

REPORT FOR WORKPARTY WEDNESDAY 6TH FEBRUARY 2013

10.30am to 1.15pm

Weather dry, cold 2 degrees Centigrade, northerly wind then started to sleet 1pm

Attendees: Wardens: Simon Braidman

Martin Elliot and John Bugler

Task: To Continue clearing up Bluebell Heath.

More tape was removed and more timber moved to south eastern clearance area.

Weather got very poor and we finished early in sleet which gradually got worse.

Next Tasks Finish clearing tape and timber removal. If weather ok (warmer) will do photosurvey.

OTHER NEWS

Friday 8th February visit by Leslie Williams of Brent Council to look at Bluebell Heath project and its applications to Fryent Country Park.

Publicity drive for Stanmore Common, Bluebell Heath and other harrow reserves using posters, leaflets and standing pull up banners. Areas Covered so far parts of Stanmore, North Harrow, Edgware, Harrow, Pinner. Areas to cover Harrow, South Harrow, Hatch End, Bushey Heath, Bushey, Rayners Lane. Anyone interested in helping contact Simon

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY SUNDAY 17TH FEBRUARY 2013

ATTENDEES: WARDENS:- SIMON BRAIDMAN AND VANESSA MARLOW

RAJINDER HAYER, MARGARET GRIFFIN, YUNXI SHI, JOHN BUGLER, JOHN WINTER, DAVID GREEN, ALLAN SMITH, MARIANNE SMITH.

FROM STANMORE COLLEGE: DARIO CELASHI, PALLY PANDI, NATHANAEL MANIR.

10.30AM TO 3.40PM

WEATHER 3.5 DEGREES CENTIGRADE SUNNY EASTERLY WIND

TASK

To carry on the cleanup of Bluebell Heath post contractual work.

BACKGROUND TO BLUEBELL HEATH PROJECT

The £41,000 lottery project is a 3 year project to restore acid grassland habitat in the largest clearing on Stanmore Common Local Nature Reserve.

Acid grassland is a very rare habitat in London. The soil is of low quality; poor in nutrients, but because it is nutrient poor it supports a unique suite of plants and animals adapted to the harsh conditions.

The clearing had become degraded as trees invaded the grassland threatening to shade out the ground layer plants and their fallen leaves rotting, fertilising the soil, reducing acidity levels and promoting common plants such as Nettles, Docks over much rarer species such as Tormentil.



Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) a member of the Rose family a typical acid grassland flower



This species of Centipede (*Lithobius lapidicola*) is found in acid grassland

This habitat has already been successfully restored on an adjacent parcel of land called New Heath which was done in 2008.

This is the first year of the project and the major works on the clearing have just finished (October 2012 to February 2013) Contractors with chainsaws have cleared many of the trees from the clearing and a sub-contractor with bulldozers have stripped off the fertile topsoil from areas just north of Bluebell Heath creating areas known as scrapes.

The volunteers will henceforth control the tree level on the clearing, maintaining an open, grassy/flowery environment, yet still retaining all the old trees and some young trees.

The scrapes will have their original acid grassland seedbank exposed to the light and new plants will appear and insects will take advantage of the bare soil to nest in and sunbathe on. Heather seed from New Heath will be used to sow in the new scrapes.

The contractors had left lots of neat piles of cut timber all across Bluebell Heath. Dead wood piles have value for lots of wildlife but in full sun they dry out, especially if not in contact with the soil. Dry dead wood attracts less variety of wildlife. Also the piles of timber are in the open and present an attraction for those who want fires.

The Bulldozer tried to shift the piles but almost broke down so we decided to move the timber. Most of the timber was moved into the clear-fell area in the south east section of Flushing Wood or the downslope leading to it. A small amount was scattered into the woodland edge on the eastern boundary of Bluebell Heath and some over the brash dead hedge that fronts the southern edge of Flushing Wood.

A number of piles have been moved but a number about 7 remain. We will be calling back the contractors to move the rest.

After lunch we changed the work. We stripped out the remaining marker tape used for marking trees and blocks of trees for retention or removal.

All the road pins except those used for marking the fixed photographic points were removed. The fixed photographic points are positions where 360 degree photographs were taken before the work started.

Simon and John Winter went around checking the location of those points and driving the pins deeper into the ground. The work took them into the far west and north- west of the project area which had been largely unstripped of tape and pins and this material was removed. They did not complete going around all the photopoints.

By the end of the task all tape and pins were removed. The tape was thrown away and the pins returned to the tool store.

Margaret Griffin was working on her own collecting timber for her Forest School Project in Chiswick.

WILDLIFE

A pair of Buzzards over the far eastern end of Flushing Wood, being chased by Crows.



Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)

Late in the afternoon, perched on a map case was a jumping spider. Careful noting of the size shape and body pattern meant identification was possible. Of Britain's 36 species of Jumping Spider (Family Salticidae) this was *Marpissa mucosa*

This species occurs under loose tree bark. I have seen it once before on the top rail of a wooden footbridge at Bedfont Lakes Country Park.



The Jumping spider *Marpissa mucosa*

This may be a new record for the reserve.

A Big thank you to all of the volunteers. The clearing looks far better and clearer.

I hope Dario, Pally and Nat can make future work parties.

THE NEXT TASK IS TO MOVE TO THE CLEARING CALLED HOLLYBROOK RISE AND WE ARE FELLING TREES TO CREATE SUNTRAPS/LIGHTPATHS AND AN ELONGATION OF THE WOODLAND/GRASSLAND EDGE.

REPORT FOR WORKPARTY WEDNESDAY 6TH MARCH 2013

ATTENDEES : WARDEN SIMON BRAIDMAN

Neville Day, Zubair Aziz, Rick Cran, John Bugler, John Winter

It was good to see Nick back from his New Zealand trip. Amazing place only 4 million people. If I get some pictures I will circulate.

Weather dry cloudy

TASK

Clear up large Oak felled on south facing edge of HollyBrook Rise and to practise cross-cutting. Then to move to Bluebell Heath and practise on felled timber and look at timber stacking.

The felled oak was further tidied up and the cut timber was shifted into the woodland edge into semi shade. The use of a thick branch a lever helped to lever the trunk off the ground, releasing tension and compression within the trunk. This also allowed complete cuts to be made through the entire width of the wood without making tension and compression cuts so that the weight of the wood opened up any cut made.

We moved to Bluebell Heath and we looked at one of the timber stacks. Zubair said that the wood was not well stacked as the bigger stuff should be on the bottom and timber should all be cut to the same length.

Zubair also said the best practise on tension and compression cutting will be on felling trees. So we moved into the northern end of The Hawthorn's Walk which is the ride between Oakmead and Bluebell Heath.

We worked on removing Holly and we selected a largish Beech to fell to practise our felling and cutting technique.

We did not check the top of the tree and it hung up on a tree adjacent to it. In fact we cut right through the tree and it stayed up. We got the felling bar left by the contractor and tried to wedge it in but there was not enough of a gap in the cut to get leverage.

We had to cut wedges around the back cut to get leverage and this combined with everyone pushing we managed to slide the tree off the stump.

We cleared up the beech, which had blocked the Hawthorn's Walk ; which took some doing as we chose a bigger tree for its thick side branches

I have asked Zubair to produce an account of felling and compression and tension problems.

The effect of this work on The Hawthorn's Walk was immediate and the light levels are very good on this path. We have effectively created a clearing. We will continue work in this area of the reserve. One concern will be to keep some evergreen as a wind screen to the west. The cut Holly wall needs a tidy up.



John and Zubair Clearing up the large Beech felled in the Hawthorn's Walk

WILDLIFE

Scarlet Elf Cap or Scarlet Ruby Cap (*Sarcoscypha coccinea* or *Sarcoscypha austriacus*)





Tommorow Thursday 7th March the Trust For Conservation Volunteers (TCV was BTCV) are coming to Stanmore Common. The plan is to get them to work on The Hawthorn's Walk

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY ON WENESDAY 1ST MAY 2013

ATTENDEES:

WARDEN: SIMON BRAIDMAN

John Winter, Nathan Day, Samina Shamsuddin.

9.30 am to 3.30pm.

Weather, bright sunny, warm.

Steve Bolsover met us at the car park and we had to move the railway sleeper to be used for installing the new bench on Bluebell Heath.

It was very, very heavy, especially over the undulations. It took three of us with samina pushing the wheelbarrow of tools.

We hid the wood ready for installation. Someone had moved the metal pole marker for its position.

Group at work on a very beautiful day



The intention was to carry out Holly control in an area to the northwest of Bluebell Heath.

Our route took us past the clear fell area in the south east corner of Flushing Wood.

Investigation of the clear fell area revealed masses of Holly and new Bracken emerging.

The work was very successful we have removed almost all the emerging Holly and controlled the first Bracken shoots.

We moved on just south of the clear fell area onto Bluebell Heath itself and cleared Holly growing around the old Oak Trees along the north eastern corner and then we cleared Holly growing into the regenerating grassland areas in the north east corner.

Holly was removed by its roots if at all possible and even larger Holly Trees were attacked in this manner using Mattocks.

The new bracken will need controlling especially in the sensitive areas such as the Orchid field, the re-scraped areas on New Heath and their associated bare earth banks.

Also urgent work is required to control the new Birch saplings in New Heath.



REPORT FOR WORK PARTY SUNDAY 12TH may 2013

ATTENDEES: SIMON BRAIDMAN, JOHN BUGLER, JOHN WINTER, ALAN SMITH, DAVID GREEN, MARGARET GRIFFIN. NEVILLE DAY

10.30 am to 3.30pm

WEATHER SUNNY, WARM.

TASK

The task was to control Bracken, Bramble and saplings from New Heath and the Orchid Field.

The photograph below shows the problem of Bracken unfurling on one of the south facing bare earth banks in the north edge of New Heath.



Bracken on a bare earth bank on New Heath

The danger is that one the bank loses direct sunlight and also the Bracken will strengthen and spread.

Repeated pulling and pinching off of the shoots will weaken the Bracken.

The bare earth banks have been very successful and solitary bees and wasps have colonised them quickly.

To keep the banks open in the longer term it may be necessary either to pull some of the developing grass or even to spray the banks with Glyphosate.

Bonzo Bank East would not be sprayed as it has developing Foxgloves.

The saplings are largely Silver Birch and come from wind- blown seeds from existing Silver Birch around New Heath.

Other species included Rowan, Scots Pine and a few European Larch.



John's Bonzai European Larch

The Saplings were pulled by hand and where they were too entrenched, Mattocks, forks and a Lazy Dog were used. A lazy Dog consists of a lattice frame which supports a pronged blade which is used to lever out roots. It is effective on the larger saplings with complex, robust root systems.

A few odd bits of heather were pulled out but were replanted. The work was successful and a lot of material was removed. We will continue the work probably on the next work party on Wednesday.

Removing Bramble from New Heath was not easy but it did create soil disturbance which will create new colonising opportunities for plants and insects.

Gorse is increasing rapidly in New Heath. This is an important wildlife plant but it will grow into very large bushes and so the longer term intention is either to prune them to keep them smaller or to relocate them to the edge of New Heath.

Whilst most of the team was on New Heath, Neville was working in the Orchid Field and he was snapping off Bracken shoots there.

Orchids are up but are still small, numbers seem very low again and advice will be sought. The Orchid Field is a rich mixture of plants; dominant is Marsh Thistle a uncommon species in London terms but super abundant in this area. Also present is Wood Sage, St.John's Wort, Wild Angelica, Hawkweed, Betony , Common Dog Violet and Bluebells.

There is a lovely small wet patch just to the north west of the Orchid Field, it is a mass of Bitter-Cress and Soft Rush.

WILDLIFE

We heard a Cuckoo singing from just north of Bluebell Heath. This is now quite a rare bird.



A summer migrant from West Africa (radio tagged individuals were through France, Italy and Spain with their final destinations being the Congo. The poor summer in the UK last year and poor conditions en route can mean death to these long distance traveller's.

Cuckoos can eat caterpillars most birds find too bristly. Brown Tail Moth Caterpillars are rubbed against branches too snap off the hairs and their stomachs can cope with the mass of hair which they cough up as a pellet. Cuckoos have been recorded as parasitizing over 100 bird species, on Stanmore Common ;Dunnocks, Wrens and Robins will be their probable hosts. Each individual Female Cuckoo belongs to genetic group called a gente. Each gente parasitizes a specific group of host birds.

Their eggs closely match in size and colour their hosts eggs. The female Cuckoo waits until the host female leaves the nest and quickly flies in and takes an egg and lays one in it's place.

Cuckoos have the ability to held the eggs longer in the body then their hosts and due to this internal incubation, ensure that the Cuckoo embryo is more advanced and so is likely to hatch before the host chicks.

The baby Cuckoo will eject the eggs or babies of the host and mimicks the sound of a whole clutch of young.

The process is not infallible some hosts recognise the egg as alien and eject it or abandon the nest, occasionally the baby Cuckoo fails to eject the hosts chicks and has to compete with them. Such Cuckoos are underweight but do recover.

What has been noticed is that Cuckoo perches are used time and time again and host nests close to these perches are the most vulnerable.

OTHER NEWS

The new bench in Bluebell Heath has been installed. A Great Crested Newt survey was carried out at the Grove Ponds. None were found but both ponds were rich in pond life and particularly in Toad Tadpoles. One adult Toad was seen as was one Common or Smooth Newt. Pynding Mersc was searched for Great Crested Newts, none was found.

A new survey visit will happen this coming Wednesday evening meeting at the car park at 8pm. This visit will look at Pynding Mersc and then move to Bentley Priory to look at the pond in Bevan's Marsh.

A wildflower and spring walk took place on Saturday 4th May. Twelve people attended the walk in fine weather.

A bat walk took place on the reserve on Friday 10th May. Fifteen people turned up we saw lots of bats. Three species were determined; Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown-Long Eared Bats and Daubenton's Bat. The best areas were Pynding Mersc and Great Brewer's Pond.

Once we have the photostrips printed out of Bluebell Heath, we will be repeating the photosurvey.

If you can make just part of a workday please come. Any time given is welcome as there is a lot to do.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 15TH MAY 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Michelle Brandt, Sue Kabel, Tony Gourdin, Neville Day,

10.30am to 3.30pm

Weather a few rain showers, cloudy and cold

TASK

To continue the work in New Heath of clearing saplings, Bracken and Bramble.

It was fantastic to see Sue and Tony and a big thanks to Michelle who joined us instead of going on a ramble.

Hand pulling is sufficient for many saplings but Mattocks and Garden Forks were necessary as it does not take long for Birch Saplings to root deeply into the ground.

The work is hard as there are so many saplings but you can see the results.



Area of New Heath post sapling pulling.

The weather was poor and quite cold. Neville and myself stayed on as we had the bit in our teeth. Neville was digging out Bramble in the centre of New Heath. I was breaking off Bracken stems on and around the bare earth banks in the North of New Heath.

Pulled material such as Bramble was moved off the clearing over the bank along the western edge of New Heath.

At most one whole work party or part of one will get New Heath in excellent condition.

From there we will move into Bluebell Heath to control Bracken.

OTHER NEWS

On Wednesday night John Winter, Claire Abbott and myself surveyed Pynding Mersc on Stanmore Common for Great Crested Newt. There were toad tadpoles but no Great Crested Newts. We moved onto Bentley Priory to Bevan's Marsh and we saw Smooth Newts but no Great Crested Newts.

The next work party is Sunday 26th May

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY SUNDAY MAY 26TH 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Rajinder Hayer, David Green, Neville Day, Zubair Aziz.

10.30am to 3.10pm

Weather: warm 16 degrees centigrade sunny

TASK

The intention was to continue the work in New Heath. We took the usual route of walking through Witling Glade and across Hollybrook Rise. Now temperatures were normal and plant growth was accelerating, the Bracken had emerged and was unfurling. One look showed that some Bracken control was necessary so we stopped there first.

Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) is a fern tolerant of dry conditions. Native to Britain it is an aggressive plant which can shade out and outcompete other slower growing plants. Bracken also produces chemicals which slow down the growth of their competitors.

Bracken has about 30 insect species which feed on it and it does form important micro-climates for some plant species.

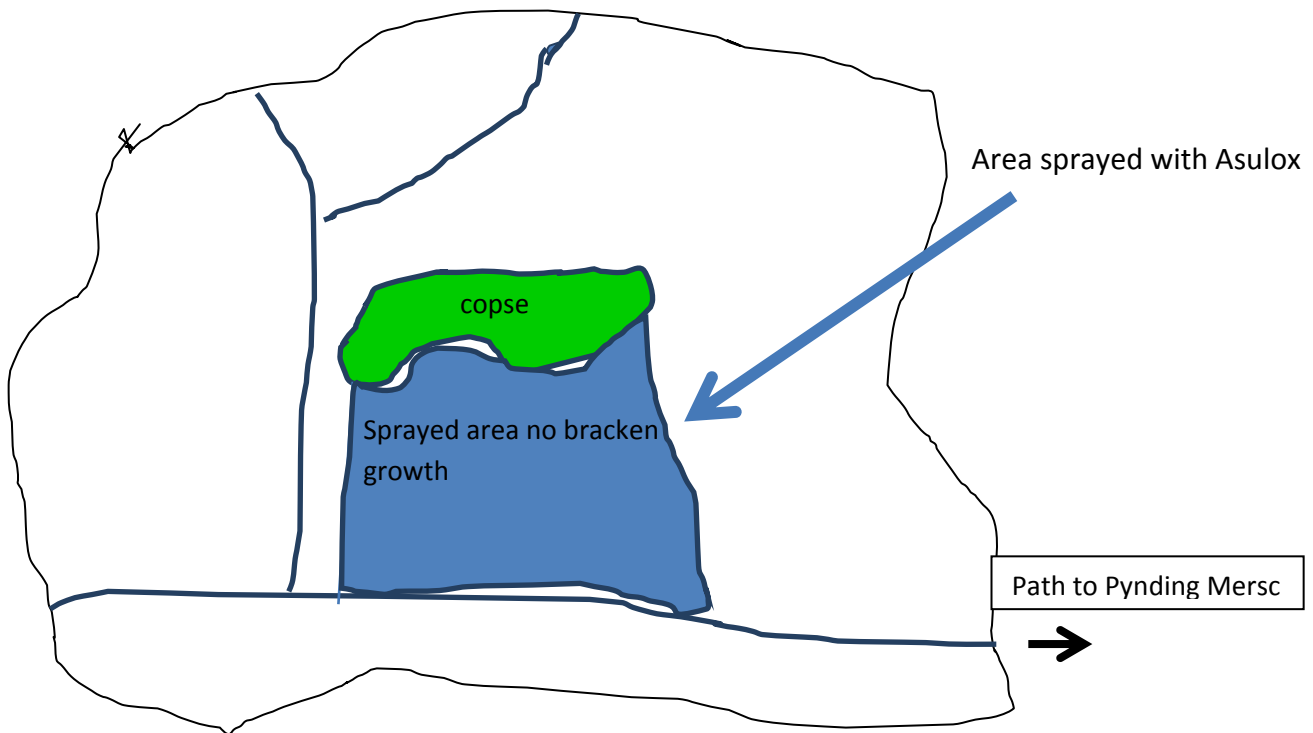
Bracken spreads rapidly by underground root runners or by releasing spores from the undersides of the leaflets (pinnae). On Stanmore Common Bracken never produces spores but relies on the extensive root system and the dormant buds they develop which sends up next years' shoots.

Hollybrook Rise had been partly sprayed in late summer last year. The spray was the Carbamate herbicide Asulox. This herbicide is applied as the Bracken dies back and the poison is transmitted down to the roots.

The area sprayed was just east of the copse that lies across the middle of the clearing. Where the ground had been sprayed there was no regrowth and elsewhere the Bracken was rampant. Spraying is in August-September, and to control the new growth we attacked the Bracken by scythe and by gloved hands.

There are increasing Bluebell stands in this clearing and where Bracken was growing amongst the Bluebells, control was by hand.

HOLYBROOK RISE



Controlling the Bracken in Holybrook Rise took until lunchtime. After lunch we moved to Bluebell Heath. Bluebell Heath as a whole looked fantastic; however it was a sea of new Bracken. We divided the party up, working the Orchid Field and the area across the other side of the path and also along the south east edge of New Heath. Bracken was the major target but we also removed Bramble and saplings.

The Orchid Field was fairly clear of Bracken after previous work parties but it did need more work as the dormant underground buds of the Bracken put up more shoots.

We were concerned as we could see few orchids but there were quite a few but they were hidden amongst the sea of other plants. All the orchids were at the bottom of the downslope.



Rajinder scything Bracken in Hollybrook Rise



Heath Spotted Orchid (looks like a fat grass leaf) amongst Betony, Rushes and Grasses.



Bluebells on Bluebell Heath



Bare soil habitat for basking and nesting invertebrates in New Heath



A view across New Heath controlled Bracken in the foreground

WILDLIFE

We saw Peacock Butterflies and Orange Tip. There was also a Brown Silver Line Moth whose food plant is Bracken. The best thing was a Beetle in Bluebell Heath which looked superficially like a ladybird. This was a member of a group called the Handsome Fungus Beetles or Endomychidae. This species *Endomychus coccineus* or the Ladybird Beetle feeds on dead wood fungi.

The ladybird Beetle *Endomychus coccineus*



We had a lovely day in fantastic weather and the intention is to continue management of the open clearings.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 29TH MAY 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Neville Day, John Winter

10.30am to 3.30pm

Weather: Rain at times varying from light to steady, 12 degrees centigrade.

TASK

Bracken control in various areas.

We started back in Hollybrook Rise, working on the narrow strip either side of the main path as it exits the clearing. We had cleared back saplings and young scrub here during the winter and it is important to keep it open. Not only Bracken but saplings and Bramble were removed.

We moved on down Druids Path, noting the non-flowering of the Wood Sorrel. By the time we arrived in Bluebell Heath it was raining but it was not heavy nor did it become so at any stage.

Because the weather threatened to pour down we attacked the Bracken at the eastern end of Bluebell Heath. This land holds many of Bluebell Heath's oldest trees and it is an area traditionally cut by Harrow Council's contractor to control the bracken. However it is apparent that this cutting is not doing the job as the Bracken gets very high and thick.

By repeated hard early cutting we hope to severely weaken this species. We also have the back up of spraying at the end of the summer. We know from the work on Hollybrook Rise this can be very successful.

We managed to cut all the way up to the top along this strip. Neville carried on working in the adjacent strip of land whilst John and myself re-visited the clear fell area in the south east corner of Flushing Wood.

This area had been bracken pulled on the 1st of May and the next batch of Bracken shoots had been deployed.

Work was not completed but about half the area was bracken pulled.

OTHER WORK

Whilst we were on site, contractors employed by Harrow were clearing the huge tree which crashed down onto the Horse Ride



The huge Oak being cut from the Horse Ride.

The rest of the tree will be left as habitat.



Neville working at the top of Bluebell Heath



Bracken in the clear fell area in Flushing Wood.

The original intention in the clear fell area was just to let nature take its course. Now the intention is to encourage grassland invasion or at least stop the area becoming dominated by Bracken/Holly/Bramble/Saplings.

The next workdays will be continue this work plus the photographic survey, the Orchid count and the widening of the upper stretch of the Horse Ride to Warren Lane.

The botany survey will start towards the end of June.

WILDLIFE

John Winter spotted this lovely spider in the clear fell area in Flushing Wood. This spider is the Meadow Spider or Nursery Web Spider (*Pisaura mirabilis*). It belongs to the family of spiders called the Pisauridae. There are 3 European members of this family. All are large with good vision and are active hunters. This species crouches on low vegetation holding its first and second leg pairs out together at an angle. This is

the only spider that does “food courtship”. The male spider catches a fly and wraps it in silk as an offering to the female as a courtship gift.



Parental care in this spider is of a high order. She carries the eggs in a bundle of silk underneath her body. There is no silk attachment and she just uses the grip of the jaws and backward pressure from the palps to hold the egg case. This means she cannot feed. Just before they are due to hatch she will spin a tent shaped web and attach the egg case near the roof. Even then she does not abandon the young and stands guard. The spiderlings stay inside the web until their second moult when they disperse.

MORE PICTURES FROM THE GUIDED WALK ON SATURDAY 8TH JUNE 2013

STANMORE COMMON

This looks like a ladybird (Beetle family Coccinellidae)but is actually a type of leaf beetle (Family Chrysomelidae). The body is more inflated and it has long antennae. This leaf beetle is *Gonioctena viminalis*. It is very similar to another leaf beetle recorded on Stanmore Common by John Dobson; *Gonioctena decemnotata*, however the legs are red on *G. decemnotata* and red on *G. viminalis*. The larvae are below feeding on Willow.





The landbug *Dryophilocoris flavoquadrimaculatus*. Possibly the insect with the longest scientific name. This was found on Hazel but it is common on many broadleaved trees and sucks out plant sap with its tubular mouth but it also will attack the odd insect and their eggs if it comes across them.

Looking like a social wasp this is an insect one would not welcome on one's hand but this is not a social wasp but instead a parasitic bee. This bee called *Nomada* is a cleptoparasite; it lays its eggs on pollen balls made by solitary bees. The *Nomada* larvae eats the pollen and kills and eats the resident bee larvae if the invading *Nomada* parent has not already done so.

There are 28 species of *Nomada* bees in the UK. They are very difficult to identify to species. This particular one has a lot of red especially red bands and probably belongs to the *Nomada ruficola* group of species.



REPORT FOR WORKPARTY SUNDAY 9TH JUNE 2013

10.30AM TO 3.30PM

Weather dry, bright, 16 degrees.

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Zubair Aziz, Neville Day, Margaret Griffin, Rajinder Hayer John Smith, John Winter.

TASK

The major works required was Bracken control and this time we went to Cerrisland to check the Bracken there. On the way we went via Fox Earth Mound. This looks fantastic and shows the benefit of the winter works.



The south east section of Oakmead was full of Bracken and we controlled this. Scything is the method we use either using hand scythes or the long bladed scythes..

The inlets along the northern edge of Oakmead look in good shape with grassland colonising the inlets. The inlets need enlarging and could be deepened.

The Group in Oakmead



Once we controlled the Bracken here we moved onto the Hawthorn's Walk.

Bracken in the Hawthorn's Walk



The Hawthorn's Walk is now in dappled light condition and more work is required to open it up in the next winter works. The path diversion is working well and the dead hedge with the horizontal Turkey Oak looks good and the latter is alive and putting out shoots. The revelation is the inlet to its east the light just pours in, showing felling larger trees really works. We did Bracken

control along The Hawthorn's Walk. We hand break the stems in amongst Bluebells sometimes.

Careful Bracken control keeps Bluebells intact



From the Hawthorn's Walk we had lunch at the edge of Enigma Wood. Here more Bracken control was done.

The group working along Enigma Wood



After lunch we moved onto Bluebell Heath. We worked on the extreme western side. We Bracken weeded the Orchid Field and with hard looking we found a few orchids but not in flower yet. Until they flower it is hard to check the numbers.

The group spread out, working the slope adjacent to the Orchid Field and others worked the edge of New Heath.

Finally a reduced group attacked Bracken growth on Bonzo Bank East on the north edge of New Heath. It will be a real job to keep the banks clear and if necessary we will resort to Asulox/and/or Glyphosate herbicide to achieve this objective.



Bonzo Bank East

.Thanks to all concerned we covered a lot of ground.

Wildlife

We found this fungus along the Hawthorn's Walk.



Growing on a dead piece of timber. It is one of two species; either Polyporus tuberaster or young Polyporus Squamosus.

Identification is not easy unless we refind the fungus. The best separation is on smell. P. tuberaster has either no smell or a pleasant mushroomy smell and P. squamosus has a very strong unpleasant mealy smell. The pore size is larger on T. tuberaster.

The previous day on Saturday 8th June we had a guided walk on the Common. It was quite well attended about 16 people.

Here are some pictures from the walk.

Female Great Spotted Woodpecker at nest in Cerrisland (thanks to Colin Foyle)





The Sawfly (a wasp not a fly) *Tenthredo mesomelas*

It was a lovely day and we walked for 4 hours

REPORT FOR EXTRA WORK PARTY FRIDAY 14TH JUNE 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Zubair Aziz and Sachin Kanadier (new volunteer)

10.30am to 1.30pm

This was an extra work party which was to encourage a new volunteer. We carried Bracken control work in Bluebell Heath, concentrating on the central zone and we have now done at least one initial control on 95% of Bluebell Heath.

Thanks to Zubair and Sachin for coming out.

OTHER NEWS

John Winter has started crayfish trapping and at first he was not successful. He got advice from the warden of Pear Wood (Claire Abbott) and went back and found a good spot. All the Crayfish scuttled away from the torchlight. John moved the trap but on returning on he found the trap had been tampered with and moved. He also found a pile of Swan Mussel shells. There was also a pile of Stella Artois bottles in the water.

On the positive side he found a interesting Pond snail.

Viviparus contectus or Lister's River Snail



© Wilstermann-Hildebrand

This snail has a type of door , a circular area of horny plate which it can use to close the mouth of the shell. Although called a river snail it is found in still water as well. It has a degree of pollution sensitivity, but is salt and acid tolerant. It grazes on mud on the bottom of ponds or filters water collecting microscopic algae. They can live for up to 13 years.

The Orchids are now well advanced and will flower shortly

REPORT FOR BOTANY TRAINING SESSION WEDNESDAY 19TH JUNE 2013

10.30 TO 1.30PM

ATTENDEES : Simon Braidman and Neville Day

The botany survey of Bluebell Heath for 2013 is due and we are having difficulty getting the original team of volunteers that did the survey in 2012.

Neville and myself went out to Bluebell Heath to practise our recognition skills on the important indicator species of Bluebell Heath.

John Dobson who trained the original team has identified a suite of 22 plant species to monitor.

We went out to try to identify as many of these as we could. A few things became apparent. The tiny saplings of Birch are too difficult to separate into species (Downy and Silver) but Aspen could be identified. Cornflower and Trailing Tormentil are absent. We struggled with young Wood Anemone.



Cornflower(*Centaurea cyanus*)



Heath Wood-rush

We found lots of Heath Wood-Rush (*Luzula multiflora* ssp *multiflora*). There are 2 subspecies; either *multiflora* or *congesta*, identified by the flower clusters.

The grasses were mostly not quite in flower and using a key proved difficult, we went astray more than once.

Brown Bent, a type of grass is very similar to Velvet Bent and is best told apart in flower.



Brown Bent(*Agrostis vinealis*)



Velvet Bent(*Agrostis canina*)

The flowers as a group (called the panicle) are more spread in Velvet Bent.

We felt that other species need to be monitored such as Holly, Bramble, or Common Dog Violet.

At the start we encountered two women who between them must have had between 18 to 20 dogs. When asked whether they were under control. They started to put them on leads but challenged our right for us to ask them to do it claiming that as volunteers we had no right to ask them.

I gave them my name which they recognised. An official badge may help.

The survey will start shortly we will run training sessions. The orchids are virtually ready to be counted.

They will be counted on Sunday 23rd June.

REPORT FOR WORKPARTY SUNDAY 23RD JUNE 2013

10.30 to 4pm

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Neville Day, Noelia Alegre, Sachin Kanadier and David Green

Weather dull, grey a few rain spots 15 degrees centigrade

TASK

The task was to continue bracken and sapling control in Bluebell Heath plus count the Heath Spotted Orchids.

We split into two teams. Noelia, Sachin and Neville were working in the upper northern, central section (Survey parcels 7 and 8) whilst Simon and David worked in the Clear Fell area in the south west section of Flushing Wood. New survey parcel 11.

Cut material was removed off the clearings in both areas.

Scythes were used in Bluebell Heath and Bracken was hand pulled in the clear fell area, due to the huge volume of cut timber on the ground.

We stopped not long before 1pm to show Noelia the Orchids which were in full flower.

After lunch we continued the work in the same area for the first team but Simon and David moved to New Heath and cleared Bracken from the north east edge of New Heath(Survey Parcel 1) . This area is in full light.

The Bracken in Hollybrook Rise is returning but it is clearly weakened and Bracken across much of Bluebell Heath is weak as well.

The newest scrape had bracken control done on it and a bit of work was done on the new bulldozed banks.

There is a need to clear the willow trees just south of the Orchid Field.

We met a lovely huge puppy, a 6th month old Scottish Deer Hound called Silas who made a fuss of everybody.



Sachin moving cut Bramble

We counted the Orchids and we found 56 orchids, there were 40 last year, 10 in 2011, 19 in 2010 and 21 in 2009, 5 plants in 2008 and 271 in 2005.

OTHER NEWS

We plan to put in extra botany sessions for surveyors. So this coming Sunday at 2.30pm there will be identification of plants.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 26TH JUNE 2013

10.30 to 1.30pm

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman

Weather Sunny, warm 23 degrees centigrade

Litter picked car park and met Steve Bolsover, the chairman of the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum. New tools had been delivered. Extendable saws, new saw blades and two, two-handled scythes.

The scythes were assembled and Steve took one to Stanmore Country Park and I took one to the Common. These saws are very sharp and need re-sharpening often.

I went to Hollybrook Rise where there is significant bracken regeneration. I thinned the bracken out, opening up areas of bare or low ground so the sun could get in and ensuring the Tormentil flowers were in full sunlight.

I varied the cut height to ensure Bluebells remained intact and that the grass flowers were not topped but on the latter score I needn't have worried as scattered grass stems, especially of the *Agrostis* (Bent) grasses just bent with the blade and sprang back upright.

The intention is just to thin the Bracken and to ensure it does not dominate.

I was looking at the reserve with new eyes following some articles published in British Wildlife magazine on the importance of vegetation structure on invertebrate conservation.

The article criticised over-grazing and that too much conservation was geared to conserving botany and not enough consideration given to invertebrates.

If we follow the simple rules for the reserve we will help the invertebrates:

1. Keep up dead wood supply
2. Keep the Common as wet and damp as possible
3. Keep the scrub element in all open clearings but keep it under control and not allow it to dominate open areas
4. Switch some emphasis from understorey felling to selected canopy felling, letting more light in.
5. Lengthen the grassland woodland boundary line
6. Keep the amount of bare soil/banks high



Bracken back again in Hollybrook Rise

Once I had cut Hollybrook Rise I moved onto the south east section of Bluebell Heath and cut there.

WILDLIFE

I had a look around and then walked back the long way via Oakmead and Cerrisland. In Oakmead I found this fungus growing in the open grassland



It was about 10cm across. It had no strong taste (I may not have had it on my tongue for long enough) or smell and the gills were white thick and distant.

I think this is a *Russula* species. *Russula* fungi tend to grow under trees as they are Myrchorizal. They infect the roots of trees and actually help trees grow by obtaining nutrients beyond the reach of the tree roots. In return the fungus gets sugars from the tree.

Fungal identification is very difficult, especially of a large group like the *Russulas*.



In Cerrisland Dog Rose and female Thick legged Flower Beetle (*Oedemera nobilis*)

There is an extra work party this Sunday afternoon 2.30pm to 5.30pm. We will be practicing plant identification.

REPORT FOR EXTRA WORK (SURVEY TRAINING) PARTY SUNDAY 30TH JUNE 2013 2.30pm to 5.30pm

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Neville Day, Sachin Kanadier and David Green

Weather 24 degrees centigrade hot and sunny

This was an extra work day to continue to train people for the botany survey. Folders have been prepared with survey maps and forms and a list of key species to survey for.

This session was to teach the key species. These species have been selected as indicators of habitat condition for Bluebell Heath by John Dobson who as an ex-warden and now ecological consultant is very familiar with the reserve.

There are 22 key species covering trees, grasses and their allies (Sedges), Ferns and flowering plants.

The species selected are not all easy to identify and so we are running these initial sessions to train new surveyors.

So far 2 sessions have been run and there will be a third this Sunday, so for those people that have missed plant identification sessions and who want to take part we are running it again on Sunday.

For those that do not want to do plant surveying, we do have practical work to do.

A team can carry out path widening especially along the horse ride as we have new tools including long handled pole saws to cut overhanging branches.

The session on Sunday for the botany bit will start with plant identification and then move onto identifying the individual habitat parcels of Bluebell Heath.

Then we will practise the DAFOR survey method.

The Orchids will be recounted this Sunday it is evident that more have come to light.

OTHER ISSUES

Preparation work is in progress for the photographic survey as we are having problems printing the photographic panoramic strips. This should be solved shortly and we will be moving onto repairing the loss of the photographic survey points

We have received comments on the state of the horse ride which have been passed to the Council and when we can we will do work on this issue.

Once again a fire was lit by the big Oak tree in Oakmead and rubbish left, a sign will be put up.

REPORT FOR EXTRA WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 3RD July 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman

2.30pm to 6.30pm

Weather dry, cloudy, 17 degrees centigrade

TASK

Bracken control in Hollybrook Rise. Carefull selection of smallish areas of Bracken to thin. Clearing over Tormentil and areas of barer ground and shorter vegetation. Trying to avoid Bluebells which are now in seed. Always clear the the south-facing edge of these areas to get the sun in. Cut Bracken is removed and taken into the woodland edge.

The Bracken control here is now quite good. There is still a lot of Bracken but it is not universally present across the clearing. The re-growth is lower and weaker.

The sprayed area has now got significant Bracken growth though not as strong as the unsprayed area.

The clearing should have further spray treatment.

Bracken control was by scythe.

Bracken control on the new bare earth banks behind the new Lottery scrape. The new banks created by the bulldozer have new growth on them. A 16 metre stretch This was weeded by hand to maintain the habitat.

Bracken, Purple Moor Grass, Willowherb, Birch, Rowan and Hawthorn (The latter 3 all tiny saplings) were pulled. Sedges, Rushes and Tortmentil were kept.

More work is required both on the bank and on the scrape itself (bracken removal).

Removed material was taken off the bank and into the woodland edge.

Bracken removal on Bonzo Bank East. The lower slope of this bare earth bank was cut by scythe and the cut material removed.

REPORT FOR WORKPARTY SUNDAY 7TH JULY 2013

10.30AM TO 1.30PM

ATTENDEES: Simon Briadman, Neville Day, John Winter, Margaret Griffin, Noelia Alegre.

Weather Blazing hot, 28 degrees centigrade finished early too hot

TASK

The task was to train volunteers on plant identification training on Bluebell Heath. Last year a small team of volunteers were put on a botanical survey training course, paid for by the National Lottery as part of the Bluebell Heath Project. The course was run by John Dobson of Make Natural Ltd. John is an ex-warden and he has carried out in an in-depth botanical survey of the whole reserve in 2010. John also sits on the Bluebell Heath Project Committee and designed the regeneration scheme.

This year the same team was unavailable and the only member of that team who is highly available is myself and a new team would have to be built up. John Dobson identified 22 key plant species to be monitored. I have added another 3 species.

The species selected are characteristic of acid grassland and also characteristic of the pioneer scrub species that grow on such grassland or on the scrapes created by topsoil removal. Some species are uncommon in London and others are at best fleetingly present on Bluebell Heath.

It proved very difficult to run this session. The heat was tremendous. The volunteers are all beginners and some of the species are inconspicuous and/or difficult to identify or separate; eg. Downy and Silver Birch.

Another problem the surveyors found was the idea of using the DAFOR technique. DAFOR stands for Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional and Rare and equates to percentage cover.

The trainees said it was very difficult to count or even estimate the cover over a parcel of land. Margaret suggested taking representative samples over a limited area. This is effectively quadrat sampling.

Quadrat sampling is a square metre frame which is thrown randomly into an area and the plant species inside the quadrat identified and counted.

It is an idea which we will pursue in parallel with the existing system not in place of.

I felt I had not explained the system properly and I missed John Dobson.

This is only an initial training and we will try again.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 10TH JULY 2013

10.30 TO 3.30PM

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, John Bugler, John Winter, Neville Day

Weather Hot

I received a phone call from a dog walker about the tool shed being broken into and raced to the reserve at 6.30am. The metal doors had been jemmied open. It was hard to assess what was taken at the time as the light had also been stolen. The police were called and the Council who sent their odd job man to have a look at it.

Steve Bolsover arrived and we took all the remaining tools out. All the bowsaws had gone and all the modern billhooks, almost all the loppers and 2 new folding saws. However they left everything else including the stunning new 2 handled Austrian Scythes which are very valuable. Luckily the chainsaw was due to be returned later that day and there were 2 brand new bowsaws which Steve had brought to add to the store.

This was a robbery looking for power tools and it was one of a short series of break-ins on Council property discovered that morning. Steve stood guard whilst we went off to do some practical work.

We carried out path widening using 2 surviving loppers and the 2 new bowsaws. We worked our way down Jake's Path. John Bugler widened the path whilst Neville went on ahead to tackle bracken in the Orchid field. John Winter and myself use scythes including one of the new Austrian Scythes to clear bracken areas in the western edge of Cerrisland behind the huge Turkey Oak. The new scythes are brilliant and need very little physical effort. They are razor sharp but need regular sharpening.

From Cerrisland we moved into Oakmead. John Bugler joined Neville and John Winter and myself scythed bracken in the south east corner of Oakmead. John went on ahead to eventually clear Bracken from Bonzo Bank East in New Heath, whilst I stayed and collected the cut bracken onto a path for later moving.

I moved through the Hawthorn's Walk where John Winter was clearing Bracken. We had lunch under the shady pines in Bluebell Heath.

John Bugler worked on the area to the east of the Orchid field and Neville worked in the Orchid area. John Winter was at Bonzo bank East and I was clearing bracken from the new scrape and weeding the bare earth bank behind the scrape.

Steve joined us to say that the Council had welded the store doors completely shut and the proper repair will be next week. So we took the tools home with us after clearing the cuttings from the path in Oakmead on the way back.

Thanks to the guys for taking the tools as well as an excellent days work. Jake's Path is now free from branches for much of its length and there are once again thinned bracken areas which can be sun blasted to ground level.

REPORT FOR WORKPARTY SUNDAY 21ST JULY

10.30 AM TO 3.30PM

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Noelia Alegre, Reuben, David Green, Neville Day, Margaret Griffin, John Winter and John Dobson.

Weather: Sunny and warm.

TASK

This was another training session for the botany survey. This time we had the original trainer, John Dobson, an ex-warden of the reserve and now an independent ecological consultant.

The toolshed was still welded shut after the break-in

I had produced a new photoguide for the key plant species which met John's approval.

We covered all the 25 species on the guide although we found one; Lilly-of-the-valley off Bluebell Heath.

The session was very useful and it confirmed that some of the key species were very difficult and that one had to group them together and also young plants do not necessarily resemble the adults.

We also found a stunning grass which seems to have increased greatly.

This is Wood Small-Reed (*Calamagrosis epigejos*)

It is very pretty with a cloud of pale pink flowers arising from dense tussocks.

This plant is found in damp woodlands and rough grasslands on heavy soils.

It was suggested and agreed that this would be another species to monitor.



Wood Small Reed

We also saw the lovely Mint, Betony *Betonica officinalis*. This is not a survey species but it is a pretty one. The flowers look orchid like



Besides the flowers there were lots of butterflies and the best ones were Small Skipper and Marbled White.



Marbled White



Small Skipper

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 24TH JULY 2013

10.30AM TO 3PM

Weather: Sunny 26 degrees centigrade

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, John Bugler, Musaret Saddiqi, John Winter, Neville Day, Johnathon Asquith.

TASK

The intended task was to carry out Bracken control however John Winter has been trapping (trying to) Crayfish in Great Brewer's Pond and finding lots of rubbish in and around the pond.

The Crayfish are reported to be American Signal Crayfish, an introduced species which eats everything .

John has a licence from DEFRA to catch them and has constructed a trap which so far until the end of this week been unsuccessful.

Now we have an identification problem as we have a doubt that the Crayfish caught is the Signal Crayfish. We will keep you informed.

The rubbish is drinks bottles, lumps of concrete, a mattress and most of all fence posts, railway sleepers and other timber to be used for fires.

We spent the morning clearing this material and taking it to points to be picked up by the Council's flytip operative.

We then litter picked the Cricket Club car park which also had another flytip of tiles which we cleared.

We had lunch at Bluebell Heath with Steve Bolsover the chairman of the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum. He is installing a new feedback form box for the Common and he also was waiting for new keys to new locks for the Toolshed which has now been repaired.

After lunch Johnathon and Neville scythed bracken down in Parcel 10 at the extreme east end of Bluebell Heath whilst John Winter and myself tried to

relocate the old photosurvey positions using a map and the panoramic photostrips.

It proved extremely difficult. Many posts have been lost or submerged in bracken and the pictures from last year do not match the scenes in front of us.

In the end we gave up and will try again by clearing more vegetation plus using individual pictures to re-locate our positions.

It was getting hot again and we stopped early.

REPORT FOR EXTRA WORK PARTY SUNDAY 28TH JULY 2013

2.30PM TO 5.30PM

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, John Winter, Neville Day, David Green

Weather: Sunny intervals with showers

The task was to carry on with working up the botany survey on Bluebell Heath. New copies of the photoguide had been produced including the extra new species, bringing the key species to be monitored to 26.

The survey was discussed and the habitat assessment survey using the DAFOR survey system was covered.

The habitat survey sheets give a list of key habitats and the idea is to assess each survey parcel of land in terms of percentage cover of the different habitat types e.g Native Broadleaved Woodland.

The method is to imagine one is looking down from above and so ground layer under dense trees would not be counted.

The figures should add up to 100%.

There were difficulties. The parcel boundaries for the first parcel we looked at were unclear and we found that one path no longer exists having been swallowed up by vegetation.

The best way of estimating cover was to draw the extent of the broadleaved trees on a habitat parcel map.

We came up with 60% Native Broadleaved Trees, 34% Bracken, 5% Acid Grassland and 1% bare earth for Parcel 10.

We then had to do the same for the 26 key species of plants but we were just discussing initial survey problems when the first rain shower came down.

It stopped and we tried to re-start but a second rain shower came down, soaking survey papers and we decided to give up.

We met Silas the Deerhound and her owners who we had last seen a month earlier and she looked even bigger. We all made a fuss of her.

Then we fell in with a family out walking the common and we looked at the many tiny frogs and toads hopping around. We walked back to the car park showing interesting things, including a rather stunning hoverfly.



This bee mimic is *Volucella pellucens* and it lays its eggs in social wasp nests where its larvae eat debris and dead wasps, larvae and pupae.

We all then walked to Great Brewer's Pond to check the Crayfish trap. On the way we said hallo to Allan and Dave, two fishermen who seem almost to be permanently camped by the pond.

By now John and David appeared to have almost adopted one of the children of our accompanying family!

The crayfish trap had around 15 crayfish in it. This was a trap found abandoned by the two fisherman mentioned above. John's own trap did not have a soft mesh internal collar and John thought that this was the reason it was not successful.



Crayfish from Great Brewer's Pond

With crayfish in the hand we could check the identification of the animal. There are 5 recorded Crayfish species in the UK. Only one the White Clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) is native to Britain. A key feature for this

species is a single pair of small ridges called the sub-orbital ridge just behind the eye.

The caught specimens had 2 pairs of suborbital ridges which meant it was not our increasingly rare native species.

Three species of Crayfish have 2 pairs of sub-orbital ridges. The Crayfish caught also had white patches at the joints of the fingers of the claw which indicates these were the Signal Crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*) a pest species from the US. Signal Crayfish eat everything in a pond they also carry a disease which they have partial immunity to which our own Crayfish are vulnerable, a similar story to the Grey Squirrel.

The White-Clawed Crayfish despite its name has not got these patches, its name refers to pale flesh colour not white along the lower part of the underside of the claws.

John has been freezing these Crayfish but he cannot eat them as he is allergic to shellfish.

The next official work party is Sunday 4th August.

However there will be an extra work party this week to clear bracken in Bluebell Heath to locate the photographic survey points.

There is also a guided walk on Stanmore Common on Saturday 3rd August at 10.30am.

REPORT FOR EXTRA WORK PARTY MONDAY 29TH JULY

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman

11.30 am to 5.30am

Weather Sunny intervals with one light shower and thunder rumbles

TASK: To uncover photopoint markers

The intention was to uncover photopoint markers in Bluebell Heath. However the car park was in a terrible state with overflowing bins and rubbish strewn everywhere. I spent an hour clearing in and around the car park and the picnic area clearing rubbish. My rubbish sacks were thin. I called the Council but they could not say when exactly when they would come. Recovered mattress.

Moved off towards Bluebell Heath but stopped at Hollybrook Rise and spent another hour clearing Bracken and then hauling it into the woodland edge.

I got to Parcel 10 at the eastern edge of Bluebell Heath and cleared a mass of Bracken working in the approximate area of photopoint 2. The area cleared was large and generated a ton of bracken cuttings.

I piled the cuttings in front of the bench intending to move it. By now my wrists ached from collecting the bracken up and exhausted I decided to move the cut bracken next visit.

It was just as well I stopped as the rain came down in a huge intense shower just a short time after I got home.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY SUNDAY 4TH AUGUST 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, John Winter, Margaret Griffin, Sachin Kanadier, John Bugler, David Green

10.30am to 3.30pm

Weather Sunny periods 23 degrees centigrade

There were mixed tasks. John Bugler worked on path widening along Druid's path and after lunch helped with Bracken removal.

The bracken was the pile I had made on my extra visit on Monday 29th July. I had exhausted myself cutting bracken in Parcel 9 looking for photopoint 2.

Margaret Griffin helped with the plant survey which was not going well due to the difficulty of fixing the boundaries of the habitat parcels of Bluebell Heath. Also estimating habitat coverage under the DAFOR system was proving slow.

John Winter and I struggled through parcels 10 and 9 and struggled with parcel 8.

Sachin and David arrived later. I showed Sachin some of the key species.

David helped with Bracken removal and also worked with John on path widening.

OTHER NEWS

John Winter has caught more Crayfish but when he tried to cook them they sprouted white mould from the joints and went a horrible blotchy colour. John has been approaching two key fisherman at Great Brewer's Pond to see if they are interested in managing the water body.

Someone stole the main access gate and gate post for vehicular access to Bluebell Heath. This was a real undertaking as the gate is huge and very heavy.

Harrow council is applying for to the Rural Payments Agency for funding for work on Stanmore Common. I have drawn a map and awaiting a second opinion from Denis Vickers, the Biodiversity Officer.

The chainsaw has been serviced and is now ready for use.

Next stages are to redefine on the ground the habitat parcels of Bluebell Heath and the photopoints of the photosurvey.

Also the bracken is starting to show signs of natural die back where they send their food reserves down to the roots. It is the time to spray the Bracken with the Bracken herbicide Asulox.

Repeated bracken cutting has had an effect but it is still very limited.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 7TH AUGUST 2013

10.30AM TO 3PM

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, John Winter and Johnathon Asquith

Weather sunny intervals warm

TASK

Johnathon scythed bracken in Parcel 9 in Bluebell Heath East. John and myself put marker tape in corner positions of the habitat parcels of Bluebell Heath.

Between the two of us we can lead the plant surveyors so that we can define the habitat survey results correctly.

We then looked at the photopoints. Almost all the original photopoint survey markers have been taken but from the photostrips we are able to relocate the positions. However the clear fell area point strips were impossible to match.

We then finished up by clearing the Bracken cut by Johnathon.

WILDLIFE

We heard Sparrowhawk and Buzzard and saw 3 Buzzards together over the fields to the North of the reserve.

There were lots of Butterflies especially Gatekeepers.

A nice find was a Devil's Coach Horse in the car park (*Staphilinus olens*)

This is actually a Beetle. A member of the Rove Beetle family the Staphilinidae. There are over a 1000 species of this group in Britain. The Devil's Coach Horse is one of the largest beetles in the UK. It habitually raises its tail and opens its jaws as a defense mechanism. To back this up it can also emit a foul smelling odour from a pair of white glands in the abdomen.

The animal is a fierce hunter and attacks worms, woodlice and other invertebrates, mostly at night. It cuts with sharp jaws and then repeatedly swallows and regurgitates the food, covering it with a brown secretion until it becomes a liquid when it is finally ingested. The larvae emerge from eggs laid

in moss or under stones and they are as fierce as the adult, taking on prey many times their size.

The lifespan for the beetle is one to two years, older survival is achieved by hibernation over a second winter.



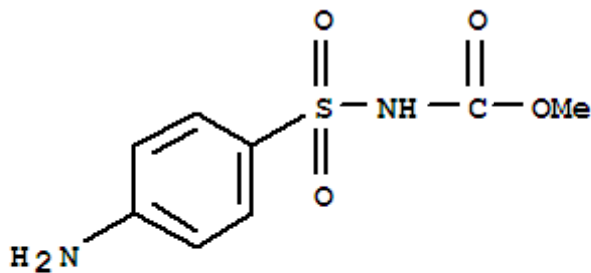
1.30PM TO 6PM

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman

WEATHER warm sunny wind southerly strength 1 to zero

REPORT FOR EXTRA WORK PARTY THURSDAY 8TH AUGUST 2013

The task was to spray Bluebell Heath with the anti-bracken herbicide Asulox.



This is a carbamate herbicide used on Bracken, Dock, Creeping Buttercup and Chickweed species. It can temporarily stop sapling growth and can effect some grass species. It works on Bracken by being absorbed through the leaves into the root system. The herbicide inhibits an enzyme involved in the formation of a chemical called Folic Acid (Vitamin B9). This Vitamin is a vital precursor of many components of DNA and blocking of this process will lead to cell death and eventually the death of the plant.

This herbicide can affect other fern species and also mosses.

It has low insect and mammalian toxicity and is safe to use in the environment. The only proviso is it is dangerous to aquatic life and so should not be directly sprayed on water bodies or near ditches.

Asulox was recently nearly withdrawn from legal use within the EU due to the costs of extra safety testing. Pressure from Grouse Moor managers has resulted in a Emergency Use Authorisation being granted to land managers.

This lasts only for a year and will need to be re-applied for on a yearly basis until the extra safety data is gathered.

Spraying should be done on a dry day with little or no wind.

EQUIPMENT

12 LITRE HAVELOCK BACKPACK SPRAYER with grey Course Droplet size feed nozzle 2ml/sec

40 litre water reservoir on a metal transport trolley

Asulox herbicide in 25 litre containers.(180ml transferred to plastic bottle)

For Bracken 60mls of Asulox to 12 litres of water.

Adjuvant : a chemical designed to help Asulox dissolve in water add 1 part to 50 parts water

Measuring Cylinder

Measuring jug

Disposable protective paper suit with hood

Plastic gloves

Nitrile chemical resistant gloves

Respirator with Class A filters (organic gas/liquids)

Wellington boots

Water was obtained from Stanmore Cricket Club, permission was sought both the day before and confirmed on the day. There is an outside tap for horticultural use. The reservoir is easy to transport and it was wheeled down the horse ride to Bluebell Heath and stored in heavy cover in Bramble in Parcel 10 in the south east corner of Bluebell Heath.

The rest of the equipment was transported with a wheelbarrow and stored in the same position.

The sprayer was checked out and tested using pure water. A leak was found due to cross-threading of the lance mounting which was corrected.

The water barrel reservoir came with a tap which was screwed into one of the two access caps on the barrel. However due to air bubbles the rate of water flow was low.

Water was collected by the measuring jug and added to the knapsack sprayer reservoir after removal of the reservoir cap.

After addition of about 5 litres of water. 60mls of Asulox and approximately 5mls of adjuvant were added by the measuring cylinder to the knapsack reservoir.

It is essential that the knapsack reservoir filter is kept in place in the knapsack reservoir entrance to prevent dirt particles from entering the knapsack reservoir. Due to the location dirt was picked up and the filter intercepted it.

Pure water was used to keep the measuring cylinder clean and the washings were added to the knapsack reservoir.

The reservoir was topped up with pure water and the reservoir cap screwed down tightly to produce the pressure

In retrospect loading the maximum capacity was a mistake due to the extreme weight. It was difficult to lift and get it strapped into place by the lurches would help mix the contents.

In fact there was some overflow of the tank at such a high volume and part of my upper back was soaked

Spraying started from east to west and so parcel 10 was sprayed first. Spray was only heavily applied to solid bracken stands. Areas clear of bracken were not sprayed and isolated bracken plants were spot sprayed.

Spraying of high stands of bracken are difficult and it would be recommended to trample a heavy stand a bit to make it easier.

It is important to get over the top to spray to get a bit of drift so that one can maximise the depth of the application.

On dense stands I tried reverse spraying, that is going into the stand and spraying the deepest bit first and then spraying as one reversed back.

Where the stands had already been partly cut it was difficult to remember which stands had been sprayed due to the complexity of the stands. Freshly sprayed bracken can glisten due to the droplets but this quickly dries.

It is important to keep moving to use the spray efficiently. I did feel the height of the bracken and my closeness to it was making the spray less efficient and that the spray was hitting the nearest bracken hard both literally and metaphorically and less was getting to the backs of the stands.

I did go both sides of the stands. Normally I try to take account of wind direction but there was so little wind and I was also struggling with the weight.

On the second loading I only filled to 10 litres and then to 7 litres and finally 6 litres.

I was concerned about people but there were very few people on the site and I encountered no one at all whilst spraying.

The whole of Bluebell Heath was sprayed, including the upper stretches of the Orchid field. I took care when around sensitive plants such as the Orchid field and the area where the Wood Small-Reed grows.

Having sprayed Bluebell Heath. I then sprayed the new scrape and the bare earth banks produced from the bulldozing. A lot of new Bracken was coming up.

The whole of the new scrape was covered.

I then moved onto New Heath and sprayed the northern edge including Bonzo Banks East, Centre and West. The bracken here was about 12 metres deep.

I also sprayed the southern section of new heath and along the western and eastern edges of New Heath.

I finished by re-spraying Bonzo Bank Centre.

By now I was exhausted and almost out of water. I kept some back so I could ensure the measuring jugs and cylinders could be cleaned and also to add to the Knapsack sprayer once it was empty so the sprayer could be “sprayed out” with clean water.

This was done in a non sensitive location adjacent to the storage area in the bramble zone in parcel 10.

The equipment was taken back the same route and stored. I was spotted by a young cyclist as I was loading stuff in the lock up and he rode off quickly (hope that is not significant).

I had hoped to spray other areas but this will have to wait.

REPORT FOR EXTRA VISIT SATURDAY 10TH AUGUST

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman

8.50AM TO 12.20PM

TASK

Time is moving on and the botany survey is running late. I go up to the reserve and carry out a habitat percentage survey and plant abundance survey on habitat parcels 6,7 and 8 on Bluebell Heath.

Parcel 8 needs averaging as it covers 2 separate areas as agreed with John Dobson (The consultant) who set up the management parcels.

REPORT FOR EXTRA VISITS SUNDAY 11TH AUGUST 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Rajinder Heyer David Green

TASK BOTANY SURVEY

I go up to the reserve at 8am and survey parcels 5 and the habitat percentages for parcel 4. Leave reserve at 10.15am

I go back to the reserve at 2.30pm and meet up with Rajinder. She wants to do practical work and she litter picks the car park and picnic area. Thanks Rajinder for that.

I finish off surveying Parcel 4 doing plant abundance for the 26 key species. I then complete the two surveys on Parcels 3 and 2 with David.

We meet a lovely family and we show them around the reserve.

We finish at 5.30pm

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY SUNDAY 18TH AUGUST

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Neville Day, John Winter, David Green

10.30am to 4.20pm

Weather Sunny and hot

TASK BOTANY SURVEY

We continued the botany survey and we finished it doing surveys on parcels 1 and the new habitat parcel 11. This last parcel was not surveyed last year as this was one of the extra fell zones. This is the clearfell area on the northeast edge of Bluebell Heath. This area originated from a desire to maximise the scrub clearance and the contractors were asked to fell the trees but instead of clearing the timber and stacking it they just left it where it was felled. This was to save money and time but also a mimic of storm damage.

This area has regenerated with regrowth from unpoisoned stumps including Holly and Bracken. The Holly has been controlled and the Bracken has been pulled but needs spraying. This area was the one area of Bluebell Heath not sprayed with Asulox on the 8th of August. Here too there is acid grassland regeneration with Green Ribbed Sedge, Tormentil and Purple Moor-Grass appearing all members our 26 species to be monitored. There was also lots of Prickly Sow-Thistle a common weed of gardens and roadsides but a valuable nectar resource and a member of the Daisy family.



Prickly Sow-Thistle (*Sonchus asper*)

The ground here is very difficult to traverse due to the sheer mass of fallen timber. We added to the timber volume when we cleared contractors wood stacks from the main section of Bluebell Heath last winter.

We have delineated the habitat parcels with little strips of tape but some have gone missing so we are using coloured sticky dots which are less conspicuous and they do last as last years dots are still present on the trees in Flushing Wood. We marked out the boundary of the new parcel 11 and we included the section of broadleaf woodland over acid grassland and the horse ride and the woodland boundary strip over nettle.

We then tried to locate the photosurvey points in parcel 11 but the tree removal is so great it is almost impossible to relocate these points. We finally made a decision and marked them up.

The photosurvey consists of 19 fixed points scattered around Bluebell Heath, New Heath, the New scrape and the extra survey parcel, number 11.

The photosurvey was done in October 2012, before the Bluebell Heath contractors started to fell the trees and the photo positions marked with road pins with a numbered yellow and black safety tape as a flag attached.

Over time these started to go missing despite us hammering the road pins deeper into the ground. Now only a hidden few survive.

From the original photos plus a map showing the original photopoints we are remarking the photopositions.

The huge felling, map inaccuracies and the regrowth plus the difference in the times of day and year make difficulties in establishing the original photopoint positions.

After relocating photopoint positions behind the New Scrape we moved to Parcel 1 on New Heath and carried out the Botany survey on the last parcel left to do.

New Heath looks fantastic the regeneration is amazing and now the Heather is in flower. There are large numbers of bees, wasps and butterflies swarming over the Heather.

It augers well for the new scrape and it does suggest that internal seed transfer from New Heath to New Scrape is probably the wise thing to do.

Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) in Parcel 1 on New Heath



We had a discussion on the interpretation of the habitat designations and the parcel boundaries and some corrections will be necessary.

The exercise is an excellent one as this is the first time that such a survey has been done by the team itself rather than by external consultants and we have learnt a lot by our mistakes.

We then go through all the remaining photopoint positions re-establishing them.

Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) in Parcel 1 on New Heath



OTHER NEWS

We are still awaiting tool replacement for the tools stolen. On Bank Holiday Monday some of us will be manning a stall at the Harrow Show at Headstone Manor from 12am to 6pm.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 21ST AUGUST

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Neville Day, John Winter

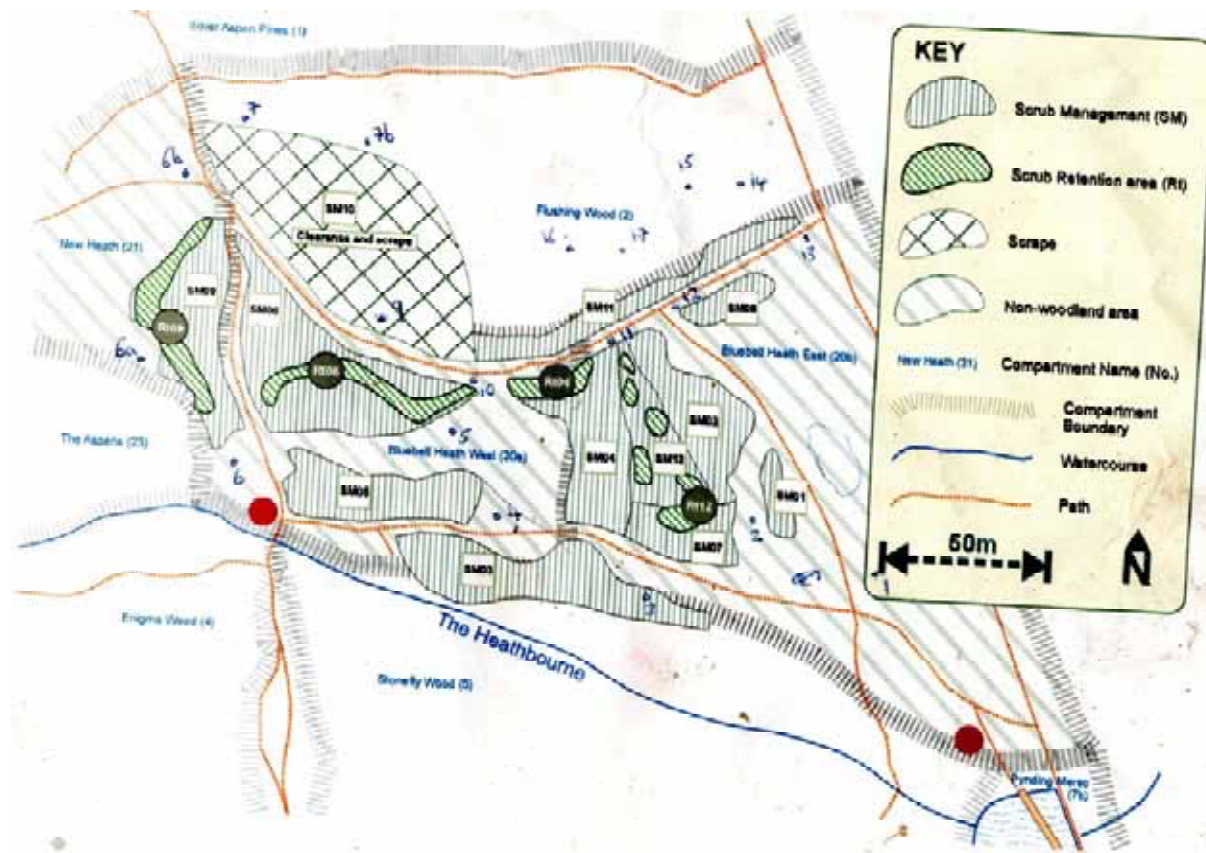
10.30AM TO 4.20PM

Weather hot and sunny

TASK

The task was to carry out the photographic survey for 2013. In October 2012 a photographic survey of Bluebell Heath and New Heath and the extra clear fell area (Parcel 11) to the north east of Bluebell Heath was carried out before the contractors started. Nineteen fixed photographic points were selected and photographs taken over the entire 360 degree view. John Winter then used a program to link all the pictures from each photopoint together to make an panorama. At the time all the points were marked with road pins with numbered yellow and black marker tape attached.

A map below shows the approximate photopoint positions.



We now went across all the positions and carried out a second post contractor photosurvey. At each position we used 2012 panoramas to ensure the exact same position was used. A big thanks to Sue Winter for the loan of her tablet and her camera as we could not have done this without her.

With the ability to expand each 2012 panorama using the tablet we were able to refix the original positions as many road pins marking the original points had been lost/stolen.

One problem was that the bracken was so high in places we had to flatten small sections to get a view.

The positions were remarked with Blue circle stickers. The camera was tripod mounted and a spirit level used to ensure the best chance of success.

A few photopoints such as position 5, still had their original road pin markers.

The greatest difficulty were the points in the new clear fell area as the tree removal was so comprehensive it was very difficult to match the 2012 photos with the perceived positions. We had done some work on this on the Sunday work party but we decided the locations were not accurate.



John and Neville at photopoint 2.



A view from photopoint 1



A VIEW FROM PHOTOPPOINT 3

We also photographed some of the wildlife. Close to photopoint 4 on some Wild Angelica (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) I photographed this fly. This fly is called *Tachina fera* and it is from the Tachinid family of flies and they lay eggs on caterpillars of various moth species. The orange wing cloud and the black stripe down the orange abdomen make this a relatively easy fly to identify.

***Tachina fera* on Wild Angelica**



Female Common Blue Butterfly (*Polyommatus Icarus*) on Devil's Bit Scabious (*Succinia pratensis*) also adjacent to photopoint 4





***Coprinus micaceus* on buried dead wood near photopoint 6a**

We saw 4 Buzzards soaring in the sky over the reserve and heard what was possibly a Hobby, a type of falcon calling. We also heard Muncjac Deer.

When we got to taking photographs across the scrape from Flushing Wood southwards we had to take a second set as the new bare earth banks formed from the bulldozed soil blocked our view. The second set was taken from the top of the bank. These points were marked with blue circle stickers.

The new scrape looks amazing with a great deal of regeneration. There are sedges and rushes, Bluebells and Tormentil, Fescue and Purple Moor Grass and of course Bracken which has been sprayed with Asulox.

The last section the clear fell area or Parcel 11 was the hardest due to the difficulty of finding the original photopoints and the mass of timber on the ground. The huge mass of fallen timber produced some nice things.



A marked photopoint 14 in Parcel 11(They do last)



The picture above shows Black Bulgar (*Bulgaria inquinans*) a fungus which grows on fallen dead wood in this case on Oak.

The last pictures shows piles of sawdust or frass from insects living inside this felled Silver Birch, whilst we were peering at the piles we spotted this insect amongst the frass. We do not know what it is. I now think it is not a beetle but a tiny member of the bug family a Hemipteran.





A big Thanks to all of the volunteers. Any time you can spend here is valuable.

I will send out the survey results when they are all collated.

We will be doing some path opening works and also looking at areas to open up as part of the winter works programme.

I will be spraying Parcel 11 with Asulox and re-spraying Bluebell Heath.

Oakmead will need checking at its western end for Bracken levels.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY SUNDAY 1ST SEPTEMBER 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, John Bugler, Neville Day, Lauren McCullagh.

10.30am to 3.30pm

Weather: Sunny warm

TASK

To check the state of the paths on Stanmore Common. This is following comments from dog walkers about the paths closing over.

We started down the main path called Druid's Path and walked down across Hollybrook Rise down to Pynding Mersc. We cleared overhanging branches and fallen trees and chopped back branch projections.

Our tool level is very short since the robbery but we will be getting replacements.

Once we arrived in Bluebell Heath we checked the botany survey results as there are big differences between the 2012 and 2013 surveys. This should be expected due to the vast changes that have been happening from the tree felling and bulldozing, but in untouched areas there were still differences. The survey team has virtually completely changed and we have had a new growing season, however.....

I decided to check just one species in one parcel. Tormentil is a pretty member of the Rose family and it is a typical flower of acid grassland



Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*)

The 2012 survey said the flower was abundant in Parcel 10 which equates to 51 to 75% of the ground cover layer. A careful search of the whole parcel which involved parting the thick Bracken blanket cover revealed only limited Tormentil abundance mostly adjacent to the footpath running up the slope of Bluebell Heath East. It confirmed our original result of the plant being less than 10% of the ground cover and therefore can be classified as rare.

Once we had completed the check, and after lunch we proceeded up the horse ride , clearing overhanging branches. Due to a lack of long handled pruning saws (stolen) we chopped larger branches at a more practical height.

Cut timber was put under the existing tree line.

In general the paths we followed were not too bad. Strimming the path edges would widen them but this would lose valuable ground cover.

Japanese Knotweed, an invasive species is re-establishing itself along the horse ride and will need herbicide treatment.



Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*)

The woodland in general is very shady but it has kept the ground moist. Too much shade means too little ground cover and a loss of woodland structure.

We worked all along the horseride until we got to Heathbourne Road then we went back along a path going south east and eventually ended up entering Oakmead from the south west.

Oakmead needs Bracken spraying in its western end and brushcutting the saplings in the central section.

We made our way back via Jake's Path and through Cerrisland. This clearing needs a brushcut in its southern section.

There is a big increase in Giant Horsetail in Cerrisland and in Oakmead.



Giant Horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*)

This plant is increasing in the south of England but it is still a scarce and local species in Harrow.

We also saw Hobby a migratory falcon which has almost certainly bred or attempted to breed in the fields just north of Stanmore Common. This falcon will shortly be leaving for Africa.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 18TH SEPTEMBER 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman and John Winter

10.30 to 4.30

Weather cool tiny rain shower 13 degrees centigrade

TASK: To remark the photographic points in the clear fell area (parcel11) and to carry on work around Great Brewer's Pond.

We started in Bluebell Heath. The wetland delta at Pynding Mersc is reflooded and looks fantastic and the streams are flowing again. The depressions on New Scrape have filled with water.

Parcel 11 has 4 photopoints all are very difficult. The contractors removed 3 of the 4 markers during felling. We have we think relocated the other 3 points by comparing pictures from 2012 and 2013 but the felling was so comprehensive we find it very difficult. The positions were remarked with coloured stickers.

We could only find 3 of the 4 marked positions.

John will go back to relocate the photopoints.

We moved off to Great Brewer's Pond to the area shown by the arrow on the previous report. The acid grassland is dying as shown by the brown area at the centre of the pre-work picture.



A careful study showed it was young Pedunculate Oak blocking light from the east and a line of young Sycamore blocking light from the south. The line of Sycamore provides privacy for the residents of Springfield Close. The line of Sycamore will be attractive to bats as they prefer continuous lines of trees to hunt along and this connects to a trees forming a continuous line stretching to the east.

Because of this I am reluctant to start full scale felling of the Sycamore line. I feel it is better to thin this line rather than to remove it and this is what is recommended in the LCS management plan.

However removal of the Oaks overshadowing the grassland will bring in more light and this we proceeded to do. We also removed oak branches from trees projecting into the existing exit from the pond onto the rugby pitch. We then attacked by cutting and pulling the Holly understory to the north of our work area which screened a rather nice Hawthorn tree shown in the centre of the second photograph below.

Almost all the tree material was put into piles in front of a line of Holly to the south east close to the site boundary and behind (to the south) of the line of Sycamore. The Holly mentioned above is young but will grow quickly and this will need removal.

A very small amount of cut material was added to the pond, and the largest whole pieces of timber were put into semi-shade.

Some outstanding branches covered in lichens, mosses and liverworts were also carefully placed so they can still get light.

Post work looking east towards the rugby club





The same area looking west towards the pond.



Cleared Holly area shielding old Hawthorn, multistemmed oak in foreground.

The area to the east and north of where we are working is quite diverse and well-structured and we will want to maintain this.

Cutting this gap will allow light in and a flow of air and even help larger bats to get in and forage around the tree lines.

WILDLIFE

There was some nice wildlife like this Hazel, an uncommon tree on the reserve.



There was also an interesting fungus growing behind the line of Sycamore.



This is the poisonous fungus *Stropharia aureginosa*.

OTHER NEWS

The next work party on Sunday 29th September is a special one. We need support as we are having 60 teenagers from the Challenge which are activities designed to instil community spirit.

We would like as many regulars as we can.

We will be supervising as well as working.

The tasks will be :

felling Laurel and Holly along the horseride

Raking brushcut saplings from areas in Oakmead and Bluebell Heath

Pulling saplings from New Heath and New Scrape.

Please get in touch so I can monitor how many of us there will be.

REPORT FOR SPECIAL WORK PARTY SUNDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER 2013

“ The Challenge”

INTRODUCTION

A charity called “The Challenge” which works with people of all ages but particularly with young people contacted the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum, regarding doing conservation work as part of their summer programme.

It was arranged that the work would take place on Stanmore Common. Seventy seven year-olds split into 4 groups with team leaders would do various tasks on the reserve.

The charity brought with them £400 of spending money which bought new tools.

The teenagers were from different parts of London and many did not know each other and they had just come back from a week in Yorkshire doing white water rafting and caving which makes our stuff seem very mundane.

They arrived by minibus at 11.15am

We provided tasks for them to do, tools and leaders for those tasks. So our role was mainly advisory and supervisory in nature.

Stanmore Cricket Club kindly offered the use of the clubhouse toilets and a big thanks goes to the club who have always been very helpful.

Our team was:

Zubair Aziz, Steve Bolsover, Simon Braidman, Neville Day, David Green and Margaret Griffin.



Zubair, Margaret, Neville, David and John and some of the teenagers.

The 4 tasks were:

- 1. Cutting Yew, Cherry Laurel and other vegetation back from the Horse ride in Brightwen Wood East**
- 2. Raking Brush cuttings in Oakmead**
- 3. Raking Brush cuttings in Bluebell Heath**
- 4. Pulling saplings in New Heath and New Scrape**

Tools were still in short supply and the biggest requirement was for task 1. Each group had leaders assigned to them and the groups did a different task in the morning and in the afternoon. Despite this it meant only 2 groups did the most enjoyable jobs of cutting down the trees. This was the impression the leaders got from the volunteer's reactions.

The most unenjoyable task was hand pulling the saplings. The reaction was very negative and so we got out the lazy dogs and assembled the blades. So that the afternoon sapling pulling was easier and more enjoyable.

This did help and a big thanks to Margaret for her feedback and to John who got his group to split into boys versus girls and got a lot more work out of them.



Pulling saplings on New Heath

Some people got stuck in. Not everyone was appropriately dressed, there were a few broken nails and Stanmore Common is “in the middle of nowhere”.



Getting stuck-in

Lunch was in the car park from 1pm until 1.40pm and work finished at 3.10pm.

Quite a lot of work was carried out and it was a positive experience. In future more tools would have been better, especially for sapling pulling. Also more felling. If 2 groups did felling then everyone could do it.

Thanks to all the group who helped lead the tasks. You did a great job.

Steve did go around asking at the end if anyone wanted a programme and a few were taken.

REPORT FOR EXTRA WORK PARTY TUESDAY 1st OCTOBER 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman

10.30am to 2.30pm

TASK

To spray Bracken with Asulox.

Certain areas of the reserve remain untreated and other areas are sensitive and need a second treatment.

Areas Treated Once

Bluebell Heath minus Parcel 11 = The clearfell Area (actually part of Flushing Wood)

New Heath and its associated bare earth banks

New Scrape and its associated bare earth banks

Areas to be Treated or treated again

Treated again

Bare earth banks of New Heath and New Scrape

Treated

Oakmead western section

Hollybrook Rise southern section

Time is running out , Asulox should be applied as the top of fronds starts to pale indicating the chlorophyll in the leaves is being withdrawn down to the plant. A fair amount of the Bracken has passed this point and some has gone brown. However the state of Oakmead is very bad with thick dense Bracken stands.

I started with the clear fell area (Parcel 11). This area lies in the southeast corner of Flushing Wood and was an additional add-on to the Bluebell Heath project area. My intention was to just get the contractors to fell this area and not tidy up. We moved a lot of the cut timber from Bluebell Heath itself into this area. It is a mass of cut timber and brash. Originally I was just going to let the area just re-wood up. Instead we are going to try to keep this as an open area. We have dug up Holly, now I sprayed all the Bracken.

The area is regenerating with lots of Silver Birch and Rowan saplings. It is very open and is south facing with a lot of bare earth so it heats up a lot. There is indications of acid grassland regeneration with hair grasses appearing.

I then sprayed all along the top edge of Bluebell Heath to the start of New Scrape.



Clear-fell area =Parcel 11 centre section looking south



A view across New Scrape and the top edge of parcel 5 Bluebell



Bare earth bank behind New Scrape

New Scrape is regenerating well with new grassland developing but also lots of Birch and Rowan Saplings and some Bracken which survived the Bulldozer.

I then sprayed the bare earth banks behind New Scrape. There is still a lot of bare earth but it is quickly being colonised. It may need a Glyphosate spray and definitely needs weeding.

The bracken northern edge to New Heath was sprayed and the bare earth banks Bonzo Bank East, West and Centre. I then sprayed the Bracken all down the western, southern and Eastern edges of parcel 2 on New Heath.

New Heath looks fantastic and the Heather has flowered and the seed is maturing. The rare Hard Fern population in the north west corne of Parcel 1 is thriving and this area will have its scrub saplings allowed to grow to give the ferns semi-shade.

On the way to Oakmead the water tank whose lid was cross threaded leaked. I had about a quarter of tank of spray left.

I sprayed the western section of Oakmead. The Bracken her had had no control either from cut or spray. It was thick, dense and over head height. Ground vegetation was dying underneath the Bracken. I had to fall on the Bracken to flatten it enough tlo get access to the Bracken block.

I then sprayed out the block and then ran out of herbicide.

REPORT FOR EXTRA WORK PARTY FRIDAY 4TH OCTOBER

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman

10.30am to 2.30pm

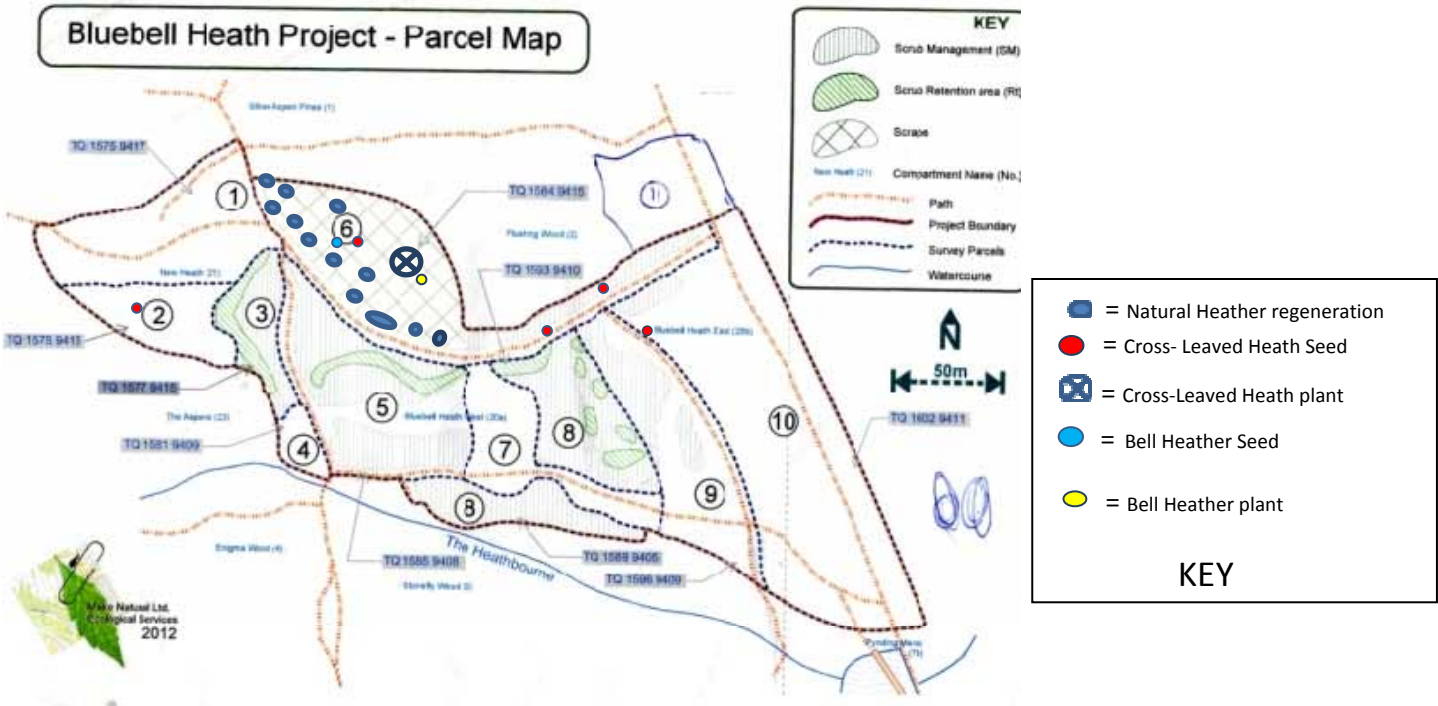
TASK

The intention was to carry on spraying but the weather was too poor. I had intended to map Steve Bolsover’s brushcutting on the Bluebell Heath parcel management maps but I also wanted to diversify the acid grassland botany and had brought back from holiday in Shropshire seeds of Cross leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*) from Catherton Common an area of wet and damp heathland. I also brought back seeds and a single tiny plant of Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) from the same site plus Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*) species that went extinct on the Common some years ago. The latter plant came from Cramer Gutter, Shropshire another area of wet, upland heath.



Cross leaved Heath at Catherton Common, Shropshire

Bell Heather at Catherton Common, Shropshire (25/09/2013)



Above shows the map of the habitat survey parcels of Bluebell Heath with very approximate positions of natural Common Heather regeneration and planted other species of Heather

The amazing change was the natural Heather regeneration. It seems to occur where a bit of topsoil has been left. This shows the seed bank was not that deep down and much may have been removed by the scrape. However the sheer amount of new heather shows the overall success of the process. To ensure an even Heather cover some seed can be taken from Heather on New Heath and sown into other areas on New Scrape.

Quite a bit of Bracken has come up which has been sprayed twice with Asulox. Also many seedlings of Birch and Rowan, many of which have been pulled but many remain. Also there is quite a lot of Purple Moor Grass plus some Wavy Hair Grass and loads of Sedges. By the yellow-green colour many will be Pill Sedge but there are undoubtedly other darker green sedges in large numbers. There is Soft Rush and Toad Rush. Gorse is coming up in the very western edge of New Scrape plus a tiny group of Wood Rush (Heath Wood-Rush?) just below a Silver Birch in the very west section. Other plants include Willow Herbs, Chickweed, Tormentil, Buddleia, Hawkweeds and what looks like very young Self-Heal. There is also one Creeping Sorrel of some kind, possibly another garden escape. We did have Orange Hawkweed come up but the flowers got eaten, probably by Muncjac.



New heather on New Scrape



New Heath Bedstraw on New Scrape



New Gorse on New Scrape



New Sedges on New Scrape



**A real mixture: Clover, a large Sedge,
Stinging Nettle and Birch all on New Scrape**

The bare earth banks behind have a great variety of plants and these will need control to maintain open habitat, however many rushes and sedges and some Tormentil are growing on the bank and Bluebells grew in the far south eastern corner of the bare earth bank.

The Marsh Pennywort was planted in Pynding Mersc in 2 places just next to the footbridge. The plant was double checked before planting to ensure it was Marsh Pennywort and not its highly invasive cousin, Floating Pennywort.

The latest check (today Wednesday Oct 9 2013) reveals the Marsh Pennywort seems to be doing well.

I also checked Grove Ponds because I had machinery sound coming from there, but it was quiet. The sound was reflected from Bentley Priory.

I only investigated the most distant Westerly pond. This is vegetating up nicely. There are masses of fish, some tiny ones were leaping from the water to escape the bigger ones. There has been work done. Access improvements in the form of tarmac/gravel aprons have been in next to access farm gates.

We should still investigate managing the eastern pond by approaching the Grove Farm owners.

REPORT FOR EXTRA WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 9TH OCTOBER 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman

10am to 3.30pm

TASKS

1. Spray the north section of Cerrisland and Hollybrook Rise
2. Install the new mushroom and dog poo signs
3. Update the signage for the next guided walk and work party
4. Check on the Marsh Pennywort in Pynding Mersc
5. Locate a pile of marking timber used in the Bluebell Heath Project for next Sunday
6. Collect brash for Forest School day for the Nursery children to make brooms
7. Sketch on a habitat parcel map for Bluebell Heath the brushcut area done by Steve

The first task was to spray Cerrisland and I did have problems in that I had left the trigger on the sprayer in the permanently on position and wondered why it was leaking.

I did correct it once at Cerrisland, when I finally realised what was causing the "leak" and I was careful on the route to ensure no drips went in any streams I crossed. I did have to mop up a few drops on a footbridge on Jake's Path.

The patch sprayed was very small. It was just where we did winter work clearing scrub and bramble and where we had developing lovely grassland, only for the Bracken to take over.

I then moved onto Hollybrook Rise where I sprayed the area hard. Almost the whole clearing was sprayed. I did not spray where the Red Bartsia was growing and I spot sprayed Bracken plants in the land west of Hollybrook Rise.

Once again I sprayed with the wind which veered from a northwesterly to southwesterly direction and let the wind take the drift.

I only used one tank as that was all that was needed to cover the area to spray.

Once the tank was emptied I returned to the lock up and then sprayed out the tank four times with pure water spraying the spill tray and the gloves.

I then using the remaining water in the pure water reservoir drum washed the nozzle head and lance and then backwashed the filter and the outside of the pesticide knapsack and the screw lids to the knapsack reservoir.

All the equipment was stacked away as tidily as I (not very) can do it. This is the last spray for 2013. It will be interesting to see the effects as all the clearings have been sprayed.

Hollybrook Rise has been sprayed twice

Cerrisland has been partly sprayed once in its northern most section

Oakmead has been sprayed partly once and partly twice. Only the south east centre section was unsprayed.

Bluebell Heath was sprayed partly once, partly twice. The main section was sprayed once, as was the clear-fell section, the northern most edge was sprayed twice, as was New Scrape and its bare earth banks and New Heath was sprayed twice and its associated bare earth banks.

As a result of my visits plus an unreported walk I did on the Common with Emmanuelle and Margaret on Sunday (To collect and assess material for Forest School and to walk around). I have found lots of evidence of mushroom picking.

I have spoken to several individuals and groups. All are Russian, Polish or Ukranian. There does seem to be a lot going on. Some areas of grassland are showing signs of trampling.

Some people are taking small amounts. I have found some people taking huge amounts.

They are cutting the caps, which is fine. There is evidence of sorting in one spot.

They do not know the names of the fungi (they may know their own colloquial names) . They do know what is safe to collect.

Some seem to specialise in certain fungi, the last people I spoke to were collecting Honey Fungus.

Where huge amounts are being taken, I speak to them and explain that the site is a nature reserve.

Most nature reserves ban mushroom picking. Burnham Beeches and Wimbledon Common definitely do.

This is recognised on the Mycological Society website which talks about seeking permission for collection even for identification purposes.

I also explain that although it does not harm the fungus directly, it interferes with insect lifecycles which need the fruiting body to breed in. I also say if they are drying their fungi return the spores to the Common.

I finally say, if you are taking from the reserve, why do you not give back by volunteering.

I checked the bylaws, there is nothing in the copy I can see about it. I have said to the collectors if they take in moderation I am not against collection.

I have put up a notice explaining this. I intend to keep this under review and if I feel that the level of collection is too high and there is again noticeable trampling of the grassland, I will approach the council to try to get a bylaw banning collection.

I also put up a notice about dog poo collection as we are getting what is probably one individual(generally the bags are the same colour, although today some bags were white) leaving bags of dog poo along Jake's Path, northeast of the car park. These bags are being flung it is clear from some of their positions.

On the noticeboard are 2 posters giving the dates of the next workparty and guided walk. I use sticky labels to change the dates. I updated these.

The Marsh Pennywort plants in Pynding Mersc are looking healthy.

I located a pile of marking stakes used in the Bluebell Heath project. These will be used to re-block the path down from the car park across Witling Marsh and combined with a sign encouraging people to use the drier but darker more wooded route. The pile is located along Druid's path past Hollybrook Rise and on the downslope to Pynding Mersc, to the right of the path.

I spent a couple of hours collecting brash for Forest School Day at Devonshire Day Nursery, where Margaret and I work. There are huge amounts of material generated from working parties. Brash has wildlife value, it can remain wet in dryer weather, providing shelter for damp loving invertebrates, it can provide food for crust or resupinate fungi. When packed tight and dry it can provide shelter for mice and voles and perhaps hibernacula for reptiles and certainly insects. However the vast amounts

of it means that areas of the woodland floor get covered with vast amounts of such material which on other reserves is often shredded and chipped and then removed from site.

So using material for Forest School gets rid of a tiny amount of the brash and brings in natural materials to an urban nursery with no green space.

Margaret is training to be a Forest School leader and the first Forest School Day was very popular.

The children made necklaces and broaches from Elder sections and masks with the stems from Brash from the Common. They now have balancing logs, again from the Common.

This brash is to make brooms. The material cannot be sharp so Hawthorn or Beech with its sharp buds cannot be used. The material cannot be brittle. Willows are good.

4 clusters of Elder berries were collected to make a dye and the seeds kept for replanting back at the Common.

A bag of Acorns and Knoppler Galls were collected from the enormous amounts on the woodland floor again to give urban children natural materials.

Finally I sketched out the brushcut area in Bluebell Heath done by Steve for "The Challenge". This will be translated onto the colour coded habitat sketch maps of the 11 habitat parcels. The area done covers more than one habitat parcel even though it was a small area.

Once this is done, these colour maps will be sent to Steve as evidence for the tracking of the Bluebell Heath Project.

The botany survey results need sending as well. We had a Bluebell Heath Project meeting on Tuesday night and equivalent maps for the pre-work will be produced.

UPSHOT OF THE BLUEBELL HEATH MEETING TUESDAY 8TH OCTOBER

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY SUNDAY 13TH OCTOBER 2013

Work party cancelled due to heavy rain

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 16TH OCTOBER 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Neville Day and Sue Kable

Weather rain, constant at times heavy.

10.30am to 1.30pm

Determined to run work party after Sunday's cancellation. We did 3 tasks.

1. Cleared paths of fallen branches
2. Repaired fence post line across Witling Beck and put up notices advising visitors to use the woodland, dryer path.
3. Litter pick across parts of the reserve.

We had reports of blocked paths and we found larger branches had come down and we moved these off the paths.

The fence post line set up to protect the wetland beyond Witling Beck had gradually been degraded by people removing the fence posts. The missing fence posts were replaced from stockpiles of wooden stakes used for the Bluebell Heath project and driven into the ground using a post rammer..

We had had reports of a drinking party along Jake's Path. We also had reports of guys hanging around the woodland at the Heathbourne Road end of the Horse Ride and that a "bag" had been hung up in the trees as a marker.

We walked to Bluebell Heath. I wanted to show Sue the state of the project and the development of the new heather and other plants in New Scrape and New Heath.

I tried to find the Marsh Pennywort but Pynding Mersc had flooded with the heavy rain. We followed the Horse Ride out to Heathbourne Road. There was remarkably little litter but we collected what we found. There was no evidence of people hanging around and there was no bags in trees. We did find a geocache box in a tree in the area. These guys were probably mushroom pickers. John Winter had said he had spoken to mushroom pickers but they pretended not to understand English.

We walked along the western side of the reserve; new paths have been worn but no one about. Little litter so the removal of the laybys along Heathbourne Road by the council was a good move. We finally walked along Jake's path, looking for the party rubbish taking the left hand fork instead of the normal right turn towards Cerrisland.

We did find a small amount of litter connected with drinking but it was not a large amount. In fact the litter situation is quite good, however the dog poo bag flinger was still around and we recovered more bags.

REPORT FOR EXTRA WORK PARTY THURSDAY 24TH OCTOBER 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman

Weather sunny and bright

11am to 5pm

A small amount of heather which had been accidentally cut or pulled had been recovered from Oakmead and Bluebell Heath. This was used to spread new heather across parts of the reserve.

I used rooting gell to get a better chance of plant survival.

I crossed Warren lane and worked along the southfacing edge of the vegetation between the cricket pitch and Warren Lane. It is acid grassland habitat and gets a huge amount of sunshine.

I planted in suitable, sheltered sunlit spots all along this edge, under the tree line and in front of the Gorse which is thriving and spreading.

I then planted once into a sunny spot adjacent to the path from the Cricket Pitch to Brewer's Ponds.

I planted once into the cleared area to the east of Great Brewer's Pond created on 15th and 18th September.

Another part of a plant was planted into a burnt patch close to Great Brewer's pond and a plant planted adjacent to vegetation close to the Rugby pitch.

I then recrossed Warren Lane and moved to Hollybrook Rise.

Hollybrook Rise

The heather in this compartment is restricted to plants in the easternmost corner. I planted Heather not far from the westernmost edge, close to a huge Oak at a bearing of 140 degrees and 23 paces. A second heather was planted close to the large Oak in the north-east section at a bearing of 260 degrees and 25 paces.

I did make the discovery that heather was naturally regenerating in this area at 250 degrees and 30 paces from the same oak. It was very healthy looking.

I also collected a lot of Hawkweed seed and a tiny amount of Devils-bit Scabious Seed from the clearing.

I then moved to Bluebell Heath via Pynding Mersc, I again failed to find Marsh Pennywort.

Bluebell Heath

I sketched parcel 10 of Bluebell Heath but I am still unhappy with the result. I planted heather into Parcel 10 close to the large Oak in the western edge at a bearing of 330 degrees and 11 large paces. I moved to Parcel 11, the clearfell area.

Clearfell Area

I planted more heather into the front central section of this area. I also planted half of the collected hawkweed seed into locations scattered across Parcel 11. I planted a few Devils-Bit Scabious seed into this area at a bearing of 210 degrees and 4 large paces from the wigwam.

I then moved to New Scrape

New Scrape

Planted the rest of the Hawkweed seed. I also planted Devil's –Bit Scabious seed in a circle around the Bell Heather plant located at 95 degrees and 18 large paces from huge Turkey Oak.

Parcel 5

Re-sketched the parcel.

Poo Bags

Picked up 2 more poo bags thrown into woods

Mushroom Pickers

I spoke to another couple explaining about over-collection.

Donation

I met John Lim in the car park, a regular walker who supports public access projects on the reserve. He kindly offered an on the spot donation of £100 for tools. I thanked him and Steve has since emailed him to kindly thank him for his donation.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY SUNDAY 27TH OCTOBER 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Neville Day, David Green and Josh Kalm (new).

WEATHER: Autumnal with early rain, then bright and then dull and breezy

TASK

To carry on working in Oakmead, to try to expand the clearing.

We got diverted as we got 2 reports from members of the public in the car park.

One came from a lady who said that she had problems finding the last footbridge along the path that runs down the western side of the reserve. I said that we might be able to get a finger post as part of the nature trail which is due to be installed as part of the Bluebell Heath Project.

The second came from a jogger who said one of the footbridges along the main path going northwest from the car park (Jake's Path) was giving problems. He said that the approach was treacherous with loads of thrown timber and that one's feet sunk into the ground on the approach and that this had put people off so much that people were going around the bridge.

We investigated and found a footbridge which indeed had problems. The actual bridge is sound but the approach to the bridge from the west was treacherous with lots of timber and the ground was soft. There were indications that people were going around the bridge and trampling the wetland plants.

At this stage there were only 3 of us. Neville offered to go to the intended work area in Oakmead and Josh and myself worked on the footbridge. We cleared all the timber in the western approach, digging it out where necessary.

Where timber was unburied we replaced the rotten material with fresh timber by felling a Holly tree and using it to fill the trenches. We packed fresh soil around the timbers and then walked and then ran over the footbridge testing the bridge and the approach. We were satisfied that the footbridge was now in a good condition and that it could be run over.

Meanwhile Neville had met up with David Green and they had started work on the deep inlet. This inlet lies on the north east edge of the clearing. It was

created by felling a large Turkey Oak during last year's winter works programme. This deep cutting was now infilling quickly with scrub.

We started work on clearing the scrub and we hammered it quite hard. The material was added to the thick pile created during the path alterations to the southern end of The Hawthorn's Walk which was also part of last years winter programme.



Arisings from the work were added to the wall running beside The Hawthorn's Walk

We also felled a few smaller trees and took out quite a lot of Bramble by pulling up the roots.

The idea is to : stop the inlet scrubbing over, create little areas where the sun can reach ground level which are surrounded by vegetation to trap the heat. This will be good for invertebrates. By pulling the roots of the bramble it slows re-growth and causes soil disturbance which may encourage buried seed to germinate.

Not all the bramble was removed. Bramble in sunlight is good invertebrate habitat in its own right.

In the process of doing this work we made some discoveries which make the value of the work more apparent.



Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), a type of mint in flower in the inlet.



***Deschampsia* species a type of Hair Grass growing in the inlet**

We also found Giant Horsetail, (*Equisitum giganteum*) growing in the inlet mouth.

All these species would eventually be lost if the scrub got too thick and shady.

A small miniclearing was created by pulling bramble the far(eastern) side of the large fallen Silver Birch, elongated in a north-south alignment to catch the sun.



An elongated mini-clearing created to become a suntrap for invertebrates.

We finished up at Oakmead at around 3.10pm and moved to Bluebell Heath to show Josh the scrapes. On the way we stopped at the very old Hawthorn lying to the east of The Hawthorn's Walk. It is surrounded by Holly and there is a good case for control of the Holly.

Bluebell Heath

We measured up parcels 5 and 10 using a tape measure and a compass so that the habitat maps can be made more accurate. The weather broke right at the end of the work party. More Devil's Bit Scabious seed was collected. We finished at 5pm.

Wildlife



Amythyst Deceiver (*Laccaria amythystina*) in inlet, Oakmead



Dock Bug (*Coreus marginatus*) also in inlet, Oakmead

REPORT FOR GUIDED WALK SATURDAY 2ND NOVEMBER 2013

LOCATION: STANMORE COUNTRY PARK 10.30am to 12.15pm

Weather a bit of sun then dull, mild

ATTENDEES: Josh Kalms, Mathilde Kaplin, John Winter and the Fineman family and Neville Day.

The dipping pond is rather shady and needs some work to get light in. There was Greater Ram's Horn Snail in the leaf litter at the eastern edge of the pond. We saw lots of galls. Cherry Gall, Spangle Gall, Knoppler Gall and Robin's Pincushion. There was some nice fungi. Common Deceiver and Amythyst Deceiver. Ash and Sycamore Black Tar Spot Fungus. We saw Long Tailed Tits and Great Tit. A Lesser Stag Beetle.

The leaf colours were gorgeous with green colour bleeding off. Brown and White Lipped Snails.

Everyone had a good time and it is great to have children on walks.

REPORT FOR MITZVAH DAY SUNDAY 17TH NOVEMBER 2013

Weather grim and cold.

ATTENDEES from the HNCF : Simon Braidman and Steve Bolsover

11.30am to 1.15pm

Every year for the last few years we have community groups coming up to do work on Stanmore Common.

Many faiths have a do a good deed day and Mitvah Day is a day given over to Jewish community events which benefit others by joint volunteer effort.

The group coming to Stanmore Common is from the Hatch End Masorti Synagogue and they have groups doing various other activities such as entertaining old people at a residential home and collecting food outside of Sharon's Bakery in Edgware.

The task for the volunteers was to collect Heather seed from New Heath and scattering it in New Scrape on Bluebell Heath.

Steve Bolsover and myself waited for the families to arrive. Only 3 boys some older mentors and a few parents turned up. They arrived late I was told they were operating to not to GMT but JMT.

They worked for about an hour and a half perhaps two hours with some nice biscuits inbetween.

Steve had brought 2 separate collecting buckets so 2 groups could race each other.

We showed them collection is easy, just a matter of running ones hand up the flowering stem and stripping the capsules off.

They then moved over New Scrape, scattering the capsules. We showed them young heather naturally regenerating on New Scrape plus a lot of other nice plants.



Mitzvah kids on New Scrape, scattering Heather seed.

They enjoyed the work and there were some interesting conversations from atomic structure to art.

These children all go to Sunday Hebrew classes and the chances of them volunteering regularly on the reserve are very slim.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY SUNDAY 24TH NOVEMBER 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, Neville Day, John Winter, John Bugler, David Green, Josh Kalms, Joel Huberman, Tim Marc, Tamsin Gadd and Richard Maylan.

TASK: To control the Holly in the clearfell parcel (parcel 11) of the Bluebell Heath Project.

We had a visiting volunteering group called the International Volunteer Service (IVS) coming along to help out.

Tim, Richard and Tamsin came from the IVS. The IVS do all sorts of volunteer work in the UK and abroad.

Unfortunately Richard became ill and could not continue. John and I applied our first aid training. It turned out to be a dose of food poisoning and John kindly took Richard home, where he made a quick recovery.

Parcel 11 originally was going to be a woodland regeneration area. The contractors from T+T earthworks had the instructions to fell but not to tidy up. So it supposed to look like storm damage. We moved extra cut timber from the main section of Bluebell Heath into this area.

The felling created a lot of bare soil and new grasses and Sedges have developed. I decided to change and keep the area as an extra clearing extension. This means a lot of work.

The Bracken has been sprayed with Asulox and now we are attacking the Holly. The Holly grows densely along the western and northern edges of parcel 11. It is regenerating from cut stumps and underground runners. A lot of it is hard to access because of all the cut timber.

Holly piles were formed and consolidated but material still remains to be collected. Josh and Joel ambitiously took on some very large Holly trees on and just beyond the boundary of Parcel 11.

These Hollies were stripped off their side branches and the trunks transported into the light.

The difference in light levels is immediate and considerable.

Whilst we were working a horse went up the horse ride and I went over to have a chat. The rider was from Grove Stables behind the Orthopaedic hospital. Most riders are training and only a minority use the Common as a hack.

I asked if she was happy with the Horse Ride. She said it was Ok but boggy under foot in 2 places. One is east of the pedestrian footpath and the other is past Bluebell Heath and around the corner. There are flushes here. (a piece of wet ground over which water flows without being in a discrete channel) Flushes are important biologically and they need to flow. Perhaps pebble beds may alleviate these stretches without compromising the flow of water.

I also asked about overhanging branches and she said this was OK. I finally asked about narrowing of the path. She said it was very narrow in places but it was OK.

I then asked the best way to contact the stables. She said through the website.

Later, a vehicle, a posh Landrover type, raced down the Horse –Ride and out of sight. We were at the wrong angle to see the number plate. We wondered who this was. We had seen tyre tracks up through the wet grassland strip into Bluebell Heath. It could not be the council. Neville walked back along the ride and went to the Heathbourne Road entrance. The vehicle had climbed the curb got around the obstacles.

This is a concern. Is this a one-off? We asked a regular dog walker and he said he had not seen a vehicle on site. (He also commented when asked about the mushroom picking, which was very heavy indeed. I am considering trying to get a byelaw against it). We will look into creating a block for vehicles which allows horses through.

It also means putting in a new gate at the bottom of Bluebell Heath.

A pair of loppers is broken but the blades are replacable. It looks as if people are taking on too thick a branch to lop them. They do not seem as good as the older ratchet ones which seem more robust.

I will replace the blades.



Standing around from left to right Mo, David, me, Neville, Tamsin, John and Tim

Wildlife

Parcel 11 with all that fallen dead wood is an excellent site for fungi.



Daedaleopsis confragosa variant *tricolor*



DARK HONEY FUNGUS *Armillaria oystoyae*



OYSTER MUSHROOM *Pleurotus ostratus*



SPLITGILL *Schizophyllum commune*

JOSH SIGHTING'S

Josh found interesting white pupal cases on the flowers of Compact Rush (*Juncus conglomeratus*). Josh did some research and the cases are spun silken pupal cases of the Sac Moth (*Coleophora caespitiella*) which feed on the rush. The adult moths themselves are small and brown with pointed wings. The Coleophoridae group are collectively known as the Case moths or Case-bearers.



REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 27TH NOVEMBER 2013

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, John Winter, Mo Farhand, Neville Day and Steve Bolsover.

10.30am to 3.40pm

Weather dry and grey and cold

TASK: Brushcutter training

Steve Bolsover has qualified for his brushcutter certificate and it was decided by the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum that Steve could train others to use the Bruscutter. This is essentially a strimmer but with a metal rotating propeller with roughly sharp edges.

I selected the Horse-Ride east of the pedestrian pathway as the training area. This is because it is relatively close to the car park and it is also an area which needs widening for horses.

Steve went through the Health and safety aspect. It is most important to keep the visor down, headphones and keep a good distance between the operator and anyone else. Do not approach anyone with the blades turning.

We put up safety signs either side of the work area.

OPERATING PROCEDURE

The hardest part is the cold start. Lay on the ground. Press back button in. Press throttle trigger lockout and the throttle trigger and hold down both levers.

Set switch on multitrigger control handle to start, release the throttle, slide control and throttle levers one after the other; the machine is in the start up position.

Set choke to close position. Press the primer knob at least 5 times. This charges the engine with fuel.

Hold down the machine hard by kneeling on it, make sure the blades will not hit anything.

Slowly pull out the starter cord until you reach the first stop, keeping it as vertical as you can and then pull strongly backwards. Do not allow the starter cord to spring back but guide it back in the opposite direction.

When the engine fires, or after the 5th pull, move the choke lever to the open position. Pull the starter cord again and the engine should fire.

Then briefly touch the throttle trigger and now the machine is in operating mode.

Hook the brushcutter to the harness and hook it so you feel confident it is well balanced.

The maximum branch width it can cut is about an inch. You can use it vertically and bring it down onto a bush. The best way to cut is always from right to left so that cuttings drop into the cut area.

Steve watched everyone in turn and we all used it twice. Steve was satisfied we were using it safely.

ALWAYS STOP THE MACHINE WHEN APPROACHING OTHERS

Once cold started, to re-start you just move the trigger to the on position and pull the starter cord.

Refueling is via a plastic can with a valved filler. One adds 2 stroke oil in sealed plastic bottles to the fuel can in the 1:50 ratio. This is 100ml of 2 stroke to 5 litres of petrol.

The brushcutter makes a nice undercut into bushes and creates entrances for small mammals.

We worked right up to the entrance to the Horse-Ride off Warren Lane. Whilst one person used the brushcutter and one watched the others worked on a fallen tree along the Horse-Ride.

The Horse-Ride is very soft at this point but when horses have compressed the soil it is harder and more compact at the bottom. This suggests that the old practise of using woodchip to firm up the Horse-Ride has not been a good idea.

Steve left when he was satisfied.

I went back to the car to fetch my lunch and bumped into 3 ladies trying to do the Bentley Priory Circular Walk using the Harrow leaflet. They were not impressed. They had got lost because the map did not match the text when going from the Car Park to the Brewery Ponds. They were right. I advised they inform Harrow Council.

After lunch we moved to Hollybrook Rise. A close examination of the dead Bracken showed it was not too thick and that some could be left as shelter.

John Winter brushcut around the Heather in the eastern corner whilst the rest of us, pulled and scythed the Bracken from the main part of the clearing. We swopped around and everyone had at least one more turn with the brushcutter.

It is essential to rake up the cut material to stop nutrients entering the ground.

I raked really hard and then back –raked to ensure the grass stood up again. A hard rake removes all the thatch and fallen leaves.

We removed the raked material to a large pile which will receive some sunlight and so should heat up. This pile was in good ground cover and so will allow Grass Snakes to safely use the pile if they want to.

The brushcutter is easy to use and it gives excellent cutting control, one can carefully cut and leave areas of differing cut heights.

I cut small areas within the grassland in a south alignment to catch the sun.

Mo cut a large swathe in the northern corner. Everything was raked up.

Leaving thatch and collapsed wet bracken will fertilize the soil and smother the fine grasses.

Raking uncut scrub saplings strips the leaves off and hand picking the leaves is a tedious task; so it is best to cut areas of scrub saplings or leave them rather than raking between them.

Not all the clearing was cut. A substantial area was left and more may need to be cut by next growing season.

Thanks to all those at the training session. We will be using brushcutters to control scrub sapling re-growth.

The first area for control is Bluebell Heath.

Walk on 7th December 2013-12-11

Report by Neville Day

The Saturday walk went OK. We had two visitors from outside the area, One from Staines and one originally from the USA but now living in the UK (I didn't catch where he is living now John Hollingdale may remember) There were also two others that John knew that I hadn't met before. I have the memory of a goldfish nowadays and can't remember their names either. I had my two grandsons Leon and Dylan with me so the usual chaos and mayhem reigned. Dylan found a queen wasp that had hibernated (fuzzy photo attached) which he was very pleased about. There was also a good bit of interest in the amount of fungi on the common.



Working Party on 8th December 2013-12-11

Report by Neville Day

Yesterday's work party was split into two teams. Neville, John Bugler, David Green and I cut down Holly near the Heathbourne Rd end of the bridal path and used the logs obtained to restrict the width of the two entrances so that horses could get through but not vehicles. Mo, Josh and Rajinder were tasked with removing scrub on Bluebell Heath. There was a bit of confusion as to where that was and they ended up continuing to remove scrub around Flushing Wood until we joined them after lunch. Just after lunch we saw the two men that walk their Rotweiller and Alsatian dogs. They had also seen the phantom 4X4 driver. They were fairly close to the bridal way and he said hello to them as he drove by. They said he looked like a traveller (that's my more politically correct version) and was driving a small blue Susuki Traveller.

After lunch Neville, David and I started removing saplings from around the apple tree but stopped as we found that they were not saplings but suckers growing from an extensive root system and we were not sure if they were from the apple tree. We therefore moved down to the saplings adjacent to the new bench seat. We finally finished about quarter to four as the light was fading.



Stanmore Common Work Party, Sunday 8 December 2013

Attendees:

Rajinder Heyer

John Winter

Mo Farhand

Josh Kalms

John Bugler

David Green

Neville Day

The work party was split into two teams to restrict access via Heathbourne Road whilst continuing with the scrub removal on Bluebell Heath.

The purpose of restricting access from Heathbourne Road was to prevent an Off Road Vehicle being driven across the Common as had been observed previously. It was intended to construct a brush wall diagonal to the opening thus still allowing horse riders access. However this proved to be impractical when we discovered a layer of concrete path, probably the remains of an original path, under the soil. Neville, John B, David and John W cut down Holly near the Heathbourne Rd end of the bridal path and used the wood obtained to create log piles restrict the width of the two entrances. The Holly brush was not used as it might become a fire risk as it dried.



Mo, Josh and Rajinder continued removing scrub on Bluebell Heath. There was a bit of confusion as to where that was and they ended up around Flushing Wood removing the rampant holly there, until we joined them after lunch.

Just after lunch we saw the two men that walk their Rottweiler and Alsatian dogs. They had also seen the phantom 4X4 driver. They were fairly close to the bridal way and he said hello to them as he drove by. They suggested he looked like a traveller. He was driving a small blue Suzuki Jeep but could offer no further detail.

After lunch Neville, David and John W started removing saplings from around the apple tree on Bluebell Heath whilst the others were doing the same to the NE. We were concerned about pulling runners from the Apple having discovered the growth was primarily suckers from an extensive root system that we thought might be from the tree suckers. We agreed and moved down to the saplings adjacent to the new bench seat. We finally finished about quarter to four as the light was fading.

It was a good day's work.

REPORT FOR WORK PARTY WEDNESDAY 11TH DECEMBER 2013

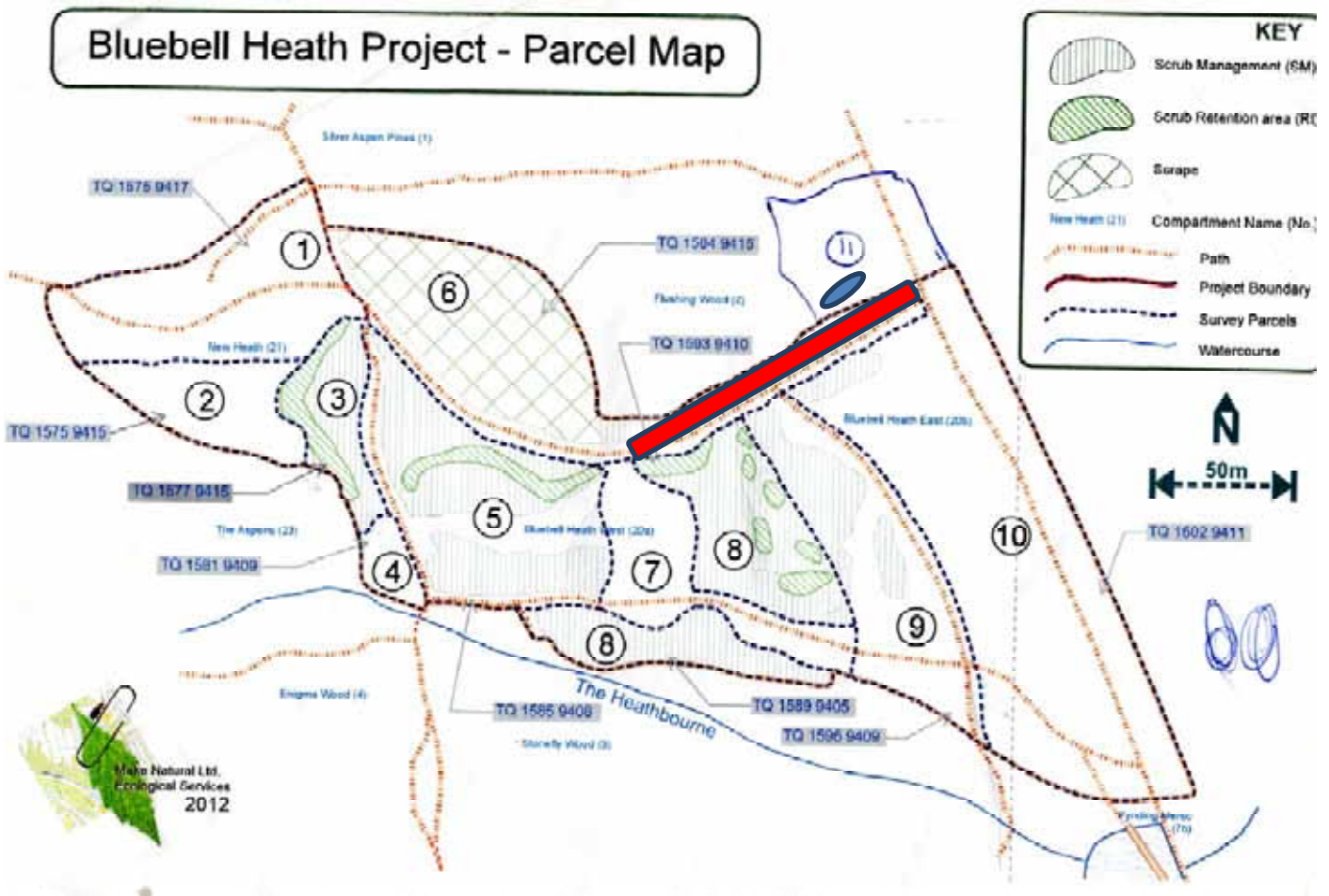
10.30AM TO 3PM

ATTENDEES: Simon Braidman, John Winter, Mo Farhand, Neville Day, David Green

WEATHER: cold and foggy

TASK: To control scrub saplings in Bluebell Heath and Holly in Flushing Wood

Work continued across the northern belt. This area is marked in red on the map below:



This area is thick with tiny scrub saplings. Although good for wildlife, left to themselves they will grow into thick mature scrub and shade out the hard one acid grassland.

Using mattocks, and Lazy Dogs we are digging the saplings up. Mattocks are generally more effective than lazy dogs as they do not have the hammering power of the mattock.

You can get the blade under the roots to lever them out. It is not always that easy many saplings are part of a network of underground horizontal roots over 2 inches thick. Others are suckers regenerating from the stumps of older scrub.

We are aiming for 90% removal.

The roots are added to the dead hedge lying adjacent to the work area.

The second work area is the blue circle in the map above. The Holly here is thick, invasive, re-rooting and hiding a magnificent group of mature trees; an Oak, a Silver Birch and a Beech.

Mo concentrated on Holly removal around this area.

The arisings were left in situ until all the Holly here has been cut down.

On the way back we met one of the regular dog walkers. Then a load of dogs appeared with 2 handlers.

These dogs were not under control and this guys dog you can see was being intimidated by 2 of the pack which were off lead. The guy wanted the dogs called off but 2 of the dogs ignored the calls of their minder.

Words were exchanged between us and the 2 women dog walkers. They claimed the dogs were under control.

The guy said his dog had been attacked before and his dig will retaliate

This issue will need to be raised again at the next HNCF meeting.

On a nicer note here are some atmospheric pictures from the work party.



Oakmead in the mist



Fungi I think *Collybia drophylla*

