*WetlandLIFE: taking the bite out of wetlands* Project

Part of the *Valuing Nature* Programme

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Interview 1 – SOM1

**So how long have you, have you worked with the same people for like twenty odd years?**

**SOM1** And I've been involved in it all my life, I'm a lifelong one in, I've lived here, my dad was on Council so I was born and bred into it but I don't like the attitude of them today. People come to the village and they think they know it all, they're here, they don't appreciate what they have moved into and hope, it should be kept like it is. I don't want to pursue it as a mothball or anything but I, it's a village, you know, because I shot one or two this morning and I said well I'm going to move to the village, no, you're not. I said well I've earmarked, my daughter has told me to put a deposit down soon as they start developing.

**Oh the, oh okay, these are new housing units actually in REMOVED.**

**SOM1** They're going up, fifty five, thirty to, thirty one to start and twenty four for local housing. One of the farmers has been very generous and they don't appreciate us.

**Yeah, because that …**

**SOM1** It's my neighbour you see and I haven't been able to fight for it on the Council because of things I haven't been able to fight for him because being a neighbour and that and they've treated him awful, some of the villagers.

**Really?**

**SOM1** Um, and it's only place you can develop.

**So what I'll do is, so if you could tell me first of all a little bit about where you, the IDB that you're working with.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**Where they, what's their geographical spread and the link with the Westhay Moor and Shapwick, that would be really helpful.**

**SOM1** Yeah, well Westhay Moor and Shapwick Heath were in the Upper Brue originally which I was nothing to do with.

**Yeah, Upper Brue.**

**SOM1** Yeah, Upper Brue, and this area here is in the, was up in the Upper Axe, five years ago, I think it was about five years ago, it might be, might be coming six but it was five years ago, the Government had, EA, said that we had to all amalgamate, they wanted one drainage wall for the whole of Somerset, yeah, but.

**Right, okay, and there were two before?**

**SOM1** No four, three before.

**Four? Oh okay.**

**SOM1** Now first of all the Parrett area was thirteen little Drainage Boards, now this must have been in year two thousand, about there, I can tell you the men, it was all men and District Council decided that I should go on it.

**Right, this was in two thousand and four, right.**

**SOM1** Four, about two thousand three, two thousand, no it's before that, this must have been before the two thousand because there were all these little Drainage Boards and they said I had to go and visit all of them in a year. Well you go there.

**Right, but then you meet?**

**SOM1** Once, once or twice a year.

**Yeah, so it's.**

**SOM1** It's not an, onerous job and the first one I went to “we don't have women on this board”. So, and I'd been forewarned that this might happen because I knew the other one, I knew a lady there wanted to put on that one and she had land there and because she declared an interest they never opened the doors and let her in again, that's how male dominated it was, and the chairman of the one spoke to a friend of ours that lives over at Theale[?], he's friendly with the lady over there, they're about the same age and he, she said, he said who's this REMOVED? Oh don't you argue with her, she's one of the best farmers we got and after that butter wouldn't melt in their mouths.

**Because rather than being just a landowner you're a farmer?**

**SOM1** A farmer, yeah.

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** [interruption]

So that's how it happened and then they couldn't get nobody on the Lower Axe and the Lower Axe and Low, Upper Axe were separate Boards and it was Lower Brue and Upper Brue, and then in two thousand and twelve we had this automated and we all had to make one Drainage Board, Axe Brue.

**Right. For financial reasons, is that right?**

**SOM1** No, because, no, because the Environmental Agency thought we were too small and we didn't know what we were doing, more or less, you know what, it was much more, highfalutin, the words used but that's what it was and it, really it caused havoc because people thought we were losing local. Mind the District Council as well was on this because the District Council liked to see only one board for the whole of Somerset, if you knew, because they think we spend too much money, see because, erm, the Drainage Board finance is really complicated that we pay drainage rates but we also pay drainage rates in our ordinary rates.

**Right, yes. So as landowners you pay rates.**

**SOM1** Pay drainage rates.

**But as a, just a taxpayer.**

**SOM1** Payer, you also pay drainage rates.

**In your council tax.**

**SOM1** The first time I explained this to our Chief Executive, and we had a new Chief Executive, he had an emergency meeting for all the appointed members, only me and another farmer turned up, none of the councillors, they don't understand the finance of it at all, the councillors, because they're not involved in it. Erm, they didn't understand it at all and he said well you don't pay no rates, I said I beg your pardon, we got to pay it on every acre of land, we got, erm, below five metres above sea level. He said you don't. Oh yes, the other farmer said oh yes you do, and mine comes to more than your community charge, rates will cost me, you know, and then that put them back but you see Sedgemoor, we had a lady representing Sedgemoor that's been a portfolio holder for us who thought that taxpayers are paying too much money, I mean it's a million and a half Sedgemoor have to pay into the Parrett and Axe Brue a year. I mean it's all spent on money, we don't have, we don't get paid for doing our work or anything.

**No, no.**

**SOM1** You know what I mean, it's, they get good value for money I would say out of us. You know, but he, erm, they didn't, they don't like it so she's been up to the House of Commons and demanded that the House of Commons make one Drainage Board in Somerset because there's got to be a law from the House of Commons to alter it now, and the Environmental Agency is helping. And that's how we have got to where we are.

**Oh right, so it's all been amalgamated together.**

**SOM1** Yeah, Axe Brue is the two, the four Drainage Boards gone together and the Parrett I think was seventeen Drainage Boards put together but the Parrett was a bit different than the Axe Brue, erm. There was funds in a lot of the small ones in the Parrett and they took theirs, kept them in little pots for them when they wanted to do work in the area, if you know what I mean, whereas we pooled the lot at once because the buildings at Sedgemoor, at Bridge, Highbridge that we use as our offices belongs to the Brue. They paid for it in the first place.

**So the Brue and the Axe.**

**SOM1** Um.

**Basically they're above the Poledens[?] aren't they?**

**SOM1** Yes, yes.

**And Parrett's beneath the Poledens.**

**SOM1** Yeah, oh yes, that's right, that's right, that's right, yeah.

**Yeah. And so the Brue is, if we look back up our maps.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**We should be able to see the Brue on here shouldn't we?**

**SOM1** Yes, I know the Brue, yeah, yeah. The Brue comes just south of here, erm.

**Okay, is it a bit off the map then maybe?**

**SOM1** Yes, yes, yes, yes, this is, you've got to come down, farther down here. The Brue comes here and runs back to Glastonbury.

**Okay, and the Axe?**

**SOM1** And the Axe comes the other side of these little hills but part of this moor here drains into the Brue catchment via Panborough. My farm here, this part drains to the Axe and the next part drains to the Brue.

**Okay, so they both have an influence on the?**

**SOM1** This levels and moors, yeah. We find since they've had these here our water levels tend to be higher, it is causing a bit of trouble with us, we don't like to complain, a lot of us, because if we have a dry time we got grass but if we, if we have a wet time we're waterlogged. But the Brue.

**So if I can ask you though, just so I've got it clear about the Drainage Boards.**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah.

**The role of the Drainage Boards is basically to manage the drainage levels.**

**SOM1** Yeah, all the water levels in Somerset are controlled and the Drainage Boards, the Environmental Agency control the main rivers, which is the Brue and some of the Axe, not all of the Axe and the Parrett. Now they keep a summer height and a lower, and a, what do you call it, winter height, then they're, the summer one comes in about now. The, summer one comes in about the beginning of April and the winter one's the eleventh of November.

**Okay. And so the Drainage Board then helps to maintain the parts.**

**SOM1** The levels of water.

**On the smaller water courses, yeah.**

**SOM1** Courses, yeah. The farmers are responsible for all the small, we have what we call viewed reams, that's ones we've got to maintain but the farmers have to look after their own little reams if they're not viewed, not viewed reams and that's where the problems occur.

**Because looking after means both getting rid of vegetation.**

**SOM1** That's right.

**But also make, keeping a water level.**

**SOM1** Water level, yeah, that's right, you know what I mean?

**Yeah, yeah.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**Okay. And so you have to collectively then through the Drainage Board.**

**SOM1** Drainage Board.

**Agree.**

**SOM1** The water levels and we have water level management with all these conservation areas. You have a certain one for certain ones in Tilham and Tadham and certain ones, the farmers agree to and they get paid for doing it, if you know what I mean. And then on these wildlife trust places, the route, all the water levels are controlled by floating weirs, you know what I mean?

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** We tried to get them now all electronically done, you know, with computers, so if the water gets too high it drops it automatically or raises it up if it wants it.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM1** It's all becoming very controlled, that.

**Yeah, very digital.**

**SOM1** Yeah, so, yeah, that's what's happening at the moment but I can't tell you exactly where all the weirs are because I haven't got my maps here but I do know this one, the farmer I was with, REMOVED farms the field just down here.

**Would you mark it for me so that I know?**

**SOM1** REMOVED’s here. These people here are beef farmers, they there, they're beef farmers.

**Do you mind marking that for me just so that I? Because I won't remember at the time.**

**SOM1** They're beef there.

**So they're right next to Westhay Moor then?**

**SOM1** Yes, because you come round here and here's Westhay Moor. Erm, there's another big new house being built there, I don't know what farming, I think that must be beef because I don't, never seen those. Now the people here at REMOVED there, they've got two hundred and fifty, three hundred dairy cows there, they're dairy farmers they are. Because he didn't turn up today, normally is there. This one there, REMOVED Farm, they used to have peat works, these up there, mindst you, there's a dairy farm there and a dairy farm there, a small dairy farm up on here, a fairly big dairy farm just over there. It's mostly dairy, it's only this one, real beef one, if you know what I mean, most of them up on here are dairy farm.

**Because the land is better for livestock then it is for any arable?**

**SOM1** But if you don't have, if you don't have livestock, you won't get no insects. That's because of cow muck breeds all the insects that brings the birds.

**Oh I see.**

**SOM1** This is what you, no harm, you vegetarian people don't understand, if you don't have livestock somewhere or other you'll soon run of food.

**Okay, because?**

**SOM1** Isn't it REMOVED?

Um.

**Right. So let me get the link right, okay. So the livestock.**

**SOM1** Graze the grass.

**Graze the grass, they drop the manure.**

**SOM1** Ah hum.

**That brings the insects.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**That brings the birds.**

**SOM1** You get all sorts of bugs in it, they're, I don't think we'd have got the Country Life here, there's been a big article about it in the Country Life.

Could be, I'll have a look and see.

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** It's, erm, it's vital, vital for nature in lots of ways. Sheep don't do the same and the sheep, this would be too wet for sheep on the whole, you get a few odd ones around but for general big proper sheep it would be no good.

**Okay, okay.**

**SOM1** You know, but I mean this here was all dug out peat works.

**Yes, so this.**

**SOM1** It's a good use of that, let's face it, it's a really good use.

**So all of these, all, you're saying, so both Westhay Moor and Shapwick Heath.**

**SOM1** Um.

**Both have got peat extraction.**

**SOM1** Yeah, erm, Westhay Moor, yes, yes, that's right.

**And that's what shaped, what shaped the reserves.**

**SOM1** Yes, yeah.

**So there wouldn't be the reserves if there hadn't been the peat extraction in the first place.**

**SOM1** No, no, because, erm, when my dad was around and before the War and that, what happened was people farmed on the hill here, they put the cows down on the moor for the summer, brought them back and they didn't worry about the moors being flooded but the likes of people here that bought this land for next door to nothing now, soon as it becomes flooded in the winter they create hell because they don't realise what the natural way of doing it.

**Yeah, yeah, because it's just basically all sodden over the winter isn't it?**

**SOM1** Yeah, that's what it's for, it's like I said today at the Drainage Board because I, I queried why they were turning down the fifty, were objecting to the fifty five houses in REMOVED.

**Ah.**

**SOM1** And they said well, it's the soakaways we need and that for the surface water. I said I'm sorry, you, you maintain the river, I said it's a viewed ream right to the boundary, the other side of the road where they're building to the boundary. So I can't see what you're doing, I said because any farmer that knows what goes on, knows that this moor is a flood relief, in time of flood that's where the water should go.

**Yeah, so basically you're saying that the soakaways from the new housing would just go into the ream anyway?**

**SOM1** Yeah, may as well pipe it straight there in the first place.

**Yeah, so it's not extra water in a way.**

**SOM1** Way, no.

**Because you're managing it anyway.**

**SOM1** The only difference to this extra water is, if there wasn't concrete or tarmac there it would go into the soil, you know, and that's how I.

**Yes, yeah. So as long as they do it sensitively.**

**SOM1** Yeah, that's right.

**Do it with SUDS.**

**SOM1** Because I haven't got the plans here but they got the SUDS and they got a great big pond like here, or they will make a pond but not with water in, it's just to take the surface water in an emergency.

**Yeah, so they've got some sort of retention pond anyway, yeah.**

**SOM1** Yeah, you see and I said I can't see what the thing is, I said because they're having car parking here and then the houses are like coming up round here, I said and so far as I'm concerned REMOVED can only develop that way because I've seen REMOVED walls washed down in my lifetime with flood water when they built those new estates up at the top end of REMOVED. I said and that, and if you build any further that way you're going to flood out Blackford again.

**So you have to think about where the water falls on the land don't you?**

**SOM1** Yeah, you've got to say which way it drains, um.

**Yeah. So just thinking back to the IDB, how many people are now on each IDB now you've got these kind of big superstructures?**

**SOM1** We've got on, erm, Parrett one, it's twenty seven appointed members and twenty six farmer members, or local people that are elected on, from local people that put their names forward, and on the Axe Brue it's two more, so it's one extra of each.

**Okay. So it's twenty seven members, twenty six farmer members and then two extra members?**

**SOM1** Erm, no, that, at the moment on the Parrett, on the Axe Brue Board, it is forty nine members altogether, that's, erm, twenty, I got to get it right. We got one more appointed member, one of the councillors and you have.

**On the Parrett?**

**SOM1** No, then you have elected members, you know like the farmers and that.

**Oh I see, okay.**

**SOM1** This is the money that the District Council put in is most of the money we spend, so they have to have a majority.

**Yes, got you.**

**SOM1** The proposed one is only twenty five members have in it, and that'll be thirteen appointed members and.

**Yeah, twelve farmers.**

**SOM1** Twelve farmers, local people.

**Yeah, okay, but this is proposed but this isn't happened yet for the IDBS?**

**SOM1** No, they've got to go through the House of Commons but it will happen.

**Yeah, okay, so then would you say out of these forty nine members you are the only female member?**

**SOM1** No, not, I was at one time, I'm not now, there's appointed members, I don't think there's, yes, there's one on the Axe Brue elected lady, that's the only one, and the rest are all men. On the District Council's appointed one there, I think there's about seven of us or eight of us, so there are more females on the.

**Yeah, but not on the REMOVED?**

**SOM1** No, no.

**No, because of what you were saying before?**

**SOM1** No, yes, but you see there aren't the lady farmers, I was the first round here wasn't it REMOVED?

Yeah.

And that's nearly forty, no, forty six years ago.

**But then you would think that most farms are generally run by a family aren't they?**

**SOM1** They are, round here they are family farms.

**So why wouldn't it be that?**

**SOM1** It's not big estates, we don't have big estates round here.

**No, so there's no reason why, even if it's not half and half, it wouldn't be say a third.**

**SOM1** Um, um, that's right.

**Female farmers maybe, you know.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**It's not unreasonable is it?**

**SOM1** No.

**Now in terms of, because I'm interested in the structure because obviously the IDBs have a big influence really on.**

**SOM1** The water.

**What happens to the water.**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah.

**You know, and that's a big part of what happens on the wetlands because.**

**SOM1** Yeah, that's right.

**Without the water you're not going to have a wetland so.**

**SOM1** No, well that's right.

**In terms of say age and in terms of say, you know, not so much class but, you know, what kind of, what?**

**SOM1** Age groups.

**Yeah, you know, what age groups and?**

**SOM1** I would say there was, the Parrett one's got a lot of younger ones.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM1** I wouldn't say a big amount but what we used to have, what they, what was the term? What you see, they call overseers, that's the ones that keep an eye for us farmers, that keep an eye on things, a lot of them are younger and they come on, they are more or less elected on as members, you know, where they're local people, they know they know the work and they put them on, but in this area I don't know. The appointed, there's several appointed members that are younger, oh no young, about forty, you know what I mean? We haven't got, but most of them are well over sixty.

**So the majority are sixty plus.**

**SOM1** Plus, yeah, I mean a lot of them are retired farmers who really want to still keep an interest and their knowledge is invaluable.

**Well this is often it isn't it? It's that they have got a lifetime's worth of experience haven't they?**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah, because I told the, erm, leader at Sedgemoor Council one, the Chief Executive one night when I see them, I said when we restructure I said please take me off. They said no, it's your knowledge we want REMOVED. I said no, I'm not doing it. I said I've done it now twenty seven or twenty eight years, [laughs] and I feel I've done enough.

**Yeah, and then presumably there'll be others who will have.**

**SOM1** We got them, the local councillor here, I suppose she's about forty, now on the District Council, she's on it, but she told the Chairman it's a waste of time, we don't do nothing but she don't realise it's the water levels we got to control. They don't realise it.

**Yeah. The thing is when it all works fine it's almost as if it's invisible.**

**SOM1** Invisible, yeah.

**When it goes wrong you realise what these organisations really do.**

**SOM1** Well they had the floods in the Parrett, now I tell you about that. I go, we go, we bank at Cheddar and we do a lot of business in Cheddar if we go. Well in the morning I went up to Cheddar and Cheddar Yeo and the canal as we call it and the River Axe here that goes through at Clover, were all down winter level and this was the end of November, it was before it should have gone down but they had promised a lot of rain, so the Environmental Agency and the pressure from the lower and upper Axe at that time, had lowered it to the winter level, we go down to the Brue, that's gone almost down to its winter level, they'd obviously lowered the levels, there were lots of it I went down over the Poledons, and they're all the rivers bank to bank, so after the meeting, he said is there any other business? Yes, Mr Chairman, I said I don't very often interfere, I sit here and write notes and tell the Leader of the Council what I think they're doing and what they should be doing, I said but, erm, I can't understand how your water levels are down there. They said shut up REMOVED, we need it for cattle fence, well within five days they were flooded out.

**[laughs]**

**SOM1** They haven't said that to me since.

**No, I bet they haven't.**

**SOM1** You see because if that'd been down an, eighteen inches and that's what it drops, the soil would have been dried out and absorbed a lot of that, you know, and they just didn't, they.

**No. You would have thought though, given all the issues they've had around flooding.**

**SOM1** Um.

**That they would have sorted that out.**

**SOM1** Yeah. You see and then I know, one of our friends has got, a niece works in the Netherlands, when they brought those pumps over, those pumps were loaded to come over in the middle of December and the Parrett Board and them wouldn't have them until it was too late.

**Oh.**

**SOM1** You know what I mean?

**So, yeah, because I mean I, it's like you've got an interesting relationship with these wetlands haven't you in that you are the ones who are engineering what the levels are like?**

**SOM1** Engineering, this house was built like for the engineer that drained the moors.

**Oh really? Okay.**

**SOM1** REMOVED this house was built.

**Wow.**

**SOM1** This old part, and it was to protect the manor of REMOVED from the thieves of Cheddar because they used to come over the bogs.

**Ooh.**

**SOM1** To, this is all in my deeds, my old deeds that they wanted to destroy.

**Oh how wonderful.**

**SOM1** Erm, when we did this alteration because this was two rooms and a hall through, that's a Dutch style because it was built on Dutch styles and, erm, on the beam is REMOVED.

**Gosh. It's got some tales to tell hasn't it?**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**That's old**

**SOM1** And, erm, that was when they were dredging because the Dutch dredged, designed and dredged all this because of their knowledge of water.

**Yeah, it's like the Fens isn't it? Yeah.**

**SOM1** Yeah, um, but that's how it was and, erm, unless you know all this you don't understand and appreciate it. I mean I was on the District Council for twenty years, that was from eighty seven I was on the District Council and I found Environmental Health, I liked Housing, I was on Housing but I couldn't get them, took me two years to get round how Housing was financed and how you did things but I loved Environmental Health because I was a farmer and understood most of it and then when I was, this water levels and all that, I knew all about that.

**Yeah, no, so it's a natural thing.**

**SOM1** Thing, it is, it's natural, if you do away, like they're going to propose with this new reorganisation, it's very worrying, this Cheddar valley here will have only just three ordinary farmers on it, that, they can't cover that.

**No, because there's too much work to be done.**

Done, yeah, too much to be kept on. I mean I keep, I keep an eye on it because we drive to Cheddar one way and come back another, so you know what, hits and means, you know what the levels are.

**Keep an eye on it, yeah.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**And I can see from where you are.**

**SOM1** Oh yeah.

**In the house, you can really keep an eye on what's happening on the levels can't you?**

**SOM1** Yes, you know, yeah, I mean from out the front here and our bedrooms you can see right the way to Wells.

**Gosh, it's a long way isn't it? I mean I hadn't appreciated it until being here.**

**SOM1** Yeah, now.

**Just how far you can see, yeah.**

**SOM1** See, yeah, you can see, before they put the buildings up, the new one, you could see right the way from Glastonbury Tor there to Axebridge Reservoir here, right the way round.

**Would you say, out of the people that are in the Drainage Board?**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**For here.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**That most people have the same opinion in terms of what the right level of water should be at particular times of the year?**

**SOM1** Yes, but I mean the one thing with water, my dad always told me not to get involved in it but I haven't had the trouble that he had because you can never get it right for everybody all the time, you know, we have, we don't have too much trouble, I haven't had too much trouble about it, maybe because they know I'm a farmer and I would simply have the answer for them, you know. I mean it, I don't think this part of the world is suitable for corn, well I know it's not and maize shouldn't be grown on it.

**I remember you said that at the focus group.**

**SOM1** Yeah, no, no maize should be grown. It's grassed land, whether you have it permanent or layers I don't think it makes much difference because it grows almost all the year round.

**Yeah. So would you say because obviously what we're trying to get from the project is a real sense of place with these particular wetlands, as in Westhay Moor, Shapwick Heath?**

**SOM1** I think there is a place for them, wonderful place for them, as long as people appreciate that the country's got to be fed, I don't mind how you feed them but we've got to be able to grow crops to produce something or other to feed the country because that is the one thing, and most of us farmers, you, you live as if you'll die tomorrow but you farm as if you'll live forever, that's the old saying.

**Um, I like it.**

**SOM1** And you do, you do. I mean it's like me and REMOVED next door that does my farming for me, he, I don't think he likes the idea of me selling up the stock but he can't afford to buy them, if you know what I mean, and so, and he got one or or two relief jobs he can do, so he'll be alright for work he said but it's my life's work, I've bred these herd of guys since nineteen REMOVED.

**Gosh, yeah, the same family of cows?**

**SOM1** Yes, you know, and he's afraid I'm going to have a serious nervous breakdown for this and I said no.

**Yeah, by saying goodbye to them, yeah.**

**SOM1** Yeah, um.

**Yeah, but it comes I guess in everyone's life doesn't it when you've got to make a change, yeah?**

**SOM1** You've got to move on, my son couldn't afford to run this house and, you know, and my daughter doesn't want it, she's a high flyer, she probably makes your salary look poor, [laughs] she's sat here.

**That wouldn't be hard, put it that way.**

**SOM1** I think she's on six figures plus. [laughs]

**Impressive.**

**SOM1** You know, well she went to REMOVED University, came out with First Class Honours in REMOVED and where it's got her is unbelievable.

[daughter/family discussion – not transcribed]

Yeah, but that's how I, I mean we got, people have to realise it's private property a lot of it because there's no real big estates. Most of the rented land round here is owned by women.

**Oh. Really?**

**SOM1** That's honest, without a word of a lie, most of the land around here isn't farmed by the people that are farming it, it's owned by women.

**There's a matriarchal geography round here.**

**SOM1** Oh there is, I know because we got what we call the Preserving Club here, it was formed in nineteen forty seven because everybody was poaching everything, you know, for food, and the farmers got together and formed this Preserving Club, everybody laughs about it because they think it's doing with jam and that but it isn't, it's to preserve the wildlife.

**Ah.**

**SOM1** They, they shoot the vermin because they're up in arms about badgers because they think they're doing more damage than enough but the, people are pro-badgers are no, they are killing all the birds, whether you like it or no, they eat birds eggs off the ground.

**Oh I see.**

**SOM1** And they'll get right up on their hind legs to rob a nest, I've seen them do it, you see, it's not just us farmers.

**Okay, they love their, no.**

**SOM1** And I mean they'll killing all the hedgehogs because they'll eat hedgehogs.

**Didn't know that.**

**SOM1** You know what I mean?

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** And this is why we farmers are up in arms. We've had them along here all our life and touch wood we've just had another clear test, we've got no TB, we don't want them to disturb them because if they get disturbed, we'll have unhealthy ones probably come back in.

**Ah, okay.**

**SOM1** You know, we're not, we're not anti-badgers, we're probably more anti, er, deer and that because.

**Okay, because they eat the young crops and trees and.**

**SOM1** Yeah, and not only that, they carry TB as well.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM1** And they also carry Johne's Disease which is a thing us dairy farmers are being forced to try to get rid off. Well I've bred my herd since nineteen fifty eight, we've never had Johne's Disease here and yet we got three so-called positive heffers, now we don't know where that's come from.

**Okay, right, so the Preserving Club then is a group of people, farmers?**

**SOM1** No, all farmers, anybody that owns land can join, they have a supper every year, and when it was started the farmer, my dad used to give half a pig, which they, because we were allowed to kill so many a year because we had pigs from, Mum was a big of a cheese maker and we had the dairy cows. Now we had a real mixed farm in those days, poultry everything, not allowed to have that now, you mustn't have poultry with cows and all this sort of thing and one used to kill a lamb and one used to have part of a heifer, you know, kill a heifer and they'd share it between four, four of them and they'd each give a joint of beef, that's how it started off. We used to give half a pig and my dad used to always get all the lettuce stuff because he was a bit of a gardener and he always had his my garden's a disgrace to what his was, [laughs] you know, and they used to give the lettuce and all that and it used to be a drunken stupor, it really would, there'd be about three hundred and some odd in there and they'd be drunk as. [laughs]

**Drunk as fools.**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah.

**So and they'd meet up the once, just to kind?**

**SOM1** No, they, and they'd have shoots all through the winter, organised shoots, certain areas and that and then they'd have the hunt down here, the beagles, not the hounds, not the big ones with the horses, the beagles twice a year, just for the fun of it and then they used to have a bit of coursing down here because we used to have a lot of hares, I think there are more hares about now than there were.

**And what do, are hares problematic in that they?**

**SOM1** They eat young, young crops, if you have wheat and that they can do a lot of damage, like deer can, I mean deer don't do too much grass, damage to grassland, that's why I say this area really is grass, it is natural thing, clover and grass.

**Yeah. So when we were talking before about the food security.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**Are you saying in some ways that the, that Shapwick Heath and Westhay Moor and the levels generally, they keep the water into them, release it over the year.**

**SOM1** Yes, yeah, they.

**And so then that …**

**SOM1** That's right, that keeps it all …

**Irrigates all the farmland.**

**SOM1** Yes, I mean at certain times when we get floods, it'll be higher and they can hold it back a bit, if you know what I mean, they can hold it at a higher level then release it slowly because I, I have very little confidence in all this about trees on hill lands.

**Okay, oh right.**

**SOM1** Because trees, yes, that beech tree out there I was told and I think it's true because in sixty seven, no seventy six when we had that dry summer, I had to put three hundred gallons of water round him every, to keep him going.

**Gosh.**

**SOM1** That's how much they take up, so I do know, I had to have the hose on all the time to keep him alive because that, that was the last thing I wanted to die. I lost all the orchards here because we used to have huge orchards, apple orchards.

**Ah, because of the drought?**

**SOM1** Drought, yeah.

**Oh gosh, okay.**

**SOM1** You see it's, erm, it's different soils, we got nice soils up here and it's heavy clay, we haven't got no peat down here, peat starts a bit farther more to REMOVED and then round the corner, and there's some peat out in, erm, oh what's the name of the moor out there? Out, Monk Moor, there's some peat out through there and that's Break Up Moor, Monk Moor and that, that back a little way towards Well because we think the peat was probably dug out down here when they were, olden days when they wanted fire stuff they dug the peat out and like they used to, down here because you'd got a bit of a drop into one of our fields, over all these years and we've been here nearly a hundred years and we've never used peat.

**Yeah, so it must have been from whoever was here back in the sixteen hundreds, yeah.**

**SOM1** Here before, yeah, yeah, you know what I mean?

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** Because there used to be lots of woods here, we know that, yeah.

**Yeah. So keeping these wetlands as they are is really important as far as the IDB is concerned.**

**SOM1** This is true, everybody's concerned, it's for the general environment of everybody to enjoy, as, people must, but they mustn't leave litters around, that's what, even our little oldest nephew, see his does his ton up at Cheddar Gorge and he goes mad if there's litters around. And we've never been like it.

**Do you think people come from Cheddar and they come to the levels or do people go to Cheddar and stay in Cheddar? Because actually it's not that far away and it's.**

**SOM1** No, no, use, there's a lot of people use it for cycling, that's the big industry, I mean you look weekends we have hundreds by here cycling.

**Do you really?**

**SOM1** Oh you, oh, I mean a lot of people get so annoyed because they slow them down but it is, we, Somerset tourist, people told it as, for cycling, and it has taken off, since the Olympics.

**Because it's relatively flat really, you can.**

**SOM1** Yeah, and it's wonderful.

**You start in the flat of the valley, yeah.**

**SOM1** It's wonderful for them to get out and get air into their lungs, you know what I mean?

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** I, I don't think it's probably sold well enough in the tourist areas, you know, like there's Brean and Berrow where there's, what is it, nearly half a million a week changed hands down there on that tourist area? Yeah, in those holiday camps and that, you go down there in the summer and it's caravans for about four miles and I.

**Right, where is that, where?**

**SOM1** Brean and Berrow, that's areas where they can be sold. I mean Cheddar, Wells, Wells is another tourist attraction.

**Yeah, well it's Wells and Glastonbury.**

**SOM1** Glastonbury.

**Always linked together really, yeah.**

**SOM1** Yes, that's right, you know what I mean?

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** Now I don't think it's sold enough there.

**But would you say?**

**SOM1** But it is a rare. Some of the wildlife out here is really rare, I mean I'm not into insects and all that but on our, honestly out here the other day, I seen a white butterfly with orange tips and I've never seen it before. I haven't looked it up to see what it is, and they've seen the partridge on the lawn and that was, REMOVED had to look that up because they hadn't told me what it was.

**Lovely, so it's amazing isn't it? You can be here for all of your life and actually see new things every year.**

**SOM1** Yeah, I said if I'd have seen it'd have said well that's a partridge, I know it.

**Yeah, I wouldn't know what a partridge looks like.**

**SOM1** It's tiny, it's a bit smaller than a pheasant but it's a rounder sort of thing, it hasn't got long tail and that, it, it's very nice to eat I must tell you.

**I didn't know you could eat them.**

**SOM1** Yeah, and I'll tell you something else that's lovely, shouldn't tell a conservation that.

[food discussion – not transcribed]

You see and we get a lot of Snipe but they tend to come here now rather than Mose Moors.

**So I wonder why that would be then, just because it's?**

**SOM1** Because I think the water levels here are just that much higher because they can't get out that end so well.

**Yeah, got you, yeah.**

**SOM1** And they come here and I mean I've never had one but they all say it's beautiful, Snipe is.

**But thinking back then to sort of getting people to use the wetlands, the IDBs, the Drainage Boards.**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah.

**How much time do you spend interacting with say the Wildlife Trust or Natural England?**

**SOM1** I, I don't have much trouble at all. Oh yes, we have a representative on the Drainage Board.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM1** Erm, oh what's his name? He's a very nice chap, he's, because I ask him if he was involved in it you see. He said I don't know nothing about this.

**Oh.**

**SOM1** Oh REMOVED.

**REMOVED?**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**That's not a name I've heard of and so he's, because we've been.**

**SOM1** He controls all our conservation areas and water levels. He, he works out of REMOVED office.

**Right. Where's REMOVED then?**

**SOM1** Down near Burnham.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM1** REMOVED it is, because last, I tell you what we had last year, erm, we don't get plagued with too many docks but we got a field out there that we're doing a lot of spraying off this year and, erm, we had docks out there, got sick of stinging nettles and docks, and REMOVED went out there one day and came back and brought me back this dock leaf and there was little black, erm, like caterpillars on it, so I took it to REMOVED and asked what it was and he said REMOVED some farmers would give you the earth for that and they eat all the docks.

**Ah.**

**SOM1** These caterpillars do, and we haven't got a dock out there this year.

**But are the docks problematic?**

**SOM1** Yeah, they, they are, if you let them seed they'll cover a ground in two years.

**I see, okay.**

**SOM1** You know what I mean?

**Yeah, and they're a pain to.**

**SOM1** And if the cows, if you make, if it goes to seed in the silage and the cows eat it that makes, brings docks with the muck. The same with clover, if you let clover go to seed before you cut it, the cows can't digest that tiny seed and we did it one year when I had an accident and we didn't harvest until beginning of July, the silage, and it was all seeds, you know, next year my farm was covered with white clover and so I can't make, they said the cows can't digest it.

**No, so it impacts on the milk then?**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah, oh yeah. I mean clover makes the grass grow better but it's.

**Well it's well known for it's green manure quality isn't it?**

**SOM1** Yes, oh yes, oh it's wonderful, don't. I mean we haven't used artificial in this year for the first time for about five years isn't it REMOVED?

Yes, yeah.

Five years and we said this year we were going to use it this year because we didn't have any ideas what we were going to do and so we said we'd use it this year and you can see a difference mind but I don't know whether it'll last too long, you know, and I mean we've got cowslips up in our top field, now they almost died out because of silage making. These sort of things we don't realise when we do it, but this year.

**The long term impacts isn't it?**

**SOM1** Yes, you know, and this year, REMOVED says there's a lot more cowslips up there REMOVED and because it's a late year they won't be, they will have dropped their seed more or less before we cut it, or the seed pods will be almost ripe and they'll drop out probably, the little seeds, you know, it is a very, it's, ecologically it's a balancing act.

**Yeah. So just so I, so I'm just kind of capture what the, how much, the IDBs, you said they have a rep with what Natural England or Somerset Wildlife Trust?**

**SOM1** I think it's Natural England, I'm not sure.

**Oh okay, yeah.**

**SOM1** I don't think it's Somerset. We have the owl man come sometimes.

**Oh yes, yes.**

**SOM1** The owl man comes, erm. There is people, they, we have to invite them but they don't always come, they only come when they think they've got a problem and they want us to sort out with them.

**Right, so that's interesting. So would you say then that most of the time, you obviously have an interaction with the Environment Agency because of regulatory, statutory thing.**

**SOM1** Oh we got to have, they, you've got to with them, you have no choice with them but they really control how big we are, it's Environmental Agency and Sedgemoor that are cause, causing this, making us smaller.

**Yeah, so it's the District Council.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**Sedgemoor District Council and.**

**SOM1** And, oh all the District Councils in Somerset got land in these areas, that's Mendip, not West Sussex, yes we do, West Somerset because we got to go down to Dunston, all five of the District Councils are involved and the Somerset County Council send one and when this new river set, erm, Somerset River Authority was set up, which is going to literally replace the Environmental Agency in lots of ways, erm, there's, Somerset County Council I think have three, Environmental, there's only ten on it, the Environmental Agency have two, conservation have one, I don't know which brand, they let them on themselves if they go and Parrett has two and the Axe Brue has two, which means us Drainage Boards have no say unless it's something that involves nature that they want done, other than that the Councils run it.

**Okay. So would you say then that you feel frustrated sometimes with the Drainage Board because you can't exercise things the way you'd like to?**

**SOM1** No, I don't think we very often get frustrated, we did get, we do get frustrated that they don't, they haven't dredged the main reams, that's what's caused the trouble. I mean when I went down in eighty seven they were drain, dredging the Parrett at least every other year, one bank or the other, it stopped in about eighty nine or ninety and after that mayor, Councillor REMOVED had to go and see them to ask them to keep it up because we could see it was silting up and then they had to spend all this and it's going to cost another five million this year if they can get the money, then they're going to do something on the Brue, well we've been telling them on the Brue, the Axe is quite free flowing other than we have problems at Bleadon[?] with the sluice at Bleadon, that, that's another thing, that belongs to Bristol Water the sluice, the land belongs to the Environmental Agency and nobody wants to mend the sluice and it's been broken for ten years and the water levels in some of these ditches back this way aren't, can't be got up high enough, is, and it's causing awful troubles at Brean because we control the water level at Brean and the Environmental Agency's sluice is there and that's wearing out because these ten years, that's been used more than it's intended to be used.

**Because the other one's broken.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**So it sounds like then that knowledge doesn't always get shared across the different organisations then.**

**SOM1** No, it doesn't, it doesn't. The Environmental Agency, as long as that box there, that computer says it, that's right, we on the ground don't know nothing. That's how it feels to the ordinary member.

**Okay. It feels very top down and it's all telling you what to do rather than listening to what you as a group have to say?**

**SOM1** Yes, got to say, yeah, we have to fight hard if we want things done, that's why we're glad because we have to pay, out of our money we, we can, have from REMOVED and the landowners, we have to pay the Environmental Agency I think it's fifty thousand a year, we have to give them that grant and we don't feel we get it.

**Yeah. You're not sure what they do for that money.**

**SOM1** Do for it, no.

**Yeah, yeah, but that's money for the main waterways presumably, yeah.**

**SOM1** Yeah, that's right, that's for the main, they control the Parrett, erm, the Brue and the Axe, and Huntspill Ream but that was built for another purpose, that was built fort the Ordinance Survey, Ordinance Depot that built, made the armaments for the War, that was built for, they, but, erm, all, the, three of those are controlled by sluices, that's the Axe, the Brue and Kings Sedgemoor, not, yes Kings Sedgemoor ream is as well and the Huntspill River is controlled by, but the Parrett isn't and that's what they're fighting for in Bridgewater is to have a sluice but you see the Environmental Agency tell them in the Parrett that the sand that comes in with the tide and that goes right back almost to Langport, goes out with the tide, well they've now proved with the testing they're doing that it doesn't and that's what built up all this silt.

**Yeah, so it's coming from the estuary.**

**SOM1** Estuary, yeah, up in, because they want, they're hoping to get the money and it's a colossal amount of money mind to build a sluice down by Dumbmoor, I mean the Port Authority down at Dumbmoor don't like it because they think it will get silted up, you know, there's when the tides come in and that.

**Yeah, you can that, that was going to happen isn't it? Yeah.**

**SOM1** You can see it all the way round, but you can't have Yeovil and Langport or Western Sloydon[?] or Bridgewater being flooded out because a lack of a sluice.

**No, it's just about investment then really isn't it?**

**SOM1** Yes, yes, it is.

**But in terms of how all of those issues impact on Westhay Moor and Shapwick Heath.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**What would you say are the main issues to do with those wetlands?**

**SOM1** Erm, it's the Brue, it is the Brue, I mean they, I think they're talking of spending three million pounds on it, next winter, or that's what they're hoping to spend.

**Right, to control the amount of water that goes into that.**

**SOM1** Goes out.

**Goes out.**

**SOM1** Out, because it doesn't go out quick enough, look, we had those floods, how long ago was that REMOVED?

Which ones?

The ones where, this year, when we went down, when the Brue was just going over at Westhay.

Ooh.

Beginning of April? End of March, beginning of April?

Yes.

When we had the last lot of really heavy rain, we had two lots within about three days and it can't go out, the Brue has got an island in it where it's silted up and all that got to be removed. All the Environmental Agency do is go up on a little dredge, barge thing and just back bits that are overgrowing, they don't take out what's in the middle.

**Right, so the problem is all the water goes into Westhay Moor.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**And Shapwick Heath.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**And then it can't do what it would do naturally which is to drain out into the river.**

**SOM1** No, ah no, because we got the pumping stations at Cove Corner which is down near Huntspill and we got the one at, erm.

**Is it on the map at all? It's.**

**SOM1** Not on this map, you haven't got this one here at all, because the Brue is here, now this ream that comes through, now I got to get the right one, comes, there's Bleadney, there's Bowerhill, it comes in through there, the one that Brue starts up in through here, it starts right at the bottom here, and it comes through the, between Bowerhill and Bleadney and Panborough there, and then it runs along here look, all the way down through here, yes, REMOVED, that's right, it comes down here, through there and out through here and then they got a pumping station at the end of there that pumps it into the Brue, you know what I mean?

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** But because we're a bit higher up here our water goes first, they put that pumping on, you can see it drop here before it gets down here, this is very, yeah, there's the North Drain, that's the one I'm talking about here.

**Because this is at the lowest level round here isn't it?**

**SOM1** Yes, that's right, through here is the lowest level. And this field down here of ours is lower than them.

**Ah.**

**SOM1** But it goes, drains towards the Axe which drains much quicker.

**Right, because it's free flowing.**

**SOM1** Flowing, yeah.

**Got you, okay.**

**SOM1** Yeah, and that's right, there, yeah, North Drain takes it, look, it comes through here, you can see, there's not, there's Bowerhill, look it comes out through there and then look, if you see what I mean.

**Okay, so do the IDB members ever walk around the levels to check?**

**SOM1** Yes, we have tours.

**Yes, you do, okay.**

**SOM1** We have tours, so everybody, especially when you get a new board set up every four years, we have tours, we organise tours, we go and it's all on our own expense mind, we don't, they don't pay or they might pay for the coach but that's all, but it's for the officers as well and we're training two new engineers because we can't get engineers, they're doing apprenticeship with us and they organised the one last year and we found they did it very well for us.

**Ah.**

**SOM1** Because the Brue starts look, right out at Frome, right past that way and we've been literally up to the end.

**Right, gosh.**

**SOM1** And then we've done, over the years I've done most of the Parrett, haven't I REMOVED?

Yes.

With them.

**So you know where to.**

**SOM1** They are, yeah, um.

**Okay, so that's good, so you can walk around. So I mean would you say from, how would you, the IDB members classify wetlands, would they define them as these, as areas that?**

**SOM1** They would consider it, all this to be a wetland, you know what I mean?

**Yeah, so all …**

**SOM1** We do, we consider this moor here to be a wetland but we don't, I don't think people like to be told what they should do on it, I think most farmers are conservative, conservationists at heart because we know if we, if we abuse it one way it'll backfire.

**Okay. So it's all got to be in a formal balanced way.**

**SOM1** Yeah, everything"s got to be balanced and I think the Drainage Board people, especially the engineers and REMOVED and them, understand that's how farmers work. I mean he's got all these higher water levels and that done because he went and spoke to the farmers and got them all together and agreed things, I mean they had a meeting once for all of this area to, with REMOVED and that, tried to get and there was absolute bedlam in REMOVED village hall. If he'd have had them like this part and then that part and then that part, he'd have got on much better.

**Right, because it's, but is it possible though to kind of disconnect them because I know we're talking about?**

**SOM1** Oh you can yes, with these tilting wheels and that you can control any field, if the farmers prefer to do it in his own local ditch, you know what I mean?

**Yeah, okay.**

**SOM1** What's happened at Tilham and Tadham, I don't know whether you've been out there when there's been flooding but you can, I mean the public don't like what's happening in Tilham and Tadham, the public perceive that area to be green grass and that, you know what I mean, and they love to see the swans and all the wild ducks and all that that come in, all the water fowl that come in there in the winter for winter feeding and that, they love it but they don't want to see rushes everywhere and that's what's happened, the farmers are not farming it, they're taking their extra money but they're not looking after the rushes because when we had a tour two years ago where the Axe Brue was through there because the Brue people didn't understand, we didn't understand what was happening in the Brue and they didn't understand what was happening in the Axe, so we've had two or three trips to get it all sorted out and the people from the Axe were fuming to see all those rushes.

**Right, because they want to see it as a more farmed environment?**

**SOM1**Environment because they think we get more through farming it properly then letting it go wild because if you look up on the Mendips look, these areas, it's all briars now, briars or bracken, you aren't getting the wildlife you used to have.

**No, and so you want the wildlife.**

**SOM1** You've got to have the wildlife to bring the people there.

**Yeah, got you, okay.**

**SOM1** Because my brother-in-law's a shooter and he used to go out there to shoot the ducks with a gang of the Preserving Club, used to go out there and last year there were no, no ducks coming hardly at all.

**Because they're all hiding in the reeds?**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah, he'd never seen any, hardly any come in.

**But would you say that's also, because I know in some farmers that organised shoots and things that that is quite an important way of raising money.**

**SOM1** Oh it is, yeah.

**Is that true for round here as well?**

**SOM1** We only, we got money here, my neighbour, that's how we got the pheasants but it's only a little shoot, it's not a big one. I don't think, I've got mixed views about it really, I really have, I think that, erm, it's alright to introduce these pheasants to shoot but you've got to be able to shoot them all, not leave them to come because I mean the fox must have a haven round here.

**And then you think that might encourage more vermin then?**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**If you've got more.**

**SOM1** Yeah, you've got more vermin come and then that, they will get rid of a lot of the wildlife that we're being blamed for destroying. You can see how it all works.

**Yeah, it's all connected together isn't it?**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**That is the thing, yeah.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**So.**

**SOM1** I mean I was surprised the Parish Council wanted me to do this because they know my views and that, yeah, I thought, because REMOVED was the one you contacted first.

**That's right, yes, yes.**

**SOM1** And she said I don't know anything about it, she came to the Parish Council said, somebody said let REMOVED do it, she knows all about it.

**Oh fabulous, yeah.**

**SOM1** Um, yeah.

**So I mean from your point of view.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**So the wetlands are there, I'm paraphrasing what you said but the wetlands are there basically for nature aren't they?**

**SOM1** Yes, that's what they're there for.

**So do you think it's also a really positive thing that people come and use the reserve for tourism, for walking, for birdwatching?**

**SOM1** Yes, I do, I do think that, but you see what I think with all this dug out peat, I know it's a wetland and all the rest of it but I think if we had a water shortage, which pray God we don't ever get in this world, the water, we should let all those people, dug-outs fill up and we'd have a reservoir of water, I know it would be probably black and it would have to be filtered out but it's possible, anything's possible today with scientific things.

**Yeah. So it's got potential then for being a water storage if we go through a period of drought?**

**SOM1** Period of severe drought. You see I mean it's like the River Axe, Bristol Waterworks aren't going to be allowed to build that new reservoir, well sooner or later they're going to need it but they're taking, I forget how many cubit million, I think it's two and a half or three million cubit metres of water a day from the Axe to keep the other reservoir going.

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

**SOM1** It is a lot of water, you see and that's why we're surprised they will not do a bleeding sluice.

**Yeah, well maybe it comes down to money, who knows?**

**SOM1** Well it's been going on for ten years we think, if not even more.

**Yeah. So if I was to ask you to sum up what you think.**

**SOM1** Of what walk.

**Wetlands sense of place, what would be your sort of, the things that come to mind?**

**SOM1** I think, the first thing that would come to mind, it's a very peaceful place for people to visit.

**Oh yes.**

**SOM1** Isn't it REMOVED? As a nature reserve, we find it very peaceful out there and I think the public don't really appreciate what it is. I think, I think education should have a lot to do with this. I mean another side of it, I mean we have, we've got a dairy farm here, it's only a small one but all animals are individuals and they're all quiet. Now when the school was next door we used to have them out here every year, two or three parties to see the milking, didn't we REMOVED and that?

Um.

When they moved up, oh there was a head, new headteacher was appointed, she said oh we can't afford to have a bus to come out and see you milking. Well a lot of people in REMOVED didn't even know where the milk comes from.

Our grandson knows that.

Yeah.

And he's REMOVED

But you know what I mean?

**Yeah, there's this disconnection.**

**SOM1** This is what it is, education of people, it's not just our area, all the country should be aware of what nature involves, I mean I was taught at school there's a carbon cycle, erm, what was it? Hydrogen cycle and oxygen cycle and they all ran together and, and if you wanted to be a farmer you had to understand them, you can't, one can't go without the other.

**No, no.**

**SOM1** Not even ordinary living people can't manage without it.

**Yeah. So it's all connected together and we all have to.**

**SOM1** Have to learn about it and they're not being taught about it, they're taught how to use computers and that.

**Yeah. So when you think of say us and nature, do you think that we are nature or that there is a difference between us and?**

**SOM1** No, we're all nature and we all got to live together, isn't it REMOVED? We always say that, we always rub that in with our grandchildren and our children, so our son loves the nature and that, but daughter is a real nature because she, we're here, you've got laugh at this, when she was a little girl because we live right by the road, she'd go round and pick up all the snails and throw them on the road so the, so the cars would kill and they wouldn't eat her plants and she's seen her son doing it, ten, eleven year old last, Sunday wasn't it REMOVED?

[laughs]

He was going round picking, she came in and she said I've seen myself again Mum.

**Aww. What do you do with this, I suppose, if you don't, if you're a big keen gardener you don't mind snails so much then do you?**

**SOM1** Oh well we are keen gardeners, I'm annoyed that I haven't done anything in my garden because it was so wet last year.

**It's been.**

**SOM1** We couldn't do it. I mean this is the first year I haven't had broad beans, I got new potatoes, I got about this high in my little border there, but, erm, I do use slug pellets round flowers but I don't like using them. I don't like using sprays, I've tried to spray the grass this year in my garden, it's grown out of control, I see it is working now but I don't like it, it's not in my things to do it, and I mean that field out there, we don't normally spray our fields, what we do we direct drill the grass seed into the grass that's there and you can't.

**Oh okay, so cut through the grass then.**

**SOM1** Yeah, you do improve the grassland but we don't like throwing. We're going to have to spray one this year because we've got to get rid of those stinging nettles, but other than that I'd like to do things as it would happen, I do. I mean this year, this year was obviously sent to be wet, it isn't the amount of rain we've had, it's the wetness all the time.

**I know there's not many days when it's been dry.**

**SOM1** No, that's right, that's what it is, it's the dullness and wetness and that's what's upset it. No, no, we are keen gardeners on the whole but last year we couldn't get out to tend to it and our son, our son mows the lawns, you know, doesn't he REMOVED? He does the lawns but we've got to do all the rest and I said we can't cope.

**It's a lot to keep on top of, it really is.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**Would you say, because, you know, I, because I've got a little allotment.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**And I like gardening, I'm not very good at gardening, I must admit but I do try.**

**SOM1** I'm ashamed of mine this year.

**But I try.**

**SOM1** I'm ashamed.

**It's been too cold and too wet though, I've got.**

**SOM1** You can't do nothing.

**No.**

**SOM1** I mean there's our greenhouse, I got everything, well I'll show you in a minute around there what I got, I got lupins in pots about to come out and flower, they should have been in the garden last October.

**But you don't want to put them in and then they rot, so.**

**SOM1** No, that's right and you couldn't got on it to do it, if you stepped on it it was too wet.

**No, no, it's all mud.**

**SOM1** You wouldn't get anything to grow. I'm absolutely ashamed of my garden and my sister said well you do try to keep it tidy REMOVED, I said I beg your pardon, don't I REMOVED?

**Oh.**

**SOM1** Um.

**When, so another part of the project is thinking about wellbeing, so would you say that when you're doing your IDB work.**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah.

**When you're out there ..to be there together, does wellbeing factor at all in terms of thinking about water levels or is it really a case?**

**SOM1** All it thinks about is water levels, we do not really want as one chap said we should have, canoes and that through there, well I don't think the Drainage Board will go along too far with that, you know what I mean?

**Okay, yeah.**

**SOM1** I think it's a brilliant idea myself but I don't think the Drainage Board, I think they're terrified, if you allow one boat in in there you'll have barges, you know, little barges and all this and that, our banks of our rivers are not hard.

**Oh okay, so there might be more erosion getting in and out.**

**SOM1** Erosion, you know what I mean?

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** That's what the general feeling is and it is, a lot of the banks are clay but if you have a cold winter that breaks up.

**Yeah. So would you say then that they like, so in terms of sort of recreational activities.**

**SOM1** Some, some of these.

**Some are alright.**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah.

**So walking and birding is fine.**

**SOM1** Is one.

**Something that's maybe, cycling or.**

**SOM1** Cycling, cycling's fine, I don't think that interferes with anybody really but I do think there's, there could be uses of the water, fishing is a wonderful thing, they love fishing round here, I don't know how many fish there is in the river but you get loads of people fishing and I think.

**Yeah, but they can't fish on the wet, on these wetlands though can they?**

**SOM1** No, no, they can't fish there but I mean the Axe area you can fish in, and, erm, Kings Sedgemoor Green I think you can.

**But just thinking about Shapwick Heath and Westhay Moor.**

**SOM1** Hay, no, it, it's got to be encouraged for people to walk and enjoy it. It's exercise people want today, they don't get enough of it.

**No.**

**SOM1** I can tell you when I haven't had enough and I've had two hips done and broken femur so I know when I am, and today I haven't, you can tell.

**Yeah, you can feel it in your body.**

**SOM1** When you're sat around you, you realise.

**Yeah, it's very true actually, it's very true.**

**SOM1** It's, I mean that's what, I don't think the youngsters, especially the town people get out and have enough exercise, I mean I really think that's what we've got to work on is the urban areas to get them to come out.

**But it's difficult, I mean how, you know, how can people access?**

**SOM1** Yeah, if you've got, if you haven't got a car and you've got to have huge car parks and then that will ruin the whole idea. It's a balance to be taken isn't it?

**Yeah, yeah.**

**SOM1** But I mean whether the television encourages people, I don't know. I know on the television wasn't it REMOVED, we took our oldest nephew, grandson out one night, on Saturday because we'd seen about the Lapwings, well I, I used to see clouds of Lapwings here, and we've watched the Starlings, they don't roost here, they roost, roost over there but, erm, seen all them and all that and we've seen on the television, there was all these Lapwings and that down at, erm, near Osery wasn't it?

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** We went down there, you've never seen nothing like it, I said now that's how Gran, Granny used to see them up on top of the hill there, when we used to do, had the small tractors and we'd spread our muck and we had to chain it in, you had to dodge the lapwing nests with eggs in, with four, they lay four eggs and sit on them, I said and I've seen those lovely pretty little things running round and my dad would say don't mow the grass until they're safer.

**Aww, so he had a sense of taking care of them.**

**SOM1** Oh yes, I think we have, all of us have, but it's modern farming, I mean if the modern farming people want all farms to be a thousand acres. I mean I can see the public getting very worried because they want all cows kept in and it's not good for the cows, it's not good for anybody or anything.

**No.**

**SOM1** And they want all these modern grasses, they don't want clovers or anything like that, they don't think that does any good and it's not on.

**Yeah, everything, everybody wants it to be standardised.**

**SOM1** Everything's got to be, you've got keep your quality of your soil good, you won't grow anything unless you keep that because I heard somebody one day saying oh we couldn't do this, this, it won't grow, I said no, because you've been on there with big tractors when it was wet and you shouldn't be.

**No, going to squish it down.**

**SOM1** It, it, that's what I mean, that's how I look at it, it's a balance that everybody's got to appreciate, I mean there's nothing better than hearing the, see the Swallows flying around and all that because they chase, take the midges along, midges and all that, you know. I don't think we got so many here this year, I haven't seen them but they say the Spaniards take them out round the airports with netting and that because they get in the.

**Ah, okay.**

**SOM1** That's what they're saying's happening because we've always had loads of Swallows haven't we REMOVED?

**SOM1** Yeah.

I've seen two pairs and normally we would have five or six here.

**Yeah, that's a big change isn't it?**

**SOM1** It is.

**Would you say because just thinking about mosquito, well.**

**SOM1** Yeah, mosquito, any of those sort of things.

**Yeah. Do you, have you had much because sometimes there is a relationship between bird levels and things like?**

**SOM1** There is, yes.

**So do you think there is, you've experienced that would you say?**

**SOM1** I think there's a major impact of it, I mean I'm one that if a mosquito bit me you'd have to rush me to get antidote.

**Gosh, you really swell up.**

**SOM1** Oh I have a real epileptic side of it.

**Ooh no.**

**SOM1** Don't I REMOVED?

Yeah.

We were in, because we've travelled a lot mind.

**Yeah.**

**SOM1** And we were in, we were doing the Yukon and Alaska, and we went over into the Arctic Circle and I had my insect repellent, my, bottom of my bag and they had some there on the bus we were travelling on so I used that, I got attacked and they had to leave me for a day in the train travelling to the, Alaska just quietly in the corner because otherwise I'd have gone out. Wasn't it REMOVED?

Yeah.

Everybody was so worried about me, the courier and everything.

**Yeah. You never had that here?**

**SOM1** Yes, I do, I get awful swellings if I get a mosquito or anything like that bite me and one time, arm, with this arm here, I've still got the mark, I had a bee bite me, a wasp bite me and I got that out and then lo and behold a day later the, a mosquito bit me and I had to go to the doctor.

**Oh gosh.**

**SOM1** So I, I know and I.

**Yeah, you.**

**SOM1** I don't think, I don't think there are the mosquitoes around, I don't.

**Okay, you don't, you think they've gone less over time?**

**SOM1** I do but I was talking to REMOVED about it, not REMOVED about it today, he doesn't think it's any worse and they're out on Tilham and Tadham look, which is the real high water levels.

**Okay, so from, so basically mosquitoes don't really have that higher visibility you'd say round here.**

**SOM1** No, no, I don't think so, I mean you might if you had a, if you were in a confined space but I mean you've got plenty of area to spread here haven't you?

**And there isn't any particular area around Shapwick Heath or Westhay Moor where they cluster or?**

**SOM1** I don't, I haven't heard, I have asked different peoples who we ring up and get in contact with and nobody's complained about mosquitoes, it's badgers we hear. [laughs]

**Okay, so out of all the things is, mosquitoes are not the problem animal.**

**SOM1** Not, not round here I wouldn't have thought so, no, no.

**Okay. And not other kinds of biting insects, you don't have problems with horseflies or ticks or?**

**SOM1** Oh we got ticks and we get hornets, hornets we get and they bite the cows and they make huge lumps on cows.

**Oh gosh, how awful**

**SOM1** You know, you see it and you just accept that it's, the cow will be alright because she can fight it but it comes up huge, doesn't it REMOVED?

Oh God, yeah.

At hornet bite does, yeah, but, you know.

Going, going back to mosquitoes, I mean up in the Arctic you went five miles north of the Arctic Circle.

I mean, mosquito.

Attacked by mosquitoes.

**It's, you wouldn't believe it would you?**

**SOM1** No, you wouldn't.

I'd say, I'd say there was a plague of mosquitoes up there but you see it's only about twenty days they got to live.

**Yeah, so they've got to go for it haven't they?**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**In that time they've got.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

Yeah, if I hadn't have actually seen it myself I'd have said you're talking rubbish, but, you know.

Yeah.

**Yeah, you've experienced it.**

**SOM1** Yeah, I've experienced it, I know what it's like.

**Do you think it's gone, so do you think that mosquito levels have gone down over time or they're pretty much the same?**

**SOM1** I wouldn't have said they've gone down that much, there might be a slight decrease, we, we're, it might be a slight decrease but nothing much, I wouldn't say it was major, no.

**Okay, okay. Well that's good to know.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**Now also thinking about wetlands and the sense of place.**

**SOM1** Um.

**And this is like the last section really of my questions and then I'll leave you be.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**Is thinking about how people, well first how your organisation, so how the Drainage Board thinks about wetlands in terms of how they compare with other types of landscape, so, you know, are they viewed as something that's part of the wider eco?**

**SOM1** It's special. No, it's special to certain areas. I mean I think as a Drainage Board we really serve farming, if you know what I mean, but we accept that these areas are there and they've got to be preserved for nature, it's, it's really, we've got to keep everything in balance whether we like it or no, you know what I mean? That's why I think we're too.

**They're seen as really functional then really?**

**SOM1** Yeah, they are seen as functional, they are seen as functional because the people out round there, I mean there's not very many go commercially into holiday and that but those that do must make a, quite a little living out of it, you don't see many big, that's one thing you don't see out of those moors, is camping sites, which I would have thought you would probably have seen more of, I know it's quite expensive now to set them up with toilets and what have you because we used to have one here and we used to do quite well out of it, didn't we REMOVED? It was only when they started one in clubhouses and that and I said forget it.

Camping, yes, yes.

I said I'm not doing that because I knew I wouldn't get it, I knew, I can't do very much here at all, you know, because I mean, over, ESA is this side of the road and that isn't, you know what I mean, and when it came to drawing money for ESA they came here and I, I said oh, erm, yeah, I'd be interested the three down there, I said but this is all in as well, can't pay you on that Mrs, I said well then I don't want it for the rest. I said I don't damage it, I won't damage it but I don't want it, if I can't have it on more than one, and then when the golf course was built up the top here, I, they took a piece of my land, we swapped the piece of land for money on my side and when I found out they were drawing on that and it's the same as mine here, so I was not very happy.

**I can see that, yeah.**

**SOM1** You see I can, I think, erm, these payments, and I'm very worried what's going to happen with farming after Brexit, I voted for Brexit, I voted against it and he voted for it, erm, but all this about, I think there should be a cap on it, I don't think people should have, anybody over fifty thousand shouldn't get it because they must have enough, I mean there was that one on the television recently, a farmer sold up two hundred and fifty cows, couldn't afford a million pound to buy the farm, well there's something seriously wrong there. They were using that as an excuse because if you've got two hundred and fifty cows you can afford to buy a million pound farm, you know, that's how I look at it. They, they don't invest in the right ideas. Farmers today invest in machinery and that's a waste of money, you know, and I. I mean we find this on the Drainage Board, I mean we got REMOVED that does, used to always run these Upper Axe, Upper Brue, well now it's down here at REMOVED, he's got to do, you know what I mean, and they don't like the idea, I mean he's a farmer in his own right, has gone and inherited a small farm, right? And he does this on, oh what do you call it? Piecemeal like, you know, he's paid, we pay him to do certain jobs for us, and he'll say well that tractor hasn't done so many hours, ah but we've got to have a new one, engineer will say, he'll say well there's another ten or twelve years life in that tractor.

**Yeah, can't keep buying new, they're expensive.**

**SOM1** No you can't and that's what, that's what people do you see, a lot of the things they've got are on hire purchase or rather, what do they call it now?

**Yeah, like a lease.**

**SOM1** Don't, yeah, you know what I mean, and everybody thinks ooh, they got a lot of money, I said I'm sorry, they haven't.

**Yeah, but in terms of how, do you think people think about the wetlands, so you, you've got people using the wetlands for birdwatching and walking the land and.**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah.

**Do you think they recognise that these are wetlands that are managed or do you think that they that nature is managing?**

**SOM1** I think they think nature, I don't think they realise, it's only when you tell people just a minute this is all managed water levels, I think that's what shook them when the floods were, they didn't realise we manage things.

**Yeah. So in the same way that those floods, like you had said about the.**

**SOM1** Yeah, yeah.

**Like the Parrett, that they could actually maybe have been.**

**SOM1** Better managed.

**Better managed, yeah.**

**SOM1** They could have been very much better managed, any of the flood, I mean with the Brue, if they do that Brue out, I don't think you'll see the flooding.

**No. So in some ways then you could, I don't want to put words into your mouth but what I'm trying to do is get a sense of, because back in the old days, you know, wetlands are always seen as something negative, as sort of.**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**You know, a mosquito laden places people didn't want to go to.**

**SOM1** That's right, I tell you one thing that does worry me with wetlands, and that is liver fluke, which is, erm, what's the name of the fly in the? Lays his eggs on the grass and then the cow eats and it, it.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM1** Breeds, which, what's the name of the fly? That is one thing that worried but I think we've, we've eliminated the war fly look, the farmers and I think we got liver fluke under control and I mean it's not an expensive drench you give them, we don't do it every year but if we see the young stuff with a bit of white in their eye, we drench them because that is, could, then.

**Are you saying that then protects the people who use wetlands, who walk around and birdwatch?**

**SOM1** Yeah, everybody, everybody, it's.

**Yeah. And that, but it's an invisible, people don't see it.**

**SOM1** It's invisible, yeah, people don't see what things go on, I mean I'm not a, in favour of antibiotics to everything or anything like that in animals and that but there's certain things you've got to manage, and wetlands got to be part of the big managed scene because then. Warble fly we got rid of, oh that was awful, I don't know if you've ever seen it, the fly would bite the neck of the cow, lay its eggs in there, it would go all round the cows body for nearly eight months and then come up as a great big bump and a caterpillar would come out.

**Extraordinary.**

**SOM1** Oh a caterpillar about this long.

**What would the caterpillar turn into?**

**SOM1** Another fly to lay the eggs again.

**Ah.**

**SOM1** So we got together about fifteen years ago we eradicated that, it was awful because it ruined the hides.

[interruption]

Yeah, I mean no, that, we did eradicate. Yeah, I think flu, and, erm, I mean it is, it's under control but it's something all farmers have to watch, yeah, yeah.

**Do you think though, do you think that other things have influenced how people use wetlands and enjoy them? So for instance, you know, I don't know, does Countryfile have an impact?**

**SOM1** Country, erm, farm, no, I don't think people, people don't, to, I mean we're being encouraged to encourage public to visit farms but most farmers don't want it. We are, most of us are family farms and we try to farm but you've got to learn on a farm, like that's what he's just come in now, we lost a heifer, calved, she calved perfectly alright and then she had an abscess, we had the vet to her I don't know how many times, cost us a fortune I expect in vets bills but she's died but you see people see that and think we're being cruel and we're not, it's part of our, if you've got livestock you're going to have deadstock, you've got to, you can't help it. I know once we had a cow calving out here didn't we REMOVED?

Yeah, yeah.

Some person coming in terrible disgrace, she's seen, stopped along and seen it and said well she's calving, she'll be alright, you don't interfere with her, I said I'll go out when I think she should have calved and if anything's wrong then I will help her. By the time I got out there she'd calved and cleansed and everything. You see they don't realise how things go, and I think us farmers, as much as we would like people to visit, but there's times and places when we don't want them.

**So, and you think that's true for the wetlands as well in terms?**

**SOM1** It's like most things, I, I don't think.

**Yeah, comes back to education.**

**SOM1** Education, it's all education, I mean the wetlands got to be appreciated by everybody because it is a rare thing. I mean we've been in the Amazon jungle haven't we REMOVED?

Oh yes.

Oh I've been seeing some of the world.

**Wow, oh gosh.**

**SOM1** Oh you, we have, we went out birdwatching one morning because we weren't birdwatchers but another couple in the party want and they wouldn't go out, the native wouldn't take us out unless there was four, and we were going to blackwaters where the, what you call its are, that eat you?

**The piranhas?**

**SOM1** Yeah.

**Oh my gosh.**

**SOM1** And, but we had to lift up all the natives fishing lines as went under, if we hadn't had a native with us we could have been killed with blow things.

**Oh my gosh.**

**SOM1** Yeah, but of course he could talk to them.

**Don't you want a more relaxing holiday? [laughs]**

**SOM1** Oh no, I go water, white water rafting all that.

**Oh my gosh.**

**SOM1** Yeah, oh no, but I mean that's what we said and over there, you don't appreciate, I mean some of them in our party, we, I wouldn't do it again, I wouldn't visit a tribe again. We visited a tribe and of course they eat everything that dies, that's their way of living, they don't waste anything and there was, erm, sloth or something had died and fallen on the floor and it stunk but they were obviously going to cook it, and they said well fancy that and I said look, that's their way of life, we don't interfere. The Americans have built a school there somewhere near wasn't it REMOVED?

Yes.

And I said I can't, I don't want to know it. We whites should not be interfering there because we're taking out bugs there and it's going to wipe the natives out. I'm sorry, and I think it's all wrong but that was quite a, that was to see birds, oh we've never seen nothing like it, oh.

**I bet, I bet, I mean that's a joy isn't it to go to different places?**

**SOM1** Yeah, we've been to Antarctica.

**You've been everywhere you two haven't you?**

**SOM1** No, we've have been, we haven't been to South Africa, Africa and I haven't been to Asia because I can't eat rice, no form of rice I can't have, so we haven't been to Asia but that's what we said if, if we sell up and move from here.

**That's the next thing.**

**SOM1** No, no, I'm not going to Asia, we got a brother in, Malcolm's brother lives out in Thailand and keeps writing to tell us he's.

**Oh you should go and visit.**

**SOM1** No, [laughs] no, I don't want to go out there thank you.

**Right, REMOVED, I'm going to now close up.**

**SOM1** Yeah, I'll just show you, yeah.

**Thank you so much for your time, that's fantastic.**

**SOM1** But that's the river that comes through, through there look it comes, that river from this moor. The other, the Axe goes over here, the top there but this one comes through here, takes the water down this river here and then to the north drain, that's how our farm drains at this, half of our farm, the middle half, it comes just through there but they've put a big pipe under the road there and this cottage here was taken up what was the river, I'm surprised the Drainage Board allowed it to happen but.

**I'm sure they don't really want to happen, those poor people there. I'm just going to turn these off.**

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview 2: SOM2

**So I've started all of these interviews by just doing a little, asking people to, I mean it depends which hat you're wearing, whether you're wearing your artist hat or whether you're wearing your project person's hat, in terms of how you., you know, what you're going to talk about today.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**And to say to me, if you're talking from your organisational perspective or from your own perspective.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**So really just starting, saying, you know, what you do, how you're involved in the area, what your interests are.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**And if you're doing from your organisational hat on, who's in your network.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**How many members.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Age profiles and things like that.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**So we get a sense of.**

**SOM2** Yeah, I think it's probably best if I talk as my personal view as an artist.

**Okay, great.**

**SOM2** So, erm, I did a project a few years ago working with the people living on the Somerset Levels, erm, most of whom live, owned land that surrounded the nature reserves, so I became more aware of the wetlands at that point, erm, and I've continued to get quite a lot of work in that, in the area, erm, that you're looking, erm, and also I go there, I take my children there and walk there, so I, I know, as a result of the project go there for, for sort of social time and, you know.

**And has that happened before, was it just?**

**SOM2** Not really.

**No.**

**SOM2** Although I've lived here for years I didn't really go there, erm, you know, and, and I've become quite interested in starlings and things like that, which I wasn't interested in before, so, yeah.

**Yeah, yeah, and the project, how did that come about, was that something that you saw somewhere and then you went for funding?**

**SOM2** Yeah, I applied for, erm, it was, at the time an emerging artist bursary, through REMOVED and, erm, they wanted people to focus on the Levels and Moors, I think, yeah, it was just after all the flooding, so with me I tend to work more with, with people and people's stories, so, erm, I identified a group of people that lived out there and they've lived there all their lives, erm, and just made artwork responding to their stories.

**So these are landowners that surround, so Westhay, Shapwick Heath.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**And the whole, Avalon Marshes Partnership area.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Ham Wall as well.**

**SOM2** Yeah, so and a lot of my time was spent trying to get some landowners to speak to me and some wouldn't, not, they didn't, because they're quite concerned about the way that maybe land has been taken from them, they would just be informally but they would not be part of anything that they thought was official, so.

**Yeah, and they wouldn't want to be recorded.**

**SOM2** No, no.

**No, and before I ask you what it is that you found through that piece of work.**

**SOM2** Um.

**What kind of artist are you?**

**SOM2** I think you'd say, I'm probably multidisciplinary is the, is where I pitch it, so, erm, I specialise in drawing and print making but I tend to use technology, so I do things with sand, erm, that project I did with drawings which were soundwaves which actually look like the reflections, you know, if you look across the wetlands, erm, like animations, or they're sort of drawings that move more than the cartoon, it's a sort of stop motion, erm. I tended to, the work really fits, once I found the people in the stories, then the things I use, it has to be sort of real to that, rather than me saying I, I make a print or.

**So you respond to the stories that people tell you.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, that's really interesting.**

**SOM2** Oh it's, yeah, I think it's, for a long time I thought oh no, I need to know if I'm a painter or a print maker but actually I don't because it's, it's not like that, it's, it's always about the people and their stories first. I'm very, very nosey so.

[laughter]

**Yeah. It's really interesting isn't it because I think we have a tendency to think of all art as being shy.**

**SOM2**Yeah.

**Or, you know, slightly detached.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**But it sounds like you are completely immersed in the people and the landscapes that you work within.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**And then you respond to those individual situations.**

**SOM2** Yeah, and I think, and that project, I definitely made, I was newly out of uni, I did my degree as a mature student, I was newly out of uni and I definitely made the mistake of going in with this preconceived idea that I'd go and speak to these landowners and they'd say how wonderful it was, all this wildlife was coming, and we'd make sure it was very pretty and it would be fabulous, but when I started recording them, I just kept thinking there's, actually this, there's a mismatch here, there's something not quite right and then what it made me start thinking about is people come to the wetlands as tourists to come and see the birds or the murmurations and they are probably guilty, the same way as I have, that they come in and they make these assumptions and some of those people can be quite damning of the local people's view and I think you've got these voices, these people that have formed this landscape, but how on earth do we see their voices and their views which is how it became this soundway visual representation.

**How interesting.**

**SOM2** But, yeah, it's very interesting.

**And how many people did you talk to as part of that?**

**SOM2** Gosh, I can't remember, probably quite, I probably, well over ten because it, because it's, I mean if you think the landowners being around, there's not a huge amount of people out there, erm.

**No, and then of course you've got the fact that not all of those landowners will talk to you, so.**

**SOM2** Yeah, because one of the most important ones I told you about, erm, REMOVED, his son and his daughter-in-law were very keen for me to talk to him and I went and visited him on several occasions but he's so, still fighting because I think their, they, either mineral rights now being withdrawn so, because he was the first, erm, farmer to have his land compulsory purchased and I think that made Westhay, so as you go into Westhay car park, that's where his REMOVED, where the car park is and that's not there anymore, they're now further away, erm, but for him it was, they didn't, it's this loss of a huge part of their land and they're quite strongly controlled about what they can do in, with the remaining land, so they have these restrictions in place but they don't get compensation for that, so he's fighting and he's been fighting for years and when you speak to him he, he will be very much, you know, can you, can you speak to people for me, can you? If you, if you can help me with this, erm.

**Okay, so he's using networks to campaign for what he feels are his loss of rights over his land?**

**SOM2** Yeah, and it's, it's a very difficult thing because I absolutely understand all sides, I think perhaps because he is a minority, because of the nature of the Levels, people do maybe just, they just won't engage with him now, I think it's this, you know, they, they just, when he speaks to the Council, whatever they just, no, we're not, we're not going there, erm, which is, it's sad. He's, I think I said to you, he's got this very strange museum on the side of the tea shop which is things he found on the Levels and then some of he made, he found a way of farming the peat, so that it was, became a renewable thing I don't really understand the science behind it but he, he got David Bellamy to, to back it and so all, all of that is in there as well but as it's quite scientific I don't really know, I don't even know if it's, what he's saying is absolutely true but it's quite fascinating.

**It is. Well if I get a chance one of us will definitely, either I or Adrianna might try and talk with him.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**Because I think that this.**

**SOM2** Yeah, go to tea shop first and speak to his daughter-in-law.

**Okay.**

**SOM2** But I think you see, the tea shop, there's, they, because they've lost land they've had to find another way of making money, so they do this tea shop. Now arguably they may have had to do that anyway, erm, but they're, they're very open to, to talking so.

**And did you find that because you live locally that talking to these different landowners was an easy process or?**

**SOM2** No.

**No.**

**SOM2** Really hard, all the projects, it was the hardest one and that's why, that, you know, the numbers, not only because of the numbers but it was really hard and the way I, I went about it was, erm, someone that I know his, erm, uncle was out there and I bumped into, to my friend who said oh God, I'm really struggling and he said oh well you know who you should speak to? And he introduced me to, to this gentleman and REMOVED, was his real name forever and he's such a character, erm, a lot of the scientists come and they're doing various things on the wetlands, they, I don't know if they still do but they would camp on his field at his farm, erm, so he had, he was quite happy, you know, with, with scientists that come, also because his farm's out there, he has that view and he has a lot of contacts so, erm.

**Okay, so it's just that gatekeeper to get you to.**

**SOM2** Yes, yeah.

**Because did you find that you, I mean I'm presuming, could be wrong but you have your works here and then in terms of the Somerset Artworks they basically leave you.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**To do the work by yourself.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**And the way, to do it.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**So although you're a member of wonderful arts organisation.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Everybody works independently.**

**SOM2** It kind of changed, I mean that was because that was REMOVED Bursary, erm, there, it, there was, erm, I had a mentor so I had someone, a painter that was up at REMOVED who was my mentor, erm, but in terms of running the project it was, you know, I came, they said it's got to be something to do with Level Moor, I said right, I've done my research into this, this is what I'm going to do and they didn't have any contacts, the only thing is Somerset is massive, so they wouldn't have had, you know. I think, erm, projects I do now, it's, it's slightly different, erm, because to progress in your career that, you know, you've got, there's, there's more, you've got to tick more boxes and there's social media and things, you've got to connect to, you know, if I get to put into a physical place, I've got to remember to work, you know, you've got work with them, whereas that was quite a lot of freedom because no-one in particular owned what I was looking at.

**No. So when you were trying to access the funds, you didn't go, you didn't talk to say Somerset Wildlife Trust?**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Oh you did.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, so they, all those …**

**SOM2** Yeah. No, and they didn't like what it was doing and they didn't like, they didn't, they weren't, no, I went down to, erm, Shapwick to introduce myself and no, no way, they did not want to talk to me and I.

**Was that the Rangers or was that the people?**

**SOM2** It was people, there was portakabins and they were in there and I, and I also emailed, erm, and I was not, at that stage I was just researching, I didn't know anything about different views, erm, I just said, you know, look I'm in, I'm going to be interviewing landowners, you know, I'm not a scientist, I don't know, so it would be interesting to get a take, no.

**I'm very interested by that, that they weren't.**

**SOM2** Was not, it was not good, yes.

**Is that true for both Shapwick and Westhay that?**

**SOM2** I can't remember with Westhay but it definitely was, I think I then went, when I went in and sort of introduced myself it was a bit, and then I, I emailed organisations but no. I mean the interesting thing is that when the exhibition was on show, I, a lot of the RSPB and various volunteers from down there came and they were actually, they, I think they were more interested in other things I'd done, because I'd done things with murmurations and stuff but there was a sound installation playing in amongst the piece, the, the artworks on the wall and they, it was snippets of conversations with people and it wasn't all just a, a sound, it wasn't a sound, let's stand here and be really cruel about, you know, the wildlife, you know, it wasn't that at all.

**Kind of can say things about lots of different things I would imagine.**

**SOM2** Well there was sort of snippets of things, so there one, I can remember one of the, erm, ladies said, she had a very haunting voice almost and she made this comment about, erm, you know, there, there aren't any skylarks out on the moor, so there's this sort of, and they, they'd sort of make little, little half comments because I didn't, I didn't want it to be just horrible but I do think that, that some of the wildlife people came in thinking this is going to be good, you know, this is going to be great, you know, we say how wonderful we are and there was a bit of a ooh, but I don't need to form opinions because as an artist I present opinions, you can do with it what you like, yes, fabulous way to be in life, I have opinions but I don't need to, erm, so it was quite interesting to have people stand there and listen, and listen to conversations and some people would be quite, you know, oh that's, they've just go to get over it, you know, wildlife's a great thing, some people would be, oh I didn't realise, you know, I don't, I, it, I'm not trying to push people either way and I would certainly have included snippets from the wildlife.

**Yeah, you're not trying to present.**

**SOM2** If I'd had it.

**Yes, so that's an interesting thing isn't it?**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, it was quite interesting.

**So when I, I'm just trying to get little handle on the different organisations that have intercepted with this particular wetlands project that you did.**

**SOM2**Yeah, yeah.

**So either Natural England, Somerset Wildlife interest.**

**SOM2** Um, um.

**They maybe were a little bit more reserved.. does Sedgemoor Council help with …?**

**SOM2**I didn't go to them.

**No.**

**SOM2** Because it was, I wanted people who were actually in, you know, I didn't want to sort of go to someone that had, erm, you know, an office somewhere or, I, it was, I was looking for people that were connected to it, erm.

**And where did you actually hold the exhibition?**

**SOM2** In REMOVED, so just, erm, I was given a mentor called REMOVED who is just down the road from where you're staying and he's, he worked REMOVED and he's got these big studios and he gave me a space there, erm, which was quite nice and because I was one of the emerging artists, a lot of people came to it, it was very, you know, it was very useful for me, erm.

**Yeah. Have you found that contacts made with him ever since, with people coming to …?**

**SOM2** That lead to, yeah, someone came to that, erm, and she said I'm trying to do a project working with, I think it was Exeter and Bristol Universities, erm, they were REMOVED PhD students, and what they'd recognised as part of this project, it was called REMOVED, sometimes some of these, the students can be a bit clinical when they deal with the people who they meet and sort of well your house is going to flood for the rest of, you know, get used to it sort of thing, so they brought these artists into work with them and just give them views around a bit, so I took, there was about, I think about four or five of these PhD students I took them out on the moors and then I took them to meet this lovely women who's how was completely destroyed, erm, and give them a sort of new, approach because her husband had, at the time, he's since passed away but very bad, erm, dementia and he was being nursed at home, erm, there's, they're so, erm, he became quite a voice for people who have been flooded and he literally had to go in and bring his father out on a, in a digger bucket because the water was up so high and, so just to hear her talk about the actual experience of, you know, the speed.

**Yeah, what it means, yes.**

**SOM2** Erm, and, you know, she, she, quite interesting, she talks, erm, it used to be that the farmers would run the Drainage Boards out there and they would control the pumps but in the build-up to that flood, her son rang before Christmas and said we're flooding, let the water out and they wouldn't let the water out and they're, from then was perception of that's because the wetlands want the water at a certain level and the problem is because they didn't let the water out when the rain then hit, it just destroyed everything.

**Now am I right in thinking this would be, at least towards the south of Somerset.**

**SOM2** Um, she was, yeah, she was a bit further down, erm, but I remember, I clearly remember the speed, and you literally, because as you come out of Wedmore, you know, I can remember being on the hill and can, and you can, you know, one day you can see and then the next day you get to the top of the hill and it's, it's just flooded, which is what it was, you know, that's what it was designed to do.

**Yes, absolutely.**

**SOM2** That was another fascinating thing about talking to people who have lived all their lives because they will say to you, that, yeah, there are certain areas that I designed to flood, you know, and they say that's why they've got the willows either side of the road so that when it floods you can line your vehicle up in between, you know, the roads then, so you're not going to fall off. So some of it was absolutely fascinating, you know, pubs that you would go in, apparently when it flooded and they put boards, there'd be slots in the wall where you could put boards so you could stand above the water and still have your drink, so that history.

**…the link with the water, you know.**

**SOM2** Absolutely but what they say now is the problem is the water doesn't go where it was meant to go, so when it runs off, it's not doing the same things.

**No, no.**

**SOM2** Erm, which I just found absolutely fas, I didn't understand or appreciate any of that before I started speaking to people.

**These local water managers that are.**

**SOM2** Yes.

**And people have lived with the water.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yes.

**For generations.**

**SOM2** And that's what they're saying, they've got all this knowledge but no-one wants it, erm, and even with the dredging because that was going on, erm, when I was, erm, interviewing and they were saying they're not doing it right, they're doing it the wrong time of year or they're not doing, which is.

**Yeah, because the people who would have dredged have now, that's now sort of contracted to other people.**

**SOM2** Absolutely, yeah.

**And they've dredged, contract rather than.**

**SOM2** Yeah, absolutely.

**…within the landscape.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, you know, and it's, erm, REMOVED, he's very, I don't know if he's been up there.

**I haven't but I have talked to him on the phone, yeah.**

**SOM2** Yeah, he's very interesting character, he's get interviewed for a lot of things, erm, but he, as well as the cider, well he does the cider to support the farm now but the cattle, he has a problem with, he called it black grass which grows in the fields near, nearer the wetlands and he can't use anything to get rid of the black grass, which then effects, you know, the, you know, the cattle, so it's, yeah, it is quite interesting.

**Yeah, it is all connected together in lots of different ways.**

**SOM2** It is, it is, yeah.

**So you've now got a really amazing insight then into.**

**SOM2** Really, and weird facts as well, I mean it, it's, I don't know how this fits into anything but one of them said to me well of course they used to make, I think he called them Bath Bricks and I said I don't know what that is, so he said right, they used to dredge the mouth, the Parrett and they would use the silt to make these blocks, they are in some local museum, they were the old-fashioned equivalent of a Brillo pad and every person that went into the army or into, you know, when they went to the war, they were given one of these and that's what they would use to keep their kit clean, ladies would scrub their steps with them, someone then invented Brillo pads so there was no longer a need for them and the river stopped being dredged at the mouth, so it silted up and I thought.

**Amazing isn't it?**

**SOM2** I don't, yeah, I've never heard of them.

**Change in the market will change.**

**SOM2** Absolutely.

**Because of course then it's not economically viable anymore.**

**SOM2** So the great thing about all of this is you start, you realise actually it's not, it's not that the nature people came and they did one thing, it's not that farmers did, you know, started being more intensive with their farming, it's changes, maybe they're more fragmented.

**Yeah, they can be incremental, fragmented, all contributed to these changing landscapes.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**Particularly around wetlands**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**You know, especially when you have, people, you know, changing, not living in the same area so that generation wanting to get …**

**SOM2** That's it, yeah, yeah.

**It is fascinating.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**I want to ask a little bit about the access to wetlands.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**So both from your own perspective and from the work that you've done.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**So it's interesting isn't it, what you're saying is these, some of these farmers?**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Are reticent about, about the reserves**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**They see it as their land, not only being taken but maybe those differently.**

**SOM2** Yes.

**Maybe not so, for the wider landscape.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**So I suppose, you know, for you, what do you understand by wetlands and what do you understand by their role in this local area?**

**SOM2**Erm, well I suppose, having, having sort of done the project, erm, for the REMOVED, particularly the one with the PhD students, I think I've got a bit more of a, of a sort of scientific view of, you know, the importance of the peat, and, and from that aspect of it, erm, and I also think, you know, obviously they're bringing back wildlife, that, you know, go out and hear the bitterns and, you know, that, that's quite an incredible thing, and sort of projecting, you know, the, the lands because I understand all of that. You know, and in some respects, you know, when they say they've taken where the peat was on and they filled that with water and so, so it sort of moves on, erm, so yeah, I, I think that from, from that sort of wildlife and, you know, and sometimes the science behind it is quite interesting as well but I don't know whether that, that is as well known about perhaps, I think when people come to the wetlands they think of it in terms of birds that they can see.

**Yes, they may not know about history or peat excavation.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, absolutely, yeah.

**It's a managed landscape.**

**SOM2** Absolutely.

**Particularly you when you come Westhay, Shapwick, they're quite different landscapes aren't they?**

**SOM2** Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, and, you know, and the sorts of people you meet out there as. If you go for a walk on a sunny day and like I do, talk to people, he, I met, there was, erm, some people that do a website looking at butterflies and moths, so they go down there because they can find interesting things to go on a website, then you'll find someone that has been ill and is now, you know, as part of their recovery, they spend time walking out there all the time, you know, you get, erm, mums taking their children down there, it's quite incredible, you know, and at certain times of year you can't move because of all the murmuration followers, so it, it's quite an important place I think, it does bring different people in.

**And so it's got different uses by different people.**

**SOM2** Um, absolutely, yeah, yeah.

**And do you think, know, where people are going to, Shapwick and Westhay, do you think from your experience …?**

**SOM2** Yeah, there, there are certain times you can go and it's, there's, you won't see a soul and then there are other times, so the murmurations been very much in the press, when that's featured, I think someone said that at the group, you do get this rise in numbers. Now I don't have a problem with that because I did, I followed on and have done some work on the murmuration, find it absolutely fascinating, erm, and I just think that it can bring people and from that bringing it then makes, oh I didn't know this was here, what, what else is, is here? I don't think it should be looked at as a negative at all, erm, yeah, it is, quite an interesting thing, erm.

**And good for the local economy, good for all of?**

**SOM2** I think so, yeah.

**Outside as well for all of Somerset would you say in terms of it brings people in?**

**SOM2** Well I know that, erm, there are things like boutique B&Bs that have sprung up and they, they've come to me about artwork and things because they are targeting the people who come, the birdwatchers, the murm, because the murmuration followers, they're not the same as the birdwatchers, that's, you know, those are people who, I don't know watch, maybe watch Countryfile on a, you know, Sunday and they, they, I think come and they, they want to buy things and spend money, erm, but some of the birdwatchers will go all over the country and they have that tick list of things, which is great. I mean the interesting thing is if you look at the Sweets tea shop, you could argue that a lot of their trade is because the wetlands is, is there, so it's.

**Yes, that's a paradox isn't it?**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, there, there is, yeah, it's a funny thing. I do think that in some cases as is the case with any place, maybe some locals don't go, because one of my, sometimes I feel like I'm a bit of an advert for when I do a project, so, erm, I think I, yeah, I was interviewed on Radio Somerset about the murmuration thing I was doing and I was given this tip-off by someone who said don't go in the evening, go in the morning because you know where they were they are because they roost[?] at the nightfall, there's a starling hotline you can ring, you stand in amongst the reed beds and you're surrounded by these birds, so I went down and it was absolutely incredible, erm, so I was on Radio Somerset going to, don't go in the evening, go in the morning.

**[laughs]**

**SOM2** And you think this is, this is, you know, this is good because if people like me who are a bit different, go down there and then talk about it, it, it brings more people.

**Yeah, yeah, yeah.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**And I mean, so for you, so do you think, one part of the projects is thinking about wetlands and trying to uncover whether there's such a sense of place in the particular wetlands we're looking at and would you say that's true for Westhay and Shapwick, do you feel that these are particular landscapes which have a completely unique resonance with you with?**

**SOM2** Yeah, I think in some respects, I don't know why, in some respects Shapwick a bit more for me. I like to get off of, you know, the main bit and you can sort of blend in a bit and I quite like that, I like the fact that, because I very often go at strange times on my own, you will see things that you will never see. You know, I remember we got out, we got out of, we got to the other end and walked in, erm, and we were with my daughter and I remember she said oh Mum, look at that deer, it's swimming across the reed. Now don't be stupid and turned round and it was, it was just swimming straight across the water and I thought I didn't know that, I didn't know they did that.

**I …[26.57]**

**SOM2** You, you just, or sometimes you'll hear the bitterns boom and you think oh, you know, and it's.

**Yeah, I heard that yesterday.**

**SOM2** Yeah, and it's.

**And it was very special.**

**SOM2** Yeah, see Westhay.

**It's very … isn't it?**

**SOM2** Yeah. Westhay, it's, it's a really strange thing. I, I don't, Westhay's to me a slightly different landscape, I don't like it when they graze things out there because I, they're, it means that there's large places I won't go, I know they have to but I think I don't want to walk in amongst a load of horses because I don't like them but I tend, I suppose, I tend to go to Westhay Moor, I don't know why but in the summer when it's quite hot and it can be, when you're walking out, you know, you can go for quite large areas where there's no shade and it's quite different then from if you were at Shapwick, erm, yeah, it's.

**But these are both places you select to go, you know, if you want to go for a walk.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**And you said by yourself, so is that, because?**

**SOM2** I do also go with my family but I do go because when I've got my art hat on, there's no point you, if you're walking with someone you're going to miss half of what's there, which would be daft. The other thing is I find, in either place really, that the, the birdwatchers are actually very, on the whole, very generous with their time, so when I'm there looking at something or listening for something, generally they, they'll tell you about, you know, who they are, and if you say what am I listening to? They will tell you. And I, I like that, I like, I think I'm quite interested in the way that people respond to different situations and interact, I think that's, so for them there must be this sense of belonging and place which they're quite happy to draw me into, erm, yeah.

**Yes. Would you choose to go to these wetland spaces over say going to the coast or does it all fit into, you know, you would choose different landscapes according to your time, your mood?**

**SOM2** Yeah. I think and I don't know whether it's because I'm getting older or because of my work, I feel that I belong more to this area of Somerset then I ever did. I mean I've lived, give or take a few sort of journeys off to other places, since I was about twelve I've lived in this area but I actually now think that I understand the area and I feel that there's a sense of belonging. Now I suppose part of that is because of the projects I've done, I actually have information. I was speaking to someone the other day about this because we've all become a bit more nomadic, I think a lot of this sharing and then belonging has gone, whereas, erm, because I've gone out of my way to find people and talk to them, I, I do find it fascinating and I, I, you know, if I pick out quotes of things like that, you know, line up your gift card between the willow trees and if you share that with people, they, they'll always, I didn't know that, I didn't know anything about that and.

**Yeah, and actually then, for the people who live round here, they might well think about that every time they go past as well.**

**SOM2** Absolutely, absolutely.

**And I think when they maybe walk on their walk, you know.**

**SOM2** Yeah, I think.

**It's a kind of like a nugget of not just local history but it's a useful knowledge isn't it?**

**SOM2** Yeah, and I, I tend to think, I do this with a lot of my projects is, it's almost like picking up things that are being lost and restarting a conversation, so, you know, you're throwing that back into the pond and the ripples will go and people might remember it slightly, you know, in an incorrect manner but it doesn't really matter because people are remembering something.

**Exactly.**

**SOM2** Which otherwise is just going to be lost, erm, and then it will just be that people will drive from miles away, they will come out here and they will go, you know, it's a beautiful nature reserve, they won't really understand about the peat, which formed a huge part of the area, erm, and the histories, you know, and the, the, you know, the way that the natural flooding always occurred, you know, no-one was, was out there, was saying we want to stop the flooding, that, because that's part of their lives, erm, so I do think it's really interesting to, to bring, bring back in some of those conversations.

**Yeah, because it's about really that connection with nature and living with nature, you know.**

**SOM2** Yes, yeah.

**Especially around living with water, making space for water.**

**SOM2** Um, yeah.

**Rather than this continual fight to try and push it away.**

**SOM2** Absolutely, yes.

**That we need to be a bit more in rhythm, as people obviously used to be.**

**SOM2** Yes, yeah, that's it.

**How could you not be?**

**SOM2** Absolutely.

**You're not going to choose to live there.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**The question also connects to health and wellbeing.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**So I guess my questions is, from your own experiences and those of the people you've talked to.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Is use of the wetlands connected to health and wellbeing?**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Or is there something else going on?**

**SOM2** Yeah, I've definitely, definitely spoken to people out there, I always remember one day I was walking along and a bloke came down to, a, on a, we were going to a hide and I thought I was completely on my own and then this man shot by on a bicycle and I thought oh I wasn't expecting, so when I got in there he, he's sat there and he said to me, he was very keen to talk and he said he'd had a heart attack, he wasn't able to work so he was trying to get fit and he comes every day and goes to different hides and it makes, you know, he talks to different people and it makes him feel really good being over there and, and that's the great thing, if you, some people don't want to talk to other people and that's fine but I, like I say, I generally spark up conversations and you will always meet, there are people that took up birdwatching in retirement, so they're, they kind of retired, they maybe don't, have lost a network of people so they go there and they're building new relationships, you know, some will say I go, I come with my friend or my brother or my sister and once a year we come down and we, you know, we come here, they, and we like it because of whatever birds that they see, there's a real connection there, it's not just your serious, erm, watchers, it's, it's, you know, people are going there.

**Yeah, they're getting something more from the landscape then just looking at it.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**And that other people enjoy it as well.**

**SOM2** Um, yeah, you know, and you get, the great thing, I love it, especially Westhay, if you go into the first hold on the left as you leave the car park, there's a little book there and you, very often you can flip the book open and you'll get and I saw an otter and next, next and you think they, you know, people, there's lots of kids that will be drawing in those books, which is a good reflection of who's going there, erm. You know, you stand there at, I don't know, some silly time in the morning, pitch black and the murmurations, they start, all the starlings start, you know, it's really strange because the noise increases as the light increases and you're, you've got the reed bed down the side and you become really aware that just a few feet from you are the starlings, you're literally in the middle of it, and they do this flowing up and down and make several sort of waves as, before they get going and the, the faces of the people, it's, you know, and the kids, it's really, it's really uplifting, you know, and it's that sort of awe and you hear people laughing because when you're in the middle of the murmuration it's on its way up, it, it is, it, absolutely uplifting and, and you can.

**Yeah, and you're sharing that experience with all those people.**

**SOM2** Yeah, all around and then afterwards they go because, you know, sudden, they've gone, erm, and then everyone, they walk up to the top, the volunteers are really good at sort of saying go and stand there, erm, and people go up and they will be, you know, sort of, it's like machine gun fire talking at, at each other and, and the volunteers who are saying, you know, God, you know, I saw this and what else can I see? Well it's, it is, it's, yeah, I think it's, for a sense of wellbeing you can't really get, beat that.

**And I get the sense that you are happy to go to the wetlands at all different times of the day.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**All different times of the year.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**And you're quite happy going not only you feel it's a safe space.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**For a woman to be there.**

**SOM2** And that's really strange because there's some places. I'm working at a place now where there's just woods everywhere and I'm, I'm not, it, it's not the same at all but, you know, if there's, for me, if there is a foggy frosty day when you can hardly see anything, I love going then as well because it changes it completely but I've never felt that I wasn't safe there. The only time that it can be a bit frustrating is sometimes in the summer that the ticks can be a huge problem. I went, erm, when was it? Last year, with my family and, erm, we were, they were all over our legs, it was, it was incredible and we were sort of like dusting them off and so we, I was thinking oh dear, maybe I shouldn't have suggested it but, yeah.

**The Russian roulette of when to go.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**So would you say, I don't want to kind of skip over the wetlands but.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**Thinking about biting insects.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Are ticks the number one deterrent?**

**SOM2** For me, yeah, I think I expect there to be a few mosquitoes or, you know, midges or whatever, but yeah, I, it's the ticks that, because that was quite, that was a lot of ticks.

**Right, they're very, very visible.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**And was that in Westhay Wood and Shapwick?**

**SOM2** That was Shapwick, yeah, yeah, erm, so yeah, I think, I don't know whether it's because I cover more ground but, erm, yeah, I think Shapwick is probably worse for ticks than, than Westhay.

**Yeah. And if you think about in terms of biting insects, would you say that there's a whole range of insects that you encounter that you don't think about or that you are anxious about, so.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, I think I go, I think with things like mosquitoes or midges I tend to, I expect that, living in this country, so I tend to sort of, I'm going to, if I think enough about it I might put some sort of deterrent on but I very often don't, so, you know, you get things in, in your hair and that's fine, erm. Other insects, like I said I bumped into some people that were looking at the butterflies and moths, it never occurred to me, so they were at great pains to point various things out. Some, some insects can be fascinating, erm, so it's quite nice, you know, to sort of go along and, and see sort of, oh look at that, you know, very, times of year there might be caterpillars or whatever, erm, so it's quite, yeah, I find, I find it part of the place, I think the ticks, it's a bit more, it's more of a worry with the ticks because it can be vast numbers and also there's this association, you know, that you might end up catching something, erm.

**But you don't have that association with mosquitoes, they're just an irritant?**

**SOM2** Yes, yeah, yeah, funny isn't it?

**Yeah. So it's never ever put you off and it's never, you don't notice say particular parts of either Westhay, Shapwick or particularly more …[37.33]?**

**SOM2** I mean I suppose, yeah, if you're nearer the water, I mean the thing with Westhay is there's, that sort of area of flat that you can cross, it's almost like a, there's a sort of wind turbine on, it's like this flat plain where there's not so much water, and on a hot day, you know, you, if you go in, in the hot day, you go across there and you don't tend to encounter anything, you know, you go in the evening and you're walking down by the water then, yeah, you're going to, going to get something but I just don't, I don't ever think I won't go because I might get bitten, I just, if I want to go I go.

**Okay, yeah, that's really positive.**

**SOM2** Um, um, um.

**And, you know, part of the project has been looking at mosquitoes.**

**SOM2** Um.

**Because of the possibility of.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Them moving into new territories.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**And climate change and expanding populations.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**What I'm getting a sense from you is that you've not experienced kind of there's been any issues with mosquitoes?**

**SOM2** Yeah, I just, I mean obviously there are, there, you know, you get them out there but I suppose in some respects an association with them bringing something harmful. It always, this is going to sound really stupid now but in some respects you see that on the television, you associate that being somewhere else, not from the mosquitoes that would be here, so I suppose that's why I just don't, you know, I spent all my life, we've sort of had various biting insects and you, you just sort of put up with it really.

**Yeah, and so they're not really a concern but the ticks.**

**SOM2** Um.

**And would you say, because I'm just interested to know whether ticks are something that's a worry because we've just more knowledge about them and in respect of Lyme's Disease.**

**SOM2** I think, yeah, now I'm thinking about, absolutely, you know, the minute you sort of said, you know, making a comparison between them, it is because Lyme's Disease has been in the press, I would be thinking about it, I've got, I'm going to take the dogs out there but I've got three dogs so very often, you know, you have a tick that you have to sort out, they aren't very nice, some insects aren't but, erm, I think it's more the thought that if you get bitten these days it's in my head, you know, whereas a few years ago I would have just thought oh it's a tick, you know.

**Yeah, thought no more of it.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**So in terms of your health and wellbeing on those sites, those anxieties around ticks say would not be enough to deter you from using the sites or would they maybe change the time of year?**

**SOM2** I think maybe they'd change the time of year and I think they also, if you, because it's one of those things, you can never quite know when it's going to be a good year, so this time that I'm thinking about we definitely, we started to walk, realise we were getting, you know, absolutely covered and, you know, just ran for it really and so we probably then didn't visit for a little while afterwards, erm, so it, yeah, I think when you've had an experience you probably back off.

**Yeah, but when you've been doing your interviews and talking about landscapes, you've not had say for instance, those sorts of impacts on, you know, you've not noticed with other respondents about health and wellbeing issues connected with insects?**

**SOM2** No, and I mean I guess part of that is because, I suppose you, you have an ability to sit in the hide and you, it's, it's quite a cool, dark place and, you know, you might get a few spiders in there but I've not known anything to follow you in there, so I suppose to a certain extent you can look at the water and be protected, you can see the clouds of various insects out there but you are slightly apart from it perhaps, it's, it's the, the walk to the hide that is more, well, you know, the issue, erm, so yeah, but I think when you're actually sitting there.

**Yeah, it's no problem.**

**SOM2** No, no.

**This last little section of the interview.**

**SOM2** Um, um.

**I'm really interested in thinking around and I think this is where your expertise as an artist will be really helpful, about contemporary social representations of wetlands, so what I mean by that is the different element of our cultural economic political life.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**That will influence how we'd been represented and from what you talked about, you have the perspective from the landowners.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**That is the compulsory purchase order that maybe took some of their land away.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**They weren't given financial compensation.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**And that maybe for other farmers, maybe they feel neutral about it.**

**SOM2** Um, um.

**I don't know, it's difficult isn't it?**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Because in farming everything is so precarious all of the time.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**But from your experience doing that and also as an artist.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Do you think that wetlands now have a different general perspective, that people are seeing them differently? So, because if you think about say literature and artwork.**

**SOM2** Um.

**Hundreds of years ago.**

**SOM2** Um.

**Marshes and moors were seen as somehow other spaces, you know.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Something that was maybe not so enticing.**

**SOM2** Yes, I think wetlands are, I think they, the nature reserves have become almost a place of their own out there because I know that people still talk about out on the moor and they, so they do view other areas around out there as still being not so much nice places and, you know, not, maybe, you know, so much to look at out there, so I think that they, there's almost a slight disconnect between the fact that, that nature reserves are actually out there as well, they sort of go to.

**Yeah, so it's …**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, which is quite interesting. I think a lot of that is also because of, you know, like Countryfile and doing, you know, the programmes and showing all the, highlighting some of the projects out there. Perhaps one of the problems is that they, they focus on, so, I think they did something about the Crane Project recently, erm, I know that, that there's been some press around the bitterns and, but perhaps some of the, again some of the press isn't also around some of the tradition, some of the things that are perhaps being forgotten because I think there seems to be, especially in the art world at the moment, there's a huge interest in this sense of place, erm, you know, and sort of looking at landscapes and I think sometimes we can forget, sometimes we make assumptions. I do remember, erm, visiting an artist who was making some work following the floods and she was painting grey and she said it was because, erm, it was representative as mud and I said to her but the fields turn red after the flood because the iron was washed up and a lot of the farmers I was talking to had to a pay a lot of money because the soil had been poisoned, who knew? I didn't know anything like that, so they had to have all the soil treated and she sort of looked a bit surprised and she said but I thought it was just mud, I thought well you're being lazy, you should go and ask, and I think that's one of the things that. I mean you can walk around nature reserves and there are some boards that will say about, you know, the railway line and I think there's a photograph of one of the trains that came off the tracks and went into the peat there but I think it would be interesting if they connected a bit more with that history and not just from the archaeological, we found these things in the peat but also some of the stories from people who used to live out there, you know, the, the fact that people would come and do piecework, this seasonal come out and they would, you know, farm the peat and they would put, stack it up so it would dry and then they would go off and, you know, maybe go and do strawberry picking and, you know, one of the people that I spoke to said there used to be little houses all over the place there because people would just come and live in them and then they'd go off and then come back again, so it was very nomadic, you know, this sort of.

**Yeah, you followed the season around the landscape.**

**SOM2** Yeah, summer settlers things is quite, quite true and I think that, that's very important, that is a huge part of what it is.

**And there isn't an archive somewhere that's captured these different oral histories in Somerset?**

**SOM2** Yeah, I think the problem for me is, erm, you know, they, there are all very small archives, there are various, erm, exhibitions that have taken place but there is, they don't take place up there, so they're, again it disconnects, it. You can go and listen or you can go and see but I like to stand, I like to stand and, this is why sometimes you get some artists and I've used it in the past, you can use a QR barcode where you scan it and you get information. I like when I'm there to, to hear, to know.

**Yeah, to be in the landscape.**

**SOM2** Yeah, because you don't, I don't think you can get the same feel, you can't imagine what that place is unless you're actually there.

**No. And is it because the exhibition spaces are all in Bridgewater …?**

**SOM2** I think the main, yeah, and funding things, you know, it's that sort of, and yeah, how, how on earth would you have an exhibition, well in a space like that? I, I would do something in the hides or.

**Yes, but in fact our writer artist who's focussed on Somerset.**

**SOM2** Um.

**Wanted to do that.**

**SOM2** Brilliant.

**She wants to do some creative writing workshops in one of the hides.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**And maybe have a little list of things to think about in the hides.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Books to read and things like that connected with the area.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, because I think, you know, it's, obviously there should be new layers of meaning to anything but I think also there should be well this is, you know, what, did you know this, did? You know, there's various other things that have happened, and the other, I got recordings of some of these people and they are the most entertaining people to listen to, you know, there's one particular man and it doesn't matter how many times you listen, you can't stop laughing as he tells you these sort of anecdotes about the place and history and it's quite incredible, erm.

**Yeah, so there you get a really strong sense of a community.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**Of a life lived in one place.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, and that's it because although they were sort of, you know, there's fewer people there and the villagers can be more drawn out, there's still quite a, a strong sense that they belong there. I mean obviously it's, everything these days has been weakened because people move in, move out, erm, and I suppose, you know, when I think of me growing up in a village you would have older people that would share stories, you would know that certain places were associated with certain things, whereas I don't know that that that happens so much anymore.

**Yeah. So do you feel then, from what you've said, that the, the nature reserves, so Westhay and Shapwick.**

**SOM2** Um.

**They're seen as something different from other types of moorland, wetland, that's in the area because?**

**SOM2** Yeah, I think so.

**Because they've got the special designation.**

**SOM2** Yeah, they're, and because they're owned by, erm, because, yeah, they relate to the nature and the preservation of the nature so they've got different ownership, different funding, they don't struggle in the same way as, as the other pieces of land around there.

**Yeah, because some of the land around the reserves, some is very tidy, neat and grazed and some is quite untidy, you know.**

**SOM2** Ooh yes, yeah, yeah.

**Almost like a dumping ground.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**And that is really interesting in that, it.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**It's not that it's been ignored or relegated as just that, it looks different, it's not, it's not.**

**SOM2** Yeah, and I think one of the things was, for the people that had their land taken, so the compulsory purchase, they were, I, as I understand it, they received the value of the land, so if you don't look at the mineral rights, the, the land value is tiny, so they didn't get a lot for it and now what's happening is they're not having the land taken away but they're having the mineral rights, are, are being removed, so they're, in effect, left with more land that has very little value. I mean I don't know how much money peat farming brings in, I can't imagine it's a huge amount but it was better than what they've got now, so some of them, living is quite hard out there, erm, so, yeah, they, they don't, you know, pay a lot of, of money to keep things tidy or. You know, in, erm, the, erm, farmer that I said, erm, spoken to this week, as you drive down the road from here, going out, erm, across the moor, on the left hand side there's this very weird chapel, so, I think it's made of, erm, it's either wood or sort of corrugated iron and it's in his, his yard and I remember saying why have you got a chapel in your, in your yard? And he said oh used to be out on the moor but, you know, it was hard to keep it there so we dragged it here because I just think there's this, I think there's this sort of, they don't leave things, they, they make use of things and because I think it has been hard out there and I think certain areas are harder than others, erm.

**Yes, yeah, because round here what is, do people have to now go outside of the Levels to work, is that?**

**SOM2** I think so, they, they, after the War, erm, they tried to make farming out on the Levels more intensive, which was never going to work, so that sort of was quite hard for a lot of them, erm, and I think in quite a few cases they had to, you know, they had children and either diversified or moved away and so I think what happens is, it's the same with anything isn't it? Once you get publicity around a place people become aware of it and then they think well I want, I maybe will move in there. So the, the sorts of people that, that move in are different and they maybe have a different view of that place as well, erm. There is a slight stigma of course about owning property out on, on the Levels because of the flooding. So some people, I know it, I don't know so much now but I know in, it, in the aftermath of the flood, a lot of people were trapped out there because they could, just couldn't move, erm.

**Yeah. So in some ways for those people, if you think about the wetlands they're not viewed for particularly.**

**SOM2** No.

**They may not have a voice with which to share.**

**SOM2** That's, that is the great, that was, that was the thing that I just kept coming back to because they, they have got experience, they've go knowledge but they're viewed as an irritation because, you know, what they're saying doesn't agree, it doesn't make life easy for people who want to do other things but, and I know that it's very, you know, it's almost, it's almost very sophisticated approach to sort of say well, you know, just listen to them but you know, you're never going to keep everyone happy but right now it feels, they feel as if no-one's listening to them.

**So do you feel then, from your experience, that there's almost a kind of propaganda around the reserves, the reserves are great, wildlife is great and it's a little bit picked from the reality of what it means to live out here and earn a living round here?**

**SOM2** I think there's, yes, I think there is a mismatch, erm, and I think that people can be very easily dismissive when a local voice says something about, you know, you know, the flooding, the water levels, one of, erm, the people I was speaking to say they keep the water levels too high anyway for the wading birds, erm, and they said so that birds can nest and then we get a bit of rain and they're flooded out. Now I don't know, I don't have any science but I think isn't that a worthy conversation? Because if you're an expert in, in the field of wildlife and you know what you're talking about why are you frightened to have a conversation? Well you either learn something or you teach something, I don't understand why there's this very closed down, you know, we're not talking to them because it just causes trouble which then of course leads to local people go well not talking to, to them because, you know, they, they don't listen, all this experience is going.

**If we go back to the focus group and the female farmer that we talked to, did you feel that her position accorded with the views of the people that you would talk to as part of your project?**

**SOM2** I found her fascinating because initially she went in and she was banging the wildlife drum and it was, I suppose in, to a certain extent quite lucky that I went last because when I said I'm not coming at this from the same as everyone else in the room, she changed her, she changed her opinion, she then started talking about the opinions of, yeah, well the people out there that, you know, and I thought, because she's not as affected, she's on the other, she's, she's not looking or working this way, so I think that she was kind of happy to say ooh yeah, it's great but then when someone said well hang on a minute, I was quite surprised how quick she jumped ship but she.

**There was a bit of fluidity then?**

**SOM2** Yeah, she, yeah, because she's obviously aware of it because she lives round here but do people want to rock the boat for a, just for a minority who have got an issue?

**Yeah. I mean I'm not going to ask you too many more questions but one of the things I notice is there's a lot of money in local villages around planning and creating more housing.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**And obviously that has an impact if you're building on areas which are prone to flooding.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Been flooded in the past.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**So have people talked to you about? Has that ever come up in your conversations when you've been talking to people about resolving the issues of flooding in this particular landscape with new housing?**

**SOM2** Yeah, some of the locals were talking about, you know, with the concreting over of things, there's no run-off, you know, the extra collection on, on, you know, it was just creating more water, there's already nowhere for the water to go, so where is that going to go? Erm, and the other slightly strange thing as well was that, erm, after the flooding people who had lived in places found that their insurance was denied to them for reasons that, there would be like a dry ditch, so a house has been built near a dry ditch, dry ditch in terms of anyone's knowledge has never been flooded or anything but because that dry ditch was there the insurers wouldn't pay out for them because they said it hadn't been declared.

**Oh I see.**

**SOM2** So the, the fact there was a dry ditch there showed that there was, you know, possibly going to be some flooding. So I think one of the problems is that you can site these houses in places and then you could potentially hit the land, the, the property owner, with a huge problem, because it's only after that something's gone wrong that they're going to find out whether their insurance is, is honoured and of course, like they say, if you're increasing the number of buildings out there, you, you're just storing up trouble. I mean a lot of them said that the water came down so it was sort of, erm, so the, one lady that was sort of further south, she said, you know, that there was a danger of Bridgewater being flooded, you know, and because the bigger towns were in danger they said let the water out so they let the water out on to the moor and came at speed, erm, and it flooded because it, I guess a numbers game, they, there was fewer, fewer of them so they caught it so the people, the major number of people wouldn't, so when you're building in places, just, what's the answer? I don't know. We need more houses but when you're increasing the size of towns like Bridgewater that have a run off that is potentially the Levels, it's not, it's not going to go well and that very strongly came out, they felt that they had been sacrificed.

**Because they feel that they are basically sitting on the water reservoirs.**

**SOM2** Yes.

**There's flood water somewhere.**

**SOM2** Yes, and they no longer control that because there used to be, it would be the farmers that controlled the gates and said, you know, would say let the water out, you know, and they would get together and sort of discuss that but now when the, when they let the water out of the towns, the farmers were saying, ringing the pumps and saying please let the water out and they were being told no because of the wetlands, and of course it all just.

**When you say the wetlands, do you mean like the reserves?**

**SOM2** Yeah, apparently they believe and I don't know, I don't know but they believe that there, there is a minimal level with which the, the reserves won't let the water go because of the nesting birds, so that it was felt that they didn't want to open and let water out to drain it but I think what the farmers were saying was the level we're at now, there's more coming, it's going to flood, so there is pop, this reminds me of things people have said. One of the things that was said is that when people come and they are working for the rivers or the, the wetlands or wherever, they come for a relatively small number of years in relation to the seventy odd years that some of these people have lived here, so they don't know stuff, so they would preserve a water level, not realising that, erm, it's had, you know, you can let some out now because there's more coming, so it's like a seesaw, so there was this don't and then nobody joined up the thinking, they let, the water came and it, because, I mean it did destroy the wildlife, no, no it was preserved, you know, they say they, that when the waters were rising, the hedges were full of the mammals and you could.

**Gosh, yeah.**

**SOM2** Alive with it, erm, and then afterwards because the soil was poisoned, you know, there were, they were finding owls that had died and there was no food.

**Oh gosh, yeah.**

**SOM2** Erm, so the knock-on was, was huge but it's, it's, I think because it's become a bit fragmented, which is difficult.

**Yeah.**

**SOM2** Um.

**And that somehow maybe in that particular instance nature was put above, the reserves were put above the flooding practices.**

**SOM2** Yeah, I think, yeah, I think the reserves were doing their thing, I think you've got the town councils doing, you know, they obviously had to save people there so they were doing their thing, erm, and the, the farmers who were out there couldn't get anyone to listen. I mean when you hear someone whose house was utterly destroyed and she couldn't go back, she was really, quite depressed for a long period of time, she couldn't go back for, you know, a very long period of time, you know, when she tells you that they rang pumps and said let the water out, we're flooding and they refused and then, that's, that's quite heart-breaking, um.

**Yeah, but nobody's listening, nobody cares.**

**SOM2** Um, that's it, and that's the problem.

**Yeah, and it's not surprising that it would really turn people off against the reserves.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**Because they would see that again elevating.**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**The wildlife over humans.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**So rather than having a connection between the two.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**It's interesting isn't it?**

**SOM2** So it's a bit of a them and us which is a shame really.

**Yeah, and almost seems to be your own experience as well from having tried to do this project and collaborate with them.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah.

**That they have isolated themselves.**

**SOM2** Yeah, yeah, I don't think they feel they need, it felt, felt at the time maybe it's changed, it felt that they didn't need, didn't, they didn't need to make that connection with local people.

**…its years ago isn't it?**

**SOM2** Yeah, kind of just felt that they didn't quite get it. You know, the interesting thing is that then you roll on maybe a year, two years and I'm talking, you know, various people around erosions and they're more than happy to share information and come and visit, you know, exhibition but it almost felt no, we don't need to, you know, the locals have got their view and we're not interested.

**Because the murmurations a feel-good factor that draws in the tourists that draws in …**

**SOM2** Yeah, although I was really surprised to hear, I think someone in the focus group, one of, he, I don't know if he was, erm, birds or whatever, but he almost complained that he doesn't like the murmuration being talked about on telly because it brings lots of people and I was thinking but isn't that a big, great big tick? You know, you're doing your job and you see I always think if you get a different audience then that can only be, that's a great thing about, not only for artist but, you know, the example being if you get an artist to work in a place, my audience is very different from the nature loving audience, so if you highlight a place and get them to look at it in a different way, they will come and they will come and use it in a different way, that's got to be good, so getting it on television is, that's different audiences.

**Yeah, and in terms of other audiences, it sounds like there's a body of artists that are working in the area.**

**SOM2** Um.

**That are collaborating together and presumably using different landscapes, not just wetlands.**

**SOM2** No, no, no, Somerset, yeah, Somerset, and I think also we're starting to see in the country, you know, countrywide there's these landscapes, it's not into, to, this sense of place. The, the project I'm working on now, erm, comes under the umbrella of a landscape of objects which ran, it ran last year, I think there were four artists looking at different landscapes, not out here, erm, so it, it is, it's quite an interesting thing for, and artists just, you know, we, we like to immerse ourselves in places and perhaps look at things from different angles.

**Yeah. Are you yourself influenced by other factors, are you influenced by filmmaking, by books, by music?**

**SOM2** Yeah.

**Are there connectors around?**

**SOM2** Yeah, I.

**I'm really trying to get a sense of, you know, are there other poets out there I should know about who work on the Levels, are there filmmakers or?**

**SOM2** Yeah, I mean I think that Somerset Artworks would, would have a huge knowledge. I mean you've met REMOVED, my friend REMOVED, a painter that goes out there all the time, she works in a very different way to how I do and she's very much, you know, she's outside and she's, you know, she's.

**She's there all weathers, all times.**

**SOM2** Quite incredible, REMOVED sometimes, erm, yeah, they, it and you, you never quite know who you're going to find there or who's doing a project. One of the slight problems, it's strange really because after the flooding for a while it became the place, I mean I imagine this is very similar to, to what you do in your work, you could get funding, so it became a very, a focal point for artists. Perhaps, the flooding has gone now, there's less around that but I do wonder that now we're seeing this, erm, focus on places as a landscape whether we could, might see more people coming, erm, it's quite interesting. I, I definitely, when I, I was doing the thing at REMOVED I was visited by quite a lot of local artists who will go and, one chap I remember was just using ink to stand looking at the murmuration and do a very immediate. People are doing things but they're very different things, erm. I'm trying to think, I'll see if I've got any names when I go home because I know that there was quite, erm, trying to think of her name, there was a photographer that took a lot of photos of her family farm for the flooding, erm, and her name is, oh gosh it's, her sister was a fashion designer, it's on the tip of my tongue, I'll, I will, so she did a book about, about it at the time, erm. REMOVED, who was my mentor for a time, painted, erm, he, they were most incredible landscapes of the Levels, but he was tilting the horizon and so you almost felt as if you were lying.

**Keeling over, yeah, yeah.**

**SOM2** Yeah, and he's moved away a bit from that now, but he lives in REMOVED and, you know, goes out all the time, erm, but yeah, I'll, I will see if I can find you some names, yeah, yeah.

**Thank you so much for your time, it's been wonderful, thank you. Thanks so much.**

**SOM2** No, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview SOM3

**So now, really this kind of, what I'm hoping to talk to you about today is just a continuation of our focus group chat.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**But I know that you wanted to have a chat on the telephone, so was there something you wanted to talk about before we had?**

**SOM3** Erm, no it was just whether or not we needed to, erm, yeah, to get anything in place before, before tonight, so nothing, nothing.

**That's perfect, that's great. Now what I've been asking people is if they could give me, with your scouting hat on, obviously I don't want to give, you don't need to give me your history of the scouting organisation.**

**SOM3** No, no.

**But it's really just really kind of what you do in this area and your main activities with the Scouts in the area and then where the wetlands fit into that.**

**SOM3** We, we, erm, yeah, okay, we, er, do anything we think the kids would find fun, erm, which, erm, can involve, erm, anything, erm, typical scouting things, building big pioneering projects like a six foot swing or a bridge or anything, erm, that will give them. Hopefully they'll, they'll enjoy what they're doing, hopefully they'll pick up some skills while they're doing it, erm, so yeah, with, it's summer at the moment so we like being out and about obviously, erm, so yeah, the, erm, somewhere like Westhay's a good place to go for a treasure hunt or a map exercise or anything like that, even just a hike so that we can, it's a nice area we can go to, erm, so yeah, and use.

[interruption]

Yeah, so we, yeah, we, can do, we try to go there once, twice a year from, just to go over there and just, you know, have fun, enjoy the, the environment more than anything else. Erm, they like hanging around in the hides and see what they can see, erm.

**Yeah, and your Scouts are for, you have adventure Scouts and all levels of Scouts, so what sort of age group are?**

**SOM3** We have, the Scout troop is ten and a half to fourteen, fourteen and a half, erm, so a little younger than they used to be, erm, but still at that age, that age they like to run around and do fun things, so, erm, and so they pick up some skills while they're at it some, you know, some useful knowledge then they're brilliant. Erm, but there are times we do wish they were a little older. We, as part of a quick camp that we did two weeks ago, we actually walked from Wedmore to Westhay, which is three miles.

**Okay, gosh, yeah.**

**SOM3** There, three miles back, erm.

**Across country?**

**SOM3** Yeah, across country. We, we started up on the, up on the hills up there, literally just as you come out of Wedmore, erm, we cut down across the top side of the village, down through Madgley, straight into the top end of Westhay, erm, but all that was set up around, it. Firstly I wanted to get, I wanted to make sure that they knew where Westhay was, erm, but also it was based around a map reading exercise following some, directions to buried treasure, erm.

**Ah. So were they pretty much self-led then, did they have to navigate themselves with a set of instructions?**

**SOM3** They, we, erm, what I did was give them a, given a map of kind of the Westhay area and I created a, some, some clues, erm, which, you know, I found when I was wandering round Wedmore. It's, erm, it's amazing how many, how many two hundred year old treasure maps you come across when you wander around Wedmore.

**There's quite a few aren't there I'd imagine? [laughs]**

**SOM3** Yeah, definitely. Erm, so no, there were directions like, erm, it was, just some treasure that someone had buried, you had to follow the, the track and turn east along the road, take the second, erm, drove to the left and go for two kilometres to, that kind of thing. Erm, and then once they'd found out where it was, erm, I gave them a map which showed where we were camped in Wed, down the edge of Wedmore and the supposed top end of Westhay so the supposed location and I said plot yourself a route that involves, that misses out the major road to, to Glastonbury, erm, and they did that along, you know, pretty much where I wanted them to go, so, erm, said right, we'll walk the route to find the treasure. Erm, we didn't quite make it to the actual spot but we were pretty close and, surprised, surprised the treasure had gone but I had some chocolate coins in my bag anyway just to.

**You always need a back-up.**

**SOM3** Exactly.

**You always need a back-up.**

**SOM3** Yeah, yeah.

**Activities like that, do you have to a lot of risk assessments?**

**SOM3** Erm, yes, the main one, the main one obviously, erm, is traffic when we're crossing the roads, erm, that's why I asked them to stick off, there's only a short piece of main road that we had to walk along. Erm, so yeah, trying to get fifteen kids safely down to Westhay and back.

**Not easy.**

**SOM3** Erm, you've got your things like, you know, slips, trips and falls, erm, insect bites, stings, just things that you need to be aware of, reactions maybe to, to plants or nettle stings, anything like that, so, erm, first aid kit, high vis jackets, erm, yeah. Obviously maps so we know where we are and that, yeah.

**So when you think about the activities you do with the boys, or other, with children I should say.**

**SOM3** Yeah, yeah.

**Apologies.**

**SOM3** Yeah, we have girls as well.

**Yeah, is it specifically, you know, fun is the main thing you said there, fun activities.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**Is it skills training, is it education, is it awareness of the natural environment?**

**SOM3** Erm, all of the above, yeah, definitely, erm, the skills, erm, the skills side of it in this case was the, the map reading, the, the finding location, being able to plot a route and then walk to it, erm, awareness was just being there and pointing out various bits we went through. We stopped for, stopped for fifteen, twenty minutes, erm, before coming back on our hike and, you know, just stopping to take a note what was around them, you know, pointed out that we could hear a bit of, erm, we could see other, other birds, one is a keen bird spotter, erm, he was pleased he saw a Great Crested Grebe I think it was, erm, so he had his binoculars and his bird book along with him so he was pleased. The others, erm, you know, just made them aware of where they were, what was about, erm, and then, you know, the knowledge and information would come later from, erm, you know, just the little things we pointed on the way but as we build on stuff like that, so yeah.

**Yeah, and do you find that sometimes the kids actually teach you a few things you didn't know?**

**SOM3** Yes, yeah, I didn't know about the birds, the, the Grebe for example, erm, I wouldn't, I'm not a massive bird spotter, you know.

**No, I'm the same.**

**SOM3** But, yeah.

**I know a few but not that many.**

**SOM3** Erm, some of the, the distinctive ones, you know, we've got a green woodpecker lands in the garden, we've got, I knew the bittern that makes the booming sound so we, you know, we were able to spot that when we were in Westhay. Erm, that's about my limit, you know, so a blackbird but, yeah, the, the boy with the bird book was able to point out, seemed to be the expert.

**Yeah, which is, you know, absolutely brilliant.**

**SOM3** Yeah, definitely.

**And so I mean I love the fact it's a two-way thing and talked about, do you ever go on to Shapwick Heath as well or is it always Westhay?**

**SOM3** Shapwick Heath normally with West, normally Westhay side, Shapwick Heath, erm, all that's the other side of the, erm, trying to think, the other side of the road, I think it's across there, the main road, we do cycle around the edge of it, erm. We do usually a cycle ride to Glastonbury and back with the Scouts which is.

**Quite a way isn't it?**

**SOM3** Yeah, twenty five mile round trip, so, erm, it's a biggy, we tend to enjoy it. We haven't got it in the programme this year. So we normally come round kind of go up through Blackford as you go out, towards the motorway, up through Blackford, around through Burtall and then the edge of Shapwick across into, into Westhay by the, erm, the old railway line, cycle along there for a while, that's part of the route.

**And I know that's a lot safer.**

**SOM3** Yeah, there's often a lot of people out there, so yeah, it's good, walkers obviously, so.

**So would you say, when you're doing your with the children.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**Are there other organisations as well that have either a youth focus or have an environmental focus?**

**SOM3** Erm, we do occasional things with the Guides, erm, that tends to be based more around Wedmore, erm, do a wide game, we'll do a joint kind of evening in one of the huts, erm, we've got an evening coming up in June with the Guides, erm, because we're pretty much the same organisation, erm, so yeah, we, we.

**So REMOVED?**

**SOM3** It's REMOVED that's, yeah, yeah, we do stuff with REMOVED and, and the Guides. In terms of other organisations, we, I do think we need to be more physical, as an organisation, just, erm, not necessarily for, for the, you know, for the publicity getting new members in but just like generally, just the fact that we're here, you know, and to see that we're doing and stuff. Erm, but that's often, not always easy.

**No.**

**SOM3** We try to keep, I try not to do too many weekend meetings or weekend sessions, erm, simply because the kids have other stuff on, Monday nights Scout, erm, and if you start doing three or four Saturdays a term, they, they.

**Yeah, it gets.**

**SOM3** The numbers drop off because it's, it's a big commitment, but they're lucky, they can go to one or two, so, erm, yeah, so we, we don't always do much, we have done a little bit before round Wedmore, erm, but in terms of other organisations, we know they're there and occasionally we try to set them up but, erm.

**So when we had the focus group, was it helping meeting some of the?**

**SOM3** Yeah, I got quite a lot of focus, contact names from the focus group, erm, that I'll, you know, explore further. Speaking to the bat people, that'll be really interesting.

**I was going to say, I think they'd be really supportive.**

**SOM3** Yes, yeah, yeah.

**Because I know for them younger people getting involved in going to the bat groups and.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**Is a great way of educating families.**

**SOM3** Yes.

**And certainly the kids about the importance of bats and their habitats.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**And having to live sensitively with them, so.**

**SOM3** Yeah, definitely. That's on my, on my list to do after, erm, after the summer, when, obviously it's a bit.

**Well you've got your programme already set out haven't you?**

**SOM3** Yeah, we have, erm, but also it's, doesn't get dark until, until nine, half nine from hereon in, so it's one that we'll do in the winter when the nights are closing in a bit, so.

**I know that, because they were explaining to me that the bat walks have to be done when the bats are active.**

**SOM3** Yes.

**And that's mainly June and July and obviously that means it doesn't get dark until about nine.**

**SOM3** No, no, that's the thing.

**Difficult for the, you know, with the kids if you needed to say up later.**

**SOM3** Yeah, also we're, we're, I'm conscious of the fact that, again some of them are only ten and a half, so staying up past eight thirty when we, is when we're due to finish on a Monday, because it's a Monday obviously they're then tired for the rest of the week if we overrun.

**Well that's the thing, I mean that's the thing, you know, my son is ten and a half.**

**SOM3** Yes.

**And if he wants to stay up late to do an activity I don't mind doing it on the weekend or in the school holidays.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**But actually in the school, because it's holiday time so yeah.**

**SOM3** Yeah, so we don't, we don't meet during the holidays, we, we only meet during term time.

**Course, yes.**

**SOM3** So it's going to have an impact on school, so, usually, we do occasionally, we do camps or something out of, out of term time but.

**Yeah, but do, the Scouts round here, do they get involved in environmental work, so do you ever do litter picking and things like that?**

**SOM3** Yes, yeah, we have done one with REMOVED, who's the REMOVED.

**Oh yeah, yeah.**

**SOM3** That was a year or two ago and it's probably time we got in touch with him and organise another one. Erm, I know the Guides do one as well round here so, yeah.

**Right. All of those are useful aren't they?**

**SOM3** Yes, yeah.

**So one of the things that the project is trying to get at is a sense of place in the wetlands and I wondered, either from your experience of leading the Scouts from the Scouts themselves.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**Whether, sounds like particularly Westhay more than Shapwick, whether it was, whether it's different for them than it is for other landscapes, you know, so are the wetlands different in terms of, you know, certain feeling they engender?**

**SOM3** Erm, yeah, as part, as, part of the walk, erm, we did the other week, when we, when we were having a bit of a break before we came back, erm, I did try, I started to think about where they were and what they, and their kind of, you know, their first thoughts of Westhay, erm, and yeah, a lot of them were down, you know, they either sketched, did a little sketch or put some thoughts down, erm, most of them, a lot of them came back with, you know, they really pretty, a lovely area to be in, obviously the wildlife and the birds, fish as well in there with, like one of the lakes, kind of the lake areas that, so yeah, they, erm.

**Do you think they see, do you think, they see it as something different from say going to the pond tops or going down to the coast or is it all just for them?**

**SOM3** Just outside, erm.

**It's just an outside, yeah.**

**SOM3** Possibly, yeah, it's, erm, I mean it is, it is a very different terrain to the tops, the Mendips, and the coast, so, erm, I think they would, I haven't directly asked them, yeah, no, I, we are kind of lucky where we live here, it's not a city, it's, I guess it isn't significantly different, erm, to how it would be if we were, if we were in Bristol or, you know, Brighton, London, whatever, erm, most places and where, you know, there's trees with a quarter of a mile, so, erm, so it's, it's perhaps necessarily kind of different as it would be where we more city-based but, but yeah, it is a different terrain which, you know, obviously we could see as adults. I don't know if it would or not, I know they, yeah, trying to get them to focus on what's going on is, or what's around them, it's, it's something that we've tried to do when we do any of these, even really things like the Cheddar Gorge walk, so actually maybe pause, look around, so yeah.

**And I think that's it, it's hard to get into the imagination of kids and work out what it is that is particularly drawing to them.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**Because it might be the fact that, you know, if you're doing a Cheddar walk and you're on the, or the Mendip plateau[?] it's.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**It's the view that's really amazing, or the fact that being so close to the birds and being, and hearing, and having nature around you is great on the wetlands but yeah.**

**SOM3** That's the thing, that's why we're trying to draw attention to the, to the bitterns and the birds so, you know, there's, erm, I could tell you, they're, I think there were, there were some taking off around me on the water, certainly as I said one of the, one of Scouts spotted a Grebe so, erm, so yeah, he, you know, it's something that we encourage them to do and then, rather than just sitting there.

**Yeah, trying to get them to pause and observe is, must be the hardest thing in the world though isn't it?**

**SOM3** Yes, exactly, yeah, some of them are more interested swinging a stick at anything they can, you know, you've got to work that.

**But I like the fact they're map making as well, so competent about moving around in a natural space.**

**SOM3** Exactly, yeah, that's, that's something we, yeah, we try to encourage.

**Yeah, and alongside of that, you know, part of the project is also looking at health and wellbeing and.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**Is that something that you talk about with the children?**

**SOM3** Yes, to a limited extent. It's, it's part of the Challenge Badge programme, erm, kind of thing, there are specific areas like camp hygiene and things like that, erm, got to research, you know, personal hygiene, physical, sorry, fitness, smoking, drugs and alcohol, things like that, diet and sleep, so we do kind of promote that, erm, it's usually a winter session when we've got them in the hut and they get to run around a bit and talk to them for a bit, erm. We, we do tend to do some sessions where we can have three or four different bases that they kind of spend fifteen minutes on, move around, so, but some we go into their, their, rather than hitting them with a full hour or a topic, we kind of keep it, keep it light.

**Keep it kind of short and snappy and move it around, yeah.**

**SOM3** Yeah, and we can always revisit, come back to it, you know, do it first half of the term and then come back to it the second half of the term, see what they've retained, erm, so we do but not in, not in massive detail, enough to be, for them to be aware and think about it and obviously how they can, how they, how they can, you know, yeah, how it relates to them.

**Yeah. Do you get a sense from them about what nature is or what it, you know?**

**SOM3** It varies, erm, some of them definitely, they love being out there doing things, some of them you can tell they'd rather be sat on the PlayStation so.

**Right, so that's, we talked about it at the focus group.**

**SOM3** Yes.

**About how you get kids involved in nature.**

**SOM3** Yeah, yeah.

**But that is some of the biggest things, getting them off screens and into nature.**

**SOM3** That's, that's, yeah.

**And making that more interesting.**

**SOM3** Yeah, that's why we have, erm, no electronics rule on camp. I've got a phone if they need one, erm, the camp we did at the weekend, one of the Scouts had a phone and a kindle, I left him the kindle because it's just a reader, erm, but I did take his phone off him for the weekend and he grumbled a bit and said can I have it back? I want to ring my mum and. Erm, but I, you know, I have to be firm, because I was being assessed but also I didn't want them, as soon as he started putting music on or whatever, everybody's clustered round his screen.

**Screen, yeah.**

**SOM3** So we try to, we try to make sure they don't, they're not using electronics when they're with us, you know, unless, unless there's a specific need for it on the, on the evening.

**But this seems to be, somewhere they, it's almost fashionable to get your phone out and just look at it.**

**SOM3** Exactly, yeah.

**To show your phone, it's very fashionable to isn't it?**

**SOM3** Erm, we were in the canteen at work and they've got, canteen area, they've got seats, bit like these really and there was, erm, there was eight of us all sat on two, four sofas, all individually looking at our phones or our iPads and the head of legal walked past and said oh this is a social group. [laughs] And just kept walking and we realised yeah, we've just, it's lunchtime yeah, we, still sat there, yeah.

**So you're either, exactly, you're either, you know, on your own personal emails or you're reading the news or.**

**SOM3** Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, it's.**

**SOM3** Well for most of us, we're sat looking at a screen as part of our jobs as well so.

**I know, it's crazy isn't it? You need to take that step back but we all do it.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**And it's very habitable I think is the other side of it.**

**SOM3** No, it's definitely beneficial and I don't know, parents just, again gone out and asked them for comments and things that they said, you know, to get them off the screen, little things like that, you know that they appreciate the fact that the kids are not on screens.

**Yeah, well I guess, although, you know, health and wellbeing is treated in a different way.**

**SOM3** Yes.

**Some ways the act of taking them off the screen and into nature is really great for their wellbeing isn't it?**

**SOM3** Yes, yes, it is, yes, it's, makes them more round decent, makes them more likely to go and find it themselves, you know, erm. As I said if we can, you know, it's, the way I describe our job as Scout Leaders, do something the kids will enjoy, they learn from, the learn something, it's great, but if we give them the opportunity to do various things they may then find something they want to take further themselves, and, you know, if they take that, you know, if we can push them or support them through that, that's brilliant, erm, so, you know, we do, we do as much as we can with them, so, yeah.

**It's really important … my son was a scout until a couple of years ago.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**Well he did Cubs until a couple of years ago.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**But his friend started not going so he didn't want to go and that's, we had the talk**

**SOM3** Yeah, yeah, definitely.

**You know, they want to do what their friends are doing.**

**SOM3** Yeah, there's like, yeah.

**You've got an age group of kids that want to go and it's great and.**

**SOM3** Yeah, as I probably mentioned before, erm, my son left for a year they came back because he had a couple of school friends that decided they, it wasn't for them or they didn't enjoy it and peer pressure won out but event, you know, a year later he decided actually he'd like to come back, erm, and I'm really proud of him for doing that, so yeah, really good, because he even stood up to them in the playground so actually, yeah, rejoined Scouts and.

**And, but also you gave him the opportunity to just choose for himself.**

**SOM3** Yes.

**Because it would be too hard, too easy I would say for you to say no, you've got to come along.**

**SOM3** Yeah, exactly.

**And then he wouldn't enjoy it because it's got to be their decision hasn't it?**

**SOM3** Yeah, I tried initially, erm, but, you know, he made the decision and I could tell it wasn't going to work pushing and he came round to, came round to my way of thinking eventually. [laughs]

**Eventually, eventually.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**And obviously another part of the project is mosquitoes.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**So what you're doing on Westhay, has that, have they been an issue at all?**

**SOM3** Erm, no more than you would expect, erm, again not, erm, not something the kids have necessarily spotted, erm. Not something we've, not something I've introduced, erm, particularly up until now. Making them aware of the, the eco system, you know, as part of, part of being there but yeah, they kind of, they notice there's a lot of them around in places, the bank stuff's kind of their, that's their exposure so far, that's it.

**Yeah, so it's not something that you'd ever, deterred from leading a group on to the site.**

**SOM3** No.

**You know, oh, too many mosquitoes, not going to go?**

**SOM3** No, no, exactly, no, we've, erm, again it's, it's countryside, a lot of them near, near fields, near streams, so there's midges, mosquitoes, you know, lots of flies around. You know, you get farmers spreading muck around, there's, you know, it's country life.

**Yeah, so it's just part and parcel of being outdoors.**

**SOM3** Yeah, exactly, yeah.

**Yeah, and the parents have never said to you, no, we don't want you to doing that activity because we're worried about x, you know, biting insects?**

**SOM3** No, no, not at all, no.

**No, no.**

**SOM3** Erm, nothing like that. I mean I, I, previously we've been to, been to Italy a few years back and I, I got bitten all over, I was just one of these people attracts them so it was all up my lower legs and everything.

**Oh miserable.**

**SOM3** Kind of big bruises from them and so, yeah, it's, it's, it wouldn't put me off, it's just part of living where we live and doing activities on, on Westhay and around the countryside really.

**Yeah. So in that, sounds like the mosquitoes have quite a low visibility.**

**SOM3** Yes, yeah, they, we haven't necessarily seen mass clouds of them, erm, occasional, occasionally, you know, you see bunches of them hanging around, swarms of them, sorry, yeah. Wondering what the collective noun was, I guess it's a swarm.

**Has it, they were a collective, I should found out, yeah.**

**SOM3** It's, erm, yeah, it's one of those things you kind of notice, you know, peripherally, you know, again not enough to put you off and, so.

**Yeah. So in terms of sort of, you haven't noticed whether there's increasing numbers or decreasing numbers?**

**SOM3** Erm, no, not specifically, erm, to, yeah, so it's, yeah, they're, they're, you know, they are there and not to any, up until now it's not something I've necessarily looked for, other than.

**Okay, yeah. Some people have said to me that it's either it's horse bites or ticks actually that people are more worried about, I don't know whether that's.**

**SOM3** Yeah, they've, erm.

**Found that.**

**SOM3** We were warned about ticks on the camp the other weekend simply because there have been deer in the field that we're using, so, erm, you know, was just something to be aware of, erm, certainly around the, the kind of areas for the longer grass, erm, and.

**Do they just ask you to check to see whether there's any ticks on those?**

**SOM3** Just, it was just a question of being, this is from the, the owner of the field, erm, just say, you know, we've had the deer in there so maybe, you know, may want to be aware that, you know, there could be, you know, quite a small chance that could be, so, yeah, we just, it's an awareness thing rather than a, a concern.

**To worry about.**

**SOM3** Yeah, and again horse flies, they've got a reputation for biting and so, you know, erm, again not something I've personally experienced, erm, and, you know, we, when we were out walking we, we, you know, we were covered up, long sleeves, long trousers and such, erm, in most places so it wasn't, erm, wasn't something that I was thinking could affect the Scouts on the walk because something again I was aware of as a, as, you know, risk assessment.

**Yeah, because, you know, the kids aren't particularly bothered about, you know, if they have anxieties about being in nature.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**It's not to do with insects, it might be to do with the darkness or it might be to do with.**

**SOM3** Yes, yeah.

**I don't know, something.**

**SOM3** Bears in the woods and things, yeah, we, erm, a couple, a year, about a year and a half, two years ago we did a night walk with the Guides down from a pub up on the hill, kind of that direction and we did come through a field, which had cows in it, including some young cows and it was dark and they were making noises and they were starting to move towards us, so there was a little bit of, erm, not necessarily, not necessarily panic but we were considering whether or not we could throw the kids over the gate in time if they charged, so, erm.

**[laughs]**

**SOM3** So yeah, again, something you're aware of, erm, I would try not to go through a field of cows if at all possible, erm, just because of their size but it was part of country life, so, you can't avoid it.

**Yeah, I think everyone's got a cow anecdote when it's gone wrong, you know.**

**SOM3** Yeah, exactly, yeah, they're just bigger than you think, so when you see them rear up, yeah.

**Exactly and that's herd mentality.**

**SOM3** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Okay, well I'm glad that mosquitoes are low visibility. In the time that you've spent doing … work with the children.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**Have you noticed any other changes in terms of animal population? So, you know, we're using mosquitoes as a way of thinking about climate change.**

**SOM3** Yeah, yeah.

**And I wondered if you have, in the times that you've been doing your field trips, whether you've noticed anything change about wildlife**

**SOM3** Erm, no, just through, not necessarily increase, a decrease, erm. Having, you know, been out through Westhay, there are, there seem to be sometimes and air of, you know, see a lot more swans than normal, whether that's just the time where they're out and about rather than, you know, nesting, erm, so there's always a load of, always lots of swans, other, other bird life, erm, again couldn't identify species but, you know, there's, erm, lots of ducks, erm. I don't recall hearing a bittern before, before the weekend before last when we went, erm, I know, well not to that extent, this one was really loud, couldn't tell how close it was but it was really loud, really calling out a lot. First time I've heard one that sort of. In terms of also things, you know, like the Starlings that, erm, or the murmurations and they have up here with the Starlings, erm, seen, I guess, an increase, erm. They seem to be, whether it's just there's more, erm, publicity about it now, BBC News seemed to pick up on it, it's kind of a local Somerset thing isn't it?

**Yeah.**

**SOM3** They seem to pick up on that more now, so I guess as a consequence I've noticed them a bit more, erm, but you see quite impressive, you know, flocks of Starlings, birds flying around so, erm.

**And what do you think of, what's increased your awareness do you think?**

**SOM3** Erm.

**Is it living in the area, is it another influence?**

**SOM3** Certainly the publicity around the, the flocks of birds, you know, erm, and you're also seeing other, erm, congregations of birdwatchers specifically waiting for something, you know, seen, seen them a couple of times more recently over the last couple of year or two, probably two or three times seen actually groups stand waiting.

**And where would they be waiting then, they're waiting?**

**SOM3** Erm.

**Westhay, at Shapwick?**

**SOM3** Yeah, in Westhay, also Glastonbury Road, erm, which is on the edge of, erm, near to Westhay, there's kind of that, yeah, we're here, Glastonbury Road's there, Westhay is here, so at the far end towards Glastonbury end.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM3** Again I wouldn't, I don't know what specifically they're waiting for, but they were, there's been a couple of times I've seen them.

**Yeah, but it's unusual if you see groups of people clustering somewhere.**

**SOM3** Yes.

**In an area where people don't cluster, so yeah.**

**SOM3** Yeah, exactly, erm, oh yeah, I've seen them in Westhay as well. Herons as well we've seen, I think not so many this year, erm, I think last year it was, we did see quite a few, there seemed to be a larger number around, erm. They're distinctive because the local bird that's the heron's family, get to recognise the shape and, erm, yeah, that's kind of increased my awareness of herons specifically, so yeah. Last year there seemed to be maybe more around than this year.

**Yeah, I mean it's funny, I was on Shapwick earlier and I heard a heron.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**No, not a heron, a bittern.**

**SOM3** A bittern, yeah.

**Yeah, and that's the first time I've heard one, so that was very special, you know.**

**SOM3** Yeah, yeah, interesting sound isn't it? Yeah.

**Interesting stound, it is, yeah. The last part of the interview as it were, I'm really interested in knowing how wetlands are viewed by your members, so the children.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**And how you think that may have changed over time because what I'm trying to get a sense of is do they see wetlands as different from other kinds of landscapes? We've talked before and that you said that they kind of, it's hard to tell with kids sometimes but.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**They certainly don't see them as negative or scary places do they?**

**SOM3** No, they don't, they're always, erm, yeah, they're always, you know, keen to, whenever we do go out, they're always keen to, you know, to take part in the activity we're doing, erm, they may do that irrespective of where we base it, erm, it's, that difficult to tell. Erm, but no, there's, I've not had anything, anything negative about the wetlands or, you know, erm, or anything like that, no, so it's, yeah, so it's, it's not so. It is a different landscape, it's not significantly different, obviously because we live in a village so, erm, but yeah, they're used to the countryside and, yeah.

**Yeah, I guess for them it's about the very natural part of the landscape, it doesn't look dramatically different does it?**

**SOM3** No, no, no, erm, I mean having said that, it's, it is a lot different to Cheddar Gorge, where you've got, obviously rocky, erm, and, you know, out towards Burnham, towards the beach, erm, it's, it is, it's quite different to the, to those, and I guess quite different to those actually landscapes but as far as, I think, the kids are concerned, it's, it's somewhere else to go, you know, they're happy to do that, so.

**Yeah. And do you feel that, you know, over the last few years that wetlands has got a different, they've got a different kind of public persona?**

**SOM3** Erm.

**Or do you think it's been pretty much the same, you know, or is it just that wetlands are actually very contentious?**

**SOM3** I think there was a lot of publicity around the area with the flooding a couple of years back, erm, whether that brought more people in, I think it probably did once the, once the water went down. Erm, so, yeah, I think there, there does seem, over time, I think, yeah, I see there has been an increased in the number of people you just see out when you're, when you go out to Westhay for, for activities or for, you know, when we go out to for example for a walk or for, for {very noisy background so some audio lost} you do see, yeah, I think there are, the amount of people out there has increased.

**Okay, that's really … yeah.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**Do you think that flooding had a negative impact on the wetlands or do people see them as actually storage[?] areas?**

**SOM3** Erm.

**Or was?**

**SOM3** I don't necessarily think they should have flooded like that, they should have been, erm, it seemed to take people by surprise and there hasn't been a lot of money put into keeping the rivers flowing, keeping them, keeping them dredged and in terms of other infrastructure as in, you know, clearing the rivers, I'm not sure of any specific details but, yeah, I know there was a focus on essentially making sure it doesn't happen again because of the effect on the landscape and the people, so.

**Yeah, because it feels like round here, you got off quite easily, that's it's down south of the Poldens was the area where it was really problematic.**

**SOM3** Yeah, there was a lot of it down there, we're, I mean it's, it's, the areas largely … so we are slightly higher anyway, erm, and then to go down, to get down into the levels, so over the back is, is kind of, certainly in Glastonbury, so we've got the ridge of hills and then dips up the other side towards, towards Westhay, so, yeah, I think we really get away with it. It certainly raised awareness of the area and, erm, yeah, I think probably brought more people in to.

**When, you know, when your friends and neighbours go for a walk or, do they ever, where are they more likely to go? Are they more likely to go to the Corn Tops or the Mendips, you know?**

**SOM3** Erm.

**Are the wetlands sort of used by the local village quite a lot or not really?**

**SOM3** I don't know, they are, erm, again I'm not, erm, I'm not particularly in, erm, in them, for, for bird groups or bat groups, so, erm, in terms of the, you know, friends and neighbours, erm, a couple of them go walking, so they go up generally across the hills, erm. One of the, one of the Assistant Scout Leaders, erm, he likes to check out new routes we could do as a walk with Scouts, which is particularly orienteering, so he'll go up and point orienteer courses, go for a bird event on the weekend, so tend to head for the hilly areas, erm, but then in terms of family, my wife's parents are, they like going over the Westhay, blackberry picking in the autumn, erm, and, yeah, also just to walk, but yeah, but I, and again I have cycled, long time ago, I have cycled with my parents and parents-in-law out there, erm, a couple of times. We do keep saying as a family we should go out but it involves my son getting on a bike, so it's trickier than it sounds, erm, but no, they like the area, and, you know.

**But I was noticing a couple of kids cycling round the village and.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**It's tricky for the kids actually because the, cars drive so fast.**

**SOM3** It's, the village is, isn't sent up for traffic.

**No, it isn't, no.**

**SOM3** As you probably noticed, erm, that's, I could go on about that, I have, I have done, I've bored my wife, there's three solutions and we don't want any of them they could see, so, erm.

**And in some ways you don't need to have anybody in this {audio lost due to background noise} at all.**

**SOM3** No.

**You could direct, redirect people that don't need to get into the village elsewhere but.**

**SOM3** Exactly, it's, erm.

**It's really tricky.**

**SOM3** Yeah, there's, yeah.

**Just doesn't seem enough places to park.**

**SOM3** No.

**I mean I tried to park out here at the back.**

**SOM3** Yeah.

**It was all full.**

**SOM3** There's the one in the Borough by Pumpkin.

**That's, yeah. I went there.**

**SOM3** There's also one on the Cheddar Road, which is bigger and it's less obvious.

**Ah, oh, I didn't know that one.**

**SOM3** Yeah, it's, erm, either, you know, can either go in, as you come out of the Borough car park, you take a right, take a left into the cul-de-sac, then as you go round there's a left hand, go take a left, there's an entrance there or as you head out this way on Cheddar Road, it's about a hundred yards after the second fork, and it's, yeah, it's a bigger car park but, erm, I don't know how well used it is because it involves a walk to the village, people, people like to park in the village, you know, outside the paper shop and the traffic coming up and down the road.

**That's it, that's it.**

**SOM3** Erm.

**We need to encourage people to do a bit more walking don't we, you know?**

**SOM3** Yeah, yeah, exactly, so, yeah, that's, that's a battle we're not going to win unfortunately.

**That's very different, yeah, not any time soon, no.**

**SOM3** No.

**Now unless you had anything else that you wanted to talk to me or ask me about?**

**SOM3** Erm, yeah, in terms of, you know, kind of the, the Scouts, what we can do as a, as a group, erm, what would you like us to do that we can? Yeah. We've got, you know, we can, we can go to Westhay regularly, erm, so what, what can we do for you?

**Yeah, well that's very kind of you. Erm, I.**

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview SOM4

**So what were you before?**

**SOM4** Erm, leaving school I went to art school, I got a degree in art in REMOVED and and then at the time it was a bit depressed so I, I couldn't get, I wanted to go into teaching, as it turned out they slashed the number of places available to do that so I went to REMOVED, worked in interior design shop for a bit but, family run business, bit nasty so decided to go, a friend offered me a space in London, so went down to London, met my husband, and just doing short work and things like this and eventually became a civil servant, yeah, strangely.

**Oh.**

**SOM4** Yeah, strangely, sort of junior manager in civil service so that took us, my husband was a civil servant at the time as well, so it was quite good, it took us all over the country to the Fens, to Yorkshire and come back down here so.

**Yeah, and is he originally from Somerset?**

**SOM4** He is, he's from REMOVED.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM4** So he's, yes, Somerset but he, so he does know the geography quite, quite well. I've only been here fifteen years, so I'm getting to know, well I do know it quite well I suppose.

**Yeah, so do you think this is it now, do you think your travels?**

**SOM4** Probably not, I think we might head back to Scotland, I don't know, I think he's of that mind but he doesn't like midges.

**Oh yeah. [laughs]**

**SOM4** Apart from that, yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. It's always interesting where life takes us isn't it?**

**SOM4** Oh isn't it just?

**That's perfect, thank you.**

**SOM4** Yeah, so we've been all over, quite enjoyed the Fens, big skies[?] and that, so I noticed … I didn't get going until we got down to here because leaving arts school you had to earn money, that involved full-time work and I didn't feel like painting, but, erm, luckily now I've got spare time to do things like come over here. [laughs]

**Yeah, well it's a joy isn't it?**

**SOM4** It is.

**Such a joy.**

**SOM4** It is, it is, um.

**And it's funny how these things in life have rhythms don't they?**

**SOM4** Yeah.

**You know, we have things we liked to do and then they go on hiatus for various reasons and then.**

**SOM4** Yeah.

**How lovely to rediscover them.**

**SOM4** Oh it's fantastic, erm, yeah, really that's.

**So are you part of an artist collective? Are you? Because how do you know the? Because I got in touch with you because of Carol, so I wondered if, did she?**

**SOM4** Yes, yes, I'm a member of REMOVED, so, and I take part regularly in exhibitions and things, not necessarily organised by, they have the Arts Week, which is something I've been doing for quite a long time and, erm, I do, North Somerset is one, so that sort of thing I find is the best sort of, well I, so my preferred way of going about artistic businesses, you know, because, it's great because you get to meet people and chat about your work and, erm, which you don't necessarily get in a gallery or something and I haven't really gone down that route, it suits me.

**Yeah, so you're able to be independent essentially.**

**SOM4** Yes.

**So you produce the work when you want to.**

**SOM4** Exactly.

**And then you exhibit it when you want to.**

**SOM4** Exactly.

**And then there's no pressure in terms of.**

**SOM4** Having to put x number of paintings or something up, you know, not, just it's not.

**Yeah, which works out really well.**

**SOM4** It does, it does, um.

**Yeah.**

**SOM4** Um.

**And so it kind of, so you're a member of the REMOVED but if you like you're an affiliate because you choose when you want to do stuff and.**

**SOM4** Yes, yeah, something, yes, just purely a member, a member of local, some art groups as well, the REMOVED art group, so again because I was hoping it would get me into a different sort of clientele and I don't mind going to the meetings or going to the exhibitions but they've always been very kind and receptive, so.

**Yeah, that's really good, and so obviously we're on this lovely landscape of Shapwick Heath but do you draw inspiration from all types of landscape? Are you drawn mainly to the wetlands?**

**SOM4** Erm, my work recently has been more about the wetlands, it's about, because I've enjoyed coming here so much on my bike and it's something I feel the need to, it's the way I work in ink, it's, the, the water, the reflection of reeds, everything else I can, I feel I can use well in my paintings, if you like. I do seascapes a lot as well, go down to Cornwall and things, um, but this is obviously more accessible because I just live few minutes away, thirty minutes away.

**Yeah, you're being modest now about your biking skills aren't you?**

**SOM4** Yes, I am. [laughs]

**It's far far away, so how quickly?**

**SOM4** Well to get here on my bike that, but, erm.

**Yeah, well what a lovely spot to end up coming to, so would you say, so in terms of the wetlands which are all part of the Avalon Marshes.**

**SOM4** Um.

**The partnership, is it mainly Shapwick Heath and Westhay Moor or is it Ham Wall or?**

**SOM4** I sometimes go along to Ham Wall, it means cycling all the way along the, erm, main ring, there in mind going over into Ham Wall, it's great, it's exciting to go somewhere different but, you know, I'm never bored with her, I come here and I'm just quite happy to sit and observe nature and recover from the bike ride.

**And in terms of the site, do you, is there any, are there particular areas that you visit or do you walk all the way round the site and it just depends on what's the light and the mood and?**

**SOM4** Yes, the mood and the energy levels as well but generally I like to come down little tracks, tracks like this and, erm, I've got, my favourite spot, my contemplative spot, which is down near, it's past Decoy Hide which we're on at the moment, we just need to …a bit more, and again it's just peaceful sitting down on the bench just looking at the water and seeing what's happening and just something about that place, it's got bigger trees probably, erm, but I like to explore this end of it, I must admit more than maybe the far end, which is very nice but, erm, yes. I mean it's all very nice but this is my preferred option because it's closer to [laughs] and it just happens, you know, just, I'm desperate to get here and explore the paths when I get, do get here, but, yeah, um.

**Yeah, that's so lovely, that's so nice, and you would cycle down here, is that, you know, or do you leave the bike at the top?**

**SOM4** No, I cycle, I do cycle down, not sure I'm supposed to.

**Yeah, oh no, I'm sure.**

**SOM4** Quite sure.

**I'm sure it's completely fine.**

**SOM4** But obviously if I ever met anybody I'd come off but no, just generally, time, sometimes it's a bit too bumpy to cycle, so I just push my bike and it's good to give the legs a bit of a change. [laughs] Um.

**Yeah, yeah, and you'll come here, all throughout the year, there's.**

**SOM4** Yes, yeah, yeah, I've been here on really cold days, which are wonderful and also in the heat of the summer as well, you get shade, you get lots of mosquitoes then but, erm.

**Ah.**

**SOM4** Yes, sorry. But different light, reeds are a different colour for example, they're green, so, erm, yeah.

**So it's really all year round interest.**

**SOM4** It's all year round because there's always something to see and this is the best time of year, I think, you have the bitterns booming.

**Yes, we've experienced that, beautiful.**

**SOM4** We've got, you know, lots of birdlife going about its business.

**Yeah, and you said before that it's mainly the morning time that you love to come.**

**SOM4** Yes, yes, I do, although I have been out here in the evening, about this time of year I think it was, last year, with my husband, we came for a walk and just walked down the Sweet track and this area, and the sunset was just incredible and it was just all broken up by a tree, very inspirational.

**It's lovely.**

**SOM4** But I tend to yes, come, sorry long answer, I tend to come here in the morning, yeah, early morning.

**Yeah. And when you, like for instance if you saw that gentleman just now who obviously had his camera with him.**

**SOM4** Um, um.

**Do you find that there's always people here, no matter what time you come or whatever time of year you come?**

**SOM4** Erm.

**Because this is quite secluded really round here isn't it?**

**SOM4** It is really and you don't see many people, you do see photographers and birdwatchers perhaps who've come up to sit in the hides for a while but, erm, generally not a great deal of people and that's the way it suits me, I like.

**Yeah, because actually for some people, the seclusion, the kind of, the fact that you're alone would be something that would be off-putting but it sounds to me.**

**SOM4** Um.

**Like you're quite happy to be at one with nature, with no-one else around.**

**SOM4** Absolutely, yes, and even though I have got a high-vis jacket on, I'm quite obvious to anybody, I've never felt threatened here, I don't think, ever, no.

**Yeah, well that's a very special feeling in itself to be.**

**SOM4** Yeah.

**To be a woman to be alone in nature.**

**SOM4** Um.

**And to feel comfortable whenever you come.**

**SOM4** Yeah.

**You don't have to second think it.**

**SOM4** No, that's right.

**It's actually, I'd say quite rare really.**

**SOM4** Is it? Oh dear, yeah, I suppose it is but there's something about this place where you do feel so, it feels so wild, so away from civilisation. I probably don't come later because I don't like traffic, I don't, having to negotiate that on my bike and having got perhaps to see more visitors, enjoying them, so it's … I just, it's just a selfish thing, I just like to come, sit down.

**Yeah, so would you say that this is one of your special places, you know, is it a special place that means something special?**

**SOM4** Oh yes, definitely, yes, it's become more special, I suppose since I've been cycling out here but I think for a first visit, I just remember thinking, you know, wow, what an incredible place and I didn't think I'd be able to navigate it or, but gradually I've, I've got to know the tracks and, and, erm, begin, enjoy just.

**Yeah, become more adventurous the more visits.**

**SOM4** You become, yeah, exactly, yeah, it's all, I'm driven by, what I might see or here, or, rather than anything else, that's great, just.

**Yeah, because there is, I mean there's no visitor centre here.**

**SOM4** Um.

**And there's no cafe or anything so.**

**SOM4** No. [laughs]

**You would have to be drawn to the space itself wouldn't you?**

**SOM4** Absolutely, hundred percent, yeah.

**Yeah, and what first brought you here? Because of course, you know, you don't live close by so there's so many different landscapes that you could choose to dwell in.**

**SOM4** Um.

**So were you drawn by because you'd read about it or heard about it, someone had recommended it?**

**SOM4** I think, I think, so my husband, you know, local knowledge, knew of it but he hadn't been here that much but I think one day we just took a walk, erm, at a time, well we, we still are dog owners, you can, can't bring dogs here for various reasons, so it was unusual for us to walk anywhere without a dog and it was really nice, it's just, I just, just struck us as being, you know, struck me as being so different and, erm, undeveloped and some might, some areas I've been to before in other parts of the country have, have had a lovely wild area but there's quite a significant amount of, erm, significant amount of management of the area that maybe is a bit heavy-handed but, you know, essential I'm sure but, you know, I just love the wildness of this place.

**Yeah, it feels a very light touch.**

**SOM4** Yes, yeah, it's managed but it's, you know, it's all for the good of the nature landscape.

**Yeah, and one thing I've been trying to ask people is, which seems a strange question maybe but.**

**SOM4** Um.

**Is how are you, for you, how do you define wetlands? Because we talk about the wetlands and we say that these are nature reserves but for you what would classify a wetland?**

**SOM4** Wetland is I suppose a percentage of water [laughs] in the area that's been used as a habitat maybe for, you know, you've got rushes, you've got, sorry, reeds, and then you've got lots of water around the trees, that everything's happier, you know. Yes, so it's a marriage I suppose of all these things and, erm, unlike somewhere where you've got a lake and a bit of growth round the sides, there's something more it's got you can see, got living, erm, got, babbling on, you've got, [laughs] you've got, erm. Yes, it's a marriage of, of various aspects of the landscape, yeah.

**Yeah, I mean it definitely feels kind of connected doesn't it? The land and water feel like they belong together really don't they?**

**SOM4** Yes, yes, that's a better way of putting it, yes.

**But it's just the way it sits here and, I mean I think it is a really special place and the fact that one of the things I like is the way that this, the reeds, you know, it hugs the trees doesn't it? So you can't quite see, you know.**

**SOM4** No, you can't but it's almost, everything's been revealed or, as you go, yeah, so as you carry on down these paths, it's a sort of thing, it's different areas, and something, there's an area down there near Decoy Hide I think where you've got really mature trees, big huge humungous, erm, beech trees are a bit past their best but, you know, you can see hints of an old farmland, or farm area or something, yeah, got a very ancient thing, I don't know, or settlement of some sort, I don't, I'm sure they can tell you what it's called.

**Yes, it's interesting thinking of the past lives that were here, you know.**

**SOM4** Yes, yeah.

**These different ways that over time, you know, different lands, the same area of land gets used for different reasons, you know.**

**SOM4** Yes, yeah, yeah, must have been so well used and the sweet track of course.

**Yeah, you know, so yeah, you're right, you know, the sweet track is there.**

**SOM4** Um.

**The fact that people have dug peat out of this area.**

**SOM4** Peat of course, yeah, yeah.

**You know, it's all interesting, the way that, the way that people have lived, people have lived and worked on the lands and how we're now viewing it, we're now viewing it from, well not having to work, we're just here to just enjoy it aren't we?**

**SOM4** No, enjoy, pure time

**Which is quite extraordinary.**

**SOM4** It is, it is, yeah.

**Would you say, one of the things that we're trying to understand on the project is, is the sense of place and I get a really strong sense that for you this is a very special place.**

**SOM4** Oh it is, yeah.

**At all times of the year.**

**SOM4** Yes, absolutely.

**Somewhere that you feel safe and secure.**

**SOM4** Yes, um.

**Would you say also then that, that feeds into your own health and wellbeing??**

**SOM4** Absolutely, absolutely, erm, like, erm, if I feel very, very stressed, for whatever reason, I know if I'm, and the bike ride, if you know what I mean, it's helping me to control the way I feel sometimes and I get here expecting myself to just, because I'm away from the family and the home I can just burst into tears and be who I want to be but I find that I get uplifted and it doesn't happen, but, you know, it's, it always does me good, I, I can reflect on my ride and, and where I've been and everything I've seen and, erm, that really helps me to keep, keep cheerful. [laughs]

**Yeah, you can kind of reenergise and then return back.**

**SOM4** Exactly, exactly.

**Yeah, which is rare isn't it, you know?**

**SOM4** Yeah.

**We spend so much of our time just coping and getting on.**

**SOM4** Yes.

**Without actually nurturing ourselves.**

**SOM4** Um, it's taking time out for thing, you really are, it's a much used phrase but, you know, you are getting out of yourself, you're just, you're just being absorbed by the landscape and, um.

**Yeah. And do you find as well when you talk to your fellow artists that that also, you know, because it can be quite a solitary endeavour can't it, you know, coming and contemplating?**

**SOM4** Oh definitely, yes.

**Which is, but then when you find a connection with other artists, so do you almost have a little network of other landscape artists or do you always do things slightly differently?**

**SOM4** Erm, well personally I tend to do my own thing, [laughs] sounds a bit arrogant I suppose but I'm, it's not, it's the way I need to be, I'm an, I'm an only child, I've always wanted to be independent and, erm, we talk, I talk to other artists about this place and everybody agrees how special it is and, erm, I've got, I know textile artists who use it, I know other inky artists who use it and, erm, people just love coming here but it's just, erm.

**Because I can see that, you know, because you're incorporating your cycle ride as well, you've both got your physical wellbeing.**

**SOM4** Yes, oh of course, yes.

**And then, you know, your emotional.**

**SOM4** Yes. [laughs] Doesn't feel like it at the time but.

**Well I know.**

**SOM4** I mean last year in particular was, it was very good, I was controlling my diet, was threatened with diabetes and I thought right, so diet was controlled for once and, erm, I thought a bit of extra physical effort, so this all tied in with that, so and I've, I've controlled the diabetes or the threat of diabetes by just doing that, so.

**That's amazing.**

**SOM4** I'm under the, erm, normal, so instead of hitting, you know, hitting stage, erm, what's it called? It's type two diabetes, I, I'm right down below the normal one, below that because of, I mean I dare say it's crept up recently but, erm, you know, I plan to get back out and, and, erm.

**Gosh, that's, very empowering when you know that you can control it.**

**SOM4** Exactly.

**Through the choices that you make every day, so.**

**SOM4** Exactly, exactly, yeah, that's, that's quite a big thing isn't it? Yeah.

**Yeah, yeah, because otherwise you feel that this thing will dominate your life and control what you're doing.**

**SOM4** Oh gosh, yes.

**In fact you're saying no.**

**SOM4** No, I can change it and, erm, and coming out here was the, a great motivator to, to keep doing that, and I'd feel for the, I'd sold myself short if I hadn't come out here, like if I go a meagre ten, fifteen cycle, miles, cycle ride, you know, it wasn't that but it was just, I just love the peace that you get, it's sublime peace and it's just wonderful.

**Yeah, and this is the, if you like the reward for the effort of getting there.**

**SOM4** Yeah, yeah, that's, exactly, exactly.

**Oh that's really wonderful.**

**SOM4** Yes.

**But then we must also, so this wonderful space gives wonderful health and wellbeing and inspiration for your art and time for yourself.**

**SOM4** Um, oh absolutely.

**What about, what about mosquitoes, where do mosquitoes fit within?**

**SOM4** Well they are a bit of a nuisance now, from now until about September?

**Um.**

**SOM4** Erm, on my bike out, because they ping into my eyes quite a lot, I wear sunglasses, so it's practical things, just, erm. As I'm Scottish I'm afraid mosquitoes don't really cut it, they're annoying because compared to midges for example but I'm sure they're really, really annoying but, erm, yeah, I'll avoid them, I'll cycle on if, if there's a clump you know, quite often get, erm, group, what do, what's a group?

**Yeah, like a cloud.**

**SOM4** Cloud, that's it, clouds of, of mosquitoes and I move on, erm, and if.

**Yeah, so it won't deter you from visiting the site.**

**SOM4** No, not at all.

**But it will impact on where you choose to sit on this site.**

**SOM4** Yes, yes, yes. Well said. [laughs]

**Yes, but I'm just really curious as to know where they love to, do they, is it a movable feast or do they always sit in one particular area?**

**SOM4** They seem to, they seem to rest as a cloud in certain spots, I've discovered, I've very rarely felt that I've been followed as such, like you would do midges but.

[laughter]

But, erm, you know, like here, you know, surrounded by water, I can see them all busy at the moment but.

**Yeah, they can stay over there and do their own thing.**

**SOM4** Yes, that's right.

**But, you know, you said that round here and towards the Decoy Hide is one of your favourite spots.**

**SOM4** Yes.

**Do they ever sit in those particular areas or is it more that it can be anywhere really on the site?**

**SOM4** Erm, well, erm, generally it's more prevalent here on these little tracks and on the main drain tracks, it's I guess there's always a bit of a breeze or it's not so obvious but I'd imagine that this sort of area's ideal for them and you've got the, you know, sort of vegetation and, erm, close, the trees come over, protect them maybe a little bit or restrains them from going up, they sort of stay, so yeah, generally I would say these little tracks are worse than the main area, so.

**Yeah, but it won't deter you from using, you just?**

**SOM4** Oh no, no.

**You just cycle on through.**

**SOM4** Just cycle on, no, it's never been a problem, as I say the only problem I have with them, with them going in my eyes sometimes but the glasses sort of protect that problem, you know, get rid of that problem.

**Yeah, but do you find that they are, I mean obviously they're more likely to be in the warmer months than the colder months.**

**SOM4** Um.

**But is there any particular time of the day or a month of the year when you think oh it's a real bother now, I'm not going to, I won't go right now because it'll be a pain or you just factor them in as part of being on?**

**SOM4** Part of, just make sure I have my glasses, you know, big drama sort of thing, I just, erm, I think it's July, August, they seem to be at their worst here, or the hotter months, you know, weeks, erm.

**Yeah. So really, it's.**

**SOM4** Never been a problem.

**No, you just learn to live with it.**

**SOM4** Yeah, exactly, you just, just work round, yeah.

**Yeah, but I've noticed on your wonderful paintings that there are no giant mosquitoes.**

**SOM4** No, there aren't. [laughs] I could draw them on.

**That's it, yeah.**

**SOM4** No, no, they don't impact on, I don't think about that when I'm painting, no.

**Yeah, and they don't, supposing, you know, you sit down, you've just settled down and you're thinking, contemplating, maybe sketching, do they ever come and, you know?**

**SOM4** Yeah, I mean further down they do because it's a similar sort of set-up, bench, water.

**Water bench, yeah.**

**SOM4** Yes, water bench, [laughs] in which case I. To be honest, I mean if I'm brutally honest I don't spend a lot of time sketching, maybe I should more but, erm, erm.

**You get the, it's more inspiration then.**

**SOM4** It's inspirational, I'm drawing it in a field and then when I quite often go back to my studio and start painting straightaway or once I've recovered.

**Okay, yeah, yeah.**

**SOM4** Or, you know, in the afternoon, I think I must get on and I've got, usually got a photograph, I tend to rely on my camera a bit more, on my phone, but.

**Yeah, do you find as well that because it's quite a long cycle ride and we're talking about two hours a round trip.**

**SOM4** At least, yeah.

**You know, and then in the site as well but.**

**SOM4** Um.

**If you like the cycle ride helps you get physically prepared for the painting because you don't have, you're not fidgety.**

**SOM4** It does, yeah, perfect.

**You're kind of physically tired, yeah.**

**SOM4** Absolutely, yeah, it settles me down and, you know, get home and I'm a happy being again and I can just sit there quite contentedly for two hours without feeling guilty, like I.

**Yeah, there's no guilt, there's no guilt, you've moved a lot, yeah.**

**SOM4** Yeah, but it's part of my make up for the moment, it's the, need to either paint or get out here or do both, I come here and just helps to keep me calm.

**Nice and level.**

**SOM4** Yes.

**And but.**

**SOM4** Not that I'm up and down a lot but, you know, just.

**No, but we all need and whatever it is that we need.**

**SOM4** It's a wellbeing thing, that is it, yeah.

**Exactly, exactly, I mean I definitely feel that, you know, I need, although I've only got a very small garden at home.**

**SOM4** Oh yeah, um.

**The gardening is something that I like to do.**

**SOM4** A bit, yeah.

**You know, because it's a distract, it's not a distraction but it's absorbing, so I'm completely absorbed in what I'm doing.**

**SOM4** Yes. That's the thing.

**And the other things just have to wait until I've done what I have to do.**

**SOM4** Yes, absolutely, yeah.

**You know, it's actually, it's functional, you know.**

**SOM4** Oh yeah, it's essential maintenance isn't it?

**Yeah.**

**SOM4** So switching off the engine or something, just.

**Yeah, yeah, absolutely, and the fact it's ever-changing. So you never come back sort of scratching your mosquito bite and going never again.**

**SOM4** Never, never, never, no, it doesn't bother me at all, no. I'm lucky, I don't really react badly, I mean my husband for example blows up like a balloon if he gets bitten so we have to be careful, erm, that's why I end up going, well I quite like coming here by myself if I'm honest, just, it's nice to.

**I can see why, it's very calming, really is.**

**SOM4** It is, it is.

**Yeah. And another aspect of the project is trying to understand about how wetlands are viewed or perceived by different groups of people.**

**SOM4** Um.

**So I wondered if you could, with your artist hat on, sort of tell me how you think, well, you know, and I say this because there's been this, sort of over time that wetlands, if you were ask people about wetlands a lot of people would say well, you know, it's marshy, boggy.**

**SOM4** Um.

**It's how you think or how you feel as both an artist and part of an artist community that wetlands are now seeing, you know, and how they fit in in terms of, you know, an artist brief and, you know, in terms of what people want to buy as well, you know.**

**SOM4** Um.

**Whether it's something that people like to buy these particular kind of wetland landscapes.**

**SOM4** Yeah.

**But also how other members of the public you interact with view wetlands. You know, is it a positive, negative benign, is it influenced by a particular piece of art or literature or music, you know, what those different factors?**

**SOM4** Um, oh gosh. Erm, [laughs] well, I mean I haven't encountered anyone because, you know, friends that see my photographs and things don't but never comment on what you're doing out in that sort of wet, boggy place, it's never, it always seems to be a revelation to some people that, I try to bring as many people here as I can just to let them see what it's like up here. Erm, as an artist, you know, people, you explain where somewhere is, I mean round here, especially up North Somerset they sometimes don't know about this area, similarly last year, down in Wellington through Somerset Art Week and I was having to explain what this area was and, you know, and everybody always came across as being really interested and they could see. Oh, I don't, yeah, it's difficult because I could have a painting entitled Shapwick or something or other and they'll, if. It's, it's the same old thing if, if they haven't been they wouldn't connect with it but, and if they have been and they think oh yes, I remember that blah blah blah, think, yes, okay, but I mean it's not what I'm about really, I don't know. Erm, I think generally, you know, every, everybody has a positive view about it that I've come across, um.

**Yeah, and like when you said that, you know, some of your friends see the pictures, it's a revelation, do you think then they are then drawn to come and visit the sites?**

**SOM4** Yes, they are, I know, I know because I had a bit of a campaign going last year.

**Oh lovely.**

**SOM4** To, to bring people over and, you know, people came on bike rides along the main drain path, you know, with their families or whatever and sort of we, we went.

**Lovely.**

**SOM4** Beautiful night, beautiful sunset, something and, you know, and just, so.

**Yeah, that's such a joy isn't it?**

**SOM4** It is.

**To think, you know, you've.**

**SOM4** Love to share it, I mean.

**Yeah, exactly, exactly.**

**SOM4** To an extent. [laughs]

**Yeah, only a little bit.**

**SOM4** But never coming here with someone else on a bike, think that'd be the end of a beautiful friendship I think, you know, but, no, no I don't, I don't mean that, it's, erm.

**Yeah, because do you think there has been, you know, from, from the time that you've been painting.**

**SOM4** Um.

**Do you think there's been a renaissance of art in this area that it really has begun to attract other artists and there's more of a?**

**SOM4** Um.

**I guess a kind of, not so much a scene but.**

**SOM4** Oh yeah, I think there are, sorry, yeah, there are quite a few artists who use this as a base, there's, I know, print maker in our group and, erm, various other people who use it as a main inspiration, um, erm, whether or not it's bringing more people, I don't know.

**Do you feel that people get as far as Glastonbury and then they kind of turn around and then return?**

**SOM4** Could do, could do because it's quite, I think it's like a little, you feel like it's a little group of people that know about this is an artist and, and paint it, as far as I've seen anyway, I mean, yeah, trying to think, um, yes.

**Because it's always interesting about how artist communities develop, you know, because.**

**SOM4** Yeah.

**People are, you know, if you're an artist you do a lot of work on your own and it's very personal.**

**SOM4** You do, yes, yeah, do.

**And yet, you know, I'm really interested by the Avalon Marshes Centre, there seem to be a lot of.**

**SOM4** Yes, there are, yeah, um.

**A lot of different types of art in there and that's really positive.**

**SOM4** Yes, oh it is, yeah, yeah, it's been a long-standing establishment I think, erm, erm.

**Yeah, and is it inclusive, are people able to, you know, it's quite easy to show your work there or do you find that it's?**

**SOM4** Erm, it's tricky because I haven't, there's been a waiting list for space because, erm, I think once you get a space you have it for as long as you want and because I'm a, a painter they need more space and quite often there isn't more space, and so, erm, or, you know, there's less but I know I've put my partner on a waiting list to go for example, so I think you have to become a member, you have to pay membership fee for about two hundred pounds per year, I think it is, to, and you have to do a stint of, of sitting there and taking sales and that.

**Oh that makes sense, yes.**

**SOM4** So it's all connected, it's, erm.

**That makes sense because when I've been in there and I've asked and I've talked to the people at the sort of service area, till area, I don't really know how to describe it.**

**SOM4** Um.

**I then realised that, say oh this is my work over here and then they go okay, and.**

**SOM4** That's right, because they're all, which is good I think for the artist and a really good idea.

**Really good I think, really good.**

**SOM4** Erm.

**And I do love the fact that, you know, it is all connected, I can see it's all connected to the wetlands.**

**SOM4** Oh yes, yeah, of course.

**You know, you have the photography with all the birds and you have, even the glasswork seems to be sort of .**

**SOM4** Yeah, it's all inspired by, I think that's, that's part of the criteria too to actually have your work there, you can't just do buses or something, you know, it's got to be about this area, which I don't think is a bad thing.

**Yeah. Do you get a sense that the, because someone was saying to me earlier today that there is a draw in terms of people are now setting up secret Somerset weekends and things like that whereby people can come.**

**SOM4** Um.

**And people will take them to various landscapes, so whether it's the wetlands here or whether it's sort of on the coast.**

**SOM4** Um.

**And will take people around and will show them, you know, interesting.**

**SOM4** Oh great, yeah.

**Places in Somerset.**

**SOM4** Um.

**And I wondered if you were aware of that, whether that was something that, you know, is kind of creating a mini economy I guess which supports the arts.**

**SOM4** Yeah, I'm not surprised, I mean I, I don't, I'm not really particularly aware of that but, erm, yeah, I'm aware of more people getting outdoors which is great.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**SOM4** Um.

**Because in your, with your other hat on, your forest school hat on.**

**SOM4** Oh, yes.

**You know, getting people involved, well getting young people involved.**

**SOM4** Um.

**Do you feel that there is a generational difference between, that's blocking people enjoying nature?**

**SOM4** Yes, um, very much so, so I work really hard at school to just extoll the virtues of nature and it's difficult because there are, it's limited, it's just pure grass and ponds and things but we've developed it and, erm, yeah, there is and most children are governed by their phones or their bloomin' Nintendo's or something, and so but, erm, but no, try to encourage it where possible.

**Yeah. So what do you think is the, if we're trying to encourage more people to use wetlands which is part of the project.**

**SOM4** Oh yeah, um.

**Trying to get people to enjoy nature.**

**SOM4** Um.

**There seem to be a blocker in terms of, not a blocker, that sounds too, that sounds too harsh. Some young people do not come into nature.**

**SOM4** Um.

**Or when they come into nature they don't know what to do there.**

**SOM4** No.

**So what is it that is the? Is it to do with access to sites, is it to do with education, is it to do with too much going on in lives, you know, too many after school activities?**

**SOM4** Yeah, possibly, I mean at the weekend there's, it's alive with cyclist family, cyclist families and sometimes you see them wandering through her and it's great, erm, erm. Sorry, I've lost my thread, [laughs] sorry, erm, so.

**Yeah, I suppose I'm trying to ask whether it's just that family lives are so busy, that people can't come to nature.**

**SOM4** Sorry, yeah.

**Or whether it's something more structural that actually it's affording a car to be able to get here because you can't get her by public transport or.**

**SOM4** Um, could be that and, yeah, yeah, I think so.

**Yeah. Do the kids say to you when they, you know, when you, when you do work with them?**

**SOM4** Erm, we, we find, I don't really mention places like this because I know that they haven't got transport or their parents perhaps aren't, it's a bit of a, a whitewash but, erm, you know, there isn't that investment in nature, you know, in getting your children out, I mean we always took our children out for walk and, you know, made sure on a Sunday at least they'd all, we'd all go together or, I don't know if people do that anymore, maybe they do, but, or if they do it's only, erm. Erm, yeah, difficult, yeah.

**If you come sum up for instance.**

**SOM4** Right.

**A really wonderful experience you've had, you know, we talked about the beautiful sunset and we had this very magical moment with the.**

**SOM4** Oh yes.

**With the ducks and the ducklings.**

**SOM4** Yeah, yeah, yes, exactly, yeah.

**Which is gorgeous, or listening to the bitterns, what would you say for you is one of the, the most wonderful things you've experienced?**

**SOM4** Well I have to say, almost every time there is something, it could just be birdsong, it could just be seeing something, a Grebe, being very silent across the water. It could be, erm, I like to go to the far end, erm, the Ham Wall end, just across there, erm, there is a big hide, Tower Hide it's called and I sit there sometimes if I'm feeling energetic and there's a wonderful shallowish lake, erm, opposite and one day I just watched, it was just quite comical really that was all, there were some egrets and there's some herons, obviously found a lot of fish, they were fishing like mad and then this giant, erm, egret turned up, [laughs] and it had all the grace of a jumbo jet, one thing and the other, custard[?], it just came down and it, its feet went down and it just went splash, splash, splash, must have scared away all the fish, everything went away then, and it was just, it was just a comical way this big, anyway.

**Yeah, no grace whatsoever.**

**SOM4** No grace, I mean I'm still hunting for an otter, I mean I need to talk to somebody and find out where the best places are because I'd love to see one and, I've seen them in Scotland but not over here yet.

**Yeah. We work on a site in Bedfordshire.**

**SOM4** Do you?

**And one of the volunteers there sent us some pictures of otters.**

**SOM4** Oh.

**A mummy and baby otter.**

**SOM4** Oh gorgeous.

**I know.**

**SOM4** Yeah, I know they have them here somewhere but I don't know where, can never find, they're so …elusive

**Well I think that's it, I mean, you know, I said to him when do you see them? And he said you have to be very still.**

**SOM4** Yeah.

**And you have to actually go quite early in the morning.**

**SOM4** Yes, sure.

**So I'm sure you're going to be lucky but that'll be a magical site isn't it?**

**SOM4** Oh, oh, yes, I know, wouldn't it? But, you know, there's things like seeing an egret, top of, there's an old tree in there and just seeing it perched on there, out, they just, you know, this time of year the lovely yellow grass growing that's growing along the river banks, I love that and, erm, no, as I say every day there's something, yeah.

**Yeah, that's wonderful, I mean I really get the sense of it being a really special place.**

**SOM4** It is, it is, yeah.

**Yeah. And if you could wave a magic wand and do anything to improve the site, whether it's, well whatever it may be, is there anything you'd change or you just love it the way it is?**

**SOM4** I do, yeah, I can't think of anything that would, erm, would improve it, you know, I think it's brilliant the way it is, it's just, you don't feel over, over, over-stimulated I guess to visit an area like you do in some places, it's just gentle. It can be quite exciting, you know, if you want it to be, you know, if you find areas that excite you, erm. No, I just love it because it's that pocket of just being sublimely peaceful, [laughs] I think that's, that's what I enjoy best about it and I couldn't think of anything else to, to improve it.

**That's lovely, lovely.**

**SOM4** Um, maybe better parking at that end but.

**[laughs] No, that is, yes, yes.**

**SOM4** But, erm.

**I suppose.**

**SOM4** And.

**Yeah.**

**SOM4** Um.

**What, do people then, when it's a really busy day, do people just park up on the, I mean where do people park?**

**SOM4** Yes, they park in that layby that we, and also over the bridge on the other side, you know, and if you can't find parking there, don't know what you do.

**You just keep going.**

**SOM4** That's the trouble because there isn't, going that way there isn't much, erm.

**No, no, because someone had said to me before to park at Avalon and walk down but with my terrible sense of direction I went the wrong way.**

[laughs]

**Honest to goodness.**

**SOM4** No, it's easy, believe me, it's easy.

**Yeah, I now know, you've taught me the way now.**

**SOM4** Have I? Alright, oh cool, brilliant.

**Yeah, no, lovely. Well thank you so much for your time, it's fantastic.**

**SOM4** No, thank you very much, I hope there is something there for you to use.

**Oh it's wonderful, wonderful, thank you.**

**SOM4** Oh thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview SOM5

**SOM5** thing where developers can pay a bunch of money to the local council and then develop a site without having to do all the translocating newts off it.

**Because then, who will do that particular translocating of newts?**

**SOM5** Well there won't be, that's the point, the developers, if that developers paid money to the local council, it's, the Council then are supposed to put that fund into creating, into buying land and creating new houses elsewhere.

**Oh I see.**

**SOM5** But it still means that there's a bunch of newts on the development site which are going to get killed as a result, whereas we used to, or up until now it's been a case of putting fencing in and trapping all round.

**Oh I see, okay.**

**SOM5** And now it's changing, but that's only if they put the money but it causes problems for them in terms of timing and so on, they have to wait until we've caught them all off site and, and moved them, so, so they, it's seen as a burden to developers but it still costs them.

**Yeah, but it's interesting that maybe they would be prepared to pay more but to be able to do what they want to do quicker.**

**SOM5** Yeah, that's, that's the idea except for the sites that then are created for newts are not protected against further developments of, further development may, we were looking at the details of licence and it's, it allows development on the sites that the Council then puts aside for newts.

**Yeah. It's a very canny way of getting around really protecting newts and that's just.**

**SOM5** Yeah, but it's, that's just, the trouble is Natural England's, have been, their funding has gradually been reduced by the Government and they have less and less people to deal with it and looking at ways of streamlining things and trying to, erm. Part of their remit is to promote conservation of various species and so they're looking at doing something sort of similar with bats but they say it's not district licencing which is what the newt thing is. So it's, and everybody's viewing it with a great deal of suspicion.

**Seeing what unfolds.**

**SOM5** Yes, because it's all driven by development and the, what is perceived as the financial burden on developers.

**Yeah, and that seems to be, I don't know, several people have talked to me about the push to develop in many villages, so, you know.**

**SOM5** Yes, yeah, yeah, yeah. It, it's difficult because what is say good wildlife habitat and what is, what works in a strategic sense from a council's point of view often clash and so it's no good saying oh we can have wildlife over here and development over here because it doesn't work like that, erm, so it's really difficult to separate the two. Plus, erm, by boss. REMOVED we went to a meeting with Natural England in REMOVED a week ago and, erm, to do with the bat licensing and, erm, he made the point well if you're, if you're separating wildlife and the development then you're separating people from wildlife as well and do we really want to be doing that? And, so, it's, it's a very difficult on developments because that's, our job is dealing mostly with development to do with protected species because you find now that all the, the nice housing estates are all the old, particularly nineteen thirties things with big gardens and all modern developments are tiny houses all squashed together with tiny gardens and there's a big drive to get holes knocked in fences to allow hedgehogs to move between them but I can't see that these small gardens of new developments gardens are going to be appealing … dogs … I just don't think it works.

**… isn't it?**

**SOM5** Yeah.

**But, yeah … the hedgehogs but whether that is actually like a walk of death in some way, it could be.**

**SOM5** Yeah, I think it will, eventually, it will take time because the nineteen thirties gardens in these old houses have been there for a long time and matured and they've got scrubby areas and not, not necessarily manicured and have a variety of habitat, so is good for things like reptiles and hedgehogs and so on, erm, the small modern gardens just, I can't ever see them developing that same way because there's no room to allow them to, you can't have a scrubby corner in a modern garden.

**No, no.**

**SOM5** That's the size of a postage stamp, so.

**Yeah, it's not going to work, no.**

**SOM5** Yeah, no, so I think eventually, well you look at old, erm, sort of inner city housing, erm. I lived at Birmingham for a bit and, erm, we had, always had like a backyard and though it was tiny and those were Victorian houses with tiny little back gardens and not much wildlife interest and, if any, erm, and I think we'll end up with modern housing developments that are similar to those.

**Yeah Such a squeeze on space isn't it?**

**SOM5** Yeah.

**You know, gardens are seen as outdoor rooms and I guess in some ways people do want to have smaller areas that they can kind of then maintain that ….**

**SOM5** Some people are like that and do have big gardens but, erm, yeah, it's difficult.

**Now, I must ask you which, hat will you be wearing today? Will you be wearing your bat hat or your ecologist hat?**

**SOM5** Er, it's hard to separate the two, oh bat hat really, but.

**Yeah, bat hat.**

**SOM5** But, erm, I, I can't separate the two, bat hat.

**That's good, well no, that's helpful for me and basically if you're then talking about things that are kind of outside of the bat world you can just say right this is my …**

**SOM5** Right, okay, yeah.

**So I just know where the two lie but.**

**SOM5** Yes, yeah.

**I've asked everyone just to say at the beginning, you know, what their role in their organisation is and what they do and how many members there are active and things like the age profile of the group that you're involved in?**

**SOM5** Oh okay. So, so I represent Somerset bat group and we have, erm, up to seventy people registered on our mailing list and maybe, erm, when we have a bat group event, say checking bat boxes, we usually get about half a dozen people, erm, you tend to get the same people so there's a committee of, erm, let me see, one, there's about eight people on the committee, erm, who are most often the most active people, erm, a range of ages but the most active people tend to be retired because they've got the time. Most of our activities are at weekends, erm, I know some of the other specialist interest groups, I think the Red group have weekday meetings and, as a result they're all retired people and they want knew people but they're never going to get them if they have midweek meetings, erm, so we always aim for the meetings on Saturdays if we have anything going on, erm, but it is the, most of the people are, are retired or part-time work and so have a bit of spare time they can do things, erm, yeah.

**Yeah. So would you say that there are, are there kind of age bands that are kind of active in your group, so would you say that you've got, say maybe people who are still at school and then you have people then who are in their early forties or?**

**SOM5** Yes.

**Split down, is that as clearly as that?**

**SOM5** Yeah, erm, so the, I guess, erm, there's a more, erm, people in their, erm, forties and upwards are frequently ecological consultants, erm, who don't have much time in the summer but get something out of the bat group and sometimes they're able to put stuff, put, erm, their talents back into the bat group. We don't really, we get, we do bat walks and we get young kids coming along with, with family sometimes but it's difficult with bats because it often involves late nights, erm. It depends what we're doing, if we're doing anything like a tracking project then we start getting people in their twenties coming, it's a more, because it involves hands-on catching bats. If we do a bat walk it's the older members of the group who do it, so a bat walk for the public and then, erm, bat box checks you get a mixture of ranges but definitely there's a younger element that like their hands on trapping elements of, erm, other activities.

**Because they just want to experience it or because they're trying to learn skills for careers?**

**SOM5** Both, yeah, yeah, it's, it's something you don't often get to do so it's a great opportunity and it's more exciting, you know, it's, it's much more involved, it's more exciting than say a bat walkway or having to talk to people and, erm, just listen to a few bats which, because it can be quite hit or miss, erm, and, I mean the trapping can be hit or miss but it's, it's more exciting because you get a bunch of bats you wouldn't ordinarily see in the hand and you get to handle them, erm, so we did, we tend to get, erm, more varied interest in that and obviously for the older members, late nights are kind of harder and so we get less older members on those kind of events.

**Yes, okay. And would you say, what would you say is the main focus of your bat group? So is it to do with recording and mapping bat populations, is it campaigning, is it advocacy, is it education?**

**SOM5** All those things, and different members have their own priorities, erm. It's essentially, the bat, so the bat groups is essentially about conserving bats, the conservation of British bats, erm, in Somerset but as part of that you can't separate out the, erm, the role of the, erm, dealing with the public in that because they have historically had a bad, bad reputation so there's an awful lot of education to do with people and of course bats are, in particular, some species are, erm, almost commensal with people because they are dependent on houses to roost in, so some species are pretty much only found in houses, like serotine bats, erm, common pips, pretty much, is dependent on housing so you could, you can't really separate out the two, so in order to protect them, people have to understand them and accept them, as being part of the fabric of the building they're living in.

**Yeah, yeah, that's a nice way of looking at it.**

**SOM5** Yeah.

**Yeah, so would you say the education part then comes through encouraging people to take part in say bat walks or?**

**SOM5** Yes.

**Bat box checking.**

**SOM5** Yes, so the, particularly bat walks because then you get casual members of the public coming along, erm, and we have a couple of bat walks that are particular, particularly popular. One of our most popular though has been Shapwick Heath actually.

**Oh lovely, yeah.**

**SOM5** Erm, mostly because we have to restrict numbers on that, so I think we usually have a maximum of twenty, erm, but we always get, we've had sort of four or five year old children coming along to those walks, erm, so, erm, in that case it's quite often that people don't, haven't ever, erm, don't really know much about bats and haven't been out with a bat detector before, so, erm, you hope to kind of interest them and enthuse them, erm, and indoctrinate the children into, [laughs] what these.

**Yeah, into loving bats, yeah.**

**SOM5** Yes, erm.

**And do you take any sort of, any information about those people? So, you know, do you get their email address, is there anything like that?**

**SOM5** No, only if they, if they want to, erm, get further involved then they, they can contact us and join the bat group. Once they join the bat group they just go on to the mailing list and get details of our events, so then they can come along, so you, you don't, we don't really recruit many people through that because just, it's quite, it's, it's uncommon to recruit many people through bat walks but, erm, as long as people go away happy and having learnt something and, erm, possibly, erm, improving people's understanding of bats then we consider that to be a success, we're not especially looking for members, it'd be nice to have more people doing more events but, erm, we're not on a sort of recruitment drive as such, erm, it would be nice if we get more people coming back again because that kind of tells you that you've interested somebody but, erm, but most of the time, yeah, the bat walks are casual because, we, we had a very popular one at, in Wells, around the Bishop's Palace, the moat round there and REMOVED who used to be our REMOVED runs that and we get ridiculous numbers of people coming, erm, just fifty plus people turn up.

**Wow.**

**SOM5** Which is a bit difficult to shepherd all these people round the place, erm, but a lot of those, well some of those will be people on holiday and, you know, it's a popular destination, so, erm, but that's fine, I mean.

**Yeah. And are these quite frequent, these bat walks, throughout the year or do they kind of cluster in the summertime?**

**SOM5** It's all summertime, erm, so.

**Yeah, because bats are roosting in winter, yeah.**

**SOM5** So, erm, May is a bit hit on, we have bat box checks, we do bat box checks, mainly in September, erm, and, because we're trying to avoid the breeding season, and then the bat walks are generally, erm, I'm trying to think when our next, first one is, I think it's probably June, June through to September, erm, that's the. So June to July is, erm, particularly good because that's when the bats are giving birth and rearing young so they're, a lot of them are in one location so and so their group, they're foraging close to where maternity roosts and so therefore predictable.

**Once you find where those roosts are you know that you're going to have some sightings, yeah.**

**SOM5** Yes, yeah, and the activity tends to be concentrated in particular areas, erm, outside of those dates it can be a bit hit and miss again, erm. So later in the season the bats are, erm, going off to, so there's a, a drop in activity generally in late summer because a lot of bats are going off to swarming sites, which is to do with mating and seeking out hibernation sites, erm, so you get a lot of males hanging around doing, erm, social calls, which is looking for females but you definitely get a drop in activity, so, erm, so the main summer period is when we try and do a few bat walks but it's, again it's more difficult because obviously dusk is later too ….

**Yes, I can see, yeah. So in terms of the two wetland sites that our project is looking at.**

**SOM5** Ah hum.

**So Shapwick and Westhay.**

**SOM5** Ah hum.

**Are they both, well you said Shapwick is popular, is Westhay so popular with bats?**

**SOM5** We don't do bat walks around Westhay.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM5** Erm, because it's, the Shapwick walk has always been handy because of the Avalon Marshes Centre and Natural England have always promoted the walk there. Westhay is more of a mix of, erm, RSPB and Wildlife Trust reserves and they never really promoted any kind of, erm, bat walks or anything, they don't, they don't, erm, whereas Natural England promote all the things, the RSPB and the Wildlife Trust, well the RSPB oversee mostly birds but they do everything as well, erm, and the Wildlife Trust have never, erm, don't really promote bats that much, they've been a little bit lately but, erm, it's always been left to the bat group to do, so, or our local Wildlife Trust anyway.

**Yeah. Do you think that's just because they, I mean given it's a wildlife trust you would think that bats would come under that kind of umbrella of, you know.**

**SOM5** Oh yes, they do, erm, they, I think it's down to, erm, individuals who work there having a particular interest in it. I think if you haven't got anybody who has a particular interest then, you know.

**You're not going to have a champion.**

**SOM5** Yeah, I think you need that, even in, within an organisation like Wildlife Trust, erm, otherwise they're just assumed to sort of, there is an assumption that they just benefit from habitat works for other species, which isn't necessarily the case, er. For the most part it's probably true but, erm, it's a generalisation that, erm, doesn't always work for some things.

**Okay, yeah. So thinking about Shapwick, how much of your, you know, you have your wonderful big bat walk there that you have to control the numbers.**

**SOM5** Um.

**And one of the things the project is trying to get kind of to grips with is a particular sense of place on the wetlands.**

**SOM5** Ah hum.

**And so would you say that these particular wetlands have a, you know, that when you do your work there that you have a particular sense of being in that particular place or is it just another landscape, you know, you have a wetland landscape, maybe you have more of an upland landscape, coastal landscape?**

**SOM5** Um.

**Is there something about it that you would say?**

**SOM5** I think it is, it's, it's, erm, I think Shapwick is different, erm, because it, there is something a bit magical about it I think because it's, it feels wilder than other places, erm, and as said to you earlier, been working on the Levels and I was really struck by, erm, how managed a lot of the, the areas are. I mean I've been working mostly on cattle, well even organic cattle farms, erm, and it was all silage, so it's all single species grassland, erm, and although organic cattle are really good for say great horseshoe bats, and maybe serotine bats, erm, the grassland doesn't produce huge insect diversity, so it's not so good for other species and it's fairly open, erm, whereas Shapwick is, but it's very difficult with Shapwick because it's obviously a heavily managed landscape historically as well because it's only there because of all the peat workings, which are now finished and now it's been turned over to wetlands so, erm, it's kind of a landscape that's recreating, I think I said within the focus group meeting that it feels, erm, like a landscape from history where, you know, erm, say one to two thousand years ago, I think it was only about a thousand years ago then that sort of … so when … and Shapwick I think has a feeling that and especially of course you've got the archaeology with the street track and so on, so, erm, it doesn't, but it's a, it's a relatively small area and, but creating that and allowing areas to flood and turn wild, but it, I mean I was going to say turn wild again but it, it's not truly wild because they still manage it in ways, I mean they still drain the scrape on the, along the South Drain, I don't know if you're familiar, so you walk along from the Avalon Marshes Centre towards the other side, so the Ham Wall end.

**Oh yeah, I never got as far as the Ham Wall end, yeah. [laughs]**

**SOM5** Yeah. There's a, there's a scrape, well they call, or a lagoon and, erm, Natural England in, at particular times of year drain it with a pump and they only drain it because it attracts birds in for the bird watchers, so they don't do it because it's, for any other reason other than, erm, and I know individual people that, who, who do the work, I'm not sure this is really, we should be doing this because it's just to benefit the bird watchers and it's, it, it's a bit more gardening then really having a truly wild place. Having said that, there's a lot of areas which probably don't have access to which are much wilder and that, and that's why lots of species are now coming, appearing there that aren't in other parts of the country and we're getting new species appearing and breeding and it's simply creating the right conditions, erm, and wildlife comes back so, erm.

**Yeah. And do you, as part of your bat group, do you get to access those spaces that other members of the public don't normally access or are you?**

**SOM5** Sometimes yes, if, we have, erm, yes, there's a couple of, of places, erm. There's a little bit, a little patch where we, just with, erm, we don't do bat walks there because of the nesting birds, erm, so we would, we would create a lot of disturbance walking around at night and we'd probably lose a few people in, in some ditches.

**[laughs]**

**SOM5** So we can't really do, do that but we do have some bat box checks around parts of the reserves that aren't open to the public, erm, so you do get to see other areas of it that, that feel a little bit wilder because there's no people, I think it also helps now having, not allowing dogs on the site as well, I, I like that, I wish they'd do that on more of the reserves, I know dog owners wouldn't agree with me.

**Yeah, because it's interesting, today I was on both Westhay and Shapwick.**

**SOM5** Um.

**And there is a big difference.**

**SOM5** Um.

**In terms of the people using, from my experience today.**

**SOM5** Yes.

**The people using Shapwick and the people using Westhay.**

**SOM5** Um.

**So for Shapwick it was walkers, photographers and, yeah, and cyclists.**

**SOM5** Yes.

**Along the drains.**

**SOM5** Yeah.

**But not along the sweet track routes or the little pathways off but Westhay is definitely park your car, walk your dog.**

**SOM5** Walk your dog.

**Come back, go.**

**SOM5** Yes, yeah, so you end up with, erm, with dog poo bags and, and whenever I go there, I can't wait to get off the main track because all you meet are people walking dogs and even on slightly minor tracks there sometimes get people walking dogs and I think it's very disruptive for wildlife, erm, and I don't. Erm, I, I'm torn about dog walkers because on the one hand I think sometimes dog walkers, it engages them with, with wild places a little bit, on the other hand, they cause a certain amount of disturbance and they're not necessarily engaging with wild places because they're just walking their dog, so, and I used to have a dog and I used to be infuriated when she would go off across a field and flush something out or jump in a ditch because there was a water vole and, but I wouldn't necessarily know those things were there until she did that, so along, oh no, just flushed a snipe on the other hand it was like on there's a snipe, [laughs] you know.

**Yeah, doing that otherwise, yeah.**

**SOM5** Always, as well, pointed out ones when she jumped in the water after because a water vole had popped up and she was like well you wouldn't have known it was there if she hadn't done that, that's true, yes.

**Oh yeah, good point, yeah.**

**SOM5** So, so I'm in two minds about it but, so it's nice at Shapwick and … because there are places where dog walkers can go so you can, you have got somewhere where, erm, you can go and off the main track you just have the more dedicated birdwatchers, so it tends to be quieter and, erm, it, it does feel a bit wilder.

**Yeah. And, you know, that accessing spaces where the public can't go, does that also feel special, not because it just feels wilder but also because of that, just glimpse that other people don't see?**

**SOM5** Yes, yes. I, I used to volunteer with REMOVED once a week, erm, on the site and we'd go off working round a little bit and it was a, I remember one particular misty day when you couldn't see anything, you could just see, erm, a sort of raised lump while[?] we were walking along and reeds and that was it, you couldn't see anything else and again it felt more prehistoric, erm, and then some cattle sort of, some longhorn cattle looming out the mist and it did feel a bit more, erm, special and wild and removed from normal life.

**Yeah. These are rare moments aren't they?**

**SOM5** Yes, yeah, yeah, it, it, erm, I like the idea because you can't go anywhere in this country without, to find any truly wild places, so it's all managed to some extent, even the wild places, they're sort of hemmed in a little bit and fiddled about with depending on whichever organisation owns it and what they're trying to promote on the site, so.

**Yeah, yeah, and again, you know, when you're doing your bat walks in the evenings, presumably, I mean I don't know, do you see other people apart from your bat group as you walk around?**

**SOM5** No, no, [laughs] there's never anybody but, erm, it's the one, I, um, no, there's, there's nobody there, erm, birdwatchers turn up very, very early in the morning sometimes, erm, but we're not there that, that early in the morning so we don't see them, so no, we're the, the only people there, erm, at that time of night, erm, and it's very dark around.

**[laughs]**

**SOM5** Yeah, you, that's the thing, you can't really go off the main tracks that time of night …

**Yeah, so you have to, but again, I mean I would imagine it feels very different at that time of night, you know, there's no-one else around, you can't.**

**SOM5** Yes.

**You've got limited vision, it's going to feel different isn't it?**

**SOM5** Um. Yeah, yeah, yes, yeah, it's, erm, and we tend to stick to, we don't use the open areas because that's generally not where the bats are, so you're generally in a more enclosed, you're generally surrounded by trees so those areas where there are trees, so more open areas where there are trees during the day you've got obviously open expanses of water, erm. There is one spot at Canada Farm, the Canada Farm hide, so we walk them down Canada Drove, erm, there's a greater horseshoe, lesser horseshoe, brown long-eared roost in Canada Farm, which is an old farmhouse that's been rebuilt for bats, so it's, it's monitored by the Vincent Wildlife Trust and I've done a few monitoring visits there, erm, but it's just set aside for bats and then we, we walk them past there, see if we can any horseshoes and then we go to the hide at the end and generally our group is too big to all go in for the hide so we have to split them up a bit but, erm, it's one of the best places, erm, at shortly after sunset where you can sit in, in the hide and the light reflects on the, erm, water and so you can see the bat skimming over the water, erm, and it's some of the, some of the best views of Daubenton's bats foraging over there, erm, and there isn't, there's, there's nobody else there, you're just looking across a marsh and.

**How special.**

**SOM5** Yeah, it's, it's, erm, yeah, it's, it's a really good place to go to see, see that.

**Yeah, well it sounds really wonderful and amazing and.**

**SOM5** Um.

**Yeah, as you said, I mean all part of our landscapes are managed now to some extent.**

**SOM5** Um.

**We don't really have wild places do we?**

**SOM5** Yeah, yeah.

**That's.**

**SOM5** I like to pretend when I'm in a place like that.

**Yeah, that's it, yeah.**

**SOM5** Is the, is, it's the, I keep talking about the sort of pre, erm, pre-farming landscape that Shapwick kind of represents to me, erm, and, because all, all those new species that are coming in, were probably there then, erm, and it's, you know, you can, you can really get, you know, if you squint a little bit you can imagine a landscape with much fewer people and no cars and …

**And when you access the wetland to go and do your bat work, how much of it is driven purely by the desire to document, watch the bats and how much of it is also, feeds into your own sense of health and wellbeing? You know, is there a link between the two or does your sense of wellbeing come from other activities that are outside of your bat group activities and disconnected from that particular wetland space?**

**SOM5** Erm, no, I, I think, er, it's, no, I don't, I, because the, they're doing the, erm, dealing with the bats on site is, erm, is a connection with the wild, you know, the, the wild and wild space and you can't separate the two, so, erm, it's always a bit, erm, there is a bit of trepidation about doing stuff on Shapwick because, erm, it's, er, it, [laughs] you do feel slightly unhealthier when you've been eaten alive by horse flies and mossies, so, but, but I, because I know the project is to do with mosquitoes and, erm, I've never, nobody ever really, erm, I've never come across anybody who's really had an issue with them, except for people who do bat work there and because there's not many of us that do it there and I explain to people when they come that they will get eaten alive, erm, and it doesn't seem bad during the day or on a bat walk because you're moving around but the second you stop after dark you become a magnet and, erm, we did a trapping session and be, while we were walking to the sort of, when we started setting up the traps, erm, I got bitten, it must have been a horse fly on my hand and my hand swelled up and I could hardly move it.

**Oh gosh.**

**SOM5** For the entire evening and it, for three days afterwards it was, it was massively swollen and when we do monitoring at Canada Farm we wear full waterproofs and mosquito net hats, erm, because if you sit still just in jeans they bite through your jeans and they're. I, I've been telling people these are different insects to everywhere else and they go, yeah, yeah, it's alright, I'll be fine and then at the end they say okay, you were right, you weren't joking.

**Through your jeans, I find that amazing that they can bite through your jeans.**

**SOM5** They're, they're just, erm, yeah, whatever trousers you're wearing they bite through, erm, and you're sitting still because you're counting bats, you know, trying to, not to disturb the bats, erm, so you're there for, er, probably an hour to an hour and a half, not moving, so, and with everything buzzing around you, just, erm, homing in on any little chink of bare skin, so, erm, and it can be really uncomfortable in summer because it's quite warm, and you're wearing.

**Too much stuff, yeah.**

**SOM5** Way more clothes than you would usually and including gloves, I wear gloves as well because if, if I had, you know, we have a counter and if you're, if you're holding your counter out of your pocket or using a bat detector in one hand and a counter in another which is frequently what you do, your hands will get bitten and just, the only bit that's exposed so in some ways I, a little bit of me dreads it because, erm, it's quite difficult dealing with that, [laughs] but that's only, that's only when we're doing static stuff, erm, the walks, yeah, normally, not really but there's enough people to spread out the.

**They share the love, the mosquito love.**

**SOM5** Yes, we do warm them about ticks but, erm, never, don't really bother about mosquitoes because it's, you know.

**So, but it would never deter you from doing your bat surveys.**

**SOM5** No.

**But you would always, always prepare and make sure that you are fully covered with everything so that the bugs can't get in.**

**SOM5** Yeah, I mean you tend, yeah, if you forget anything then you just have to take the pain, but, erm, well no, it's not pain, it's just discomfort, erm, but it.

**And it's always in those particular sites, so you always know it's around Canada Farm and you always know it's going to be sort of in a wooded area.**

**SOM5** It's where you are around Shapwick Heath basically, it's just a massive wetland and there's lots of biting insects, there's lots of cattle that they normally feed on, and some nice ewes with soft skin wandering round.

**It's a happy mix isn't it?**

**SOM5** Yeah.

**It's a happy mix, and do you think from your experience of doing the bat surveys that those mosquito populations have, have they grown, have they, are they there for longer periods of time or does it feel like it varies according to the years?**

**SOM5** I think we're not there enough to say whether, because we'd just take a little snapshot … a walk or an evening trapping, so, erm, it's. We're always going there in the middle of summer and I just expect it to be like that, so I wouldn't say I've ever noticed, I've never know, knowingly had a better night or a worse, you know, or a worse night, it just, it's just the way it is, erm. We're not particularly, if we're doing any work we're not normally near any livestock which I've noticed when we've been doing work, in … with my work hat on, livestock, erm, can cause problems with insects just kind of bothering you on some sites but, erm, with, with the bat group stuff I don't, I think we're just there for short periods so, which is why I never, you know, doing a bat walk there. We, we mention mosquitoes actually but not particularly in a negative way, we just explain that sometimes bats come close to people because we attract insects.

**Ah, okay.**

**SOM5** And bats come in and feeding off you, so sometimes you get bats swooping round at people, which is, which is nice because you get to see bats. Erm, on the other hand, we always quote the, the figure of, erm, a single bat can eat three thousand mosquitoes a night because, erm, somebody once weighed bats as they left the roost, weighed them as they came in and then weighed in, small insects and worked out it was something like three thousand insects. It's probably a highly inaccurate figure but it's a nice one to give the public, erm, to, to sort, to give bats, erm, positive angle, erm.

**Well anything that eats mosquitoes.**

**SOM5** Yes, yeah. [laughs]

**Is something positive. [laughs]**

**SOM5** Yeah, but they'll never eat enough to make a difference, [laughs] so.

**No, possibly not, yeah.**

**SOM5** Yeah.

**Okay. So then for you, actually you could say your wellbeing is slightly impaired by the work you do because of your interface with these mosquitoes?**

**SOM5** Erm, yes, but only in the sense of discomfort and a tiny, tiny little bit of dread that I know I'm going to have to be uncomfortable, whether it's being bakingly hot because I'm wearing too many clothing or, or because I get bitten because I've forgotten to wear something, erm, but on the other hand we wouldn't have such great bat populations if those weren't there, so they, they go together, erm, so it's just, it's just one of those things. It is a particularly bad site for doing stuff at night. During the day I don't think it's an issue, I don't, don't have any problems during the day, but at night it is. REMOVED, who is the REMOVED Manager for the REMOVED always, erm, dreads going to Canada Farm because it's particular but it's the one, I think it's probably their only site that's on a wetland, so it's noticeably different from other sites.

**Yeah, and that's at the very back of, is that the back of Shapwick Heath, sort of towards Ham Wall then? That where Canada Farm is?**

**SOM5** No, if you come down, if, if you're travelling towards, you're going down, the road where the Avalon Marshes Centre, if you travel towards the A39, so you're heading south, it's on the right hand side, so it's about quarter of a mile down the road.

**Oh okay. Yes, I've seen it, it's actually got a dedicated car park hasn't it?**

**SOM5** No, no, it hasn't, no.

**Ah. There seemed to be one part of Shapwick Heath, you know, where the sweet track is, that you have to park in a layby and then you drive south and there's a car park on the right hand side.**

**SOM5** From Shapwick Heath. Oh no, that's the Hawk and Owl Trust.

**Ah.**

**SOM5** That's, yeah, that's, it's before, long before that, it's just, it, it looks like a farm track, there's just a gateway, there's.

**That's, I wouldn't have noticed that.**

**SOM5** You can fit about three cars at the most, so yes, you wouldn't, unless you knew it was there you wouldn't know.

**Yeah, but is it public access?**

**SOM5** Yes.

**Ah that's interesting but there's no signage that would indicate?**

**SOM5** There is a sign but you can't see it from the road, it's just inside the gate.

**Okay, yeah. Oh see that's another interesting thing about signage and, it's possibly then marked as a footpath on the map, on an OS map but not signed on the road.**

**SOM5** Yeah, well it's, they are, because it's got, you've got Canada Farm Hide down there so it's not a site that you …actually you do get dog walkers, there's only a few dog walkers, no, so mostly birdwatchers down there, erm, but you can walk from there with a dog all the way down the track and then where Canada Farm is you turn left and keep walking and you end up at that Hawk and Owl Trust site, the car park, it's quite a long walk and then if you want to do a completely circular walk you'd have to walk along the road so you don't get.

**That many.**

**SOM5** Many dog walkers, erm, and it's only those who maybe are interested in birds perhaps who know and go a bit, exploring a bit, erm, so yes, it's, it's not, erm, to get to it, you wouldn't get the general public go, it's too difficult because the Avalon Marshes bit is nice and easy, park in a layby, there's a nice, erm, maintained track, smooth track, can cycle.

**Yes, there is.**

**SOM5** And walk along, they drain the Mere Heath bit with a scrape, erm, for birdwatchers, so there's, and there's a little bench there you can sit down, so it's much … more friendlier section, erm, but that, that's, that's kind of nice to have kind of, erm, stages of, of, erm. What's the word? Stages of, erm, access I think. So you've got, you've got a general public one where everybody can go, well everybody can go to Canada Farm but.

**Yeah, but it's, you need to work a little bit harder to?**

**SOM5** Yeah, there's not so much traffic down that way and in fact there's, just opposite the entrance to there you cross the road, there's another footpath, erm, there's trees, we've got some bat boxes through there and you do get people walking through there, erm, it's, it's slightly different because it's kind of swampy and lots of trees in there, erm, and we've got a bat boxes and whenever we do bat box checks on there, we do meet a few members of the public walking around that bit, erm, erm.

**So it's interesting that there are, because this is kind of, these are sort of my last section of the interview.**

**SOM5** Um.

**Which is about how people, how you feel from your organisational perspective that people view wetland spaces because of course you've got the kind of very nicely manicured, you know, Wildlife Trust in certain parts of the country.**

**SOM5** Um, yes.

**The visitor centre and information centre.**

**SOM5** Yeah.

**And that is very different round here.**

**SOM5** Um.

**You have got the Avalon Marshes Centre but the reserves themselves, there's just slightly away and so, you know, you have to, you know, like parking on a layby or having to walk down a track you have to work that little bit harder don't you?**

**SOM5** Yes, yeah.

**So how do you think that people view those places? Do you think that they view them as almost like a public park but in nature or do they see them as wild spaces?**

**SOM5** I don't, I don't know, erm, I don't know because we never, we never have those discussions with the public, so it's, people generally say positive things about the place when we're dealing with, when we're, we're doing bat stuff that you, you always get just positive reaction because, because people have to make the effort to go there, it's not, it's not like they turn up and then say where's this, the kiddies play park, you know, bit, they're not expecting that, erm, or at least I've never met anybody who's been expecting that, erm, and I guess for the organisations that are managing those places the, there's a balancing act because you can have the, almost a sacrificial bit that the public have access to and then they have very off limits areas, erm, which, so there's this balancing act of making it good for wildlife but also, erm, engaging people and see the wildlife … doesn't impact too much, or even habitats because you can … obviously the, the, I guess the time when you get the, the slightly strange people, or the.

**[laughs]**

**SOM5** Well, yeah, well not strange, there's no, no people who would not have, what I mean is people who wouldn't ordinarily go there, it's when Starlings are flocking in winter and then if you go along to a site so that's, that's going to be conflict with obviously locals because it matters to people … the site was never able to cope with that, now they've got the car park and it's great but you still get people who turn up in shell suits and you can hear them talking about wildlife in a, a way that they've clearly only experienced from TV, don't know much about it and, but they know there's a spectacle going on and they come out to it, so there's, there are certainly people who go who don't have much connection with, with it, erm, but, you know.

**Yeah. But do you think that, so it's driven by those, by TV programmes, by Nature Watch or Autumn Watch and.**

**SOM5** Yes, because the only reason most people are there is because they've seen the signs on TV because it's, it's a bit, it's become a big thing for Shapwick and Ham Wall starling murmurations in winter, erm, is kind of promoted for tourists, I mean there's only, it's only going to be local, or people from Somerset generally, erm, who go to these things in winter, erm.

**Yeah, so what's?**

**SOM5** But that's, yeah, that's just.

**And would you view that as a positive then, that people are coming out to?**

**SOM5** Yes.

**Try nature for themselves.**

**SOM5** Yes, because they might come back, they might, because people … they come along and it would be nice to think … I, I would hope they develop an interest in that, erm.

**Do you think there are other factors that might influence because I'm trying to get a handle on how wetlands used to be perceived and how they're perceived now.**

**SOM5** Yes.

**What's kind of changed, those changes, you know, is it driven by environmentalists[?] who have fought for these places to be established and that has generated interest or is it that and something else? Is it to do with, I don't know, an enhanced understanding of that nature connectedness or, you know, that wellbeing in green spaces is different from wellbeing in going to the gym or exercising or whatever, or doing yoga? I mean I'm trying to get, you know.**

**SOM5** Um.

**What are the other influences that bring people in to wetland spaces and change how people view wetland spaces?**

**SOM5** Er, that's a good question, I don't know, because the, certainly I think with Shapwick and associated places like that, it's, it …initially, erm, because they're, they're dealing with sites that were no good, no use for farming anymore, peat workings have gone, and they were certainly, if you, well I'm sure you probably talk to the organisations and they used to have some real difficulties with local landowners who hated them and I think some still do, erm, I'm, I think because they see, erm, sort of local, some local landowners only see wildlife as something that is there because of them and these NGOs don't know what they're talking about and that, that kind of thing, erm, but I think following, you know, the, the better it's got, the more successful it's got, the more it draws in people who are, it gets more powerful in, in terms of, erm, getting more people involved and, erm, and promoting it, so I think it, it's grown to a point where it's, kind of takes on life, more of a life of its own and, erm, it's easier, I think, for the NGOs to promote it because it kind of does its own promotion and there's a lot to see, there's … but, erm, what draws people there, I don't know, I don't know. I mean it, the initial, the obvious, I always think it's the obvious things initially, like birds so people want to go and see some, go and do some birdwatching, erm, but I think you have to know a little bit about birds, where to go, doesn't necessarily attract, the, say the starling murmurations thing attracts people who don't do birdwatching, don't, because they don't have to work, they don't, they don't have to work at it.

**It's just there, it's a spectacle right in front of them.**

**SOM5** Yes, there's an RSPB guide stood in front of you explaining stuff and millions of starlings appear and swirl, around if you're lucky. If you're not lucky there's no, rubbish night, they're just flying straight and disappear.

**[laughs]**

**SOM5** Erm, but if you were to go to the Avalon Marshes on a nice sunny day on your own, with a pair of binoculars, erm, you have to know a little bit about what you're looking for I think to get anything out of it, because there's nobody there telling you what you're seeing and hearing, erm, so I, I guess there's still some, it requires still some work from people to do that, so the, the other ways of, of, erm, because they, they sort of, erm, so they're creating access for disabled people and, erm, which is great but it also makes, turns the reserves, or some of the reserves, into more of a, there's more management going on, so it feels less wilder when you're walking down a boardwalk. …put this great little wooden boardwalk and new, big new hide in, and it feels more managed to me now because there's, we used to have to struggle through squelchy sort of peat, erm, and that was what the, the Wildlife Trust were, were trying to get more people out there, so making it easier to access but in doing so it makes it slightly less wild, for me, but, but for other people who want to visit it casually and don't want to fight through a peat bog to get round it … boardwalk is the most convenient…

**When you see in … local newspaper and on blogs and things that people use this area, do you get the sense that the wetlands are viewed as this very sort of nice benign space that's family friendly and user friendly?**

**SOM5** Um.

**Or are they still seen as maybe something that's for specialists? Yes, so something that, yeah, you'd need to either be a dedicated birdwatcher or?**

**SOM5** I suspect people don't know what to do, where, particularly families with, with children, unless the parents know the places they're going and what, and what they want to get out of it, I don't think people, erm, are necessarily drawn to those places unless, and, and so the Wildlife Trust and the RSPB and naturally, and they, they have little family fun days which, which are brilliant because it means that you get to go out with somebody who can point things out to you and get the kids engaged and so on, and that's necessary, I think, in a place like that because it's a little bit too wild for casual family visits because they don't know what to do, they don't know where to go, they don't know what to look at, they know what they're looking for and trying to entertain children and saying look there's a pintail duck over there through a pair of binoculars kind of difficult, so it's still, it's still not as accessible I think to some elements of the public because of that, and, but, I don't know how you get round that, other than those kind of. They have a little forest school there and things like that.

**Yeah, and in terms of sort of art scenes and things like that, are you aware of, so for instance I'm aware that last year there was a film out called The Levelling which was set in Somerset, and, you know, little, you know, stories that are always sort of set in wetland spaces. I'm thinking of.**

**SOM5** Was Levelling the farming one?

**Yes, exactly.**

**SOM5** The women who took on her father's.

**That's right, yeah.**

**SOM5** I haven't seen that but yeah, yes.

**Yeah, I'm just wondering, you know, I'm always interested to know, you know, are things like that drawn by things that are happening in the area or, you know, are contemporary writers and film-makers drawn to spaces that are seen as … different from other parts of the country, you know? There are, you know, you think about waterlands and set in Norfolk and Suffolk and this idea of spaces that are away from infrastructure and harder to get. You know, people have talked to me about the fact that.**

**SOM5** Um.

**You know, the M5 is nearby and, you know, you have the A303 but somehow the Levels sits sort of within it, so.**

**SOM5** In it, yes, yeah, I don't, yeah, I don't think, I don't think Somerset is seen … anything like that, I don't think they're big enough and they've been, I know they haven't been there long enough to. Whereas other wetlands, say like Norfolk Broads are, are, have been there since forever kind of thing, that sort of, erm, and are really popular, not necessarily, they, they have their own wildlife interest but their biggest interest is, is sort of casual, kind of holidays and boating and what have you, erm, whereas that isn't, the same isn't true with Somerset.

**They're too young maybe.**

**SOM5** Yes, I think the, the film, I'm, you've reminded me I need to see that film actually, The Levelling, erm, because that is taking it from a slightly different angle that the film-makers felt wasn't being looked at, which is more the, the farming side of it, erm, but I think it's still seen, the Levels are still viewed as a, erm, well a kind of out of the way places, quite a lot, there's just silage machines … but then you find little pockets and going over there the, and … county, the field, erm, with farming that was a county wildlife site and the difference was astonishing, species in the field compared to the other fields surrounding it and, erm, she was saying it's never been ploughed which is why, and she was explaining it's sort of undulating because it's never been ploughed, there is a … in other fields would have been filled in and it would have been all levelled out and seen as …

**Yeah, made neat.**

**SOM5** Yeah, erm, so most of the Levels I see as that, erm, and recent visits to … going, confirmed that, erm, so I know, I suspect that people passing through see that as well because it's not, it's not an easy landscape to navigate round, if you get out on foot because there's ditches in the way all over the place, you, you can't wander freely, you can only really follow footpaths and half the time there's a bunch of cows in there who take an unnecessary interest in you, and, erm, so yeah, it's only, I don't, I don't think, it's not old enough, the wetlands as they are now are not old enough or established enough and there's not, it's, it's very much wildlife orientated, which is as, erm, I think is, is a. From my perspective is a bonus because it's, the wildlife's done well as a result, if you start to introduce the kind of thing you get in other areas like boating lakes and stuff, then it reduces its value.

**Yeah, yeah. So things like introducing, I know that, you know, when we had the focus group we had the canoe representative.**

**SOM5** Oh yeah, yeah.

**Would that be seen as something that's detrimental do you think?**

**SOM5** No, I think, I, I don't think so because that can be managed in a way that is, erm, where they can have access to some areas, well you can paddle along the South Drain, which is where all the people walk and it's absolutely fine and people are out and about and, erm, you're not disturbing wildlife any more than anybody else is.

**No.**

**SOM5** Erm, so there are areas. I, I remember a story, erm, of a guy who was, erm, sitting in the hide at Canada Farm, not Canada Farm, it was Shapwick Heath and all the birds suddenly disappeared and he saw this guy in a canoe suddenly come paddling into view and, erm, he was looking through the binoculars, he's like what the hell? And he was looking at this guy who was paddling along and he was like it's fucking Ray Mears, [laughs] it was. Do you remember, I don't know if you know Ray Mears came and did a TV show.

**No.**

**SOM5** From Shapwick Heath, the Level.

**I didn't know that, yeah.**

**SOM5** Paddling around and.

**Look that one up.**

**SOM5** Yeah.

**Oh my God, Ray Mears does urban wildlife.**

**SOM5** But he was doing, he was talking about wildlife at the Levels, so there you go.

**Wow, that always … Ray Mears, so it's interesting, so Ray Mears is mentioned now and Hugh Fearnly-Whittingstall was mentioned before with his, he did something about the Levels.**

**SOM5** Oh he did, he's done a wildlife thing hasn't he?

**Um, which I haven't seen either, I'm going to have to look it up now.**

**SOM5** Yeah, yeah, but again it seems to have good reviews, I'm always a bit reticent about watching things with various celebrities doing wildlife stuff because I generally cringe but, erm, yeah, that one seems to have had positive, very positive reviews.

**Yeah. So I mean it's interesting that in this era where people talk about how people don't watch TV anymore, watch boxsets and things.**

**SOM5** Oh yeah, yes.

**That actually they still, these wildlife programmes actually do seem to have a big sway on people, they do have a large influence.**

**SOM5** Yes, erm, I, I think, yeah, programmes like Springwatch are amazing, erm, because it really engages with people and promotes places like Shapwick.

**Yeah, well I watched the last one with, which had a thing from a bat box which, yeah.**

**SOM5** I haven't had.

**Have you not seen it?**

**SOM5** No, no.

**Okay, yeah, that was interesting, it was interesting.**

**SOM5** Yeah, so again, erm, it, the, the programmes are kind of generalist because it's trying to appeal to everybody and some of the things they do, you're just like oh, no, that's, but, but actually they, they have a, I think they have a really positive impact and they introduce people to things they don't realise is going on in their own backyard and you get to, you know, they show a starling murmuration and people are like ooh you can go along and watch that and see it for yourself and it's, it's a very different experience than watching it on telly, so, erm, because you've got all the, you've got the cold and the wind, you can hear, if you, if you're close, you can hear the, the sound of the.

**The wings.**

**SOM5** The wings and.

**Yeah, it's amazing, yeah.**

**SOM5** So yeah, it, it's much more of a spec, and you get poo'd on. [laughs]

**[laughs]**

**SOM5** Erm, so I think they've, they're really a good force for engaging with people and get people more involved in stuff, erm, yeah. They, they also kind of, er, I went to the Mammal Society Conference recently and actually there's some, there's a researcher from Brighton studying, is she, she in Brighton? Erm, studying the interactions of, erm, wildlife in people's gardens where they feed them because you get.

**Ah, is that Dawn Scott? She, I know that she does.**

**SOM5** Is it Dawn Scott? That rings a bell.

**Yeah.**

**SOM5** So she, she got in touch with people through … in their garden and then people feeding stuff and then have wildlife cameras, voice cameras down and looking at interaction between foxes, badgers, cats and hedgehogs because they're living in a very unnatural situation, erm, in the same place and it was, it was saying it isn't necessarily a good thing because they're then creating a situation.

**An independent, yeah, get it.**

**SOM5** Interdependency and some of the animals are getting unhealthy because there's, she says one little old lady who buys a loaf of bread every single day and puts jam on every single slice then feeds it to the badgers and they go.

**[laughs]**

And, you know, they're then showed a, erm, radio tracking, a, like a Google Earth image with the, erm, radio tags on these animals and showing that they actually don't really go from these gardens where they're fed, so they have these tiny territories and they're in conflict with the different species, erm, as a result. It's going off the tangent slightly but.

**No, but I mean it's interesting isn't it about how, maybe the negative side of interactions with nature is the idea that. What am I trying to say? That somehow we're great benefactors, us humans are great benefactors for animals and look at largesse and how we do all these, why can't we just let, let nature be?**

**SOM5** Yes, yeah.

**You know, let it do its own thing for good or for bad.**

**SOM5** Yeah.

**Rather than always trying to tweak it the way we think is a good idea, so.**

**SOM5** Yes, because you, you end up, in terms of conservation you end up taking a snapshot of a time period that you want to conserve and it's, it's, because it's never always been the same, so it's … do you want it twentieth century, pre-Second World War or do you want it pre-Enclosures Act, do you want? You know, which, at which point do you decide.

**Exactly, they decide.**

**SOM5** That this is what the landscape is going to be like and these are the animals that we want?

**Yeah, and this is how they should interact with each other.**

**SOM5** Yeah, so then you get into the realms of climate change going to change everything anyway, because the Levels is already, a good part of it already below sea level anyway and it's only going to get worse and it's a changing landscape, you know, it's only, erm, was it seventeenth, eighteenth century that the major drainage works was, was conducted and, erm, kind of post war period when pumping stations were put in, so it's never been the same all, all this period of time and it's going to change again as climate change really takes effect, erm, and then you've got all the emerging[?] species that, erm, are going to appear and are, you know, like Himalayan Balsam has invaded our wetlands and there doesn't seem to be anything we can do about it, particularly, so it's, it's going to be a part of the British flora now and it will always be there to a greater or lesser extent.

**Yeah, so how much change are we prepared to accept?**

**SOM5** Yeah, yeah.

**It's always a question isn't it? Well it's been brilliant talking to you.**

**SOM5** Oh it's fine.

**I could continue for a long time.**

**SOM5** [laughs]

**A long long time, but thank you so much for your time.**

**SOM5** It's alright.

**I really appreciate it, at the end of a long day.**

**SOM5** That's alright.

**And, yeah, thank you very much.**

**SOM5** Right.

**Thank you.**

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview 6 SOM6

**So thank you so much for agreeing to chat with me today. I'm going to sort of really, almost ask you to have the kind of schizophrenic identity I suppose because it would be great if you could talk about things from your organisation's perspective.**

**SOM6** Yeah.

**But of course you may also want to say something yourself personally if it's something that you feel differently from the main organisation.**

**SOM6** Ah hum.

**So if that is the case then that's wonderful.**

**SOM6** Yeah.

**Just indicate to me that it's your own opinion rather than that of the organisation.**

**SOM6** Ah hum.

**So I suppose the first thing is to ask about your organisation, what they do, what they're interested in, which wetland spaces they use and a little bit also about the members in terms of how many members there are and how active they are when they come to the wetlands, maybe their age range, that would be helpful, and if they come from the local area or from elsewhere.**

**SOM6** Ah hum, ah hum. Well it, erm, Somerset Ornithological Society, I mean it covers the whole of the county, erm, membership getting on for five hundred, erm, probably the vast majority in the over fifties but, you know, it's a bit wider. Erm, there are active birdwatchers and those less active, erm. A lot of it is to do with sort of getting out recording what's seen, you know, over the course of the year and then the different areas and report being produced, erm, and we, we produced a few years ago a whole atlas of all the birds of Somerset. Erm, in terms of, erm, using the wetland areas, that, we, we have some organised walks a few times a year, erm, you know, on the wetlands, otherwise it's probably individuals and, you know, sports, small groups of people, you know, coming out and enjoying it, erm, for their own sort of pursuits and, and for recording and, erm, doing surveys and things like that, so.

**And will, so in terms of the individuals and small groups where you go, would that be determined by the bird species or it'd be determined by the, where the geographical location of the space is?**

**SOM6** A bit of both, certainly the bird species will have a big attraction if there's something quite unusual a lot of people will come out but obviously accessibility is, you know, has, has a bearing, you know, on that and where you can come, where you can park and, you know, what facilities there might be but the really keen ones, so they would go anywhere but I think some of the perhaps older folk might.

**Right, so you.**

**SOM6** Well you go to the places that are known and the places that perhaps there's good information about, obviously more inclined to go to those, yeah, which would be Shapwick and, erm, here to some extent, erm, and Ham Wall across the RSPB one is very popular.

**Yeah. Because of the good walkways or because of the good, say car parking?**

**SOM6** [interruption]

Yes, so, erm, yes, I mean the, I think having good level paths and walks will have a bearing for some people, yeah, erm, so, and if there's a good, you know, good car parks or, erm, the, the safety can, can vary because all these car parks like most rural areas have, have trouble from time to time, erm. So people, yeah, like, prefer a proper, perhaps a proper car park, erm.

**Would this one here at Westhay be deemed as a proper car park?**

**SOM6** It's a proper car park but it's had its troubles because as you can see it's well out of the way from anywhere and there's not a lot of passing traffic so it does have spates of, erm, break-ins, yeah.

**Right. And do you think that affects when people might use the wetlands as in, you know, if you're going to come with your car and park might you want to come when you know it's a busy day, like a day like today or you?**

**SOM6** I think it probably does, I mean I prefer to come early in the mornings because you think well that way you're more likely to, well you sort of think the people who might break into cares aren't there early. [laughs] Other people might prefer to come when it's busier and there was lots of people around, erm. It is very popular with dog walkers as well here, erm, and you'll find that if they had had a spate of break-ins then perhaps they'll sort of perhaps ease off a bit, you know, so.

**I see, yeah.**

**SOM6** You will find that it would put people off that aspect, yeah, from, from time to time but the police do come round and they do use, erm, covert camera cars and things like that from time to time but it just sort of …

**Yeah, but for the diehard birders, it's.**

**SOM6** They will almost socially come out anyway if they think there's something to be seen, yeah, erm, they'll perhaps, and they, they often prefer early, late sort of time, and you've just got to be sensible and not, you know, leave stuff in, you know, in the car but, you know, as, as birders we do tend to carry a lot of equipment and it’s very expensive.

**Well I was going to say, you have a lot of equipment and, yeah.**

**SOM6** I mean I've only got binoculars and camera today but I quite often have a telescope and there's a lot of photographers, you know, come out with sort of serious equipment. [laughs]

**Yeah, yeah, so you've got to be careful.**

**SOM6** Yeah, yeah.

**Okay, that's interesting to know then. So it's both led by your use of the sites are both led by the accessibility and the security.**

**SOM6** Ah hum.

**But also by the bird species.**

**SOM6** Yes.

**Because do the bird species, is it that they come in different seasons or is it that they move around the sites in the same season?**

**SOM6** Oh. No, they've, they'll be fairly seasonal really, so we have the birds that come for the winter and that's a lot of duck species and things and then the, the birds that, you know, the summer migrants and the warblers and things like that and then of course in this summer, you know, breeding season, so some of the resident species and the bitterns here are booming and which is, that's a big attraction, so, erm, you know, yeah.

**Yeah, okay. And so just going back briefly to your users, your organisational members and the possibility that maybe more of them are over fifty than under fifty.**

**SOM6** Ah hum.

**Are places like the hides then really important in terms of, you know, kind of getting out of the weather and having a good say space to watch the birds, is that a big draw as well?**

**SOM6** I think it is for some, yes, erm, so the really keen ones wouldn't, wouldn't worry, erm, but for other, probably other visitors, not necessarily are members of the society, that definitely has, has a bearing, erm, yeah, and people, you know, would like to be able to sit and, and, erm.

**Yeah. And in terms of the, you know, so you've talked about producing reports in an atlas, does your organisation, does it, it's rationale for what it does, obviously, you know, you're interested in birds and looking after birds but do you have a kind of advocacy element of it, do you, are these reports for, to share with other people to educate them about birds or to encourage them to think about wildlife?**

**SOM6** Yes, yes, I think, so the, erm, say the annual report which give details of all the birds or, you know, what their, their status, erm, you know, if it's resident, they're breeding and how well they've been doing and the, the general spread of where they are, erm, so all the members will receive that and various other organisations but a lot of it now feeds into the British Trust for Ornithology, so they've got, you know, big, big database and people it, so they will receive, you know, get a lot of those reports and they produce national atlases, so it's, erm, I, I recently looked at actually some reports from the seventies and so you, you could really see the changes and that's what it's doing, you know, it's documenting, recording, keeping the data, erm, so it can be researched and, and see what changes have happened, you know, where you've got losses and where you've got gains and there's quite a lot. [laughs]

**Yeah, I'm sure, yeah.**

**SOM6** Um.

**I'm sure.**

**SOM6** Um.

**And so do, would you say you're also a campaigning organisation then in that element of it, I mean do you?**

**SOM6** Erm, no, not, not really, no, no.

**No, okay, so it's more about the recording and the documenting.**

**SOM6** Yes, yeah, yeah, yes.

**And which other, you said that you send the document to other organisations, so what would be those other organisations?**

**SOM6** Well, well, I don't know exactly to, they go to, I mean there is the Somerset Records, erm, Office, I forgot the name of, the initials are SERC and I can't remember exactly what it stands for, erm, and I guess some libraries and places like that will have copies of the, erm, reports, erm, but mostly I guess individuals so, um.

**Yeah. So would you, do you think that, if we think about say education and skills sharing, would you say that education and skills sharing is something that happens just between the members or is it part of the organisation's rationale and, you know, would you try and do that with other groups or with other parties?**

**SOM6** Mostly between members I think, but we do have a website, we do have a forum so information about what's been seen and, and where it's been seen, if it's safe to do so, you know, will be on there and that's accessible to anybody erm, you know.

**Yeah, okay. And am I right in thinking that wetlands a key part, a key geographical location for you, is it all different types of landscapes?**

**SOM6** There's all different types of landscapes, erm, Somerset has a very wide range of, you know, habitats, erm, and landscape but the wetland area have become increasingly popular because of the development of the wetlands and the, you know, the species that have been turning up for the last ten years. [laughs]

**Okay. So in many ways the work of the reserves here has actually worked, yeah.**

**SOM6** Oh absolutely, yes, oh yes, yeah.

**Yeah, that's wonderful because presumably before ten years ago, when these weren't reserves then these spaces were, well were they still visited by your organisation?**

**SOM6** Erm, this reserve and some of Shapwick are actually, go back quite a long way, but, erm, they've obviously been developed and the reed beds have developed because of the ex-peat workings, erm, so they have developed in terms of the birds that are coming in now, but thirty, forty years ago they were often drier and more heathy and there was a different set of birds which have sadly disappeared, um.

**Right. Is that a large number of species that have?**

**SOM6** Erm, no, not, not necessarily but, erm, you know, some popular, bird populations have decreased nationally, erm, but some have definitely sort of gone from this area, would have been here, because the, the land was probably drier and higher. I mean I did speak to someone who suggested that a lot of the land's actually shrunk a bit, you know, we, we've sunk down because, the nature of the, the underlying sort of peat bed and, and things like that, that, erm.

**Yeah. So the birds might have moved on just because it's not their suitable terrain anymore.**

**SOM6** Exactly, yeah. Erm, whereas of course the wetland birds have come in because there wasn't a suitable habitat for them before so the egrets, the bitterns and all these sorts of things and in the winter we do have large numbers of duck come and spend the winter, they wouldn't have been here in the same way. Yeah, so it's quite a change, it is.

**So if you think about how often your members come to Westhay and Shapwick, would you say it's very frequently, I mean is it once a month, is it once, twice a year, does?**

**SOM6** Erm, we'd be very variable of course in members but I would say that there's probably somebody out there, erm, probably a couple, you know, a member would, would be there at least a couple of times a week, you know, or more this time of year they'll be out, you know, when, well when the weather's good or bad really, erm, so it will vary enormously. Erm, within the, that, erm, say the sort of, nearly five hundred members but we probably only say that a hundred of those are the more active, you know, ones.

**Got you, yeah.**

**SOM6** Erm, who are recording and who send in reports and the others perhaps it's a more general interest but like to stay a member but, yeah, I think it gets, some sites get covered better than others but I think on the whole they're covered pretty well and regularly.

**And if you think about, you know, the sites that are maybe the most popular, where do Shapwick and Westhay fit within that profile?**

**SOM6** Well fairly high up. Well in terms of reserves, probably Ham Wall is, probably gets the most publicity, it's got the better facilities, that doesn't necessarily affect the, really the keen, you know, birders. Erm, yes, in fact I know some, some people, a member, who might be out on one or two of the reserves five times a week. [laughs]

**Gosh, that is investing a lot of time isn't it?**

**SOM6** They've retired and that's what they do, you know, and, erm, yeah, so.

**Yeah. And if on these wonderful maps here, I mean are there particular areas that are, of each reserve that are more popular than another or will it just simply depend on where the birds are siting themselves?**

**SOM6** I mean it will depend on where the birds, obviously on here, I mean there are various hides around here and some of those will be more popular and there's a new one that's up out there somewhere, erm, which is a really smart hide now and that could be quite popular, but the hides are quite popular too for photographers but, erm, and, you know, what have got the best view, obviously there's some hides which actually don't look out on to very much, so they won't be used, erm, you know, and others that have, you know, and might be really good in the winter, erm, not so good in the, you know, in the summer, so.

**Got you, yeah. So it's sort of areas.**

**SOM6** But people will go where they're likely to see, you know, the most.

**Yeah. And will bird activity, obviously it fluctuates throughout the day but would you say? Because, you know, there's, we're now here and it's about, you know, half past ten.**

**SOM6** Ah hum.

**Is it not unusual to have members of your organisation here at say four in the morning when the sun's rising or really late at night?**

**SOM6** Um, yes, yes, there will be some, you know, who, who will do that, I mean obviously, yes, early mornings, or mornings are definitely better, erm, particularly in spring, erm, for seeing, you know, birds and there could be quite a lull of, you know, early afternoon, so will perhaps be quite quiet, so the really, the keen ones probably won't be out quite so much but, you know, other people like those times of the day, erm, and again. Evenings are actually remarkably quiet on the reserves, the keen birders will be out there, particularly if there's some species which you might only see them but generally, erm, you know, I can go out sometimes and after six o'clock you hardly see anyone.

**Gosh, and you would think well I suppose you would think from my perspective that it might be busy because that's when people have finished work.**

**SOM6** Um.

**And they might like that last hour or so of daylight.**

**SOM6** Um.

**In the day, but maybe.**

**SOM6** Yeah, no certainly in, whether that is to do with dynamics]?] of people who are using the reserves of being older, like to get back for their tea, I don't know. [laughs]

**Got you, yes. So it maybe more skewed towards the beginning of the day because people are.**

**SOM6** Um, um.

**You know, up early and.**

**SOM6** I think it's true, there probably are some, some places say who work and will go out, you know, afterwards, you know.

**Yeah. And there are no parts of the reserve that are sort of maybe put people off from maybe accessing them?**

**SOM6** Er, no, I mean there's obviously not open access to everywhere, erm, but there's plenty enough paths and accessible bits, erm, for, for most people, yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. And that isn't something that your organisation would like to change, you know, widening some of the access points, or they're quite happy with what you're able to access?**

**SOM6** Erm, I think here, erm, and for the wetlands, yes, yes, I don't think there are any issues with access, you wouldn't want greater access because of the risk of disturbance. So whereas the birders might be able to go out and sit quietly and so on but I mean they, obviously as you know, it's multiple use and where we have, where there's more access, like here, and you get people out with dogs and unfortunately they don't read the notice, you know, and they, they will let the dogs off and of course if they're running out into, you know, the reed beds they can disturb nesting birds and things, so we want to keep, I think most people, you know, like to have, and obviously the reserve wardens and so on, the quiet areas where there is no access because the reserves are here foremost for the birds, secondly for the people and. [laughs]

**Yeah. So it's getting the balance the right way round.**

**SOM6** It is, yeah, because we need the visitors to support the organisations but you need to have the non-accessible and quiet bits, so.

**Yeah, sure.**

**SOM6** I think we've got very good access actually personally.

**Yeah. Oh that's positive.**

**SOM6** Um.

**Now, this may be a strange question but how does your organisation understand the term wetland?**

**SOM6** Erm, I suppose any area of sort of where there's a reasonable size water body, you know, really, erm. I think a lot of people would think areas where there's, you know, water body and sort of reed type habitat, you know, more low lying rather than say an upland, you know, lake but, erm, with, with one of the surveys that some people get involved with, which is the, erm, what do they call it? WEBS? What does it stand for? It's the big national survey, which has been done, organised by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust plus, and the BTO and so on and that will cover any wet area, so it could be lakes, it could be rivers, it would be wetlands, like this, marshy, you know, habitats so some people might take that a bit wider as wetlands but I think most people would think of areas like this, open areas of water, marshy land, reed beds, yeah.

**Yeah, wonderful. And I think that pretty much describes this area doesn't it?**

**SOM6** Yes, yeah.

**With all the wonderful reed beds and open areas of water.**

**SOM6** Yeah, um.

**Yeah, thank you. And so are you familiar with the term ecosystems services? Is it something you've heard of before?**

**SOM6** Erm, well I sort of, I think I understand what you mean really, I've not heard the term particularly but, yeah, yeah.

**Okay, yeah, because it's interesting isn't it? There's lots of different ways of framing our relationship with nature.**

**SOM6** Ah hum.

**So we have things like, you know, natural capital, nature-based solutions and ecosystems services is one way of thinking about the benefits that human and non-humans derive from different ecosystems.**

**SOM6** Yeah, um.

**So I just wondered that if you were to think about that, about what your organisation gets from nature, if you would be able to, be able to articulate what that would mean for you?**

**SOM6** I can, I sort of probably know personally rather than as …[22.41] because I think our membership anyway is very broad and, and sort of mean different things to different people.

**Sure, yeah.**

**SOM6** Erm, for me because I've had a very long-standing interest and grew up in the countryside, erm, I mean it's, erm, I think it actually goes a long way to wellbeing, erm, for me personally and I like to be out, I like to be quiet and so you, you know, get that and, erm, so just, just uplifting I think, just standing out there this morning and listening to the birdsong and, for me personally that does. [laughs]

**Yeah, no, that's wonderful.**

**SOM6** I mean I had, erm, I mean I lost my husband fairly young and I knew that it would be my birding and being able to sort of get out would be one of the key benefits to me of sort of, you know, getting back and getting over that really, erm, because it was my hobby and perhaps not his, you know, so in a way but, yeah, I definitely think there's a huge, there can be a huge benefit to link with nature but I did grow up on a farm and I'm, you know, grew up and had that around and wandered the fields, you know, from an early age and so, really connected with it.

**Yeah. So it's part, yeah, yeah.**

**SOM6** And maybe in my dreams, I don't know. [laughs]

**Yes, well there's that idea of.**

**SOM6** A very strong vibe acting.

**There's a genealogy actually isn't there where your environment can actually have a physical effect on yourselves.**

**SOM6** Um.

**I mean it's not such an extraordinary thing to think is it that, you know, that there is that essential connection that benefits us all?**

**SOM6** Yeah.

**So, because that's of course another big part of our project is thinking about wellbeing.**

**SOM6** Ah hum.

**And so how would you, you know, you've touched on it there with making you feel connected with nature.**

**SOM6** Um.

**So how would you frame wellbeing, both for yourself and for your organisation? Is it a physical thing, is it an emotional thing, do you think it's mental?**

**SOM6** Well I think it's an emotional and sort of mental, yes. You know, you come out and on a beautiful day, you're, even if it's raining and you're hearing birdsong and, and seeing birds which you're obviously fascinated about and, yes, by the end of the day or if you've had a good day, you've obviously seen something interesting or if you've found something rare, you know, have a real buzz but that will vary for people but, yeah, I think erm, and, erm, I think now that these days, being retired, I can get out perhaps a lot more but there were definite times and, especially in the winter where I, [laughs] can be quite restless if you haven't managed to get out and you sort of knew yes, I've got to get out, you know, I need a, I need a walk, I need to be outside and, er.

**Yeah. It's interesting because somebody I talked to yesterday said exactly the same thing.**

**SOM6** Um, um.

**They said that they knew they hadn't done enough exercise that day when I was with them.**

**SOM6** Um, um.

**Because they could feel it, you know, they needed to be outside and sort of active.**

**SOM6** Um, um.

**And I think that's really important.**

**SOM6** Um.

**And do you think, I mean when you've got, your members, obviously they're driven by interest in birds but do you think the wellbeing aspects of nature is also an element of what connects them with that?**

**SOM6** It might be but I don't know that a lot of people actually think that because I think the talk about wellbeing and it's, it's quite a modern sort of phraseology so I think for a lot of, erm, particularly the older people who've been out and enjoyed the countryside and birding for years and years and years, that wouldn't actually occur to them until somebody put the question to them and they says yes, well it does make me feel good, [laughs] but they won't.

**But they won't frame it like that, yeah.**

**SOM6** No, they wouldn't necessarily think that's why they're going out, because it makes me.

**Got you, yeah, okay, oh that's really helpful, that is helpful. Because this all connects back with our, the study's desire to really interrogate a kind of sense of place that the wetlands develop and.**

**SOM6** Um.

**How would you, do you feel that these wetlands really connect with you? I mean do you feel a sense of place when you come here or could this be any generic wetlands that you visit and it's the birds that drive it rather than the place?**

**SOM6** Probably the birds to be honest, you know, the whole sort of, erm, sort of thing but I could see, it's that but, you know, for some it might be, you know, there's some people who do, who mainly come to these sort of sites and perhaps not go, you know, anywhere else very much, [laughs] and, erm, yeah, so.

**Yeah, okay, yeah. Well I mean that's really interesting to know, that these are beautiful sites but it's the birds that are the key factor that take you to the places that you.**

**SOM6** For, for birders and the really keen birders, yes, that'd be, they, they'd go where the, you know, the birds are but I, on the other hand these days, you know, I find myself more drawn to coming out to the local areas rather than it, you know, driving an hour and a half to other habitats. Not, I don't do that as often as I thought I might, shall we say, you know, you do it, because we like to see, because you have different species of birds and if you're down on the Corn Tops or on Exmoor they like to do it but I am quite drawn to come out locally, yeah.

**Yeah. So would you say that's just a matter or sort of sheer logistics as much as anything else that, that sometimes the idea of having to get in the car and prep yourself to go for a two hour drive, you may not have the time in the day?**

**SOM6** Oh there's definitely, you know, that factor and thinking well why sit in the car for, [laughs] you know, a couple of hours when I can be out, erm, locally in ten minutes? So.

**Yeah, so that is an important pull isn't it?**

**SOM6** On my bicycle, [laughs] yeah.

**Yeah, that's wonderful. Now, so I've got a whole section actually on wellbeing, so we've touched on it already.**

**SOM6** Um.

**Do you think that in thinking about the sort of emotional wellbeing you get from being on the site but what about physical, do you feel that your birding actually, you know, gets you out and walking around, is that?**

**SOM6** I'm sure that's, you know, good, I mean it's, [laughs] birders sort of tend to be, to be slow shall we say, because obviously you stop and you're, you know, looking, so you're not as necessarily out there for exercise, erm, as such but of course you are, you know, getting, you know, exercise, erm.

**Yeah. It sounds quite meditative really, you really have to pause and stop and be in the moment and make it a quiet time.**

**SOM6** I think so, yes.

**For the birds and for yourself.**

**SOM6** Yes, yeah.

**Yeah.**

**SOM6** Um.

**Sounds very zen actually.**

**SOM6** [laughs]

**That's what I'm hearing. And yeah, we think about, you know, the wellbeing, when we talk about wellbeing, we often talk about humans but what about from the other perspective, from the birds perspective and thinking about, for instance if this site wasn't here obviously the birds would be elsewhere but do you think this does encourage larger bird numbers generally?**

**SOM6** Oh definitely, yes, yes, there's been, erm, particularly in the last sort of ten to twelve years, been increases in, erm, for the wetland bird species in particular, especially the bitterns, which was what a lot of the project was, was for, erm, of, you know, developing, you know, these sites but yes, then the birds have come, you know, you develop the habitat, get it right, erm, and birds come.

**Yeah, it's a wonderful thing isn't it?**

**SOM6** Um.

**Really is. Do you think, again thinking about your organisation, you know, you said that maybe most, it could well be that many of your organisational members wouldn't really be familiar with the term wellbeing, do you think that's something, is that? Let me try and sum up what I'm trying to say. Would you say that your organisation really has quite a singular focus on birds and bird numbers and the other aspects of birding, like the wellbeing or the site access is kind of, is not their focus?**

**SOM6** Yeah, that's right, it's definitely, it's more for the, the birds and recording what's seen and so on, so, yes.

**So it makes it quite straightforward there's, you know.**

**SOM6** Yeah.

**There are no sort of other tangential areas that they?**

**SOM6** No, not within, not within the.

**No, okay, well that's good to know. Now, mosquitoes, those wonderful creatures.**

**SOM6** Um.

**We obviously touched on it a little bit when we had a little chat in the focus group.**

**SOM6** Um.

**But from your experience and from your organisational perspective.**

**SOM6** Um.

**Are mosquitoes and, or biting insects, an issue on the site, I mean?**

**SOM6** They are here, they are on the site, I've chatted to a few other birders and that, the, erm, chap I met this morning and asked him because I know he comes out early. Erm, most keen birders they know that but they take relevant precautions so it's, you know, cover up, use, erm, insect repellent, erm, and so, it's not an issue, you know, doesn't put them off coming because you take the necessary precautions and, but you try to, it's very easy to forget when you first start going out in the evenings. So, erm, yeah, there are areas, erm, and if you are out early, you'll come across them and some, erm, some places where you've got sort of rides, rides, you know, walks through the trees in particular where it's sort of wet underneath and, and trees and, yeah, they'll, they'll be there but, erm, it doesn't stop people and, you know, various people I've spoken to, have spoken, the key birders I've spoken to have said, well no, doesn't worry me.

**Yeah, you just see that as actually part of what you have to.**

**SOM6** As part, yes.

**Experience when you're, what, when you're birdwatching.**

**SOM6** Yeah, yeah, I mean the other thing actually is ticks, which is, we have actually more concern about, erm, ticks I think now then, erm, mosquitoes really because we don't have malaria here, yet. [laughs]

**But are ticks an issue because of just a general anxiety around ticks because of Lyme's Disease or is there actual anecdotal proof?**

**SOM6** Erm, I think it's just the, well because Lyme's Disease is, is known and, and I think it's been in Somerset but more on the, the Corn Tops so it's something to be aware of.

**Because it's normally chalky downland isn't it rather than actually?**

**SOM6** But there definitely are, I mean there are ticks, there are, you know, they're deer around this and I think that's probably where the, the source, so, you know, walking through longer grass, erm, is something, you know, that if, if we're doing guided walks and things, we always tell people, you know, to be careful to check and take precautions and, erm.

**Yeah, okay. So on Shapwick Heath and Westhay Moor mosquitoes are there but they are not an issue, if you're a kind of prepared birder.**

**SOM6** Yes, yeah.

**You're saying that they're more prevalent in the morning, early morning and the early evenings.**

**SOM6** Evenings, yes.

**Yeah, and at any particular time of the year? Is it?**

**SOM6** Well summer, yeah, obviously but, er, yeah, so even high summer, there's one or two places, I mean I, here that I go, but I mean it would almost put me off a little bit going there perhaps in the summer, not because I'm really particularly worried about being bitten but there actually are quite a few because they are very wet, you know, habitats, erm, but.

**And they put you off because they're more of a nuisance or?**

**SOM6** Oh just more of a nuisance because the ground, you know. [laughs] And of course there's that danger that you sometimes think oh I'll go for a walk and you go out and you've forgotten to take the, erm, the insect repellent or the long sleeved shirt or something. [laughs]

**Yeah. That's always the way isn't it?**

**SOM6** Yeah.

**Because, you know, you're getting there and then you suddenly think, I mean I've forgotten something.**

**SOM6** Yeah, yeah.

**But on these particular sites themselves, these wetlands, Shapwick Heath, Westhay Moor, it's not really a concern, there's no particularly buggy place that people avoid?**

**SOM6** Not that I, well I, not, not keen, not keen birders, it's not something that's been talked about a lot or discussed or people say, oh, you know, they're, they're a nuisance but I think it's because we take precautions and, erm, um.

**Okay. And you've not noticed, there's not been any, none of your members have noticed whether there's been say a particular decline or a particular rise because obviously there is a relationship between mosquito numbers and bird numbers.**

**SOM6** Um.

**And so I wondered if that was something that had been noted.**

**SOM6** Erm, no, not, I don't, I don't think anyone's probably thought too hard about the, you know, the connection, particularly the mosquitoes, I mean there's certain other insects, erm, that have a, quite a big bearing on the number of birds seen at any particular time and that's particularly dragonflies and other big flies that the, erm, Hobbys, you know, so migrant falcons sort of live on, so, you know, if there weren't any of those around we'd definitely know, whereas mosquitoes, I think, I don't know that anybody's really thought so much about it, erm. We do often have quite large numbers of swallows and martin swifts and things feeding over the reserves and in fact a few weeks back when they were on migration, there were hundreds but they seem to have gone and they've been in a bit short supply since.

**Oh.**

**SOM6** So that was, you know, must have been a lot of emerging insects and that they were feeding on and they were feeding low over the water, you know, so, yeah.

**Right, okay. And presumably they will follow the insects will they? I mean if that's their main food source.**

**SOM6** Erm, well for the main they would just be going back to wherever they, their nesting areas, which will be very much where they were reared themselves, so, so they will stop on the wetlands, erm, in spring and autumn and use that resource because there is a lot of insects and really feed up for the onward journey, um, yeah.

**Okay, yeah. Do you, and having talked to members, you don't have any organisational kind of opinion about mosquitoes in terms of whether you think they're going to expand?**

**SOM6** No, I don't think I do, no, no, ever really thought about that.

**It's under the radar?**

**SOM6** Yeah, yeah.

**Because in the project we've, we've used mosquitoes as a way of thinking about potential climate change impacts on wetlands.**

**SOM6** Um.

**But from your organisation is there anything that you've noted in terms of a warming climate or anything that you are, as an organisation, already talking or thinking about in terms of potential changes that might impact on bird populations?**

**SOM6** I think yes, because of the birds that have, have come, that have appeared, although the, erm, a lot of the habitat management work was done specifically to, erm, attract bitterns and, erm, to get other, bases of sort of populations because they, you know, they were very, very few, some fifteen or so, you know, years ago, erm, and that has worked but we've had, so many other things have come too, which, you know, wasn't planned for so great white egrets is one of them, white herons and, erm, and then there's the, we've got the little bittern which is a migratory bird, big surprise, bred here for the, or at Ham Wall actually for the first time this country. We've had cattle egret, which have bred for the first time in, in the UK, in Somerset within the sort of wetland areas. Last year there was night herons which nested here somewhere for the first, one of the, not necessarily the first time in the UK but certainly for a long time, so birds are coming back, erm, partly because the habitat's here but it's assumed that to some extent it is because of the warmer, you know, climate, they're surviving and there's other little warblers as well which are considerably more abundant than say they were, erm, twenty or thirty years ago when they'd be quite a rare bird are now very abundant, so it's.

**So it sounds.**

**SOM6** And they were able to survive over the winter perhaps better than they would have.

**Right. So it sounds like in some ways it is all positive but have there been any negatives would you say?**

**SOM6** Well yes, because other birds have disappeared and not necessarily just here because of.

**There's a creation of the.**

**SOM6** Within the UK as a, as a whole and, you know, there's a lot of concern within the bird, you know, of some, particularly some of the upland birds and, erm, you know, what's going to happen, climate could become, change, you know, might be too wet or, you know, too, because, because of their, particularly spaces that have quite a sort of niche habitat, you know, really, so they just have to have the right conditions and if those are gone, they're going to, to go.

**Got you, yeah.**

**SOM6** But some bird losses around here, erm, you know, things like nightingale and things like that, is probably partially habitat changes and partially because a lot of those species have been on the edge of their European range anyway.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM6** And it's shrunk back and, and that's noticeable, you know, from other areas, yeah.

**Yeah, okay, thank you. So I think, are there any other, anything else you would like to offer in terms of mosquito, stroke biting insects that you've come across with your organisation?**

**SOM6** I just.

**It's just basically low visibility and business as usual?**

**SOM6** Um, yeah, yeah, got to say I've never really heard anyone particularly, I mean even those, I, I was just this morning, I mean I can react quite, erm, you know, badly and, you know, people do if they have a bite, erm, mosquitoes not quite so bad, the horse flies can be nasty but you tend to carry with you a, you know, you either use a repellent or cover, you know, cover up, and antihistamines if you need them, that sort of thing, so, erm.

**Yeah, you just come prepared.**

**SOM6** I don't think there is a huge, you know, negativity about biting sort of insects.

**Yeah, okay, okay, it's just part of the mix.**

**SOM6** Um.

**So I'm on to the sort of last section of the interview now which is, part of the project is really trying to understand how people view wetlands, so from your organisational perspective, how your members view wetlands and how you think members of the public view wetlands from your experiences of being on site such a lot.**

**SOM6** Um.

**And I say this because of course back in the day wetlands were always seen as sort of fairly barren dank places.**

**SOM6** Ah hum, um.

**Again mosquito laden.**

**SOM6** Um.

**And I'm just, we're trying to get a sense now of how wetlands are viewed, are they viewed as really lovely natural spaces to enjoy and use, are they seen as mainly habitat for, for wildlife?**

**SOM6** Um.

**Or is it that they're also recreational spaces as well?**

**SOM6** Um, I think they're increasingly becoming recreational spaces, erm, and people like to, you know, getting out and enjoying them, because there are, you know, good facilities, because there are, erm, you know, good, good paths and, and good, good hides, erm, and with a, at Shapwick in particular because it's the old railway track so it's set up, you know, as a cycle path, so there's, yes, quite a lot of recreational, you know, activities, so I think that is perhaps changing people's perception of what wetlands are and there's, it's a lot of interest, and the, a lot of the wildlife is very, is quite accessible, you know, you've got hides and if you sit there long enough, you know, you'll see and, and hear things and, erm, people are sort of slowly getting there but.

**Yeah. So physically changing the sites to make them accessible has an impact on how people view wetlands?**

**SOM6** I think so, yeah.

**Yeah, but what about other things like any influences from say books or TV or?**

**SOM6** TV has had a big impact in, erm, things like Springwatch but in particular for, erm, Somerset and, and that again is a bit more Ham Wall but there, there used to be here, is the, the big starling, erm, roosts in the winter and that has had a massive impact and has brought people out because it seems to be one of those things, you know, you must, must see, erm, and it can get very busy and so the starling roost now is at mostly Ham Wall and Shapwick. When I first came here it was here and didn't get too many people out, erm, and of course then they go to know the site and so there's always plenty of publicity about that but, but the fact that it's been on, gets on television most winters I think has had a big impact, and again, erm, the RSPB in particular obviously have got a much greater probably publicity, erm, they probably spend more time, you know, with, doing then perhaps the Wildlife Trust but Wildlife Trust does quite a lot, erm, and, you know, educational work brings people out and, and people are getting to know, so I think most sort of local birders and local people will have seen a big, big increase in visitor numbers, erm, in the last ten or fifteen years to, to these sites. I mean just the fact that, erm, that, erm, between Ham Wall and the Shapwick they've had to put in an enormous new car park.

**Have they?**

**SOM6** Um.

**To, because of the?**

**SOM6** Because of numbers visiting, yeah.

**But even though that's going to be sort of only in, well basically in what, three or four weeks in the winter?**

**SOM6** Oh, ooh no, no, it's, it's the, the starling roost is from about December through to about February.

**Ah.**

**SOM6** Yeah, erm, and then of course you've got, you know, the summers, so that, it's, it's, erm, busy, you know, and, and people who come out just for a walk, erm, or, you know, just bring family out to cycle through, take the dog for a walk, erm, and so on, so there's, you know, a lot of, quite a lot of recreational use, yeah.

**Yeah, yeah. So do you think in some ways that there's a kind of knock-on effect in terms of it's an ongoing, that the murmurations bring people in and that maybe that encourages people to come more often?**

**SOM6** Oh yes, yes, yeah.

**Yeah, okay, that's really positive.**

**SOM6** Yeah, so they, you know, come in the winter and starlings and a lot of people now, you know, like to come out in spring, and particularly, you know, to see and hear the bitterns is, is something quite, erm, yeah, that they do and, erm.

**Yeah, think they're really special, the booming of the bitterns. So in terms, but, because also I've noticed quite a lot of artists around, so do they, do you think that has an impact that maybe there are more people coming to Somerset because of artistic interests and, you know, taking photos and wanting to display photos.**

**SOM6** Well photography in particular, I mean obviously, erm, big numbers of, now because of the ease of digital, you know, cameras, there've been a huge increase of popularity of photography and wildlife photography, erm, and I guess so, you know, with art, that you probably see more photographers and there's quite a lot of groups, and now, you know, sort of Facebook groups for nature photography and, and Somerset and that, so some of the reserves will have a lot of photographers and most birders will carry a camera now. I mean I've only recently upgraded to like a bridge camera but, erm.

**But that's for your own enjoyment not for?**

**SOM6** That's for my own enjoyment and, and it's what we call, do taking records, so if you saw something rare or unusual or different, then you could take a quick picture to prove that you'd seen it.

**Yeah, that's it, yeah.**

**SOM6** It's much easier than writing a long description, you've actually seen, pictures, got to prove that, yeah.

**Yeah, and then you need to verify.**

**SOM6** You know, you've to prove that you have seen what you say you've seen, because a lot of people make mistakes so. [laughs] So it's in an interest.

**Yeah, it's easy to misidentify on the hoof isn't it?**

**SOM6** Um.

**And do you think, so when you, from an organisational perspective, when you think about members of the public, how they view wetlands, do you think that has changed over the last few years?**

**SOM6** I think it probably has now because there has been a lot more, you know, and that, publicity, and that can be probably largely television driven, you know, about them and what they're about, erm, and, you know, what you can see there and, and so on, erm, but there may be some sort of older folk, you know, who've lived in the country a long time who still have a bit more negative sort of, you know, idea, you know, about them, but, erm.

**Okay. Do you think there is then some residual sort of negativity around wetlands?**

**SOM6** Erm, at times there's been a little bit of negativity about well, in, in the old days, you know, we could go here and there or, or walk and now it's wet and now we can't and because the conservation organisations have come in and, and just sort of say well this is where you can go and, and not there and that's, that sort of thing, erm, so there is that sort of, a little bit of resistance of being told what to do as it were, whereas they thought that, you know, fifty years ago you just went wherever you liked. [laughs]

**I think that's the interesting side of it isn't it? So rather than kind of improving access in some ways, for some people the access is denied.**

**SOM6** Well they feel that it is, I mean I think they're, I mean there's, generally, you know, round there is very good access but there'll always be some who, who feel that, you know, they can't, erm, do quite perhaps what they, they could but, erm, but I think that's probably in, in the minority and I think, erm, you know, there are a lot of people obviously who've lived there all their lives and, and, erm, you know, they are beginning to appreciate perhaps, you know, what, what we've got and what we've got here but, you know, like anyone if you live somewhere you sort of take it for granted and you don't realise and, you know, if you've never lived in a city or a town you don't realise what it's like to be able to come and visit somewhere.

**Yeah, I think that's it isn't it?**

**SOM6** Um.

**Because you just assume that it's all, well access is like this for everyone.**

**SOM6** Um.

**And it's not always so easy.**

**SOM6** Um.

**I mean when, as a kind of quick return, when you think about your organisational members do you think, is that an anxiety for the organisation about getting younger people involved in birdwatching?**

**SOM6** I think they're concerned about getting young people and that's always been a concern with these organisations, there's always been a heavy bias towards the, you know, the older ones. Erm, there are groups more specifically for, you know, younger people but in terms of membership, yes, we're always saying yes, we've got very, very few young, you know, members but, erm, and yet there is still quite a lot of interest, erm, young people in wildlife and, erm. We don't do anything organisationally to be, specifically aimed, you know, at them but obviously they're sort of encouraged and I think it's, the concern is that, you know, is getting people to be out there, you know, to, to do the surveys and get the data and, and, you know, record the information which is obviously where we've, then we see where the changes are happening and, and what's happening but I suspect that people will come in and fill the gaps as the time goes on but with a lot of organisation there is perhaps a shift in who belongs and, or perhaps other groups springing up and, yeah, so.

**And would you, is there anything that your organisation would like to see in terms of government regulation or government policy or EU policy that would support the ethos of your group and what you're trying to do?**

**SOM6** Erm, I don't think as a group, you know, we've ever discussed anything like that, erm, not, not as the organisation but I know generally obviously that, erm, various people I, I know who obviously want to see the protections kept in place, the, you know, wildlife protection and laws that we've had, particularly through the EU, there is definitely a concern that these could be diluted and, and the safeguards and protections yes, wouldn't be in place and that especially I think for the wider countryside rather than the reserves. Erm, obviously there's a lot of, erm, SSSIs around here and, erm, that's what the other one they call it, environment, various environmental schemes in terms of farming and there's concern, you know, some of that could be lost which would have an impact on the farmers as well.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**SOM6** Um.

**And as a final question, have you noticed or reflected on in any way whether our sort of recent austerity measures whether they've impacted at all on wetland spaces in terms of how they're organised or looked after or their long term viability?**

**SOM6** Erm, [pause] don't think that's sort of been, well I don't think it's sort of been, ever been discussed within a group as something. I don't think there's too much concern but obviously we are aware that for some of the, erm, you know, organisation wildlife trusts, obviously that has an impact, erm, on what they can do but, erm, and, yeah, I'm, I'm sure some would think well being, you know, if they had more money they could improve the habitats further, erm, but I don't think it's had that sort of impact whereas austerity, you know, in other, in other areas of life like health, health service, [laughs] erm, you know, it doesn't have the concerns there because a lot of work has been done and as long as they've got a reasonable amount of maintenance with, with the habitat, erm, it should stay and of course a lot of it's done voluntarily, so, you know, there seems to be plenty of volunteers who'll get out and, and do that, so at the moment anyway, that's not, erm.

**Yeah. So thank goodness for the volunteers.**

**SOM6** Oh yeah, oh yes, you wouldn't have half of this if it weren't for volunteer groups and this. I mean the, erm, a lot of the, the reed here is, is all natural as it's sort of moved in, but a lot of it was planted, I've done some of the.

**Yeah, I bet, I bet you have.**

**SOM6** Well, [laughs] you know, it was physical, all physical. They've got better, got better machinery now as, but initially it was.

**Hard work, hard graft, yeah.**

**SOM6** Yeah.

**REMOVED thank you so much for your time that's been wonderful, so thanks ever so much.**

**SOM6** Yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW

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**SOM7** It's quite interesting also because the Levels is split into different areas as well and I suppose we have different relationships with different areas, so that's quite interesting as well, erm.

**Yes. It does feel like there's different artists in different parts of Somerset, so some are on the coast, some in the north area, some in the south.**

**SOM7** Yes, and some of them are connected, erm, you know, doing MAs, erm, and they're the ones who are a little bit more in the oh she doesn't do anything for free frame sort of mind I think because quite a lot of.

**I know because there's quite a big movement at the minute isn't there amongst artists who say I'm tired of being asked to do things for free, I'm tired of being asked to do, you know, give a project pictures for free.**

**SOM7** Yes, yeah.

**Or doing exhibitions for free and that shouldn't be right.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah.

**We should be paid for our time and I can understand that. We have three artists that work on our project, we have a sound artist.**

**SOM7** And none of them have been in touch at all.

**No, the three artist that we commissioned to work on our project, these are for the whole country.**

**SOM7** Oh, oh right, right.

**Across England.**

**SOM7** I think REMOVED suggested that they might get in touch when they were working locally.

**Did she? Oh I see, yes, yeah.**

**SOM7** [project artist discussion – not transcribed]

**But I wonder if at the very beginning we could go back in time and you could tell me, very briefly, about REMOVED and what you do, who you represent, number of members, age range of members.**

**SOM7** Okay, okay. Erm, yeah, right, okay, there's, the story.

**Yeah, even in a little brief.**

**SOM7** Yeah, okay, erm. Somerset Art Weeks were set up by, erm, sort of founder group of, of local artists in conjunction with the County Arts Officer, which is set up open studio event in nineteen ninety four and we were the third, third or fourth after Oxford, Cambridge and Dorset, erm, so we've been running the studio event as a biannual event ever since, erm. In the early two thousands, erm, the local authorities decided to, they no longer wanted to fund the event but they were interested in us becoming a visual arts development agency, so REMOVED, so they were looking to really, erm, build in sort of sustainability for the future, so we, we tried to build the membership offer and to that offer we brought in a second event, a festival year, so we have it in studio one year and the festival the other and that's an offer for local artists and they also have access to the website. We do all the event promotion for, for those things, erm, we also offer training around marketing and developing your practice and we offer bursaries to emerging artists and mid-career, erm, who want to resume their careers or find a new direction. And we became REMOVED.

**How are those funded, those bursaries, is that from the Arts Council?**

**SOM7** Erm, they're funded by our Friends of REMOVED initiative. We then in two, in the mid two thousands, erm, we changed our name to REMOVED to reflect the growing breadth of what we deliver, so we run, year round we run partnership projects around arts, environment and community, so that can be a range of partners from National Trust through to Somerset, through to North Dalton Community Partnership, erm, so we develop a programme of commissions and residencies through different partners which explore people and place around Somerset, and again being a very rural county, this obviously reflects the subject matter, reflects the rurality of the county, so. And then alongside that we also have an education strand, so it's an arts enrichment. It, at the moment it's part of a subscription service, which is part funded by, erm, the schools contact, erm, that, that situation may change as the county needs to become more dominant, we, but we run a primary offer, so we offer education resources around the art weeks to schools. We also run art awards and we run residency programmes for PRUs and special need settings, so it's a very sprinkled, so yeah. So essentially we have those strands so we have the artist membership strand, which is predominantly the festivals in the studio offer and supporting professional development. We have the projects which is around our partnership working, to develop to bring national artists to audiences in Somerset. We have our community and education strand.

**Right. So I mean that's amazing spread of different things that you do all at the same time.**

**SOM7** They all inter, they all connect, so we're very much looking at, erm, the moment encouraging local artists to develop socially engaged practice, so they can engage, erm, so engage and broaden the audience for visual arts, yeah.

**Yeah. And I mean if that connector was across different organisations it's really interesting about how you begin to map together, bringing in different type of organisations to understand the utility of art, the use of art**

**SOM7** Yes, well predominantly for us that's around heritage and environment, so, erm, we haven't had formal partnerships. We, we were part of a research project, erm, to do with, with making, you know, the therapeutic nature of making which was partnered with Falmouth but we haven't had, erm, many opportunities to be part of, erm, arts and humanities research projects, erm, at, at this time, partly because Somerset doesn't have a university, erm. We, we're starting to build con, we have some connections with university setting at Somerset at Exeter University and Bath Spa, so we have very sort of fledgling, erm, particularly I think they're more interested in our, in our work as social impact becomes really key to, to these various strands, so.

**Yes, and you can see that with that educational strand of what you do?**

**SOM7** Yeah.

**Impact it has one, presumably the children and also the carers as well if you're dealing with children with particular needs?**

**SOM7** Yes, yes, I mean we, it's quite interesting, as I say we haven't sort of covered sites but obviously with our partnership with the RSPB and Somerset Wildlife Trust, obviously there's some environment, environmental sciences sort of there but we tend to, where we're doing our partnership projects it tends to be around developing new, erm, ways of representation or interpretation, so it, we generally bring artists who have a lot of experience without those fields and are perhaps used to working across, across disciplines and into those projects, erm, and we sort of encourage local artists to either, erm, become assistants or, or sort of get actively involved in, in the experience but I think generally in the region, there have, there have been quite a shift towards, erm, socially engaged practice and across sort of inter, interdisciplinary working, I think it's starting to sort of come on the radar.

**Yeah. It takes time to develop new ways of crossing disciplines and new ways of integrating people who wouldn't normally work together I think and make them open to that.**

**SOM7** Yes, I mean it's been very successful with the RSPB particularly and around the REMOVED Project that we did with Somerset Wildlife Trust in autumn where there was a sort of very, erm, clear understanding around what we wanted to, to achieve, erm, so yeah, so round environmental sciences certainly that we seem to made good inroads.

**Yeah, and do you know the project is focussed on wetlands but I know that your work with artists, because it's people in place across all different kind of landscapes, that would be part of what you do but in terms of just focussing on wetlands, what part, what kind of roles has wetlands played with the artists that you meet and you've worked with? Is it a growing factor in what they do in terms of, you know, the landscapes that they're involved in?**

**SOM7** Erm, I think it is because I think there's an acknowledgement, erm, that landscape could, is very sort of, wide range of factors around landscape and I think there's a move towards, away from the sublime, erm, and the romantic view of landscape and understanding, erm, that these are, these historic landscapes but also they're working landscapes and a lot of it isn't pretty, and there's some, there's some quite sort of grimy nitty, gritty subjects there to really unlock, so not, to, to kind of move away from the aesthetic I think, erm, is needed. I mean obviously there's a, we ran ourselves a plan, a painting project, but that was around getting people out into the landscape, you know, none are, none are general public, children getting out there and getting them to look, erm, so it.

**And is that an ongoing?**

**SOM7** Yes, we offer that as a primary school, erm, activity, erm, to really just get people to engage, erm.

**Yeah, really observe what's around them?**

**SOM7** Them.

**And document it.**

**SOM7** Yeah, so we've always had a number of, of those projects at any one time.

[interruption]

**Yes, so I mean do you think that view of the wetlands from the artists perspective, funding perspective has changed since the floods, has kind of brought more money in?**

**SOM7** Erm, I think that it initially, I mean there was a spike of funding but for businesses like ourselves, we were affected by the funding, by the floods because we had to drive, you know, we, rather distantly, erm, there was no means of getting compensation for, because it's quite difficult to prove the sort of direct effect on your business. Erm, we did receive support from REMOVED, erm, which I don't think we would have got if the flood hadn't happened.

**I don't know that, is that an organisation?**

**SOM7** REMOVED, they're a, they're a big, erm, Trust, support the arts. So, so that brought some, some fund, funding to really explore, erm, really, the relationship, erm. I think because we work quite closely with the RSPB and the wetlands, they would give us a different perception of how the floods affected the landscape as opposed to how it affected people.

**Because they?**

**SOM7** Because obviously people were very badly affected, whereas the wildlife wasn't necessarily, so.

**Okay. So nesting sites weren't lost or habitats weren't lost?**

**SOM7** Erm, no, erm, because mostly birds, you know, birds can fly or they.

**They were able to.**

**SOM7** Yeah, so, erm.

**So from the artistic perspective it was, you were able to get a view of both the impact on humans and the impact on?**

**SOM7** Yeah, so we did have, erm, this very famous photographer who runs a global project called REMOVED, oh, think it's called REMOVED, and he goes round the world photographing flooded communities, and we showed his work in REMOVED a year after the flood, erm, but he carries on, it's, with that project, so really the sort of nature of sort of global, global warming.

**Yeah, okay. So would you say, you know, trying to get a sort of, what we're trying to pin down is a sense of place and do you feel that the wetland landscapes are very different landscapes from say coastal or the Corn Tops or the Mendips, you know, do you think there is a different sense from I guess both, you know, living and working in?**

**SOM7** Very different, the light's different, erm, to coastal light. The significance of the fact that the wetlands are at sea level, erm, and, you know, the whole notion of summer, set as a summer land, means that, you know, you get the most amazing sunsets because you've got so much, because so much space.

**So close, yeah.**

**SOM7** Erm, to, to see, erm, and of course they're, they're, they're maintained by man and also they wouldn't be, wouldn't be there, you know, if it wasn't for man they would be, would be flooded.

**Could you feel that they're almost more sculpted landscapes than say the coast or the hill, the uplands because they are so closely managed I guess?**

**SOM7** Yeah, they have, they have a mechanical character to them, erm, unless of course you're around Shapwick. I mean obviously the, you know, where the peat beds, they're redundant peat works and that has a very different character and, and I think it's, erm, always, erm, is the way that nature reclaims the land so quickly is really quite exciting, it's quite dynamic but.

**Because if you think about Shapwick and Westhay, really as reserves they haven't really been around for that long, twenty or so years.**

**SOM7** Yeah.

**And yet they almost feel timeless don't they? So.**

**SOM7** And they look, they look very natural but of course they're not.

**Well I think that's, and what's curious for me is both in terms of what members of the public feel about those landscapes when they come into them for the first time but also how the artists choose to depict them because they can choose to depict them as these naturalised, almost historic.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah.

**Landscapes or they can choose to emphasise the very managed nature of them, so what do you feel comes across from the, from the majority of the artist's work, do you think it is a mix of the two or is it almost kind of bucolic romantic nature has reclaimed or do you think it's more about control and hydraulics? The reality of those wetlands.**

**SOM7** I think there's still the majority, I mean obviously we're trying to encourage, erm, you know, contemporary visual arts which involves, you know, a number of different, different disciplines and also a connection with people, so like the works but I think that still it's predominantly the romantic view and this notion of it being a, you know, wild, a wild place.

**And is that?**

**SOM7** And I think, and I think that's perpetuated by this, you know, the notion of the tourist and the sort of gaze, you know, I think, erm, and it's sort of perpetuated by the sort of Countryfile sort of notion of the, of the countryside as playground.

**Yeah, because that's always a question isn't it, how much does art lead these perceptions and how much does art, I guess, in some ways, follow the money maybe? You know, because for some people you have to make a living, you want to create pieces of art that fits in with the vision that people want to have.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah, and also I think the, the reason why. I mean interestingly, you know, in the sixties they were encouraging people, you know, not to build houses on the Levels and this whole notion of risk of flood and perhaps the jury was out on as to whether they were going to carry on farming the Levels, whether the money would be there to support but I think it's such a, quite exciting time where hopefully the balance between conservation can, you know, and the economic active, you know, can hopefully find a balance but then it will become a very, a very manicured kind of countryside, it won't necessarily sort of have that, erm. I mean the willow, I mean the willow businesses do, you know, they have growing businesses, you know, it's sort of.

**Are these the making baskets or something more functional like lobster pots or something like that? Is it for a tourist market mainly or?**

**SOM7** Mostly baskets but people come and do courses to make baskets and then the REMOVED has sort of created a sort of fashion for last, using willows and stuff for material, so.

**And is that from.**

**SOM7** REMOVED will sell out of willow very quickly, erm, where makers like, like REMOVED, you know, have done and others, you know, where, where they're making large scale pieces, so, but I think the, I think willow's doing well also because there's a resurgence, interest in natural materials in the home, so.

**But are these from a local market or more of a national market?**

**SOM7** I think they're probably more the national market at this stage, yeah, very definitely.

**So that's interesting then, so if you think about things that, you know, equal consideration, things that, you know, you can claim from ecosystems, this idea that the willow growing and the basket-making is something that is an artistic activity and also function activity that will happen here in Somerset, possibly around the wetland but then, you know, the artefact to be taken away enjoyed somewhere else but will encourage people to come here...**

**SOM7** Um, um.

**For a weekend of activity making.**

Yeah, I think, I think there is a slight drive around sort of.

**Do you think?**

**SOM7** The need for sort of urban wanting to sort of reconnect with, with nature but quite how long that will, will last, you know, not sure it, maybe potentially it's just a, just sort of a trend, whether it's really rooted.

**Yeah. And do you think, I mean it's hard for you to say unless you really know but do you think that those activities of people coming to do the basket-making, do you know to do with health and wellbeing, is there some sort of desire to connect with nature?**

**SOM7** Yeah, very definitely, I mean I think the, the bird observations are really popular, you know, like the starling murmurations and things like that, they're incredibly, they're incredibly popular, erm, and if you drive past any of the, the reserves, you know, they're, I think because it's an ageing population as well, you've got time and, erm, you know, are very interested in.

**Yeah, because are these the same, you know, constituents as normal birdwatchers or are they something else that, the starling murmurations people?**

**SOM7** I think that's probably broader, I think it's people who wouldn't necessarily class themselves as twitchers.

**So they're not birdwatchers but they have an interest in these particular spectacles?**

**SOM7** I think it's the experience, yeah, that they're drawn to, yeah.

**So in terms of artistic, or artist's activities on the wetlands, we've got photography and basket-making, we obviously have the visual art that REMOVED are involved with.**

**SOM7** Yes, yes.

**Are there other topics, I mean do you get many performance artists that come down or sound artists that come and record?**

**SOM7** Sound is quite popular, erm, and it does, a number of films that have been made just, just slightly the sort of sinister aspects of the Levels as well, so often, certainly been two or three films in the last few years that have used aspects of the, of the wetlands as something that's sort of dark and mysterious and.

**Okay. So not giving this romantic bucolic view but focussing on, is it the remoteness, is it the change in the light or the change in the air moisture?**

**SOM7** I think it's around the darkness.

**So do you think that?**

**SOM7** I don't know if ethereal leisure comes into all of that, it comes in.

**Yeah. Do you think it kind of maybe harks back to times when?**

**SOM7** Um.

**You know, historical literature of the marshes and the moors as something.**

**SOM7** Somewhere where you'd hide away?

**Yeah.**

**SOM7** Yeah.

**So there's an element of retreating there?**

**SOM7** Yeah.

**Yeah, is it retreat or is it maybe non-disclosure?**

**SOM7** Er, yeah, potentially, yeah, more, more non-disclosure really.

**Because I'm aware of a film called The Levelling actually but I don't know of any other pieces of film-making or writing or anything like that which shows that more edgier side of the Levels.**

**SOM7** Erm, there's someone I can, I can ask for you, and they're, they're generally will be, I mean there's really sort of, springs to mind, erm, there's a really lovely film made by two boys, erm, about nature and the nature of flooding and how they are under the the sea, it's, they, they produced it as part of REMOVED so probably I ought to give REMOVED contact because she'd be able to point you in the right direction there.

**That'd be helpful.**

**SOM7** Of films that have been sort of made around that sort of notion.

**Because, you know, we're doing some work on contemporary representations of wetlands and I'm aware that if we were to go into the Avalon Marshes Centre you have all the beautiful different types of work which is all about the wildlife and the birds and the murmurations and the sunset.**

**SOM7** Yeah.

**But we don't go to this various, this other side of like I say, like a darker sort of.**

**SOM7** But apart from The Levelling, there is another film, erm, came out quite recently.

**Okay, this year?**

**SOM7** How long ago was The Leveller, is that the one about the girl who?

**Um, the farmer.**

**SOM7** That, erm, I'm sure, I'm sure there is another, another one, erm, but I don't know whether, but REMOVED, I can definitely give you her.

**She'd be the person that knows, yeah.**

**SOM7** Yeah, erm.

**That'd be really helpful.**

**SOM7**… whether, because I got a sense, erm, I might have it on my phone

**Because that would be an interesting turn wouldn't it? So we talk about health and wellbeing on the wetlands, I mean we know that from people who like to cycle, like to walk and like to birdwatch but what about the other side of health and wellbeing is a kind of, the, kind of emotional release that you get with basically horror films or films that are slightly darker?**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah.

**It transports you out of yourself, which is, which is a strange way of viewing health and wellbeing but that, nevertheless, why isn't it as relevant as going for a jog or something?**

**SOM7** Yeah, I, erm, I think, I think some of the, I, I don't know a lot of about, there's other people who would know not me but I mean some of the, erm, of the villages, you know, were quite isolated and quite, they're a closed community.

**Yeah. So this idea of, it was the, really the droves would connect them but in some ways would also separate.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah.

**Have very long stretches of road actually.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah.

**And I can imagine.**

**SOM7** I mean sort of stories of in-breeding and, you know, rival, rivalry and right up to the 1960 erm, right up to fifties were quite, subsistence living.

**But do you think?**

**SOM7** But then, then there was a sort of resurgence of people who lost loads because the property was cheap, so, and you get all strange rivalry between the need for the landscape to breathe and have a new, find a new way.

**Do you think, so when it, you know, say about property being cheaper and brings people in, would you say that would be maybe artists or people with alternative vision?**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah, very definitely, people who, you know, already couldn't afford property elsewhere, you know, there's sort of opportunity to.

**Almost like it's a kind of, I guess inland Cornwall.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah.

**That would then promote a different kind of community.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah.

**And then that jar of how they sit with the older established.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yes, yes, sort of feel of incomers. [laughs]

**I get, I'm really getting a sense of there are different ways of thinking about the wetlands and that it's not all about the, the kind of bright eyed, bushy tailed wildlife side of things, there's also another edge which is really a consideration of what it's like to be in these quite remote isolated landscapes, they're almost kind of hugging the earth aren't they? They're not on the coast looking out to sea.**

**SOM7** No.

**They're not outward looking.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah.

**And they're almost not insular, they're just in, embedded in that kind of little pocket of land.**

**SOM7** And that's where Shaun Harris's project was really interesting because he was deeply interested in the animals who lived in these landscapes, sort of, you know, pre-Ice Age, erm, and, and he, or, and even the cranes, you know, who, who had, were extinct four hundred years ago how they were.

**Presumably, they, yeah.**

**SOM7** They were part of, you know, they, they were these cranes bones were, these little, little pipes and, you know, so they're very much sort of part, part of the landscape. So it's quite interesting the way he connected all of the sort of pre-history right the way through to really bring to life, really bring these ancient, erm.

**Where's this exhibition now, is that kind of?**

**SOM7** No, it's just online, it's just on REMOVED website, it's just the film of the landscape, so.

**I'll have to write to him to see if he'll allow us to have a snippet on our website or something like that.**

**SOM7** Yes, yeah, yeah, you, I think you've got, well did I give you his details? Well it's on REMOVED.

**Yes, I'm sure that you did.**

**SOM7** Yeah.

**I know that you were involved**

**SOM7** The crane …

**… project before, yeah. I think that's, it's how it maps over time and. With all the different artists you've been working with, have any of them ever talked about mosquitoes? Kind of have any of them ever said I would like to do more work on x but I keep getting bitten?**

**SOM7** No, not really, never really, there's, it's, it's never really come up, I mean there's only really one artist who we work quite regularly who, erm, she's not closely but she has in the past focussed on insects, REMOVED, she lives, she lives on the Mendips, Mendips Edge, erm, and she worked, she worked on the REMOVED project for, erm, for a while and worked at the REMOVED Environmental Centre, so she made big dragonflies there and sort of, so she, she's the only, only artist who's really been interested in, in the kind of insect, erm, life really. Erm, I mean there's somebody like REMOVED who, her work, a lot of her work is inspired by ants and tiny kind of, you know, she, she'd be an ideal sort of commission really for, for mosquitoes, the mosquitoes. I think, I think generally they're sort of more experiences around the dragonflies and the Mayflys fly then there are the mosquitoes in, in art and reference, you know, because very often jewellers will make dragonfly jewellery and dragonflies feature on the, on print, prints a lot and, and I think she, REMOVED might have animated them as part, part of his project. Erm, yeah, so.

**Mosquitoes seem to be sort of pretty much ignored in the art world I get the feeling.**

**SOM7** Yeah, they seem to, yeah, they've not, yeah, they've not, I can't think of an artist who, who's really majored, you know, I think they, they might work with other insects and then, sort of, could be invited to consider the mosquito. Oh and sound would be a fascination erm, commission, mosquitoes really, that's kind of.

**Because I know that our sound artist is hoping to do something on the course with, how it's going to actually work out we don't know yet.**

**SOM7** Right, to do something.

**To do something about that sound.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah, yes.

**Because it's not just the mosquito sound it's our, I guess our response to the sound.**

**SOM7** Yeah.

**Our anticipation.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah, no, yeah, no, could be quite interesting, yeah.

**But it's been really fascinating sort of thinking about the mosquito and their importance to the ecosystem, and so it's not about, you know, trying to …eradicate mosquitoes, it's more about moving alongside them because I think also they're connected with water and, you know, the flood water in the Levels about, it's not that the floods are going to go away, you have to learn how to live with them.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes, because I, I did ask, ask a couple of artists and they've kind of, they've sort of looked quizzical, you know, sort of thought, um, **SOM7** [laughs] it's something clearly, they've not really, even though they live on the Levels they’ve not thought, it's not, it's not, they've not sort of, just accepted them being there.

**Because presumably, I mean in some ways.**

**SOM7** Because obviously they don't get swarmed necessarily, so.

**No.**

**SOM7** Well we do but.

**And presumably they're not so bad that people talk about them.**

**SOM7** No, no, not really, I mean probably you'd get more of a reaction from midges possibly.

**I mean yourself do you ever walk from Shapwick Heath to Westhay Moor's a bit too far away from the main path?**

**SOM7** No, no, I mean I have over the years, I mean generally when we, when we've had projects, project work going on, so I haven't, I haven't walked there, erm, for a, for a little while, I mean I think the last time I actually was there during, you know, during the Demoiselle Hatch, which is really spectacular and if you hit it right, that can be really spectacular, the little, erm, turquoise dragonflies.

**Ah.**

**SOM7** The Demoiselles, that's really.

**Because.**

**SOM7** That's really amazing, I've not seen that for a while.

**Because that's.**

**SOM7** I've seen it twice over the years.

**Because that's for one or two days a year, is that right?**

**SOM7** Yes, yes, it's very, it's very short, so you've just got to catch it, catch it right. [laughs]

**Catch it when you can, yeah. I mean it's really interesting thinking, because we want to encourage people to use and value wetlands but it doesn't seem to be like some sort of glossy, that it's all great on the wetlands and everything's fine, it's got to kind of keep people's interest as well because if you're not, if you are interested in landscape because it's not just about the wildlife, there's something else, it's also humans in the landscape, I think there's a lot to be said about what artists could do from that perspective in terms of who you're making, to see what it's like to live in these close communities because increasingly that's quite rare isn't it?**

**SOM7** Yeah, yes, yeah, it is.

**You have that, you know, it makes me think of, say, some of uplands in The Lakes or Cumbria feel quite removed from places and hard to get to.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**And it's almost like The Levels are ringed by motorway and so everything moves around but doesn't come in.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah.

**Get as far as Glastonbury or they get as far as Cheddar and then, and they go back and they retreat again, so it’s very kind of tied.**

**SOM7** Yeah, so sort of, yeah, so sort of, yeah, quite, because REMOVED, who you've met, have you met? He's REMOVED.

**Oh I haven't met REMOVED yet, because REMOVED was going to come to the focus group but she was unable to come along.**

**SOM7** Right, right, right.

**Sounds like she's quite a lot of things.**

**SOM7** Yeah, she's got a family issues but REMOVED, her partner, he's, he paints but you really ought to meet.

**Do you know, REMOVED mentioned about him.**

**SOM7** Yes, because she has, he was her mentor, she had her residency there, in his studio.

**Yes, that's right, but REMOVED surname's different from his surname, she's REMOVED.**

**SOM7** REMOVED yes, yeah, erm.

**Yes. That's why I didn't connect the two together.**

**SOM7** But he came to the arts development, we had an arts development day and he was talking about, he has a studio in Bristol so he, although he paints.

**Paints.**

**SOM7** Erm, wetland landscapes but in a very monotone way, they're very dramatic, erm, but he likes to have the dynamic between the quietness of REMOVED with sort of going to the city, so it's a sort of, they both, they both have some equal qualities for him, it's not that the city is better, it's, it kind of balances it out between the two.

**Do they live full-time here in REMOVED as well?**

**SOM7** In REMOVED, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Okay, yes, because I was staying at the REMOVED.**

**SOM7** Right, right.

**Which again feels like it's trying to fill in a very different audience.**

**SOM7** Yes.

**Weekenders I think or, I mean it's busy during the week as well, but they don't have.**

**SOM7** So you didn't stay at the REMOVED then?

**No.**

**SOM7** No, right.

**In fact I don't know why I didn't think of that but I think it's maybe because a colleague of mine said that he stayed at REMOVED, and I thought that was easier to go there.**

**SOM7** Right, yeah, yeah.

**And I can … yeah.**

**SOM7** Well yeah, so it's, so REMOVED practice very much painting, erm. I mean he, he's a very keen surfer so he, so he's very used to very sort of dramatic wild, wild landscapes, so he has an eye for, for that sort of remoteness really, which is quite.

**Yeah, but presumably no midges or mosquitoes in these dramatic landscapes?**

**SOM7** No, no, life but it's interesting because the whole thing around cranes, the idea that in order to retain wetland we needed, erm, so the, we needed people to be sympathetic towards them, so in a sense the crane was seen as an ambassador for wetlands, because they need, they need the, a habitat, so it was kind of, well let's make this the sort of symbol of, of a wetland and it helps really, it is that it needs to have not just the farming but it needs to have a vibrant wildlife too but I mean it's kind of tricky having these pockets of reserves because of course the rap, it's raptor heaven, you know, so suddenly birds of prey sort of, you know, it's like lunch, you know, so you feel that it does need, it needs to be a sort of integrated approach around the farming and the wildlife and, and it, it needs a sort of gentle kind of, it needs to keep its wildness, it doesn't need to sort of become a theme park and that's, that's the tricky, the tricky, tricky dynamic isn't it? Because I think a lot of people feel that national parks, very often become, sort of antiseptic because, because of them, the effect of tourism and, erm, the dislike for mess and smell and.

**It's interesting actually, yeah, having been to see a farmer at the very beginning of this trip down, they're very, they were very adamant that you couldn't have bird life without having a dairy farm, without having animals because you need the animals, the insects, the insects bring the birds….**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**So you can't have a complete nature reserve with no farming nearby because …**

**SOM7** No, I think RSPB are really, yeah, they're really clear about that, because the cranes live on the farmland, they don't live in the, the neat pockets of the nature reserve, you know, they're very much, so.

**So that's it.**

**SOM7** Did you, did you meet REMOVED at all?

**No.**

**SOM7** Because he, he's actually the farmer who was on, because that's in Shapwick, which is the other side of the Poledons, so, erm, because he's breeding rare, rare breed cattle for beef, so.

**Okay, it's the other side of the Poledons.**

**SOM7** Yeah. So, you know, he, he just loves seeing the cranes on the farm and he, you know, he's part of the winter feeding programme and during the early stages of the reintroduction, so, so that's, so that's really, really key, but I think it's, I think it's, the true thing is the bounce between the people and the wildlife and the farming is tricky and the sort of, in a sense it's for artists to find, to sort of find the sort of richness of it appealing to them and their practice and how they might.

**Because do you think, this is always the tricky role of the artist, is the artist there to document or is the artist there to maybe provide a different perspective, would it be, I don't know, informational or educational?**

**SOM7** I think it's all those things, erm, I think they, at one, at one level it's to give them the free, freedom to stand back and reinterpret what, and perhaps find elements which are not so well, erm, known, or, or even documented. I mean I think the photography on the Levels is extremely important, erm, I mean Getty, erm, Getty have some amazing images on the Levels in their collection, erm, but really, and it tells the life and the, and the story of it. Erm, and maybe artists can help, erm, people, you know, live more comfortably with the flood, you know, as a way, as a way of life, you know, erm, but it's, it's hard.

**And also.**

**SOM7** You know, it's a hard landscape, any true, truly rural landscape in this country, you know, it's, when the sun isn't shining, which is most of the time, you know, they're, they're really, they're really difficult landscapes and the wildlife can, you know, completely, because the, completely can have a negative effect on what you're trying to do, you know, whether you're a farmer or, or, you know, growing crops or, but it's, it's a hard, it's a hard, hard existence, you know.

**Yeah. I mean, you know, that's this image of some kind of rural idyll… which doesn't actually exist does it?**

**SOM7** And there's all, you know, there's all the isolation factors or that's, you know, for young people, finding a way, you know, their way for the future, so what does the countryside look for them, and, you know, where, you know, where do you, you know, where do they fit, you know, in terms of the decision making for the future?

**Yeah. When you, with your sense of sort of movement, do you find that younger people want to move away from smaller towns, they want to move out of the countryside and then make, and then people come back maybe years later?**

**SOM7** I think there's a, there's definite change of pattern at the moment because, erm, well educated kids, at any level, erm, would move away and then would come back to have, you know, support of, support a sort of family, erm, but I think given the current education system there, there are more young people around who are staying at home and learning to drive, erm, so their independence is different, because it's all rooted locally and they're having to sort of adapt their work patterns around, you know, perhaps staying with them at home, erm, rather than, you know, going, leaving, leaving and coming back and so I think they're looking for more experiences locally, erm, and how, and also the notion that they're going to have a job for life so it's well how do I, how do I make what I'm interested in my work? And how, how I might survive, so I think there's a lot, there's a lot going on, there's definite kind of shift but, erm, our young people.

**Yeah. And do you feel that with the educational work that you've sort of done, helped to bring that connection with locality and valuing the place a little bit closer?**

**SOM7** Yeah, I think, I think so, definitely, I mean certainly around, you know, young filmmakers that, that we work with, erm, you know, they're, they're really, they're really keen to be actively involved and have, have a good eye around what's going on and, and also, you know, engaging other young people in the medium as well, you know, being a very sort of media savvy generation, it's sort of resonance with, with their lives really, so.

**Can I ask you just, I mean I'm not going to ask you too many more questions.**

**SOM7** Okay. [laughs]

**But there is, we've been using mosquitoes in the project, sort of think about changing ecosystems and thinking about climate change and how that may impact on ecosystems.**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**And, you know, it's got me wondering about whether, you know, younger people that you work or even the established artists you've worked with, whether there's a sense of climate change impact on the wetlands and Shapwick Heath, Westhay, whether that's coming through in terms of invasive species, whether that's animal or plant life or different kind of ways of living.**

**SOM7** I, I think, I don't think it's so, erm, I think young people are more, more affected by the lack of transport infrastructure and poor, and poor broadband. I don't think they're out in the landscape enough to really sort of observe the, the changes. I mean when you talk to the professionals and they're really aware of it, they're aware of there aren't as many lapwings coming to over winter here, erm, you know, well the, you know, the, the resident population because of farming, changes in farming practice, is reduced population. There is, there are northerly species and southerly species, you know, sort of egrets and, and I think, I think the night crane I think erm, heron is the next, you know, there are various species which are, that you wouldn't, you wouldn't see, there's definite shift particularly through Somerset as well but I don't think it's obvious to, erm, because, because I think our climate is so dramatic anyway and it's always been, there are always examples of, you know, very hot summers way back and very cold winters and, was it last week that it was hotter here than in Barbados, a couple of days ago? You know, I mean I think it's, erm, the idea of a general sort of warming I think is quite difficult for people to observe and things like, you know, ash dieback you know, I think, you know, really, like obviously when we lost all the owls, you know, that was obviously very traumatic but the ash dieback, most people won't be aware of it yet because it won't have impact on, on the visual aspect of, so. I think in the every day people don't have that much connection with the land that they're kind of aware of, of change, of environmental change.

**And what I'm getting a sense there then is it's, maybe it's more austerity effects that are having an impacted on lives .**

**SOM7** Yeah, economically, yeah.

**…in the landscape because it's about transport, it's about jobs.**

**SOM7** Yeah, and I think, I think, the notable things like, you know, sort of with Airbnb, I mean I think, you know, that, they're breakfast providers of, you know, find people are doing shorter stays and they're not necessarily getting the trade through traditional routes, so there's a lot of external factors that sort of play on.

**Yeah. So people that rely on that summer income, can't rely on it anymore because it's a bit more demanding.**

**SOM7** Yeah, I mean I think it, yeah, I don't think it's, statistics are always sort of a year, year behind.

**Yes, that's it, they're all.**

**SOM7** But anecdotally that's definitely what people are finding, that people are coming for shorter lengths of time and, and not, erm.

**They're not taking a week's holiday maybe now, a couple of days, yeah.**

**SOM7** No, yeah, yeah. And, and I think the sort of elderly, there's quite an elderly base as well and then perhaps are less confident about travelling, and things play out.

**Yeah, okay, things impact each other don't they? And then I wondered about coming here to Street whether, you know, we are really only twenty minutes from the Levels but how many will come here to buy some cheaper shoes at Clarks and then never shop anywhere else.**

**SOM7** Yeah, never, no, yeah, huge number.

**Yeah, yeah. And yeah, would also benefit from an hour's walk on the sunshine on the wetlands but they will never get that far.**

**SOM7** It's very popular with, erm, the cycling fraternity, good and flat. [laughs]

**Yes, that's it.**

**SOM7** But there's kind of specialist groups really, I think, think that's where sort of, draws, draws it, but there's definitely an urban mindset and, and still a sort of draw I think to the urban as opposed to being rural planning.

**Yeah. So get those people on to the wetlands for all manner of different reasons.**

**SOM7** Yeah, and I think that a lot of them wouldn't necessarily, you know. It's quite interesting, I talked to an artist who had a show in Clarks Village and she, and she's recently finished an MA and she found that the majority of people who came to, you know, sort of were almost coming by mistake and weren't interested at all. I, I don't, I didn't see her shows, I don't know where her subject matter and things lay so, but there's definitely people who go to Clarks, definitely not an arts audience but that building over there, erm, is Clarks Headquarters and they, they have a, the most beautiful REMOVED film in the main reception because one of them, erm, the family collects contemporary, erm, art, you know, good quality contemporary art, so. So there's a sort of.

**So kind of strange….**

**SOM7** Yeah, yeah.

**Bedfellows aren't they? That people buying shoes.**

**SOM7** Yeah, and Millfield School, they have a big gallery, a big art gallery. I don't know what's on at the moment actually, erm, it's on, it's on their campus but it's open to the public. And they have, and they have a sculptor trail as well, you know, so they have, you know, Carays[?] and they've got, you know, important, they commissioned important art over, over the years.

**Yeah, so there are pockets around, it's just finding them.**

**SOM7** Yes, but it's very, it's very in pockets, it’s very definite pockets.

**Well thank you.**

**SOM7** Huge contrasts. [laughs]

**Yeah, massive.**

[project discussion – not transcribed]

END OF INTERVIEW

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**And I should say at the beginning that it would be great if you could talk from, yeah, as a representative of your organisation.**

**SOM8** Sure.

**But you may also, because we always wear multiple hats.**

**SOM8** Yeah, that is.

**You may at some point want to move into talking about things from a different perspective or from your own perspective, and that's absolutely fine and brilliant, you don't need to stop the flow, if you just let me know when it is you're talking about, your bat work or your educational work or just your own perception, that would be brilliant.**

**SOM8** Okay, sure, yeah, that will, that's fine.

**So thinking about the wonderful world of bats just to start with.**

**SOM8** Um.

**If you could tell me a little bit about your organisation, what you do, how many members you have, things like the geographical spread of your interest and interesting things like the age profile of your members as well and things like that that would be really helpful, thank you.**

**SOM8** Okay. Okay. Somerset Bat Group, we set ourselves up as a, we set ourselves up in the nineteen eighties, although I didn't join until REMOVED. Erm, we've had a membership that's grown continually since it, since it started, with some key members that started the group still involved now and they're chaps that are in their eighties.

**Gosh, okay.**

**SOM8** So, erm, they, they've been the stalwarts of the organisation and we've, we've probably got an active membership of around thirty people, maybe a few more, erm, but actually on REMOVED erm, membership of over seventy people on REMOVED mailing list so those people dip in and out as and when they feel, they feel like it really, erm. So we've got a large focus area, we cover the whole of Somerset, obviously we're the regional specialist group for bats but, erm, in the last five years we've focused particularly on the Brue Valley area which does include Shapwick Heath Nature Reserve and Westhay Moor as focus sites in particular although we've also concentrated with Brue Valley Big Bat Survey on a number of other sites where we've been surveying, erm, around the villages of Mere and Westhay village, over to Godney, over towards Wells, the back of Wells, quite a large focus area so altogether I think there's fourteen sort of mapped out transect routes that we took, we, we've undertaken of our bat surveys in that area.

**Yeah. That's quite a big geographical spread isn't it?**

**SOM8** Well generally the bat group focusing over the whole of Somerset it is, yeah, so to have focus areas does help our membership because it means they can get a little bit more involved over a longer period of time on a smaller local scale, so that, that has helped and we've brought in newer members whilst we've been doing the project.

**Oh right.**

**SOM8** Because they know that they can do it for every year they can take part in a, some of it is meaningful and makes sense to them in their local patch.

**Yeah. So if you went to say for instance, that the spread of active, the age of the active members, does it break down into certain age profiles?**

**SOM8** Yes, yeah. We've definitely got the young members who are new graduates and they're willing, they're wanting to get experience in bat survey skills. It's the fieldwork element which normally they can't undertake whilst they're doing an ecology degree or any other biology related degree. We're people that can give them a hands-on experience, taking part in some actual citizen science that makes, erm, makes sense of their studies really, so we've definitely got a cohort group that are those newer members, the young twenty somethings, new from college. Erm, the other sort of bulk of the members are the retired group, erm, that are, have always been interested in wildlife, maybe don't, didn't have the identification skills that the new members have got, using the bat kit and the technology but they've learned the old-fashioned way which is just by looking and, you know, field skills, looking at bats flying around, looking at the habitat that they're flying in, without using bat detectors maybe.

**Okay. So that's an interesting sort of mix between the newer technologies and then kind of lifelong experience of actually observing and then recording what you're observing and reflecting on it, kind of the two married together make a perfect.**

**SOM8** Yeah, the, it is perfect, yeah, because both groups help each other out in that way. That's a bit of a generalisation, in fact one of our oldest members, REMOVED, who's our, our recorder for the group, he started the group in nineteen eighty five and he's still involved now but he's also one of our most specialist bat analysts if you like, he looks at the sound analysis work that we're collecting, the data we're collecting and he's the one that can really pull out the best, erm, trends really of what bats are doing because he's so skilled now at doing that. So he has got specialist skills that other, the young people probably haven't got yet.

**Yeah. So would you say that for your younger members getting those fieldwork skills of bat identification and the fieldwork experience, is that for their own joy of bats or is that for potentially working in environmental groups for, potentially for careers?**

**SOM8** More than usual, more than, more often it is for their career, motivational reasons that they're doing these things and then sometimes we find they only stay within the group for about a year, once they feel like they've ticked that box, they move on because obviously they're perhaps, erm, joining us because they're from Somerset and they're home for a short period of time and then they get a job somewhere which takes them elsewhere but hopefully they'll transfer their skills and take them to their local regional bat group wherever they've gone, erm, or just use the skills they've learnt for work. It has been a bit of a bugbear for some of our older members that they feel like they're passing on their skills and then they're just losing them straightaway, erm, because obviously we don't charge people any money to learn these skills from the, the experienced members, erm, apart from a nominal cost for our training courses that we might run.

**I suppose that also links back to the difficulty maybe of being able to find a job on your local patch as a younger person that you might have to.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**You know, of course you may have the desire to go and work away from Somerset but that there may just not be an opportunity so I mean would you say that is true that there's?**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah, there are limited opportunities in certain specialist areas like bat biology really, it is really quite niche isn't it?

**Yeah.**

**SOM8** So, yeah, there aren't, there aren't few, there are few openings for people so we understand they've got to move around with it really.

**Yeah. When you, if we think about the rationale of the Somerset Bat Group, is it mainly for recording of species to gather data around where species are and whether those populations are expanding or declining or is there something else, are there sort of campaigns and advocacy work, so do you work in collaboration with other environmental NGOs?**

**SOM8** Erm, we, I think the focus is to, is finding out where the species are, where the bats are, erm, in greater numbers or it's really collecting the data as a baseline so that we've got something to fight against any challenges that we're going to come up with, ie, the, the planning issues we're always facing. We work very closely with the Wildlife Trust, sharing that information. Obviously all our records go to Somerset Environmental Records Centre but I constantly get phone calls, nearly one a day at home because of being REMOVED. People will always phone us and say we've got x building development going on at the end of the road, have you got any information that can help us fight it? So that's, erm, that's a constant sort of request.

**Okay, yeah, because I know there's, for instance in Wedmore there's a possible planning application for quite a few new homes isn't there?**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah.

**So presumably housing is a big issue in many villages, is that?**

**SOM8** I think every, every village really in the Mendips has got a certain amount of local housing they've got to find for local people, which is a big issue, erm, and normally people will phone up expecting me to sort of provide that information so that they can just go down to their Planning Department and say look I've got this bat roost in the house around the corner from that development or this hedgerow needs removing and that's not good for bats so, yeah, we have to be sort of quite careful really in what we, what information we give out, and understanding that these planning matters have to be resolved but ultimately it's the local, erm, Record Centre that provide that information and not the Bat Group, and we always make sure they know that.

**Okay. So you just say to them, look, that's not something that we can do but you can go to the Record Centre, yeah?**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah, yeah, we're, we're always signposting people.

**Because otherwise you then get dragged into sort of political issues that you may not, so.**

Yeah, we can't get involved in, in political issues.

**No.**

**SOM8** And we always make it clear they need to go through their Planning Department or you know, talk to the Somerset Environmental Records Centre and share their knowledge that they, they know with the Centre and then the County Ecologist, it's his job, REMOVED, to, to sort of pick on, look through any planning applications that need more scrutiny as far as the bats are concerned, and if we feel there's a particular area that is sensitive that REMOVED may not know about then we'll discuss it in one of our Bat Group committee meetings maybe and pass information between ourselves rather than just give it to the, the local people that might be trying to oppose any development work.

**Yeah. So would you say then that really campaigning is not one of your declared, strategic desires?**

**SOM8** It's not, no, no, it's not what we're about really. No.

**No, no. So it's really recording mandatory, as you said, having a baseline data.**

**SOM8** Yeah, capturing the data really.

**Yeah. And what about things like, I mean do you host Bat Groups because that's a form of educating members of the public isn't it about, you know, what's out there and what to look for?**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**Is that something that you do really as an organisation?**

**SOM8** We, we put on community events to educate and make people aware, I think that's definitely on, one of our things on our agenda is, is to increase awareness in the general public of, erm, the vulnerability of bats and the need to protect them, and hopefully give a positive image about bats because many people, all they hear is negativity, erm, the cost of bat surveys is all, you know, that people come on the phone quite frequently, expecting us to help them for free because obviously they're worried about the cost of paying for a survey and that is a big issue as well, so we've got no resources really to carry on that sort of, that work because there's so many requests that we'd be out every night, almost every, round every village doing this work and we, we can't.

**No. Is that then obviously a double-edged sword in that it's great that the surveys have to take place that bats are protected but the other side is then that it gives a different public opinion about bats and it seems there's another kind of money sink I suppose?**

**SOM8** Yeah, erm. Sorry, can you repeat that last question? I nodded off there.

**The bat surveys and having to pay for bat surveys, obviously from a bat conservation point of view it's really positive that these surveys have to take place because then you're making sure that any bats which are roosting in any homes are protected but the other side of it, as you kind of alluded to, is that the public then might, then have a particular opposition towards bats because then it's seen as being an added cost of either redeveloping a home or moving into a new home, so yeah, how do you feel as an organisation about that, about that kind of, that balance between protecting bats in law and then the knock-on effect that might have with general perceptions, an awareness about bats?**

**SOM8** Yeah, it's, it is difficult for, erm, to give that positive image over without there being an implication for somebody and the householder does have to foot the bill in the end, particularly as the Bat Conservation Trust at the moment is so underfunded, erm, they're stretched to the limit, they, they, they have just lost a lot of funding that would, for the Bat Helpline service and it's that that we have relied on for many householders to go to when we, when they'll phone up and they've got an issue with bats and they need a survey, we'll always say contact the, the Bat Helpline and they should be able to send out a free Bat Warden, erm, but we've, we're realising now that the funding has been pulled and the hours that they can run the Helpline are diminishing, so more and more they're looking to us as a Bat Group to fill in almost for that advice service that has been funded previously by DEFRA.

**Right, yeah, I see. So would you say that's a kind of knock-on impact of austerity that, you know?**

**SOM8** Probably, erm, yeah, and funds being prioritised to be spent elsewhere, erm, and, and perhaps thinking bats aren't as important as other issues, which is hugely worrying because, you know, they're under more and more threat not, not, it's not the other way round.

**Yeah, no, no.**

**SOM8** As we need to develop more and more of our green fields or.

**Yeah. Their habitats are just being reduced.**

**SOM8** Their habitats are getting squeezed even more, or, you know, we've lost so many bat species already, it's only going to get worse in the future if, if not, if no, solutions aren't found and sharing these resources or giving money to organisations like the Bat Conservation Trust to give that advice to the householders for free.

**Yeah. So it sounds like then that your organisation actually works with quite a few other environmental NGOs?**

**SOM8** Yeah, I think we, we do really, yeah, yeah, and sharing and helping as much as we can, you know, however we can.

**Yeah, that's really positive.**

**SOM8** A lot of our members are Bat Wardens that are involved in this free service that, organised by the Bat Conservation Trust. We're all, most of our committee members are licensed bat roost visitors which is a sort of term that we're given and we'll get involved in any way we can if the helpline calls us out.

**So I get the sense then from, you know, the discussion that the reality is that bat habitats are being really, really squeezed and pulled and funding has been cut so that, you know, the ability to monitor and protect bats is really more and more difficult.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**Therefore these wetland spaces that our projects are about are really quite important to the work that you do for bat habitats.**

**SOM8** Yes, I think, erm, the data that we've collected on the, on the wetlands particularly in Westhay and specific areas, we've shared that information with the local farmers and we know that, erm, they, they are using it to help them gain the funds from the entry level stewardship or the mid-tier level agreement now for stewardship, erm, schemes. I'm sure it has helped them and it will continue to help them gain the extra funding to support and manage the work they're doing on their local farms, whether it will be gapping up hedgerows or replanting hedgerows, erm, as, as well as continuing the management of the, you know, not draining the fields for instance when, you know, they ought to be going with the flow as it were rather than against where they should, and how they should be farming it.

**Okay. Leads you to how supporting natural water management.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**But then an artificially based … So would you say then, it's the farmers coming to you for advice, or are you going out there and saying to the farmers, look if you did this, this and this, this would really help the bats and, you know, that's an added addition to your stewardship application form?**

**SOM8** It's a bit of both, I think really when we've, ask for full permission to do some monitoring work on local farmer's sites on the, on the Levels, erm, obviously we've had to give them some information why we want you, want to do this work and they've taken some interest, most, most of them anyway have taken some interest in what we're doing and, erm, sort of inadvertently we'll have given them a, the advice anyway because, you know, we've sort of shared that information and good practice in how to manage their land for bats in a positive way, erm, so yeah, I'm sure, it's, it's happened, it's worked both ways. Or the, the reports that we've written at the end of it would go to the Somerset Wildlife Trust and then they ultimately have a, more of a formal advice service if you like to the local farmers for them to sort of tap into really.

**Because am I right in thinking that quite a lot of the local landowners are, they're family farms a lot of them?**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**So they've been here quite a long time.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**So they have a kind of, already have a longstanding interest and understanding of the wildlife that are living in their field.**

**SOM8** Yeah, they, I think so, they, they're the ones that have got the most information really, because we're only there for a short space of time doing a survey but they can fill in all the gaps and tell us exactly when they see what barn's being used by bats at what time of year and where they'll forage them, see them flying around the meadows, you know, which hedgerows they know are good for bats, you know, they quite often tell us the information even before we've gone out to do some survey work, but you know, where not to look or where to look for the bats, so.

**Yeah. Well that's brilliant isn't it that?**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**There is that two-way flow and they're quite receptive to the idea of supporting.**

**SOM8** I'd, I'd say most of them are maybe eighty-five percent of them are, there's a couple of farms we've had issues with where they're not so keen and we've asked them to perhaps not put the, the cattle or the young bullocks in certain fields because we'll be out there surveying at night and it's not great to suddenly be stampeded.

**No.**

**SOM8** By a field full of cows when you're out in the middle of a bat survey.

**That really is the last thing you need.**

**SOM8** And, yeah, yeah, yeah, we've had to call a stop on one of our surveys because of that because there was actually a bull in the field one night and three volunteers came running back rather worried that they're going to, they were going to get chased by the bull, so yeah, and obviously we had try to speak to that farmer but he didn't want to, he chose not to move the bull so that tells us that he really wasn't interested in us being there.

**No, no. But the fact that the overwhelming majority are supportive is a really positive thing isn't it?**

**SOM8** Yeah, no, it is, it has been really positive, yeah.

**Yeah. Because what we're trying to get out of part of this project is a kind of a real sense of place with regards to these two different wetland sites, so Shapwick and Westhay, and so from your use of, your organisational perspective, how do these wetlands fit in with the sort of matrix of the landscapes that you work within for the bats, are they sort of part of the fabric of the landscape or are they something quite special and unique for bats?**

**SOM8** They're, they're definitely very unique, they're definitely a contrast to our Mendip sites because five years previous to doing the Brue Valley Big Bat Survey we did work on top of the Mendip Plateau, along the ridge up there, so we were, you know, there, there is a different population of bats using the higher Mendip land than there is the lowland of the, the wetland areas and we always suspected that the Greater Horseshoe bats from Cheddar Gorge for instance were using the wetland sites to forage and that's indeed what we found out, erm, they're using the reams, the drainage ditches, to forage along where there aren't any hedges and because they can navigate along these linear features and there, there's nice sheltered areas for, for insects to be focused in and that's where the horseshoe bats have been feeding along so, and we, we know from other bat workers work that the tracking numbers, the ring numbers that you put on certain bats, they've proved that they've come from Cheddar, Cheddar maternity roosts and then recaptured them out on the Levels so we know that, you know, that is what is happening and.

**Yes, they're going to there and then kind of returning back again.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**Because Cheddar's not so far away, but how, is it, would you say six miles away, something like that?**

**SOM8** Erm, well yes, probably as the bat flies, depending on which part of the Levels we're looking at, it's, it's, you know, the western end of some of these reserves, yeah, six or seven miles, it must be about right.

**Yeah. And is that a normal sort of foraging distance for Greater Horseshoe bats?**

**SOM8** It can be, the female bats will only forage a couple of miles from the roost so it might be, erm, this is more the males bats, bats behaviour or they're getting desperate and that they can't find enough food in a closer proximity to the maternity colony in Cheddar, so they're looking further away because they're forced to, and the wetlands is still a more naturalistic landscape, lots of insect activity because of the wetland nature of the sites, all those midges and mosquitos obviously essential, erm, for most bats and so, erm, the pesticide use maybe on the farmland around Cheddar may be having a detrimental effect on the bat sites there, so they're finding it's a, a resource selection to, to sort of go further, it, it might be forcing them further out than they would like to be going.

**Yeah. Because, I mean have you, with the bat surveys that you've done because you see the reserves have been around since two thousand and six is that? I think that's right, it is for.**

**SOM8** I can't remember now but it has been a good twenty years I think, of the whole wetland complex and these, all these NGOs linked, well all the conservation organisations working together, it's got bigger and big, better over those years, new sites been added, better management practices put in place.

**Yeah. And have you noticed that there's been a correlation with bat populations over those years, it's risen in those wetland areas?**

**SOM8** I can't really comment on that because I don't think our data that we'd have collected would have shown those statistics in a very robust way. I think you need, would need a lot more work really because our citizen science type survey work is only one night in the middle of August and, okay, we're looking at ten or up to fourteen different sites in that, on that night, it, it is weather dependant as well. So you can only correlate certain information, can't you on that one survey night?

**Yeah.**

**SOM8** So, erm, I don't know, maybe we'd need to do more to proof that really, yeah.

**Yeah. But again I guess it comes down to resources doesn't it, you know?**

**SOM8** Yes, yeah, resources.

**If you had more funding then you'd be able to do, maybe, you know.**

**SOM8** Yeah, that's, yeah, it, for the first few years The Wildlife Trust didn't actually support the work we were doing either which was always a problem.

**Really?**

**SOM8** Yes, erm. We, we got a limited amount of support from them, they, at that time and I don't know if I ought to be saying it really but, [laughs] erm, it depended on the staff that was employed and what their thoughts were but also their target species for management work were not bats early on in the phase of, erm, our Brue Valley bat survey work. They were looking at bird species, they were looking at certain insects, target of insects and perhaps water voles, erm, but they weren't very interested in finding out where the bats were, so we were a bit challenged by that because we, we had assumed The Wildlife Trust would be very interested in the work we were doing but we carried on anyway and latterly they realised it was interesting information and they do now host our surveys on their website so, and point towards it quite often, so we know they do value it now, yes.

**But it's just, I guess, it's that, takes that time to build up that relationship and that trust.**

**SOM8** Yeah, well we'd been working alongside them for many years because they've helped, they did support us with the Mendip Big Bat Survey work that we did the same citizen science, science model, which REMOVED, who's one of our keen members, she inaugurated the idea, we're talking about more than ten years ago now, erm. She put the model in place, we ran it for a first year, it was successful and we, we carried on for four more years and The Wildlife Trust were also, had staff employed to help us at that time, and it was supported by them because they had staff time that was in the budget to, to put towards us but after that had finished and we moved down, we thought we'd like to find out some more information about the Brue Valley, erm. It, it just wasn't in their remit at that time. They had other priorities so I think, yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. Well I mean it's, you know, these things are, they're useful to know, you know, bat, the realities of trying to do this on the ground, you know, and.**

**SOM8** Yeah, well The Wildlife Trust are being under some pressure too for how they spend their very limited resources, so I think they probably realise we just get on and do it without them anyway.

**And maybe that is the anxiety and is it another job, you know?**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah.

**Like we had said before about saying yes to everything, if it's another job then suddenly it, rather than seeing it as, which actually adds to their own database and their own knowledge of the site, so. Well hopefully that's, you know, moving forward.**

**SOM8** Well we, we got over it, we, we got funding from Wessex Water and, erm, who else funded us? Erm, Sedgemoor District Council funded us, so we, you know, we got around the, the, the cost implications of managing the survey through, through our own grant aid that we applied for.

**So why do you think Wessex Water got involved?**

**SOM8** Because they were putting a new pipeline over the meadows and the wetland areas for, I'm trying to remember now, it was, erm, out towards West Huntspill I think and it was affecting the local communities, the pipeline work, so their way of mitigating it was to put funds into conservation projects that would help, erm, conservation work in the area really, so it was kind of pay-off scheme going on, yeah, very weird how you sort of fit into these schemes sometimes but.

**Yes, but, you know.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**It's right that the money comes in.**

**SOM8** Yeah, it came in from somewhere so, yeah, it didn't matter, yeah.

**Yeah. So having talked about, you know, that, about these two particular wetlands site I realise that I haven't asked you how you would, how your organisation would define a wetland site?**

**SOM8** Define it?

**Um.**

**SOM8** Well it's a unique habit and, you know, much, and so important for the wildlife that it, it supports, erm. Whether it is the midges and the mosquitos as well, you know, when you realise it's all part of the ecosystem and has been for many thousands of years, so.

**Yeah. And of course, you know, the mosquitos and bats often go happily hand-in-hand, so I'm presuming, although I may not be right, that you are a great celebrant of mosquitos in your organisation?**

**SOM8** I think we'd be in dire straits without, without the dear old mosquito because the Soprano Pipistrelle who, which is now a, a protected, well it's a, I think it's an Annex II species on the EU Habitats Directive, as it's declining, or they think anyway, erm, yeah, that's, its key food, prey item is a midge or mosquito and that's what we've proven in, on the Somerset Levels whilst we've been doing our survey work that the Soprano Pipistrelles are one of the main species we, we pick up on all of our transects, you know, there's lots of them down there so they do well on the Somerset Levels.

**Yeah, great.**

**SOM8** So obviously any, anything that affected those mosquito numbers would also have a negative impact on those Soprano Pipistrelle bats.

**Yeah. So from your experience having, you know, going out at times of the early evening, are there plenty of mosquitos out there? Is it something that's declined in recent years or increased in recent years or hard to put a figure on?**

**SOM8** Erm, I'm not sure if they've stayed about the same but I couldn't actually be quoted on that I don't think really. [laughs] I mean we do know, if ever we're going, if we're going out to do bat surveys near Shapwick we'd definitely need to wear arm covering, leg covering, erm, hats and even mosquito head covering some nights. [laughs]

**Oh okay.**

**SOM8** Because we know we're going to get bitten otherwise and, erm, you know, it's just one of the parts of doing that work really, you know, it's inevitable that you've got to cover up, whilst we're doing it.

**Yeah. So they don't deter, obviously they don't deter you from doing your work, you just make sure that you're fully prepared.**

**SOM8** Yeah, as long as we, we tell all our volunteers to come fully prepared for it, and wear, wear the bug juice and most people are sensible and wear the right clothing, some people realise by mistake they shouldn't have warn the shorts, so even on the most hottest of nights, that was a bad idea.

**Oh no.**

**SOM8** But they've paid for it, certainly won't, they won't do again.

**Yes and very itchy the next day.**

**SOM8** Oh yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. And I mean one of the curious things is always trying to discern between midges and mosquito because you know, they look different and they sound different but in the dark it must be quite hard to tell, so I suppose my fundamental question is, you know, when people are exposed to insects and nature, do you think they're able to discern what's a mosquito and what's a midge, you know, when you've worked with your volunteers?**

**SOM8** Probably not really.

**No.**

**SOM8** No.

**No.**

**SOM8** It's pretty difficulty. I mean even the daytime the, the biting midges can be a problem sometimes, you know, it's not necessarily just the, the mosquitos that come out at dusk, you know, so, and the, and the horseflies which are almost as, worse than them anyway, so.

**I mean many people have said that to me.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**That the horseflies are more of an irritant.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**Than the mosquitos are.**

**SOM8** Yeah, I've heard about more, you know, you're right, more people have had more problems with a horsefly bite long-term. I'm one of them, I react really badly to horseflies, my arm will swell up like a balloon, you know, and it has happened on a, on a bat night where you'll get bitten by both horseflies and mosquitos, so, but we just carry on, we do it.

**You're brave, you're brave, yeah.**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah.

**But do bats eat horseflies as well?**

**SOM8** I don't think so.

**I don't, no.**

**SOM8** No, because I think most horseflies have gone to roost by the time the bats come out.

**And not as sort of night loving as the mosquito are they?**

**SOM8** I don't think, no, I don't think so.

**No, no. So when you take your bat groups out, the site that you use is obviously determined by the bats but do you avoid any areas because you know it's particularly buggy or do you just tell everyone, wrap up, we don't know what's out there?**

**SOM8** We don't avoid anywhere but we do know Shapwick is particularly buggy, then parts of Westhay can be too actually, but we've got a lot of bat boxes up on Shapwick Heath and we've got some on the Westhay Moor as well, so we're fixed to it really. We, if we want to monitor the boxes we've put out then we go there, you know, although we do do the bat box checks during the day. So we'll, we'll, we'll go out during daylight hours so there is less of a problem being bitten then and, you know, we can sort of see who's in which box, and it's always Soprano Pipistrelles in all our bat boxes on Westhay and Shapwick.

**Okay. So the bat boxes are the, if you like the guides that lead you around the site, so you make sure you always go to those particular spots?**

**SOM8** Yeah, we, we've, we do have several checks each year for both sites, and then the evening bat walks as well, we've been asked by Natural England at Shapwick to run one every year, we always run it at the end of July and it's always oversubscribed by people as well and.

**Wonderful.**

**SOM8** So, we have to take a waiting list, it gets that booked up that people want to come out and, and find out what's living there and.

**And those people who want to go on the bat walks, would you say they are families with younger children or they can be any kind of person?**

**SOM8** Can be any, any, any sort of mix of people but it tends to be three-quarters are adults and there'd be just two or three children with us in each group, because usually at the end of July, erm, it doesn't get dark till late still and so it does limit the number of children taking part, but the very committed sort of people will come with, with their older children, maybe about eight and above perhaps, yeah.

**And what sort of time are we talking about, half nine, ten o'clock or have to be a bit later?**

**SOM8** Yeah, about eight thirty we start a bat walk till about half ten, sometimes eleven we finish.

**Yeah. And do you, when you take people around the site at that later hour, do you find that it creates a different kind of sense of walking around a wetland at that time of night?**

**SOM8** Yeah, it's quite magically really, because you get a lovely sound, the sounds of the dark, you know, the night time on the nature reserve and the Marsh … you can hear as well singing at that time, so there's always a bit extra in it, if they didn't hear, well they'll always hear bats because, we make, you know, that always happens, there's no other way, unless it's chucking it down with rain and then we won't bother going, but yeah the, people do enjoy the sounds that they hear at night and it does add another interesting element going round in the dark with a head torch on as well, bit of an adventure.

**Yes, it's always an adventure doing things in the dark. When you've done these bat walks in the dark, have you ever found other people using the wetland that you wouldn't expect?**

**SOM8** Not usually, apart from the moth trappers, they're often out the same night. [laughs]

**Okay, yes.**

**SOM8** No, we don't tend to meet any, not many other people, runners occasionally out on the lane as we're heading down that way, no.

**Okay. But for instance safety is never something that makes you sort of think twice about using the wetlands at that time?**

**SOM8** Well we risk assess it all obviously before we go out and we, we check the route, we make sure we've got high vis vests on and we've got people with torches at the front and the back and enough torches to split between the group, you know, check who's physically able and who isn't, that side, that kind of thing, and if there's someone that is particularly needing extra help we'll, you know, make sure they're escorted back early or something, you know, or whenever they want to go.

**Because does your route take you mainly along footpaths or do you ever have to veer out and kind of go into welly territory, you know, do you ever go into sort of the marshy bits of?**

**SOM8** Well it's, it's usually on the designated footpaths as in, within Shapwick or Westhay, not usually off the main footpath routes, yeah. So, but they can be wet anyway.

**Yeah, that's true.**

**SOM8** Because, you know.

**If it's been raining.**

**SOM8** It, it can be, yeah, yeah.

**And it's rutted and, yeah.**

**SOM8** And some areas have got boardwalks and not all of them have, erm, so.

**Yeah. It must be really magical going out on a night actually, you know, if you've got a lovely still night and the moon's out.**

**SOM8** Yeah, it can be really perfect, yeah, if the weather is just right and, yeah, we've had some very memorable evenings doing that, yeah, yeah, and owls as well, we hear the barn owl quite often as well where we go to Shapwick and to see them sometimes as well, that's been a really nice treat.

**Because thinking about, you know, the rationale for doing your, you know, your bat surveys and your bat walks, how much do health and wellbeing play a part of that, you know, is, are your members focused solely on bats and the conservation of bats and protection of bats or is that also something else which drives them to be out in these outdoor spaces, these wetlands?**

**SOM8** If it's the members, they're probably driven by the fact that they're going to go out and learn some bat stations or get some knowledge on bats that they want to improve on. But the public events definitely, I think it's a bit of both. It's people that are just looking for some, a new way to relax and learn something while they're out walking at night, have a new experience they've not had before maybe and yeah, just, just do something different.

**Yeah. I mean do your members ever talk about the wellbeing aspect of being on the wetlands whilst they're doing this activity or is that not really something that they talk about, it being a sort of?**

**SOM8** No, they don't normally talk about it very often, I have to say, no, it's back of their agenda maybe.

**Yeah, yeah, well that's really useful to know. There is sometimes a kind of presumption that I guess sort of physical, emotional, mental relaxation comes with these activities but that may not be at the forefront of what's driving people to do it, it maybe that it really is a desire to look after bats and protect bats and help bats.**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah.

**And that that, yeah.**

**SOM8** And they just want, just eager to learn and build their knowledge, quite a lot of them really, it's not the main driver why they've come out at night, no.

**No.**

**SOM8** Probably some will say, yeah, it's good to get out of the office or, you know, if they've got a desk-based job, yeah, and have a nice walk in the evening, yeah.

**Yes. I can't think of anything nicer really at the end of a long day.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**To be able to just walk in a place where actually there are very few people around as well.**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah.

**It's a real privilege isn't it?**

**SOM8** Yeah, it is, it is, yeah.

**Okay. So one of the other things that we talk about a lot in the project is about ecosystem services and I'm aware having talked about it quite a lot whether organisations such as yourself ever use the term ecosystem services and if you are familiar with it, if it's something that's useful?**

**SOM8** Yeah, I think we've definitely probably quoted that in our bat survey reports for the, all the Brue Valley maybe, and the Mendip Big Bat Survey, you know, we know that, you know, we, the bats do provide an ecosystem service effectively, essential part of the toolkit, yeah, erm, but generally we won't be talking about that term too much to our public groups, it's not sort of the thing that interests them so much.

**No, no. They're there to just learn about the bats.**

**SOM8** Just, yeah, yeah.

**And where they are and about their habitats?**

**SOM8** And why bats are important, why we really need to have look after them, yeah.

**Yeah. Well it's interesting isn't it, how you use different terminology in different settings, you know? So you may be talking about the bat's ecosystem services contributions or considerations but you wouldn't normally talk about that with a member of the public.**

**SOM8** No.

**It's not because they don't understand but because that's not their main frame of why they're there and doing what they're doing, you know.**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah, we might refer to it in a bat talk if we were giving it to a specialist group like a, a natural history group, you know, that we know maybe would be familiar with that terminology and that, that language.

**Yeah. And do you do that, those sorts of talks very much as an organisation, is that something that happens?**

**SOM8** There's a number of us that do give talks maybe more four or five of us in the group committee, that would talk to interested groups, whether it's you know, natural history groups, erm, there's probably just myself that goes to talk to schools and probably wouldn't normally use ecosystem services to primary schools but, you know, I'd, I've never talk, a talk to, I've never been asked to give a talk to an older group.

**I'm sure a lot of schools really love you coming to talk about bats don't they?**

**SOM8** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, the thing, the thing is I have to keep it quiet because if it does get out I would asked to go do it every, every week or something, you know, and there's only so many nights you can go out or well day, obviously that's day time, and, erm, you know, there's a limited amount of time I can give to it.

**Yeah. So you do that on a voluntary basis just to spread the love about bats?**

**SOM8** Yes, yeah, I have, have done when I've had the time, yeah.

**Yeah, that's a great thing. And what would you say would be the number one interest for the kids? Because there's this kind of idea of bats being vampire bats and, you know, sucking your.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**So what is the thing that really peaks their interest would you say?**

**SOM8** Erm, they're always excited to find out how many bat, insects they eat each night and I've got a little graphic with three thousand mosquitos or nearly three thousand.

**Wow.**

**SOM8** So lots of little dots on it and the bat sort of munching them and you know, they're always amazed to find out that's how many one bat will eat each night, you know, they're such tiny creatures, so, erm, that's an interesting fact that they like and they just, they also like to hear the bat sounds that we can hear through a bat detector, so I've taken recordings of different bat species, and what noises they make and that always.

**Okay, whether it's clicks or?**

**SOM8** Yeah, clicks or pops or smacks or warbles, you know, and they always find that fascinating.

**Fantastic, yeah.**

**SOM8** I've got a slideshow that has a, a bat roost where there's bats emerging and they like counting them out as they come out, so.

**That's really.**

**SOM8** And then they can learn about how to do it on their own housing estate or, you know, themselves look for bats in their nearby neighbourhood.

**Yeah. So that's really interesting to think that if there was funding available you may not have the time to do it but that could be, that's something that could be really useful both for the schools and for the bats, you know?**

**SOM8** Absolutely, yeah. I mean if there was some, part of somebody's job role for instance it would be kind of essential, I would have thought, but you, the Bat Conservation Trust probably do give talks and then if they can fit it in but again they haven't got the funding to.

**No.**

**SOM8** Request, to answer everyone's request to go out to all these schools, yeah.

**Yeah. So that's one of the kind, I guess, missed opportunities isn't it?**

**SOM8** Yeah, there.

**You know, because there's a mutual benefit on both sides, you know.**

**SOM8** Exactly. I know there are some projects that The Wildlife Trust are operating like the Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project, that's been a great model and I think if that kind of model could be rolled out elsewhere, it would work and their, their remit is very much to do school group visits and educate and advise and, and make more people aware of the vulnerability of their rarer bats. The Greater Horseshoe, there's less than six thousand of them in the country, the UK completely, so they are, you know, in a few more years they could be well extinct, you know. If we don't look after the colonies now, they're heading that way, so yeah.

**Yeah, time is of the essence.**

**SOM8** It definitely is, yeah, we can't afford to lose anymore.

**And when you talk to the schools, and we talked about this a little bit in the focus group, do you find that there are a kind of cluster of kids that actually never come out to the wetlands, that never come and never?**

**SOM8** Oh yeah, yeah, where, the, the schools I've been to aren't actually schools near the wetlands. So I'm thinking of you know, there's places like Shepton Mallet which is not, it's not that far from the wetlands but, erm, I don't think they've been out there for a school visit. I can't recall now but, yeah, they probably wouldn't even dream of it, I mean the transport issues is the main, main problem, yeah.

**Yeah. Because you need your own car?**

**SOM8** You do, you do need.

**Or you need to park some?**

**SOM8** Yeah, you need your own car but it's not just that, if they were to go out with their families, their families would be, erm, actually quite reticent to go because they're not sure what's in it for them when they get there or they're worried about being out there to start with, you know, it's, it's, the, like the countryside is a whole another area, you know, they're used to being within town and, yeah, it's a sort of a generation that's lacking that confidence really to go out and explore.

**So it's the kind of not knowing what to do in nature when you're in nature.**

**SOM8** Yes, yeah.

**You know, like you have to have a purpose to go to a place.**

**SOM8** That's it.

**Rather than just to go and experience it.**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah, or even how they would find their way around in nature, I think, or in a wilder area, that would worry them, erm, not everyone's confident enough to even read a, a map on a, you know, a leaflet.

**No, no.**

**SOM8** To learn how to get around from A to B safely or be confident enough so there's huge barriers, I think for people, yeah.

**And, you know, in thinking about getting more people using wetlands for their health and wellbeing, this is a big issue isn't it about not only getting people on the site, but then making them feel able to navigate the site and enjoy the site, you know?**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah, they.

**Because these wetlands are not like more developed wetlands, you know, where you have a visitor centre adjacent to the wetland and a boardwalk, you know, these wetlands are the ones, Shapwick and Westhay.**

**SOM8** Remote.

**They are remote.**

**SOM8** Really remote, Westhay especially, yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, remote and I guess kind of, you know, wonderfully simple in a way, you know, it's not.**

**SOM8** Yeah, they are, they're not overdeveloped like you say and they haven't got the interpretation centre and I'm not sure they ever will, erm, although the new Avalon Marshes Centre would be wonderful if and when it comes off and gets built.

**Yes, well things are sort of moving slowly.**

**SOM8** It, yeah, getting there a bit nearer now, erm. I'm not sure why they went for the heritage side of it first but at least they did that and nothing, you know, something happened, erm, but, and the new, the new bird hides at Westhay are fabulous but hope, I mean hopefully people are finding, but then in some ways you don't want too many to find them because it would ruin the whole atmosphere if coach loads of people turned up and then they want the cafe and the toilet block, you know, then it really would ultimately affect the quality of the landscape as well if it's not carefully managed, erm, so it doesn't mean we shouldn't get people out there though, no.

**No, but I can see that by developing the Avalon Marshes Centre and that being sort of quite close to Westhay and Shapwick, that you then could, you know, use that for your cup of tea and your toilet break.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**And then you take yourself to the site.**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah.

**So, because that, it's that changing of expectations of everything being on site isn't it?**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**Unless you have low-tech technologies on the site, so you know, composting toilets and things like that, but.**

**SOM8** Yeah, they did try the composting toilets at Avalon.

**Oh did they?**

**SOM8** Yeah, before the ones that are there now.

**Oh, I didn't know that.**

**SOM8** Oh yeah, about ten years ago, they had, they had them and people hated them, [laughs] so I don't know whether it was that negative that people didn't come and use them because you could smell those toilets from the other end of the carpark. [laughs]

**Oh I see, I got you, yeah.**

**SOM8** So they did try that and it, you know, it was a great idea when it was working but either the technology of the composting loos wasn't as up to date as it could be, but they replaced them with the system they've got there at the moment, and people prefer what they've got now, some water flushing there. [laughs]

**Okay, yeah. At least it's good to know that they did try it though.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**They did try to keep it low tech. Now the last, the very last section of this interview, so I know that you're, haven't got bags of time so it won't take too long but part of the project is trying to understand how wetlands are perceived, both at the local areas, the local wetlands and also sort of generically, what kind of cultural value is placed upon wetlands, so I wondered both from your organisational perspective about what shapes or influences perspectives on wetlands and then kind of working with the public, what influences approaches to wetlands? So what I mean by that is that, you know, if you look back in say fiction or historical records, wetlands are often seen as being sort of marshland and boggy and full of mosquitos and marshy and all negative connotations, and we're trying to assess really if that has changed and people now view them as sort of benign recreational spaces or whether there's still some sort of hangover?**

**SOM8** I think the definite attitudes have changed and I think the, the main driver in that has, has got to be the TV actually, erm, the, these great new conservation TV programmes like Springwatch, Autumnwatch. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall did a great one recently, I quite enjoyed that, he did a few visits to the Somerset Levels.

**Oh did he?**

**SOM8** Yeah, he, he.

**Oh I didn't see that.**

**SOM8** Yeah, it's been brilliant, he went to Ham Wall I think, and, erm, I'm pretty sure actually that Natural England said no, he couldn't visit because when they had Countryfile come and they, to see the starlings, they couldn't cope weeks later when thousands of people turned up to see the starlings and it was having a bit of a negative impact, erm, but the Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall one was quite nicely done and they focused on, on one chap's perspective as a wildlife photographer and why he enjoys visiting the site.

**Oh okay, yeah.**

**SOM8** Or the sites, and what he was gaining from his visits, so on a health and wellbeing side of things really, I think they were looking at that and, and how positive those, these wetlands are, you know, so it was nice that he did put it out there on TV really and it was well accepted.

**What channel was that on, because I?**

**SOM8** It was on Channel Four, and they do, it was a good number of programmes, so he might have done about eight or ten different programmes and some sites he revisited throughout the seasons, so it's definitely one to look up.

**Oh okay, yeah. All wetland sites or just different nature sites?**

**SOM8** No, he, he called, the programme is called Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's Wild West or, Wild West, so he was looking at landscapes that were important to him as a child, it, during his childhood and places he visited, he wanted to revisit and find out why people still like to go there, so it's a bit like your project actually.

**Ah, oh lovely, yeah.**

**SOM8** And he looked, he, he actually looked up people that were volunteers and had connections with the wild spaces, erm, in whatever way, so it might have been an otter recorder or a wildlife photographer, erm, yeah. So and he went and sort of bat people as well, he, he'd, he got involved with and he went out to sites and looked at what they were looking for so.

**Fabulous.**

**SOM8** And why. Yeah, it was a good programme. So those programmes have been good I think at making, or marketing the wetlands as a positive place. Erm, I don't think people do have a negative impact or view of them anymore because of these TV programmes, yeah, and the starlings, you know, everyone loves to see the starlings, it's just phenomenal.

**Yeah, that's. I mean I think really, as you said Springwatch, Autumnwatch, has been phenomenal for that.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**For making people really take the time to focus on nature and enjoy nature.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**And that's been a big turnaround.**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah.

**But in terms of say like your own, you know, are you interested in nature writing or wildlife photography, is there something that motivates you with an, already with an interest in natural spaces?**

**SOM8** Yeah, I've got, I have a sort of fairly broad natural history interest generally, and conservation management of, you know, all, all habitats, so I've taken my kids there, they've grown up going birdwatching, now my son is an avid birdwatcher, it's obviously inspired him and rubbed off on him enough, he's now doing Environmental Management.

**Brilliant.**

**SOM8** As a Masters Degree so, yeah, and my daughter's into, she's doing Physical Geography, so you know, they've, they've both grown up loving the countryside and we've taken them to nature reserves throughout their childhood so.

**Yeah. Well it's a gift isn't it? It's a gift that they can now enjoy nature and explore nature and feel confident in nature.**

**SOM8** Yeah, yeah.

**And also getting them away from those screens, you know?**

**SOM8** Yes, yeah, yeah, definitely, yeah.

**That's what we have to do.**

**SOM8** Yeah.

**That's fabulous, right well, I, you know, is there anything else that you would like to share with me at this point as we close the interview?**

**SOM8** Erm, not, not particular, no, no, just don't, can't think of anything else.

**Well it's been really fabulous and thank you so much for your time.**

**SOM8** Thank you.

**I really appreciate it, thank you.**

**SOM8** So you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

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**One of the things I really wanted to capture by talking to people was, not just people who use wetlands but people that could and who don't, to try and find it out what is that's maybe a barrier towards accessing these spaces.**

**SOM9** Well I actually asked the, we've got a Facebook group for the South West of England and I actually asked, and one lady responded to me, she said I live, because I said has anybody used these wetlands and, and could, you know, what was your experience? And one lady said oh I live in the wetlands, I'll private mail you but she hasn't private mailed me yet, so. [laughs] But she said she had been out and about but that's only one.

**Okay, yes. Well see that says a lot in itself doesn't it? And so what I'm curious to know is whether it's, yeah, well we'll explore that in a, yeah, what are the drivers but.**

**SOM9** No, no, you go.

**Thank you so much for your time today. First thing I'd like to say is that it'd be wonderful to find out from your organisation's perspective your responses to these questions but there may be points at which you feel you want to give your own personal opinion and that's absolutely brilliant and wonderful to help me …**

**SOM9** I think at the moment my opinion will be sort of British Canoes opinion because I haven't got any other opinions. [laughs]

**Okay, right, that's.**

**SOM9** I mean I, I can connect it through to their REMOVED, who is my sort of like dotted line boss if you like, erm, and I don't think it's really come into any discussions anywhere.

**Okay, well that's great. So I suppose we could start by me asking you the name of your organisation and how many members you have and what, and things like, you know, what your members like to do as part of the organisation and also things like their age range and background, to try and capture what kinds of people from our society are part of your campaign.**

**SOM9** Well it's British, it's now called British Canoeing, it used to be called Canoe England, it used to be called British Canoe Union but it's now British Canoeing, it's had a new CEO probably two, three years now, who has totally changed the culture and drive of the organisation. It was originally very much focussed on sporting and, and sort of like international competition and things like that, but the CEO recently has realised that yes, yes, that's an important element but actually the vast majority of the membership do recreational paddling and not really that keen on and that's true I think of most sports, you know, people will play tennis but there'll only be a very small percentage that actually want to be.

**Yeah. Most people are doing it for their own enjoyment and health and.**

**SOM9** And that sort of thing and certainly there's a big push to, erm, more, get people out paddling and more places to paddle because one of the big issues, erm, particularly for canoeing but it will apply to other water-based sports is access to water and welcome to use water and, now access doesn't just mean you can walk down a path because people will be carrying canoes and, and in most cases they're relatively heavy, I mean you won't get anything lighter than fifteen kilograms and you'll get up to thirty, forty kilograms, so in general, they're fairly hefty objects, erm, and they move around and wheels on, but you need to be able to park a car safely, use that, use water safely and be able to get off safely. Now a lot of canoeists do, like they'll go down a river, well you can go down the river, it's bloody hard to paddle back up a river, so often there's a shuttle, they, clubs do shuttles like.

**Got you.**

**SOM9** Cars or whatever, move around.

**Got you, yeah.**

**SOM9** Now in terms of flat waters and lakes and things like that, where you've, you're starting and finishing at the same point, not an issue, but it is an issue having, being able to park a car, offload a canoe, not upset neighbours and things because, for example, let's take this place, you know, if there was a body of water just down there, the danger is people would be parking all over the high street. Because you've got a large object on your roof, you're perceived as perhaps negatively, whereas you could have hundred people parked here and from a walking group and you wouldn't necessarily know they're a walking group, so.

**No, no, so it's a high visibility.**

**SOM9** It's a high visibility but, erm, in general there's a, sort of strong trend to get more places that they're welcome to paddle. For example in British Canoeing terms, if you're a full member, you get a licence to paddle most of the canals in England, not all but most of them and quite a few major rivers like the Thames and things, that's included in membership. There are other places, and Bristol Docks is one of them, that you have to pay for a separate, separate licence. Now, and the Norfolk Broads is another one that you have to pay for a separate licence, which is a big wetland. I don't think there's much objection to paying for a licence, but I think one needs to know what it is. It's not extent, it's not ridiculous and it's easy to do on the day rather than oh dear I've got to go to a site beforehand and people wouldn't do it.

**Yeah. They want to know that there's certainty that they can use that site on the day that they can fit it in.**

**SOM9** Yeah, and, and with all these things, it doesn't matter whether you're canoeing or, or things, you need public facilities, like loos not too far away ideally and, because unfortunately it is a, it is a sort of, shall we say a sport that people are used to, shall we say, wild camping approaches [laughs] if, if needed.

**Okay, yes, well needs must, needs must.**

**SOM9** Which, I know, which isn't necessarily. [laughs]

**Yeah, yeah. So in some ways, unlike maybe other users, like walkers or cyclists, you need a little bit more infrastructure.**

**SOM9** Yes. Where you, particularly with, because people are going to bring, there are, well you're going to bring a car regardless unless you happen to live right by the waterway, so you need access parking.

**Yeah, and then presumably access to get in off the bank into the water itself?**

**SOM9** Yes, yes, now a lot of that can be done, most canoeists are quite used to getting in and out of interesting places shall we say but as long as it's sensible flat or an easy gravel thing, that's perfectly okay. What, what they don't want people, or we don't, as an organisation want people to do is to be dragging canoes across grass on banks because it just wears the, you know, like if people walk on one pathways it wears paths down, so certainly we would encourage people to be environmentally friendly. Also take any rubbish out. We certainly wouldn't push people to, because canoe's are possible so you can have one in the sea one day, you can have it in a lake next, you can have it in different water, obviously with invasive species there's a danger of stuff moving around, so there's certainly a big thing encouraging people to wash their kit after each time. Now.

**Right, bit hard to monitor really that isn't it?**

**SOM9** In an ideal world, that would be at the site, you could take your boat off, you could use some sort of spraying thing or what I do is I wash it on the car roof when I come home but, you know, not everybody lives in a place where I can run a hose pipe on, you know, live in flats, they live in all sorts of areas. Or the other alternative is having an easy hire facility because then a lot of people now, if you wanted to encourage older people for example, I have to have a special rack on my car roof that will lift a thirty kilogram canoe off on my own, having a, a kind of, a facility that people can rent is helpful and obviously the right sort of support that people just don't rent willy nilly and safety and.

**Don't know what they're doing.**

**SOM9** Yeah, or there's, I mean some canoes can be very, very safe indeed but it's just, and I think with the wetland is knowledge somewhere that says certain areas are inappropriate to go to if there's certain wildlife nesting and things or, or, you know, and people won't know that before they come.

**Yeah. They want information on site.**

**SOM9** Somehow I think you need to have information to say, maybe March or something that please don't go over here because, is my view. I mean some wildlife, I go canoeing on the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal at a place called Perton and every year there's mating swans and every year there's a male swan that guards the. [laughs]

**Ah yeah.**

**SOM9** Fair enough.

**Yeah, you know not to go there.**

**SOM9** Well you wouldn't with a, cross males swans [laughs] they really are.

**In terms of acceptable waterways, I mean obviously you've got, you've got as you said, you've got canals and you've got lakes and you've got the coastal areas, if you think about the wetland round here, they will have, because they are dug out peat pits.**

**SOM9** Yes.

**They will have kind of designated sort of wet areas which are kind of almost lake like.**

**SOM9** Um.

**They also have drains called rhynes as well.**

**SOM9** Yes, yes.

**The question is, you know, what capacity of water does a canoeist need in order to canoe?**

**SOM9** They're not likely to go down some of these rhynes because I mean if you think about it, you've got banks up there, what are you going to see? You're going to see grass banks and a, a straight piece of water. Unless you've got a particular interest in, you know, wildlife or accessing certain parts of wildlife from the water.

**So the vista is as important as the actual.**

**SOM9** The vista's important, erm, because all around the Somerset levels you've got the rhynes and things and, and if, if they're narrow because quite a few of them are quite narrow. I mean a typical spread of a, a canoe paddle, you could, I could, I could probably paddle down a, a rhyne that wide and why would I want to unless it was going from to something else?

**Unless it was connected to something, yes, okay.**

**SOM9** Or I was seeing something else. Where, erm, canoeists could be more helpful perhaps is, you can pick up litter and things from the waterside.

**Ah yes, yes.**

**SOM9** Er, and many do, many clubs do that, have clear-ups because, A, it's unpowered and it's just easier to manoeuvre it and get, you know, bottles and detritus and things that, which I don't know how bad it is here but unfort, you know, it could get floods or if you get high winds and things stuff blows and it can, it can help.

**Yes. Well it's interesting, you know, when I've talked to other people about littering, it's, well listening to that other time it seems to be that cyclists seem to have the biggest wrap for dropping litter, I think the birders consider themselves to have a leave no trace policy, a bit like the canoeists, so someone must be dropping it somewhere and of course you said unless it's blown in from various, especially because it's so flat, there's no surprise that things have flown in from wherever.**

**SOM9** Well I mean if you go down certain rivers after high rivers, you can see a lot of rubbish that's been caught in trees and things, which you can't necessarily get at easily, even from a canoe safely, you couldn't do it, but it's just one thing that canoeists can.

**Can do, yeah.**

**SOM9** Can help with.

**So when, if we go all the way back to your membership, what would you say is the age profile of your members and then maybe the split between the ones who are quite active members who do it a lot and then those who are?**

**SOM9** Very difficult, very difficult to tell, I couldn't tell you the, erm, current membership level but it's, it's, it's, you know, thirty, forty thousand at least, erm. Like with all organisations the number actually, it's one of the challenges that canoeing gets, it's how do you get measure? Because if you look on the M5 on a Saturday, you'll see loads of canoes gone down on car roofs and things, large numbers may not be members of British Canoeing, they've just bought them down the shop and they're going to have a bit of fun on the beach and, and that's it, you know, that's, that's life, erm. Age range, usually people don't take people canoeing under eight, although obviously if you've got children and you've got your own canoe people do take children, you know, I mean that's, that's parental risk assessment.

**Assessing, yeah.**

**SOM9** Erm, and we've got people in their seventies and eighties doing it.

**Okay. What would you say is the most active age range would you say just from anecdotal?**

**SOM9** I would say it's probably more mature, erm. Well you get two levels, you get the keen younger ones who get into it, can physically do like the, the more exciting things who probably wouldn't ever come to whatever, they'll go down the River Wye, they'll go down the River Dart.

**Yeah, the wide water.**

**SOM9** The exciting stuff. You then tend to, as most organisations do, have a gap between about seventeen to, I don't know, mid-thirties, basically because people at that age, A, find the other sex and, B, are trying to survive in life, moving around, different jobs, university, things like that, so people tend to come back to it I think, mid-thirties, forties and fifties. There's probably an increase in the sort of, the fifties, sixties.

**Oh okay.**

**SOM9** Mainly because that group is the only group of people who potentially have, A, money to buy, you know, a typical canoe will probably cost, I don't know, a new one, six or seven hundred pounds, another.

**Gosh.**

**SOM9** Another couple of hundred for, you know, for the right sort of gear and things. Yes, you can buy them cheaper second-hand etcetera, etcetera, erm, but, you know, you, and then you've got like car roof racks which cost about hundred and, you know, and that's.

**Yeah. So the kind of kit and all the things that go with it.**

**SOM9** Tends to.

**Tends to, you need a little bit of a think about, yeah.**

**SOM9** Or if you've got a hire thing, people will come and, erm, use it. I mean the Somerset Coal Canal which is connected to the Avon has a, a canoe hire, two, two or three canoe hire places, how viable they are as businesses I don't, I don't know, erm. Flat water environments are very good for training people and just enjoying things, erm, they're not suitable for the, I wouldn't do scary stuff things, so it wouldn't.

**Yeah, just learning technique.**

**SOM9** Unless somebody's really keen on, you know, their other hobby is wildlife or photography or, or something like that.

**Yeah. So having talked about the CEO changing the ethos of the organisation from being more focussed on competitions being more inclusive, let's say.**

**SOM9** Yes, yes.

**Would you say, is the main kind of focus of the organisation to encourage people to canoe or to support people who already canoe?**

**SOM9** Want to do both and it's very much increase, it's very much increasing the number of participants and how many people canoe, very strongly that way. I've a feeling, I'm not a hundred percent centre that the target is something like to get up to about eighty thousand.

**Okay, so you kind of almost want to double the membership then.**

**SOM9** It's, I mean very hazy on those numbers but it's, it's significant.

**Yeah. And aside from sort of, trying to get people to engage with canoeing and presumably that is from a health perspective of getting out in nature and enjoying being outdoors.**

**SOM9** I think, it started with I think the people just want to go canoeing and the reasons why people want to go canoeing, people are generally getting connected with improving the health of the nation, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, I mean and people are seeing that as a, as a positive and also certainly, erm, in certain areas, like in Bristol in particular, erm, there are funding streams to get people not just canoeing but out doing physical exercise and particularly over fifties with the intention of reducing the load on the NHS and that.

**Yes. So it's part of the broader campaign of health and fitness and canoeing is one of those activities you could choose to go to.**

**SOM9** Yeah, I mean canoeing gives you quite a lot of freedom in the sense that you can go and you can move around, you can see things from different angles and things and offers quite a lot of variety, I mean I've canoed at night through Chichester Harbour and Langston Harbour and things like that but it's quite a different experience but not many will do that.

**No, no.**

**SOM9** They won't do it when it's minus five either in January. [laughs]

**[laughs]**

**SOM9** And, you know, there are, are the wetlands, you know, so.

**No, so there's a lot of fair weather canoeists.**

**SOM9** Yeah, and there's, the serious guys will go out, like in any sport, they, they'll go out, people who like water polo, that's very specialist but there's a group of people who, who like that, you know, and do it.

**Is there an element of British Canoeing which is also involved in say campaigning advocacy work?**

**SOM9** Yes, very strongly, erm, they're campaigning to get more access to more places to paddle. British Canoeing along with, erm, other, well I'm also national chair of the Land Waterways Navigation Committee which is more about canals and navigable rivers. Both organisations push politically to try and get more access because access to water in England is fraught with legislation of all sorts of different issues and some is very hotly contested, there is, unfortunately, in some cases, quite a lot of conflict with other groups, anglers being one. Now that's not true of all situations, there's lots of, quite a lot of people who, angling from canoes these days, erm, but there is, there are stress points on certain areas between fishing community and canoeists.

**Okay, because both see each other being in conflict and that, the anglers find you, find canoeists disruptive and then the canoeists find the anglers disruptive in their own way?**

**SOM9** It's not in every case, there's a lot of good working relationships.

**Oh yeah.**

**SOM9** There are hot spots in the country where there are strong vested interests that say if you're not canoeing, also for example if they have an angling competition down a stretch of water, it can be, can cause problems if you block the whole water off and annoy people. In most cases, I've never actually personally experienced any antagonism but then I've not gone out to prove a point. There are, not so much wetlands but there are landowners that don't wish you to go through water because riparian and rights and things are complex in this country. Scotland has a different legislation but even Scotland I think has some free access to water as in, I think, to roam and but I've heard what's happening in Scotland, is that might be in law but people are blocking off car parks and other physical access to water.

**Okay. So they may not block off, you know, I've seen some dreadful things in the States of people putting barbed wire across rivers and things like that.**

**SOM9** There's.

**Not that but.**

**SOM9** No, but that can happen and, and will, people will do things like that in, in their area, and obviously where there's a navigation owned by a nav, reputable navigation authority, you know, they would prevent that but there are lots of landowners that, for various reasons, don't want canoeists coming down or through across their land.

**No, but in terms of, because obviously the project is focussed on.**

**SOM9** Wetlands.

**Wet, yeah, but that, would you say that the issue of access for wetlands is simply that there aren't, it's to do with?**

**SOM9** It's knowledge of being able to get there because British Canoeing has a, has a campaign to have places to paddle where, and they call them canoe trails, which they publish on their website and there is a campaign to get more of these on websites, so, and it would be interesting if, if Westhay is a suitable place and haven't been there, perhaps getting that publicised, you know, I think would be, well there's a car park here, there's a cafe there, there's a toilet there, there's a route as you go here, avoid this, whatever, up up and publish it, so it's public knowledge then to use and there are, there's a very big push to get a large number of those in the country, basically so that try and minimise stress with people, get people to, you know.

**Yeah. So in some ways that kind of trying connect up together so, because I think you had said to me that you had found the focus group useful because you were able to talk.**

**SOM9** Well I found it very interesting actually, mainly because of just hearing all different people's aspects and issues, you know. There's a danger in arresting things and we want to do that without thinking why, why does somebody not want to do that? And, you know, I think being fair, seeing both sides of it, there's very good reasons why somebody doesn't want to do that and I think rather than having you're not letting me, you're not coming here, it's some. [laughs]

**Yeah, accommodation of some kind, yeah.**

**SOM9** That says look, the reason we can't do that is because, you know, wildlife are breed, are breeding and it's going to disturb it.

**Yeah, might be times of the year when you can't access.**

**SOM9** Just, just, let's just because fishing, they're not allowed to fish all year round are they?

**No, no.**

**SOM9** So my personal view is we just need to have the sensible.

**Need some education around what time and the place.**

**SOM9** You're very welcome here but please don't come then or if this sort of thing happens and the only other thing I could think of is if for example somebody, as people will think, oh I'm just going to go let's say to Westhay, right? Not knowing that let's say the particular weekend they go is closed, whatever reason, to sort of say but you can go two miles down the road to there.

**Ah, yes, so they have various options, yeah.**

**SOM9** Maybe is, is a, it's not a million miles away from here but Bridgewater Canal is one area that wouldn't be.

**Yeah, would always be an easy access area.**

**SOM9** But usable all year, erm.

**Do your members, do they, in terms of sort of keeping updated with information, do they use your website or do they use your twitter page or is it?**

**SOM9** Very difficult to know, very difficult.

**Is it word of mouth?**

**SOM9** Well they're, we have regionals, I, I'm in the REMOVED but we're all volunteers so it's a massive region for volunteers and my particular role is, well I've got two roles, one of my roles is the REMOVED for what they call Wessex, which is basically this Somerset up to Gloucestershire and that area and I've got a colleague who covers Devon and Cornwall, erm, and we sometimes get all sorts of requests from people. A lot of people want, it's very difficult to, to come, you know, connect with people. We started a Facebook site to try and, but then there's a million Facebook sites, you know, and, and emails and all those gets very difficult with people changing email addresses, now the GDPR regulations make it another thing, so in some ways I think we've got to get, obviously as, as an organisation we've got, hopefully respectable and responsible organisation on our website but a lot of people will not look at it and just go along and do something and you almost need information at the point to say.

**Yes, okay, so it's almost as if you want it, if they, so I can paraphrase what you're saying, if the wetlands, these spaces, Westhay and Shapwick Heath want to encourage people to maybe think about canoeing on those spaces, if that is possible, then they need to kind of make it easy for canoeists to have an information point.**

**SOM9** And welcome, yeah.

**And welcome seems to be a big kind of frame.**

**SOM9** Well we've, we, as an organisation would be happy to, you know, publish that if it's sensible, making people aware. Of course British Canoeing now the con, conventional, like kayaks and canoes and things, of course you now have these stand-up paddleboards which British Canoeing certainly support but there are at least one other organisation, nothing to do with British Canoeing that are stand-up paddleboards.

**Oh I see, okay.**

**SOM9** I don't know whether you know much about these things but.

**No, no.**

**SOM9** But they're very portable, they blow them up, they feel very firm but you can buy very expensive ones but a lot of them are, they're actually inflatable so they, they can roll up in a car boot, you can bundle them in the car, drive there, you can always carry them round, blow them up and way you go.

**That really opens what people can do, yeah.**

**SOM9** And a lot of, it's the fast growing part of it, I personally don't do it because A, I, I'm not interested in standing on a flippin' board and be up to stand, but it is very, very popular.

**So that is something to think about really, that that could be a new area that could be expanding quickly.**

**SOM9** Yeah, but they're relatively innocuous but used, like all things, used properly, I mean not here but, you know, people moan about jet skis and things and they're, irrespective of jet skis but I mean they're blooming useful as an emergency safety thing in, in some situations.

**Yeah, they are, yeah. So obviously I'm thinking about the wetland side of things.**

**SOM9** Yeah, bring it back to wetlands because I get carried away.

**Well no, because I'll always get interested in, then a million different things on my list but. So when I think about your connections with other organisations, so I get this sense that, you know, you do your campaigning work but are there any other organisations you work quite closely with in terms of advocacy or information sharing or?**

**SOM9** We, well this is where my Inland Waterways have now, erm, we, we've started a better relationship with British Canoeing because Inland Waterways traditionally has been thought of like canal boats and, and the long boats and things, we now have a working relationship with British Canoeing, we're working on one with, with the RIA and the other one that might be, which we're considering, is Sustrans, erm, which incidentally is headquartered in Bristol I find. [laughs]

**Oh okay, that's handy.**

**SOM9** Erm, but they're more into like sustainable transport systems to and from places, rather than wetlands.

**Right, okay, yeah. So using canoeing to, canoe to work and things like that, maybe.**

**SOM9** Well no, it's more like, erm, are there joint projects for example on repairing canal towpaths? Could we have a joint litter clear? Could we have a joint?

**Oh I see, okay.**

**SOM9** You know, could.

**That's interesting, yeah.**

**SOM9** Could we work? I think the answer is, if people can work with organisations to do something useful, like a litter pick.

**Yeah, then why not?**

**SOM9** Why not? And people, well, you know, if it's some charity thing, why not? You know, there's no, I mean the, the organisation is open to all sorts of sensible guys that, the real ethos is to be a friendly, sport, active or activity that is in harmony with things and is welcome.

**Yes, okay. That's really positive. And, so obviously access is a big big thing for you. In terms of how many, well these are open questions, how does your organisation define a wetland?**

**SOM9** Doesn't, I don't think, I don't think it even thinks about it. Erm, when I sent to, dropped Richard a note, just, you see they probably wouldn't think about the, the Norfolk Broads as being probably one of the biggest wetlands in the country and because people sail there, they canoe there, done all sorts for centuries probably. [laughs] I didn't even know, I only live what, thirty, twenty miles away, I didn't even know they existed and coincidentally I saw on TV a programme, not, not about these two but there's another one out at Bridgewater isn't there?

**Um, the Steart.**

**SOM9** And there are organisations, yeah, something like that. There are organisations, for example the, this is not British Canoeing, that Waterways Association is, is actively trying to promote getting Bridgewater Docks and there's a Bridgewater tidal barrier, protectively built for all different sorts of areas, so there are other organisations with not a direct interest but potentially could be and possibly what one needs to look at is the health and environmental impact of these places could be massively improved by better access, so cruising, you know, if it's a nice place for relaxation and things, people with stress and things might find it.

**Yeah, a relaxing place to go, yeah.**

**SOM9** A benefit.

**Yeah. So it sounds then as an organisation you do use wetlands, you don't use these particular two wetlands at the moment.**

**SOM9** No, I don't think we recognise wetlands as, concentration is on like big lakes like the Windermere, the sea or the canals.

**Yeah, these big bodies of water.**

**SOM9** Or, you know, the exciting rivers like, you know, the Wye, the Dart, places like that where people, the Honeypot you know.

**Yeah. In terms of then sort of differentiating between those different types of spaces, you know, you talked about canoeing in Chichester Docks and Dart and about going down the Norfolk Boards, would you say that for your organisational members, getting out and about is a wonderful thing and the location in a sense, the varieties that it draws, or are there particular places that your members, do you think, are drawn? I'm trying to get a sense of whether wetlands in themselves are deemed as special by your members.**

**SOM9** They'd be special by some members, it certainly wouldn't be by all. I mean a lot of, erm, canoeists like playing in weirs and things like this, so they would go to that sort of thing and I think it's more of an interest, erm, but if you don't know, if you haven't got access it doesn't, it never happens. I mean it may be that the wetlands could attract more people, so for example the thing I find interesting was like, there was somebody there that was a bat expert, somebody. Now I've never seen a bat in the wild, I've seen them hanging up in Brickwell Zoo, you know, things like that, but I'd be quite interesting in going and maybe it's a sort of a combined, maybe there's something you can do for, in some sort of organised thing that sort of says, pointing out all, what, what's there because if you don't know what's there.

**Yeah, you don't know to look for it.**

**SOM9** Unless you're an expert you don't know.

**Yeah. So that's it, it's trying connect all these different things together if you like.**

**SOM9** There might be possibilities, it'll only, I think, be a niche interest, it could be useful for like there are very few canoe clubs in this general area, erm. I mean a canoe club, often canoe clubs have like a home area, like in Clevedon which I'm a member of, Bristol Channel is quite dangerous place to go canoeing unless you know what you're doing. However, they have a marine lake, which is fenced off but a lot of the trade goes there but the Club then drives off, day trips, it goes to North Devon, it goes to, you know, the Wye, the Dart, it goes, goes down to Langport, it goes on rivers, so.

**It's got quite a wide geographical spread then?**

**SOM9** It's, so I don't know but round this area, obviously it's very rural, whether there's a case for a canoe club based on, on the wetlands but, don't know.

**Yet to be seen, yeah.**

**SOM9** But that would be a useful thing because they would under, they would understand the, you know, the restrictions or the, that sort of thing.

**Yeah. One of the terms that we use quite a bit in our project is ecosystem services and I don't know whether that's something that, a term that you've ever come across or that your organisation ever uses.**

**SOM9** I think you need to explain that to me, but.

**Okay. So an ecosystems services approach is an idea of a way of valuing nature where we can quantify what benefits we can get from nature and as a way of showing how important nature is has come with it and that kind of capital[?] approach but breaking it down to different types of benefits that we get from nature. So an example might be increased wellbeing, it might be sort of psychological release from being in nature.**

**SOM9** Um.

**It could be something very practical so it could be about the crops that we get from there or the money that's generated by tourism.**

**SOM9** Or the fish farming or..

**Fish farming, all different things, so trying to, so it's a way of really trying to encapture all the different benefits we get from nature and I just wondered if it's something that ever comes into British Canoeing.**

**SOM9** Not, not current, it is, no.

**It's not, no.**

**SOM9** Not currently, erm, having said that, I'm pretty certain they would be supportive of that but it's not, it's not the primary focus of things. Might be worth you just having a quick look at their website, British Canoeing's website, just to get a broad, broad view of what we're doing.

**Yeah, sure. Yeah, that, it's helpful. Now, you know, having thought about a sense of place and what I'm getting a sense here is that all different types of watery spaces are important for your organisation, not just wetland, but whether it's the coast or whether it's a lake.**

**SOM9** Yeah.

**So if you like, it's the activity that drives where you end up going, not the place itself if you like.**

**SOM9** The place can be an important, you know, people don't like going along and, you know, because, because all you can see.

**Long straight paths, yeah, then it's..**

**SOM9** So there is, there is a lot, forgetting the, you know, hair and scare and things which just really enjoy the, the fun of the moment. The, the place can be a real attraction, you know.

**And again this project's also looking at mosquitoes, and mosquitoes, I don't know if you've managed to ask any of your members about whether they encounter mosquitoes because imagine if you're, you're canoeing in, you know, certain parts of the day.**

**SOM9** Certainly in Scotland it's a, it's a mega issue. [laughs]

**Oh okay, right. [laughs]**

**SOM9** Erm, it is a well known issue of mosquitoes and things like that.

**Yeah, other biting insects, yeah.**

**SOM9** In Scotland and it's a well-known pest in the sense and, you know, you can buy these sort of, you know, almost ultra-buggy type things that can stop, you can put over you.

**Oh I see, okay.**

**SOM9** To try and minimise them and obviously use chemicals and things like that but, but it, but for those who go round Scotland canoeing and things, it's.

**It can be, but from your experiences in England it's not been a problem?**

**SOM9** Didn't even know, didn't know about it.

**No, that's interesting, very interesting to know that isn't something that deters people from getting involved in canoeing or.**

**SOM9** It's, in general not, those who go, go to Scotland, it's, it's a big issue.

**Yeah, but not round here, and.**

**SOM9** I, but it's, I'm not aware of it which may show my ignorance but I'm not aware of it.

**Yeah, and so, because we're interested in mosquitoes for lots of different reasons but one of them is almost emblematic of climate change.**

**SOM9** Yeah.

**Is there something, has your organisation noticed anything which they think is attributable to climate change, has that?**

**SOM9** Er, I don't think so. Erm. I have to say I think it's only in the last two or three, virtually since the new CEO came in to British Canoeing that a lot more emphasis has gone on environmental policy and, and concerns and things like that. You know, has the environmental thing changed anything in terms of the water people go on? Probably not.

**Yeah. No, no changes of water quality or amount of water?**

**SOM9** Wouldn't, wouldn't, well there's always an argument about, you know, dry winter, wet winters and, and it's a perverse thing that canoeists who get wet aren't going to worry about it and it can get too exciting in places. I mean I've been upside on the River Exe in Exeter, you know, and it can, for me it got a bit too exciting, I don't do that these days, erm, but yes, there's worries about if there's not enough water in certain places, it's boring and whether it would be perceived as climate change per se I don't think so, it's more concerns about, erm, danger of weirs and things like rocks and things moving or artificial things put in the way, erm, because certain weirs are sort of killers and people have lost their lives and I don't, erm. If you look on YouTube and you look at some, mainly American things of rivers over low head dams and to see what can happen with a, with boats and things because they, they're develop, their, in their case they're developing techniques to rescue people, what happens is somebody goes over, capsizes, they're trapped and the water is circulating and you can't get out and you drown, unless you can pull out.

**Pull back, yeah.**

**SOM9** And there are different weir, different shaped weirs and things which you can escape from, you can't, that's more they, what people would worry about on the river flows and the people who know that area would be very concerned, but that's not going to be a, the wetland one is probably when the Somerset levels got flooded, that is clearly, [laughs] well there's either more water to paddle in and there will be wild, wildlife centres because you'll be going over somebody's field, and forgotten the name of the village, it's not too far from here, it's stand in for ah road, it all got flooded two or three years ago, is it Mich, Michitt or something like that?

**Yeah, I think that's a little bit further sound isn't it?**

**SOM9** I know but when the floods in this area, that became the highlight of focus and occasionally you see on the local TV somebody paddling along or rowing a boat and all sorts.

**That's when the canoeists come out in force to help people isn't it?**

**SOM9** Well yes, but that hopefully is limited.

**Yeah. So in terms of sort of, so in terms of biting insects, they're really not a problem and climate change.**

**SOM9** Well they've not been highlighted as a problem.

**They've not been highlighted, yeah, that's really positive, and I guess this also links back to ideas of health and wellbeing because I'm presuming that that's a big factor of what makes people get involved in canoeing or maybe not, maybe I'm making assumptions.**

**SOM9** It may be health and wellbeing but I don't think it's there, I think it's more the fun of exploring freedom or doing something exciting if it's in the exciting thing. Why do I do it? Well I can, I can store a canoe in my garage in my case, I can stick it with a bit of oomph on a car roof, as long as I know where I'm going, I can, can just go, sort of.

**Yeah. So it's the autonomy that you have from being a canoeist of choosing where you go and seeing landscapes the way you like to see them.**

**SOM9** Yeah, absolutely, yeah, and also compared to most other things, I'm not paying vast fees. For example, if I'm on an inland sailing club I would probably be paying between one and five hundred pounds a year to be a member of that club, mostly in, that's, where it is, that's where they sail, they don't go anywhere else in most, in most cases, erm, and that's, you know, or some money on top of boats which are more money than most canoes. Canoes, I don't have to pay that, I don't, pay forty, fifty quid to British Canoe, it gives me a licence for two thousand miles of thing, truth is I'll never go on, erm, [laughs] but.

**But it's about being able to have the choice.**

**SOM9** The flexibility, I can just go and do it and, and I can do it on there or.

**Would you ever though concede that as being part of your wellbeing, this agility?**

**SOM9** Nowadays I would, originally not, not perhaps, I think perceptions have changed. My wife's particularly keen on wellbeing and things and she also seems to want to keep me alive at the moment so. [laughs]

**She's a nice wife. [laughs]**

**SOM9** So, erm, it, I think it's come more the fore in terms of wellbeing and things and also nothing to do with British Canoeing per se but I've been, well it is really because REMOVED and disability has, over the last five years, widened in concept from someone in a wheelchair to mental health issues and, and all sorts of visual impairments and things, so things like wetlands, potentially for people with certain types of disabilities and usually you've got, so it actually could be a really good environment, for example if, I could imagine if somebody's got considerable visual impairment, you know, hearing birdsongs and, and things like that could be quite a, you know, a benefit.

**Yeah, a real, yeah, beneficial for their heath.**

**SOM9** Yeah, and also having dealt with quite severe mental difficulties, some people like just being on the water and it has to be nothing more than just floating around and, and I used, well I still see, there's a chap, he's now eighteen, this is more in sailing and he would go into the sailing boats in Bristol Harbour and he, in March, he'd trail his hand in the water and he just like the, the glistening of the things and he saw dolphins, crabs and you name it, the water of course but, sort of, and that was not only relaxation to him, it was also relaxation of mum and dad who would sit on the side and it just gave them a little bit of space, time in.

**That's interesting, yes, yes.**

**SOM9** In, so there is, I think.

**There's like a.**

**SOM9** An element of broader caring and in many respects the wetlands could be quite a good environment, stable, you're not going to get waves, you're not going to get things but you need a facility to be able to get somebody safely there, on and off a boat. I mean there are things like specialist, quite a few different things but one is called a cata, it's basically like a catamaran, very, very stable, you can get six people in and just paddle around, and paddle around with like two hearing impaired people and, and a learning disability person and myself and the hardest thing is the communication because the people at the front, if you scream often can't hear anyway, so.

**No, no.**

**SOM9** But they're all getting their different pleasure out of the environment and it, and it can, and it often is just I'm not stuck in my wheelchair, my thing, I'm, different space to explore, so I think there's actually a big bon, that could be the better pull, erm.

**Yeah, yeah. It's a relatively safe space for people to enjoy.**

**SOM9** So, I mean so there's people with disability, I mean amputees and things from the military who still want to go hiking off to Lundy Island and things and will do so with, you know, but.

**Yeah, but with others that maybe need a more general exposure into the landscape.**

**SOM9** Yeah, and it's not just them that's getting the benefit, it's their carer, stroke patients who can get a benefit because it can just give a little bit of a mental.

**Yeah, bit of a respite.**

**SOM9** Bit of a respite, so I think that's something that should be thought about.

**Yeah, oh that's great. My last little section of the interview is thinking about the way that your organisation views wetlands and also the way that you, the public perceives wetlands from your experience.**

**SOM9** Well, my ignorance, didn't know they existed for a start, or round here anyway. Erm, so I suspect there's a lot of people that don't know about them, erm. I suspect from the focus group, if you suddenly had a hundred people turning up there might be a, a negative reaction to it, erm, and it might be that you possibly need some form of attraction events, like come and explore nature, bring your canoe or, or, you know, Bloggs and Co have got them for hire or something, as a way of oh I didn't know that was here, erm. Against that you've probably got a community here that don't want loads of cars and people, whatever, erm, I think that's a balance that you're, and the only way it'll work is if both parties get a benefit out of it and, and constructively see the other one.

**Yeah, find some form of accommodation between them. But from your, you know, since we talked before about the wetlands, do you feel like you have now got a greater sense of where they are and?**

**SOM9** Well funnily enough I actually, I was toying with bringing my canoe down on my car today, I haven't but, erm, I actually looked at the Westhay site and it didn't tell me easily, it said like I get to a bird hide, it didn't tell me where I could go and safely launch a boat or where the water was, and okay, I'd have to drive there, park and.

Explore and either make a decision that oh dear it's not going to work or in my mind I'd be saying if I do launch it here am I going to upset somebody? [laughs]

**Yeah, yeah, having to be careful. When you, you know, since we've been talking about the wetlands, have you got a kind of, what conjures up in your mind when you think of wetlands? Because I'm really interested to know, because always used to be, you know, in historical literature, in fiction, very, certainly kind of depictions of wetlands in particular ways, and I'm interested to know whether that still is the case now, so does the term wetland conjure up a particular feeling or?**

**SOM9** I think, I think it conjured up to me initially marshy type grounds which might down, now if it's just marshy type grounds, it's of no interest to anybody in canoeing terms, you can't do anything. If I think of it broader, like the Broads which is dug out peat by the monks years ago, well clearly, you know, that's a very big area, lots of activity goes on, it self-funds itself incidentally on, erm, licenses and things for things, it doesn't need much support from like Government or anything else and I've no doubt there are issues with the Broads and things, and I pick up things from lot of meetings and things but my initial reaction was they're marshy grounds and things, where you wouldn't put a canoe anyway because it's, why would I paddle five feet just to go stuck on a mud bank? So with that, you know, with floating in like six inches of water, you, you still need to think well there's somewhere I could go, a little bit more space.

**Yeah, that's interesting, so your initial response is really these aren't the sorts of places where I'd be interested in going.**

**SOM9** Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, because it's trying to get, because of course the people who use wetlands now have very particular feelings about wetlands, they're used to, they're used to what they look like and…**

**SOM9** Well they've lived here, that's their life and they understand it.

**Exactly, exactly but it's capturing what it's like for people who don't know those landscapes and I'm getting a sense that they are an unknown if you like, they are an unknown territory that you may not be drawn towards.**

**SOM9** No, but I mean if you like this area, people will plop me on that and find millions to the south where some things, so do whatever they do, erm, they probably don't think of, I came to work, my wife went to the, the shop over, I didn't even know there was a, and then I wouldn't have gone and looked at it because if I look on Westhay site I can't actually see any pictures that says to me oh there's a, there's an expanse of water and I'm allowed to go on it, go on it.

**Yes, yes, because.**

**SOM9** All I can see is a thing that says the road up to is rutted, these, you know, parking, then you can walk down some sort of boardwalk or something and that's it, I mean we didn't look properly but.

**Okay, but that's what you found so, you know.**

**SOM9** Yeah.

**If you've looked and that's what you've found then, so it's interesting that maybe then the information if possibly scant and then possibly negative if it's to do with, you know, rutted roads and careful with your car when you, don't keep things in your car and.**

**SOM9** Yeah, because it says something like that drive down is not part of the nature reserve or something, it absolves itself of responsibility, erm. I, I don't know which, erm, County Council covers this area of Somerset, erm, is it Sedgemoor or something like that.

**I think it's Sedgemoor, yeah.**

**SOM9** Well I live in REMOVED so, which is different from Somerset, so. Maybe the County Council will have a, for example a sport stroke leisure department and maybe they ought to have a, more of an interest in, you know, access to some of these facilities for, you know, walking, you know, possibly sailing, I don't know, you know, I don't know, but the first thing is I look at it and I think I'm not certain, am I going to drive twenty or thirty miles to somewhere that? Because I only get like two or three hours free in a day at the moment and lots of other people only have.

**Pockets of time, yeah.**

**SOM9** I don't want to waste my time going somewhere that I don't, but, but the other side of it is that I think going to some of these areas, I'll take Langport and the River Parrett for example, there's a slip there that you can get in the River Parrett and quite a few canoes go there and you can paddle up and down the Parrett, you can drive there, put your boat in, come out, drive, you've put nothing into the local economy because you can't actually get easily at Langport and people are starting to think about that and it, even if it's something you use cafes and things, it's putting something back into the local economy and the place and if for example, I don't know, Westhay, there is something like a cafe or even if you have to pay for the loos, I think that's fair, fair enough, if you put something back in.

**Yeah. So I suppose that's the thing isn't it? If they are just going to continue as nature reserves and there's nothing wrong with that then they function at one level.**

**SOM9** Yeah.

**But if you want to encourage more people to use them for health and wellbeing, there might have to be another kind of infrastructure set up to support that.**

**SOM9** Doesn't have to be massive, doesn't have to be complex but all infrastructures costs and it, and it'll all come down.

**Yeah, well.**

**SOM9** You know, I don't know whether people get Lottery funding or x, you know, whatever their funding but I think there has to be a conscious decision to say we're going to make this a resource in the area and this is walking, fishing, canoeing, birdwatching, what, whatever, and it's a benefit to the community and ideally, because there's quite a few, erm, and they're not wetlands but where I used to live, REMOVED, there was a, a lot of gravel quarry that they converted into a nature reserve and they had a sailing club there, there's a cafe and then there's a little golf club and, you know, and fundamentally it became a nice place for people to go and, you know, spend a Sunday afternoon or.

**Yeah, I think that's it isn't it? It's I guess figuring out long term what it is that they want to do with these reserves and maybe, if they want to keep them as they are and not have those other types of user groups and then that's what they decide to do but if they do want to encourage other users.**

**SOM9** But it's also trying to encourage a revenue stream into the area and into maintaining but all needs maintain, you know, fair's fair these days, you can't expect everything for free. I know some people moan about, you know, everything, they clearly haven't lived in London and paid London car parking prices and things. I mean I read somewhere in Bristol that the road traffic's worse than London and I thought you clearly haven't been to London. [laughs] You haven't driven round the North Circular.

**No, although Bristol's always been bad for it's congestion, yeah.**

**SOM9** I know, but.

**But it's not like, yeah, it's not like London though.**

**SOM9** Yeah.

**No.**

**SOM9** You get stuck on the North Circular, or South Circular at times, you know.

**You're going to be there a long time, a long time.**

**SOM9** I've sat on the M25 for many hours.

**[laughs] Don't want to do it again. Okay, well that's been really helpful.**

**SOM9** Sorry, I've digressed a lot but hopefully you can get a bit out of it.

**No, it's helpful because, you know, I am very aware that, you know, these wetlands are not wetlands that you kind of currently use so it's helpful to see it from a different perspective about how it's seen by people who don't use the wetlands, so that's really helpful.**

**SOM9** Yeah, I think people who, forgetting canoeists, if I came to walk round them I'd want to know could I park my car or could, was there a loo, was there a cafe?

**Yes, yeah.**

**SOM9** You know.

**So thank you very much for your time, it's wonderful.**

**SOM9** Pleasure.

**Thank you and I can answer that there's no loos.**

**SOM9** There's?

**There aren't any toilets on either of the reserves.**

**SOM9** No.

**Yeah, it's very, very wild.**

**SOM9** Well shall we say fortunately canoeists are quite capable of dealing with. [laughs]

**Yes, well.**

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview 10 SOM10

**Yeah. So if you, thanks very much for taking the time to see me.**

**SOM10** Pleasure, pleasure.

**Yeah. So if you could give me a quick overview of your organisation and what you do in your organisation and, yeah, and really kind of how your organisation connects with the wetland spaces that we've been looking at which is Westhay Moor and Shapwick Heath.**

**SOM10** Okay, right. Well I work for Somerset Wildlife Trust, we're the biggest environmental charity in Somerset and we've been established since nineteen sixty four and we have about eighteen thousand members from quite a broad age range, although we do find that we have peaks of sort of younger members but also then sort of fifty five plus to that age group.

**Okay, so basically the two ends of the spectrum if you like?**

**SOM10** They do sit at the two ends, yeah, which is interesting. We'd like to get more in the middle but it's, we think it possibly is people get distracted by their families and their careers and things like that and so these things drop away a little bit but, but yeah, quite a broad, and it's, and it's going up too, which is encouraging.

**Yeah. And do you also have lifelong memberships, is that something that somebody could buy as a gift for someone?**

**SOM10** Yeah, I believe there is still that scheme and we're widening, we're going to, we're just developing a new corporate membership scheme at the moment and we have a new patron scheme as well where people that are, just want to be that little bit more involved and, and, but usually contribute that little bit more as well, so it's sort of a slightly different angle on it as well, erm, so it's quite healthy and encouraging, we're moving in the right direction and my role is REMOVED, so that involves me in all sorts of different things. I get involved in REMOVED mostly on levels and moors and the coastal areas, so I get involved in, in a little bit of REMOVED, that, that, that help achieve the objectives of the charity and.

**So you cover all kinds of landscapes actively in your role?**

**SOM10** I do, yeah, yeah, but, but mainly with levels and moors and coast but, but yes, I, I have to stray into Mendips and all sorts all the time so that's, that's great, lots of varied and I have to sort of liaise with all the local MPs and things like this as well. Last week I had to meet our local, one of our local MEPs, that was interesting as well. So that's, and I do a lot of sort of, REMOVED that are coming up.

**Okay. So do you feel like it's a nice two-way relationship then so that you're kind of helping the MPs, the MEPs and councillors to really understand environmental issues, and hopefully then, then that means that for the organisation you can get your shoe in and influence how things might be perceived in these things?**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, definitely. We, we, we're, aim to be the friendly organisation that they'll go to if they've got a, a question about some aspect of natural environment or what have you but, but, you know, of course the other way is that raises the environment in their, their awareness hopefully and, and the value of nature so that they contribute that whenever they're speaking in Somerset County Council or Parliament or what have you.

**Yeah. So would you say that in your role, your role is REMOVED advocacy, kind of communication at a governance level?**

**SOM10** Yeah, it's definitely more the advocacy at a governance level, though I do get to speak and, and give talks, talks and stuff on things like climate change to, to, to the public which is fantastic, so I get the whole, I get the whole range, so that's good, that's good.

**It's a diverse job then trying to do lots of different things all at the same time?**

**SOM10** Oh yes, but the thing is as the way the trusts are organised, the, the central national, national body does the main lobbying with the likes of DEFRA and, and we, we sort of contribute a, a Somerset flavour to it, erm, because the levels and moors, especially, are so unique in, in this country and the way they're managed and farmed and looked after, we feel that special flavour deserves a, a voice in Parliament or what have you, so, so we liaise closely with our local MPs on that.

**So I guess from what I'm hearing now, sort of the governance work you do would be with organisations in the local area, so it would be with IDBs and the local councils?**

**SOM10** Yeah, exactly, yeah, and the other, other NGOs, you know, other environmental organisations so we do a lot of work in partnership and collaboration with, with, with the RSPB especially and, and Natural England and the IDBs and the Environment Agencies and so on.

**Yeah. And what about, because for instance I know that the Owl Trust is round here and they own a portion of land as well don't they?**

**SOM10** [Yes], yeah.

**So.**

**SOM10** Yeah. So they're part of the Avalon Marshes partnership which is one of the bigger partnerships that we have going at the moment, which is what Westhay and Shapwick Heath are all part of and, and that's worked incredibly well, so that's been a great success.

**Great, wonderful. So it sounds like that there is this sort of really special identity around the marshes, so Avalon Marshes, if you were, they are, what different segments of land are connected? So it's definitely Westhay Moor and Shapwick Heath isn't it?**

**SOM10** Yeah, it's a big area, it's pretty much the whole of the Axe Brue, erm, not so much the Axe, but definitely the Brue Valley, which is quite a big area, so it goes beyond the Glastonbury area, right up, right up the Brue into all sort of Baltonsborough area and then right over to Highbridge so it's a big, big area which certainly encompasses Westhay and Shapwick, and, and our big reserves at Catcott as well, so all, all the main reserves in, in the Brue Valley.

**Because I bought these, I'm sure you have actually produced these maps or been involved with these maps but I bought them just.**

**SOM10** Okay.

**These were just for anytime to scribble on, if you ever need to explain to me something and I look very blank and you go, I mean it there Mary.**

**SOM10** Okay, yes, no worries.

**That's what I'm looking at, so that would be helpful.**

**SOM10** I mean Shapwick is Natural England so we don't have too much to do with that, although we know it well of course, erm, but our main focus for, you know, for your project is, is obviously Westhay.

**And then the Brue is up here and the Axe is down here isn't it?**

**SOM10** No, the Brue's down this part.

**Ah.**

**SOM10** It's actually south of, and, and the reams and stuff that connect up through Westhay feed down to the Brue down here. The Axe runs north of, of the Wedmore Island here which is here, so it snakes up through the back here and up and around, yeah. There's probably a bigger map here somewhere I could pinch for you actually. Hang on a minute I'll just see if I can grab one. Okay, as if by magic.

**As if by magic.**

**SOM10** So, so here's Westhay, so, so the Brue is this river here where it actually cuts up here.

**Oh yeah.**

**SOM10** Yeah, it snakes all the way up here and again going down here, and the Axe is off the map at the end, in this part. So it snakes up here. But where they go out to the sea is actually within about ten miles or so, it's quite small.

**Yeah. So it's not so far.**

**SOM10** It's not a huge area.

**No, no.**

**SOM10** No, but you get an idea of the scale of the Avalon Marshes area, you know, because the coast is just here really.

**Yeah, there. So how many orchestrations are part of the partnership?**

**SOM10** Well the full partnership is, is quite, is quite big, so we've got, over on the back, we've got RSPB, Hawk and Owl, Natural England, us, also South West Heritage Trust who are like the archaeologists that we work with, and the Environment Agency and English Heritage, so it's quite a big partnership. The key members are, are the environmental NGOs.

**Because these are, I guess the more active ones that you're, yeah.**

**SOM10** Yeah. And we're the ones that own the land as well. South West Heritage Trust don't, don't own much land, they've little bits and bobs as, as far as I can tell.

**So would you say that say for instance when you're working with your partners, that there is a two way information that works between the different organisations or is there hierarchy there? You know, RSPB are the bird specialists so you go and refer to them about bird related activities, or, you know, how does it, how is it possible to make this partnership work? Is it a really difficult thing to do?**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, it's, it's the name of the game really, I mean environmental, or any sort of charitable wellbeing, so, so it's just a matter of really getting on with each other, there's no real hierarchy as such. So although we know that RSPB will, will know more about birds than probably anybody, that, you, we, you know, our experts on the ground and our wardens and stuff are pretty good, so, so we don't need to actually have to bother them too much, you know, if there's a specific, if there's like a really rare bird has moved into the area, it doesn't happen sometimes, or, or a new species moves in, into a particular reserve that we don't know much about, you know, we'll, we'll communicate amongst ourselves partly to protect it as well so that you don't get a, a flood of people coming to see a rare, rare creature.

**Because how do you manage to agree on kind of the common visual for the marshes because obviously each organisation is going to have a particular perspective on how it should be managed and it's trying to come up with some sort of, I guess, collective approach.**

**SOM10** Yeah, that's basically done by the, by the steering group, so there's an Avalon Marshes steering group that meets regularly and they set the direction for the, for the, for the partnership, which I haven't been involved in to this, to, to, till now but who knows in the future.

**Yeah. So there's a kind of operational and then a strategic element and there's been flow between each other?**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, I mean the operational, the, the strategic stuff is all being assessed as we speak in fact because the main National Lottery funding finished last year, so we're at the stage of looking at where we go now, like what's going to be the next chapter, so it's quite an exciting time.

**Yeah, because that's, did that fund the first?**

**SOM10** Yeah, five, six years of the project so, so yeah, it, just make sure we capitalise on the success.

**Yeah, that's exciting.**

**SOM10** It is, yeah, I know.

**Now the, it seems that, because I'm asking, I'm speaking to lots of different organisations who interface with the wetlands. One of my questions is how do you use these wetland spaces, which is a strange question when in some respects you're involved with managing the wetland spaces but could you discern a way that you use them as well as managing them? I mean.**

**SOM10** Yeah, I mean we're, the approach, we look at and the other organisations are the same is, is looking at the landscape scale. We're, we're very conscious that, that our nature reserves are little islands of good habitat but for nature to turn the corner and actually to recover, erm, in Somerset and in the country we, we need to connect these, these, these areas up and to make sure that, that, that nature can move around the landscape, can, can thrive and can, can spread rather than, rather than struggle and decline as it's been doing the last hundred years or so, erm, so we look at it in as big a scale as we can manage really. Yeah, and just looking to, for ways of working with farmers and working with other landowners to make this happen, so it's landscape approach is what we've been doing for, for many years now, and are starting to get the hang of. [laughs]

**Because the farmer that I talked to before had said something interesting to me that.**

**SOM10** Ooh excellent, they do, do say interesting things sometimes, yeah.

**They do say interesting things, that a lot of the land around here that's farmed is owned by female farmers.**

**SOM10** That's an interesting thing to say.

**It is an interesting thing to say.**

**SOM10** Okay.

**And I just wondered if that was, so I suppose what this particular person was saying was that there may have been, there may be a particular perspective towards the landscape based on the fact that it's mainly female owners?**

**SOM10** Who knows? Could well be.

**But would you say from your experience of dealing with farmers that that is something that you as an organisation have experienced or?**

**SOM10** It's never something I've come across but it's fascinating, and I love, I love the idea that that could be true and it might well be but I've got no evidence to prove it one way or the other. What I can say is that, I mean certainly from the environmental NGOs perspective, the majority of people that work, certainly in Somerset Wildlife Trust are women, erm, you know, that, that, at some of the most senior positions, so that's an interesting, whole different area of discussion and probably a research project for the future.

**Yeah, well exactly, itself, yeah.**

**SOM10** And it's, yeah, something in my career that I usually work in organisations that tend to be more women than men as well, and my wife has the opposite so it's quite interesting.

**This is it isn't it, you know.**

**SOM10** She's been in computers so, you know, it's more a male dominated industry so.

**Yeah, you've gone into more sort of, yeah.**

**SOM10** Yeah, more touchy-feely maybe, I don't know.

**But that was, Yeah. So I mean, so from that person's perspective she'd said there's a lot of kind of I guess custodial approach, to not only working with you but also managing the land and enjoying the land.**

**SOM10** Right.

**So I wondered how, you know, your organisation members do that balance between knowing how and managing this landscape but also getting, from it themselves, you know, that everyday experiences with it.**

**SOM10** There's a lot of, a lot of farmers that have been on it for, for generations, and generation and generation, but that's particular different for other parts of the country but, but there is a real sense of their stewardship and I think there always has been, and that, and that's fantastic and, and you get farmers of all sorts of course but, but many of them realise that, that nature and farming will always have to go together hand in hand, and you can't have one without the other. And they do have a special bond with, with this landscape, because it is pretty special, and not just because we're close to Glastonbury, those…

**No, true. You know, the fact that it's always been a very managed landscape.**

**SOM10** Exactly, yeah.

**You know, it's, I suppose that's a balance isn't it between these, having this landscape view of this area which is, it's a highly managed and governance landscape?**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**And so that brings its own sets of expectations.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**In terms of people coming to visit a landscape and expecting it to look a particular way and then, how much do you fulfil that kind of external perspective on what it should look like, and then what your own organisation's desires are for what you think it should look like.**

**SOM10** Ah well yeah, now you're getting to the crunch of it really. It is interesting, I mean we're the new boys in town obviously, you know, we've only sort of started moving in here and, and looking after land for the last forty, fifty years but as opposed to, you know, two thousand years ago when the Romans came, but because most of these areas were developed because of the peat workings, it's gone through that transition and because after the peat was dug there aren't too much options for the land, you know, it's either going to be a fishing lake or it's going, it's going to be a nature reserve in a way, but then yes we manage it for the wildlife but also we, we're always looking to the future and looking for how the land could be managed for wildlife but also for climate change and bringing in, in issues like that as well and looking for what's, what is the best way to actually manage it, you know, and what are we trying to achieve above and over and above just nature? Erm, so all sort of other issues like that come into play and issues around potential rewilding aspects and things like this about introduction of different species, erm, and working with nature the whole time is obviously our big thing so we're not trying to battle it, we're not just trying to control it, or, or, over manage something, erm, which, you know, you'll often find in a lot of the farmland round here as well, it's not, it's not intensively managed and it doesn't seem to be, you know, you, but there are various controls over it, especially for the areas who are doing, in SSSI areas and what have you, you know, you've got to be very careful about what you can do to the land but, but yeah, it's, it's not East Anglia, it's.

**Yeah, you don't have these sort of agri farms.**

**SOM10** No.

**Sitting around abutting you.**

**SOM10** No, quite, it's lots of little.

**Hemming you in, yes.**

**SOM10** Yeah, lots of little, little land holdings and smaller land holdings and.

**Yeah. And I get the sense there's lots of family land holdings as well.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah.

**And so you get this kind of patchwork of care, of ownership sitting in the Levels.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**Which give it a very unique feeling indeed.**

**SOM10** It does, and that's partly history, partly climate, partly all sorts of different things, but it, yeah.

**Yeah, but I liked when you said, you know, you're managing it for the wildlife, you know, that is then the focus, the focus is it's wildlife first.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah.

**And driven by that, not driven by tourism for example.**

**SOM10** No.

**But tourism might work alongside it.**

**SOM10** It's, yeah, exactly.

**But it's not there for people to come and view as the main focus, the main focus is for the wildlife.**

**SOM10** Yeah, it certainly is for us, yeah, yeah. But also, you know, a lot of our land is farmed as well and things like this, you know, especially because we own land, you know, around Tealham and Tadham which is, we have graziers on it, but that, that, you know, get a, get a crop and a, and a product from it, erm, but no, it's, yeah.

**Interesting. So I had asked whether there were areas of any particular, when you're sort of dealing with this particular landscape, the areas of main, I guess I talked before about benefits and disbenefits but more about sort of the areas which you're really focusing on that you really want to develop, enhance, protect in your organisation, whatever terminology you wish to use, what's I guess the sort of, you know, the driving force for the next few years that you want to achieve on this particular site?**

**SOM10** Yeah, okay. Well one of the, one of the things we're always looking to try to establish, especially on an area like Westhay is to move us, to get a, to say a near, natural hydrology, you know, movement of, and, and the amount of water is, is, is a bit of a, a bit bonkers is such a managed land but trying to get to a, get to a situation where the water and stuff is working in a more, in a more natural way and not, not moved around by us, if, if we can, so, so that's.

**Yeah. Which is I guess in opposition to what maybe the IDBs want to do?**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, they have a much different, their background obviously is, is their, their, their supporting and management from other farmers and so on so their, their main ethos, although they're part of the IDB as well, you know, the access but their, their ethos for the areas is, is thinking farming first, … off the land, whereas our, yeah, our, our perception is slightly different.

**Yeah. And does that mean that even excepting when there's a possibility that by enabling natural hydrology you have to then accept the good with the bad? So for instance not just flooding issues but if you had a period of drought.**

**SOM10** Um.

**Also accepting that too as a possible factor that you would have to?**

**SOM10** Well, yeah, I don't, drought is tricky, I mean, yeah, for, for flooding areas, you know, this, this is a natural, this is a store already of, of floodwater and what have you, which works really well, but, but, but in the summer we were, we do try and keep it as wet as we can because, yeah, if there was to be a drought it, I mean it, for this to completely dry out, you know, it would be a drought that would make, you know, nineteen seventy six look like a, a rainy day, erm, but, erm, but yeah, we have to keep it a certain amount of wetness otherwise the, the reed habits and so on would, would, would suffer.

**Yeah. So I'm guessing that means that there is actually a sort of margin of how natural it could be?**

**SOM10** Um.

**You know, given that as you said, you know, thinking about climate change, we're not actually sure where the parameters are anymore because everything's shifting.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, I know, everything is getting so, so, so interesting right now. Erm, I mean, you know, if, if we were to face really, really bad drought conditions the, but the other scare of course, not only damage to wildlife would be the, the drying out of the peat, which we just cannot allow, you know, because then it, once it dries out, it, it, it blows away and you lose more carbon and. [laughs]

**Yeah. And that's it, well exactly, yes.**

**SOM10** We'd be in a worse state, so yeah, it is, it is worrying, it is a big worry, and then summer floods are always the farmer's worst enemy, they're always really worried about the summer floods because that's when the grass is growing the fastest and can be damaged really quickly if the water's on the land for more than a couple of weeks or so, so, so yeah, it's, you know.

**It's trying to balance it all out isn't it?**

**SOM10** That's, it's all about the balance, yeah, but we talk about resilience issues as well, so we try to look ahead with climate change, its, one of the projects we're working on this year is to try to plan working with other organisations to look at what climate change will, will, will bring us, and what our current infrastructure is like in the whole of the Somerset Levels, and, and how resilient that will be in five or ten or fifteen, twenty years, and so that we can assess okay, what we need to do, to stay more joined up and more smart about what we do.

**Yeah. Do you have like a benchmarking wetlands that you look to that, as you would say, well look, you know, they've actually managed to get the perfect balance right, or is it that this is such a unique area that it's impossible to do that?**

**SOM10** It's kind of impossible in a way. [laughs] I mean we'd say West, Westhay, yeah, Westhay's the, Westhay's the best, most unique place, but you know, but everywhere is really different, you know, there's some wonderful wetland sites over in East Anglia but they're just, they are just different really, you know, and each one has different species and different, different habitats, slightly different habitats and stuff, different sorts of peat and all sorts of things like that, so yeah, there's no, there's no one idol or, or guide that we're looking to really, yeah.

**No, well I mean that kind of takes me onto this next part of the interview which is about a sense of place and I'm really getting from what you're saying that this is, just this area, is unique, you know, it's not comparable, although there are factors which are, you know, comparable across different types of wetland spaces that they're still not the same.**

**SOM10** Um.

**So the way that you, not just the wetland itself but also the different people and organisations that are inhabiting the space.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**It makes it very special.**

**SOM10** It does, yeah, and, and the archaeology as well, the history, you know, things like the Sweet Track, you know, possibly the oldest trackway in the world, you know, that's just fantastic.

**Yeah. It is phenomenal isn't it?**

**SOM10** So we're incredible proud of these things, you know, and it all just adds to the mosaic of interest that we have here.

**Yeah. And have you found since the time that you've been here that all these different things that are pulling together that you're doing to kind of showcase how wonderful this area is, is pulling in more people to come and visit?**

**SOM10** Yeah, definitely.

**That they are using the internet to find out more about this area and are interested to come and find out and?**

**SOM10** Yeah, definitely. We, we're noticing a few little companies starting up that are starting to look at more specialised tourism and bringing people in to look at this, you know, the hidden Somerset in other words.

**Oh that's interesting.**

**SOM10** Which is, which is good, which is good, so yeah it is encouraging and I've, I've been lucky enough as well, like some of the other farmers you've spoken to, to have always grown up round here, so you know, I knew what it was like in the seventies and moving on, where, where these were only still baby new reserves and no-one really knew about them, and, and there was still a lot more peat digging going on and so nature was in a, was, was seriously under threat really, [laughs] you know, it wasn't been, wasn't been looked after, and so I've seen that transition over the last forty years which is, which is fun and encouraging.

**And I think, you know, I think it's interesting that I think environmental organisations now have an equal say and an equal role, you really had to fight your corner.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**Even as recently as twenty years ago.**

**SOM10** Um.

**To have a voice and not been seen as something which was just kind of green and geeky.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**And didn't understand how economics worked.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, well very much.

**Because now it's different which is saying, this is the big economic driver for the area.**

**SOM10** Definitely, I don't know about twenty years ago, a lot more recently. Yeah, we constantly have to, have to push that and, and remind people the value of things. The whole, some, from the 25 Year Environment Plan which was, was, was really exciting this year when that was launched because it, it really showed that the Government has finally listened and heard what we've been saying for many years and, and that things like Natural Capital are so, so important and that, you know, it's not just a, you know, that peat isn't just a, a black spongy stuff that makes rhododendrons grow well, you know, it's vital in so many different ways and it, the current, I mean before did have no value rather than, other than what you could get, you know, bagging it up and selling it to a garden centre, but, it's very, very important stuff. [laughs] It does a good job and, and so issues like that are really, are really exciting, so it's encouraging.

**Yeah. And what do you think's been the turnaround between it, that message finally clicking in, you know?**

**SOM10** Oh that's a good question. I mean hopefully it's the lobbying and stuff that we've been doing for, for decades but it has taken time. I mean the influence of, of committees like Natural Capital Committee REMOVED, have, have been really useful, but I think probably it's just the chip, chip, chip away from all the different organisations. They've got a lot more organised recently, the Greener UK organisation that's a collaboration of all the main NGOs, environmental NGOs, I think has been very successful. To have that unified lobbying voice in Parliament bringing together all those memberships has been brilliant, so they can say look, we've got six million members in the country, you're going to listen to us now aren't you? And they're going, oh right, yeah, fair enough.

**Yeah, that's six million potential voters isn't it?**

**SOM10** Yeah, exactly.

**Who are active voters.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**That's the other thing, yeah.**

**SOM10** Okay, Yeah. So that, that, that's, that's good, it's smart, it's the way to do it.

**Yeah, strength in numbers isn't it?**

**SOM10** Yeah, and we're trying to do the same thing locally so there's a South West Greener UK branch which is just developing now. It will be interesting to see how they can do the same thing at a more local level.

**Yeah. And the challenge is always funding isn't it, you know?**

**SOM10** Oh yeah, yeah.

**Having, because people can only give so much time if they're already involved in lots of different activities, so it's.**

**SOM10** Yeah, definitely, well it's always our, and then especially since Brexit vote is, is, is our concern as to what replaces the COP which, you know, has its faults of, of course, and we're not going to miss it that much but, [laughs] but we have to see how the whole agri-environment schemes are going to pan out and, and it's looking fairly encouraging at the moment but you just never know what's going to come out the end of the door from Parliament, so.

**Yeah, because what would be the worst case scenario for your organisation say?**

**SOM10** Oh well probably the worst case scenario would be to go to a completely market-driven New Zealand-style approach where everyone's just at the mercy of the market and, you know, there's no subsidies, there's no encouragement to, and, and you know, it's over to you, good luck, erm. I mean that would at a stroke take away big chunks of our funding so we would have to, we'd have to rely on the grants we apply for and our members which, erm, you know, probably account for fifty or sixty percent of our funding but we still have to fill a, fill a big shortfall.

**Still, still very precarious isn't it?**

**SOM10** Oh yeah, yeah.

**And then I guess it kind of prevents that long-term planning that you need to do?**

**SOM10** Oh yeah, for sure. Well it, it'd be devastating on many fronts because it would, it would not only, yeah, but, really, really affect our short-term, erm, you know, bottom line, it would throw into that all sorts of programmes and initiatives and, and, and any chance of turning nature's recovery around really, we would have no chance really of, of making a difference, we, we'd be just, we would just have to hang on and look after reserves we could afford to look after still, and, and, and hunker down because there'd be no scope to do anything else, which would be to a detriment of nature and, and the environment, erm, so, yeah, that feels a bit scary.

**Hopefully that wouldn't happen, I mean.**

**SOM10** Let's hope not. [laughs]

**Yeah. Do you think, because one of the things that the project uses a lot is an acceptance that the use of the term ecosystem services is a useful one and I wonder from your organisation's perspectives whether that has been useful or whether other terminology is more useful in terms of kind of helping both the public and governance agencies understand that idea of Natural Capital so.**

**SOM10** Um, I think we have to, we've still got work to do to make people understand it, I don't think ecosystem services or public, goods for public are, are, you know, public services mean anything to the public at all still. I think there's a lot of work still to do. I'm not quite sure what the answer is yet, I think if I did, I'd start to write a book and, bring in our income that way, but.

**Yeah, but do you think, from your organisation's perspective, is it a useful term, does it help in terms of when you're, well, trying to build a case for something, whether it's applying for funding or for lobbying?**

**SOM10** It depends who we're talking to, you know, and, and MPs local to here, they understand that sort of, those sort of, those sort of words now which is great, but, but the public don't, and so you, you can't just throw it in there to a presentation without really giving some background to it still. It hasn't, it's not mainstream yet by any stretch. I think we still need to do some work around showing some really, really clear case studies and examples and just try to find something that really catches their, catches their imagination and makes it as clear as possible, and, and I don't know, maybe something like the Steart Peninsula is another good example of course of Natural Capital being used and, and then ecosystem services to help protect against flooding and so on, but even, but even there I think people would struggle. So I, if I give a talk, if I'm speaking to the public I just try to simplify it as, just to make it as straightforward as possible. Things like the peat is a good one because people can see, you can sort of, you, you know, from people's own examples, just driving around, if you see a pile of peat, like next door here, I mean it starts to dry out, it starts to, you, you can, it starts to get dusty and you see the sort of, the wind pick it up and, and blow it away, you can quite easily explain well that, yeah, there's a lot of carbon locked up in there, and when that blows away it basically is released back into the atmosphere.

**Which is the last thing that we want, yeah.**

**SOM10** Which is, which is, you know, which is health, yes, there's a problem, so.

**So it's really making sort of something tangible and real?**

**SOM10** Definitely, yeah.

**And for you it's important for the public because they form such a large part of your membership or because of generally educating people about that connection.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**Of different cycles and systems in our environment.**

**SOM10** Yeah, it's getting that balance right. We, we introduce these things in a magazine a lot and that's changed a lot over the last year or two, become a lot more scientific in a way but, but, but just not being too, you know, oh here's a cuddly dormouse, isn't it cute? You know, it's, you know, a little more hard-hitting in a way but with still really good images and so on and we're, we're thinking that works well, but it's always hard to tell what, you know, getting that, that hard information about what people are understanding, what, what they, what they make a connection to, what they link to, what they find digestible in a, in an argument or debate.

**Yeah, because that's it, because you don't want to kind of alienate them and disconnect them from.**

**SOM10** No.

**The different information you're giving out but neither do you want them to feel as if they're being talked down to or?**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, and, and the Avalon Marshes itself is still quite a new concept, it's being going six or seven years but, even you chat to people around the outside, they'll probably just know, they might have heard the name but, and they might have heard of one of two of the reserves but they probably won't have a real idea of the partnership and, and, and so on, which is fine as long as they know it's vaguely there and doing a good thing, but, yeah. People are busy, it's a tricky, tricky, tricky balance.

**That's it. It is, it is hard trying to kind of get that information across.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**When people as you said already have busy lives, but I think, you know, as things build momentum.**

**SOM10** Definitely.

**It's critical mass isn't it, you know?**

**SOM10** Definitely, yeah, definitely, and just making those connections to the communities around the outside of the, Avalon Marshes, because of course there's not that many people live in the, in the area itself so, so we sort of look to the Glastonburys and the Streets and the Wedmores and the Highbridges and Wells to, to, to make those connections.

**So for you would you say that there, that access to the reserves are possibly the thing that holds people back from visiting.**

**SOM10** Um, possibly.

**Or is it to do with interest levels? I mean is it education or is it access, is it time, you know, what are the?**

**SOM10** It's a bit of everything, I mean you know, in an ideal world if someone was to, you know, drop ten million pounds into the Trust's lap it'd be fantastic to have a wonderful proper visitors centre here and a proper, not too national parky but a bit like the American National Park system where you've got a nice visitor centre which has got loads of good quality information, you know, rangers on hand so people can come to get their bearings, learn about the, the place and then go out and see it and, and, and we just don't really have that. There's still some work to be done here at the Avalon Marshes centres, erm, because it's not, it's not ideal, you know, because of.

**Yeah. You want to make it a destination place rather than a place you might stop on the way to somewhere else?**

**SOM10** We do, we do, but subtly and not in big numbers, there's always that's balance still, you know, we, we never want to have millions of people turning up here because then it would destroy what we're trying to protect, so it's always that balance but, but definitely more and, and, yeah, staying for longer and, and really getting, getting to know it.

**And maybe, yeah, grappling with the concepts a bit more rather than coming for a cup of tea and walking on the boardwalk and going away again.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, exactly, oh look there's a pretty bird and, where, where's next? Oh let's go to Glastonbury, yeah, it's trying to, yeah, help them to see the value of a place as well, it's just, yeah, what it's doing and.

**Because when you have, when you interact with people that come and visit here, do they really understand this as a wetland, I mean what do you think is the?**

**SOM10** Well some will, some won't, yeah, it depends if they're passing through, probably not too much, there'll just see it as a low lying bit of marshy area that's got a few nice pretty birds but they won't see the connections in the fact that it's a managed landscape.

**Yeah, because they will see it as a natural landscape?**

**SOM10** Yes, often, yes, yes, yeah but then if you get the, the regular people obviously they've, you know, the regular volunteers and the people that live nearby that come here a lot, you know, the birdwatchers and stuff that will sit out in a hide all day long with their sandwiches and a, a flask of tea, you know, they'll, they'll know.

**Yeah. Because when, in your, I haven't, you know, haven't kind of worked through this piece of communication but how many times is the word wetland, do you think, brought up here or is it mainly, when we talk about, you know?**

**SOM10** That's a good question, yeah, not a lot initially, it's true, I mean when we talk to people from the Trust perspective it, you know, they've, it's usually Levels and Moors but we usually say, yes, it's, it's a wetland, it's not, you know. But I don't know if, if people are starting to get a little concerned about, yeah, flooding issues and, and, and that story, and maybe that's part of the reason.

**Okay. So it might be easier to talk about a moor or a marsh than it is to talk about a wetland?**

**SOM10** It might be partly that. [laughs]

**Because the wetness of a wetland?**

**SOM10** Yeah, could be, but I wasn't involved in creating its leaflets so I couldn't possibly say, but.

**No, it's interesting to me about whether a wetland is something that draws people in or whether it's something that actually like you said, might already have some connotations that?**

**SOM10** Yeah, I mean to the locals they'd say oh it's just a moor isn't it? You know, it's just, just the moors, and the word wetland probably isn't used too much by locals even, it's interesting. Probably because it was, it's been managed for so long and farmed for so long and, and because these nature reserves are fairly new, it hasn't really moved into that, into that vernacular locally yet.

**Okay. Well that's interesting to know.**

**SOM10** Because of course, you know, forty years ago when none of these were here and it would be, would only have been a, a mixture of farming and peat digging, well yes, there are ditches but that's just to drain the moor isn't it, you know, there's no, because there wouldn't have been these big areas of open water so much and stuff so they wouldn't have considered it maybe like that, wouldn't have put it in the same way as the Norfolk Broads or something like that.

**Yes, because if you like the water's never been particularly visible.**

**SOM10** No, no.

**If you like it sits in the soil whereas the Norfolk Broads it is very visible.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah.

**Because of the way they've managed that landscape over time.**

**SOM10** That's right, yeah, and we've always had flooding of course, I mean that's been a way of life, even though it's been managed, erm, but yeah, it's never been seen as a, the flooding was always a fact of life but it was never seen as a, any, in any way a positive thing particularly.

**Yeah. So when you are kind of communicating about the reserves here are you focused more on the wildlife that sits here or you focus more on the fact that it is a managed reclaimed landscape? Because I'm trying to get a sense of, when we think about a sense of place for here.**

**SOM10** Um.

**For the Avalon Marshes, what is it that's driving the sense of place? Is it the wildlife or is it the landscape itself?**

**SOM10** Well, well you would probably focus on the wildlife first but we'd also focus very much on the landscape. Only, only over the last sort of three or four years you've moved that way, but, but partly because of the Avalon Marshes, looking at things in a bigger, more joined-up manner which I think helps, erm, and I think it helps to bring people in from, with different interests as well, so that's not a bad thing but nature is our main thing and our main focus but, but things like climate change are, are becoming more of an interest as well which is part of my role which is quite good.

**Did the, when you have people that are actually coming to visit and walk around, I know you probably, because you're not a ranger and you're not on the ground you don't get but I'm sure you get a sense of it, but do you get people that live close to here, so do the local villagers, do they actually come and use these reserves or would you say it's specialist users, people who are birders or walkers?**

**SOM10** Yeah, it tends to be more, more yeah, people for interest, erm, so yeah, you're, I mean, yeah, many people that live round Westhay and Wedmore and stuff, yeah, would never actually come to a reserve, erm, and that's, a bit of a shame but, you know, it's, but it's fine, you know, but.

**Yeah, but it's not so unusual because I think sometimes people have a sense of a place for a location that they don't necessarily live in, you know?**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**Somewhere that's special to them that they go and visit that means something to them, that doesn't necessarily mean it's on their doorstep, you know?**

**SOM10** No, no.

**I think it just depends on, it depends on where you live and what you like to do and how you like to frame things, yeah.**

**SOM10** Yeah, and, and big, big incidents and events like the flooding of thirteen, fourteen obviously raised it all and I imagine a lot of people maybe and maybe some old, old folk, you know, a bit surprised by how much attention and, oh okay, you know, and wow this, oh yeah, it's only just down the road isn't it, and.

**Does that make people feel, do you think more warmly towards reserves if they could actually see them doing something functional or do you think it made them feel vulnerable that there was?**

**SOM10** Ah, it depends who you ask again, you see, because at, at one point there was a concern that the reserves, and especially like the raised water level areas, were contributing to the flooding and actually made a situation worse, and that managing the land partly for, more for nature than farming was actually causing more problems and they did some early work soon after the floods, erm, by, I forget who did it, the Environment Agency or something, that quickly proved that was not true at all thankfully. [laughs]

**Yeah, phew.**

**SOM10** So we would have clearly, but of course things stick, you know, and, and you'll always get some people that, that, yeah, they're going to accuse nature of, you know, just.

**Quite steadfast in their views?**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, exactly, and you're always going to get that but.

**Another aspect of the wetland life project is thinking about health and wellbeing and trying to encourage people to use wetlands for their health and wellbeing so I wondered is wellbeing or more particularly human health and wellbeing a declared component of your organisation activities and it may not be if you're, if wildlife is.**

**SOM10** No, no, it definitely is.

**It is, okay.**

**SOM10** And even, we have a Health and Wellbeing Manager.

**Okay, wonderful.**

**SOM10** And he was one of the, one of the speeches at the launch of the Festival of Nature last Friday, was, was, and, and from him and from the Somerset County Council and the Head of, Head of Public Health, erm, spoke as well on just that thing. Yeah, we see that as a really, really vital component of what we're trying to do here, erm, because, you know, it's been proved now with various, you know, surveys and so on that, that it, it's incredibly encouraging for, for people's health so.

**Yeah. So does that mean, does your organisation then have a certain kind of defined way of depicting what wellbeing is? Because different organisations have a different way of doing wellbeing, so what would you say that yours?**

**SOM10** Oh wow, you're probably asking the wrong person, REMOVED would give you a really good answer on this one, but, but yeah, I mean we, we see it as, as yet another huge benefit of, of having a, a, a good natural environment basically, but of course the spin-offs are it gets more people involved in us and coming to the reserves and enjoying it and, and taking part and, and hopefully supporting what we're trying to do, so, you know, it's a win, win, win type thing but, but, erm, but no, we, yeah, we see it just as, as an essential component for, for everybody just to try to get some, if it's only ten minutes walking under a tree, you know, park in the middle of a city to try to get some dose of nature.

**Yeah, because that lovely sort of dose of nature idea, I mean I like the way that it links with therapeutic landscapes.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**That it gives something that other types of experiences do not give you.**

**SOM10** Um.

**You know, you can go to the gym and, you know, build your muscle tone and that helps with your metabolism but there's something about being in nature which is different isn't it so?**

**SOM10** Yeah, it definitely, well it's primeval, you know, it's, the whole of human's history and pre-history, you know, for ninety nine percent of it, we were all living outside or in huts or something, so it's just natural for us to be outside and so our whole biology and, and ecology and everything is, is tuned to, to being outside, erm, so it's, it's no surprise really, it makes us feel relaxed and safe and, and so on.

**Yeah, all the good things.**

**SOM10** All the good things really, yeah.

**And so, you know, we think about human wellbeing, so what about sort of non-human wellbeing so, but I'm presuming that that is an imbedded part of your organisation because you've always said wildlife first, so it's.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, definitely, it's one of our main strategic pillars.

**Yeah, that's it, yeah.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**So that, giving them a good habitat.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**Increasing numbers, making those kind of mosaics where different biodiversity corridors can kind of connect together.**

**SOM10** Yeah, exactly, and one of our big projects that we've, that we champion on in Somerset is the Ecological Network Scheme which has been joining up and has been mapping the whole of Somerset as much as they can to, to show areas of good habitat and, and these sort of core areas but also these stepping stones and, and ways to connect, because we see that as, as the future, erm, linked to the 25 Year Environment Plan. If we're going to turn natures fortunes around we have to know where nature is now and where it could potentially be before we can, you know, try to bring it back, so it, these sort of networks and stuff are absolutely vital.

**Yeah. So a big component of it then is that idea of, yeah, evidencing what is there now.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**So you can think about what goes on.**

**SOM10** Yeah, exactly.

**And these partnerships are vital for it I'm presuming?**

**SOM10** Yeah, definitely.

**So you can't do it on your own and it wouldn't work.**

**SOM10** Well exactly, and that's, we, and we've had good partnerships with the local authorities as well, which is key, so when it comes to planning issues and what have you, we've been imbedding ecological network thinking with them for years now, so we're quite far advanced on other, of other counties to make sure that they consider that, so you know, for planning of, I don't know, a new railway, motorway junction or a massive great business park or something like that, then that decides and is consider for, so at the moment and mitigation aspects and so on, so that's a, that's a big aspect of what we do.

**Yeah. So that's a lot of sort of skills exchange isn't it?**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah.

**And then presumably your organisation also gets skills back because you're learning how the planning system works or you're learning how?**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**Infrastructural planning works and, yeah.**

**SOM10** Yeah, exactly, and we, we start to form more connections with other organisations like Local Enterprise Partnerships and that, and Chambers of Commerce and things like that are really important and again it, it means we can communicate issues like Natural Capital and ecosystem services to new audiences that probably hadn't thought of it before and, you know, beyond just the tourism aspects but, you know, I mean agriculture and, and all other aspects, you know, if you're moving a, moving to a new office in Bridgewater say, you know, part of the reason might well be people see this area as a nice place to live because of its nature and so on, because of what, other things that they can enjoy, so.

**Yeah, that all makes perfect sense.**

**SOM10** It all connects.

**It all connects, it's all connected.**

**SOM10** Yeah, it's all important.

**And talking of which I now smoothly move on to asking about mosquitoes. [laughs]**

**SOM10** Mosquito. [laughs] Bless them.

**I'm presuming that your organisation is very supportive of mosquitos for obvious reasons.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, key part of the whole ecosystem.

**Yes. So on this site is biting insects generally, is that a nuisance factor on the wetland sites or is it something that's kind of low level?**

**SOM10** They don't. Yeah, it's pretty low level. The, the, and it's, and I'm not, you know, this is speaking from no scientific background whatsoever but, you know, when I was a, when I was a youngster I remember mosquitos being more of a problem, which is interesting, back in the seventies or so. These days, over the last sort of ten to fifteen years, I can't remember the last time I got bitten by a mosquito. [laughs]

**Wow.**

**SOM10** I really can't, and I'm, and I'm really susceptible, you know, my wife's the one that they never touch and they come straight to me, and I cannot remember, horseflies, yes but mosquitos.

**That's often the way isn't it, you know?**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**It's the, so it's horseflies and hornets I think seem to be.**

**SOM10** Oh right, okay.

**Sort of more prevalent, yeah.**

**SOM10** Yeah, but mosquitos.

**But mosquitos, no.**

**SOM10** I mean maybe the, the human biting ones aren't, aren't many of them round here at the moment.

**No, no.**

**SOM10** I don't know, but, but very low level nuisance I'd say. It's worse for, the worse ones are sort of clouds of midges, you know, that sort of still time and, or early evening, especially when you're cycling or jogging which I'm going to do later today, and I think I'll be likely to get them in the eye, oh damn, [laughs] kind of think, but no, but mosquitoes, no.

**No.**

**SOM10** No.

**And you've not had, and none of your colleagues and, no.**

**SOM10** Never heard of anything.

**It's not been a factor that people have said?**

**SOM10** No.

**Well we would come down, we would, you know, walk around it more but so it's?**

**SOM10** No, never heard that.

**No.**

**SOM10** You see them sometimes, you know, and just around the house and stuff but they're no nuisance.

**Yeah. It's not a problem, yeah?**

**SOM10** No, no.

**I mean it's, you know, I suppose that's the thing isn't it, it's? Because for me it's the interesting thing about how all of these different types of animals are being impacted by climate change.**

**SOM10** Um.

**In very subtle ways that we don't know so we make a, you know, so that the, as you know the project explores about the potential that mosquitos might be expanding because of climate change, but the other side of it is about animal populations declining and including mosquitos as part of that animal population decline.**

**SOM10** Um, um, um.

**And that maybe that's actually one of the outcomes that will come out of the project?**

**SOM10** Yeah, it could be, maybe it's because there's fewer, maybe because there's less cattle around or something like that which may, it might have an impact on things, I don't know.

**Yes, because that's what the farmer associate were saying to me that without the animals you're not going to have the animal dung and that's going to, those are the breeding grounds for the insects, so it is all connected together.**

**SOM10** Um.

**What we, how we choose to manage and use our landscapes.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**Has a big impact on the wider ecosystem as we know but it's when you get tangible evidence for it.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, I mean the best evidence we have but not round here sadly but things like the REMOVED for their rewilding projects and, and by just stepping back and letting nature just look after itself a lot more, but still farming it, you know, they do get very quick returns of nature, which is really, really exciting.

**Yeah, because the catchment I was working on before this project was the REMOVED.**

**SOM10** Ah okay, yeah, yeah.

**So, yeah, and the REMOVED, you know, fabulous example of.**

**SOM10** I know, I must try and get a visit there.

**Yes, well I mean, you know.**

**SOM10** Do one of their safaris.

**Yes, well if you, you know, I can talk to the one of the guys, you know, who is in Adur Rivers Trust if you want to have the connecting link?**

**SOM10** Oh brilliant, yeah, yeah.

**But I'm sure you can do it anyway, you're a networker.**

**SOM10** Yeah, they came, they, they spoke at our AGM last year, REMOVED.

**Oh wonderful.**

**SOM10** And, well REMOVED didn't because he lost his voice but his wife, [laughs] his wife was fantastic.

**His wife did it.**

**SOM10** I'm keen to get her book actually, I literally, today but, she's.

**Oh I didn't know she'd written a book.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, I'll have to, remind me if I forget I'll send, send you the details.

**Oh thank you.**

**SOM10** Yeah, it's supposed to be fantastic.

**Yeah, I'm always happy to read more about people doing wonderful things.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, me to.

**With their own estates.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**Because that's enlightened.**

**SOM10** Of course it does help when you get two and a half thousand acres to play with but.

**It does, just a little bit. So mosquitoes very low level is what I'm feeling.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah.

**I'm going to move now on to the last section.**

**SOM10** Okay.

**Which is, this sounds a bit of a mouthful, but it's called contemporary social representations.**

**SOM10** Oh wow.

**And basically it's about how your organisation thinks that wetlands are viewed both by other organisations that you work with but also with general members of the public because, you know, wetlands have always had this connotation with something a little bit, maybe barren or unwelcoming or, yeah, you know, low lying boggy land that's hard to traverse.**

**SOM10** Um.

**It's hard to understand why you would make a connection with it. I mean one of things we'd like to do with the project is to really support wetlands and really show their value in part of wider ecosystem and for themselves as an ecosystem but it's about, so what's at the local level in terms of how wetlands are viewed, and what's out there in terms of sort of general media and general legal structures and policy and literature?**

**SOM10** Yeah, I mean I think because there's so few of, few good examples in this country they're pretty low profile and I don't think at every level from, from, from our dear Prime Minister downwards, they, they really appreciate and it's partly our fault that we need to do more work to, to get that knowledge up there about how important they are, you know, as, as an ecosystem for this country, you know, very internationally really, really important, [laughs] you know, this is, you know, we like to call this our part, our sort of Somerset Camargue, [laughs] you know, and this is, and this is how we'd like people to start seeing it, you know, but they are really special and we're really lucky to have these down here, and that, and we've got some work to do on that still, I don't think they're seen as that yet and I think they are, but as, as, partly because, partly because we've still got some work to do which is fine, it keeps me employed and partly because they're quite new still relatively, erm, but yeah, I think we need to do a bit more celebrating, and a bit more, yeah, bloody hell, these are special, yeah, they're blooming amazing, and we'll. I mean we're lucky, the last couple of MPs we've had in these areas get it and, and so, so they've got a good idea and we're in a quite a good spot at the moment, with REMOVED being part of DEFRA and stuff like that, so, so that gives us a good, you know, she understands, erm, so she knows how special they are and how unique and she's a very good advocate for it, so and we're making more and more inroads that way, and Michael Gove has been down to Steart and all the rest of it and we'll get him down here at some point.

**Yeah, with a high vis jacket on?**

**SOM10** Oh yeah, exactly, yeah, make sure he has decent wellies and all this.

**Don't want anything unfortunate happening to him.**

**SOM10** No, no.

**No.**

**SOM10** No.

**Getting stuck in the mud.**

**SOM10** Yeah, quite, it'd be terrible, so yeah, we've got some work to do but that's fine, and we will get there but at the moment now I don't think there's enough of appreciation.

**So do you think the cultural change is shifting by environmental groups getting together and helping to spread information and positive images around wetlands or is there something else going on? Is it, is there for instance, you know, we seem to, think about that's behind you, these lovely shots of murmurations and things, that there are other things influencing how people feel about wetlands, you know, whether it's Countryfile or whether it's Springwatch or whether it's.**

**SOM10** Yeah.

**That understanding of engagement with nature and so looking for different types of landscape with which they can do that.**

**SOM10** Yeah, also a big question. When we did a, when we did the Hills to Levels project and were doing the community engagement for it back in twenty sixteen and we, we tried to get as much feedback as we could from people, and we got about three or four hundred good responses so we were quite pleased with that.

**That's really good isn't it?**

**SOM10** And, and we were really encouraged by that. I mean okay, it was probably only the people that were interested would come to our little stall at the fair and what have you anyway, but still.

**Yeah, but you accept that, yeah.**

**SOM10** So that, you know, it wasn't particularly scientifically robust probably is the expression but even so we were quite pleased that, when people, when we asked people what, what words come to mind when you think about the levels and moors we didn't mention the word wetland too much, we just said levels and moors, we haven't, probably didn't use the word wetland before much, because, you know, we used the, the reserve names or the National Nature Reserve or, or levels and moors or Avalon Marshes, perhaps we should use the word wetland more, maybe not, I don't know, but, but the responses were really encouraging, people were saying that they come here for the tranquillity, for the nature, for the wildlife, for the water and it was all positive wetland type words they were using and nature type words, so that was quite encouraging, so maybe we're completely wrong and, and the whole community loves what's going on down here and they get it completely, but, but again it's just so hard to know sometimes because no one has got any money to do good, really good in-depth, you know, mass survey, you know.

**Yes, that's the problem, yeah.**

**SOM10** You know, we're not America and we don't get that opportunity.

**Well.**

**SOM10** But again if someone gives us a few million pounds we might have a go.

**Well exactly, but that's it, I mean because that type of very detailed research takes funding and it takes time.**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, yeah, it does, yeah.

**You know, it takes, you know, more like ethnographic work, I think really being imbedded in a local community to really understand how these spaces are used and valued and perceived over long periods of time.**

**SOM10** Yeah, and you get these dangerous situations where you get some, erm, local councillors still banging the dredging drum strongly and that if you ask them, well is that really the whole answer? Well my constituents want it. It's like, how do you know? They haven't a clue really, it'll mainly be a loud local small group of people that, that are good at making themselves known, but that doesn't necessarily mean that's, that's by any means what all your constituents think.

**So it's, yeah, because it's interesting, is it then just a few very vocal focused people who are then influencing how things are seen?**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, I think that's, that can happen, and, and so we just try to show and to emphasise how, how nature can be the answer, it's not the obstacle, we're not trying to slow things up.

**No, see one of the things I'm very interested in is there's this new vogue of nature writing, as you talked about Charlie?**

**SOM10** REMOVED yeah.

**REMOVED wife and you know, I'm aware of lots and lots of books being produced by people who are, it's not just about them being in nature, it's about them reflecting on their own life, and working things out through the journey through a piece of landscape.**

**SOM10** Um.

**And I wondered if you'd recognised that as part of, so this kind of different engagement we seem to have at the moment of nature, whether that's something that you've experienced in the time that you've worked for Somerset Wildlife Trust, you know.**

**SOM10** You do find that with people, you, you know, you find the people that, that know it and love it, they've, the passion is, you know, boundless, and it's lovely. The project, the project, you know, I've been involved in. Well, well, but the, the REMOVED has been so helpful with in getting us some photos and stories, again that's, that's, I'm really excited about how that's going and how successful that's been and how, by showing positive, interesting stories from people who live and work in this area is getting people engaged and talking and liking and so on, and that, and that's a good thing which we hope will contribute to part of the picture and that whole landscape scale of appreciation and, and love of, of what's here, so yeah.

**Yeah, well it's all wonderful.**

**SOM10** It's all coming, it's all coming together.

**I've got one very last point which is, is there any Government policy or EU regulation that you think might influence how wetlands are used and valued? Is there like one piece of kind of key?**

**SOM10** Well the, yeah, I mean it all depends on how the new agri-environment schemes pan out really. So, so there's currently a, an agricultural command paper, deadline today for correspondence, for, for responses, erm, and, and from that will become an Agricultural Bill and then an Act hopeful, and then there's an Environment Bill probably going to come, appear near the end of the year, and how these two bits of legislation work together is going to be absolutely key. It's going to, it's, it's going to be the replacement for the COP, it's going to be, it's going to, it's, you know, show how we're going to move forward really and how we manage land.

**Yeah. And that's, it's.**

**SOM10** Kind of scary and exciting all at the same time. [laughs]

**It's really, well there's all the potential there.**

**SOM10** Exactly, we just have to.

**Oh gosh, they're obviously going to be working their fingers to the bone, aren't they?**

**SOM10** Yeah, yeah, when the first draft of the Bill comes out, it's going to be, everyone's going to be looking through it really closely and, and hoping that it's what, what we hope it says.

**Yeah. Well hopefully this, the project will go some way to supporting only positive outcomes.**

**SOM10** Well we, the, the Hills to Levels project was, was actually one of the case studies in the 25 Year Environment Plan.

**Great.**

**SOM10** Which was really exciting, so a good Somerset scheme looking at natural flood management and, and engagement with people on, on, on all these sort of issues was right there bang in the centre of, of a Government, big Government paper so that was really encouraging.

**Fantastic.**

**SOM10** So we banging a gong, you know, and, yeah, hope for the best.

**You're doing a good work here.**

**SOM10** Well we do try. [laughs]

**Yes, thank you so much for your time.**

**SOM10** Pleasure.

**That's wonderful, very thoughtful.**

**SOM10** Yeah, thank you Mary.

**Thank you.**

**SOM10** No, no that's great, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW