Hedgelaying World Record Attempt creates wildlife haven

Tuesday 11 October, 2022

National Hedgerow Week, Monday 10 October - Monday 17 October 2022*

Ahead of this year's National Hedgerow Week, more than 60 hedgelayers from around the UK and Ireland converged on East Hampshire for a Guinness World Record attempt for the longest stretch of hedge laid in 12 hours. Dr Francis Buner, senior scientist at the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) was called upon for scientific advice and to act as 'Specialist Witness' for the world record attempt.

The event on 1 October at the Rotherfield Park Estate resulted in a remarkable 555.4 metres of hedges laid in approximately seven and a half hours - a speed of nearly 80 metres of hedge laying per hour. £6,550 has so far been raised by the event, being split between prostate and breast cancer charities and the Ukraine DEC appeal.

Dr Buner said: "Hedgelaying is a beautiful rural tradition and the people practising it are simply lovely. In times gone by hedgelaying was a necessity to keep livestock in fields, each region having its own typical style. Once the hedge has grown back, it will be beaming with wildlife once again."

With a mix of amateurs and professionals from the National Hedgelaying Society and the National Hedgelaying Society of Ireland all working in 10m strips, the attempt saw over 60 hedgelayers getting involved. The local team was joined by teams from North Somerset, Lancashire and Westmoreland, Devon, the South of England, Midlands, Cheshire and Ireland. Many of the teams brought their own regional styles of hedgelaying, including the Midlands style and the Irish freestyle.

Conditions at Rotherfield Park Estate meant that this record attempt was difficult to compare to a previous hedgelaying record achieved, of just over 280 metres of hedge laid in 12 hours by two people, which it is assumed was undertaken by professional hedgelayers working on optimal hedges. Hedges should ideally be laid at eight or nine years old. In the Rotherfield attempt, the hedges had last been coppiced (cut down to one foot tall) around 18 years ago and were already 30 to 40 years old at that point. This, combined with the exceptionally dry spring and summer, meant that the stems and trunks were extremely thick and brittle, and the hedges included a mix of species with plenty of thorn bushes - proving a challenge for even the most seasoned of hedgelayers.

As well as being useful to farmers, GWCT wildlife monitoring has shown that proper management of hedgerows, including hedgelaying, is highly beneficial to wildlife. Francis commented:

"I have been doing bird surveys in the area where these hedges were laid since 2010. In that time farmland birds of conservation concern, such as skylark, linnet, yellowhammer, dunnock and song thrush have increased by more than 90%. That is testament to the efforts of Rotherfield team to improve habitat on their farm.

"During the same period, these birds have continued to decline nationally. The GWCT is proud to have been involved with the recovery of wildlife at the Rotherfield Park Estate.

"Whether this is a world record or not, we will find out once all the paperwork has been processed. Regardless, everyone, from the charities and the local community to the wildlife, is a winner."

National Hedgerow Week began in 2021 to highlight the immense contribution these unsung heroes of the natural world make in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss and to raise awareness of the threats they face. Find out more hedgelink.org.uk/campaign/national-hedgerow-week/

For more information on the **Hedgelaying Society**
and how they are working to maintain the traditional skills of hedgelaying and encourage the management of hedgerows for the benefit of wildlife and landscape, visit hedgelaying.org.uk

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thriving countryside. The GWCT is an independent wildlife conservation charity which has carried out scientific research into Britain's game and wildlife since the 1930s. We advise farmers and landowners on improving wildlife habitats. We employ 22 post-doctoral scientists and 50 other research staff with expertise in areas such as birds, insects, mammals, farming, fish and statistics. We undertake our own research as well as projects funded by contract and grant-aid from Government and private bodies.

National Hedgerow Week, 10 – 17 October 2022. NB. This event was postponed from 17 – 25 September 2022, due to the sad passing of HM The Queen.

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