



# **Oxford Conservation Volunteers**

## **Annual Report 2022 – 2023**



Registered Charity Number 1186114

## **Contents**

<b>Chair's Report.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Task Programmer's Report .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Social Secretary's Report .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Treasurer's Report .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Secretary's Report .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Website Editor's Report.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Minibus Officer's Report .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Tools Officer's Report .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Webmaster's Report .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Social Media Officer's Report .....</b>	<b>13</b>

## 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 been a 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 Bassett. 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 Bassett 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 25<sup>th</sup>.

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](mailto:tasks@ocv.org.uk), or Chris at [chair@ocv.org.uk](mailto: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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

	<b>2022-2023</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>
<b>INCOME:</b>				
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 <sup>(3)</sup>	£11.54 <sup>(3)</sup>	£0.00 <sup>(3)</sup>	£865.21 <sup>(3)</sup>
<b>Income for the year</b>	<b>£6,578.67</b>	<b>£6,526.85</b>	<b>£5,803.02</b>	<b>£9,662.69</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE:</b>				
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 <sup>(2)</sup>	£332.44 <sup>(2)</sup>	£279.89 <sup>(2)</sup>	£279.89 <sup>(2)</sup>
Merchandise	£0.00	£338.40	£0.00	£0.00
Depreciation	£0.00	£0.00	£1,600.00 <sup>(1)</sup>	£1,600.00 <sup>(1)</sup>
<b>Expenditure for the year</b>	<b>£4,656.59</b>	<b>£4,763.33</b>	<b>£3,901.20</b>	<b>£4,662.84</b>
Excess income over expenditure	£1,922.08	£1763.52	£301.32	£3,162.27
<b>*Excess income over expenditure excl depreciation</b>	<b>£1,922.08</b>	<b>£1763.52</b>	<b>£1901.32</b>	<b>£4,762.27</b>
<b>Balance in current account</b>	<b>£3,939.23</b>	<b>£2,756.85</b>	<b>£4,319.89</b>	<b>£34,806.50</b>
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](mailto: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](http://www.ocv.org.uk)

**Carla Ponte Júlio**





*Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, April 2023*