

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 coppicing 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

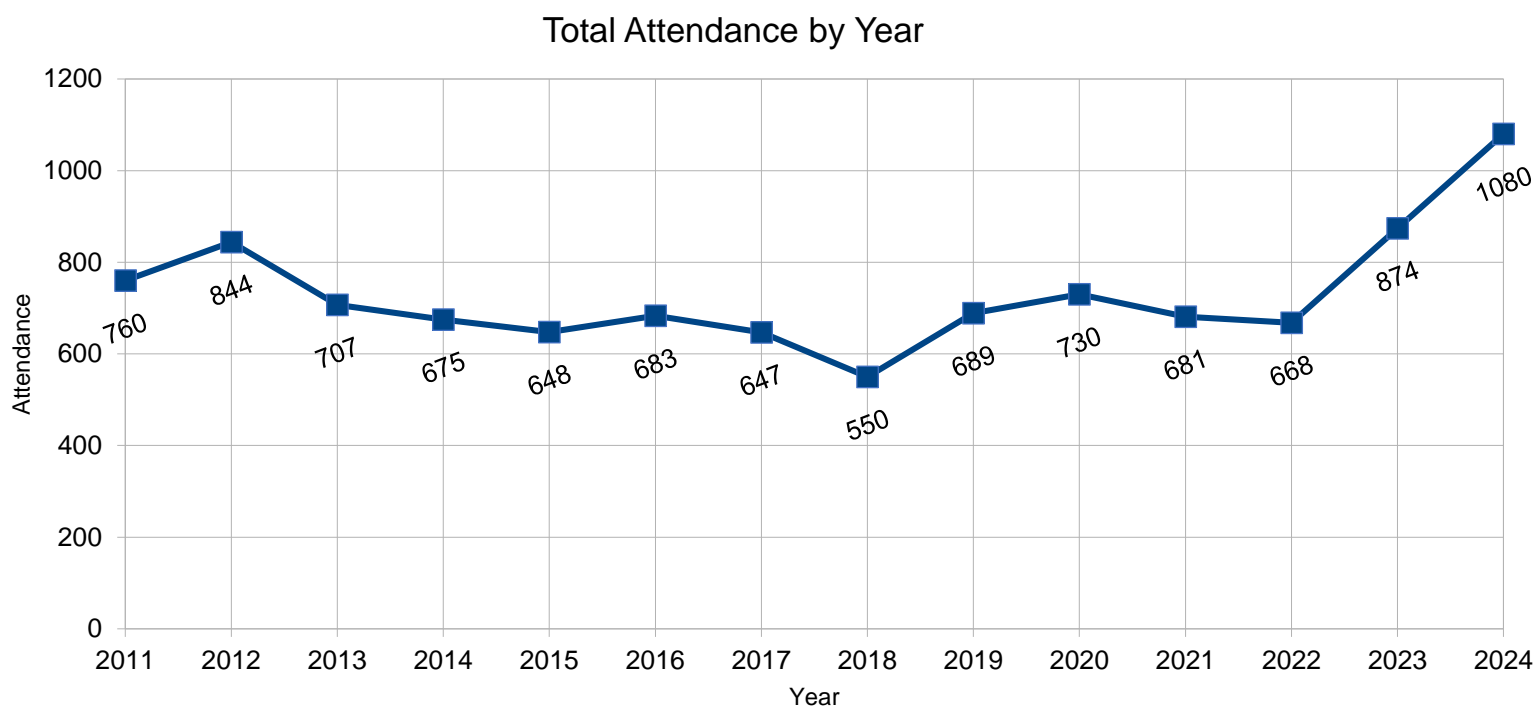
OCV Site Database

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