

BLACKWATER VALLEY

News

SPRING/SUMMER 2006



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The past few decades have seen tremendous changes in the Blackwater Valley, but what does the future hold?

Thanks to the foresight and vision of the Councils who formed the Blackwater Valley Project (forerunner of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership or BVCP), the Valley has been transformed from an unloved backyard to a well used green corridor that brings the countryside into the heart of the Blackwater Valley towns.

It was in 1976, 30 years ago that the first **Blackwater Valley Joint Landscape Report** is published. Running to 164 pages it was a comprehensive analysis of every aspect of the Valley's landscape and its problems – and these were many. The River Blackwater itself was so polluted it barely supported fish and was set in a ravaged landscape, pock marked with backyard industries, landfill sites, abandoned gravel workings and unsightly scrapyards. The report included a co-ordinated landscape development plan and this formed the basis of all that has been achieved since. This has been considerable: over 400ha of derelict land restored, 230ha opened to free public access, a Valley-long riverside path opened, five nature reserves created, and ever increasing use by wildlife and people.

This is still a work in progress, the **Blackwater Valley Countryside Strategy 2006-10** (see page 7) outlines our plans for the future and identifies many opportunities

which, if seized, could see a major increase in accessible and wildlife-rich greenspace. But it also identifies serious stumbling blocks we need to overcome.

The true value of accessible greenspace for people is now being realised, it's a vital element for quality of life and has a remarkable effect on the physical and mental health of users. People who use their local countryside regularly are measurably healthier and happier.

National government have earmarked the Blackwater Valley towns as a centre for growth, over 50,000 new homes are expected to be built in the next 20 years. In itself the growing population will increase pressure on the existing greenspace and the role of the Blackwater Valley can only increase in importance.

The Valley is central to large tracts of heathlands and woods that have been notified as the Thames Basins Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), as they support internationally important populations of three rare birds: Woodlark, Nightjar and Dartford Warbler. Under European and UK law any development which could significantly damage an SPA must consider the opportunities to avoid harm to the SPA through management and mitigation. The biggest threats to these

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YOUR FEEDBACK**

BIRD TALK: Little Egret



Stag Beetle larva

Deborah Harvey



Adult Stag Beetle

Deborah Harvey

Bury Buckets 4 Beetles

They may be big, but Stag Beetles need all the help they can get to survive

Stag Beetles (*Lucanus cervus*) are Britain's largest terrestrial beetle, named because the male's huge jaws look just like a stag's antlers. They spend about five years as white grubs underground and emerge as fully grown adult insects in spring. Males can be up to 70mm (2.5 inches) long; females are smaller, without the characteristic male 'antlers'. Both sexes have a shiny black head and thorax (chest) and their wing cases are chestnut brown. They are quite harmless -- although they can give you quite a shock if they bump into you while flying around on summer evenings looking for a mate! Their large jaws are designed to ward off other males.

Last year the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) launched a new project to help monitor Stag Beetles

up and down the country. The Bury Buckets 4 Beetles project, or BB4B, is a great way for everyone to get involved in conservation at a local level and do something practical to help.

How to take part

All you need is a garden, allotment or any other small green space, a plastic bucket, a little time and lots of patience. By making holes in your bucket, filling it with deadwood and soil and, finally, burying it in your chosen spot, you can create an artificial breeding site for Stag Beetles where their larvae (developing beetles) can mature. Once your bucket is in place, Stag Beetles (and a whole host of other insects) may use it to lay their eggs in. In the space of the next three or four years these eggs will develop into fully-grown adult Stag Beetles. The PTES is asking participants to dig up your bucket

in the spring of 2007 and carefully check for larvae, and to let them know what you find. If you are interested in taking part, contact PTES by phone 020 7498 4533 or email enquiries@ptes.org for details, or visit their website www.ptes.org

Seeing Stag Beetles

You are most likely to see males in flight on warm summer evenings between May and August, while they look for a mate. Females lay their eggs near decaying wood below ground and the developing larvae are large white grubs with orange heads, which feed on this rotting wood. It can take up to five years for them to develop into adult beetles. The majority of adults live for only a few weeks in the summer in order to mate, although a few may survive the winter till the following year. With such a long larval stage, you can see how very important it is to protect their habitats.

Otter Update

Otter signs (and indeed a dead otter) along the River Blackwater in 2004 and 2005 heralded the beginning of otter recovery in Surrey, so Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP), together with Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT), decided to bid for project funding to help them along the way. The money was required to carry out a full survey of the river to find out hazards to otter survival, then to address these and carry out habitat improvements to make the otters' lives more comfortable.

Although the project met ENTRUST's stringent criteria, we were unable to get any grant funding at the time, so it was decided to proceed with a much smaller one-year scoping project instead. This will identify the potential risks in the Valley to otters and cost all the

work that needs to be carried out. The Environment Agency and Thames Water have kindly provided the necessary funding and an MSc student, Steve Bolton, has begun the survey work. His results should enable BVCP and SWT to accurately cost all the mitigation and habitat work, and this will enable us to bid for the much larger amount of money needed to actually undertake the work identified.

In addition, volunteer surveyors are being given intensive training in otter survey techniques and health and safety. Training takes a full day for each individual and is structured so that they have experience of being in the water, working under bridges, identifying otter signs and learning the precautions necessary to avoid waterborne diseases. So, at last, work is underway. We will report on our findings in due course.

CHRIS MATCHAM

Chris Matcham is the Otters & Rivers Project Officer at Surrey Wildlife Trust.

Hawley Meadow was last flooded in the winter of 2000/1



Hawley Meadow in summer



WATER, WATER... ANYWHERE?

There's no escaping the facts, we are suffering from a water shortage. South-east and central southern England experienced the driest 15-month period (November 2004-January 2006) in over 80 years, and the entire Blackwater Valley area is now subject to a hosepipe and sprinkler ban. Without significant amounts of rainfall the river and its environs, including the 100+ lakes and ponds found in the area, will suffer.

The river rises in Rowhill Nature Reserve and according to Kathy Spink who has been involved with the site since the 1970s the source has never dried up in all that time. Unfortunately only a tiny part of the river's water supply comes from here.

Most water abstracted from rivers or groundwater is for the public water supply and returned via sewage treatment works. In the Blackwater Valley the bulk of the water used

by domestic and industrial users is extracted from the River Thames. Once used, it is then discharged into the River Blackwater via the many sewage treatment works found along its length. This means that during the summer around three-quarters of the river's flow is treated effluent. This simple fact greatly increases the flow of the river above natural levels making it unlikely that the river itself will run dry.

However, with the predicted climate change and more housing planned for the area there is no guarantee that this situation will continue. Even before the current dry period, concerns had been voiced over the deterioration of the Blackwater Valley SSSI, which is gradually drying out. At the same time the current system of grading rivers is to be replaced, but how this will affect the River Blackwater remains unclear.

"What we do know is that Hawley

Meadows, one of the Valley's natural floodplains, is usually water logged in winter and inaccessible, but this winter it has been dry enough for us to gain access," explains Steve Bailey, Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership' Manager. "This is quite unlike the winter of 2000/1 when the site resembled a lake." (see picture).

Water levels in the Valley's many fishing lakes, which are more reliant on rainwater, are lower than normal, making them more susceptible to algal bloom and reduced oxygen levels. Low oxygen levels have an adverse effect on fish, causing many to die.

In the short term a drought should have no marked effect on the Valley's riverside sites, nature is fairly resilient. But who knows what will happen if current conditions prevail. Then again it's possible that it could rain throughout the summer...we can only wait and see.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Continued from front page

species come from disturbance from people and their pets, so an increasing population so close to the SPA creates major problems.

The Valley is in the perfect location to provide new or improved public greenspaces to enable recreation to take place. Discussions with developers on how the Blackwater Valley Countryside could be involved have already taken place and it is likely that we could find ourselves the green heart of the overall project. The potential for improving facilities and greenspaces within the Valley is huge, but we need to ensure we do not damage the existing value of sites to wildlife and people.

Ironically at the same time as the true value

of the Valley's greenspace is being realised, funding is becoming a serious problem.

The reduction of funding to local authorities by national government has been continuing for many years and as a result our funding partners have been carefully examining all areas of their spending. As countryside services are non-statutory they are under particularly close scrutiny.

The proposed cutback by Surrey County Council to the Basingstoke Canal Authority made the national press as it put the canal's future in jeopardy; it could be a taster of what is to come. Bracknell Forest Borough Council have announced they are to stop funding

the BVCP in 2007, and with the countryside departments of all our partners being closely examined the future, not just of the partnership organisations but all countryside work in the areas, is uncertain.

We will do all we can to find the necessary resources to continue our work and without doubt future income will be more reliant on grants and project funding. We are certainly not short of ideas and are determined to explore every possible avenue to ensure the long-term future of the Valley and to continue to improve and open up, not just maintain, many more areas for local residents to enjoy - both people and wildlife.

VOLUNTEER NEWS SHORT CUTS

Autumn and winter are always busy for conservation work and the volunteer groups in the Valley have all been working very hard over the past six months. We asked them to report and tell us what they have been up to ...



Tongham Wood Improvement Group

TWIG have not taken it easy over the winter with bramble bashing, rubble clearance, planting beech hedges and, most recently, planting 48 cherry and field maple trees to create Cherry Tree Walk and make a circle of colour all year round to the Play Area. We have also launched our website www.tonghamwood.org.uk

Meet the third Sunday of each month. Email twig@tonghamwood.org.uk or ring Tony Anderson, 01252 331353.



A It's the pontoon bridge now in use at Moor Green Lakes which is made of 'Cubisystem' modular blocks and has provided a novel solution to the problem of reaching the three islands on Colebrook Lake.

Previously the only means of access to the islands was by boat and this severely limited the management work that could be carried out, resulting in the islands becoming covered in dense scrub and bramble. A successful grant application, through the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA)

from the Aggregates Sustainability Levy Fund, meant the Moor Green Lakes Group received £38,000 for site improvements, which included purchasing the bridge. Constructed and put in place early last year, the bridge has been a great success. Not only does it provide a stable platform and easy access to the islands but it can also be put in position in about 10 minutes. With its two fibreglass ramps providing access, machinery, wheelbarrows etc can be moved easily across the pontoon making access for volunteers much simpler and quicker.



The Bourne Conservation Group

The group continued with its core tasks on the footpaths and wooded areas in the Bourne valley including the planting of some new trees and shrubs. In February work started on a major project alongside the A287 road. By March the site was cleared and preparations are in hand for seeding part of it with a meadow mix of grasses and wild flowers. We would like to thank Tony Anderson and the BVCP team for their help and encouragement.

Meet once a month on Sundays. Contact Stan Cockett, 01252 794511.

Rowhill Conservation Volunteers

At Rowhill we have finished coppicing for the winter, selling the hazel for stakes and heatherings for hedge laying. We have also been doing some large timber extraction from wind blown trees that have come down over the last few years, which we hope to cut into planks using a mobile saw mill to produce a board walk along the northern boundary. Have planted over 600 trees to replenish areas that have been badly deer browsed, plus a new section of hedge.

Meet the first and third Sundays of each month 10am to 2pm. Contact Roy Champion, 01252 548837.

BBOWT

This winter has seen BBOWT's Mid Week Team back at our Blackwater Reach Meadow SSSI nature reserve. Following on from our September meadow cut we have now carried out some ditchline clearance too. This should help to maintain the flow of water throughout the year and create excellent hawking dragonfly territory.

Meet every Thursday. Contact James Hitchcock, 01628 829574.



BV Conservat

As usual our Tues the Shepherd & north. As well as combined forces Frimley Fuel Allo Wellington Mon bright sunshine -

Meet every Mockridge.



Cove Brook

In the last thr areas at South llent talk with painting Meet the ring Ant

Moor Gree

Through the bramble from the lake some section Meet se Contact

Yateley Co

The Yateley conducting f and at Castl removal is e frequented Meet th Pool, Ya or HCC



BV Conservation Volunteers

As usual our Tuesday volunteers visited sites up and down the Valley over the winter months, from the Shepherd & Flock roundabout near Farnham in the south up to Moor Green Lakes in the north. As well as the usual Valley sites they've also carried out work at Eelmoor SSSI with Qinetiq, combined forces with the Hart Rangers at Basingbourne and Elvetham Heath, worked with the Frimley Fuel Allotments Conservation team, and carried out more clearance work around the Wellington Monument. Then of course there was the special Xmas task at Lakeside Park, where bright sunshine - plus the traditional BBQ - made the task of reed clearance a pleasure.

Meet every Tuesday at Farnborough Gate outside Courts at 10am. Contact Tim Mockridge, 01252 331353.



Snaky Lane Community Wildlife Group

Over the past six months Snaky Lane Community Wildlife Group have been busy with 'Wildflower Rescue' which has entailed mowing and raking large areas of the meadow. We have also been clearing views to the pond by removing trees and thinning overgrown scrub. A 75-metre length of native hedgerow species was planted in January and we buried some buckets for stag beetles and made a rustic bench.

Meet the first Sunday of each month at 10.30am. Contact Sue Dent, 01252 331353.

Cove Brook Greenway Group

In the last three months the CBGG have cut back brambles and saplings to improve grassy areas at Southwood and Birchbrook. Graham Cornick from Hydestile wildlife hospital gave an excellent talk. Much effort has been put into removing rubbish from the brook but similarities with painting the Forth bridge remain...

Meet the 2nd Saturday of each month. Email Paul Sanders at paulsanders@talk21.com or ring Antonia Hebbert, 01252 512634.

Moor Green Lakes Group

Through the winter 'maintenance season', the group has continued its perennial task of keeping bramble from taking over the reserve completely. In addition, we have removed invasive scrub from the lake edges to allow grazing wildfowl to access the surrounding meadows, coppiced some sections of woodland, and installed some 'stag beetle buckets'.

Meet second Sunday of the month, September - March. Contact Simon Weeks, 0118 9730199.

Yateley Common Conservation Group

The Yateley Common Conservation Group have recently been conducting habitat improvements close to Blackbushe Airport and at Castle Bottom overlooking the primary bog area. Scrub removal is expected to enhance the ground nesting area frequented by nightjars.

Meet the last Sunday of each month 10am at Wyndham's Pool, Yateley Common. Email mike.mann1@ntlworld.com or HCC Ranger vicky.booth@hants.gov.uk



AND LOOKING AHEAD

Fleet Pond Society

This year the Fleet Pond is 30 years old. We plan to have a two-day exhibition of photos, press cuttings and documents from our birth up to the present day. This will be in the Function Suite, Harlington Centre, Fleet, on Friday 21 and Saturday 22 July. We will be joined by Hart Countryside Service (10 years old this year) and Fleet & Church Crookham Local History Group. All are welcome - entry will be free (but you might have to put something in a collection box to get out!). Look out for more details in the local press.

Steve Jackson



BADGER WATCH

We know there are plenty of badgers in the Valley but have you seen them? That's what we would like to know.

We have recently had a survey done of the Valley and believe we know where all the badger setts are located, but we would now like to get a more detailed picture of the badgers living here and their movements. That's where you can help.

We often hear anecdotal stories from people who see badgers crossing the road or digging up their lawn for earthworms, or even coming into the back garden to be fed. But now we would like to have more details about these sightings for our records.

You can help if you have seen a badger in the Valley, please tell us when (date and time) and where (ideally a grid reference, alternatively an accurate address with post code), how many you saw and what it/they were doing. Information on any badger road kills are also welcome.

Please send details to 'Badgers', BVCP, Ash Lock Cottage, Government Road, Aldershot GU11 2PS. Contact Sue Dent for more information on 01252 331353.

To find out more about badgers visit www.badgers.org

WASTE NOT!

A story about rubbish

Did you know?

As a nation we take home around 12 billion plastic bags every year. Most of them end up in a landfill site.



Looking after the green spaces in the Valley is one of our main priorities. This involves managing the different habitats to maintain and/or improve the biodiversity. It's a huge task and one we could not achieve without our conservation volunteers, a dedicated and hardworking group of individuals, who turn out rain or shine to help.

Cutting, clearing, planting, repairing, making and assembling are jobs we do on a regular basis depending on the season, the site and local requirements. But there is always one other job that we carry out on every site we visit, litter picking – one of those never ending tasks. We are helped by a small number of individuals who, in their own time, do a litter pick to try and keep the Valley clean – our thanks to you all.

Unfortunately there are a great many people who are not as community minded and seem to think that their rubbish is someone else's problem – and we are not just talking about a few drink cans and crisp packets! We regularly remove supermarket trolleys, old bikes and prams, paint cans and buckets from our sites, and it is quite normal to return from one of our regular tasks with a several black sacks full of rubbish. Wherever possible we always try to recycle whatever waste we can and then safely dispose of the rest. But just for the record over the past six months we have collected:

- 10 supermarket trolleys
- 8 bicycles
- 3 motor bikes
- and 87 black bin bags of rubbish

This is not just a local problem. According to the Environment Agency the amount of rubbish dropped on our streets has increased by some 500% since the early 1960s and dropped food and takeaway litter has helped swell the rat population to 60 million. A little closer to home, two-thirds of rivers in England and Wales are of aesthetically good or fair quality, but the rest are classified as poor or bad, largely due to rubbish being dumped in them.

And that's another problem not only is litter unsightly, but it is also dangerous. Some people may think throwing a plastic bag or drink can into the river is harmless, but if everyone did this the river would be totally clogged up with rubbish. The accumulation could then create a blockage greatly increasing the risk of flooding.



In fact we do get blockages along the river due to discarded rubbish which then have to be cleared away. Rubbish thrown into the many drainage ditches similarly can be a flood risk.

Unfortunately fly tipping is a major problem that occurs both locally and nationally. Until recently it was difficult to get a picture of the full extent of the problem because the figures were not gathered centrally. Now a web-based database called Flycapture, which went live in April 2004, has been established and between June and November 2004 some 444,536 fly-tipping incidents were reported to it. The top five most commonly dumped items were:

- household waste
- white goods
- construction waste
- garden waste
- waste from businesses

Unightly, a health hazard and a damage to wildlife, all this illegally dumped rubbish is also costly and nationally between June and November 2004 it cost an estimated £23 million cleaning it all up.

We're sure you always dispose of your own rubbish properly, but if you would like to keep the Valley clean and a safer place for wildlife, please help us with a litter pick once in a while.

HOW LONG DO THEY LAST?

Cigarette butts	1-5 yrs
Wool socks	1-5 yrs
Orange peel and banana skin	up to 2 yrs
Plastic-coated paper	5 yrs
Plastic bags	10-20 yrs
Plastic film containers	20-30 years
Nylon fabric	30-40 yrs
Leather	up to 50 yrs
Tin cans	50 yrs
Plastic six-pack holders	100 yrs
Aluminium cans and caps	80-100 yrs
Glass bottles	1,000 yrs
Plastic bottles and styrofoam	Indefinitely

MAI

Following the success programme, which attracted people and plenty of people organised a similar programme.

We have already held and talks with our Blackwater Valley talk given by C attracting an audience.

New this year is our for Beginners' aimed at consider themselves to like to give it a try. The atmosphere friendly predominantly along pavements and related place every Friday a July, August and September for 1½ - 2 hours. Start the Frimley, Farnborough areas, so check our give us a call on 01



Click

Since its launch it has gradually attracted and in March we almost 13,400 visitors an average of 43 been getting some excellent website reviews. I have your information enjoy it," are so

So if you have why not take a valley.org.uk

We have a section telling for each month 'Bird of the Month' pages wildlife sighting sites are featured volunteer opportunities groups, plus n

MAKE A DATE

Following the success of last year's events programme, which attracted around 600 people and plenty of compliments, we have organised a similar programme this year.

We have already held a couple of walks and talks with our Birds of the Blackwater Valley talk given by Colin Wilson in February attracting an audience of 40 people.

New this year is our series of 'Walks for Beginners' aimed at people who don't consider themselves to be a walker, but would like to give it a try. The pace is leisurely, the atmosphere friendly and the walks are predominantly along surfaced paths or pavements and relatively flat. They will take place every Friday afternoon during June, July, August and September starting at 2pm for 1½ - 2 hours. Start points will be around the Frimley, Farnborough, Ash and Aldershot areas, so check our website for details or give us a call on 01252 331353. Flat comfy

shoes, a drink and sunscreen or raincoat are recommended. Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult.

Other events worth a special mention are:

- 'Walk the Path' weekend on Saturday and Sunday 6 & 7 May, details below.

- 'Wildflower Meadow Survey' at Lakeside Park on Sunday 25 June.

- 'Meet the Wildlife at Hawley Meadow' a one-off special on Thursday 3 August for all the family when you can meet Blackwater Valley staff and find out more about this special site and how it is managed. Children can see how many different insects and birds they can find.

Our full programme of events is given on a separate sheet contained within this newsletter, so why not pin it up next to your calendar to make sure you don't miss any of the dates. If you don't have an events sheet or if you would like further details please ring us on 01252 331353.



Join us for a wildflower meadow survey on Sun 25 June



Join us to 'Walk the Path'

Last year it involved 132 feet, belonging to 60 people and three dogs, walking a total of 1,175 miles over two days. And the occasion? Our first ever 'Walk the Path' event which proved a great success.

This year 'Walk the Path' is being held on Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th May. Not only is it a great way of seeing the river from start to finish, but it is also good exercise. Last year two of the participants used the walk as part of their training for a 60km walk later on in the year to raise money for the Breakthrough Breast Cancer charity. So why not join us this year? You will need to pre-book, registration per person costs £4 one day or £6 for both days. For more details please contact Sarah at the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership, ring 01252 331353 or visit our website www.blackwater-valley.org.uk



Click on

Since its launch in 2003 our website has gradually attracted more and more hits and in March we reached an all-time high with almost 13,400 visits over the month – that's an average of 432 visits per day. We've also been getting some very positive feedback: "an excellent website", "probably one of the best websites I have seen in ages", "Thank you for your information in your January website. I do enjoy it," are some of the comments received:

So if you have never visited our website, why not take a look now www.blackwater-valley.org.uk

We have a special 'This month in the Valley' section telling you what wildlife to look out for each month and there are informative 'Bird of the Month' and 'Butterfly of the Month' pages as well as details of all the wildlife sightings sent in to us. All the Valley sites are featured, as well as details about volunteer opportunities and the conservation groups, plus news, events and much more.

Our Strategy, Your Feedback

We would like to thank everyone who read and responded to the draft **Blackwater Valley Strategy 2006-2010**. This Strategy is the latest in a series of strategy and planning documents aimed at improving the Blackwater Valley and will steer our work programme until 2010 and beyond.

One of the purposes of the strategy is to strike the right balance between different land uses which can sometimes conflict. A lot of factors have to be considered which does not make for light reading. We appreciate the input of everybody who took the time to read through the 100+ pages. The consultation period is now over and we received a number of very helpful comments and observations, all of which have been carefully considered. It was pleasing that the vast majority of views, despite coming from a variety of standpoints, were supportive of our policies and proposals.

Following on from your comments a

number of amendments have been made, these include:

- Improving the multi-user section of path to form a regional cycle route between Aldershot & Guildford.
- Identifying more areas of land for access improvements.
- Strengthening the commitment to landscape improvements, especially to hedgerows in the more rural sections of the Valley.
- Ensuring the existing and future wildlife value of the Valley is recognised and protected.

Once the amended Strategy has been approved by our partners the document will be available, this should be in the early summer. Once again a big thank you to everyone for passing on your thoughts and comments which have helped refine the vision for "A continuous greenspace along the Blackwater Valley, attractive to wildlife and the community".

NG DO ST?

- 1-5 yrs
- 1-5 yrs
- up to 2 yrs
- 5 yrs
- 10-20 yrs
- 20-30 years
- 30-40 yrs
- up to 50 yrs
- 50 yrs
- 100 yrs
- 80-100 yrs
- 1,000 yrs
- Indefinitely

Blackwater Valley Walks & Wildlife Guides

I would like to order (use boxes):

Blackwater Valley Path

- A long-distance route covering 23 miles along the River Blackwater
- Including easy to follow maps
- Highlighting the multi-users section for cyclists, wheelchair users & families

£2.50 + 50p p+p

Blackwater Valley Circular Walks

- Details of 12 circular walks
- Including route guides and maps
- Varied terrain and distance
- Fascinating facts about local wildlife and history

£3.50 + 50p p+p

Blackwater Valley Dragonflies

- Details of the 30 species of dragonfly and damselfly found in the Valley
- Close up colour photographs
- Including information on when and where to spot them.

£2.50 + 50p p+p

Blackwater Valley Butterflies

- Details of the 32 species recorded in the Valley
- Full colour guide.
- Easy to use 'Sites to Visit' chart
- Butterfly families chart and information

£2.50 + 50p p+p

I enclose a cheque for £ _____
made payable to: 'Blackwater Valley'

Name: _____

Address: _____

Post code: _____

Please send this form, with payment to:
Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership,
Ash Lock Cottage, Government Road,
Aldershot, Hampshire, GU11 2PS.
Tel: 01252 331353

FACT FILE

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Length: 55-65 cm

Wingspan: 88-95cm

Weight: 350-550g

RSPB Amber List



Dickie Duckett ARPS

BIRD TALK: Little Egret

The Little Egret is a very topical bird, having suddenly appeared in the Blackwater Valley in good numbers in the last year or so. This elegant and attractive all-white heron has black legs but its contrasting yellow toes are often not seen as it wades around in ponds and ditches. The bill is blackish at all times, but if you look closely it has either a bluish or reddish base, the latter being part of its breeding plumage, the time when it also has two wonderful long plumes hanging from its nape.

Barely recorded in the UK prior to 1950, by 1960 only 33 birds had been reported in the whole of England. In the next decade 47 birds were recorded, then 104 in the 70s and 262 in the 80s. One bird was recorded at Fleet Pond on April 22 1982, the only record I have found for this area up to 1990. Since then numbers have taken off and at Thorney Island on the south coast 246 birds were recorded in 2000 alone.

Here in the Blackwater Valley Little Egrets can be seen most days at Hawley Meadows where a brief stop in the car park on the A331, on the opposite side of the road to Sainsbury's, will give you a very good chance of seeing one. Up to 11 have been seen roosting in the Camberley Sewage Works and these birds regularly fly across to the river bank and meadows to feed and rest. I have seen them in the trees at the back of the meadows and searching the wet meadow area for food in winter. Odd

birds are now turning up regularly at Moor Green Lakes, mainly on Colebrook Lake, and have been seen close to the gravel workings near Pe Bridge, Frimley Hatches and Shepherd Meadows. Most are winter sightings and it remains to be seen if the birds remain here in the spring and summer months.

The hope is that we will soon have these wonderful birds breeding in the Blackwater Valley taking advantage of the improving water quality and habitats being cared for along the length of the river, although they are still largely nesting in more coastal sites. They are partial to floodlands, probably the reason why the wet meadows at Hawley are their strongpoint here, but these will dry out in summer. Little Egrets have catholic tastes feeding on small fish from the river, small amphibians, terrestrial, aquatic and larval insects and worms and small mammals to name but a few.

If you do see them please send details to the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership. Rest assured when we know more about the progress of this exciting bird in our Valley we will let you know.

COLIN WILSON

This is an edited version of a longer article which appears on our website www.blackwater-valley.org.uk.


Colin Wilson is Chairman of the Reading Ornithological Club. For details please see www.theroc.org.uk or email Colin at colin.wilson@theroc.org.uk

BLACKWATER VALLEY

Events

SPRING/SUMMER 2006



 Event organised by Blackwater Valley Countryside. Ring 01252 331353 for more details. Always phone to check times before making a special journey for any event.


APRIL

Sun 9 WALK: Spring at Rowhill 2.30pm
Guided walk around Rowhill, a 55-acre nature reserve. Meet Rowhill Field Centre, Cranmore Lane, Aldershot. SU 849499. Ring 01252 319749.

Wed 12 WALK: Birds of the Blackwater Valley 9.30am-12 noon 
Guided walk through Sandhurst Memorial Park and Shepherd Meadows. Bring binoculars. No dogs. Meet Sandhurst Memorial Park car park, Yorktown Road, Sandhurst. SU 842613.

Mon 17 WALK: Woodland Walk 2pm-4pm
Learn to identify our more common trees. Meet outside the Pavilion, Frimley Lodge Park, Sturt Road, Frimley Green. SU 888512. Ring 01252 836970.


Wed 19 WALK: Heathland Hike 
10am-1pm
Walk around Elvetham Heath & Fleet Pond and see some of the area's heathland habitats, 6-7 miles. No dogs. Elvetham Heath Community Centre car park. SU 798552.

Fri 28 WALK: Bats of the Blackwater Valley 8.15pm-9.45pm 
Find out more about bats. Bring a torch. No dogs. Meet Aldershot Park car park, Guildford Road, Aldershot. SU 877491.

Sun 30 EVENT: Woodland Crafts Weekend 10am-4.30pm
With traditional woodland craft displays and craftspeople at work. Rowhill Field Centre, Cranmore Lane, Aldershot. SU 849499. Ring 01252 319749.


MAY

Mon 1 EVENT: Woodland Crafts Weekend 10am-4.30pm
Same details as 30th April.

Sat 6 & Sun 7 WALK: Walk the Blackwater Path Weekend 
10am-4pm
Walk the 23 miles of the Blackwater Valley Path over two days. Booking essential, £4 for 1 day, £6 for both, includes transport and refreshments. Ring 01252 331353.

Sat 12 SURVEY: Cove Brook 10am
Survey walk with Chris Matcham. Meet at north end of Cheyne Way, Cove by footbridge (near Curly Bridge). Ring 01252 512634.

From 16 May-1 July EXHIBITION: Wildly Natural Tues-Sat 11am-5pm
Exhibition of local wildlife, to mark the 60th anniversary of Camberley Natural History Society. Surrey Heath Museum, Knoll Road, Camberley. Ring 01276 707284.

Thur 18 WALK: Rural Wander 
10am-1pm
See some of the Blackwater Valley's more rural areas on this 5½ mile walk around Eversley and through Bramshill Forest. No dogs. Meet at small parking area off Bramshill Road. SU 760613.

Sat 20 FOR CHILDREN: Amazingly Wild Faces 11am-12.30pm
Face painting session. Surrey Heath Museum, Knoll Road, Camberley. Ring 01276 707284.

Sun 21 WALK: Dawn Chorus 4am
Listen to the birds. Meet at Highfield Road car park (by vets on Bridge Road, Cove). Ring 01252 512634.

Thur 25 TALK: Local Trees – Facts & Folklore 3pm-4pm
By Chris Howkins. Donations welcome. Surrey Heath Museum, Knoll Road, Camberley. Ring 01276 707284.

Sun 28 WALK: Mid-Morning Bird Watch 10am-12 noon
For bird watchers who aren't early risers. Bring binoculars. No dogs. Meet Visitor Centre, Lightwater Country Park. SU 921622. Ring 01276 479582.

Tue 30 TALK: Water Voles 7.30pm
Meeting for Cove Brook Greenway Group starts 6.45pm. Talk by Chris Matcham follows. Blunden Hall, Blunden Road, Cove. SU 855561. Ring 01252 512634.

JUNE

WALKS FOR BEGINNERS

Don't consider yourself a walker, but would like to give it a try, then these walks are for you. Every Friday afternoon during June, July, August and September starting at 2pm, lasting for 1½-2 hours. Different start points in the Farnborough, Frimley, Ash and Aldershot areas, check our website for details or ring 01252 331353. No walking boots required!

Fri 2 & Sat 3 WALK: Nightjars

9.30pm-11pm

Listen to the best sound of the year and learn more about these fascinating birds. No dogs. Meet outside the Pavilion, Frimley Lodge Park, Sturt Road, Frimley Green. Ring 01252 836970.

Sun 4 FOR CHILDREN: Water Beasts of Watchmoor 2pm-4pm

Family pond dipping at the Watchmoor Reserve. Nets provided but limited, so first come first served. Meet at car park behind Sainsbury's petrol station Watchmoor Park. No dogs. SU 864587 Ring 01276 479582.

Fri 9 & Sat 10 WALK: Nightjars

9.30pm-11pm

Same details as Sat 3rd June.

Sat 10 WALK: Beyond the Brook 10am-1pm

Suitable for keen walkers this 7 mile walk takes you along Cove Brook and through the woods around Hawley Lake. No dogs. Meet Blunden Hall, Blunden Road, Cove. SU 855561.

Wed 14 WALK: Transported through Ash 10am-12.30

An interesting walk of 4½ miles linking the history of transport in the Valley. Meet Coronation Gardens car park, Ash Hill Road Ash. SU 896514.

Wed 21 WALK: Wait Until Dark 9.30pm

Join ranger Gordon Voller for a twilight stroll and search for creatures of the night. Meet Visitor Centre, Lightwater Country Park. SU 921622 Ring 01276 479582

Sat 24 FOR CHILDREN: Make a Bird Box Between 10.30am-12.30pm

Materials limited so first come first served. Children must be accompanied by an adult £5 per box. Surrey Heath Museum, Knoll Road, Camberley. Ring 01276 707284.

Sun 25 SURVEY: Wildflower Meadow 10am-3.30pm

Improve your wildflower identification skills and help survey the meadow at Lakeside Park. All levels and abilities welcome. No dogs. Meet Lakeside Park car park, Lakeside Road, Ash. SU 888517.

Fri 30 WALK: Nightjars 9.30pm-11pm

Same details as Sat 3rd June.

JULY**Sun 2 FAMILY EVENT: Brickfields Fur & Feathers Fun Day** 11am-4pm

With farm animals, displays and stalls from local environment and wildlife groups, refreshments, games, quizzes, bouncy castle, tombola, and more. More details from www.brickfieldspark.org

Thur 6 WALK: Discover Dragonflies 1pm-3.30pm

Join Ken Crick on a walk round Wildmoor Heath, to look for dragonflies. No dogs. Wildmoor Heath car park, Crowthorne Road, Little Sandhurst. SU 837630.

Fri 7 & Sat 8 WALK: Nightjars

9.30pm-11pm

Same details as Sat 3rd June.

Sat 8 WALK: Wildflowers of Cove Brook 10am

To be confirmed, Ring 01252 512634.

Thur 13 WALK: Summer at Rowhill 7.30pm

Guided walk around Rowhill, a 55-acre nature reserve. Rowhill Field Centre, Cranmore Lane, Aldershot. SU 849499. Ring 01252 319749.

Wed 19 WALK: Heathlands & Meadows 10am-1pm

A 5 mile walk around Yateley Common & Shepherd Meadows. Meet Yateley Common Gravel Pit car park, off the A30, nr Blackwater. SU 838594.

Sun 23 FAMILY EVENT: Mini-beasts of the Meadow 2.30pm

Search for mini-beasts amongst the grass and scrub. Sweep nets provided but limited, so first come first served. Outside the Groundsman's office, Frimley Green recreation ground, Frimley Green Road. No dogs. SU 887572. Ring 01276 479582.

Fri 28 WALK: Nightjars 9.30pm-11pm

Same details as Sat 3rd June.

Sun 30 WALK: The Magic of Heathland 2-4pm

A guided tour of Wildmoor Heath, hear how heathlands were created. Meet at car park off Crowthorne Road. Bring binoculars. Ring 01344 354400/354441.

AUGUST**Thur 3 FAMILY EVENT: Meet the Wildlife** 11am-2.30pm

Bring the family for a day of discovery. Meet the rangers. Find out about the site's history and current management. See how many insects you can find. Meet Hawley Meadows car park, Blackwater Valley Road (opp Watchmoor Business Park) Blackwater. SU 860590.

Sat 12 WALK: Grasshoppers at Cove Brook 10am

To be confirmed. Ring 01252 512634.

Sat 19 WALK: Hills, Heather & History 10am-1pm

Walk of around 5 miles. Details to be confirmed. Ring 01252 331353.

SEPTEMBER**All month CONSERVATION: Go Wild!**

Find out more about conservation and the volunteer groups in the Blackwater Valley through this special programme of events. Ring 01252 331353.

Sun 10 WALK: Greywall & Whitewater 10.30am-3.30pm

Leisurely all day 8 mile walk. Meet Colt Hill car park, Odiham. SU 747517.

Tues 19 WALK: Valley Waterways 10am-1pm

A 5-mile walk along the canal and river, passing lakes and through woodlands. Canal Centre, Mytchett. SU 893550.

Fri 22 WALK: Bats of the Blackwater Valley 7pm-8.30pm

Find out more about bats. Bring a torch. No dogs. Meet Sandhurst Memorial Park car park, Yorktown Road, Sandhurst. SU 842613.



PROGRAMME OF EVENTS - 2006

Our meetings are held on the 3rd Thursday of the month at Hedgecroft, Brocken Lane, Yateley, 8.00 pm start unless otherwise stated. If you would like to receive email reminders about meetings, please email me to hill.45@ntlworld.com

Thursday	21 September 2006	RSPB - Joanna Butler Thomas Valley Planning - this will enlighten us on the planning and SPA regulations and how it will affect our local area and protected birds on the common.
Saturday	23 September 2006	Fungal Foray - Led by Andy Davidson Meeting at Wynchams Pool Car Park at 2pm.
Sunday	24 September 2006	Go Wild In September Yateley Common - Join the Yateley Society Conservation Group and the HCC Countryside Rangers who will be clearing birch from the heathland from 10am to 1pm. Meet Wynchams Pool Car Park off Cricket Hill Lane. A series of events is happening throughout September, organised by the Blackwater Valley countryside Partnership. For more information call 01252 331353 or visit www.blackwater-valley.org.uk
Thursday	19 October 2006	Hampshire Playing Fields Association - Malcolm Miles Having helped to provide and protect sport and children's play areas in Hampshire for over 75 years, find out about their recent projects in Yateley.
Thursday	16 November 2006	Farnham's Hop Growing Heritage - Chris Hellier A light hearted look at 300 years of hop growing around Farnham and its impact on the town and surrounding area.
Thursday	14 December 2006	The Holly Story - Chris Howkins Tracing the history of the great Midwinter Festival and the story of the plants we use at Christmas.
Thursday	18 January 2007	Loddon and Eversley Heritage Group - Alison Cross This joint initiative was established to meet the challenge of protecting and enhancing all that is special about the area whilst promoting a healthy and sustainable rural economy. http://www.loddon-eversley.org.uk/
Thursday	15 February 2007	AGM This is the most important meeting of the year and we must have a quorum. Come along, have a glass of wine and exercise your Member's right to vote.
Thursday	15 March 2007	Local Trees Fact and Folklore - Chris Howkins
Thursday	20 April 2007	Yateley Parish Plans - update http://yateleyparishplan.pbwiki.com
Thursday	20 April 2007	Border Ware - see article on Front Page http://yateleyparishplan.pbwiki.com
Thursday	18 May 2007	Investigate the wiki website: http://healthhis.pbwiki.com/ArchaeologyBorderware
Thursday	15 June 2007	Yateley Common SSSI Archaeological Investigations - Carol White More interesting finds on Yateley Common in the 2006 summer dig.

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The Conservation Working Party:
We normally meet at Wynchams Pool, Cricket Hill at 10.00 am on the last Sunday of every month. Everyone is welcome to join in the fun! It was found that the tap-dancing cows grazing at Castle Bottom proved too much for the rickety boardwalks, so the August Conservation Working Party were challenged with building new boardwalks which would withstand the bovine boogie.
The aim is to help the Yateley Rangers in all sorts of tasks in the upkeep of Yateley Common. To find out more, please call Mike Mann on 01252 877741

Editor - Jo Hill, tel: (01252) 640909, email to hill.45@ntlworld.com
Yateley Society website: www.hants.org.uk/yateley/

Yateley Society Membership Renewal for Subscriptions due 30th September 2006

Please renew my/our membership of the Yateley Society

Name Address 1st line

E-mail address:

I enclose payment of £..... (please delete as necessary)

I pay by Standing Order

If you wish to start payments by Standing Order please complete the Standing Order Mandate

Membership required (please indicate)

Student £3.50

Pensioner Household .. £5.00

Household £7.50

Adult £5.00

Adult pensioner £3.50

Gift Aid (optional)

I am a tax payer and I authorise the Yateley Society to recover Gift Aid from the Inland Revenue.

Signed

Date

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To Bank Branch

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Please process this as a New Instruction

Please amend my Previous Standing Order quoting Reference/Beneficiary Tick one box

Details of Account to be debited:

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Account Name

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Bank BARCLAYS BANK, VATELEY BRANCH

Sort Code 20 16 99

Account Number 70989371

Beneficiary Name The Yateley Society

Payment Details

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and annually on 1st October until further notice.

Signature of Account Holder

Date

Please return this form to The Yateley Society Membership Secretary,

Hartford House, Vicarage Lane, Yateley, GU46 7QR