

# Greenham Common Bulletin

Berkshire  
Buckinghamshire  
Oxfordshire



## Managing your common for you

2nd Edition, winter 2015/16

### Take the Wild Ride for Wildlife challenge! Cycle from Greenham Common to Paris and raise funds for local nature reserves

Sign up to the 200-mile Wild Ride for Wildlife from Greenham Common to Paris, and help to protect the amazing birds, flowers, reptiles and insects of West Berkshire.

The Wild Ride for Wildlife will take place in September 2016, but cyclists are encouraged to sign up now to start fundraising and training for the ride through southern England and northern France.

Funds raised on the Wild Ride for Wildlife will help us to look after heathland nature reserves such as Greenham and

Crookham Commons.

The Wild Ride for Wildlife is being organised by experienced event managers, Global Adventure Challenges.

Seasoned long-distance cyclists and enthusiasts who would like to take on the challenge can find out more at a Wild Ride Information Evening on the 27 January at the Nature Discovery Centre in Thatcham.

For more information visit:

[bbowt.org.uk/wildride](http://bbowt.org.uk/wildride)

Contact the Fundraising Team on [fundraising@bbowt.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@bbowt.org.uk) or 01865 775476.



#### Wild Ride for Wildlife

8 to 11 September 2016

200 miles

3 days cycling

Accommodation provided

Minimum sponsorship £1,300



Adrian Wallington

## Grazing on Greenham Common

**Cattle have** been present on the commons since 2001 and are owned and grazed using historical commoners' rights. Grazing is important for the management of the common as it reduces the growth of trees and scrub which can prevent less vigorous plants such as heathers and dwarf plants from flourishing.

It is usual to remove the livestock during the winter because of a lack of grass but last year the cattle were given additional hay because they were quarantined due to bovine Tuberculosis (bTB).

Four more animals tested positive to bTB at the end of October 2015. The cattle are tested every 60 days and for the herd to be classified as bTB free, there must be no positive reactors during two consecutive tests (120 days). A special dispensation has been given by Natural England to authorise feeding this winter.

This year, the cattle are overwintering on the Common under a special agreement with the Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission, the body that oversees the management



Rob Appleby

of the common, not directly because of restrictions imposed by bTB.

### Badger Vaccination

BBOWT secured £45k funding from DEFRA through its Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme (BEVS) to implement the vaccination scheme east of Newbury, covering Greenham and Crookham Commons, and Thatcham Reedbeds, as well as West Berkshire Council sites and adjacent land in private

ownership. A total of 50 active badger setts have so far been recorded and to date we have vaccinated 29 badgers over about 10km<sup>2</sup> of land. The scheme requires a long-term commitment from The Wildlife Trust as the vaccination process needs to be repeated at each sett annually until 2018.

By hopefully creating a buffer of healthy badgers in West Berkshire and continuing a licenced programme of vaccinating badgers on our nature reserves in Oxfordshire, the scheme could play an important role in helping to contain the disease and halt its spread eastwards in the county.



Rob Appleby

Find out more: [bbowt.org.uk/badgers-and-bovine-tb](http://bbowt.org.uk/badgers-and-bovine-tb)

Protecting local wildlife

[www.bbowt.org.uk](http://www.bbowt.org.uk)

Tel.: 01865 775476

**Greenham Common Trust** awarded a grant of £10,098 to the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust at the Pitch to the Panel event on 12 November. This is a valuable contribution to the West Berkshire Access Improvement Project helping to give people easy access to seven nature reserves, each renowned for their rare wildlife and open spaces. The objective is to increase opportunities for everyone in the community to access the countryside to improve their health and wellbeing.

Specifically for Greenham (subject to approval from the Greenham and Crookham Commons Commission) the

project will see the renewal of the old waymarked trails. Using locally sourced and sawn oak posts, each trail is coloured coded and has a recognizable image for visitors to follow. Five easy to read information signs are being designed which will help visitors make a choice where they would like to go and make the most of their visit. The completion of the waymarked routes and installation of the visitor signage is due spring 2016.

The project is also set to deliver visitor improvements at Pyle Hill car park, a safer crossing for all at Crookham pools/ Chamberhouse Farm bridleway and path repairs to maintain good access.



James Stevenson

## Keeping an eye on wildlife



Tom Marshall

**BBOWT undertakes** evidence based conservation which means we record the presence of species and monitor the habitats so we can then undertake targeted management.

### Nightjars numbers are up on last year.

15 to 16 pairs of nightjars were recorded across Greenham, Crookham and Newtown Commons this year.

Wading species such as lapwing, ringed plover and redshank did not manage to successfully rear any young. Song bird species such as Dartford warbler, stonechat, woodlark and nightingale have been more successful.

Skylarks continue a steady decline on the common, particularly along the heathland lozenges, territories dropping by 56% since 2009. These ground nesting birds are at risk from disturbance and predation.

Sightings indicate that yellowhammer and reed bunting (both species of conservation concern) are colonising

the Crookham restoration area and Crookham pools.

### Preliminary results of our adder tracking

A total of 14 snakes were tagged as part of the research into adder movements on the common. Females moved relatively short distances while males were more prepared to move around +500 meters, possibly looking for females. All adders kept to their preferred habitat. Records of their movements will be overlaid onto habitat maps so we can safeguard current populations and join fragmented populations by better managing the adders preferred habitat type.

## How to help care for our common

Berkshire Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust

**Please pick up your dog's poo**

Dog mess is unpleasant and can harm:  
 ■ wildlife ■ volunteers ■ families ■ staff

We use all corners of this site, not just the paths.

[www.bbowt.org.uk](http://www.bbowt.org.uk)  
01865 775476

Managed by the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust on behalf of West Berkshire Council

**If you** bring it on, you can take it off! Treading in dog waste can ruin the day for visitors and volunteers, and be harmful to health. Please pick up your dog's poo and bin it or take it home.

**Keep Greenham** free from invasive garden plants. It is not OK to dump garden waste on nature reserves! Garden waste can harbour species that can take over our natural habitats. The outcome is often irreversible. Himalayan balsam is found extensively around Greenham and Bowdown Woods and it outcompetes natural species. Waste can also look unsightly, block access and infill ponds. It will also enrich habitats which promotes the growth of weeds. Dispose of all your garden waste responsibly in your green wheelie bin or Newtown Road Recycling Centre.

**Help the ground nesting birds** raise their chicks in peace by observing the zones that are marked out every year between 1 March and 31 July. As in previous years, BBOWT will be providing seasonal wardens during this period to answer visitor questions, provide information on what to see and undertake free guided walks on Saturdays.

### Donation Stations

Why have you installed donation stations?

*BBOWT is keen to provide the highest standards for visitors and wildlife alike. Currently*

*BBOWT is using its own funds raised through membership to top up the West Berkshire Council grant we receive. We want to allow anyone visiting the opportunity to help us with our work.*

Do I have to pay to park?

*No, BBOWT is asking for voluntary donations. You can contribute as much as you would like, whether it be during your visit, weekly or monthly if you visit regularly.*

Will visitors be forced to pay in the future?

*No. BBOWT does not charge for parking at any of its sites.*



Rob Appleby

**F**ormed as a result of thousands of years of human activity, heathlands have evolved as special habitats with their own unique and fascinating wildlife. Our conservation work ensures that this natural heritage won't be lost.

On a hot summer's day, the earthy smell of heather mingles with the sweet, coconut fragrance of gorse to create an environment like no other.

This habitat is known as lowland heath. This heathland, together with areas of flower rich grassland, is the main reason much of the Common is listed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Since the 1760s Berkshire has lost 98% of its heaths under encroaching urban development, plantation forestry and agriculture.

### Human impact

Lowland heath has a long association with human activity and its creation is due to the clearing of the post glacial forests by the Bronze Age people. Exposing areas of free-draining, nutrient-poor acidic soils provided the perfect

conditions for plants such as heathers, gorse and birch to take root. Animals like the adder need the warm microclimate that the heather produces, and the Dartford warbler would not be present this far north if it weren't for the gorse. Deemed unsuitable for crops, these unique habitats were subsequently maintained by commoners as a resource for grazing, foraging and firewood.

### Military history

Greenham and Crookham Commons' military history has created a truly diverse range of habitats. Removal of the old concrete has exposed large areas of gravel beneath. This means we have birds such as ringed plover, lapwing and redshank – species you wouldn't normally find in heather-dominated areas.

Lime leaching from remaining concrete has created pockets of alkaline soils, so we have patches of kidney vetch – a wild flower normally found in chalk grassland!

This in turn supports a population of small blue butterflies, whose caterpillars feed upon it.

### The right balance

Much of the practical work carried out relies on staff and volunteers working to achieve the right balance between open heathland, scrub and tree cover.

Nightjars are spring and summer visitors to our heaths. The males require vantage points from where they can proclaim territory and attract a mate. Isolated trees left by the conservation team provide ideal perches to call their churring song, watch for rivals, and to begin their silent hawking forays for moths and night flying beetles.

Balancing habitat is important, so occasionally gorse must be removed to prevent it from overwhelming the heather. This winter, specialist machinery has been cutting the gorse and scrub and burning, to prevent enrichment of the nutrient-poor soil. Halting succession prevents the loss of the unique species that call Greenham home.



Ric Mellis

**Discover**  
Wildlife watching is fun, free and everyone can do it!

Why not bring a pair of binoculars and spot the large variety of birds that live here and use Greenham as a stopping-off point. Bring children for a bug hunt and explore the sounds, smells and textures.



Adrian Wallington

**Activity**  
Bicycles are permitted to use the well-defined paths and tracks.

Many of the wider tracks follow routes that were once taxi-ways for aircraft and are predominantly flat providing easy cycling for off-road capable bikes. The tracks are also suitable for robust all-terrain mobility vehicles.



James Stevenson

**History**  
The fire plane is totally unique and was made by a Newbury metal fabricator.

Installed in August 1986 as a fire fighting simulator it was intended as a mock-up of a C-130 bomber aircraft. During practice the plane was fitted with seats and dummies and dowsed in fuel.

# Events and Volunteering

## Greenham Common Bird Walks

Control Tower, Main Car Park, Bury's Bank Road

Wednesdays, 13 January, 10 February, 9 March 10am - 12pm

Join enthusiastic birder Graeme Stewart for one or more of a series of monthly strolls around Greenham Common. Free. Booking not required.

## Linking the Landscape: Team Rangers

Brackenhurst Lane, Greenham Common

Wednesday 17 February 10am - 3pm

A chance for 12-16 year olds to try their hand at coppicing, and get stuck in to some real conservation work at Peckmoor Copse on Greenham Common.

**BOOKING ESSENTIAL**

This is a taster session of the types of activities you can expect to get up to on our monthly Team Rangers sessions.



Penny Lock

There are more events and online booking at: [bbowt.org.uk/whats-on](http://bbowt.org.uk/whats-on)

## Spotlight on BBOWT Volunteer of the Year

**Volunteers have** been a core part of BBOWT's work and we are indebted to so many talented, inspirational and hard-working people.

You don't need to have any wildlife knowledge and attending a work party is a great way to meet new people, get outdoors and learn about wildlife.

Once a year nominations are held to honour particular individuals and groups who have gone above and beyond and generously given their time and expertise for free. This year the individual award was given to Lloyd Garvey who lives close to Greenham

and is a long standing member of the Greenham and Crookham Common work parties. Lloyd is an expert naturalist and is the Berkshire county recorder for beetles.

### When and why did you first decide to volunteer?

*A friend started to volunteer at the Inkpen common work parties and I decided to join him in 2006. In 2010 I took on the role as volunteer warden. I started volunteering at Greenham and Snelsmore Common in 2007 and since then my many roles included mapping all the paths on every BBOWT reserve across the*

*three counties.*

### What makes you come to our work parties week after week rain or shine?

*There is something about being outside in the fresh air, fair or foul, that makes you breathe easier. Even on the days the rain doesn't stop, you will see something that will lift the day, be it a red kite or a deer peering back at you through the trees. On sunny days what can be better than working away with butterflies flitting around and the birds singing.*

### How would you describe the social side to volunteering?

*The work parties are made up of a huge cross range of people. We have wildlife enthusiasts, people doing it for exercise, and chatters (people there for the social fun), all help make the work parties fun places to be. There is no pressure to do more than you want and we always stop for tea and biscuits!*

### What intrigues and interests you about the wildlife here in Berkshire?

*There is nowhere more 'humanised' than Berkshire*

*and it is a place with a massive amount of history. Despite all this human disturbance and population pressure wildlife still survives. Thankfully there are even places on Greenham where you can absorb the natural surroundings around you in peace and solitude.*

### What volunteering and wildlife work are you going to be doing in 2016?

*Spring sees me undertaking newt, butterfly and beetle surveys at Greenham Common, Kintbury Newt Ponds and beyond. In May I start dragonfly surveys at Sole Common, Decoy Heath, and Snelsmore Common. During the summer I hope to be involved in the adder monitoring and checking barn owl boxes for young chicks. I aim to be at most of the Greenham mid-week work parties as well as running my own groups at Inkpen Common.*

Join Lloyd on Saturday 23 April, 10am -12.30pm, for a gentle walk on Greenham as he relates the history and wildlife of Greenham Common.

**Why not join the team?**  
[bbowt.org.uk/volunteer](http://bbowt.org.uk/volunteer)



Ric Mellis

[www.bbowt.org.uk](http://www.bbowt.org.uk)

Managed by the Berks,  
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Trust on behalf of:

West  
Berkshire  
COUNCIL