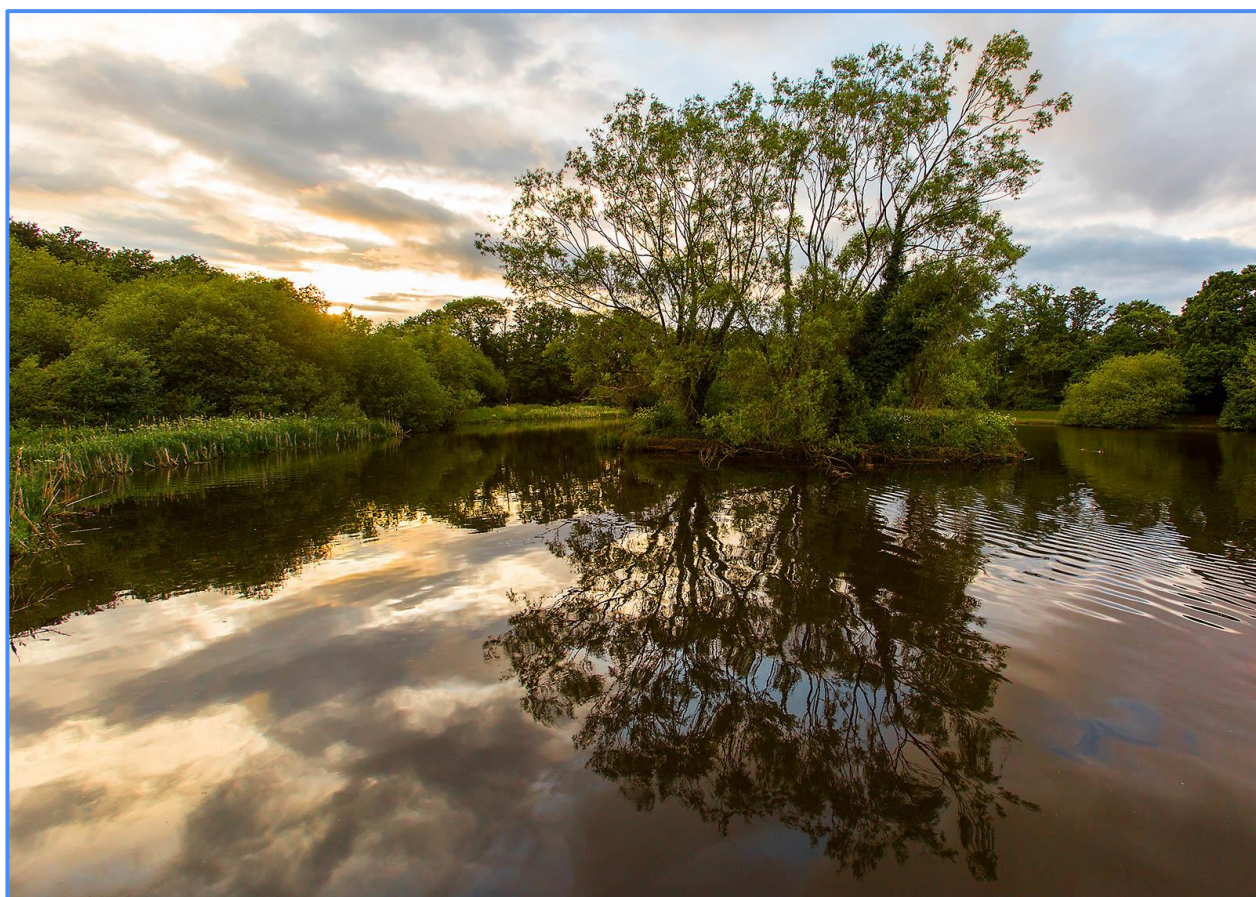




Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE PERIOD STARTING ON 1ST OCTOBER 2017
AND ENDING ON 30TH SEPTEMBER 2018



Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust
Registered in England and Wales under company number 04898996. Charity number 1109424.
Registered office: Ash Lock Cottage, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2PS.

1. Structure, management and governance

We are a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. Our governing document is our Memorandum and Articles of Association, adopted on 15th September 2003. In addition, we have adopted policies and procedures designed to ensure legal compliance and operational efficiency. These are reviewed and regularly updated.

Trustees are appointed to the Board by existing trustees until the next Annual General Meeting, when they are eligible for re-election. The following trustees managed the charity during the period covered by this Report:

Name	Office (if any)	Dates acted if not for whole year
Michael Swaddling	Chair	Resigned 20 th February 2018
Mary Ferriss	Chair	Chair from 13 th March 2018
Colin Wilson	Vice-chair	Vice-Chair from 13 th March 2018
Jane Biscoombe	Vice chair	Vice-chair from 13 th March 2018
Alan Rolfe	Treasurer	
Bernard Baverstock		
Alan Taylor		
Christopher Smith		
Catherine Morton		Resigned 13 th March 2018
David Murr		Died 10 th April 2018
Peter Collins		Resigned 30 th September 2018

The Board met eleven times during the year.

The following people undertook other roles in the management of the Trust during the period:

- Company Secretary: Stephen Bailey, Manager of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP);
- Membership Secretary: Peter Collins.
- Webmaster: Peter Collins.
- Minutes Secretary: Julie Hannington (December 2017 onwards).
- Mary Ferriss acted as Events Manager throughout the period.

We recognise that our members and supporters are essential and appreciate that they are key to our continued success. We inspire and enable everyone to do their bit – because the challenge of conserving our natural environment in the valley is too big to overcome alone.

We are extremely grateful to all donated funds to us to support our projects and our running costs.

We would like to thank all those who participated in managing the Trust during this period and provided so much of their time and their specialist skills in so many different ways. Thank you too to all the dedicated volunteers too numerous to mention who helped us with events, workdays and projects throughout the year, not forgetting our friends at the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership who provided their unwavering support throughout the period.

We really appreciate the dedication of unsung heroes Paul Sanders who organised the programme of members' circular walks throughout the period and Mike Burns who acted as backmarker. Angus and Marilyn Glen-West very kindly help Paul provide refreshments on the walks.



Our thanks also go to John Mackey and others for their help in making the bird boxes, swift boxes, swift terraces, hedgehog homes and dormouse boxes.

We should not forget the “Wood Gnomes”, a small band of volunteers based at Ash Lock Cottage, who have continued to contribute to Trust funds by cutting timber retrieved by BVCP into firewood for sale to the public.



2. Financial Review



- Expenditure of £9,641 during the period exceeded income £8,654, by £987.
 - Our bank balance remains healthy with the bank and deposit account balances £24,904 at the year end (we have a deposit with Scottish Widows of £15,452, which earned interest of £19 in the financial year) but continual fund-raising activity is ongoing in order that we can respond swiftly to future projects as required.
- Our “Save our Swifts” appeal raised £2,357.
 - We received a grant of £920 for our “Lost Words” book project, £73 from walks and talks and £133 from sundry donations including those from Rushmoor and Hart Community Lotteries and donations at our AGM.
 - We have been generously supported by our members who, in addition to £1,595 of annual subscriptions, have given £507 in donations.
 - Our annual fundraising walk, this year entitled “Beating the Bounds”, raised £1,203.
 - Charitable Gift Aid amounted to £202.
 - Our expenditure included the following major items: “Save our Swifts” costs £2,043, grants to two schools of £1,513 and £1,602 respectively, grants for bat boxes at Tice’s Meadow and Princes Avenue of £763, and the Lost Words book project of £922. Various other smaller items of expenditure were incurred.

We do not have a policy on reserves, although we are now developing one. We aim to retain a minimum of two years running costs.

Our accounts were again independently reviewed this year by Phil Caunt, FCMA. We thank him for his review and ongoing support.

3. Membership

This is the eleventh year that we have had a membership base. Unfortunately, problems continued from last year, which meant that the dispatch of the renewal notices was delayed. The transition to the online management package proved problematic. The subsequent resignation of the Membership Secretary also made the correction of the problems more difficult.

As a result of these issues, we sadly lost some members. We apologise to our members for these issues and thank those who have remained with us. The membership figures as at 30th September 2018 were:

- 255 Households*
 - 8 Business and Associate members
 - 6 Honorary and Life members
- Total 269.

**As each individual membership is assigned to an address or household which may have more than one person living there, the number of actual individuals covered by membership is materially higher.*

We have worked hard over recent months to resolve all outstanding issues and are now hopeful that we have a solid platform on which to move forward. We are delighted to announce that we have a new Membership Secretary, Annie Keighley. Membership recruitment is a priority for 2019. We are also working hard to attract more corporate members and sponsorship and donations.

4. Our Objectives and Activities

The objects of the Trust set out in its governing document are:

- (i) To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment and promote the management of the countryside, biodiversity and wildlife habitats and characteristic landscapes of the Blackwater Valley by supporting conservation projects and programmes within and around the Boroughs of Rushmoor, Bracknell Forest, Guildford, Waverley and Surrey Heath; the Districts of Hart and Wokingham and such other areas as the Charity may from time to time decide ("the area of benefit").
- (ii) To advance the education of the public on matters connected with countryside management by supporting, promoting and improving public access to the countryside, and promoting the participation of the public in countryside management within the area of benefit.

5. Our main achievements during the period

The trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit when undertaking their activities. The main activities undertaken for public benefit were:

Events

We have maintained a full programme of varied educational walks and talks, attended local events and fairs, and issued monthly news updates to members.

Our events included the following:



- 10 circular walks, which included talks about the local environment;
- “Beating the Bounds” which was our annual large fundraising walk, which took place in and round Yateley;
- a programme of educational events to support the Sandhurst Chelsea Fringe event, including bat, butterfly and swift walks, and a talk on our local landscape, and a walk on Wildmoor Heath;
- we had a joint stand with BVCP at the Yateley May Fayre, Fleet Pond Wildlife Day, Aldershot Active Awards and Lakeside Park, Ash. All featured activities for children and yielded several new members as well as maintaining our public profile.
- we also took part in the BioBlitz at Wellesley Woodland in September with a bird ringing demonstration;
- we organised bat and butterfly walks and small mammal trapping, bat box checking and a swift awareness day;
- we have given talks to various local organisations which resulted in donations and new members; and
- we attended meetings connected with a wide variety of environmental issues throughout the year including BVCP Annual General Meeting, Yateley Neighbourhood Plan Open Space and Wildlife Sub-group meetings; and
- we attended a number of local meetings with developers to provide input on provision for biodiversity.





Projects and grants

During the year the Trust clarified that a **project** was an activity directed and funded by us; a **grant** was money paid to another organisation to use for a particular activity. These definitions are used in this report. A number of activities previously regarded as projects but, in fact, directed by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership with Trust finance have been recategorised as grants.

Projects

Blackwater Valley Swift Project (led by Colin Wilson)

This project was started in 2017 to provide suitable nesting places for swifts in order to halt a decline of up to 50% in swift populations in the UK. The project is largely self-financing by requesting donations as the swift boxes were erected.

We have worked to improve understanding of swifts' needs and build partnerships with local planners and developers, including those at Wellesley and Deepcut. The ecology and habitats specification for the latter now includes the use of materials such as bat/swift bricks in construction.



Swift boxes or terraces have been installed in Surrey Heath on Camberley Theatre and the shopping centre, at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, Cathedral of St Michael and St George, Aldershot, Sandhurst Town Council building, at St John's Church, Lower Hale, and on a number of other premises and private houses – a total of almost 150 nesting places.

Six Swift nesting boxes were placed at Frimley C of E School kindly paid for by Hamilton's Estate Agents of Frimley Green.

In conjunction with RSPB North East Hants Group, we held a Swift Day at Aldershot Library on 16 June during Swift Awareness Week, with additional swift walks in Aldershot and Sandhurst.

Looking ahead, we began to chart all known swift breeding places in the valley in order to maximise the potential success rate of future installations. We also plan to add speaker systems to attract the birds: 30% of boxes in the right places attract swifts, but this rises to over 60% if they have callers.

Natural Surrey Heath (led by Colin Wilson)

This project, run in conjunction with The Camberley Society and led for the Trust by Colin Wilson, was launched in March 2018 to focus on public awareness of the decline in wildlife within Surrey Heath, and encourage public action to reverse it. This project was largely funded by contributions from the two charities plus small personal contributions.

The initial project was to give away 50 garden bird nest boxes to residents in The Square Shopping Centre, Camberley. This element was funded by a grant from TAG Farnborough Airport.

The flagship event, a public meeting entitled 'What is the Future for Nature in Surrey Heath?', was held on 2 November 2018. Speakers included Michael Gove, local M.P. and Secretary of State for the Environment, two speakers from Natural England and Daniel Raven-Ellison, the founder of the London National Park City movement.

We have also given talks on wildlife topics to Beavers groups, manned a stall at the Surrey Heath Show, responded to the public consultation on the Surrey Heath local plan, and held discussions with the borough council to manage grass cutting regimes to benefit wildlife.



Lost Words book donations

To increase children's involvement the project secured funding from SC Johnson of Frimley to provide an iconic book called 'The Lost Words' to 100 junior schools in Rushmoor, Hart and Surrey Heath. The book shows, with beautiful illustrations, many nature words that have been removed from the Oxford Junior Dictionary. Contacts made following delivery of these books have opened up opportunities to develop our educational activities.

Frimley Reedbed (led by Colin Wilson)

This ongoing project aims to manage a reedbed habitat at Frimley which is of high ecological importance. After major funding in 2013 to control growth of willow and birch causing drying out of the reedbed, regrowth is impacting the specialist bird species and needs further action in 2019. During 2017-18 working parties in February and April installed walkways to provide safer access to the site.

Structured surveys every summer for the British Trust for Ornithology revealed the gradual changes in species at the reedbed due to the regrowth of scrub.

Grant's Moor (led by Bernard Baverstock)

This ongoing project originally improved and now aims to maintain the habitat at Grant's Moor (west of the River Blackwater between Coleford Bridge and Frimley Bridge). Working parties in November, March, July and September cleared invading broom and gorse, cut the path and meadow, trimmed the hedges, and consolidated the beetle bank.

Blackwater Valley Path Signage (led by Alan Taylor)

This project aims to survey signage along the Blackwater Valley Path so that decisions on improvements can be made.

Installation of nesting and roosting boxes (led by Bernard Baverstock)

For many years this ongoing self-financing project has provided and installed bat and bird boxes at various locations in the Valley. During the period, in response to queries, dormouse and hedgehog boxes were added to the range of items we make and install. Numerous boxes were manufactured and installed.



Grants to BVCP

Restoration of Darby Green Pond

The Pond was restored and a bench placed the previous year. An information panel was installed in the period at a cost of £266. BVCP will monitor the site and propose further work if necessary.



Woodland Flowers

Sites were cleared for the 2017 season.

Seeds of violets, Woodland Sage, Ragged Robin, Red Campion, Self-heal, Primrose, Hairy St. John's Wort, Wood Aven, Hedge Bedstraw, Meadowsweet, Foxglove, Betony and Garlic Mustard, and bulbs of native Bluebell and Wood Anemone were purchased.

These have been planted at Cove Brook, Gerry's Copse, two sites in Wellesley Woodland, Swan Lake Park, Southwood Woodland, and Hawley Meadows. A report on the project is available on our website.

We have agreed to donate £2600 for the 2017-8 season. This will be reflected in next year's accounts.

Aldershot Hibernaculum

We purchased 6 bat boxes at a cost of £417, and the Hampshire Bat group provided another 4 boxes. These were installed by staff and volunteers of the BV Partnership in a bat hibernaculum (winter hibernating quarters) in Wellesley Wood that lacked suitable roost sites.

Grants to Other Bodies

Environmental improvements at Frimley C of E Primary School

£1,602.19 was paid to Frimley C of E Primary School for the development of a wildlife-friendly science garden in the school grounds, and the installation of bird and bat boxes.

Installation of a wildlife pond at Frimley C of E Primary School

£1512.83 was agreed to be paid to Frimley C of E Primary School for the installation of a wildlife pond.

Environmental improvements at Guillemont School

A grant of £6,000 was approved for Guillemont Junior School towards the cost of redeveloping the school grounds to encourage wildlife. This will be reflected in next year's accounts.



Renovation of shelter at Tice's Meadow Nature Reserve

We approved a grant of £1700, payable on completion, towards the cost of developing the bird watchers' shelter at Tice's Meadow. This will be reflected in next year's accounts.

Installation of bat boxes at Tice's Meadow

We co-ordinated a project for the installation of bat boxes at Tice's Meadow. £346 was agreed to be paid to Tice's Meadow Bird Group which, together with contributions from Surrey Bat Group and Farnham Town Council, enabled them to erect 30 bat boxes to ensure that bats colonised the site as its habitat develops.

Hedgehog Homes

Five hedgehog homes (valued at £100) were provided to Happy Hedgehog Rescue, a Yateley based non-profit organisation to assist in raising funds for its purposes.



Other activities

The Trust responded to the following consultations:

- "Health and Harmony, the government's consultation on farm support post-Brexit".
- Southampton to London Pipeline Consultation.
- Surrey Heath Local Plan.
- Rushmoor Local Plan

Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership - we continue to actively support the BVCP by partnering them in projects and their programme of local events. With pressure on its funding expected to increase, the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership is moving to alternative means of working and fundraising. We will have a significant role to play in supporting Partnership staff in fundraising and project delivery in the future.

The website - development of the website has continued, with new content being regularly added.

Social media - our growing presence on Facebook continues to attract public interest and support. We also have a limited presence on Twitter.

Newsletters – we issued monthly newsletters to our members.

Policies - we continued to review our existing policies against the most recent guidelines and legislation and developed new policies where appropriate. All other policies and procedures are undergoing a complete review.

Firewood - the “Wood Gnomes” have continued to contribute to our funds by cutting timber retrieved by BVCP into firewood for sale to the public. Sales of this wood generated income of £1087.

6. Looking towards the Future

2017-8 has been a year of change and consolidation for the Trust, with a new management team and many governance tasks undertaken.

Our Business Plan for 2019 will soon be available on our website at <http://www.bvct.org.uk/>. A selection of projects listed in the Plan will be undertaken during the next twelve months.



We are now in a good position to move forward with a new focus on membership and fundraising, a wide range of new projects to undertake and an interesting mixture of planned events and community engagement, all to achieve our aims which are encapsulated in our mission and vision statement, below:

“Our Mission is to use our skills and resources to make the Blackwater Valley a special place, full of life, where the countryside is valued and the people and wildlife thrive together. We will do this by engaging local people and businesses in nature and conservation activities and show them the purpose and benefits of our work”.

Declaration

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees’ report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity’s trustees

Signatures:

Names:
Positions:

Mary Ferriss
Mary Ferriss
Chair

Alan Rolfe
Alan Rolfe
Treasurer

Date: 12th February 2019.