

RAILWAY LAND WILDLIFE TRUST

August 2020
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Our last newsletter in February hailed an exciting programme of environmental events and projects for the coming spring and summer. The world has now changed beyond recognition and the repercussions of humanity's abuse of the natural world have been made plain – as well as the solace that we can gain from our connection with nature.

It has been wonderful to hear from so many people about how important the Railway Land has been to them during lockdown (*more of that below*).

The global pandemic has also highlighted our ability to adapt and, as the climate emergency takes grip, this is something we will need to do more and more. Promoting, developing and enabling nature based solutions to climate change remains central to our ethos and will inform all our work as the Trust also adapts to uncertainty and flux in the coming months.

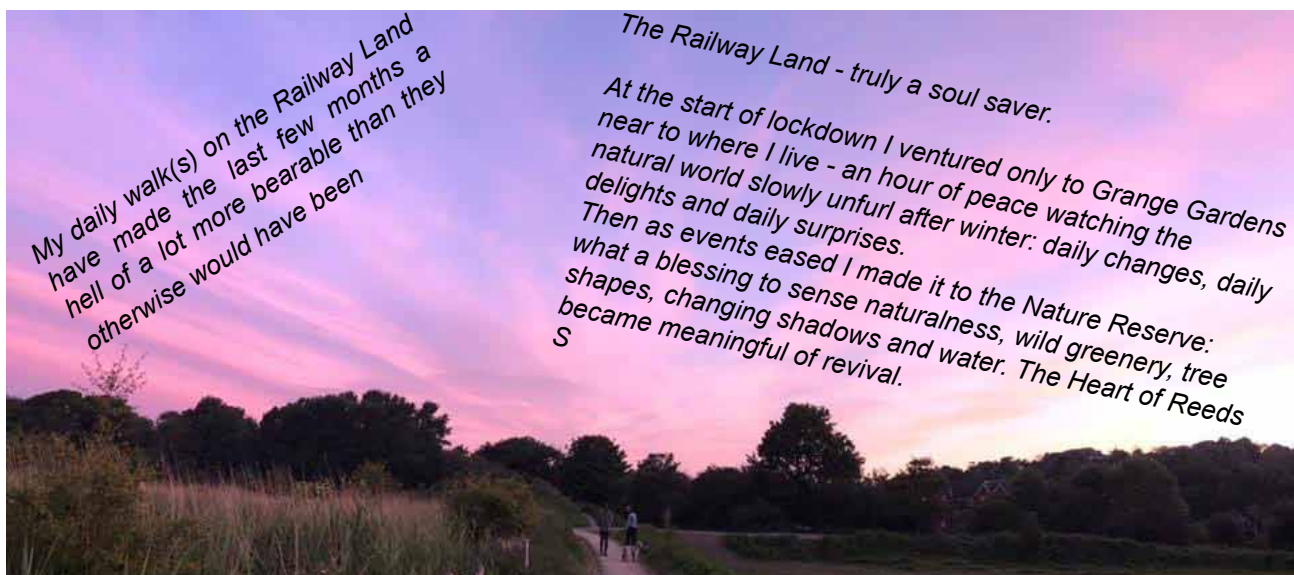
The Linklater Pavilion – lockdown and re-emergence

The Linklater has become such a buzzing, thriving hub of community activity, it was both sad and eerie to close its doors during lockdown. Now that we are re-emerging from lockdown we will obviously see some changes in its use to ensure everyone's safety, and some adaptations to enable the changing nature of how people come together.

Some of these adaptations include the purchase of conference microphones to enable hybrid face to face and online meetings, and further improvements to the Jolly Room to improve its year round usability, as its size and ventilation make it an attractive space in our post-covid world.

We have undertaken rigorous risk assessments in order to become a COVID-19 secure venue, and will continue to monitor and adapt to the situation. The building is now available for hire again, so please get in touch with **Ruth Collens** if you'd like to discuss your requirements, at admin@railwaylandproject.org.

There has been so much appreciation for the Railway Land during the pandemic, with loads of people contacting us to say how lucky they feel to have such a beautiful place on their doorsteps. Here and overleaf are some comments made by members and gorgeous pictures of the Railway Land at dawn, taken by Susan Burrell.



My daily walks on the Railway Land, while strictly observing the lockdown restrictions, were a lifesaver in terms of both mental and physical health. Through spells of glorious spring and summer weather, after that very wet winter, and with an increasing appreciation of quiet, I moved to a deeper more thoughtful awareness and response to the natural calendar – the changing varied tree greens, amazing colour bands and meadows full of flowers and grasses, the sheer volume and variety of birdsong and the fascinating water meadows, all beneath that great empty sky. I sensed my growing connection to such beauty, with renewed optimism that we humans may indeed change our behaviours and work for its survival.

J

The Railway Land in spring sunshine, new life, new buds, bright green young leaves, springy grass dotted with odd clumps of daffodils; poplars retaking their ovoid shape, new footpaths, new walks - helped renew my soul. The six sided Linklater - learning centre, symbol of struggle, success and conservation of the environment, source of new insights and inspiration. The Railway Land - a brief respite away from the daily numbers, nightmare hospital wards, the dead pubs and restaurants, the frozen relationships. Life enhancing!

V

Apple Pressing

Despite having to cancel nearly all of our events, we **ARE** hoping to hold our annual apple pressing event, as long as government guidelines still allow. In fact we are holding it twice - not because we're desperate to welcome people back, (**we are!**), but because the extreme weather this spring and summer means that many apples are ripening earlier in the season.

The apple pressing will be held outdoors, (under gazebos if need be), with physical distancing in place and in line with our COVID-19 secure venue measures. Please check our website and social media the week before the pressing to make sure it is still going ahead.

Dates: August 30th and Sept 20th, both 1pm – 5pm.

Bring your apples for pressing - Don't worry about bruises and brown bits but do give them a quick rinse - Please bring your own bottles if possible, or we can sell them to you for 50p each - We will press your apples in our wooden hand operated presses for 50p / litre - Please do not show up with large volumes of apples at the end of the afternoon!

One of my favourite times to volunteer was on the apple pressing weekend in September. This would take place in the undercroft and the whole area would be full of the pungent smell of crushed apples. Two rather homemade looking wooden apple presses would be rigged up by the couple who organised it. Families with small children, couples, or individuals would turn up with the apples they'd picked off their own trees at home. The apples would be piled into the presses and then, once the lid was on, they would be slowly squeezed by turning a lever, until the juice gushed out and was collected, then poured into empty bottles and other receptacles to take home. At busy times a long queue of people would form, but no one seemed to be in a hurry as the process itself was so fascinating to watch. Occasionally, I was asked to record the number of litres of juice squeezed and bottled from each batch of apples and I seem to remember that the total for the weekend often came to more than eight hundred litres of apple juice. Phew!

Chris Burgess, Volunteer



We have a handsome new apple press!

Our apple pressing kit (pulper, press, trugs, jugs and funnels) is now available for hire, with very preferential rates for Friends of the Railway Land!

Friends of the Railway Land - £30 a day or £50 for the weekend.

Non-Friends - £100 a day or £150 for the weekend

Work on the Water Meadows and further improvements to the Signal Box

The ditches on the water meadows have not been dredged for about 11 years and some of them are silting up. Having secured some funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy, we will be getting some of the ditches dredged this autumn, as well as breaking out some of the edges of the ditches on Chilly Brook and the LDC owned meadow. Breaking out the edges of some ditches will provide a greater variety of depth of water and more naturalistic, ragged banks, which we hope will encourage a variety of invertebrates and other wildlife.



photos taken by the WIN group. Wellbeing in Nature is run by Ellie Moulton

The Community Infrastructure Levy funding will also enable us to complete our improvements to the Signal Box, both for educational activities and for use as a wildlife hide.

Friends of the Railway Land will be able to access the Signal Box and we will be in touch when the work is complete about how this will be done.

Put these Art Wave dates and times in your diary!

Darren Bedser
Wood Sculpture Inspired by Nature

ART WAVE

The Signal Box
Railway Land, Railway Lane, Lewes BN7 2FG
17th - 20th September
10.00 - 16.00
dhbedser.wordpress.com

Wellbeing in Nature during Lockdown

At the end of March Wellbeing in Nature stopped walking and meeting together. The world had changed suddenly and we needed to adapt new ways of reaching each other and sharing nature connection ideas. At the beginning of lockdown we encouraged contributions: photos, films, sound recordings made in people's gardens or out of a window. We started a weekly newsletter, a weekly virtual walk around the Railway Land from those who could take their daily exercise there and grew a busy Whatsapp group; we ensured that those who were most isolated were kept in touch with one to one emails and phone calls.

The new **virtual WIN** brought together our wonderful volunteers, participants, nature experts and health professionals to provide nature observations, environmental news, exercise ideas, creative activities and wellbeing tips. Wildlife experts describe what's going on in the natural world around us and that helped us feel connected to the changing seasons. As lockdown eased more of us were able to get to the Railway Land and captured on film the new growth and changing landscapes as we moved into spring then onto summer. Since the beginning of July I have been leading 2 small safe walks for those who are in need of connecting to nature with like minded people.

Lockdown and Covid 19 have had a big impact on our mental health. Anyone who is experiencing or has experienced poor mental health, anxiety, loneliness can join this free and friendly group. If you would like to sign up for the newsletter and are tentatively thinking about joining one of our walks, do get in touch.

While the restrictions continue, we will be continuing to help people connect with nature in creative ways, wherever they live and whatever their lived experiences.

Ellie

wellbeing@railwaylandproject.org

From one participant who is still shielding:

I have loved reading it (the WIN newsletter) especially as I have found this time so challenging especially to my mental health. It has felt like a lifeline to me as everything I was doing stopped so suddenly. I really look forward to the weekly contact with such a compassionate group. Recognising your names and seeing photos of the Railway Land has given me such hope and I am learning so much more about nature from its content



Photos taken by the WIN group for their Virtual WIN newsletter: hardy geranium, six spot burnet, and grey heron

This picture taken on the 5th March, shows the water lapping at the door of the Linklater when the gutters were overwhelmed by the torrential rain.

Ellie's picture from the first week of lockdown shows the stone circle underwater.



Its both amazing and sobering to think that just weeks before lockdown we were contending with extreme rainfall.

Whilst these recent photos show the effect of the heatwave!



Bees, butterflies, bats and other animals need connected green spaces that they can fly along to find food - and each other!



We want to create “stepping stones” of wildflowers across Lewes, linking the town to the Downs, making corridors along which wildlife can thrive.

Wildflower Lewes – Nature 2020 update and how you can help



Nature 2020 - set up by a coalition of local environmental organisations - marks the 10th year of the UN Decade on Biodiversity by celebrating and highlighting the natural environment of the Living Coast, our local biosphere reserve.

97% of our meadows have been lost since the 1970s and, with them, the flowers that feed and provide homes for pollinators, insects and other invertebrates, and all those that feed on them. Wildflowers feed pollinators and other invertebrates; longer growth provides homes and breeding areas for many invertebrates, like grasshoppers and crickets; invertebrates and other small wildlife provide food for swifts and other insectivorous birds, for bats and other mammals like hedgehogs, and for reptiles.



Wildflower Lewes is taking action, together with the Town, District and County Councils, to improve our local diversity by creating and improving mini nature reserves amongst Lewes Town's green spaces. We are particularly working to improve the wildflower content of some of the roadside verges across town. These are being left to grow longer; allowing the wildflowers already present in the soil to grow properly, flower and set seed for the first time in years.

We had hoped to have a mass ‘sow and grow’ effort, working with community groups across Lewes, but we all know what happened to that plan! Some people are still growing the wildflower seeds they took away at Seedy Saturday, and we are so grateful to them for sticking with it so we have more to plant out in autumn. Meanwhile, Kew at Wakehurst has been funded by Nature 2020 to grow seed from the Millennium Seed Bank into 1,000 wildflower plug plants, which will be delivered to us in October 2020.



Wildflower Lewes members have surveyed all verges being left uncut to see what's already growing. In late September / early October, all the wildflower verges will be cut by the County Council's contractors, who will also remove the cuttings. We will then be able to plant out Kew's plug plants, alongside those being grown by Lewes residents.

**Photos : © Lesley Healey
from the top of page 6: Ox eye daisies, Ladies bedstraw, Wild marjoram**

page 7 Red clover, Horseshoe vetch, 'Pride of Sussex' (Round Rampion)



We need your help!

We would really appreciate your help with the planting out phase in October 2020. We don't have an exact date yet. Whilst we won't have quite as many plants as we hoped, we will have well over 1,000 to get into the ground and watered. The best way to do this is to split the plants across the different areas and have a small planting team for each, who can also maintain a physical distance.



We have calculated that, with 5 or 6 volunteers per team, it will only take an hour to plant each area.

The roadside verges we're planting up are:

- Prince Edward's Road**
- King Henry's Road**
- Offham Road (near Kingsley Road junction, behind the crash barrier)**
- Brighton Road, towards the prison junction**
- Nevill Road, both sides towards / alongside Nevill Green**
- Hereward Way (part)**
- Church Lane (part)**
- Malling Close opposite Malling stores (part)**
- Also the slopes of Nevill Green.**

Please email Lesley Healey on lesleyhealey267@gmail.com to offer your help with planting out.

Even if you can't help this time, please join our contact list. Get to hear what's going on and how you can get involved! Email lesleyhealey267@gmail.com, or visit our Facebook page [wildflowerlewes](#)

An Education Update from Milly Hawkins - August 2020

An Award!

Our schools outreach program has been nominated to receive a CPRE Countryside Award! Keeping us in suspense, we will hear more in October... watch this space!

Education Sessions - Autumn 2020

We've missed having school visits on the reserve this spring and summer, but we really hope to welcome schools back to the reserve this autumn. Now, more than ever, outdoor education seems to be a great idea, helping with physical distancing and wellbeing, as well as just being a great way to learn and enjoy our wonderful natural places! We are especially keen to support our local Lewes schools this autumn term so have let them know how we can help, including free led education sessions and some free teacher-led learning opportunities around the reserve.

Many people have said they have appreciated nature even more during lockdown, and it feels more important than ever to get to know natural places and what we need to do to look after them. Our innovative 4 6 8 Project, where Lewes pupils visit us in Years 4, 6 and 8, aims to do this, helping pupils feel that they can be part of the solutions to improve biodiversity and tackle climate change. We're hoping that all Lewes Year 6's will return to the reserve this autumn under this program.

Education Volunteers Needed

Our education volunteers are fantastic, and really vital in helping us provide quality education sessions for our visiting schools; but we're keen to have a few more! Volunteering is a great way to gain experience if you're looking to get into environmental education, or a rewarding way to share what you know with the next generation if you have experience or knowledge. We'll give you training and support to lead small groups, or help others deliver sessions, and you don't need to be an expert, just reliable and genuinely enjoy working with children and young people. Please get in touch with Milly to find out more - education@railwaylandproject.org.

A 'Big Thank You' to those who have helped our education delivery in recent years. You know who you are!...

New Trustee: Julie Lloyd

Julie Lloyd brings extensive educational knowledge and experience to the role as a Trustee.

As well as teaching sciences at A level and IB level in the UK, she has worked in Peru, Jamaica, Russia and the Far East. She has been involved in an incredible array of ecological studies around the world and has written and taught online courses.

Now retired, Julie has been working with Milly on elements of the 4 6 8 programme, and hopes to help further develop interactive schemes for use with local schools that will be useful for pupils and teachers.



The Joys of Volunteering!

Here are a couple of memories I've trawled up from the depths, as though I was using one of those nets to gather creatures from a pond or stream on the Railway Land itself:

For a couple of years I was a volunteer for the Sunday afternoon opening of the Linklater Pavilion and I would be one of a small group of volunteers showing visitors round, or providing them with information about the Railway Land. Often there would be guided walks round the reserve, or sometimes there would be a particular educational talk or an activity in the Linklater itself.

Another memory that floated to the surface was of taking part in an "Aquifers Day" (in 2019).

As you may know already, our local water supply comes from aquifers under the Downs around Lewes and Brighton and these large underground reservoirs are a very important local resource, particularly at a time when the future of the water supply in the South East is becoming a more urgent issue. So the Aquifer Day was designed to highlight some of these issues.

We are lucky to have a couple of working models of aquifers in the undercroft at the Linklater, but Helen Meade thought we needed something more "hands on" to engage the children. So I was given the job of showing children how to make their own aquifers, using a Pyrex bowl and filling it with layers of shale and sand, to mimic the layers of chalk laid down over the millennia.

The layers in each bowl were then pierced vertically with a couple of straws to make the artesian wells. Then came the magic and sometimes messy moment when we added the water, as though it were rainfall, and watched it percolate down through "the chalk". Each child was then given a pipet to draw the water up through the straw, like the pump in a well, and the look of delight on many of the children's faces at that moment was unforgettable. Chris Burgess



Tree Summit

Just a few weeks before lockdown, on March 8th, we held the first Lewes Tree Summit. The day was attended by over 100 people, made up of individuals, small landowners, professional foresters, and representatives of community groups, environmental charities, and statutory bodies.

Key themes of the day included:

- The need for a coordinated and well planned approach to tree planting, natural regeneration and the development of other habitats
- The great potential in joining up existing areas of woodland and biodiversity hotspots, and in using 'scraps' of land. Similarly, planting new hedgerows and improving existing ones are effective means of boosting natural capital and do not conflict with the national park protected landscape designation
- The need for a unified, well researched and supported approach to landowners and businesses to secure their buy in, particularly in identifying larger areas for tree planting and other approaches to increasing natural capital
- The need for coordination between groups, for partnerships to be facilitated, and for plans to be joined up
- The development of a tree and wildflower nursery was a practical project that was very popular with many delegates who felt it could be taken forward relatively simply and quickly.

Although lockdown slightly took the wind out of our sails, the RLWT is continuing to work with partners to take forward actions and ideas identified on the day. We have set up an online forum as a means of taking these conversations forward during a time when we cannot meet face to face, and to build on the diverse skills, enthusiasm and desire for action that characterised the event.

Anyone can sign up to the forum at <https://www.railwaylandproject.org/forum>,

or if you are interested in this work do contact Helen Meade at coordinator@railwaylandproject.org



Caroline Kenward's view of the Railway Land

We would like to draw your attention to the fundraising sale of Caroline Kenward's photographs in aid of St Peter and St James hospice. This will be held at the Depot cinema studio during Artwave.....

The Railway Land - Frozen in Time



.....An appreciation of Caroline, a stalwart volunteer and supporter of the Trust, can be found in February's 100 edition of the newsletter

Her sons Tom and Bert have worked with Kathie Murphy in putting together this exhibition.

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/caroline-kenward-photos



ART WAVE

Venue - Lewes Depot
with six at 21

a special sale of photographs
by
Caroline Kenward

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/caroline-kenward-photos

5/6 - 10/11/12 - 18/19/20 September
open 10:30-17:30

all proceeds to St Peter & St James Hospice

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