



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

**Spring Biodiversity Audit**

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

**Project number 2023/084 C**

**Worcestershire Wildlife Consultancy  
Lower Smite Farm  
Smite Hill  
Hindlip  
Worcester  
WR3 8SZ**

**Tel: 01905 754909**

[www.worcestershirewildlifeconsultancy.org](http://www.worcestershirewildlifeconsultancy.org)

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## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

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

- Spring Biodiversity Audit

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

**Report number:** 2023/084 C

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**Author:** Catharine Jarvis BSc(Hons) MPhil – Assistant Consultancy Ecologist

**Internal reviewer:** Joshua Evans BSc (Hons) MCIEEM – Consultancy Manager & Principal  
Ecologist

**Authorised by:** Joshua Evans – Consultancy Manager & Principal Ecologist

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## SUMMARY

In April 2024, Worcestershire Wildlife Consultancy was commissioned by Ms. Rachel Pope, Parish Councillor for Old Milverton and Blackdown Parish Council, near Royal Leamington Spa, Warwickshire to undertake a Spring Biodiversity Audit on three walks along public rights of way within the parish council boundaries. This was one of a series of four seasonal biodiversity audits.

The appraisals were requested to inform the parish council as to the wildlife that members of the public might encounter along 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 appraisals are also to inform the parish council about the species present on the land and especially if there are any protected species. As with previous appraisals, this one is in order to ensure compliance with National and European legislation.

## DESCRIPTION OF WALKS AROUND OLD MILVERTON & BLACKDOWN

For this, the third (spring) Biodiversity Audit in April 2024, the observers walked from the village hall car park at SP297674, into the churchyard of St. James The Great Church in Old Milverton, through the fields past Manor Farm, at SP297670 to the small stream that runs into the River Avon at SP300665. They walked alongside the river up to Saxon Mill at SP291670. From the bridge at Saxon Mill they walked back up to the Church of St. James The Great in Old Milverton, stopping at a pond at SP296673 that might be favourable habitat for great crested newt. They then made their way through the village to the edge of a stubble field at Church Farm at SP299675, where they had a view over to the railway viaduct.

The second walk was from Leicester Lane at SP324682 to Westhill Road in Blackdown at SP324689.

The final walk of the day started at Bamburgh Grove at SP313672 and took them along the public footpath along the side of a hedgerow and past a pond at SP309672 over the railway line, to connect with the Old Milverton road at SP301674.

## OBSERVATIONS

- **Badgers** – During walk 1, from the Church of St. James The Great in Old Milverton, past Manor Farm, along the River Avon and up to the bridge at Saxon Mill, badger (*Meles meles*) setts were observed at a couple of locations within banks and areas of scrub.
- **Bats** – As the survey was undertaken during daylight hours, no observations of bats were made. There were many observations of where bats might take shelter in bark and trunks of mature trees such as oak (*Quercus robur*). 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 (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*). As the footpaths around Old Milverton take in a variety of habitats including the river Avon, species such as Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*) might be present. **A bat survey could be undertaken between the months of May – September, to determine which species frequent the area. A local bat group or ecologist could be contacted to see if they are interested and able to carry out such a survey.**

- **Birds** - The areas surveyed comprised of field margins, established mixed species hedgerow, river, scrub and woodland and therefore offered the opportunity to observe a good diversity of species.
- Bird species in the order they were observed on walk 1: blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*), greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*), goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*), **skylark** (*Alauda arvensis*), **blackcap** (*Sylvia atricapilla*), **chiffchaff** (*Phylloscopus collybita*), blackbird (*Turdus merula*), **common snipe** (*Gallinago gallinago*), moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*), carrion crow (*Corvus corone corone*), jackdaw (*Coloeus monedula*), magpie (*Pica pica*), grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*) robin (*Erithacus rubecula*), **house martin** (*Delichon urbica*), mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), greylag geese (*Anser anser*), **kestrel** (*Falco tinnunculus*), swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), **sand martin** (*Riparia riparia*) and wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*).

Bird species in the order they were observed on walk 2: **blackcap** (*Sylvia atricapilla*), wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), carrion crow (*Corvus corone corone*), skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) and blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*).

Bird species in the order they were observed on walk 3: blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*), **whitethroat** (*Sylvia communis*), magpie (*Pica pica*), buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), great tit (*Parus major*), chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*).

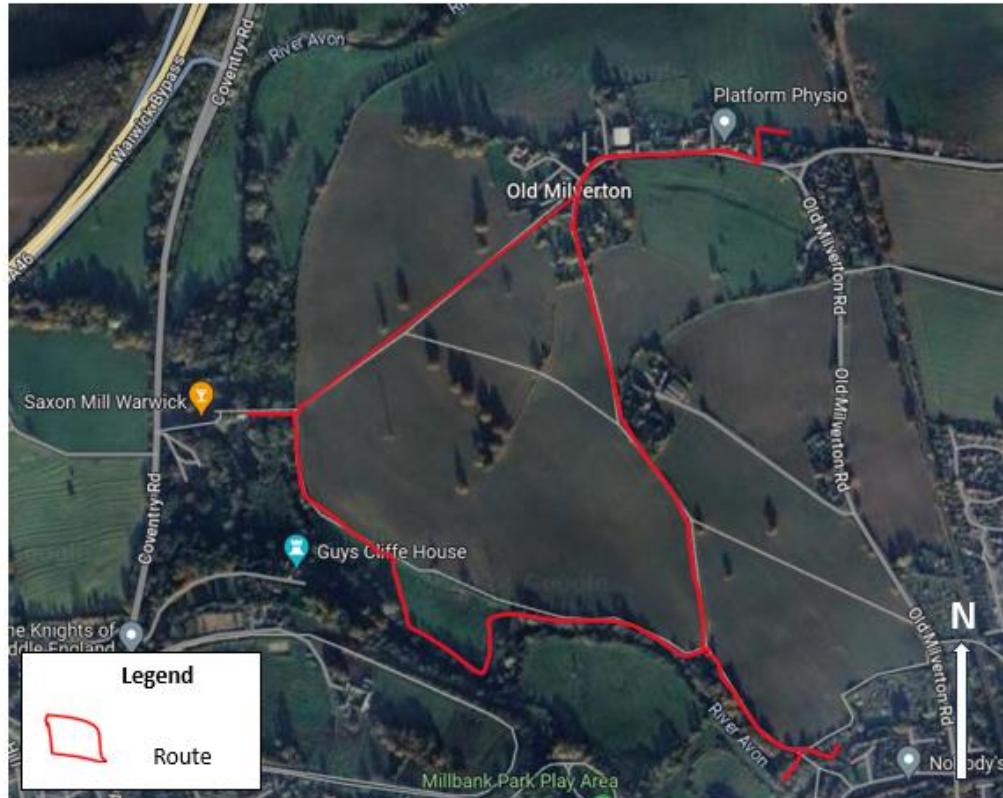
- As nesting birds are legally protected, development operations should take care to avoid the risk of killing/ injuring birds and their nests, especially during the nesting season (generally considered to be late February to late August). Ground nesting birds such as skylark are particularly vulnerable to disturbance. **Dog owners should be encouraged to keep their dogs on leads at all times especially during the bird nesting season.**
- **The removal and/or management of suitable nesting habitats, for example, the hedgerows or trees, 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 evidence of dormice was observed. No dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) are thought to be present in this area of Warwickshire. As dormice favour continuous natural corridors along which to travel between woodlands. Although the mixed species hedgerows along the side of the footpaths are well-established, the River Avon, surrounding main roads and the branch railway line all act as barriers to their dispersal. The area is also subject to disturbance from dogs, all the above factors make it 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 in June 2014. Features such as log piles and stone walls in which great crested newt might hibernate in the winter months were observed along walk 1 by the church in Old Milverton. There is also anecdotal evidence from a local resident in Old Milverton that they have seen great crested newt in their garden. There were seven small ponds around the agricultural fields and within gardens in Old Milverton and so the observers carried out a great crested newt habitat suitability index survey on the pond by the Church of St. James The Great. The outcome of the habitat suitability index was that the pond provided “excellent” habitat for great crested newt. The other pond surveyed for being suitable for great crested newt was by the allotments on walk 3. According to the MAGIC database there was a record of GCN being present in the vicinity of that pond in June 2014. There was only one other pond within a km of that pond and so the outcome of the habitat suitability index was that the pond provided “good” habitat for great crested newt but not “excellent”.
- **Water Voles** – The river environment appeared suitable for water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) but none were observed during the walk. On a previous visit, 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. This might also capture images of otter (*Lutra lutra*) and deer crossing to the island.
- **No White-clawed crayfish** (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) were observed during the appraisal.
- **Otter**- There was also no evidence of otter (*Lutra lutra*) on site but otter are known to frequent rivers such as the River Avon in Warwickshire and so it is possible otter might be present. There are areas, such as the island, upstream of the Saxon Mill where they could go undisturbed. Again, the siting of the trail camera at the natural crossing point between the island and the field margin, might capture sightings. Anecdotal evidence from members of the parish council mentioned hearing of sightings of otter along the River Avon and in the housing estate towards Blackdown where otter were reported to be taking Koi Carp (*Cyprinus carpio* var. ‘Koi’) from a back garden in the housing estate.

- **Reptiles** – No evidence of reptiles was seen during the ecological appraisal. Apart from the piles of grass cuttings in the churchyard, due to the nature of the land being very agricultural there is considered to be a very low likelihood that common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) or slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) are present. **However, reptile refugia mats could be placed along the northern fenceline, within the churchyard to provide an opportunity to survey for reptiles.**
- **One final dedicated survey is recommended** in late summer (July 2024), to complete the seasonal cycle of wildlife and botanical observation along the footpaths. This is because different species of vegetation, invertebrates, birds and mammals will 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: Route of the walks around Old Milverton & Blackdown

**Map 1: Route of Walk 1 – Old Milverton down to Saxon Mill and return to Old Milverton**



### Biodiversity Audit

**Walk 1: Old Milverton to Manor Farm, Banks of the River Avon, Saxon Mill and return to St. James The Great Church in Old Milverton, through the village and into a field at Church Farm**



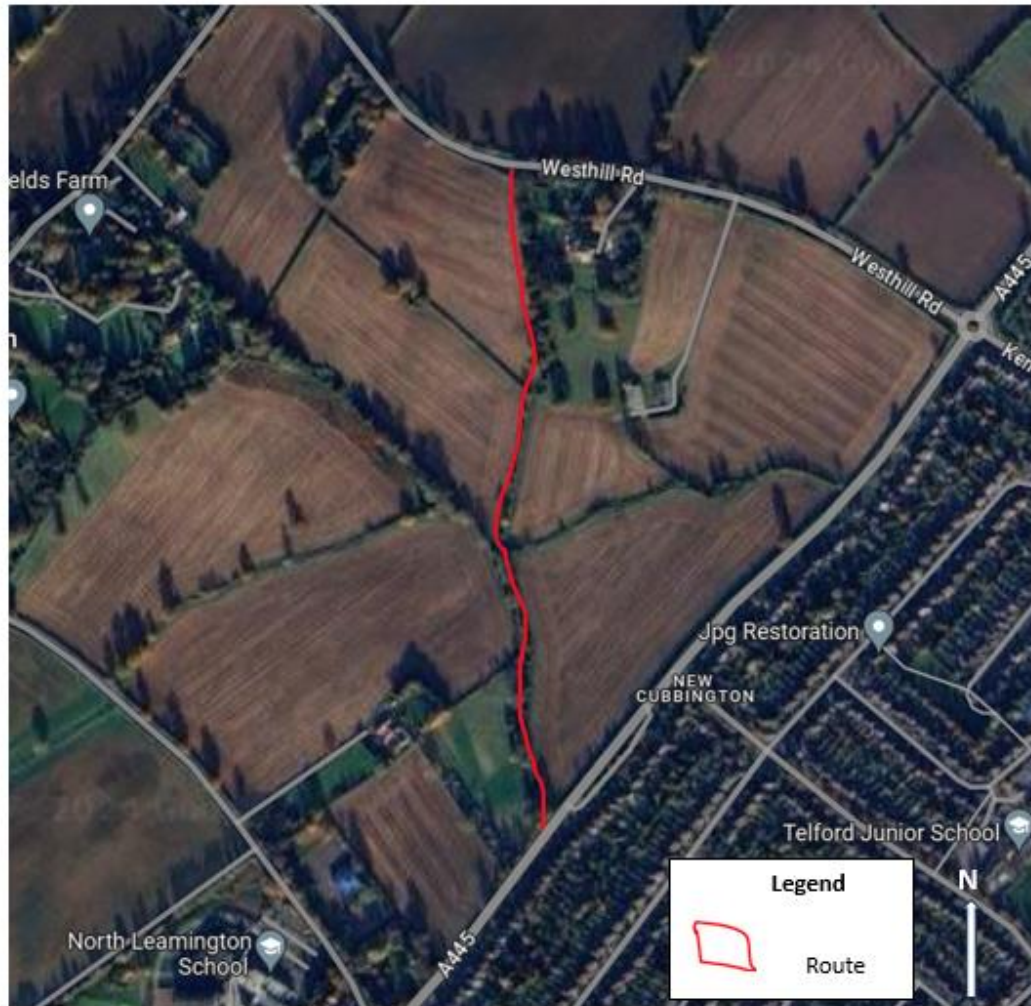
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**Map 2: Route of Walk 2 – Leicester Lane to Westhill Road, Blackdown**



**Biodiversity Audit**

**Walk 2: Leicester Lane to Westhill Road in Blackdown**



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**Map 3: Route of Walk 3 – Bamburgh Grove to connect with the Old Milverton Road**



**Biodiversity Audit**

**Walk 3: Along the Public Footpath from Bamburgh Grove in Milverton to connect with the Old Milverton road, Old Milverton**



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**Appendix 2: Images taken on the walks**



**Plate 1: Walk 1 - Bluebells and buttercups at the side of the footpath through St. James The Great churchyard in Old Milverton**



**Plate 2: Walk 1 – View across the River Avon to the horse paddock**



**Plate 3: Walk 1 – Grey Heron on the bank of the River Avon**



**Plate 4: Walk 1 – Cherry tree in the churchyard of St. James The Great, Old Milverton**



**Plate 5: Walk 2 – Entrance to the public footpath from Leicester Lane, Blackdown**



**Plate 6: Walk 2 – Leamington Spa skyline from the public footpath from Westhill Road, Blackdown**



**Plate 7: Walk 3 - Entrance to the public footpath from Bamburgh Grove to Old Milverton**



**Plate 8: Walk 3 – Looking back along the public footpath from Bamburgh Grove to Old Milverton**