

THE CHILTERN NEWSLETTER

Wildlife Trust news, views and event information from the Chilterns Group, College Lake and around Buckinghamshire.

Issue 101 Spring -Summer 2020

PLEASE SUPPORT THE BBOWT PLANT AND PRODUCE CHARITY MARKET

GREAT MISSENDEN

Memorial Centre, Link Road,
Great Missenden HP16 9AE

Sunday 18 Oct 10 - 12 noon

- Excellent value plants
- Tasty homemade produce
- Tea, coffee, cakes
- White elephant stall
- Free entry, free parking

For contributions & queries
please contact
John Catton on
01494726616
richard.catton1@ntlworld.com

Or **Julie Pomfret**, 01296486854
cyberpom@btinternet.com,

Conservation in Action

There was a lot of interest in the last piece I wrote in this Newsletter about dealing with ecological anxiety by getting active. I've had responses from more people wanting to join work parties and other BBOWT activities, and even to start up a new local environmental group.

There couldn't be a better time to turn your worries, frustration and anger about environmental issues, from HS2 to climate change, into action in this part of Buckinghamshire. Naturally I would like you to offer your time and energy to BBOWT, where there is plenty going on locally and you can get involved with our reserves, talks and walks, fundraising and campaigning. However, there are lots of other opportunities with organisations BBOWT supports and with whom we collaborate.

The Chilterns Conservation Board's exciting 5-year project 'Chalk, Chairs and Cherries' is now well underway. This National Lottery funded scheme will see lots of interlinked wildlife and landscape focussed projects across the Central Chilterns. The Chilterns Society has been active in the Chilterns for almost as long as BBOWT and shares some of our objectives. Its active conservation groups work on some of our reserves. In the south of the county Chiltern Rangers, based in High Wycombe, is a group carrying out practical conservation tasks linked to community and personal development. Lindengate, the mental health charity with gardens on the edge of Wendover, is another collaborating organisation that shares our passion for wildlife. Don't miss their Bioblitz later in the year when BBOWT and other organisations will be helping them record all the wildlife on their 5-acre site. There really is no excuse for not getting involved in some way with wildlife conservation with all these

organisations working for nature's recovery in your local area. Failing this (or in addition!) I urge you to make sure your own garden plays its part – by making it more wild, growing good plants for pollinators and adding features that will help birds, hedgehogs, reptiles and insects. If you do, you will certainly want to come along to our Plant & Produce Market in Great Missenden in October. **Don't let nature decline while you sit and watch it on the television.**

Mick Jones, Chilterns Group Chairman

College Lake Shop and Café news.

We had some great sales in the shop and café leading up to Christmas and we hope to continue those this year. I will be attending the Spring Fair at Birmingham looking for new and interesting products to introduce to the shop this year. I will also be attending many of the Chilterns Group Talk evenings with the shop so hope to see you all! We have had a few staff changes in the Visitor Centre. Sam Nichol has now replaced Paul Simmons and will be focusing on introducing new and exciting events for our visitors. Stella Gosling has taken over from Claire as Café Supervisor. Stella has already introduced lots of lovely new dishes and I cannot wait to see these develop. Last but not least Andrew Inkley has replaced Collin Allum as our Facilities Manager. Andrew will be making sure all the technical sides of our lovely building are working and fully functional. I wish you all a great year and look forward to seeing you here at College Lake when we can reopen.

Toyah Baulk, Centre Manager

Old Passion, New Job!

I have always had a keen interest in wildlife and conserving Britain's natural spaces, so when I moved to the Chilterns last year I saw it as the perfect opportunity to seek out a job that would allow me to share my passion with everybody else! I've been with BBOWT for four months now, working mainly with organising and delivering new events in the centre, reserve and education barn. We have a few events in the pipeline, including several bird walks, a swap shop which will encourage reusing and recycling old books and clothing, and seasonal themed arts & crafts classes such as gingerbread decorating, bird box building, pumpkin carving and medicinal herb identification. I'm excited to encourage more people to get in touch with their wild side, and I'm honoured to be working for such an incredible local charity that looks after some truly beautiful places!

Sam Nichol, Visitor Centre Assistant

The Badger Café

I am Stella, the new Café Supervisor at College Lake.

We have had a very exciting re-fit at the College Lake Café to give it a more open plan feel and reopened on Wednesday 29 January. We are also in the process of creating a new menu which will include a full English breakfast with a vegetarian option, seasonal soups, pasta salads, quiche salads along with our local Harpers sausage rolls that we know our customers love.

We also hope to offer more vegan options which will include vegan chilli, sandwiches and soups.

I am a qualified cake decorator and my previous jobs have been making birthday, celebration and wedding cakes. I have a passion for good cake and we know our customers love bread pudding so we will definitely be keeping it on the menu!

Stella, Café Supervisor

Surveying Reptiles at the Waterworks, Dancersend Reserve

Over the past three years a reptile survey of the Orchard and Waterworks areas has monitored comings and goings of various species. They seek the shelter of reptile refugia (tiles) that have been deployed to make the task of finding reptiles easier and maximising the opportunities for observing them. The tiles consist of corrugated tin sheeting or roofing felt. A small number of tiles had been deployed previously but these were augmented in late winter 2017. Dancersend Waterworks is a good site for this type of study as it is a 'permit-only' area of the reserve, meaning that the tiles are not constantly being lifted by visitors.

Observations are undertaken during spring to autumn when reptiles are active. Historically slow worms and grass snakes have often been recorded, but I have been recording their presence systematically in order to provide a baseline and a guide as to how their populations are faring.

My voluntary duties as a stock watcher for BBOWT are often combined with the surveys when there is stock to watch over at Dancersend. Ponies are used to periodically graze the Waterworks site and Hebridean sheep are used on the Crong Meadow and the Meadow Plots.

Over the monitoring period the maximum number of slow worms recorded has been stable. After deployment of the tiles in mid-February 2017

the reptiles took a little while to find them. However, a maximum count in mid-June of 19 slow worms was identical to the maximum number recorded in 2019 (31 May). 23 individuals were recorded on 8 June 2018; the greatest number of animals noted on a single date.

Numbers recorded vary and are likely to depend on the usual factors affecting populations, such as weather conditions, prey availability and mortality rates due to predation by other animals. Air temperatures when slow worms have been recorded under

the tiles varied from 4 to 29 degrees Celsius

and their presence noted between the end of March and

mid-October. Although slow worms are often found lying within the ant nests that are often present under the tiles it is thought that ants do not form a significant part of their diet. The prey items are believed to primarily include slugs, snails and earthworms.

Courtship takes place between May to the end of June and begins by the male biting the female on the neck or head. Scars are occasionally observed on the females as a result of this behaviour. This activity has been recorded (8 May 2019) and is shown in the photograph.

Slow worms are born alive, but within an egg membrane from which they emerge quickly using an egg tooth. Birth occurs between mid-August and mid-September and they measure 70 - 100mm in length. At Dancersend the young have been observed under the tiles soon after birth and again early in the following year.



**Mike Jennings, Chilterns Group
Committee**

How local volunteers help fund BBOWT's conservation work.

We all appreciate our local BBOWT reserves and there are nine nearby. It seems counterintuitive, but maintaining a natural wildlife balance takes an awful lot of human input - for this read BBOWT staff and volunteers. Chilterns Group volunteers help the staff cover the reserves in an area of the Chilterns roughly from Aylesbury to Amersham. Money to acquire and manage reserves comes in from a variety of sources one being through the efforts of a small band of volunteers within the Chilterns Group who organise fundraising events each year.

The two major events are the Plant and Produce Markets held in May and October at the Memorial Centre, Great Missenden. The big draw is obviously the plants, all donated by enthusiastic local gardeners. If you are short of garden tools, 'Workaid' will be able to supply some reconditioned ones. Inside the hall you'll find a pop-up café, a home produce stall that will make the WI envious and a (never know what you'll find) white elephant stall. The next one will now be on **Sunday 18 October**, from 10:00am to 12:00 noon when we expect over 200 visitors and should raise about £1,000 thanks to the endeavours of some 40 helpers.

Full details can be found on the Trust's website: www.bbowl.org.uk/events

So, how is the money raised spent? It could be on those all-important information boards, or benches on which to rest and admire the view, or the high-visibility jackets worn by volunteers when working on the reserves, along with the upgrading of the tools they use.

John Catton, Chilterns Group Events Organiser

Working through the winter at Finemere Wood

The Finemere volunteers have been knee-deep in mud during the winter months, slipping and sliding through great quagmires as they tackled the winter work of clearing scrub and trees. The rainfall has been high, and thus there has been many a wet and soggy work party. Despite this, these ardent woodland workers kept coming back for more, and so much has been achieved.



And now the spring is upon us, and Finemere Wood will blossom and bloom. It is truly a wonderful time to visit this wildlife haven. The bluebell extravaganza, which we can expect to see in the latter part of April, is a sight not to be missed. Carpeted with a mass of deep violet-blue flowers, the wood is transformed into a magical wonderland.

Much of the winter was spent coppicing a large area, to create a coupe. A number of tall conifers were felled around this site. The sun can now flood in and seeds lying dormant in the soil will germinate. It will be fascinating to see what emerges from this bleak and

muddy bog in the coming year.

Fencing around this newly cleared area will be a priority now, to protect lush new growth from the predatory deer. Other tasks the volunteers will find themselves engaged with will be the annual cutting and raking of grass along the rides, keeping paths clear from encroaching brambles and removing protective fences that are no longer required.

The biotic boom is almost upon us, a time when the wood bursts into life. Flowers and trees, butterflies and birds, mice and bats, it is a most exhilarating time of year.

Charlotte Karmali, Volunteer Warden

<https://www.bbowl.org.uk/nature-reserves/finemere-wood>

Can you help us to check our livestock?

The beginning of this year saw the reserves team back out with our four-legged workforce, as we carried out health checks on our sheep and moved our livestock onto their winter grazing. Across Berks, Bucks &



Oxon, over fifty of our nature reserves are grazed. We use our own animals on over half of these sites while the rest are grazed by sheep and cattle belonging to external graziers.

Livestock play a key role out on our nature reserves. They help to control the more dominant coarse grasses and to prevent encroachment by woody 'scrub' vegetation. BBOWT uses traditional, native breeds and while out on the reserves you may come across Hebridean sheep, Dexter cattle, or our Exmoor and New Forest ponies. These breeds are selected for their hardy nature and do well in the habitats that we manage. Our livestock move between the sites to provide the right

amount of grazing at the best time for each habitat – some reserves are therefore grazed throughout the year, whereas others may be grazed for only a few weeks.

Our grazing animals do an essential job for us but we wouldn't be able to utilise them at all of our reserves without the invaluable support of our volunteer stock watchers. These volunteers help us to carry out the checks on our animals, ensuring that our livestock stay healthy and happy. We are currently looking for

additional stock watchers at our **Windsor Hill** reserve, near Princes Risborough, and at **Swains Wood**, near Watlington. Can you help?

For more information please contact **Stacey Hewitt** on staceyhewitt@bbowt.org.uk or 01442 826774 (ext. 208).

Ash Dieback Update

2019 saw a rapid advance in the spread of ash dieback (*Chalara*) across Buckinghamshire with many of our nature reserves now having trees with quite advanced stages of the fungal disease.

The disease causes dieback in the crown of the tree and is usually fatal. At an early stage the disease causes severe dieback in the crown of the tree so that it is unable to put on the late hardwood growth, which is essential to maintain its structural integrity. This means that trees with ash dieback have a high level of weakness in the canopy and they are very susceptible to shedding large limbs. The disease also makes trees more prone to attack from secondary pathogens such as honey fungus, which rots the core wood and roots of the tree and makes them extremely unstable.

To ensure that our nature reserves are safe, we will be undertaking a programme of work over the coming years to fell ash trees when they are deemed to be unsafe and posing a serious risk to users of our sites and neighbours. As well as felling unsafe trees this may also include temporary closures and diversions of paths to try to limit the number of trees needing to be felled and subsequent loss of valuable habitat. Where possible standing and fallen deadwood will be retained to provide excellent habitat for bats, deadwood invertebrates and other species.

This winter works have started at several Chilterns sites including Weston Turville Reservoir, Pavis Wood and Hog and Hollowhill Woods all of which have a high proportion of mature ash trees. Please look out for signage at site entrances and additional information on individual nature reserve web pages to find out what major work might be happening and if there will be any resulting impacts on visitor access to the site.

Mark Vallance, Senior Land Manager (Bucks)

Making a bit of a mess at Dancersend

You probably associate the term 'conservation' with protecting and preserving habitat for wildlife and treating those special places with great reverence. At most you might expect to see 'fine tuning' of our nature reserves to ensure conditions remain favourable – by grazing, mowing and a little scrub clearance. If so, you would have been surprised – even shocked – at the work going on at Dancersend during December and January.

Keeping our special Chilterns wildlife thriving in the face of serious pressures in the wider countryside sometimes needs more habitat intervention - this is what we are doing at Dancersend ... and it involves cutting things down and digging things up! Coppicing is generally understood now as an important conservation activity and we don't have to field as many complaints these days because we are cutting down trees. At the southern end of Bittams Wood, overlooking the valley and the Waterworks, we have been cutting down old, almost moribund hazels, which will save them as an important type of woodland at the reserve before they collapse and rot. These hazels have all been coppiced in the past to harvest poles for making hurdles, stakes and binders for hedge-laying, thatching spars and firewood and we need to re-cut them now and take out some of the taller trees overshadowing them so they regrow successfully. In the meantime, with sunlight flooding into the woodland for the first time in many years, flowers will flourish along with all the insects that need them.

Along with the start of selective felling of ash trees that are infected with *Chalara* fungus, or 'ash dieback', for safety reasons, this means that there is a lot of fallen timber at present. Most of this will be left to gradually rot on the ground or in piles as extraction would cause too much damage to the woodland floor. A small amount may be removed for firewood, hedging material, bean poles, and so on but the extra dead wood will be of great benefit to many invertebrate species. A truly rich ancient woodland will have at least a third of its timber in a state of decay.

At the other end of Dancersend, on the Extension Fields we



New earthworks being excavated

were able to purchase in 2000, there have been much more spectacular activities going on. The last few days of January saw the arrival of a large excavator, luckily equipped with caterpillar tracks as the land was still incredibly wet. The skilled operator proceeded to excavate an impressive S-shaped deep ditch, moving soil to form an adjacent bank and heaping raw chalk over this. No, we are not going into quarrying, or starting a new golf course. This really is conservation work to create important new habitat for rare chalk plants and butterflies.

Earlier shallow chalk scrapes, created in 2011, have already been very successful, with over 1400 Chiltern gentians counted last September, rare plants like slender bedstraw and basil thyme, now established and blue butterflies arriving. The new earthworks will connect up two of the original scrapes, creating a replica ancient sunken 'trackway' that will provide much-needed shelter at such an exposed site, and a new 'butterfly bank' to be reseeded and provide south-facing slopes with bare ground that will warm up early in the year and supply perfect conditions for our rare butterflies.

So, we might be making a bit of a mess, but we are not destroying this beautiful reserve – we are enhancing it, leading to more wildlife for you to see over the next few years.

Mick Jones, Volunteer Warden

BBOWT Chilterns Group Guided Walks June - July 2020

June events may also be cancelled so please check on line as lockdown may affect future events.

College Lake is now closed until further notice. They offer many walks and children's sessions throughout the summer. Please go online at <http://www.bbowt.org.uk/events> for details of all events and how to book or alternatively phone 01442 826774 once it reopens.

June

Annual Orchid Count at Aston Clinton Ragpits

Saturday 13 June: 10.00 - 14.00 Aston Clinton Ragpits, near Wendover, HP22 5NF

Discover the Wildlife of Aston Clinton Ragpits

Sunday 14 June: 10.00 - 12.00 Aston Clinton Ragpits, near Wendover, HP22 5NF

Exciting Flora of Bacombe Hill

Saturday 27 June: 10.00 - 13.00 Coombe Hill & Bacombe Hill, Wendover, HP17 0UR

July

What's Hiding in the Bushes?

Saturday 11 July: 10.00 - 12.30 Dancersend Nature Reserve, near Tring, HP23 6LD

Marsh Helleborines & Dragonflies

Sunday 19 July: 13.00 – 15.00 Pitstone Fen, College Lake, near Tring HP23 5QG

Discover the Wildlife of Aston Clinton Ragpits

Sunday 26 July: 10.00 - 12.00 Aston Clinton Ragpits, near Wendover HP22 5NF

Walks cost £5 per adult and £3 per child and must be booked on www.bbowt.org.uk/events

All funds raised help support the Wildlife Trust's work protecting wildlife and you can find out more about getting involved at www.bbowt.org.uk/volunteering

Rough Around the Edges Update

It's been quiet over the winter period – Christmas takes up lots of energy – but things are picking up now. We've had some conservation hedge laying at Lindengate (thanks to Leila from Chiltern Rangers) and the whips are ready to be put in the ground for gapping up and a new hedge. Pupils and parents from the school at Widmer End had a great morning making bird and hedgehog boxes with me on the calm Saturday before the storm that followed. They have now put in lots of homes for hedgehogs, birds and amphibians around their new pond, and have prepared the ground for the short hedge that they want to plant. As they did this, we scattered and trampled in some



wildflower seed. We still have some plans for the woodland area there, with some heavy lifting of debris, a tree survey and a new mowing regime around the edge of it to let some of the grass grow a bit longer. As I write, Leila is laying some large hawthorns along a field edge at Donkey Lane Orchard in Chinnor to let some more light in for the fruit trees. The Orchard group (part of Greening Chinnor) have done a fantastic job reclaiming this site from the bramble, clearing the ground and stabilising some of the trees. They have had around a third of the trees identified now and hopefully we'll be able to do more at the end of this next fruiting season. With an Apple Day in October, January's Wassail and a Blossom Day planned for 26 April, this site is a real hub of activity and enthusiasm.

There's plenty more planned work on the Rough Around the Edges sites, as well as new groups to encourage to take up the support the project can give them. I'm beginning to see and plan the kind of training that groups need – from species ID to first aid – so that they are all more confident about their sites and projects for the future.

It's clear that many people would like more opportunities to learn about bird, plant and invertebrate ID from a beginner's level, and I will be trying to get out and do some very simple site surveys for groups. If there are any keen volunteers who think they might be able to help me with these, please do get in touch. If nothing else, I'm finding that this project is a great way to explore some hidden corners of the Chilterns.

Katie Horgan, Project Officer

katiehorgan@bbowt.org.uk / <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/rough-around-edges>

College Lake History Updated

We are very grateful to Ken Thompson, assisted by John Clutterbuck, for preparing a new history of College Lake. You can download it at -

<http://www.museumoftechnology.org.uk/ken/clhistory.pdf>

Focus on Yoesden Bank

Over the last few months, much work has been done at this fabulous chalk grassland and beech hanger reserve. Last year, extensive new fencing, gates and some steps joining the grassland and woodland have been installed. And in the first two months of this year, a huge amount of work, from various quarters, has been carried out. Large areas of scrub regeneration and bramble have been cut back and burnt, in and around the top Clearing. Many 'work hours' were put in by the Yoesden Work Party, the Bucks Mid-Week Team and our four conservation trainees, all volunteers! This will maintain and encourage, amongst other things, the rather spectacular colony of devils-bit scabious. Why not visit in August and September to see the 'Purple Haze' for yourself?

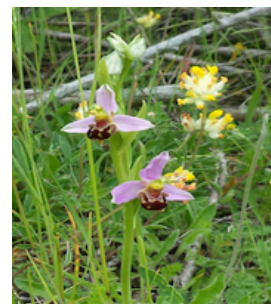
In addition, contractors have felled some tricky, big ash in our on-going plan to link up the two grassland areas. They have also installed a water trough, which will enable the more effective grazing of the Extension with cattle. All this effort doesn't just maintain but will enhance and increase the area of this rare and rich habitat.



And ...Signs of things to come...

College Lake is so rich in wildlife that you don't even have to leave the car park to see something of interest. A quick count the other morning revealed over 50 bee orchid plants at the base of the hedge that divides the bays. And that reminded me of another colony...so I climbed onto the visitor centre roof and found another 103.

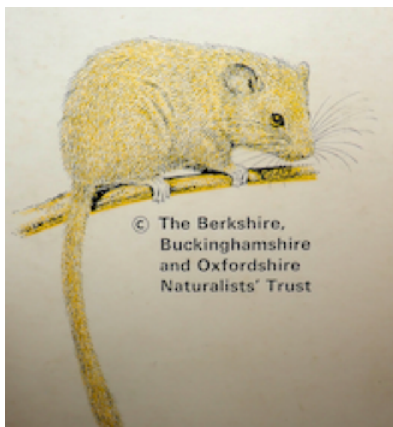
So remember, come June, you won't need to go far to see this amazing flower



Bee orchid

Chris Trew, Reserves Officer

Denys Ovenden, Natural History Illustrator, 1922-2019



Dormouse, from an early BBONT publication

It is sad to mark the passing of Denys Ovenden on 26 November, aged 97 years. He was a prolific and highly celebrated illustrator of all aspects of natural history. Working closely with Michael Chinery he helped to create a whole series of ground-breaking Collins field guides and contributed illustrations to many other publishing projects.

Living in the Chilterns, he was a long-standing supporter of BBOWT and acted as Chairman of the South Bucks Regional Committee for many years. In the early days of BBONT, Denys illustrated many of our publications, drew reserve maps and designed publicity material, almost certainly at very favourable rates. He was a fine field naturalist and contributed records from the Southern Chilterns he knew so well. We were privileged when Denys and Michael Chinery joined us for a joint BBOWT/Bucks Invertebrate Group 'Plant Gall Hunt' at Dancersend in August 2017 and contributed their many years of expertise.

A service to celebrate his life was held at the Chilterns Crematorium on 18 December with donations collected for BBOWT.

Mick Jones

Hugh Mellor, CBE, Conservationist and Former Chair of BBOWT, 1936-2019

Hugh was chairman of The Wildlife and Wetlands Trust and oversaw the creation of the London Wetland Centre at Barnes. He then became chairman of BBOWT and led us through an important period of expansion. As a former trustee recalls, 'Hugh always had a calm and amicable approach, listening to different viewpoints and guiding discussions until a consensus was reached on the various issues which the Trustees had to deal with'.

Richard Birch

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

We are covering topics from around the county to encourage members to spread their wings. The Trust's reserves north of Aylesbury have year round interest but are less visited, so please explore them and support the hard work of local staff and volunteers.

We are grateful for everyone's contributions to the newsletter. If you have ideas for the next issue, **covering September to March please submit them by 1 July to juliebirch60@yahoo.com.**

To be put on the mailing list for this newsletter please contact membership@bbowt.org.uk

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HANDS - ON CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

Work parties are sociable and satisfying local events with opportunities to learn new skills. Beginners are particularly welcome and you can stay for whatever time you can spare. Please wear stout footwear and work clothes, including gloves, and take care on steep slopes and uneven ground. Tools and instruction are provided. Children (10+) are welcome but please contact the organiser if you wish to bring them. Parents must supervise children at all times.

ALL DATES SUBJECT TO LOCKDOWN RULES See Website

DANCERSEND (near Tring) 10 - 4pm - Second Sunday of month

- 14 June** Meet at western end of reserve near Chivery. Turn south off B4009 Wendover -
13 Sept Tring Road towards St Leonards for approx 1.7 miles. 150 yds S of Chesham
Fencing Supplies, take track on left signed to BBOWT car park, then follow
signs to work site.
- 12 July &** Meet at Thames Water pumping station. SP 905088, HP23 6LB. Where
11 Oct Wendover – Tring Road B4009 meets old A41 take Dancersend road, turn right after
1 mile and continue for 0.75 miles to car park on left by Waterworks.
- 9 August** Entrance to Extension fields, between Aston Hill and Chivery SP 891097

Contact Judi Fisher 01494 722073, judiandbryan@yahoo.co.uk

ASTON CLINTON RAGPITS (near Wendover)

For information please **contact** Phil Townsend 01923 353410,
philjtownsend@yahoo.co.uk

FINEMERE WOOD (near Quainton) Work party dates: 9.30am - 3pm on second and fourth
Thursday of the month from April to August

Contact Charlotte at charlottekarmali@outlook.com

WESTON TURVILLE RESERVOIR (near Wendover, 10am - 2.30pm) last Thursday of month
30 July, 27 Aug, 24 Sept, 29 Oct, 26 Nov

Meet at eastern entrance to reserve in the lay-by in Halton Lane, off B4009,
map ref SP866096, HP22 6AZ. Work is mostly in wet areas so waterproof
footwear is essential. New volunteers from the area will be very welcome.

Contact Stacey Hewitt (see below).

COLLEGE LAKE (near Tring) 10.00 - 4pm

Please call or email **Leo Keedy** - 01442 826774 ext. 210 or leokeydy@bbowt.org.uk

For Roving Teams **contact** **Stacey Hewitt** ext. 208 or staceyhewitt@bbowt.org.uk

PITSTONE FEN work party is 1st Saturday of the month. Meet at College Lake for 9:45am. I need to know
how many to expect so please contact me if you want to attend. steve_keene@btinternet.com

BERNWOOD GROUP Rushbeds/Lapland on first Sunday of month. Whitecross Green Wood
on other Sundays. For more details contact **Becky Woodall** on 01844 238399

YOESEN BANK For more information contact Ched George on c5hed.george@btinternet.com

BACOMBE HILL (near Wendover) 10am on second Thursday of month,
contact steve_keene@btinternet.com

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**Volunteering Information:
www.bbowt.org.uk/how-you-can-help/volunteer**