

Centre News

The Woodland Education Centre, Offwell, Honiton, Devon EX14 9SW. Tel 01404 831373



Centre Director's Report - April 2008

.....To the Trenches!

Offwell Woodland & Wildlife Trust

The last two months have been a positive hive of activity at the Centre. The first phase of the Devon hedge bank scheme has been completed with the construction of a new hedgebank alongside the Marsh area. This work has been funded by the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. Trenches have also been dug to house the 500 metres of water pipe necessary to extend the mains water supply from the existing toilet block to the new cabin extension, whilst at the same time putting in electricity and a data link from the cabin back to the lake classroom.



Building the Devon Hedgebank.



The new hedgebank and trench for water, power and data.

Just to prove that nothing ever goes strictly according to even the best laid plans, the trenches proved to be filled with large quantities of sharp chert and flint nodules, rather than the expected soft, predominant Greensand. This necessitated the importation of large quantities of sand to line the trench and protect the pipe from puncture, adding several thousand pounds to the cost of the work.

By the time you read this newsletter, BT Openreach (which has very kindly provided the data cable to allow the transfer of electronic data between the Lake Classroom and the Log Cabin) will have visited to install the cable and this major phase will have been completed.

In addition to BT Openreach, the Trust also thanks the East Devon AONB Sustainable Development Fund and OELink. Both have donated funds to make it possible to extend additional services between the Cabin and Lake Classroom, on the back of the main cabin extension project funded by Alcoa.

The Devon hedgebank alongside the Marsh just awaits the arrival of plantings being donated by the

Devon branch of the International Tree Foundation. These plantings will create a species-rich hedge on top of the hedgebank, eventually replacing the former rhododendron wasteland with a highly diverse wildlife corridor alongside the main track.

The at times torrential rain has turned the work site into a quagmire. The resulting atrocious conditions have brought work to a standstill for the moment, although the rest of the Centre is unaffected.

On top of all these major landscaping works, schools and colleges have been visiting and education has carried on as normal. Gratifyingly, more groups than ever before have been booking in outside the main fieldwork season, allowing education staff to show them a variety of life and life stages which they will not see later on in the year.



A close-up view of frog spawn from the pond.

Action for Biodiversity

There is a Long-tailed Tit making its beautiful nest of lichen and moss just 30 feet from the cabin door, the Chiffchaffs are calling, Brimstone and Comma butterflies are abroad, and the first Bluebells are flowering in Maple Walk, so it must be spring! The Action for Biodiversity project is well under way now and lots of good work has been achieved in the last couple of months with willing volunteers and groups.

The main area of work has been coppicing Hazel in the Dormouse area and cutting in the new Dormouse Trail, so that visitors can now wind their way through the coppice stools and see the carpets of Bluebells and foxgloves that will be flowering in the next few months.

Two coppice training days were held in February, with a total of nine volunteers attending from as far afield as Broadhembury and Chard! The coppicing has opened up two new glades which will soon be recolonized by wildflowers and herbaceous plants.

Students from Bicton College have been coming out weekly throughout March. They have cleared bramble from around the Hazel stools which was shading out the wildflowers. However, it's all a question of balance and we have left lots of the bramble as good nesting and feeding sites for the Dormice and good sources of nectar for butterflies and other insects.



Lizzie Hinchcliffe working on the Dormouse area.

a regular weekday volunteer day, on either a Tuesday or a Wednesday and if you would like to join our small, but very merry band, please do contact me at the log cabin! (01404 831881 Mondays - Wednesdays, or at any time on offwell5@aol.com)

It is quite common nowadays for large corporate companies to give their staff the opportunity to get out from behind their computers and the office environment and let them loose in the countryside to help with local projects. So, we were very grateful indeed to the Environment Agency team based in the Exeter area, who came out and expended what seemed to be an unlimited amount of energy on our Woodland Project area, pulling rhododendron as if their lives depended on it. As if that wasn't enough they also got into the leat and tackled more rhododendron on the steep and difficult to get at slopes. They were blessed with a good day weather-wise and they had all brought wonderful home cooked food, so lunchtime was a veritable feast!

I, for one, am really looking forward to the spring and summer as I have not yet seen the reserve in its full glory. I very much looking forward to meeting many of you at our upcoming events which will include moth evenings and family days. The next event on the calendar (April 10th) is Mervyn Newman bringing us up to date on the latest on Water Voles in Devon. A month later on May 10th, we will be launching Environmental Action Days for families and individuals in a big event at the Centre. You can find out more details on www.countrysideinfo.co.uk



The Bicton team clearing bramble in the Dormouse area.

The coppicing and clearance work produced a lot of arisings or brash and with the help of our 3 stalwart regulars, Mike, Lizzie and Peter, we have burnt it all up. It was decided that there was just too much to be left as 'habitat piles', as we wanted to clear the woodland floor to allow as many woodland flowers as possible to flourish in the light. We have been having