BRAUNTON COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



North Devon Environmental Trust

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PUTTING NATURE BACK INTO THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Braunton Countryside Centre is run by volunteers as a free, inclusive, family-friendly hub for nature connection and awareness in North Devon.

Braunton Countryside Centre
Caen Car Park
Braunton
EX33 1AA
www.brauntoncountrysidecentre.org

Charity number 296707

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines another highly successful and action-packed year for the Braunton Countryside Centre. The start of the year saw the completion of the two-year Connect2Nature (C2N) project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which benefited the Centre in so many ways -leaving us better equipped to host new events and activities. The project also resulted in increased revenue through our refurbished shop area, increased footfall, and a stronger community presence.

For the first time we were able to open seven days a week throughout the peak summer weeks. With increased opening hours there has been a corresponding increase in visitor numbers. A total of 12,808 visitors came through the doors in 2025 compared to 11,703 in 2024, many of whom expressed positive, appreciative comments about the Centre with several being surprised to learn that it is totally staffed and funded by a team of local volunteers.







TRUSTEES AND TREASURER

Trustees of the North Devon Environmental Trust (NDET) met five times during the year. A significant change in the management of the Centre was the stepping down of **Ken Rutherford** as Chair of Trustees at the end of 2024, after serving for over twelve years. Ken oversaw the most amazing transformative improvements to the Centre that have enabled the Centre to go from strength to strength. At the end of March, Libby Rutherford stepped down as Treasurer, also after twelve years. Her work as Treasurer has been extremely appreciated - especially during the four years of fundraising and handling grants for the building works and then the additional work managing the two-year National Lottery Heritage Fund grant for the C2N project. We thank Ken and Libby for all their hard work and massive contribution to the Centre.



We have three new co-chairs Mark Ward, Ian Davis and Mary Breeds alongside Trustees Kate Boyd, Susi Batstone, Sue Gilbert and Dawn Stephens-Borg who is also our secretary. We thank Bryan and Rita Price and Dave Jenkins for all they have done as Trustees over many years and who have now stepped down. In February we welcomed Lydia Mitchell as our new Treasurer who has brilliantly and efficiently settled into this important role. She continues to be assisted by Sarah Carter who collects and pays in all cash payments and donations. Tim Kirby attended Trustee meetings as a Braunton Parish Council representative – his input was much valued.

VOLUNTEERS

We have the most fantastic team of committed volunteers who keep the Centre running smoothly and efficiently, sharing the various responsibilities of the day to day running of the Centre. We estimate our total volunteer input to the running of the Centre to be in excess of **5,000 hours** during the past year! We were pleased to welcome the following new volunteers during the year - Brian Gilbert, Fiona Moffatt and more recently Simon Hickling and Georgina Wainwright. Although our team of volunteers mainly comprise those that staff the Centre, we have others who carry out important jobs such as Mike & Gill Dow who keep the two big flower tubs looking great and Rob Sumner, along with our Trustee Dawn, who help to maintain the website and assist with IT matters.

FUNDRAISING

We estimate the current annual costs of running the Centre to be around £10k. This is raised from several income streams:

- Sales from our shop,
- Events – talks, walks & other activities
- Payments from organisations using the Centre
- Donation boxes including a GWD card donation stand which was installed in January (purchase funded by the C2N project).

A new initiative this year, organised by Trustee Kate Boyd, was the formation of the Friends of Braunton Countryside Centre, that has brought in over £300 from the 20+ supporters that have signed up. We hope they will continue to renew each year.



THE BUILDING AND DISPLAYS

A community grant of £2,300 from Braunton Parish Council funded five new double-glazed windows with openers to replace the old single glazed ones in the meeting room and toilets. These provide improved insulation and much needed ventilation in warm weather. We are very grateful to Fozz Forsdike for carrying out many items of maintenance, improvements and repairs throughout the year. We also thank Braunton Men's Shed for undertaking extensive repairs to our map display and repairing the digital screen in the north facing window.

The newly created displays and transformation of the children's area by volunteer Sally Forsdike and Trustee Sue Gilbert took place in January and February assisted by a donation of £300 from Braunton Masonic Lodge. This funded new tables and chairs, frames for artwork and materials to create a 'woodland glade'. Fozz has improved the lighting over the marine tank and also above the two displays in the front window. We are planning to improve and introduce further new displays over the course of 2026.

The new attractive shop area being run by volunteer Sally Forsdike and Trustees Sue Gilbert and Kate Boyd with its increased range of stock, has been a great success in terms of sales takings and increasing footfall to the Centre. Many of the popular items such as the shell trinket dishes, wildlife cards and crocheted hedgehogs and pumpkins are hand made by our volunteers – thanks especially to Sue Gilbert.



EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Our events and activities were more varied and numerous than ever before with our volunteers continuing to organise some of the activities initiated by the C2N project. We thank everyone who has helped make all these events so successful – they not only fulfil our aim of connecting people with the natural environment, but have raised a significant sum through donations towards the Centre's running costs.

We have also been able to support several other organisations with their events by loaning out equipment such as bat detectors and pond and bug nets. Volunteer Jo Dyer has produced a leaflet featuring local walks for visitors to use that accompanies our various displays. Volunteer Kate Dando created a new quiz based on our displays for children and school groups visiting the Centre. Lichen experts John Skinner and Maxine Putnam have created and designed a lichen trail leaflet available from the Centre that opens up the world of lichens on the different species of trees around the car park.







Event Round Up

Seed & Plant Swap
In April we held our annual seed and plant swap, an event that encourages people to grow their own vegetables and wildlife friendly plants. Our inaugural plant and produce swap in September allowed for excess produce to be shared in the community.





Marine Actvities
Trustee and marine ecologist Mark Ward led two very successful Seashore Safaris for families at Saunton in April and in August. He also led a land-based marine 'sea watch' survey at Morte Point in August.

Apple Day
In October we held our annual Braunton Apple Day which was an incredible success with queues of people bringing their bags and boxes of apples to be mashed and juiced. Big thanks to Volunteer Andy Clee for all his help throughout the day.





Nature Book Group
Our monthly nature book group, 'Wild Pages', led by author and poet Mark Haworth-Booth has proved very enjoyable with stimulating and interesting discussions inspired by the various nature based books people have chosen.

Nature Walks



Volunteer Andy Leat has led twelve monthly bird watching walks along the estuary at Crow Point and Heanton Court. These have proved very popular and been very well received with some people becoming regulars.



As part of our commitment to citizen science, volunteer Debbie Frazer led sixmonthly bee and bug walks from the Centre on a specific route. These have been popular with children and adults alike!



The weekly Wednesday evening Wildlife Walks on Braunton Burrows led by Trustee Mary Breeds, took place throughout June and July. We also had a great selection of other walks on the Burrows at various times throughout the year including a herbal plant walk, spring walk and a late summer dune and strand-line walk. A special Well Being walk also took place on the Burrows in July.

Bat walks to the Beacon took place on late summer evenings in late August and early September using our bat detectors. The highlight of these was observing several species of bats, including Greater Horseshoe, from the special bat viewing platform and locations along the River Caen on the return route.



Talks

The Devonshire Association held their UNESCO Discovery Day at the Centre on 29 June with a showing of the Braunton Burrows film: 'Sands of Time' and a talk celebrating the biodiversity of Braunton Burrows. This was followed in the afternoon by three different themed walks on the Burrows.

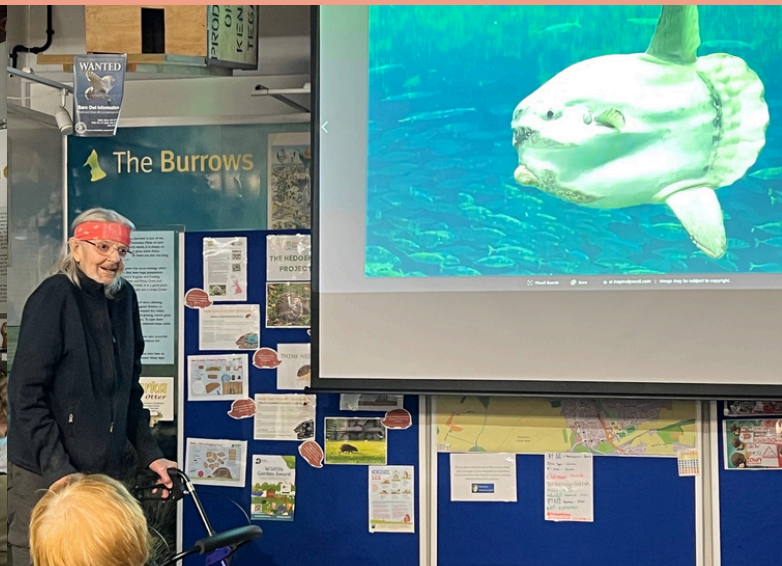






A series of five weekly evening talks took place throughout October, which were well received. Topics covered Devon's orchards, Braunton Burrows, Braunton Marsh, fungi and short talks featuring the wildlife highlights of 2025. We thank all the speakers for giving their time and expertise so generously.





School and College Groups

On 21 January, Year 5 classes from Caen Primary visited the Centre to learn about the flora & fauna of the dune habitats.

On 5 February, Year 1 classes from Southmead Primary visited to learn about mapping their local environment with a repeat visit already scheduled for next February.

On 8 May, all three Year 6 classes from Caen Primary visited the Centre to learn about habitats and local biodiversity. Also later the same day a group of Year 9 students from the Steiner School at Totnes cycled to the Centre and were given a talk on habitats and ecology of the area before visiting the dunes.

On October 23rd a group of mature students studying ecology and conservation at Petroc were given a talk on the ecology of Braunton Burrows and shown the 'Sands of Time' film followed by an interesting discussion.





Other Events and Activities



Two children's craft sessions took place on 15 April and 28 May organised and led by our talented Trustee Sue Gilbert. The latter one was hedgehog themed – linked to our Hedgehog Project.

We ran two Microscope Discovery Days at the Centre. These sessions were a chance for people of all ages to learn the wonders of using microscopes, gain a new skill and learn about the microscopic world.





Trustee Mark Ward, with help from Volunteer Chris Lewin, led a very interesting Active Hope - Nature Connections session on Braunton Burrows on 19 July.

We welcomed over 640 people to the Centre on 6 December during the day of the North Devon Christmas Market – some lured in by mulled wine and hot chocolate!



OUR PARTNERS

During 2025 we welcomed many of our partners and local organisations to the Centre. The Centre is a fantastic space with a projector, sound system and refreshment facilities making it an ideal space to host.

Several organisations used the Centre to host committee or public meetings including Earth Action North Devon (formerly Plastic Free North Devon), Fullabrook CIC, Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) North Devon group and Coastwise North Devon.

The fortnightly Wellbeing walks organised by 'Live Well in Braunton' continue to be based at the Centre, with walkers enjoying hot drinks and social time after each walk.

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A MARINELife training course was held at the Centre on 6 September and a Devon Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings course took place on 15 November training another batch of volunteers to record strandings of marine cetaceans along the North Devon coast.

The North Devon Dragonfly group led by Andy McGeeney held a microscope workshop on 6 April to identify dragonfly and damselfly nymphs found in local ponds.

We were pleased again to host the DWT static bat survey recorder from May to mid-October and thank John Breeds for his help in organising this.

THE HEDGEHOG PROJECT

We were successful in obtaining a grant from the Devon Environment Foundation for £9,000 to fund a one-year project focussing on the recovery of hedgehogs within five different communities across North Devon. We were pleased to appoint Jack Woolfenden as the Project Manager and Kerri Nias as the Project Support Officer.

The Hedgehog Project started on 1 May with a well-attended, inspiring launch taking place at the Centre on 22 May. A project display incorporating a hedgehog friendly garden was created by Kerri along with a very attractive hedgehog collage by Volunteer Sally Forsdike. Several hedgehog related events have taken place at the Centre – a project forum and a family day in September and visits from Braunton Brownies, Rainbows and Girl Guides later in the autumn. An online mid-way project meeting was held on 4 November during which sixteen attendees from across all the participating communities shared achievements, activities and ideas. One of the outcomes of Hedgehog project is a newly formed Braunton Community hedgehog group who will use the centre as meeting point and continue to have a display board to support hedgehog conservation in the village and beyond. Find out more at www.brauntoncountrysidecentre.org/hedgehog-project/







OUR PLANS FOR 2026

We plan to repeat and develop many of our 2025 events such as our sea watches, as well as looking at ways of continuing to improve the Centre especially updating its displays and resources. We are looking to launch a new project, with the support and input of our volunteers, trustees and partners, called 'Action4Nature'. This will encourage visitors to the Centre and those who attend our events to explore ways they can take their own actions to look after nature. We are actively seeking grants and sponsorships to help fund this work. We look forward to sharing more information about this in due course.

We also hope to celebrate the 40th anniversary since the Charity behind the Centre was established in 1986.











