



BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP NEWSLETTER No.89 OCT to DEC 2017

Weasel on Brook Meadow

A Weasel (no black tip on tail) was spotted running across the River Ems from east to west on a thick, fallen tree trunk south of the North bridge. This is the first Weasel reported on Brook Meadow since one seen and photographed by Malcolm Phillips on 09-Apr-2014. I suspect they are more common but elusive and not easily seen. Below is Malcolm's excellent image.



Chairman's Report to the AGM

Starting with the good things of 2017: the usual successful workdays, new volunteers, and thanks to Brendan Gibb Gray our new regular litter picker. A visitor survey on a sunny Saturday in June showed how well used the meadow is with over 200 human visitors and 87 canine ones. Various groups have visited, both to enjoy the meadow's abundant fauna and flora, and to assist with keeping it looking as good as it does. One particular group of sixth formers from Bay House School in Gosport gave us a whole day of practical work as part of their 'Pay back to the Community' scheme and I think that they enjoyed it as much as we appreciated their hard work.

Development of tree work on the Meadow continued, as per the new supplement to our Management Plan, and we were very fortunate to have a survey carried out by our speaker tonight, Hugh Milner, to help us plan the way forward. The logs produced by this work have been disposed of very satisfactorily by piling them near a gate with a notice proclaiming "Help Yourself" and people did.

New things: a lovely oak bench on the west side of the North Meadow, donated by the family and friends of our good friend and former litter picker in chief, Frank, and a new, more robust sign on the North Bridge announcing "Dog Splash Zone". We hope to be able to repopulate the river Ems with water voles before too long, when we have found a way to sort out better management of the water flow and bank vegetation. With the help of David Gattrell in Peter Pond we have eliminated the possibility that it was mink depredation which caused our small population to crash. Finally, one third of the hedgerow adjoining Seagull Lane was laid, under the instruction of Mike Probert, and we hope to continue that in the coming winter.

Less encouraging has been the difficulty of establishing a good working relationship with two statutory bodies who are responsible for some maintenance on the meadow, namely the environment Agency and Norse, the new operational arm of HBC for all outdoor spaces. We are determined to do better next year, insisting on their carrying out their responsibilities in accord with our management objectives.

Finishing on a more upbeat note, our stand at the Emsworth Show was the success we have come to expect, our new Brook Meadow Christmas card is available tonight and from committee members, thanks to John Twedell for his donated art work and Debbie's organisational skills, and we were delighted lately (too late to feature in this years accounts) to receive a generous donation from the estate of a former Emsworth resident to be used for 'the improvement of the Emsworth environment', and that is what we all hope to promote.

My thanks go to every one of our hard working and efficient committee for their dedication in the last year and I am delighted to be able to report that we are all ready to carry on for another year. But don't let that put you off volunteering to join us, we would be delighted to recruit more committee members and leaders of practical workdays.

Jennifer Rye



Here is the new committee: from left to right Dan Mortimer, David Search, Jennifer Rye (Chair Person), Maurice Lillie, Debbie Robinson (Minutes Secretary), Pam Phillips (Treasurer and Membership Secretary), Colin Brotherston.

PRACTICAL WORK IN THE MEADOW—4th QUARTER SUMMARY

Conservation Work Session—Thursday 21st September

12 volunteers turned out on a cloudy morning. The main tasks comprised raking up and clearing areas of the Meadow that had been cut some time earlier – to reduce the nutrient load, improve the sward and promote wild flower growth. The larger team tackled the wild flower and orchid area and a smaller team the Seagull Lane patch. In parallel a small team removed the extensive lower branches from the large multi-stemmed Willow near Beryl's seat which were beginning to shade the wild flower area.



Conservation Work Session—Sunday 1st October

Five tough, stoic volunteers turned up for work today. It was decided that the ground was far too wet to use the power scythe which would likely get stuck in the mud. So instead we cleared around the Rowan plantation of 20 trees which were badly in need of being trimmed back around their bases. We cleared away the nettles, brambles and bindweed that had grown high up into the trees. We all agreed that this must not happen in future and that regular mowing with the power scythe would help to keep down this growth.



Conservation Work Session—Thursday 19th October

Overnight rain had cleared, more or less, by 10a.m. when no less than 14 volunteers arrived at HQ, ready for a strenuous session. The main task for the day was to rake, collect and drag to disposal point the arisings from the Lumley wild flower area. This area had been efficiently cut ready for us on the day before, by Nigel. It looked like a huge task but turned out to be relatively quick and easy with so many hands making light work of it.



Conservation Work Session—Sunday 5th November

What a beautiful day, just perfect – sunny with a wintery chill. A fantastic 15 eager volunteers turned up today. Here we all are at coffee break. We all set to, raking up the already cut grass in the north meadow orchid area and around the Rowan trees. The orchid area had a welcome second cut and clear. We managed to sort out the best method of transporting the cut grass to the dumping areas by using the blue plastic sheet and not the white grab bags. Hopefully every one has finally learnt and realized this is the most efficient method for this task.



Conservation Work Session—Thursday 16th November

A rainy early morning in November gave way to a mild sunny day providing the perfect start to an unusual work session. There was a large turnout of 18 volunteers for a special session. See article on page 4.

Conservation Work Session—Sunday 3rd December

A turnout of 11 volunteers gathered on a cloudy and relatively mild morning. The main tasks comprised clearing around the Alder Buckthorns on the central cross path and trimming and tidying Mike's first hedge. The remaining volunteers collected and cut willow poles and binders from around the Meadow to use for a dead hedge. This material was processed into sharpened stakes and thin, trimmed binders; and reconstruction of the hedge starting at the North end. See picture on page 3.



WILDLIFE ON THE MEADOW

Changing nature of the River

The river and its banks have deteriorated badly over the past 10 years or so and must be a contributory factor in the loss of Water Voles from the site. Below are two photos taken from the same position near the observation fence to show how the river has changed - now (Nov 2017) picture below left and then (Feb 2003) picture below middle. It is also noted that the volume of water flowing down the river appears to be much reduced. The picture below right shows volunteers working in the river.



Unusual Fungi – Earthstar – Saturday 21 October – 2017

While walking on Brook Meadow this afternoon, Rayner Piper found four Earthstar fungi on the east bank of the river just down from the north bridge. He sent me the following photo. I think they are Collared Earthstars (*Geastrum triplex*). They are like Puffballs with an outer skin which splits and peels back in a star-like pattern. The lobes surround a thin-skinned inner bag full of spores, which escape through a small opening at the top. They are relatively uncommon and a first for Brook Meadow, so we are grateful to Rayner for spotting them. See picture right.



Common Polypody Fern

On the north bridge this fern has grown over the past few years. It now occupies about a metre of the bridge and looks like increasing further. Picture left.



The newly woven dead hedge

on the river bank from the work session on Sunday 3rd December. Picture right.

Frank's Bench

At the end of the work session on Thursday 19th October volunteers were photographed around the new green oak bench in front of the five cherry trees by the raised river path.

The bench is a memorial to our good friend Frank Styles. It was made by Dan Mortimer's brother in law, and paid for by a collection at Frank's funeral. Hereafter it will be known as "Frank's bench". We shall remember him with great affection as we sit there and view our lovely meadow which he enjoyed working on with us.



Christmas Card 2017

This years Christmas card was on sale for 30p. There are still some available from committee members. Picture left

Work Session 16th November

Pictures below show volunteers clearing fallen trees from the river south of the north bridge. The gang in the river sawed off branches and guided them towards the bank. Others on the bank hauled the cuttings up to the path where more volunteers carried branches and twigs to a nearby habitat.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FORTHCOMING WORK SESSIONS 10-12noon:

Meet at the Tool Store Seagull Lane. Tools and gloves provided.

Sunday 7th Jan : Thursday 18th Jan : Sunday 4th Feb: Thursday 15th Feb : Sunday 4th Mar : Thursday 15th Mar : Sunday 26th March

BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP—CONTACTS

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