

Forest Update



Issue 47

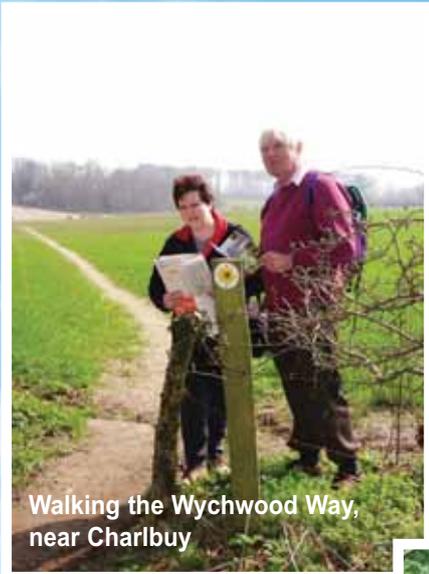
The Wychwood Project Magazine

Summer 2015



Don't forget the Wychwood Forest Fair this September

Enjoying the Wychwood countryside



Walking the Wychwood Way, near Charlbury



Walk at Cornbury



Cycling, North Leigh Common



Flora event, Glyme Farm



Edge of Cogges Wood



Drystone walling at Fawler



Admiring an ancient oak, Cornbury



Footpath sign, Eynsham

Director's Report



We listened . . .

Sometime ago we asked you, our members, for your thoughts on the project. We asked you about the activities we undertake, how we communicate and what was important to you. The feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive, but in those areas where improvements could be made we have endeavoured to do so.

Many of you requested that we have more events and opportunities to get involved. In response to this we have been putting together a calendar of events which has included a gathering at Foxburrow Wood with a tour and refreshments, a 'food for free' foraging morning, a bluebell walk, as well as monitoring of wild flowers with our Flora Group. There will be more events added to the list throughout the year, so keep an eye on our website and in future editions of the Forest Update for more details. We hope you will support these events, which in some cases are free to join, whilst others need to cover their costs by charging for tickets. Coming up soon is a 'Pollinator walk & talk' at Honeydale Farm, Shipton-under-Wychwood, and an Autumn Foraging day, not to mention the 16th Annual Forest Fair.

Another area that members wanted to see improved was our website. This has now been achieved and a new site was launched at the end of April with a brighter look, more project information and easier navigation around the pages that you like to visit. You can now book events on-line, shop for Wychwood Project t-shirts, bags and books,



make one off or regular donations or adopt a Foxburrow Wood tree.

It also offers the opportunity to subscribe to our monthly Forest Flyer – an email newsletter keeping you up to date with not only Wychwood Project news but information about other organisations that are aligned with our cause. Take a look at www.wychwoodproject.org, and let us know what you think.

Sharon Williams

Wychwood Project Director

Champion Trees

by Catherine Hitchens

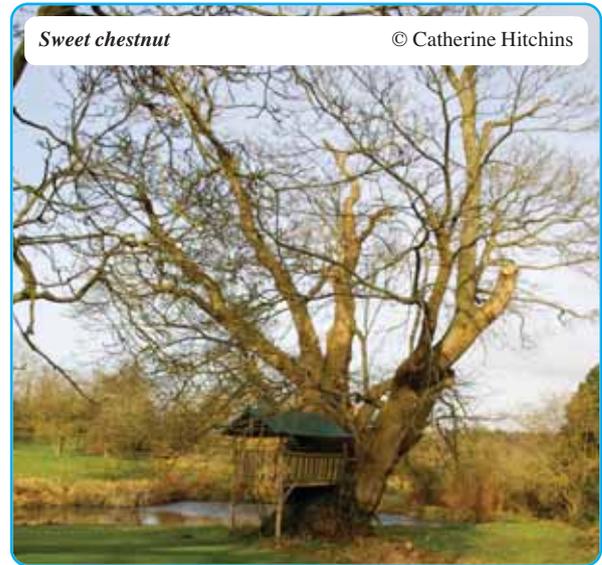
A few years ago I was offered the chance to attend a course on how to age growing, living ancient trees. The idea was that a proper record should be produced of the Ancient Trees in the area of the Old Wychwood Forest. The course itself was fascinating and those taking part were able to visit the royal estate and favoured hunting ground of Henry II, Blenheim Park at Woodstock and nearby Cornbury Park, to look at Ancient and Veteran trees.

Once I had completed the course I was assigned to a specific area to survey, where landowners had given permission.

I knew there were some old trees in our village of Fifield. Some can easily be seen from the lanes and footpaths, but there are many others, less noticeable or on private land. My colleague Gwen and I, having seen the magnificent trees at Blenheim and Cornbury, set out on our survey. We were chatting happily as we rounded the corner of a farm house and buildings, which were our first port of call, when we stopped dead in our tracks. We were looking at the most incredible array of ancient nut trees planted in wide spaced rows. In particular we saw walnuts and Spanish sweet chestnuts - some bowed by the years, one or two propped to prevent them falling over – all were the remains of a nuttery planted some 700 years ago. The owners of the property knew their trees were old, but had assumed that old meant 150 – 250 years. The oldest tree, which we dated by using an accepted method, which includes measuring the circumference (9.53 metres), was calculated to be 700 years old. This tree, which has come into leaf, flower and fruit for all these years, was in very good condition.

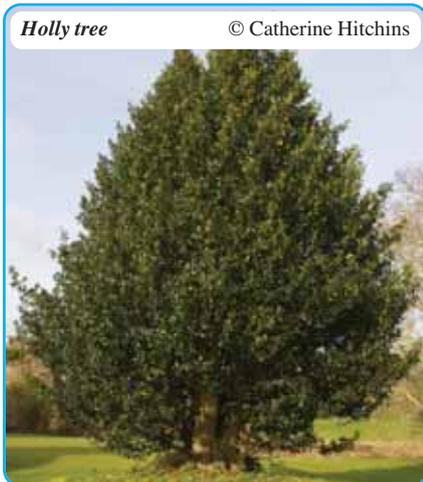
As well as the sweet chestnuts and the walnuts, there was also a magnificent holly tree with a slightly strange history. Some forty or fifty years ago the crown began to die, and the tree was, in effect, pollarded. Luckily it pulled through and is now healthy. Although not tall, it has a wonderful conical shape with the massive give-away trunk often found in holly trees. This specimen was estimated to be about 225 years old.

Both the sweet chestnut tree and the holly have been declared 'Champion Trees' of the Wychwood.



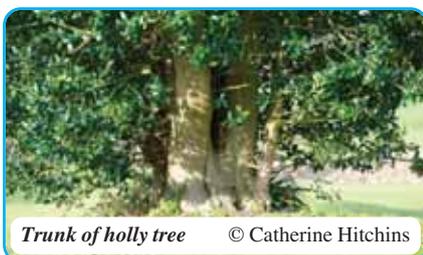
Sweet chestnut

© Catherine Hitchens



Holly tree

© Catherine Hitchens



Trunk of holly tree

© Catherine Hitchens

The sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) is regarded as an 'honorary native'. It was brought to England by the Romans and proved to be an important foodstuff – providing nuts and nut flour. Sweet chestnut wood is more rot resistant in the ground than any other wood except yew. It was used extensively by hop growers, as supports and was also coppiced for fuel, re-growing and producing nuts with exceptional speed. Henry II gave the title of chestnuts in a remote part of the Forest of Dean to the Monks of Flaxley Abbey – over 600 years later those same trees were recorded in a survey of 1769. Some were still there at the start of the 20th century.

A fair for the future

by Michael Drew



When starting to plan the Forest Fair each year, I try and remind myself and members of the organising group, of the footsteps we are following in, and never cease to be amazed at the published figures for the

1850s when it is said!! that some 50,000 people attended Forest Fairs in Newhill Plain in the middle of the Wychwood Forest. Those sorts of numbers are now reserved for music festivals, and just as well, as volunteers we would be somewhat overwhelmed.

It is also worth reminding ourselves that Foxburrow Wood would not exist without the profit from the first 10 years of the current round of Forest Fairs, and the £20,000 which the fair now contributes annually to the Project helps us to carry on its good work.

So we have a lot to live up to, and it is good to report that after the very successful event last year in Little Park, Cornbury, we are all looking forward with some confidence to the 16th fair.

Planning is well under way, this year on a new site within the Wychwood boundaries, namely Ditchley Park Estate, by kind invitation of the Trustees. Regular attendees of the Forest Fair will find nothing new in our peripatetic travels round our Wychwood area, this is our 12th different venue in 16 fairs, all presenting new challenges for the organisers, and new opportunities for us to remind ourselves of the diversity of Wychwood landscapes seen from a different viewpoint, from Combe to Cornbury, from Capps Lodge to Cogges.

Of course every new site presents new practical challenges, and this year is no different!

Effective signing to any new site is always a challenge, particularly so this year; please follow the signs!!

Can we create a pedestrian pay gate or will we have to allow for extra volunteers, to take money from cars??

Have we got enough refreshment providers to feed 2 – 3 thousand people in 2 – 3 hours, whilst ensuring that those who do come and sell food find it financially worthwhile?

There is no mains water to this site so what are we going to do about that?

Of wider interest, how do we increase numbers of visitors to the fair, should we try new formats but without destroying the special atmosphere which we believe currently exists? Of equal importance is how do we ensure the continuing existence of the Fair itself. As volunteer organisers we are all getting older but hopefully wise enough to realise we must ensure our succession if “the show is to go on”.

As you will see the Organising Group is working hard to make this Fair as enjoyable as usual, all we need is your continued support in many ways, from buying the Grand Draw tickets enclosed with this Forest Update, by responding to the request for volunteers, but most importantly by coming to the

Forest Fair on Sunday 6th September at Lodge Farm, Ditchley, on the B4437 between Charlbury and Woodstock.

Keep even more up to date with Wychwood news and events by following us on



www.facebook.com/WychwoodProject

or



www.twitter.com/wychwoodproject



Report on Wigwell

by Louise Spicer

Wigwell Nature Reserve, on the northern edge of Charlbury, is owned by Thames Water and was acquired by them originally to secure a water supply for the town as it is endowed with many springs. Water is no longer removed for public use but the water abstraction rights are a Thames Water asset which can be transferred to other sites. For this reason, it is unlikely that Thames Water will ever part with it.

Interpretation board



Planting meadow clary

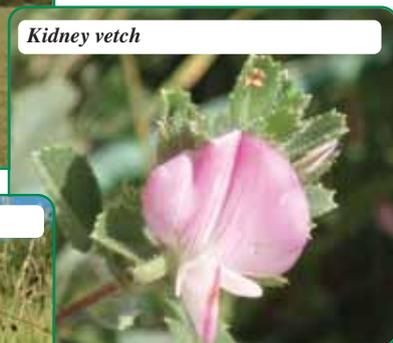


The Nature Reserve consists of 22 acres of unimproved limestone grassland, and is home to Meadow Clary (*salvia pratensis*) a 'near threatened' plant that occurs at only 21 locations in Britain. In 1995 Charlbury Town Council acquired a conservation lease for

Wigwell Nature Reserve



Kidney vetch



Wild flora



Wigwell and during the past 20 years a group of enthusiastic local volunteers (including the Town Council; conservationists, Wychwood Project members, Cotswold

Voluntary Wardens and the local Green Gym) have been looking after the site, working tirelessly to conserve and improve its flora and fauna. This has been done by managing the grazing, protecting the plants, persistent attempts to increase the Meadow Clary plant numbers, managing thistles, brambles, ragwort and blackthorn and repairing stressed fences.

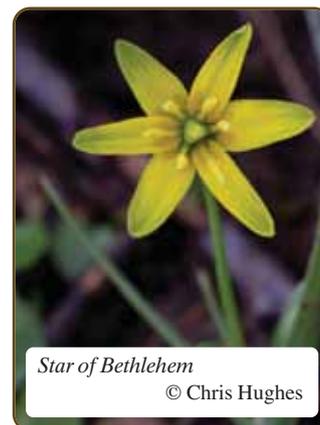
The Wychwood Project is now delighted to announce that, at the time of writing, negotiations are underway to transfer the conservation lease from Charlbury Town Council to the Wychwood Project. In preparation for this a new "Wigwell Friends" group has been set up to provide liaison between the Wychwood Project, the Town Council and local volunteers. We look forward to continuing the enhancement of the site for conservation with the help of the local community.

Thanks go to Louise and Alan Spicer, local residents, long term Wychwood Project supports and leaders of the Wychwood Project Bird Aid Group for their contribution to this article.

Looking for the Yellow Star of Bethlehem

On a cold morning at the beginning of April members of the Wychwood Flora Group made their annual visit to Whitehill Wood to check on the Yellow Star of Bethlehem. This attractive bulbous plant has leaves like bluebells and flowers which appear like celandines. It is described as local in the field guides. In most of the locations where it is known in the Cotswolds it does not flower which makes it hard to spot. In Whitehill Wood it grows on both sides of the path running along the side of the River Evenlode. Our survey started at the Ashford Mill end and plants were noted on the river side of the path on the way out and on the wood side on the way back. Leaves of Yellow Star of Bethlehem were seen along most for the length of the survey and in a few places were abundant, but only 19 flowering plants were spotted. The river bank is badly eroded in places and some of the habitat favoured by the Yellow Star of Bethlehem is gradually being lost. Dogs entering and leaving the river are contributing to this erosion. Another threat to these plants is trampling under foot as walkers try to avoid the muddy sections of the footpath or low branches and fallen trees.

There are two other unusual flowers which we always like to see at the time of our visit to Whitehill Wood. The first is Toothwort which has flowers, described as pallid and ghostly, in a one-sided spike, which pushes up through the soil bent over and then straightens up to expose the flowers. They are the only part of the plant seen above ground as, being a parasite, here on the roots of Hazel, it has no leaves. The second is Town Hall Clock or Moschatel – a diminutive plant which is also easily overlooked. Its dice-shaped clusters of small greenish-yellow flowers are unique. There are five flowers in a cluster with four lateral flowers (one on each side) and a single upwards-facing terminal flower.



Star of Bethlehem
© Chris Hughes

Brenda Betteridge - *Secretary WFG*

Into the Woods!

On Sunday May 17th the Wychwood Project was delighted to join forces with the Rotary Clubs of Witney and Burford & Windrush Valley in a sponsored bluebell walk around Cornbury Park.

Thirty three people turned out to support the Wychwood Project and walk one of the two routes on offer of either 4 miles or 8 miles, both incorporating beautiful woodland carpeted with bluebells.

Our Wychwood walkers raised over £430 of which 75% will support our on-going conservation work, with the remainder being donated to Rotary club supported charities Macmillan Cancer Support, Contented Dementia and SeeSaw.

Huge thanks go out to all who turned out on the day, raised funds and donated.

Andrew Thomson, our prize fundraiser said "I had not heard of the Wychwood Project before, but was invited to join in this walk by Sharon, the Project Director. As a walking group leader, I am outdoors most weekends all around Oxfordshire. The countryside brings me so much enjoyment, so it felt right to fundraise for a local organisation that is striving to protect it."

If you are taking part in any sponsored events or fundraising activities and would like to make the Wychwood Project your chosen charity, log on to [Just Giving/Wychwood](#) to set up your own fundraising page.



Lower Windrush Valley Project

Spring 2015

At Easter four ring necked ducks, verified as wild birds and not escapees from a collection, found their way from the USA and seem to like it here. Lots of birders have also visited the valley to see them. It is rare to find one of these birds in the UK but to find four was unprecedented and resulted in a visit from BBC Radio Oxford to talk to Ian Lewington, the County Recorder for birds. I keep expecting them to move north as they would in their natural migration pattern but they haven't gone yet (end of April). More familiar birds are returning for the summer with little ringed plovers and common tern at both Standlake and Rushy Common as well as sand martins, swallows and swifts passing through.



Orange tipped butterfly

© Chris Hughes

The five year aftercare period has finished at Rushy Common Nature Reserve and the day to day management now becomes the responsibility of the project in negotiation with Smiths and Harcourt Estate (the landowners). We ran some very enjoyable pond dipping sessions at Tar Lakes last year and plan to do some more this year, so keep an eye out for news of these and come along and rediscover the child in you. It will be good, but is not essential, to bring a child or two along with you.

The SSSI meadows at Ducklington Mead put on a great display of snake's head fritillaries this year and attracted over 1000 visitors on Fritillary Sunday on the 19th April. The Langley's Lane SSSI is also starting to look as if there will be good numbers of cowslips with the green winged orchids just starting to show through.

Follow us on  



The Wychwood Project works within the area that was once the Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood.

Our Goals:

The Wychwood Project aims to raise awareness of the history and heritage of the Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood, and to encourage local people to take part in and benefit from restoration, conservation and enhancement of the rich mosaic of landscapes and habitats within the Forest boundaries.

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The Wychwood Project is grateful for the continued financial support of Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and a range of other community and private donors

