



**OLD MILVERTON & BLACKDOWN PARISH WALKS,
NR. ROYAL LEAMINGTON SPA,
WARWICKSHIRE.**

Biodiversity Audit - Summary

Report to: Rachel Pope, Old Milverton & Blackdown Parish Councillor

Project number 2023/084 A

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QUALITY ASSURANCE

Title: Old Milverton and Blackdown Parish Walks, Nr. Royal Leamington Spa,
Warwickshire.

Biodiversity Audit - Autumn

Submitted to: Rachel Pope - Old Milverton & Blackdown Parish Councillor

Report number: 2023/084 A

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SUMMARY

In September 2023, Worcestershire Wildlife Consultancy was commissioned by Rachel Pope, Parish Councillor for Old Milverton and Blackdown Parish Council to undertake a Biodiversity Audit on five walks along public rights of way within the parish council boundaries.

The appraisal was requested to inform the parish council as to the wildlife that members of the public might encounter along five footpaths within the parish council boundaries. The parish council are intending to site information boards at the start of the walks and possibly at strategic points along the walks. The appraisal is in order to ensure compliance with National and European legislation.

DESCRIPTION OF WALKS

Walk 1 – part 1 Around Church Farm to the west of the railway line

The observer was taken on a walk around the perimeter of private arable fields on Church Farm, Old Milverton, Warwickshire. The main crop had been beans. The walk started at SP 298675 and walked in an easterly direction until we reached the branch railway line at SP 302675. From there we walked down the field alongside the railway viaduct to SP 299679. We then walked about 10 metres from the bank of the meandering River Avon in a south westerly direction. We walked past the island at SP297679 until we connected with an established hedgerow at SP294675. After walking a couple of hundred metres along the hedgerow until the public footpath across the field and up to the Church of St. James was in view, we then walked uphill, towards an ancient Holloway. This Holloway comprised of a lone Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) tree and pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) trees along with scrub. The Holloway started at SP295675 and ended a few hundred metres uphill at SP296675. Our walk ended by the village hall at SP677675.

Walk 1 – part 2 - Around Church Farm to the east of the railway line (note: private land)

To gain a comprehensive knowledge of the species on Church Farm, the observers took a short drive to SP 301679 from where they walked to the area known locally as ‘the cliff’. The walk took the observers along the edge of the private field until they reached SP304679 when they headed uphill and walked along a fenceline that ran towards the Disc Golf course at SP306677. They passed many rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) and badger (*Meles meles*) holes over the fenceline. They turned round when they observed a doe and a young buck roe (*Capreolus capreolus*) deer grazing and a decision was taken not to disturb them. They walked across the field, back to the vehicle.

Walk 2 Old Milverton – linear walk eastwards towards Blackdown

The observer was taken on a linear walk from Old Milverton village heading eastwards towards the curvi-linear residential housing estates on the outskirts of Milverton and Leamington Spa. The walk was across a public right of way on private land that belongs to the Heber-Percy family. The walk commenced through a metal kissing gate near to the branch railway line at SP302674 and followed a well-established hedgerow, interspersed with pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) trees for 1.5 km until the end of the footpath was reached at SP314674.

Walk 3 - Part of a circular walk from Old Milverton to Saxon Mill and back

The observer was taken on a walk from the centre of Old Milverton village at SP 295 675, heading south westwards through the churchyard of the Church of St. James until a view of the public right of way from Saxon Mill could be seen at point SP296674.

Walk 4 – Linear walk in Blackdown towards West Hill

The observer was taken on a linear walk in Blackdown starting at SP 324683. This was along a narrow public right of way bounded by scrub, hedgerows and established trees. We walked in a northerly direction up West Hill until we connected with the West Hill Road at SP324690.

Walk 5 – Linear walk from Bericote Road in Blackdown to the Kenilworth Road

It proved very difficult to park for the final walk of the day in Blackdown. It was another public footpath leading from Bericote Road at SP314696 down to connect with the main Kenilworth Road (A452) at SP313692. Logistics of parking and time meant that only the first section of the walk was completed when the observer reached an ecologically valuable area of scrub and a large Leyland cypress (*Cupressus x leylandii*) hedge. There didn't appear to be anything else of great ecological significance on that section of footpath.

Wider Landscape

According to the 2021 Census, the hamlets of Old Milverton and Blackdown had a population of 319 in the 2011 census. Beyond the two hamlets, the wider landscape is predominantly arable to the east, west and north, with numerous small villages and scattered residential properties. The towns of Warwick and Leamington Spa are to the south of the two hamlets.

OBSERVATIONS

- **Badgers** – During the main walk around Church Farm, Old Milverton badger (*Meles meles*) hairs, tracks, trails and setts were observed at many locations within hedgerows and areas of scrub. Evidence of Fox (*vulpes vulpes*) was also observed with hair, tracks, droppings and trails.
- **Bats** – As the survey was undertaken during daylight hours, no observations of bats were made. However, anecdotal evidence from residents of Old Milverton, reported having seen bats over the gardens in the village and the fields. The MAGIC database contained data from surveys undertaken in 2012 and 2014 with records of common pipistrelle. As the footpaths take in a variety of habitats including the river, species such as Daubenton's might be present. **A more up to date bat activity survey could be undertaken between the months of May – September, to determine which species frequent the area.**
- **Birds** - The areas surveyed comprised of field margins, established mixed species hedgerow, river, scrub and woodland and therefore had a good diversity of species. Blue tit, great tit, robin, blackbird, starling, green woodpecker, skylark, pheasant, carrion crow, jay and sparrowhawk were some of the birds observed.
- As nesting birds are legally protected, development operations should take care to avoid the risk of killing/ injuring birds and their nests, especially during the nesting season (generally considered to be late February to late August). Therefore, **removal and/or management of suitable nesting habitats, for example, the hedgerows, should be undertaken outside of the main nesting season and where this is not possible, a suitably qualified ecologist must be engaged to check for nesting birds prior to any works taking place** and to provide advice on the most appropriate way to proceed.
- **Dormice** – No dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) are thought to be present in this area of Warwickshire. As dormice favour continuous nature corridors along which to travel, the surrounding main roads and branch railway line act as barriers. No evidence of dormice was observed and although the hedgerows along the side of the footpaths are well-established, as the paths border urban areas and are subject to disturbance from dogs, it is highly unlikely dormice are present.
- **Great crested newts** - There was no evidence of great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) during the ecological appraisal. The MAGIC database did contain two records of great crested newt, either side of the branch railway line at SP296675 and SP309672. There is also anecdotal evidence from a local resident in Old Milverton that they had seen great crested newt in their garden. There were several small ponds, around the agricultural fields, which would score high on a Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index, were one to be carried out. One of

the footpaths crosses the main watercourse of the River Avon but as flowing water is not favourable to great crested newt, there is a lower likelihood of great crested newt by the river. Features such as log piles under which great crested newt would hibernate in the winter months were observed along the main footpath. Overall, the area is considered to be a medium likelihood for great crested newt.

- **Water Voles** – The river environment appeared suitable for water vole but none were observed during the walk. The observer suggested **siting a trail camera at a natural crossing point** (fallen tree) between the island and the field margin to see what wildlife could be observed.
- **No White-clawed crayfish** were observed during the appraisal, as the observer did not have access onto the riverbank due to the extensive bed of nettles and scrub.
- **Otter**- There was also no evidence of otter (*Lutra lutra*) on site but Otter are known to frequent the rivers such as the River Avon in Warwickshire and so Otter might be present. There are areas, such as the island, where they would go undisturbed. Again, the siting of the trail camera at the natural crossing point between the island and the field margin, might capture sightings.
- **Reptiles** – No evidence of reptiles was seen during the ecological appraisal. Due to the nature of the site, being very agricultural there is considered to be a very low likelihood that common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) or slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) are present.
- As this survey was undertaken in October, all the summer migrants have now departed and the UK is in a transition period with wintering birds such as geese, swans, roving parties of fieldfare and redwing due over the coming months. **Two or three further dedicated surveys are recommended** to observe wildlife along the footpaths at different times of year during winter, spring and summer. Different species of vegetation, invertebrates, birds and mammals will also be seen during the different seasons.
- **It should be noted that if more than twelve months elapse between this appraisal and the commencement of any development then a further appraisal may need to be undertaken at an appropriate time to determine the status of any protected species which may have taken up residence during the intervening period.**

Appendix 1. Maps of the Walks around Old Milverton & Blackdown



Map 1: Route of Walk 1- parts 1 & 2 Church Farm – Old Milverton – west and east sides of the railway line



Map 2: Route of Walk 2 – Public Footpath From Old Milverton towards Blackdown



Map 3: Route of Walk 3 – Walk Around St. Jame’s The Great Churchyard in Old Milverton and down towards Saxon Mill



Map 4: Route of Walk 4 – Public Footpath from Leicester Lane to West Hill Road



Map 5: Route of Walk 5 – Public Footpath from Bericote Road to Kenilworth Road (A452)

Appendix 2. Images Taken On The Walks Around Old Milverton & Blackdown



Plate 1: Walk 1 - View towards the Church of St. James The Great in Old Milverton



Plate 2: Walk 1 - Doe and buck roe deer, along the fenceline above the cliff on Church Farm



Plate 3: Walk 1 - Views of Guy's Cliffe House from the public footpath from Saxon Mill to Old Milverton



Plate 4: Walk 2 - The start of the linear walk from Old Milverton to Blackdown



Plate 5: Walk 2 - View south towards the housing development. Note: the dead tree provides a good habitat for invertebrates



Plate 6: Walk 2 - The footpath – looking east towards Blackdown



Plate 7: Walk 3 - The start of the walk around the churchyard of St. James The Great in Old Milverton



Plate 8: Walk 4 - The start of walk 4 on Leicester Lane in Blackdown



Plate 9: Walk 4 - Arable fields and the Warwick skyline from walk 4



Plate 10: Walk 5 - Start of walk 5 along the Public footpath from Bericote Road to Kenilworth Road (A452)



Plate 11: Walk 5 - Emerging into an area of grass and scrub on the Public footpath.