



Volunteer Newsletter No. 3 – January 2012



Hello everyone and Happy New Year. Welcome to the third volunteer newsletter and the first of 2012. The next few months can seem like they should be quieter for parkland recording, with many plant and animal species becoming dormant until the spring, shorter days and inclement weather.

However, the winter can also be a good time to be recording certain archaeology and wildlife if the conditions are favourable, precisely because there is less obscured by leaves and vegetation. The training opportunities will be ongoing while the survey season starts in earnest, in February.

We are keen to hear your experiences from any events or activities you attend related to the project. Also, information which you have used and could be useful for everyone to read about. Many thanks must go to Michael Downey and Elaine Barnett who report back on their day surveying fungi at Whitney Court, with the Herefordshire Fungus Survey Group and Brian Jones for some really helpful online resources.

The project now has many volunteers, with various interests and responsibilities, offering expertise and performing a wide range of important roles. In this issue we profile Mary Ledlie who is assisting with parkland surveys and mapping work.

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Field Surveys for Barn Owls and Pellet Identification at Wessington– 12th, 15th October

These 2 training days at Wessington Court focused on barn owl ecology, their habitat requirements and how to look for the signs of their presence on parklands.

Denise Foster, formally of Aylesbury Vale Barn Owl Project, and Bob Hall, of Herefordshire Ornithological Club provided detailed presentations to the well attended sessions. We even had (deceased) stuffed examples of barn owls, claws and feathers to further illustrate their adaptations to hunting their prey of small mammals, e.g. field voles, especially when in flight.



Like most species of owl, barn owls are specialists in hunting in low light, especially at dawn and dusk. This can make them difficult to spot normally – if you are lucky you may see one flying silently across rough field margins or orchards. More often they will appear in our headlights, flying over a roadside hedgerow.



However, we can use other signs to show that are around. Most birds of prey regurgitate a “pellet” of fur, bones and shells, every few hours, the indigestible remains of what they have been eating. Often these are to be found close their nests or roosts. We learnt how the size, shape, colour and content of these pellets can be characteristic of each species and can help to identify if they belong to a barn owl and how recently they were produced and exactly what they had eaten. Under guidance, the trainees were able to dissect

examples of these pellets and using keys, actually identify the prey species from the bones

The afternoons provided a chance for us to visit the parkland at Wessington, under the guidance of Mark O’Brien and Liz Vice, who farm the estate using low-intensity grazing and other management aimed at increasing the overall biodiversity of the parkland.



Parklands can provide the ideal habitat and food resources for these beautiful but sadly declining birds. We learnt of the importance of the old, hollowing trees, which they use for roosting and nesting and which are often found on or near to parks. Just as important for barn owls is the presence of the rough grassland which is the ideal habitat for their prey. Their decline across the UK and in this county has made barn owls a priority species for biodiversity in Herefordshire.

Our field-work on parklands will assist the greater understanding of their distribution by identifying where there are still population of barn owls and influencing the management of these sites to help establish suitable habitats. Special thanks for these training days, go to Denise and Bob for their time and expertise and to Mark and Liz at Mabley Farm, for their excellent guided walk around the parkland at Wessington.

Fungus Surveying Workshop and Foray at Croft Castle – 20th November

We were fortunate to have the support and enthusiasm of members of the Herefordshire Fungus Survey Group (HFSG) for a day of fungus identification and surveying at the National Trust estate, Croft Castle.

In spite of a few logistical hiccups, volunteers of all ages, received expert coaching from Jo Weightman, into the key groups and features to look for when identifying fungi in parkland setting.



Jo presented, an amazing display of specimens, covering the range of types of fungi and all collected from the park over the preceding few days. This highlighted the diversity of species associated with the varied habitats we associated with parklands – woodland, old grassland, deadwood (standing and fallen) and veteran trees.

Then it was over to the trainees to explore the grassland and woodland in just a relatively small area of the park, to recognise and collect the fruiting bodies from a variety of fungi.

In a short time, we had our containers filled, with the HFSG experts on hand to offer guidance and identification tips as the trainees went along. Back at the café, the volunteers demonstrated their new knowledge of how to group associated species before Jo worked through the specimens to help identify and record what we had found. In just this one survey, a total of 62 species were recorded, some of which were parkland indicator species and included a rediscovery for Croft Castle, *Lyophyllum eustygium* which had not been recorded there since the 19th century.



Special thanks must go to Jo, Mike and Shelley from the HFSG, Iain Carter and all the staff at the National Trust at Croft Castle for hosting the training day.

Parkland Survey at Wessington Court– 21st and 22nd November

This parkland was used for the barn owl training days, earlier in October, and through the work and dedication of Mark and Liz, is being restored and managed for its historic landscape features and biodiversity whilst being a productive farm. Your survey work there will contribute directly to the production of a parkland restoration plan for the estate as part of its Higher Level Stewardship Agreement.

The first morning's surveying turned into something of a washout with relatively few trees girthed and many soggy recording forms returned. Thank you to everyone who carefully dried them out and then wrote up their findings on the tree spreadsheet! At least the afternoon was redeemed thanks to a local hostelry with its welcoming fire, whilst the rain continued to pour down outside.

Day 2 was rather more successful both in terms of weather and area covered. By the end of the day, 99% of the parkland trees on site had been surveyed, including several unusual "exotic" species (like the Tulip tree below), some interesting examples of reclining or "layering" trees (e.g. rowan) and a



number of very old pear trees on the adjoining Herefordshire Nature Trust reserve. It was also noted how rich and diverse the site was for grassland and decaying wood fungi, making it a potential site for a more thorough fungus survey next autumn.



We were also fortunate to be joined by Neil Rimmington from Herefordshire Council Archaeology department who was leading a guided walk of county archaeologists from around the country. Wessington was seen to be a good example of how environmental stewardship work for the benefit of landscape protection.

Many thanks to everyone who took part in this survey and who wrote up their findings, in sometimes difficult conditions. Your experience has identified some improvements, we will need to make to the tree survey forms, to make them simpler to use, but still recording the same information. Your use of GPS for way-marking trees has certainly made the data processing easier too and I would encourage you to continue to use GPS in this way. Guidance and advice in use of GPS is always available. Please let me know if you need any assistance.

The findings from the survey are currently being compiled. The following map shows the trees successfully recorded, including most if not all, of the open grown parkland trees and a number of veteran pear trees on the Trust's nature reserve. (This map does not show the 3 trees recorded most recently by Paul Hadley. The colours of the dots indicate survey teams).



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Introduction to Researching Historic Archives at Lower House Farm - 1st December

A small group of volunteers squeezed into the library at Lower House Farm, for a day of training into how to research historic documents and archives given by local historian, Sylvia Pinches. The aim of the day was to gain an understanding in the use of archive material, e.g. documents and maps, which could assist us when investigating the histories of parklands and estates. This is because a number of estate owners have expressed keenness for the Parklands Project to help fill gaps in their knowledge of the estate histories, whether this is through the ground surveys you do or by researching archive material.

Documents and maps come in many forms, as Sylvia described, and all require a certain amount of interpretation and an open-mind approach when attempting to put them into a chronological or social context.

For example, Sylvia showed how old paintings and drawings of a landscape and historic features may have sometimes been prepared in a way which emphasise or frames certain attractive features of an estate whilst excluding undesirable ones. Old maps are as accurate as the cartographer was able to produce using the technology of the time. This is because they were drawn for defining land ownership, resolving disputes or deriving taxes. Indeed, we have been using the remarkably detailed 19th century maps for our surveys, because they show the positions of individual mature trees on open parkland.

Documents with legal status (such as deeds, wills etc) should theoretically be the most accurate records and representations of their time. By their very nature, these sources can appear daunting and difficult to decipher, but with a few key pointers, the trainees were able to identify and investigate the important and relevant information they contain.

The training also highlighted the range of useful sources available to archive researchers, including written correspondence, newspaper cuttings, photographs and agricultural records as well as the places we should start to look to find all the pieces of these fascinating historical jigsaws. A follow up session or sessions are being planned for the new year, to be held at the Hereford County Records Office.

We must offer our thanks to Sylvia for providing the training at Lower House Farm, and special thanks and appreciation to Victoria and Stephen Wegg-Prosser of Warham House, Breinton for their assistance and allowing us to borrow a selection of their fantastic estate records.

Herefordshire Fungus Survey Group foray at Whitney Court – 7th December

Report by Michael Downey and Elaine Barnet

When Elaine and I put our names down to attend the Fungus Foray at Whitney Court we had naively assumed that there would be a mixture of other, less well informed volunteers going as well. However, when we arrived at the car park on probably the coldest morning in December, we found that not only were we the only Parklands Project personnel but that everyone else seemed to only speak Latin. As we did not know our *Butox culus* from our *Humerus cubitus* we thought that it was going to be a very steep learning curve. Luckily, after our introduction to the group by Mike Stroud (HFSG Secretary) we were made to feel really welcome and were given two extremely knowledgeable chaperones (Peter Roberts and Shelley Evans) who went out of their way to put us at our ease and we were soon starting to identify and record fungi.



Just a few of the specimens collected, note the waxcaps

In the last issue Lewis explained the importance of identifying key fungi species that can indicate a healthy, functioning parkland ecosystem. With this in mind the group concentrated on the grassland and lawns around the main property and a large number of different waxcaps were identified as well as some earth tongues. Since these species are very sensitive to land improvement, such as the use of fertilizers, their presence was a very good indicator of older undeveloped grassland. This information will be fed back to the owners of Whitney Court who manage the land and hopefully will continue to preserve this rare habitat for future generations to enjoy.

After two hours of collecting and identifying numerous species of fungi we regrouped in the car park to finish the survey. All known species were recorded and any unknown ones taken back by the members for further analysis, after which a complete list will be compiled and published. So although it was bitterly cold we had a really interesting and informative first Foray with the HFSG and would like to thank Mike & Shelly Stroud, Peter Roberts, Shelley Evans and all the other members who made us so welcome. And to show that anyone can contribute to the survey, we discovered this colourful find, just as we were packing up. It was a parasitic fungus growing on a piece of dead wood in the hedge surrounding the car park.



Our find, *Tremella aurantia* or Golden Ear for the non Latin speakers

Winter Hedgerow Survey Training at Warham House – 12th December

Hedgerows are important priority habitats in Herefordshire and in the context of parklands may be remnants of much older woodland or estate boundaries. This training day in and around the grounds of Warham House, Breinton, focussed on learning how we identify hedgerow composition in winter and how to record their ecological and historical features.

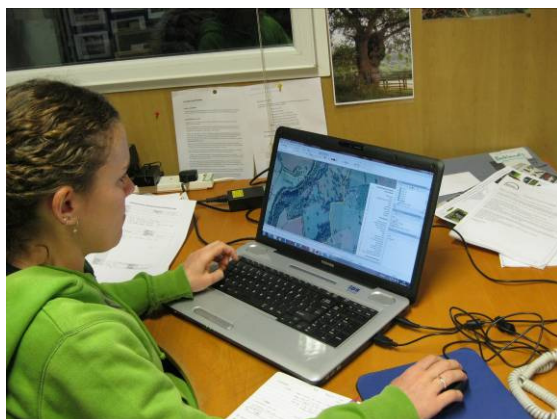
The survey volunteers looked at how they would record the woody species in consecutive 10m sections of the hedgerow, which can be used as an indication of age. Occasionally, especially in summer, it is possible to find ancient woodland indicator flora which may indicate if a hedgerow was once part of a much older woodland. Not only was the training a chance to become familiar with the survey method, we were also able to draw on John Ockendon's extensive knowledge of botanical identification especially in winter (see photo below)!



The hedgerow survey is being run across the county by the CPRE, so our parkland work will help to build a picture of the condition of hedgerows we identify, especially those of the highest ecological value or historical significance. We are grateful to John Ockendon and Ros Bradbury for their guidance on the day, Victoria and Stephen Wegg-Prosser at Warham House, for hosting us and offering a warm refuge at lunchtime and neighbouring landowner, Kevin Hammett for permission to access and survey his meadows.

Volunteer Profile – Mary Ledlie, Volunteer Parkland GIS and Data Recorder

Mary has been with the project since October, helping to provide GIS, (Geographic Information System) support for our work, here at Lower House Farm. This task is a key aspect of the project, as it is only by recording, managing and mapping our findings electronically and accurately, that we can process and interpret the records and discoveries you are making.



Some of you will have met Mary on the survey at Wessington or at one of this autumn's training days. She was until quite recently working overseas, on projects related to marine and island ecology, in the [Seychelles](#). With her roots here in Herefordshire, Mary now has a stronger interest in the "terrestrial" ecosystems closer to home and fortunately for us, the Parklands Project. She has quickly picked up the technical requirements of using the GIS software (called Manifold and for reasons of software licencing, has to be used here at Lower House Farm) and at the same time, is developing more survey and species identification skills to carry out parkland surveys. Over the next months it is likely that any maps you use or data you submit will have been or will be processed by Mary, so hopefully you will meet her on the parklands at some point.



Online Resources and the Project Website

Thank you to everyone, especially to Brian Jones, for sending through some really interesting and valuable resources, to share with everyone. We are always keen to expand the knowledgebase in the project and there is a wealth of information out there, if you know where to look for it. Please keep me informed if you find anything helpful (or even not so helpful) and I will endeavour to make sure your experience is shared and you are acknowledged accordingly. Your recommendations are extremely valuable when it comes to “test driving” the huge range of information available, be they guide books, web-pages etc. We can also send you copies of any training course resources used during the project.

Species ID

For fungi, you can try either:

www.rogersmushrooms.com or <http://www.mycokey.com/>. Both websites will lead you to photographic records for individual species, however be aware that the latter site, (thank you to Sheila Spence for these comments), uses more technical terms and may suggest you need specialised equipment for measuring spores!

For Trees and Flora try:

http://www.hainaultforest.co.uk/55Treeidentification_index.htm and in particular for winter tree identification, <http://www.hainaultforest.co.uk/3Winter%20twigs.htm> or <http://www.hainaultforest.co.uk/55Wild%20flower%20index.htm>

This Hainault Forest website has a range of photographic ID resources which although specific to that area of SE England, will overlap into Herefordshire. In some cases they are just for more common species, but becoming familiar with these can allow you to exclude them when recording and flag the more unusual!

Local History and Ecology

Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club for the years 1852 – 1904 and can now be accessed from the internet.

<http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=woolhope%20AND%20collection%3Abiodiversity>

This is extremely helpful for archive work, especially if the reference you are looking for is to be found in one of these volumes, and could will save an extra trip to the Hereford Library. In addition, the ability to download and print pages including photographs from these volumes can be very valuable. It is worth remembering that the first transactions of the Field Club were produced only around 70 years after Capability Brown was actively redesigning the Herefordshire Parkland landscape we find today.

Mapping

For those who would like to be able to use Google Earth aerial and Ordnance Survey maps side by side, try “Wheres the Path” <http://wtp2.appspot.com/wheresthepath.htm>, or if the map limit has been reached, try <http://wtp2recorder.appspot.com/wheresthepath.htm> . If anyone is particularly keen use this technology whilst surveying you can now download a “mobile” version or even an App for your i-pad at <http://mortimermaps.appspot.com/wtp3/wtp3.htm>.



The Parklands Project Website is currently in development this month and it is hoped that all of the information you need to support you in your work will be accessible from there by February.

I will still be able to provide paper copies of recording forms and colour maps in A3 size, to save your printing costs. The website will include all the latest project news, dates for surveys, events and training, and will supplement the regular newsletters and e-mail updates we currently provide.

We hope to include a (passive) mapping function, to allow you to locate the parklands around the county, with an aerial "Google Earth" view and associated information about the sites. Watch this space for news of when it will become live.

Forthcoming Surveys and Training Dates

Surveys

Please contact Lewis (01432 356 872, e-mail l.goldwater@herefordshirewt.co.uk) if you wish to be involved for any of these days. Further dates during February and March will be advertised in e-mails.

Ridgebourne and Hergest Court

Ridgebourne's land originally belonged to the Hergest Court estate. The house was erected in the late 17th century and retains an interior of this period, although it was rebuilt in a modern style in 1806. 18th century county maps do not show Ridgebourne, but it appears on the 1833 OS 1" map, surrounded by pleasure grounds. Bryant's 1835 county map shows emparked grounds and planting, and an area of the park is named as the 'Lawn', although the 6" OS map (c. 1885) shows this as parkland.

Survey Dates: February 6th - 7th 2012

Location: Kington

Survey Skills: Parkland/veteran trees.

Meet: at 10:00 am at the visitor car-park to Hergest Croft.

There is no limit on numbers for this survey.

The Moor Estate

This will be to complete the survey of trees and any remaining archaeological features.

Survey Dates: 16th – 18th February 2012

Location: Clifford

Survey Skills: Archaeology, parkland/veteran trees

Meet: at 10:00 am at the eastern lodge entrance.

There is no limit on numbers for this survey.



[Sutton Court](#)

The 1832 OS 1" map shows Sutton Court with a very small park, SW of the church. The 1844 tithe map shows the house and shrubberies, as well as the park. This was divided in two; the upper park was known as the 'Dog Kennel Orchard', while the lower park was the 'Great Orchard'. The OS 6" map (c.1885) shows no park, but an 1885 sale catalogue describes the grounds as well planted with trees. There are also two ponds, and a walled garden to the NE. Sutton Court was purchased in 1886 by Robert Ormston Backhouse of Co. Durham who, together with his wife, became a noted breeder of daffodils. Many of their hybrids can still be seen in the park in spring

Survey Dates: March 19th 2012

Location: Sutton St. Nicolas

Survey Skills: Gardens, historic/ornamental buildings, orchards.

Meet: at 10:00 am at the eastern lodge entrance.

There is no limit on numbers for this survey.

[Training](#)

[Winter Tree ID](#)

How can we identify a tree's species in Winter when there are no leaves attached? This training day will give you the practical experience of looking for a range of broadleaved trees' key features to identify the species using twigs, buds, tree form and bark. Amazingly, even flowers start to appear on some trees but fruits and seeds the other important features, we are unlikely to see these at this time of the year.

Training Dates: 1st February 2012

Location: Queenswood Country Park, Dinmore Hill

Survey Skills: Trees

Meet: at 10:00 am at the car park, Queenswood Country Park. Tea/coffee provided – please bring lunch.

There are 4 places remaining for this training

[Woodpecker Survey and ID](#)

Learn about the fascinating ecology of Woodpeckers, how to identify the three species we find in Herefordshire, and how to survey parklands and orchards for signs of their presence.

Training Dates: Tuesday 13th March 2012

Location: TBC

Survey Skills: Woodpecker ID

There are 12 places available



[Parkland Pond Surveys](#)

Learn how to carry out a high level survey and analysis of ponds and standing water, by identifying a range of indicator flora and fauna present and testing the water quality. Many parklands retain ornamental pond features which could have been adaptations from significantly older and therefore may retain high biodiversity. We will be looking to survey ponds during 2012

Parkland: Pengethley

Training Dates: Tuesday 27th March 2012

Location: Hentland

Survey Skills: Ponds

Meet: 10:00 am at Hentland Church.

There are 12 places available for this training day.

[Events](#)

[Eastnor Study Day: The Parish, its Inhabitants and the Castle](#)

Parkland: Eastnor Castle

Event Date: 19th April

A day of multi-disciplinary talks, which will take place in the Octagon Room of the Castle.

The fee is £25 per person and will include tea, coffee and a light lunch.

For further information and reservations, please phone 01432 269766 or e-mail

david.whitehead.hafod@care4free.net

That's all for now. If you wish to speak to me at any time about the project, require any advice or there is anything in the newsletter you would like to talk about, please feel free to do so. My contact details are: Tel 01432 356 872, Mobile 07773 879 823, e-mail L.Goldwater@herefordshirewt.co.uk or drop by to Lower House Farm in Tupsley. Hope to see you all soon.

Lewis