

# THE CHILTERN NEWSLETTER

From BBOWT Chilterns Group – supporting and promoting our local Wildlife Trust

Issue 107 Autumn – Winter 2023



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

We are very grateful to all who take the trouble to send in material. If you would like to contribute to the Spring 2024 edition please send your news, photos and features to [juliebirch60@yahoo.com](mailto:juliebirch60@yahoo.com) by 1st March.

Cover image: sheep at Aston Clinton Ragpits by Mary Payne

## Think big, act local!



With around 150 staff and operations across three counties – including looking after 2,600 hectares of nature reserves; providing educational experiences for thousands of people; advising hundreds of landowners on wildlife-friendly management; and campaigning on many national and regional threats to wildlife – BBOWT is by any measure a super impressive organisation.

More than 50,000 members fuel this impressive body of work and are pleased to be enabling this massive force for nature across a large swathe of the country. The latest major initiative is a wide-ranging project aimed at Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray (REBOR) – restoring nature and supporting rural communities to establish wildlife corridors across the agricultural landscape on the Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire border (see [www.bbowt.org.uk/reconnecting-bernwood-otmoor-and-ray](http://www.bbowt.org.uk/reconnecting-bernwood-otmoor-and-ray)).

As well as big projects like this, BBOWT wants to inspire people to get more involved with nature and get more out of it, both personally and to benefit their local community. There are currently several focussed projects in particular towns facilitated by BBOWT's Community Wildlife Team, but this is also where our Chilterns Group fits in. Our role is to provide a local presence for BBOWT's big mission roughly in the area between Aylesbury, Berkhamsted, Amersham, Beaconsfield, High Wycombe and Princes Risborough. We aim to connect with people through a programme of public talks, guided walks, field trips and fundraising events, and help them to take action for wildlife in this area – from visiting our nature reserves to volunteering in their management; from learning about our Chilterns wildlife to helping to enthuse and engage others; from making a more nature-friendly garden or village green to contributing to wildlife surveys.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Chilterns Newsletter, full of information about our recent and forthcoming events and lots of opportunities to get more involved.

**Mick Jones MBE, Chairman BBOWT Chilterns Group**



**PLEASE SUPPORT THE BBOWT PLANT AND  
PRODUCE CHARITY MARKET**

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

**Sunday 15 October, 11am – 1pm**

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

For contributions and queries please contact John Catton  
on 01494 726616 or [richard.catton1@ntlworld.com](mailto:richard.catton1@ntlworld.com)

## **What's been happening at Dancersend**

In spring and summer, work at the nature reserve normally tails off a bit with the physical management work being largely replaced by surveying. We record particular groups of wildlife year on year, using standard procedures. This helps us to check that our management of the reserve is being effective, or might need tweaking, and (increasingly important) gives us early warning that factors outside our direct control – climate change, pollution, diseases and invasive species – might be threatening our native plants and animals.

However, this year it has remained hectic through the summer months on top of the surveying. Our 2-year Rothschild Foundation funded 'Celebrating Dancersend' project has been coming to an end and there has been lots to finish off – new signage for the refreshed Tree Trail and brand-new Audio Trail, preparing on the ground for new welcome and interpretation signs, new fencing to help us manage the grazing stock better and improvements to The Forge, our volunteer centre and training facility at the Water Works.

Completely unexpected were two incidents in July where large trees were blown down, blocking a key footpath and the road through the valley. These required rapid responses with difficult access, and both eventually resulted in some large chunks of timber suitably relocated for invertebrate and fungus habitat as well as piles of logs available to volunteers.

Ongoing through the summer has been a major Thames Water construction project which has meant considerable disruption at times around the land we manage at the Water Works and periods when access was restricted and the car park closed.



Given the urgency of this work – a new borehole and pipelines – for the resilience of water supplies in the Tring and Aylesbury areas, we were happy to co-operate with Thames Water and their contractors but were concerned about damage to some of the wildlife features – including a superb colony of Chiltern gentians and nesting sites for rare mining bees. We were grateful for the considerable efforts taken to protect the nature reserve area including using underground horizontal drilling to minimise the surface excavation needed. We were further impressed when

the contractors offered to create extra chalk mounds for mining bees and replace some rickety steps with new concrete ones – all over and above the contract they were working to. We are currently reinstating the car park and areas that were affected by the excavations.



Almost the final straw has been the abnormal rate of vegetation growth after such a wet July necessitating extra path clearance and mowing of some grassland areas. Ideally, we need to graze earlier than normal and with more stock but that will be difficult. This is just one example of unseasonal or extreme weather patterns starting to affect our management of the reserve. Mind you, the drought and extreme heat last summer had already turned much of the reserve into a parched wasteland by this stage. I think I prefer the rain – at least I don't have to worry about watering the

600 trees and shrubs we planted at the Extension earlier in the year!

Keeping on top of the management challenges at Dancersend would not be possible without the support I get from Judi Fisher and Len Jessup and the hard work contributed in all weathers by our great group of keen volunteers. Some of the extra tasks this summer have benefitted from work by the South Bucks midweek volunteers based at College Lake. I'm hoping things calm down now for the rest of the summer and autumn so we can just enjoy the wildlife!

**Mick Jones, Volunteer Warden, Dancersend**



## The Chilterns Group event volunteers spread the word and raise funds for wildlife



In May this year, we held the first of our popular biannual Plant and Produce Markets at College Lake – raising £1,000. Then in June, the Group participated in Amersham's Climate Action Day. Here we discussed with members of the public how their gardens could be planned to allow for their needs (children perhaps) whilst at the same time encouraging wildlife into their life and reducing their impact on climate change.

Looking forward, we will be taking our gazebo to the **Amersham Heritage Day on Sunday 10th September**. This is a hugely popular all-day event we've attended in Old Amersham High Street for many years. And the final event for our group this year is the second fundraising **Plant and Produce Market** being held as always at **College Lake on Sunday 15th October**...and we'd love to welcome some new volunteers on both occasions.

For us, the Amersham Heritage Day is primarily an awareness raising day – you'd be surprised just how many people do not know of BBOWT's existence. We'll be sited next to a BBOWT recruiter, meaning no membership "hard sell" is involved! As it's a family day we'll have a couple of quizzes for both parents and children. The event runs from 11:30am to 5:30pm so we'll be looking for up to 6 volunteers to spend about an hour each with us.

The Plant and Produce Market is now a well-established event that takes place in the heart of the Chilterns area at College Lake Reserve. It's open for two hours from 11:00am to 1:00pm. We get a huge amount of support from volunteers based at the Reserve but more people are needed to run the stalls: Plants – donated by

enthusiastic local gardeners, Produce – selling locally grown, made and cooked food items, plus, I hope, some “Dancersend” apple juice, from the heritage orchard, along with the ever useful charity **Workaid** van.

The success of these events depends very much on the support of volunteers. It's good fun and I'm confident you'll know people attending both activities.

If you would like to help at either, or have any queries, please contact John Catton on 01494 726616 or [richard.catton1@ntlworld.com](mailto:richard.catton1@ntlworld.com)

**P.S.** Thinking about the Plant and Produce Market in particular, even if you can't help on the day, you can contribute to its success through donations of plants and home produce, so please consider:

- a. potting up and labelling any excess plants (especially the rarer ones) you may have as you divide them
- b. bake a cake (or two), and some biscuits, make jams and marmalades, perhaps conjure up some fudge or pick some late summer fruits from your garden, and...
- c. spread word of the Market nearer the time to get your friends to come along too!

**John Catton, Events Team Leader**

## **All change at College Lake**

The Reserve has a new Visitor Engagement Manager – Emma Mitchell, reporting to Andrew Inkley, Head of Commercial Estate for the Trust. Emma's role is all about looking for ways of engaging the public to act for nature and supporting the Trust in working towards nature's recovery.

Emma's career has always focussed on visitors. She worked at Vauxhall Motors for 20 years in various positions in their in-house event team, starting as a Shows and Events Assistant, and progressing to Live Event Manager before heading up the team as Head of Shows & Events.

During her time at Vauxhall, she managed motor shows, product launches, customer track days, and incentive trips, to name but a few. After two decades in the motor industry, Emma decided it was time for a change of scenery. So, she left Vauxhall and gained further experience managing visitors at several National Trust properties before joining us here at BBOWT.

In her spare time, Emma enjoys walks in the countryside, yoga, and growing vegetables in her garden, and can still be found at the odd car show every now and again. Be sure to introduce yourself to her next time you're visiting, as she's looking forward to getting to know the membership and hearing your ideas.

Following us saying goodbye to Toyah Baulk, Visitor Centre Manager, who was a welcoming face for many years, the day-to-day running of College Lake will be in the

hands of Emma and Phil Bruss, Reserve Warden whose role has been changed to support this new approach. We wish Toyah every success in her new endeavour.

The visitor access at the Reserve will soon be moving. All visitors will once more be guided to enter through the visitor centre and onto the reserve that way. New volunteers to help with the shop and with visitor welcome are invited to channel enquiries by email through [volunteering@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@bbowt.org.uk) where Wayne Brown will give more information and assistance.

*With thanks to Gillian Simpson whose text in the College Lake Volunteers Newsletter has been incorporated above.*

**Richard Birch with Emma Mitchell**

## **Community Wildlife Team Update**

BBOWT's Community Team is now back up to full capacity. **Fiona Bennett-Meere** joined the team at the end of June as the Community Wildlife Officer West (Oxon & West Berks). Fiona will be delivering the Nextdoor Nature project in Reading and supporting **Veritie Turner** with the Wild Bicester and Wild Banbury projects.

The Nextdoor Nature project in Slough has been working with the Ujala Foundation to help local residents create a community garden – watch our video at <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/nextdoor-nature-projects>. **Barbara Polonara** has also been working with The Parvaaz Project and St Paul's Church.

**Clare Hegarty** started delivering the Engaging with Nature project in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead in April. Clare is working with four organisations to deliver seasonal sessions to cohort participants to improve their health and wellbeing through increasing their connection to nature and improving local community spaces for wildlife.

We continue to promote #TeamWilder, sharing people's stories at <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/blog/tag/team-wilder> and encouraging people to add their actions to help wildlife locally on our interactive map <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/be-part-of-team-wilder>.

In partnership with the Diocese of Oxford, we have launched a Wilder Churches resource page on our website at <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/team-wilder/team-wilder-churches>. Churches also have their own unique pin on the #TeamWilder map.

**Lily O'Neill**, Community Network Officer ran two training courses to help the group members to increase their knowledge and confidence on how to improve and manage their grounds for wildlife. To find out more about the Community Network Resources visit <https://www.bbowt.org.uk/team-wilder-community-groups>.

**Katie Horgan**, Rough Around the Edges Project Officer continues to support wildlife groups within the Chilterns to improve local green spaces for wildlife. The project is

due to end in March 2024, Katie has been delivering training for groups to allow them to be more self-sufficient as the project is coming to the end of its funding.

Make sure you follow BBOWT's social media to see regular updates of what BBOWT's Community Wildlife Team get up to.

**Kate Sheard, Community Wildlife Manager**

## **College Lake Birds**

We are fortunate to have several regular birders who report their sightings to the Bucks Bird Club from whose website I have extracted the bones of this account.

No rarities have been seen this year but lots of birds categorised as scarce have been noted, with a satisfying number of them being waders for which the Reserve was particularly designed.

Breeding species this year include redshank, oystercatcher and lapwing, though the 'oysters' failed to raise their chicks to fledging.

Visitors in winter, spring and summer have included dunlin, black-tailed godwit, ruff, little ringed plover, snipe, greenshank and green and common sandpiper.

The reedbeds attract many warblers including Cetti's, reed and sedge.

On the islands and belatedly on the tern raft, common terns have successfully raised a number of chicks with more to come still.



\*Interesting one-offs were a great white egret and a goosander in January. These are both birds that are increasing in England with the goosander breeding on the rivers Thame and Ouse, while 'great whites' have moved in from the continent and begun to breed though not in Bucks yet.

Another unusual sighting was a pair of shelduck which had a failed breeding attempt.

I am indebted in particular to Adrian Bayliss, Graeme Kennedy, Terry Lewis and Peter Griffin for their regular reports to the Bucks Bird Club sightings site. If you see something of interest on a visit do get the Meet and Greet volunteers to put it in the notebook kept in the hut for all kinds of wildlife sightings.

**Richard Birch, volunteer**



## **HS2 and the Bacombe Hill aquifer – good news at last**

It looks likely that the Environment Agency will accept the solution now being offered by the contractors following years of badgering principally by Wendover's resident hydrologist and BBOWT member, Andy Band.

The problem has always been that the so-called green tunnel being carved through the chalk lower slopes of Bacombe Hill will set the rail tracks up to 10 metres lower than the aquifer which supplies Weston Turville Reservoir and the feeder canal to the Grand Union at Marsworth. HS2 refused to tunnel under the chalk though this was shown to be a cheaper option and have caused massive disruption to the A413 and Chiltern Line by insisting on a high-level trace requiring two huge viaducts on the approach to Wendover from Amersham.

Reports suggest that the Environment Agency are due to finally accept EKFB/HS2 plans to excavate through this lower slope of Bacombe Hill. The hold up in approval has been over the issue of ensuring that there would be no negative effect on the quality and quantity of water supply to the Weston Turville SSSI - our reserve.

As the track through the green tunnel and cutting is up to 10m below the ground water level in the aquifer, without mitigation, this will flood and excess water will empty into Stokes Brook which is already prone to flooding. The plans shown to BBOWT at an information session in the spring show a wetland area being planned between Wendover and Stoke Mandeville to hold some of this water in very wet conditions but no provision for water to go to the Reservoir.

Since then, Wendover HS2 have held a detailed technical meeting with EKFB. They indicated that, after many years of campaigning, the finally accepted solution shows mitigation shall be installed in the form of a semi-permeable wall along the cutting. Most importantly, the solution includes monthly water monitoring up to the point when the railway has been operational for 6 years and that this monitoring includes condition monitoring of the SSSI. Wendover HS2 and WPC are pleased with the outcome as the solution whilst not perfect is a significant advance on nothing. They are also pushing for an artesian well to be installed at the Hampden Pond which will help with maintaining water levels there.

Details of the hydrogeology and other aspects affecting the local community can be seen on the website of Wendover HS2 (<https://www.whs2.org>). The 'latest news' section has a video of the construction site from Gt Missenden to Stoke Mandeville which makes for interesting viewing.

We are all very grateful for the efforts of Wendover HS2 Mitigation Group, spearheaded by Andy, thanks to which we are near to having a reasonable solution for the water issue at least. Noise is another matter!

**Richard Birch with Andy Band, Wendover Volunteers**

## Some local wildlife sightings in 2023



For the first time, as far as we are aware, a **scarlet elf cup** fungus has been found at College Lake near a newly cleared area close to the Warden's Bench and very close to the main trail. There are a number of fruiting bodies in the area, one is shown in the photo. The identification was made by Bucks Owl and Raptor Group (BORG) while installing new owl and kestrel boxes.

David Owen  
January 2023 on the Volunteers' Hub (VH)



**Small Skipper butterfly** on a patch of scabious at Dunsmore.

Liz Hancock



**Herb Paris** (*Paris quadrifolia*) was found at Warburg Reserve.

Roy Booth, Trailside ambassador, April (VH)



In August, I led a couple of volunteer surveyor thank you walks at Yoesden. On both walks we initially spotted and then potted-up a couple of interesting looking plume micro-moths. Many weeks of research and discussions with lepidopterists have now confirmed the moth in question was the **Downland Plume Moth** (*Oxyptilus pilosella*).

Sue Taylor, a local invert specialist and BBOWT volunteer surveyor, confirmed existing identification books list the species as extinct or probably extinct!

However, there have now been sporadic sightings in Bucks since 2013 but in no other county. Of the fourteen known sightings three have been made at Yoesden,

which indicates a viable population on site and the habitat has been maintained in the right way to allow it to persist. See full article below.

At **Gallows Bridge Farm**, curlew held territory but we believe they didn't attempt to breed on the reserve. One or two pairs probably bred just off the reserve and we are hoping next year to be able to liaise with local landowners so we can find their nests and protect them with electric fencing to deter potential ground predators. We have done this very successfully at Chimney Meadows. Redshank were again present during the breeding season within the electric fenced entrance field and are believed to have bred successfully.

Slow worms at **Dancersend** showed great resilience to the Water Company's work – 12 were counted in early summer and 24 in July says surveyor Mike Jennings (whose full account will appear in the next Newsletter). At **Homefield Wood**, 1,100 military orchids were counted this summer.

At **Weston Turville Reservoir**, the early marsh orchids in the area by the former hide plummeted a few years ago due to flooding and they have not recovered. Subsequently, it was decided to concentrate on maintaining and hopefully increasing the orchid populations in the fen area – where 1,184 were counted this year. Do not attempt to access the fen – unsafe ground!

With thanks to **Mark Vallance, Colin Williams and Gill Cornelius** for the information above.



On a less exotic note, leaving part of my **Wendover lawn** uncut for a second year produced this lovely pyramidal orchid, says the editor's husband.

Now for something bigger. **Adrian Bayliss** was pleased to find an unusual visitor to College Lake back in January – a great white egret, like an outsize little egret but with a yellow bill. These have become commoner over the last few years and may have attempted to breed in Somerset. The photo of a similar bird at Linford was taken by Mike Haberfield of the Bucks Bird Club and appears in the report on College Lake Birds.



Returning to smaller sightings, **Steve Hawkins'** photo shows a number of beech galls on beech trees at Whiteleaf.

John Tyler comments: All too often we hear of plants and animals which are disappearing from our countryside, but there is one insect which has gone against the grain and is currently enjoying a population explosion in the Chilterns. It is a small fly called *Mikiola fagi* (sadly it is still waiting to be issued with a common name). It lays its eggs only on beech leaves, stimulating them to produce shallot-shaped galls like the ones in this photograph.

Within each hollow gall there is a single white larva, feeding safely out of sight of predators. As the gall grows, it changes from apple-green to rhubarb-red and when the leaf falls in the autumn the galls fall with it, lying dormant on the ground until the following spring when an adult fly will emerge to repeat the cycle.

*M. fagi* was once so rare that it was thought to be extinct in Britain, but within the last few years its numbers have increased enormously in the Chilterns, to the point that you shouldn't need to search more than a few trees before you come across one laden with hundreds if not thousands of the distinctive galls.

No one knows the reason for this little fly's dramatic return (climate change perhaps?) but it is certainly worth looking out for next time you are walking through your local beechwood.

For more news on sightings see: **College Lake Birds** based largely on Adrian Bayliss's records, the results of the **Aston Clinton Ragpits orchid count** reported by Phil Townsend, and Mick Jones's report on **Dancersend Reserve**.

### **Aston Clinton Ragpits**

The mixed spring weather provided some good conditions for plant growth. There were also some notable fungi with a couple of morel species: the thimble morel and the semi-free morel. There were also a good number of the unusual vinegar cup fungi sprouting underneath some hazel trees.

Soon, the first butterflies were emerging with good numbers of holly blue followed by dingy skippers and green hairstreak. The first slow worms appeared under the specially placed corrugated tin refugia in mid-March.

I would like to acknowledge the Bucks Owl and Raptor Group who very kindly replaced the owl nest box in April and very quickly reported that the box was occupied by a tawny owl, possibly sitting on young!

A notable success this year was the explosion in yellow rattle which had spread widely across the reserve. This fantastic plant which is widely known as the 'meadow maker' was even found in the meadow margins and put on a stunning floral display.

On a sunny day in April, I was lucky to witness a female brimstone butterfly egg laying on a buckthorn shrub. These beautiful pale green spindle shaped eggs darken in colour over time before hatching around the end of May.

We then had a very hot period of weather at the end of May into June which compressed the flowering period of many plants somewhat. The orchid display was in full swing by mid-June and the annual count produced the following tally:

Common spotted orchid 5,684

Chalk fragrant orchid 10,243 (including 2 white flowered varieties)

Common twayblade 4,542

Pyramidal orchid 2,080 (including 8 white flowered varieties)



Greater Butterfly orchid 144  
Bee orchid 48  
Common spotted x chalk fragrant hybrid 1

On 2nd June, I counted the following:  
White helleborine 105

In addition, there were 54 flowering broad leaved helleborines flowering at the end of July.

**Grand total: 22,901**

A huge thanks to everyone who gave up their time to come and help with the count on Saturday morning, the overall tally was slightly up on last year's figure of 21,469.

As we entered July, we have seen the small population of basil thyme flowering well, and also the best ever numbers of clustered bellflowers with over 50 flowering plants.



Many butterflies were on the wing, including a few chalkhill blues and the first scintillating orange persistent waxcap fungi started pushing up through the chalk grassland. That soon turned into quite a display with hundreds of these beautiful mushrooms popping up all over the place!

There is still plenty to enjoy, so please drop by and pay a visit.

**Phil Townsend, Volunteer Reserve Warden**

## **Bacombe Hill**

The Bacombe Hill team have continued their hard work through the summer. Clearance of scrub on the top ridge was the main priority and went on right until the first of the orchids and other wildflowers started to appear. This year, like most things, the orchids were about two weeks late. We had a good show of spotted orchids, fewer fragrant orchids, and a late profusion of pyramidal orchids, some of which continued well into mid/late July. However, the only bee orchid seen this year had sadly been nibbled, probably by a rabbit and only the stalk remained. Rabbits seem to be increasing in number on the reserve - which may account for the fact we were lucky enough to see a stoat run right in front of us whilst having a mid-morning drinks break on a working party.

In June, Gill Cornelius and I jointly led a BBOWT walk to introduce people to the reserve, which was a success. Not only was the weather kind, but there were a number of wildflowers out. Thyme, Quincy wort, clustered bellflower, quaking grass, various orchids and - my personal favourite - rock rose, to name just a few.

Some additional temporary volunteers are also doing a fine clearance job on the hill. We currently have ten cattle grazing away happily. So happily, in fact, that they haven't yet bothered to form an escape party and keep probing the fences like last year's lot!

On the downside, someone had a big bonfire on top of the round barrow one night in early June and the area was badly scorched. I really get annoyed when people can't respect a nature reserve, and especially a scheduled ancient monument within it. We seem to be getting an increase in litter and petty vandalism. Signs warning of the livestock grazing, as well as those asking people to respect the reserve and not light fires, are being ripped down and thrown in the bushes. I am having to retrieve or replace them quite regularly.

On the plus side, while we couldn't 'pop' the scrub as the wildflowers were out everywhere, the team turned to clearing bind weed, climbers and scrub growing over and up through the endangered junipers. We were delighted and amazed to find some baby junipers growing around the edge of several 'parent' trees. These tiny little junipers – thought to be less than a year old – are the first naturally germinated junipers that anyone can remember finding there.

Those of you who walk up the hill can't help but notice that the replacement Ellesborough Road is nearing completion, and Bacombe Lane is being realigned to enable 100 tonne articulated dump trucks to move the earth from the cut and cover HS2 tunnel. We wait to see how this affects our access to the reserve. But I am sure the team will keep hard at it; as the baby junipers have shown us that mother nature is hanging on in there, and as long as she doesn't give up, neither will we.

The contractors say they will maintain pedestrian access for the Ridgeway Path even when Ellesborough Road is closed to traffic. We shall see! (ED)

**Paul Niddler, Volunteer Warden**

## **Weston Turville Reservoir**

For 20 years, Weston Turville Reservoir had always been a place that I quickly walked around. I had young children and life was busier in a different way.

Living next door to Tessa Taylor and finding out how passionate she was about the place, I soon learnt that there was lots to see and learn about rather than just going on a quick walk.

During the lockdown of 2020, it became a place for new people to exercise and appreciate the outdoors, enticing many new visitors. The quiet reservoir I loved became very busy so I chose not to walk there anymore.

When local social media highlighted the increased litter, I knew I had to be proactive and look after the reservoir, just like Tessa had. I was then introduced to Richard Birch and many others as I became a volunteer. Richard asked me to take over as the Watcher of the Reservoir, as I am indeed walking around there most days.



Unfortunately, there is still a litter problem and it is comforting to have the support of others if there needs to be an emergency clean-up. The BBOWT patrollers together with other stakeholders (Prestwood & District Angling club and the Aylesbury Sailing Club) show we can all work together to keep the reservoir the amazing nature reserve it is for generations to come. Some paths needed clearing in summer - an impromptu work party soon sorted the problem out thanks to Dave Evans, David Atkinson and some impressive tools.

If you can help with litter patrols please email [volunteering@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@bbowt.org.uk)

Susanna Allford

### **A summer of mixed fortunes at College Lake**

Summer is the season to see nature at its best; dappled light on woodland floors, insects adorning sunlit meadows, and the floral confetti of plants in full reproductive flow. At least, when it's not raining. It has been a summer of unsettled weather, in which a bright June has given way to a soggy July and, as I write, a thoroughly mixed August. This will certainly have favoured some species and hampered others, but the ground vegetation has remained lush, rather than burned to a crisp as last year, so on the whole nature has had a reasonable ride.

Our islands have produced a good number of young waterbirds, with successful breeding from our lapwings, redshank and terns, though sadly with no success for our oystercatchers. However, the black headed gull colony has suffered. Soon after their cacophonous return to the islands, some birds began to show signs of illness, blearily standing at the water's edge. Dead birds began to show, the numbers accelerating as the breeding season progressed.

Following a visit to the islands, under full protective clothing and carefully controlled conditions to collect some of the fallen, the presence of avian flu was confirmed on site. The gull collection was heart-breaking, with birds looking up at me inches from my feet, unable to muster the energy to fly. Sadly, there was little to be done, with DEFRA guidance forbidding us to intervene with sick birds. The illness peaked in mid-June, with fatalities dropping off again later in the summer, but the damage was done. The productivity of the colony this year was less than a tenth of 2022. We can only hope that the disease has done its worst and those birds which successfully bred this year leave us with a more resistant colony.

In more positive news, the arable plants project has had a good year. We saw particularly strong displays of corn buttercup and, thanks to the efforts of our volunteers, we now have the largest colony of field cow-wheat in the UK. That's what I call a win! For those fans of obscure insects, our local miniscule celebrity *Tachydromia smithi* is back. A tiny but exceptionally well-mannered fly whose mating

ritual seems to involve queuing up for the female's attention. It is often present on fenceposts near the Octagon hide.

As we move away from summer, and the explosion of life begins to wind down, we will be moving back into scrub clearance mode to preserve the open matrix of the chalk grassland on site. Over the course of the winter we hope to significantly open some of the smaller paths, allowing light in for basking insects, creating dragonfly flyways and providing visitors with a less claustrophobic experience. We also hope to undertake maintenance work on the pond behind June Ives hide, which is beginning to choke with bullrush and overgrow with scrub. While a slower season for wildlife watching, winter is the season to see how much work goes into managing a nature reserve, so why not come along and talk to our staff and volunteers to find out more about what we do?

**Phil Bruss, Reserve Warden**

### **Dear readers, help needed**

Please can you help the Chilterns Group with creating and delivering its programme?

**Our aim 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 work. 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 2023/24 programme as you will see in this Newsletter and on the events website.

But we need more help with:

- publicising events (particularly on social media), and
- helping to organise walks and field trips.

We are a small local team usually working from home but with planning meetings at College Lake three or four times a year. We are a friendly group of folk from varied backgrounds but all enthusiastic about doing our bit for nature in the Chilterns under the BBOWT umbrella. Volunteers register with the Trust and so benefit from the insurance cover provided.

For more info - with no obligation - please contact in the first instance Wayne Brown on [volunteering@bbowt.org.co.uk](mailto:volunteering@bbowt.org.co.uk). Then, either Richard Birch in Wendover on 01296 624511 ([richardbirch60@yahoo.com](mailto:richardbirch60@yahoo.com)) or Mick Jones in North Bucks on 01296 720623 ([jonesmick365@gmail.com](mailto:jonesmick365@gmail.com)) will be happy to tell you more.



**BBOWT fundraising event, Tues 19 March 2024 – save the date!**

### **From The Mountains to The Sea – The Rhythm of Nature**



Back by popular demand! The Chilterns Group is organising another evening of entertainment starring The Wick Trimmers, a superb folk group from Prestwood. Their music will be complemented by poetry and prose on themes of nature, read by a hand-picked group of staff and volunteers.



Please save the date: on Tues 19 March at 7.45pm we shall perform our encore back in the Memorial Centre at Gt Missenden, bringing you tuneful light entertainment with a serious central theme - the relationship of people and nature. We invite you to send in for possible inclusion your favourite songs and poems relevant to our theme 'from the mountains to the sea' (email the producer [richardbirch60@yahoo.com](mailto:richardbirch60@yahoo.com)). Wordsworth fans don't worry – 'Daffodils' is on the shortlist already!

Tickets will be on sale at the evening talk in Gt Missenden on Tues 19 December and from [www.bbowt.org.uk/events](http://www.bbowt.org.uk/events) afterwards.

### **In praise of invertebrates**

I gaze in wonderment as I watch our amazing wildlife, but now I also wonder about the future, for this year my sightings have been notable as much for what I have not seen as for what I have seen.



Insect numbers have been noticeably down this year, both in abundance and variety. I have not seen several species I expect to see each year, like the golden-bloomed longhorn beetle, or *Megabunus diadema*, a rather lovely harvestman. Red-legged robberflies were very thin on the ground and had a shorter than usual flight period. I saw fewer solitary bees, and fewer of their predators too, like the nomada bees.

I've seen far fewer dragonflies and the numbers of small blue and chalkhill blue butterflies are down, there are fewer spiders this year too and so few caterpillars that I worry about moth numbers. So what!! - you may say. You may dislike flies and be afraid of spiders and feel we are better off without them. If so, think again. The truth is that we need all our invertebrates in all their fascinating and beautiful variety. They are at the heart of our natural environment and without them the complex processes that support us would collapse. Insects can survive without us...but we cannot survive without them.

It is time we stopped thinking of our natural habitats as optional extras and mere play spaces and instead hold them up as intrinsic to our health and wellbeing and to our

survival as a species. I don't want to leave you on a depressive note though. Invertebrates can bounce back given half a chance, so we need to give them that chance, and the hard work of the volunteers and staff on our reserves gives them the best likelihood of doing just that.

Some species are bucking the trend and doing well, increasing their range. I saw more dotted bee-fly than ever before this spring and look out for bee-wolves, a beautiful wasp that preys on honeybees.

Other species hide in plain sight. At Yoesden we have confirmed the presence of Downland Plume, a species thought to be extinct until recently. Pheromone lures have allowed me to find Orange-tailed Clearwing at Grangelands, College Lake, Yoesden and Dancersend. So I have reason to hope that even when I don't see species I expect to see, they may still be there in numbers that will enable them to bounce back when conditions allow. It is up to us to ensure that this can happen.

**Sue Taylor, BBOWT Volunteer Entomologist**

**A new season of BBOWT Talks at Great Missenden starts Tues 19 September** (and climaxes in March with another session of The Rhythm of Nature, an evening of entertainment with The Wick Trimmers).

Our talks will take place as usual on the third Tuesday of the month at the Memorial Centre. Doors open at 7pm for coffee and a chat with friends before the talk starts at 7.45pm. Admission is £5 to include coffee/tea and biscuits and a free raffle ticket. Parking nearby in Borough Fields is also free after 6pm. The postcode is HP16 9AE.

**Phil Townsend**, volunteer warden of Aston Clinton Ragpits Reserve opens the programme with 'Wildflowers and Butterflies of the Chilterns', a journey through our area and parts of Bucks, highlighting some species that are rare or very localised. Phil writes elsewhere in this newsletter on spring and summer at his reserve which is rich in orchids – about 23,000 were counted in flower this year.

In October we welcome **Mike Wallen** back, talking this time on 'Skomer Island' while in November it's **Veritie Turner** of the NBBG on 'The World of Bats'.

December sees us celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Ridgeway Path being declared an official long-distance trail, with an investigation by **John Clarke Tyler** of the wildlife that lives alongside the route from Ivinghoe in Herts to Avebury in Wilts, a track used by countless generations from Iron Age flint knappers to 21st century hikers.

This season's programme is being put together by Jenny Shaw, who recently joined the Chilterns committee and has kindly taken over from Steve Hawkins who is having a well-earned rest after organising many seasons of entertaining evenings for us all. A big thank you to Steve – and to Jenny!

We'd like to build our audiences to a higher level by increasing the spread of our publicity. We typically get 45 to 55 folk and the hall holds 110 so there is some space

to fill. At the first meeting do give your email address to our publicity officer Richard Birch if you'd like to be on his circulation list or if you can help by spreading the word. You will get a monthly reminder of events coming up with a flier attached as a jpg that you can print and post in your local library or on the parish noticeboard. Or you can send on to friends by email or use it on social media, like your village Facebook page. You can opt out at any time.

**Richard Birch, Publicity**

In our occasional column dedicated to Head Office confessions, we offer you...

**'The Curious Case of the Emperor Butterfly', Wayne Brown tells all.**



I'm almost 18 months into my role as Volunteering Administrator for BBOWT, and I'm still very much enjoying it!

My role includes monitoring the volunteering inbox, which is mainly from fabulous people who are willing to give up their time to help nature! I send details of the roles and, where necessary, arrange for them to have informal chats with Team Leaders. I also deal with DBS checks for Key and Learning Volunteers, as well as setting them up with required training.

The latter I am very familiar with as I used to look after staff training for an NHS Trust caring for people with learning disabilities. Before that, I worked in Customer Services for a publishing firm, and prior to that I was airline cabin crew with the now defunct Flybe! I used to operate the Belfast service, and my favourite thing was when I'd ask passengers if they would like milk and sugar, and they would reply: "Milk just!". I love local phrases like that – such as in my native West Cumbria, we don't say: "I'm going home", rather: "A's garn yam!". There's a whole book on the subject of Cumbrian dialect, and it's a very interesting read! I wonder if there are any Chiltern-isms? I'd be interested to hear.

I also look after BBOWT HQ reception a couple of days a week. This isn't an arduous task as we are not always busy, but the queries can be eclectic to say the least. One lady complained of being 'attacked' by an emperor butterfly at one of our reserves! Of course, she received a sympathetic reply, but I didn't have the heart to tell her that emperor butterflies are attracted to human sweat...among other things!

I'm forever in awe of those who give their time and energies for any charity, but those who help nature must, surely, reap the most reward!

*'There's a harmony that holds you in the noises of the wood  
Where I never tire of listening for it does a fellow good.'*

- From 'The Music of the Trees' by Charles A. Heath

Editor's note: Wayne is not responsible for the title which can be blamed entirely on my husband!

## **HS2 in the line of fire**

### **A message from Nikki at the Federation of Wildlife Trusts, Grantham**

On Tuesday 25 July we travelled to London to hand in a copy of the HS2 open letter, showing the number of co-signatories, alongside our report, 'HS2: Double Jeopardy', to each of the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment.

Thanks to you and over 104,000 other campaigners like you, this campaign has received a huge public response!

Now, Ministers must work together to ensure that HS2 Ltd. recalculates the scheme's impact on nature and fixes its mistakes.

We also made a delivery to Number Ten Downing Street. We want the Prime Minister to understand the gravity of the failings for nature that our report has exposed.

Mathew Stanton, the Trust's lead on HS2 matters, says HS2's failings to adequately protect Western Turville Reservoir are symptomatic of their whole approach to the environment. HS2 has made fundamental errors in the way it has assessed the value of nature along its construction path and only takes remedial action when put under huge public pressure. We have been saying for years that the project will do enormous damage to the natural environment. The Infrastructure and Projects Authority has said HS2 is unachievable in its current form which has been obvious for a long time. Without the dedication of Wendover HS2 and community groups, HS2 would be even more damaging than it already is and the mitigation secured for Western Turville would never have happened.

### **HS2 on red alert - where does the money go?**

So, the government watchdog for infrastructure projects has updated its analysis and ruled that HS2 cannot be completed as planned. What a surprise!



The big hole at Shardloes was a portent that went unnoticed by them at the time – just natural subsidence they said, nothing to do with our tunnel. Now the A413 is being partially closed again so they can bring in materials to fill the hole and returf the area.



## 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)

## MAIN CONTACT DETAILS

### **BBOWT Head Office**

The Lodge, 1 Armstrong Road, Littlemore, Oxford, OX4 4XT  
01865 775 476  
[www.bbowt.org.uk](http://www.bbowt.org.uk)

### **College Lake Nature Reserve & Visitor Centre**

Upper Icknield Way, Bulbourne, Tring, HP23 5QG  
01442 826 774

### **Events**

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

### **Volunteering**

[www.bbowt.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer](http://www.bbowt.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer)  
[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 Spring 2024 issue, please submit them by 1<sup>st</sup> March to [juliebirch60@yahoo.com](mailto:juliebirch60@yahoo.com)**

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

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