

Oxford Conservation Volunteers

Annual Report 2018-2019



Registered Charity Number 1065601

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Chair's Report

It's been another excellent year for Oxford Conservation Volunteers.

We've had a nice mixture of tasks, including constructing and repairing fences and boardwalks, pond work, scything, hedgelaying, scrub clearance, coppicing and pollarding. We've worked on a diverse mixture of sites, old and new, in Oxford and in elsewhere in the region. The quality of the programme of tasks is thanks to excellent work from Phil Hunter, the Task Programmer. In many cases, these tasks have required complex planning and negotiating with interested parties, which can include management committees, ecologists, landowners, land agents, councils and local volunteers. An interesting and varied task programme is the single most important thing for the group, but this can be easily forgotten in the midst of other administrative matters.

Turnouts have been steadily improving since the autumn, and on several occasions recently we have had a full minibus, plus those people who went to the site directly. It's been good to see people from a range of different backgrounds getting involved including a few students and younger adults, as well the occasional parent with children. There are 25 paid-up members at present and 820 volunteers on the mailing list at the last count.

Notable incidents on tasks this year included finding a hand grenade while working in a ditch at Aston's Eytot. Fortunately no-one was hurt. The police were called and the army disposed of it. The story was covered by the Oxford Mail, and we were later told it was a Mills Bomb dating from WW1.

Unusually for OCV we haven't had a residential trip this year. But we have arranged to go to the Peak District at the start of June for a weekend working for the National Park Authority. We may also do a camping and coppicing weekend in autumn, although there are no firm plans as yet.

We've welcomed two new enthusiastic committee members and task leaders this year: Jenny and Anne, as Secretary and Social Secretary respectively. Anne has arranged several interesting and enjoyable socials. Jamie has been doing a great job as Website Editor, and Paula has helped raise funds for tools and other running costs. We've also welcomed Carla back from her travels and she and Ed are doing great work on social media and publicity. However, we still have a vacancy for Tools Officer. We are also keen to replace our Van Officer as John has moved north and it is a difficult job to do from more than 200 miles away.

Even without a Tools Officer in post we've managed to keep on top of maintaining and replacing tools by sharing the jobs around. Andy Mo deserves a mention for making an excellent job of sharpening all our bill hooks. In the summer we purchased our first generator, which should enable us to guarantee a supply of electricity for construction projects, even after all cordless drill batteries are exhausted. We chose one that could provide power smooth enough for battery chargers and sufficient for drills, grinders and potentially other light power tools. It's been used 4 times so far, and has so far proved reliable and much less noisy and smoky than the one we have sometimes borrowed from the council.

This year we consolidated all our leader and driver information into two complete "handbooks". The driver's handbook contains information about the van and how to check it over and load it. The leader's information includes all the general risk assessments for different activities, which are used

to develop the specific risk assessment for a task day. All this information has been updated and reviewed by the committee. It is hoped that these documents will help new leaders and drivers get up to speed quickly and be less confusing than the jumble of wiki pages they replace. We agreed to pay travel expenses for leaders and drivers to get to the tool shed, and we did a yearly review of all our other policies.

A few long term challenges remain for the organisation. As ever, we need to ensure we recruit a sufficient number of leaders, drivers, and committee members to replace those who step down for one reason or another, usually because they are moving away or have new family commitments. In the not-too-distant future we are likely to have to replace the minibus, and there will be some research required into the type of vehicle to get and some important decisions to make. Then we will have to do the fundraising to pay for it. We also intend to investigate the possibility of becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, a new type of charity structure.

As ever, I'd like to thank everyone for their hard work. A great conservation group doesn't happen by accident. It takes a dedicated team of committee members, task leaders, minibus drivers, members and regular volunteers. Everyone has played a part and that has enabled us to achieve so much for wildlife, biodiversity and the outdoor environment.

Chris Skepper



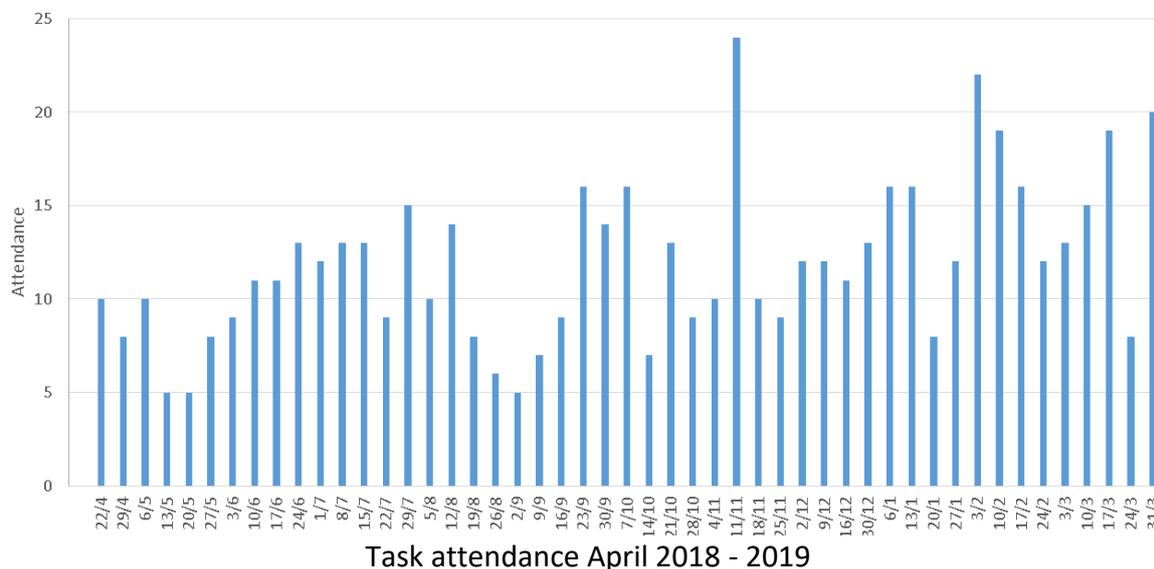
Ditch clearance at Aston's Eyot, 7th October 2018

Secretary's Report

Committee meetings have been held throughout the year on the first Tuesday of each month in Oxford Town Hall and we are grateful for the continued access to a free meeting room space there. Meeting attendance varied between 5 and 8 people and sometimes we were joined by non-committee members - the meetings are advertised on the events page of the website and all are encouraged to attend.

After joining the Oxfordshire Community Action Group (CAG) Network about a year ago, we have been advertising our events on their events calendar, and entering our volunteer statistics into their

reporting tool. A summary of the volunteer attendance from the period April 2018 – 2019 is shown below, demonstrating solid support throughout the year by our volunteers with the occasional exceptional turnout.



Jenny Hill

Treasurer's report

The accounts for the financial year 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019 are presented in Table 1. Our income for the year was £6,220.70. The balance in our current account is £31,275. We now have sufficient funds to replace the minibus.

Table 1. Accounts for period 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019

	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
INCOME:				
Task Fees	£5040.00	£7,200.00	£5,520.00	£6,240.00
Memberships	£135.00	£175.00	£132.00	£190.00
Donations	£1045.70	£1,562.50	£50.00	£3,378.50
Grants	£0.00	£0.00	£650.00	£1,900.00
Merchandise sales	£0.00	£51.50	£67.00	£0

Interest	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£7.75
Other	£0.00 ⁽⁵⁾	£671.10 ⁽⁵⁾	£372.13 ⁽⁵⁾	£73.38 ⁽⁵⁾
Income for the year	£6,220.70	£9,660.10	£6,791.13	£11,797.13
EXPENDITURE:				
Minibus				
Maintenance, MOT	£1100.70	£188.28	£340.38	£563.87
Fuel	£372.37	£364.63	£457.64	£501.86
Tax & Insurance	£770.84	£741.00	£1,160.00	£1,121.37
Total Minibus costs	£2,243.91	£1,293.91	£2,187.10	£2,187.10
Car Mileage	£17.82	£0.00	£48.65	£0.00
Tools, materials & tool insurance	£1082.48	£1,154.82	£1,451.24	£558.70
Training	£0.00	£0.00	£360.00	£735.00
BTCV affiliation and insurance	£207.09	£211.60	£169.17	£352.46
Food	£1.69	£193.27	£181.71	£8.78
Stationery	£77.72	£58.78	£178.73	£61.60
Publicity	£20.60	£39.37	£71.33	£0.00
Accommodation	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Other	£238.58 ⁽⁴⁾	£113.35 ⁽⁴⁾	£583.66 ⁽³⁾	£37.33 ⁽²⁾
Merchandise	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Depreciation	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾	£1,600.00 ⁽¹⁾
Expenditure for the year	£3,939.38	£3,065.14	£5,002.51	£4000.97
Excess income over expenditure	£680.82	£4,794.96	£188.62	£6,196.16
*Excess income over expenditure excl depreciation	£2,280.82	£6,594.96		

			£1,788.62	£7,796.16
Balance in current account	£31,275.56	£28,230.00	£22,230.50	£21,802.77
Balance in Investment Account	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Petty Cash	£2.38	£2.38	£2.38	£2.38

- (1) Depreciation was calculated using the straight-line method, based on an estimated 8-year lifespan, and a £500 trade-in value
- (2) Website hosting fees
- (3) Website hosting fee (£88.66) and payment for minibus accident (£495.30)
- (4) Website hosting and email service
- (5) Refund for task materials and residential payments

Tim Bletsoe



Planting Devil's-bit Scabious at Beckley Park, 4th November 2018

Fundraising Officer's report

I raised £1,200.00 last year thanks to the high generosity of Oxford Colleges who funded OCV. Letters were sent in April and May last year to twenty-five colleges where 8 colleges had donated at different times throughout the year. A thank you letter was sent out in December 2018 to colleges who had donated.

I have sent 2019 funding requests to twenty-three colleges this month as well as thank you letters to two colleges that donated late last year.

In May 2019, I am stepping down as Fundraising Officer and I am handing over the role to Celia.

Paula Dunne



Hedge-laying at Rectory farm fields, 30th September and 9th December 2018, and 27th January 2019.

Task Programmer's Report

It's been another busy year with a full programme of 52 task days since the last AGM. There were the usual seasonal variations in the work made memorable by the hot summer of 2018 – the July tasks at Burgess Field and Lye Valley were scorchers, as was the long day under the late summer sun mowing the meadow in Cuxham. The relatively clement winter meant there was no need for any cancellations, and significant improvements to the OCV minibus (touch wood!) made the winter morning cold starts a lot less stressful.

The standout features of the year have been some extraordinary construction projects: an ambitious fencing task that crossed both slopes and the brook of Chilswell Valley; an elevated boardwalk at Greenmoor Ponds in the Chilterns; a major path revetment at Mathew Arnold Field; and the installation of a new bird-hide at the Trap Grounds. These tasks take a lot of careful preparation given that our clients need detailed specifications of the materials we'll need; that we have to start and finish the work in the allotted time; and that our open invitation policy means that we don't know who exactly will show up on the day. So it's worth noticing the contributions of Chris Skepper (the OCV Chair) and Tim Evans, who both helped out on a Saturday to prepare for the boardwalk task at Greenmoor Ponds, and whose know-how and practical skills were invaluable.

Greenmoor Ponds was a new site for OCV. There are three others to mention: Burgess Field, Beckley Park, and Langdon wood. We're likely to be back on a regular basis to Burgess Field and Langdon Wood. The management of the former has been taken in hand by a newly formed local friends' group. Langdon Wood is an SSSI on the Aston Upthorpe Downs. It's a large hazel wood and we'll be

working with the private landowner under the terms of a Natural England project to carry out some extensive coppicing. The Beckley Park project is also under the aegis of Natural England – the plan is to recreate a habitat suitable for the relatively rare Marsh Fritillery butterfly.

We have, of course, continued to do significant work for our usual clients: for Natural England at the Aston Rowant NNR and at Cothill; for the joint Oxford City Council/BBOWT Wild Oxford project at Lye Valley, Chilswell Valley, and Boundary Brook (the latest addition to the project); for the Oxford Trust at Stansfeld; for the Oxford Preservation Trust at Mathew Arnold Field, Iffley Island, and Simons' Land; for the Friends of Trap Grounds and the Friends of Aston's Eyot; and for the Tackley Parish Council at the Crecy Hill reserve.

There was one especially innovative occasion to note: a so-called, 'corporate day' at Stansfeld Park. This was a joint enterprise between the Stansfeld Trust, who provided the volunteers (all from a company which had donated significant funds for the redevelopment of the Stansfeld site), and OCV, who provided the



Fen raking at Lye Valley, 21st October 2018

task leader and driver (both unpaid volunteers) and the tools. The Trust managed to actively involve their sponsors in the project, the volunteers had a great day working in the woods constructing a flight of sleeper steps, and OCV charged a triple task fee. Everyone went home happy.

My only cause for concern has been our reliance on a relatively small number of leaders and drivers. However, last year I said that that number was 'dwindling', well that's no longer true thanks to Jenny Hill and Anne Cossutta (new committee members) who have also led tasks, and to Andy Mo. All our volunteers are important, but those prepared to lead and drive are essential to what we do. So thank you to everyone who has been prepared to do so over the past year.

If you think you can help out by leading a task or driving our van then please let either myself or Chris know. We'll do everything we can to help you get started by shadowing current task leaders, or taking you through the driver's van induction. If you'd like to have a go, then please get in touch with me at tasks@ocv.org.uk, or Chris at chair@ocv.org.uk

Phil Hunter

Van Officer's Report

John Worth remains the Van Officer as the van is currently registered in his name although he is no longer living in the Oxford area and wanting to step down, therefore duties are mostly being covered by other committee members.

Tools Officer's Report

This position is currently vacant and being covered by other members of the committee. If you are interested in finding out more about what the role involves come along to a committee meeting or email Chris at chair@ocv.org.uk

Webmaster's report

It has been a mostly quiet year from a webmaster point of view. Motivated by GDPR, we wrote a Data Protection Policy and made it available on our website last May. In October, we switched the protocol over which the website is served from http to https.

We continue to use 4U Hosting to host our website, and MailChimp for our public mailing lists.

Please continue to report any website or mailing list issues to me at webmaster@ocv.org.uk.

Nic Bricknell

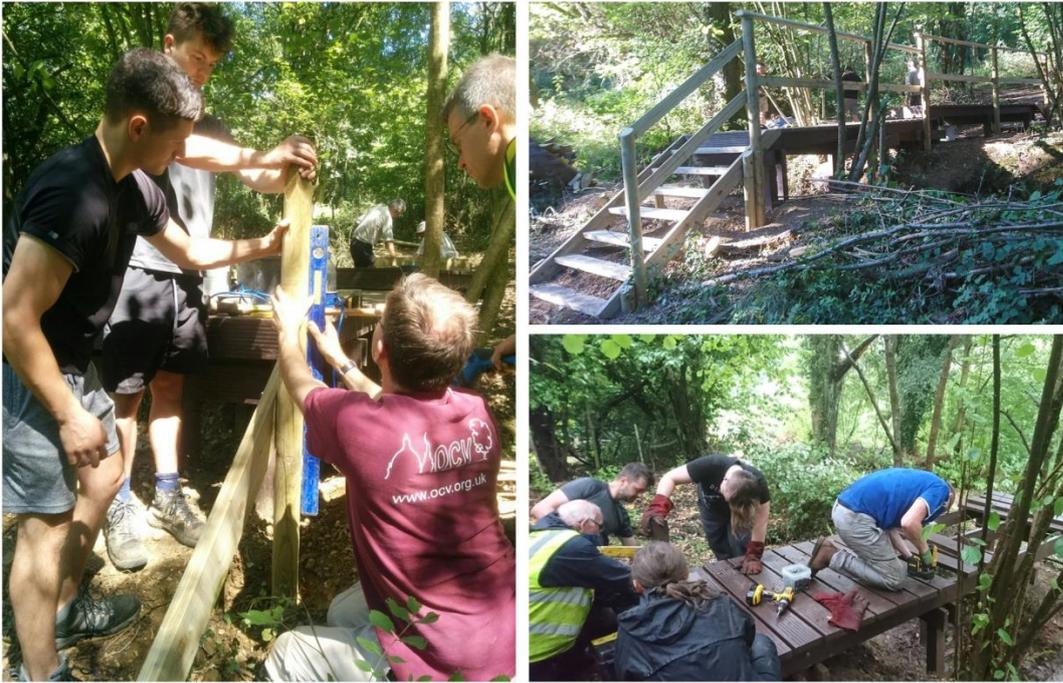


Step construction at Stansfeld Park, 3rd February 2019

Social media and Publicity Officer's report

We've currently got 445 followers on Twitter (403 last year), and 397 followers on Facebook (318 last year). Tim Bletsoe has been uploading task photos to Facebook and I've been trying to repost on Twitter whenever possible. Task photos usually get noticed and particularly the one about the hand grenade incident at Astons Eyot caused a lot of interest. Carla has been uploading the task programme as Facebook events and we've also been making sure that Daily Info, and the CAG events calendar are up to date with the programme.

Ed Polehampton and Carla Ponte Júlio



Boardwalk construction at Greenmoor Ponds, 29th July and 5th August 2018

Social Secretary's Report

I officially took over as Social Secretary in January of this year. Many thanks to Jamie for all the socials he organised while in this role.

This year's socials so far:

- We met at the Mad Hatter in January for their open mic night "The Furry Mic". As their charity of the night we presented OCV and collected donations as well as 10% of the bar profits while enjoying some live music.
- In February we sought shelter from the snow at Turtle Bay where we enjoyed some tasty Caribbean food.
- In March, we headed along for a talk on "Securing nature's recovery" by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust. With a last minute change of speaker, the talk was not as good as it could have been, but at least it created some interesting debate when we headed to the pub afterwards!
- In April, we put our general knowledge to the test during the Fir Tree's Pub Quiz.

Planned socials include our traditional punting in the summer and a tool sharpening session at the Cutteslowe Depot... other suggestions are welcome!

We actually sent out a survey at the end of December 2018 to hear people's thoughts on the socials. It is still open and can be taken here: <https://forms.gle/rShkMEZaredqetox7>.

Anne Cossutta



Open Mic Night at The Mad Hatter, January 2019