



BERKSHIRE CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS



Newsletter no. 170

February / March 2004

Task Reports

21st December – Snelsmore Common – Richard Coles (Photos – Neil Frankum)

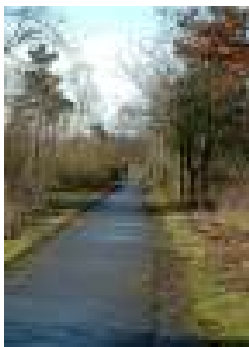
A good number turned up for our pre-Christmas task. The site was mostly puddles, with deeper ditches



Left – fire watching.
Above - view of the rather wet site for the fire.
Below left & below right – views of the part of the site we were working on.



here and there to trap the unwary, but Alisdair soon had a good bonfire going. For the rest of the day we ate the mince pies, kindly provided by Keith the Userbody, and had the occasional work break to clear



small birch from the edge of the path to feed the fire and bake the potatoes. An agreeable way to get into training for Christmas.

Left – We cleared some of the birch and gorse encroaching onto the main track through the site.
Right – Alisdair guarding the fire whilst everyone else has a break from the work.





Left - Lunch break at Snelsmore Common L-R Alisdair, Richard & Peter, Maurice & Keith, Philip, Sarah & Nigel.

16th November – Beale Wildlife Park -
No task report for this one.

9th November – Dinton Pastures – Neil Frankum



We had a rather wet miserable day for this task, working on the edge of Lavell's Lake at Dinton Pastures. However, a good turnout and a roaring fire made it an enjoyable task.



23rd November – Padworth Common – Richard Coles

That was the wettest task I have ever been on!

The following is from Adrian, the site warden: "Just a quick note to say thank you for your hard work in the pouring rain last weekend - It was an excellent job and helped complete our stewardship obligation for this year."

30th November – Padworth Common – Richard Coles

This was our site for collecting Christmas trees this year. After several years of going to the MOD site near Camberley, we found the trees there were getting too big or silly-shaped, and Padworth Common is much closer and avoids the Camberley traffic jams. There were not many of us – the lure of a free Christmas tree to attendees is no longer so effective, but we were joined by Tom and Patrick, our former Duke Of Edinburgh volunteers, who have a knack of turning up when numbers are thin. It was a very cold day, and no bonfire. After collecting all the trees of any use, we filled the van and its roof rack (to the point where the van itself looked like an enormous mobile Christmas tree) and delivered them to Prospect Park for sale.

7th December – Pinewood – Richard Coles

Steam trains were running on the miniature railway and the level crossing was locked, so the van had to stay in the car park. I arrived late to find a large number of us clearing rhododendron and bamboo – a task we have done before here, so now only the really difficult ones are left, like the one growing under the fence. Some of these just had to be attacked instead of removed, which is less satisfying, but we had a happy day and stopped at the pub in Finchampstead on the way home.

14th December – Beale Wildlife Park – Neil Frankum

I'll remember this task for a while, even if it's only for that horrible sinking feeling in my stomach

when I got back to the car park, put my hand into my pocket.....and then straight out through the hole in the bottom without having found my car keys. Luckily, after retracing my steps the 750m to the worksite, I amazingly found the keys in the long grass under a pile of brashings near where I had been working. The task itself involved clearing a short stretch of willow trees along the banks of the stream that runs just outside the wildlife park fence. Seeing a kingfisher fly past at lunchtime was a nice sight.

4th January – Padworth Common – David Fiddes



A chance to get some fresh air after spending the Christmas break stuck in front of the telly munching on turkey sandwiches produced a reasonable turn out of regulars. We

were clearing birch and willow from one of the seasonal ponds on Padworth Common. The weather was dry and unseasonably mild, but the wood was wet, and together with a distinct lack of wind it took a while to get a fire going, but when it was up and burning it made short work of the brush. It also baked the potatoes Richard brought a long to perfection.

Above The pond at Padworth Common.
Right – Piles of brashings & the bonfire.



11th January – Snelsmore Common – Richard Coles

We had a good turnout again despite the weather, and arrived to find the site full of big puddles and the Wardens trying to light a fire – a challenging job since everything was wet, Alasdair wasn't with us, and

we had forgotten to bring the kindling bag. Luckily I had brought my bellows, which helped to establish a fire, and thereafter the howling gale soon established our usual blaze. The local group of Snelsmore Common volunteers were there, removing birch from the heathland. It was sometimes sunny, but there was a torrential rainshower mid morning, followed by hail, and another hail shower mid afternoon. However, the bonfire was there to dry everything out, and bake the potatoes, so good fun was had by all. (Please note that this is definitely a wellies site after rainfall)

Committee

Thanks to Peter Harrison, who has volunteered to fill one of the vacant ordinary member posts. Peter was co-opted onto the committee at the November committee meeting.

A Look Back at 2003

In January we received notice to leave our Caversham Court tool store, and a hunt for alternatives ended with us being offered part of the sports pavilion at Edenham Crescent, off Berkeley Avenue. This is bigger and a good pick-up point for several volunteers who live nearby. As expected, the move scheduled for last Autumn hasn't happened yet.

We have changed our emphasis for worksites, away from urban sites (except where we are supporting a local group) to rural sites of greater wildlife importance, and 2003 saw us working for West Berkshire after several years' absence, on Snelsmore Common and Padworth Common (and on BBOWT's Bowdown Woods). Several tasks there during the early months of the year saw low turnouts, which

made us wonder whether volunteers would come out that far, but numbers on these sites improved later, so it may have been due to the weather. We had some vile weather around March, wet cold and dull, in fact it has been the worst year for Sunday weather I can remember – in previous years, Sundays were usually dry and escaped the bad weather we had during the week.

The turnout for tasks has still not reached the levels we enjoyed a few years ago, but is improving, and one good change is that we now have a larger number of people who come out occasionally, instead of a small core who are always there. It would be good though to get more volunteers out, because this makes the task more enjoyable. It improves our income, too, because every year our insurance for the van & public liability goes up. Having said that, however much work we achieve is all for the benefit of wildlife, which is what we are here for – & of course to get out into the fresh air and have a good time. Our thanks to the Officers on the Committee for all the hard work they have done during the past year to keep us going, and we hope to see you (lots of you I hope!) during the coming year. Happy New Year. - Richard Coles

Socials

Pub – Sundays after task

If everyone feels up to it we sometimes adjourn to the pub after task. We'll usually decide where we are going on task, when we've found out what everyone wants to do.

Other socials etc

These get arranged on an ad hoc basis - turn up on task, contact one of us, or sign up for the Email mailing list to find out the details.

Visit To Museum Of English Rural Life at Reading University

We've been invited to have a look round the museum at some point. Contact David for details.

Thursday 20th May – Rounders v Basingstoke CV

We've been challenged to another game of rounders by Basingstoke Conservation Volunteers. Meet at Silchester village green from 6pm. Afterwards we will be having drinks at the Calleva Arms. Contact Sally on 0118 9292304 for further details.

2004 Membership Renewal

Thanks to all of you who have paid your 2004 membership. For those that haven't this may be your last newsletter (depends on how ruthless I am at controlling the size of the newsletter print run!) A nice crisp new five pound note (or cheque) will guarantee your copy of six further issues of this wonderful newsletter of ours, as well as all the other delightful benefits of being a member of the group.

Task Details: 1st February – 28th March 2004

To book for task, please contact the task-leader listed below (If possible, by the Thursday before the task). Transport is available from the Tool Store at Caversham Court at 9:10am, and from the front of Reading Station (near the taxi rank) at 9:30am. Other pick-up points can sometimes be arranged – please contact the task-leader.

You are advised to wear old clothing, and stout boots or wellies (preferably with steel toecaps). Also bring waterproofs and a packed lunch, BeC will provide Tea/Coffee/Squash and Biscuits. As it is winter we could experience any type of weather, so wrap up warm, and bring the sun cream!!

Whenever possible, please do let the task leader know you are planning to come on task. Occasionally task details change at short notice, and we can only let you know of changes if we know you are planning to attend the task. However we do always take enough tools and biscuits for a few extras, so if you get the urge on Sunday morning, but haven't booked, you will still be made welcome. We usually go to the pub after task, so remember to bring some money (and a change of clothes if it's likely to be a very muddy task) if you want to join us.

CLAYFIELD COPSE, Caversham 1st February 2004

Task: Joint task with the Friends Of Clayfield Copse. Woodland work.
 Leader: Laurence Herniman 0118 954 9620
 Meet at: 10:00 at the carpark off of Caversham Park Road (OS Grid Ref: SU725767).
 Userbody: Reading Borough Council.

WARBURG RESERVE, Bix, Oxfordshire 8th February 2004

Task: Scrub clearance & bonfire.
 Leader: Philip Allen 0118 941 0471
 Meet at: 10-15am at the reserve car park (Grid reference SU720878). Leave Henley on the A423. Turn right onto the B480. In Middle Assendon take the second turning on the left and follow this road for about two miles until it turns into a dirt track. The reserve carpark is on your right.
 Userbody: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

CALIFORNIA COUNTRY PARK, Finchampstead 15th February 2004

Task: Rhododendron bashing.
 Leader: Philip Allen 0118 941 0471
 Meet at: 10-15am at the country park car park on Nine Mile Ride in Finchampstead (Grid reference SU787647).
 Userbody: Wokingham District Council Countryside Service.

POUND COPSE, Arborfield 22nd February 2004

Task: Layering some of the hazel coppice to try and increase the density of the coppice.
 Leader: Richard Coles 0118 976 0580
 Meet at: 10:00 at Grid Reference 751673. Follow the Shinfield Road (A327) south out of Reading. Cross the M4, pass through Shinfield village, and bear left at the mini-roundabout passing the ESSO petrol station. Half a mile after crossing the River Loddon turn right into Greensward lane opposite the signpost to Swallowfield. Pound Copse is 100m on the right.
 Userbody: Arborfield Parish Council

OLD BURGHCLERE LIME QUARRY, Burghclere 29th February 2004

Task: Scrub clearance. Since closing as a working concern some 50 years ago the quarry has developed a fine turf sward with a wide range of downland plants. Also present are insects, such as the scarce Small Blue butterfly, which depend on the flora. However, scrub has also invaded much of the pit and would take over completely if not controlled. Joint task with Basingstoke Conservation Volunteers.
 Leader: Nigel Mason-Fluke 0118 984 4177
 Meet at: 10:15 am. Grid Reference SU 470574. From M4 J13, head south along the A34 for 8 miles. Leave the A34 at the B4640 turn. Take the second exit at the roundabout towards Burghclere. At the next junction turn right, and follow this road (parallel to the A34) for 1½ miles. Turn left towards Old Burghclere. In the middle of the village there is a sharp lefthand bend by the church. Go straight on into the track ahead and park on the verge. Walk down the road, and after 300 metres turn left between the houses. Follow the track through the field and the reserve is directly ahead of you.
 Userbody: Hampshire Wildlife Trust.

WARBURG RESERVE, Bix, Oxfordshire 7th March 2004

Task: Scrub bashing.

Leader: Neil Frankum 0118 975 1528
 Meet at: 10-15am at the reserve car park (Grid reference SU720878). See 8th Feb for directions.
 Userbody: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

SNELSMORE COMMON, Newbury **14th March 2004**

Task: Scrub clearance & probably a bonfire. Wellies a good idea if it's been raining! Joint task with the Friends Of Snelsmore Common.

Leader: Laurence Herniman 0118 954 9620
 Meet at: 10:15 at the site (Grid Ref SU463710). Snelsmore Common country park can be found north of Newbury and is located along the B4494 road from Donnington to Wantage. The entrance is sign posted from the road and is located opposite the entrance to Mary Hare Grammar School.

Userbody: West Berkshire District Council.

GREENHAM COMMON, Newbury **21st March 2004**

Task: Birch clearance. Joint task with Greenham & Crookham Conservation Volunteers. Great chance to see how a cold war cruise missile base is being returned to nature.

Leader: Laurence Herniman 0118 954 9620
 Meet at: 10:15 at the site. The meeting point has yet to be confirmed. This is a LARGE site, so contact Laurence for details if you are coming.

Userbody: West Berkshire District Council.

TBC (HIGHWOOD, Woodley, or LAVELL'S LAKE) **28th March 2004**

Task: TBC.
 Leader: Mark Clay 07810 838916
 Meet at: 10:15 at the site. The task location has yet to be confirmed, so contact Mark for details if you are coming. Brief details – Highwood – access from Kingfisher Drive, Woodley. Lavell's Lake, follow the arrows from the sailing club car park on Sandford Lane.

Userbody: Wokingham District Council.

Diary Dates

TBA Committee Mtg 7-45pm. Black Boy, Shinfield Road. All welcome.
Mon 1st Mar. Newsletter copy date. Any (printable!) contributions to the newsletter are always welcome. Any items for inclusion in the next newsletter should be sent to the P.O. Box on or preferably before this date.
TBA Please contact Richard Coles for dates of tools evenings.

BeC Contacts

Chair & Tools:	Richard Coles	(0118) 976 0580
Treasurer:	Philip Allen	(0118) 941 0471 *
Van Admin:	Rodney Chapple	(0118) 986 4438
Task Co-Coordinator:	Laurence Herniman	(0118) 954 9620 *
Membership & Newsletter:	Neil Frankum	(0118) 975 1528 *
Social Secretary	David Fiddes	(0118) 950 0735
Committee Member	Peter Harrison	

* Answerphone available

Address for Correspondence: Berkshire Conservation Volunteers, PO Box 165,
 Reading, Berkshire, RG6 4LD

Email: membership@berkshire-conservation-volunteers.org.uk

MOBILE: We now have a mobile phone for use on task – although primarily for use in emergencies, volunteers can also use it to contact us if they are having difficulties locating the worksite – the number is **0780 3360654**. **NB:** this phone will only be switched on during tasks.

www.berkshire-conservation-volunteers.org.uk