



HARROW NATURE CONSERVATION FORUM

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2016

Chairman's report

Since the last newsletter I have mainly been involved with Roxbourne Rough, Newton Farm and Greater Stanmore Country Park. Our other sites continue to progress well under their warden teams.

We now have a new voluntary warden at Roxbourne Rough, Gary Garland. Contact him at garygarland@hotmail.com or by phone at 077 11 938 423. Gary has the great advantage of being supported by Gerry Bloomfield's enthusiastic team of Friends of Roxbourne Park. I hope that Harrow's new biodiversity officer, Gareth Ryman, can get down to the Rough soon and advise Gary on what can be done to maintain and improve the site.

In contrast at Newton Farm, strenuous efforts to find a warden or set up a friends group for have so far come to nothing. Leslie Bolsover is at present acting as temporary warden and has a regular work session on the site from 9AM to 11AM every Saturday. She would appreciate help! Over the last few weeks Council workers and contractors cut the grass in the two main open areas, the wet and dry meadows, but are unable to collect the arisings, so Leslie, helped by two volunteers on one Saturday, raked the entire area. She and I then made many trips to the Council dump with the grass clippings, while Fraser Dodwell has taken one load to use on his allotment. Hopefully Mark Richardson's team at Parks will be able to take the rest now it is in a neat (albeit soggy) pile.

The overall picture at Greater Stanmore Country Park is positive. Pear Wood continues to thrive under Claire and Rosemary's leadership (with Peter Elton giving a lot of physical support). In particular the orchard looks wonderful and hosted an enjoyable Apple Day on October 1st. Harrow Council's Green Grid funds will be paying for some more trees of heritage fruit varieties to be planted this winter. The quality of the site was highlighted by the Vole Patrol project, a lottery funded initiative headed by Huma Pearce and the London Wildlife Trust. Surveys revealed that Pear Wood was home to the largest number of small mammal species of all the sites surveyed (wood mouse, bank vole, yellow necked mouse, field vole, common shrew and pygmy shrew).

Stanmore Country Park looks better than ever. John Hollingdale's long term plan of uniting all the open grassland areas by woodland rides is now close to being achieved, with only the northwestern grassland areas (Spinney Field / Spring Meadow / Cloisters Field) isolated from the remainder. Different funding streams and a large number of volunteers have contributed. Money has come from the Green Grid and from the lottery funded Dragon Finder project. Volunteers have come from the TCV, the Shree Swaminarayan Temple on Wood Lane, Peter Elton with his trusty D R Trimmer, and the regular Wednesday team led by Simon Braidman, Sue Kabel and John Winter. Meanwhile Saira Gregory is working on a woodland management plan, and Sally Reeves has negotiated the quagmire of poorly funded government bureaucracy to register the site with the Rural Payments Agency, so that we can in the future apply for Countryside Stewardship funding. However we do urgently need one or more enthusiastic people to take over from John as volunteer warden(s) and push these initiatives forward.

Wood Farm looks wonderful. Mark Richardson's team at Parks have mowed the rides regularly, helping to both encourage visitors and guide them along defined routes. By keeping people and dogs to the defined paths we leave the remainder of the site for wildlife - notables seen recently include wheatear and barn owl. Oliver Peters from the contractor A T Bones did a good job of brush cutting the top of the site in September, and the cut areas have now greened up nicely for the winter. Best of all, David Winton has taken over as volunteer warden and is already making a difference - for example he and Josh Kalms have repaired the vehicle gate and he has repaired the chestnut paling fence around the pond. We hope to replace the latter with a permanent post and rail fence next year. Contact David on David@circletimes.co.uk or by phone at 07790 490200 - but give members of the public the official email address of wardenwoodfarm@gmail.com. The visitor centre is equipped and available for use by parties, whether simply to sit or study in the space, or use it as a base to explore and study the site, so do please publicize it. To enquire about booking contact Tosh Padhiar at tosh@ligphotography.com or 07976 304 333.

Steve Bolsover 9th November 2016

WARDENS' REPORTS

- Bentley Old Vicarage (BOV) and All Saints' Churchyard Warden's Report September 2016

The glade south of the 'Butterfly Meadow' has been maintained by cutting. The intention is to create a corridor of less dense vegetation to enable light to penetrate into the woodland and to create a variety of habitats.

A new 'sleeper bench' has been installed to replace the damaged bench with wrought-iron ends which has been removed from the reserve.

The Forest School is now beginning its fifth year of providing outdoor learning opportunities to young people at risk of failure in Harrow Primary Schools. 80 young people visit the woods over a ten period week during term time. Care is taken to ensure that the woodland south of the middle path and north of the pond is left undisturbed. Impact assessments are undertaken to ensure habitats are not over-used. With this in mind, a second 'outdoor classroom' area, enclosed with willow hurdles, has been created at the southern entrance to the wood on the site of the old cemetery dumping area.

Beyond the boundary to south west of the reserve All Saints Church has begun managing an area of previously neglected scrubby woodland, within the curtilage of the churchyard, with a view to creating a woodland burial site for cremated remains.

Bentley Priory

Bentley Priory Warden's Report September 2016

Peter Peretti and Sue Kabel

Grazing

Protracted negotiations have been carried out, with LBH and the grazier, regarding the creation of various compartments for the isolation of the cattle. A cattle crush and corral was purchased to facilitate the collection and veterinary treatment of the cattle. Jonathan Chapman's herd of Red Devonshires have been grazing the site since late May after extra fencing was erected to keep the cattle out of the Hornbeam Wood. There are 23 head of cattle on site. We requested that this increase to 40 next year with Natural England's approval as they are only yearlings and do not therefore consume as much grass as fully grown cattle. There were some difficulties experienced with try to secure payment to the grazier, but these have now been resolved.

Species recording - there is a need for more reliable ongoing monitoring

New Bird of Prey Box -This is located in the oak tree near the Glenthorne gate in Spring Meadow. It has been replaced as the old one had fallen down and was rotten.

Local volunteer working parties 6 since April approx. 190 hrs

Projects have included Ragwort control, removal of Canadian Pondweed and Himalayan Balsam, bramble control in Glenthorne and clearing fallen trees to improve access

Reptile Survey

With the help of Froglife, we put out 40 felt roofing mats around the reserve. We found grass snakes, toads, common shrew, ant colonies and a robin's nest! The mats were not secured and a few were lost so it might be worth investing in corrugated iron. We were hoping to find lizards that have been previously recorded on the reserve.

The Challenge

10 Teenagers from the Challenge joined us to learn more about Bentley Priory and to spend a day helping us with ragwort removal on Furze Heath and Furze Meadow. They worked really hard, despite the heat and made a real impact on reducing the number of Ragwort plants in that area.

Newton Farm Ecology Park

Newton Farm

I have agreed with Mark Richardson to move back to a twice yearly mowing regime for the dry meadow, with cuts in the spring and autumn. This is so that food plants for insects are available in August and September.

The pond is dreadfully polluted with oil; at times the smell permeates the whole of the site. After the heavy rains of September 15th, mats of vegetation around the pond were saturated with oil. I have reported the situation to the Environment Agency, who I am told is the only agency that could take any investigative action, and to the Crane River Project and Thames21.

Rubbish continues to be a problem but is not overwhelming.

On the positive side a fresh badger's set appeared in July and the area is also well used by residents.

Leslie Bolsover

Temporary Warden

Pear Wood

Pear Wood Nature Reserve Report for GSCP Meeting 8th September 2016

Ten Acre Field (TAF).

Two benches were installed at the top end of TAF on 27th May. Trimlock did a great job. This had been postponed from earlier in the year due to water-logging. We are really pleased with these; they are good solid benches and among other things will provide a good 'stopping off' and bird watching spot on our guided walks.

The paths in TAF have been mown twice this year; this is not enough as nearly all paths became impassable, particularly on the eastern side of the field where it is wetter.

Access paths to the clumps of Japanese knotweed were made on 29th June. Thanks to Steve and the Wednesday group of volunteers. The Japanese knotweed was sprayed on 5th July but it was not very satisfactory due to rain and access problems e.g. steep slope. This was a shame as apparently the spray is far more effective if the plants have never been previously sprayed. A second re-spray is going to be done but so far, I don't have the date.

The Scrape.

The TCV came to help us clear the area to one side of the pond and create another entrance and exit path to PW. We sowed some wild flower seeds in the cleared area but unlike in the orchard these were not successful. This may have been due to the quality of the seeds or it may have been the weather. We have not finished working in this area and are going to create a feature (for amphibians and reptiles) in the cleared space. At the last meeting, I had requested two TCV days for this but we completed the work in one and so did not use the proposed second day.

The final reptile survey by LUC (Land Use Consultants Ltd) in this area has been done; results to follow.

Pear Wood.

Rosemary led a guided walk on the subject of Grasses on the 11th June for members of the Harrow Natural History Society. A keen group of enthusiasts attended and a great morning was had.

The TCV came to 'bash' the bracken on the Grimsdyke on 11th July as per English Heritage's instructions. We had our full quota of volunteers (and more; 16!) as is usual at Pear Wood.

Follow up visit to the Grimsdyke by the TCV on 1st August. As well as 'bashing' the bracken, we also felled some large hollies on the top of the dyke to open it up more. Well attended (14 people).

A couple of plum trees came down during high winds in the orchard, obstructing a footpath and they were also leaning on some other trees overhanging the footpath. We'd like to thank Peter Elton for his invaluable help in removing these trees and also for clearing the footpaths in the orchard.

Some (14) traditional varieties of apple tree have been ordered for the orchard via Sally Reeves and funds from the Green Grid. These will be planted this winter.

We have created some extra parking spaces along the Fishermen's Track.

The small mammal survey is ongoing and the 49 dormouse nest boxes have been checked once a month. We'd like to thank everybody who has helped with this.

The week of live trapping small mammals (in progress at time of last meeting) yielded fantastic results. We have all six species that were looked for; bank vole, field vole, shrew, pygmy shrew, wood mouse and the rare yellow necked mouse. We were the only site of the nine taking part in this survey (LWT) to have all six. The abundance of small mammals was also amazing and these results have been borne out by the recent sightings of breeding barn owls on the edges of Wood Farm.

Rosemary attended a course about dormice.

10. Interesting sightings; mandarin ducks bred again this year and a kingfisher was seen on the lake a few days ago.

Stanmore Common

REPORT FOR HNCF FROM SUNDAY 8th MAY TO MONDAY SEPTEMBER 11TH 2016

WORK PARTIES

The total amount of volunteer hours from 11th May 2016 to 7th September 2016 is 283 hours for non –Bluebell Heath work in 21 work parties.

1 NCIS group 14 volunteers (27 VOLS from 2 groups) plus another 24 vols.

We started off the reporting period on Sunday May 8th in ‘Silver Aspen Pines’ (Management Compartment 1). It was part of an idea to get around the whole reserve. It did not happen. We spent two workdays felling small trees around a large one. This is called haloing and it helps the tree to grow and it looks pleasing to the eye.

We were overtaken by the Bracken emergence which was strong. We started tackling it early and we did our 1st cut at Hollybrook Rise on Wednesday 18th May and the 2nd cut on Sunday May 22nd. We continued this on the next work party too.

On Sunday May 29th we had the 23rd Wembley Scouts do their woodland badges. They had to identify trees, plant and fell trees and learn about the differences between natural woods and commercial ones.

We started June working on thinning Willows just south of the Heathbourne Stream and clearing Bracken/ and scrub in Bluebell Heath in plots 3, 4, 5 and 6. Arisings were added to the piles in ‘Silver Aspen Pines’.

We moved to Oakmead and from June to September we have been working on keeping the grass clearings open. The only other significant work has been done along Jakes path where we have been felling trees around the Speiring Stream.

The concentration of work over the next period should be clearing condition and woodland light levels.

GUIDED WALKS

On June 11th we ran a course on plant surveying on parcel 4 of Bluebell Heath. 6 people attended including David Winton and Josh Kalms.

No one turned up to the treasure hunt on June 18th.

Once again we had a successful walk around parks and nature reserves in Rayners Lane. There were 8 of us not including ‘Piglet’, Neville’s Dog.

OTHER ISSUES

Flytipping reduced and then increased again in September, a security man was sleeping in a van in the car park over the summer. The police have just now increased their local presence due to public complaints

The Brewer ponds were surveyed by independent consultants due to reports of the pond being dead.

The initial results belie those reports and we are awaiting the final report.

There seems to be an increase in tree disease. Many young Sycamore, Aspen, and Rowan have partially died. The weather has been very dry and this must have placed young trees under strain.

We counted 96 Hard Fern plants on New Heath.

Honeysuckle also seems to be badly affected and the Herts and Middx are warning their site managers.

The major Oak in OAKMEAD has symptoms of Acute Oak Decline with 3 new bleeds from cut limbs.

WILDLIFE

Pill Sedge (*Carex pilulifera*) was in flower on May 18th. We counted 36 Heath Spotted Orchids this year. Other uncommon plants were Pignut, in flower on May 22nd.

We heard Crossbill calling from the pines on Bluebell Heath on June 1st. The stunning Wasp Beetle *Clytus arietis* was seen on June 4th and Black Tailed Skimmer Dragonfly on June 26th. There were Peacock butterfly caterpillars both on Stanmore Common and Wood Farm.

On 3rd July we saw Marbled White and Ringlet Butterflies both grassland species. We also Brown and Southern Hawker Dragonflies.

On July 20th we saw the Cucumber Spider *Araneus cucubita*. We also saw the Maiden’s Blush moth and caterpillar.

The most amazing wildlife sights came from Pear Wood and Wood Farm: Masses of Swallows and Martins over the sewer connected pond.

Clouded Yellow butterflies and Vipers Bugloss on Wood Farm

In August we saw White Ermine Moth caterpillar and Angle Shades Moth.

In August we saw a number of Twany Cockroach.

We have a few small colonies of Sheep’s Sorrel and we found a new one in Bluebell Heath.

On the 23rd August we re-found the uncommon ancient woodland indicator woodlouse *Ligidium hypnorum*.

On the 4th September we had common Toad

Stanmore Little Common

Report to HNCF on Stanmore Little Common Nature Reserve

Robert Stone, Volunteer Warden, 25 September 2015

Little Common has flourished during the summer, with one exception (see below).

The native flora is thriving and my vigorous removal of New Zealand Parrot’s feather from the margins of Caesar’s Pond in spring (as recommended by Denis Vickers) successfully forestalled a further infestation – none has appeared since then. The litter louts have also been less active, though coconuts and plastic representations of gods are once again invading the ponds from the Shree Swaminarayan Temple: we’ll have to have a word with them one more.

The exception to the flourishing is the waterfowl thanks to the terrapins in Spring Pond who are stealing their eggs.

I wish the heron would learn how to eat terrapin, but short of that, if anyone knows a sure way to get rid of these pests, we’d be most grateful if you would contact us.

Stanmore Country Park

SCP warden's report 30th August 2016

Our thanks must go to the monthly group who do a great deal of work when they visit. They have cleared up after Steve's brushcutting and Peter Elton's visit with his 'machine'. Thanks to Peter Elton as well. He keeps the paths clear of bramble which makes the Country Park a pleasure to visit.

'Bones' is now doing the annual cut. Riding around with him on the perimeter of 40 Acre Field has shown me how the trees are restricting access to the edges. We need to look at this and decide what to do.

Maria Crastus, on her monthly visits has been raking too and cutting back bramble where required.

Saira Gregory is in the throes of writing a management plan. This is the first step in a process that we hope will eventually provide funding to allow cattle grazing in 40 Acre Field.

We have been cutting back overhanging Holly and also trimming back bramble in Ant City and do regular visits to inspect the Park.

Kate Lewis has mentioned, more than once, that an oak bough over the path leading up to the Scouts Field is getting lower and lower and could we do something about it. Oh thanks to Kate for diligently picking up discarded rubbish.

We have had one butterfly walk and two moth evenings. The August moth event was to see if the Oak Processionary moth had reached the Country Park; none appeared. We did however have two Jersey Tiger moths that night; they are spreading into Herts as well.

There have been instances of people shooting the Muntjac at night; one body found beside a path.

John Hollingdale

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Wood Farm

Report on Wood Farm

Mark Richardson's team at Harrow Council has done an excellent job of mowing the paths and amenity grassland. Having wide well cut paths makes the site welcoming to visitors.

Griffin Shutters Ltd. installed security shutters on the visitor centre in early July. They work well, and now we can be more confident about leaving items such as books and dipping nets in the visitor centre. There are three sets of keys: I have one, Tosh Padhiar has the other, and the third is a guest set that is at present with Simon Braidman.

On 10th July the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum ran a course on scythe maintenance and use at Wood Farm, using the visitor centre as the base. The five students were taught by Ida Fabrizio and greatly enjoyed the day.

The Wood Farm budget has already paid Japanese Knotweed Limited to carry out a winter cut of the vegetation inside the fenced enclosures around the Japanese knotweed clumps, allowing them to identify clumps that were still active and sprouting in spring 2016. We have included in the budget for 2016-2017 funds to pay the company to do this again in the coming winter. However in July the company said that the undergrowth in the enclosures was so thick that there needed to be additional cutting now, in the summer, to create paths to allow their contractors access to the knotweed clumps. We agreed that this would be done by volunteers.

On August 10th I walked around the site with Gary Brown of Japanese Knotweed Limited, and was impressed with his thoroughness and by what has been achieved. Very little of the knotweed shown in the map created before handover still remains, What there is is weak and spindly. On August 23rd and 24th volunteers created the required paths. On August 31st I met Gary to review the clumps now that we had access, and then Gary sprayed the clumps.

The management plan for Wood Farm designates about 25% of the total area as meadow grassland. This is to be flail cut every year in September and the arisings collected and removed. A further 25% is designated as tussocky grassland, and is to be cut on rotation every two or three years to prevent progression to scrub. On 23rd August I met the wardens of Stanmore Country Park and Pear Wood on site and we surveyed the areas to be cut. Oliver Peters from Bones did the cut on September 6th and collected the arisings in the following few days. In particular we created a large skylark meadow in the centre of the site hidden from view by bramble bushes. If significant growth occurs before next spring we might want to cut it again then so that it is as short as possible when skylarks might be prospecting.

The white-letter hairstreak butterfly is resident at Stanmore Country Park. The caterpillar of this comparatively rare butterfly feeds on elm. English elm persists in a number of areas on Stanmore Country Park, but the number and size of the trees is markedly reduced as a result of Dutch elm disease. Meanwhile, the lower part of Wood Farm contains a number of fenced areas planted with saplings. I have not monitored these closely but there are certainly some saplings that have survived but others have died. On 28th July 2018 Saira Gregory suggested that the gaps in the copses be planted with Wych elm, a species resistant to the disease that the caterpillars are happy to feed on. This would help ensure the survival and even growth of the white-letter hairstreak population. This seems an excellent idea and I will suggest this be added as an item in the 2017-2018 budget.

Steve Bolsover 25th September 2016

Upcoming working parties

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Wednesday 16 November 2016 | Stanmore Common | 10:30 AM - 3:30 PM | Simon Braidman | Widening Witling Glade |
| Saturday 19 November 2016 | Newton Farm | 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM | Leslie Bolsover | Clearing scrub, planting bulbs, litter picking |
| Sunday 20 November 2016 | Stanmore Common | 10:30 AM - 3:30 PM | Simon Braidman | Scrub control in Cerrisland |
| Wednesday 23 November 2016 | Bentley Priory | 10:30 AM - 3:30 PM | Sue Kabel | Creation of bays and inlets into wooded areas to south and west of Spring meadow |
| Saturday 26 November 2016 | Newton Farm | 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM | Leslie Bolsover | Clearing scrub, planting bulbs, litter picking |
| Wednesday 30 November 2016 | Not yet assigned | 10:30 AM - 3:30 PM | Contact HNCF | Regular Wednesday working party |
| Saturday 03 December 2016 | Bentley Old Vicarage | 10:00AM- 12:00noon | James Mercer | Morning working Party |
| Saturday 03 December 2016 | Newton Farm | 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM | Leslie Bolsover | Clearing scrub, planting bulbs, litter picking |
| Sunday 04 December 2016 | Stanmore Common | 10:30 AM - 3:30 PM | Simon Braidman | Clear bare earth banks in New Heath and New Scrape |
| Wednesday 07 December 2016 | Stanmore Common | 10:30 AM - 3:30 PM | Simon Braidman | Scrub control in Oakmead |
| Saturday 10 December 2016 | Roxbourne Rough | 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM | Gary Garland | Morning working Party |
| Saturday 10 December 2016 | Newton Farm | 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM | Leslie Bolsover | Clearing scrub, planting bulbs, litter picking |
| Wednesday 14 December 2016 | Stanmore Country Park | 10:30 AM - 3:30 PM | John Hollingdale | Regular Wednesday working party |
| Saturday 17 December 2016 | Newton Farm | 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM | Leslie Bolsover | Clearing scrub, planting bulbs, litter picking |
| Sunday 18 December 2016 | Stanmore Common | 10:30 AM - 3:30 PM | Simon Braidman | Construct new hollow in Brightwen Wood East |

Meeting point and contact details

Events are open to all and are free - just turn up. Children under 16 years should be accompanied by an adult. If possible, contact the warden before attending a moth evening or working party for the first time so that they know to look out for you and bring the necessary equipment. If you cannot reach the warden or other contacts listed below, contact Steve Bolsover (chairman of Harrow Nature Conservation Forum) as listed at the bottom of the page.

The Wednesday working parties always meet in the Stanmore Common car park, off Warren Lane. From there we walk or arrange transport to the site we are working at.

| Site | Contact name(s) | Contact email(s) | Contact phone(s) | Standard meeting point for walks and working parties |
|------------------------|--|--|------------------|---|
| Bentley Old Vicarage | James Mercer (warden) | jamesjmercer@mac.com | 020 8954 0247 | No specific location - just look for us inside this very small site. |
| | Jane Skelly | jvskelly@yahoo.com | 020 8863 9714 | |
| Bentley Priory | Peter Peretti (warden) | | 020 8954 2918 | The meeting point for guided walks and other educational and fun activities is at the north end of Old Lodge Way. Working parties: see above |
| | Sue Kabel (deputy warden) | suekabel@yahoo.co.uk | 07759 781592 | |
| Roxbourne Rough | Gary Garland | garygarland@hotmail.com | 077 11 938 423 | The meeting point for all events is beside house number 2 on Stirling Ave, off Cannon Lane. |
| | Friends of Roxbourne Park | forp2016@yahoo.com | | |
| Stanmore Common | Simon Braidman (chief warden) | simonbraidman@hotmail.co.uk | 020 8386 2502 | The meeting point for all events is the Stanmore Common car park, off Warren Avenue |
| | John Winter (Deputy warden) | johnswinter@virginmedia.com | 020 8863 5957 | |
| Stanmore Country Park | John Hollingdale (chief warden) | hollhu@yahoo.co.uk | 020 8863 2077 | The meeting point for guided walks and other educational and fun activities is the Stanmore Country Park car park, off Dennis Lane. Working parties: see above |
| Stanmore Little Common | Robert Stone (warden) | robertstone@gmail.com | 020 8954 3869 | No standard meeting point, contact warden |
| Wood Farm | Tosh Padhiar (outreach and education warden) | tosh@ligphotography.com | | The meeting point for guided walks and other educational and fun activities is the Wood Farm car park off Wood Lane. Working parties: see above |