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Newsletter - Spring 2026

Welcome to the second Letcombe Brook Project e-newsletter, bringing you a quarterly round-up of news, activities and seasonal highlights. We hope you enjoy it!

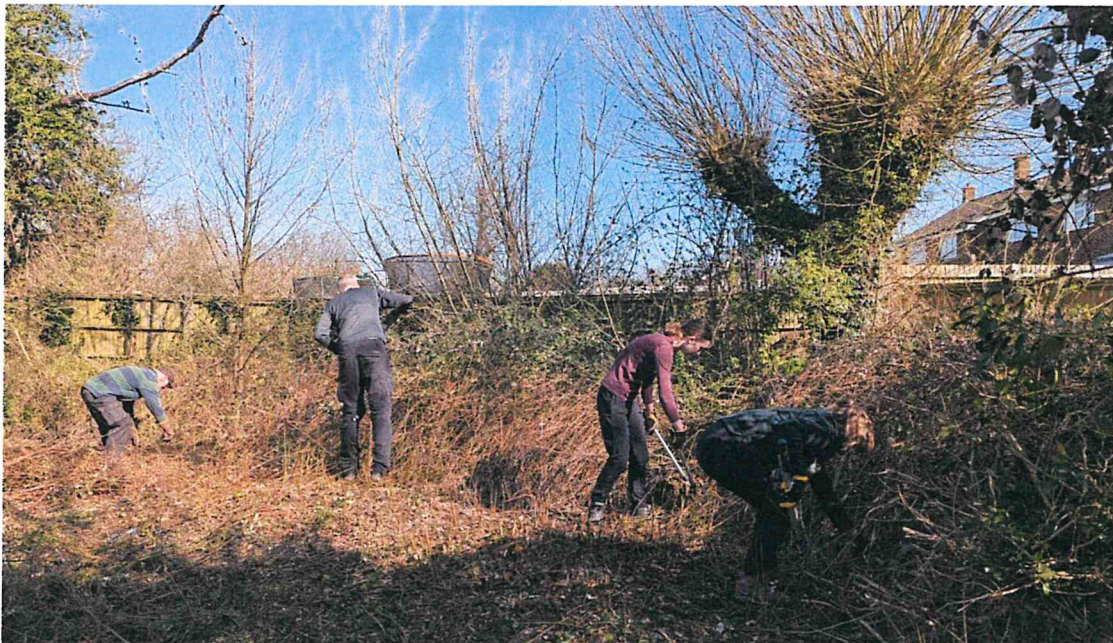
In this edition:

1. Spring volunteering – what we've been up to!

2. Upcoming activities - June to September
3. Seasonal wildlife - what to look out for, and what we've seen so far
4. Project news
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Spring volunteering

Our enthusiastic group of practical volunteers have been bramble-bashing in recent months, working near Old Mill Hall in Grove, and at Willow Walk in Wantage. Bramble is fantastic for wildlife, providing flowers, berries and wonderfully well-protected nesting sites for birds and small mammals. However, along the brook's banks there are places where the bramble has become so dense that hardly any light is able to reach the water or its banks, preventing more typical chalk stream flowering plants from growing on the brook margins and in the channel. Clearing bramble in small sections helps create a mosaic of habitats along the brook, and we can already see plants such as watercress, water forget-me-not and water figwort taking advantage of the extra space and light.



Overgrown brambles blocking out light and visibility at the start of the work party in Grove.



Clear view of the brook afterwards, with sunlight beaming into the water and edges.

The bramble clearance at Willow Walk has made the entrance to the reserve more open and welcoming, encouraging people to visit the Letcombe Brook. We've also created more space for a wildflower meadow, and plan to introduce plug plants to this area in the autumn.



Huge bramble patch at Willow Walk making the entrance dark and gloomy, before work started.



At the end of the work party at Willow Walk Nature Reserve

Upcoming activities

Volunteer voiceover opportunity - This year, we have commissioned a local videographer to make a short film about the Letcombe Brook, showcasing its wonderful wildlife and habitat and raising awareness of some of the pressures they face. We are looking for someone to provide a voiceover for the film (reading from a script). If you have a lovely voice, or know someone else who does and would be interested in helping us, please get in touch!

Wantage & Grove Extravaganza - Members of the team will be running an activity stall at the Wantage & Grove Extravaganza on **Saturday 13th June** between 12 noon and 4.30pm. Do come and say hello and find out more about what we are doing to look after the Letcombe Brook.

Weekend volunteering - We will be running practical volunteering sessions on **Sunday 28th June** and **Sunday 27th September**, both from 2-4pm. Further details to be confirmed, but please save the dates, especially if you're keen to volunteer but don't have chance on a weekday!

Letcombe Valley Discovery Day - We will be having a stall at this event, which is being held at the Letcombe Valley Nature Reserve, Letcombe Regis, from 1-4pm on **Saturday 1st August**.

Seasonal wildlife highlights

Spring is a lovely time to enjoy walking along the brook. A quiet, early-morning stroll might offer a sighting of a water vole tucking into fresh new plants at the water's edge. Water voles spend the winter in their burrows, only rarely leaving for a quick snack if the weather is good. Mother voles can have as many as five litters between April and September if the habitat is of high enough quality, so they need to spend a lot of time eating!

It's also a wonderful time of year for birdsong. Last year we had our first known records of Cetti's Warbler at Willow Walk in Wantage. While not much to look at (being small and brownish), this bird has a very loud, short, sharp song, which is easily recognisable even if the bird is not. We've already had one report of a Cetti's Warbler singing at the old cress beds in Letcombe Bassett, and look forward to hearing where else it pops up.

There has been a lot of otter activity in East Hanney recently, with amazing trail camera clips being shared on our 'Letcombe Brook Project' Facebook group. Do join for more fantastic photos of local wildlife and tips on where to go to see it: facebook.com/groups/261124248200733/.

Project News

Riverfly Monitoring

We were delighted to train twelve new volunteer riverfly surveyors in April, who will carry out monthly checks on invertebrate populations at key sites along the brook. This data provides invaluable information on the health of the Letcombe Brook and means we are much more likely to detect any incidents of pollution. We are very grateful to TOE (Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment) for a grant from the TVERC Recorders' Grant Scheme which enabled us to purchase the equipment needed for this monitoring programme.



Above: New riverfly monitors getting stuck in at Letcombe Brook, Grove



Some of the brook specimens observed during the riverfly training session (blue-winged olive, cased caddis, bullhead and demoiselle - invertebrate photo credit: Julian Parfitt)

During the training, we were reminded of the threat posed to river invertebrates from pet 'spot-on' treatments for fleas and ticks. These powerful insecticides have been quietly leaching into our rivers, either directly through swimming, or indirectly through hand-washing after stroking your pet or washing their bedding. They are having a devastating impact on freshwater insects; one drop of Fipronil (one of two pesticides used, the other being Imidacloprid) is toxic enough to kill 30,000 bees! These chemicals have been banned from use in agriculture, yet are still widely available for our pets. *Please, if your pet receives spot-on treatment, ask your vet for an alternative.*

New Education Sessions on the Brook

This summer, we will be providing educational sessions for around 300 pupils from four local schools. Our new Education & Outreach Officer, Cat (pictured below), has created an educational package for schools and local youth clubs. Our offer now extends to younger children than previously, to instil a love of nature and to learn how to keep safe around

water. The sessions support pupils to engage with the brook in meaningful ways, by not only looking at the wildlife in and around the brook but also learning how to look after it.



LBP Funding Update

Thanks to our Fundraising & Development Manager, Rachel, we have secured funding from the National Lottery's 'Awards for All' to expand our outreach activities and engage with many more people over the coming months. Keep an eye out in this newsletter for new opportunities to spend time by the brook and new ways to get involved.

Further information

More information about LBP can be found on our website, including walking trails to help you enjoy the brook and surrounding area. We are very grateful to several donors who contribute funding to help us to look after the Letcombe Brook. There is a PayPal donate button on our website for anyone wishing to make a donation to our ongoing work.

Our Vision

A clean, wildlife-rich, natural Letcombe Brook, enjoyed by all.

Our Mission

We protect, enhance and restore the brook and its natural processes, for wildlife and communities.

Letcombe Brook Project website



Letcombe
Brook Project

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