



Forest Update



Friends of Wychwood Newsletter

Issue 27

Spring 2008

V good news

Nick Mottram

The Project and the Friends of Wychwood are delighted to announce that we have been successful in a bid for funds to help more young people aged between 16 and 25 to get positively involved in their community over the next three years.

The funding comes from a national organisation called V and is part of a £75 million investment across England which aims to inspire half a million more young people to volunteer. The aim of this wider programme is to create a 'step change in the quantity, quality and diversity of youth volunteering opportunities'. We will be playing our part.

The Wychwood V programme doesn't start formally until the beginning of April. One of the key requirements of V is that the young people who take part have a say in deciding upon and developing the opportunities that they take up. The Project has done quite a bit of work with children but relatively little with the target 16–25 year age group. There's no doubt that it is going to be a learning experience for all of us. Helping us along the way will be Jane Bowley who many of you will have met during her time as our Parish Conservation Challenge Project Officer.

So, if you are aged 16–25 and like the idea of volunteering with the Wychwood Project, or you know someone who is, get in touch with Jane on 01993 814131.



Inspiring a million more young volunteers

www.wearev.com

New Wychwood Project Web-site

Calling all web-users! We have recently launched a newly refreshed Project web-site with new content and new fresh look. Technical problems had resulted in the previous web-site becoming difficult to update. The County Council stepped in and offered to both host the new site on their server and help in the development of the new look. We have some new features such as local photographs and a list of local firewood merchants who source wood from local woodlands. We are also able to add new material more easily so keep an eye-out for future changes.

Pay a visit today at www.wychwoodproject.org



From the Project Manager's Notebook

Nick Mottram



Nick Mottram

It may be wet and chilly but winter is perhaps my favourite time of year for Project work. This is the season when much of the practical work on-site takes place – the coppicing, tree planting, hedgelaying and practical courses that allow us to make direct improvements to the landscape and habitats of the Project area. As ever the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens play a vital part in this, providing much of the man- and woman-power to wield saws, hammers and spades. We have completed our most recent sections of coppicing and deer fencing at Dean Grove near Charlbury and on the Ditchley Estate. The Wychwood hedgelaying group have been busy at Finstock and Delly End and have a third site lined-up. The hazel for the stakes and heatherings has all come from local woods, most of which we coppiced ourselves thus re-instating the traditional cycle of interlinked management. New landscape trees have been planted in a range of locations: Bladon, Ditchley, Chadlington and Spelsbury so far.

If you would like to get involved with some of these practical activities please drop the Project Office a line. There are week-day and weekend places and something to suit most abilities. Best of all it gives you a great excuse to get out and contribute to the upkeep of parts of the Wychwood countryside that you might not otherwise see.

The news that we were successful with our bid to 'V' was most welcome. Not only does it open up a whole range of new opportunities for young people to become involved in the Wychwood Project but it allows us to retain Jane Bowley's expertise and enthusiasm.

The Project Office has continued its efforts behind the scenes to support the preparation of the Cotswolds Inter-Regional Partnership (CIRP) bid for funds from the Rural Development Programme for England. It has made me realise that the range of people the Project works with has given us a unique and surprisingly comprehensive overview of forestry and farming in the area. West Oxfordshire District Council who were leading on this, submitted the bid at the end of January. Fingers crossed for a positive outcome.

Oxfordshire Bird Atlas 2007-2011

Would you like to help generate a detailed picture of our Oxfordshire bird populations? If you are interested, register on the national BTO website to check on local areas not yet covered.



Like the Wychwood Project survey of ancient trees and hedgerows, your help as a volunteer is increasingly important in helping to build up a picture of the likely effects of climate change on our landscape and wildlife.

BTO website: www.bto.org/birdatlas/

Local information, email Gavin Bird at the Thames Valley Records Centre; gavin.bird@oxfordshire.uk

DATES FOR THE DIARY

A Festival first with an exhibition of the Wychwood Tapestry and the delightful Oxford Waits who entertain with songs, dances and readings, wearing seventeenth-century costume and playing traditional instruments. They are appearing in the first Leaffield Festival which takes place from 29th May to 7th June, 2008. The provisional date for Oxford Waits is Friday, 30th May at St. Michael's Church, Leaffield. The Waits will be putting together a forest-themed programme and the evening will also feature the work of the Wychwood Project. Tickets will be available from April 9th at £8, discounted to £7 for Friends of Wychwood and Leaffield residents.

Contact: Jeanette Cayley on 01993 878893

Friends of Wychwood Hedgelaying and Coppicing Group

Andrew Deller



Hedge-laying at Dark Lane



Judith takes it seriously

On a bright, sunny morning on October 14th a coppicing session at Dean Grove woodland along the Oxfordshire Way, west of Charlbury, got the group's season underway. New hazels and oaks were planted to supplement the existing trees so, with last year's coppiced area growing back well, we should have good quality produce that we can harvest in future years.

Work started on a relatively young hedge at Dark Lane, Finstock on 21st October. The hedge, planted about nine years ago with mixed native species, is owned by Jennifer Wates and managed under a countryside stewardship scheme. It is on a public footpath and the work created a lot of interest from the public. Passers-by seemed impressed with the work with several expressing an interest in 'having a go'. Work progressed well through November with the group meeting every other Sunday and Monday, with little time lost to bad weather. Over half the hedge was completed by the start of December, with several newcomers trying their hand, and was all but completed by Christmas. Work started again on the 6th January and the remainder soon completed. We were very pleased to welcome our youngest volunteer, aged 10, and he gave us great hope that this rural craft has a good future..

Four group members took part in the North Cotswold Hedgelaying Competition at Ebrington, Glos on the 17th November. Dave Lee and Richard Lane had a very good day, winning the beginners pairs.

All in all a satisfying start to the season with the quality of work improving all the time.

Anyone interested in 'having a go' or who knows of suitable hedges or areas to coppice can call the project office on 01993 814143.



Richard and Dave

FOREST FAIR 2008 Sunday 31st August

TWO SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

This year the Fair, at Ducklington, is expected to attract many more visitors than before. To ease the workload on the hard-pressed voluntary organisers, we are looking for

2 SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS

- one on the organising group to co-ordinate entertainments and attractions
- and one to run the successful Friends' bookstall, with the help of others

If you can help please ring Ken Betteridge (01993 878615)

Lesser Celandine

Sue Leigh

Lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) is one of the first woodland flowers of the year; one of its old names is 'spring messenger'. The name 'celandine' derives from the Greek *chelidon*, a swallow. The celandines are certainly out before the arrival of the swallow but perhaps like the swallow, the flower signals the arrival of spring. Another obsolete name is 'pilewort' as there was thought to be a resemblance between the knobby tubers and piles - the plant was thus thought to be a cure for haemorrhoids. These tubers are one of the means by which the celandine reproduces itself. The other is by small round swellings about the size of a grain of wheat found at the point where the upper leaves join the stem. In the early summer these become loose and drop to the ground. Each is capable of producing a new plant. You would think the brightly coloured flowers would attract insects for their fertilization but the flowers can face colder days than insects with the result that very few plants set seed.

The lesser celandine (so called to distinguish it from the greater celandine, *Chelidonium majus* which it resembles only in the colour of its flowers) frequents open and disturbed soil of damp woodland tracks and colonizes stream-banks, ditches and shady gardens. The celandine was Wordsworth's favourite flower - he wrote three poems celebrating its 'glittering countenance'. It was decided that it was the fitting flower for his tombstone but by some mistake (or inept carving) it is the greater celandine that is represented there.



Ranunculus ficaria

Our Village Verges and their Wildflowers

Alan Spicer

In 2007, as part of the Parish Conservation Challenge, a number of roadside verges were studied for their abundance of grassland flowering plants. In Crawley, Church Enstone and Dean several lengths of verge have been recorded as having particularly attractive and ecologically important collections of wildflowers including knapweeds, scabious, cranesbills, wild carrot, champions and musk mallow. In Shipton-under-Wychwood, a verge that had been laid bare during construction of a new dry-stone field wall was resown with a suitable grass/wildflower seed mix. Two years later established wildflowers included celandine, yarrow, salad burnet, hairy violet and knapweeds. The Parish Council has also encouraged monitoring of three other village-entrance verges to see if wildflowers can be encouraged.



Fiddlers Hill, Shipton-under-Wychwood

Verges such as these, unsprayed and undisturbed, are probably remnants of limestone pastures. They act as refuges for plants uncommon elsewhere and for the butterflies, bees and other insects attracted to their nectar and pollen. If we close-mow these verges over a period, the wildflowers cannot set seed and will slowly disappear. We would then be deprived of the glorious colours, for example, of the meadow cranesbill, a candidate for Oxfordshire's 'wildflower'. Let us encourage, in the right places, the colourful display of our local wildflowers that delight the walkers, horse riders and motorists as they travel through the Wychwood countryside. Eventually it may be possible to create some more roadside verge Nature Reserves to add to those already designated by the County Council and marked by distinctive green and white posts.

West Oxfordshire butterflies – help needed!

Butterfly Conservation (BC) (www.butterflyconservation.org) is recording butterflies across Britain and Ireland on a 5-year cycle, tracking the consequences of climate, habitat and landscape changes. At a more local level, the Upper Thames branch of BC tracks changes across Berks, Bucks and Oxon. This



Marbled white butterfly

year (2008) is year four of a five-year recording cycle. A map of records collected across the three counties so far (since 2005) generally shows encouraging coverage but the data are very thin across West Oxfordshire, even for the common species. BC is looking for help from people who live, work or walk in West Oxfordshire to note the butterflies they see, and send the records in to add to the local and national databases.

With this newsletter, we have enclosed a recording form to help you to capture your records. When you are out and about this year (and next), during the flight season (April-October) please note any butterflies you see on the recording form, with the grid reference, date and location. Against each species, add the number you saw, either as a count

or using the codes explained on the form. In sunny weather, you will find butterflies in rough grassland, woodland clearings, along hedgerows and field margins, and in churchyards and gardens.

At the end of the season, please send the form directly to Jim Asher, 24 Fettiplace Road, Marcham, Abingdon, OX13 6PL. Any records you send in will help fill the large gap on the map.

Lower Windrush Valley Project – Water Voles

Alison Hopewell

The Lower Windrush Valley is once again becoming a hot spot for water voles. Until recently, they had all but disappeared from the Lower Windrush Valley, a worrying trend also seen right across the country. Loss of riverside habitat and predation by American mink are key factors in their decline and so the LWVP has been helping BBOWT's Water Vole Recovery Project and Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (Wildcru), to tackle these two issues in the valley.

Since 2001 good progress has been made creating suitable bank-side habitat and controlling mink. Research suggests that once the environment is right, the re-introduction of water voles can help re-establish the population and so in 2005/06 some were released at two sites in the valley as part of a project being undertaken by Wildcru. Although, water voles may survive just six months in the wild, they are capable of breeding up to four times a year and so populations can rapidly expand in areas of good habitat with no mink.

In 2003 survey results indicated that the water vole population had become extinct in the valley but following the reintroductions, the 2006 survey found evidence of them in seven of the twenty-five sections surveyed. By continuing to work alongside our partners to provide a safe haven in the Lower Windrush, we hope to ensure a brighter future for these charismatic creatures.

To find out more about any of the work or if you are interested in helping to survey for water voles in 2008 contact Alison Hopewell on 01993 814126, email alison.hopewell@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Make the Most of Wood in the Wychwood

David Rees

Recent years have seen an increasing awareness of the value of using locally produced wood products. There is a direct and enormously beneficial link between buying locally grown and processed wood and the creation of attractive, productive woodland of high conservation value. One of the key problems currently faced in many woodlands, particularly the smaller ones, is the high level of shade, the result of insufficient thinning and felling. The heavy shade limits the diversity of the woodland flora and results in fewer habitats for the birds, butterflies and other woodland creatures.



Cleft chestnut post and rail fencing

The Oxfordshire Woodland Project has been working on a number of initiatives as part of the Wychwood Project's Ancient Habitats Programme. The first of these was a survey of local businesses that use and produce wood. To our surprise over 40 businesses were found in and around the Wychwood area, ranging from sawmills to makers of memorial benches but not all of these businesses use local timber. There were a number of reasons for this including the type of wood available locally and constancy of supply; lack of demand was also an issue.

We have begun to try and help address this lack of demand by using the opportunities we have to publicise those businesses that do sell locally grown timber. The first opportunity was at the Forest Fair where information was available and two companies also had trade stands. There is now also a page on the Wychwood Project website (see the 'What We Do' section) which lists companies which can source local timber. Even if you can't find what you want as 'locally grown', supporting local wood processing businesses keeps the infrastructure in place that is vital for the future.

Although you might not use or produce wood, you might have an open fire or a stove. Burning wood is an alternative to burning fossil fuels and a great way to support local woodlands as it uses the stems that are either too small or knotty to put through the sawmill. This is particularly valuable in the early stage of a woodland's development during the time-critical but relatively expensive thinning phase.

HELPERS NEEDED FOR OUR FRIENDS OF WYCHWOOD PUBLICITY STALL

We take a recruitment and sales stall to various events in Wychwood during the summer months.

We need a rota of helpers to spread the load. Just the occasional Saturday or Sunday to attend fêtes and fairs. It's a sociable activity and a good way to contribute to the work of the Wychwood Project.

We also need an organizer and ideas for improving the look of our stall.

Contact: Gwen McConnachie 01993 832253

The Resourceful Windrush

Mike Righton

The Speaker at the well-attended joint meeting of the Wychwoods Local History Society and Friends of Wychwood in Shipton last November, was local resident, Mike Righton. He has made a detailed study of the River Windrush and the significant impact it has had, and is still having, on the local environment and economy.



Derelict sluice at Swinbrook

Mike's talk presented a very different picture from today's image of a peaceful, almost idyllic, lowland river meandering through the Cotswold countryside. Massive earth movements, glacial melt and other temperature changes produced periodic uncursion of seas of varying depths. Over millions of years this resulted in the build-up of a series of rock layers through which the modern river now cuts and exposes at various points on its 30-mile journey from its source at Taddington to the Thames at Newbridge.

While the Windrush now satisfies a major local drainage function and is a haven for fishermen, it has also provided a significant focus for settlement, industry and employment for the area over the centuries. Many mills, all water-powered, for the production of flour, cloth and blankets were built along the banks; also fulling mills, using locally available fullers earth (formed from the decomposition of volcanic ash in the sea). In addition the audience were intrigued to learn that there once was a paper mill at Upton using imported used rags from Germany and Italy. Apparently these were usually filthy, smelt terribly and were alleged to be the source of a smallpox outbreak in nearby Burford in 1758!

Witney Woodland Volunteers

Juliet Curry

The town of Witney finds itself half in and half out of the area once covered by the Wychwood Forest, with the border along the River Windrush, running west/east through the town. The river valley is flat and meandering, creating a wonderful green corridor right through the centre. The Witney Town Council and West Oxfordshire District Council own this green corridor, and over the last 20 years have laid out many footpaths and riverside walks.

This is why WWV was created in 2006 by local enthusiasts to help the local authorities maintain Witney's many woodland and riverside habitats. With encouragement from Nick Dalby of the District Council and Nick Mottram of the Wychwood Project, we became a Witney branch of the Friends of Wychwood. We currently have 18 members and meet every Monday morning at 10 a.m. under the clock tower at Waitrose, for two hours of hard work, followed by a pub lunch.

This last year we have cleared seven footpaths, repaired a dry stone wall on Langel Common, and planted trees, shrubs, a bluebell wood and wild

flowers along the Windrush Mill Stream. Last winter we planted 45 trees in Thorney Leys bordering the busy A40, to shield the housing estate from noise, and this winter we have planted 100 more nearby. This spring we are busy coppicing hazel, dogwood and willow along Witan Way, and finishing off our contribution to the Old Trees of Wychwood ancient tree survey. If you fancy joining us on a Monday morning, please call Juliet on 01993 702202.



Volunteers planting trees on Thorney Leys

Barn Owl Project

Ian Anderson

It's been a busy winter. The increasing interest in our activities has resulted in a steady demand for nest boxes and advice on suitable locations. However, like most wildlife, barn owls cannot be expected to perform to order!

When advising on site selection we try to take a number of key factors into account. The mere action of putting up a nest box will certainly not guarantee that it will be taken over by a breeding pair. While the provision of nesting accommodation is very important there is little likelihood of success unless suitable hunting habitat is also available nearby. By this is meant areas of coarser grassland where field voles and other favoured prey can thrive.

There is much more likelihood of attracting barn owls to a particular nest site if there are indications that the particular vicinity is already being used by adult birds, possibly for roosting. Positive signs include preening feathers and black regurgitated pellets (packed with fur, prey bones etc.) on the ground and 'whitewash' splashings on the walls or tree trunks. Barn owls like the opportunity to occasionally perch and survey the scene, looking for food. One simple way of increasing the chances of getting barn owls to take a fancy to a particular barn site is to provide a perch or two at the entrance to encourage the birds to linger a while. Also, in areas of good prey habitat, the odd wooden stake in the open is also excellent in providing grandstand views.



'Whitewash' splashings on a barn end wall



A simple perch fixed to a barn pole



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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E-mail Updates? – For those Friends who wish to receive e-mailed updates of future events, please let the Project Office have your e-mail address so we can keep you informed.