

Forest Update



Issue 31

The Wychwood Project Newsletter

Autumn/Winter 2009



Wychwood v Green Team at Dark Lane, near Finstock



2009: The best Forest Fair so far



Thank you to all those who helped at and visited the Forest Fair



The BIG Story

Nick Mottram, Project Director

I am delighted to announce that, together with the Friends of Wychwood, the Project has recently secured nine hectares (twenty two acres) of farmland on the north-east fringe of Witney with the intention of creating Wychwood's newest and largest community woodland.

The site of the proposed new woodland is part of Southdown Farm to the west of a public bridleway known locally as Milking Lane.

This new undertaking marks a key point in the development of the Wychwood Project and will help us to achieve many of our long term aims to benefit the people, landscape and wildlife of the Wychwood area.

At present the land is currently used for grazing cattle. A small stream passes through the middle of the site and the ground slopes gently up from this to flatter ground. There is a network of well established hedgerows that will provide effective boundaries and potential for access from the adjacent bridleway and a public road – Foxburrow Lane – to the north. The adjacent farmland to the west has also changed hands and we look forward to working with the new owners to get the best out of both sites.



Site of the new Wychwood community woodland.

We hope that local people and Friends of Wychwood members will want to join in with the design, creation and ongoing management of the woodland. The next big challenge will be to secure the funding to make these good intentions become reality over the coming years.

If you would like to help us achieve this ambitious new project please contact me, Nick Mottram, at the Project office on 01993 814143; by email on 'wychwood@oxfordshire.gov.uk'; or by post at The Wychwood Project, Fletcher's House, Park Street, Woodstock, OX20 1SN. We would be delighted to hear from you.



The arrowhead shows where the new woodland will be, as seen from the B4047 Witney to Burford road

Changing of the Guard

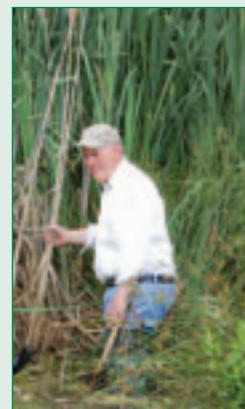
By Alan Spicer and Nick Mottram

The Friends of Wychwood had the opportunity at their recent AGM to say thank you and good-bye to two long-standing Trustees – Ken Betteridge, the Friends' founding chairman, and Robert Bigwood. Ken has led the Friends of Wychwood from their informal founding 10 years ago. Through his enthusiasm, guidance and ambitious vision the Friends have become ever more closely involved in the work of the Wychwood Project both in fund raising and in practical volunteering. Ken now feels that the time is right to pull back from the FoW frontline and give an opportunity for others to play a significant role in the Wychwood Project at a key point in its development. Fortunately Ken will continue to share his local knowledge and network of contacts with the Project and to communicate his love of Wychwood to a wider audience.

Ken's vision has seen the growth of the Friends to over 700 members, the creation of the Wychwood Way and 10 Community Woods. One of his ambitions has been fulfilled in the growth of our modern Forest Fair from its small beginnings at Combe to this year's 'coming home to Cornbury' with over 4,000 visitors attending. With his management team, Ken has developed the Forest Fair as a showcase for community spirit and conservation in Wychwood while involving so many Friends as helpers. We all owe Ken a huge debt of thanks for the work he has done and look forward to the Friends of Wychwood continuing to build on the strong foundations he has helped to develop.



Ken Betteridge leading a guided walk through Wilcote



Robert Bigwood inspects a pond on North Leigh Common

Robert Bigwood is also retiring, having been a trustee for 6 years. His environmental science based background in education has added an important element to the work of the Trustees. Robert is also known for his 'fearless' approach to recruiting new members at events. He created and has led the Pond Group on numerous night-time forays and amazed some of us in the discovery of pond life. Last but not least Robert has given endless time and patience to the job of Forest Fair volunteer co-ordinator as many of our volunteer members will testify! He will now have more time to indulge his many interests, from bonsai to clocks.

Our heartfelt thanks to both Trustees – and their most understanding partners! We wish you well and look forward to your continuing interest.

- NEWSBOARD -

DIARY DATE

Forest Fair 2010
Sunday 5th September

WANTED

ADMINISTRATOR/ DATABASE CONTROLLER

To join the successful team of volunteers running the Forest Fair

To coordinate our contact with stallholders and volunteers by post and email, using and improving our existing contacts database. You will need to be organised, precise, proficient with computer databases and spreadsheets and patient with those who are not as computer-literate as yourself. You will want to be part of the successful Forest Fair team and able to meet an increasing workload in the run-up to the 2010 Fair in early September.

For further details contact Forest Fair chairman Michael Drew on 01993 702624

Missing Out?

Are you missing-out on Project activities, news and events?

Sign-up for the Project's fortnightly email bulletin *The Forest Flyer* and you can join over 200 others who already benefit. Just email your details to the Project office.
Wychwood@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Situations vacant; the Project and Friends are looking for

volunteers with particular skills to help drive forward our new programmes. Key areas that we would welcome help with include publicity and communications, member recruitment and services and promotional events. If you are interested please contact the Project Office.

We are pleased to welcome two new Trustees to the Friends of Wychwood. Stephen Ashworth of Shipton under Wychwood and Richard Lord of Ramsden were elected at the recent Friends of Wychwood AGM.

Welcome to the 42 new Friends of Wychwood members who have joined since the last issue of Forest Update.

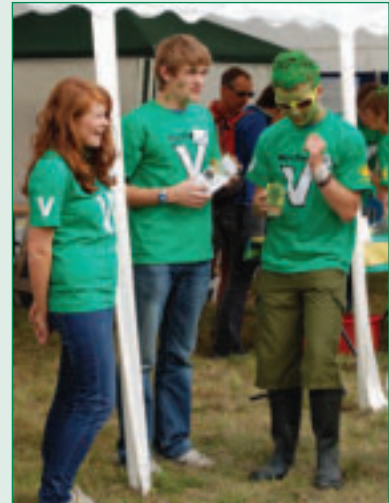
Wychwood v Goes Green

Jane Bowley

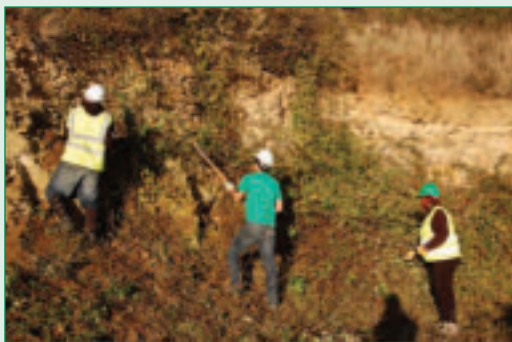


At the Forest Fair.....

A fantastic few months in the development of Wychwood v saw sixteen volunteers helping out at the Forest Fair. They showed that young people can have fun at the same time as promoting a cause to which they are passionately committed. They were delighted to be able to show off their distinctive new T-shirts and hoodies with the unique Wychwood v logo designed by the group. As the picture shows, Rory didn't stop at the T-shirt! A key feature in the Wychwood v marquee was the screening of the brilliant woodland film made in a local wood by Ross Harrison. The v volunteers also ran a Climate Cam asking people to comment on film about their views on climate change. This is going to be an ongoing project to create a short film to use for talks to groups or with politicians about responses to climate change.



Corry, James and Rory show off their new Wychwood v T-shirts and colour scheme



v volunteers working with the Oxfordshire Geology Trust to clear vegetation off the nationally important quarry face at Charlbury.

In the field

Over the summer volunteers with Wychwood v have been active in a wide range of practical conservation activities including footpath clearance at Eynsham allotments, dry stone walling at Stonesfield, making bird nest boxes and other activities shown on this page.



Tree maintenance at Finstock: clearing round the young trees planted by children from Finstock school two years ago.

Project development

Paul Furnborough has been our first full time volunteer. Paul helped to run the Wychwood Project hedgerow survey and a Wychwood v nest box building project. Also, due to his extensive volunteering experience and great enthusiasm he pushed the development of Wychwood v to a new level of thinking. It is a pleasure to report that his volunteering contributions have been recognised by vinspired as he is a regional winner in the Eco category of their national awards.

Wychwood v is the Wychwood Project's vinvolved (www.vinspired.com) initiative to encourage 16-25 year olds to get involved in conservation volunteering

For more information about Wychwood v contact Jane Bowley, Project Officer on 01993 814131 or email: Wychwood.v@oxfordshire.gov.uk



Grass raking at Enstone airfield to maintain the calcareous grassland habitat for orchids and cowslips.



Paul Furnborough, Wychwood v's eco-award winning volunteer

Wychwood Butterflies 2009 Highlights

Margaret Cochrane

The big event which was featured in the national press was the invasion of Painted Ladies from North Africa. These butterflies migrate here every summer, but this year there were thousands of them. When they arrive in Britain the females search for young thistle plants on which to lay their eggs. This caterpillar feeds on the thistles – which is useful, pupates and in a few weeks the butterfly emerges. Soon we were seeing many fresh Painted Ladies on sunny tracks, flower pastures and in our gardens.

It has been an interesting season at Foxholes BBOWT reserve in the north-west of the Wychwood area. April started with the first of the adult over-wintering butterflies – Brimstone, Comma and Peacock. Most butterflies over-winter as a chrysalis. The first of these to emerge were the Orange Tip, Green-veined White, and Speckled Wood. The Green-veined Whites were particularly numerous in the woods and hedgerows this year, with a second brood in July.

In June and July there were the usual crowds of Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Gatekeepers and Skippers feeding on the bramble flowers.

The elusive White Admiral, whose caterpillars feed on honeysuckle leaves, was also seen in three separate parts of the Foxholes reserve.

Purple Hairstreak

The big excitement was the Purple Hairstreak. This butterfly spends most of its life in the canopy of oak or ash trees so is seldom seen. One day I saw a strange little pale grey butterfly – or was it a moth – disappearing into an oak tree. Further on was a similar insect on some low ash branches, it looked like a butterfly. On the next sunny day we found several on an ash tree. An expert kindly came and confirmed a rare sighting of Purple Hairstreaks.

In the countryside in general there were more Common Blues (I counted 6 at one location), Small Coppers and Tortoiseshells (hurray!) than in recent years.

The Red Admiral, however failed to escort his Painted Ladies, and it was not till late August that I saw one or two.



Painted Lady (Photo - Patrick Boston)



Brimstone butterfly (Photo - Patrick Boston)



Purple Hairstreak (Female F, Male M)

Barn Owl Project

Ian Anderson

The 2009 summer has proved to be a reasonable time for the local barn owl populations that we have been monitoring.

Of the 114 nest boxes that now fall within our study area, 46 produced young, including 8 which had not been successful in attracting a pair of breeding adult birds in previous years. Brood sizes at the ringing stage (25-35 days approx.) have ranged from 1 to 7 with the average at 3.3. There was a definite trend for the larger broods to be found in situations where the adults' hunting ground took in a significant area of river flood plain grassland. The stretch of the Thames from Radcot Bridge down to Newbridge was particularly productive. The average brood here being 4.3, clearly indicating the availability of suitable habitat for the main prey species, short-tailed field voles.

Whilst it is encouraging to have achieved these results, it is also somewhat sobering when they are viewed from another perspective. On average a barn owl female will lay and incubate 6 or 7 eggs. Therefore our results indicate that, even as early as around 4 weeks of age, there has been almost a 50% loss. Depending on the severity of next winter, a further 30% loss can be expected in numbers surviving through to breed in spring 2010. With surviving adults in the wild only living for 3-4 years, it can be seen that we need a run of 'good years' to have any significant impact on local barn owl populations. We will therefore, through the Wychwood Project, certainly continue doing all we can to monitor and maintain existing nest sites, look for new sites and encourage wider local understanding of the habitat needs of these charismatic birds.



Three owlets in shock as they focus on our photographer, Ian Anderson, the first human they have laid eyes on.

Report on Bird Aid, Nov 2008 - May 2009

Louise Spicer

'Between 1994 and 2007 farmland birds have seen the steepest decline across England. The south-east region comes bottom of the farmland bird league table with a 27% decline in population.'

DEFRA report (RSPB Magazine)

The Bird Aid scheme, which is a Friends of Wychwood initiative in conjunction with the RSPB, is now in its sixth year. The sites are largely self-sustaining with supporters organising grain supply and monitoring bird numbers. Money for purchase of grain has been provided by the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment, and the Ditchley Estate near Charlbury has provided free grain for three of the sites. Our grateful thanks to both TOE and Ditchley who make this scheme possible.

Farms at Over Norton, Chipping Norton, Charlbury, Finstock, Crawley and Hailey have participated in the scheme. At Over Norton, regularly observed birds include the tree sparrow using millet feeders, yellowhammer and

many other small birds. On the nearby field were linnets and skylarks. In the summer the fields provide good hunting for swifts and skylarks whilst corn buntings and yellowhammers have nested in the adjacent hedgerows. The introduction of millet feeders has proved a great success with the tree sparrows.

In general, however the numbers of farmland key bird species seem to be declining, particularly corn buntings and the Bird Aid project continues to provide a vital source of food for farmland birds during periods when all 'natural' supplies are exhausted. Over 20 people are involved in volunteering – some on a daily basis and our thanks are due to the team of dedicated volunteers for building a picture of which birds are out in the countryside and helping to ensure our local birds survive the winter.



Louise Spicer gathering winter feed from a bird-seed storage bin



Male Yellowhammer

(Photo – Chris Gomersall, RSPB)

(Our apologies to RSPB for omission of acknowledgement of tree sparrow photo in previous issue.)

A Hedgerow Survey trainee reports

Romina Peddis

I became interested in the Wychwood Project when I moved out of London as I wanted to learn more about the countryside.

When I found out about the hedgerow survey seminar led by Alan Spicer I was a little apprehensive about my lack of knowledge. However, the day proved to be informative and enjoyable and I am already enjoying walks in the countryside more than before.

About 15 people attended the day-long seminar in Charlbury. The morning was spent being introduced gently to what I would call the 'science bit', ie the purpose of the surveys, why hedges are ecologically valuable, the importance of effective data collection and how data is used to inform a community-based approach to maintaining the landscape.

The site visit was fun as we all traipsed down to 'Woody Lane' with our hedgerow survey sheets and our tree and shrub identification booklets to carry out practice surveys. Although some were already 'hedgerow enthusiasts', it was great to learn that the hedgerow project work is being structured in an inclusive way to enable anyone to meaningfully contribute to the work of the project if they wish. Precisely the approach I had hoped for!



Trainee surveyors examine an old hedgerow near Charlbury

Forest Fair 2009 – Behind the Scenes

Michael Drew

So after what seems like, and was, months of meetings, the week of the fair has arrived, and we can start doing instead of talking.

TUESDAY Mark out the positions of the two main marquees which will determine everything else. Nigel Gregory (Cornbury's Park Manager) makes time from harvesting to mow the site.

WEDNESDAY Dry, gale blowing across site, stay relaxed, it WILL all come together.

THURSDAY Still dry, still blowing. Marquees completed, tables and chairs delivered. Phone calls to check toilets, deliveries, stone from Cornbury quarry for stone walling, security for Saturday night. What did we do before mobile phones?

Erected beer enclosure, essential for licensing purposes!

Ken Betteridge and I set up tables in large marquees for Craft and Community stands. The tables get heavier every year!

FRIDAY Fetched 6 small tents from Ramsden, no way we can put up these light things if this wind keeps blowing. DON'T PANIC. Start erecting the frames, and when and if the wind drops we can put the covers on. Obvious!

SATURDAY Dry, with strong breeze. Lots of strong young volunteers from Wychwood v plus a few of us oldies. Erect 10 tents with help from beer festival crew. Wind still a problem but succeed with all but one tea tent.

Move 300 chairs, 200 tables, erect Friends of Wychwood signs, rubbish/recycling bins. John Bean laying electric cables to stalls, tea tent etc.

Ian Anderson busy with his trailer, moved roughly 6000 books to bookstall marquee.

Security guard rings from Oxford wanting postcode of field for his satnav!

SUNDAY At least it is dry and the wind has dropped.

Ken Betteridge putting out road signs. Charles Keighley was busy last night with direction signs.

John Bean plugging generators in. Waves of Forest Fair volunteers arriving.

Gill Hill running one tea tent, and wondering where her other one is, it did go up! Robert Bigwood and helpers manning Marshals' Tent.

Ellie Mottram and Abbie Festa taping trees to stop cars driving down avenues.



Forest Fair – the morning after.

Get those vehicles off the site, we open in 15 minutes!

Check on toilet rolls (I know my priorities!)

Queue sunshine, smiles, pig roasts, rural crafts, displays and games.

And then we take it all down again. Was it all worthwhile? We think so and so did the several thousand visitors on the day.



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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