

# Railway Land Wildlife Trust No 56



Registered Charity No: 800655 - Company Address: 115, High Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1XY - Co Ltd by Guarantee Reg No. 02313579

## Editorial:

We have a very busy spring and summer programme ahead and I make no bones about urging all our members to support one or more of the events we have planned.

I would like to thank all of you who have responded so generously when renewing your membership subscriptions, it has made a real difference to our income and we want to use this money to further our 'core business' – namely maintenance of ditches and habitats, and for providing community information and educational materials.

The need to raise a very large sum of money to build the Linklater Pavilion exercises all of us, and the **Charity Auction** on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> May, being masterminded by Ann Thomas is our first major fund raising event of this year. We need your help in a variety of ways:

Firstly could you publicise the event by sticking the coloured poster enclosed with this newsletter, in your window or at your gate, or on a board where you think it will be noticed.

Secondly can you tell your neighbours and friends about the event, and encourage them to donate items for auction and / or attend the auction themselves.

Thirdly can you help by thinking creatively about a way in which you can participate. It might be to donate an item or two for auction, but equally we can auction promises of help with gardening, an offer to do someone's ironing, or some such useful pledge. Please ring Ann Thomas for details of how to be involved.

The event itself promises to be great fun, and even if you don't bid for anything, the proceedings will be entertaining and there

will be a bar and raffle, all to help swell the building fund.

Tessa George, our Treasurer, has been busy setting up a World Pay system which allows people to donate to the fund on-line, and the website [www.railwaylandproject.org](http://www.railwaylandproject.org) is now a very impressive means of keeping up to date with the Linklater Pavilion and all the other inter-related projects on the Local Nature Reserve. Fund raising for the Pavilion is kept separate from the RLWT funds, and our accounts will show this in the coming years. We are applying for larger amounts of funding from major organisations and charitable bodies.

However, we still have to raise money from the local community and by the 'sweat of our brow' - to tap into any of these larger 'pots' of funding. Hence our second fund raiser, the Sponsored Walk taking place on June 9<sup>th</sup>. This will be an event for everyone, as the walk will start at the Railway Lane entrance and participants can be sponsored by family, friends, colleagues and neighbours for even the shortest distance. Sponsorship / entry forms will be sent out to you in May.

Pat Rigg

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[www.railwaylandproject.org](http://www.railwaylandproject.org)

## Dates for your Diary

18 <sup>th</sup> May	Fund Raising Auction, 7.30pm at Southover Grange
9 <sup>th</sup> June:	Sponsored Walk – starting and finishing on the Railway Land
30 <sup>th</sup> June	River Festival – Railway Land

## The Minders' Winter and Spring Work Programme

We receive regular requests from new members how they or their children might help on the Railway Land. Regretfully, very young children cannot be accommodated on the Minders, programme of conservation work, but older children accompanied by their parents for the session would be very welcome.

There are a huge variety of jobs to be done – some seasonally specific work such as coppicing and planting, but also repair work, clearance of scrub, regular maintenance of the paths, steps and signal box and general litter picking. Sessions last for two hours, but whether you are strong fit and healthy or just prepared to undertake an appropriate task for your age and fitness, John Gunson and his team could do with some willing volunteers on the following dates.

Sunday Apr 1<sup>st</sup>

Sunday May 6<sup>th</sup>

Sunday June 3<sup>rd</sup>

The actual programme will be found on our website by clicking on the Participation link.

*We will meet as usual at the main entrance to the Railway Land, by the gate with the red spot at 1.30pm.*

## Chairman's Corner

Last Autumn, **Alex Kirby** gave his view on why he thought the Railway Land was so important at an evening organised by **Graham Shuttleworth** at All Saints. We publish an edited version of this important talk and owe a huge thanks to Graham and Alex for an evening which raised £755.

Alex was also involved, along with **Liz Williams** and **Jenifer Barton**, in a second application to the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management for funds to maintain the ditches. Sadly, all their paper work was to no avail and so we will pay out of our own funds.

We say farewell and a huge thanks to **Bill Jenman** who has been such a support to the Habitat Advisory Group. We wish him well in his new conservation job in Wiltshire.

The Nature Corridors for All participants were national finalists in the Health & Social Care Awards ~ congratulations all round.

The Junior Management Board have landed a £23,000 grant to restore Leighside pond and to produce a water saving poster to be launched at the 30th June River Festival.

By the time you read this, we will have formally applied for full planning permission for the *Linklater Pavilion – centre for the study of environmental change*. The necessary £26,000 has been raised as follows and we are so grateful to everyone.

Mettyear Charitable Trust loan	5000
Friends of Lewes	5000
Railway Land Wildlife Trust funds	5000
Anonymous benefactor	2000
Urban forum group	1000
Guerrand Hermes Foundation	500
Rees Elliott	4000
Alex Kirby talk and various donations	4322
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26822</b>

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## 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007 - SUSSEX OUSE RIVER FESTIVAL

**PLACE:** Railway Land Local Nature Reserve and Chilly Brook Meadows

**DATE:** 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007

**TIME:** 1330 – 1745

**1330 GRAND OPENING** and the launch of a water saving poster by the JUNIOR MANAGEMENT BOARD.

**1400 – 1445 and again from 1545 – 1630**

### THE TURNING GREEN BAND PLUS...

- Fly down the Ouse video
- Action in Rural Sussex Bus
- Seed and wild flower competition
- Wildlife Watch group
- Hi Tech Wild Trek Mobile Workshop
- David Bradford workshop
- Africa warbler flight jigsaw game by Wallands Primary School
- Willow weaving with Sara Holmes.
- Insects and water creatures with Peter Hodge and aquatic biology with Professor Derek Lampont on Chilly Brook.
- Bird box workshop with the RSPB.



**1500 - 1530**

**PRIORY SCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS DANCE CELEBRATION** of the creatures to be found on the site

**PRIORY percussion & drumming group**

**‘ANGELS WITH ATTITUDE’** sing songs about the river and the Reserve

**ALL AFTERNOON**

### DISPLAYS (provisional)

- Natural England
- Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre
- Sussex Bat Group
- Castle Hill Group
- Sussex Wildlife Trust Watch Group
- Sussex Coastal Biodiversity Project
- Sussex Downs Joint Committee
- LDC Community Safety team
- LDC Sustainability team
- Sussex Reptile & Amphibian Group
- Linklater Pavilion Appeal

**1645 – 1745 GUIDED WALK WITH RIVER BAILIFF JIM SMITH ENDING AT HARVEYS TAVERN.**

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## **Trouble Ahead: Why Lewes Needs the Railway Land**

**A digest of the talk delivered by Alex Kirby at  
'All Saints' 24.10.06**

I have to confess I wish the Railway Land was just what it used to be 50 years ago, a place echoing to the clang of the trucks and the whistles of the shunting engines -- not because I'm an incurable old romantic, but because that would mean we lived in a country where most of our goods - and most of us - travelled by train, where the High Street would not be blocked by queues of stationary and mostly superfluous 4X4s, and where the A27 could revert once again to being a honeysuckle-scented country lane. But this is the real world, and the question is - what are we going to do with the Railway Land? The answer, I think, is - we should do as little as possible to it, but we should recognise what it can do for us.

This talk is in two parts - Trouble Ahead, and then Why Lewes Needs the Railway Land. I think when I suggested that as a title John Parry thought I was scaremongering, doing what of course in the BBC we never did nor never would - sexing up the story. I promise you I'm not. I won't be telling you the half of it this evening: I don't have the time, let alone the knowledge or the skill, to describe to you the full extent of the threats that humanity faces. They are spelt out in a book called *Our Final Century: Will the Human Race Survive the 21st Century?*, by the Astronomer Royal, Sir Martin Rees. I want to concentrate for a moment on just two threats: climate change, and species loss.

Climate change is happening now, and it's affecting Lewes (think of the floods of 2000, the heatwave of 2003 and 2006's very warm summer - then think of the likelihood of them all happening increasingly often). I am not going to deluge you with statistics about climate change, but I want to mention

briefly two articles in a recent issue of the *New Scientist*.

One of them quoted Dr James Hansen, the director of the US space agency NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies. Dr Hansen says another decade of business-as-usual carbon emissions will probably make it too late to prevent the ecosystems of the northern hemisphere from triggering runaway climate change. Jim Hansen is a scientist of international repute, with no axe to grind apart from science itself - and he says we have ten years left in which to change course. His warning was echoed last week in a letter from Tony Blair and the Dutch Prime Minister to other European Union leaders. They wrote: "We have a window of only 10 to 15 years to take the steps we need to avoid crossing catastrophic tipping points."

But carbon is not the only worry. The other, much shorter *New Scientist* article was a report from the settlement of Ny-Alesund in Svalbard, the group of Arctic islands that lie about 650 miles from the North Pole. Scientists there have found that levels of a far more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon, called HFC134a - it's used in air conditioning systems - have doubled between 2001 and 2004. Molecule for molecule, it has a warming effect on the atmosphere more than a thousand times as strong as carbon dioxide. And it's doubled in three years.

The regional impacts of climate change are still not entirely clear. But for many of us, Lewes included, they are likely to mean more storms, more floods, more unpredictable and unstable weather, and more misery for people. In Lewes we have a good chance of coping. We are fortunate, more fortunate than many. Six years ago I reported from an island a few miles off the coast of Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal, called Kutub Dia. In 1991 it had been completely submerged during a cyclone and tidal surge, and 30,000 people - a quarter of

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its population - had died. It now has a string of cyclone shelters, enough to shelter half its people when the next cyclone strikes. But the Bangladeshi environment minister told us her government had no money to build more shelters. She also told us she hoped the West would accept responsibility for the millions of environmental refugees who would have neither homes nor food when rising sea levels swallowed up to 17% of Bangladesh's landmass - as they are expected to do. I'm glad I live in Lewes, not in Kutub Dia.

I'll leave climate change, with three points that I think are sobering:

- it is happening faster than most climate scientists thought likely or even possible just a few years ago;
- it is feeding on itself, a process known as positive feedback: an example is the melting of the Arctic sea ice, which exposes the darker water beneath. This absorbs more of the Sun's heat instead of reflecting it back into space, as the ice did, and so the warming intensifies;
- the decisions we take within the next few years may not affect us, but they are likely to trigger irreversible changes for the next generation to live with. Don't believe me - listen to Jim Hansen - and Tony Blair.

So, on to the loss of species. I sometimes think that's a threat at least as severe as climate change, and far harder to do much about. Five times in the past the Earth has undergone a massive wave of extinctions: the last time was 65 million years ago, when the dinosaurs were wiped out. Scientists believe we are seeing the sixth great extinction wave. We try to save the really photogenic ones, but most of the species that are sliding into oblivion are tiny unregarded things, things we may never have known existed at all - but which may be vital to our well-being, even to our survival. Lord Robert May - used to be president of the Royal Society, Britain's

national academy of sciences. I remember him once telling a press conference: "The underlying cause of accelerated extinction rates is simply too many people. Most conservation effort goes into birds and mammals - creatures like the panda, a dim, dead-end animal that was probably on the way out anyway. Yet arguably it's the little things that run the world, things like soil microbes. They're the least-known species of all... we're burning the books in our biological library faster than we're able to read them."

The tropical forests are shrinking yet we don't know what we're losing when the chainsaws move in: a drug made from a plant called the rosy periwinkle, found in the forests of Madagascar, has given new hope to children with leukaemia. But Madagascar is losing its forests. There's a group of molluscs called cone snails, with around 500 distinct species. Each species has its own set of about 100 toxins, and so far only about 100 of the estimated 50,000 cone snail toxins have been analysed. They look promising for treating some forms of lung cancer, for controlling epilepsy, helping muscles after spinal cord injury, preventing cell death when there is inadequate circulation, and for treating clinical depression, heart irregularities and incontinence. There is one toxin that may be a thousand times stronger than morphine for treating pain. But millions of cone snails are now being killed annually - for their shells - and the places where they live are being damaged. If we do not protect them, who knows what we shall have stolen from the future?

All life on Earth, in some sense, is interdependent, and if we are going to remove one species we have to think very hard about the possible much wider impact. To say life is interdependent means many species will flourish only within a community of other species (which is why protecting those communities, like forests, matters as much as protecting the creatures

that live in them). Some years ago a group of entrepreneurs decided to make life easier by growing Brazil nut trees in plantations. The trees grew well enough. But they didn't produce a single nut. They need to live in a community, in the forest, if they are to bear fruit. That's interdependence.

What I conclude from all this is that we need to hang on very hard to what we've got, and stop pushing other species off the planet. We are part of the natural world: our health depends on its health.

I think the prospect of the changes that are taking place across the planet because of the climate and the loss of species mean it's more than ever worth guarding what we still have of the natural world. I can think of several reasons why the Railway Land is worth keeping, and keeping as much as possible as it is - I'm sure you can think of many others, but here's my list:

- First, it's practically useful - it means that when the Winterbourne is in full flood four houses at least are saved from being inundated.
- Second, the Railway Land is home (a wet home, which matters a lot - we complain about hosepipe bans, but Nature suffers far more when there's a drought) to a range of species, some of them rare and some not. Listen to what one of the Trust members, Jon Gunson, saw on the last Saturday in June: "... six glow-worms on the road to the tip, ... the streamside vegetation full of frogs and froglets, the kingfisher... hunting... and as I watched an emperor dragonfly from the bridge over Cockshut, a grass snake calmly swam up the stream towards me." And all that barely ten minutes' walk from here. It's the countryside come to town, Nature amid the Tarmac. Perhaps you'd like the complete catalogue of what species live on the Railway Land. Here it is: 1,150 insects, of which 100 are listed in

the Red Data Book, the national list of endangered species, or are otherwise notable; eight grasshoppers; nine dragonflies; nine mammals; 64 birds; 18 butterflies; 21 moths; two fish; and 366 wild flowers and trees, one for every day of the Leap Year.

- Then, crucially, the Railway Land is where our last, best hope, the next generation, can fall in love with Nature. E.O. Wilson, an American biologist was asked recently what advice he would give to adults who wanted to instil a love of Nature in children. He replied: "Early exposure in pleasant circumstances is the best way to make a naturalist. Take a child into the field and encourage him or her to become an explorer, adventurer and treasure hunter in the environment." You could almost think it was a tailor-made plug for the Railway Land.

But the story of the Railway Land is not just about conservation, vital though that is. It's about something else too: reflection.

I use that word in a double sense. First, think of the Railway Land as a mirror: it reflects back to us the reality of our wider predicament. It's fragile, it's threatened by human pressures, and it's being changed by distant causes which are beyond the control of anyone in Lewes. By trying to understand what happens to it, we may hope to understand what is happening to the wider world. And secondly, the Railway Land is a place for our reflection: for us to realise our own dependence on the natural world, our place within it, and how close those tipping points now are.

So yes, let's try to keep it as it is, while accepting that it is changing just as everything else evolves. But let's respond to what it is showing us about ourselves and our world; look at the way it's helping us to

learn about how climate change is already altering this part of East Sussex, through the work of the adults with learning disabilities in the Nature Corridors for All project. They're recording the changes that are happening, and for me they are one of the most exciting parts of the whole enterprise.

I value the Railway Land not just for what it is but also because of where it is, looking down the Ouse Valley, across the Channel, over to France and beyond. It is for me a reminder that in so many ways we live on the edge. Lewes sits on the edges of the eastern and western hemispheres. The Railway Land is a reminder that we're on the edge in another sense as well - the edge of disaster. It reminds me that we live on the edge of a lucky continent in a desperate world, and it gives us the chance to reach out over that edge, out of our comfort zone and into the shared humanity beyond the horizon.



I haven't yet mentioned the Linklater Pavilion. It's not yet certain the Trust will be able to build it - there's planning permission to obtain, and money to raise. £700,000 is a huge total. But I hope it is built, for three reasons:

1. Memory. The Pavilion will be an archive, a record of where we came from and how we got to where we are. And if we do not bother to remember our past we shall have that much less chance to understand our future.
2. Learning. The Pavilion will let all of us learn more about the environment and experiment with ways of conserving and improving it. I hope it will become a sort of community

think-tank, a place for thinking not the unthinkable but the unthought. Perhaps you think the price of the Pavilion is too much for environmental education. I once heard Anita Roddick say: "If you think education's expensive, try ignorance."

3. Imagination. The Pavilion will be for everybody, and I hope it will draw in people from every part of Lewes and every walk of life, and many from further afield as well. It will unlock potential we cannot yet see. It will help us to picture and then try to build a better, more sustainable world, for us and for others. It will be a catalyst: many of us may have bright ideas, but we are likely to have more and brighter ideas if we are not working on our own but as part of a community: like every other creature, we too are interdependent.

I hope I am not leaving you with the idea that things really have already passed the point of no return. I think our problems are appallingly serious, but not yet desperate. That's why I hope the Pavilion will be built, because it will be a small step towards a better world.

There is an alternative to new thinking if it's too uncomfortable, or too difficult, or too expensive, and that's to go on as we are - business-as-usual, the same old routine that Jim Hansen says we have ten years to unlearn. So for me the people determined to be totally unreasonable in protecting what matters, are really the ones who stand between us and disaster. Otherwise I think we may come back here in 2016 or thereabouts and agree that it won't be trouble ahead. It will be trouble here and now, without the option of leaving it to our children to try to sort it out.

Alex Kirby



**Railway Land Wildlife Trust**      **Charity No: 800655**

Minimum Annual single membership donation £7.50 - 3 newsletters & two illustrated talks a year

Name:.....Address:.....

.....Post Code..... tel:.....

email:.....

I want the RLWT to treat this membership donation  £7.50 /  £10.00 /  £15.00 as gift aid.

Signed:.....

- You must pay an amount of income tax and / or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity reclaims on your donation in the tax year (currently 28p for each £1 you give)

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.....  
**We rely on your support, so please renew your membership by using one of these forms If there is a red dot here, according to my records, you have not renewed your subscription yet.**      ○

**Please try to recruit a new member for the Trust this year. Show a neighbour or friend your newsletter, encourage them to look at our website but better still, take them to visit the Reserve. Then give them one of these forms!**



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