

# Volunteer News

Autumn  
Winter  
2005/2006



## Waverley Action for Wildlife

### In this Issue:

Natterjacks Sing at Frensham

Forthcoming Bat Project

Downslink - Past, Present and Future

Do Snakes really need Ladders?

Combating Aliens in The Bourne

Chamomile Returns to Ewhurst Green

Farnham Park Volunteers

Conservation on the Verge

#### WHAT'S ON

Water Vole and other Riparian Mammals

If you require a large-print version of this leaflet please contact:-

Countryside Office  
on 01483 523394

## NATTERJACKS SING AT FRENSHAM

Little did I know when I wrote the article for the last edition of "Volunteer News" that I would be writing about their success so soon! The work carried out last winter seems to have agreed with them.

Once their release pond was removed and carefully filled up with water, we were rewarded one evening with the sight and incredible noise of fifteen adult toads. With last year's total count of adults being only seven, this represented a much larger population of adults than expected.

Since then, strings of spawn were seen, tadpoles



Barley straw bundles

hatched and everything seemed to be going well.

The presence of algal blooms in the water were combated by barley straw bundles and netting erected to stave off predation by birds. Some of the spawn was raised by the Assistant Ranger, Fiona Hayes, just in case we had a disaster with water levels and the pond dried out – a possibility with this unlined pool. However, since these individuals were re-introduced to the pond as either large tadpoles or actual toadlets, their numbers seem to have been decimated. Aquatic predation is minimal as fish are absent and other predators are kept in check by allowing the pond to dry out all winter.

The current thinking is possible predation by wood ants, common around the margins. On coastal sites where natterjacks do well in dune slacks, there is an absence of this voracious predator. It doesn't take too



Natterjack Toad  
photo by Steve Webster

many ants to overpower an emerging toadlet the size of your thumbnail.

Further investigation is required and more practical work is planned for the pond this coming winter. The number of adults seen this year does indicate that they are able to survive, therefore we will endeavour to do what we can so that Frensham will remain an area that resounds to the sound of Natterjack "song" each spring.

Steve Webster

## FORTHCOMING BAT PROJECT

All British bat species have suffered dramatic decline in numbers during the last century due to factors including habitat loss, reduction in the abundance of insect prey and loss of winter roosting sites in buildings and old trees.

We are hoping to help Waverley's bats by continuing to manage our sites with them in mind by providing a number of potential hibernation sites on our land.

With the help of the Surrey Bat Group, two buildings have initially

been identified as suitable, an old toilet block by the cricket pavilion in Farnham Park and a World War Two pill box on the Lammas Lands in Godalming.

We are hoping to convert these buildings over the next year then move onto further sites across the Borough.

The work is expected to help species such as the brown long-eared bat and the common pipstrelle.

Once work has begun, regular updates will be posted on our website ([www.waverley.gov.uk/countryside](http://www.waverley.gov.uk/countryside)).

If you wish to help bats in your



photo from Surrey Bat Group

immediate area, see the Bat Conservation Trust website for guidelines on gardening for bats ([www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk)) or join your local bat group ([www.surrey bats.org.uk](http://www.surrey bats.org.uk)).

Fiona Haynes

## THE DOWNSLINK - PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The Horsham and Guildford Direct Railway Company, established in 1860, used 15½ miles of single railway line to link Stammerham Junction, Horsham to Peasmarsh Junction on the London and South Western Railway, two miles south of Guildford Station.



Battles started with ownership squabbles before the railway opened and during construction, a contractor went bankrupt!

In 1864, the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway took over the company and the line opened on 2nd October 1865. According to the Sussex Agricultural Express "an event so important as the opening of this line might well have been celebrated by some public demonstration, but the timetable was simply issued and the first train left Horsham for Guildford at 6.35 a.m."

Unfortunately the railway was never particularly successful, the majority of commuters from Bramley, Womersley and Cranleigh travelling via Guildford

to London found it more convenient to drive to Guildford to catch the London train. This greatly weakened the case for retaining the line, even the considerable trade in Fuller's Earth from Baynards Park was not enough to save the railway and it finally closed on 14th June 1965.

Following the closure, the lines and sleepers were lifted and much of the track ballast removed. The coppiced woodland along many of the cuttings and embankment sides were neglected and in 1970 ownership transferred from the British Railways Board to Surrey County Council/Hambledon Rural District Council (the latter becoming Waverley Borough Council in 1974). From 1970 until 1984, management consisted of general scrub clearance to enable the public to use the recreational facility.

In 1984, a continuous link between National Trails of the North and South Downs Way were created. The Downlink was officially opened on 9th July 1984 by the Mayor of Waverley and subsequently received a commendation in the National Conservation Award Scheme.

Although the railway had had its problems, today it is a well-used route to school and local shops, a

footpath, bridleway and cycle path. Over the next few years, Surrey County Council will undertake considerable drainage, signage and surfacing improvements to the whole of the Bramley to Baynards stretch, ensuring that the popularity of the Downlink will continue.

There are plenty of rumours regarding the future of the disused railway. A Railtrack report, which was commissioned by Surrey County Council, documented a feasibility study for restoring the line from Guildford to Cranleigh. The financial assessment revealed that the scheme was not financially viable, unable to meet even maintenance costs. One positive outcome has been the recognition of the Guildford to Cranleigh stretch as both an important current and future movement corridor that means it is protected through the statutory planning process.

Good news for all who use it, including the nine species of reptiles and amphibians, 23 species of butterflies, 23 species of mammals, 78 species of birds, 140 species of fungi and a huge 356 species of plant!

*Ian Baldwin*

## DO SNAKES REALLY NEED LADDERS?

Occasionally, wildlife does something that all the books say they don't. For example, ladybirds biting humans (this actually halted construction work on the Humber Bridge in the 1970's).

Recently another myth has been dispelled at Frensham Common. Do snakes climb trees?

We have all seen images of giant pythons in tropical forests wrapped around branches, but what about our native species? The answer it seems is yes and quite well.

An adder was discovered about three feet up a small silver birch which had no branches closer to the ground than two feet. The snake itself was shorter than this and had to have climbed the bare trunk of the tree unassisted. Unfortunately her method went unobserved! She was reacting to a threat and her behaviour might be considered unusual.

Let us know if you have any wildlife sightings that you consider to be a bit odd or out of the ordinary. We may want to share them .....

*Steve Webster*



*Adder photo by Steve Webster*

## COMBATING ALIENS IN THE BOURNE

The Bourne Conservation Group has this summer, made a determined effort to eradicate Himalayan Balsam from the middle section of the Bourne stream.

Himalayan Balsam was introduced into the UK by intrepid plant collectors in the 19th century. Over the years it has escaped from private gardens into the countryside, mainly along watercourses.

Although it has a most attractive pink flower, it is a very dominant annual plant, growing to 3m high in a single season. After flowering in late July - August, the seed pod bursts, scattering up to 500 seeds over a 7m radius.

In the following year, the new plants grow in that area and carried by water, they spread downstream. Quickly dense clumps form which suppress the growth of native grasses and other flora. In autumn, the plants die back leaving the banks bare of vegetation and therefore liable to erosion.

As landowners have not always taken action to control the alien plant, Himalayan Balsam has been allowed to spread unchecked along watercourses.

The Bourne Conservation Group had wanted for some time to control this situation. The first real opportunity arose this year when our friends in the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP) decided to control Himalayan Balsam in their area.

Waverley's Rangers agreed to

help and as a result, two very successful sessions were held, each with groups of more than 10 volunteers.

In addition to achieving its main objective, the operation also provided an opportunity to further cement excellent relations with the rangers of WBC and BVCP and to establish contact with local residents with properties along the stream.

We are aware that we have not solved the problem, we will need to check the stream again next year and tackle the section nearer the River Wey. Unfortunately, the action taken has not found favour with everyone. The Himalayan Balsam flower is a good source of nectar so therefore it is popular with bee-keepers, some of whom have voiced their concerns.

This illustrates that conservation issues are rarely straightforward!

**Noel Moss**  
**The Bourne Conservation Group**

*Stan and Fiona*



## CHAMOMILE RETURNS TO EWHURST GREEN

The cricket green at Ewhurst was once the best site in the County for chamomile and was accordingly designated as a SNCI.

Unfortunately in 2001, the cricket club took exception to weeds on the green and used herbicides to eradicate them.

With advice from English Nature and the County Ecologist, we waited for a few years to see what returned.

In 2002, there was nothing, in 2003 still nothing, but in 2004 a few small patches of chamomile reappeared. This year there are over 20 patches of chamomile, which is excellent news.

Chamomile's Latin name means 'ground apple' due to the appley scent that comes from its leaves when crushed.

Apart from chamomile tea, it is also used in making herbal beers (possibly a more palatable drink!).

In the past it was strewn onto the floor as an air-freshener and had many medical uses. Commonly the flowers were used in a poultice for reducing swellings and an antiseptic.

Traditionally Chamomile grows well in closely grazed areas. Mowing mimics these conditions, so today some of the best places for chamomile are sports pitches - as long as artificial fertilizers and weed killers aren't used!

**Sarah Henderson**

## FARNHAM PARK VOLUNTEERS

Most Wednesday mornings there is a hive of activity in Farnham Park, a mediaeval deer park once a private hunting ground of bishops and kings. Today, the park is an important conservation site for its ancient trees and varied habitats; it is also a green lung for Farnham.

The hive of activity? A group of Wednesday volunteers who are an essential component of the management of the Park, without whom much of the essential habitat work and maintenance of recreational facilities would not take place. The volunteers have helped manage the ponds, plant trees, control invasive species including Himalayan balsam, ragwort and bracken. They have also helped to construct informal path surfaces and steps to make access easier through the wetter areas in the winter months and to maintain landscape features such as The Avenue.

Tasks vary from week to week, but the volunteers meet at various entrances around the park depending on the location of the task.

They meet at 10.00 a.m. and usually finish by 1.00 p.m., but there is sometimes an option to work into the afternoon. Tools, gloves, refreshments and good company are provided.

For further information, call:-

Ron Hills,  
Countryside Ranger  
on 01252 792416

**Ron Hills**



**Farnham Park - a green lung for Farnham**

# CONSERVATION ON THE VERGE

**W**ouldn't we all prefer roadside banks of wild flowers instead of tight-mown grass?

Well, Surrey County Council is looking at changing the way their contractors deal with roadside verges.

For many years, the County Council has arranged for some rare plants to be recorded, monitored and managed appropriately, but now the scheme is due for expansion with a number of sites being searched for as an initial trial for a county-wide scheme.

The idea is to reduce maintenance costs by mowing as late into the year as possible allowing wild flowers to set seed ready for the following year. Where feasible, cuttings will be removed or at least composted on site

causing nutrient-loving common grass species to gradually be out-competed by increasing wild flower diversity.

Initially, sites will be selected if they possess rare plants or excellent communities of wild flowers. Hopefully, the results will indicate that this is easily repeatable (where traffic sight-lines allow access) across much larger areas of roadside grassland.

Such conservation management techniques have already been successful on Waverley's countryside sites. There has been an increase in orchid numbers on some of our sites and one of Britain's rarest plants – Tower Mustard (*Aramis glabra*) has been saved at a sensitive location in Milford.

Ian Baldwin

Do you know anywhere that you would like to see this happen in Waverley?

If so, please get in touch with Ian on 01483 423081 or

ibaldwin@waverley.gov.uk



## WHAT'S ON Water Vole and other Riparian Mammals

**A** one day conference on Saturday, 29th October is to be held at the Pfizer premises, Walton Oaks, Tadworth, Surrey. The conference has been organised by the Kent, Essex and Surrey Mammal Groups and the speakers will include:-

Chris Matcham, Surrey Wildlife Trust  
**'Otter recovery in South East England'**  
Catherine Helswell, BBO Wildlife Trust  
**'Colne Valley Water Vole Project'**  
Rob Strachan, Wildcru Oxford  
**'Strategies for Water Vole Conservation'**  
Peter Frost, Kent Mammal Group  
**'Beavers in Kent'**  
Chris Rostron, Water for Wildlife  
**'Water as a resource for mammals'**

Merryl Gelling, Wildcru Oxford  
**'Water Vole Disease Project'**  
Tony Mitchell-Jones, English Nature  
**'Water Vole Legislation'**  
Phoebe Carter, The Mammal Society  
**'National Water Shrew Survey'**

The cost of the conference will be £25.00 including lunch. There is a 20% reduction for members of the Mammal Society, Mammals UK or local mammal groups and a 10% one for the unwaged and senior citizens.

If you would like to book a place, please contact Dave Williams at Surrey Wildlife Trust on 01483 795454 or e-mail Dave.Williams@surreywt.org.uk

Water Shrew



"Wild Specimen"  
photo by Dr Steve Furness

### The Countryside Team

Broadwater Rangers Office  
Ian Baldwin & Sarah Henderson  
01483 423081

#### The Rangers

Fiona Haynes  
Assistant Ranger  
07771 945921

Frensham Great Pond Rangers Office  
Ron Hills & Steve Webster  
01252 792416

#### The Office Staff

Countryside Manager  
Jane Bowden  
01483 523443

Countryside Projects  
Assistant  
Denise Roffey  
01483 523392

#### Local Conservation Groups

The Bourne Conservation  
Volunteers  
Stan Cockett  
01252 794511

Cranleigh & District  
Conservation Volunteers  
Tony Fox  
01483 272899

Friends of  
Farnham Park  
Murray Nurse  
01252 716064

Haslemere and District  
Conservation Volunteers  
Robert Serman  
01428 654681

### How can you help?

We are always looking for new people to join the Waverley Action for Wildlife band of volunteers. There are a wide variety of conservation tasks and events to become involved in this coming season and help is always welcome. However, if the thought of 'getting physical' doesn't appeal to you, there are plenty of administrative and office type jobs available. If you are interested in assisting with survey or monitoring work, the Rangers are always in need of some extra help. For details of how to start volunteering, please contact Denise Roffey at Waverley.

Visit our website at  
[www.waverley.gov.uk/countryside](http://www.waverley.gov.uk/countryside)