



## Spring 2013 Newsletter

We have been working hard at several locations on the hill. Our work has taken us mostly to northerly, easterly and southerly locations.

We have cleared the usual growth of scrub and trees to allow the Downland sward to regrow and the grazing cattle and sheep then control this. It is not all work and no play as there were walks to watch and hear birds, observe orchids, learn about archaeology and geology as well as an interesting fungi foray in the autumn.

The team has repaired fences with new posts and barbed wire to keep the stock in and the horses in the right place. We are having problems during this wet weather with horses using the footpaths in places and turning them into deep mud! Extra posts have been installed to try to put a stop to this.

We have installed stiles and a new seat on the north side of the hill was also put in place. These last two activities involved digging very deep holes to take the supports. As the subsoil is chalk and the holes are dug by hand this is not an easy task as it takes a great deal of effort to make a hole 1 m. deep x 30cm x 30cm. This task is definitely a team effort as many hands make light work. The finished result is there for all to see.

The clearing season is now over as the birds are starting to nest and the spring flowers are making their appearance. Whilst working on the orchid bank in March we saw violets and primroses already in flower. The basal leaves of the early purple and purple spotted orchids were growing amidst dog's mercury, nettles and cowslips. This does not mean we will stop our task days in the summer but we will move onto other projects, which need undertaking to preserve this wonderful, peaceful area.

Unfortunately two of our regular team, Steve and Peter, died during the year and we are greatly missing all their help and expertise.

### **Dates for your diary.**

This year we will be holding task days as usual on the first Friday and third Saturday of each month, and also interest walks.

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| 29 April | A.G.M. The Plough, Pyecombe. 7.30pm              |
| 18 May   | Bird Walk by Prof. Dudley Knowles. 7.00am start. |



## FRIENDS OF WOLSTONBURY

9th June	Orchid walk by Graham Welfare. NT. Book a place at Saddlescombe. (01273 857712) Numbers limited.
Late July	Summer Flower Walk by Paul Atkins of Plumpton College
Early August	Butterfly Walk by Bob Foreman of Butterfly Conservation
15 & 22 Sept.	Hurst Festival - Geographical, Ecological and Archaeological Walk by Neil Milton (max 20 per walk). Book through Hurst Festival box Office
Autumn	Log cutting day for own use - organised by the NT

More details are on our web site: [www.wolstonbury.com](http://www.wolstonbury.com)

On the hill, more to the east and south sides, away from the traffic noise of the A23, sitting listening to the birds, enjoying the flowers and watching the buzzards soaring above is just pure pleasure.

Come and join us.

Editor: Margaret Maillardet

### **Native Orchids Continue To Thrive by Dave Pearce**

The twice-monthly working parties of volunteers have continued to maintain areas previously cleared from scrub at Wellcombe Bottom. Further progress has also been achieved by clearing more hillside from ground cover shading. Maintaining habitat that is close cropped by means of mowing or grazing allows natural flora to regenerate and provision for native orchids to propagate.

One of the first orchids to be recorded by a British naturalist, William Turner in 1548 and later extensively studied by Charles Darwin was the common twayblade (*neottia ovata*). This orchid stands approximately 350mm in height with two ovate leaves opposed to each other at the base of the stem. The plant has a wide distribution throughout Britain and has exceptional longevity with rhizomes providing flowering spikes for more than 20 years.



## FRIENDS OF WOLSTONBURY

This orchid has been quick to populate newly cleared areas on Wolstonbury Hill and this may be because it's not reliant of mycorrhiza fungus in the soil to initiate germination. It's also known that the common twayblade has a number of pollinating insects, ranging from sawflies, ichneumon wasps and flying beetles. All of these insects are attracted by the flowers' scent. Although a rather plain orchid because of its completely greenish-yellow colour it may be worthwhile to keep an observant eye for the less common three-leaved variant, *trifoliata*.

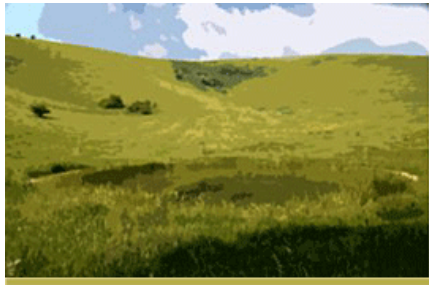
The greater butterfly orchid (*plantanthera chlorantha*) is another plant that has been quick to increase its population on areas cleared of ground cover. The population at Wellcombe Bottom is of sufficient size to provide reliable plant morphological data to researchers at Kew Gardens. The research study is focused on the evolution of the plant with pollinator and their relationship to global latitude. This site is one of only two locations in the British Isles now providing this data, the other is near Stirling in Scotland.

The fly orchid (*ophrys insectifera*) has also increased its population with more than 20 flowering spikes recorded last year. The return of bee orchids (*ophrys apifera*) to the site was another pleasing outcome.



### **Bronze Age Axehead by Neil Milton**

Last Spring a Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age [900-700 BC], socketed Axehead was discovered within a short distance of Wolstonbury Hill, a well-known Bronze Age site. A member of the Friends found it whilst out walking on the hill.



## FRIENDS OF WOLSTONBURY

The complete cast copper-alloy axehead is in remarkably good condition. The colour of the metal is overall grey-green, which indicates a higher tin content, and areas towards the blade end exhibit a high bronze-coloured patina. The axehead weighs 209 grams.

This is the first significant find on the hill for many decades and is very exciting for all with an interest in how man has used and worked the Downs since Mesolithic times. The axehead is now in the hands of the Wolstonbury Trust (National Trust), and has been generously made available to the Friends for specific events including the November Public Meeting.





FRIENDS OF WOLSTONBURY



### **Trees of Interest on the Dyke Estate by Mike Botterill**

Whilst a large proportion of our time is spent removing scrub and cutting down trees, these actions are taken in the name of conservation not because we dislike trees! Chalk grassland is a species rich habitat which has declined drastically in the area since the Second World War. Without scrub and tree removal, the area of open chalk grassland would continue to decline putting at risk many species of plant and animal which rely on this habitat for their survival. This said there are still many areas on the estate where impressive trees can be seen and enjoyed.





## FRIENDS OF WOLSTONBURY

### **Wolstonbury Hill**

Walking south from the direction of Little Danny onto Wolstonbury, take the left hand permissive footpath east through the woodland just before the main contour bridleway. After a distance you will come across several trees with dark green foliage. These are yew trees and they retain their soft needle like foliage all year round. Yew is a relatively slow growing tree that will live for hundreds of years and they are often associated with places of worship. They are generally found in woodland rather than grazed areas because all parts of the tree are poisonous. As few as 3 seeds which are found in the bright red fleshy fruit would be enough to kill a person. Yew wood was much sort after by archers for making bows as it has high strength under tension.

### **Fulking Escarpment**

If you walk the along the Northern contour path at the foot of the downs, every so often you will come upon a large imposing tree standing on its own. These trees with their compound leaves made up of 5-9 elliptical leaflets are common walnut trees. Walnut trees do not propagate easily in this country so these trees must have been planted but it is not known for what reason. These trees have been left because they are not common on the downs and are unlikely to spread.

### **Dyke Valley and Newtimber Hill**

On the top of the northern edge of the Dyke Valley and on the western side of Newtimber Hill you may be able to find common Juniper. Whilst this is a tree, the growing conditions on the South Downs mean that you are more likely to see it as a bushy shrub. Juniper has short spiky foliage. Its green cones, which ripen to black, most people mistake for berries and it is these, which are used to flavour gin. Juniper, whilst a native species, is relatively rare because of low fertilisation rates. Pollen from male plants needs to enter the cones on female plants via small holes. Unfortunately these can be easily blocked by dust and pollution. To help maintain Juniper levels on the property seed has been collected on site, grown on in a nursery and then been planted near the parent plants.