

Summer 2015



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Thames Valley

Environmental Records Centre



Sharing environmental information in Berkshire & Oxfordshire

Welcome

I thought I'd surely been the busiest person in the last six months looking after baby Benji, but it seems that the last six months have been a busy time for everyone with lots of new and exciting projects, events and opportunities. Lucy and the team have done a fabulous job while I've been away and it's been lovely to come back and hear all the news.

While I was away Helen Miller left us and is now running the new Warwick branch of Acorn Ecology. We will miss those quirky cartoons in our newsletter!

I'd like to welcome Katherine Holmes, our new Berkshire Biodiversity Officer and also congratulate Caroline Coleman who will be staying at TVERC in the new role of Volunteer Co-ordinator from September. And huge congratulations to Dr Lucy Lush who has completed her PhD in hare ecology.

Apart from big projects such as the TVERC training courses, Oxfordshire Habitat Mapping and Berkshire Ancient Woodland Inventory review, we've also been working hard to better utilise technology to automate our data management and provision processes. This will give us more time to spend on getting data into our database, and on supporting recorders.

Reading through this newsletter I see that recording and conservation groups have been very busy too; securing funding, putting on talks & walks, surveying wildlife and carrying out practical work. It's evident that Berkshire and Oxfordshire would be a much poorer environment without all your efforts.

So thank you to Lucy and the TVERC team, and all those volunteering their time to help conserve the environment—I concede I possibly wasn't the busiest person in the last six months!

Camilla Burrow



Camilla and Benji enjoying a rare sit-down!

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TVERC Training Programme

TVERC received funding from Natural England to run 7 training courses covering a range of species and habitats. The aim of the courses was to provide an introduction to ecology and overview of survey methods, to encourage volunteers to get involved with surveying in their area.

All the courses were soon booked up with waiting lists for any spaces that became available. We have been very lucky with the weather so far and participants were also rewarded with some great views of brown hares, grass snakes and common lizards at Otmoor and bank voles at the Organic Research Centre. Let's hope that the last two courses are just as lucky.

We plan to run further courses next year that will be advertised on our website and Twitter account. So if you are interested in attending keep any eye out as they will likely book up quickly.

Lucy Lush



© Lucy Lush

Oxfordshire Recording and Conservation Day 2015



*Downy
Woundwort
Photo from Ken
Betteridge*

TVERC, with invaluable support from Judy Webb, the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire, Wild Oxfordshire, BBOWT and Shotover Wildlife, held a successful event for Oxfordshire's recorders on 28th

February 2015. The event was held at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, a fascinating place in its own right which was much enjoyed by the 70 people who attended.

The theme was '**Recording the invisible**' and we started with an enthusiastic and informative talk by Judy Webb about seed banks and the difficulty of recording 'buried long-dormant seed' plant species. Ken Betteridge then described the work that he and others have done with Downy Woundwort in the west of Oxfordshire. David Wilding then showed us how remote monitoring techniques including cameras and data loggers have been used to monitor the impacts of ground predators on nesting waders at Otmoor. In his talk about moth recording, Paul Waring explained how synthetic pheromones can be used to trap moths by mimicking the pheromones released by female moths. The last talk of the morning was from Jeremy Biggs, with a thought-provoking exploration of the potential for e-DNA, which is already being used to detect the presence of great-crested newts in fresh waters.

The afternoon speed updating session proved popular as ever, with updates from 11 participants. The updates were

about Wild Oxfordshire; the Oxfordshire Biodiversity Strategy for 2020; recording of invasive species; Save our Magnificent Meadows; Oxfordshire Pollinator Advisory Group; the Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire; TVERC's online recording system; the Oxfordshire Mammal Group; Oxfordshire Rare Plants Register; the BSBI 2020 atlas; Shotover Wildlife; and clearwing moth recording.

For the last part of the afternoon, people had the opportunity to attend one of four workshops. Darren Mann entranced his group with a tour of the museum's Hope Entomological Collections. Stephen Ellwood gave a very successful master class on using radio-tracking. There was lots of discussion in a workshop by Debbie Lewis on use of monitoring results to influence conservation. Merryl Gelling gave a demonstration, with many examples, of the signs left by mammals in a workshop on 'Poo, prints and more'.

Our thanks go to the Oxford University Museum of Natural History for providing such a fascinating venue and to all of the speakers and participants for educating and informing us all. Look out in the next newsletter for plans for the 2016 event and the Autumn Recorders Conference later this year!

Caroline Coleman



Ken Betteridge's Excellent Tomato Map showing location and numbers of Downy Woundwort plants

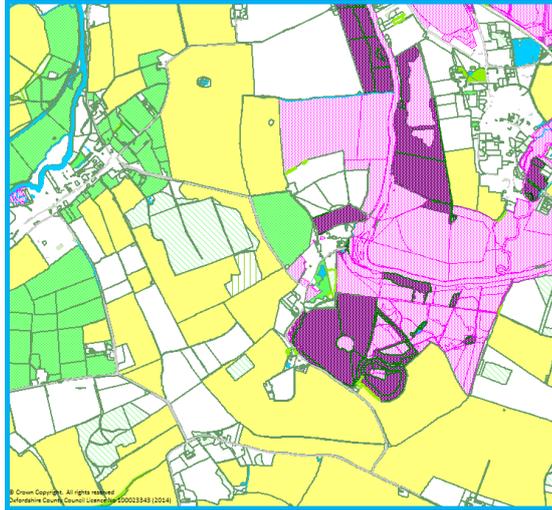
How would you know where to find different grasslands or other habitats such as ponds or traditional orchards in Oxfordshire? Many of us have local knowledge about favourite patches or places we've seen when we are out and about. And there are also sites that have been chosen for their importance to wildlife – Local Wildlife Sites, Conservation Target Areas and national designated sites such as SSSIs. Amazingly, though, there isn't a comprehensive map showing habitat types across all of Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire County Council has decided to remedy this and has commissioned TVERC to map habitats across the whole of the county. This will prove invaluable for strategic decisions about

where to prioritise conservation. It will also provide the information about the most important habitats for district and county planners when individual planning applications are received.

We have already carried out a similar project for Cherwell District Council. Some areas of high ecological importance were mapped for the first

time and we also found some unexpected areas of interesting fen and grassland. This has demonstrated the value of producing a comprehensive habitat map.



Although it would be lovely to spend the next few summers recording habitats across Oxfordshire, this isn't the most efficient approach. Instead, we take advantage of aerial photography (and other sources) to take a bird's eye view, identifying habitats as accurately as we can and then adding them to a GIS layer.

So far, we have made a start with mapping arable fields and grassland. It is rarely possible to be absolutely certain about some habitats – for example, distinguishing unimproved from improved grassland is tricky. Fortunately, Integrated Habitat System (IHS) codes allow us to use terms such as “probably improved” or “possibly unimproved”, reflecting the inherent uncertainty in identification from aerial photos.

This is a long-term project that will progress from the more straightforward habitats such as arable to more complex ones such as parkland. Over time, we will have a much better picture of Oxfordshire's habitats and where they are.

Caroline Coleman

“This will prove invaluable for strategic decisions about where to prioritise conservation”

Meet our new Berkshire Biodiversity Officer

Katherine Holmes has joined TVERC as the Berkshire Biodiversity Officer. Katherine has a degree in Environmental Biology and a Masters degree in Applied Ecology and Conservation, and has worked in the field of ecology and conservation for 7 years.

Prior to TVERC, she worked on the 'Save Our Magnificent Meadows' project with the Cotswolds Conservation Board, where she was responsible for community engagement; arranging practical conservation work parties, public events and volunteer-led botanical surveys.



Katherine was previously employed as an ecologist at an ecological consultancy in Oxfordshire, where she was involved in a range of work across England and Wales including carrying out ecological assessments

and surveys of flora and fauna. She has also worked within the reserves teams at the Staffordshire and Derbyshire Wildlife Trusts, carrying out practical conservation tasks in a variety of habitats.

In addition to her paid work, Katherine volunteers as a nest recorder and bird ringer for the BTO, and also volunteers for BBOWT's Water Vole Recovery Project.

Katherine is thrilled to be joining the TVERC team, and is looking forward to meeting and working with our recorders very soon.

“If you have potential project ideas that would benefit your local area, please do get in touch.”

WHAT IS THE TRUST FOR OXFORDSHIRE’S ENVIRONMENT? (TOE2)

The Trust for Oxfordshire’s Environment (TOE2) is an environmental funder for Oxfordshire. We are here to provide funding and support for environmental and community projects in Oxfordshire, supporting both strategic priorities and local initiatives in order to improve quality of life and the environment, ecosystem services and the local economy.

TOE2 directs its funds in **3 key funding areas** aiming to:

- Promote and improve the biodiversity of Oxfordshire’s wildlife habitats
- Encourage and develop the sustainable use of renewable resources, including promoting and encouraging energy efficiency
- Increase access to the local countryside and green spaces

Education and raising environmental awareness are seen as key across all three funding areas.

TOE2 is a fund seeker as well as a grant giver, keen to work with a range of funders interested in supporting Oxfordshire’s environment. Current funders include Grundon Waste Management, Oxfordshire County Council, the Patsy Wood Trust and both corporate and individual donors.

SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY

TOE2 is keen to support a range of projects which bring about practical biodiversity improvements through habitat and species management and habitat creation. We are looking for projects which fit within the county or national strategy for biodiversity.

Examples of projects we have supported include:

- **River of Life** - funding towards the establishment of priority habitats including reed beds, wet woodland and lowland meadows at the Earth Trust’s visionary landscape scale wetland creation project beside the river Thames in South Oxfordshire.



River of life Project

- **Oxfordshire Reserves Scything Project** - providing equipment and staff and volunteer training so that the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) can use scything as a management tool on five of its Oxfordshire nature reserves.



BBOWT volunteer scything—photo courtesy of BBOWT

- **Daeda’s Wood** – Support for the Woodland Trust to pollard willows in this community woodland

- **Eynsham Abbey Fishponds** – Eynsham Parish Council working in partnership with the Wychwood Project encouraging local involvement with this green space around historic monastic fishponds. TOE2

funding supported wildlife surveys to find out more about the site's biodiversity and a day of activities for local families.

SUPPORTING COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

TOE2 supports projects which improve access to green spaces and the wider countryside, such as creating new links, improving path surfaces and replacing styles with gates. We are particularly keen to fund projects which improve connectivity and create circular routes.

Many projects include an access and a biodiversity element.

RENEWABLES/ ENERGY EFFICIENCY

We still have a few remaining **energy audit grants** available for community buildings. Over 100 Oxfordshire community buildings have so far benefited from an energy audit supported by funding from the Patsy Wood Trust. Feedback shows that over 75% of the recommendations made have been or will be implemented. Low and no cost short-term actions are suggested as well as those requiring investment.



Eynsham Abbey Fishponds

Eligible buildings, which include rural and urban village and community halls, sports pavilions and Scout/Guide halls, are provided with £500 by funder TOE2 towards an energy audit (with a total cost of £660). Following the audit up to £5,000 of implementation funding is available as well as the benefit of reduced running costs.

CONTACTING US

If you have potential project ideas that would benefit your local area, please do get in touch. Future deadlines for applications are the 22nd July and 14th October.

We are delighted to launch our new website

www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk. Do take a look and follow us on Twitter @TOE2_Oxon.

We have recently moved offices; our **new phone number is 01865 407003 and our new address is: TOE2, Earth Trust Centre, Little Wittenham, Oxfordshire, OX14 4QZ.**

Fiona Danks



You're never too young to get involved!

Watery fun at the Oxford Festival of Nature

signs. Happily we managed to find a slide into the river and some spraints, so everyone had the chance to have a good sniff! The crayfish were less obliging, but we did manage to catch one male and one female signal crayfish.

The watery theme continued with the Wild Fair, which was held at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. TVERC, along with many other wildlife groups and organisations, had a stall there on the rainiest day of the year so far!

The rain didn't seem to deter the visitors though so we had a steady stream of nature lovers, potential volunteers and people interested in our online recording website coming to talk to us. Having our foxy friend with us also attracted some of the youngest wildlife enthusiasts to the stall.

Look out for TVERC at future events including Bugs! at Silwood Park on Friday 10th July and the Wychwood Forest Fair on Sunday 6th September.

Ellen Lee and Hannah Boylan



TVERC got involved with this year's Festival of Nature which took place over a fortnight at the beginning of June.

TVERC's resident Otter and Crayfish expert Ellen Lee led walks along the river in the nearby University Parks on the 6th and 7th of June. The otter walk proved especially popular with about 25 people going on a search for otter

Woodstock Natural History Society 40th Anniversary

The Society was founded in October 1975 with Alison Clay as Chairman, Dr. Bruce Campbell as President, with Sheila Hepworth as Secretary supported by John Brucker, local headmaster and long-time member of Oxfordshire Ornithological Society.

An inaugural meeting produced a programme of nature study walks and lectures by prominent naturalists. For many years a monthly early morning walk around Blenheim attracted early risers. Fund-raising is an important activity with an annual coffee morning and a Christmas raffle providing donations to local nature projects.

A 5-year monthly survey of flowering plants in Blenheim Park commenced in the 1980's and the results were presented to TVERC. Woodstock meadows have seen several management projects to encourage wildlife and local flora; in 1990 the Society backed a 5-year plan by John Brucker to bring the meadows back to better condition by grazing etc. Some members assisted with recording of the flora and fauna as well as pulling up Himalayan Balsam!

Coach outings are well supported with Slimbridge a favourite venue. Our current programme consists of lectures from September to May

arranged by Secretary Sheila Thompson, with summer events and a walks programme throughout the year. These meetings are advertised in Elite Magazine, Bladon & Woodstock News and Oxford Times.



Dedication Ceremony of Trees planted on the banks of the river Glyme in the Woodstock Water meadows to the memory of Bruce Campbell, Internationally famed naturalist and founder member of the Woodstock Natural History Society. May 31st 2003.

The Society has planted trees in memory of past members including several on the banks of the Glyme for Dr Bruce Campbell. We plan to provide more this year to mark our 40th

anniversary. Woodstock's Community Woodland site has been earmarked as a starting point.

We look forward to recruiting more members to carry on the work of the Society.

**Pat Crutch,
Committee Member**

“We look forward to recruiting more members to carry on the work of the Society.”

Friends of Lye Valley (FoLV) Oxford

This group has spent a lot of time in the last year helping with the management of the Lye Valley North Fen SSSI and LWS as part of the BBOWT 'Wild Oxford' project, where they have most recently learnt to use the Austrian scythes to good effect in felling more of the tall reed to remediate the very rare calcareous short fen habitat.

They also regularly assist the Oxford Conservation Volunteers in the essential reed-raking in July and October in both the North and South fens which substitutes for the grazing the fens can no longer have.

Oxford Geology Trust benefitted from their help in cleaning the rock face exposure of the limestone Jurassic Coral Reef at Rock Edge Nature Reserve in Headington.

Rock Edge has been the focus of one limestone wild flower enhancement FoLV Oxford session, and will be the subject of another session of seed spreading at the end of July with the aim of providing more nectar and pollen sources for insects.

At the AGM on 3rd August there will be an illustrated talk on **'Helping Pollinators in Headington'**.

For details of this and all other news see the group's website at <http://www.headington.org.uk/lyevalley/>

Judy Webb

Oxfordshire Mammal Group Secure funding for Dormouse Project

Over the winter the Oxfordshire Mammal Group received a generous donation from TOE2, (see page 4); for an Oxfordshire-wide dormouse survey. This under-recorded and rare mammal is present in Oxfordshire but we only know of a few locations. There is historic evidence to suggest they were (and potentially still are) widespread across the county in a few of our fantastic ancient woodlands, so we are using this opportunity to find out where!

We have received the vital permission from a few of Oxfordshire's estates and other land owners to access their land and install the survey tubes. After months of the initial set-up we are starting to install the tubes into these woodlands across the county in preparation for our surveys. If you see these tubes please do not disturb them as if they are occupied the dormice are probably trying to sleep. Disturbance may also affect our survey results,

and finally without a licence it is illegal to disturb these wonderful but rare mammals. We will need to leave the tubes in place for a month for them to bed down before our surveys begin.



© Pete Newbold

We will be getting our members involved in helping us on the surveys, where they will get the chance to see these secretive creatures up close, and even if we don't find dormice we get the opportunity to access normally private land and take a walk in some amazing woodland, with plenty of other things to see.

All our dormouse records will be submitted to TVERC in an effort to increase everyone's knowledge of where dormice are hiding.

I hope to see many of you out helping with our surveys or even surveying on your own (as most of our native Oxfordian mammals can be surveyed and enjoyed with very little experience or equipment). If you haven't already, please get in touch if you would like to help with the dormouse surveys, any of our other surveys that will be coming up over the summer or if you have any suggestions for surveys of your own.

If you would like further information on helping us with these surveys and joining the Oxfordshire Mammal Group please visit our website at www.oxonmammals.org.uk.

**Pete Newbold
Survey Officer, Oxfordshire Mammal Group**

New Marston Wildlife Group (NMWG) Oxford

This group has now become a smaller group which focuses on practical conservation work needed in Milham Ford Nature Park in Marston. It is thus now known as the **Friends of Milham Ford Nature Park** (FOMFNP, see <http://fomfnp.weebly.com/>).

The most recent big project in the Nature Park on 24th May has been the construction of a 'bee wall' in the south facing bank of the stream. This will benefit solitary bees by providing nest sites for those species that like to burrow in soil or old walls in a suitably hot sunny position. The construction of limestone and traditional sandy lime mortar has been set into the bank of the stream in the park.

For some photos and a video of the wall in construction see <http://fomfnp.weebly.com/milham-ford-nature-park.html>.

The group is grateful to the Oxford Conservation Volunteers for their hard work on the day and to Oxford City Council for preparing the bank and providing the limestone, sand and lime for the construction.

The Friends group continue regular work parties on Sundays in the park, controlling overgrowth of bramble, pond marginal plants and invasive aliens such as Michaelmas daisies. The next events are 'Seed Sunday' and 'Seed Saturday' at the end of July/beginning of August when other wildlife groups are invited to the park to collect seed for their own sites before the meadow hay is cut and removed.

Judy Webb

Hedge Laying in Blewbury



Photo by Bernard Mattimore

Blewbury (pop. 1700) is near Harwell and within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is a spring-line village below the North scarp face of the chalk downs. Like many villages, most hedges are owned and cared for by home owners but there are stretches of mixed hedge around common areas such as playgrounds, sports fields and cemeteries. Inevitably, some of these hedges become overgrown, impeding views and losing their structure and density. Traditionally, farmers and landowners have laid hedges in order to maintain dense, healthy, stock-proof boundaries to their fields but with the added and very significant bonus of creating excellent wildlife habitats.

A few Blewbury villagers who had some experience of the craft (some of it long ago!) proposed to carry out some hedge-laying over the winter of 2014-15. The Parish Council gave full support and this was

endorsed by Sustainable Blewbury, the village's very active environment group.



Photo by Bernard Mattimore

This encouragement was a salutary reminder that standards would need to be high and two people involved attended excellent weekend workshops at the Earth Trust in Long Wittenham to brush up their skills.

Volunteers were sought and over three weekends about 80 metres of hedge were laid at the recreation ground. They were mixed hedges including hawthorn and blackthorn but with many semi-mature trees such

as field maple – hedges almost too far gone for laying and so a real challenge to rookies! But laid they were and staked and bound with hazel coppiced locally. Judged a few months later the results are, by and large, successful and the hedges are putting on strong growth.

Next winter we plan to carry on the process with more volunteers. It is a sociable activity which produces direct benefit to the environment and the visual amenity of the village – and it revives an old craft. A win-win situation!

John Ogden



Photo by John Ogden

Colchicum
smut
Urocystis
colchici found
in a wood in
West
Oxfordshire



Judy Webb

Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire

This recording group (a local group of the British Mycological Society) has just completed its two spring fungal forays – to Pinsley Wood and Stow Wood. Eight more forays are planned for good sites around Oxfordshire this autumn.

The group always welcomes people interested in fungi – why not just come along to see the interesting world of fungi and learn identification tips from the experts?

The programme of events is on the group's website at www.fungusoxfordshire.org.uk/index.html. Here you can find an interesting photo gallery of fungi and all the group's newsletters since 2005 can be accessed.

Judy Webb

The Oxfordshire Flora Group (ORG)

This study group of the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire (ANHSO) continues its programme of plant education surveys and monitoring surveys of the rare plants it studies. It always welcomes people wanting to learn more about our native flora, how to identify them and the needs of its rare species

within the county. The calendar of meetings is on the group's website at: www.anhso-ofg.org.uk. Note the need to contact the leader before coming, in case there are any last minute changes.

Judy Webb

Former Rubbish Tip Now Recognised as a Local Wildlife Site

The Oxfordshire Local Wildlife Sites partnership has designated the Trap Grounds Town Green in north Oxford as a Local Wildlife Site. The main reed bed in the eastern section of the Trap Grounds already had LWS status, but now the wildlife value of the whole site has been officially recognised.

The new designation was granted because of the diversity of the Town Green's habitats, which form a mosaic of woodland, ponds, scrubland, and patches of reed bed; its communities of rare or exceptional species, especially its reptiles and amphibians; its links to Port Meadow and the Canal; and its value for learning and the appreciation of nature.

The Friends of the Trap Grounds manage the whole site in partnership with Oxford City Council. They have installed a boardwalk and a bird hide. They organise guided walks for the public, and support visits by school groups and research by University students. And the public can record wildlife sightings on their website: www.trap-grounds.org.uk.

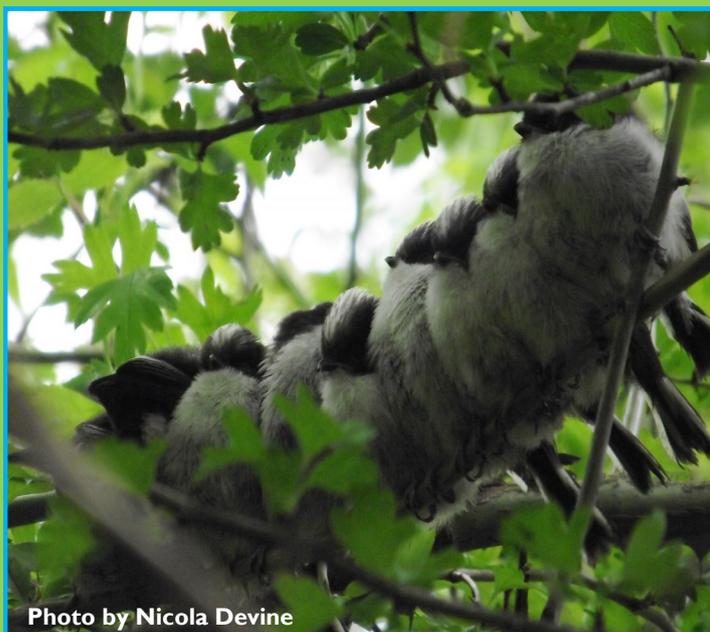


Photo by Nicola Devine

Devine's photograph shows young Long-tailed Tits lining up for lunch on their first day in the outside world."

Catherine Robinson, the Secretary of the Friends, says:

"It's hard to believe now that the Trap Grounds were used as a rubbish tip for many years. The place is full of life at all times of the year, and especially now: swans and kingfishers have nested, bees are using our newly constructed Insect Hotel, and fledgling birds are leaving their nests. Nicola

Catherine Robinson
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The Charles Elton Archive is now available to all

You may remember an article about the Charles Elton Archive from last summer's TVERC newsletter. The material is now available on Oxford University Research Archive (ORA) as an 'open access item' at: <http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:e426b54a-22f5-472c-a7bf-050e3dff7ab4>



Caroline Pond

An Elton drawing

Autumn Recordors' Day

... look out for news!

We are beginning to make plans for this year's autumn recordors' day, to be held in Berkshire during September or October. As in previous years the conference will be organised jointly with the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership. If you have any ideas for the conference or would like to give a talk or short update, please contact Caroline or Lucy at TVERC.

Caroline Coleman

Online Recording Update

Our online recording site sightings.tverc.org has now been up and running for nine months and we have received over 1400 records from the site. Since we launched the site we have added the option to download your records. Mark Leech from Oxford wins the virtual prize for adding most records. Thanks Mark!

Next we're going to get the local recording groups part of the site fully working. Each recording group that wants to use the system will have their own "survey" set up into which their records can go. The information collected should be 'customisable' for each group (within the confines of the software system). Watch this space for an update on where we've got to by this winter.

Graham Hawker

Local Wildlife Sites Criteria Review

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are important sites in Berkshire and Oxfordshire for wildlife conservation. TVERC surveys and reports on LWS in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, working with BBOWT and volunteers.

To ensure that LWS are consistent with DEFRA guidelines, we work to a set of published selection criteria. These are used by LWS selection panels in Berkshire and Oxfordshire to review existing site designations and to evaluate potential new LWS.

The same criteria are also used in the current version and more information about LWS can be found on the TVERC website at <http://www.tverc.org/cms/content/local-wildlife-sites>.

TVERC is currently undertaking a review of the criteria, which have remained unchanged since 2009. The review includes clarification of the descriptions for each of the criteria as well as more specific descriptions of the qualifying criteria for habitats and some species groups.

A consultation copy with the latest amendments will be available for comment over this summer. If you would like to take part in the consultation, please contact Caroline.

Caroline Coleman



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The Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) is one of a national network of Local Records Centres. It aims to: collect, collate and make available information to help people make sound decisions about our natural environment and hold all available information about the plants, animals, wildlife habitats and important wildlife and geological sites in Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre is a 'not for profit' operation run by a partnership of the following organisations: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, The Environment Agency, and the following councils: Bracknell Forest Borough, Cherwell District, Oxford City, Oxfordshire County, Reading Borough, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough Borough, South Oxfordshire District, Vale of the White Horse District, West Berkshire District, West Oxfordshire District and Wokingham Borough.