

SoberNewts Events over the Last 18 Months

Soberton and Newtown have a very active conservation group that provides opportunities for parishioners of all ages to become involved with practical conservation tasks, wildlife surveys or educational and entertaining activities. The following pages contain a brief summary of the events that taken place recently. You can find a schedule of future events in the parish magazine - please feel free to come along.

2014 - Parish Biodiversity Map was launched which we are hoping will grow into a record of what is growing and living in our area, or passing through it. The map will help conservation organisations monitor the growth or decline of different species, to make informed responses to planning applications, and will also help us understand our local flora and fauna better, albeit some of the data is sensitive so won't be recorded (rare orchid locations).

Progress on recording has been slow – it is quite a time consuming task and with other more pressing events, it has not received the attention we had hoped but it is something we want to focus on.

EVENTS

Autumn 2014 - We completed a Nature Detective trail on part of the Meon Valley Trail in Droxford. Local families/children attended, accompanied by our 'Member Experts' who were on hand to identify and inform us on the insects and flora/fauna detected.



December 2014 – Every Winter we try to hold a 'hands on' workshop where the children get to make something that can be put to good 'conservation use' thereafter. 2014 we made insect hotels but in previous years they have made bat boxes, bird feeders and bird boxes. The 2015 workshop will be making Christmas wreaths from natural materials.



April 2015 – We undertook an Amphibian Survey of 4 local ponds in the village, including Soberton Heath Pond - the 'Village' pond. It was very interesting to see the different habitats and how diverse the 'inhabitants' were even though the ponds were all within a short walking distance of each other. Our parishes are home to Common Frog, Common Toad and three species of newt.



Surveying a water course in Newtown (left) and a local garden pond.

May 2015 - Pond Dipping at Soberton Pond. This is an annual event which is always well attended by the village families as well as those 'not-so'local whose children attend the local school. It is supported by our resident Member, Richard Osmond from Hi-Tech Wild-Trek who generously lends us not only his time and expertise but also his high tech equipment. This enables the creatures found to be projected onto a large screen (in a specially adapted vehicle) so that all the children can see the intricate details of the creatures in high definition. The experience is enhanced with Richard on hand to not only share with them his knowledge of the habitat and life of the creatures found but also answer all their 'burning' questions.



June 2015 –Newtown Nature Trail. Another ‘Nature Detective’ walk was undertaken in a larger than average village garden. It was interesting to find evidence of Wild Service, an ancient woodland tree along with other flora/fauna of interest. Having Nigel Johnson our ‘flora/fauna expert’ member on hand was helpful in both identifying and spotting interesting plants/trees.

July 2015 – Soberton Moth Morning. Nigel kindly hosted a moth morning at his home, along with an impromptu tour of his extremely wildlife friendly garden. The birdlife that visited was an added bonus alone! The moth trap was set the night before and brought into the conservatory the following morning. Still being cold, the moths are very slow and inactive in the morning which makes it easy for the children to collect them in pots to be identified by Richard. Some 43 different species were caught ranging from the very large and impressive elephant and privet hawk moths, to the many, many, very small, micro moths. The release was also great fun as the moths, still cool, would pose on hands and fingers until they were sufficient warmed to fly off. This is another well attended event.

Mo. Name	Counts	Mo. Name	Counts
Small Magpie	1	Smoky woodcock	24
Flame	2	Privet hawk	25
Rosie Footman	3	Paper hawk	26
Common Footman	7	The snail	27
Buff Ermine	4	Riband wave	28
Dark ardes	5	Comet	29
Swallow tail	6	Grey dagger	30
Clouded silver	8	Beautiful web-foot	31
Common wave	9	Shoulder silver web-foot	32
Small emerald	10	Large silver web-foot	33
Un-certain	11	Common rustic	34
Elephant hawk	12	Common emerald	35
Drinker moth	13	Ruby tiger	36
Hears and dart	14	Moth of pearl	37
Willow beauty	15	Pink panicle	38
Burnished brass	16	Dot moth	39
Garden tiger	17	Redy thorn	40
Flame shoulder	18	Basic	41
Heart and club	19	Drinker species web	42
Clouded tortois	20	Common fly	43
Brimstone	21		
Large hoglet	22		
Sparrow	23		



September 2015 – Soberton Bat Walk. We were fortunate to enlist the services of Nick Knight, the Chairman of the Hampshire Bat Group. He provided numerous bat detectors and a wealth of knowledge about our local bat communities as well as those further afield. We walked across the Church meadow, identifying the Common and Soprano Pipistrelles as we walked. . A short walk back along the railway line to the village green where we stopped and Nick was certain he had recorded our 3rd species of the evening, possibly a Daubenton’s bat. Had we stayed longer by the river, Nick assured us we would have recorded more Daubenton’s as the habitat was ideal. Previous surveys had identified Daubenton’s bats along the River Meon near Soberton Mill, plus Serotine and Long-eared bats. Volunteers from the group hope to continue surveying in the area.

As a result of this event, we have been asked to take part in an annual bat survey for 2 nights each August, specifically looking for Daubenton’s bats along the River Meon near Soberton Mill. Previously the survey was done annually at this site, however it has not been done for several years so we are looking to re-start it and incorporate it into our annual schedule.

GENERAL MAINTENANCE TASKS

Throughout the year there was other, less glamorous, but vital, tasks and events undertaken

Soberton Down has benefited from the launch of regular Winter weekday work parties. Headed up by Hugh Pringle, he has gathered a small group of volunteers who have battled with the invasive blackthorn and bramble and brought it under control along the entire length of the top of the Down. At the lower perimeter there is still much work to be done next winter to reduce the very thick belt of blackthorn.

Winter Maintenance

The work at the top has opened up a considerable area of the Down for grazing by Dexter Cattle from Mark Black Farming and ewes owned by John Clark. Between them the animals have helped keep the grass down so that spring and summer downland flowers could emerge. Both cattle and sheep were then moved on so that the flowers were not damaged.



The vehicle access track to the Down was also cleared by SoberNewts volunteers but does need constant attention to enable the animals and equipment to be moved in and out.

Summer Maintenance

The summer months saw further working parties attack the ragwort. Below is the last of the loads for 2015 but with only a third of the area tackled we hope to wage war on the remainder in Spring 2016 when the new rosettes form.



Soberton Heath Recreation Ground - A team of volunteers has been actively managing an area of wild orchids on Recreation Ground. Contract mowers leave the area untouched and our team strimmed the area once seed had set. The orchid area is protected with marker posts to prevent accidental mowing at the wrong season.



The picture on the right was taken many years ago and is of Green Wing Orchid which unfortunately are no longer on the site. There are however two other orchids, the Common Spotted and Southern Marsh which we are working hard to protect.

Bere Copse East - A team of SoberNewts volunteers has been helping Hampshire Wildlife Trust at Bere Copse East, formerly known to us as Fay's Wood, which lies between the disused railway line and Horns Hill. Access is via a public footpath from the bottom of Horns Hill (SU 6055 1505) and it leads, via a flight of wooden steps to the railway line. This woodland contains three rather rare trees, Small-leaved Lime, Wild Service Tree and Wych Elm. The woodland is owned by one of the founder members of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust and on his death it will be left to the Trust

to be managed as a nature reserve. Unfortunately he is now too old to be able to work in the wood himself but has appointed Hugh Milner, recently retired from the Forestry Commission, to act as his agent. Hugh is keen to preserve the rare tree species, especially the Small-leaved Lime, and considers that the best way to do this is to return the wood to coppice with standards.

Volunteers have helped with fencing to prevent the deer and rabbits eating the regrowth on the coppice stools. Hugh Milner has obtained a grant from the Forestry Commission for the erecting of the fencing which has been donated by Windsor Great Park. The work is now nearly complete.

Soberton Heath Pond

The group has been actively managing and monitoring the pond. Data collected at the annual pond dipping event in May also provides a useful record of the variety of species inhabiting the pond.

At least once a year there is a working party arranged to help contain the never ending battle against invasive species such as *Crassula* and, obviously, the responsible disposal of it thereafter! Since the work began as part of a Millennium project, the group has been responsible for bringing about an almost total eradication of Parrot-Feather Weed which was at that time covering over 70% of the pond.



Other events in the past have included:

Fungus Foray - where we again enlist the help of a local expert to help with the identification & sharing of knowledge. It is amazing what is so close by to us and yet also so deadly!

Orchid Walk – Our Orchid Expert Nigel has led various walks showing us where and how to spot these beautiful plants, many of which we might otherwise walk by without noticing.

Bluebell Walk – There are several great spots local to us which enjoy an annual bluebell display

Stream' exploration – Visiting a village resident's garden to sample the wildlife in the stream running through his garden.

Dawn Chorus Bird Walk in Bere Forest- Under the guidance of Ian Cox, a volunteer warden at Titchfield Haven bird reserve.

Early Morning Visit to Titchfield Haven- Again under the guidance of Ian Cox, to experience the Haven's wildlife from the purpose built hides on the site.

Bonfire on Soberton Down – Sausages and marshmallows cooked on the fire lit to dispose of all the brambles and blackthorn cut by the various working parties.

Scavenger Quiz Walk – Led by Richard, nature items are gathered and identified whilst on a pleasant walk in the local area.