest National Landscape, and the Cotswolds has some wonderful neighbours – why not explore a few and enjoy the benefits of such a rich network?

You can head into the **Malvern Hills National Landscape** by hiking along the Wyche Way that links with the Cotswold Way at Broadway Tower. Covering parts of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, Malvern Hills varies dramatically between pastoral farmland and its spectacular 'hogsback' north-south ridge crowned by ancient hill forts such as British Camp.

*The Malvern Hills offer panoramic views*



**Malvern Hills  
National  
Landscape**

Themed guides (available to download) offer fascinating ways to explore the area: 'Springs and Spouts' trails tap into the Malverns' famous heritage of natural mineral 'water cures', for example. Tramper routes (and hire) enable increased access, even to the Worcestershire Beacon, the highest point of the Malvern Hills and with exhilarating, far-reaching views.







The Mendip Hills team working on dry stone wall restoration



**Mendip Hills  
National  
Landscape**

The limestone country of the **Mendip Hills National Landscape** to the southwest of the Cotswolds is renowned for the weathered cliffs and crags of Cheddar Gorge and Wookey Hole Caves. 'A wild land ready for adventure', it's perfect if you fancy caving, climbing and cycling – or maybe bird-spotting around Chew Valley Lake is more your style?

Chew Valley Lake is included in The Mendip Explorer's Passport featuring eight 'missions' to complete across the landscape: full of activity ideas like studying rocks and different bark patterns, and with wildlife plaque rubbings to collect along the way, there is plenty of fun for nature detectives of all ages.

To the east of the Cotswolds, the **North Wessex Downs National Landscape** is an area united by chalk, though habitats vary from open downs and scarp slopes to sheltered river valleys, secluded woodland and low-lying heaths and farmland. If you love archaeology and antiquity, you're in for a treat, with prehistoric barrows, ancient tracks like the Ridgeway and the Neolithic stone circle at Avebury to investigate, not to mention the White Horse of Uffington (and other equines) cut into the chalk.



**North Wessex  
Downs  
National  
Landscape**

Get further inspiration for things to do from the landscape's '50 Things Not to Miss', from top spots for stargazing to walking flower-rich grasslands of Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve or along chalk streams.

Keep on walking along the Ridgeway National Trail and you arrive in the **Chilterns National Landscape**, famous for its colourful beech woods and woodland heritage. Rolling hills, wooded valleys and steep chalk escarpments offer a range of rambling and cycling adventures, and experiences like Burnham Beeches sensory trail, featuring tactile and acoustic sculptures, open up the countryside to visitors with different needs.

Heading south from the Cotswolds, **Cranborne Chase National Landscape**, once a royal hunting area, is a treasury of unimproved chalk grassland, biologically rich chalk streams, arable fields and ancient woodlands that support rare species of invertebrates and fungi – also providing havens of tranquillity to walkers and nature-lovers.

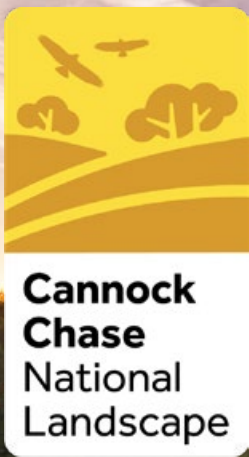
A free Time Travellers app will help you to delve into history and stories around the landscape, including an augmented reality reconstruction of a Roman rural farmstead. Awarded International



Ann Shepley

Walking through wildflowers in Pewsey Downs





Ron Evans

Cannock Chase is famous for its heathlands (above and right)

Dark Sky Reserve status across its whole area, Cranborne Chase is a superb place to enjoy starry, starry nights – check out stargazing events and the top ten sites.

To the west of the Cotswolds, the **Wye Valley National Landscape** is the only protected landscape to straddle the border between England and Wales, while its namesake river is a designated Site of Scientific Interest along its entire length. Recently introduced to a whole new generation thanks to starring as a backdrop in the Netflix series *Sex Education*, the Wye Valley had already gained popularity in the 18th century – when the river’s picturesque scenery of horseshoe bends beneath limestone cliffs and ravine woodlands, combined with romantic ruins like Tintern Abbey, inspired guided river tours and the beginnings of British tourism.

Hire a canoe and maybe spot an otter; or discover landmarks on the Picturesque Wye Tour from Ross-on-Wye to Chepstow Castle. Symonds Yat Rock provides fantastic bird’s eye views over the Wye, and look out for peregrine falcons that nest on nearby Coldwell Rocks.

Finally, if you are up for a long-distance walk, follow the 101-mile Heart of England Way connecting the Cotswolds and **Cannock Chase National Landscape**. Set on a domed plateau and covering 26sq miles, Cannock Chase is proof that ‘small is beautiful’ with its mosaic of forest and internationally important heathlands fringed by



Sam Carpenter

historic parklands and enclosed farmlands.

An oasis of escape for the busy West Midlands, here you can peel back layers of history: from Castle Ring Iron Age hill fort, to remnants of the medieval hunting landscape, and sections of once-bustling canals. Today the emphasis is on tranquil enjoyment: horse riding along extensive bridleways and from trekking centres; walking routes, including a Tolkien trail; and family cycling – or more challenging mountain bike trails.

**For more information**

*For more information on our family of National landscapes, visit [national-landscapes.org.uk](http://national-landscapes.org.uk)*



**Dyffryn Gwy  
Tirwedd  
Cenedlaethol**

**Wye Valley  
National  
Landscape**





Golden hued stone is part of the charm of the gatehouse at Stanway House

# CotswoldGold

**If asked to name a colour most associated with the Cotswolds, it would be gold: the colour of its limestone, distinctive dry stone walls, and towns and villages that together give the National Landscape such harmonious character. Sian Ellis celebrates our 50th anniversary issue of the *Cotswold Lion* with a golden treasure hunt.**

The very story of the Cotswolds begins beneath our feet with its rich geology, in particular the Jurassic limestone laid down 140–210 million years ago. The typical oolitic rock, derived from billions of fragments of corals and shellfish, reminds us that warm, shallow seas once covered the area, while a walk along the Cotswold escarpment as sunshine burnishes craggy limestone outcrops can't fail to induce a sense of the simmering Earth forces that created our beautiful landscape.

It's little wonder that 'Father of English Geology' William Smith (1769–1839) was a local lad: Churchill and Sarsden Heritage Centre tells how his interest in geology was sparked in childhood by collecting fossilised sea urchins or 'pound stones' – so-called because dairy maids used them to weigh butter.

Our internationally important beechwoods – fiery icons of a Cotswold autumn – thrive on the limestone soils, which are also loved by some of Nature's more unusual and





Sian Ellis

'Pound stone' fossilised sea urchin

alluring jewels including those of the mellow yellow to shimmering orange kind. Look out for spring's yellow star-of-Bethlehem at Colerne Park & Monk's Wood, north of Bath, and bursts of purple-and-gold Pasqueflowers in the Pasqueflower Reserve at Barnsley Warren SSSI. Rare Duke of Burgundy butterflies flit over the limestone grasslands of Rodborough Common; eye-catching yellowhammers sing their "little bit of bread and no cheese" song on Cleeve Common. Or simply enjoy the sun crowning the

top of the Golden Valley on the way to Stroud.

In truth, Cotswold limestone subtly shifts shades from honey colours in the north of the area to greys around Stroud and pale creams around Bath: much like sunlight playing in and out of passing clouds. Its use to construct dry stone walls dates back 5,000 years to Neolithic long barrows, although most dry stone walls seen today originate from the enclosure of open fields and sheepwalks in the 18th and 19th centuries. Character lines criss-crossing estates and farmland, they are now thankfully maintained and enhanced by modern craftsmen.

Quarrying from Roman times onwards made

Alana Hopkins



The colour of limestone in the Cotswolds changes depending on age and location



Simon Smith



Anna Field

The golden centre of a pasqueflower and the auburn hues of the Duke of Burgundy butterfly





Sian Ellis

*Limestone characterises much of the architecture in the Cotswolds*

the most of the eminently workable local stone for building – remnants at Chedworth Romano-British villa, Yanworth, show a love of home comforts surpassed only by the spa luxuries of Aquae Sulis (Bath). From the World Heritage City of Bath to the World Heritage Site of Blenheim Palace, our National Landscape is aglow with grand architecture, not to mention eccentric landmarks like Broadway Tower.

*Cotswold Lion sheep – historically their wool was nicknamed the golden fleece*



Sian Ellis

But most of all it's our stone villages, seeming to spring organically from their surroundings, that display gold-medal quintessential charm: their vernacular limestone-slate roofs and luminous walls holding the sunshine of centuries even on gloomy days. Medieval wealth generated by the 'Golden Fleece' of Cotswold sheep that grazed the limestone grasslands (everything is connected!) created an unrivalled canvas of market town architecture, manors, merchants' houses and, when clothmaking took off, weavers' cottages and mills. Step back in time to meet rich benefactors in glorious churches from Burford to Chipping Campden, Northleach and Painswick.



Squashed Robot Films

*Woodlands with their autumnal golden glow*

*Writers and artists, too, have flocked, though none is more synonymous with the landscape than Slad lad Laurie Lee.*

Even when the Cotswolds lost its bustling wool and cloth trade and became a 19th-century backwater, its unalloyed halcyon beauty drew pioneers of the Arts & Crafts Movement who took up its architectural legacy. Writers and artists, too, have flocked, though none is more synonymous with the landscape than Slad lad Laurie Lee. Who can forget his poetic descriptions including "that first long secret drink of golden fire, juice of those valleys" in *Cider With Rosie*?

An artisan cider certainly offers a suitable toast to the Cotswold Lion's anniversary, or maybe a whisky distilled from local golden barley, or a traditional orchard apple juice. Cheers!



ENRAPTURED BY

# RAPTORS

Britain's got talons... a battalion of birds of prey grace the Cotswold skies. Matt Brierley shares some of the most awesome seasonal raptor spectacles.

**120-180**

breeding pairs now in the North Cotswold



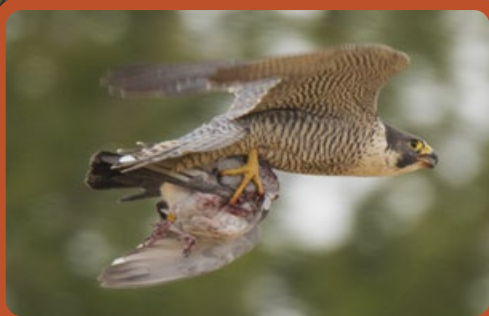
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## WINTER

The sun's low angle and crisp air conspire to paint pastel sunsets that bring warmth to eyes and soul. Just before shivering frost comes creeping and first stars twinkle, scan skies above woods for red kites in considerable numbers. Guidebooks describe rusty reddish plumage but to watch them kissed by low sunlight is to see them glow. **Red kites** are unusual. Outside breeding season, territorial boundaries are put aside and these fork-tailed raptors sleep together. The Gloucestershire Raptor Monitoring Group has counted up to 100 roosting birds. Listen for their distinctive weoo-weoo-weoo call. They wheel and

circle before heading to their treetop sleepover. Why they gather is mysterious. Maybe they're exchanging information, or if one kite has spotted carrion that day others may benefit by tailing it at dawn. Some experts say it's about love. Parents bring that year's young along to roost. Do would-be partners catch each other's eye across crowded canopies? One thing is for sure, with 120-180 breeding pairs now in the North Cotswolds, red kites are making a prestigious comeback after being reintroduced into the nearby Chilterns 34 years ago.





## SPRING

In the Gloucestershire Cotswolds late winter and early spring is the best time to glimpse the elusive “Phantom of the Forest” – the **goshawk**. They skydance above tall conifers with nesting potential. The female tends to lead. She begins slow, exaggerated puppet-like flapping: think elasticated halloween bat. The male joins her. Switchbacks follow – deep plunges before wings close tight and they shoot vertically upwards.

Smaller sparrowhawks skydance too. The best way to tell them apart is the buzzard-size of the female goshawk. Sparrowhawks regularly frequent gardens. Most people meet them when they’re plucking prey on their lawn. A neat trick is to tell the sex by what it’s caught. Prey bigger than blackbird? – the good money’s on female. Goshawks enjoy even bigger meals. Analysis of ten Cotswold nests found 261 prey items. 31% were corvids, 12% wood pigeons and 28% non-native grey squirrels!

Analysis of ten Cotswold nests found

**261**  
prey items

## SUMMER

There’s one raptor you can reliably see in the Cotswolds at any time of year. Not only that, it’s the fastest animal on Earth. In a dive - a stoop - they can reach 242 mph. This is the formidable **peregrine falcon**. Where can you spot these epic predators? Cheltenham’s Christ Church, St. John’s, Bath or St. John the Baptist, Cirencester.

Eyes fill 50% of a peregrine’s skull; human eyes fill 5%. Our retinas have a fovea, a specialised region with a higher density of light sensitive cells. Peregrines are bifovent, with one for viewing distant targets and another for looking straight ahead. This means enhanced perception of distance and speed of prey. A third eyelid - a transparent nictitating membrane - works like fighter pilot’s goggles. Nose baffles deflect air shockwaves from nasal passages allowing them to breathe during a hunt.

Eggs laid in early April hatch some 37 days later. By late June fledglings take first tentative flights but stay close. As summer progresses parents stop plucking prey for their young, luring them off their perches, dropping fully feathered birds for them to catch. In Cheltenham an impressive food drop happened directly above the county cricket ground on match day. Whether the peregrine juveniles were out for a duck was unclear... it was most likely a pigeon.

Whether you’re out in the wilds on a chilly winter’s day, or grabbing an ice cream in suburban summer, keep your eyes peeled for raptors. You won’t be disappointed.

Eyes fill  
**50%**  
of a peregrine’s skull



**For more information**

[www.glosraptors.co.uk](http://www.glosraptors.co.uk) With thanks to Anna Field.

Follow @mattbrierleywildlife on social media



# Walking Highlights

The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens have been busily planning guided walks for the New Year – with 55 already planned – and more to be added as the year progresses! From regular walks, weekend walks, town walks, floral walks, and wildlife walks – there are plenty to choose from! Below is one highlight from each month, but there are so many more...

Visit [cotswolds-nl.org.uk](http://cotswolds-nl.org.uk) and browse the guided walks page to choose the route for you! And do remember the self-guided walks too – these include detailed route descriptions that you can do under your own steam, and more accessible routes (including those without stiles, wheelchair routes, and routes suitable for off road mobility scooters).

## JANUARY

**Saturday 6th January • Start: 10:30am**

### Blissful New Year

*No Booking Required*

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 2 hours

Distance: 3.5 miles

**Start point:** Chipping Norton Town Hall

An easy walk with lots of variety starting in the centre of Chipping Norton and exploring the countryside beyond taking in the iconic Bliss Mill which once brought prosperity to the town. Pavements, grassy fields, woodland and an ancient track provide our route with some possible muddy sections.

## FEBRUARY

**Thursday 22nd February • Start: 10:00am**

### Snowdrops and Aconites

*No Booking Required*

Difficulty: Easy

Duration: 2.5 hours

Distance: 4.5 miles

**Start point:** Hunter's Hall Inn, Kingscote; please park considerately. The inn is on the A4135, 1.8 miles west towards Wotton from Calcot crossroads. Satnav GL8 8XZ.

A short walk exploring the lovely woods near the village of Kingscote. Snowdrops may still be seen! Suitable for novice and experienced walkers, but may be muddy in places, depending on the weather. Refreshments can be taken after the walk in the historic Hunters' Hall Inn.







## MAY

Tuesday 7th May • Start: 9:30am

### Alderton to Dumbleton Bluebell Walk

*No Booking Required*

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 2.5 hours

Distance: 5.5 miles

**Start point:** The Gardeners Arms Alderton  
GL20 8NL.

A beautiful walk around the hills of Alderton and Dumbleton.

## MARCH

Friday 8th March • Start: 10:00am

### From Peak to Peak

*No Booking Required*

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 4 hours

Distance: 7 miles

**Start point:** Coaley Peak picnic site.  
On the B4066 road from Uley to Stroud.

From the car park the walk follows the Cotswold Way to Uley Bury from where we descend towards the village of Uley. We then navigate various field tracks in the direction of Owlpen Manor before heading to Nympsfield. From there it is a short walk back to the car park. Packed lunch required.

## APRIL

Tuesday 16th April • Start: 10:00am

### Spring Surprises in Stanton

*No Booking Required*

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 3 hours

Distance: 6 miles

**Start point:** Village car park Stanton WR12 7NE.

This walk will take us up the scarp and through Littleworth wood where we will look out for spring flowers and listen for singing birds. Please bring refreshments.



## JUNE

Tuesday 18th June • Start: 10:00am

### Box Tramp

*No Booking Required*

Difficulty: Moderate

Duration: 3 hours

Distance: 5 miles

**Start point:** Box Parish Recreation Ground  
car park.

A walk around the various footpaths of Box Parish. Bring a drink and mid-morning snack. Parking on the Box Parish Recreation Ground car park SN13 8NT.







# On the Grape

# vine

**A tour of a vineyard may not be the first activity to spring to mind for a day out in the Cotswolds. But grape-growing is on the increase, as English viticulture enjoys a modern renaissance. Words by Siân Ellis.**

While England's South East steals many viticultural headlines, there is also a long-rooted local heritage in Gloucestershire, with the 12th-century scholar William of Malmesbury noting: "This county is planted thicker with Vineyards than any other in England, more plentiful in crops, and more pleasant in flavour. For the wines do not offend the mouth with sharpness, since they do not yield to the French in sweetness."

Enhanced expertise, public demand for locally produced food and drink, and interest in 'experiential' activities like wine tourism, have all boosted contemporary wine growing.

Award-winning 58-acre **Woodchester Valley Vineyard**, begun by Fiona Shiner in 2007, includes land at Stonehouse, which seems apt given that the Domesday Book of 1086 listed "2 arpents of vineyard" at "Stanhus" (an arpent was an old French unit of land of about an acre).

Today's vineyard grows a selection of grapes across three sites with differing soil profiles, although all are predominantly limestone and "very fossiliferous", and the winery produces a variety of still and sparkling wines. The vineyard is committed

*Little Oak Vineyard, near Chipping Campden*

to limiting and, where possible, reducing its impact on the environment (earthworms have even been counted as part of monitoring soil health). Information on guided tours and tastings can be found at: [woodchestervalleyvineyard.co.uk](http://woodchestervalleyvineyard.co.uk).

Smaller Cotswold vineyards include award-winning **Little Oak Vineyard**, founded by Steve Wilson on the outskirts of Chipping Campden in 2005. Now expanded to nearly 3.5 acres, it grows Siegerrebe, Seyval Blanc and Divico grapes, with still and sparkling wines sold from the vineyard and in local shops.

"People are surprised to find us here," says Gemma Wilson (whose recent wedding with Steve took place at the vineyard). "Our loam soil is good for drainage and we are north-to-south facing, which suits vine growing."

"Visitors who come on tours and tastings [pre-booking required] often remark that English vineyards must benefit from climate change," she adds. "Warmer temperatures do mean grapes can ripen more, but weather is unpredictable, which still makes growing tricky!"

Gemma enjoys working close to nature. "The nice thing about doing everything by hand is you can see how the vines are waking up when you are winter pruning, and how the grapes are growing when you are summer pruning."

Family and volunteers help with harvesting, and people can lease vines in return for wine and invitations to annual wine-tasting events. "The vineyard is a happy place. We love sharing it with people." More information: [littleoakvineyard.com](http://littleoakvineyard.com)





Quoins Organic Vineyard near Bradford on Avon

Alan Chubb, who founded award-winning **Quoins Organic Vineyard** near Bradford on Avon in 2002, enjoys sharing insights into vine growing with visitors too. After a worldwide career advising people on how to grow tree crops and promoting organic methods, he planted 2 acres to grow Orion, Rondo and Madeleine Angevin grapes, selling wines locally and online; his wife Jane Laurie began her collection of fruit and nut trees around the vineyard edges.

Alan talks animatedly about organic and biodynamic methods working in harmony with nature. The site (Cotswold shale with some clay under-soil) is south facing, gently sloping

*Woodpeckers come and get insects from cracks in the wooden vineyard posts, which is nice to watch. It's all part of the natural order of things."*



and well draining, with selected herbs and grasses growing "so that when it rains hard, you don't lose any soil, and the deep roots aerate the soil and bring up nutrition." Mowed cuttings are left for mulch, and nutritional sprays for the vines are made from Russian comfrey.

The fruit and nut trees attract some 25 species of birds, "but because of my method of close planting vines I don't have issues with them eating grapes. Woodpeckers come and get insects from cracks in the wooden vineyard posts, which is nice to watch. It's all part of the natural order of things."

Pre-booked groups, including hen parties, come for tours and tastings, and are welcome to bring picnics and sample orchard fruits in season. Information: [quoinsvineyard.co.uk](http://quoinsvineyard.co.uk)



### Also on the grapevine

- **Poulton Hill Estate**, Poulton, Cirencester: tours and tastings available at this small vineyard with an environmentally active ethos, [poultonhillestate.co.uk](http://poultonhillestate.co.uk)
- **Three Choirs Vineyards**, Newent: vineyard stays, brasserie, self-guided wine tasting, lunch and vine walks, [three-choirs-vineyards.co.uk](http://three-choirs-vineyards.co.uk)





**Cotswolds  
National  
Landscape**

# HELP SHAPE

## THE FUTURE OF THE COTSWOLDS

The **Caring for the Cotswolds** grants scheme is a way for businesses and their customers to give something back to the environment in the Cotswolds. We use donations to support projects that conserve vital habitats, preserve our heritage, and improve access to the countryside for everyone.

The more contributions we receive, the more we can do to. Want to get involved? Being a member boosts green credentials with customers, and shows that your organisation cares for the environment. Donating as a customer is a great way of helping us look after the Cotswolds National Landscape now – and into the future.

**Funding applications  
open January 2024**

For more information click [here](#)





**Cotswolds  
National  
Landscape**

## **Glorious Cotswold Grasslands**

**Our Glorious Cotswold Grasslands team is on a mission to restore as much wildflower grassland as possible, right across the Cotswolds!**

This vital work is improving biodiversity, and helping wildlife - from beetles and butterflies, to birds and bats. It's great for livestock too!

If you are a landowner, land manager, parish or town council, school, farm, or conservation project, and you're interested to know how the GCG team could work with you, take a look online to find out more, or email Harvey Sherwood, GCG Operations Coordinator at [harvey.sherwood@cotswolds-nl.org.uk](mailto:harvey.sherwood@cotswolds-nl.org.uk)

