

Forest Update



Issue 57

The Wychwood Project Magazine

Winter 2018



Forest Fair 2018 © Cereta Drewett

Forest Fair 2018



All images ©Cereta Drewett. www.ceretadrewettphotography.co.uk

A wonderful day at the Forest Fair

After last year's dampness it was a huge relief to see the sun on Sunday 2 September for the annual Forest Fair which returned to one of our favourite sites at Lodge Farm, Ditchley. Over 3,000 visitors came through the gate, as well as the many volunteers and helpers who make the day possible. New for this year was a 'soft' arena, bounded by a few hay bales (kindly borrowed from Nigel Adams) where Kate from Rowan Working Horses demonstrated forestry techniques with her horse Kit. We also had a quite tent where poetry and storytelling took place.

Many thanks to everyone who supported the Wychwood bar, tea tent and bookstall and those who brought tickets for the Grand Draw which raised over £2,000 to support the work of the Wychwood Project.

Wychwood Flora Group

The Wychwood Flora Group are an active group of people with a passion for plants, and our objective is to look after the wild flowers that are found in the Wychwood Project area. We have had a busy and enjoyable summer, with many outings to beautiful locations, to monitor rare plants, conduct surveys for the BSBI 2020 Atlas and the Evenlode Catchment Partnership, and to undertake habitat management activities. Flora guardians for each site are nominated, and they liaise with landowners with regard to survey dates and access; conduct the survey; record plant numbers; and note any land management requirements.



Management activity on the Saltway for Downy woundwort

Some of the rare plants and sites monitored include:

- Yellow star of Bethlehem at Whitehill Wood
- Grape hyacinth at Chadlington
- Meadow clary at Finstock, Grintley Hill Bridge, Abel Wood and Crawley
- Purple milk-vetch and Downy-fruited sedge at Westwell Gorse
- Red hemp-nettle, one site
- Downy woundwort, various sites
- Cotswold pennycress, various sites



Red hemp-nettle

Management requirements are noted at the time of surveying, and the landowners are informed by receiving copies of the survey reports. The Wychwood Flora Group are also directly involved in habitat management on some sites, turning over soil, cutting back vegetation, and coordinating with other volunteers and Oxfordshire County Council staff.

As well as plant surveys and management, the Wychwood Flora Group are keen to build awareness and knowledge in the community about local plants. At the Wychwood Forest Fair we had displays and quizzes for children and adults, and would like to further increase engagement with young and old in the local communities.

If you are interested in joining the Wychwood Flora Group or finding out more about our activities, please email us at info@wychwoodproject.org.uk. New members are always welcome!

In a Nutshell



John Tyler

On Thursday 29 November, 7.30 - 9pm at New Beaconsfield Hall, Shipton-u-Wychwood we will be holding the Wychwood Project AGM. There will be a short business section, then an update on all the activities we have been up to this year, followed by our guest speaker John Tyler presenting 'Life in a Nutshell'.

After studying zoology and conservation at university John worked with the Ecological Parks Trust creating and managing urban nature reserves so that children could learn about nature at first hand, before spending 22 years as the Warden of the Sevenoaks Reserve in Kent, a string of flooded gravel pit lakes fringed by woodland. Since then John has been based in Buckinghamshire giving talks on a range of natural history topics and leading guided walks.

His talk 'Life in a Nutshell' looks at how nature is full of countless small and infinitely detailed things, most of which go completely unnoticed by busy humans. Everything illustrated in this talk, whether a flower, a fungus, a caterpillar or even a slime mould, would fit comfortably inside a nutshell and most live within a mile or two of your front door, just waiting to be discovered.

Everyone is welcome, members and non-members, so we do hope you will join us. There is plenty of parking at the hall, and refreshments will be provided.

Wychwood Bird Aid Group

The Wychwood Project Bird Aid Group are passionate about feeding farmland birds that overwinter in this area. We caught up with Louise Spicer, a key volunteer with the group.

"One advantage of the dry summer we have had is the increased density of insects and seeds, hopefully this extra food source will have improved the chances of farmland bird breeding being successful. Some species such as Yellowhammers and Tree sparrows will have three broods, producing up to 20 chicks, so may still be actively breeding as late as August or even into September. For this reason we are keen to encourage landowners to leave any hedge cutting, where the birds are nesting, to as late as possible.

With high numbers of offspring we would hope to see an increase in bird numbers generally, but sadly this is not the case. Many do not make it to adulthood due to predation and lack of food. Our surveys have shown that Tree sparrows have disappeared from Over Norton, one of our key sites, for reasons that are not clearly understood. We are trying to encourage them back by selecting specific feeding sites that they may like and providing nesting boxes away from competition. Only time will tell if these are successful interventions.

Right now we are getting prepared for the winter bird feeding season across our 12 sites. We put out food two or three times each week initially, but by late January this becomes a daily activity. We feed right through until the middle of May, so we cover the 'hungry gap' when all natural and sown bird seed plots are exhausted. The cost of this food is covered by generous donations for which we are very grateful.

An emerging problem for feeding stations is the proliferation of pheasants and wood pigeons who compete for the food. To try and overcome this we hope to provide each feeding station with more small seeds such as millet and rape which are of less interest to the larger birds as they have to work hard to get the amount of food they need. We are constantly having to rethink our feeding strategy to overcome problems and rise to fresh challenges."

If you are a landowner/farmer who would like to join the Wychwood Project's Bird Aid Group, or would like to volunteer for surveying or feeding activities, please get in touch – our contact details are on the back cover.



A margin of arable flowers to provide seed for farmland birds

Learning with the Wychwood Project

by Toby Swift, Learning Officer



Summer school in action



Our first every summer school, held during the holidays turned out to be a resounding success! With glorious weather – the hottest and driest year since 1976 – the children had a packed week taking part in all manner of activities including otter holt building, jam making and water testing. Everyone was very complimentary with comments such as: “fun, educational, idyllic location, she loved it!” and “Amazing in every way, please repeat!” Thanks to our funders, we will be able to put on another summer school in 2019.

Craig Blackwell once again gave us his valuable time and knowledge to lead a well attended bee walk. We visited Applegarth Nurseries in Chipping Norton to hear about their pollinator meadow and learn about the many plants we can use to attract bumblebees into our gardens.

Throughout the summer Combe Mill provided the setting for a series of learning walks across the flood meadow and through the wood above the Evenlode river. Visitors to the mill enjoyed a break from the industrial into the natural, learning about the plants, insects and animals of the area and their relationship with the mill. A particular favourite was the Leopard slugs!

Witney Brownies joined in with a series of Wychwood Project learning activities based around the importance of the Wychwood Forest including games, a talk and a visit to Foxburrow Wood. Over 80 Brownies took part, finishing off with a bat hunt and star gazing. None of them believed in my stories of Wychwood Hobgoblins despite my best efforts! Ruyard Cubs pack from Witney are following the same programme, as well as carrying out some practical conservation work at Woodstock Water Meadows. Everyone who took part in both sessions received the new Wychwood Project badge. An acorn for the Beavers and Rainbows, a sapling for the Brownies and Cubs and an Oak for Guides and Scouts!

The walling course in October was well attended and carried out in beautiful weather. We have begun a feature wall in Foxburrow next to the bridge and pond which will be the site of many more courses (see page 7).

A new parent and toddlers group has been formed. Parents with children under five come to Foxburrow Wood to take part in practical conservation tasks and learn practical rural skills. So far they have coppiced, scythed and dry stone walled. Great times are had by all as the children are occupied by a learning volunteer who engages them in suitable activities whilst the parents are busy.

Stuck for a Christmas Gift?

Why not buy the person who has everything a Wychwood Project Gift card to a value of your choice? Gift cards can be redeemed at our on-line shop (t-shirts, bags, books); for Wychwood Project membership; adopting a tree; entrance to the Forest Fair; a place on a rural skills course such as dry stone walling, or any of our other fee paying events.



Celebrate Volunteering

Volunteers get involved in everything from owl conservation to dry stone wall building, wild flower meadow or tree planting, hedgelaying and field bird feeding for the Wychwood Project. Each summer a host of volunteers ensure the smooth running of the charity's annual Wychwood Forest Fair. Every aspect of the charity's work to conserve wildlife, improve landscapes and inspire people to greater enjoyment of the natural environment is made possible by the effort of volunteers from across West Oxfordshire.

On Tuesday 30 October over fifty of the Wychwood Project's regular volunteers got together, filling Ramsden Village Hall. The lunch, which was made possible by the generous support of the People's Postcode Lottery, allowed the Wychwood Project to say "Thank you" to volunteers' for their varied and extensive support of its work. Three long-standing volunteers Ken Betteridge, Trevor Townsend and Michael Drew, nominated by their peers, had their efforts recognised by receiving commemorative plates. The fun event was a great success, allowing volunteers to meet socially, share experiences, and compete as teams in a nature themed quiz competition. (Do you know how many miles of dry stone wall there are in the Cotswolds?) The event also brought to the fore volunteering opportunities: The Wychwood Project's Hedgelaying Group, its new Swift Group, and a dry stone walling class, are all looking for more participants from the start of December. If you would like to find out more about volunteering with the Wychwood Project, please contact the office.



Corporate Volunteering



Wetland planting at Bruern

Corporate volunteers from Audley Travel and Lex Autolease helped out with some planting on the Bruern Estate. Along the river they put in a mix of bankside plants. These will help stabilise the bank and provide habitat for numerous insects, birds and other wildlife. The groups had a rewarding time with Richard Bennett from Wild Oxfordshire giving a guided tour and explaining the importance of the work.

Many thanks to the Big Lottery Fund for providing £10,000 of funding which will enable the Wychwood Project Volunteer Officer (Toby Swift) to continue in post into 2019. Toby is on hand to offer support to all the Wychwood Project volunteer groups and recruit new volunteers.



Building Experience



Before



After

The Wychwood Project Dry Stone Walling Group continues to “build up” their experience. Following on from successful restorations at Southill Community Solar Farm and St Mary’s Church in Charlbury, the latest project at Holy Trinity in Ascott-u-Wychwood was the biggest yet. The team faced a bulging wall on the verge of collapse. The first task, dismantling the damaged wall, revealed much of the existing stone had weathered and cracked so that it couldn’t be used again. Ultimately an eight tonne skip full of damaged stone would leave the site, and eight tonnes of new Cotswold stone would come in. The core volunteer team of five, Roger, Trevor, Pete, Robin and Sam worked for two days a week and completed the job in about four months. The team are highly satisfied with the result and the experience. In their own words: “it’s nice to be outside, the team work is enjoyable, the permanence of the new wall is satisfying, building the wall is like doing a 3D jigsaw, it’s great exercise – no gym fees, and it’s good to make a contribution to the local environment and learn new skills”. If any of this appeals to you, please think about joining the group. More information can be obtained by contacting the Wychwood Project office. Likewise, we are always on the lookout for new walling opportunities in the Wychwood area. We carry out projects in public spaces, churchyards, parks, and community facilities where all we ask is that any new stone needed is provided.

Dry stone walling course, Saturday 8 December, 10am - 3pm, Foxburrow Wood, Witney

Learn to build a dry stone wall

Work with experienced local wallers to begin the construction of a feature wall. No experience necessary. Tuition will cover: batten frames, foundations, building and cheek ends. All tools and equipment provided. Bring stout boots, gloves if you have them and suitable clothing for the weather. Drinks will be on offer in the Wychwood gazebo but you will need to bring lunch. Portable loo will be on site. Booking essential at www.wychwoodproject.org under the Learning/Events tab. £35 per person. Maximum 8 places.

Wychwood Hedgelaying begins in December

Join us on Saturday 1 December, 9.30am - 3pm, for the first of the season’s hedgelaying days on the Saltway. No experience necessary, as others will be on hand to help you learn this traditional hedgerow management technique. All tools and equipment provided. Call the office for location details.

If you are not already a member why not join the Wychwood Project today; for just £3 per month (individual membership) you will be contributing to conservation on your doorstep.

As a new member you will receive a native sapling tree, either planted on your behalf – or posted for you to plant yourself, with a planting and care booklet.

Two easy ways to join:

- Join online at www.wychwoodproject.org/membership
- Complete and return the short contact form below

Your details:

Title: Name:

Telephone:

Email:

Address:

..... Postcode:

We will contact you with further information on membership rates and payment options.

Choose your tree . . .

As a thank you for joining the Wychwood Project we will plant a tree on your behalf within the Wychwood area. You can choose which tree we plant for you from the list below.



Crab apple

Whitebeam

Field maple

Crab apple (9m)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Whitebeam (15m)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Field maple (26m)	<input type="checkbox"/>

full grown
heights in
brackets

If you would prefer to plant your tree yourself please tick here ☐ and your tree will be delivered to you, along with planting and care instructions, during the tree planting season of mid November to March.

To those of our readers who are already members – thank you!
Your support is vitally important to the work of the Wychwood Project.
Please consider passing this newsletter to a friend once you have read it.



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.

Contact us:

Wychwood Project
c/o WODC Offices
Woodgreen, New Yatt Road
Witney, Oxon, OX28 1NB
Tel: 07584 262437

E-mail: info@wychwoodproject.org.uk
www.wychwoodproject.org

 [www.twitter.com/wychwoodproject](https://twitter.com/wychwoodproject)

 www.facebook.com/WychwoodProject

Registered Charity 1084259



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

