



Issue 4 2019

Newsletter



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

We have undertaken a number of training events to improve our knowledge and ability to manage different habitats. This included a fascinating talk by Andy House, Wessex Water's senior environmental scientist, who has spent considerable time working on the River Ebble. The talk covered the significance of chalk rivers, described some of the species associated with this rare habitat, management considerations, and the importance of water quality.

We also visited Bright Seed's demonstration plots at Swallowcliffe to learn about wildlife seed mixes. It was a great opportunity to discuss the merits of various crops and the importance and



Discussing seed mixes with Arthur Barraclough from Bright Seeds

sediment loss into the River. We visited Nick Combes's farm to see how he has successfully addressed runoff from his tracks. Management carried out by Nick is very relevant to other tracks throughout the Cluster area (see following article).

We recently met with GWCT's Mike Swan at Prescombe Shoot Lodge to discuss Shoot Biodiversity Assessments (SBAs). The Chalke Valley contains a large number of shoots due to the topography of impressive chalk valleys. Ensuring we maximise the benefits of shoots, such as habitat creation and supplementary feeding, and minimise potential negative impacts, is really important. SBAs provide an independent expert report on best practice and biodiversity gain on individual shoots, not just for the large commercial enterprises but also the smaller scale 'family and friends' shoots. Contact Simon if you would like more information.

challenges of good establishment to ensure they deliver for our farmland birds by producing lots of seed! If you would like guidance notes from this meeting please contact Simon.

Towards the end of February we welcomed Charles Bentley, farm tracks specialist at ADAS, to discuss management and construction of farm tracks and how we can minimise



The River Ebble at Homington. One of the most important and iconic environmental features in the Chalke Valley

Farm track management CVFC Recording App



Tracks are a serious source of pollution into the Ebbles as many of them come off the top of the Downs straight down into the valley bottom and any run-off can either flow directly into the River or via adjoining roads and drains. Many farm tracks are not suited to today's bigger, heavier kit and with changes in weather patterns many tracks are struggling to cope. However, some relatively simple things can be done to improve tracks without significant cost.

The key to maintaining tracks is to keep them dry and firm and to sort any problems as soon as they occur.

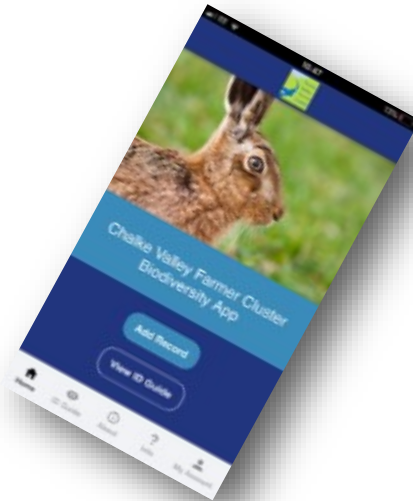
- * Add a camber to the track allowing water to flow into a ditch
- * If cambering is not possible add sleeping policeman or cross drains to divert water.
- * Swales—channels cut into the verge into which water can be diverted.
- * Consider relocating tracks or gateways with known problems.
- * When constructing new tracks, check with planners and try to avoid discharging water to land that is prone to erosion.

Well managed tracks can:

- * Reduce maintenance costs
- * Reduce machinery wear
- * Save time
- * Reduce transfer of sediment, into our river systems and other sensitive habitats

Grants are available under Countryside Stewardship including cross drains, sediment traps, and resurfacing.

The CVFC has been working with Natural Aptitude, a Bristol based company who create environmental apps, to trial their data-collection platform, Coreo, by producing an App specifically for CVFC members to record wildlife when they are out on their farms. The App can be



used when out in the field so you can record a wildlife sighting instantly. It is really easy to use and includes an identification guide for 40 of our priority species.

Please contact Simon if you would like details of how to set the App up on your phone.

Species Focus: CORN BUNTING

This dumpy brown bird is one of our most characteristic, even emblematic birds of open the open Downs. It is often seen perching on a wire, fencepost or top of a hawthorn bush repeating its song, which is likened to jangling keys (listen to the call on the new CVFC recording App!). It will fly off with a fluttering flight often with its legs characteristically dangling below its body. It has declined dramatically in the UK but fortunately can still be found in in the Chalke Valley —Wiltshire supports 50% of the national population.

What do corn bunting need?

Nesting habitat that remains available throughout the summer. They nest late

on the ground in cereal fields and can often have flightless chicks late into August so early harvests have a significant effect on their success. One option is to grow large areas of cereal based wildlife seed mixes in open areas. This will ensure that late second broods can survive as the crop is not harvested. Wide conservation headlands can also be beneficial. Sowing strips or blocks within these areas at a higher seed rate may also be beneficial. It is thought that corn bunting will select these areas which have a reduced threat of nest predation.



Lots of seed throughout the year. Adults feed on seeds, particularly cereal grains, so providing areas of wildlife seed mix is again very important for them. In combination with this, supplementary feeding on the ground during the late winter and early spring is likely to be extremely important.

Insects and spiders during the spring and summer. Corn bunting feed their chicks on insects and the availability of insects has a huge effect on breeding success. Flower-rich chalk downland, nectar flower mixes and flower-rich margins are all important foraging habitats and should be available near to nesting habitat.

GET INVOLVED

For more information on the CVFC and to be kept up-to-date please contact Simon Smart - 07748155143 - simon@blacksheepcm.co.uk



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