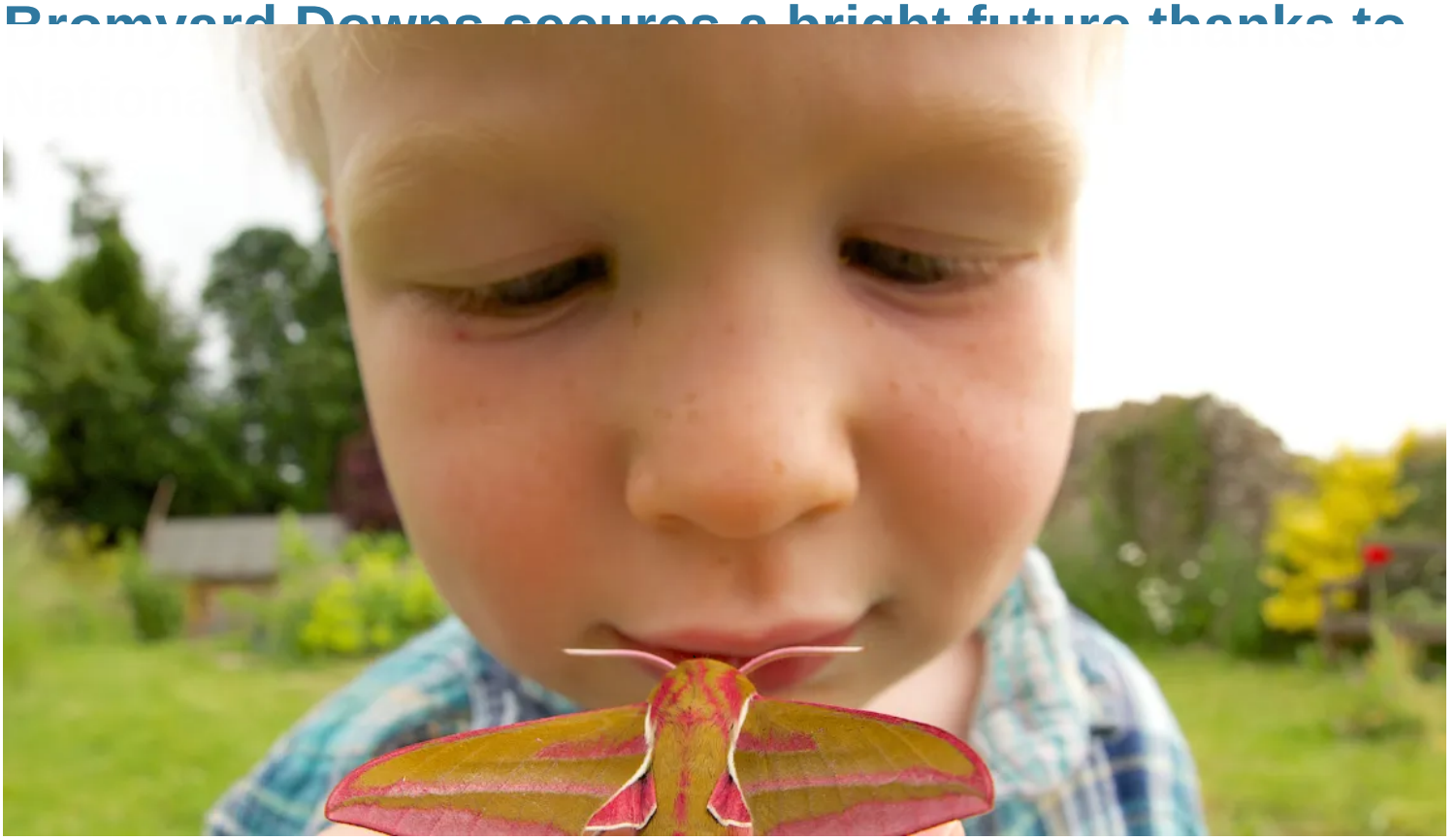
Bromyard Downs secures a bright future thanks to National



A young visitor with an elephant hawk moth E. Bowen-Jones

Spanning 114 hectares and reaching 700 feet, the Downs is a key landmark and home to an incredible array of species, including the increasingly rare bullfinch and viviparous lizard.

Now the Bromyard Downs Common Association (BDCA) and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust (HWT) are launching plans to safeguard the future of the Downs by creating a strong long-term strategy while inspiring and training the local community to play a key role in their area's outstanding natural heritage.

The plans aim to boost visitor numbers and create a wide area of well-managed habitat stretching from Bromyard, through Brockhampton Estate and on to Bringsty Common.

Reyahn King, Head of HLF West Midlands, said: "We're delighted to support these plans to secure a deservedly bright future for Bromyard Downs. The project offers fantastic opportunities for volunteers to get involved and gain some valuable skills. Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, we're proud to support projects across the West Midlands which share and conserve our amazing natural heritage, from grasslands to wetlands and bumblebees to bats."

Training days will equip volunteers with skills and training needed to carry out a range of essential practical work. This work will help to reverse the decline of the landscape and its wildlife to ensure the Downs remains a haven for finer and rarer species as well as the more common flora and fauna that thrives there.

Ecological surveys will monitor the condition of habitats and the wildlife they support. With support from the Institute of Science and Environment at the University of Worcester, the data will be collated and added to a database to help tell the natural story of the Downs.

There are 88 registered commoners with a range of rights including the right to graze and collect firewood. There has been little to no grazing for over 20 years but the project will work with the commoners to reintroduce traditional breeds of sheep and cattle to temporary fenced areas. Centuries of grazing has shaped the landscape of the Downs – it is both a traditional and sustainable way of managing the Downs, whilst maintaining the diverse mosaic of habitats that make the place so special and loved by the local community.

Brockhampton Academy on the Downs will be used as a base for an educational resource to inspire the next generation of custodians of Bromyard Downs. Visitors of all ages will have the opportunity to get in touch with the natural heritage of the area thanks to wildlife focused BioBlitz days, guided ‘safari’ walks and talks, and brand-new interpretation boards.

As well as looking forward, the project will take a trip back in time to tell the story of the Downs. Archaeological investigations will look into the Downs’ long-gone racecourse and a fabled Second World War Mercian Maquis bunker in Warren Wood – which Hereford and Worcestershire’s resistance organisations would have used. The local history group will also look at the more recent history of the area by collecting memories, photos and newspaper cuttings from the local community.

Project Manager Hannah Welsh is thrilled that the good work that began in the last year can be continued and expanded. She said, “just last week we had over 30 volunteers including the senior section of the Guides out on the Downs for a big litter pick as part of the Big Community Clean Up weekend. It was great to see the community coming together to help preserve the Downs for people and wildlife.”

Notes to editors

- Herefordshire Wildlife Trust (HWT) is part of the federation of 47 Wildlife Trusts based across the British Isles. Formerly known as Herefordshire Nature Trust, it is the largest member based nature conservation organisation in the county, with nearly 5,000 members and 55 nature reserves across Herefordshire. HWT has over 50 years experience of managing sites valuable to wildlife and people, and successfully run a variety of partnership initiatives from environmental education programmes to conservation projects celebrating Herefordshire's natural beauty. For more information visit the Hereford Wildlife Trust website.
- Bromyard Downs Common Association (BDCA) manages the common on behalf of the owners, Hereford Council. Members are all active and committed members of the community. Their commitment to the project and the aim of engaging local people is strengthened by their status as residents.

Further information

Hannah Welsh, Project Manager, on tel: 01432 356872 / 07733 404938 or via email: h.welsh@herefordshirewt.co.uk