

# Annual General Meeting

## 2015 - Chair's report



As previously, we continue to develop a website, which now includes reports from our committee meetings, news of our activities, and contributions to a blog reporting sightings of unusual species. We have developed a 'welcome pack' for new members. Our monthly contributions to the parish magazine continue to cover a mixture of accounts of local activities and more general information about wildlife. Sometimes these are in response to requests for information and we are open to suggestions of things people would like covered in these articles.

We liaise with the Parish Council as appropriate, and when it asks for our input. This past year we have been particularly involved in the preparation of the Parish's Neighbourhood Plan. One issue that came up this year was several complaints about certain fields being marred by large quantities of plastic and other debris. Considering also the implications to wildlife, we wrote to the Parish Council and I am pleased to report that the council wrote to the Environment Agency who pursued the matter. And we continue to give advice to a range of people about wildlife and their habitats.

For events, the first since the last AGM was a Christmas social in The Plough for members and others who have helped us. Our usual spring nightingale walk was not so well attended this year, either by people or nightingales, but we did hear them and people seem to quite enjoy tramping around the countryside in the dark looking for them. The group included visitors from Lewes and Newick.

Our early morning bird watch was even colder and drizzly, so the sausage sizzle back at Sally Huband's was most welcome. We also organised a general wildlife ramble from Plumpton across to James and Sarah's meadow in East Chiltington. A stand at the Nicholson's Open Garden event to raise money for the Hospice also raised a bit of money for our group, although the sales of our special plant fertilizer (serotine bat droppings) were a bit of a disappointment.

In late summer we organised a 'safari' at Knepp Park, where about 20 of us were guided round by the estate's ecologist for an evening. This was enjoyed by all, and some returned to watch the deer rut a little later in the year.

### **Surveys**

We continue a general activity of observation and record keeping and organising surveys.

On the plant side, more woodland surveys were carried out. The aim of this ongoing project is to compare the present-day findings with those of Robin Lang who surveyed Plumpton's 23 woods in 1986.

We haven't done much with fungi this year, but I was interested to be asked about a fungus on some apple trees in the north of the parish. These turned out to be about the fourth Sussex record of *Phellinus pomaceus*; I have since seen it a couple of times on Blackthorn (its true host plant) in the parish.

There was a national survey of selected areas for House Martin nests this year. None of the selected areas was here, but the Sussex Ornithological Society asked for survey data from anywhere else as well, so we undertook a survey of Plumpton, which we had last done in 2009, when it was a rather bad summer. This year 120 nests were counted in four locations. They used to nest on the back of the north stand at the racecourse, but haven't done so for some years, so we plan to install some boxes there to encourage them back. There is also a follow-up to this year's survey with volunteers carrying more detailed, but simple, observations of behaviour at the nest next year, and we hope that we will have some volunteers for that.

Another species that we have tried to keep an eye on is Turtle Dove. This is a highly threatened species in Britain (and elsewhere) and is regarded as one of the species most likely to go extinct here in the next few years. There are at least three regular sites around the parish and it is good to note that birds were present at all three this year.

Another national survey that people in the parish contribute to is the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch in January. I get copies of what people record for this survey, so I hope we can track how the bird populations are faring here in comparison with the results for the county and nationally.

We put out a call for records of hares early in the year and got a few useful records, including a few from the north end of the parish.

We haven't done much with dormouse this year, but I was pleased to learn that a project from Plumpton College has found evidence of a good colony at Brock's Wood, c.1.5km from the nearest place where we have found it, and some closer areas where we didn't find it.

### **Toads crossing**

The toad signs were activated, but there were no major marked migration nights this spring.

### **Field cameras**

The Group now has two wildlife or 'trail' cameras which have so far been used to see what activity there is in gardens around the village and are available for loan. We also have plans for their wider use around the parish. And we plan to get a couple of small field microscopes, to aid with identification of plants and invertebrates in the field and for demonstration or education activities.

### **Sites**

We have continued our involvement with the station through the Station Partnership. The wild flowers there did look good this year and new species keep

appearing. And we are grateful to the Southern area manager, Kate Richards, for help with the grassland management here. Other meadows, such as that at the Plough, also looked very good this year (while we have had terrible trouble with our own little front garden meadow at Winkfield).

Our wildflower meadow at the Playing Fields was short-lived, but a resident reported that some of the snake's head fritillaries we planted flowered this year before the grass was cut.

We have been in discussion with Parish Council and local residents about the future of the so-called Bevernside Pocket Park. But with the election of a new council and involvement in the Neighbourhood Plan, this has been put on hold. We have also continued our interest in Ferrings Wood and keep aware of the situation of the sandpit. We have also been in liaison on the management or development of some other areas, including in East Chiltington.

### **Neighbourhood Plan**

The Neighbourhood Plan has been a major source of activity in this year, including through a landscape and biodiversity topic group, which includes members of the wildlife group. This group has been strongly involved in developing the policies for the future of the parish, including decisions about future sites for development and the design of such developments, and is currently looking at potential sites for designation as 'Local Green Spaces' (which include areas designated for wildlife conservation). To support the decisions of the Neighbourhood Plan, the topic group has produced an 'evidence report' entitled 'Plumpton's Living Landscape', which will give a summary account of the parish's wildlife and habitats and what people like and want to preserve. We hope that much of this report will be of wider interest as a statement of the state of the parish in 2015.

### **And 2016?**

We look for closer links with East Chiltington, which is also embarking on a Neighbourhood Plan and has other development concerns. There have been suggestions of carrying out a Phase 1 Habitat survey of East Chiltington (as we did with Plumpton) or perhaps compiling a more comprehensive flora of the two parishes. Other suggestions of new surveys include a bumble bee survey – or even a dragonfly survey. But final decisions will be the province of the new committee.