



# PRESTWOOD NATURE ANNUAL REPORT 2014



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## **1. Angling Spring Wood (Project Leaders Hilary Tyrrell and Keith Tyrrell,**

There has been discussion with Chiltern District Council and Chiltern Woodland project about the number of trees removed at the beginning of the year and why. Prestwood Nature's concerns have been relayed about the deep ruts left by the contractors and the possible loss of rare fungal colonies. The Chiltern District Council has said that when the management plan for the woods is reviewed next year they will ensure that Prestwood Nature is involved and members' concerns addressed.

There have been 4 work parties at the woods this year, mainly involving scrub removal and litter picking. Work parties are now being led by Hilary Tyrrell but comments or questions on the woods should come to the Secretary via the website admin in-box to be dealt with. Sessions are held during the week to try and attract people who are not working, however, turn-out is not generally high, with usually only the same 4 to 6 people attending. Despite this, a lot is achieved and the work parties are friendly. Scrub removal of holly and laurel is important to encourage growth of plants under the canopy. Also, thinning some of the trees is hoped to encourage growth of flowers in particular, and so encourage pollinators and birds.

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

At the end of my 2013 report I said it would be good if The Misbourne was to come back again in 2014. Its 2013 visit was the first for many years. Well, it returned in the spring and only stopped flowing a few days ago after an excellent period of several months. During this time it flowed very strongly and supported a lot of aquatic plants, ducks and moorhens. When the river is present the scenic quality of the whole site is greatly enhanced!

We have had a typically busy year maintaining the meadow. Last autumn our work party cleared out the copse, planted more hedging along the public footpath and generally cleared up ready for the onset of winter. (It's a good feeling when I hang up my scythe for a few months!) During the winter we just keep a watching brief on the site, clearing up litter and making sure no significant trees have come down.

Spring came at the end of a particularly wet winter. This was good for the autumn plantings -other plantings over the years have suffered from drought and unless the river is flowing we have no access to sensible quantities of water. There is a limit to the number of watering cans you can carry from the toilet block in the car park. The spring flowers were a delight. They are slowly spreading along the wagon road and across the floor of the copse. In the meadow we had a good show of mixed flowers along the edge of the copse and cowslips were dotted everywhere. We had our first contractor cut in late April with an attendant work party. From then on it has been a normal growing, cutting, scything, pruning, lopping and raking season.

In June we held a 'summer event' on site with the intention of showing people our work in pursuit of a future flower meadow and Boug's history/points of interest . Our hard preparatory work was not rewarded. It absolutely poured with rain and we were left to huddle under a soggy gazebo. Efforts at dipping in the river did however reveal signs of aquatic life including a young newt.

One feature of the year has been the increasing number of people using the site as an amenity. From meeting folk during my regular work stints I have been made aware that it is now a popular haunt of several local elderly people who use it as a quiet haven from the bustle of life. Members of the nearby church use the seat under the alders for contemplation and relaxation and judging by the piles of dog poo it is used by several dog owners to exercise their pets!

We will have a third, and last, contractor cut in September followed by an autumn general work party before putting the tools away for another year. I guess a summary of 2014 is slow progress towards the desired flower meadow but significant improvement in the public awareness of what we are trying to achieve with the overall site and an easing of the maintenance work involved.

I take this opportunity to thank the Boug's Meadow Volunteers who frequently give their time and effort on this long term project and my wife Valerie for the flapjack and coffee which keeps us going!

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

Prestwood Nature is now entering its ninth year as a contributor to the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS) and after a shaky start to 2012, all was redeemed in 2013. It is pleasing to report that the total number of sightings in 2014, whilst not exceeding our first recordings in 2006 of 3201, will come a very close second. The mild winter may have contributed to the over-wintering of some butterfly species enabling us to see some species much earlier than expected.

We were again fortunate to have a team of thirteen volunteers to walk the Transect with only two lost weeks when the Transect was not walked. As the weeks progressed some sections of the Transect became overgrown, with evidence of a shaky stile making the walk a little challenging at times.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Wk 22</b>	<b>Annual Total</b>
2011	1639	1671
2012	884	982
2013	2318	2348
2014	2700	2752*

\*Projected

Each year the Meadow Brown Butterflies top the charts with the largest number of sightings and as at week 22 of the Transect, this year has been no exception with 1078 recorded, followed by the Ringlet (362), Common Blue (278), Marbled White (189) and Hedge Brown (164).

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

Little Stocking Meadow - Although we had arranged for sheep grazing at this site, difficulties arose over the need to upgrade the fencing. With various bodies involved with this split-ownership site it is extraordinarily difficult to resolve even the simplest matter, so we have not been able to continue our work here. It seems very likely now that meadow clary will become extinct in the county.

Prestwood Picnic Site - Sheep from Hampden Bottom Farm were put on for several weeks last autumn and this seems to have been successful.

Plant Protection Project - Three volunteers, George Lewis, John Obee and Tony Marshall, successfully protected orchids from deer and human damage at three sites - Stonygreen Bank, Great Missenden Cemetery, and Prestwood Picnic Site.

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

The Glow worm transect at Hampden Bottom Farm was undertaken on 5 occasions from early June until end of August. This year has been quite similar to last year's disappointing observations with only very low numbers being observed over the 1km transect. The transect is generally undertaken on moonless or overcast nights when possible, from about 10:30pm until 11:30pm. With the successes recorded on the butterfly transect I had been hopeful in seeing far greater numbers. In previous years I have established the locations where I am liable to spy the glowing bodies and often it's in the areas with shorter grass. However this year when I did find them it was in longer grassy areas. It will be interesting to hear of the results from other local sites as well as the national picture so see how we compare.

## **6. Hedges and Trees (Project Leaders Tony Marshall and Val Marshall)**

Tony Marshall and Val Marshall have now taken over the reins of this project and will be kick-starting it again in 2015. New procedures and recording forms have been developed and tested to make the task as enjoyable as possible for volunteers and ensure the results have a practical use both for PN's own conservation work and to inform local authority planning decisions. Training for new volunteers will take place in Spring 2015. The data-base of records has been consolidated into a single spread sheet.

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

Some trees continue to do well but not all. Bernwode nurseries have been contacted at the time of writing for advice on pruning and also care generally. It is obviously important to keep the grass down but this is labour intensive and/or expensive if someone is employed to do it (£100 to cut with a reciprocal mower if the grass is long). The Committee is conscious that not all members sponsored a tree and so are reluctant to spend this amount on an annual basis. Although Ian Waller has cut the grass free of charge in the past, we feel that we can't keep asking him to do it as he is a very busy farmer! We would also like to replace the signs with tags with the same wording on them as they are proving to be too fragile.

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

This has been conducted for six years now, although this period has coincided with an all-time low in ladybird numbers, which limits the viability of the project. It has been useful, however, in documenting the development of populations of the alien harlequin ladybird. It will be difficult to maintain the enthusiasm of volunteers if numbers do not pick up in the next year or so, but if populations do increase again we shall have uniquely valuable data for showing how this happens.

## **9. Membership (Membership Secretary)**

An intensive membership drive was carried out this year with leaflets delivered to nearly 4000 houses in Prestwood and Little Kingshill. Posters have been displayed throughout the area in the hope of raising awareness of the Society and what it stands for. This resulted in 18 new members. Current membership numbers are as follows 83 households with 149 Adults and 11 Children.

## **10. Sheepwash Pond (Project Leader Fiona Waller)**

In November 2013 we were assisted by Christine Breden of the Chiltern Society and some of their regular volunteers in cleaning out a lot of overgrown plants at Sheepwash Pond. It was a long day and by all accounts, from those who got stuck in, one of the most demanding activities we have done. The up side of this was that the pond looked fantastic afterwards and the team had created some much needed space around the edges. There was a plan to do a little more in the spring but with the presence of so many early tadpoles and newts this has been postponed until Autumn / Winter 2014/15.

The wood-chip path was originally laid 5 years ago and was much reduced. Ian Waller donated a load of wood-chip, which, with the assistance of some of the residents from Honor Wood Close, was distributed down to the dipping platform giving it a fresh new look.

During the summer the path, hedges and grass have been maintained by a mix of committee members and residents all voluntarily lending their time to keep this site looking good. With gorse bushes and sycamore growing high, the view to the platform had become obscured and so this has been reduced by Sylvia and Mike Bennett. Sadly there has been a bit of vandalism of the dipping platform in early summer which was repaired, only to be broken again days later. This last incident is still to be fixed and hopefully the culprit will be dissuaded from repeating. Litter is a constant issue at the site which is disappointing but is kept under control by a number of good-hearted people.

We were made aware that the school were using the pond for dipping and nature studies and it's good to get regular feedback about the numbers of people who use the site. Following a roadside survey that we undertook in 2013, people expressed a desire for a picnic table at the site. To this end we have purchased a robust table made from recycled plastic which we hope will fulfil this need.

## **11. Social Events (Chairman)**

At the AGM in 2013 members were polled on the types of activities they would like the society to hold. Evening talks were commended by a significant number and so in May, we arrange for David Curry from Hertfordshire Orchard Initiative to talk to the society about planting, managing and enjoying community orchards. It was a successful and informative evening which also attracted new members.

At the end of May the chair and secretary gave a talk to the Abbeyfield community at Great Missenden. We discussed the work that the society had been involved with and also about the aims of the group and our projects. Many of the residents had moved to the area later in life and therefore were interested to hear about the history of the Chilterns Hills and how humans have influenced the landscape.

In June we held an open day at Boug's Meadow to explore the life in the Misbourne, uncover the archaeology of the site and show people how the site has developed from its once dock and nettle infested site. Whilst turnout was low, in most part due to particularly wet day, we did start to appreciate the numbers of people who are using the site. Some of the recreational uses were as a quite meditative location, for painting and reading and also just as an excuse to rest a while and look at nature from an easy stroll from the car park.

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

Tony and Val Marshall have continued searches for rare plants last recorded a long time ago. Although many have been lost because of habitat change, there have been some encouraging re-discoveries. In 2014 we started carrying in-depth surveying at Priestfield Arboretum, which has some unique qualities as a wildlife habitat. We now have a very substantial database of records for the area, which are regularly used to respond to queries. The plants data are now being compiled into a new Flora for the area (generally applicable to the Chilterns as a whole), which is being published serially on the PN website.

## **13. Website (Webmaster Frank Rickett)**

The new Prestwood Nature web site went into operation on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013.

The web site has been completely redesigned to give greater prominence to Prestwood Nature projects. Each of our current projects has one or more pages devoted to it describing the aims of the project, the progress so far and including pictures wherever possible. Many of the pages include a Google map showing the location of the site.

Pages from the old web site have been put together in a section called "Our Environment" and over the coming months we hope to update many of these pages, incorporating many more pictures. The "natural grasslands" page already has a photo gallery attached.

Current copies of the PN newsletter are still being made available to members only but past issues can now be read by everyone. They can be found in the "News / Newsletter archive" page. We have obtained an additional domain name and the web site can now be accessed at [www.prestwoodnature.org](http://www.prestwoodnature.org) in addition to the original name [www.prestwoodnature.org.uk](http://www.prestwoodnature.org.uk).

The web site is attracting between 250 and 300 visitors each month who, between them, are viewing an average of 1400 pages per month.

## **14. Wildlife Garden (Project Leader Tina Hillas)**

Volunteers have been doing quite a bit of weeding and tidying at the Wildlife Garden, especially at the beginning of the growing season. Come full summer, the borders were packed with a wonderful variety of colourful plants and there was much insect activity.

The grass has been kept short and the bench repaired and renovated so that it is now an inviting place to sit and meditate.