



West Berkshire  
Countryside Society

# UPSTREAM

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Kestrel © John Dellow

## Not just barn owls...

When we climb a ladder, and open the hatch of a barn owl box, it is essential to go carefully – we never know what we will find. Anyone doing this must have undergone appropriate training and hold a licence issued by the British Trust for Ornithology. The design of our nest boxes has been refined over the years with barn owls in mind, but several other species see the “des res” that we have provided and decide that is just what they are looking for.

You might suspect that other owl species would like to move in. Fortunately, the much more aggressive Tawny owls very rarely use our boxes, preferring the middle of a wood rather than the periphery. The little owl, is occasionally found in our barn owl boxes. They are welcome - the species is in decline, partly due to a shortage of nest sites. We also monitor about 12 smaller boxes designed for little owls.

Kestrels also frequently use barn owl boxes. The chicks are extremely aggressive and can be a real challenge to ring. They have incredibly sharp talons so that it is almost inevitable that “blood is spilled” when birds are ringed. Nevertheless, we like to see the species in our boxes. A building at Haw Farm was recently redeveloped into office accommodation and the design

## Inside this issue



» p4



» p8



» p6

4 Meet Ed Cooper

6 WBCS at Seven Barrows

8 Training for Volunteers

**Plus lots more...**

included a slit in the roof gable leading into space for barn owls to breed. Last year, the accommodation was taken over by kestrels and five healthy chicks fledged. It was great to see the newly fledged birds flying around the buildings.

Jackdaws frequently use our boxes. They are less welcome, taking over a box and filling it with twigs in an amazingly short time. If a barn owl is using the box it is usually forced out although the species have occasionally been known to co-exist.

Stock doves frequently use barn owl boxes. They are an amber list species which means they are of moderate conservation concern but in West Berkshire they are quite common. They make a very meagre nest with just a few small twigs. *Continued on page 4 >*

West Berkshire Countryside Society

*Caring for our Countryside – Join Us and Help Make a Difference.*

# West Berkshire Countryside Society

The aim of the West Berkshire Countryside Society is to promote the understanding, appreciation and conservation of the West Berkshire countryside... furthering these objectives through practical conservation work and guided walks and talks from local experts. It was formed in 2012 by amalgamating the Friends of the Pang, Kennet & Lambourn Valleys; the Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group; the Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers & the Barn Owl Group.

Upstream is our quarterly publication designed to highlight conservation matters in West Berkshire and beyond and to publicise the activities of the Society.

<b>Chair:</b>	<b>Ed Cooper</b>
<b>Vice Chair, Webmaster &amp; Enquiries:</b>	<b>Tony McDonald</b>
<b>Membership Secretary:</b>	<b>Jathan Rayner (wbcsmembership@gmail.com)</b>
<b>Upstream Editor:</b>	<b>John Salmon (upstreameditor2017@btinternet.com) <span style="color: red;">NEW!</span></b>
<b>Hon President:</b>	<b>Dick Greenaway MBE RD</b>

Initial contact for all above and for the Barn Owl Group, Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group and West Berks Conservation Volunteers should, unless otherwise stated, be made via [enquiries@westberkscountryside.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@westberkscountryside.org.uk)

## Volunteers' Task Diary

For outdoor events please wear suitable footwear and clothing. Most practical tasks start at 10am and usually finish around 3pm, unless otherwise stated, so bring a packed lunch. However, we are more than happy to accept any time you can spare! All tools are provided. A map of each task location can be found on the website diary page by clicking on the grid reference shown for that task.

Date/ Time	Venue	Details
<b>October 2017</b>		
<b>Tue-03-Oct</b> 10:00	Winterbourne Woods. SU451 719	Coppicing and other woodland management tasks. Park in the entrance to the wood.
<b>Tue-10-Oct</b> 10:00	The Malt House, West Woodhay. SU395 637	Coppicing hazel stools to encourage regeneration. If you wish to enjoy the lunch provided for us at The Malt House, please confirm your attendance to <a href="mailto:tonyjmcDonald@btinternet.com">tonyjmcDonald@btinternet.com</a> by the end of 5th October. If you miss the deadline please bring your own lunch.
<b>Sat-14-Oct</b> 10:30-13:00	Bucklebury Common, heathland management.	Join the Bucklebury Heathland Group to help maintain this important heathland habitat. Meet at Angels Corner. SU550 688
<b>Tue-17-Oct</b> 10:00	Cleeve Water Meadow, Garden Cottage, Streatley. SU593 812	Ongoing maintenance of this important Thames side water meadow. Park in the recreation ground car park at the top of Cleeve Court Road.
<b>Tue-24-Oct</b> 10:00	Bucklebury Common Heathland management.	Cutting silver birch and Scots pine saplings. Hopefully a bonfire. Parking at Angels Corner. SU550 688
<b>Tue-31-Oct</b> 10:00	Decoy Heath BBOWT site near Aldermaston. SU613 634	Heathland habitat maintenance. Reserve car park opposite Allport factory
<b>November 2017</b>		
<b>Tue-07-Nov</b> 10:00	Kent's Down Farm, Cox's Lane, Midgham. SU547 676	Variety of tasks on this wildlife site. Parking in the driveway of Kent's Down farm. Space is limited so do please car share if possible.
<b>Sun-12-Nov</b> 10:30-13:00	Bucklebury Common, heathland management.	Join the Bucklebury Heathland Group to help maintain this important heathland habitat. Meet at Angels Corner. SU550 688
<b>Tue-14-Nov</b> 10:00	Furze Hill, Hermitage. SU512 740	Woodland and butterfly habitat management on this parish wildlife site. Parking at new village hall – through double gates off Pinewood Crescent.
<b>Tue-21-Nov</b> 10:00	Boxford Water Meadow Site #1 Westbrook, Boxford. SU426 717	Scrub and vegetation clearance on this SSSI. Parking in access track off Westbrook.
<b>Tue-28-Nov</b> 10:00	Bucklebury Common Heathland management.	Cutting silver birch and Scots pine saplings. Hopefully a bonfire. Parking at Angels Corner. SU550 688
<b>December 2017</b>		
<b>Tue-05-Dec</b> 10:00	Grove Pit Common, Leckhampstead. SU440 777	Coppicing, felling and scrub clearance on this parish wildlife site. Access the common via the track which leaves the B4494 west at Cotswold Farm. Please leave your vehicles at the bottom of the track and walk up to the common. Vehicles carrying tools and refreshments please drive directly to the task site.
<b>Tue-09-Dec</b> 10:30-13:00	Bucklebury Common, heathland management.	Join the Bucklebury Heathland Group to help maintain this important heathland habitat. Meet at Angels Corner. SU550 688
<b>Tue-12-Dec</b> 10:00	Boxford Water Meadow Site #2 Westbrook, Boxford.	Scrub and vegetation clearance on this SSSI. Parking in access track off Westbrook.
<b>Tue-19-Dec</b>	No Task – day off	
<b>Wed-27-Dec</b> 10:00	Padworth Common.	Joint task with CROW with bonfire and baked potatoes. Park on the common at SU619 647.
<b>January 2018</b>		
<b>Tue-02-Jan</b> 10:00	Holt Lodge Farm, Kintbury. SU387 648	Coppicing and under storey thinning. Meet at Holt Lodge Farm House near Kintbury.
<b>Tue-09-Jan</b> 10:00	Grove Pit Common, Leckhampstead. SU440 777	Please see comments for 5 Dec 2017 task.



# Conservation Volunteers Round Up

Summer is when West Berkshire Countryside Society's volunteers devote time to combating unwanted species. This year we've been cheered by evidence that on several sites we're winning.

On a second day on the outer slopes of **Grimsbury Castle near Hermitage**, we continued clearing invasive rhododendrons – not small, colourful bushes but large fast-growing trees, some up to thirty feet high, which easily root and choke other vegetation. Over the past few years we have cleared a section of some 200 by 150 metres, enabling a more bio-diverse habitat. In 2017, for the first time, we saw birds and new vegetation enjoying the improved environment

Our yearly efforts seem to have all but eradicated Himalayan Balsam at **King's Copse**, a Site of Special Scientific Interest near **Bradfield South End**. This summer we returned twice to cut down and pull up bracken and bramble – and to clear vegetation along the base of a recently laid hedge.

Likewise in **Sulham Meadows**, regular visits have removed much ragwort from one field and now we are extending our efforts beyond it. This

time digging out or pulling up some 2,000 plants and stacking them for removal by Home Farm.

In Spring 2014 we created a **woodland classroom at Yattendon** on a site provided by Lord Robert Iliffe and Yattendon Estate. It has proved popular with Yattendon Primary School and others. After three years, it needed a make-over, and a small team cleared the site of brash, cut back invasive undergrowth and repaired the dead hedge to make the classroom fit and ready again. We made our annual trip to glades on **Ashampstead Common** to rake up grass cut by Yattendon Estate, and cleared a mediaeval pillow mound – an artificial warren used to breed rabbits. Each year wild flowers in the glades spread further along what was, twenty years ago, hammered mud.

On a rare hot day we cleared bracken at **Winterbourne Wood**, extending the area previously worked to expose more primroses and encourage further butterflies next spring. A large oak branch that had dropped on the south side was tidied up by our chainsaw gang, providing a considerable amount of firewood for us to take away.

We worked with rangers from the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust at **Snelmore Common Country Park**, repairing fencing and clearing vegetation. Rotten posts were removed and replaced, and wire fencing and strainers reinstated.

At **Cleeve Court, Streatley**, we again assaulted nettles in the area of the rare Loddon Lillies; also clearing brash and wood.

We twice visited the **Organic Research Centre, Hamstead Marshall**, initially clearing scrub and cutting back bramble and blackthorn in the flower meadow and along footpaths. Steps we had built previously on one path were cleared of grass and weeds. On the second visit we removed weeds from the base of two young hedges and spread woodchip mulch. The condition of young trees was checked and guards removed where necessary.

At **Holt Lodge Farm, Kintbury**, we cut bracken from a slope that is too steep for machinery to be used. Cattle then graze the field and trample the cuttings so that after a few weeks they have virtually disappeared.

Our main task at **Furze Hill, Hermitage**, was rotational cutting of the butterfly meadow. This is a demanding task and our brushcutters again proved their worth in dealing with bramble and other undergrowth. There was also manual cutting and raking of grass that became quite exhausting as the day warmed up – with butterflies then encouragingly appearing to endorse our efforts.

**Terry Crawford**



# Meet the New Chair of WBCS

## Hi WBCS Members

I grew up on the Isle of Purbeck and it was here that I first discovered my desire to work outdoors in the countryside. Having graduated with a Mech. Eng. degree I worked on a Swanage dairy and sheep farm for 4 years. After subsequently working in the construction and oil refinery industries, I changed course and retrained through a 1 year BTEC Dip in conservation management. A work placement with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group introduced me to John Bishop, Rushall Farm and Peter Trentham of the Pang Valley Conservation Trust.

I wrote the Pang Valley Countryside Project Feasibility Study and mobilised the project. The project started advising Pang Valley farmers; and founded both the Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers (now WBCV)

and the Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group. The first barn owl boxes were put up. I left to take up the role of Greenham and Crookham Commons Project Officer where I completed the restoration of Greenham Common in 2001.

Since then I have managed Government contracts supporting small businesses, working for the Greenham Business Park, and then co-founded VitalSix Ltd – working with Henley Business School and other partners to support high growth potential businesses through Leadership training, 1:1 coaching and raising finance.

In a voluntary capacity I have maintained my interest in outdoor activity through committee membership and fund raising for Newbury Canoe Club and West Berkshire Spokes (I cycle and canoe



regularly). I was also a trustee of West Berkshire Education Business Partnership for 10 years.

I hope that this strange mix of contract management, conservation, business consultancy and voluntary body knowledge will be beneficial to WBCS and it is rather special to be involved in something so worthwhile that I helped to start 24 years ago.

**Ed Cooper**

*Continued from page 1.*

They invariably lay two eggs and may have two or three broods through the season. Woodpigeons, a closely related species, rarely nest in our boxes.

Surprisingly, mandarin ducks are sometimes found in barn owl boxes. Over recent years, they have used several boxes in the Pang Valley and are even more common in an area south west from Reading. They build substantial nests often lined with sheep's wool and have large broods. 10 - 12 eggs are not uncommon. They are tolerated as an uncommon species but when they take over a box it is no longer available to barn owls.

Squirrels frequently take over barn owl boxes. They are definitely not welcome, being a pest to forestry and game rearing. Their nests are instantly recognised by being made up with twigs with fresh green leaves. While the leaves quickly dry out they remain in the box as an obvious identifier.

Wasps and hornets can be found in boxes. They do not normally sting



unless their nest is threatened. The sting can be extremely painful so when encountered the best strategy is usually to beat a hasty retreat. The nest often disintegrates over the winter months or it can be removed during winter maintenance visits. Wasps are a nuisance and are not welcome. On the other hand, hornets are magnificent fighting machines and they are becoming quite rare in the countryside, we are therefore pleased to see small numbers using our boxes.

So, willingly or unwillingly, we find that our boxes play host to a wide range of birds, mammals and insects.

**John Dellow**

## Society Publications

The Society has a number of excellent publications available for sale. Most notably, Dick Greenaway's latest book, 'What's in a Berkshire Wood? And how did it get there?' Full details can be found on WBCS website.

All publications can be obtained from [rg.greenaway@btinternet.com](mailto:rg.greenaway@btinternet.com)



# Mow Meadows

In traditional farming practices, pasture is the term applied to permanent grassland grazed by livestock, whereas a meadow is grassland cut for hay for winter feed.

Before the days of selective herbicides much more native flora than just grasses appeared in the sward. In pastures this was generally not too much of a problem as sheep will eat nearly everything; indeed, the meat from sheep put out in a field containing mint and herbs will have a significantly superior flavour to sheep raised on pure grass.

Horses are much fussier eaters and will leave unwanted weeds to grow up, develop and spread by seed. Pasture is often cut to keep those weeds such as thistle, dock and nettles suppressed. If this was not done brambles and tree saplings would take over the land within 4-5 years.



Chicory

© Charles Gilchrist



Corn Marigold

© Charles Gilchrist

A grassland meadow (left to grow for hay) has to be cut at a critical time before grass loses its nutrient value and turns brown; this has to coincide with a dry spell so that the cut strips (windrows) can be turned to allow the grass to dry before being taken to storage. If the timing, or the weather, is wrong for hay the grass can be made into silage.



Small Scabious

© Charles Gilchrist

With pressures on land, far less meadow acreage remains now than in the days of traditional farming practices, so it is vital that conservation efforts are concentrated on keeping grassland, not now under cultivation, mown in order to conserve a species-rich habitat.

It is vital for the preservation of wildflowers to remove the cut grass from the mown meadow. Firstly, the cuttings lain on top of the smaller plants will swamp them out. Secondly, leaving the grass to rot will enrich the soil and allow coarse grass, dock and Hogweed to flourish at the expense of more delicate plants. The removal of the cuttings also removes some of the minerals from the soil. Wildflowers are ideally suited and adapted to the low nutrient conditions that arise when hay has been taken off the field for many years.

Where nutrient levels are low and grass struggles to grow, native flora thrives, especially plants in the leguminous family with their nitrogen fixing bacteria such as vetches, trefoils, and clovers or alkaline and drought tolerant species such as ox-eye daisies, scabious and knapweeds. These and many other

plants are essential for providing food and nectar for diverse invertebrates and the birds and animals that, in turn, rely on them.

The butterfly meadow, beside the M4 at the northern end of Hermitage, was in danger of being overrun with brambles and willow saplings. Volunteers have cut them back to the fringes and now mow the meadow in order to maintain wildflowers in the sward for the benefit of butterflies, in particular the Grizzled Skipper, whose food plants are herbaceous members of the rose family such as strawberry and agrimony. Unlike a hay meadow this area is not cut in its entirety each year but 25% is selected on a chequerboard basis with the cuttings raked away. This method ensures that there is always plant life, at various stages of maturity, up to four years old, within easy reach of any invertebrate, bird or small mammal to use as food or habitat. Mowing in this way for conservation purposes, rather than for hay making, means that the greatest numbers of wildlife species as possible can benefit.

Charles Gilchrist

## Kindred Spirits...

Upstream regularly promotes the activities of other organisations who contribute to the conservation of the countryside – kindred spirits of WBCS. In 2017 we have featured the North Wessex Downs AONB, the River Lambourn Renewal Project & ARK – Action for the River Kennet.

If you are a member or supporter of such a 'kindred spirit' organisation & would like to feature in Upstream, please contact [upstreameditor2017@btinternet.com](mailto:upstreameditor2017@btinternet.com).

Please note: The Renewal Project website address is now: [www.therenewalproject.co.uk](http://www.therenewalproject.co.uk).

# Action for the River Kennet (ARK)

We are the Rivers Trust for the Kennet catchment & a registered charity. Chalk rivers are internationally rare, with only 200 in the world and over 160 of them are in England.

We run a range of educational outreach projects including Trout and Eels in Schools and our newly launched River School to connect children to their local chalk stream. We work with farmers to expand catchment sensitive farming and we have a fantastic team of volunteers who help us care for the Kennet catchment in numerous ways. We campaign to reduce abstraction and recently celebrated that abstraction has stopped on the Og and a new £30m pipeline has been built to reduce water stress on the Kennet in times of very low flow.

Many attend our weekly restoration and conservation tasks, carrying out award winning river restoration projects big and small. Projects are along the Kennet and its tributaries. In April/May this year we ran the Bearwater Community River Days project on the River Dun in Hungerford, with the aim of improving a stretch of river that flows through the Bearwater retirement properties land.

After a successful funding application to Thames Water Rivers & Wetlands Community Days we set out to restore a more natural and sinuous river corridor. The riverbanks would be rich in native plants to prevent further erosion and

create a diverse habitat for wildlife. We wanted to attract water voles, in recent years Britain's largest vole has dramatically declined nationally and a pre-project survey found no field signs. It was important to involve Bearwater residents and the wider Hungerford community. Working closely with Bearwater Manager Anne Maddison, we widely promoted the volunteering opportunities to learn new skills, help restore the Dun and meet new people.

The elderly residents supported the project from the start, running a coffee morning for the project and provided drinks and freshly baked cakes at all seven all day community restoration days.

The volunteering days were well attended. Over the seven days 47 volunteers contributed nearly 600 hours of their time. This input is of huge value, it enables us to deliver quality projects in a very cost efficient way. It is also tremendous fun for our volunteers, working outdoors, being in waders and knowing that you are contributing to making something better. We had teenagers working alongside people in their late seventies and all ages in between. The camaraderie was brilliant, many people who took part have continued to volunteer.

The project is only a few months old, but the transformation is amazing. On a site visit in July I was thrilled to spot and



film a very plump water vole swimming along and film it. This is evidence that if the habitat is right, wildlife will come, linking up habitats so animals like water vole have places to move into when they need to disperse.

We continue to work with Bearwater, they carry out water quality testing, checking nitrate and phosphate levels. We have trained up two local residents to carry out monthly riverfly monitoring, this detects pollution incidents and can help us measure increases as well as declines of indicator species of freshwater invertebrates.

We are a membership organisation with over 600 members and 120 volunteers. For more information visit [www.riverkennet.org](http://www.riverkennet.org) and our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/riverkennet](https://www.facebook.com/riverkennet).

**Anna Forbes – ARK Project Officer and Volunteer Co-ordinator**

## Seven Barrows – WBCS Walk

Nestled in the West Berkshire countryside near Lambourn is the Seven Barrows Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which is nationally important for both its wildlife and archaeology. It exists within a wider chalk landscape dominated by dry valleys and many signs of man's long-term habitation of the area.

The Reserve was the location of a recent short walk organised by the Society together with the Festival of Archaeology. The walk focused on

the inter-relationships between the geology, landscape, flora, fauna and man. It was led by Charles Gilchrist to present the flowers, Grahame Hawker to present the butterflies and Sarah Orr, the Historic Environment Records Officer for West Berks council to explain about the different types of barrows to be found in the vicinity. A most informative afternoon was spent on the Reserve and also at nearby Westcot Wood long barrow.

The Seven Barrows Nature Reserve actually comprises more than

seven barrows (there are over forty in the immediate area) which were constructed from the Early to the Middle Bronze Age period and include good examples of a variety of barrow types such as bowl, saucer and disc barrows. As with many archaeological sites, the location, and our limited knowledge of pre-history, raises many questions that are still to be answered, such as – where did the barrow builders live and why are the barrows located in the valley rather than on the crests of the nearby ridges?

# Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group

In the 1980's Francis Suttill, a Conservation Officer at the former Berkshire County Council, realised that lowland heath was fast disappearing from Berkshire. Francis lived at Hilliers Lodge on Bucklebury Avenue and took a keen interest in Bucklebury Common. He approached Derek Hartley Russell whose family have owned Bucklebury Common since 1540 to establish a project to try and regenerate the lowland heathland and heather on the Lower Common (between Chapel Row and Upper Bucklebury). This area of land was traditionally an extensive area of heathland but was requisitioned by the Ministry of Defence during the Second World War as a vehicle depot and accommodation camp. The top soil was removed and placed into three heaps (which are still visible today). After the war invasive species of birch and scots pine re-colonised the heathland and much of the heathland was lost.

The first working parties were in conjunction with BTCV from Maidenhead, work groups came out once a month on alternate Saturdays and Sundays, throughout the winter months. Small scots pine trees were harvested in the weeks before Christmas and sold as Christmas Trees which raised additional funding to support the working parties.

The first meeting of the Heathland Group was held on 1st September 1993. Malcolm Storey was elected Chairman and Cyril Lewington was confirmed as Honorary Secretary. A committee was elected, a constitution ratified, and a management plan put in place.

Small grants were obtained from various bodies to pay a contractor to hand spray 'Round-Up' on birch regrowth, and carry out some 'swiping' to try and counter other regrowth.

For the next 10 years the Bucklebury Heathland volunteers cut and burnt up about 15 to 20 acres of 20 foot silver birch every winter. A new area of heathland began to emerge.

The next big breakthrough came when Land Fill funds became available (environmental grants from land fill sites). As a consequence, the Group commissioned a comprehensive ecological survey and management plan of the Lower Common to the south of the Upper Bucklebury -Chapel Row road. This envisaged removing the invasive Scots Pine and Silver Birch, 'mulching' the trash, and scraping all organic matter into long 'bunds' up to 5ft high.

In the first year a contractor cleared about 15 acres, including removing 1000 tons of Scots Pine, which was chipped and, when dry, was transported



Bucklebury Common

© Tim Culley

to Slough power station. In the second session of work, a larger area of land was cleared, and 1000 tons of Scots Pine went, in part, to Norwich to make fencing panels and part to Andover for horse bedding.

On the Lower Common 70 acres has been cleared to date, and the big task is to keep the Silver Birch and Scots Pine in check.

It's not been all hard work, in February we always have a 'burn up and Barbecue' with burgers and sausages, and often the children come to 'help'.

In addition to our own volunteers, we now receive help from WBCS, MSc students from the University of Reading and volunteering groups from local businesses.

Over the past 35 years, volunteer conservation work has helped preserve one of the County's most important habitats.

If you would like to join the Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group, please contact [enquiries@westberkshirecountryside.org](mailto:enquiries@westberkshirecountryside.org).

Willie Hartley Russell MVO DL



Marbled White Butterfly and Parasites

The walk didn't just focus on the archaeology. Within the Reserve there is a wide diversity of plant and butterfly life as a result of the steps taken to manage this area of grassland and retain it as an example of the now largely

lost landscape that once covered the downs. 170 species of plants have been recorded whilst Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Red Admiral, Small Blue and other species of butterflies were seen on what was a short walk on a relatively cool and cloudy day.

The walk was typical of many that the Society offers – short, interesting strolls in hidden landscapes in the company of a friendly group of experts. Why not try one yourself?

Chris Sayer



Caterpillar of Cinnabar Moth

Background image – Bowl Barrow Images © Anne Sayer

# Training for Volunteers

Someone once remarked to me that the WBCS volunteers are organised 'just like it was at work'. Do not let that deter you from volunteering – it merely represents our desire to have an efficient organisation as this article will hopefully demonstrate. Rest assured, the volunteers' committee not only want you to be safe, but to have fun as well!



Having moved away from West Berkshire several years back, I also now volunteer for several land oriented groups in north Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, and can assure you that when you, as a WBCS volunteer, venture forth on Tuesdays you are well equipped to undertake the tasks ahead. Principally:

- Provision of tools and personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Training
- Emergency first aid cover
- Task day guidance and notification of likely site hazards.

Tool and basic PPE provision is nicely handled by Chris, Andy and Nick – as evidenced by the consistently good condition of the cutting tools and provision of a wide range of equipment and necessary PPE. I do wonder if their respective partners realise how

much garage space, workshop space and even car space is taken up by the Society? I for one have always been appreciative of the skill and time invested in this exercise, which formerly was managed by Chris alone.

Task day guidance and site hazard notification falls to the site task leader who also liaises with Chris regarding risk assessments for the site. With regular visits scheduled to each site, these have been developed and honed by Chris over several years.

Emergency first aid cover is provided for each task day by means of a trained volunteer.

Training falls into two categories. The first is informal 'on the job training' which mainly covers the safe use of cutting tools such as scythes, saws, grass hooks and felling of trees and branches. Also, precautions needed when powered equipment is being used by other (trained) volunteers. The safety of the public is also considered where such access is likely.

For prospective volunteers who may be reading this, we are always keen to provide new volunteers with 'on the job training', whatever your skill level to start with. This means that you can

Skill	Accreditation Body	Validity	Course Duration
Emergency First Aid	European Medical Services	3 years	One day
Task Leadership	TCV	For life	One day
Brush cutter	City & Guilds (NVQ Level 2)	5 years min	Two days
Risk assessment	TCV (and WBCS internally)	For life	One day
Chainsaw operations and felling (ground based)	C&G NPTC (Level 2)	For life, although our insurers require refresh within 5 years	One week plus one day for qualification

Finally, may I refer you to the Society's volunteer handbook which is a concise and useful source for information and advice on tool usage, PPE, safety risks etc. This is available for download from [www.westberkscountryside.org](http://www.westberkscountryside.org). This and the associated documents to be found on the website underpin our activities and are available for download by all conservation volunteers.

Timothy Clarke, Volunteer Training Coordinator



be helping out in a short space of time, and where appropriate, working with an experienced volunteer.

Formal training, which I am pleased to coordinate, is fairly diverse. Many of our volunteers have undertaken this type of training and have been awarded qualifications as shown in the following table.

Most of this training is necessary to meet the requirements of our public liability insurance. All formal training is sponsored by the society and is approved by means of an annual training plan and budget.



**Don't forget our website!**  
**[www.westberkscountryside.org.uk](http://www.westberkscountryside.org.uk)**