



# **Oxford Conservation Volunteers**

## **Annual Report 2023 – 2024**



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>7</b>
<b>Secretary's Report .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Treasurer's Report .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Website Editor's Report.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Minibus Officer's Report .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Fundraising Officer's Report.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Tools Officer's Report .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Webmaster's Report .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Social Media Officer's Report .....</b>	<b>14</b>

## 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, 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> May and 4<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:tasks@ocv.org.uk), or Chris at [chair@ocv.org.uk](mailto:chair@ocv.org.uk)

**Phil Hunter**



*A bright and clear day for raking the south fen of the Lye Valley, Oxford on the 15<sup>th</sup> 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 25<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024**

	<b>2023-2024</b>	<b>2022-2023</b>	<b>2021-2022</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>
<b>INCOME:</b>				
Task Fees	£9,020.00 <sup>(4)</sup>	£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 <sup>(3)</sup>	£162.59 <sup>(3)</sup>	£11.54 <sup>(3)</sup>	£0.00 <sup>(3)</sup>
<b>Income for the year</b>	<b>£23,003.57</b>	<b>£6,578.67</b>	<b>£6,526.85</b>	<b>£5,803.02</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE:</b>				
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 <sup>(2)</sup>	£454.14 <sup>(2)</sup>	£332.44 <sup>(2)</sup>	£279.89 <sup>(2)</sup>
Merchandise	£0.00	£0.00	£338.40	£0.00
Depreciation	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,600.00 <sup>(1)</sup>

	2023-2024	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021
<b>Expenditure for the year</b>	<b>£10,742.50</b>	<b>£4,656.59</b>	<b>£4,763.33</b>	<b>£3,901.20</b>
Excess income over expenditure	£12,258.07	£1,922.08	£1,763.52	£301.32
<b>*Excess income over expenditure excl depreciation</b>	<b>£12,258.07</b>	<b>£1,922.08</b>	<b>£1,763.52</b>	<b>£1,901.32</b>
<b>Balance in current account</b>	<b>£50,037.76</b>	<b>£3,939.23</b>	<b>£2,756.85</b>	<b>£4,319.89</b>
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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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](mailto: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 26<sup>th</sup> November 2023, and home made soup and afternoon tea at Hogacre common, on the 8<sup>th</sup> 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](http://www.ocv.org.uk)

**Carla Ponte Júlio**