

Summer 2016



Photo by Julie Kerans

# Thames Valley

Environmental Records Centre



*Sharing environmental information in Berkshire & Oxfordshire*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Spring Recorders' Day 2
- Volunteering, good for you... 3
- TVERC training courses 4
- TVERC annual report 5
- Brightwell cum Sotwell's community orchard 6
- Trap Grounds Restoration Work 7
- BBOWT Local Wildlife Site Pilot Project 8
- Wychwood Verges 11
- TVERC training programme 2017 11

## Welcome

Since our last newsletter was published in December, there's been plenty of change at a national level with Brexit bringing in a new Prime Minister and Cabinet. Along with possibilities of devolution of powers to and reorganisation of our local governments.

How will this affect us? We don't know for sure yet but will be keeping an eye on the horizon to ensure we handle any issues effectively!

There might be a reduction in the amount of funding

available to LERCs from local and central government if there's a cut in budgets, and from developers paying for data searches if the house-building market stalls. We'll manage this by continuing to promote the value of using our evidence-base for decision-making, and by offering a diverse range of services to a wider range of customers.

On the positive side, the inevitable review of agri-environment and planning policies could give us the opportunity to influence and make decisions at a more local level which are better at conserving wildlife. And

perhaps devolution will lead to communities having the knowledge, passion and power to identify, protect and enhance wildlife corridors and green spaces. We have exceptionally good data and knowledge in Berks and Oxon so we need to work on ensuring it's used and understood by the right people.

In the meantime of course, we'll all carry on with the great recording and conservation work we've been doing in our patch!

Camilla Burrow, Director

## TOE2 and TVERC Recorders' Grant Scheme

TOE2 is delighted to invite applications for projects that improve the quality, quantity and/or coverage of voluntary species recording in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Applications may be standalone grants to support better recording or they may be linked to a larger biodiversity application to TOE2. Please contact us or look at our website [www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk](http://www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk) for further information about the Recorders' Grant Scheme.

Fiona Danks - TOE2



## TVERC Spring Recorders' Day in Oxford "Linear habitats and pollinators"

**T**VERC Spring Recorders Day in Oxford "Linear habitats and pollinators"



Photo by Marilyn Cox

Agency using river fly monitoring data to trigger water pollution investigations to Natural England altering stewardship scheme options for hedgerow management. Camilla (the TVERC Director) highlighted how all the data provided to TVERC by volunteer recorders (70% of the data we receive) is made into high quality data products by TVERC staff. These data products are used on a daily basis by all the local authorities in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, BBOWT, RSPB and the Environment Agency to make sound decisions on how to manage land and waterways and the design and location of development.

If you are thinking I wish I had been there, don't despair, we have our Autumn Recorder's Day being held on Saturday October 8th, in Reading., more details to follow keep an eye on our website.

TVERC runs conferences and training courses for recorders in Oxfordshire and Berkshire. To learn more, visit our website or contact TVERC ([tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk); tel: 01865 815451).

"Come along to the Autumn Recorders' day at The Oracle ... on Saturday Oct 8th?"

About 60 people attended TVERC's spring recorders' day on 27<sup>th</sup> February. From local projects to enhance habitats for pollinators around Chipping Norton to national schemes, gathering data on wildlife from roadkill and training volunteers to take water quality samples, we heard great examples about how both amateur and professional scientists can harness people's time and effort to help monitor habitats and species.

The series of lively talks and workshops demonstrated the importance of data for good decision-making, from the Environment



Dr Judy Webb's Workshop

Photo by Marilyn Cox

# Volunteering - good for you, good for TVERC, good for the environment

**Y**ou may already know that TVERC relies a lot on its volunteers to help out with data management and projects as well as field surveys. In 2015-16, volunteers contributed 188 days to TVERC. Many of these days were spent by volunteers in the TVERC office tidying and checking data, enabling us to add new species



records to the TVERC database. Specialist volunteer surveyors support our Biodiversity Officers, providing their ecological expertise to tell us more about particular species on Local Wildlife Sites. That information helps inform the selection panels about the true ecological value of those sites. Volunteers have also supported TVERC with several projects. They have helped prepare a new set of maps for the Oxfordshire Rare Plants Register, reviewed ancient

woodland using historic maps and investigated the distributions of invasive non-native species.

The benefits to TVERC are obvious. Like all other environmental records centres, TVERC has seen its central funding from Natural England withdrawn. Whilst we continue to be fortunate in having a strong partnership with our local authority partners, the Environment Agency and BBOWT, we have to cover the costs of data collection and management. It is clear that volunteers allow us to do much more than would be possible without them. In financial terms, the days given by volunteers amounted to a value of nearly £19k. We don't make a profit from this, but can simply do more because of our fantastic volunteers.



But volunteering is not a one-sided arrangement. It offers people an opportunity to meet others with similar interests whilst learning more about TVERC and its host organisation, Oxfordshire County Council. For office volunteers, there are plenty of

interesting data management activities. Volunteers might be manipulating data in spreadsheets, carrying out mapping in our Geographical Information System (GIS) or searching for ecological data in reports from online planning portals. Field volunteers have unique opportunities to visit sites that might not normally be open to access. And, of course, there are recognised health benefits associated with getting outside. Some people have come to TVERC to help develop their career and several have left to take up new jobs in conservation, having gained relevant experience with us. Whatever people want, we set out to be flexible, helping our volunteers to meet their aspirations and fit TVERC into their busy lives.

An important aspect of volunteering with TVERC is the feel-good factor people can gain from making a positive difference. The purpose of collecting biological and geological data is to benefit the environment. TVERC shares data with its partners, ensuring that data contributed and handled by volunteers is used directly in planning control and strategic decision-making. The data we hold informs developers and their consultants, making sure that protected and notable species are taken into account in planning

applications. Importantly, information is also available to conservation organisations, voluntary groups, members of the public, landowners - in fact anybody wanting to use data for positive conservation outcomes.

If you want to enjoy the personal benefits of volunteering and make a truly positive contribution to your local environment, then TVERC might be for you. Further details can be found on our [website](#) or by contacting [Caroline Coleman](#).

*"If you want to enjoy the personal benefits of volunteering and make a truly positive contribution to your local environment, then TVERC might be for you. "*

# TVERC Training Programme 2016

## Do you know what you don't know?

How often do you go into the countryside with friends and family and, because you're the 'wildlifey' one, get asked all sorts of questions? It happens to me quite frequently and it often makes me realise not only what I know, but also the things I don't know. There's never enough time to learn about everything, but TVERC can help you develop your skills in identification and survey techniques. Since 2015 we have run nine training courses and, as well as another two this year, we are planning more for 2017.

All of the courses include a mixture of indoor and outdoor work, so course participants have had a good

grounding in the theory as well as practicing what they have learnt in the field.

For people wanting to know more about plants, we have offered courses in winter trees, woodland plants and grass identification. By working with pre-collected samples, those on the courses have been able to practice working through identification keys before seeing plants in the field.

Our course on bird survey techniques covered some of the main methods that can be used to survey birds in the field, with several practical sessions in gloriously warm weather. We saw and heard a variety of spring birds, including my first cuckoo of the year and a single swift cutting across the sky.

By contrast, the bumblebee identification course this year

started with snow – not ideal for bees! But the course tutor, Ivan Wright, was well prepared with specimens and live bees for people to examine indoors. Fortunately, the weather did improve so there was an opportunity to get out in the field later in the day.

The course on small mammal identification has been one of several on mammals and included a chance to see live mammals caught in traps that had been set overnight. The course was led by Merryl Gelling, a real expert in her field, who can set traps and handle animals before releasing them safely into their home environment. TVERC has also run courses on brown hares and dormice and there are still opportunities to register for our last two courses for 2016 on otters and water voles.

Of course, one of the best things for an environmental records centre is to see people feeling able to become recorders for the first time or expanding their knowledge into new areas. All of the courses include ideas on how to take the next steps as a recorder by joining a local group or starting to visit a local patch for example.

To book on one of our remaining courses for this year, click [here](#). If you have any questions or would like to sign up to our mailing list for future courses, contact Hannah Boylan ([hannah.boylan@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hannah.boylan@oxfordshire.gov.uk); tel: 01865 815479).



Woodland Plant ID course

Photo by Hannah Boylan

*“All of the courses include ideas on how to take the next steps as a recorder by joining a local group or visiting a local patch for example”*

### TVERC training programme 2016

£60 paid in advance

*Professionals £120; Limited student places £30\**

- **OTTER ECOLOGY & SURVEYING**  
Saturday 6th August, midday to 6 pm at RSPB Otmoor Nature Reserve (No student places left)
- **WATER VOLE ECOLOGY & SURVEYING**  
Saturday 10th September, 10 am to 4 pm at BBOWT Chimney Meadows

# TVERC Annual Report 2015-16



**W**e had several staff changes over 2015-16, with Camilla returning from maternity leave in May, Caroline starting as

the Volunteer Co-ordinator in September, Yolanda starting as a second Biodiversity Data Assistant and Lucy our Projects Manager leaving in January and Dan starting as the new Projects Manager in March. We focused this year on reviewing our processes and procedures to ensure they are as efficient as possible in future. This included working with Andy Foy to automate some of our data management processes and creating new online forms for data search requests. This has been a great success so far and allowed our Data Team to spend more time wrangling data into our database. All data-users will benefit from the improved quality and quantity of data that we can provide. We also continued to survey sites and analyse data to further improve the environmental evidence-base in Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

We were very busy as usual providing high quality raw data which has been validated and data products to those needing it to make decisions. We were disappointed to hear the announcement from Natural England in February that they would no longer be funding any LERCs (Local Environmental Records

Centres) from 1st April 2016. TVERC have income from a range of sources which means we are resilient to this type of sudden change. However, the decision by NE to stop funding LERCs all across the country is very concerning. This decision appears to show a serious misunderstanding of the need for this evidence-base and the legal and policy requirement for them to use it to make decisions.

We have also been putting additional resource into support for voluntary recorders and recording groups, with Caroline our Volunteer Co-ordinator starting in September. We now have a list of survey equipment available for recorders to borrow on our website. We have also streamlined our processes for recruiting and managing office volunteers and updated our website pages. We have been focussing on negotiating new agreements with key data-providers to give TVERC permission to use data at the highest possible resolution in the normal business of TVERC without seeking further permission either from the individual recorder or recording group. This will allow us to move towards 'Open Data', for example by uploading more of the species data we hold onto the NBN (at reduced resolution) so it is accessible to all.

We ended 2015-16 with a net underspend of £7.6k, which will be re-invested into the TVERC service. The full report is available to download from our website here: [www.tverc.org](http://www.tverc.org)

Camilla Burrow—TVERC Director

## Meet our new projects manager

Introducing...

**D**r Dan Carpenter, the new Projects Manager. Dan started with TVERC in March 2016 and has since been finding his feet and meeting with many of TVERC's partners. Dan has a background in biodiversity research and local government, having previously worked for Bracknell Forest Council as their ecologist and the Natural History Museum in London as a post-doctoral researcher. Dan's particular interests are in soil biodiversity, in particular earthworms, which were the focus of his PhD research; he also set up the Earthworm Society of Britain in 2009 and has been helping to run it ever since. Dan is particularly excited to have access to over 1.7 million biological records and the opportunities that presents for data mining and analysis.



Dan identifying an earthworm

## Brightwell cum Sotwell's Community Orchard

Photo by Alison Bloomfield



*“Flowers this spring already include species like Ragged Robin, Bird's Foot Trefoil, Red Campion, Spear Thistle, Hoary Willowherb, Greater Knapweed, Common Comfrey and Bladder Campion”*

A Community Orchard of 45 trees was planted in Brightwell cum Sotwell in November by 105 villagers. A survey of top fruit trees in the village discovered an astonishing 90 different varieties of apple with many trees in gardens and abandoned orchards up to 100 years old.

This huge range of trees in just one village illustrates what the traditional crop of the past would have been like. Villagers would have had a harvest for up to 5 months with fruit storing through to as late as April.

The apple crop in the village starts with varieties such as Beauty of Bath and Emneth Early, ready in July and early August; with James Grieve and George Cave, Annie Elizabeth and Lady Henniker ready in September to mid October; all the way through to the later varieties like Blenheim Orange in late October, early November.

Traditional orchards supported a wide range of wildlife specific to this unique habitat and are now recognised as important for UK BAP priority species such as Noble Chafer Beetle, Stag Beetle and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

We have also had success with the wildflowers we sowed under the trees; we knew that wildflower meadows are particularly hard to establish so we were pleasantly surprised. To prepare the land for the orchard the whole of the area was cleared by diggers which took off the top layer of vegetation. It appears that this accidental preparation gave the seeds a head start.

Flowers this spring already include species like Ragged Robin, Bird's Foot Trefoil, Red Campion, Spear Thistle, Hoary Willowherb, Greater Knapweed, Common Comfrey and Bladder Campion. The flowers have also attracted Common Blue butterflies.

Have a look at our website to find out more about our orchard - [www.brightwellorchards.co.uk](http://www.brightwellorchards.co.uk)

Alison Bloomfield—Brightwell cum Sotwell Orchard Group Secretary

Photo by Alison Bloomfield



## Wigwell Nature Reserve, Charlbury

The Wychwood Project would like to thank TVERC for recent notification that Wigwell is still classed as a nature reserve. A ceremonial hand-over of the reserve lease from Charlbury Town Council to the Wychwood Project took place on Friday 17 June. The event was also an opportunity to celebrate and acknowledge 17 years of volunteering which makes managing sites like Wigwell possible. After the exchange of a lease certificate guests enjoyed a walk around the site and visit to the rare Meadow Clary plants.

Helen Datson—Wychwood Project Assistant



Photo by Ric Mellis with thanks to BBOWT

On Saturday the 4th June TVERC joined 7500 other wildlife enthusiasts at Wild Fair held at Oxford University Museum of Natural History which is part of the 2016 Oxfordshire Festival of Nature organised by BBOWT.

It was the best attended Wild Fair so far and we had many interested young visitors to our stall to identify our signs of wildlife. They had to decide which nest, pellet, poo, feather, footprint or skull belonged to which animal and the prize was a certificate and a TVERC

pencil. We had so many winners in the end that the certificates ran out!

We also spoke to many people who were interested in recording the wildlife they see every day and referred them to our online recording website <http://sightings.tverc.org/record/sighting>

Look out for us at other events this year such as Bugs Day in Silwood Park Friday 22nd July and the Wychwood Forest Fair on Sunday 4th September.

Hannah Boylan—Admin Officer

## POND AND REED-BED RESTORATION WORK ON THE TRAP GROUNDS

With a grant of £5,000 from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment, and expert advice from staff at the Environment Agency, the Friends of the Trap Grounds commissioned a contractor (Aquatic Solutions UK) to do some major work earlier this year. The flow of water in the stream that crosses this Town Green and Local Wildlife Site has been improved by unblocking a culvert, desilting the bed of the stream, and clearing invasive vegetation. Digging a winding channel from the main pond into the reed bed has



Photo by Nicola Devine

created a safe haven for Water Voles (and maybe for the Otter which has been seen several times recently in the adjacent Canal). The operation made a lot of noise and mess, but our resident Kingfishers soon returned to their favourite haunts, at least 40 Reed

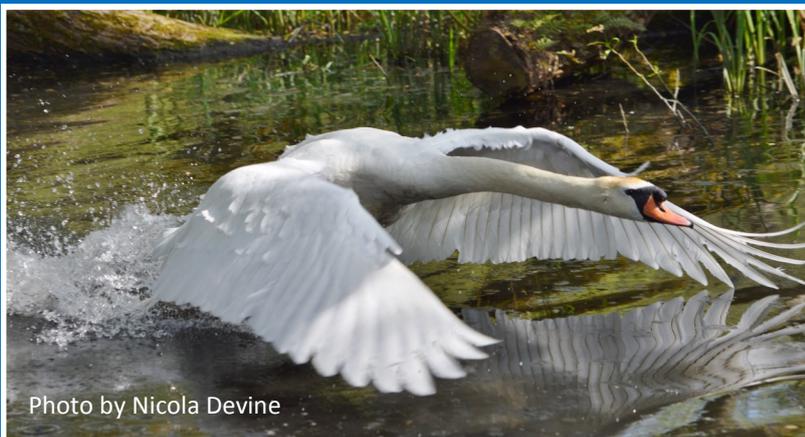


Photo by Nicola Devine

Buntings established a communal roost, and a Cetti's Warbler stayed for three months before moving on. A pair of swans produced seven cygnets, to the delight of local children.

Catherine Robinson  
Secretary, The Friends of the  
Trap Grounds

# BBOWT Local Wildlife Site Pilot Project

The Local Wildlife Site (LWS) Pilot Project was set up to explore ways in which we could increase the number of LWS in good condition. The aim was to address

the gap between management advice visits, which, although beneficial, were often not acted upon. Using data that TVERC's Julie Kerans, Oxfordshire Biodiversity Officer collected as part of her role a number of landowners of

LWS within Conservation Target Areas (CTA) were contacted. Eventually the pilot work was focused upon three wetland sites along the River Cherwell, two within the Lower Cherwell Valley CTA and one within the Oxford Meadows and Farmoor CTA. A summary of the three sites and the work undertaken is given below:

## Dukes Lock Pond

Dukes Lock Pond is a 2.2ha site on the Oxford Canal, just north of Wolvercote. It contains a large reedbed, open water and willow scrub. It is an important site for birds, with red and amber listed species such as cuckoo, grasshopper warbler, starling and kingfisher. There are records of otter using the site, as well as water vole on the canal just downstream. Lack of management for over 12 years has resulted in a significant reduction in the area of open water, encroaching scrub and a gradual drying out of areas of the reedbed.

Funding from TOE2 was secured in partnership with the owners, the Canal and River Trust. The CRT also match-funded the project, and will continue with site management beyond the timescales of this project. These works include:

- Pollarding
- Removing scrub
- Cut back the reed bed, opening up channels and new pool areas.
- Opening up access
- Installing interpretation
- Cut back fresh willow and scrub.

## Bletchingdon Quarry

Bletchingdon Quarry (6.5ha) was designated for its wet grassland and fen, species rich dry grassland and the mosaic of habitats that have developed on this previously quarried site. The site has also been noted as important for birds, with records for red listed grasshopper warbler, yellowhammer and grey partridge, and amber listed whitethroat, reed bunting, kestrel, mistle thrush, dunnock and green woodpecker. The diversity of solitary bees and wasps is also exceptional. The site had been unmanaged for at least 15-20 years, resulting in a decline in botanical diversity. Recently, grazing has been re-introduced to the site but as it is currently uncontrolled, overgrazing and poaching have become an issue, most notably in the low-lying wet areas of the site.

Working closely with the landowner, a management plan was put together, and funding was granted to carry out the following works in order to bring the site into positive conservation management:

- 400m of fencing to enclose the wet meadow and fen area
- Pollarding
- An agreed 5 year management plan for the whole site
- An updated hymenoptera survey
- Interpretation sign and a permissive path for guests of the adjacent holiday park.

## Enslow Marsh

Enslow Marsh sits between the Oxford Canal and the River Cherwell just north of Enslow. The project area, at the south,



Pim Young

*“Funding from TOE2 was secured in partnership with the owners, the Canal and River Trust. The CRT also match-funded the project, and will continue with site management beyond the timescales of this project.”*



Pim Young

contains a large sedge bed and fen, with areas of wet woodland and scrub. There are also two ponds. This is also an important site for birds. Lack of management of this site has gradually led to the loss of open water and pond areas, a loss of botanical diversity as sedges dominate, and a gradual increase in scrub.

The project has put together a management plan to include smaller scale works using volunteers, and the local fire crew with funding provided by



Cherwell District Council who also manage the site. Works include:

- cutting back areas of sedge annually
- old pond areas being opened up
- scrub removal.
- Removal of some larger willows.

By Pim Young Oxfordshire,  
Local Wildlife Sites Project Officer

## Coombe Fen visit

Thanks to everyone who came along to Coombe Fen on Friday 15th July where many wetland plants were found including Greater tussock sedge, southern marsh orchid, jointed rush, ragged robin and fen bedstraw.



Photos by Julie Kerans



## Data from ecological reports



Photo by Andy Glencross

Where do we get our species data from? Up to a year ago the answer to this question would have been “we get data from a variety of organisations and individuals both amateur and professional, in fact whoever sends us their data. However around a year ago we started getting “proactive”!

One of the important users of our species data are local planning authorities. It’s vitally important that we have good information concerning the most important species affecting planning; bats, great crested newts, barn owls, badgers etc. By “good” I mean good spatial coverage, good quality and up to date. We have therefore been working hard with our local authority partners to make sure we get access to as many ecology reports for sites with wildlife interest as possible. For partners with their own in house ecologists, this means forwarding relevant reports when they come into the public domain or sending us spreadsheets of records that they extract directly from reports. For partners who don’t have in house ecological expertise, we have been experimenting with asking volunteers to check planning portal websites on a regular basis to extract reports that are of interest to us. In the last 12 months, this has added 122 ecological reports to those arriving via other routes. The species group that has benefitted most from this work is bats. We’ve added just under 6,000 new bat records in the past 12 months. Great crested newt records have also increased by just over 200.

Photo by Andy

Ellen Lee—Data Services Officer

## Data sharing through the NBN Gateway

Environmental records centres form a local focus for wildlife and geological data. There are also national schemes, playing a slightly different role in gathering information, often for specific taxonomic groups or to address particular issues. But local records centres remain the main repository for many of our county recorders, wildlife groups and professional or volunteer experts. Although this might appear to produce a fragmented system, in which data are lodged within one recording scheme or another, the reality is very different. The many schemes and record centres are well coordinated, aspiring to make data available to increase knowledge and inform decision-making.

A core element in data distribution is the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway. Here, users can find data from recording schemes, local records centres, research facilities and environmental organisations. It is an astonishing resource that illustrates the benefits of collaboration.

Whilst TVERC places species data on the NBN Gateway, access is restricted to the Environment Agency. Anybody else wanting to make use of records can do so by making a data request to TVERC. We believe that a lot of those records could be put to much wider use if they were more openly available through the Gateway. Our ideal would be for less sensitive species records to be accessible, but with the precise locations blurred to avoid potential damage to wildlife.

That might seem a straightforward decision, but many of the records held by TVERC are ‘owned’ by the people or groups who submitted them. We are beginning to contact our main data providers to ask permission for records to be made accessible through the NBN Gateway (unless they are already doing this through another route). We fully recognise that some will not be able to grant access, but we think those that do will feel satisfaction in knowing that their records are being put to the greatest possible use. Inclusion in the NBN Gateway will also raise the profile of the great work being done by recorders across Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

If you would like to share your data through the NBN Gateway or have any questions about how this will work, please contact us.; [TVERC@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:TVERC@oxfordshire.gov.uk) 01865 815451

*“Inclusion in the NBN Gateway will also raise the profile of the great work being done by recorders across Oxfordshire and Berkshire”*

Did you get a chance to come to one of our training courses this year?

Don't worry if you missed out, there are more courses next year.

These introductory training courses are run by expert ecologists and aimed at **beginners**. Courses will cover basic ecology, relevant legislation, identification features and survey techniques.

Topics include:

- **Winter Trees**
- **Bumblebees**
- **Bird Survey Techniques**
- **Introduction to Invertebrates (2 day course)**
- **Otter Ecology and Surveying**
- **Hedgerow Surveying**



More information on dates and venues will follow so keep an eye on our website [www.tverc.org](http://www.tverc.org) and our twitter feed [@tverc1](https://twitter.com/tverc1)

## Wychwood roadside verge and community green project funding

**A** new Wychwood Project initiative to bring more colour and beauty to roadside verges and community green spaces in West Oxfordshire has secured funding from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2) and Cotswold Sustainable Development Fund.

Over the years a number of road verges in the Wychwood area have been identified as having ecological interest for their range of plant species characteristic of limestone grassland, or for one or more specific plant species. These verges have been marked with Nature Reserve posts, given specific management prescriptions and are periodically surveyed. This project will seek to enhance the flora diversity of nine Road Verge Nature Reserves and green spaces. Supported by the Wychwood Project Flora Group, Oxfordshire County Council's Environment & Strategy Officer, the Save Our Magnificent Meadows project and enthusiastic volunteers including a retired ecologist, the initiative will gather seed from the most flora rich road verge nature reserves in the area, for example 'Ranger's Lawn' dominated by limestone loving species including Salad burnet, Milkwort, Bee orchids, Bellflower, and Green hellebore. Using a suction vacuum and hand picking, gathered seeds will then be stored and dried until ready for sowing on scarified land in September.

Sharon Williams, Wychwood Project Director says "We are excited to be able to move forward with this initiative thanks to funding from TOE2 and the Cotswold Sustainable Development Fund. We are looking forward to having lots of volunteer helpers to collect seed, and hope that we can work with local communities, landowners and county, town and parish councils to ensure the newly seeded areas are managed and monitored into the future."

More information from Wychwood Project, Signal Court, Old Station Way, Eynsham, OX29 4TL Tel: 01865 815420/3 Email: [wychwood@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:wychwood@oxfordshire.gov.uk) [www.wychwoodproject.org](http://www.wychwoodproject.org)

## TVERC recorders' days – what you told us

**M**any of you will have attended recorders' days in Berkshire and Oxfordshire over the last few years. TVERC is actively involved in putting these events together, often with other partners. The Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire, BBOWT, Berkshire Local Nature Partnership, Shotover Wildlife and Wild

Oxfordshire have all contributed ideas, energy and contacts to help us put on events. Judy Webb has also been an invaluable and enthusiastic contributor, often delivering talks and workshops on the day as well.

We generally get good feedback from the events, and hope this means we are doing things about right, but we wanted to ask you – the region's recorders – what you thought.

We had 24 responses to our online survey earlier this year, mostly from people based in Oxfordshire, although we had three from Berkshire and one from just over the boundary in Surrey. Many thanks to those who joined in the survey. Your ideas and opinions are all very helpful.

TVERC covers a large area and it is apparent that finding venues to suit everybody can be a challenge. Times people are willing to spend travelling vary from 30 to 90 minutes. Those attending our events are split fairly evenly between those preferring to travel by car (or other private means) and those taking public transport. We therefore need to make provision for both whenever possible. Add to the mix venue costs and finding somewhere that is interesting in itself, and the search will always be on for great venues that as many

people as possible can get to. Our events are open to everybody, whether they are based in Berkshire or Oxfordshire.

The last few years have seen a recorders' day held in spring and another in the autumn. The responses did not give enough information for us to draw firm conclusions, but spring and autumn/winter seem to be

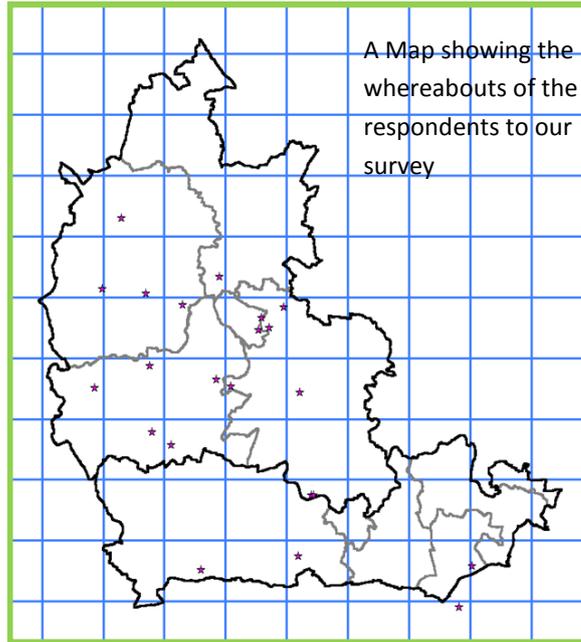
your favoured options.

There seems to be a strong preference for the events to be held on Saturdays and for them to last a full day.

The mix of talks and other activities is something we work hard on. We try to provide for a range of biological interests, taking different angles on topics and including some practical activities as well as talks. Your feedback tells us that you want to hear about themes

that are relevant to you, with presentations from local groups and from new speakers you have not heard from before. We were also asked to include topics relating to birds, mammals and butterflies, identification and habitat management. Our current mix of talks and practical workshops seems the most popular, with discussions/seminars, panel discussion and outdoor activities scoring less favourably.

The online survey closed in mid-May and we have looked through the results and done some (admittedly basic!) analysis of results. The number of responses was too small to draw firm conclusions but has given us some lines to follow. Planning has started for our next conference later this year and we hope your feedback will continue to help us provide good quality events for you all.



A Map showing the whereabouts of the respondents to our survey

*“Your feedback tells us that you want to hear about themes that are relevant to you, with presentations from local groups and from new speakers you have not heard from before”*

Caroline Coleman—Volunteer Coordinator

**M**oor Green Lakes are looking for one or more Butterfly enthusiasts to take on the responsibility of Butterfly Recorder on the site in Finchampstead, Berkshire, where the existing recorder wishes to stand down. Records have been kept since 2000, during which time 31 species have been seen. Transects, which take about an hour, are walked weekly through the season from April to September, and results collated and passed on. If anyone would like to know more, and is interested in taking over or sharing in this important work please email John Westmacott on [westmarj@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:westmarj@tiscali.co.uk).



## BHS Amphibian Ladders

For many years now, it is well known that amphibians (toads, frogs and newts) fall in to roadside gullypots, where they become trapped with no chance of escape. Once trapped, they are doomed from drowning, starvation and exhaustion. There has been no cost-effective solution to mitigate this problem, until now.

The British Herpetological Society has built upon work in the Netherlands and UK, and engineered a unique solution. We offer retrofit *BHS Amphibian Ladders*, which can be installed in gullypots easily and at low cost, without the need for any modifications to the gullypots themselves, and with no adverse effect on drainage. In our experience, there is unlikely to be any objection from local authorities.

Studies and trials carried out in Angus, Scotland, have shown that *BHS Amphibian Ladders* are a practical and simple solution, and may save more than 90% of amphibians and other small animals that inadvertently fall into them. Local amphibian populations can suffer unsustainable losses of breeding adults and young through gullypot deaths, which can impact on the future viability of the population, leading to sharp declines, and even local extinction.

Gullypot deaths are a particular concern where great

crested newts are affected by gullypot mortality, as there are legal ramifications if such deaths are avoidable. Also, common toad populations are considered to be declining throughout the UK, and road mortality is already a known contributing factor.

Our innovative *BHS Amphibian Ladders* cost only £15 each (incl. P&P), and come with fitting instructions, guidelines for monitoring, and advice for gullypot maintenance. Once installed, this product will not only provide a means of escape for amphibians, but also assist local authorities to meet required biodiversity regulatory obligations.

We have attached our *BHS Amphibian Ladder* flyer, and a supporting research article, recently published in the British Herpetological Society's *Herpetological Bulletin*. Please contact our Secretary, Trevor Rose, on 07778 830192 or [secretary@thebhs.org](mailto:secretary@thebhs.org) for further information and details regarding orders.

**BHS** The British Herpetological Society

Roadside gully pots entrap many thousands of amphibians every year across the UK.  
*Finally the solution is here!*  
**The BHS Amphibian Gully Pot Ladder**

- Provides frogs, toads and newts with a means to escape these death traps.
- Easy installation\* - self standing ladder, no fixings or fastenings required!
- Shown in tests to aid up to 90% of trapped amphibians.
- Robust materials provide a minimum 10 year product life.
- Fully detailed installation manual available free!

\*Use and installation of this product requires local authority approval.

**£15 each** Free P&P To place your order now, visit [www.thebhs.org/shop](http://www.thebhs.org/shop) or call 07778 830192 for further details

Reference: McInroy, C. & Rose, T.A. (2015) Trialling amphibian ladders within roadside gullypots in Angus, Scotland: 2014 impact study. Herpetological Bulletin 132, pp15-19.

All proceeds from sales fund UK herp conservation.

The British Herpetological Society

c/o Secretary, Trevor Rose

07778 830192, [secretary@thebhs.org](mailto:secretary@thebhs.org)

[www.thebhs.org](http://www.thebhs.org)

## Free workshops from Freshwater Habitats Trust



Free training workshops with experts in their field are being offered by Freshwater Habitats Trust through Heritage Lottery Funding. Nick Stewart will be leading the Stonewort workshop on 28th July and our very own Dr Judy Webb is leading the Wetland plant workshop on 2nd August. For more info see our website

<http://www.tverc.org/cms/content/free-stonewort-training-workshop-28th-july>



Follow us on twitter **@TVERC1** to keep up to date with what TVERC are up to.



Send us pictures of your finds to help with identification.

## Save the Date!

TVERC's Autumn Recorders' Day will be held in Reading on **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October**. As usual, there will be talks, practical sessions, time for conversation and news from other groups across Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

Hold the date! Keep an eye on our website and twitter feed, more details will be available nearer the time.



**TVERC**

c/o Oxfordshire County Council  
Signal Court  
Old Station Way  
Eynsham  
Oxon OX29 4TL  
01865 815 451  
[tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

- Director:** Camilla Burrow
- Projects Manager:** Dr Dan Carpenter
- Volunteer Coordinator:** Caroline Coleman
- Data Services Officers:** Ellen Lee and Graham Hawker
- Berkshire Biodiversity Officer:** Katherine Holmes
- Oxfordshire Biodiversity Officer:** Julie Kerans
- Biodiversity Data Assistants:** Rachael Clemson and Yolanda Vazquez
- Administration Officer:** Hannah Boylan

**If you wish to email any member of staff please use [firstname.surname@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:firstname.surname@oxfordshire.gov.uk).**

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.