

Forest Update



Issue 34

The Wychwood Project Newsletter

Autumn 2010



Some of the members of the Witney Woodland Volunteers who designed, organised and ran the "Buy a Tree for Foxburrow Wood" stall at the Forest Fair.



Forest Fair 2010



Pictures: Marquees going up; The Wychwood v tree of life, the bow maker; Guild of Weavers Spinners and Dyers; willow work and wheel-wrights; making time for the Morris; Foxbury Farm making lunch; bodgers and turners; the famous Forest Fair Bookstall; Ray at the shave horse.

Project Update

*Nick Mottram,
Project Director*

"May you live in interesting times" is a much quoted phrase that seems particularly relevant at the moment. There are many exciting new initiatives that the project is involved with, not least the continuing development of Foxburrow Wood – the Friends of Wychwood's new community woodland site near Witney – and our involvement with another important area of conservation land in the heart of Witney – of which you can read more on this page. However, there are also other challenges that the Project faces as the Friends Chairman writes below.

Introducing Grimesmead and Little Grimes

An exciting new initiative for the Project is the forthcoming acquisition by the Friends of Wychwood of 14 acres of farmland across two riverside meadows close to Cogges Manor Farm Museum in the heart of Witney. These meadows are of particular biodiversity value and important in the historic setting of the area. Grimesmead, the larger of the two, is designated as a Local Wildlife Site. We have been supporting the previous landowner on a range of management works for a number of years and were able to respond positively when he approached us earlier this year with a view to our taking over the sites and ensuring that conservation work continues in the future. We are fortunate to have been able to pull in some external funds to help with the purchase. More details will follow in future issues of Forest Update.



The Windrush flowing through the heart of Witney

Another Great Forest Fair

Early rain couldn't put a damper on the Forest Fair. Whilst visitor numbers were a bit lower than usual, the quality of the experience was up to its usual high standard. As ever, thanks are due to the many volunteers who worked tirelessly to get the show up and running. Amongst the new exhibits this year was a maker of traditional wooden archery bows and a medieval re-enactment. It is interesting to see that our rural crafts displays now take up one side of the Fair ground, a sign of how the Fair continues to build interest. Even with the reduced numbers the Fair still made a profit for the Friends of Wychwood, which will go towards supporting the wide range of Wychwood Project activities.

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE FRIENDS OF WYCHWOOD

*The Wychwood Project has benefited from the financial support of the County Council and West Oxfordshire District Council since its inception in 1997. This funding is now under threat. Although it is a relatively small proportion of the income the Project generates, this money is important as it underpins our Project office. It allows the Project to provide support to many local communities and develop initiatives such as Wychwood v that benefit local people, wildlife and landscapes. At this moment in time we don't have any clear information about what the effect of cuts will be. But there will be an effect. The Project will evolve in response to this, seeking out new opportunities and new ways of achieving our core aims – promoting the **Identity**, sense of **Belonging** and **Stewardship** of Wychwood. We are already doing this through sites like Foxburrow Wood. However, now more than ever, we need your continued support. Please spread the word about the benefits the Project brings; tell your local councillor, recruit new members of the Friends of Wychwood and take part in our new initiatives like the Friends of Wychwood lottery.*

Michael Drew, Chairman, Friends of Wychwood

WYCHWOOD V BIG DIG

“We should have our own Time Team” said Dan, as we were digging out the old perimeter ditches at Eynsham Abbey Fish Ponds. Initially it appeared that this throwaway comment had sunk into the mud, but it must have taken root. After considerable planning and organisation it resulted in a three day archaeological dig at the Fish Ponds involving most of the v team at one time or another.

Steering group meetings, and also a meeting with Paul and Verity Hughes of Eynsham Parish Council, were set up to plan where and when the dig would take place. We learnt that there had been a previous excavation which uncovered several walls and a road, thought to date back to medieval times.

From August 24th to the 26th the dig went ahead with regulars from all our programmes, new recruits and passers by all getting involved. However we were unable to escape the British summer, and were rained off on the 26th. We returned undeterred on the 31st and brought with us Twitney who recorded the event and our finds before everything was covered over once again. The group had great fun working together on the project, finding many pieces of pottery, horse shoes, nails and uncovering more of the walls and road that drew us there in the first place.

Watch the story online at www.twitney.co.uk.

Top to bottom: getting stuck in at the Eynsham site; sketching out the area found at the fish ponds; watching Jane struggle with her tree while the rest sit back and admire their work at Wigwell nature reserve.



Recruiting

Fancy getting involved yourself or know someone you think might enjoy coming along?

Give Jane a call on 07785515730



Forest Fair

In preparation for the Forest Fair, we had a number of activities in mind, perhaps none more ambitious than the creation of our very own tree, which was brought to bloom throughout the day thanks to the many personalised hand prints of the visitors to the fair. There was also live music from our volunteers, clay animals being made as well as a treasure hunt. All in all, the forest fair proved to be a great day for v!

People Behind The Scenes

Alan Spicer – Wychwood Project, Chairman



After careers in both industry and Higher Education, Alan was instrumental in founding the Wychwood Project and was elected Chairman in 1997. He has been its anchor and valued councillor ever since. Among his particular contributions have been the creation of the 37 mile

footpath through the former Royal Forest, the 'Wychwood Way', and its accompanying guidebook, research into the history and biodiversity of our hedgerows and the recording of wildlife in the area. Based in Charlbury for over 40 years, he also advises on the management of their local nature reserves. Alan says 'What I find truly inspiring about the Wychwood Project is the increasing involvement and support of the numerous individuals and community groups of all ages and interests who are working so hard and effectively to achieve its aims. As we enter the fourteenth year of the Project and embark on our most ambitious woodland scheme to date, 'Foxburrow Wood', I feel we should continue to seek further opportunities to manage a diversity of wildlife habitats and amenity spaces for local people.'

John Lilly – Friends of Wychwood Trustee

John Lilly has been a trustee for three years and a member for much longer. As a trustee he has responsibility for membership recruitment – amongst other things. He has been headteacher of two Comprehensive Schools and later worked on economic regeneration on Merseyside. His particular interest is Early Years education. He regularly goes travelling worldwide – as he says 'backpacking with a little more money!' He sees being a trustee as both a privilege and a responsibility. Stewardship means caring for and sustaining the Forest heritage in all its forms. Identity means you identify with and commit yourself to a very special place. Belonging is working with others and as a community. This is why he believes that our membership is at the heart of all that we do – individuals, families, partners and forest businesses. His love of the Forest grows from living here and walking his greyhounds.



Non-breeding adult barn owls (male left, female right) in a nest box monitored during 2010. Note abundance of moulted feathers.

Barn Owl Report

Ian Anderson

We have had a busy summer monitoring sites where there are nest boxes. The information gathered this year has again proved very interesting, albeit a little depressing! Reports of barn owls being seen during daylight hours in late winter/early spring had aroused our suspicions. Why were they finding it necessary to hunt in the daytime when there were adequate hours of darkness for them? Could it be that food supplies were short and the owls were being forced to do 'overtime' in order to find sufficient to eat? We were worried!

Our fears were confirmed when in June we started off on our rounds to check the nest sites. Whilst we found adult birds at sites, they had not started to lay eggs. Clearly the females had not achieved the required weight gains after winter to stimulate egg laying. Whilst the very harsh winter will have undoubtedly taken its toll, it became clear that spring 2010 had coincided with the cyclical 'crash' in populations of the short-tailed field vole, the main prey for barn owls. This happens naturally every 4-5 years, the last time being 2006.

We were hopeful that perhaps the situation would improve during the early summer and that we would then be recording late broods. However, this didn't happen. A significant number of adult birds went into a premature moult and did not breed. By mid-September we had only ringed 29 young owlets (an average of 1.8 per successful nest). This compared with 148 in 2009 (average 3.3 per nest). We understand that our results are similar to others around the country.

International year of Biodiversity

Cynth Napper of the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum explains why we should recognise the value of our natural environment – now.

We are 100% dependent on our natural environment, another term for which is our 'biodiversity'.

At the local level, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 devolves the responsibility for recognising the value of biodiversity on our own Parish Councils. Section 40 states that **'Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity'**. So, what is biodiversity and what is the Act's purpose?

'Biological diversity' is a collective term for all the species on Earth, humans included. All species are interdependent, maintaining the 'web' of life. We humans depend entirely on other species for all our food, fresh water, clothing, shelter, fuel, oxygen, medicines. We use other species as a genetic resource. We make money by growing or trading in other species. We enjoy free **'ecosystem services'** from other species – the soil communities which recycle the nutrients that grow our food; the bees that pollinate around a third of that food; the grass in river meadows that hold floodwater, giving it time to percolate and cleanse through soil and rocks, collecting in aquifers from which we draw pure water to drink; the trees that absorb pollutants and purify the air we breathe. In Africa this term 'ecosystem service' is well used and understood – because communities there live on the edge.



Field scabious



*Artificial nest for masonry bees –
Charlbury*

The Act's purpose is to maintain our biodiversity so that it can sustain us, not just materially, but aesthetically and morally too. Having given a NERC talk to three Wychwood communities I know that people choose to live in Wychwood because of its beautiful landscape – and that is mainly down to biodiversity.

Local environment groups become vital to their parish council and local community, helping for instance, by recording species and by managing local sites. But more than that the entire local community has a vital role to play. First, in providing space for wildlife in their gardens, for example, by leaving long grassy areas, sowing wildflower patches, planting shrubs and climbers for nesting sites, allowing bats and swifts access to buildings, installing bird, bat and bee boxes. Second, by allowing the council to reduce their never-ending tidying and mowing of village communal areas, saving money in the

process! Third, by supporting local initiatives such as providing allotments, growing coppice for wood fuel provision, planting community orchards, again all money saving ideas as well as allowing for greater biodiversity in the community and reducing carbon dioxide

Foxburrow Wood Update

Our first site works have taken place at Foxburrow Wood, with the erection of deer fencing along the western boundary. Our plan is that ultimately the entire boundary of the site will be fenced to keep deer out. Soil sampling was undertaken with the help of both volunteers with spades and some mechanical assistance – there is soil (hurrah!) and at least one pocket of clay so perhaps we shall have some variation of habitat. A lot of effort has been going into fundraising: from institutions, private donors and with our new **'Sponsor a Tree for Foxburrow Wood'** campaign. Why not sponsor a tree for all sorts of reasons – see the next page for more details.



First deer fencing installed



Soil sampling underway



Dedicate a Tree at Foxburrow Wood

Tired of giving socks and perfume as presents. Why not give a more lasting gift to that special person in your life, or perhaps just a present for yourself: dedicate a tree at Foxburrow Wood. Our new ***Dedicate a Tree at Foxburrow Wood*** pack includes a gift card with details of our new woodland; a certificate with the recipients name(s), the number of trees you have dedicated and any message that you wish to give. This message will be recorded in the Foxburrow Wood Book of Dedications, recording your gift for years to come. There are even opportunities to help plant the trees. To dedicate one tree costs £15, three trees £40 and 10 trees £100. Complete the form enclosed with this newsletter or download it from our web-site and send it with a cheque made payable to 'The Friends of Wychwood' to the Project Office. If you want this in time for Christmas please return to the office by Wednesday 15th December. For more information: email wychwood@oxfordshire.gov.uk; Tel 01865 815423, web www.wychwoodproject.org

Please note – the gift card is not specific to the Christmas season.

FRUIT TREE PRUNING

Gwen McConnachie

Orchards have existed in this country at least since Roman times. Sadly, since the 1950s we have lost over 50% of our traditional orchards. Andy Howard of the Heritage Fruit Tree Co. aims to revive and restore such orchards in conjunction with BBOWT. Members of the Orchard Group attended his course on the pruning of older fruit trees.



Traditional orchard trees near Ramsden in fruit this autumn

Such pruning aims to remove dead, diseased and damaged wood, and to encourage space and light within the tree. The results include better fruiting, reshaping the tree, encouraging wildlife, and often restoring the appeal of an old orchard.

Pruning is very much a skill that has to be learnt. Sadly some of Andy's work includes restoring trees,

which have been decimated by over-zealous use of the chain saw. It takes time and consideration to decide what to prune in an old fruit tree. No more than a third of the tree should be removed in any year, with the work being spread over several years. The aim is for a goblet shaped tree, open to the light and air. The Edwardians reckoned it should be possible to throw a bowler hat through the middle of a well-pruned fruit tree!

Most fruit trees should be pruned in winter, between November and March. The exceptions are cherries and plums, pruned in late spring to summer. Usually the aim is to encourage horizontal lateral shoots, but some fruit trees such as Bramley apples fruit on the tips of their shoots, and require only very modest pruning.



Careful pruning needed to ensure good fruit and healthy trees

Andy works with several community orchards and is helping to create two new ones in the Wychwoods. It is surprising what an impact an orchard of only a half or two-thirds of an acre can have. If you would like to know more about Andy's work, visit www.heritagefruittrees.com

Our Orchard Group is surveying traditional orchards in the Wychwood area. For further information contact the Project Office.

Bird Aid Update

Louise Spicer

The Bird Aid project is in its seventh year. Expenses are now being met by Friends of Wychwood on an annual basis. The Ditchley Estate continues to support three sites with two tons of tailings (left-over seed and small grain), enabling the scheme to benefit large numbers of yellowhammers and other farmland birds. There is a small amount of private funding. The number of volunteers involved on a regular basis is up to 20, many of whom put in daily effort at feeding stations.



Shovelling grain for winter feeding

This project goes from strength to strength with record bird numbers helping Park and Walk Farms at Over Norton to enter HLS (Higher Level Stewardship), thus ensuring bird feeding becomes more sustainable. Tree sparrows are being supported with millet feeding stations and it is hoped to set up more sites and nest boxes. Enthusiasm for the Bird Aid Project is outstanding and bird numbers of the target species of yellowhammer and tree sparrow are increasing throughout the Wychwood Project area. Sadly, corn bunting are following a national decline apart from at Walk Farm. We hope to extend the scheme to include other farmland birds such as linnets.

I would like to thank everyone who is helping with feeding and monitoring of birds especially important last winter when the continual supply of food will have enabled many more birds to survive the prolonged period of snow when all natural supplies were exhausted.

- NEWSBOARD -



Congratulations to Matthew Jellings who took the winning photograph (left), titled Windrush Morning in the Forest Fair Wychwood Photos competition. You can see other images from the competition on our web site www.wychwoodproject.org under the photography section.

Friends of Wychwood Lottery. From just £2/month have a chance to win a cash prize and support the Project's activities at the same time. Far better odds than the National Lottery and the 'good cause' is the one on your door-step. For details call the Project Office 01865 815423 or visit the web site.



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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