



FRIENDS OF WOLSTONBURY

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WINTER 2015 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to this year's newsletter. This will give you a brief insight into what we have been up to over the last year on and around Wolstonbury Hill.

Conditions on the Hill

The friends of Wolstonbury have been busy again this year on our task days. At the beginning of 2015 we focused our efforts on removing bushes and trees above the Western "Campions eyebrow" and within the Bronze Age enclosure at the top of the hill. Visually this has made a dramatic impact enhancing the rounded outline of the hill.

The area on the North facing slope above the new fence line which we cleared last year has grassed up quickly. We have continued on from here this year removing bigger trees and scrub but leaving a wavy scrub edge which is good for butterflies.



We have acquired some trees to plant in the Eastern "Campions eyebrow" to help enhance this feature. These are native species that already exist on the hill so they won't look out of place. Most of the existing vegetation is smaller scrub species.

If you walk through the woodland of Ashen plantation you may have spotted signs that Ash Dieback (Chalara) is with us. This is caused by a fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* which causes lesions on leaves and branches which then kills that part of the tree. Single leaves may be affected or whole branches and eventually the whole tree will die. Whilst this is unfortunate there is no treatment. It is hoped however that there may be some immunity in some of our trees so we shall just have to wait and see.

The National Trust are going to start targeting some scrub and tree removal in the Western paddock which they have asked the Friends to help out with so we may be doing some of our task days here in the new year.

As always if you see us out on the hill and want to know more come and say hello. If you come at the right time there may even be a cup of tea and chocolate biscuit to go with it.

Mike Botterill – Chairman

BIRDS OF PREY ON WOLSTONBURY

What could be more satisfying on a beautiful warm September day, than to sit on the hill, eating chocolate biscuits, drinking tea and watching three buzzards circling overhead. On our September Saturday working day we could hear them "mewing" constantly and we were able to watch them soar above us on the thermals all day. Wonderful!

Also spotted during the summer was a pair of peregrine falcons nesting in the chalk quarry on the west side of the hill. These could be observed from the footpath by the quarry.

Red Kites have also been seen locally. All these birds of prey must indicate a healthy wildlife population.

WOLSTONBURY POND SURVEY

Since last year's survey of the relined dew pond there has been a welcome increase in the species of flora and fauna observed. We undertake our dew pond survey each year in July and this year were pleased to note much more vegetation surrounding the pond compared to the bare ground which surrounded the pond following the relining. There was also an increase of water plants noted.

We were also delighted to see many dragonflies and damselflies swooping over the water. In the water, water boatmen and pond skaters were also in evidence as were a number of juvenile newts.

The water level is now staying high and it seems that the relining was successful.

Common Blue damselflies *Enallagma cyathigerium*



The Orchid Review

Another season on Wolstonbury Hill and we can safely say all eleven species of orchids have flowered successfully. Some plants like the bee orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) and the greater butterfly orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*) have flowered in fewer numbers this year but we are confident that within their natural cycle greater numbers will be found in future years.

One orchid, which has flowered exceptionally well this year, is the autumn lady's tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*). This plant has been seen in good numbers on the western slopes of Wolstonbury Hill and in many other places within our local area. With the common twayblade (*Neottia ovata*) this was one of the two orchids first recorded by the British naturalist, William Turner, in his book 'Names of Herbes' of 1548. This orchid grows in height between 5-10cm with white and green flowers that spiral around the upright stem. A further interesting characteristic of this plant, on close examination, is the hairy structure of the stem, sepals and petals.

Bumblebees are the pollinating insects for the *Spiranthes*, and once the bee has taken pollen the inner structure of the flower is such that the stigma cannot be pollinated for a period between one to two days. In this way the bumblebee carries pollen from young flowers to older flowers and by so doing ensures cross-pollination.

Conservation of these orchids requires nutrient poor short grassland. Any disturbance or added fertilisation to the soil is destructive to these plants but established mown lawns do offer the prospect for new colonies of this rather attractive late summer plant.

On a final note, it has been the case for many years that the two main orchid banks in Wellcombe Bottom have been visited by many interested orchid enthusiasts. We hope the many orchid species that can be found on these slopes will continue to delight these visitors.

