



LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

# NEWSletter

Issue No 185

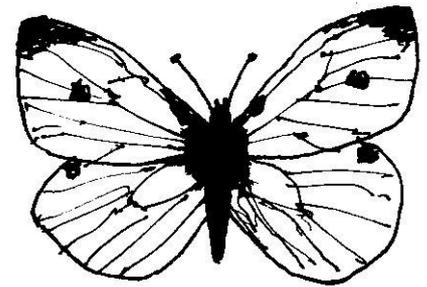
August 2020

## A Strange Year Indeed...

I have continued to work and exercise in Foal Hurst during the strange events of this year, and, being amongst the trees and undergrowth most of the time I have been well isolated. However, I saw several orange tip, small white, brimstones and marbled white butterflies during April.

With the dry weather at that time, the water level in the ponds dropped rapidly meaning some of the tadpoles in the smaller ponds did not make it. With all the rain of last winter, one would have thought the water table would be sufficient to see the ponds through the summer but it would appear most of the water left as runoff and the ground remained dry in many places.

This has not been helped by the loss of the old orchard to the east of Foal Hurst.



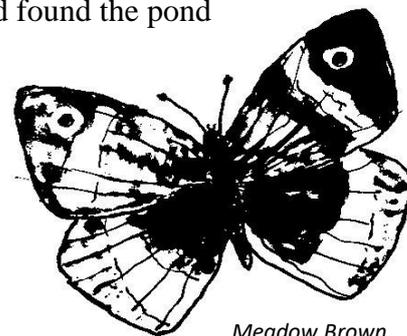
*Small White*

Around the 13<sup>th</sup> May I set to work on the Hibernaculum that was supposed to be made on our March work day. I managed to complete it over two mornings. At that time, Steve Songhurst saw muntjac deer (*Muntiacus reevesi*) and on a separate occasion two female roe deer with fawns. Muntjac are our smallest deer standing about 18 inches (45cm) at the shoulder. They were introduced from China into Woburn Park at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from where they inevitably escaped. There are now some tens of thousands of individuals across southern England.

At about the same time, the cat-proof fence started to be erected by Berkeley Homes along the boundary between Foal Hurst and the old orchard. I have some reservations about its suitability as it is only metal mesh up to a height of two feet and then resorts to plastic. It is not dug into the ground and appears so flimsy that I think it will be riddled with holes by Christmas. It is unlikely to keep cats out for long because as soon as a fox burrows under the fence a cat will be able to take the same path into the wood.

On the third of June, Michael and I wandered the dormouse path to make sure all was clear for Steve Songhurst when he does his dormouse surveys. We had to clear a camp site which was full of litter and other detritus. It was the third camp that has needed to be cleared this year. We also cleared some of the reed mace from the dipping pond and found the pond floor covered with tiny frogs hardly a centimetre long

At the end of May, Waitrose donated £330 for Foal Hurst Wood which the steering group thought would be best spent on the Orchard as it needs quite a bit of work on it. Also because it was Waitrose who donated the orchard in the first place, it would seem appropriate to use the money for the same asset.



*Meadow Brown*

On the 24<sup>th</sup> June I disturbed a group of eight roe deer, three does with a fawn each and two young stags with two points each. They took their time departing with the does and fawns going in one direction and the stags the opposite way. I heard their alarm calls later in the day but didn't see them. The meadows were full of butterflies, mostly gatekeepers, meadow browns, and small coppers. The small copper flits around which makes it very difficult to identify. These ones were only about two cm across.

I had to warn some boys about bicycles not being permitted in the reserve. The immediate response was:- "Why do you care?" It puzzled me and I wonder if this is the attitude of all teen regardless of their upbringing. The three lads I spoke to all seemed to be well behaved except they had not read the signs at the entrance. However, the response was so quick I felt it was their natural way of thinking. Do they really not care or have they just not considered the matter of environment and the effect it has on our lives. It also puzzled me because they were obviously having a good time and enjoying the reserve so why would they not want to comply with the rules and keep the reserve in good order so they can continue to enjoy its benefits.

In the middle of July Michael pruned the apple trees in the Orchard Meadow. There is a vague plan to trim round the trees and provide some mulch or manure for feed. I have yet to arrange this though Michael has started to cut the grass around the tree trunks using a scythe.

Once again it is time to set out the proposed course of action for the coming volunteer work days. There may be some of you who are worried about the social distancing problem while we are working.

# FHW NEWS *letter*

I am sure the coppice area we will be working in is big enough to allow distancing while for hedge laying and trimming we can all stand two or more metres apart as we work. The only two man job will be knocking posts into the ground so this will have to be done by those of us who are already part of a bubble together or by people wearing masks. The sharing of tools should not be a problem as we will all be wearing gloves. I recommend you bring your own gloves but if you need to borrow gloves then you should keep them with you ready for the next volunteers' day. The big problem is tea break. Members of the committee to whom I have spoken think that we should all bring our own tea, coffee and biscuits in order to avoid unnecessary contact. This will also help Mark and Alison who won't then have to deal with our cups and spoons after the event.

However, ultimately I must let you all make your own decision as to whether you think you should attend a volunteer day or not. So, I look forward to seeing all those who wish to attend

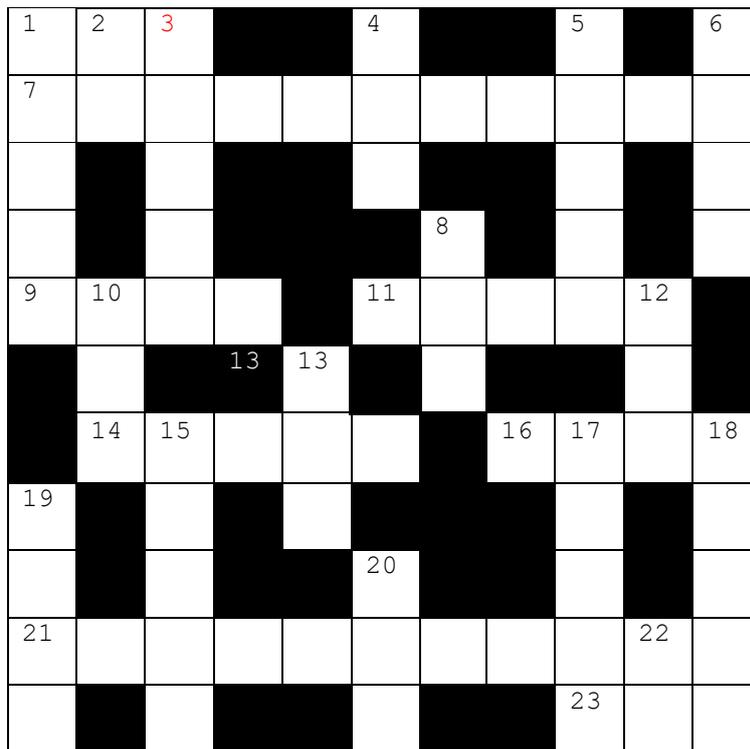
## **Sunday Date      Planned activity      Exercise involved**

<b>Sunday Date</b>	<b>Planned activity</b>	<b>Exercise involved</b>
September 27 <sup>th</sup>	Coppicing and dormice habitat improvement	Sawing, stacking logs, log splitting, building dead-hedges
October 25 <sup>th</sup>	Coppicing and dormice habitat improvement	Sawing, stacking logs, log splitting, building dead-hedges
November 29 <sup>th</sup>	Coppicing and dormice habitat improvement	Sawing, stacking logs, log splitting, building dead-hedges
December 27 <sup>th</sup>	Coppicing and dormice habitat improvement / Hedge laying prep.	Sawing, stacking logs, log splitting, building dead-hedges
January 31 <sup>st</sup>	Hedge laying	Lopping, sawing, weaving.
February 28 <sup>th</sup>	Hedge laying	Lopping, sawing, weaving.
March 28 <sup>th</sup>	General work on paths and hedgerows	Bramble bashing, hedge trimming etc.

This season we will be coppicing in the south west corner of the wood about as far from the nature reserve entrance as it is possible to be. I look forward to seeing you all at 09.30 in the Badsell Road car park on Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>. Remember to wear good strong footwear, and plenty of layers to protect against rain and cold, and to bring your own drink and snack.

*Peter Prince.*

## FHW Crossword No 152



**Clues Across** 1. Subscriber identity module, (3). 7. *Maniola jurtina*, (6,5)9. Luxuriant, (4).  
11 See 4 Down. 14. Junior night flyer, (5).16. Agricultural Holding, (4). 21. Lepidoptera, (11)

**Clues Down** 1.15. *Artiga rapae*, (5,5). 2. For example, (1.1). 3.P.P.E.).4,5and 11 Across. June 24 sighting, (3,5,5). 6. Biting insect, (4). 8. Dined, (3). 10. Strange thing in the sky, !(,1,1).  
12. Male title, (3) 13. Busy insect, (3). 15. See 1 Down. 17. Plant pest, (5). 18.Field or Harvest, (5).  
19. Young foxes, (4). 20. Biblical animal refuge, (3).22. Political and economic grouping, (1.1).

### Solutions to FHW Crossword No 151

**Across** 6. Primrose. 8. Nova. 9. Muddy. 13. Eat. 14. Coo.  
17. Sac. 19. Clump. 21. Dodo. 23. Milkmaids.

**Down** 1. Spawn. 2. Imam. 3. Toads. 4. Deny. 5. Stags.  
11. Tea. 12. SOS. 15. Hedge. 16. Ducks. 18. Copse.  
19. Coir. 20. Plan.

### Any News?

Items for the next Issue by  
1<sup>st</sup> October please, to:-

80 Forest Road, Paddock Wood  
Kent, TN12 6JX  
email b.mace452@btinternet.com

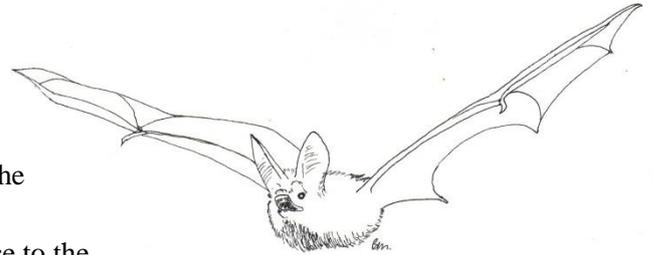
## Supplement

### The busy bats of Foal Hurst Wood...

No doubt many of you will have enjoyed marvelling at nature during a visit to Foal Hurst Wood this spring or summer; listening to the wonderful birdsong in springtime, seeing the bluebell display in May, or just enjoying the shade of the woodland on a hot summer's day. But of course, all this is best seen during the daytime and yet not all of nature goes to sleep during the hours of darkness; indeed for some animals such as foxes, mice, tawny owls, moths and bats etc., the hours of darkness is their busy time.

Bats have always fascinated me and in the past, as the sun set, I would spend a couple of hours listening to and recording the bats visiting Foal Hurst Wood, using a hand held bat detector. But technology moves on and things that previously were impossible, or just too difficult, have now become much easier to monitor, such as recording bat activity in the woodland throughout the night-time.

For three nights this summer (22 – 25 July) I borrowed a couple of static bat detectors from work and left them attached to trees to record all the bat calls in two positions within Foal Hurst Wood. One position was close to the main entrance to the wood and the second was near the roundel.



*Common Pipistrelle*

The static detectors are battery operated and 'come to life' between sunset and sunrise, recording any passing bats echo locating within about 50 metres of the detector. They store the information on a SD card which later can be removed from the detector and with appropriate computer software all the bat activity can be analysed.

For the technically minded of you the static bat detectors I was using were 'song meter mini bat detectors', produced by Wildlife Acoustics in USA and I also used the company's kaleidoscope bat analysis software. To stop any possibility of theft the detectors were attached to trees at a height of about 6 meters and secured with 8mm steel cable security locks.

## So, what did I discover?...

Firstly, both recording areas were busy with bats on all three nights, providing me with 3166 bat call files to look at! Each bat file was up to 15 seconds long, with the recording spot near the entrance to wood providing me with 4 hours and 48 mins of 'bat chat', whilst the roundel was slight less at 3 hours 15 minutes, so the entrance area was busier with bats than the roundel. This matched my understanding from previous years' manual surveys in the wood.

However, my earlier bat surveys generally lasted no longer than about two hours after sunset and what the static bat detectors have revealed is that most of the bat activity - indeed 81% of their feeding and socialising - takes place between 11 pm and 4 am, with 11 pm – 2 am a particularly busy time for them!

Of the bat calls I recorded, Common Pipistrelle bats represented 82% of the calls, Soprano Pipistrelles 15%, Myotis species 2% and Noctule 1%. At times both common and soprano pipistrelle bats were flying in the same area and often there was quite a bit of social calling going on between the two bat species. I suspect this is the bats arguing about who the feeding area belongs to!!!

In addition, close to the entrance to Foal Hurst Wood I also recorded Tawny Owls calls during the night. Again, this matches my finding of two winters ago, when I took part in a national tawny owl survey and regularly recorded tawny owls in the wood.

So there you have it, whilst most of us are tucked up in bed, the bats share Foal Hurst Wood with other creatures of the night, free to feed and socialise without worrying about disturbance from any passing humans.

Affordable modern computer-based technology is beginning to transform our knowledge of the natural world, this is just a small example of how simple bits of technical kit can help us to better understand the world we live in.

*Steve Songhurst*



# FHW NEWS *letter*