



FRIENDS OF ASHENGROUND AND BOLNORE WOODS

CONSERVATION : PROTECTION : ENHANCEMENT : ENJOYMENT

Newsletter – Summer 08



Great Poplar Field (where Phase 4A will be built)

Things are on the move again, with the bridleway upgrade work due to start this Summer. This upgrade, the new school at the woodland edge, and the submission of plans by Crest for Phase 4A (currently known as Great Poplar Field), will all impact on Ashenground Wood in particular. **Stuart Meier** explains more about **Crest's plans** for Great Poplar Field. On p.2 you will find information about the **bridleway upgrade**, the **school** and the **photographic survey**. And on p.3, **Sarah Witts** writes about the ongoing **flower survey** and **Gill Rogers** tells us more about the positive side of **stinging nettles**. Finally, turn to the back page for information about our conservation work and some special events to note in your diaries.

Janice Tipping

Crest's Phase 4A Plans Shock

Crest's proposals for the details of Phase 4A – Great Poplar Field – just north of the bridleway – triggered new concerns as this Newsletter went to press

Members will know that FoABW, working with local Residents Associations as the LCOs (local community organisations), fought and won proper protection for ancient woodland at the recent Planning Inquiry, thanks to the powerful support of experts like Dr. Tony Whitbread of the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

Now, **Crest are trying to exploit a loophole which could leave the Bridleway Woodland at risk.**

The Inquiry fixed the separation between houses and ancient woodland at 15 metres – but new plans from Crest are suggesting a buffer of only 5 meters between houses and the critical bridleway woodland west of Quarry Hollow. MSDC's Ancient Woodland Inventory surveys in 2006 decided that this was Ancient Woodland, but because it was not specifically listed in the Inquiry report, Crest are trying to cheese-pare it from 15 down to 5 metres. Dr. Tony Whitbread says this short length of woodland is the most important wildlife corridor in the whole area, and that it is critically important that it should be fully buffered with the 15 metres separation between the woods and houses.

This key issue could lead to a renewed planning battle unless Crest see sense.

Stuart Meier (coordinator of the LCOs at the Inquiry)

Bridleway Upgrade



The Bridleway in June 08



Many of you will know about the Public Notice issued by West Sussex County Council that stated that the bridleway would be closed for six months – giving grid references that included Ashenground Bridge and the very top end of the bridleway at its junction with Bolnore Road. The notice gave cause for great concern, as if it meant what it said then we would not have been able to enter the woods from Ashenground, and the link between the communities of Bolnore and Ashenground would have been cut for the six months.

However, at a meeting between representatives of the Local Community Groups (including FoABW) and Crest's managing director, it became clear that Ashenground bridge will remain open (except for the short time that the bridge itself is resurfaced). The bridleway will need to be closed during the upgrade, but the woods **will** remain accessible from the bridge - and the top end of the bridleway (from its link from Bolnore Village) **will** also remain open. At the end of July the work on the two road crossing points from Bolnore Village into Phases 4 and 5 will start (the Thatched Cottage route and the extension of Parkfield Way). Work on the bridleway itself is unlikely to start before the end of August. Crest have promised to keep us informed as the construction programme is developed. FoABW will be monitoring the work closely to ensure that it meets the required environmental standards and we will keep you informed as things progress over time.

Janice Tipping

School Update

At the beginning of June 2008 the announcement that we had been awaiting hit the headlines: Bolnore School Group had won the bid to provide the first parent run primary school in the UK! The Temporary Governing Body is now being set up and the process of working alongside West Sussex County Council has started. We've also set up a website (www.bolnoreschoolgroup.org) to communicate to the wider community. We hope to get involved in the initial design stages of the school over the next few weeks.

Alastair McPherson (Bolnore Schools Group and FoABW)

Photographic Survey



Bolnore Wood



The photo on the left was taken in January 08 and the one on the right in May 08 – both from the same fixed point. More photos will be taken in the summer and in the autumn.

Four times each year, a total of 60 photos will be taken from the same fixed points across the woods. This will enable comparisons to be made across the seasons and over the years. See all the photos from the January and May 08 surveys on the following picasa web albums page: <http://picasaweb.google.com/FoABWphotos>

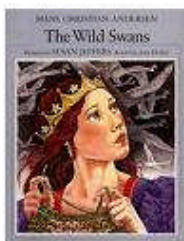
Stinging Nettles

Nettles have a really bad press. Every child quickly learns to beware, and to find the magic dock leaf. We have forgotten the flip side.



They are among the most useful of plants known to man, and have lived alongside us throughout our history. They grow where there are good sources of phosphorus and nitrogen, in ground manured by animals, on the rubbish we throw out, in cemeteries where they recycle our bones! Nettles are heavy users of phosphates. That is what they get from us.

Our benefits have in the past been substantial. The list of medicinal uses for nettles covers almost every ailment; they can also be a food plant with an array of vitamins and minerals, a hair wash, a dye, a fertiliser, and a source of fibre for cloth and rope. The word 'nettle' has to do with cloth, or perhaps needle. In Hans Anderson's story of 'The Wild Swans' the princess has to weave a nettle shirt with her bare hands for each of her seven brothers to release them from a spell which had turned them into swans!



Superstitions include protection against lightning and witchcraft, and many place names include a 'nettle' element.

Botanically they are fascinating. Each nettle clump is a clone, either male or female, spreading by underground stems; the stinging hairs are minute hypodermic syringes, whose tips break off on contact, and often remain in the skin causing further irritation. In fields browsed by animals (nettles are grazed if other food sources are low)

plants on the outside edges of the clump develop extra stinging hairs, for greater protection.

All this won't stop most of us from avoiding nettles!

Gill Rogers

Flower Survey

Change is all about us! Most obvious are changes to the paths and trees. The walk from Bolnore to Town no longer means muddy shoes and FoABW conservation work means formerly dark areas are now light.

Plant changes in the Woods are less obvious but can give us a lot of information. Plants need food, light and heat to survive. Like people, different plants require different things. Some plants can live happily in damp, dimly lit places but others only thrive in areas with plenty of sun and little water. Changing the amount of light and heat in an area can change the types of plant able to grow there. A plant survey can track these changes. Surveys are necessary to good conservation work. We know what should result from our conservation work but this doesn't always mean that it happens! One way to find out if conservation methods work or if they need a rethink is to survey plants in the area.

FoABW surveys in Ashenground Wood always take place in **exactly** the same place, at the same time of year. This means we can compare the results and spot any changes. During our first survey last year, Gill Rogers and I selected and marked survey spots. Each year at survey time we scabble amongst the undergrowth to find them and then mark out a large square, identical in size and position every year. Next we count and record every plant species inside the square.

This is only the second year of surveying, but we can already see changes in the flora. Now the Glade is more open, more light reaches the ground, which explains why more bluebells were recorded this year. I was surprised there were no foxgloves. Perhaps next year.

I will send the survey results to the Sussex Biodiversity Record Office. These will then contribute to the picture of change throughout Sussex.

Sarah Witts

Special Events and Conservation Projects

On Sunday 25th May we were pleased to welcome Brian Pennock from Lindfield to lead our **Early Morning Bird Watch** and a group of a dozen people, including one very young twitcher, assembled at Ashenground Bridge. Those of us who were newcomers to birdwatching sometimes saw only black specks against a grey sky but the more experienced members of the group were quick to identify these. A total of twenty species were seen or heard around Ashenground Wood and Four Acre Meadow, including dunnock, chiffchaffs and a great spotted woodpecker. Everyone enjoyed the walk and we are grateful to Brian for his informative leadership.

Ros Wyncoll



Bird spotting along railway path



Summer Picnic

On Sunday 29th June we held a **Summer Picnic** in the New Glade in Ashenground Wood. This was held on a 'bring and share' basis – and the 'shares' included some wonderful home made lemon drizzle cakes and very fresh scones. The weather was kind to us and as you can see from the picture above it was a lovely, lazy relaxed event enjoyed by all ages. Our youngest visitor was particularly keen on the green olives!

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. Our Newsletters and Programmes are also put on the **MSDC Website** under **Environment and Planning - Nature Conservation – Ashenground and Bolnore Woods**. www.midsussex.gov.uk

Join us to help with **Conservation Projects**. We usually meet on the 1st Sunday (meeting place Ashenground Bridge) and 3rd Saturday each month (meeting place the Thatched Cottage in Bolnore Village) at 10.00 a.m. However in July we are not meeting on the 3rd Saturday and in August we are not meeting on the 1st Sunday. You are also welcome to join us on our monthly review walks, which take place on the 2nd Sunday of every month.

We arrange **Special Events** throughout the year. We have a **new date** for our **Bug Hunt** with Dr. Martin Hall of the Natural History Museum. This will now be on **Sunday 3rd August**. Meet at 10.00 a.m. on Ashenground bridge. On **Sunday 17th August** at 2.30 p.m. we have an **indoor event** in Ashenground Community Centre, Southdown Close – Jenny Clarke from the **Sussex Bat Hospital** will do a presentation about these amazing creatures. On **Sunday 31st August** there will be a ranger led **walk** explaining how the woods are linked to global environmental issues – meet at 2.00 p.m. on the bridge. Contact Janice on 01444 414053 or 07752 003529.

Photographs taken in our woods over the years can be seen on the following web link. The album has new photos added to it at regular intervals.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/janicetipping/ashengroundandbolnorewoods>

Our **Membership Secretary**, Fleur Carey, can be contacted on **01444 473179**.

Don't forget **Jane Good's** book **Ashenground Archive**, which contains many beautiful pictures taken in the woods and meadows, plus paintings, memories and poems. A journey through the history and nature of Ashenground and Bolnore. Find it at Waterstones in Haywards Heath.

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