



The West Berkshire Living Landscape is on the edge of Newbury and Thatcham. It covers 26km<sup>2</sup> and is a mosaic of land rich with history and wildlife. BBOWT and West Berkshire Council have joined forces in an initiative to celebrate this landscape, create more opportunities for people to enjoy it and expand the wildlife habitats within it. Being close to two large towns, the success of The Living Landscape doesn't just depend on the support of farmers, landowners and planners but of thousands of individuals, like you. We are the caretakers of this natural heritage and an important part of securing its future for generations to come.

**Living Landscapes are big and bold: they create space for wildlife and people, reconnect isolated habitats and give wildlife room to adapt and thrive.**

## West Berkshire Living Landscape

Thatcham Reedbeds



Bowdown Woods



Greenham Common



## What makes a Living Landscape?

- Varied and wild habitats
- Green spaces between our towns
- People learning about and enjoying the landscape
- Connected areas so wildlife can move freely
- Room for wildlife to adapt to change

The heathland at Greenham Common is on the top of a flat gravel plateau surrounded by ancient-woodland slopes running down into the rich wetland river valleys of the Kennet and the Emborne. Many birds, mammals and insects thrive in this diverse and rich landscape, but some species are struggling as habitats have become more fragmented and the areas between them less friendly to wildlife. A number of species once common in the area are now threatened or gone, such as the water vole, otter, barn owl, silver-studded blue butterfly, round-leaved sundew and bittern. If we can provide enough space and the right conditions, we could give these species a chance to return and flourish in large numbers.



# West Berkshire Living Landscape

**Six-mile circular walk**  
Thatcham–Bowdown–Greenham–Thatcham



## Things to do

- Volunteer on conservation work parties:
  - for BBOWT: 01865 775476
  - for Greenham and Crookham Conservation Volunteers (GCCV): the Ranger 01635 580792, [www.gccv.org.uk](http://www.gccv.org.uk)
- Visit West Berkshire Museum, The Wharf, Newbury, 01635 30511. [www.westberks.gov.uk](http://www.westberks.gov.uk)
- Join the local RIGS Geology Group: 01993 814147, [www.tverc.org](http://www.tverc.org)
- Learn about local history with the Thatcham Historical Society: Secretary 01635 863536, [www.thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk](http://www.thatchamhistoricalsociety.org.uk)
- Enjoy a walk with the local Ramblers: local group contact 01635 281621 [www.wberksramblers.org.uk](http://www.wberksramblers.org.uk)
- Explore the Kennet and Avon Canal: 01380 721279, [www.katrust.org.uk](http://www.katrust.org.uk)
- Learn about wildlife and sustainability at the Nature Discovery Centre: 01635 874381, [www.naturediscovery.org.uk](http://www.naturediscovery.org.uk)
- Find out more about the history of Greenham Common: [www.greenham-common.org.uk](http://www.greenham-common.org.uk)

**Help us to help wildlife**  
**Join your local wildlife Trust today**

**Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT),**  
**The Lodge, 1 Armstrong Road, Littlemore, Oxford OX4 4XT**  
**info@bbowt.org.uk | 01865 775476 | [www.bbowl.org.uk](http://www.bbowl.org.uk)**



## Planning your walk

The walk is six miles (without suggested detours). You should allow three to four hours.

Start at the Nature Discovery Centre, Muddy Lane, off Lower Way, Thatcham RG19 3FU. Some local bus services stop on Lower Way near the Centre – visit [www.traveline.org.uk](http://www.traveline.org.uk) or call Traveline on 0871 200 2233 for up-to-date information. The Centre is run by West Berkshire Council, and has a range of displays and information on wildlife and the environment; plus a shop, toilets and café. Check for opening times on 01635 874381 – [www.naturediscovery.org.uk](http://www.naturediscovery.org.uk).

Alternatively, start at Thatcham railway station; there are regular trains from Reading and Newbury – visit [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk) or call National Rail Enquiries on 08457 484950 for timetable information. This increases the walk by just under one mile.

The terrain consists of a towpath, tracks, steep slopes and can get very muddy. There is one stile, road crossings and a railway crossing that needs particular care.

Dogs can easily disturb wildlife, particularly ground-nesting birds. Please keep dogs under close control at all times, and on a lead when in the nature reserves, or during the bird nesting season (1 March–31 July).

Photos: Rob Appleby, BBOWT, Peter Creed, GCCV, Gavin Hageman, Norman Jones, David Kjaer, Ben Micklen, James Osmond, Philip Precy and Mike Reed

11.08 Registered Charity No. 204330



[www.bbowl.org.uk](http://www.bbowl.org.uk)

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Nature Discovery Centre

Kingfisher

Bluebells

Kennet and Avon Canal

Lapwing

Sulphur knight

## Directions

From the Nature Discovery Centre, walk with the lake on your left. At the far corner cross a junction of tracks to go through a green gate. Continue along the track. At a 'private access' sign, turn right onto a small path under the electricity wires.

**1** Excavation of this area uncovered many flint tools from 10,000 years ago: tools for cutting vegetables, scraping animal skins, making holes and sawing.

Turn left at an information board and through the reedbeds until you reach the river and canal.

**2** Approximately 40 species of insect feed only on reeds. Look out for the bloody-nosed beetle that gets its name from emitting a blood-like substance from its mouth when it feels threatened.

At the canal towpath, turn right to go over a bridge. Pass Bull's Lock and cross the canal on the swing-bridge. Turn left onto the road and walk under the railway. Keep to the right along a track following the footpath sign until you come to a gravel processing plant on the left and a lake created from a disused gravel pit on the right.

**3** This lake attracts a wide range of birds, such as the little ringed plover, a summer visitor from Africa.

Continue on the track up the hill.

**4** Moving away from the river valley up a wooded escarpment, you might notice the ground is wet. This water seeps out of the ground at the junction of the London Clay and the overlying sands.

Turn into the car park for BBOWT Bowdown Woods Nature Reserve on your left. Take the path in the top corner of the car park and follow it up a slope between two banks until you reach a fence on your right. Follow the path along the fence.

**5** Notice the majestic, ancient oak trees. The bark of oak was once used in the tanning of leather and acorns were fed to pigs. There are over 300 species of fungi in Bowdown Woods; spot the yellow sulphur knight with its unpleasant gas-like smell. On a sunny summer's day look out for the distinctive gatekeeper butterfly.

## Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust 6-mile circular walk through the Living Landscape



Please note the walk is to be followed in an anti-clockwise direction.

The numbers on the map indicate points of interest along the way.

Don't forget that you can help look after wildlife by keeping your dog on a lead.

When you reach a T-junction, turn right on a tarmac path.

**6** The Old Bomb Site on the left of the path was used as a wartime munitions site. A military structure was demolished and the bricks left provide shelter for lizards, snakes and small mammals.

When you reach the car park, walk along the drive to the Bury's Bank Road. Cross the road onto Greenham Common.

**7** Look underfoot here, most of the pebbles are smooth rounded flints showing that they have been transported a distance in the great river systems that once covered the area.

Berkshire Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire  
wildlife TRUSTS

**KEY**

- BBOWT nature reserve
- Railway Station
- Parking

Our walk takes you left, but you might detour ahead to the old Airfield Control Tower.

**7a** Near the control tower is a map and information about the Common. The present tower was built in 1951 and updated in the 1980s. Alongside is a mosaic created by an artist at New Greenham Arts with local people in 2005.

Turn left onto a path that initially runs parallel to the road. Continue past a tall white pole to the gravel path and turn left towards Crookham Common.

**8** You are parallel to the old runway: 3,660 m in length. In 1995 the 1.25 million tonnes of concrete was removed, and some reused for the Newbury by-pass. You may see the Exmoor ponies grazing; they are now rare and are bred on the Common to help conserve the breed.

After some distance, take the left fork and follow this path as it runs alongside the road.

**9** The area of lakes on your right was re-landscaped to create 'micro-climates'; different facing slopes, drier or damper areas to give varied conditions for wildlife. There are just three or four pairs of lapwings breeding on the Common, but you may see one circling over the pools. The name describes its wavering flight.

Keep the lakes on your right until you come to a gate on your left. Cross the road and down the gravel bridleway. Turn left at the metalled track and cross the Kennet River to Chamberhouse Farm.

**10** The American signal crayfish, an escapee from crayfish farms, is now very common in the river; unfortunately, it carries a disease that has almost wiped out the native white-clawed crayfish. Evidence of late Bronze Age activity has been found at Chamberhouse Farm; it is also reputed to have been the site of a late medieval castle.

Continue ahead between the hedges to the canal.

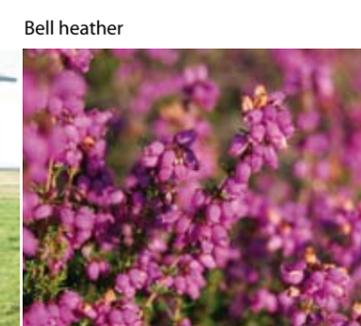
**11** The swing bridge crosses a mile-long straight of the canal built to by-pass the winding River Kennet. In June notice the tall, prolific hemlock water dropwort and look out for the bright blue kingfisher as it flies low over the canal.

Our walk turns left on the towpath, but you might detour right along the towpath to Monkey Marsh lock.

**11a** This has been restored as an old traditional 'turf-sided' lock using modern materials. South of the lock, there is a 'pillbox', a Second World War defence structure.

Head back along the towpath to the next lock, Widmead. Just after, cross a stile away from the canal. Cross the railway being extremely careful and walk straight ahead back to the Centre where our walk ends.

Design and production: Naturebureau, Newbury, www.naturebureau.co.uk



Gatekeeper butterfly

Greenham mosaic

Bell heather

Autumn lady's-tresses

Bloody-nosed beetle

Hemlock water dropwort