

Forest Update



Issue 32

The Wychwood Project Newsletter

Spring 2010



Hedgelaying – placing the stakes

Winter in the Forest of Wychwood



Project Update

Nick Mottram, Project Director

Work Parties

The snow and ice at the beginning of the year played havoc with our winter works. Despite this we have still managed a nearly full programme of coppicing and hedgelaying. Our work at Dean Grove near Spelsbury is in its fourth and final year. The value of deer fencing here has been highlighted by comparing the growth of the coppice inside and outside the fenced areas.

New Woodland Update

The boundaries of the new community woodland are shown on the adjacent aerial photograph. Members of the Friends of Wychwood and local people were invited to public consultation meetings in March. The views gathered will inform the ongoing design of the site. Our first site works began in late February with a team from the Witney Woodland Volunteers cutting back some of the scrub around the proposed entrance from Foxburrow Lane. Efforts have also begun to identify sources of funds to help us create and maintain the new woodland. Initially we are concentrating efforts on the larger 'institutional' funding sources such as landfill tax and large charities. This will need to be supported in the longer-term by local fundraising activities.



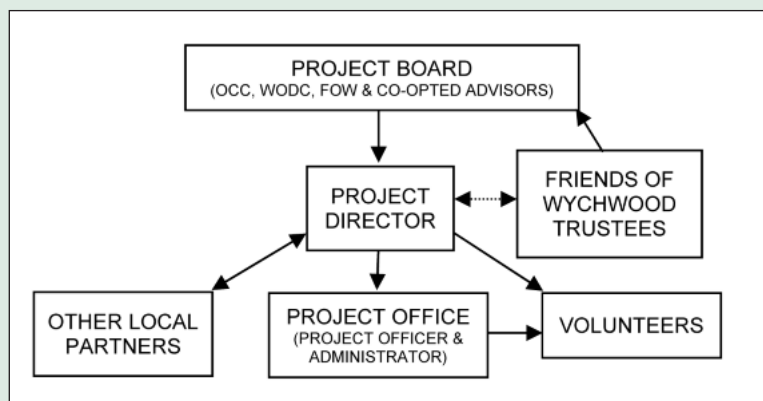
Over 80 people have already written to register their interest in being involved in the creation of the new woodland. If you would like to join them please send your details to the Project office. We will be circulating updates as our plans develop.

What is the Wychwood Project?

One of the questions I am often asked is "what is the Wychwood Project". The short answer is that the 'Project' is an informal partnership between local people, The Friends of Wychwood, the District and County Councils and other supporting organisations. Our aims are set out on the back page of Forest Update.

The Friends of Wychwood provide financial and local community support to the Project and, when needed, the formal legal structure necessary to sign contracts and, as is the case with our new woodland, own land and other assets. The Project undertakes its activities through a combination of volunteers and full-time paid professionals. The professional 'staff' (Project Director, Officer and Administrator) are hosted by Oxfordshire County Council and work from the offices of the County's Countryside Service.

Management of the Wychwood Project is overseen by a Project Board with an independent Chairman plus representatives from our Council partners and the Friends of Wychwood with a number of co-opted advisors who bring particular expertise or local experience. The Friends of Wychwood, as a registered Charity and also a legally registered Company (limited by guarantee), have a separate Board of Trustees. The Project Board and the Friends' Trustees work very closely together to ensure that best use is made of the time and resources available to the Project.



Wychwood Project Hedgelaying Group – a wet day's work!

By Judith Wood

Late November 2009 saw the Group hold its very first hedgelaying competition. We laid a section of hedge leading from Whitings Lane up to the Community Woodland in Hailey. There were ten participants including two pairs, each laying an eight yard stretch. It rained a little in the morning then a great deal more in the afternoon so became somewhat muddy underfoot. It was the end of one of the wettest Novembers on record in the local area! Despite this, we had a very enjoyable day supported by many intrepid spectators. Hefin Davies and Tony Wilsdon gave up their day to judge the competition and Derek McNamara did the chain sawing. A BBC cameraman came along and we got a good amount of coverage the following day on BBC South. Andrew C. Deller was the winner with Martin Rowland coming second. We hope to make this a regular event.



Jane Bowley and Janet Boulin take a break from the competition and, for a while, from the rain.



Andrew Deller stands by his winning stint in which the 'pleachers' (the angled stems), stakes and heatherings (twisted bindings) can be seen clearly.

Michael Drew – an introduction to the new Chairman of The Friends of Wychwood



Michael Drew from Hailey was unanimously elected as the new Chairman of the Friends of Wychwood by the Trustees. Michael has been both farmer and farm manager in the local area for many years. He has been closely involved with the Forest Fair and the creation of Breach Wood and was a great help in our securing the land for our new woodland near Witney. Michael writes below:

I take over the Chairmanship of the Friends (and the running of the Forest Fair) in exciting and challenging times.

The very success of the Friends over the past 10 years under the chairmanship of Ken Betteridge, with a growing and more involved membership, the purchase of our own land for another Community Wood and ever more successful Forest Fairs, are all achievements that must be built on if we are to continue to hold our place as the pre-eminent conservation group in West Oxfordshire.

At the same time as wishing to expand our membership and our influence, the economic downturn is causing some of our funders to look carefully at the level of support they can provide, which means in turn that we must work even more closely in our support for the Wychwood Project to ensure that what we all do together is what our members expect from us.

The Wychwood Project draws its strength from the people who support it. What is certain is that in order to survive and expand we shall need the help of all our members in many different ways, whether it is as volunteers at the Forest Fair, getting involved in the CAT project, assisting in the many tasks on our land at Southdown, or supporting us financially by encouraging friends and neighbours to join us and increase membership or take part in the new initiatives and events such as the lottery, launched in this issue.

Wychwood v

Jane Bowley

Students from Abingdon and Witney College STEP 3 & STEP 4 courses have established their own Wychwood v volunteering programme on alternate Thursdays during term time. They have made a great contribution to clearing footpaths at Wilcote and Eynsham allotments and have particularly enjoyed the challenge of reducing the size of the hedge at Freeland playing field. They have learnt to use the tools safely and to work together as a very effective team. Several of the group now have the confidence to come along to other Wychwood v or Wychwood CAT activities where they make a great contribution to completing a wide range of tasks.



Kyle hammers in a stake during hedgelaying.

A hedgelaying training course was a very popular activity again this year and more young people have learnt the traditional skills of pleaching and binding. They have also gained an appreciation of just how to make the right cuts in the right place so that the hedge will regenerate back into an attractive landscape feature and good wildlife habitat.

As well as enjoying the outdoor activity and the skills that they are learning the volunteers who are applying for university are finding that their work with the Project is proving to be a popular subject of conversation at their interviews. Others are valuing their awards of vifty certificates that recognise the work that they have done with the Project, especially if they have not received any awards or qualifications since they left school.

Work with Wychwood v is not all hard graft and there is always time for cake or even toasted marshmallows on a bonfire day.

Wychwood v is the Wychwood Project's vinvolved (www.vinspired.com) initiative to encourage young people aged 16-25 to get involved in conservation volunteering. For more information contact Jane Bowley, Wychwood v Project Officer on 01993 814131 or email: Wychwood.v@Oxfordshire.gov.uk



Many hands make light work.



Toasted marshmallows – volunteers' perks!

The Wychwood CAT

By Liz Bandom, Project Volunteer



The CAT Group.

The Wychwood CAT is a new Wychwood Project initiative that provides an opportunity to do practical conservation work in the countryside at a gentle pace in a sociable setting. The group meets on the first Saturday of every month working from 10am till 1.00pm. In November the CAT cleared competing vegetation from around trees which had been planted at Swinford Lock by the young volunteers of Wychwood v last year. In December they took part in the national Tree o'clock tree planting campaign, helping to plant 243 trees at Stratfield Brake in Kidlington in association with the Oxfordshire Woodland Group and other local groups and companies.

On Saturday 6th February, eighteen enthusiastic adults and two children spent a morning clearing brambles, in a small woodland near North Leigh to help to conserve a

nationally rare plant, meadow clary (*Salvia pratensis*). The site is designated a Local Wildlife Site for its limestone flora and is monitored by the Cotswold Rare Plants Group. Meadow clary suffered a great decline in numbers before 1950, mainly due to loss of grazing and smothering by coarser plants. It is now only found as a native population at 21 locations in southern England. This is the sort of small scale conservation that is ideally suited to work by volunteers such as the Wychwood CAT.

Contact for the group is primarily via email co-ordinated through me, a volunteer with the Wychwood Project at liz.brandon@oxfordshire.gov.uk. Anyone who does not have email should contact Jane Bowley, Wychwood Project Officer on 01993 814131. A welcome cup of tea and cake are provided so it is always useful to know how many people intend to come. Tools and gloves are also provided but feel free to bring your own.



Hand tools and enthusiasm – a key ingredient for a CAT group member.

Meet the Farmer – Mike Kettlewell of Over Norton Park Farm, Chipping Norton

Interview by Gwen McConnachie

'Environmental Stewardship is a Government-funded scheme open to all farmers, which funds the delivery of environmental benefits through agriculture. The scheme aims to conserve wildlife, maintain and enhance our landscape quality and character, protect our natural resources and promote public access to the countryside.' DEFRA news release, May 2008.

Over Norton Park Farm is a family run farm on the northern border of our area. The family participated in the previous Countryside Stewardship scheme over 10 years ago and has now entered the Higher Level scheme under a similar ten year contract.

Mr. Kettlewell, whose son now runs the farm with family help, talks about the past, present and future.

Originally an estate of some three thousand acres the land holdings were reduced, like so many similar estates, in the early twentieth century. It now comprises four hundred acres over two sites. The commercial pig unit has been replaced with a handful of mixed old breeds which now have just a five-mile journey to the local abattoir. They also keep a pedigree herd of South Devon cows, recognizable by their ginger-red coats. These were originally dual purpose (think Devon clotted cream!) but are now beef animals and, at Over Norton, go to the breeding market.

The farm stands at a height of seven hundred feet with plateau land, valley, woodland and stream. There are two hundred acres of arable and one hundred and forty of grassland including unimproved ridge and furrow. During the past ten years, under earlier schemes, they have planted three kilometres of hedgerow, restored perimeter stone walls on the outskirts of Chipping Norton, planted trees in positive blocks, left field margins for wildlife and over-wintered stubble. The Wychwood Project helped with a veteran tree survey and management plans for the parkland under the Ancient Habitats programme.

For six years the farm has participated in the Bird Aid scheme to which the Friends of Wychwood contribute and which has brought flocks of the now rare tree sparrow to the hedgerow millet feeders. There are plentiful farmland birds including the corn bunting. There are raptors, kestrel, buzzard and hawks which indicate the plentiful supply of small mammals and other wildlife for prey. As the farmer added, somewhat ruefully, there was also plenty of cover for larger animals such as deer and foxes which could do a great deal of damage.

Looking to the future, he explained that the Higher Level scheme is designed to have an even more positive impact. There are a number of different options. Typically, we can recognize participating farms by their six metre field margins, sown with pollen and nectar mix with others left uncultivated for wildlife. At Over Norton Park, pasture is sown with a 'floristically enhanced' grass mix. The unimproved grassland is grazed in rotation. Two acres are sown for birdseed and a further five acres of unharvested cereals left over winter as bird feed and a similar amount as lapwing plots. Twenty-five acres of over-wintered stubble will be left.

They are hoping to see a return of the native grey partridge and an increase in brown hares on the plateau land, where skylarks are already a common sight. Mr. Kettlewell reported that they had also noticed an increase in butterflies around the hedgerows which were now cut on a rotation. He was particularly pleased that he would be not cutting but laying in a traditional way one of his ten-year old planted hedgerows. Mr. Kettlewell felt that there was much satisfaction for the farmer in such positive environmental benefits. There were also financial benefits for a traditional mixed farm like Over Norton particularly when the returns on arable were poor.



Forest Schools – A Teacher’s View

Lisa Munro

Lisa is a teacher at Ascott-under-Wychwood Pre-School. She had always been interested in 'outdoor play' for children even when it wasn't fashionable. The Friends of Wychwood helped her with the fees for a 'Forest School' course. This is her report.

What is Forest School?

Children who go to Forest School regularly visit a marked out area of woodland which has been specially set aside for their group. Our children love going out to Forest School in the minibus borrowed from the Ace Centre. Once children get to Forest School they are free to participate in activities suggested by staff as well as undertake their own exploring. The session will usually include time for a drink and a snack and a chance to share all the exciting things they have done.

Forest Schools originated in Scandinavia in the 1950s. In Oxfordshire, Forest Schools use the outdoor environment to support children's learning across the whole curriculum, helping foster and develop confidence and self esteem. It has been found that the combination of freedom and responsibility has been particularly beneficial to children who, for whatever reason, struggle within a conventional classroom environment. The experience is fun and the learning which occurs is observed and recorded in a similar way to the learning which occurs in school. The children splash about in puddles, roll in the leaves and because of the high adult/child ratios, they can safely experience types of activities that are so often prohibited, such as climbing trees or cooking on fires.



Waterproof overalls provided by the Friends of Wychwood keep the children clean and dry.



Learning about the environment first-hand – the best way.

Ideally children will attend Forest School sessions weekly throughout the year and although this isn't a specific environmental educational programme, they will experience all weathers and seasons and develop a deeper understanding about the natural world along the way. I feel the earlier children start learning about the 'outside world' the better understanding they will have later on in life.

My Experience at Forest School

I began my Forest School Course with an intense week of study and practical tasks at Hill End Residential and Field Studies Centre in Oxfordshire. They also gave us a large file and a portfolio to complete in a year!. Everyone on the course had a mentor (Forest Leader) to give practical experience with the children.

I have been able to start the ball rolling with a Forest School at Ascott. The Astor family very kindly allowed us to use part of their 'woods' at Bruern for Forest School. In September I passed my Advanced Award in Forest School leadership. Yippee! It has been an amazing experience and I cannot thank everyone enough, especially Friends of Wychwood for helping me with my course fees.

- NEWSBOARD -

NEW

THE WYCHWOOD PROJECT LOTTERY

Fed-up with not winning the National Lottery? You get much better odds and help to support your local wildlife and landscape conservation charity at the same time with our new Wychwood Project Lottery. Open to Friends of Wychwood members only; for further information contact David Dunmur on 01993 878370.

Free Weekly Email **ENVIRONMENTAL BULLETIN FOR OXFORDSHIRE**

Want to know what's happening in Oxfordshire? Where to go for a walk? Why not get involved in some volunteering? And lots lots more. The ONCF weekly bulletin is free and in a simple format.

To sign up email cynth@oncf.org.uk

(Highly Recommended—Ed)

Artists to the Wychwood Forest at Chipping Norton Theatre Gallery – see back page for more information

Wychwood Project and Cotswold Wardens Coppice Restoration

Nick Mottram



Before



After



Three years' growth

Regular readers of Forest Update will recall previous articles about coppice techniques and use of hazel. The Project, working closely with the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens, has been involved in restoration of neglected coppice at several sites for a number of years. One benefit of this regular work is that we can start to see the results of our actions.

Our work site near Chadlington is a good example. The pictures on this page show the rate of regrowth that occurs when the hazel stools have sufficient light and, importantly, are protected from deer browsing by (very expensive) deer fencing. Not all the overstorey trees have been cleared and one area of very old and large goat willow has been left for its wildlife value providing cracks and crevices for bats to roost in.

The other benefit of coppicing has been the huge increase in the amount and diversity of the ground flora. This is supporting a wide range of insects and birds. Log piles provide a shaded and secure habitat for fungi, lichen and small mammals. New hazel and oak has been planted to supplement areas that were lacking. The absence of deer browsing has also allowed an abundance of natural regeneration of birch, ash and oak from which the better trees will be selected to grow-on as timber trees – a system known as coppice with standards.

The site has produced several hundred stakes and binders (heatherings) which were used by the Project hedgelaying group and in the Cotswold Conservation Board's annual hedgelaying competition, as well as some firewood.

'Artists to the Wychwood Forest'

The Wychwood Project at Chipping Norton Theatre

We are delighted to have an opportunity to showcase a selection of local artists who have been inspired by the Ancient Wychwood Forest, by hosting an exhibition in the gallery at Chipping Norton Theatre. The exhibition will be on from the 15th April to the 20th May and includes work by Celia Crampton, Liz Hogarty and Christopher Townsend. The gallery is open during performances and films and Saturdays 10am-1pm.

Information about the work of the Wychwood Project will also be available.



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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