



# Prestwood Nature Annual Reports 2021



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## 1. Membership

Household membership (Family and individual subscribers) has increased slightly from last year. The breakdown of membership is given in the table below.

Category	2021	2020	2019
Total Households	93	84	92
Total Adults	159	149	162
Total Children	115	11	17

The Facebook page is receiving a growing level of engagement, with 293 followers.

The annual membership subscription was £8 per household for the 2021 calendar year and will remain at this level for 2022.

*Helen Mathews*

## 2. Events

Covid regulations have been in force for much of the year so we have not been able to run our usual walks and talks programme.

Helen Mathews led a walk through Angling Spring Wood starting and finishing at Boug's Meadow which gave a chance for the volunteers to show off the wildflowers and Tony Marshall's annual fungus foray will run in October.

We have been able to hold two talks on line - Karen van Oostrum showed us how to make the most of our countryside and introduce children to nature. John Catton talked to us about bumblebees and was also able to demonstrate at National Meadow Day at Boug's.

Hopefully for Martin Harvey's talk on the Beauty of Flies at the AGM we may be able to meet in the Village Hall.

We look forward to being able to get back to our normal programme in 2022.

*Vanessa Rickett*

### 3. Butterfly Transect

Prestwood Nature has organised a butterfly transect every year since 2006. This is a defined route of 4km which is walked one day a week from the beginning of April to the end of September. All results are submitted to the [UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme](#) organised by Butterfly Conservation.

Requests for new volunteers placed in local newsletters and papers early in 2021 resulted in an excellent response. However, as we were still subject to significant restrictions due to Covid-19, training sessions were delayed and then had to be conducted under the rule of six. Ten new volunteers were trained, so 21 volunteers were available to complete the transect and most volunteers only had to walk the route once in the year.

We had an exceptionally cold and wet spring which impacted the emergence of a number of summer broods, according to Butterfly Conservation. This also meant that there were four weeks in April and May which were too cold to meet the criteria for the survey. All other weeks have been walked (to date). The only problems reported by walkers were a couple of sections that were becoming overgrown.

Despite the cold start, a total of 2018 butterflies were recorded on the transect in the season. This compares to an average of 2088 butterflies per year in the last 10 years. The top five butterflies reported in 2021 are shown below, again compared to the average of the previous 10 years recorded for the transect.

	2021	Average from 2011-2020
Meadow Brown	933	874
Ringlet	193	254
Marbled White	191	185
Gatekeeper	146	124
Large White	80	120



Dingy Skipper

Silver-washed Fritillary



Notwithstanding the weather, a record number of Dingy Skippers were recorded (12). Another species that seems to be on the increase is the Silver-washed Fritillary, with 12 records in total, from 6 walkers. Both photos were taken on the transect route. A Dark Green Fritillary, which has only been recorded once previously on the transect, was also reported.

Anne Evans

## 4. Boug's Meadow

With the gradual lifting of pandemic restrictions through 2021, activity at Boug's Meadow has returned close to normal. The winterbourne Misbourne flowed for longer, new species have been recorded, wildflowers thrive and essential maintenance has continued.



The winterbourne flow of the River Misbourne lasted 188 days until 21 July, a modern record. A huge effort on de-silting revealed stretches of the river bed.

First sightings of Smooth Newt (since 2014) and Grey Heron (first ever) in the river resulted and a FSC school visit caught voracious Water Beetle larva.

Watercress and Water Speedwell were abundant while Broad-bodied Chaser dragonflies, Banded and Common Blue damselflies were frequently seen.

The river was a main attraction for Pied and Grey Wagtail and a Mallard pair called it home for a while.

Although overshadowed by strong grasses growth, the meadow flower display continues to be good. The meadow cutting and scarifying regime will be changed for 2022 to restrain the grasses and promote a longer flowering season.

Meadow and copse flowers included Snowdrop, Blue Bells, Cowslip, Primrose, Wood Anemone, Ground Ivy, White and Red dead nettles, White Violets, Red and White Campion, Dark Mullein, Common and Greater Knapweed, Agrimony, Betony, Devils Bit Scabious, Ox Eye Daisy, St Johns Wort and Evening Primrose. We spotted fewer butterflies this year, both in species (down 7 at 13) and in absolute number. Blue tits nested again in the copse as did Robin, Wren and Blackbird. Redwing and Fieldfare visited and a Kestrel patiently sits on the electricity wire scanning for our increasing number of small mammals.

Volunteer activity continued subject to the varying pandemic restrictions. Essential maintenance included the fast growing car park hedge as well as meadow and stream clearance. We added more necessary dead hedging, to protect the Waggon Road, in which we were helped by a Duke of Edinburgh volunteer who also built a hedgehog house for us.

After many years the picnic table bench legs finally rotted through. A swift volunteer effort got the collapsed bench back in safe use within 5 days at no cost.



Huge volunteer support enabled a successful National Meadow Day event to resume despite challenging wet and windy conditions after last years forced cancellation. Visitors were highly complimentary of the work at the meadow. We appreciate the

continued support of other conservation organisations, such as Butterfly Conservation, to its success.

Our ability to put on such an open event in partnership with others is overall a tribute to all the Prestwood Nature volunteers who worked hard through the year and specifically in advance of the day.

We move forward into 2022, continuing to cherish our wildlife haven in the centre of Great Missenden with access for all. We always welcome new volunteers to join the effort and the fun. Contact [paulheathuk@me.com](mailto:paulheathuk@me.com).

*Paul Heath on behalf of all volunteers*

## **5. Sheepwash Pond**

In 2020 it was reported just how popular this site had become, especially during lockdown and as we entered into a second lockdown in 2021 its popularity continued.

As reported in 2020 no formal work parties have taken place at Sheepwash, although routine maintenance has continued to be observed with regular hedge cutting to the front of the site [undertaken on recommendation by the Police in an attempt to reduce vandalism to the platform]. Grass cutting alongside the pathway has continued on a monthly basis, together with the control of some of the invasive brambles. Regular litter picking has also been a major feature and continues to be a problem, although it is apparent that members of the public continue to assist in picking up litter.

Consideration has been given to reinstating the pathway with bark/chipping, but removal of the weed/grass would be quite an enormous task and might be considered too much work for little gain. The pathway continues to be closely mowed.

A semi-formal work party is scheduled to reduce and remove the dead vegetation, as well as reducing some of the Sycamore samplings. Further hedge cutting is also scheduled along the border with the neighbouring field.

Sylvia Bennett

## 6. Pollinator-Friendly Garden

We had hoped to be able to install a pond at the Garden to provide an additional habitat for wildlife but we are required by the Great Missenden Parish Council to provide 10 million pounds worth of insurance to cover the risk that 6 inches of water may pose for local children.

Under the direction of Karen van Oostrum we have plans to gradually refurbish the garden with new planting to make it even more hospitable to insect life as well as a welcoming area for local residents.



Despite the little attention this area has been able to have this year it still provides an abundant growth of pollinator friendly flowers showing that nature does not always require that much interference from us!

Thanks to all our members who keep a watchful eye on the area and spring into action when required.

*Vanessa Rickett*

## 7. Cornfield project

In the autumn of 2020 the site for endangered cornfield annuals was dug over as usual, but there were only two to carry out digging (Geoff Barton and myself), as we did not get any offers from anyone who had a rotovator. Unfortunately the lack of a decent soil (the site was reclaimed from grassland) and the stiff clay meant that our resources were not really sufficient to cultivate the site fully or to get rid of deep-rooted invaders such as hogweed, dock and thistle. We sowed as usual with corn and our remaining cornfield annual seed. Unfortunately, the corn proved to be too old and did not germinate, although some of the annuals came up from the new sowing and from self-seeding from the year before. The weather conditions this year were also favourable to the invading plants, and Geoff, Val Marshall and myself were unable to keep on top of them adequately. This was a shame as we had shown in previous years that it was possible to grow and self-perpetuate some of these endangered species. As it was, this year we had good showings of broad-fruited cornsalad, shepherd's

needle and corn buttercup. The project may have to be discontinued unless we can find a way to rotovate the site this autumn. In any case, the site is not ideal because of the unworkable soil, so that it may be best to postpone further work until an alternative and better site becomes available. We have collected a little seed from previous crops and this will keep for a long time in dry conditions.

*Tony Marshall*

## **8. Kiln Common Orchard**

Most of the trees continue to thrive in the Orchard and this year we held a well attended work party led by Karen and George to prune the stone fruit (cherries and plums). A band of volunteers made short work of weeding and tidying up round all the trees. Hopefully during the winter we shall be able to turn our attention to pruning the apple and pear trees.



The wildflowers where the ground has been scarified and reseeded are looking good. Lloyd and Colin have again mown paths through the area

*Vanessa Rickett*

## **9. Angling Spring Wood**

Work parties were held in the spring to clear scrub and weed around the trees that were planted for AONB 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in November 2015.

*Jeremy Handley*

## **10. Prestwood Local Nature Reserve (Picnic Site)**

Because of Covid there were again no work parties this year, although we have continued to monitor the site, which now urgently needs a good cut this autumn/winter. I am in touch with the Chiltern Society warden for the site about organising this work, although no dates are yet settled. A count of the flowering stems of Chiltern gentian showed that numbers had increased considerably from the last count (in 2009), so that current management appears to be on the right lines.

*Tony Marshall*

## 11. Churchyards

At Holy Trinity, the area cleared of bramble last year by PN volunteers (Geoff Barton, Val Marshall and myself) on the north side of the church produced a very flowery meadow this summer. It is now due to be strimmed by church volunteers, after which we shall organise a work-party to tackle the re-growth of bramble on some of the grave-plots. An information board, financed and designed by the County Council, has been erected to explain the management of the whole churchyard for fungi, plants and wildlife.

No work was done at Great Missenden because of Covid.

Holmer Green churchyard was surveyed by myself last autumn and proved to be a regionally important waxcap grassland - not as great as Prestwood, but still a notable site. It will become, like Holy Trinity, an official Local Wildlife Site. Other churchyards have been checked for important fungi, but no others in our region are managed sufficiently well (the essential issue being the removal of cuttings to prevent the build-up of nutrients). An exception is the Zion Baptist churchyard in Kiln Road, which is too small to be able to qualify as a Local Wildlife Site, although it has a number of uncommon waxcaps.

*Tony Marshall*

## 12. Surveying and Records

My report on surveys at Hampden Bottom has been completed and will shortly go to the Chiltern Conservation Board who commissioned it. It provided a chance to view a whole farm as a complete eco-system and produced some interesting results and findings.

A Botany Group was set up (Karen van Oostrum, Tony & Val Marshall, Anne Evans, George Lewis) and carried out directed surveys of different parts of our area fortnightly through the summer. There were several important new findings (reported in the newsletter).

PN members have continued to send in records, although the weather in 2021 was far from ideal. Over 1,000 new records have been added to our database, including 48 new species. I continue to work on combining our database with records from BMERC (county records centre) and will shortly be able to rank sites according to their biodiversity, which will help direct future surveying and possibly sites for PN involvement.

*Tony Marshall*



### **13. Hedges and Old Trees**

Three volunteers (Geoff Clegg, Sue Longman and Paul Heath) were trained in the new methodology in May. Hedges are now surveyed in total rather than by samples, and volunteers are trained to spot rarer species and to measure any qualifying old trees occurring in the hedge. This gives more relevant information on wildlife than the old methodology (which was primarily focussed on determining the age of hedges). We trialled the new methods at Hampden Bottom. Forms from the volunteers are now being received from work over the summer.

Although we submitted lists of the oldest and most important trees in our area to Chiltern and Wycombe council tree-officers, nominating them for Tree Preservation Orders, in October 2018, we have heard nothing from Chiltern and only preliminary acknowledgement from Wycombe. The change of governance in the county, and Covid, may have hindered progress, but cannot possibly explain the extent of the delay, as the Tree Officers have remained in post as usual. I have heard informally that officers have been told not to issue further TPOs because they may interfere with planning proposals.

*Tony Marshall*

### **14. Website**

The web site continues to attract about 200 visitors each month. The Events page is the most popular but there is a good spread of hits among the other pages on the site.

A feature this year has been a series of presentations on our Home Page of plants which can be seen each month from April to August. We are grateful to Karen van Oostrum for providing these.

Thanks also to John Catton for articles on the various bumblebees and solitary bees which can be found in spring and summer.

*Frank Rickett*