



*The Bi-Annual* – Jan 2012

# Newsletter

of Harlow Conservation Volunteers

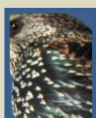


Clearing willow – Marshgate Spring

Welcome to the new format Bi-Annual Newsletter containing a summary of the range of tasks carried out by our volunteers over the last six months, plus contributions from group members, including the chairman's report, nature reserve spotlight, photographs, poems, quiz questions, and interesting events.

## QUICK QUIZ

1. What do you call a group of moles?
2. Who is this?
3. What is this?
4. 'Jack by the Hedge' is the common name for?
5. Stag Beetles can fly – True or False?



Caring for our natural environment



# CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

Notable projects during the year include the construction of a rustic oak footbridge at Brenthall and Barnsley Wood, lining the pond at Stewards School we dug in 2010, and building an artificial otter holt from a kit just off the River Stort as part of British Waterways towpath improvements in the area.

A new feature of the work this year has been undertaking projects which are part of larger projects developed by sister group Harlow Wildlife Projects (HWP). As part of HWP's "Access and Wildlife" project at Brenthall and Barnsley Wood, as well as the rustic bridge, the group planted some 600 whips of mainly shrub species to create an under-story around the glades and ponds opened up by contractors. The group also continued removing sycamore alongside the rides. On the Town Park Marsh LoWS (Stage IV meadows) the group has planted 21 medium and 3 larger trees on the new picnic site at the western end of the newly revamped path network for HWP's Lottery funded "Stort Valley Meadows – Access for All" project.

Elsewhere, significant progress has been made at Marshgate Spring (part of Harlow Marshes LNR) in conjunction with other volunteer groups in removing the invasive and dense shading sycamore which had become dominant in part of what is a beautiful remnant of hazel coppice with oak standards with probably the best display of bluebells in the spring in Harlow.

We managed a couple of trips out this year. In September a few of us spent the afternoon at the WoodFest at Hatfield Forest – a chance to look at all manner of uses of wood as well as catch up with some acquaintances. In October our "end of summer" trip was to Bedgebury Pinetum, the national pinetum in the Forestry Commission's Bedgebury Forest on the Kent-Sussex border. We could not have picked a better time to go: in the central part of the Pinetum the trees are spaced well apart along a valley with several lakes, and with the needles on the deciduous conifers turning colour it was absolutely stunning. On the way back we fitted in a short visit to "Wilderness Wood" near Uckfield, which represented one way a private woodland could involve the public and be financially self-sustaining, and then a wander round Friezeland Wood, a Woodland Trust site near Royal Tunbridge Wells, which is a geological SSSI - all in all a brilliant day out.

**Andrew Tomlins**



Autumn colour at Bedgebury

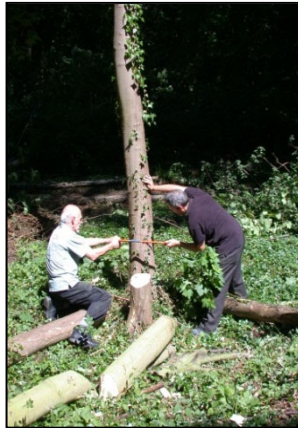
High Rocks – Friezeland Wood

The lake at Bedgebury





Coppicing Hazel and clearing Sycamore in the woodland on Marshgate Spring nature reserve.



# PHOTO PAGE



Construction of footbridge over deep ditch in Brenthall and Barnsley Wood, Harlow.

Installation of Otter Holt for British Waterways in the Stort valley, Harlow.



As part of the volunteer input into the Stort Valley Meadows project in Harlow, conservation volunteers are seen here planting trees in the project's picnic area, and will be carrying out further works on the site during the spring and summer months 2012.

HCV members on Parndon Moat marsh controlling the encroachment of willow trees out into the marshes sedge beds to prevent this remaining natural wetland habitat from drying out.



**Joke 1.** Why can't a ladybird hide? **Joke 2.** What's a frog's favourite year?

## RESERVE SPOTLIGHT



### Parndon Moat Marsh Nature Reserve

Situated between the railway and the river Stort navigation east of Parndon Mill, this three hectare narrow strip of original marshland derives its name from the moat that is found at the western end of site, where a timber framed building once stood dating back to around the 13<sup>th</sup> century and where Little Parndon Hall stood before being re-sited further away from the river. At the other end of the site once stood the Burnt Mill 1950's sewage works where today only a few old concrete posts are left of its boundary fence.

Major habitat improvements were carried on the marsh in the 1990's when the moat and dykes had the silt removed from them and water level control measures were installed, and at the same time a pond was excavated to provide some clear standing water at the eastern end.

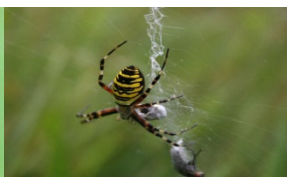
Harlow Conservation Volunteers have been involved in this site since the group's inception in 1985, most of the work carried out today being much the same as in those early days, such as pollarding/coppicing willows, controlling the spread of reedmace, and cutting down and raking off areas of sedges each year to allow weaker plant species to flourish.

In 2004 the site was declared a Local Nature Reserve. HCV have since improved public access by installing a boardwalk over a wet section of trail, and shallow seasonal pools have been created adjacent to this, and on the east end embankment HCV have installed steps and leveled the path; also along the trail, seating and an information board have been installed.

Work carried out by HCV and other volunteer groups has contributed greatly to maintaining the habitat quality that supports the wide spectrum flora and fauna found on this site. The reserve's flourishing wildlife population includes one of the best sites in Harlow for reptiles, and it supports several notable spider species plus the rare Desmoulins Whorl Snail; a broad range of wildflower species are seen through the spring and summer, and summer migrant birds such as whitethroat, sedge warbler, and blackcap regularly breed on the reserve.



Desmoulins whorl snail



wasp spider



slow worm



common lizard



## Woodland Dreams and Screams!



*HCV, gathered here in winter beneath these leafless trees  
Recalling the birdsong that floated on a springtime breeze  
A place of warm sunny glades, and cooling dappled shade  
Here dreams of summer yet to come, were so often made  
Drifts of Bluebells spreading, under boughs of Hazel leaves  
Today we are all working to retain such dreams as these*

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*There was something that we never quite really understood  
What caused the screech that often echoed through the wood  
Could it be that someone had fallen into its flowing stream  
To release such a far reaching, and eardrum splitting scream  
Was it an Owl, a Fox, or lost soul that followed us around  
That was producing this explosive, harsh outburst of sound*

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*Assembled again to maintain the woodlands best of health  
Protecting our environment, preserving its natural wealth  
Taking care of its ponds and marshland, over so many years  
This small committed collection of enthusiastic volunteers  
Found working in torrential rain or beneath a blazing sun  
Would not be dreamt by many, as their idea of having fun*

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*Building a bridge, install a seat, encourage flowers for a bee  
These things they have been doing long before the big society  
A love to wade in water and scream in murky muddy pools  
Is not only a playground for small children and of silly fools  
Just cutting back high growing reeds, or coppicing a tall tree  
Helps keep the vision seen in our dreams alive, thank you HCV*

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*from the Voice of the Forest*



HARLOW CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

Back page Bits and Pieces – Members comments – Meet a volunteer

Volunteer G.D. →



**Fires on tasks** – Are the group volunteers in favour of a fire to dispose of cleared vegetation and brushwood: or for creating habitat piles: tell us what you think.

**For fires:** \*fires could be said to leave a site looking tidy \*charcoal left behind may be beneficial to the soil, viz. terra preta \*many volunteers like a fire \*it creates a focus for the task \*provides warmth in winter \*you can cook jacket potatoes for lunch.

**Against fires:** \*a habitat pile provides a refuge for wildlife \*but do they cover up the ground where plants may grow \*remains of a fire could encourage others to start one \*smoke may affect health through inhaling \*releases carbon dioxide into the environment \*fire can sterilise the soil beneath it and destroy an existing seed bank.

**Viewpoint:** Fundamentally burning wood is a waste of a resource, \*decaying wood piles benefit nature's recyclers; personally I think the balance is against having fires. *Andrew Tomlins*

**Celebration of Trees**, Fri 20th & Sat 21st April at Capel Manor College - : it's advertised as a trade show for the arboricultural and countryside industries - it's free if you can prove you are trade. HCV was given some tickets the first time it ran. <http://www.celebrationoftrees.co.uk/>

**Weird and Wonderful**, Sat 12th & Sun 13th May at Haughley Park, Wetherdon, near Stowmarket, Suffolk - This is a wood craft show with lots of demos, things for sale, and music (Entrance for adults £6). I went a couple of years ago and the atmosphere was very relaxed - I went by train via Cambridge to Elmswell and walked through the countryside to get to it - a great day out. Perhaps we could do this as a group spring day out; it could be combined with a walk round nearby Bradfield Woods (Felshamhall and Monkspark Woods near Felsham), a Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve <http://www.weirdandwonderfulwood.co.uk>. Other ideas welcome, (AT).

**Quotes:** 1. In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught - *Baba Dioum*.

2. I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and have my senses put in order - *John Burroughs*.

3. Happiness flutters in the air whilst we rest among the breaths of nature - *Kelly Scheaffer*.

**Tree fact:** A fully grown Oak in Great Britain produces 50,000 acorns in a good year.

**Insect fact:** For every human alive on our planet, there are 200 million insects.

Joke answers:

Quiz answers:

1. Because they are always spotted 2. Leap year 3. No-eye deer?

1. A Labour 2. Marilyn Hart 3. Starling 4. Garlic Mustard 5. True

Volunteer D.S. →



HCV members are invited to contribute to the next newsletter, so why not a send us an article about a wildlife encounter, an interesting fact, a poem, or a place visited, maybe a photo taken on a task.

New members are always welcome — contact number or email below for details.

Reply to: Marilyn Hart, 70 Rivermill, Harlow, Essex CM20 1NT. Tel: 01279-865239,

email: [hcvadmin@harlowwildlife.org.uk](mailto:hcvadmin@harlowwildlife.org.uk) web: <http://www.harlowwildlife.org.uk/hcv/hcvindex.htm>