

RAILWAY LAND WILDLIFE TRUST

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www.railwaylandproject.org

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Bouncing Back and Locking Down (again...)

Since our last newsletter in August, activity began to pick up again in the autumn, with some schools making visits and a variety of groups returning to the Linklater with very careful, COVID secure measures in place. Amongst them were two groups of learning disabled adults from the St Nics Centre, many of whom know the Linklater and the Railway Land well from John Parry's Nature Corridors for All project. It was heartening to see things begin to bounce back, even though it was quite short lived.

During the second lockdown all staff continued to work – more of what Ellie, Helen and Milly have been up to throughout the following pages.

WIN - Wellbeing in Nature

What a year this has been!

Being told to stay closer to home has led to a more gentle slowing down of how we live our lives and has brought many people to the Railway Land to find solace. Sadly (but inevitably) the pandemic has led to an increase in people experiencing isolation, anxiety, stress and poverty. If you are reading this and are a supporter of the Railway Land then you probably know already how important it is to access and preserve green spaces. Luckily we are now seeing more research than ever before in the positive impacts that green spaces have on our mental health and our communities. This brings hope for the future as we move into 2021 and plan new activities, attract funding and involve more people in the development of Wellbeing in Nature.

This year we have run the Wellbeing in Nature project differently: instead of sessions in the Linklater with yoga, art, writing and mindful activities we head straight out for a wellbeing walk on the Railway Land. We have been rewarded by moving through the seasons with a wonderfully warm and sunny spring, a hot dry summer, colourful, soothing autumn and now a cold crisp winter: all showcasing the beauty of the land and highlighting our relationship with it.

To ensure that we reach isolated, vulnerable people we set up a virtual Wellbeing in Nature group. With the focus on



exploring the ways people and communities connect to nature during this time. The WIN group is friendly and supportive, we have learnt about nature together, helping each other identify wildflowers, birds, trees etc and finding the answers to small and big questions. I am amazed at the knowledge and skills in the group, the photographs that people send in are stunning – the more we question the more we learn.

Each week members of WIN receive:

- Photographs of the wellbeing walks and the changing landscape of the Railway Land throughout 2020 seasons.
- A Wellbeing in Nature newsletter with contributions from a team of volunteers, participants, social prescribers and nature experts to provide nature observations, environmental news, exercise ideas, creative activities and wellbeing tips to support mental health during lockdown.
- Wildlife experts describe what's going on in the natural world around us. We receive contributions: photos, films, writing, art, sound recordings made in people's gardens or out of a window: sharing gardening, food growing, wildflower planting and nature connection ideas.



One participant wrote:

“The newsletter has been invaluable for helping me feel connected to others and the continuing cycles of nature throughout this pandemic. Although I've been out on my own each day, it is lovely to hear what others have seen, heard and experienced. Being in nature is a universal experience and it does me good to know what people are experiencing in their patch.”

Moving forward into 2021 we will be continuing the wellbeing walks on a Wednesday and a Friday morning - meeting in the Linklater undercroft, The Jolly Room, at 10.45am - heading for a walk at 11am. Do let me know if you would like to come along and if you do, please bundle up in warm waterproof clothing and wear good boots or shoes!

Anyone is able to join WIN and receive the newsletters. Once we can, we will be starting longer sessions with activities such as yoga, art and mindfulness. These are free sessions, welcoming and friendly. Updates on these will be in the newsletter.

We are always looking for volunteers to help with WIN in any capacity that suits. This could be: helping compile the newsletter, social media, helping with a new wellbeing walk in spring for people with dementia and mobility issues, facilitating an activity in or outside the Linklater Pavilion.....

We work together with participants, volunteers, surgeries and other voluntary groups. If you have any ideas that fit with Wellbeing in Nature's aims and / or if you fancy trying out something new, then please get in touch and we can make plans for 2021.

Ellie Moulton
Wellbeing Project Coordinator
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Photos taken by WIN participants, Kristy, Philippa and Flo



Exciting Trust News – the Ouse Valley CARES Project

We're delighted to say that we are part of a broad local partnership that has been awarded a £150,000 development grant from the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund!

The development grant will help the partnership investigate, test and develop ways that the Ouse Valley can increase long-term resilience to climate change. The project area follows the river valley downstream from Barcombe, through Lewes and the villages of the lower Ouse Valley, to the large coastal communities of Seaford, Peacehaven and Newhaven.

Detailed research and engagement across the community over the next year will then be used to work up a much larger National Lottery bid – potentially up to £2.5m – to deliver a series of long-lasting projects that help address the climate emergency and help nature flourish.

The delivery phase of the scheme, if successful, could feature a number of inspiring initiatives including:

- Creating more green corridors across and between communities and connections to the wider countryside and the South Downs National Park, such as tree planting, wildflower corridors and improving habitat quality at nature reserves.

- Projects to enhance wellbeing, knowledge and skills around climate change mitigation, such as community gardens, community orchards, training for groups and schoolchildren, climate cafes, Forest School development, sustainability advice and events.

- Initiatives to reduce carbon footprint such as supporting residents to reduce energy bills, training volunteer 'climate and energy champions', identifying new sites for community-owned energy schemes and helping to increase accessibility to electric vehicles and green travel.

- Projects to ensure on-going funding support for the Ouse Valley through the establishment of two new funding schemes managed by the South Downs National Park Trust – one for nature recovery and the other for community-led projects that benefit nature or encourage sustainable living.



Ouse Valley CARES – which stands for Climate Action, Resilient Ecosystems, Sustainability – is spearheaded by the South Downs National Park Trust alongside a number of partners, including South Downs National Park Authority, Lewes District Council, Railway Land Wildlife Trust, Transition Town Lewes, Seaford Community Partnership, Community Energy South, OVESCO, 3VA and Sussex Community Development Association.



Around 650 projects from across the UK applied for lottery funding and the Ouse Valley is one of 15 successful applicants.

Who needs another Basket Maker called George? A History of Chilly Brook

In 1988 **Anne Grantham** gave Chilly Brook, one of the water meadows to the newly formed RLWT.

- The first recorded member of the Grantham family wrote in the family bible ‘...here went George Grantham(1) to Lewes 18 March 1702’.
- His younger son, George Grantham(2) (1689 - 1765), became a prosperous tradesman in Lewes. By the age of 40 George was in trade as a basket-maker, and served as a constable (an unpaid law enforcement officer). Basket makers used osiers, a willow which grows in wet habitats and when coppiced is the source of the flexible shoots, ‘withies’, used in basket making. The Grantham family acquired or rented wet land along the river Ouse. There is a map in the Linklater which shows some of the family holdings, one of which was Chilly Brook.
- His son George(3) (1726-1776) and grandson George Grantham(4) (1749-1836) also worked as basket-makers, diversifying the business and trading as ‘wood-turner, basket, chair and sieve makers’.
- George Grantham(5) (1782-1849), the son of George Grantham(4) further diversified the family business into the coal trade, and by 1810 had turned their thriving osier plots below St John sub Castro church into a coal and timber wharf. It was this George Grantham who transformed his family from urban tradesmen into country gentlemen.
- His descendants George Grantham(6) (1830-1880), William Wilson Grantham (1866-1942) and William Ivor Grantham (1898-1986) continued to own Chilly Brook and it gradually became water-meadow summer grazing land.

Anne Grantham (*seen on the right*) was William Ivor Grantham’s widow.

This important gift added new habitats to the Reserve, helped protect the integrity of the water meadows and made the Trust a landowner.

The Trust spent the next seven years commissioning surveys by Peter Hodge of the entymology of the ditches; designing projects for local schools; all of which led to the establishment of Local Nature Reserve status in 1995.



Eventually a public footpath was established along the riverbank across Chilly Brook to join up with the all weather path (now part of the Egrets Way).

Pat Rigg

Chilly Brook & the Signal Box

The Trust has had a planned programme of dredging beginning in 1990/91, then in 2008/9, and again in 2020.

Sections of the ditches bordering Chilly Brook and the water meadow owned by Lewes District Council have now been dredged. It was touch and go whether we would be able to fit this in during early autumn to minimise the impact on the aquatic wildlife but before the ground got too wet. Luckily there was a window of opportunity in mid October and the work was completed within a week.



As well as being dredged, the scrapes on the southern side of Chilly Brook were renewed, and one scrape on the ditch cutting across the meadow was renewed and enlarged.



In 1998 / 99 our beloved Signal Box was erected on site and formally opened by David Dimbleby. A reminder of that project and the part played by our then Chairman, Dr Tony Tyrrell is overleaf. Twenty years later the box has just had its first major refit.

In the New Year the renovation of the Signal Box will be completed – always a lovely vantage point for watching the water meadows.

Helen Meade



Dr Tony Tyrrell and the Signal Box

It is very sad to report the death of Dr Tony Tyrrell who as Chairman for a couple of years during a very busy time, took on the restoration of the Uckfield signal box with immense care and strategic planning. Tony was working at Brighton College of Technology and he and his students not only restored sections of the timber structure but sourced a new upright from the New Forest and replaced the sliding windows.



From the digging out of the undercroft to the final two-day erection of the signal box by a team of young volunteers, Tony masterminded the jigsaw puzzle of putting it all together with red and white marker stickers to guide the assembly. They are probably still there!



But Tony was also a keen photographer and composed a large photograph of the cliffs to make it easier to show visitors where the peregrine falcons were nesting or resting in the sun perched high on a chalk outcrop.

The achievements of RLWT over the years are founded on the contribution of people like Tony. His efforts in the early years enabled the Trust to achieve as much as it has. He was totally committed to any project he was involved in and it showed particularly in the erection of the signal box. We have lost someone who was part of the spirit of the Railway Land and as Roger Beasley says, 'I think of him every time I visit such a special place.'

John Parry will always remember Tony's delight at walking John and his wife Annie around his

childhood hunting ground at Chailey Common – his love and knowledge of the countryside combined with his technical skill was a rare mix and it was with huge pride that he turned up one working Sunday with a landrover that he had always wanted. The work on Chilly Brook as well as the signal box was his perfect excuse!

We send our love to Tony's wife, Sue, and son Ben who, as a teenager, played a critical role in funding the restoration of the signal box by writing to the Chairman of British Rail.

It took 7 years of voluntary effort from the lifting of the Uckfield structure to the formal opening by David Dimbleby in 1999.



Within days of its opening, a pair of peregrine falcons nested on the cliff opposite for the first time in 50 years - a fitting tribute to a labour of love conducted with humour and a keen eye for detail. Thank you, Tony.

Roger Beasley and John Parry, former trustees.

photos © Dr John Parry

“Editorial”

Helen has urged me to write an editorial but I don't really think it's necessary for this edition of the newsletter.

What **is necessary** is to thank her, for holding the RLWT ship steady, and taking us through this strange period of lockdown. She has made sure we were all Covid safe and took every opportunity to support the different groups that use the Linklater. She has continued to work hard as evidenced by new projects and collaborations such as the Ouse Valley CARES Project. The WIN project run by Ellie has been a lifeline for the people involved. Milly has managed to reach out to schools and other groups providing them with outdoor education.

This edition celebrates these successes.

On behalf of the Trustees, volunteers, and staff we wish you ***Season's Greetings.***
Enjoy the Railway Land!

Pat Rigg

Trustee News - Recruiting a New Chair

After four years as Chair of the Board Jim Hillage has decided it is time to step down as Chair, although he will stay on as a Trustee.

Jim's input to the Trust over the last four years has been invaluable. The Board had been without a Chair for some time when he took on the role and the Trust was facing considerable challenges in terms of achieving financial sustainability and good governance. We needed to plan a clear, communicable strategy for the future. Jim's depth of experience along with his clear headedness, humour and equanimity were exactly what were needed and the Trust is now in a much stronger position, with a clear strategic direction and 11 Trustees who work well together with a comprehensive skillset and high level of experience between them.



The Trustees are actively looking for a new Chair, preferably local, with strong environmental credentials, enthusiasm about the aims of the Railway Land Wildlife Trust and some experience of Committees and Boards.

The ability to provide strategic direction and efficiently chair meetings with other strong minded Board members and sub committees as appropriate are desirable attributes, as are knowledge of the charitable and environmental sectors. A voluntary role, potential candidates should be willing to spend about 10 hours a month on the Trust.

If you are that person, or you know someone who is, then please get in touch with Helen (contact details on the back page).

We would be very grateful if you could share this opportunity amongst your networks.

Helen Meade



The Swamp Cypress in its summer and autumn glory captured by the WIN group.

Some memories from Thyone

I am leaving Lewes District Council at the end of February to move on to the next adventure in life. I have worked with the Railway Land and RWLT in one way or another for 12 years. I have so many good memories and I have learnt so much from my work with the Land, the wildlife and the people that I can't possibly tell you about them all or thank everyone. So here's a random selection of memories.

My first time at a Railway Land Wildlife Trust meeting

I was used to local group meetings in damp scout huts and re-purposed porta-cabins. The Railway Land Wildlife Trust met in the magnificent Town Hall and had just raised hundreds of thousands of pounds to build their own state of the art environment centre – clearly this was no ordinary group!

Experiencing the wildlife – all of it



Seeing three species of orchid in a tiny patch of rough ground.

Kingfishers - an enormous pleasure every single time.

photo left © Luca Casale: commons wikimedia .org

Walking down the Winterbourne in the early dawn light with the blackcaps singing.

The cacophony of the marsh frogs in the spring – then watching them leaping up to gobble dragonflies.

The marvel of 500 grey mullet shoaling at the sluice.

still photo © Steve Homewood film



Experiencing the beauty of the landscape.

The first time I saw the meadows white with frost and the



ditches frozen – if you have never seen this, definitely go there the next time there is a freeze.

The first time I experienced the excitement of when the site floods – wonderful and so strange the way the whole place transforms.

People – so many wonderful ones

Clearing the reeds with volunteers, the Meadow Minders and other groups – who doesn't enjoy messing about with boats and water?



And so many other tasks especially with Jon Gunson, Natasha, Jill, Jenny, Perry, Helen and many many more amazing and interesting people.



The Nature Corridors Group - we had a lot of laughs working on the Reserve. Helen and Milly giving me friendly companionship and a place to work for a while at the Linklater during the pandemic.

The amazing festivals and other experiences

The singing bowls on the dipping platform, the lovely puppet shows in the woods, watching children get such pleasure out of a cricket or ladybird, or a small maze.

Watching young people build a village on the meadows for the Prepare for Battle festival (and watching their responsible adult so incoherent and drunk that he fell off the stage!)

The seeming endless quantities of lovely people the Trust summoned up to help at festivals who always turn up when you are flagging.



A few down sides

Sometimes clearing dog poo and occasional human poo.

Saving 50 emaciated Railway Land toads from a drain and realising how many more had drowned because I had never thought to look before.

Linklater events

Laughing through comedy fund raising shows at the Linklater especially Simon Evans.

Weeping uncontrollably through Patrick Bond's poetry reading. As someone one who

has to be professional, scientific, authoritative, practical and keep 'getting things done' in my job as a council officer, the poet in residence allowed me to understand it's OK to feel all the emotions of a deep bond with the Railway Land.



Watching John Parry showing the Environment Agency animated film of the flooding of the Lewes to Newhaven Ouse at different climate change heights of sea level rise – so graphic at a time when it was not being addressed as real.

Dawn chorus: Realising nearly 30 people had turned out in the pitch dark at 4.30 in the morning for the Dawn Chorus, then after the walk having a delicious breakfast prepared by Pat Rigg and the RLWT team – perfect.

I may be leaving a job at the Council but that won't keep me away from the Railway Land...

Thyone Outram



Education Activities Pick Up Again!

From September, after many months without visitors, it was great to welcome several local Year 6 classes back to the Railway Land.

Pupils explored the reserve whilst thinking of all the ways nature helps us. Many were surprised to learn that even their tech devices ultimately come from natural resources! They thought about climate change solutions and calculated how much CO2 just one of our trees stores. Pupils also investigated living evolution, and found out about how cuckoos and reed warblers, (both summer visitors at the Railway Land), have co-evolved in attempts to out-smart each other.

Later in the autumn we welcomed two different groups of home educated children, both with a keen interest in developing green woodwork skills. One group have been visiting weekly, and have really built up their skills and grown in confidence. They are using tools to come up with some fantastic creations.

The other group came for a 'one-off' boat-making session where they came up with some great original designs after looking at a full-sized coracle and how it was made.

Government guidelines continue to recommend outdoor learning as a safer way of continuing learning through the pandemic. With the physical and emotional benefits of learning in nature well documented, learning in nature has an important role to play in helping us all through these times and beyond. We very much look forward to welcoming schools and groups back to the reserve in 2021!

***For any education enquiries, please get in touch!
education@railwaylandproject.org***



Photos: right - a Christmas reindeer, below - making a model coracle, and floating rafts.



Milly Hawkins



The changing nature of the Railway Land captured by the WIN group photographers.

Late autumn flooding, high summer drought, and our resident heron.



....and finally - just in case you thought being Chair of the Trust isn't "hands on" enough for you....Jim tries working out on the apple press.



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