*WetlandLIFE: taking the bite out of wetlands* Project

Part of the *Valuing Nature* Programme

Grant number: NE/N013379/1

Data submission: ReShare

University of Brighton: Social Science fieldwork

School of Environment and Technology

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Co-Investigators: Professors Neil Ravenscroft and Andrew Church.

Focus group date: Somerset 20th March 2018

**Hello everyone, hello, thank you very much for coming this evening. You know by now that I'm Mary Gearey of University of Brighton, as part of the wetlandlife project, I do the research on behalf of our university. I have my wonderful colleagues with me this evening who are also helping me. This is Professor Ravenscroft from the University of Brighton.**

Yes.

**Dr Adrianna Ford from the University of Greenwich and very soon to be a doctor, Victoria Leslie, who is our artist who is working as part of the project. So thank you all so much for coming.**

[information sheets/safety – not discussed]

**Thanks very much for your time, we're going to start now and hopefully finish by about quarter to eight and I wondered if, on the consent forms it should say about photos, Victoria would love to take some photos of this event, if you're happy with that that's great, if you're unhappy just let me know, if you decide you don't want your photo involved just let me know then we'll retract the photos, they're not going to go anywhere than possibly on our website or our, so it's all kind of contained but if you don't want it then please say.**

[recorders/transcripts/prompts – not transcribed]

**So I wondered, as is usual with these groups, if we could start by a quick round robin in terms of who we are and what we do, just one minute to say who you are just that we all get, with why you've been so kind to say that you'll be involved with this project and exploring our sense of place with these two wetland sites, Westhay Moor and Shapwick Heath. So if we could start with REMOVED if you don't mind?**

M1 Yeah, cool, erm. My name's REMOVED, I'm the leader of REMOVED Scouts, based on REMOVED there, erm, been at.

[interruption]

M1 Interrupted in midflow.

[10.00]

**Sorry REMOVED.**

M1 Erm, was going to say, no worries. I'm REMOVED, for, run for four years, erm, various capacities. We use Shapwick, erm, as a venue for wide games. We go do treasure hunts and things there in the summer. We also cycle through the area when we do our sort of annual cycle ride that's ...

**Great.**

A1 REMOVED I'm an artist, I'm …REMOVED so I go to the Levels for fun but also . So done few projects out there, erm.

J1 REMOVED, I've lived here all my life as you know, I've served on the REMOVED, I think it's thirty four years, REMOVED twenty years and I was on the REMOVED when that was run and I've always lived down here, visit there regularly with my grandchildren. As you know … I am, although . So got my own views about things so I think, I may have upset a few of you over the time.

T1 My name's REMOVED … I must but a bit of an interloper because I'm from the North Somerset Levels, the forgotten Levels, and so I, I remember the discussion with REMOVED, saying well, erm, we, we do have views over … and she said well you can express them here as well.

**Um.**

T1 Erm, my interest in this is actually, erm, I, I've set up, erm, a charity and as, we have set up a charity because we purchased land through wetland, triple their size, either side of REMOVED which is just off the REMOVED just below Bristol.

S1 Hi my name's REMOVED and I work for Somerset Wildlife Trust, of course we run Westhay Reserves, the other reason I'm here.

P1 I'm REMOVED, I'm REMOVED by trade based on REMOVED just up the road and I'm REMOVED of Somerset Bat Group and so we conduct lots of bat surveys in the area and I'm interested in species, wetlands.

**Great.**

A2 I'm REMOVED I live in one of the, rent in one the … villages, I'm a birder, I also represent Somerset Ornithological Society and I use the service regularly, so.

**Perfect, thanks.**

S2 My name's REMOVED and I'm coming from British Canoeing, representing in this role, I hold several but this one is the REMOVED, I'm also an interloper from North Somerset as well.

[laughter]

**Thanks.**

E1 I'm REMOVED, I'm representing REMOVED Guides here. My girls are doing a lot of eco green badge work and this may well be something that we can get involved with on behalf of the girls. On a personal level I live out on the, REMOVED, which is on the edge of the Moor and we use, I use the Moor to run and for running, playing, walk the dog and the girls, we take the girls out when we're going for night walks etcetera, so it's part of our lives.

**Lovely, okay.**

A3 Hi, REMOVED, also with Somerset Bat Group with REMOVED and, erm, I also work as an environmental educator and I take out one of the local REMOVED groups to Westhay quite frequently and help to run the school sessions as well as a freelance educator for the REMOVED and also use the wetlands in my own spare time as well.

**Lovely, yeah. it's great that you've all got a wide variety of interests and, you know, even though the interlopers are from North Somerset Levels we welcome you here, we welcome you here. I've given each of you a piece of blank paper, just to start off I wondered if you could, just very quickly just so that we can begin to break down some of the issues that we're looking at, is to write down for me the three main benefits that your organisation gets from these particular wetlands and the three nuisances or deterrents or challenges that you think these wetlands face. Obviously our work here, the wetlandlife project is really interested in three key areas, it's interested in a sense of place, what are these landscapes, what do they mean for you, what kind of sense of place do they mean for you? How are you embedded in your landscapes and what's so special about them? Certainly it's Contemporary Social Representation so what I mean by that is how do you think the wetlands are viewed? Are they viewed negatively, positively, are they seen as a very special kind of landscape? Is it a tourist area, is it a working area? How do you think that these wetlands are viewed locally? And lastly, mosquitoes. We're really interested in finding out about the impact of mosquitoes over these wetlands and how you think that's changed over time and what you think might be happening in the future. So those three different areas in mind as we think about the deterrents and the benefits of these sites, if you could just write those down for me that would be great, just we can start to talk about those. Just for five minutes.**

[15.52]

S2 Write at the top of this, the organisations we represent.

**That would be very helpful, yeah.**

S2 So focussed …[16.09]

**Exactly, that would be very helpful because then I can take it away with me later, so yeah, that'd be great, thanks.**

[writing exercise]

S1 So short term memory, so three benefits of wetlands, three challenges and then the last one's about mosquitoes, is that?

**Yes. Well I mean you may want to have it as a separate area, you may want to incorporate that in the benefits of the nuisances, depending on of course which organisation you're from and how you view mosquitoes.**

S1 Right.

**No conferring, no conferring, absolutely no conferring. Anybody feel like they've finished? Everyone feel like they've had enough time?**

M1 Yes.

**Okay. REMOVED, since you've already said that you're going to have a controversial perspective.**

J1 Yeah, I say that the water levels in these things must be controlled, I mean we, I'm on the REMOVED in case you don't know, for North Somerset, our engineers work with and, and I feel, as REMOVED especially, especially in my area which is outside of Levels and Moors really, is controlled because of our river feeds into that river and our water levels in our moor are higher than we've ever had them and it means our fields, especially on our farm are beginning to get very wet and we can't farm them properly so I think it's important that we stop the water levels down the farm.

**Okay, so would you say, are you saying that the wetlands are a benefit because they can act as a sponge for that water?**

J1 Yeah, oh they should be, that's what the moors should be for, is to receive water and flood the times and that's what they were originally were and the land was always better for the flooding, if you know what I mean, and then I say. Another thing while we have our tour as a REMOVED and it comes up all the time and not all Drainage Board members are farmers. We go across Tilham and Tadham and through there and they get very upset because the rushes aren't getting under control because the farmers consider you, the Swans and all the wildlife go out for fresh grass, you know what I mean? And another thing we've discussed with this is we don't want the summer floods, neither you naturalists or us farmers, and it's causing summer floods when the naturalists are using all their bugs and a lot of the birds nest that are around and we don't get the crops we should have because it's been spoilt. Now I think it's, is that all, do you want me to say, do you want me to go on about tourists now?

**Well, yeah, so you, I'm just trying to capture within the terms of the.**

J1 Yeah.

**You're talking about the benefits of these wetland spaces?**

J1 Yeah.

**So you're saying that they're great because they act as a sponge and they release water …**

J1 Yes, that's right, yeah.

**But now, in terms of the reed control you're saying that's a disbenefit or a benefit?**

J1 No, I think it's a disbenefit because you don't get enough fresh grass because I don't think you get the birds and wildlife out there that need it, that's the general.

**Okay, but you think there should be.**

J1 When we travel round.

**Okay. So if we, to focus just for a moment on the benefits, one is that they control water levels, are you saying the next one is tourist?**

J1 Yes. It's very good for tourists, I honestly do believe that, especially with the cyclists and the walkers, I really do, they do.

**And how is that good for say farm, you know, the farmers?**

J1 It brings, brings income to the farmers that do bed and breakfast and that and camping and what have you.

**Okay, great.**

J1 Yeah.

**And then did you happen to have a third benefit that the wetlands produce?**

J1 Not really, I just, I went on to the mosquitoes then, I don't think they're any worse than we've ever had them.

**Okay, lovely.**

J1 So I can tell you, I've lived here all my life.

**Okay, ah, that's interesting to know, so you don't think they've changed at all?**

J1 Oh they might, no, I don't think there's any more, definitely not. There might be other bugs but not mosquitoes.

**Ah. So when you say other bugs, what would you say?**

J1 No, I think the farming community has got rid of several of them by drenching and we've eradicated several of our dangerous ones. Personally I don't like drenching, I don't like eradicating anything, nature is a balanced thing as far as I'm concerned.

**Okay, lovely. I'm sure we're going to come back to that a bit later as well.**

J1 Yes.

**Lovely, thank you. REMOVED, we're going to continue in a circle, so you're?**

T1 Okay, yeah. Erm, benefits, so, erm, I will, I've got some interesting comments that will come out on the challenges side.

**Okay, yeah.**

T1 Yeah, there's.

**And feel free anyone to chip in at any time if you feel like you want to respond to something.**

T1 I think, I think in terms, I've looked at it both ways but in terms of through our area, the, the wetlands, although they're flat they provide wide open space, so it's that, erm, greenness and that visual amenity which I think's very important, they are very distinctive and something I've found when I, I lived in REMOVED, erm, forty years and when I first came here was, was, it was very flat and people said why do you want to go to a flat place? But we've got a backdrop of the Mendips, erm, the contrast between the two I think is very special and you've got that all the way round here, the various, erm, high lands, so I think that, erm, that is something, how you encapsulate that and put and so.

[25.14]

**Yeah, so you say that bit about kind of green visual amenity, that's for everyone that.**

T1 Yeah, I think it, I mean it's not in, there's no wildernesses left really in, in this, erm, country, in the UK, you know, as, as such and of course everything's been touched by, erm, I used the word man, erm, for thousands of years and the wetlands are very much a managed landscape.

J1 Yeah.

T1 Very much so. It's, it goes back right to Roman times, maybe even prior to that and certainly, you know, that's what our group has discovered, erm, the history is fantastic. Erm, but with, but having said that, it, when, when you travel out over the moors at night and things, there is a wilderness about them because, you know, and I think that's special but, erm, in terms of, of my group, erm, we, we bought the land primarily and we manage, part of our, we bought, erm, we manage about sixty acres, erm, hectares of something along, I can't remember, just under thirty hectares and, erm, two thirds are, yeah, we bought that but we also manage part of the old Cheddar Valley, erm, railway walk, erm, which is a branch …right the way through, you know, just under the foot of the Mendips and touching on the wetlands, so from Yatton station up to Congresbury we manage within the site is, this, which again is very flat, erm, but with that land and our own land we, erm, we've got tremendous density of, of breeding birds in summer, wetland birds in our reed, reed beds, erm, they're reed margins actually, erm, and so that's special. The wetland wildlife is something special as well because it goes with, with the wetlands [laughs] and so our benefits are sort of saving that habitat and, erm, but very much the problem is that is often, that it's like, erm, our little bits of land are, islands is, it's increasingly becoming a desert, perhaps talk about that later one but we've, for example we've managed to, we've, erm, I've worked with a chap called REMOVED over the years, he's into barn owls and probably know all about him and as a result.

**He's the REMOVED Trust.**

T1 REMOVED Trust, yeah, and, erm. Well we know them and they purchased the reserve and I was with him, yeah, and he took me out there and we, we looked at that just, we bought it, so he helped us, erm, bring back barn owls and so we now have, last year we had four pairs of …of barn owls and what he was doing was using a little oasis of land which we managed across, in fact the barn owls were moving from over the villages around two or three fields, we've got in one place to another the place. So I think that says a lot about the landscape, so, that.

**Yeah, and you feel these wetland sites weren't here that that species for instance wouldn't have any territory, wouldn't have anywhere?**

T1 Yeah, and if it wasn't for actually, I think some of the work that is being done to hold back some of these challenges we face, which farmers face as well, you know, so.

J1 Yeah.

T You know, so is one extinct. You know, if I was jumping to the last thing about mosquitoes, I would say the biggest challenge isn't mosquitoes.

J1 No.

T There are other challenges, yeah.

J1 No.

**And so for instance what would they be?**

T1 Oh, we're, have I got to my challenges now?

**Okay, no I'm just about the, I mean I don't want to be jumping around but.**

T1 Well basically I mean you've got all the classic things about, you have got, there is, erm, over the years I've been involved, this whole business about water levels has been a big issue. Now in North Somerset we don't suffer really from flooding. We, our problem is we haven't got enough water in the ditches for the, for the fish it's too well drained, erm, by the way I was eight years REMOVED so, I, I was, I know you're a farmer but having said that I'm also a land, represent a landowner.

[29.56]

J1 Yeah.

T1 But the issues about water quality and, is, is very important but actually over management now of some of our ditches and there's, you know, the people, if you asked me what the biggest threat was that people think about, and in REMOVED particularly, because of nineteen sixty eight, people lost lives there through the flooding and it's actually flooding and, erm, so that is a sort of, the mindset that goes with it, so, erm, I think.

**Yeah. So people don't want to see high water levels because they associate that with something threatening?**

T1 Yeah, yeah, but also there are confusions about managing, erm, wetland because during the winter, erm, it's thought that if you could get water away it will make, it will make the land drier, but it won't and there are lots of things around, I talk with the contractors, the way that ditch work is done and everything else because it's not done in, sometimes in the old way which is less intensive, you now actually park, just for example, you park, what happens is because you've got bigger excavators going in, erm, you actually build up, at the edge of a field you actually build up a bund, what does that do? It prevents actually the land draining.

**Water getting, yeah, yeah.**

T1 You know, there's lots of real, real issues about what's going on.

**Okay, so that would be a challenge for these wetland spaces, this particular over management of the drainage system?**

T1 Yes, yeah, and using too bigger equipment but of course it's all to do with cost isn't it, to do with money?

**Yeah.**

T1 And funnily enough you could manage them, I believe more sensitively, I can tell you loads of anecdotes about that, yeah, erm, because we, we get caught up in a tradition of just doing things because we do them that way. It's like hedge cutting, you know, erm, over the moors, is so severe because it's, yet the hedges could still be maintained, erm, and cut but let's make them better for bats for example.

**Yeah, okay. So are those your challenges to the wetlands or are they external?**

T1 Well the, development pressures, you know, erm, that's one of the things that's happening, erm, that losing land that way but also.

**To build houses.**

T1 Build houses, primarily and also land use, changing it for intensive use by keeping horses …erm, the other thing is, erm, grazing, it's, cattle grazing is very important in an area for great horseshoe bats, erm, at the moment we're finding the horses, you know, over the years we've lost dairy grazing, we're going maybe to sheep, sheep sort of go too harsh and on the land, well it depends, it's, whatever happens it becomes so intensive because land holdings were shrinking so farmers try and get the most out of the land.

**Got you.**

T1 And REMOVED I'm just not getting the most out of my land and, and really there is another way and the final point to say, if there is money, money isn't being directed, I think effectively to get, erm, ecological benefits, I think landowners, farmers and wildlife, people with wilder interests could benefit if, if people at grass roots level were able to get in on the debate.

**Yeah, do you feel there's maybe a governance issue here?**

T1 There's a governance, there is a governance issue, yeah, and, erm, you know, opportunities like this in others centres need to take place, yet people, who've, it's too, too top down, you know, we all need to learn from one another but there's too much top down sometimes.

**Okay, well I'm sure we're going to come back to that because once we hear from everyone, thank you that's really fantastic.**

T1 Yeah.

**And REMOVED.**

S1 I'm the same really.

[laughter]

S1 Erm, yeah, so the benefits are where, and it's hard to keep those free really, I mean ideas of nature, not surprisingly come from me, and they're used for recreation and appreciating nature to the local people that come, tourists, cyclists and everybody else, which is amazing and a very valued nature, health and wellbeing, which is a very important issue. Erm, secondly their learning aspects are so useful, you know, it's great to see that, you know, Scouts and Guides are using those areas as well because they're amazing adult classrooms, which is just fantastic, any chance to get the kids out there, and adults, I learn something every day. Erm, the third main benefit, that, there has to be, this issue in Westhay it's kind of, there's a fascinating link into part of the local heritage, historical journey that these areas of learning have been through, you know, previous peat diggings of these areas were and I much prefer to see them as a nature reserve than another fishing lake to be honest.

[35.16]

**Yeah, of which there seem to be very many.**

S1 Oh which there are, sorry if there's any fishermen here. [laughs] So I just, yeah, just another lovely part of the chapter of the land.

**Yeah, so it's capturing the heritage of the area as well is another benefit.**

S1 Yeah, yeah, such, such deep, deep wonderful history and it's, the Avalon Marshes Centre which is so fascinating and recreating little peat diggers huts and stuff like that just to celebrate that, that heritage.

**Make it come alive, yeah.**

S1 Yeah, it does. Erm, and lots of challenges then of course and some of them have been raised already. Summer floods, I kind of agree with REMOVED, nobody wants summer floods happening. We had some, was it twenty thirteen, twenty twelve?

J1 Yes, we've had two lots haven't we?

S1 Erm, but I would say that's all of my three because other's I pinched off REMOVED, erm.

[laughter]

J1 That's, oh don't worry.

S1 Erm, one of the main challenges really, I mean they are islands of nature but it's, but generally nature is in decline and so it's trying to reverse that decline and trying to join our big islands of nature so we've got these networks so that we can try to turn a corner. Erm, it's a bit of, that's a huge challenge, leading to matters of climate change issue and natural capital issues and it's preserving natural capital, preserving the peat left in there because of course that's locking up millions of tons of carbon, we can't let any of that dry out, no way, no.

**And it seems it's still really, peat extraction is still quite a big thing in this area as well.**

S1 It's still going on, not for much longer, the licences run out I think in four or five years don't they?

J1 Yeah.

**Okay, so lot long.**

S1 No, then it'll be over, but, so that's an issue. Erm, and then you've also got all the issue of Brexit and we've touched on briefly with our group schemes as well and the future of, of funding farming and how it, how it pans out. When that happens pretty much we're facing a revolution, how subsidies are going to be, and distributed and nobody quite knows how that's, to go probably, so.

**No. It seems, I mean I haven't read any statements from the NFU of late about, you know, about what they think might happen.**

S1 Well the twenty five year environment plan seemed to lay it out quite well in January but the detail is still quite sketchy, erm, it looks like there's going to be less money for, erm, what's called a Lazy Payment Scheme but, but.

J1 And that will go.

S1 Yeah, that's probably going to go, erm.

J1 No, but you've got REMOVED that's one thing we've got to think about.

**Very true.**

S1 Yeah, exactly. So getting that whole balance right.

J1 Yeah.

S1 And, and that's the challenge we face all the time and it's balancing that, competing these, people, farming, land and nature, water levels, you know, it's a complicated, complex managed area that.

**Yes, very dynamic system.**

S1 Very dynamic, yeah, and of course we, we talk about flooding but of course in the drought situation they're an oasis.

J1 The land.

**Yeah, absolutely.**

S1 And, you know, seventy seven during the drought and, seventy six rather, it was, you know, was a green oasis out there, you know, pretty area, ooh, was it, you know, hills and so yeah.

**Great. And did you have mosquitoes tucked at the end of that one?**

S1 Ooh sorry, mosquitoes. Erm, yeah, I mean all part of the rich habitat of.

J1 Yes.

**Yeah … of life.**

S1 Exactly, they'll, they'll be food for somebody else.

**Wonderful, thank you.**

S1 That's alright.

P1 Aren't just got for benefits, it's all been touched on really much but engaging with public is a big thing and that's part of our remit is about trying to engage with the people as well, so we try and get them out, erm, and looking at bats in the landscape as well, erm.

**I'd imagine, presumably your bat walks must be very popular.**

A3 Overbooked normally.

P1 Yeah, I think the more, more popular.. a few months back, yeah, sixty people turned up and …

**Wow.**

A3 About a hundred or something.

P1 More than a hundred, yeah.

**Wow. Do you have the staff to cope with that many people if they turn up?**

P1 No. [laughs]

**No, okay.**

A3 … between us.

P1 We try and limit it but, erm, yeah, and I think that the place, erm, enhances wildlife, you know, the managed landscape so obviously that it has been heavily managed over the years, erm, and, and part of that is also reclaiming historic pre-farming landscape. I mean one thing, erm, people talking about the flooding, erm, I rather liked the flooding, the extreme flooding events we had because it made the Levels look like an area that before the intensive farming we had there, erm, you know, aren't particularly, had particularly done our own so.

[40.00]

**Yeah, so a little snapshot of how the Levels used to be like in the day.**

P1 Yeah, how, how it could have been, erm, up to a point. Erm, and, erm, we've got returning new species, erm, so new species we haven't recorded before and species coming back into the, the area, erm, and that is something that's going to be, it's quite a change begins to happen will impact as well.

**Yeah, so is that?**

P1 New species appearing.

**Okay, is that something then you've noticed in the last five years?**

P1 Well it's particularly noticeable with bird species that sort of, from here, so got things like egrets and…

A3 Now it's like …

P1 … egrets it's just like everybody bets on every year, it's, we …

**Something …**

P1 … species going to turn up next.

S2 It's interesting, only this morning, this morning I cycled down the strawberry, strawberry line … and, erm, I was, my wife said oh what's that, was that a Cettis warbler? I said oh yeah, it's a Cettis warbler and in fact there were two calling. Now if I go back ten years, you wouldn't, wouldn't be there but now we have them regularly breeding, that's just one of the changes, you know.

**Yeah, and what would you say is the driver of that change?**

P1 I think, erm, simply creating the right habitat in the first place. I mean it kind of happened as a, as a snapshot of that with Chertsey[?] in Cornwall because they were going to reintroduce Chertsey into Cornwall from South Wales, so they had to create the habitat first, they actually got round to bringing birds over, the birds started breeding straightaway, so it's, it's about creating the right environment and that's been done, erm, increasingly on such a large scale that that's accidental, so I'm looking forward to some new bat species.

S1 Fruit bat.

P1 Yeah …

[laughter]

T … willing to say all new options of fruit bat.

**Yeah.**

P1 Some of the challenges, I've noticed sometimes present some of the conservation measures that take place, erm. , I mean it, it's quite possibly change in the way farming take place in landscape and so it's understanding that flooding kind of been mentioned as an issue.

**Yeah, and would those confrontational conversations take place, are there forums where it happens or is it when you're out and about and you just happen to meet people?**

P1 Erm, no, not, not directly, it's usually indirectly through farming, NFU … but there is also a lot of …

S1 Well suppose, well certainly for me there's a lot of … as well but, but the fake news can fly around something and be picked up by a hundred, hundred, two hundred, three hundred people.

P1 And sometimes when you're …

S1 Trying to catch us, overtips …

P1 The flooding issue is sometimes drifting to issues on, erm, nature, the sort of nature reserves and it has a lot to do with huge quantities of rain, massive high torrents, that is actually just where the problem came from.

**So rather than seeing wetlands as a sponge they see it as the creator of the floods would you say?**

P1 Or part of the problem.

**Okay, that's interesting.**

P1 Erm, so we've still got, erm, another charity’s continued inappropriate farming practices, say people growing maize on.

J1 That's one thing I will ban, I'm sorry, I did it in the sixties, seventies, in that dry summer and never again, it's a wonderful fee but it's not for this land here.

P1 Yes, yeah.

**And not for this land because it used too much water or?**

J1 No, it, it's when you harvest it the land's not right to be harvested, when you go on land, I blame farmers for a lot of trouble, I am a farmer but I'm sorry, these big tractors are not, our soil was not meant to have big tractors on it.

P1 Yeah, it's a complex issue which was …

J1 Yes.

**Oh I see.**

J1 That makes the grass worse, you can't …

P1 So other crops tend to be appropriate on this landscape but maize is probably the worst problem.

J1 The worse there is.

P1 You get lots of run offs from the fields, lots of soil erosion erm.

**Okay, so it should really be a grazing landscape is that right?**

J1 Yes, yes.

P1 Yeah.

**Okay.**

P1 And another challenge, with the invertebrate species grazing these landscapes and get things like Himalayan Balsam having control of things like that, erm. We've got bullfrogs at Westhay.

**Where have they come from?**

P1 They're from Spain, they. They're the ones that are in Westhay are actually of Spanish origin

**Yeah, but how do they, yeah, how do they get here in terms of?**

P1 Something lets them go.

**Oh I see.**

P1 Domestic … so, and then fish, I think fish farmers, so fish farmers tend to have non-invasive species in them, which could easily get.

[45.06]

J1 Into.

P1 Into places where they shouldn't be?

M1 Especially …

**Okay. Are they not controlled for that though, are they not controlled for what?**

P1 Well they, because a lot of things can get mixed up. [laughs]

**Yeah, okay, yeah.**

P1 Little control there. In terms of, erm, mosquitoes there, I think everybody who is interested in conservation should join in because their place … food chain insects, we depend on them and we've got certain populations, great horseshoes that come down and share caves and population share caves, comes on to the … seems to be one for the Levels, so, and they feed on, erm, dung beetles which are relying on cattle particularly organic, so.

**So are the horseshoes attracted to the dung beetles or are they attracted to mosquitoes or a bit of both?**

P1 Er, the dung beetles, so greater horseshoes they prefer them and there are larger common species which focus on conversation … but taking them … anything else, a landscape.

T1 Yeah, I, it's critical for the juvenile stages on the horseshoe bat, it's very specific in that sense but there's, really wide diminution of our domestic … is coming off, it's actually, we've got tremendous decline in invertebrates.

J1 Yes.

T1 It's tremendous, you know, I noticed in my, you know, terms of pulling out a moth trap compared, twenty, you know, twenty years ago, I mean all, all the statistics are there which is, is incredible, I don't bother doing it.

**Yeah, because there's such a decline. So that's, yeah.**

T1 Yeah, so.

**And would you say that's true for mosquitoes as well that they have also declined? Because Jessica is saying that they're.**

J1 I would have thought they're about the same round our way.

P1 Trouble is there's so much that's anecdotal that's just.

T Yeah, it is anecdotal.

P1 I think a survey in Germany was so useful but it's, it's the only one that, that length of that time with doing the survey, so long.

S1 Generally mosquitoes aren't the only biting insects, during the, during the day, erm, horseflies are a bit of a pest.

P1 Yeah.

J1 Oh they're the worst.

P1 … and for me mosquitoes are in remission at night when I trying to count the bats out of, there's a roost of horseshoes at Canada farmhouse and, erm, you really have to wear mosquito kit, I don't know … otherwise you're eaten alive but that's fairness to the bats.

**Yeah, that comes with the territory of surveying bats, right.**

P1 Yeah, but it's only at night, vast majority comes out at night in this landscape and certainly in the landscape you get.

**Okay, yeah, brilliant, thank you.**

A2 Quite a few things also been touched on, say from birder's point of view it's obviously it's a wide range of species on these reserves and it's increasing and of course we have, you know, apart from rarer species coming in and breeding for the first time, do think possibly the, erm, you know, the Spanish frogs are, are quite noisy, so that may well attract wildlife and things like the bitterns and the herons I, you know, one hopes, so, erm. Also for most birders the facilities down at these reserves are pretty good, you know, got good paths, super hides, you know, and a lot of, erm, good access for people, also there's disabled access for people, so it's really, you know, and it's becoming a top area, Was one, I think it was voted one of the top spots, you know, one of the bird magazines this year, erm, and if you go out early on your own, it's great, it's beautiful, it's peaceful.

J1 Yeah.

A2 So I think there's that sort of mentality, people, for it. Erm, challenges. I think sometimes there is, can be conflict sometimes because they're used quite a lot, perhaps between different groups of people, birders, just again thinking from the birders point of view, you know, dog walkers and perhaps dogs not being kept under control, erm, and dogs being out where they shouldn't be, because there's people don't read notices, erm, and like some, sort of Shapwick you've got the rowing and the odd rower and like lots of cyclists and, you know, that sort of thing, I don't go out on a Sunday afternoon because it's so busy.

**Oh okay, so it's does feel really quite congested then sometimes?**

A2 It can, it can do at times but then most birders as you know, prefer to go out in early morning anyway, so, you know, it's not, it's not a big problem but, but we see the increasing use obviously over, over the years. When I first moved back down this way, you know, you hardly saw anybody but, erm, you know, that, that's fine. Erm, other challenges we touched on, I think is that perception by some local people that this is sort of, what you hear, oh you can't do this now, you know, we used to do that but what it, yeah, that was water, they, you know, worrying about flooding or raising water levels in terms of fields and grazing I suppose, erm, and sort of being told what to do by the conservation organisations, there's that perception, you know, this is what comes from local, local people.

[50.32]

**So are these from people that who live rather than people from your organisation?**

Oh from people who live with really, because I live in one of villages. Erm, and very little is from a point of view of, you know, that's not a, because obviously it's great for these reserves. Erm, mosquito wise, I say I, not a particular problem, I know one or two spots that perhaps I might avoid in high summer because I know that I'll be but otherwise we just stick and, you know, I don't know, if you're out late in the evening, erm.

**Yeah, so it's a happy if you like, because you know you're going to be going out and mosquitoes are likely to be out and, yeah.**

Yeah, you hope you remember, if you don't you get bitten.

**Yeah, but you're never, you're never anxious about being bitten, it's not something that you don't really think you go on, on the site.**

Oh sorry, me, I lived in areas as much as anywhere, so you sort of deal, doesn't bother me really.

**Yeah, it's part and parcel of the environment as far as the.**

Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. Does anybody here ever, you know, when you're on the wetlands, do you ever double think where you go because you think I would like to go there but I know I just going to get bitten and I just don't want to go there?**

A2 Yeah.

J1 No, I have experienced it abroad, I was rushed to hospital with mosquitoes in the Arctic Circle.

A2 Oh well yes, it's notorious isn't it?

J1 Yes.

A2 And also on top of Mendip.

J1 And I had anti-repellent and everything on and I was.

A2 Once or twice at Priddy

A2 … over the years you go up there for night jars and one, one year, I mean the young midges they were just crowding in, like you might expect in I or somewhere, other, but that is, that was unusual, can't, can't remember which year it was.

**Yeah, so that's midges rather than mosquitos though.**

A2 Yeah, midges in Scotland.

M1 The only place I started working or thinking about is, erm, the incidence of ticks is becoming …

A2 Yes, that's …

M1 We, we've got a field which we want to take, because we work with two local schools, erm, say the comments earlier on, I got opportunity to bring kids out but they also come, you want to take them into fields and, you know, the first thing you do is you have to do so many risk assesments these days, it's good if you work with the schools, we just chuck it over to the school and say you might find this is a problem if you do it but, erm, yeah, ticks are sort of coming, becoming a real problem, you know.

**Yeah, from being an irritant or people actually getting unwell?**

T1 Well the threats are there of, by picking up ticks, you know, you, people just basically, for ages are used to dogs picking them up and now they're picking them up themselves quite significantly I think.

A2 Lyme disease isn't it? Otherwise.

A3 Yes.

T1 And the incidence of Lyme Disease because there was some interesting, erm, research being done in France I think about the spread of Lyme Disease and they're noticing it, you know, mentioning climate change because I think one of the issues we're talking about habitat getting, erm, if you create the right habitat, you can increase the number of species of birds you have as well but there is a climate change I think is an important factor but they're certainly looking at the spread of ticks in I and everything seems to be coming, you know, closer and I think, erm, the whole business of, you know, I not at all about, but other people are worried about mosquitoes and when they're going to turn up, you know. Erm, I had, erm, apart from dreaming about it last night which was weird.

**You were preparing for now weren't you?**

T1 You know, I had this dream I was being taken to these various places in the wetland sites and being shown these new species of mosquito coming in. Well I have to say my, my son and daughter-in-law work in Grenoble University and this earlier, erm, end of last year they sent me this photo of the tiger mosquito, erm, within I building itself and it's been fascinating because they've, my son's interested in moths and I am as well and we, we make exchanges about the species of moth that are coming in, there's certain pyramid moths that are coming in off the Mediterranean moving out into Grenoble which is sort of the, the, you know, on the east, on the east side but already these things are happening and so if you're mindful of that and you attend a session like this, you're thinking well it's only a matter of time before some of these things turn up, you know, so.

[55.25]

**Yeah, mosquitoes come. REMOVED, you were saying that some of your girls maybe don't want to go the park outside.**

ET We had a couple of, erm, allergic to life young ladies, so, you know, they get bitten, they generally have a nasty reaction so we try.

**Yeah, so it's interesting isn't it, there's an anxiety around if you know you've been bitten before and you know you're allergic to it, you don't want to expose yourself again and then as you were saying I, kind of the growing awareness that actually these species are changing where they are and maybe that will also impact on where we are so it's all different but I, you are, from your point of view as a waterways person, in terms of mosquitoes do you have any, is it something that your members are anxious about?**

S2 Well nothing to do with this, it's certainly a noise of no end in places like I and things and but people just get on with it. Do you want to, or have you finished or carrying on?

A2 No, no, I finished, yeah.

S2 It is, fundamentally I don't know, this is my gross ignorance that these places existed at all round here, you know, I only lived in the area six years so, you know, thirty, forty to go down.

**Yeah, then you'll just about be a local by then.**

[laughter]

J1 Not.

S2 But, you know, taking a canoe which is unpowered, you know, paddling, that, like all things it can be a thrown opportunity, certainly we could, it's very interesting listening to the sorts of challenges and things that people have with respect to the Levels. Certainly canoeists and things, the hairy scary again aren't going to take any interest whatsoever, they'll go to the River Dart and Welsh rivers and down to the coast in Cornwall and things, but.

J1 Yeah.

S2 There will be a group of people who are interested in nature and people like that, so as a public organisation we could promote it, we could, and I can see an advantage, erm, for disabled people and REMOVED disability, erm, canoeing as well, that some people with some disabilities could get out perhaps in areas that they couldn't get out to again, so there's potentially a lot of opportunity but within this, and I think this comes out in anybody else's, there needs to be an education process because there's always the danger people see, somebody goes out on a canoe or something and if they don't, if they're not aware of a particular issue in an area, they're not trying to be awkward they just don't know, so I suspect there needs to be some sort of education, erm, but it can be positive, like it can be positive and negative, because mosquitoes they, normally they bite and perceived to be a nuisance but there's a large community that would use unpowered craft either to just sit and watch and not on this area but I used to enjoy night paddling in Lyson Harbour and Chichester Harbour as the tide went down, you saw all the birds at night come on to the mud things and it's a fascinating experience and obviously there's no tidal issue here and just ahead of a flood I suspect but, you know, there are experiences that people could have provided it's done with care and a responsible approach and that's really, although I know in British canoeing terms, erm, as it happens I going to a conference this Saturday with other colleagues round the country who would have wetlands in their areas, the organisation wants to promote canoeing to people by promoting trails and things like that which obviously because REMOVED Taunton Canal and River Parrett and places like that, and these could be included but …

**Yeah …**

S2 Say, and the other thing that does, would be an issue to consider is, erm, invasive species, because canoes are portable they will be used on, well they might have been used in this area but me, for example, I go through half a dozen different areas regularly from, you know, I, wherever and certainly the organisation is promoting cleaning stuff and doing all that but like with all things you, there's the odd ball people who, groups are forgotten as they, you just can't control, so I mean.

**Yeah, I mean that's really, I never thought about that before in terms of, you know, health and wellbeing, how that can be impacted by people performing health and wellbeing, that could be impacted by the invasive species.**

S2 Yeah, and I mean certainly, you know, as an organisation you sort of think, from a sporting point of view it's recognising that it has now a role in, erm, leisure industry that pull people into areas but like all things, you know, you can overdo it, you need people to come in cars, it needs people to park cars. [laughs]

[1.00.10]

J1 Yeah.

S2 And you need people to be able to launch.

S1 They, they do go to one of the nature reserves actually.

S2 I'm sure they do, I don't have all the know how…

S1 … times of year there's a, there's a, set days where they, and it's, it's about … again a bit of different perspective from that of your nature, water.

S2 Oh this is where I think, erm, wearing another hat I'm actually REMOVED which clearly doesn't apply to this area but I can see a role that lots of these organisations would welcome hearing about birds and another things and people will positively contribute and it's also positively contributing to mental health just as much as this in fact, you know, this …

**That's very helpful, very helpful, thank you.**

E1 As on a, you know, enjoyment level really from the Guides point of view because it gives the girls space, certainly, well space and like to explore so we have lots of badges that are linked obviously to development about the, and it's about birds, vegetation, photography, a lot of them are keen amateur photographers in our unit and so let's all to actually programme Guides and Guides and wetland but it allows us to also, erm, share our specific identity, we do quite a lot of international camps, our girls go ever year and it's, it's something different to talk about as well cider and, you know, cheese.

[laughter]

E1 So when we're talking about national guiding for example, our girls are aware, our girls are very aware of their space and their landscape. And also quite a frightening number actually of our girls, we're a big unit, erm, don't go out with their families and don't explore the Levels with, as a family so it's quite, erm, to be going on night walk and various, using the areal, come across down to the Moor, that's quite good because it gives us or helps us, I think that the girls understand where, where they come from, always enjoying it, even all those trendy young ladies love being out there.

**They respond to being in the landscape?**

E1 Yeah, so even, even our most, you know, worrisome, shall we say, young ladies, there aren't very many but we do have them but really, they just don't go outdoors so.

**No, even though they actually live very close by?**

E1 Yeah, yeah, I can ...

S2 Just, I think that highlights, when you see an expert in an area who can make, you know, you can walk past things, because I've walked past many things, not realised there's something of interest there, it needs somebody who understands it, knows about it to sort of almost excite one's interest doesn't it?

**Yeah, yeah.**

E1 Yeah, we have, we work with, from a, positive for us, it provides quite a safe an easily accessible because it is on our doorstep area for all kinds of things but we don't, so we, this is where we meet more often than not out all summer long so whatever the weather, so thankfully the bird sanctuary, there's some nice dry areas to have picnics but, but, it, so from, from a positive point of view it's, it's part of what we do, I think we use our, our local communities to, especially not much to do, they're, they're surprised, they're always surprised how much there is and that we join, Scouts are a bit more out and about than our team.

M1 There's only so many times you can go up and down Church Street.

E1 Yeah.

[laughter]

M1 See how the local stuff is.

E1 Yeah, yeah.

**But even the ones as you said that you would think were too cool for school, once they're out on the wetlands they respond very differently.**

E1 Yeah.

**Because it's such a part of their area.**

E1 They don't have to be cool when they're, I mean it's maybe a girl thing, you know, and you think I, that's girls of a certain age, they're just too cool to do anything but once they get out and about they just like to be rolling down a hill or picking something up or, so, no, they're from our, from my, from our guiding unit, we get out and about with the girls definitely enjoy being out, doing whatever they're doing.

**Yeah, fabulous.**

E1 That's positive. Disadvantage, challenging side I think it's great to see the cyclists that we get here but we've doing this pick in the village here, erm, twelve years probably now and the amount of litter that we see that clearly is, is clearly discarded by the increasing number of the people on their bicycles.

T1 Yes, that's right.

E1 And it's clearly what happens because I see very well my daughter.

**Oh really?**

E1 That's a downside, I mean the girls have noticed because we have a sort of the gold rush if you like to pick, you get more money for, more points for Lucozade bottles and sports drinks, erm, than you do for.

**Gosh. So is it really kind of sports jars, sports drink?**

E1 Yes.

**I don't know, trash bars recover.**

E1 One of my girls has done a project idea, so.

[1.05.01]

J1 Just the right distance from Cheddar, fish and chip wrappings.

**Oh really? Oh.**

J1 It's just the right distance from Cheddar. You can pick up a bag full every fortnight on our road.

**Yeah, of litter.**

J1 Of litter.

**Of fish and chip litter.**

J1 And I mean you, I know one of the nicest views there is across county and the litter that gets there is unbelievable.

**Yeah, is it not thrown out of cars, it's?**

J1 Yes, yeah, it's, always, I mean the cyclists are awful at it, they just finish a bottle and then.

E1 But more importantly most of my girls, because they're the ones that have done and we keep going for four years so they've noticed, yes, that's right, just saying but from a challenging point of view I think, that was, and farming too, we see the girls do pick up of the peat materials that come and that cover the hay bales that are just discarded each so pick those up too, so they are noticing things like that. Midges, I've got a couple of super-sensitive girls, so mosquito bites more a problem with some of them, they cover up. Erm, I think the challenges, one of experts here, you know, my, our challenge or certainly from a perspective, a leader perspective for youngsters, erm, is just to keep them interested in it because it's their heritage and they're the ones who'll take this forward so we feel quite strongly as a unit that we utilise our standards.

**Do you find that there's a drop off? That there's almost like a wave where, you know, children can be engaged at a certain age with the wetlands but then they get into their twenties and maybe before they've actually rediscovered their hobbies again, that may mean there's a lull. I've trying to think about, you know, I think about the age distribution of people that use the wetlands, I've trying to imagine that everybody could benefit.**

E1 Yeah.

A3 Yeah, there's a gap in the teenage market, not using it so much probably. There's nobody that's more interested, and the Cubs, the Guides and Scouts that taken out there, yeah, but also if you talk, sorry, have you finished?

E1 No, no, yeah.

A3 Erm, moving on to sort of educational issues there is a big challenge with secondary schools getting them out to the Levels, it's the time impact it has on their other subjects they're studying, so, I mean out of all schools I've worked with down there I think there's only one or two secondary schools that I've taken out to the Levels, erm, because they've got to give a whole day to get there, even for the local schools it needs that amount of time and they miss the four subject areas and pressures on schools these days.

**So would you say it's a curriculum squeeze in terms of having to get people's funding squeeze?**

A3 Erm, mostly curriculum squeezed and funding less a problem but also we find, also with the primary schools transport is an issue because they're sharing transport with other schools, so they've got to get the kids there and back before the school bus does the run.

**Got you.**

A3 To all the pick-ups to all the secondary schools as well so we're sort of running to their timetable and we need that certain, you know, set time to get them out to do the work we want to do with them, as well as the toilet issues which, you know, can be an issue sometimes and times we've booked toilets to come in isn't an answer because the, erm, mobile businesses because getting thirty kids through two toilets takes about an hour, so that's like.

**Yeah …**

A3 So it's not, so yeah, it's fabulous when we were work out on Avalon Marshes because yes there is resources there, toilets there, erm, but such as Westhay, you know, except there's no toilet.

**Do you find also that there's an expectation that there will be toilets there for instance, you know? And I don't mean that just for the school age children but maybe for other people that?**

A2 I think the, yeah, I mean I did a walk on Saturday for the I've Ornithological but on the website, you know, please note no toilets, you know, on Avalon Marshes but otherwise they'll turn up, is there a toilet round here? [laughs]

A2 Yeah.

T1 It's a national issue actually, is it?

A3 Oh yeah.

T1 You know I was listening to a group of sixty year olds they were saying because the older you get the more likely you have need of a loo for whatever reason, men and women and yeah, just the same, you go to I've or any city or something, you know, now and toilets being taken away because of the costs, you know, it's, erm.

**Yeah, so you wouldn't say it's a particular, an issue around our expectations of being in nature, you know, that we? I think that, you know, because we can put a road or a walk or a hide that we want these other attributes of urban life.**

M1 First thing they want, Wi-Fi, yeah.

A3 Yeah, it's become more of an expectation really, it's that nature does …unsettle them really isn't it? Where people are scared of the wild and the environment, what's out there? And yes they've got everything to keep them cosy and they don't go there and the schools I think I've worked with, they might be from Glastonbury … which you think is the most local they could be to the Levels but perhaps half those kids don't go there.

[1.10.15]

J1 No, they don't know it.

A3 They don't know their street or go, you know, go in their garden possibly but they don't go beyond it, even with their parents, their parent, they're used to, so, erm, that's a huge issue that hopefully.

**Yeah. What do you think is stopping them from accessing the wetlands? Is it to do with a lack of desire or a lack of access would you say, you find?**

A3 Well the access, the access is good, it's getting better all the time and I think it's the generation that's missed out on having the knowledge and the feeling comfortable about visiting very natural environment that perhaps they won't or it wasn't involved in school life as well, they feel disconnected from, you know, use of technology, erm, perhaps, so yeah, it's that group need to reengage with the natural environment, we work really really hard, I don't know but issues to getting these groups.

**… groups are really popular aren't they?**

A3 Yeah.

**There are a cohort of families that are really interested in accessing nature and accessing experiences of nature.**

A3 Yeah, and, you know, from our bat walks we can prove that people, if they're taken out there and involved in it, they love it, you know, we can get them rebooked and subscribed …

P1 Actually I think that's probably with the younger children and less, you don't really get teenagers coming.

A3 No, we don't tend to, even with the family groups, yeah.

P1 The younger kids, there's a slight challenge at night because they're.

**Tired. [laughs]**

P1 Get, erm, yeah, less.

A3 Yeah, we are focussed, summer months because it gets light so late, erm.

**Yeah, that's a tricky one.**

P1 So it tends to be older people or, erm, young, you know, families with young children.

M1 There's some good blackberry bushes round there which is a great pull to bring the younger kids in to go out picking the blackberries so it's …

P1 It's hard to see though.

[laughter]

S2 But it also, not only in this sort of thing but in sports and things trying to get the youth engaged, not about, you know, forty probably engaged then life hits them, like exams, they obviously, so it's university, whatever.

A3 That's right, yeah.

S2 And then just surviving but plant the seed there.

P1 Yeah.

S2 And what do they do when they've got young children and things? They start coming back so, you know in a way I don't think people should panic about it because, you know, we all, you know, life's like.

A3 Life takes over.

S2 And life does take over certain part of your existence but almost, you know, coming back home, my daughter, two daughters actually hated farming school trips to somewhere in Somerset and then when Somerset stood in Portsmouth in pouring rain about twelve years ago I get a text from one of my daughters in Northern Australia when she was oh it's not so bad Dad here, you need to, but.

[laughter]

T1 I think the thing, one thing that would concern me is the negativity, any, any negativity, whether it be mosquitoes, whatever, those perceptions will only, erm, increase some of these trends that we've got. I mean for example, I mean some of these bits of research that have been done, I mean the latest one I read was about, erm, creating a group of children, I can't remember their age range now, I think it was something round about ten or eleven, so giving them two sets of cards and to, and to state what were on those cards, so a proper bit of research and so it's Pokémon cards and cards of, erm, all the common sort of plants, animals you would see and of course the kids score far better on Pokémon than they did images of, of the general wildlife and the countryside but that's merely reflecting a lot of other things that are going on and this disengagement business is a very, very important thing to consider but it's wider than just, it's, it's, you know, if we're looking at push four factors in terms of what your research is, it's, erm, it's sort of a general trend which will have an impact on the specifics we're looking at at the moment, so there's, a lot of those drivers and how we turn them around is, is, you know, there is a challenge there, you know, I mean we do, there's a lot of work with two schools and the, the thing is their countryside of course is the wetland, which, which is good and we can access it but accessing North Somerset to countryside is pretty poor, I don't know, erm, what it's like in Somerset as such but it is poor and the roads are bad, you can't cycle very well or anything like that, so for us we follow the local nature reserve on Cadbury Hill, which is great and we've got the strawberry line and those are the two things we share between our villages and therefore they're great for communication between villages but they're also our access and it's great, you can just pull the kids out into those and take them out and show them whatever and they, you know, it's surprising that, erm, they don't get out so much. Having said that, the strawberry line's becoming more important for cycling and so local families now because the roads are bad and everything else, they're coming out on to that and, and on a Sunday the, the cycle way is packed but whether or not they're actually interpreting the landscape that's heritage, natural history, archaeology and that, it's all still limited by the curriculum and the only way we're making access with that is something called learning college in our primary schools where they invite local groups in and we've been going in on particular topics on owls, otters and, you know, pet analysis, taking them out and seeing the wetland themselves.

[1.16.32]

**Yeah, so it's really exposure to the wetlands that seems to be the key thing.**

S1 Yeah.

**And tell me when you go to the wetlands with your groups are they, the mosquitoes, I mean obviously for you with your bat hat on, it's great but?**

A3 They don't tend to mention it, they are more worried about horseflies, at least one child that's had a reaction to one and that's the first thing I mention when we get on the bus, horseflies but, yeah, the bat bites, we always warn people wear long sleeves, mossie up and belt up, and they don't seem, people don't, aren't put off by coming because of them, so not a big issue, erm.

**Yeah, that's positive.**

A3 Yeah, and I think they have to work done with citizen science, bat surveys over the five years on the Levels, the … the soprano pipistrelle … pipistrelle most prevalent bat species munching their way through thousands of those mosquitoes, you know, people understand that., we've proved that, that's what's happening down there, as well as the horseshoe species, it's really a navigation on to the Levels could be … plateau, so, erm.

**It's connecting it all together in people's minds isn't it? Yeah, that people love to enjoy looking at the bats but the bats also need a certain kind of environment and they need a certain kind of food source as well, but have you found that REMOVED when you've been taking your Scouts out?**

M1 Erm, yeah, it's, the, it's the, it's the starting point if you like, as, as things, for the education, that's how we use the, kind of the area, erm, getting the yeah, getting the understanding there of, where as, how everything fits together, erm, it's the key really isn't it? Making sure, you know, just getting the, the interest in, as REMOVED said, and all touched by it as well, about what you said, getting the, the interest in there, erm, getting the understanding of how it all interacts, erm, that's, that's what we need to do.

**Yeah, and do you find that you're also, if we quickly go through your benefits and your challenges but for you, from the Scout point of view.**

M1 Um.

**Do you think that they really connect with the landscape by going out and doing their activities?**

M1 They do, they, erm, as REMOVED knows, they love running around, you know, anything that gets them out is brilliant, erm, so yeah, it's, erm, when we take them out obviously we know, you know, we know a small amount of that local area, so, erm, you know, the, the information boards that are out there gives, gives us a good starting off point to kicking off a debate or just, even just pointing out something that we can return to later, so, so yeah, the, the interaction is there and as far as we kind of point it out as we go past so they like the bird huts, they're climbing up into there and having a look, see what they can see, so, yeah, but then that gives us the, you know, why would you use it? Would you come out for the afternoon and, you know, actually use it to watch the birds?

**Yeah, yeah, and do you find that they will do that after you've kind of introduced them to the landscape, they feel more confident about?**

M1 I would, yeah, yes, erm, yeah, certainly the ones who've been through the, you know, been through, on the, the cycle path before, erm, they know what to look for, so there is a little bit of retention there and it's good, so.

**Yeah, yeah, great, and any challenges?**

M1 Erm, challenges, tourism, the popularity, the erosion of the walkway, etcetera, etcetera, the dogs I think somebody mentioned as well, erm, but also promotion, enticing new users in and giving them that interest in that preservation and conservation of the area that they are visiting and hopefully want to continue to.

[1.20.14]

**It's that push pull isn't it, about wanting to get people to enjoy the landscape?**

M1 Yes, yes.

**But not too many people maybe, or people that respect it.**

M1 It's a balance, yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, it's a challenge isn't it?**

M1 Erm, one of the benefits I think we mentioned, regional, it's part of the regional identity, I think that's what people were touching on earlier, it's, you know, North York Moors, the things like that, it's that, yeah, it's the Somerset Levels isn't it?

**Yeah, that's it's, it's a big the thing isn't it, you know?**

M1 It's kind of where we come from, so.

**Yeah, yeah, but I wonder if, I mean obviously, you know, you're all interested in the landscape so you're proud of the Somerset Levels but do you think that is, that's something that people, you know, say when they go out and about, you know, we come from the Somerset Levels area or do people just associate it with flooding do you think, trying to get?**

A3 Still sore

M1 Yeah, yeah.

S2 Yeah, it's never been a mass tourist centre, that's part of Somerset’s charm.

M1 Yeah.

S2 People often say oh I go on the M5 and I know I … on the way to Devon. And so it's that balance, that, that works for the area really.

A2 There is the Countryfile effect of the murmurations, the starling.

S2 Yeah, yeah, you get your hits don't you?

A2 It was almost too good, wasn't it? And the, they did the coverage, they did little starlings and hoards came, couldn't really cope.

S2 No, no, exactly it's a, it's a big challenge we face, the RSPB goes nuts when it's wet, can we look in for the starlings? It's like, no. The car park overflows and it's, it's tough for the locals then to try and run a business or something, it's tricky.

**Yeah, well you can see, if you're getting a lot of people and then wanting to drive along these roads as well, I can see that they can soon have, yeah, jam the roads up. And REMOVED you've got a bit weight on you because not only the last person to respond.**

A1 I don’t agree with any of your comments at all from any of your points, I'm really sorry, because I've done a huge project where I've interviewed people who live, they either farm.

J1 Yeah.

A1 In the area that surround, so I don't really form, a great deal of the analysis, I don't really have to form an opinion, I just can present their views so I, see I really appreciate that the Levels are full of beauty as an artist, you know, for inspiration I can go down there, I can meet huge groups of people, really fascinating, you know, you can learn so much, starling sell all day long, if you want to do a picture, do a starling, it's great.

**Yeah. [laughs]**

A1 But when you interview local people, you know, that were flooded or, they don't feel as if they have control over their land anymore.

J1 No.

A1 You know, they, they just feel that, that the land's kept too high, there are cases where people were saying that, erm, they, they run through to ask the Levels to be dropped prior to the flooding and it wasn't done and then they flooded, so it's a really very, very different view, so it's really, it's, it's tricky for me because I've listened to many hours of these people, they were really badly affected.

**Yes, they've been traumatised by the flood.**

A1 Yeah, yeah, yeah, and after, it's not, it's not. I did another project with, erm, hydro-engineering students at University of Exeter, erm, and they were actually, we, we were asked to take them and introduce them to these people that had been affected because they had a very clinical view of the flood, you know.

**Ah, that's interesting.**

A1 It floods, it will flood, blah blah, which when you're speaking to someone that's lived there all their lives, like, but I, I think it's, obviously it's more than any one thing but I do think that it's quite concerning that if you speak to people who have lived there all their lives they just don't feel that they have a voice.

J1 No, that's quite right, they don’t, they don’t

A1 But it's very hard.

**Listening to them or there's no forum on which they can …**

A1 Yeah, yeah, they don't feel they're listened to and …

S1 And it's interesting, I there is no forum to speak of but some, we find with the Trust, to keep people, the Trust, there's various community groups that are quite, like flag groups and, there's Wildlife Empowered which is really influential but and things like the SRA which, which is Somerset Rivers Authority, which was set up about three years back to find extra money to help, erm, address these flooding issues, erm, there's no community engagement, community representation on that but it's.

J1 No, there's only four, the Committee of REMOVED that understand the water levels, all the rest are people that have not lived in the village all their lives, or in the area all their life and they don't understand. I mean I went on REMOVED District Council in REMOVED and from then to when they big floods formed, I've been with the Leader of the Council to visit the Environmental Agency to ask them to dredge the Parrett, if that Parrett had been dredged out we wouldn't have the extent, and another thing about it, only about ten days, no maybe three weeks before that big flood happened, I live here, I go to Cheddar for things, our, in the Upper Axe area and the Broom area, the rivers were down to winter levels, which suits you and suits the farmers, you've go over to Poledons, you go down and then I go across to Western … to the meetings, I asked at the end of the meeting, I say because I must tell you Drainage Boards don't like women on it, REMOVED.

[1.25.59]

**Yeah.**

J1 But I said why are your water levels at least eight inches or ten inches higher than ours? Oh we've got to have it to keep the stock, fence for the stock and I said all stock at this time of the year should be in house and then I, when I went down there and the rain hits in January, somebody said it's, did you know that was coming? I said and REMOVED said it was commonsense, when the winter comes you drop the levels but the Environmental Agency drop it on, I think it's the twenty ninth of June, November to the winter level and from the first of April summer level and you, and they don't allow for variations in it, in the.

**Yeah, they want to keep to a static level the whole year round.**

J1 Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, and is that.**

T1 Yeah, my experience is you have a date.

J1 Yeah, that's right.

T1 And the Somerset but, and.

**Yeah, so date rather than commonsense.**

J1 Yes.

T1 Yeah, I think one of the problems too, it's like with the management because at one time the, the work of, if you go back I mean years, less intensively, work used to be carried out on drained pitches and everything all over.

J1 Yeah.

T1 Now what happens with the Drainage Boards they go in from one big contractor, so that person has to start.

J1 On a set day.

T1 On a set day and then they go, and, and they can't do it all at once because the thing is the period of time where you have to manage is a narrow one and it needs to be sensitive. You, when you have individual landowners, sensitive to, to the weather.

J1 That's right.

T1 They were able to respond but now you have a mammoth, these mammoth contracts going out and if, you know, so one, one year I said to my, to the, to the super, green supervisor, I said look, you know, that is one of the best ditches for flower, you know, plants in the area.

J1 Yeah.

T1 Because we know that detail, we know that is one of the best features for flowers, you know the best field for grazing, we know the best field for the wild flowers.

J1 Yeah, that's right.

T And, you know, so, you know, if I had people, compared down in Brook, our original record centre, I remember them saying to a group of people in that ditch there some of the rarest plants in the area, and it's probably the only ditch within four square miles or something, so the, so those, the supervisor said to me well I said don't do it, can you do it?

J1 Afterwards.

T1 After, you know, after, do it in late July. Alright, I'll try and do that but of course the trouble is he said oh sorry REMOVED at the end because he's got to start somewhere but I tell you what, this year and this was the thing, he said I'll get him to start at, do his.

J1 Other way.

T1 The other way round.

J1 That's right.

T1 And so he did the route the other way round and so.

**It's that communication isn't it?**

J1 Yes.

**That communication to why these have got to change.**

J1 Yes.

T1 It's minutiae that's been lost through funding issues, through, and internal Drainage Boards affected by those funding issues but it's again it's a sort of wider thing, oh we must do this and it becomes a prescription and this is one thing even the Wildlife Trust faced back in the eighties and that where they started talking about having wet splashes in fields, so raising the water levels, well the thing is you can get, you know, it created such a fuss, it changed the whole debate and I think we're still living with some of that problem now, you know.

**Yeah. Well that kind of connects to REMOVED, you know, issue about people carrying on this legacy of anxiety around flooding, so if you think about, you know, we've been talking about a sense of place, I'm presuming that your experience is that people have this kind of disconnect from the landscape, they found it ominous or threatening.**

A1 I think that they have a lifetime of knowledge that they know what, which levels would naturally flood.

J1 That's right, yeah.

A1 That would be an act of life …

[1.30.01]

T1 … the knowledge.

A1 Yeah, go to certain places.

T1 Yeah, yeah.

A1 And when they try to put that, that point of view across they're, they're disregarded so they, their voice is not in that landscape, we put, even though it's much more part of them then it is the, the visitors that come to watch the murmurations and the, so it's really tricky.

S2 I think it's a problem with things like the Environment Agency who coincidentally the new head of the Environmental Agency talked a few weeks ago and she's a finance background, right, so I suspect that a lot of the skills of like the local knowledge of this is missing. Now it's not the same situation but in the Canal River Trust which I know is around here, one of the number, another organisation I represent has got into their planning panel for how they do stoppage on the canal, so suddenly it's like the motorways, they don't block off the A4 or the M5 at the same time in theory, [laughs] that's quite good and it's almost that sort of level of putting constructively in the knowledge, the local knowledge in the, you know, where the water should be up or down in at the right level in a constructed way. One of the differences is if someone keeps moaning at an organisation they will, they will become defensive.

J1 That's right.

S2 If you get something more constructive at the right level they help them, they'll probably listen and.

**Yeah, so you're saying something like, I don't know, a community spokesperson or somebody.**

S2 Well I don't know what the Environmental Agency organisation is in this area but if that's, it's getting the right level and trying to be seen as helpful because the local knowledge, quite frankly, is pretty well forgotten, lost.

J1 See the trouble is with the Drainage Boards especially REMOVED being forced to be in one Drainage Board for the whole of Somerset.

S1 That's right.

J1 But that, county of Somerset.

S1 Economies of scale.

J1 And we're going to lose all the local knowledge because on the Panel the management committee is a lot, it's forty nine, which is twenty, what's half of forty nine? Twenty five of elected represented, they put on for the councils in the area and the rest are farmers, are people that are interested in their community but they never have, unless they've got something which like me, if I feel something's better for the community I'll go for it, though REMOVED a representative still on the councils and on the Axe we got fifty one, which means twenty six elected representatives and twenty five local people and REMOVED the farmers respect me because I will be honest with them. If the money won't cover what we've got to do you can't have it but if we got the money and that's what you think is best that is what I would vote for for the community's sake, I mean but, that's how it works and REMOVED got it down to just twenty four, twenty five members, the management committee.

S2 Still a committee though isn't it?

J1 Yes, but that covers a big area, that's most of Somerset and they've only been twelve local people.

**Yeah, so, because I mean that then fits with what REMOVED was saying in terms of big and small and how it all fits together.**

J1 Yeah.

**Now we haven't got very much time left but I wondered if REMOVED you could tell me your perspective on mosquitoes?**

A1 There are certain times of year where I'm happier because ticks are for me, I struggle with ticks, erm, but yeah, I guess depending because of where you're going you do expect some of them bite you, erm, so I just bear that in mind really, yeah, yeah, yeah, so.

**So just to kind of wrap things up because I could continue talking to you all night long because it's absolutely fascinating but I, we just wanted to get a quick sense of, just to go round the room is we talked about wetlands in lots of different ways and I'm really interested in knowing whether they're seen really as just a quick sum up, you know, whether from your organisation's perspective, what has to change really to increase that connection with other, human health and wellbeing with other people, you know, what can wetlands site manage, the people involved in wetlands, what can we do to encourage people to use wetlands in a respectful way, you know, not dropping litter on the way and everything else? So maybe if we started with Paul, how would you?**

P1 Hum.

**I know, very quickly, if you could say.**

P1 It's not a quick question.

**I know.**

[laughter]

P1 From our perspective we've got, we probably just encourage the appreciation of them and to love them, so that people develop their own awareness and saying because they know about it and then …

[1.35.04]

S1 Headache getting them out, tend to get kids and then miss the sort of middle bit, erm, what you were saying, I think that's how I started, I grew up in Liverpool and, erm, and into birds when I was a kid and then … you know, erm, quite interested in other things and I came back to it in later days.

**Yeah, so it's starting them young.**

S1 Yeah.

**Yeah, do you agree?**

A2 Yeah, absolutely and I think, you know, because the, Somerset Levels now and the Avalon Marshes especially is becoming very well known from a birder's point of view, you know, people are coming and someone was saying the other day that because came, they came down from all over the country to see one or two of the rare, rare species that we had here and somebody said oh well, you know, this is a great place, I've come back and.

**Yeah, so it's getting them here in the first place.**

A2 And it's suddenly realising that it is a very good place which has really happened, you know, through this, sort of over the last twenty years or so.

**Yeah, brilliant, yeah.**

A2 Yeah.

**Yeah, so there is momentum there.**

A2 Oh absolutely, yes, and it is beneficial to the whole area really in terms of tourist costs, you know.

**That's it, you can feel it can't you?**

AL B&Bs, cafes, pubs and it's pretty.

**Yeah, it's really positive. REMOVED, you're a newbie but you're going to come back aren't you now?**

S2 Well I think predominantly it's education but who would I go to for example to say look like to encourage, you know, sensibly to come to wetlands in this area? Who would I say, who do I start to have that dialogue with? And whether there's anywhere so that we could promote a sensible thing, you know, it's been absolutely fascinating all your knowledge and I just haven't got enough hours in my life to go and, to go and see different birds, bats and all the rest of it, I'm quite enthused by that, whereas I haven't got the hours in my life at the moment but I'm sure there's lots of other people but I would want to do it sensibly and I'd want to do it respecting everything, so who, and I don't know who I go to, I mean there isn't like a wetlands.

F No.

P1 The best start to go to probably the Avalon Marshes, have a chat to the man there.

S2 Yeah, and I'm thinking for example I'm sort of co-representing, well I do go to a national organisation, there's not just the people here, people with canoes drive all over the place, you know, and if it's something of interest, they happen to be interested in a particular bat or species of birds and things, they might come from Nottingham, they might come from Scotland.

**So you want a national resource that.**

S2 No, what I'm saying is how would me in this area say look the right things to do in this area are. [laughs] And don't come, don't come in, you know, March or, you know, whatever or. I mean canoeists can help get litter out of waterways that is inaccessible from pathways and things but, you know.

**Yeah, no, I think that's really interesting point, yeah.**

E1 Just keep on doing what we're doing really, just introduce them to it in all sorts of ways, some of them will be the great photographers and I remember it for that, some will be the runners or the environmentalists so whatever floats their boat really, that's what I'm trying to.

**Yeah, so exposure to lots of different things and they can choose the thing that really ticks their box, yeah, wonderful.**

A3 Echo what everyone's just said but promote education as the main driver, put funding in place to make sure all schools have got access and they learn and understand what's important about the place right from get go and yes, they will come back.

**Yeah, fabulous.**

M1 Plant seeds basically, integration to get them, make them aware of it and get them interested so that they come back.

**Brilliant.**

A1 Yeah, I think it's also the range of different audiences so I know Countryfile is a pain in the neck for you but there are a lot of, erm.

S2 And … [laughs]

A1 Yeah, and I get it but, you know, I imagine that there are, there are families who know nothing about birds and actually sat there and went do you know what why don't we go and do that? And that's the great thing about, about it, our project because you will engage different audiences. I, I was doing something and had conversations with the RSPB who told me come to the starling murmurations and that just, I, I'd no idea until I had an amazing conversation and now, you know, I, I love going up there, so it's. I think that it's not just talking to people who naturally come and look for you, go and find people who don't and speak to them because that's how you engage other people, um.

J1 I agree with most things that have been said as long as you appreciate the area you are visiting because there's nothing better, I don't care what any of the rest of you say, there's nothing better than a May morning when the may's in blossom and there's a thickness and you walk around and you almost step on a deer and you hear the cuckoo calling and all that, and that is what the Moors and Levels are about, first thing in the morning. Yeah, everything, yeah, everything, you go quiet in there and you feel that you're in heaven really.

T1 That conversion there, when the, the mist is just, it's like a …

[1.40.32]

J1 From my bedroom window I … trees come up through and.

T1 Yeah, I just, yeah, I think education.

J1 Yeah.

T1 Young people and an understanding of the richness of the heritage.

J1 Yeah.

T1 It's the history of the landscape because it's so exciting when you start talking to people about things. Do you remember? If you go back in the archaeology you'll actually discover there were storks here.

J1 Yeah.

T1 And then it starts you thinking about all those things that changed.

**Yeah, all the things that have gone, yeah.**

T1 Well because of the changing in the climate and things over the years and that, how the land was used, all history and everything, it's fascinating.

**Brilliant.**

S2 Can I just add? Everyone goes on about the young, I think it's also after you've newly retired.

J1 Yes.

S1 Because with grandchildren and things like that you can impose that but for example some of the things you mentioned I wouldn't know what a certain bird sounds like, you know, I've no idea, you know, you know, no, but I mean it just shows, I, I've lived in sort of, you know, suburbia.

J1 Yes.

S1 You know, I've had a busy job like thousands of others and it's the first time in my life that I've got a bit of space, I'm, to….

J1 To do things.

T1 Yeah, I mean to, you know, because can I, my area where we are, we've got a fantastic, fantastic, tremendous development pressure and there are a lot of people moving in, people idyllically say oh well you go and sit in, into the countryside without actually being aware of what that really means, you know, being in a rural area and I think you're absolutely right, it's all age groups and these, in my area which is, we'll, we try, we're actually putting leaflets through all the new houses saying come and learn about our group, you know, and I think that's something that could be done but, yeah, that all goes back to education and you know.

S1 And walking marathons and ninety year old gent who comes.

T1 Yeah.

S1 You know, and he's been interested in bugs all his life and he's fascinating, you know, because he points to bugs and.

T1 Well it's the same with the schools, people need to get hold of all these local people, involve them a little bit more, bring them into the schools, bring them in everywhere else and listen to them and listen to the, I mean farmers as well.

**It's about education.**

[laughter]

T1 I don't mean you an all.

[laughter] …

**Thank you everybody, you've been absolutely brilliant and thanks for your time and your insights and absolutely wonderful, thanks everyone.**

[transcription stops 1.43.19]

END