



# Prestwood Nature Annual Reports 2015



## Contents

1. Angling Spring Wood (Project Leaders Hilary Tyrrell & Keith Tyrrell)	2
2. Bogs' Meadow (Project Leader John Obee)	2
3. Butterfly Transect (Project Leader Sylvia Bennett)	3
4. Glow-worm Transect (Project Leader Ian Taylor)	3
5. Kiln Common Orchard (Project Leader Lesley Stoner)	4
6. Membership (Membership Secretary)	4
7. Pollinator Friendly Garden (Project Leader Tina Hillas)	4
8. Roving Plant Protection Team (Project Leader Tony Marshall)	4
9. Sheepwash Pond (Project Leader Fiona Waller)	4
10. Social Events (Vanessa Rickett, Membership Secretary)	5
11. Special Hedges and Trees (Project Leaders Tony Marshall & Val Marshall)	5
12. Surveying and Records (Project Leader Tony Marshall)	6
13. Website (Webmaster Frank Rickett)	6

## **1. Angling Spring Wood (Project Leaders Hilary Tyrrell & Keith Tyrrell)**

There have been many work parties over the past year working on removing the overgrown and encroaching holly and several large laurel bushes. This has allowed more light to filter through to the plants below resulting in a good show of bluebells. At the request from Chiltern Woodland Management Ragwort was removed from the log removal track and several other areas. These are poisonous to horses and the seeds spread readily. Work has continued in cutting back overhanging branches and nettles from the pathways. A few people have been involved in removing metal stakes that were originally used to support new saplings, but are now dangerous as the trees have grown up around them or they are protruding at knee level. This work does not come under "conservation" but woodland management, hence only a few persons carry out this work, which requires the use of bolt cutters. There are several hundred stakes to be removed and it will be an on-going project. Further work will continue to be under the guidance of Chiltern Woodland Management.

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

This has been another typical maintenance year down at Boug's with several work parties. We did not see a return of the river unfortunately. The winter and spring were unusually dry, so dry that the main meadow vegetation hardly needed its first contractor cut of the year. Never mind, we will hope to see the river flowing in 2016. Our efforts in the last 12 months have, as usual centred around controlling the growth of unwanted nettles, clearing up after contractor cutting and pruning hedges. The car park hedge is now so full and thick that our shears and secateurs are no longer man enough for the pruning task so we are in the process of purchasing a good quality hedge trimmer courtesy of a generous donation from the Great Missenden Revitalisation Group. They have been very supportive of our work at the meadow for several years now. The eastern (paddock) boundary hedge is composed of hedging plants and trees and light pruning has resulted in a pleasantly evolving green edge to our plot.

We have continued to thin out the elder from the copse and plant replacement trees, including silver birch and hazel. Two of the three copse nest boxes were used this spring, both by blue tits.

This autumn we will be planting a trial 18 square metre area with a mixture of meadow flowers and grasses. The preparation of the nettle and stone-filled ground has proved to be very arduous and particular thanks are due to David Wildman who has helped me to get everything ready for a late September sowing. The seed company have told us to expect some growth next year (assuming the seeds germinate!) but no flowers. They should come in 2017 by which time we plan to have more patches planted. We will also be planting some more trees this autumn which we will get free from the TCV Conservation Volunteers as part of a UK wide effort to green-up our countryside.

More members of the public are visiting the meadow now with a good mix of adults and children. The benches are very popular with elderly people looking for a bit of peace and quiet in the centre of the village. Unfortunately we did have two visits from a group of people who lit a bonfire but there was no lasting damage and the police are aware of our concerns.

So overall another uneventful but satisfying year at Boug's. Here's hoping for a return of the Misbourne, good flower/grass seed germination in our trial patch and plenty of (well behaved) visitors in 2016. As usual I take this opportunity to thank all the people that have helped me this year and on *their* behalf say how much we enjoyed Valerie's flapjack!

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

We are now in our tenth year as a contributor to the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKBMS). Over the years we have seen some dramatic lows (2012), but also some highs (2014). It is pleasing to report that the total number of sightings in 2014 exceeded our projected figure, but remained short of our first recordings in 2006 of 3201. It is felt that the mild winter may again 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 core team of volunteers to walk the Transect although one or two volunteers do drop out over the years and sadly we do not manage to recruit to the same level. Attempts to recruit volunteers have been made at various village events this year and it is hoped that new volunteers will undertake the Transect in 2016. To date only three weeks have been lost when the weather was not ideal to successfully complete the Transect.

In the past we have witnessed as the weeks progress that some sections of the Transect become overgrown and walkers were this year advised to take along a pair of secateurs as a precautionary measure. However, some excessive growth was swiftly dealt with by Tony and Val Marshall on one of their walks. All walkers were this year advised to formally record any hazards encountered whilst walking the Transect as part of our Health & Safety records and also to enable the information to be passed on to subsequent walkers. No reports of hazards have to-date been received. The offer of hi-viz jackets was made to walkers for those concerned about the short walk along the Hampden Road.

Year	Wk 22	Annual Total
2011	1639	1671
2012	884	982
2013	2318	2348
2014	2700	2786
2015	2772	2858*

\*projected

Each year, as expected, 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 1269 recorded (an increase over 2014), followed this year by Marbled White (507), the Ringlet (242), Gatekeeper (139). In 2014 the Common Blue numbers were record at 278, but in 2015 there has been a dramatic drop with only 51 sightings recorded.

### 4. Glow-worm Transect (Project Leader Ian Taylor)

Now that the 2015 glow-worm transect centred at the Picnic Site off Hampden Road is about to end, the results for the past two seasons can be reviewed and compared.

Both the 2014 and 2015 glow-worm transects have seen an improvement on the numbers of insects recorded in 2013. This was particularly gratifying as insects were once again recorded on the grass verge in the car park following the changes to the reserve a few years ago. However 2015 has been a record year with 27 glow-worms recorded to date. Surprisingly all were spotted during three consecutive transects which differs from previous seasons where insects tended to appear regularly throughout the season. However, one thing that can be reliably said about glow-worms is that each season is different, but at least 2015 has been a good year.

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

Mulching of all the trees last year gave most of them a burst of growth and about three-quarters of them are now doing quite well. They will never be big as they are on short root stocks. Many do not now require stakes although one or two of the pears collapse if not staked.

Two work parties have been held to scythe the grass which has also been mown once this year.

Wildflowers are being encouraged and some seeding will be done this Autumn including Yellow Rattle which parasitises and weakens grass.

Replacement of broken plaques with tags is still to be done.

## **6. Membership (Membership Secretary)**

Membership has remained steady this year with only 4 households failing to renew their subscriptions. With 6 new memberships our numbers are slowly climbing towards a hundred! At the time of writing this report we have 87 memberships comprising 153 members and 11 children.

## **7. Pollinator Friendly Garden (Project Leader Tina Hillas)**

The Prestwood Nature Garden on the allotments site in Greenlands Lane continues to be tended by a small group of volunteers, for the benefit of the community as a whole. Working parties took place this year in April, May, September and October. An abundance of colourful flowers attracted many pollinating insects throughout the summer. Thanks are due to Lesley Stoner for cutting the grass and maintaining the bench.

## **8. Roving Plant Protection Team (Project Leader Tony Marshall)**

Over a dozen uncommon plants are protected from rabbits, deer and "men with mowers" by caging each year. These include four species of orchid. Caging is only used when there is a distinct threat to the plants likely to lead to their loss unless protected. (Tony Marshall with the assistance of John Obee and George Lewis.)

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

The picnic table, which I mentioned in last year's report, was constructed and fixed in place at Sheepwash. We also added a commemorative plaque to the picnic table remembering Gaye Pickard, who was one of our committee members. There is also a small sign at the entrance to the site identifying that Prestwood Nature and volunteers maintain the site. After a brief incident of vandalism which damaged the dipping platform, Mike Locke carried out some final repairs and since then there have been no further issues. In February 2015 we had an event at Sheepwash to remove some of the reeds from around the pond. Our management plan for the site requires us to remove reeds in three areas in rotation. We try to complete this work before any amphibians start laying eggs on the plants. Around the edge of the pond we want to maintain the grass slightly longer as a habitat for insects and young frogs which we have seen in abundance in some years. Once again the hedge at the front of the site has been clipped by Sylvia Bennett and a few other willing volunteers during the year and we have kept the gorse and sycamore saplings trimmed so that the platform is visible from the road. Litter can be an issue on the site but there are several people that I know regularly visit and remove litter from the site, helping to keep it a pleasant place to visit. Certainly we have had several reports that the picnic table is being well used.

Visitor numbers appear to be good with adults, youths and children making regular visits. In July 2015 we held a summer event at Sheepwash which was well attended. We held pond dipping and mini-beast identification for some of the children who visited. Julie Hopton, who runs Nature's Jewels and is a committee member, provided the materials, imagination and skills to craft dragonflies with beautiful wings too which the children and their parents enjoyed. A few cakes and drinks helped to make this a nice event and for once we didn't have any rain!

What we did notice was that this year there were far fewer newts, frogs and other invertebrates. We are keen to establish if this is due to the numbers of duck / moorhen on the site, or if there is problem with the quality of the water or perhaps the way we are managing it. To investigate further we have commissioned Rod D'Ayala an ecologist and pond expert, to have a look at the site and we are currently awaiting his report. Hopefully we will be able to enhance the flora and fauna at the pond so that we can keep it as a refuge for the aquatic species which we have identified here and encourage a few more too!

## **10. Social Events (Vanessa Rickett, Membership Secretary)**

We have held a programme of talks throughout the year. At the 2014 AGM Allan Beechey, who leads the Chalk Streams Project for Chilterns Conservation Board, gave us a highly informative presentation on chalk streams in general with a focus on our local stream - the Misbourne.

Earlier this year we had the good fortune to obtain the services of a local speaker and national expert on glow-worms, John Tyler, to talk about these insects (not worms) in some detail. As a follow up to this talk a Creatures of the Night activity at Prestwood Picnic Site was held when we saw not only glow-worms but also night-flying moths and met Rosie the bat.

In September we had a talk by John Morris of the Chilterns Woodland Project (again part of the CCB) about Angling Spring Wood - its history and plans for its future. We are planning a walk in November to visit the wood with John to see how it is developing. This is important to PN as our team under the leadership of Hilary Tyrell are responsible for much of the maintenance in the wood.

We did not hold a major summer event this year. However the Hedleys once again opened their wonderful wildlife friendly garden to members. Julie Hopton led events for children at both Sheepwash Pond and Prestwood Picnic Site and also visited Moat Lane School to talk to children in the Reception Class.

## **11. Special Hedges and Trees (Project Leaders Tony Marshall & Val Marshall)**

Nine new volunteers have been trained and given areas to begin surveying for old hedges and trees, bringing our team up to 14. This has already resulted in the discovery of a national champion tree (Huntingdon Elm) that has survived Dutch elm disease and has been entered in the national Tree Register. In due course the locations of important hedgerows and trees will be routinely reported to local planning authorities.

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

Our record database continues to grow markedly every year from a combination of members' sightings, regular surveys of chosen sites, and searches to check the status of old records. We now have 33,190 records covering 5,715 species at over a thousand sites. The coverage for a single area is unprecedented and is useful for responding to queries, such as in relation to HS2 and its possible effects, or planning applications (eg that for building on land off Lodge Lane, Prestwood). Dozens of such queries are dealt with each year, so the existence of the database makes an important contribution to conservation in the area. It is also planned to make the data publicly available by means of reports on different groups of species. The first of these (plants) is already in the process of preparation as "The Ecological Flora of the Chilterns" available on-line at the PN website. 21 sections out of a projected 49 on plants are already published and these are regularly updated to reflect new information.

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

A major addition to the Prestwood Nature web site has been made this year with the publication of Tony Marshall's book "The Ecological Flora of the Central Chilterns". When finished, the book will contain 46 chapters describing every plant that has been recorded in our area of the Chiltern Hills. The first 17 chapters have already been published and are available for anyone to download free of charge from the web site.

We have also set up a search facility so that people can enter a plant name or part of the name and search the index to locate the section where the plant is described.

One of the most frequently visited pages on the web site is the Events page. This is kept up to date regularly by Vanessa Rickett who enters details of all future events on a Google calendar and they automatically become visible to everyone looking at our Events page. We also publicise from time to time important events held locally by other bodies that would be of interest to PN members.

It is very gratifying that many people are using the web site. We are getting on average over 50 visitors per day.