



Hawridge & Cholesbury Commons Preservation Society

Newsletter May 2005

Summer Party:- Tickets are now available for the Summer Party which will again be held at Hawridge School from 5.30 to 8pm on Saturday 25th June. Once again it will be a Hog Roast and Barbeque with bread, salads and desserts also provided. BYO drinks. Soft drinks are available for the children. There are some tables and benches available but you might like to bring folding chairs or a rug. The costs remain the same as in previous years - Adults £10.00; Children (5-16) £5; children under 5 free. As usual there are concessionary prices for members Adults £7.50 and Family Ticket £25.00. Do come along and enjoy it!

Summer work:- Now that the winter working parties are finished we thought you might like to know what we are planning to do during the spring and summer months. Isobel Clark has outlined the various tasks which will be undertaken. As you see there is a great deal to do and we are fortunate in having a number of willing helpers but there is always work for more! If you are interested in being involved in any of these activities, please get in touch with Isobel (Tel 758987, email hccps@cholesbury.com). You don't have to commit to being involved over many years; you can help even if you can only offer a couple of hours; some tasks you can do at home.

Many thanks to all of you who do help. The Commons look wonderful.

1. **Paths:** Our first activity is to keep the paths cut low enough for walkers. To this end we have a volunteer who uses his own tractor to cut the paths on part of the Commons and 3 others who use the society's tractor and mowers to keep the rest of the paths open. In addition we have some tractor maintenance to carry out every so often.
2. **Grassland/Heathland:** A wide variety of plants can be found on the open areas on the Commons; of particular interest are those found on acid grassland and heathland. The Commons here provide one of the few places in Buckinghamshire where this kind of habitat is found and it is here because the geology has left us with pockets of clay and flints on the surface, overlying chalk. The clay and flints break down to give an acid soil which provides ideal conditions for certain grasses and heathland plants. To maintain this habitat we need to remove the nutrients provided by the mature grasses. In the past this would have been carried out by grazing animals. Today we cut the grass in September and collect it. This also allows the herbs and finer grasses to flourish because they are not smothered by the fallen stems of the coarse grasses.
3. **Bracken:** Our next priority is the control of bracken which is found over large areas of both Commons but is absent from some large areas, notably the open grassland between the cricket pavilion and the Full Moon. Over recent years it has gradually made its way up the slope from the bottom of the Commons near the Hertfordshire boundary. The main aim of our bracken control programme is to stop the progress of the bracken into unaffected areas, and preferably to push it back. Where the bracken is dense, there is very little chance of eradicating it, but near the edge of the area where the rhizomes are still young and weaker we may be able to push it back.

The advice we have is that rolling the bracken when the fronds are about 18 inches tall, thereby breaking the stems, weakens the rhizomes which continue to try to develop the broken fronds. This drains them of energy in a way that cutting off the fronds does not. Last year we rolled most of the accessible areas but cut a well-defined small area at the appropriate time (June/July depending on how warm and wet the preceding months

have been). We want to continue with this over a number of years so that we have a visual comparison of the techniques. In addition we have been making measurements of the effect of rolling on the height and density of the bracken in a number of areas. To do this we have taken a series of 1m squares in various locations and counted the number of stems and measuring their length before rolling starts. We have 2 years' data and hope to continue collecting this in future.

In September we cut and collect as much of the bracken as we can and have started to compost it near the bottom of Horseblock Lane.

4. **Heather:** Over the last 4 years we have been developing a programme to encourage the heather to spread. The most important thing to do is avoid mowing the areas too closely, which has been successful on the whole. The next and most arduous task has been to remove the thatch from a strip around the degenerate plants exposing the mineral soil so that seed can germinate and grow in relatively benign conditions. We did this 4 years ago and again last year. If you look closely at the area which can be found about half way down the Common below The Old Mission Hall near the school, you will see that there is a ring of young plants growing in the strip cleared 4 years ago. We don't expect to see any plants yet from last year's strips. In addition we cleared a number of areas further from the plants 4 years ago to see if any old buried seed would germinate. Some areas where the existing plants indicated that heather would not be grown easily were also cleared to give us a comparison. We are still awaiting the results of this trial.

Another activity has been the raising of young heather plants from seed collected from the Commons. We have about 8 plants (sown by the children of Hawridge and Cholesbury School) which are doing well and which will be planted out on the Common later this year. Members of the Horticultural Society have also taken seeds to raise plants for later planting out.

5. **Bluebells:** As you probably know, the native bluebell is under threat from the foreign Spanish bluebell. Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) are native to Britain, and 30% of the world's population of the bluebells are found here. Bluebells are much less common elsewhere in Europe, so this country has an international responsibility for the conservation of this species and English Nature is doing all it can to preserve them (www.english-nature.org.uk/news/story.asp?ID=521). The native wild bluebell cannot easily be established outside its native habitat but the Spanish bluebell planted in error will grow anywhere. What is more, it will hybridise with the native wild bluebell, and, its traits being dominant, will breed it out of existence. Its botanical name is *Hyacinthoides hispanica*. This is a race against time for once the hybridisation begins, it cannot be reversed. The dominant genes cannot be removed from a wild population once their presence has been established.

Both Hawridge and Cholesbury Commons have a fine distribution of native bluebells and we want to protect them from the invaders. With this in mind we are in the process of removing the invasive Spanish bluebells and their hybrids from the Commons. This is a task which will extend over many years since it takes 4-6 years for a seed to mature sufficiently to flower.

Gardeners can contribute by removing any Spanish or hybrid bluebells from their gardens (and destroying them). Digging up the bulbs and burning them is the most effective method of removal; cutting off the heads before they set seed stops the seeds being transported to surrounding areas; and cutting off the flower heads prevents the pollen, which contains much of the genetic material, from being transported to local native populations. **This is a great time to fill vases and take the flowers indoors!** If you aren't sure what yours are see Anne Brown's description in the April/May edition of Hilltop News (page 10) or just ask us. **Remember that it is an offence to dump garden waste of any kind on the Common and stiff penalties apply.**

Rocks etc. on the verges:- Just a reminder that none of us has the permission of the Lord of the Manors to put them there. If anyone is hurt or damages their car on anything that you have placed there, they are your responsibility!

Lindsay Griffin (Chairman)

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Subscriptions:- If you have not paid your subscription since the AGM then it is now due. Please send a cheque for £7.50 for each member to Mike Fletcher, Ivy Cottage, Cholesbury.

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