



Welcome

A reflection on 2012.

As 2012 has drawn to a close, this second edition of the Friends' newsletter provides an opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the past year and to look forward to 2013. A special thanks goes to Nick Hopkins, (Countryside and Parks Officer London Borough Bromley), without whose knowledge, guidance, support, patience and inspiration nothing would have been accomplished.

A few things the Friends got up to in 2012.

April. It was too late in the year for any conservation work as the trees and plants were in growth. Conducted an amphibian survey on the ponds at High Elms (on a dark, very cold evening mid April -Brrr!).

May. Conducted a plant survey to identify indicator species on the Orchid Bank

August. Tidied up the site of the former house in time for the Lubbock Celebration events. At High Elms even when involved in a seemingly mundane (but necessary) task something interesting can happen.

A caterpillar of the Comma butterfly was spotted by our group expert. (Does it resemble a bird dropping to you?)



September. Worked in between heavy rain showers around the pond and BEECHE. Nick found a vole's nest containing nuts. Cut willow to dry for use in craft work during the winter. Trimmed the beech hedge next to the Cafe. The smell of bacon sandwiches was tantalising.

November. Near Burnt Gorse-removed Portuguese laurel and small trees to create a glade (otherwise it

will revert to scrubby woodland). This allows plants, such as the wild strawberry, food for the Grizzled Skipper butterfly, to flourish. The coppiced hazel in this area provides a habitat for the dormouse.

December. We turned our hand to laying a hedge behind BEECHE. Laying hedges is one of the techniques used to manage hedgerows to prevent them growing and eventually forming a line of trees. In farming a well laid hedge forms an impenetrable barrier to livestock. It is also important for wildlife, providing nesting opportunities for birds and a habitat for small mammals and insects. Different areas of the country have different styles of hedge laying; each evolved to cope with differing climates, soils, farming practices and the species of trees and shrubs native to the area. Not surprisingly we used the South of England style. A well laid and maintained hedge should last for 50 years.

Tools: Bill hook, axe, stakes for the verticals, about 4 ft x 3 in and binders, long thin flexible hazel whips for the horizontals.

Technique: We began with a tall hedge comprising two rows of various shrubs and trees e.g. hazel, hawthorn and beech. This was trimmed and tidied. The hedge was



laid uphill from right to left, so that when growth starts the sap can rise. The upright stem to be laid is cut almost through 6 inches from the ground with a billhook and bent over at 35 degrees. This is called a pleacher and will grow back vigorously,



FRIENDS OF HIGH ELMS



producing vertical shoots that form the hedge. Stakes are driven in vertically, a cubit apart (the distance from the elbow to the fingertips) along the centre line of the hedge. A row of 7 binders are then woven in between the stakes at chest height to give the structure stability. The stakes are trimmed off at 4 ft high.



More photos at <http://highelmscountrypark.btck.co.uk/Gallery>

Glow Worm Safari. Mid August

After dark, on a warm August night, led by a couple of experts, Alison and Nick, we set out intrepidly to track down that most enigmatic of creatures, the Glow Worm (*Lampyris noctiluca*). It is not actually a worm but a beetle related to the firefly. It looks like a large woodlouse, about 2.5 cm long. Their preferred habitat is open country that



Glow worm by Bill Welch

has been “lightly” managed and not sprayed with fertilisers or insecticides. They are important as they are a good indicator of a healthy ecosystem that supports a diverse amount



Glow worm by Bill Welch

of wildlife. The best time to see them is June to September. They spend 95% of their life, two years or more, as an inconspicuous larva, feeding on slugs and snails. The adult female glow worm is a magical creature. The male is mobile but the female being wingless cannot fly and moves slowly by walking. Only the female produces light which she uses to attract a mate. The adult female crawls slowly up a grass stem, puts its head down and the last 2 segments of its body light up to attract the male. Once she has mated the light is extinguished. The light is a

manifestation of bioluminescence –created by the interaction of 2 chemicals, luciferin and luciferase. It is a very efficient light that produces no heat. More information at: <http://www.glowworms.org.uk>

*William Wordsworth called glow worms
“earthborn stars”.*

Sheep on the Orchid Bank.

End October

During October you may have seen sheep on the Orchid bank at High Elms, on loan from the Downlands Project. As part of the management plan 22 sheep, Jacobs and Beulahs, were grazed on the Bank to reduce the scrub and dominant grass species. This will encourage plants such as the 8

species of Orchid, which have been identified on this field. During the period the sheep were on the bank public access was



closed off and volunteers checked the sheep daily. The sheep were very efficient (or hungry) and cleared the scrub much quicker than anticipated.

It's easy to become a Friend of High Elms.

If our work has interested you and you would like to join the Friends of High Elms please visit our website for more details, email us or contact us by phone.

Website: highelmscountrypark.btck.co.uk

Email: friendsofhighelms@gmail.com **T:** 01689 862815

Conservation work tasks take place every Monday afternoon and once a month on a Saturday. All tools and training (and tea!) provided. No previous experience is required, just bring your enthusiasm.