

Chilterns Commons Project

2013 Annual Report

Chilterns
Commons
Project



LOTTERY FUNDED

If 2012 was the Year of Introduction, 2013 has been the Year of Information - gathering and giving. The Chilterns Commons Project, run by the Chilterns Conservation Board, is growing from strength with more people involved in more activities across a broader spectrum of disciplines and commons.



Cattle grazing on Cow Common, Ewelme - photo: Clive Ormonde

Some facts and figures:

£254,876 of our total budget of £534,534 has now been spent. A further £58,152 has already been allocated for spending in 2014 on practical work, surveys and new information boards. These figures include 33 applications for grants worth over £44,000 received from local groups.

We hoped volunteers would contribute £65,000 worth of their time to the whole four year project. We've surpassed that already - many thanks to everyone who's given their time and expertise, and then submitted timesheets.

The training workshops are proving as attractive as ever - there were another 11 courses in 2013, bringing the total to 22 courses held to date. More courses are planned for 2014, some of which will be repeats by popular request.

Learning how to identify hazardous trees - photo: John Morris



more facts and figures:



(above) Erosion scars on Five Knolls before restoration



(right) Repairs underway in July

During 2013, capital works were completed on eight commons with the highlight being the restoration of two Scheduled Monuments - Moneybury Hill on Pitstone Common and Five Knolls on Dunstable Downs ([see the News page for details](#)).

A number of smaller practical tasks have also been completed by volunteers under expert guidance.



(above and right) Volunteers looking for newts and their eggs during a pond survey on the Ashridge Estate commons. Photos: Emily Smith.



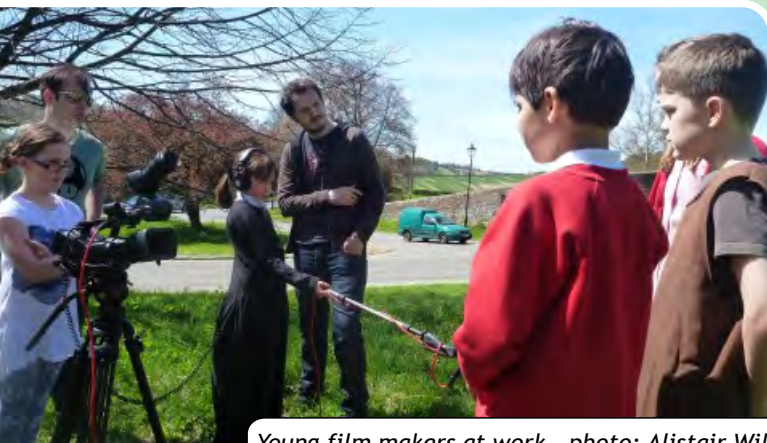
Research projects included pond surveys on five different commons, orchid, butterfly and invertebrate surveys, geological and archaeological surveys. All of the surveys have deepened our understanding and appreciation of our commons. Some have recorded rare species new to that site or the county and there have even been some national rarities. The advice within the survey reports will be invaluable and guide the future site management, be it part of volunteer work parties or scale work.

These figures tell only a part of the story for 2013 saw three major community projects take place:

more facts and figures:

West Wycombe Combined School Year 4 Arts Project

The pupils in Year 4 (8-9 year olds) at West Wycombe Combined School made a short film about the past, present and future of their local common, West Wycombe Hill, from their perspective. The film explores the historical context of common land and how West Wycombe Hill has changed through history. It also discusses how land use by commoners has evolved from grazing and firewood collection towards the current emphasis on recreation and wildlife conservation, showing how this common continues to meet the needs of local people and remains a special place. [Watch it here.](#)



Young film makers at work - photo: Alistair Will

Bricks, Bodgers and Broomsticks

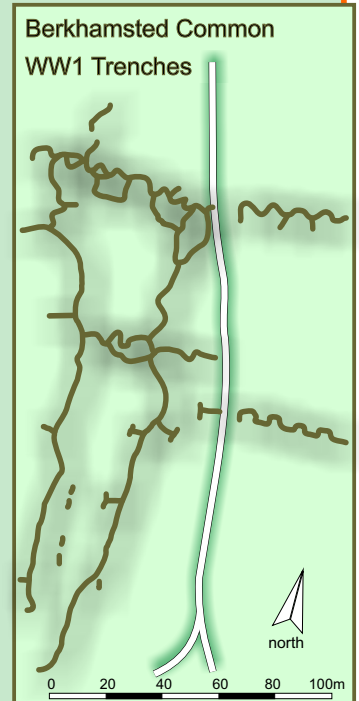
"It was so good, I would have happily paid for it". This free day surpassed everyone's expectations with 1400 people taking part in a range of activities linked to commons life - from hovel building to hurdle making, making bricks and brooms to food for free. A film especially made of the day by volunteers from the Reading Film and Video Makers' club is now on the [website](#).



Hovel builders at work - photo: Chris Smith

Berkhamsted Common trench mapping project

Between October 2012 and April 2013 more than 50 volunteers were involved with this project which mapped the orientation of trenches dug by troops from the Inns of Court Officers Training Corps during WWI. 9 days were spent clearing scrub before mapping could start. During 10 mapping work party days, the volunteers surveyed 15,000 sq m and mapped c.600m of the original 12,000m of trenches. Volunteers from the local community and Chiltern Society were helped by trainees from RAF Halton and TA reservists from The Inns of Court City and Essex Yeomanry. We are indebted to Norman Groves for leading this project. More info and photos are on the [website](#).



Mapping the trenches - photo: Colin Drake

The project benefited from an increasing amount of publicity throughout the year which included 15 talks to local groups, coverage in local papers and regional magazines, local radio and two Radio 4 programmes about commons. The project also contributed to Newcastle Law School's '[Sustaining the Commons](#)' project further raising the Chilterns Commons profile to a far wider audience - one of the objectives originally set.

Activities for the coming year include:

More training

The training programme continues, including specialist skills like brush cutter use, first aid, species identification and, by popular request, the legislation surrounding commons.

If you'd like more info about training workshops past or future, please visit the project's website for the 'Training' and 'Training workshop materials' pages.



Learning botanical survey skills

More interpretation

Information boards telling the social and natural history of commons will be erected on 12 commons. Possibly the most poignant will be a new board on Berkhamsted Common about the troops from

The Devil's Own who were trained there during WWI.

The board will be in place in time for the local commemorative ceremony on 26th July.



Imagine...

This free art competition is encouraging people to visit commons in the Chilterns for creative inspiration. Artwork in any medium is welcomed from amateur artists young and old. Full competition details and an interactive map are on the [website](#).

Closing date is Friday 19 September and selected entries will be exhibited at Arts4Every1 in High Wycombe in the autumn.



Many thanks go to the volunteers who have researched and put the commons on the website map during 2013.

And finally...

...it goes almost without saying that the continued success and expansion of this Project would not have been possible without the continuing and active support of our many partners and a whole host of unseen volunteers without whom much of what has been achieved would not have been possible.



For more information about the Commons Project, please contact Rachel Sanderson on 01844 355525 or rsanderson@chilternsaonb.org



The Chilterns Conservation Board would like to thank our project partners including the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Chiltern Society for making the Commons Project possible.



an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

www.chilternsaonb.org/commons