

Downley Common Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter of the Downley Common Preservation Society Issue 17. Sept 2001

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Grasscutting

This summer's principal activity has been the grasscutting on the Common. As in previous years we have been able to cut the grass using the tractor and flail but this year we have added a grassbox to collect the cuttings rather than let them rot back into the soil. The box is a rather Heath Robinson affair, intended more to prove a principle than to provide a long term solution.

However, despite it's crudity, it is quite effective at collecting grass albeit rather slow and we were able to complete quite a large area. The slowest part of the process is emptying the box at a convenient spot before

returning to continue the cut and it could still do with some improvements.

Still, we would like to express our thanks to those who came along to help and to hope for similar support when we continue next summer.

	Diary	
4 Oct 2001, 8.00pm	AGM & Talk "Red Kites over Downley"	Village Hall
7 Oct 2001, 10.00am	Working Party. Tree felling for bonfire	Dairy
14 Oct 2001, 10.00am	Working Party. Tree felling for bonfire	Dairy
21 Oct 2001, 10.00am	Working Party. Tree felling for bonfire	Dairy
28 Oct 2001, 10.00am	Working Party. Tree felling for bonfire	Dairy
4 Nov 2001, 10.00am	Working Party. Tree felling for bonfire	Dairy
11 Nov 2001, 10.00am	Working Party, Clear up after Bonfire	Dairy
17 Nov, 2001	CCN meeting Archeology of Commons	Cadmore End Village Hall
2 Dec 2001, 10.00am	Finish cutting back hedge by track next to Mannings Field, Flail glades	Bus turning circle
6 Jan 2002, 10.00am	Clear path parallel to bridle way by Mannings field, strim area by Moor Lane	Bus turning circle
3 Feb 2001, 10.00am	Coppice planting	Dairy
3 Mar 2001, 10.00am	Install posts alongside track to the LeDe	Bus turning circle



Bee Orchids

Mowing the lawn earlier in the year I noticed some unusual leaves amongst the moss, wild flowers (weeds?), and grass. Broad, pointed and light green they suggested an orchid but how could it have got there? I mowed around it carefully and gradually a flower stalk started to grow until it was over a foot tall with nine pale buds. At this point I wondered if it was a Helleborine but decided not after poring over the wildflower books. Then the lower of the buds started to open and from the colours inside I knew that it was a Bee Orchid. The other buds opened over a period of about three weeks and the plant grew to be 18" tall.



Now how could it have got there I wondered. I certainly didn't plant it or sow seeds and they are very difficult to grow anyway. I've lived

in this house for 22 years and this is the first time an orchid has appeared in the grass. Sometimes, if a colony of orchids is threatened by development, they are dug up with a large amount of earth and transplanted rather like laying turves. Even then they sometimes fail to grow in the following season. I doubt if a bird could have dropped a seed because there aren't any Bee Orchids growing nearby as far as I know and the seed is like dust anyway. So my bet was that I'd brought seed in on my muddy boots after a walk and deposited it on the grass. But I've not seen this plant for some years and wonder how long the seed has lain in the soil.

I decided to contact Maurice Young who is a local naturalist involved with BBOWT and Wycombe Wildlife Group. This was his reply.

"Bee orchids are very erratic in their occurrence. Hopefully yours will stay for some years.

I doubt if you brought the seed in on your boots. Seed of orchids is like dust so blows around very easily and can travel miles. What is crucial is the presence of the right fungus in the soil where the seed lands. You obviously have that fungus in your lawn. The fungus invades the seed and brings in nutrients for the embryonic orchid to grow until it produces its own roots and green leaves. The fungus then lives on in the roots of the orchid in a symbiotic association in which both partners, the fungus and the orchid benefit.

Ideally cross-pollination is the best but bee orchids have a fail-safe mechanism which brings about self-pollination. So your orchid should bear some nice fat seed pods, each one containing thousands of seeds. Most will blow away but hopefully some will end up somewhere on your lawn and may give rise, in future years, to new plants.

You are obviously managing your lawn in an "orchid friendly" way so don't change anything and keep a sharp lookout for new orchids".

Harry Wheate



Red Kites over Downley

John Francis of the RSPB will be giving an evening lecture at the next DCPS meeting on:

4 October 2001, 8.00pm

at the Village Hall