

BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP NEWSLETTER No.90 JAN to MAR 2018

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE RIVER BANK

Snowy scene on the meadow!



Palmers Road Copse enhancement

Palmers Road copse is the area of woodland at the south west of the meadow adjacent to the car park. The committee is discussing improvements that could be made to his area. These include planting new trees to replace the 39 trees which have fallen or been felled. Also the introduction of native bulbs such as daffodil and wild garlic and maybe clearing some areas to encourage natural regeneration.

Over the past few years the state of the banks of the River Ems, which flows along the North and West boundary of the meadow, has been steadily deteriorating. They have become somewhat overgrown with brambles and nettles and the river is increasingly obscured with fallen trees. This change in vegetation reduces the bio-diversity of the banks which in turn reduces the possibility of re-establishing water voles and other riverside fauna and flora.

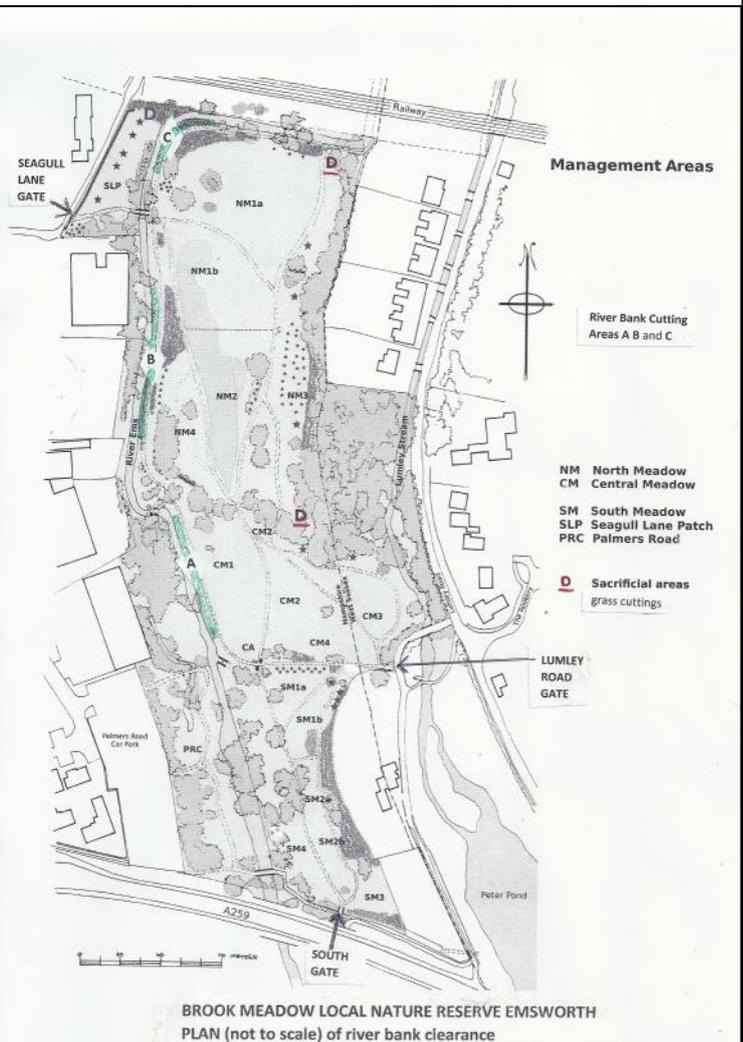
The committee has concluded that a programme to improve the river banks should be implemented. BMCG plan to remove selected overhanging trees and other vegetation along the banks of the river, to allow sunlight onto both banks and thus to allow suitable vegetation to grow there. Some of the work has been started by our volunteers. This work has comprised partial clearance of overhanging trees and removal of unwanted vegetation on banks in two sections north and south of the north bridge. In order to speed this process, it has been decided to engage the services of a contractor to carry out clearance work on three other sections of bank. This is partly due to the amount of work to be undertaken and also because the banks are steep and require people with greater agility.

To this end the committee is in the process of asking for tenders from three local businesses specialising in working in environmentally sensitive areas. It is hoped that one of these outfits will submit a quote which is within budget and then the work can be started.

The improvements will be restricted to the East bank of the river as BMCG has no right to work on the West bank. Also there will be limited work done to remove fallen trees that are in the river as it is the committee's view that this job should be undertaken by the Environment Agency.

The map shows the regions where bank clearance will be undertaken. The regions of bank to be cleared are identified as A, B and C.

It is not expected that this work will commence until next Autumn.



PRACTICAL WORK IN THE MEADOW—4th QUARTER SUMMARY

Conservation Work Session—Thursday 21st December

Eighteen volunteers responded to the call to work on the Meadow today. Not that it had anything to do with the advertised mulled wine and mince pies by way of refreshments, surely? I prefer to think it was the lure of a second major attack on the badly overgrown river just south of the north bridge. There's nothing quite so alluring as working in or around water. ►



Conservation Work Session—Sunday 7th January

Bright sunshine flooded Brook Meadow as eleven volunteers arrived, although the temperature was only a few degrees above freezing. The main job was to complete the dead hedge at the "S" bend of the river bordering the Central Meadow. Jennifer, climbed down into the river and sawed off a broken willow branch that threatened to create a local blockage. ►



Conservation Work Session—Thursday 18th January

Following a night of heavy wind and rain a turnout of ten was a surprise. One group tidied up the fence that we laid on the previous work party with additional posts and bindings. The other group had the task of tidying up the river bank south of the North bridge, carefully weeding nettle roots by hand. After break we all put down wheel barrow loads of wood chip by the steps on the wet and muddy path by the North bridge. ►



Conservation Work Session—Sunday 4th February

Nine braved the cold north wind ► and were rewarded with bright sunshine. The aim was to remove the wire stock fencing which encloses the belt of willow and alder trees just north of the S bend, in the south west corner of the central Meadow. This must have been put up more than twenty years ago to protect the newly planted trees from long departed cattle, or maybe deer.



Conservation Work Session—Thursday 15th February

Just seven volunteers arrived at HQ, pleased that the pattern of alternating weather gave us a mild, sunny morning. The one task for the session was to continue clearing the intertwined vegetation and remove the old wire stock fencing around the Willow and Alder copse in the southwest corner of North Meadow. ►



Conservation Work Session—Sunday 4th March

Snow, rain, ice, fog: all these in the preceding week, plus arctic blasts, made it hard to predict if the workday would happen at all. However 7a.m. brought blue skies and a really much nicer day than could have been expected. Twelve volunteers showed up, including newcomers Sharon and Nick Robinson. The main task for the day was to build a bonfire to get rid of some of the leftover branches and twigs from the hedge laying in Palmers road area. Some longer ones were kept for future use in hedge making but most were cleared. ►



WILDLIFE ON THE MEADOW

OBSERVATIONS DURING WORKDAY – Sunday 4th February 2018



◀ The first Butterbur flower spike beside the main path near the sluice gate. I found several more just emerging on the large Butterbur area below the main seat. This is not especially early. In some years I



have found them out in January. I had a little mooch around in the Lumley copse. ▶ It is not easily accessible, but OK if you go carefully. I found plenty of fresh growth of Lords and Ladies

(Arum) leaves.



◀ There was also, lots of a light green feather moss growing on trees and twigs. I will tentatively identify this as Brachythecium rutabulum, which is one of the mosses that Rod Stern identified during his survey of the site in 2001. The photo shows fruiting of inclined capsules which are produced on rough reddish stalks in autumn, winter and spring.

Report by Brian Fellows

Hedge Laying on Brook Meadow : Friday

23rd February

◀ The final day of the special work session hedge-laying on the Seagull Lane patch. Present were Rachel, Maurice, Tony and Dan. They completed the final section of hedgerow just after 1pm, fully laid, staked and woven and matching up neatly with the earlier one done by Mike Probert.

The completed hedge. ▶



WATER VOLE CRISIS – but hope for the future?

Report by Brian Fellows – 26 Feb 2018

The disappearance of Water Voles from Brook Meadow over the past two years is reflected in the findings of a new report based on data collected over the last ten years by a network of experts from the Hampshire Wildlife Trust (Feb 2018) which points to a 30% decline in Water Vole distribution across England and Wales during this time. So, the decline over the past 50 years or so appears to be continuing. Although the new survey reveals a slight increase in distribution in recent years, thanks to some successful conservation efforts by The Wildlife Trusts and others, the full data covering the whole ten years paints a bleak picture.



Habitat loss, water pollution and massive building development have led to declines in the voles since the 1960s, exacerbated by predation by North American mink. The Wildlife Trusts and other organisations across the UK have made huge conservation efforts to restore rivers and reintroduce the species, to ensure a future for this charismatic mammal.

The Wildlife Trusts are calling for Government and Local Authorities to enable the creation of a ‘Nature Recovery Network’, as set out in the Government’s 25 Year Plan for the Environment. This should be underpinned by a new Environment Act to protect, link and create areas of habitat which help wildlife move and spread out, benefiting Water Voles and a range of other wildlife. Funding should be increased to expand Water Vole conservation efforts including for landscape-scale restoration schemes.

We are doing our bit here in Emsworth on Brook Meadow by attempting to improve the habitat of the River Ems for Water Voles. Volunteers are actively clearing river banks and overhanging trees and further work is planned from outside contractors to complete the job. Let’s hope we can once more see these

Membership Numbers. Brook Meadow Conservation Group has 177 paid members so far this financial year. The committee are considering ways of increasing awareness of the meadow and increasing membership numbers.

Photographs this issue: Brian Fellows, Malcolm Phillips, Editor.

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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