



SPRING 2014 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to this year's newsletter. This will give you a brief insight into what we have been up to over the last year on and around Wolstonbury Hill.

Also included is a list of our future 'walks and talks' and an update on 'our' orchids.

If you, family or friends, would like to take an active part in maintaining this haven of tranquillity please join our friendly group on task days- chocolate biscuits, tea and coffee provided.

Editor: Margaret Maillardet

Chairman's Report 2013 – 2014

Task Days

The group only managed to complete 17 task days this year primarily due to the wet and windy autumn and winter. Work site safety is always an important issue and we had to leave one site early because the ground was becoming too slippery to work on. This said we still managed to clock up over 500 volunteer hours averaging 6 volunteers per session.

The two main areas where we have focused our energies were scrub clearance around the Campion eyebrows on the Northern side of the Hill and reinstatement of the dewpond.

The removal of scrub from around the eyebrows has enhanced these features and the difference can be clearly seen from some distance. This work also encourages the cattle grazing on the hill along the contours thus ensuring it is kept clear of unwanted regrowth.

The dewpond, which has been leaking for some time, had the plastic membrane stripped out and new clay imported and puddled on top to enable it to once again hold water. Whilst relatively clear of plant life currently we look forward to seeing this habitat re-establish itself.

For the coming year we will be focusing our efforts on removing the old fence line along the bridle way on the north side of the hill, continued scrub removal from around the Campion eyebrows and from the hill top and more work on the orchid bank.

Hurstpierpoint College

We were joined once again by c.30 students from Hurstpierpoint College on a National Trust led community involve day, removing previously cut vegetation. Thanks to Hurst College.

Organised Walks

Once again we hosted a number of successful walks on the hill both for our members and other local groups; 1 Brownie walk, 1 bird walk, 2 General interest walks for Hurst Festival, 1 orchid walk and 1 fungi forage.

This year as well as running some of these walks we are hoping to expand into a badger watch and some visits to other local sites (Newtimber Hill and Lag Wood). Please see the web site for these events.

Bob McHardy

Unfortunately one of our task day regulars Bob was knocked off his bicycle near the Friars Oak pub just before Christmas. Bob died later in hospital. Bob would turn up on his bicycle come rain or shine with his bowsaw strung under the crossbar. He was a keen cyclist and attended a number of conservation groups but liked Friends of Wolstonbury because of the chocolate biscuits provided at break time. He will be missed.

And Finally

Thank you to everyone who supports the group through subscriptions to the group and through donations of time be it at task days or through administration. This group is for its members so if there are any issues you feel need addressing or any events you would like to see happening please contact any member of the committee or come to one of our meetings. All are welcome.

Annual General Meeting 19.30 hrs Monday 12th May 2014 @ Plough, Pyecombe

Mike Botterill 12.10.14

Dates for your diary

This year we will be holding task days as usual on the first Friday and third Saturday of each month. There will also be interest walks

Please check the website for details. www.wolstonbury.com

May

12th May. A.G.M. The Plough, Pycombe. 7.30pm
Badger Watch. t.b.a. There will be a limit on numbers

21st May Visit to Orchid Grower. Invitation only

10th June NT. Orchid Safari. 6.00pm. Book in advance 01273857712.

July

4th July Pond Survey and flower survey.

5th July Woodland Walk (Newtimber). Meet at roundabout past Tates Texaco garage for 10.30 start.

12th July Lagwood visit with owners. 10.30am at the wood.

9th August Introductory Wild Flower walk.

May or Aug. Butterfly walk t.b.a.

October Fungi Foray organized by NT. Book in advance 01273847712.

All walks at £3.00/head with children free.

RESTORING THE DEW POND AT WELLCOMBE BOTTOM Hilary Pulham

In 2007 one of the Friends of Wolstonbury's summer tasks was to carry out the first annual survey of the dew pond at Wellcombe Bottom. Three years later in 2010 we became concerned

about the state of the pond. The level was very low and the water was cloudy and muddy making it difficult to identify the specimens removed for identification. By 2011 the water level had dropped again and there was little evidence of aquatic life. Since then the pond has been more like a puddle that has frequently dried out.

Various plans to restore the pond were talked about but funding was an issue. Finally in October 2013 the good news came that a contractor, Mark Stenning, had been hired to start work. However the pond had not been constructed in the traditional way. In 2000 a butyl liner had been laid on top of the layers of flint, soil and chalk under the final layer of clay. Our daunting task was to remove it.

When the day came for the work to start we arrived to find that there was water in the pond and the steep bridleway path was too unsafe to drive the digger down. A few days later most of the water had been pumped out and the track regraded. The digger was now in place and work began.

However many layers were there?



To begin with as each section of liner was cut out the digger dragged it up the slope and piled it up on the other side of the fence.

The pump was set up to drain away the rest of the water and straw was removed.

Once each section of liner was taken away the digger moved the clay across from the next section and we began cutting again.

After a break for lunch we seemed to pick up speed. But would we finish before it got dark?





We started removing the last section at three o'clock but by now we were working well as a team.

We had to carry the old liner round to the



trailer ourselves as the digger was busy moving clay.

We finished our task at 4.15 pm and used the Kelly kettle to make tea. It was getting dark by the time we left.

Bad weather followed and the pond was not finished till the following week. Richard Burrows had donated surplus clay from Danny and it was added to the layer already in position. There was a great feeling of satisfaction as we looked at the restored pond, thanks to the skill of the contractor, Mark Stenning.

The pond has gradually filled with water thanks to the excessive amount of rainfall. It will be left this year unless any invasive species arrive. Once established it will be weeded regularly.



We donated the bequest from the estate of Steve Witts towards the cost of the Dew Pond and a plaque will be put on the fence for Steve and his family.

THE ORCHID REVIEW

Dave Pearce

It is pleasing to report that the many varieties of orchids found on Wolstonbury continue to flourish. This is particularly the case on the two orchid banks at Wellcombe Bottom. The greater butterfly orchid (*Plantanthera chlorantha*) continues to thrive and can now be found in good numbers on both the upper and lower slopes. The fly orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*) also has maintained its numbers with the majority of its population found on the lower orchid bank. Other species to be found on this part of the hill are the white helleborine (*Cephalanthera damasonium*), twayblade (*Neottia ovata*), common spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and now a good distribution of bee orchid (*Ophrys apifera*).

The bee orchid is one of four species of the ophrys genus found in the UK, the others being the fly, early and late spider orchids. This group of orchids, which have a distinctive velvet lip, have evolved to mimic the female fly or bee insect and by so doing attract the male by visual deception. By attracting the male insect to mate with the orchid, pseudocopulation, pollen is attached to the insect and subsequently transferred to pollinate a nearby flower. Not only must this orchid provide a good visual deception for the male bee but also come into flower in the few days between the male insect coming out of hibernation and that of the female. There is a growing concern from new research showing that this short window of time is being disrupted by climate change. The good news for the bee orchid is that it is the only ophrys species that can self-pollinate and is thought to be why it maintains a wide distribution throughout the UK.

Countrywide there is range of differing forms of the bee orchid to be found, with each showing a distinctive difference to the velvet lip both in shape and colour pattern. In addition a distorted form of the bee orchid without this lip and termed a 'peloric' form has been seen on Wolstonbury hill in recent years. The term peloric, meaning petal, was first used by Charles Darwin to describe the mutant formation of a flower's petal structure. This mutation in the bee orchid is characterised by the lip being deformed or replaced by an additional petal.

The western slopes of Wolstonbury are also a good hunting ground for orchids where you can find excellent populations of fragrant orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and the occasional man orchid (*Orchis anthropophora*).

