

Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum

Minutes of August 15th 2017 meeting, held 5-7pm at the Booth Museum of Natural History

Key actions and summary points

BHWF members reminded of need to check LWSs for correctness prior to them being used in new City Plan - Items 2/7
The open spaces network "Brighton & Hove Green Spaces Forum"- is a step nearer to being set up in October - Item 3
BHWF status formalised at their First AGM on June 27th - details have been put on the website - Item 4
Brighton & Hove House Sparrow 'photographic competition' ongoing, closing date for any entries is Oct.31st - Item 5
Stanmer Park –preparation of habitat map has commenced – LBT working on ranger supplied maps - Items 2 & 6
Conservation sheep need monitoring to make sure wildlife is not being compromised by summer grazing - Items 6
TWEACK to survive as a nature sub-group of much larger Friends of Westdene Green Community Group - Item 6
Wildlife Grassland topic raised, considered its management in this city needs to get more care and thought - Items 5/8

Present: *Martin Robinson* (MR) Chairman, Benfield WCG; *John Patmore* (JP) Brighton Greenway; *Maureen Holt* (MH) – notes, and *Colin Leeves* (CL) Keep the Ridge Green; *Tracie Parker* (TP) *Fiona Richards* (FR) and *Pam Wright* (PW) Deans Preservation Group; *Anne Hyatt* (AH) St. Ann's Well Gardens; *Chris Lowe* (CLo), Friends of Queens Park; *Denise Taylor* –(DT) BHGSF; *Corinne Attwood* (CA) CPRE Brighton; *Lindy Brooke Tweed* (LBT) Stanmer Preservation Society.

Apologies *Dave Larkin* (DL) Conservation Manager BHCC; *Marcus Oldfield* (MO) TWEACK; *Stuart Derwent* (SD) Friends of Withdean Park; *Mike Parrott* (MP), Bevendean Down; *Gill Taylor* (GT) Friends of Hollingbury and Burstead Woods; *Dave & Dolly Bell* (DoB) Benfield WCG; *Phil Belden*- (PB) SWT; *Christine Fitzgerald* (CF) Friends of Waterhall; *Bernard Evans* (BE), *Heather Booth* (RSPB).

1. Chairman's welcome to all group representatives and introductions.

Membership – Two new applicants from 'The Deans', Ovingdean were present at the meeting.

2. Minutes of last meeting (23- 5 -17) were approved. **Matters arising** included:

JP – (i) **Wildlife sites on City Plan 2**– Some limited response, but only 24 of 132 sites have been looked at to assess condition. Please check sites for accuracy by sending an email to BHWF for link.

Sites still urgently need monitoring as the consultation will be swift so *we should review chosen sites well in advance*. In the worst case scenario some could be removed for development as the council requires land for house building.

(ii) **Stanmer Park Project:** progress had been made to help map the features.

3. BHCC Report – DL absent so no direct council input, but DT gave a report on the formulation of the new overarching green spaces network for this city: "*Brighton & Hove Green Spaces Forum*".

The last of the CUPP financed meetings will take place on 8th September when it is anticipated the Constitution will be ratified and finalisation of governance established. A website is being set up around the same type of formula as *The Living Coast* (formerly *Biosphere Project*) with all member groups being listed with their websites together with a Calendar of Events.

Rich Howorth and Cityparks are primary partners and there will be links to National Parks groups; funding help and insurance suggestions. It will show ranger site allocation and a message board with useful links to help structure the role of volunteers in management of green spaces by providing required guidance and support.

There is to be an official BHGSF launch event in late October to which all groups will be invited and this will also honour groups who entered 'South & South East in Bloom' competitions.

After the successful recent Parks survey highlighted a need to contact 1100 people offering greenspace volunteering help, DL was running a series of Leadership courses but most of those present did not think they had been notified of forthcoming events and were unsure when these were taking place. CLo would contact DL about information notification– however JP had managed to book on to the next one on 26th August and is happy to help local groups with their site management needs.

4. BHWF Constitution – the 1st AGM was held on June 27th at the Booth Museum when the proposed draft Constitution was approved by members present. Nominations for the committee are: Martin Robinson as Chairman; John Patmore as Secretary and Anne Hyatt as Treasurer – who were all duly elected. Anne offered to locate an auditor eventually. These three posts are to be regarded as the quorum necessary for the setting up of a bank account –which is about to happen. It was agreed to keep the committee simple with potential occasional roles also being co-opted on to the committee as necessary. General forum meetings are to remain at four per year and are not subject to a quorum;



Maureen Holt prepared to continue as minute taker for the time being and JP to continue as Vice Chairman, a copy of the Formal Constitution is on the BHWF website.

5. Brighton and Hove's House Sparrows Project & Photo Competition (AH) –

Survey - Current research work has been brought to a successful close (but we are still collecting ad hoc sightings). Finalised results have been sent to John Newnham (thanks John!) The Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) is providing funding for this study and has it on their data base and records will also find their way into national databases including the Sussex Biodiversity Record centre and Birdtrack.

Photographic Competition – this is up and running and consists of several categories (schools, children and adults). It will be judged later in the year by CL prior to winning entries being exhibited at the Booth Museum - leaflets are available. RSPB and Sussex Wildlife Trust have this month kindly donated more great prizes. Any ideas for a local celebrity to present the prizes welcomed? Exciting news is the project has been shortlisted for next years Springwatch.

***Action:** people across Brighton and Hove are challenged to capture images of house sparrows visiting our city. The competition is free to enter and the closing date for entries is 31st October. So there's plenty of time to get spotting and photographing sparrows. Prizes will be awarded in a range of categories and the winning photographs exhibited at the Booth Museum. It's simple to take part – just snap a photo of house sparrows and see details on the website <http://www.bhsparrows.uk/> - click on photographic competition, and submit (with an entry form) to: BHsparrowsphotos@gmail.com

Remember there is a House Sparrow Group on the BHWF message board if you wish to join it. <http://s4.zetaboards.com/bhwildlifeforum/topic/30016464/>

Events During the summer we have been at several events and this has enabled us to have useful conversations with people who are not necessarily nature lovers. It will not be possible to directly measure the success of this, but we hope that awareness has been raised.

Future Surveys - Ideas are being formulated for a new project – maybe wildflowers or mini meadows?

6. Local Groups updates – concerns & successes

Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group – (DoB) A decision by David Larkin to alter the times of grazing on Benfield Hill to spring grazing is utterly devastating. On dry early springs the loss of early Twayblade Orchids and ground cover for the Adders and other reptiles which are supposed to be protected, would be a disaster. Possible 106 monies from the Downsman development requires re location of reptiles on Benfield Hill, but the Amphibian and Reptile Group are advising to say no on this occasion, due to several reasons. If relocation did go ahead the developers will be stripping part of the hillside by machinery to clear more land to create meadows for sheep grazing, which is a concern to some members of the group. Our autumn talk is on Wednesday 22nd November 2017 at 7.30 by Trevor Weeks MBE on “The Work of East Sussex Wildlife Rescue & Ambulance Service” at the Oasis Fellowship Church hall, corner of Northease Drive and Hangleton Way, Hove. All are welcome to come along. Visit our web site on <http://benfieldlnr.tumblr.com/>

Friends of Bevendean Down – (MP) held their annual butterfly walk on 16th July, it was well attended and showed everyone many species of butterflies and downland flowers. The day was bright with a stiff breeze; it kept the butterflies down in the herbage which gave more time for people to look and photograph them. On the 20th and 27th July our friends the Green Gym came to our rescue and did more revetments on the footpath at the bottom of *Cardboard Hill* and made their usual good job of it.

Friends of Brighton Greenway - (JP) Two workdays have been held on Sundays since the last BHWF meeting. Cirsium, commonly known as thistles are becoming dominant, so will need cutting in autumn but do have a wildlife value. Invertebrates are abundant in the wildlife area. Future planned work days can be seen on the www.BrightonGreenway.uk website and on the Twitter page.

Preston Park – (JP) The Rockery Bridge was dismantled and has now been rebuilt.

Friends of Queens Park. (CLo) Despite welcoming several new volunteers our overall numbers went down with the loss of several key regulars, but a session of general clearance in the wild garden with Sussex Wildlife Trust Youth Rangers was a success.

On the Pond, duckweed was easily controlled but blanket weed did not respond as well as last year to barley straw extract (reduced dose) and needed more manual removal than anticipated. Many Lily and yellow flag tubers were divided and replanted and a dozen new shallow water lilies planted. The presence of a Heron through the spring and summer, plus Herring Gulls showing off interesting fishing skills appeared to reduce the number of dumped goldfish and small carp.

Swifts were dusk feeders on the ponds evening insect hatch in August, followed by around six common Pipistrelles.



Grey Lag geese raised a total of six young and around 20% of Mallard and Moorhen chicks successfully evaded Herring Gull predation. A Coot took up residence in August as did a single Great Black Backed Gull (juvenile).

The Swift Conservation .org Swift group joined forces with RSPB in an exciting new city wide survey. Results from our two survey patches showed 11 new nest sites, in the Whitehawk Road, Hellingly and Chiddingly. Including close areas this brought the total nests to 16. Of these 12 were in the Guinness Trust Development- with its unique open eaves construction. Loose colonies of four and eight nests were notable in Chiddingly Place (four nests) and Whitehawk Road/Hellingly Place (nine nests). The number of active nests at the Brighton General Hospital site also rose from 14 to 15 and included the adoption of a new nest box.

Friends of Sheepcote Valley (BE) Work days In May a Dew Pond tidy up took place- the pond is quite successful in terms of attracting pondlife, despite some, now repaired, vandal damage. In June a minimal workforce refurbished some steps - used quite frequently by more stalwart visitors, so a worthwhile exercise! The July butterfly walk was restful! Weather was not ideal - dull and breezy - seven varieties were seen so we were not too disappointed, and our ranger, Paul, filled in with a lot of interesting facts on flora and sheep! We have one "adventurist" sheep that jumps the hurdles, and on a couple of occasions "human assisted" escapes! Grazing is quite successful, although a high growth rate of brambles soon takes hold! Motorbike nuisance is increasing with the "summer holiday" effect.

Friends of Withdean Park – (SD) Work Mornings were held in May and July with attendance continuing to be very low, and the one planned for June was cancelled on that morning due to only a Committee member turning up. With Work Morning dates now set through to the end of the year, we are really hoping that more people will attend. The Group were very pleased that the Mayor, Councillor Mo Marsh, officially named the pond garden in the park as the "Pip Shaw Garden" on a sunny morning in July.

Sadly, since then one of the park benches adjacent to the ponds has been burnt beyond repair in what must have been an act of vandalism. With the Council having no funds available, we are investigating how this memorial bench can be replaced. *It makes you wonder why we bother.*

Friends of Waterhall - (CF) A butterfly count was undertaken the first week of August, but numbers were down considerably again which seems to be the pattern now we have sheep grazing the site virtually all year round. The old chalk downland meadow once known as the *butterfly bank* has virtually no flowers left but has been overtaken by hawthorn and bramble. *The trouble is no one has told the sheep that's what they are supposed to be eating!*

Dormouse sightings have been disappointing at the last two box checks. No breeding females have been found despite evidence they are about. Hazel trees planted eight years ago are now bearing fruit so with the bramble and Travellers Joy there is a good food source for them.

Green Gym had a ragwort pulling session in a small enclosure virtually being overtaken by that plant and three foot high wild carrot. They have another session booked to try to clear the remainder.

Deans Preservation Group (TP) –this site should have been designated a LWS in 2013 due to the presence of Red Star Thistle but the proposed development at Meadow Vale had been rejected (7 to 5). The ecologist the group appointed to carry out surveys last year greatly helped but it is expected the applicant will appeal again -*so the fight continues!* TP will be abroad far more in future so she introduced two other group members, Pam and Fiona, who will become more active in this campaign and attend BHWF meetings. PW was concerned about sapling elms so JP advised her to contact the Woodland Trust for advice.

Keep the Ridge Green (MH): The July Butterfly walk led by Jamie Burston from Butterfly Conservation was a great success with 20 people in attendance and 14 varieties identified. These included many common blues (male & female) a Wall and several Essex skippers. Butterfly conservation gave advice on how to improve site maintenance for butterflies. No dormice were actually seen at the last check but this does not mean they are not around as boxes revealed dormouse nests and a sweet pigmy shrew was discovered in one box. Numbers are down as this has been a poor year, partly due to spring weather but also there are more predators - squirrels and cats. The woods are improving with more understory light and new saplings are doing well giving greater diversity. Bird populations are thriving due to an early Autumn of seeds and fruit. Ranger Will Furze has succeeded in getting the long awaited water trough pipeline completed.

We were grateful the Green Gym came in July to attack the dreadful Russian Vine in the hedgerow; this garden escapee belongs to the same family as Japanese Knotweed and after many years of battling still eludes destruction. Perhaps in September Green Gym will clear more of it but our ranger needs to find a more permanent solution?

Garden rubbish fly tipping into the ancient hedgerow unfortunately continues with a very large tree bough left behind another garden and we have not heard whether the council enforcement team is dealing with the last problem yet. The group is short of several committee members and struggles to attract more active volunteers; sadly Annabeth no longer wished to act as KTRG secretary after several very competent years in this key position.



KTRG is strongly opposed to any suggestions for summer sheep grazing on the meadow which would be disastrous for wild flowers, grasses and of course butterflies.

Stanmer Preservation Society (LBT) reported not much news re the HLF bid, probably due to time of year - but a possible date for the next stakeholders meeting is planned for 12th September when an update will be given.

Bats – using a bat detector and walking the circuit around Stanmer church, house and village revealed one sounding by the church, one sight and sound in the village and two sightings near the Palm House. As it was a potentially good evening for feeding this was a bit disappointing!

LBT will be doing habitat mapping in the park with the help of Tony Spiers - Will Furze has emailed some maps.

Notes from a meeting with Will Furze:-

(i) **Sanctuary** - BHCC say it is not possible to create a wildlife sanctuary in the Great Woods as access level is too high.

(ii) **Dormouse monitoring** – it is hoped to get boxes up in several locations before the next breeding season.

(iii) **Mountain biking** –Rangers are talking to the organiser of the group that regularly ride through the woods - in order to raise awareness of path erosion and threats to wildlife- *especially at night*. There's a possibility of creating an area through the East side of the park, north of Lot's pond which mountain bikers will be encouraged to keep to.

(iv) **Gates** – Ten more have been replaced around the park as part of this rolling programme.

(v) **Village pond** – unfortunately there wasn't enough money left in the budget at the end of the financial year but more quotes are to be obtained and it is hoped to make progress over this soon.

(vi) **Coppicing** is to start in late September.

(vii) **Sheep** are to be grazing the Marquee Brow area a little earlier this year – we will be informed of the date.

TWEACK - Withdean and Westdene LNR (MO) Luckily this group has a new and enthusiastic secretary, Lesley Nunan, acquired from the newly formed '**Friends of Westdene Green**', so enabling TWEACK to continue, even though this is as a kind of nature sub-committee of the much larger 'FoWG'. It is great news as it was thought that, with the resignation of Martin & Lili Wilson (TWEACK chair & secretary for the last 25 years), there could be no TWEACK committee & that would leave just a very few individuals doing whatever they could for the three woods in the area on an individual basis.

Despite low support for these events the regular workday led by Neil Doyle continued with involvement over step repair/replacement in Withdean Stadium Woods.

CPRE Brighton (CA) – mentioned the last meeting at the Old Ship hotel on 4th July which proved very useful as Phil Belden of Sussex Wildlife Trust provided useful information – notes on this are about to be distributed.

7. Planning:-a) (JP) - Despite several enquiries it had not been possible to obtain an up to date map of proposed LWSs (and LGSs). BHCC Planning Development still uses 2005 data! It would be good to discover Local Plan progress on the "final" list.

(i) Why is the current list and map on LWSs not available from BHCC?

(ii) **Can** a Development Plan be written using outdated information?

(iii) BHWF needs to ensure the LWS and LGS list accurately reflects 2013 LW (/SNCI) discussions and more recent local knowledge.

b) (SD) - Lack of any apparent determined implementation of the added measures provided by the 12 Public Space Protection Orders, appears to be having little impact on the Travellers with the now familiar merry-go-round continuing. This is even with spaces invariably being available on the Transit Site at Horsdean, which were financed by Government grant and by the local Council Tax payers – us!

8. Any other business. a) JP has raised the idea of **Wildlife Grassland**. Some feedback, but no progress made on setting objectives. CL reported wide areas of grass up Surrenden Road and George VI Ave could be left for wildflowers over the summer rather than regularly mown. DT was worried signage could be obstructed by vegetation as these need to be clear but generally members considered managed cutting may be the answer and that grassland management in this city could be dealt with more intelligently.

b) MR raised the subject of another BHWF Social Event but it was agreed to leave this to next year.

9. Date of next general meeting- 5-7pm on Tuesday 14th November

Thanks go to the Booth Museum for kindly providing a venue for this meeting.