

OXFORD CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

England & Wales · Charity number 1186114

Details

Status Registered

Legal form CIO

Registered 2019-11-04

Register [View on the Charity Commission register](#)

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Activities

Objects: TO PROTECT, CONSERVE, MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY, PARTICULARLY IN, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, OXFORD AND THE SURROUNDING AREA, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PUBLIC BY:1. PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PUBLIC AS VOLUNTEERS TO PARTICIPATE IN PRACTICAL CONSERVATION WORK, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PUBLIC;2. ADVANCING EDUCATION ABOUT THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS RELEVANT TO NATURE CONSERVATION, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE PUBLIC.

Activities: Oxford Conservation Volunteers is a voluntary organisation that carries out practical work conserving the wildlife and traditional landscape of the Oxford area. The group organises work parties every weekend undertaking a wide variety of nature conservation work.

Classification

- **How:** Provides Services, Provides Advocacy/advice/information, Other Charitable Activities
- **What:** Education/training, Environment/conservation/heritage, Economic/community Development/employment
- **Who:** Other Charities Or Voluntary Bodies, Other Defined Groups, The General Public/mankind

Geography

- Throughout England And Wales

Finances

Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees
2025-04-05	£12,291	£36,143	-	-
2024-04-05	£23,000	£10,742	-	-
2023-04-05	£6,579	£4,657	-	-
2022-04-05	£6,526	£4,763	-	-
2021-04-05	£11,860	£5,587	-	-

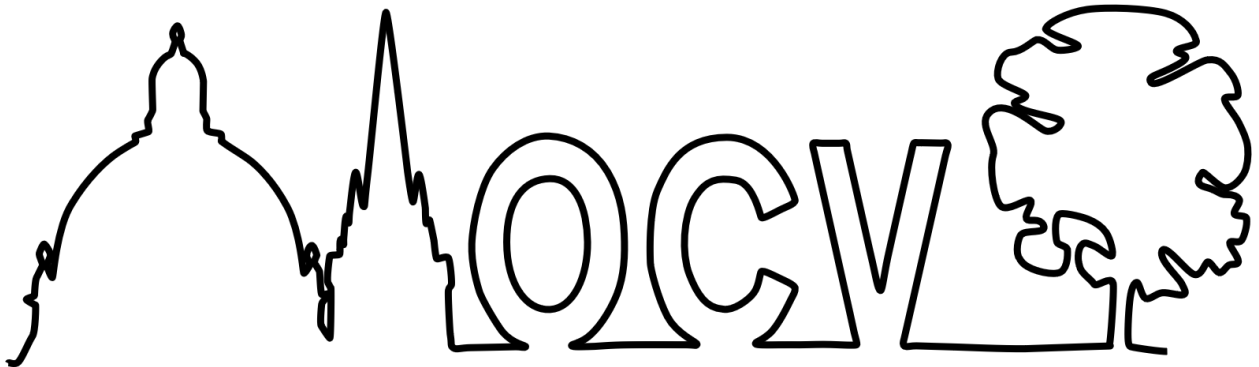
Trustees

Name	Role	Appointed
Christopher James Skepper	Chair	2025-06-03
Carla Ponte Julio		2025-06-03
Dariusz Maton		2026-06-02
Dorota Maton-Mosurska		2024-09-03
Dr Jennifer Louise Hill		2026-06-02
Nicolas Elliot Bricknell		2024-06-04
Philip Bradford		2025-05-06
Philip John Hunter		2025-06-03
Samuel Fishwick		2026-06-02
Timothy John Bletsoe		2025-06-03
Tom Bulford		2026-06-02

OXFORD CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

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Accounts



Oxford Conservation Volunteers

Annual Report 2024 – 2025



Registered Charity Number 1186114

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Chair's Report

We've had another productive year doing a lot of conservation volunteering. We're still getting great turnouts and have had plenty of Saturday tasks to supplement the regular Sundays.

On the committee, much of the discussion this year has been focussed around getting a replacement minibus, including what we could afford and what sort of vehicle would suit the group's needs. We also spent quite a lot of time talking about which tools and equipment to purchase with money from grants. If we get reports of any safety concerns, or incident reports following recent tasks then we discuss those and how to mitigate risks in future.

The new minibus was purchased in January this year, and represents a big investment for the group. We first viewed it in November 2024, but it had to be modified to include tool storage and various minor repairs had to be done, so it finally entered service at the start of February 2025. The previous one had mostly served us well since 2011 but had caused a few problems over the years and was obviously at the end of its useful life. The new one enables us to carry two more people and a small amount of extra tools, and is considerably less polluting. There are some differences which mean we have to be more careful to avoid driving on bumpy surfaces and avoid going off road. Since taking delivery we've also fitted seat covers, roof bars and purchased a spare wheel.

Regular tasks have been going well and turnouts have been significantly up, so much so that we are having to purchase additional PPE, such as helmets and gloves to make sure we always have enough. There's a small but dedicated pool of leaders and drivers, so there have been very few tasks recently where it took too long to get a leader or driver signed up. Nevertheless, we would still be very keen to encourage anyone who is interested to step forward. We will make sure you have a full induction before leading the first time.

We had a very enjoyable residential trip to the Peak District last Summer repairing a footpath on a steep mountainside with wooden revetments, and repairing sections of dry stone wall. We're not planning one this year, mostly because the folks in the Peak District can't accommodate us, and with the minibus administration I haven't had chance to investigate any other possible locations. We intend to resume residential trips either late this year or, more likely, next year.



Repairing a stone wall and a footpath, residential in Peak District June 2024

In the coming year, I'm hoping we can modernise our equal opportunities policy to continue to ensure that the group is as welcoming and inclusive as possible. I'm also hoping we can modernise some of our IT, particularly with better mobile support and improving the map links and directions on the website.

I'd like to thank all the committee members, leader and drivers, and regular volunteers for their dedication and commitment this year. You are what makes OCV great!

Chris Skepper



Coppicing hazel and installing wire cages for protection from deer, Pissen Woods, March 2025

Task Programmer's Report

Since the writing of my last report, OCV has worked 59 task days - 48 on a Sunday, 11 on a Saturday. That we have managed so much, so consistently, is due firstly to the number of OCV volunteers that are prepared to turn out, in pretty much all weathers, and, secondly, the number of those volunteers prepared to take on the extra responsibility of leading tasks or driving the minibus. As long as these numbers hold up I can continue to program work with confidence, including Saturday tasks. At the moment, there is no lack of work to program.

All of our work is collaborative in one way or another, and our list of collaborative partners is a long one. I should begin with Oxford City Council, as our home base is a converted freight container in the Council's Cutteslowe Park depot. We kept up our regular maintenance work at several OCC sites in Oxford, usually alongside their respective Friends Groups – The Trap Grounds, Burgess Field, Longbridges, Milham Ford, and the two Lye Valley fens. Our strong relationships with the Oxford Preservation Trust (OPT) and Natural England (at the Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve), continue and we made new connections with the Nuneham Courtenay Estate and the Hardwick Estate (down by the Thames in South Oxfordshire). Our involvement with the restoration of the water meads at Wolfson College continued to the point where the end of the extensive scrub management and fencing project is now in sight, hopefully in the second quarter of next year.



Fen raking, Lye Valley, October 2024



Scything the reed bed, Trap Grounds, September 2024

We kept up our long-standing relations with two private clients at sites in the Chilterns with hazel copping in Pissen Wood, and scrub management on the SSSI at Gray's Lane Bank, where Hamid, the landowner, treated the whole OCV crew to a magnificent barbecue at the end of a day's work in June.

In the 2024/5 winter season we teamed up with Wild Oxfordshire again to help implement the third season of the CPRE "Hedgerow Heroes" project. In all kinds of conditions we helped plant several hundred meters of new hedge at West Challow, Milton-under-Wychwood, Long Mead, and Nuneham Courtenay. We also planted new hedges independently of the CPRE scheme for the local parish Council at Great Haseley and the Howe Trust at Wheatley. Given the variety of conditions and locations, it will be interesting to compare the success of each of these projects. So much for hedge planting. We also tackled two significant hedgelaying projects – at Hogacre Common and Kirtlington. At

Hogacre we spent two days laying the third side (the west side) of the square of hedges that surround their orchard. At Kirtlington we were asked by the Parish Council to return to relay the same hedge we first laid in 2013/4. The good people of Hogacre Common let us harvest hazel materials from their coppice for use at Kirtlington.



Hedge planting, Greater Haseley January 2025 (left) and Long Mead, Swinford January 25 (right)

Some of the more complicated tasks we take on require that we move or prepare materials in advance of the task days. So thanks in particular to Guy Hudson and Chris Skepper for finding the time to help out in mid-week.

I'm always struck by the variation in the type and scope of work we're asked to take on. This year, for instance, we've taken on the attempt to control invasive Balsam at one site (Longbridges) and to eliminate it at another (the Hardwick Estate, Greenbroom Farm Wood). In the same year we've started collaborative work with the botanist Andy Byfield to recreate orchid habitats on the south facing slopes of the Chilterns above the Thames Valley. Too much of one thing in one place, too little of another thing in another place. Whether either of these initiatives succeed, and indeed, what counts as success, we'll see, but the maxim I'm attempting to follow is "Pick your battles!"



Himalayan Balsam removal, Longbridges Nature Park, June 2024



Hedgelaying, Kirtlington, November 2024

Three projects stand out in my recollection. The first is the boardwalk bridge we built at Larkins Lane for the OPT involving Chris Skepper's uncannily intuitive grasp of parallelograms. The second is the two days' extensive coppicing work we did at Eynsham Wood for the Woodland Trust that should be transformative for the woodland flora and the understory. The third is the day we spent mowing the reed-bed at the Trap Grounds with a team of eight scythers, all in line astern. We must have cut and raked several hundred square meters that day.



Construction of a boardwalk bridge, Larkins Lane, June 2024

Once again, as always: all our volunteers are important, but those prepared to lead and drive are essential to what we do. Thank you to everyone who has done so – without you it would not have happened. We're always on the look-out for volunteers prepared to lead a task or drive the bus, so if you think you can help out then please let either myself or Chris know. We'll do everything we can to help you get started by shadowing current task leaders, or taking you through the driver's van induction. If you'd like to have a go, then please get in touch with me at tasks@ocv.org.uk, or Chris at chair@ocv.org.uk.

Phil Hunter

Social Secretary's Report

We generally aim for one social event per month, although it does tend to vary a bit, depending on what I have time to organise.

This year we've had boat trips, pub trips, meals, walks and a bird-watching evening. We went ice-skating in the Winter, and we also had a well-attended Christmas meal. At the start of the year we went bowling at the Kassam stadium and we enjoyed a meal out at the Turtle Bay restaurant.

The next social will be punting on the Cherwell, which is probably the most long-standing fixture in the OCV social calendar.

It's always great to see everyone and talk about conservation outside of a task. Socials are good for recruitment, since people understandably can be reluctant to get into a minibus and be whisked off into the countryside for a day with people they haven't met before! They are also good for the regulars to get to know one another which helps a lot when it comes to working together on something difficult.

There is still officially a vacancy for Social Secretary so if anyone would like to take this over, or just help out by organising a social events once in a while, then please let me know.

Chris Skepper



Hedgelaying, Hogacre Common, February 2024 (the left hand photo shows the laid hedge being laid, the right hand photo the hedge being bound)

Secretary's Report

Throughout the year, we have held regular monthly committee meetings at Oxford Town Hall. In October, I temporarily took over the role of secretary while Jenny commenced her maternity leave. The meetings typically last approximately one hour, during which we review usual agenda items. On average, eight committee members attended each meeting, with some joining via Skype or Teams. Occasionally, a few volunteers also participated. Our primary mode of communication for agenda items and other committee correspondence has been email. Meeting minutes are circulated to committee members via email and are also posted on the OCV website. A significant amount of meeting time was devoted to discussing the change of our minibus, which eventually happened in January this year. Following this change, the minibus handbook was updated by Chris; the revised version is available on the OCV website, and a printed copy is kept in the minibus. I regularly replenish hard copies of the leader's and driver's information forms to ensure they are available for each task. I have been updating our virtual Task Sheet Repository regularly by posting completed sheets in chronological order. This resource helps task leaders review previous work details at each site.

In March 2025 I completed the Annual Activity Report for Community Action Groups (CAG) Oxfordshire as Jenny did in previous years. The report included the total number of volunteer task attendances between April 2024 and May 2025, which amounted to 1,166 which is an impressive figure. I hope we can maintain these numbers next year and it would also be great to see increase in our number of drivers and leaders.

Dorota Maton-Mosurska



Fen mow and rake, Louie Memorial Fields, North Hinksey, July 2024

Treasurer's Report

The accounts for the financial year 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 are presented in Table 1. Our income for the year was £12,291.14.

The balance in our accounts is £27,935.61. Despite having had the major outlay for the new minibus we are in a healthy financial situation thanks to sufficient contingency for the minibus cost, membership fees, grants and donations.

Table 1. Accounts for period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025

	2024-2025	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-2022
INCOME:				
Task Fees	£7,580.00	£9,020.00 ¹	£5,355.00	£5,220.00
Memberships	£388.66	£489.90	£495.00	£105.00
Donations	£904.95	£6,030.00`	£400.00	£150.00
Grants	£1,457.90	£6,500.00	£0.00	£850.00
Merchandise sales	£319.00	£14.00	£60.00	£150.70
Interest	£30.81	£224.93	£106.08	£39.64
Other	£1,609.82 ²	£724.74	£162.59	£11.54
Income for the year	£12,291.14	£23,003.57	£6,578.67	£6,526.85
EXPENDITURE:				
Minibus	£29,180.73 ³			
Maintenance, MOT	£476.47	£581.29	£779.89	£217.80
Fuel	£648.15	£482.65	£470.54	£301.21
Tax & Insurance	£1,036.64	£825.90	£820.89	£793.53
Total Minibus costs	£31,341.99	£1,889.84	£2,071.32	£1,312.54
Car Mileage	£1,099.04	£553.62	£378.74	£155.52
Tools, materials & tool insurance	£1,847.65	£6,719.07	£563.99	£2,000.57
Training	£0.00	£0.00	£822.45	£350.00
BTCV affiliation and insurance	£248.23	£242.49	£207.09	£207.09
Food	£194.86	£188.22	£54.84	£0.00
Stationery	£0.00	£127.46	£104.02	£66.77
Publicity	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Accommodation	£400.00	£500	£0.00	£0.00
Other	£678.13 ⁴	£521.80	£454.14	£332.44
Merchandise	£333.00	£0.00	£0.00	£338.40
Depreciation	£2,764.50 ⁵	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Expenditure for the year	£36,142.90	£10,742.50	£4,656.59	£4,763.33
Excess income over expenditure	-£26,616.26	£12,258.07	£1,922.08	£1,763.52
*Excess income over expenditure excl. depreciation	-£23,851.76	£12,258.07	£1,922.08	£1,763.52
Balance in current account	£13,090.05	£50,037.76	£3,939.23	£2,756.85
Balance in Investment Account	£14,845.56	£1,240.28	£37,133.53	£36,792.15
Petty Cash	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00

Note in 2023 the billing for 12 tasks for NE at Aston Rowant was moved to the start of the financial year. Therefore, 2023 accounts include the fees for 2022 and 2023.

² Refund for task materials residential, and Gift Aid from HMRC

³ Includes total cost on new minibus £29,180.73 including trade in of old minibus of £1,000 (minibus including tool cage, seat covers and roof bars).

⁴ Website hosting and email service

⁵ Calculated using straight-line methodology assuming 10-year lifespan and £1000 trade-in value (£28,645-£1,000)/10

Tim Bletsoe

Website Editor's Report

New sites

The following new sites were added to the website between April 2024 and April 2025:

1. Nuneham Courtenay Estate, Oxfordshire
2. The Recreation Ground, Great Haseley
3. Milton-under-Wychwood, Bruern Road
4. West Challow, Vale of White Horse
5. Bottom Wood, Hardwick Estate
6. Greenbroom Farm Wood, Hardwick Estate

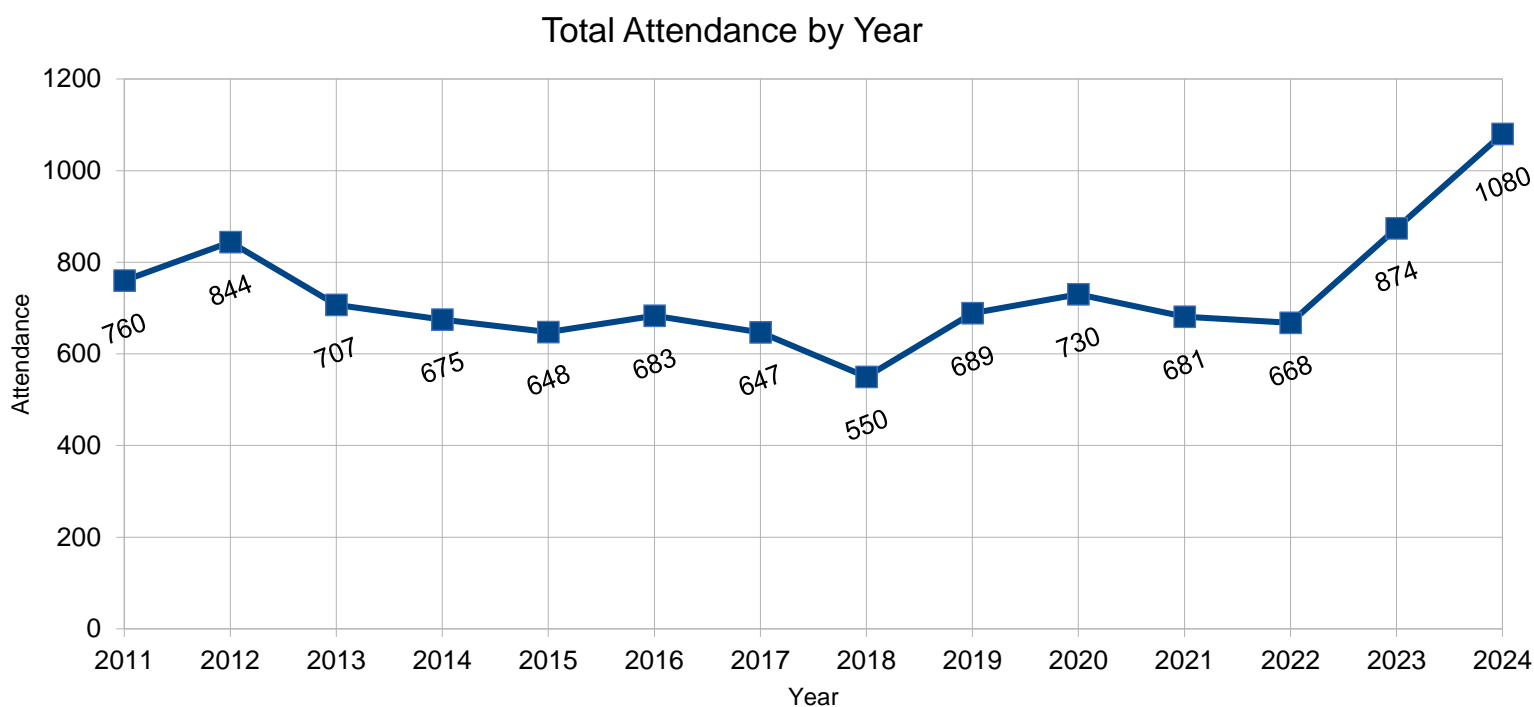
OCV Site Database

The *OCV Events Database* has been updated. The URL address is below:

https://www.ocv.org.uk/wiki/index.php?n=Leaders.DocumentsAndForms?action=download&upname=ocv_events_database.xlsx

Turnout

Below is a graph of the total annual task attendance we have been having from 2011 to 2024¹



¹ Prior to 2011, OCV did not record attendance for individual tasks. Each year during this period was treated as a standard year rather than an AGM year.

Samuel Fishwick

Minibus Officer's Report

This year we replaced our minibus. The LDV Maxus was purchased in 2012 and despite a rocky start (new dashboard), and an aversion to starting on cold days (rectified with new glow plugs) it has served us well in the last few years. We received £1,000 trade in when we bought the new one.

In February we took ownership of a Peugeot Boxer 14 seater which has been modified and with a tool cage it has a lower unloaded weight, allowing us greater capacity having eleven usable passenger seats. Many thanks to our chair Chris who did most of the leg work to find the new one.

The minibus is our largest expense, but vital for our work for the transportation of volunteers, and tools. Tasks without it would be severely limited and we would not be able to run them without volunteers having to sign-up in advance.

Tim Bletsoe



Site maintenance and pond work, Milham Ford Nature Park, May 2025

Fundraising Officer's Report

For most of the year we have been applying for grants to help fund the replacement minibus. These proved unsuccessful but with the vehicle bought we were able to change tack and seek funds for new tools. At the year-end we were delighted to receive support from the Pye Trust, a local charity, and also from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment.

Our submissions have emphasized the value of our work to the natural environment of the Oxford area and also the physical, mental health and social benefits that accrue to our many volunteers.

We are most grateful to our donors, both for their financial contributions and for taking the trouble to understand and appreciate our endeavours.

Tom Bulford



Pollarded willows, Iffley Island, October 2024

Tools Officer's Report

This year has been a great test of our now extensive range of tools.

The small tree poppers have improved the efficiency of scrub removal tasks with volunteers welcoming its lightweight construction. Our lazy dog tools have also played a key role in swift and ergonomic ragwort and dock extraction. The extended stock of scythes has noticeably increased the area OCV can clear on a given day, particularly noted at the Trap Grounds reed bed scythe last September. Lastly, during winter, OCV's new draining shovels were invaluable for hedge planting which, given the increasing frequency of these tasks, we are looking to acquire more of.

Aside from the usual renewal of bow saw blades, pruning saws, gloves and sharpening equipment, this year has not seen any major new additions to the repertoire bar two sets of neoprene waders.

The annual OCV Tools Day was healthily attended with volunteers painting, sharpening and oiling almost everything in sight! Some neat rodent proofing to the shed was also done by Chris.

Special thanks to Oxford City Council for their continued support storing our tools at the Cutteslowe Parks Depot. Thanks also to Warwick Shadbolt for his specialist saw tooth sharpening, wedge making and fork straightening skills.

Dariusz Maton



The annual OCV Tools Day, Cutteslowe Parks Depot, April 2025

Webmaster's Report

For OCV's website and mailing lists, the year has been mostly uneventful. Our committee/leaders mailing lists suffered from some slow/unreliable-delivery issues toward the end of 2024, which appear to have been resolved by some configuration tweaks with our web host.

Otherwise, the only notable website change (apart from the many events, tasks and reserves updates, of course) is that we added a link to our new BlueSky profile in the navigation menu.

As always, please report any technical problems relating to the website or mailing lists to webmaster@ocv.org.uk.

Nic Bricknell

Social Media Officer's Report

Our social media continues to help us connect with more people in the Oxford community, in a direct and informal way.

We use social platforms to share our tasks and activities, as well as our monthly social events and occasional trips, and it's great to see our audience and reach grow.

We share our work through:

- Our weekly task email (thanks to the leaders who send these out each week)
- Facebook events on our group page
- Daily Info website events
- X (formerly Twitter) feed
- Instagram page
- Bluesky (a new addition to our channels)

Instagram is a fantastic way to share photos of our tasks and connect visually with our community. A big thank you to Anne Cossuta for managing our Instagram feed so well, helping us grow to 785 followers, which is 90 more than last year.

Our Facebook page allows us to post details of upcoming tasks, and easily communicate with everyone interested in our group's work; we now have 851 followers (up from 833 last year). Thank you all! It's wonderful to share the results of our efforts and see your feedback on the dedication and hard work our volunteers put into each conservation task. Special thanks to Tim Bletsoe, Dariusz Maton, and Chris Skepper for providing great photos.

We use X (formerly Twitter) for last-minute updates about our tasks. Each week, as the weekend approaches, we tweet about the upcoming task, illustrated by a photo taken by one of our volunteers. We currently have 519 followers, down from 570 last year. We think this drop is mainly due to many users leaving X recently. This also explains the decrease in the

number of people, charities, and organizations we follow, which went from 259 to 240 this year through no action of ours, likely because many have left the platform. However, we are still committed to using these quick and effective channels to publicize our volunteering opportunities.

In December 2024, we joined a new social media channel: Bluesky. It's early days and we are proud to have already reached 50 followers. Feel free to join us there!

Lastly, Daily Info is an important part of the Oxford community, and many volunteers find us through it. We regularly post our events there, and sometimes we get featured by the Editor, which helps bring more attention to our work. Thank you!

Finally, a huge thank you to all our friends, volunteers, and followers for your incredible support and commitment to nature conservation. You all make a difference!

Join us on:

instagram - @oxfordconservationvolunteers

facebook - @OxConservation

twitter - @oxconservation

bluesky: @oxconservation.bsky.social

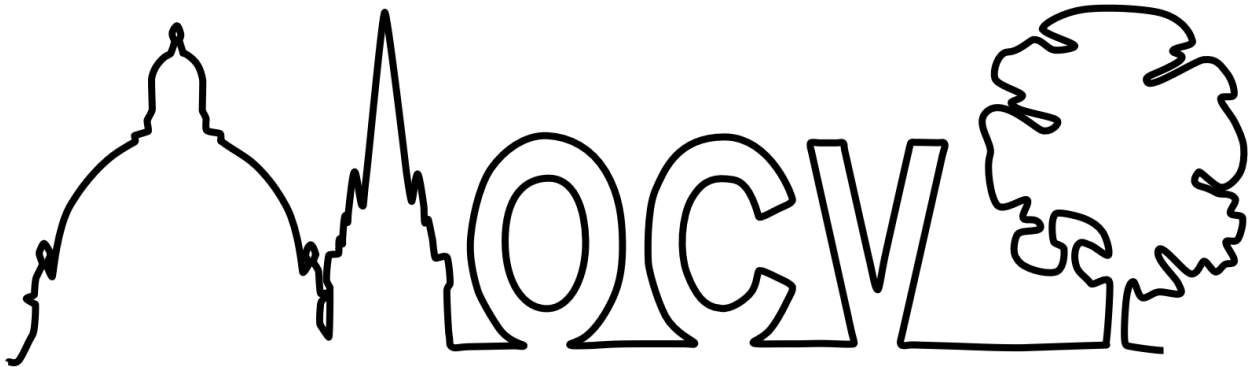
website - www.ocv.org.uk

Carla Ponte Júlio

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Chair's Report

It's been a great year for OCV, with one or two excellent tasks completed every weekend, sustained volunteer numbers, and a residential trip. For the committee, some important jobs have been ticked off the list, such as sorting out online donations and raising money to replace a lot of our tools.

At the end of July 2023 we had our first residential trip since the pandemic. We did two days volunteering in the Peak District National Park, staying near Hathersage. Despite unseasonably wet weather, a good time was had by all. We are planning a similar trip in June this year, but hopefully with better weather!

We've raised a lot of money and replaced a lot of old and worn out tools this year, as well as purchasing quite a few new items. Thanks are due to the organisations that awarded the grants, and particularly to Tom for doing so much work on the applications and reporting, and also to Dariusz and Phil for doing most of the purchasing.

We've welcomed two new task leaders and one new minibus driver this year, which has helped take some of the pressure off the relatively small existing pool. More leaders and drivers would still be very welcome though if anyone fancies it! Four leaders and drivers have received first aid training at no cost to the group thanks to a generous arrangement with Steph from Natural England.

After several months of administrative headaches we now have a new online platform called "CAF Donate" set up for donations and membership fees. This allows people to donate via credit or debit card and Direct Debits for the first time, so we're no longer reliant on bank transfers or cash and can finally say goodbye to cheques.

At the last count we had 46 paid-up members, which I think is a record. We have accumulated around £600 in donations from our own members. The committee approved extra membership rules to better organise the process of joining the group.

This year we've had more Saturday tasks which has helped spread volunteers across different tasks, make better use of our tools and transport, and ultimately get more valuable conservation work done. Over the Winter we did some extra hedge-planting tasks as part of the Hedgerow Heroes project with CPRE. Some of the team have become very effective at this sort of work, and I think it's fair to say that the length of hedge that we can plant in a day has steadily increased!

We didn't get round to replacing our minibus last year, so that will be the major project for the forthcoming year.

Chris Skepper



Residential trip to the Peak District National Park, Derbyshire, 21st – 23rd July 2023. Left – removing gorse on Mam Tor to prevent walkers from straying from the paths and eroding the hillside. Top right – picnic lunch in wet conditions on day one. Bottom right – wet again on day two working on the nature garden at Brunts barn.

Task Programmer's Report

We've never been busier. In the year since my report last year we've worked 58 OCV task days - 49 of them on Sundays and 9 on Saturdays.

Several things came together to make this possible. Firstly, we've had high turnouts of volunteers. Secondly, several of those volunteers stepped up to take on the responsibility of leading tasks and driving the OCV minibus, which meant that I could begin to schedule work on Saturdays. A reliable cohort of leaders and drivers is essential to what we do, how we do it, and how much we can do. A third element was Tom's success in raising significant funds for new tools and extra kit. We had the resources: the wherewithal, the tools, and the people. The final element has been the demand for work.

We've continued to collaborate with the usual rich mixture of clients. Our home base remains with the Oxford City Council at their Cutteslowe Park depot and we kept up our regular maintenance work at several OCC sites, usually alongside their respective Friends Groups – The Trap Grounds, Burgess Field, Longbridges, Milham Ford, and the Lye Valley fens. We

also spent two days installing a wide flight of steps, frameworks of sleepers filled with aggregate, at another OCC site: Raleigh Park. We've Julian Cooper (the ODS and Oxford City Council Countryside Supervisor) to thank for good relations with the Council. Long may they continue.



Sleeper step construction at Raleigh Park, Oxford on the 28th May and 4th June 2023. Steps were constructed to improve site access and prevent a muddy quagmire in winter in an area fed by natural springs.

We kept up our long term collaborations with Natural England at Aston Rowant and with the Oxford Preservation Trust at sites in and around Oxford. As well as our regular work at Mathew Arnold Field and Iffley Island (we mowed the meadow here for the fifteenth consecutive summer) we took on work for the Trust for the first time at Wolvercote Lakes and Heyford Meadow.

After two years work coppicing in Piddington Wood for the Woodland Trust we were asked to move to the Eynsham Millennium Wood. Left unmanaged since it was planted, the woodland habitat is not what it might be. We coppiced, and dead-hedged, an extensive area of hazel over two days which should drastically improve light levels to the advantage of the woodland flora and the surrounding understory. The plan is return again next year to continue the work. We also continued a rolling schedule of coppicing work at Pissen Wood in the Chilterns, this time installing stock-fence cages to prevent the regrowth from being grazed by deer.

The new year marked the beginning of our most extensive collaborative project – a program of hedge-planting (“Hedgerow Heroes”) organized at the national level by the CPRE (the Campaign to Protect Rural England) and devolved to local wildlife organisations, in our case Wild Oxfordshire. We teamed up with local residents to plant several hundred metres of new hedge at Great Haseley, Little Wittenham, and the Cumnor Church of England Primary School – all new sites for OCV.

There was more hedge-planting at Long Mead, Swinford for the Long Mead Foundation. Their principal interest being the restoration of floodplain meadows by the Thames, we also spent two days pulling docks out of what will be a floriferous and insect-rich habitat when the work is finally complete.

The local parish councils at Tackley, Kidlington, and North Hinksey were also pleased to have our help manging their local sites, as was the Howe Trust at Wheatley.

In addition to all this there were some stand-out moments to remember: an intense summer downpour while mowing the meadow at Cuxham; the views across the Vale of White Horse from the fields where we pulled ragwort on the Wessex Downs above Letcombe Basset; man-and-woman handling the heavy lining for the complex of new ponds at Aston's Eyot; and, perhaps most memorable of all, an Indian summer's day at the beginning of October when we began an extensive hedge-laying project at Hogacre Common in Oxford. We had a turn-out of 36 and our hosts laid on not just lunch, but a sit-down afternoon tea with homemade cake and scones with jam and cream.

It's usually the case that when things are very well organized, nobody notices. I think it safe to say that nobody notices the OCV committee.

All our volunteers are important, but those prepared to lead and drive are essential to what we do. Thank you to everyone who has done so – without you it would not have happened. We're always on the look-out for volunteers prepared to lead a task or drive the bus, so if you think you can help out then please let either myself or Chris know. We'll do everything we can to help you get started by shadowing current task leaders, or taking you through the driver's van induction. If you'd like to have a go, then please get in touch with me at tasks@ocv.org.uk, or Chris at chair@ocv.org.uk

Phil Hunter



A bright and clear day for raking the south fen of the Lye Valley, Oxford on the 15th October 2023. Left – using willow from maintenance of the fen boundaries to reinforce the banks of the stream after recent storm damage. Right – dried marsh lousewort collected prior to raking for reseeding of the fen at the end of the day.

Social Secretary's Report

We've had a social just about every month in the last year, including the traditional Summer punting trip, several walks, one evening at the ice-rink, and various pub and restaurant trips.

Particularly notable socials included a paddling trip on the Thames and the Cherwell in June with people bringing their paddleboards, open canoes and kayaks. It turns out quite a few OCV people have access to a boat of some sort or other.

In November about a dozen of us had a tour of Ardley Energy Recovery Facility. It was an extremely interesting afternoon. We were almost hypnotised watching grabbers lifting rubbish into the furnaces. We had a lot of interesting conversations about waste, pollution, recycling and the climate crisis. Most of us left as experts on how Oxfordshire's waste is dealt with, and a desire to buy less stuff in the first place!

Our best attended social was a bird-watching walk around Otmoor with around 25 of us getting our binoculars out to see what we could spot, and then watching the murmurations, before warming up in the local pub. Thanks to Ricky for organising that and another walk in April.

We still officially have a vacancy for social secretary, so let me know if you'd like to fill the role, or alternatively please get in touch if you have an idea for a social which you'd like to organise.

Chris Skepper



OCV volunteers at the November 2023 visit to the Ardley Energy Recovery Facility run by Viridor where 95% of Oxfordshire's non-recyclable waste is burnt to divert waste from landfill and generate electricity.

Secretary's Report

Committee meetings have continued monthly in the Town Hall with plenty of matters to discuss - the purchasing of new tools, a busy year for tasks, and ongoing planning for a minibus purchase, to name a few. Observers are always welcome to attend the meeting in person or online via Skype, and/or join us afterwards for a drink.

As mentioned by Phil it has been a record year for the number of tasks (at least for as long as we can remember) and this is reflected in our task attendance numbers. Volunteer task attendances between April 2023 and March 2024 total 980. Counting the two days of the residential trip as separate attendances we are just nine volunteers shy of reaching a major milestone of 1,000 'volunteerings' at our work parties. Compared with the previous period a volunteer has jumped out of bed early at the weekend and made their way to one of our tasks an additional 254 times, which is quite remarkable, particularly so given a damp summer in 2023 and an especially soggy winter and spring into 2024. Let's hope that 2024-25 is another productive year!

Jenny Hill



Orchids photographed at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, South Oxfordshire on the 25th June 2023.

Treasurer's Report

The accounts for the financial year 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 are presented in Table 1. Our income for the year was £23,003.57.

The balance in our accounts is £51, 278.04. We are in a healthy financial situation thanks to membership fees, grants & donations. We have sufficient funds to replace the minibus.

Tim Bletsoe

Table 1. Accounts for period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024

	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021
INCOME:				
Task Fees	£9,020.00 ⁽⁴⁾	£5,355.00	£5,220.00	£4,080.00
Memberships	£489.90	£495.00	£105.00	£309.00
Donations	£6,030.00	£400.00	£150.00	£829.70
Grants	£6,500.00	£0.00	£850.00	£550.00
Merchandise sales	£14.00	£60.00	£150.70	£0.00
Interest	£224.93	£106.08	£39.64	£34.32
Other	£724.74 ⁽³⁾	£162.59 ⁽³⁾	£11.54 ⁽³⁾	£0.00 ⁽³⁾
Income for the year	£23,003.57	£6,578.67	£6,526.85	£5,803.02
EXPENDITURE:				
Minibus				
Maintenance, MOT	£581.29	£779.89	£217.80	£456.55
Fuel	£482.65	£470.54	£301.21	£90.95
Tax & Insurance	£825.90	£820.89	£793.53	£772.93
Total Minibus costs	£1,889.84	£2,071.32	£1,312.54	£1,320.43
Car Mileage	£553.62	£378.74	£155.52	£106.80
Tools, materials & tool insurance	£6,719.07	£563.99	£2,000.57	£1,860.30
Training	£0.00	£822.45	£350.00	£0.00
BTCV affiliation and insurance	£242.49	£207.09	£207.09	£207.09
Food	£188.22	£54.84	£0.00	£0.00
Stationery	£127.46	£104.02	£66.77	£40.32
Publicity	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£86.37
Accommodation	£500	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Other	£521.80 ⁽²⁾	£454.14 ⁽²⁾	£332.44 ⁽²⁾	£279.89 ⁽²⁾
Merchandise	£0.00	£0.00	£338.40	£0.00
Depreciation	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾

	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021
Expenditure for the year	£10,742.50	£4,656.59	£4,763.33	£3,901.20
Excess income over expenditure	£12,258.07	£1,922.08	£1,763.52	£301.32
*Excess income over expenditure excl depreciation	£12,258.07	£1,922.08	£1,763.52	£1,901.32
Balance in current account	£50,037.76	£3,939.23	£2,756.85	£4,319.89
Balance in Investment Account	£1,240.28	£37,133.53	£36,792.15	£30,052.63
Petty Cash	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00

- (1) Depreciation was calculated using the straight-line method, based on an estimated 8-year lifespan, and a £500 trade-in value
- (2) Website hosting and email service, and Local Giving fees
- (3) Refund for task materials, residential, and Gift Aid from HMRC
- (4) Note in 2023 the billing for 12 tasks for NE at Aston Rowant was moved to the start of the financial year. Therefore, 2023 accounts include the fees for 2022 and 2023.



Many hands make light work - the best task attendance of the year was at St Mary's Fields Kidlington for the annual hay rake with 40 in total made up of regular OCV volunteers and lots of Kidlington locals.

Website Editor's Report

This year I finished scanning the website for broken links with the help of an online tool. They have now been fixed or removed completely if a suitable alternative couldn't be found. This will become an annual task from now on.

There's been several new reserve sites added this year with basic information added.

Samuel Fishwick

Minibus Officer's Report

The minibus continued to support the tasks we ran transporting tools and volunteers to site and has had a reliable 12 months passing its MoT with no issues. Fuel cost was slightly higher due to the trip to the Peak District.

As an essential asset for the group, we will be looking to replace it later this year and have sufficient funds to do this.

Tim Bletsoe



The first of three visits this year to Hogacre Common, Oxford took place on the 8th October 2023. Hazel coppicing on site provided stakes and binders for laying the hedge surrounding the orchard.

Fundraising Officer's Report

The year started with a letter writing campaign to Oxford colleges and other leading local employers. This resulted in donations from Christ Church College, Jesus College, St John's College and New College. Thereafter we applied to various grant making bodies and received donations from Sustainable Charlbury, Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment and South Oxfordshire District Council. We also received a donation from the Litmore Foundation. The total of these donations, amounting to over £10,000, has largely been spent replacing worn tools and buying new ones that extend our capabilities. Any money raised this year will go towards a replacement minibus.

Our submissions have emphasized the value of our work to the natural environment of the Oxford area and also the physical, mental health and social benefits that accrue to our many volunteers. We are most grateful to our donors, both for their financial contributions and for taking the trouble to understand and appreciate our endeavours.

Tom Bulford



An assortment of insects and wildflowers photographed at Grays Lane Bank, Ibstone, Buckinghamshire on the 2nd July 2023

Tools Officer's Report

It has been an exciting year as OCV's tools officer.

With a £6,500 budget, we have finally been able to buy ten mini Tree Poppers. This has undoubtedly increased the amount of scrub volunteers can effectively remove on tasks such as our monthly visits to Aston Rowant. This lightweight tool means volunteers get tired less quickly and we can safely pack more tools (and potentially volunteers) in the van.

Also purchased were five Lazy Dogs. While initially intended for dock and thistle pulling, we have also found these useful for ragwort control. The ergonomic design of this tool allows plants to be uprooted without needing to stoop down to reach them.

With the grant money received, a new set of loppers were also bought. Given that loppers are almost always taken out on tasks, this was a very worthwhile spend and some of our old loppers will likely be rehomed to another conservation group soon.

Other notable purchases include the impact driver which we had planned to buy for some time, more spades for our hedge planting projects, a complete set of new bow saw blades, rakes and two more scythe snaths (with blades).

We would like to thank the organisations that awarded us these generous grants, Tom for doing the paperwork, Phil, Chris and Tim for their help with purchasing, Oxford City Council for continuing to house our kit at the Cutteslowe depot and Warwick Shadbolt for sharpening our pole and pruning saw blades.

Dariusz Maton



Working at The Windmill, Great Haseley on one of several tasks this year as part of CPRE's Hedgerow Heroes project.

Webmaster's Report

It has been a year of business as usual for the website.

As mentioned in last year's report, our previous web hosting provider 4UHosting was acquired by HostPresto, another UK-based provider, early last year. As part of this, in June 2023 our web hosting was transferred over to HostPresto's servers. This was mostly seamless apart from a brief disruption to the website on the morning of 2nd June 2023.

We continue to use MailChimp for our public mailing list.

Please continue to report any website/ mailing list problems or suggestions to webmaster@ocv.org.uk

Nic Bricknell



Treats for the volunteers! Enjoying a warming fire pit at tea break at Grays Lane Bank, Ibstone on the 26th November 2023, and home made soup and afternoon tea at Hogacre common, on the 8th October 2023.

Social Media Officer's Report

This year, our social media engagement has allowed us to reach more and more of the Oxford community and grow quite a bit, for which we are thankful (and impressed!).

We rely heavily on these channels to publicise our tasks – as well as other activities such as our monthly socials and occasional residentials – and it's encouraging to see the numbers grow.

As per the last few years, we socialise our work via:

- Our weekly task email (thank you to the leaders who send these out every week)
- Facebook events, in our group page
- Daily Info website events
- X (formerly Twitter) feed

- Instagram page

Instagram remains a great way of sharing the task photos, and engage in a more visual way with our network. Thank you to Anne Cossuta who continues to manage the Instagram feed with gusto, and has helped grow our reach to 695 followers, an increase of 86 since last year.

Our Facebook page is where we can more readily dialog with all those interested in the work of the group, and we now have 833 followers (an increase of 135 from last year). To all of you, thank you! It's great to share the outcome of the work we do and see your feedback to the commitment, time and hard work that all the volunteers put into each conservation task. As ever, thanks go to Tim Bletsoe, Dariusz Maton, and Chris Skepper for the steady supply of great photos.

We rely on X (ex-Twitter) for close-to-the-event advertising of each task: every week, as the weekend approaches, we tweet about the upcoming task, alongside a photo taken by one of our volunteers. We now have 570 followers, a modest increase of 12 since last year but we remain committed to the immediacy and reach of the platform. We follow 259 people and organisations in the charity, science & nature space, and we often retweet interesting posts they share.

Last but not least, Daily Info is a pillar of the Oxford scene and we are aware many volunteers find us that way. We post our events steadily throughout the year, and occasionally make the Editor's spotlight choice, which brings an increased attention to our work and schedule. Thank you.

Finally, a massive Thank You to all our friends, volunteers and followers for your commitment and support to the cause of nature conservation.

Join us on:

instagram - @oxfordconservationvolunteers

facebook - @OxConservation

twitter - @oxconservation

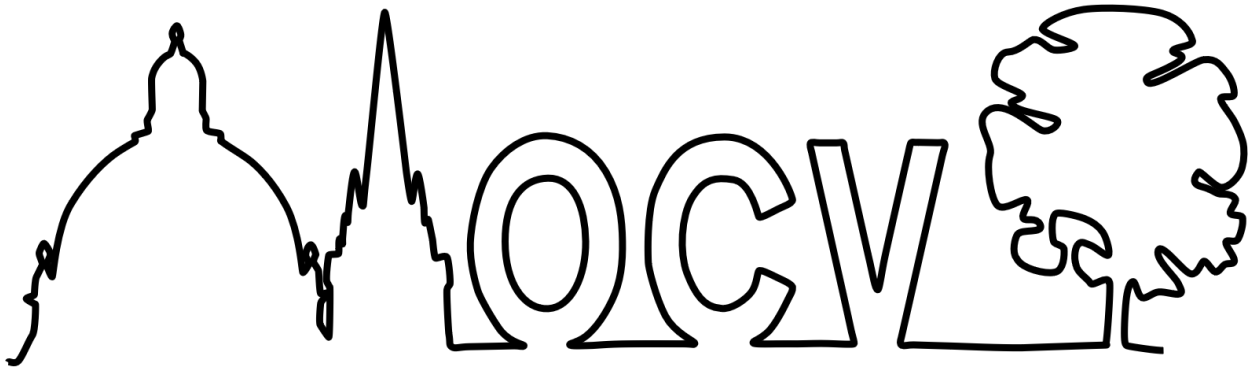
website - www.ocv.org.uk

Carla Ponte Júlio

OXFORD CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

England & Wales - Charity number 1186114

Accounts



Oxford Conservation Volunteers

Annual Report 2022 – 2023



Registered Charity Number 1186114

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Chair's Report

There are so many really positive things to report this year. We've had another excellent full programme of tasks, with no Covid-related cancellations. In fact, I don't think we've had any weather-related cancellations either. Turnouts have been excellent in general, and there have been a few truly exceptional tasks where making tea for so many people became a very big job!

More people have been using the minibus for transport to tasks. After several pandemic years where it was often half-empty, we've had it full on numerous occasions and had to rope in backup car drivers. We've also had to remind minibus drivers of the importance of not overloading it with heavy tools.

We've not had quite the same difficulties as recent years finding leaders and drivers for each week, although we do still have quite a small pool to draw from. Special thanks should go to Dariusz for leading so many times. We'd love to have a more diverse group of leaders and drivers so please get in touch if you'd like to give it a go.

We've welcomed Dariusz, Sam and Tom to the committee this year as Tools Officer, Website Editor, and Fundraising Officer respectively. We're very grateful to them for getting involved and helping to keep things moving along. There are still vacancies on the committee for Van Officer and Social Secretary, although these roles are being covered by other committee members for the time being.

A big plan for 2023 is to finally replace our ageing minibus. This is likely to be quite a complicated process but it's important to do it before the current one becomes completely inoperable or expensive to maintain. It's likely to take some time and effort to find a suitable replacement, but I think we're all gearing up for that.

Our last two residential trips were in 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic. For various reasons we've struggled to organise anything since then, so plans for the coming year include getting back into the habit of arranging residential trips a couple of times a year, starting with the Peak District which is booked for July.

At the time of writing there are 32 fully paid-up OCV members. This is the most since 2019 and the second highest for the last decade. As usual, we concentrated our efforts to sign-up members in January, but it's likely we'll get a few more throughout the year.

Overall it's a been great year, and it only remains for me to thank everyone for their parts in it.

Chris Skepper



Matthew Arnold Field in May 2022.

Left: view of the fen, right: controlling the flow of water as part of work to re-wet the area and promote biodiversity.

Task Programmer's Report

We've been at three new sites since our last AGM: two in Oxford, Longbridges Nature Park, and the Jarn Mound, Boars Hill; and one south of Oxford at Letcombe Basset. The Longbridges task was to help out with the initial restoration of the derelict western side of the site in collaboration with the Council, who had done some of the heavy lifting to shift fallen timber, and a newly founded local friends group, who turned out in force – the volunteer count for the task was 31. We pollarded willows, raked the meadow, demolished wire fences, and cleared rubbish and junk. Another restoration job took us to the Jarn Mound in Boars Hill, created as a viewing point by Arthur Evans in 1931, now overgrown, owned and managed by the Oxford Preservation Trust. This was scrub bashing at angle of something like 40 degrees, but the raking was all downhill and no one lost their footing. The work at Letcombe Basset took us to the very edge of the Lambourn Downs with extensive views north across the Vale of White Horse. We were there to help a local landowner keep control of an extensive and expanding population of ragwort.

We also worked at a new location on a very familiar site - The Trap Grounds. We scythed and raked a large swath of the dense reed-bed beyond the main pond. A secondary task involved the removal of invasive buddleias from the margins.

Other summer scythe work took us back to sites we visit regularly: Iffley Island (for the fourteenth successive year); North Hinksey; Cuxham; and the wet meadow at Burnt Mill on the edge of the Cherwell flood plain in Old Marston. The drought conditions of last summer made scythe work relatively easy compared to former years and we had time to set up some tuition sessions for beginners in the late afternoons. Later in the year we cut and raked the fens at Lye Valley and the Louie Memorial Fields.

We've kept up our long-standing relationship with Natural England at Aston Rowant - our local National Nature Reserve. The monthly tasks there were mostly dedicated to the maintenance and enhancement of the chalk grassland habitats. We kept up our more or less regular work at Burgess Field, Stansfeld, Mathew Arnold Field, Crecy Hill, and St Mary's Fields in Kidlington.

Winter hazel coppicing took us back to Pissen Wood in the Chilterns (for a private client) and to Piddington Wood in Buckinghamshire (for the Woodland Trust).

The highlight of the year as far as construction work goes was the completion of several hundred meters of post and wire fencing around the riverside perimeter of the North Mead of the Wolfson College water meadows – a dedicated SSSI. As with the task at Longbridges, this marked the beginning of the implementation of a long-term management plan that aims to involve locals, in this case Wolfson students.

I took over the task programmer role in April 2014 when we raised the OCV task fee from £100 to £120. We decided that from January 2023 we'd increase the task fee to £160 to reflect increased costs and in the hope that would forestall the need to raise it further in the near future. At the time of writing I've had no complaints, on the contrary, clients are very pleased to see us and I still have more requests for work than I can easily accommodate.

Another significant change since our last AGM has been the appointment of Dariusz as our new tools officer. The improvement in the condition of our tools makes a significant difference - there is nothing quite as satisfying as wielding a *sharp* slasher.

In summary, from the beginning of June 2022 to mid-April 2023 we've worked on 45 days – every Sunday except December 25th.

All our volunteers are important, but those prepared to lead and drive are essential to what we do. Thank you to everyone who has done so – without you it would not have happened. We're always on the lookout for volunteers prepared to lead a task or drive the bus, so if you think you can help out then please let either myself or Chris know. We'll do everything we can to help you get started by shadowing current task leaders, or taking you through the driver's van induction. If you'd like to have a go, then please get in touch with me at tasks@ocv.org.uk, or Chris at chair@ocv.org.uk

Phil Hunter



Longbridges Nature Park, February 2023.

Many hands make light work at our first task at Longbridges earlier this year, rejuvenating the western side of the site and opening up access for walkers and swimmers.

Social Secretary's Report

We've had a social event just about every month this year. These have included meals out at the Gardeners Arms, the Coconut Tree and Za'atar bake. We went for a pub walk on Port Meadow in the Summer and we met up to watch a film at the Phoenix Picture House called The Ants and the Grasshopper about the effects of climate change in the developing world.

We had a very well-attended bird-watching social at Otmoor RSPB reserve in December which was expertly organised by Ricky Clark. We were waiting for a spectacular starling murmuration which occurred almost exactly at the expected time and was very much worth seeing despite the cold.

The Christmas social was a delicious Nepalese meal at The Everest restaurant in East Oxford. More recently, we've been to play Junkyard crazy golf at the Westgate centre, had a large turnout for pizza at the White Rabbit, and have also been bowling at the Ozone leisure park next to the Kassam stadium.

Plans for socials next year include a session punting, a paddling adventure and probably various walks and meals out.

There is still officially a vacancy for the role of Social Secretary, and I'm only covering it temporarily. Please let one of us know if you're interested in joining the committee and becoming our next Social Secretary.

Chris Skepper



Showcasing the tree popper!

Left/right: volunteers proudly display long roots which have been pulled using our tree poppers while removing vegetation encroaching onto rare grassland at Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve. Centre: A tree popper with dogwood removed from Aston Rowant.

Treasurer's Report

The accounts for the financial year 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 are presented in Table 1. Our income for the year was £6,578.67.

The balance in our accounts is £41,072.76. We are in a healthy financial situation thanks to membership fees & donations. We have sufficient funds to replace the minibus.

Table 1. Accounts for period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023

	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020
INCOME:				
Task Fees	£5,355.00	£5,220.00	£4,080.00	£7,200.00
Memberships	£495.00	£105.00	£309.00	£131.00
Donations	£400.00	£150.00	£829.70	£949.00
Grants	£0.00	£850.00	£550.00	£491.48
Merchandise sales	£60.00	£150.70	£0.00	£26.00
Interest	£106.08	£39.64	£34.32	£0.00
Other	£162.59 ⁽³⁾	£11.54 ⁽³⁾	£0.00 ⁽³⁾	£865.21 ⁽³⁾
Income for the year	£6,578.67	£6,526.85	£5,803.02	£9,662.69
EXPENDITURE:				
Minibus				
Maintenance, MOT	£779.89	£217.80	£456.55	£226.08
Fuel	£470.54	£301.21	£90.95	£460.35
Tax & Insurance	£820.89	£793.53	£772.93	£771.48
Total Minibus costs	£2,071.32	£1,312.54	£1320.43	£1457.91
Car Mileage	£378.74	£155.52	£106.80	£99.52
Tools, materials & tool insurance	£563.99	£2000.57	£1860.30	£1,012.92
Training	£822.45	£350.00	£0.00	£810.00
BTCV affiliation and insurance	£207.09	£207.09	£207.09	£217.09
Food	£54.84	£0.00	£0.00	£503.39
Stationery	£104.02	£66.77	£40.32	£167.09

Publicity	£0.00	£0.00	£86.37	£65.45
Accommodation	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£50.00
Other	£454.14 ⁽²⁾	£332.44 ⁽²⁾	£279.89 ⁽²⁾	£279.89 ⁽²⁾
Merchandise	£0.00	£338.40	£0.00	£0.00
Depreciation	£0.00	£0.00	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾
Expenditure for the year	£4,656.59	£4,763.33	£3,901.20	£4,662.84
Excess income over expenditure	£1,922.08	£1763.52	£301.32	£3,162.27
*Excess income over expenditure excl depreciation	£1,922.08	£1763.52	£1901.32	£4,762.27
Balance in current account	£3,939.23	£2,756.85	£4,319.89	£34,806.50
Balance in Investment Account	£37,133.53	£36,792.15	£30,052.63	£0.00
Petty Cash	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00

- (1) Depreciation was calculated using the straight-line method, based on an estimated 8-year lifespan, and a £500 trade-in value
(2) Website hosting and email service, and Local Giving fees
(3) Refund for task materials residential, and Gift Aid from HMRC

Tim Bletsoe



Jarn Mound, September 2022.

Built as a lookout Jarn Mound on Boars Hill was completed in 1931. Our task to remove scrub from the mound was part of plans by the Oxford Preservation Trust to restore the area. The steep incline meant aching legs for all.

Secretary's Report

Committee meetings have taken place each month this year in the Oxford Town Hall and we are grateful as always for the use of a room cost-free in central Oxford, not to mention with a touch of grandeur in the surroundings! I provide an option to join online via Skype for those who request it. This year we've had some observers join us for committee meetings which has been great to see, if OCV is to thrive we need people to take an interest in the running of the charity as well as to carry out the physical work on tasks.

Each year I add up the number of volunteers attending tasks in the preceding 12 months and report these to Community Action Groups (CAG) Oxfordshire. CAG have shifted their reporting period recently and so having spent enough time looking at spreadsheets already I haven't directly compared this year and last, but it is clear that volunteer numbers have risen and turnouts are healthy! From April 2022 to March 2023 the total number of volunteer task attendances was 726, which I feel is quite an impressive number. I hope that I will be reporting more of the same this time next year. As others have already mentioned before me it would be lovely to see our number of leaders and drivers grow also!

Jenny Hill



Taking part in our Sunday work parties isn't a requirement for OCV committee members although many of them do. From top left to bottom right – OCV's chair, task programmer, web editor, secretary, tools officer and fundraising officer – out on tasks this year.

Website Editor's Report

I have made progress in collating latitude and longitude coordinates for OCV reserves to later display Open Street Maps embedded to reserve pages. About 25% of reserve pages have been checked for broken links and inaccurate relative date references. Wolfson College Water Meadows reserve page has been updated more significantly. I will continue reviewing and updating all reserve pages to improve the accuracy and usability of information presented to readers.

Samuel Fishwick



Top: A holloway on Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve in June 2022. Holloways were tracks created by driving livestock across fields to country markets.

Bottom: A few of the many types of wildflower found on Aston Rowant; left: Meadowsweet, middle: Horseshoe vetch, right: Common spotted orchid.

Minibus Officer's Report

The minibus continued to support the tasks we ran transporting tools and volunteers to site. It passed its MoT with no issues. It required four new tyres because three and the spare were older than 10 years. The impact of inflation can be seen in the increase in the cost of fuel. As an essential asset for the group, we will be looking to replace it later this year and have sufficient funds to do this.

Tim Bletsoe



Raking the fen at Lye Valley, October 2022.

Tools Officer's Report

OCV's set of tools has grown this year with the acquisition of six ragwort forks and five micro-mattocks for ragwort control and scrub removal tasks respectively. The latter have proven particularly useful for getting at the roots of small to medium-sized saplings without the need of heavy full-sized mattocks. Other notable purchases this year include a tip sheet, two new mattock handles and two additional pairs of bolt cutters. Ten new pairs of welding gloves were bought in January to replace the most worn out in the glove bag. The first aid kits were replenished and all 12 small bow saws (21") received new blades in March 2023. Six loppers found to be in the worst conditions were removed and their replacement is being planned. Many thanks to Oxford City Council for continuing to house our kit at the Cutteslowe depot.

Dariusz Maton

Webmaster's Report

Work on the website this year has been limited to fixes and routine maintenance.

The website encountered two outages in the past year. The first outage was the result of a PHP upgrade enacted by our web host; a code change was required in order to gain compatibility with the newer PHP version. The website's functionality was severely limited for around 24 hours as I made this required change. The second outage was shorter in time scale (< 1 day) and was a result of a DNS misconfiguration at our web host.

The web hosting provider that we have been using for many years (4UHosting) has recently been acquired by HostPresto, another UK-based provider; I am optimistic that this acquisition will not necessitate significant changes to the operation of our website or (non-public) mailing lists.

For our public mailing list, we continue to use MailChimp.

As ever there are website improvements that I would like to make and features to add; thanks to the committee and website visitors for their patience as I slowly find time to implement these.

Please continue to report any website/ mailing list problems or suggestions to webmaster@ocv.org.uk

Nic Bricknell



Structural work at three sites in the past year – left: Wolfson College Water Meadows in June 2022, middle: Jubilee Fields and Long Meadow, Wootton in July 2022, and right: Aston's Eyot in March 2023.

Social Media Officer's Report

In the last year, social media has continued to be a strong source of exposure for OCV. Every year, we try to improve our efforts in leveraging these tools to spread the word on the tasks we organise, the ways the public can join in, and to highlight the benefits of the work we do.

We continue to use the same 4 main channels, when it comes to socialising our activities:

- Our weekly task email
- Facebook events in our group page
- Daily Info website events
- Twitter page

We also use Instagram to showcase pictures of the conservation work we do - thank you to Anne Cossuta who continues to manage that feed. It's a worthwhile endeavour, as our Instagram account now has 609 followers.. an increase of 76 since last year.

Our weekly task email is sent by the up-coming task leader and goes out to the full mailing list, with details of the task ahead - the when, the what, and the why. Thank you to the leaders for putting in the effort to highlight the benefits of each week's work in these communications.

Our Facebook group page has seen marginal growth since the last report (from 693 to 698) but we see good engagement and good feedback whenever we post photos of the tasks, and for that we remain indebted to Chris Skepper and Tim Bletsoe, among others, who are always willing to take and share photos.

As with Facebook events, we post on Daily Info a few times a year as the activity programme becomes available. We believe the events we post on Daily Info are impactful in our publicity reach (it has a high profile as Oxford's leading listings website) but we have no numbers to share.

On Twitter, we post mainly once a week, as the task Sunday approaches, as well as any other special event, such as our monthly socials. We also engage with other groups and retweet activities from our friends in the Conservation and Science fields. We now have 558 followers, and follow 260 other groups and organisations.

Thank you to all our friends, volunteers and followers for your steadfast support to the efforts of practical nature conservation.



instagram - @oxfordconservationvolunteers
facebook - @OxConservation
twitter - @oxconservation
website - www.ocv.org.uk

Carla Ponte Júlio

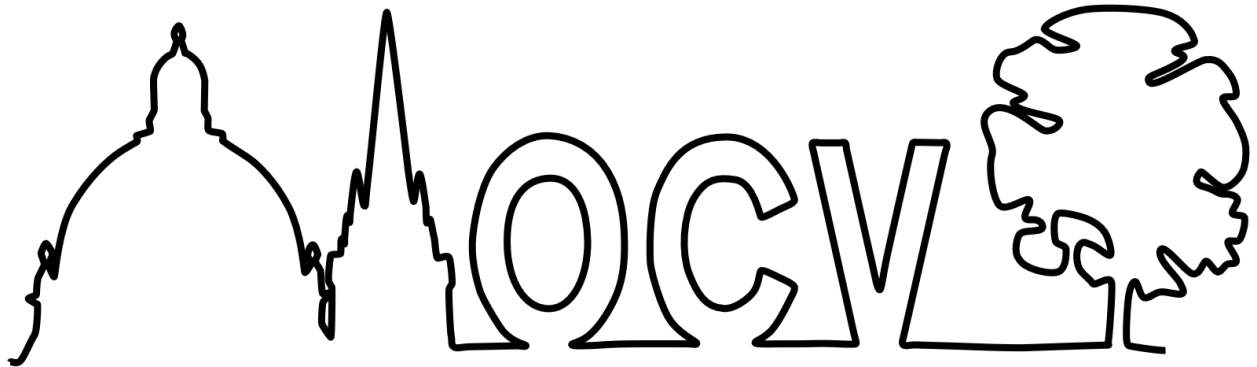


Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, April 2023

OXFORD CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

England & Wales - Charity number 1186114

Accounts



Oxford Conservation Volunteers

Annual Report 2021 – 2022



Registered Charity Number 1186114

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Chair's Report

It's been a year of a gradual return to normality for OCV after the pandemic restrictions. We haven't needed to cancel any tasks in the 2021-2022 year due to Covid. We've been able to re-introduce minibus pickups, and with the end of restrictions on social gatherings we've been able to end the booking system to manage volunteer numbers, as they return to more ordinary (but still healthy) levels. We've also ended the special signage, hand hygiene measures and compulsory mask wearing in the minibus. We're gradually re-introducing tea and coffee on tasks as leaders see fit. But we still haven't organised any residential trips and we are continuing to keep the minibus well-ventilated.

It's difficult to choose highlights of the task programme. Phil has carefully planned it to include a good balance of different types of work and site, all while doing tasks at the most appropriate time of year. Favourites for me would include the Wolfson College fencing work in the Summer and the Burgess Field hedgelaying work in Winter. Both of these gave those of us who have become the old guard the chance to refresh our skills, and remind us that we do actually know some stuff, if only we can find some people willing to listen to us drone on about it! Usually it's only towards the end of the day that we really remember how it all works, so it's nice to have more than one of each task like this per season. The pollarding at Aston's Eyot was also a great success, although we have decided to scale back this sort of work in future. The risk factors included working at height, heavy branches, rotten timber, uneven ground and members of public on footpaths and in small boats, so it was complex to manage the work safely. It's always important to be able to identify when jobs are too big for us.

Turning to longer-term projects, we have yet to make much progress on purchasing a new minibus, but we have made some tentative first steps. Nic has made excellent progress on starting to modernise our website, beginning with making it work much better on mobile devices. In light of current economic circumstances we recently made the difficult decision to increase the task fee from next year. This will ensure that we can continue to pay for ongoing running costs such as fuel and insurance and replacing broken tools without dipping into the reserve kept for a new minibus.

One of our main pre-occupations in recent months has been the small pool of leaders, drivers and committee members. This is becoming an existential threat to the organisation and we need to continue to work on this problem seriously, perhaps considering more radical solutions. Following discussions at recent committee meetings our current approach is to produce good publicity to maintain our pipeline of keen volunteers, and then support as many of them as possible to develop knowledge, skills and confidence to lead tasks. It might be necessary to slow the pace of work to prioritise encouraging more people along the path to becoming task leaders. It's also important to foster a positive and supportive atmosphere, and try not to put new leaders off by holding each other to unnecessarily high

standards! Despite these concerns I think overall OCV is in good shape, doing great work to improve biodiversity in so many ways, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of everyone involved. I hope everyone else has had as much fun as me doing it.

Chris Skepper



Hedgelaying at Burgess Field Nature Reserve, February 2022

Task Programmer's Report

We took on two hedge laying projects over the winter season - at Burgess Field and Aston Rowant. The supposed hedge-line at Burgess Field was really nothing of the sort. Composed of grown-out, brittle hawthorn trees, planted in line astern it was tough going, but we persevered and laid about 60 meters in three days' work. The Friends of Burgess Field followed up with extensive new planting to plug the gaps and broaden the girth of the hedge. It will take two or three years for the new growth to develop but it should amount to the regeneration of a valuable habitat.

We worked on the other hedge project, at Aston Rowant, along the top of Hill Lane, in collaboration with Nigel Adams. The mixed hedge was in a nice state to lay and Nigel completed the work with an immaculately finished course of binding. On our April visit to Aston Rowant the hedge was already in full leaf and in partial flower.

Hedge-laying requires that we provide hazel stakes and binders which have to be harvested in advance and then brought to site. We now have two woodlands that we can coppice for hazel: the privately owned Pissen Wood in the Chilterns, and Piddington Wood, owned and managed by the Woodland Trust, in Buckinghamshire.

We've had a strong program of construction work over the past year: the renovation of the stepped paths that give access to the reserve at Crecy Hill: the installation of a flight of sleeper steps at Stansfeld; diversionary path work along the riverside path at Aston's Eyot; revetment construction and path levelling at Mathew Arnold Field; post and wire fencing for Wolfson College on the mead that borders the Cherwell; fence repairs and demolition at Jubilee Fields; ad hoc dam work with natural materials at Mathew Arnold Field; and the construction of several large raised beds from scaffolding planks at the East Ward Allotments in Oxford. This last job was for the Children's Allotment project – a nice example of one of our more unusual clients.

Summer scythe work took us back to sites we visit regularly: Iffley Island (I reckon we've now cut this Thames riverside site for thirteen consecutive years); North Hinksey; and Cuxham. We also cut and cleared the wet meadow at Burnt Mill, a new site for OCV on the edge of the Cherwell flood plain in Old Marston. Later in the year we cut and raked the fens at Lye Valley and the Louie Memorial Fields.

On a Saturday last August we arranged one of our occasional training days, this time on the use of Austrian scythes, our standard bit of scythe kit. The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust granted us funds for the day long course hosted and led by Clive Leeke at his home base in the Chilterns, just outside Reading. There were eight places, and we had a good mix of volunteers - men and women, young and old – all beginners.

The work I've mentioned so far is in addition to our usual, more routine tasks, for example tackling scrub at Aston Rowant to maintain the grassland habitat, or working on general maintenance at two urban Oxford reserves - the Trap Grounds and Milham Ford.

In summary, from the beginning of April 2021 to the end of May 2022 we worked on 67 days (60 Sundays, 7 Saturdays).

All our volunteers are important, but those prepared to lead and drive are essential to what we do. Thank you to everyone who has done so – without you it would not have happened. At the time of writing we are desperately short of task leaders in particular. This last year we've worked a full schedule and yet still I've had more requests for work than I could accommodate. I've never had to cancel a planned task for the lack of a volunteer to lead it, but that's becoming more likely as we're forced to rely on the same small number of leaders. So if you think you can help out by leading a task or driving our van then please let either myself or Chris know. We'll do everything we can to help you get started by shadowing current task leaders, or taking you through the driver's van induction. If you'd like to have a go, then please get in touch with me at tasks@ocv.org.uk, or Chris at chair@ocv.org.uk

Phil Hunter



Scythe Training Course at The Old Farmyard, Emmer Green, Reading, August 2021

Social Secretary's Report

As Covid restrictions were relaxed, socials resumed properly in June with a picnic in Angel and Greyhound meadow, an evening walk around Wolvercote in August, a meal at a pizza restaurant in September, a pub trip in October and fireworks night in November. Despite many people cancelling Christmas parties amid another bout of Covid concerns we did have a modest gathering for curry in December. Then, so far in 2022, we've had a night hike, a pub trip and a vegetarian/vegan meal at a different pub. Most socials attracted 6-8 people and they sometimes appeal to new potential volunteers as well as many of the regulars so they do seem to serve a useful purpose as well as being a fun night out. I'm really only standing in temporarily as Social Secretary and would be more than happy to hand over the responsibility to someone else, so if you would like to take over, or you know someone who would be good at it, then let me know. It's an easy and fun job, and there is the possibility of bringing more creativity to it than I normally manage!

Chris Skepper



Scrub control at Grim's Ditch Blewbury, South Oxfordshire, January 2022

Treasurer's Report

The accounts for the financial year 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 are presented in Table 1. Our income for the year was £6,526.85

The balance in our accounts is £39,549.00. We are in a healthy financial situation thanks to grants & donations. We have sufficient funds to replace the minibus when needed.

Tim Bletsoe

Table 1. Accounts for period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022

	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019
INCOME:				
Task Fees	£5,220.00	£4,080.00	£7,200.00	£5,040.00
Memberships	£105.00	£309.00	£131.00	£135.00
Donations	£150.00	£829.70	£949.00	£1,045.70
Grants	£850.00	£550.00	£491.48	£0.00
Merchandise sales	£150.70	£0.00	£26.00	£0.00
Interest	£39.64	£34.32	£0.00	£0.00
Other	£11.54 ⁽³⁾	£0.00 ⁽³⁾	£865.21 ⁽³⁾	£0.00 ⁽³⁾
Income for the year	£6,526.85	£5,803.02	£9,662.69	£6,220.70
EXPENDITURE:				
Minibus				
Maintenance, MOT	£217.80	£456.55	£226.08	£1100.70
Fuel	£301.21	£90.95	£460.35	£372.37
Tax & Insurance	£793.53	£772.93	£771.48	£770.84
Total Minibus costs	£1,312.54	£1,320.43	£1,457.91	£2,243.91
Car Mileage	£155.52	£106.80	£99.52	£17.82
Tools, materials & tool insurance	£2,000.57	£1,860.30	£1,012.92	£1,082.48
Training	£350.00	£0.00	£810.00	£0.00
TCV affiliation and insurance	£207.09	£207.09	£217.09	£207.09
Food	£0.00	£0.00	£503.39	£1.69
Stationery	£66.77	£40.32	£167.09	£77.72
Publicity	£0.00	£86.37	£65.45	£20.60
Accommodation	£0.00	£0.00	£50.00	£0.00
Other	£332.44 ⁽²⁾	£279.89 ⁽²⁾	£279.89 ⁽²⁾	£238.58 ⁽²⁾
Merchandise	£338.40	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00

Depreciation	£0.00	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾
Expenditure for the year	£4,763.33	£3,901.20	£4,662.84	£3,939.38
Excess income over expenditure	£1,763.52	£301.32	£3,162.27	£680.82
*Excess income over expenditure excl depreciation	£1,763.52	£1,901.32	£4,762.27	£2,280.82
Balance in current account	£2,756.85	£4,319.89	£34,806.50	£30,045.03
Balance in Investment Account	£36,792.15	£30,052.63	£0.00	£0.00
Petty Cash	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£2.38

- (1) Depreciation was calculated using the straight-line method, based on an estimated 8-year lifespan, and a £500 trade-in value
- (2) Website hosting and email service
- (3) Refund for task materials and residential payments



Left: Riverside path work at Aston's Eyot April 2022, Right: Newly created steps at Stansfeld Park, January 2022

Minibus Officer's Report

The minibus continued to support the tasks we ran transporting tools and volunteers to site. It passed its MoT with no issues, and no other repairs required in the past year. As an

essential asset for the group, we will be looking to replace it later this year and have sufficient funds to do this.

Tim Bletsoe



Matthew Arnold Field, May 2021

Secretary's Report

Having met online from spring 2020 to summer 2021, the autumn of last year saw a return to in-person committee meetings. While the town hall remained closed outside of office hours we managed as best we could for a number of months finding a little space in a pub. However this was a poor substitute for the quiet meeting rooms of the Oxford Town Hall, and we were glad to finally make our return there in December 2021, and have been appreciating the benefits of having this space since. As we enjoyed greater meeting attendances online, in particular from non-committee members, I have been continuing to circulate a link to allow online attendees, and aside from a few glitches these hybrid meetings have been working well.

As Chris mentioned in the Chair's report we are no longer implementing a booking system and cap on task attendees, which has removed a job for the leader, avoided us turning away enthusiastic volunteers, and at certain sites where attendances tend to be high increased the amount of work we can get done. Although below the heights reached while people's regular weekend activities were subject to COVID restrictions, volunteer attendance numbers remain healthy. As mentioned already by Chris and Tim, where the OCV is now struggling is a lack of people who can spare a little time to help with the running of our

activities, either by sitting on the committee, or volunteering to drive the minibus or lead tasks. Although not without responsibility and a commitment of time and energy, we're not only looking for people to do these jobs every other week; leading or driving for a task every once in a while is still a great help. I have found it to be rewarding and bring an extra appreciation of the work we do and why we do it.

Jenny Hill



Before and after at Wolfson Water Meadows, August 2021

Tools Officer's Report

After the excitement of the introduction of the tree-poppers last year, 2021-2 was a relatively quiet year for tools. We carried out the usual basic maintenance with some replacement of new for old: a couple of mells; new bungee cords for the tools cage in the van; a new, lighter wheelbarrow; a replacement set of 19 inch bowsaw blades; replacement first-aid consumables.

There were a couple of notable repair jobs. Jim Ballantyne arranged a repair by a friendly welder to one of our scythe blades that was slightly cracked. A very tricky repair which lasted the length of last year's mowing season. So far so good! The other significant repair

work - fixing a loose contact in one of our Dewalt battery drills, was carried out by our own Chris Skepper. Chris also turned his hand to the fabrication of a new stob-twister, the revamping of the first-aid box; and sharpening the blades of some of our mattock heads, with definitely improved performance as a result. We also reorganized the contents of the OCV tool box into two much more manageable separate boxes.

Additions to the tools stock included, in no particular order: another long-handled lopper/pruning saw, an extra muck fork, some litter pickers, safety glasses and protective sleeves.

The OCV scythe equipment will see its seventh year of use later this summer and into the autumn. There's always the chance that inexperienced, or even experienced, scythers will strain the tools, or damage the blades, but with the one exception mentioned above, the kit is still wearing very well.

We added two pairs of chest waders to the OCV stock of clobber.

We continue to be based at the Oxford City Council Parks depot in Cutteslowe Park, and we're grateful for the handy location, the use of a freight container as a tool shed, and a secure parking space for the OCV minibus.

The Tools Officer position on the committee has been vacant all year. Chris and I filled in well enough, but we're still looking for someone who can take it on. If you'd like to give it a go, please get in touch!

Phil Hunter



Revetment construction at Matthew Arnold Field, April 2022

Webmaster's Report

After a few years of no development, 2022 has seen some new changes and improvements to the website. In particular, the home page now contains details of the next upcoming conservation task, and many of the frequently viewed pages are now easier to read on mobile devices, with a single-column view and a toggle-able navigation bar. Following this success, I hope to roll out the improved mobile view to the rest of the webpages in the coming weeks and months.

As in previous years, we are using 4UHosting as our web hosting provider and Mailchimp for our public mailing list.

Please continue to report any website or mailing list issues — or suggestions for improvement — to me at webmaster@ocv.org.uk.

Nic Bricknell



Milham Ford Nature Park, April 2022

Social Media and Publicity Officer's Report

In the time since April 2021, we have increased our social media presence and once again used these channels widely in communicating our volunteering tasks, as the COVID regulations changed over time and it was possible once again to safely accommodate more people on tasks.

We continue to advertise our events online through 4 main channels:

- Our weekly task email (thank you to the leaders who send these out every week)
- Facebook events in our group page
- Daily Info website events
- Twitter page

Facebook and Daily info events are posted as the task programme becomes available on our website. Both the task email and our tweets are more topical and aimed specifically at the up-coming event in the calendar. During this year we've made a conscious effort to use Twitter more widely and consistently and try to engage with other local groups via this medium.

Our always organic, never paid, social media presence continues to grow slowly but steadily:

On Twitter we now have 556 followers, a slight increase on last year's numbers.

Instagram has seen our biggest growth in following, with 533 people currently. Thank you to Anne Cossutta who continues to manage the account with such gusto.

Our Facebook group now has 693 followers. Many thanks to Chris Skepper and Tim Bletsoe, among others, who are so helpful in taking and sharing photos from our tasks on the page. It's these posts that see the most engagement and help us share with everyone why the work we carry out is important and beneficial, and we all appreciate seeing the results of everyone's efforts.

To all our volunteers and friends in the past year, thank you again all for your continued support!

Carla Ponte Júlio

www.ocv.org.uk

instagram -

@oxfordconservationvolunteers

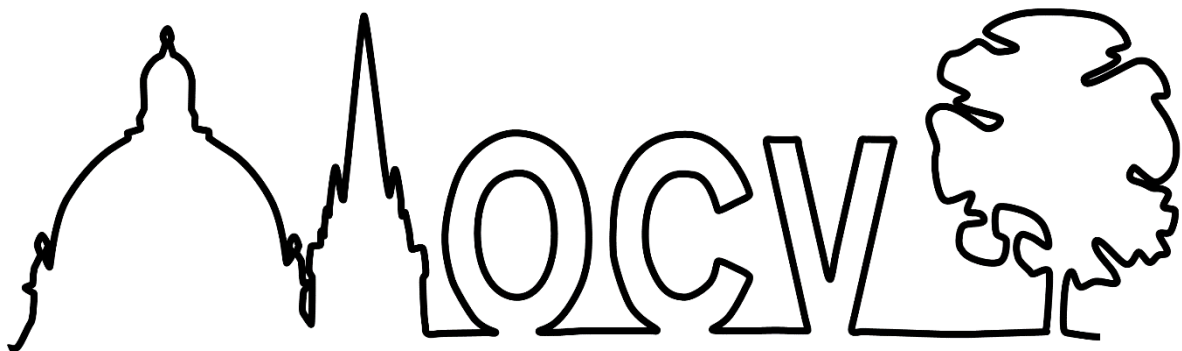
facebook - @OxConservation

twitter - @oxconservation

OXFORD CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

England & Wales - Charity number 1186114

Accounts



Oxford Conservation Volunteers

Annual Report 2020-2021



Registered Charity Number 1186114

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Chair's Report

It's been a strange year for everyone as a result of the pandemic, but we've managed to achieve a huge amount in very challenging circumstances, which I think makes OCV's year a rare positive story in what has otherwise been a tragic, bleak and lonely period for many people.

This time last year we had cancelled all our tasks because of the pandemic, but we had begun to think about how to resume activities in some form. I think we probably expected things to be completely back to normal within a matter of weeks, but I'm glad we didn't wait, because we would still be waiting a year later! We had some early strong encouragement to restart tasks from former OCV stalwart John Gorrill, who had a beach cleaning group running in another part of the country. He was the first to point out to me that there was nothing preventing us from organising work parties if we could mitigate risks, and suggested some practical steps. The regulations which allow volunteer work have stayed constant in this regard, although confusion about them has been widespread, particularly about whether work had to be in some way essential and in whether there were differences in tier areas or during different periods of time. Often the policy choice of one organisation was cited as an example of what the regulations must say, so rumours developed that did not reflect either the regulations or the guidance, which was hardly surprising given how difficult the regulations were to find and understand, and the arbitrary way in which they were enforced.

A major part of the preparation for resuming tasks was developing a risk assessment and some risk mitigation measures for Covid-19, which we did at a time when face-coverings were still a rare sight in public and actually against government advice. The focus at the time was on cleaning hands and surfaces, and then distancing. I think we did a thorough job on the risk mitigations, and several other conservation groups used it as a model to adapt for their own use over the subsequent months. The key points were not providing minibuses transport and 2m social distancing. Both of these have provided significant challenges. The latter meant mostly avoiding doing more complicated construction tasks or things like hedgelaying that we would normally do in pairs.

We had our first task following the first lockdown on Sunday May 31st 2020 at the Trap Grounds and were very relieved that plenty of volunteers showed an interest and we were able to do some useful work without any problems. I will always be grateful to those clients that were willing to host us for those first few tasks. I led the first couple of tasks and had the experience of arriving on site with not just a risk assessment in my pocket, but also printouts of laws, regulations, guidance and police advice, in the case there was an altercation with the authorities or members of the public! Thankfully, in the event, none of that was needed.

Although many people and organisations continued conservation volunteering on an ad-hoc basis throughout the first lockdown I'm proud that we were one of the first groups in the area to restart officially, and that we did so openly, with a risk assessment that the trustees had signed off, and that we made that we made it known to all our volunteers rather than just privately contacting people we knew personally. I think this shows the value of small,

dedicated groups like ours and some of our partners, as compared to very large charities and government organisations which can sometimes be slow to make decisions, have to support paid staff before volunteers and can become pre-occupied with finances and bureaucratic processes.

One of our biggest challenges this year has been managing large numbers of willing volunteers, often more than we can make good use of or safely accommodate on site. This was anticipated as there were fewer opportunities for people to get out and about, or to do volunteering with other organisations. It became increasingly apparent over the Summer where we had some very large turnouts, regularly between 25 and 35 for tasks in Oxford.

We were able to continue throughout the November/December lockdown with largely the same measures in place, but then cancelled a few tasks in January before resuming activities in February, this time with numbers limited to 15. One task was oversubscribed by 30 people, meaning we had willing volunteers to do 3 times as much work. (If only we had 3 times the tools, leaders and organisational capacity!)

In a year of great disruption and uncertainty, Phil Hunter deserves a special mention for juggling all the requests and filling all the gaps in the programme, sometimes swapping things around at quite short notice in order to maintain a full and varied programme with work that we could do safely in the circumstances.

A notable success story this year is the amount of scrub clearance work we've been able to do at Crecy Hill, Tackley. We've transformed this site with half a dozen sessions of cutting back mountains of bramble and thorny scrub. It had been significantly declining as so much wild flower habitat was lost to scrub, but I think we've made a good start on turning it around, and hopefully we can do some of the longer term work now.

The purchase of 4 tree-poppers was a significant investment for us. But they are proving very useful, so much that I wish we'd had them sooner. Although they are expensive, one was purchased as a result of a donation, and they seem unlikely to break or wear out quickly.

We've had a couple of online social activities, two or three real-life socials involving 6 people at a time, but no residentials this year. I don't feel we've missed any opportunities, since residentials were clearly out of the question, and socials limited by regulations much of the time. There doesn't seem to have been much demand among volunteers for online socials, and most seem to be occupying themselves between tasks with work, other volunteering, and whatever outdoor activities are allowed.

Fundraising has gone well this year under Celia Taylor's direction, and now we are excited that Tom De Wilton is taking over the role with some new ideas. In the Autumn we were awarded a grant from the council for Covid-19 expenses such as gloves, cleaning products and extra tools to reduce the need for sharing. We also received a grant from the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust for a scything training course to be held later in the year. We received donations from Sainsbury's and Asda for cleaning products and snacks.

One thing about OCV that is not widely appreciated is the amplifying effect we can have when we work with other organisations. For example, there are partners that have the budget to look after their nature reserve but not the numbers, or who have the expertise to design fantastic habitat projects but need the volunteers with the skills and tools to carry them out, or people trying to get a new volunteer group off the ground. Being part of a large and complex informal network of conservation organisations is great for resilience in difficult times like these.

Above all though, I continue to be impressed by all our volunteers who have shown a great willingness to drive, cycle or even walk significant distances in order to come to tasks, shown understanding when there isn't room for everyone, been willing to follow sometimes apparently arbitrary rules, while all the time working hard and keeping cheerful. I always feel better about the world after an OCV task and I hope everyone else does too.

Chris Skepper



Milham Ford Nature Park, Sun 6th September 2020



Secretary's Report

All committee meetings in the past year have been held online, with the town hall remaining closed for booking. The online meetings have been reliable with just a few minor technical issues, and attendance has been good, with the committee often joined by other

members or interested individuals. While the online meetings do have advantages I think I am not alone in hoping that by the time I write the report in 2022 we will have been able to hold at least some in-person meetings, once the committee judge it to be appropriate.

Last report I presented a summary of task attendance, for the year in question and further back in OCV history. This year interest in tasks has been healthy but a cap on numbers was introduced as a COVID safety measure, allowing all to hear the tools talk while social distancing and avoid overcrowding at other points of the day, and to ensure there are not more people present than is required to carry out the work. While it has been a real shame to turn enthusiastic volunteers away I hope that people will not feel put off and keep trying until we can accommodate greater numbers again, as there is plenty of conserving to be done!

Jenny Hill



Bat box installation at sites including North Hinksey Nature Reserve

Treasurer's report for the period 01/04/20 to 31/03/21

The accounts for the financial year 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 are presented in Table 1. Our income for the year was £5803.02

The balance in our account is £30,000. The reduced number of tasks was compensated for by an excellent fund-raising effort. We have sufficient funds to replace the minibus when needed.

Tim Bletsoe

Table 1. Accounts for period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021

	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
INCOME:				
Task Fees	£4080.00	£7,200.00	£5040.00	£7,200.00
Memberships	£309.00	£131.00	£135.00	£175.00
Donations	£829.70	£949.00	£1045.70	£1,562.50
Grants	£550.00	£491.48	£0.00	£0.00
Merchandise sales	£0.00	£26.00	£0.00	£51.50
Interest	£34.32	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Other	£0.00 ⁽³⁾	£865.21 ⁽³⁾	£0.00 ⁽³⁾	£671.10 ⁽³⁾
Income for the year	£5,803.02	£9,662.69	£6,220.70	£9,660.10
EXPENDITURE:				
Minibus				
Maintenance, MOT	£456.55	£226.08	£1100.70	£188.28
Fuel	£90.95	£460.35	£372.37	£364.63
Tax & Insurance	£772.93	£771.48	£770.84	£741.00
Total Minibus costs	£1320.43	£1457.91	£2,243.91	£1,293.91
Car Mileage	£106.80	£99.52	£17.82	£0.00
Tools, materials & tool insurance	£1860.30	£1,012.92	£1082.48	£1,154.82
Training	£0.00	£810.00	£0.00	£0.00
BTCV affiliation and insurance	£207.09	£217.09	£207.09	£211.60
Food	£0.00	£503.39	£1.69	£193.27
Stationery	£40.32	£167.09	£77.72	£58.78
Publicity	£86.37	£65.45	£20.60	£39.37
Accommodation	£0.00	£50.00	£0.00	£0.00
Other	£279.89 ⁽²⁾	£279.89 ⁽²⁾	£238.58 ⁽²⁾	£113.35 ⁽²⁾

Merchandise	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Depreciation	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾
Expenditure for the year	£3,901.20	£4,662.84	£3,939.38	£3,065.14
Excess income over expenditure	£301.32	£3,162.27	£680.82	£4,794.96
*Excess income over expenditure excl depreciation	£1901.32	£4,762.27	£2,280.82	£6,594.96
Balance in current account	£4,319.89	£34,806.50	£30,045.03	£28,230.00
Balance in Investment Account	£30,052.63	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Petty Cash	£0.00	£0.00	£2.38	£2.38

- (1) Depreciation was calculated using the straight-line method, based on an estimated 8-year lifespan, and a £500 trade-in value
- (2) Website hosting and email service
- (3) Refund for task materials and residential payments

Tim Bletsoe



Tree planting at Burgess Field Nature park, 21st Feb 2021 (left) and Stansfeld Park 6th Dec 2020 (right)

Fundraising Officer's report

Ceila Taylor stepped down as Fundraising Officer in February 2021. Tom de Wilton took up the position of Fundraising Officer in February 2021.

Celia secured £898 of funding during 2020 through a variety of sources. The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust donated £300 to finance a volunteer Scythe training session, to be carried out once the COVID-19 restrictions allow in 2021. Asda (Wheatley) donated a variety of cleaning materials to disinfect tools between uses as well as individually wrapped drinks and snacks to support volunteers whilst on socially distanced work parties. Sainsbury's (Heyford Hill) donated a £50 gift voucher. Celia established a funding campaign on The Big Give to enable OCV to receive donations online.

Tom de Wilton has applied for a variety of grant funding, including: The Woodroffe Benton Foundation, Postcode Lottery Magic Little Grant and the Oxford University Community Fund. Tom has established an OCV LinkedIn page to explore fundraising from the Oxford business community in alignment with their ESG obligations. Tom has submitted applications to the Waitrose Community Matters and Tesco Bags for Help schemes.

Tom is in the process of writing to all of the Oxford University Colleges to ask for financial donations. Tom is exploring larger capital grant funding options to support the purchase of a new OCV minibus.

Thomas De Wilton

Task Programmer's Report

The Covid lockdowns threw out the task schedule not once, but twice. We lost 8 tasks and a weekend at Carrifran in Scotland to the first lockdown. New projects at the C.S Lewis Reserve in Headington, at Wolfson College, and at Ruskin College were indefinitely postponed as clients shut up shop and furloughed staff. But we managed to get back to work promptly, and legally, at the very end of May 2020 with a revised, simplified, and carefully planned schedule of tasks which ensured that volunteers could work widely separated, and in line with our anti-Covid policies. The most significant consequence was that anything that required close physical cooperation was ruled out. So, no fencing; no construction work.

Even so, we managed a full programme of tasks throughout the remainder of the year. We began a new project at Cutteslowe Meadows by the Cherwell in collaboration with the Freshwater Habitats Trust, Oxford City Council, and Oxford Botanical Gardens to reintroduce relatively rare native flowers suited to the pond and flood-plain habitat. We also worked seven scrub bashing tasks at the Crecy Hill Nature Reserve in Tackley, and restored the balance of the grass habitat in favour of the flower and insect populations. One of the unlooked for side-effects of the disruption caused by the pandemic was that it gave us the

opportunity to concentrate work on a single site that should show beneficial long term results.

Another task directly relevant to the pandemic involved a day's work cutting, clearing and widening the extensive path networks at Aston's Eyot. It's been obvious that all the sites on which we work have been used far more over the past year than they were before Covid, and I've never been thanked as frequently, and as often, by passers by as I was on this sunny day back in June 2020.

We have, of course, wherever possible, continued to do significant collaborative work for and with our usual clients: for Natural England (at the Aston Rowant NNR); for the Oxford City Council; for the Oxford Preservation Trust; for the Friends of Trap Grounds and the Friends of Burgess Field; and, not least, for the Oxford Trust at Stansfeld. We also took up work again on behalf of the local Parish Council on the fen at Louie Memorial Fields, after a break of several years.

We cancelled another five tasks in response to the resurgence of Covid-19 in January 2021. Again, it was possible to get back to work promptly with new working arrangements, including a booking system. Again, however, the distancing requirement all but ruled out some planned hedge-laying, which usually involves instruction at close quarters. However, we did manage a couple of ten-meter stretches working solo (one at North Hinksey, one at Burgess Field). In summary, from the beginning of April 2020 to the end of March 2021 we worked on 42 days (38 on Sundays, 4 on Saturdays).

Once again, we've been reliant on a relatively small number of leaders and drivers, although since my last report we've managed to recruit new leaders and a new driver – good news! All our volunteers are important, but those prepared to lead and drive are essential to what we do. So thank you to everyone who has been prepared to do so over the past, difficult year.

If you think you can help out by leading a task or driving our van then please let either myself or Chris know. We'll do everything we can to help you get started by shadowing current task leaders, or taking you through the driver's van induction. If you'd like to have a go, then please get in touch with me at tasks@ocv.org.uk, or Chris at chair@ocv.org.uk

Phil Hunter



Willow pollarding at Aston's Eyot, 27th Sep 2020

Van Officer's Report

The minibus continued to support the tasks we ran transporting tools to site. It passed its MoT with no issues, bar a clutch repair. It is an essential asset for the group and will hopefully return to carrying volunteers to tasks later this year.

Tim Bletsoe

Tools Officer's Report

The stand-out news on OCV tools for 2021 must be our new set of Tree-poppers. We've bought four of the tools: one large and three medium sized. In essence, the tree-popper is a long, strong lever ending with a simple clamp at the business end. The clamp grips the stem of the thing that you want to extract from the ground, then you apply force to the lever. If you judge the application of force correctly, given the state of the ground and the size and type of sapling or tree that you want to remove, it's possible to lever out the top growth complete with its whole root system, without unduly disturbing the surrounding turf. It's a tool that makes a significant difference to OCV 'scrub-bashing' in at least two respects: firstly, we can now eradicate invasive scrub without the need for herbicide, which, in fact, we've rarely if ever made use of; and, secondly, there's no regrowth to recut in future years. It also means that we can do productive scrub removal in the summer months if we're careful to select recently self-seeded saplings still too immature to support nesting activity. They were expensive, but should prove very useful.

The other significant recent addition to the tool stock is a very handy telescopic ladder.

We've also bought more spades.

We revamped our stock of bow-saws. Some of the old frames had lost sufficient tension in their snap-handles or screw mechanisms, so they were retired. We bought new saws in all three sizes, and old blades were replaced with new.

The OCV scythe equipment is wearing well – it's about to see its fifth year of use. We did crack one of the ditch blades last summer, and that's been recently replaced with a specialist grass blade.

We continue to be based at the Oxford City Council Parks depot in Cutteslowe Park, and we're grateful for the handy location, the use of a freight container as a tool shed, and a secure parking space for the OCV minibus. We had one of our occasional tool maintenance days there at the beginning of April: cleaning, oiling, and sharpening.

Phil Hunter



Our new tree poppers have been in action at various sites

Webmaster's report

Please continue to report any website or mailing list issues to me at webmaster@ocv.org.uk.

Nic Bricknell

Social media and Publicity Officer's report

In the past year our publicity efforts have been intermittent, due to the global coronavirus pandemic. The health measures meant that we couldn't go through with our programme as normal and therefore we had to adapt our social media and publicity efforts accordingly.

To that end, we mainly communicated with our members and friends through our task newsletter. During the times of the year when we could go through with tasks, in a safe way, we refrained from advertising this too widely in order to manage numbers of potential attendees and therefore decided to keep our communication to emails to our mailing list. Facebook and Daily info event posting was not pursued until as recently as April 2021, when it was deemed that a small increase in publicity could be managed by the booking system we have put in place.

Despite this, our Facebook page has continued to grow with and now totals 577 followers and 519 friends who like our page. Our activity on the social channels is largely thanks to the photos we publish of the work on tasks on both Facebook and Instagram (a special thank you to Chris Skepper and Tim Bletsoe, and all others for their continued posting).

Our Twitter page has 509 followers, and we are still trying to get better at this medium.

On Instagram, we have 318 followers.

It's worth noting that all our posting and advertising online is made for free, and our growth is organic.

Finally, thank you to all that come along to tasks and/or join the conversation with us online - it's a pleasure to be a part of this lovely community.

Remember, the simplest way to stay informed about OCV activities is to join our mailing list, via our site... so please do so if you haven't already.

www.ocv.org.uk

instagram - @oxfordconservationvolunteers

facebook - @OxConservation

twitter - @oxconservation

Carla Ponte Júlio

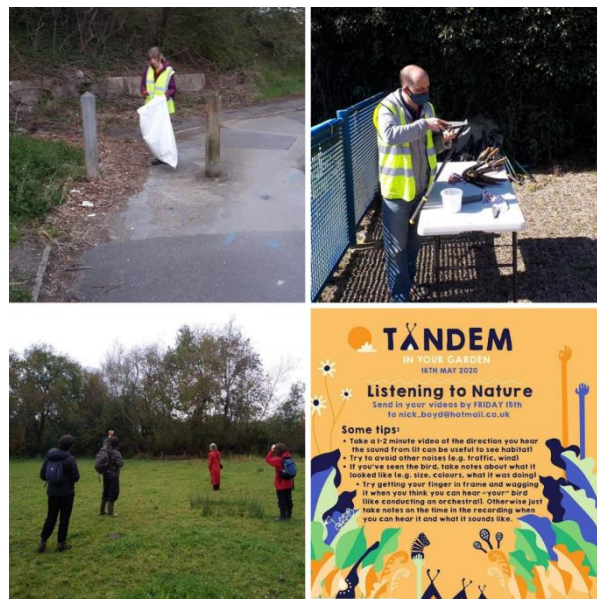
Social Secretary's Report

2020 was a tough year and not a particularly social one because of the Covid outbreak. But we still managed to have a few virtual events such as a "Listening to nature" workshop in May on Zoom where bird expert Nick Boyd helped us get better acquainted with the chatterboxes hiding in your trees and bushes. He talked us through how to read different environments and identify the sounds of our feathered friends within them.

Another social in October also involved Nick who took us on a nature walk in Iffley Meadows to look for signs of interesting wildlife and search the sky for brilliant birds. This event was particularly popular and we had to organise multiple sessions to comply with the 6 people limit at the time.

Other socially-distanced socials included a day at the OCV toolshed in the Council's Cutteslowe Parks Depot in April, working on our tools and various bits of kit. We cleaned, oiled and sharpened tools, everything from scythe snaths to bill-hooks, and from loppers to slashers. We also gave the shed (actually a decommissioned freight container) and the van a good spring clean.

More recently, we went on a socially-distanced evening litter-pick walk around the footpaths, cycleways and nature reserves of south-east Oxford. Instead of an evening social, which would not have been very practical with the rule of six, we instead tried to clear up some of the unsightly lockdown debris before it makes its way into streams and rivers and potentially affects wildlife.



As usual, if you have time, please make sure to fill out our short survey to give us some ideas for upcoming socials: <https://forms.gle/rShkMEZAredqetox7>.

Anne Cossutta



Scrub bashing at Swyncombe Estate, South Oxfordshire, 28th Feb 2021