*WetlandLIFE: taking the bite out of wetlands* Project

Part of the *Valuing Nature* Programme

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**What I should say at this point is you may choose to either, I mean what I'm imagining is you want to talk from your REMOVED perspective and from your own perspective of using these spaces at various times but I mean you've got a really good idea now of what the project's all about and so just begin to set the scene for me, could you tell me when you've been using these spaces in your organisational capacities, running your own business? How long have you been doing that and who does it interface with in terms of the public, what other organisations?**

**B1** So I've been doing it for six, just over six years now, beginning of two thousand and twelve and, erm, it's a broad range of people but most of them are over sixty and there was a stage when I first started up, most of the people tended to be sixty two years old so I think that at that time they'd retired, they'd had two years off and then they'd come Nordic walking, so it's really sociable and it's great for people, I don't really interact with many other businesses down here because there's not many businesses running but it's mostly, erm, yeah, retirees, mainly women.

**Yeah, so you essentially support them to get out and about, let the technique of Nordic walking, find routes that are, you know, good for them and then they're also part of this kind of social group where you go round together and do it, walk and talk and.**

**B1** Yeah, exactly.

**And they can dip in and out can't they? So you do it a few times a week and they can choose how often they come.**

**B1** Yeah, so I have this card system, so they can come with me or any other instructor. So if they want, erm, urban, then I tend to run them in the parks round here, the urban areas and if they want to then progress and do something rural or something a little bit longer or more exciting than they can go to, to whatever the others are running but, erm, they tend to be more women or ninety percent of them are women. You, very like-minded, people get on very well, they bond really, really quickly, especially, it's really funny, the people that they start with, you might have some very different characters but that group that they start with is very important to them, so you could effectively run a group that everybody's happy to be with each other but then obviously you've got the different species and everything, so you do tend to split people up from the original group, and that original group is very important to them and they feel like they really belong to something and they go for a coffee after at the, erm, Beefeater and that's really, really important to them, so for most of them, the amount of times that people have said it's their lifeline, which is quite sad really because to me it's, it's not, I'm not say it's a job job but to think that something that I'm doing is having that much effect on people because a lot of people are quite lonely, so, erm.

**It's quite significant isn't it?**

**B1** Um.

**And, you know, so mainly women, retired after a couple of years maybe want to, you know, get their health and fitness up, would you say that the people that come to your group represent the kind of wide ethnic mix of Bedford?**

**B1** No.

**Or is it quite singular?**

**B1** Yeah, and it's, erm, very white middle class, erm. A lot of the same professions are coming through so a lot of people actually know each other from other things they'd done, been to, so lots of teachers, accountants and nurses, I would say are the main people that come through, a lot of, I, mostly teachers, you know, I would say about thirty percent are teachers. Dozen, yeah, we have had, erm, Asians, that come and go, they don't stick to it anywhere near, you know, like, erm, the groups that I've got, a couple of.

**Could you, you know, is there a reason why you think? Is it to do with the social bonding and they feel maybe excluded or is it just to do with?**

**B1** No, I don't think they feel excluded.

**Is it just when or the time, you know?**

**B1** Erm, I'm just trying to think of individuals that have come, the last lady that came, she worked full-time, erm, she had one or two afternoons off a week and I think, I don't know why she gave up, she wanted to bring her husband but he didn't want to do the Nordic walking whole technique so that's that but, erm, I've had a few come and they've enjoyed it and they've gone and I don't, I don't really know why. I don't know if you've got a whole group of people together whether it would be different but I, I mean Asians in this town don't feel excluded, so we're all, it's all very intermingling and mixed up and yeah, so, so I don't think they would feel excluded at all or different or anything but I don't know if it's a cultural thing, I don't, I don't know the answer because I would love to have tapped into that, they're all so lovely and they're all so appreciative of what you're doing, erm, so it doesn't happen.

**Yeah, and it's hard isn't it when somebody's left, you don't want to make them feel as if you're hounding them to find out why they've gone, you know?**

**B1** Um. Yeah, but, yeah, um, I'm just trying to think we've, I've had about, erm, fifteen I suppose, I should imagine I've had about a thousand people through my books in the last six years.

**Gosh, yeah.**

**B1** Because I think at the moment I've got, over all my groups I've got about a hundred and sixty clients, and that is no more than, it's about twenty percent of the people that I've had. I would have said, I think they say that women that are active over sixty, I think it is, you might be able to quote me better than this, about sixteen percent of women are active over sixty.

**Okay, sixteen?**

**B1** Only sixteen percent or something, yeah.

**Oh my gosh, yeah.**

**B1** So and this is your typical perfect for anybody over sixty because it just ticks all the boxes, you know, it improves your walking, it improves the length of time you can walk, how fast you can walk, erm, how many times a week you can walk, so, and it gives you something back that you might have lost, so.

**Yeah, and in terms of the times of the day or the times of the year when you come on site is that, what, how does that shake down?**

**B1** This is the worst time of the year for attendance because a lot of my clients would go off on holiday, May and September, when the holidays, school holidays aren't around, so, erm, winter, January's quite popular funny enough, so they don't get put off by cold weather or anything like that, that isn't really an issue unless it, this year it's been obviously particularly wet to put people off. It's the first year that I've ever had to call a walk off because it's been raining or too wet under foot, so this is the wettest year definitely that we've had.

**Yeah. Have you, because you've then maybe come off the main path, is that why it gets too wet because it's?**

**B1** We're never on the main paths anyway, we'd always walk on grass, we'd never walk round it.

**Got it.**

**B1** Right, so, so we would have to walk round it if it's wet, most of the time we're on the grass, we'd just go off and use the rest of the space, we don't, very, that's our safe, safe one, our safe walk if we can't do anything else, that or the, the, or the cycle route.

**Okay, yeah. So the weather is only an impediment when it's really wet, so the cold is not a problem.**

**B1** No.

**And do you do it early morning?**

**B1** No, no.

**Early evening?**

**B1** About half past nine to ten o'clock in the morning, I was doing evenings until this year and numbers just got so sporadic, I just, I've just culled them this year, erm.

**It's not.**

**B1** I haven't got the energy, you know, I've, you know what it's like going out in the evening to do something, it's fine for those people, they might have been at work all day and then they come from work but I've got to sort of like hang around a little bit, try to conserve a little bit of energy, some of the groups I've done in the evening have, erm, been working ladies, that want to walk five miles quite fast and so it's sort of like stopped me enjoying my day so much because I think right, well I've got to go out and walk five miles at speed and, you know, try to be a little bit dynamic, I mean that doesn't work but, you know, try to have a little bit of energy left.

**[laughs] You're the group leader so you have to set the pace.**

**B1** Yeah, so I have to set the pace and everything, so, erm, for me it's been really lovely, it's the first year in four years that I've cut my, erm, we've been all through the winter, I cut it a bit in March funnily enough, erm, but it's been lovely for me.

**Yeah. So the cutting of the evening's nothing to do with not feeling safe in the space or anything like that just simply?**

**B1** No, no, just me, just my energy levels. Yeah, so next, so if I talk about last year when we walked, I had, I was walking here with a group of ladies around about fifty, so that was anything, forty to sixty, erm, and we'd have about eight or ten, erm, we'd, we'd meet here twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, have a really good walk, really good social, erm, group, really cohesive and really supportive of each other. Erm, and then before that, other years, I've had, I had some, some pensioners and they said oh it's not fair that other groups have got, erm, evening walks, can we have one? And I thought well this will be okay because come October when the clocks go back they'll, they won't want to do it, and I couldn't believe that when the clocks went back they still wanted to carry on, so I was taking out these people that were seventy to eighty years old at seven o'clock at night and some nights it was freezing cold and I just couldn't believe that, it's something you wouldn't imagine is it? You'd think that they should be at home with their slippers on but no, they were quite lonely and they, it broke up the evening, it gave them something to come out for and I've got one lady, she's, because I have quite a few widows come, I mean that would, mostly likely be quite a few widows that would be in that group and one of the ladies said well I'd only go in at maybe twelve, one o'clock, or if she had something on in the day, five o'clock, I shut my door, I don't see anybody until the next day so this is as a good as it gets, coming out in the freezing cold, so I always used to tease her, and I used to say you should be at home, you should be sitting there with your cocoa, shouldn't be out there, dragging me out. [laughs]

**[laughs] So when, they obviously get their, you know, their fix of outdoor space and they get their fix of sort of company, in terms of sort of their interaction with the environment itself, do you get the sense that they learn things about the natural world and from being part of this walk or is it really focussed on the walking, the social and that the space is a lovely space to be in but there's no time actually to dwell and reflect on the view, the changing light?**

**B1** The evening walks, yeah. I mean sometimes when we've come round there and we've stopped and we've taken a photo and, erm, the sun's just setting and it's wonderful and I think the, the evening walks round here are particularly nice, erm, but, erm, when I ask people this question, how important is it that you exercise here? They've said it's really about the time and the, the ability to get here is rather than actually being by the lake but what I like to do is if we go round the lake, I also stop, look at that water today, you know, look at this, look at that. Erm, I'd say the only, so that's just walking round this lake, doesn't exactly excite them that much but when we go, erm. These are Nordic walks and just being nosey, here they are. When we go over the other side, we've got the swans nesting so on an evening walk I'd always try to take them round there, so they could see the different stages, so we see them, they see them mating and then we see them hurt them sitting on the nest and then we see them with their young and, you know, and so it's.

**Yeah, so that's past the Finger Lakes or is that sort of towards Tesco?**

**B1** It's right over, behind Tesco's yes. So there's a, there's a swan over there and there's one also, erm, up behind that cafe on Longholme and so that's like on this nest that you can see, everybody can really see.

**How wonderful.**

**B1** And the other thing is they really love to see, erm, yeah, love to see the signets, love to count them, so that really, really important but that's not this space but it's still Priory but it's over there because it's much more, we go over the bridge, do you know where I mean?

**Yeah, I do.**

**B1** So you go over the bridge and we always, always, always stop and look, is the swan there, has she lost any of her young? You know, erm, what they're doing and then obviously we watch them grow up and then they get to be nice and big and then big grey things and they talk about oh do you remember when we saw those, you know, four or five months ago?

**Yeah, yeah.**

**B1** So I without knowing it, they, erm, but I don't think anybody's particularly knowledgeable about birds and, and the different, you know, trees and things like that, I think if we had somebody in the group what, that was knowledgeable, I mean my husband's just going to train up to be a Nordic walking instruction with me and he's quite knowledgeable on trees and birds and things like that, not really knowledgeable but enough to be able to tell people what they are but I haven't ever learnt about it so I should have.

**So what's made you choose this site then to run your business? Is it to do with access and parking and things like that, practical things?**

**B1** Erm, yeah, practical things because it is the free parking, you can have a wee, that, you see on their list can you go to the toilet before you walk and straight after you walk is very, very high priority. Erm, staying for a coffee, parking, they're the main things. Nobody would, and they would always say oh the marina, I like it down there, they would never say oh we're going to go to the marina because it's by the water but I did speak to, I've been asking a lot of my groups, you know, how much of an influence, you know, the, the wetland is and, erm, somebody said to me, she always feels very, very calm by the water, so she would always choose so walking along the river to her is very important and they always love to see the heron, obviously they're only going to find that here, so subconsciously it is important to them but they're not saying, you know, the walk is, is, I think the social, the social side of it is the main thing for them.

**Yeah. And do you run your business in any other site? So do you go to Marston Vale? Do you go to other country parks in Bedfordshire?**

**B1** Yeah, yeah, so really, really wide mix of places, so I do Bedford Park here, I do do, erm, the other one, Marston Vale, Harrold Country Park sometimes, but then lots and lots of footpaths and lots of rural walks as well, so it's really a mix and I think with this place, I can give them ten different walks, and so people don't get bored, erm, but.

**Is that because of the size of?**

**B1** Size of it, yeah.

**Because it's pretty big isn't it?**

**B1** Yeah, and you can go all the way round and sometimes if I do exactly the same walk I couldn't believe it, I had a group and this particular lady had been walking for two years and I took her on a place where I'd pretty much taken every week and she said to me oh REMOVED, this is lovely, we haven't been here before and I said are you being sarcastic? And she said no, and she absolutely swore she had never ever walked down there and I just thought, they're just so unaware because they're so busy in conversation, all we're interested in really is a safe environment where you can walk side by side, country parks are brilliant for that, well this one is, Harrold isn't particularly but, erm.

**Because you have to say on the path pretty much at Harrold don't you?**

**B1** You have to stay on the path and you're very much, erm, one behind the other, you know, if you want to be two abreast really, so you don't want to be single file but this is brilliant because we can walk three side by side and we, we got loads of space and so it's ticking the box isn't it?

**Yeah, yeah. So would you say it's your favoured site for that reason because of its space?**

I, the variety of walks, yeah, the size of it and I always love to, I always absolutely love to, love to see the lake, that's very important for me but in honesty I don't know how important it is for, if they took the lake away and we still had all the green areas they'd still come.

**Yeah, so in some ways it's about the, it's about, as you said, the parking, the loos, the coffee and so you could transplant that because you know Harrold has that but as you said it doesn't have the width of the footpath.**

**B1** Um, but people don't want to be driving six or seven miles but also it's the location, you know, if they live on this estate or they live this side of town, this space they could go. Some people have got an hour and a half, they want to go, they want to get the walk done, they want to go home, erm, other people might two, have two and a half hours so they can go for a coffee. What people don't want is to not know when the walk's going to finish, you're talking about people that are quite set in their ways in a way, they like to know that this walk will finish, start on time and finish on time and pretty much, we know it will here, there's, they're not going to get a tractor or not going to get horses or, we're not going to get anything to really disrupt our time, so this is a pretty safe place.

**Yeah, so it's interesting isn't it? It's all sorts of very small components that all add up to what makes us choose a landscape to be in.**

**B1** Um.

**For this activity, you know, and as you said, I can get the sense that people don't want to drive for twenty five minutes when they could drive five minutes and they're here.**

**B1** Um, and it's not boring here, I mean, you know, the smaller parks, even a hundred acre park, this is three sixty isn't it, three hundred and sixty acres?

**Yeah.**

**B1** So a hundred acre park, you would feel like you were just going round and seeing the same things but here you've got, we've got a little bit of woodland, we've got, erm, we've got pathways, we've got, we've got obviously the water, we've got the lake and the river, erm, and, you know, there's, like I say there's the odd thing that they love to look at, they'll always stop and look at the heron or, erm.

**And do you feel safe using this space, is that another factor that, you know, everybody feels like they're going to have a peaceful calm time here?**

**B1** Yeah, pretty much, I mean the only thing that could go wrong is if a dog jumps on you, erm, which, not in my group but somebody at, she came to me because this had happened to her, she was at Harrold Country Park, and a Dalmatian was off the lead and came, jumped on her, she fell over, she broke her femur, the person just went home, left her there, it was somebody else that took her to the hospital and, well got the ambulance and she was in hospital for six months, she had two major, major operations and that person just went off, she doesn't know who they were, they just went off and left her, so she was terrified of dogs, so whenever there was dogs off the lead, I mean, you know, of course I totally understand that, erm, so that made other people nervous of dogs because of her story but pretty much that's the only real hazard. Dog muck and, erm, and dogs. What was the question?

**Yeah. About feeling safe in your space.**

**B1** Yeah, we don't ever feel threatened by anybody, except when you say, personally I've had a couple of experiences down here when I was very young, there was somebody hiding in the bushes and I was lying here actually I think, just having a sleep and I woke up and somebody was looking right over me and, and then another, I was walking along the back and somebody was in the bushes, sort of walking in the bushes following me so that's me personally when I was about eighteen, twenty, but as a group we all feel safe and I think a lot of those people perhaps wouldn't walk on their own, they'd walk around here but they wouldn't walk without the group anywhere else because a lot of people don't feel safe, erm, I, I don't know why, I would feel totally safe but I, that's me.

**Do you think, yeah, I was going to say, is that connected with feeling safe sort of anywhere, like you wouldn't walk anywhere on your own? Is it particularly because it's these more less managed parts of the park do you think?**

**B1** Erm, well I was a post woman for many years so I was out and about with money on me and everything and so I've always been very, very independent and a lot of other people have perhaps always been attached to the husband or, you know, associated going out, walking with somebody and especially when you lose that person they lose a little bit of security I suppose, so, erm, I know that they would feel safe walking round here, that's fine, a lot of them would want to, if they're going to come back and do a walk that I've showed them off track, they will, ninety nine percent of the time say I'm going to bring my husband back to do this route, so I don't know if that's a fear of getting lost because they just follow me, I mean, and a lot of them I could just take them just down, somewhere, you know, a, just over the other side of those trees and they feel they haven't got a clue where they are. They say to me all the time, I don't know, if you, I haven't got a clue where I am REMOVED and I say well that's what you pay your money for.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**B1** You know, so, yeah, so for me I'm, I'm obviously, I have to go out on reccy walks, have to find all these different places.

**You know when you've brought people here, do they, do they recognise that they're in a wetland or do they think they're in a park that has a lake in it?**

**B1** I think the latter.

**Yeah. Despite the fact we've got these wonderful bird species here, of all different sorts, we've got birds, hides, we've got the Finger Lakes with their own little special areas, for them it's still like a wilder park would you say?**

**B1** You're talking about women, and I would say women and men are two, except if you're a bird watcher or, you know, an artist or something like that, erm, I would think people would, if you said what have you got down here? They'd say we've got geese, ducks and swans, and a heron, we wouldn't know about anything else because we're not educated on it, so they don't think, they think it's a, erm, a lake, a lake with some paths round I think.

**Okay, yeah, it's interesting isn't it? So it's, education is when it's, it feels like a key thing really, which is, I don't know, is it that we're reticent about nature or frightened by nature or just not really interacting with it enough?**

**B1** Erm, right, so me personally, I've been, lately I dropped my son at Sharnbrook and I go on to Irthlingborough, I go on to Rushton and Irthlingborough Lakes, and they've got an RSPB site there and they said oh we're doing an early morning, erm, birdsong walk or something and I was going to book on to that and it was about six, seven pound and as it happened I couldn't go, but I think that's what people need, they, if there was a sign up saying right, we're doing, we're doing a walk, you think oh yeah, I'd like to go to that but those sort of things aren't offered here, erm, and so all this beauty, all this nature that's going on, we don't really know anything about it and we don't really know where to go to to ask people. I, that is one of the things that I really feel that within the next two or three years I'm going to go on to some courses and stuff to find, so I can at least tell people what they're seeing and everything but you're interrupting a conversation that they're having, in order to tell them and sometimes people just really couldn't be bothered, erm, they do take it all for granted a little bit.

**Yeah, because the nature is not the overriding reason why they're doing this walk, it's health and to be sociable with other people in the group, to have their kind of social time?**

**B1** Yeah, exactly, they're, you, it is a social, social is the number one thing but there is something that's coming through now, erm, which, you know, is the buzzword for the moment isn't it? It's like a wellbeing walk or a mindfulness walk and that's much more about stopping and listening to nature. One of the things I do do with people and it's so simple, erm, and it's, it's really powerful, is I just say to them right, just stop, close your eyes for sixty seconds and listen to noises that are not manmade. So first of all when you do that all you can hear is the manmade noises and then after about, I don't know, fifteen, twenty seconds, you can actually start to focus in on anything that's around you and everybody says do you know, that's brilliant, we should do that a lot more but it's just having that, stopping and finding the right place because even if you did that now, straightaway if you closed your eyes, you'd hear whatever that is in the background wouldn't you first? There's something in the background and you just really have to tune in. So I think in the next two or three years, nature will be much more appreciated, erm, through mindful, mindfulness and things like that that are coming into play.

**Yeah. So obviously one of the things that we're trying to find out in the project is whether wetlands generate a sense of place and I think what I'm, because what I'm getting from what you've said is that these natural landscapes that you host your walking groups in the connection between them is green space but not necessarily a wetland space, so it is having somewhere that's green, outdoors, that people can easily walk through and there's variety in the walks but wetlands themselves are part of that kind of network of green spaces but they are not the be all and end all, they are not the, you know, the pull to, it's not because of the lake and the birds on the lake, it's the space, it's natural space itself.**

**B1** With this particular place, Irthlingborough lakes, I, I, right, what I absolutely love, it's my favourite place because it's wetland, so, and I'm taking a group up there in a few weeks time and, erm, Felmersham Pits, it's one of the, my favourite places in the world.

**Oh.**

**B1** Do you know Felmersham Pits?

**I don't, no.**

**B1** So it's just six miles north of here, and it's, it's managed so well and the nature is oh, amazing there and I go there, out of choice because and there's, it's completely different because you'll see, a lot of people you bump into have got two or three cameras round their neck, so it is, you know, and you don't actually see people with cameras here, so I think this is, this is, to Bedford, it's, yeah, it's a nice place to come, whereas Felmersham Pits, which is a lot smaller and it's, I went there a few weeks ago and I felt like a, I wrote a little blog on it because I felt like a real gooseberry, it'd been raining and raining and raining and raining and there was one sunny day, everything was coupled up, so every single bird, ever species you could imagine, even the pigeons were in a pair and I was just, me and the dog and I was like, yeah, we feel, you know, because they were all making their mating sounds and call, you know, mating calls and everything and it was really great and it was a fantastic place to be on that day and I took a few.

**Was a real love-in.**

**B1** Yeah, it was, there was loving in the air, you know.

**[laughs]**

**B1** He, I don't know, perhaps it's because it's, it's not such a small cosy place and it might be if you go down the Finger Lakes but it's not something we would do with Nordic walking poles but I think, erm, yeah, this particular place we're talking about, I don't know how important the wetland is but other, I mean oh, you know, Rushton Lakes, it's, and the other day I went up there, Irthlingborough, I went on a walking festival and there's a Whitworth factory and outside the Whitworth factory there must have been fifty or sixty swans all in, in an area and you never seen it, never seen it before.

**Fascinating, yeah.**

**B1** And I said to somebody what on earth are they pumping into the water to make all these swans congregate together? And he said no, no, what it is, is it's last year's, erm, young and they, they haven't gone off and found their mates yet, so that's what it was, I don't know if that's true but it was really like, I didn't, I couldn't be bothered to get my camera out my bag which was really silly of me because it was a really powerful photo, you've never seen so many swans in, in one place, and so the differences between this place and my own, where I would choose to go, I would, me personally, I'd definitely choose to go to a wetland for a lovely walk and just be in my own thoughts and.

**Yeah, so they are special places for you?**

**B1** For me, yeah, personally but the people that come here, what they're doing is they're following the Nordic walking trail. So if I put up, I'm doing a taster At Priory Marina, they're coming because I've told them to come whereas myself I'm choosing where to go, so there might be other people that you talk to that, that absolutely this is so important to them but what's important for people is them Nordic walking taster, their courses here and actually another thing that's most likely, really nice, they might see people that they know here walking their dog.

**So that extends the social aspect of it doesn't it?**

**B1** Um.

**So for you the Rushton Lakes are, they're close to where you live?**

**B1** No, no, no, this is a lot closer but, erm, it's just, it's just, it's on the Nene Valley and it's just like loads and loads of miles of lakes and you've got lakes both sides and it's just, you've just got a path and you can just, all the time you can hear the birds and, and it's, yeah, you always something going on because there's always something flying off or, or swooping down and, you know, the water's like quite alive, so to me it's, erm, and, and Felmersham is just very quiet and peaceful and, and they've done lots with all the wooded area, so they've created beautiful areas with the, the wood they, they coppice it and they do this and that and they make all these, erm, piles of wood to attract all different species and everything. so it's really, really well managed.

**Yeah, brilliant and just, look at these lovely ducklings here.**

**B1** They're cute.

**Thinking about you, about the work you do with your walking group, I know in September that Bedford always has its kind of, you know, walking festival.**

**B1** Um.

**Do you get involved in that in any way, do they approach you to kind of lead guided walks or to pally up in some way?**

**B1** Yes. Yeah, so I've been involved in that for the last four or five years, so what I'll do is I'll run taster sessions because I've actually tried the longer walks and with Nordic walking people tend to, if they're doing it, they'll always stick with that instructor or group that they're with so we have offered walks where anybody can come who can Nordic walk, they don't come, so we do taster sessions and I've got about four this, this year, yeah.

**Yeah. So is that, you've connected with Bedford Council because they're supporting you as somebody who's running their own business or have you approached them saying this is a service I can offer, whilst it's the walking festival?**

**B1** Well the walking festival isn't actually run by the Council, it's run by completely independent, it's run by the ramblers.

**Oh okay.**

**B1** It's just a man basically on his own who works all year to do it.

**Oh fantastic.**

**B1** So, and it's voluntary really, erm, I am involved with Bedford Borough Council because I've been running their REMOVED courses for the last six years but that's just sort of, coming to an end now because I think Nordic walking has, has had its day, the phase is over now, erm, and only one person booked on to the last course and at its peak I had forty two on one course on, one January.

**Wow.**

**B1** And that's gone from, it's gone down and down and down, to, to one person. Erm, because other things, I don't know, people want to do other things, I don't know what they want to do but.

**Yeah. So in terms of other organisations or, yeah, okay, Government agencies, those are your main contacts or do you have any other? I'm just trying to understand how sort of the network you work within to support your business within Bedford?**

**B1** To support my business. Nobody really supports us.

**No?**

**B1** No, nobody.

**No.**

**B1** Don't get any. Oh Velocity, which is, erm, it's a European funded thing and they're based in Cranfield but it's for the whole of, it's for the whole of Bedford and they offer free business support, erm, and they run workshops and stuff, that's been really, really helpful but, and, and Bedford Borough Council have always helped me, in the fact that they've, they've employed me, and I did do their GP referral programme for about four years, erm, and that's taking people from the doctor's. If you've got one of twelve conditions you could get referred to the doctor, you could do the gym or what, and people were just saying I really don't want to do the gym, so this was the green space gym that we did and, and I got really, really good numbers on that and, you know, quite a few of them have carried on walking but, erm, and now of course they're, they're asking for a donation to walk in these spaces, Bedford Borough Council are.

**I see, okay.**

**B1** So, and the donation this year is four hundred pound.

**From you as an organisation? Okay.**

**B1** It's a donation though.

**Yeah. How did they pitch that to you? Did they write you a nice letter?**

**B1** Er, they wrote me a letter, [laughs] I haven't got a problem with it because I can say look, couple of pound a week, a pound a week, you know, it's, it's fine, a pound, a pound a day I mean, you know, whatever it was, it was very minimal but I haven't got a problem with paying it but I want them to catch up with everybody, you've got personal trainers that use this and nobody's caught up with them, you've got loads and loads of people using it and they haven't caught up with them, they've caught up with me because I work for them, so.

**Yeah. You're on sort of their radar.**

**B1** On their radar but other people that should be on the radar aren't on the radar and I don't, I think everybody should pay for the upkeep of these spaces, I haven't got a problem with it but I don't want to be paying when my, when my competitors don't pay and.

**Yeah, seems fair.**

**B1** You know, other people just don't pay, erm, so some people have got a real problem with it, they think they pay their council tax and they really shouldn't be charged again because basically I will have to pass that cost on at some, in some way.

**Yeah, how could you not?**

**B1** You know, so they're feeling that they're getting charged twice so I don't really make a big thing of it to be honest because I don't want them to be, get too upset about it.

**Yeah. So I mean I'm moving now on to the next section which is human health and wellbeing, which we've kind of talked really at the very beginning of the interview about that and obviously how could you not do a Nordic walking group that isn't to do with health and wellbeing? But one of the things that we touched on was, you know, we've talked about the physical wellbeing of actually doing it and, you know, looking after yourself and we've talked about the social wellbeing side, erm, around, you know, interacting with other people and one thing you mentioned a couple of times was about loneliness, about people coming to the group at different times, particularly in the evening because it breaks up their evening, do you think that's significant, would you say that the kind of emotional wellbeing side, the social wellbeing side overrides the physical wellbeing side for most of the people who are part?**

**B1** I would say, yeah, I mean they like to say, erm, they obviously are attracted initially by the exercise, an exercise that will suit them but what keeps them here is that they straightaway feel part of something and you might be somebody that feels that you haven't fitted in to anything in your life before, you know, you weren't in the netball team, you weren't in the running group, you weren't in, and you couldn't cycle, whatever, so you've always craved to be part of something and this is the answer, you know, at last there's something that is achievable, they can do it and they feel part of it, erm, I think the loneliness is a massive problem and I know, you know, the Government's trying to highlight and address it, mental health, you know, it's a, it's a massive problem and I do think they ought to be pouring money in to more groups like this to make them, I don't think they should ever make them free because people don't value things that are free, so they don't turn up anyway but it's not, but saying that the health walks in Bedford are massive, have you got in contact with the REMOVED people? Actually I should have, if it's not too late I can put you in contact with their coordinator. They have got masses, they might have forty, fifty people down here on a Wednesday. What people like about the Nordic walking, they pay and so it becomes a little bit more exclusive and obviously they've only got groups of eight or ten so you get to know everybody in that group, whereas these big free groups, you basically just have to go and hopefully you'll find somebody that will talk to you but because you're paying for a leader obviously paying for somebody to make sure that you don't get left behind and that you're talked, you know, as a leader we should be speaking to people for at least twice through the walk, that's, that doesn't always happen because you, you might feel that somebody's just started a conversation and you try and sidle up next to them and they're in a deep conversation and that's all they need from that walk but you do find that they, erm, find people that are in the same boat as them and it's, yeah, it's really important but the, but other people, they come and they, they don't, they don't know how to mix and so then that's my job to walk with that person and try to, try to bring them into the group, so what I usually do is I start talking to them and I just say oh hang on a sec and then I'll get the next person and say oh have you met such and such before? And I'll, I'll leave them and hopefully they'll start a conversation. Sometimes you would turn around and they were both on their own again, so I would say my job isn't really exercise, I don't really think about the exercise, I think my job is creating groups and how I do that is when people come, I move the, so I, I say right, pick somebody to walk with and then I'll stop after a certain length of time, I say right, okay, swap over, find something and so I'll make, by the time we've been round the first week of a course they've spoken to absolutely everybody, so I always split people up, erm, and so that usually works quite well but a couple of times it hasn't, when I've split up married couples and they haven't come back because they didn't go to that to be split up, so you, you can't, you can't.

**You can't win it all.**

**B1** You can't.

**No.**

**B1** And a lot of couples are coming now, they want something to do with their husbands, you know, and they, he goes off and he does his golf, he does this, he does that but actually he's, he's quite happy to come to their walking group, so I think they need more of it not less.

**Yeah, I think that's the answer isn't it? And are there any other components of wellbeing that you feel that we haven't covered, that you feel are important in the work that you do?**

**B1** Yeah, so we've got your, the five ways of wellbeing, which is the NHS national, erm, campaign. So the first one I'd say is social and then, erm, give, so they, they do, they do look out for their friends, they do make sure that they're, that other people are okay, they're very good at, and I've got a Whatsapp group for a lot of my classes now and one of them are so lovely dovey … not well, oh sorry to hear that, kiss kiss and there's a man in the group who said to me oh your Friday group and said I know they're very supportive of each other, so that's like an extension, erm, and you do think sometimes oh for goodness sake and, erm, but they, particularly on their walk day, they want to go home and they want to put in their, do you know, that was a great walk, thanks and then somebody, oh I'm sorry I missed it and so that's another extension which is important. Erm, so they do look out for each other, they do connect with people and with nature, they do learn something new, so some people might just be really happy that they've, erm, first of all learnt the technique, that they've learnt a new walk and then they can then go back to their partners and teach them a new walk, good about that, so, erm, yes, all the five ways of wellbeing in there. Erm, and it does tick every box, yeah.

**Yeah, it's fantastic, and of course you know the project is also concerned with exploring mosquito populations, so leads me seamlessly to ask.**

**B1** [laughs]

**Have biting insects or insects generally ever been a factor in either deterring where you walk or how you walk or?**

**B1** In, erm, on my evening sessions and not mosquitoes but there's gnats follow us all the time, from the time we get out the car they're there and they're just with us the whole time.

**Ah.**

**B1** I don't know if it's perfume or whatever but they particularly like to follow this group of ladies around and I don't know if it's ever put anybody off but they hate them, yeah, but I.

**But not mosquitoes so much then?**

**B1** Do you know, until you've come, this project, nobody knew there was mosquitoes here, and there are quite a few aren't there, different species? But no, nobody's ever seen a mosquito here.

**Okay, so the times that you come here you don't really have to double think about either what you wear or where you go or what your punters are going to say, it's, kind of it's not a problem in essence?**

**B1** No, no, no.

**Yeah, yeah, that's positive. My last section of the interview has a very complicated title which is Contemporary Social Representations and it basically means how do you feel that wetlands are viewed by people who use your group? In that wetlands have always had a sort of mixed bag with, you know, in the past they're seen as sort of barren, boggy marshy places but we're here in the wetlands with all sorts of people here right now, with their families and dog walking and cycling and so what do you think might have been part of that turnaround of making wetland spaces friendly, you know, encouraging people to come and use them? What do you think might have changed it, what might have made that possible?**

**B1** Well accessibility definitely isn't it? I mean this is so close to the town and so close to like a really big housing development, so I suppose they feel some ownership don't they? The people on the riverside estate most likely feel that the marina is, is theirs, it's right on their doorstep. Erm, I suppose they haven't got to travel miles have they? It's, it's just here and it's got a path around it and if you know that it's, is it three quarters of a mile round there?

**Um.**

**B1** They know that if they come they can walk three quarts of a mile, they've done that, if they do it twice or three times, so it's, it's not something, erm, in Norfolk or somewhere that you've got to go to, it's just here, so why not use it?

**Because, you know, you think thirty years ago this wasn't here, you know.**

**B1** No.

**So it's amazing to think in that period of time this, you've kind of created this beautiful, you know, nature reserve.**

**B1** Um.

**Do you think it's also that people are, feel it's part of their fabric of their life to be outdoors and, you know, be in nature?**

**B1** Yeah, yeah.

**I'm just trying to think sort of back, you know, back when I was a kid in the seventies, kids would go off and play in the park by themselves.**

**B1** Um.

**But you wouldn't go with your family necessarily, so.**

**B1** Yeah, I think, I think that's all changed because parents are much more, we all used to play out for, we were neglected weren't we? It was great being neglected, don't want your parents sitting there but really because of all the, you know, stranger danger stuff and cycling down, you couldn't just get on bike and cycle down here. It's a, it's a nightmare the traffic nowadays, you know, people are on their mobiles aren't they? Or, you know, it's just the sheer volume of traffic, so you're sort of, if you want to go for a bike ride, you sort of need your parents to come and put it on the back of the car, so I think it's, erm, I was listening to something on the radio and it was, they were talking about it and they were saying that all this stranger danger thing has actually made families different so we spend more time with our children and we know our children a lot lot better than our parents knew us don't we? So in a way it's a good thing. I mean you know, I look back and think all the lovely days out that we've had with the children, erm, and when I was a child it was always Sunday evening, we used to go to Ampthill Park and that's what we did after church on a Sunday evening but, erm, my parents were busy, you know, they had a farm and so they were always busy but it, but I think it's changed because the whole of society's changed hasn't it?

**Um.**

**B1** People have got more money, they can come down here and they can have a, I, I still, I still am quite amazed that when I see a family eating out at the Beefeater I think how much is that costing them? We'll do it once in a while but I am, I would get a picnic or something, erm, but people years ago wouldn't have that sort of money would they?

**No, no. So it's interesting, so it's almost as if we've got a generation that's a bit more wealthy.**

**B1** Um.

**We've got issues to do with accessibility to spaces that is, you don't really want your kids playing on their bike in the street because streets are now too congested as you said.**

**B1** Um.

**And then this idea of having to be with kids, that kids on their own, there's something somehow unsettling, both for the kid and for the parent.**

**B1** Um.

**I also wonder if it's other factors as well, you know, is it that, you know, now, nature is to be embraced, you know, we have lots of TV programmes about enjoying nature and encouraging people to enjoy nature, do you think that has a kind of cultural impact?**

**B1** I think we're going that way but I don't think we're there yet. I mean when you and I were children we wouldn't have had like, like they do all these, erm, sailing courses and things like that, we didn't have them did we? We were just very much, we were connected with nature because we, we were weren't we? But now you almost have to make an appointment to be connected with nature, it's, do you know what I'm trying to say?

**Yeah, it always has to be an organised activity of some kind.**

**B1** Yeah. Which I, I always felt coming, you know, my, you know, when I lived on the farm, it was completely the opposite, you know, just go off and play in the woods on your own or, you know, what, whatever but now it's almost like I'll book you on a course, you know, I don't know what to do with you in the summer holidays, I'll book you on a course and one of the things that my son resents me for so much is all the courses I booked him on to and he said I, you know, I really, really hated it and you damaged you. He's always saying you damaged me, put, put him a sailing course here and when I came to pick him up they said oh he's not interacting and come on son, what's the matter with you, what's the matter with? And he, he says now you really damaged me, why didn't you just leave me be and let me just be what I wanted to be? And I said look don't beat me up about, I was paying good money, you know, to, to put you on something, so how much of this generation are going to absolutely hate all this organised stuff? And so when he started to tell me when he was about twelve or thirteen I hate all this organised stuff Mum, I just thought oh do you know what, I'm not going to do all this stuff at half term, you know, meet up with other mums and put myself through hell organising it all for them to actually think well do you know, I hated those days, sort of been quite happy to sort of, the three of us going out and just having a nice walk somewhere and then we got, the dog is twelve, getting the dog to us was a major thing because the dog needs a walk and it was a great excuse to get the kids out, come on, we've got to walk the dog and I suppose a lot of these families now have got a dog and this is a great place, you can bring the dog, walk the dog and the children can learn to ride their bikes. How many places have you got like this where you've got a path and you've got grass and your children can learn to ride their bike and fall off and get back on again? You know, we used to teach ourselves all these things didn't we?

**Yeah.**

**B1** Swimming, rivers and, erm, whatever. Now you wouldn't, you wouldn't dare, we've just become too clinical and.

**Yeah, we're kind of risk averse aren't we?**

**B1** Um.

**You know, we don't want any of our children unattended, we don’t want to encourage them to climb trees and possibly break their arm, you know.**

**B1** [laughs]

**We want to control everything don't we? Like you said, the kind of free time, what free time? Everything's got to be scheduled in, you know.**

**B1** Yeah, and I feel sorry for these children, when I see, they just go from one activity to the other, to the other, to the other and I was the one actually that was like that, I mean don't get me wrong, I was exactly like that and then I thought no, this isn't what they need, just, just be at home and just be yourself and just do what you want to do and if you want to see a friend, you know, and just ask me and quite often they just want to get up late, you know, and, and walk around in their pyjamas and, you know, just things that you can't do when you're at school but if you, every holiday you schedule something, it's got a start time hasn't it? And it's pressure for you, pressure for them.

**Yeah, trying to fit every, squeeze everything in.**

**B1** Um, and I, I was the parent that used to jam pack every holiday with something until I saw the light but we used to be part of the Wildlife Trust and we used to go, there was more sights around then, we used to go pond dipping and we did all those things and we had, you could go on a Sunday afternoon to Mandle's Farm and, erm, they did, you know, a lot of pond dipping, I mean that's really popular with the children isn't it? Erm, and nature walks and things like that and I remember once it was just a simple task, you had to pick, erm, a leaf of all the trees or one of the tasks was you had to see how many different shades of green you can find and just something like that sticks in my mind because you're like wow, you know, or, get a leaf and really examine it and things like that and I suppose they don't have time to do that at school, it is something that, erm, you need to be doing as an extra-curricular activity isn't it?

**So that's interesting because you know the gist of what I get from what you've just said is really about this idea of creating space for some unmanaged time.**

**B1** Um.

**Where time can move slowly, that you can take the time to examine the shades of green around you is quite amazing because it makes you stop and look and observe about what's around you.**

**B1** Um, um. What I used to do is I used to have a couple of friends that had children, so if we all get together, everybody had somebody to play with and that was the best time of the child's life because this other mum was very like-minded with me, she used to like to get her wellies on and just go out and even though she was very, very glamourous, you know, the most glamourous woman you'd ever see but she wasn't against sticking her wellies on and going out and getting a bit of mud. She loves that for her children because she'd had that when she was a child. The problem's going to come is these children growing up now, if they didn't have that as a child they won't want to be passing that on, so and to me I was so passionate about it, I was like, you know, I'm, I was a farmer's daughter and so I lived outside, I was feral really, and I, I thought it was only me because I'd come off a farm but everybody used to talk to, like yourself, you, I don't know what environment you lived in but we all did it didn't we? We were allowed to just go and do what we want. What's going to happen to managed children, they're never going to be able to pass on this wild streak that they had are they?

**No.**

**B1** So, erm, I just think the.

**So do you think sort of coming here to wetlands like this is a way of helping kids begin to engage with nature? You know, that it's, yes, it's very, as you say, manicured and managed but it is an interaction with nature, even at a very surface level and maybe that's a way of beginning to try and get, you know, a next generation of kids connecting with nature.**

**B1** Yeah, because you can sit here, other than dog muck, right, which is a, which is a problem, you could sit here and, erm, you could just sit with your partner and they could go off into the bushes and things like that and so it's a little bit of a halfway house thing isn't it? You know, I think they need to be going in the undergrowth and getting stung by stinging nettles and, erm, stung by the odd wasp or whatever, you know, it's, it's part of growing up and it's, it's what you need to do and you need to be going and making camps and things like that, erm. There was a place we used to go, it wasn't a wetland but it could just as easily be a wetland and they'd, they'd got some, they'd, they'd got some logs and they just left them there and the children could come and they can make camps and then just leave it and so each child would come and rip down the last person's camp and put a new one up and that was great, erm, and I think they could do a lot more like that here but they haven't got the staff have they? They just haven't got, they just haven't, well they haven't got, Bedford doesn't seem to have that, Northamptonshire I think is a lot more. Have you heard of these forest schools that are really coming up and? I don't think they've got one in Bedford and I was thinking that'd be a good idea.

**I think they've got one at Marston Vale actually.**

**B1** Yeah, because I know the lady, erm, REMOVED yeah, that, that runs that there, but somebody was telling me the other day that they're actually, her daughter, she's doing one in London, they've got the Forest School Nursery and now they're doing the first ever Forest School as a proper school but they've got, erm, a tepee in the, it's all outdoors and I was just thinking I would have definitely chosen, I'm sure it's going to cost thousands to send your child there but, yeah, it was something that I really, really needed to give my, I gave my children as much as I possibly could under the circumstances but it was nowhere near enough nature and mud, and there's this place where I go, Stanwick Lakes in Northamptonshire, and they've got, it's, it's a big space and they've got water and mud together, so all you had to do was pack some clothes, always remember to take some clothes and they could get really, really muddy and I just thought this is great and I used to take everybody up there and that's the place that I still like to go myself, I've got such happy memories of that. I think they toned it down a little bit, I don't know if they do the water so much now with the mud but it was, it was brilliant, it was.

**Yeah, because it's really just getting down and dirty with nature.**

**B1** Um.

**So just to kind of begin to finish, I'm trying to really capture what people really understand by wetlands, so if you had to try and sum up how you think people that you've interacted with perceive wetlands, kind of socially and culturally, are they just another landscape like a coastland landscape, like a mountainous landscape or do they mean something else, you know? Are they, do people recognise they're in a wetland, you know?**

**B1** I don't think they do, I don't think they do, I think we just. No, it's not a term that I would, if you said to me wetland I'd immediately think of Norfolk or, or Suffolk or somewhere, with, erm, you know, an estuary, that sort of wetland, I don't think people recognise the significance of, of this, no, they just think it's, it's a pool of water that we can walk around. [laughs]

**I think that's, yeah, I think that's very true and on that lovely note, is there anything else you would like to tell the project team, anything that you wish to communicate that you haven't so far?**

**B1** Erm, I just think they need more people educating people about all this, you know, people that have got knowledge, pass it on, give them a channel to pass it on, give them a platform, you know, there's people out there, maybe very lonely people and they, they would love to share their knowledge and they might not be the most sociable people in the world but to, you know, to, just to pass on their knowledge to the next generation and get that excitement back again.

**Yeah, brilliant. Thank you so much for your time, been wonderful.**

**B1** That's, [laughs] oh I hope I didn't mess it up REMOVED.

**I'm sure.**

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview 2 BED2

**So to open it, I wonder if you could just tell me a little bit about the organisation you're involved with, the kind of membership that you have, the geographical spread of the membership, you know, who's involved and things like the age range and the gender split and the ethnicity of the people who are involved in your organisation, so I get a really good sense of who's doing what.**

**B2** Right, yeah.

**Thank you.**

**B2** Right, okay. Well there's three organisations in fact because there's Beds Natural History Society, which is the biggest body and that's got a membership of about four hundred, probably more, about fifty five, forty five split, males to females I would think, erm, but not everybody, by any stretch of imagination, is active but age range, we've got a junior section which are called Young Gnats, which people can join really at any age, I think the youngest at the moment is six and we probably go up to now about just short of nineteen because we've just lost two of our oldest members, erm, but a big spread and as I said variable in the extent to which they will participate but across the county and a number of people from outside the county, particularly from Hertfordshire where the Natural History Society is not particularly active, erm. The other two organisations, the Fungi Group, Herts and Beds Fungi Group REMOVED many years ago, that grew out of the WEA course on fungi REMOVED, that's got about forty members, erm, and the spread of those, a lot of them from Hertfordshire but people from Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, erm, and further afield. We've got a couple of members from London, we've got one from Cambridgeshire, erm, off the top of my head, I think that's probably it because REMOVED no longer deal with that side of things, REMOVED. Again a fairly wide spread of ages, we've had some youngsters a bit of older than Beds Natural History Society but ten, eleven, twelve, certainly and remarkable where they cope with Latin names at that age, far better than most adults do and then again going up to in that case late eighties, erm, and more or less fifty fifty, if anything I'd say slightly more females than males, erm, because a lot of the interest in fungi is in cooking them and certainly in our experience the people who've been more interested in cooking them have been the female members that we've got rather than the male members. And then the third group is the Beds Invertebrate Group which REMOVED and that's got about seventy members, more males than females, probably in that case about seventy to thirty, males to females, erm. Again, level of participation is nowhere near the number of members we've got. If we get eighteen on a foreign, on a field excursion we're doing well, erm, but then part of the problem is that a lot of the members are elderly, a lot are retired, they prefer midweek, week meetings and particularly where they've got spouses still working they want to spend the weekends with them or the weekends with grandchildren, whereas they can manage midweek, whereas a lot of our members, other members are working and they prefer weekend meetings, so you can't really get a big spread of everybody there together, erm. The oldest member we've got in the invertebrate group is just coming up for ninety, he's just hung up his net finally, erm, but he was a wonderful naturalist and he's made a huge contribution to knowledge of the flies of the county and of, erm, Northants where he actually lives and we've got, although most of the Members for that group in Bedfordshire, again we've got people from Hertfordshire, people from Buckinghamshire, people from Northants, people from Hunts, people from Cambridgeshire, as the widest spread of Huntingdonshire. Okay, so.

**Yes, so.**

**B2** I think that's more or less….

**So three different groups with quite different spreads. Now I wondered if you could tell me the sort of ethos behind all three groups, so, you know.**

**B2** Well all.

**Educational, is it about collecting data?**

**B2** It's primarily identification and collecting of the data and the records, erm. The Beds Natural History Society, there, there are two main societies in Bedfordshire devoted to natural history, the Trust is primarily concerned with managing reserves but they do whole field meetings now, they didn't when I first was involved with both groups. The Bedfordshire Natural History Society their priority is recording the flora and fauna of the county, both, therefore identification and, erm, recording that and they have a system of recorders for different groups who are responsible for databasing, they have certain responsibilities within the county, present their annual report which goes in the Journal and so on. Erm, and the fungi group, as I said, REMOVED and the reason why, that a lot of people came on the courses originally, certainly in a good many cases would have been wanting to find fungi that they could eat, and they, erm, would, I was told that they could pay for their course in what they collected to eat but as time went on a lot of them became interested in fungi for their own sake and, erm, as I said, the, the fungi group grew out of that course, it had to stop when they had the health issues, erm, but, erm, for instance REMOVED, who started because of an interest in cooking them, was a professional REMOVED but she had to stop playing the flute because of, erm, RSI and she, erm, had to stop various other things but became increasingly interested in fungi for their own sake and she's now a national authority on fungi and a lot of the people that joined the fungi group are now recognised nationally across the country having started out with me. Erm, but again the main focus now is in identification and recording, I continue as REMOVED for that group and maintain the database for both REMOVED and, erm, we hold forays throughout the year in fact and we try and encourage people as well, bringing people on, say we've got some quite young members and they are, there's probably more young members there, well there are more young members in the fungi group than in BNHS, despite that being a bigger group. Erm, and in fact the two groups have organisms which attract most interest among youngsters are birds and fungi.

**Okay.**

**B2** So, erm, I think fungi because they're just so amazing and birds of course a lot of lads are particularly interested in birds and in the past that used to be egg collecting but nowadays of course with so much better photography and photographic equipment, a lot of people can take good images of birds and that's really replaced collecting eggs and so on. Erm, but the, so the fungi group, erm, very much, erm, dedicated to that. The invertebrate group, as I said Beds Natural History Society's got a lot of recorders but it became apparent to me and I was at that time REMOVED for fungi for many, many years, for bryophites for forty years, but it became apparent to me that there were groups of insects or other invertebrates which had been totally neglected and having done the bryophites for forty years and written up the flora and having passed on the fungi group to other people and having manual dexterity problems which made microscopy increasingly difficult and you need really high power microscopy, a lot of delegate work to do fungi, I became conscious of the limited amount of work that had been done on some of the invertebrates. REMOVED initially in launched an initiative called Neglected Insects in Beds, to try and stimulate greater interest and greater recording effort using photographs of REMOVED, giving lectures, encouraging people within the Society and founded the Beds Invertebrate Group to facilitate that and we've also had conferences within the BNHS devoted to groups of insects and other invertebrates that have been neglected over the years and that's all been extremely successful, erm. We've now got the, for caddisflies which of course are an aquatic group of lavi we're now one of the best recorded counties in the country for caddisflies, having gone from a standing start, erm, we're one of the best recorded counties for barkflies, again from no records to start with, erm. For a lot of other groups as well, the progress has been really impressive and Bedfordshire is really on the map and when we do the conferences, we've never had a speaker who's said no, they all do it for nothing and they're all keen to come. [laughs] Many of them say we've heard so much about Bedfordshire.

**Oh wonderful.**

**B2** And yet it's such a small county and you get people elsewhere who say ooh what's Bedfordshire got to offer? And that's basically people who really don't know much because those who do are active in natural history generally, know how much Bedfordshire is really on the map, and it always been for a lot of groups.

**Yeah. And how do they hear about the work you're doing and the data collection you've done? Is it because it's all onlines, it's all online groups?**

**B2** Well both the, the invert group is affiliated to the Beds Natural History Society and provide our insurance. The fungi group is not technically affiliated to the BNHS, though it acts as a recording body for the BNHS and for the fungi group the insurance comes through the Mycological Society, which, or British Mycological Society, which is, erm, an over, a governing body for fungi groups throughout the country, erm, but the fungi group has its own website, the Beds Natural History Society has a big website which is really excellent and the invertebrate group basically has a page on there and people can tap into that but then REMOVED send out mailings, both the BNHS, the fungi group and the invertebrate group have all got mailing groups, so people join the societies and also join the mailing groups, so they get information via that. The Beds Natural History Society has also got a Facebook group but I don't do any social media, so I've not got involved in a Facebook group for the invertebrate group or for the fungi group.

**Yeah. So in terms of, you know, obviously you know the work we're doing is focussed on wetlands and in particular Priory Country Park and Millennium Country Park.**

**B2** Yeah, yeah.

**Those two sites, do you access both of those two sites for the groups that you work with?**

**B2** Yeah, all of those groups have been to all of those sites. Marston Vale Country Park we've had, we had a foray fairly recently, last year, I think was the most recent foray but I think that's about the fourth foray that we've had there for the group and last year was amazing because it was a public foray and public forays are always very popular but the public side of it was done by two, a husband and wife part of the group, whereas the rest of us were actually doing recording and then we could then show the people, the public what we were finding.

**So it's almost in action, yeah.**

**B2** While REMOVED would basically be doing basic teaching, erm, but it proved to be a really remarkable foray because if you think about it, erm, Marston Vale has got no woodland, you've got bits of scrub but there's no proper woodland and generally if you want a foray for a full day for a group you're looking for a decent woodland with, particularly ancient, semi-natural woodland, but this produced a big list, the list was over a hundred species, which you always reckon if you got less than a hundred a day that's a bad foray but to get a hundred for a site like that is impressive and we have a lot of interesting species, we had new county records and we had some nationally scarce species as well.

**And you're saying there's no woodland because it's, it's all newly planted isn't it?**

**B2** Yeah, I mean the woodland is not really within that site is it? I mean Marston Vale is the overarching area and of course it is the Millennium, or the woodland was the body for which it was set up but the site itself is basically a wetland site as you know. So there's no actual woodland within that site although there's areas of scrub but the foray was focused really, I mean we had an indoor session first of all in the building, all our Beds Natural History Society conferences by the way, are held there and then we moved outside, basically worked our way across and as I said it was so rich, we didn't actually cover a great deal of ground and if fungi are good you don't cover that vast amounts of ground.

**Okay, because they're like, if you're going to find them on one spot they're likely to be all in that area.**

**B2** Yeah, that's right, you can spend a lot of time just covering a small area.

**So the public foray, is this an invitation where the public can see what you're doing?**

**B2** Yeah, I mean with, both BNHS, or all organisations, all the organisations hold meetings which are open to the general public and the fungi group in particular, because of the national interest in fungi we get asked by various places, will we hold a foray for the public? And we've done it for National Trust and various places. We had, I've done one for many, many years at the REMOVED and we've had hundred and forty people turn up at that, erm. We've done them at, erm, I don't know if you know, Swiss Garden.

**Yeah.**

**B2** Wrest Park, Swiss Garden has one every and REMOVED who runs that now used to be a Wrest Park, we used to have them every year, Wrest Park when she was there, we still have them occasionally at Wrest but those are generally, are forays which are open to the public and I will then, in general it's me does the teaching on those and the other fungi group members will go off and collect stuff but as I said at Priory and at Marston Vale, there's REMOVED that done it, did it last year on the site.

**And the people who come along to the foray would say they're a mix, a complete mix of different members of society?**

**B2** Complete mix, because you do, I mean we, we, although we've got some Eastern European members of the fungi group and some, erm, Western European members as well, there's no Afro-Caribbean at all but we do get some Afro-Caribbeans and some Asians come on forays. We don't generally get them on meetings for Beds Natural History Society though we have had a few and we have had a few come, we have an invertebrate day at Flitwick Moor which is the BNHS and the invertebrate group and Wildlife Trust who manage the site and we have an invertebrate day again at Swiss Garden and, erm, we've had, certainly, erm, Afro-Caribbeans and I think, certainly some Asians come on those, yes, but not that I recall for things at Marston Vale. Marston Vale BNHS, sorry at, erm, Priory Country Park. BNHS has run a lot of events there for the public and in particular for children because it's a site where you can do pond dipping reasonably safety, safely, around the big lake margin and around the Finger Lakes erm, whereas at Marston Vale it's more difficult to do pond dipping with children safely so that hasn't actually been done there but those events at Priory Country Park are very popular.

**Yeah. And do you charge for those days?**

**B2** That, well that varies on the organisation. Priority Country Park we don't, there's no charge. BNHS itself doesn't charge and the fungi group and invertebrate group don't charge but the overarching body who own the site might. For instance Swiss Garden will charge people a small amount to come which contributes to their funds. RSPB charge people a small amount to come to the, their forays and so on but we're not charging. We, we don't, we're completely voluntary, we do things for, entirely for, for nothing.

**So the pond dipping and the public forays, is the intent behind that to demonstrate the work of the groups or is it to try and engage people with nature, is there an educational element to it?**

**B2** I would say more to engage people than anything else, I mean if people show sufficient interest that they want to join, that's fine but those sorts of meetings, I mean obviously there are exceptions, like the foray at Marston Vale, public meetings are generally less productive of records than when you've just got the group themselves doing a recording because people can focus on what they want to do and the, the difficulty with, particularly public forays, are the fact that people can collect fungi without detriment, is that you get a lot of children which are very enthusiastic, which will keep coming up, one boy will come up with something, his brother will come up with one from the same clump, his sister will come up with another one from the same clump and they're all thrusting them under your nose at the same time and then the next lot of children will, also found that clump, you know, so it can get completely out of hand and you spend a lot of time that's really quite unproductive in that way but on the other hand it's not unproductive in encouraging people and that's what you, the main function of those sorts of events there.

**Yeah. And would you say that's a core part of the organisations is to help people connect with nature better or learn about?**

**B2** Yes, I mean as I said, when REMOVED founded the Invertebrate Group, erm, one of the things was to try and encourage people to take more interest in these groups which are neglected, erm, but I mean people have always had an interest in butterflies and increasingly there's an interest in moths, and birders now are, so many birders now run moth traps, whereas I can remember back in the early nineteen seventies no birder would ever look at anything under bird, you know.

**Yeah, you were quite kind of restricted in terms of what you looked at.**

**B2** Yeah, it's quite remarkable and I went for a job at the RSPB in nineteen seventy one which said a detailed knowledge of birds is not necessary, general history knowledge would be an advantage. First question I was asked was how close is your finger on the bird population in Bedfordshire? Could you for instance say whether, erm, woodlarks currently nest in the county? Yes, they do. How many pairs? And it went on like that throughout the entire interview, not a single question about anything other than birds and that was very much their focus and every time the RSPB got a new reserve, first thing they did build a scrape regardless of what they destroyed in the process. Now, totally different, the RSPB is a fantastic organisation now, I mean they, when they doubled the size of the Sandy Lodge Reserve, first thing they did was asked all the BNHS recorders to have a look at this quiet area, what's the natural history interest, what's your advice regarding management.

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

**B2** And if we do this, what will be the consequences do you think? You know, totally transformed.

**So what's changed, what's enabled that collaboration across different organisations?**

**B2** I think the fact that, I mean there's always been collaboration but I think it's the fact that the RSPB has broadened its perspective so much that they realise there was an opportunity there to bring other things in and they, I mean clearly the more the organisation became scientific, the more it became apparent that you cannot just focus on birds and ignore everything else, the birds are dependent on everything else and, I mean certainly now, the number of friends I have at the lodge and elsewhere at the, in the RSPB organisation, nationwide, who are fantastic entomologists, excellent botanists, good mycologists and so on and they've now got a whole ecological team so, you know, they.

**Their perspective is very different.**

**B2** That will drive much more the fact that they've got to be focussed on other things but I think that has cascaded downwards and I think that certainly what is obvious with the birders, a body of individuals, not a society, but birders who were primarily only focussed on birds, what's noticeable is that their main interests after that are butterflies, moths and dragonflies, all of which are fairly big things that fly [laughs] and they don't take a lot of interest in insects that crawl generally.

**No, no, I can understand that. So now more of these things about how the different organisations work together and the activities you undertake?**

**B2** Yeah.

**How important are wetland spaces in supporting the work that you do, are they integral?**

**B2** Well absolutely, I mean you, you always want a range, whenever you're organising a programme for any of those organisations, you always want a balance of habitat types and site types and with the best will in the world, Bedfordshire, despite being a well-recorded county and a fantastic county for those of us who recognise its, its potential and what it's got to offer, it does lack a lot of good habitat. We've got very little ancient semi-natural woodland, we've got very little unimproved grassland and we've got very little good wetland, so clearly wetlands that you have got are important and when you're looking to make, put together a programme there's only a limited number of sites that you can include if you want to include all those basic habitat sites in your annual programme.

**Yeah. And I guess particularly from what you're saying also to include particularly the public in some of your activities.**

**B2** Yeah, absolutely.

**That you need somewhere that's an accessible and safe place.**

**B2** You've got to have somewhere which is accessible and safe, particularly if you're wanting to involve children.

**Yeah, which of course you want to do if the idea is.**

**B2** Yeah.

**To kind of educate the next generation of potential naturalists.**

**B2** Yeah, and I mean there's no way you could take children to some of the flooded brick pits and the gravel pits at Broom and so on, it would be totally unsafe to do so, you know.

**Yeah, so because that's it, so what I'm trying to get at is really, that for some people the, you know, Priory Country Park and the Millennium Country Park are quite manicured, they're quite managed spaces.**

**B2** Yeah. Well.

**But it sounds like yes they are but we have to recognise their value for that.**

**B2** Yeah, I'd say parts of them are manicured but I think that there's also good areas there which are still pretty good wildlife habitat. I mean you look at, you know, the lake or the large pond area that you look out on from the visitor centre at Marston Vale and the far side of that is pretty good, the near side, yes, it is manicured grassland but the far side is good and some of the other wetland areas as you move across, which are marshy, are pretty good as well and when you look at Priory Country Park the main lake, okay, the edges of that are, to a large extent, fairly manicured, and the area round the boating lake the fact that it fulfils several functions of course, is part of that, the fact that you've got people can cycle and walk, it is a country park, so it caters for a whole range of, but the, again the, the Finger Lakes are good wildlife habitat and even though the edge of the main lake is fairly manicured, it's remarkable how good it is, just that thin strip between the edge of, between the footpath and the first ten feet of water going out, you know, once you get below, erm, more than tent feet out, it starting to get too deep to have much of an interest anyway, so.

**Yeah. So would you say that those sites in, when you're thinking about the whole county and the work that you do, that Priory Country Park and Millennium Country Park, they are, they are quite essential to the work that you do?**

**B2** Absolutely, yeah.

**You couldn't do the work you do without those sites.**

**B2** Absolutely, no, no. I mean for birders the best bird site is, are the Broom gravel pits, but they're not particularly good for other aspects of wildlife, erm, and certainly the vast majority of records of wetlands species of birds, of invertebrates within the county will come from one or other of those sites. There'll be some from Swiss Garden, which of course has got the lake and the woodland there, is good wet woodland habitat. Flitwick Moor is a fantastic site and far and away the best site for natural history in South East England, I mean it's so rich, erm, but, you know, that's a special case really, but as, with areas of decent open water, you're looking at those two sites really.

**Yeah. And what do you think could be done, for your organisation to improve access or use of those sites, is there something that currently needs upgrading or changing or a different perspective?**

**B2** Erm, that's a hard one really and I think that there you run up against the fact that even within natural history you will find conflicts of interest in what people would want. For instance, at Marston Vale, the birders really want the hides but the very fact of putting in a hide can be destructive of habitat, at, erm, Priory Country Park, again it's an excellent site for birders, erm, but fortunately there there's not too much conflict but I think if they wanted to start putting more hides in at Priory Country Park then the one you've got, that might create some issues but no, I think really probably most people would say they're pretty good as they are providing the management regime continues. I mean we've mentioned Flitwick Moor, which as I said is the best site in South East England for so many things and the problem there is maintaining the site as it is, I mean the management there is incredibly difficult and to get it to really keep it as it is, you've got to throw vast amounts of money at it and it can't be done, you know.

**Can't be done because there isn't the…?**

**B2** There just isn't the money and the resource available. I mean if you want me to diverge on to Flitwick Moor for a little while, it's got all sorts of inherent problems, it is a triple SI but it is small, it should be more than a triple SI, wants European recognition but there's all sorts of reasons why it hasn't got it. One of the reasons it hasn't got it is there's no buffer, it backs straight on to farmland and on to housing and that will always count against it but that is also a factor which makes it a problem in managing it and, and there's a, as you drive up the track to Flitwick Moor there's a big field on your right hand side, which is actually owned by Oxford University but it's farmland but every so often there's an application goes in to build housing on it. Now housing was built on there, you've got an even greater pressure on draining or on the, the hydrology of the site, which is difficult enough as it is because the farmland, a lot of farmland was at one time part of Flitwick Moor and of course they wanted to drain it.

**It's difficult, yeah, yeah.**

**B2** If you build housing on there you've also got the fact that whenever people's houses butt on to woodland they think they can just throw their garden waste over the hedge, and that.

**Yes, have that in Priory Country Park actually.**

**B2** Of course you do and that messes up the natural flora and you've only got to have one child drown at Flitwick, Moor which I'm afraid will be an inevitably, an inevitability sooner or later and there'll be an outcry, you know, the site should be drained.

**Yeah, because where does the water sit on Flitwick Moor? How does it? I haven't been to Flitwick Moor, so I don't know.**

**B2** Right, well it's an in, very intriguing sites, it's part of what was an, an acid bog that once went right the way across the middle of Bedfordshire and a large part of that has now dried out. Flitwick Moor is the largest remnant but you've got Penny Farthers Moor and Flitton Moor which are other small fragments and Duck End and those are the last remaining bits. Flitwick Moor is about kilometre and a half, by half a kilometre but as I said it's the best site in South East England for so many things. I mean, you know, bryophites, hundred and thirty seven species, the only site that comes anywhere near that is Wicken Fen which is eight times the size.

**Yes, so.**

**B2** It's the third best site in the country for fungus gnats and it will become the second or the first in the course of this year, it's so rich and for so many things. It's a site of special mycological importance because it's fungi are so rich. It's the best site in the county for saw flies, it's the best site in the county for all sorts of things, you know, and the best site in South East England for all sorts of things but the, the pressures on it are immense.

**So I've got a question, which is, from what you've said about Flitwick Moor, that says to me, what I'm hearing is more of a, a less, obviously all these spaces are managed.**

**B2** Yeah.

**A less managed space in terms of intervention, footpaths.**

**B2** Yeah.

**You know, car parks. When your members compare Flitwick Moor to say Priory Country Park or Millennium Country Park, do they see Flitwick Moor as a wetland and do they see the other two?**

**B2** Oh certainly see it as a wetland because it is.

**But do they see the country parks as wetlands or do they see?**

**B2** Oh yeah.

**Yeah, they do.**

**B2** I mean Flitwick Moor is the wettest site in the county, [laughs] but I mean it's not open water, it's bog and I mean you can quite easily plunge up to your waste in Flitwick Moor if you don't know what you're doing and I've done it, I've gone in up to my thigh and I've known other people who've done it, and as I said, if you've got a child that doesn't know what they're doing or thinks it's going to be ploughing off into the, erm.

**That could be worrying, yeah.**

**B2** Of the main path and so on, they've got a problem, but Flitwick Moor was dug for peat, up until the early nineteen fifties and the water was actually marketed as health, spa water, it's got masses, I mean it's brown because it's got, you know.

**Yes, all the peat.**

**B2** All these other things coming, iron salts coming out in it and so on but up until the time it was time for peat you had areas of open, moor areas of open water but those are quickly, quickly colonised and closed over and some of those are now woodland already you see, but the main part through Flitwick Moor was actually a single gauge railway track for bringing the peat to the loading area, the loading area is now the small car park and that old railway is now the main track through, erm, and I mean that helped keep that open and the fact that they were digging helped keep an area of open water. I mean some people have suggested maybe we should resume peat digging on Flitwick Moor and it would certainly make a difference in creating some more open water and we've certainly lost some diversity because there's no open water and the encroachment of trees. I mean the Trust have been doing their best to prevent too much encroachment and there's an open area which has got cotton grass in it, which is a plant you won't see anywhere else in Bedfordshire or much else in the South East of England and it's got a wealth of other interesting flora and very rich in that area itself is rich in its bryophites but that used to have things like sunview and marsh sankfoil, which have long since gone but again they've gone because they required a much more open area, and REMOVED who's our flowering plant, he was born in eighteen ninety and he was our flowering plant coordinator for many, many years, wrote to the Council for Rural Bedfordshire that preceded the one that REMOVED, and I mean he was a fantastic man, he lived in, well into his nineties, erm, but can't remember where I was going with that now but.

**I wanted to ask you, because in the middle of this flow.**

**B2** Yeah.

**What I'm really getting the sense is that these really are very special places.**

**B2** Oh they are, unquestionably, yeah.

**Yeah. So would you say that the.**

**B2** Oh I know what it was, John reckoned that, you know, the, the loss of these plants was primarily down to the encroachment of all this vegetation and that, you know, you needed quite a radical programme to, to take out more and more of these trees that were incoming.

**But.**

**B2** But you see even the conservation organisations don't get this right because the Moor is acid bog, the stream that rolls round, flows round the edge is alkaline and natural, English Nature as it was at the time, had a wonderful idea to stop all, the fact the moor was drying out, they dammed the stream without thinking well this is alkaline water and, and I went there and the stagnant mosses were dying in sheets and chucking out great globules of calcium salts on the end of their shoots because they couldn't cope.

**You need to know what you're doing on those particular.**

**B2** Now the focus is to prevent the drainage off the moor of the water rather than try and put water back on.

**Yes, well it's a complex management.**

**B2** You know, I mean as many areas are being made in the name of conservation there's, you know.

**Yeah, isn't always so?**

**B2** Don't always get it right, I mean look at the large blue butterfly, that was wiped out because of the conservation measures that went down to protect it, you know.

**So your members, would you say, how much of the work that they're involved in is for mental stimulation and to satisfy their engagement with nature and how much does that fit in with their health and wellbeing? You know, do any of your members say gosh, you know, this is, if I didn't have this, I?**

**B2** Well I would certainly say that, I mean I was interested in natural history from the moment I could crawl, and it's been in my passion throughout my life and with the exception of REMOVED and so on, you know, natural history has been really my raison d'etre and everything else hangs around that, I mean photography is basically natural history photography, you know, and the, the work I did as, teaching was basically teaching ecology primarily and the career was as close as I could get to, to doing natural history.

**Yeah, so you're.**

**B2** And then I worked as an ecologist when I left teaching.

**Right. So basically your work life and your personal life are closely connected.**

**B2** Yeah, and I mean without natural history, I mean the health issues have been a major, major problem and when I had the big back issues I couldn't sit down for five years, so I couldn't drive, I couldn't sit at a computer but it was very difficult to get out and I was walking round the village on crutches and just having to look at things that were at waist height but without that I would have gone mad, I mean I was getting totally depressed by it all and thought I'd never ever get back to leading an active life and doing the sort of things I wanted to do, I had to be very careful the sort of places I went and there's been a whole series of things since then that have done the same thing, two heart scares and these issues now and REMOVED issue, worrying about letting me out on my own because.

**Aww.**

**B2** In case I fall and so on, you know, but.

**Yeah, so but really, I mean then gives you both physical wellbeing.**

**B2** Of course.

**But also mental wellbeing from what I can…**

**B2** Oh yeah, yeah. I mean for me the stimulus of finding things and identifying things and so on is just enormous and.

**Yeah, and do your colleagues also share that?**

**B2** Yeah, I think for a lot of people that is very much the case, I mean a lot of the people I know are pretty dedicated and pretty enthusiastic. It's, I mean people have hobbies which they pick up, do for a couple of years and then drop them and move on, do something else, and okay, there are exceptions in the longevity of that with some people but very few naturalists will do natural history for a year and then drop it. If you're a naturalist, you're a naturalist and you might shift disciplines in the same way as I've shifted more from bryophites and fungi but that's been partly circumstance but then the reason I went into those was partly circumstance, up until I graduated I was always seen much more as a zoologist and it was circumstances that pushed me more in botanical direction to bryophites and fungi, erm, but I'd always said I wanted to get back to doing more on insects and that was what I've basically been able to do by relinquishing the fungi work to, to the park, or to an extent, I mean I still lead forays but I'm not running the group and I'm not recorder for the society, I'm REMOVED although it amounts to the same thing but what it does mean is I'm not getting all the enquiries from the BNHS that I used to get, thousands and thousands of appalling images that were out of focus, taken on a dark night, through a thick fog, you know.

**Yeah, yeah, you don't have to wade through those.**

**B2** That you cannot possibly identify, you know.

**No, which leads me to asking you about mosquitoes.**

**B2** Yeah.

**Given that one of the focusses of the project is about mosquitoes.**

**B2** Yeah.

**And trying to understand how they fit into the, I mean we know their ecosystem function, of course we do.**

**B2** Yeah.

**But whether they are issue for people who, you know, access these sites, whether that deters people or people aren't really bothered by mosquitoes. So for you and your members, are mosquitoes or other biting insects, and I know we discussed this in the focus group, in terms of it's hard sometimes to classify what's an insect and what's a biting insect and which one is a gnat, which one's a mosquito and.**

**B2** Well yeah, I mean separating out various groups is, is not that easy always and I mean a lot of people who aren't naturalists would see any flying insect that looked vaguely like a mosquito as a mosquito but the fact that you've got relatively few mosquito species in this country, whereas you've got six hundred species of non-biting midge, passes them by, you know. If it's flying and it settles on them and it looks like a mosquito it's a mosquito you kill it but it doesn't work like that, certainly with entomologists and within the invertebrate group, their, their immediate reaction would be catch it, let's see what it is.

**Yeah, and a different relationship altogether.**

**B2** And it's the same with all these thing, I mean REMOVED had a, when we were in Cyprus over in, REMOVED had a tick crawling on her knee, my first reaction was to catch it and it actually turned out it would have been far worse one than our tick, carries for nastier things that Lyme's Disease.

**Oh really? Oh my gosh.**

**B2** But fortunately it hadn't bitten her but it was a very interesting one and it's aroused a lot of excitement and interest among people with the, the images I've, and, you know, we, we had a, a chap who's interested in, he's very keen and very involved in the mammal group within the society and he brought me a dead polecat, which was heaving in ticks and fleas.

**Oh. [laughs]**

**B2** I mean that went in a double wrap polythene in my freezer upstairs which is dedicated to natural history, not the home freeze, fridge freezer, and from that, I mean there were umpteen ticks on it but it was the first authenticated record, for the county, of human flea.

**Really?**

**B2** Now there must have been human fleas in abundance in the county in the past but nobody will, has actually documented that of course.

**Gosh, yeah.**

**B2** And human flea is now very scarce in the country but there it was on a polecat and of course all these things will jump over us anyway, I mean they're not bothered, provided they can then get a host to feed on, erm, and I mean cat fleas, as you know, will go on us but they can't survive entirely on us, they've got to go back to cats sooner or later but all these things, you know, are there and they'll feed on other things and one of, I'm friends with the national flea recorder, erm, and he was the one who identified that but, you know, you, these things turn up on all sorts of hosts and very often it's quite unexpected, the host that you find something on, as in that case.

**So in your world mosquitoes are welcomed.**

**B2** I wouldn't say they're welcome but they're another source of interest and you want to know what is there, you want to know what they are, erm, because they were, I mean only by recording what is there have you got any handle on how things change and it's very much a course methodology or an un, erm, sophisticated way of doing it but at least we've got some idea. I mean ideally you want to record numbers, you want to, I mean we've got some idea of that from the data and the number of records we get in the database but you see for birders, they never ever used to record birds like house sparrow, song thrush, blackbird, starling, and then when they suddenly declined they had no idea when the decline was actually started and therefore it became a lot harder to actually pin down what was the cause of the decline. Now of course they record those things and they even record feral pigeon, whereas they never used to and I mean I was saying to birders way back in nineteen seventies, you know, why aren't you recording these things? The passenger pigeon was the most numerous bird in the world, it went extinct and, you know, this, to me the focus of conservation has always been wrong that you concentrate on a species which is already very rare and might be doomed, you know, and you've had round the watch, round the clock watches on Ladies Slipper Orchids and you've had special protection measures introduced for various other species, plants and animals which are scarce in the country but the key thing is to protect the habitat and to protect the overall biodiversity and focussing on rarity is wrong because what can become a one day, could suddenly become very, very scarce indeed.

**Yes, so.**

**B2** And I mean tree sparrows, I remember when they were bunging, we put up hundred and fifty nest boxes in Moor Woods in the early nineteen seventies, British Natural History Society, put up a hundred and fifty nest boxes, they were going round turfing out the tree sparrows, another damn tree sparrow, another damn tree sparrow, where now we had, occasionally we've had tree sparrow in our garden in the winter, all the birders were queuing up to see tree sparrow here on the first of January, to make sure they saw one.

**Yes, oh gosh.**

**B2** Because we've got one.

**So does that mean then that you do have records for mosquitoes then?**

**B2** Oh yeah, REMOVED got the records, REMOVED hold the records, all the, the neglected groups of insects REMOVED database. Now as far as the flies are concerned, we've got REMOVED who's been recorder for hoverflies for a long time, erm, and we've had, in fact we've had continuous recorders for hoverflies since nineteen seventy but the rest of the Diptera were under recorded, so all of Diptera records come to REMOVED, so REMOVED all the records for the mosquitoes and all the other two wing flies and similarly the barkflies and the, erm, the caddisflies, the, erm, mayflies and the stoneflies and all these other groups which are neglected, all those other records come to me.

**So in terms of the mosquito populations and Priory Country Park and Millennium Country Park.**

**B2** Yeah, yeah.

**Have you noticed a change over time?**

**B2** It's, there's not enough lengths of time really to say because the initial, it was only launched in two thousand and ten, and as I said part of the problem was that we've virtually got no records for most of these things and we were working from a standing start and even, I mean I don't know if you know a little hopper, red and black hopper, little plant hopper, it's about that big and beautiful little red and black thing, and there was not a single published record for that for the county and yet it's quite common and that was the one that first set me, well why are there no published records? Because nobody's been recording them, all these things and we've got no idea of how numerous they are, how widespread they are, and we'll have no idea if they start to decline.

**No.**

**B2** So that was why REMOVED launched that initiative in two thousand and ten but I mean eight years is hardly long enough.

**No, you need time.**

**B2** To really put a big, erm, erm, lot of information on.

**Yeah, and talking about time, have you noticed a change in attitudes towards wetlands over the time that you've been doing your work? So, and I mean that from the general public, do you think people understand wetlands a bit more, do you think that they've been rehabilitated somehow and if so?**

**B2** I don't, I don't think there's a straight answer to that, I think that naturalists have always valued wetlands, I think members of the public, some of them have been totally ambivalent about wetlands but then some of the public are totally disinterested in natural history and open spaces and when you think, I mean the classic example of this is ancient semi-natural woodlands and Boris Johnson's statement, which just shows what an arse he is, well all this rubbish about ancient, semi-natural woodlands, after all how long does a tree live? Sixty years. I mean people.

**That's just ignorance though isn't it?**

**B2** I mean so many people, just ignorance I'm afraid and I mean certainly within the Houses of Parliament there are fewer people now with any scientific expertise than any time in history. Okay there are some that have some scientific expertise but it's fewer, less than at any time in history. The House of Lords has got a bit more but the House of Lords is constantly drawing attention to the problem. The House of Lords produced a big report a few years back saying about the lack of expertise now in whole groups of organisms. We've now got nobody in the country working on thrips, tiny insects but economically they're important and there's just one person left alive who really knows anything about thrips and can identify them and you've got nobody at the Natural History Society recording large numbers and you've got collections which are just falling into a state of deterioration.

**So would you then say that that's a result of, I don't, a kind of long term disinterest by Government.**

**B2** I think Government, a lack of interest by Government certainly plays a part and you look at, erm, the fact that we used to put a lot more money into science and into natural situations, even you go back and you look at the fact that when I was a kid, every park had a park-keeper, you know, and places were looked after, they weren't necessarily manicured but they were looked after and all those sorts of jobs are gone and the number of people that work. When I first started an interest in mycology in nineteen sixty eight, there were fourteen full-time mycologists at Kew, there were twenty four at Cabby, there's now none at Kew that are actually devoted to identifying British species, you've got one mycologist who's really, his role is very strategic and all the other people that are there are voluntary, they spent a couple of million I think it was on a new fungus library because the old one was bursting at the seams but nobody's staffing.

**So it's all staffed mainly by the volunteers?**

**B2** The mycology section at Kew now is, yeah.

**Yeah, and that's.**

**B2** And there's nobody professionally in Britain now working on larger fungi.

**And that seems to be a trend isn't it, this reliance on volunteers?**

**B2** Yeah, yeah, you've got nobody working, you've got people working on plant and animals pathogens but Cabbie you see, which is really in that field, from twenty plus people, down to just two and they've been told when they retire they won't be replaced.

**So then how do we ever stand a chance of, you know, improving engagements with nature?**

**B2** That's it, yeah.

**Taking care of nature, if there isn't investment.**

**B2** Yeah, exactly, but they don't care and they just show a total lack of interest at that level and I say even people within the House of Lords have tried to reverse that but it can't be done.

**And.**

**B2** And while you've got that attitude at that level, it's hardly surprising that you get that lower down. I mean my teaching subject was environmental studies and it was an option subject against geography at, erm, GCSE, or O'Level CSE as it was when I first started, they're all and then there was an A'Level Department at A Level and as an option subject it was the most popular of the options in that block because there was also music and, can't remember what the other one was in there now, erm, and at ‘A' Level it was the biggest department in the school and I never had a student who went, who didn't go on and wasn't able to use the fact they'd got ‘A' Level environment studies. Marcus Yeo who I taught is now Director of the Institute of Ecology, a lot of people I taught have gone on and there was never any lack of interest in students but what do they do? They brought the national curriculum to get rid of that. Environmental education could be, should be cross-curricular, you know, and I saw the problems with that when you've got English people, English Departments completely muddling up issues like, erm, ozone hole and, erm, global warming and general pollution issues and so on, you know, and completely muddled thinking because they didn't understand them and yet they were teaching it.

**It's a specialism, yeah. Do you think things like Countryfile and Spring Watch and Autumn Watch has helped rehabilitate natural spaces in terms of getting the public interested?**

**B2** I don't know, I mean I used to watch some of those, I used to watch Countryfile and things like Springwatch but to be honest I found they become, became so dumbed down, I couldn't face watching them and you see in the early days I thought Bill Oddie did a huge amount to promote ornithology and natural history per se but his, he became an increasingly angry and silly individual and I'm not alone among naturalists who just couldn't watch it, erm, whether that was him or whether it was the BBC pushing in that, I don't know. I mean I've met David Attenborough on a couple of occasions and I know that he has refused to do things for the BBC and he gets away with it because of who he is but they wanted him to do the commentary for Walking with Dinosaurs and he wouldn't do it because he said you are completely muddling fact, total fiction, pure fantasy and speculation and you're never indicating which is which. Giving dinosaur babies individual names and twee little stories about them might be popular for people watching but it doesn't really educate people.

**No. So there's a gap then isn't there between?**

**B2** Yeah, and, you know, I've seen it with other presenters as well. I was thinking the other day, there was somebody else who I fear has become very much in the same mould, I can't think now who it was that I was looking at and thinking well you're going exactly the same way as Bill Oddie. So as I said, whether it's the BBC that are driving that and I know David Attenborough's resisted it over the years and things they've wanted him to say, things they've wanted him to put in and certainly for the American audience they wanted him to, to do particular things and he wouldn't do it and yet he's extremely popular in America anyway.

**Yeah. So if you could, you know, bring in a new policy or some changes to the, you know, curricular.**

**B2** Um.

**I don't know, what would you do to encourage people to get engaged more with our wetland spaces and the natural environment within those spaces, what do you think needs to shift?**

**B2** Well I think it's very, very difficult because the pressures on curricular in schools are now more intense than they've ever been and certainly one of the things that we have always found within science courses is that you put more and more and more in and very little comes out and certainly, my wife taught physics and towards the end of her teaching career what was on the physics ‘A' Level syllabus was very much what some of us would have been doing at degree level and yet the expectations in order to achieve a pass are a lot lower, so it's, it's, a very ambiguous direction in which things have gone but how you, I can't see that you could fit environmental studies or an equivalent back into a school curriculum. It varies very much across the country, dependent on the interest and enthusiasm of individual members of staff what is done both at primary school level and at secondary level that relates to natural history. In biology ecology was always something you did tacked on the end if you had time and generally you didn't and even at university level our son, our eldest son was very much like me, an organism biologist, so difficult to find a course that he could do because so much of biology has been hijacked by chemistry, biochemistry and it's at a molecular level. He went to Oxford and he went there because they did still do quite a lot taxonomy and so on but the people that taught the molecular stuff, oh this is the most exciting stuff and yet all the students loathed it, they said it was dreadful. The lecturers might have thought it was exciting but their delivery was appalling, most of them ended up far more interested in the whole organism stuff but then try and find a job and if you can find a job find a job that's going to pay you and, erm, what really got me was that Richard Dawkins and his estranged wife, who don't speak except via inter, via intermediaries even wanted to get rid of the field course and I quote, "because it is old hat and a waste of time" and yet the students were up in arms because they said it was actually the best bit of the course but that's the problem. At all levels, you've got pressures, which are squeezing and it's that side of things which tends to get squeezed and you say well we want more money for, or we want more doing on this and you want more money putting into conservation, you want more money putting in natural history but they'll say yeah but what about the Health Service, what about the roads, what about this, what about? And it's absolutely true, you know, the demands are just immense.

**Yeah, it's a smaller and smaller pot.**

**B2** Yeah.

**Is there anything that you would like finally to share with the project that you would like to pass on to the team, to the funders, to the powers that be?**

**B2** I think I've probably said enough. [laughs]

**[laughs] Oh.**

**B2** Probably too much in some cases.

**No, you've been wonderful, really wonderful.**

**B2** Yeah. I mean as I said, natural history has been my passion all my life, I've spent my life trying to enthuse and encourage and interest others in it and to a large extent I think I've done that, you know, I mean I've lead tours overseas and people have enjoyed them and so on. I've finished doing that because health issues, I just don't feel, I feel I'm going to become a liability to myself let alone to clients but, you know, it's still, it won't stop me doing things and it won't stop me still promoting natural history and encouraging people to take an interest in it but it does get very depressing at times, you know, the way things are going, both with regard to the amount of building on sites which are important, the other loss of sites. I mean when I left the teaching and worked as an ecologist, one of the things I was responsible for was monitoring woodland grant scheme applications and you got the ludicrous situation where a nice bit of grassland will be earmarked for building houses on, or cleared or it was in, at that time, in, erm, I can't remember where it was set aside, and they wanted to build houses, trees on it, put trees on it and ancient semi-natural woodland, they're clearing and wanted to put houses or factories on.

**But then, and then they would say. I'm just going to turn these off now.**

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview 3 Bed3

**So thanks for agreeing to see me today.**

**B3** Okay.

**And if you could just briefly outline for me which hat you're wearing today and so in that particular vein, say how long have you undertaken that role and what's your connection with the wetlands?**

**B3** Right, okay, so my name's REMOVED, I live in REMOVED and that is, erm, on the River Ouse and we have the, erm, flood plain for the Ouse directly, so it sits right on the, REMOVED of the River Ouse. So if we start off and we explore being a River Warden because that's where I interact mainly with the, erm, the environment then perhaps we'll talk about the things afterwards, yeah, if you want to.

**And how long have you been a River Warden for?**

**B3** Erm, so we moved to Kempston two years ago and for the first, so we moved in two thousand and sixteen and for the first year I was doing otter spotting, erm.

**Lovely.**

**B3** Along the river and from that, erm, we, I then, erm, I also used to volunteer with, erm, the woodland (unclear due to background noise) the group there and they manage the woodland and … … walks and that it was those, that group that sent round the prospectus do you want to become a River Warden? So that's how I got into being a River Warden, that group at … Erm, so I've been a River Warden for a year now.

**Yeah. And is it a voluntary role? I mean how does it work in terms of hours given or is it up to you to define how many hours you work?**

**B3** It's, it's, erm, it's up to each particular warden to define how many hours they do, erm, there's no stipulation, so you can do once a week, you can do once a month, you can do once a quarter, you could do once a quarter, you can do once a year, erm, and it's mainly, as a River Warden, it's mainly looking for pollution in the river and invasive species.

**So this is I guess physical pollution, like saying you can actually see debris in the water?**

**B3** Yeah, yeah. So, and looking for fly-tipping because it's near a main road so looking for fly-tipping, reporting it, erm, looking for pollution in the water because it's quite built up round it, so number of water outlets, erm, then there's no farmland or land where particular stretch so there wouldn't be any farm, erm, erm, pollution.

**Okay, yeah, yeah.**

**B3** Yeah, erm, but having said that it is, erm, heavily used by dog walkers, so it's not a managed area as such, it's, I think it's mile, as a footpath, the actual path is around a mile, so you've got the actual river itself and then, erm, a, I think they call it the Long Lane, so a channel that's been, an overflow channel that's been cut and it tends to be used mainly by dog walkers, the River Warden has got nothing whatever to do with dog walkers, the actual area itself is also looked after, it's part of the Vauxhall Angling Fishing Club, they have bailiffs and they, they will look after that, so they, they have got the fishing rights for a long way, along that part of the, the river bank and they do have active bailiffs there and they do maintain the footpaths and they do have, erm platforms for fishing … I don't …

**Okay, so do you have then much interaction with the bailiff?**

**B3** No, none at all.

**No.**

**B3** Erm, I went out with REMOVED, when we did our base level survey and we met the, erm, Chairman of the Vauxhall, the Anglers Association, so he made contact with REMOVED and, erm, think REMOVED was trying to get them to become River Wardens as well and that, so they could take over the stretch I have and I'd move down but nothing's come of that yet.

**Oh okay, okay. You don't think they really wanted to take on an additional role?**

**B3** Erm, I don't know, I honestly don't know, I honestly don't.

**So in terms of the River Warden work, who’s overseeing, who's the kind of, what's the chief organisation of the River Warden's work?**

**B3** That's the, oh gosh, what's REMOVED The Wildlife Trust.

**Oh okay, yeah.**

**B3** I think that's what his name is.

**Okay.**

**B3** And it's part of the, oh, sorry about this (background noise in café selected by participant distracts participant from remembering their line of thought).

**It's not a kind of, a legal duty is it?**

**B3** No, no, no, no.

**It's all voluntary.**

**B3** It's voluntary.

**Build up a kind of baseline of what the river looks like as it's been treated and?**

**B3** And it's the Ouse Valley and Tributaries so it's the Ouse, the Ivor, the River Flit, erm, the Ouse which comes through Leighton Buzzard so, erm, it's, yeah, it's.

**So if you like it's the water courses that will connect with the wetland here.**

**B3** Yeah.

**But your actual focus is outside of this particular wetland?**

**B3** Yeah, I think it's taken over a lot of what the Environmental Agency perhaps would do, so it's just having eyes and ears on the ground so if there's anything that goes wrong, if there's any, erm, invasive that, any invasive species that they want it reporting, and don't actually have to do anything, we just have to report it.

**Got you, yeah.**

**B3** If there's any fly-tipping you report it, erm, if there's any, erm, at. There's also monitoring changes, erm, over a period of time, so I went on a course for static photography and the idea is that you take, well let's see, you go once a year, once a quarter and you take a photograph from the, the same place of course, same direction, each year and then, erm, so that the Environmental Agency or whoever keeps the central database can look to see what changes have taken place over the course of time because you don't always.

**No, you wouldn't.**

**B3** It's so gradual you wouldn't see it, so things like erosion of banks, change in vegetation, change in use.

**And have you noticed changes yourselves in the time that you've been doing the work?**

**B3** No.

**No, no.**

**B3** I think I've been very lucky that I haven't seen invasive species so I haven't got any problems I haven't seen any, erm, crayfish, so that's fine. There are planning changes, there are perspective changes could take place because they want to build a canal from the Ouse to Milton Keynes to, to connect them up, so you've got the Oxford Cambridge corridor, erm, and they are trying to build, or there are plans to build the canal between them, to link up the, erm, the Ouse and the Great, the Grand Union Canal, erm, because it goes from Kempston to Milton Keynes, erm, and in order to do that, I mean what they have to do is actually dredge the river because you can't get boats up beyond Kempston Mill.

**Can't you?**

**B3** So they're talking about dredging the river. Erm, and I think REMOVED is, there've been, he's been to a lot of meetings to see how that affects because obviously it will affect, erm, and the angling, the Vauxhall Anglers Association are very concerned because, erm, there are sort of quite, erm, there are quite a few riffles along the river section of the bed where the fish will actually spawn, so if you dredge, if you dredge it they'll lose that.

**Got you, yeah. So then there's a kind of tension then between this idea of development because it's going to be bring tourists in to the local area.**

**B3** Yeah, yeah.

**And then actually what, how people actually use the river.**

**B3** To do that.

**Actually want for themselves.**

**B3** Yeah, yeah, so, and that's where the Wildlife Trust people will become involved because they might then have to set up separate gravel beds for the fish to spawn, so, erm, but I think that's still in the planning stage, nothing's happened but it's, erm.

**So do you get to meet with the other River Wardens or is it?**

**B3** No.

**No, it's just basically calling it in aren't you? Yeah.**

**B3** Yeah, yeah. There's a website, erm, so you go out and do your survey, you fill a form online and then you split it, so from my perspective, erm, I'm actually a little disappointed, erm, I'd like to, this, well I'm going out and supporting this what, what's happening.

**You don't get any feedback in terms of where that data is going or?**

**B3** Or what they want doing or meeting with people, how's it going, who's doing all the sections, erm, so I think it's lost a bit of its impetus for doing that, so whether it will fold up, I don't know.

**Yeah, because it sounds like it's quite isolating really.**

**B3** It is, yeah.

**Not kind of part of the social group that's doing something collectively.**

**B3** No, no. They had, erm, I think they had a meeting in January where they got together to say thank you for what they were doing, erm, and at that point I hadn't even realised I was supposed to be submitting these forms online, so I'd been going out and collecting information and talking to people, it's like oh what do you do with that information? And so it's not as organised as I'd possibly like and I don't think they, I don't know what they do with the information but things like photographs, I've stopped taking them because.

**They're just sitting in your file somewhere.**

**B3** Yeah, yeah, so.

**Sounds like they could do with a bit more coordination really.**

**B3** Yeah.

**But again I would imagine that probably also comes down to finances because.**

**B3** Finance, yeah.

**They're all volunteers themselves aren't they?**

**B3** Yeah, yeah.

**So in terms of your connection with Priory Country Park.**

**B3** Um.

**Is this a place that you go to very much?**

**B3** It is, it is, erm, yeah, really just for walking purposes, erm, so I would, husband, I would come down here with my husband, husband and I, come down here sometimes, it's, it's a lovely walk, erm, all the way round so really that's what we would use it for, erm.

**And how often would you, does it depend on the weather or on your availability?**

**B3** I'd possibly, two or three times a year because there are so many different walks round here, erm, you're spoilt, you really are spoilt for choice.

**Yeah, and always through, in the daytime?**

**B3** Yes, yeah.

**Yeah. You're not a night walker?**

**B3** No, no, no, no. [laughs]

**No? I ask because when I talked to the bat group people and they're taking bat groups out, of course they have to do that in the evening because of the bats.**

**B3** Yeah.

**And if, but they do sometimes see people here kind of, I don't know, it's a nice summer's evening and I guess coming down.**

**B3** Yeah, but then we've got, we're so close to the river, whereas to get here we have to, erm, get in the car, driven twenty minutes, park the car, whereas we have urban countryside right on the doorstep, so.

**Yeah. So it's not quite local enough for you really is it?**

**B3** No.

**In terms of just popping along.**

**B3** Yeah.

**When you can open your front door and walk outside.**

**B3** Outside, yeah, yeah. So I think, you know, the cafes very nice, that's good facilities but we're not really into boating or any water activities here so, yeah.

**Yeah, but it sounds like the walking thing's also, it is then part of your hit list of places you do like to go and walk next to water and….**

**B3** Yes, yes, yeah.

**And for health and wellbeing purposes I presume?**

**B3** It's fairly flat, erm, so, erm, my husband has had some hip problems, erm, I now have got a hip problem. Never do walking netball, it is not as healthy as it seems.

**Walking netball?**

**B3** Yes, I started it thinking I'm going to be healthy and I now have a really sore hip that's been like since October, so.

**Caused directly by.**

**B3** Walking.

**Note to self.**

**B3** Yes.

**No netball. [laughs]**

**B3** [laughs] So, erm, it's good for just, it's good for bringing families, you see a lot of families round here, the paths are all laid out so you can get pushchair round, so, erm, it's a place we would probably bring out granddaughter round here as well, it's, it's a good family facility.

**And does, do your children come here with the grandchildren?**

**B3** No, it's not wild enough for them, they're into things like wild camping and mountaineering and this is, this is too tame. [laughs]

**Okay, it's too structured with the paths.**

**B3** It's, they, yeah, yes, they're thirty five now.

**See that's interesting to me because if we're going to try and encourage people to use wetlands for health and wellbeing.**

**B3** Right.

**We want to make it as attractive to people as possible. It's been almost that, there's again another tension between keeping wetlands as they are and then making them accessible with paths and cafes.**

**B3** Um.

**But it sounds like your children are kind of another category which there's quite a large contingent of them.**

**B3** And.

**They would actually rather it a more wilder space with less paths.**

**B3** Yes, yes.

**And less people coming.**

**B3** Yeah, so.

**Yeah, yeah, so.**

**B3** But, yeah, it's interesting.

**Yeah, and just a sort of kind of reflection on who comes to visit, would you say, because of course Bedford's quite a mixed, you know, it's quite a mixed town in terms of ethnic….**

**B3** Um, one of the highest in the country I think.

**Yeah, but do you think that's reflected here by people who use the wetlands?**

**B3** Yes, yeah, yeah, because a lot of things you go to, seem to be predominantly white middle class but I think it's because it is fairly accessible for large families, you do, I have seen quite a, a good ethnic mix here.

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

**B3** Yeah, that's good.

**Yeah, it's nice when you see people coming actually and having sort of big family picnics because as you've said there is the space actually.**

**B3** Yeah, yeah.

**If you want to have a gathering of thirty people it's quite easy to do it here.**

**B3** Yeah, and, erm, okay, we were coming down this afternoon there were two ladies in, in full, erm, dress and they, and, but they, there were no men around so they felt safe enough to come down by themselves with the children so it's, it's a good safe environment for people.

**That's the other thing isn't it about making sure these spaces, people feel safe?**

**B3** Um.

**Not just in terms of walking around but even things like leaving their car in the car park.**

**B3** Yes, yeah.

**And do you feel that's the same here, that actually all of the site is quite safe?**

**B3** Yes, yes.

**Yeah, okay, that's really positive. So are there any things that would maybe draw you away from using these wetlands? Is there anything that makes you think twice about coming here?**

**B3** Too many people.

**Interesting.**

**B3** It's too many people, I like, I mean we've just come back from the Lake District and we went off peak, off season to a really remote area, not.

**Did you go to the North Lakes?**

**B3** We went, yes, we went to Ullswater but, erm, I just, if I'm going to be in the countryside I'd do it because I want the peace and quiet, erm, so it's, it's, that would, that would fit my views and if it became too commercialised, erm, there were too many people or, erm, it's, became a dumping ground let's say for fly-tipping or just, it was, it was about, it was not seen as a good resource, it was just seen as something where we can just, we don't need it, we can just dump everything, erm, in there, and that would put me off as well, so, erm, and it's good to see, erm, species coming back into, into these areas and I said that I was, erm, an otter spotter on the, erm, the Ouse, the whole year I didn't see one otter, I mean there's signs of otters because it's, because there's so many dog walkers there and that's, that's the theory behind it, whereas up, upstream there are otters, erm.

**Because there's no footpath for dog walkers?**

**B3** Yes.

**Yes, oh interesting, interesting, yeah.**

**B3** So, erm, it's, it's good to see, erm, things coming back into, into the environment and it being managed in such a way that it's, it's happening again.

**Yeah. So it's almost as if it needs almost a light touch management then.**

**B3** Um.

**In terms of encouraging the wildlife back but not, because when you said there are too many people, do you feel there's a kind of, I use the word tension quite a lot but a tension between this being a wilder space within the centre of town and it being a bit too manicured?**

**B3** I don't actually see it as being a wild space, it just feels like a park with a lake in the middle. So I don't, I don't see it as being, I wouldn't call this, erm, a wildlife, yeah, wildlife area of the country but we live here, it's.

**And have, the other wetland that we are looking at in our project, the Millennium Country Park, so it's called Marston Vale.**

**B3** Yes, I hate that even more. Sorry, sorry.

**No I like it, I like it.**

[laughs]

**Why is that, what is it about?**

**B3** There's no biodiversity, it's, erm, because I, I am from Bedfordshire so I can remember it being, erm, being used for the clay, erm, and it's obviously clay is, at the moment it's, there's no fertility in soil and so on, and it's taking a long while for the flora and fauna to regenerate so actually walking round there isn't a lot of interest there, it will come as, as the trees grow and you get more species but at the moment it's, it's pretty, there's a monoculture but I don't, I don't see like a variety but been there a couple of times, the centre is absolutely amazing but I wouldn't go back there again.

**Okay, because for you it's the wildlife that pulls you to the place?**

**B3** Yeah, yeah.

**Not the access to the space.**

**B3** It felt, felt like walking in a lunar landscape, it. [laughs] You said be honest.

**No, that's true, no, but it's, because it's really fascinating, because you know the area you know the kind of background behind it, I mean you're quite right, they're trying to work with something that's had a very industrial past.**

**B3** That's right, and it will take time to regenerate, erm, and you can see that and it's, I suppose from ecologists, it's quite good to see the, the first species coming in and, and colonised and it will come back because obviously clay's quite fertile but, but at the moment I say the area's it's just like walking on the moon, there's very little there.

**Yeah, and yet would you say from your experiences of being there that it's as popular with family and different types of recreational users?**

**B3** It's.

**Or is this place more popular for?**

**B3** No, it seemed to be, it seemed to be, just as popular when we were there so it was difficult to park and famous for, I suppose it's larger for, the plants to walk round, so it was more spread out but just seem to sort of be funnelled in a certain direction, so, erm.

**For instance have you been to the Finger Lakes here at Priory Country Park?**

**B3** Um.

**And have you been to, taken the river route that goes up towards Tesco?**

**B3** I haven't walked up there, I've been to, erm, the Danish Camp up, so, so we're still, you know, getting used to, to living in Bedford, erm.

**Yeah, because I'm quite interested in that, some people have said that people will walk around the lake.**

**B3** Um.

**And then they think that's the extent of the park. There's other….**

**B3** I didn't, even I didn't realise that, so, so, erm, the countryside, do a little bit more exploring.

**Yeah. What would be interesting, be interested to know if having done that whether you would maybe see a different side of the wilder spaces.**

**B3** Yeah.

**Because I know that for some wetlands they have an approach where they don't mark footpaths, so the footpaths are logged but they don't maybe mark them on the map to discourage people from accessing some of the spaces.**

**B3** Right, right.

**Which doesn't mean they can't access them but like you said it's at the top numbers.**

**B3** Yeah.

**And how do you encourage people to come and enjoy the space but not disturb the wildlife when they need?**

**B3** Space, yeah, yeah.

**For breeding and everything else.**

**B3** Haven't thought about it like that, yes.

**Yeah. So in terms of then what kind of deters you is really to do with just too many people.**

**B3** Yeah.

**And then the other site it's the fact that it's.**

**B3** There's not enough, needs more diversity.

**Yeah. So in ways those are sort of positive negatives if you like really, you know, it's nothing to do with.**

**B3** Us humans are complex creatures.

**We are complex creatures, we are complex creatures because, of course one of the things that I'm very interested in are mosquitoes.**

**B3** Okay.

**And I wondered if that's ever been a part of your experience of being on these particular wetlands, have ever seen mosquitoes or biting insects generally.**

**B3** I mean I, I am very, very susceptible, very, to biting insects and it's never been a problem here, the two years we've been here, it's been no problem at all. Normally I can't go outside and I'm just completely covered in insects that just seem to like me, it's never been a problem here. And I've also noticed there are no, I haven't seen, lots of swallows around this year aren't there? Whereas they were up in the Lake District so they obviously have arrived but I haven't seen them yet.

**Yeah, because that's, again there is a link between the two really, you know.**

**B3** Yeah, yeah.

**So yeah, because a lot of people have said they haven't seen mosquitoes and we're trying to figure out why that, is it just that they're not where the people go, you know?**

**B3** Well so we, we live right on the, the River Ouse so you, there, the insect population's quite high, it could bethat there’s nothing biting, but the mosquitoes, nothing biting at all.

**No. So in terms of either putting you off from going or deterring where you go on a site actually mosquitoes have no impact whatsoever?**

**B3** No.

**No, okay. Well that's really useful to know.**

**B3** What have we done to them?

**I don't know, what have we done to them? Because there's, I don't know if you've seen but there's currently an alert out in France for tiger mosquitoes, these are the ones that could potentially carry the Zika virus.**

**B3** Oh really?

**Um, and that's what's so interesting, is that some sectors seem to have these expanding mosquito populations. Now we have, we've also got an ecological survey going on in twelve sites for mosquitoes.**

**B3** Right.

**This is one our partner organisations that's leading on, so we'll actually know soon, in the next six months or so, exactly what scale of things that we totally have on the sites.**

**B3** Ah interesting.

**Of course most of them don't bite, it's only a small. They come for obviously like you.**

**B3** They come for me.

**They come to you but I mean that's, yeah, I mean it's curious isn't it because when I talk to people they've often said it's other things that bite, so it might be horseflies.**

**B3** Yeah.

**Or gnats that seem to be irritants.**

**B3** No, nothing.

**No, well I think we can only celebrate that that keeps you.**

**B3** Well it's swings and swallows so, so, you know. I can, I can dress for mosquitoes, I have a mosquito repellent outfit but.

**Wow, that's impressive, I mean all I've got is a bit of, you know.**

**B3** No, I try not to, so I wear the clothes and.

**That's very sensible. So that's it. So in terms of, we were talking about sort of representations of wetlands, is there anything else that you would like to see done differently in terms of the management of the wetlands here in Bedfordshire?**

**B3** Erm.

**Given your sort of ecologist biodiversity wildlife hat on.**

**B3** Erm, um, gosh, it's difficult. I suppose from my artist perspective there's not a huge, I haven't come across, I've probably missed it with the areas that, a huge variety of wild flowers, erm, yeah, that would be the only thing. Erm, so I'm not too sure how we would manage that at all.

**Yeah. So in terms of where you go for sites for your spotting of your clouds that you use for your inspiration.**

**B3** Um.

**It won't be on a wetland site.**

**B3** No, no, I've tended to go to Mowsbury Hill Fort because it's an ancient meadow so they'll have, they've got, erm, good variety of orchids and the, a good variety of, of plants, erm, I just haven't seen that here, it could well be that I've missed it and I've got to do a bit more exploring say we've only been here two years and it does take a while to, to get to know the sites but, erm, yeah, I'm desperately looking for some bee orchids at the moment.

**Bee orchids.**

**B3** But, erm.

**Okay, I'll put my feelers out for you.**

**B3** Well I know where they are but they're not on the wetlands, so I.

**Yes, ah. And where's Mowsbury Hill Fort?**

**B3** It's, do you know where Mowsbury golf course is?

**Um.**

**B3** Well there's Mowsbury golf course and then the golf course is sort of in a hill, I didn't realise it was there and on top of a hill there's a wooded area and that's the that's the Hill Fort, it’s quite near woods.

**Oh okay.**

**B3** So there's, there's a note, erm, some woodland and then there is ancient forest, ancient orchard in the middle.

**How lovely.**

**B3** And it's a community orchard so it's one of these things, it's not signposted so you don't know it's there but I think last year we got, I don't know, quite a lot in the autumn, there's just a big variety of fruit with damsons, there are plums, there are amazing apples and you, it's there, it's, it's a community, erm.

**So you can kind of almost help yourself within reason?**

**B3** Oh yes, yes.

**Wow, that's amazing. I mean I lived in Bedford for years and I didn't know about that.**

**B3** No, no, we didn't either, a lot of people don't but we went on, erm, in September Bedfordshire have a walking celebration, one of the walks was through there and we got talking to people.

**How lovely.**

**B3** And I think they go once a week on a Wednesday just to, it's volun, once again it's volunteers and they maintain it, so.

**Yeah, how lovely. Do they ever come here for their spectacular walk?**

**B3** No, they, oh I don't know, they might do, they, there's a, it's just a whole, it's a whole month of walks.

**Okay. Oh I'll have to kind of get in contact with them?**

**B3** Yes.

**Is it through the Council?**

**B3** Yes.

**Okay, well I'll contact them and see if I can come in September.**

**B3** Oh see if there's any wet, wetlands.

**Yes, try and encourage them to come along.**

**B3** Yeah.

**So my last section of this lovely chat, it's got a very fancy title which is Contemporary Social Representations.**

**B3** Wow.

**You're telling me.**

**B3** [laughs]

**What it basically means is that wetlands have always had quite a bad rap if you like, if you think about sort of historical fiction and depictions of wetlands, it's always to do malaria and the ague and.**

**B3** Right.

**You know, Great Expectations where people hide in the mists.**

**B3** Right.

**And so one of the things we're trying to as well, we're doing a historical analysis of wetlands and in all forms of cultural depictions.**

**B3** Um.

**So whether that's literature or art or whether it's legal documents and I'm trying to find like contemporary representation, so really kind of how are wetlands are perceived now by people, you're a person.**

**B3** I'm a person.

**You're a person, so.**

**B3** So the rumour has it. Erm, yeah, perhaps I'm maybe a peculiar person because I'm, I'm actually a geographer by profession.

**Are you?**

**B3** So, erm.

**We should have special glasses shouldn't we?**

**B3** And we're REMOVED so that's. [laughs]

**I think the connection runs deep. [laughs]**

**B3** So, so, erm, I actually, just talking to, wetlands and the big area, I love the Fens, the flat country, the Broads, that area, so, erm, it's one of, it's one of those areas I think, for me wetlands is supposed the same as, synonymous with mountains, there's still a lot of wildlife there, there's a lot of, erm, untouched areas there. Getting away from Bedford and moving right out into Norfolk and Suffolk and the Fens, erm, and there's a lot of wildlife life there, erm, and I just think it's amazing place. Plus talking about Fens we did some punting through some of the, the reed beds in France and it's just amazing.

**So would you, when you think about in your mind's eye of a wetland, again you said before that you see this as a park with a lake in it so.**

**B3** I was, yeah, I was really surprised when you, you were talking about wetlands, you came here and then you started talking about Priory Park and I was thinking I didn't see that as wetland, I see the Fens and the Broads as wetlands, rather than here. This is, this is just an old gravel pit to me.

**Yeah. Because for the work we're doing we're trying to look at all different types of wetlands.**

**B3** Right.

**So this constructed wetland.**

**B3** Right.

**In an urban setting, is, you know, we contrast this with say, an estuary wetland.**

**B3** Yeah.

**Lincolnshire and Somerset Levels and they're all very different types of landscapes, they are all wetlands.**

**B3** Yeah.

**And so it's trying to capture how wetlands create a sense of place, I mean would you say that when you think of wetlands you immediately get a kind of image in your mind?**

**B3** Of reed beds, flat.

**Yeah, big skies.**

**B3** Big skies, yeah.

**Yeah. Because would you say that, you know, if were to think of say the landscapes that you enjoy being in, whether that's doing your artwork or whether you're walking with your husband do you get, is there something that creates a real sense of place for you that you feel really connected to?**

**B3** It would be, it wouldn't be wetlands, it would probably be, erm, somewhere like the nature stretch, so the wetlands, no, erm, no, I wouldn't, wouldn't have a sense of place for me, erm, or within Bedfordshire it would be places like that, the Green Sand Ridge and that's, that's my idea of, that's my place.

**Yeah, yeah. So do you think you could, it's possible to say then that a sense of place is really personal, you know, it's? I mean that sounds almost too obvious doesn't it? What I mean is you either feel it or you don't.**

**B3** Yes.

**Kind of quite marmite like in a way.**

**B3** Yeah.

**So some people love wetlands, absolutely adore them and others, you know, I get the sense that you enjoy the, the kind of green blue space but it's not really, it doesn't really float your boat in terms of the landscape.**

**B3** No, no, no.

**Yeah, no, I think that's really interesting. Sort of continuing on with this idea of how wetlands are represented, do you think that's changed in the last few years?**

**B3** I think with the work that's going on around Peterborough and doing Great Fen, erm, that is, erm, making people, I hope it's making people identify wetlands as being, erm, a good resource for the country rather than just being, oh we, we need to drain it, it's, it's a waste of resources, it, it's, it's wet, if we drained it we could then farm it, they're now, it's now being seen as, as being, erm, a resource for, for the country and we're reversing the, the wetland, you know, the, taking out some of the drains, ditches and reversing them and flooding areas again, so I think it's been taken, erm, a lot more seriously so, erm.

**Because of course that's very controversial because you've got this dichotomy between space for nature and then the need to have food security.**

**B3** Yes, yes.

**And make sure that we've got places to grow our food.**

**B3** Yes, yeah, but the PR is good, erm, I, you obviously, different side of it from sort of, it seems to be, when you see reports about, it's not, erm, it's not talking against it saying, you know, it's, it's coming from a positive aspect, erm, I think this helps as well if people aren't, if they're, if they live in the town, erm, somewhere like Priory Park would give people the opportunity to, to come out and to meet nature but in a very safe environment so they don't feel threatened, threatened by it, erm, and, and that's good.

**Do you think, there are two things I'd like to ask you about following on from that, the first one is that last point about feeling threatened by nature, do you think people are anxious around nature, don't know what to do in nature?**

**B3** Um.

**Do you think there's a disconnection with nature?**

**B3** Big time, big time, erm, I suppose that people, you know, lived in, in villages and on farms and they, they're there but it's, it's unfamiliarity, people don't like unfamiliar things or unexpected things, so this is, this is very safe, you've got nice open paths, if anything happens you've got a signal on the telephone that you can get in contact with and within say half an hour of your path[?], it goes, you can get back to here, so it's a very safe environment that isn't threatened, you know, you're not going to be eaten by an otter or anything like that.

[laughter]

**A rogue otter.**

**B3** Rogue otter, monster otter. So, so people feel safe and the, the more they come here, erm, they, they will get used to seeing things, erm, and, and that's, that's good, erm.

**Yeah. And do you think with your artist eye actually we need to take time to observe?**

**B3** Oh big time, yeah, yeah. Erm, so walking round's good but you, you actually miss so much, you've actually got to sit there and as soon as you sit down and it goes quiet then things will come, start to come out, whereas with having so many people around, you know, obviously the animals and insects but then they're waiting for them to go home but when they go home they will come out, erm, so perhaps people don't see as much as they could do, erm, but then it's trying to getting people to slow down and stuff isn't it?

**That's a good point isn't it? It's a bit, it's almost, it's not just enough to get them here, they have to change how they interact in the space.**

**B3** Yes.

**They have to slow right down and they have to maybe stop expecting things just to be there, when they go to the hide it's going to be there straightaway, I'm going to take a path, I'll see an otter.**

**B3** Yes.

**They actually need to kind of spend time somehow.**

**B3** Yes. Have you been to Stanwick Lakes which is another, erm, it was a gravel pit? It's up, up near Ashton and it's a similar sort of thing here but, erm, the, the Gravel Association, or whatever it's called, invested a lot of money turning what was, erm, these gravel excavation sites, they've put a huge bird hide in it, which, erm, is for people that aren't used to bird watching, they've got all the pictures of birds and you've got the binoculars there you can pick up and it's, it's another stepping stone to get people, you're talking about getting people to stop and to look and it's another way of doing that, so once again it's very safe, it's quite large, it's quite modern, people feel happy, you know, fun again there, that it's, it's, erm, it's set up so disabled people get in, families can get in, they've got feeding stations for birds so it's getting people to, to interact, erm, as well.

**Yeah, and did you say that was an investment from the aggregate industry?**

**B3** Yes, yeah.

**So what would be their incentive for putting in that huge amount of investment to make that?**

**B3** Er, I think it, I think it was the, the balance between the County, Council, County Council letting them dig up the land, that was a promise, they had to put the money back into it.

**Got you, got you.**

**B3** So it's part of the new (unclear, background noise) corridor they're … Bedfordshire.

**Oh I see, so it's part of kind of Rushden Council's overall plan for.**

**B3** Or Northamptonshire Council, so you've got, erm, about the, around Irthlingborough, around Rushton, Stanwick, there were lots and lots of gravel pits like here, erm, and they're perhaps a little bit, I think these are quite mature landscapes so these are quite, erm, in my time I can remember them, erm, starting up, so once again it's quite immature landscapes but they've put a lot of money back into it but it's all about getting people back into the countryside, getting back into the countryside, getting children used to stopping and watching and things like that.

**And trying to reconnect with nature, because when you were talking earlier about friends and how much they've been rehabilitated in terms of.**

**B3** Um.

**How people view them as not these barren landscapes that need to be drained but as a resource, would you say that, what is it that makes that happen? Is that to do with visitor centres? Is it to do with online resources where people can read up about the Fens before they go?**

**B3** I think it's, it's things like the, the Wildlife Trust, erm, getting people involved, erm, to literature out and once again I've, I think there's, I'm sure there, we've never been but whether there's visitor centres there, so people have a base that they can go to, they've once again that feel safe for people and if they're not used to, to going out to the countryside, so to wetlands say … so it's, it's …

**Yeah, because that in some respects is to do with education isn't it?**

**B3** Yeah.

**It's about educating people about the different way of perceiving this landscape and using this or enjoying this landscape.**

**B3** Yes, yeah.

**And would you say that education is quite a fundamental part in terms of how wetlands have been rehabilitated?**

**B3** I think so, think so.

**Yeah, and sharing between different organisations because we've talked about the Wildlife Trust and you've mentioned, you know, the aggregate industry and you've mentioned the Council, so do you think these organisations are, is it just who knows who in the councils or the organisations?**

**B3** I don't know, I honestly don't know, I don't know …

**You don't know. No, yeah. No, it's interesting how these things unfold.**

**B3** Yeah.

**You know, is it part of an organised plan or is it just germ of an idea that somebody has who carries it forward, you know, it's always fascinating.**

**B3** I'm sure it's the Government, I'm sure, I'm sure, they, they thought, please. This is recording, I said that cynically.

**And just thinking again about social representations, are there any, can you think of any books or films or pieces of music or artists that you connect with wetland spaces?**

**B3** No.

**No?**

**B3** No.

**There's no-one that you go, okay, seen that wonderful landscape and I want to go and visit that space?**

**B3** No.

**No, okay, yeah. Well look, that's been very, very helpful indeed and thank you so much for your time.**

**B3** Thank you very much.

**Thank you, thank you.**

**B3** And cut.

**Over, rush off, end.**

**B3** End.

**Oh that's lovely, thank you so much.**

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview 4 BED4

**So I wondered if you could just start very simply by you telling me which site you're involved with and then how long you've been active within that site?**

**B4** Forest of Marston Vale, which is the Millennium Park and the Grange Estate, down at Willington, that runs into Priory Park, they're like this, so.

**To both sites really.**

**B4** Both site, well yes because I've been here nearly as long as Priory Park has been there, I saw that as a gravel pit and then saw the bark chippings appear so I've been involved with that but only as a voter. The other two I've been involved as a hands-on getting my hands, you know, grubber.

**Got you, yeah.**

**B4** So yes, I'd say it was Priory Park about thirty years, thirty five years, a long while and Forest of Marston Vale I've been involved with the, the charity for twenty five, twenty, ninety eight.

**Yeah, yeah, so that's interesting.**

**B4** Yeah, it is quite a while.

**You're geographically located close to Priory Country Park and yet your main voluntary activities are, you know, twenty minutes drive away.**

**B4** Um.

**Is there a reason why you selected one over the other, is it just to do with opportunities to volunteer?**

**B4** It's more peaceful out there. Yes, it's peaceful in, erm, Willington but Priory Country Park it always was surrounded by noisy things and I go to wetlands for peace, silence. You don't get silence in a built up area, but it's relative silence.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**B4** Yeah.

**So in contrast.**

**B4** And the people, it was people was what I got engaged with the trees, that and the fact I've always enjoyed trees.

**Yeah. So trees are the sort of driving factor in terms of helping to create new landscape, is that what's so exciting about it?**

**B4** [pause] I think it was more opportunity presented and early on, when they first formed I was there and there was no volunteer input and I had the skill, the expertise to get volunteering, course I did, you know, let's do it, let's do a bit more, so I did, erm, so I got involved both on the, the planting side, the clearing side, the conservation, erm, but also on the recruitment and admin and volunteers.

**Would you say that those were skills that you brought in from your working life into that role?**

**B4** Yeah.

**Yeah, yeah. So it feels familiar and you know you're good at it.**

**B4** I knew I was good at it and it just seemed so stupid that nobody was doing it.

**[laughs]**

**B4** And I can be a bit forthright.

**Yeah, but that's right because if you identify something that needs.**

**B4** That needed doing. And it's such a small team at Forest.

**Do you think, you know, you identified there's a gap there about the volunteers, do you think that's one of the, maybe the sort of issues with volunteering is that people, that maybe people don't know that they, there's an opportunity that they could do lots of different types of activities volunteering and it's really just getting that?**

**B4** It's really just getting people to say I've got some time, I want to do something useful but then being able to identify where they can be useful. I mean yes, I want to do something but what, where, who do I contact? And these volunteer bureau people haven't got a clue, they get landed with all the people who really haven't got much mental capacity, alright they get all the other bright ones as well but the ones who haven't got the mental capacity are a problem to them in that there's not a channel and they tended to send me all of those, so I didn't have much of an opinion as a volunteer but you're, I mean I do know that they're okay.

**Yeah. So did you choose a different route then to help recruit your volunteers?**

**B4** Yeah, I got out there and talked to them, I got out there and got my hands dirty and chatted because the, we set up the system, they set up the system that once a month they had a volunteer task, well if you chat to people and they're working alongside you and explain what you're trying to do, well they join in and they're onboard and a lot of them still are.

**So you're saying those are people that are using the site but not volunteering that they'd be engaged with seeing these volunteers days and you'd kind of draw in, and so if you like what they're doing, why don't you come and join?**

**B4** Come and join us, yeah. And then course once we'd got the Forest Centre you could put up a sign and you could put up recruitment forms and invite people in to chat at their convenience, which wasn't always mine, erm, and once you got them in to chat you'd got them.

**Yeah, so it's setting up that infrastructure.**

**B4** It's just giving a channel so that they could get in.

**Yeah, and would you say and we touched upon it briefly when I first came in before the recorders were on but in terms of the, if you like the mix of people that are volunteers, would you say that you could say that there's a particular age range or a gender split or ethnicity or is it, does it cover completely spectrum of Bedfordshire society?**

**B4** No it doesn't, it doesn't represent Bedfordshire society because Bedfordshire society is mostly foreign, erm, I think twenty five percent of the population are of Italian origin. When we have planting day once a year or twice a year, I think it does represent the local population but the actual conservation, the actual volunteers on a regular basis tend to be people who, who've retired and have got skills and still need to use them, it's an outlet for their skills, right down to I used to have a dinner lady who came in and did washing up when she retired, she was used to that environment, she was happy in that environment, erm, yet I've got other people who run businesses and they're drilling holes in what, you know, so they're quite happy doing that.

**Yeah, some people want the familiar and some people want to do something brand new.**

**B4** Yes.

**But it sounds like.**

**B4** But they often don't want to take overall responsibility, they just want to come along, do a job and go away again, and if they learn a few things and make a few friends along the way, well and good.

**Yeah, so that's an important part really isn't it? Which is how much is the keeping your skills active, learning new skills and the social side of things.**

**B4** Social side is extremely important, if you don't get on with the people you're working alongside, you're not happy and these people choose and they choose to be happy rather than unhappy, yeah, we, you do occasionally get a, a grumpy awkward one but they don't last long because they're not happy, you know, but they have their reasons for being grumpy.

**Yeah. So and have people said to you it's really great that I've learned how to, you know, I've done a course in chainsaw management until something, you know, that for them what part of it is there's a mix between the actual contribution they make to the site and the skills that they themselves have gained.**

**B4** Gained, yes, I think it's true. I still think that there's basic interest that they've built on rather than, although having said that, the women out at Willington, they've never done that sort of work before and they loved it and, and that has, the, the physical work has drawn them into it.

**Which is interesting isn't it because you know when I asked about the gender split, I was also interested talking to, try and find out from you whether it does fall into those traditional lines of the men are going to cut things in the woods or plant things and the women are going to.**

**B4** Oh no, no.

**You know, be reception and front of house and things like that.**

**B4** Yeah.

**It's not like that?**

**B4** It's, it's not like that because the women like grubbing about outside too, but the women do tend to be better at the personal interface with the public stuff because they're more confident, erm, but then having said that I've, I've had men on reception.

**Yeah, and in terms of, you know, going back to the planting days of, it's a time that brings everyone in but maybe not so much for the regular volunteers, what do you think that's about? Why do you think it is that, that it seems to be older white constituents of Bedfordshire?**

**B4** Because they've got the time and the money and the transport as well as the will because they need that stimulation, I mean if you haven't got much money, I mean the lady who does the washing up doesn't have much money but she has a link via her daughter so that's how she manages but there are other people who don't have much money that come on the bus but it's a long way and I think that very much, I mean it's only three or four miles to Willington and six miles out there but, if it's, it’s so much easier in their car, the buses don't run when you want them to.

**No, and that's the problem isn't it? Which is, you know, public transport is infrequent and it's relatively expensive, you think the cost.**

**B4** It's expensive, it's expensive in this area and it's not as reliable as you need it to be and it's always under threat.

**No, yeah, so this is it isn't it? So really if we want to get people to volunteer in these spaces.**

**B4** They've got to be able to get there, you know, and if you want to extend it to people who don't have a lot of money then they have got to be able to get there.

**Yes, so they're, I mean and in some ways would you say that's also reflected by the people that you see who actually use the site because again, really you need to access that site, either if you're local, you really live close to it.**

**B4** Um.

**Or by your car don't you?**

**B4** Or bikes, because Willington is on the cycle route fifty one, as is Marston and there's quite a number of my cyclists. A lot of local people walk around on a regular basis but an awful lot of people do come in my car, I mean I went, was there yesterday and the day before, I hadn't been for ages before that, erm, and the car park was full and it's an issue, these little bits of woodland that we've got dotted around, we weren't building car parks, we've got bits of woodland and people are welcome to walk them but there's nowhere to put the car, so you can either walk in from the village or not go there.

**Yeah, and then it splits down to those who feel passionate enough to do the walk and those who don't feel passionate enough to do the walk, yeah.**

**B4** Well I think people who want to walk will walk, erm, but so many younger people don't walk, they get in a car because they've always been taken to school in a car and, you know, that's it, that's how it goes.

**Yeah, it's almost, it's habit forming isn't it? So.**

**B4** It's so easy to out and jump in the car isn't it?

**Yeah, yeah. And just going back for a moment because I'm really interested in, you know, using these wetland spaces and who uses them.**

**B4** Um.

**Through the work, the voluntary work that you've done and help coordinate, have you connected with other organisations as well or have you kept it very focussed on this is what I do and, you know, I'm not going to connect with say the Council about this, that and the other? And you've talked about the voluntary bureau.**

**B4** Um.

**Are there any other organisations that you have worked with apart from?**

**B4** The Green, the Green Sand Trust, when they were setting up a volunteer system, they were in contact with me. Erm, the Ampthill Park, erm, they were, they, they got some money, it's a bit muddled because it's a bit councily but the person I was talking to wasn't council, they get some money to revamp Ampthill Park for Capability Brown's anniversary and the, the man who was on the edge of the Council came to me for advice as to how to go about it so I, I've been in that position chatting to people, erm.

**And do you feel that that elevates the status of the Forest Centre, you know, that you're seen as being a really well organised volunteer supported?**

**B4** Well we have something to offer, we might as well share it, because the more you share the more people will get the satisfaction of being out there doing, that's why I did it, I mean it wasn't particularly convenient but hey, it worked.

**Yeah. And for you in those spaces, what are the different benefits you get from supporting this?**

**B4** Well a certain amount of satisfaction and recognition, the fact that I have something to offer but there's a satisfaction later being able to see what they've done with my help, erm. We were tickled pink, we were given the, the Queen's Award for voluntary something or other, [laughs] but, you know, we were tickled pink because it was acknowledged that we did something, that we were doing something right, and why not? I mean I've worked with the people down at Priory years ago, when they wanted to set up volun, a volunteer group because you can't be too strict about who you take and who you don't take, you have to take who comes but you can encourage who you will, erm, yeah. It, it's a recognition, a form of recognition.

**Yeah. And have there been any negative experiences associated with doing the voluntary work that you've done?**

**B4** Well I've had the odd, odd occasion grump, I've had two actually. One of whom, well who knows what got to her, something was biting here but I don't know what, and it was nothing to do with me. The other one seemed to take things so personally, you know, something had to be cancelled it was as though we'd deliberately done it to upset them but it, people get over it, erm. Negative, negative, negative.

**Yeah.**

**B4** Well it rains a lot. [laughs]

**[laughs] That's what keeps it nice and green.**

**B4** Yes, and it can be, it can be freezing cold and the east wind can blow and the snow can come down and, yeah, they're all negatives, weather but there's nothing you can do about that.

**When you.**

**B4** The people side of it is fascinating, it's absolutely fascinating and because of the work I've done in the past, I used to work on public and attitude studies, food related mostly but a lot of other things as well. I just find people fascinating and because I do you can get them to open up and I get a story out of it.

**Yeah, so part of the interest is that you learn about other people's lives as well as doing something interesting.**

**B4** Yeah, yes, and you contribute, I mean if you contribute to life it enriches the whole experience, which sounds awfully airy fairy but I'm a giver rather than a taker.

**Yeah, but we're not atomised.**

**B4** That's all.

**Yeah, and we're not atomised individuals.**

**B4** No.

**Who just circulate round each other, we're connected to each other.**

**B4** Um.

**And what, what we do together has a knock-on.**

**B4** It has a knock-on effect, yes, and if what we do can improve the place we've inherited, the world we've inherited so much the better because there's far too much population for the space that we have and we're damaging it and we've got to do something about it in my view.

**Yeah. So one of the key parts of the project is thinking about wetlands and how they help develop a sense of place.**

**B4** Um.

**And do you feel that you have a sense of place, you know, do you feel really connected to those wetland spaces when you're working there and when you're there?**

**B4** Yes.

**Are they different from other landscapes for instance?**

**B4** They're more familiar. You know where things ought to be or are, where if you go somewhere strange you, where does the path go? It, the, the arrow points that way alright but has some little darling twiddled it round, you know? That's that familiarity with the areas you know well.

**And the landscape, like you've talked before about, you know, you love trees and we've talked before about willows and, you know, managing the site going forward in years to come, so is there something about that, you know, the interplay between the water and the forest that is particularly delightful for you?**

**B4** Well I love the way the willows mop up all stray water [laughs] erm, you know, especially on the wetlands because it does get very soggy, very soggy and once they go into leaf they, well before they go into leaf they're pumping it up but you really notice it, once the trees get into leaf it dries up.

**Yeah, so there is that direction connection between the land and.**

**B4** Yeah, it all becomes more accessible.

**The water, the trees.**

**B4** Yes.

**You can almost see the water cycle in action.**

**B4** You can, yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, and would you say, you know, because you work, you know, you're, you know, you said that you visit Priory as a punter.**

**B4** I'm a punter, I go for a walk and a cup of coffee.

**Yeah. And are those two activities connected? So what's delightful about that space is you can walk, have a cup of coffee, meet your friends, have a quiet moment.**

**B4** Yeah.

**How would it be for instance if you were in a different kind of wetland environment? Would you feel the same or is it the fact that it's a bit more managed that's the interesting part or the familiar part?**

**B4** I don't actually like the managed bit, that, all that much, it's over-manicured in my view and I also think that the Millennium Park's getting a bit over-manicured, erm, Priory[?] Country Park is over-manicured, there's too many volunteers for the space and they're overdoing it, erm, it's not so obvious this time of year where everything's growing like mad, it's covering up the fact it's been overdone but I don't like things to be overdone, I much prefer a slightly muddy walk between trees to a cycle track where the whole world's whizzing past, it's different.

**Yeah. So that goes back to the people element again.**

**B4** Um.

**You know, maybe a less managed space, that would encourage people to go off the beaten track and to explore new parts of it?**

**B4** A less managed space tends to be quieter because you, I mean you can hear it, vroom, vroom, vroom, I'm surprised we haven't had be ba be ba be but you can hear it all over the town, all these wetlands are close to the town and you can hear the noise, where I prefer silence, I like time to think and you don't think, you react when there's things around you all the time.

**So are there other spaces where you go to where you get that solitude and that quiet time or is there not enough time to visit the quiet places?**

**B4** No, you go to the quiet places, I mean if you, if you choose your route, erm, at Willington, you can get way, just follow the river round, erm, and that goes, well all down the river there are paths. I, because I was born here, I, the river is part of my life, erm, and all the way, well from, for miles you can walk by the river and a lot of it is silent. I mean Paxton Pits, it is manicured to a degree but I need to make it easier to get round and that is silent, that's lovely, it's lovely.

**I've not heard of Paxton Pits.**

**B4** Paxton? Where's it near? How do I get there? Paxton Pits, Little Paxton, Little Paxton.

**Okay, I'll have a look.**

**B4** Towards Huntingdon because you can walk from there to Huntingdon if you want.

**Yeah. So if you had to say which type of landscape really pulls on your heart strings, would it be the river environment, the river corridor that you like to walk down or would it be the wetlands, the Forest Centre that you've been working on or are they the same but different?**

**B4** They're the same but different because it's, it's not concrete and asphalt, it's green and it's calm, it's calmer than where I live, it is my, my quiet, they are my quiet places, some of them quieter than others and, I mean my ideal place is in the back end of nowhere with a seat, with a back on it, so you can sit and just listen but you don't get that because you only get seats where there's people really.

**Yeah, that's it. It's usually the case that there's a seat with a view isn't there?**

**B4** Yes, yeah.

**Yeah. Whereas we should be championing a seat without a view or a different kind of view.**

**B4** Yeah, a different kind of, yeah, something to sit on, perch, rather than a seat that's got to be maintained but.

**Yeah. And another key part of the project is to think about health and wellbeing and I wonder if, you know, for, when you're, both for yourself but also when you're encouraging people to volunteer, is that something you really emphasise to your volunteers, that they can really benefit their health and wellbeing by volunteering or is that not something that's mentioned?**

**B4** I, it is something, I usually, I usually mention social side of it, the chance to meet new people, gain new skills but the fresh air and exercise will make you sleep wonderfully, is the little bit I used to chuck in because it is a benefit, I mean banging about in the fresh air will make you sleep well and so many people don't sleep well.

**It seems to be a curse of modern age actually doesn't it, not able to sleep?**

**B4** Never bothered me. [laughs]

**[laughs]**

**B4** Work and sleep but, yeah, even now.

**Yeah, that's a joy isn't it?**

**B4** It is, and I do enjoy.

**Yeah. And I know that wellbeing is one of those modern phrases that's used all the time, so, you know.**

**B4** It is, yes.

**I wondered how you would, or how you define or understand wellbeing?**

**B4** Wellbeing, I think it's an inner relaxation, it's that at peace with yourself and the world and so much of life now is a hundred miles an hour, jamming six things into five minutes. We all do it but we don't need that level of stimulation, it, to, to eat well, sleep well, be well, you need calm, some of the time anyway.

**Yeah. One of the things I've been thinking about is that when you enter wetland spaces, you move into a different time zone really.**

**B4** Yes.

**That things slow down.**

**B4** It slows down, you slow down, your shoulders come down, you start breathing properly and the air's cleaner, you can feel, feel it, do I mean feel it or do I mean smell it? Well one or the other.

**Yes, sense it somehow.**

**B4** You're aware. You, you know that the air is cleaner because it isn't in towns.

**Yeah, no.**

**B4** I mean it's not as bad here as it could be but, you know.

**Yeah, well we're surrounded by this beautiful green space here aren't we?**

**B4** Yes, and these trees get really filthy by September.

**Do they? Right.**

**B4** September, October, when they start dropping, the leaves are filthy and because I will leave the windows open it gets really grubby in here too. [laughs] Yeah, yes, you get the sort of greasiness off the, well I suppose it's the fumes from the cars.

**Must be, yeah.**

**B4** Yeah. Well you miss that when you cross a few fields.

**Yeah, you're suddenly in this wonderful green space with no cars, which is amazing isn't it?**

**B4** Yeah, but I do think it's the, the quietness or relative quietness.

**Yeah, so that's the thing isn't it?**

**B4** And the fact that you've taken time out to go for a walk for yourself, it's my time, I'm going to do it.

**Yeah.**

**B4** Yeah.

**It's a gift to yourself isn't it?**

**B4** Yeah, be kind to yourself.

**Yeah, it's very, very important.**

**B4** Yeah.

**And we say it but we actually.**

**B4** And we don't do it.

**That's the thing, we have to.**

**B4** You need to do it every day, for at least a little while, yeah.

**Yeah. It is true, it is true and put ourselves last often don't we?**

**B4** Well women do, because there's so many other people need looking after, yeah.

**Yeah. Have we created that demand though I wonder sometimes when I look at my own children and think you can do that yourself?**

**B4** Well maybe, maybe, but you just have to step back and let them struggle.

**Yeah, I think that's it.**

[children discussion – not transcribed]

**So it sounds like it's a really, not just a physical kind of release you get from being in the wetlands but also an emotional and mental relaxation.**

**B4** Yes.

**Which helps, would you say it helps sort of rebalance your everyday life that you feel refreshed and invigorated when you come away or physically lovely tired?**

**B4** Well it's my time, even if I'm only taking half an hour, which I do every day, erm, but sometimes I'll take a whole day, and I, I work it in, make sure I do because I do feel so much better.

**Yeah. And would you say that you feel that in other natural spaces as well? I'm just trying to get a sense whether the wetlands are kind of, in your, for you a continuum of green space, green blue space or whether it's, there's something very particular about wetlands because for some people wetlands mean a lot to them and for others they are another part of the natural environment but they're just as lovely as say the coastline or mountains?**

**B4** Oh no, this is totally different. I don't actually like grey rocky, I like foresty, I like woodlands but the river is just an intrinsic part of my life and always has been because of where I've lived, I lived on the outskirts, was the outskirts then, it's not outskirts anymore but we lived five minutes walk from the river, so our, our regular walks were along the river one way or the other and it's exactly the same here, I can follow the river and I can be out of obvious town in twenty minutes, just walking in that direction.

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

**B4** Yes, it is, and it's always been like that for me, so that's how, it is an intrinsic part of my life.

**Yes, you've had it there right from childhood, it's part of.**

**B4** With parents that have appreciated it.

**Yeah, I think that's often the key isn't it because, you know, we talk about?**

**B4** Oh yes.

**You know, for your kind of what are volunteers, they're mainly retired people because they've got the time.**

**B4** Um.

**But it doesn't sound like there are say younger people who are studying or still at school who volunteer, would that be right to say that?**

**B4** There are some, there are some and there always have been some, erm, they often come along as a result of the Duke of Edinburghs and stay. I mean obviously I resigned REMOVED months ago because I had to, erm, but at that time I'd got Cat, I'd got three youngsters who'd come to us as Duke of Edinburghs and ended up as volunteer rangers, went off to uni, came back in the summer, they were volunteer rangers again and they still come back to say hello and join in.

**Yeah, because that's now interwoven in the fabric of their life isn't it?**

**B4** It's, yes, yeah, I think the Duke of Edinburghs that did that, not particularly their families, yet there's others, the REMOVED boys, erm, yeah, there's others that come with parents and continue, so, yeah, when we get planting days when we're doing a new piece of woodland, it's the same people that turn up, you know, there's, there's this group, there's that group, there's the church group, there's the Indian group, you know, you know them and they come because they know about it but they probably don't know about the, the regular routine volunteering or have the, the time, you know.

**Yeah. Will they do it part of their own social group, come and do that?**

**B4** Yes, yeah.

**But then that doesn't extend to a continuing relationship.**

**B4** Well it does because they come again next year, that, it's, it's their winter.

**Yeah. You know when you've seen people coming to do the planting and things, because one of the things I've noticed quite a lot in different wetland space is in all our case study sites is that there may be for instance tree planting in memory of past loved ones.**

**B4** Yeah.

**Or there's benches for, you know, in commemoration of people, do you see that activity there, for some people that it?**

**B4** Oh yeah.

**Wetlands are kind of place of remembrance or celebration of life?**

**B4** There's an awful lot of trees with a little packet of ashes underneath, we don't know about it, we don't see it, good luck to them, I'm doing the same, you know, that's how it is.

**Yeah, yeah. That that's actually a really lovely connection with these spaces.**

**B4** Yeah, because then you get that, well you go and visit granny don't you? A walk, and that happens, I do know that happens.

**Yeah, yeah. That's a lovely thing isn't it?**

**B4** Well you want an association, and if you associate granny's ashes with a place, you can walk in that place and talk and think and it doesn't do you any harm. It's far better than the cemetery isn't it, just stacked up a hillside and forgotten?

**Yeah, because it's kind of in the living fabric of the earth isn't it, you know?**

**B4** Um, yes, I mean you're returned to where you came.

**Yeah.**

**B4** The aborigines have that belief and I, I subscribe to it myself.

**Yeah, part of the circle of life.**

**B4** Part of the circle of life, you are part of this world.

**Yeah, yeah. And moving seamlessly into part of this world, part of the project talks about mosquitoes.**

**B4** Yeah, yeah.

**And I wondered, from somebody who, you know, obviously you've worked in the wetlands and all different times of weather conditions and presumably times of day, early morning and maybe into the late afternoon, are mosquitoes a feature of your work? I mean do you find that you're having to double think not going to go there because it, I know that's a mosquito sit, or?**

**B4** They don't bite me, but if my husband's with me he gets chewed, so it just, they don't like me so it doesn't matter to me.

**Yeah. What about with your volunteers though, is there, are the some that would say I'm not doing that because I don't want to get bitten or is that never really mentioned a great deal?**

**B4** I haven't heard it mentioned but I haven't worked at Willington where it is quite soggy and it may be an issue there because when you get these sort of puddles that hang around and hang around, because on the clay out at Marston it just goes to concrete and splits but it'll be different down there because that's ex-gravel pits or sand pits, one or the other, not sure, sand, gravel, gravel down there, erm, it's different, it's, it's different under foot, erm, I don't know.

**Yeah, and because I know, you know, because you use both Priory and Marston Vale, you haven't noticed yourself a difference between the two sites in terms of insect, biting insects?**

**B4** No, because I'm not a very good example to ask. [laughs]

**Okay, they don't bite you so you don't notice them, yeah.**

**B4** They don't bite me, they annoy me, you know, the same as anybody else but they don't, they're just part of life aren't they?

**No, but you've never had a volunteer say saying look, I can't do this work because I just get bitten if I do that?**

**B4** No.

**Okay, well that's worth knowing, and over the time because obviously you were talking now about familiarity with these sites over many years, there hasn't, for you there hasn't been a kind of a great change between the two sites?**

**B4** [pause] I don't know that site as well as I know that one. I don't know.

**Okay, yeah, but it's obviously.**

**B4** It seems to be there's less lying water now at Forest, I mean we've had heaps of water rained recently yet it's like concrete there in places, you know, you perhaps find some places where it's a bit muddy but I was amazed.

**I've just been somewhere where they have a little natural pond and the person said to me for the last two years there's not been enough water and the pond has been empty.**

**B4** Oh yeah, it's been dreadful the last couple of years.

**Yeah, but now we've had all this damp over the winter their water table has risen and the pond has returned, so it's interesting isn't it, that?**

**B4** Yes.

**I suppose it.**

**B4** It's fairly local perhaps because there's a pond that we dug that I saw yesterday because REMOVED and I were, walked round the wetland and went up all the hides, erm, and I noticed it's been there for years, we dug it probably fifteen years ago and it's always had water in it and usually a morning and it wasn't, it was a muddy dip, it wasn't even wet mud, it was concrete mud, so, you know, it's, it's dry.

**Can be very variable can't it?**

**B4** Very variable.

**So, because that's interesting because really mosquitoes, we're interested in mosquito management, thinking ahead for.**

**B4** Global warming and all that.

**Exactly, and for you saying about where the water's lying on the land, have you noticed any other changes over the years that you think might be attributable to, you know, global warming, a warming planet?**

**B4** I don't know much about that Mares Tail but there seems to be an awful lot more of that when I walked around, erm, equisetum is it called?

**Um.**

**B4** Yeah, there seemed to be an awful lot of it more than before. Now because as the trees have gone up, a lot of the understory has died down, so I mean that's a change that's going to happen. The, the reeds, I mean obviously they're managed but they seem to be getting thicker and thicker and thicker, trying to reclaim, erm. Um, so the natural growth and the, and the progress you can, is what I'm thinking of of the things that would happen. You're thinking of, of creatures though aren't you?

**Well no, all sorts really, you know, where the, like you said, it's maybe where the water lies on the ground, maybe it's to do with visiting species of animal, whether that's insect or birdlife.**

**B4** Yeah.

**Or plants. I mean it's really whether you think over time, because of course, you know, these spaces are going to change over time because.**

**B4** Yes.

**You know, that is what happens.**

**B4** That's, that's what happens, yeah. I mean what I noticed at the Forest Centre is a lot more wildlife, birds, deer, rabbits, things that were doing weird droppings that I didn't know what it was, so I didn't say anything, [laughs] you know, that sort of, there's a hell of a lot more.

**Yeah. So the plan really is working isn't it, you know?**

**B4** Oh yes, it was working almost from the word go, just by having the space there and not under monoculture.

**Yeah, that's the key thing isn't it?**

**B4** Yes.

**Keeping things as biodiverse as possible.**

**B4** As possible, yes, yeah.

**And one of the other things that we, and this is like the last second of the interview, is we're trying to understand how wetlands are viewed now by both people who use the site, so, you know, people like yourself and by members of the public, so would you say that when people come to visit, either Marston Vale or Priory Country Park, do they know they're in a wetland or do they think they're in a green space with a lake?**

**B4** Green space with a lake.

**Yeah.**

**B4** Erm, because of my association with the cancer unit a lot of people go out for coffee and have a little walk and have a little sit and go home again, so they're going to places where there's a car park, somewhere to walk and a coffee and it doesn't really matter what it is. In the winter it's garden centres, endlessly, you wouldn't believe it, erm, and then it will be the country parks when the weather's better and that's what they're going for.

**Yeah. It's a country park rather than?**

**B4** It's a country park.

**It's a wetland…**

**B4** It's not a wetland, oh no, there's some lakes over there, you can fish over there but your average, if you're not interested particularly in the detail it's a country park, it's just not as manicured as Bedford Park.

**Yeah, and would you say that people's? You know, we touched on it before, you know, from what you're saying there, what people are interested in is they like to have a nice view but essentially they want somewhere to park their car, so they can get there easily.**

**B4** Um.

**And they want a toilet.**

**B4** [laughs]

**And they want to have a cup of tea and they want a footpath where they're not going to trip on any roots or.**

**B4** Where they're not going to get too muddy, yeah.

**Yeah, and that's what they're really looking for.**

**B4** That's what they're looking for.

**So in terms of a kind of connection with nature, that's a very sanitised connection with nature isn't it?**

**B4** Oh yeah, yeah.

**So would you say that, in some ways that there is a big difference let's say between the more managed wetlands that, you know, we're looking at in this case study in Bedfordshire and say other areas which are, like Flitwick Moor, somewhere like that that's a bit more remote?**

**B4** That's, that.

**And it's relatively remote isn't it?**

**B4** It's compared with.

**Yeah, you know, and so and in terms of even thinking wider afield like other types of wetland landscape.**

**B4** Landscapes, yeah.

**Like the Fens or the Broads.**

**B4** Well the Broads, I always think of that as the tourist broads. The Fens I always associate it with birds, RSPB type of, it's that association.

**Yeah, that's it. So, you know, we're really trying to capture whether wetlands are now seen as kind of spaces of nature which is a kind of positive.**

**B4** Yeah.

**Or whether some spaces are still seen as unproductive and barren because that's always how wetlands always used to be perceived, as, you know, not good for agriculture, therefore drain them, you know, get them more productive.**

**B4** Well that's what we're doing to them, yeah.

**Yeah, exactly.**

**B4** I mean that's the result of the, the second world war and probably, possibly even the first.

**Well it's connected to food security isn't it?**

**B4** Dig everything up, yes, yeah.

**You know, we need space for growing food and so I just wondered whether people actually do have a connection with wetlands or whether actually they don't even think about them, you know.**

**B4** I don't think they think of wetlands as such. They think of the Fens, the Broads in different context, erm.

**Yeah. So in some respects it's maybe their geographical location rather than their kind of, their landscape type?**

**B4** I think of the people that appreciate the Fens are probably people who live by and walk the dog regularly. People like me who go there for bird watching purposes are very much going for bird watching purposes and you know what to expect. Again, you're, it's a particular set of the population. I'm thinking Paxton Pits, erm. They're better off, they're hard up. Where it, around the lake at Priory Park, you find all and sundry, people flying by on their bikes on their way to work, people pushing the pushchair, people walking the dog, any race, creed or colour, erm, but once you get off into the Finger Lakes, you really don't. They're white and probably got more idea of what they're looking at.

**Yeah, yeah. So I mean it's interesting isn't it that, what that almost feels is that those popular bits where the play area is, near where the toilets are, that's a kind of, it's like a green amenity for everybody?**

**B4** Yeah, yes.

**But in terms of a connection with nature that ends once you get off the footpath.**

**B4** Once you're off the beaten track, you're only going there because you, you see, you're seeking what is there.

**And that's likely to be a certain kind of person, as you said maybe has more money, because.**

**B4** Or has more knowledge, it may not be money, but very often, it is.

**So then to encourage people to use these other parts of the wetlands, it's maybe to do with education.**

**B4** Yeah, [laughs] very much so.

**I mean do you? Yeah, and do you think? Well when I talk about social representations, I'm talking about things like it could be popular cultural things, such as television or film or books or music or it could be other things like the influence of the media or it could be other things such as Government policy, what do you think influences how we currently see wetlands or experience wetlands? Where do you think most people get their source of the knowledge?**

**B4** Well probably get it off Countryfile and the telly. I mean there, there's, there's some wonderful pieces of film, the Fearnley-Wittingstall prancing about on a river, absolutely beautiful, erm. You get an awful lot of stuff on the telly but then if you're glued to the telly you're not out there walking it.

**That's the conundrum isn't it?**

**B4** Yeah, I mean and Countryfile tends to be little snippets of this and that and not a depth of anything but then you see that'd be my, my idea of how people get things, and people want convenience and speed don't they?

**Um.**

**B4** And they're flying around so much they want instant mindfulness in the, in the woodland, forest bathing.

**[laughs]**

**B4** Ten minutes and I'm off, got that meeting to get to, you know, it's that sort of thing, it's the whole package of the way we manage our lives now.

**Yeah, everything's accelerated isn't it?**

**B4** Yes, and it, it's gone too far in my view.

**Yeah. We need to find a way to slow things down.**

**B4** Yeah, to use technology rather than being driven by technology because I feel that we are being driven.

**Yeah, and have you got any, when we think about Priory Park and Marston Vale are there any particular anecdotes or stories that you can think of that are connected with those sites in terms of, you know, community engagement with them? I don't know whether that's, you know.**

**B4** Well when I, when I was leading walks at the forest at the Millennium Park, I collected all the local tales.

**Ah.**

**B4** Erm, and, and told them on the way round. I went through it all with my friend who'd never been there before, it was lovely, erm, but there is loads of local stories but they're stories from way back, erm, I've got lots of lovely memories of, of planting days where kids have got covered in mud, erm, kids have got cold and I've put a Glastonbury mac on them and told them to dance in the puddles to get warm, you know, things like that. Anecdotes. Oh the old fella, when we were planting at Lidlington, erm, steep hillside and there was an old fella who was puffing up the hill beside me, puffing up the hill, erm, and he was saying yeah, it's not the same as it used to be, there were elms all along the top of there….. right? That was just, and then I, I handed him over to REMOVED, who was our hands-on man at that time, that led to us joining in as a group with the elm project in London and growing the clone, the little bits of elms that they'd taken cuttings from, I don't think they were clones, erm, and we've planted them out and I saw some of them yesterday and they're growing, we've got to get past the fifteen year stage, they, they will go for that length of time and then they don't.

**Oh I see.**

**B4** It's weird, it's weird.

**Yeah, and if they can get over that kind of limit**

**B4** Well we're hoping we can get them over that because there are various different sorts of elms and one particular one doesn't seem to be bothered by Dutch Elm disease.

**Oh I see.**

**B4** So it was this old fella's comments, you know the way old fellas do, they?

**Yeah.**

**B4** They tell you their life history and the history of the world around you, well this was the elms at Lidlington.

**Gosh.**

**B4** And that was a good one.

**Yeah, because otherwise.**

**B4** Because we.

**You'd never have known.**

**B4** Well I wasn't that familiar with that hedgerow and they, they've gone, erm, but, yeah.

**I mean do people, yeah, do people ever talk about, you know, swimming in any of the lakes or the pond? I mean I know they're not supposed to but, you know.**

**B4** Well yeah, but we do, we did, we always, I mean I learnt to swim in the river, we all did.

**Gosh, this one?**

**B4** Yeah, yes.

**Gosh.**

**B4** There were particular swimming holes that were, were muddy under foot rather than weedy which, or gravelly and we, and rather than weedy, weedy's not very nice, prick your feet with that, feels horrible, erm, but yeah, we learnt in the river, until polio came along when I was a teenager, so we're talking sixty years ago, polio became really nasty or publicised, I don't know which, erm, and then you went to a swimming bath which wasn't any better because it was still a river, I, I, you know, we always swam in the river and I still would and people still do and if they want to why shouldn't they? It's their lives.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**B4** Yeah.

**I think that's it isn't it? There's, you know, a lot of don't do this and don't do that in various places but you make your own risk assessment maybe.**

**B4** Well when I was little, I mean I was born in forty two, there really wasn't a lot, so you made your own entertainment and the river was there and if it was hot you swam in it and.

**Yeah, do you see people swimming in Priory Park or Marston Vale?**

**B4** No. They do at Cardington, it's called Cardington Mill, erm, it's ideal, it's where the cows used to go in, it shells down, there's the lock, lock there, the weir there and just beyond the weir there was a place where we, where we all swam and it's called Cardington Mill but it's not, but, yeah, people swam there. And they swim, erm, just below the, the rail, the ex-railway bridge. I've seen people swim there, I wouldn't fancy that bit because it's very weedy and we used to keep the boat in Priory Marina and it's very weedy down that stretch, I wouldn't fancy that much.

**Yeah, but still, you know, there's still this idea then that people are happy to do it, you know, I think that's sort of the lost art of river swimming isn't it, you know?**

**B4** Yeah, it's wild swimming, it's totally different, I mean swimming pools are all very well but they smell, I mean the river smells.

**Yeah, but it's different isn't it?**

**B4** Yeah, the thing it is smells, we've got a caravan on a lake out at Cosgrove near Milton Keynes, we've got a fishing deck down at lake level and I was sitting there and I thought [sniffs] there's a dead fish somewhere.

**Oh no, oh no.**

**B4** It came to Sunday, we didn't have our lunch down there because it stank.

**Oh no.**

**B4** So, you know, there are joys to river swimming.

**Yeah. Well I think that's it, you have to take the rough with the smooth don't you?**

**B4** You do, you do.

**It's nature, it's not always going to be polished and.**

**B4** It's not the end of the world.

**It's going to be gnarly sometimes isn't it?**

**B4** Yeah.

**Yeah.**

**B4** Yeah.

**So do you think, who do you think, you know, if we want to get more people connected with nature, what do you think is the right route? Is it education at schools?**

**B4** It's schools, it's youngsters. Erm, I was at the Forest Centre yesterday and they've got a forest school out in the wood, it's a din, a din, but hey, they were happy and they were all running about and all engaged, there was nobody sitting playing with their thumbs, they were all doing something, erm, no, that was the day before. Yesterday, there were kids came in a bus from somewhere, littlies, seven, eight, and they'd been pond dipping and they were so happy, they weren't grumpy or grisly, they were just happy, running about and it's the way in, if you start them early, give them some knowledge and that's what got me in the first place, my dad and his endless stories about creatures and basically he was teaching us but I just know.

**And so what do you think has stopped that connection in schools, is that to do with curriculum?**

**B4** Probably.

**Is it to do with risk assessment, is it to do with money?**

**B4** Bit of everything because these children had arrived by bus, somebody had to pay for the bus, somebody had to dress them all in yellow jackets, somebody had to keep counting them, counting them, counting, it, there's just so much paperwork, I can quite see why people stay in the classroom, and you've always got this pressure to fill, tick the boxes on exams, you've got to do all that and you hear politicians spouting yet another nonsense about citizenship or something and you think for goodness sake, teach them to read and write and let them get on with their lives but, this is an old woman talking isn't it?

**But the thing is, you.**

**B4** There's not the freedom now.

**No, but that's it isn't it? When do?**

**B4** Yeah, you don't see kids tearing about on their bicycles very often.

**No, no.**

**B4** They obviously are supervised.

**Well the thing is, so we live in Lewes and we often walk on the South Downs and one time my daughter wanted to get home a bit quicker or she was in a mood about something so I said well go and walk ahead then, so she walked over and she was maybe sort of five or six minutes before we got there and I said, you know, go and I said everything alright? And she said well two people asked me if I was alright and I said well why did they do that? And she said because I was on my own. So we're not used to seeing children on there on their own.**

**B4** We're not used, children, no, children are not allowed to be on their own.

**No. So how are they ever going to develop those skills to.**

**B4** They're never going to learn to be independent.

**Exactly to negotiate the world if they're continually being monitored.**

**B4** Yeah.

**And I think they transfer that idea of monitoring with their phones.**

**B4** Oh yeah.

**They use it as a resource for themselves to feel safe.**

**B4** Yeah.

**That they can contact somebody, they don't know what it's like to be on their own and just be self-sufficient and I wonder if that also then connects to feeling insecure in nature in like you're in, you're somewhere.**

**B4** Yeah, an awful lot of women will not walk round these green spaces, yes, yes.

**Yeah, and how do you feel about that? Do you walk with friends or do you walk on your own?**

**B4** I walk on my own but I've always walked on my own, I'm quite confident on my own. If anybody talks to me I can outtalk them because you walk a bit faster don't you?

**Yeah, yeah.**

**B4** But yeah, I stop and talk. I enjoy it.

**Yeah. And would you say that would feel safer in a less managed space or in a managed space? Because in some ways, you know, someone I was talking to said that in a less managed space, like a wild wood, they're less likely to see people.**

**B4** That's true.

**They see someone it's likely to be a birder, another walker.**

**B4** Yes.

**Whereas in like Priory Country Park where all different people go you then, you're not quite so sure who you're going to interface with or do you just not think about it, it's the space is the space and you don't think twice?**

**B4** There are some places where I'm more wary, now there'll be a river festival and I will not be here because I don't like it, there's all sorts of people who I really don't choose to mix with and, I don't choose to mix with them.

**So do?**

**B4** People are out to make a fast buck or to. They're, there's a hoard of little boys, little boys, they're not little boys anymore but there's a, a group of little boys that come from over the river who are now fourteen, fifteen, they cycle along here tipping their bikes up on there, wobbling all over the road, daring the traffic to go past, I had words with one of them once because they were fiddling with the electric cables over there, I said be careful, there's water, electricity there, and I had a load of lip, I wouldn't bother again, they can electrocute themselves if they wish, you know, I don't like that feeling, I feel that I, as an adult I should be responsible but they're, there are, there are people but oddly more built up places than less built up places. Priory Country Park, Millennium Park, doesn't bother me a bit. Wilder places doesn't bother me a bit, I mean once upon a time I could have run but I can't now, erm, but I would never have had the need to anyway, you know, it's. I would hate to have to work in London now, I would feel threatened but I think it's the frenetic, erm, atmosphere that I, I really do dislike.

**Yeah. Slowing it all down is the key.**

**B4** Yeah, and retiring is great because you can go at your own speed.

**Yeah, you choose the course of your day don't you? That's the joy**

**B4** Well mostly you do. [laughs]

**Yeah, most of the time you do.**

**B4** Mostly, you do.

**[laughs]**

**B4** Any use?

**Wonderful and thank you so very much for your time, is there anything else you would like to ask me or anything else you want to, you know, add to the interview that you feel very passionate about that you want the project to know about?**

**B4** I just think it's important that you, you continue this project and reach some sensible conclusions that can be actioned because it's that, there's so many reports come out and there's airy fairy waffle and there's no money to back it all up and there's absolutely no point in the whole thing happening, so if you can manage to get something practical out of it so much the better.

**That's well said, thank you so much.**

**B4** Yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW 5 BED5

**Now so thank you for your time, I wondered if we could start really, because you, I sent you the participant information sheet didn't I? So you've, an idea of what our project's all about, wetland life, yeah.**

**B5** A long time ago.

**Okay. Well basically the conversation interview's in three parts. The first one really is to understand how your organisation and your organisation's members use and enjoy wetlands.**

**B5** Right.

**Then to think about health and wellbeing as part of that and then, also then to talk about mosquitoes as part of our project and then finally to think about how wetlands might be viewed by the general public and how, what you and your organisational perspective feel that members of the public get from their interaction with wetlands, in terms of wetland's role in our wider cultural perceptions. So if we just start really with the very simple thing of the name of your organisation.**

**B5** Ah hum.

**And the role of your organisation, your members and your organisation, particularly in terms of not just member numbers but also age range, gender split, social demographics, ethnicity, that would help give a little context of, yeah.**

**B5** Some of that I don't know.

**That's fine, that's fine.**

**B5** To be honest.

**Okay.**

**B5** Okay. The organisation is the Bedford Natural History Society, which has been in existence since the late forties. One of the main roles of the Society is recording the wildlife of Bedfordshire, so we have a whole series, I think it's twenty four at the moment of recorders who record specific groups, everything from well known groups like birds, plants, right down to things like weevils, REMOVED, but more obscure things, erm, but all that information goes in to the Record Centre, the County Record Centre and we have a memorandum of understanding up there. Erm, for a lot of the more well-known groups, dragonflies, butterflies, all that sort of, a lot of information comes from the members who send information to the recorders and they can either do it directly or some of the groups have got a thing called Ad Nota which is an online recording system, which is accessed through our website and they just fill that in and the records go straight into the recorder, and then we publish, erm, a report every year, it's called the Bedfordshire Naturalist, erm, and all the recorders are supposed to write something, one or two skip, now and again but there will be report, like record on what's gone on, written in laymen's terms as it were, erm, so it's not heavy going but it does provide all the information and it's all the.

**So is it more of a statement of what's happened that year or is there any comparative analysis?**

**B5** There is still comparative analysis, there are also articles in it as well and it's published in two parts erm, the second part covers the birds because there's a separate Bedfordshire bird club which is linked to the society, I mean the finances are common for example, so they, they are a part of the society but you can be a member of the bird club and not the rest of the society if you see what, and those annual reports and journals go out to the whole membership, erm, which for the Natural History Society is about three hundred and forty at the moment.

**Yeah. And they're all subscribers, so they pay an annual fee to be part?**

**B5** Yeah, they pay annual fee, which at the moment for an ordinary full-time adult member is seventeen pounds.

**Okay, it's quite modest really.**

**B5** Yeah, we've only just put it up. [laughs]

**Okay. [laughs]**

**B5** But it is quite modest for what they get. Erm, but the other thing we do is organise meetings. During the winter months is our, there's a meeting held once a month and that's a talk, either by a member of society on something or, or often an invited speaker, give a talk. Erm, and that's open to anybody to come along, don't have to be a member to attend it.

**Yes, you pay a little fee to come along?**

**B5** There is a donation box for you to voluntarily.

**Okay, yeah, lovely.**

**B5** But most of the people that turn up are members anyway. The bird club has separate meetings in the same way. During the summer we have field meetings, erm, and these range from walks around places like country parks or interesting sites to focus walks, it may be a butterfly walk or an orchid walk for example, erm, and then they're also some which are family orientated, so it might be pond dipping, in which case we would use obviously the wetland site.

**Yes. [laughs]**

**B5** One we have used is Priory Country Park for pond dipping, several times. Erm, or it might be small mammal trapping, so you could put out traps and check them in a morning and check the kids, the mice and the voles and things and let them go, erm, and we. Sorry.

**Sorry, are those welcome, everyone can come to those?**

**B5** Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. And are they advertised for instance in the country park's websites and things like that, so do you people hook up?**

**B5** Yeah, if it's in a country park there'll often be a notice put up so they're advertised obviously on our website but we also have a, a Facebook page and they're advertised in that as well and it's, it's a closed Facebook in that you've got to sign up to it, erm, but some of the people that use it are not necessarily members of society, so, erm, so a lot of people report things they've seen and put pictures up of wildlife.

**Yeah, oh lovely, yeah.**

**B5** And it might be, erm, recently I saw otters in Priory Country Park this morning, there was fog down, that sort of thing, dragonflies.

**Yeah, so there's a little bit of citizen science in there.**

**B5** Yeah.

**In a way that people are welcome to come and document what they.**

**B5** In a way, yeah, yeah.

**You know, they've seen.**

**B5** That's right, and obviously people are sending in records to the County Recorders, that’s citizen science as well. Erm, we do have links and joint things going on with other organisations, like the Wildlife Trust, like the Green Sand Trust, if you've heard of the Green Sand Trust.

**I have, yeah.**

**B5** Yeah, erm, so we, we link up with them and they may ask us to take part in bug hunts. The Green Sand Trust in the summer for example, runs a series of bug hunts for kids, over a week in various places, erm, and one or two of us will go along and help out with that, identifying stuff that.

**And that's all voluntary?**

**B5** That's all voluntary. All society's volunteers, there's no paid people at all.

**No, no. And those connections with the other organisations, is that through sort of mutual desire to support each other in environmental concerns, is it?**

**B5** Yeah.

**Yeah.**

**B5** Yeah, it is, erm, joint interest really and as REMOVED, erm, I sit on various committees, right there's the Bedfordshire and Luton Wildlife Working Group, okay, which is chaired by the Wildlife Trust and it has people from local authorities who, who sit on it, erm, Bedford Borough Council, County Council, Luton Borough Council, who are responsible for conservation, that sort of thing, planning.

**Yeah, and who set up that particular group, is that led by the Council or is that led by the Wildlife Trust?**

**B5** I couldn't tell you who originally set it up, erm, but it is led, the Wildlife Trust provides a Chairman and secretariat for that, they organise it, erm, REMOVED from the Bird Club sits on it, but, erm, and people from Natural England come along to it, yeah. RSPB, that's on.

**Yeah, so it's a good umbrella organisation in terms of.**

**B5** Ah hum.

**Being able to connect with governance agencies.**

**B5** Yeah.

**And do you think it has made a difference, do you think it has influenced government policy, local government policy in terms of taking your perspective and?**

**B5** Yeah, I think it does because it's a good forum for raising concerns, erm, and that's another important role if you like for all the recording side it does through the records sent. If there's a development proposed then the records sent are, has got all that information, as a society we do not lobby one way or the other and that's not our role, our role is to provide information, erm, for whatever site, the information set and we, we can give our opinions as to what effects there might be.

**Yeah, so you keep scientifically neutral?**

**B5** Yes, yes. No it, it's not a good thing to be seen to be lobbying one way or the other, we could do it as individuals, members of society but not in the main society.

**So if you like the ethos of the society is really as a scientific institution or group if you like to collect data, keep that data, do you also see yourself as a, in the role of educating, do you have these bug days?**

**B5** Oh yeah, yeah.

**So yeah.**

**B5** Well is to, you know, provide a, a society whereby people interested in the natural history of the county can take part and contribute and learn about what's going on, so there's that function as well.

**So would you say for your members, that one of the great aspects of the society is about developing new skills, whether that's recording skills or identification skills?**

**B5** Um.

**And also how much of that is also about meeting like-minded people and the social side of things?**

**B5** Yeah, I think that plays a big role, erm, people coming to meetings, coming out on field trips, you know, and chatting. The other thing we've done, erm, twice before and third one's coming up, is run a one day conference and it's held here at this centre, in the rooms.

**In Millennium Country Park, yeah.**

**B5** Erm, and it, it was, at first, well we do it every two years, so the first one was coming up for six years ago, and it's on neglected invertebrate groups, okay? So we have experts from round the country who come and give a presentation about a, a group that, the average person may not recognise or think about, some of them are more familiar, we've got one on ladybirds for example this, by the National Ladybird recorder, erm, but we normally get a hundred people come along to that.

**Oh that's good.**

**B5** Yeah.

**And so people from all around the country will come to?**

**B5** There are people from outside the county that come, yes. Erm, and we normally, I think it's seven talks and we have displays and it's been very well received.

**Yeah, so would you say then an aspect of it is awareness raising?**

**B5** Yes.

**Yeah.**

**B5** Yeah, definitely, getting people interested to, to go out and look for these things and learn a bit about them and maybe send in the records and, and it does work. There are some people that, they go oh I've seen one of them, we'll go and have a look for another one and send the information. Erm, the two conferences we've already had all the presentations are accessible through our website and anybody that wants in retrospect to look at all the PowerPoint slides.

**Lovely, yeah, the data's there, yeah.**

**B5** Data's there.

**Wonderful.**

**B5** They can look at, at that.

**Yeah. And you don't need a password or anything to access that data on your website?**

**B5** No.

**It's just public information?**

**B5** Yeah, just go into our website and find the relevant picture, click on.

**How wonderful.**

**B5** Yeah.

**So if we just think for a moment about your membership, how does that sit in terms of age range, gender, ethnicity?**

**B5** Right. I, I couldn't answer the gender one without, you'd need our membership secretary to look at that.

**Yeah, just a kind of rough approximation.**

**B5** Certainly in terms of age, like many societies we're top heavy, so a good, certainly over fifty percent are sixty five plus time, erm. It's a constant battle really, certainly to get younger people active in the society because everybody leads busy lives, erm, and I have to admit I've been a member for a long time but it's only, well it's not only after I retired, I did do some beforehand, it's only when people retire they, they get more involved in terms of, but.

**Yeah, and I think that's true of many organisations.**

**B5** Yeah, it is.

**There is, you have younger people who are maybe doing their A levels or doing their degree, then people in their sort of, you know, fifties onwards but the, you know, that other section of society it seems quite hard to.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Apart from when they come to family days.**

**B5** Yeah, that's right.

**You actually, actually in other ways it's quite difficult.**

**B5** Yes, that's right. We have free membership for under eighteens, they're called the Young Gnats.

**Yeah, but without the G?**

**B5** With a capital G.

**Oh with a capital G.**

**B5** Capital Young Gnats.

**Okay.**

**B5** Erm, and I think we have about thirty five signed up, the problem is getting them to come along to activities or getting parents to, to bring them along but they get a little bit welcome pack, you know, a notebook and sticker and things like that, various things.

**Yeah, well to find engagements is, is, you know, is trying to get that next generation.**

**B5** Yeah, yeah, that's right.

**To be interested, yeah.**

**B5** Yeah, my view is that we have to keep trying and providing information and engaging where we can, even though we might not get much feedback … (background noise) we're probably seeding interest and I think that's the important point, that's why we help out with the bug hunts that the Green Sand does and have our own things.

**Yeah. Are you ever asked to go to schools and give talks in schools and things?**

**B5** Yeah, now and again, erm, it happened, ooh last autumn, there was a national biology week, okay, which schools engaged in and there is a primary and pre-school school just down the road from where I live and one of the teachers had looked at our website, actually come across my name as the REMOVED, seen that I live two streets away and sent an email saying would you like to come and talk about REMOVED to the kids? So I emailed back and said no, [laughs] but it will be better if I came and talked about general natural history because my garage is half full of wildlife artefacts, nature table stuff.

**Yeah, how wonderful.**

**B5** Yeah, inherited from other people, the garage has got everything from a cow's skull down to insects and whatever, yeah, so we've got a load of stuff. So my wife and I took a selection of stuff in photographs and I actually talked to three different groups, one after the other, for about half an hour each, starting from four year olds up to seven and eight year olds, erm, and you showed them things and, and that was quite entertaining and especially with the younger ones, because I.

**Oh you get brilliant reactions from little ones don't you?**

**B5** Oh yeah, we had some cast snakeskins you see, and I had, held up a big photograph of a grass snake, said this is a snake we get around here, it's called a grass snake, what do you think a grass snake eats? Of course, grass. [laughs] No. And a little girl at the end put her hand up and said sausages.

[laughter]

No.

**It's quite endearing that, do you think there is a disconnect with younger kids in terms of actually understanding?**

**B5** Yeah.

**Having any concept about the natural world?**

**B5** Yeah, I think some of them, they, they do vary a lot because another of the things we do, we have a society display, a stand with photographs and what have you and we take nature table stuff and have that laid out, that's a great draw, erm, it'll be events, maybe at Rushmere Country Park with the Green Sand Trust for example, RSPB Give Nature a Home days, we'll set up. And we just did one in Bedford, it was a local group that teaches kids about bugs, and they had a, a bug event, well it was more than bugs, they had a garden snake, all sorts of things.

**Right, all the things that will attract younger kids, yeah.**

**B5** Yeah, but you put out nature table stuff and the kids just come along. I also have a couple of photographic quizzes for kids, erm, so there'll be twelve photographs and they have to choose one of three alternatives for each one, so for example I have a picture of a cold tit, a blue tit and a great tit and is it a blue tit, a great it or a cold tit? And they just. And then you go through it, it doesn't matter if they get them wrong.

**No.**

**B5** You tell them what it is and why it's what it is.

**Yeah, it's just engagement isn't it?**

**B5** Yeah. Erm, anybody gets ten or more, or twelve, they get a prize and they all get a sticker for doing it, that sort of thing, so again we're trying to get them engaged.

**Yeah, connect.**

**B5** Yeah.

**And would you say that the work you do as a society that Priory Country Park, Millennium Country Park, quite intrinsic to the, to the work that you do?**

**B5** Yeah, partly all, all their, not only the country parks but all the wildlife sites. I mention the Bedfordshire Wildlife working group, well another committee that I also sit on which is linked to that is the County Wildlife Site Committee, erm, and they meet. The County Wildlife Site Committee, they meet to decide on new sites that might be proposed as county wildlife sites for example and look at, there is a list of criteria they have to satisfy in terms of their importance for various things, erm, so I sit on that as well to decide Country Wildlife Site.

**You're very busy on a number of committees.**

**B5** [laughs] Yes.

**I know I keep jumping but going back to the membership.**

**B5** Yeah, okay, so we divert.

**Very quickly, we diverted there but.**

**B5** Yeah, gender.

**Just to recap, gender.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Fifty fifty, sixty forty?**

**B5** It's probably about fifty fifty I would say, I mean certainly if you look at the audience, some stuff, a talk for example, yeah, it's certainly no, no more than sixty forty in terms of males, very often it's fifty fifty.

**Yeah, and would you say it's mainly white?**

**B5** Yeah, yeah, it is. Erm, we occasionally get ethnic minority people turning up, erm, for some of the field meetings for example but it's unusual at the meetings, yeah, I couldn't tell you in terms of the general membership, there may be people but it, probably a small minority, which is a shame.

**Yeah, and, yeah. And can you think of any obvious reason why?**

**B5** I don't think there's that kind of the tradition within those circles. I think it's slowly changing, I mean every week through the summer I do a butterfly survey for butterfly conservation, it's called a Transect Walk, yeah.

**Okay, yes, yes.**

**B5** And I do it on Dunstable Downs.

**Lovely.**

**B5** Erm, and very often the weather's, you have to have good weather to do it, you can't do it.

**Yes, otherwise they're not going to be coming out are they?**

**B5** Yeah, we're not allowed to do it because we can't prepare, you know, from one week to the next, you have to have certain weather conditions. Of course what's nice for butterflies, is nice for people going out on to butterfly.

**Yes, of course. [laughs]**

**B5** But I have noticed in the last couple of years more and more Asian and black people actually utilising Dunstable Downs and you see, see them, you know, having picnics and flying kites, which is a good sign.

**Yeah, very physical.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Because that's the other thing with the project, it's about trying to reach as many people as possible to encourage them to be using these wetland spaces.**

**B5** Yeah, yeah.

**And it's how we access all members of society because it seems to be that it's predominantly that organisations that are involved in these sites, the membership or the people leading activities are mainly white.**

**B5** Yeah.

**And I tried very hard to try and include as many people as possible but of course if people don't want to get involved in the project it's quite difficult to.**

**B5** Yeah, I know, I know.

**So it's a conundrum that we're….**

**B5** Yeah.

**You know, just trying to kind of piece together really.**

**B5** Yeah.

**And for you, you know, the country parks, they obviously bring a lot of different kinds of people along but from your organisation's perspective, do you view them as wetlands or do you view them as parks with wet spaces within them?**

**B5** Oh parks with wet spaces, yeah, yeah, definitely.

**Yeah, because you would consider somewhere like Flitwick Moor I presume as a wetlands.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**B5** Yeah, there's, erm, the Wildlife Trust, as you probably know, has local groups, there are three in Bedfordshire, there's Bedford Local Group Flitvale, which covers the area with Flitwick Moor in it, Flitton Moor, there's two. Erm.

**Yeah, there's another one beginning with P isn't there, that's near Flitwick Moor? There's kind of, there's Flitwick Moor and then there's Flitton Moor and then there's another one isn't there?**

**B5** Yeah.

**Is it called Purbeck or something like that?**

**B5** Can't remember, erm, but there's also South Bedfordshire, which is on the chalk, actually sit on the committee for South Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust. [laughs]

**A glutton for punishment, a glutton for punishment.**

**B5** I know. Erm, now what was my thread? I, I know, erm, the Flitvale group, erm, every year have an invertebrate day at Flitwick Moor where the public can come along, you know, and do some bug hunting as we call it and the society members help out with that and that's coming up, when is it, a week on Sunday? Or is? No, it's tomorrow, it's tomorrow, yes, tomorrow. I can't be there because I'm going to be at Twickenham for the rugby finals, my team's in the final.

**Wow, congratulations.**

**B5** But [laughs] very often there. Erm, so again we, we help out things like that.

**Yeah, because would you say for your organisation that these two sites that, that, you know, our project's looking at, are special or are they just part of a kind of mosaic of landscapes within Bedfordshire?**

**B5** We're part of the mosaic of the landscape basically. In terms of wetlands, as you'll know, there's, there's more places than these within the county. Erm, some of our specialist recorders that are obviously recording groups, which are associated with wetlands, dragonflies and, you know, things like that, erm but also we have a reptile and amphibian recorder and she of course, has involved newts and frogs and things, erm, in wetlands, so, you know, those recorders will visit wetland areas, to get records.

**Because part of the project is to try and understand the sense of place when it comes to wetlands and what I'm understanding, from talking to you, is that your members are led by their wildlife interests that they have as specialisms rather than the landscape per se.**

**B5** Yeah.

**So it's following the animals.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Rather than sticking to one particular site, finding out what's in that site, so yeah.**

**B5** Yeah, it is, I mean we, we have used both here and, erm, Priory Country Park for events, like pond dipping or, or guided walks.

**So would you say then if you like the utility of these sites, the Millennium Country Park and Priory Country Park, is really to do with their functionality in terms of being accessible for the public, so enabling the public to see what you do and get involved in your activities?**

**B5** Yes, partly.

**Because am I right in saying somewhere like Flitwick Moor which if you like is more biodiverse, rich for your organisation, it's not as user friendly as these sorts of sites?**

**B5** No, no, absolutely. You tend to get more, erm, the gen, if I can use the word general probably.

**You can, yeah.**

**B5** People who've got an interest but aren't specialised, are focussed on anything, would come along to an area like this more than they'd turn up at Flitwick Moor for example.

**Yeah, but would you say that there's a potential that by holding events in these, if you like, more managed spaces that they might encourage people to build their confidence back, interacting with nature and to try and use sites around Bedfordshire, have you ever seen that evolve as part of your group?**

**B5** Yeah.

**Where people have said oh I feel confident now about doing my own bug hunt somewhere else or doing some pond dipping in the, in somewhere that is?**

**B5** Erm, not.

**Or do you think?**

**B5** It might have, I've not seen that directly, erm, certainly people's interest is sparked and you get the occasional person will turn up to a meeting and join the society because their interest has been sparked, erm.

**I mean the other side of it is thinking about, do people enjoy these family days because someone else is organising them, someone else has done their risk assessment, they're a quantified known interaction with nature and that's as much as people want?**

**B5** Yeah, I think a lot of people do it because it, it's there and they're doing it and, oh let's go and do that for the afternoon, it might be interesting, rather than specifically looking for something that's going to, the Members will, erm, or people moving into the area who are, generally interested. Erm, but yeah, it's one of the problems really is, is getting our activities advertised out to the general public, that's why we put on the stand for example, at various events. I mean we do use Rushmere Country Park, of course that's not got a wetland in it. [laughs]

**Yeah. [laughs] When you're doing your.**

**B5** Well it has got a pond actually.

**Yes, I mean it may, this may be an irrelevant question because of course as naturalists, you're quite happy working in a whole diverse range of natural environments but are there any disbenefits of doing, undertaking some of your work in wetlands?**

**B5** Are you getting on to the mosquito bit now? [laughs]

**No, no, I'm not, I'm not yet on the mosquito. Just, you know, are there times when your members will still think about where they go if it's a wetland site or is it just a case of you just get your welly boots on.**

**B5** I'm not aware of that, I'm not aware of that. Erm, we do hold events at Flitton Moor for example, because, erm, they have open days which we're invited along, I think, I have got this summer programme on me actually. My wife organises a programme with her friends. Erm, and I think we've got one at Flitton Moor. Let's see. Yeah, Saturday twenty sixth of May is Flitwick Moor Invertebrate Day. Erm, ah there we are, Flitton Moor to look for dragonflies and explore the nature trail.

**Oh nice, the fourth of August. Oh we're not here then, we're on holiday then, otherwise I'd take the kids.**

**B5** Yeah.

**I'm back at the end of August.**

**B5** Erm, Duck End Nature Reserve, that's very small one.

**That's supposed to be very lovely.**

**B5** It's very nice there, that's where we often do the small mammal task. We had a harvest mouse last time which is, you don't often get them in the traps.

**They've got a bit more savviness so they won't.**

**B5** Yeah. You can take this away if you.

**Oh that's very thoughtful, thank you. So did you say.**

**B5** See what's going on.

**That for your members, wetlands are very different types of landscapes from other types of landscape?**

**B5** That's a hard one to say, erm, certainly if our members have got a particular interest in something associated with wetland. Erm, and if you expand from the Natural Society into the bird club as well, obviously wetlands are very important for the bird club, erm, and every, every spring, erm, not spring, end of winter, after Christmas the bird club holds a wetlands survey for birds around the whole county, so they'll have people visiting and counting all the different birds using the wetlands, across the county and that survey is done every year, so the bird club are very active in terms of wetlands and the bird club have got a guy that, who also sits on this wildlife working group who is, erm. What's his official name? Not scientific officer, something like, anyway he's, he used to be in planning, erm, in Hertfordshire I think it was, he's retired now, but he gets involved in, erm, recording what's on various wetland sites which are coming up or threatened with development for example and providing information and liaising with owners of wetland sites, to actually manage them in the right way, that sort of thing.

**Yeah, so he's part of your organisation?**

**B5** Yes, the bird club, yeah.

**Yeah, okay, yeah.**

**B5** Yeah, and people from the bird club, the chairman of the bird club sits on our council, and the bird recorder as well sits on.

**Yeah, so again they're doing the same function in terms of sharing information.**

**B5** Yeah.

**To help people make decisions about managing those landscapes.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Yeah. Moving forward a little bit now to think about health and wellbeing.**

**B5** Ah hum.

**We touched on it before in terms of your members’ activities, would you say that health and wellbeing is a large part of, of what motivates them to get involved in the organisation?**

**B5** Yeah, I think certainly with older members, retired members, they're very conscious of getting older. [laughs] Erm, and they've probably, for a long time, had an interest in natural history but coming out on field events, and being active if you like, erm, going off and recording stuff, sending the information in to the mammal recorder, the bird recorder, butterflies, whatever, erm, keeps them happy.

**Yeah, so it's both physical activity but it's also mental stimulation as well.**

**B5** Also mental, yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, and you also talked before about the social side of things.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Someone had talked to me before, one of my other interviewees about loneliness, about how being part of these organisations combats loneliness.**

**B5** It does.

**And for some members that might be their only social interaction, a meaningful social interaction, in a whole week.**

**B5** Yeah.

**And I, I know that's a very personal thing and you can't probably talk about your members but would you, have any of your members talked about the importance of that, particularly if they've lost a loved one?**

**B5** Yeah, that's very true. I mean our secretary at the moment, she's eighty one now, [laughs] I think, erm, and certainly coming up to eighty but she lost her husband some, some years ago to cancer I think it was, erm, and she just decided she had to get involved, they'd always, her and her husband had gone out a lot into the countryside and were interested in flowers but she took an active decision to get involved and get out the house, so she's our REMOVED, she volunteers for the RSPB, erm, does a lot of things but certainly that does play a part.

**Yeah, and one thing I've noticed from these two wetland spaces, the Priory Country Park and Millennium Country Park is the importance of remembrance in those sites, so.**

**B5** Yeah.

**So there's, you know, whether it's that little take, undertake a walk to remember somebody or sit on a bench or in fact dedicate a bench or even something more personal, like scattering ashes.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Was that ever, was that ever something that's been commented on by any of your organisation and members?**

**B5** Not to me, I, I'm not aware of any, may well have happened to people. Erm, moving away from society on to a personal note. [laughs] My daughter lives not far away, in a village called Westoning, the other side of Flitwick and she's got twin boys who are coming up to five and ever since they were babies she regularly brings them here to walk around, now they bring their bikes and ride around.

**Lovely.**

**B5** Utilise the area, as somewhere to bring the kids where they can run around free.

**Feel a bit free.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Yeah, I mean it's a very special place isn't it? It's lovely to think that there is a wetland space that will encourage people to just be kids and run around.**

**B5** Yeah, absolutely.

**Choose whatever activity it is that they would like to do.**

**B5** Yeah, yeah.

**So I get the sense that your members are drawn by the activity of being naturalists but, I keep wanting to say naturists which is terrible isn't it? But would you say.**

**B5** Naturalists. [laughs]

**Naturalists, not naturists. [laughs] Would you say that wellbeing then sits side by side with that, that that is as important or is it just as important?**

**B5** Yeah, I think it is important to, to a lot of them, as, as they get older, both mentally and physically, I'm sure it is.

**Which now enables me to see wonderfully smoothly into talking about mosquitoes because as you know, a part of the project is about monitoring mosquitoes and doing ecological surveys to be able to map the mosquitoes on twelve different sites and Millennium, no Priory Country Park is one, Millennium is one but would you, do your members, they, at some point do interface with mosquitoes, is that something they, have they ever discussed in terms of, you know, it's an irritant or might put them off doing their work or is it simply part and parcel?**

**B5** No, I've not heard of anybody saying it would, it's put them off, erm, quite the contrary, I mean the, I said we run these conferences, we can get neglected invertebrate groups, there's one guy in particularly who set it up and interested in that, and, erm, if he finds mosquitoes he wants to know what they are, so they'll be sent off to the national or European expert to get identified and find out what we've got.

**Okay, yeah. So they're certainly not seen as a species that, you know, they're seen as part of the ecosystem.**

**B5** Yeah, the, the Members I have most interaction with, are the active members, the recorders etcetera, erm, and certainly then they might complain if they get bitten now and again but it wouldn't put them off.

**No, no, and in terms of sort of from your members experiences with mosquitoes, has there been any variation over the last few years in terms of population and interaction with them on site?**

**B5** I wouldn't know, no.

**No, no, but it sounds like.**

**B5** Wouldn't have any information on that.

**No. So it sounds like really that mosquitoes have quite low visibility if you like.**

**B5** Um.

**They're certainly not something that deters your members from using these spaces.**

**B5** No.

**They're just not discussed, yeah.**

**B5** No.

**Okay.**

But then the members are naturalists anyway, so, it's more likely to be the average member of the public that would be put off by biting insects.

**Yeah, and do you think, I mean it's a hard one to call but do you think it's sometimes maybe mosquitoes get a bad press and that it may not be mosquitoes that are doing the biting, it could be any range of things?**

**B5** Absolutely, yeah.

**But mosquitoes are.**

**B5** They're a whole range, you probably know, of flies, which will bite, which are not mosquitoes but, yeah, I think so, they just get lumped in. People have heard of mosquitoes.

**Yes, am I right in saying the caddisfly's a biter, is that right? No?**

**B5** I've not, I've not known caddisflies to bite, no.

**Obviously horseflies are like the number one irritant.**

**B5** Horseflies, yeah, black flies, midges, a whole range of midges which bite, not only the Scottish midge, you get, Flitwick Moors and the Tors. I, I go out on volunteer work parties for the Wildlife Trust doing maintenance and, and we're work in Flitwick Moor in the summer, everybody's got their repellents. [laughs]

**I bet they have and long sleeves on.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Yeah, that's the thing isn't it? You have to be really well prepared for any eventuality, yeah. And in terms of your members accessing sites, I'm presuming that they access sites, you know, early in the morning, when dusk is falling, do, do they, have you ever had any reports in terms of accessibility and personal safety? That must be an aspect of your going out into these spaces.**

**B5** Yeah, I've not had any reports of problems, no. No they do access at various times because we have, we have a moth record, who runs moth traps, so they're out and, we have affiliated with a society, a bat group who obviously go out monitoring bats with bat recording, erm, including on wetland sites, so they, they will be out at that. The bird club very often have dawn chorus meetings, they tend to be woodland rather on wetland sites.

**Oh okay. And why, is there any, just because of the bird presence?**

**B5** Well you get more birdsong, woodland birds singing in the morning, in woodland then you would. Wetlands are more renowned for the water birds, which don't tend to be the singers.

**No. I was very lucky when I went to the Somerset Levels the week before last to hear a bittern.**

**B5** Oh yeah.

**I'd not heard a bittern before.**

**B5** Yeah, wonderful sound.

**Lovely sound, really unusual sound.**

**B5** Blowing across the top of a bottle.

**Yeah, ooooh, yeah.**

**B5** Yeah. [laughs] Yeah, and it carries a long way.

**It's quite lucky. It does carry a long way, yeah, so, yeah, I felt very lucky.**

**B5** Um.

**Just sat quietly for a few minutes and then so many different things and that's the other thing that I've been sort of dwelling upon, talking to different people about the wetlands is about time, how, you know, we'd said before about how, you're on so many societies and you're dashing here and there and you've got your own interests in terms of recording species, when you come to a wetland and you come to a natural space, you have to slow everything down don't you because you're not going to see the things that you want to see?**

**B5** Um, that's right.

**Unless you slow down, and do you think that's quite important for your members, that very active slowing down and taking a moment to pause and to listen and to?**

**B5** Yeah, I'm sure it is, sure it is, yeah, definitely.

**And for you personally, is that an important part of?**

**B5** Yeah, well I, I visit areas like this, all think my capacity is recording things but also the family aspect as well. I wouldn't say taking the twins round is slowing me down, [laughs] it's quite the opposite. Faster Grandad, faster. [laughs]

**That's the nature of, are they both boys?**

**B5** Yeah, two boys.

**Yeah, I'd say that's the nature of small boys isn't it?**

**B5** It is.

**Now my last section of the interview is called Contemporary Social Representations and what we're trying to get to understand in the project is how wetlands are understood by different groups in society now, and that's because, you know, historically wetlands were always seen as if you like almost redundant spaces, you know.**

**B5** Um.

**That's just a space that livestock can't use, you can't grow, you know, you can't use for agriculture.**

**B5** Yeah, yeah.

**So let's drain it and do something with it.**

**B5** Yeah.

**And I was really interested to know whether you feel that wetlands are now perceived differently by, obviously your members will be in a different group, whether the people you interact with, whether it's other organisations who are not naturalists or whether it's members of the public that you interact with, where do you think that they see wetlands? Do they see?**

**B5** Well it really depends on what sort of wetland it is. If you're talking about places like this and Priory, erm, they see it, I think, very positive, to go and walk somewhere by a lake, that's regarded as scenic, erm, but.

**Do you?**

**B5** If, if you sent them into Flitwick Moor, [laughs] that would be a different reaction. So this sort of wetland certainly I think is, is regarded not as wasteland, it's regarded as a scenic open space with water which is relaxing, I think a lot of people see water as relaxing.

**And would you say that the people, do you think most people see this as a wetland or do they see this as a park with a water body in it?**

**B5** I think probably as a country park that's got water in it.

**Yeah, so in terms of a wetland as a naturalist would view a wetland such as Flitwick Moor, would you say part of the, not the difficulty but would you say they're seen as, because they are less managed spaces and they're all managed spaces to some extent.**

**B5** They are managed.

**But because they're less managed but they're seen as being unknowable or people don't know how to access them to use them, to find their way round them? Would you say there's a kind of, this lack of confidence with those sorts of?**

**B5** Yeah, I, I think people, other than people like ourselves going there to record things, a wetland like Flitwick Moor is used for walking the dog, that sort of thing, rather than let's visit it because it's a wetland. Okay, a lot of these places are used by locals a lot, for walking dogs. Erm, there have been problems at Flitwick Moor last, last autumn I think with drug users using the area, going in, lighting fires and taking cans of beer and, yeah, those sorts of problems but once the cold weather of the winter came they disappear but they will spring up again, who knows? But that's not because it's a wetland, it's because it's woodland that's accessible and you can't be seen, especially at night. It happens in other spaces.

**Yeah. Do you think, so see this is like a clearly accessible easy space for people to use, when you think about maybe other things that influence how people use space or think about space, are there any things that you think positively influence people? So I'm thinking say any films or books or TV programmes or Government policy that might have shaped how people feel about wetland spaces?**

**B5** No in, in terms of other people using somewhere like this, cafes, I think that, that's a big draw for a lot of people, somewhere to go where they can sit and have a cup of tea, get some food as well as have a walk around, erm, and there's toilet facilities, that sort of thing is important to a lot.

**Yeah. And do you think that interests stops here? So it stops at, you know, these kind of more managed sites, do you think that there's any way that these can be used as education spaces to encourage people to explore other wetland sites or do you think that's really asking too much of most general members of the public?**

**B5** Yeah.

**Do you think are not interested in that kind of exploration?**

**B5** No, I think the majority of people who use a place like this wouldn't necessarily be the people would go off into Flitwick Moor or Flitton Moor, unless it was on their doorstep. I think if you live in the village of Flitton you will use the paths in Flitton Moor.

**So that is the point, is that here the only easy way to get here is either if you live round here and you can walk here.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Or you drive here.**

**B5** Yeah.

**So we have issues around accessibility don't we?**

**B5** Um, and I suppose the same is, you know, Priory Country Park, I don't know whether any bus services run through to Priory Country Park.

**And I noticed as I was driving there there's not an easy footpath from town to the park either.**

**B5** No, so people are driving.

**Driving, I guess you can walk along the river.**

**B5** Yeah.

**But I'm not sure, it's interesting, you know, it would have to be mapped differently to see how people actually access the site and that's another piece of work but, yeah.**

**B5** Um.

**It's trying to get people to go to nature, I mean I've talked to some people about say programmes like Countryfile or Hugh Fearnley-Wittingstall in Somerset accessing the Somerset Levels.**

**B5** Well I'm sure some people are influenced by that, erm.

**Yeah. Do you watch those sorts of programmes yourself?**

**B5** Yeah, I do, yeah.

**Yeah. Do you end up shaking your fist at the television if they say inaccurate? [laughs]**

**B5** Not very often, not very often, no, no. I mean you do get some people who are very keen naturalists and who tend to be impatient with people that don't have much knowledge and regards some of those programmes are just dumbing it down. My personal view is if you want to get across to the average member of the public and stimulate interest, you've got to present it in that way, erm. I know people who don't like things like Springwatch because of the way it's presented but, you know, I think it's great, it's getting across to a lot of people. The problems is and I read an article about this recently, that says that not only with that with wildlife orientated programmes, nature orientated programmes but with cookery orientated programmes, or dancing, you know, a lot of people are ardent watchers of it but don't translate it into their own lives. I think a lot of people watch cookery programmes but don't, don't cook and I think the same's true with wildlife, they like to engage and see it on the, on the telly but don't necessarily then say oh I must go to a nature reserve, unfortunately. I think a lot of people do that, but.

**Yeah, I think that's true, I think that's true, I think there's a.**

**B5** Yeah.

**A differential isn't there?**

**B5** Yeah.

**Watching it is very nice.**

**B5** Yeah.

**Doing something is something else, it's how to encourage people to do that something else.**

**B5** Yeah.

**So I mean that's the tricky bit.**

**B5** Yeah.

**I'm going to close the interview in a moment.**

**B5** Yeah.

**But I wondered if you have, with your members having worked on both sites of Millennium Country Park and Priory Country Park have you got any little anecdotes or stories relevant to either of those sites or?**

**B5** Erm, not really, erm. One of the good things about putting an event like pond dipping we do, which obviously is advertised to the site it's a family event but if you put it on somewhere like Priory, then you get members of public passing with the kids and you get them involved, they don't have to be members of the society, come along and have a go and, you know, kids get absorbed in it, so that's a benefit of having something in a place like this rather than in a remote nature reserve, whichever wildlife facilities and we can get ordinary members of the public who are passing with kids involved in, so again you're sewing the seed hopefully with the kids who might remember in later life oh I had a great time I caught a fish, you know, I caught a dragonfly, a nymph or whatever.

**Yeah. And would you say there is a difference between Millennium Country Park and Priory Country Park in that Priory Country Park is urban, it's like within Bedford itself?**

**B5** Yeah.

**So when you're doing those sorts of bug days, would you say you get more kind of people walking by, getting involved at Priory rather than Millennium or does it just differ because?**

**B5** Probably more here, I think with people making the effort to drive here and it's not getting to the town, yeah.

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

**B5** But, you know, I wouldn't, I wouldn't stake my life on it. [laughs]

**Yeah, you've got no figures, got no data to back it up.**

**B5** No, no, absolutely. As a scientist I, a retired scientist, [laughs] I'm wary about anecdotes.

**That's it, exactly, it's all about the data. Is there anything else that you would like to share with the project?**

**B5** No, I think we've covered most things, say I hope you've got a good general view of what the site is about.

**It's been really, really helpful, really helpful. I mean it's so fascinating, especially the voluntary side of things and people are giving up so much of their time to do the thing that they're really passionate about, it's also admirable, you know, there's so many pressures on our times and our lives to fit that in is important isn't it?**

**B5** It is.

**So yeah.**

**B5** We have a constant struggle getting people to fill vacancies. We have a, a post called Scientific Secretary, secretary is probably a misleading word but they, we have a scientific committee which oversees a lot of the work we do in terms of recording and the Scientific Secretary runs that committee and we had a guy who's still active in the site who did it for seven years and he's recently packed it in because he's writing a book on the hoverflies of Bedfordshire. I mean we also publish books of course for specialists erm, our latest one was on the orchids of Bedfordshire which is a very nice book. They do have it on sale here, whether they've got any left, erm, but that's a beautiful book and we've done a flora of Bedfordshire, which is a big county flora. We've done ones in the past on birdlife, on the dragonfly but this guy, I divert, this guy's writing one on of the hoverflies of Bedfordshire but I can't find anybody to take it on at the moment. There have been various candidates, the trouble is people who do volunteer for things tend to volunteer for a lot of different things, so if you're under the same people doing all things, other things and people say well, you know, I don't have the time to take on an extra thing, or one or two people who would be very good at it they're still actually in full-time employment and they say well maybe when I retire I'll take it up but not while I'm still working.

**Yeah, it's a real problem actually isn't it?**

**B5** It is, it is.

**It seems that working lives, the hours are longer.**

**B5** Yeah.

**The demands are more.**

**B5** The demands are more certainly.

**People just don't have extra capacity.**

**B5** No.

**To do, to be part of civic society.**

**B5** Yeah. It is, it is much more, it is diff, it's getting much more difficult all the time, so, erm, but yes, people do volunteer are.

**Are marvellous, yeah. Thank you so for much your time.**

**B5** That's alright.

**That's so kind of you.**

**B5** Good.

**I'll turn these various devices off now.**

**B5** I hope you can hear what I'm saying.

END OF INTERVIEW

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**I wondered if you could tell me at the very beginning, the organisation that you work with and how many members you have and their ages and what's the ethos of the organisation?**

**B6**  I work with Girl Guides in Bedfordshire, we have over three thousand members, erm, their ages range from five to twenty six, user participation, and then they range from, erm, sixteen through to, erm, ninety plus in volunteer, adult volunteers.

**Gosh, that is an absolutely gigantic span of ages.**

**B6** Yes.

**Yeah, fantastic, and your role in that is as a guiding leader?**

**B6** I am REMOVED.

**So as the REMOVED, presumably you work with a network of other advisors across the country so do you have a kind of stated goal in terms of what you hope to do in your particular role?**

**B6** Erm, my, my understanding of my role is to, erm, facilitate our young members getting active in the outdoor, erm, and, erm, having opportunities that might not be available to them otherwise.

**Is that because of opportunities are limited for them because of things like mobility or in terms of just being able to access the countryside?**

**B6** Erm, there's a large element of qualifications, erm, that so we require people to have certain qualifications to do certain activities, especially water sports, erm, they, just to go for a country walk, it's fine, if you want to do something, erm, adventurous within the outdoor, you need to have qualifications and I facilitate that side of it. I also offer advice on risk assessments and things that people need to do and things like pond dipping, if they've not done that before and things like that, so it, anything that is REMOVED, if they've got questions then they, they ask me.

**Yeah, okay. And would you say that your members come from quite a wide sector of society or would you say that actually, you know, that maybe getting all types of young women to participate is quite tricky?**

**B6** It is tricky, getting all, all to, to everyone within society. We have specifically been targeting, erm, ethnic minorities within the Luton area and they, they have, erm, opened up, erm, units which target particular religions, so that the, the leaders are the same religion as the girls and therefore all the cultural and safety aspects are with their, within it already and the fathers are then happy for the girls to participate, whereas with, with them joining a unit that is already existing, if they're the only one of their faith then their, their parents, well the fathers say no. So we are, we are working on, erm, extending the reach of who we can, erm. We do target, we do have members of all abilities and disabilities and we have members of all ages and we have members of all social economic backgrounds.

**Yeah, wonderful. So you're trying to get as many young women involved as possible in all sorts of different ways?**

**B6** Yeah, we would, as far as I'm aware we would never say no to somebody joining.

**Yeah, no, absolutely. And when you're, as you said because some of the elements of the things you'd like to do might require specialist training, particularly around water sports, does that mean then that you coordinate your activities with other organisations, whether they're, you know, regulators or whether they're other sports facilitators?**

**B6** Erm, yes, so we, we create partnerships where we can, so, erm, we, Bedford Canoeing Associations run out of Priory Marina and they, and because I'm a coach we, we have agreed that I can be a coach on their behalf and, erm, we, we run, erm, for raft building and for the paddle boarding for our youth members from Priory Marina, erm, we have also had a partnership with, it's, is it the Millennium one up at Marston Moretaine?

**It is, yeah.**

**B6** And so that the, the county have had a partnership with that and the rangers will do, erm, pond dipping with our younger girls, erm, and also nature walks and things.

**Yeah. And will you do things though that are slightly out of hours, like bat walks and things like that?**

**B6** Yes.

**Yeah, yeah, so.**

**B6** Erm, in the evenings, erm, we, we go for walks, so most of the Unit and because of the ages, will meet after five o'clock because of work commitments, erm, but some meetings will finish at six and some will start at seven and finish at nine and generally we contact organisations and say we're a youth organisation and we want to get people in the outdoors, and it's a one-off thing, they do extend hours and they make it possible.

**Yeah. So other organisations are quite flexible because they can see the worth of, of what your organisation does?**

**B6** Yes. And it's a two way process too.

**Yeah.**

**B6** Yeah.

**Yeah. And would you say, yeah, the other organisations that you work with, do you get involved with local government very much or are they quite removed from this process, this partnership process that you're involved in?**

**B6** Erm, for, for me specifically it's all removed, erm. For, at charity level I would say it's, erm, the, there probably is some missing identity, but when you get up to, erm, regional level there is definitely the input and, with the Government and also at national level, erm, Girl Guiding UK have quite a lot of advocacy and so, erm, they, they have input, input on, on national campaigns and things.

**Yeah. So at a kind of, as you said, strategic level, there's a lot of coordination but when it gets down to the very micro level maybe it's no so much hands-on between you and local government.**

**B6** Yes, yes, I'd agree.

**Yeah, lovely, oh that's really helpful, thank you. And in terms of, you know, thinking about the two wetlands that we've been looking at on the project, which is Priory Country Park and Millennium Country Park, do you use both of these spaces?**

**B6** Yes.

**Yeah. And how often, I mean is it quite a prominent feature throughout the year or is it more seasonal or does it just depend actually on who's leading?**

**B6** Erm, it would depend on the local leaders, erm, predominantly they are used in the summer because you've got the light nights and you've got a better chance of nice weather, erm. However, sometimes there are local unit, so there's several units meeting in Cranfield and their Guides meet at the Millennium Park quite frequently because they have the flexibility with their, with their, with their usual meeting place that they just don't stay long because they don't go, but nobody else will use it instead of them, so if the weather is bad they can just change their meeting plan and if the weather is good and it's a … they can say well we'll do it this week instead so it very much depends on individual units and the leaders involved, erm.

**Yeah, okay. And so it sounds to me like then, that it's more sort of, when the weather improves, the activities can move outside, which just makes perfect sense.**

**B6** Yeah.

**You know, because you don't generally want to get kids too muddy and cold if it's a certain time of the year, but in terms of whereabouts in those wetlands the Guides will do their activities, I understand, if it's pond dipping obviously you're going to be using the pond but are there other activities that might take you to those less marked spaces in the wetlands? So I'm thinking about, you know, maybe do you ever do orienteering or do you do long rambles that may take you off the normal track or is it kind of, it's going to be cycling and then cycling around the main track? You know, how do you use those wetlands once you're in them?**

**B6** Erm, we do do orienteering. Erm, I think Millennium has an orienteering course set up but I do also know that there is a unit that set up their own orienteering course and runs, run with, erm, parents help their own volunteering. We, some we do cycling and that then is very much constrained to where it is. When we do water sports and pond dipping there are so many set areas for it. Erm, if you've got the younger girls, the, so the five to seven year olds particularly, if you go for a walk it will very much be on, on the path, erm, and then if you've got the older girls we would do longer walks and we would go perhaps off, off the more mainstream paths.

**Yeah. And would you, when you've experienced the different ages of, you know, your young members using the space, do you find that they get something different when they are off the marked path, you know, do you find that they really enjoy being the only ones in these wilder spaces or do they feel more comfortable when they are on the footpaths would you say?**

**B6** I would say they're more comfortable when they're on the footpaths but if you sell it to them as an adventure then they love the adventure of exploring and that side of it, erm, yeah.

**Yeah. I mean do you think from your experience, you know, you've been doing it a while now, would you say that you almost have to convince your members that there's nothing to be frightened of? I mean do you think they fear nature or do you think that they, it's just that it's so unknown to them they don't know quite what to do in those spaces? Because wetlands aren't like say other spaces that you can be in, they, there's a certain amount of, I guess less managed space there, so there's a chance of kind of beginning to feel a bit lost I suppose.**

**B6** Erm, I would say for some of our leaders there's the potential that they are less willing to take girls into these spaces because they themselves aren't confident with being in the environment and being responsible for people, erm, and I'd say there's an element of the girls pick up on, erm, leaders willingness to do things, erm, I don't have too much of an issue encouraging the girls to have fun and adventure because that's my starting point, erm, yeah.

**Yeah. And it's interesting isn't it that maybe with some of the leaders without even meaning to they might discourage the, you know, your young members from accessing those wilder spaces because of their own inherent anxieties around that?**

**B6** Yeah.

**And would you say that that is more to do with our kind of litigious age around risk management or would you say it's to do actually with being uncertain in nature? I'm trying to get a sense of where one begins and another one ends, you know.**

**B6** Erm, so I'd say there's two sides of it, so, erm, there is a, there is a large element of, erm, the paperwork and, and the risk assessment process and, erm, misunderstanding of what you're actually allowed to do, erm, and that doesn't help people get out and explore, erm, but then there is also the other side of if they're not confident and happy within an environment then they're less willing to, to be in it themselves and they're less and, and that's then going to transfer to the girls. Did I, did I answer the question?

**Yeah, no, because it feeds off each other doesn't it? And when your leaders are, or when your members are in these spaces, you know, the Priory Country Park and Millennium Country Park, do you think they feel that they're in a wetland or do you think they feel they're just in a, a larger park space?**

**B6** Erm, I think it would depend on the activity that they're doing. Erm, for the vast majority of the activities we do I would say that they are unaware that they're in a particularly special environment, erm, I would say that that, the, probably the only exception to that is when they're doing activities like pond dipping and it is, erm, the, the nature side of it is central to the activity, erm, so pond dipping wasn't the only sample is, if you're also doing some sort of, erm, nature trail or walk, then that might also give them the feeling of being in somewhere particularly special but if you are just going for a walk or doing geocaching or orienteering or water sports, if you're doing water sports you, you miss the fact that you're in nature because you're in the water having fun, erm, yeah. So it very much depends on the activity that you're doing as to how they feel in that environment.

**Yeah. Do you feel that the young ladies really, you know, I mean I know it splits down to sort of just personal preferences but do they see it as, you know, an exciting bit of the year that they connect summertime or the better weather with being outdoors and doing outdoor activities, is the something, you know, when you're stuck inside and doing things in the winter months, is that something that you think everyone looks forward to, this idea of being out in nature?**

**B6** Oh yes, definitely, erm, it might, so the, it might not specifically be the nature bit that they pick up on and it will be the outside and the good weather but certainly a lot of the activities end up being, erm, more nature orientated, erm, but there is a large element of that, that that comes down to cost but certainly when the units I'm involved with, you ask simple ideas and even in the depths of winter you get the let's go for a walk, let's do this, that and the other and then they're all outdoor summer activities, erm, and, erm, there, there is, there is a, that the ideas that they want to do are outdoor and, and related to not being inside, erm.

**Yeah, and because, you know, the two wetlands we're looking at in Bedfordshire, one's obviously right in the middle of Bedford and the other one's a little bit further out, do you have logistical complications in terms of, that maybe members would prefer one over the other because of access? Whether that's, it's easier to access and park outside of town or that it's just impossible if people don't have a car to access the other side?**

**B6** So for the majority of Bedfordshire as a county, erm, getting to Bedford can be a challenge but then also getting to the Millennium Park is equally a challenge, erm, so it very much depends on your location within Bedfordshire. Erm, for, for the ones that are within Bedford getting to, on the whole getting to, erm, Priory is easy, erm, we do promote the fact that they can share lifts and things. There are some units where they will not do outdoor activities, activities that you don't get outside of their meeting place but they will meet at their meeting place and go somewhere from it on the basis that all the girls can get to the meeting place every week whereas they cannot get to other places necessarily and that might be due to transport or childcare or, erm, parents working, rotas and things like this, so there's lots of reasons why a unit wouldn't meet somewhere so then their meeting place, I, I personally think that that's wrong, erm, I think there are ways and means round everything. Erm, certainly, I, I think Priory is more easy to access than Millennium, erm, but then if you're within Cranfield you can definitely say that Millennium is easier to access because there's some good parking and things like that but I am amazed at how many people don't quite know that Priory is there and that's even if you're, if you're within Bedford.

**Yeah. That is the sense I got when we had our focus group, is that if you know about Priory Country Park you might well use it quite a lot but there's quite a few people that don't know it's there because either the signage is low visibility or they've never explored that part of the river system.**

**B6** Yeah.

**And I mean what do you think, you know, from your experience what do you think could be done to maybe encourage more people to use both sites but particularly Priory given that it's got this urban situation?**

**B6** Yeah, it's really difficult because the obvious one is sort of to advertise it but how, how do you do that? Because all of the channels for advertising have sort of changed and it's also not the most, erm. I, I think advertising the outdoor through different media is perhaps not necessarily the way you want to go, if that makes sense. It's, it's an odd way to advertise it, erm, yeah.

**Yeah, I mean do you get the sense that once some of your members have gone to Priory, they might indeed bring their families back because it's something that they've discovered and they're sharing with their families?**

**B6** Erm, yes, to an extent they were, I would say it's more that the parents bring the kids back having discovered that it's there if that makes sense.

**Ah yes, when they've come to collect them.**

**B6** So it's, it's not girl led perhaps but it certainly because of the involvement with guiding, so they've had a trip there and the parents have had to bring them and because our meetings are sometimes only an hour, an hour and a half then they don't go home so you explore yourself and discover what there is actually there and bring your kids back because you saw.

**Yeah. That's such a lovely idea isn't it that, you know, you're, by having an activity there you're really enabling the family and therefore all the extended friends and relatives can then discover it that way too? It's a lovely word of mouth isn't it?**

**B6** Yes.

**Do you think if, you know, hand on heart, if Priory Country Park and Millennium Country Park weren't there would you still be able to do the outdoor activities that you do but just simply in a different space?**

**B6** Erm, so things like pond dipping would be harder, erm. I'm, I'm aware that the, so in Brickhill there is an allotment area or somewhere where there is a, an area where you can do pond dipping but that's very much, that's even more local knowledge than, erm, Priory Park, erm, and then things like the water sports, there are still sites that we can use but that requires, erm, transport, so it's, it's a different catchment for, so if, if you said it's, you know, you'll travel twenty minutes for somewhere then I would be unlikely to do, erm, water sports for anybody in Bedfordshire, in Bedford, because it's too far to travel.

**Yes, got you.**

**B6** Erm, but then things like country walks and orienteering, we can, we do, you can do that in some form anywhere and, and people do, it's just the, erm, I would say you don't get, you wouldn't get the remoteness easily and, and for me that's, that is really nice.

**Yeah. So I mean it's sounds to me from what you're saying that really the, the water is pretty key because that's the thing that's accessible in these sites, that it's not so easy to get in other sites.**

**B6** It, it's also the, the one thing that is unique in the site, erm, yeah.

**Yeah, wonderful. So if you could.**

**B6** That also, that also makes, brings in a lot of the wildlife and things that then makes it somewhere for you to walk that's nicer rather than, I know country walks through the fields and things are nice but they're different, they're not by the water.

**Yes, yeah, you're right.**

**B6** I like water, I think water is the key selling point for Priory.

**Yes, no, I agree and it's just, I mean and it's not of course just the lake but it's also the river itself, I mean do you ever take the, you know, the walk that takes you out towards Tesco from Priory or do you normally stay around the main lake when you're doing your activities?**

**B6** Erm, so I, I would say most units would stay around the lake, erm, they would also make use of the, erm, visual[?] display area, erm, particularly with the youngest kids, they tend not to go too far because there are the toilets and things at the centre. Erm, with the older kids it depends on what you want to do, erm. I know an awful lot of units will, erm, set the, set them a walk that involves a quiz and things like this or they'll, they'll set, they have to come up with a quiz and then they might swap quiz questions for the following week, erm, and those sorts of activities that tend to, erm, involve you being a bit more, erm, central and located rather than off and exploring, erm, but there, there is, there is definitely a mix.

**Yeah, yeah. So it really depends on the activity that's being undertaken.**

**B6** Yeah, and also the, the girls, so if they've been to Priory before then they're more likely to do adventurous things because they've been there and done that, so if it's their first time you ease them in gently and.

**Yeah, exactly, you want it to be a positive experience for them don't you?**

**B6** Yeah.

**Yeah. And I mean we've touched on it briefly but if you could say what you would say for your organisation are the main benefits and disbenefits of using these two wetlands, would you be able to sum them up?**

**B6** Erm, so for Girl Guides Bedfordshire, I would say the benefits are the, erm, the chance to, erm, engage with nature in a, erm, so it's, so it's the, the contact with nature and it's the fact that you don't need to pay to go there and that it is, erm, accessible with, with the transport, erm. I would also say the negative is that it's accessible with the transport because it so much depends on where you are.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**B6** Erm, that it very much is the, the ability to have, erm, hidden education.

**Yeah, no, that sounds really positive.**

**B6** And …

**Yeah, and I think that's really important isn't it? Because where else do you get that chance to be experimental and to spend time, especially being away from your parents as well, I think that's quite a big thing isn't it because?**

**B6** Yeah. It's all, it's also the, the removal of technology in some way, I know that that's not always the case, sometimes that they do do, the aim of it is to find photographs of things that they saw, you are using technology within the outdoor space but a lot of it also is you don't need the technology and you're having something that is technology free, so that does apply to a lot more guiding than just being outdoors, yeah. [laughs]

**Yeah, yeah. I mean this is it, this is one of our toughest challenges I think coming ahead is how we get kids to be able to put the technology down and be in a space without phones, without, you know, music playing and just be in a place.**

**B6** Yeah.

**It's really tricky isn't it? Also one of the key things that we're trying in the project is to really understand that if wetlands do generate a sense of place and I don't want to load that by suggesting that they necessarily do but I wondered if, from your experience, whether you think that these wetlands are, if you like, just a kind of mosaic of landscape and they're just one type of landscape or whether there is something particularly special about them that gives people something that they don't get in other landscapes.**

**B6** Erm, this is, this again be personal but I, so I think wetlands are special, erm, I think a lot of different landscapes are quite unique and quite special, erm, the benefit of wetlands is that it's a special environment that is on our doorstep, erm. A lot of the other areas that I think are special, you..but from Bedfordshire you would have to travel so, erm, the likes of the Peak District and the National Parks and the coast are all things that are, again, quite unique environment and offer unique experiences that you, you can't go there in an evening and, and that's what makes the wetlands special for Bedfordshire.

**Because you can really integrate them in your day to day life then can't you? If you choose to.**

**B6** Yeah, definitely.

**Yeah, that's interesting. And would you say, one of the things we're also interested in is whether these wetlands could be seen as educational spaces, either between the people, so, you know, your members who use the spaces or between the organisations who, you know, who negotiate around using the spaces, so would you say that you feel there is an educational role that these wetlands have?**

**B6** Definitely.

**And it.**

**B6** Erm, you've got the whole, whole nature element and then you've got, you, you've got, erm, there, as individuals you, you've got an active risk assessment process going on of what's safe and what's not and, you know, changing environments, erm, whereas a lot of other environments are quite fixed and therefore the risks don't change so it's, it's quite good to be able to teach that in a, in an active environment, if that makes sense.

**Yeah. And do other organisations influence your organisation in terms of perceptions around these sites? So I don't know, do you access websites to try and engage whether there is something safe or unsafe about these sites, you know, do you, are you influenced, is your organisation influenced by other organisations, I guess around using and enjoying these spaces?**

**B6** Erm, so, yes, yes is probably the right answer, so if, if there was local knowledge that said there was something dangerous about a site currently well then when we recommend our users not to use it and that might be because of pollution or because of nature of if there was, erm, I know it probably doesn't apply to the wetlands but in other areas you, you've got things like nesting birds and therefore can not use an area for a particular amount of time? Or don't go in this, use this particular, so if there's detours on footpaths and things and we would always follow the, the local recommendations on those sorts of things, erm, but at the same time if, erm, if another organisation says that they're not going to do, erm, what, what's in the countryside because of risks, because of dogs or something, we are independent and we, and we, erm, follow our own rules and we would say that, that's crazy and that we, we are still going to enjoy the outdoors, so it very much depends on what the information is and where it's coming form.

**Yeah, yeah, well that makes a lot of sense, yeah.**

**B6** But we certainly do try and keep using the out of doors.

**Yeah, as much as you can.**

**B6** Yes.

**Another aspect of what the project is looking at is looking at wellbeing and I wondered whether wellbeing was something that was a declared component of what you do, you know, are you actively trying to support your members' wellbeing or is that, if you like, a kind of outcome of other targets or your organisation?**

**B6** Erm, so yeah, yes, we do actively, erm, just to do that wellbeing, we have a duty of care of the, of both, erm, the, the organisation as a whole is quite big on self-esteem and mental health issues, erm, and, erm, empowering young women to be the leaders of the future, erm, so that's all, all positive for their wellbeing, erm. I don't know that we pursue that explicitly outdoors but in the wetland environments and like that but I think that, erm, as a whole ethos of the organisation you sort of do it without thinking about it necessarily a lot of the time, erm.

**Yeah. So it sounds like from what you've said that wellbeing is both the physical aspect of being in a space and enjoying your health, physical health but it's also emotional health as well.**

**B6** Very much so, yes.

**Yeah, yeah. And do you think that's something that's become more prevalent in your organisation in the last few years? Because I think there seems to be a recognition about all the pressures that are on young women these days.**

**B6** Yeah, it certainly is, mental health has got a lot of, well recognised within guiding before it became more mainstream, erm, I don't think we did it particularly well to start with and I think we are, erm, level with a lot of other organisations but certainly it is something that we actively pursue, erm, and are, and are aware of.

**Yeah. So I mean would you say that from a guiding perspective if you like, physical health and mental health and emotional, social health, because of course, you know, these activities are also very sociable as well aren't they? You're doing it as part of a group.**

**B6** Right.

**Would you say that they're seen as being all connected together or would you say that, that one aspect is, is more prominent than another, that really it's about the social wellbeing of the girls and their physical and the mental come next or is that almost impossible to say because it's actually not a declared component of what your organisation does?**

**B6** Erm, I think it's impossible to say but not because it's not something that we see but because you can't, you can't, you can't sit pigeon hole each bit individually and say we're, we're doing this bit now or we're looking, looking at that bit now or, people come as a whole and then we, as a group, are socialising as a whole but then within that you're always taking account of the individuals and are aware of everybody's, erm, starting point and issues and, erm, and it's more difficult in terms of things like this, so I think it's very hard to say that you're particularly concerned about one issue or the other because it very much depends on the individual and your group, as a whole and that it, erm. Every, everything is interconnected anyway.

**Yeah. And following on from that, you know, we're thinking about human health and wellbeing in these wetland sites, but I'm also aware that, that wellbeing extends beyond humans into the non-human world as well, you know, so the other animals that are part of these wetland systems.**

**B6** Yeah.

**So how does that fit in with the perspective of the guiding association in terms of taking care of the environment, is that also, you know, part of what you do, is that, you're in nature, you're in space and it's also about being a, really aware of the natural world?**

**B6** Erm, so we have, see I, I'm going to get it wrong. We, we used to have, erm, ten Guide laws and we now have five but the one that I, I remember from when I was a Guide that doesn't quite exist now, is that you're a sister to all, all Guides and, erm, something along the lines of protecting the environment and being, erm, kind of thoughtful type thing but think the whole, there is very much an emphasis on, erm, being part of the environment and not being detrimental to it and we do a lot of community action projects and quite a lot of these are, erm, linked to the environment, so we, we have done tree planting locally, we do litter picks locally, we, erm. I, I think there have been a group that built bird boxes and put them up and things, so we, there, there is an awareness of our connection to the environment in a lot of what we do.

**Yeah. And have you been, you know, you mentioned among those other activities, litter picking.**

**B6** Ah hum.

**Is that when, if you were involved, I don't know if you've ever personally been involved in a litter pick with the Guides but does it actually prompt some quite big discussions about consumption and around, you know, why it is that some people would drop litter, you know, our attitudes towards not just the planet but also other people, that there's someone else that's going to tidy it up or there's someone else that's going to sort things out? Or maybe those are too big a question and actually that, you know, the young ladies are just simply involved in picking it up and having a chat.**

**B6** Erm, I, I think, particularly for the younger ones, they're too big a question, erm, I would definitely say that, erm, by highlighting the, the litter around and then having to spend time picking it up, erm, they, they as individuals would certainly not contribute to the problem for a little bit of time, erm, so I think we, we do make a, a social change even if it's slow and short lived, erm, but by doing things repeatedly you certainly instil in them different values. Erm, I, certainly for the younger ones, erm, the, the conversations tend to be around being kind and helpful and that you are being kind to the environment rather than kind to other people, erm, but we start with five year olds then their understanding is, erm, different.

**Yes, no, absolutely, absolutely, but I guess that's where it starts isn't it? Is that you have to engage them when they're younger to start thinking about these bigger questions.**

**B6** And, and, erm, I think for Girl Guiding they're never too, too young to take responsibility and to, erm, know what they're doing and why, erm, and they have an input to their programme at all levels, erm, the input changes as they get older, they have more input as they get older but they, they definitely have decision making and, erm, at all levels.

**Yeah. Which leads me on to the other aspect of the project which is around mosquitoes and I wondered, from your experience of, anecdotal experience from talking to other group leaders about whether mosquitoes have ever been an issue on the wetland sites in Bedfordshire that you've used?**

**B6** Erm, so I personally would say I'm not aware of it being an issue, erm, I am aware that people do change their behaviours based on the perception of mosquitoes, erm, and would maybe change activities or not at certain times of the year, erm. I'm, I'm not sure whether it is actual mosquitoes or if it is, erm, their term for anything that flies.

**Yes, that's the big question.**

**B6** Bit like you always have the flu. [laughs].

**Yes, exactly. [laughs]**

**B6** Erm, so I, I, I would be inclined to say the, the mosquito gets a bad reputation and that an awful lot of it is just normal things that fly rather than actual mosquitoes.

**Yeah, no, I think you're right. I think that if we see a cloud of swarming flying things there is a tendency to maybe, well actually I think also to say it's midges as much as mosquitoes.**

**B6** Yes.

**But nobody's really sure until maybe afterwards when they've been bitten and if they get bitten then they say it's a mosquito, though of course it could be a biting midge.**

**B6** Yes.

**Or something else. That's really interesting isn't it? But from your experience no-one's ever said REMOVED, we're really worried about these mosquitoes and I can't take the girls there or are you ever asked for advice about say using insect repellent or things like that, you know? Because presumably people come to you for advice around things like insects and other animals that will possibly bite or sting or something like that.**

**B6** Erm, so for the wetland environment and, erm, anything within Bedfordshire I've never been approached for information on, erm, dealing with any sort of wildlife, erm, and that includes midges and mosquitoes and flies, erm. The, mostly they would carry some sort of antihistamines cream or tablets and possibly, erm, like sort of biting and a lot of them would, erm have a list that would say that, erm, insect repellent is optional, erm, it's one of those things that we're not allowed to put that out, erm, however if they bring their own then they can use it, erm.

**Yes. So, and how, because one thing I didn't ask you at the very beginning is how you long you've been doing your particular voluntary role, is it a couple of years or longer?**

**B6** Erm, so I, I've been REMOVED Advisor which is the fourteen to twenty six year olds, erm, but my, my passion is still the outdoors, so I was involved in the outdoor team before that.

**Yeah. So I mean you've then had a lot of experience of these outdoor spaces in Bedfordshire and as far as you're aware mosquitoes are not a problem and more than that you haven't noticed any great differential in terms of changes of population or anything like that?**

**B6** No.

**No, yeah. So presumably just mosquitoes are off the agenda, you know, they're just not talked about in your organisation?**

**B6** Erm, they're maybe not talked about to me and I, I, but outside of Bedford, yeah, when I was in Edinburgh I know there were people that would get bitten and, and I was first aider at one event and somebody got bitten by something quite innocuous, it was just a horsefly, erm, but we, we ended drawing an alarm and writing hands on her arm because she reacted really quite badly to any bite and she, and, and she, as an individual, was, was less inclined to do things in the outdoors with the girls because for her it led to potentially a couple of days of flu like symptoms and generally feeling unwell.

**Oh it's very miserable isn't it?**

**B6** Erm, yeah, but when, when you have an autoimmune response like that you can understand why.

**You absolutely can.**

**B6** You wouldn't want to give, do, offer the opportunity to your girls.

**No, because it's just thoroughly miserable so why would you want to do it, yeah, no, my sympathies goes to that dear lady. So given that mosquitoes seem not to have a high profile in Bedfordshire at the moment, would you say from your time of working with the Guides that you've maybe noticed some other ecosystem changes that we could, that you have thought to yourself gosh that's not how it used to be? I'm trying to, because we've been using mosquitoes as a way of thinking about climate change and the potential changes that maybe impact on different wetland sites and I just wondered from your experience whether you've experienced anything, either positive or negatively on these sites that you have attributed to climate change?**

**B6** Erm, the one I noticed more is the changing river level, erm, and, erm, because that, that impacts whether I can take the girls on the river kayaking and canoeing, erm, and mind you I've only been in Bedford REMOVED years, so I've got a very short window but, erm, I, I do think that the longer I've been there the more frequently we've had extremes, there have been more cases of extreme water levels where I'd say I'm not running a session for the girls.

**Yeah, because it's just hard to get in and out and maybe the water's too turbulent and things like that.**

**B6** Yes, it's, it's not safe for beginners.

**Yeah. Oh that's interesting, is interesting, yeah, but nothing else to do in terms of say animal population or, I don't know, wildflower species or anything like that?**

**B6** Not that I'm aware of but I'm, I'm not the best person for identifying animals.

**Yeah, no, I understand, yeah.**

**B6** Erm, I, it does always, it maybe shouldn't surprise me but it does always surprise me when I, when, so when you see the herons on the, on the main river or you seem, erm, I think they were otters but we, we have seen with, with some kids, erm, otters or that sort of mammal, erm, and for a lot of them it's the very first time they've seen it.

**Oh it's wonderful isn't it? How exciting for them.**

**B6** It, it's a lovely, wonderful surprise to see them but that's just because I've got lots of kids and we're not being particularly quiet.

**Yes, exactly, there's not shy animals are they?**

**B6** Yes.

**Yeah, oh it's a wonderful thing. I know a couple of the volunteers that were at the focus group, they sent me some pictures of the otters that they'd taken photos of in Priory Park, I thought how amazing to have otters in the middle of a town.**

**B6** Yeah.

**It's absolutely astounding isn't it?**

**B6** Yes.

**That you could really just sit by the river and I know they come out at certain times of the day to feed or to play but that if you sat, if you went often enough and just sat quietly for ten or fifteen minutes you could be very likely to see them and I think it's a wonderful thing, it says an awful lot about how we've taken great steps towards trying to protect different types of species, so.**

**B6** It does also show that, how clean and healthy the, the river and the wetlands are.

**Yes, that is very true.**

**B6** Because you wouldn't have that if they were polluted.

**No, so, you know, we must also celebrate all the positives as well mustn't we?**

**B6** Yeah.

**You know, we've got a tendency to focus on things that have gone or changed rather than saying well some changes are really positive and that's one of them. I'm just at the last section now of the interview, so there's not too many more questions left, so thank you so much for your wonderful responses and this last section is looking about how our society in general think about wetlands, so it's kind of, it's more of a slightly removed set of questions in that it's about cultural factors, so in particular what I'm interested in is whether you think that maybe culturally we now view wetlands differently and what I'm thinking about is, or what things might have influenced that, you know, because before in literature, wetlands were always seen as sort of dank murky barren places and, and I know there's been a vogue to try and re-energise wetlands and seeing them as natural spaces and reserves of biodiversity of animal life and I wondered from your organisation's perspective and from your work that you've done as a group leader, as a, you know, the county advisor for outdoor activities, whether you think there has been a cultural shift in how wetlands are perceived or you might say no, I think they're still really under the radar, so I just wondered what you thought.**

**B6** Erm, I think wetlands are under the radar compared to a lot of other environments. Erm, I would say that more people would be, would, would not be aware that they have it on their doorstep, erm, compared to, compared to the likes of the canal network and things like that. A lot of people don't know that they're within a mile of, of a canal somewhere and things like that but I'd say that's even more extreme for the wetlands. Erm, I, I think it is changing with time, I think people are more aware of them, erm, I'm not quite sure why that is but it might be that, erm, the likes of the country parks and that they, erm, there is a bigger drive by organisations to preserve them and therefore educate within that.

**Yea. So you think the country parks themselves have done a good job at educating people?**

**B6** Yeah.

**Do you think other things have influenced maybe nature writing or TV programmes or films or? Some people have said to me oh, you know, David Attenborough's Blue Planet's had a massive impact on how people recognise the fragility of nature but I don't know whether you feel that is something that is, that you've noticed?**

**B6** Erm, certainly, erm, with, the Blue Planet has changed the amount of, erm, environmental things I get on my newsfeed on, erm, Facebook and things, so people that I know are more aware and conscious of, erm, the real environment, I don't know that that necessarily lends to the wetlands environment, erm, but I do, I personally believe that any, erm, any, any change in people's perceptions of a particular environment have, can have, will have a wider impact on all of the environment, erm, and I, I am, is it? Erm, there's, with the likes of Springwatch and things, I think that also has a, a big impact because it's, it's set in an environment that people can actually access, whereas Blue Planet is a, is a, a bit, bit more removed.

**Got you.**

**B6** But has, definitely has a bigger wow, wow factor but is, is less, is inaccessible in comparison.

**Yeah, yeah. So in some ways the good things about Springwatch and Countryfile are that they are landscapes that people recognise because they're part of the country but.**

**B6** But then can also access.

**Yes, yeah, yeah, that's interesting, yeah. And, you know, do your members, do they talk about things that influence them to do with the countryside? Or maybe they don't at all but I mean I'm wondering if, you know, sometimes you have, you know, if people are watching for instance different YouTube people, you know, I'm thinking of Zoella and people like that, that the things that they say and do can influence young people in ways that old codgers like me wouldn't be aware of? I wondered if, do they ever talk about, your ladies ever talk about things they've seen on YouTube or on social media that influences them in terms of the countryside?**

**B6** Erm, definitely they talk about things that influence them on social media, I'm not aware of the connection with the countryside, erm, however, erm, I am aware of, erm, oh I don't remember the organisation. There's, there's a member within Bedfordshire and she is, I think it's something to do with the Carbon Trust or something but it's, it's a climate charity within London and she is, erm, very vocal within her unit about, erm, climate change and, erm, the impact on the environment and the unit have become involved in, erm, social pledges and things like this, erm, and about the slowing down their lifestyles and things so that's about the particular rhythm thing.

**Yeah, yeah, interesting. I mean what do you think from a personal perspective, can be done to encourage local people, local, you know, people who aren't using these wetlands at the minute to encourage them to use them, do you think there's something, some strategies that we could implement to support that?**

**B6** It's, it's all about, erm, it's, it's the knowledge of them being there isn't it and also, erm, that the facilities available, so I think it's a really difficult one, erm.

**Yeah. Because things like, you know, obviously at.**

**B6** A lot of, sorry?

**There's a difference now, at Priory Country Park you can still park for free and Millennium Country Park you now have to pay for parking and with, do you think things like that will deter people from visiting certain sites?**

**B6** Erm, I, I would say yes, erm. I, I go to the Peak District a lot and I'm, I'm always amazed at how many people will park on the verges just outside the car parks.

**[laughs]**

**B6** Erm, so that they don't need to pay the car parking and so it, as, as a species we are inclined not to pay if we can and so that will always put people off. Erm, you, you, you always need to make it as easy as possible for people to access and the outside space but if you make it too easy and the, the space gets abused, so there does need to be some sort of balance.

**Yeah.**

**B6** Erm, yeah, I think it's a really difficult one to, to do. I like parking donations personally.

**Yeah, I think. Yeah, it was interesting talking to the manager of the Millennium Country Park, she just said if you give people the option to pay they don't pay. [laughs] You know, probably the likes of you and I because we know how much work has to go into managing these spaces but for some people.**

**B6** Yes.

**I think it's that, I wonder if there's a perception, I've not done any work on it that somehow it's being paid for out of their council tax money and so therefore being asked to pay simply an added tax rather than saying that this is a voluntary trust where they don't get any money from Central Government, you know, it all has to be funded through either hiring out facilities or through donations or subscriptions.**

**B6** I would say there's a big misconception over, erm, funding for a lot of things, erm. Mountain Rescue is a big one, erm, Girl Guides I think a lot of parents think we get paid to volunteer.

**Oh do they really?**

**B6** And, yeah.

**[laughs]**

**B6** On the basis that you pay for everything else and you also pay for, you, the girls pay to, to come to the, to our events and things but they, they don't pay anywhere near the level that they would pay if it was run through the likes of PGL or another organisation.

**Yes.**

**B6** So we, we pay, a lot of units are about thirty, forty pounds for ten weeks, whereas you'd do, erm, twenty, thirty pounds for an hour of horse riding but there's still the perception that you are paying and therefore what are you paying for? Erm, so I, I do think there is just a big misconception over funding for an awful lot of organisations.

**Yeah, and I think that's very interesting and I think that then probably does feed into, you know, if these sites need to fundraise to keep going that the general public may have a misconception about, as you said, that someone's making some profit somewhere rather than.**

**B6** And also the, the costs involved, so, so how much does it actually cost to maintain a park? But, but I'm sure would always be underestimated considerably.

**Yes, I think you're right, I think you're right. So it's a real struggle isn't it about getting people to use these spaces and also getting them to recognise that?**

**B6** They're important.

**They're important and we need to pay, sadly we do need to pay for them to keep them going because otherwise they're not going to be run in a way that would be most beneficial for humans and non-humans on those spaces? I wondered if, from the time that you've worked in these various spaces, whether you've got any stories about, you know, experiences that your members have had on the site or experiences that the leaders have had on the site, I mean just, you know, either historical stories or contemporary events?**

**B6** Erm, so, erm, last year or two years ago we did a, a dads and daughters day at Priory, the girls did canoeing and paddle boarding and I want to say canoeing and then they had a nature trail where they had to, erm, run around the country park finding photos of things and they had to mark where the photos were on, on a map, erm, and we got incredible feedback from the dads because they said that they'd have never done this with their daughters otherwise.

**Wow.**

**B6** Erm, and the other one was that for some of the dads particularly, the, the spending time in nature, so actually the nature trail and, and the exploring with their daughter was more enjoyable than the adventurous activities because they could have done that anywhere, if that makes sense.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**B6** Erm, and that, and that was a nice surprise for me.

**Yeah, that's a wonderful thing and.**

**B6** Because it's not always the, the cost of things that gives the experience or the value to the experience.

**Yeah, and I think it says a lot doesn't it still that it may be perceived that, you know, that fathers and daughters do certain activities but they may not do activities in the great outdoors together, you know?**

**B6** Yes.

**But that's something that's either a complete family activity but not, you would just go one to one with your daughter because maybe a presumption that your daughter wouldn't enjoy it, where in fact, you know, of course why wouldn't they enjoy it as much as their brothers or their cousins or whoever else, you know?**

**B6** Yeah.

**Yeah, ah, it's a wonderful thing. Just to wrap up, is there anything that you would like to share with me about these wetland spaces that we haven't talked about so far that you feel quite passionate about that you would like the project to know about?**

**B6** Erm, not that I can think of.

**Yeah, okay. Well REMOVED thank you so very, very much for your great support and your great help and all your wonderful insights because it really, it's really invaluable for the project and I can't thank you enough really because I know how busy you are and you've had all your big move and juggling everything and it's just been brilliant, it really has.**

**B6** Okay. If the, the bit with the mosquitoes comes in the time, erm, please feel free to get in contact again because I'm quite happy to support, erm the other, the rest of the project if it, if it does happen.

**Oh that's wonderful, thank you so very much. Well one thing that I'd like to do is, we, I don't know if I said to you before, we've got a few artists who are now working on the project and two of the artists, who are called Kerry and Helmut, they are hoping to kind of almost set up an art station in Priory Country Park.**

**B6** Okay.

**And I know they were going to do it at some point in the summer so I'm going to email and just find out if they've actually pinned down the dates that they're going to do it, because I think they had to wait to get permission to be on site and things like that, so the date wasn't set.**

**B6** Yeah.

**But I'll find out about that and I'll let you know, even if they're not doing it, I'll let you know, so I'll let you know what happens with that, yeah.**

**B6** Okay, no, that would be really good.

**So I'll be in touch with you very, very soon.**

**B6** Okay, thank you very much.

**Brilliant, thanks so much REMOVED.**

**B6** Okay, bye.

**Take care, bye.**

END OF INTERVIEW

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**Thank you so much for your time today, it's very kind of you to come along and talk to me.**

**B7** Thank you, I'm looking forward to talking to you.

**So you are talking to me as a representative of your local bat group are you not, in this wonderful weather?**

**B7** I am.

**And just to kind of go back in time a little bit, how on earth did you end up being involved with bats**

**B7** I got involved with bats from REMOVED, so I found that I was going to be need to lead a bat walk potentially so I thought I'd better find out something about bats, about, you know, the flappy things that came out at night and that was about it. So there was a project in the area being run by the Bat Conservation Trust and I went to a couple of their things, which included some basic training, so I thought.

**Oh okay, and that was free for everybody?**

**B7** That was free, yeah, just had to, to say that you wanted to be on in essentially, very limited numbers so that it made sense, erm, and that's why I started learning about bats.

**Oh wonderful, but no, you know, in your younger years when you were, you know, getting involved in wildlife or interested in ecology, bats were just another part of the environment, it wasn't?**

**B7** Yeah, it was nothing specific, they sort of flapped around at night a bit, it's only when I actually started finding out a little bit more about them that I got totally fascinated. You find these little bits and pieces and then suddenly you're thinking ooh, that's brainy.

**Yeah. So for instance what would be one of the bits and pieces, would it be how they mate, how they choose their particular area that they live in?**

**B7** It's probably slightly more some of the technical bits, the fact that bats echolocate on a certain frequency and then they listen on a different frequency to allow for Doppler shift.

**Okay, so they can actually work out spatially where they are?**

**B7** And they know that they're flying forwards so therefore it's going to compress the, the sound wave so therefore they listen on a higher frequency and bats don't deafen themselves because they've got an extra muscle and they can actually disconnect the eardrum, so when they shout, they actually can't hear and they reconnect it to listen to the echo coming back.

**Lord above.**

**B7** And it's little things like that and you think.

**Yes, what an amazing adaptation.**

**B7** Yeah.

**Like I've heard that owls have, they're not ears but they're holes that are, they call them ears, are different heights so that they can work out exact locations of things by kind of triangulating the sound and the direction it's coming from so.**

**B7** Yeah, well we've got some.

**Quite amazing.**

**B7** Got something like a Noctule it shouts about a hundred and ten decibels and then you've got the, well how can it hear? And actually it disconnects its ear so that it doesn't deafen itself and it's listening to a faint echo back. So yeah, it's.

**Yeah, and that's true across different bat species that you might find round here?**

**B7** It's true for bat species we find round here, it's not true across all bat species.

**Okay, yeah.**

**B7** So not all of them use the same techniques you see, some use a warbling sound from the nose leave and others are using tunnelled whips so they're not necessarily producing sound in the same way, and they're not necessarily producing sound at the same volume, so brown long eared bats are very quiet, so you hardly pick those up on the detector, so they don't have quite the same issue.

**Right, but when you're working with your bat group, you have this technology that you capture these different Doppler ranges so you know exactly what species of bat you've got or do you know which species of bat you've got because they maybe have it bat boxes or?**

**B7** It's a mixture, we've got bat detectors, that allows us to pick up echolocation calls, social calls, so we can actually hear the bats, erm, different bats are calling at different frequencies, certain bats are calling on different waves as well, so you might get something that's at a constant frequency so it'll be almost about fourty five kilohertz, so common pipistrelle for example or you get some type of Daubenton's back that does a sweep, so you've got a broad range of frequencies, so it might start at about eighty kilohertz and drop all the way down to twenty. So on a full spectrum detector that might look like a diagonal line, whereas the other one will look almost like a pinpoint.

**Okay, so that's, what I'm getting a sense of there is that you have to really know how to use your equipment and then you know how to decipher the data that's on your equipment, so…**

**B7** Yeah, and there's still some stuff with the equipment you can't tell, so it's very difficult to get the Myotis bats apart because they all have a very similar call, erm, there's one you stand a chance of telling, other things you need to use other information as well. So for example Daubenton's bats like to fly low over water and on a sonogram, which is essentially the, the sound turned into a power spectrum, so you actually see it as a frequency range as opposed to an amplitude and if it's across water, it actually has gaps, so you've got sort of like a dotted line and that's due to the reflections of the water interfering with what the detector's receiving, so.

**Okay, right. So it's a very intimate relationship then between the bats and the water in terms of your ability to capture the data about the bat.**

**B7** In that particular case that gives you an idea that the bat was low over a reflective surface and Daubenton's we know fly lower over water to pick insects off the surface, whereas an Antrus bat might look almost the same on a sonogram but wouldn't be low over water, so there are ways and means but it's by no means definite.

**Yeah. So when we're thinking about collecting the bats in the wetland, saying that different species of bat will choose particular habitats within the wetland.**

**B7** Yeah, they.

**They hunt for gathering their food and for roosting.**

**B7** Different, different bats live in different habitats, the ones that live together tend to have niches, so that they're not in direct competition. Soprano Pipistrelles are associated with water, Daubenton's are associated with water, but lots of bats can be find by it but others are woodland species, so they're more likely to be found in woodland. So the Barbastelle for example, although we have had Barbastelle here (Priory Country Park) it's not a common visitor here so we've had one record of it.

**Because here on the wetlands there's more water than there is wooded area for them to inhabit.**

**B7** Yeah, I mean it, it's more, they might have been commuting between got out in the rainstorm and came down to find somewhere to, to roost though but.

**Okay, yeah, because am I right that, I don't know whether this is true of all bats but what they need is, they need thermal stability so as long as the temperature that they're roosting is within a certain range, am I right in saying it doesn't need to be in a range, like they don't have to have say twenty degrees to roost in but it's got to be stable, it's got to not shift too much in that big variations of temperature?**

**B7** It's, it depends what they're trying to do, erm, bats roost for different reasons, so we have maternity roosts, where all the mums get together to give birth and they want a warm environment, erm. Let's go backwards slightly. When, when a bat goes to sleep during the day essentially it drops its body temperature to whatever the outside temperature is, so if it's four degrees outside it'll drop its body temperature four degrees and therefore it's metabolism will slow and, and its heart rate may go down to four beats a minute or something like that. If you have got a baby that's maturing inside and you want it to happen at any reasonable rate, you want to stay warm because you're slowing down the development path, so you're pregnant for longer and being pregnant means you're more likely to be gradated. So a maternity roost will want to stay as near to thirty seven degrees as they can, so they want a warm environment so that it doesn't slow down the development of the pup. In hibernation you want exactly the opposite, you want a cold environment, so that you don't use up lots of energy whilst you're asleep, if you've using lots of energy because you're running at twenty degrees c, and there's not the food source around well then.

**They're burning calories.**

**B7** Essentially you'll starve.

**So then there's a real seasonality then about where the bats are on this site, so when you're, you know, you're tracing your wetland year, particularly with bats you'll be moving in different areas around the site?**

**B7** It's difficult to know exactly how the site's used. Erm, measuring populations of bats is incredibly difficult, if you're at out at night with a bat detector and you hear a bat, you know you've got one bat, if you hear a bat again and it's the same species is it the same bat or is it a different bat? And you don't know. So you know from a detector, sometimes you see multiple bats on the sonogram, sometimes you'll see the same species of bat on the sonogram multiple times. If you've got lots of bats about they, if you've got say three common pipistrelles, common pipistrelles call between forty five and fifty kilohertz generally, they'll call out about forty but you can see one calling at forty two, one calling at forty five, one calling at forty seven so they don't interfere with each other, so you've got three separate bats at all the same species together. And then you get other species as well, so you can work out how many bats you've got in one particular thing, or if you've got bat boxes or a roost you can count, but working out populations is incredibly difficult.

**Okay so then the work that your group does, I get the sense that you do quite a lot of activity over the year, it's just, do you do the same activity at the same time throughout the year or does it change according to the year, so?**

**B7** We've got bat boxes that we monitor, we've had a bat box project in the past that we monitored via artificial light only, so we didn't open boxes, we were just shining a torch into it to count bats and that one we were doing monthly for about seven years.

**Gosh.**

**B7** And that gave us some really valuable information, it allowed us to find out how the site was being used, so we were actually comparing two different types of bat box and we found that one was preferred over the year and that was a new type of box, so we, we took some photos of bats in boxes and things like that, and due to the work we did here those boxes are now being used nationally.

**That's fantastic.**

**B7** The information we found out for preference for slot sizes and how these work means that some of this work has been in parks, gone out to, not only national but internationally, so I've had calls from Holland.

**Through conferences or through journals?**

**B7** There's a bat, bat house symposium in the Netherlands.

**Wow.**

**B7** So I've actually had calls from the Netherlands from people who've heard of our site asking me about my experiences with wooden bat boxes.

**How wonderful, and have they come to visit and have a look at the site themselves?**

**B7** No, they haven't, we've had the Jersey Bat Group that come and visited.

**Nice, very nice.**

**B7** And had a look, erm, but.

**Just to these wetlands?**

**B7** Yeah, yeah, they came to actually look at the boxes and, and have a look.

**Because these boxes aren't in other wetlands, they're just here?**

**B7** They, they were developed by a different group, the Kent Bat Group but we proved that they worked, essentially, but we, but we've got a bit more of a connection with the Jersey Bat Group now, we help train Jersey Bat Group members up because they were a very fledging group and the legislation is different over there, so whereas in the UK bats are, essentially you have a licence to disturb them, they didn't have the legislation in place, so trying to get something in place to say we know what we're doing, erm, meant that they needed to essentially get somebody to say yes, we know they what they're doing.

**Okay. So you kind of gave them the validation that they needed to do the work they wanted to do back in Jersey.**

**B7** Yeah, and that also helped the Jersey authorities work out what they were doing with licensing and how they should be working because there wasn't the legislation in place. If you think about the first time you need a licence to do something who can tell you that you're capable of doing it, if it's not there?

**Well exactly, yes, you need a kind of guiding authority don't you? So was that, would you say that was part of the Bedfordshire Bat Group that did that?**

**B7** Yes.

**Or was it to do with this particular wetland site group?**

**B7** The Bedfordshire Bat Group did, this site was used as a demonstration of artificial light check on bat boxes knowing that we would have bats here.

**Yeah, because how many members are there of the Bedfordshire Bat Group altogether? I mean you've got active members and you've got inactive if you like.**

**B7** It's, well in our case we have memberships and then we have the, a membership can be an entire family so number of members and memberships is different, so we have around about ninety memberships, so that's either individuals or families in the group, so it's not a massive group.

**Yeah, okay. And how many sites would you say that you're, the bat group actually focus on?**

**B7** Depends what you mean by focus on, there are certain ones that we, we use on a regular basis and we monitor. We've got hibernation sites which are different to normal sites, so those are where the bats go to hibernate so they're there over winter, so they're not actually monitored during summer, they're monitored during winter, erm, which of course is a time when you want minimum disturbance, so all of that is licensed, and.

**Okay, and is any of that happening here on this wetlands?**

**B7** We don't have a, a high presence on this wetland site.

**Okay, so all of your activity on this wetland site is in the summer months?**

**B7** It's in summer, yeah, well I say that, we, we have had, I've monitored the, the wooden boxes over winter and you do find bats. So I was due to do a check with somebody, we did a condition check on handing over something to another bat group member and we were going to sort out the boxes and so we did a pre-check in, I think it was late October and there were thirty five bats in seventeen of the boxes, so we had to delay doing anything because too many of them were in use in, would be aiming, going across to, to where you start looking for hibernation.

**Yeah. So would you say that that's changed over time, is that a greater increase in the use of those boxes? You know, has the bat population here grown would you say?**

**B7** I couldn't say whether the bat population here has grown, because take-up of bat boxes is different.

**Is it? Yeah.**

**B7** They reckon that if a box hasn't been used in seven years it's not going to be used but I've had boxes used in eighteen days from going up and I have a lot of other boxes that have never been used, so it's, it's a total mixture. Sometimes you find lots and lots of bats in boxes together, I've, I've had one where I've known that there was a minimum of nineteen because that's what I could count but there might have been another layer, erm.

**Yeah, gosh, is that quite common to get so many in one space?**

**B7** It can be, I mean there's a different type of box where we've got here, had half an inch of droppings within the box where there's obviously been a lot of.

**Quite a lot, yeah.**

**B7** Group have gone in for quite a short period of time.

**But I'm presuming they'd all be the same species that would be nesting together.**

**B7** It's, it's most likely, they, they tend not to have mixed roosts, where you do have mixed roosts they tend to be using different parts of an area. So we did have a hibernation, not a hibernation, we did have a maternity roost here, and that was a structure and the first time I counted that there was a hundred and eighty seven bats, so that got reroofed and the numbers that went, erm, to, have reduced and at the moment is not in use, doesn't mean it won't come back into use and everything was done correctly, erm.

**So there's a kind of element of unpredictability then, that's what I'm feeling about when you're doing your bat surveys, is that you can't guarantee that a certain box that was popular at one point will be popular again, so.**

**B7** No.

**It means then presumably that it makes your users really use the whole site, you know, they're not just accessing one particular site where popular bat boxes are, the bat boxes are distributed around then you're using will be accessing all those different boxes.**

**B7** By users are you talking about bats?

**I know, well that's a good point. No, I'm talking about your, your members of your group.**

**B7** Yeah, we, we access the site, the areas where, where the boxes are. The bats actually have a preference where, there isn't an area that I can put on a map where I know they're more likely to get bats than others, so the concentrations tend to be in a certain area, erm.

**Okay, yeah, because one thing I'm also trying to get a sense of is when your human bat members [laughs] come and do their surveys, do they just come for the bats or would you say that they're also using the wetland space, you know, that they'll come and whilst they're doing the survey they'll have a look around and they'll come for a coffee or something else, you know?**

**B7** Well if we're here for the bats they're not going to come for a coffee because it's night.

**Because it's night, yeah.**

**B7** So we've got that.

**But they wouldn't come say earlier in the day, because presumably at some points in the year they'll be coming at sunset, for that sunset maybe say or sort of four something like that, half four?**

**B7** Um, no, you're into winter at that point, winter hibernation, so.

**Okay, so it's quite a clear.**

**B7** It's quite a clear definition, it doesn't mean that they don't use the site for different reasons at other times. Bat box checks we can do during the day, erm, but the detector surveys, you're talking about flying bats, so you're at night.

**Always at night and it's always in the summer months and so you're coming really at a time when no-one else is coming to use that site?**

**B7** Yeah, I mean there are still people using the site but you're not at the time when most people are using it, so you're beyond the normal users, you're into the people that are, are there for late evening drink, you know, because it's, you know, they're, people come and sit and there's, it's like having a picnic and then hanging around for a while and things like that.

**Got you, yeah.**

**B7** Most people tend to disappear by ten, elevenish, which in summer's only sort of an hour after sunset.

**Yeah. So you really get to see the people that use the wetlands kind of at that edge time, where most of the people who come for dog walking and walking around the park, you know, taking their kids to the labyrinth, they've all gone home and now they've got a different kind of group of people.**

**B7** You do, yeah, that's one of the issues we potentially have with wetlands, if we're trapping, so putting up nets or, or using hard traps, potentially.

**Because you're stringing things across trees I'm presuming.**

**B7** You're stringing them across what I believe is going to be a flight path, now if your flight path happens to be a human path as well, trapping cyclists is not a particular good thing, either for the cyclist or for the net, erm, so.

**Has that happened?**

**B7** It's been very close before when somebody's not paid any attention. We, we would, we cross a path like that we would post people both sides, we tend not to go across that sort of path due to the nature of it, we tend to be on either minor paths or we'll be strung between trees, out the way but the other side of it, is that you may have ten thousand pounds worth of equipment with you. If you've got three half traps, acoustic lures, it, it might not be uncommon to have ten thousand pounds worth of equipment lying around in areas of paths, so that means that you need to be within reasonable walking distance and a way that you can make sure that there's security.

**Okay, because of the risk of somebody stealing that equipment?**

**B7** Yeah, they probably wouldn't steal the half trap because they wouldn't know what it was but they might steal a, a laptop connected to what they would see as a speaker. The fact that they don't know it's an ultrasonic lure, so if they try to play something back out of it, it wouldn't do them very good because it's, it's played at that sound, so it can do, it can do sort of twenty kilohertz up to a hundred and twenty kilohertz, so it's about half our audible.

**Can't hear it, yeah.**

**B7** But the bats of course can.

**So you have issues then about security, both for non-bat people, maybe getting caught up in a piece of equipment and then there's equipment itself.**

**B7** Then there's equipment itself.

**And what about say the types of people that you might find who are non-bat group members using the park and all the wetlands at that time, generally benign or is it, you know, it's a mix?**

**B7** It's, it tends to be young groups of people that are out drinking, some people are just passing through, the park is on their way home or whatever. Some people do have a little bit too much to drink at times, and other people are just out for a late evening walk. You get night fisherman as well, so there can be people on the lake, so they're not normally an issue.

**They want to be tucked away and left alone I'm presuming.**

**B7** But they want to be tucked away and left alone, they're there doing their thing, it's just we're there doing our thing, we're just different but they see lights around and we see lights around so there's an awareness that other people are using the park still, despite the fact that it's dark.

**Yeah. And does that unsettle your human bat group members, the fact that you have these other people in the wetlands at night time or do they accept it as just other users of the wetlands?**

**B7** Well the fact that REMOVED, so I know that it's not a problem, erm, but that doesn't necessarily mean that people who didn't know the site wouldn't, erm, be comfortable with it. I know people that are not comfortable with going out to site at night and I know lots of people that say what, you go and sit in woods at night? And I'm thinking yes, well if I was going to go and try and mug somebody I'm hardly likely to go to a wood at night because the likelihood of meeting anybody is so slim, you're much more likely to get mugged if you're down in the town centre but that's our perception as a race, of woodlands are dangerous at night. It's not real but it's a perception that's there, so people think that you're mad going out in the woods at night, that's the nature of being a bat person.

**That's it, you like, you like the solitary nature of being in this wonderful space when there's very few people around?**

**B7** Yeah, the bats are out, that's what we're there for, you're with a bunch of like-minded people and you have weird conversations and cake, you know, what, what's not to enjoy?

**Yeah. And what kind of social demographic mix and age are the people that are involved in the group? So I'm trying to get a sense of who is involved in the bat scene, who are your human bat group members?**

**B7** I suppose it, there is a mix, erm, you've, they're predominantly white. I suspect the majority or, well you get, you get the young ones that are ecologists, so you'll have sort of early twenties through to retired, there's not many of the, the other races, they're, a lot of them don't like being out at night but I think that's a cultural thing, again it's probably perceived danger or there's some cultural issues about people being out anyway, I mean in general you don't tend to see, for example Asians out in parks at night, full stop, er.

**So because I mean presumably you don't need to recruit members for your bat group, you don't actually recruit, people are welcome to join, anyone's welcome to join but you don't go on a recruitment campaign and try and get more people to join?**

**B7** No, there's not a recruitment campaign, we do walks and talks and also we run bat walks at various sites and those are open to the general public, the only thing is we make sure people book so that they get a decent experience, there's nothing quite like having a person stood up in front trying to talk to sixty people and you're walking round, so we tend to put a maximum of about twenty. We also tend to have quite a few detectors out with us, so if we've got twenty people out, we might have ten, ten detectors out for the public to use, so it's not.

**Okay, it's their chance to kind of get hands-on.**

**B7** They can get hands-on and we can teach them how to use it. Again there's bits associated with that because if you've got the ten detectors out the chances are you've got well over a thousand pounds worth of detectors in people's hands, with people, you have no idea who they are, they're just members of the public, erm, but we don't get any real problems with that because the people that come out tend to be interested and they're glad to have that opportunity to actually interact with the bats where they wouldn't get that in their daily life, so we, as far as I'm aware, we've never lost a detector.

**Yeah, and presumably would you say that that's also possibly their first experience of being in the wetlands at night time?**

**B7** For a lot of people it would have been, yes. I mean there's, there's people there and they're sort of saying, you know, what's it like at night? Say there's no problem whatsoever, you're a group of twenty people walking around for a start and that, that gives people security in numbers. There's also a nominated leader and normally there's two or three additional members dotted around, so somebody's making sure that the health and safety side's there, so be keeping an eye on, on whatever and it gives multiple people to talk to, so they can ask questions.

**Yeah. Do you think lack of experience of being in the wetlands at night time is to do with a general fear of the dark or do you think it's to do with, about being solitary in woodlands like you were saying before? Is there something about this particular type of space that makes for uncertainty? So for instance people might be quite happy walking near a dam or say on a beach front at night, is there something maybe different about these, about wetlands at night or these particular wetlands at night? The things that make people feel slightly reticent.**

**B7** These particular wetlands no, but in general I think that you're in enclosed spaces, so in a woodland you're in but you're out, so it's, if you're on a beach the chances of their being anywhere that somebody can creep up on you is very slim, the chance of anybody creeping up on you is so slim that it's not worth worrying about but the perception is that people might be hiding behind a tree, erm, God knows why they would but, you know, I mean.

**[laughs] Nothing better to do.**

**B7** Yeah.

**Exactly, so where does that come from, where does this? Because presumably this is something that a lot of the general public feel because you've experienced that when they've come to the wetlands at night time for the first time, so we can say that it's something that's cultural.**

**B7** Yeah.

**We can say it's something that's more than the individual.**

**B7** I mean it might go all the way back to wild animals in woods, erm, and then because you don't have that line of sight, that it could, it could literally be within our DNA that we're, we're programmed to be afraid of enclosed space or places we can't see, erm, when other things have got better vision than us.

**So it's tapping into something that's very primordial if you like and then we're bringing that into our everyday lives.**

**B7** But we're, we're not in that situation any longer and it's people overriding that fear, I mean just like people that are afraid of spiders in the UK, there's no reason to be afraid of spiders in the UK, yes, if you're in Australia and they bite and can kill you, you might have a reason, in the UK you don't but lots and lots of people are afraid of spiders, so it's that programming again.

**Because presumably in terms of the wildlife in the wetlands, you know, we have lots of ducks, herons, we've got the Muntjac but they're not going to come near humans are they? And presumably neither will say the otters.**

**B7** Um.

**Any, they're just not interested in any interactions with.**

**B7** Most of them, if you're about they will move away from you as opposed to come to you, if you lay very still they might come to you not realising you're there, you just happen to be night time, here you're more likely to find a fox then you are than a Muntjac, there's only a few of them about, we don't see them very frequently, erm, more rabbits and.

**So in terms of sort of, with different people using the groups at night, in terms of how we can encourage people to use wetlands as well or from a bat group perspective, you would say it's about the educational side, it's about more people coming on these walks, more people even doing bat walks during the day, in terms of seeing where the bat boxes are, about familiarising themselves with this kind of particular environment?**

**B7** No, I mean day, day time's something totally different because you can't engage with the bats, if you're, if you're on a bat box check, you're essentially doing a survey. We don't open our surveys to the general public, we have quite a, an easy and fairly rigid definition of what's a survey and what's, what's a walk. A survey is bat related and the bats come first. If you're on a public event the public come first and the bats are a secondary, it's as easy as that. So if we're doing a detector survey, you can't do that sensibly if you've got twenty people asking you questions, so.

**No. There is no citizen science involved in the work you do, there may be education but.**

**B7** Depending how you decide is what's citizen science. We have a project within the bat group that is along those lines where people can borrow a detecting, a detector that records and a GPS. They have to be members, that's the thing and then they can go out wherever and they record bats with a geo-located reference to, to give us data within the county.

**Okay, but that's not the general public, you have to be a member of the bat group.**

**B7** Yeah.

**Because of the expense of the equipment?**

**B7** Yeah, essentially you're lending people five, six hundred quid's worth of kit and just to take it away and do whatever and, and bring it back.

**Yeah, but where does the money come from for this kit, does it come just from membership, do you do other fundraising activities?**

**B7** Our, our bat group, the membership doesn't even cost, cover the cost of running the group, our membership is eight pounds for the, a year for a family, so it’s.

**Extremely affordable.**

**B7** Yeah, it doesn't really even cover admin costs, so our main funding stream is data searches for commercial developments, so as part of the planning process people need to find out if bats are using an area and we hold the records for Bedfordshire of all the bat activity, so they come to us and we make a charge for doing a data search and resupplying the data. So it's, we're charging essentially, we're a volunteer organisation so we're charging for our time to do that, it's all done by volunteers and we turn it round and then it goes into the planning process, so it's a cost for that that generates all of our, our income.

**So the voluntary work that you do which is a necessary part of commercial development, funds that are raised from doing that, you plough back into the organisation to buy equipment and to train members and to disseminate your research, things like that.**

**B7** Yeah, yeah, I mean if you, if you think about it, if you've got a three bat half trap, that's two and a half thousand pounds. The acoustic lure, just the speakers, another thousand pounds, then you've got the, the computer to go with it which is probably one of the cheaper bits at a couple of hundred and it soon, soon adds up.

**Yeah. It's an expensive endeavour trying to.**

**B7** Yeah. I mean a basic, basic detector is around about a hundred pounds for working with the public, if you need something that's doing that's a bit more sophisticated then you're into between two to five, six hundred pounds. There's a bit more affordable thing there which I said, one that we give to people as a recorder to go out, that's at around about the two hundred and ninety pounds and the GPS is a hundred pounds, so it's quite easy to rack up quite a lot of expense.

**Right. So thinking about that cost, if you were to think about risks involved in your group on this particular wetland site, what would you say are the top three risks of being involved in running this group?**

**B7** The main risk is other people, erm, it's, it's as easy as that.

**Other people in terms of either.**

**B7** Members of the public.

**Damaging just equipment, twisting ankles?**

**B7** Er, here.

**Needing the toilet halfway round the walk?**

**B7** Yeah, well they do, there's often that, I mean walks aren't, aren't that long so we tend to, I mean it's got slightly longer in the last set, so it's about a two hour walk now roughly, so toilet, they can use before starting out and they know they're going on a walk, so we don't normally have a toileting issue, erm. We tend to be on hard surface here, so again there's not too much worry about trips and slips. We do go off piste on one area and then we, for somebody with a torch to show where tree roots are, we know the route well, we know exactly what we're doing, we've done it so many times, so. You do have the, the possibility of people damaging equipment, so we, we instruct them how to use and, and essentially say keep, keep the wrist strap on, so that it doesn't get dropped.

**Do you ask them to sign a form at all or any kind of health and safety check before they go on the walk or is it all just done verbally?**

**B7** No, it's all done verbally, I mean whether that needs changing in the future, I don't know but that's, I don't know, it, it would detract from it. The point is that you're there to talk to people, to educate them, they're there because they want to be there, you know, they want to, to get an appreciation of something or learn something about it, so you don't normally get the sort of people that are there to try and trip you up and be a health and safety hazard or.

**No, no, but of course when I'm thinking about risk and I'm thinking about bats and I'm thinking about people out at night, have to also think about mosquitoes of course because presumably mosquitoes are a big factor when it comes to where you go for your bat walks and the fact that mosquitoes feed bats for other food and mosquitoes, so how do mosquitoes fit into the bigger picture from that perspective and also thinking about the human interaction with mosquitoes?**

**B7** Well mosquitoes are fairly small, so they fit into the smaller bat spectrum, so our biggest bat prefers cockchafer beetle, erm, so they're big and crunchy and they've got big teeth they can bit through to the bone, er, so we're working, the bigger the bat. If you've, if you've got to eat mosquitoes all the time and you're a large bat, I mean our, we're talking this big, our, our biggest bat's not very big, it's, erm, and it weighs a few grams really, erm, but essentially the bigger the bat the bigger the food because if not there's just not enough time to catch everything, so on the smaller bats you're talking around midges, mosquitoes, that sort of size. Er, people do get bitten by mosquitoes whilst out on bat walks, most people are aware that biting insects come out at night, by water, so generally we're prepared. Some, some members wear, erm, mosquito repellent, some don't, some just seem to naturally not get bitten and others, you just stand next to somebody who gets bitten more.

**Okay, [laughs] that's very practical.**

**B7** Yeah, so.

**But you've not had anybody from the general public going on walks complaining afterwards well I enjoyed it but the mosquitoes spoiled it for me?**

**B7** No, no, they're, we're, you're aware that there are midges, it's probably more midges than mosquitoes but you're aware that there are insects around you, erm. Yes, people will get bitten to an extent, whether it's mosquitoes or not, that's the nature of being out in, in the wild, so.

**So it doesn't deter their sense of enjoyment at all.**

**B7** Oh no, no, I've never had anybody complain. You occasionally get it mentioned if you get a whole load of midges at one point, there's a lot of them about and you just explain it's bat food, so.

**Yeah. And as you know, this project is around health and wellbeing and wetland spaces, would you say, how have your members communicated with you about how being involved with the bat group has helped their health and wellbeing or had some other impact on them? It's maybe there's some negatives as well as positives.**

**B7** They tend not to communicate with me.

**Oh don't they?**

**B7** Yeah, so it's, they're out and they're doing things, so there's obviously benefits to being out and walking around. We get people out at times when they wouldn't normally be. I mean that's the same for, for the bat walks, you get members of the public out into the wetlands at times they wouldn't normally be out there, the amount of them that have never been into the park at night, erm, and, you know, that's commented on a lot and even the kids, we've, you get them, sort of six, seven year olds and of course then it's exciting because they're out in the dark, they're not normally. People, especially mums seem to be particularly worried about what happens outside at night, they're very protective and they have no real idea what goes on outside at night because it's what's in their mind as opposed to reality.

**Yeah. So it's actually a seldom opportunity for younger kids to be outside in the dark, with a kind of relative amount of freedom if you like because, you know, they can kind of walk here and walk there as part of the group, you know.**

**B7** Yeah.

**They're not kind of guided and which particular path and which to follow a certain, you know.**

**B7** No, I mean we've got a route so we stay together normally as a group, erm, with multiple bat people there, sometimes it splits up because somebody hears about us and they ask questions so they stop in one place and part of the group's a little bit further ahead, erm, so it doesn't necessarily stay together as a single group all the time.

**Would you say that there's a link to the different types of bat group member or? You know, it takes a particular type of person to want to study an animal that is quite difficult to study, you know, and that you have to really make a big effort to get involved with. For instance birders, you know, the weather's nice, you go out and.**

**B7** Yeah, they go out in the day.

**Yeah, exactly, you know, and they, and okay some birders will go out in inclement weather and, because that's the time those particular bird species will be around.**

**B7** Yeah.

**Or they'll travel, is that the same for the bat group people?**

**B7** You do get bat twitchers, so you get people that want a tick list but I don't think you get as many of those as you do in the birding community. As you say, it might be partially because it's more awkward. The other thing is identifying bats is significantly more difficult, you can't just see it fly by and know what it is. So for example there's cryptic species they call them, so there's ones that you see the call and you can't tell which bat it is. In the hand, if you've caught one, it can still be really difficult to tell which bat it is, so Brandts and Whiskered are quite difficult, they're very difficult to tell apart, you're looking at colouration on the tragus in the ear, potentially the dentition and you'll start, you're talking about the bat that's two inches.

**Oh gosh.**

**B7** And you're looking at its, its teeth, saying ooh.

**Yeah, you're there with your headlight looking at it.**

**B7** Yeah, oh is there a protocode on the third molar? So.

**Yeah, it's very, it's quite technical.**

**B7** Oh some of it can be, and some, some are easier to tell with a male, because penises can be used as distinguishing features, so some are different colours, some are different shapes, erm, of course that doesn't help with females. So yes, some are, some are quite technically difficult to tell apart so you can't sort of just go and say ooh there's a flying bat, that's a such and such.

**So it attracts people that actually quite a lot of focus and a lot of dedication, so clearly people who are interested in bats it's a real passion, this isn't a kind of dip in and dip out, you probably, I'm presuming you get people that this is a life.**

**B7** You're generally or you're there just because you, you like the idea and you're there for one thing, so it's a very big difference between doing a bat walk where you're educating somebody and doing a trapping session where you could be sat around until two o'clock in the morning waiting for bats to go into a trap, so it.

**Yeah, you need a lot of patience.**

**B7** Oh yeah, so this is why we have that distinct between public focussed than bat focussed. So that people understand if there's a bat focussed evening the bats will come first and you might have to wait to have your questions answered and if it's a busy evening you might not get your questions answered.

**Got you. No. How does it feel to have a bat in your hand?**

**B7** How does it feel? I, now this is where I'm a bit odd because to me handling bats is just something I need to do as part of it. If you speak to other people the actual handling of the bat is a major part of it and that's, that's how they connect to it. In a way I connect to it with the science, it's, it's a bit weird but well, bats have amazingly soft fur, so they're very nice to handle, we're supposed to handle them with gloves at all times, erm, but.

**To stop contamination, stop you contaminating the bats?**

**B7** It's a mixture of both. We can contaminate the bats with our oils which probably doesn't matter under normal circumstances, but if you've got a pup it may matter to, to the mum, but normally we're not handling pups, we handle them as juveniles if they're caught but not normally as pups but bats can bite, they have sharp teeth, they eat insects and although a pipistrelle has teeth that are too small to bite through your skin, the other bats don't, so we have varying sets of gloves, so I have a very thin set for handling pipistrelles and then they get progressively thicker the bigger that bat, to the Noctule ones are essentially leather gardening gloves.

**Wow.**

**B7** And yeah, they can quite easily bite through to the bone, yeah, the Cockchafer beetle so they've got, they've got some power.

**Yeah, you've got to be careful, yeah.**

**B7** When you've got one of those in a handling bag it is at the top saying let me out, it's, it's bouncing off the thing.

**Yeah, I bet, I bet, I don't think the bat would like to be handled really.**

**B7** Er, some are more docile than others, some species are more awkward than others for handling as well, I find, I personally find that the small ones, I've got quite big hands so the small pipistrelles I find are harder to handle than the Noctules.

**Got you, yeah.**

**B7** But they're, those are what you normally end up handling.

**Yeah, but when, you know, you said that some people feel quite emotional when they're handling a bat or that's the way they connect a bat.**

**B7** Yeah.

**Do they, are they able to talk about it, are they, do they say that was just a wonderful thing or is it quite, you know, is it something they keep to themselves?**

**B7** I think they internalise it normally, but they, they get that connection with the animal by handling the animal and the handling is a major part for them, I mean I handled because I have to handle but all of us that handle have to have pre-exposure rabies because bats can carry lister virus so we're aware that there are dangers. In, in general there's probably more dangers to the bat by handling it than there are to the person but there's been about fourteen cases of lister virus found in this country but that's through over three thousand bats being test.

**So would you say though, so here's a, if we think about monitoring bats and we thing about risk profiles, you've got the risk profile of the mosquitoes and the potential of getting something from a mosquito, now whether that's a bite that gets infected, the discomfort of being bitten or something else because we know that there are different types of viruses that, that are being carried in different mosquito species.**

**B7** Yeah.

**We think about the possibility of rabies and so know it's quite out there, the possibility of twisting your ankle when you go walking, if you think about all of those different risk profiles, where do mosquitoes, where does the risk of mosquitoes sit within that profile, is it kind of miniscule or is it something that is?**

**B7** I think for people that deal with bats, the risk from bats does not fit within the profile. So I've handled, I have no idea how many bats I've actually handled, I've been handling bats since I've been licensed and to get my licence, so I've handled hundreds and I don't see that work as a high risk, erm. Public Health England see it as a high risk but I don't personally, I've never had a bat break the skin and they, but they.

**And none of.**

**B7** They've got the ability, the same as we have to decide how much pressure, once, I've been warned by one one time, so I was removing it from a mistnet and I think it sussed that I was doing something to help it and it was, it was Noctule so it could have bitten me, I was wearing gloves, erm, but I felt the pressure against, it said look I could do this, just be careful. Erm, so you get that sense that it was communicating with you, and the other thing that bats can do is, we talk about echolocation noise being really high but they can make noises in our own hearing range, so they, they'll squeak at you and so you can actually, if you, if you're doing something slightly wrong it will tell you, it will communicate with you, so. Yeah, I understand the connection people have with bats on a very personal level to that, erm. My connection with bats is slightly different, I don't feel the need to handle bats, I have to be able to handle bats for, for what I do and I have to be able to help other people learn how to handle bats and things like that, I mean removing a bat from a mistnet is not an easy task.

**No, no, I'm sure it isn't.**

**B7** They tend to get themselves quite tangled and they're not.

**Yeah, and then they're distressed and.**

**B7** And they're not as robust as birds either, so you've got to be careful, you definitely don't want to break a bat wing and have to euthanize it if you do, so.

**So in terms of thinking about the future of these wetlands, thinking about the work that you do apart from the bat group, if you could wave a magic wand what would you do for these wetlands to support bat populations?**

**B7** I think they already do support bat populations. A lot of the managed wetlands, it's a matter of getting the balance of the management, erm, bats and health and safety don't necessarily work together, I've done tree surveys with people, I've been out with a member of the tree team and I said you do realise we are both looking at exactly the same thing, you're calling it a defect, I'm calling it a habitat, so bats want the defect in trees but having defects in trees next to public areas, people don't want from a health and safety point of view, so you've got to be careful that you're not destroying roosts or potential roosts in the name of health and safety if it doesn't need to be done.

**So a defect would be say a hollowed out tree or something like that?**

**B7** It could be a hole, it could be a crack, it could be a split, it might be that the tree's dead and the bar is flaking, bats will use all of those but a lot of people are quite risk averse nowadays and they're, they're very hot on health and safety and they take things down and, when they don't really need to, I mean in, if you think about it an oak can be mature of four hundred and fifty years old, it's over mature at eight hundred years old and it might stand as a dead tree for another fifty, sixty years afterwards and then as soon as they find a defect in something they take it down, which isn't necessarily right.

**Yeah. So maybe sit with nature a bit more and accept, if we are humans interacting in these environment we should expect a bit more risk ourselves maybe would you say?**

**B7** Yeah, I think a lot of connection with nature's gone, people aren't as connected. I mean it's the same as, well people with food, you know, it comes from Tesco's, it's plastic packaged, erm, they don't want to see a lamb in the field and think well they're going to eat it in nine months time, so it's the same disconnection, so we're disconnected from our food chain, we're disconnected from our nature and we see things as dangerous as opposed to natural. So it's, that's a.

**Yeah, we need to have a shift, a shift back to.**

**B7** In the cultural attitude.

**That split between humans and nature and accepting that we're part of nature.**

**B7** We're controlling nature more when we should be accepting that we're part of it. I don't think we're moving the right way on that at the moment, what we're trying to do is legislate for everything and you can't, commonsense makes far more sense but it's not very common any longer.

**No, you can't factor the risk out of everything, particularly when you're in a natural environment. So going to wrap up the interview in a few minutes but I just wanted, obviously the wetland life project is trying to interrogate a sense of place, I get a really great sense of place by talking to you about bat groups in these particular wetlands but for you, if you could sum up a sense of place in these wetlands, how would you kind of sum it up in a couple of sentences?**

**B7** I think the wetlands are very important, they're important for what's using them, not necessarily for what they are, they're an area that nature has, areas of with, within the wetlands aren't accessible to people and that is really, really important, we need to keep people out of some areas, so that the wildlife and the things that use it naturally have that ability to without being disturbed, and the natural succession of things means that they will manage themselves to an extent. Other parts need to be managed if we want to bring people into it in a safe way and it's getting the balance between it, so you can't turn round and say keep all idiots out of wetlands although you might like to because the people that don't understand are the ones that are going to get themselves into problems because they're too disconnected from what's going on, so that's why people get into problems in wetlands if they're in sort of a marshy type area, I mean most people nowadays wouldn't be able to tell the difference between the grasses that indicate that you've got a marshland, that you've got dry land, so they're likely to stray into bits that, erm, that aren't there and that forces people to try and manage more because they're worried about the safety side.

**Yeah. So would you say it's education or is it exposure to the natural environment that would improve our connection with wetland spaces?**

**B7** From a natural perspective, I don't think there's any difference, I don't think you can educate purely in a classroom, I think you need to educate, you need to give an idea in the classroom and then you need to get out there, educate in the environment because if not you don't understand it.

**No, there's too removed, has to be experiential.**

**B7** Yeah, it's, it is like buying a piece of lamb in Tesco's and going and killing a sheep, erm, it's so different but it's part of the same thing.

**Yeah. And you think, you talked a little bit about lifelong learning, do you think that's something that should, of course that should happen at primary school age and upwards or pre-school? But do you think how can we get adults involved in that too or both the connection to the natural environment and then health and wellbeing?**

**B7** It's a matter of finding something they want to do within, I mean wetlands are used for water sports, they're used for, for health, they're green gyms, people walk around them, I mean there's the bat group, we engage with people with public bat walks, our bat walks here are always over-subscribed, so that's, that's something that just, that we, we could run additional bat walks and it wouldn't, we'd, we'd fill them.

[interruption]

**I'm just going to finish very, very briefly, going back a little bit, thinking about cultural representations of wetlands because it's kind of occurred to me that wetlands have had sometimes a negative connotation of being places where people don't want to go and bats.**

**B7** They're both, they're both sides aren't they?

**Yeah.**

**B7** Because you get in, in prehistory where they were a link to the underworld or a link to the afterlife, erm, because you've got that sort of connotation that you can't see through the water and offerings have been given, both positive and negative, so it, they've got that sort of, erm, mixture.

**Yeah, true, and then in the same way that bats have always been somehow represented as being something, well yeah, of the night and could possibly, so how is it?**

**B7** Yeah, bats, bats got a bad, a bad press with, with Dracula, until then bats weren't vampires you see, so if you go back in, in bat, well in folklore there were lots of things that were vampires but never bats, so it's only Dracula that's changed that, that perception of bats are vampires, there's been various things if you go before that that were linked but there was never bats.

**Yeah, so, because now, you know, with the bat walks being so popular, there is a renaissance of bats, at the same time I think there's a renaissance of wetlands, so what do you think might have changed that, why, how have you managed to get this positive association now with bats and wetlands? What, can you attribute it to anything in particular?**

**B7** Er, personally I can't, no. I suspect that there is a lot more to do with things on TV that have linked people back to nature, I suspect David Attenborough's probably had quite a big, big link in, in that, he will have inspired generations, erm. I mean I know a seven year old, if you met him you wouldn't believe he was a seven year old, erm, he's so advanced, you know, and he's just absolutely mad about nature, he's done a couple of bat walks with us and the questions that he's asking some of the adults have not asked the questions, they don't even understand the questions but it all perfectly valid.

**Yeah, he's got all of his facts.**

**B7** Yeah.

**He understands everything and it's.**

**B7** He did, he did his research before coming on my bat walk.

**Really? That's wonderful.**

**B7** And he's using the facts from my bat walk to talk to other people afterwards and he's still excited by bats.

**Oh that's fantastic, and would you say that that, did he say where his interest was sparked? Was it through watching Blue Planet and David Attenborough, other David Attenborough programmes?**

**B7** I think he's, he's just one of these people that clicks with nature, and he's just fascinated but it, it's not only bats, it's other bits of nature as well and he's got that mind that enquires and he wants to learn and because he's got that sort of enquiring mind and he's finding things that he can connect with and people that could help talk to him about it and that's where you get your next generation of people that will make a, a difference.

**Yeah, it's an enquiring mind isn't it?**

**B7** It is.

**And just to finally finish off, if we think about our changing environments and our changing landscapes, how do you think that climate change is going to impact on your bat population and on your bat group? Do you think it will have any impact?**

**B7** We might end up with an extra couple of species coming north, that's possible and it's quite possible that we'll get species coming off across from, from Europe.

**Okay, looking for somewhere that's cooler?**

**B7** Or just the expansion will mean that their, their home range can widen, because gen, I mean same with all species, the further you get towards the poles the less species you get and so there's some bats for, like walk, so it's they might expand in the higher ranges, so we, we might get new bats in, so.

**Okay, so it's not all negative, it could actually be quite positive in some ways?**

**B7** Oh yeah, I mean there's, it's, it depends how good they are, I mean more bats mean there's more competition for the same resources, so depends how, how good they are at living together in their niches but that's what evolution's done. I mean bats, as they are now, you can find fifty million years ago, so there's evidence of echolocating bats in prehistory they're pretty much the same as they are now, so they've not involved a massive amount in that period of time but you've got a stupid amount of bat species, you probably don't know a third of all species of mammals, bats, there's over a hundred and twenty species worldwide.

**I didn't know that. So they are, yeah.**

**B7** They're on every continent apart from Antarctica.

**Wow. Go bat go say, yeah.**

**B7** So they will adapt, so where you've got no trees because it's too cold, so where you hit the tree line, you stop getting bats because it's too cold for them but yeah, they will exploit resources.

**Yeah. Well I've gone one, I did say it was the last but that's just made me think of one more. Do your members go to other sites outside of Bedfordshire looking for bats?**

**B7** Yes, some of them do, it, it depends on the individuals but quite a lot of people are members of more than one bat group.

**Oh I see, okay.**

**B7** So we've got quite close links with Cambridgeshire. Northamptonshire doesn't have a proper bat group, so quite a lot of people in Northamptonshire are in the Bedfordshire bat group.

**Got you.**

**B7** I do bat work outside of Bedfordshire as well, erm, and yeah, some people even go on bat holidays to, to go and see species abroad or they're involved in bat holidays where they're essentially paying for their accommodation and then they're helping educate, erm, or train bat workers in other countries where there's a lack of experience.

**Okay, that's fabulous, yeah.**

**B7** So you've got that sort of network as well, so they will go across to.

**Yeah, if you like, this is their homeland that they would go out and educate in other parts of the world.**

**B7** Yeah, this is because people get really attached to bats and there's, there's lots of persecution of bats, in other countries they don't necessarily have the legislation to look after them and, you know, they sit on specific resources or they believe that there's, there's something specific. There was talk, I heard recently and bat wings in one country are used in FGM, it's actually part of the cultural process that they use the wings of bats as part of making some sort of, erm, lotion or potion for it and so there's a, there's a lot of weird things out there but I mean bats in other countries, bats are really important pollinators as well in other countries, so if you eat cashews a bat has pollenated it.

**Okay, I didn't know that.**

**B7** Bats and mangos and things like this, so they are really important in other areas for commercial props, so.

**Yeah. So it's important to go out and spread that information and education and try and rehabilitate that.**

**B7** Yeah, and the fact that, people are really, really committed, people in the bat world are really committed. We've had an internationally renowned bat worker come and join us on a trapping session here, locally, they're people that will lend you ten thousand quids worth of equipment.

**Wow.**

**B7** To take out into the woods at night because you're doing something specific and they, they know you well enough and they say yeah, that's fine.

**Yeah, so these wetlands are really, really important for that.**

**B7** Yeah, it's, there's all sorts of things, I mean we use this for education and that's important because we're engaging with people who can then go on and say right, bats are worth concerning, they're an indicator species, we understand why this is right and it's getting education schemes to pretty much everything.

**So the education starts here in these wetlands but it has a global effect if you like.**

**B7** Oh yeah.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**B7** Yeah, there's people, people learn the basics here and you'll spark an interest and they'll go off and learn other things and who knows? That's, that's how it works.

**That's wonderful, thank you so much.**

END OF INTERVIEW

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**I am talking to you in your official capacity as queen of the empire. [laughs]**

**B8** I like that, maybe that could be my new job title. [laughs]

**It should be shouldn't it? I do think we should have more made up job titles.**

**B8** Definitely.

**That, not so much made up but maybe reflect what you actually do.**

**B8** Yes.

**REMOVED.**

**B8** [laughs]

**So you know why I'm here.**

**B8** I do.

**I've come to talk to you about wetlands in a very nice relaxed and welcoming manner, but because of your capacity as the REMOVED, I wanted to ask you really about how the work that you do interacts with other organisations so I guess in terms of, you know, how much of it is on a relaxed voluntary way of just swapping information or swapping ideas and how much of it is strategic where, you know, it's kind of, it's part of a formal agreement for instance, maybe with, I don't know, other councils or other kinds of infrastructure like highways and for instance you've got all this development work going on, you must have had to interact with some organisations about that in terms of planning so.**

**B8** So I think it's all of those things, so the kind of more kind of strategic work is actually handled by my manager, so, erm, if you wanted to know more about that side of things he's, he's the man to speak to, so he's involved in a lot of committees and works at that kind of higher level sort of on how this site and our forest sites fit in with everyone else and what we're all doing and we all know in the kind of world of the environment connectivity and climate change and wildlife moving is very important, so I think it's very important that, that people work together on that more strategic level. At my level it's more, anything that relates kind of on the ground here. So we have got a great relationship with Central Bedfordshire Council who, erm, obviously although we own the land they're responsible for the public rights of way on the land here, so, erm, we've got a close relationship with them and they, I mean they've just spent a great deal in upgrading some of the footpaths around the, erm, part of the park, as part of their responsibility it's kind of rights of way, erm, management. Erm, and then there is, is a lot of work with, erm, on a, I suppose more of a kind of relaxed chatty basis with other organisations, so charities like the Greensand Trust who are another local environmental charity, we work alongside, erm, right down to things like one of their rangers, REMOVED, is very, erm, active here as a volunteer, so particularly, erm, birding, I think it might have mentioned REMOVED, don't know, he leads a lot of our guided walks because he's a very knowledge birder, so.

**Okay, great.**

**B8** So while he volunteers here, he's a good link with, with the Greensand Trust and have a, erm, they're involved in our, erm, wood processing, so we've got a, our firewood processing, erm, sort of business going on and they.

**So is that selling firewood?**

**B8** So we thin trees on our sites or sites we manage and then they're brought back here, processed by volunteers and then sold through the shop as a revenue generation.

**Oh okay.**

**B8** But Greensand Trust will bring their timber over here, we process it, they take it back and sell it but we get a cut for the, the kind of process, so.

**Got you, yeah.**

**B8** And ditto the local Wildlife Trust, erm, there's interaction there. I mean I, I sit on a, erm, on a fairly relaxed group of education providers across loads of different organisations that are relatively local just to keep in touch with what everyone's doing in their areas and just joined the local wildlife working group which again is representatives of local organisations, erm, around this area to kind of share information and help each other where possible and kind of share expertise of.

**Yeah, yeah. That's great, so it sounds like it's kind of people connecting together to try and maximise on resources and maximise on skillsets, with an aim to supporting local wildlife and local environments.**

**B8** Yeah.

**And presumably also getting people involved in interacting with these spaces.**

**B8** Absolutely, I mean this, this site, erm, is as much about people as it is about wildlife, it's kind of, while on one hand they're kind of inherently opposing, you could argue there'd be loads more wildlife, put a big fence round that kept people out and actually there'd be more variety of things for people to do if we bulldozed a reed bed and put something else in there but that's one of the, I suppose things I enjoy about my job is trying to maintain that balance, so you've got space for wildlife but also space for people to do a range of outdoor activities but also get that interaction with nature and outdoor, especially in this world of phones and tablets and people not getting outside and particularly with children as well because they're probably the ones that if their parents aren't interested they could just be lost to that kind of natural side of, of life.

**Yeah, I think it's the Canals and Rivers Trust has just released a report today saying that the average distance of any person from a waterway is a kilometre and that most people don't even visit their local waterway.**

**B8** So it's just sad, it makes you want to weep that people are so disconnected, some people are so disconnected from….

**Yeah. There seems to be a sort of real kind of breakdown doesn't there? There's some people that never access countryside in whatever format that may be, whether that's a completely kind of unmanaged space or a managed space like the wetland here and then people who, that's what they love to do.**

**B8** Yeah.

**You know, that's their passion in life, so it's trying to make the connection between those two groups.**

**B8** Yeah.

**To try and encourage people who love wildlife and who love being in nature to encourage people to come into nature? Even just a little bit more.**

**B8** Yeah, absolutely.

**Not even a lot more.**

**B8** Because I always say to people it's not about knowing what that bird is or what that invertebrate is, if you just come out and marvel at that bird who cares what it's called or where it comes from or what it's doing or? Just enjoy it for the moment and that's the same when you've got kids lifting up logs and seeing what's underneath them, it's about that moment, not about them having to know the ins and outs of the life cycle of that invertebrate, just enjoy it isn't it?

**Yeah, yeah. So would you say the ethos here is really around both supporting nature and supporting people getting into nature? So it's got a kind of, I don't know, how would we say it. Would we say it's an educational focus, would we say it's interactional focus?**

**B8** I'd like to think it's all of those things. I mean the, the kind of charity as a whole, erm, it's about kind of making new woodlands, making this part of Bedfordshire a nicer place to live and work. It's about, yeah, people and spaces and recreation and people being able to get out and doing what they might want to do, it's about wildlife and it's also about supporting local economy, so whether that's promoting local woodland economy or job creation or, and kind of, we're all about all of those things, erm. Here are the park, the Centre is an important revenue generation, erm, but the outside space, I think it's as much about people as it is about wildlife and making that link between the two.

**Yeah. And would you say, you know, thinking about the educational side of things, obviously bringing people in and you've got volunteers who take people on guided walks round the site.**

**B8** Yeah.

**So people are being educated about wildlife from that side of things, in terms of you as an organisation learning from other organisations, is that done just through, is that structured? So for instance, you know, do you have sort of personal development days where you're then able to go to different conferences to find out what's going on or is it all about, you know, is it organisationally led or is it personally led? You know, so will you be the person, because it's in your nature to go out and find that information?**

**B8** Erm, again probably both, we do go to kind of conferences and, and training days, erm, to learn more. When we can, it's great to do those kind of, erm, reciprocal visits. So for example last year, a team went from here when up to Nene Park to see what they were doing and then Nene Park came down here to see what, what we were doing and that was very interesting because they had, they've got lots of money and loads of stuff and came here and were just like gobsmacked that we were managing to do what we were doing with such a small team and volunteers but there was a lot to learn from, from kind of both sides, erm.

**Yeah. So how can they have more resources?**

**B8** Different, erm, they were set up with a lot more original investment. I think they've got a lot invested in various areas generating an income, whereas, erm, being a small charity that's not the way we were kind of set up, I don't know the ins and outs of it, erm, of why that is but both performing kind of similar functions of that kind of recreation, erm.

**Yeah. So interesting that you can maybe, when, I don't know if you felt this when you weren't there, you cherry pick the things that you could do, to scale it differently according to the resources you've got here.**

**B8** Yeah, and I think actually there was, erm, volunteers are so embedded in every single part of what we do here and I think while they had volunteers it wasn't quite as embedded as it is here, so, erm, there isn't, I don't think there's a single thing we do here without volunteers being involved in it and, erm, it's been noticeable since the new estate went in next door, we've got people coming over from that estate. We've moved here just because we've loved being next to the park and we want to get involved in what's going on over here and people have moved in last month and I want to be involved and you think God, I'd still be unpacking boxes and you're over here, I mean there's a.

**It's so phenomenal isn't it?**

**B8** Yeah, there's a guy that's only been over there a few months and he's been out with one of our other volunteers who does nest surveying, he's helping with some of the kids holiday events and he's been out doing practical volunteering, he's just, every time you turn round he's there but it's great.

**Yeah, he's really embedding himself in it.**

**B8** Yeah.

**So it's lovely, so people are obviously self-seeking to develop new skills by doing the volunteering and presumably to create social networks as well.**

**B8** Absolutely, and I think for a lot of our volunteers that's really key. So they, they like the organisation, erm, obviously they wouldn't want, wouldn't, there's lots of volunteering opportunities so they chose us, so there's a link to what we do, but yeah, I think a lot of is is, is social as well, there's good camaraderie and, erm, volunteers of, I mean there's volunteers that now go on holiday with each other because they met here and got on and go off and do other things and there's definitely a social side, erm, with it as well which I imagine is, is more, erm, even more important for those that are new to the area, they come over and immediately kind of find, you're thrown in with relatively like-minded people.

**Well this is it, yeah, you know, people that are also, bit like I said earlier, people that really love nature, I mean you're kind of galvanised together aren't you? Would you say, if you were to try and kind of say what you thought the, kind of the sociodemographics of your volunteers are, do they split down into say younger older people, do they split down into certain ethnicities or genders? Or is it a real mix, it's just whoever's?**

**B8** Age wise it's definitely leans towards the retired group, which just makes sense, they've got more time, erm, to be out doing, doing what they want, erm. I'd say we've got a reasonable mix of different genders, perhaps distributed, possibly more in certain areas, so, erm, example volunteer receptionists, I think they're all female apart from one chap, erm, practical, might be a slight bias towards men but I think generally across the Board, it's male, female is, erm, is fairly mixed. Erm, ethnicity wise it's, I think it's predominantly white, erm, but unless you get right into Bedford that's probably what the immediate demographic is.

**Got you, yeah.**

**B8** I would guess, without knowing the ins and outs of it.

**Yeah, and I know you've got a couple of volunteers that live in Bedford but do the rest of them live sort of more round here would you say? Because Bedford's only twenty minutes or so away, depending on the traffic.**

**B8** Yeah. [laughs] Across the vale really, so Kempston, Wootton and Houghton Conquest, so really I, erm, without looking at, at those addresses I would say most of them come within that Forest of Marston Vale area, erm, so I guess they're looking for something on their doorstep, if you want to go and volunteer you don't want to spend half your day travelling to get to that place, so.

**No, and in fact you'd rather work in the place that you're familiar with and you really love, yeah.**

**B8** Yeah, I suppose, erm, you're feeling like you're making that difference on your own doorstep.

**Yeah. So obviously the wetland project really wants to kind of capture people who use and enjoy wetland spaces, their sense of place, now as a sort of overarching manager you can't talk on their behalf but.**

**B8** No.

**In terms of say encouraging people to enjoy the space for health and wellbeing purposes, is there, are there particular things you do in order to try and support people in that way?**

**B8** Erm, yeah, I think so because, because not everyone is, just briefly going back to volunteers, not everyone volunteers because they like nature, they, they might like the idea of the fact that we're trying to plant trees and create those kind of green open spaces but it might not necessarily be the nature part of it, it could be just a general health and wellbeing and being outside but, erm, in conjunction with, I think it was set up by the Council originally, there's health walks, free health walks run every Wednesday, which has just got to phenomenal numbers, you're tripping over people on a Wednesday morning downstairs just because there's so many people down there and they run across Bedfordshire but from here to, erm, and we run.

**And they're free I presume.**

**B8** Yeah, yeah, so, and our volunteer team run, once a month, a Sunday stroll, so just a kind of fairly low key, it's not too far, erm. We try and, we get, are always involved in the Bedfordshire Walking Festival as well, which is about encouraging people to visit the places and get out walking.

**Yeah, and that's in September isn't it?**

**B8** It is, yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. And obviously the footpaths encourage to come and either walk or cycle or jog.**

**B8** Horse ride was well.

**Oh okay, oh, I didn't know that, okay.**

**B8** Yeah, so we've got four kilometres of dedicated, erm, horse trail which links into the wider bridle way network and again, their use, a few years, five, I don't know, [laughs] erm, we had a project which is a path for communities project which we got some funding to, and designated new bridle way into the park but also got some money to put together a series of walk leaflets that either in, erm, started or finished here at the centre but was about exploring the Vale and they were a bit more kind of guided. I think some people that aren't used to maps think that they're going out into some kind of terrifying jungle and actually, while you need a bit of an OS map with you, they're quite friendly, accessible kind of.

**You could actually do it with that map and not need any other, a compass or anything?**

**B8** You should, with, with a bit of commonsense, you should be able to just do it with that, with that route, so.

**That taps into something that I was talking to somebody earlier about, which is about our loss of confidence in our ability to be in nature, that if we are in a space that isn't clearly managed, so of course round here, you know, clear footpaths, we've got the visitor centre for toilets, a car park but it doesn't take very long to go down a path and then you lose the eye line of that, and I wonder how much people are reticent about going off the main path because of that uncertainty about, well the fear of getting lost, you know, because actually Bedfordshire's quite rural in a lot of places.**

**B8** Absolutely.

**You could walk for quite a while.**

**B8** Yes, there's some really beautiful places and I think that is a point, whether it's just the way society has gone and this kind of, we're, I suppose less outdoorsy, more focussed on electronics and all that and people have lost that confidence and I think that even extends to organised school visits, so we run school visits here, we've got limited number that we can do with the staff that we've got and when we kind of hit that limit, I'm always saying please come on a self-led visit, I'll help you, tell you where the best places to go, we've got kit you can borrow and you can just see, oh, they're just, I, it seems, they don't want to have the responsibility of the kids and.

**Right, yeah. Well do, I mean the other subject's also the health and safety aspect of having to sign off risk assessments and the idea presumably that a staff member will reduce the risk because you're the experts.**

**B8** In the, yeah, you know the site and you're more familiar. Yeah, and I'm sure there's some people feel kind of safer in that, in that situation.

**Yeah, I mean do you get a feedback through any comment forms or anything like that in terms of the maps you provide? Because I am curious to know really how people, you know, connect with those, because the maps are obviously a brilliant resource and take a lot of time to plan and to print and everything and just the feedback you've got in terms of how people utilise and whether they feel brave enough to go off.**

**B8** Yeah, I mean I think we're, we're relatively lucky here, because there's, there's that manmade element of this site, it's, it's kind of reasonably structured which give people confidence without the maps, we do sell maps, a lot of people come in and, and get them, erm, but we also have maps out on site but as well as, erm, our main maps here we have a map at every pedestrian entrance and we also have finger posts round the site with distance markers on them, but I have, erm, I mean on the whole I find with the public, if you don't hear it's good, you tend to only hear if there's a problem.

**Yes, I think that's right, yeah.**

**B8** Erm, and we've had one or two comments over the years about, erm, kind of it's not very well signposted and that kind of thing, which without dismissing people's feedback, which I, constructive feedback is really useful, people saying there's no signs I find quite difficult to believe because there's so many out there but sometimes people don't, they don't look or they think it doesn't apply to them and actually it might be something really useful or it might actually stop them, don't know, falling off a cliff or something, I mean signs are useful and we aim as far as we can here, to keep it to a minimum so when there is a sign it's relevant, useful or for a safety reason, erm, so here I think people are, erm, I think we help people quite a lot try to and get out but people do tend to stick to that figure of eight because they know as long as they keep going in the same direction they're going to end up back in the Forest Centre.

**Yeah. And do you think the other thing could also be that there's usually always people on those paths?**

**B8** Yeah.

**So there is familiarity seeing someone else is further ahead.**

**B8** Yeah.

**Or you've walked that way already, because actually if you were to think about the whole connective site with all the footpaths, what is the potential distance that somebody could walk and still be in the Forest Centre?**

**B8** I mean the, the whole figure of eight is eight kilometres, erm, but then within that there's other shorter footpaths as well so, erm, can't remember what, it was twenty something, if you added up every path and admittedly some would run parallel, so go in the same direction, it was twenty something kilometres.

**Yeah. So that's a good days sort of, you know, exercise in nature in one space, which is pretty phenomenal really.**

**B8** Yeah, and there's lots of options, so I mean thinking about me personally, I actually get off any kind of managed footpath because that's not what floats my boat, getting a bit wilder is what I want but obviously it's great for accessibility for wheelchairs and, and mobility vehicles but then there's the option for unsurfaced footpaths, erm, and then kind of up and down, lumpy bumpy footpaths that some people want to kind of get out there and get on those and, so it's nice that there's a variety here, so again that's about trying to appeal to as many different people as possible.

**Because some people do want that less managed feel don't they?**

**B8** They do, they do.

**Yeah, they want something that's a little bit wilder, which also then sort of leads me to think about, you know, this thought about health and wellbeing with kind of a constituency that we, that are kind of quite easy to classify but I'm thinking about people that might want to use this space differently, so maybe people that want to come here overnight and camp out overnight, I don't know if you've got experience of that, people have come after hours or would you maybe not know because that's, you're maybe not here so?**

**B8** Erm, it's not something we allow, so we, no like camping but that's as any open space that's open twenty four seven, that's not to say it doesn't happen so it does happen, erm, and I'm sure there's people that come here and camp, clear up and leave, the ones we're aware about are, tend to be the ones that come, camp, light fires, leave litter all over the place and then go home and leave all the tent and their crap behind, so that is quite frustrating given that we don't allow camping in the first place ,it's something that it would be nice if we had the space and the staff to be able to do something managed, because camping's brilliant.

**Yeah, because, yeah, but again it's got to have respect for environment, yeah.**

**B8** We've got to be appropriate, yeah.

**Because equally do you ever get groups that will come and have say, because you've got quite a large space, come and have big family celebrations here? Because, you know, often, you know, in Bedford itself or the surrounding areas, there aren't big spaces to go that are easy access to toilets and things, so do you get sort of family gatherings that will come here, have birthday parties or picnics and stuff like that?**

**B8** Yeah, definitely, erm, you get and sometimes I think wow you've got a big family because they'll come with their little gazebos and people will be spread and there'll be everyone from granny to little toddlers all running round together and it's great to see because I look at that and I think that's part of the reason we're here, I love seeing you out just all in the fresh air enjoying the space that's been created here which essentially is for the community so.

**Yeah, but that still needs, big groups still need sort of managing as well don't they, so has that ever proved? You know, because you're talking about signage, you want to encourage people to enjoy the space don't you? And I've had situations where there's just been so much signage in places telling me what I can't do.**

**B8** Yeah.

**It feels very restricted, so how do you get the balance between educating people about how to use the space mindfully and not telling them exactly what to do, you know?**

**B8** It's hard and actually it's something that because there's a few things that are becoming more prevalent that I think we probably need to address through signage. So, erm, and I like you, hate that and you're created with the sign and it says don't do this, don't do that, don't do this, don't have a good time, don't do anything vaguely innovative, so like it's kind of almost ruining someone's day before they get here.

**Yeah, don't enjoy yourself too much.**

**B8** But, erm, and, erm, I suppose part of it is about modern health and safety culture, if you've, like obviously we've got two old clay pits here, very inviting in sunny weather, hideously dangerous if you swim in them and we get people swimming here, so if we.

**Because of the steep sided nature of the pits?**

**B8** Just, and the temperature, there's, there's probably all manner of old kind of machinery and stuff in the bottoms of them but I think it's mainly about temperature, they can feel quite warm and then you swim out and they're freezing cold, people get into trouble. I mean how many stories do we all hear? It's probably more relevant here, there's probably at least one person that dies every summer in a brick pit round here because they go swimming, so, erm, that kind of thing and I feel we now need to, because we know it's happening, we need to sort of put some kind of signage up for that and ditto, barbecues are another issue, sort of fire hazard, so it's trying to work out a way of having that nice welcoming sign and having these key points in there without, yeah, kind of dampening someone's enthusiasm for the, their kind of visit but.

**Yeah, because this kind of sort of leads me, because I've got three sections in the interview, the first one is around health and wellbeing and the next one's about mosquitoes and really that taps into ideas of wellbeing, in terms of what the public think is their right or they understand their wellbeing to be able to enjoy those spaces and then what the organisation understands by wellbeing and people's enjoyment of these spaces because I think there with the, the barbecues and the swimming that's where the line kind of is drawn isn't it in terms of enjoying nature but understanding when to do certain things and how to do certain things, that's not appropriate?**

**B8** Absolutely, and that, and it is, when, erm, so we use dog walking for an example, great way of so many people getting out and enjoying the countryside and parks and so many people do it, but then, so one issue is always picking up after dogs, it's, it's a binary thing, you have to do it, you can't half do it, people that don't do it, there's no arguing about it, the bigger issue for us is keeping your do under control, perception of control varies wildly from people to people and you, if you can try and tackle it it can be quite difficult because people treat their dogs like they're children, so you're kind of almost insulting their child if you're suggesting it's out of control and, erm, it's alright, he's only friendly and don't worry he always come back are the two comments that drive me completely nuts because that dog could have run through thirteen picnics and nicked someone's ice-cream or ruined a whole field of ground nesting birds while it was off having a lovely time but it's okay because it always comes back. So it is about that appropriate use and I don't, I mean dog walking is one of the areas where there's the most conflict but I think each group, whether you're a walker, horse rider, cyclist, there's always individuals within all of those user groups that don't act responsibly, so the cyclist that hurtles past at a hundred miles an hour without letting people know, the group of walkers that just go en masse and don't move to the side to allow the cyclist past, the horse rider that's riding on the footpath inside of the bridleway, erm, for me it's just about people being respectful for each other, there's space for everyone, particularly here because we have that luxury of the fact that it is pretty manmade, all of those things were thought about so there's the way of keeping the horse riders slightly separate to give everyone space but I think that's a kind of societal thing, just look out for people, step to the side, just be a bit more considerate.

**Yeah, we need a bit of tolerance don't we? Yeah.**

**B8** And I think on the whole people are, but like we said before when there's a, you're more likely to hear about the one issue where there was a problem than the hundred people that all said thank you and moved aside and were considerate and patted the pony and cheered the runners on and.

**Exactly, yeah, had a lovely time, yeah.**

**B8** All those kind of lovely sides of a multi-use site, you just hear about.

**Yeah, because one of the things that I was thinking about earlier today is this idea of that these wetland spaces have a different sort of time dimension to them in that if you really want to enjoy these spaces you've got to put aside the sort of, the clock time that you work on on the everyday and slow down when you get here because if you don't slow down you're not going to experience the wetland in the way that you could do, so.**

**B8** Absolutely agreed.

**You know, I think it's, it would be wonderful wouldn't it to almost encourage people to do that, to say you'll get so much more by stopping and sitting and waiting for the wildlife to come out and feel, you know, able to come out because of course if you're running around or cycling or running, you know, wildlife will disappear, the very reason that you've come to this space.**

**B8** Or walking while looking at your phone rather than your child. Mummy, mummy, that, ah.

**Yeah, yeah, that's it, we need a different way of interacting with these spaces don't we that allows people the space to say you don't have to do everything now, you know, you can focus on one thing?**

**B8** And again some people do, there was a lovely lady up looking at the lake with a, when my colleague went out litter picking and she was painting, she had her easel up there. There's another chap that comes, erm, twice a week, every week, same day, same time to go round the nature reserve, he's into photography and his birds and there's one particular hideout there that quite a few people say is a load of rubbish, you never see anything and he always says I don't know what they're on about, he's got some amazing shots, but he goes in there and he sits there for two hours, he said he sits there and the time he sits in there, he'll have twenty people come in, sit down for five minutes and leave again and he's got shots of bittern in flight and kind of in the edge of the reeds, just because he'll, he just sits and enjoys it and kind of don't see anything, it's pretty.

**That's it, maybe have no agenda as well.**

**B8** Yeah.

**Because you can't just kind of have a tick list of the things that, you know, you're going to see or experience and each time is different, so.**

**B8** Yeah.

**Which lets me, just really seamlessly, talk about mosquitoes.**

**B8** [laughter]

**Do you, are mosquitoes present on this site from your experience of working here?**

**B8** They are, although I think one of the chaps at the BNHS made a point at the evening in that I think people say mossie when actually it's just a random bitey thing, so, erm, and I think I would probably include myself in that I kind of, if a mossie lands on me I can tell it's a mossie, if it's some kind of tiny flying thing, erm, I wouldn't necessarily if it was actually a mosquito or it was some other kind of, erm, of thing. So we're a large site with lots of water bodies on it, we get, I can't imagine we don't have mosquitoes but we have lots of other things.

**Yeah, other insect life around.**

**B8** Yes.

**But in terms of the members of the public accessing the site that's never been a problem in terms, from your experience of people saying oh I've terribly bitten, I'm never coming back again or I do come but I only come at these months of the year, you've not any kind of?**

**B8** Never, never experienced that here and if it was significant again I think I would have, I would have heard about it because, don't write this down, people will probably come in and say it's our fault. [laughs]

**Yeah, well that is true though isn't it? There's some way you've got to manage everything on the site including where insects choose to nest.**

**B8** To be.

**To nest.**

**B8** And it, it varies, I'm one of those lucky people that things that bite, they hate me, I rarely get bitten and the next person along could be, be bitten for[?] me.

**And the same for your volunteers, presumably you've not had any feedback from volunteers where people say I won't go and do that activity because I don't like getting bitten or I won't come at that time of day?**

**B8** We've got maybe the odd volunteer and again it might not be mosquito specific which doesn't help this study but, erm.

**Yeah, but it to, yeah.**

**B8** But who, towards kind of the end of summer will often be cutting wildflower meadows and breaking them off and they'll choose not to be involved in those because they're much more likely to get bitten, erm, but again I don't think it's, it's particularly seems to have stopped anyone being involved.

**No. So for instance, you know, you don't need any special clothing, you don't need to offer volunteers any anti-insect spray or anything like that?**

**B8** We don't, I think any that, erm, have a tendency to be bitten would provide that themselves. Incidentally actually I'd have, we've got a lady that's, erm, coming to do, it's just a random group dog walk, there's just people that have met on Facebook and get together and go for a walk with their dogs, she actually emailed me last week to say that they'd been somewhere else and got bitten really badly and, erm, what was it like here?

**Ah.**

**B8** Which is almost the impossible question to answer because it's like well big site, loads of water, there's going to be.

**Choose your patch and, yeah.**

**B8** It's kind of.

**But as you said before if, if the way it falls is that people only make a complaint when there's something negative then you probably would anecdotally have heard, either from volunteers or from hearing people in the cafe or online maybe, because I mean do people, presumably people do twitter, do tweets?**

**B8** Yeah, and, erm, we've got, trip, people report back on TripAdvisor around on our Facebook page as well, erm. Incidentally going back to the dog walker lady, she did say so we can be prepared as opposed to we won't come which is encouraging, erm. I think if people are, are complaining about insect interference, it tends to be based around wasps and the picnic area so it's the typical wasp in the jam sandwich thing isn't it? And, erm.

**Yeah. It'll be interesting when the surveying work is done to see exactly where the mosquito breeding sites are.**

**B8** Yes, because we didn't get picked, Priory got the mosquito side of things. [laughs] Shucks.

**Well I'm sure next summer, the roulette wheel of mosquito fortune you're going to be very lucky.**

**B8** Oh right. Actually Priory's only a short distance away, so actually what's found now will be really interesting anyway.

**Exactly, exactly, and I think, I'm sure there won't be huge amounts of difference because the sites are quite similar in some way, I mean I know there's, you know, huge variations in terms of the sort of, the tree lines and things but in terms of round the water bodies that you said which is where they're likely to be I'm sure, if we've seen what the species are and which ones are human biters and bird biters, that will be interesting to find out.**

**B8** Yes.

**But it sounds like it's kind of low level, not really something that is a problem on this particular site from your experience.**

**B8** Yeah, from what we've, we've heard, so I don't know what we haven't been told if that makes sense.

**Yeah, no, that does make sense.**

**B8** So there could be people quietly avoiding the place in high mosquito times and, but, but, yeah, it's not something we've heard and, yeah, as you say from experience if people have a problem they tend to have a voice.

**They tend to make it quite vocal, yes.**

**B8** Yes.

**And just a little aside which is, you know, we've been using mosquitoes obviously because we're interested in mosquito populations and mosquito expansion but also as a kind of metaphor for climate change in terms of, you know, warmer wetter climate, what will that mean in terms of insect life? And there's been lots of various debates about, it could be beneficial for some types of animal life, from your experience on the site in the last five years have you seen any variation that's been kind of curious or unusual?**

**B8** Personally no. One comment from REMOVED I think was last year, when he was trying to ring swallows, he, he seemed to think that there was a lot less around because he wasn't, sorry insects therefore the swallow catching was going badly, erm, but I haven't sort of, there's not been days when I've gone out and thought oh there's nothing around or in contrast, oh my god, where's all this come from? Because actually if there's a, where's all this come from, I tend to think yey, more things for, to feed to baby birds and, you know, there's.

**Yeah. And I think also, you know, actually we need to look at the long term data in order to look at trends but, you know, sometimes it is an anecdotal thing of, you know, some years there's an oddity, you know, but that's.**

**B8** Whether weather conditions would affect, wouldn't they or do they?

**Yeah, you would think. Well you would think so wouldn't you? I mean, you know, it's interesting today, the Environment Agency talking about by twenty fifty we're going to not have enough water in this part of the UK, what a surprise.**

**B8** [laughs]

**I mean I'll be interested to know how that really impacts and I mean they haven't, I don't think they've done any forecasting in terms of how it affects non-humans, they seem to have completely focussed on humans.**

**B8** Um.

**So I think a bit more work needs to be done there about that, about what they think might happen in terms of, you know, other animal populations but we, you know, watch this space, see what happens.**

**B8** So many higher species that depend on not only mosquitoes.

**Well yeah.**

**B8** But all kind of flying insects.

**Well that's it, it's all connected together isn't it?**

**B8** Absolutely.

**And I think, you know, when REMOVED made that connection between the swallows and the mosquitoes, you know, I can't remember what the bat people said now, I don't think they said that they'd noticed a change and of course that's, the bats are the big thing for the.**

**B8** Yeah.

**You know, mosquito eaters.**

**B8** Yeah, erm, and I mean REMOVED comment, was that just that week or was it that summer or was it?

**Yeah, yeah, exactly, exactly, but it's good because once somebody peaks your interest, you start looking at things a little bit differently don't you? Start thinking have I seen any swallows?**

**B8** Yeah.

**Yeah. My last section of the interview, it's got the very crinkly titled Contemporary Social Representations.**

**B8** That sounds very grown up. [laughs]

**It does doesn't it? And it's basically what do people think about wetlands and what I mean by that is that certain landscapes evoke certain kinds of responses and that's reflected in wider culture, so whether that's literature or art or legal policy or the way that different NGOs frame things, so one of the parts of the project is trying to understand how wetlands have shifted from one perspective to another, so for instance, you know, traditionally wetlands have always been viewed as barren unfertile, murky places where, you know, marsh fever and ague and where criminals hide out and smugglers coves and things like that.**

**B8** [laughs]

**And I would like to explore the sense whether people feel differently engaged with wetlands or whether actually there is a split between some people feel nothing or maybe most people feel nothing about wetlands or those who really love wetlands, feel very passionate for them or whether they're viewed now as almost sanctified spaces where, you know, you have your visitor centre and your walkway and your car park and that's what people think wetlands are rather than these very, very different types of geography, you know, because you've got coastal wetlands, you've got estuarine wetlands, you've got wet woodland wetlands, you know, they can be very different.**

**B8** Yeah.

**So it's really about, when someone talks about wetlands, what is the idea that's, you know, what image is conjured up? Now obviously I can't ask you personally what you think, I'm only curious to know from your experiences talking to your volunteers or interacting with groups or talking to members of the public, how do you think people perceive wetlands or, you know, do they see them now as somehow safer spaces?**

**B8** Gor, that's a really hard question to answer.

**It's a really, yes, I know it is.**

**B8** Because yeah, you could answer personally but it's difficult there because I think you'd get a hundred and one different responses depending on whether it, you were talking to someone that bird watched or whether someone that didn't really walk much and just maybe did it on one day of their holiday or because they have different levels of understanding already about what wetlands are, so.

**Yeah. So the question is then, I mean would you almost say then it's a very personal thing?**

**B8** Absolutely, me, I would.

**So this.**

**B8** I would say that's absolutely the case because, erm, you know, the, the more you, you would only learn about something further if you were interested in it, then you become knowledgeable and you would know the extent of the different types of wetlands, whereas if you just went for a walk and happened upon an orderly lake with a circular walk and a visitor centre you might just think that that's what wetlands are. So I think it is, it is very personal. I think people do have a, erm, kind of a love of water and wetlands. I know that, erm, here, so sort of external to the kind of paid for wetlands nature reserve, obviously you've got the lake at the top and it's, again slightly anecdotally, if people are going to do a four kilometre loop, it's always much busier around the lake loop than it is round the southern half of the park where you don't get views on to water, erm. People have said ooh why couldn't you have more views over the lake? Can we have a bench near this viewpoint so we can sit and watch the lake? Erm, memorial benches, oh I want it for someone who loved the lake. It's, it, those things do tend to focus around being near or looking at or feeling the space around that kind of water body.

**Yeah. I mean it's interesting you talk about, you know, remembrance benches, is that quite a, do you get a lot of enquiries about having a remembrance bench?**

**B8** Definitely and we've had, and the, the scheme now, erm, and that was because everyone wanted the benches where there was a view over the water and you, you'd end up.

**Just be a load of benches.**

**B8** It would be a like a bus stop and there'd be benches everywhere, erm, and we'd be trying to encourage people to have benches where we actually needed them for a functional point of view but no, they wanted to look at the lake, so say the majority of the memorial benches that we've got are looking over or near to water on site.

**Right. Do people ever dedicate trees to their past loved ones?**

**B8** Yes. So we do a dedicated tree scheme, erm, but like a lot of woodland trusts that's like it's, you dedicate a tree as part of a woodland, as opposed to an individual tree. We did have an individual tree dedication scheme here in the early days, so we've got a small group of trees by the Forest Centre that each one has a, has a post and plaque next to it but it just wasn't a viable scheme going forwards, erm, whereas.

**Because it's too time intensive to put the plaque up or?**

**B8** Erm.

**Was it the tree died and you had to plant another tree?**

**B8** Yes, put another one in, people become very attached to that individual tree. I think, erm, I, I was probably the instigator of ending that specific tree scheme because just looking at what I inherited, you can already see that in the future those trees are going to be too close together, so there's going to be a management issue for someone in fifty years, erm. Kind of luckily they're in a spot that's quite hard going for them to grow, so they're growing really slowly, [laughs] which is probably helpful.

**Okay. [laughs]**

**B8** Which is why we kind of lean to this, you don't have a specific tree but you're contributing to the woodland because there's always going to be future woodland management and thinning and stuff's going to die and it kind of manages out that kind of expectation of that individual tree, so.

**Yeah, but they presumably get a certificate or something saying John Harvey contributed, you know, this is John Harvey[ NB an example name].**

**B8** Yeah, and it can be for births, deaths, new babies, there's a whole range of things and I think there is, a colleague of mine deals with, I think if people adopt like a copse of trees, say fifty trees, which obviously would be more of an investment financially, they can have a post and plaque associated with those, so it's kind of levels of, erm.

**Yeah, but then that also kind of creates something which is less individualistic and more a kind of woodland cosmology where you become part of the wider, you know, space of the.**

**B8** Yeah.

**Of the centre, which is lovely.**

**B8** And we try and, erm, obviously we planted all the trees on this site but our wider woodland sites, erm. Most years in the past we've had a public tree planting day so you get people involved and trying to focus on the people that live locally so their input in their tree in the, in the ground and doing that contribution and if people have dedicated trees and that woodland come along, put a tree in the ground and even if their certificate isn't for that tree they know that they've planted ten trees on that day and in their head one of them is theirs and that ownership.

**Yeah, but then, so that already, you know, when I talked about this sort of rather clinically phrased Contemporary Social Representation, that is part of it because then that is saying that these are memorial spaces or spaces of, I guess some identity in the local area, through doing these pieces of, you know, tree planting and contributing to the wider woodland.**

**B8** Yeah, I think it gives, and I suppose that, I'd like to cultivate that sense of ownership over a local space, because the more people you've got caring for a site the more we're all working together to keep it safe and clean and, and all those, those things and I mean you bump into people that walk here every single day because they love it and they, and I don't think it's just about convenience, it's about loving the site and we have a Friends scheme, erm, and that, it's a charity wide one rather that specifically wetlands but people pay a monthly contribution to their, to the charity and they do get benefits but it's about supporting the charity and, and what we're trying to do as well, so.

**Yeah. So is that, you know, so for here particularly it's that idea of linking the wetland is for everyone, it's not just when you come and visit on the odd occasion, it's about ongoing in the future isn't it?**

**B8** Yeah, yeah, definitely.

**And preserving the space.**

**B8** I think, yeah, I think there's definitely a personal, people have that affinity to water and wetlands. I mean look at how many people stick a garden pond in their garden, that's a teeny, tiny wetland.

**Yeah, and, you know, it's funny watching the Chelsea Flower Show yesterday, you wouldn't really have one of these gardens without some form of water.**

**B8** Water.

**In that space, you know.**

**B8** Yeah.

**I haven't seen one of them without water in the space, whether it's flowing under kind of metal grills or in a lovely fountain or something. Over the time you've been here, so we have like the memorial benches but do people ever come and do their own forms of memorial ceremony, do you ever find, I don't know, little things in the trees in springtime or any evidence of wassailing over winter, you know?**

**B8** Erm, not too obvious, we're, we've had people that want to scatter ashes here which I think is a lovely thing to do and, erm, and we're pretty relaxed about, about that, as long as it's in woodland, so we're not willing to enrich grassland, strange way, but one of the kind of conditions of those things is that there isn't memorials or things left.

**Nothing static left, yeah.**

**B8** Because often it will involve non-biodegradable items, so we're then picking up plastic flowers that have blown away or, or other bits of plastic and actually other visitors can sometimes feel a bit funny about those kind of memorials, erm.

**Do you think they find them slightly creepy in the woods?**

**B8** Possibly or just, I think no-one likes to think of death really do they? So it's kind of, although it's, in some senses it can be the celebration, it's kind of, there's, even if it's not your life, you can see the sort of sense of loss.

**Reminds us of our finality, yeah.**

**B8** So it's kind of, it's, erm, it's nice when, say a bench for example, it's nice when it's a positive message, so it might be benches in memory of David who loved to walk here with his dog and it's kind of nice, it's like a, a, happy association.

**Yeah. And from your own sort of perspective of wetlands, are there any pieces of literature that you like to read up? I ask that because I really love nature writing, I love Robert McFarlane's work and there's so many different types of work now out there, which is all different ways of exploring, you know, our connection with nature and I wondered if there was anything that you had ever read that made you think yes, that's why I love doing the job that I do.**

**B8** I'm about being in it, so all my main kind of this is why I do it moments, might not necessarily have been these wetlands but they'll be in spaces where I go cor I'm lucky or, and I get that here, working here, there'll be a certain day or something'll happen, it might just be a moment or the weather or you hear something and I just think wow, I can't imagine going to London, this is my office and I often stick those pictures on Twitter, just having one of those moments kind of, erm.

**Oh that's lovely though isn't it? Because that is capturing the moment and being still for a moment and saying gosh, life's such a hurly burly, to be able to have this, to be able to work here is just phenomenal really.**

**B8** Yeah, but yeah, going back to books, I mean I, I, I suppose I get passionate from reading about other people that are passionate as well so it goes without saying, Sir Attenborough complete legend, don't know what's going to happen when he goes.

**[laughs] He's never going to do.**

**B8** No, I think, I think so.

**Going to keep him alive, going to keep his brain in a tank.**

**B8** Yeah, it just, it's, it doesn't even bear thinking about.

**No, it doesn't, no.**

**B8** But other people, well it might be a wildlife photographer or, so, or people like Simon King or Steve Irwin, God what an infectious man, I know he's a bit of a marmite character but I just, I, I thought he was amazing as far as engaging people with nature and wildlife, just absolutely brilliant, so I'm a bit of a factual girl, so I always hated English at school but I was kind of science and maths, so I think a lot of my reading is based around that kind of learning, erm, so, and I often think I should probably, I kind of like the odd kind of moving bit of poetry or something, but I don't, I kind of come into contact through those kind of accidentally or through passing, I'm much more likely to be reading about real life experiences or sites or countries, so.

**Yeah, because I mean I think the sort of, the whole, you know, nature documentaries on TV and, you know, things like Springwatch, even Countryfile have all been really helpful I think in terms of helping people to see the wide range of different landscapes out there and all the different activities that go on in different species.**

**B8** Um.

**Both urban and rural and I think it has helped people to bridge that gap between, you know, sedentary city lives and being in nature and encouraging people to just be brave and.**

**B8** I couldn't agree more because I get really annoyed when people in the industry, so peers and such like and they go oh God, Springwatch is bloody awful, there's blue tits in boxes and you think who cares? And it goes back to that, it doesn't matter what it is, if you watch a boxful of blue tits fledging and you're just going oh my God, I want to go out and see that myself, if you live in a flat in London, god, it's ticks all round as far as I'm concerned, just to inspire people to, to kind of get out and be out and.

**And embrace nature.**

**B8** Absolutely, because the other, the other thing with, it's from a personal point of view, that wetlands and outside space and the wellbeing thing, I'm harking back to the beginning, for me for a kind of, from a mental side of things, it's just, for me it's beyond beneficial, I am a complete stress head and kind of get worried and anxious about everything in the world but for me that feeling of when you go out, even here I used, just I'd be doing something inside, go out and you can just feel it drain away and actually I find that, I love Scotland, so you go up and you start seeing the lochs and the mountains and, erm, I'm not religious but for me drive, that drive up when we go up there on holiday is the closest thing to spiritual that I believe and it, you can, I can literally feel it draining away. You see the greatest expanses of water coming out and so big, you think how can that be inland? Mountains rising up and I just. Mental wellbeing, benefits of these spaces, I think are just under-rated how valuable they are.

**Yeah, I agree, and I think to enable people to have more access to these spaces is essential.**

**B8** Um.

**I think it's, you know, it's almost a human right really.**

**B8** Absolutely.

**We need to find ways to make it possible for people and it was interesting, you know, I went to Priory Country Park earlier and there isn't a footpath goes from the centre of town to there, you know, I mean if you're driving, the footpath disappears and then it appears again, so is it any wonder that people only go there by car? And I know that here it's difficult, you know, unless you live right next to here, you have to access here by car. We need to find a way of making it easier for people to access wetlands spaces or green spaces generally that's affordable and reliable.**

**B8** And they feel safety, because Route 51, the cycle path, comes in here, so it, in theory it's relatively easy to cycle but then you're back to that, God, am I going to get lost, is little Johnny going to get run over on the way? That, oh no, let's go in the car, and again the, the community rail line runs immediately adjacent to the park and we have one school visit a year and they pack all the kids on to the train and they, and we meet them at the train station to start their activity, so the first activity goes on as we walk back through the park to the centre and, erm.

**Yeah, that's lovely, so great.**

**B8** And that's why, why don't more people do it? It's cheap and affordable and I think the only thing I can think is it's an hourly service and people want to do what they want to do now and that car gives them the ability to.

**Yeah, that's it because then they want the flexibility of choosing rather than saying I have to be on that particular train.**

**B8** Um.

**Which is again a different mindset about slowing down saying just make time.**

**B8** It is.

**To get that train.**

**B8** Yeah, I think we live in a world where, from ten and twelve we will walk at the wetlands, then we need to go shopping and then we need to go and visit granny and oh god, then they've got to go to the football match and then we've got to do that and then they all fall in a heap at the end of the day.

**It's okay because you can tick all these things off.**

**B8** Yeah, that we've achieved, yeah.

**To close, are there any points or issues that you would like to communicate with me, anything in terms of clarity or anything that you really passionately want to kind of share with the project in terms of wetlands and how they're being managed and where you think they're going in the future?**

**B8** I think they're amazing, there should be more and you get more support, whether that's, I mean we're a small charity and doing great things but you listen to, and I imagine they've mentioned it when you've talked to the guys at Priory, all they're getting is cuts, less people, less money but expectations of providing the same service and it's, I don't, where is that, it's not possible so how are those decisions being made higher up? We should value these spaces for all of their benefits and all the knock-on benefits, so it's probably saving, savings to the NHS, you're getting people out but it just seems to be cuts, cuts, cuts, everywhere and they should, it should be the other way but it always feels like, erm, particularly in kind of authority run places it's an easy place, because you're not going to cut money to children's services are you? But oh that country park down the road, we can slash some stuff down there but it's a much bigger picture than just let's get rid of a couple of rangers and then that'll save us a few quid every year. I think people don't, erm, fully appreciate the extent of benefits of places like this and like Priory and other wetland and outdoor spaces round the country, so.

**Yeah, I couldn't agree with you more, like you said, it's looking at it holistically, which is saying okay, what do you bring to the local economy, as you said for the NHS, you know, getting people's mental wellbeing, their physical wellbeing, getting families to connect together to slow down, it's all connected together and if these sites, you know, if you stop managing the sites in a way that people come to expect then they may not come because they don't feel safe, they don't know how to use them anymore or they find them irritating, so, you know, when you put in your car park charges, which is not something we've talked about yet but I will be very interested to see what effect that has on visitor numbers or, and also visitor expressions of satisfaction with the site.**

**B8** Yeah, yeah, because, erm, yeah, I think what we're expecting is a dip and then a recovery, erm, and you, I suspect people will, erm, use car park, the fact that they've paid to park, I've paid to park so you should be providing this, whereas when it was free, while any negative things should be reported but there's, they may feel that well I haven't paid so I kind of, I can't really say that or I just need to put up with this or whereas I think when.

**Yeah, the change of expectations if it's.**

**B8** Yeah, it's almost like you've created a transaction, I've given you x pounds to park, therefore this is what I expect and I think the public generally have got a high level of expectation, even when they're contributing a small amount or even nothing, erm, which can be a little frustrating as someone from a charity managing a large site on very little resources and you think.

**Have you ever asked people who visit who they think actually own this site? Do they think it's owned by the Council?**

**B8** Some people do and, erm, over the last few years we've been working very hard to rectify that because, because sometimes, I pay my taxes why have you not go more dog bins? And you have to explain to people that that's not the case, so I think historically there was more people that thought we were council, I hope that we're moving towards people having a better understanding of, of the fact that we're a charity and we rely on donations and support to, to keep going, erm, and think through work that, that the rest of the team that are more involved in that kind of communications and kind of fund raising side that is becoming clearer now we've gone through a whole rebranding thingamajig to, to try and make that clearer.

**Yeah. I mean I love your new board, showing the whole extent of the Forest Vale Centre, I think that's really fantastic.**

**B8** Yeah, yeah, and a lot of people think that this is it, this is the forest and they don't understand that, and that's been something we've been trying to explain when we've been interacting about car parking charges, it's not just here, we have twelve sites altogether that all need to be looked after and owned and managed and litter picked and reconstructed when they get squished by some lout and all of those things, so, erm, it's a, it's an ongoing thing to provide all of those spaces for people to keep enjoying.

**Yeah, and the car parking charges start quite soon, next month you said?**

**B8** Beginning of June.

**First of June.**

**B8** Sorry I think it's fourth of June, we waited until after half term because it seemed a bit unfair to throw it in and.

**That seems sensible, that's very good PR there.**

**B8** [laughter]

And actually that's a, it's a good time to keep doing promotion because we'll get an increased number of people visiting, so, erm.

**Yes, get that message out.**

**B8** Get, if you can make sure people are aware then you're manage that for their next visit, so they don't rock up and find they've got pay and they didn't know and, and that kind of thing.

**Yeah, they can be prepared for next time.**

**B8** There's been a lot of people that have been supportive over it, I mean just look at, not surprisingly it went a bit crazy on Facebook when it, it went out and there was lots of comments, a lot of them are negative, definitely interspersed with positive comments and people saying I don't know why you didn't do it earlier, erm, but then kind of the emojis at the top, you get the kind of positive ones and the negative ones and when you actually add up, it's about half and half of people doing the kind of thumbs up and the, all the kind of angry group.

**But that's positive.**

**B8** But they don't do the commenting bit, well as many of them don't do the commenting bit.

**Yeah. I would have presumed it would have been overwhelmingly negative.**

**B8** As far as those comments have gone, the actual written comments, it has definitely been more negative than positive but then.

**But you said it was five percent of people that were actually donating when it was voluntary.**

**B8** Yeah, which is, is, yeah, it's really sad but then right at the other end of the spectrum, we've got a couple here that come, erm, all the time, they've always been a friend of the forest so they pay, erm, I think they were paying over and above what they, they should have even before and we've done, changed this and they've popped in and upped their contribution to sixty pounds a month because they love it so much.

**What? That's amazing.**

**B8** For the two of them, they're here probably three or four times a week.

**Wow.**

**B8** And they've upped their contribution again and even our fund, we joked with our fundraiser that she's really mercenary, she's lovely but it's just all about getting the money and she said even I said to them you don't have to do that, [laughs] but they wanted to because they love what we do and they, erm, the gentleman's in a wheelchair and they use the, the wetlands nature reserve every time they visit, so that was.

**Yeah. So that was essential for them.**

**B8** Yes, absolutely and I was delighted when our new tower hide went in and we made the decision to almost double the cost by putting the accessible ramp in and he's up in there and absolutely loving it and so they're the people we're doing it for.

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

**B8** And it's not about the money, it's about seeing, physically seeing the pleasure in people, just experiencing the site and they've been coming for eleven or twelve years, so they've seen the changes over the years and, and just love everything.

**Yeah. That's just so brilliant.**

**B8** It is.

**Well keep on the good work, that's all I can say.**

**B8** [laughs]

**I'll give you a virtual tap on the back there.**

**B8** Oh it's, it's a great, I do feel privileged to be involved in, REMOVED and actually feel like, I'm quite an over achiever, I always want to do as best as I can and I think I've got to do this site justice, it's so special, I can't mess it up, I need to do everything and it's, have such a great dedicated team of, tiny team of staff and all the volunteers that you think good on you team and you kind of feel proud of what everyone's achieved with so, so little resources and you walk out there on a summer's day and think cor, this is special.

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

**B8** That's okay, I feel like I've just rambled massively and I kept thinking.

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**So I wonder if you could just start by telling me a little bit about the organisation that you work with and kind of your wider interests within that sphere?**

**B9** Okay. Well in terms of, I suppose working for an organisation it would be BRCC, we do have, erm, sort of ecology side to the organisation, although I'm, I'm involved on the rural development side which is very much about REMOVED, although we do look at, erm, sort of ecological improvements within projects and fund those, erm. From my own perspective, I'm, I'm a keen birder, erm, and sort of amateur naturalist I suppose, my, my degree was in biological conservation and physical geography, erm. I always had an interest in nature but it's really grown over the years and I spend most of my free time out birding or just generally walking the countryside, so, you know, and my dissertation was on wetlands as well, so, you know, I have a particular interest in, in wetlands. Erm, is that okay, do you want more?

**Yes, it sounds wonderful. So your birding activities, obviously you do it for your own love and your own pleasure.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Do you collaborate with other members of Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust?**

**B9** Yes, erm, Bed, well Bedfordshire Bird Group.

**Oh, okay.**

**B9** I'm involved with, I'm a member of the local Wildlife Trust and the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and Bedfordshire Bird Club and, and, so all the local nature organisations and I'm also involved with a number of them through work as well, erm, I mean we, we run a, the REMOVED, but my colleagues REMOVED actually do the graft but we, we're working closely with the Wildlife Trust Natural History Society, erm, Greensand Trust, RSPB, you know, you name it, it's a big collaboration with, with lots of organisations throughout the Greensand Ridge area. Erm, I tend to try and use bird track for reporting my sort of sightings, so it's.

**That's an online resource?**

**B9** It's an online resource and we also take part in the, erm, the two bird surveys that the Bedfordshire Bird Club do every year, which is a, a winter garden bird survey and a summer garden bird survey, erm, you know, so I, I'm a great believer in, in sort of monitoring and recording. It's nice to sort of watch the birds for watching the birds sake but the data, you know, gathering data to inform sort of how populations do is always something I feel really passionate about.

**So building up a database that you can track changes over time.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah, which can inform management and so on and so forth.

**Yeah. So it's sounds like you've got lots of involvement in lots of different organisations.**

**B9** Um.

**Are those organisations, are they self-funded, are they sort of run through voluntary contributions of time and voluntary contributions of money?**

**B9** Yes, I, I think most of them, certainly the, the Bedfordshire Bird Club, erm, Bedfordshire Natural History Society, I think they're, they're all funded through subscriptions and, you know, and that if they do anything particularly involved then they may get funding from external sources but at the moment most of it, yeah, it is voluntary, you know, certainly the bird club, you know, people just put in records and REMOVED collates them, you know, the Bedfordshire Bird Recorder, so yeah, I think most of it is, is voluntary and it's the usual suspects.

**Yeah. And because they, would you say that a lot of them kind of work in these different organised, so they all kind of know each other?**

**B9** Yeah.

**It's a network of like-minded individuals.**

**B9** Yes, very much so.

**Yeah, that's wonderful.**

**B9** You know, and you get people that specialise in certain things so, you know, the, the birding group tend to be mainly birds but some of them will be ooh butterflies and dragonflies as well or so, because REMOVED and I really really like dragonflies so we spend a lot of time searching for dragonflies over summer.

**I noticed your earrings. [laughs]**

**B9** Yeah, and, erm, yeah, and then sort of once the dragonflies disappear it's, it's, you know, birds so they, they keep us going all year and dragonflies.

**Okay, so you've got a nice seasonality there of the different species.**

**B9** Oh yes.

**How lovely, yeah. And would you say, so obviously thinking about your groups, Bedfordshire's the sort of key county that connects all of these different activities but thinking about the members of those groups.**

**B9** Um.

**Are they all, you know, if we were thinking about sociodemographics, is there a sort of breakdown in age or ethnicity or gender?**

**B9** Oh that's, that's an interesting one. I, I would say certainly from the birders that I meet when I'm out and about and this holds true for pretty much anywhere we go, so whether it's, you know, we're spending time in Norfolk birding, erm, Majorca birding and you come across the same types of people and it's, it's generally with the birds, male, middle aged, retired, you know, you get the occasional youngster and we saw more out in Majorca, couples, erm, birding together but certainly round Bedfordshire, you know, you, you turn up at a site and you will see the same middle aged white males, erm. Ethnicity, again White British, predominantly, erm, very, it's unusual to see somebody from an ethnic minority out in nature. It's noticeable when you do see somebody, you know, you kind of think ooh.

**Right, got you, it's the exception.**

**B9** You know, it's nice to see that group using this site.

**Yeah, and does that, I know that obviously the, you know, the animals, the birds, they're the focus.**

**B9** Um.

**But is that ever discussed within the groups would you say, about, because obviously sometimes you must talk about how to, you know, membership changes.**

**B9** Um.

**And membership numbers falling, and I'm interested in asking, just because about if we think about kind of getting more people into nature.**

**B9** Um.

**How do we encourage all different groups in society to access nature and I just wondered whether that was something, as it seems so obvious, whether it was something that's ever been discussed in the group or whether it's just accepted as that's just the way it is.**

**B9** Um, yeah. I think in, in the birding group, erm, it, it always gives me the impression of being, not, not a closed group as such but, you know, I think they're quite happy doing their own thing, erm, and people find their way to it but there's, there doesn't seem to be an active move towards encouraging younger people or people from different ethnic minorities to join in, erm. However, when you look at people like the RSPB, you know, they, they run, erm, events and what have you, that are aimed at families to say well look, isn't this group? You go up to the Lodge and there's nature trails with bits for the kids and it's, so they're very much involved in it and certainly through the, the Greensand Country Project that we do, part of the thing, it's Heritage Lottery funded so part of the thing with that is very much about engaging new audiences and getting more people to, to understand the place that they live in and the nature and the built environment that makes this place special, so, you know, I think within the organisations there tends to be a drive to engage new audiences but I think in the clubs it tends to be a, particularly the specialist clubs, you know, I think they're, they're not exclusive, you know, I think they're always welcoming to new members, erm.

**But you have to find your way to them.**

**B9** Yes, there isn't an active, come and join the Bedfordshire Bird Club, it's.

**Yeah, I guess because they're so focussed on the actual activity.**

**B9** Yeah.

**That you would only want to be part of that if that was your passion anyway.**

**B9** Yes, yeah.

**Yeah, no, it's interesting, it's interesting. So within that, within these, these wonderful world of birding.**

**B9** Um.

**Do you connect with other organisations outside of birding specialisms or? So for instance, you know, nothing is isolated is it, everything's collated?**

**B9** Yeah.

**So do you ever connect with other types of organisations, whether it's for campaigning work or advocacy or is it not like that because actually you're just focused on the birds and so that's beyond your remit?**

**B9** Erm, again I mean I would have to answer that from, I think a personal perspective because I'm not involved. Yeah, I think because I'm not actively involved in sort of the, the management of any of the groups, erm, it would be difficult to say what they do but I, certainly from the forums that I'm on. Forums, or fora? Can never remember.

**No.**

**B9** You know, occasionally there'll be something that comes up on the, on the group mailing list that oh this is happening, can people do this or watch out for this so, you know, within that network then people do. You know, if, if there's a, I don't know, a particular campaign or whatever then people will make others aware of it and try and engage. I mean this.

**Yes, indeed, yes.**

**B9** Prime example, you know, so, somebody in, I think Bedfordshire Natural History Society was probably contacted, they put it on to the Beds Birds forum and I thought ooh, you know, so, yes, there is that kind of connection, but, erm, you know.

**Yeah, wonderful, yeah.**

**B9** And I think, I, I know sometimes there'll, there'll be threads posted on the, the sort of email forum, erm, that was something about management of a pond up in Morden Woods and, you know, people have known it for many years and they've seen the management change and sort of decline basically and as a habitat it's declined and it's, you know, what can we do about it? So there is that kind of interplay I think.

**Yeah. So there's a wider awareness of all the other things that are, in terms of ecological management within the county that everyone's keeping an eye on.**

**B9** Yes, yeah, yeah, I think, you know, because most people, you've got, oh probably getting sweeping generalisations here, erm. I would like to think that most people that are interested in a particular species understand all, all family class order, whatever, you know, that they understand that the management of the habitats for those species is crucial to continuing to enjoy those species, so, you know, I, I think a lot of people have a wider understanding, you know, they're particularly into birds but they understand where they fit into the, and if you don't manage habitat correctly or.

**Yeah, birds will go elsewhere.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah. So, you know, I think there is a wider appreciation of the natural world, it's not just I like looking at birds.

**Yeah. Which kind of also makes me, and I think I know what your answer will be is would you say the organisations that you're part of have any kind of brief when it comes to education or would you say they're just focussed on the work of birding?**

**B9** Yeah, that's an interesting one, erm. Again I think the larger organisations, yes, and I would say the Bedfordshire Natural History Society yes, because I mean they, they've got a, a section, I think it's called Young Gnats or something, erm, which is about encouraging and mentoring young people, erm, so it is, you know, get them while they're young, get them interested and certainly when, when there's events on and BNHS are there, it's very much about what can we do to bring people in? Wow, isn't this amazing? Look at this thing down a microscope or whatever and so I, I think as an overarching group they're very good at that, I'm not so sure that the Bedfordshire Bird Club is the same in that respect, erm, it's. [laughs] oh I'm glad this is anonymised, I think, I think it's a bit more like an old boy's network, you know.

**Okay, yeah, yeah.**

**B9** Erm, but I think they, they are keen to encourage others but I don't, I don't think there's an active to.

**They may not act it.**

**B9** You know, they have a programme of events and, and, but it's talks and walks in places and I, I think, again you have to find it, it's not so much about hey, come and do this, this is fantastic.

**Yeah, they're not stood in the middle of Bedford Square going come on everyone, come to our talk.**

**B9** No, come and look at birds, yeah, it's sort of, for those that, and they're, they're often quite specialist, so, you know, it's, the breeding behaviour of such and such, you know, it's that kind of thing.

**[laughs] Yeah.**

**B9** So, but again sweeping generalisations, it's not all like that.

**Yeah, well no, it's helpful, it's very helpful to know which brings me now to ask about where wetland spaces fit in.**

**B9** Um.

**And particularly the two wetlands that we're using as our case study so Priory Country Park and Millennium Country Park.**

**B9** Yeah.

**How that fits within the vista of your birding.**

**B9** Um.

**So are those spaces that you go to very often, are they kind of on the periphery or?**

**B9** They are now.

**Oh, oh.**

**B9** Well one of them is, Priory is. We've, erm, recently discovered Priory, I mean we, we knew it was there but there, there was a, was it a Red Necked Grebe? And we, we went and twitched, a Red Necked Grebe, I think it was so easy, it was amazing, you just kind of walked to the big lake and there it was, so probably the easiest bit of birding I've ever done but, erm, and on the back of that we then went further afield and we, we kept seeing, erm, reference to Hundred Acres in the, the forums, so we said, we kind of thought oh, you know, let's go and have a look. Wow, fantastic, you know, and it, it's, it's just, you've got the main lake and I knew about the Finger Lakes but I didn't know about all this bit over behind the sewerage treatment works.

**Nobody seems to know about it.**

**B9** And it's amazing, it's beautiful, it's fantastic, you know, erm, we, we went and we, we've mooched around there and, you know, looked at the, the different habitats and it's interesting to see which birds are on what lake and which bits they're using and, oh it's amazing, you know, and the proximity to, to the river and that there's a Cettis Warbler over there but there aren't any over here and, yeah, wonderful. So I'm, yeah, I mean I prefer that bit because there's not as many people, erm, because people just annoy me.

**[laughs]**

**B9** How good is the microphone? [laughs] No, I, it's, it's sometimes.

**Well birds don't really mix do they because in terms of, if you really want to go and be studying the birds.**

**B9** Yeah.

**You don't want hoards of people walking around with their dogs or with other …**

**B9** Yes and no because sometimes, where, when you've got a site that's heavily used, the birds are, the birds get used to it and, you know, so you do see stuff closer in some instances because they're not as spooked by people because people are part of their, their everyday life, so they, they don't tend to swim quite as far out or. I mean it's like this, this grebe on the main lake, you know, absolutely fantastic views of it because it, it was with the other grebes and they're just kind of like yeah, people, whatever, and, yeah, amazing, absolutely fantastic, so.

**So it sounds like that you use the whole site then of Priory Country Park.**

**B9** Um.

**You don't just use the main hides round the lake but you go off to the Finger Lakes.**

**B9** Oh yeah.

**You do the walk up.**

**B9** Yes.

**As you say where the sort of old power station used to be.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah.

**Which I think's, because I think some, a lot of people just stick to the main body of the lake.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And they don't go, I mean it's still a footpath.**

**B9** Yeah.

**So it's still really well marked isn't it?**

**B9** Yeah, it's, it's really, it's a fantastic site, you know, and so accessible as well, you know, it's easily accessible, erm. We, we went up there I, I think it was two weekends in a row and it was after one particularly warm day, erm, we, we went up in the afternoon, we saw some people were going out to the hundred acres and picnicking and when we went back there the next day there was litter everywhere and, you know, it's that kind of thing that annoys me with people using spaces that, you know, and we were with the main area as well, adjacent to the, erm, slalom, the canoe thing, erm, you know, people were down there, big groups of them all having their picnics and this, that and the other and they go away and they'd leave piles of litter everywhere and you just kind of think oh.

**So how can, it's unfathomable isn't it?**

**B9** Yeah, and I think, you know, that's something, aesthetically it's unpleasant, erm, but from a wildlife perspective as well, you know, having all this stuff blowing around and, you know, animals getting caught up in it and, oh it's, yeah, it just. So we, we take a bag out with this and we, we pick litter, so it's.

**So you combine your birding with litter picking?**

**B9** Yeah.

**I mean, it's a hard one to answer isn't it? Do you think it's a sense that somebody else will pick it up?**

**B9** Yes.

**Or is it there's a lack of bins and so they say well if there was a bin there I'd put it away but there's no bin.**

**B9** No, absolutely not because one pile there was a bin, no more than, I don't know, twenty feet away, and it wasn't full, it wasn't overflowing.

**No, no, it's really shocking isn't it?**

**B9** But it's just they don't, I don't know, they, they don't care, they, they do think it's somebody else's job to pick it up perhaps, I don't know, you know.

**That's another research subject area isn't it?**

**B9** Oh.

**Interviewing people who've dropped litter.**

**B9** Yeah, why, why?

**Exactly, I'd love to understand why, could be all sorts of reasons why.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah.

**Anyway that's for another day.**

**B9** Another, another research and I'll happily participate in that one.

**Thank you, right, add that to the list. But when you access, thinking just about Priory Country Park now.**

**B9** Um.

**So your, the times when you choose to access.**

**B9** Um.

**Will they be dependent upon actually when you're free to go, were they dependent upon when the birds might be there or is it a time of day?**

**B9** It's a combination, erm, you know, the, the first visit we had was, I think mid-afternoon, which isn't, isn't generally a good time but that's when we were free, erm, and then, you know, we kind of scoped it out and thought wow, this is actually really good, this, this deserves more visits, erm, and so we would then look at something and get up early and go and visit it early to see and sometimes it is about just visiting at different times of day to see what point stuff is there because, you know, you get different things at different times of day and, yeah.

**And as a female birder and presumably sometimes you go on your own.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Do you feel that it's accessible and safe and you feel quite comfortable being in that space? Because I know you go to the woods on your own.**

**B9** Yeah.

**So you're used to being but somehow is it different being in a more urban green environment if that makes sense?**

**B9** Oh that's, that's a really, that's an interesting one because I, you know, I spend a lot of time in nature and certainly over the last few years, most of that has been spent with REMOVED, you know, so I don't often visit spaces on my own now, we, we tend to go together, erm. When I was birding or just generally walking, walking on my own, I was fine in the areas that I was comfortable with and I'm very happy to be in a space on my own, you know, I, I don't feel threatened by them, I probably actually feel more concerned in an urban space than I do in, I don't know Pedley Woods or Flitwick Moor because, you know, I, I feel that if there are ne'er do wells, they're going to capitalise on the fact that there is a nice footpath with nice little undergrowth either side blah blah blah blah, easily accessible from town, you know, so I would probably feel a little bit more edgy somewhere like that and the, sometimes the kind of people you just get coming through, you know, so I, I would feel slightly more on edge I think on my own as, as a female, particularly carrying expensive.

**And what, well yes, that's it, the equipment, yeah.**

**B9** Photography equipment, yes, erm.

**Yeah. Do you think, what do you think could be done to maybe alleviate those anxieties?**

**B9** Oh. [pause] I really don't know because the, the kind of solutions that I think people would leap towards, which would be better lighting and this, that and the other, are all the kind of things that I wouldn't want to see in that environment, you know, I don't want street lights all over the place. One of the reasons I love the village where I live is because there are no street lights, erm. Oh, [laughs] I don't know, I, I really don't know because so many things, you kind of think oh, you know, the easy thing would be to have more, more staff around patrolling, you know, have rangers but they've cut the number of rangers, you know. I won't even go there, [laughs] you know, that's just nonsensical, erm, you know, so pretty much any, any solution requires more resource which requires more money, more funding, erm, and, you know, in my humble opinion most of these things go back to a lack of awareness by local authorities of the importance of these spaces for multiple uses and multiple users and, you know, they just see them as a, as a nice to have and not worthy of adequate funding, you know, so, yeah, pretty much any solution that you put forward would be, you know, oh no, we can't possibly do that, that's far too expensive, you know, we, we need to make cuts, we need to make cuts and, yeah, what gets cut? Rangers.

**Yeah.**

**B9** [laughs] So, which is just, yeah.

**Yeah, I mean that's it isn't it? If we want to encourage people to use wetland spaces or to access green space, we have to make those environments feel safe and accessible.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And as you said that doesn't mean, CCTV cameras isn't what we want.**

**B9** No.

**We want there to be people on the ground.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Ensuring that those spaces are safe for everyone to use.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah.

**It's very frustrating.**

**B9** And then it comes down to volunteers as with so much, certainly in the, the conservation sphere, you know, the, the reliance on volunteers to provide wardening duties, all this, that and the other, and again I don't think they get adequate support to do that, so, because local authorities don't have the resource to train, to equip blah blah blah.

**And again, if we were to think about the cohort of volunteers that are active.**

**B9** Um, um.

**In various organisations, would you say they also reflect the profile, this is going to sound like a leading question, do they reflect the profile of the members of the organisation? So we're talking about people who are older.**

**B9** Ah hum.

**Who are white, maybe there's a bit more of a gender split.**

**B9** Yeah, I think there, I think there's a greater gender generally, erm, but yes, I, I think the vast majority it's white British retired because they, they've got the time and the interest to do it, erm. One of my, my staff members here is early twenties and she's volunteering with the RSPB, so there is a younger cohort going through but generally speaking I think the, the ones that you tend to see are, are the older.

**Yeah, because it seems to break down that way that you've got people in their early twenties who are doing volunteering because they either love the.**

**B9** Um.

**The subject matter or because they're trying to get experience.**

**B9** Yes.

**You get older ones who are retired because they've got the time and they've got the experience.**

**B9** Big gap in the middle, yeah.

**And how do we address that?**

**B9** Yeah.

**How do we address the people in their early to mid-thirties and their forties who are just not present in those spaces, you know, apart from a bit of cycling or a family picnic?**

**B9** Yeah, yeah.

**How do we get them to enjoy nature?**

**B9** Yeah.

**Now this moves on really to this, this idea of, one of the things we're really interested in the project is to explore a sense of place.**

**B9** Ah.

**So, you know, you've talked now about how much you've enjoyed your recent visit to the Priory Country Park.**

**B9** Um.

**Is that true for Millennium Country Park or is that just a space that actually?**

**B9** It's a space I don't know, this is the thing, it's not somewhere that I've tended to visit and I don't really know why because there's some good birding there. I, we've been to Stewartby Lake and we've been to Brogborough Lake, erm, but we don't tend to go to Marston Vale and I think with, with both of us it tends to be, it's quite difficult to get us into country parks, you know, as soon as you put country park on the end of something and it's got facilities both of us tend to go nee, let's go that way, [laughs] it's, because we want that wilder, wilder experience, we don't want hoards of people. It's like, you know, we went to Rushmere Country Park and it was hellish and it's such a shame because it's a gorgeous place but so many people, you know, and you're, you're wanting to sort of look at birds and you've got people jogging through like this all loud and shouty and you just come to.

**Ah. [laughs] So it's actually the people, it's other people that maybe determine which spaces you access.**

**B9** Yeah, definitely, and when, you know, erm, just, example on holiday. We were getting up at five in the morning, out of the villa by seven so that we could be at sites we wanted to be at for, you know, the prime bit of birding in the morning and before people turn up, you know, and you could pretty much set your watch by it, ten, eleven o'clock they'd be in and it's the same over here, you know, people start late and then, you know, by, the time we're coming back often the crowds are building, or, crowds, the population is, is building and, yeah, we, we sort of think right, we've seen all the really good stuff.

**That's it, and we've got the best of the day.**

**B9** Yeah, we've had the best of it and.

**You do feel a great sense of smugness don't you if you go somewhere early?**

**B9** Totally, yeah.

**And it's, the light is beautiful.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And it's quiet and you think I've got something that no-one else has.**

**B9** Yeah. [laughs]

**Which makes me, again, jump back into that idea of sense of place.**

**B9** Yeah.

**So it sounds to me like a sense of place is also connected to time in that.**

**B9** Um.

**What you're, what is very special for you is these wonderful places where you have that space to yourself.**

**B9** Um, ah hum.

**At a particular time of the day.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Or time of the year.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Or maybe even weather when people aren't going to go out to places when the weather's a bit drizzly or it's windy or.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah. This, I mean I think when you're.

[interruption]

Yeah, I think, I mean it's interesting that you say that sense of place because it's one of the things that we're doing with the REMOVED is we're building a sense of place toolkit, so, you know, I think sense of place is, is an incredibly important thing, you know, just having that connection with somewhere and understanding why it's, it's special or valued or, you know, learning to look at it, learning to really absorb everything about it and just sometimes, just to sit somewhere and be quiet and let it happen around you, you know, and, and being, being a part of it, you know, you're, you're not just a visitor, you're, yeah.

**Yeah, actually going back to that place.**

**B9** That connection, the connection to a place that you, you feel, because I, I think so much of our, our daily lives, it's about things being provided for us, being entertained, being, you know, input, input, input all the time and just having, having a space where you can just sit back and slow down and, and notice, you know, just look and accept what's going on around you and just take that time, think oh, you know, and to enjoy the way the light's playing over somewhere, you know, the clouds over a hillside or the, the change in, in the water as, as, you know, dappled sunlight and the birds, different birds singing, different birds coming in and it's, it's wonderful, you know, you've got a cloudy bit and then all of a sudden the sun comes out and a host of butterflies comes up, you know, it's, it's magic and it's, it's being able to just sit back and observe that quietly and thoughtfully I suppose in a way, it, it's, yeah, you know, instead of rushing through all the time, we've got to, we've got to do this, we've got to be there, we've got to, you know, aagh, just going ooh, and realising that there's all of this around us and that we're, we're just actually, just a little part of it.

**Because I talked to somebody yesterday about exactly that.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Which is that we need to change the tempo that we operate at once we come into these spaces.**

**B9** Yes, yeah.

**Because we have to be still and observe what's around us.**

**B9** Yes.

**And give nature time to.**

**B9** Yes.

**Kind of relax with us there.**

**B9** Yes.

**Because it's almost as if we want to go through everything.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Somebody was saying that, you know, it's like in a morning they want to do their Tesco shopping, in the afternoon we're going to go to the wetland space, in the evening we have to go to football practice.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah.

**And the day is full of deadlines and logistics.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah.

**And moving and, rather than just being in the moment.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah, totally.

**And I think that's what so interesting, for the people who love wetland spaces.**

**B9** Um.

**That's what it provides them with.**

**B9** Yeah.

**It provides them with a kind of slow down button.**

**B9** Yeah.

**To really absorb what's going around and what's happening.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah, but you have to take time, and I mean it's interesting about, you saying there about nature, just taking time to accept you in there, you can't just walk up to somewhere and say right, entertain me, you know, just, well where is everything? You know, you, you've got to, you've got to give it time and it's, I mean we're, we've just spent ten days doing that and it's magic, you know, you walk into, you, you sit in a hide or something and you come in, a hide to go, oh god, you know, people come in, they're aagh, you think oh come on, you know, I know it's a hide and the birds are probably used to it but just give them a little bit of, but yeah, just sit, sitting down on the edge of a, a bit of water and just nestling down and waiting and just seeing and stuff comes closer and all of a sudden, you know, a sedge warbler will start singing about three feet away from you, you see the reeds rustling so you know where it is and oh, I mean it is, it's just, and you get that glimpse and it's just, oh, magic.

**It's really interesting what you say there about nestling in the trees, you know, waiting for nature.**

**B9** Um.

**Because, I don't know if you've read a guy called Rod Gibblett?**

**B9** No.

**He has written something called, I think it's called Black Swan, a Wetland Year.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And he lives next to a wetland.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And he just, it's just a document really of a year of that.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And basically being in this wetland space.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And even that documenter, he sits down in a tree room.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And he just sits there and he starts to see things and he hears things.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And he catches glimpses of things.**

**B9** Yeah.

**But this can't be rushed and it's not.**

**B9** No.

**You can't, as you said, you can't go there expecting the same thing to, in fact that's the joy of it, it's different each time isn't it?**

**B9** Yeah, yeah, um, and each different time of day, each different weather condition, you know, if the wind's coming from the north, if the wind's coming from the east, you know, where's stuff going to be? Is it going to be over this side of the lake, is it going to be over that side of the lake? You know, where's, where's the food being blown over to? Right, everything's going to be over there. It's, and it, it's such a wonderful opportunity just to step back and stop and it’s so, so rewarding.

**So another aspect of this wonderful project we're doing is about health and wellbeing.**

**B9** Um.

**And I wonder from your perspective how that fits into what you do.**

**B9** [laughs] Massively. Erm, I don't know whether I said to you before but I, I suffer with depression, I, depression and anxiety, erm, have done for many years, I was off work last year for a month with stress, depression and anxiety, erm, and being out in nature, getting my fix of nature is pretty much what keeps me sane, erm, you know, yes, I'm on the little white tablets as well but, you know, it's, it's important to me to have that time in nature, erm, you know, I, I surround myself with it, it's, because it gives me that space to be calm and relaxed and to just, to be in the moment, you know, to, to, I don't know. Every time I hear a Cettis Warbler it makes me smile, you know, because they're just fantastic little birds.

**[laughs]**

**B9** And I've got photographs of them now, finally, erm, they're very frustrating because some of them.

**Are they easier to hear then to see?**

**B9** Oh god, yeah, it's, you, you pretty much only ever hear a Cettis, you'll see this brown flash and then it'll shout, you know, it, it's this incredibly loud call and it's, it's a diminutive little brown bird.

**It's gives out more than it’s size would allow…**

**B9** Oh yeah.

**I'm going to now Google Cetti’s Warbler.**

**B9** Cetti’s Warbler.

**I can hear the little.**

**B9** I can, I can provide you with.

**Oh. [laughs]**

**B9** It's, I mean yeah, it's absolutely unmistakable and they, they are down on the, the Hundred Acre, that.

**Are they?**

**B9** Yes, but they, they are fantastic, and for ages I didn't know what it was and then found out and now every time I hear a Cetti’s, it, because it's just such an explosion of sound.

[sound playing]

It's just, it's wonderful.

**Aww.**

**B9** Yes and poor, poor, but it's just this cascade of noise and I mean that's quite quiet.

**I love that, that sounds like it says listen, no listen to me, listen to me right now.**

**B9** Absolutely, yes, definitely, I mean that, but they, they tend to, I think they fly then call, so you'll see this, and it just goes straight into the reeds and then shouts at, you think argghh.

**If you shouted first I could pick where you are.**

**B9** Exactly, yes, yeah, but I, I found one that was posing really quite nicely, so, you know, it, it's, I mean, and again for me bird song is, is a massive thing for me and I, I love learning it because they're, so often you can't see the critter but being able to identify it by sound and you, you can sit there and you build this soundscape of what's around you, you know, and you sit there and think oh there's Cetti’s over there, I've got a Sedge Warbler there and a Reed Warbler's over there and ooh, ooh, is that a Whitethroat, you know, and it's, yeah, I, it's.

**Something magical about.**

**B9** Totally magical.

**Being immersed in it.**

**B9** Yeah, and it is, it's, it's, because I think, for me learning birdsong has been huge because, you know, otherwise you walk through and it's just this sound but as I say to build that soundscape of what, what's there and I mean you get such great birds in wetlands, you know, from Waders, Passerines, everything, they're, they're all there and, oh it's, it is, it's just heavenly and sitting there and taking that time to sit and then, you know, you'll see a Moorhen come creeping out or you'll hear, erm, a Water Rail and if you sit long enough you might be lucky enough that it comes out here to the reeds, you know, it is, it's just that, it's magic and I find, with, with the, the anxiety and depression, being able to just take that time to sit and focus on other things, other than the, the stresses that cause it is, it's a life saver, you know, it really is, it's, it's a real sanity preserver.

**So it sounds like it, it kind of does everything in that it's your mental wellbeing.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Your physical wellbeing.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Emotional wellbeing.**

**B9** Yeah.

**That you feel this connection to the spaces.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And these wonderful birds.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And when you talk to your other birders, do you get that same sense of this is why, you know, you get out in all weathers and at all times of the day?**

**B9** Yeah, yeah.

**Because getting up at five am on your holiday is quite a big ask.**

**B9** Pretty committed. [laughs]

**Thinking I don't know if I'd do that, but that idea of, because the benefits that you gain from that effort.**

**B9** Um.

**Is so much greater.**

**B9** And the rewards are huge, you know, and, and it, oh on, like you say on so many levels, you know, there, there's the, the health and wellbeing, erm, generally, you know, because I'm, I'm relatively fit because we spend a lot of time walking and just, just being outdoors, you know, it's just good to be outdoors, not staring at a flipping screen, erm, you know, it, it's, because it's so different to fit anything else that we do in our daily lives, you know, if you don't take that time you are rushing from one, you know, it's up in the morning, get the wash on, get the wash out on the line, get into work, erm, come home, cook dinner, collapse exhausted on to the sofa and watch telly, you know, and it's sort of oh God, but just having, having that time and I, I try and get out somehow, somewhere every day, you know, I, I cycle work most days now.

**On the electric bike.**

**B9** Yeah, it's amazing, erm, and that's made such a difference because again it's made me slow down, you know, and I don't just come in the five mile route into work because that's easy and it's too quick so I generally do about ten miles in and often about fifteen miles home.

**Wow.**

**B9** And it takes me through, you know, and because you're slower you see stuff and, but, and sadly no wetlands but.

[laughter]

Erm, but yeah, you know, I just think the, the natural, the natural environment is, is crucial to, to wellbeing, you know, we, we've lost that connection, erm, nature, nature is something that happens out there for a lot of people and you don't have to be an expert, you, you know, I, I take it to extremes to some extent, you know, I, the birds on the bird ID, recording this, that and the other, it's all pretty committed but you can just go out there and enjoy it and that, getting people out there I think then encourages, you then start to question something, you know, what is that bird? That, that one's different to that one, oh I wonder why and it builds that, that connection.

**So it's just getting people to have an exposure to nature then build their confidence up.**

**B9** Yeah, definitely, definitely, you know, it's, because and I think sometimes people are frightened to access new places, erm, and I think there's an element of oh it's not for me, you know, I, I'm not, I'm not a naturalist, I don't know anything about this, you know, and so I'm not going to go there, I'm going to stick to the well-marked route, paved route round the lake because that's safe, that's, I know, I know what I'm going to experience and it's not, it's about just trying to push people out slightly, come and have a look at this, it's really amazing and even if it's just because it's a different view or, you know, because they're, not everybody cares about birds, not everybody's fascinated by them but, you know, just seeing a lake with a load of birds on is aesthetically pleasing, you know.

**Yeah. So how then do you think we can begin to encourage people to do that? I mean so for instance, not that it's anyone's responsibility, what could be done do you think, what kind of education campaigns or, I don't know, very simple things like maps that people can go off or courses that people could do to just do some basic map reading because I think that's a skill that seems to be lost?**

**B9** Oh yes because we all rely on GPS, you know.

**To, exactly.**

**B9** Yes, and we don't actually know where we are, so, which is not good, erm, yeah, I think basic map reading is a good one, it's something that we're doing on the landscape partnership is, is we, I think the ramblers are doing something with us to encourage people to learn how to use a map, erm. I think you could do things like orienteering, you know, why not at Priory run orienteering things for families? What a great way to get people out and to move them away the Honey Pot park because, you know, most people when they visit a site they'll only go, I think it's about three hundred metres or something from the, the loos, the cafe and the car park, you know, which is great for us because we know that as far as, as quickly as we can get away from that we've left the people behind so, you know, part of me doesn't want any more people out there but I do want people, there's such an amazing world out there and so many people don't appreciate or value or understand it and I don't expect everybody to be an expert in oh, let's look over here because it's, it's marvellous wetland, you know, it's just nice, you know, it's nice to look at, it's a nice place to be, erm, go out and enjoy it and if that peaks your interest, fantastic, even if you discover a new place and you just like it because it looks nice, if that's under threat you're more likely to say oi, hang on a minute, this is an important resource for us, you know, we go there, or, you know, we, we've been using that for fifteen years, we've had our family picnics there and this, that and the other, you can't fill it in or put a road through it or, it, it's about making people aware of that wider environment and why it's important.

**Yeah. So it sounds like in some ways if the wetland spaces that we've been looking at, so Priory Country Park and Millennium Country Park are, if you like, you know, they're, they pull people in because they're seen as accessible, safe, what, you know, green spaces.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah.

**There's something that those sites could do in terms of encouraging people to explore more, or develop a sense of confidence about being in nature, that could be a stepping stone.**

**B9** Yeah, yeah.

**To, because even if you're not particularly drawn to those spaces you might find some other spaces but that's a stepping stone to that isn't it?**

**B9** Yeah, I think you, you've got to give people confidence to step out of their comfort zone, erm, and step away from the familiar, I mean I know REMOVED and I sometimes we, we, when, because time is, is valuable, you know, we don't have a lot of free time so our choices about which sites we go to are largely determined by our familiarity with them and what we know we're going to experience, we know that that's a good site therefore we will visit it and I think this is something very much with recording, you, you get these recording hotspots because people know they're reliable, erm. When we try a new space, it's kind of like ooh, you know, is it going to live up to our expectations, is it going to give us what we want, are we going to be disappointed, are we going to wish that we'd actually gone to this other one instead? And we're getting better at just saying right, we're going to go there because we're gaining confidence, we, we're getting better at bird watching, therefore we are more confident in trying new spaces for birding, erm, but, you know, and I think for, for other people it is about realising that they don't have to be next to a loo, they don't have to have a cafe on hand, you know, they've got legs, they can actually walk, you know, it's, you don't and I, I think some of that is down to people, people don't know how to use the countryside, erm, I don't, I don't quite know how to explain it but it, it's, I suppose so much, so many places are like don't do this, don't do that, don't go here, you know, there's a lot of negative stuff out there, you know, private, keep out, erm, you can't go into this area but it doesn't say why you can't go into this area so I think with places like Priory it's important to give information as to why an area perhaps is private and don't just put nature conservation area, put why it's a nature conservation area, say, you know, this isn't accessible, you know, we, this, this particular area is really important for these species and this is why we'd prefer that you didn't go in there, you know, it's, it's, it's giving that, just that little bit of extra information, it doesn't have to be a two grand signboard, you know, it, it can be a laminated thing stuck on the gate or something, just, just saying why, you know, and I think encouraging people to use spaces, erm, I, I heard something recently on, on Radio Four, there, there was something, I forget the two organisations, erm, but they were talking about picking wildflowers and I think it was, oh, can't remember which organisation is was but one of them was saying look, you know, we don't mind if people pick daisies make daisy chains or buttercups or this, that and the other, you know. As a kid we used to sit and make daisy chains and we'd get buttercups and put them under our chins and I don't think stuff like that is done as much now because people, we're bombarded with negative things about the natural environment and that, you know, you mustn't do this, you mustn't do that, erm, your kids can't go den building here, we, we had that on Flitwick Moor actually, not Flitwick Moor, on Duck End Nature Reserve, little wetland site, kids were going down there and building dens, the wardens were then coming along and taking them down, you know, and, oh. Yeah, you're going to get a bit of undesirable behaviour now and again but for goodness sake, you know, do we have to have organised den building? Why can't kids just go on to a site and build dens? You know, I think we, we need to be a little bit less uptight.

**Yes, because how else are we going to get kids to explore nature if we're saying you're allowed to do it then but you're not allowed to do it then?**

**B9** Yeah, yeah.

**It's kind of, it's.**

**B9** It's, you know, why does everything have to be risk assessed and managed and, you know, yes, oh come to Priory Country Park on this day, we're going to have a den building session, oh why not such the soul out of it?

**[laughs]**

**B9** You know, it, it's, kids should be able to go there and, in a little glade, I mean if you want to make it organised leave stuff out for them to, you know, so that they're not maybe sawing a bit of tree down, leave some dead fall around so that they can make dens, encourage it, you know, and if you want to manage it why not say this is a den building area, you know, feel free to use this stuff?

**Yeah.**

**B9** Great, get, get them out there.

**Yeah, a little bit less hands-on maybe all the time.**

**B9** Yeah.

**People use their imagination.**

**B9** Yeah, I, I think we've got too, we're very, we've very risk averse, erm, and I think equally so with parents, you know, parenting, we, we've become too, we expect everything to be provided for us, we, we expect kids to be, well like, like I say, you know, it has to be a den building session, you wouldn't just turf your kids out and go, you know, dis. I used to disappear off for the day, you know, it was safe and actually it's no more dangerous now, there's just the perception that it's more dangerous, you know, and if, if you, if you encourage, if you take your kids out into these spaces and teach them how to use them, then they can go out in relative safety and yeah, they might fall out of the occasional tree or do something stupid but hey.

**That's what experimenting as a child's all about isn't it?**

**B9** Yeah, yeah, you know, we, we wrap everything up too much in cottonwool and bureaucracy and rules, regulations, risk assessment and it's does, it just sucks.

**Stifling isn't it?**

**B9** Sucks all the joy out of it.

**Yeah. Thinking about risk assessments makes me move smoothly on to mosquitoes.**

**B9** Eeh, mosquitoes, evilness, evil mosquitoes (laughs)

**[laughs] Are, being a birder you must come across insects quite a lot.**

**B9** Oh yes. [laughs]

**So you're familiar with the world of insects.**

**B9** Oh yes.

**And then we have the world of the biting insect.**

**B9** Oh yes, oh yes, yes.

**So within that world of the biting insect, what's your experience of being on site and being bitten and can you identify who's biting you? Are you not bothered who bites you?**

**B9** I'm not generally bothered who bites me, erm, I, I've had a couple of nasty horsefly bites, I, I find those far worse than anything else and you never know the, can I swear? [laughs]

**You can.**

**B9** You never know the buggers have actually bitten you until the, at least with, I assume, a mossie, you sort of feel a little tickle then a little like, and it's like oh you, [slap] so quite often squashed mess and, I can't actually identify what it is but I, I'm not very good at ident, ID'ing them, I mean I, I tend to put things in, into midges and mosquitoes are, are the two main flying insecty things that I figure, yeah.

**Yeah, and it could be either one, yeah.**

**B9** Yeah. Erm, I've had experience of, I think Scottish midges that are different to the little tiny, because yeah, you get little tiny bitey things which are probably gnats or, I don't know.

**Yeah, probably.**

**B9** Yeah, and then, because mos, erm, the Scottish bitey things, midges and they, they were quite chunky, I, and yeah.

**Um, where they grow up there.**

**B9** And ooh, they're not nice but.

**Thinking very specifically about the wetland sites in Bedfordshire have?**

**B9** Um. Oh, I've, I've not really had that much of a problem I don't think, erm, different times of day yes, erm, evening definitely more activity and it's, it's more the irritation of them sort of landing on you rather than being bitten, you know, I don't, because I never walk where I'm absolutely covered in bites, erm, I've recently started taking Vitamin B complex because allegedly that helps to deter, and I haven't had many bites it has to be said. However, my other half, it's a carefully controlled experiment here, my other half has been taking it as well and he gets bitten to death so, you know.

**There's no right, yeah.**

**B9** There's no, you know, it appears to work for me, erm.

**Yeah, but for instance would you be deterred from using the sites because of mosquitoes or do you just accept that they are part of the natural world?**

**B9** I accept they're part of it, if, if I want to go and enjoy a site, I have to put up with whatever it throws at me, you know, whether that's biting insects or not, or stingy insects or, yeah, spiders, erm, and I tend to take, you know, I've got a mosquito net that I'll wear if I'm going to be sitting in a hide or somewhere in the evening I'll use a mosquito net or I use insect repellent, I'll, I'll do citronella or something like that, erm, because they're, they're an irritation but then they won't get in the way of me enjoying somewhere, it's, yeah.

**Yeah, so that's interesting. So there's, it's not the case then that there are particular sites that you won't visit because you think no I will just get bitten, I'm not going to go there.**

**B9** No.

**You will access all spaces at all times.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And you just go prepared.**

**B9** Yeah.

**For that eventuality.**

**B9** Basically, yeah.

**And over the time you've been birding have you noticed any changes in mosquito populations, up, down, just the same, not on your radar so?**

**B9** It's not, not really on my radar because, you know, it's just, it goes, it goes with the territory quite literally, erm, so I, I don't, it's not something that particularly bothers me, erm.

**And not something that your fellow birders have ever talked about in any group discussions?**

**B9** No, because.

**Ever said keep away from Priory, it's a mosquito nightmare.**

**B9** No, no, because, you know, I, I tend, again I think it's because we're outdoory kind of people you just take the rough with the smooth, you know, you know if you go to, and I, I don't, a lot of it depends on the wetland and the type of wetland, you know, you're going to get over a lake I, I think you're going to get far fewer and again this is my perception, than if you're going to a boggy swampy place, you know. If I go down Flitwick Moor I know I'm going to have issues with, but then I, I sat badger watching in a wood and been bitten to death, so, you know, it, it's not, I think the, the perception of wetlands as being places where you're going to get bitten to death is wrong because, you know, I, I spend a lot of time in a lot of different places and if I go out late evening around dusk I'm going to get bitten by something, so. I mean the badger watching is probably the worst one ever, you know, and that, that was sitting in a wood and I, I was just, I mean I ended up with sort of covered up to there just to try and I had my hands all because it just was the little buggers, oh.

**Just the live stuff.**

**B9** Oh god, it was awful.

**Do you think, because, you know, part of the project is trying to give wetland site managers advice about mosquito management.**

**B9** Um.

**Do you think if there ended up being say signage about mosquitoes in wetlands that might deter people from accessing wetlands?**

**B9** Um.

**As in they might become aware of a problem they didn't know existed.**

**B9** Ooh. I think it would depend on the signage and it would depend on the message that the signage is giving, if it's giving a negative impression of ooh, you know, beware, mosquitoes and what have you, whereas if it's, if it gives some information about, you know, what they are, that the females only bite and, you know, if you're bothered about this, you might like to avoid the site at these times but the rest of, you know, during the day, not really an issue but if you do want to come down here and sit in the evening then be aware that there might, and, you know, I think it is, it, instead of saying, you know, erm, there will be, there may be because on one evening there might but if the wind's in another direction or it is windy they might not be, you know, so.

**And for instance when you've done your birding overseas.**

**B9** Um.

**Have you ever been on alert for mosquitoes? Because for instance recently in France they gave an alert for the South of France with the tiger mosquito.**

**B9** Um, um.

**Which has the potential to carry the Zika virus and that's not something that's part of your kind of birding vista?**

**B9** No.

**No.**

**B9** No, I mean I, I just, because on, on holiday we spend a lot of time, certainly in Majorca, we spend a lot of time on wetlands, you know, that, that's one of the main focusses, you know, we, we rented a villa on a wetland and we visited S'Albufera three, four times, during the week, which, I mean I assume you're familiar with the S'Alburfera.

**No.**

**B9** It's, it's Ramsar site, it's, I think sixteen kilometres square, erm, it's, it's massive, absolutely massive and if you're going to get mosquitoes anywhere it's going to be there and we were there morning, we were there evening, erm, we were there throughout the day and yeah, I mean they're there, they're a bit irritating but, I think that's where REMOVED got bitten most, erm, but they didn't really trouble, trouble me. [laughs] So.

**[laughs] You and your vitamin B.**

**B9** I think I had, I had one bite there and I had a couple of bites on my cards and that was it.

**That's nothing is it?**

**B9** But, you know, you can get that by sitting down on the grass somewhere and something will bite you.

**You can, yeah.**

**B9** Erm, you know, biting insects are part and parcel to me of being out in, in nature, you know, it's, and that may well but, erm, yeah, I think, yeah, I probably don't think twice about visiting a site because of insects but it, it's more time of day for me and that, that would be any site and I think oh, you know, if we're going out in the evening. Our back garden, you know, we sit out and watch the bats and as dusk falls, oh, you get, again bitten to death.

**Yeah, so it's.**

**B9** So.

**It's, as you said, you can be anywhere that's not indoors and you.**

**B9** Yeah.

**You run a risk don't you?**

**B9** Totally, you know, it's, so I think a lot of it is perception and education, erm, yeah.

**I'll move on to the very final section of the interview.**

**B9** Okey dokey.

**Because I appreciate the time that you've given so far and this has got the wonderful title of Contemporary Social Representations, which sounds quite a mouthful but essentially what we're trying to look at is understanding how particular organisations conceive that, how wetlands are perceived by the public.**

**B9** Um.

**I probably didn't explain that terribly well but back in the day wetlands have always been associated with, you know, kind of barren land.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Let's just drain it, let's put agriculture on it, you know, let's do something more productive with it.**

**B9** Yeah. [laughs]

**These are unproductive sites, now I think there has been definitely shift away from that.**

**B9** Um.

**So when we think about social representations, we're not just talking about say education campaigns.**

**B9** Um.

**We're also thinking about policy that's changed, we're thinking about say art and literature that might influence how people feel or pieces of music.**

**B9** Ah hum.

**Television, film, all these different influences which change how we perceive space.**

**B9** Um.

**So I wondered from your perspective, your birding perspective.**

**B9** Um.

**If you feel there's any, what do you think might have been the main drivers to changing those perceptions and where are those perceptions now? So is it that people just look at green space and go oh my gosh, it's green space and it's all one big generic green space?**

**B9** Um.

**Or do you think that wetlands have a particular take, you know?**

**B9** Ooh, interesting one, erm, I think probably you can put it into a couple of different areas, you know, you've got those that know and appreciate wetlands and just generally green spaces, you know, that you might look at a patch of rough grass and, you know, some, one person will say oh god, isn't that a mess, shouldn't they, you know, shouldn't they mow it, shouldn't they make it nice and neat? And other people go god, what a fantastic habitat and, you know, there, there's the group of us that look at a wetland and see that and there's the group that look at a wetland and think um, erm. I think perhaps the profile of wetlands has improved because I think there's been more emphasis placed on them in the media perhaps in terms of flood prevention or flood mitigation and attenuation, erm, and carbon sequestration, erm, I think these kind of things have, they, they appear more in the news and in newspapers and Countryfile, you know, I think Countryfile, I don't watch it but I know a lot of people who do, who are sort of like on the edges of being interested, it's a nice fluffy programme to watch on a, whatever day it's on, erm, and I think because of that people are sort of thinking and Springwatch and Autumnwatch and this, that and the other, you know, they're all things that are bringing people and raising the profile of these places, erm. I don't really know where I'm going with this, it's, erm. I think, yeah, I think sort of increased exposure in the media has perhaps changed perceptions and changed people's views, although I still think people see them as a slightly mysterious place, you know, it's, it's perhaps not, people understand lake, you know, a lake in a park, they get that. The Finger Lakes, ooh not sure, you know, it's, it's a bit more.

**It's a bit murky and it's a little bit muddled isn't it?**

**B9** Yeah.

**You can't really see where the path is leading really.**

**B9** Yeah.

**You do really feel off the beaten track once you're down there.**

**B9** Yeah, which is, and again I think that's lovely in that kind of environment that you've got the main loop that goes round and then you can go off into this little and try and encourage people to go down there and that it's okay, that going off the, the tarmacked path is okay, erm. I, I still think more could and should be done to raise the profile, you know, because we, we concentrate a lot on pretty flowers and meadows and, yes, they're, they're all, they're all very important but I think people still, and media still don't really get wetlands, you know, and that, and what is classed as a wetland, you know, from a lake to a bog, you know, I mean bog, or swamp, they're, they're not really words that.

**Inspire confidence …**

**B9** Exactly, [laughs] I'm going to this really nice bog, you know, it, it's just not, erm, yeah.

**Yeah, so it sounds like then they're still work to be done in that you get these, almost pristine wetland sites, you know.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Ones that are easy to access, good signage.**

**B9** Yeah.

**Good footpaths, toilets, facilities.**

**B9** Yeah.

**But when we get to more, to less managed spaces.**

**B9** Um.

**There's still a gap there, where people don't quite know what to do or how to envisage these spaces.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And that programmes like Countryfile help and like you said, you know.**

**B9** Yeah.

**More scientific information about the importance of these spaces for.**

**B9** Um.

**All sorts of different ecological reasons and ecosystem services reasons, but more work needs to be done really.**

**B9** I, I would say there's a, there's a lot more work that needs to be done to, to, I don't know, I don't know whether it's even about changing, well yeah, it is to some degree changing perceptions of, of wetland spaces, it's, it's getting people to appreciate and understand the, the diversity of wetland spaces, so, you know, from, from your, your lake to your bog, erm, and why each element of that is special and important and if you take the time to go and enjoy them, you can see a whole new sort of.

**Yeah, new vista.**

**B9** Yeah.

**And I've only got a couple more questions but in particular I'm interested, we touched on it earlier about austerity, about.**

**B9** Um, um.

**Government cuts, do you think that has an impact on?**

**B9** Massive, yeah, absolutely massive, erm, oh, I get on my high horse again with this. It's, erm, oh, I suppose, you know, anybody in any sector will want to shout loudest about the thing that they're most passionate about, I still feel that Government, you know, they, they mouth platitudes about being the greenest government and the importance of looking after habitats from a point of view not, not just of health and wellbeing but the economic importance and I, I think the, the fact that there is more of a drive towards recognising the economic importance of, of these spaces but they still haven't fully taken that onboard, it's something that I don't think is sufficiently understood, erm, and particularly in, in terms of flood relief, flood prevention, attenuation mitigation, erm, just, just, I mean I'm passionate about soil, I've got a real thing about soil and the fact that, you know, people look at soil, oh it's just dirt, it's not important. It's the foundation of everything, if we cock that up, we're screwed, you know, and all of these things have to work together, it's, you know, an ecosystem, you can't neatly package it as, you know, it's a wetland ecosystem but it's a wetland ecosystem within a wider ecosystem, you know, and it, it just goes on and it's all this, this interlinking and I, I still don't feel that Government truly acknowledges how important these places are and that it's, it's not a nice to have, it's not an add-on, it's not, you know, well we're going to spend loads of money on the NHS and on education and blah blah blah blah and we'll spend some money on nature because, you know, nature's important, you know, we're, we've been told that nature's important therefore we'll spend some money it but if you don't get that bit right.

**All the other bits go.**

**B9** You might as well throw all the other stuff out, you know, because we're not going to be here and okay it's not going to happen overnight or in, and it's, it's a short termism, you know, each, and each successive Government, they're only interested in their period and what they do, they're not, it never feels to me that they're actually thinking beyond, they're not taking that, that bigger picture and the same with local authorities and I think the, the continual drive to push costs down, yes, we need to keep costs down but not at the expense of our natural spaces, erm, you know, obviously I'm going to say that because I, I'm a naturalist but I would like to think that's because I'm, I'm sort of looking at the bigger picture and saying look, all this money and education, it's all very well but if we haven't got these resources that provide us with the air that we breathe and this, that and the other, you know, try breathing money guys, you know, let's, aagh, yeah.

**Yeah, priorities need to change and be in the right sequential order.**

**B9** Absolutely, you know, I'm not.

**You can't have life without the environment with which to create life.**

**B9** Yes, you know, and this is where this whole disconnect comes in and I, I've just, I don't know how we change that, you know, because we always say about getting kids involved and this, that and the other but it's, it's got to be, for me such a fundamental thing from the earliest age that nature is, we're part of it, it's not something that's there for us to, I, it, yeah, we manage it and we do this, that and the other but because of our impact on it we have to do these things, we have to manage but people have to understand the importance, they don't have to be passionate about it, they don't have to be a mad birder that gets up at five am to go out recording birds, you know, they just, people need to understand why it's important, why it's important to their daily lives, even if it's not something that they particularly want to go out and do, you know, they, but they need to understand why it's important to, to value and protect and appreciate these spaces, you know, just for human existence.

**Yeah, and that we mustn't be cavalier towards them, yes, yes.**

**B9** You know, erm, yeah. And I, yeah, the, I mean the cuts, as, as an org, you know, with my organisation hat on, erm, as part of BRCC, the, the cuts that we've seen to the, the countryside services in, erm, central Bedfordshire who is, you know, mainly who we deal with, it's just horrendous, you know, when, when I first started in the conservation sector back in two thousand and seven, after I graduated, CBCs countryside service was, I mean it wasn't massive but it was well staffed, you know, and they, they had, they had really good people who were passionate, they knew what they were doing, they've cut it and cut it and cut it, year on year, it's been cut and it's now down to a handful of people, erm, that are in different directorates now, you know, they're, some of them are in highways, some of them are in leisure and what have you and it's just not, they're losing, they've lost really good people that are passionate about the countryside and the importance of it.

**Yeah, and you can't get that critical mass back.**

**B9** No.

**No.**

**B9** You know, you've got to spend some money on it and okay, there's, there's so many competing, you know, there is education, health, social care, you know, we, we deal with all of these things within BRCC, you know, erm, and there's no money, you know, and the, the whole idea of the big society, that all of these volunteers were going to come in, really? You know, where from and how are the organisations? You know, volunteers aren't free in terms of staff time.

**You've got manage them.**

**B9** You've still got to manage them.

**Yeah, exactly, exactly.**

**B9** And it's not cheap, you know.

**No, no.**

**B9** And you've got to fund, you, you know, we do a lot of stuff, we, we've got conservation volunteering groups, we, we run, erm, an ecological survey services, all manner or things but it's got to be funded from somewhere, you know, and it's, aagh. So yeah, fund, funding, it's.

**Funding is the central thing.**

**B9** Essential, you know, it's, erm, and, and I think policy change as well that you could tie in with education that, you know, instead of, oh, again this, it, it's how you can incorporate not necessarily nature conservation, nature management I suppose, just effective ecological management, erm, understanding within the national curriculum because it, you can hit that at so many levels throughout different subjects and I, I would really like to see nature being embedded within so many things, you know, it's, erm, we, and going back to risk assessment, you know, getting kids out there, you know, enabling teachers to take kids out into natural spaces to learn and enjoy, erm, and make, yeah, just making it easier without the fear always of oh we can't go out, it's dangerous and we might get stung and we might get hit by a branch or, you know, it's.

**Yeah. It's gone, not almost too far but there has to be a balance doesn't there?**

**B9** Yeah, and we, we've lost that balance, I, I firmly believe we've, we've lost that balance and that, and the more we do that the further and further disconnected we become and the harder and harder it becomes to pull that back and what a threat it all is.

**REMOVED, that's just been so wonderful.**

**B9** Thank you.

**So thank you so much for your time.**

**B9** Wittering on.

**Oh it's absolutely brilliant and I would love to speak to you more.**

END OF INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW 10 BED10

**You're a journalist.**

**B10** I was a journalist and, and then from nineteen up until, trying to about nineteen, late nineteen eighties I used to work in the University sector, I was Director of Development at fundraising at five universities, I've been, universities, LSE, Cambridge, Cambridge, Oxford, York and then at the Open University.

**Gosh, yes, so you have an intimate knowledge then of how universities have changed in the last few years.**

**B10** Indeed I do.

[university discussion – not transcribed]

**Am I right in thinking that you're retired now?**

**B10** Not quite, I continue to, erm, I'm seventy two, I run a website which continues to get sixty, seventy thousand hits a day.

**Wow.**

**B10** And, erm, you know, and also provides me a little income so that's, I've just gone on and do that, I don't do it for the money, I do it for the, keeping me in touch as it were, people on it.

**Yeah, how wonderful. So for how many years have you been running your website?**

**B10** Er, fourteen years. So it's been, it's very, very established in its field.

**Yes, so you must have been pretty much one of the first ones to sort of, you know.**

**B10** It started off, started off as a blog and it's, it still is a blog but it just gets a bigger audience and I have people who help me do it and so on, you know, it's just, it's, it's good fun.

**Yeah, and what is the nature of the website?**

**B10** The web, the website's called REMOVED and erm, it's, you, you know, we, we're quite often listed as one of the top two or three, erm, political blogs in the country and so on. Basically it's looking, looking at politics through a, a very, a different eye which is very much focussed on outcomes and, and so outcomes, so looking at polling, obviously looking at betting and so on, so, but perhaps that's, that's, and it's, it's sort of, it appeals to a very nerdy sort of person, mostly male, about ninety five percent male. [laughs] And it, and it's just, I, I was, you know, I'm seventy two, at some stage I will either go gaga or dementia whatever the term, find somebody else to take over.

**But I think if you can find the thing that you're interested in it.**

**B10** Um.

**And you can do it as a way of, well to keep your interest and also to generate some income, I think then you've hit a wonderful marvellous formula haven't you?**

**B10** Yeah, and I think also it's quite nice when you've been working, it's actually quite, I, you know, I don't know what I would have done, I'd have probably been dead now if I don't, if I wasn't Nordic walking, I wasn't running my website, so there we are.

**Yeah, well it's interesting isn't it? When you move away from, especially when you've been very involved in a difficult career?**

**B10** Yeah.

**When I say difficult, I mean just involved and moving around to then reformulate your life can be quite tricky and I think for some people finding the transition very, very difficult.**

**B10** Yeah.

**I think to find a group of things that you get a great deal of fulfilment from is quite a wonderful thing.**

**B10** Yeah, yeah, no, I agree, I agree.

**So now have long have you been involved with the Nordic walking scene?**

**B10** I, I started about two years ago, erm, the local authority, Bedford Borough Council, was funding, I think probably still does fund REMOVED to run the course, wellbeing courses and so the, I, I've been talking, I decided a Nordic walking is what I ought to do because clearly as you get older your joints and keeping fit and these things become much, much more important and I, I, well I went on this wellbeing course and, run by Teresa, funded by the Council and then I continue with it and have been continuing ever since and, you know, I, I, it is very much part and parcel of my life and I do, I try to go out on my own every, maybe once, maybe five or six times a week as well as being participating in one or two formal groups, which, which are part of REMOVED organisation.

**Yeah. So you've really integrated it pretty much into your daily life then it sounds.**

**B10** Yeah, yeah, because it's, it's important that, yeah, just keeping, keeping fit and also the, it, what's really important actually is the social dimension as well, because you, you, if you, you meet the same people on a regular basis and somehow, you know, you're, you're both, you're all exerting yourself physically and there's no doubt that if you're doing it in a group you can walk faster and further than, than, erm, than on your own, I mean certainly I go out on my own and I don't, I don't cover my, the same sort of speed or the same distance, it's, it's, no it's important, social, social dimension's very important.

**It's interesting isn't it that other people can be your motivators as well? So the walking that you do as not part of the group, is it in the same location as when you go to Bedford Priory Park?**

**B10** Oh yes I mean I go to the Priory Park sometimes, yes, so I, so I, I know, I know, well I mean I, it's nice to have somewhere that's relatively pleasant to look at, you know, or whatever because that just, you know, it sort of, it's, it's easy, I quite like Priory Park, it's not hilly.

**Yes, and then also it's you know how long the route will take you and you can anticipate it and you know.**

**B10** Yeah.

**And presumably, you know, what are the other benefits through using the site, is it, you know, is it the wetland space itself or is it the access issues that are kind of paramount or?**

**B10** Well, well, erm, Priory Park's a good starting point, it's got a good car park and also, and the important as people are getting older, it's got toilets. [laughs] Never get, may sound silly but I mean I think most of the people who, with Nordic walking, they're probably in their sixties, they're probably and probably at the older end age range but they are people who are getting on a bit, erm, and, and, erm, and, you know, things, those, that comfort factor is, is important for those, for that. Also, every direction you walk towards there's an interesting place to walk, you like, you, it's like walking on different surfaces, so you've got, erm, and you, you obviously got grass, you've got footpaths, you've got things which are quite challenging to walk, to walk over and, and that, that's adds to it enormously.

**Yeah, and do you always take the same circuit because you have?**

**B10** No, no, no, we use different ones all the time and you're looking, you're looking for the, the interest and, and the fact that you're in a sort of, you know, part, and the, you know, wildlife actually is very much a, very much part of, I mean yesterday there was a, the, the wildlife farm or wildlife place in Bromham which is, I'd never really seen before until REMOVED took me Nordic walking there and it, absolutely extraordinary, extraordinary, you just, you know, and, and quite, quite exciting and quite, you know, hides, like in Priory Park where you can look, you know, look at the birds and so on.

**Yeah. So it's amazing isn't it what you can find out there and really in an urban environment?**

**B10** Yeah, yeah.

**So how do you get to the different sites then, do you drive yourself?**

**B10** I usually take the car, that, that, but I sometimes cycle, but one, the problem is your Nordic walking sticks are not the easy to carry on the bike.

**No, no, exactly. Well you wouldn't want them flying out and sort of.**

**B10** Yeah.

**Whopping somebody in the eye would you, that's the thing.**

**B10** Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. So would you say out of, you know, you're saying that you go maybe five or six times a week and then possibly two of the organised walks as well.**

**B10** Yeah.

**How many of those times would be based in Priory Country Park or does it really change according to the seasons or the weather?**

**B10** No, no, I think, I mean we're in, I'm in Priory maybe once a week, so, so that, that is, just about, about that. Erm, I, I, for the walk, for my own walk I tend to be ones which I can just start at my own house, I don't, I'm much less likely to take the car to the, to starting point.

**Yes. Well sometimes it's just great to be able to shut the front door and get going isn't it?**

**B10** Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, and presumably you live in Bedford itself?**

**B10** I live in, I live sort of pretty close to REMOVED.

**Yeah. I used to live in Bedford because I used to work at Cranfield.**

**B10** Oh right.

**So I know Bedford very well.**

**B10** Well I live just off the REMOVED.

**Right, so I was up by Bedford Park.**

**B10** Right, I know, right, by Bedford Park, yeah.

**Yeah. Well I mean I think Priory Country Park's a wonderful spot and, you know, I think it's a fantastic thing to be able to use, you know, an area which is a wetland but also in the middle of town, I think it's such an amazing resource for so many different people. When you do your walks, you know, do you actively try and meet up with people or do you just see who's around on the day and then if you end up walking together you end up walking together?**

**B10** No, no well, when I'm on my own, I, when I'm, when I'm going on my own, I tend, I tend to just do it on my own, erm, when, so, and, and I, I tend probably about, I always go on the Wednesday group, which the leader leads but I usually go on the Tuesday group as well.

**Yeah. So when you do your own walks, you know, how far would you say you go and how long does it take you? Is it?**

**B10** Well I tend to sort of walk for about an hour, so I guess I'm, I'm doing just under four miles I would guess.

**Yeah, I mean that's, yeah, because I know with, I haven't had done the Nordic walking yet. I keep, REMOVED keeps threatening to take me on one but it's quite a fair pace isn't it?**

**B10** Yeah, I mean that's the, it's quite remarkable, I mean I, you know, I find if I'm, if I'm out and there's other people that, you know, people who are much younger than I am and, a new leader I, I'm going past them, you know, because simply, simply because you've got, you, pace with your sticks you are using the upper part of the body propulsion and so, so but you, that's, that's giving you a much greater workout but also you're, you know, you're getting about thirty percent of your propulsion from, from your shoulders and arms.

**I mean is it quite amazing really isn't it? And it does make me appreciate now why, if I ever go up hills and I see people with the Nordic poles how useful they are.**

**B10** Yeah, absolutely.

**Not just balance but also as you said for kind of getting you around, so.**

**B10** Oh yeah. And also gives you confidence that if you're, you're able to go distances and, then you, then you can, you know, you just, you feel, you feel much, much more likely to take on a longer walk because the sticks will help, the poles will help you.

**Yeah, and do you do, will you do your walking most days, most weeks of the year or will it depend on the weather?**

**B10** Well, erm, REMOVED will probably tell you, I am, I am one of the very hardy.

**Ah.**

**B10** And there's a wonderful photograph of us in, I think just near, just off, I think it's in Priory Park in the height of a blizzard in February and there were, there were three of us walking, plus REMOVED.

**Wow.**

**B10** It's, it's a wonderful picture, it probably must be completely barmy but so, so, you know, I think we, I go out whether it's fiercely hot or whatever, you know, just that, that's what I do, on, and if, if you, if you make, I think it's important to get these routines into your life as well, you know. I might, so that's, that's all, you know, it's good.

**Yeah, and especially when the other part of your day may be taken up with being at the computer, I think you need that balance don't you?**

**B10** Yeah, yeah, that's …

**Yeah, that's wonderful. And when you, when you're in Priory Country Park, you know, or people ask you about going there, does the word wetland spring to mind, do you actually see it as a wetland or do you see it as a park that happens to have some water features within it?**

**B10** I think the latter, erm, I mean obviously you're aware of the, the wetland areas and, yeah, but, erm, but I don't, I don't think I necessarily see it as that.

**Yeah, because one of the things that we're interested in in the project really is about trying to widen access for people to really encourage them to use wetland spaces, now you may say actually you don't want any more people to use wetlands because, or Bedford Priory Park because you like it as it is, because I've always thought of it as almost like a little secret really, I mean a lot of people do use it in Bedford but considering the volume of people in Bedford I think it's quite a, you know, underused facility, what would you say could be done to encourage people to use these spaces more?**

**B10** I, yes, for some reason, yeah, you're right, it's, I mean say compared with, erm, the embankments in Bedford, which is, which is, or compared with Bedford Park, yes, you get much heartier people going into, into Priory Park, and I think, I actually think that it's not its location, I don't think people are necessarily aware of it, you know, erm, not quite, they don't quite know what's there, also it's the, as you turn off the road into it, you've got the, you've got the marina and it looks as though it's just the, you know, it's, it's not immediate apparent what you're, what, what you're going into.

**Yes, yes.**

**B10** I think, I think that's, that's a factor.

**Yeah. So I mean that's it because it's not really signed particularly well.**

**B10** No.

**And although it's not far from the embankment and you can connect with it, it's, it's not immediately obviously is it?**

**B10** No, no.

**So.**

**B10** No, that's true. I think that, I think that, I think, that, that somehow needs to be sell it, sell itself and I mean I've, I think, you know, a simple factor that what it has got is parking and I don't think, in all the years of actually going there I've ever had a problem finding a space which is a, which is, you know, massive, a massive benefit and of course they've got their expansion car park round the, round the back of the, as it were, and I've never been in there, I've always been, you know, round the circle.

**And I mean do you ever use Millennium Country Park in Marston Moretaine, is that another space that you would ever consider going to?**

**B10** I've, I've, I've been there occasionally, erm, it just is, I'm, it's the other side of, it's, it's slightly further to go but I have been and I don't quite have the same feeling about it, I don't know why, I just, erm, doesn't, it's sort of slightly, slightly messy, I don't know why, I, you know, I mean I know it and I've been there quite a few times but I, it's not quite the same as Priory Park.

**Yeah, you see I think that's really interesting that these are two, if you like, very similar country parks with big water features in and yet, you know, what you're saying is not unfamiliar to me that people choose one rather than the other as a familiar space so.**

**B10** Yeah.

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

**B10** Yeah, and, yeah, they've got obviously, there's like two lakes in Marston or whatever, and, and you've got that, you've got that central area where, you know, it's, it's got quite a lot of facilities, much better than Priory Park actually.

**It's true. So, but would you say it, it is really the distance or would you say it's more the familiarity that would maybe draw you towards Priory rather than?**

**B10** I, I think I prefer the park, I think it's nicer, I mean that's a, it's, it's much more, there's an openness to Priory Park which is very, which is very attractive, and also you've got, you've got lots and lots of contrasts and somehow I think Marston feels, they're all, sort of all gravel pits or whatever, so, you know, they're, but, but Marston feels slightly more, you know, less structured as it were, as, whereas Priory Park feels much more natural.

**Okay, yes. I guess because actually one's been around a little bit longer than the other one, so maybe over time Millennium Country Park will kind of catch up with Priory Country Park.**

**B10** Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. And so for you, when you talked about contrast, you're talking about the fact that you have, you've got the defined path around the lake and you've got the Finger Lakes and then you've got a meadow.**

**B10** Yeah. Yeah, absolutely got, all sorts of different sort of places you can walk, you know, it's, it's a complete mix, I mean, you know, it's, it's very, just to sort of go with the, even if you go on the, just the simple circuit round the lake, you're, there are, you, you know, you go through very different areas, you know.

**Yeah, it's amazing isn't it?**

**B10** You've got the, you've got the footpath and then you, you move round a bit and then you've got the areas which are sort of, which you can't access certain times because of the, you know, because, because of the wild, wildlife breeding, erm, so it's, it's got, it's got, it's very, very interesting, erm, but, but then you've got the other things by the, by the river which are, which, you know, they've, there are so many combinations of walks round the place, you know, which, which is, which is great, you know, that you, you know, we, we've, whenever we go we get this where are we going today? And you think of maybe ten or fifteen circuits that you can do.

**That's quite amazing really isn't it to have that much option in a very urban environment?**

**B10** Yeah, yeah.

**If could say for you what the main benefits and the main disbenefits are from using this wetland space, what would you say they might be?**

**B10** Are the main the benefits of, it just adds to the interest, it adds to the enjoyment of, of the walk. The walk is not just a, I mean if, I could actually sit on the exercise machine and spend, if it would be just for exercise so, you know, and it's, it's, I, I just get this, I get a very pleasant feeling of, with the openness, an openness, I don't know, just makes, the openness and the contrast just makes, just makes me feel, I don't, I've not really thought about it but it makes me feel quite good which is important.

**So would you say it's all the different combinations of being in nature so it's hearing the birdsong, it's the light on you?**

**B10** Oh yes, absolutely, I, one of the things, erm, a year ago I got a hearing aid for the first time and as most people get older, most people should have a hearing aid but they don't and, and you're immediately then getting, the first thing you notice with hearing aids you're getting a much broader range of sound coming into your ear because, because it's the, it's the high frequencies which you lose as you, with age-related hearing loss. I, and I remember, people told me this on my first walk, I went into Priory Park with my, with my hearing aids and it was lovely, it was lovely because it just the, the range of extra sound that was coming, which, you know, you've actually lost that with your standard age-related hearing loss.

**So it's amazing isn't it that you didn't even realise what you'd been missing out on until you got your hearing aids in place.**

**B10** Yes.

**Yeah, it's fantastic. And are there any things that maybe hold you back? So thinking about the disbenefits, are there any things that ever make you think I'm not going to go there today? So something that it, you know, sometimes prevents you from visiting the site.**

**B10** Erm, well yes, I, I have a, you know, the sort of slight security issue that, erm, erm, and you hear odd stories about things about, erm, cars being interfered with and that sort of thing or, or whatever, erm, and that's, that's just a sort of slight, slight you, you know, it's, it's getting on a bit, you, you suddenly slight, your slight worry but it doesn't seem to attract, erm, a really yobbish element as maybe other, other open spaces and parklands do, certainly you get the yobs round the, erm, round the embankment much more than the, much more round Priory Park.

**So the issue of security, does that mean that maybe you will then tailor the times of day you go and visit the site?**

**B10** Probably, yes. I mean that is, I mean I know other people I've walked with and I've mentioned I, I come here, I come here on my own sometimes and say well I'd, I'd never, I never would come here, I'd be too, I'd be too scared.

**Oh isn't that a shame?**

**B10** Which is, which is, erm, interesting and mostly the older women taken that, taken that view.

**Yeah. So for them I guess, I mean I know you can't speak on their behalf but actually the, the guided walking gives them the opportunity of being able to have a walk and feel secure because they're with other people?**

**B10** Yeah.

**Yeah. And would you say that you have a different experience walking with others than you do on your own? I mean I know you talked about the speed and the distance but what about for instance things around camaraderie or catching up socially?**

**B10** I, it is really, really important, I mean I, you know, just suddenly you get this group of, you know, a group of friends. I mean you walk the same people every week for a couple of years and you'd know everybody, everything about them, you know, about their daughters and dislike of the daughter's boyfriend and all, [laughs] all of the factors and also you're, you're fully aware of everybody's medical ailments and, you know, and going into this and of course, you know, again when it, older people, you know, you're, med, medical things tend to become the predominant item of conversation, [laughs] erm, and it's also nice if you're, if you, if, you know, you've been, somebody says how was, how was it yesterday with, you know, wherever? And people asking you, so you know, just this awareness of, of you and, and be aware of other people and that's, that's, erm, that's very important, it's, you know, you feel, you know, feel part of a group and, you know, just you, you know, you, obviously you, you go in a group where you like them and, you know, you feel you're welcome, that's, that's important to me.

**Well that's what makes us human isn't it, our interaction with other people?**

**B10** Yeah.

**Would you say that you get any elements of that from any other social activities that you'd do?**

**B10** Erm, my other social activities are basically politics, not in the same way, no, erm, erm, no, not in the same way and it's based partly because you're doing this, again same people and you're, you're with each other for maybe, at least an hour and a half because generally you have a cup of coffee afterwards, maybe two hours and you, you're, you're sharing the sort of, the, the challenge, the challenge and, you know, you're, and you come back and you're, you know, you probably push yourself and gone further than normal and you're feeling knackered together and that, that is, that's a mutual support and so on.

**Yeah, you kind of, you've surmounted a challenge together is what I'm hearing, it's kind of.**

**B10** Yeah.

**Brings people together doesn't it?**

**B10** Yeah, I mean it's, it's what I was mentioning before about the freezing cold in a blizzard and, and whenever, whenever the, the three of us are together we use, we, we feel this, this, we're special because we, we weren't sort of overawed by the weather and then cope, and cope that day.

**Yes, that's it. It sounds a bit of a shackleton about you Mike.**

**B10** [laughs] And there's, there's also, within the group, I don't know whether to mention to, there's a woman called REMOVED who is eighty.

**Wow.**

**B10** And she's, she, and, you know, oh I won't be here next week, oh where will you be? I'll be, I'll be walking in the Pyrenees, I mean, she's just sort of completely sort of.

**Wow.**

**B10** Totally shames, shames me, you know, if I feel, struggle a bit and I see her doing so much better and she's so much older, makes me, you know, gives a bit of inspiration, slightly shaming.

**Well it's funny isn't it that somehow sometimes we, we can have a tendency to limit ourselves I think and so to have somebody like that who's so inspirational is really wonderful isn't it?**

**B10** Yeah, absolutely, absolutely, and, and, you know, just, it is, it is, you know, very, you know, very nice. You also know each other's characters, you know, and also I mean I have said REMOVED as, as a leader, she's very good at sort of, erm, getting the group to mix, she's quite, she's quite good at that and, erm, and, and it's also, because people walk at different speed, she, they'll just, you know, she tries to coordinate it so you actually, you know, you, you, you know, it's, sort of people in the lead will suddenly find that they're brought back a bit, whatever.

**Yeah. She's very thoughtful isn't she?**

**B10** Very good at sort of linking it all together.

**Yeah, I think the groups mean an awful lot to here and I think it, you know, I mean I haven't participated in one of the walks, I would like to but I can see that it, you know, she, it means a lot to her, it's not just something that she does to generate income, you know, she likes all the people that come on the walk.**

**B10** Yeah, yeah, I'm sure.

**And wants everyone to have a lovely time, which, and be pushed.**

**B10** Yeah.

**She can be quite ferocious. [laughs]**

**B10** Erm, yes, that's, yeah, I get on well with her.

**So would you say, yeah, I think she's tremendous, she's been so supportive of the project as well, which is just amazing.**

**B10** Yeah.

**You know, I really appreciate everything that she's done for us. One of the things we're also trying to do with the project is understand how these wetland landscapes are different from other types of landscapes and whether they generate a sense of place when people use them, so, you know, kind of slightly going back to, you know, thinking about, you know, when I asked you before about whether, when you walk in Priory Country Park does it feel like a park that has water in or does it feel like a wetland? I get the sense from you that it feels like a park but would you say it feels different from say other parks because of these kind of water features that are populated around?**

**B10** Oh yes, I mean it's totally different from Bedford Park, which is a beautifully, beautifully designed and historic but that's much more formal. I mean it, Priory Country Park is much, is much, you know, less, it's not a formal park, which, and, and that, I think adds, adds to it.

**Yeah, wonderful, but do you ever visit any other wetland spaces, is that anything that you do in your leisure time?**

**B10** I, I try and find other, as you were saying, you know, yesterday, another wetland space, quite specifically because I quite, it just felt a nice place to be walking …

**Yeah, so would your, I mean I'm not going to put words in your mouth but would you say that the place you visited yesterday is partly encouraged by the fact that you like Priory Country Park and so you kind of almost know what you're going to be finding when you go to another wetland?**

**B10** Yes, but it's also interesting going to another one because it's different, you know, erm, and it, and it's, it is, it is, if you're ever in Bedford, Bromham, Bromham Nature Reserve and it's completely hidden gem as far as I'm concerned, it just is a complete, it, nobody knows about it or I'd never even heard about it.

**I've never heard of it, no.**

**B10** Until REMOVED took us there about three weeks ago and it's just been superb.

**How wonderful, that's really fantastic.**

**B10** Yeah.

**And, you know, when you've, since you've been doing your Nordic walking, is that something that you kind of talk to your family and friends about and encourage them to have a go?**

**B10** Well I've, erm, yes, I mean I do encourage people to do it. In fact, you know, I, but I, you know, about sort of, you know, I, I don't have any, you know, I don't have any friends with me throughout, apart from those who are, who I met when I was Nordic walking when I'm walking probably but, I do, you know, I, but we, we do like going to Priory Park, you know, if we've got visitors occasionally we, we'll, you know, after lunch let's go walking round Priory Park, one of the places we go to.

**Yeah, yeah, you can show them the ropes.**

**B10** Yeah, and the only downside, when it's wet, it, it can be pretty bad under foot sometimes, that's the, that's the downside of it, in the winter.

**Because of muddy paths or because of uneven paths?**

**B10** Oh, yeah, uneven and, uneven and muddy path, it's part of it, so it's not like going into … Park where you've got a sort of tarmac path running round and you don't have to worry about that.

**Yeah. And moving on now slightly, because we've obviously touched on sort of wellbeing already but I haven't asked you what you understand by wellbeing, so if you kind of sum up what you understand by wellbeing, that'd be really wonderful.**

**B10** Well I suppose wellbeing, doing things which make you feel, feel better about yourself and better, and better about your, your body, your body, your body's a finite thing and your, your, you know, your, your muscles and, you know, you're general ability to walk and, and have mobility just, and make sure you're, you, keep, keep it up okay, that's what, I suppose that's what wellbeing is and, and taking active steps and recognising that that's very important for enjoyment of your life generally.

**And how much would you say that as well as the physical wellbeing that there is some mental wellbeing that is important?**

**B10** Oh I think the mental thing is, is extremely important, I mean I think the, obviously the walking with, with groups is, is important and I, you know, and I, I feel sort of a, a different circle of friends completely, you know, all my friends outside Nordic walking are involved in politics and we talk about politics, in walking we never talk about politics and so that's, that's good, that stays, that's very separate and it's a nice dimension.

**Yes, it's completely freeing isn't it?**

**B10** Yeah.

**So you have a completely.**

**B10** And nobody knows, you know, I, my, my, nobody really under, well they think I'm slightly odd but then nobody really understands my, my background and that's, that's quite good and I, and I don't push it, you know, just sort of that's, that's who I am, so, yeah.

**Yeah. So would you say that it's almost like, you know, the Nordic walking groups see a different side of you that your political friends wouldn't see maybe?**

**B10** Probably yes, probably.

**Yeah, and so on, you know, jumping back to the physical side, you feel like you've improved your mobility and your strength?**

**B10** Oh very much so, erm, yes, I mean I, I know that very directly, erm. When I started I, I, yeah, I've got one, I've got, had a chronic back pain and I used to have to sit down every ten, fifteen minutes and now I, now I can do an hour and a half walk without sitting down.

**That's amazing isn't it?**

**B10** And, yeah.

**To be able to and to feel the empowerment of that that you've turned it all around through your own persistence.**

**B10** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**It's wonderful.**

**B10** Yeah.

**Now as I said at the very beginning, you know, part of the project is looking at mosquitoes and I wondered through all of your walking on, on Priory Country Park do mosquitoes feature very much or other biting insects as part of your kind of?**

**B10** Have I been bitten?

**Yeah.**

**B10** [laughs] Erm, yeah, I think I have yes, and that's, that's, erm, yes, it is, it is, I regard that as a problem, you know, being bitten and, and clearly, you know, in the more wetlandy areas, the more, more you've got, more you're vulnerable. In fact I had a bite, I had a bite on my leg, I can't remember, I think about three or four weeks ago which was a bit, bit uncomfortable.

**Yeah. So does that mean that you would, I don't know, certain times of the year or certain times of the day then choose not to access those particular parts of the park?**

**B10** Erm, to an extent yes, erm, erm, you know, it's, sometimes you find yourself there without, without really, erm, being able to sort of get very, get, you know, away from it, but, but, you know, insect, insect bites, you know, mosquito bites are, you know, are not fun.

**No, no, but, you know, would you say it's definitely something you factor in when you're thinking about going to the site or actually it's only on site itself, you suddenly think oh it's a bit, it's a bit midgy round here or, you know?**

**B10** Yes, it's only when you're there I think.

**Yeah, so it wouldn't actively stop you from using those sites or?**

**B10** No, no.

**No, and do you, you know.**

**B10** I mean they, they, quite a lot on another site somewhere else we, we found ourself walking on top of an adder, that was strange…

**Oh, oh, just having a little lie in the sun?**

**B10** Yeah, yeah, and, and we nearly trod on it, it was, it was, that was quite scary actually.

**Yeah, but it's funny isn't it? You know, when you've come across something that you're just not used to it can be quite alarming.**

**B10** Yeah.

**And in terms of the other people that you walk with, have they ever mentioned mosquitoes, you know, does anyone ever say I don't want to do the walk today?**

**B10** Yeah, yeah, that, that happens occasionally, and actually some days it will be worse than others and you come back and you find two or three of you have been bitten, yeah.

**Right, yeah, but it's not enough to change the direction of the walk, it's not enough to put people off, it's just that it's an irritant?**

**B10** Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. And do you ever wear particular clothes or use insect spray or anything like that or?**

**B10** I sometimes use insect spray, yes, because I, I like to wear shorts from about April through to September where I can, but yeah, that, and I think that if you're wearing long trousers, erm, you know, long hiking things with the, there's, you know, that you're, that you're more projected but I, I prefer to be less protected and be in shorts.

**Yes. So you just accept that that is one of the risks for having lovely brown legs is that you might have a bite or two here or there?**

**B10** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Yeah. But there are no, for instance, no particular stories around mosquitoes that you think of in all the time that you've used the site?**

**B10** Erm, you're aware of it but no, I mean actually I suppose it just adds to the, adds to the sort of feel this is actually adaptable[?], you know, and I, so it's, it's, that's, that's a good element in one sense.

**Yeah, I mean it shows that, you know, this is nature and nature sometimes is not always benign is it?**

**B10** Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, wonderful, and we're using mosquitoes to think around climate change and trying to imagine what wetland environments might be like in a warming climate, have you just in the time that you've been using this wetland space, have you noticed any changes that you can think of that could be attributed to climate change?**

**B10** I certainly feels, [laughs] feels at the moment, looking at the very barren sort of thing, weather, weather, the, the lack of rainfall here for God knows how long is, is called climate change I don't know but I think that those are, are, you know, certainly that's very noticeable, it looks, the, the environment such as the parks look very different than at normal times.

**Yeah. Now the very last section of the interview is around, it's called Contemporary Social Representations which is quite a mouthful but what we're trying to gauge in the project is how people really use and enjoy wetland spaces and if we think about wetlands, if we look back historically in literature, they're often depicted as being these very barren damp places that, you know, are no use for agriculture and no use for human beings and we're trying to understand if that has changed over time and if so, what are the drivers behind those changes. So I wondered if you have any feelings around what, you know, how wetlands are viewed by people and how that might have changed, what's made those changes happen over time.**

**B10** I, I think we actually much more ready to go into to those, those sorts of areas, I think, you know, much more, I think there is a greater, greater appreciation of a, of, of nature and the environment and people are, people are very, are much more understanding and, you know, certainly, you know, people, you just, you know, very, I mean just more aware, you know.

**Yeah, but what do you think has driven this awareness? Do you think it's to do with changes in the media or in nature writing or film making or is it to do with other changes around, I don't know, around the common agricultural policy, stewardship schemes and things like that? What do you, I mean there might be more than one driver, so.**

**B10** Yeah. Erm, I think obviously the farmer and the way farming operates that has a, has a big, big aspect. Actually the most important thing is actually that, you know, we are, we are just more, more aware, you know, and that comes through the media and, and other factors.

**And do you think maybe actually visiting wetlands has an impact on how people view nature, you know, so?**

**B10** Erm.

**We're all travelling more aren't we? We're all travelling.**

**B10** I'm sure it does, yes, you know, you know, you feel, within urban environments, the idea of just getting into a non-urban environment only a couple of miles away from your home is really quite good.

**Yeah, yeah, and what was it, I mean obviously you said that it was through the, sort of the Council sponsoring these Nordic walks that got you involved but before then, were you somebody that would go and visit natural spaces, have you always been somebody that likes walking and getting outdoors?**

**B10** Oh yes, yes.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**B10** Yes.

**And would you say, can you think of any media, any films or TV programmes or literature that you think might also influence how general popular culture might view wetland spaces?**

**B10** I, [pause] I just, just, just trying, I'm just trying to think, yeah.

**That's obviously a tough one.**

**B10** A tough one. I, no, I, I'm sure, I'm sure you mention something and I'd say oh yes, but I, I can't, I can't think of anything off hand.

**Yes, okay, well that's interesting in itself. And the final question I'm going to ask because I thank you so much for all of your time is I'm very interested in water governance and one of the things I've been thinking about recently is about how austerity measures might have impacted on different wetland spaces and I wondered if in the time that you've been visiting the site whether you've noticed any of those sorts of resource changes have, whether they've impacted on the site itself?**

**B10** That is, that is happening, erm, obviously the, the things which are in, within the control of local authority, local authorities are under massive pressure and the, and things like the, the level of what they can do is, I mean Priory Country Park started as a sort of, it, it was there as a sort of object place to link people with nature and there used to be a sort of information centre and everything and, and that got dropped.

**Ah, I didn't know that.**

**B10** I guess, I guess because of the financial side.

**Yeah, and yes, so, but you don't, you know, when you think about things like, I don't know, the quality of the car park or the footpaths, do you think that's changed over the last few years, do you think you've?**

**B10** Erm, I think, I think there is.

**Good or bad, it could be either way.**

**B10** I think it's, yes, yes, I think that, that's correct, I mean the, you know, the footpaths are not, are not fixed at the same level and so on, yeah, yeah, I'm sure that's right.

**Yeah. Well that's all been really wonderful and really interesting REMOVED and thank you so much for sharing your insights with me and with the project and I wondered, as a last, just a final question, is there anything you would like to share with the project or, you know, hope that the project can achieve something in particular because, you know, you use the site such a lot?**

**B10** Well I hope it doesn't change and I hope that it's, the Council doesn't, don't abandon it in some form, whatever, erm, because I do know that the, the staff who work at the, at, certainly Priory, that has been reduced quite, quite radically and that, that must be a concern.

**Yeah, yeah. Well thank you, I will share that with the rest of the project.**

**B10** Okay.

**Lovely and I'll keep in touch with what's happening and what we found out through all the three different sites.**

**B10** Yeah.

**The fieldwork continues really until late autumn and, yeah, so hopefully by early next year we'll start having our reports compiled and shared and I'll let you know how we get on.**

**B10** Excellent, okay.

**Lovely.**

**B10** Good to talk to you Mary.

**And you too and hopefully speak again.**

**B10** Okay, bye.

**Yeah, take care, bye.**

END OF INTERVIEW