

Friends of Naphill Common

Our open meeting and AGM will be on Friday 7th February 2014 at Naphill Village Hall.

Doors will open at 7.15pm for a 7.30 start. There will be tea and coffee available. The highlight is an illustrated talk by the historian **Frances Kerner**, entitled '**Wild and Picturesque Places: a local and national history of our common land**'. Before that, there will be an opportunity for you to elect a new committee and even offer your services if you wish. There will be a brief outline of what we have been doing and as much information as we have about the proposed felling and scrub clearance to start next year. Please come and ask questions and make comments and suggestions about what FONC should be doing. We need your opinions and advice.

The Pond Survey. Visit:

www.naphillcommon.org.uk/ponds.html

This year the Friends of Naphill Common commissioned a survey of the ponds on Naphill Common. Two experts, Tony

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Willow Pond

Marshall and Holly Bennett (who has a Great Crested Newt licence) spent a year looking at the flora and fauna associated with the seven principal ponds.

The survey was paid for by the Chilterns Commons Project under the leadership of Rachel Sanderson and cost £800. A copy of the final report is on the website and it makes interesting, if sobering, reading.

The survey is in-

teresting because it has revealed 232 species of plants and animals (including insects) and gives us a clear picture of the wetland communities we have. It is sobering because it demonstrates how much our ponds have deteriorated since they were last surveyed. As they have become overshadowed by trees and scrub, filled by leaves and choked by dominant plants, so their biodiversity has declined as species have been lost.

Of the 174 wetland species once present only 33 were



Ash Pond

found during the survey. **Pal-
mate newts** were the most
common amphibians, and
smooth newts were found in
two ponds, while great crested
(or warty) newts were found
only in Daisy Pond. Of the 80
species of **wetland plants** pre-
viously been recorded, only 15
were detected. For example,
Daisy Pond is the richest we
have but the great rarity, star-
fruit, was last seen in 1995, and
the pond has also lost lesser
water purslane and alternate
water-milfoil. Of the 26 marsh-
land **beetles** previously re-
corded, only three turned up
this year. Only two out of ten
water-bugs were found and
four out of seven **water-snails**.

The report ends with recom-
mendations for work to be done
to try to halt the decline of the
ponds and even revive their for-
tunes. This work includes

scrub clearance
around the ponds and
clearing out both the
rubbish and some of
the leaf debris. But all
this will have to be
done with great care
so as not to disturb or
destroy what is of in-
terest and still sur-
vives, and of course,
the Common's SSSI status has
to be respected.

We hope to embark on sev-
eral years of work, attending to
the problems a little at a time so
as not to do damage. For ex-
ample, we need to achieve lar-
ger areas of clear water by re-
moving weed, but this must be
done gradually. Dredging out
the dead leaves that have al-
most filled the ponds is essen-
tial, but we must not destroy the
invertebrate communities we
want to preserve. Even the



Daisy Pond

shape of the ponds can be of
historical significance, as in the
case of Shipwash Pond, where
there is an earthen promontory
along which the sheep were
driven for dipping.

Fortunately, Sir Edward
Dashwood has given us per-
mission to undertake this work.
We will have to produce a man-
agement plan and arrange for
expert guidance, and then our
work parties can get on with a
programme of work. *Perhaps
you would like to join in.*

Felling.

There is not much new information about
the proposed tree felling and scrub clear-
ance by Wessex Woodland Management,
due to start next autumn. FONC has been
supplying information and maps show-
ing the significant trees that must be pre-
served and the archaeological features that
must be protected from the heavy machin-
ery. Whether the men doing the work will
take note of this information is another
matter and we must remain vigilant
throughout. Volunteers will be welcome to
help in monitoring what happens. It is
said that the intention is to undertake
only limited felling of some of the smaller
and middling trees but how many we do
not know. It is going to be a busy year.

