

As we start to see the first signs of Spring here is a seasonal insight from across Clinton Devon Estates.

Clinton Farms

Grass doesn't grow when temperatures drop below 4 degrees Celsius so in the first two months of the year, the cold weather has meant our grass has been slow to grow. Organic farmers use slurry and lime rather than artificial fertilisers and these have been spread on our field to get the grass going. Sheep were brought in to control weeds and ploughing for spring crops is underway.

Pebblebed Heaths

Visitors to the commons will have noticed car park improvements at Wheathill and Uphams. We are also responding to other needs and additional dog poo bins have been purchased for three new sites popular with dog walkers. Permanent signs will replace the temporary boards at junctions of unmetalled roads and prevent off roaders taking shortcuts or straying onto byways with no right of vehicular access. The bins and new signage will go out soon. We hope that both these measures will greatly reduce negative impacts, helping everyone to make responsible choices to protect the important heathland and improve the experience for all users.

Woodland

Beating up, which is replacing any missing or dead trees before the growing season and straightening and re-firming guards and supports is a key winter task for the forestry team. They will then begin the next stage of the cycle, weeding, spraying and brush cutting the weeds which compete for nutrients and light around younger trees. This is vital at the early stages of a successful crop.

Harvesting contractors have been supporting our heathland management plan on Woodbury common. By allow light into plantations on the edges of the commons this encourages a better ground cover of heather to regenerate, than when the whole area is clear felled. Thinning operations will also be taking place on steep ground sections at Otterton Hill, Aylesbeare common and around Beer.

Property and Land

Recently, *Tool Station* were the first company to move into newly built commercial units at Liverton Business Park on the outskirts of Exmouth. This national chain will serve the tradespeople and DIYers of East Devon and provide seven new jobs. Others, including two local small businesses will open their doors very shortly and we have only one units left to fill.

Our Trainee Land Agent Emma Davies, on placement from *Harper Adams University*, has completed 150 inspections of residential properties across East Devon. These checks ensure tenants are happy and properties are in good repair enabling the team to draw up a maintenance schedule. Emma has now moved onto a review paddocks and small land parcels.

The Estate delivered an event with *Natural England* in North Devon for tenant farmers to help them understand how to manage maize crops to reduce soil compaction, soil erosion, fertiliser application and runoff. This aims to ensure healthy soil and clean water and will also supports the *Devon Wildlife Trust* 'Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project'.

Bicton Arena

Sandy soils are usually free draining allowing competition in the first few months of the eventing calendar when other venues can be rained off. However, there can be puddles on our all-weather arena after wet weather, which is a challenge during winter months. We have invested in a machine called a Verti-drain and over this period, made three passes of the main arena as well as one of the cross-country course to reduce compaction.

During the Easter break, Bicton Arena will support several local pony club camps and the competition calendar is busier than ever with *British Dressage* and *British Show Jumping* events and our International Horse Trials next month.

Countryside Learning

Much of the first part of the year has been spent planning events and education work for the rest of the year. We will be attending Lambing Sunday at Bicton College on the 19th March and Budleigh Food Festival in April where we are pleased to be sponsoring the farmers market at this two-day event.

We are excited to be teaming up with Otterton Mill to offer a monthly walk series on a wide range of subjects. Estate staff and local volunteers will lead celebrating all the Lower Otter Valley has to offer.

Our Countryside Learning Officer has delivered a couple of visits to local schools and supported projects with the *Otter Valley Association*, *Devon Birds*, *Devon Wildlife Trust* and *Devon Local Nature Partnership*. Education bookings will build up as the weather warms up and teachers look to get their classes outside for learning opportunities.

For all events see www.facebook.com/Clinton-Devon-Estates. If you would like Clinton Devon Estates to be part of your community event or need a countryside speaker or visit for your education or lifelong learning group, please contact kate.ponting@clintondevon.com 01395 466 918

March Events

Otterton Farmland Birds – Come and watch rare farmland birds as well as sea ducks and dolphins from the Jurassic Coast.

Saturday 4 March 1000-1230

Stantyway Farm, Otterton EX9 7JJ

Kate Ponting, Countryside Learning Officer for Clinton Devon Estates and local resident and volunteer bird warden Doug Cullen will find the best places for you to observe the wildlife and explain how adaptations to farm management can benefit wildlife.

Booking required: kate.ponting@clintondevon.com 01395 466 918

The Lower Otter Restoration Project - A walk from Budleigh Salterton, Lime Kilns car park to Otterton Mill

Tuesday 7 March 1030-1230

The beautiful Lower Otter Valley has a history of modification by human hand stretching back 1,000 years. The local landscape has been adapted to our needs over centuries, but must now confront another challenge. That of a rapidly changing climate. This walk will look at the history of management of the Lower Otter Valley, and discuss how current management might need to adapt in the future as sea levels rise and the catchment experiences a greater intensity of storm events predicted under climate change scenarios. The walk will be led by Dr Sam Bridgewater, head of Wildlife and Conservation for Clinton Devon Estates.

No booking required

Otter Valley Association Spring Litter Pick

Saturday 25 March 1000-1200

Volunteers of ages are welcome to join the OVA in cooperation with EDDC and Clinton Devon Estates to clear all litter from the estuary below White Bridge. Prizes for the best find! Just turn up on the day, parking permits, bags and litter pickers provided, please wear gloves and wellies.