RAILWAY LAND WILDLIFE TRUST

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News from Helen Meade - CEO



We have had another incredibly busy period for the Trust!

It has been wonderful to see the Linklater Pavilion and Railway Land buzzing with activity again as school children, local groups, volunteers, staff and members of the public from far and wide have returned in their own time. They've taken the measures they need to ensure their safety as we all adjust to the world post lockdown.

The hard work of volunteers, led by Jenny Lindop, coupled with the incredible growing season this

summer, means that many of the areas of the nature reserve that were denuded during lockdown are now well on the way to recovery. This work to nurture the habitats and wildlife on the Railway Land will continue over the winter, as will our many plans and projects that you can read about here.

Exciting News – Funding Success for the Changing Chalk Project!

We are absolutely delighted that the National Lottery Heritage Fund has approved

a hugely generous £2.23 million of funding for the Changing Chalk project!





The project is made up of a partnership of 10 organisations, of which the Trust is one. Collectively, we will work towards the restoration of rare habitats, as well as providing new experiences in the outdoors for diverse and vulnerable communities, and bringing cultural and archaeological heritage to life.

The Trust's role will be to recruit a **Chalk Life Ranger** who will work across Lewes District and Eastbourne. The role is a busy and varied one, with activities ranging from supporting volunteer groups in habitat restoration to working with school children to interpret the Downs artistically and establishing a 'dog ambassador' scheme. Happily, one element of the project will enable groups of learning disabled adults from the St Nicholas Centre to participate in the work or the Trust

again.

Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils are both making financial contributions to the role, and will be providing expert support as and when needed. The Trust is thrilled to be employing a Ranger, as it will undoubtedly bring new skills and ideas into the organisation.

Huge thanks is due to all members of the partnership who worked so hard to secure the funding, particularly those at the National Trust, who are leading the project. Thanks is also due to Thyone Outram who established the Chalk Life Ranger element of the project while she was still working as a Specialist Advisor for Lewes District Council, and who advocated for the Trust to take it over when her role ended.

Recruitment for the Chalk Life Ranger will begin in January 2022, so keep an eye out for more information in our Friends' Updates, on our website and on social media, and please do pass this on to anyone who you think might be interested!

Other funding news

We are also very happy that our **Wellbeing in Nature Project** been awarded nearly £10,000 by Awards for All. As regular readers of the newsletter will know, this project has been invaluable throughout the pandemic and continues to adapt to the needs of participants, supporting their mental health and deepening their connection with the natural world. The funding will enable the



project to keep going into Spring next year. This is a project that will always need funding and Ellie Moulton, who runs it, shows great resilience as we hop from one funding pot to the next. It is a priority for the Trust to seek longer term funding for Wellbeing in Nature in order to provide greater security for Ellie, and in turn the many people she supports.

The South Downs Trust has also awarded us a grant from their **Youth Action Programme.** We'll use this to run a six month programme for young people aged 16-25 who are interested in working in the green sector and need more experience to set them on their way. As well as practical conservation work,



they will have the opportunity to get involved with other aspects of the Trust's work, depending on their interests. Jenny Lindop will be running this for us, starting in early November.

Welcoming New Faces

Judy Mackerras - At the end of June Judy Mackerras joined us as our new Administrator. She has previously worked for both Lewes District Council and at Charleston, and in a voluntary and Trustee capacity is involved with Lewes Festival of Song and the Musicians of All Saints. She has slotted into the team at the Railway Land seamlessly and has taken the bull by the horns in reviewing and improving many of our admin systems.



Sacha Smith – having run our social media platforms as a volunteer over the summer, Sacha is now working for us as a paid intern and doing a great job of spreading the word about the Trust and the things we get up to. Sacha is studying for a BA in Marketing and brings an sound understanding of digital marketing, and we hope that the internship and the experience she gains will help with her future career.



Recent Events:

The Planet Party on November 19th was a roaring success! Kati Vandyck's photos capture some of the spirit.

Despite a rather drizzly start and a few downpours, it was a well attended and vibrant event, celebrating the steps we can all take to alleviate the Climate Crisis – huge thanks to Lewes Climate Hub for leading on the organisation and to all the stall holders, performers, volunteers and speakers who made it such a great day!

Just one week later we held our annual apple pressing. It was a mixed apple harvest this year, following high winds in spring and heavy rain in the summer. Nonetheless we squeezed nearly 200 litres of delicious apple juice and sent 9 bags of pulp to the Compost Club!























PLANET PARTY photos by Katie Vandyck

Upcoming Events

Green Christmas Fair - November 20th, 10am – 4pm, with a private view for Friends of the Railway Land on November 19th 6.30 – 9pm

A fabulous, eclectic mix of wares produced by local artists and craftspeople, all inspired by the natural world. A great way to get the festive season underway!

Tree Day Dec 5th. 10.30am – 1.30pm Our annual celebration marking the end of National Tree Week. Join us to make wreaths, natural tree decorations, bird feeders and maybe enjoy a winter tree identification walk. Free.

Project Updates

Tree and Wildflower Nursery

When we hosted the first Lewes Tree Summit in March 2020 (a different era...), many people identified establishing a tree nursery to grow trees from locally collected seed as an initiative they would like to take forward. Since then this idea has grown to include wildflowers, and we have joined forces with Lewes Urban Arboretum and Wildflower Lewes to make this a reality! A local resident has very generously donated some of their land for us to use, and we will be working in the coming months to put in the infrastructure on site so that we can begin growing as soon as possible.

Rewilding Pilot Project

The concept of rewilding has really captured the public imagination, and has of course been incredibly successful on estates such as Knepp. In our rewilding pilot project we have been exploring how some of the principles of rewilding can be used in small, urban areas such as the Railway Land – but without the roaming herd of herbivores! Working with Dylan Walker from Wilderlife and small performance adventures who work with people in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction, we explored and recreated the role of some keystone species on the nature reserve (namely aurochs and wolves), and reflected on our own role as humans in the landscape. It was not only huge fun, but a very powerful and accessible way to think about nature, ecosystems and humans as part of those ecosystems. We very much hope to repeat these sessions with different groups (and species!)

















More Planet Party photos from Katie Vandyck



Coastal Communities 2150

In 2013, a small group of local people were invited by the Environment Agency to take part in producing a vision and action plan for the lower Ouse valley in the firm conviction that we needed a local response to climate change and sea level rise. Called the Coastal Futures Group, our report, published in 2014, was endorsed by the Flood and Coastal Risk Manager for the Solent and South Downs Area as well as the Lead Councillor for Health and Environment at Lewes District Council.



The vision was developed as part of the Coastal Communities 2150 project involving coastal communities across Europe facing the prospect of significant change from rising sea levels and higher storm surges increasing the risk of coastal erosion and flooding.

Coastal Communities 2150 set out to help communities who are at long-term risk from coastal change to understand the implications and take action to ensure that their community remains viable. The aim was to engage with those who live, work and govern along the coast to help them picture a future coastline that looks radically different from today.

The result was 6 illustrated adaptation scenarios:

- 1. Hard Line: Hard structures can be built to hold back high tides and floodwaters. While this would allow life on land to continue pretty much as it is today, it would require a lot of investment in building tall defences along the shoreline and riverbanks and would put pressure on the natural environment and landscape in these areas
- **2. Get wet:** The worst effects of sea level rise will only be experienced at very high tides or during storms. Instead of holding floodwaters back, we could accept some flooding and provide local protection for buildings and infrastructure. This could reduce the damage done and keep people and businesses safe, at least in the short term.
- **3. Rise up:** Buildings, roads and the railway could be lifted out of harm's way by putting them on stilts or embankments or making them float when the floodwaters rise. This would mean re-building or replacing most things in the areas affected by flooding and would create places that look quite different to what we are used to today.
- **4. Higher ground:** Moving buildings and infrastructure such as roads and the railway away from the current shoreline and riverbanks to higher ground is another way of reducing the risk of flooding. This would require a lot of people and businesses to move over time and would also affect the downland on either side of the valley.
- **5. New Growth:** The way that we farm the land will need to adapt to changing weather conditions and seasons and cope with more extreme weather. This could create opportunities to grow more valuable crops and rear different livestock or fish, but care will be needed to protect them from flooding, storm damage, drought, pests and diseases.
- **6. Soft focus:** More natural features like salt marshes and embankments can be used to defend some areas of land against flooding, but it would still mean allowing parts of the valley to flood more often. Soft flood defences can be more attractive to look at than hard defences and provide habitat for wildlife, but they need a larger area of land.

At the time, just seven years ago, the notion of adaptation as opposed to mitigation was not fully understood or accepted by the general public – there was a feeling that surely it won't come to that and somehow we will all muddle through. 150 years into the future was hard to grasp and the illustrative panels that we produced were used for a while but then stored quietly in the Jolly Room waiting for their time!.

And this is why I decided to give them an airing at the excellent **Planet Party** alongside a framework developed by David Hicks of whether an action was easy or hard and probable or preferable.

Although I cannot claim the survey was robust in any way, there was a strong feeling for working with nature in the lower Ouse valley. In a nutshell, the numbers of responses to the adaptation panels were as follows:



Preferable

11 for Soft Focus 5 for New Growth 1 for Hard Line 11 for Soft Focus 10 for New Growth 2 for Rise Up 1 for Hard Line

Easy

2 for Higher Ground 1 for New Growth 1 for Hard Line 1 for Get Wet 1 for Soft Focus 1 for Get Wet

Probable

There were some thoughtful comments, too, including more effective ways of desalination to solve coming water crises linked to sea level rise; rice paddies farmed by robots; fish farms to replace damaging bovine farmed protein; mini renewable tidal power stations linked to an overall valley response. There were several comments about soft solutions that would also enhance people's well-being and a call not to try to save things that will eventually flood.

Chair of the Environment Agency Emma Howard Boyd's recent call for: "Adapt or die', was deliberately intended, according to David Shukman of the BBC, to startle governments, companies and communities into preparing for global warming effects such as higher sea levels and more extremes of rainfall and drought. Coastal Communities 2150 was ahead of the curve and along with Lewes District Council, the RLWT, Priory School, Green United and others, my hope is that our work of 2013 will be of some help.

Dr John Parry



New Ecologists join LDC's Green Consultancy

Hi, my name's Becky and I'm one of the new ecology advisors at Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils.

I was previously working at Surrey Wildlife Trust as part of their Planning Advice team. I'm now excited to be working in Sussex and am looking forward to being involved in biodiversity conservation in the local area.

It's been great visiting the Railway Land and I'm looking forward to getting to know the site. Hopefully I'll have the chance to meet some of you soon!

Rebecca Fuller

Specialist Advisor (Ecology and Biodiversity)

Green Consultancy Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough

Council

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Hello, my name is Lydia and I am one of the new ecologists working for Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils.

Since graduating from University, I have built up a varied repertoire of experience within the environmental field, including three seasons in ecological consultancy, various research projects in conservation, and most recently manging habitat restoration, enhancement and creation projects.

I have a specific interest in the conservation of European Protected Species, such as bats, dormice, badgers, reptiles, and great crested newts, and I am looking forward to becoming involved in conserving these species across our county. I am excited about the variation in my new role, specifically being out on site and working within the wider ecology team across Sussex.

Away from work I enjoy nature photography, specifically wildlife and landscape photography, and I am often seen out and about with my camera. I am hoping to meet some of you on the Lewes Railway Land in the not too distant future!

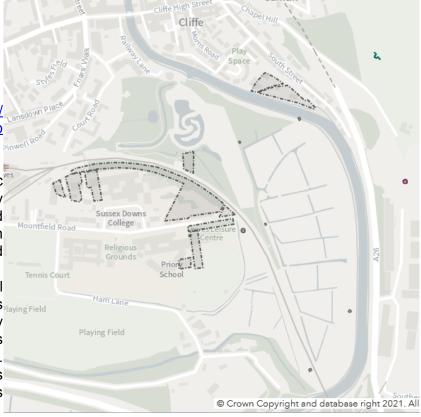
Lydia

Aerial Archaeology Mapping Explorer from Historic England

https://historicengland.maps.arcgis.com/ apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d45dab ecef5541f18255e12e5cd5f85a

I was intrigued to explore this new Historic England resource in relation to the Railway Land which reveals the fact that there used to be 5 pill boxes on the site shown by green circles on Chilly Brook and each described as follows:

'A possible pillbox can be seen on aerial photographs taken in 1945. This was laying Field situated on the eastern side of the railway embankment at TQ 4221 0991. This structure had been demolished by 1947. It was mapped from aerial photographs as part of the English Heritage: South Downs Project.(2-3)'



Interestingly, no mention is made of allotments that we know used to be located where the stand of black poplars now thrives. However, just to the south and west of Heart of Reeds there is mention of allotments as follows:

'A group of probable Second World War allotments are visible on aerial photographs taken in 1945. These allotments were situated on land between Mountfield Road and the railway line, an area now largely occupied by Sussex Downs College. From here they extended westwards in a narrow band closely following the railway line and connected with another group of allotments east of the railway station. A separate group was on the north side of the railway lines. These allotments were created as part of the Dig for Victory campaign that was introduced in September 1940. This campaign encouraged people to produce their own food in response to the wartime shortages. The allotments were mapped from aerial photographs as part of the English Heritage: South Downs Project.'

Dr John Parry

Investigating the geographical history of Chilly Brook

On Sunday 7th of November, a group of third-year students and staff from the Department of Geography at Birkbeck, University of London visited the flood meadows just south of the Railway Land Reserve to delve into the ancient history of the site. Using hand coring equipment, they took a core nearly 7 m long which showed the history of the site.



In this core, it was possible to see that the Ouse has been an estuary for a long time, with nearly 6 of the 7 m yielding finely bedded silts and clays which are really characteristic of this environment. Below this, they found evidence of what the land was like near the Ouse before the sea level rose to its present level, several thousands of years ago. The silts and clays gradually merged downwards into a much more peaty deposit, suggesting that the Ouse used to run down to the sea through a waterlogged bog-like environment.

They found fragments of Phragmites and have taken samples back to the lab to look for more seeds and shells. This was the first time that this group of students have been able to get out in the field because of COVID and the sun shone, making the Railway Land a glorious location for this. By the end of the trip, the students were expertly managing the coring unaided.



Dr Becky Briant, Reader in Quaternary Science, Department of Geography, Birkbeck, University of London



© Dr B Bryant





The Railway Land Recovery Project has been going really well.

We started off in May planting the Hornbeam in front of the Linklater and began creating the natural barriers throughout the reserve.

Throughout lockdown some new pathways had been walked in to areas that are normally left wild for nature, so we set about using some of the Sycamore that came down over the Winterbourne to make natural blocks, and put up signage to let people know what we were doing.

You might have noticed that some of the bigger areas that were blocked off have regenerated really well.



The numbers in the group kept growing and we had a lovely community of people helping look after the Railway Land.



In July the vegetation next to the footpaths started encroaching rapidly so we were working to keep that cut back. Whilst out and about we are always spotting wildlife and talking about the different plants and animals on the reserve. We spotted this excellent female Spotted Longhorn beetle amongst the nettles.



In September we provided some freshwater invertebrate surveying training for volunteers, as part of a project to look at the degradation of the dipping pond area. The dipping pond area used to be full of invertebrates and in recent years has become a bit of a desert for pond life. There could be a few factors involved in this, including the Rudd

that have become trapped in there, or dogs poaching the edges of the pond.

We had a great turn out for this volunteer session and lots of people were very enthused about the regeneration of the dipping pond area.





We spotted an Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillar crossing the footpath, likely making its way from the Greater Willow Herb on the right (which is a key food plant of the caterpillar) to find some vegetation on the left to begin its transformation in to a chrysalis for the winter. We will be putting together a short report on the findings from the freshwater invertebrate surveying and possibly doing some planting of marginal pond plants.

We also have planned some training in wildflower surveying for volunteers next spring. This is in connection to the new dipping platform project that is going to be created in the wet meadows.







Some interesting flora we noticed there already, who enjoy wet habitats, are (left to right) Common Fleabane, Water Smartweed and Purple Loosestrife.



October saw us doing the exciting habitat management task of sowing wildflower seed in the newly fenced area near the Linklater. We cleared the area and broke up the soil, which had become compacted over lockdown, creating a fine tilth for the seeds to embed in. We used a shade tolerant mix of local native wildflower seed from Colin Reader https://www.wildflowerlawnsandmeadows.com/product/economy-woodland-shade-mix-with-wild-orchids/. It'll be really interesting to see how this area develops and what species will pop up next spring!

We've also been doing odd jobs as we go to maintain the Reserve - such as litter picking, Himalayan Balsam pulling, and treating the Signal Box. We've had some great experiences with a great bunch of people, and done some brilliant work to take care of the reserve. Thank you very much to all the volunteers. The conversation group has been going out the first Sunday of the month and third Wednesday of the month. Please come along if you are interested.

Jenny Lindhop jenny@railwaylandproject.org photos © Jenny Lindop

Education!...Education!

lockdown The easing restrictions in spring 2021 the start heralded of exceptionally busy summer term for our education delivery. With renewed enthusiasm for outdoor learning, schools were very keen to visit us, or have us visit them. We delivered a wide range of curriculum linked sessions out on the reserve, including several in depth studies around our river (no pun intended!), detailed investigations of chalk and the Winterbourne stream, and lots



of opportunities to study the Railway Land's aquatic life, and meadow, reed bed and woodland habitats. We wove curriculum topics into creative adventures in the woods, including one class who were shipwrecked and had to learn hunting, gathering and fire making skills to survive. We have also provided regular forest school sessions locally, and had an outreach visit to a rural school to run learning sessions in a beautiful woodland nearby. Between us, we worked with more than 860 pupils in the summer term alone!



We have received really positive feedback for our new Lewes Outside Learning (LOL) program, our curriculum linked program offered to local schools. The program aims to 'nurture green guardians' by encouraging local children to know more of their local nature, and to develop the sense that they can do something positive to protect it. These sessions build on successful elements of our previous repeat visit program developed by John Parry; make the most of learning opportunities out on the nature reserve; and are firmly rooted within the curriculum in order to best support the needs of local schools.

Straight on the heels of our busiest term ever, came another successful holiday club These proved very season. popular again, and were close to fully booked. We had some fantastic feedback, and by all accounts a great deal of fun was had. Games were played, skills learned, friendships made and nature that bit more known and loved.





The autumn term has continued in the same busy vein and November is as booked out as June was! I think what this shows is that the time is ripe for outdoor environmental learning. Perhaps the past couple of years have made us more aware than ever about how much we need time in nature. It feels that all school visits to the reserve this year, apart from helping to bring the curriculum to life and providing important learning opportunities, have also provided a much needed antidote to the stresses of the last academic year. It has been reassuring to see so much eagerness from schools, pupils and parents for what we do.

Many of our sessions depend on having enthusiastic and knowledgeable helpers, and I want to thank all our brilliant education volunteers who have given much of their time, experience, and humour over this season to ensure children enjoy their visits. You are a joy to work with and RLWT is very lucky to have you all! Thank you also to Jenny who has co-led when larger groups visit.

My thanks also go to our skilled leaders, assistants and volunteers who have created some magical times for the participants....and I'm particularly grateful to Alice Purnell and Chris Roach who have both recently generously donated some wonderful fossils and rocks to help bring our 'Rocks and Soils' learning sessions to life.

Whilst we've put in lots of effort to develop our education provision in recent times, I'm acutely aware that being able to provide our sessions rests on the huge efforts of many people in the community over many years. Those who held the vision to protect the land, and those who brought the idea of the Pavilion to life, so that we can now welcome so many children and young people to connect more with our beautiful varied, and dynamic patch of nature. To all of you - I am so grateful for all your efforts.

Milly Hawkins

pictures

page 12: top left, tree hugging, centre, studying aquatic life, bottom right, running free

page 13: spiral silhouette

Wellbeing In Nature - Summer and Autumn 2021



Summer and Autumn at the Railway Land has been a time for Wellbeing In Nature to regroup after coronavirus restrictions gradually lifted. The reserve has offered us a space to reflect on the past with the changing seasons reminding us to look forward to the future. It has been wonderful to see old faces return and welcome new faces joining us.

We know that the ups and downs of the last year has been hard and impacted on people's mental health in various ways: it has led to people feeling anxious, isolated, stressed, depressed and more. One upside is the increased acceptance and interest in the benefits of getting outside and spending time in nature is being recognised. Research is also showing us that the more we engage in nature and learn about it, the more likely we are to look after it and protect it. This seems timely as we wait to see the impact of the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2021, COP26

There are different ways that people can participate in the Wellbeing In Nature group: participants can join by getting in touch directly or you may recommend someone you think would benefit. We take referrals from GP surgeries, health workers and social prescribers. We work with some fantastic local green wellbeing groups so we can recommend different activities if you want to explore ways of connecting to nature. This could be gardening, community allotments, tree planting, swifts surveying, conservation and wildflower growing. All of this is great for us, for Lewes and for the planet as it increases the biodiversity around us.

We are tentatively returning to pre-pandemic sessions where we include a regular therapeutic activity alongside the wellbeing walks. This can be in the form of yoga, art, creative writing, mindfulness.... Expert wildlife volunteers join us on the wellbeing walks and tell us about wildflowers, bird watching and ecology.

The newsletter that we started at the beginning of the pandemic has gone from strength to strength with participants, volunteers and wildlife experts sending in amazing photographs of nature around them and sharing wellbeing links. It's a good time to join us as the group are currently designing and planning some lovely projects that will take us into 2022.

Please do get in touch with Ellie at <u>Wellbeing@railwaylandproject</u> to sign up to the fortnightly WIN newsletter where you will receive updates on the walks and activities.

















© all photos :Maggie and Fiona This page - top left, ivy flower, top right, marsh frog middle row left, Heron, right, Bulbous Honey Fungus - Fiona bottom row left, Yoga with Sarah in the woods, right ,autumnal fungi

page 14, top picture Autumn - taken by Maggie below, left, heron fishing in the ditch, right, summer growth on the scrape

Leslie Gorski

Right from the start the Trust was keen to have an educational remit and presence on the site but with few resources to build anything substantial – that had to come later in the form of the Linklater Pavilion. So we tracked down some old signal boxes – Lancing at first which was smashed by contractors before we could take it away. Birchden Junction followed but this was taken on by the Tunbridge Wells and Eridge Railway Society (Twerps!) and so we finally landed on the Uckfield ground frame structure which was brought by low loader and lifted into Priory School playground for restoration.

However, this proved to be too big a project for the woodworking department and it was at this point that I got a call from what I thought was a young person with a high voice talking about the possibility of HMP Lewes giving us a hand.

The distinct voice (and laughter) was of course dear Leslie who as a prison officer worked on the prison Governor to allow a group of us to bring the signal box in pieces into the prison on a lorry. What a time we had over two weekends, working with young offenders from B Block on restoring the timbers and bringing them back to a light brown shine.

Leslie's determination to get through all the necessary paperwork to bring a collapsed signal box into a prison was superb and so it was that eventually the restored pieces were re-assembled on site along with the help of young apprentices from Hastings College of Technology as well as Brighton – all masterminded by Dr Tony Tyrell whom we also sadly lost recently.

So thank you Leslie for saving the day with an inspired move into prison followed by inspiring prison staff who in turn inspired young offenders to scrub up a modest educational building they were unlikely to visit - a little gem saved and still serving its purpose on the Railway Land.

John Parry.

Lesley was a lovely, straight talking, hands on supporter of the Trust who really believed in the aims and objects of the Trust and will be sadly missed. Leaving



one third of her estate to the Trust shows just how much she valued our work. We always have to remember that what we have achieved is not just the work of one person but the dedication of so many people coming together with a common aim, so important in all walks of life. Roger Beasley

Lesley also helped with the play group run by Dinah Prior; gave her support as a Trustee; and enthusiastically and cheerfully helped on numerous events. Even when she moved away she kept up her membership and took a keen interest in our projects. Pat Rigg

Left: ©RLWT Lesley's infectious good humour made light work of Meadow Minders working parties. To contact the Railway
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