



Wokingham
District Council

Biodiversity News

A Newsletter for Wokingham's Biodiversity Forum

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2

The Wokingham Biodiversity Forum aims to enhance the Districts biodiversity by ; -

Promoting Awareness understanding and a wider perspective of biodiversity in Forum member groups.

Enhancing the level of skills and knowledge within Forum member groups.

Increasing community involvement in biodiversity within the district.



New Local Nature Reserve

by Alastair Driver

Sonning Parish Council in Berkshire, recently became only the third Parish Council in the country to designate a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). Ali's Pond LNR is a small field of approximately 0.5ha in the heart of Sonning. The site is named after local resident and wildlife conservationist Alastair Driver who conceived, designed and project managed the conversion of this neglected area of parish council owned land into a mosaic of habitats back in 1997. The site was transformed in its first three years with the help of funds totaling approximately £10,000 (from Rural Action, the Environmental Trust for Berkshire and of course Sonning Parish Council) and the help of various local groups and individuals. It is a credit to all involved that what was only 20 years ago the village bowling green, now features a large pond, a wildflower rich meadow and laid boundary hedges.

In addition to its wildlife value, Ali's Pond LNR is already a much loved amenity and dog walking area for local residents, and since the summer of 2000 has been used by the nearby Sonning Primary School for its environmental studies.

Following the discovery last year of the internationally protected great crested newts in the pond. The Parish Council decided to pursue Local Nature Reserve designation for the site.

What is a Local Nature Reserve?

LNRs are sites of high wildlife interest in the local context, which are important for

informal enjoyment or environmental education by local people. They must be owned or leased by the Local Authority wishing to designate them. The principal Local Authority (County, District and Borough Councils) in consultation with English Nature (EN) normally designate them. However Parish and Town Councils can also designate them providing the principal authority is willing to delegate these powers to them.

How can a Parish or Town Council designate a Local Nature Reserve?

The process for designating LNRs is fairly simple. Once the site has been identified a management plan needs to be drafted to maintain the wildlife interest of the site. This plan can then be sent to EN along with a letter requesting LNR status for the site. Once EN have written back in support of the proposed designation, the Parish or Town Council needs to write formally and ask the District Council for powers to designate LNRs to be delegated to them. This normally involves formal approval by the relevant council committee

(Environmental Services in the case of Wokingham). The council can then designate the site by placing a formal notice in the local press for 2 consecutive weeks. Woking-

UK BIODIVERSITY



VARIETY OF LIFE

New Grant Scheme for Local Groups

By Sally Oldfield

Who Can Apply?
Any voluntary group can apply, but you must have a bank account and a formal constitution. Individuals and commercial organisations cannot apply.

How Do We Apply?
For an application form, either visit the website at www.lhi.org.uk, or call 0870 9000401. The South-East Region Adviser, Kevin Haugh, is also happy to offer advice (01622 765222). Applications can be made at any time of the year, and decisions are usually made within three months.

The Local Heritage Initiative (LHI) is a national grant scheme that funds local groups to run projects which care for and investigate their local landscape, traditions and culture. The scheme was set up in February 2000 by the Countryside Agency, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Nationwide, and it will run for ten years.

What sort of projects does LHI fund?

LHI aims to help local people to care for the heritage that they feel is important to their local environment. To qualify for a grant, a project must:

- Be started and supported by local people
- Focus on local heritage – whether this is natural, archaeological, built or industrial heritage. It also include customs and traditions.
- Offer clear public benefits

Some examples of projects that LHI has funded so far:

The Park Wood Project: This is a small woodland, set in a semi-urban area. LHI has provided a grant for the local community to survey the wood for wildlife, and also to research its historical use. The funding covers training for the group, plus information boards and leaflets.

The Black Hedge: This is one of the oldest recorded boundaries in England and has unfortunately suffered some damage in recent decades. LHI has funded a project which seeks to record, survey, conserve and interpret the history of the hedge.

What will the grant pay for?

Grants of between £3,000 and £15,000 are awarded. LHI will fund the production of leaflets or books, display boards, repair and restoration work, equipment (e.g tools or cameras), art and drama. The grant will also pay for the input of specialists advisers e.g. to provide training or to carry out practical work.

LHI funds 60% of project costs, with the remaining 40% being met by the group. However, the group may contribute volunteer time to make up the project costs. Since LHI aims to promote wide community involvement, groups are encouraged to apply for fairly complex and well thought-out projects, involving investigation, interpretation and practical action.

If you or your group are thinking of applying for a grant from the LHI for a biodiversity/wildlife project then Andy Glencross able to assist with planning and form filling.

WDC is committed to training local people and groups. If you have any wildlife related training you or your group would benefit from then please let Andy Glencross know.

Wildlife Courses prove popular

This spring undeterred by the foot and mouth outbreak WDC has run two wildflower identification courses. Both the first on woodland wildflowers and the second on hedgerow wildflowers were well attended with 20 and 12 people respectively.

The courses involved both classroom sessions (including slide talks from local experts) and assistance with using wildflower keys and books to identify plants. The courses have helped the Holt Copse Conservation volunteers to start

doing their own wildflower surveys.

There are two further courses planned for this year, Parish Wildlife Surveys on Saturday 2nd June from 10am - 4pm and Survey and Monitoring bats on the 23rd June from 7.30pm - 11pm. Both courses will be at Dinton Pastures Country Park and are open to all members of the Forum. If you would like to book places on either of these courses or have any ideas for future courses then please phone Andy Glencross on 0118 9342016.

Wokingham's newest Wildlife Heritage Site a Car Park!

Late last year Wokingham District Council designated the Car Park next to the Berkshire Museum of Aviation as a Wildlife Heritage Site (WHS).

What is a Wildlife Heritage Site?

WHS are the most important places for local wildlife outside nationally protected land such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). They are selected by a panel of independent experts and designated by the Local Authority. Unlike Local Nature Reserves the Local Authority need not own them. These sites

subsequently receive a certain level of protection within the planning system.

What's so special about a car park?

The car park in Woodley is home to a nationally rare plant called Tower Mustard (*Arabis glabra*), indeed there are only about 20 sites nationally for this plant. Approximately 300+ plants grow here in Woodley making it the fifth largest population in the country. Work is currently underway on the site to clear back scrub and adjust mowing regime in order to encourage the plant to colonise further

The fifth largest population of the nationally rare Tower Mustard found in Woodley Car Park

Berkshire Bird Index

by Chris Robinson

Birdwatchers in Berkshire have been aware for some time that we are very short of accurate data on the numbers and status of our bird populations. The county's bird atlas, "The Birds of Berkshire" provides an excellent guide to the general distribution and historical status of the county's avifauna but we particularly lack information on how well our birds are faring.

With this need in mind, early last year the Berkshire Bird Index Group was formed. The group, consisting of representatives of all Berkshire ornithological clubs and groups and as well as BBOWT (the county wildlife trust), have now devised a plan which should go much of the way towards filling this gap.

The plan, started in April 2000 builds on an existing national survey being carried out by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and formed the basis of our trend monitoring process. This survey, known as the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), already covered twenty six 1km squares annually in Berkshire but in order to obtain a statistically viable dataset, it was

proposed to expand this coverage to a minimum of fifty squares. This was easily achieved – the total coverage in 2000, including BTO ones, was 78! The extra squares were selected randomly (as in BBS) in order to eliminate observer preference and any bias towards "good" birding areas. This is an essential requirement if we are to obtain an accurate, countywide picture of bird population changes.

The survey method is simple. After an exploratory visit to plan the survey route and record basic habitat details, surveyors are asked to make just two visits to their square every year during Spring and early Summer. The survey itself involves walking twice across the square (once out and once back) using routes which are ideally about 500m apart. While doing this, surveyors record all the birds that they see or hear. Depending on the terrain, each survey visit should take one and a half to two hours complete.

Year 2000 was an excellent start but we still need more volunteers, particularly in the west of the county! You do not need

This project will be invaluable in the future for monitoring the success of our BAP. In addition the Gov't has stated that wild bird population should be considered a priority indicator for sustainable development.

If you are interested in helping out with the BBI then contact Chris Robinson on 01491 671420.

Biodiversity Forum Continues to Grow

*For further information
or if you would like to
become a member of
the Biodiversity Forum
please contact Andy
Glencross at the
Countryside Service.*

Wokingham's Biodiversity Forum met for the third time on the 20th March. The meeting gave everyone a chance to comment on the work of the Habitat Action Plan Steering Groups. Over the preceding 3 months each group had met and worked out a set of measurable targets for the five main habitats, Woodlands, Heathlands, Grasslands, Towns and Villages and Wetlands. The Steering Groups have put in a great deal of hard work and speaking for the entire Forum I would like to thank everyone who's been involved (you know who you are!).

Internal consultations with other Council Departments are now in progress and we

hope to get the document adopted as Council policy by the Autumn 2001.

The Forum meeting raised a couple of other issues, namely the Newsletter and membership targets for the Forum. The Newsletter was considered an essential part of our work by the Forum and it was agreed to continue producing it. If anyone has ideas for articles for future issues please contact me at the address below.

In addition the membership of the Forum has increased over its first year from 40 members after the first meeting in February 2000 to 70 in March of this year.

If anyone has would like to write an article for a future edition of the Biodiversity News then please contact Andy Glencross at Dinton Pastures Country Park.

Wokingham District Council Countryside Service

Wokingham District Councils Countryside Service is fulfilling the role of secretariat to the Wokingham Biodiversity Forum. All correspondence or enquiry's should be directed to Andy Glencross at the address opposite.

Wokingham District Council Countryside Service

The Countryside Service is part of the Environmental Services Department of Wokingham District Council.

The Service is committed to promoting the awareness and enjoyment of the countryside and

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We are on the
Web!

