

Futurescapes



Upper Thames River Valleys

An amazing place for people and for wildlife

Travel the world and you will experience few things more evocative and romantic than a meadow in spring filled with the heady bubbling of curlews, tumbling lapwings and “drumming” snipe. Welcome to the Upper Thames River Valleys, the tributaries of the River Thames that weave through Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Throughout the Futurescape area we are promoting the creation and restoration of vital wetland habitats, improving water quality and increasing community involvement in conservation. A whole host of wildlife will reap the benefits of this landscape-scale work, including water voles, otters, dragonflies, butterflies, wetland plants and wading birds, such as lapwings, redshanks, snipe and curlews. But people will benefit too. Local communities will have more opportunities to experience the natural world and the precious species that have long been absent from many parts of this county.

We’re working together with the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to link our nature reserves with farming communities across the Upper Thames catchments. The area includes our Otmoor nature reserve on the River Ray near Beckley, BBOWT’s Upper Ray Meadows nature reserve on the River Ray near Grendon Underwood and Chimney Meadows nature reserve on the River Thames near Bampton. Farmers and landowners outside these reserves are being offered specialist advice to help integrate conservation with production.

Our work so far

Relationships with local farmers are central to our vision for the Upper Thames River Valleys. Over the years we have helped many farmers to provide the ideal conditions for breeding waders, such as lapwings and curlews. With support from us and Natural England, a number of farmers have successfully applied for Higher Level Stewardship and have created or enhanced wet grassland areas on their farms. At present, we’re working with over 50 farmers to aid the creation and management of wet meadows and shallow pools. This work is already showing positive results with five areas becoming important for breeding curlews. In the Otmoor basin, breeding snipe numbers reached a record 14 pairs in 2013 – a remarkable achievement.

We’re also working closely with local authorities, the Environment Agency and Natural England to benefit all kinds of wildlife. We are promoting restorations to priority habitat, such as reedbeds, after mineral extraction through work with the County Council and other operators.

The RSPB and BBOWT are both excited by our joint working. Steve Holliday, RSPB Midlands Director, said: “The sight of tumbling lapwings and the bubbling calls of curlews are magical experiences – nature wrapping its arms around you and lifting your heart. It is exciting to be forging such an effective, long-term relationship between the RSPB, BBOWT, farmers and the community for the future good of wildlife, the landscape and the quality of our lives”.



Sentinel of the marshes

Long bright red legs, a nervous disposition and piercing, ringing alarm calls... it is easy to see why redshanks have been named the sentinels of the marshes. And when it comes to traditional names, redshanks steal the show. Try ebb cock, watchdog of the marshes and red-legged horseman. Sadly, the marshes have fallen silent as land has been drained, developments have spread and chemicals deteriorated water quality. But there is good news. Thanks to farmers, landowners and the RSPB, breeding redshanks are increasing, with over 50 pairs recorded in 2013. Together with farmers we are creating more wetland homes for this beautiful bird.



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“ The local RSPB team are good neighbours. We benefit from their expertise to enhance the environmental management of our grassland farm. Even in stunning landscapes, farming remains a business. Working together and sharing our skills adds value for everyone.”

J Smith & J Dixon Farm Partnership, Noke, Oxfordshire

What's next?

We want to continue helping nature to flourish throughout the Upper Thames River Valleys and beyond. We hope to maintain the relationships formed with key partners and promote the importance of wildlife to the area and its communities.

We plan to work alongside the Environment Agency to achieve the desired outcomes of the Water Framework Directive – good quantities of clean, healthy water flowing through the area. We will explore the links between our nature conservation work and future urban development. And, importantly, we will involve people in the local communities to increase their awareness and appreciation of their stunning natural surroundings.

Get in touch

We want to hear your ideas about how we can work together to make the Upper Thames River Valleys even better for people and wildlife.

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The Upper Thames River Valleys Futurescapes project is kindly supported by:



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The RSPB is a member of BirdLife International, a partnership of conservation organisations working to give nature a home around the world