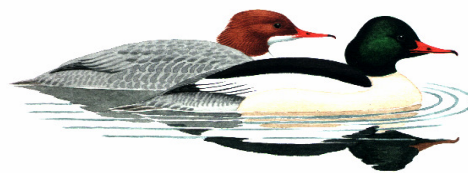


# MOOR GREEN LAKES GROUP NEWSLETTER



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## BBOWT Courses

*Ken Crick*

I wonder how many MGLG members living in the Wokingham District electoral area know of the one-day courses run by BBOWT (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust) in conjunction with the Wokingham and District Council Ranger Service based at Dinton Pastures. These one-day events run from 10am to 4pm usually on a Saturday and are often hosted in one of the classrooms at Dinton Pastures. The teaching format tends to be lectures in the morning with a little fieldwork in the afternoon. The standard of lecturing to date has been first class. I personally have been to one or two courses every year for the last three years on subjects such as Hedgerow surveying, Pond life and Pond Management, Small Mammals, and Bats (an evening class).

Classes are usually well supported with about 17 to 20 members from various natural history and conservation groups in attendance. The subject matter varies on a year to year basis, and reflects where possible the needs of those attending regularly, as a questionnaire seeking among other things the views of class members on future subject matter is offered for completion at the end of each course.

Lunch is a sociable affair; one can avail oneself of the excellent facilities for food at Dinton Pastures or take sandwiches. I take sandwiches but often have difficulty consuming them in the time available due to ongoing conversations with other class members. Coffee and tea with biscuits are provided mid way through the morning and afternoon sessions, and all this is free to members living in the Wokingham District with a genuine interest in the environment.

Unfortunately our newsletter issue dates do not match the course programme announcement date but any member interested in attending courses can ring Dinton Pastures on 01189342016 round about April time and get the information on forthcoming courses.

## Conservation Work Parties at Moor Green Lakes.

*Steve Farmer*

The Moor Green Lakes Group hold Conservation Work Parties throughout the winter season from September to April on the second Sunday of the month. In addition there are several Blackwater Valley Conservation Volunteer Work Parties held on Tuesdays through the winter. The normal meeting place is the Car Park on Lower Sandhurst Road at 10:30 AM. The Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership based at Ash Lock supply all the necessary equipment - saws, loppers, slashers, bill-hooks, forks, spades, rakes, etc, etc and a boat when there is work to be done on one of the islands. If you want to confirm whether a Work Party is going to take place please phone Sue Dent or Adrian Douglas at BVCP, Ash Lock on 01252 331353. However it is unusual for a Work Party to be cancelled once the proposed dates have been published.

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Robert Godden attacking a large patch of brambles on the wildflower meadow on the west side of Colebrook Lake North.

Fourteen MGLG members turned up for the first Work Party of the winter season on 14 September 2003. Two visitors also came along as part of the BVCP "Go Wild in September" events.



A happy band of Moor Green Conservation Volunteers show off the results of their labours at the end of a one day hedge laying course on Sunday 14 Dec 2003. The course was lead by Peter Roberts (third from the right) from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. On the following Tuesday another group of Blackwater Valley Conservation Volunteers attended a second course. Left to right: Simon Weeks, John Coupland, Tony Elston, Steve Farmer, Martin Mitchell, Stan Iliffe, Peter Roberts, Bruce Archer and Gerry Bryant.



Each Work Party is usually a full day - but in mid-winter this is quite a short day. Some people may only come for part of the day if they have other commitments. Tea/coffee and (chocolate) biscuits are provided and if you intend to stay all day please bring a packed lunch. Also bring adequate outdoor clothing - boots or wellingtons, anorak and gloves - as it can be cold, wet and muddy on some occasions. BVCP do bring some items of extra outdoor clothing - especially gloves - but the wellingtons may be three sizes too large!

Thank you to all the members who have already come along and helped during the autumn and winter. Two Work Parties were held in September and major clearance work was done on the wildflower meadow, the Colebrook Hide scrape and round Colebrook Hide. These were part of the month of events called "Go Wild in September" organised by BVCP to encourage new people to try their hand at conservation work. In early October alder saplings and bramble were cut on the north side of Grove Lake. At the end of October part of the south side of Long Island was cleared of bramble, gorse and birch saplings. In November Tern Island was cleared back to clean shingle. The year ended with two Work Parties in December laying part of the hedge between the bridleway and the footpath at the south west corner of Colebrook Lake South.

The dates of the conservation work parties to be held at Moor Green Lakes during January to March 2004 together with the proposed plan of work are given below. The plan of work may be modified in the light of results achieved earlier in the season, the number of volunteers who turn up and the weather.

Sunday 11 January	Plover Island
Tuesday 20 January	Goose Island and shingle beach
Sunday 8 February	Long Island and Sandpiper Island
Tuesday 17 February	Finishing off work on the islands for this year
Sunday 14 March	North side of Grove Lake

## **Forthcoming Reserve Work**

*Peter Scott*

Members will be aware that our Conservation Volunteers carry out many manual tasks on the Reserve during the winter. This work is continuing as usual this year, the most noticeable jobs probably being the clearance of vegetation from Long Island and Tern Island and the laying of a further section of hedge alongside the footpath.

However, the passage of time has led a number of jobs to develop that are not practicable for volunteers with (mostly) hand tools. Therefore visitors to the reserve may, over the coming months, see contractors carrying out one of three main jobs:

### ***Sluice repair***

The sluice in Colebrook Cut, near to Colebrook hide, leaks increasingly. A consultant hydrologist employed by RMC has examined it and found that the wooden slats are rotting, especially where they are embedded in the banks of the Cut. His advice that all the woodwork should be replaced with (more durable) hardwood has been accepted by RMC. Subject to satisfactory costing, the job should be completed by about April.

At or about the same time, a new sluice should be fitted to the pipe which connects the south-west corner of Colebrook Lake South with the River Blackwater. The presence of this pipe is probably not known to many members, as it is not visible from the footpaths. However, it forms an important component of the system for controlling water levels in the lakes and the river. Once

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these two jobs are complete, we should be able to retain water in the wader scrapes more effectively, though summers as dry as the last one will always create difficulties.

### ***Plantation coppicing***

The strip of woodland that runs round of the west and south shores of Colebrook Lake South and Grove Lake forms a screen to reduce disturbance of waterfowl by traffic on the footpath. It is also habitat for woodland birds. To produce a mixture of trees and shrubs at a variety of heights, the plantation needs to be coppiced. About a dozen 10-metre-wide strips will be cut each year, with the consequence that 'viewing slots' will be created.

Of course, such work has been done in previous years, but on a rather 'ad hoc' basis, with the result that some strips have been cut repeatedly while much of the woodland has never been touched. We intend to coppice the plantation more systematically in future, cutting all of it on a rotational basis over a ten-year cycle. A contractor will be carrying out this year's work sometime during the winter.

### ***Bramble cutting***

Bramble forms excellent nesting habitat for some species, so a certain amount of it is welcome on the reserve. However, its great vigour enables it to quickly 'take over' large areas, obliterating meadows, etc.. Although our groups of volunteers frequently cut back bramble patches, it has become clear that we are not keeping up with the growth. Some patches have got completely 'out-of-hand', notably to the north-east of Colebrook Lake North and the north of Grove Lake. We intend to employ a contractor in the near future to reduce these patches by at least two-thirds. It may then be practicable for our volunteers to control the re-growth for a number of years.

## **Steve Farmer resigns from the committee.**

*Peter Scott*

After two years as Site Liaison Officer and Newsletter Editor, Steve has decided to resign from the committee. Steve's contribution to the maintenance of the reserve has been second to none, often noticing problems and rectifying them before the rest of us were even aware of them. He took on the additional job of editing the Newsletter more-or-less 'by default' and it certainly wouldn't have appeared without him. The Group is indebted to him for his services and we hope that we will continue to see him at work parties.

## **Help wanted!!**

Your committee needs new (not necessarily young) blood. Specifically, there are three jobs where assistance is required

### ***Newsletter Editor***

We issue two newsletters per year: one just before the AGM in February and one as members renew their subscriptions in late summer. The Newsletter includes any items of general interest which have more immediate impact than the articles in the Annual Report. The editor has the discretion to include any short articles on wildlife on the Reserve or in the Blackwater Valley. There are also notes about conservation, security, etc

The job of the Editor is to:

- prompt likely contributors (e.g. officers, recorders and general members) for offerings;

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- collate the responses and produce a tidy 'top copy';
- arrange printing;
- liaise with whoever deals with distribution.

The Editor is not expected to write the newsletter although any contribution which he or she wishes to make is obviously welcome.

### ***Site Liaison Officer***

This job is a little difficult to define. Previous incumbents have largely made it up as they've gone along! The essentials could probably be fulfilled, with fairly little extra effort, by any member who visits the reserve frequently. It involves:

- acting as a focal point for information about incidents/developments on the site and informing others. In particular, we like to know of incidents of trespass or vandalism, or just of infrastructure deterioration due to wear and tear, even if we can't always solve the problem quickly (or at all). Of course, we are pleased to learn of such things from *any* member, but it has proved effective to have a specific person looking out for them;
- restocking leaflet boxes and hides with MGLNR leaflets and membership application forms.

Beyond that it is largely up to the incumbent what he is prepared to do. It would be helpful if he was prepared to tidy the hides and oil locks when needed and put up notices of forthcoming work parties and other events, but these tasks could be done by others if it was not convenient.

### ***Postal Secretary***

With a membership at a record level of nearly 500 and still rising, the job of Membership Secretary has become quite onerous, so the current Secretary (Sheila Farmer) has asked that it be split. The Membership Secretary would continue to keep members' records and receive subscription renewals. The new Postal Secretary would arrange mailing of various items to members. This involves two main 'bursts' of activity:

- a bulk mailing of newsletters and AGM notices to all members in January;
- a bulk mailing of annual reports in July;

For each of these the Postal Secretary would acquire stamps and envelopes and arrange despatch. Please note that most committee members (and no doubt others) are prepared to help with envelope-stuffing and stamp-sticking. The Postal Secretary would be expected to recruit helpers, not to do the whole job single-handed.

If you think you might be prepared to help with any of the above jobs, please contact the Group Chairman, Peter Scott (tel. 01252 878205; email [ppscott@aol.com](mailto:ppscott@aol.com))

## **MGLG Sweatshirts**

At the celebration of the Group's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary last June, RMC Aggregates presented each of the regular volunteers who attended the function with a rather smart sweatshirt bearing the Group's motif (a pair of Goosander). We can obtain more of these garments, but need to place an order for at least 25 (of mixed sizes). They are priced at £9 each. If you would like one, please place your order (with cheque payable to the Moor Green Lakes Group) with Peter Scott (55 Globe Farm Lane, Blackwater, Camberley, Surrey, GU17 0DZ). No doubt several members will be 'modelling' theirs at the AGM, if you wish to examine them first.



## Moor Green Lakes in Summer.



Cattle enjoying the wildflower meadow on the north side of Colebrook Lake North. The annual visit by the cattle forms an essential part of the management of the meadows on the Reserve.

## Moor Green Lakes Management Plan completed.

The MGLNR Management Plan (Issue 2, January 2004) has just been published. This 48 page document provides a very comprehensive description of the Reserve and detailed plans for the future maintenance of the site. It covers everything from the islands, wildflower meadows, hedges and scrapes to the hides, paths, fences and car park. The Management Committee is very grateful to Ken Crick who has spent a great deal of time and effort over the last two years guiding this project from its inception to completion. This plan will be an invaluable aid to the management of the Reserve for the next five years.

## Security.

*Steve Farmer*

I was recently called out to Grove Hide by an attentive walker and found a viewing port wide open and the door wide open and swinging in the wind!! This is the perennial plea to make sure that the hides are secure when you leave them. The hides represent our most valuable assets.

Fortunately we have not suffered much vandalism recently - beyond motorbikes on the footpaths, model powerboats on Colebrook North Lake and trespassing dog walkers - but this is no guarantee that something more serious will not happen next week. Make sure you follow police advice and leave nothing valuable in your car.

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## A Winter Walk along the Blackwater

*Steve Farmer*

Thursday 18 December, just a week before Christmas, dawned clear and frosty. With a fine day in prospect I decided to walk from Yateley to Swallowfield and back. As I left the house at 8.10 three jackdaws chattered and squabbled among the chimney pots of the house opposite. Many of the local starlings, sparrows, blackbirds, magpies and wood pigeons were already on the wing under a pale blue sky. A short walk brought me to the Horseshoe Lake and the Blackwater Valley Path. All the trees and plants were thick with hoar frost. Wisps of steam fog curled above the River Blackwater. I greeted two early dog walkers. The sun had just risen as I reached Grove Lake. Beech Hill was bathed in pale golden light. Every branch and twig glinted and gleamed with reflected sunlight.

At the new Manor Farm gravel workings three RMC men were out early replacing the fence. The breach in the river bank caused by November's floods had been repaired. The field just beyond Longwater Road, which is often very wet in winter, was iron hard with frost under foot. A flock of chaffinches flew up. I surprised two roe deer from under a hedge and they went bounding away across the fields towards Fleet Copse, their white rumps flashing in the sunshine. Pied wagtails foraged with the horses.

At Eversley Street I turned westwards at Bakers Farm. Now every blade of grass, reed and bramble stem twinkled and sparkled in the bright sunshine. A fox was sunning itself at the base of an oak tree and lolloped away as I approached. At New Mill another roe deer fed quietly in the corner of a field. I turned down the lane to Greenacres Farm. The next couple of miles is the most picturesque section of the Blackwater Valley Path. Just beyond Jouldings Farm a spindle tree was heavy with rich pink fruit thickly encrusted with hoar frost. I wondered if a field archaeologist would still be able to recognise the line of the Roman road to Silchester across the fields to my right. At Thatcher's Ford two men from the Environment Agency were busy pollarding a willow by the footbridge. On the south side of the Ford (along the line of the Roman road) I counted 12 different hard wood species growing in a 30 metre section of hedge, which suggested that the hedge was roughly 1200 years old.

I returned to the north side and continued across the water meadow beside the river. A goldcrest foraged in the frosted head of a dead dock plant on the river bank. A bullfinch flew up from a patch of bramble. Nutbean Lane was alive with chaffinches and magpies. A greater spotted woodpecker hammered away at the rotten trunk of a dead elm tree. I crossed the River Blackwater by Salter's Bridge and then across a huge flat field of winter wheat. Have you ever wondered why the River Blackwater has such a wide flat valley bottom? Song thrushes and fieldfares were feeding here. In the hedge along Part Lane I saw wrens, greenfinches and goldfinches. Then into the centre of Swallowfield with The Old Post Office and the Village Hall.

I turned for home down Church Road. In Swallowfield Park there were redwings under the venerable trees. A nuthatch was calling from the trees round All Saints Church. I had lunch in bright warm mid-winter sunshine on the bank of an old river terrace but there was still ice on the puddles. A robin triumphantly extracted two large worms from a tussock of grass close by. Two roe deer fed contentedly on the other side of the river. I heard the call of a green woodpecker. The air was completely calm. A kestrel sat on an electricity pylon to my right. A thick column of white smoke climbed vertically into the sky to my left, from near Thatcher's Ford where the men clearing the river bank were still working.

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As I walked back to Jouldings Farm I saw swans, pheasants and a jay. A buzzard called from Bramshill Forest on the south side of the river but I could not see it, peering into the low sun. A heron flew up from the river bank. As I retraced my morning's path I heard a green woodpecker and nuthatches again, saw a bullfinch, redwings and squirrels. From Eversley I decided to walk back across Banisters' land and up towards Finchampstead Church. The Church is built on the site of a Roman earthwork, possibly a temple. I saw two more roe deer feeding quietly and then another group of seven above Rectory Farm. At Finchampstead Church I was surprised to find that the Queen's Oak (planted in 1887 for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee) had been felled recently. But the greatest surprise was when I saw a small tortoiseshell butterfly flying across the field just beyond the Church!! Although the sun was bright there was still frost between the tussocks of grass.

Finally down Dell Road and across the bottom of Finchampstead Ridges. There were no holly berries due to the long, hot, dry summer but near Splat Pond I did find a piece of holly in flower!! Presumably this was in response to the very mild autumn weather. Below Ambarrow Farm there were 30 meadow pipits on the field in the late afternoon sunshine. So down to Horseshoe Lake again. This was alive with our regular ducks and geese.

I soon arrived home at the end of a very enjoyable day out. The fifteenth roe deer of the day was in the back garden eating my carrots!!

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A guide to the whole of the Blackwater Valley Path is available from the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, Ash Lock Cottage, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2PS at a cost of £2.50p (includes p&p). If you want a copy please send your cheque made payable to "Blackwater Valley" together with your name and address to BVCP.

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## **1993 to 2003 Commemorative Bookmark.**

*Peter Standley.*

To mark the 10th anniversary of the Group and as a thank you to those members who played an active part in helping and supporting the Group, we commissioned a coloured, woven silk bookmark depicting two kingfishers with the words "Moor Green Lakes Group 1993 to 2003"

A minimum number had to be ordered and the remainder are available to members at cost. If you would like one of these attractive mementos of the Group's first decade they are £3.50 each including postage. Cheques should be made payable to "Moor Green Lakes Group" and sent to Peter Standley, 7 Llanvair Drive, South Ascot, Berks SL5 9HS. Any that remain will be available at the Group's Annual General Meeting in February.

