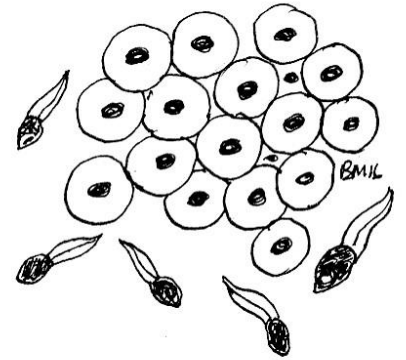


Summer time in the wood ...

Michael and I started work on the damaged Allotments Way on the 31st March with two rolls of matting and 400 pegs. The path was quite muddy and the grass was almost completely gone after a much higher foot fall from visitors and from the volunteers working on the hedge there. A skylark over Orchard Meadow kept us company by singing to us much of the time. By the end of the morning we realised we needed another three rolls and additional pegs. However, we did open the path so the whole of the reserve was open for Easter. I saw a brimstone butterfly along the Avenue that day. There were over fifty newts in the Small Orchard Meadow Pond which is a lot compared with last year. There was still no sign of the toad numbers I had been expecting and hoping for but the frog spawn had all hatched by that time. Having said that, I found three clumps of frogspawn in a small pond in the coppice area, these did not hatch for another two weeks close to mid-April. I have never seen spawn in this pond before possibly because it is normally so dark up there. Perhaps the pond has been made more favourable by our cutting the trees.



By the 7th April the first bluebell was open in the south east corner by the old orchard and the early purple orchids were producing flower buds. A common spotted orchid was already fully open by this time but there was only the one.

A lady by the name of Stacey asked to donate a bench and tree to the reserve. The tree was planted on the 11th April and the bench was placed opposite the existing bench in the Flower Meadow on May 26th. There is a plaque on the bench in memory of her late husband.

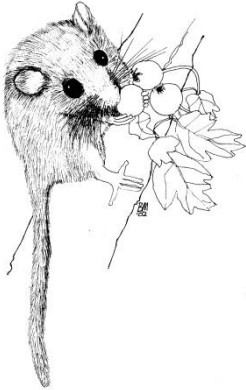
I was very disheartened when during the Easter Holidays most of the path name signs were wrecked. Michael offered to repair and replace those that could be salvaged but unfortunately a couple were beyond help. I don't have a router anymore as my old one eventually burnt out the contact wires. I don't use one often enough to warrant the cost of replacing it, so for the time being we will go sign-less where necessary.



On a brighter note, it was lovely to see a pair of mallard ducks on the Wetland from about mid-April. Unlike the mandarins from a few years ago, these did not fly away the instant they saw someone and were often still on the water beyond 10.00am. In the past I have seen mallards on the Dipping Pond but they never stayed very long.

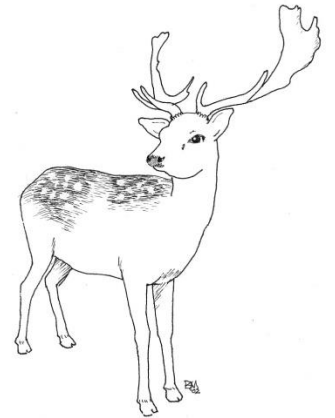
FHW NEWS letter

By May 5th the bluebells were in full swing and the scent was quite powerful and very pleasing. This had only improved by May 12th and to top that, I heard my first cuckoo. The ducks were on the small pond in the Orchard Meadow but flew back to the wetland at about 11 o'clock.



When Steve Songhurst carried out his dormouse survey in May, he found that 24 of the 50 boxes had blue tit nests. Of these 7 had eggs, 5 had chicks 1-7 days old, 3 had chicks 8-12 days old, 7 had chicks 13-18 days old, and finally two had dead chicks. This is a very wide range of ages, possibly due to the strange weather during April and May. He also saw a group of 9 fallow deer, the largest group either he or I have ever seen. Throughout May, Mark, Michael, Ray and I dug ditches but progress was slow at times because the rain made it very heavy going. We kept the work to short spells, going home early rather than later.

On the 26th May I saw deer droppings in the Flower Meadow right by the car park hedge. This is the first year I have ever seen evidence of the deer in the flower meadow and I wonder if they are becoming more adventurous looking for places to spread out. We may in the future find them in the town during the night as they explore the area. I spoke to the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council about this and suggested that a green corridor may be necessary so that the deer can move between Foal Hurst and Whetsted Woods after the new houses are built along the railway line. It seems that deer numbers are on the increase so it is probable they are looking for new areas to exploit. The railway line is a major barrier to their habitat range and it is possible that a deer-friendly crossing can be built to the west of Whetsted Wood to help them. However a new land bridge over the railway is at present out of the question even though it would probably be the best option. Also on the 26th I saw the mallard ducks were still on the small pond in Orchard Meadow. I am sure they have nested but I have not seen the nest.



In the Orchard Meadow there are several young trees growing, mostly Jay planted oaks. I have posed the question to the Council as to whether they should be left to develop which will mean the Orchard eventually becomes a part of the wood, or do we want to remove them and keep the meadow as a meadow. There are pro's and con's for both arguments. In view of our ever increasing climate change problem, I would like to see more woodland. We have to bear in mind that the section of the meadow under the power lines will have to stay as a meadow anyway. The Council will deliberate this in July and we may have an answer by September when we all meet up again. Considering the time it will take the oaks to mature it is obviously a very long term plan and one none of us will see to the end. Hopefully our descendants will thank us for which ever plan we choose.

FHW NEWS *letter*

Once June appeared on the scene, the damsel flies came out in numbers. There were the usual culprits at the wetland. To begin with I saw mainly female with just a few male broad-winged damsels (*calopteryx virgo*). *Calopteryx Splendens* also made a show with the big black spots on their wings. Later I saw members of the narrow-winged damsels (*coenagrionidae*) but there are so many varieties it is difficult to know what is what.



On the 14th July Mark and I discovered a buzzard nest in the north side of the wood. The two chicks were very vocal which was what alerted us to the nest. This is the first time buzzards have nested and had chicks in the reserve. Previously, they have tried nesting but have been driven away by human activity. By early August there was only one chick remaining which by this time had fledged and was being very vocal all over the wood.

During the last half of July, Ray and I spent time clearing brambles from the paths. Most of the work was done by Ray. Thank you, Ray. We finished in the wood on the 11th of August.

On August 27th the Flower Meadow was mown. Unlike previous years the cuttings were not mulched and needed to be raked off. Hopefully this will have been accomplished by the first work day. Also on that day I planted nine hazel shoots at the Wetland to help develop a hazel hedge around the pond. I also set out the new area for coppicing.

Barsley's department store has offered to donate a couple of small leafed lime trees to the reserve. These will hopefully be planted sometime in September.

Our next volunteers' day will be on Sunday, September 26th when we will commence coppicing. We will be working close to the Wetland. The whole season's work should be as set out below:

- September 26: Coppicing, clearing brush, building dead hedges, felling trees.
- October 31: Coppicing, clearing brush, building dead hedges, felling trees.
- November 28: Coppicing, clearing brush, building dead hedges, felling trees.
- December 26: Coppicing, hedge laying, clearing brush, building dead hedges, felling trees.
- January 30: Hedge laying, thinning shrubs, planting stakes, applying bindings.
- February 27: Hedge laying, thinning shrubs, planting stakes, applying bindings.
- March 27: General work on paths and hedges, thinning shrubs, bramble bashing.

As usual we will all meet in the car park at 09.30am. Tools, tea, coffee and snacks will be provided. Wear good clothing and shoes and bring your own gloves if you can. I have some gloves but it is difficult to cater for all the different sizes.

Peter Prince



NEW DEAD HEDGE - S.W. CORNER

Any News?

Items for the next Issue by
5th October please, to:-
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TN12 6JX
email b.mace452@btinternet.com