



Kempshott Conservation Group



June 2011

Newsletter No. 16

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The next Newsletter will be published in September.....

Contributions should be submitted by 15 August.

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Timber!

A contractor is at work in Kempshott trimming and felling trees that the Council considers to be a hazard.

We are always keen to acquire large pieces of raw timber, both for our tree fungus bank in Down Grange Meadow and for wood products, such as seats and benches, which can be made out of healthy sections of timber.

If the tree surgeons undertake any work near you and leave timber more than 12 inches in diameter, please do give us a call. We can then assess whether it can be recycled. We have our own trailer and can collect.



The Friends of Stratton Park.....

.....is a sister group recently launched for those living in the north east corner of Kempshott. The group - already over 40 strong - is working towards an ecologically richer park environment and borrows the expertise and sometimes the tools of the Kempshott Conservation Group.

We want as many green spaces as possible in Basingstoke to have local residents' input and protection. We are the **big** society. The more the merrier! If you would like to join the new group, please contact friendsofstrattonpark@sky.com or 01256 470171



Wild flower seed.....

.....for our seed bank will be collected from the end of June. After our appeal for volunteers to help with freeing the dried seed from its pods and sheaths ready for storing, we were contacted by three ladies who will form the basis of our seed team starting work at the end of July and into August.

If you would like join the team, we would be delighted to hear from you.



The Orchids are back

On Down Grange Meadow we watched with apprehension as the very dry spring unfolded. Orchids are notoriously "picky" about growing conditions, and not just above ground. The development of symbiotic underground fungi will affect how and where they will flower.

Last year we had our first Pyramidal Orchids, which were first seen in early July. This year they returned three weeks earlier with 24 spikes counted on 14th June in roughly the same area as last year when we had just 12. This is reassuring as that area of grass was cut in March this year to see how things would develop. The position will, however, continue to be monitored as orchids can take two years to develop underground, alongside their fungi, before they put up a flower spike.



By 7th June, the Common Spotted Orchids were a "no show". In both 2009 and 2010 there was just one clump and the two sites were over 200 metres apart.

New flower areas



Setting wildflower seed is a slow process! If, and it's a big if, the seed can be sown in autumn, the following summer the first to show will be the annuals, typically Yellow Rattle and Red Bartsia. These two are our "vampire" plants semi-parasitic on the roots of grasses. Where they become established they reduce the vigour of the surrounding grass.

The following year, the "ruderal" species will flourish. These are the first to colonise ground after it has been disturbed and include Oxeye Daisy and Dove's Foot Cranesbill. The second and third summers will see fine perennial flowers, such as Bird's-foot Trefoil, the bedstraws and Kidney Vetch, become established.

It is difficult to get the ground ready for autumn sowing as most of our work parties are in autumn and winter. For this reason a number of seedings have been carried out in spring. In 2010, it was not until mid-May that the first phase of the Embayment in

New flower areas - cont'd.

Down Grange Meadow was seeded. This was followed by a hot dry spell that delayed germination. Last autumn we seeded part of the "snake" that was scraped last year.

Not all the seed collected last year was used. We set some for perennial plants and most germinated under glass, surviving the winter. These were potted on and should have been planted out as "plugs" in the spring, but this was prevented by the dry conditions. Some plugs have been planted alongside the meadow paths and, subject to the weather, planting will continue into late summer. We will retain some of the plugs and continue to pot them on ready for next spring. When they are planted out, they will not be "plugs" so much as established plants that should soon become naturalised.



An "early" year for butterflies

The warm dry spring brought on the emergence of butterflies by two or three weeks. On Down Grange Meadow some of our hibernating species, such as Small Tortoiseshell and Coma, were out and over by the time the official transect recording year had started. The first brood of Brown Argus were all finished by the end of May, but the Common Blues managed to linger on into early June.

So far, it looks a like a good year for the Skippers. Recording Large Skippers started three weeks earlier than last year. These have been seen all over the Meadow and three pairs were seen chasing each other over the bramble close to Homesteads Road. Small Skippers have been seen nearly four weeks early.

Such an early start may help the later broods of Common Blue, Brown Argus, Small Tortoiseshell and Small Copper. The Common Blue may manage a third brood that could be on the wing during October. On 14th June, the first Marbled White was seen, a good two weeks earlier than usual.



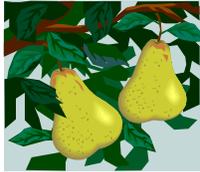
< A Large Skipper basking in the sun on Yellow Rattle. The black "sex band" on the fore-wing show it's a male.

A male Common Blue > nectaring on Bird's-foot Trefoil. The female's eggs are laid on this flower.



Our hedgehogs.....

.....from Hart Wildlife Rescue that we reported on in the March Newsletter were released as planned in the Old Orchard and on Down Grange Meadow. The one in the Orchard, sadly, did not survive, but we hope that the two in the Meadow have now settled in to their new home.



Fruit and flowers in the Old Orchard

Helped by the warm spring the fruit trees have set a bumper crop. After a couple of years of flowering but not setting any fruit, we now have a good crop of quinces swelling on the tree.

We are consulting on the best arrangements for the distribution of fruit. Our guiding principles are:

- as a community orchard, local residents will be offered it first,
- the fruit will be distributed fresh when picked,
- any income from the fruit will go towards the upkeep of the orchard,
- we are happy for residents to make jams, chutneys and other preserves. If sold the proceeds should go to local good causes,
- we are keen to support fruit cooking and preserving skills.

Any comments or suggestions will be welcomed.

Our programme of meadow flower introduction in the Orchard is going well. Two years ago we seeded some small patches which now look like this:



This year the major sections between the fruit trees were seeded and we hope this glorious display will be repeated there next year.

Why not visit the Orchard the next time you are passing?



At the Old Hedgerow.....

We have started to return shrubs and flowers to the Hedgerow as the original elements continue to decline and fall. Where the live hedge is thinnest a dead hedging line is being created. This will be used as the basis for shrub planting and perennial flowers, such as Foxgloves, which flowered so well this year.

Would you like to join us?

The committee has a couple of vacancies that we would like to see filled. It's interesting work that doesn't take up too much time. Why not contact us to find out more? See page 1 for details of how to contact us..