

BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP NEWSLETTER No.93 OCTOBER TO DECEMBER

Chair's Report November 2018

My job tonight is to inform you all of what has been happening in the year since our last AGM, and to look forward to give you some idea of the challenges we are facing in the years to come.

So, what has happened in the last year? Many of the usual things which happen every year: regular workdays twice a month, regular committee meetings once a month, seasonal jobs involving cutting, raking, dragging, trimming, digging, bat and butterfly surveys, and so forth.

Volunteer numbers have been healthy, with anything between 6 and 12 turning up, which makes planning the jobs to be done each time quite difficult. With the valuable addition of Colin to the leadership pool we have coped, and no session has been anything but valuable and useful.

Brian's faithful attendance at work days has ensured that we continue to pay due heed to what is coming up, flowering, appearing or reappearing each season, as well as providing photographic records of our ways of working and who does what at work sessions. His enthusiasm for and love of the Meadow, coupled with his immense knowledge, continue to inspire us all.

On some occasions, a specially invited work force of volunteers has tackled jobs which are beyond the remit of the regular sessions, such as river clearance work near the south bridge in July under the direction of Maurice, and erection of 6 bat boxes in the minimum intervention area near the Lumley stream, also in July, under David Search. Last winter a fresh section of the Seagull Lane hedge was laid, under the direction of Rachel from TCV.

Additionally we have employed some specialists for work beyond our capacity. Highlights of the year for me have been the hedge laying by our own team of volunteers, and the continuation of the development of active management in Palmers Road copse, a previously somewhat neglected area of the site. Our presence at the Emsworth Show at the end of August was another good time of sharing our aims with members of the general public and renewing acquaintance of old friends and supporters. A particular encouragement was the gift of £500 by an original member who can no longer volunteer for practical work but made his contribution in this timely and useful way. We expect one more relocation of native British reptiles from a nearby building site in the coming year.

In general, I think our biggest challenge is that, in these times of continuing austerity, the dwindling resources of local authorities and governmental organisations has already reduced the amount of help we can expect from them towards our own particular aims and objectives. I would like to remind you of these, as laid out in our management plan:

- To protect and improve the diversity and habitats of grassland, woodland scrub and watercourses
- To increase the biodiversity of fauna and flora
- To protect and improve the habitats of endangered mammals
- To maintain and develop the attractiveness of the site for the quiet enjoyment of visitors, insofar as this is compatible with the other objectives.

So, with less money available from outside sources, even from the owners of the Meadow HBC, how do we square the circle of improving diversity and habitats, and biodiversity in general, with less financial support? It seems to us, your committee, that we have to further our own efforts to provide the necessary monies which are needed. Broadly, that means:

1. Increasing our membership, and maybe increasing subscriptions.
2. Raising the profile of the Meadow.
3. Exploring the ways of appealing to other bodies in the town for financial support, for example the Residents Association, the Community Association and others.
4. Encouraging gifts from people who do not necessarily want to become active members but wish to support our aims.
5. Exploring ways of doing what we do on the meadow more economically, making better use of our volunteers and machinery.

So, those are broadly, our aims for the coming year. Thank you to all members for their support.

Jennifer Rye

PRACTICAL WORK IN THE MEADOW—3RD QUARTER SUMMARY

Conservation Work Session—Thursday 20th September Twelve volunteers on a warm dry and cloudy day

A big group with plenty to get on with—clearing arisings from the Seagull Lane Patch, clearing the east bank of the river ► (see article on front page) and further training on how to drive the power scythe.



Conservation Work Session—Sunday 7th October Eleven volunteers on a warm dry sunny day

The main task was to cut the flower-rich area by the Lumley stream, rake up and dispose of the arisings. ► This required a lot of muscle power. A small alder tree was saved from the cutback and we'll see how it grows.



Conservation Work Session—Thursday 18th October Fourteen volunteers on a sunny day with light breeze

Tasks were One-Rake up arisings from the previous workday cut in the central meadow and drag them to the central dump. Two-Clear debris and wood from the river south of the north bridge under the fallen tree.

Three-Cut the wild flower area in the north meadow using the power scythe leaving a four foot boundary of scrub to mark the area.

Four-Remove nettle roots from the river bank south of the north bridge.



Conservation Work Session—Sunday 4th November Nine volunteers on a dry overcast day

First task was to finish off raking, and disposing of arisings from the orchid area of the North Meadow. ► Secondly the power scythe was taken down to the South Meadow cutting the green paths en route to tackle the South East corner. There was a considerable amount of raking once the cut was finished.



Conservation Work Session—Thursday 15th November Eighteen volunteers on a overcast mild day with no wind

A large group split into four teams. A raking team finished clearing arising from the South meadow, a power scythe team re-cut and extended the cut in the South meadow . A tree team lopped overhanging branches ► and Dan's river team continued to clear the east bank and plant more reed rhizomes.



Conservation Work Session—Sunday 2nd December Fifteen volunteers on an overcast dry day with no wind

Three major tasks were undertaken. First cutting a new path through the rowan trees, ► secondly constructing a hibernaculum in the south meadow and thirdly pruning branches where they overhang paths or endanger the tree. Dan and his team continued the major task of clearing the river bank using strimmers.



WILDLIFE ON THE MEADOW - Flowers, Butterflies and Moths

From Brian Fellows' wildlife blog



15th November Kathy pointed out some interesting fungi growing on an old Willow log beside the south path. I have tentatively identified them as follows: Grey Polypore (*left*) which is a fairly common fungus growing in tiers on dead wood

On the same log were some Bonnet Bell Cap (*right*) which again grows in clusters on fallen logs.



Trees keeping their leaves in autumn

The two young Oak trees on the Seagull Lane patch that retain their brown leaves over winter are looking quite magnificent. Most Oak trees lose their leaves in winter, but some like the two on this site, retain theirs. This is called **marcescence** which also affects Beech. Apparently, it does not harm the tree and may provide an advantage in the early years of the tree's growth in making it less palatable to browsing animals.

It was also good to see the first Winter Heliotrope (*below*) of the season. The species is dioecious, male and female flowers being borne on separate plants. Female plants are unknown in the British Isles.



New Rowans Path

For the purpose of the exercise, the Environment Agency had cut a wide path through the jungle of vegetation around the back of the Rowan plantation.

This suggested to me what a good idea it would be to make a permanent path around the plantation. I discussed this with Maurice Lillie and he agreed it would be a wonderful idea. Such a path would open up these magnificent trees, which at present are loaded with bright red berries, to public viewing. A path around the plantation would also provide ready access for the conservation group to do regular clearance around the trees which always get covered in bindweed.

Maurice and I thought the new path could follow the present EA path around the back of the Rowans and then cut through the mass of nettles and bindweed to the left of where Tony is standing in the photo to link up with the main path near the Aspen tree.

Brian Fellows



RIVER BANK WORK

A small band of volunteers have taken on the considerable task of riverbank maintenance. This involves clearing the bank of brambles and nettles and planting rhizomes for reeds and other plants which might encourage water voles. One of the disappointments of the last few years has been the absence of water voles. It is considered to be a priority to improve the biodiversity of the river bank in the hope that re-introduction may be considered. This task is being led by Dan and will be an ongoing task. It is also expected that volunteer riverbank maintenance will improve the riverbank experience for meadow visitors.



SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 22 – 2018 EA flood barrier exercise

Report and photos by Brian Fellows



I went over to Brook Meadow at about 10.30 this morning, with rain in the air, to view the Environment Agency exercise in laying down a temporary flood barrier on the east side of the north meadow behind the Lumley Road cottages. Such a barrier could be erected fairly quickly if a flood was expected. Masses of workers (lads and lasses) were laying out the barrier of aluminium sheets, all which will be removed after the exercise. The permanent flood barrier planned for next autumn will be of more natural construction.

Volunteer Attendance

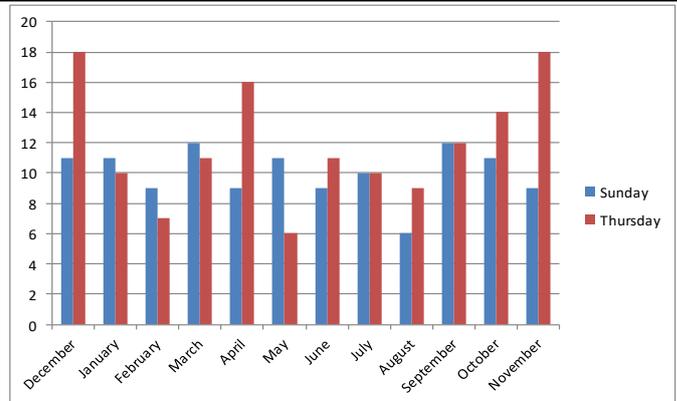
The chart shows the attendance of volunteers at work-sessions for the past year. The average attendance was

Sundays 10 (2017 9.25)

Thursdays 11.8 (2017 11.5)

The attendance is slightly up on 2017. While Thursday's average attendance is higher, Sunday has less variance.

When larger numbers of volunteers attend the leader should co-opt an assistance to help manage to work parties.



Forthcoming Events

No special events are planned for this quarter

Photographs this issue: Brian Fellows

FORTHCOMING WORK SESSIONS 10-12noon:

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

Sunday 6th Jan : Thursday 17th Jan : Sunday 3rd Feb: Thursday 14th Feb : Sunday 3rd Mar : Thursday 21st Mar : Sunday 7th April

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