

# Friends of Naphill Common

Since the birth of FONC, the increased interest in our local common has continued to uncover more and more of its secrets. Despite the unprecedented weather, this year has been very fruitful and we have been able to show what a remarkable place it is – and how important it is to look after it properly. It is worth reminding ourselves of some of the chief developments.

**Geology.** Early in the summer, under the leadership of Dr Jill Eyers, we have shown that the geology maps are wrong: the common has a greater variety of soils than just the 'clay-with-flints' that the maps show. From the sarsen stones (known locally as Den-

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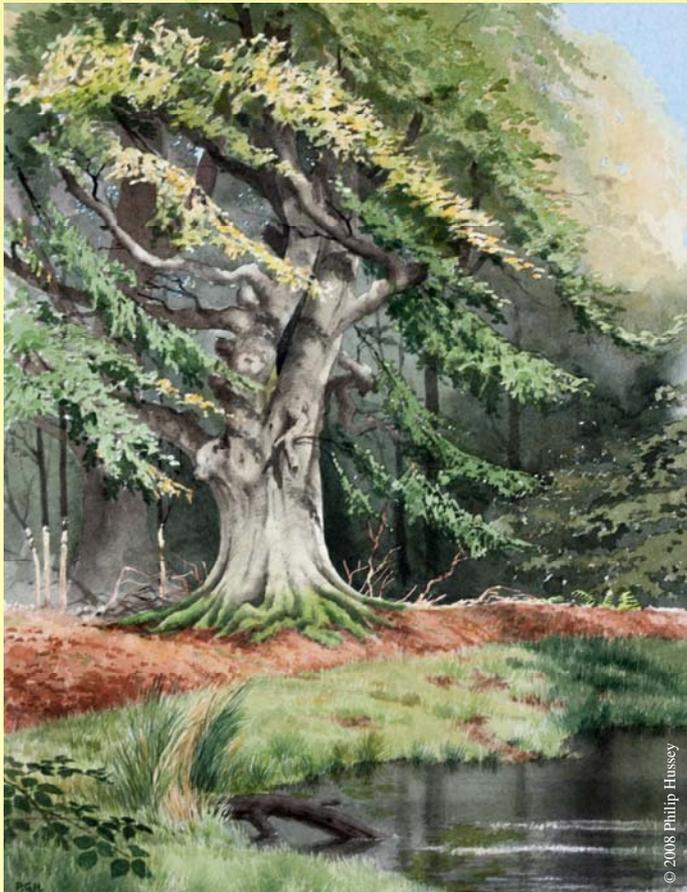
ner Hill stones) embedded in the side of Willow Pond, Jill was also able to show that these enigmatic boulders are much older than previously thought. They were believed to have been formed in arid conditions around 30 million years ago, but since they appear to rest on Reading Formation clay they are more likely to be about 50 million years old. Willow pond may be designated as a Local Geology Site to ensure its protection.

**Rare species.** We already have the rare Starfruit (*Damasonium alisma*) in Daisy Pond; the fairly rare Hairy Bindweed (*Calystegia pulchra*) opposite Woodbine Cottages, and the rapidly diminishing Junipers (*Juniperus communis*), but we can now add Yellow Birdsnest (*Monotropa hypopitys*) to our list of unusual flowering plants. This is a saprophyte which, lacking any chlorophyll, feeds on decaying leaf-mould. It is a new dot for this quadrant on the botanical map.

So far our most renowned fungi have been the rare *Hericium erina-ceus* which appears every few years on the Great Beech by Dew Pond,

### *The Great Beech.*

Sadly we have to report that one of the huge limbs of the Great Beech at Dew Pond collapsed on (around) 27<sup>th</sup> August. It has disfigured this noble tree and demonstrated vividly how urgent it is to take measures to help the veteran trees survive. Fortunately the limb with the rare *Hericium* fungus is undamaged.



and which has been photographed by Peter Davis throughout its life cycle, and the Old-man-of-the-woods (*Srobilomyces floccopus*) that grows nearby. However, at last year's fungus foray the experts think they may have discovered the extremely rare *Psathyrella caput-medusae*. Perhaps our foray this year will confirm the species.

There are Purple Hairstreak butterflies (*Neozephyrus quercus*) in several places on the Common but last year experts confirmed that we also have the very local Purple Emperor (*Apatura iris*). Unfortunately, this year the oak where the males were congregating was cut back by the electricity company at a crucial time and there has been only one possible sitting of a female butterfly. We have taken measures to try to ensure that this does not happen again. Look on the website to see the list of invertebrates recorded on the Common over the last year or so by John Tyler.

About the most unusual species of bird seen on the Common this year is the Hawfinch. There have been Treecreepers and several warblers, including Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs, but sadly no one has reported hearing a Willow Warbler. This species seems to have declined rapidly in recent years. Red Kites nest on the Common and Ravens are being seen more often.

As to mammals, unfortunately the alien species, Muntjac and Grey Squirrel, are prospering and have been joined by the Edible Dormouse (*Glis glis*). There are a few of our native Roe Deer and our bat survey revealed a Natterer's bat and a Brown Long-eared bat as well as the two

helped by the Risborough Group which has the appropriate survey equipment. Part of the bank and ditch has disappeared during the last 2000 years and we want to establish whether it completely enclosed the area, and where the entrance was situated. We hope to complete this work this autumn. A survey led by John Morris has identified various other archaeological features, including saw pits and charcoal making areas. We have begun some historical research, including discovering the origin of the name of Louches Lane,

again, and this will also contribute to Naphill's attempt to win the 'Best Kept Village' competition. We have also persuaded the Council to repair the surface of two paths leading to the Common: from the Crick to Downley Road and from there to the Common.

**Please join in.** If any of the above interests you please get involved. All are welcome to join in the activities and events. Visit our website [www.naphillcommon.org.uk](http://www.naphillcommon.org.uk)

**Our programme.** The year's programme is coming to an end. We have a fungus foray on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup>

### *Not-so-glorious mud*

FoNC are following up the damage to The Common caused by SSE's tree trimming works along the power line. Vehicles have left many of the paths in the area in a very poor state. Additionally, an oak tree used by the rare purple emperor butterflies has had three limbs chopped off. The Chiltern Conservation Board has become involved to try to ensure that events like this do not happen again.



and hope one day to write a history of the Common.

**The Clumps.** We are cooperating with the National Trust in trying to rejuvenate the Clumps. They had almost disappeared under a forest of holly and young trees. We have cleared most of the bushes and the NT is going to remove some of the surrounding trees. Unfortunately, a few of the trees actually on the circular banks are in a dangerous condition. Rather than remove them altogether, they will be "topped" to leave a tall stump. This will help to preserve the impression of a tree-lined clump. There is going to be a display board nearby to show what it is hoped to achieve.

**Working parties.** Our working parties will start again on 7<sup>th</sup> October at 10 am. Meet at the end of Chapel Lane. We made a start on clearing the paths near the village edge of the common but, inevitably, they have become overgrown again. We must clear them

November, starting from Forge Road at 10 am. Our Open meeting will be in Naphill Village Hall on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2013. Our speaker will be Rachel Sanderson who is the Commons Project Officer at the Chilterns Conservation Board, overseeing the lottery funded project covering all of the commons in the Chiltern area. Of course, our walks-for-pleasure continue. Ron Collins leads the longer walks on Mondays, starting from the Village Hall at 10 am on 24<sup>th</sup> Sept.; 15<sup>th</sup> Oct.; 19<sup>th</sup> Nov., and 17<sup>th</sup> Dec. Chris Miller leads the shorter walks on the first Wednesday of the month, starting from the Village Hall at 10.30 am, on 5<sup>th</sup> Sept.; 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct.; 7<sup>th</sup> Nov. and 5<sup>th</sup> Dec. Everyone is welcome.

**Thanks.** Thanks to everyone who has contributed to our events and working parties. Also, many thanks to the Chiltern Conservation Board and to the Hughenden Parish Council who have given us financial support. **Our Common is worth it.**

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species of Pipistrelle. Amongst the reptiles, Grass Snakes are near Daisy Pond but the spread of the trees has driven the Common Lizards into nearby gardens. However, the children on our Mini-Beast Safari were delighted by a Slow Worm.

**Archaeology.** We have completed a mapping of the WWII tank tracks and hope to record the memories of local people who witnessed the tank testing. We have begun a survey of the Romano-British farmstead (?),

