

# **HARROW NATURE CONSERVATION FORUM**

## **Autumn 2017**

Printed copies of the newsletter will no longer be sent out by post. To receive our newsletters by email, email us at [hollhu@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hollhu@yahoo.co.uk). Our fun events and conservation activity events are listed on our website at [www.harrowncf.org](http://www.harrowncf.org) , or sign up to receive regular email updates by emailing [admin@harrowncf.org](mailto:admin@harrowncf.org)."

John Hollingdale – Editor

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### **Report from chairman**

Our sites continue to do well under the hard working tutelage of our volunteer wardens.

We have added two small sites to our portfolio. The Dingles is a small wood at the east end of Montesole recreation ground in Pinner Green that Karen Pillai is looking after, while Lady Gilbert's Orchard is the official name of the Victorian orchard in Grimsdyke Open Space. It is located outside but adjoining the gardens of Grimsdyke hotel, just northwest of the sunken rose garden. The wardens are Hilary Coombes and Charlotte Lippitt. Hilary and Charlotte organized an Apple Afternoon at Grimsdyke on October 8<sup>th</sup>, where they made fresh apple juice with a wooden press, much to the enjoyment of children and adults alike. We handed out leaflets about our site, as we had at two earlier events in the summer, on the May and August bank holidays at Headstone Manor.

We also welcome Tania Watts as deputy warden at Stanmore Country Park. At that site we were very pleased to host six Red Devon cattle on 40 Acre Field in the southeast corner of the site. The cattle came on in April and left in September. Cattle grazing is much better for biodiversity than mechanical cutting, and the cattle did a good job of keeping the grass down.

Meanwhile at Roxbourne Rough we welcome Peter McLouglin as warden. The new pond at Roxbourne Rough has now been fenced off to prevent dogs jumping in and hopefully will begin to fill and settle. In spring 2018 Harrow council will plant marginal plants at the edges

of the pond to improve it as a habitat for invertebrates and amphibians. In September a volunteer team visited Roxbourne Rough and worked with experts from the Harrow Natural History Society to create a baseline species list; we intend to go back in spring/summer 2018 to add the less obvious plants.

There was sad news from Bentley Priory. In April the Friends of Bentley Priory Nature Reserve was wound down, and then in May Tony Wood, who had founded the Friends 22 years earlier, died. We also lost Jill Lewis who had for many years taken care of the Living Churchyard at All Saints' church, adjoining Bentley Old Vicarage nature reserve and who died in April.

At Wood Farm we have been watching the results of tests on the effluent from the waste water treatment system at The Cloisters housing development. Phosphate has been consistently high, which has contributed to algal blooms in the pond into which the effluent flows. We are therefore very happy that a chemical dosing unit was fitted in September to reduce phosphate levels. Wood Farm hosts The Old Dairy visitor centre which is slowly becoming known as a venue for small events. Caroline Nathanson, one of our regular volunteers, used the Old Dairy as the base for a foraging course on August 30<sup>th</sup> while next Sunday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, there is an arts and crafts afternoon with a nature theme run by Susan and Jennie Alexander (from 1PM to 4PM). To enquire about using the Old Dairy email Leslie Bolsover at [info@harrowheritagetrust.org.uk](mailto:info@harrowheritagetrust.org.uk) or on 020 8933 2823.

Gareth Ryman left as Harrow's biodiversity officer in July, and we welcome Steve Whitbread to the role. Steve has been visiting many of our sites and talking with wardens and we look forward to working with him.

Lastly we are at the moment one of the charities that Tesco will fund in its "Bags of Help" scheme. If we receive the full funding of £4000 the money will help support our central costs, such as insurance, as well as supporting a restoration project in Stanmore Common.

Steve Bolsover 15<sup>th</sup> October 2017

# WARDENS' REPORTS

## **Bentley Old Vicarage Nature Reserve**

Two dying willows on the church woodland boundary have been felled as a health and safety precaution. These are to the south of the pond and their felling has enabled considerably more light to penetrate the pond area. It has also opened up the view from the wood towards the church.

A circa 50 year old dead oak has also been felled within the pond enclosure. Within the outdoor classroom area, a dead pear and a dead oak have also been felled. These had been shedding branches and were becoming hazardous. A pine tree and an oak tree were brought down earlier in the year by 'Storm Doris'. They blocked the path adjacent to Harrow Weald College. These have been cut into logs. The rings within the trunk of the tree suggest the pine was also circa 50 years old. The felling was carried out by Greenville Tree Surgeons, contracted by Harrow Council. All logs have been stored as conservation piles.

The footpaths adjacent to the pond and Harrow Weald College have been resurfaced by Harrow Council. A path ramp has been created to permit wheelchair access into the churchyard reserve.

General maintenance has continued within the reserve, with the cutting back of brambles and the mowing of the Butterfly Meadow. Churchyard bees have been busy. Honey is in the process of being spun and put into jars. Throughout the summer months with the help of members of Harrow

Natural History Society a survey of churchyard butterflies was carried out for Butterfly Conservation.

The Forest School is now in its sixth year of operation. Around 100 young people from local schools visit the site on a weekly basis. Care is taken that the young people are restricted to the outdoor classroom and area and footpaths.

In July BOVNR hosted an evening and bat walk jointly with Harrow Natural History Society. Both

Soprano pipistrelles and Common pipistrelles were identified.

James Mercer/Jane Skelly

## **Bentley Priory**

Peter reported that the major cut was taking place this week. He and Simon will liaise regarding the priorities for the monthly Wednesday Conservation Action days at Bentley Priory. Work to be carried out includes pond clearing of Reed Mace and work on the Laurel in the Glenthorne area.

At the Green Grid meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept Sally Reeves reported that they were going to install a wheel-chair friendly kissing gate at the Old Lodge Way entrance but that similar gates at the Glenthorne and Priory Drive entrances were problematic. It was thought better to spend the remaining money on putting a kissing gate on the lakeside path by the Master oak.

At the Bentley Priory Management Committee meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> Sept the Visitor Centre at Masefield Avenue was discussed. As far as everyone knows, work is finished and the Centre includes toilet facilities, it now needs to be furnished.

Steve Whitbread reported that he is looking at information from the Bat Conservation Trust regarding the pillbox and the creation of a bat roost.

## **Lady Gilbert's Orchard**

At the end of June, Charlotte Lipitt and Hilary Coombes became co-wardens of Lady Gilbert's Orchard.

The Japanese Knotweed was treated by the Council by spraying and, for one clump where there was a concern about spray spreading onto nearby Solomon's seal, by stem injection. Some of the Knotweed now shows signs of dying.

A foraging group from Harrow Council's Adult Community and Family Learning Service enjoyed a visit to the orchard to collect some apples.

At the beginning of October, we look forward to a visit from Gerry Edwards an orchard specialist who will seek to identify some of the varieties of the old trees

The orchard was partially strimmed by the Council in preparation for harvesting the apples.

Harvesting took place organised by the Orchard Project for their juice and cider project but they left some apples for our Apple Afternoon which is on the 8<sup>th</sup> October.

Charlotte Lipitt and Hilary Coombes

## **Pear Wood Nature Reserve**

1. We had two TCV days working on the Grimsdyke, manually controlling the bracken, 7th June and 31st July. Good turnout of volunteers. This work is funded by English Heritage.

2. Checked dormouse boxes (all 49) on 13th June. No definite evidence of dormice but some boxes had been occupied by other small mammals and the odd bird's nest. Our thanks to Jane and Simon for their help. We would like to do this one more time before the winter.

3. Guided walk on 17th June. Summer nature walk led by Rosemary. Good turnout, a particular highlight was all the dragonflies on The Scrape.

4. Created paths so the sprayer would have access to the clumps of Japanese knotweed in Ten Acre Field. We also made a new path from the lower end of TAF to Pear Wood; hopefully this will divert people away from the Japanese knotweed; a big thank-you to Steve for his help with this.

5. The Japanese knotweed in Ten Acre Field was sprayed 14th July. A follow up spray was due but I have not been informed whether this happened or not.

6. The Scout Field was mown on 30th Aug. and the arisings collected a few days later. The new arrangement this year with the Scouts being able to park in Wood

Farm car park (and walk across to Pear Wood) has been a great success and they have met regularly throughout the summer. The number of younger scouts

(Beavers) in particular attending, has risen, since there are no longer road safety concerns with dropping off and collecting children.

7. Many of the donated wild flower seeds that we sowed earlier in the year with the help of the TCV (see HNCf report June 2017) came up and bloomed. Several different species can be seen by The Scrape and have been noticed by the public. We are hoping that some will set seed and come up again next year.

8. Apple Picking Afternoon on 16th Sept. We did not have an Apple Day this year but instead we opened up the orchard (and parking) for an afternoon and invited members of Harrow Nat Hist Soc and the public to come and pick their own apples. Rosemary and I were both there to answer questions and assist with picking apples. This was surprisingly well attended and we were fortunate with the weather, so a lovely afternoon was had by all. Our thanks go to Peter Elton whose help was invaluable in getting the orchard ready for this event.

The restoration of the old orchard is going well and it continues to go from strength to strength. The newly planted apple trees are all doing well. We have had to water them a few times this summer, the water butt and collection tank have been essential to guarantee their survival. Grass snakes have bred in the orchard this year and there were an enormous number of baby toads a few weeks ago. Exactly where these have bred is a mystery at the moment. This quiet little corner of Pear Wood is an absolute haven for wildlife, abundant not only with reptiles and amphibians but many species of birds, mammals both large and small and also a great diversity of insects and plants, which includes some interesting fungi and lichens.

9. We are still keen to find funding for a new fence along Wood Lane if at all possible.

Claire Abbott and Rosemary Etheridge

### Newton Farm (Newton Park East)

This summer we've maintained the existing paths and cut paths from the stone circle to the "stump" using scythes and other hand tools. A few regular volunteers are getting good at scything. Also in summer we had a morning revisiting the species lists compiled 20 years ago. Of those listed only the Giant Hogweed was missing after 20 years however, there is no more diversity. Mowing & collecting was done by Bones in September after a bit of pruning along the path to ensure that equipment could access the meadows. Hopefully, by maintaining an altered autumnal mowing schedule rather than a July mowing, we might see some species diversity occurring in the meadow plants in a few years. Sadly two of the three small apple trees planted in the Spring Meadow three years ago by Ground Works and the Orchard Project were dug up and whisked away over the summer. There is a lone tree remaining but I'm not keeping my hopes up – it could disappear at any moment! The three standard apples trees which are much less obvious are doing well. Many thanks to Fraser who helped mulch and fertilize the saplings in the Spring. The large pond has shown a bit of improvement over last year's influx of oily water. We saw Common Snails return, dragonflies and damselflies and also a bumper crop of ladybirds as well as grey wagtail and the coots – so the pond isn't dead yet. Problems besides tree snatching include the deteriorating state of retaining walls in the Healing Garden and the health of a few of the trees. I'm researching funding options for repair work. The Japanese

Knotweed was treated by SRB with good results. On the positive side fly-tipping is down and regular volunteers are very keen to continue cleaning up old rubbish dumps. We did a small bit of bat detecting and "heard" Pipistrelle and Daubentons.

The butterflies this year have been superb and all volunteers on one Saturday participated in the big butterfly count. Split into 4 groups they recorded 40 butterflies of 9 species.

Leslie Bolsover

### Roxbourne Rough

I took over in March 2017 so this is my first report and only covers part of the year.

**David Bolton's Pande** The decking and fencing have now been installed round the pond. The intention is to lock the gate and to restrict access to allow the pond and proposed plantings to establish.

Access terms have yet to be finalised. Dave's idea was to establish a pond especially for the use of schools and educational purposes. Himalayan balsam continues to be a problem despite repeated attempts to clear it.

**Wheel chair access gate** This was installed by the Council in Sept. at the Woodlands Av end of the Rough.

**Working Parties** These took place on the dates advertised via Friends of Roxbourne Park Facebook and the notice boards with the exception of Sept 10th which was cancelled because of holidays. Attendance varies inevitably between 1 & 9. The next ones are planned for Oct 12th, Nov 12th, Dec 9th.

**Contact links on HCVF web** This seems to have been removed rather suddenly and without discussion.

**Litter** Regular litter picks are carried out though recently the number of bottles and drugs packets seems to have declined

**Tree felling** The council, which seems excessively keen on felling, has recently felled several trees in the park and we are hoping this habit does not spread to the Rough.

**Bio Blitz volunteers** Volunteers blitzed the Rough in Sept we are looking forward to the results and thank them for their work and especially the path laying work they undertook.

**Grass cutting** We asked for this to now exclude a small section around the small copse in the North West of the Rough and around the bench and memorial trees on the east side.

This was done by the very helpful tractor driver and we are already seeing some tree growth in these areas. The plan is to establish more trees in these areas.

Peter McLoughlin

### Stanmore Common

There was a total of 521 volunteer hours work in the period June 3rd to Sept 27th on Stanmore Common.

287 of those were on Bluebell Heath.; 64 hours on Hollybrook Rise; 22.5 hours on Oakmead; 32 hours on Cerrisland. We have had 16 regular volunteers plus assorted one offs.

The first work party of the period on Sunday June 4th was to improve Bluebell Heath by bracken control. The idea is not universal clearance but to create patches within the bracken which can catch the sun but avoid the wind and allow animals shelter and cover.

We moved on the 7th June to Hollybrook Rise to control bracken there.

On the 11th June we did work to improve the Horse Ride removing low branches and widening the path.

In July work continued in the open compartments as we tried to carry out control of Bracken and saplings in the clearings without removing the entire habitat. We wanted to wait as long as possible before control to allow insects to be undisturbed and go through as much of their life cycles as possible. We did control in Oakmead and Bluebell Heath West on the 5th July. We noted a population of Hairy Sedge (*Carex hirta*) in Oakmead. 3 large bracken patches were cut in Oakmead and we started bracken control in Parcel 5 in Bluebell Heath West.

The following Sunday, the 16th we were on New Heath and in the adjacent woodland of the Aspens. John Winter and John Bugler were felling trees to get more light into the Aspens. I was joined by Josh and we carried out bracken control on New Heath. New Heath looked fantastic with lots of bare ground and grass tussocks. and lots of solitary bee holes.

There is a lot of nice plant species including Mat Grass (*Nardus stricta*) and Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*).

Wednesday 19th July was a special day. We had a visit from teenagers of the National Citizens Service to Bentley Priory. There were 16 15 17 year olds and their leader and they pulled Ragwort.

On Friday 21st July we had an extra work party. Four of us set up and measured permanent quadrats on New Scrape to monitor plant populations. I was joined by Tony Gourdin, Jack Rowntree and Josh Kalms.

Then on Friday 21st July evening we had Wembley 23rd Scouts come back and they felled trees in a belt to the east of Druid's Path.

The following Sunday 30th July we were back on Bracken control in Bluebell Heath around Parcel 5/7.

In August Bracken control continued in Bluebell Heath. The first Wednesday was well attended. 8 people attended doing bracken clearance in the north end of Bluebell Heath. More bracken bashing on the 13th August this time in Parcel 10 on the east side. Work continued on Bluebell Heath throughout August. Finally after weeks of working Bluebell Heath we moved to Hollybrook Rise and did some bracken control.

On Sunday 3rd September we cleared a fallen tree around Great Brewers Pond and then did a circuit of the pond edge which was full of Bladderwort *Urticularia* species. On the 6th September we had a corporate group – the train maintenance company Alstrom. They pulled bracken in Parcel 9/8a and also did scrub control. They were great.

On the 10th September we weeded baby trees from New Scrape. On the Sunday 17th September we moved to Cerrisland and we cleared an area just north of the cross path in the centre of the clearing. More work is needed here but less, intensive.

On the 24th September we were in Oakmead which had got quite overgrown and we worked in the area just west of the major Oak. Another 2 new volunteers came along.

The reporting period finished with just Vicki Cooper and me felling trees to provide chipping material for the Master Oak on Bentley Priory on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> Aug.

Simon Braidman

### Stanmore Country Park

We have had a spring and summer walk and a moth evening since April.

Moth evening

The weather was good and about ten of us gathered around the UV light hanging above a white sheet. Several Common Swifts appeared first as always. Moths came regularly and the more able of the attendees were able to give me most of the Ids for which I was grateful. I was doing the recording sitting on the nearby bench. We potted most of the micros for me to look at next morning. Amongst the more notable Macros were Figure of Eighty, Orange Footman, Pale Prominent, Pebble Hook tip, Peppered Moth, Scorched Wing, Shoulder-striped Wainscot and Small Fanfoot. There was a total of 21 macro species.

There were 11 micro species too. I had to send several of them to Colin Plant, our county moth recorder, for identifying and verification. There were thus 5 new records of micro species for the country park.

The spring walk was a bit disappointing. Only four species of butterfly were seen.

Margaret and my daughter Sarah led the July walk; I was having a rest in the nearby hospital. Fortunately Dick Middleton of the Ruislip Natural History Society came along too so the butterfly IDing was done by an expert. All the summer species were seen including Marbled Whites and Ringlets.

Steve Bolsover has been working hard brush cutting assisted by the Wednesday working party. Margret and I were 'lookouts' as Steve felled a couple of Ash Trees that residents of the local flats said they were "blocking their view of the Country Park"; we aim to please. We since have had a nice letter thanking us plus a donation to the Forum. The latest Wednesday group spent some time pulling up some Goats Rue that suddenly appeared in the silt dragged out of the balancing ponds. Then they removed large branches that had come down on the path leading to the Scout's Field. This was reported to me by Kate Lewis. Thanks Kate.

John Hollingdale

### **Stanmore Little Common**

A quiet and healthy summer for the reserve this year. Caesar's Pond remained free of New Zealand Parrots Feather and is now clear of Broad Leaved Pond Weed. The terrapins have fortunately (but unaccountably) disappeared from Spring Pond, leaving the mallards, coots and moorhens calm and untroubled, along with our visiting heron. The Council is replacing the wooden fencing around Caesar's Pond with concrete fencing, which at present looks rather stark but will no doubt weather nicely. It will certainly be more robust than the wooden fencing.

Robert Stone

### **Wood Farm**

#### **Meadow Grass**

The meadow grass has had its annual cut by Bones, overseen by Steve Bolsover (thank you). The Tussocky grassland was also cut in the two / three year rotation.

#### **TCV days**

A number of TCV days took place

First priority was removing as much of the Goats Rue as possible in the meadow grass area.

This was a big task and a fair amount of Goats Rue was removed.

#### **We had an issue with Algae growth over the Pond.**

The level of algal "bloom" pollution by filamentous algae is very high indeed indicating increasing eutrophication. Jaysam has installed chemical dosing unit and undertook the removal of the current algal bloom. They are also installing the air pump remote monitoring system, which is a positive as this goes beyond what is stipulated in the Deed of Easement.

The fencing by Trimlock has been completed. I took the opportunity to stop the public walking round the pond and limiting them to one side only; keeping the other side for animals only.

Dave Winton