

RAILWAY LAND WILDLIFE TRUST

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Springing Back!

With a slight feeling of Groundhog Day, we are gearing up to re-open our doors to school visits, volunteers, co-collaborators, local groups and the wonderful plethora of activities that take place here. The Linklater Pavilion has been given a lick of paint – many thanks to everyone who helped with this – and is looking bright, fresh and ready for action!

Nearly all staff have worked through the most recent lockdown, with Ellie providing essential support through WiN the Wellbeing in Nature project, and Milly reviewing and revamping our schools' programme and developing the excellent Green Careers for All resources for schools and young people.

Vital restoration work: Railway Land Recovery

The Railway Land has been an absolute lifesaver for many people and families during lockdown. It has been lovely to receive messages from all sorts of people expressing what a difference it has made to them.

However, the increased use of the nature reserve has had a very noticeable effect. In some places whole areas of vegetation have been lost to increased footfall, and other areas that were once thickets of wonderful wildlife habitat are now criss-crossed with paths and open areas. This is not through misuse, it is simply caused by the extraordinary increase in use that we have seen in this past year.



Luckily, the Chalk Cliff Trust has provided funding for us to kickstart voluntary restoration activities on the nature reserve, including restarting the Meadow Minders group that has dwindled during the LDC restructure. We will be developing a plan of action to restore areas of lost habitat, and work with volunteers and other groups such as the Priors Forest School group and WiN participants to take this work forward.

These areas were untouched a year ago. It's wonderful that the Railway Land has provided so much solace for so many people. Now we need to make sure the vital wildlife habitats can be reestablished

If you would like to volunteer to help with this, please contact Helen at coordinator@railwaylandproject.org



Jenny Lindop will be leading the volunteer groups as part of the **Railway Land Recovery**.

Jenny graduated from Plumpton Agricultural College a few years ago with an Advanced Technical Diploma in Land and Wildlife Management.

As well as being a regular Meadow Minder herself, Jenny has volunteered for us over the years doing everything from leasing walks to running bars, painting walls and even cycling 35 miles to raise funds for the WiN project!

It's great to have her joining our team.



New Chair - Deborah Prince

We are very happy to say that we have recruited a new Chair to take over from Jim Hillage, whose leadership of the Trust over the last 5 years has been invaluable.

Deborah Prince is a Lewes resident and regular user of the Railway Land. She has spent many decades working in the charity sector as a senior leader, having previously studied life sciences and carried out research at Imperial College. She looks forward to getting stuck in and adding her fundraising, governance and policy experience to an already talented trustee board and management team.



Changes at LDC

As many of you will know, Lewes District Council has been facing the double challenge of providing emergency support during the pandemic and re-structuring their services in order to achieve the savings that are expected of them.

While this has been going on, they have also been working to complete their Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy to put in place plans that respond to their declaration of a Climate Emergency in July 2019. The Strategy, for which RLWT was one of many consultees, has now been published and can be seen at <https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/community/climate-change/>

Sadly the restructure has led to the loss of the Specialist Advisor Role for Downland and Nature Reserves that was held by Thyone Outram. The new structure at LDC is still in the consultation stage and there remains a degree of uncertainty about the final outcome. Within this consultation LDC are proposing a new team, The Green Consultancy (GC). This will be formed with specialist knowledge in ecology, sustainability, horticulture, arboriculture, coastal engineering, waste management and recycling, land management and partner engagement, air quality, contract, and project management. The GC will provide internal consultancy to other areas of the organisation. They will manage existing contracts, maintain and develop external partnerships, and deliver biodiversity, sustainability, and capital projects.

In the meantime we are very lucky that **Chris Bibb, Specialist Advisor for Open Spaces**, is providing interim support in the management of the Railway Land.

Climate Action Forum

This forum supports LDC's response to the climate emergency. It aims to:

- Support the creation of shared ideas for climate action;
- Enable community involvement in climate action;
- Develop an ongoing group of interested stakeholders; and
- Maximise opportunities for feedback to Lewes District Council on their Climate Change and Sustainability Framework

The next Climate Action Forum workshop is on **May 11th , 4 -5.30pm**, and looks at carbon footprinting for individuals, groups and organisations. <https://climateactionforum.org.uk/>

Education Update: Millie Hawkins

Lewes Outdoor Learning - Nurturing Green Guardians

It feels even more important than ever for children and young people to get to know and love their local natural areas. **Lewes Outdoor Learning** is our new repeat visit education project for primary schools from Lewes and the surrounding area, that aims to provide engaging opportunities for pupils to experience and enjoy learning in nature. Ultimately, by '**nurturing green guardians**', the program seeks to inspire action to protect nature, helping to grow the next generation of people who know and love the natural world. Time outside is obviously also really beneficial for children's wellbeing, and a pressure release to all the restrictions pupils have faced over the past year.



Lewes Outdoor Learning replaces the previous **4 6 8 project**, providing schools with fun outdoor learning sessions relevant to the curriculum, and pupils' needs. Year 4 and Year 6 pupils from local schools will visit us – Year 4's in the summer term, and Year 6's in the first half of the autumn term - and this year we are also inviting Year 5's as they missed out on visiting us last year. A big 'Thank You' to the Nineveh Trust, for a grant that allows us to offer many of these sessions at a significantly subsidised rate. If your children are in one of those year groups locally, ask your teachers about booking their visit!



Education Volunteers Needed!

We have several opportunities for education volunteers to help deliver this fun and engaging program this summer term and beyond. We are keen to hear from you either if you want to gain environmental education experience, or if you have education experience to share. Don't worry, we offer training and support! Please do get in touch with Milly at education@railwaylandproject.org to find out more.

Green Careers for All!

Throughout last winter's restrictions we were kept busy incubating our new green careers resources... Enter '**Green Careers for All!**' These freely available video resources for secondary schools and young people (and even adult career changers!) aim to inform and inspire young people to pursue 'green' careers that



will help tackle the climate and ecological emergencies we face. Despite the seriousness of these situations globally, we have tried to highlight the many rapidly growing local opportunities for young people to develop fulfilling careers, whilst being part of 'The Solution'.

We enjoyed interviewing our 'green champs', drawn from a wide range of sectors, about their jobs and the local opportunities for career growth they see in the near future. Hearing their optimism, passion and commitment was inspiring to us making the resources. Originally conceived to support schools in their careers education, the online resources also contain a lesson plan and teachers' notes, but we also hope they are a great resource to be viewed more informally, to inspire and inform a wide range of people.

Many thanks to all our 'green champs' for giving their time freely to be interviewed, to Alice Ross for her fantastic video making skills, to Year 8 & Year 12 students at Seaford Head school for coming up with well thought out further questions for our interviewees, and to the South Downs National Park Authority for funding this work through their COVID emergency fund.

<https://www.railwaylandproject.org/green-careers> Or 'For schools' button

Holiday Clubs are here again!

We're very excited to be able to offer holiday clubs again this coming May half term and for three weeks during the summer holidays.

The clubs offer a great range of nature-focused outdoor activities for children aged 6-13 years. Kids have the opportunity to rise to our fire lighting challenge, build dens, and discover amazing creatures in our ponds. They will share wildlife adventures, listen to stories, and join in games, craft activities, and campfire cooking. Older children with us for the full 4 days will also have the opportunity to achieve the John Muir Award.

The clubs run from Monday to Thursday, 9.30am to 3pm. You can book for either two days or four days, with reduced prices for siblings.

There's full information about dates and prices on our website at

<https://www.railwaylandproject.org/holiday-club>



Milly planning the holiday clubs with Jenny Lindop and Luke Meanders, who will be running the sessions this year.



Green Working Days at the Linklater Pavilion

One thing that has been sorely missed by many during the lockdowns is the ability to have informal conversations with colleagues and collaborators. While online platforms like Zoom have enabled people to keep many things going, the casual bits in between are lost and are often so important for seeding new ideas and ways of working together.

To try and fill in some of these gaps, we will be starting monthly Green Working Days at the Linklater Pavilion. This is essentially a form of informal hot desking. Organisations working in the environmental field will be able to book a desk for the day and use the Linklater as their base, meet and chat with people working in the same area, and hold small meetings.

The Green Working Days will run on the first Thursday of each month, 9am-5pm, starting on July 1st.

For more information or to book a spot, contact Helen at coordinator@railwaylandproject.org.



WiN - Wellbeing in Nature

Covid 19 has forced us to spend the last year at a slower pace, noticing nature around us in more detail and appreciating the changing of the seasons. For many of us walking for exercise and mental wellbeing has become more important than ever and we have been fortunate to be able to offer walks throughout the pandemic in the most beautiful location. This change of pace has led to us learning about the Railway Land: its rising water levels, the first appearances of tree buds and wildflowers, the bees that feed on them, pregnant squirrels, tiny insect life and exquisite bird song as we moved from winter into spring.

For those who have not been able to join the walks we have kept connecting to nature and each other through a weekly wellbeing newsletter sharing photographs of the changing natural world on our doorstep with photographs and updates, sightings and questions – while we don't always know the answers the ever increasing WIN community have kept each other going through darker days and offered hope, support and signposting to organisations that can help.

We have kept the wellbeing walks going while keeping up to date with current coronavirus restrictions. As this last lockdown eases we are pleased to offer the following wellbeing walks:

Wednesdays

10am - One to one walk lasting 45 minutes - for anyone who: is feeling anxious, are hesitant walking in a group for any reason or just want to want to check it out first and ask questions.

11am Group walk lasting about an hour - currently up to 6 people per walk.

Fridays

10am - One to one walk lasting 45 minutes - for anyone who: is feeling anxious, are hesitant walking in a group for any reason or just want to want to check it out first and ask questions.

11am Group walk lasting about an hour - currently up to 6 people per walk. Spring is a wonderful time to come and join us, it's a time full of positivity and promise, an opportunity to engage with like minded people and by learning about the outside world a way to protect wildlife and address the ecological and climate crisis.



To tempt you further here is a taste on what we spotted on our wellbeing walk today: Tree creeper, Heron, Blackcap, 3 Goldcrests, 3 Goldfinch, Kingfisher, Robins, Blackbirds, Crows, Magpies and 2 Peregrine falcons circling overhead.

It's also the start of Butterfly season and we spotted Brimstones, Orange tips, Peacock, Red admiral, Speckled wood and Comma butterflies. All of these were seen today in just over 2 hours!

Come and explore with us - all walks are friendly, slow, gentle and start off at the Linklater Pavilion – To keep the walks covid safe it is essential to book - contact me to book a space and for further information. Alternatively if you would like to sign up to our newsletter and receive updates we can put you on our WIN mailing list. If you have friends, family or neighbours that you think may benefit please do pass this info onto them and encourage them to get in touch.

'Heart on Leaf' and 'Heart of Reeds': two pictures taken by Fiona on the 23rd April walk

Volunteers needed

Do you have time on your hands? Are you interested in helping others? As we slowly and safely return to opening up our services at the Railway Land we are looking to recruit and train some new volunteers to support our wellbeing in nature and education projects. Volunteering has loads of benefits and while Covid 19 has brought communities together it has had a huge impact on our mental health - we are currently looking at providing some free training in mental health first aid for all Railway Land volunteers and WiN participants, the aim of this is to raise awareness of mental health for people who are volunteering or engaging with others on a regular basis..

Ways you can volunteer:

We are looking for people to come along and support Ellie on our wellbeing walks In the last few weeks we receive interest from people wanting to join the walks and would like to increase the number of walks that we do to include as many people as possible whatever age and physical ability. How often you volunteer is flexible and we will buddy you up with another volunteer so you won't be walking alone. We will provide you with walk leader training and support you if you have an area of interest such as putting on a wildflower walk or supporting a dementia walk.

Contact Ellie for more details on wellbeing@railwaylandproject.org



Above left - a clear flowing Winterbourne. Above right- a heron stalks the Heart of Reeds
©Fiona, 23.4.21

Update on our Madagascar Project

In 2003 a remarkable partnership was formed between Dr Alison Jolly, a Lewes based primatologist specialising in the social behaviour of lemurs in Madagascar, and Dr John Parry of the Railway Land Wildlife Trust, both of whom saw huge value in small nature reserves. Alison was among the first to argue that ***conservation must recognise the needs of local people***. She nurtured students in Madagascar and brought a leading researcher, Dr Hanta Rasamimanana, of the University of Antananarivo to Lewes where they visited the Railway Land. This led to an extraordinary insight and a conservation project in Madagascar that the Trust has sponsored for 9 years. During this time 20 of her university students have been involved in a training programme which we have supported financially. Many have gone on to become high school teachers, bringing 860 young people to participate in the project. Educational materials have been produced and 5 Palace and forest guides have been trained to use interactive and engaging methods of teaching. Hanta's report follows:

Report on the Ambohimanga Palace Forest Project: Sept. 2019 to March 2021 Funded by the Railway Land Wildlife Trust, Lewes

Goal: To aid the preservation of the Ambohimanga forest and appreciation of this UNESCO World Heritage site.

Description of Ala-kolo-toro program

Ala-kolo-toro is a Malagasy compound noun composed of three words: Ala which means forest, kolo for conserving and protecting, and toro as guidance or advice. Ala-kolo-toro can be translated as forest conservation and culture guidance.

The Ala-kolo-toro program started at Ambohimanga Forest in 2016 and offers this outdoor, play-based, child-led learning throughout the year, regardless of the weather. This project aims to engage children and youth in particular (although tourists too will also be served) because they will be the future guardians of the forest and its natural and cultural artifacts, the future decision-makers and natural resource managers.

Ala-kolo-toro engages visitors in diverse activities such as visiting the museum, palace and the forest, comparing and classifying leaves, smelling flowers, following animal tracks, measuring tree trunks with ropes, and playing a picture domino game about the king and queen of Madagascar. Visitors have an opportunity to problem-solve by, for example, discussing traditional uses of some plants to face daily needs. For example, how could people dig a pit before the use of metal tools? In fact, Valanirana was used to dig hadivory—moats—because the wood of this plant is very robust and can be used not only for digging but also for spears and agricultural tools.

These activities teach and support stewardship of the environment and of historical and cultural artefacts as well as develop problem-solving, collaboration and leadership skills as well as self-confidence and curiosity amongst students. Using nature as a classroom, young people also learn more about what it's like to make a career in Forestry or in Environmental and Cultural Tourism.

The Ala-kolo-toro program also includes a capacity-building component for the local guides and volunteers, supporting them in becoming facilitators of learning—sensory, kinaesthetic and experiential—during the visit instead of simply talking at students. Ala-kolotoro also plans to settle a building for training and for exhibiting environmental learning tools.

Preliminary evaluation of Ala-kolo-toro program

1. Through informal experience, we have learned that the time children and youth spend at Ala-kolo-toro program is extremely beneficial to their emotional and physical health—not only through the learning in the forest in the curated activities, but also through interacting and helping each other

along during the hike. At this moment, we have begun a formal evaluation of the program which so far reinforces our informal experiential findings.

2. As part of preliminary evaluation of the project, a questionnaire based on the KVP model by Clements was used; we compared children pre- and post-visit to obtain these results. As they are quite young, they managed to handle the second circuit which entails a three-hour walk. Preliminary evaluation of this program--also called Nature Schools--shows that young people who have participated in Ala-kolo-toro activities on-site demonstrate growth in selfconfidence, concentration, joyfulness and motivation, skills that also benefit academic performance. By incorporating environmental-based learning from primary school to high school, numerous students across Antananarivo can learn and are learning to appreciate the complexity and value of Malagasy's forests and local culture, like the use of different types of plants during customs and traditions. As environmental education is already incorporated into the national curriculum, the program helps students to see the connections between what they've learned in school to what they experience in the environment, the climate, forests, trees, wildlife, biodiversity and forest products, and this learning in turn reinforces the concepts of sustainable, natural resource management.

3. Appreciating the value of forests and culture. The Ala-kolo-toro program provides children and youth with a unique learning opportunity. Counting ferns species, learning about traditional medicine, native history, Malagasy culture and being a scientist, visitors learn to recognize and appreciate the importance and value of one of Malagasy's greatest natural resources-- protected due to the respect of the king. By developing enthusiasm for nature and learning through hands-on, outdoor activities, students learn how to problem-solve and build social skills, complementing the national curriculum while reinforcing the concepts of conservation and responsible use of natural resources.

The Ala-kolo-toro program allows students to get knowledge while building their work ethic, initiative, reliability, confidence, teamwork skills, problem-solving, relationships with others, respect, and character-building. These are valuable skills not only for future employment, but for responsible citizenship and for living life.



above: the Royal Palace

below: a history lesson



above: a forest walk

below: time for assessment



Jim and Maureen Franks

“they were both lovely people, true friends of Lewes and a wonderful example to us all”

Roger Beasley and John Parry write:

“It is with real sadness and fondness that we heard of the death of Jim and Maureen Franks, within days of each other, in December 2020 at the ages of 93 and 91. They had both lived in Lewes since 1954 and were both devoted to the Town and their local community. Many of us would say we love our Town but Jim and Maureen spent much of their lives keeping Lewes special.

Heritage coursed through Jim’s bones in terms of his long work on the local Town council, the executive committee of the Friends of Lewes and was a Trustee of the Railway land Wildlife Trust for many years. Maureen was heavily involved in the House of Friendship and Age Concern and was Jim’s Project Manager and Secretary, a pretty full time Job!

Jim wrote an excellent article for the Friends of Lewes publication “Lewes 1952-2002” which covered many of the projects he was involved in but perhaps his and Maureen’s legacy is best summed up by their devotion to the splendid restoration and conversion of Fitzroy house. Just round the corner was a piece of land that drew Jim to the Trust in the early years as he could see the potential for natural heritage.”

Jim became a valuable and significant player in our development and gave freely of his surveying expertise and building connections and skills to our projects. John earlier described the unofficial ‘topping out’ of the signal box....it saw Jim in core position, ordering the right equipment and then helping to put up the guttering and drain pipes immediately after the slates had been secured and before the scaffolding was due off site. One cold frosty morning while the slater was finishing off his work, we were scampering round the scaffolding pushing the plastic piping together and fixing it to all sides of the box. We could not have guessed at the rain the roof would one day fend off as in October 2000 the river rose to new heights to flood not only the entire undercroft of the signal box to ceiling height but also Jim’s own Fitzroy House at the bottom of School Hill.



Anne Grantham who also arrived in Lewes in 1954, was a co-trustee and shared with Jim, a keen interest in botany and the management of the watermeadow she had donated to the Trust. She was delighted that Jim undertook level surveys of Chilly Brook which then contributed to the successful raising of the water levels in the summer of 2002.

Jim's daily early morning walks through the reserve enabled him to document the flora and fauna and share his observations with the membership. The pieces he submitted to this newsletter were always amusing - one on the rabbits, stoats, weasel and fox on site was headed 'A saga of sex and violence'. Another one entitled 'Bird's and Bunnies' in 1996 began with a typical Jim observation 'if you see just two rooks together they are most likely to be crows and if you see a flock of crows, they'll be rooks!' It ended with 'I wonder if those two black birds eating the rabbits were rooks? And has anyone else seen the male blackbird with the white tail feathers? It all happens on the Railway Land.....'



*Ranger
Annabel
Kennedy leads
a woodland
walk.*

*.....Jim's
unmissable
'listening' pose*

In our early days he provided a valuable link with other relevant interested Societies. When Jim stood down as a trustee in 2003 John wrote *"Strategically, Jim has been an important sounding board and would provide insight into how other people in the town might view the Railway Land somewhat differently to us - a very important role in which I like to think we are now quite well trained by his example."*

Jim was held in much respect and undoubtedly helped to raise the profile of the Trust which was eventually housed in the Linklater Pavilion – described by John as *"a gateway to the old railway sidings as well as the countryside.....I often saw Jim at the end of a day when I was working at the Linklater and we exchanged warm words amidst his knowing smile – a smile that will be missed"*.

Lewes Climate Hub to open on 22 May

Lewes Climate Hub will officially open its doors at **2 Fisher Street** in central Lewes on Saturday 22 May – and everyone's welcome to come along and share their ideas on what they'd like it to feature.

Lewes Climate Hub came out of the concept of climate emergency centres – places in the hearts of communities where anyone can get information and advice in order to take action on climate change and its impacts, such as flooding, water scarcity and severe weather conditions.

The urgency of the global warming crisis has made it vitally important to give climate action a high-profile presence in every community. By having a physical centre in the heart of Lewes, it's hoped that a wider cross-section of the town can be inspired to engage with climate and environmental action – and feel welcome to get involved in local projects.

Lewes Climate Hub is sharing its new premises at 2 Fisher Street (just around the corner from the Town Hall) with Lewes Community Volunteers (formerly Lewes Coronavirus Volunteers). So there's an exciting opportunity to share resources and ideas to support many different aspects of our local community – from food to biodiversity to creating a more sustainable, low-carbon economy.

The Hub aims to provide information and signpost to groups and projects focusing on nine areas: Energy, Food, Housing, Jobs & Economy, Biodiversity, Water & Flooding, Transport & Air Quality, Waste & Reuse, and Well-being. As well as signposting to other groups' activities, the Hub will also host its own workshops, talks, projects and online events.

Lewes Climate Hub is run and managed by volunteers from a range of local community organisations concerned about climate change and creating a socially-fair transition to a more sustainable, green economy. Alongside Transition Town Lewes, these include Extinction Rebellion, Friends of Lewes and the Railway Land Wildlife Trust. You can see the full list of affiliates here. <https://www.lewesclimatehub.org>

If you are part of a group interested in becoming an affiliate member, please email info@lewesclimatehub.org.

Organisers are also interested in learning what information and support visitors would like from the Hub – so either email your thought or drop into the Hub when it opens.

Regular opening hours for the Hub are still to be announced – but the plan is to be open during normal business hours. Look forward to seeing you there!



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and click on 'About' / Newsletters

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