

West Berkshire Living Landscape

February 2010

Heathland and Beyond

We have now embarked upon the first major phase of our West Berkshire Living Landscape project, focussing on conserving and enhancing key areas of the landscape's lowland heathland, lowland deciduous woodland and reedbeds. This exciting initiative has been made possible by three significant grants from Grantscape, SITA Trust and Biffaward, (distributors of Landfill Communities Fund grants), recognising the significance of the project's biodiversity value both regionally and on a national scale. We will deliver the project over the next three years in partnership with West Berkshire Council.

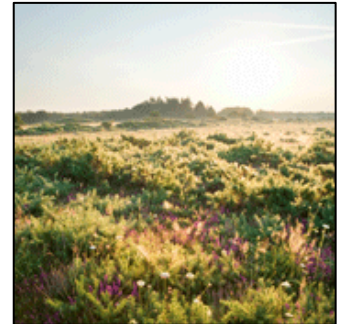


Photo: James Osmond

The funding provides for a team that includes a project officer, three seasonal wardens and four conservation trainees. This team will deliver work on the ground in partnership with West Berkshire Council to make the following improvements to these three key habitats:

The lowland heathland of Greenham and Crookham Commons

A large number of rare and endangered species rely on this nationally important habitat for survival, including ground nesting birds such as the nightjar and the Dartford warbler, reptiles, invertebrates and plants.

Over the next three years, the project team will:

- Restore 20 hectares of lowland heathland at Crookham Common and Bowdown Woods.
- Undertake surveys of birds and reptiles to inform the heathland restoration work and other habitat management.
- Assist with the management of existing heathland through scrub clearance. This will in turn help maintain around 80 hectares of heathland in 'favourable condition' and prevent encroachment from the surrounding woodland edge.
- Reduce the disturbance of ground-nesting birds and increase their chances of successfully raising chicks



Little-ringed plover.
Photo: Sherie New



Seasonal wardens:
Lauren,
Lisa & Joe

by employing seasonal wardens, who will engage with visitors during the bird nesting season.

Thatcham Reedbeds



Photo: Chris Newton

This stunning habitat is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and in part, as a Special Area of Conservation (European designation), mainly due to the presence of the Desmoulin's whorl-snail.

Over the next three years, the project team shall support the maintenance of 22 ha of reedbed habitat at Thatcham Reedbeds. The work mainly consists of reed cutting and keeping scrub under control. ensure that this habitat remains in favourable condition. This will benefit a range of associated species including various BAP priority species: otter, water vole, great crested newt, Desmoulin's whorl snail, grasshopper warbler and bittern



Bittern. Photo: Tim Watts

Lowland deciduous woodland at Bowdown Woods Nature Reserve

Mysterious hidden valleys, sunny glades and patches of heathland, hold a wealth of wildlife in this expanse of woodland overlooking the Kennet Valley.



Photo: Rob Appleby

Over the next three years, we shall help maintain a diverse woodland structure by controlling invasive species, coppicing areas and keeping glades and rides open.

This will benefit a range of associated BAP priority species including: dormouse, lesser spotted woodpecker, adder, grass snake, slow worm, common lizard, white admiral, grayling, common bullfinch, common cuckoo, and song thrush.



Adder. Photo: Nigel Smith

Volunteer involvement

The project presents opportunities for more volunteers to get involved in looking after these habitats:

- A team of four Conservation Trainee Volunteers will be recruited, who for three days per week will undertake conservation and surveying tasks. Trainees will be given invaluable opportunities to learn new skills that will assist them in starting their career in conservation.
- Weekend and mid-week volunteering groups will also be expanded to assist with practical conservation work.



Photo: Rob Appleby

Cost and funders

The total cost of delivering this exciting project over its three year lifespan is £480,000. In addition to Landfill Communities Fund grants, thanks to donations received from Greenham Common Trust, Thatcham Town Council and our individual supporters, as well as in kind support, we have raised over 80% of these costs.

We are now seeking support for the remainder over the three years. Any contributions towards this amount will help deliver benefits for wildlife in the area and would be greatly welcomed. If you can help or would like to know more, please contact one of our Fundraising Managers, Matthew Chambers or Ruth Grice for further information on 01865 775476 or matthewchambers@bbowt.org.uk or ruthgrice@bbowt.org.uk

