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CHES VALLEY WALK

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why **RED KITES WERE
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(but were too afraid to ask)



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CONTENTS

- 3 Chief Executive's letter
- 4 A new lease of life for the Chess Valley Walk
- 6 Everything you wanted to know about walking in the Chilterns countryside
- 8 Widening the welcome: how we're making our Chilterns countryside more accessible
- 10 The Chilterns: where families have more fun
- 12 Latest news from the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project
- 14 Celebrating Chilterns women
- 16 Putting venison back on the menu
- 18 Visit the northern Chilterns
- 20 Understanding wasps
- 22 How we saved the Red Kites: an interview with Dr Mike Pienkowski
- 24 What's next for archaeology in the Chilterns
- 26 Chilterns young explorers

CREDITS & THANKS

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Design credit: Blooberry Creative Ltd, blooberrycreative.co.uk, 01494 864851, hello@blooberrycreative.co.uk

With special thanks to Dr Helena Chance, Dr Mike Pienkowski, Fran Momen, Helen Walsh, Linda Seward, and our great staff team and fantastic volunteers.

Main cover images: (From top left) Stepping stones on the River Chess, walking in Ipsden, Burnham Beeches Heritage Day and Hitchin Lavender.

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WELCOME

A note from the Editor



Welcome to the latest edition of Outstanding Chilterns magazine, helping you experience the best of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Every year we're spoilt for choice when it comes to items to feature in the magazine, and this year is no different! On page 4-5, we're pleased to share news of the revamped Chess Valley walking trail, the Chilterns' most popular walk, which now has a new set of information boards, waymarkers and improved footpaths. On page 10-11 we've put together some great family days out, and you can discover the delights of the northern Chilterns on page 18-19.

Have you ever eaten venison? A fantastic article on page 16-17 explains why locally sourced venison is sustainable, helps tackle climate change, protects farmers' crops, and supports biodiversity in Chilterns woodlands. If you're new to exploring the countryside, there's a brilliant article on page 6-7 with everything you need to know (but were too afraid to ask) – a great introduction if you'd like to experience the health and wellbeing benefits of time outdoors in green spaces but don't know where to start.

We're looking forward to welcoming you all and, if you're new to the Chilterns or venturing into the countryside for the first time, visit our website at chilternsaonb.org, for walking groups to suit all ages and abilities, along with details of festivals, events and places to visit.

I hope you enjoy your read! If there's anything you'd like to share, or if you have an idea for a future article, please contact me at communications@chilternsaonb.org

Vicki

Vicki Pearce, Editor
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Sign up to our monthly e-newsletter for the latest news, events & exclusive reader competitions: <https://bit.ly/ccbnewslettersignup>

ABOUT THE CHILTERN'S CONSERVATION BOARD

Outstanding Chilterns magazine is published annually by the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB).

Established in 2004, the CCB is a public body with two key purposes:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Chilterns AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)
- To increase understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the AONB.

The CCB also has a duty to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities within the AONB.

The CCB's Board members are drawn from across the Chilterns AONB and its staff team of 28 is based in Chinnor, Oxfordshire. More information: chilternsaonb.org



Please recycle this magazine when you are finished with it – don't forget to share it with your friends and family first!





What's On?

Peter's Railway Event 17th—18th June

Book reading and workshop with author Chris Vine

Summer Holidays

Greg Chapman Magician every Tues, Wed, Thurs

Woodcraft Weekend 2nd –3rd September

Traditional woodcraft demonstration

Bekonscot Illuminations and Santa Weekend

Dates to be confirmed

Full details of upcoming events and details of how to book will be posted on our website.

Follow us on Facebook or Instagram or sign up to our newsletter to receive reminders and up to the minute information.

Regular Events

Toddler Takeover

Monday mornings during term time, 10.00—3.00 the Education Centre becomes a toddler friendly zone with age appropriate toys and games. Free hot drink for parents/carers.

Make and Take Craft Activities

Every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during school holidays in the Education Centre



Tickets can be booked in advance via our website www.bekonscot.co.uk

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S LETTER



It has been four years since publication of the Landscapes Review, in which Julian Glover and his team published their recommendations on how national landscapes can do more for nature and natural beauty, and ensure they are a positive force for the nation's wellbeing.

Last spring, we were pleased to share our views on the Government's response to the report. Although we had some concerns, we welcomed many of the Government's proposals, especially its emphasis on the important role of AONBs and National Parks in addressing many of the challenges and opportunities currently facing society.

Since then, we have been working hard to implement many of the Landscape Review's recommendations, particularly

Natural England is currently exploring an extension to the Chilterns AONB boundary. Visit our website for the latest news and progress on the project: chilternsaonb.org/boundary



those that ensure we can fulfil the original mission of AONBs and National Parks – to provide opportunities so that everyone can enjoy and benefit from these special places. This is especially important in the Chilterns, which is one of the most accessible landscapes in the country, with over 2,000km of footpaths and bridleways, and is within easy reach of London by tube and train.

As guardians of the Chilterns AONB, we are committed to ensuring that everyone has equal access to green spaces, and we have been delighted to help distribute Government funding that will improve access to the Chilterns landscape, including its nature reserves, visitor attractions and local businesses. You can read more about this work on pages 8-9.

It's exciting to see so many articles in this magazine that celebrate all the wonderful ways in which the Chilterns landscape can be enjoyed, whether it's understanding nature and wildlife, learning about its history and heritage or enjoying delicious local food and drink in one of the many cafés, shops and restaurants.

Much of what we do would not be possible without the hard work of dedicated staff and volunteers from the Chilterns Conservation Board and our many partners. The revitalisation of the Chess Valley Walk is a good example, where everyone working together led to numerous improvements to this popular walk alongside the river Chess – one of the Chilterns' very special and rare chalk streams.

I hope you enjoy the magazine. It's great to be able to share the breadth of work being done in the Chilterns to conserve and enhance this special landscape, and to ensure that more people can take advantage of all it has to offer. Finally, our work with Natural England to explore extending the Chilterns AONB boundary is progressing well so, if you've picked up a copy of this magazine and you are currently outside the Chilterns AONB, watch this space – you may be part of it soon!

Best wishes

Elaine King

Elaine King,
Chief Executive

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE FOR THE **CHESS VALLEY WALK!**

In September 2021, a new endeavour to revitalise one of the Chilterns best-loved walks – the Chess Valley Walk – was launched. This exciting venture was part of a larger project to improve chalk streams and wetland meadows across the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The project, a partnership between the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) and the Chiltern Society, was funded by the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The fund sought to help create and retain thousands of green jobs through conservation and environmental education projects spread across England.



WHY THE CHESS VALLEY?

The Chess Valley Walk is a 10-mile walk through the Chilterns following the River Chess from Rickmansworth to Chesham. It passes ancient woodlands, attractive villages and water meadows, with lovely views of the Chilterns landscape. The route travels through the Chiltern Hills and the top of valley peaks, but also drops down to the clear sparkling waters of the River Chess, one of the Chilterns' rare chalk streams. The opportunity to experience this countryside is only 30 minutes from central London, starting at Rickmansworth station and finishing at Chesham station. This popular walk was in need of improvement to allow accessibility and to fulfil its true potential.

IMPROVING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

With only a year to complete the project, action was taken straight away to manage the priorities that could be undertaken in the tight timescales. The team worked closely with landowners, Buckinghamshire Council and users of the walk to determine the main aims of the project and deliver the required improvements along the route. From the feedback, it was quickly realised that enhancing the visitor experience would be the main ambition for the project, and it was agreed that improvements to footpaths, signage, walk information and infrastructure, such as benches would be top of the agenda.



A TEAM EFFORT

- Many of the issues highlighted along the route were addressed and completed thanks to a real team effort. For example, it was clear that signage for the walk was not satisfactory, and we are thankful to those who gave their time to walk the 10-mile route and survey it, to see where new signposts were needed. As a result of their hard work, new signs have now been installed with a brand-new logo as well as signs linking walks from the nearby stations.
- In addition to this, the team worked closely with landowners and were able to resurface the footpath at Cannons Mill, a popular but muddy path used by locals which had naturally widened, having not been improved since the 1980s.
- Following discussions with Buckinghamshire Council and Thames Water, the verges were cut back, and vegetation removed along Latimer Road, allowing walkers a safer passage to pass without having to walk in the road.
- Benches and fencing have been installed near Latimer House, providing walkers with a clear route and opportunities to sit and enjoy the beautiful views.
- Thanks to additional funding from Thames Water's Smarter Water Catchment Project and the local Community Board, a long overdue new boardwalk was secured at Meades Water Gardens which, due to damage, caused a section of the walk to be closed for prolonged periods.
- New information boards were also installed thanks to the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project, which aims to educate people about this fantastic habitat. Eleven boards have been installed along the route covering the heritage, fauna, flora and the importance of chalk streams.

EXPLORE THE CHESS VALLEY FOR YOURSELF

The rejuvenated Chess Valley Walk will be officially launched in May 2023, with a series of guided walks and exciting events.

Find out more about the walk and download the walk leaflet at chilternsaonb.org/chessvalleywalk



**CHESS
VALLEY
WALK**

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The National Lottery
Heritage Fund



This project is funded by the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The fund was developed by Defra and its Arm's-Length Bodies. It is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission.

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE COUNTRYSIDE (BUT WERE TOO AFRAID TO ASK)

Walking in the Chilterns is a wonderful way to immerse yourself in nature, get some exercise and recharge your batteries.

BY FRAN MOMEN

But planning a countryside hike can also be daunting for those who are not used to walking in rural areas and unfamiliar with the lie of the land. Where do you start, where can you walk and what if you can't read a map? The good news is you don't need any special skills, there is plenty of information and guidance to help you on your way. We get lots of questions about walking, so have prepared some tips to help with your most common queries:

YOUR FAQs:

Where am I allowed to walk?

Some of the Chilterns countryside is owned by public bodies or organisations such as the National Trust or the Woodland Trust, and offers countryside sites with parking, waymarked trails and facilities. However, most of the Chilterns is privately owned (much of it is farmland) but with an amazing network of footpaths and other public rights of way criss-crossing the landscape, which you are free to explore. You need to stick to the paths which are waymarked with colour coded arrows to help keep you on track – yellow for footpaths (walkers only) and blue for bridleways (walkers, horse riders and cyclists) are the most common.

Are there any recommended routes I can follow?

We have lots of great routes on our website with downloadable maps, route descriptions and visitor information, which can be downloaded for free. You can search for short, easy access routes, stile-free routes, walks starting from railway stations or more challenging long-distance walks. chilternsaonb.org/visit-chilterns

I'm not great with maps - how do I avoid getting lost?

You can plan ahead by printing out a route map and walk description for your chosen walk. Alternatively, you can download routes to your smartphone and use it to navigate. Try OS Maps or Visorando – you can create a free user account so you can search and view routes. If you are following a map on your phone, it's a good idea to download it before you set off, in case you lose your mobile phone connection on the walk.

Want to learn how to read a map? We offer walks specifically designed to help with map reading and navigation skills during our Chilterns Walking Festivals in May and October. Pipsticks Walks is based in the Chilterns and runs regular navigation courses.

Choosing a start point with parking and toilets

If you are looking for somewhere with facilities, you can either head over to a countryside site, or start your walk from a Chilterns market town surrounded by lovely Chilterns countryside. Chesham and Henley-on-Thames are 'Walkers are Welcome' towns, especially geared up for walkers. Visit the Market Towns pages on our website for walks and inspiration!

Alternatively plan a walk that takes in a walking-friendly pub or tearoom, there are lots to choose from on our website.

What kit or essentials do I need?

Philippa from Pipsticks Walks says: "Be kind to your feet – you need them for walking! Before you go out, check your toenails. You don't want them to be digging in or breaking because they are too long. Footwear – you can get by in trainers when ground conditions are good and dry, but for uneven or wet, muddy ground you will benefit from having good fitting, comfortable shoes or boots with a good tread. In trainers you are more likely to slip, fall, or injure yourself."

Take a light rucksack with some water and some snacks. This means you can also take extra layers and be prepared for rain or shine. A waterproof coat is light to carry and will help protect you from the unpredictable English weather!

Dogs in the countryside

With dog ownership on the increase, here is a quick reminder that you must always keep dogs under control and in sight. This is particularly important around sheep and cows, but it also protects ground nesting bird habitats and other precious wildlife. And remember to bag and bin dog poo – any public waste bin will do.



DID YOU KNOW?

We have over 2,000km of public rights of way in the Chilterns!





TOP TIPS:

Choose a waymarked direct route for easy navigation. We recommend the Thames Path National Trail, the Ridgeway National Trail, the Grand Union Canal or the Chess Valley Walk.



Take time to notice everything around you on your walk. Use all your senses and be curious on your adventure. Listen to the bird song and the breeze in the trees; feel the different textures of tree bark or the crunch of leaves underfoot; smell the bluebells, the freshly mown meadows, or the autumn woods; see the many shades of nature's green, and more. You will be amazed at what you might discover.

THE COUNTRYSIDE CODE: RESPECT, PROTECT, ENJOY



The Countryside Code provides useful guidance for people visiting the countryside, including the rules about dogs, what the different signs mean and tips about travel and parking. By following the Countryside Code, you will be helping us to care for the Chilterns.

WANT TO WALK WITH A GROUP?

There are local clubs you can join that offer a full programme of guided walks, including the Chiltern Society and the Ramblers. You can try a couple of walks for free before joining, so why not give it a go. Check out our website for details. chilternsaonb.org



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WIDENING THE WELCOME IN THE CHILTERN

Protected landscapes like the Chilterns make an important contribution to people's enjoyment of the countryside, and their health and wellbeing. In 2019, the Landscapes Review, led by Julian Glover, called on the Government to ensure our national landscapes could be enjoyed by a much more diverse audience.

In response, DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) allocated £14.5 million towards making protected landscapes, National Trails, forests and the wider countryside more accessible for people of all ages, abilities and needs. The funding has enabled the Chilterns Conservation Board to support an exciting range of projects.

SOME OF THE CURRENT PROJECTS INCLUDE:

"Evie" the Electric Car

Chiltern Rangers CIC bought a seven-seat electric car and tools with their grant, with flexible seat configuration options. This will help them get 200-300 more volunteers each year into caring for nature reserves and habitats in the Chilterns, including young people with special needs, people with dementia, and those without their own transport.

"We can pick people up from central High Wycombe locations like the Rye Lido or the train station for Green Thursday volunteer group. Dozens of groups and schools will benefit."

John Shaw, Managing Director



Tramp around College Lake Nature Reserve

Home to around 1,000 wildlife species, College Lake is a wonderful place to spot water birds, butterflies and orchids. BBOWT (Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) will purchase two new trumper mobility vehicles which can be borrowed by anyone visiting the reserve. The Trust is also resurfacing 200m² of path and installing several new, mobility scooter and buggy-friendly gates. Staff hope the project will attract more visitors who have limited mobility.

"We are so pleased to be making these upgrades which mean that more people than ever will be able to come and see what an extraordinary place College Lake is. At BBOWT we believe that people need to see nature to be inspired by it and take action to help it – but spending time in nature is also good for our physical and mental health, so this project really is a win for everyone in our community."

Mark Vallance, Buckinghamshire Land Manager

An accessible loo for Chiltern Open Air Museum

This fantastic rural museum has 37 historical buildings set in 45 acres of gardens. The museum already has all-terrain wheelchairs to borrow, sensory backpacks for autistic visitors, hearing loops and a popular programme of accompanied walks combatting social isolation. Their grant funded a much-needed upgrade to their existing accessible toilet provision.

"We are very grateful for our Chilterns access grant. The new accessible toilet facility will improve the visitor experience for our guests with impaired mobility and encourage others to come in the first place."

Gill Whitehead, Fundraising Officer

Improving the Chess Valley Walk for all

The grant will fund a new, fully accessible bridge on the Chess Valley Walk at Chesham Moor, plus an access survey along the length of the walk to assess longer term opportunities to improve accessibility.

Innovations in Countryside Access



The National Land Access Centre at Aston Rowant, England's first national centre for specialised countryside access, have used their grant to buy state-of-the-art off-road mobility vehicles for rough terrain: a terrain hopper, a mountain trike, an e-trike and a Treknetic wheelchair. They will provide training promoting the

British Standard for Gates, Gaps and Stiles to parish councillors, rights of way volunteers, local highway staff, countryside managers and landowners. They will demonstrate the best standards of countryside access for people of all abilities, and how to use the many designs of gates on their "obstacle course" for off-road mobility vehicles.

"We are really excited to be able to use this fantastic new equipment to promote countryside access so everyone can enjoy nature."

Val Woods, National Land Access Centre Lead.

Augmented reality hillfort history

The Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership is working with VRCraftworks to develop augmented reality apps to bring to life three prehistoric monuments in the Chilterns. This semi-immersive experience will help wider audiences to experience the ancient past on their doorstep at locations in High Wycombe and Luton. The apps will also enhance accessibility for those with sight or hearing impairments.



Access surveys in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns

BuDS – Buckinghamshire Disability Service, is carrying out access surveys at four popular countryside sites – Whiteleaf Hill, Brush Hill, Aston Rowant Nature Reserve and Captains Wood – with a view to improving online access information about these sites and advising the site managers on future accessibility improvements.

Wendover Canal towpath improvements



The grant will contribute to resurfacing a stretch of the Wendover Canal towpath, which will provide greatly improved accessibility for local communities, especially those with limited mobility.

If you've got ideas for future access improvements in the Chilterns, there will be a further round of funding in 2024/25. We're hoping to get community groups involved in deciding how this should be spent.

Do get in touch with us at aweiss@chilternsaonb.org if you'd like to be involved.



THE CHILTERNs: WHERE FAMILIES HAVE MORE FUN

BY FRAN MOMEN



It's always special to see kids feeling excited and enthusiastic about something new. But it's even more fun when the whole family enjoys a fresh experience together, and that often happens when we get outdoors and learn about the world around us. The Chilterns has so much to offer families, so we've put together some ideas for you to explore. Enjoy!

MAKE COUNTRY WALKS SPECIAL...

For some families, going on an enjoyable walk is less of a hike and more of a saunter. And some children are inclined to think a walk is just a slog! But you'll find a walk to suit everyone in the Chilterns and experience delights along the way that will charm even the most reluctant trekker.

For beginners or 'short-legged' hikers, inspire a love of walking with an easy 1.5-mile trail from Lacey's Farm in the breath-taking Hambleden Valley. Details of this walk (and longer ones) can be found on their website. The promise of a Lacey's Farm ice-cream from their shop, is usually enough encouragement and a delicious reward afterwards.

For a saunter, try the 2.5 mile walk from Nettlebed Creamery. An easy-to-follow route map is available from their website, as well as a free copy of their children's nature activity sheets to allow the whole family to explore. Treat the family to delicious refreshments from their café, The Cheese Shed.

More experienced family ramblers should aim for one of the National Trails – The Chilterns is lucky enough to have both The Thames Path and The Ridgeway.

Improve your map reading skills with a free orienteering course from the Chiltern Society. At Captain's Wood there is a permanent course suitable for beginners to navigate. Just download the orienteering map from the website, and you're free to go.

SIMPLE OUTDOOR PLEASURES RE-DISCOVERED...

Re-connecting with the outdoors is easy if you plan ahead. Depending on the season, pick a walk that maximises exploration and 'treasure-hunting' that the whole family will love. For example:

- Warburg Nature reserve is a fungi hotspot in autumn and there are also organised events run by BBOWT (Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) where an expert guides you on which sorts are poisonous!
- In summer Hartslock Nature Reserve is blessed with many different orchids, butterflies and other wildflowers.
- Spot red kites at Watlington Hill and Chinnor Hill Nature Reserves.
- Cowleaze Wood is a great place for den-building – who doesn't love that?
- Fruit picking is available at Sotwell Manor near Wallingford and Peterley Manor Farm near Great Missenden.
- Other family-friendly wild foraging and bushcraft opportunities include: Pipsticks Walks, Bushcraft with David Willis, GG Wildlife Experiences and Path Hill Adventures who all run guided experiences through the Chilterns.

ENJOY PEDALLING IN SAFETY...

There are some great spots for families looking for safe off-road cycling. The Phoenix Trail runs for five miles along a disused railway track from Princes Risborough to Thame and is perfect for all fitness levels as it is flat. Or head for the hills to Wendover Woods, which has a more challenging trail through the woods. Enjoy the café or take a picnic.

FANCY SOME WATERY FUN?

- Hiring a boat, canoe or paddle board is a fantastic way to explore the Chilterns, discovering the sights and sounds of riverside wildlife as well as attractive towns. You can hire boats at Benson, Henley, Wallingford and Marlow to explore the beautiful River Thames. Don't forget to take some ship's rations so you can find a shady spot to picnic.
- Wild swimming is available in various spots along the Thames. Check out anywhereweroam.com to discover safe areas. Wallingford is a wonderful place to paddle in the river or swim in the outdoor heated pool and splash park at Riverside Parks and Pools.





RIDGEWAY 50 ACTIVITIES

2023 is the Ridgeway's 50th anniversary since it was opened as a National Trail, so to celebrate, there's a programme of discovery and events, which you can visit. To view the Ridgeway 50 programme, visit: <https://bit.ly/31BbHu1>

As well as these upcoming anniversary events, take a look at the #RidgewaySpotter, a free monthly magazine challenging everyone to enjoy the Ridgeway and discover new seasonal sights, sounds and changes. The perfect guide to a walk anywhere along the Ridgeway, which will encourage the whole family to discover more about our environment and history. <https://bit.ly/RidgewaySpotter>

GO LOCAL FOR A FAMILY DAY OUT WITH A DIFFERENCE...

- At The Chiltern Open Air Museum, families can discover social history by scrutinising over 30 historic buildings. Your children get to see how their great grandparents may have lived! You can also book experiences which teach old crafts and trades.
- Bekonscot Model Village has delighted families for years with its huge model railway and intricately detailed buildings, all captivating the charm and essence of the 1930s.
- Animal lovers have lots of fun at Kew Little Pigs near Amersham. Their miniature pigs are attention-loving TV stars (yes really), and love being petted and stroked – don't forget to book in advance.

Connecting families with their environment has never been more important. Immersive experiences within the Chilterns landscape offer rewarding activities for the whole family all year round.

For more walks, rides and things to do in the glorious Chilterns countryside, head over to the website at chilternsaonb.org/visit-chilterns



VISIT THE OLDEST HORSE CHARITY IN THE WORLD

The Horse Trust is set within the Chiltern Hills, an area of outstanding natural beauty, between High Wycombe and Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. We care for up to 130 retired and rescued horses, ponies and donkeys who you can visit.

We are open: Thursday – Sunday & Bank Holidays, from 1pm – 4pm

www.horsetrust.org.uk/visit-us

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LATEST NEWS FROM THE CHILTERN CHALK STREAMS PROJECT



CHILTERN
CHALK STREAMS
PROJECT

2022 marked the 25th Anniversary of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project. The anniversary provided an opportunity to review achievements and progress and reflect on the role the Project should play in shaping the future for Chilterns chalk streams. These chalk streams and their surrounding landscapes remain under tremendous pressure and in need of continued protection and improvement. There's a huge amount to do, and thankfully the Project now has a whole team of people working to protect our chalk streams. Below, two of the Project's newest team members, Adrian and Hannah, share updates on some of their work tackling the issues our chalk streams face, raising the profile of these globally rare and truly special habitats.



IMPROVING CHALK STREAMS AND WETLAND MEADOWS THROUGH RIVER RESTORATION, EDUCATION AND ACCESS PROJECTS.

By Adrian Porter, Rivers Officer.

I was one of two project officers employed 18 months ago to deliver river restoration, education, access and interpretation projects, all

designed to kickstart environmental renewal. This was made possible thanks to a joint bid with the Chiltern Society which secured funding from the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF).

As well as expanding our school outreach, refreshing and creating new information boards and improving the Chess Valley Walk, we proposed improvements to five sections of chalk streams including the River Chess at Latimer Park and Chesham Moor, the River Wye backstream near the Barrowcroft, Benson and Ewelme on the Ewelme Brook and upstream of Pheasant's Hill on the Hamble Brook.

As every river is different, every restoration project has to be tailored to suit the channel, ecology and landscape, whilst considering the needs of landowners, nearby homes and businesses, users of footpaths and recreational areas.

Many hours go into researching, designing and planning restoration projects to demonstrate why we are confident in what the river needs and how we will measure success. As part of the process we talk with local rivers groups, residents and landowners to gather comments and/or

concerns, learning from their experiences of the channel, and we build on expertise from organisations such as the Chiltern Society and the Chiltern Rangers. It's a painstaking process, but this all helps ensure we are doing what's right.

The designs for three of these projects were implemented by local volunteers, who between them have worked on over 1,200m of channel improvements. Volunteers need to be recruited and organised, trained and provided with tools, but it is down to their own energy and enthusiasm as to how much actually gets done. At the last count these amazing people had built an incredible 112 channel interventions, not including all the coppicing, pollarding and brash-clearing, nor the dragging and cutting of everything we re-use in the channel.

At 1,100m and requiring the sculpting and/or removal of hundreds of tons of gravel, the Hamble Brook project was too large even for our volunteers, so we worked with environmental contractor R.J.Bull to deliver this project. This is the largest river restoration project the Chilterns Conservation Board has done and one of the largest winterbourne projects ever attempted. We have revitalised an exceptional channel whilst showing how large machines can be used in sensitive landscapes without causing any material harm – and it looks fantastic!

Once a project has been completed, it is important we don't just walk away. The channel and bankside areas take time to properly respond to interventions, and as flows change over the season, we may need to carry out maintenance. Although we do our best to visit restoration sites on a regular basis, we cannot manage without the support of landowners, community groups and citizen scientists who carry out much of the maintenance, monitoring and data gathering on our behalf, and to whom we are extremely grateful.

This project has just ended, but both project officers are staying to deliver more conservation and engagement work in the years to come. There are exciting plans for the Ver, the Misbourne and the Bulbourne, plus additional projects on the Chess, Hamble and Wye. I'm genuinely proud of what we have achieved under the GRCF and look forward to continuing this fantastic work.





IMPROVING WATER QUALITY THROUGH CITIZEN SCIENCE

Hannah Parry-Wilson, Citizen Science Coordinator

Over the last two years, the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project has been enhancing citizen science monitoring for the River Chess, working with various local groups and organisations through the collaborative Smarter Water Catchment initiative, funded by Thames Water.

As part of our focus on improving water quality, we have trained citizen scientists to collect water samples from the river to help monitor chemical content. As part of our Emerging Contaminants of Concern survey, samples collected monthly are sent to Imperial College London who investigate which chemicals of potential concern are being found throughout the River Chess. We are continuing this survey until summer 2023, when we will have 12 months of data to show how weather, season and unprecedented events can affect the chemicals we are finding.

To complement river restoration projects, we have also been using the national citizen science method of measuring ecological habitat quality, called Modular River Survey ('MoRPh'). This method allows us to track changes to the physical environment and hopefully record vital improvements to water flow, sediment type and number of vegetation morphotypes present (trees, shrubs, long grasses, mosses & lichens, etc.). Citizen scientists have been helping us record this data before and after restoration work, providing evidence of physical changes to the channel, bank face and bank top. We've done plenty of pre-restoration surveying so far and have lots of post-restoration surveys to do in 2023 and beyond!

We are so thankful to every individual that has helped us so far, and to all those who continue to do so as the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment initiative progresses.



If you are interested in any volunteering opportunities, please get in touch: chalkstreamvolunteers@chilternsaonb.org or 01844 355500. More information on the work of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project can be found on our website – chilternstreams.org



CELEBRATING CHILTERN'S WOMEN



BY DR. HELENA CHANCE,
Woodlanders, Lives &
Landscapes Project Lead

Every March, International Women's Month celebrates women's contributions and achievements and reminds us about the need to tackle

gender inequality across the world. This year, the Chalk Cherries and Chairs Landscape Partnership joined the celebrations, raising a flag to the remarkable Chilterns women of the past and present who have shaped cultural, social, political and economic life in the region.

The Partnership's International Women's Day conference 'Chilterns Women, Traditional crafts, skills and work' held on the 8th March at Missenden Abbey and the exhibition 'Hidden Hands, Women and work in the Chilterns' at Wycombe Museum are raising awareness of the stories of Chilterns women which often remain hidden or undervalued. They highlight the importance of celebrating women, giving their lives the recognition they deserve and the confidence to continue to break the glass ceiling.

The Chilterns has long been a centre for women's activism, campaigning for political and social rights and equality. In 1911, the suffragette, who founded the Chesham branch of the 'Women's Social and Political Union', (a militant campaigning group founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst) served time in prison and she could have been involved in



Celia James, chair caning

the most famous suffragette protest in Buckinghamshire – the burning down of Saunderton Station in March 1913.

The previous month, local suffragists held an exhibition of sweated labour in the Town Hall to highlight the gender pay gap (or gulf, as it was then). The exhibition included lantern slide demonstrations of goods made at 'ludicrously' low rates by sweated labour.

The '*Hidden Hands*'

exhibition at Wycombe Museum highlights the inequalities and discrimination faced by women working in some of the key industries that supported the local economy – lacemaking, chairmaking, straw plaiting and embroidery and beading for the London fashion industry. Women like Emma Ginger, a lacemaker from Loosely Row who could make about four shillings a week in 1863, working 11 hours a day, at a time a male agricultural labourer might earn about 12 to 14 shillings a week.

Even by the early 20th century, women such as chair-seat matter (rusher) Mrs Beale from High Wycombe, typically earned only half of a man's wages. The lives of women like these, whose work was so crucial to the local economy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and often kept the family from starvation during hard times, have been belittled and forgotten.

Jane White, ceramicist



'*In Their Own Words*', a series of books and films, produced by the Woodlanders' Lives and Landscapes team - a group of enthusiastic volunteers investigating the lives of people who worked in the rural and domestic industries of the central Chilterns – have brought to light the lives of some of the women of yesterday whose recorded oral history interviews have, until now, largely remained hidden held in public and private archives. Women have come a long way in our fight for equality but with the gender pay gap still an issue, and with violence and discrimination against women reported daily in the media, the importance of empowering women through hearing their voices and sharing experiences was highlighted at the International Women's Day 'Chilterns Women Conference'. The conference celebrated Buckinghamshire women from the past whose names should be better known – prison reformer Lillian Barker (1874-1955); Herbalist Maud Grieve (1858-1941); environmentalist Frances Alexander (1935-2020) and astronomer Cecilia Payne (1900-1979).



Mollie McMillan, chair matting



For the present, a panel of women from the conservation, heritage, tourism and education sectors spoke about the challenges faced today by women at every level, from those who work as CEOs, or policy makers, to women like nurses, carers, or industrial workers, who work long hours to feed their families and drive the economy.

Women's successes were celebrated too – those who drive environmental principles into the heart of decision making; women who have started or changed careers in later life, to fulfil a lifelong dream; and women who are working to overcome discrimination and prejudice.

One of these is Dr Geeta Ludhra (above) who leads a community social enterprise, offering free events and walks to give a sense of 'belonging' in the countryside to people of colour. Another is Hattie Speed, Furniture-Maker and Craft Communicator, who focusses on the therapeutic nature of craft, seeking to encourage more women into the male dominated world of furniture making, and help them benefit from the social and therapeutic qualities of craft. The pioneering women who demonstrated their skills and craftsmanship at the conference included, straw-hat plaiter Veronica Main MBE, lacemaker Alex Adkins, ceramicist Jane White, and chair seat makers Celia James and Mollie McMillan, all of whom inspired attendees with their dedication and expertise. They are also keeping these crafts alive with local classes and workshops.



To join the conversation about Chilterns women and learn more about the thousands of Chilterns women in the past whose work formed a crucial part of the local economy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, visit the exhibition 'Hidden Hands. Women and work in the Chilterns' at Wycombe Museum.


MISSENDEN ABBEY







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LOCAL STORIES AT THE AMERSHAM MUSEUM

Amershammuseum.org

01494 723700

VISIT COB COTTAGE

Conveniently located in the heart of Chinnor village and at the foot of the Chiltern hills, Cob Cottage Café on Station Road, Chinnor provides a welcoming place for freshly cooked breakfasts, light lunches, home baked cakes and beautiful coffee from The Oxford Coffee Company roastery. The café also offers free car and bike parking, making it the ideal stop to meet socially, or to drop in after a walk or cycle, not forgetting that dogs are welcome too!



Open 7 days a week; Monday to Saturday
8:30am till 4:30pm and Sundays 9am till 4pm.

PUTTING VENISON BACK ON THE MENU

Venison produced through deer conservation management is fast-becoming the red meat to buy – it's local, environmentally friendly and sustainable, and it's better for your health too. Helen Walsh finds out why.



Non-native muntjac deer can cause damage through browsing on bark, shoots and wildflowers, such as our native bluebells.

A LUCKY ENCOUNTER

A sunny glade, early in the morning, young shoots on the trees, bluebells on the woodland floor and an inquisitive pair of black eyes spotted through the brush ... a quick flick of the tail, and the owner bounds off through the forest. Such an encounter with our largest herbivore, the deer, can be uplifting and exciting. But there is a complex story behind those eyes of conservation and management, farming and economics.

There are two species of native deer in the UK: red and roe; and four non-native species: fallow, sika, muntjac and Chinese water deer. Roe, fallow, muntjac and Chinese water deer are found in the Chilterns.

EATS SHOOTS AND LEAVES

Deer play an important part in the natural balance of our habitats and biodiversity. Their grazing and browsing creates structure within our woodlands and grasslands, keeping some vigorous plants at bay and allowing delicate wildflowers to flourish. Their droppings can disperse nutrients and seeds, encouraging plant growth and helping invertebrates. Yet, their ability to breed quickly and spread rapidly – with no natural predators to keep them in check – can increase populations to densities that can have a massive impact on some aspects of our wildlife, including the health and welfare of the deer themselves.

Over half of the Chilterns' woodlands are classified as ancient woodland – in existence for more than 400 years. These woodlands develop particularly rich ground flora but, where deer numbers are high, this can be wiped out. Native bluebells, for instance, have developed a bitter taste to deter browsing by our native deer species, but this has no effect on non-native muntjac, who devastate them.

Through constant browsing, roe, fallow and muntjac deer can cause damage to young trees and agricultural crops; one fallow deer can eat around 3 kg a day! Muntjac also prevent coppice regeneration (coppicing involves cutting the branches of trees like hazel and willow to allow new growth and open up the forest floor). Some individual landowners have reported losing more than £1 million per year to deer damage.

If you can see though woodland in summer – there's little or no ground flora, including bramble, and a browse line 1-2 m from the ground – it's likely that deer numbers are too high.

KEEPING OUR DEER IN CHECK

Deer populations are now at their highest level for 1,000 years. When deer become a hindrance, it is up to us to keep them in check through stalking as we no longer have large predators to keep populations down. There is strict legislation in place protecting our deer to make sure control is as sensitive and humane as possible.

From a conservation viewpoint, managing deer numbers is essential for habitat maintenance, regeneration and biodiversity, protecting young leaves, shoots, bark, trees and ground flora from being eaten to the point of destruction. Without this management, much of the food and shelter that insects, birds and small mammals rely on is lost. There are also economic and social benefits: from protecting arable crops and farming incomes, to providing local, sustainable, wild venison throughout the year.

Geoff Wickett, local deer manager, found that lockdown allowed him to expand his stalking hobby into a viable side-business. He founded Chiltern Venison, starting small by selling to local farmers'

markets and Peterley Manor Farm; but he was soon able to expand to other local shops, restaurants and charcuterie. He explains: "Consumers are increasingly interested in venison; there is a general awareness that deer are wonderful, but in the wrong place, in the wrong numbers, they are a problem; thus they are an environmentally friendly, ethical and sustainable way of eating meat."



Geoff Wickett of Chiltern Venison is a local stalker and an advocate for the production of sustainable, local venison to aid habitat restoration.

The Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) is supportive of local deer management because of the biodiversity and business benefits it provides, as Tom Cackett, independent stalker, found: "The Chilterns Conservation Board has really supported our deer management business, helping us to secure capital funding to purchase items that have allowed us to harvest more deer and protect habitats."

Justin Carter, Wild Venison and Game, also found that the CCB's Farming in Protected Landscapes programme was invaluable in expanding his business: "With help from the CCB and FIPL funding, we have been able to double the size of our venison processing facility, enabling us to supply wild venison to a wider area and produce a variety of venison products."



Fallow deer (credit Helen Walsh)

VERSATILE VENISON

The sale of venison can help to offset some of the cost of damage to timber and arable crops – while protecting our wildlife – and provides employment for deer managers and venison producers. Wild-caught venison is a high-quality meat and a great source of iron, zinc, vitamin B and protein. It is also low in saturated fat, making it a great substitute for beef and other red meats.

You might think venison is expensive or hard to cook, but it's actually very versatile: you can enjoy a joint or steak, dice it up for tender casseroles, or mince it and use it in place of beef, lamb and pork. Buying locally produced goods helps the climate, too. Meat that hasn't travelled far from forest to table has a lower carbon footprint than that you might find in a supermarket, having been transported from the continent.

BUY LOCAL, WILD VENISON:

Wild Venison and Game:
wildvenisonandgame.co.uk

Chiltern Venison:
chilternvenison.co.uk

Peterley Manor Farm Shop, Great Missenden:
peterleymanorfarm.co.uk/farm-shop

Westside Fruit, Booker Farm Shop,
Clay Lane, Booker SL7 3DJ

Find out more about habitat management and Chilterns' food and drink on our website: chilternsaonb.org

Get cooking! Venison Spaghetti Bolognese

Featured in the Chilterns Recipe Book, this dish is from Geoff at Chiltern Venison: "Bolognese is rarely afforded the cooking and preparation time that it deserves. A slower cook mellows the tomatoes, producing a rich texture and allowing the flavours to meld." Serves 6 and freezes brilliantly.



METHOD

1. In a large frying pan, heat half of your olive oil to a medium heat and fry the bacon/pancetta. You are rendering some of the fat out and this will add to the texture and flavour because venison mince is so lean.
2. Next add your venison mince and brown it at a medium temperature so as not to create tight little nuggets of overcooked meat. If your pan is not big enough, then just cook it in several batches, transfer to a casserole dish when done.
3. Next, deglaze the pan with the red wine and add the juices to the casserole dish.
4. Wipe the frying pan clean, add the remainder of the olive oil and heat gently.
5. Add the finely chopped onion, carrot and celery, 'sweat' (by putting a lid on) until soft and translucent. Add the garlic minutes before removing from the heat, so as to avoid browning it.
6. Now add the tomatoes and passata; turn up the heat so it all bubbles merrily and stir occasionally. Once reduced and thickened, add the tomato sauce to the meat along with the stock and herbs tied in a bouquet/muslin so that they can be lifted out at the end.
7. Season with salt and pepper.
8. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook uncovered for an hour, stirring occasionally. By now it should have a thick rich sauce. If so desired, for extra richness, you could stir in cream or butter at this point or leave that for glazing the pasta.
9. Boil the pasta in plenty of well salted water until al dente, drain and return to the pan.
10. Ladle the bolognese over the spaghetti and mix in the casserole before serving, ensuring that the pasta is well coated. Garnish with Parmesan and chopped parsley.

INGREDIENTS

1kg minced venison
250g-300g streaky bacon or pancetta
4 tablespoons olive oil
1 glass of red wine.
2 large garlic cloves finely sliced
1-2 carrot(s) finely diced
1-2 stick(s) celery finely sliced
400g tin of chopped plum tomatoes
250ml tomato passata
300ml beef or pork stock
2 bay leaves
A few sprigs of herbs including thyme, basil, parsley, marjoram or oregano
1 tablespoon cream or a large knob of butter (optional)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

TO ACCOMPANY

500g fresh linguine, cooked (then tossed in butter – optional)
Fresh Parmesan cheese
Chopped fresh parsley



CHILTERN'S RECIPE BOOK:

With more than 60 recipes, the Chilterns Recipe Book showcases the region's best ingredients and the people who lovingly make them. Set to the backdrop of the stunning Chilterns countryside, it celebrates the deep connection between our food, the land and the people who produce it. The book is authored by Rebecca Fleckney, an award-winning television producer whose passion for local and seasonal food led her and a group of volunteers into founding Wigginton Community Shop in Hertfordshire. The book highlights Rebecca's ethos that eating locally sourced food is better for us and the planet (and often better for our wallets too!). Rebecca loves cooking Geoff's Venison Bolognese and being with the family in the Chilterns' countryside.



BUY NOW: chilternsrecipebook.co.uk (£20 plus P&P)

SWEEPING HILLS AND BIG SKIES: THE NORTHERN CHILTERN

The northern Chilterns feels distinctly different from the southern Chilterns, full of open, sweeping vistas, big skies, and stunning chalk grassland nature reserves, hosting rare wildflowers and butterflies.

Dunstable Downs is the best-known landmark with dramatic views, a great place to fly a kite or enjoy a picnic. There's a National Trust visitor centre with facilities, plus wheelchair and pushchair friendly trails. It's also a great starting point for exploring the northern Chilterns' fantastic network of walks, commons and open spaces.

But don't forget there are many other spectacular places to visit, some of them lesser known, but all with lots of interest. Here's a selection of our favourites.

NATURE RESERVES AND COUNTRYSIDE SITES

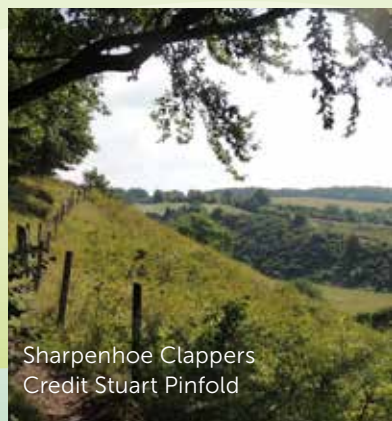
Whipsnade Tree Cathedral First World War infantryman, Edmund Blyth, planted this incredible cathedral from trees, shrubs and plants, to commemorate his fallen comrades-in-arms. There's limited parking, or you can walk from Dunstable Downs (1.1 miles).



Whipsnade Tree cathedral

Barton Hills Nature Reserve

This dramatic Site of Special Scientific Interest is an outstanding example of chalk downland, notable for its spring display of pasque flowers, grassland herbs and flowers and a rare chalk stream.



Sharpenhoe Clappers
Credit Stuart Pinfold

Sharpenhoe Clappers

This classic chalk escarpment is crowned with traces of an iron age hillfort and an impressive beech wood with initials of lovers carved on the trees from the 1960s to the 1980s! The word 'clappers' derives from the Latin 'claperius' for a rabbit hole. Rabbit warrens provided meat, fur and leather and used to be an important part of the economy here.

VISITOR ATTRACTIONS AND SITES OF INTEREST

Hitchin This medieval market town is one of the oldest towns in Hertfordshire. Visit St Mary's Church on the banks of the River Hiz, the British Schools' Museum, and Hitchin Market, one of the largest outdoor markets with 150 stalls.



Hitchin

Shillington Village Visit to see the 1,000 year old ironstone and sandstone All Saints Church (with a more recent Victorian makeover), and quaint cottages.



Hitchin Lavender

Hitchin Lavender

The lavender trade put Hitchin on the map in the 15th century. You can wander through purple fields, take stunning photos, and visit the lavender museum and tearoom.

Shaw's Corner (National Trust) This 18th century country house, once the home of playwright George Bernard Shaw, has arts and crafts features and a tranquil garden where you can see Shaw's iconic rotating writing hut.

Totternhoe This ancient village has the earthworks of a Norman motte and bailey castle and two pubs.

Amaravati Buddhist Monastery Near Great Gaddesden, this monastery has a retreat centre in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, and welcomes visitors for a look around.



Barton Hills



Deacon Hill Pegsdon
Credit Greg Knapp



Explore & enjoy

Bedfordshire clanger



WALKS & RIDES

Pegsdon Hills and Hoo Bit Nature Reserve: Enjoy spectacular views, with sweeping grass hills and strip lynchets (cultivation terraces), which are evidence of an ancient settlement.

Pegsdon and Deacon Hill Walk:

This steadily climbing walk takes in Deacon Hill's ancient earthworks, an ancient beech wood and Knocking Hoe Nature Reserve, great for butterflies and wildflowers.

Lilley and Warden Hill Loop: This 4.8 mile stile-free walk starts from the historic village of Lilley and passes through farmland and chalk downland to the summit of Warden Hill. You'll be rewarded with far reaching views, wildflowers and butterflies .

Sewell Greenway: Following the old railway line between Dunstable and Stanbridgeford, the Sewell Greenway provides a wildlife rich, accessible escape for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, wheelchair ramblers and families with pushchairs.

Links for all walks:



A LOCAL SPECIALITY

The hearty **Bedfordshire clanger** was traditionally made for agricultural workers, a roly-poly suet crust dumpling filled with meat and vegetables. These days they're hard to come by, but Gunns Bakery has branches in Biggleswade and Bedford if you fancy a little trip to hunt one down – or you can even mail order them from Gunns!



URBAN FIXES NEARBY

Visit the **Stockwell Discovery Centre** in Luton for the history of hat-making in the 1800s and the Wenlock Jug, a rare medieval masterpiece, plus gardens and a café. The Luton International Carnival, is the UK's biggest carnival after Notting Hill and takes place every May. You can join carnival masterclasses on the art of Caribbean carnival costume making. Luton's not known as a visitor destination but if you look closer you can find hidden gems such as The Bear Jazz Club, Ambala Indian confectionary store and Papa J's Indian Tapas. Phillip Wright Hats and Ken Pierson and Son keep the hat making tradition alive.

A GREAT DAY OUT THAT MAKES A REAL DIFFERENCE



For making great family memories, you simply can't beat a day trip to the zoo. Right here in the Chilterns you'll find the UK's biggest – Whipsnade Zoo. Along with its sister site London Zoo in Regent's Park, it's part of ZSL, the Zoological Society of London, an international conservation charity which has inspired generations of famous nature-lovers for nearly 200 years.

Set in 600 acres of Bedfordshire countryside, visitors to Whipsnade Zoo have ample space to explore. With over 10,000 animals, a steam train with views into elephant, rhino, camel and deer enclosures, plus a giant outdoor play area, there's enough to keep the whole family busy.

At the heart of it all, of course, are the animals, amongst which you'll find perennial favourites like tigers, zebras, giraffe, brown bear, penguins and rhinos. Keep an eye out too for the free roaming wallabies and South American mara.

Whipsnade Zoo is big, and so too are some of the residents. Whipsnade's family of seven



Asian elephants live within the £2m Centre for Elephant Care, which includes 700sq metres of indoor space, dimmer lights, puzzles, scratching posts, and soft, deep sand – all to provide the very best care. Whipsnade's experts study their elephant family's behaviour and share information with ZSL colleagues working in Nepal, Thailand and China.

A day out at Whipsnade Zoo is more than just fun. Every ticket bought contributes to ZSL's vital conservation work in the UK and around the world, dedicated to tackling some of the main problems facing the natural world today. ZSL's zoos (Whipsnade and London) look after 16 species that are extinct in the wild – more than any other zoo in the world.

That's why a visit to Whipsnade Zoo isn't just about having an unforgettable time with your family; it's about showing your love and support for the natural world. A great day out that makes a real difference.

whipsnadezoo.org

UNDERSTANDING WASPS

BY LINDA SEWARD



Let's face it: wasps have a rotten reputation. They sting, they build nests in inconvenient places and they can ruin a picnic. But appearances are deceiving. Delve a bit deeper and you'll find that these remarkable insects are essential for the healthy maintenance of our planet which would simply not function without them.

Wasps are, in essence, a natural form of biocontrol, ridding gardens and farms of all manner of destructive insects, from aphids to caterpillars. Social wasps in the UK consume about 14 million kilogrammes of spiders and insects each summer to feed their larvae—try to imagine what our country would be like if all of those species were allowed to thrive and overwhelm the ecosystem, not to mention our own gardens! Some parasitoid (see below) wasps benefit farmers by controlling pests such as caterpillars, thereby reducing the use of harmful chemical pesticides. Worker wasps help to decompose rotting flesh and prey on flesh flies to feed their larvae, thus regulating that fly population. Cleaning up our environment of insect and spider carcasses isn't a fun job, but someone has to do it and wasps perform this service for free.

In addition to being global cleaners, wasps are pollinators. Adult wasps require sugars to sustain them because they do not eat the insects and spiders that they predate for their larvae—their tiny "wasp waists" preclude their ability to digest prey. Instead, adults feed on nectar from flowers and the honeydew produced by aphids; they will also consume a sugary liquid produced by their larvae in the nest. As the adult wasps seek nourishment from fruit and nectar, they become inadvertent pollinators. (Their sugar obsession is also why they are troublesome at outdoor meals.) Wasps are generalist nectar feeders, feasting on whatever they can find, so will pollinate a wide range of flowers that may not be so attractive to bees. There are some orchids and figs that depend entirely on wasps for pollination. Moreover, wasps are a food source for some animals and other wasps. As if that wasn't enough, wasp venom and saliva have antibiotic properties that may be exploited by scientists to create new medicines in the future.

A wasp does not want to harm you and won't sting unless threatened. There is no doubt that the potent poison package that a wasp's sting delivers can be painful, and in some cases, induce anaphylactic shock and even death if not treated swiftly. However, if one lands on you and you stay calm, it will fly away when it understands you aren't a meal. Jump around and scream and the wasp will probably sting you repeatedly. You've been warned.

It's puzzling that wasps are not appreciated as much as bees because they are of such value to our environment. Learning more about their lives may go some way towards enhancing their status. This is the life cycle of a social wasp, the species with which you will be most familiar. In early April, a wasp queen

emerges from the secure location in which she has hibernated during the long cold winter. The previous autumn she had mated with a now dead drone, so is full of sperm and hope. Hungry and alone, she forages for nectar while she searches for a sheltered, secluded place for her nest, either in a loft, shed or in a cavity in the ground or a tree. She patiently scrapes wooden fences, buildings and furniture for pulp that she mixes with her saliva to build a papery nest. When the nest is ready, eggs will pass down her oviducts and she will release sperm to fertilise them so they become females. She lays the fertilised eggs in cells where they will develop into the worker wasps on which she depends – you may notice these workers emerging by early May. The all-female workers enlarge the nest while the queen concentrates on filling each hexagonal cell with a fertilised egg. The workers tend and feed the larvae as the colony grows; they will also defend it from attack. As autumn approaches, the queen will release eggs but no sperm so that male wasps are produced. She'll also produce a number of new queens who leave the nest to mate. The fertilised queens will find a safe hole or fissure in which to hibernate while the entire original colony dies on the first freezing day.

The wasps you may never have noticed are solitary wasps; they are not aggressive and live entirely alone in dead wood, holes in the ground or in bee hotels. Females lay single eggs in a nest or cell that are tended in two ways. Some wasps cram the cell with enough spiders and insects to feed the developing larva—these unfortunate "rations" are permanently paralysed so that they remain fresh and are thus eaten alive. Other solitary wasps will repeatedly return to provision the nest with prey when more food is required. Adult females die by summer's end and the larvae will pupate and emerge as new adults the following summer, when they will seek mates and restart the cycle.

Then there are the sneaky parasitoid wasps. These inject their eggs into the bodies of unwary bees, caterpillars or spiders who have had the misfortune to get too close. When the egg hatches, the larva will eat the insect's body from the inside out. After the insect dies, the larva will pupate, hatching the following season.

Finally, gall wasps—you are probably more familiar with the galls than the actual tiny insects. The gall wasp lays an egg on soft developing plant tissue and as the insect grows, it releases enzymes that cause the host plant to swell, forming extra tissue (a gall) that protects the larva and provides food. When mature, gall wasps drill through the gall to escape and start the process all over again.

KNOW YOUR WASPS



Common Wasp (*Vespula vulgaris*) is identified by the anchor-shaped design on her triangular face. This gorgeous yellow and black striped social wasp is an important pollinator. Adults feast on nectar, fruit and sugary foods. The larvae are fed protein in the form of chopped-up insects, caterpillars and spiders, thus clearing your garden of surplus insects.



Ctenichneumon divisorius is one of those parasitoid wasps about which little is known. It can be found in June and July in meadows and hedgerows. The adults feast on nectar, particularly of umbellifers like hogweed, while the larvae parasitise the caterpillars of various moths.



Dyspetes Wasp (*Dyspetes luteomarginatus*) is a parasitic wasp found throughout the British Isles. While the head, thorax and abdomen are black, the legs are red-yellow. You can tell this is a female from the ovipositor (for laying eggs) on her tail.



Early Mason Wasp (*Ancistrocerus nigricornis*) is a potter wasp. Females build the nests in hollow stems, holes in fences, tree trunks and old mortar. Each nest chamber contains one egg and some live insects that have been paralysed so they cannot escape but remain fresh for the larvae, who eat them alive. When filled, the chambers are sealed with mud to protect the larvae.



Ornate-tailed Digger Wasp (*Cerceris rybyensis*) is commonly found in chalk grasslands. Deep burrows consisting of a vertical tunnel with horizontal cells for the eggs are dug by the female. This solitary wasp hunts mining bees, favouring those carrying pollen as they tend to fly more slowly so are easier to catch. She will paralyse the bee with a sting, flying straight back to the larvae in her burrow with her prize.



Wall Mason Wasp (*Ancistrocerus species*) is one of those wasp species that is difficult to identify definitively without microscopic study. These solitary wasps look very similar to each other, with black bodies decorated with yellow bands and tiny waists. They can be found in many habitats nesting in tubular holes in walls, trees or in banks of soil. Adults feed on nectar while butterfly and moth caterpillars are predated to feed the hungry larvae.



Bedeguar Gall Wasp (*Diplolepis rosae*) is a tiny wasp that creates this gorgeous gall, colloquially called Robin's Pincushion. Females lay eggs on rose buds or young leaves; these hatch into larvae that exude chemicals causing a harmless growth to form. It becomes a woody habitation, protecting the larvae in chambers within the gall until they hatch.



Silk Button Spangled Gall Wasp (*Neuroterus numismalis*) is a female wasp with no need for a male in order to reproduce. The female lays her eggs on oak leaves in summer, which form into galls that do not damage the leaf. Each gall, containing a single larva, has a silky rolled edge that looks like it has been embroidered on the leaf, although no "stitches" appear on the other side. Larvae mature in late summer but remain in the gall (which falls with the leaves in autumn) until the following spring when they hatch.



Smooth Pea Gall Cynipid Wasp (*Diplolepis species*) lays her egg on a Dog-rose leaf, causing a smooth pink gall to form. The hollow gall is a nursery for the developing larva as well as its food source.



You can contact me through my website: lindaseward.com or follow me on Instagram: [instagram.com/quiltmaniac1](https://www.instagram.com/quiltmaniac1)

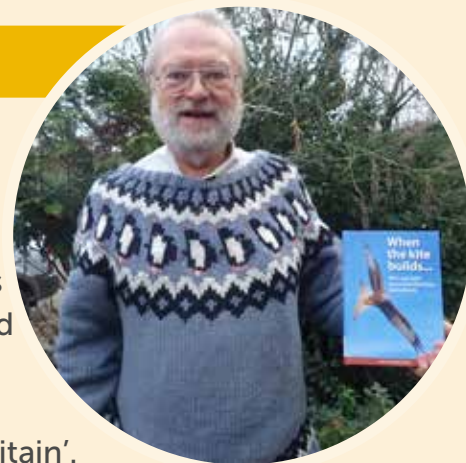
It is essential that we protect and treasure our wasps and I hope that you now have a greater appreciation of these misunderstood insects. For further reading, I highly recommend a wonderful book called *Endless Forms: Why You Should Love Wasps* by Professor Seirian Sumner. I'd like to thank Seirian for checking this article.



HOW WE SAVED THE RED KITES

An interview with Dr Mike Pienkowski

The sight of red kites soaring overhead in the Chilterns is so familiar and iconic that it's hard to remember that, in the 1980s, they were on the brink of extinction in the UK. Their reintroduction in the 1990s has been called "the biggest species success in UK conservation history" by the RSPB. We interviewed Dr Mike Pienkowski, who chaired the Red Kite Project Team during the reintroduction, and has just published a book: 'When the kite builds... WHY and HOW we restored Red Kites across Britain'.



Why was the decision made to reintroduce red kites to the UK?

Red kites, previously very common, featured in several of Shakespeare's plays. After 1600, industrial-scale persecution of birds of prey began in Britain. The estates would shoot anything with a hooked bill or clawed feet, whether it was competing for game or not – and kites weren't – they are scavengers rather than hunters. By 1900 there were only about five pairs left, in central Wales. With intense protection, this crept up to 50 pairs by the 80s. Those pairs were too closely related, genetically all one family, to be productive. Red kites were declining in other areas of Europe, so reintroduction would contribute to international conservation too. There was a very good case.

Why did you choose Wormsley in the Chilterns as the first reintroduction site?

We needed a secluded site with good habitat, a record of responsible gamekeeping, a positive landowner and agreement to keep the site confidential. If the birds were continually disturbed by people trying to see them, they wouldn't be eating and growing, and it would interrupt farming operations.

You sometimes imported kite chicks on public flights – what was the reaction?

For the first importation of Spanish chicks, we got permission to carry the birds in the cabin, so we could check the kites' condition. British Airways had an 'Assisting Nature Conservation' programme, so the pilots and cabin crew had all opted to be on that flight and were very helpful. There was a delay caused by a tyre-puncture, and to entertain everyone, the pilot made an eloquent announcement about the red kites. We put leaflets on the seats for passengers and put the birds in cardboard boxes with one corner folded up for airflow and sat beside them.

How long were the kites in captivity for in the UK?

We imported them at around one-month old – by then they can regulate their own temperature. They are usually in the nest for two months, and the UK quarantine period for birds is 35 days, so we weren't keeping them in captivity much later than they would usually fly. We minimised human contact to avoid them associating people with food, so feeding was done through a little hatch.

What was it like to release the first red kites?

It was very exciting! The kites' reactions were very individual. Some flew out as soon as the door opened. Some would come to the front perch, turn and go back.

The last bird out did not see the others resting nearby in trees, but picked up a thermal, a rising bubble of warm air, and went up and up and up. I ran to pick up radio-receiver so we could follow by car, but it went into a long dive, joining the others. My colleague Ian always travelled with a toothbrush in his car – he had no idea when they would leave the area and he'd have to track them across country!

Is it true that red kites decorate their nests?

Yes - the book title is from Shakespeare: 'When the kite builds, look to the lesser linen' – that's Shakespearean for underwear! Kites like bright colours. They are so agile they can catch things off washing lines – they did in Shakespearean times and they do now. We don't really know why!

"We've seen half a teddy bear in their nests, dog toys, underwear, things which people leave lying around."



How did you tackle the persecution of red kites during the reintroduction programme?

We knew we would lose some. Of eleven kites reared in Scotland and England the first year, two were lost to poisoning – a high proportion. The one from Wormsley had travelled to the Welsh borders when its radio-signal stopped moving. Our local contact investigated and found it dead. When we informed the police, a senior detective did an incredibly thorough job, getting a successful prosecution. Such reports increased public concern. The majority of gamekeepers put pressure on the few law-breaking keepers, there were government and NGO campaigns, and poisoning declined. As a result, not only kites have spread, but buzzards, ravens, and other birds of prey.

What have been the legacies of the red kite reintroduction programme?

The spread of kites across Britain has been superb – over 10,000 kites now – well over 10% of the world population. Chicks from the Chilterns have even been exported to boost populations in Spain where they've had problems. Cutting down illegal poisoning has been good for the environment generally.

As one of the first major reintroductions, it pioneered techniques used by later projects, for species restoration, rewilding, and developing sustainable farming methods. It's boosted jobs and income from rural tourism, particularly for areas less vibrant than the Chilterns. There's something about having that big bird around as part of the ecosystem that impacts positively on the quality of life.



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Mike now works for the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum. More than 90% of the global biodiversity that the UK is responsible for is in its Overseas Territories, but it is underfunded. All proceeds of this book will support this endeavour.



WHAT'S NEXT FOR ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE CHILTERNES



BY DR WENDY MORRISON,
Heritage & Archaeology Manager,
Chilterns Conservation Board



In April of 2018, I was lucky enough to land a dream job – to deliver a project on Iron Age hillforts in a spectacular setting of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Although the project (Beacons of the Past) has now ended, it has left behind some rich legacies for the future. None of the project's achievements could have occurred without our dedicated core of volunteers and the investment of the National Lottery and our many supportive partner organisations.

THE UK'S LARGEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL HI-RES LIDAR SURVEY

Of course, the jewel in the crown of BotP was the LiDAR (Light Distance and Ranging) survey, which used a plane-mounted laser to create a digital model of the Chilterns. Once we digitally removed the trees, we could see archaeological features hidden under the vegetation. Largest of its kind in the UK, the survey generated a staggering amount of data, so m'colleague Dr Ed Peveler and I developed an online portal for Citizen Scientists to help us reveal new discoveries – over

10,000! And that resource will continue to lead to new evidence, as the portal is accessible for the next five years (until Dec 2027) at chilternsbeacons.org.

What we discovered through the use of Citizen Science, by involving thousands of enthusiastic members of the public in our analysis of the LiDAR, was that the Chilterns is a vastly complex archaeological landscape with many exciting tales to tell. BotP tried to stay focused on the Iron Age, but it's safe to say that the entire history (and prehistory) of the region has been enriched by the wealth of evidence that the LiDAR has brought to light.



NEW INTERPRETATION PANELS AND PUBLICATIONS

Some of the information revealed through the LiDAR survey finds its way to the fore on new interpretation panels which will be rolling out across many hillfort sites in the spring and summer 2023. There is also a new 80-page booklet on the hillforts of the Chilterns and the major related discoveries of the project - available later this summer.

BRINGING THE PAST TO LIFE WITH AUGMENTED REALITY

We have commissioned an Augmented Reality App that will bring the Seven Ways Plain hillfort at Burnham Beeches to life, across all three of the time periods that were influential in its development and use. By scanning a QR code, visitors will be able to immerse themselves in the Iron Age, the later Medieval period, and see the hillfort transformed into an WWII army base. This is an exciting new way to make ancient earthworks tell a richer story, and we will be rolling out more apps like this across Chilterns locations.



LONG TERM LEGACIES

We are proud to have helped create long term management plans for landowners and land managers at some of the hillforts in the project. We supplied spatial data on new archaeological features to the relevant local authorities, so that these new discoveries can benefit from the protections that are in place during the planning and development process. From dealing with dangerous trees at Cholesbury Camp, to supporting partners at the National Trust to mitigate erosion damage at Ivinghoe Beacon, the project has been instrumental in removing one site already from Historic England's Heritage at Risk register.

The project has been so fortunate to have reached into so many areas in the Chilterns and discover more about the depth of human activity that has moulded and shaped the landscape we have come to know and love.

Even more so, I have met some wonderful people along the way, who have shared and magnified my enthusiasm for the archaeology of the Chilterns as well as the other aspects that make up an holistic landscape, from woodlands and chalk streams to hedgerows and wildlife. It's been an amazing five years and now it is time to look forward to what the future holds for the past!

A NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR HERITAGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

From the 1st November 2022, my role shifted from Project Manager of BotP to being the core team archaeologist for the Chilterns Conservation Board. An exciting new initiative that I will be working up is the Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership (CHAP). CHAP models itself after the highly successful Chilterns Chalk Stream Project (CCSP), a partnership celebrating a quarter of a century of commitment to improving the state of the fragile Chilterns waterways. Where CCSP is the 'voice for chalk streams', CHAP will be the voice for heritage and archaeology.

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WE'D LIKE TO INVOLVE EVERYONE WITH ARCHAEOLOGY. SOME OF THE THINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO DO INCLUDE:

- Public talks for community groups
- Volunteering opportunities – we'll offer training and support for archaeological and heritage skills and citizen science
- Providing advice and support to landowners on managing land with heritage assets and archaeological features
- Setting up an annual archaeological fieldschool in the Chilterns
- Working with academic institutions to encourage heritage research and learning
- Providing online education resources and workshops for teachers

If you are an individual who would like to get involved or an organisation who would like to join the Partnership, do get in touch!

CHAP@chilternsaonb.org

CHILTERN'S YOUNG EXPLORERS



Focus on WASPS & BEES

We hear a lot about how important bees are for our crops, flowers and trees, but did you know that wasps also help to pollinate plants? So, they're not all bad!

How can I tell which is which?

It's quite easy to tell a **BUMBLEBEE** from a **WASP**, as the shape is very different, but what about a honey bee? **HONEY BEES** tend to be browner with yellow stripes but wasps have the very bright yellow/black colouring. **WASPS** also have very few hairs while honey bees can sometimes look quite furry.

Neither of them will deliberately try to sting you but it's always best to be on the safe side as stings can be very painful and sometimes cause an allergic reaction. Ice or a cold compress and some antihistamine cream should help if you are unlucky enough to be stung – always remember to ask an adult for help.



Wasp



Honey Bee



FUN FACTS about wasps:

Only female wasps are able to sting you, and, like bees they only sting in self-defence! The difference is that the wasp survives stinging someone while bees, unfortunately, die shortly afterwards.

Wasp nests are only used for one season before being abandoned – that old wasp nest in your attic is not going to be used again, phew!

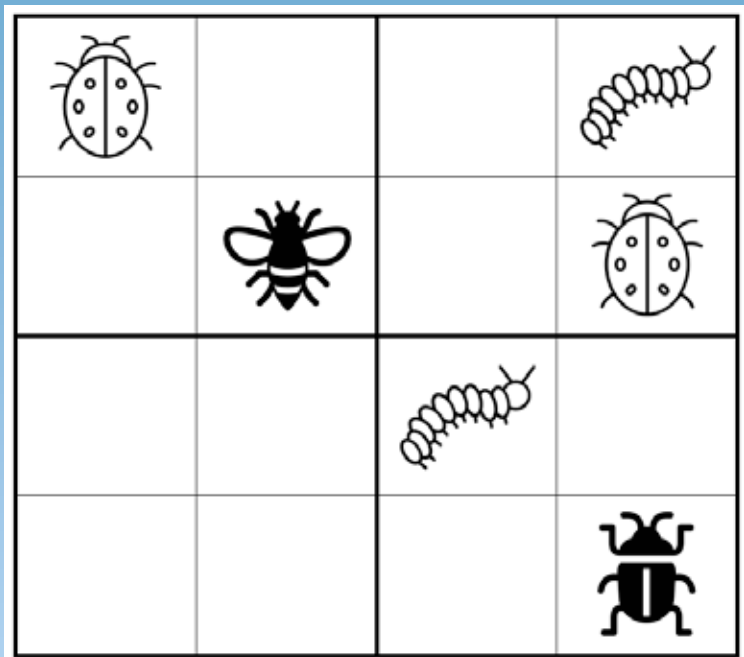
They don't like the smell of peppermint! So, ask an adult to buy some essential oil or a lovely Chilterns-made candle and your picnic should be safe.

Wasps may have taught us how to make paper – a long time ago people watched wasps chewing wood into pulp and making nests out of it – and tried it out for themselves.

Wasps are actually helpful to farmers because they eat caterpillars and other pests that eat our crops.

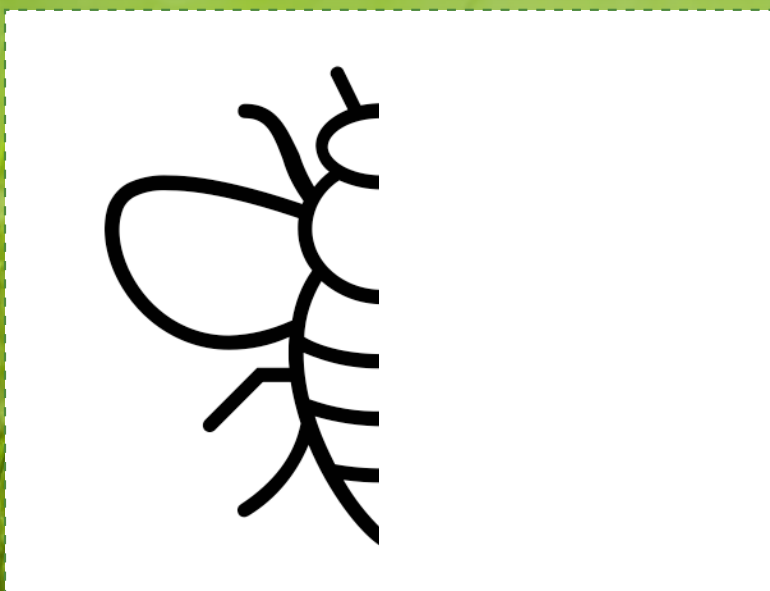
Insect-doku

Can you fill in the grid below so that there's one of each bug in each line going horizontally and diagonally?



CAN YOU COMPLETE THE BEE IMAGE?

Then colour it in and tag us on social media @ChilternsAONB, we'd love to see what colours you use!



Insect-doku answers



Bringing the past TO LIFE

This March, our friends at the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment Project (read more about them on page 12-13) organised a Heritage Day on Cholesbury Common, close to the site of the Cholesbury Hillfort.

Over 200 people braved the rain to come and have a look at a range of stalls and listen to talks and demonstrations about medieval apothecaries (doctors that used herbs to cure people), and prehistoric weapons, painting and art as well as metal production and flint knapping.

The event was extremely popular with families, and we heard from two young visitors after they'd been around all the stalls and demonstrations:



"I liked all of them but my favourite was the paint and rocks one because I like art and DT. It was very fascinating to learn about the Iron Age when I wasn't in school. You could craft stuff, for example I made a paint brush out of wool, grass and a long stick." **ISABELLE, AGE 8**

"My favourite was the one where I got to carve a face in some chalk, try and fight with the lady talking to us and hold a sword and shield. I loved how we were allowed to use things that I would never have dreamed about using, like swords and shields, and create stuff too." **WILL, AGED 11**



Ask your adult to keep an eye on our events page for other exciting Chilterns family fun throughout the year: chilternsaonb.org/events





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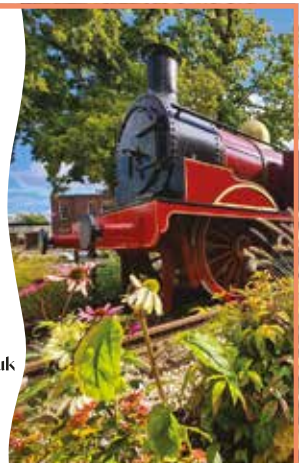
With a plethora of retail and leisure opportunities, areas of ecological and historical interest, summer band concerts & the infamous annual Heritage Day, Amersham—RHS Britain in Bloom Overall Winner 2022—has a lot to see and do.



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