

# Newsletter

of Harlow Conservation Volunteers

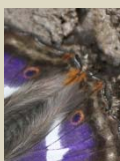


Group visit to Knettishall Heath - Suffolk

Welcome to the Harlow Conservation Volunteers Bi-Annual Newsletter, which now incorporates updates from Harlow Wildlife Projects, summarising the work carried out by both of these volunteer groups over the past six months.

## QUICK QUIZ

1. Which of the world's continents has no active volcanoes?
2. What can this be?
3. What is the only mammal that can fly?



4. How many hearts has an Earthworm got?
5. What do you call a group of Otters?



6. What is this?



# CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

## Marshgate Spring Bridge

Just over a year after it became evident that the old bridge was beyond repair, the replacement footbridge at Marshgate Spring was finally completed on Wednesday, 20th June. The bridge, at 3.6m long, spans one of the main drainage ditches at the western end of Marshgate Spring LNR on the route between the formal part of the Town Park and the river via the zigzag bridge over the railway.

Hopefully the new bridge will last a bit longer than the previous one installed by HCV in 1995 - there is now a damp-proof course between the concrete foundation and the timber superstructure, there is an absolute minimum of holes in the main beams and no hidden dirt trap between the doubled up beams of the old design, and a gap between the parapets and the deck for sweeping, and we painted the whole thing in wood stain.

It took 4 goes to complete the installation: an HCV Sunday task, a GreenTeam Wednesday task, plus two impromptu days. Before that a similar amount of effort, spread over 14 separate days, was devoted to preparing the timber into a kit of parts, making a total of 30 practical volunteer work days overall. Thank you to all volunteers who helped, especially those who contributed on extra days: Colin, Dennis, Lenny, and Dolly.

## Harlow Wildlife Projects

Harlow Wildlife Projects is an independent voluntary group formed to develop conservation projects and projects which improve access to nature and to seek the funds to carry them out. The aim is to carry out larger and more complete projects than can be achieved by volunteers alone, by obtaining primarily grant funding and engaging contractors to carry out much of the work, particularly those tasks beyond the scope of volunteers, while also involving volunteers in some project elements where practical.

## Stort Valley Meadows – Access for All

The group's main project at the moment is on the Town Park Marsh Local Wildlife Site (LoWS) (Town Park, Stage IV), the meadows and ditches by the River Stort. In June 2011, after a year and a half of preparation, a delivery grant of £50,000 was obtained for the first phase of the project, the "Stort Valley Meadows – Access for All" project, from the Community Spaces grants programme, funded by the Big Lottery Fund. This project is to revamp the footpath network in this area, re-routing one section of path which gets waterlogged in winter via a new footbridge, upgrading the paths and existing bridges over ditches for disabled access, and adding a picnic area and some interpretation boards. The main contractor started work in November, but owing to various problems, mostly weather related; only reached practical completion in May.

Meanwhile the volunteer component of the project, that of laying a plastic mesh to reinforce the grass path across the orchid meadow, did not go quite to plan either. This was another way of keeping the project within the £50,000 maximum budget. The original plan had been to have a surfaced path like the rest of the network through this meadow, but with other costs rising this had to be abandoned in favour of just a mown grass path. It was only when Colin came up with the idea of using reinforcing plastic mesh for the grass path across the orchid meadow that we could complete the path network with a surface that would hopefully be satisfactorily take the level of use expected.

**Andrew Tomlins**





Replacement of footbridge designed and constructed by HCV and Greenteam volunteers.



## PHOTO PAGE



New bridge spans a ditch giving access to the river section of Harlow Town Park.



Seen here soil being spread to level ground before laying reinforcement mesh, to stabilize the new footpath route that runs through this orchid meadow, then grass seeded.



HCV and Greenteam volunteers worked together to carry out this part of Harlow Wildlife Projects' 'Access for All' project funded by the Big Lottery Community Spaces programme.



HCV made a visit in May to Knettishall Heath in Suffolk where former Parndon Wood nature reserve warden *Sam* is now working on this Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve.



## Harlow Conservation Volunteers - Working with schools

Over a number of years HCV has been working with junior and secondary schools in Harlow to encourage their students to appreciate the wildlife that can be found in their school grounds. This has been achieved by working alongside the schools staff, parents, and their children to create wildlife gardens and maintain natural areas within the school property to encourage the children's interest in the natural environment that surrounds them.

An example of this is at Stewards Meadow that lies adjacent to Stewards School in Harlow where HCV have been working with the school, the PTA, and its students since 1998 to re-turn this piece of old ancient meadowland back to its former glory. Over time it had become overgrown and a dumping ground for rubbish; a survey carried out in the summer of 1997 recorded 43 different plant species growing there, but the area was being shaded out by the spread of trees and bushes into the meadow.

So on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> March 1998 Harlow Conservation Volunteers and Stewards PTA spent the day clearing the site of invasive bushes such as hawthorn, blackthorn, and dog rose, but leaving some young Oaks to develop on its boundary; all this work was helped by a supply of tea and coffee, and a lunch of hot soup, rolls, and cakes supplied by members of the school's PTA.

Since that time HCV volunteers have been regularly returning with the help of different teachers and young students to carry out the annual cutting and raking of the meadow, and controlling the spread of bushes into the meadow; in the last two years the school students have constructed and installed bird and bat boxes, and with the help of HCV volunteers created a wildlife pond and a living Willow screen.



Students seen here clearing invasive bushes and carrying out plant surveys.



All this work has been rewarded with the school and its students being awarded '*The Blake Shield*' from the British Naturalist Association for their work on this project.



## RESERVE SPOTLIGHT



### Marshgate Spring Nature Reserve

The reserve covers an area of about 4.8 hectares and consists of mixture of woodland, willow car, marsh, ponds, and ditches; the reserve was once part of the grazing marshes linked to Marshgate Farmhouse, a timber framed and weather boarded building that probably dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century but is now dissected from it by Edinburgh Way; the 'Spring' in its name derives from the number of springs that rise in the woodland and flow into the lower marsh. The woodland supports a fine display of Bluebells in early Summer.

The trail running through the site is a combination of firm ground and boardwalks: this is reached via steps at the top of the reserve's woodland, or over a stile off the footpath that connects the Town Park via the underpass to the railway bridge.

In March 2007 work was carried out on the marsh to prevent its reed bed from drying out: channels were cut out from the adjacent spring-fed stream into the old reed beds to rejuvenate them, and water level controls installed to maintain the marsh's water table.

The reserve supports a wide range of wildflower species that includes the second largest colony of Common Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum Flavum*) in Essex; surveys have shown the site holds a rich diversity of rare invertebrate species, and the bird population includes Great Spotted Woodpecker, Sparrowhawk, Water Rail, Reed Warbler, and Reed Bunting.

A gentle stroll or sitting on one of the benches can bring you close to much of the wildlife on this interesting fragment of natural wetland, a habitat that once spread along much of the Stort Valley before drainage took place.

HCV have carried out several improvements to the Reserve over recent years installing boardwalks and seats, and have been carrying out yearly maintenance to the site that has included cutting down annually sections of reed bed, the controlling of Sycamore, and coppicing Willow & Hazel.



Wild Garlic (Ransoms)

coppiced Hazel

Phragmites reed bed

Meadow Rue

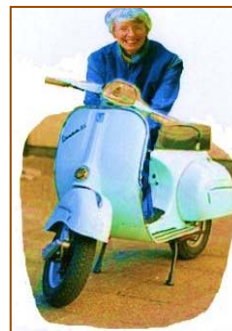




## HARLOW CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

Back page Bits and Pieces – Members comments – Contact Numbers

Meet a volunteer:



60's CHICK - LINDA

**Interesting Fact 1.** A person standing under an Oak tree is 16 times more likely to be hit by lightning than someone under a Beech tree, because an Oak's roots go straight down into the water table.

**Fact 2.** A Bat can eat up to 1,000 insects in one hour.

**Fact 3.** The Swan has 25,000 feathers covering its body.

ECCO have now taken over the running of the main building at Parndon Wood nature reserve—but HCV still have a base there—and the new centre manager, *Tom*, funded by ECCO started working in the reserve from the end of June.

Harlow Conservation Volunteers have full programme of tasks lined up for the coming months which include Willow control and reed cutting on the marshes, cutting wildflower banks and meadows, and installing woodland seats. We are also seeking suggestions from group members for a day trip out somewhere in September.



Harlow Wildlife Projects is staging a wildlife day in the meadows adjacent to the River Stort in Harlow on Fri. 24<sup>th</sup> August, and it is hoped that a broad range of wildlife groups will be able to attend; this is to launch the completion of phase one of their Lottery funded 'Access for All' project.



In June we received the sad news of the death of *Peter Hooper* a long time member of HCV. Peter attended many HCV tasks over the years, although he did not live in Harlow, and had a love of the traditional methods and tools used in the maintenance of our woodlands and hedgerows.

He had amassed a very large collection of old tools, particularly bill-hooks, which he would bring along to craft events and engage with the public in their use for different conservation tasks. Peter will be sadly missed as a person, and for his vast knowledge of countryside skills and the need for all of us to take care of the natural environment that surrounds us.

Quiz answers:

1. AUSTRALIA. 2. PURPLE EMPEROR BUTTERFLY. 3. BATS. 4. FIVE.  
5. ROMP. 6. GREATER REEDMACE SEEDHEAD.

HCV members are invited to contribute to the next newsletter, so why not 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,  
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