

WoTHABS REPORT TO THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING ON 5th APRIL 2011

The Whitchurch-on-Thames Habitat Study Group (WoTHabs) continues to try and fulfill its primary aims, which are to encourage the protection and enhancement of habitats in the parish and to promote local interest and enthusiasm for the natural environment.

Our current committee consists of eight members and we do enlist help from our supporters for special events. However, as always, we would be delighted to welcome more people to get involved on a regular basis especially when we are working on particular projects. Sandra Parkinson has recently stepped down from the position of Secretary and as a committee member; she was a founder member of the group and had contributed enormously over the years with the depth and breadth of her botanical knowledge and practical skills – I would like to express our sincere thanks to her. Fortunately, she is continuing in a supporting role and also with hosting WoTHabs events at Chalkhills. John Bradon has now stepped into the role of Secretary.

The popular Cowslip Open Day at Chalkhills was held on May Bank Holiday Sunday last year in very disappointing weather conditions. The hardy families who braved the rain and cold wind to walk or tractor-ride up the hill, were rewarded by the sight of the carpet of delicate yellow cowslips on the chalk downland. Turnout was not surprisingly lower than previous years but everyone who came said how much they enjoyed the event, including the quiz for the children and of course the tea and cakes, served in the barn. WoTHabs volunteers were ably helped by the Goring Heath Scouts. Please note that there will not be a Cowslip Open Day this year but instead we held a Spring Walk last month to see the early spring flowers, particularly the violets, at Chalkhills. We are also planning a Hardwick Meadow Walk on Sunday 26th June - this will be a new opportunity to visit the stunning flower-rich riverside hay meadow at Hardwick Estate just before hay-making.

Last July, we held our third Wildlife Explorers Day for young children and their families, again at Chalkhills. It was a glorious day and the children were able to discover and study close up some insects, flowers and grasses in the meadows and to get busy and messy with water and soil. We finished the activities with snail racing which is much more exciting than you might imagine! We plan to hold another similar event this summer on 17th July.

Also last season, full botanical surveys were carried out (primarily by Sandra) on three LWS/proposed LWS sites at Bottom Wood, Straw Hill (Hardwick Estate) and Seymours Meadow and the results for these have been sent to TVERC (Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre).

Finally, we have been acting in an advisory role to the Parish Council recently with regard to the impending 'double trouble' on Muddy Lane – the re-routing of the gas main and the necessary but significant felling and pruning of trees to achieve power line clearance. We shall keep closely involved with both these projects to ensure minimum environmental damage. However, with the power line work by SSE, there is the opportunity to turn it to good effect by replacing any trees lost with more suitable smaller native trees/shrubs, and extending the planting organised by WoTHabs in 2006.

If you would like to find out more about our activities, or have any questions for us, please speak to me afterwards or get in touch via our webpage, which has a link from the Village website.

Sally Woolhouse, Treasurer

5th April 2011