



FRIENDS OF ASHENGROUND AND BOLNORE WOODS

CONSERVATION : PROTECTION : ENHANCEMENT : ENJOYMENT

Newsletter – Summer/Autumn 09



Musk Mallow along Railway Path between Ashenground and Pierce's Woods

(see article about Railway Path and its Wildflowers by Gill Rogers on p.2)

Welcome to this latest edition of our Newsletter. It can also be viewed on our website – www.foabw.com – and on the MSDC website. FoABW continues to have challenges to its role in helping to care for our Nature Reserve. These include ongoing issues around the Bolnore Development, some opportunities as well as challenges presented by the imminent building of Bolnore Village School, and the continuing need to carry out practical tasks to ensure the woods are managed appropriately. (see p.3)

We need YOUR help in many ways. Helping out at our Conservation Events is one way (the fit and strong and the not so fit and strong are all welcome as the tasks range from the easy non-physical to the difficult and everything in between!). Being a member is another – as the more members we have the more credibility we have when we need to speak up for the Nature Reserve. If you are a member, you could consider joining our committee – we currently desperately need a new Secretary (see below). And of course we need you to spread the word about the Nature Reserve and how important it is to our part of the world both for us and for the trees, shrubs, wildflowers, insects, birds and small mammals that depend on the area as their life support. Our **Bug Hunt** was attended by over 70 people and revealed some interesting finds within and close to the Nature Reserve (see back page).

Janice Tipping

Vacancy – Secretary for FoABW – is this for you?

Can you use a computer – word and e-mail? Are you looking for ways you can support FoABW? Do you have a few hours a month available? Then this may be the position for you. Gill Rogers has been our secretary since we started in 2004 and has done a splendid job – but she is standing down. Gill can tell you all about the tasks involved and is happy to talk informally to anyone who would like to know more before thinking further about whether to put their name forward (or the name of a friend!).

So do please give **Gill Rogers** a ring on **01444 415339**

Wildflowers on Railway Path

Do you remember how the railway path looked after it had been cleared of vegetation – just over a year ago, in the Spring of 2008? I do. I stood at the north end of it, near Ashenground Bridge, and wondered if my instincts had been completely wrong! It was utter desolation. But green shoots (!) began to grow in a few weeks, and I knew many of the plants would recover.



Look at it now! It has become a wonderful meadow, embroidered with purple and yellow and pink.



Common bird's foot trefoil



Self-heal



Purple Vetch

Many of these plants are the sort that spring up when bare ground is exposed – the thistles and docks. These will gradually disappear. But the increase in the sheer number of other flowers is wonderful. They were all there before - the musk mallow and vetches and trefoil, and the lovely pink common centaury. Just not flowering except on the edges.



Common Centaury

This will never be quite the same again. Brambles and alder will cover it, but we shall cut it back from the path edge in the autumn, so some of the meadow will survive. The whole cycle will be repeated in four years time, when contractors clear below the power lines.

Gill Rogers

Problems ahead on Phases 4 and 5

No progress on the Bridleway yet – and worse. Crest are applying to MSDC in an attempt to overturn some of the planning conditions and obligations imposed by the Secretary of State. Their reasoning is that the house price crash has made the Bolnore scheme unviable. Crest wants to eliminate affordable housing and other infrastructure provisions, and to build the first 50 houses without building the ‘spine road’ which is a key feature to minimize impact on residents.

Ecologically, the good news is that Bridleway Shaw is properly buffered, as set out in FoABW’s legal opinion obtained last year from our barrister, Charlie Banner.

But the *bad news* is that Crest are trying to force a playzone onto the ancient woodland of Quarry Hollow, by deleting the option for a playzone on a field to the north. We doubt a playzone can be accommodated without serious harm to this ancient woodland, although we acknowledge that a remote chance exists. If MSDC accept Crest’s suggestion, the children would probably end up without a single play area on Phase 5. FoABW together with the other Local Community Organisations will be writing to *object* to the applications 09/02062/COND and 09/02101/CON. You may wish to write to Steve Ashdown at MSDC to object, supporting the FoABW objection, giving your name and address.

Stuart Meier

Note from Editor: Another member commented ‘presumably they thought it was viable just last November when they paid £14.5 million to buy Phase 4!’

Major Progress made on Wildlife Corridors in Bolnore Village – Hibernacula nest

After lengthy negotiations with Crest, the long outstanding remedial work on the Ashenground Wood buffer and the adjacent wildlife corridors has been carried out, using ancient woodland soil from the school site.

The work has included clearing builders’ rubble, followed by topsoiling and fencing work. The use of ancient woodland soils has

been a key factor, as they contain a wide range of seeds, bulbs and other propagules. Natural regeneration rather than planting is the priority. The soils were available as a result of the new Bolnore school site clearance. FoABW had requested and obtained a planning condition in the school application to ensure the soils were re-used in the best ecological way.

It has required extensive negotiations with WSCC, MSDC, Crest and the two firms of ecologists working on site to get the best results possible. We were greatly helped by the continuing interest of Tony Whitbread (Sussex Wildlife Trust).

The next step will be construction of five hibernacula for reptiles and insects. Nearly a thousand newts, lizards and snakes have been displaced by the school site clearance, and the hibernacula will give them new homes to live in! The hibernacula will be in the woods or on their edge, earth covered but with a core of roots crushed tightly together. They will be up to 2 metres high, but one of them might be 40m long! We hope to tell you more about them in the next newsletter.



Site clearance underway on the school site, with ‘newt fencing’ to stop newts and reptiles returning

Stuart Meier

Stop Press and School update

The diversion of the school path to the south of the school site will take place imminently, and may have been completed by the time you read this! Away from the school site, the committee has been involved in producing a resource pack for Sharon Allen, the head teacher, so that she and her staff have a good understanding of the work of FoABW and what we can offer their school, evolving the ties between the woods and the school from an early stage. More on www.bolnoreschoolgroup.org

Alastair McPherson

Annual Bug Hunt with Dr. Martin Hall



On Sunday 26th July our annual **Bug Hunt** went ahead – with **over 70 people** attending. Many young children and their parents joined us and everyone had a great time. We searched in separate sites – the woods, the meadows and the glade. Finds included grasshoppers, crickets (including Roesel's bush crickets), beetles (many ground beetles, a devil's coach horse beetle and some soldier beetles), 7-spot ladybird, bumble bees plus the troublesome mosquito. Outside the insect remit, we also found a beautiful grass snake and a couple of amazing frogs. Martin had set up traps during the morning and also a special tent. Nets and special boxes were provided by Martin. Gill Rogers also brought some nets and boxes that FoABW had purchased.



Roesel's Bush Cricket from above and below

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. **www.foabw.com**

There is also a link to an album of photographs taken in the woods over the years plus a link to an album of photographs taken as part of our ongoing photographic survey of the woods.

Join us to help with **Conservation Work**. We 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. (Note: In August we are not meeting on the 1st Sunday – only on the 3rd Saturday – back to normal from September). We also arrange **Special Events** throughout the year. Look out for details on the notice boards and our website.

Advance notice of our **AGM**. This will be held on **5th February 2010**. Full details in due course.

General Information - Janice on 01444 414053 or 07752 003529
Information about membership - Fleur Carey on 01444 473179

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