



Newsletter

Summer 2011

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Future Programme

July

Saturday 16th ► The Bourne Show ◄

August

Thursday 4th Balsam check
Sunday 7th Balsam pull Lower Bourne

September

Sunday 4th ► Annual General Meeting ◄
Sunday 18th Old Churchyard

October

Thursday 13th Presentation to Rowhills
Sunday 16th Footpath maintenance

November

Sunday 20th Old Churchyard

December

Sunday 4th Middle Bourne Lane

January 2012

Sunday 8th Woodland Management

Sunday sessions will be 1000-1300h – a calling notice will give details a week in advance.
Mid-week sessions will be arranged whenever necessary at short notice.

Why record our wildlife?

A key objective of our group is to protect the diversity of wildlife and the semi-rural character of The Bourne. One way in which we pursue this objective is to comment on those planning applications that in our opinion pose threats. While we do not oppose all development, we do seek to minimise their impacts where we consider they pose unnecessary threats. However, to be effective we must have accurate information to back up our arguments. Hence a thorough and up-to-date knowledge of our wildlife is a prerequisite.

There are several animal inhabitants in our area – bats, badgers and slowworms – that are afforded protection under the law. The Council also has an obligation not only to protect but also enhance the green corridors along which animals and plants can freely move between sites; the Bourne Valley is such a corridor linking the Wey Valley, Bourne Woods and Alice Holt Forest. Yet our inadequate knowledge about what occurs in our area is seriously hampering our efforts to maintain the biodiversity and character of The Bourne. For example, the proposal to build a bridge across Borelli Walk to take the East Street development



Badgers, common in The Bourne, are one of the animals that are afforded some protection by law.

site traffic included an ecological paper by a consultant based in Oxford claiming there was no reason for the development not to go ahead. It was quite evident that the consultant, while being

competent, lacked first hand knowledge of the area's wildlife, which was based on only a couple of daytime visits. The report was quite properly supplemented by data from the official county records. Looking at these data, it came as no surprise that the report under-estimated the biological wealth of the area. In this example, the outcome would not have been altered, even if the wildlife evidence had been better. However, for future applications comprehensive biological data may well be a critical factor in ensuring the right outcome. For example, we have recently commented on three proposals to build houses close to badger setts, with a modicum of success. However, to demonstrate that a sett is active, we need permission to gain access to the site, which is not always forthcoming. So we need to know before the proposals are submitted where there are active setts. Hence BCG needs to be far more proactive in feeding information into the official data base that is maintained by the Surrey Wildlife Trust. To this end your committee has set up a Facebook account where reporting your observations is quite straightforward. It helps if you know what you have seen, but please do not be deterred from reporting anything and everything, from odd birds you see on your feeder, to something funny in the wood-shed. We do not expect you all to become instant experts, but help is at hand. A web site www.ispot.org.uk, where you can learn more about wildlife and get help in identifying what you see.

Please alert me to anything special you see or find. For example, when chatting to Paul Wheeler while we were waiting for the Farnham in Bloom judges to arrive Paul described what he called a



You may find something really extraordinary - Richard Sandars found this western conifer seed bug in The Bourne only three years after it was first reported in the UK – a fascinating record!

'tree mouse' that has been raiding his bird feeder at night – a small gingery mouse – could this be a dormouse? If so this would be a really exciting observation. In the last few years we have seen the arrival of a new species – the tree bumblebee, the harlequin ladybird, an American bug, the wasp

spider, as well as witnessing the nation-wide immigration of painted lady butterflies in May 2010. We have seen the abundance of hornets increase until 2009, and then wane again with the recent snowy winters. Not only can our records help to describe some of the changes that are occurring around us, but may also provide us with the ammunition to ward off undesirable developments in The Bourne. *It is also a lot of fun!*

Record your observations at:-
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bourne-conservation-group/170640006320537>
alternatively use our group e-mail
info@bourneconservation.org.uk

Farnham in bloom 2011

We learned in the Spring that, in addition to entering the town centre in the SE in Bloom competition once again, Farnham was also to enter the "Large Town" category and wanted to include the Middle Bourne Lane (MBL) Wildlife Garden. After we pointed out that we have other notable sites, the final itinerary included not only MBL, but also the Old Churchyard (OCY) and The Bourne Crossroads.



The raised beds outside the new coffee shop at the Crossroads that we planted at Abigail McKern's suggestion. The coffee is pretty good as well.

Knowing that participation would involve some extra work, we were determined to use the event as a stimulus to improve our sites. As it turned out this was especially important at MBL (see next item). The competition also stimulated us to take up the suggestion floated by Abigail to plant the small raised beds by the shop at the Crossroads, which is now a coffee-shop.

From April through to June we concentrated on the range of tasks across all sites, which went remarkably smoothly thanks to all those who helped. The last minute preparations, however, were hampered by a variety of circumstances, not least Noel being laid low by an attack of jaundice. Never-the-less come Judgement Day on the 6th

July all was 'ship shape and Bristol fashion', at MBL thanks to a blitz carried out by the working group lead by Karen Redman the previous Sunday and several mid-week sessions in OCY and at the cross roads.

The day was a mixture of sunshine and sharp showers, but we were lucky in having sunshine when the two judges toured our sites. They did a drive by the cross-roads, presumably giving it a royal wave. Richard Sandars and Abigail McKern conducted them with enthusiasm around MBL. Martin Angel and Paul Wheeler did the honours at the Old Churchyard, where they flew an elephant hawk moth and enamoured the lady judge with a very placid expectant slow worm.

With only 10 minutes at each site throughout the town (including MBL and OCY), it was important at the end of the day to talk in more detail to the judges in the Town Office over cups of tea and some excellent sandwiches and cake. Noel, like Lazarus, had risen from his sickbed and was able to talk to the judges using the three display panels he had prepared about the work of BCG, which endeavoured to hit all the points most likely to score brownie points. Initial reactions seemed very positive, but we will not know how positive until the autumn. Both Kevin Tait the Town's outside manager and Councillor Julia Potts who was in charge of the Town's efforts have expressed their appreciation of our efforts.

Training day in OCY

The Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) held its third annual identification and training day in conjunction with BCG in the Old Churchyard on Saturday 18th June, exploring how to collect and identify animals in an area. Frances Halstead of SWT was again our leader and was helped by Martin Angel and Lisa Malcolm. After the usual general introductions and briefings, Frances gave a short Powerpoint presentation on the diversity of creatures we were likely to encounter. Martin then went through the few moths that had been caught in the light trap the previous cool and drizzly evening.



A participant photographs an insect, while Lisa stand poised ready to use a sweep net.



A buff ermine, one of the moths caught the previous evening in the light trap.

The participants then divided into three groups and collected the animals which had accumulated under mats and in pitfall traps set out under the limes, in the grassy area at the site of the old church and under the ivy along the northern boundary. Generally relatively few animals were collected reflecting the previous dryness of the season. But one mat had over 50 of three species of woodlice under it, and under others were a slow worm and a hedgehog slug. A heavy thunderstorm brought lunch forward. After the storm had cleared, we surveyed lengths of privet and laurel hedge using a method suggested by iSpot (www.ispot.org.uk). These surveys involved using a dust pan and brush to collect animals from the hedge. It proved to be more of a training exercise than a rich source of animals as the earlier torrential rain had beaten the insects from the vegetation; even so we found a few things of interest. Proceedings were interrupted by another downpour, so we decided to finish an hour early. Despite the interruptions caused by the weather, a lot was packed into the day. The participants went away with a folder full of useful information and a CD containing identification guides, pictures, codes of practise and forms for recording animals seen. The day was greatly enhanced by the enthusiasm and knowledge of the two youngsters, Jack and Linda, who participated. Any BCG member who would like a copy of the CD can request one from Martin Angel.

Middle Bourne Lane

Our original 2007 design for MBL has steadily evolved over the years. For example, the compost area initially planned to be in the SE corner, was better placed in the SW corner. Our work in MBL this year, stimulated by the Farnham in Bloom competition has continued this process of modest evolution. The first in a series of tasks were making improvements to the lower path. This is a



The renovated rustic fence round the pond.

feature that children in particular like, because it lets them explore. However, the close-boarded fence is rather unattractive. We have therefore erected 5 lengths of trellis up which we are training some evergreen and wildlife-friendly plants. These have already improved the appearance of the path and will in time create a new green screen. The rustic fence around the pond has been replaced.



The compost area has been given a serious face-lift

We have also improved the compost area which had not only become rather untidy but was also supporting one of the large sycamore trees whose roots had effectively ruined one bay's worth of compost. To overcome that we dug it all out and put down a membrane plus paving slabs.

Another big task has been to improve the gateway. It was becoming quite badly eroded thanks to the increasingly large number of people that are now using the garden - a sign that our aims are being achieved. We agonised long and hard as to how best to tackle the problem. We finally decided on putting in hard paving with granite sets, because of its appearance and its ability to resist the impact of the flow of people in and out. The job was completed over 5 days and rounded off with some new turf around the edge.



Jo Bootton models the new entrance to the garden.

The Old Churchyard – a retrospective

When browsing through some of the pictures I had taken in the Old Churchyard, I came across one that I had taken just after we had started work. The original reason for taking the picture was to get permission to fell the 'sapling' oak and sycamore trees that were growing in amongst the graves. These were not only threatening the integrity of the monuments but were also shading the meadow that had developed on the site of the old church. I took the same view again this summer after we had finished the new pond and it is interesting to compare the two pictures. The two trees a sycamore and an oak, which had reached heights of nearly 10 m have gone. But I had forgotten just how far the laurels had encroached. It was a major exercise to clear these rampant laurels and get rid of their stumps. Removing them uncovered a mound of rubble in the south-east corner and opened up the view towards Frensham. We have attempted to create a wild flower meadow on one side with only a modicum of success because of the dryness of Spring this year. On the other side, we have dug a pond. In Middle Bourne Lane the creation of a similar pond has proved a major success, as it has dramatically increase the diversity of insects in the garden, and grass snakes are frequently seen in the pond. We are already beginning to see similar increases in the variety of wildlife using the Old Churchyard. A



Looking towards the south-east corner in winter 2009 before we felled the sycamore and oak, cleared the laurels and made pond. Note the altar marker.

large population of tadpoles has been evident in the pond, pond-skaters have arrived, damselflies have been egg-laying and a large water beetle *Acilius* sp. took up temporary residence in April. During the training day in June young newts were spotted.



Some of the first arrivals in the pond. Tiny froglets can be seen now leaving the pond.



A similar view this July showing how the summer flowers are now flourishing.

Stag beetles in The Bourne

Our area is well known for its stag beetles. On two successive warm evenings at the beginning of June, when standing out in my garden to watch for bats sorteying out, male stag beetles looking like mini-pterodactyls buzzed over. When I asked a dog walker if he had seen one of them, his rather startled reply was that he had seen something. I guess he thought I was more than a little eccentric to get excited about a mere beetle. I recorded the sightings with the People's Trust for endangered species (<http://ptes.org/>) which is the organisation that is responsible for managing the Biodiversity



One of this year's male stag beetles – the females do not have the big jaws.

Action Plan for the stag beetles and have been carrying out national surveys for about ten years. Their web-site includes fact sheets about the stag beetles and the results for previous years' surveys (also for the other species they look after – the noble chafer beetles, the violet click beetle and the dormouse). Of course, I have also recorded it on our new Facebook site (see the editorial).

Where have all the ponies gone? A cautionary tale

New Year marked the arrival of three New Forest Ponies on the RSPB Farnham Heath Reserve. They were called 'Bracken' (the one with the chestnut coat), 'Willow' (creamy light brown) and 'Erica' (dark brown). They were on loan from the SWT Surrey Heathland Project.

Mike Coates, the RSPB Site Manager, explained their presence. "These ponies are to complement the current summer cattle grazing programme to give the advantages of mixed grazing. The different feeding habits and preferences of horses and cattle result in a more varied mixture of plants Ponies can chew the more prickly plants such as holly and bramble; whereas the cattle go for grass and young deciduous shoots. The ponies will be on-site all year, being moved from one fenced area to the next as required."

The ponies had been grazing on sites with public access for years, so were used to people and dogs. However, they were not pets and had never been ridden; the RSPB had specifically asked the public not to feed them and keep their dogs under control whenever near them. Unfortunately Erica developed laminitis, which is a painful condition of the hoof which for a horse is then like having to stand on a very badly bruised toe or having a gout. If left untreated it can result in the horse having to be destroyed, so it was decided to remove all three ponies in May. One of several causes of laminitis is an inappropriate diet and it was



The ponies grazing in the spring

suspected that some well-meaning member of the public had been feeding the ponies inappropriately thus bringing this trial grazing to an end.

The ponies have been replaced by a small herd of Jersey/Sussex-cross cattle, which are more robust. However, the benefits of a mixed grazing regime will be lost. Once again the RSPB reiterates its request for the public not only to refrain from feeding the cattle but also to keep their dogs under control when they are near them.



The grazing regime now relies solely on these cattle,

Lowland heath is an internationally rare and unique habitat, which supports a variety of specialised plants and animals, many of which are rare or endangered. These include birds such as the Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark, which get most publicity, but it also supports reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and plants. Two hundred years ago, heathland covered most of west Surrey; now 85% has been lost. The Surrey Heathland Project was set up in 1989 to help stop this decline. Further information on this Project and the heathland habitat is available on their website www.surreycc.gov.uk/heathland

Beetle airlines

Have you ever wondered how flightless animals get around? Well here is one example of how some do so by hitch-hiking. When light trapping in the Old Churchyard last autumn. A most extraordinary animal alighted on one of the monuments in front of me. I took its picture and almost immediately its appearance change dramatically. So I took a second picture. What had seemed initially to be a most extraordinary insect transformed into a black sexton beetle (*Necrophorus humator*). This is an appropriate beetle to find in a graveyard! It is quite common in our area. It flies around at night smelling out corpses on which lays its eggs. The larvae when they hatch feast on the decaying flesh. Without



The first picture I took of the mystery animal, I can count 58 mites hitching a ride.



In the second picture the mites have scuttled underneath, revealing the true identity of their taxi to be a black sexton beetle (*Nicrophorus humator*).

these scavengers our streets would be full of the stinking remains of road kills. What had made the beetle look so very odd initially was a hoard of mites that were hitching a ride to the next corpse, where they, too, would help out with the environmental clean up. In response to my flash, the mites had scuttled beneath the beetle, revealing its true identity. If you want to see some of the rich diversity of animals that help to keep our environment clean of dead animals, next time you see a dead fox or badger in the road stake it out in your garden (I recommend down-wind!), and watch what happens. It will only take a week or so. A rather goulish experiment but an intriguing one.

Outreach

The Group has managed to maintain a steady trickle of publicity in the local media during 2011 to date, which is particularly pleasing given that we have not started any new projects. Coverage has included:

- A full article about BCG in 'Round & About', a free monthly distributed to all households in the area

- An item in the 'Farnham Herald' about our work session in Paradise Wood in February
 - The 'Farnham Diary' covered our last Newsletter with particular reference to the Old Churchyard
 - The 'Farnham Diary' also published a letter asking if any readers could provide information about a broken headstone from WWI found in the Old Churchyard, though nothing was heard.
- Martin Angel and Lisa Malcolm attended the annual meeting for recorders held by the Surrey Wildlife Trust, which has played an important role in maintaining our relationship with the Trust. Probably our most important recent publicity, to the great and the good of Farnham, was the talk on our work given in 1st June to the Farnham Society at St Joan's Hall by Noel Moss and your Editor. The title was 'Badgers, Bulbs and Burials in The Bourne' and it was of course mainly about our the Old Churchyard. The turnout was gratifyingly large and much interest was shown.



The audience in St Joan's Hall waiting for the lecture to begin.

BCG Committee

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