

# Plantlife Ranscombe Farm Reserve

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2011

## Reserve management round-up

### Timber!

One of the ways in which we manage the woodland at Ranscombe Farm is by 'coppicing'. This is an ancient form of woodland management, which has been practised at Ranscombe for hundreds of years. It was originally a way of obtaining timber for building or firewood. But today, it is recognised as a vitally important way of protecting rare woodland plants, butterflies, and birds.

Coppicing involves cutting down areas of woodland on a cycle of 15 to 25 years. Although it looks drastic, it results in a superb show of wildflowers in the first few years - coppicing is what helps maintain the wonderful show of bluebells in Kent's woodlands. Then the trees quickly grow back, making good habitat for birds and Dormice.

Over the autumn and winter, several areas of woodland at Ranscombe are being coppiced as part of their long-term management. This work involves a lot of tree felling, and use of heavy machinery, so please take care and look out for warning signs.

Open patches in the woodland are among the richest places for plants on the whole reserve, so stumps will be removed in a few areas. This will create wider, sunny glades and benefit rare species such as meadow clary, lady orchid, and hairy mallow.

The cut timber won't be wasted, as most will be used to make locally-produced wooden fencing.

### Making tracks

Over August and September, over a mile of farm tracks through the centre of the reserve were improved by laying a thick stone base. Upgrading these tracks has been a major undertaking, made possible by our Heritage Lottery Fund grant. These will make it far easier in the future to manage Ranscombe's extensive woodlands.

Later this autumn, the Town Road will also get an upgrade. This kilometre-long, historic path runs east to west through the Reserve's woodland, from Strood to the boundary with Cobham Park. It is being hard-surfaced for use by cyclists, horse-riders, and walkers, and once completed will improve access from Strood to the Darnley Mausoleum and the wider Cobham Woods area. The work is being carried out by the Valley of Visions Project that operates in the Medway Valley ([www.valleyofvisions.org.uk](http://www.valleyofvisions.org.uk)).



### Population explosion!

Broad-leaved cudweed *Filago pyramidata* (pictured above) is a small, grey plant which many people might overlook. It is one of the country's rarest and most threatened wildflowers, but at Ranscombe Farm, it is thriving. In just one field, a count revealed up to 300 plants in a single square metre, and the total population probably totals hundreds of thousands!

Broad-leaved cudweed used to be far more common, growing in many arable fields on the chalk downs. But farming changed. Now its survival is dependent on careful management by Plantlife's tenant farmer, supported by government Environmental Stewardship funding.

### Brockles goes wild

Brockles Field was purchased last year with money from our Heritage Lottery Fund grant and from Medway Council. Our aim is to recreate wildflower-rich downland. On-going management includes hay-cutting as well as digging shallow 'scrapes' to encourage wildflowers of thin, chalky soils. We hope to introduce grazing in the near future.



## Walks and other events at Ranscombe

For more information about any of the events listed below, contact us (details below).

### Sat 22 Oct, 7pm Meteor sky watch event

Observe the Orionides meteor shower, with up to 30 shooting stars per hour. Booking required: contact Valley of Visions: e-mail [mail@vov.kentdowns.org.uk](mailto:mail@vov.kentdowns.org.uk) or phone 01634 242826.

### Tue 25 Oct, 10am-noon Fungus foray

Learn more about fabulous fungi. Meet at the Knights Place Recreation Ground car-park, off Albatross Avenue in Strood. Booking essential - call us on 01634 292062, or e-mail [ranscombe@plantlife.org.uk](mailto:ranscombe@plantlife.org.uk).

### Sun 20 Nov, 10am-1pm History & heritage walk

Learn about the fascinating history of Ranscombe Farm. Meet at the main car park on the A228, just south of the M2. Booking advisable - call us on 01634 292062, or e-mail [ranscombe@plantlife.org.uk](mailto:ranscombe@plantlife.org.uk).

### Sun 4 Dec, 10am-noon Trees in winter walk

Discover Ranscombe's wide variety of trees and shrubs. Meet at the main car park on the A228, just south of the M2. Booking advisable - call us on 01634 292062, or e-mail [ranscombe@plantlife.org.uk](mailto:ranscombe@plantlife.org.uk).

### Tue 20 Dec, 10am-1pm Christmas Special—guided walk

Enjoy a walk around the winter countryside, and enjoy a mince pie, and mulled wine or spiced fruit juice on us! Booking essential - call us on 01634 292062, or e-mail [ranscombe@plantlife.org.uk](mailto:ranscombe@plantlife.org.uk).

### Tue 3 Jan, 7pm Meteor sky watch event

Observe the Orionides meteor shower, with more than 40 shooting stars per hour. Booking required: contact Valley of Visions: e-mail [mail@vov.kentdowns.org.uk](mailto:mail@vov.kentdowns.org.uk) or phone 01634 242826.

### Sun 5 Feb, 10am - 1pm Ranscombe winter walk

Explore the woods, with activities for the family as we go. Meet at the Knights Place Recreation Ground car-park, off Albatross Avenue in Strood. No booking required. For more info, call us on 01634 292062, or e-mail [ranscombe@plantlife.org.uk](mailto:ranscombe@plantlife.org.uk).

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## Ranscombe Farm Project Office

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Follow us on Twitter @Ranscombe\_Farm

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## Plantlife

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## Speaking up for the nation's wild plants

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## Volunteer work days at the reserve

Take part in practical habitat management on the reserve. Tools and equipment provided. Just come with good footwear, suitable clothing, and plenty of energy! Please contact Ben at the Ranscombe project office for more information and to find out where to meet: [ben.sweeney@plantlife.org.uk](mailto:ben.sweeney@plantlife.org.uk).

**Every Wednesday, 9am–1pm** (tea and biscuits will be provided).

**Sunday 6 November, 8 January and 4 March, 10am–3pm** (please bring a packed lunch).



This little insect is a rufous grasshopper *Gomphocerippus rufus*. You can tell because the antennae are club-shaped at the end and have a white tip. It is nationally scarce, but was found this year in the small chalk grassland patch at Mill Hill Wood.

Rufous grasshoppers are only found on the best chalk grassland sites, showing how plant conservation is the basis for conserving insects and other wildlife.