



National  
Trust

# Nature Recovery at Killerton



Issue 5

May 2026

Welcome to the latest edition of our Nature Recovery newsletter. Here's where the Killerton team share information about our current work and forthcoming plans.



My son asked me this month when I would retire, I laughed and said 'not yet as there is still loads to do for nature at Killerton'. As we enjoy the best of spring and celebrate butterflies on the wing, flowers blooming and swallows returning, there are still many animals and plants that are not thriving. The estate is missing red squirrels, cuckoos, water voles, turtle doves, pine martins and the list goes on. Our rivers need a helping hand and our insects are struggling. Nature is in trouble across the UK and the National Trust is taking action. My new role is to lead the team to put nature back into every corner of the estate and reverse this trend.

This newsletter highlights real hope as we make great strides forward on this vision. This winter we planted our 400,000th tree, our 20<sup>th</sup> km of new hedge, and created more ponds and wildflower meadows. The conservation grazing of our historic parklands has created a more diverse grassland and our woodlands and orchards are being actively managed to produce timber, fruit and make more space for nature. I hope you enjoy the stories of what has been happening at Killerton.

I will delay my retirement for a few more years!

Spring regards,

Tim Dafforn



**Tim Dafforn**—Restore Nature Delivery Manager

## Community Forest

Killerton has taken another major step toward a greener future, with 37,000 new trees planted this winter as Phase 2 of the Community Forest Project got underway. Local farmers, community groups, schools, volunteers and residents all played a part.

Building on the success of last winter's Phase 1, which saw 70,000 trees planted, over 10% of them by community volunteers, along with 6.9km of new and improved permissive paths, this next stage continues to expand woodland and wood pasture across the estate. The result is a richer, more resilient landscape that supports wildlife, enhances public access, and strengthens the relationship between nature and farming.

The project is delivered in partnership with the Plymouth and South Devon Community Forest, supported by Defra's Trees for Climate programme, and forms a key part of the National Trust's commitment to reach carbon net zero by 2030. By the end of the decade, more than one million trees will have been established at Killerton.



One of the groups was Budding Friends – Exeter Age UK's social gardening and art therapy group for people living with dementia and their carers (pictured above).

'This next phase has been another big step for Killerton, bringing local people together to create woodlands and wood pasture that support wildlife, store carbon and provide shade for livestock. Just as importantly, we're improving access so more communities can explore these new spaces as they grow. When people can enjoy and feel connected to the landscape, farming, nature and community all benefit.' **Tim Dafforn, Restore Nature Delivery Manager at Killerton.**

The Killerton Community Forest Project is as much about people as it is about trees. As part of this investment, 12 km of new and improved permissive paths have been created, providing access to nature for communities in Cranbrook, West Clyst, Cullompton and Exeter.

During Phase 1, groups from Cranbrook Education Campus, Exeter College, and Age UK Devon joined National Trust rangers and tenant farmers to plant trees, nurture young saplings, and monitor their growth.

**Hannah Wickens, Assistant Head Teacher at Cranbrook Education Campus -**

‘Our ongoing partnership with the National Trust has given our children an extraordinary opportunity to shape a landscape. The children were proudly the first planters of Phase 2 of Elbury’s future woodland – a moment that connected them to the project in a truly meaningful way. These experiences build confidence, spark imagination and nurture a lifelong sense of stewardship for the natural world.’

The new wood pastures on farmland will continue to be grazed by livestock, providing natural shade and shelter for animals while improving soil health and carbon storage. All planting was carried out in collaboration with tenant farmers, or on land that has returned to Trust management, ensuring the project supports a healthy balance between productive farming and thriving nature.

At sites including Ashclyst, Budlake and Elbury Farms, the tree planting will help connect existing habitats such as ancient woodland and wetlands, while improving water quality, reducing flood risk and creating wildlife corridors for bats, birds and pollinators.



**Amelia Greenway, a farmer and tenant at Columbjohn Farm on the Killerton Estate -**

‘As an organic farmer, we value trees integrated within our farmland. Our native breed cattle nourish themselves on the medicinal benefits the trees can provide, while providing essential habitats for wildlife. Our farm is susceptible to flooding - highlighting the essential role trees play with helping mitigate flooding risk, alongside drought exposure to our soils and shade and shelter for our livestock. We know that trees have helped extend our grazing season for up to 16 weeks of the year, reducing our financial outputs on the farm.’

Volunteers tree planting on the Killerton Estate (left).

## The New Woodlands—Adam Kalopsidiotis, Ranger

The new woodlands are extensive; I have written a little about the character of the woods for those of you who haven't been able to visit them yet.

### Beare Wood – on the B3181 North of the Killerton turning

This very small farm is very hilly which gives great views back across the Culm Valley towards the Clump. Archaeological surveys showed that there was some kind of enclosure on the summit of the steepest hill and therefore we couldn't plant trees there, which means that the views will be reserved. The woods have the feeling of a hidden land, tucked behind a screen of trees. Beare will be open to the public and have a path from the road to the summit once the buildings have been refurbished.



The Clump from Beare Wood

### Elbury Wood – across the railway from Cranbrook

Elbury Wood is currently fully open to the public and is popular with dog walkers and runners who use the looped smooth stone track. This is a more contained site, you can see all of it from everywhere. It is busier too, trains periodically rush past; the sound of children playing wafts over from Cranbrook Education Campus, and you can see the new town of Cranbrook through the hedge. Rod, who volunteers at the ranger yard, carved wooden posts into the shapes of animals which are dotted around the loop. There is often a kestrel in the air so keep your eyes peeled.



The vast plains beyond Dane's Wood

### Between Dane's Wood and Columbjohn

The character of this woodland is much vaster and more open (almost American). The stone track sweeps round in great shining curves (it's still new enough that it gleams). This new woodland will be open to the public in the summer and so for now, it is undisturbed by dogs. Skylarks nest in the vast swathes of tufty grass between the trees, as you walk around you hear the constant sound of their burbling calls.



Elbury Wood



## Winter Woodland Work—Steve Ellis, Area Ranger



Autumn and winter are the busiest times of year for a Ranger, especially so when your specialism is woodland management. I split the year in half with September to February being the ‘felling season’ and March to July being the ‘nesting season’, when we minimise disturbance. Historically we'd wait until September to start felling trees but with increasingly wet winters, we're forced to start in August to make the most of the dry ground

The soils of a woodland are the most important part, having accumulated from decades to centuries of decomposing leaf mulch and decaying wood, and require careful protection. Some trees like oak must be felled in the middle of winter when the sap is down to preserve timber value. However, getting them out in winter is a no-go as a laden forwarder (log carrying machine) can weigh anything from 20 tonne (Killerton's forwarder) to 50 tonne laden!

We've worked closely with a local contactor, Jason from Columnjohn Farm, this year who has invested in low impact, yet productive sized machinery. Jason runs a 14.5 tonne digger with a grapplesaw and a 14 tonne harvester. Whilst this seems like a lot of weight to put on sensitive soils, the 14.5 tonne digger only exerts about twice the ground pressure I do standing in boots! Three metre long by 0.5m wide tracks help spread the weight out and reduce the impact.



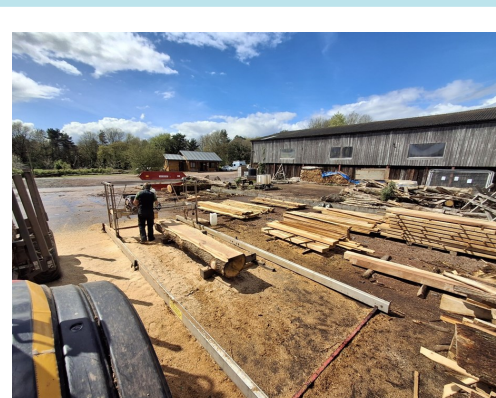
Jason's grapplesaw loading some of the Douglas fir sawlogs from Forest Gate car park, Ashclyst Forest.



Using a combination of Jason's machine felling and National Trust Ranger hand felling, we fell and process trees to length and stack them in the woods. I then go back in Spring and extract them to either the Ranger yard for milling, or to roadside where they are sold to local sawmills.

This winter, the team have been thinning conifer, oak, and western red cedar, removing laurel, coppicing hazel and widening woodland rides (linear open spaces or tracks) across the estate.

We've also worked on lots of smaller projects too like open space management, deadwood creation, tree safety work and coppicing. We're extracting the last of the timber and we've just completed our first round of milling for 2026. We've mainly been milling oak and Douglas fir for use in projects both at Killerton and other National Trust properties in the south west. Some of the stack is going down to the National Trust team at Lands End to be installed on the coast path as signage. Other posts will be holding up new interpretation boards in Killerton's new woodlands. Some other timber will be used to create pied flycatcher boxes destined for Whitedown Copse at Killerton.



Mobile sawmill at Killerton (above).

## The Scarlet Elf Cup fungi

Ranger Steve spotted this scarce Scarlet Elf Cup and Dog's Mercury emerging in Rattlecot Woods on the Killerton estate. The Scarlet Elf Cup thrives quietly in the dampest corners of the woods, growing on decaying sticks and branches and often hiding beneath leaf litter. Its season is short, typically from December through to March. Although it's reasonably widespread, the Scarlet Elf Cup is considered uncommon, making each sighting rather special.



## Little Owl Boxes-Harry Whiting, Ranger

An exciting step in our ongoing conservation work at Killerton. Recently the Ranger team put up 15 Little Owl boxes across the estate, in the hope to entice Little Owls back into some of the older orchards. Little Owls used to be called 'Orchard Owls', and as the name suggests they used to be a common sight in orchards, making the hollows of fruit trees their home. They feed on small mammals and invertebrates, and have been found nesting at various heights, including underground in disused rabbit warrens. We'll be keeping a close eye on the aptly named boxes over the coming months, and with a bit of luck, we'll be welcoming some new residents before long.



## New Ponds Flourish at Killerton

Ranger Jack (pictured right and below) and the countryside team have been hard at work creating a series of new ponds across the estate. As water settles and vegetation grows, these ponds will transform into rich habitats where beetles, invertebrates, mammals, birds, and countless other species can feed, breed, and shelter.

These ponds are also part of a longer term vision. One day, they will form a wider network of retention ponds designed to slow the flow of water through the landscape, helping to reduce runoff, improve water quality, and keep more moisture within the estate's natural systems.



Dead hedge pictured above.

From newly dug ponds to carefully protected wetlands, the work at Killerton is helping restore nature. As these ponds mature, they will support a growing web of wildlife and contribute to a healthier, more resilient landscape for years to come.

At Snaffle Drive on the Killerton Estate, a pre-existing pond is receiving special care. The team have installed a protective dead hedge around its perimeter which is an important measure to safeguard the Great Crested newt.

Killerton is fortunate to support a strong population of these newts, but nationally the picture is far more concerning. Great Crested newt numbers have fallen by around 50% over the past 60 years. Their survival depends heavily on access to undisturbed ponds for breeding, making habitat protection absolutely vital. The dead hedge acts as a natural barrier, preventing disturbance while still allowing the pond to function as a safe, productive breeding site.



## The Great Big Green Week

The Great Big Green Week (6-14 June) is the UK's biggest celebration of community action to tackle climate change and protect nature.

Join Killerton's ranger team for a week of free, expert led walks that invite you to explore the estate, get closer to nature, and learn how our conservation work is helping the landscape thrive.

# THE GREAT BIG GREEN WEEK



### Ranger walks and talks for The Great Big Green Week

Sunday 7 June	Sunday Stroll - wellbeing walk (2.00pm-4.00pm)
Sunday 7 June	The Great Big Help Out-Litter Picking at Columbjohn (10am-12.30pm)
Monday 8 June	Exclusive Preview of the Community Forest (10.00am-1.00pm)
Tuesday 9 June	New Parents walk (10.30am-12.30pm)
Wed 10 June	Sustainable Timber Production (10.30am-12.30pm)
Thursday 11 June	Ancient Trees (10.30am-12.30pm)
Friday 12 June	Walk the Bridleways (10.00am-12.00pm)
Saturday 13 June	Traditional Orchard Management (12.00pm-2.00pm)



**For more information on each walk and to book your place, visit:**

**[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/devon/killerton/events](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/devon/killerton/events)**

All walks are free of charge, but booking is essential.



If you would like to get in touch or involved, please email: [Killerton@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:Killerton@nationaltrust.org.uk)

Updates and information on nature recovery work can be found on the Killerton website:

**[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/devon/killerton/killerton-estate-project](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/devon/killerton/killerton-estate-project)**

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