

BBOWT CHILTERN'S GROUP

NEWSLETTER

104 Spring/Summer 2021

Wildlife Trust news, views and events from the Chilterns, College Lake and around Bucks

Hooray! We are back

As I write this, we are just about to resume volunteer work sessions at our Chilterns nature reserves and to put together a tentative programme of small group guided walks. We are also looking forward to College Lake reopening on 14 April.

It will be wonderful to begin to catch up with management tasks that were put on hold at the end of December. A small group of volunteers have helped with some essential tasks on reserves during the latest lockdown and I would like to thank them, as well as our reserves staff and trainees, who have been key to keeping things ticking over.

We are proud to have kept our programme of illustrated talks going through the winter after mastering the online technology. Steve Hawkins assembled a series of fascinating speakers, growing the audience to at least 200 viewers, many of whom have been new to our talks, and we hope to build on this experience for our 2021/22 Talking about Nature series.

Thankfully, nature has hardly been affected by the dreadful pandemic and people have been able to exercise at and enjoy our nature reserves, many discovering them for the first time. This has brought considerable pressure in some cases, and we are having to increase messaging and signage to point out how visitors should behave. Please help us by setting a good example when enjoying our reserves – park considerately, keep to paths, take litter home, keep dogs on short leads and take care where you picnic (our orchids and other rare plants can be destroyed by too many feet and bottoms!). If you can help us by collecting other people's litter, that would be an amazing bonus.

Wishing you a wonderful nature-filled summer.

Mick Jones MBE
Chairman, BBOWT Chilterns Group

...and the next BBOWT Charity Plant Market will be?

As many of you will know, we were hoping Covid restrictions would be behind us by May in time to hold a Spring Plant and Produce Market, but alas restrictions on gatherings of more than 30 people outdoors will be in place till at least 21 June. It is felt that holding the event after this date would be simply too late, so reluctantly it has been cancelled. However, after the very successful Market last October, we are optimistic we will be able to hold one this October, again at College Lake. So please watch for a date nearer the time and whilst you are busy thinning out your perennials and taking cuttings please pot-up and label three or four in preparation! The event typically yields over £1000 towards Trust funds.

John Catton, Chilterns Group Events Organiser

Farewell to a familiar face at BBOWT

After 15 years with the Trust, I am sad to report that I will soon be leaving BBOWT. The good news is that I have an exciting opportunity before me as I will be joining the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) as their CEO, starting in April. This has been a really hard decision for me to make, but I feel the move is the right step for me to make at this stage of my career.

BBOWT is a truly great organisation and it has been a privilege to have been part of some transformational change during my time here. Locally, a significant shift occurred when College Lake was developed with its Visitor Centre and office base. That brought a new focus and impetus to our activity across Buckinghamshire and resulted in some staff positions, previously based in Oxford, being relocated and new positions being created.

Importantly, the development of College Lake and establishment of a Buckinghamshire-based staff team, also changed the dynamic of the Chilterns Group and especially how this vital volunteer arm related to the broader operations of the Trust. Richard Birch, the chair of the group for many years, with whom I worked closely, and other members of the committee were so welcoming and supportive to me at this pivotal time. I will always be appreciative of the help they were able to provide to me and my colleagues. I think most people who know me understand how much I loved being based at College Lake (who wouldn't?) and I have so many great memories from my time there.

I will miss so many people and I want to thank everyone who has supported me, advised me or inspired me through their work – which is an awful lot of people! Thank to you all of you for everything you do for the Trust.

I will return and visit many of my favourite places in the area, so I hope to see you soon.

Christopher Williams, Land Management & People Engagement Director

Good News! College Lake Reopens!

We have all missed being able to visit the Reserve and Visitor Centre but both are scheduled to be back in business on Wednesday 14 April. Staff and a few specialist volunteers have been valiantly working behind the scenes to keep up with maintenance while some colleagues have been furloughed but now it's full steam ahead. Toyah Baulk writes:

'We will be open on April 14th from 10am till 5pm with last entry 4pm. We will be open Wednesday to Sunday during April and then Tuesday to Sunday in May, moving to seven day opening from June. The cafe will be serving a new and exciting takeaway menu and there will be a refurbished outside seating area. The shop will also be open selling some new products including a local range from Chiltern Brewery which we are hoping to expand on. Second hand books and trampers will also be available. We are very keen to hear from old and new volunteers to help us open efficiently and there are lots of roles available!'

David Owen has been contacting those on the existing volunteer list with details of brief refresher sessions prior to opening as we all want to make sure simple procedures are in place to make visits safe. Please contact him on david_o@bbowt.org.uk. He'll happily arrange a briefing for anyone joining the team after opening - just get in touch. Gillian Simpson, who runs the College Lake Newsletter, is encouraging volunteers to return with news of a new ice cream stall, no less.... You can contact her on gillian_s@bbowt.org.uk

Everyone in the College Lake Team looks forward to welcoming visitors and volunteers back and asks people to be patient while arrangements bed down. Good weather on any day will mean that the car park will be under pressure so please be considerate of others.

The College Lake Team

And welcome to new members of staff, Ro Turan and Ed Turpin

Changes to Volunteer Recruitment

We've heard from prospective volunteers that it's often difficult to register for volunteering work. We've heard from BBOWT team leaders that it's time consuming answering volunteering enquiries. To make the system consistent and more straight forward we are centralising recruitment.

Volunteering opportunities will be advertised with the central email address volunteering@bbowt.org.uk. Andy Gunn and I at BBOWT HQ will liaise with team leaders about vacancies, register new volunteers and provide an induction into the Trust's policies and procedures.

Once the volunteer joins a team the team leader will add them to their mailing list and communicate details of the volunteering work.

Ro Turan, Volunteering Journey Advisor

New Community Wildlife Officer

Hi everyone, my name is **Ed Turpin** and I'm the new **Community Wildlife Officer** for the east of the BBOWT region (Buckinghamshire and East Berkshire). I joined BBOWT in mid-January and have been enjoying getting stuck in since! Previously, I worked for Kent Wildlife Trust as part of their Community Engagement team so moving to Buckinghamshire has been an exciting (and challenging!) journey during lockdown. I'm enjoying being part of the BBOWT Community team and have been working on some exciting projects. We recently ran a series of five online events that provided an introduction to wildlife gardening. Each event focused on various aspects of wildlife gardening from garden birds through to a session on wildlife ponds, which attracted nearly 50 people. These events were a fantastic way to share some tips on wildlife gardening whilst also



concreting our own knowledge and honing our Zoom skills!

I've also spent some time working alongside the Education team to organise and run our first ever Youth Summit. The Summit was held in early March and was a fantastic opportunity to engage with local young people. The aim was to give young people a voice and the chance to help shape future BBOWT youth work. We had several fantastic speakers including a panel of inspirational young people from the local area. Overall, the Summit was a great success and was thoroughly enjoyed by all those who attended.

Hopefully, I get to meet some of you in the not-too-distant future and if you see me out and about, I'd love to say hello and have a chat!

Ed Turpin, Community Wildlife Officer

Spring and Summer at Aston Clinton Ragpits

It has been a long winter and thankfully signs of spring are emerging. We have seen some lovely displays of the rare mezeon flowering adding lots of colour and scent to revive the senses.

This plant along with the snowdrops is the first to flower on the reserve and it is encouraging to see that some of the scrub clearance work has revealed some tiny seedlings of this rare plant emerging.

We are also seeing some primroses in the woodland and some hairy violets peppering the grassland margins.

Now that the season is underway and lockdown restrictions are lifting we can plan this year's annual orchid count, which will be on **Saturday 19 June from 10am until 2pm.**

We would welcome anyone who wishes to join us for a leisurely morning recording the orchid numbers, but attendance will be limited to 30 in line with the Trust guidelines. This is of course subject to any changes in government guidelines. Please look out for more details on the BBOWT website shortly.

This orchid count data is incredibly useful in highlighting trends in numbers and to see how each species is faring. I am sure we are all desperately looking forward to getting out and about once again and reconnecting with nature!



Phil Townsend, Volunteer Warden

Bad and good news for Dancersend



2021 has so far been a very frustrating period for those of us involved in managing Dancersend Reserve. All volunteer work sessions have been on hold and we have been restricted to doing essential work while the lockdown has been in place. This has meant mainly fencing repairs, the care and movement of our Hebridean sheep flock and some mowing and raking of coarse grasses.

However, the woods were noisy with chainsaws as contractors hurried to complete safety work related to ash dieback before the nesting season got underway. In the central part of the reserve, around the Meadow and Anthill, many ash trees close to the paths and rides have been felled or had branches removed. All had been monitored over the last couple of years

and were showing infection by the fungus such that up to fifty percent of the canopy was dying. Left without action we would have been faced with closing many of the paths over the next few years. Also, if left until more of each tree was affected by the fungus, the necessary felling work would become increasingly dangerous and expensive to carry out.

Where possible, the amazing group of tree surgeons climbed the trees to remove branches whilst leaving the main trunks standing and saving good features for bats, hole-nesting birds and deadwood invertebrates. The extra standing deadwood will add important habitat at Dancersend, especially as the reserve has few very mature trees due to clear felling during WWII. The extra timber left on the ground to rot down will be important too, for fungi, slime moulds and insects like beetles, and extra light reaching the woodland floor will revive flowers and create better conditions for many of our rare invertebrates. It looks a bit of a mess at the moment but will quickly green over.

A few weeks ago, we had some really good news for the reserve. Firstly, the Government's roadmap dates were announced and BBOWT was able to plan for a resumption of volunteer activity. So, all being well, I will be organising a few mini work parties (limited to 8 people) from **12 April** to start catching up with delayed management tasks, followed by full-scale work parties from **17 May**. Those of you keen to get out carrying out conservation work should watch out for announcements. If you are interested but not yet on our volunteers' email list, please contact me.

The second bit of news was very exciting - we have been successful with a funding bid to the Rothschild Foundation for £92,000 over 2 years for habitat enhancements, improved access, signage and interpretation, new machinery and projects working with neighbouring landowners. This award recognises the importance of the reserve and, of course, the connection with the Rothschild family, which we will be celebrating this year, 80 years since Dancersend was handed over to the Wildlife Trust as a memorial to Charles Rothschild, the founder of our movement. Watch this space to find out more as our plans progress. There will be plenty of opportunities for volunteer involvement!



Mick Jones, Volunteer Warden
Email: jonesmick365@gmail.com

Summer Litter Pickin' Fun at the Reservoir Anyone?

We confidently expect a lovely hot summer and with it plenty of action at Weston Turville Reservoir where community use will soar with the rising temperatures. The Litter Patrol Team would welcome some new members to enable us once more to make daily visits showing the BBOWT flag and keeping the place looking good.

The area is owned by the Canal and River Trust and enjoyed by several stakeholders - BBOWT manages the greater part as a nature reserve, the lake is used by fishermen and dinghy sailors and the permissive paths are much used by local people for exercise. As well as removing litter, our volunteers gently remind people to keep to the reserve rules regarding BBQs, dogs, swimming and cycling.

Could you spare an hour a week in the summer months please?

Contact volunteering@bbowt.org.uk if you'd like more information. Volunteers will be covered by the Trust's insurance and have access to free conservation training sessions if they would like them.

Water? What water! The Threat to the Reservoir

HS2 is pressing ahead with detailed plans for construction through Wendover. This includes their 2.5km 'green tunnel' and cutting along the west side of the town through the base of Bacombe Hill. It is from here that ground water percolates east to feed the many springs in Wendover and in turn the Canal and the Reservoir, a SSSI Reserve. The local mitigation group has done a great job to focus attention on the problem and propose solutions, the best one being to tunnel under the chalk so allowing the ground water to go on flowing through the upper layers. This has been dismissed by HS2 who want to take the line of least resistance (and cost) which means sending up to 30 million litres a day north to Stoke Brook and onwards to Aylesbury, increasing the risk of flooding there. Several winter floods have already occurred in Aylesbury without HS2!

BBOWT has met with Natural England and the Environment Agency who have the job of policing the project. The EA insists HS2 must come up with better informed plans which mitigate the problem. Bucks Council have been asked to refuse Schedule 17 planning permission until this is resolved along with the Noise and HGV nuisances also being forced on the Vale by very poor project design.

More information is available on <https://whs2.org> . Please write to your county councillor by visiting <https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

Richard Birch, Volunteer

Steve Keene Retires

Many of you may know Steve Keene, who has been Volunteer Warden of both Pitstone Fen and Bacombe Hill for a number of years. He has recently decided to stand down from leading the monthly conservation work parties and I'm sure that all of the team members would like to thank him for being such a capable and amiable team leader for all that time. Steve took over Bacombe Hill when Bucks County Council transferred its management to BBOWT. It is a beautiful site on the steep hill above Wendover, and there has been plenty of work to be done there. Steve took it all in his stride, of course. I well remember using tree poppers to remove as much Buddleia as possible from the chalk quarry area, with great success.

Under Steve's care the junipers have had a lot of attention including the removal of encroaching scrub and the addition of protection against grazing. At Pitstone Fen he has supervised the perennial job of stemming the tide of scrub in the chalk grassland and calcareous fen areas, putting in new fencing and walkways. Steve has done this and much, much more besides. He always made sure that the team was well looked after and we spent some time at the end of each session looking round the sites and enjoying looking at the wildlife and the fruits of our labours. Memories of jacket potatoes



cooked in the bonfire and sharing Christmas mince pies round the burning embers will be treasured.

Steve is going to continue as a member of the work parties so it's not goodbye; he will now have a bit more time to devote to his family and to his wood carving, at which he is very skilled. Thanks for being a star, Steve!

Sylvia O'Brien, Volunteer

Getting ready at Finemere Wood Reserve

The Finemere team is gearing up to return to the wood on April 15th. That day can't come soon enough, it has been a long and wearisome lockdown during the cold, gloomy winter months. The volunteers can look forward to an action-packed spring. There are fences to be mended, fences to be erected, paths to be cleared and grass to cut.

And what a fantastic time to be returning to this haven. Finemere Wood is at its best in the latter part of April, when much of the wood is carpeted with bluebells. The show promises to be good this year, with a mass of bluebell leaves edging their way through the soil as I write. Having missed out on this annual wonder in 2020, it will be an extra special sight for many this year.

A few winter gatherings in the wood were squeezed in between lockdowns, and the volunteers worked harder than ever during these times. Thus, a number of scallops were cleared along the woodland edges. Once fenced and protected from the nibbling of deer, these areas will be fascinating to watch as they bloom with fresh new growth, attracting a host of insects and butterflies. The woodland workers will soon be reunited, laughter and banter will echo through the trees once again. The birds are singing, green shoots are emerging. New life, new hope, new beginnings.

Charlotte Karmali, Volunteer Warden

Pollinators: from the verge of collapse and onto the road to recovery

Since the 1930s, the UK has lost more than 97% of its wildflower meadows and consequently we are witnessing a collapse in bee, butterfly, and other pollinator populations. Although developments and

modern agricultural practices are in large part to blame, the cause also lies in how we manage those green spaces and places closer to home.



The insatiable desire to keep our towns, villages, and gardens 'neat and tidy' is cleaning out many of the remaining pockets of pollinators and is acting to fragment and isolate those that cling on. But, despite the bad news, there is a public awakening to make a positive change. For good reason, this campaign has centred on grass cutting along roadside verges and how to persuade councils and other residents to see this in a new light. By taking a new approach, there is not only the chance to add back in significant land coverage for wildflower meadows, but also a real potential to connect those separated pollinators, making them more resilient by migrating along these revitalised corridors. Buglife calls such verges "insect super-highways" and has launched the idea as part of its "B-Line" initiative.

The idea is simple. A network of wildlife-friendly habitats criss-crossing the country with the aim of strengthening and promoting healthy pollinator populations. However, like many simple ideas, implementation is more difficult and will require input and persuasion at all levels. With the entrenched perspective that some councils and residents

have towards grass cutting, and management of the environment more generally, this is fertile ground for conflict. Nevertheless, if we are truly serious about protecting our pollinators and wildlife, as well as our own food security, we must all start making changes, however small, to the way we see and manage the land around us.

Jack Jordan, Weston Turville Reservoir Volunteer

[Click here to see the full article.](#)

The Wildlife Trusts have collaborated with Plantlife to produce a manual of best practice for roadside verges which you can see [here](#)

Community Team and Rough Around the Edges

The promise of spring seems to be giving everyone the energy to start or restart projects, with some new groups signing up, including allotments and a community garden in Penn and Chinnor. Work is slowly picking up for the existing Rough Around the Edges projects: Social Link have planted a new hedge and some wildflowers at Wycombe Arts Centre; we've started creating some new ponds at Lindengate in Wendover; pupils, parents and staff are completing a woodland classroom area at Widmer End School. The pupils have already planted woodland bulbs, made bird boxes and spent time learning how to measure area in the future seating area. My online talk about the wildlife in the churchyards in and around Chinnor was well attended and has hopefully generated some more local interest in the work that the Chinnor Churches Go Wild! volunteers do to be aware of and create space for wildlife in such beautiful areas. If you'd like to watch the talk, you can find it here

- <https://youtu.be/KC9dXVSrL3o>.

It also the time of year to start thinking about surveys and monitoring – as many of you know, we simply couldn't do this last year – and it's feeling like we're playing catch-up. I have lots of groups wanting to start monitoring their own sites but needing support for methods and identification skills. I'm planning to try a couple of online sessions but nothing can replace being on site and actively spotting and counting. Along with my colleagues in the Community Team, we have some ideas of how to start simple so that groups can really take on the monitoring themselves with limited time and skills but if anyone would like to help with testing a possible method and/or by doing some local baseline surveys off-reserve, please let me know.

You can find more information about the project here <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/wildlifewildlife-conservation/rough-around-edges> My email is katiehorgan@bbowt.org.uk

Katie Horgan

Rough Around the Edges Project Officer for BBOWT as part of the Chalk Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership Scheme

Exciting Changes to Wildlife Talks

Next season's wildlife talks programme will look a bit different. The pandemic has made us alter the way we do things, sadly often in a negative way. However, as can happen in times of adversity new and possibly better ways of doing things are created.

Moving the Chiltern Volunteer Group Wildlife talks to Zoom was one of these changes born of necessity. Another necessary change was moving the Plant and Produce Sale away from Great Missenden to College Lake. Cash sales were discontinued and replaced with contactless payment and both changes were a great success.

The shutting down of our Wildlife Talks was a big blow as attendances had been steadily rising with several talks reaching over 100 people. In November last year the talks programme moved online. Concerns were raised about how we promote this idea. Would you be ready, willing and able to pay to watch online rather than in a hall? Would the booking system work ok? And for me would I have the technical skill and confidence to host a Zoom talk?

On that last question, with the help of Kate Sheard from College Lake, I learnt that hosting a Zoom talk does not require the technical skills of a computer mathematician. Kate also gave me the confidence to be able to engage with a hall full of imaginary people, a skill I've yet to be fully at ease with. I never realised just how hard-wired we are to receive non-verbal signals from an individual or audience. Small humorous expressions are met with tumble-weed blowing across the tundra - a disconcerting experience.

Our original concerns were quickly dispelled. You did find out we were broadcasting talks. By adapting our normal paper posters to fit social media formats word soon got around and the number of registrations steadily rose from 40 to over 180 meaning that possibly 50-250 people were watching, far more than could even fit into the hall.

You overcame the sometimes tricky booking system and willing stumped up the normal entrance charge. The comments on the chat function while online were hugely supportive and encouraging as were the personal emails sent to committee members after the talks. In the absence of face to face contact your messages were immensely important and encouraged the committee to continue online talks.

Also I'd like to thank our speakers who have embraced presenting online and took the time to adapt their talks and above all overcome that weird self-conscious feeling when sitting in your own home talking to a computer for an hour assuming people are watching.

Your committee is currently looking at introducing a hybrid Zoom/Hall talks programme next winter with the autumn and spring talks being held at Great Missenden as usual and the winter talks, when the nights are cold and dark, held online. We will of course keep you updated on developments.

Steve Hawkins, Talks Organiser

Guided walks at BBOWT reserves

If Covid restrictions permit, we hope to restart guided walks and field visits with small groups after 17 May. While the BBOWT Events Team is being reformed please email Mick Jones on jonesmick365@gmail.com for a list of the early walks and details of how to book. The first few events will include a gentle walk around Dancersend to see spring turning into summer, a walk to discover the history and wildlife of Weston Turville Reservoir with Steve Hawkins and Richard Birch and a look at the chalk grassland flowers and shrubs at Bacombe Hill with Gill Cornelius. From the end of June please check the BBOWT Events website for details of later summer walks.

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.**

The digital version of this newsletter is available on the BBOWT website - just search 'Chilterns'. To be put on the mailing list contact membership@bbowt.org.uk

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.

We welcome all new volunteers who are invited to email volunteering@bbowt.org.uk for registration. The contact information below is for queries from members of existing teams. Expect restrictions on numbers allowed to attend in at least April and May.

DANCERSEND (nr Tring/Wendover) Regular work parties 10 - 4pm on second Sunday every month, plus variable mini work sessions on weekdays.

Contact **Judi Fisher** on 01494 722073 or judiandbryan@yahoo.co.uk

ASTON CLINTON RAGPITS (near Wendover) Contact **Phil Townsend** 07876217957, philjtownsend@yahoo.co.uk

FINEMERE WOOD (near Quainton) 9.30am - 3.00pm on second & third Thursday of the month.
Contact **Charlotte Karmali** - charlottekarmali@outlook.com

WESTON TURVILLE RESERVOIR (near Wendover) Work parties restarting in August 2021
Contact **Stacey Hewitt** on 01442 826774. To help with litter picking and patrolling contact volunteering@bbowt.org.uk

COLLEGE LAKE (near Tring)

Please contact **Leo Keedy** - 01442 826774 or leokeedy@bbowt.org.uk

BERNWOOD GROUP (near Brill) Group currently full.

YOESDEN BANK (near Princes Risborough) Contact volunteering@bbowt.org.uk

BACOMBE HILL (near Wendover) Contact volunteering@bbowt.org.uk

PITSTONE FEN (near Tring) Contact volunteering@bbowt.org.uk

MAIN CONTACT DETAILS

Head Office:

www.bbowt.org.uk / 01865 775476

College Lake: 01442 826774

Conservation:

**Leo Keedy,
leokeedy@bbowt.org.uk**

**Visitor centre: Toyah Baulk,
toyahbaulk@bbowt.org.uk**

**Education: Claire Garrity,
clairegarrity@bbowt.org.uk**

**Volunteering Information:
www.bbowt.org.uk/volunteer**