

Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum
Minutes: 3rd September 2013, meeting at the Booth

Key actions and summary points for the CSP

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| Need liaison / feedback from BHCC on its work / HLS spend on wildlife sites | - Item 2 |
| Japanese knotweed needs controlling on the Dyke railway trail | - Item 2 |
| Shock discovery that the important Wild Park LNR chalk grassland site not voted as a LWS by recent panel | - Item 3 |
| Query to Biosphere partnership about biodiversity and geodiversity objectives and action commitment | - Item 5 |
| Waterhall Group forging ahead with planned second pond, to accommodate wildlife rather than dogs | - Item 6 |
| BHWF approached by Food Matters Group with a view to discovering and mapping wildlife sites | - Item 7 |
| Concern over threat to habitat at Dorothy Stringer Eco-school | - Item 9 |
| Proposals for traffic-calming Ditchling Road noted | -Item10 |

Present: Martin Robinson (MR) - chairman, Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group; Phil Belden (PB) Brighton Urban Wildlife Group and South Downs National Park; Maureen Holt (MH) - notes, Keep the Ridge Green; John Patmore (JP) Eco21st ; Christine Fitzgerald (CF) & Andrew FitzGerald (AF) Friends of Waterhall; Marcus Oldfield (MO), TWEAK, Withdean & Westdene Woods; Stuart Derwent (SD) Friends of Withdean Park; Lynn Bird (LB) & Ann Barker (AB) Friends of Sheepcote Valley; Pru Gridley (PG) - Nature enthusiast; James Newmarch (JN) Landscape Architect; Lee Ismail, host.

Apologies: Dave & Dolly Bell (DB & DoB) Benfield Wildlife Group; Gill Taylor (GT) Hollingbury & Burstead Woods; Geoff Stevens (GS) Friends of Bevendean Down; Colin Leeves (CL) KTRG; Roger Carter (RC) Friends of Craven Wood; Nicola Yuill (NY) Stanmer Preservation Society; Huw Morgan (HM) Sussex Wildlife Trust; David Alderton (DA) Wild Park; Jane Hawkins (JH) Friends of Sheepcote Valley; Joanna Walmisley

1. Chairman's welcome to all, and introduction of group representatives.

2. Minutes of last meeting (11- 6 -13) were approved. Matters arising included: JP suggested and it was agreed that Chris Lowe, Friends of Queens Park and Pepperpot, & Joanna Coleman, 'ONCA', (One Network for Conservation and the Arts) should join BHWF. PG wanted Dyke railway to be added as a Japanese knotweed site needing attention. PB asked whether there had been any liaison / feedback from BHCC about how it was managing the HLS grant obtained through NE and what it was being spent on.

3. Choosing the best wildlife sites in Brighton and Hove – MR advised that Matthew Thomas had completed the assessments using three judging panels (East, West & Central) and PB raised serious concerns for Wild Park, one of the best chalk grassland sites in the city – unfortunately, and very surprisingly, not recommended for Local Wildlife Site by the central area judging panel, disregarding MT's recommendation totally. MR agreed to bring this matter up with Gillian Marston by asking that both Wild Park and 39 Acres should be included as LWSs; also, that the legal process for LNR designation needed to be completed, not de-designated. BHWF also wished to ascertain what the next step for finalising *all* the recommendations for the discussed wildlife areas would be and the possible time scale involved to submit recommendations to Natural England. JP was concerned over the lack of geological sites and would liaise with John Cooper regarding these.

4. BHCC representation at BHWF meetings – MR had invited ranger Paul Gorringe to attend this meeting but he was unable to do so. When the long awaited new council position of Conservation Manager is filled, they should be offered an open invitation to our meetings. PB suggested a letter from the Forum requesting information concerning this post should be sent to the council and, if not being immediately filled, for another responsible officer to come to the BHWF meetings in the interim.

5. Update to the BHWF 10 item Conservation Agenda – These needed bringing up to date. For instance, Item 1, relating to the Booth Museum, should be more positive now there is no immediate threat of closure. PB agreed wording changes could be worked out by email and some points would be better moulded together. JP proposed details on the text can be agreed by e-mail and the 'Agenda' then updated on-line by the end of 2013.

6. Local Groups updates - concerns & successes.

Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group (DoB) has had a busy few months starting with the end of June Glow Worm count when 24 were found, a further count a few weeks later revealed 68. Although the day was hot for Michael Blencowe's most entertaining Butterfly Walk in early July, not many butterflies were about; however a Small Blue butterfly and a pristine Small Elephant Hawkmoth were seen. The first all night moth-trapping session was held with a volunteer from the Sussex Moth Group and over 387 in the trap and 86 species were accounted for.

It was an exceptionally hot evening for the BHWF get together hosted by BW&CG, ending with refreshments in the garden at St Helen's Church Hall. They would love this event to be hosted every year by different groups, as it has traditionally been in the past. Groups only have to ask for help if they have the space but need some assistance. Regular surveys and path clearance were carried out during the summer months and an explosion of the butterfly population and flowers was noted as the summer became hotter.

One new Lectern Board on the hillside is still awaited, but it all takes time.

The next event is 7.30pm on Wednesday 23rd October, an illustrated talk "[In Search of Dormice](#)" at the Oasis Church Hall at the bottom of Northease Drive and Hangleton Way, all welcome to come along. See web site:

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

Friends of Hangleton Park (DB) has achieved the Queen Elizabeth II Fields in Trust designation for Hangleton Park and a Plaque was unveiled by the Mayor to this effect. The final position of the Plaque will be undertaken by the council on a large rock in a prominent position.

The next work day is Saturday 12th October and the next event is the Christmas Wreath making session at Hangleton Park on Saturday 14th December. Everyone is welcome to join in.

Friends of Bevendean Down (GS) - on the evening of 10th August astronomers from Sussex University set up telescopes and the rangers did a moth trap at Bevendean. It was a fine clear night and was enjoyed by about 20 people both young and old.

On the August workday some serious path clearing took place with the help of rangers and several brush cutters.

They are still hoping that the grazing will be extended this winter to help conserve the rapidly deteriorating banks of south facing chalk grassland. Their policy, as ever, is to preserve areas of existing chalk grassland rather than to try and reclaim areas already lost.

Friends of Sheepcote Valley (LB) has not had a productive couple of months as other commitments / holidays / illness has seen volunteers drastically reduced on workdays. Luckily, Paul Gorringer arranged lots of Butterfly Walks in East Brighton to compensate and FSV had a stall at the Whitehawk Fete to try to encourage local residents to use Sheepcote Valley more. The weather was kind for the FSV Butterfly Walk & Picnic on 21st July and so the group picnicked around the severely low Dew Pond where they saw Yellowhammers. According to Paul this is a good sign of the pond's acceptance by the local wildlife.

The August workday consisted of just four volunteers + ranger so they litter picked and cleared brambles while Paul repaired two benches up by the racecourse by request of disabled walkers who use the access path to the north of Sheepcote Valley. These had been denuded of wooden tops – which were used for firewood by Travellers last year; the problem with having these benches throughout the valley is that users do tend to leave litter!

A Facebook Page has been suggested in committee and it would be interesting to know if any other Friends group has experienced the pros & cons of this?

Friends of Withdean Park (SD) - monthly work mornings were held in June, July and August. The June session focussed on the attractive Pond Garden and the others on the much weed covered lilac beds. Litter picking also remains a necessary task. People having barbecues in the park continue to scorch small areas of grass. On one occasion they have used a rustic seat installed by 'the Friends' a few years ago as a table for their instant barbecue- inevitably severely scorching the seat!

FOWP submitted the Pond Garden in the wildlife section for the City in Bloom Competition. Valuable advice was obtained from Keith Cobbett and the departing Matthew Thomas, and much was learned by the Group. Whilst not successful, it was suggested they considered submitting the Pond Garden in the Community Garden category next year. The Group were dismayed to note that "Travellers" - the smart vehicle and caravan variety - have entered the nearby Surrenden Field through a locked gate and remain on this Public Open Space some five days later. It is pleasing to see that Councillors Ann and Ken Norman are taking steps on behalf of the Council Tax paying residents to have them removed. Councillor Sue Shanks has responded "I went past there yesterday and the travellers seemed to be peacefully occupying the top of the field I do not see how this causes problems for residents but it will be dealt with by the BHCC travellers team." *Makes you wonder why there is, or was, a lock on the gate and why there are Council installed wooden railings along the London Road frontage.*

Friends of Waterhall (CF) - summer, although slow to start, has in fact turned out better than expected. Butterflies have been plentiful although some species have shown a marked decline. The Adonis Blue is doing well and silver spotted skippers have been seen. Dragonflies have been abundant with Emperors much in evidence. The red and blue damselflies have been very plentiful. Spawn from the spring has hatched but many of the toad tadpoles have failed to grow legs; it will be interesting to see if they come through the winter and continue to develop next spring. Having been granted permission for a new wildlife pond, the council decided the site was unsuitable and changed the position to down in the valley where the group wanted it in the first place! The funding application has been completed so it is now a question of waiting to see if a grant will be awarded. The pond will hold about 110 sq metres of water and have sloping sides and planting shelves. In the south facing bund a hibernacula will be built to provide a habitat for amphibians and reptiles. Stock fencing will enclose the area to prevent dogs gaining access.

The existing pond is to be known as “the recreational pond”. Waterhall Friends have become members of The People’s Trust for Endangered Species and joined their national dormouse survey. An additional forty boxes will go up this winter and when checking, three of our present ones show signs of habitation.

As usual the summer was spoiled due to a traveller incursion. Although only on site for nine days their impact was very marked with visitors avoiding the area. Most days all the car parks were deserted. If people were brave enough to walk in from the Devil’s Dyke Road they ran the risk of being flattened by groups of youngsters careering round the paths on small motorbikes. The sheep will return to Waterhall north in early September, then in late autumn through to January are moved down to the conservation site.

Keep the Ridge Green (MH) - In glorious weather the celebratory community picnic event in July following the annual butterfly walk was greatly enjoyed, as were other events and site tours of Coney wood (see website www.keeptheridgegreen.com). Newly planted trees in the wood suffered from the sudden arrival of summer and a prolonged drought but a rescue plan was mounted with ranger Charlie assisted by volunteers and four bowsers of water distributed on the browning whips -so trees are once again flourishing. Likewise the memorial tree to previous chairman John Golds was regularly watered by Gill, his widow and has survived. A new kissing gate has been installed on the path beside the farmer's field as well as a further gate placed before entering the wood in an effort to deter bikers crashing through!

The long awaited site leaflet using the last of the money obtained under the BHCC Environmental Sustainability Grant and designed by Jane Hawkins has been well received by all and is being distributed. Recent workdays continue with clearing vegetation around newly planted whips in an attempt to prevent nettles, brambles and especially bindweed from taking over in the boundary hedge. Sheep are expected to return to this site any time now.

Preston Park (JP, local resident) - Preston Park report states “*Biodiversity was also increased with the addition of the chalk grass bank and native wildflowers – which we can see today is clearly attracting and benefiting wildlife*”

- In fact there were no native flowers planted; mostly US and central European annual plants.
- Visiting the newly planted areas showed just how few invertebrates were living in the vegetation (eg: no orthoptera recorded) – only nectar sources were adequately provided for, nothing was crawling around.
- Annual summer festival was held on 24th August, in conjunction with CityParks.

Stanmer Preservation Society (NY) - the council has hosted a meeting with villagers and organisers of the Shakedown music festival to be held in the park in September, to consider mitigation of damage that will inevitably be caused, especially re noise and disturbance. Following the SPS petition, this is the last such event that will be held in Stanmer Park.

The Brighton and Hove Food Partnership held a meeting to discuss local food production and sales in Stanmer Park as part of the council master plan: this would include uses of land for agricultural purposes. Turner and Townsend have been employed as consultants by the council to develop the ‘Master Plan’. Meetings on this continue to be held.

Following the review of sites of nature interest, we hope to apply for Nature Reserve status for Stanmer Park: *any advice on this process welcome*. Forthcoming events include:-

15th September - "Stanmer and Water". as part of the Heritage weekend, a one hour talk in Stanmer Church starting at 2pm is planned. The talk will focus on Stanmer's unique 19th Century Water Catchment. After this there will be an optional walk to see the restoration work in progress (Stout footwear & outdoor clothing required) Free Admission.

22nd September - "Saving our bumblebees" by Professor Dave Goulson of Sussex University, 2.30pm Stanmer Church. Free Admission. PLEASE NOTE this date is also 'Appleday' which was moved to avoid clashing with 'Shakedown'. Visitors are therefore advised to arrive early in Stanmer Park.

TWEACK - Withdean and Westdene LNR (MO) - has now received the promised £1500 Environmental Sustainability Grant and Neil and the Committee are getting down to the detailed planning of the new nature trail in the Stadium Woods. They have decided to complete it before March 2014 with an opening in May after their original date of 28th September 2013 was agreed to be too ambitious!

However, their 20th Anniversary Celebrations in the Withdean Stadium Woods is going ahead on Saturday 28th September between 12.00 to 15.30 pm. The day will include a guided walk and various activities for children. They are asking those attending to bring their own picnic. All members of BHWF and families will be very welcome.

Woodland management workdays were held in June and August. Both involved the Eldred Avenue Copse. The August day was spent trying to clear up the ‘mess’ made (they are sure with good intentions) by a group allegedly doing supervised community service who cut back the overgrown hedge next to the pavement. As yet they have been unable to find out who authorised the cutting, but assume those cutting the hedge were unaware that it is part of a Local Nature Reserve. Monthly bird surveys continue. The next workday is 21st September in the Stadium Woods from 10.30 a.m.

7. Food Matters – mapping for food production land - MR has been approached by members of this group who could prepare a ‘map’ of local wildlife and nature conservation areas with a view to ensuring wildlife sites are not damaged in their identification of food growing sites JP considered it would be ideal to digitize these using the LWS and Food Partnership files. Mapping our wildlife sites using GIS data from the council who is also funding them, would provide both BHWF and the Food Partnership with shared maps. This would ensure wildlife sites are not threatened by local food production initiatives.

The files will need to be provided as layers capturing the council's declared SNCIs, SSSIs and LNRs. The most recent Local Wildlife Sites could be provided on another layer, although these would need amending once a final decision is reached on the LWS review. Ideally the GIS layers can be provided in ESRI '.shp' format files, although .gpx files can also be imported with the WGS84 projection datum correctly specified. MR will extend an invitation to the Partnership to send a representative to the next Forum meeting in October.

8. CSP – RC had attended the last meeting on behalf of the Forum.

9. Planning - A plastic 'sports pitch' + floodlighting is planned at Dorothy Stringer School, Varndean Campus, where two mature and healthy 'Wheatley' elms and hedgerows are being removed. The 'Copse' area was planted with young birch trees as a previous planning condition, which also referred to keeping the elms and hedgerow intact!

- Details, with aerial image on BHWF discussion board. See: www.facebook.com/saveourschooltrees

10. Any other business

- The SWT had taken over running the City Wildlife site, but PG considered one valuable facility lost with this new version is that registered group representatives are no longer able to post their group's events on a noticeboard. Only one event at a time can be advertised. The Forum considered SWT might be able to do more than just record species, and by using gathered information wisely, could highlight species needing protection / habitat work / etc. There is a need to identify all the local wildlife sites and check that the list is accurate.
- MH - There are new plans for Ditchling Road:
<http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/parking-and-travel/travel-transport-and-road-safety/ditchling-road-south-downs-national-park> The Council, in association with the South Down National Park, wish to traffic-calm this section of road, making it more accessible for cyclists and walkers and users of Wild Park. Cycle lanes, cattle grids, removing road markings etc. are proposed, to improve access, which should also help in the management of Wild Park and associated greenspace, with the benefit of allowing sheep to graze/wander freely over the road and surrounding land. There is a concern that this stretch of road is one of the main arteries into the city, and it is already getting more use as a result of the people avoiding Lewes Road. However, the fact that this is an unlit road, with sharp curves and dips, means that it is viable to return it to a more "rural" National Park road, with the A270 and A23 being the main urban road arteries either side.
- A suggestion had been made by Rich Howorth for the Forum to actively support and work with the Brighton & Hove and Lewes Downs Biosphere Partnership. He considered this could both further BHWF objectives, and contribute to a shared partnership agenda on nature conservation in the wider area (extending beyond Brighton & Hove), and include future work to deliver the B&H LBAP. The BHWF could consider becoming 'a formal BHLDBP Partner'. This was discussed, and it was agreed we should write to RH requesting further information regarding biodiversity objectives to be pursued, and the inclusion of geological aspects. through the biosphere application process. There is a worrying lack of explicit references to BAP objectives in the biosphere documents. For example, the recent 'Back the Bid' booklet made no reference to any BAPs or to biodiversity action. Promoting Biodiversity is a local authority duty. Clearly there is a significant gap in the biosphere application details which needs to be acknowledged and steps taken to ensure biodiversity is explicitly promoted by the BHLDBP with adequate details.

11. Date of next meeting: 29th October 2013.

Thanks go to Lee Ismail for kindly opening the Booth Museum as a venue for the BHWF meeting and being our hospitable host. BHWF would also like to extend their Best Wishes for a speedy return to good health to Geologist John Cooper after his recent heart surgery.