



NEWSLETTER OF THE

POWDERMILL TRUST

FOR NATURE CONSERVATION



SPRING 2011

MARSH MARIGOLDS & ORANGE TIP
BUTTERFLYS AT POWDERMILL WOOD
NATURE RESERVE - BATTLE IN
APRIL & MAY.



'Completion of Hicks' Highway at Rotherfield Reserve autumn 2010'



'Green-winged Orchid in a Battle churchyard (May 2010) Ralph Hobbs'

The Powdermill Trust is a registered charity that helps conserve wildlife and safeguards natural landscapes. The Trust has nature reserves at Powdermill Wood, Crowhurst and Rotherfield.

Members receive a well-illustrated newsletter twice a year. They are given guided walks round the reserves, to which they have free access at all times. Free advice is given on wildlife matters.

Registered Company No 3841637 Registered Charity No 1121510
Registered Office 79A Vale Road St Leonards-on-Sea East Sussex TN37 6PX
Affiliated to BTCV and Sussex Wildlife Trust

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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor, nor of the Powdermill Trust.

Many of you will have noticed the error in the picture caption on the back cover of the last newsletter. The butterfly was a Comma, not a Brimstone. This was because Dominic Hicks' colour photocopier, while excellent at reproducing photographs, is no use at all at butterfly identification.

You missed
the dawn
Chorus?

I know ... Forget
the clocks
altered last
night!



Derek's Chat

Dear Members,

It was a turn-up for the books to have a heavy downfall of snow in early December. I have always held the belief that if a prolific crop of holly and hawthorn berries occurs in the autumn then a harsh winter will ensue. I smiled wryly that my prediction came true suddenly and early.

Love it or hate it, you cannot deny that the snow produced magical scenery and ambient silence of thick falling snowflakes; most blessed of all was the total stoppage of motor traffic noise with cars reduced to becoming white mounds in people's driveways. I relished the joy of walking to my local nature reserve where nocturnal animal tracks criss-crossed the pristine snow unadulterated by any signs of human intrusion.

In the knee-deep snow it was interesting to note that foxes jump instead of trotting and similarly rabbits take extra-long hops. Here a crow or jay had buried an acorn leaving an imprint of wings when taking flight. By midday, families were out and about discovering this new world, parents unable to get to work and schools closed, some saying it was all the fault of the council, delighted children being pulled along on long-stored toboggans.



The colourful WAXWING

The usually scarce winter visitor



This snow-fall was considered to have been the worst for years, causing all sorts of chaos. I smile again (looking sympathetic of course), remembering the severe snow of 1947 in south-east London on the Kent border as a small boy, when the front door was opened to reveal a wall of drifted snow almost to the top of the door-frame and my father spent days tunnelling through to where he thought the road was, which was devoid of lamp-posts or road-signs which otherwise might have helped as markers. The arctic conditions persisted and I will never forget my father bringing home starved little bodies of sparrows and blue-tits frozen to death.

Such snowy conditions however produce winter migrant birds and I was amazed to see on the news that people working on ships and oil-rigs in the North Sea were feeding flocks of chaffinches. Such was the influx in January 2011 of flocks of waxwings from Siberia in prolific numbers the whole length of Britain, feeding on berried trees

and shrubs in parks, gardens and supermarket car parks. Flocks could be mistaken for starlings as they are about the same size.

My bird-table saw a new bird in the snowy weather: a pied wagtail which must have been very hungry, causing me to jump in fright as it swooped down inches from my face when I was putting out food on the bird-table. Normally a bird that pecks about in the lawn and paths picking up insects, the attraction to the bird-table was dried mealworms which my robin relishes. Now the wagtail has become a permanent visitor, competing with the now-deposed robin. The wagtail during this cold spell roosted in my conservatory during the night. It seems that was the first and last of the white stuff this winter and all those berries kept birds and small mammals going.

If you would like to conjure up a snow-scene at home, sit back, close your eyes and listen to Saint-Saens' *Carnival of the Animals*, 'The Aquarium', and let your mind do the rest – it's very realistic. It's true! If you don't believe in the power of music, try it.

Derek Bates

Moth Watch

We will be holding two public moth nights in 2011 to observe these wonderful, yet rarely seen insects, in the company of Ralph Hobbs, Chairman of the Powdermill Trust.

Powdermill Wood

8pm Saturday 7 May, and 8am Sunday 8 May

Meet in the Powdermill Reserve carpark (Grid Ref TQ735144) at each start time.

Rotherfield nature reserve

7pm Saturday 10 September, and 9am Sunday 11 September

Meet in the Rotherfield Reserve carpark (Grid Ref TQ556291) at each start time

The Saturday evening sessions will start with the setting up and demonstration of the special light trap, in time to witness the first moth arrivals at dusk. Then the following morning there will be a full examination of the night's catch with opportunities for moth photography.

Non-members, members, friends, and children (accompanied by an adult) are all welcome, but sorry dogs and moth-traps don't mix! There is no need to book, just choose evening or morning session, or both. Evening visitors will benefit from bringing a torch and appropriate footwear for walking in woodland. The location of the trap will be obvious or well sign-posted for anyone arriving late.

Only if there is heavy or persistent rain might the event be cancelled. For further information in advance or on the night, please contact Ralph Hobbs on 07763 151787.

All records will be published in the Powdermill Trust members' newsletter and also submitted to the Sussex Biological Records Centre.

Ralph Hobbs

New Homes for Bumble Bees

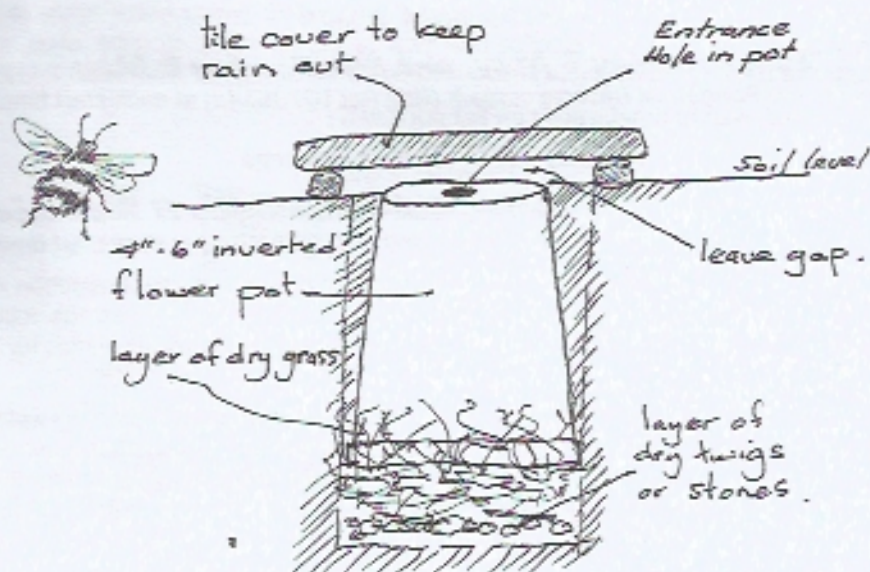
You will have observed by now (in March) the huge dark furry bumble bees buzzing around the garden and undergrowth searching for crevices and holes as nest-sites. These are the queen bees of *Bombus terrestris* on the lookout for disused mouse nest-holes in dry grassy banks under hedges preferably. We are encouraged by every wildlife society to help bees wherever we can, as they are most important for pollination of fruit trees for example and for an abundance of wildflower species.

Dig out a small hole in a dry sunny bank or soil-heap in a warm well-drained situation and place a layer of dry twigs or stones in the bottom of the hole and cover with a layer of dry grass. An inverted 4" - 6" flower-pot with a hole in the base is placed on top of the grass and twigs. The base of the pot should be level with the surrounding soil.

A roofing tile or cover is placed over the pot to keep the rain out, leaving a gap underneath for the bees to access the entrance, and then stand back for the bees to find this 'des res'. Nectar-bearing flowers in the garden are essential

Make two or more around the garden or field as badgers will destroy them to get the nest. In late autumn remove the pot to see if you have any finished wax cells. Queen bumble bees hibernate in thick dry grass protected from the wet.

Derek Bates

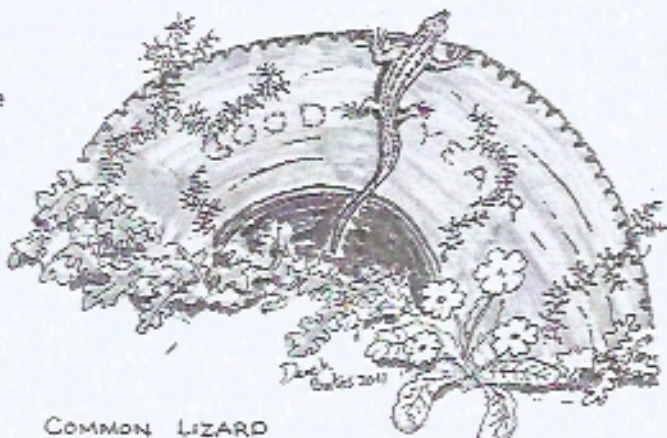


MAN-MADE BUMBLE BEES' NEST

oured glossy leaflet professionally produced via the splendid efforts of Barry Hawkins, Trustee and manager of the Rotherfield nature reserve.

Spot the Lizard

Common lizards are about now, basking in the sunshine in warm situations. You might be lucky to see these 'solar-powered' reptiles; they are very quick and disappear at the slightest movement. It's very frustrating to have spotted your lizard basking and have spent fifteen minutes gradually creeping up on one to have it disappear like lightning when a dragonfly flies over it. The best thing is to have close-focus binoculars, or wait patiently for it to return.



COMMON LIZARD
basking in the sunshine on an old car
tyre at Crowhurst Nature Reserve.
The rubber absorbs the sun's heat
ideal for re-charging a lizard's mobility.



A Lizard's skin is formed of an intricate pattern of scales so typical of all lizards throughout the world.

Should you get lucky and catch one, usually on a cool day when it is slower, do not hold it by the tail which may come off. This is its escape mechanism. I expect many a cat has been surprised at losing its catch. It will eventually grow a new tail.

Derek Bates

Rotherfield Nature Reserve

Annual open day

Sunday 31st July, 10am – 4pm.

Come and enjoy the meadow flowers at their peak, and learn how to identify them.

Around Sussex...

As part of an occasional series, we are showcasing small nature reserves around East Sussex which are managed by volunteers, on principles similar to the Powdermill Trust's.

Church Wood, Ninfield

In 1995, a small Ancient Woodland west of the parish church was acquired by Ninfield Parish Council, and a group of villagers stepped forward to look after it. The Wednesday Volunteers, a local group of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers which I continue to lead, was called in to help.

Church Wood is traversed by a public footpath, parts of which were a quagmire, bordered by broad bare tracts as visitors tried to bypass the mud and their footfalls killed the Bluebells and Wood Anemones. Improving the path was clearly a priority. As most of the trees in the wood were overstood coppice stools which would benefit from cutting, we decided to crop the chestnut and bridge the swamp with an elevated boardwalk. Naturalised chestnut timber varies in quality (canny timber-merchants used to wait for rain before buying a standing crop: if the water made straight runnels down the young bark, the timber was straight-grained and valuable; if they spiralled, it was twisty and tough). Fortunately, the chestnut in Church Wood is first-rate: easily cleft into straight, smooth lengths. We made one 12-metre handrail out of the halves of a single 6-metre long log.

Working in such wet ground has its pitfalls. Lay a tool on the ground and it will sink, millimetre by millimetre. After one day's work our crowbar was nowhere to be found; fortuitously, one of our volunteers owned a metal detector, which he brought on our next visit. Where he found a strong signal, we dug: and there, a spit's depth in swamp, was our crowbar.

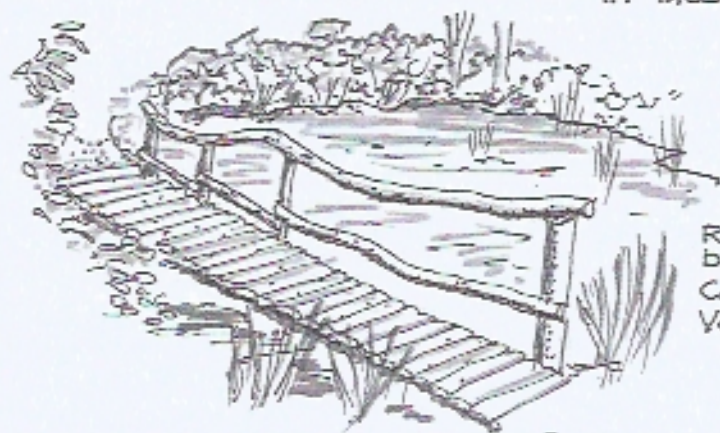
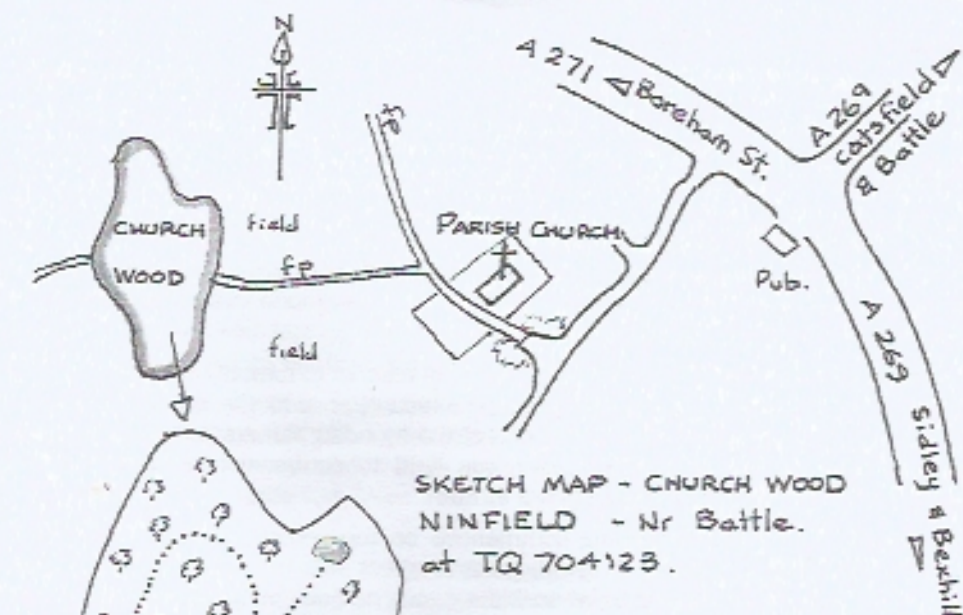
Chestnut is one of the most durable of wild-growing timbers, but much of our original pathwork has now in the natural course of things had to be renewed by the County Council, who use standard tanalised softwood. (After all, felling a pine tree in Estonia with a giant machine, shipping it to Britain, then transporting it by road to a factory where it is pressure-treated with poisonous chemicals, then transporting it again to the Council depot, and then transporting it into the wood, all by machine, is much more sustainable, isn't it?)

Lots of animals which have already gone extinct in Britain used to impact dramatically on the local ecology. Wild elephants will have knocked the trees down, coppicing them just like volunteers do today. Giant wild cattle (Aurochs) will have grazed young trees and brambles, keeping some areas as grassland. Cave lions will have preyed on the cattle (and the odd passing human, presumably), preventing over-population. And, in wet places like Church Wood, beavers will have coppiced the younger trees and dammed the stream to make ponds.

Today, volunteers fill all these roles (except for getting eaten by the lions). At Church Wood, where the villagers still work on Wednesdays, two ponds have now been made, and there is a circular trail, a picnic site, and several seats where you can sit and watch the woodland wildlife.

Owen Johnson

Church Wood is at the bottom of the steep footpath from the parish church at TQ704123.



News from the Reserves

Rotherfield

Autumn/winter activities

We started our annual meadow mowing earlier in September by cutting our neighbour's grass at 'The Glen' (in return for the usual donation). The ground was reasonably dry and this made the normally strenuous task somewhat easier.

On October 17th Jean Hicks and family came to the reserve to formally open the newly-laid 100-metre-long Fittleworth Stone path from the main entrance to 'the landslip'. The path is dedicated to the memory of John Hicks, one of the founding fathers and leading lights of the Powdermill Trust. A small ceremony was held to commemorate this event. This improvement has been a boon through the winter!

On this same day meadow mowing commenced on the central meadow and adjacent areas. As the conditions were still good, great progress was made. The final cut was in November when most of the devil's-bit scabious seeds had fallen. Approximately two acres of vegetation were cut and removed to avoid over-fertilising the ground and to reduce grass growth and encourage more wild flowers.

The annual volunteers' Christmas Lunch was held at the King's Arms and was attended by 20 members and guests.

Winter work parties

New fencing was erected between the main entrance gate and the roadside hedge. For the second year running, the roadside hedge was cut by a local contractor, saving us a lot of strenuous work under hazardous conditions. The inside was then cut and brambles cleared to complete the job.

Over the Christmas period, a deer became trapped by its antlers in the rope barrier around the pond. Unfortunately unable to free itself, it died as a consequence. It was found partly eaten by foxes and was subsequently buried nearby. (All the rope has now been removed.)

Coppicing of the larger trees in the hedgerow of the upper meadow and woodland boundary was completed to enable to smaller hazels etc. to grow to a suitable size for hedgelaying in the future. The remainder of the very large laurels on the western boundary were felled, cut up and stacked, to form habitats for various creatures. Native trees (ash, oak etc.) were then planted in this area. Other areas of the reserve were also planted with hazel, yew, holly, hawthorn, etc. Two very large wild cherry trees were uprooted by the wind near the bottom bridge and one, which had fallen across two paths, was cut up. Also, a large oak which had fallen two years ago was cut through to re-open the path.

Fencing on the Grub Reed boundary was re-erected after the original posts had rotted through. Ferns and tussock grass were also re-located to open up the areas in which they were growing. Path-levelling and ditch-clearance were also carried out as part of the necessary ongoing maintenance.

Flora and fauna

This year the spring flowers seem to be more abundant. Whether this is due to a more traditional winter or not, I do not know. However, the primroses have increased in number and look like bright jewels among the leaf-litter. The wild daffodils which were planted about 12 years ago have multiplied from 80 bulbs to well over a thousand and are spreading quite a distance from their original location. Once again, the early purple orchids have increased in number from around 38 last year to around 40 this year. Five years ago we only had around nine plants. Wood anemones, milkmaids (lady's smock) and other spring flowers are also looking very good. The blackthorn and cherry trees are beginning to blossom and the leaves are bursting forth on the trees and shrubs. Spring is here at last!

The bluebells should put on a spectacular display this year and some are already in bloom in early April. They should be at their best from mid-April to mid-May. They are certainly worth seeing. Common spotted orchids are also showing signs of growth in many areas of the reserve. Yellow rattle has been sown in the grass around the carpark to discourage grass vigour.

Apart from the birds we expect to find on the reserve, we have been visited by a woodcock, which has been seen on a few occasions. Nuthatches are once again nesting in the Centre Oak, in a different hole this time, and maybe more species will take up residence in the usual places.

Deer are increasing in numbers and are usually seen on most visits to the reserve. Much damage is being done to trees and new growth on coppiced stools. Rabbits, foxes, badgers etc. still visit and something has carried out a massive excavation inside the old encrusted oak in the north-east corner. Frog-spawn has turned into tadpoles in the old pond and, hopefully, will develop into frogs.

Summer tasks

Most of the major tasks have been completed. However, there is still fencing to repair/replace; paths to maintain; steps to lay; the 'quarry' bank to clear; fallen trees to deal with and any other tasks that require our attention.

If anyone would like to spend an hour or two in the company of a lively bunch of people in beautiful surroundings, then please come along to one of our work-parties, normally on the first Tuesday and third Sunday of each month, 10am to around 3.30. You will be made very welcome.

Also, don't forget that members have access to the Powdermill Trust's reserves at all times and these are certainly worth a visit in every season to see the best that nature can offer. Why not take a flask of coffee and a sandwich and sit under the Centre Oak to take in the views? There are chairs in the Bothy to use. (Please replace after use.) Please be careful on the sloping paths as they can be slippery, particularly after rain.

Barry Hawkins
Reserve Manager
6th April 2011

Powdermill Wood

In the eastern area, the glade on the north track was thoroughly cleared of bracken and bramble which has somewhat shaded out the ground flora. The devils-bit scabious benefitted from this clearance with slightly increased numbers in September. The bramble and grass verge to the path across the dam was strimmed twice to encourage floral diversity. Where the tall trees were coppiced along the south track, leaf-litter and timber was cleared to enhance the regenerating flora. Some planting of devils-bit scabious and primroses was carried out. New wire mesh was fixed to the surface of the boardwalk, and leaning trees above it were cut down. A heavy chestnut post-and-rail guardrail was erected as a safely barrier over the culvert on the south track.

In the western area, the glade was cleared of bramble and over-shading vegetation, which has resulted in a much-improved flora. The march marigold however is still being nibbled by rabbits, reducing its rate of increase. Various trees had fallen across the paths and these were cut up.



WHERE TO SEE THE STUNNING DISPLAY OF
MARSH MARIGOLDS IN APRIL/MAY
EITHER SIDE OF THE BOARDWALK AT
POWDERMILL WOOD NATURE RESERVE,
BATTLE. (Map in car park.)

My gratitude is extended to the conservation volunteers for their much-valued work.

Derek Bates
Reserve Manager

Bluebells – observe the difference



ENGLISH BLUEBELL
Endymion non-scriptus

SPANISH BLUEBELL
Endymion hispanicus

The English woodland is famed the world over for its bluebell woods. The wild bluebell occurs in Scotland where it is called the blue hyacinth (the 'bluebell' here refers to the harebell, *Campanula rotundifolia*). The other bluebell is an introduction called the Spanish bluebell, *Endymion hispanicus*, which is now a frequent garden flower. The Trust's Powdermill Wood nature reserve has the native bluebell in the surrounding woodland, and within half a mile it is exclusively the Spanish bluebell in the grounds of the famous Battle Abbey where it is now naturalised. (Incidentally here may be found colonies of the 'Scottish bluebell', the harebell, growing in and on top of the ancient stone walls.)

The species hybridise easily and hybrid offspring are now appearing everywhere, meaning that there is a risk that 'pure-bred' native bluebells will in time be lost as a species.

Visit the Rotherfield nature reserve in May (around the 8th) and experience the wondrous sight and drink in the heady scent of the English bluebells; look out for the occasional 'whitebell' here.

Derek Bates

Events, Summer 2011

Maintaining and where possible enhancing the ecology of our nature reserves is the heart of the Powdermill Trust's activities. At each of our work parties there are things going on which are suitable for volunteers of all ages and abilities (though under 16s must be accompanied by a responsible adult). So please don't be put off by the fear that the work will be too demanding for you, or will require too much existing expertise, or that you cannot make a regular commitment. Even the odd hour each year will help the Trust to fulfil its commitments, and you will be led by expert conservationists and taught any skills you don't already have.

Work parties run from 10am to 3pm. Please bring suitable footwear, work gloves, a packed lunch and something to drink. Tools are all provided. The reserve managers will be able to answer any queries you have:

Powdermill Wood Derek Bates (01424 425538)

Rotherfield Reserve Barry Hawkins (01892 852120)

Crowhurst Reserve Paul Johnson (01424 830304)

May	Tuesday 3 rd Rotherfield work-party. Saturday 7 th Moth trapping night, Powdermill Wood. Sunday 8 th Opening the moth trap, Powdermill Wood. Sunday 15 th Rotherfield work-party.
June	Tuesday 7 th Rotherfield work-party Sunday 19 th Rotherfield work-party.
July	Tuesday 5 th Rotherfield work-party. Sunday 17 th Rotherfield work-party. Sunday 31 st Rotherfield reserve open day.
August	Tuesday 2 nd Rotherfield work-party. Sunday 21 st Rotherfield work-party.
September	Tuesday 6 th Rotherfield work-party. Saturday 10 th Moth trapping night, Rotherfield. Sunday 11 th Opening the moth trap, Rotherfield. Sunday 18 th Rotherfield work-party.



'Path complete!'



Mullein Moth caterpillars can be found on Great Mullein in May and June. Their exposed position and bright markings remind birds they do not make a tasty meal! Ralph Hobbs