

Friends of Naphill Common

The Friends of Naphill Common evolved from the Naphill Common Committee in December 2008 and, in terms of members, has become the largest organisation in the village. Now, seven years on, we have a **new chairman**, Chris Miller, who has been on the committee for some time and who leads our short walks. I am sure we all wish him and FONC all the best. Thank you Chris for taking on the post. The new committee consists of Chris Miller (chairman and short walks leader), Sheila Draper (secretary), Peggy Ewart (treasurer), Peter Davis (working party organiser and web-master), Lynn McMinn (membership secretary), Ron Collins (long walks leader), Marek Pawlik (who provides the venue), Neil McMinn, Kevin Bennett, Philip Hussey (posters), Trevor Hussey and John Camp. John has kindly agreed to replace Steve Roderick who has left after long and generous service, for which we thank them both.

The Future.

Wessex Woodland Management are due to start felling again in autumn 2016. We don't yet know which region of the Common they will thin, but

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Juniper

we hope to be able to ameliorate the effects and to mark the significant trees and other features that need special protection, as we did before. The archaeological sites will need special care.

Our working parties will continue to improve the paths, attack the alien species (**Japanese Knotweed** and **Himalayan Balsam**), care for the notice boards and undertake two special tasks in the autumn. The first is to work on some of the **ponds**: clearing out leaf debris and reducing some of the more dominant plants such as the Floating Sweet-grass and Yellow Iris. We have to be careful not to disturb the ponds too much or damage the

fauna, but some are so degraded that there is not much to damage. We marked many trees around the ponds for felling and now much more light gets in so we hope they will flourish once again. The second task is to reintroduce the **Juniper** cuttings which were taken a few years back. We will choose some of the open, sunny spots produced by the felling. The cuttings have proved to include both male and female plants, so we will put them in mixed groups and protect them with wire netting guards. (At present we have only one Juniper that is known to be male and the nearest definite female is on West Wycombe Hill.) As you can see, there is a lot for our **working parties** to do and so we desperately need more people to join in. You could help regularly or occasionally to suit you – and it is good exercise with friendly people.

The felling has left the common looking stark, with huge areas of bare soil. It must be tempting to help its recovery by sprinkling wild flower and grass seed. However, please resist the temptation. As an SSSI Grade 1 and a Special Conservation Area it is forbidden to introduce any species or any foreign matter such as surfacing for paths. Anyone doing so could be prosecuted. (Our Junipers are not aliens because they originate from cuttings taken from the four remaining specimens on the common.)

Common Rarities.

Because our common began life as open grazing land, dotted with trees, gorse and juniper and has since been allowed to become covered in trees, it has a relatively restricted flora and fauna. None-the-less it is home to several uncommon or even rare species: plants, insects, birds; amphibians and mammals. With luck and careful management we will keep what we have and, perhaps, discover more. Over the last few years we have organised a number of surveys by specialists and they have identified several rarities but some have been found by FONC members – so keep searching!

Amongst the plants our chief claim



Japanese Knotweed

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to fame is the **Starfruit** *Damasonium alisma*, which reappeared in Daisy Pond in 1992 (having been found in Mannings Pond on Downley Common in 1989). It is a very rare and temperamental plant which used to thrive in, or on the edge of, shallow muddy ponds when they were trodden by livestock. Perhaps the activity of clearing the ponds stirred old seeds into germination. They have not been seen since the 1990s, so we hope our proposed work on Daisy Pond will encourage it to reappear. Between June and September look out for small white flowers, each with three roundish petals, standing a little above the water. The seeds are held in a very distinctive green, six-rayed star shaped fruiting body. The floating leaves are oval – almost a narrow heart shape.

pear this summer. Our fungus forays have discovered several unusual fungi but the most spectacular can be seen every few years, about twenty feet up on the great

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beech next to Dew Pond: the white tousled, Boris-like head of **Hericium erinaceum** feeding on rotting matter (I shall say no more).

As to birds, the story here is as depressing as elsewhere and we are likely to see ever more once-common species become rarities. The number of small birds appears to be in a dreadful decline. Warblers, finches, buntings, swallows, martins and others are all suffering. How many heard a cuckoo around Naphill this year? Their calls used to become almost

haps the **Edible Dormouse** *Glis glis*, which is common here but nationally is restricted to an area of the Chilterns. Our bat walks have produced only fairly common species but we hope for better luck in future. Fallow and Roe Deer are joining the Muntjacs with mixed consequences for the Common – if only they would eat holly!

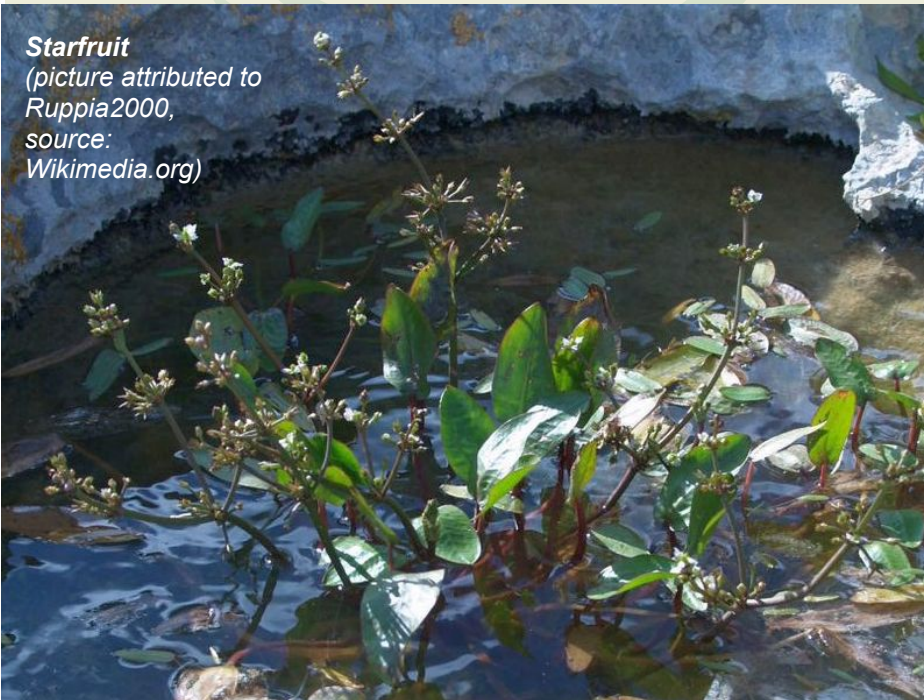
In the 1940s someone discovered **Fairy Shrimps** *Chirocephalus diaphanus* in some small puddles on the Common. These tiny crustaceans breed in temporary pools so as to avoid such predators as newts. Their eggs will survive drying out and wait for years until the pool refills. I have searched but failed to find any – so far.

We have had several insect/invertebrate surveys and they have found too many species to mention here; many that are nationally scarce and notifiable, including many beetles, hoverflies, bugs etc. Some species are indicators of ancient woodland and are probably supported by our oldest trees. Perhaps the most beautiful insect, although not the rarest, is the **Purple Emperor** butterfly *Apatura iris*, which lays its eggs on sallows (pussy willows) but the adults tend to be attracted by oaks (and dog mess). Our several moth surveys have generally produced the more common species but some less common have turned up, such as a **Mocha** *Cyclophora annularia*, which is a nationally scarce and notifiable species.

We conduct occasional moth-trappings, using ultraviolet lamps to attract flying insects. These usually take place late at night during the summer months, but are subject to last minute changes and cancellations if the weather is unfavourable for flying insects (as it so often is during a British summer), and for this reason we do not publicise them. Anyone interested is welcome to attend, however – keep an eye on our Twitter feed **@NaphillCommon** for news.

Starfruit

(picture attributed to Ruppia2000, source: Wikimedia.org)



Other uncommon plants include one small patch of **Hairy Bindweed** *Calystegia pulchra*, which has large pink, trumpet-shaped flowers, with five white stripes. It is beside the path almost opposite Woodbine Cottage. It differs from the common Hedge Bindweed (which is usually white but can be pink) by having hairy stems. In July 2013 small group of **Yellow Birdsnest** *Monotropa hypopitys* appeared by the side of the path over at the Bradenham end of the Common. It is a pale yellow saprophyte, less than a foot (30cms) high, which lives on decaying vegetable matter and so lacks any green pigment. I did not see it last year but hope it may reappear

monotonous. We need a Chiltern-wide, indeed Nation-wide, project to reverse present trends. However, Blackcaps, a few Chiffchaffs and even fewer Willow Warblers have been heard on the common, and Ravens and Stock Doves and a Hawfinch have been spotted.

Frogspawn appeared in two of our ponds this year and there are **Great Crested Newts** *Triturus cristatus* in Pickup's Pond, next to the Common, and may also be in Willow Pond. Perhaps our work on the ponds will eventually bring back a richer fauna. We don't have any rare mammals except, per-

