

THE CHILTERN NEWSLETTER

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

Issue 111 Autumn/Winter 2025



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 issue, covering April to August 2026, please send your news, photos and features to juliebirch60@yahoo.com by 10 March 2026.

The newsletter goes out twice a year to over 600 people. To be put on the mailing list, please email membership@bbowt.org.uk.

Welcome to our Autumn/Winter issue

Welcome to the latest edition of the BBOWT Chilterns Group newsletter. I ought to start this introduction to the newsletter with a further introduction. My name is Paul Niddler and I have taken on the role of co-ordinator of the Chilterns Group, carrying out the tasks that our previous chairmen Richard Birch and Mick Jones have carried out so well. I would like to pay tribute on behalf of the group to both for all their hard work, and gentle, but firm guidance, without which the Chilterns Group and wildlife in Bucks would be in a much poorer state. But don't worry, Richard will still be very much in evidence, dealing with our publicity, offering sage advice and in person at our events, and Mick will carry on at Dancersend and with his other conservation work.

Many of you may know me as the warden/lead volunteer (whatever BBOWT Towers call us now) for Bacombe Hill. I'm a born and bred Londoner, living and working all my life in central London, but with both sets of grandparents being former country folk, I have always had a great love of the countryside, and most days off were spent walking the footpaths and national trails all over southern England. I retired to Wendover 8 years ago almost immediately saw a poster asking for volunteers at Bacombe Hill and soon joined up.

I am a firm believer in the power of nature to calm and nourish the soul. The Japanese have a word, *Komorebi*, which refers to the beautiful, dappled light falling through leaves, and I defy anyone not to feel the benefits of walking through a green beech wood, or along a scarp slope carpeted with chalk flowers and butterflies flitting about.

If we achieve anything worthwhile, then preserving the wonderful places we are blessed to live near and encouraging people to enjoy and care for them would be a marvellous legacy. This summer's programme of free guided visits to our reserves, coupled with more expert ticketed visits (albeit priced at the cost of no more than a decent pint, and less than a coffee and a cake), has proved extremely popular and been well attended. Even though some of them brought on rare summer downpours!

The Plant and Produce Market at College Lake in May brought many of us together, either to volunteer or come out and purchase plants, cakes, books and tools from Workaid. A big thank you to John Catton, who has organised these markets for us for many years.

This September, our programme of talks resumes at Great Missenden Memorial Centre and I very much look forward to meeting you at one of our events soon. In the meantime, get out on a reserve, enjoy a walk, a bit of nature, maybe even a spot of volunteering.

Remember the words of the poet Alfred Williams: "Still to find, and still to follow, joy in every hill and hollow."

Paul Niddler, Coordinator, BBOWT Chilterns Group

College Lake Reserve – Sightings from the Summer

The reserve, like many others, was hugely affected by the very dry, hot summer. The lack of water affected the plant life, causing some to flower early, others produced smaller or few flowers, notably the bee orchids on site, and others less nectar. Despite this, the consensus from our ecologists at the start of the season was positive. Butterfly numbers were up on last year, and we had a few climate change winners in the Odonata order. As Colin Williams highlights, the news of a Norfolk hawker dragonfly brought in the visitors, and they were also witness to several lesser emperor dragonflies hawking along and feasting on flying ant day!

Moving over to Lepidoptera, another first for the site, two purple emperor butterflies were recorded, spotted on the western woodland edge close to the visitor centre.

The annual moth trapping event run by the Bucks Invertebrate Group was highly attended by visitors, where they had the opportunity to get up close to specimens and see the vast diversity of moth species found across the site. Some stars of the invertebrate show were a puss moth larva and *Oxyptilus parvidactyla*, a rare plume moth which lives on the mouse-ear hawkweed. (Pictured right: Forester moth)



Visitors to the window in the woods hide were rewarded by a family of stoats playing amongst the log piles, and hares have been seen frequently on Marsworth scrubs compartment, hiding amongst the anthills. The bird life around the lake did not disappoint us either this breeding season. The newly deployed tern raft was colonised by the black-headed gulls. This did free up space on the other two rafts for the common terns and approximately 20 successfully fledged. We believe improved management of the west island provided more nesting areas for the terns and became home to a family of oyster catchers.

A huge thank you to all our volunteers at the reserve and in the visitor centre for monitoring the wildlife in such detail and showcasing it to our visitors.

Emma Routledge, College Lake Warden

People on the move

Having been with the Trust for a few months now, we welcome **Nigel Hopper** into our orbit as Chilterns Group Management Report in succession to **Ro Turan**. Ro continues as Volunteering Development Manager after giving us superb back-up over a couple of years, even participating in our two entertainment fund-raisers to great effect.

Nigel was profiled in the recent issue of '[Wild](#)', describing his main job as Head of Community Organising, as essentially empowering local people to deliver the changes for nature that they want to see in their communities. He's a keen birder

with a particular interest in corvids, the focus of his academic research some years back.

Within the Chilterns Group, **Paul Niddler**, Volunteer Warden of Bacombe Hill, has taken over from **Richard Birch** as leader of the Group with its Planning Team of seven volunteers (more on this in the next issue).

College Lake has welcomed **Julie Pinder** as a new Duty Manager. Her background is in the children and young people's side of Bucks Health Care. She has two daughters and, going back a bit, has an academic qualification in chemistry.

Sadly, we have to record the recent passing of **Ian Gordon Cumming**, the very likeable South African Parks ranger from Wendover, who gave us a short talk on the rhino and was poised to give us a more extensive account of conservation in his home country. Back in the winter, we also lost from Wendover, **Robin Carr**, butterfly expert and long-time stalwart of the conservation scene and of the Group Committee.

Raising awareness

I live in Amersham, and if you look at a map of BBOWT reserves, you'll note a dearth of them around here. In fact, our nearest ones, College Lake and Dancersend, are a good half hour's drive away. So, whilst it is sad, it's not unsurprising that I'm often asked what BBOWT is. The Group endeavours to explain as often as opportunities arise.

So far this year, we've mounted two stalls and will be attending Amersham Heritage Day on Sunday 7 September.

Amersham Eco Fair (June): This is a biennial event with an ethos BBOWT can easily align with. This year it comprised 3 short talks, display stalls (inc. BBOWT) and a cream tea! The talk I gave was entitled 'Welcome wildlife into your garden', the second was on 'Ethical Investing' and the third about the increasingly popular 'Repair Cafes'.

Wildlife Discovery Day (July): Ten minutes from Amersham is the Chiltern Open Air Museum which holds many themed events; the aim of this Discovery Day was for visitors (children, families, adults) to engage with nature. Our BBOWT gazebo was alongside the Bucks Bat Group, the Field Studies Council and pond dipping. The big talking point on our stall was, as always, the selection of skulls Mick Jones has collected at Dancersend over the years.

Amersham Heritage Day (7 Sept): The whole of Old Amersham High Street closes for this huge event, one we've attended for many years. It's one where we really do need volunteers. 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 if you can spare an hour or two please contact **John Catton**: Richard.catton1@ntlworld.com or call 01494 726616.

Finemere Wood Reserve



Throughout spring and summer, the reserve has been alive with activity. The woodland workers have ploughed through the annual tasks of removing redundant fences and erecting others around newly scrub-cleared areas to protect from the nibbling of deer.

Many hours have been spent pulling creeping thistles in the adjacent meadows, in an attempt to keep them in check and allow room for the more delicate flowers to flourish. And now, as we reach the end of July, the scything of grassy rides and paths begins, a favourite activity of all.

The spring flowers were breathtaking, especially the wood anemones. These delicate blooms of ancient woodland are said to spread only six feet in a hundred years through their underground rhizomes. And yet, in Finemere Wood, they seem to defy that rule. Each year, I discover new swathes of their star-like white petals in places where I'm certain they didn't grow before. The bluebells, as ever, were reliably magnificent, and the early purple orchids appeared in growing numbers. Summer brings its own floral wonders - common spotted orchids, lady's bedstraw, and the sweet-scented meadowsweet. In the meadows, grass vetchling was prolific. With its bright pink flowers and slender, grass-like leaves, it dances in the breeze, a small but striking presence amid the greenery. On warm, sunlit days, the woodland air has come alive with butterflies - silver-washed fritillaries, white admirals, and gatekeepers flitting through the trees. Even the elusive purple emperor made a rare appearance during a work party in June, to the delight of the volunteers.

If you're planning to visit this nature haven, please check ahead. Road closures due to HS2 construction will make Finemere Wood inaccessible by car at times in the coming weeks.

www.bbowt.org.uk/nature-reserves/finemere-wood

Charlotte Karmali, Volunteer Warden

Norfolk hawker dragonflies discovered at College Lake

Many thanks to the army of volunteer surveyors helping survey and monitor wildlife on our Chilterns' nature reserves as part of BBOWT's Reserves Surveying Programme. The survey data collected is used to inform our management work as well as contribute to national recording schemes.

The obvious highlight so far this year was the discovery of two Norfolk hawker dragonflies at College Lake, patrolling the channel adjacent to the trail leading to the Octagon Hide. They were photographed by members of the Bucks Invertebrate Group on their visit to the reserve on 31 May. Further investigations have revealed that one was also photographed in the same location by a visitor the day before. BBOWT College Lake dragonfly surveyor, Susan Makepeace, confirmed one was still present during her dragonfly transect survey on 26 June. I believe these represent the first documented records of the species in Buckinghamshire.



Norfolk hawker is one of two brown-coloured hawker dragonflies to be found in our three counties. The green eyes, small yellow triangular mark near the top of the abdomen and the clear wings help distinguish it from the brown hawker.

The distribution range of the Norfolk hawker was previously restricted to the Norfolk and NE Suffolk Broads. However, over the last twenty years, it has spread westwards and northwards. It has now been recorded as far as Devon, Lancashire and Sussex. The range expansion is thought to be related to climate change.

Please do keep an eye out for the species when visiting BBOWT nature reserves and send any records to the BBOWT Ecology Team. Only time will tell if the Norfolk hawker is a climate change winner and is now here to stay.

Colin Williams, Senior Ecologist

Aston Clinton Ragpits

Well, here we are with the increasing normalisation of extreme weather cycles. This spring/summer seems to have been as dry as last year was wet - the only saving grace is that chalk grassland plant species are used to surviving in a fairly dry and harsh environment at the best of times. The shallow soils are usually free-draining and any moisture is soon gone.

This was after a lot of vigorous vegetative growth last year so the sward height was perhaps greater than usual and had perhaps shaded out some late summer plants such as clustered bellflower and autumn gentian, which disappointingly didn't produce any flowering plants at all.

This year, the warm spring advanced the flowering season and the first of the orchid species were in evidence in mid-May. White helleborines fared much better this year,

so it was good to see some impressive specimens in the shade of the beechwood. Greater butterfly-orchids we're also looking good and, despite the lack of rain, produced some very tall and robust individuals.

It was also good to see some adder's-tongue ferns in the meadow. I spotted one with a kink at the top of the spadix that resembled a cobra rearing up somewhat, and another which had three spadices on one plant - a three-headed serpent if you will! The spadix is the reproductive structure which gives the plant its unusual name, and these ferns are found in ancient unimproved grasslands.

The annual orchid count took place in mid-June as usual - many thanks to all the volunteers who turned out to help. Luckily, it was a sunny day so we enjoyed seeing lots of marbled white butterflies on the wing slightly earlier than usual.

Even with the dry conditions, we were still lucky to spot a grass snake in the quarry area. Startled, it slithered off into the marginal scrub.



Here is a breakdown by species:

Chalk fragrant orchid - 10452 (including 1 white variety)

Common spotted orchid - 4488

Common twayblade - 3841

Pyramidal orchid - 616 (including 2 white varieties)

Greater butterfly-orchid - 170

White helleborine - 82

Bee orchid - 1

Hybrid (Chalk fragrant x Common spotted orchid) - 4

Total: 19654

That is just over 500 more than the 2024 total.

I was looking back at some of the historical orchid count records; there were 870 plants counted in 1981 when the first count was done. It is a testament to all the many hours of management by BBOWT staff and volunteers that the numbers have increased to the totals now seen. It also shows the value of these long-term surveys

in identifying the fluctuations in populations so that any management strategies can be adjusted where necessary.

This year, we tried doing a summer cut of some dense dogwood areas, which is far more effective at holding the scrub back. It is carefully targeted so as not to cut or damage any of the orchids and other special chalk grassland plants.

As we approached midsummer the plants were looking very desiccated but there were excellent numbers of many butterfly species. On one day in mid July, I counted 16 species in one short visit, just showing the rich insect biodiversity - that's over a quarter of the total number of butterfly species found throughout the whole of the UK! Most notable were lots of second brood common blues, holly blues, small copper, speckled wood, painted lady and dark green fritillary.

Thanks again to all the volunteers for all your hard work!

Phil Townsend, Volunteer Warden

The BBOWT Plant and Produce Market is poised for a new phase so please give your ideas and offers of help.

After ten years of masterminding the fundraiser twice a year, and raising over £22,000 pounds in that time, John Catton is taking a break to concentrate on smaller public appearances in the Amersham area. This gives us the need to prepare for a new phase in the life of this time-honoured event, which brings the whole Chilterns Group together. After being welcomed to College Lake for several years with great support from local volunteers and staff, we have decided to revert to our traditional Great Missenden base. This is nearer to the homes of the majority of the helpers and gives us both freedom to operate on a Sunday and to attract passing business from the town and the busy road.

The next Plant Market will be a spring one, on **Sunday 17 May** from 11am to 1pm using the facilities of the Memorial Centre again. While John has a rest from his labours, members of the Planning Team are getting the ball rolling and looking forward to some of the experienced helpers ganging up to form a buddy group to coordinate the preparations and the day itself. Please get in touch with Paul Niddler: pniddler@gmail.com

Let's hear your suggestions for the event - things to do differently, that we did not have space for at College Lake perhaps? Particularly bearing in mind the areas we have to play with at Great Missenden, in the hall, in the car park and probably on part of the verge of the playing field round the carpark. Should we have a few third-party participants like we used to have? And how about simple catering? - which used to bring in good money and tempt buyers of plants to stay longer and spend more...

The Spring Plant Market will be our main fundraiser of the year, so we need to maximise the profit opportunity within our volunteer capability. Thank you, John and all the regular volunteers who make a success of this event.

We used to get nearly 200 people coming so let's aim high again!

Paul Niddler, Chilterns Group Coordinator

Not just wildlife at Dancersend

Dancersend Nature Reserve is amazingly rich in wildlife, including rare and spectacular plant and animal species, some of which are present at their only site in Buckinghamshire and even one or two with their only records for the UK! However, there is also plenty to spark interest on a visit to the reserve that is not actually wildlife - archaeological features, industrial heritage, geological exposures and fossils, including echinoids, pictured below. Some of this has featured in recent guided events at the reserve and there are more of these to come.



Archaeological features such as hollow ways, marl pits, saw pits and wood banks help to unpack the story of earlier land use. Wood banks and ditches that can be traced through the middle of Bittams Wood reveal areas that were assarted - cleared of trees for cultivation or grazing in the past - only to be abandoned to woodland again later.

In the Waterworks area of the reserve, a series of chalk pits along the edge of Northill Wood, hollowed-out trackways and the remains of a lime kiln point to a period, prior to the building of the pumping station in 1866, when crushed chalk and lime were produced to spread on heathland above the valley to bring it into cultivation. The development of the Waterworks and associated reservoirs led to a complex of excavations and structures that have since been colonised by rare chalk-loving plants taking advantage of the low nutrient conditions.



More recently, our own excavations to create chalk scrapes at the reserve extension, on the slopes of Aston Hill, have helped to recreate conditions that led to the development of flower and insect rich chalk grassland along the Chiltern Hills. In doing so, we have revealed fascinating chalk rock features and fossils, adding to the collection mostly recovered from badger diggings in the reserve woodland. Some of these fossils are definitely our earliest wildlife records at around 80 million years and can be used to categorise the different geological structures underlying the reserve.

As the summer wildlife extravaganza wains, some of these other reserve features will provide interest during a walk. Looking at the humps and hollows in the landscape, relics of human activity and signs of earlier land use can add to an appreciation and understanding of this precious reserve.

Mick Jones, Volunteer Warden

Sustainability: Your role - Focus on carbon emissions **A call to arms from new volunteer, Mike Perry**

Humanity is annually consuming natural resources at c.173% of Earth's annual 'biocapacity'. We extract 90-billion tons of resources, including biomass, fossil energy, metals and minerals. That consumption is weighted to developed countries. This rate of consumption is unsustainable and before 'undeveloped' countries catch-up!

Some examples: Possibly most concerning is our pollution of the atmosphere, driven largely by energy consumption, emitting carbon dioxide which causes Global Warming. The pivot point of Global Warming concerning scientists is 1.5°C, beyond which environmental changes become irreversible. Measurements show we have already reached 1.3°C (c.87% towards the pivot!).

- There is a clear imperative to reduce our carbon emissions. In Northern Europe and comparable latitudes, the rank order for carbon emissions is:
 - Cars and powered vehicles: c.38% of carbon emissions
 - Heating our homes, predominantly gas boilers: c.29% of carbon emissions; 67%
 - Commercial & industrial emissions at c.20%; 87%
 - Leaving a miscellaneous balance of 13%...

Focusing on those streams over which we have individual control:

- Aim to drive less - all forms of vehicle, including:
 - Combustion engines
 - Electric vehicles
 - Initially, hydrogen powered vehicles

While electric and hydrogen vehicles do not directly emit carbon, they carry what is called 'embedded carbon', for example in their manufacture and maintenance.

- Turn home thermostats down - turning a thermostat down by 1°C reduces carbon emissions by c.10% and consequently reduces energy bills - of concern to us all.
- Do not heat all rooms to the same temperature, so-called 'zoning'.
- When shopping, be aware of the environmental impact of items purchased, selecting those with higher sustainability credentials. Increasingly packaging displays 'environmental information'.

Recently, a senior UK politician commented there was no policy or regulation that would resolve environmental challenges - it is down to us as individuals to take actions to reduce adverse environmental impacts. Our collective actions can contribute to improving our environment - improving our environmental legacy to our children and future generations!

Dr Mike Perry

Discovering local treasures on guided reserve visits

One of the most important activities that Chilterns Group has long promoted are the guided visits to Trust reserves. These give people a privileged opportunity to get up close and personal with the wildlife on their doorsteps.

Thanks to counting Mick Jones among our close volunteer colleagues, we were fortunate to benefit over several years from an extensive programme using the talents of the volunteer wardens and other local experts like Sue Taylor and John Tyler (both entomologists with a wide knowledge of natural history). So, in the summer of 2025, we have been able to run eleven guided visits to seven locations, welcoming over sixty visitors.



To give you a feeling for the value of these visits, early in the process, Mick noticed that some of the people coming along had never heard of the reserve before coming, so they were being attracted to a completely new experience. In the May visit to the ongoing Dancersend Extension Arable Reversion Project, the group saw the series of chalk scrapes, excavated over the last 15 years, which demonstrate what is possible if such low-nutrient habitat can be created. Rare plants like slender bedstraw and meadow clary were shown to be thriving while special butterfly food plants like bird's-foot trefoil, kidney vetch and horseshoe vetch are now abundant, along with key nectar sources like marjoram, scabious and knapweeds. Orchids like common spotted and pyramidal are now gradually colonising, and many classic plants of rich chalk grassland - clustered bellflower, yellow-wort and the early shoots of Chiltern gentian - were all showing well. The new pond was attracting dragonflies and damselflies, but was low on water...

In July, those exploring College Lake after dark - looking for glow-worms with national expert John Tyler, ably assisted by reserve warden Emma Routledge - were

rewarded with 15 sightings and now know what to look for and where. An army of toadlets crossing the car park was an added bonus.

Earlier, John took a group to Grangelands, one of our oldest reserves and most exciting locations, with great views over Aylesbury Vale and very varied wildlife to spot, including Roman snails, wolf spiders and a thriving juniper colony. Later, Sue Taylor and her group braved the thunderstorms at Yoesden in early July and were rewarded by seeing eight rare chalkhill blue butterflies among the 11 butterfly species identified, on this lovely downland reserve, in spite of the heavy showers.



On his third reserve visit of the season, Aston Clinton Ragpits warden Phil Townsend revealed that there is much more to see there than 'just orchids', amazing though these are in May or June. In late July, the reserve was a sea of fragrant blue and purple flowers, particularly knapweed, scabious, harebells and marjoram, none of them rare but all buzzing with bees and hoverflies. In addition, Phil found us some more unusual treasures in the form of the last flowering broad-leaved helleborine growing in damp shade beneath coppiced hazels alongside ploughman's-spikenard, formerly used by countryfolk as a cottage air freshener.

The small but appreciative group carefully photographed every new specimen for their records- this is one of the advantages of going out on one of the expert-led visits, as groups are kept small so the leader and followers can get close to the action. Phil will be going out again early in October to find fungi, so book early for that excursion on the events website (www.bbowt.org.uk/events) when details are posted. Also looking ahead, Paul Niddler hopes to repeat a visit to Bacombe Hill, combining natural history with pre-history and coinciding with Halloween - a new experience to look out for.

Next year we want to organise another extensive programme, perhaps including some winter guided visits to major on trees and birds, but first we must find a volunteer willing to build on Mick's experience, as he is retiring from this job, after giving a lot of people great enjoyment and wildlife education over many years. Thank you, all the guided visit leaders, and especially Mick Jones!

Richard Birch, Chilterns Group Planning Team

Events at College Lake from Tessa Folkes

<https://www.eventbrite.com/cc/college-lake-tring-2673599>

Guided Walks – Most Fridays (check for dates)
Natural Craft Workshops – 11/9, 16/10, 13/11, 4/12
Forest Bathing – 14/9, 12/10, 9/11, 14/12
Early Birding (8.30am) – 18/9
Guided Bird Watching – 20/9
Home Educators Day – 1/10
Fungus day, various activities 4/10
Oct Half term – various activities for Adults and Children
Day Camp 28/10
7+ workshop 29/10
Stickactular – family fun 29/10
Wreath Making – 6 & 7/12
7+ natural decorations 6/12

Nature Tots – Tuesdays 9/9, 30/9, 4/11, 9/12
Nature Tots – Thursdays 11/9, 2/10, 6/11, 11/12
Young Rangers – Saturdays AM 13/9, 4/10, 8/11, 13/12
Teen Rangers – Saturdays PM 13/9, 4/10, 8/11, 13/12

Chilterns Group Talks Programme begins

Gt Missenden Memorial Centre, Link Road, Great Missenden HP16 9AE

As the days begin to shorten, that means only one thing... the start of a new autumn and winter talks season! With 6 talks taking us from September to February, plus a light-hearted social occasion in March, there will be something for everyone.

We start this season on **16 September** with Jon Mason (aka The Early Birder) - Jon gave an excellent talk last year on his trip around BBOWT reserves. This year he will be staying more local and covering his journey to create a wildlife garden at his house, 'Little Orchard'.

On **21 October**, Sarah Scott, senior advisor on Biodiversity Net Gain at the Environment Agency, will be bringing to life this often-referenced topic and its vital importance for nature and planning.

Our speaker for **Tuesday 18 November** has still to be agreed - the simplest way of getting the news is to sign up with richardbirch60@yahoo.com to go on his monthly circulation list for all our activities.

Our Christmas talk, on **16 December**, will be given by John Tyler (pictured). John is a local naturalist with a wealth of knowledge and his talks are packed with humour, interesting insights and vivid photos. John's subject will be 'Woodland Wildlife'.

John will be publishing his new book on glow-worms with Pelagic Publishing towards the end of the year. He says that



since he wrote his first book, a lot of new knowledge about the species has come to light, so it has been fun doing an update.

The dates for 2026 are **20 January, 17 February and 17 March** - with the topics to be published closer to the time. We'll ask at the autumn talks what sort of social evening you would like to have this time. It could be another quiz, but it is unlikely to be a poetry and music show again, as that takes more expense and a lot of organising. On that theme, we could do with a couple more volunteers for the small jobs to be done at each meeting that add to everyone's enjoyment - contact Richard as above.

We look forward to seeing you at Great Missenden, with admission kept for the time being at £5, which includes refreshments and a raffle ticket.

Jenny Shaw, Talks Organiser

Something to celebrate...!!

This year has been quite extraordinary, weather-wise. As a result, many plants have suffered and struggled to thrive. Just ask any gardener! Not so the red helleborine!!



This extremely rare orchid, which is known from only about 4 sites in southern England, grows at our Windsor Hill reserve (permit-only access). It's fair to say that our small colony has been the stronghold of the British population for the last couple of decades at least. In recent years, they have usually been the only plants in the country to produce flowers.

This year has been exceptional. A total of 19 plants appeared, of which 14 produced flowers. This may not seem like many, but to put this into context, it is the highest number of plants since 1958 and the most flowering plants ever recorded since the colony was discovered in 1955!

As well as pure numbers, 3 of the flowering plants appeared in a new area, and 2 of the non-flowering plants were clearly seedlings. This is exciting and a cause for some optimism, as it indicates that the population is spreading and is producing viable seeds.

On a national level, excellent news came from the Cotswolds, where 4 flowering plants appeared at a site that had not produced any for several years. In addition, Natural England, who chair the Red Helleborine Restoration Steering Group, has successfully made a bid for money under the Species Recovery Programme to specifically focus on the red helleborine. This will look at the genetics of English red helleborines, developing a cross-pollination protocol and comparing environmental factors. The overall aim is to bolster the resilience of our precious but vulnerable populations, to increase our knowledge of the species and its requirements and, most crucially, inform our management of the plants and their sites.



Taken altogether, there is reason to be cautiously optimistic about the future of this truly stunning orchid. Not something I would have said only a few years ago. Something to celebrate indeed!

Chris Trew

Hands-on conservation opportunities

Work parties are sociable and satisfying local events with opportunities to learn new skills. Beginners are particularly welcome, and you can stay for whatever time you can spare. Please wear stout footwear and work clothes, including gloves, and take care on steep slopes and uneven ground. Tools and instruction are provided.

Children (10+) are welcome, but please contact the organiser if you wish to bring them. Parents must supervise children at all times.



To join a work party, write to volunteering@bbowt.org.uk, tell them where you live, and they will identify options. This process ensures you are 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, covering April to August 2026, please submit them by 10 March to: juliebirch60@yahoo.com

To be put on the mailing list for this newsletter please email:
membership@bbowt.org.uk

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