

Wigwell Nature Reserve

Report for Charlbury Town Council

June 2021

1. **Working Parties.** Working parties are continuing on the 2nd Wednesday each month and are well attended, subject to Covid restrictions. Ongoing work includes:
 - a. **Improvements to the Permissive Paths.** Steps are being constructed beyond the eastern bridge and drainage gullies are being cut along the sloping section leading down to the bridge, which often becomes extremely muddy.
 - b. **Fence repairs.** Some rotted fence posts are being replaced around the species-rich meadow field. Broken tree branches that have fallen across the fences are being cut up and removed.
 - c. **Salvia Management.** Work is continuing to protect the near-threatened Meadow Clary (*salvia pratensis*) plants within the fenced cages – see also 3 below.

Future work through the summer will include management of thistles and ragwort.

Many thanks are due to Toby Swift (Wychwood Project) for running the work party sessions and also to all of the volunteers who have attended including Roger Newman (WP Trustee), members of the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens and, of course, the Wigwell Friends (numbers still growing and more always welcome!).

2. **Species Monitoring.** Surveys are continuing to build a more detailed base record of species on the site.
 - a. **Reptile Survey.** This survey was set up by Neil Clennell from the Wychwood Project, an experienced herpetologist who has provided training to volunteers. The survey has been running since April and has now been extended through July. Sightings so far have included Grass Snakes, Common Lizards and many Slow Worms. Other non-reptiles also found availing themselves of the protection of the refuges, have included toads and small rodents including a water shrew. NOTE: When visiting Wigwell you may see small pieces of corrugated tin and/or roofing felt which are part of the survey. Please DO NOT disturb them or remove them – they are not discarded litter!
 - b. **Butterfly Monitoring.** The Wychwood Project is working with the Butterfly Conservation charity and is encouraging local people to record butterfly sightings using the “iRecord Butterflies” smartphone app or the Butterfly Conservation website <https://butterfly-conservation.org>, which provides a lot of useful information including identification charts. Identification charts specific to the Wychwood Project area have been produced and are available on request to wigwell-friends@gmail.com.
3. **Meadow Clary.** Wigwell is one of only a handful of sites nationally in which Meadow Clary grows naturally and considerable effort has been taken to monitor its presence and to ensure that it continues to thrive. For decades this work has been spearheaded by Louise Spicer and her late husband Alan, who was a joint founder of the Wychwood Project (WP). Three robust cages have been constructed by the WP to protect the plants. An annual count of flowering stems is carried out each July and this year’s will coincide with the July working party on 14th July.

Despite considerable efforts, dedication and a variety of protection measures, there is concern that the species is not thriving as hoped. Careful consideration is therefore being given to options for the future management of these plants and the three cages may now be used to trial alternative strategies over the coming years.

4. **Wigwell Friends & Community Engagement.** Public interest in Wigwell remains high and membership of the Wigwell Friends continues to rise, with many new members having already taken part in work parties. Future WP aims for management of the site chime closely with the objectives of the Nature team of the Environment Working Group and we look forward to close co-operation between the groups and with the community of Charlbury in general.
5. **Local Green Space Protection for Wigwell.** I am delighted to report that, following a successful referendum, the recent adoption of the Charlbury Neighbourhood Plan has conferred additional protection for Wigwell as a designated Local Green Space as well as through its location within the important Wigwell Blue-Green Corridor.