

RAILWAY LAND WILDLIFE TRUST

Feb. 2020

www.railwaylandproject.org

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Upcoming events

We have a great schedule of events this year, supported as always by our fantastic volunteers. Here is a taster of things to come in the next few months:

LewesLight 2020 Festival Feb 28 – March 1 6pm - 9.30pm, more details in article on pages 6/7

Tree Summit, Sunday March 8th 10am – 3.30pm

This is a one day event to bring together community groups, experts, support organisations, local authority representatives and councillors to explore the processes and skills needed to increase the tree cover across Lewes District and beyond. The day will include speakers, expert panels, Q and As, and planning for the future. Entry costs £5 and includes a light lunch. You can book by going to www.eventbrite.com and searching for Lewes Tree Summit

Launch of Egrets Way and Signal Box, Sunday March 22nd 2pm -5pm

Come and join us to celebrate the revamping of the signal box and the completion of this part of the Egrets Way. As well as family activities and information stands about both cycling and accessibility, we will have the signal box set up for nature watching, self guided walks around the reserve and clip on lenses for mobile phones to encourage people to capture unusual views and ways of seeing nature.



Monthly Guided Walks on the first Sunday of each month, at 2pm starting April 5th

Please keep an eye on our website and email updates for details of these

Dawn Chorus Walk on Sunday May 3rd at 4.30am!!

This popular annual event gets quickly booked up so please reserve your places by emailing Pat Rigg on patspur9@icloud.com The walk and continental breakfast cost £15 for Friends of the Railway Land and £20 for non-Friends. It is suitable for over 11's. Unfortunately we cannot accommodate dogs

Save the Date! Railway Land Summer Festival this year will be on June 28th – more information to follow

Work on the Railway Land now finished

The autumn and winter saw a lot of work on the Railway Land which, coupled with long spells of heavy rain, meant that mud became a prominent element of day to day life here! First of all the Environment Agency replaced the sluice gate between the Winterbourne Stream and the River Ouse – a huge job undertaken in challenging conditions – and then the final stretch of the Egrets Way between the Winterbourne and the level crossing gate was finished.

At times it felt like the work would never end, but now peace has been restored and there are already signs of vegetation springing back up where the ground has been disturbed. It is still pretty muddy, but as it begins to dry up our friends at Wildflower Lewes and participants of the Wellbeing in Nature project will help with re-seeding some areas. Others will be left to regenerate naturally.

The water in the Winterbourne stream is crystal clear now, and the mullet are beginning to arrive where the fresh water meets the brackish water of the Ouse.



Spring Clean – an amazing day of community support!



The muddy conditions and busy schedule of school visits, community events and increased use of the Linklater meant that the building, and the Jolly Room in particular, were looking rather sorry for themselves and frankly pretty filthy in places.

On January 19th we had an amazing spring clean. Members of South Street Bonfire Society, Lewes XR, and our own volunteers came together in a cleaning whirlwind! With over 40 people on hand, not only was the building as clean as a new pin by the end of the day, but loads of small DIY jobs had

been miraculously completed and we had cracked the conundrum of how to clean the Jolly Room floor. It was really fantastic to see so many people come together to support us in this way, so huge thanks to everyone involved!

Wellbeing in Nature

Our mental health project, Wellbeing in Nature, continues to provide essential support to people struggling with their mental health.

Participants and volunteers share all sorts of activities, from learning about fungi, bats and winter tree identification to yoga and creative writing – all inspired by the beautiful surroundings of the Railway Land.

More recently, they adopted a hedgehog as their mascot and have instigated the Lewes Hedgehog Watch, to find out more about the hedgehogs of Lewes and look at ways to improve their chances of survival – there is more information about this on page 4.



By the end of last year our regular Friday group had become rather large and participants, volunteers and staff were concerned that it might become a victim of its own success and lose the safe, nurturing quality that is needed. Fortunately, the Chalk Cliff Trust generously gave us a grant to run overflow ‘walk and talk’ session, which are now taking place on Mondays between 11am and 1pm.

We have recently found out that our main funders for Wellbeing in Nature, Lloyds Foundation, are no longer supporting mental health initiatives in East Sussex. This has come as a bit of a blow as the project is so successful, and we are actively looking for alternative funders.

Helen Meade

Hedgehog Watch – from the Wellbeing in Nature group

Hedgehogs are a much-loved native species but they are under threat from loss of habitat. They may look sleepy but they can roam as far as 2km (over a mile) in one night, particularly when looking for food or a mate. They are surprisingly good at climbing banks and steps. In the winter they need cosy corners such as wood-piles and piles of leaves where they can hibernate in safety. They are welcome in our gardens because they eat pests such as slugs.

The Wellbeing in Nature group who meet on Mondays and Fridays in the Linklater Pavilion on the Railway Land have adopted a hedgehog as their mascot. We would like to know more about the hedgehogs of Lewes and look at ways to improve their chances of survival. Can you help us?



What can you do to help?

First we need to know how many hedgehogs there are locally, in Lewes. So we are asking you to let us know about any hedgehogs you may see. Please note when you saw it, where you saw it (including the postcode if possible) and what it was doing (sadly this includes lying squashed on the road). Send these details by email to the Railway Land Wildlife Trust at this address including “Hedgehog Watch” in the subject box wellbeing@railwaylandproject.org We will collate your data and try to give you a regular update on our local population of hedgehogs.

Secondly we can try to make our gardens more hedgehog-friendly by enabling them to access neighbouring gardens through gaps in fences and by leaving piles of wood and leaves for them to nest in. They need water to drink. They enjoy swimming but make sure your pond has some sort of ramp to enable them to climb out. People sometimes ask if we should put food out for hedgehogs. They will eat cat or dog food if it contains meat but that may attract unwanted guests such as rats. Do not give them bread and milk.

Another frequent question is what to do if one finds an injured or needy hedgehog. Locally you can try your local vet or WRAS (Wildlife Rescue and Ambulance Service) who are based not far from Laughton. Phone 07815 078 234.

For more information about hedgehogs and how to help them try Hedgehog Street at www.hedgehogstreet.org or the Wildlife Trusts on www.wildlifetrusts.org

Wellbeing in Nature



The Signal Box has had a serious makeover, and will feature on Sunday March 22nd between 2 - 5pm.

The Signal Box has been rehabilitated, with financial support from the South Downs Volunteer Conservation fund and the hands on support of very many volunteers!

Huge thanks not only to the Volunteer Ranger service, but also to our own volunteers and the young people from Brighton College who came and threw themselves into sanding, filling and priming with great gusto.

Many of the timbers had become rotten over the years and these are now all replaced, so now the Signal Box is safe and secure once more.

Additionally, the windows have been rehung and bird watching flaps installed, so that it can be used more effectively as a bird and nature watching hide. A false ceiling has been installed and crevices created within the roof to encourage bats to roost., Swallow and swift boxes have been attached to the exterior.

We still have a little bit of decorating to do before our re-launch on March 22nd , this was hampered in the autumn and winter by the endless rain.

Our next task is to fit a number lock to the main door so that Friends of the Railway Land can access the Signal Box and enjoy the tranquillity of the water meadows whenever they like.

Helen Meade

Below: Brighton College Volunteers



LEWESLIGHT 2020 LIGHTS UP THE RAILWAY LAND

28th February - 1st March 2020

Spread over locations around the town between 6.00pm & 9.30pm

At the end of February on the Railway Land the Linklater Pavilion and woodlands will be the site for a substantial part of the LewesLight 2020 Festival.

This year the LewesLight Festival 2020 will be focussing on the natural world, from the glow of moonlight and its shadows to the effect of light on water, with the artists looking at the impact that mankind is having on planet earth, the consequences for nature and how this affects the future.

The Water Wall

In the Jolly Room will be the Water Wall, an installation designed by still and moving image artists Maggie Lambert and Emily Lowry, with light projecting images onto swathes of iridescent gauze, giving a sculptural effect rather than a flat form. There will be an electronic soundscape integral to the display, designed by Jon Meacock.

The artists say:

'Water Wall celebrates water and all its physical and mystical properties.

In the light of the Climate Crisis we have created a piece that allows us to pay homage to Mother Nature and our urgent responsibility to protect it. We hope the installation allows the viewer to experience both the moving image and the sound of Water Wall in a deeply personal and contemplative way and enables them to celebrate with us the natural world we so urgently need to cherish.'

The artistry continues with further immersive displays over the Winterbourne Stream, and a light projection onto the riverbank.

Jackie Ralph

RATS

Upstairs at the Linklater Pavilion there will be an exhibition displaying the activities of the Linklater RATS, the voluntary after school group run by Dr John Parry that emerged from the Coastal Communities 2150 project, and that is dedicated to Raising Awareness of Tides and Sea levels.

The newly formed 4th group of Linklater RATS were challenged by the 3rd RATS group to help organise and design a flooding display for the LewesLight Festival.

photo © Dr John Parry

Rising to the challenge and helped by community artist Michelle Dufaur working with other professionals from LewesLight, the RATS contributed to a display to be projected on a river wall in Lewes.

They also worked on a commentary of a digital fly-through of the lower Ouse valley showing how it would look with higher sea levels in their lifetime.



This can be seen, alongside further information about the RATS work, on the first floor of the Linklater Pavilion as part of the Festival. As well as the young people, RATS has been supported voluntarily by teachers Cath Cardin from Kings Academy Ringmer and Lawrence Quinn from Priory, and Chris Janes, Flood Resilience Engagement Advisor at the Environment Agency who said, *'I have been so impressed at the dedication, hard work and enthusiasm of these young people'*.

Graham Festenstein observed, *'I'm really pleased to have an opportunity to be working with the RATS and to help them to promote these important issues. This year's LewesLight explores environmental themes including sea level rise due to global warming and climate change and the RATS have contributed significantly to some of our work'*.



Dr John Parry

LewesLight 2020

LewesLight
Festival of Light 2020

Friday February 28th
to Sunday March 1st
6pm - 9.30pm

www.leweslight.co.uk

LewesLight acknowledges the financial support of Lewes Town Council, The Rowland Family Foundation & The Sachs Trust Fund at the Sussex Community Foundation

Supported by:
Lewes District Council
VISIT LEWES
Arts Council England
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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Unlike other events of its kind, LewesLight is design led, and this year the installations are site specific, taking inspiration from the town.

There will be 18 sites in all, some very small, some colourful and some dynamic with moving images.

In addition to the major site on the Railway Land, other Festival sites include The Depot, Grange Gardens, the Pells area and South Malling, all in Lewes.

In a departure from previous years, there will not be guided tours. Instead, the Festival will focus on individual site specific installations. Says Graham, 'This year most of the installations will be best viewed close up - the nature of the theme and the scale and intimacy of the installations makes them best appreciated from near by.'

These works of art are free to visit and view – individuals are able to approach and enjoy the displays as they open in the evenings, and there will be stewards on hand to explain the works in more detail.

Jackie Ralph



**Families enjoying our
Annual Tree Day in
December 2019**



New Trustees

We are very happy to welcome two new Trustees to our Board – Toni Scarr and Natalie White.

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.



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.



Education News February 2020

Although a slightly quieter time of year since our last newsletter, there has still been plenty going on with our education work here at the Railway Land.

Early in the autumn term, Year 6 pupils from all Lewes schools returned as part of the 4 6 8 Project to investigate the questions of “what nature does for us”, and “what we can do for it”; very topical given the steep rise in awareness of climate and other environmental issues in recent times. Planning for the pilot run of the Year 8 visits will be happening over the next few months.

Among the other schools' visits, one chose to look at decomposition and recycling in nature; very relevant for the autumn! We also welcomed pupils on a geography themed day, who visited via a group aiming to encourage pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in future study at university, and we look forward to working with them again.

A key aspect of our education work is continuing to ensure we are offering teachers a choice of sessions that wholly support them in delivering the national curriculum. Over the winter, our sessions have been re-vamped, and their links with the national curriculum have been strengthened and made clearer. These links are now available on the education pages of the website.

The autumn also saw us being successful in securing a small grant from the Active Access for Growth Fund. Capitalising on our obvious transport links, our 'Up River' Project combined the fund's aim of encouraging sustainable active travel (in this case train and walking), with our own education aims, allowing us to offer fully funded sessions to explore the nature reserve and wider Ouse valley. These were offered to schools from the Newhaven and Seaford areas. A big thank you also to Catherine Simmons of the Sussex Community Rail Partnership whose train safety workshops formed a natural partner to this project.

Education Volunteers Needed

In all of our education work, volunteers are a vital part of our success. We would welcome hearing from anyone who would like to volunteer with us. If you have experience in education, or if you are keen to gain environmental education experience, please do be in contact. Our busy education program involves working with schools on curriculum and wider enrichment activities, full training and support will be given depending on need. Whilst we are on the subject, our current education volunteers bring a huge amount of knowledge and enthusiasm to the work of the RLWT: A huge 'Thank You' to those who have helped out with our education sessions over the past year!

Milly Hawkins

An appreciation of two ‘Stalwarts’ of the RLWT

Jean Heywood: volunteer and generous friend of the RLWT



The last part of Jean’s long life was spent in Lewes, in the “best flat in Greyfriars’ Court” as she often described it, overlooking the River Ouse and the Lewes Railway Land Nature Reserve. Jean said she was very happy and lucky to have moved here. Jean loved the Railway Land and made it an important part of her Lewes life. She contributed in so many ways, including volunteering on Sunday afternoons in the summer, when the Pavilion was open to visitors, showing what the Railway Land had to offer.

From the right: Jean, Jenifer Barton, Jan and Tony Pepler on a sunny Sunday afternoon opening

She was a member of “the three Js” with Jenifer Barton and Jan Osborne, one of several teams making a survey of the Railway Land flora. Jean organised the other Js from her buggy, advising and keeping records of their finds. She loved to visit the nature reserve and enjoyed seeing the changing seasons, up to her last summer. She delighted in taking visitors there and especially loved sending her youngest family members out to play in her favourite place in Lewes. Jean bought two electric vehicles specifically to fit in the Linklater lift; so she could sing with her beloved acapella group ‘Angels with Attitude’. She treasured her time with Angels and enjoyed busking and performances on the Railway Land at the summer Festivals.

Barbara Cummins Oct 2019

Caroline Kenward, volunteer, photographer and long time supporter of the RLWT



Among Caroline’s many talents was photography, and we first met ‘properly’ when she entered some stunning black and white images of the reserve into our first photographic competition.

Caroline had a great eye, and the skill to develop her images. Thereafter she volunteered with various projects, including supporting the Nature Corridors group, but particularly the Sunday afternoon openings with a regular group of volunteers.

Caroline could talk with anyone, and had the ability to enthuse about the reserve, the flora and fauna, the local history and the many examples of sustainability built into the Linklater. She was good fun, and livened up a grey quiet Sunday afternoon with a fund of observations.

Above: Caroline discussing the Linklater’s geological walls with Professor Rory Mortimore

Pat Rigg January 2020

LDC Specialist Advisor's Reflections

The expression 'Water, water everywhere...' from The Rime of the Ancient Mariner surges into mind. As nature intended, the Railway Land has responded accordingly, by flooding its plains after what feels like, the unrelenting precipitation of the last few months.



The incredibly beautiful submerged Winterbourne Stream and wet meadows December 2020 © LDC

The Reserve's dynamic riverine, hydrological system, comprising of alluvial, soft silty clays, gravels, peat and chalk, entirely shapes its beauty and character, affording us the absolute privilege of the distinctive wetland meadows, wet woodland and reedbed habitats.

The landscape in and around the River Ouse and Winterbourne Stream would have historically been very marshy, prior to our engineering of flood embankments and drainage interventions. LiDAR maps of the wet meadows, which comprise of a clever survey method that measures distance and land levels by illumination with laser light, gives a hint to the historic intertidal creek complex that used to exist - criss-crossing the whole floodplain area like a snail trail glistening in first light over garden paths! The present manmade drainage ditch grid-system that we look upon today was created to allow for grazing, but hopefully one day we can help it once again revert back into a more naturalistic or wild area.

On a very sad note, you may be aware that tragically we have had two swan attacks on the wet meadows in December and January. We have spoken at length with the dog owner of the latest attack, which resulted in the fatality of the swan, and they are really distressed and upset by the whole, needless result. In light of this, it is a good opportunity to stress the importance to all dog owners of remembering that dogs do have an inbuilt instinct to chase and attack other animals, and so to avoid this being repeated in the future, PLEASE , PLEASE, PLEASE can dogs be kept on leads within the wet meadows, so as to allow wildlife the chance to remain undisturbed.



Swan attack aftermath wet meadows Jan 2020 © LDC



On a much happier note, with the help of Audrey and Nick Jarvis from Lewes Tree Committee, and the helping hands of the forest school groups from Priory School, and the Talking Tree tots, we have been very busy planting out approximately 200 native tree whips, donated for free from the Woodland Trust, along the rail line boundary.

I can't wait to see them flourish into thick bushy food and shelter for bees, birds and bats alike in the seasons and years to come.



Tree planting triumph Nov 2019 © LDC

The Egrets Way path way is now complete, along with the Environment Agency's essential repair works of the sluice gate after a lengthy slog. The heavy rainfall and boggy ground conditions placed plenty of additional challenges to the works, causing them to overrun. The areas tracked over were heavily churned up, but will recover, especially with a little TLC from our ever-so-dedicated volunteer groups including the RLWT Wellbeing group, Wild Flower Lewes, and our Meadow Minders. We already have plans to sow native wildflowers, alongside looking at test areas to see what naturally re-generates.

Hopefully everyone will be pleased to see the new 'on the go' recycling bin at the front entrance, which now replaces its broken Leaning Tower of Pisa predecessor. A new metal bin has also been installed next to the circular bench, in the hope that this will stop the constant littering blight we have here - Fingers crossed! Here's to a cleaner and greener year ahead.

Kim Dawson
LDC Specialist Advisor.

Newsletter 100 !

I took on editing the RLWT newsletter at 'Number 8'. It was a four page 'cut and paste job' using original photos stuck on a print out of the text laid out in three columns to look like a newspaper. The newsletters have been hand delivered by myself and a trusty team from all over town, but gradually, as more members went digital, the distribution was mainly by mailshot. I want to thank the many people who have contributed such informative articles about their participation in the work of the Trust, and helped to make it a real pleasure to publish 92 editions.



Pat Rigg, Editor

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