



West Berkshire
Countryside Society

UPSTREAM

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Spring Hedgerow © Marathon/Geograph

Hedgerows: Habitats for all seasons



Dr George McGavin, President of the Dorset Wildlife Trust, Honorary Research

Associate, Oxford University Museum of Natural History and Senior Principal Research Fellow, Imperial College is a well-known writer and broadcaster. He is one of the UK's foremost entomologists and leading authorities on the natural world, a respected academic, author, television and radio presenter, explorer and speaker on all things bug-related.

Here he shares his view of an important habitat that the Society's volunteers have extensive knowledge of maintaining by hand.

There are few better opportunities for insect spotting than wandering slowly along a hedgerow. Hedgerows vary enormously in their value for insects and wildlife, but I know a good hedge when I see one! It is tall, and broad at the base with a good wide strip of diverse vegetation on either side, and it is very likely to be much more than one hundred years old. There are abundant fruits and flowers and it is literally buzzing with life. Sadly, what I see more and more is a mangled mass of woody stems, their ends broken, tattered and frayed. If this happens often enough, bacteria, viruses and fungi will take hold and finish the hedge off. Since the end of the Second World War, the UK has lost half of its hedges and the decline continues.

As wild spaces disappear from our already nature-depleted countryside, hedgerows are extremely significant.

Their origins go back to the Neolithic period when small parcels of land used for growing grain crops were protected by being enclosed. As agriculture developed, more and more land was taken into cultivation. The techniques of hedge building varied from place to place but, typically, small banks of earth were topped with a live palisade of some thorn-bearing perennial. Demarcating ownership as well as protecting crops from wild or domesticated animals and the weather, hedgerows have become historically and culturally significant elements of our landscape. But modern agricultural intensification has seen fields grow enormously in size to take advantage of economies of scale by allowing the use of bigger and bigger farm machinery, wringing as much profit from the land as possible.

[Continued on page 5 >](#)

Inside this issue



» p3



» p4



» p5



» p7

3 Volunteers: Task Roundup

4 Death of a Tree

5 Rewilding?

7 Taking a walk on the wild side

Plus lots more...

West Berkshire Countryside Society

Caring for our Countryside – Join Us and Help Make a Difference.

West Berkshire Countryside Society

The aim of the West Berkshire Countryside Society is to promote the understanding, appreciation and conservation of the West Berkshire countryside... furthering these objectives through practical conservation work, and guided walks and talks from local experts. It was formed in 2012 by amalgamating the Friends of the Pang, Kennet & Lambourn Valleys; the Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group; the Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers & the Barn Owl Group.

Upstream is our quarterly publication designed to highlight conservation matters in West Berkshire and beyond and to publicise the activities of the Society.

Chair & Enquiries:	Nick Freeman (enquiries@westberkscountryside.org.uk)
Membership Secretary:	Stewart Waight (membership@westberkscountryside.org.uk)
Upstream Editor:	Margery Slatter (editor@westberkscountryside.org.uk)
Hon President:	Dick Greenaway MBE RD

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Conservation Volunteers' Task Diary

For outdoor events please wear suitable footwear and clothing. Most practical tasks start at 10am and usually finish around 3pm, unless otherwise stated, so bring a packed lunch. However, we are more than happy to accept any time you can spare! All tools are provided. A map of each task location can be found on the website diary page by clicking on the grid reference shown for that task. The three-word code after each grid reference is the "What Three Words" listing for the task meeting point.

Date/Time	Venue	Details
April 2024		
Tue 2nd April 10:00	Winterbourne Wood	Clearing fallen trees, coppicing hazel and clearing paths. Park on the main woodland entrance track. SSU447 717 headboard.tubes.olive
Tue 9th April 10:00	Padworth Common	Repairs to the Car Park, post installation and path clearance. SU619 648 bigger.restores.highlighted
Tue 16th April 10:00	Bucklebury Common	Heathland management. Clearing/felling around veteran trees plus removing invasive Scots pine and silver birch. Meet at the Crossroads. SU556 691 taskbar.flagpole.sensual
Tue 23rd April 10:00	Inkpen Common, The Mire	Replacing fencing, laying paths and general cutting back on this BBWOT site. SU381 643 . Please park in the 3 lay-bys along Great Common Rd. Tools vehicles and overflow parking will be available on the common. SU381 643 blackmail.verge.edgy
Tues 30th April 10:00	Winterbourne	Clearing fallen trees, coppicing hazel and clearing paths. Park on the main woodland entrance track SU447 717 headboard.tubes.olive
May 2024		
Tue 7th May 10:00	Redhill Wood	Clearing woodland floor and glade creation. Park on entrance to the main ride. SU420 642 inserted.stable.homecare
Tue 14th May 10:00	Hosehill Lake, Sheffield Bottom	Footpath construction around part of the lake. Additional task will be general path clearance around the lake. Park in the car park of the Fox and Hounds pub at Sheffield Bottom. SU650 699 noisy.doll.roof
Tue 21st May 10:00	Rushall Manor Farm	Woodland management and ride widening. Meet at the Black Barn off Back Lane between Stanford Dingley and Bradfield. SU584 723 telephone.brink.crate
Tue 28th May 10:00	Furze Hill	Woodland and butterfly habitat management on this parish wildlife site. Ample parking at village hall – through double gates off Pinewood Crescent. SU512 740 simmer.equipping.casual
June 2024		
Tue 4th June 10:00	Grimsbury Castle #1	Parking near the Estate house at the castle - by the interpretation board. Clearing invasive rhododendron from this ancient hill fort. SU511 723 blip.slumped.nametag
Tue 11th June 10:00	Grimsbury Castle #2	Parking near the Estate house at the castle - by the interpretation board. Clearing invasive rhododendron from this ancient hill fort. SU511 723 blip.slumped.nametag
Tue 18th June 10:00	Holt Lodge Farm, Kintbury	Clearing bracken. Meet at Holt Lodge Farmhouse. SU387 648 skid.comments.tripling
Tue 25th June 10:00	Sulham Home Farm #1	Continuing ragwort control on this SSSI. Parking at Sulham Home Farm. Please bring a garden fork if you can. SU643 758 artist.resist.humans

Volunteers: Task Roundup

© Andy Hollox
At work on Decoy Heath

Considering the very wet weather of this quarter, we have been lucky to have been drenched all day only twice and dampened infrequently. Our tasks have concentrated on the maintenance of some habitats and the restoration or recreation of others.



Bucklebury Common proved our nemesis for the season, being mainly underwater for both task days of clearing invasive birch and pine. A second visit at New Year was cancelled, due to similar conditions, but rescheduled successfully to slightly higher ground. A similar task was undertaken at the BBOWT reserve on **Decoy Heath**, thankfully with drier feet and sunny skies overhead.

Habitat maintenance continued successfully at several more sites including **Boxford Water Meadows**, a site rich in biodiversity alongside the River Lambourn chalk stream. On the day, we removed fallen trees and a large amount of brash improving access for light to reach areas of the meadow for the benefit of wild plants. On our visit to **Rushall Farm** in December we coppiced an area of hazel over carpets of bluebells, cutting out older stems and leaving younger growth to be used for poles and hedge-laying material. This created a tall shuttlecock of stems which will produce a striking effect when the bluebells flower. At **Ashampstead Common** we received our second drenching whilst 'polishing the halos' around the veteran trees and widening the wheelchair path.

We all enjoyed a great lunch provided by Dick and Jill Geenaway which did much to alleviate the effects of miserable weather.

Maintenance and safe access go hand in hand at other sites visited. Cutting down leaning trees and cutting up fallen timber at **Redhill Wood** keeps the paths safe and accessible. Cut wood was used as path edging or stacked in habitat piles. (It was a little wet after lunch!) Whilst there were some similar tree maintenance tasks at **Bucklebury Meadows**, we had an excellent day continuing the hedge maintenance of this well used village asset. The main objective is to keep hedges to a size that can be maintained without the need of specialist equipment. A slightly drier than average day made for a productive task. The volunteers applied themselves to 3 main tasks at **Grovepit Common**: removal of some of the dead elm which is a potential hazard to users of the Right of Way; maintaining the clearing by cutting bracken and bramble around the disease resistant elm; and restoring habitat by coppicing some overgrown hazel stools, providing them with protection from animal grazing.



Successful restoration of habitats makes a very satisfying activity. Volunteers did well to get to **Sulham Farm** as several roads around Tidmarsh were flooded. About 70m of a hedge, 4m high in places, was cut to ground level to allow regrowth for trimming or laying in



later years, leaving standard trees to grow on. Smaller trimmings we're laid over the cut stools to give protection. A good wildlife resource was created, easily viewed by walkers using the footpath. The **Sheepdrove** hedge-laying visit has become quite a challenge as the 'hedge' is now quite tall. Perhaps 'hedge reclamation' would be a more appropriate term for our activities! However, tackling it with enthusiasm and chainsaws, another 35 metres was satisfactorily completed.

The Lapwing Field at **Paices Wood** provided another opportunity to restore habitat. Invasive willow was cut away to extend the area of open damp grassland in which birds feed and to create a mosaic of habitat for grizzled and dingy skipper butterflies. At **The Malt House**, it was a damp day which got progressively wetter. A further section of hedge was laid to restore the gappy line of flailed shrubs to a sustainable wildlife corridor. A large team was employed in the vital task of cutting stakes and binders and coppicing hazel stools in the woodland.

Compiled by **Margery Slatter**, with thanks to the **Task Leaders**

Death of a Tree

It was with great shock and sadness that I heard the news that the Sycamore Gap (or Robin Hood) tree, winner of the 2016 tree of the year competition (and 5th overall in Europe), had been felled – an act of sheer wanton vandalism! I cannot understand why anybody would want to do this, and the outpouring of people's emotions seemed genuine in their condemnation of this senseless act. But after my initial shock, it occurred to me that this was symbolic of the attitude of neglect shown to trees in this country, and I wondered what hope there could be for any tree.

Apart from Tree Protection Orders, which have limited impact, the lack of any real protection for trees is clearly highlighted by this incident. Trees have no legal status, including even our Ancient and Veteran Trees. As a result, trees continue to be cut down far too frequently, sometimes legally, sometimes not, and often failing to consider public opinion. Recently, Shropshire CC approved the felling of another living legend, the Charles Darwin Oak, along with other veterans, to make way for a new by-pass. With a 7m girth and believed to be around 500 years old, Darwin, who lived nearby, is said to have played in its branches. A petition to save the tree has been started but we can only hope it will be successful. This was the case, thankfully, when the Kings Oak in

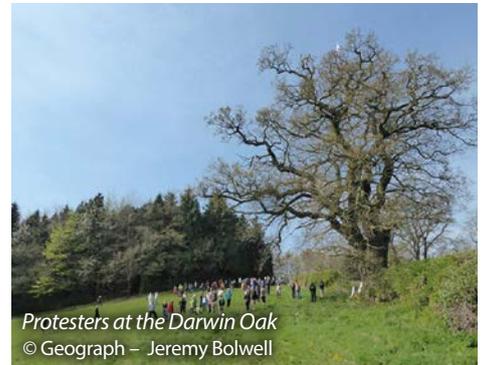
Caversham was saved from being cut down to make way for a house, due to public pressure.

However, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, which came into law in November 2023, offers a glimmer of hope in so much as it gives the government a three-month deadline to introduce a requirement for local planning authorities to consult with the secretary of state before approving developments affecting ancient woods – and yes, whilst this is good news, the government rejected an amendment to legally protect ancient woods and trees, leaving large swathes of our woodlands and individual trees with little or no legal protection. If all this was not bad enough, a recent forestry industry conference argued that more emphasis should be placed on tree establishment than on conservation.

Currently, trees still count toward planting targets in the UK's net zero and bio-diversity strategies even if they die before maturity. A recent survey found that at least 80 local authorities are failing to record whether trees that have been planted have survived. For example, Brighton and Hove Council spent more than £400,000 planting trees but did not check to see how they were doing; and in Kings Lynn, out of 6,500 trees planted only 10% had survived. It is not just councils who are wasting money and opportunity! The



King's Oak, Caversham
© Jennifer Leach



Protesters at the Darwin Oak
© Geograph – Jeremy Bolwell



Sycamore Gap
© Geograph – Andrew-Curtis

National Highways Agency recently planted 850,000 saplings along the A14. A survey found that at least 75% of them had died. Including replanting, this is a total cost to the taxpayer of £2.9 million.

Our trees continue to be plagued by new pests and diseases. Ash dieback is expected to kill up to 80% of all ash trees at a cost of billions of pounds, changing the landscape forever. Given all the difficulties of planting and establishing new trees and faced with the loss of so many trees to natural causes, cutting down mature trees makes no sense at all.

So, what can we do? We can stand up for trees by planting a tree or donating to a charitable scheme; or by adopting a locally planted tree and watering it in its first 2 or 3 years. Most of all, we can support campaigners everywhere in their efforts to protect or save trees from development; write to our MP's; and fight for greater legal protection for our woods and trees.

Terry Davis

Join us for a

Members Social Evening

The Victory Room, Bucklebury Village, RG7 6PR

Thursday 30th May 2024 at 7:00pm

Ploughman's Supper and Drinks Provided

Reports from Society Groups

Talk – Ed Munday from The Newt Conservation Partnership

A short AGM

Items of Any Other Business – Please notify the Secretary at least one week before the meeting at wbcshonsec@btinternet.com

RSVP editor@westberkscountyside.org.uk

Continued from page 1.

When farm hedges used to be trimmed with mechanised shears, larger versions of the ones you might use on your garden privet, hedges suffered little lasting damage and the cuttings were allowed to fall to the ground where they provided additional microhabitats for wildlife. The invention and widespread adoption of tractor-mounted hedge flails, fast rotating bars bristling with chains or metal rods, has caused immense damage to hedgerows and the wildlife they support. They are relatively cheap to manufacture and unlike cutting bars, do not need regular sharpening. Some have argued that, in the right hands, mechanised hedge flails are not themselves the problem – rather it is that hedges are flailed too often, too hard, and despite the regulations that exist, often at the wrong times of year when birds are nesting or there is a profusion of fruits that could feed a wealth of wildlife. These powerful machines even pulverise quite substantial saplings, which, left alone,



Ash tree growing through hedge
©George McGavin

could grow clear and become mature trees, providing shade and more habitat for wildlife.

We need more trees. Here, an ash tree has grown through a hedge.

Its age suggests that it escaped before hedge flailing became widespread.

I suppose if great care were taken and the regulations were followed, the state of our hedgerows might

improve. After all, trees and hedgerows have been shown to be beneficial for farming and the wider environment. They can increase productivity by harbouring natural enemies of crop-damaging insects as well as vital pollinators. I know there are a minority of concerned farmers and landowners who understand the importance of hedgerows and treat them with respect but I'm afraid that there are very many others who see hedges as a bit of an inconvenience.

Hedgerows are an essential year-round resource for all manner of wildlife and act as living corridors which join up isolated fragments of natural woodland. They support over three quarters of our woodland birds, half of our native mammals, a third of our butterflies and a lot more besides. We must all know by now that we are facing a climate emergency, but let's not forget there is an ecological emergency as well and, more than ever, we need to work with nature not against it.

Rewilding?

Everyone, it seems, is writing about rewilding – but does anyone really understand what it means? Surely, the whole point of it is to increase wildlife diversity, but it could have the opposite effect.

It may be helpful to explain the laws of ecological succession. In the UK, if land is left unmanaged, it will in time end up as woodland. Wildflower meadows will first grow scrub. Trees will follow, aided by birds like jays planting acorns. Coarser agricultural grass will do likewise though more slowly. Ponds will silt up and go the same way. A 'do nothing' policy will usually reduce diversity. This is why we manage (or use animals to manage) meadows, hedges, heaths and wetlands – to stop this relentless ecological process.

Allowing intensively farmed land to do what it wants initially leads to

an explosion of diversity, but most of the plant species will be annuals, which will not come again. Diversity will decrease year on year until only a few coarse grasses are left along with powerful species such as docks, ragwort and creeping thistle. Most perennial wildflowers will not appear as their seed dormancy, which allows seeds to overcome periods that are unfavourable for seedling establishment, is poor. Additionally, they will not be able to colonise as we have so completely removed them from the countryside that there is no seed source available for natural regeneration. If a successful wildflower does appear, such as fleabane, it may spread uncontrollably from its underground rhizomes and wind-blown seeds. Without some form of management or grazing, diversity will decrease.



Whitethroat
© Geograph – Mick Lobb

40 years ago, I had the opportunity to buy an intensively managed species-poor arable farm and try my hand at increasing diversity. We planted wildflower meadows, hedges and trees; dug ponds; and managed for wildlife. Farmland birds returned (skylarks, yellow hammers and whitethroats), and we ended up with as many butterflies as it was possible to have on a small 175-acre farm (22 species).

This was the way to increase diversity – rewilding would have had the opposite effect!

Charles Flower

Watch Out! There are Ticks About!

Ticks are becoming much more common across large parts of England. Their numbers are increasing due to the increase in deer. Reports about ticks in gardens are also increasing and, with deer moving into urban areas, they are bringing ticks with them here, too.

So, why are ticks a concern?

Unfortunately, the risk of contracting tick-borne Lyme disease is increasing with the spread of deer, and a new health threat has emerged in the form of tick-borne encephalitis (TBE). Recent reports confirm the presence of TBE in ticks found in various regions, including Thetford Forest, the Hampshire/Dorset border, the New Forest, and the North York Moors. Unlike Lyme disease, where symptoms may be more evident, TBE can be asymptomatic in some cases, making it even more challenging to detect and treat.



Ticks spend most of their three-year life in the leaf litter, trying to avoid drying out. Periodically, when the conditions are right, they climb up vegetation on the lookout for animals. They can sense carbon dioxide breathed out, body heat and the vibrations made by movement. Questing ticks wave their front legs around until an animal gets close and they can climb on. They're after blood and they've probably been waiting quite a while! They will walk up the skin until they find a warm, moist area and begin to feed.

So, to keep safe when out and about:

- ✓ Stick to paths and avoid going through long grass
- ✓ Avoid areas frequented by deer – such as their tracks and places where they rest
- ✓ Wear long trousers tucked into socks and a long-sleeved shirt (preferably light in colour, so you can see the ticks and they can be brushed off)
- ✓ When you get home, remove all your clothes and your watch. Check your whole body. Don't forget your face and hairline too

If you find a tick (they can be VERY small) use tweezers or a proprietary



tool to remove it, pulling vertically up from the skin and wipe the spot with an antiseptic. This reduces the chances of becoming infected. Ticks found within 12 hours won't have started feeding and, as only a small proportion of ticks carry disease, infection is unlikely. Read up on symptoms and seek immediate medical advice if you develop any. When you next see your GP, explain that you have been exposed to tick bites, making a timely diagnosis more likely.

Margery Slatter

Did you know...?

On some grouse moors sheep are used as 'tick mops' to control ticks which weaken young chicks. The sheep are dipped up to 5 times per year to kill off the ticks and then released again to collect more.

The charity BADA – UK is devoted to the prevention of tick-borne diseases. Volunteers use an old towel to collect ticks in woodland.

Dear Members...

We apologise that some members may not have received their copy of Upstream (Winter 2024) due to a failure in the postal system. Despite posting copies to you on 8th December, most have failed to arrive.

Many members were able to receive an electronic copy by email as a substitute, but we are aware that there are others for whom this was not possible or suitable. Please remember that copies are always available in local libraries and on our website!

Several members have expressed a wish to receive Upstream electronically by emailed PDF in the future. If it would suit you to take advantage of this environmentally and financially friendly method of publication, please email the editor to confirm your choice so that your name can be added to our mailing list. editor@westberkscountryside.org.uk



Don't forget our website!
www.westberkscountryside.org.uk



Taking a walk on the wild side

Were you inspired by Sir David Attenborough's series, 'Wild Isles'? Has it made you want to get out into your local countryside and enjoy the amazing wildlife? Butterfly Conservation (of which Sir David is the President) would love to help you enjoy your local butterfly and moth species. There is a programme of free guided walks throughout the spring and summer organised by the Upper Thames Branch.

For instance, in the Goring Gap on the National Trust's Lardon Chase local residents, Maureen and Margery, will lead 2 walks to look for chalk grassland species. Last year, in May, a group of visitors met here on a warm and sunny morning – ideal conditions for seeing butterflies and identifying them. Some of the commoner species including brimstone, small heath and common

blue were soon spotted as well as dingy skipper, a spring grassland specialist. However, only one grizzled skipper, a close relative with a more contrasting pattern, could be found.

Further down-slope, every blue butterfly was checked out in the hope it would be one of the rarer species. Suddenly, there it was – the brilliant iridescent flash of an Adonis blue as it perched to sip nectar from flowers. Eventually, 10 Adonis blue were seen during the walk. Participants also identified half a dozen or so day-flying moths, including the gorgeous purple and gold mint moth and the curiously named Mother Shipton.

Another May-time walk took place on BBOWT's Hartslock nature reserve. Though most famous for its orchids, it also is a wonderful habitat for butterflies and moths. 13 different species of



Common Blue

© Geograph – Lairich Rig

butterfly were identified during the visit, plus several scarce white-legged damselflies that had made their way up from the River Thames.

If you are tempted to try a butterfly walk, there are a large number of free Guided Walks in the 2024 programme, right across Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. In and close to West Berkshire, please join us for a walk at these sites where we hope to see particular species and a range of other butterflies and day-flying moths:

Saturday 18th May at 10:00am Paices Wood Country Parkland, Berks
Dingy skipper and grizzled skipper

Sunday 19th May at 10:30am Aston Upthorpe Downs, Oxon
Green hairstreak and both dingy & grizzled skipper

Saturday 25th May at 10:30am Lardon Chase NT, Berks
Adonis blue

Sunday 26th May at 10:30am Seven Barrows and Crog Hill, Oxon / Berks
Small blue, dingy skipper and maybe Duke of Burgundy

Tuesday 28th May at 10:30am Hartslock, Goring, Oxon
Dingy skipper and green hairstreak

Saturday 1st June at 11:00am Ashbury, Oxon
Blues and skippers

Saturday 29th June at 10:30am Pamber Forest & Silchester Common, Hants
Silver-studded blue and white admiral

Sunday 30th June at 11:00am Hackpen Hill, Sparsholt Firs, Oxon
Dark green fritillary

Thursday 1st August at 11:00am Greenham Common BBOWT, Berks
Grayling

Saturday 10th August at 10:30am Lardon Chase, Streatley, Berks
Adonis blue

Full details can be found on the website: www.upperthames-butterflies.org.uk/guided_walks

Peter Philp, Guided Walks organiser, Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation

Dates for your Diary



© Geograph – Steve Daniels

Tues 23rd April 7:30pm – Warbler Walk at Hosehill Lake

Join Cathy McEwen to hear and look for newly returned spring migrants, particularly **nightingales**, in this nationally important area. Bring binoculars and wear stout footwear. Please car share if possible and consider patronising the pub. Meet and park at the Fox and Hounds, Sheffield Bottom. **SU650 699 noisy.doll.roof**



© Geograph – Edmund Shaw

Wed 12th June 9:15pm – Nightjars - a short walk on Bucklebury Common

Join Society members to look for and hear these summer visitors to the heathland. Meet at the Crossroads on the Common. **SU556 691 taskbar.flagpole.sensual**



**North Wessex
Downs
National
Landscape**

31st May – 9th June 2024 – SAVE THE DATE! for the North Wessex Downs Walking Festival
www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

Over the border! Ladle Hill and Sydmonton

Approx 4.3 miles (7km). A mixture of tracks and paths with short road sections with a steady climb at the start. **Park** in the informal lay-by on left when approaching from Old Burghclere to Sydmonton/Kingsclere. *OS Explorer 44 might be useful.*

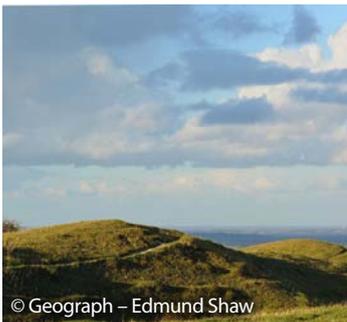
1. In front of you are the imposing entrance gates to **Sydmonton Court**, a Grade II listed Tudor mansion with later additions, belonging to Lord (Andrew) Lloyd-Webber.

Cross the road and follow a wide track leading southwards for about 1 mile which rises up towards the ridgeline. A lovely stroll along a wooded holloway. Avoid any mud by passing through the trees on the field boundary.

2. Look for roe deer and hares in the fields here and admire the view westwards towards **Beacon Hill**, an ancient Iron Age hill fort 261m high and once the site of the most famous beacon in Hampshire.

Go ahead uphill for a short distance to another path (Wayfarer's Walk) and turn sharp left at FP sign and flint cairn.

Continue rising up to the top of the hill.



© Geograph – Edmund Shaw

3. **Ladle Hill** is an 'unfinished' hillfort on the site of an earlier Bronze Age settlement. It shows features which would not be seen in a completed work – marking-out trenches, partly dug sections of ditch and untidy spoil heaps – and encloses seven acres of open access land with glorious views over the vale to the north and west.

The well-defined track bears right and continues on a slight decline eastward.

4. Near the gate is a **dew pond**. These ponds are regular features on chalk downs. They are man-made, being excavated and then lined with clay, so rainwater is captured to provide drinking water for livestock.



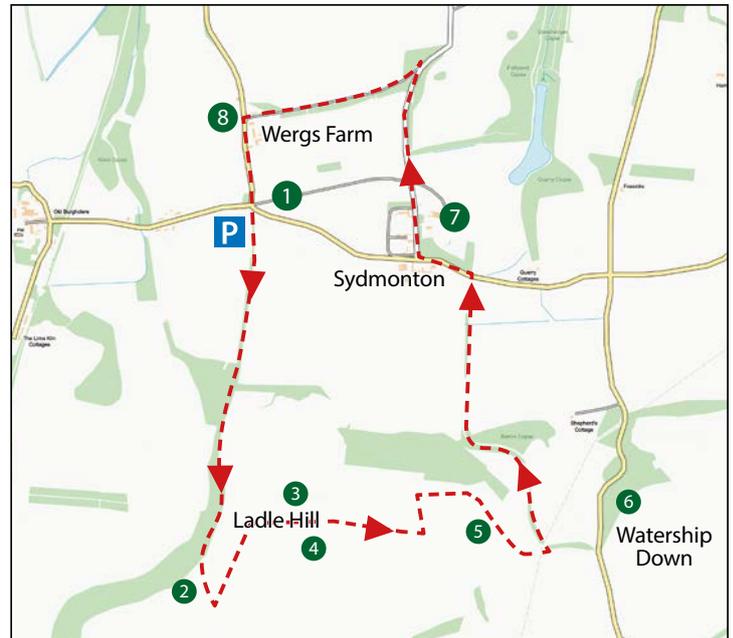
© Geograph – Graham-Horn

On reaching a tree line, turn left and, after a few hundred metres, look out for FP sign going right which takes you into a grass field (often sheep grazing here – so dogs on lead). Follow the path as it skirts the righthand field edge passing by another dew pond and a copse of mature trees and then descends towards a large pylon in the corner of the field.

5. This path is part of the **Wayfarer's Walk**, a 70-mile, long-distance walking route from Walbury Hill above Inkpen to the coast at Emsworth Harbour.

The path emerges onto a metalled track – turn left – but after a short distance turn left again down a gently shelving holloway with a wooded bank on left. Do not continue eastwards along the track (Wayfarer's Walk)

6. **Watership Down** rises up to your right, made famous by Richard Adams' book of the



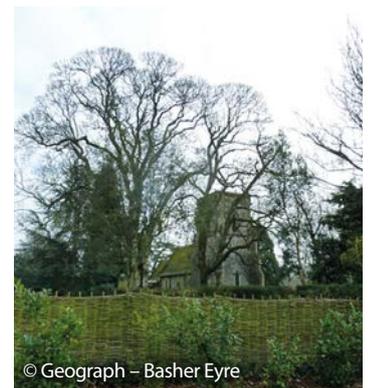
same name. Richard Adams, born in Wash Common, lived in the nearby town of Whitchurch and frequently used to walk with his children on the top of Watership Down. He told them stories about the rabbits who lived there. **Look out for rabbits!**

Descend through woodland passing through a gate/stile and continue northwards to the Kingsclere road at Sydmonton. Cross and turn left to face oncoming traffic. Take great care as vehicles travel at considerable speed!

After about 500m turn right through a gate heading north on a metalled drive passing the walled gardens and courtyards of the Sydmonton Estate. Security cameras watching you here, so behave!

7. On the right you can also just see **the church of St Mary** (Grade II* 1849-53, possibly by T H Wyatt) replacing a medieval building. The church is now adapted as a private music studio.

Cross a cattle grid and continue towards woodland. Don't forget to look right as you do so back towards the manor house. Turn sharp left to follow a well-defined track with a field rising to the right. There are sometimes hares here!



© Geograph – Basher Eyre

8. **Wergs Farmhouse** dates from C18 and is Grade II listed. The name derives from the Old English word *withigas*, meaning willows.

Turn left to return to the starting point.

Nick Freeman and Margery Slatter

Many more interesting local walks are available on our website: www.westberkscountryside.org.uk