

WALK WITH GRAHAM WILSON

Monday 11 July 2011 – Shatterford Car Park

We were very pleased once again that Graham kindly agreed to meet us for a walk and talk.

A Balmy Night

It was on a balmy Monday night that a group of club members, spouses, friends and dog met at Shatterford car park for yet another memorable walk with the club's good friend Forest Keeper Graham Wilson. Those of you who know Graham will be pleased to hear that despite his serious accident last year he has lost none of his dry sense of humour, willingness to be controversial, thought provoking and most of all his love and knowledge of the Forest. As always he sought to raise and explain some controversial topics such as controlled burning, the active reversal of the drainage systems implemented some years ago, the need to preserve, or otherwise, the wild life of the forest and the maintenance of the Bio diversity of the forest and of course the current spending review by the Forestry Commission. The group, to Graham's delight, did not hold back when in disagreement.

It is amazing the things you learn when out with Graham; things that you would otherwise miss when walking alone. How some of the small ancient woods could benefit from active intervention allowing our traditional Oak and Beech to flourish for future generations and not necessarily for commercial purposes; how the introduction of Goshawks to the forest was a possible cause for the serious decline of Kestrels and other raptors, the effect of Crows and Magpies on the ground nesting birds, the effect of the pressures on the forest by the considerable increase in visitor numbers. We saw how goat moth bored holes in a tree. Graham explained that this caused the tree to leak a nectar based sap which the hornets and butterflies fed on. He also explained how the ants nurtured the larvae of the Blue butterfly. With sightings of fallow deer and marsh frogs (unfortunately no Night Jar), we got back to the car park around nine having been thoroughly entertained. The smiles on everyone's face confirmed that this was another successful event. Roll on next year.

Mike Ludwig

Report on the evening's activity

Around 15 people and one dog enjoyed a very informative stroll around Shatterford Bottom with Forestry Commission Keeper Graham Wilson, on a beautiful Monday evening. Graham began the evening by prompting thought and discussion about conservationists versus naturalists. Should we nurture habitat for one species at the risk of alienating another – it is an endless cycle of discussion.

Graham then explained the benefits of controlled burning which is carried out annually in different heathland areas of the forest. Graham explained that burning takes place in the winter so that only the top vegetation is burned, and the potash created helps regenerate vigorous growth of new plant life. Worms, snakes and lizards hibernate underground and so are not harmed by the burning (unlike forest fires in the summer).

The group walked about 2 miles looking at natural regeneration of native trees in an area described as Ancient and ornamental woodland; saw hornets drinking sap from an old oak tree; watched a group of fallow deer relaxing in the bracken; spent time leaning over a bridge watching marsh frogs; marvelled at the hard work needed to create the medieval dyke banks depicting the Bishop of Winchester's purlieu, and finally walked back to Shatterford at dusk hoping to see or hear a night jar – no such luck but a stonechat supplied some ornithological interest before dark.

Sue Randall