

THE CHILTERNS NEWSLETTER

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

Issue 110 Spring 2025



Primroses at Dancersend by Mick Jones

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 autumn edition, please send your news, photos and features to julieburch60@yahoo.com by 28 July 2025.

The newsletter goes out twice a year to over 600 people who have registered their interest at membership@bbowt.org.uk.

The Chilterns Group looks ahead with confidence

There has been a lot of change since the Chilterns 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 and multi-tasking across all sorts of Trust activities. Nowadays, 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 Reserve, which also hosts a growing community engagement wing. We remain passionate about 'our' Chiltern Reserves and some 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 years now, as a Group, we have concentrated on the work of engaging with the public, promoting The Trust and its local reserves, finding new volunteers and raising much needed funds. In 2023, with the help of Kate Sheard, the Community Wildlife Manager, we redefined our mission within The Trust as an aspect of BBOWT's 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 friendly volunteer Planning Team has a great deal of freedom of action under the supervision of Ro Turan, Volunteering Development Manager, and our 2025 programme is forging ahead, as you will see in this Newsletter and on the events page of the BBOWT website.

We are determined to maintain our programme of events and we shall always welcome more help from members, new volunteers and staff to keep up the momentum.

Richard Birch, Interim Chair

College Lake Report – February 2025

New beginnings

The start of the autumn season saw many changes at College Lake, not only in the colour of the leaves. A new Warden - Emma Routledge, Seasonal Assistant Warden - Simon Allison, and Operations Manager - Tessa Folkes joined the team. The first few months of feet-finding are to be expected, but all have now fully settled into their new roles, and the whole College Lake team has had some stability over the winter months.



Habitat management



The annual island haircut was well underway in October, carried out by staff and our fantastic volunteers from the Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday work parties. A total of 5,880m² of vegetation was cut using brush cutters, raked up and the arisings burnt over a total of 12 days of work parties – a huge effort by all. This essential management removes woody vegetation such as willow and brambles and keeps the grass sward low ready for the breeding waders like redshanks and lapwings in the spring. Our battle with too much water has been an ongoing theme for the winter. The front lake levels have been at their highest in many years, but unfortunately, so has the back lake. This has meant we have not been able to control the water levels as desired. Thankfully,

the spring draw down has now begun, so we hope to see those muddy margins appearing at the water's edge over the next few weeks, in time for breeding season.

The work parties have been carrying out habitat management across all areas of the site this winter. Time has been spent opening the darker closed tracks and paths by coppicing ride side scallops and laying hedges to increase the herbaceous verge sides. The Cornflower Meadow volunteers have been out sowing winter wheat in the freshly cultivated arable plots and sowing seeds in the nursery beds to ensure a healthy display come the spring. The Wildlife Garden team took a moderate harvest from the Orchard and have since been pruning the winter pip fruit trees. The rule is to remove dead, diseased and damaged material and create an open structure to allow light and air through the trees. This, in turn, should improve crop yield the following autumn.

The winter waterfowl population has been a little up and down this year. The wet weather has provided ample feeding grounds in the surrounding fields and neighbouring reservoirs, which has meant we have not seen large numbers of wigeon, shoveler and teal as usual. However, we were blessed with a rare visitor who made the lake its home for several weeks, a black necked grebe. This excitement brought in many a birder to see the rare visitor, with only 115 reported to over winter in the UK (see the article by Adrian Bayliss). As the evenings become lighter, the team is ramping up for a new year of exciting upcoming projects across the site. Visitor engagement and accessibility improvements are on the horizon, along with hopeful plans to future-proof our habitat management. Watch this space!

Emma Routledge, College Lake Warden

College Lake Visitor Centre

Tessa Folkes joined BBOWT in November 2024 in the updated role of Operations Manager of College Lake. It's fundamentally about bringing together the three teams on site (Visitor Centre, Reserves and Learning) to provide a collaborative offer to visitors and showcase the great work that BBOWT carries out across its reserves.

College lake will be expanding the range of engagement activities and interpretation information to encourage, inform and attract a wider range of visitors. They will also be working closely with colleagues at the Nature Discovery Centre in Thatcham, to standardise (where possible) the BBOWT experience at the two visitor centres.

Upcoming events at College Lake

April	
Tuesday 8 April	Wildlife Day Camp for 7-12 year olds
Wednesday 9 April	Family event 'Animal Eggstravaganza'
Wednesday 9 April	Pond dipping workshop for children age 7+
Saturday 12 April	Pond dipping for adults
Wednesday 16 April	Family event 'Animal Eggstravaganza'
Wednesday 16 April	Bug hunting workshop for children age 7+
May	
Saturday 10 May	Dawn chorus walk for adults
Saturday 17 May	Plant and Produce Market – Joint event with the Chilterns Group

Plus, all the usual Nature Tots and Teen Rangers sessions!

Visit www.bbowt.org.uk/events for details.



Prestwood Nature

Prestwood Nature is the local environment group for the central area of the Chiltern Hills in Buckinghamshire. Centred on the Buckinghamshire village of Prestwood, our area also includes the villages and land around Great Missenden, Great and Little Kingshill, Great and Little Hampden, North Dean and Speen.

The primary aim of Prestwood Nature is to **enhance the quality of the natural environment through the involvement of local people**. We do this by:

1. Restoring and maintaining sites to preserve natural resources.
2. Organising guided walks to increase awareness of the natural environment.
3. Arranging talks on subjects of interest to our members.
4. Producing a regular newsletter for members.
5. Maintaining records of plant and animal life.

There are plenty of opportunities to volunteer for Prestwood Nature, including helping to care for our **pollinator-friendly garden** at Kiln Common in Prestwood, and maintaining **Boug's Meadow** at Great Missenden.



Both sites are havens for wildlife, and these are just 2 examples of the work we do - you will find more on our website: <https://prestwoodnature.org/wp/>

Other upcoming events (see our website for more details and how to book):

Spring Flowers Walk, Sunday 13 April, 2.00pm - 4.00pm

A country walk around the lanes and woods of Great Hampden, led by Karen van Oostrum, looking at wild flowers and other interesting plants of the season. This is a free event for anyone who enjoys a gentle stroll in the countryside.

Dawn Chorus Walk, Sunday 4 May, 5.00am - 08.00am

The dawn chorus is one of the delights of a British spring. Led by Simon Nichols, this wonderful walk starts at Boug's Meadow and includes Angling Spring Wood.

Midsummer in the Meadow, Sunday 29 June, 10.00am - 4.00pm

Annual Open Day at Boug's Meadow – information and activities for everyone.

Summer Flowers Walk, Sunday 6 July, 2.00pm - 4.00pm

A country walk around the lanes and woods of Great Hampden, led by Karen van Oostrum, looking at wild flowers and noticing how the plants have changed since the spring walk. A free event for anyone who enjoys a gentle stroll in the countryside.

Community

BBOWT's new Head of Community Organising is Nigel Hopper. Nigel will be leading on our community work - and helping to embed everything we have learned over the last few years about the impact of community organising - for people and nature - into many of our people-based projects across The Trust.

The Community Network continues to support community groups in the Chilterns area. Lily O'Neill and Katie Horgan recently led a walk at Estone Grange in Aston Clinton. The aim of the walk was to explore the management of various habitats so that participants could use this learning in their own areas. Lily is very keen to hear

from community groups and interested individuals to explore how the BBOWT Community Network project can support more people to look after nature. Please email her at teamwilder@bbowt.org.uk.

Buckinghamshire Reserves

2025 will see a big push across several of our key Chilterns chalk grassland nature reserves to undertake much needed additional work to tackle scrub encroachment.

The extreme weather patterns that we have seen over the last couple of years have meant that it has become quite challenging to get contractors with the larger machinery needed to cut and clear big blocks of scrub onto sites during very wet autumn and winter periods. This, along with the longer growing seasons caused by climate change, has increased the rates of plant growth in wet warm years and effectively narrowed the window in which much of our usual winter scrub clearance work can be carried out.

To make matters more difficult, many bird species are starting to nest earlier and may have second or third broods of young. As such we will be aiming to secure more grant funding in the coming months to bring in contractors with machines such as this roboflail, to undertake selective cutting of young scrub (where we are sure no birds are nesting) in the spring and summer period.



Cutting of young/low scrub will take place throughout the growing season, when it has been shown to more effectively knock back scrub such as dogwood. There will be some small, short-term impacts on flowering plants in these areas, however this work is essential to ensure that we don't lose valuable chalk grassland under dense swathes of scrub that will develop if we don't up our game.

Mark Vallance, Buckinghamshire Senior Land Manager

Chilterns Group People

From 1st April: Paul Niddler, Volunteer Warden at Bacombe Hill, takes on the role of Coordinator for the group planning team, reporting to Ro Turan. Richard Birch (former Interim Chair) will continue to take care of advertising, Jenny Shaw continues as Talks Organiser assisted by Steve Hawkins, and David Atkinson is our Treasurer.

Until September: John Catton continues as Events Organiser and Julie Birch as Newsletter Editor. **We need your help please to keep the Events and Newsletter work going from October and to find a Reserves Visits Organiser for 2026.** Our planning team is a very informal group of local folk who meet four or five times a year.

Please email volunteering@bbowt.org.uk or speak to Richard Birch on 01296 624511 for more information.



An update from Meadow Farm

This winter has seen unprecedented levels of flooding on the Upper Ray, especially affecting operations out of our base at Meadow Farm. In previous years, flood waters would rise to the front door of the office, once or twice at a push – this year we have lost count! It is unknown what has caused this increase in flooding, but the floodplain has done its job, and we are now hopefully into drier, warmer weather.



Our band of trusty volunteers still managed to make it out onto the meadows in between floods to complete two hedgerow coppice blocks at Meadow Farm, in addition to many others across the Upper Ray sites. By cutting these blackthorn dominant blocks, we rejuvenate the scrub and create a diverse age structure within the hedgerows. This favours many species but is targeted towards the black and brown hairstreak butterflies. The brown hairstreak lay their eggs on new growth of

blackthorn, whereas the black hairstreak prefers mature growth. By cutting these blocks on rotation over a 15–20-year cycle, this mosaic of ages can be maintained.

With winter and the scrub control work it brings with it behind us, we are now looking forward to the delights of spring – wildflowers surfacing, curlew calling and much drier feet!

Chloe Bradford, Reserves Officer for Upper Ray

BBOWT's Reserves Surveying Programme Update, February 2025

As you would suspect, the winter has been a quiet time for wildlife on our nature reserves in the Chilterns. However, it won't be long before the first Brimstone butterfly will be on the wing, heralding the onset of spring!

College Lake has played host to an excellent array of wildfowl, with the undoubted highlight being the long staying, black-necked grebe. It is a scarce bird for Bucks so it attracted a steady stream of admirers.

However, it has not been a quiet time in the Ecology Office at the Lodge in Littlemore, Oxford. We spent most of the late autumn and early winter collating, entering, and analysing all of the survey data collected by our fantastic army of volunteer surveyors throughout the 2024 survey season. After we returned from our well-deserved festive break, the Ecology Team met with our Land Management Teams to feed back the results of all our survey data analysis and discuss the success or otherwise of the ongoing habitat management work on our reserves... a clear example of evidence-based conservation work. As well as informing our own management work, our survey data is also shared with national recording schemes, such as the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme.

As I write this, I am now busy allocating and organising this year's planned priority survey projects on our nature reserves for the 2025 season. Many thanks to those of you once again helping monitor the wildlife on our nature reserves. Without your help, we would have far less idea of what we have and what we don't have and how populations are changing over time. Let's hope for a wildlife-rich year ahead and for some decent weather!

Colin Williams, Senior Ecologist

Enjoying spring flowers at Dancersend

As I'm writing, at the meteorological start of spring, our earliest hedgerow blossom, cherry plum, has just started to flower, outshining its more common close cousin. By the astronomical first day of spring, on 20 March, we can expect blackthorn to be starting to clothe the hedges and scrub blocks with its similar delicate white flowers. By the end of the month many more wildflowers will be decorating Dancersend, taking advantage of the spring sunshine while it can still reach the ground through the bare canopy of the skeletal trees.



Our volunteer team will also be taking advantage of the next few weeks of improving weather, prior to the bird nesting season, to complete our winter management tasks, especially scrub clearance and coppicing shrubs to extend open conditions for our special chalk grassland wildflowers and insects. We then turn more to maintenance and repair tasks, and to recording wildlife at the reserve.



Now is a great time to get out and explore Dancersend and get your eye in again for the different types of flowers that form the basis of its rich ecology. There will be swathes of primroses, probably being visited by remarkably colour-matched brimstone butterflies and bee-flies hovering like miniature hummingbirds. Dotted around, and brightening up any otherwise unoccupied nooks and crannies along woodland edges, will be tiny plants of wood sorrel (pictured left), barren strawberry and violets.

Did you realise that you could find four different species of wild violets on a walk at the reserve - early dog violet (right), common dog violet, sweet violet (bottom right) and hairy violet? It can be fun to bring along a flower book (or the very handy little guide available from the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland*) and see if you can find all four, and also learn to recognise some other flowers while the variety actually in bloom is still quite limited! With over 410 different species of flowering plants, ferns and conifers at Dancersend, you won't be short of specimens to learn from!



Mick Jones, Volunteer Warden at Dancersend

*https://bsbi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/dinkymoira-Violets.pdf

Join our guided reserve visits and field trips this summer!

Visiting Trust reserves is one of the pleasures of being a Trust member. Making a visit with a member of staff or a volunteer warden who knows the reserve intimately is both a pleasure and a learning experience.

Mick Jones and the wardens have kindly put together a series of five **introductory guided visits**, free of charge, plus six **in-depth field trips** with expert tuition, at £5 a head, from May through to October.

In addition, if you have some basic orchid ID skills you can help the warden do the **annual survey of orchids** at Aston Clinton Ragpits on 14 June, providing you contact him in advance by emailing philjtownsend@yahoo.co.uk.

BBOWT Chilterns Group reserve events 2025

May	
Saturday 3 May 14.00-16.30	Introducing Dancersend Nature Reserve A FREE guided visit with reserve warden, Mick Jones
Sunday 25 May 10.00-12.00	Introducing Aston Clinton Ragpits A FREE guided visit with reserve warden, Phil Townsend
June	
Saturday 7 June 10.00-12.00	Introducing Bacombe Hill Nature Reserve A FREE guided visit with reserve warden, Paul Niddler
Saturday 14 June 10.00-14.00	Help with the orchid count at Aston Clinton Ragpits Join the count with reserve warden, Phil Townsend
Sunday 15 June 10.00-12.00	Introducing Grangelands Nature Reserve A FREE guided visit with local naturalist, John Tyler
Saturday 21 June 10.00-14.30	Discover a remarkable wildlife refuge created on ex-arable fields at Dancersend An expert guided field visit with reserve warden, Mick Jones
Sunday 22 June 10.00-12.00	Explore the amazing variety of orchids at Aston Clinton Ragpits An expert guided field visit with reserve warden, Phil Townsend
July	
Sunday 6 July 13.30-16.00	Introducing Yoesden Nature Reserve A FREE guided visit with expert naturalist, Sue Taylor
Saturday 19 July 21.30-23.00	Discover glow-worms, the remarkable beetles active at night A guided exploration with national expert, John Tyler (venue to be confirmed)
Sunday 27 July 10.00-12.00	Late summer wildlife at Aston Clinton Ragpits An expert guided field visit with reserve warden, Phil Townsend
August	
Sunday 31 Aug 10.00-12.30	Explore the rich variety of wildlife amongst the industrial heritage of Dancersend Waterworks An expert guided field visit with Mick Jones
October	
Sunday 5 October 10.00-12.00	Explore fungi and other autumn wildlife at Aston Clinton Ragpits An expert guided field visit with reserve warden, Phil Townsend

To avoid overcrowding, all these reserve visits must be booked online at www.bbowt.org.uk/events. Full details will be available from mid-April.

A charge of £5 per adult and £3 per child makes a small contribution to the funding of our conservation work.



If you would be kind enough to consider helping us to coordinate the next season's programme as part of our friendly Group Planning Team, please contact:

volunteering@bbowt.org.uk or
richardbirch60@yahoo.com

It would help if you had a basic knowledge of the reserves but you can pick that up easily and it is not necessary to go on all the walks. Basic computer skills are all you need, really.

Winter birds at College Lake

As I write this in mid-February, pintail and goldeneye have been recorded at College Lake in the last week, and red-crested pochard made a brief appearance, but generally it has been a quiet autumn and winter on the reserve.



However, the absolute stars of the last few months have been black-necked grebes. This is a scarce bird in the UK, with the British Trust for Ornithology estimating only around 40 breeding pairs, with that number supplemented in the winter to around 130 individuals, as a result of birds migrating here from mainland Europe. In size, the black-necked grebe is slightly bigger than a little grebe but significantly smaller than its great-

crested relative. In breeding plumage, it has a black neck, which gives it its name, and a bright yellow fan of feathers behind its distinctive red eye. In winter it moults into dark grey and white.

On 24 September a winter plumage black-necked grebe was spotted on the lake. An individual stayed for 10 days and was shortly followed by two birds on 11 October that were present for just 4 days. There were no further sightings until 27 November but this bird stayed into the New Year with the last confirmed sighting on 25 January. All that can be said with certainty is that there were at least two different individual birds recorded over the winter but possibly as many as four.

This is remarkable given that you have to go back to 2015 to find the only other record of black-necked grebe at College Lake. Currently there have been no other sightings in Buckinghamshire this winter so the birds attracted considerable attention from visitors and birders alike.

Adrian Bayliss



Estone Grange Community Walk

A new housing estate in south-east Aston Clinton was the destination of a short walk organised by BBOWT's Community officer Lily O'Neil and led by Katie Horgan from The Trust. They were joined by Katy Todd, a director of the management company for the Estone Grange Estate, with a view to seeing and understanding how an area of waste land on the margin of a housing estate is being turned into a recreation and conservation area. Part of it is a children's playground, part consists of three ponds, and the rest is short turf with promising hedges around the perimeter. The birders present counted eight common bird species and a pair of stonechats, an uncommon winter visitor to Bucks. Coltsfoot was seen in flower and a lot of wildflower bulbs have been planted.

Participants included some volunteers from College Lake, a man dealing with the developer of the 10,000 houses being built around Tring, and the assistant clerk of Stoke Mandeville Parish Council who wants to increase the natural space beyond the work they have put in at the railway station. The Chilterns Group members present were myself and active volunteer Gill Cornelius, whose interest in botany led her to set up a Wendover U3A group called Discovering Wildflowers. Gill has turned her lawn into a wildflower meadow and from time to time leads the group on botanical walks in the area, including to Trust reserves.

The group photo - taken by a reedbed, planted by the Estone Grange supporters - shows Gill out front with Katie (in red scarf) behind her and Lily O'Neill, BBOWT Community Network Officer (in blue) in the front row. The representative of the estate managers, Katy Todd, is on Katie's left. For information on future events like this please contact Lily O'Neill at teamwilder@bbowt.org.uk.

Richard Birch, BBOWT Chilterns Group

Bacombe Hill

Is it just me or does it seem that we have had one of the dullest, wet winters? I don't know about global warming, but it seems we are suffering from UK wetting!

Bacombe Hill is about as saturated as I can remember and this is coming on top of the two previous winters that have made it so wet that the contractor could not get the flail cutter on site for the winter mow/cut. This had led to waist-high dogwood and brambles taking over large parts of the slopes that we had worked so hard to clear.

Over the past few months working parties have cleared an old overgrown hollow way that appears to lead up to the circular enclosure around the scheduled ancient monument. This opened out the hollow way to light and saw the hazel along this path coppiced for the first time in years. It also means it's easier to get through where the dense scrub was, to retrieve beer cans and plastic bottles that some idiots seemed to love chucking in the undergrowth.

We have brush cut the main hollow way banks, this area usually sees the first wildflowers and orchids appear in the spring, especially on the south facing bank. As well as having a couple of patches of horseshoe vetch which were in danger of being crowded out. But, more importantly, it means that walkers are no longer in danger of being snagged on long groping fingers of dog rose thorns that were reaching out to snag anyone venturing along the way.

Our equivalent of painting the Forth bridge i.e. 'popping' the scrub on the top ridge has continued and been the one thing to benefit from the wet weather as the roots have been coming out really easily. It also meant that we cleared loads of invasive buddleia in the quarry area, at the January working party before tucking into chef Chris's jacket spuds, beans and cheese. All cooked on a dead ash and buddleia branch bonfire. Delicious!

The weather though, has had me worried that we wouldn't get a winter mow/cut for the third winter running. But a new contractor has been on the hill in the last few weeks with a remote-controlled caterpillar tracked cutter. This has done a great job and has cut large areas of scrub below the monument and below the Ridgeway footpath, where a few years ago we had started to get on top of the growth and orchids and wildflowers had been starting to appear again. So, fingers crossed for a good spring and a welcome return of flowers this year.

This summer we had a few bee orchids appearing for the first time in a couple of years. We seem to have an increase in rabbit numbers, certainly on the lower slopes and this may well account for the regular glimpse of a stoat whizzing about in the undergrowth. If you are up on the hill and hear the robins or blackbirds giving an alarm call, just stand still and quiet for a minute or two and you might be lucky and see it too. The ravens can often be heard in the distance and sometimes flying over and out into the vale. Occasionally you might see red kite, buzzard and kestrel all on the wing at the same time.

I still can't get used to walking up via the alternative route rather than past the cottages on Ellesborough Road. It certainly seems further and steeper not to mention the eyesore that is the HS2 works! Now we have lost the route up to the

reserve via the back way on Bacombe Lane, from South Street, which is now closed until December 2026 (I don't trust that date). Bacombe Lane residents get access to their homes via an alternative new road that punches straight across the front entrance to the reserve. It will be interesting to see if all this reduces foot fall on the reserve, as a once popular circular walk up from Wendover has been turned into a long trudge up along and back down newly tarmacked allegedly temporary routes.

Paul Niddler, Volunteer Reserve Warden

An update on Weston Turville Reserve and the Bacombe Aquifer

Negotiations between BBOWT and the CRT continue regarding future management of the site. Steve Proud, says: "Our ecology and land management teams are jointly working on a conservation management plan with CRT's ecologist." BBOWT has sent some outline suggestions for a legal agreement for CRT's consideration.

On a more colourful note, that green shrieking feral bird the ring-necked parakeet has been spotted near the sailing club, having been seen in nearby Wendover Gardens for a couple of months. Thank you, Susanna Allford and Jenny Summerfield, for your reports. The birds are unwelcome on the reserve because they monopolise potential nesting holes in trees, squeezing out woodpeckers and nuthatches, and in your garden, they will push out the better-behaved local birds on your feeders. They have been plentiful in London parks and gardens and in the western suburbs for many years and have been seen around Beaconsfield for a long time. Mystery surrounds where they came from but when several hundred flock in to roost near the Barnes Wetland Centre - you certainly know they are here.

For those who have not got bored with the problems that HS2 has brought upon itself by not tunnelling under the Bacombe aquifer, the latest episode is enshrined in a planning application (25-004) before the council now. More formal measurement of the current spring water flow is required by the Environment Agency before they will approve the sub-surface Green Tunnel construction plan. Unfortunately, a pair of kestrels has taken up residence just where the measuring device is supposed to be located near the King's Farm shop, and if they nest there, disturbance of their abode will not be allowed. For more detail, go to www.whs2.org where the hydrogeology of all this is clearly explained. Our thanks go to Andy Band and the members of this group who have never given up the struggle to make HS2 accountable for the serious interruption to water flows that will result from their poor planning. Meanwhile, Wendover's quiet residential roads will be overrun by a forecasted 1,200 return construction vehicle movements just to build 800 metres of construction roadway and a modest chamber for the spring tank instrumentation in the fields to the north.



Weston Turville Reservoir Reserve is very much still open and will soon host the many reedbed warblers that will be arriving to spend the summer with us. If you want to see and hear them, and those ugly metal gates and chain-link fences are in your way, contact the CRT to have your say.

In Gill Cornelius's photo, the lovely winter sunshine at the reservoir gives no hint of the turmoil behind the scenes in the efforts to ensure that the water supply is not interrupted.

Richard Birch

Finemere Reserve

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 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.bbowl.org.uk/nature-reserves/finemere-wood>

Charlotte Kamali, Volunteer Reserve Warden

Another highly successful winter talks season completed in March

Hosted by the Chilterns Group at the Great Missenden Memorial Centre, the talks regularly attract 40 plus attendees who are able to enjoy a clear view of the speakers' presentations thanks to the new screen and projector bought with Group funds.

The season kicked off in September with a highly entertaining talk from Jon Mason - aka The Early Birder - who regaled us with his account of his trip around BBOWT's reserves. In October, Nick Marriner of the Chilterns Conservation Board gave us a highly insightful look at the farmer clusters and the incredibly important work done with farmers in the Chilterns to create space for and promote wildlife diversity on farmland. In November, BBOWT Reserve Warden Chloe Bradford took us on an inspiring and colourful tour of the Upper Ray reserves and the success stories they have had there over the years.

In December - for our Christmas talk - the Group's departing chair Mick Jones took us on a journey through his time at Dancersend, showcasing the incredible story of this evolving site and attracting a significant crowd.

January saw returning speaker Veritie Turner of BBOWT take us through the world of British bees, really bringing the subject to life for the audience and inviting plenty of questions.

The penultimate event in February brought in 73 people, the largest crowd of the year. Steve Thomas of the Bucks Owl and Raptor Group talked about the crucial work the group do to preserve and monitor owl populations and gave a fascinating insight into the day-to-day tasks and challenges of working with owls and raptors.

Finally, March brought the spring social evening. A light-hearted end to the season starting with a short and highly insightful talk on the African rhino from retired S.A. Wildlife Ranger Ian Gordon Cummings, followed by an update from Interim Group Chair Richard Birch, and finishing with a highly competitive two-part nature quiz run by quiz master Steve Hawkins, with Ro Turan kindly acting as scorer. Nine teams from around the Chilterns competed, with three of them scoring 100% on the musical part, leaving it to the art questions to sort the men from the boys, as we used to say - until the Anthill Mob from Dancersend came out overall top team. Thank you to everyone who attended and supported us, including Amy Padfield our local trustee, and we look forward to seeing you in September for the next talks season.

Thanks to all the volunteers without whom these talks would not be possible: Ian, Stephen, Margaret, Jenny, John, Julie, Steve, Richard, Sandy and Helen - your support and assistance is invaluable and greatly appreciated.

We are always on the lookout for additional volunteers. If you are able and willing to join us, please contact me at: jshawam@gmail.com. The new season starts on Tuesday 16 September.

Jenny Shaw, Talks Organiser

Spring Plant and Produce Market, College Lake - Saturday 17 May 2025

The Chilterns Group is holding its spring Plant and Produce Market on Saturday 17 May jointly with College Lake, from 11:00am to 1:00pm.

Please note the change in the day, **Saturday** not Sunday.

The wonderful selection of plants donated by enthusiastic local gardeners is obviously the big draw. 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, cooked 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, some biscuits, make jams and marmalades, or perhaps conjure up some fudge or pick some rhubarb from your garden, and...
- c) spread word of the market nearer the time.

Event details will be displayed at: www.bbowt.org.uk/events

If you would like to help us in any way, or have any queries about the market, please contact John Catton on 07895 157670 or richard.catton1@ntlworld.com.



PLEASE SUPPORT THE BBOWT PLANT AND PRODUCE MARKET

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

Saturday 17 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 07895 157670 or richard.catton1@ntlworld.com

Amersham Heritage Fair

The Chilterns events volunteers will be back at work at the Amersham Heritage Fair in September.

Pictured right: John Catton and Steve Hawkins at last September's event



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.



As we go to print, we believe that the reserves with some summer work party activity include Bacombe Hill, College Lake, Dancersend (pictured above), and Finemere (near Quainton).

To find out more, please email volunteering@bbowt.org.uk - mention where you live, and ask when/where there are work parties within a reasonable distance. You will be asked to register in order to be covered by The Trust's insurance.

MAIN CONTACT DETAILS

BBOWT Head Office

The Lodge, 1 Armstrong Road, Littlemore, Oxford, OX4 4XT
01865 775 476
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

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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