

## **Millbrook Mead Report, 2016 – 2017**

This small area, managed by Benson Nature Group (formerly Benson Ecological Study Team), is located alongside Ewelme Brook south west of the A4074. Part of the site continues to be leased to Mr Ian Burles, and the remainder is divided between a marshy nature reserve, a wildflower meadow and a Hazel Coppice. A clump of giant hogweed was discovered in the marshy area and the Parish Council have placed warning signs and contracted a company to remove the danger.

The Hazel trees, which were planted in the winter of 2006/7, continue to do well and, this year, a further sixth of them were coppiced and selected poles offered and used for bean supports. The Hazel plantation was extended by planting a further 60 trees. This was carried out with the grateful help of Wallingford Green Gym (WGG). We hope to incorporate a path through the Hazels to supplement the existing paths through the wildflower area.

The boardwalk, built in 2007 continues to be well used by Benson and Preston Crowmarsh residents but parts are showing signs of damage. A 10m length was refurbished and the supporting structure was replaced with recycled plastic so should last considerably longer. More of this work remains to be done. WGG again helped with the construction and whilst part of the team was engaged in this, others cleared some of the plant growth from the pond. This pond appears to hold a healthy population of common newts.

A large willow tree overhangs the boardwalk and, according to a professional tree surgeon, is in a dangerous state. The tree is not on Parish land and, although many attempts have been made to contact the owner this has not been successful. Users of the boardwalk should be aware of this and be cautious during high winds.

General maintenance work during the year has included the regular cutting of the paths through the flower meadow. The two allotment areas that were vacated due to a rat problem have been incorporated into the wildflower meadow area but will need attention for some years before they become a fully integrated. The picnic table has been well used during the year and makes an ideal location to sit and enjoy the flowers, wildlife and your sandwiches.

BNG held another “moth breakfast” during the year when numerous moths were caught, identified and released. We plan to repeat this during 2017 so keep your eyes on the Benson Bulletin for details. Marc Botham, a butterfly ecologist with Centre of Ecology and Hydrology, has provided great support and has carried out moth trapping at other times on the site.

The area is a real sun trap and as well as a wide variety of native wild flowers it attracts some fairly unusual insects. If you have an interest in our native flora and fauna it is well worth a visit for the flowers, butterflies, dragonflies and other insects.

If anyone is interested or would like to help with the maintenance contact BNG.

Tom Stevenson

Chairman Benson Nature Group,  
25 April 2017