

Railway Land Wildlife Trust

February 2018
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www.railwaylandproject.org
Registered Charity No. 800655



Editorial:

At the volunteers' meeting in mid February it was heartening to see old friends and welcome a number of new faces to the team. Having fresh ideas and energy really bodes well for our future. Please look at the **programme for the year** on the back page. We will continue to email the membership with reminders, but putting dates in your diaries ensures you don't miss a trick!



One suggestion was that we should hold a frog event, and there was much discussion on when would be a suitable date. If it was to catch the spawning time we would need to be quick.... if it was to see the marsh frogs jump and bellow at each other, we could wait till April or May! Well, exactly a week later, whilst walking near the semi-flooded woodland next to the bright green weed-covered and apparently frog-free Leaside Pond - the non-stop swirling of the surface of the water was evidence that spawning was happening. It was just before the very cold spell and I wonder if the spawn will survive the hard frosts, ice and snow we are expecting. Steve Homewood had observed this activity and took these pictures catching the frenzied activity above and the mass of spawn below.

Patrick Bond, a Lewes-based poet, spent every Thursday during 2014 immersing himself in the Reserve, absorbing the feel of the place; its past, the flora, fauna and fungi, the seasons and the spirit of its setting in the chalk landscape. His observations were captured in 52 poems, 42 of which have now been published, with illustrations by Lil Tudor Craig. The volume is entitled '**Signals on the Railway Land**'.

We held a celebration of this remarkable collection on the 23rd February, and Patrick performed his work using a back drop of his photos of the Reserve and a sound track of the dawn chorus; he shared some of the process of honing and revising his work and added anecdotes that illustrated the depth of his knowledge. It was a magical members' event, and if you want to contact Patrick to order a copy please email him on:

patrickgbond@yahoo.co.uk

See pg 7 for a prescient poem, 'By the Fire-Site'.

Pat Rigg



photos © Steve Homewood

'Spring has sprung on the Railway Land'

It's now a chilly first half of February but there is a stirring in the Reserve already, and there are things to see, hear and do.

The first of the mullet arrived at the Winterbourne sluice in the second week January, four weeks earlier than usual, the snowdrops are up looking beautiful in the damp dead leaves under the trees and our winter resident birds are singing magnificently at dawn and dusk. The stunning notes of the song thrushes lifting everyone's spirits after a long cold dark winter. It's so well worth wrapping up and getting out there.



For those of you new to the area and for those who missed my illustrated talk on the amazing spring spectacle of the thin lipped mullet healing themselves in the spring water outlet last year, here is a link to my 5 minute slot on BBC Springwatch in 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03wwztx>

Last year I managed at last to photograph something the BBC missed, a river lamprey hitching a ride upstream to spawn and taking a chunk out of a mullet to keep it going having attached itself to the mullet while they were spawning way out to sea in the winter months. These fascinating ancient eel like creatures are in fact fish too, they predate the dinosaurs by 200 million years!



This year my mission is to photograph a pike attack that I have witnessed several times, but so far have only photographed the injured fish that manage to escape.

By early March there will be up to 1000 mullet in that clear water pool just behind the Linklater, and a further 10,000 or more hidden in the murky waters of the River Ouse next to them, all slowly swirling around like a murmuration of starlings, taking turns in

the healing water coming out of the sluice gate until one day before April, they leave to spread out for the summer between Hamsey weir to the north and Piddinghoe to the south. Happy days ahead for those who want to look and learn.

If you are aged between 7-13 and would like to join my nature photography course in April / May check out page 8 for details.

Steve Homewood

photos © Steve Homewood



News from the Linklater



It has been a busy and productive winter at the Linklater Pavilion and now that the blackthorn buds are beginning to burst we are looking forward to spring and an even busier season ahead!

School visits at the Railway Land

The 468 Project for Lewes schools is full steam ahead again this year. Led by John Parry, this project sees pupils from the Lewes primary schools visit the Linklater Pavilion and Railway Land in years 4 and 6, and then again in year 8 if they go on to Priory. This 'circular curriculum' enables them to revisit their learning from previous visits and deepen their environmental understanding. We are now on the second round of year 4 visits, which take place in spring, with year 6 visits from the three pilot schools happening this summer.

It is very exciting that we have another new member of staff! Milly Hawkins has joined us as our new Education Officer. As well as developing and promoting our programme for school visits, she will also be working with volunteers so that they can play a greater role in our work with schools. Milly's role has been funded by the Ernest Cook Trust, the Chalk Cliff Trust and the Heritage Lottery Fund. See pg 4 for her first report.



Resilient Railway Land Project

Work has been progressing well on the development of a long term strategy to make our charity more resilient, with a clear direction and sound plans to improve our financial self-sufficiency. Trustees have now drawn up a strategy for 2018-2022, which will be formally launched at our AGM later in the year.

There are many ways that we can generate more of our own income – especially given the wonderful asset we have in the Linklater Pavilion – and moving towards a position where we cover our core costs without depending on external funding is a crucial element of the strategy. In 2018 we plan to boost our income in a number of ways; through venue hire, events, children's holiday clubs and membership for individuals, families and businesses. Our intention is to make our membership offer more attractive and better known, so members benefit from reduced prices and members only events, as well as the knowledge that they are helping to support our work in environmental education and social inclusion.

If you are not already a member, why not become one? It is easy to sign up through our website www.railwaylandproject.org/membership. If you are already a member, why not suggest to a friend or neighbour that they become one too?

Volunteers , volunteers, volunteers!

The Railway Land Wildlife Trust was founded on voluntary action, and this is what secured the beautiful Railway Land as a haven for wildlife in Lewes. We held a fantastic meeting of volunteers in early February, which produced a really excellent programme of events for the year ahead and generated all sorts of interesting ideas. Now that we have ambitious plans to boost our activities, we need our volunteers more than ever, and we also need new volunteers! Roles for volunteers range from helping to plan, promote and run events to supporting educational activities, running social media campaigns and helping with maintenance tasks.

Helen Meade

If you're interested in volunteering with us, please contact me, Helen Meade, at: coordinator@railwaylandproject.org for more details.

Jumping in at the deep end!

I'm very happy to have joined the Railway Land Wildlife Trust as the new Education Officer. As a Lewes local, and a long term environmental educator, I feel very lucky to be part of the Railway Land team.

Just after I started, we had a large school group keen to visit us. So on a largely sunny January day, and with the help of Ruth, Helen and Mary, we hosted 90 Year 5 pupils. Each pupil took part in 3 sessions which linked to their curriculum learning at school. The children enjoyed looking at maps old and new of the area and studying the river, and even calculated the speed of its flow. They were excited to explore the woodland habitat, and became engrossed with finding frogs and a range of invertebrates. I was particularly excited about their third session in which pupils explored the potential ecological benefits of the



re-introduction of large carnivores, and specifically whether Lewes was suited to the reintroduction of wolves! They generally concluded that they liked the idea of reintroduction somewhere in the UK, but that Lewes was not the right place. Much as I'm keen on wolves, I think they made a good assessment!



I am now looking forward to welcoming more schools onto the Reserve over the coming months, and have been developing a range of practical and experiential learning sessions which directly meet many curriculum aims (mostly for primary schools at this stage), and all trying to make the most of the fabulous habitats here.

Before I joined the Trust, I spent 15 years being involved in the communication of environmental issues, including a stint at Greenpeace when I lived in Australia. In the past 10 years I have been working locally as a qualified Forest Schools Leader and environmental educator, with other organisations

and freelance. I really enjoy sharing my enthusiasm and encouraging pupils to extend their curiosity for, and knowledge of, the natural world, through a wide range of practical, hands-on activities. I have also recently worked on a programme providing training in a wealth of practical heritage skills, including building pre-historic roundhouses with school children, and supporting trainees in developing their teaching skills to deliver pre-history learning.

If you have connections with any schools, and would like to find out more about the educational opportunities we are now offering, please just get in touch. Email education@railwaylandproject.org Being a small provider, we can tailor our sessions to meet individual learning goals.

Milly Hawkins

above photos © Ben Shorer

Can you help encourage swifts to nest in our special swift boxes?

We are seeking a donation of £50 to buy a special recording of swift chatter that would encourage other swifts to nest in one of our special swift boxes. In recognition of your generosity we will even name a swift bird box after you!

Plastic Free Lewes



The Plastic Free Lewes campaign has got off to a flying start! It aims to reduce unnecessary plastic use, particularly of single use plastic items. Two very well attended open-space workshops have led to the formation of sub-groups concentrating on promoting positive action in the following areas:

Alternative materials – Exploring and promoting what we can use instead of plastic

Disposal – Researching the pros and cons of measures such as incineration as an emergency measure to dispose of plastic

Drinking water – Cutting the need for disposable water bottles e.g. by establishing a water refill scheme and lobbying for water fountains in town

Education – Raising public awareness of plastic pollution and how we can each tackle it, including by working with local schools and colleges

Lobbying – Working to change legislation at the local, national and international level and pressuring national retail chains to improve their plastic practice

Produce & local retailers – Supporting local cafes, restaurants and other businesses to help cut their use of plastic, and finding other ways to help consumers buy ‘plastic free’

Recycling – Working to improve plastic recycling services and uptake of them, and demystifying what happens to our plastic rubbish

Supermarkets – Lobbying national supermarkets to cut their use of plastic packaging

If you would like to join one of these groups – or have an idea for another one – please get in touch via the Plastic Free Lewes Facebook Group or email Plastic Free Lewes’ administration team, suemfleming@gmail.com and Juliet@julietoxborrow.com

Plastic Free Lewes meets monthly at the Linklater to report on progress, share ideas and discuss next steps. New members are always welcome. Future meeting dates are:

Sat 17 March 10am-12pm

Wed 11 April 7.30pm-9pm

Wed 9 May 7.30pm-9pm

Wed 6 June 7.30pm-9pm

Wed 18 July 7.30pm-9pm

Wed 15 August 7.30pm-9pm

Wed 12 September 7.30pm-9pm

Wed 24 October 7.30pm-9pm

Wed 21 November 7.30pm-9pm

Tree Charter



In November the Railway Land Wildlife Trust took part in the launch of the Tree Charter in Lewes. This was a truly inspiring evening, organised by Vert Community Woodland.

Led by the Woodland Trust, ‘The Charter for Trees, Woods and People’ sets out the principles for a society in which people and trees can stand stronger together. The Tree Charter was launched in Lincoln Castle on 6 November 2017; the 800th anniversary of the 1217 Charter of the Forest.

You can find out more about the history, background and principles of the Charter, and join over 130,000 people in signing it by going to www.treecharter.uk

Helen Meade

Farewell Bough for the Old Railway Poplar

Back in October, tree works were completed on the mature Railway Poplar and Willow along the old rail embankment.

The trees, impressive reminders of the site's railway past dating from the late 19th and 20th centuries, were showing signs of wear and tear and old age decay with large hollows and crevices apparent. These features offer suitable habitats for a great number of creatures including invertebrates, birds, and bats and therefore help to benefit biodiversity on the Reserve.

Sadly the willow had to be taken down completely due to an extensive rot hole. However, the Railway Poplar, reputedly the largest in Sussex, was in a sense subject to a major haircut - with the hope to prolong its survival as a standing trunk, alongside ensuring public safety, for a good few more years to come. The targeted limb removal, notably removal of the crown branches, was undertaken in order to lift excess load off the main trunk.



The tree works were undertaken by professionally qualified tree surgeons, and I (a licenced bat worker) was in attendance, going up in a MEWP (Mobile Elevated Working Platform) beforehand in order to check holes and crevices with an endoscope to make sure no bats or other wildlife were tucked away or could be harmed by the works.

We planned the tree works specifically at the beginning of October so as to be outside the most sensitive times for wildlife notably breeding bird season, and bat maternity and hibernation periods.

Sadly, shortly after the works were completed, on the run up to bonfire night, the Railway Poplar caught ablaze following the setting off of bangers by teenagers. Police, fire crews and specialist tree surgeons were called to the scene in order to put the fire out and make the tree safe, which unfortunately meant that the tree had to be felled.

The felled tree trunk and arisings have been left in-situ to provide a reminder of the great tree that once stood hand in hand with continuing to provide important dead wood wildlife habitats.



Kim Dawson, LDC & EBC Specialist Advisor (Downland & Reserves)
Feb 2018

Kim has joined Thyone Outram as one of our two Specialist Advisors (Downlands and Reserves). Kim has responsibility for the Railway Land but both she and Thyone will continue to lead the Meadow Minders volunteers. For practical conservation volunteering, join them on the first Sunday of every month at the red dot gate entrance at 1.30pm. They organise a range of tasks to suit all ages and abilities.

Signals on the Railway Land

By the Fire Site

Trains pull out on the New Curve
scrape their righteous screech too near
overlook the still flow of the Winterbourne

a chiffchaff dots all the i's, crosses all the t's
blackbirds flute, jackdaws crack and jape
robin sings rippling, a wren piercingly

sunlight with new force, a kind of roar
pours and soaks into my winter clothes
heats the crown of my head, my neck with sweat

swaying back I see fingertips of the raised
arms of the Railway Poplar far up touch cool
dark silver-fired puffs of clotted cloud

the collared dove sits silent, a slip of fruit
shaped on the sharp scarp of a poplar twig
shining in the spine-tingle of an April breeze.

Patrick Bond

11th April



A sad end to the Railway Poplar - not its first fire, but the most destructive.

A New Trustee



We are pleased to welcome Angie Smith as our newest Trustee, bringing the number on the Board up to 10.

Angie's professional background is in housing and property management and in public sector research. We hope that Angie can use her experience to play a key role in the management and maintenance of the Linklater Pavilion.

In addition to her work as a Trustee, Angie continues to contribute as a volunteer with a particular interest in supporting the rich wildlife on the Reserve.

Trustee, Belinda Chapman tendered her resignation at the beginning of February. The trustees will record their thanks to her at the AGM. The current Board members are: Jenifer Barton, Roger Beasley, Simon Cooper, Chair: Jim Hillage, Barry McNulty, Liz Penrose, Pat Rigg, Treasurer: Mark Sawtell, Angie Smith and Sam Smith. Minutes are taken by Jan Osborne.

Programme for 2018

Details of booking & tickets for each event will be emailed each month to all who receive this on-line newsletter.

Date	Event
Sun March 11th, 2-4pm	Nature Photography – Top Tips and Secret Tricks. An illustrated talk and exhibition with Steve Homewood.
Fri March 16th, 7pm	‘The Washing Up’ - a work in progress sharing in advance of performances at Your Place, Brighton Festival in May 2018. The Washing Up is a collaboration between Small Performance Adventures and the Cascade Drama Collective and has been co-created with artists and participants in addiction recovery.
Sun March 25th, 2-5pm	‘Bats, Bees, Birds and Bugs’ – Getting ready to welcome wildlife in your garden this year. All sorts of activities and ideas for you to support wildlife. 3pm – ‘Working with Bats’, talk by Amanda Millar of Sussex Bat Group.
Fri April 13th 2-5pm	‘Signs of Spring’ Children’s activities to celebrate the coming of Spring - arts, crafts, walks, games.
Sun April 22nd 7-9.30pm	French jazz, swing & chanson with “Fleur De Paris” + food & wine. RLWT Fund Raiser.
Mon May 7th	Dawn Chorus walk and breakfast
Fri May 25th 6pm	‘Owl Sense’ Miriam Darlington, author, book-reading and talk
Fri June 1st 10am -12.30	Half term children’s event
Sun June 17th tbc, 2-5pm	Plants and Pollinators event – an event for young and old
Sun July 15th, 11am-5pm	30 year anniversary festival!!
Weekend Sept 8th and 9th	Apple pressing and apple day event
Sun Sept 23rd	Fossil Festival
October (date TBC)	Pop up supper at the Linklater as part of Octoberfeast
Fri Oct 26th 10am-12.30	Half term Children’s event – a hibernation themed pyjama party
November, (date TBC)	Tom Walker - Pastellist, an illustrated talk
Sun Dec 2nd	Tree Day at the Linklater

A 6 week nature photography course starting Sunday April 22nd, led by Steve Homewood. Suitable for 7-13 year olds. No special equipment required, but please let us know if you would like to use one of our i-pads. £36 for members, £48 for non-members.

to contact the Railway Land Wildlife Trust & Programme Coordinator

Helen Meade

Email: coordinator@railwaylandproject.org

(Helen also deals with bookings & membership)

RLWT

Linklater Pavilion

Railway Lane, Lewes BN72FG

Tel: 01273-477101

(answerphone only)

to contact Lewes District Council Ranger

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www.railwaylandproject.org

and click on ‘About’ / Newsletters

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