

HCCPS Newsletter Spring 2022

Litterblitz

This year our annual litterblitz will take place over two weekends from Friday 8th April, including Easter, until Monday 18th. Although we are fortunate to have help to keep the Commons as clear as possible of litter throughout the year, we really try to have a blitz on it now before the vegetation grows rampant and it is harder to remove the rubbish.

Unfortunately, rubbish is a perennial problem and there are individuals who have thrown away the same things over a number of years such as the gin and tonic drinker who throws his/her can away regularly on Hawridge Hill! What a pity they can't just take it home and dispose of it in the regular roadside collections instead of leaving it for others to clear up. The new cycling café has meant that there are fewer disposable coffee cups though!

As usual there will be a number of rubbish bags at three points

- By the notice board at the Cricket Club
- By Edgar Taylor's bench opposite the School and
- At the top of Parson's Path opposite Church Lane, Hawridge.

Rubbish may be left at any one of these points or, if it is too heavy to carry, please leave as close to the edge of the road as possible for Council pick up. If you are able to take rubbish home and dispose of it in your own rubbish collection that would also be very much appreciated.

As last year, we are giving away a number of litterpicks to help you carry out this activity safely. If you would like one, please contact [Lindsay Griffin](#) 758 440. THANK YOU TO ALL CONCERNED FOR YOUR EFFORTS. It really does help.

County Wildlife Site

Christine has now had verbal confirmation from Fiona Everingham of the Bucks and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre that all of Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons are now to be included as a County Wildlife Site. Previously, the Manorial Waste (the strip outside houses on the south side of the main road) was not included but, as more residents of these houses are now leaving the area outside their houses to nature in order to create a corridor for wild flowers to spread, this area is now to be included with the main area of the Commons.

As elsewhere, the vegetation needs minimal care and should only be cut after the wildflowers have set seed in the autumn. We understand that more residents might be willing to leave theirs too but are concerned that they may not be able to carry out the annual cut when the vegetation is too long for a lawn mower. However, if this is a worry, please contact [HCCPS](#) or [Christine Stott](#). We would be happy to have James Jolliffe cut it when he does his annual cut around September. Christine's farmland at Hawridge Court Farm is also a County Wildlife Site and it is a real tribute to her thoughtful management to have two such awards.

Owls

At the AGM in December 2021 we showed a little video which demonstrates some of our work with [Bucks Owl and Raptor Group](#) (BORG) since 2013. It shows footage of the successful ringing of some young Tawny Owls from the box roughly opposite the school and some Barn Owls on Christine's farmland. We are very grateful to Michelle Storm for putting our material together.

We do hope that you will have a [look at the video](#) on our website. If you need something to lift your spirits this is guaranteed to do it! Some comments from people who have already viewed are 'stunning!', 'gorgeous!', 'lovely!' Do watch it!



Tawny owlets being ringed

Christine and I have been really privileged to see the work that Lynne Lambert and her team do as volunteers under licence from the British Trust for Ornithology and it is really encouraging and uplifting to see what goes on behind the scenes on the Commons and nearby on Christine's farmland. We hope to share the video with the school children and BORG plan to use it too. We also hope that this will be the first of several short videos which will feature our work with other groups and individuals.

Tree Felling

You will no doubt have seen that some tree felling has already taken place near to Post Office Cottages; along the main Chesham and Cholesbury to Wigginton Roads; down Stoney and Pound Lanes; and on the Parson's Path, Hawridge. These were mainly Ash trees which John Morris, who advises Christine, had identified as suffering from Ash Dieback and which were potential hazards.

The only other was the enormous Beech tree roughly opposite Box Tree Cottage, Hawridge. Sadly, it was one of 40 veteran trees identified on the Commons in 2012. It had lost an enormous limb in the autumn and because of its proximity to the top ride also presented a possible hazard. As you can see there was rot throughout the trunk of the tree. Most if not all old trees will have some (rot) to varying degrees - fungi get in either through the roots in which case they will probably die, or less immediately seriously through broken branch stubs which in turn increases the chance of breakage in the wind.

We believe that the stand of Beeches along the ride to Stoney Lane and those at the Iron Age Fort may have been planted in Victorian times when there were many plantings in similar places of historic interest or to enhance views.



The base where it was cut was 163 centimetres or 5ft 4inches in diameter. We had hoped to count the rings to establish how old our Beech was but this is proving difficult because of the rot.



Whilst grazing was occurring there would have been few other trees on our Commons and most of our current woodland has simply regenerated naturally.

We have been asked whether we plan to plant trees to replace those lost. For now, we have been advised by the Forestry Commission not to do so but to see what regenerates naturally.

In his Nature notes in the Times, Jonathan Tulloch points out that 'there is no need to plant trees; they plant themselves. We just have to give them the space they need..... Ten undisturbed years will transform even a car park into a young woodland glade. This kind of tree planting happens when we allow the natural foresters to do their work: the wind spreads light seeds while wood mice, squirrels and jays bury the heavier ones. A single jay can cache 3,000 acorns annually. The jay will eat some; many will germinate. When you hear a jay, you are hearing an oakwood in waiting.'

Meanwhile, John Morris will advise on further felling work necessary and Pete Leybourne and his tree fellers will be back. We are pleased to see that they continue to work very quickly and efficiently and to clear up afterwards. Wherever possible Christine will try to leave Ash trees where they do not pose a significant threat in the hopes that some will survive. Some isolated trees do not appear to be affected.

Recent storm damage

One positive outcome of the recent storms was that a tree, which needed to be cut back to prevent it rooting in the pond, itself came down in the wind. Two trunks have broken - one lying on the grass to the right, the other in the water. Not dangerous, but too weighty to be dealt with manually. James Jolliffe will clear both trunks and will also deal with other fallen trees though some will be left in situ if not causing a problem for access. These rot down eventually and provide important habitat for numerous species.

Pallett's Pond

The poor state of the pond in recent years led those who decide on County Wildlife Sites' status to consider whether or not the pond should still be included but Christine was able to persuade them that it is being carefully monitored and maintained and we hope is in recovery.

One of the major problems has been the prevalence of New Zealand Pygmy Weed. NZPW *Crassula helmsii* is native to New Zealand and to Australia where it is known as swamp-stonecrop. Introduced into the UK from Tasmania in 1911 to oxygenate ponds, it wasn't until the 1970s that it was recognised as a real threat to pondlife here in the UK.

It was first recorded in Pallett's Pond in 1978 and again in 1985 and it provides a convincing reason why people should not dump anything in or around the pond. NZPW is an extremely invasive species. It can survive on land, in and around water and is spread easily by birds, animals or on clothing etc. For some mysterious reason NZPY did not then become the problem in our pond that it was later to become, not just here but in ponds, lakes, reservoirs, canals and ditches throughout the UK. If left unmanaged it will form an impenetrable mat which swamps other plant life and damages animal habitats. It grows all year round.

Over the years we have made various attempts to control or eradicate it by covering it over with black plastic, by mechanical extraction and by burying it underground. Because it is so

easily spread it is difficult to transport it safely from the site and so latterly it was buried on the Commons to a depth of one metre since it cannot survive at that depth.

Two years ago, David Dennis, Richard Bysouth and Dave Tarn were removing it manually when they found that large amounts of the weed could be removed from the surface at the back of the pond by rolling it up. As there was already NZPW in the area they simply left it there to die and monitored the situation. Left to die on the banks it did so within a few weeks and soon disappeared. David writes last month 'in that area, there has so far been very little regrowth. So today, I have done the same at the front of the pond, taking care to leave the weed on the slope below the level of the path. This should minimise the chance of walkers getting any on their footwear

'All along the front of the pond, the weed had spread up to 2 metres out from the edge and almost all of that area is now clear. Of course, this is still only a temporary solution - management rather than eradication - but at least it will not cover and stifle the pond this summer.



'Here is a picture of the mass of NZPW that has been rolled out onto the sloping bank at the front of the pond. This mass of weed was all raked out by the roots from the first two metres out from the front edge of the pond. Had this not been done, it would have spread much further this summer, cutting out light to most of the pond surface. We now expect the exposed weed to dry out and rot down over the next few weeks. We'll keep an eye on it to make sure it does - if not, it could be removed manually.' However, one week on, it is already showing signs of rotting away.

Our thanks to David for carrying out this recent work on the pond single handed. If it works, this method will mean that the weed can more easily be managed until such time as there is a means of eradicating it otherwise.

There is some hope on the horizon. For some years trials have been in progress to use a mite to control it. David has been in contact with Dr Sonal Varia, at Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) who are carrying out this research and David explains - 'The mite is a native of Australia and its only foodplant is NZPW. In the laboratory it has been shown seriously to inhibit the growth of the weed, which forms galls on its surface when attacked by the mite. This restricts the weed's ability to reproduce. There are, quite rightly, serious concerns to be addressed whenever a non-native species is proposed for

introduction to a new part of the world, but so far, no harmful consequences have been found. Highly controlled open water trials are now being conducted in England and Wales to evaluate its efficacy. This will not be a quick fix, and the trials are likely to take some years, and only if they prove successful and safe will a more widespread introduction of the mite be allowed. I'm keeping in touch with the lead scientist on the UK project and hope to have an update in the near future."

Moths

David Dennis and Peter Bygate continue to survey moths on the Commons. You may be relieved to hear that there is an early sign of spring at least in the moth world with the trapping of a Spring Usher though David says 'it is a minor triumph of enthusiasm over common sense'!!



The total of 309 Macro moth species still stands but there are potentially many more micro moth species on the Commons. They vary between about 3 and 10mm in length. Undaunted by the difficulties in identifying such small creatures, David, Christine and Peter have, with expert help, identified about a dozen different species so far. Another minor triumph of enthusiasm?

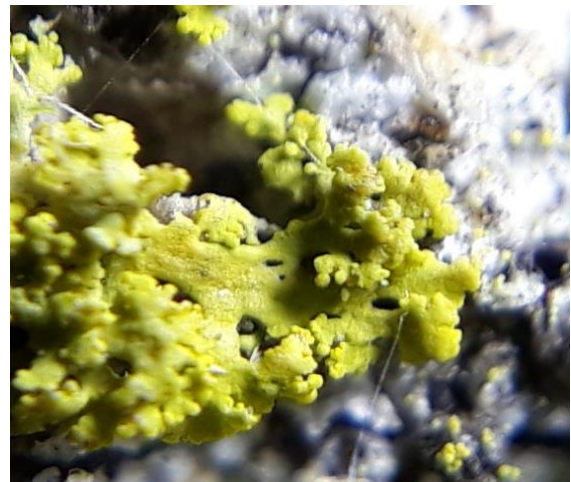
In Butterfly Conservations March publication of All Aflutter they listed 20 amazing facts about moths. These included:- Some male moths can smell a female up to seven miles away; there are some moths that never eat anything; there are more than 2500 species of moths in the UK (David and Peter have some way to go to identify that many here!) and at least 160,000 species world-wide compared with 18,500 species of butterflies; there may be many more species of moths yet unrecorded; the best way to distinguish between a butterfly and a moth is by their antennae (most butterflies have club-shaped antennae with a little ball at the end whereas moths have usually feathery antennae which are saw shaped or taper to a fine point; moths are important pollinators of wild plants including orchids; and moths are an indicator species which means that their numbers tell scientists how well an ecosystem is doing.

This last is important for us since it isn't just the number of species that is important but the numbers of actual moths. In a moth trapping on 4th March David trapped a total of 9 different species and 93 moths in all. This suggests that we have a healthy environment for these important creatures.

Lichens

Isobel continues to record lichen species found here and has similar problems in identifying these species which are also tiny and can look very different in different places. 'The most wide variation that had the experts scratching their heads was one which is normally yellow but mine was grey when dry and green when wet. See attached. I found the grey/green one whereas the other is more common. I have yet to find someone who has seen one like mine. It was on a cherry tree which fell across Parson's Path last year. There's the edge of a 10p coin in the wet photo to give some idea of scale.'

We are fortunate to have local people who are willing to spend time and expertise in studying the small things on our Commons. The importance of these species should not be underestimated.



Visiting specialists

We always welcome experts who can advise us on how best to care for and maintain the biodiversity of the Commons. In the near future Isobel and Christine expect to meet Sean O'Leary on the Commons. Sean is the Bucks Recorder for Mosses for the British Bryological Society and is coming to investigate mosses here - some of which Isobel recorded some time ago and which are listed on the website hawridgeandcholesburycommons.org.

We also hope to have visits from the Bucks Invertebrate Group and also from the Fungus Group at some point.

DofE

Toby Grief-King, one of our DofE candidates, has been monitoring our trail camera in the hopes that we might have another sighting of the polecat seen earlier in Hawridge Vale. So far, there has been plenty of evidence of badgers and squirrels but no polecat! Toby also helped John Kilpatrick erect bat boxes opposite the school and has topped up the bug hotel.

Later this month we hope to transplant more of the very simplest snowdrops onto the Commons. Snowdrops are thought to have been introduced to this country in the 16th century but have become naturalised in many woodland settings since the late 18th century. Those transplanted last year will enhance our memorial benches again year after year.

Our thanks to Toby Grief-King and Fabien Belgrave for their work on the Commons. This included clearing gorse from around a magnificent oak tree and planting more snowdrops. Most recently Toby, under David's supervision, undertook the clearing of weed from the dewpond on a very chilly day (fortunately not NZPW!). Good work all round! James will clear some of the vegetation from the perimeter of the dewpond soon.



Calendar/Card/Cake/Dundridge book sales

Thank you to all who bought any of these or supported us in their production or sales in any way. The revenue raised has again meant that we did not need to raise our subscriptions for this year which remain £10 per individual or £20 for a couple which also includes children. If you would like cards (5 for £5), fruit cake (£15) or the excellent Story of Dundridge Manor by Katharine Dallas and the late Gordon Kew (£15) please contact [Lindsay Griffin](#) (758 440).

Membership subscriptions

Although the AGM date will change, the financial year will still end in October and subscriptions are due from the beginning of November.

Ways to pay

We are very grateful to all those of you who choose to pay by **PayPal or by Direct Debit**. It is easy to pay by either of these methods on our website under [HCCPS Membership](#).

Alternatively, you can pay by **Bank Transfer**:

Account Number: 50458015

Sort Code: 20-02-06

Reference: Subs + Payer's name.

Cash or Cheques (made payable to HCCPS) may be sent to Philip Prettejohn, Barncroft, Vale Farm, Hawridge, Chesham HP5 2UG.