



# Wyre Forest Study Group

## The First 25 years of the Wyre Forest Study Group

ROSEMARY WINNALL



Peter Hobson (left) and Mike Talyor, at the charcoal burn, Frank Chapman Centre, April 1990

In the late 1980s Peter Hobson, Conservation Officer with the Forestry Commission (FC), was based at the Wyre Forest Callow Hill offices, and he and his wife Gosia lived in one of the Forestry Houses close by. It was Peter who gathered a few local naturalists together in 1990 to suggest that we develop a Forest study group separate from the Wyre Forest Society, with the express aim of recording the wildlife of the forest, documenting results, and carrying out surveys and research.

April 1991. Chris Bradley was studying Fallow Deer, Sylvia Sheldon was monitoring the Adder populations, Frank Lancaster was looking at butterflies in the Forest, Mike Averill was studying bats and dragonflies, John and Denise Bingham were studying the flora and fungi, and Rosemary Winnall had just completed a four year study of woodpeckers in Rock Coppice. After meeting to discuss the way forward, it was decided to make this more official and on 18th April 1991 we held our first minuted meeting of the WYRE FOREST RESEARCH GROUP in which Rosemary Winnall (RW) was elected Chairman, Pat Lancaster Minutes Secretary. It was agreed that we would meet every 3 months to discuss ongoing research and future studies, and draw up a list of referees for the different taxa. Paper records were to be duplicated and kept in 2 centres: Peter Hobson's house and the Frank Chapman Centre (where RW was living). That first meeting finished at midnight!

1991 meetings were attended by: Peter and Gosia Hobson, (Peter had left FC in 1991 and was writing up his PhD on 'The Ecological History of the Wyre Forest' at

Wolverhampton University), Mike Averill (Environment Agency), Mike Taylor (Nature Conservancy Council), Sylvia Sheldon (Wyre Forest Society, living at Knowles Mill), Chris Bradley (Wyre Forest Society and working part-time at the Forestry Commission's Visitor Centre), Pat and Frank Lancaster (volunteer recorders for Butterfly Conservation), Rosemary Winnall (Education Officer with the Forestry Commission running the Wyre Forest Discovery Centre), John Bingham (Nature Conservancy Council) and Denise Bingham. John Robinson (NCC) was asked to join the group, but declined. It was agreed that all members would pay £1 per meeting. Chris Bradley drew up a map of land ownerships in and around the Wyre Forest. It was agreed that we should collect together reports, articles and written studies of the wildlife of Wyre, its ecology and landscape. Mike Averill was to make contact with John Thoumine of the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre based at Worcester City Museum. The Wyre Forest Society welcomed our plans to record and document wildlife records and offered their support.

In 1992 the following were invited to join the group: Mike Bloxham (Sandwell teacher, and recorder of hymenoptera and plant galls), Neville Wilde (past lecturer on the Natural History of the Wyre Forest for Birmingham's extra-mural Department) and Dr Susan Limbrey (soil scientist from Birmingham University). The following people were contacted to see if they had any wildlife records from the Wyre Forest: Graham Martin (Birmingham University), Colin Plant (Hertfordshire) and Steven Falk (Herbert Museum and Art Gallery). Ongoing studies within Wyre were noted: Mike Taylor (MT) - Common Bird Census, multi-species transect, moths, spiders, Land Caddis; Peter Hobson - Kermes survey on oak trees; John Bingham - Shropshire and Worcestershire Flora Projects, fungi on a tetrad basis, moths with MT; Mike Averill (MA) - study of the Club-tailed Dragonfly on the River Severn, bats; Chris Bradley - deer; Johnny Birks - Polecats and the collection of road casualties. Mike Bloxham gave us a talk about ants, encouraged us to look out for *Formica sanguinea*. John Bingham encouraged us to map Lily of the Valley colonies. Plans were made to produce a journal, but this was not realised as in November 1992 Peter Hobson resigned from the group to take up a teaching post at Otley College in Suffolk.

1993. Name changed to Wyre Forest Study Group with the following aims and objectives: *The Wyre Forest Study Group (WFSG) was established in 1991 with the aim of co-ordinating the research and survey work carried out by various natural historians and other scientists in the Wyre Forest and adjoining woodlands. The objectives*

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*are: to further knowledge and understanding of the ecology and wildlife of Wyre Forest through research and survey work; to contribute towards the conservation of the Forest by making information available, where appropriate, to individuals and organisations involved in the conservation and management of Wyre. This is on the understanding that reference is made to the WFSG when quoting information released by the group: to contribute towards county and national wildlife recording schemes; to publish any significant findings.*

There was much discussion about how to computerise records including a visit to Craig Slawson of the Urban Wildlife Trust for a demonstration of the database software RECORDER. Target species for 1993 were *Formica sanguinea*, Hornet nests, Buzzard nest sites, Lily of the Valley sites, High Brown Fritillary, Muntjac deer and Solitary Wasps. The Discovery Centre was used for meetings, and it was agreed to invite more folk to enlarge the group. Brian Stephens and Dr David Smith were invited to join. The first 2 outdoor meetings took place on 15th June (bats with Mike Averill) and 22 July (moths with John Bingham and Mike Taylor).

1994 *Formica sanguinea* was located on Wimpherhill. More *Sorbus domestica* trees were found on the cliffs of South Glamorgan. There were 6 reports of Muntjac deer in main block Wyre and 2 in Ribbesford. Frank Lancaster (FL) warned of decline in the High Brown Fritillary. Wolverhampton University ran a symposium on the ECOLOGY, MANAGEMENT AND HISTORY OF THE WYRE FOREST in March. Wyre Forest District Council passed plans to develop the Bewdley Business Park at Callow Hill in spite of opposition. There was a meeting on 6th September at Lodgehill to discuss computerisation of wildlife records for Wyre attended by David Heaver, Chris Hogarth, John Robinson and Mike Taylor from English Nature (EN), Mike Bloxham (MB) and Rosemary Winnall from WFSG. It was agreed to progress further in conjunction with John Robinson. A grant application was submitted by MB to EN for the purchase equipment and for training, but it was not successful. John Little (mycologist) joined the group. Frank Lancaster volunteered to be Treasurer. The annual subscription was set at £5.

1995 Close liaison was developed with FC. RW sent out 11 letters applying for money to purchase a computer but £50 only was received from Rock Parish Council. One Roe buck was seen in forest. FL gave a talk about Butterflies of Wyre. Field meetings arranged were two moth evenings, a Glow worm count, and a visit to Park House meadow. Sadly Fred Fincher died.

1996 Five summer meetings were arranged: a dawn chorus, Adder sites, dragonflies, Glowworms, and a

butterfly transect. The Millennium Fund was setting up Recording Centres in some counties. Worcestershire's paper wildlife records moved from Worcester City Museum to Lower Smite WWT with John Meiklejohn overseeing. This year was the Whitty Pear's 80th birthday. During one meeting Mike Bloxham and John Little dismantled the light fitment in the Discovery Centre and procured a range of interesting deceased insects including a Purple Hairstreak butterfly!

1997. Brian Stephens took on the post of Treasurer from FL. 2 members published books: Chris Bradley's 'The Realm of the Fallow Buck' and Mike Averill's 'The Dragonflies of Worcestershire'. FL organised a series of evening moth recording events during the summer at the IMI site (now Roxel) in Postensplain.

1998. John Robinson retired as EN Warden and Wyre was managed by Mike Taylor and John Bingham (JB) part-time. There was concern about the increase in recreation and mountain biking. We targeted the following on our field events: Grizzled Skipper, Glowworms, grasses and sedges, Noble Chafer, pond life. Sadly John Little died. EN designated a Prime Biodiversity Area around Greater Wyre. First minuted Annual General Meeting where RW was elected as Chairman, Pat Lancaster Secretary, Brian Stephens Treasurer and RECORDER co-ordinator. A computer laptop PC was kindly donated by Anthony Collins Solicitors via John Iles for running Recorder software. RW volunteered to champion the Narrow-leaved Helleborine with Phil Rudlin (FC) through Plantlife's 'Back from the Brink' project as only 3 Wyre sites were known. Dr David Harris joined the group from Pound Green Common which is in Countryside Stewardship for 10 years to restore it to heathland.

1999. Richard Boles took over as Forester from Jeremy Gyssop at FC Wyre. Monthly moth recording at the IMI site in Postensplain continued for another year with 7 sessions involving up to 12 people and 8 moth traps, completing 3 years of recording. David Barnett and Kevin McGee joined the group and Kevin gave a presentation on Longhorn Beetles. Target species were Hornet Robber Flies MA, *Andrena* solitary bees MB. Neville Wilde (NW) organised a FUNGI evening and RW brought paper made from bracket fungi and wool dyed with toadstools.

Aims and objectives were rewritten as follows: *The Wyre Forest Study Group was established in 1991 to bring together persons who are interested in studying the natural history of Wyre Forest. It is the aim of the group to be a significant authority on the flora and fauna of the forest and thereby provide advice and information to educational and planning authorities*



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*and environmentalists. To achieve this the group will undertake to: record the status of the forest's flora and fauna over time and study the trends of growth or decline in the interest of conservation; set up and maintain a comprehensive database, for national and international purposes, using 'Recorder'; encourage individuals with specialist expertise to join the group; provide informal regular meetings where ideas can be exchanged and observations discussed; encourage members to write and publish books and papers on their findings; use the information collected to make schools and the wider public more aware of the unique biodiversity of Wyre Forest, thereby assisting in the protection and conservation of this region.*

**2000.** In March Mike Taylor left Wyre to move with EN to Suffolk and his expertise on birds, moths, spiders etc. would be greatly missed. RW took over his multi-species transect, Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and the collection of frogspawn data. Jim Martin (BBS) and Paul Wright (mammals) joined. RW and NW decided to continue organising regular moth recording evenings in different parts of Wyre. A WFSG publication was suggested for the Millennium and David Harris (DH) offered to produce it on his computer. Our annual REVIEW was launched with early copies being printed from the computer and spiral bound.

**2001.** Harry Green joined the group and he was congratulated on his MBE. Our REVIEW 2000 was well received and sold to members for £5. RW organised the Wyre Forest Moth group on the 1st Friday of each month between March and October with Dr Tony Simpson who, with Dr Michael Harper, was writing atlases of moths of Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Saturday field meetings were arranged between February and August. Foot and Mouth disease closed the forest from the end of February until mid April. RW produced a Newsletter, the first of many which would be emailed out every 6 months to members, landowners and associates. Half of the large Mawley oak tree collapsed in the morning of 29 October. The last known sighting of Argent and Sable moths in Wyre were from the Longdon pipeline.

**2002.** Dr Malcolm Smart, Joy Ricketts, Mervyn Needham and John Meiklejohn joined the group. MB ran a training day on Parasitic Hymenoptera. The Moth Group continued to meet 6 times during the year and Neil Gregory encouraged everyone to use Mapmate for moth records. Collection of veteran tree data was encouraged. Use of a website was discussed. RW offered their Forest Vision website [www.wyreforest.net](http://www.wyreforest.net) to be shared, and it was agreed to add all articles from our last 2 REVIEWS which have been lodged with local

libraries. Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WRBC) agreed to put all records for SO77 including all of Wyre Forest onto their RECORDER 2000 system and all members were encouraged to contribute.

**2003.** Simon Wood was employed to run WBRC. A joint meeting was arranged with the British Plant Gall Society in July. An ISSN was obtained for our REVIEW. Studies included: BTO Woodcock Survey (Jim Martin, RW, Paul Wright), BTO BBS (Jim Martin, RW), BTO Waterbirds Survey (Michael Harrison), Frogspawn survey (RW, SS, PR), Adder Survey (SS), Dormouse Survey (PR), BC butterfly transect (FL), Narrow-leaved Helleborine (RW), BMS Waxcap survey (RW), moths Common Fanfoot, Drab Looper, Argent and Sable (Dave Grundy), fritillary butterflies (Dr Jenny Joy). SS warned of decline in Adders. 44 Glowworms were seen one night in garden adjoining Pound Green Common. RW to leave her FC post due to her daughter's ill health, but will continue part time with Forest Vision helping to run the Visitor Centre. John Meiklejohn brought Whitty Pear wine to Christmas Party!

**2004** Sadly Neville Wilde died suddenly on 9th January. An orchard project was undertaken at Bowcastle Farm with visits once a month to 3 small orchards, and 2 Malaise traps erected. Mick Blythe gallantly sorted Malaise samples and identified some of the groups of Diptera. Phil Rudlin celebrated 10 years studying dormice in Ribbesford Wood, checking 500 boxes twice a year. Forest Research became involved radio tracking dormice to find out more about summer breeding nests and winter hibernation sites. WFSG organised the first Worcestershire Entomology Day with keynote speaker Dr Gavin Broad on 'Parasitic Lifestyles (Hymenoptera)'. Opportunity Bewdley provided us with a grant for the printing of the REVIEW. A suggestion was made about the writing of a book about the wildlife of Wyre. WFSG hosted a British Bryological Society meeting in April, a Conchological Society joint meeting in June and British Plant Gall Society meeting in October.

**2005.** Harry Green (HG) agreed to be our President, and the following were elected: Chairman Mike Bloxham, Secretary Rosemary Winnall, Treasurer Susan Limbrey, Committee John Bingham, Sylvia Sheldon. A constitution was adopted. MB approached New Naturalists about writing a book but they thought the area was too small. Our Orchard Survey Report was completed and sent to EN with 6394 records of 1906 species. JB and RW divided Wyre into sites for input into Recorder and for ease of retrieval, and maps were distributed to all those recording in Wyre. Regular visits were made to Roxel between April and August to supply records for their management plan. Paul

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Reade rediscovered the Common Wintergreen in Wyre after 100 years. We accompanied Dr Ian Wallace into Wyre at night and located adult male and female Land Caddis. The keynote speaker for Entomology Day at Heightington Village hall was Mike Edwards 'Woodland Structure and Insects'. 40 attended. More folk are now joining the group. The final standing part of the mighty Mawley Oak collapsed in the night of 3 November.

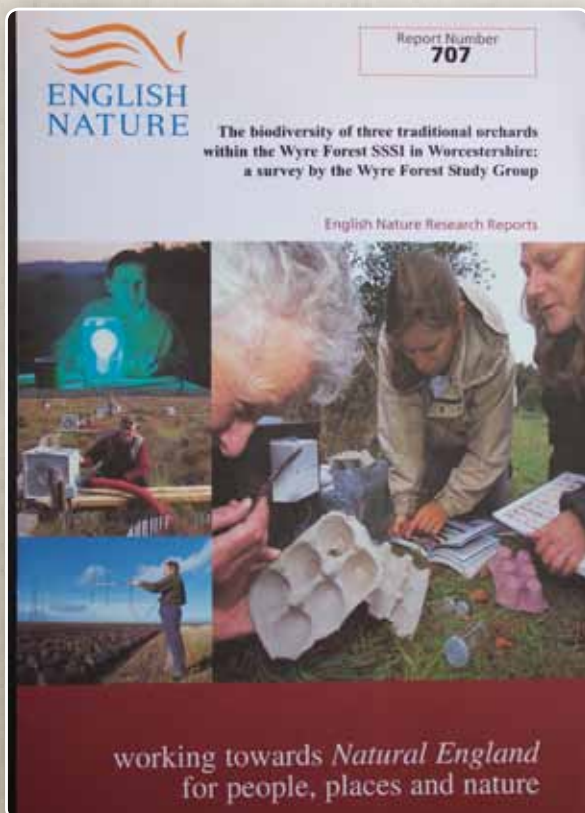
2006. A constitution was adopted and insurance taken out through BTCV. The Wyre Restoration Project GROW WITH WYRE bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was submitted in October 2006. Mike Averill was welcomed onto our Committee. Fieldwork was undertaken on the pipeline through the Forest as there are plans to extend it and an environmental assessment was required. The route was eventually changed due to sensitivity of the site. Sadly Dr David Harris was killed on his motorbike on 25th August. Rosemary and Simon Winnall took over the production of the REVIEW, a 68 page colour edition, which was printed this year thanks to a grant from NE. A publications subgroup was formed. RW and Dr Malcolm Smart rewrote our Orchard Report for EN as Research Report No. 707. This was an important national study and was used as evidence of the special nature of orchards for wildlife, resulting in BAP status for traditional orchards. The Shining Guest Ant *Formicoxenus nitidula* was found again in Wyre after 100 years! Entomology Day was

titled LIFE IN AQUATIC HABITATS with Lucy Morris of the EA as the keynote speaker - 'Biological Sampling and its use in River Classification'. Linda Averill made cakes in the shape of insects!

2007. Susan Limbrey (SL) was elected Chairman, Vice-chair Mike Averill, Treasurer Mick Blythe, Secretary RW, committee members SS and MN. Publications committee formed (with the idea of publishing a book) - HG, Brett Westwood (BW), RW, SL, MA. Entomology Day speaker was Keith Alexander 'The Importance of Invertebrates in Ecological Evaluation, with special reference to the Fauna of Decaying Wood'. Stage 1 pass was awarded for Grow With Wyre the 4 million pound project led by FC with WFSG as a partner organisation. 'Back to Orange' began led by Butterfly Conservation (BC) to survey and manage part of the Forest for fritillary butterflies. In addition to our monthly Saturday field meetings, we started going out on the first Wednesday of each month. There was major flooding in Wyre in June and July. Membership was raised to £8 per person or £12 per household. Our records contributed to the Roxel Management Plan written by Pete Boardman. NE again sponsored our REVIEW 2007. WFSG was contracted by Wessex Woodlands to undertake fieldwork and write a report about the vegetation of 2 stream valleys prior to conifer removal in Cleobury Woods. The RSPB chose Wyre as one of their 3 survey sites for a 3 year study of Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers.

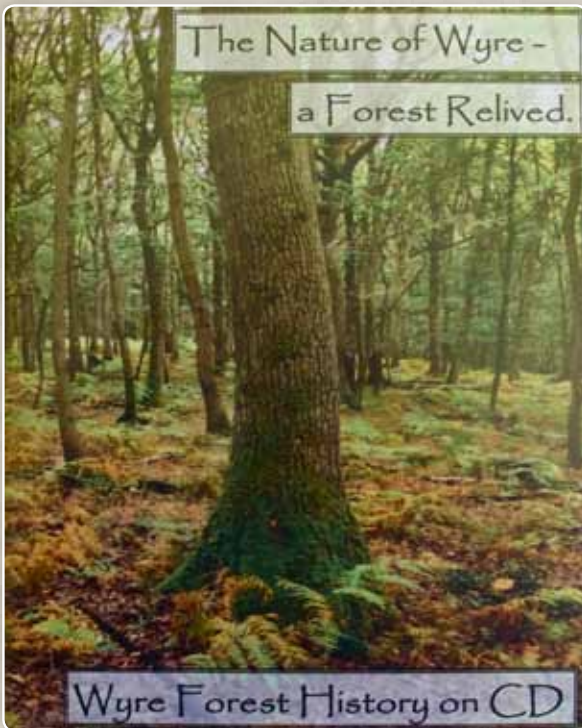
2008. The Grow with Wyre HLF bid was successful. The WFSG was contracted to survey Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries for Back to Orange. A Reptile Survey began to help SS, and fieldwork was undertaken on wet flushes. We started mapping Lemon Slugs. Entomology Day concentrated on BUTTERFLIES with contributions on Back to Orange, rare lepidoptera found in Wyre, butterfly monitoring and Tachinid flies. Tony and Rosemary Winnall retired from running the WF Visitor Centre in May and the website [www.wyreforest.net](http://www.wyreforest.net) passed over to the Study Group. Health and Safety was reviewed in line with our insurance policy. A Field Risk Control Sheet is now read by members attending field trips, and signed. We undertook a pollination project in Bowcastle orchards with the help of a cherry picker through Grow With Wyre (GWW) and FC. NE sponsored Review 2008. After storms in July, a live juvenile Gannet was found grounded in the middle of Wyre. It was rescued, nursed back to health, and released at sea in August.

2009. GWW started in April 2009 for 4 years. WFSG will have a dedicated equipped Archive and Records Centre and money for the development of a website.





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Some members used an EA boat to survey along the River Severn from Arley to Blackstone. Pheromones were used to attract clearwing moths. Entomology Day THE TIMES THEY ARE A'CHANGIN' was ably chaired by Brett Westwood with contributions from local entomologists. Mike Averill was elected Chairman and Brett Westwood and Jane Scott were elected to the committee. FC sponsored REVIEW 2009. Snow Fleas were found in Chamberline in December. Sadly, Simon Walker, Wyre NE Assistant Site Manager, died prematurely after a short illness. Saul Herbert was appointed as Reserve Manager.

2010. The new Community Discovery Centre was constructed and opened by Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin fame who lives locally. A WFSG Records Room within that building was opened on 2 October as a satellite recording centre to the WBRC. The newly created website [www.wyreforest.net](http://www.wyreforest.net) was launched (designed and constructed by 383 Birmingham). Brian Stephens catalogued our library. We open the Records Room every Friday morning for the general public with queries about wildlife (RW and Mick Blythe). Entomology Day: ENTOMOLOGY, A WIDER PERSPECTIVE with keynote speaker Dr Jon Sadler 'The Little Things that make the World go Round' was popular. Incidental sightings of some White-clawed Crayfish resulted in a survey through GWW by Drs Ann and Graham Hill, to continue annually. GWW set up a radio tagging adder project with SS, CB and Nigel Hand (herpetologist).

2011. Mervyn Needham was elected Chairman, Mick Blythe Vice-chair, SL Treasurer, and John and Denise Bingham joined the committee. We now have 50 members. Entomology Day INSECTS AND PLANTS had 59 paid participants. Keynote speaker was Dr Margaret Redfern 'Plant Galls – a fascinating world in miniature'. REVIEW was sponsored by GWW. Dr Graeme Peirson led an event to net trawl Uncllys reservoir to check on the fish population. The book continues to gather pace. The GWW oral history project 'The Nature of Wyre – a Forest Relived' was completed to document memories of older residents in Wyre. RW and Mike Williams produced the Butterflies of Wyre leaflet. Phil Rudlin and Val Lambourne started their annual newt survey in Wyre's ponds.

2012. Grow With Wyre finished and generous legacy monies were allocated to WFSG for future renewal of equipment and publications. The Wyre Forest Landscape Partnership formed to keep momentum of GWW (RW is a board member). Tim Selman was appointed Strategic Development Manager funded for 3 years by NE and FC, with the aim of producing a holistic management plan for Wyre to safeguard it for the future. BC's 'Reconnecting the Wyre' project began with funding from SITA. Coopers Mill, owned by Birmingham City Council, was opened on 17 March after GWW refurbishment. Hermione Gerry planted another Whitty Pear close to where her grandmother Mrs Woodward had planted the present-day tree in 1916. A BLOG was added to our website so that we could communicate interesting Wyre records. Stuart Leadley agreed to become our auditor taking over from Tony Winnall. More floods occurred in July 2012. Entomology Day INSECT BEHAVIOUR moved to Rock Village Hall and Dr David Skingsley was keynote speaker presenting 'Insect Vision'. Wyre Forest WATCH Group was 25 years old.

2013. At the AGM Mick Blythe became Chairman and JB Vice-chair. New aims and objectives were agreed. SL arranged for WFSG to be registered for Gift Aid. Entomology Day PIRATES AND PREDATORS had John Walters 'Potters, Pirates and Predators' as keynote speaker. Our Wyre Book is to be published by Pisces with Peter Creed as creative designer. We started our annual Winter Bird Walk Trimpley/Arley circuit in January aiming to record 60 species. Field trips involved watching Waxwings at Arley, Two-barred Crossbills at Postensplain, Lampreys in the River Severn and Dowles Brook, the Strawberry Spider and *Hyptiotes paradoxus* in Wimperhill, discovering *Sabacon viscyanum ramblaianum* in Hawkbatch and *Spermodea lamellata* along Park Brook. Andy Grubb helped us with Arc GIS. Joe Botting joined us for a meeting in June and added



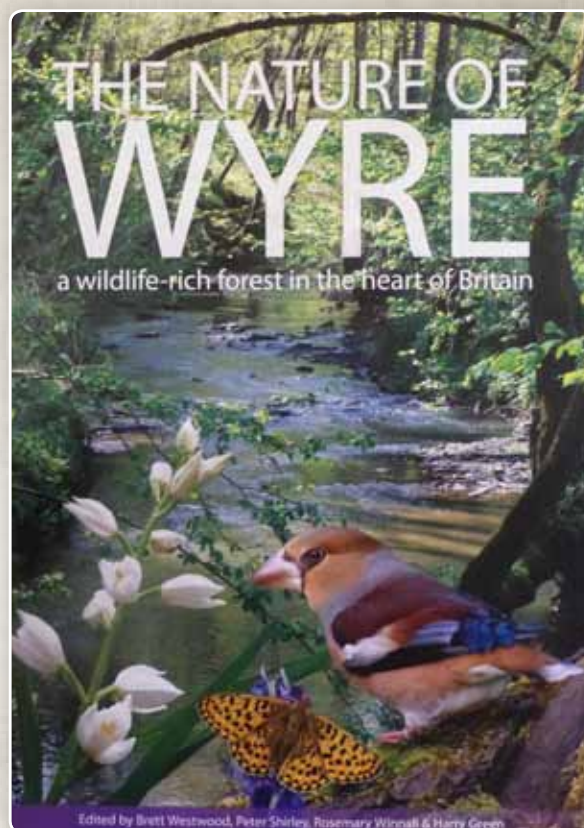
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to our hemiptera records. Worcestershire Wildlife Trust purchased Pound Green Common and took over its management.

2014. In January BBC's Countryfile came to film in Wyre. MA replaced JB as Vice-chair. WFLP continues to meet with Prof. Chris Baines as chair and RW on the board. SL sits on the Historic Environment working group and RW on both Learning and Access, and Land Management. (Rural Economy is the other group). Work on the Wyre book continues and generous donations were received from 2 members towards its publication. Peter Shirley joined RW, HG and BW on the editorial team as BW's time is going to be limited. NE put in a new weather station in Town Coppice. Entomology Day INSECTS, PEOPLE AND PLACE took place with Peter Marren speaking on 'The Secret History of Butterflies'. Joe Botting led a Bugs event for us in July. Health and Safety was revised with a new attendance form for each field meeting and a next of kin sheet. Button Oak Meadow was purchased jointly by WWT and Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

2015. RW was congratulated on her MBE. Mike Averill was elected as Chairman, Susan Limbrey as Vice-chair and Jane Scott took over Treasurer from SL. John and Denis Bingham stood down from the committee. The Gift Aid system was implemented through HMRC. Coopers Mill Cottage was purchased by Sandwell Council. Sadly Roy Mantle died on 7 July. Entomology Day THE RARE AND THE COMMON PLACE with Paul Brock as keynote speaker 'Insects of Britain and Ireland' was well attended. Tim Selman's post with WFLP came to an end but he continued working in Wyre as the Manager of the Wyre Community Land Trust based at Uncllys Farm. NE (in conjunction with the BTO) launched their annual Wyre Forest BIRD surveys with volunteer recorders. NE undertook a fogging exercise to look at invertebrates in oak canopy, and the Study Group became interested in recording at dung heaps. The Worcestershire Wildlife Trust sponsored our book 'THE NATURE OF WYRE - a wildlife-rich forest in the heart of Britain' which was eventually published in December, just in time for Christmas.

2016. In our 25th Anniversary Year, our Wyre book received excellent reviews nationally and the Book



Launch occurred at the Wyre Forest Discovery Centre on 29 January. This involved a TV appearance on Midlands Today and articles in local newspapers. At the AGM SS stood down from the committee and Graham and Ann Hill were voted on. RW handed the Narrow-leaved Helleborine survey to Paul Reade BSBI recorder for Worcestershire. Records of bumble bees, orthoptera and longhorn beetles were collected for mapping schemes. NE and FC signed their joint management plan for working together in Wyre. A 5 year Facilitation Fund Project run by BC was launched in Wyre to provide Wyre landowners with help for Countryside Stewardship applications and to encourage connectivity of habitat and improved management for wildlife. Crayfish plague devastated our few remaining Native White-clawed Crayfish populations. It was the Wyre Whitty Pear's 100th birthday on 16th March and we gathered at the site to celebrate. a special tree in our 25th anniversary year!

