



*The group discussing the opportunities for feeding farmland birds at one of Andrew Reis' supplementary feeding sites*

better enable invertebrates such as butterflies to more easily move around the Chalke Valley. We also secured additional funding for approximately 1.4km of new fencing to improve management of chalk grassland at the Dineley's Manor Farm, Berwick St John.



## Living Record

Online environmental recording

Keep those records coming in.

We are keen to improve our knowledge of the species we have in the Chalke Valley and use this to show how important the area is for wildlife and target our farms with management to the species we have. To do this we are using Living Record: please keep adding records. If you are unsure how to do this, Simon can help set you up and show you what to do. Having said this, the most important thing is that we have the records in whatever form they may be in, even on a post-it note!



*Adonis Blue, a Chalke Valley speciality, was recorded at 9 sites late last summer by Dr Sue Clarke. It is hoped that this years surveys will record yet more sites where this butterfly occurs.*

## We've been busy in the Chalke Valley!

Welcome to this edition of the Chalke Valley Farmer Cluster newsletter.

Despite the incredibly variable weather of the last few months with rain, snow and bright sunshine, we've been busy on the downs and in the valley.

We've had a number of really useful training events, including best practice **supplementary feeding** for farmland birds over-winter. This included the opportunity to see first hand a really successful supplementary feeding site at Andrew Reis's Manor Farm. Following this, members have set up 9 new locations for supplementary feeding throughout the Chalke Valley landscape. Later in February, we heard from RSPB's Rob Blackler on how to manage **fallow plots** to provide ideal nesting habitat for **lapwing** and **stone curlew** at Rob Hitching's Gurston Farm; GWCT ran a **bird identification** training at the Mann's Knowle Farm.

More recently we worked with the WWT's River Guardians Project to provide training on surveying for and iden-

tifying **invasive species** along the **River Ebble**.

Despite the less than ideal weather conditions over the winter, we managed to undertake **sward enhancement**, introducing wildflowers into



*Yellowhammer is one of the birds which will greatly benefit from the supplementary feeding being carried out in the Chalke valley*

existing grassland, on 6 locations to improve connectivity between existing areas of chalk grassland. We plan to undertake further over-seeding and plug planting at an additional 2 sites this autumn. It is hoped that this will

## White Letter Hair-streak

The White-letter Hairstreak is a small butterfly with an erratic, spiralling flight typical of the hairstreaks. It is distinguished by a white 'W' mark across the underside. Adults are difficult to see because they spend so much time in the tree canopy, although they occasionally come to ground level to nectar on flowers near elm trees or scrub saplings. This makes it likely that they are under-recorded, although we do have records of them in the eastern part of the Chalke Valley they likely occur elsewhere.

The species declined during the 1970s



when its foodplants were reduced by Dutch Elm Disease, but is recovering in a few areas.

To encourage these butterflies CVFC members have been busy planting resistant elms. The plants were supplied by Peter Shalcross who farms at Tisbury and is very keen and knowledgeable on butterflies. The plants used were *Ulmus minor* 'Ademuz' from a resistant strain identified in Spain. *Ulmus minor* is known as narrow-leaved elm, smooth-leaved elm, or simply field elm is found in the eastern counties.

## The Ebble needs your help

Invasive non-native plant species such as Himalayan balsam and monkeyflower can grow prolifically along our river banks. They can out-compete native species and leave river banks susceptible to erosion.

We need volunteers to help us record and monitor the occurrence of invasive non-native species in the headwaters and middle reaches of the River Ebble.



When we know where they occur, we can take action remove them and have an opportunity to work together to clear our river of these plants. We have a number of volunteers who would like to help survey for these plants, so we will be in touch with riverside landowners shortly to plan the surveys. If you know you have any of these plants such as Himalayan balsam or Japanese knotweed or if you are keen to get involved, please let Simon know. We will be offering additional training on identification shortly.

## Stone Curlew and Lapwing - have you seen them?

Stone curlew are back in the county and starting to breed, albeit delayed by the poor spring weather.

We hope that these amazing birds return this year after the excitement of appearing last year at a couple of locations for the first time in a few years. If you see or hear (they have a very distinctive call) any please let Simon know ASAP!



Due to the delayed crop planting this spring there is a lot of potential nesting habitat for lapwing too. Please keep a look out for their nests when you are doing field work such as rolling. Their numbers have declined drastically so every nest counts. It would be great if you could go around them when carrying out any potentially damaging field work - you don't need to leave a large area just avoid the nest. Again, if you would like help locating the nests or advice on what to do please get in touch and Simon can help.

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## FUTURE ACTIVITIES

- Pollinators 13th June
- Evening Farm Walk & BBQ 10th July

If you have any other topics you would like covered please let us know!

As farms reach end of their Environmental Stewardship agreements we will be busy supporting members with reviewing opportunities under Countryside Stewardship and delivering Cluster priorities.

## GET INVOLVED

For more information and to be kept up -to-date with the CVFC please contact Simon Smart, tel 07748155143, email [simonsmartblacksheep@gmail.com](mailto:simonsmartblacksheep@gmail.com)