

C.R.O.W.

Conserve Reading on Wednesdays

NEWSLETTER



NO. 3

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On wednesdays, whatever the weather, CROW carry out PRACTICAL CONSERVATION TASKS in and around the Reading area. There are two pick-ups from the front of Reading Railway Station; one at 10.00am and the second at 1.30pm so if you can only come for half a day that's fine! - look out for an off-white minibus with Berkshire Conservation Volunteers' stickers on the side.

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OVER....



Affiliated to the BTCV

CROW

CROW [CONSERVE READING ON WEDNESDAY]

Welcome to CROW's third newsletter! Crow is Reading's own midweek conservation group for all those who want to do conservation work but can't make weekends or would like to do both. If you are new to conservation it's no problem as we're quite experienced and very welcoming to new members.

So what type of work do we do and where? Generally our tasks are every other week [but often between times as well]. We work within an 8-9 mile radius of Reading, so there are lots of pleasant trips into the Berkshire and Oxfordshire countryside. During Autumn our tasks include coppicing, fencing, hedgelaying, tree felling and thinning. Nothing is too difficult if you are a beginner.

All you need are some old clothes and strong boots/wellies, we provide all tools and transport and even coffee and biscuits to munch during breaks. So if you're interested get in touch or just come out for a day.



"The Story So Far..."

Time seems to have flown since CROW was first formed in March this year.

Already we're on to our 23rd task, not too bad when you consider we only meet officially once every two weeks. The truth is that, in the face of overwhelming demand both from old members and new, CROW have been meeting more-or-less every week in the last few months. In this third Newsletter though we have decided to keep the old two week format, since it gives us a lot more flexibility to fit in any unfinished work or undertake new tasks which arrive unexpectedly, just as Ruscombe Pond has recently.

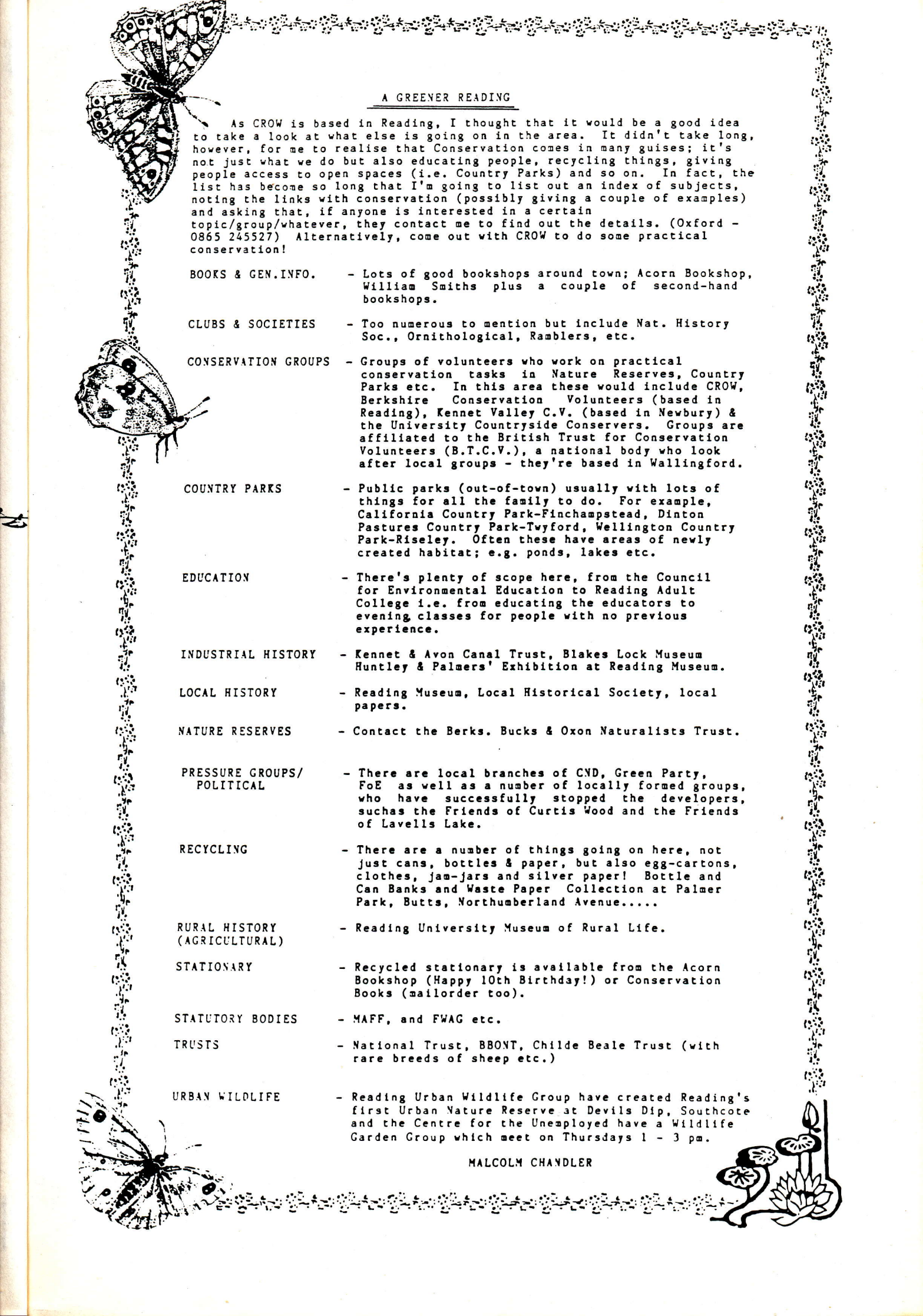
What is very noticeable is that we seem to have done a tremendous variety of work in past months: tree felling, fencing, ditch digging, scrub bashing and pond clearing amongst others. They all had marvellous weather, with one noticeable exception, Lavell's Lake, where we made a trench for over-wintering invertebrates in relentless drizzle. Some reward though; one of the trench banks is now the favourite perch for a local king-fisher, and in the last few weeks the trench itself still had some water in the bottom even though the adjacent wader scrape almost dried up.

At Aldermaston in September we had the chance to start off a small tree nursery in the grounds of Blue Circle Cement HQ. It was part of a project co-ordinated with the local primary school. Each pupil has adopted and planted his/her own tree now - so I hope none of them die.

Penny Edwards from BICV has ordered another 400[!] saplings to plant out in the next few months, and then comes the Grand Opening [probably Dec 3rd] - a date for everyone's diary.

During our various tasks we also had the opportunity to talk to interested locals. At Lodge Wood tales of 5ft pike fished out of the R. Lodden abounded: "you could have put your head in its mouth" [never heard that before!]. However it was very interesting to discover that Ruscombe Pond was once a pickling pond, the only remaining of an original 14, once used for curing willow canes for basket weaving.

With any luck the next two months should be as enjoyable as the last. Digging-out Ruscombe Pond [Oct 29th] will probably be wet [and undoubtedly amusing]. Hedge laying [12th Nov] is a lovely old country craft to acquire and practice. At Curtis Wood [26th Nov] we'll be felling sycamores, and since some of them are over 30ft high that's always pretty interesting. And finally on Dec 10th [remarkably close to Christmas] we're clearing Douglas Fir at Owlsmoor Bog, so come along, pick out your own Christmas tree and make haste with the chocolate coins and fairy lights.



A GREENER READING

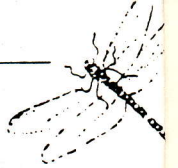
As CROW is based in Reading, I thought that it would be a good idea to take a look at what else is going on in the area. It didn't take long, however, for me to realise that Conservation comes in many guises; it's not just what we do but also educating people, recycling things, giving people access to open spaces (i.e. Country Parks) and so on. In fact, the list has become so long that I'm going to list out an index of subjects, noting the links with conservation (possibly giving a couple of examples) and asking that, if anyone is interested in a certain topic/group/whatever, they contact me to find out the details. (Oxford - 0865 245527) Alternatively, come out with CROW to do some practical conservation!

- BOOKS & GEN.INFO.** - Lots of good bookshops around town; Acorn Bookshop, William Smiths plus a couple of second-hand bookshops.
- CLUBS & SOCIETIES** - Too numerous to mention but include Nat. History Soc., Ornithological, Ramblers, etc.
- CONSERVATION GROUPS** - Groups of volunteers who work on practical conservation tasks in Nature Reserves, Country Parks etc. In this area these would include CROW, Berkshire Conservation Volunteers (based in Reading), Kennet Valley C.V. (based in Newbury) & the University Countryside Conservers. Groups are affiliated to the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (B.T.C.V.), a national body who look after local groups - they're based in Wallingford.
- COUNTRY PARKS** - Public parks (out-of-town) usually with lots of things for all the family to do. For example, California Country Park-Finchampstead, Dinton Pastures Country Park-Twyford, Wellington Country Park-Riseley. Often these have areas of newly created habitat; e.g. ponds, lakes etc.
- EDUCATION** - There's plenty of scope here, from the Council for Environmental Education to Reading Adult College i.e. from educating the educators to evening classes for people with no previous experience.
- INDUSTRIAL HISTORY** - Kennet & Avon Canal Trust, Blakes Lock Museum Huntley & Palmers' Exhibition at Reading Museum.
- LOCAL HISTORY** - Reading Museum, Local Historical Society, local papers.
- NATURE RESERVES** - Contact the Berks. Bucks & Oxon Naturalists Trust.
- PRESSURE GROUPS/
POLITICAL** - There are local branches of CND, Green Party, FoE as well as a number of locally formed groups, who have successfully stopped the developers, such as the Friends of Curtis Wood and the Friends of Lavells Lake.
- RECYCLING** - There are a number of things going on here, not just cans, bottles & paper, but also egg-cartons, clothes, jam-jars and silver paper! Bottle and Can Banks and Waste Paper Collection at Palmer Park, Butts, Northumberland Avenue.....
- RURAL HISTORY
(AGRICULTURAL)** - Reading University Museum of Rural Life.
- STATIONARY** - Recycled stationary is available from the Acorn Bookshop (Happy 10th Birthday!) or Conservation Books (mailorder too).
- STATUTORY BODIES** - MAFF, and FWAG etc.
- TRUSTS** - National Trust, BBONT, Childe Beale Trust (with rare breeds of sheep etc.)
- URBAN WILDLIFE** - Reading Urban Wildlife Group have created Reading's first Urban Nature Reserve at Devils Dip, Southcote and the Centre for the Unemployed have a Wildlife Garden Group which meet on Thursdays 1 - 3 pm.

MALCOLM CHANDLER



RUSCOMBE POND - Before [and after]

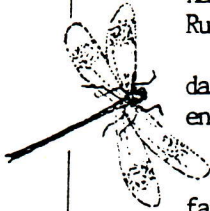


By an amazing [if somewhat suspicious] coincidence, just one week after some of us had been "encouraged" onto the BTCV course on Ponds and Wetlands, CROW adopted Ruscombe Village Pond.

Overall this is very good news, not only because it gives us a chance to steer all our newly acquired knowledge in a "proper" direction, but because pond work encompasses all that's best in conservation; it's dirty, wet, uninhibited and you really do achieve obvious results by the end of the day. Unfortunately though locals don't always see it that way; "coppicing" and "pond clearance" to the average ardent conservationist are "chopping down all those lovely willows", pulling out that nice bank of rushes" and "making a b**** ** of the place to most residents and passing dog-walkers. Tact and diplomacy is undoubtedly an asset in pond work; not always easy when you emerge from a pond which may have started off lush and green but after a day's hard toil is now turbid and brown.

The saving grace is that ecologically all that work makes a lot of sense. Ponds are by nature transient environments, whose sole aim seems to be to dry-up ASAP. The state of Ruscombe Pond is not yet desperate but there's quite a bit to be done.

A brief visit in September showed the obvious problems: the pond is generally rather dark and in imminent danger of silting up, both from bottom sedimentation and from encroachment of the banks.



A lot about a pond's general state of health can be assessed by studying its flora and fauna. It is important that any pond contains a balance of plant types. Submerged plants are particularly necessary because they provide food, light, habitat and oxygen for the pond's animal inhabitants. At least Ruscombe Pond contains canadian pondweed, but even this looks a bit lost amidst all the bottom debris. Semi-submerged plants such as the reeds which surround the NW of the pond are also useful because they provide cover for many birds and animals and play a vital role in the life cycle of invertebrates, such as dragonflies and damselflies. Unfortunately though reeds can also spread very rapidly and at Ruscombe this is becoming a major problem, in fact in some places the bank has encroached by 6-7m.

A pond's animal life gives a good indication about the state of the underwater environment. A quick pond dip at Ruscombe [nets not us], revealed quite a diverse "healthy" fauna including waterboatmen, water beetles, lots of small crustacea like cyclops, daphnia and fresh-water shrimp and a single lone goldfish [christened Osmosis]. What we didn't want however were the results of the bottom dredging; red midge larvae, redworms and abundant watersliders, a sure sign that the base of the pond is poorly oxygenated.

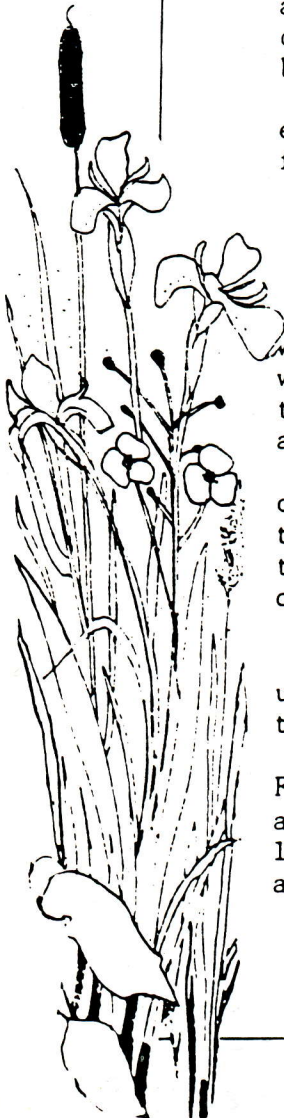
The main culprit, perhaps suprisingly, is the surrounding vegetation. The picturesque willows which overhang the pond are in effect biological pollutants. They block out light which feeds the oxygenating plants, their fallen leaves and branches silt up the pond and the decay of this organic matter at the pond bottom produces the low oxygen conditions which are disasterous for healthy pond life.

Thus at Ruscombe Pond the first front of attack has been to coppice many of the overhanging trees as quickly as possible [especially with this autumn's leaf-fall well on the way]. The second, potentially much more mucky aim, is to dig out much of the reed bank to create a deeper area in which the pond invertebrates and amphibians [and the goldfish] can over-winter.

In the long term much of the pond will have to be dredged by hand, using long rake-like "cromes", but it won't all be done this year to avoid too much trauma for the long-suffering inhabitants.

Eventually it is hoped that someone will set up a Friends of Ruscombe Pond Group [FROG?], and continue all the good work. In the meantime there's just one last problem - where or what are we going to find as a friend for the goldfish? Answers in jam-jars please.

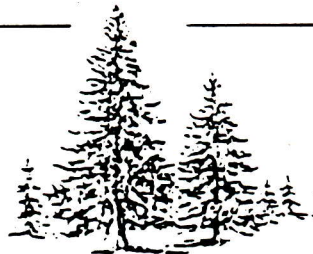
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WORK PROGRAMME



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|-------------------------|----------|---|
| RUSCOMBE POND | 29th Oct | Clearing the reed banks from the SW of Ruscombe Pond. [GR 796763] see p3 for details. |
| DEVILS DIP | 12th Nov | Laying the elm hedgerow along the northern margin [Bath Road side] of Devils Dip - Reading's first Urban Nature Reserve. [GR 685722]. |
| CURTIS WOOD | 26th Nov | Removing scrub and small trees to thin out the woodland and promote the growth of native species. [GR 664726]. |
| OWLSMOOR BOG | 10th Dec | Clearing birch and douglas fir which are encroaching and drying out the bog area. [GR 850629]. |
| RUSCOMBE POND | 7th Jan | Coppicing and reed clearing [GR 796763]. |
| CALIFORNIA COUNTRY PARK | 21st Jan | Planting a hedge at California Country Park, newly made a site of special scientific interest. |



what else?



NOVEMBER

- Sun 2nd. ReC task, coppicing, Warburg Reserve, Bix.
- Sat/Sun 8th/9th. ReC training course, hedgelaying.
- Sun 9th. ReC task, coppicing, Reenham Common.
- Sun 16th. ReC task, pine-pull, Frensham Common.
- Thurs 20th. Talk, "Nature by Night", Dinton Pastures. 7.30pm.
- Sat/Sun 22nd/23rd. ReC residential, Cleeve hill, chalk grassland
- Thurs 27th. Talk, "Urban Foxes", Dinton Pastures. 7.30pm.
- Sat 29th. Reading Urban Wildlife Group, General Meeting.
- Sun 30th. ReC task, heathland work, Bucklebury Common.

DECEMBER

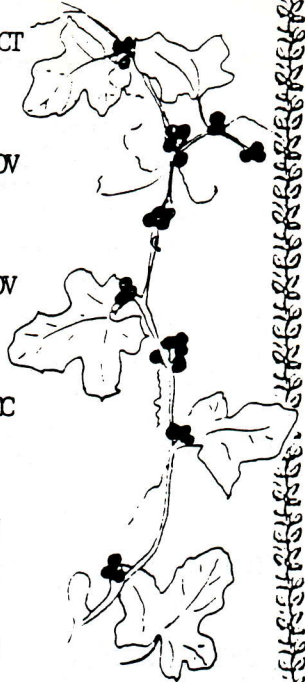
- Wed 3rd. Aldermaston Tree Nursery, Grand Opening.
- Thurs 4th. Talk, "Ghostly Hunters - Owls", Dinton Pastures. 7.30pm.
- Thurs 4th. Reading Urban Wildlife Group, General Meeting.
- Sat 6th. ReC training Course, tree planting.
- Sun 7th. ReC task, Fencing, Devils Dip.
- Thurs 11th. Talk, "Year of the Bat" Dinton Pastures. 7.30.
- Sun 14th. ReC task, scrub removal, Owlsmoor Bog.



ReC [Perks Conservation Volunteers]
 - Rdg. 874034, 473160, 664686
 ReC training Courses - Rdg 473160
 Dinton Pastures - Rdg 342016 Rdg
 Urban Wildlife Gp - Rdg 661918



FORTHCOMING TASKS...



RUSCOMBE POND	29TH OCT
DEVIL'S DIP	12TH NOV
CURTIS WOOD	26TH NOV
OWLSMOOR BOG	10TH DEC
RUSCOMBE POND	7TH JAN
CALIFORNIA COUNTRY PARK	21ST JAN



Since 1949 an area of "prime" habitat the size of the Lake District had been destroyed? This destruction includes the complete disappearance of much of our best loved and most beautiful countryside:

In this time WE HAVE LOST;

- 125,000 miles of HEDGEROWS
- 95% of HAY MEADOWS
- 80% of CHALK DOWNLAND
- 60% of HEATHLANDS
- 40% of NATURAL WOODLANDS
- over 50% of MARSHES

AND pollution & canalisation of major WATERWAYS.

Many of these losses have been due to modern, intensive farming methods. Others as a result of the building of motorways, houses and factories. Some, were doubtless inevitable others could perhaps have been avoided.

Did You Know?

CONTACT No's

Sue: Rdg 668636 Pete: Rdg 54798

Nick: Rdg 667882 Helen & Penny: Rdg 873142

