



Friends of Chorleywood Common

Newsletter Summer 2013

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1. CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT

My Report to the AGM, on 22 February 2013, is available on the website -

<http://chorleywoodcommon.org.uk/> and follow the link - and these notes summarise what happened last year and what is happening this year. The website itself is an important innovation: it increases the amount of information that can be made available to Members, and e-mail alerts are quicker and much cheaper than using the post. Many thanks to Stuart Marshall for setting up and running the system; and may I, once again, encourage Members to provide e-mail addresses? We will only use them for Friends of the Common communications and will not give them to anyone else.

Since the last Newsletter, in September, we have had a very successful Fungus Foray led by Steve Kelly of Beds and Herts Fungi Group. The winter talks programme included "The Honey Bee and its relations" by John Catton of the Bumblebee Conservation Group; "History of Commons" by Rachel Sanderson of the Chilterns Conservation Board; and "Chorleywood on Thames" by Tony Morigi. Marilyn Hampton has decided to step down from the Committee; we are all very grateful for her work in organising the winter talks.

The talks and outdoor events since the AGM are described in the "Recent Events" article in this newsletter. Please let us have your thoughts if you have any suggestions for topics we might cover or other things we might do. (And anyone interested in helping to organise the programme will be warmly welcomed!)

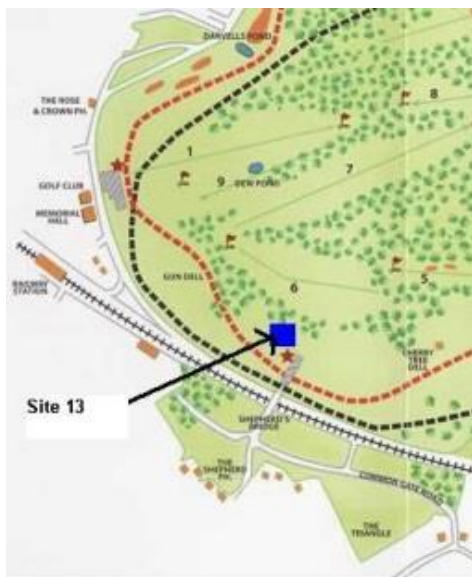
In addition to pond work and ragwort-pulling, the volunteers, under Andrew Goddard's supervision, have collected and spread heather seed to encourage new growth in the areas either side of Darvell's Pond; fixed point photography is now under way; and the Butterflies group are continuing with their surveys - I am sure everyone joins them in hoping for a spell of warm, calm and sunny weather to help the butterflies recover from last season's terrible conditions.

In the Treasurer's Department, the finances are healthy. A sub-committee is considering how to maintain and increase membership: here again, all ideas are welcome.

Many thanks to all our speakers and events leaders, to Yvonne Merritt and Mike Arnold for making the Memorial Hall available at short notice for our AGM, and to the Committee for all the work they put in. We look forward to seeing you at Village Day and other events; and to receiving your thoughts on any issues affecting the Common - in particular, of course, on the Play Area and Grazing proposals, which have their own articles in this newsletter.

2. PLAY AREA UPDATE

PROPOSED PLAY AREA – WATCH THIS SPACE!



The picture and map extract show “Location 13”, near the Shepherds Bridge parking area, which the Parish Council has suggested to TRDC as the site for the proposed Play Area. The general idea is to put the taller equipment among the trees (to the left of the open area in the picture), and to have only comparatively low-level items in the open glade.

TRDC is inviting four companies to prepare designs and tender for a contract to install play equipment: the present plan is that public consultation on the designs will begin at Village Day, Saturday 13 July.

TRDC will choose a design in the light of that consultation, and if it is also acceptable to the Parish Council, there will be an application to Defra in the autumn, under Commons Act 2006 section 38, for permission to install the equipment.

The application has to relate to a specific project, but the Planning Inspectorate will also consider any issues of principle which may be raised, and may decide to hold a public enquiry. Anyone who wishes to do so will be entitled to make representations on any aspect of the proposal: whether there should be a Play Area on the Common at all, and whether “Location 13” is the right place, as well as

the particular design chosen.

The Committee of FoCC will wish to know what members think about the project, in order to make appropriate representations. ***So please look at the selected design, and send us your views on the whole project!***

3. FIXED POINT PHOTOGRAPHY

Earlier in the year Friends of Chorleywood Common volunteered to embark upon an initiative that Chorleywood Parish Council had to record the changing nature of our Common throughout the seasons and for years to come. So far, starting at the end of February, 22 separate sites were identified around the Common for a photographic record. The aim is to complete a round of photos for each and every month of the year.



Although this year started out cold, wet and snowy, and the bad weather seemed to go on for ever, the Common has at last really begun to spring into life.

Here we have selected one particular site out of the 22; Darvells Pond, looking towards Darvells Yard from the Common. The five sequential shots begin at the end of February and take you through to the end of June.

February



March



April



May



June

4. CRICKET PAVILION

The Cricket Club have been planning, for some time, to replace their 50 year old pavilion. They have now reached the stage of taking advice from an architect and will be discussing their proposals with the Planning Department at Three Rivers District Council, to find out what sort of design is likely to be acceptable. Then they intend to prepare plans of what they would like to do and invite the Parish Council (who have a "say" as the Club's landlord), and their resident neighbours, including the School and Christ Church, to comment. That, we understand, will also include the Friends of the Common: in due course the Committee will think about, and respond to, whatever the Cricket Club proposes to do; and we encourage any Members of the Friends who have an opinion to make their views known to us, to the Cricket Club, to the Parish Council, and to the planners.

5. GRAZING

The Parish Council are still keen in principle to reintroduce grazing by cattle on the Common (a proposal which the Friends have supported). Because of the legal complications affecting the use of physical fencing, even on a temporary basis, the Council are now investigating a system of "virtual fencing". A wire is buried along the boundary of the area to be grazed, and send signals to collars, worn by the cattle, which give them an electric shock when they come too close: apparently the cattle learn very quickly, and the system does effectively confine them. The Council have seen "virtual fencing" in operation at Burnham Beeches, and intend also to look at it in Epping Forest, where it is used in a situation resembling that in Chorleywood - with open ground, and roads close to where the cattle are grazing. The issue is likely to be discussed at the next meeting of the Open Spaces Committee (9 July): we hope to let Members of the Friends know about any decision as soon as it is made.

6. BUTTERFLY SURVEY

This is a gentle reminder to Members that the second priority in the Parish Council's Open Spaces Committee's "Four Year Vision" is to make arrangements for future butterfly surveys: Mr Bill Cattle, who has undertaken such surveys for the Council for many years, has agreed to pass on his knowledge of where and when to look for different species, and generally to train volunteers to continue to make the surveys. FoCC Committee have agreed to publicise this project and to ask for volunteers to come forward: will anyone interested please get in touch with Greg Hill (e-mail gregoryjshill@btinternet.com or telephone, evenings or weekends, 283555). The "season" is high summer (whenever that may be), and the surveys for 2013 have already started, but additional participators are always welcome. An outing on 26 June recorded a number of Common Blues and Meadow Browns on Larks Meadow (and one Cinnabar moth); the woodland edge produced no more than one Small White, which was perhaps indicative of another difficult year. Having an ongoing record, year by year, of the butterflies found on the Common is interesting in itself, and also helps track the effects of how the Common is managed and of environmental changes generally.

7. SURVEYING WILDLIFE on the COMMON

Members might be surprised to discover just how many surveys are carried out into the variety of wildlife that we have on the Common, from birds and mammals, through amphibians, butterflies and invertebrates, to plants, lichens and fungi. Attending the Chilterns Commons Project workshop on this topic confirmed that all records can be of great value to the County or National bodies that have interests in one or more aspects of our wildlife. Martin Harvey, our course tutor, took us through the steps to be followed in carrying out surveys and in so doing, we were introduced to “quadrats” – not a family of four rodents but a systematic approach to measuring the varieties of plants within a given area – introducing us to the chalk grassland “Common Mouse-ear” and three species of Buttercup. This gives an added incentive to our forthcoming Flower Walk with Martin Hicks at the end of July, to record the changes we see in the plants from one year to the next and their relative abundance.

8. RECENT EVENTS

Chorleywood House Estate After the formal business of the AGM, Tim Venner gave us an illustrated talk on the work of the Friends of the Chorleywood House Estate. He showed us particularly memorable pictures of the work done to restore the Fire Pond (the formal pond in the lawn near the main house), where the Rangers have since “re-homed” a large number of goldfish from Darvells Pond, and of the effect of mechanical trimming of the new hedge along the boundary of the football pitches; it has recovered!

“Bats without Belfries” James Shipman, from the Berks and South Bucks Bat Group, gave us a talk in the Library on 21 March, and brought a small friend (recuperating after an accident) to see us. It seems that bats look much larger flying around in near-darkness than on James’s hand in full light with their wings closed. Did you know that as many as 250 pipistrelles could fit into a space the size of a shoebox? That when they are flying, their hearts beat up to 1000 times a minute? That one bat can eat up to 10,000 mosquitoes in one night? That their droppings are almost entirely dust, from the hard parts of insects? That they can live up to 18 or 19 years, but usually do not reach that age because of predation by cats, tawny owls and seagulls? That at birth a baby bat is 20% to 30% of its mother’s weight, and that it is able to fly at the age of three weeks? (Neither did I!)

If you wish to provide a roosting-place for bats, you can find a design for a bat box at

http://www.bats.org.uk/pages/bat_boxes.html .

British Reptiles and Amphibians On 18 April Nick Bessant of the Thames and Chiltern Herpetological Group talked to us about the seven native species of amphibians and six of reptiles. He brought frogs and toads for us to see, and some frog spawn (in clumps) and toad spawn (in long strings). He told us (among other things) that adult amphibians (out of water) breathe through their skins and the membranes of their mouths, as well as their lungs; that toads might live as long as 40 years if they could avoid the hazards of traffic coming along whilst they wait in the middle of the road for a member of the opposite sex, and of falling into roadside drains because they cannot climb the kerb. Grass snakes predate amphibians, and can become dangerously entangled in heron netting when hunting in garden ponds. The markings on an adder resemble bracken fronds and provide the snake with camouflage. But the slow-worm is not a snake at all: it is a lizard which has lost its legs

in the course of evolution. Other lizards may lose part of their body more suddenly: they shed their tails as a distraction to help them escape predators (!).

The Dawn Chorus Walk led by Anna Marett on 28 April was not very well supported. (Where was everybody who indicated at the AGM that it would be a good idea even with a 5 a.m. start?) But the conditions were good, and we heard or saw 25 different species, including linnets and chiff-chaffs. Not all of them were song-birds: the count includes a heron, and jackdaws on (and in) the chimneys of the cottages along Common Road. By the end of the walk, about 6.30 a.m., the sun had come up into an almost clear sky, and we had the bonus of seeing a “sun halo”, a rainbow effect in very high and thin cloud about 25° to the left of the sun.

Beating the Bounds of the Common on Rogation Sunday, 5 May, was organised and led by officers and members of the Parish Council and well supported by the Friends of the Common. We started at Christ Church, with the traditional turning upside down of one of the children present (to make sure it was a memorable event), and inspected most of the boundaries, including the boundaries of the Dells within the Common (the stretch from the cattle creep towards Berry Lane and back to Clements Road was left for another time, and the road boundary from Darvells Pond to the traffic lights and back to Christ Church did not seem to need close inspection). The result was a list of encroachments, which will be taken up with the relevant frontagers, and of instances of fly-tipping, which will be removed - except that the subsequent Open Spaces Committee meeting on 21 May decided to leave in place one galvanised sheet which was well placed to collect warmth from the sun and to form a shelter for newts and possibly grass snakes, slow worms and lizards; the grass will be encouraged to grow over it and camouflage it.

Many thanks to Judy Cansdale and her daughter for opening up The Junction and providing tea and cake when we got back to Christ Church.

Pond Dipping took place at Christ Church Pond on the evening of Friday 7 June; two families turned up, and with their assistance Andrew Goddard carried out an "Opal" survey of plants and animals which are now back in the pond, after the draining and dredging which took place earlier in the year. There is some greater and lesser duckweed, float grass, water forget-me-not, and flag irises, and the local amphibians have found and used the water - there are tadpoles, and newt larvae. Also observed were midge larvae; water boatmen; leeches; and at the bottom of the food chain, daphnia.

The Herb Walk on 23 June, led by Victoria Stainsby, started at Shepherds Bridge parking area and ranged as far as the bushes in the common on the other side of the bridge and back to the cattle creep; but in that fairly small area Victoria identified 16 or more useful plants. A straightforward list of them would not be very interesting, but here are some suggestions: young hawthorn leaves in salads; heads of elderflower deep-fried in batter, or combined with yarrow and mint as a fever treatment; cleavers (goosegrass) with spinach and chickweed; the leaves of ribwort plantain, instead of dock leaves, rubbed on nettle stings; dried dock root with molasses; dandelion flowers deep-fried in batter; bruised and rolled-up yarrow leaves as a treatment for nosebleed; fresh nettle and peppermint leaf tea – one of the party has since tried this combination, and reports that it is delicious.

9. DATES for your DIARY

Saturday 13 July, Village Day. Organised by Chorleywood Parish Council (weather, ground conditions and back-up plan permitting): the Friends of the Common will have a stall to display the sort of things we do.

Sunday 28 July, Wild Flowers and Butterflies Walk to be led by Martin Hicks of Herts Biological Records Centre; meet at 2.30 p.m. at Christ Church car park.

Sunday 22 September, Fungus Foray with the Beds and Herts Fungi Group: meet at 10.00 a.m. at Christ Church car park.

Apple Day – Saturday 5 October. Organised by Chorleywood Community Orchard in their Orchard in Chorleywood House Estate.

To be arranged: Bat Walk to be led by James Shipman (evening event); *details will be posted on the website.*

It is also time to start planning the **Winter Programme:** if anyone has any ideas for a topic, or knows of a speaker who has a subject which would be interesting, or would be prepared to join the Committee to help with that part - or any other part - of the Friends' activities, ***please get in touch with any member of the Committee!***
