



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

Summer Biodiversity Audit

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

Project number 2023/084 D

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17th July 2024

QUALITY ASSURANCE

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

- Summer Biodiversity Audit

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

Report number: 2023/084 D

Date: 17th July 2024

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SUMMARY

In July 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 Summer Biodiversity Audit on three walks along public rights of way within the parish council boundaries. This was the last in a series of four seasonal biodiversity audits.

The Biodiversity Audits 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 THE WALKS AROUND OLD MILVERTON AND BLACKDOWN

For the fourth (Summer) biodiversity audit in July 2024, the observers walked from the village hall car park at SP297674, into the churchyard of St. James The Great Church in Old Milverton and through the fields past Manor Farm, at SP297670. They then walked down to the Cliffe allotments and along 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. The observers then walked from SP 303675 on Sandy Lane that runs from Old Milverton to Blackdown. They walked around the field margins bordering the railway embankment and down to the railway bridge, under the bridge and then along the bottom of the fields of Church Farm before heading uphill, alongside an old, wooded trackway and back into the village of Old Milverton.

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

The third walk was from Westhill Road in Blackdown at SP324689 along a public footpath to Leicester Lane at SP324682.

The fourth walk was on private land from Old Milverton Road in Blackdown at SP313678 to a small, overgrown pond and then along the field margin to a copse of mainly alder trees before walking up the side of a field, almost to the A452 road from Blackdown to Royal Leamington Spa before returning to the car at SP313678.

OBSERVATIONS

- **Badgers** – During walk 4, badger (*Meles meles*) setts were observed at a couple of locations along the field margins within banks and areas of scrub on farmland to the east of Blackdown.
- **Bats** – The survey was undertaken during daylight hours and the observers did not expect to see bats. However, at approximately 10am, the observers were standing opposite Guy's Cliffe House on the banks of the River Avon by a mature London Plane (*Platanus x hispanica*) tree when they spotted a probable **Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*)** bat flying over the surface, picking off insects. It only worked that section of river for a minute before flying upstream.

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. At the time of writing, despite enquiries, no local bat group was available 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: chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*), garden warbler (*Sylvia borin*), woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*), blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*), swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), carrion crow (*Corvus corone corone*), jackdaw (*Coloeus monedula*), nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*), blackbird (*Turdus merula*) and robin (*Erithacus rubecula*).

During the afternoon walk around the northern and eastern fields of Church Farm, greenfinch (*Chloris chloris*), cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), magpie (*Pica pica*), woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*), mistle thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) and carrion crow (*Corvus corone corone*) were all observed.

Bird species in the order they were observed on walk 2 from Old Milverton Lane to Bamburgh Grove were: house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), carrion crow (*Corvus corone corone*), woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*), moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), green woodpecker (*Picus viridis*) and magpie (*Pica pica*).

Bird species in the order they were observed on walk 3: great tit (*Parus major*), swift (*Apus apus*), woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*), whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*), wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), blackbird (*Turdus merula*) and dunnoek (*Prunella modularis*).

Bird species in the order they were observed on walk 4 in the fields behind Blackdown were: woodpigeon (*Columba palumbus*), carrion crow (*Corvus corone corone*) and buzzard (*Buteo buteo*).

- 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. Dormice are present further to the north-east in Ryton (8.7 km to the north-east) and Wappenbury Woods (7.8 km to the east) following a successful re-introduction scheme in 2016. 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 around Old Milverton, 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. Dormice footprint tunnels could be placed in the hedgerows around Church Farm for a period of 3 months between May to October 2025 to establish if dormice are present and are using the hedgerows as a corridor.
- **Great crested newts** - There was no evidence of great crested newt (*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 during a previous audit, the observers carried out a great crested newt habitat suitability index survey on the pond by the

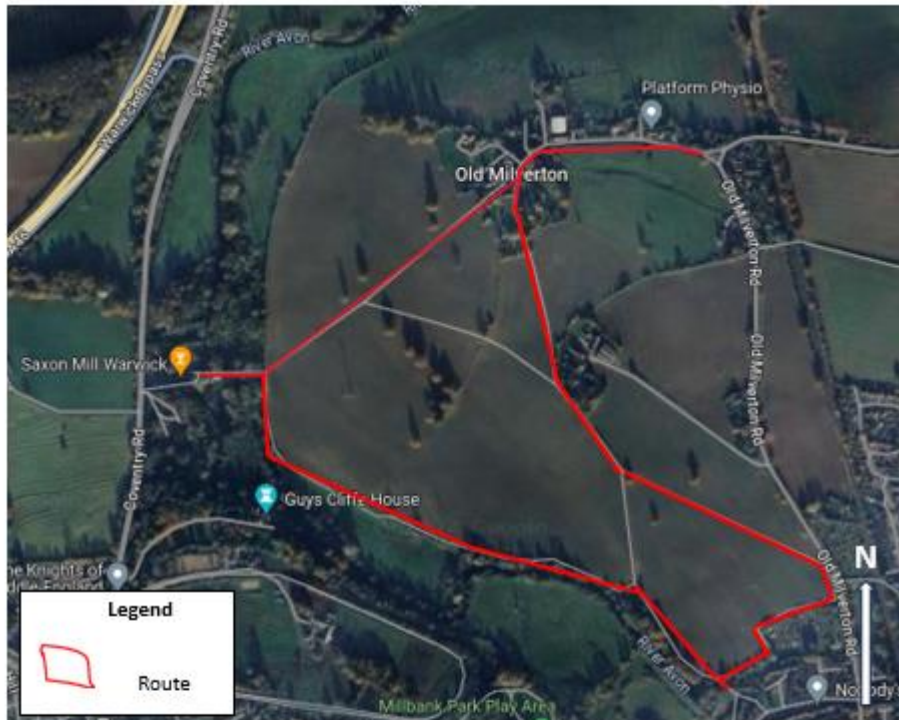
Church of St. James The Great. The outcome of the habitat suitability index was that the pond provided “excellent” habitat for great crested newt (GCN). The other pond surveyed for being suitable for great crested newt was by the allotments on walk 3. According to the MAGIC database there was a record 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”.

- During the Summer audit, the observer carried out a habitat suitability index on a small pond near Blackdown as NGR 311678. The pond appeared very shaded with willow and given all the factors, the score was “below average” habitat for great crested newt.
- **Water Voles** – The river environment appeared suitable for water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) with vegetation covering the banks but none were observed during the walk. On previous visits, 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. Anecdotal evidence from a householder on the opposite bank of the River Avon from the railway bridge, suggests that they too have had sightings of otter.
- **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 eastern and western fencelines, within the churchyard to provide an opportunity to survey for reptiles during March – October 2025.**

- **Amphibians** – A common frog was observed in long grass on walk 1B, on the eastern side of the railway embankment at NGR SP 30075 67813. This was close to the floodplain of the River Avon and therefore damp ground.
- This summer's audit (July 2024), completes the seasonal cycle of wildlife and botanical observation along the footpaths around Old Milverton and Blackdown. Different species of vegetation, invertebrates, birds and mammals have been seen during the different seasons.
- Parish councillor Rachel Pope suggested the focus of an interpretation / infographics board might be "From Field to Fork". The board might be able to demonstrate that whilst fields are productive for crops such as barley, oats and wheat, leaving space for nature around field margins for pollinators, benefits everyone. Summer flora and fauna to consider including on an interpretation board might include:
 - Butterflies found in scrub along footpaths and around field margins e.g. comma, gatekeeper, large white, meadow brown, peacock, red admiral, ringlet and small tortoiseshell.
 - Dragonflies over fields and near watercourses e.g. brown hawker
 - Damselflies over the river and ponds e.g. common blue and banded demoiselle
 - Summer migrant bird species such as swallow, swift and whitethroat
 - **Flora - importance of hedgerows as food sources for a variety of species**
 - Importance of keeping dogs on a lead in the bird nesting season, particularly for ground nesting birds such as the skylark
 - The views from the main walks around Old Milverton and Blackdown can also be highlighted, including the Leamington Spa skyline, the fields and the riparian environment.
 - The health benefits of walking could also be included. Perhaps consider linking in with a local NHS walking group initiative to create a circular walk, supported by an infographics board.
- **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

Map 1: Route of Walk 1 Around The Fields Of 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 – Morning of 17th July 2024



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**Map 2: Route of Walk 1B – Around the northern fields of Old Milverton
(Note: Private land)**



Biodiversity Audit

Walk 1B: Start just off Sandy Lane, Old Milverton, down the east side of the railway embankment and under the railway bridge towards the banks of the River Avon, along the field margins and then past an old trackway up to the village of Old Milverton, through the village and return to the field to the east of the railway line – Afternoon of 17th July 2024



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Map 2: Route of Walk 2 - From Old Milverton to Bamburgh Grove, Leamington Spa



Biodiversity Audit

Walk 2: Along the Public Footpath from the Old Milverton Road in Old Milverton to connect to Bamburgh Grove, Leamington Spa



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Map 3: Route of Walk 3 - From Westhill Road to Leicester Lane in Blackdown



Biodiversity Audit

Walk 3: Westhill Road to Leicester Lane in Blackdown



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Map 4: Route of Walk 4 - Pond, Alder woodland and farmland to the south-east of Blackdown. Note: Private Land



Biodiversity Audit

Walk 4: Pond, Alder woodland and farmland to the south-east of Blackdown



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Appendix 2: Images taken on the walks



Plate 1: Walk 1 - The view of the oat fields from the public footpath looking towards Manor Farm



Plate 2: Walk 1 - Banded demoiselle - male (*Calopteryx splendens*)



Plate 3: Walk 1 – Fledgling swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) on a hawthorn branch



Plate 4: Walk 1 – One of the public footpaths leading up to Old Milverton



Plate 5: Walk 1b - The view towards the railway bridge over the River Avon



Plate 6: Walk 1b – Small white (*Pieris rapae*) butterfly



Plate 7: Walk 2 – Entrance to the public footpath from Old Milverton Lane to Bamburgh Grove



Plate 8: Walk 2 – View across the field of barley



Plate 9: Walk 3 – view down the footpath towards Leicester Lane



Plate 10: Walk 3 - The public footpath between Westhill Road and Leicester Lane



Plate 11: Walk 4 – View along the drainage ditch looking towards the alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) woodland (note: private land)