

Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund 2015 – 2016
Final Project Report
Clun Valley Organics - S Wheeler & Son
Project name & Ref: Bales Education Facilities - CF/1516/33

Our aim is to provide environmental education to individuals and organisations, including schools and colleges, to help promote environmental awareness in the Shropshire Hills. This, we believe, is best achieved by allowing participants to take part in courses and activities in a special place in the Shropshire Hills AONB.

The main outcomes are an increased understanding of farming, biodiversity and landscape. This in turn leads to sympathetic management of habitats which will ultimately help to safeguard the environment that we all share. There will also be benefits to people's wellbeing, through their experience of nature.

We currently have a viable educational operation which last year we extended to include a number of wildlife courses, as well as those that already take place such as smallholding, animal husbandry and herbal/wellbeing courses. The educational building (BALES) is an excellent resource and essential to our aims. However, we are desperately lacking basic resources that will help us to deliver courses.

As described above, the educational facility BALES, is lacking basic educational equipment including;

- A digital projector, which will allow teachers and course leaders to present information to various groups including schools and colleges
- Moveable storage, including storage trays
- Bug jars with magnifying glasses, white trays, pond nets, collecting pots, magnifying glasses and sweep nets
- Microscope that can be plugged to projector. Slides, dissecting implements etc.
- Clipboards, pencils, paper and pens
- Flipchart easel
- Wildlife/environmental/farming/gardening literature
- Gardening tools and other equipment for children

The output attached to our grant was to purchase the above educational equipment for The Bales, which has now been achieved.

Outputs are measured by the feedback and interest we receive from the courses and activities we undertake (see list below).

Work on this project was carried out mostly by T Wheeler, P Wheeler (son), J Button (daughter) and N Button (son-in-law). Courses were led by various people. This year we managed to attract environmental tutors from all over the West Midlands to undertake courses.

We run courses similar to the way other environmental education organisations run theirs, except we feel we have a special farmed environment, unlike anywhere else.

A special condition attached to the grant was for us to explore potential links and involvement with the AONB and other potential partners. Working with Cath Landles (AONB), we achieved the following:

- As well as hosting the John Muir Award (JMA) for two local schools (Clun and Newcastle), we also hosted the JMA teacher training day at Brynmawr. The session was run by Cath Landles (SHAONB) and Ellie Larkham (SWT) and also involved Andy Naylor (JMA England Manager)
- Ludlow College – Field trip for A level geography students looking at rural rebranding and catchment issues. Involved Cath Landles and Mike Kelly (SHAONB)
- University Centre Shrewsbury, Dept. of Geography & International Development - field trip for students looking at Border Regions: landscape, place and identity
- Brynmawr Farm visit, part of the Annual event for Friends of the Shropshire Hills AONB members to the Clun Forest
- Hosted visit for Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund grant award panel

As well as hosting 50 farm visits, we have also held the following courses and events:

Bat ecology, conservation, identification and surveying – 7th May 2016 - 13 attendees

Amphibian ecology, identification and surveying – 30th April and 16th May 2016 – 22 attendees

Introduction to the invertebrates of Brynmawr, an upland farm - June 25th and September 3rd 2015 – 15 attendees

We had really positive feedback from the courses as demonstrated below:

“I just wanted to say that we really enjoyed the course last Saturday, Brynmawr Farm is a stunning place and the course (and course material) was really informative, it’s great to hear so much interesting information from such knowledgeable people. Thank you so much for the lovely soup and cake too!”

“I really enjoyed the amphibian course the other week and found the balance between the talk in the morning and getting out looking at newts in the afternoon worked really well. I could’ve listened to Alan longer – and I’m pretty sure Alan could’ve talked for longer! – but for an introduction to the ecology of amphibians it was just right. The homemade soup, bread and flapjack were a delicious bonus, as well as the views!”

“We just wanted to say how much we enjoyed the day yesterday. You have a wonderful facility on an inspiring farm, in an amazing location. It was lovely to see people who were completely new to entomology being so interested and excited about what they found. We will certainly be interested in more courses with you. I've been looking at your web site which is very informative. “Great to see a farm and farmer that welcome people and want to share their experiences.”



Morning session of amphibian course with tutor, Alan Shepherd



Outdoor afternoon sessions of amphibian courses





Bat course led by tutor, Cody Levine

We also took part in Open Farm Sunday:

We had 80 plus visitors and had displays showing the public:

- How the farm was used by visiting school children, particularly for the John Muir Award
- Work of the Upper Clun Community Wildlife Group
- Work of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
- Sheep shearing
- Wool spinning
- Native sheep and cattle

We put on educational activities for adults and children such as:

- Pond dipping
- Importance of hedgerows using insect models
- Quiz on ladybirds
- Farm tour covering the 'thinking cottage' powered by the wind and sun and use of native breed cattle in conserving and enhancing Wildlife Sites in Shropshire

We shall be doing it again this year (2016).

