



FRIENDS OF ASHENGROUND AND BOLNORE WOODS

CONSERVATION : PROTECTION : ENHANCEMENT : ENJOYMENT

NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2013



Ashenground Wood in March 2013 - The snow and the bitter wind kept coming but the daffodils were not to be beaten

I don't need to tell any of you how slow Spring has been in coming this year. And still the bitter winds persist in early April! This long period of cold and wet weather will impact on our eco system. Migrant birds are few and far between, breeding is delayed, and it's thought that some of our favourite species such as the chiffchaff might produce only half their expected broods. Other birds such as blackbirds, robins and song thrushes will find it hard to locate food to feed their young. Some of our dwindling hedgehog population may not wake up from hibernation. There will be less food for the hedgehogs that do wake up as beetles, slugs, caterpillars and worms will be in short supply. Badgers will struggle to find earthworms. And experts say there is little sign of the great crested newt. Please continue to report your wildlife sightings to Lorraine to help us monitor the impact on our woods.

In this edition of the newsletter you will find information about **Conservation, Forest School, Hornbeams on the bridleway**, the **Haywards Heath Half Marathon**, plus **Railway Shaw**. We also explain the long running saga about the **bridleway lights!** Do look on the back page for information about some up and coming events – including an **Early Morning Bird Walk** and a **Photography Afternoon**. **Janice Tipping**

Find us on Facebook – Jason Peters tells us how!

As many of you will know, **Facebook** has over one billion users worldwide with over thirty two million of those being in the UK (i.e. more than half of the population!), so it makes sense to have a Facebook Page for a community organisation like ours. It means we can reach many more people with our news, as an interesting resource for those that are already members and as a means of gaining more support from those that use and care about the woods within the wider community. A Facebook Page allows us to quickly share information and photographs for all to see. People can **'Like'** the page so that our postings show up on their homepage, keeping them up-to-date, and interact with us directly by linking, sharing and making comments on our postings or by posting their own content. Visit the page here: <https://www.facebook.com/FoABW> Please **'Like'** the Page and then start interacting with us and our supporters. Please share the page with your Facebook friends and anyone else that you think might be interested in what we are doing. The more the merrier! ☺ **NB:** You don't have to be a Facebook user to view the Page, so please do check it out! If you've any questions or suggestions, please send a message via the Page or email me on jason.peters@me.com

Conservation Work

Many aspects of our work in our LNR are dictated by the effects of the increasingly heavy footfall on the ground and ground vegetation as the number of people visiting the woods increases. Part of our remit as a group is to keep and improve the woods as a place of recreation and healing, so with that hat on we are pleased about this. It is now widely recognised that people's well-being is improved by being among trees, fields and gardens. But our other aim is to preserve and protect the natural habitat and the creatures that live in it. And that is really beginning to suffer. Plants do not grow where the ground has been trampled, and there are increasing areas of bare, hard earth.

We have been putting up short lengths of fencing where there is need, to let the ground recover, and we may have to increase the area this covers. We ask people to keep to the made up paths, but detours are appearing as people try to avoid the muddy bits.



We have also now created a new clearing, round the area where a large oak has fallen in the north west of the wood. Many twiggy 'wigwams' mark the coppiced hazel. We hope this will be as successful as the other clearings, letting light into the wood.

Gill Rogers

Railway Shaw

Following consultation with FoABW, tree surgeons working for Crest Nicholson have cleared a route hugging the railway shaw embankment for a footpath to link the foot of Great Haywards field with the bridleway. The path itself will be constructed later in the year to a similar

specification to those in Ashenground Wood. If walking this route now, please be aware of barbed wire that has been exposed. The path should provide an easy, attractive and dry route that will reduce footfall through the more environmentally sensitive Four Acre & Pond Meadows – the latter in particular needs the opportunity to regenerate after the creation of the balancing ponds. Other work has been done in the railway shaw itself to remove hazardous trees and to allow in more light to improve the range of flora.



Peter McKerchar

Forest School

This has taken place in Catts Wood this year, but swamped ground has made life very difficult. We thought a stone circle would give them a firm base for their campfire activities, and this they now have, after a great concerted effort by friends and parents to barrow tons of stone chips from Cattswood Lane. The circle is softened with wood chips, and dead hedges behind the seats give some privacy. We hope this will protect the woodland by enabling them to stay in one spot.



Haywards Heath Half Marathon and Grant from Haywards Heath Town Council

This is being run through our woods again this year on **Sunday 5th May**. We intend to put special rails along some of the paths where runners went off the path last year, and with the help of the grant from HHTC, and support from MSDC, we have purchased an earth auger to help us make the holes for the posts. We will also be providing official marshals to help with the run through Ashenground Wood.



Railway path during last year's event

The Bridleway Lights

Q. Why aren't the Bridleway lights working?

A. They have been vandalised. Again.

Q. Why doesn't someone fix them then?

A. They have been fixed, and vandalised, and fixed and vandalised, and so on ... again ... and ... again and again.

Q. Then why weren't more robust ones fitted?

A. Good question. A large part of the difficulty is to find equipment that isn't liable to criminal attack, yet satisfies other criteria. They have been already *completely replaced* with new fittings once.

Q. Well, why did they refit with inadequate replacements?

A. Crest who fitted them hoped the new ones would be strong enough. We warned they would not be robust. They were fitted nevertheless, and lasted only a few weeks before they failed again.

Q. Is vandalism the only problem, then?

A. No - theft has been a major issue too. The complete wiring system has been

replaced at least twice. Trouble is, any metal with significant resale value has been targeted by thieves in recent years. Just ask the railway or electricity companies.

Q. So what happens next?

A. FoABW, BVRA and others together with many councillors want to know this too. WSCC who now are responsible have asked the supplier (not Crest - it's a PFI contract... but another story) to propose a robust replacement. We are unconvinced by their current suggestion.

Q. Why are their lights there at all? It's in ancient woodland...

A. True, but the provision of lights is a requirement of Sussex Police. The lights fitted have to be 'bat friendly' among other things. It is another constraint, but an achievable one.

Q. Well street lights work, so why can't they make these ones work?

A. Street lights are concreted into solid roads, and are open to view. The bridleway is not, and FoABW would strenuously object to making a solid road, as would many others. And it would cost millions of pounds. No-one has that sort of money to fix the lights.

Q. Catch 22, eh?

A. Something like that.

Q. So what happens next?

A. FoABW and the other groups are asking this question, and we know our councillors want an answer too. It's starting to look as if the cost to achieve lighting will be so large that it will greatly exceed any possible benefit that might ever be achieved. And we think that any further investment should *ONLY* be done *AFTER* alternative equipment has been fully tested against theft and vandalism. Let's not pour money down the drain! We'll keep you posted...

Stuart Meier

Reporting Wildlife and Flora Sightings

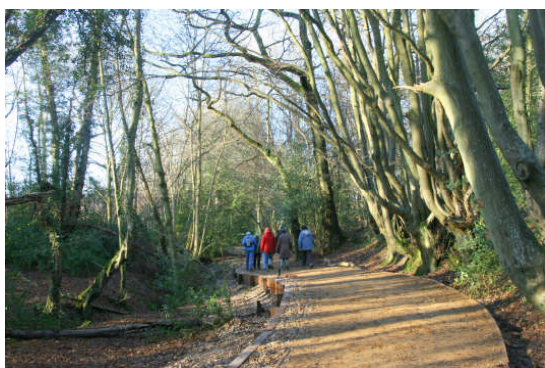
FoABW would like to appeal to all visitors to the nature reserve for **reports of both common and unusual sightings of birds and other wildlife plus flora**.

This will help us monitor changes in the wildlife and flora in our LNR. Our bird/wildlife monitor Lorraine says 'nothing is too common to report'.

Reports to **Lorraine** - 01444 450997 or e-mail: Petal1948@aol.com

Hornbeams

A considerable amount of tree work has to be undertaken before various pieces of woodland can be transferred by Crest to MSDC ownership. The ancient hornbeams on the bridleway had been coppiced over many years – probably several hundred – but have not been cut for about 50 years. Many of the branches had become very tall, and some were leaning down over the bridleway, or had already broken off. Crest's tree specialist insisted that coppicing was necessary for the health of the trees.



Hornbeams on the bridleway – before and after the removal of the top few feet

With MSDC we argued that this should be done over a period of time, to cause less shock to the trees. The top ten feet or so have been removed from a group of trees. They will be cut again, to a lower level, but still to a high pollard (well above the hedge height) in three years' time. Other groups will be similarly treated in the autumn. It's hard to tell anything has happened, the trees are so tall! The branches cut off will be left beside the bridleway to create extra shelter and habitat.

Gill Rogers

Getting Involved

Please join us on one or all of the following special events:

Saturday 27th April. ***Early Morning Bird Walk***. Phil Clay will help us hear and see the birds in our nature reserve. Meet on Ashenground Bridge (end of Ashenground Road) at 6.30 a.m.

Sunday 12th May. ***Spring Flower Walk***. Meet on Ashenground Bridge at 10.00 a.m.

Saturday 25th May. ***Nature Photography Afternoon***. Photographer Linda Howard will lead a photography afternoon for all levels of ability – from beginners to experienced. We will be photographing the flora and fauna in our woods. Meet on Ashenground Bridge at 3.30 p.m.

Programmes on the notice boards. Our **website** has our Newsletters, latest Programme, photographs, bird/wildlife reports, surveys, and details of special events. **www.foabw.com**

And of course don't forget our Facebook page: **<https://www.facebook.com/FoABW>**

Join us for **Conservation Work**. We meet each month on the **1st Sunday** (meeting place Ashenground Bridge) and **3rd Saturday** (meeting place the Thatched Cottage in Bolnore Village). Meeting time 10.00 a.m. No expertise needed – a warm welcome and refreshment break awaits. We also now meet on the **2nd Wednesday** every month at 10.30 a.m. – contact Stuart on 441645 for more information and details of where to meet.

General Information – Contact Janice on 07752 003529 or janicetipping@aol.com

Bird & other Wildlife Sightings – Contact Lorraine on 01444 450997 or Petal1948@aol.com

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