



West Berkshire
Countryside Society

UPSTREAM

ISSUE 111
SPRING
2025



© European Grass Snake - Wilma van Holten/Wiki Commons

Encountering Grass Snakes

Last spring I had my first encounter with a grass snake. It was basking atop one of my compost bins. I was surprised by its girth, length and sheer beauty. A couple of months later, some 30-40 pencil-like hatchlings, each around 15cm in length, appeared from the bin. Starting with zero knowledge, I decided it was time for me to learn a little about Britain's most common snake species...

The grass snake (*Natrix natrix*) is usually greenish in colour, with a yellow and black collar, pale belly, and dark markings down the sides. Females are bigger than males. With a length of 90-150 cm and weighing up to 240g, they are Britain's largest snake. They are not to be confused

with the adder, which has a distinctive dark zigzag pattern along its back; nor with the slow worm – legless lizards identifiable by their shiny appearance and bullet-shaped head.

Grass snakes are excellent swimmers and are known for their love of water. During the summer, they can be spotted basking in the sun near their favourite ponds or swimming in the water. Whilst particularly fond of wetland habitats, they can also be found in dry grasslands and in gardens – especially those with a pond nearby. They hunt on land and in water, taking whatever is seasonally available. In spring they catch fish and tadpoles, and even tuck into frogspawn. During the summer frogs and toads are their main prey along with newts. Any amphibians are fair game! Grass

snakes will also hunt voles and mice if the going gets tough.

With no venom, grass snakes rely on the element of surprise to hunt. They will strike out and grab unsuspecting prey, swallowing it whole (and often alive). Their favourite meal is a frog, so a garden pond is a great way to attract them – especially in spring when snakes wake up from hibernation and feel particularly hungry.

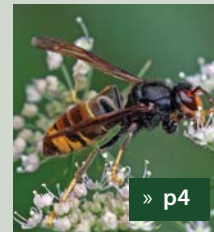
As cold-blooded reptiles, grass snakes spend the coldest part of the year in hibernation, using a variety of warm and humid sites. Tree root systems, fallen trees, compost heaps and rabbit warrens are all favoured. Hibernation usually commences in October or November, continuing until March or April.

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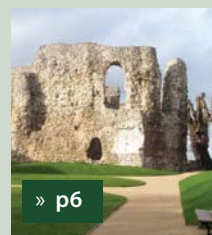
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West Berkshire Countryside Society

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.

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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 2025		
Tue 1st April 10:00	Hillgreen, Leckhampstead	Scrub clearance and clearing fallen trees. Park along the track by the common. SU452 767 W3W: windpipe.bedroom.comically
Tue 8th April 10:00	East Garston	Woodland conservation management tasks. Meet at the E Garston village hall car park. SU363 767 W3W: float.goodnight.sideboard
Tue 15th April 10:00	Little Hidden Farm, Hungerford	Conservation tasks on the organic farm. SU351 712 W3W: wins.shredding.dogs
Tue 22nd April 10:00	Hosehill Lake, Sheffield Bottom	Construction tasks and footpath clearance around the lake, with BBOWT. Park in the car park of the Fox and Hounds pub at Sheffield Bottom. SU650 699 W3W: noisy.doll.roof
Tue 29th April 10:00	Winterbourne Wood	Clearing fallen trees, dead hedging and general clearing of wind fallen brush. Park on the main woodland entrance track. SU447 717 W3W: headboard.tubes.olive
May 2025		
Tue 6th May 10:00	Furze Hill, Hermitage	Woodland and butterfly habitat management on this parish wildlife site. Ample parking at village hall – through double gates off Pinewood Crescent. SU512 740 W3W: simmer.equipping.casual
Tue 13th May 10:00	Hosehill Lake, Sheffield Bottom	Construction tasks and footpath clearance around the lake, with BBOWT. Park in the car park of the Fox and Hounds pub at Sheffield Bottom. SU650 699 W3W: noisy.doll.roof
Tue 20th May 10:00	Rushall Manor Farm, off Back Lane, Bradfield	Continuing woodland conservation management tasks. Meet at the Black Barn off Back Lane between Stanford Dingley and Bradfield. SU584 723 W3W: telephone.brink.crate
Tue 27th May 10:00	Eling Way	Clear invasive vegetation either side of the permissive footpath. Park at Hampstead Norreys village car park. SU527 762 W3W: singing.during.barrel
June 2025		
Tue 3rd June 10:00	Grimsbury Castle #1	Clearing invasive rhododendron from this ancient hill fort. Parking near the Estate house at the castle – by the interpretation board. SU511 723 W3W: blip.slumped.nametag
Tue 10th June 10:00	Grimsbury Castle #2	Clearing invasive rhododendron from this ancient hill fort. Parking near the Estate house at the castle – by the interpretation board. SU511 723 W3W: blip.slumped.nametag
Tue 17th June 10:00	Holt Lodge Farm, Kintbury	Clearing bracken. Meet at Holt Lodge Farmhouse. SU387 648 W3W: skid.comments.tripling
Tue 24th June 10:00	Sulham Home Farm	Continuing ragwort control on this SSSI. Parking at Sulham Home Farm. Please bring a fork if you can. SU643 758 W3W: artist.resist.humans



Volunteers: Task Roundup

© Andy Hollox | Work Party, Holt Lodge

This quarter usually generates reports of excessively wet, cold days and occasional cancellations. Remarkably, nothing has prevented tasks going ahead as planned and volunteers have attended in good numbers, enduring a lot of waterlogged ground and one particularly sleety day when the fire proved particularly popular!

Our task at **Sulham Farm** involved completing the coppicing of an old hedge (mainly elm) and protecting the stools with the resulting brush. This is to prevent the young shoots being grazed by deer. Last year's work is already growing well and has been admired by people using the adjacent footpath. It is now a fast-regenerating habitat for small mammals and farmland birds.



Hallowing in Progress, Bucklebury Meadows
© Andy Hollox



Boxford Water Meadows © Andy Hollox



Hedge at Sulham – Before Coppicing
© Andy Hollox



Coppiced Hedge, Sulham – After (Regrowth)
© Andy Hollox

Our mid-November visit to **Boxford Water Meadow SSSI**, was well supported despite the very cold and snowy conditions. The main task was to remove and process two trees that had fallen over onto the perimeter fencing. We continued to remove brush and thin out trees that were preventing light from reaching the important wetland meadows.

On several sites visited, the continuing effects of Dutch elm disease are evident. On **Grove Pit Common** many trees are suffering. A productive day was spent removing some of these to create clearings into which new trees could be planted. This aims to increase the woodland diversity and enhance the flora and fauna. Two large overgrown hazel trees were also coppiced. In another example, hedgerow elm dieback at **Rushall Manor Farm** has presented the opportunity for volunteers to lay a length of lane side hedge. This gives the trees and shrubs, including the elm, the chance to regrow. Some interplanting will regenerate this hedge for the future.

Just before Christmas we made our annual visit to clear a glade and halos around important trees on **Ashampstead Common**. This allows the trees to gain as much light as possible, reduces competition for nutrients and water and allows a rich ground flora to develop. Our efforts were rewarded with a delicious lunch! On two occasions, volunteers turned up in force to work on **Bucklebury Meadows**. Newer hedges were trimmed, and encroaching scrub, bramble and bracken was scalloped. Haloes were cleared around mature oaks to reduce competition from other vegetation, mainly thriving holly. Local people have commented on the huge improvements.

It's been a while since we last visited **Holt Lodge Farm** in the winter. Last year the site was flooded. We brush cut bramble along the bank – the site for our bracken bashing visit in the summer – and cleared paths into the copse, giving access to a group of hazels to coppice. We also felled some large invasive sycamore trees.

We made a rare visit to the BBOWT site at **Decoy Heath**, removing invasive birch and willow to benefit birds and reptiles, and beginning to clear scrub from the edges of scrapes to maintain boggy habitat for dragonflies – a particular feature of this small reserve. The maintenance and enhancement of butterfly habitat was our purpose at **Paice's Wood**. This involved cutting willow scrub to increase the more open areas of grassland, and scalloping bramble to provide a mosaic of vegetation types across an area noted for its dingy and grizzled skipper butterflies.

At the second of our three hedge laying tasks this season at the **Malt House**, a concerted effort meant that good progress was made with around another 50 yards being laid. Another winter's visits may see this long hedgerow completed!

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

Asian Hornets – yet another threat to our pollinators

I wonder – how many of you have heard of Asian hornets? There has been mention of them in the British press over the last few years, but what are they and do they really pose a threat to us here in the South of England?

As the name suggests these large insects originate in Southeast Asia but were accidentally introduced into France in 2004. Since then, they have spread across France and other European countries. They are voracious insect predators with a particular liking for honeybees, so much so that in some parts of France honeybee populations have been decimated. If no honeybees are available, then any type of insect (including other pollinators), spiders and even small mammal carcasses are on the menu. Later in the year they feed on ripe fruit and ivy blossom. They have no natural predators in Europe so their movement across vast areas has been largely uninhibited. Since 2016 there have been a total of 101 confirmed sightings of Asian hornets in the UK including 85 nests all of which were

destroyed. The majority of these were in the South of England. Worryingly, 78 of these sightings were in 2023.

The UK Government (Animal and Plant Health Agency) and the National Bee Unit are monitoring the situation carefully in an attempt to stop the spread of these destructive creatures. The only way that this will be possible is to identify nests or individuals. Once nests have been found they will be destroyed and the area monitored to check for further nests. There are ways that we as individuals can help with this process, especially those of us who enjoy spending time out of doors. (However, do be careful as Asian hornets can be aggressive around their nests and their sting can cause an allergic reaction.)

What we can do:

1. Find out what an Asian hornet looks like. Make sure you know the difference between an Asian hornet and a European hornet. The Asian hornet is smaller and has yellow legs. The European hornet is a useful pollinator



Asian Hornet (Yellow Legged)
© Charles J Sharp/Wiki Commons

and an endangered species. A good website for identification is Asian Hornet Action Team at ahat.org.uk.

2. Be vigilant! Keep an eye open for large insects while you are gardening, walking or just enjoying the outdoors. If you see an insect you think might be a hornet check for those yellow legs. If you suspect that it is an Asian hornet, and it is safe to do so, then take a photo of it. Some local allotment holders and beekeepers will be setting up traps. If you manage to trap one do be careful and make sure you don't release it.

3. Report it. There are several ways to do this, but the easiest and quickest way is to download the Asian Hornet App onto your phone. This will enable you to quickly send a photo along with the location and any other details directly to the relevant authority. Otherwise, record it on the online reporting form which can be found at aphascience.blog.gov.uk

Purley Sustainability Group is planning to distribute more information to members of the public, monitor the situation locally and support local groups doing the same. Let's hope that by working together, locally and in collaboration with the relevant authorities, we can stop this alien species in its tracks.

Alison Hallowell
(Purley Sustainability Group)
www.purleysustainability.co.uk

Think you've seen a Yellow-legged hornet? Report it!

Yellow-legged hornet (*Vespa velutina nigrithorax*)
An invasive hornet from Asia that poses a significant threat to honey bees and other pollinators

Animal & Plant Health Agency

Yellow-legged hornet
Vespa velutina nigrithorax

European hornet
Vespa crabro

Wasp
Vespula vulgaris

Honey bee
Apis mellifera

Report through the Asian Hornet Watch app or www.nonnativespecies.org/asianhornet
Further information on honey bee health available at www.nationalbeeunit.com Tel: 0300 303 0094

Purley Sustainability Group (PSG) is a community sustainability group for Purley on Thames. We are passionate about enhancing community wellbeing through projects that bring people together in order to improve our local environment and encourage sustainable living. Please get in touch if you want to learn more or become a volunteer at the allotments, or at the repair café.

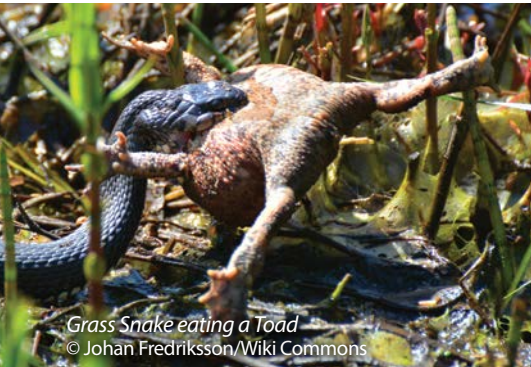


Don't forget our website!
www.westberkscountryside.org.uk



Continued from page 1.

With a lifespan of 15-25 years, grass snakes are the UK's only egg-laying snake. Eggs are laid soon after waking from hibernation, hatching around 10 weeks later in late August and early September. Eggs are normally laid in a sheltered location within rotting vegetation, e.g. a compost heap, where the decomposing vegetable matter produces heat that is ideal for incubation. The eggs themselves are around 25mm long and are laid in clusters of 10 to perhaps 40. They are



Grass Snake eating a Toad
© Johan Fredriksson/Wiki Commons

creamy-white leathery ovals rather than the hard-shelled chicken eggs we are used to seeing. Hatchlings are immediately independent. Only a minority of the young will reach adulthood. Predators include badgers, red foxes, domestic cats, hedgehogs and a number of birds (pheasants are a major hazard).

To avoid capture, grass snakes are known to 'play dead.' When caught, they hiss and release a foul-smelling substance from their anal gland. Although they may also strike with the head, they do not bite and are harmless to humans. In fact, they are extremely shy and will rush for cover at the first sound of humans approaching. Your best chance of seeing one is to visit a suitable habitat early in the morning when they must bask in the sun to absorb warmth. If you disturb a snake, it is worth quietly revisiting the spot



Grass Snake Eggs in a Compost Heap
© Georg Wilhelm/Wiki Commons



Juvenile Grass Snake
© S Grabner/Wiki Commons

as the same basking points are used repeatedly.

John Salmon

The above information was sourced from BBOWT, the Woodland Trust, Countryfile.com, DIYGarden.co.uk, Britishwildlifecentre.co.uk & the New Forest National Parks Association. All excellent & accessible sources that I can highly recommend.

The Oak Tree's Forester Friend

Widespread across the UK, apart from in northern Scotland, jays are birds that are active throughout the year. They favour broadleaf woodland but are also found in conifer woodland, scrub and urban areas. Shy but highly intelligent, a screaming call usually lets you know a jay is nearby. Although they will take eggs and young birds from nests as food, jays are well known for stripping hundreds of acorns off a nearby oak and carefully 'caching' them for future consumption. (Jays have specially adapted elastic throats and can carry up to 5 acorns at a time!) Sometimes these caches appear to have been forgotten and it is these forgotten titbits that are credited with the rapid spread of oaks after the last Ice Age.



Eurasian Jay
© Wikimedia Commons/hedera.baltica

So, although a jay remembers where most of its cache has been buried, each spring, oak saplings appear all over the area where a jay has been busy in the autumn. Is this by accident or design?

Recently, experts have observed jays returning to newly growing saplings in the spring. They pull the plant upwards and remove the fleshy first leaves but leave the rest of the sapling unharmed. These nutritious leaves are fed to hatchlings, showing that jays don't just eat acorns but apparently cultivate them as well. Most of the saplings survive this rough treatment and may grow on into the mature oaks so beloved in our countryside.

Jays are now much more numerous than when Victorian gamekeepers attempted to exterminate them and so the English oak has a potentially brighter future too. Next time you see an oak tree growing a long way from any possible parent it will probably be the result of activity by the jay – the oak tree's forester friend.

Margery Slatter

Join us for a Members Social Evening

The Victory Room,
Bucklebury Village, RG7 6PR

**Thursday 22nd May
2025 at 7:00pm**

**Buffet Supper and
Drinks Provided**

Reports from Society Groups

Talk:

**'From WAG to Riches –
a parish case study'**

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@westberkscountryside.org.uk

The St James' Way in West Berkshire

They say you learn something new every day! Many of the volunteers had no idea that they were helping to maintain a recognised pilgrimage route when working on the lakeside footpath at Hosehill (1).

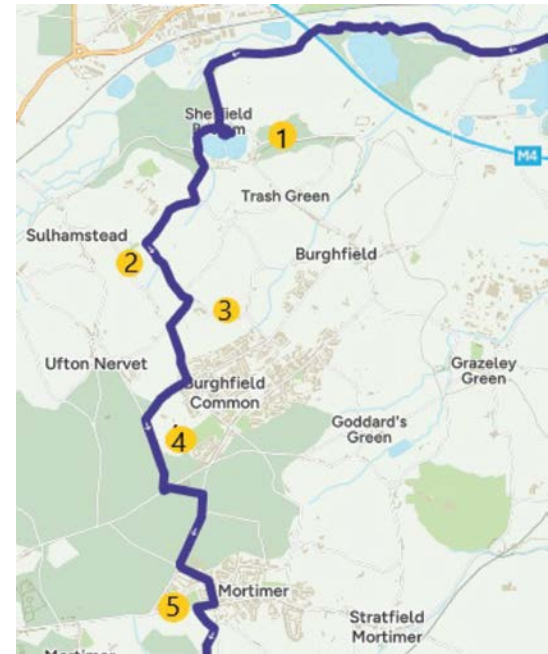
During the afternoon of a regular task day, volunteers were passed by a large group of walkers carrying backpacks, some displaying the scallop shell symbolising the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Towards the back of the group was a hiker carrying a lightweight flagpole, like a medieval battle standard, waving the flag of St James. A couple of walkers stopped to chat. They were walking the St James' Way – an authentically English start to undertaking the Camino de Santiago – running from Reading to Southampton, a port from which medieval pilgrims would have embarked on their onward journey. It is 66 miles in length (6-7 days' walking).



Path Constructed by Volunteers at Hosehill
© Andy Hollox

Dole – bread and ale – still given to all travellers who ask at the porter's lodge.

Along the route are many medieval sites. Reading Abbey was the centre of the St James (St Iago) cult in England in the Middle Ages. The Abbey complex would have cost half a billion pounds



Route through West Berkshire

dedicated to St Bartholomew, it was re-named in a desperate plea by villagers to save them from the Black Death. There are fishponds and moated buildings, dating from the medieval period, nearby.

Burghfield's manors and commons (4) were once owned by Queen Emma, mother of Edward the Confessor. One of them included Sheffield Bottom (1), which was gained by Reading Abbey in 1270, becoming a grange (an outlying monastic farm) with a chapel and mill.

Mortimer was an agriculturally based community concentrating on arable land and rearing pigs (5). Hugh Mortimer gave about 160 acres of land and a meadow to the abbey at Reading. This led to disputes between the Mortimers and the Abbots of Reading, but in the late 1220s the heart of Hugh Mortimer was buried before the high altar, presumably signalling an end to hostilities.

Further information and walk maps/guides are available from:

www.csj.org.uk/caminos-in-the-uk

Margery Slatter



A Medieval Pilgrim Badge

Starting at Reading Abbey, the route follows the Kennet and Avon Canal out of the town, crossing into West Berkshire to the west of Southcote Mill, and continuing along the towpath to the Sheffield Bottom swing bridge. Here, it turns south along the roadside to the Fox and Hounds pub and makes its way along the northern shore of Hosehill Lake. It then passes along lanes and footpaths to Sulhamstead, Burghfield Common and Mortimer before crossing into Hampshire close to the Roman city of Calleva, at Silchester. Following the Roman road from Silchester, via the medieval wall paintings at Bramley, through Basingstoke to Winchester Cathedral, pilgrims can visit the historic Hospital of St Cross and partake of the ancient charitable institution of the Wayfarer's



Reading Abbey Ruins
© CC/Chris Wood

in today's money. Founded by Henry I in 1121, it was one of the largest monasteries in Europe. Still incomplete by his death, Henry was buried here in 1136. Eventually opened by Archbishop Thomas Becket, in April 1164, the ceremony was attended by King Henry II (grandson of Henry I).

The manor of Sulhamstead Bannister Upper End (2) was part of the grant of the royal manor of Aldermaston from King Henry I. Banister was the name of the lords of the manor from some time in the 12th century. Sulhamstead Abbots (3), as its name suggests, was owned by Reading Abbey and popular with medieval monks as a summer retreat, possibly because of the availability of fresh water from its springs. St Mary's has a font from the original Norman church. Originally

Tree-planting Opportunities: Can You Help?

Yes – another article about trees. Why? Because they need our help more than ever!

As support for nature, and the environment in general, seems to be taking a back seat, we need to do more, including taking action for trees and woodland. There are two immediately effective things we can do – support efforts to improve the legal status of our all our trees, especially our veteran and ancient specimens; and, of course, plant more trees.

In this article I would like to highlight what can be achieved with very little effort, looking at a couple of sites where the society has been involved in promoting tree planting, and then making a plea for help to resolve one of the limiting factors to further action – land to plant them in.

With the kind permission of the local council, the Society's volunteers planted 18 trees, all home grown from seed or rescued from destruction, in a small parcel of land bordering one of the open areas at Hillgreen, near Peasmore. Space for planting had been created by the removal of dead or dying trees succumbing to Dutch elm disease. I recently visited the site and can report that all the planted trees are doing very well. It is hoped that as the few remaining elms inevitably succumb, more trees can be planted to take their place.

We have also recently planted another 11 trees in an existing woodland, with the kind permission of the landowner, where the Society has worked for many years to assist in the on-going management of the site. These trees were also home grown, some by the owner from seeds collected from the wood. The owner also purchased wire netting to protect

each individual young tree from the ever-present deer. Grazing pressure from deer prevents a wood from regenerating naturally, so young trees must be protected if they are to survive and thrive. The only other options to protecting individual trees are culling the deer or the erection of expensive deer fencing around a larger area. In a couple of cases where young, un-touched, self-grown saplings were found we have used netting to protect them, too.

Help to establish young trees is urgently needed, even though it can be reasonably easy to obtain small trees ready to be planted. As well as home grown and rescued saplings, free trees are available from several company-sponsored schemes and charities for particular sites, such as those managed/ owned by schools and community groups. This includes the establishment of new hedges in these areas.

Members of the Society have been involved in providing advice to local groups to help them source trees, carry out the planting and assist with ongoing maintenance. In order to keep any costs to a minimum, wherever possible we re-use discarded tree tubes and obtain stakes from coppicing work carried out in the management of other sites in the county.

So, please, if you have a field corner, a community site or a wood with some space, perhaps as a result of felling diseased ash or elm, and would like to discuss the possibility of planting trees or a new hedge, contact the Society! We would be very happy to help.

Terry Davis



Tree Planting, Winterbourne

© Andy Hollox

Dates for your Diary



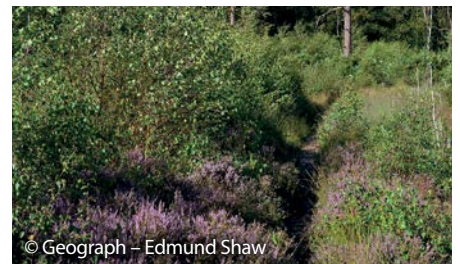
© Geograph – Steve Daniels

Thurs 8th May 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 11th 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

Have your say on the Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

www.rbwm.gov.uk
Royal Borough
of Windsor &
Maidenhead

You're invited to share your views on our Strategy, which will set out the actions to protect biodiversity in local areas, reduce the impact of climate change and boost the benefits of local nature.

Leave your comments and add your pins to the Local Habitat Map for Berkshire by
Monday 24 March

Visit rbwmtogether.rbwm.gov.uk/berkshire-lnrs-public-consultation-page or scan the QR code.

Hampstead Norreys: Woodland and Wartime

An easy 2-mile walk (3.3km) taking about 1.5 hours, ideal for a short stroll with local refreshments. This walk starts and finishes at Hampstead Norreys Village Hall car park SU526 762 spotty.showcases.building. It includes one steep hill. Paths may be muddy and uneven, especially after rain. Pub and community cafe in Hampstead Norreys. OS Explorer Map 158.

From the Village Hall turn right down the track before turning left to walk through the church grounds.

1. The **Church of St Mary** is thought to date from Saxon times and is mentioned in the Domesday Book when Hampstead Norreys was held by Theodoric the Goldsmith and could offer 8 ploughs, small meadows and woodland.

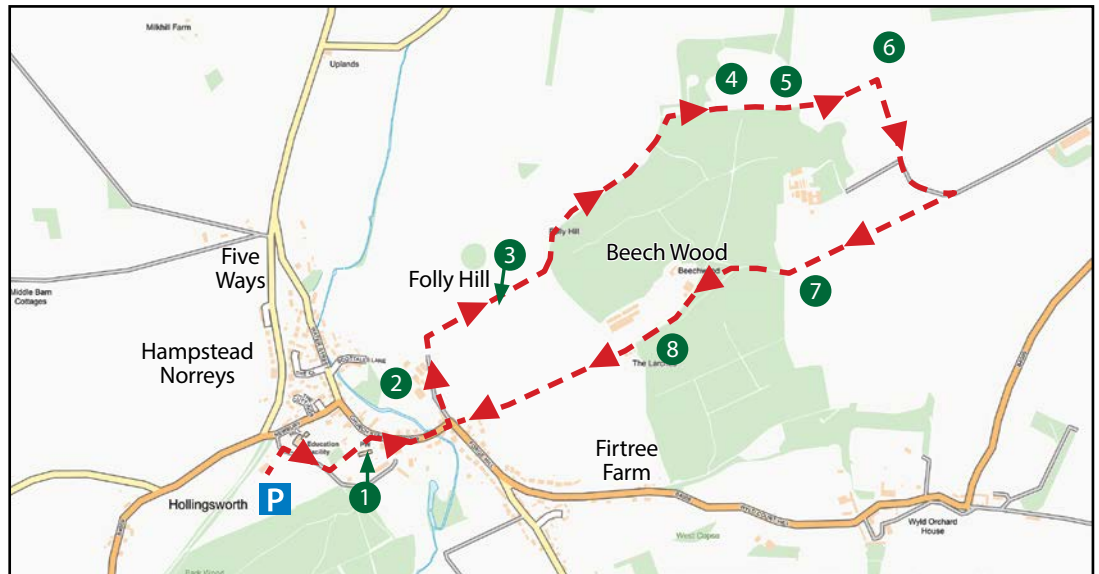
Turn right at the main road and walk past the **White Hart pub**.

2. The **River Pang** is an ecologically important chalk stream whose source is near Compton/East Ilsley. It is a 'bourne' (a seasonal stream) as its upper reaches may dry out as the water table falls. This now regularly happens to the section in the village during summer and autumn.



Just past the pub take the track to the left for 400 metres before taking the footpath to your right directly up Folly Hill.

3. From **Folly Hill** there are good views overlooking Hampstead Norreys. The name Hampstead means 'farm place' and there has been a settlement of some kind here for at least two thousand years and probably for much longer. 'Norreys' was added when it was bought by the Norreys family of Bray in 1450.



Once you reach **Beech Wood** follow the track around the wood on the edge of the field until you come across a permissive path through the wood itself.

4. An example of a **coppice**, **Beech Wood** was worked by man in the past as a source of stakes, firewood and timber. Look out for other signs of human impact in the form of boundary ditches, chalk pits and old brickworks.



On leaving the wood continue straight towards the beacon in the fields of **Haw Farm**.

5. As you leave the wood you enter the plateau where the **Hampstead Norris Airfield** (as it was originally called) was located. Numerous WW2 remains can be seen

throughout the walk including pillboxes, munitions stores, airfield buildings and of course parts of the runway and taxiways. The airfield was operational from 1940 to 1945 housing an Operational Training Unit, flying Wellington bombers, as well as other training, transport, glider and ferry units.

6. The farmed plateau has an ongoing aviation role as an active airfield and also houses a **radio beacon** which marks one of the airline corridors for Heathrow.

At the beacon take the track to the right. Where the track bends towards the farm there is a footpath sharp right which may be difficult to see. Look out for the footpath marker on the ground. Head towards the wood noting the old airfield Technical Block to the north.

7. On entering the wood, you will see an **air raid shelter** on your right. This was particularly needed when the airfield was subjected to a bombing raid on the 12th May 1941. 10 high explosive bombs and 100

incendiary devices landed on the airfield.



Continue through the wood.

8. This section of **Beech Wood** contains a variety of ecosystems including a rich moss understorey below fir trees.



On leaving the wood, join the track to the footpath crossroads and take the path straight down towards the village. Before returning to your car, take the opportunity of a relaxing break in the pub or community café.

Chris Sayer

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