

An appreciation of Holtspur Bottom Reserve and its creator

by David Redhead

I don't recall the date exactly, but my researching of past copies of this Newsletter suggest it must have been late 1997 or early 1998. My recollection is of an Upper Thames Branch Committee Meeting when the idea of a Branch Reserve was first floated as a serious proposition. Most present, including myself, were both excited and perturbed by the idea. Did we have the resources for such an undertaking? The Branch was then half the size it is now. The factor we were not taking into account was the enthusiasm, capacity for working against the odds and sheer determination of the proposer of the idea. We subsequently visited the site which only served to emphasise the size of the task ahead – one half appeared to be a rather boring monoculture of tallish grass and the other half a monoculture of ragwort. However, closer examination showed there were some goodies hidden away and the bank looked interesting if rather scrubbed over. The Local Nature Reserve [Holtspur Bank] on the other side of the valley showed what was possible and Frank Banyard's enthusiastic recollections of the Small and Chalkhill Blues once found there were infectious. So Holtspur Bottom Reserve was born. I am pleased to say the Small Blue did not take too long to make a re-appearance – perhaps they had never totally gone. I was delighted to provide some of the first evidence that they were actually breeding on our Reserve when I came across a mating pair at the 2005 Open Day. [See [Field trip led by Frank Banyard at Holtspur Bottom, July 2005](#) on the *Photos* page of this website.] I was even more delighted to receive reports of singleton male Chalkhill Blues being seen in 2006 and 2008. We all held our breath as we waited to see what effect 1,000 Horseshoe Vetch plants, carefully reared by Frank prior to their planting on site, would have. Again we did not have to wait for long and the first multiple sightings were made this summer [2011] including at least one female. I could not resist going to see for myself in the company of Frank and Wendy Wilson. We spent a glorious couple of hours which included seeing three male Chalkhill Blues and a female going through the motions of egg laying. The find of an egg finally resolved matters: we now have two UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species breeding on our Reserve. Since it came under the care of Frank and the Upper Thames Branch, Holtspur Bottom has been transformed into a very special place and the presence of the Small and Chalkhill Blue are the icing on the cake: let's hope they are both here to stay.

I could fill more of this Newsletter than the Editor would care for, recounting the effort and time Frank has put into Holtspur Bottom and even then it would be incomplete as there are things I don't know about. For example he has spent endless hours sorting out the paperwork to obtain the very necessary Countryside Stewardship grants and more latterly the even more fiendish Higher Level Scheme grants. Frank would be the first to acknowledge that the present state of Holtspur Bottom is down to teamwork but I know that without his inspirational leadership Holtspur Bottom would still be overrun by tallish grass and ragwort and be no friend to either the Small or Chalkhill Blues.

This of course might not be the end – Dark Green Fritillary and White-letter Hairstreak? The work at Holtspur Bottom necessarily continues and the first of our winter work parties, as ever organised by Nick Bowles, will be on 6th November [2011]. I hope to see you there as I shall be making up for my past short-comings. See page 20 for details of the Holtspur Bottom winter work-parties. Thank you, Frank, for the gem that is today Holtspur Bottom. My contributions have been small, my enjoyment has been great.

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