

FOREST WYRE - THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WYRE FOREST SOCIETY

December 2025

Chairman's Report

The weather confuses again, with a hot, dry summer followed by incessant rain and now a sudden drop in temperature – in our garden (which, admittedly is quite sheltered) we have daffodils about 8 inches tall and crocuses that have already flowered. The Forest seems to have escaped the worst of the nation's flooding, however, if my from-train observations on my regular trips to Marylebone are to be an indicator.


I've noted more white (leucistic) Fallow this year, both bucks and does and there are some regulars in the immediate vicinity of Far Forest. Also spotted have been slow worms and lizards. The Far Forest Red Kite seems to have moved on, perhaps the Buzzards have been temporarily successful in driving it away, but on a recent trip over the Clee Hill I saw plenty of Kites. We may just have some other new arrivals...see below.

In my day job I have some dealings with the world of mosquitoes and to cut a long story short, I had some dealings with the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and when the time is right, the UKHSA entomology people are going to send me some mosquito traps to set up in the Forest to ascertain if there are any invasive species present.

Planning matters seem to be going through a quiet period, though I have heard that the top field at Bill White's Nurseries has been sold, so we may well expect some sort of planning application – being where that is, the impact on the Forest will probably be minimal, unlike the Lynall's Lane situation, about which nothing seems to have been decided.

The Committee continues its' efforts to rejuvenate the WFS and it will be presenting a few ideas at the AGM in April (date TBC). We do, however, need some new members – particularly someone who could manage the WFS' social media presence: we only meet about 3 times a year, so please step forward if you could help – we'll raise this again at the AGM.

With very best wishes for Christmas and the New Year!



Simon Oakley FRSB

Chairman WFS

Indoor Meeting – The Pine Martens of Shropshire

Mia Clement of the Shropshire Wildlife Trust will be giving a talk on Pine Martens in early 2026: a date had been agreed, plus a venue, but there has been some feedback from Members about having an evening meeting in the winter plus a venue more in line with the forest. I am looking at a forest-centric venue in the next few days and have emailed Mia to look at perhaps a Saturday afternoon and will keep you all posted. As we need to cover some costs (speaker, venue) there will be a nominal charge.



Related to this, Member Mark Ward may just have spotted a Pine Marten in an isolated part of Cleobury Coppice – apparently a very dense part which would suit the species: it's not too much of a stretch from a confirmed sighting just outside Cleobury Mortimer (see the nbnatlas.org database for details) a couple of years ago.

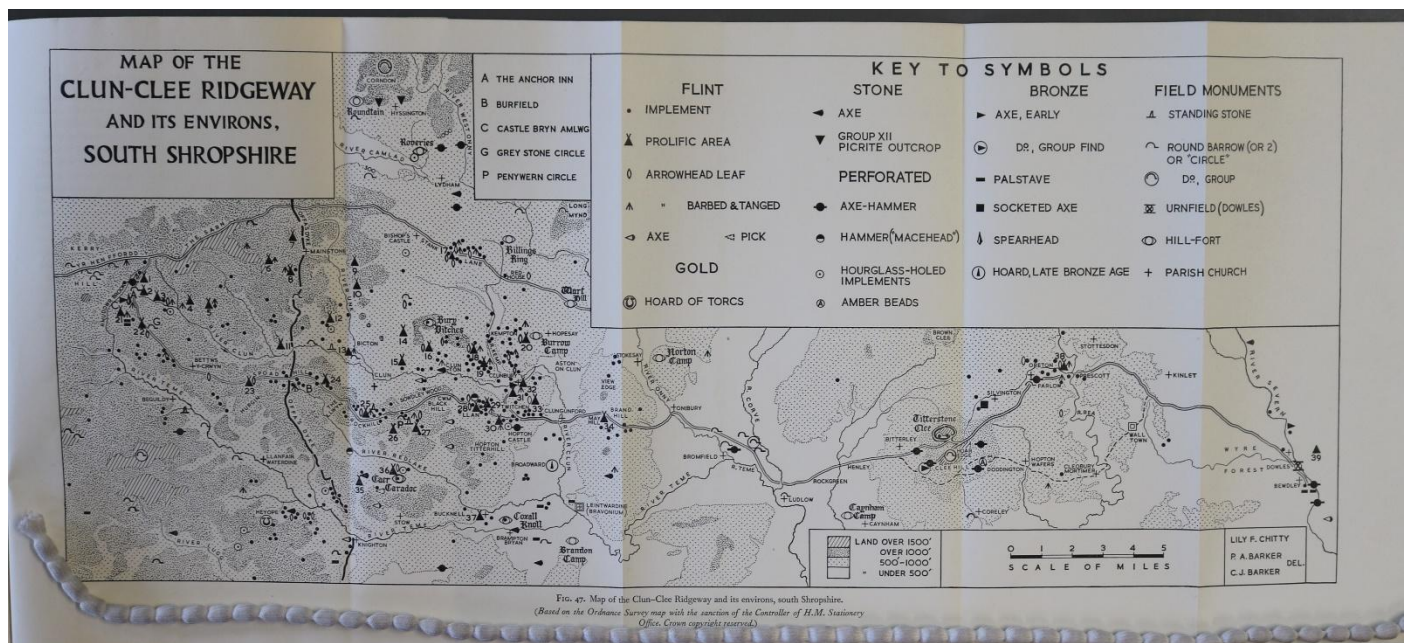
The Clun-Clee Ridgeway

Many of you will know that a 'ridgeway' is a prehistoric track associated with trading and often confined to higher ground, the purpose of the elevation being to deter bandits and suchlike. Well-known examples include The Ridgeway in Wiltshire/Berkshire and more locally, the Kerry Ridgeway in Powys/Shropshire, which included a cider house! However, who knew about the Clun-Clee Ridgeway? Not me! In reading the book on Kinlet referred to below, I found a section where a stone axe was found by a farmer in a field at Upper House Farm, Ivor Price – he alerted Ludlow museum, which in turn contacted an archaeologist, Lily Chitty. Miss Chitty researched the area thoroughly in the 1920s and 30s and found several more axe heads and flints, ultimately associating them with a lost trackway: the Clun-Clee Ridgeway (CCR). It's a slight misnomer as Miss Chitty posits that the route went further than the Clee and down to a trading point on the River Severn just above Dowles.

Fascinated by this, I contacted Herefordshire archives which was able to source Lily Chitty's original article:

Chitty, Lily F. 'The Clun-Clee Ridgeway: A Prehistoric Trackway Across South Shropshire', *Culture and Environment: Essays in Honour of Sir Cyril Fox*, ed. by Idris Llewelyn Foster and Leslie Alcock. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963. 171-192 + map. Offprint.

In my possession are several old maps and I've been able to (sort of!) overlay the image reproduced below and ascertain what remains of the route today – not a lot! Much of it appears to have been subsumed by more modern metalled roads, at least in the immediate area of the Wyre Forest, though further west, the track may be identified on modern OS maps around the Clun region. It seems to me that the CCR crossed the River Rea somewhere near Prescott (though perhaps not by the ancient bridge at SO 66256 81504) before traversing the forest down to Dowles. Below is a scanned image of the map in Miss Chitty's article, so see what you can make of it.



(Reproduced by kind permission of Herefordshire archives)

Here are some additional links for further reading:



<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/data-catalogue/resource/349b5960dcfb933ceef8cd721984a0e94f05b148c29389c48e90afc534a87ab1>

<https://research.birmingham.ac.uk/en/publications/flint-and-stone-the-significance-of-clun-and-the-clun-clee-ridgew/>

By the way, the National Library of Scotland is the best place to find old maps: <https://maps.nls.uk/os/>

DVD – Disaster at Dowles

The Civic Society has just reproduced its once popular DVD video 'Disaster at Dowles' on a memory stick. It includes a brief history of Dowles and many interviews with people connected to The Manor at the time leading up to the disastrous fire including the late Hon Petronella Trustram Eve, Marjorie Sheldon's half sister. They are on sale at £10 each. Excellent gift for people interested in local history. Contact Richard Perrin. Jrichardperrin@aol.com

Kinlet local history group

Francis Engleheart of the Kinlet Local History Group has edited and produced a rather excellent book – actually from 2007 but which has only just come to my attention. It contains some fascinating snippets of local history and some rare images. Please contact me at wylfreforesociety1@gmail.com and I will connect you to Francis if you would like to purchase a copy.



Wyre Community Land Trust

Member Margaret Tunstall sent me the flowing article about the Wyre Community Land Trust.

Simon asked me to write an article for the Forest Wyre newsletter - I am a volunteer who is a director of and manages Wyre Community Land Trust - so this is all about who we are and what we do:

We are a not-for-profit company established in April 2007 and our focus is Conservation, Community and Education. We rent 15 acres of land plus farm buildings at St George's Farm in the Wyre Forest from the Guild of St George – a charity started by John Ruskin.



Aerial view of St Georges Farm, Wyre Forest

(Photo by Peter Broome)



We manage 383 acres of local meadows, woodlands and orchards for conservation with a team of around 40 volunteers and 6 part time staff. Our herd of 40+ pedigree Dexter cattle carry out an extensive conservation grazing programme across much of this land. Including at Longdon and Wimperhill in the Wyre Forest. In these areas they graze under the no-fence system – this is where the cows wear a collar and our Farm Manager, Sally, defines the area to be grazed on an app. If the cow strays close to the boundary the collar plays some music if they try to cross the boundary, they get a shock – exactly like an electric fence.

THE WYRE FOREST SOCIETY
WORKING FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE WYRE FOREST



We work closely with Natural England, Forestry England, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, The Woodland Trust, Butterfly Conservation, our landlord and local landowners.

We have conservation volunteers – who work to manage scrub and invasive weeds as well as planting trees and maintaining fences, hedges etc .



We also have woodworking volunteers who operate our sawmill and work on making the benches, fingerpost, bird and bat boxes and the many other things we make.



Volunteers are vital to our work – if any of you are at all interested, please contact Kate our Volunteer Coordinator (details below).

We also host educational visits from schools and local organisations – over 80 this year.



We have recently trained a number of volunteers to monitor the wildlife in and around our base in the Wyre Forest and this year have had three active surveys running. Our small mammal tunnels were installed at the start of June in three of the coppice coups on Ruskin Land, these have been checked and reinked every two weeks. (We have found dormice which means we have had to adapt our coppicing strategy for their needs).



Our reptile refuges were put out and checked every month with several sightings of grass snake, slow worm and lizard recorded.

Butterflies are recorded on our transect from the start of April until the end of September on a weekly basis.

Earlier this year we were able to obtain funding to map all the ponds in the Wyre Forest and undertake a survey of Frogspawn. We are currently in the planning stage of the second Frogspawn Survey covering the whole of the Wyre Forest

If you are interested in volunteering or becoming a wildlife/frogspawn surveyor in the Wyre Forest, please contact Kate Quinton on kate@wyreclt.org.uk or 07873508494 or at the office on 01299 488083.

And do please contact us on the office number if you are interested in oak firewood from the Wyre Forest or in having something made from the local oak. (We do benches, signs, bird and bat boxes).

Margaret Tunstall

Frogspawn survey

Thank you to Margaret again for the following article on the frogspawn survey.

Summary Statistics

24 volunteers involved

Covered 68 ponds in total

59 of these ponds being in the main forest block or immediately adjacent to it

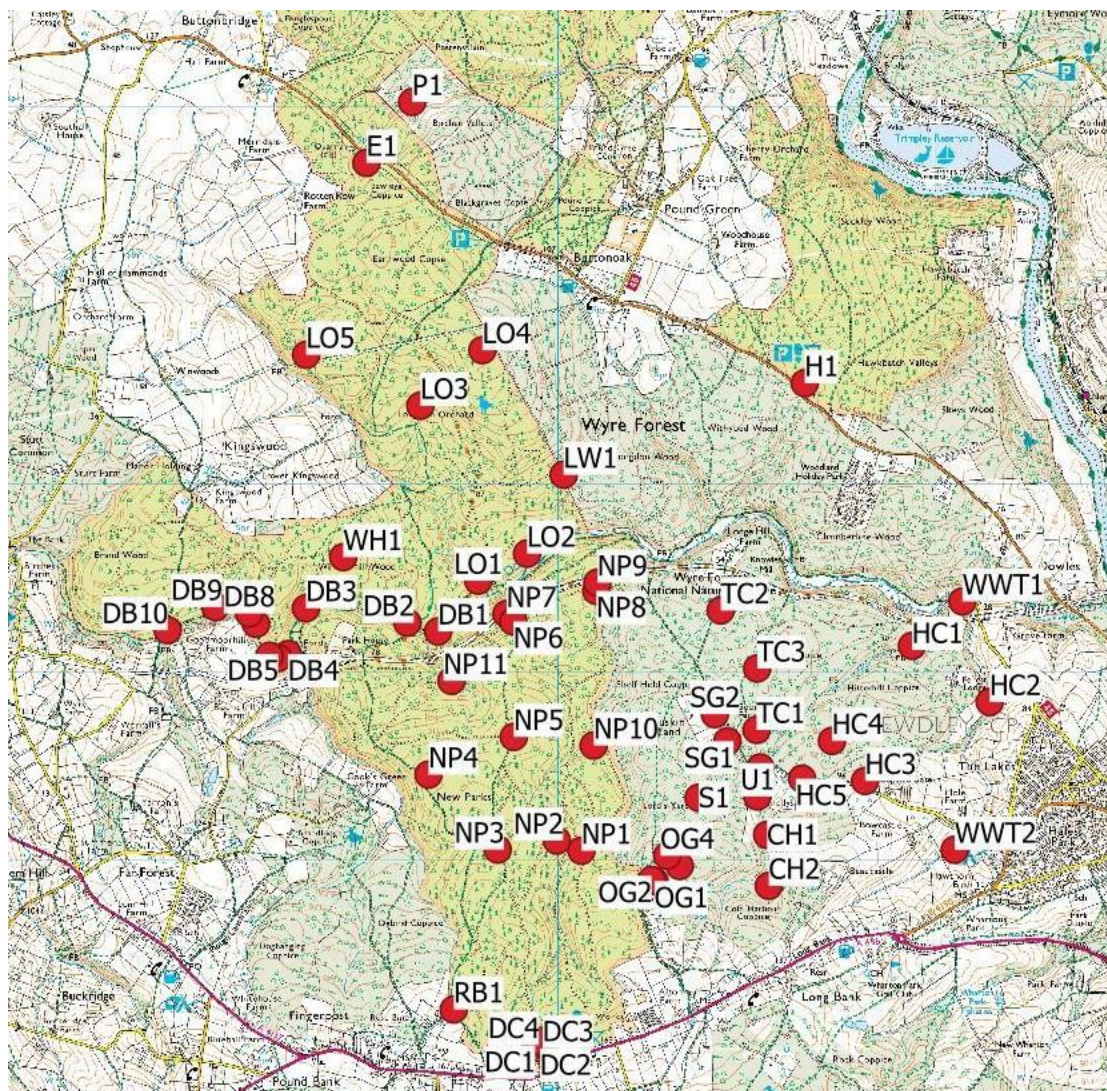
Clump Counts

A total of 1433 clumps were recorded as the peak counts at these 68 sites

Of these 1361 were recorded as the peak counts at the 59 sites within the main forest block (or immediately adjacent to it)



This new numbering has been linked to the old names so the long-term monitoring frogspawn dataset can continue



The 24 people involved in this survey made at least 337 visits to ponds during this project

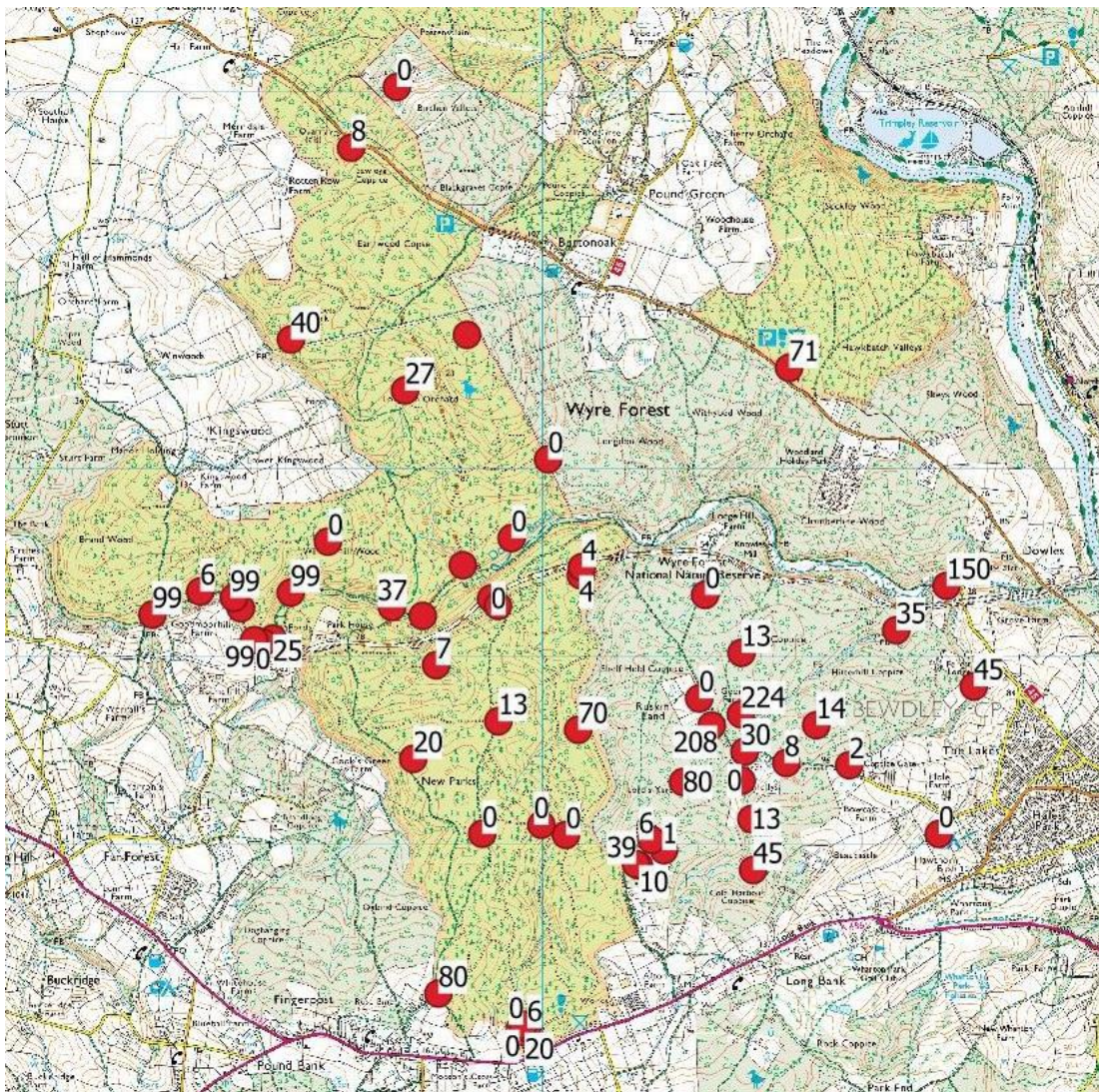
Summary of Results

Frogspawn was found in 62% of all the ponds surveyed by the volunteers during this project

Of the ponds surveyed that were in the main forest block or immediately adjacent to it, 68% of them had spawn.

The peak number of frogspawn clumps in the main block or close to it was very variable (range 1-224) with only 7% (3 out of 40) ponds having more than 100 clumps.





Key: 0 = no clumps seen at all; Red dot no number = not recorded; 99 = spawn recorded here but no clump number

March 2025 was one of the driest years on record

At least 41% of the ponds dried out before the frogspawn had a chance to develop properly

This is because many of their breeding sites were tractor ruts, or shallow ponds

Prolonged cold nights also slowed the rate at which they developed resulting in some frogspawn being frozen (maybe more than normal).

Website statistics



