

Somerset Wildlife Trust has now successfully completed its year-long **‘Making Space for Butterflies in Mendip’** project with **Aggregate Industries (AI)**, which worked to **improve butterfly habitat and food sources** in the Mendip Hills area.

Thanks to a **£22,000 grant** from The Wildlife Trusts and AI’s Local Partnerships Fund, a range of grassland and woodland **habitat restoration work**, including woodland ride management, thinning, hedgelaying, coppicing and fencing works, has been carried out at Somerset Wildlife Trust’s Cheddar Wood Nature Reserve and at wildflower grasslands around Aggregate Industries’ Torr Quarry.

Opening up woodland rides and glades, thinning woodland, and the traditional management technique of coppicing are all important ways of **enhancing the structural diversity of the woodland**.

This work ensures there are areas of older denser woodland, as well as newer growth and areas that are opened up to allow more light into woodland rides and glades.



Volunteers coppicing hazel in Cheddar Wood

This allows woodland plants and flowers to flourish, which are essential for supporting Mendip woodland butterflies and other invertebrates. Having all these different habitats within the same woodland allow it to support a larger range of wildlife including fungi, mosses and lichens, small mammals, invertebrates and birds. The coppicing volunteer days also provided training in traditional woodland skills for nine long-term unemployed volunteers from partner organisation Osprey Outdoors CIC.



Thinning and ride-opening works carried out at Cheddar Wood.

In East Mendip, removing dense bramble and installing fencing on grasslands close to Torr Works Quarry has enabled grazing to be reintroduced. Grazing helps to ensure that certain plant species, like bramble and tall, vigorous grasses, which could outcompete grassland wildflowers, are kept at a manageable level by being browsed by grazing animals. Over time, this allows **a rich variety of wildflowers to flourish on these grasslands**, supporting a range of butterflies and other insect species.



New fencing around grassland areas

The project has also helped to **create habitat patches of kidney vetch** – an elusive plant in East Mendip - and the sole foodplant of the larvae of the small blue butterfly.

In August, Somerset Wildlife Trust joined local butterfly expert Chris Iles and Torr Works quarry's Biodiversity Adviser Simon Wiltshire to **collect seeds of kidney vetch** which grows on limestone grassland north of Torr Quarry. Somerset Wildlife Trust volunteers **then sowed the seed collected onto suitable limestone grassland nearby**, to create 'stepping stone' habitat patches for the small blue butterfly to increase its range.

The rest of the seed was given to neighbouring Halecombe quarry to create more **vital habitat patches on limestone grassland**.



Collecting kidney vetch seeds



Small blue butterfly © Kiff Hancock



Small blue butterfly on kidney vetch © Cath Shellswell



Kidney vetch © Cath Shellswell

Somerset Wildlife Trust have also run several **free hedgelaying training days for local landowners and volunteers** as part of Making Space for Butterflies, led by local hedgelayers Chris Claxton and

Bryan Eley. By learning this traditional skill, attendees can now help to rejuvenate hedgerows – an important habitat for butterflies and other invertebrates.

The workshops also provided the opportunity for people to work together, socialise and be outdoors, which is proven to **help improve physical and mental wellbeing**. Many participants have found the work invigorating, meditative and perfect for relieving stress at a busy time of year, as well as being of great **benefit to the local wildlife**.



Hedgelaying workshops

Somerset Wildlife Trust would like to thank Aggregate Industries for funding this project, as well as all of the hedgelaying and coppicing volunteers, specialist trainers, contractors and quarry staff who have **helped us to restore butterfly habitats across Mendip this past year and make this project a soaring success**.