

Forest Update



Issue 33

The Wychwood Project Newsletter

Summer 2010



Wychwood v volunteers at Eynsham Abbey fish Ponds



Out and About with the Wychwood Project

Pictures left to right: CAT Group at work; River Glyme at Glympton; Wychwood v at Leafield playground; Oxford Brookes students hedge planting at Finstock; veteran ash near the Lady well, Wilcote; footpath improvements at Eynsham Abbey Fish Ponds; Wychwood drystonewalling group at work near Widford; wet meadow near Ascott under Wychwood

Project Update

Nick Mottram, Project Director

Our new woodland gets a name

Our new woodland site has been given a name – FOXBURROW WOOD. This was the clear favourite in our recent consultation evenings and was formally adopted by the Friends of Wychwood Trustees at the end of June. The wood takes its name from Foxburrow Lane, the small road that runs along the northern edge of the site and links Hailey with Crawley. For those of you who missed the consultation evening or would like to see a video of the site there is a nice piece on newly established Witney-based online news serve Twitney (www.twitney.co.uk).

Efforts continue behind the scenes to get the new woodland up and running. A planning application was submitted to create a new entrance and a small amount of short-term parking off Foxburrow Lane. Botanical and breeding bird surveys have been undertaken to help inform the future design and a lot of effort is being put into trying to attract financial support from charities and national funding bodies. Meanwhile the grass continues to grow and a local farmer has taken a first cut of hay.

The next big milestone in the development of the Foxburrow Wood is the Forest Fair, which will be held on the site. This year more than ever the Forest Fair will be a really important fundraising opportunity for the Wychwood Project. I hope you will come along and persuade your friends and neighbours to come too. We are also looking for volunteers to help with stalls and activities on the day. If you would like to volunteer contact Ken Betteridge on 01993 878615.



Foxburriow Wood in May - pretty but not species diverse

New Offices for the Wychwood Project

After ten years in Woodstock the Project Office has moved to Eynsham, to make way for the re-development of our previous home in the grounds of the Oxfordshire museum. The Project office is hosted by the County Council's Countryside Service, and we, along with all the other parts of the Service have now been brought together under one roof. Whilst we are sorry to say goodbye to the delightful museum garden the new premises are much more modern and better equipped. There will also be benefits from closer links with other Countryside Service teams such as Rights of Way, the County ecology team. Our new contact details are on the back page. Our email address remains the same.

- NEWSBOARD -

THE WYCHWOOD PROJECT

Wanted: Treasurer / Company Secretary for the Friends of Wychwood.

Are you comfortable dealing with numbers and would you like to play a direct part in helping conserve the beautiful Wychwood countryside and wildlife? The Friends of Wychwood—the charity and limited company that provides such crucial support to achieving the aims of the Wychwood Project—are looking to recruit a treasurer to replace Stuart Fox who will be standing down later this year as a trustee and treasure after 10 years. This is a really exciting time to be involved at the heart of the Project.
For more information contact Michael Drew on 01993 702624.

LOTTERY WINNERS: The Wychwood Project lottery has proved popular and our first winners have received their cheques. Half of the funds each month are distributed in prizes, the other half going to support Project activities. You take part for as little as £2. Contact Sally Jeffery in the Project Office to find out how.
Tel: 01865 815423.

Welcome to new Corporate Members, **TALL TREES CARE HOME** and **TIMBER WINDOWS** who, with **AUDLEY TRAVEL** have donated to our Forest Fair Grand Draw. Look out for Corporate Members stalls at the Forest Fair.

Artists to the Wychwood Forest

By John Lilly

An ancient forest – the words conjure up thoughts of mystery and myth. Hardly a mystery – the exhibition in May at the Chipping Norton Theatre Gallery did showcase the creativity and imagination the forest inspires. For Celia Crampton it comes from the exquisite flora that she captures not only with incredible accuracy but also imbued with a deep emotion and beauty. For Liz Hogarty it is the fauna, wild and domestic. With confident draughtsmanship and outstanding use of colour, design and tone, you will never see a hare or cow in the same way again. For Chris Townsend it is the tree. His work in metal uses his skilled control of the medium to give the essence and soul of the tree. The feedback was superb – from the Theatre, the artists and the general public. Judging from the application forms taken from the Wychwood Project display – people clearly saw what we do and liked what they saw. We hope this 'Artists to the Wychwood Forest' will become an annual event.



Left to Right: Liz Hogarty, Celia Crampton and Chris Townsend

Ditch clearing at Eynsam Fish Ponds

Wychwood v Move Mountains

Jane Bowley

Something to prune, clear, drag or repair? Wychwood v will be there to help. Working on more than twenty sites in recent months, different groups have contributed to the completion of a wide range of tasks for the benefit of the local environment and community groups.

The most regular gang are the students from the Abingdon and Witney College STEPS

programme for young people with learning difficulties. Their Wychwood v group comes out into the field every other Thursday during term time and are developing their practical and team work skills to great effect. They had a great time at Freeland cutting back a hedge on behalf of the playing field committee, followed by ritual marshmallows on the bonfire, and they created mountains of invasive Canada balsam cleared at Woodstock water meadows.



Himalayan mountain of balsam at Woodstock

One site in particular, Eynsham Abbey Fish Ponds, has been adopted by all of the volunteers who have worked on it. They love the site and have thoroughly enjoyed contributing to its management and feeling part of the historical development of a fascinating location. They have helped to clear perimeter ditches, clear ponds, repair footpaths and clear scrub from the car park and surroundings. Their contribution has been widely recognised in the village and by the Parish Council and it is no coincidence that the group chose to celebrate the second birthday of Wychwood v in Eynsham in June.

As well as improving the environment for local communities and contributing to habitat maintenance the project has helped young people to make positive changes in their own lives. Three volunteers who were unemployed have now found permanent employment, one of them as a conservation project officer on reserves run by Froglife in Peterborough.



Community Woodland Award in The Forest of Wychwood

Clare Musson and Nick Mottram

The summer months were brightened further with some great news from Hailey. Breach Wood Community Woodland, which was established by the local community in 2003 with support from the Wychwood Project, has won a prestigious award from the Royal Forestry Society (RFS) – Best Community Woodland in the South East Region, beating off over 50 other community woodlands including, we hear, a number of high-profile entries.

The award was judged by two highly experienced, independent foresters on behalf of the RFS. Despite suffering a puncture to their car as they left they still noted that Breach Wood stood “head and shoulders” above the others they saw in the following weeks. This success reflects not only the high quality management which the Wood’s Trustees organise, but also the extent of community involvement and continuing engagement.

There are many examples of how Breach Wood has become integral to the local community: the Breach Wood Fair, moth nights, dawn chorus walks, the recent Wychwood Hedgelaying Competition, close links with Hailey Primary School, involving young people and the Witney Woodland volunteers in tree maintenance, tree pruning workshops and much more. That all

this is possible in a woodland of a little over 6 acres in size and less than 10 years old is a testament to the hard work, inspiration and support of all involved.

Many people have helped Breach Wood become established further highlighting how important it is to have a good network of supporters. David Rees of the Oxfordshire Woodland Project has provided invaluable tree management advice over the years, whilst funders such as WREN and the Forestry Commission have matched local fundraising efforts.

The Trustees are keen to explore other ways in which local people can benefit from the site and hope that the award might encourage new ideas as well as attract others with an interest in helping look after and develop the woodland in the future.

Community woodlands have been one of the real success stories of the Wychwood Project. Some, such as Leaffield Community Woodland have community involvement at their very heart. Others such as Diggers Wood in Shipton-under-Wychwood, owned by the Woodland Trust, are just nice places to enjoy some quiet time in. Further details can be found at www.wychwoodproject.org



*RFS Inspection Day.
L to R: Nick Mottram (Wychwood Project),
Judith Wood (Trustee), Simon Hewitt (RFS),
Rod Leslie (RFS), Sean Morris (Trustee)*



Moth night at Breach Wood



*An unusual use for Breach Wood— as a venue
for a formal meeting*



A perfect setting for a BBQ

Easy fund raising:

More and more people are using the internet to buy things. If that includes you, why not support the Wychwood Project when you shop online using Easy Fund Raising. We receive a percentage, sometimes as much as 5%, of any purchase that you make through the site.

It doesn't cost the user. Lots of major retailers are represented from Amazon to M&S. Visit www.easyfundraising.org.uk and choose the 'Friends of Wychwood – Ascott-under-Wychwood' as your preferred good cause.

Lower Windrush Valley Project Update

Alison Hopewell, Lower Windrush Valley Project Officer

Standlake Common Nature Reserve continues to be our flagship site in the Lower Windrush Valley and 2009 brought some exciting developments. In June we were pleased to find a family of barn owls had at long last taken up residence in one of the nest boxes that were installed in 2004 on the disused electricity poles.



Common Sandpiper enjoys the new pools and shallows

Four chicks hatched and were ringed by Pat Wixey and Ian Anderson. However, in July the arrival of a Great Bustard on one of the islands rather stole the limelight. This bird of the Russian Steppes

could hardly have been more incongruous amongst the ducks and geese.

A prominent red tag revealed it to be one of the birds introduced onto Salisbury Plain. We later discovered that this particular female had flown up from Somerset. She seemed to enjoy her 3 days at a lakeside retreat before continuing

her journey! In August, a hay crop was taken for the first time from the new 6ha meadow and with the stock fencing installed earlier in the year creating a more convenient grazing unit, we were able to introduce sheep on site (another



A mosaic of ponds, shallows and grassland helps make the Reserve so valuable for wildlife. The pond in the foreground has been located to encourage dragonflies close to the bird hide

first!) to graze the aftermath. In November, an 18 tonne excavator arrived on site to fine tune the lake habitats. Although the existing shoreline had a shallow gradient it was very uniform. Dave, from Smiths Construction, created a mosaic of pools and bays within the shoreline and then used the spoil to create additional islands just off shore. Pond Conservation helped us with this work, which gave an opportunity to put into practice the principle of spoil transfer promoted in their Pond Creation Toolkit for the Aggregate Industry.



Creating new islands at Standlake Common Nature Reserve

Introducing two new Trustees

The Friends of Wychwood were pleased to welcome two new trustees of the Friends of Wychwood at last year's AGM: Stephen Ashworth and Richard Lord.

Stephen has lived in the Wychwood area for over 20 years, and has been associated with the Project since it started. He is particularly interested in the flora and fauna of the area, reflecting his more general interests. Last summer a visit to Romania to study the vast unimproved grasslands of Transylvania threw up the contrast of a thousand years of traditional husbandry with our own more intensively farmed landscape. Stephen is keen to help the Wychwood Project engage with local people, knowing that the more we can build on the enthusiasm and knowledge already present, the better the results will be. Stephen ran the now famous Wychwood Project bookstall at last year's Forest Fair.



Richard with some of the trees he has planted

Richard Lord grew up in Warwickshire but has lived in the Wychwood forest area for 15 years and is a long standing supporter of the Wychwood Project. He has always loved trees and has planted as many as he can fit into his garden in Ramsden where he lives with his wife and three children. Richard was a founder member of the Wychwood Network which, during its short but busy lifetime, promoted various aspects of sustainability and environmental conservation in the area. He also enjoys playing and watching cricket, especially at Swinbrook Cricket Club, walking with his dogs, listening to Reggae music and strumming his guitar very badly. You may not have seen him but will have heard him, as Richard is often behind the microphone of the PA system at the Forest Fair.



Stephen on the bookstall at last year's Forest Fair

Wychwood Geology

Charles Keighley reports on a talk hosted by the Wychwood Project

William Smith of Churchill, the founder, in the early 19th century, of the modern geological map, would have been intrigued to learn the theory of plate tectonics, which underpinned a talk about Wychwood's geology given to Friends of Wychwood by Lesley Dunlop and Denise Dane of the Oxford Geology Trust.

Lesley explained that Middle and Lower Jurassic limestones and clays associated with the Cotswolds were laid down about 170 m. years ago, in shallow tropical seas when the land on which we sit was then about 30 degrees north – similar to the coast off modern Florida. This was before the Atlantic Ocean opened up, and somewhat surprisingly when there was volcanic activity in what is now the North Sea. Fullers Earth, once extracted and used locally in the woollen industry, is a remnant of volcanic ash laid down in those shallow seas.



Blocky limestone topped with clay on a site in Bladon



The geology of Asthall showing a u-shaped patch of gravel that was left as the course of river changed after the last ice-age

© Ken Betteridge

Is the existence of the Royal hunting Forest of Wychood in any way related to local geology? Lesley suggested that the better-drained limestone areas were more easily traversed than the lower clays, and were therefore more attractive to the hunting elite. Within these limestone areas, woodlands seem to have survived longest on the more recent, higher level glacial deposits around Cornbury and above Burford where ground may have been less suitable for farming.

Several of the limestone beds provide good building stone. Quarries at Taynton supplied stone for St Paul's Cathedral and Blenheim Palace. Mines at Stonesfield produced the stone slates, familiar on old roofs locally, from strata in which William Buckland discovered the first dinosaur in 1824. Much of our geological knowledge comes from studying these quarries which dot our area. Ditchley Quarry near Charlbury provides an opportunity to view a cross-section of geological strata, with several beds of different limestones. Its rock face has recently been cleared of scrub by Wychwood V volunteers, under Denise's guidance.



Wychwood v volunteers keeping an important quarry face clear of vegetation

Over time geological activity reduced and, during a long period of gradual erosion, the various strata were exposed, with the older rocks to the north of our area, and the younger to the south – from Lower Lias around the Wychwoods to Oxford Clay south of Witney.

Global cooling introduced the Ice Ages during the last 2 million years. Massive braided rivers flowed south off the ice sheets, in a landscape like that of northern Alaska today, and deposited their stones and pebbles from the north at higher levels in what is now the broader Thames Valley. The question of how far south the glaciers reached has not yet been settled. The modern river valley systems of the Windrush, Evenlode and Glyme, and their associated low level gravels are essentially recent post Ice Age phenomena.

Campaign for the Farmed Environment - Preserving the Benefits of Set-Aside

Ian Anderson

In the late 1980s a compulsory scheme, known as Set-Aside, was introduced for each Country in the European Union, that required farmers to leave a certain percentage of their arable land un-cropped each year. The aim of Set-Aside was to discourage over-production of cereals preventing so-called 'grain mountains' and maintaining prices. Some twenty years on, the supply and demand picture has changed, and the compulsory Set-Aside requirement has been removed.

When Set-Aside was in force, the areas left un-cropped brought considerable environmental and wildlife benefits. Birds in particular benefited from increased ground feeding and nesting opportunities. Such advantages were therefore likely to be lost if all this land went back under the plough. This led to proposals that UK farmers manage 4-6% of their land specifically for environmental outputs, as a condition of receiving some other support grants. Following subsequent discussions between the UK government and the major Farmers/Landowners Organisations (NFU & CLA) a voluntary arrangement has been agreed instead which aims to recapture and exceed the delivery of environmental benefits that previously arose by Set-Aside.



Diverse and species rich margin on arable land – in Gloucestershire! Good local examples wanted

This voluntary approach is to be known as *The Campaign for the Farmed Environment* (CFE) through which farmers will be focussing attention on three key themes;



What space for wildlife?

Farmland biodiversity – maintaining and enhancing important arable farmland habitats e.g. flower-rich strips for butterflies and bees, hedgerows as wildlife corridors.

The NFU & CLA will be working in close partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency and conservation organisations including FWAG, RSPB and Wildlife Trusts, in order to promote the Campaign for the Farmed Environment. A key component will be a significant increase in on-farm participation in the existing Entry Level Stewardship Scheme (ELS). There will be considerable benefits in securing improved uptake in West Oxfordshire and the Wychwood Project will be giving every encouragement to see CFE succeed.

Resource protection – protection of soil by, for example, establishing buffer strips alongside watercourses to tackle soil run-off and slow down soil erosion.

Farmland bird habitats – management and creation of safe nesting sites, summer feeding opportunities and overwintering seed sources.



The Wychwood Project works within the area that was once the Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood.

Our Goals:

The Wychwood Project aims to raise awareness of the history and heritage of the Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood, and to encourage local people to take part in and benefit from restoration, conservation and enhancement of the rich mosaic of landscapes and habitats within the Forest boundaries.

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