



**Berkshire  
Buckinghamshire  
& Oxfordshire**  
Wildlife Trust

# THE CHILTERN NEWSLETTER

From BBOWT Chilterns Group - supporting and promoting our local wildlife trust

Issue - 106 Spring - Summer 2023

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

## Doing our bit for nature ... and ourselves

I don't know about you, but my most intense and exciting wildlife experiences have usually been solitary ones – the time when I was looking at a tiny plant thought to have become extinct in Bucks around 1900; the evening I was finishing a walk close to dusk and became aware of at least 35 red kites and a few buzzards collecting above my head, wheeling around like starlings for a good five minutes before rushing noisily into a nearby wood to roost together.

Sometimes I wished I had someone with me as a sort of witness, but basically the best moments in nature are gloriously intimate. They don't have to be about rare or iconic species – just spending some quiet time surrounded by relatively common woodland flowers, tuning into their subtle fragrances and the sounds of birds hidden in the canopy can be just as memorable. And the feelings of happiness and wellbeing engendered by such times are exactly the benefits that people seek on 'mindfulness' training courses.

Mind you, I'm not always so good at following up by submitting a record of that woodcock I flushed or the cluster of orange ladybirds I found huddled together in a tree trunk depression. I have made a resolution that this year I will record the wildlife I find

## PLEASE SUPPORT THE BBOWT PLANT AND PRODUCE CHARITY MARKET

**COLLEGE LAKE RESERVE  
Bulbourne,  
Tring HP23 5QG**

**Sunday 14 May  
11am - 1pm**

- Excellent value plants
- Tasty homemade produce
- WorkAid recycled tools
- Badger Cafe open
- Free entry, free parking

**For contributions & queries  
please contact  
[richardbirch60@yahoo.com](mailto:richardbirch60@yahoo.com)  
until 23/4/23 and then  
John Catton on 01494726616  
[richard.catton1@ntlworld.com](mailto:richard.catton1@ntlworld.com)**



more systematically – it is not that difficult using online apps like iRecord or iNaturalist and the value of adding such data to the body of knowledge about a particular site or species population can be substantial. If I can be a bit more disciplined I can really be helping with the understanding of nature as well, something else to feel good about.

Then there is nature conservation activity – I feel very passionate about helping to safeguard places for nature and managing them to provide good wildlife habitats. In this mode I am usually working with other similarly minded people and ‘work parties’ (an oxymoron that one of my daughters has never understood!) are a brilliant blend of social interaction, green gym and good deed. These work sessions, looking after our precious nature reserves, are thankfully attracting more people these days, and a more diverse mix of people – not all white-haired bearded men (I’m teasing myself here) any longer. I might ache at the end of the day, but I also feel I’ve had an almost intoxicating combination of stimuli from the experience.

The social interaction combined with input to conservation and learning opportunities (there are often people who find interesting bugs or plants to share) at work parties are not the only way to get together with other people to help nature. We have groups involved in promotion and fundraising events who would welcome additional members, and there is lots of fun to be had working on these.

So I’ve realised in this little bit of musing that living in this wonderful area as BBOWT members, with the possibility of both visiting and volunteering at our nature reserves and getting involved with Chilterns Group activities, we all have the means to be fully rounded nature lovers. Just take a minute to think whether you are getting as much out, as well as putting as much in, as you can. I would love to hear from you if you can help with any of BBOWT’s work.

**Mick Jones MBE Chairman BBOWT Chilterns Group**

**01296 720623 jonesmick365@gmail.co.uk**

## **A New Job**

–  
Everyone is familiar with that feeling when they start a new job. That heady mix of trepidation and excitement, being introduced to (and forgetting the names of) twenty people a day for a straight week. Nature reserve work is no different, and the spinning of the seasons doesn’t slow down to allow you to find your feet.

I arrived in September, but I’d visited in the summer and seen the wonderful diversity of life on the site. The fuzzy, pottering lapwing chicks, the delicate, tiny, small blue butterflies and the ornate yet structural flower spikes of the orchids. All of these and more suddenly felt like my responsibility. Lives in my hands.



Of course, this isn’t the reality. Britain is fortunate to have droves of nature lovers, those wonderful people for whom the aesthetic of a landscape is intricately tied to the species that inhabit it, the same breed as those who could see the potential of College Lake when it was being actively quarried. Many of these people act as volunteers, as habitat influencers, as visitor interfaces and as species experts. In the time I’ve been here I’ve made acquaintance with very many of these inspirational individuals, carrying nature’s torch through a determined mix of natural curiosity and the determination not to sit idle in a world where nature is struggling at every turn.

As a result, the lives of the wonderful life forms that call the reserve home, the animals, the plants, the fungi and all the other, less commonly acknowledged groups, are not in my hands at all, they are in the hands of everyone with a stake in the site. The management plans I work to are the result of countless hours of evidence gathering, watching and obsessing over nature, the vast majority of which is done for free.

College Lake is unusual amongst nature reserves, it speaks to modern thinking about conservation, about the necessary integration of nature and humanity, recognises that there is wildness in us all. That wildness is what we feel when nature dazzles us with its beauty, its complexity and its brutality. The natural world is our evolutionary cradle, the moulder of our mental landscape, and to understand and appreciate it we must, each of us, immerse ourselves in it. College Lake makes this easy. A car park, a path you can get a push chair round and a cafe to get a cake at the end.

When summer rolls round again, as it always does, the site will be a haven for the inquisitive, a showcase of the abundance of life. Whether watching the ever-squabbling black headed gull colony on the lake islands, appreciating the splashes of colour in our chalk grasslands and restored cornfields or getting really into the weeds figuring out which wasps are parasitising which solitary bees, College Lake is a place to nourish the seed of wildness lying hidden, but not gone, in the centre of your soul.

**Philip Bruss College Lake Reserve Warden**

### **College Lake Visitor Centre**

We are looking at our staffing levels and cover in the VC. Currently we are advertising for shop volunteers and a volunteer baker to join our cafe for a couple of hours a week to bake some cakes. We are using social media to advertise these jobs at present but if you know anyone that would like to help us with any of these roles please do pass them my way! More help at the welcome desk at the entrance to the reserve is always appreciated too - you can sign up for whatever hours suit you but first please make sure you register at [volunteering@bbowt.org](mailto:volunteering@bbowt.org). In the cafe you can enjoy an English or a vegetarian breakfast every day until 2pm (Tuesday to Sunday). If the weather is bad, stay and rent a board-game for a small donation with the option to buy it if you wish to take it home. Looking forward to seeing you soon.

**Toyah Baulk, Visitor Centre Manager**

### **Winter birds at College Lake**

As winter approaches wildfowl numbers increase dramatically as birds start to return to the UK from their breeding grounds in Scandinavia and Siberia. Winter has truly arrived when the distinctive 'whistling' call of wigeon can be heard across the marsh, joining other dabbling ducks such as teal, gadwall, shoveler and the ubiquitous mallard. Of the diving ducks, pochard and tufted duck are generally present and this winter, goldeneye put in regular appearances on the lake, the drakes, stunning in their black and white plumage. red-crested pochard added



more colour to the lake with up to three pairs staying for over three weeks from late November.

Mid December saw snow and sub-zero temperatures create beautiful patterns in the ice over a frozen marsh with hoar frost decorating the trees. The lake became a refuge for



local water birds as it remained free from ice, in contrast to the nearby reservoirs, with around 60 shoveler and nearly 200 wigeon making use of the open water. Alder trees between the June Ives and Castle hides proved irresistible to flocks of siskin as these acrobatic finches were able to extract seeds from the cones

in the freezing conditions. Redwing picked off the last of the hawthorn berries and goldcrest foraged through the scrub with long-tailed tit flocks.

As the marsh thawed the great white egret became a regular again but disappointingly common snipe numbers have been poor so far this winter, with jack snipe yet to be recorded. However, green sandpiper and a passing goosander were spotted on the lake shoreline, so there was always something of interest.

As I write this in early March, the first few oystercatchers and redshank have arrived. and lapwing are beginning to display and stake out territories. Phil and his team have done a great job clearing scrub and brush cutting the vegetation on the islands to produce ideal nesting habitat for waders. The pump is on to reveal that lovely marsh mud, vital for the wader chicks, so fingers crossed for a successful wader breeding season.

**Adrian Bayliss, Volunteer Surveyor**

### **The Ice Age exhibit at College Lake**

The exposed Ice Age features, which were given an Award of Excellence by the Geologists Association last year, had the worst winter conditions of their existence with temperatures generally well below zero interspersed with short warmer spells, but they resisted the assault by nature. Conditions must have been similar to when they were formed although we cannot boast a permafrost.

Despite the loss of a small amount of material, all the originally exposed features remain visible. It is hoped that this means these features will be useful as a teaching aid.

Few examples of these ice age constructs are maintained for a useful number of years. We hope ours will break the mould and become a longer-term geological resource. The exposed features are in the steep bank to the right of the gateway to the path down to the Octagon Hide. An interpretation board explains how they were formed.

**Rodney Sims, College Lake Volunteer**

## **College Lake dates to pop in your diary**

**Please book on [www.bbowt.org.uk/events](http://www.bbowt.org.uk/events)**

**Tuesday 4 to Sunday 16 April** - Step into Spring Family Trail

**Thursday 6 April** – Adult Pond Dipping event in the Wetland Centre

**Thursday 6 April** - Taking Better Pictures with Your Smartphone. Two sessions at 10:15am and 1:30pm. **Sorry, both sessions have been cancelled.**

**Tuesday 11 April** - Pond Explorers – for children 7+ - Wetland Centre 18 April to 18 July - Nature Tots on Tuesdays and Thursdays

**With thanks to Gillian Thompson who kindly produces a newsletter specifically for College Lake volunteers.**

## **The Chilterns Group redefines its Mission within BBOWT**

There has been rather a lot of change since the Group was set up in the sixties by one of our founding trustees, Susan Cowdy of The Lee. Then we were one of ten regional groups looking after local reserves, recruiting members and volunteers, distributing Trust communications, and raising funds. Now we are part of a complex organisation based in Oxford with a large central staff and a small South Bucks Reserves team based at College Lake. Nonetheless, we remain passionate about 'our' Chiltern Reserves and many of us still enjoy taking part in work parties which have changed little from the early days in terms of the spirit and fun of helping nature thrive or in the largely pick, shovel and bowsaw methods of getting things done. For some time now, as a group we have in practice concentrated on the work of engaging with the public, promoting the Trust and its local reserves, finding new volunteers and raising badly needed funds. So we thought it was time to redefine our mission within the Trust and as part of BBOWT's wildlife community outreach activities.

**Our Mission is to engage local communities in taking action for wildlife by delivering a programme of public talks, guided walks, field trips and fundraising events.**

Our role complements that of the local BBOWT staff teams and echoes the campaigning nature of much of the Central staff's output. Our small committee of volunteers has a great deal of freedom of action under the supervision of Kate Sheard, Community Wildlife Manager, and we are forging ahead with our 2023 programme as you will see in this Newsletter and on the events website.

There has been an increase in regulation around volunteering activity in recent years.

We are determined to maintain our programme of events and we would welcome more help from members in achieving this.

**Richard Birch, Deputy Chair, BBOWT Chilterns Group**  
**richardbirch60@yahoo.com**

### **Charity Plant and Produce Market – Sunday 14 May**

The Chilterns Group runs two major fundraising events each year, the **Plant and Produce Markets**, and the first one this year is at **College Lake** on **Sunday 14 May**, from **11:00am** to **1:00pm**.

The big draw is obviously the plants, all donated by enthusiastic local gardeners. These will be supplemented with bedding plants bought in (at extremely) favourable rates from a local nursery. And, if you are short of garden tools, **'Workaid'** will be there as usual with lots of, to use the modern parlance, pre-loved reconditioned ones. Alongside all this will be the produce stall selling locally made, cooked, sourced and home-grown food items.

The real success of the event depends on your support through donations of **plants** and **home produce**, so could you please consider:

- a) If, like me, you've started tidying up your herbaceous borders, then you'll almost certainly be dividing up and replanting those ever-expanding clumps of perennial plants. Please donate a few of those divisions to us by potting them up, but don't forget to label them.
- b) baking a cake (or two), and some biscuits, make jams and marmalades, perhaps conjure up some fudge or pick some rhubarb from your garden....and....
- c) spreading word of the Market nearer the time.

Details of the Event are on the BBOWT website. If you would like to help us in any way, or have any queries about the Market, please contact John Catton on 01494 726616 or [richard.catton1@ntlworld.com](mailto:richard.catton1@ntlworld.com)

PS: A future date for your diary: Sunday 15 October, when we're holding the Autumn Market!

**John Catton, PPM organiser**

### **Chilterns Group Talks at Gt Missenden celebrate another successful year.**

The series of seven talks running from September 22 to March 23 has drawn to a close. We are happy that numbers attending, normally between 45 and 55, have gradually built back to near the levels we saw before the pandemic and the switch to Zoom. The March 21 talk on Climate Change by Brian Eversham was also well attended and attracted more younger folk. Overall, after hiring the hall and paying for the cost of refreshments we have a surplus for the Trust of £100 per talk. More importantly, the quality of the talks has been consistently high. For this we have to thank all the speakers, some of whom give their services free of charge, and particularly Chilterns volunteer Steve Hawkins who recruits the speakers, coaxes the details of their talks out of them and pins them down to a date. He is backed up by all who prepare the room for the audience, take the money, make tea

and coffee and publicise the events online and on local noticeboards - it's a terrific volunteer team effort involving a dozen people. In the coming year Jenny Shaw has kindly offered to take on the job of recruiting speakers while Steve will share with Mick Jones the job of compering the evening. More help with publicity would be much appreciated. Our thanks go to all who help and to all who attend.

During the series, three talks have been on species - Martin Harvey on **local moths**, Mike Wallen on **peregrine falcons** and Tim King on **the yellow meadow ant**. Others have spanned the complex crossover between conservation efforts and the reality of nature like Richard Tennant Eyles on **Woods**, Mick Jones on **The Duke the Gentian and the Beefly** and John Tyler on the **Countryside in Winter**. Finishing the season on 21 March we highlighted the most critical correlation of all with Brian Eversham talking on **Climate Change - the Effect on British Wildlife**.

The new season will start at 7pm on Tuesday 20 September - everyone's welcome so please come and join us at Great Missenden Memorial Centre.

### **Aston Clinton Ragpits – Orchid Count & Autumn Waxcaps 2022**

In 2022 we had a reasonably good year for orchids, numbers counted on the 18th June were as follows,

Common spotted orchid 4794

Chalk fragrant orchid 10553

Common twayblade 4814

Pyramidal orchid 1083 (including 8 white flowered varieties)

Bee orchid 14 (including 1 x belgarum, 1 x fulvofusca varieties)

Common spotted x chalk fragrant hybrids 10

Greater butterfly orchid 168

White helleborine 33

### **Grand total 21469**

A huge thank you to all those who kindly gave up their time to come along and help with the count at Aston Clinton Ragpits

After the very hot late summer weather, much of the meadow and chalk grassland was looking very desiccated, a very stark comparison to the lush growth of the previous summer.

As we moved into the autumn the opportunities to spot some fungi species seemed a little on the hopeful side. Nevertheless, there were some regular species which appeared. There was the rather spectacular warted Amanita, a large and robust white mushroom that often appears on the chalk grassland. We also had some wrinkled peach fungus showing on the fallen beech trunks.

In the hazel coppice a lovely white furry species the bearded milkcap was found and its relative, the beech milkcap was spotted at the base of one of the beech trees. Also in the coppiced areas we were also able to enjoy two species of saddle fungi, the white saddle and the black elfin saddle

However, the biggest surprise was revealed in the meadow where there was an eruption of blackening waxcaps. I had only seen singles previously and none in most years. Whilst many of the more traditional sites for waxcap species in the Chilterns (and we are blessed to have several superb sites) were slightly disappointing this year, at the Ragpits the blackening waxcaps were incredibly numerous and widespread. Many were very large specimens too and the colours were beautifully intense with scintillating oranges and reds, before succumbing to the black discolouration that is one of their diagnostic features. There were also more surprises, lots of the more delicate snowy waxcaps were also appearing alongside the blackening waxcaps. Even in the shorter turf of the quarry part of the reserve, there were more species in this particularly attractive group of fungi. A species that has been seen regularly is the uncommon toasted waxcap, a relative of the more familiar meadow waxcaps. There were also two new species spotted, one being the earthy waxcap and the other being the spectacular golden waxcap.

Quite why there would be such a display of these fungi after such a record-breaking hot summer was a mystery to me, although the grassland does have areas of moss and this is an important component of waxcap grasslands, helping to hold onto more moisture than some of the drier areas.

As well as providing a lovely and colourful spectacle, these waxcaps are in themselves indicators of healthy grasslands and points to the fact that they have not been affected by the application of synthetic fertilizers or herbicides.

It is very satisfying to see them flourish and an important validation that the management of the reserve is helping to conserve a grassland in good condition. It is another reminder of the intricate nature of chalk grassland soils and how critically important soil biodiversity is to the health of these sadly threatened ecosystems.

Many orchid and fungal species have very close relationships, and it really shows the need for a wider appreciation of fungi and to consider their requirements within reserve management plans.

For example, in some years we have raked up some of the mossier areas to expose the chalk grasses and to help create bare areas of chalk. These bare areas are necessary for the germination of some of the rarer plant species on the reserve such as basil thyme. However, it is also important that we maintain areas of moss to provide those suitable conditions for waxcaps to thrive.



golden waxcap

So, if you are planning a fugal foray this autumn, then please don't forget to check out the Ragpits. We have now identified seven different species of waxcaps on the reserve, so even after the orchids have finished flowering there are still plenty of wildlife highlights to enjoy!

**Phil Townsend Volunteer Warden**

## **Finemere Wood**

Just when it seems that Spring is on its way, the heavens open, and snow sprinkles down: bewildering wildlife and woodland workers alike. The winter work of cutting and clearing of scrub is halted once March is here, for this is the time that birds begin to nest and must not be disturbed. The volunteers need to find other jobs to fill their time in Finemere Wood and so under dark gloomy skies, and awash with snow and freezing rain, the summer work begins.

Over the winter, a number of scallops along the woodland edge have been cleared of scrub and trees. Sunlight will now reach the ground. Fencing, to protect fresh new growth from voracious deer is high on the agenda. Dismantling those fences that have done their job, and erecting others around areas needing protection, will keep the volunteers busy for some weeks.

Despite the cold gloom, the weather-beaten wood is slowly coming to life. One primrose is in bloom, and others will follow soon. The emerging lobed leaves of wood anemones can be spotted by keen eyes. The long yellow hazel catkins are dangling from branches. This is an entrancing time in Finemere Wood.

Leo Keedy took over the role of North Bucks Reserves Officer in the latter part of last year. He is a very welcome addition to the team and under his guidance, Finemere Wood will continue to flourish.

And lastly, a word of warning to those who venture to the wilds of this enchanting reserve. HS2 is gathering speed, and access to Finemere Wood can be challenging due to endless road closures and ever-expanding potholes. It is worth checking the information on the BBOWT website, with regard to access, prior to your visit:

[https://www.bbowt.org.uk/nature-reserves/finemere-wood?gclid=CjwKCAjw8sCRBhA6EiwA6\\_IF4XO3QZVtSsZMlf2ddiv\\_7mmU](https://www.bbowt.org.uk/nature-reserves/finemere-wood?gclid=CjwKCAjw8sCRBhA6EiwA6_IF4XO3QZVtSsZMlf2ddiv_7mmU)

**Charlotte Kamali, Volunteer warden.**

## **How are our Junipers?**

Bacombe Hill and Grangelands both support small populations of juniper bushes: 45 mature bushes at Bacombe and 76 at Grangelands. They are surveyed every few years to monitor their condition.

Junipers are a species of conservation concern in southern England: between 1987 and 2016, 43% were lost in the south and 84% have been lost in the Chilterns. They are declining mainly because of land management changes, and because they have very particular requirements to regenerate and thrive. They have a very low seed viability, with only a few percent able to germinate and grow into seedlings. The seeds need to fall on disturbed ground with little competition from other plants. Mature bushes can die if they

become overshadowed by scrub or taller trees. Many mature bushes have been lost at Bacombe Hill, presumably killed as the (mostly) ash woodland, once kept at bay by grazing, spread up the hill. Grazing can cause damage, especially to seedlings and young plants.

Junipers live for 90 to 130 years, and some of our bushes are old and in decline now.



A fatal fungus-like organism, *Phytophthora austrocedri*, can cause devastation but it has not yet been seen at either site.

A fungus called 'tongues of fire' has been found on one bush at Bacombe. This fungus has two stages to its life cycle, the other growing on hawthorn, of which there is plenty nearby. It is not likely to cause serious harm.

Many of the berries at Bacombe, and to a lesser extent at Grangelands, are showing signs of damage.

Some of the females have hardly any healthy berries at all while others appear unaffected. This may be caused by a parasitic mite which feeds on the seeds inside, a response to drought stress, or other reasons. Micromoths and other parasites can also feed inside the berries.

Juniper shield bugs are often to be seen if you look carefully amongst the green shoots. Rabbits have made burrows underneath some bushes, and one large bush in the chalk quarry area at Bacombe appears to have badger excavations beneath it, and is now looking sick, with extensive yellowing of the foliage. This all sounds as though the juniper has little chance of survival, but work parties at both sites are working to keep them safe.

Prior to BBOWT's management of the sites, Bucks County Council grew many seedlings from cuttings and planted them inside wire netting fences. Most of these are doing well and have outgrown their protection.



Visitors to either site may have noticed large, enclosed scrapes which were also made by BCC, to scatter berries or prepared seeds onto the bare chalk. At Bacombe Hill, the large scrape is the only site where any juniper seedlings have been found. It's

thought that the thick turf and enriched topsoil which have built up over the years are preventing seed germination. At Grangelands, seedlings can be found, possibly because there is more bare soil and thinner turf there.

The work parties ensure that the bushes are kept free of scrub and build low dead-hedges around the bush perimeters to keep out rabbits, deer and other grazing animals and create a safe haven for seedlings to grow. These require regular maintenance and a good supply of short hazel poles and brash.

A recent survey showed that most of the mature bushes are thriving but the low level of regeneration remains a threat to the long-term survival of our junipers.

**Sylvia O'Brien, Volunteer**

### **Rough Around the Edges and Chilterns Orchards**



Volunteers from Prestwood Nature putting the finishing touches to their first laid hedge at Penn

The last couple of months have seen some training sessions get off the ground for both projects.

We have the new 'Rough Around the Hedges' project lead by Prestwood Nature with professional support from Nigel Adams training a team of volunteers to assess and manage hedgerows. They have had their first go at hedgelaying and are now planning where they will be working next winter season.

Lily O'Neill and I had a session on how to run events for Community Groups, held at College Lake. Hopefully this will help groups to feel more confident about planning and holding their own events, as well as taking the opportunity to attend other people's activities.

We also treated orchard enthusiasts to a day with Andy Howard (Midshires Orchard Group and the Heritage Fruit Company) learning how to graft apple, plum and pear trees. We had this session at Lindengate in Wendover, so attendees were also able to enjoy the gardens.



Volunteers from Lindengate and other Community groups with Andy Howard. Photo credit: Katie Horgan

I also have several projects running – some near the end of the project, some in the middle, and a few new ones. Amersham Band have a meadow that I am helping them to manage, we have some work planned at a pond in Speen, a couple of other pond surveys on the horizon, a talk and an activity day planned for Winchmore Hill, and some wildlife friendly planting at Chinnor Community Church. 2023 is going to be very busy.

**Katie Horgan, Rough Around the Edges Project Officer**

### **Still busy at Dancersend**

For the last 18 months much of our focus at Dancersend, apart from extensive ash dieback safety work, has been on the Rothschild Foundation funded 'Celebrating Dancersend' project. We are now just into the last four months of the project with a lot of work to complete.

Last year we carried out a lot of refencing, bought new kit for managing the grassland and scrub areas, wrote up the history of the reserve (see <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/dancersend-nature-reserve-history>), held special events to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and ran extra fun events for children in the school holidays. We refreshed the Tree Trail and worked on a new audio nature trail and carried out extra wildlife surveying – for invertebrates on the restored chalk grassland of the Extension and for fungi, with a series of special visits by the Bucks Fungus Group. These surveys revealed new insect species for the reserve, including the brown tree ant (*Lasius brunneus*) and the hawthorn jewel beetle (*Agrius sinuatus*), and a list of species of fungi new to the reserve, the county and even the UK with the find of a very attractive small cup fungus *Humaria solisequia*, pictured, currently at the RBG Kew Fungarium for confirmation.



We also started to plan new welcome and interpretation boards, improvements to our volunteers' base in The Forge at the Water Works and held discussions with neighbouring landowners about habitat improvements that we could help with on their land, an important innovative strand of the funding. These mini projects are all happening now, with old grassy glades being reopened in woods next to the reserve and invasive scrub being controlled elsewhere, all with great enthusiasm from the landowners.

Over the end of the year, we finally got around to carrying out two mini-projects we have been wanting to do for some time – digging a pond and planting up an area of around 600 mixed trees and shrubs on the reserve Extension. The pond is now filling nicely, and we have started to landscape and seed the banks with butterfly food plants and other wildflowers, and the new plantation is about to be fenced. The arrival of the tree and scrub whips, or more precisely the sea of canes supporting tree guards, provided excitement for some bird species in the otherwise rather featureless expanse, notably two stonechats observed the day after our big planting effort.



The last few months of the project will see new trail signage using recycled plastic posts, the erection of the new interpretation boards and some path improvements. We will also have further family fun events at half term.

Much of this work has involved BBOWT reserves staff and contractors, but such a lot couldn't have been carried out with the amazing input from the Dancersend volunteer team, with help from the Midweek volunteer team from College Lake. Since June 2021 we have held an astonishing 66 volunteer work sessions, some whole days (with up to 30 people) and some half-day sessions, a remarkable record! I would like to thank Judi Fisher and Len Jessup, without whom the work party logistics would be so much more difficult. Despite all this work, there is still lots to do so in my next report I expect to touch on being busy again.

**Mick Jones, Volunteer Warden for Dancersend**

### **Discover BBOWT Nature Reserves this Spring and Summer**

Are there nature reserves you have not yet visited? Have you been to reserves but not found some of their special plants and animals? Would you like to be shown around by people who know these special places intimately? Now is your chance!

Our new programme of guided reserve walks will help you to get to know our nature reserves better. They might even show and tell you things that ordinary visitors would never get to experience. Book soon at [www.bbowt.org.uk/events](http://www.bbowt.org.uk/events) as places are limited.

Saturday 15 April **Discover Spring Flowers at Dancersend** with warden Mick Jones.

10.00-12.30 Meeting at Dancersend Water Works, HP23 6LB

Sunday 21 May **Discover Dancersend Extension** with warden Mick Jones.

14.00-16.15 Meeting at Dancersend Extension car park, HP23 6LA

Saturday 3 June **Discover Butterflies and Other Insects at Yoesden** with Sue Taylor.  
14.00-16.00 Meeting off Bottom Lane, Radnage, HP14 4AR

Saturday 10 June **Discover Bacombe Hill Nature Reserve** with warden Paul Niddler.  
10.30-13.00 Meeting in Coombe Hill car park, Lodge Hill, HP17 0UR

Sunday 11 June **Discover Grangelands Nature Reserve** with John Tyler.  
10.00-12.00 Meeting in Pulpit Hill car park on Longdown Hill, HP27 0NB

Saturday 17 June **Annual Orchid Count at Aston Clinton Ragpits** with warden Phil Townsend. 10.00-14.00 Meeting at reserve entrance at the bottom of Aston Hill, HP22 5NF

Sunday 18 June **Orchid Spectacular at Aston Clinton Ragpits** with warden Phil Townsend. 10.00-12.00 Meeting at reserve entrance at the bottom of Aston Hill, HP22 5NF

Sunday 23 July **Chalk Grassland Flowers and Butterflies at Aston Clinton Ragpits** with warden Phil Townsend. 10.00-12.00 Meeting at reserve entrance at the bottom of Aston Hill, HP22 5NF

Saturday 26 August **Discover Late Summer Insects at Yoesden** with Sue Taylor.  
10.30-13.00 Meeting off Bottom Lane, Radnage, HP14 4AR

Saturday 26 August **Discover Butterflies and Other Insects at Grangelands** with Sue Taylor. 14.30-17.00 Meeting in Pulpit Hill car park on Longdown Hill, HP27 0NB

### **Beautiful Birdsong and \*\*\*\*\* Bottles at Weston Turville Reservoir**

April and May see the return of many migrant birds to our local reserves. They tend to burst into full song when they arrive, choose mates and set up their territories so this is a good time to listen out for them. At Weston Turville Reservoir in particular we can with care get close to the reedbed action to hear migrant reed and sedge warblers plus the resident water rails and reed buntings. Take the muddy path along the water's edge from the site of the former hide near the reserve entrance from Halton Lane and listen as you go. Take great care if you go on the anglers' pontoons as some of the walkways are in poor condition. Away from the reedbeds backcaps will be very active in the scrubby areas and chiffchaffs are numerous in the trees and bushes. Please be very careful to keep dogs under control on a short lead at this time of the year. To identify birdsong there are various apps for mobile phones or you can go online with the RSPB. However the apps are often

inaccurate and the best way forward is to buy a birdsong disk or download some streamed material and learn the songs at home before you go out. Near the start of the path is a good place to hear stock doves, hooting softly a little like monkeys in a tropical forest, and both great spotted and green woodpeckers drumming for the females' attention.



[Taking the lead: dog owners urged to keep their pets in check in the countryside](#)

For most people the reservoir is a place of peace for the study of nature where you can take in views of Coombe Hill and Wendover Woods. However, there are some who enjoy it a little too much and leave their enjoyment behind in the form of cans, towels, socks, inflatables, gas cylinders and of course glass and plastic bottles.

We are unsure what Summer 2023 will bring for the group of volunteers who patrol the reservoir and keep it clean on behalf of the owners the Canal and River Trust, the leaseholders BBOWT, and the other stakeholders, the angling club and the sailing club, who also do their bit to keep on top of the litter problem. Thanks to you all.

If you have some spare time and wish to help please let me know on [susannawtr@outlook.com](mailto:susannawtr@outlook.com). I tend to walk round a few times a week and monitor the situation but I know it will be upsetting for many to see the litter increase as the warmer weather comes so we need to patrol twice a week with litter pickers and bags to carry our finds away.

**Please keep Britain tidy, take your litter home.**

**Richard Birch and Susanna Allwood, BBOWT Chilterns Group volunteers**

## **HS2 and the Water supply to WT Reservoir**

In February, Bucks Council nodded through the HS2 plan to extract water from their excavations in the lower part of Bacombe Hill and to pipe it to Aylesbury to feed Stokes Brook. This will be bad for western Aylesbury residents who already suffer winter flooding and bad for our Weston Turville Reservoir reserve which will be deprived of the spring water it gets from this source. A final decision is dependent on the Environment Agency giving its assent to the detailed plans of the contractors. So far the EA has refused HS2 a derogation from the Water Framework Directive to allow rerouting of the water to happen but we shall have to wait and see the eventual outcome. Meanwhile please protest to HS2 and write to your MP This is no way to put at risk a much-loved local leisure resource which also happens to be a SSSI under BBOWT's management.

Our member Andy Band of the Wendover HS2 Mitigation Action Group sums up the current situation (and the group's website at [Whs2.org](http://Whs2.org) has a good summary of the issues at stake). 'Buckinghamshire Council granted Schedule 17(3) approval for the Wendover Green Tunnel and cutting section last month despite the fact that the Environment Agency had not accepted EKFBs submissions and were not in a position to grant either a WFD derogation nor Schedule 33 approval'.

NB the original HS2 budget contained a contingency for the water intercepted by the Wendover Green Tunnel at Bacombe Hill to be redirected to its original destination.

**Richard Birch, volunteer**

## **An Introduction to Invertebrates**

Invertebrates account for 97 per cent of all animals in the world and one of the biggest groups is that of the insects, of which there are at least a million species. It's a baffling prospect to try to get to grips with such numbers so we thought we'd start with some help from BBOWT members and volunteers Sue Taylor and Linda and Chris Wells, who have enjoyed a lifetime's addiction to insects and who have charted many of the species we can see on local reserves. Given the complexity of the insect world, many people specialise in particular groups of species.

The first link below is to a series of beautiful illustrations that Linda and Chris prepared for Mick Jones for his annual round-up of happenings at Dancersend in 2022. Linda says, 'We do a bumblebee survey there between March and October, and another at College Lake, for the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. We have a great interest in all invertebrates, but especially in bees, and bumblebees in particular'.

The second amazing series 'Little bits of magic' has been put together by Sue Taylor who is running a course called 'an introduction to recording Invertebrates' The summer session is fully booked so she hopes to be running it again in the autumn, a chance for people to be introduced to some fascinating Invertebrates and more importantly to learn how to make good records that enable scientists and land managers to understand both what is present and how healthy the habitats are.

For those getting into insect studies Sue says 'A Comprehensive guide to Insects of Britain and Ireland' by Paul Brock, Pisces Publications is a good start as is its sister book 'Britain's Insects' also by Brock but published by Wild Guides. The former has loads of photos the latter has fewer photos but it helps you learn more about the different groups of insects, both over £25 new.

<https://www.bbowt.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/dancersend-review-2022.pdf>

<https://www.bbowt.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/little-bits-of-magic.pdf>



Micopteryx moth

## **A New staff member for East Berkshire and Bucks**

I am Barbara Polonara the new Community Wildlife Officer East covering East Berks and Bucks. I joined BBOWT in October and I am based at our Woolley Firs office. I have a special interest in House Martins, Swifts, Swallows, and Hedgehogs, and volunteer for House Martin Conservation UK-IE, as well as a local Hedgehog Rescue.

I run a NextDoor Nature project in Slough, aiming at engaging with the local Community and bringing more nature locally, where people live and work. I have so far engaged with several underserved groups and created connections as well as running wildlife centred

activities. Some of these groups and Charities are: The Ujala Foundation, The Good Gym Slough, St Paul's Church and Be Happy Preschool, The Parvaaz Project, The Slough Anti Litter Society, Ramgarhia Gurdwara, and The Slough Hub.

I hope to create a positive, thriving network of Communities engaged in nature themed activities, especially in relation to their mental and physical wellbeing.

### **Appreciating The Chilterns by Peggy Verrall**

When I came to The Chilterns years ago,  
Mobile and with a car, keen to admire  
Gladly I joined a conservation group  
Eating my packed lunches round the fire.  
Old beeches, bluebell woods and snowdrop fields  
Amazing hilltop views, llamas and sheep  
Were much enjoyed and shared and photographed  
And stored in albums, memories, I'll keep  
The seasons passed, the years too, and now  
I'm old, can't drive, can't walk far any more.  
The snowdrops and the bluebells I enjoy  
Grow in my garden close to my front door.  
These days my walks are taken near my house  
And I look down, not up so that I'm ready  
For roots or sticks or mud or snow or ice,  
Lest I should trip now that I'm so unsteady.

Still I find riches: a tiny white breast feather,  
Landing on dead leaves, a butterfly,  
Green, brown and yellow mosses, liverworts,  
An iridescent beetle scuttling by.  
So, though I can no longer litter pick,  
Nor weave new hedges, search for missing sheep,  
On this much smaller scale, The Chilterns still  
Provide me with new memories to keep.

## **MAIN CONTACT DETAILS**

**Head Office:**

**[www.bbowt.org.uk](http://www.bbowt.org.uk) / 01865 775476**

**College Lake: 01442 826774**

**Events**

**[www.bbowt.org.uk/events](http://www.bbowt.org.uk/events)**

**Visitor centre: Toyah Baulk,**

**[toyahbaulk@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:toyahbaulk@bbowt.org.uk)**

**Education: Sarah Close**

**[sarahclose@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:sarahclose@bbowt.org.uk)**

**Volunteering Information:**

**[www.bbowt.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer](http://www.bbowt.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer)**

**Headquarters The Lodge,  
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Website: [www.bbowt.org.uk](http://www.bbowt.org.uk) Reg Charity No  
204330**

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## HANDS-ON CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES

Work parties are sociable and satisfying events with opportunities to learn new skills and discover more about our reserves. Beginners are welcome and you can stay for whatever time you can spare. Please wear stout footwear and work clothes, including gloves, and be prepared for poor weather. Bring your own refreshments. Tools and instruction are provided. Many reserves welcome new volunteers who are invited to email [volunteering@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@bbowt.org.uk) for registration.

Contact information given below is for queries to leaders of existing teams.

### Regular work parties

**Dancersend with Pavis Woods** (near Tring) Main work sessions are held on the second Sunday of every month, 10.00am-3.30pm, with occasional morning sessions on Wednesdays. To be added to the email list for more details contact Judi Fisher 01494 722073, [judiandbryan@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:judiandbryan@yahoo.co.uk) .

**Bacombe Hill** \* (near Wendover) 10.00am on second Thursday of the month.

**College Lake** \* (near Tring).

**Finemere Wood** (near Quainton) Work parties on second and fourth Thursday of the month, 9.30am-3.00pm. Contact Charlotte at [charlottekarmali@outlook.com](mailto:charlottekarmali@outlook.com).

**Grangelands** \* (near Princes Risborough).

**Pitstone Fen** \* (near Tring).

**Weston Turville Reservoir** \* (near Wendover) Last Thursday of month, 10.00am-2.30pm.

### Sporadic work parties

**Aston Clinton Ragpits** (near Wendover)

For information please contact Phil Townsend 01923 353410, [philjtownsend@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:philjtownsend@yahoo.co.uk).

**Yoesden Bank** \* (near Princes Risborough).

\*For all queries about these groups please contact the BBOWT volunteering team on [volunteering@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@bbowt.org.uk).

### 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 2024 please submit them by July 15 to [juliebirch60@yahoo.com](mailto:juliebirch60@yahoo.com).**

**To be put on the mailing list for this newsletter please contact [membership@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:membership@bbowt.org.uk)**

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