

## **BLACKWATER VALLEY COUNTRYSIDE PARTNERSHIP (BVCP)**

**MARCH 2019**

During 2018/19 the Partnership continued its extensive activities throughout the Blackwater Valley area with its workload only being made possible with the support of many individual volunteers and site groups. The Partnership operates with a small but dedicated staff complement. It ended the year with 7 staff members in post – one less than at the beginning of the year – as follows:

Manager	Steve Bailey, B.Sc., M.Phil., MIEEM
Senior Ranger	Stuart Croft, B.Sc., M.Sc
Countryside Ranger - Wellesley	Laura Keighley, B.Sc
Countryside Ranger	Stuart Barilli
Countryside Ranger	Jenny Sibley, B.Sc
Assistant Ranger	Bobbie Withers, B.Sc
Senior Administrative Assistant	Emily Moore

The following report is just a snap shot of the work undertaken by BVCP which is of particular relevance to Ash. Details of some of its other activities elsewhere are given in the reports of the site visits which were made before the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

### ACCESS

#### Blackwater Valley Path

Some sections of the Blackwater Valley Path fall within sites managed by the Partnership but some don't and work on those is reliant on core funding to keep the path open and safe to use. The whole path requires an annual litter pick in Spring and regular vegetation cut backs and safety inspections. Clearance of windblown trees is a frequent job following storms.

Forty five instances of fly tipping were cleared from the path and sites during the year. Repairing footbridges is an annual task. During the year the decking at Lakeside Park was replaced.

### CONSERVATION

#### Habitat and River Improvement

BVCP supported the Loddon Catchment Partnership Rivers Week by organising 3 tasks to introduce woody debris safely at Hawley Meadows, Rushmoor Stream and Lakeside Park.

To encourage meadow wildflowers and manage the grasslands the Partnership has an annual programme of hay cutting and mowing across its sites: specialist equipment is hired to enable cut and lift of meadows, tackle scrub and bramble patches and to work safely on steep banks.

#### Invasive Non-Native species

The urban fringe nature of the Valley makes it prone to invasive species spreading often from gardens or from fly-tipped garden and builders waste. Japanese Knotweed was treated at Lakeside Park.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

#### Volunteer groups

The rangers lead a Blackwater Valley Conservation Volunteers task every Tuesday and student work parties on Fridays. The addition of a weekly Thursday task in the year worked well.

Amongst others staff support site groups at Snaky Lane and Tongham Wood by supplying tools, advising on work with the staff leading most tasks and attending group meetings.

#### Volunteer value

The BVCP is very grateful to all volunteers who contribute so much to the Valley. They are vital in enabling the team to undertake the necessary practical work. Based on Heritage Lottery Funds figures introduced in 1999 of £50 per day per volunteer, £150 per day for skilled volunteer, the total of 8,883 hours (equivalent to 1,777 days) contributed by volunteers gives a value of £219,642. However if these figures were updated using Bank of England inflation rates a total value of £361,862 would be more appropriate.

#### WORK IN GUILDFORD (including Ash Parish Area)

Sites: Hollybush Park  
Shawfield Meadow  
Lakeside Park  
Snaky Lane  
Blackwater Valley Route landscaping

The Snaky Lane Community Wildlife Group holds monthly work parties. The Partnership supplies all tools and equipment and attends with staff when larger equipment is required. During the year BVCP provided staff and equipment for meadow mowing on 2 occasions. At Lakeside Park work included moving car park boulders to prevent anti-social access, reedbed management, input into the revised management plan and a Rivers Week event. The annual checks of bat boxes and meadow orchids were completed.

Paths across Shawfield Meadow were mown and hedgerows cut back to enable access, a "camp" with much debris was removed and the meadow hay cut. At the request of Ash Parish Council a volunteer project was organised to clear a pond at Ash Meadows.

BVR Landscaping North (Surrey Heath, Rushmoor): Land either side of the A331 is managed by the BVCP to ensure commitments to environmental mitigation for road construction are met. The linear green corridor contains long sections of the BV path, screening tree belts and wildlife rich habitats. Annual management includes clearing roadside sight lines, thinning plantations, cutting grass on wildflower areas, litter and fly-tip removal.

BVR Landscaping Central and South (Guildford, Rushmoor and Farnham): The Surrey section of the BV landscaping has a similar annual work requirement to the northern section with clearance of overgrown vegetation and work on hazard trees to maintain safe public access. A difference occurs in that where the northern and central sections have acid ground with heathy patches and water features to look after, the southern section has chalk grasslands, some on steep slopes that need annual mowing.

#### **Annual General Meeting 19 October 2018**

As is usual the day of the AGM started with visits to several sites to get an appreciation of the diverse range of engagement the BVCP has in the whole area. On this occasion the sites were:-

##### *Rowhill Nature Reserve*

To facilitate easier access within the site the BVCP had worked alongside volunteers at the Reserve to install new bridges. In view of the sites of the bridges gaining access for the necessary heavy equipment to undertake the work was something of a challenge but after a lot of hard work the bridges were very successfully put in place.

### *Chalk Farm Lake*

We met the Chairman of the Aldershot Garrison Angling Club and were able to see how some areas to the lake have been made more accessible for the use of disabled individuals. It is an aspiration of the Club to encourage more disabled, particularly ex service personnel, to participate in the sport for its therapeutic benefits.

### *Ash Lock Cottage*

After admiring the tranquillity of the lake we had a short walk to Ash Lock Cottage where we were able to see several volunteers (known as "Wood Gnomes") in the process of cutting reclaimed wood brought to the site from areas worked by BVCP. Once the wood has been cut into manageable logs these are sold on generating funds for the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust.

### *Thornhill, Aldershot*

This is the SANG associated with the nearby Wellesley redevelopment site. Thornhill was previously military land and since taking over management of the site BVCP has been active in the removal of quite a substantial amount of barbed wire keeping a wary eye open for any potential rogue ordnance which may lie hidden. Also part of the internal vista of the site has been opened up by the removal of a laurel "wall". This has allowed more light into that part of the site and given it more a feeling of openness.

## **Highlights of the year**

These were particularly noted at the meeting.

- Official opening of Tice's Meadow Nature Reserve
- Highest annual value for volunteer input at £360,000
- Three substantial bridges installed
- Large tree planting project at Tongham Wood

As I reported last year one very important issue which has been of concern is the future financing of the Partnership. Discussions took place during the year and as a result a new model for future funding has been conceived. Although further consultation with the various stakeholders is required to put the final "meat on the bones" of the preferred option it seems that an acceptable method of the future financing of the BVCP is achievable. No-one wants to lose the BVCP and the admirable work it does in behalf of the area.

## **Stop Press**

Since the AGM the BVCP took over management on behalf of the Land Trust of Ash's new SANG, known as Ash Green Meadows. The main entrance to the area is at the end of South Lane. This SANG had to be provided by developers to mitigate against some of the new development taking place in the area not least the large site at Ash Lodge Drive. Rangers from BVCP have already been very active in the area, removing barbed wire, fly-tipped detritus etc and basically making in-roads into the basic clearance work which needs to be done to bring the site up to an acceptable standard. The BVCP are very keen to promote local engagement with the work and to date several volunteer open sessions have been held to generate interest (tools, training, a hot drink and biscuits provided) . These have been well attended by local residents who are not frightened to get their hands dirty. The site is well worth a visit. Information about BVCP's activities can be found on:

Blog: [www.blackwatervalleycountryside.wordpress.com](http://www.blackwatervalleycountryside.wordpress.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/blackwater.valley](http://www.facebook.com/blackwater.valley)

Councillor Jo Randall  
Ash Parish Council