

PRESTWOOD NATURE ANNUAL REPORT 2006-07

Projects

1. Boug's Meadow

Regular work-parties of members have cleared much derelict elder from the copse area. 25 native trees and shrubs have been planted there. We are grateful to Sue White for donating five wild service trees. Planting of herbaceous plants was largely unsuccessful because of the colony of rabbits, but later planting of bluebell bulbs was more successful. The owners CDC have arranged for the cutting of the meadow area and removal of the cuttings on a regular basis. Two bales of hay from a National Trust meadow were laid down in August 2006 and raked up after trampling out the seeds. Many knapweed plants have appeared from this. The nettles in the meadow have been treated chemically this year, as it would have taken many years to get on top of them, and consideration is being given to similar treatment next year in the more sensitive areas by the stream and among the trees. More hay-meadow seed was put down at the end of August this year. We have liaised with the Misbourne school to plant a hedgerow inside the car-park fence in November 2007. Rotary Club of Great Missenden gave us £500 for a notice-board at the site and this was erected in August. We are grateful to Mark Pickard for making this and to Paul Moore for an original painting for the poster about the project. We consulted with the county archaeologists about any features that need preservation and we are consulting with the Chalk Streams Officer at the Chiltern Conservation Board about possible re-engineering of the stream to improve the flow (should it return). This would also involve liaison with the County Council, which owns the land adjacent to the field on the north side, and we are keeping them informed of our work. John Obee erected a bird-box on one of the larger trees and it was used by blue-tits this spring, although later attacked and damaged by a woodpecker. It is ironic that much conservation work is a battle with wildlife (rabbits, nettles, woodpeckers)! An article on the project was printed in the parish newsletter, *The Link*.

2. Angling Spring Wood

This year our work was dominated by the Forestry Commission's pilot project for a woodland audio trail, completed by July. This involved planning a route, commissioning carved posts from Malcolm Hildreth to mark interpretation points, advising on the audio messages and helping with the content of a leaflet. An joint application for funding for the management plan was submitted by the Chiltern Woodlands Group but was unsuccessful and another funder is now being tried. With the assistance of Ian Waller and many other volunteers, we cut down and extracted a good deal of laurel and started taking down the old rabbit-proof fences.

3. Collings Hanger Pond

We were commissioned by Great Missenden Parish Council to restore the pond by Wycombe Road opposite the farm, which we did with the help of volunteers, Ian Waller, Virginia Deradour and a hired digger from AJP. Although a good stretch of deep open water returned immediately, it remains to be seen whether there is any long-term benefit. It was used by frogs and the reeds have returned quickly.

4. Green Lane pond

Rubbish and fallen branches were cleared out this winter and some scrub cut back at the edges. Plants were introduced in the summer - bulrush, broad-leaved pondweed and bogbean - needed to try to improve the quality of the water, although we cannot be sure they will survive, given pollution from the road. The immediate results of clearance gave rise to appreciation by many local residents and by spawning frogs.

5. Community Orchard

A site on which we had agreement had to be abandoned at the last minute because of unforeseeable events beyond our control, which meant that we lost our successful bid for funding. Attempts to find another site have so far been unproductive.

6. Families and Children's Activities

Lesley Stoner & Gaye Pickard organised several popular events, mainly advertised through the two Prestwood schools, as details are usually not ready for our newsletter. These comprise a mixture of outdoor and indoor activities. A workshop for children and parents was organised at Great Missenden library in August, attended by 24 children.

7. Wildlife Gardening

Sue Devlin has agreed to take the lead on this, has written articles for some local newsletters, and is working on an advice leaflet on alternatives to peat. We are planning to start clearing waste-land at Sprinters Leisure Centre for a demonstration wildlife garden this autumn, and also to start trials using peatless compost. The Secretary was consulted about wildlife gardening at Moat Lane School, Prestwood, and contributed a number of options with an offer of PN support, but nothing has yet resulted.

Surveys, Monitoring and Management Advice

1. Hampden Bottom Farm

An existing pond, three former ponds and a chalk grassland slope were surveyed in order to draw up management plans for each. It is intended that these will be incorporated into the Stewardship plan for the farm.

2. Haypole Field

The Secretary continues to monitor this field. As a result of our describing the unusual plant community here, it is being considered as a potential County Wildlife Site. This would help confer a little more protection in case the ownership should change. The hedge from here to Nanfan Wood is similarly under consideration as a CWS.

3. Churchyards

We continue to advise on and assist with the management of Holy Trinity churchyard, Prestwood, in association with the current manager and PN member David Page. A visit was made to Great Hampden churchyard and assessment of their needs was also made. The manager here is another PN member Nic Heald. A letter was written to other churchyard managers in the area, so far without results.

4. Garden Wildlife Survey

An article based on this study has been published in *Chiltern News*, the Chiltern Society magazine. The survey has been extended by visits to some of the gardens in the survey and by studies of the three allotments in Prestwood. This will be written up this autumn. One of the PN Field Days was devoted to a tour of several of our members' gardens.

5. Liaison with County Wildlife Sites Officer

The Secretary has helped survey numerous local sites being considered as County (now Local) Wildlife Sites, with the officer Michelle Dublon. The sites are only designated on present quality (not potential) and the criteria are quite severe, so that it is unlikely that many will be added to the current list.

6. Butterfly transect

This continued for a second year after another training event in March. We now have 14 active participants, which is very healthy for the future. We hope that Chris Bartlett (Butterfly Conservation) will take over the running of this next year. Special searches for breeding sites for White-letter Hairstreak, Brown Hairstreak and Purple Emperor have not so far yielded any success but will continue in 2008.

7. Glow-worm monitoring

This summer a new monitoring scheme for glow-worms was introduced, modelled on the Essex scheme. So far two sites have been included - Picnic Site and a field at Hampden Bottom. This project is managed by Ian Taylor.

8. Pond monitoring

A form for monitoring and keeping a permanent record of local ponds has been devised and tested. Members can help us by filling in forms for ponds near them. Several ponds were surveyed this year - including Green Lane, Brickpits, Moat Lane, Prestwood Lodge School, Dennerhill and one near Mill Cottage in Prestwood. A special visit by several members of PN Council was made to Sheepwash Pond, where we are considering a major (and costly) restoration, for which we hope to apply for funding this autumn.

9. Woodland archaeology

Tony Marshall, Ian Taylor and Marilyn Fletcher have all been trained to carry out archaeological surveys in woods. Angling Spring, Atkins and Peterley have all been studied so far. The results can be fed into management plans in due course.

10. Old trees

George Lewis, Paul Moore and Tony Marshall continued to measure and photograph some of our oldest trees. A copy of our register was sent to the Special Trees Project at the Chilterns Conservation Board. One PN Field Day was devoted largely to measuring some splendid trees in Abbey Park, Great Missenden. It was agreed after discussion among the three of us that future work will largely take place in the context of the new integrated PN Plan (see below under Management: The Council). Letters of complaint were sent to Great Missenden Parish Council about the felling of trees at Buryfields, which met with a very apologetic response from certain councillors.

11. Hedges

No surveys have been made this year. The project will be resurrected in the context of new integrated action plan (see below under Management: The Council).

12. Other surveys

A number of opportunities have been taken to visit sites in our area that had not been surveyed recently to check on the survival of rare plants last recorded over 20 years ago. Some of this has been incorporated in PN Field Days, as it gives a useful focus to a collective event. Some of the plants seem to have disappeared, but a good number have been refound, although sometimes only just hanging on.

Management

1. The Council met 8 times since the last AGM. Ian Waller was co-opted to fill the vacant place. Revisiting the original action plan, it is currently considering a new integrated plan for clearer priorities in our work.

2. Financial matters

Arrangements for reclaiming tax via gift aid were made and a new subscription form designed by Jenny Smith. Arrangements were made for Ian Mead to inspect the annual accounts prepared by Fiona Grant.

3. Risk assessments

Risk assessment sheets have been prepared by Joy Mead for use in relation to work-parties and field trips. These should soon be in general use.

4. Newsletter

Val Marshall edited three newsletters over the year, having settled on a layout of two colour pages and 10 black-and-white on recycled paper, within our budget. The last two issues were printed by David Page and we hope this arrangement will continue.

5. Membership

Membership has risen slightly over the year to 128 adults and 23 children. This has been achieved without any need for a recruitment drive or special publicity. The membership is, however, concentrated in Prestwood and we would have to make more effort to expand our geographical coverage to the rest of our area.

Other issues

1. Liaison with Farmers

The Prestwood Forum for Farming & the Countryside continues to meet 2/3 times a year and is useful for keeping in touch. Two farm visits this year were very well attended, with hundreds coming to Hampden Bottom Farm Open Day, when The Secretary showed visitors some of the wildlife, and about 40 coming to the guided walk around Collings Hanger Farm. There was also a special bat walk at Ninneywood Farm open to the public.

2. Liaison with Chilterns Conservation Board

Separate tours of some of our interesting local sites were conducted for two officers of the Board, Cath Daley and Tracy Adams, keeping them informed of what we are doing.

3. Liaison with Parish Councils

We were invited to make a presentation to Great Missenden Parish Council about their environmental responsibilities and conducting an environmental audit. The Council commissioned PN to restore the pond at Collings Hanger. As a result of this, Little Missenden Parish Council has asked for advice on Holmer Green pond.

4. Liaison with Great Missenden & Prestwood Revitalisation Group

So far Stella Watts-Moore has represented us on this group, which is a good way of getting through to some of the more important local movers and shakers. In future we intend to ensure that at least one member of the PN Council attends each meeting.

5. Liaison with County Biodiversity Action Plan

The appointment of the county's first Biodiversity Officer and plans for prioritising areas covered by the plan led to a major consultation exercise. Contributions by Tony Marshall, John Obee and Lesley Stoner led to the designation of PN's catchment as a priority area, because of its linkage to other priority areas and the potential generated by co-operative landowners and an active conservation group.

6. Pond restoration

While some of our work has been productive (eg Moat Lane), other ponds appear to be beyond help. We are devising a systematic way of prioritising ponds, not being wholly reactive to public concerns. (See Pond Monitoring above.)

7. Longfield Wood

The owner of this wood recently passed away and the executors may be willing to sell. The wood is important for a number of rare plants and creatures - it is one of the best ancient woodlands in the centre of our area. Unsuccessful attempts have been made to find a major body willing to work with us in trying to acquire the wood for conservation. (Most conservation bodies are fully stretched at the moment.) We continue to try to interest other bodies, as the price is beyond our means as a small local group.

8. Bats

With the new bat detector a few surveys have been undertaken, but with little success apart from the ubiquitous common pipistrelle, hampered by bad weather.

9. Reptiles and Amphibians

Several PN members (Tony & Val Marshall, Chris Bartlett) took the lead in setting up a county group for reptiles and amphibians (BucksARG), part of a national network of such groups. We have organised two field trips in our area, one to Deep Mill and the other to Haleacre Wood. The above members and also Peter Daltry & George Lewis contributed to a national survey based on random 1km squares, surveying areas at Speen, Denner Hill and Hughenden. The group has a licence for surveying great crested newts and two of us carried out a survey of newts (trapped?) in the drains of a house in Hotley Bottom Lane, Prestwood. The group obtained funding for two ponding nets and two torching lamps. These are held by PN and available for our own work when not in use elsewhere.

10. Birds

John Obee has been carrying out systematic searches for birds at selected sites. These records are added to the database kept by Tony Marshall (see 16 below).

11. Japanese knotweed

We have a list of sites where this plant has a hold. It is intended to monitor the extent of each of these colonies in future. It is only proposed to take action if there are signs that they are enlarging, as eradication is difficult, long-term, costly and time-consuming.

12. Cockpit Hole

The Great Kingshill Residents Association has drawn up proposals to improve this "pond" and is seeking funding of over £40,000. The Secretary commented on the plans but is not persuaded as to their viability. We continue to keep in touch with progress.

13. "The Source"

A proposal for a community newspaper for the HP16 area has been taken forward and due to have its first issue in September. We have kept up close liaison with this initiative, as it could form a good means of publicity across much of our area. The Secretary is acting as the newspaper's environmental correspondent.

14. Road verges

The county council plans for road verge nature reserves seems to have run into the ground, despite representations by us to officials and elected representatives. Several members of PN had been trained as road verge reserve wardens - Helen Bartington, Chris Jolly, Tony Marshall, Joy & Ian Mead, & John Obee. We had also been supplied with road-signs and yellow jackets - which have come in useful for roadside pond work!

15. BOATs (By-ways Open to All Traffic)

Applications by the Trailriders Federation to open up bridleways to motor vehicles continue to cause concern at Gypsy Lane, Great Missenden, and Cobblershill. Marilyn Fletcher has put a lot of work into combating their latest appeal.

16. Wildlife records

Members continually report interesting sightings to The Secretary and many of these are included in our newsletter. The list of known species in the area is continually increasing and now comprises 822 plants, 56 mosses and lichens, 409 fungi, 74 molluscs, 1,806 insects (including 165 bugs, 446 beetles, 330 flies, 662 butterflies and moths, and 154 bees, wasps etc), 9 amphibians and reptiles, 112 birds, 32 mammals, and 140 other orders. (3,461 in total.)

6 September 2007