

# Wild Oxfordshire NEWS

## People and Nature – Making Connections

### Chairman's report 2016-17

This is my first report to Wild Oxfordshire as chairman of the board of trustees. It is a huge honour and responsibility to serve a cause that I have been committed to for so many years.

This year new vision and impetus had been put in place as a result of the re-organisation of responsibilities in Wild Oxfordshire. Following on from a review of the impact of our work over the years, a Statement of Purpose was drawn up: –

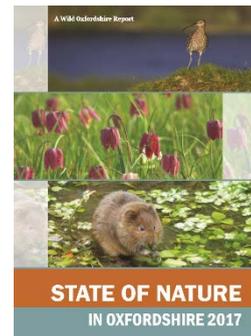
*To stimulate better land management for nature in Oxfordshire; to increase awareness and interest in enhancing Oxfordshire's nature. Uniquely, our focus is on bringing organisations and communities together to work collaboratively in a strategic and prioritised framework.*

This will evolve with time, but it signifies a strong and renewed direction of travel. However, how has this translated to work on the ground? The achievements of the Wild Oxfordshire team and our partners, especially our members, speak for themselves.

The recruitment of Roselle Chapman, whose Community Wildlife Project is a happy new milestone in continuing of one of our most influential, core projects. Over 90 communities have benefited from Wild Oxfordshire's advice on managing their green spaces for nature. Whilst supporting local groups in the time-honoured fashion, Roselle brings in-house ecological expertise. The project also continues to provide a conduit between local people and member organisations.

Another core project that bore fruit this year was the production and launch of the [State of Nature Report](#) for Oxfordshire in March. Drawing on data and stories from all our member organisations (and more!) the report represented the most comprehensive review of the current situation for wildlife in the county.

Hilary Philips pulled together over 60 skilled individuals and 40 environmental groups to produce a detailed baseline, against which future changes can be assessed. Links between Wild Oxfordshire, businesses and agriculture were strengthened, and issues faced by wildlife were given prominence by the presentation of the report to Robert Courts MP. Wild Oxfordshire's Biodiversity Action Group (chaired by Graham Scholey, Environment Agency) has pledged to keep the momentum going.



The 4-year old [Evenlode Catchment Partnership](#) continues to make significant strides in improving understanding of water quality, whilst enhancing biodiversity, flood management and resilience to climate change. This year saw even greater community, business and landowner engagement as well as projects on the ground. Hosted and coordinated by Wild Oxfordshire, this project exemplifies how an effective collaborative partnership can bring together local knowledge and expertise to deliver cost-effective improvements.

Partnership coordination was funded by the Environment Agency and matched by Wild Oxfordshire's own core funds. Starting from a modest base, this project has so far attracted over £400,000 into on-the-ground projects (e.g. River Glyme Restoration at Stratford Bridge which has seen tremendous benefits to local wildlife after 1 year) and most recently the Natural Flood Management project. Richard Bennett has joined Wild Oxfordshire as our Natural Flood Management Project Officer, designing and overseeing the delivery of manysmall-scale 'slow the flow' interventions in the Evenlode catchment. This is the only trial of this sort in a lowland setting and in the upstream catchment of the River Thames. He is based at the West Oxfordshire District Council office.



The Evenlode Catchment Partnership has also organized and secured funding to deliver water wildlife- friendly farming advice, establish an open-air laboratory at Combe Mill and engage families in getting up close to wildlife. It is also developing into a 'living laboratory' for land management and monitoring, drawing in researchers from Oxford and Reading Universities, Queen Mary College and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, as well as citizen scientists.

Less flashy, but nevertheless crucial, is the continued refinement of the [Conservation Target Areas \(CTAs\)](#) process. These CTAs are the best areas of biodiversity in Oxfordshire. They give a landscape scale view of Oxfordshire allowing conservation bodies to deliver 'more, bigger, better-joined', that in turn make for an efficient use of resources. They provide a focus for coordinated delivery of biodiversity work, agri- environment schemes and biodiversity enhancements through the planning system. The business of developing protocols for updating information, amendments and extensions to specific CTAs, consideration of new CTAs continues smoothly. There is now the opportunity to link Wild Oxfordshire community work with these targets. More resource is sought to strengthen the partnership work within the CTAs.

The reserves held by Wild Oxfordshire have enabled us, over the years, to look at the bigger picture. Our size allows us to be nimble and efficient. We have been able to provide continuity for our members by funding core work and at the same time taking risks with innovative new projects, brokering funding bids, and driving projects that have benefitted the whole county.

We add value and continue to provide the *"mortar between the bricks"*. Nevertheless, the changing economic and political climate have slowly chipped away at our funding base and we foresee that resourcing this unique style of working will continue to be challenging.

#### **I would like to thank our funders without whom we would not have made this journey**

**Trusts:** Patsy Wood Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation ,Wild Trout Trust

**Companies:** Beard Construction, Blenheim Palace, Bothy Vineyard, Smiths and Sons, Thames Water

**Local authorities and public bodies:** Cherwell District Council, Environment Agency, Oxfordshire County Council Natural England, NERC, West Oxfordshire District Council

**Others:** Banbury Ornithological Society Audrey and Martin Wood Dave Woodwark

I am also indebted to the wonderful team of Trustees, who have put in so much time and effort supporting the whole team.

**Sian Liwicki, Chairman of the Board of Trustees**

