



# PRESTWOOD NATURE ANNUAL REPORT 2012



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## **1. Angling Spring Wood (Project Leader Sue Graham)**

We have continued to remove holly, primarily from the area near Martinsend Lane and also keeping the re-growth down on the laurel in that area. I had hoped to make more progress with coppicing squirrel-damaged trees but we have not had enough volunteers to do this. Litter-picking is performed on a regular basis.

We removed metal rods and plastic guards from an area felled in the 1980s, this work continues.

The chicken wire fence bundles (from fence removal) remain to be removed by CDC contractors.

Despite the welcome appearance in 2011 - of Duke of Burgundy, White Letter Hairstreak and Purple Hairstreak - possibly as a result of improved management practice in the wood in recent years - these butterflies have not been seen by me in this location this year, perhaps a reflection of the weather not being favourable.

We are still awaiting new information boards to be installed by CDC at entry points to the wood.

Thanks to the volunteers who have helped in the woods including Prestwood Campus boys. It is always a pleasure to work alongside you.

## **2. Bougs Meadow (Project Leader John Obee)**

This has been yet another year of frequent work sessions. On seven Sunday mornings a dedicated team of typically a dozen people have scythed, raked, lopped, weeded, pruned, litter picked and munched flapjack! These group activities have been augmented throughout the year by the work of individuals unable to make the group work dates and by my own efforts.

The meadow is now predominantly grass as opposed to the original dock and nettle. We have a small but steadily growing population of wild flowers thanks to 'nature' and the work of Christine Hoskins who propagates plants at home and then brings them to Boug's . Tony Marshall will do a proper plant survey as soon as it is practical. During the year we had our first bit of contractual cutting done by Wycombe Rangers. The cuttings were raked and stacked by teachers and pupils from Prestwood Lodge School. They enjoyed the work and we hope they come back for more!

The car park hedge is really looking good. It is a good mixture of shrubs heavily laced with roses. Frequent pruning by volunteers is definitely getting results. The trees/hedging along the eastern boundary are also growing well. They have been in for two years and our wet summer has aided their growth. Also growing well are the nettles along the same boundary. Thanks to dedicated work by Hilary Tyrell they have been brought under control and now that I have the permission of the adjacent paddock' owner I can also scythe them from the 'outside'. The 'wagon road' inside the boundary is gradually being filled with ground cover plants which are replacing what was a man high nettle forest.

The copse is now much thinner and lighter. We have removed most of the once predominant elder. In July a large piece of the tallest tree on the copse, an ash came down in a storm. Thanks to Ian Waller and his trusty chainsaw and a group of work session volunteers the tree has been made safe but we now have a very large pile of branches to get rid of somehow. The bed of the still -absent Misbourne is thick with various grasses which take a strong arm and a sharp scythe to bring under control. So what comes next? Well, we are going to do some more soil testing to see if our scything/raking efforts over the past five years have made any difference to the fertility. It was very high when we did the original pre- project test. Depending on the

results we may change our management strategy. Funds permitting we also hope to install a simple rustic table in front of our oak bench. This autumn we are set to receive some trees from The Woodland Trust to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. We will use these to fill any gaps in our two hedges and the copse.

More people are using the site for recreation and picnics. This is great and exactly what we want. It is very much a public amenity.

I would like to personally thank everyone who has helped me manage the site during this reporting year. It is hard but rewarding work. I enjoy listening to the birds when I am there working on my own and hope to see the grass snake again soon!

### **3. Butterfly Transect (Project Leader Sylvia Bennett)**

In 2011 I reported that we had a rather inclement start to the year! Sadly 2012 has been quite disastrous in terms of recording Butterfly activity. At times there was no need to step outside to realise that a Transect Walk would not be possible.

In this our seventh year we had thirteen volunteers ready to undertake the walk and at the time of going to print, ten Transect Walks have had to be abandoned because of the poor weather conditions. Inevitably the number of sightings has been dramatically low, with two actual Transect Walks revealing no sightings at all! With just three further Transect Walks to be undertaken when we would not expect to see a significant number of Butterflies, the numbers below demonstrate just how dramatic the weather has been on the Transect Walk this year.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total No Butterflies</b>
2011	1671
2012	948

The data collected is submitted to and forms part of the United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS). As Butterflies are uniquely placed amongst British terrestrial insects and other invertebrate groups to act as indicators of the state of the environment our continued involvement with UKBMS is of great importance.

### **4. Chalk grassland sites (Tony Marshall)**

**Hatches Bank** - Clearance of this chalk grassland site continued and the population of Chiltern gentian has exploded as a result.

**Little Stocking Meadow** - While previous work had increased the number of rare meadow clary plants from two (nearly extinct) to ten, we were unfortunately unable to carry out scrub clearance over the last winter because of weather conditions.

**Prestwood Picnic Site** - The Wycombe District Council Woodland Service gained funding to install a stock fence. It is now hoped to put sheep on this site in the winter to keep the dogwood down. The Chiltern Society has also offered to help with volunteer support.

This site has been well worth the effort over the years, the display of wild flowers this summer being one of the best.

## **5. Glow Worm Transect (Project Leader Fiona Waller)**

Prestwood Nature carries out two areas for monitoring glow worms, Hampden Bottom Farm and Prestwood Picnic Site. The transects are completed by Ian Taylor at the Picnic Site and Fiona Waller at Hampden Bottom,

With unusual weather this year the number of transects and their timings has been atypical. The transect at Hampden Bottom Farm this year had a slight deviation due to the crops being grown in one of the fields that made it difficult to access the wood side path. However the main transect through the chalk grassland, where the majority of identifications occur, was unchanged.

This year the first walk was not carried out until 26 June when two glowing females were spotted in the shorter areas of grass at the top of the field. The same evening plume moths were out in abundance and Pipistrelle bats were also noted. A few days later, following further rain, another two glow worms were observed in different locations. A walk at 10:00pm on 17<sup>th</sup> July was the first occasion of >24hrs dry weather in 2 weeks. Eleven glow worms were identified and plume moths and bats were also observed. On a walk with the PN committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> July a record 15 glow worms were identified across the whole route. The higher number recorded no doubt partly due to an increase in pairs of eyes! About 10 days later a walk only identified 1 glow worm. Overall this is an improvement in the numbers found here last year.

There were 10 visits to the Picnic site this year and in total 20 glow worms were identified. There will be more detail about the transects in our next Newsletter.

## **6. Hedges and Trees (Project Leader Vanessa Rickett)**

Work has progressed very slowly. One more person has been trained to carry out surveys bringing the number in our team up to 6.

## **7. Kiln Common Orchard (Project Leader Sue Graham/Lesley Stoner)**

PN council decided (on professional advice) that for the next 5 years the priority is to promote the establishment of the trees. To this end we shall keep the grass around the trees short, so as to reduce competition for nutrients and water. Once the trees are firmly established having wildflowers in amongst the trees should not pose a problem. We will be able to have both wildflowers and orchard, just not yet. The council continues to discuss mowing regimens.

Mulch mats and manure/compost have been put around the trees. This work continues. Two replacement trees for those that have died (Merton Glory and Nimble Dick) have been planted. Other trees that are not thriving have been noted and their growth will be monitored, with a view to possible replacement. Several trees have put on good growth this year.

The wet summer was helpful in that we did not have to water the trees, a prospect which was of concern during the warm weather in spring and the hosepipe ban.

The replacement plastic mesh tree guards have been successful though abrasion in windy weather is a problem which we are addressing.

Due to time-planning constraints we will hold work parties at short notice when time allows, notifying those interested in this project by email or phone.

## **8. Ladybird Monitoring (Project Leader Tony Marshall)**

This continues and is reported annually in the PN Newsletter. More volunteers to survey their gardens would be welcome.

## **9. Living Tapestry (Project Leaders Lesley Stoner/Ian Waller)**

Little progress has been made on this project. Talks continue with the Chiltern Society as reported last year. Progress will depend on whether more support becomes available from members.

## **10. Ponds (Project Leader Tony Marshall)**

Work was carried out in October 2011 at Kiln Corner Pond, Moat Lane, Prestwood. We could have done with more volunteers, so only half the pond was opened up. Another session was planned for the 2012 but this is likely to have to be postponed to 2013 because of high water levels.

## **11. Sheepwash Pond (Project Leader Fiona Grant)**

In November 2011 we held an event at Sheepwash which was a very short session collecting litter from the pond and the grass area, checking the bird and bat boxes were still in good condition and a little tidying up and trimming of some of the ash and holly stumps which continue to send out shoots. It was mostly a social occasion to catch up with each other and residents who often help out at this site. We did, however take the opportunity to obtain feedback from local residents, passersby and helpers as to what they wanted from the pond now that it was more established.

On average, those questioned visited the site once a week mostly to look at the site in general, some to look specifically for wild flowers, birds, insects and frogs / newts and then others just as part of a walk either with or without a dog. There was an equal number of people who wanted the site to have some minimal maintenance and those who wished it to be a bit tidier understanding that this may impact upon the wildlife. No-one questioned wanted the site as a well maintained area with formal plantings.

There was a desire to have more notices or information at the site and to be able to read about what was happening at the site. Opinion about a picnic table was divided between being great to encourage families but negative in attracting teenagers to loiter here. Organised events such as pond dipping were also suggested as activities that would be attended by adults with children / grandchildren.

In response to this we have held one pond dipping event which was attended by the Brownies and tree measure exercise was also carried out for them. The event was a great success and we plan to repeat this for other groups next year.

The regular mowing and strimming on the site continues despite repeated requests for this not to happen. It is difficult to prevent happening and we have decided that there is little point in pursuing this any further although we have informed the Parish Council. As a result there is no improvement in the range or numbers of wild flowers being found at the site. Frogs and newts, however, have done well and seem to have escaped the strimmer.

**The upside of this over maintenance is that the site is used by the community for recreation and anecdotal evidence indicates it is considered to be one of the few pleasant places to sit quietly in Prestwood.**

Minor repairs have been made to the dipping platform partially as a result of minor vandalism and partly general wear. Overall the platform is still in good condition and the supports appear satisfactory.

## **12. Surveying (Project Leader Tony Marshall)**

Most plans were put on hold in 2012 because of the persistently poor weather, but a survey of Westrick Walk, Prestwood, and its important line of ancient trees resulted in management suggestions being submitted to the residents and getting a surprising amount of support. Discussions continue and it is hoped that this site can be preserved and improved. The site is particularly sensitive because of the proximity of the trees to houses. Some road verges were surveyed and attempts are being made to get the council to take conservation into account in its grass-cutting plans (an uphill job this!).

## **13. White-letter Hairstreak Hedges (Project Leader Sylvia Bennett)**

Liaison has continued with the church and more elms are to be ordered and planted this autumn.

## **14. Wildlife Garden (Project Leader Lesley Stoner)**

The garden has matured well this year, particularly because of the rain. There is even a frog in the small pond. It does however; require regular attention, almost on a weekly basis in the summer.

Rather than work parties booked well in advance it is considered easier to arrange sessions informally at fairly short notice and some members are even working there alone when they have the time. More volunteers are needed for this to keep the garden looking attractive and encourage others.

If more volunteers come forward it will make it easier to use the garden as an educational tool for children next year. Otherwise, its future is uncertain.

## **15. Membership**

There are now 88 Memberships comprising 161 Adults and 16 children; 2 New memberships this year comprising 3 adults; 6 households did not renew their memberships comprising 15 adults and 4 children.