

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2023

We have had the warmest September ever and some of the wettest days on record, with flooding even in Topsham High Street. The trees have therefore kept their leaves for longer than usual but are now taking on their full autumn hues. Those of you who have ventured on to the Goat Walk Land in recent weeks may also have noticed that our efforts to reduce the fertility of the soil to encourage wild flowers are beginning to have results. With reduced fertility the grass crop is much reduced in both fields from previous years in spite of the rain and high temperatures. Once again we have not been able to find a farmer who is willing and able to cut and bale the grass in our meadows and with lower grass yields this is likely to be a problem in the future. Like last year, when the grass is cut it will be removed to the corner of the field.

The scrapes have been working well during the periods of high rainfall, keeping the entrance by the field gate comparatively dry, with only the occasional puddle. Both scrapes have filled and are now discharging slowly into the ground. The scrape in the lower field has developed a substantial growth of Goat Willow and even a few Turkey Oak saplings. These are protecting the scrape from disturbance providing a short-lived aquatic habitat for insects and other invertebrates. Unfortunately, the scrape in the higher field which remains wet for a much longer part of the year has not yet developed into an insect haven, and there are still no signs of frogs.

The warm wet weather has seen a good variety of fungi this autumn. One group of



Bracket fungus on the Turkey Oak

fungi is, however, not so welcome. The survey of our trees in 2021 found that three of our biggest and oldest trees have bracket fungi growing on them. These fungi feed on old wood which provides the trunk with strength but is no longer part of the plants water and nutrient transport system. The fungus on two of the trees is very localised and does not significantly affect them.

However, the large Turkey Oak in the hedge between the two fields shows evidence of a larger fungal growth with brown spores covering the

surrounding ivy. There are now several fruiting bodies on the trunk of the tree but fortunately no external decay is present. We will continue have the Turkey Oak and our other trees checked regularly.

The rain has also curtailed our working parties this year, but we have made good progress on removing the ivy from the inside of the wall fronting the Goat Walk. The

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pointing of the wall that we undertook in 2017 is mostly still solid but the ivy roots are beginning to work their way into a few cracks. The Management Committee has now begun to update the health and safety review of our land. Over the last few years we have had several working parties removing barbed wire from the hedges and the woodland but we continue to find short sections hidden in the undergrowth. Please beware if you decide to pick blackberries from the thicker sections of the hedges.

At the last Annual General Meeting the possibility of amending our constitution to enable the Trust to own and manage other areas of land was discussed. The Trustees considered that with the very limited open space remaining in Topsham there was a risk that if some suitable land become available, the Trust may not be able to change its constitution quickly enough to mount a bid, and the land could be lost to development. We would therefore like to hear your views on changing our constitution to enable the Trust to own and manage other land within Topsham so that they can be taken into account in a proposal which will be put to the Annual General Meeting. If you are not already a member and would like to join please see the Trust's website (<http://goatwalklandtrust.org/>) or you can contact the Trust at our email address (info@goatwalklandtrust.org) or at our postal address, Matthews Hall, Fore Street, Topsham EX3 0HF.

Under the terms of our constitution one of our existing Member Trustees must stand for re-election each year at the AGM. Last year we only had one member stand but two vacancies. We were able to appoint a member to fill the other vacancy but this year we will again have two vacancies. If you wish to stand for election please forward your name to the Trust by noon on 1st December, together with a brief statement of up to 80 words about yourself which we will send to members with the formal notice of the AGM. If you need any further details about what is involved in acting as a trustee please contact the Trust at our email address (info@goatwalklandtrust.org) or at our postal address; Matthews Hall, Fore Street, Topsham EX3 0HF.

Members are also entitled to submit resolutions for consideration at the annual meeting. If you wish to have a resolution put to the AGM you should also submit it to the Trust by noon on 1st December at the above address or by email and these too will be circulated with the notice of the AGM. The Annual General Meeting is your opportunity to hear what has been happening so please do join us. The Trustees and the Management Committee will also be happy to answer any questions at the AGM and notice of these is not required. The AGM will be in January and notice of the date and venue will be sent to members in due course.

Chris Buckingham
Chairman