

Railway Land Wildlife Trust



February 2012
Edition No. 74

www.railwaylandproject.org
Registered Charity No. 800655

Editorial

This newsletter is packed with information about recent activities on the Reserve and in the Linklater, showing our capacity to attract members, supporters, visitors and volunteers all year round! Our current exhibition, Railway Land Images 2012 closes at 3pm on Sunday 19th February. It has already attracted a steady flow of visitors, many of whom are keen amateur photographers, and we intend to hold a similar event annually. We are very grateful to H A Baker and Buckland Photographic for sponsoring the competition. We are delighted by the quality and variety of images submitted in all the categories, and by the enthusiastic response of visitors.



Junior Film Club members gather to walk the Reserve before the showing of 'Ring of Bright Water' at All Saints.



The next public event is the **AGM**, featuring short presentations from our Director, John Parry. and Dan Ross, LDC Ranger, followed by a question and answer session. Please put the **23rd March** date in your diary, the meeting will start at 7.30pm.

Left: Delegates from a conference about educational projects in Madagascar visit the Linklater and Reserve with Professor Alison Jolly in late January. The RLWT is keen to forge links with environmental education projects in other countries

Annual Membership

There are 312 households that receive our Newsletter, a very large number do so by email. This saves the Trust a lot of money, both for postage and for printing costs. The newsletters are also, of course, seen in glorious colour!

It is now time to renew your membership so please consider whether you could receive this publication by email. Currently we have 44 households who use a standing order to renew their membership. If you would like to do so please use the emailed form sent with this edition of the Newsletter. If you receive a hard copy of the newsletter you will find a SO form printed on the back page as well as the usual renewal form. Annual membership remains at £10 per household.

Pat Rigg

Director's report



John Parry clears a path for the opening of the 'Railway Land Images 2012' exhibition on Sunday 5th February

It hardly seems possible but it is 25 years since the start of the campaign to create an open space on the former railway sidings of Lewes. Credit should go to Cyril Mann of Lewes District Council who saw the opportunity for a public open space which was subsequently refined by Peter Linklater, with enthusiastic activity from John Chaplin and Elizabeth Howard, to lay the foundations for a Local Nature Reserve with a strong educational remit – which was my little bit. And what a story of progress it has been with support for such a vision from so many local people in so many different ways.

This is surely something to celebrate and so we are going to run a Festival for the afternoon of Saturday 2nd June 2012 to acknowledge those 25 years of establishing the Railway Land as a community open space. We are joining forces with Lewes District Council and will have performers, workshops, food stalls, a puppet theatre and live acoustic music.

The Festival will explore different themes such as wildlife, sustainability, water, waste, soil, climate and recreation in surprising and entertaining ways and will especially look at the notion of eco-system services that we are calling 'Naturegain - what nature does for us and how we can help'.

One of the core activities will be the encouragement of members and other visitors to bring photos and memories of the Railway Land site around 1987 as we want to explore the economic, social and environmental drivers of 25 years ago and use these as a basis for projecting forward 25 years as a community visioning exercise - all as part of our remit as a centre for the study of environmental change.

However, sending memories or photos in advance would be even better and can be delivered by hand to Trevor Watson at Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes – all photos will be scanned and returned. Alternatively, contributions can be e-mailed to us at festival@railwaylandproject.org. Do get in touch if you have particular memories of the site round about 1987 - just as we were coming out of a previous recession!

Much planning is going into this event so do please put the date in your diary – the afternoon of 2nd June.

On another tack, we are delighted that Geoff Bush has very kindly agreed to help set up and run a volunteer group for our Sunday afternoon openings of the Undercroft from May – September. Displays are gradually taking shape and there will be much to share with visitors and we are planning a short training session from 3 – 4 pm on **Sunday 29th April**.

Our aim is to establish a core group of 40 people who may be prepared to give a Sunday afternoon or two through the summer so if you know anyone who may be interested (we have about 15 people so far) or if you would like to put your own name forward then do please get in touch with Geoff Bush at:

g_bush@sky.com

or contact me or Pat Rigg at:

info@railwaylandproject.org

or leave a message on 01273 471332.

Finally, a big thank you to Geoff, David Bradford and Pat Rigg for organising and displaying the February photographic exhibition and competition which attracted 66 entries and 72 visitors on the first day to much delight and acclaim.

John Parry



Sunday Openings in 2011, with volunteers, Jean Heywood and Lesley Healey



Geoff Bush sorts the competition entries & David Bradford reframes his iconic marsh frog image

NOTICE
Annual General Meeting of The Railway Land Wildlife Trust
Friday 23rd March 2012 at the Linklater Pavilion

- 7.00pm – hospitality, everyone welcome
7.30pm - 1. Welcome from the Chairs of the Trustee Committee
2. Short presentations and Q&A session - by Dr John Parry and Dan Ross
3. AGM

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
 2. Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 15 April 2011
 3. Matters Arising
 4. Annual Report and Accounts year ending 31 October 2011
 5. Election of Members of the Management Committee.
- Under our Articles of Association half the Members have to retire each year and any Members joining since the last AGM are also obliged to retire. All are able to offer themselves for re-election. Those retiring this year are Ruth O'Keefe, Alister Scott, Jenifer Barton, Roger Beasley, David Sykes and Alison Lawfield
6. Appointment of Auditor
 7. Any Other Business

Please bring this publication to the meeting as it includes the Minutes of the last AGM and the Annual Report for the year ending 31 October 2011. Copies of the financial statements and accompanying notes will be made available at the meeting – see note below.

Gift Aid forms will be available and Annual Subscriptions can be renewed before and after the meeting.

Annual Accounts

It would be normal to include a Statement of Financial Activities and Balance Sheet for the Trust with this notification. However, as these are not yet back from the auditors we propose to circulate copies at the meeting once they have been approved by Trustees. If any member would like advance sight of these documents please let me know and I will make arrangements for you to receive them as soon as we have them to hand.

Alison Lawfield, Company Secretary arb@brewers.co.uk; or 07885 409341

RLWT Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, Friday April 15th 2011 in the Linklater Pavilion, 7.30pm. Chaired by Alison Lawfield, Company Secretary.

Apologies: B Cramp, D Ross, R & D Hutchinson, T Tyrrell, S & J Baksi, G Vines, F Price, M Dale, C Newitt, L Mercer, M Marwood, J Barton, D Sykes.

Present: 30 members

1. Minutes of meeting 16th April 2010: These were approved as a true record and adoption was proposed by Jon Gunson and seconded by Tessa George. Heartfelt thanks were expressed for Jenifer Barton's excellent minutes of this and many other meetings
2. Annual report: This was compiled by Pat Rigg and covers the year to 1st November 2010. The core report was published in the February Newsletter. An expanded version, amended by Alison Lawfield and John Parry, was tabled at this meeting in order to meet the requirements of Companies House and the audit. Pat was warmly thanked for this document which summarises

the many aspects of the Trust's work.

3. Financial Report and Accounts year ending 31st October 2010: The treasurer Tessa George explained aspects of the accounts, they had to be audited this year because of our increased income. Adoption of the accounts was proposed by Neil Merchant and seconded by Graham Shuttleworth, and unanimously passed. Tessa was thanked most deservedly for her hard work in compiling them.

4. Election of the Management Committee: The Company Secretary, Alison Lawfield, explained that under our Articles of Association half the members have to retire each year. Any members joining during the year since the last AGM are obliged to retire. All are able to offer themselves for re-election. Jean Cash stood down as she joined us during the year, with Tessa George, Jon Gunson, Chris lent, Neil Merchant and Pat Rigg. The re-election of Jean Cash was proposed by Lesley Healey and seconded by Rosemary MacQueen. The re-election of the other five members standing down was unchallenged and Alison acknowledged the huge contribution they and Jean Cash have made to the work of the Committee. She then thanked Jane McIntosh who is leaving the Committee due to her increased workload for another voluntary organisation. Her work as Company Secretary and with the Nature Corridors team were particularly appreciated.

5. Appointment of Auditor: Richard Maxwell Gumbleton was unanimously elected.

6. AOB: The Company Secretary is working on the Trust's Memorandum of Understanding and Articles of Association following the requirements of the Companies Act. The re-written version will be shared with members in due course. Graham Shuttleworth thanked the Trustees and John Parry for all their hard work during the past year.

Minutes taken by Jane McIntosh

Results of Firewalk Challenge Draw: 1574, Nina (Steve from Viva Lewes), 0239 Nick Pennock, 1595 Tarara Sacks, 0398 Ashley Tayna, Robert Cash, 0791 Wenda Bradley, 1643 Jane Valery, 1604 Lawrence Buckingham, 0797 P Tilley, 0406 Beryl Bradley

THE RAILWAY LAND WILDLIFE TRUST LTD

Registered number 02313579 Charity Number: 800655

TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT For the year ended 31st October 2011

The trustees, who are also directors of the charity for the purposes of the Companies Act, submit their annual report and the independently examined financial statements for the year ended 31st October 2011. The trustees have adopted the provisions of the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) "Accounting and Reporting by Charities" issued in 2005 in preparing the annual report and financial statements for the charity.

Directors and Trustees

The Directors of the charitable company (the Charity) are its Trustees for the purposes of charity law and throughout this report are collectively referred to as Trustees.

The elected Trustees serving during the year and since the year end were as follows:-

Jenifer Barton

Roger Beasley

Andy Bradley appointed joint Chairman October 2011

Jean Cash

Teresa George

Jon Gunson

Chris lent

Alison Lawfield Company Secretary

Neil Merchant
Ruth O’Keefe appointed May 2011
Patricia Rigg
Alister Scott appointed October 2011 and Joint Chairman October 2011
David Sykes

Independent Auditors

Maxwell-Gumbleton and Co
1 West Street
Lewes
East Sussex BN7 2NZ

Registered Address

27 King Henry’s Road
Lewes
East Sussex BN7 1BY

Structure Governance and Management Governing Document

The Railway Land Wildlife Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act and is governed by a memorandum and articles of association dated 4th November 1988.

Recruitment and appointment of Trustees

In accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association Trustees are elected by the Membership. Half of the Trustees are required to retire annually by rotation and may offer themselves for re-election. Any Trustees co-opted by the Trustee Board during the year are required to stand for re-election at the next Annual General Meeting (AGM). When considering co-opting, the Trustee Board has regard to the requirements for any specialist skills needed. During 2011 we welcomed Ruth O’Keefe and Alister Scott to the Trustee Board.

Organisation

The Railway Land Wildlife Trust is governed by a Trustee Board which is responsible for setting policies and ensuring legality and good practice in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust and Charities Act 2006. Authority was delegated to the Pavilion Operation Sustainability Team (POST) sub-committee in respect of the building project but as this is complete the group is now disbanded.

Risk Management

The Trustees have a risk strategy in place which comprises an

- Annual review of the risks the charity may face
- The establishment of systems and procedures to mitigate against those risks identified in each review
- The implementation of procedures designed to prevent any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise.

Objectives and Activities and Performance

The objects of the charity are to:-

1. Record, study, conserve improve and create for the benefit of the public, places of natural scientific interest and in particular of arboricultural, botanical, entomological, geological, ornithological, archaeological and zoological interest and to protect the flora and fauna of such places
2. To promote, organise, conduct and encourage study and research for the increase of knowledge in the natural sciences and to publish the useful results of such study and research
3. To advance the education of the public in:
 - a. The natural sciences and in particular arboriculture botany entomology, geology,

ornithology, archaeology and zoology; and

b. The employment of the natural resources of land in craft work

4. To provide or assist in the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation for the benefit of the public at large.

Membership and Public Awareness

We have a membership of 312 households who receive 4 Newsletters a year which can be found at <http://railwaylandproject.org/Newsletter%20home>.

These newsletters provide not only editorial and notification of future events but a regular insight into the work of the Trust in the Linklater and importantly to work on the nature reserve itself with reports from the Community Ranger, Dan Ross; the bird group; the meadow minders group and opportunities to be involved.

We are developing relationships with local media regularly getting editorial coverage of events at the Linklater and on the reserve.

Volunteers

The Trustees are proud to have kept the administrative expenses to a minimum due to the huge amount of voluntary work and support give by the Trustees and members to the many projects.

Activities in 2010/2011

The emphasis on activities on the reserve and in the Linklater is very much focused around the objectives of the Trust and importantly inclusion.

Linklater Pavilion Project

The building was formerly opened by 17 people representing different groups and aspirations in Lewes and the Ouse valley on 16th October 2010.

- From May – September 2011 we opened the Undercroft to the public free of charge every Sunday afternoon from 2 – 5p.m. This initiative was run by volunteers and attracted an average of 30 people an afternoon. Visitors were encouraged to report sightings on the reserve, particularly birds and volunteers were able to answer questions about the project and future developments. The Linklater first floor was also open to the public free of charge from 1000 - 1500 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

- During the year we held or hosted:

- 19 days devoted to schools or environmental education teacher training workshops of which 5 were free

- 57 social group meetings from diverse groups such as Sustainable Sussex Business Forum to a outdoor nursery play group of which 7 were free

- 59 regular evening group events such as a community choir and a print making group

- 3 Away Day groups such as a binocular fair

- 5 local government or national park workshops or gatherings

- 7 sponsor events or entertainment

- 22 days of exhibitions or festivals of which 4 were free

- 10 days of adult education courses of which 2 were free

Exhibitions

- A free art exhibition by Lil Tudor Craig attracted 900 visitors over two weeks in November 2010 *

- A school's free art exhibition attracted 50 people over 3 days

- We were open for free entry for 4 days as part of the Lewes Heritage Trail

- We were open for 4 days of Lewes Artwave which gave free entry to over 500 people in 4 days.

Linklater Bee project

We worked with the University of Sussex to provide a free resource in the form of a honey bee observation hive opened at a ceremony, 'Bee the Buzz', for 70 people and visited by over 100 people on our open Sundays. This is an ongoing project and this year children from the local

secondary school focused on the bees producing some exciting artwork during their week at the Linklater in the summer.

Participants - The Trust has successfully bid for an East Sussex County Council Commissioning Grant – Prospectus for Health, Social Care and Wellbeing – over 3 years. This guarantees the continuity of the ground breaking approach to working with the Nature Corridors group of adults with learning disabilities. It will also allow opportunities to bring in professionals with expertise in specific areas identified by the participants themselves – currently mosaics and soon to be working with the hazel now ready to harvest on the reserve.

Junior Management Board: This group made up of children aged 8 – 11 met three times during the year and one of their projects was to design artwork for display on the nature reserve to encourage dog walkers to pick up their dog's mess.

Through all the above activities the Trustees are confident that they have fulfilled the charity's aims regarding public education and through the Linklater Pavilion are providing an inclusive and much needed resource for the public benefit of the people of Lewes and the Ouse valley.

Our Strategy regarding public benefit:

We are operating a multi-level social enterprise in which we are encouraging opportunities for public benefit to appear and emerge in different and unexpected ways. For example, a local artist's exhibition led to a workshop demonstration of screen printing for a group of adults with learning disabilities. A print making group are going to produce an illustrated book on the land which will inspire people to understand more about it and care for it. A photographic competition we ran has been so successful that there have been requests to make it an annual event.

Our strategy is both to engender such opportunities and to be alert to realising them.

Financial Review

Having successfully completed the building project at the end of the last financial year and begun the fit out this has been an ongoing process through 2011.

Costs have been carefully managed in a number of ways including tight management of cash flow; the generosity of time and expertise from a tireless group of volunteers led by David Sykes delivering amongst other things - the kitchen, offices, storage, external pathways and floor to the undercroft. Careful planning around the use of the building and the resulting income is supporting the cleaning; overheads and maintenance.

We are fortunate to have received a number of generous donations for specific elements of the building which have allowed us to purchase the folding door configuration giving us ongoing more flexible use of the space; clad the external ground floor in the rocks which will in time be a source of environmental study and experiment; purchase equipment to support the research with the bees and other educational studies; complete the water tank experimental area in the undercroft. Specific events organised by Trustees have both raised our profile locally and supported the cash flow, particularly:

- The firewalk in April – a huge success with particular thanks to the energy and commitment of Jean Cash for making it happen together with the brave walkers and their sponsors
- Public entertainment events – a comedy evening in the spring with Simon Evans and the Month of Sunday events towards the end of the year on a range of subjects from music to poetry and nature.

The Trust moves into 2011/12 in a positive cash position with partnerships continuing with Sussex Wildlife Trust and a local secondary school. Given the uncertain economic outlook careful cost management is vital for future sustainability and in 2011/12 our focus will be on our objectives but keeping the growth of the work of the Trust within manageable limits.



'Railway Land Images 2012' Photo Competition: Adult winners, clockwise from the top: Steve Homewood, 'Grass Snake: Susan Burrell, 'Come to Mummy' : Simon Crummay, 'Pavilion Steel': Caroline Kenward 'Flooded Winterbourne'



Children and teenagers winners, clockwise: Francesca Hughes, 'Teasels': Jane Simmons. 'Railway Land Entrance': Patrick Wells, 'Matching trees': Esther Allen, 'Frosted foliage': Lola Thomas, 'Eerie Winterbourne': Joe Rideout, 'Linklater Ladybird'

Railway Land Ranger Winter Report

We have now completed much of our winter habitat management work on the Railway Land Local Nature Reserve. Throughout the season we have worked in all of the habitats on site including our woodland, ponds, reedbed, sidings, and meadows.

Within our woodland we have recently carried out works to clear up storm damage, as well as clearing dead branches overhanging footpaths. We have begun our hazel coppicing work, within the small hazel coppice area near to Leighside House, working with the Forest Schools programme and the adults with learning difficulties from the Nature Corridors for All project. The cut hazel is being used in craft making activities.

We have cleared overgrowth from in and around Leighside pond, weeding round the young hazel trees planted two years ago around the pond. The hawthorn and hazel hedge also planted two years ago fringing Leighside Pond is doing really well, and providing a good screen from the road. Within the sidings, annual scrub clearing work took place in October 2011, and several small glades have been created within the old allotment area, to the east of the old sidings.

We are currently carrying out small scale hawthorn tree planting near to the Linklater, as part of efforts to help soften the landscaping around the building, and provide native fruiting plants for local birdlife. We will shortly be carrying out some extensive pollarding and coppicing of crack willows fringing the Winterbourne stream. This is part of our regular management of the willows near to footpaths.

The Winterbourne Stream, the lifeblood of the Railway Land, has failed to flow in 2011/12, and it is predicted by the Environment Agency, that there will not be any flow until next winter due to low ground water levels in the aquifer. This is significant as the Winterbourne feeds our wet woodland habitat, and tops up our reedbed and ponds during high flow conditions. The Environment Agency (EA) and Southern Water are researching flow in the Winterbourne catchment, and we are in discussions with the EA as to how that research could benefit our work at Lewes Railway Land.

We have cleared overgrowth from the ditches in the northern meadows, working with our Meadow Minders group. Within the reedbed, we have completed willow tree removal and reed thinning from ditches, and are working with our bird group volunteers to site kingfisher posts in select locations. In the next few weeks, we will begin work to re-surface large sections of our stone footpaths, in order to improve the quality for wheel chair and push chair users. This is a special project, jointly funded by Lewes District Council and the South Downs National Park Authority. We have commissioned some rustic green oak log benches, which will replace the three existing (now rotten) log benches along the surfaced footpath. These are made by a local carpenter specialising in green oak products from local sustainable oak.

Our Higher Level Stewardship funding has paid for a number of new bird boxes, which our bird group volunteers have been installing as part of their bird box mapping and management programme (there is more detail on this work on page 15-16)

We are continuing to work with the RLWT to prepare for the Railway Land Festival to be held on the 2nd June 2012, which is shaping up to be an fantastic event. There will be much more detail to follow in the next issue.

By way of a polite reminder to the public, we are installing signage throughout the Railway Land meadows requesting that people stick to the footpaths. We need to remind walkers that the meadows are privately owned, and that access is permissive, and by good will of the land owners, who only request that walkers stick to the footpaths, and keep dogs under control at all times. In winter, there are many wetland birds who are easily scared off by dogs, and during summer the site is grazed with cattle, so dog control is essential at all times. Dan Ross, February 2012.

Minders Programme

Our thanks to Jon Gunson who leads the monthly 'Minders' conservation group. This is their programme of activities. Come along and join in at 1.30pm for some fun and healthy exercise.

Sunday March 4th

Tasks: Buddleia bank weeding, and entrance area shrub bed maintenance

Leader: Jon Gunson & Thyone Outram

Sunday April 1st

Tasks: Maintenance of infrastructure, including maintaining steps and bridges.

Leader: Jon Gunson & Dan Ross

Sunday May 6th

Tasks: site furniture maintenance, including signs and gates.

Leader: Jon Gunson & Thyone Outram

Sunday June 3rd

Tasks: reedbed management including reed channel maintenance

Leader: Jon Gunson & Dan Ross

Sunday July 1st

Tasks: Footpath and hedgerow maintenance and pruning

Leader: Jon Gunson & Thyone Outram

Sunday August 5th

Task: Ragwort control, and bramble thinning in sidings and meadows

Followed by Annual Meadow Minders BBQ – social event in the Pavilion Undercroft from 4:pm

Task leader: Jon Gunson & Dan Ross

Everyone welcome, tools provided. Please bring stout footwear and appropriate outdoor clothing. Contact Jon Gunson on 01273 473262 or e-mail jon.gunson@hotmail.co.uk for more information. NB: All tasks are weather dependant.

Pre-Christmas fun with NC4All

Trustees joined the NC4All group for a festive lunch on the 20th December. Live music was provided by John, a good spread of food and soft drinks was brought to share, and a rather recognisable Father Christmas dropped by with cards. This event marked the end of the first full year of the Linklater as a hub for all our activities.



Education moves

I have deliberately worked a slow and steady approach to schools and the curriculum – they are both busy and full and the worst thing you can do is rush in – far better to build trust and lasting relationships rather than throwing together fly by night programmes that wither on the vine.

Our contract with Priory School is a good example and we are now developing a series of approaches with staff and the senior management team. For example, a physics group are starting work on building a model to explain the ground source heat pump. I shall shortly be talking to the English department about a 25th anniversary leaflet of the founding of the Trust in 1988. I also hope to talk to the music and drama department in the near future. Meanwhile, I am working with my University teacher training colleagues on a week of activities in May for Priory pupils – these activities range from colours in nature and how we think birds and bees see the world to energy flows and a sustainability role-playing game led by the Science teacher trainees. It promises to be a fascinating week and the results will feed into our 2nd June Festival which in itself will yield interesting environmental educational material as we look both back and forwards 25 years.

As for the Primary schools, we recently put on a free twilight session called Eco Island led by Sharon Ginnis which although attended by just a few, proved to be a powerful and interesting introduction to environmental issues as the teachers were shown ways of building up an imaginary environmentally sensitive island with their pupils. I am hopeful that this may lead to visits to the Railway Land where we will build on what pupils have done at school through the idea of Naturegain – of looking at what Nature does for us and how we can help.



The photos show Sharon and the island map that had been assembled by the teachers as well as the effect of a simple gown in role play to help become an 'elder' leading a debate on rules for the emerging island society that the children have built for themselves.

On 20th February, I shall be running two taster sessions for 30 teachers from our 6 local Primary schools to show them what we can offer and how we would like to collaborate as partners – in the same way that we are doing with Priory. This steady, deliberate, caring, sensitive approach is, I believe, the right way forward and is backed by much research that warns of the negative effects of frightening children about their futures or dictating to them how they should live their lives. We model, we share, we guide, we collaborate, we work from their position not ours and above all, we don't preach.

Finally, I am delighted to say that our approach is being adopted by a group of Madagascar teachers and researchers based on a sacred, untouched wildlife site near their capital. We shall be supporting them and I will write more about this in the summer.

My purpose in writing this is to assure members that I am steadily putting into place the building blocks of our educational approach – firm blocks built on solid research and experience on which, in due course, others will build.

John Parry

CONSERVATION, POLITICS AND FUZZY LEMURS - A Madagascar Tale

On Sunday 27th November Alison Jolly - with promptings from her husband in the front row - gave a fascinating insight to her experiences in Madagascar, having just returned from there.

Her photographs were very revealing and Dr Jolly explained the current political and economic situation in Madagascar and the effects on wildlife and conservation very clearly. Dr Jolly is a Visiting Fellow of Sussex University and an expert on lemurs. She has written several books on her experiences and research, including **Lords & Lemurs**, a popular account of Berenty's history; **Lucy's Legacy**, which offers a unique take on the sociobiology of humans; **Ringtailed Lemur Biology**; and two children's books, **Ako the Aye-Aye** and **Bitika the Mouselemur**.

Dr Jolly has conducted extensive fieldwork on Lemurs in Madagascar, primarily at the Berenty Reserve, a small private reserve of gallery forest set in the semi-arid spiny desert area in the far south of Madagascar. She has received many awards for her research and conservation work, but one of her dearest distinctions came in 2006 when a new species of mouse lemur (*Microcebus jollyae*) was named in her honour.

Dr Jolly began studying lemur behavior at Berenty in 1963. Since 1990 she has returned for every birthing season to carry out research assisted by student volunteers. She has focused on the ringtailed lemur, its demography, ranging, and especially inter-troop and territorial behaviour, in the context of the fivefold difference in population density recorded from the front to the back of the reserve.

The talk was very well attended and the discussion time revealed a number of other people in the audience who had also either visited or worked in Madagascar so the topics were developed in an interesting, enlightened and far-ranging way.

Dr Jolly and her husband have been staunch supporters of the RLWT projects, including the building of the Linklater and they were keen to provide the basis for one of our fundraising events. The evening raised £304 - so our grateful thanks for a fact-filled evening that helped us focus on the environment in another part of the world and created a meaningful link for the Trust.

Chris lent, Trustee

'Berenty is not just private, but exceptional in all ways--owned by a family who have supported conservation through three generations. Good management doesn't come from whether a place is public or private, it comes from vision, adequate funding, and courage.' A Jolly

photo © wildmadagascar.org



Bird Report, Winter 2011

Finches are colourful, insect and seed-eating birds. They have short strong bills with which they can crack open beech-masts, extract seeds from teasels and thistles and nibble peanuts and sunflower seeds in a garden bird-feeder. Three species of Finch are to be seen and heard on the Railway Land.



There are always Chaffinches around. It is the commonest finch in the UK and second only to Wrens as top UK breeding bird. What Chaffinches enjoy best is the plentiful habitats of hedges and woodland, finding their favourite nibbles there, including caterpillars, chickweed and grasses. We expect to see them all winter too, flocking in their 'gangs' of males and, separately, the females, before they pair up for the breeding season.

It is because of the males' behaviour in forming single sex flocks that their Linnean name is *Fringilla coelebs* – the bachelor finch. How appropriate!

Male Chaffinch (©RSPB)



Greenfinches favour the old allotments and a few are usually to be seen there, perching high up on a bare tree, or passing over with their characteristic undulating flight. Sometimes small flocks can be seen in Sussex, flocks that come down from Scotland and northern England during the winter. We certainly have some of the seeds that they like, such as yew and bramble, but flocks of greenfinches have not been recorded on the Railway Land this winter.

Male Greenfinch (©RSPB)

The most handsome of our three common finches is undoubtedly the delicate, showy Goldfinch. Just as flocks of Greenfinches move to southern England during the winter months, our home-grown Goldfinches may themselves move even further south, many females wintering in France and Spain. Yet still we have plenty of these colourful fellows left, flocking to the seed heads on open land.



Male Goldfinch (©RSPB)

According to the RSPB, numbers of all three finches have increased in the UK, little by little, over recent years. However there is some setback - trichomonosis, the parasite-induced disease that has spread across UK over the past five years. Our own records are fairly consistent; all three species of finch seen on nearly every survey but not in large numbers and, in fact, the Greenfinches were not seen at all on the November surveys in 2011. We can't help but wonder whether some of our own birds are being affected by trichomonosis. Greenfinch is the species most frequently reported as having the disease, but other finches and house sparrows are also susceptible. The trichomonad parasite lives in the upper digestive tract of the bird, and its actions progressively block the bird's throat, making it unable to swallow food. The bird dies from starvation. Unfortunate though it is, this is a disease found only in birds - it does not pose a threat to the health of humans, cats or dogs.

As 2011 drew to a close with a damp, mild and blustery December, many other birds were here to delight us. The Little Egret, Great-Spotted Woodpecker, Tree creeper and Goldcrests



were all present on the Railway Land and there was a rare appearance of a Goosander on the river. From a little way down the river came reports of Common Sandpipers, Redshank, a possible Water Rail, and, of course, the enchanting Short-eared Owls on the water meadows of Rodmell.

Goosander and Mallard (©Richard Stanyer)

Bird Group Report compiled by Christine Roach

Nest Boxes

Each winter, the RLWT bird group carries out a program of cleaning, replacing and/or adding nest boxes on the reserve. We clean them for three main reasons: firstly to see which boxes need replacing or repairing, secondly to reduce disease by getting rid of parasites that linger in the nest materials, and thirdly so we can tell if they've been used the previous season. This year, we found that just about every box had been used in 2011, which is encouraging information.

Nest boxes seem to last about 5-10 years before they rot away, although woodpecker boxes in particular seem vulnerable to attack by squirrels, who chew their way in: they include both eggs and young in their diets. The smaller boxes also sometimes get occupied by woodpeckers, who either enlarge the hole or make a new one: there's a box on a tree just past the Winterbourne sluice flap which has a metal-plated blue tit-sized hole in the front and a larger woodpecker hole in the side. It's on the list for replacement soon!



We've just about completed this year's work, which is just as well since, with the warm winter, it won't be too long before nesting starts (not that they need nest boxes, nor are they actually on the reserve, but ravens are already – in late-January – starting nesting on the chalk cliffs opposite the Meadows). As they get in the mood, birds suddenly start moving around with more urgency and purpose, exploring nest sites and establishing or defending territories.

We've put up some 15 new boxes, 10 funded by LDC from a Countryside Stewardship grant and 5 made by Brian Walter, a long-time stalwart of the group. Some of these have replaced boxes that were rotting away, some were additional, and we made a conscious effort to locate them in new sites on the reserve: most have historically been in the wooded areas near the Linklater Pavilion.

There are now some 35 boxes on the reserve, catering for blue and great tits, robins, wrens and great spotted & green woodpeckers. These are the species commonly found on the reserve that benefit most from boxes, although we do plan some house sparrow boxes in future, both on the Linklater Pavilion and in the reserve. House sparrows are a species in serious decline, for reasons



that are not well understood, and encouraging a population on the reserve is one of our goals. Tree creeper is another species that we could target with boxes: they're now sighted fairly regularly around the old meanders of the Winterbourne.

Of other species nesting on the reserve, smaller ones such as long-tailed tits, finches and warblers tend not to use boxes, while larger birds such as wood pigeons, stock doves, carrion crows and magpies construct nests of twigs in tree branches. Mallard and moorhens are ground nesters. Our herons will probably go to nest in heronries such as those at Weir Wood reservoir and Knepp Castle.

While we were at work on the nest boxes, we also put four kingfisher posts up, two in the Winterbourne near the Linklater Pavilion and two on the edge of the Heart of Reeds, near the Mound. They may be a bit late for this year, as the kingfisher(s) that have been seen over the winter will probably head off

upstream to find a suitable nesting site, but if you do see them being used, a report would be welcome.

There is scope for many more boxes, so if you'd care to donate one or more it would be welcomed, and you may want to try your hand at making some: guidance is available on several websites, for example <http://www.bto.org/nbw/make.htm> and <http://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/helpingbirds/nestboxes/smallbirds/making.aspx>

Neil Merchant, Trustee

photos © Neil Merchant

Winter Heliotrope – *Petasites fragrans*

Biodiversity is desirable but this plant, a native of North Africa, is a mixed blessing on the Reserve because of its tendency to spread and crowd out other species. We don't know how it started to travel north but it is recorded in central France in the mid C18 and charmed Parisians with its pale mauve flowering spikes produced from December to February. It looked fine in pots in their indoor winter gardens but when out of doors in their gardens it spread rapidly and was often thrown out, taking refuge along roadsides and under hedges.

It arrived in Britain in 1806, was again encouraged because of its winter flowers but after a spell of cultivation in gardens its bullying tactics became apparent and gardeners tried to get rid of it. This proved to be difficult since only the tiniest piece of the underground rhizome is needed to start a new patch. From such a small beginning rhizomes spread radially sending up shoots with large circular green leaves which quickly form a continuous carpet and persist throughout the year. Despite the name Heliotrope the flowering spikes do not follow the sun, but they smell of vanilla and are attractive to any brave insects which happen to be about in mid winter.

The photo was taken on the verge of Kingston Rd where the footpath to Lewes and Iford takes off.

You can see patches of the leaves along the accessible paths on the Reserve and on the old railway embankment. Our plants do not seem to flower, but do tell me if you have discovered a patch which does. Finally it is interesting to reflect on how this plant, which limits its growth in the drier Mediterranean climate, rampages across our countryside where conditions are cooler and damper. A lesson to be learnt?

Jenifer Barton, Trustee



Ice Water and Blood



Co Chairman Andy Bradley and the grandchildren of Michael Stevens read the plaque in memory of their grandfather.

We are very grateful to the Stevens family who have donated money to provide the projection equipment and much of the cost of materials for the water and sand trough.

The trough was inaugurated at the Ice, Water and Blood' celebration in January.

Architect, Roger Beasley, filled the trough with water from our own catchment tanks. Finally a Chris Drury short film of the movement of a stream of silt in still water was projected onto the dark surface of the water.

A second plaque acknowledging 'True Grit' was accepted by Trustee Dave Sykes, on behalf of his fellow 'path and water trough constructors' Martin Fox and Mike Fensom.

Chris Drury unveiled his exciting display panel explaining his vision of the Heart of Reeds, and his time-lapse film of a slowly moving iceberg in Antarctica was projected onto another wall. The other displays for the undercroft walls are being planned by small teams of experts and will be unveiled as each is completed - and we thank them all for their expertise and time freely given.



Photos © Jem Long

STOP PRESS: Images of the Railway Land

The 'people's choice' was won by **Summer Paterson's** entry in the Children's 'Flora' section who said '*I noticed the colour of the sky looked like there was a fire, so I grabbed my camera and took some pictures. I am a member of Cliffe and fire reminds me of Lewes.*'

Her winning photo will feature on our website and in our next newsletter.

These final two winning images from Esther Allen in the teenage section completes the selection chosen by David Bradford.

Prizes of vouchers were donated by **H A Baker**, and their generous sponsorship and support of this event is much appreciated.

We fully intend to make this an annual event because this year's entries demonstrate that close observation of the landscape and habitats and the response to the changing seasons enriches us all.

Dates for your Diary:

March 23rd: RLWT AGM , talk and Q&A session 7.30pm, Linklater, Mettyear Room

June 2nd: Railway Land Festival, Linklater and Reserve

Minders meet on the first Sunday of every Month at 1.30pm at the Linklater.

For access to past newsletters or to see this printed version in full colour go to:

www.railwaylandproject.org

& follow the 'news and future events' link

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