



West Berkshire
Countryside Society

UPSTREAM

ISSUE 100
SUMMER
2022



© Karen Davies

Celebrating 100 Editions of Upstream...

A farm facilitation group led by Tim Clark (also an ex-Pang and Kennet project officer) discussing a re-profiled ditch to make a space for wetland and reduce sediment entering Wilton Water

Many Happy Returns, Upstream!

I have fond memories of initiating this newsletter and editing the first copy in October 1997 and the subsequent 18 editions up until March 2002. Indeed, I still have all those copies! At the time it was a showcase for the Pang and Kennet Valley Countryside Projects with the aims of promoting regenerative farming to landowners and managers and raising awareness about issues in the countryside to members, and was a community notice board advertising guided walks, events and of course volunteer tasks. Although the projects no longer exist, it's great to see the newsletter still championing the work of West Berkshire Countryside Society. Many of the founders of the PKVCP who

were with us from the start with the Pang Valley Countryside Project, (over 33 years ago) are still involved today through the West Berkshire Countryside Society. Others, who also played a big part, are no longer with us but their legacy lives on.

I wish current and future editors all the very best. Long may Upstream continue and go from strength to strength!

Sally Wallington

The Same but Different?

Many of you may be forgiven for thinking that tree and hedge planting are brand new initiatives to save the planet. The same could be said of Countryside Stewardship schemes to encourage farmers to plant areas of pollen and nectar, and wild bird mixes.

Inside this issue



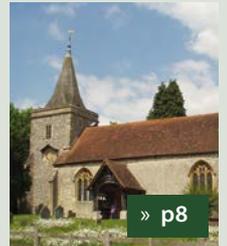
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Those around since 1997 will know that the Pang and Kennet Countryside Project and its band of trusty volunteers were, from the early days, fully involved in tree planting, hedge management and stewardship. Even now the number of existing Higher Level Schemes (and new schemes) are a testament to the dedication of several project officers and the commitment of West Berkshire farms and estates to wildlife and conservation. However, the last few years have seen major challenges to farming and food production. Payments to farmers for basic ecological features are no longer under the remit of the EU but have transferred over to domestic control.

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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.

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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
July 2022		
Tue 5th July 10:00	Sulham Home Farm	Continuing ragwort control on this SSSI. Parking at Sulham Home Farm SU643 758. Please bring a fork if you can. SU643 758
Tue 12th July 10:00	Winterbourne Wood	Clearing bracken from Primrose Ridge. SU447 717
Tue 19th July 10:00	Ashampstead Common	Raking previously cut grass in woodland glades. Meet at car park. SU587 751
Tue 26th July 10:00	Grove Pit Common Leckhampstead	General footpath clearance on this parish wildlife site. Access the common via the track which leaves the B4494 west at Cotswold Farm. SU440 777 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.
August 2022		
Tue 2nd Aug 10:00	Holt Lodge Farm	Bracken bashing. Meet at Holt Lodge Farm. SU387 648
Tue 9th Aug 10:00	Rushall Manor Farm	Wildlife habitat management. Park by the Black Barn. SU584 723
Tue 16th Aug 10:00	Furze Hill	Woodland and butterfly habitat management on this parish wildlife site. Ample parking at village hall – through double gates off Pinewood Crescent. SU512 740
Tue 23rd Aug 10:00	Furze Hill and BBQ	Woodland and butterfly habitat management in the morning followed by the regular volunteer's BBQ at village hall. SU512 740
Tue 30th Aug 10:00	Malt House	Woodland habitat maintenance tasks. Meet at the farmhouse. SU395 637
September 2022		
Tue 6th Sept 10:00	Hockets Field Bucklebury	Completing an earlier hedge line task. Park on the hard standing at SU548 687 .
Tue 13th Sept 10:00	Bucklebury Common	Help maintain this important heathland habitat. Meet at Angels Corner. SU550 688
Tue 20th Sept 10:00	Eling Way	Clear invasive vegetation either side of the permissive footpath named Eling Way. Park at Hampstead Norreys village car park. SU527 762
Tue 27th Sept 10:00	Redhill Wood	Maintaining paths and safe access throughout the wood. Parking off road, on entrance to the main ride. SU419 642



Conservation Volunteers Round Up

One of the many satisfactions for environmental volunteers is seeing how sites benefit from our regular visits.

After three annual visits to **Hill Green**, Leckhampstead, the improvements around the common's margins are very noticeable. In March, we cleared fallen and partially fallen trees along the public footpath. We also cut back encroaching brambles and a number of fallen ash trees that had succumbed to ash dieback.

Rushall Farm is another example, where on two recent occasions we continued widening rides, felling selected trees on the verges and reducing overhang from others, thus letting in sunshine to make the tracks more welcoming to walkers – and to wild flowers. Our previous efforts have encouraged foxgloves, primroses, bluebells, celandines, stitchwort, wood anemones – and wood spurge, the host plant for the rare Drab Looper Moth, a welcome visitor to Rushall.

We also paid two visits to **Winterbourne Woods**, processing some very large trees brought down during the February storms. We stacked brash in habitat piles, with much of the oak wood proving useful to replenish volunteers' log stores. We also cleared an overgrown path that had been built towards the end of World War 2 to provide access to two approach lights designed to guide American

aircraft landing at RAF Welford. However the war ended before they could be fully installed.

At **Furze Hill** we divided into small groups. One cut back buddleia, some of which was very mature, on the former railway line that is now the Eling Way, another protected the stools of newly-cut trees in the fenced-off exclusion area, and a third cut a scallop shape into vegetation to encourage butterflies, with bramble being removed from a solitary survivor of the furze (gorse) that gave the site its name. We also removed and collected two cubic metres of redundant tree protectors.



Coppice Stool Protection, Furze Hill
© Andy Hollox

We had another session at the **Wildlife Allotment Garden** at Cold Ash, scything and raking long grass, felling dead trees and cutting up some fallen ones. A large accumulation of logs of varying sizes was sorted, the larger ones becoming log-pile habitats, the rest being put on a very carefully-managed bonfire.



At work in the Coldash WAG
© Andy Hollox

On our first visit to **Moor Copse** nature reserve at Tidmarsh, one of our brush-cutters and our manual efforts made short work of clearing growth from both sides of a popular path. We repeated this on a nearby transect (a standard route used to monitor butterfly activity). We concluded by removing wire fencing from around coppiced hazels, now mature enough to no longer need protection from deer.

We returned to **Hosehill Lake**, near Theale, to cut back substantial vegetation near the dipping-pond next to the main lake and to continue improving the perimeter path. This involved cutting channels in some very hard earth along each side for wooden revetments, and wheeling many barrow-loads of aggregate for some distance, then raking and tamping it in place.

Two of our long-term projects comprise extensive hedge maintenance. At **Malt House Farm** we continued to improve a very long roadside hedge, which has occupied us for many days – and will continue to do so for several more. Overgrown sections are cleared and any gaps in the hedge filled with saplings protected by guards. At **Sheepdrove Organic Farm**, near Lambourn, hedge-laying progress was not helped by a two-year absence due to Covid19, during which some of the remaining hedge had grown substantially. This created challenges, as did inclement weather, but the finished work blended in with the previously-laid sections. The more substantial debris was formed into log-piles and the residue was burned.

Compiled by Terry Crawford



WW2 Path in Winterbourne Wood
© Andy Hollox

Stand up for trees!

Stand up for our planet!

With numerous issues challenging us in our everyday lives, it is easy to overlook the twin crises facing the planet: namely climate change and biodiversity loss. As a matter of urgency, we need to start enacting solutions to these problems and, as a recent UN report makes clear (4/4/22), it's "now or never" to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees.

Expanding all UK tree cover will play a vital part in capturing carbon. To this end the climate change committee announced that woodland cover needs to increase from 13% to 19% to help the UK meet its net-zero commitment by 2050. Commercial planting will continue to play a significant role, especially in Scotland. However, conifers are not the best solution in the long term and may be more damaging than ameliorative. The best option is to plant broadleaf woodlands and then leave them intact to capture carbon as they grow and provide diverse habitats for wildlife.



But planting the right trees in the right places is essential. In the rush to capture carbon, we cannot compromise other habitats such as peatlands and wildflower meadows. Planting trees on these habitats will do more harm than good, risking the loss of biodiversity and negating the very important role they also play in capturing carbon. Peat bogs, for instance, are especially important and vulnerable for, if they are damaged

or dry out, the easily eroded peat itself becomes a major source of greenhouse emissions. One thing we can all do – stop using peat-based products!

But can our tree nurseries supply enough bio-secure trees to meet the surge in demand? We cannot continue to use imported trees. As Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) clearly demonstrates, the risks of importing diseases alongside nursery stock are too great. First recorded in the UK in 2012, Ash Dieback is forecast to kill around 80% of UK Ash trees. It is therefore critical that all new trees should be sourced (seed) and grown in the UK, protecting us from importing pests and diseases as well as creating jobs in the rural economy. Trees established from local seed are best suited to local climate conditions, self-sustaining and better placed to face the challenges of pests, diseases and climate change. What is needed is a huge increase in the capacity of our UK tree nurseries to produce young tree saplings.

Another option would be to allow natural regeneration of woodland. However, this is also problematic: there may not be a suitable seed source nearby, and there is little choice over the final composition of the woodland.

Is it a simple binary choice between the two? A decision might depend on the reason behind the establishment of a wood. If nature conservation is the focus, then natural regeneration could be the best way forward, especially when expanding existing native woodland. However, planting offers more certainty in the speed and success of establishment – important considerations if carbon sequestration is the main objective.

A recent report by a House of Commons committee (21/3/22) highlights the need to establish clear goals and annual targets, especially in England. It warns that a lack of focus is putting at risk the government's aim: to plant 30,000 hectares of new woodland in



WOODLAND STATISTICS

1.50c – The maximum global temperature rise to avoid environmental catastrophe

2% – UK land mass covered by ancient woodland

7% – UK native woodland cover

13% – UK woodland cover of all types

19% – Woodland cover recommended by the Committee on Climate Change if the UK is to be carbon neutral by 2050

1.5 million – Hectares of additional woodland required by 2050 if the UK is to meet its carbon neutral target

0.4 million – Hectares of additional UK woodland by 2050 if planting rates remain the same as 2018/19

84% – The proportion of the UK public who agree with the statement "a lot more trees should be planted" in response to climate change

3,781 million – Tonnes of CO2 equivalent currently removed by UK forests

53% – Proportion of UK woodland wildlife species in decline

95% – Proportion of the UK public who value woodlands for their wildlife

the UK every year. Indeed, over the last five years, it has failed to get anywhere near its target with just under 10,000 hectares being planted per annum (45% broadleaf). Providing financial support for planting and natural regeneration, and to increase domestic tree production and the necessary workforce, is crucial to meeting climate change targets.

As a world we face a lot of problems, but we only have one planet. We need to hold the government to account. Tree planting is only one of many actions needed. However, as a visible and hands on way of tackling these twin issues, it appeals to many people as a positive course of action they can take, as a volunteer or by contributing financially. Why not sponsor a tree? It makes a wonderful birthday or anniversary present!

Terry Davis

Happy snapping!

Pete Hughes of the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) celebrates the return of the charity's always-popular photography contest – and urges Upstream readers to join the fun.

A very happy 100th edition to Upstream and all its readers!

We at BBOWT have also been celebrating recently, over the return of our much-loved photography competition after a very long hiatus of three years.

The challenge couldn't be simpler: take the most stunning snap you can of any natural subject at any BBOWT nature reserve - OR, for our new Team Wilder category, people outside of BBOWT reserves taking action for nature and wildlife. Anyone from a seasoned snapper with a telescopic lens to a six-year-old with an iPhone can enter one of our six new categories.

Rachel Levis, BBOWT's new Head of Events, said: "The brilliant thing about nature and wildlife photography is that the subjects are all so beautiful to start with, you don't have to be a professional to capture a winning shot."

So what are this year's categories?

- **Flora and Fauna** – any plants or animals on a BBOWT nature reserve



- **Nature Reserve Landscapes** - on any BBOWT reserve, capturing the beauty of the surroundings
- **Team Wilder** – anyone taking action for nature and wildlife not on a nature reserve
- **People in Nature** – someone in a beautiful location on one of BBOWT's reserves
- **Children's category** – for children aged 6-12, on any of the themes in the adult categories
- **Teenagers category** – for ages 13-19, on any of the themes in the adult categories

This year's overall winner will receive a Panasonic LUMIX 30x Optical Zoom Camera DC-TZ97EB-K and a photography workshop with wildlife photographer Steve Gozdz. They will also have their photo featured in BBOWT's Wild Magazine and the 2023 BBOWT calendar, receive a printed canvas of their winning photo and a certificate.

The other category winners will get a photography workshop with from GG Wildlife Experiences, a printed canvas of their photo, have their photo featured in the 2023 BBOWT calendar, receive a £10 BBOWT gift voucher and a certificate.

The competition will be judged by a panel of three experts: Steve Gozdz is a professional wildlife photographer and founder of Reading-based GG Wildlife Experiences, which offers wildlife walks, experiences and photography classes; Ben Vanheems is a wildlife gardener and YouTuber



who also compiles BBOWT's Wild magazine; and Kate Titford is a BBOWT Communications Officer and a keen wildlife photographer.

As Upstream readers are well aware, there is no shortage of wonderful photo opportunities at BBOWT nature reserves in Berkshire, from the rugged heathland of Snelsmore Common to the hidden magic of Kintbury Newt Ponds – but as a small added inspiration, the last winning photograph we had – an extraordinary close-up of a grasshopper perching among pink heather fronds – was taken at Crookham Common.

We have also just installed two new bird hides at the Nature Discovery Centre and carried out some major enhancements of the banks in the lake to create new wildlife habitat, hopefully providing some more new photography opportunities!

For full details and to enter the contest, go to bbowt.org.uk/photocomp22

The deadline for entries is Thursday 8th September, so the whole summer stretches ahead to get the perfect shot.



Don't forget our website!
www.westberks countryside.org.uk

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In this 'Transition' period Basic Payments will decrease and farmers will be expected to take up a slightly bewildering array of alternative grants. As well as paying for wildlife options, payments may also underpin the agricultural activity on the farm and support cheaper food production – it is all interlinked. There are also the challenges of reducing emissions, nutrient neutrality and supplying areas for carbon off setting, all of which place more pressure on the land.

However, despite these challenges many farmers have adopted or are looking

at moving to no-till cultivation, which reduces disturbance of the soil and uses soil structure and biology (such as earth worms) to help maximise production. Improving soil structure reduces soil erosion and reduces the use of fertiliser and pesticides, which also benefits our chalk streams.

There are several farm facilitation groups in West Berkshire where farmers are working together to improve soil health and optimise efficiency as well as choose options that enhance the local rivers and wildlife habitats. The new schemes on the horizon

(Environmental Land Management schemes) look to offer payment for environmental goods, rewarding farms that work together across the landscape.

There will be some great opportunities in the future! Hopefully farmers will have the stability they need to be able to take them.

Karen Davies

(Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer and Independent Farm Conservation Adviser – still working in the Kennet and Lambourn Catchment, somewhat greyer, and now with two boys and a dog)

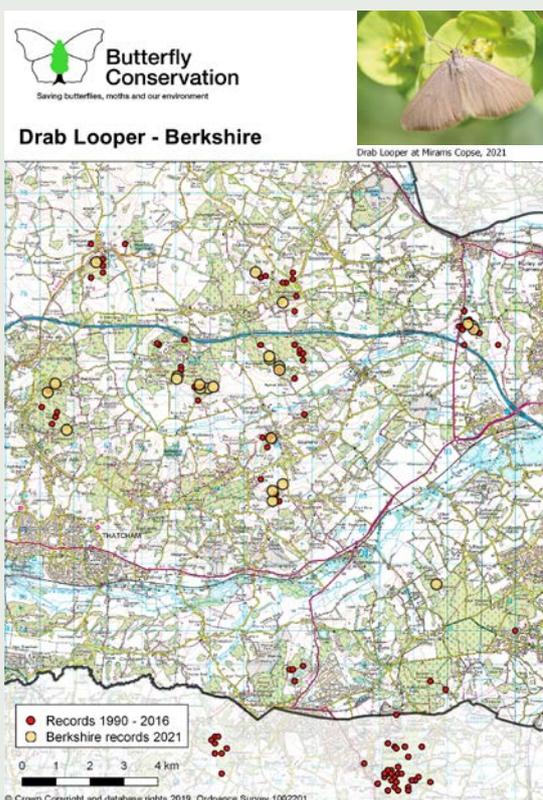
The Little Moth that follows the Woodsman

One of Butterfly Conservation's priority species is a nationally scarce moth called the Drab Looper (*Minoa murinata*). The name always seems a little unkind to me as, when freshly emerged, the wings are silky in appearance, and it has a dainty charm. The Latin name comes from 'murinus', meaning mouse-coloured. This day-flying species is on the wing in May. It has a very limited range and is found in only three small areas: along the Welsh border; in parts of Hampshire; and in part of West Berkshire. The moth is dependent on wood spurge, the larval foodplant, which needs to be growing in a sunny but sheltered position. The right habitat can be transient, with wood spurge often springing up after the felling of timber or, more often in days past, after coppicing, as well as along woodland rides after soil disturbance. With coppice regrowth or young trees replanted, these areas become too shaded after a few years and the moth needs to move on to another part of the wood. The danger for the moth is that, if no other suitable areas exist within a reasonable range, it will simply disappear.

The first steps in the conservation of any declining species are understanding

how many are left, where the remaining populations are and how suitable the habitat is. To answer these questions about the Drab looper, Butterfly Conservation (Upper Thames Branch) volunteers carried out a very extensive survey this summer, searching all the species' known historical Berkshire sites and much woodland outside its known range in case any colonies had been overlooked. The volunteers spent many hours searching over 40 woods, recording 63 adult Drab Looper, and gaining an accurate picture of where the moth is and, just as importantly, where it isn't. The large yellow dots on the map show the 2021 records and the red dots are older historical records. It was found the moth had seriously declined from its haunts north of the M4 motorway (with the exception of BBOWT's Moor Copse Nature Reserve) and although it was recorded it seems likely that it will be lost from this area. South of the M4, which has more 'worked' woodland, the picture is better with the best areas the woods around Frilsham, Rushall Farm, Fence Wood and Greyfield Wood.

Armed with the knowledge gained from the survey we are hoping to raise the profile of this species and to



contact more landowners to tell them about the moth and its needs – after all they certainly won't be in a position to try and protect it if they don't even know it exists! And it would be very sad to see this little companion of the woodsman just quietly disappear from our Berkshire countryside.

Peter Cuss

(Butterfly Conservation, Upper Thames Branch)



'Upstream' 100th Edition!

"Doesn't time fly when you are having fun!" Here we are at the Hundredth

Edition of 'Upstream': twenty-five years of collecting material, meeting deadlines, typing, editing, printing, distributing and almost all of it done by volunteers.

The Society has a complete set of 'Upstream' in its Archive and looking through the collection is inspiring! So much has been done and it is all there in edition after edition: the task programmes with reports on progress; the adverts for meetings and fund raising; the specialist articles; and the walk dates.

Though the Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers were first in the field with their 'Newsletter' in 1993, 'Upstream' proper started in Autumn 1997 as 'the combined newsletter of the Pang and Kennet Valley Countryside Projects'. This was produced by the Projects' professional staff who were funded by West Berkshire Council and the Farming and Wildlife Group (FWAG). The professionals were supported by the Bucklebury Heathland Group and the Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers. Extra funds were provided by The Friends of the Pang Valley. When FWAG went into administration in 2011 the three volunteer groups decided to merge and to carry on the good work. All this was reported in Issue 49, Spring 2012. Shortly after this, the new grouping was joined by the Pang Valley Barn Owl Group – another band of very skilled and committed volunteers.

'Upstream' provides an amazingly valuable and interesting record of human voluntary activity in our area and the great benefits it has brought to wildlife of all kinds. Our countryside, and the people who live in it, have benefitted greatly from the hard work it records and I am very proud to have been part of it!

Dick Greenaway
Honorary President

Upstream No 1 © West Berkshire Countryside Society

Memories of Bill Acworth

Sometimes it is good to pause and remember those who have inspired and encouraged you along the way. One such person in my life was Bill Acworth, who died recently. He farmed just outside Hungerford and always supported the work of the WBCS, the John Simonds Trust and what we aspired to do on Rushall Farm

I first came across Little Hidden Farm in the early eighties. I was being driven in a Ranger Rover by my boss William Cumber and his co-director Alec Davey from the M4 down to Hungerford on our way to the company's 800 acre farm in Wiltshire. "That's the fellow who grows and harvests weeds," said Alec with disdain. Little did we realise that Bill's focus and foresight would come to shape national agricultural policy so dramatically. Bill was always aware that he was a steward of the land. To farm in harmony with the environment would not only benefit wildlife including the microflora, soils and trees and improve the landscape, but also sustain, economically, the person in charge. He pioneered re-establishing wildflower meadows, planting woodland, grazing and organic systems and was always at the forefront of initiatives to improve awareness of good conservation practice.

I was involved with him a few years ago. He had been very unwell and at eighty was wanting advice on his next 10 year stewardship agreement. It was late May and the farm was fully expressing the



fruits of his labours. Fledgling blue tits were being monitored from the kitchen; kestrels were hovering over wildflower meadows in bloom, with an array of butterflies enjoying their presence. I was impressed and inspired, but the following day I reflected as I sheared our sheep, "How ridiculous! He is eighty, Sue is seventy and working all hours and he has just had a "shot across the bows". Surely it is time to retire!" I pleaded my case over several subsequent visits, but Bill, with back to the Aga sitting and stooped, looked up and with a smile said, "Why should I ever want to leave this place?"

That was Bill, steadfastly committed to his vision, an inspiration to me and many others, someone who loved life, loved people and dwelt on things which were good and wholesome. But then he also carried the pain of the indifference of so many fellow farmers to their true responsibility to this precious planet.

That is a responsibility that we all share NOW.

John Bishop

Dates for Your Diary

Wed 6th July 22 – 9:00pm

Join Tim Culley on a short walk looking for Nightjars on Bucklebury Common. Meet at the Crossroads on the Common. SU556 961

Sun 17th July 22 – 10:30am

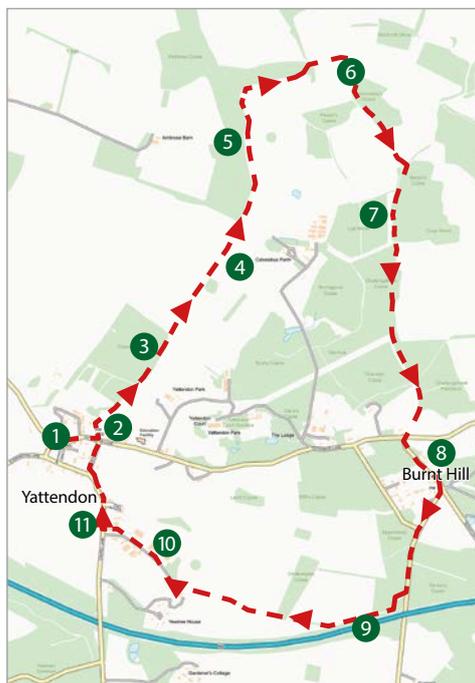
Join John Lerpiniere and Anne Booth for a walk around Moor Copse.

Meet at the car park for the BBOWT Reserve at Moor Copse just South of Pangbourne SU633 738 for a short walk around the reserve looking at the history, the management and the botanical interest.

Exploring the village and countryside around Yattendon

About 7km or 4½ miles

Starting and finishing in Yattendon Square. There are several car parks in Yattendon, and a pub and a café. The brewery tap is on the walk. OS 'Explorer' map 158 'Newbury and Hungerford' may be useful.



Yattendon Village is very ancient. The name comes from the Old English 'The Hollow of Geat's People'. The original village was near the modern school. The 'castle' – a fortified manor house – was built by John Norris when he bought the manor in 1448.

1. The Square was laid out as a marketplace at about the same time as the Manor House was built. The Well is 131 feet (39.9 metres) deep. It was sunk in 1878 by Alfred Waterhouse who bought the Estate in 1877. He was the architect of the Natural History Museum in London.



2. The church, a short distance to the east of the Square, is another of John Norrey's constructions but has had several remodellings, the last in the late 19th century by Alfred Waterhouse.



After looking at the church go up the left-hand side and diagonally across the churchyard at the back.

3. The Woodland Classroom was proposed by Yattendon Estates and created by West Berkshire Countryside Society Volunteers in 2013. It is regularly used by Yattendon Primary School and is available to other schools.



4 Calvesleys Farm once housed the men and horses that worked the wide fields to the west. This saved a long walk back to the home farm in Yattendon after a hard day. Ambrose Barn served a similar purpose.

5. Ancient Coppice stools were formed by the regular cutting of ash trees near ground level to provide straight thin poles for many purposes. Coppicing allows the stumps to continue to grow – virtually for ever! They steadily become wider and thicker. These may be 400 years old. The red strip is a metre long.



6. Drove Way. The wide track at the 'T' junction is an ancient road. Many of these, often deeply sunken, exist in this area. This one led from the high grazing areas to the north around Aldworth down to the Pang Valley near Bucklebury and on to Reading and the Thames Valley.

7. Lye Wood. 'Lye' – a very dangerous liquid – was made in this wood by burning twigs, brambles and bracken in shallow pits. The ash was then soaked in a barrel and the water drawn off. Boiled with animal fat, it made a very coarse soap. It was also used to remove the hair from hides during tanning.

8. Burnt Hill probably got its name from the glow in the sky above wood fired brick kilns. The local geology of sands over clays and chalk provided the raw materials for the bricks and the local woods and coppices provided the fuel to fire them.

9. The M4 motorway was opened on 22 December 1971.

10. West Berkshire Brewery's buildings were converted from an ultra-modern dairy unit. The east end houses a shop and tap room.



11. Frilsham Home Farm was built in 1896. It served Frilsham House which was a little way to the south. The house was demolished when the M4 was built.



Dick Greenaway, Terry Crawford

Many more interesting local walks are available on our website: www.westberkscountryside.org.uk