



NEWSLETTER 22 May 2010

Chair's Column

Hello Everyone,

Newsletter deadlines oblige me to write in advance of issue time but as I write this in early April I do believe Spring has finally sprung! I spent yesterday working with my eldest grandson along the Misbourne on a school project. We saw four species of butterfly and children were actually paddling in the river wearing short sleeved tops! Back in my car the temperature indicator showed 15 degrees. Let's hope the fickle weather of early spring has gone. Down at Boug's Meadow this morning our newly planted hedge is sprouting merrily and there are numerous clumps of cowslips along the (still dry) stream-bank. Up at Sheepwash a pair of mallard is nesting on the island and there is plenty of frogs spawn in the water.

2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. All across the country government and volunteer groups are busy organising their contribution to this important year. PN's efforts in support of biodiversity do of course transcend any one year but we will try and participate in or 'match' any organised events in our geography. Talking of biodiversity much of our flora, fauna and indeed food is dependant on pollination by the honey bee. Everything I read says that the wild honey bee population is in sharp decline so let's hope 2010 is a better year for beekeepers.

The big 'general' news story since the last newsletter is of course the HS2 High Speed Rail project. I'm sure the ensuing debate is going to touch many PN hearts and minds. As with all major projects that affect the environment, unfortunately our wildlife is unable to get to meetings - it's up to people like us to ensure its needs get a fair hearing. On my frequent walks around the Chilterns I often ponder whether the folk that trod the paths years before me saw a lot more wildlife than I do. I'm not sure but I do know that I want my grandchildren to see at least as much as I do today!

I hope to see you at some of our events. Meanwhile Happy Wildlife Hunting.

John Obee



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From the Editor

Welcome to our May 2010 edition celebrating the arrival of May flowers, May-poles and May blossom. This time of year is one of a re-awakening, of new life and of re-growth. I hope you too will feel re-energised after the long winter and look here for ways of helping to ensure future spring-times and future celebrations of our local natural heritage.

Members' News

The snow may have reduced human traffic, but wildlife seems to have been little affected, judging from all the reports received. In fact the enforced winter break has probably been beneficial, nature finding its proper seasonal rhythm. During our tree-measuring at Little Hampden on 17 January we did see one *7-spot Ladybird* responding to a little sun, but most observations were of hibernating ones until mid-March, when we also saw our first *Harlequin*. Since then we have been seeing plenty of 7-spots and our first *22-spot* in April, auguring much better for our regular ladybird survey this year. **Tom Cotton** brought along the first hoverfly of the year, a red-tailed variety of the bumble-bee-mimic *Volucella bombylans*, but this had emerged indoors on 19 February and, outdoors, hoverfly numbers are only just picking up as I write (end of April). I saw my first butterfly as late as 1st March in the centre of Prestwood, a *Peacock*. **Pat Morris** reported the first *Brimstone* (and a *Honey-bee*) on 14 March at Hughenden. Since then we have seen *Small Tortoiseshell* & *Comma* (**John Obee** at Boug's Meadow 8 April), *Holly Blue*, *Speckled Wood*, and *Orange-tip*, while on 27 April Val and I saw two of our uncommon species at the Picnic Site, *Green Hairstreak* and *Dingy Skipper*. On 24 April, in an old orchard at Hughenden, *Jet Ants* were very active. They nest in rotting tree-stumps and are conspicuous because they are quite large and a beautiful shiny black as their name indicates. This was my first local record of this species.

Mammals were still in evidence most of the winter - **Marilyn Fletcher** saw three *Roe-deer* above Angling Spring Wood, where there is a major colony, on 10 January; badgers and foxes were still getting around; and **Mandy Cotton** saw *Hares* boxing at Cobblershill on 15 March.



The winter seems to have been good for *Fieldfares* - I saw one in the Old Orchard, Little Kingshill, but **Marilyn Fletcher** had over a dozen ravishing her cotoneaster berries on 10 January. She also had *Bullfinches* pecking out the buds of her

flowering cherries, but we only saw them once in our garden this winter. Unusually, we have had no reports of the usual bramblings, siskins etc (let alone waxwings or snow buntings) and I have not seen the usual flocks of redwings. **Jenny Smith** was very lucky in having a *Grey Wagtail* in her garden over several days, as these are not birds one expects to see in small gardens. As to the first *Cuckoo*, **George Lewis** beat **Frank Fermor** to it by a few days in hearing one calling in Longfield Wood on 18 April. Frank, however, heard more than one, in Lodge Wood and near Nanfans. We had the first *Willow Warbler* in our garden on 24 April, but surely they had been around for some weeks before that? If so, no-one has let us know! Nesting seemed to be well advanced in March, with **Mandy Cotton** even having a *Long-tailed Tit* nest in her garden hedge and was worried about the regular *Sparrowhawks* (which now seem to be common garden birds). Despite the invasion of campers and their rubbish over summer in Peterley Wood, the rubbish since cleared by public-spirited residents, birds seem to have been unaffected, with reports there of *Treecreeper* from **Roy Dobson** and *Tawny Owl* from **Val Marshall**. **John Obee** also reported *Barn Owls* at Hampden Bottom Farm.

The long winter has delayed amphibian activity compared to the last several winters, and spawning has occurred this year at more or less the traditional time. The first active *Frog* in our pond was on 10 March. She went next door to spawn with others in our neighbour's little pond, returning later with some of her mates to our larger one, which is supposed to be more wildlife-friendly! There is probably much cunning in this, as we have lots of newts and they eat tadpoles. At the same time in early March I saw frog-spawn in many ponds in Prestwood, but not until a couple of weeks later at the Sheepwash, where it is probably cooler because not surrounded by housing. The first *Toad* was seen by **Frank Fermor** and others at our Boug's Meadow work-party on 21 March, and the first *Smooth Newt* was in our garden pond on 4 April (and in the Misbourne on 8 April). A reptile search at Hampden Common on 6 March was unproductive (it was still very cold), but **Rose Collard** had a *Lizard* in her Perks Lane garden on 17 March (a very rare occurrence around here - although they have been seen at the Picnic Site).

Flowers also seem to be on their old schedules - even our *Snowdrops* were not really flowering much before March. The *Marsh Marigolds* were in good flower at the Sheepwash on 8 April. The magnificent colony of *Coralroot* in Longrove Plantation was in flower on 13 April, along with

Ramsons, Val reported the first *Wood-sorrel* on 14 April and *Bluebell* on 21 April (both Atkins Wood).

The two ancient tree visits to Little Hampden Common in January and March were notable for finding two uncommon fungi on old oaks there - *Oak Mazegill* and one without an English name, *Ganoderma pfeifferi*. Val, who has just started recording our local mosses, found *Sandhill Screw-moss* on the wall beside the Mobwell, outside its usual coastal range. In the moss we found a small black weevil *Amalorrhynchus melanarius*, which feeds only on water-cress, the first record for this area. We also found there was a thriving colony of *Lesser Hawkbit* at Hatches Bank, flowering among the primroses on 23 April. This plant has long disappeared from the Picnic Site. On the other hand, cowslips seem to have gone from Hatches Bank, while they thrive at the Picnic Site. I thought I knew the Picnic Site like the back of my hand, but it is surprising how one can still find new species. I have always known there was dog-rose and sweetbriar there, but this year I noticed *Sherard's Downy-rose* as well. Another new species (apparently new to the county) was a patch of *New Zealand Bittercress* flowering in our garden. We do not know where its seeds came from, but it is found as a contaminant of garden centre pot-plants, and could well get established. It is small and pretty and unlikely to be a problem, so we shall leave it be.

Finally, again at the Picnic Site, Robert Lewis, Val and I saw several specimens of *Morel* near where there had been a lot of scrub clearance this winter. This was the first time I had seen it here, although I had encountered the related semi-free morel before. The latter can cause stomach upsets, but the true morel is excellent eating. These specimens were well riddled with maggots, unfortunately, which put us off trying them.

It was very sad to see the Environmental Centre close in High Wycombe at the end of March. This was a great venue and a vital facility. What a waste.
Tony Marshall

Other News

Swallow-holes

John Obee spotted this article in the *Speen and North Dean News* relating to land at Pipers Lane, Great Kingshill.

'On Christmas Day we experienced a phenomenon unknown to most people. While feeding young stock on land up at Kingshill, Charles noticed that two animals were missing. After checking all the boundary fences, a faulty one being the usual

source of missing animals, he saw a brown patch in the deep snow in the middle of the field; at the edge of the patch he could just see an animal's nose. The brown patch was a swallow-hole and in it was a live heifer standing on the top of a dead one. The hole was the size of a table tennis table and when Charles got into the hole to rescue the live heifer he found it to be at least five foot deep. (This was not an enjoyable experience for Christmas morning but Charles drew some comfort from the fact that he had not found the hole by falling in himself when spreading fertiliser with the large tractor.)

Swallow-holes occur most often on limestone and more rarely on chalk-land. (This was only the second one we had seen in 50 years.) Water collects in a hollow in the field and gradually dissolves the limestone or chalk underneath until the area collapses leaving a 'swallow-hole', the size of the hole presumably depends on the size of the original hollow.'
Gill Kent

Old swallow-holes, often 30 metres or so across, are known from several other places in our area, such as in Piggott's and Atkins' Woods. They can be told from, say, chalk-pits by being steep-sided all the way round. Cockpit Hole at Great Kingshill is probably another large example.
Tony Marshall

Peat

DEFRA has recently launched a campaign to encourage gardeners and horticulturalists to minimise use of peat-based products: "Act on CO2 peat". This follows a previous campaign to support the Government target of 90% of all growing media to be peat-free by the end of 2010. As this figure has only reached 54% so far, it is obvious they are far from reaching their target. It looks as though appeals to the remaining consumers to refrain voluntarily from using peat are falling on deaf ears and most conservation organisations advocate a ban on the sale of peat as the only way of saving our peat lands and reducing the carbon signature associated with their destruction.

... and Peat-Free Peaks

For the first time ever, peat-free composts have out-performed peat rivals in tests carried out for Which? Gardening. The three Best Buys awarded for container composts all went to peat-free varieties: Vital Earth Tub and Basket Compost, New Horizon Multi-purpose Compost and Vital Earth Multi-purpose Compost.
Which? News April 2010

Ragwort

A perfectly respectable native

There is much misinformation going around about the effects of this plant, so it may be as well to acquaint members with the facts.

The Ragwort Control Act 2003 was passed as enabling legislation to allow the control of ragwort in certain circumstances. Despite what some livestock owners say, it places no obligation on landowners to control the plant, although it could allow a local authority, for instance, where there was a major problem, to issue an order to control it.

The legislation was in response to scare stories about poisoning of horses and cattle. In fact, cases of such poisoning are very rare.

Common ragwort contains compounds (pyrrolizidine alkaloids) poisonous to most vertebrates. These substances occur in other plants as well, in fact 3% of the world's flora. Inside the plants, they occur in a non-toxic form, but after the plant has been eaten it is first changed by the intestines and then broken down by the liver. The breakdown products formed in the liver are toxic. (This is why it is not dangerous for humans to handle ragwort.) Contrary to what is often thought, the alkaloids do not accumulate inside the animal, being excreted in about 24 to 48 hours. It is the damage that is caused to liver cells that can, if sufficient ragwort is consumed at each dose, be cumulative to the point of death. Research has shown that horses and cattle need to consume, over time, between 5 and 25% of their body weight. For goats the figure is much higher, between 125% and 404%.

Animals are good at recognising what they should and should not eat. Livestock will not choose to ingest ragwort. The problem only really arises when ragwort grows in a meadow that is cropped for hay, because once chopped up, dried and mixed with grass, it becomes impossible for livestock to distinguish or avoid the poisonous constituents. The obvious solution to the problem is therefore good control of meadows from which hay is taken as livestock feed and good grassland management of fields where livestock graze to ensure that ragwort does not become dominant (which it may do if the fields are over-stocked and grass becomes depleted).

Ragwort is a native species that has always been common in pastureland. In fact, in the past it was used, in controlled doses, as a cure for the staggers in horses! The unnecessary hysteria surrounding the plant today is of concern to us because ragwort supports many invertebrate species (you'll notice the flowers are popular with

butterflies) and is essential for the survival of 30 species dependent on it including the cinnabar moth, whose black-and-yellow striped "football shirt" caterpillars are familiar to most people. It is important, therefore, that the plant is not regarded as a special danger, but just one that needs to be controlled in certain places.



Some common myths include:-

1. **"Ragwort is spreading like wildfire across the countryside."** Regular surveys have shown that incidence has not changed generally since the 1960s and is in decline on neutral grasslands.
2. **"The Weeds Act 1959 and the Ragwort Control Act 2003 mean landowners must control ragwort on their land."** There is in fact no legal obligation to do anything about ragwort on one's land unless there is a specific order in force (which there isn't).
3. **"Local councils must control ragwort in their areas."** The legislation lays councils under no obligation to do any such thing; it merely gives them the powers to issue control orders if they deem it necessary.
4. **"Ragwort is a notifiable weed."** There is no such thing as a notifiable weed.
5. **"The tiniest amount of ragwort will kill a horse."** It would take a stone or more of ragwort to poison an animal of this size.
6. **"Horses breathe in seeds of ragwort drifting from neighbouring fields and so get poisoned."** It would be impossible for livestock to breathe in a sufficient quantity of such seed and there is no evidence that they do even inhale seeds in this way. While ragwort seeds are built to be distributed by wind, in fact most of them do not get carried far from the originating plant.
7. **"Meat from cattle that have eaten ragwort is toxic."** The damage is confined to the liver and does not affect the meat. In fact, ragwort is no danger to humans, who are not affected in the same way as some other animals.
8. **"You should uproot ragwort wherever you see it."** It is illegal to uproot any plant on land that does not belong to you.

Tony Marshall

Deer, Oh Dear!

[Based partly on the article "*Escalating ecological impacts of deer in lowland woodland*" by Paul Dolman et al in *British Wildlife* April 2010]

Our local deer populations are made up almost entirely of the medium-sized roe deer and the small muntjac. Of our two native deer, roe became extinct in England by 1800 and red deer were reduced to small colonies largely in the North, the South-west and East Anglia. For centuries, therefore, deer were entirely absent from our area, until in the 20th century, roe re-introduced by the Victorians started to expand rapidly. Muntjac were brought to the Woburn estate in 1901 and both allowed to escape and deliberately released. Between 1972 and 2002 the muntjac population expanded tenfold. Introduced fallow deer are only occasionally seen in the wild around our area and are largely confined to deer-parks. The current estimate of deer numbers in Britain is about 1.5 million - not far below those of Mesolithic times, but with only a tiny fraction of the wooded land.

Deer numbers have increased because of C20th woodland planting, relatively warm winters improving survival rates, the shift from spring-sown to autumn-sown cereals providing winter feed, restricted hunting, the absence of large predators, and the depopulation of the countryside as farm machinery displaced agricultural workers. Problems associated with these large populations include traffic accidents (at least ten fatalities a year and 70,000 or more collisions), transmission of livestock diseases (blue tongue, bovine TB and foot-and-mouth - where they are probably much more important than the much maligned badger), threats to human health through Lyme disease because they act as the main hosts of ticks, grazing of farm and garden crops, and damage to young woodland trees.

These impacts are increasing as populations continue to grow, especially muntjac, which are all-year-round breeders and benefit disproportionately from mild winters.

Woodland ecology is suffering in particular, as these woods have not suffered deer browsing for centuries and the large carnivores that controlled them before that (wolf, lynx, bear) are now gone. Deer can help disperse some plant seeds, but roe do so only to a moderate degree and muntjac hardly at all, compared to red and fallow deer. While in certain schemes they may help with control of undesirable vegetation like bramble, the intensity of grazing now occurring in our small woodlands prevents tree regeneration, reduces coppice re-growth, and impoverishes shrubs and ground flora of wild

flowers, with knock-on effects for communities of invertebrates, small mammals and birds.

Similarly orchards are suffering from deer eating bark from the trees, often ring-barking and therefore killing them. One tree has been lost in this way already at Kiln Common Orchard and the majority of our plants there have suffered from deer browsing the tips of side-twigs.

In our area it is not possible to think of reintroducing large carnivores. The scope for shooting is limited by the dense network of footpaths, especially through woodlands. Where deer have been controlled this has been only at great expense, including costly fencing, sacrificing some areas to deer while excluding them from others, and shooting. It is particularly difficult to confine small muntjac. If deer numbers are reduced, it will require continual effort to prevent them rising again. Moderate numbers could be beneficial in browsing excess vegetation and opening up woodlands. Like the grey squirrel, our local deer populations pose a problem to conservation that we are still a long way from resolving.

Tony Marshall

Glow Worm Transect 2009

2009 was the third year that PN undertook glow-worm transects during the months of June, July and August. The principle aim is to monitor the glow-worm colony at Prestwood Picnic Site nature reserve.

The weather was settled and dry during the first transect on 7 June when no insects were seen. Conditions had changed dramatically on 15 June when an evening of thunder and rain gradually cleared in time for the second transect to take place. Here three females and a male were observed on the short grass which surrounds the car park. It was also pleasing to see that the grass clippings from a recent mowing had all been removed.

During the next ten transects when weather conditions were invariably wet rather than dry only 14 other females were recorded. This marks a reduction in numbers from the previous two seasons and the decline was especially evident on the steep bank where only five insects were observed.

To get a better idea how many consecutive nights an insect was typically seen to be glowing, various other visits to the nature reserve throughout the summer months were undertaken. For example on 16 June only two of the three females observed the day before were seen to be glowing and a day later only one. This valiant individual had the misfortune to be emitting its fluorescent green light from underneath the picnic site litter bin and it was

no surprise that this individual was still seen to be glowing on 18 and 19 June.

During the 24 June transect, one of the two females recorded was located amongst the bark chippings which divide the car park spaces. At first this seems an unlikely habitat, although bark chippings would certainly provide a dark backdrop for a male to locate the female without the hindrance of vegetation or litter bins. On 29 June when two insects were recorded, the first of three female roadside verge insects were observed. The following evening the same insect was seen with a male. After that sighting, no other insects were observed until 13 July when another of the road side verge insects was seen. Three females recorded on 20 July were all glowing within a metre of each other. These were the first insects to be recorded on the steep bank, which makes up a very large portion of the 400 metre transect. Returning the next evening those insects which had been glowing close to the footpath were no longer visible, but it was noticed that a large section of dogwood where the insects had been seen the night before had been cut down. Another female was observed on 28 July and another two on 3 August, which were both located on the steep bank. Three further transects were undertaken on 10, 18 and 25 August, but no insects were observed. During September's moth trapping event the grass bank surrounding the car park was unsuccessfully checked for glow worm larvae, which also emit a faint fluorescent light.

In line with the Living Tapestry project it is hoped that the large field next to the reserve will also be monitored this year for insects. Checking for larvae should also continue but most importantly, a mowing and dogwood clearance regime, which avoids disturbance during summer months, would definitely be beneficial to the community of insects located at Prestwood nature reserve.

Ian Taylor

Grassland Restoration & Boug's Meadow

At Boug's Meadow we were faced with the problem of restoring grassland that had been stocked with horses for a while, where the soil had become too fertile. The vegetation had deteriorated to a jungle of cow parsley, nettle and dock. Our first action was to have the field cut every month, removing the cuttings and so gradually lowering the fertility. The cow parsley was quickly reduced. The nettles remained a problem and these were treated chemically, which really knocked them back. We laid down hay from a National Trust meadow and raked it up again, hoping that seed would establish. The next year there were more plants such as knapweed and

even some cowslips, but the docks were still coming on strong and the nettles yet again becoming problematic. We received advice from a variety of conservation sources, much of it conflicting. One suggestion was that plant plugs would become established quicker than seed, so a hundred plants were put in. Unfortunately the rabbits found these much to their taste and they were wiped out overnight. There were two other approaches to be considered (while still continuing the policy of regular cutting) - putting on more wildflower-meadow seed or removing the surface soil entirely. Tests showed that even deep soil had high nutrient scores and the costs of removing so much soil would have been enormous. We therefore decided to go ahead with the seeding policy (which had already been partially successful) and obtained funds for buying a large amount of seed, a mixture of native grasses and wildflowers, which we put down this autumn after a work-party had broken up the turf as much as possible to give the seed a good chance of working into the soil. The seed was all locally sourced of English origin. We shall continue cutting the coarse plants this coming summer, having bought scythes and rakes so that we can do it ourselves, previous contractors having proven unreliable.

It was only after this decision that we came across evidence that our approach was almost certainly the right one. Controlled trials over 3 years of different methods in the Netherlands compared topsoil removal, topsoil removal plus sowing, and sowing without removing topsoil. In both methods involving topsoil removal, vegetation was very sparse and poor after 3 years, whereas sowing had already produced a mixed flowery sward, significantly better than where no action was taken at all. The situation in these trials was somewhat different from ours in that it did not seem to have a prior problem of nettles and dock, but we are hopeful that our policy of cutting these regularly will allow the diverse meadow grasses and flowers to become established. The fact that we already had the knapweed flowering last year provides optimism that we can match the Dutch experience. The only doubt is over how long we shall have to continue with the monthly cutting and be able to let the flowers flourish and seed fully, with a single cut of hay in the late summer, which is our main aim.



PHOTO PAGE



Preparing to sow seed Boug's Meadow (Photo John Obee)



Muntjac (Photo Paula Turvey)



Cowslips Prestwood Picnic Site (Photo Val Marshall 4/2010)



Roe deer (Photo Brian Stone)



Morels Prestwood Picnic Site (Photo Val Marshall 4/2010)



Green hairstreak



Scrub clearance Prestwood Picnic Site (Photo Val Marshall 4/2010)



Grey wagtail (Photo Doug Smith)

Focus on "Linear" Habitats

The Living Tapestry document produced by PN as its new action plan argues that the current isolation of most wildlife sites needs to be overcome by creating "corridors" of wildlife-friendly habitat between them. Two new national initiatives focus on the importance of such "linear" features.

The People's Trust for Endangered Species has a new "Hedgerows for Dormice" project. This follows from the increasing isolation of current dormouse populations. The hazel dormouse is one of the rarest of our small mammals and is not to be confused with the alien "fat or edible dormouse" which causes havoc in some house-lofts and woods. Improving the quality of hedgerows would enable dormice to move from area to area and colonise new sites. If managed properly and not allowed to develop gaps, hedges, especially those with plenty of hazel, bramble, blackthorn, hawthorn, ash and honeysuckle, can provide nesting and feeding sites for dormice. The project has started in four counties initially (Surrey, Essex, Dorset and Shropshire), but will soon roll out into other counties. PTES organise management workshops for landowners and can contribute to capital costs.

www.ptes.org/index.php?cat=110

Ideal management consists of cutting on a three-year cycle (one side, top, other side in successive years) in January/February. Flailing is appropriate if the wood is not too thick, otherwise a circular saw attachment is necessary. Every now and again selected saplings should be left to grow into mature trees to provide a more varied habitat. Laying needs to be carried out from time to time to renew the hedge and keep it dense. Planting of new trees should be carried out in any gaps. Where a hedge has grown too large for laying, coppicing can be used instead, cutting the shrubs down almost ground level to encourage them throw up a thick re-growth of shoots. A minimum one-metre strip of vegetation should be left each side of the hedge which is cut only once every three years.

The second initiative is from Buglife, which is concerned that the loss of three million hectares of wildflower-rich habitat since the Second World War is threatening populations of many insects dependent on flowers, most notably of course bees and butterflies. Buglife proposes continuous 300m wide corridors ("B-lines"!) of wildflower habitat to be established across every county. Agricultural stewardship schemes should provide "conservation credits" for the creation of such corridors. Sowing of a wildflower-meadow mix would kick-start a rich habitat, but natural regeneration could also be used.

Such habitats would need to be cut each year in late summer or autumn to prevent scrubbing over. (www.buglife.org.uk/News/callformorewildflowers.)

PN is already helping to re-establish such wildflower havens wherever possible, such as Boug's Meadow and Kiln Common Orchard, but thought also needs to be given to how these habitats may be extended into neighbouring fields via narrower "corridors".

Everyone can create their own wildflower area in their gardens. A list of appropriate flowers for different local soils and situations can be obtained from Tony Marshall. Seed or plants should be purchased from guaranteed British sources by selecting suppliers from the www.floralocale.org website. If you have a large enough area you can also plant a few old fruit-tree varieties from a source such as www.bernwodefuittrees.co.uk, the firm we mostly use for our own orchard.



Your Records Make a Difference

Every natural history record you send in becomes part of our large database. This not only helps with our own planning, but we share the records with other bodies to assist their work too. This is a message from the County Mammal recorders, Mic and Jan Wells:

"Please would you be kind enough to pass on to the members of Prestwood Nature, our appreciation of all the work which you have collectively put in, and the high quality of the information supplied. It is entirely consistent with reports received from the best covered areas of the County, but your data cover a much larger area and a longer timescale. It should also give added potential for the protection of wildlife in the Prestwood area when planning new developments and structures. We will look forward to receiving further updates from you at convenient intervals." Mic and Jan Wells

Project News

Angling Spring Wood

We had a work party on 24 January in the wood. Many thanks to all who attended - it was a prickly job as we continued to remove holly, trying where possible to pull up the roots. There was also laurel removal - not much evidence of re-growth following previous years' work so that was pleasing. Although I am getting to the stage where I see holly *everywhere* and lament our apparently slow progress, I think someone less familiar with the area visiting at intervals will start to notice clearer sight-lines and reduced thickets. We have already noticed some bluebell resurgence in the cleared areas.

The enormous pile of holly has now been chipped. Another work party is scheduled for 30 May when the bluebells will be over. On 21 March and 27 March I picked litter extensively along the bridleway past Andlows farm, through the wood and along Martinsend Lane. Some remains of impromptu campsites have left an appalling amount of debris just outside the main part of the wood.

Sue Graham 01494 866621

Boug's Meadow

A good picket/chicken mesh fence was erected along the car park boundary of the meadow on 6-7 December and ground prepared for hedge planting. A splendid rustic oak bench has now been built on site by The Chilterns Green Timber Company, funded by the Chilterns Conservation Board.



A work party on 7 February attracted a brilliant turn out of 22 people to plant a mixed hedge (funded by Chiltern District Council and the Chilterns Conservation Board) along the inside of our new fence on the western boundary of the site. Surplus plants were also planted on part of the northern boundary. The number of volunteers was the highest yet for a Boug's event and the coffee and flapjack supplies were stretched to the limit! On 21 March Chesham Archaeological Society carried out surveys in the meadow assisted by several PN volunteers.

John Obee 01494 865564

Family Activities

Prestwood Nature has had a number of family activities over the past few years which have provided opportunities for the family to share time together, without great financial expense. Hopefully too, a walk or an activity initially introduced by Prestwood Nature becomes a regular activity for that family.

We have had craft sessions at Missenden library, arranged walks around footpaths, fields and woodlands in Great Missenden and Prestwood, including Abbey Park, Angling Spring and Lodge Woods, and have had picnics and a tour of Trish Swains' wonderful garden in Swan Bottom. Her garden has many treasures - a field to run in, a large pond teeming with life, doves, chickens, pigs, bees, woodland, paths that wind through beautifully planted areas and lots of very interesting sculptures and craft.

With the regeneration of Sheepwash pond we have been able to go pond dipping. This has been successful because the children were able to catch and identify a wide variety of pond-life, despite the resident ducks! We hope to have another session after school on Thursday 24 June to see if we find even more creatures.

We have been involved with the Easter Egg Trails at Collings Hanger Farm and have also run craft activities at their annual Apple Day event, making bird feeders out of windfall apples. The event is extremely popular with local people, though some travel many miles to attend. We have also had a family picnic followed by a walk around the farm. We hope to repeat these activities this year.

Last year we gave a presentation to the children at Prestwood Infant School, about caterpillars and butterflies. The children produced some lovely craft following on from this, and the older children were given the means to do their own simple butterfly survey at home. Hopefully we will have a generation in Prestwood who are well informed about the metamorphosis of caterpillars into butterflies.

Lesley Stoner 01494 890128

Hatches Bank

This privately-owned chalk slope used to be particularly noted for its rare flowers, but it was planted to trees, and scrub has invaded most of the remaining grassland, although some important plants are still hanging on, with good populations of primrose and Chiltern gentian. A work party was held on 14 February. Scrub was cleared from the main open grassland section and a smaller grassy area to the

east of that, leaving a few shrubs to provide variety and interest. Next winter we shall start to cut areas of thick scrub neighbouring these, creating a means of taking cuttings to the bottom of the slope and making a false hedge near the road.

Tony Marshall 01494 864251

Hedges and Trees Survey

On 17 January a very good session of tree measuring was held on Little Hampden Common when 36 trees were measured and data collected on their condition. 11 members of Prestwood Nature attended including 4 people new to hedge and tree survey. On 18 March another good session was held on Little Hampden Common when 22 trees were measured and data collected on their condition. Six members of Prestwood Nature attended including Robert Lewis who has agreed to make a photographic record of the trees.

Vanessa Rickett 01494 866516

Living Tapestry

PN Council have begun putting the new plan into operation in discussion with Bucks Biodiversity Officer, Jez Elkin. Initial emphasis will be on creating a wildlife corridor between Hampden Bottom and Hughenden, linking a good number of high biodiversity sites.

Chris Bartlett 01494 864178

Perks Lane Picnic Site

Visitors will notice a major change at this reserve, as a large amount of scrub and some young trees have been cut down, making an open space much further up the slope. Although this looks rather devastated at the moment it was necessary to return the site to more open conditions that suit the plants that grow here. Plenty of scrub will remain higher up and at the perimeters, and some of the shrubs will grow back to give a mosaic of sun and shade that will be ideal for enhancing biodiversity.

Tony Marshall 01494 864251

Pond Surveys

Ecology student Holly Bennett was selected and given training to carry out pond surveys this summer. We have total funding of £425 from the John Baker consultancy and the Great Missenden & Prestwood Revitalisation Group, which should cover the initial survey of over half the ponds in our area.

Chris Bartlett 01494 864178

Surveying

I have begun the orchard surveys for the national study, helped by Val and with advice from George Lewis. There are about 94 to visit, of which we have so far covered a third. We are also trying to survey all areas of public land owned by Great Missenden and Great Kingshill Parish Councils that we have not already covered, where much of the work is being done by Alan Showler.

Tony Marshall 01494 864251

White-letter hairstreak

We have received a promise of £200 from the GMPRG to add to the £150 from the Parish Council. The new hedge will be put in next autumn, including plenty of elms on which the butterfly depends.

Chris Bartlett 01494 864178



Wildlife garden

We had a successful, well attended and sunny (!) work party on 7 March, including a few non-PN gardeners. We planted all the plants we had and will gratefully accept any more donations for next time. The Mountain Ash tree that we had bought was planted, and the pond was dug out and put in. Although it is very shallow, we are covering the pond with wire mesh for the sake of Health and Safety. Some bulbs were put into the long grass area, and logs we had collected from Angling Spring Wood were used to edge one area of the garden. Other logs were used to make a log pile by the pond. We were a little bemused to note that a buddleia plant in a pot had disappeared over the winter! I have had offers of volunteers to keep an eye on the watering, and am now looking for a volunteer(s) to mow the tiny lawn - no more than once a fortnight in the highest season, and possibly only once a month in the rest of the growing season. The idea is to find out how long we can keep the grass while still keeping a reasonably tidy appearance. A push mower is available for use. In the next work party we hope to do more planting, maybe putting down some chipped bark if we can scrounge some by then, and thinking about the 'bug hotel' for which I am now collecting material. Any stones, bricks, old pots/pipes, canes etc gratefully received.

Susan Devlin 01494 717630

International Year of Biodiversity 2010

The United Nations has declared 2010 to be the International Year of Biodiversity. To quote their web site 'this is a celebration of life on earth and of the value of biodiversity for our lives'. The world is invited to take action in 2010 to safeguard the variety of life on earth: biodiversity.

Why do we need to do something? The International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List for endangered species states that 36% of all evaluated species on the globe is threatened with extinction. At this rate, an area of 1.3 billion hectares worldwide — about one and a half times the size of the United States — will completely lose its original biodiversity levels by 2050. Some experts predict that we are on the brink of the sixth global mass extinction of species, and the first to be caused by humans, one species amongst millions.

A report on climate change and biodiversity submitted to the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit shows that approximately 10% of species assessed so far have an increasingly high risk of extinction for every 1°C rise in global mean surface temperature, a trend that continues up to a 5°C increase.

However, biodiversity could be part of the solution. If deforestation is halted forests can increasingly play their part as carbon sinks. By protecting peat-lands, which cover only 3% of the world's terrestrial surface, but store 30% of the carbon contained in both terrestrial vegetation and soils, we can stop even more greenhouse gas emissions. A survey carried out last September on 1,500 schoolchildren in the UK showed that 30% of them could not properly identify a creature as common as a bee — more than a third mistook it for a wasp, and some even confused it with a fly.

So what can we in Prestwood Nature do about this?

- **Raise awareness of biodiversity** - make sure that everyone you know appreciates the importance of nature. We already do this as a group through our events programme. Buckinghamshire's Wonderful Wildlife Event on the 23rd May at College Lake is also a great opportunity to teach children about nature. We will be having our own pond dipping event at Sheepwash Pond on the 24th June to demonstrate how much aquatic life there is there.
- **Combat climate change** - Reduce your energy use from fossil fuels. Walk or cycle instead of using the car. Find out about discounts and grant

aid for insulation and other energy efficiency measures by phoning the Energy Saving Trust on 0800 512012 or look at their website : -

<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/>.

- **Take part in the conservation projects in our events programme** - these are specifically aimed at improving habitats for wildlife and plants
- **Use peat free compost** and help to protect the peat bogs globally.

For more information see the International Year website at <http://www.cbd.int/2010/welcome> and for the Bucks and Milton Keynes plan see <http://www.buckinghamshirepartnership.co.uk/partnership/bmkbp/home.page>

Lesley Stoner



Biodiversity Loss

In the context of the International Year of Biodiversity and the campaigns to bring back our wild flowers, I thought I would do a little calculation from our database of the flower species **lost** to our area in each decade. The results are striking. From the C19th to the middle of the C20th, the rate of loss was a regular one per decade (a figure that many other studies have come up with). But in the 1960s we lost 5 plant species, in the 70s seven, and in the 80s a frightening 18 species. It declined again to five in the 1990s. Such losses peaking in the 1980s would seem to be associated with irresponsible use of chemicals on the land at this time, which also of course impacted on our birds.

Tony Marshall



PN People and Projects

Leader			Project	Other roles
Chris Bartlett	864178	admin@prestwoodnature.org.uk	Butterfly Transect Pond Surveys & Restoration	Project Coordinator
David Cann	865182			Council member
David Page	863176	pageshouse@aol.com	Holy Trinity Churchyard	Newsletter printer
Fiona Grant	07801 677205	fiona.grant@veoliawater.co.uk	Sheepwash	Treasurer
Gaye Pickard	865250	markandgaye@hotmail.co.uk	Family Activities	
George Lewis	862780	glewis@apm-mail.co.uk	Kiln Common Orchard	
Ian Taylor	890653	ian_taylor@spe.sony.com	Glow-worm Survey Prestwood Picnic Site	Council member
Ian Waller	488567	ian@hbf-uk.com	Farming issues	Council member
Jenny Smith	866426	membership@prestwoodnature.org.uk		Membership Secretary
John Obee	865564	jk333@btinternet.com	Boug's Meadow	Chair
Joy Mead	864011	joymead.t21@btinternet.com		Council member
Lesley Stoner	890128	Lesley_Stoner@wycombe.gov.uk	Family Activities	Secretary
Robert Lewis	863661	sustainabledesign@hotmail.com	White-letter Hairstreak	
Susan Devlin	717630	susandevlin@supanet.com	Wildlife Garden	
Susan Graham	866621	shgraham@mac.com	Angling Spring Wood	Council member
Tony Marshall	864251	records@prestwoodnature.org.uk	Ladybird Survey	Wildlife records
Vanessa Rickett	866516	var@fairholme.me.uk	Hedge and Tree Surveys	Council member

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

May

22 Saturday Early Summer Walk in the Hughenden Valley Meet at far end of Hughenden Village Hall car park Combe Lane/Valley Road junction. Contact Angus Idle (**BBOWT**) 01494 563673 No dogs

23 Sunday 10am-1pm Boug's Meadow Scything, raking the meadow, tidying up the copse and preparing the eastern boundary for hedge planting. Free parking at Link Road Car Park, Great Missenden

30 Sunday 10am-1pm Angling Spring Wood Demolition of fences and laurel and holly removal. Meet by gate by main road. Limited parking, but short walk from either Great Missenden or Prestwood

June

11 Friday 8:30-late Moth-trapping at Wren Davis Collings Hanger Farm. Meet at farm entrance Contact **Wycombe Wildlife Group** 01628 526225

24 Thursday 4.00pm Pond-dipping at Sheepwash Pond. Family event to look at aquatic life

27 Sunday 10am-1pm Boug's Meadow Scything, raking the meadow, tidying up the copse and preparing the eastern boundary for hedge planting. Free parking at Link Road Car Park, Great Missenden

September

12 Sunday 10am-1pm Boug's Meadow Scything, raking the meadow, tidying up the copse and preparing the eastern boundary for hedge planting. Free parking at Link Road Car Park, Great Missenden

26 Sunday 10am-1pm Angling Spring Wood Litter picking and holly removal, cutting back/down small trees with squirrel damage. Meet by gate by main road. Limited parking, but short walk from either Great Missenden or Prestwood

For further information contact: admin@prestwoodnature.org.uk or 01494 864178

Letters, contributions and photographs to the Editor please. Next print deadline 31 August 2010

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