

RAILWAY LAND WILDLIFE TRUST ANNUAL REPORT 1ST APRIL 2019 - 31ST MARCH 2020

Chairman Jim Hillage

As I write this in September 2020, the year to last March, covered by this report, seems like a world away. Yet this report serves as a valuable reminder what a successful year it was for the Trust and how it laid the foundations for the Trust not only to survive lockdown, but also to provide valuable solace and support to the local community over recent months and enable us to look forward with confidence. It is a great tribute to Helen, Milly, Ruth and Ellie, as well all of you who advise us and proved voluntary support, that we were able become more influential, build better partnerships, engage with more local people and organisations, develop new exciting educational opportunities and become a robust organisation. On behalf of the Trustees I thank you all and look forward to putting the current difficulties behind us and help build a more biodiverse and sustainable future.

Our Strategic Plan for 2018 – 2023 lays out four key strategic aims:

Strategic Aim 1: Increase our influence with key stakeholders

Strategic Aim 2: Get more local people involved with the Trust

Strategic Aim 3: Provide inspirational and innovative learning activities and events

Strategic Aim 4: Improve our infrastructure and resources



Staffing

Our staff team has remained unchanged. Salaries for three members of staff - Helen Meade (Programme Coordinator), Milly Hawkins (Education Officer) and Ruth Collens (Admin Assistant) - are now covered by revenue we generate ourselves and this reduction in dependence on grant funding is a strong development for the Trust. The salary for Ellie Moulton, who runs our Wellbeing in Nature mental health project was funded by the Sussex Community Foundation and the Lloyds Foundation during this period, and we secured funding from the Postcode Local Trust to continue the project for a further year. In this year we were also joined by biologist Steve Savage as an intern from the University of Sussex.

Strategic Aim 4: Improve our infrastructure and resources



Work with schools

4 6 8 Project

Our 4 6 8 project with Lewes primary schools and Priory Secondary school continued to develop and this year saw the Year 6 visits being rolled out to all of the Lewes primary schools. The project consistently underpins the aims that were set at its inception by Dr John Parry, namely of increasing participants' understanding of the natural world, including age appropriate approaches to climate change, and cultivating a sense of agency to affect change.

The Year 4 and 6 visits were delivered this year by Milly Hawkins, who adapted the sessions to her own style that has a strong emphasis on outdoor, experiential learning. In Year 4 the pupils focus on individual responses to their environment and in Year 6 move to deepening understanding and group responses to ecosystem services.

The next stage of the project is to work with Priory School to develop the Year 8 visits, which are scheduled to start in January 2021 and emphasise futures thinking, the notion of social agency and the integration of Gatsby career benchmarks.

School visits from further afield

Milly was happy to welcome schools from further afield to the Linklater Pavilion and the Railway Land, and the new floor in the Jolly Room has made it an excellent base for outdoor learning. Visits covered Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. While some were focused clearly on the curriculum, such as a Y3 session looking at nutrient cycling in soil, others were purely for enjoyment, such as a Year 6 class coming to enjoy a day learning bushcraft to celebrate the end of primary school.



As well as these visits, we worked with IntoUniversity to run sessions for Year 6 pupils from disadvantaged areas of Brighton.

IntoUniversity aims to broaden the horizons of pupils from such areas as research has shown that many children identify university as an opportunity, or not, before the end of primary school.

RATS



A new group of young people picked up the baton for Dr John Parry's voluntary after school club RATS (Raising Awareness of Tides and Sea Levels). Following the steer from the previous RATS cohort, they worked with experts from the Environment Agency and local artist Michelle Dufaur to create a flooding display for the LewesLight Festival 2020.



Lewes Environmental Education Strategy

The Trust were partners in this work, led by John Parry, that worked with pupils, parents, teachers and governors to develop a local curriculum that included intrinsic environmental learning and stewardship.

[Strategic Aim 3: Provide inspirational and innovative learning activities and events](#)

Events

2019 – 2020 saw a fantastic array of events taking place at the Linklater, all of which were supported by volunteers new and old.

Our events attracted over 3500 people all together, but numbers cannot convey the imagination and variety of ways in which people expressed their connection with nature and responses to the threats of climate change and ecological breakdown.

Highlights included: Dawn Chorus Walk, Living Coast Bike Ride, Looking Out Festival and Art Auction, Apple Pressing, Songs of Nature concert, Bat Blitz, Tree Day, the first Lewes Tree Summit, Community Clear Up Day and the wonderful installations for Lewes Light.

[Strategic Aim 2: Get more local people involved with the Trust](#)

[Strategic Aim 3: Provide inspirational and innovative learning activities and events](#)



The Songs of Nature concert attracted a good crowd, to hear amongst others, Shirley Collins and Pip Barnes, with Blue Jam-balaya in a transformed Jolly Room undercroft.



Lewes 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.

Projects

Wellbeing in Nature

In May 2019 we secured funding from the Lloyds Foundation for our Wellbeing in Nature mental health project that is run by Ellie Moulton. This excellent news meant that we could really embed this piece of work in our programme, and the numbers of participants attending the Friday sessions began to grow steadily. In fact the sessions became so popular that there was a risk of the welcoming, supportive atmosphere being slightly lost and so, with the support of the Chalk Cliff Trust, we were able to start extra ‘walk and talk’ sessions on Mondays as well.



Walking, talking, observing and sharing knowledge of the natural world are part of every session, and Ellie is always supported by a team of excellent and dedicated volunteers. In addition to the walk, the Friday session includes a therapeutic activity that is usually led by a volunteer or participant. These have included arts, crafts, creative writing, yoga, forest bathing and mindfulness activities to name but a few. In June the Wellbeing in Nature group had a stand at the Looking Out Festival to share some of their work, including their magnificent clay Green Man.

Part of the funding from the Lloyds Foundation was to co-develop effective and engaging evaluation of the session with participants. Underpinned with training from the New Economics Foundation, we have made good progress in devising means of collecting and analysing data that the participants themselves have identified as being significant measures of their mental wellbeing.

[Strategic Aim 2: Get more local people involved with the Trust](#)

[Strategic Aim 3: Provide inspirational and innovative learning activities and events](#)

Linklater Pavilion and the Signal Box



The Linklater Pavilion was absolutely buzzing with activity. As well as our own educational work and wellbeing project, the number of organisations hiring space from us increased considerably. We were also able to support many local, voluntary environmental groups with free space, such as Wildflower Lewes, Plastic Free Lewes, XR, Laughton Greenwood and the Mammal Society. Many organisations reciprocated the support, helping with both fundraising events and practical support in keeping the building ship shape.

The signal box had fallen into quite some disrepair over the years, and the timbers were rotten in many places. With help from the South Downs Volunteer Conservation Fund and use of our own money, we were able to fix the signal box up and also remodel the interior to make

it more useable as a nature watching hide. In addition to this, there are now swift and swallow nesting boxes on the side facing the water meadows. This is part of a larger plan to renew and enlarge some of the scrapes on Chilly Brook and increase the variety of shrubs around the signal box, in the hope that this will attract more wildlife in the long term.

[Strategic Aim 4: Improve our infrastructure and resources](#)



Egret's Way

Work to the limb of the Egret's way that runs through the Railway Land and then on to Ham Lane was completed. Unfortunately our planned joint launch for the Egret's Way and the Signal Box had to be cancelled because of the lockdown, but it has been wonderful to see how much more accessible the path has become, particularly for local people with limited mobility.



Strategic Aim 2: Get more local people involved with the Trust

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Partnerships

Our key partnership remains with Lewes District Council, who we work closely with on the management and use of the nature reserve. During this period Kim Dawson was the Specialist Advisor most involved with supporting the Railway Land, and her incredible ecological knowledge and enthusiasm were great assets. At the beginning of lockdown Kim moved on to take a role with Southern Water, and Thyone Outram has taken over from her. Thyone has a fantastic overview of the Railway Land, having been involved here for nearly 10 years.

In July 2019 Lewes District Council declared a climate emergency and have been working on their Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy, and RLWT has been one of the representatives on their expert panels.

In this period we have also developed our partnerships with many other local organisations, for example taking part in the district wide application to the Climate Action Fund, Ouse Valley CARES (standing for Climate Action, Resilient Ecosystems, Sustainability) led by SDNPA and including as partners OVESCO, Community Energy South, Sussex Community Development Association, 3VA, Transition Town Lewes and Seaford Community Partnership.

Strategic Aim 1: Increase our influence with key stakeholders



left and right: the fully booked Dawn Chorus walk in full swing - followed by a continental breakfast in the Linklater.



below centre: Tree Day



below right: the Art Auction which raised £600....and left: one of the Lewes Light installations.

Our world floating in a 'sea of plastic'



Volunteers

As always, a huge huge thank you to our many volunteers who support every area of the Trust's work. This year we have had over 75 active volunteers. We are always interested in enabling more people to become involved in our work in a myriad different ways, so if you would like to volunteer, do get in touch.

[Strategic Aim 2: Get more local people involved with the Trust](#)

[Strategic Aim 4: Improve our infrastructure and resources](#)

Trustees

We were fortunate to recruit four new Trustees in this period, all with skills and experience that are invaluable to our work.

Jackie Ralph - Jackie joined the Board of Trustees in June, having already been involved with RLWT as a volunteer. She has a background in Marketing and PR, a function often overlooked in charities, and hopes to use those skills to make the Trust more visible and accessible to local people from all walks of life.



Natalie White - Natalie has substantial governance experience and a legal background, which really strengthen the makeup of the Board. She is a Chartered Governance Professional & Chartered Secretary, and works as the Deputy Company Secretary of a global education company where she also participates in developing the company's sustainability strategy. She is a very keen observer of nature and wildlife gardener.



Toni Scarr - Toni works for the Environment Agency as a Senior Advisor working on water management nationally. Previously she has worked in the estuary and coasts team, and in the biodiversity team, and this experience is obviously incredibly valuable to the Trust. She has two young daughters and her family often spend time on the Railway Land, so she also brings this perspective to the Board.



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.

They join our other Trustees, namely Jim Hillage (Chair), Mark Sawtell, (Treasurer), Sam Smith, Angie Smith, Barry McNulty and Simon Cooper.

[Strategic Aim 4: Improve our infrastructure and resources](#)



above and below left: there's always something to take home after a seasonal workshop

above right, the Living Coast bike ride team - Helen Meade, John Parry and Jenny Lindop



The Railway Land Wildlife Trust aims to inspire environmental sustainability by bringing nature to the heart of Lewes.

We do this through:

- Running the Linklater building as a community-based hub for the understanding of a sustainable environment
- Providing inclusive outdoor learning using innovative approaches
- Supporting the local authority in managing the Railway Land nature reserve for the whole community
- Providing accessible volunteering opportunities



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