

January 2018



Thames Valley

Environmental Records Centre



Sharing environmental information in Berkshire and Oxfordshire

Welcome to the Winter Newsletter

This edition of our biannual newsletter is all about wildlife recording (as it should be you might well say!). And it is of course essential that we continue to collect and receive up to date information about the wildlife of Berkshire and Oxfordshire. So thank you to everyone who has submitted records to us so far, and do please send more in if you're still getting round to sorting out your survey results from the summer. We've now got over 2 million species records in our database, a great achievement we should all be proud of.

But there's no point in us just storing the information in our database where no-one can use it. We've been working particularly hard on new ways to transform the data you send us into easily-understandable information. This will be particularly important over the coming years as there are vast amounts of housing and transport developments planned for Oxfordshire and Berkshire. We need to ensure that sensible decisions are made which protect and enhance our natural environment and well-presented information can help persuade decision-makers that our environment is essential. So our next newsletter will be focussed on what we've been doing with the invaluable records which you share with us.

In the meantime, read on, to find out about our Spring Conference, grants available for recording, and the benefits of volunteering whether in the office or out in the field surveying. I look forward to seeing you all at the Spring Conference.

Camilla Burrow, Director



Chilswell Valley Local Wildlife Site calcareous grassland.

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Mock up of winning swift tower design

The Oxford Swift City project, is a two-year collaborative initiative led by the RSPB.

This project launched in May 2017 and aims to improve the outlook for swifts in Oxford and was made possible by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Highlights to date include a public competition to design a [swift nest box tower](#), won by Jonathan Wheeler.

Think ahead to blue summer skies and returning swifts and look at the 'Oxford Swift City Foraging Swifts' recording page created by TVERC: <http://sightings.tverc.org/>

A brief list of instructions and screenshots is [provided here](#).

TVERC Recorders' Conferences News

Spring 2018 Recorders' Conference

Our next conference will be on **Saturday 10th March** at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Wallingford.

The theme is: **the importance of good biological data, and how it is used to inform decision-making, research and conservation work.**

There will be opportunities to hear presentations on a variety of topics including how wildlife records are used in the planning process, and research into insect population trends. There will also be a choice of afternoon workshops to improve or share your recording skills such as developing multi-access keys (with staff from the Field Studies Council's Biolinks Project), and using GPS devices and grid references, plus species identification training.

We will have speed updates and displays from a variety of organisations and groups and opportunities for informal networking and finding out what others are doing across the counties of Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

See our website for more conference details and how to book your place:

<http://www.tverc.org/cms/spring-conf-2018>

BOOKING IS NOW OPEN!



Anna Broszkiewicz giving an update on the RSPB Upper Thames Breeding Waders project, October 2017. Photo credit: Mark Kail



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Spring 2018 Recorders' Conference
Wildlife data for decision-making and conservation

Saturday 10th March 2018
10am - 4pm
Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Wallingford

To book a place, go to: <http://www.tverc.org/cms/spring-conf-2018>

 @tverc1
#TVERCconf

Autumn Recorders conference October 2017

To whet your appetite for our forthcoming 2018 Spring Recorders' Conference here is a reminder of some of the highlights from our Autumn conference held at Oracle, Thames Parkway, in Reading on 7th October 2017, with the theme of 'Our Common Cause: Clubbing together for conservation gains':



Martin Moore of the Loddon Fisheries and Conservation Consultative spoke passionately about his extensive experience of co-operation between partners and individuals at a river catchment level, and Jeremy Biggs of the Freshwater Habitats Trust updated us on the fast-moving world of Great Crested Newts monitoring, conservation and the benefits of partnership working.

There were workshops on earthworm identification (Anthony Roach), Pantheon invertebrate habitat analysis (Martin Harvey), brainstorming ideas towards pooling our time and recording efforts (Anna Broszkiewicz) and on studying Oxfordshire's dinosaur footprints (Owen Green). A great mix, another wonderful conference and many thanks again to all who joined us and contributed (including Mark Kail for photography).



Jeremy Biggs presenting.



Oxford Geology Trust display.



Owen Green introducing us to dinosaur footprint analysis.

All photos this page by Mark Kail



Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association 10th Anniversary

In October, the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association (WDVTA) celebrated 10 years of veteran tree recording with the launch of their 10th anniversary report. The launch event was an inspiring evening with over 100 attendees. Jill Butler from the Woodland Trust spoke of how WDVTA is

“a brilliant example of how local groups can make a real impact for projects like the ancient tree inventory”.

The report celebrates a very busy and productive first decade surveying, recording and photographing veteran trees in Wokingham Borough. There are now over 7,400 trees in their database and on their tree map. This is from the efforts of lots of volunteers and partners working together.

WDVTA works to ensure that Wokingham's veteran and other significant trees are properly identified, protected and managed - and to increase public awareness of their beauty and contribution to the town's heritage and amenity. Many WDVTA members are also tree wardens for their local community.

Their webpage www.wdvta.org.uk has a wealth of information on veteran trees and an online version of the report. Printed copies of the report (price £3) can be ordered by phoning 0118 978 4013 and are also available from Wokingham Library or the Wokingham Information Centre in the old Town Hall.



The Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association team and display at the TVERC Autumn 2017 Recorders' Conference.

FUNDING: TVERC Recorders' Grant

We've reinstated our [TVERC Recorders' Grant Scheme](#) supporting projects improving the quality, quantity and/or coverage of voluntary species recording in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. The fund is administered by the **Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2)**. Applications may be standalone grants to support better recording or they may be linked to a larger biodiversity application to TOE2 (www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk).

How might our TVERC Recorders' Grant support you? Submit your applications now.

As examples, in 2016/17 we funded the following projects:

Moth Trapping in Oxon, Butterfly Conservation £750

To loan mains operated skinner traps to individuals who usually would not have access to them, plus one pair of protective UV glasses and ID book, for an initial term of a month with a further five months' loan available to interested individuals.

GPS equipment, River Thame Conservation Trust £400

Support to a grassroots environmental organisation working towards a river catchment with healthy fresh waters and wildlife, more resilient biodiversity for the future that is valued and enjoyed by local people. Purchase of a handheld GPS with detailed OS mapping to improve accuracy and efficiency of a range of survey and monitoring initiatives being carried out by trained volunteers and their own staff in the Lower Thame in the next three years.



Hoverfly *Epistrophe luniger* (female)



Wayfarer Tree *Viburnum lantana*

High Park biodiversity survey £750

This section of Blenheim Park, Oxfordshire, is a primary site in England (and all of Europe) for large ancient oak trees, but the biodiversity is little studied. This survey project will be heavily dependent on volunteer recorders with specialist knowledge and experience in recording for their organisms of interest. Funding covers field work coordination in close consultation with the Blenheim Estate, potential paid specialist identification work and volunteer expense reimbursement especially where accumulating costs may become a disincentive to continue till the survey is completed.



Brimstone Butterfly *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Deer Park Wood, Witney, Nature Day Event with recording kit loaned by TVERC.

In April 2017 the Witney Woodland Volunteers (with the Earth Trust) organised a [Nature Day Event](#) at this 11 acre community woodland that they manage. The weekend event engaged local residents and children in observing and recording the range of wildlife inhabiting the woodland, also providing valuable wildlife data submitted to TVERC. The Volunteers had great support from various local naturalists and wildlife groups including members of the West Oxfordshire Field Club, the wildlife photographer Brian Walker and with recording equipment loaned by TVERC.

On the Friday evening Dr Amanda Lloyd from the Oxon Mammal Group led a bat walk for around 50 participants, mainly from the local community. Due to the prevailing cool conditions bat activity was limited, however we had one detection of a Common Pipistrelle. Martin Townsend and Julian Howe from the County Moth Recorders set up three traps and during the night caught 14 different species of moth.

In preparation for the main Saturday event 15 small mammal traps were set along with 6 board traps. These caught 3 wood mice which were collected and temporarily held captive by Earth Trust staff for the benefit of the visitors. An early morning chorus walk recorded 16 different species of birds. Brian Walker identified 19 species of insects through his photography both on the day and on previous visits. We had approximately 70 visitors for the main event who provided many favourable comments as a result of their experience.

By Mark Kail.



Lucy Tomkinson, Earth Trust, with stall

See our [TVERC website](#) for information on equipment and books available for loan to local recorders.

The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2)

Oxfordshire's independent environmental funder

Main grant scheme: TOE2 welcomes applications for funding; most grants are up to £5,000. Projects are invited to apply that:

- Promote and improve biodiversity
- Support Oxfordshire's Low Carbon Agenda through encouraging energy efficiency and the sustainable use of renewable resources in community facilities
- Improve access to green spaces and the countryside

TOE2 also has **Third Party Funding** available.

If you are applying for funding from an Environmental Body in Oxfordshire and require up to about £5,000 as the third party funding contribution, TOE2 would be pleased to hear from you.

Third party funding can be provided for projects which:

- Are located in Oxfordshire
- Fall within 10 miles of a landfill site and are eligible for LCF funding
- Are seeking funds from an Environmental Body that distributes LCF funding in Oxfordshire; this could be WREN, Viridor Credits or Biffaward.
- Fall within at least one of TOE2's funding areas (biodiversity, access to green spaces and energy efficiency/renewables)

The next application **deadlines are 5th March, 4th June and 3rd September 2018.**

For further information: www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk @TOE2_Oxon Tel: 01865 407003 or email admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk

Examples of recently funded projects from the main TOE2 grant scheme include:

1. **Clanfield Angling Habitat Enhancement project** (funded by Grundon Waste Management Ltd)
Funding enabled the length of the riverbank to be fenced and cattle drinkers to be created, restricting the cattle's access to the bank preventing bank erosion and destruction of wildlife habitat. This would allow vegetation growth which would create a safe haven for water voles and smaller mammals, increase cover for fish and also help reduce bank erosion. A fish refuge and gravel spawning beds in a stream off the main river, at the bottom end of the fishery, have also been created.



2. **Blewbury Community Orchard** (funded by S106 monies)
Sustainable Blewbury has created a community orchard in the village.
 - 47 trees have been planted with full protection against deer and rabbit.
 - The planting process was a true community effort with a large number of volunteers involved.
 - A party will be held in the Spring, on the site, to which all villagers will be invited
 - A management plan is being prepared to ensure the site is effectively maintained.
 - Project has benefitted from lots of volunteer enthusiasm and support.



3. **Hinksey Heights Nature Trail**, Oxford Academy (funded by Grundon Waste Management Ltd)
This project consisted of three main parts:
 - Interpretative Habitat Trail - with more family friendly information boards. These were erected by pupils from the visiting schools and also incorporate the students' artwork. Signs were used to waymark the trail so users can easily find the different routes.
 - The students repaired and constructed boardwalk sections of path which had deteriorated during the prolonged wet weather of recent years.
 - Students also constructed a fence alongside the field, which will help prevent sheep getting onto the trail and damaging it.



Volunteering with TVERC: Volunteers are an intrinsic part of everything TVERC does. From recording wildlife to data management to helping with events, TVERC volunteers play an important role.

- ◆ Our volunteers contributed 229 days of their time to TVERC in 2016-17— and that doesn't include the many days spent by voluntary recorders out in the field, back at home identifying species and entering their data before allowing TVERC to use their records to inform decision-making across our area.
- ◆ During the year 16 volunteers came and helped out in the office. We also hosted seven students from Sparsholt College, the University of Oxford and University of Reading. Several of them got involved in short projects to help us test out ideas and pull together information. Volunteers also helped with field surveys at seven Local Wildlife Sites.
- ◆ The gains to TVERC are enormous. We couldn't do nearly as much without the support we get from our volunteers and recorders, so we send out a big thank you to every one of you. But there are many benefits for volunteers too. By providing us with a helping hand you can stretch your mind to do something different or new; and carrying out field surveys might stretch your body too. You get to meet other people either in our office in Oxford, at events or on one of our group field days. Some people volunteer with us to gain important employment skills and advance their CV; many of our volunteers have gone on to new jobs. And, of course, we hope that volunteers and recorders will get a sense of fulfilment from providing an important role for us whatever it is they do.
- ◆ To find out more about volunteering opportunities with TVERC [please see our website](#) or contact us.

Lauren Moore is doing a Masters in Biodiversity, Conservation and Management at Oxford University and volunteered with us over the 2017 Christmas break: *"It was fantastic to be able to make a real contribution to the work of TVERC, and to be able to do so independently. At the same time, the level of support given was fantastic and all staff members/other volunteers have always been happy to help. Another brilliant aspect has been the opportunity to learn so much about biodiversity, the roles within record centres and their external partnerships."*



Photos: Satan's Bolete *Rubroboletus satanas* fungus, found by Dr Judy Webb near Headington, 2017: intact and cut to show staining.

Here is the reason given by one of our key volunteers, Dr Judy Webb, for why she volunteers for TVERC:

"I'm passionate about the conservation of biodiversity, thus of saving species. The first step in being able to save a species is being able to put a dot on a map. If we don't know where they are, sites cannot be given conservation status to protect them. Invertebrates are vastly under recorded due to lack of expertise in identification. Therefore I try to survey two sites a year for TVERC in sites likely to be good for the invertebrates I can manage to identify (mostly flies). Alongside the invertebrates I also identify all the vascular plants, ferns, fungi, mosses and liverworts I can manage. Yes, I'm a complete obsessive, but my reward in volunteering for TVERC is seeing important sites recognised for their worth in preserving species and habitats. I know I am making a difference."

We really enjoyed putting on our 2017 **TVERC Training Programme**.

See our website [here](#) for full details in case you missed out.

We had an excellent finale to our training session season on 4th November: **Otter ecology and surveying, with Ellen Lee**, at Otmoor RSPB reserve, near Beckley, Oxfordshire. Always a very popular course and with great feedback.

Thanks to everyone who participated in the 2017 series whether as tutors, venue providers or course participants.

We look forward to receiving records from those of you with your new identification skills! Our top tip is just to start tentatively even if you are not fully confident —and then ask us, or other recorders, if you need more support with the techniques, identification tips or recording processes that we have trained you in.

Look out for details of our forthcoming 2018 training workshops and also for repeats of ad hoc events such as our **Field Skills for Recorders Days** such as held at Oxford University's Wytham Woods last July.

Contact us if you would like to hear about future training events and are not signed up already for alerts: tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk



Otter ecology and surveying, Otmoor.

Photos: Katherine Lister



Hedgerow survey training, Chimney Meadows. Photos: Kate Prudden

Introducing two new TVERC team members!

Katherine Lister joined TVERC as **Biodiversity Data Assistant** in August 2017. This is Katherine's first formal job, which she started as she was completing a Masters degree in Biodiversity and Conservation. As a student, Katherine volunteered in the office of West Yorkshire Ecology Service, which gave her an insight into the importance of local records centres. Katherine is a trainee bird ringer with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), and has also been involved in various studies of bird behaviour and cognition. Originally from Yorkshire, Katherine took part in biodiversity monitoring with the Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership as well as practical conservation work with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust before moving down south. Katherine has really enjoyed her first months with TVERC and is looking forward to working with lots more data in 2018 and beyond!



A second addition to our team is our new **Biological Records Co-ordinator, Zoe Caals**. Zoe has worked for a number of environmental organisations including the New Forest National Park Authority, the National Trust (on Exmoor) and Trees for Life in the Scottish Highlands. She has carried out fieldwork on wading birds in New Zealand and has also volunteered on several conservation projects around the UK and New Zealand, often in very remote locations. For the last few years she has worked as a countryside ranger, however she also has many years' experience of working in data analysis and GIS. Particular interests include birds, trees, butterflies and marine life although she is keen to learn more about all wildlife. She is very pleased to be joining the TVERC team and supporting the local wildlife recording community.

Local Wildlife Site Surveys 2017

TVERC plays a key role in the survey, selection and maintenance of information on Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. These were previously known as Wildlife Heritage Sites in Berkshire and County Wildlife Sites in Oxfordshire. Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are varied but key areas in Oxfordshire and Berkshire which include important and rare habitats and species, assessed carefully against detailed criteria. The 42,000 LWS in England (covering 5% of land) are essential in conserving wildlife in the UK and halting the loss of biodiversity.

LWS create a better connected landscape of wildlife buffers, corridors and stepping stones so that the countryside is more resilient to the pressures of modern living and climate change. LWS are protected from harmful development through the planning system but as most sites are in private ownership, their long-term survival depends upon the interest and goodwill of their land managers and owners.

For more information please see our [dedicated website page](#) about Local Wildlife Sites and TVERC's work surveying and mapping these see this TVERC website page. From here you can also download leaflets for more information on the Local Wildlife Sites Project in each of Berkshire and (with BBOWT) in Oxfordshire.

2017 survey highlights from Oxfordshire, by Julie Kerans, Oxon Biodiversity Officer:

This year TVERC carried out surveys of 42 existing and proposed Local Wildlife Sites (pLWS) in Oxfordshire. Thanks to the help of our volunteers, specialist species group surveys were completed on several sites for birds, invertebrates and rare plants. We're progressing with the species data entry, with over 4800 records added so far.

Areas surveyed include parts of **Chimney Meadows**, a Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) reserve where additional arable reversion fields (not currently included in the SSSI or existing LWS section) are now also being considered for inclusion as an extension to the existing Local Wildlife Site. These areas include species-rich grassland with many of the species typically associated with lowland meadow such as Black Knapweed, Oxeye Daisy, Meadow Vetchling, Bird's-foot-trefoil, Quaking Grass, Meadowsweet and Pepper Saxifrage.

In July we joined several members of the **Besselsleigh Common Wood Group** on a site visit where a variety of woodland plants were recorded including Wood Anemone, Hairy Brome, Wood Sedge, Bluebell, Wood Sorrel and Wood Millet.



Chimney Meadows, BBOWT



Early Purple Orchid
Orchis mascula

Interesting species recorded elsewhere included Bird's-foot at **Lincoln Lane Fields**, Wild Liquorice at **Chilswell Valley** and Early Purple Orchid at **Stoke Wood**. Photos by Julie.



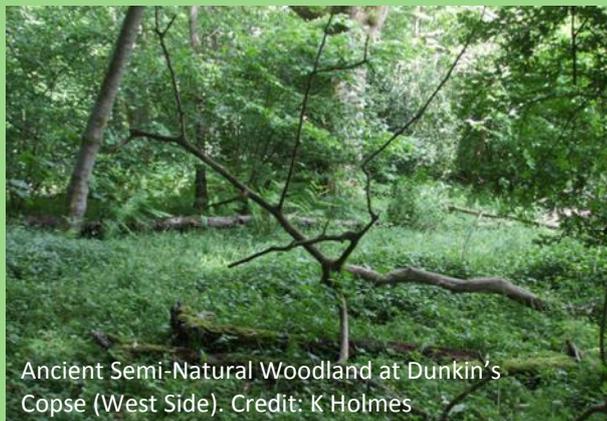
Bird's-Foot, Lincoln Lane Fields



Wild Liquorice, Chilswell Valley



Besselsleigh Common Wood



Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland at Dunkin's Copse (West Side). Credit: K Holmes

2017 survey highlights from Berkshire, by Yolanda Vazquez, Biodiversity Projects Officer:

In 2017 a total of 19 existing and proposed Local Wildlife Sites were surveyed in Berkshire. These surveys were carried out by experienced surveyors Katherine Holmes and Helen Miller. A variety of habitats were surveyed across these Berkshire sites, including woodland, heathland, fen, grassland, wetlands and ponds.

Particularly interesting sites of the season included:

Dunkin's Copse (West Side) LWS – where along with several indicators of long established woodland such as moschatel, pignut, red currant, woodruff and three-veined sandwort; a single stand of Nationally Scarce Spiked Star of Bethlehem, *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* (see photo to the right) was found in this small remnant piece of Ancient Woodland in West Berkshire.

Fobney Island proposed LWS—This is a wonderful example of a successful wetland habitat restoration project. In just a few years this site has become a lovely mosaic of wetland habitats that includes: open water with marginal vegetation, swamps, grasslands, wet woodland, scrub and tall ruderal vegetation. This form of wildlife focused habitat creation and management has resulted in a provision of high valued habitats to both wildlife and people.



Credit: K Holmes

Fobney Island pLWS in 2011 ©Friends of Fobney Island Wetland Nature Reserve.



Fobney Island pLWS in 2017 ©Helen Miller.

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2,076,239 Number of species records in the TVERC database.



The **2 MILLIONTH RECORD** added was for a **DUNNOCK** recorded by **MARK LEECH**.

165,632 Number of records added to the TVERC database in 2017.

32% Proportion of records provided by **LOCAL RECORDERS**, either as individuals or as part of a recording group.

16,535 Number of species with records in the database.

MEADOW BROWN (*Maniola jurtina*) Species with the most records in the database: **23,410**.



419,700 Records of protected & notable species (**20%**).

49% Proportion of protected & notable records provided by **LOCAL RECORDERS**.



9,290 Records for species most frequently considered in planning.

43% Planning species records provided by **ECOLOGICAL CONSULTANTS**.

TVERC now holds over 2 million records!

Please submit your records to TVERC via our Sightings website. The more, quality, data that we have, the better we are able to help you and to help protect our local wildlife. Thank you! <http://sightings.tverc.org>



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Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) is the environmental records centre for Berkshire and Oxfordshire. TVERC is a not-for-profit partnership organisation between all twelve local authorities across Berkshire and Oxfordshire, the Environment Agency, and the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust.

We collect, analyse and share environmental data to help people make sound decisions about how to develop and manage land sustainably and where to direct wildlife conservation work.