

THE CHILTERN NEWSLETTER

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

Issue 108 April 2024



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 next edition please send your news, photos and features to juliebirch60@yahoo.com

So, what's it all about?



The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust 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 several projects in particular towns facilitated by BBOWT's Community Wildlife Team, and this is also where our Chilterns Group fits in. Our role is to provide a local presence for the Trust's big mission roughly in the area including 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 - visiting our nature reserves and volunteering in their conservation; learning about wildlife and helping to enthuse and engage others; or even making a more nature-friendly garden or village green.

College Lake has a great programme of events this spring and summer - visit the [BBOWT website](#) to find fun activities for families, teens and nature nots!

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

In line with our mission of inspiring people to take local action for wildlife, we are tightening the focus of the newsletter to concentrate more on local reserves and activities so making it crisper, and shorter.

We currently mail to nearly 600 members' addresses - please sign up to receive it at membership@bbowt.org.uk

Outstanding Contribution Award to BBOWT Chilterns Group

The first Plant and Produce Market was held in 1981, 43 years ago! In case any of you missed it, at the Trust's AGM last October, the Chilterns Group Events Team - who organise and run the Markets - were the chosen recipients for the Outstanding Contribution award given to groups to celebrate the work they do to protect wildlife. Over the past 10 years, the Plant and Produce Markets have raised £22,000 for the conservation teams.

Spring Plant and Produce Market - Saturday 18 May 2024

The Plant and Produce Market will be held on Saturday 18 May at College Lake, from 11:00am to 1:00pm. Please note the change in the day, **Saturday** not Sunday.

The big draw is obviously the plants, all donated by enthusiastic local gardeners. These will be supplemented with bedding plants from a local nursery. If you need a replacement garden tool, 'Workaid' will be there as usual with lots of reconditioned ones. Alongside all this will be the Produce Stall selling locally produced, home-made or 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 one or two of those divisions to us by potting them up - don't forget to label them.
- b) bake a cake (or two), some biscuits, make jams and marmalades, perhaps conjure up some fudge or pick some rhubarb from your garden, and...
- c) spread 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

PS: A future date for your diary: Saturday 12 October, when we will be holding the autumn market!



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

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

Saturday 18 May, 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

Winter at College Lake - Widening the Ways by Phil Bruss, Warden

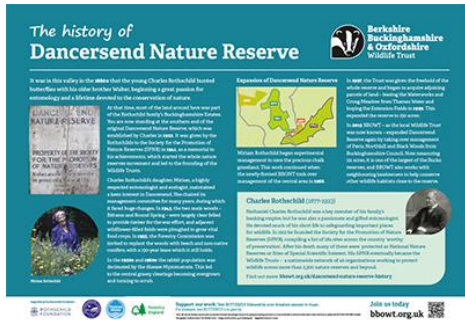
Winter on any nature reserve is usually focused on scrub clearance. Despite the best efforts of our animals, chewing, trampling and shunting their way through developing scrub, additional help is always needed on these artificially compact sites to get the results we need. At College Lake this is especially true. The geography of the site as a result of its industrial past means it is tricky to graze many areas. This is especially true of those patches of ground adjacent to the main circular route. Last winter we began rectifying this. Several areas of the site have been worked in order to push back the scrub, either through clearance or through hedgelaying, creating a more open, lower lying feel to these areas of the reserve. This will allow extra light to the ground near the tracksides while still providing low level wind breaks, promoting the generation of more grassy margins to catch the sun for invertebrates. They will also provide shelter for small birds to feed.



Key areas to see this are on the path out to the education barn, on the section of path just beyond where the bird trail spurs off to the June Ives hide, and on the path outside June Ives hide itself. This last site has already proved a much-enhanced location to watch foraging redwing over the depths of winter and will hopefully become a good flyway for dragonflies over the summer. As always, this work has been completed in large part by our volunteers, whose tireless dedication to improving the landscape here allows these changes to take place.

Dancersend Nature Reserve by Mick Jones, Volunteer Warden

At Dancersend, high up in the chalk hills, we are recovering from the excessively wet January and February, the wettest February since 1836! Extremely muddy conditions have interfered with woodland management work, fencing repairs and signage maintenance, but we should now catch up ready for visitors to enjoy the spring flowers and butterflies.



Visiting Dancersend you will find some changes. New interpretation signs explain the history of the reserve, the connection with the Rothschild family, and our management for wildlife, especially on the precious chalk grassland, which is home to many regionally important flowers and animals. You will also find new signposts for the reserve trails made of recycled plastic, saving us a lot of maintenance associated with wooden posts.

Sadly, we have had to close off part of the trail by Round Spring Wood due to the risks presented by high numbers of diseased ash trees.



On the reserve Extension fields, which stretch up from the original nature reserve in the valley to the summit of the road on Aston Hill, you will see some new excavations exposing the raw chalk. They are not for a new golf course or a location for a war film! They are part of a project being carried out with the national charity Plantlife to reintroduce juniper to the valley. (See article on Juniper Conservation.)

Over the autumn and winter period new species have continued to be recorded at the reserve. At the end of October, a Bucks Fungus Group visit to the reserve recorded 88 species despite atrocious non-stop rain. The list included at least two species new to the county and others very rarely recorded.



Perhaps the most attractive species found, even in the rain, was cobalt crust (*Terana caerulea*) in an area of Round Spring Wood where it has been found regularly for some years. Surveys at the Extension for lichens, by Paula Shipway, and mosses and liverworts, by Sean O'Leary, recorded the lichen *Lecanora albellula*, which is a new county record, and the tiny liverwort *Leiocolea badensis*, which is very rare in Bucks.

Less esoteric has been an effort to record birds at Dancersend over the last couple of months as I receive very few reports of either birds or mammals from visitors. I have been able to confirm the presence of many of the more common species and have been especially pleased to see marsh tits, a species we felt had declined over the last few years, plenty of woodcock, still a regular winter visitor, and groups of up to 30 common crossbills enjoying larch cones high up in the woods. Soon attention will turn to invertebrates, especially insects, and with a visit planned at the end of May for a group of entomologists from the Natural History Museum, I think you can expect some exciting new insect records in my next report.

Juniper Conservation by Mark Vallance

A recent project that the Trust has been working on has seen BBOWT working with Plantlife and other landowners in the Chilterns to conserve the rare juniper. This is a species that has been in severe decline for many years having been lost from nearly 50% of its historic range.

The work undertaken has been assisted by the Chilterns Conservation Board with funding from the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme.



Several shallow scrapes have been created in grassland restoration areas at Dancersend, Grangelands and Yoesden. This has been done by using a 360 excavator to strip off the nutrient rich topsoil to create bare ground after it was lost post-WWII when grassy clearings were allowed to scrub over and become woodland. Seed collected from our reserve at Bacombe Hill, on the other side of Wendover, will be used for this.

The chalk scrapes will also provide additional habitat for wildflowers that need low nutrient conditions and lack of competition, including key butterfly food plants. This creates suitable conditions for juniper and other rare early successional plants such as Chiltern gentian to grow.

Several of the scrapes have or will be fenced to ensure that the seed is able to germinate and this slow growing plant is able to grow without the pressure of grazing animals.

Over the coming weeks, juniper seed, collected from bushes at Bacombe Hill by Plantlife (under licence from Natural England), will be sown by our volunteers into these scrapes. These will then be monitored over the coming years by Plantlife and BBOWT volunteers and it is hoped that new seedlings will soon start to appear and go on to establish healthy young populations of juniper across these three sites.

Herpetological update from The Waterworks, Dancersend by Mike Jennings

Herpetology is the study of amphibians and reptiles. Two previous articles provided an overview of what has been found to be using the refugia/tiles on this reserve. This update will focus on only two checks, that were possible in 2023 due to the disruption from works carried out by Thames Water.

Tiles were stored elsewhere during the works to minimise risks to tile users. These were re-deployed at the end of May and the first survey took place at the end of June. Numbers of slow worms, the main reptile found on the reserve, have been monitored since 2017 and their use of the tiles has shown consistent numbers over that period. The greatest number each year during the period 2017 - 2022 found in any one particular survey has varied between 19 and 25 individuals. Reassuringly, the first survey of this year found 12 individuals and a survey towards the end of July found 24. Checks are normally carried out in the morning when the animals move under the tiles to warm up, ahead of becoming more active and foraging for food. Interestingly, July's survey was carried out in the afternoon when previous checks at this time have found very few or no animals present.



Ants are attracted to the tiles and construct many nests under them. The photograph shows a female slow worm with ants, some of which are crawling on her. There is some debate about whether slow worms eat ants or whether they both appreciate the same conditions created by the tiles. Textbooks tend to favour the latter and suggest that if ants are a portion of the diet then it is a relatively small part.

Groups of slow worms are often found under the tiles, taking advantage of the warm conditions. The tile in the photograph was only placed in a new location a month before but it was rapidly adopted as a suitable habitat by this group. Surveys over the course of the monitoring have shown that if tiles are positioned in appropriate habitat then slow worms are present on an overwhelming majority of the reserve.

A grass snake was found during both surveys, probably the same animal. However the snake moved off swiftly and avoided examination. This is probably just as well because this species has a tendency to exude foul-smelling excretions and defecate when feeling under threat.

Surveys have provided a means to monitor the impact of the works carried out by Thames Water at the reserve and they appear to have had no measurable impact on the population level for the slow worms. These results have allowed an assessment of the impacts for the main reptile species on the reserve and highlight the value of long-term monitoring studies.

Finemere Wood by Charlotte Karmali



Mud, mud, glorious mud. For those who need to wade and wallow in squelching, sticky, slippery mud, Finemere has been the place to be over the winter. There has been so much rain that rivers have been forged along the footways and natural ponds have appeared in dips along the paths. Despite this, the volunteers have continued to meet for their biweekly fix of nature, physical challenge, and companionship.

Out on the edge of the Finemere meadows, a footpath meanders through an area of relatively new woodland, planted some 20 years ago. Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) grows densely along much of the path, blocking out sunlight, it had become dark and gloomy. The trees, slender and tall, their upper branches twisted and entwined with adjacent plants, had very little growth at their base. This year, much energy has been directed into managing these great thickets of blackthorn by laying large sections thus giving them a new lease of life. The resulting compact hedge is where birds will nest and small mammals will live, protected from predators by a thick mesh of thorns. The path, no longer shadowed by tall trees, will be bathed in sunlight allowing flowers and grasses to bloom, biodiversity will soar.

Despite the never-ending grey and rainy days of recent months, spring is here, a welcome sight for those who are winter worn. The wild is awakening and colour is returning. The cheerful, sunny yellows of primroses aplenty along the woodland rides, with brimstone butterflies fluttering past. Purple, tiny dog violets and brilliant white wood anemones are a feast for the eyes.

Soon the bluebells will be blooming, one of Finemere Wood's most magnificent treasures and a sight not to be missed.

The volunteers now turn their attention to fixing fences and managing the grassy rides and glades, whilst enjoying the spectacle of flora and fauna emerging into life once again.

New barriers to access at Weston Turville Reservoir

by Richard Birch and Susanna Allford, WTR volunteer patrollers



At some time in March 2024, the CRT allowed high gates to be erected stopping people accessing the shoreline between the dam and the Sailing Club by any of the three paths from the main permissive path. We think this would have been at the instigation of the anglers to prevent people going anywhere near their fishing platforms - but while this would result in a reduction in vandalism and littering there, it also prevents bona fide visitors including BBOWT management and volunteers.

PRIVATE, NO PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY signs have been added to each gateway - they are out of character with a nature reserve and unnecessary, since the paths are blocked off anyway.

BBOWT was not informed of these moves and management is trying to unravel the situation. Meanwhile, do go to the location and then if you disapprove, register your view in '[incident reports](#)' on the Canal and River trust website. In the drop-down menu check Grand Union for the canal system you are reporting about and specify Weston Turville Reservoir in your message.

Reducing access to the shoreline is a particular blow for birdwatchers as this shoreline is one of the few places from which one can view the whole reservoir. The far shore was fenced off some years ago to the general displeasure of the local community.

Aston Clinton Ragpits by Phil Townsend

Finally, signs of a long awaited spring are here, but it was a relatively mild winter and there were plenty of lingering autumn fungi to enjoy. A nice surprise was to find a small group of collared earthstar fungi growing in leaf litter under the beech trees. As usual there were great displays of grassland fungi including pinkgills and waxcaps. There was, and still is, a colony of hairy curtain crust fungus growing all the way up a standing dead beech in the woodland.

The last few weeks have seen nice displays of flowering Daphne mezereon and some small seedlings have been found showing the very gradual spread of this slow-growing and rare plant across the reserve. It's overpowering scent is produced, perhaps, to ensure it is able to attract what few insects there are on the wing at this time of the year.

Some early emergent bumblebee queens have been prospecting for nest sites and the first hairy violets are beginning to flower. These will be followed by early dog violets in the woodland.

In the next few months there will be primroses flowering in the hazel coppice and cowslips flowering in the meadow and the quarry.

Blackthorn and willow provide a valuable early nectar source for many invertebrates and the welcome sounds of song thrush and blackbird are interspersed with the rapid 'twit twit twit' call of the Nuthatch.

Then in May you should see the chalk milkwort and horseshoe vetch flowering on the warmer close-cropped grassy slopes - a beautiful contrast of gentian blue and golden yellow. Adders-tongue ferns will appear in the meadow, growing under the dappled shade of the crab apple trees with their beautiful blousy blooms. Look out too for the beautiful glaucous sedge and Good Friday grass starting to flower in the chalk grassland.

As we approach late May the first orchids will be flowering so look out for the early flowering white helleborines and greater butterfly orchids. These are the prelude to the peak displays of chalk fragrant, common spotted and pyramidal orchids, not forgetting the thousands of green flowered common twayblade.

Plenty to look forward to as we move effortlessly into the spring and summer months.

Bacombe Hill by Paul Niddler

The Bacombe Hill team have been hard at work over the winter period with the usual scrub clearance. I am sure you don't need reminding just how wet it has been this winter. We had to abandon the February work party due to a monsoonal deluge that day, I think that's the first working party we have called off since the 'Beast from the East' snow.

However, we have been able to get stuck into a number of tasks despite the rain. We have brush cut and raked around the scheduled ancient monument burial mound. A joint working party was held with the North Chiltern Conservation Volunteers in January and an area of scrub cleared. This area was first opened up by the alpine mower last winter and we have now cleared two dense areas of blackthorn and bramble on this south-east facing side of the hill.

Ash dieback has badly affected most of the ash trees on the reserve. If you walk the path around the bottom of the hill and take the diagonal path up left to join the Ridgeway trail, you will see that large areas have been opened up by the removal of young dead ash poles leaving just old hazel pollards, felled timber, and little open glades. Tree surgeons have also felled a number of the older large dead trees, all over the reserve.

The paths on the reserve at the moment are as muddy and churned up as I can remember and particular care is needed on the exposed chalk which is very slippery. Fingers crossed for spring sunshine to arrive soon and dry them out. Early morning walks this winter though have been a delight with the occasional roe deer slipping off into the trees at the bottom fence line, mists swirling through the trees at the top, a deep throaty croak of a raven flying over, and a first for me, a small flock of waxwings briefly glimpsed sitting in the tree tops.

The alternative road around the back of the cottages to replace the Ellesborough Road is still not open (only about a year behind schedule!). But numerous road closure works have meant us humping the tools up from next to the Shoulder of Mutton for work parties. A huge amount of excavation has taken place to the left of Ellesborough Road and it surely can't be long before the HS2 cut and cover tunnel drives straight through here.

There will be a guided walk on Bacombe Hill on Saturday 15 June, so watch out for this on the BBOWT website and book a place to hopefully view the orchids and whatever is out and about on the day.

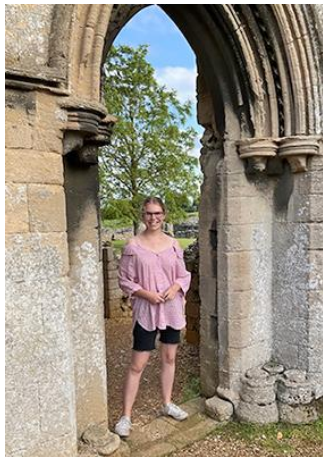
We welcome three new volunteers helping the Chilterns Group

Jenny Shaw, Talks organiser and Chilterns Group committee member

Jenny took over from Steve Hawkins in the summer of 2023 so it was her programme that we all enjoyed at Great Missenden over the last winter. She also chairs the meetings, which sounds fairly straightforward, but you just try coming up with an interesting way of pointing out the fire exits, the cables on the floor, the perils of hot drinks and so on!

Jenny and her partner, Jonathan, are Aylesbury residents and her background is in IT delivery. Outside of work she enjoys walking in the Chilterns - particularly around Wendover or Ashridge. She is the Volunteer Footpath Monitor for a segment of the Ridgeway and she also supports the Chilterns Society. One of her ambitions for the Committee is to add a more sociable side to its proceedings. She made a good start by making sure with Mick we had a very enjoyable Christmas lunch at The Grand Union in January. She's working on next year's party plans while of course finding us an exciting new programme of speakers.

Maddie Carlin, Volunteer Marketing Assistant



Hello, my name is Maddie - I was fortunate enough to be able to do design work to help promote the most recent fundraising event 'The Rhythm of Nature in Words and Music'. I grew up in the Chilterns so am always aware and appreciative of the great work BBOWT carries out in our local area. This, combined with my love of doing craft projects, was the perfect challenge for me, as well as benefiting my community.

For the past six months I've been living in North Norfolk, working at a YHA hostel (where I found myself really enjoying my daily coastal walks and being constantly in awe of the landscape and wildlife). One particular moment that stood out for me was when a kestrel followed me home! It was like playing 'granny's footsteps' - the kestrel would hover a few metres in front of me, then as I got closer it would move to hover further down the path, truly showing me the connection we have with nature and the importance of protecting it. I've just returned to Princes Risborough, which has given me a new appreciation of the Chiltern Hills, where I have continued my walks when time allows, in addition to starting my new job as a healthcare assistant at Wycombe Hospital, which I am enjoying.

Amy Wizard-Ponter, Volunteer Marketing Assistant

I have to work around my health issues and volunteer for various organisations, working remotely. Currently I do things for Rennie Grove Peace Hospice Care, Samaritans, and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust while I will shortly be starting to do some work for Discover Bucks Museum. I have also supported the charity Adviza with writing poetry for their various workshops. For Rennie Grove, I write content and news stories, develop booklets, and proof-read.

For BBOWT, the challenge from Richard has been to find ways of getting a wider spread of information on Chilterns' events like walks, talks and fundraisers out to the community, maximising the opportunities offered by online information services. We are now signed up to nine of these and I think we are gradually feeling the positive effect of that in attendance numbers.

COULD YOU HELP US DO MORE IN THE CHILTERNES?

Please get in touch with volunteering@bbowt.org.uk where the administrator Wayne will do his best to help you find a slot.

Or, if you can help with the Plant Market on 18 May, please contact John Catton on richard.catton1@btinternet.com

Looking back at our winter talks and 'The Rhythm of Nature' by Richard Birch

From September to February, we enjoyed a series of good talks from visiting speakers, some highlights being Veritie Turner on bats, with a spontaneous contribution on bat acoustics from Kaya Saman, one of our volunteer helpers; then Mike Wallen, Chair of the Bucks Bird Club, on Skomer - complete with lifelike bird calls; and Harry Appleyard on Suburban Wildlife in Milton Keynes - all of course accompanied by excellent photography. The new season of Gt Missenden talks starts on Tuesday 17 September.

To end the season, in March we enjoyed an evening of entertainment provided by a joint team of volunteers from Wendover U3A and from BBOWT Chilterns Group, reading selected poetry with lovely musical interludes by the Wick Trimmers Folk Group from Prestwood.

Introduced by MC Steve Hawkins, the production by Richard Birch and Barbara Muston took us on a nature inspired journey from the rivers and mountains of Wales, over to the Pennines and through Bard of Avon country, before inevitably looping back to the Lakes for Wordsworth's 'Daffodils'. Thanks to Barbara's input and some stimulating discussion, the final script blended modern verse with Richard's classic poetic material and included a thought-provoking climate change section before relaxing into a very light-hearted closing chapter of comic poetry (plus a full-throated

rendering of Flanders and Swann's 'Mud, mud, glorious mud' in honour of our conservation volunteers). Thanks to Barbara's drama training we readers had the benefit of six hours of rehearsal, learning about speech delivery and posture, giving us the confidence to do a more professional job. This in turn meant we could relax a bit and enjoy the evening too. So, quite a development and learning process lay behind what was delivered on the night.

Coming back to the practical details, after a publicity drive by volunteers and staff, we sold 83 tickets - roughly half online and half through our own local sales efforts. Adding in helpers and performers meant we had a capacity total of 100 folk in the hall and gross receipts of £634. Feeding and watering 100 people was, in itself, quite a feat of organisation for which we have to thank Jenny Shaw, Stephen Mulcahy and the whole team of Talks Helpers.

The surplus after costs will go to BBOWT's [Nature Recovery Fund](#), adding to £2,000 of funds raised in 2023, largely by two Chilterns Group Plant Markets, money that we were able to send to HO in December.



Volunteer readers at Great Missenden

BBOWT Chilterns Group Guided Walks 2024

Discover your local BBOWT nature reserves this spring and summer

Our wildlife walks are the very best way of getting up close to nature and learning from local experts about species on our reserves. Please see the following list and sign up online. This is necessary as it is important to limit numbers to enable everyone to get near the subjects of the walk, and in some cases because car parking is also limited. Our walks are more like field study visits, they are certainly not long distance yomps, but one does need to think about the terrain being visited and the weather conditions and prepare accordingly. Do remember to bring your camera and binoculars.

Are there nature reserves you've not yet visited? Have you been to reserves but not found some of their special plants and animals? Now is your chance! Get to know your local reserves in the company of people who know their secrets.

For more details and to book your place, visit www.bbowt.org/events (events will be added to the website over the coming weeks so please check back later if an activity is not currently displayed).



Guided walk, Dancersend

April

Discover spring flowers at Dancersend

Saturday 20 April, 10am-12.30pm. Led by reserve warden Mick Jones.

May

Discover flowers and butterflies at Aston Clinton Ragpits

Saturday 25 May, 10am-12noon. Led by reserve warden Phil Townsend.

Discover Dancersend Extension

Sunday 26 May, 2-4.30pm. Led by reserve warden Mick Jones.

June

Join the annual orchid count at Aston Clinton Ragpits

Sunday 9 June, 10am-2.30pm. Led by reserve warden Phil Townsend. Free event!

Discover Bacombe Hill Nature Reserve

Saturday 15 June, 2-4.30pm. Led by reserve warden Paul Niddler.

Discover orchids and other wildlife at Aston Clinton Ragpits

Sunday 23 June, 10am-12noon. Led by reserve warden Phil Townsend.

Discover the history and wildlife of Weston Turville Reservoir

Sunday 30 June, 10.30am-12.30pm. Led by Steve Hawkins and Gill Cornelius.

July

Discover the history and wildlife highlights of Dancersend

Saturday 13 July, 10am-12.30pm. Led by reserve warden Mick Jones.

Discover late summer wildlife at Aston Clinton Ragpits

Sunday 28 July, 10am-12noon. Led by reserve warden Phil Townsend.

September

Discover late summer flowers at Dancersend Extension

Sunday 1 September, 10am-12.30pm. Led by reserve warden Mick Jones.

Discover autumn flowers and fungi at Aston Clinton Ragpits

Sunday 29 September, 10am-12noon. Led by reserve warden Phil Townsend.

In addition, there are a number of walks specifically for **BBOWT volunteers** being organised by Ro Turan as part of the development programme. [Click here for details.](#)

Some sightings summarised by Colin Williams incl. 2023 orchid highlights

On the whole, orchids had an excellent year. I'm still to receive all of 2023's data but I can report a record year for the very rare military orchid at Homefield Wood and 9 flowering narrow-lipped helleborines at Warburg. The annual orchid census at Aston Clinton Ragpits, organised by volunteer reserve warden Phil Townsend, recorded: 10,243 chalk fragrant, 5,864 common spotted, 4,542 common twayblade, 2,080 pyramidal, 144 greater butterfly and last but not least 48 bee orchids. An impressive total.

I'm always keen to highlight the more obscure or overlooked wildlife on our reserves. David Morris, Oxon Flora Country Recorder, visited Warburg in September and recorded over 25 species of rose and rose hybrids. He was accompanied by the BSBI rose expert as well as another rose enthusiast! All were very impressed with what they found. They found 9 out of the 11 species that occur in southern England, plus 9 hybrids. As well as the nationally scarce and near threatened small-leaved sweetbriar (*Rosa agrestis*), they found two hybrids with this species which were new county records. Short-styled field rose was a notable addition to the site list too.

Birds at College Lake and Dancersend

Highlights in spring 2023 were:

Shelduck bred for the first time since 2014.

Common Tern nested on the raft anchored on the Marsh, very late in the season, and successfully fledged three chicks to supplement the seven from nests on the East Island. A second raft has now been positioned close by.

Unfortunately, the two pairs of oystercatcher failed to produce any chicks in 2023 and the lapwing had a modest season. However, the real stars of the breeding waders were the redshank. They are a scarce breeding bird in Bucks and College Lake has become something of a stronghold. Nests for two pairs produced chicks and a single youngster from each survived to fledge. Of particular interest is an adult bird that was ringed in Suffolk in August 2019 by the British Trust for Ornithology and has come to the reserve in each successive year. Remarkably, it is here again in 2024 making five years in a row and it is hoped it will once again have a successful season.

At Dancersend, Mick Jones reports some winter birds of note

A flock of 30 crossbills was seen in the larches. Woodcock were plentiful and marsh tits are still resident (this attractive tit is becoming rare in Bucks).

And finally the Bee-all that ends all...

Linda Wells, an indefatigable trust volunteer, has a passion for bees, though it is not known if this passion is requited. She tells us that there are 280 species in the UK, and she has kindly sent some remarkable photos of [ten species she found on BBOWT reserves](#) in 2023.

Hands-on conservation opportunities

We welcome volunteers to help with the practical management of our reserves. Work parties are sociable and satisfying events with opportunities to get exercise in the open air, learn new skills and discover more about our reserves. You will join a group led by one of the BBOWT reserves staff members or a volunteer reserve warden.

Some reserve groups currently have enough volunteers, but others are welcoming new volunteers, including complete beginners. You can often elect to work for a half-day or a full day. Tools and instruction are provided.

All potential new volunteers must register with the BBOWT Volunteering Team (email volunteering@bbowt.org.uk) who will provide information about opportunities at different reserves and a briefing to get you started.

Where contact details are given below they are for queries to the work party leaders.

Regular work parties

Bacombe Hill, near Wendover. Work parties held on the second Thursday of each month. Leader: Paul Niddler 07756 775153 or p.niddler@gmail.com

College Lake, near Tring. Several different work parties held plus a roving mid-week team covering other reserves.

Dancersend, near Tring. Main work parties held on the second Sunday of every month throughout the year. Occasional half-day sessions are held on Wednesday mornings. Leaders: Mick Jones 07818 624092 or jonesmick365@gmail.com, Judi Fisher 01494 722073 or judiandbryan@yahoo.co.uk

Finemere Wood, near Quanton. Work parties on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month. Leader: Charlotte Karmali charlottekarmali@outlook.com

Grangelands, near Princes Risborough. Work parties held in conjunction with the Chiltern Society.

Sporadic work parties

Aston Clinton Ragpits, near Aston Clinton and Wendover. Leader: Phil Townsend 01923 353410 or philjtownsend@yahoo.co.uk. For your diary, Phil hopes to hold work parties on **Sunday 6 October and Sunday 20 October 2024**, both 10am-4pm.

Weston Turville Reservoir, near Wendover.

Yoesden, near Bledlow Ridge and Radnage.

Pitstone Fen, adjacent to College Lake, near Tring.

MAIN CONTACT DETAILS

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01865 775 476

www.bbowt.org.uk

College Lake Nature Reserve & Visitor Centre

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01442 826 774

Events

www.bbowt.org.uk/events

Volunteering

www.bbowt.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer

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, please submit them to:

juliebirch60@yahoo.com

To be put on the mailing list for this newsletter please email:

membership@bbowt.org.uk

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