



## FRIENDS OF ASHENGROUND AND BOLNORE WOODS

CONSERVATION : PROTECTION : ENHANCEMENT : ENJOYMENT

### Newsletter – Spring 2011



#### **A profusion of wild daffodils in Ashenground Wood announcing the arrival of Spring**

One of the joys of living in England is the way the natural world responds so dramatically to the four seasons, with the daffodils almost guaranteed to put on a short but beautiful show in our ancient woodland as Spring begins to make an appearance. This year's extra special daffodil display makes us realise how precious our nature reserve is and underlines why there was such a huge response to the ill thought out plans revealed by our Government to sell off the country's forests and woodlands. The role of the Forestry Commission is the 'protection and expansion of Britain's forests and woodlands' and this responsibility should not be diluted. 2011 is the **International Year of Forests** and the aim is to celebrate people's action to sustainably manage the world's forests. It is not just the huge forests like the Amazon that are important – all woodland plays a part however small in adding to the whole. 31% of the total land area of the world is covered in forests, but in England only 12% of the land is wooded, underlying how important it is to reverse this decline. FoABW is, we hope, playing its part in managing our relatively tiny local woodland in a way that encourages biodiversity. Let's celebrate and enjoy our special woods.

An **archaeology dig** in the big field suggests that this part of Haywards Heath was occupied in the twelfth/early thirteenth centuries. Gill Rogers writes about this important dig on p.2. The **bridleway upgrade** is now nearly complete – Stuart Meier updates us on progress and problems on p.3. Lorraine Maynard has been studiously recording sightings of **birds in our woods** – information about some of the many birds that have been seen or heard in the past quarter can be found on p.2.

**Janice Tipping**

### **Early Morning Bird Walk, Spring Walk and Bug Hunt**

Three very different events have been arranged for the warmer season. On **Easter Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April** we have an **Early Morning Bird Walk** – meet at 6.00 a.m. on Ashenground Bridge. Later that day we have a **Spring Walk** – meet on the bridge at 2.00 p.m. Our popular annual **Bug Hunt** led by Martin Hall of the Natural History Museum will be held on **Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July** - meet on the bridge at 2.00 p.m.

## Archaeology

Many of you will have noticed the dig going on in the big field to the north of the Bridleway. The field is part of the next phase of development of Bolnore Village, and the dig is happening because planning law requires an investigation of what lies underground before it becomes lost under houses.



We are grateful to Archaeology South East and WSCC for giving a small group of us a sight of some of their finds, and an explanation of what they have so far found on the site.

Post holes and beam slots were evidence of several timber framed buildings, one of considerable size, on the south-facing slope. There are some massive post holes associated with it which suggest a building requiring strong support, perhaps of a huge roof.

There is evidence that a droveway connected the farm to the bridleway, along which cattle may have been driven to market. They have also found pottery which enables them to date the occupation of the site to the late twelfth/early thirteenth centuries.

It is likely that at this time there was a stream flowing down the middle of the field. It was probably not a pioneer settlement, but developed under the auspices of the Lord of the Manor – perhaps of Hayward, or Trubwyk. Other evidence in this area dates from much later: Great Haywards farmhouse probably from the fourteenth century, and the beautiful map of the estate was made in 1638.

This is then the earliest evidence we have of a settlement in the Haywards Heath area.

The report on the site, and the findings, will eventually be housed in Cuckfield Museum.

**Gill Rogers**

## Birds in our Woods

Our bird recording project is revealing just how much bird life there is in our woods. We have received reports of sightings in Ashenground Wood and Pierces Wood, by the ponds, and along the Bridleway, School Path and Railway Path. So what species made the list for the last quarter? It is amazingly long!

Blackbird, Blue Tit, Bullfinch, Crow, Chaffinch, Collared Dove, Dunnock, Feral Pigeon, Green Woodpecker, Great Tit, Grey Wagtail, Jackdaw, Jay, Long Tailed tit, Magpie, Mallard, Moorhen, Robin, Rook, Song Thrush, Siskin, Sparrowhawk, Tree Creeper, Woodcock, Woodpigeon and Wren are all on there. As well as the Sparrowhawk, the rarely sighted Woodcock (seen in the snow) is particularly pleasing.



**Sparrowhawk (seen flying from Ashenground Wood into gardens in Bolnore Village – reports from three people - photo by Andrew Croft)**

As well as birds, many rabbits have been seen. Deer tracks and badger prints have also been identified. Thanks to all our reporters for their contributions.

Do let our Bird Recorder, Lorraine Maynard, know what you see, when and where. We want to know the common and the unusual – all are of equal importance in helping us monitor which birds and wildlife are sustained by our ancient woodland. Lorraine also welcomes photographs of your sightings. You can contact Lorraine on 01444 450997 or by e-mail on [petal1948@aol.com](mailto:petal1948@aol.com)

**Janice Tipping**

## Bridleway upgrade



### Ashenground Bridge – now resurfaced - gates will soon be in place to prevent unauthorised vehicles parking there

Works to upgrade the bridleway are almost complete, with the railway bridge resurfaced, gate replacement underway, and the new wide 'east' gate ordered, we hear.

Outstanding works include a short section by the Thatched Cottage, delayed by the new licensing, and installation of bollard lighting.

The bridleway is now heavily used, by schoolchildren, their parents and buggies, as well as recreational walkers, bikers and horse riders.

Some would prefer horse riders not to have the use of it (although the ones I have met have been rather more accommodating than the troop of joggers I had to step aside for). Horse riders do have a legal right to use the bridleway. Recent archaeological work suggests horses could have been using it for a thousand years or more!

In the past Crest argued the bridleway upgrade should follow after ALL the houses were built. We objected strenuously, and are grateful Crest changed their tune, and have completed the work before ANY further houses are started.

**Stuart Meier**

## Phases 4 moves ahead

Crest are pressing ahead with phases 4 & 5 of Bolnore Village and own all that land now.

They hope to start house construction soon, but first must comply with conditions laid down at the Inquiry. Importantly, after numerous objections, they have provided the correct 15 metre buffer to King Street Copse to comply with the Ancient Woodland rule. Further very detailed aspects of drainage,

fencing and paths, and protection of buffer zones are outstanding but we hope these can soon be agreed.

The first works will be to build the 'Spine Road' from Bolnore Road to Parkfield Way. This will be for construction traffic only. It will be built working from both ends, but thereafter a 'one way system' will apply. A bollarded 'bus gate' will stop it being used as a rat-run by cars.

Sadly, large parts of Great Poplar Field and Convent Field will be fenced off for safety reasons. We expect that the Great Poplar itself (which is very close to the end of its life, well into the limb shedding phase) will soon be felled – probably when the first houses close to the Thatched Cottage are built. Perhaps we should hold a wake!

**Stuart Meier**

## Anti Trampling Fences



We have been here before, and I'm sorry to be preaching to the converted.

You will have noticed short lengths of new fencing in Ashenground Wood. We are trying to block the entrances to new paths beginning to form, as well as giving some protection to the daffodils growing close to the path. These ad hoc paths have no stone on them, and rapidly widen, especially in winter when they become muddy. Nothing will grow in these hard-packed areas, and they are too hard to be any use to creatures that need bare ground.

These new bits of fencing do look rather massive but we hope they are vandal-proof, and at least they have been made from our own chestnut, using our own tools and labour! We are also hoping those who are walking quickly through the woods on the way to town will be tempted to use the bridleway now that the surface is so good!

**Gill Rogers**

## Steering Committee Meeting

The Steering Committee for Ashenground and Bolnore Woods met on the 17<sup>th</sup> March at MSDC Offices in Oaklands. The meeting was attended by people representing various organisations including FoABW, TARA, BVRA, Crest, Jacquelin Fisher Associates, our local Council and our local Rangers. **FoABW** provided the Committee with information about the AGM we held earlier this year where some of you will have heard the talk by our guest speaker Heather McNiven of the Sussex Bee Keepers Association. We also heard about FoABW's two new Committee Members – Richard Berry and David Waite. Our membership is now 170 – with about 30 being described as 'active'. On the conservation front, we were pleased to be able to report that some of the hazel coppice has now grown out of the reach of deer and that catkins are currently on show. Our new bird recording project was explained (see p.2). **Crest** reported on Phase 4 (see p. 3). FoABW urged Crest to ensure that information about the nature reserve is included in welcome packs – and Crest confirmed that they are keen for this to happen. **BVRA** explained that the school (sited on the Western edge of Ashenground Wood) will eventually be a 420 pupil school. The Forest School project is going from strength to strength. Sussex Wildlife Trust lead some of the sessions for the children with Sarah Witts leading others. The children are learning more and more about the woods and are developing an appreciation and respect for the natural world.

A concern was raised about **out of control dogs** that rush around – there is a fear that an accident could result with a child or frail older person getting hurt. It was recognised that most dog owners are responsible and keep their dogs under control. The rangers will consider how to ensure that out of control dogs are managed, particularly when the Forest School is running.

**Janice Tipping**



**Grey Squirrel in Ashenground Wood – friend or foe?**

## Conservation Work and Special Events

See our **Programmes** on the **notice boards** on the Bridge at the Ashenground Road entrance to the woods, and at the entrances to Pierce's, Catts and Bolnore Woods. Don't forget to check out our **website** for our Newsletters and Programmes plus photographs and details of special events.

[www.foabw.com](http://www.foabw.com)

Join us to help with **Conservation Work**. We meet each month on the **1st Sunday** (meeting place Ashenground Bridge) and **3rd Saturday** (meeting place the Thatched Cottage in Bolnore Village). Meeting time is always 10.00 a.m. The work we do is very varied and you do not need to have any expertise or bring any tools. We have a refreshment break. Give it a go!

As explained on the front page, on **Easter Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April** we have two events. To join the **Bird Walk**, meet us at 6.00 a.m. on Ashenground Bridge, and to take part in the **Spring Flower Walk** meet us at the same place at 2.00 p.m. Our **Bug Hunt** is being held on **Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> July** - meet on the bridge at 2.00 p.m. For all our events, children must be accompanied by an adult who must take responsibility for their welfare and behaviour.

General Information – Contact Janice on 01444 414053 or 07752 003529  
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