Newsletter - Winter 2025/26

Welcome to the inaugural Letcombe Brook Project e-newsletter! We will be bringing you a quarterly round-up of news, activities and seasonal highlights. We hope you enjoy it!

Winter volunteering

Our hardy group of practical volunteers have been focussed on a new site this winter: Sharland Close, in Grove. Over two mornings, we cleared back stands of vegetation to let more light into the brook and allow local people to see it! We are looking forward to seeing what bankside and in-channel plants take advantage of the light; we hope to see species such as water forget-me-not, watercress and maybe even water crowfoot getting a foothold.



Sharland Close, at the start of the work party …



… and afterwards

We also joined forces with the Letcombes Conservation Group to carry out the annual meadow cut and rake at Millennium Green in Letcombe Regis. This is a gem of a site, well worth a visit both for its wildflower display and the Letcombe Brook running clean and clear along its western boundary.





Millennium Green, Letcombe Regis

A big thank you, as ever, to all our volunteers, whether they are helping with practical tasks, carrying out water quality checks or monitoring some of the Letcombe Brook's smallest inhabitants: the riverflies. If you would be interested in joining us as a volunteer or Trustee, please get in touch. Work parties currently take place on the morning of the first and third Thursday of the month.

Future volunteering opportunities

Riverfly Monitoring – can you help?

We need more volunteers to help us conduct monthly health checks on the Letcombe Brook. Riverflies – that is, the larval phase of species such as the mayfly – are key indicators of water quality and river health, and monitoring their populations is an excellent way to detect pollution and other issues. Surveyors are allocated a site of their own to visit once a month, with full training on the sampling technique and data input being provided through a certified training course. If you like the idea of donning waders and gaining a deeper understanding of your local river, please get in touch!

Riverfly Monitoring Initiative training day – Thursday 23rd April, 9:30-4.00 at Old Mill Hall, Grove. The day includes classroom sessions to become familiar with different riverflies, and practical sessions out on the brook, practicing the sampling technique (called 'kick-sampling'). Guaranteed to be a lot of fun! To register, please email projectadmin@letcombebrook.org.uk by **Weds 11th March** at the latest.

Interested, but want to find out more before committing? Come along to our taster session on Saturday 7th March, from 10-12 at Marygreen, Grove. Meet the Letcombe Brook Project team to ask questions, meet some riverflies and have a go at sampling – come prepared to try out some waders! This is a drop-in session; no need to book.

Seasonal wildlife highlights

While winter is a tough season for most, the constant conditions of chalk streams mean they are not subject to quite the same level of seasonal change. However, 2025 was an exceptionally dry year and the winter rain has been absolutely vital, giving a slight increase in water levels and enabling the chalk aquifer to begin to refill.

If you're a brown trout, winter is the time for spawning. Our Letcombe Brook brown trout have been more visible lately, with females busy creating nests called redds in the gravel bed, into which they will lay their eggs. If you're walking by the brook, look out for small patches in shallow water where the gravel bed looks lighter and cleaner – these could well be redds.



Brown trout in Letcombe Brook



A trout redd

Over on the Letcombe Brook Project Facebook Group there were some spectacular photos of kingfishers in December and January, with frequent sightings at the cress beds in Letcombe Bassett. Other bird sightings have included: chiffchaffs, grey wagtails, goldcrests, great spotted woodpeckers, redwings, robins, teal, blackcaps, long-tailed tits, kestrels, dunnocks, blue tits, red kites, Canada geese and song thrush.

Do join the 'Letcombe Brook Project' Facebook group facebook.com/groups/261124248200733/, for more fantastic photographs of local wildlife.

News

Fixed Point Photography Challenge 2026

Several of you responded to our Fixed-Point Photography Challenge for 2026 – thank you! While we have lots of wonderful photos of the Letcombe Brook's iconic species, we lack good quality photographs of the chalk stream habitat. To set this right, we asked volunteers to take pictures of the brook from the exact same place, once per month throughout 2026 - this is called Fixed Point Photography. We can't wait to share (next year) the resulting photos showing the changes throughout the seasons of 2026.

New Education and Outreach Officer



We are delighted to welcome **Cat Boaz** to the Letcombe Brook Project team as Education and Outreach Officer. Cat is a primary school teacher with a specialism in science, and will be leading on our education and outreach work over the next two years, thanks to funding from the Oxfordshire Community Foundation.

Project News

More information about LBP can be found on our website, including: an interactive map, brook history, steering group, projects, advice, volunteering and walking trail maps. We are grateful to several donors who contribute funding to help us to look after the Letcombe Brook. There is a PayPal donate button on our website for anyone wishing to make a donation to our ongoing work.

Our Vision

A clean, wildlife-rich, natural Letcombe Brook, enjoyed by all.

Our Mission

We protect, enhance and restore the brook and its natural processes, for wildlife and communities.

Contact

If you would prefer not to hear from us, you can unsubscribe from this newsletter at any time by replying with the word 'Unsubscribe'. If you have any queries, contact us at: projectadmin@letcombebrook.org.uk.

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