

Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum

Minutes of July 16th 2019 meeting, held 4.50-6.50pm at the Booth Museum of Natural History

Key actions and summary points

BHWF members present at Committee Meeting agreed to Richard Partridge becoming our New Treasurer	- Item 2
BHWF to object to BHCC allowing pollarding of street trees in Hove during the spring nesting season	- Item 4
KTRG – Photographed thriving Mile a Minute plant behind No.85 – no sign of any attempts to remove it	- Item 6
Friends of Whitehawk Hill made plea to BHWF for support over any future Council development plans	- Item 6
THV Group hoping for joint response by HM and BHWF on the latest Master Plan consultation for site	- Item 7

Present: *Martin Robinson* (MR) Chairman and Benfield WCG; *Dave Bell* (DB) HK. Hedgehogs; *John Patmore* (JP) Brighton Greenway; *Maureen Holt* (MH) – notes, & *Colin Leeves* (CL) Keep the Ridge Green; *Marcus Oldfield*; *Mary Sansom* (MS) + Keith Upton, Withdean Park; *Chris Lowe* (CLo) Friends of Queens Park & Swifts; *Corinne Attwood* (CA) CPRE Brighton, *Alice Angel*; *Richard Sickers* (RS) Friends of Whitehawk Hill; *Kim Turner* (KT) Brighton Downs Alliance; *Philip Thompson* (PT) Friends of Woodbourne Meadow.

Apologies: *Mike Parrott* (MP) F.of Bevendean; *Lindy Brook-Tweed* (LB) Stanmer Preservation Society; *Christine Fitzgerald* (CF) Friends of Waterhall; *Dolly Bell* – Benfield WG; *Kia Trainor* (KT) CPRE Sussex; *Hazel McKay* (HM) Save Toads Hole Valley; *James Newmarch*. *John Cooper* (JC) Sussex Geodiversity Partnership; *Steve Savage*; *Ricci Masero*.

1. Chairman's welcome to group representatives and introductions. Four new members were welcomed.

2. Minutes of last meeting (16-04–19) were approved. **Matters arising** included:

(i) **BHWF Treasurer** (JP) Richard Partridge has now been approved to become BHWF Treasurer. His formal appointment was proposed and seconded at the BHWF Committee Meeting this evening. He could not be there tonight but is also involved with the sparrow project.

3. Meeting with Green Councillors- BHWF have met with BH Green Party Councillors (James Lloyd and Sarah Neil) on 28th June to discuss publishing an agreed map of wildlife site locations and boundaries, plus preparing guidelines on site management. Paul Steedman and Steve Davis were unable to attend..

4. New BHWF Web Site. (JP) BHWF website has been modernized! Click on Link near top of current Home Page and send comments on layout or content to BHWF. It would be good to use it from the end of July.

5. Tree Trimming in Hove Alert from Sussex Wildlife Group–(CL) Jess Price, SWT, advised BHWF that BHCC were cutting all the Elm trees in Highdown Rd, Brighton. Obviously this is completely the wrong time of year re breeding birds, white letter hairstreaks and for tree health.

We obtained a reply from the contractors Connick TC, to the effect that they were carrying out best practice.

BHWF decided that although Connick TC conformed to standard operating procedures they were contracted by BHCC and therefore the decision to cut trees, contrary to the 1981 Wildlife Act

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/wildlife-and-the-law/wildlife-and-countryside-act/> was theirs. CA agreed on behalf of CPRE and was sure Penny Hudd considered this behaviour out of order as trees are an important Natural Capital asset and beneficial to public health and general wellbeing.

BHWF will reply expressing strong concern at these decisions and in future tree cutting should be carried well before the spring nesting season. BHWF trust these concerns will be addressed and look forward to hearing what BHCC proposes to do to ensure the matter is given due consideration by checking that they follow all nature conservation guidelines, especially when pruning trees during the nesting season, so that nature remains unaffected, and that they employ ornithologists and other specialists where necessary (e.g. bat ecologists).

The cost of managing trees is met from the public purse, therefore paid for using tax-payers money.

6. Local Groups updates – concerns & successes

Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group (DoB) –All events this year were a success and well attended. West Hove Golf Course has submitted a planning application for building eight driving range bays complete with lights. So far I have not seen any objections from BHCC or National Parks. The WHGC groundsman have also severely cut back our new hedging alongside Badgers Way, cutting so close they have damaged the fencing, another job to be done before the sheep arrive. Our autumn talk will take place on the 30th October 2019 at 7.30 at the Oasis Church Hall our speaker is Clare Blencowe on “Discovering Fungi” all welcome.

Website: <http://benfieldlnr.tumblr.com/>

HK Hedgehogs (DB) - have continued with educational talks for local groups in the city and have two events this autumn. We will have our display stand at the 50+ event on 4th October at St Richards Church, Hove, and in support of the women's multicultural group's 10th birthday on Sunday 3rd November. With the Hedgehog Survey 2019 – The group are pleased to be involved again in the Hangleton Hedgehog Survey organised by the University of Brighton and Nottingham Trent University. The survey started on 12th June until end of July 2019. Check for up-to-date details on Facebook www.facebook.com/hkhedgehogs or email us Email hkhedgehogs@gmail.com and for Honey Croft Hogs Rescues if you need help or advice on hedgehogs phone 07985 987908.

Friends of Bevendean Down – (MP) Geoff Stevens, our long serving member has finally retired from the group, he will certainly be missed at meetings and his service to the local wildlife movement cannot be over stated. Our annual butterfly walk is on Sunday 21 July, led by members of the Butterfly Conservation Society. Our work day this month was spent popping trees ready for grazing, when the gates are secured in the area.

Friends of Brighton Greenway - (JP) Workdays held 28th April, 26th May and 30th June. Part of the wildlife zone has been cut away and vegetable 'Raised Beds' installed, considered a totally inappropriate location in view of cut grassland turf nearby. Refer to www.BrightonGreenway.uk for info.

Friends of Queens Park – (CLO) Although the Pond viewing platform still awaits a safety gate, our lilies and yellow flag Iris were resplendent in the Spring and the marginal planting has survived quite well so far.

To have a pair of Mute Swans breeding on the pond topped off the good news story but we later discovered this came at a price as none of our resident Mallard, Moorhen or Greylag Geese have bred successfully - due to harassment by the Swans and the adult Greylag Geese have now departed. The Swans have also eaten three and a half thousand square metres of the oxygenating Hornwort which covered the pond base and we now have to feed them to take pressure off other plants.

In addition several large Koi Carp have been dumped in the pond to add to the feral goldfish which have been breeding fast! It looks like electro-fishing and paying to have the Swans removed might have to be next on the agenda!!

We also have a major infestation of aphids on our lily plants which this weekend we will be trying to wash off with buckets of water and a battery pack powered jet washer –so plenty to do.

Swift Conservation – (CLO) The year started sadly with the unexpected death of John Cuthbert who was a key driver of the Swift survey as well as being a kind and much respected colleague.

We celebrated Swift Awareness week by meeting Caroline Lucas for a walkabout to explain our conservation work and again for a photo-shoot and to put up a swift nest-box for her.

Friends of Waterhall – (CF) for some months Waterhall's regular ranger has not been available so movements of the flock of sheep have been managed by other staff members. Butterfly species are down again this year, and it is debatable whether this is connected to sheep grazing of the meadows on a rotational basis for the best part of nine months of the year! Native flowers just don't have the chance to flower, then seed and downland grasses are nibbled away where once they provided a suitable site for some species to lay their eggs.

Discussion is underway regarding the long term management of the adjacent golf course. Whether it will remain solely for golf, multi sports including glam: camping with an environmental aspect, or allow the whole area to return to managed natural downland, is up for discussion. It is hoped the SDNP will be allowed some input.

The pond level is very low; however the brush barrier surrounding it provides ideal perching for small birds that visit the water. Swallows and swifts have returned performing their aerial acrobatics over the pond surface. Green Gym has had a volunteer work day controlling the growth of the nettles and bramble along the paths used by walkers.

KT, as a 'looker', put forward ideas for this whole site and also proposed her ideas for more of the downland management. DB reminded us that the original reason for Waterhall was to act as a safeguard for drinking water in this city.

Friends of Withdean Park - (MS) The Friends of Withdean Park continue to meet on the last Sunday of the month for their work morning. Average attendance over the last few months has been four so progress is slow with such low numbers. MR suggested Green Gym might become involved and MS appeared happy to know they were available. The

secretary has written to the council twice about the park not being included on their list of wildlife sites but has not yet received a reply. MS is happy to welcome MO who has shown an interest in joining from TWEACK. The AGM will be held in the park on 25th August (approx 11am). All are welcome. See www.withdeanpark.org.uk.

Friends of Whitehawk Hill – (RS) – has relaunched on the back of Dave Bangs Campaign which won against recent high rise Development Plans, but it is still one of the sites down in the councils draft plan. They held their first meeting at the end of April when 40 people signed up and have met three times since. Eighty people came on their first event –a talk and a guided tour. Paul Gorringer is organising scrub removal between 10.30 and 1.00 on August 11th –meet at top of Manor Hill and a facebook group is up and running.

Their main objective is to get the council to remove this site from the draft city plans themselves.

Friends of Woodbourne Meadow (PT) are a group located very close to Hollingbury and Burstard Woods but hold separate workdays. The site is long and narrow and runs on the roadside; it remains uncut, with a SDNP notice in the middle. Main interest is in preserving butterfly habitats, of which it has potential. Effort is being put into creating small restored chalk downland patches at first -as the site is too big to establish all at once and grasses are too coarse. They also keep the site clear of litter.

Keep the Ridge Green - (MH) Neil Doyle has now replaced worn out dog bins with a very impressive new one located up the drive to the windmill. Green Gym continues to clear areas and KTRG members think it always looks so neat and tidy afterwards. The AGM will take place at Westdene Barn on 25th July at 7pm and the Butterfly Walk will take place on Sun, 25th August, 10.30-12.30 hours, meet at the café - where our main target is the Brown Hairstreak with their low down egg laying behaviour.

Liaising with Alan Griffiths to find a solution for finally eradicating the invasive Polygonum creeper (mile a minute plant) located behind no.85 in the hedgerow (a cause of persistent aggravation for at least 15 years) appears once again to have got overlooked with no sign of disturbance and white flowers all over the largest hawthorn. This resident is not happy with it returning to his garden from the Downs after he successfully got rid of it.

CPRE Local Street Tree Project (CA) is happy to have secured £10,000 of funding from a Lottery Grant and a further amount from Rampion, and they organised a very successful launch recently. BHCC were being supportive as they have no cash available for provision of new trees themselves. CPRE still hope to hear from volunteers regarding identification of streets for mapping where to plant street trees around the city and finding locations of the most benefit. Watering is obviously a big issue and initiating a group of ‘tree champions’ to provide help with this for a time after planting is envisaged.

Stuart Derwent reported another elm lost to Dutch elm disease in Preston Park this month so it would be good if the street trees group could keep a look-out for the disease if they can; logs bringing in the fungus carrying beetles maybe a source.

Stanmer Preservation Society– (LB) - Work has been started in the walled garden to the North of Stanmer House so there will be traffic and some disruption within the park for quite a few months ahead.

Fiona Le Garsmeur has contacted SPS to draw attention to the ecological survey work that is being done in Stanmer Great Woods, Pudding Bag Woods and Upper Lodges Wood. Here is part of the email she has sent us :-

“we will be corroborating biodiversity records held by the Sussex Wildlife Trust) and inviting all to contribute their own findings. Local ecologist, Kate Ryland, is working with Brighton & Hove City Council’s City Parks team to review ecological records. The aim is to ensure that accurate information is available when planning woodland management plan activities for 2019/2020.

Help us record wildlife and plants. Until 25 July, we’re asking walkers to locate and record plant or animal species and flora or fauna, in any of the woods. SWT provides some helpful tips on how to make wildlife records.

Use the iRecord online tool to share what you have seen and to make sure species are recorded. You’ll need to create an account - but don’t worry, it’s quick and easy to do! Alternatively, you can email fiona.legarsmeur@brighton-hove.gov.uk with a location reference and a photo of what you have seen. You can find the location by using this [location grid reference finder](#) and right clicking on the location to get the reference.”

So anyone visiting the above areas please help.

SPS are concerned about the poor health of many trees in the park. This is probably due to a number of reasons such as ash dieback, pollution, drought and climate change. Martin Osborne (councillor for Green Party) has attended two SPS meetings recently.

The Wild Flower Conservation Society has been offered their third ! site for a poly tunnel to continue the work of propagating wild flowers. Hopefully there won't be any hiccoughs – third time lucky ! The warm weather has been good for butterflies and there are different species to be seen on wild flowers in areas where John Gapper has planted them -such as in Upper Lodge Lane. John's wild flower meadow will be open on Sunday 18th August – details to follow asap.

TWEACK - Withdean and Westdene LNR) – is absorbed within the community group where wildlife not a priority, so MO looking elsewhere (Withdean Park) for fulfillment.

Sussex Geodiversity Partnership (JC)

The Sussex Geodiversity Partnership continues to meet through the agency of the SWT and our last meeting was on April 30 at Woods Mill. The agenda included the identification of further possible LGS, Cocking Chalk Pit geological trail, Geowalks, Worthing Museum fossil collection, Rye Harbour and Ibstock quarry sites.

7. Planning–(i) (JP) Longhill Wood Open Space: Land rear of Wanderdown Road - 3 houses have now been approved, despite the LWS nearby.

(ii) **Toads Hole Valley (MH) BHWF** -a reply still needs to be written from the wildlife aspect to the latest masterplan, as a joint statement between the Forum and Campaign? Co-operation with HM on the planning part was envisaged; the wildlife aspect **must be addressed ASAP** as a **matter of urgency** or any opportunities will be lost. CPRE Sussex, SOS and SWT have already made representations to this plan. To date there is NO proposal for a wildlife access tunnel or bridge across the A27.

CL has taken wonderful new images of the LWS –agreed by those who have seen them as providing an excellent haven for Wildlife. But this is next to the 880 dwellings generating high volumes of people planned for this difficult 98 acre Greenfield development site. Although the application indicated the plans would not create a flood risk, several supporting documents are devoted to flood risk management and infrastructure is a major problem! Maybe writing to Michael Gove imminently would be useful to make him aware of what is about to be lost.

The steeply sloping LWS has been included in the main development site plan- but surely showing paths here is unnecessary and should not have been considered at this stage. They need to be disregarded as being beyond the current remit? City Plan part1 stated it wanted to ensure the natural environment was protected and enhanced, and surely that is also the aim of The Living Coast Biosphere of which BHCC is a lead partner?

At the base of the LWS a key wildlife corridor would become the boundary with the school playing fields –always supposing the school materialises. If not then extra houses should not be placed bordering a LWS for obvious reasons. The proposed corridor for dormice/ wildlife at the eastern end appears too narrow to be attractive to wildlife.

CL mentioned CPRE Sussex had received a letter requesting support from Friends of Three Cornered Copse in which they worried that evolving plans for development of THV could mean the council gifting a strip of their land for a road widening scheme. The Copse plans to fight this as it is where 100s of whips and daffodil bulbs have been put in by the group.

8. Any other business. JP -The BHWF Committee agreed it will be useful to appoint a ‘Membership Secretary’ as we often do not know where members are based.

Dragonfly records - where are priority areas for ponds? The records are extremely random at the moment, based on all sightings, rather than breeding locations. Map has been created at:
<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/dragonflies-and-damselflies-in-brighton-hove>

A one page introduction to the Hummingbird Hawk Moth has been produced and is available. Link can be sent, or view Tweets from BHWF in early July.

(ii) CL mentioned council mowing has taken place up the whole of the verge adjacent to King George VI Ave and that there did not appear to be any arisings left?

9. Date of next General Meetings - October 15th and January 21st 2020, start at **4.50pm** and finish at **6.50**. However prior to the January one there will be a Committee meeting with a 4.30 pm start.

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