

WEST KENT DOWNS COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

Plotland Project

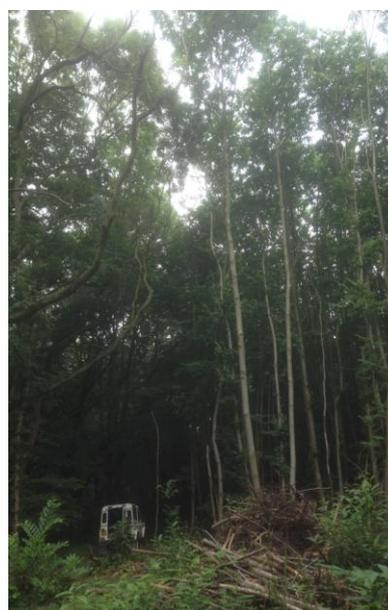


Natural England helps track down SSSI plot owners

You all probably know by now that Cobham Woods, including parts of Ranscombe Farm Reserve are designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest and that the area we call the Plotlands, sold off into leisure plots in the 70's, sits in the middle of it.

This area, around 110 acres, could be argued as probably the most interesting and naturally diverse area between Cuxton and Cobham. However the plots of plantations and Coppice woods, for example, are neglected and trees are becoming over-stood, too large for commercial use and starting to fall down. Those sites in particular need managed coppicing regimes to maintain its biodiversity.

The West Kent Downs Countryside Trust's on-going task is to trace Plot Owners and endeavour to manage the area as a whole through ownership or by agreement in order to restore, improve and sustain the diversity of habitat. And, while doing so, allow access to Trust's plots for members to enjoy until such times that the Trust, or Local Authority, are able to provide Public Right of Access, having achieved total ownership.



To help do this, on our behalf, Natural England sought Government funding to carry out a Land Registry search and establish current ownership. That has now been provided and a letter is about to be sent out by Natural England to inform them of their statutory responsibilities of owning SSSI land and to introduce the WKDCT, offering help to manage the plots through the Trust in partnership with Natural England, or if willing, to allow the Trust to purchase.



Kent Field Club spots unusual plant in the orchard

On Sunday 3 August members of the Kent Field Club held a Study Day in the Plotlands exploring, observing and identifying the flora and fauna along the track way and in particular the Trust's 'Orchard' plot. The commencement of conservation work, returning the failing orchard back to its natural chalk grassland of Warren Plain has so far proved successful with 45 plant species

identified except, with great excitement.... one... which was found by the inimitable Joyce Pitt. Joyce is the Kent Wildlife Trust's botanist, responsible for identifying the Kent Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, and a widely experienced tutor and leader of wild flower and fungi studies for many years. Joyce thinks it is probably a 'garden escapee'. We look forward to her findings with great interest.

Mosses and lichens proved to be another wonder in the Orchard. The two most interesting lichens were both on plum trees - **Usnea flammea** and **Pseudevernia furfuracea** (declining in Kent). **Pseudevernia furfuracea**, commonly known as **tree moss**, normally grows on the bark of firs and pines. The lichen is rather sensitive to air pollution, its presence usually indicating good air conditions in the growing place. The species has numerous human uses, including use in perfume, embalming and in medicine. Large amounts of tree moss is annually processed in France for the perfume industry.



Usnea Flammea



Pseudevernia furfuracea,

Also a **Spotted Longhorn Beetle (*strangalia-maculata*)** was found. The adults are very common flower-visitors feeding on pollen and the nectar. The markings are rough imitations of wasps, which probably gives them some protection from birds.



strangalia-maculata

For more information about the WKDCT and the Plotland Project please contact Roger Savage 01634 723027. email: roger.savage2@btinternet.com, or visit www.wkdct.org.uk. Generally we plan to carry out conservation works on the 1st weekend of the month, usually Sunday mornings. So, if you would like to find out what we do... come along. We will be pleased to see you.