



# SUTTON NATURE CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS NEWSLETTER 19 FEBRUARY - MARCH 2010

## NEWS

### **Christmas Away Day**

We had a fantastic day at Chobham Common (a Surrey Wildlife Trust Reserve and National Nature Reserve) hand felling scots pine and silver birch from this lowland heathland site. It was all very exciting with a huge chipper and tractor on site collecting up and chipping the trees that were being felled.

We have a great partnership with SWT carrying out this type of habitat improvement (many hands make light work and all that!) and the SNCV had a chance to see a different habitat and conservation work being carried out at a much larger scale. Mince pies and chocolate was had by all along with a chance to meet new, like minded, people.



**DID YOU KNOW?.....**Chewing on a green birch twig can be used to clean your teeth in the wilderness??



Woods.

### **Tasks**

The snow has not been terribly disruptive to the planned task days and so we have been busy clearing scrub in these winter months before the bird nesting season begins in March. We have also been coppicing at Ruffett and Big Wood, clearing the stream of willow and sedges at Carew Manor Wetland (a very mucky job!) and controlling the invasive snowberry at Roundshaw

### **Apples against Aeroplanes**

Following on from the planting of apple trees in Sutton Local Nature Reserves to protest about the third runway at Heathrow (See SNCV Newsletter 18), Croydon Greenpeace has now enabled the planting of four Cox's apple trees in the area encompassing Sutton (3) and Croydon boroughs (1).

Greenpeace is completely apolitical and is pleased that politicians from all the major three parties have been represented in showing their commitment to reducing CO<sub>2</sub> at what would be the largest source of greenhouse gases in the

U.K. - if the Heathrow expansion went ahead! Hopefully, the villagers of Sipson, endangered by the proposed development, will soon be savouring the apples.

The Airplot campaign has also had us asking the public to get involved in Apple Bobbing and Apple Tree planting for which we (Croydon group) have planted the most i.e. 4 trees. We have brilliant photos from both events which were posted to our local website: [www.greenpeace.org.uk/groups/croydon](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/groups/croydon) Croydon Greenpeace presently has about 15 very active members. We always follow campaigns initiated by head office, which are currently related directly to climate change.

We hold meetings on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of every month in The Green Dragon Pub, 58-60 High Street Croydon, CR0 1NA at 7.30pm in an upstairs room.

Article kindly written by Richard Griffiths of Croydon Greenpeace.

## **CONSERVATION FOCUS**

### **Hedgerows**

From the air our beautiful rural landscape is made up of a network of fields of all shapes and sizes. The defining character of these is the linear boundaries which separate one field from another. Hedgerows are an important part of our countryside both historically, culturally and aesthetically.

Hedgerows as we know them today started when the Enclosure Acts were introduced in the 1700's. This meant that each man had his land as one piece, instead of numerous strips and had to 'fence' it in. Wire was unknown and post and rail was time consuming and hard to make without modern machines, so the boundary banks were planted with thorny bushes. When these grew they had to be kept in order - a method we now know as hedge laying.



© Countryside Agency - Photographer Mike McGoran 02/506

Every region in the country has a slightly different method and a variation in the tools used.

Hedgelaying was learnt by farm hands and as such it is a skill that has declined since the industrial revolution, when more and more labourers left the countryside to find work in towns and cities. Further, increases in the size of fields, due to an increase in agricultural machinery in the post-war years, as well as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the 1970's had devastating results on Britain's hedgerows, either removing to increase field size or simply flailing with machinery. As if this wasn't enough, post and wire fencing has become a quick, cheap and widely available means of enclosing areas, thus negating the need for skilled hedgelayers.

However, you can learn this ancient skill at Sutton Ecology Centre during a two part hedgelaying course, taking place on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> February (please see below for more details).



We will be laying a hedge at the Ecology Centre in the southern style (similar to the photo, left). Whilst carrying out coppicing at Roundshaw and Bigwood, we harvested the hazel to use as stakes and binders for the hedgelaying course, much as our

ancestors would have, managing woodlands for a material crop.

**DID YOU KNOW?** ..... That the bark of the willow tree was used to make painkillers very similar to modern aspirin??

### Woodlands

The woodlands in Sutton are in desperate need of management. For the majority of time people have occupied Britain (since after the last ice age retreated, so about 8,000 years+!), they have used the forests that once carpeted this pristine land for food, shelter, warmth, boats, fences and loads more besides. There is almost no area of Britain that has not been used (and sometimes abused) by man over all those centuries, which has created the landscape we see today.



Woodlands were traditionally managed by cutting for crops; be it coppicing hazel (*Corylus avellana*) for hedging (see above) or turning into charcoal, willows (*Salix* spp.) for fuel to mighty oaks (*Quercus* sp.) used to build Britain's ocean-faring vessels. Depending on the use, different species were cut on different rotation schemes: willows on a 2 to 3 year short coppice rotation; hazel cut on 10 to 25 year rotations and oaks

felled after 100 to 150 years! A clear case of foresight needed to plant those!

With the commencement of war(s) at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, on a scale not seen before, fast growing timber was the order of the day. Many conifer woodlands were planted (often in exactly the worst place for the habitat already there!) to provide fuel and raw materials for use in the war effort. As technology rapidly improved between WWI and WWII though, metals replaced timber frames and oil replaced wood as the fuel of choice, leaving the conifer woodlands no longer fulfilling their duty. With the massive increase in oil and petrochemicals after WWII, for cars and plastics, creams and clothes and everything in between, the traditional British woodland was left out in the cold.

No longer used, no longer managed, no longer cared for. The species that had evolved to take advantage of the specific conditions in woodlands created by these management practices, no longer had the right conditions in which to breed and so died out. Some species that were once common in the southeast (like the silver-washed fritillary *Argynnis paphia*, which needs large broadleaved woodlands) now only survive in western parts of England and Wales.

By selective felling, thinning and coppicing, we can influence the species in a wood, their age and their physical structure, all in such a way as to provide opportunities for other species to exploit. Bluebells grow thickest in areas that were once covered by a dense tree canopy for up to 3 or 4 years after felling, until they are again shaded out by the growing trees. The winter season is the best opportunity for woodland work, so if you want to help Britain's woods (even without a chainsaw!), get out, volunteer, get dirty and tired and see the rewards that come from being part of an 8,000-year-old tradition!

### **Dates for your Diaries**

- **Hedgelaying Course Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> February.** Sutton Ecology Centre 10am-4pm. £8.50 per day or £15 for both days. Please book in advance 0208 770 5821.
- **Hedges for families! Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> February.** Families can take part in a host of hedgy crafts and activities to discover what makes hedges so fantastic for wildlife. Drop into Sutton Ecology Centre 11am-2pm. Cost is £3.50 per person or £10 per family. Adults must accompany children.
- **Wandle Walk Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> March** A 3-4 mile easy circular walk around Bennetts Hole, the Watermeads and Mitcham Common. Meet Mitcham Junction Station (bus stop on bridge) 2.15pm.

### **Give us your feedback**

Please give us your feedback on this newsletter or any other aspect of the SNCV. As a volunteer-based charity, we encourage active participation in all aspects of the running of the organisation. Please contact us if you think you can help in any way.

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### **The Sutton Nature Conservation Volunteers are based at:**

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Telephone 020 8770 5821 / 4203. <http://www.sutton.gov.uk/environment/sncv/>