



Kempshott Conservation Group



March 2011

Newsletter No. 15

In this issue....

Graffiti vandals – this page
Hedgehogs – this page
Seed team – page 2
Seeding & planting.– pages 2-3
Orchard Team – page 3
Spring bulbs – page 4
Old Hedgerow – page 4
Work Parties – page 4

The next Newsletter will be published in the summer.....

Contributions should be submitted by 30 June

Your contacts.....

E-mail:

Kempshott-conserve@tiscali.co.uk

Tel.: (01256) 470171

Chair

Steve Goodwin
15 Avon Road
Oakley
RG23 7DJ
Tel.: 07831 289261

Treasurer

Marion Wolstencroft
14 Ennerdale Close
Basingstoke
RG22 5HJ
Tel.: (01256) 470171

Newsletter

David Brown
93 Coniston Road
Basingstoke
RG22 5HU
Tel: (01256) 320474



Graffiti vandals.....

.....are, from time to time, making a mess of our three interpretation boards - there are two on Down Grange Meadow and one in the Old Orchard.

It's unrealistic to expect us to be immune from this social ill which blights society at large, or to catch the individual responsible, but a prompt tip off about the presence of graffiti gives us a chance of removing the paint before it gets too hard, normally after about three days.

Please do give us a call straightaway if you see any. In the April *Kempshott Courier* we are asking Kempshott residents in general for their help.



A very small hedgehog.....

.....apparently in a poor way, was found in the Old Orchard last November. Hart Wildlife Rescue came to its aid, feeding it up to hibernation weight and then looking after it, with many others, until the spring.

As there are several suitable sites in the Old Orchard and on Down Grange Meadow on which a hedgehog can be released to forage this summer, we have three hedgehogs "on order" from Hart for delivery once the days are warmer.

There will be more news about our prickly arrivals in the next Newsletter.



Our wild flower seed team.....

.....is now established with three volunteers kindly responding to our appeal in the November Newsletter for members willing to sort and clean seeds during the summer and early autumn. As we said, wild flower seeds are collected on various sites in north Hampshire for reseeded on our own sites and for use by several other conservation groups in and around Basingstoke.

Harvesting and drying is no great problem, but releasing the seed from the pods and cleaning it is a very time consuming job best done during daylight. If two or more can work together, it can be a very sociable time. Would anyone else like to join in? Please do give us a call on (01256) 470171.



Scraping, seeding and planting

This winter's work party season has seen a lot of activity in the scraping, seeding and planting department. The ideal time to sow is in the autumn as some seed may need to go through a cold spell to trigger germination. Autumn gets seeds off to a flying start in the spring, but sowing at this time of the year does not always fit in with the work party season as it may be difficult to get the ground prepared before it gets too cold.

In general we do most of our ground work in the depths of winter so we need to wait until it has warmed up before we can seed. Spring seeding usual takes place in April, but it is weather dependent and a cold spell may push this into May.

On Down Grange Meadow the first area to get underway was the "ribbon" to the south of the Community Copse, located behind St. Mark's Church. This was scraped for us by the Council using its machinery and saving us countless hours of really hard manual work. In October, we turned over the ground close to the footpaths at each end of the ribbon and seeded it with a wide variety of wild flowers. The rest of the ribbon was turned over by the Community Payback team for seeding this spring.

Along the Northern Belt, the trees between the Meadow and the playing fields, our colleagues from Alençon and Euskirken during their visit last autumn scraped and seeded twelve patches. Each patch was sown with just one species of wild flower. This will help us to see what species are the easiest to establish on our ground.

Another large area to be cleared was the completion of the Embayment, the gap about half way along the Northern Belt. Again, this was done by the Community Payback team who had made a start last year. The first part they scraped was rotavated and seeded just before the hot dry spell in May. Despite this slow start, this area had by late summer the local population of Small Copper and Brown Argus butterflies quite excited. In the spring we will rotavate and seed the second part and hope it will do just as well.

To supplement the existing "shrub islands", we will be planting trees and shrubs in strategic

On Down Grange Meadow - cont'd.

locations. As these are container grown, they will be planted out in late spring. For these plantings, we will be using Mycorrhizal fungal rooting powder. Previous plantings of shrubs in the Meadow have, sadly, seen a high failure rate, but we hope that using this fungal powder, which encourages root growth, will improve our success rate. We shall see.

In the Old Orchard we had three ribbons, following the lines of the new fruit trees, scraped and rotavated by one of our members. In the spring we will be seeding the ribbons with our retained stock of wild flower seed. The effect we want to achieve is three ribbons of wild flowers snaking across, tying together all the orchard trees.

Close to the new interpretation board, we planted 200 crocus bulbs kindly donated by Basingstoke Rotary Club in aid of Life - Polio Plus. After planting we have had a cold winter so they were slow to put their head above the parapet, but our patience was eventually rewarded with a lovely show, albeit slightly late.



Community Orchard Team.....

We are hoping that the Old Orchard will produce a really good fruit harvest this year. The only tree which has yet to bear fruit is the quince. Other quince owners tell us that we must be patient and in a couple of years we could be in luck. Meanwhile, we hope the new Community Orchard Team, who all live very locally, will keep a close eye on the health of the trees (spraying and pruning each year) and manage the picking and distribution of fruit.

Community orchards are very much in the news these days and, in blossom time, we will be hosting a visit by a recently formed community orchard team from Andover.

We are very interested in hearing from keen jam and conserve makers who would like to make medlar jelly. Any takers?



Spring bulbs



Last autumn, bluebells were planted along the side of the path from the playing fields closest to Coniston Road. Most wild bulbs are notoriously "shy" to flower and can take a number of years to feel confident enough to emerge.

For example, in autumn 2008 we planted some wild daffodil bulbs in the Old Orchard and this year they are putting in an appearance for the first time. The flowers of the wild daffodil are considerably smaller than their cultivated cousins.

On Down Grange Meadow, look out for Ramsoms, commonly known as wild garlic. We planted these bulbs two years ago and they flowered for the first time last spring. If they flower again, the chances are they will become regulars.



Ransoms

While not a bulb, we planted some Dog's Mercury along the edge of the Northern Belt of the Meadow. These are another woodland mat-forming species that first

appeared last year for the first time. We are pleased to see that this year's shoots are already visible!



Dog's Mercury



Snowdrops

This year we have another splendid display of snowdrops in the Old Orchard.



The Old Hedgerow.....

.....is really showing its age. There are a large number of "shrubs" such as hawthorn and elder now so old they are dying off or are so tall that they could fall over in the next gale. Consequently, we need to start "planting for succession". On a recent work party we planted a range of shrubs along the hedgerow on the playing field side.

On the Coniston Road side, the "gullies" have been cleared and widened to show the Council's staff the limits for grass cutting. The scraped areas on this side will be extended and seeded this spring with wild flowers from our seed bank.

Look out for the foxgloves (*digitalis*) which were planted out last year and should flower this year.



Our Work Party programme.....

.....for the current season is coming to an end - - final dates below - and will resume in the autumn.

Thursday, 31st March 14 00-16 00	Down Grange Meadow - Gate by St. Mark's Church
Sunday, 10th April 10.00-13.00	Old Orchard, Kendal Gardens
Thursday, 21st April 14.00-16.00	Old Hedgerow - Southern end of footpath between Coniston Road and Down Grange

Tools, etc. provided, but please bring gloves.