

BLACKWATER VALLEY COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NEWSLETTER

July 2025

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Welcome to your July newsletter – a roundup of news and events from the sole charitable organisation focused on the protection, enhancement and human enjoyment of the natural environment of the whole Blackwater Valley.

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF VOLUNTEER GROUPS



We would like to add our heartfelt congratulations to **Tice's Meadow Bird Group**, who recently received the Kings Award for Volunteer Services from the Lord Lieutenant and Deputy Lord Lieutenants of Surrey. The award was

dedicated by TMBG to “all the volunteers past and present that have spent their valuable time and effort helping Tice’s Meadow to be the place it is today.”

However, our old friend the British weather immediately managed to rain on their parade (almost literally) when the Tice’s Meadow open day event on 19th July had to be cancelled because of the torrential downpours. We’ve all been there ...

ANCIENT WOODLAND

A July article in the national media highlighted “a deeply concerning trend; ancient woodlands are failing to regenerate”. Monitoring of the same areas since 1959 shows that sapling mortality has increased in some cases up to 90%, meaning that an average sapling’s chance of survival after five years had fallen from 41% to 16%. Even in areas which are relatively open, where you would expect to see new trees coming up and more trees surviving, we see fewer coming up and more dying. The reasons – global heating, disease and overgrazing by (unculled?) deer.

In addition, the rate of biomass loss has started to increase across the study sites, with a rise in mortality rates of the largest trees. As a result, the rate at which the woodlands are removing carbon from the atmosphere has started to fall. Findings from the research have sparked concern about the future resilience of Britain’s forests.



In the Valley our only ancient woodland (*defined as continuously present since 1600 ie. the first maps and so probably present a long time before that*) is Rowhill, part of which is coppiced anyway so lack of sapling regrowth in those parts is not an issue.

Woodlands not managed for forestry or coppicing rely on fallen trees to open the canopy before saplings can take.

Rowhill, like a few other woodlands in the Valley (and wider), also has large patches of rhododendron and cherry laurel, which makes the situation even worse. We are removing these at Rowhill, Wellesley and Queen Elizabeth Park in Farnborough. We do also have a tiny ancient woodland at Ash Green called Bin Wood. This was clear felled circa the 1940/50’s and grew back as mostly ash which were killed by ash dieback. So we’ve had to remove a lot of that, hoping for natural regeneration of more varied species, but we may have to do some planting.

Steve Bailey

FLOATING PENNYWORT in YATELEY

by Martin Moore

[At the A.G.M. last January the BVCT's inaugural Conservation Project of the Year award was presented to the Floating Pennywort Eradication Project. This Partnership project is now well on its way to eradicating this highly invasive species from River Blackwater and four other water bodies around Yateley. **Martin Moore** from the Loddon Fisheries and Conservation Consultative tells us more about the project.]

The introduced and invasive plant Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) became of increasing concern from around 2010. The EA has monitored its spread and efforts to eradicate or at least control it. There were particular concerns concerning its growth in watercourses where it outcompeted native plant species, caused a deterioration in water quality, and also affected navigation, angling and flood resilience.

At a Loddon Catchment Partnership meeting in 2017 a request was made to record the situation in the Blackwater catchment, particularly a known incidence at a lagoon at Mill Lane, Yateley, which was feeding plants into the river. Some discussion ensued as to whether to simply monitor the outbreak or attempt to eradicate it. This started a chain of events involving a number of partners in and around Yateley, where further incidences were identified and subsequently tackled.

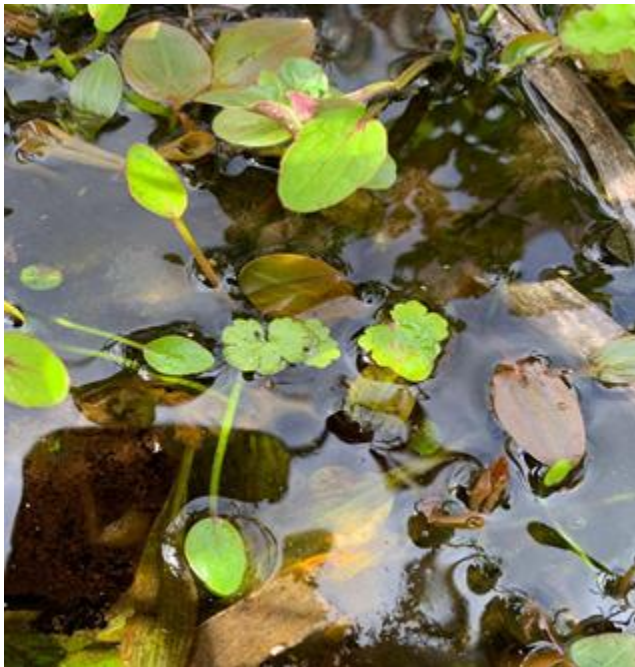
The Loddon Fisheries and Conservation Consultative, working closely with the Environment Agency, co-ordinated the initiative. The first site targeted was Mill Lane, a fishery controlled by Farnham Anglers. A manual removal of the pennywort was followed by two targeted applications of glyphosate herbicide. At the same time BVCP manually removed the Pennywort from the river, whilst the lagoon outlet was screened to prevent the escape of fragments. Further monitoring and removals since the main effort in 2018 have resulted in a three-year period when no plants have been found in the lagoon, with a six-year absence in the river.



Many ponds and streams around Yateley were visited in an effort to identify

other incidences and understand more about the Pennywort's local distribution. Three further affected sites were identified, the smallest being Darby Green Pond where a small incidence was manually removed by BVCP.

The next site, an old moat at Yateley Hall, had more complex ownership. Thames Water were responsible for part of the water with businesses at Yateley Hall the rest. A mechanised operation by contractors working for Thames Water was followed by manual removal by the LFCC and EA, again combined with a containment screen at the outlet. Subsequent monitoring and removal efforts have been supported by the local residents' association and the businesses at Yateley Hall. These efforts have resulted in nearly four years with no reported sightings, despite regular and thorough inspections.



The final incidence was at Wyndham's Pool, where a small marshy area at the inlet of the pool has a rich and diverse variety of plants, including two rare species - White Sedge and Marsh Willowherb. Following Botanical Society advice and with full agreement from the Yateley Common Countryside Rangers, it was agreed to attempt a totally manual removal of the Pennywort growing among the native species. This had the advantage of keeping the impact on any other plant species on site to an absolute

minimum. It involved both volunteers and contractors paid through Fisheries Improvement Project funding from the EA. Although this removal has yet to be completely successful, the affected area is now less than 30m² and just eight small plants were located and removed on the last visit in Spring 2025.

More recently Pennywort has been found in the Fleet section of the Basingstoke Canal. The Canal Authority are leading efforts and their ranger patrols are looking out for Pennywort. The latest check removed 19 small viable fragments between Reading Road bridge and the Gelvert Stream overspill.



Partnership Update

It's been a busy period for training for both staff and volunteers, with courses on various equipment which require a ticket to use. Keeping paths clear of encroaching vegetation is a large part of our work this time of year, and the more trained folk we have the quicker we can get jobs done. Ironically the courses have taken up time when could have been on site. This has rather slowed our progress as we work along the riverside footpath from south to north so apologies if your local path is still a bit "hairy".



A new volunteer group has been started at Southwood Country Park meeting fortnightly on Wednesdays, and training has been immediately put to use. Do get in touch if you're interested in helping with this or any other site group.

Partnership staff supported Rushmoor Green Week with activities each day, including 'meet the ranger', bug hunts, crafts and bat and moth night (*pic right*).



The bridge at Hawley Meadows is coming along. This will enable large machine access avoiding the ford and so allow hay meadow cuts every year. The dry sunny spring has restricted grass growth at Hawley along with our other grassland sites, allowing the flowers and butterflies to flourish. Marbled White butterflies have been numerous on all sites - these were not known in the Valley when I started work a few years ago. The dry conditions also allowed access into a normally boggy and mosquito-infested woodland at Lakeside Park to monitor numbers of Gingerbread Sedge (*Carex elongate*), one of the rarest plants we have in the Valley. One plant was rescued from the line of the A331 and translocated here in 1998. To find over 50 healthy clumps was a nice surprise.

Steve Bailey

NORTH CAMP STATION - In Glorious Technicolor!

The work continues at North Camp Station where its 'Friends', supported by BVCT, are adding colour in many ways ...

Karina, Genna and Chris have been doing their best to beat the drought and supplement the wildflower areas with perennials to make the flowering season on site longer. A big thank you to Southeast Communities Rail Partnership (SCRCP) and especially Bethan Gane Yoga for helping to fund the gardening activities at the station.

Once again South Farnborough Junior School Year 3 and Holly Lodge Primary Academy Year 4 have provided new artwork for the platform shelters (*see below*). Sara Grisewood from SCRCP went into the schools to give an artwork masterclass about wildlife in the Blackwater Valley and the results of the activity can now be seen at the station.

There are some exciting project opportunities at North Camp Station – to be part of the 'team' and 'Make a Difference' contact chris@bvct.org.uk. You can also follow us on Facebook 'Friends of North Camp Station'.

To learn more about BVCT involvement with Rail to Trail and other rail related activities go to <https://www.bvct.org.uk/rail-to-trail/>

A picture paints a thousand words, they say, so here's two grand's worth.....



Safari in your garden

For over four decades BVCP has been working hard on reinstating and protecting natural landscapes in the Blackwater Valley. This has not been easy, yet against all the odds we now have a deceptively large number of green spaces to enjoy. The habitats created by the wide variety of landscapes maintain a wildlife corridor along the Valley around the river and the lineside railway.

Acknowledging this work is important but there is still something that each of us can do. **If you have a garden or an overgrown open area near you why not go on an urban safari?** Learn for yourself, teach youngsters (you will be surprised how much they already know) and embrace nature. You will be contributing to the corridor.

Here are a few recent shots taken in my garden - I am sure that many of you have similar ones and a whole host of stories to go with them. So why not send us your photos to feature in this newsletter, on our Facebook site or on our website?? email them to chris@bvct.org.uk

BVCT has a large network of partners including all the Valley - groups whose volunteers work tirelessly on your behalf, Network Rail, various agencies and schools and colleagues. **But we also want to work with you - let's hear from you, let's together 'Make a Difference' in the Blackwater Valley.**

Chris Smith

Footnote: We have seen from the weather this year that our climate is changing. Nature is here to help us if we let it, so why not embrace it and work with nature and enjoy it at the same time? One thing is for sure - you will never beat it.





for as part of a grant from Southeast Communities Rail Partnership. The photos show BVCP management team members using the installation as a team-building exercise.

NATURE THIS WAY

More new signage has been installed along the Valley, this time at Farnborough North Station (already at North Camp) showing you the way along the Valley path. This is part of the BVCT Rail to Trail initiative and the R2T logo on the sign signifies the part that the railway can play to explore nature in the Blackwater Valley.

The signs were paid



BVCT WALKS – REDISCOVER YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD!



and walked beside the railway line to finish at North Camp Station. Only about 3½ miles in all, but even so a local resident commented that she discovered places and paths she never knew existed!

Seven people – a modest but select company – joined Alan Taylor on Thursday 29 May to walk some of the less known paths in Farnborough in support of the Rail to Trail programme. Starting at Frimley Station they explored Church Path with splendid views of Farnborough Hill and Farnborough Abbey, took unfrequented alleyways through the Avenue Farm estate