

Out on the Towans:

Autumn and winter arrivals

by Martin Rule, Towans Ranger

Friends of the Towans have made exciting progress since my article in the last issue of St Ives Local. In September, we held our first annual general meeting and 11 local people put their names forward to be trustees. Now we are in the final stages of gaining formal charitable status from the Charity Commission.

At the AGM, I briefly outlined our mission to protect and conserve the Towans from Hayle to Godrevy, working with other groups, landowners etc, as well as to encourage better understanding of the rich and important wildlife and heritage present here. Having been working as the Towans Ranger on a one-day a week basis since 2014, I have been limited in what I can achieve, but now we hope to push forward, build capacity and do even more work together.



The trustees will be looking at forming groups focussing on topics like publicity and fundraising — and, most importantly, education. The Towans is such a great resource on our doorstep for local

schools to utilise across the curriculum. I was delighted to show two local teachers around recently, and to start planning activities here.

Since we waved goodbye to the late-flying small copper butterflies and various hawkmoth dragonflies, the Towans has been gradually taking on its 'winter plumage' as the plants stop flowering and colour ebbs away. This is the time when the ponies return to graze in certain areas to keep the grassland in good condition. We plan to graze a new area this winter: part of Gwithian Green, which has become very choked with vegetation. It's noticeable how the once-abundant cowslips have reduced in that area in the last few years.

If you find the darker evenings difficult, step outside one evening and see if you can hear one of my favourite seasonal sounds — the thin 'seep seep' of flocks of redwings overhead. This thrush comes here in huge numbers from Eastern Europe to winter on our earthworms and berries — look out for them on playing fields, hedges and gardens pretty much anywhere. They have a cream stripe above the eye and an orange patch under the wing. Tawny owls are also very noisy on autumn evenings, as they hoot and 'ke-wick' to each other, seeking a mate. A lovely woodwind sound on a crisp, still night.

Autumn is also the time when our brilliant volunteers meet up to cut back some of the encroaching bushes in various locations across the Towans, as well as removing invasive and non-native species. Anybody is very welcome to come and enjoy some fresh air and company while doing some useful work to conserve an important habitat. If you'd like to join us, just drop me an email at martinrule@talktalk.net

