

Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group
AGM 2014
Chairman's Report

Publicity and communications

We continued to develop an attractive website on 2014, including a blog. We also continued our monthly contribution to the parish magazine. We have liaised with the Parish Council as appropriate and when it asks for our input. And we have also given advice to several people in the parish about wildlife and their habitats.

We had a stand at the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2014, which gave us the opportunity to produce a couple of posters that will have longer-term use. And we maintained a general activity of observation and record keeping.

Meadows

We continued an interest in meadows. We resurveyed The Plough meadow and surveyed Crossways for the first time. Both looked good this year and about 60 species of flowering plant were identified at both. Meadows at Sedgebrook were also surveyed, not only for flowering plants but also by a group specialising in mosses. We unfortunately lost the Jubilee Meadow at the Playing Fields, due to objections from the various sports clubs sharing the space, but continue to look for another area where we can develop a good wildflower meadow.

The cutting and removal of meadow vegetation can be a problem, but Mark Brunt did an excellent job at The Plough and Crossways, liaising with us over dates, and was very happy with the hay he got.

We also continued to maintain the wild flower areas at the station, under the Station Partnership Scheme. Southern Rail cuts the grassland here, but we rake it off and this year we were very pleased to be assisted on the day by the area manager, Kate Richards.

Woodland survey

A number of woodlands were surveyed this year, mostly for the first time. These include the alder carr by Upper Mill, Ashurst Wood ('The Pines') near Blackberry Farm, Russet Wood at the top of the parish, and Riddens Wood. These survey results are being compiled by Jacqui Hutson, who is also carrying out an assessment of earlier surveys of John Tetley and Robin Lang.

Through Jon Wood, we are continuing to manage Ferrings Wood to restore this to a more natural mixed wet woodland.

We also gave advice on and helped plant a hedge at the Playing Fields with whips provided free by the Woodland Trust. The plants supplied did not seem to quite match with what was promised and we may replace some as the opportunity arises.

Ancient trees

The survey of ancient or veteran trees will probably be completed in 2015, with work concentrating on the south end of the parish.

Pocket Park

Plumpton Parish Council owns the strip of wood by the Bevern Stream between East View Fields and Riddens Lane. It asked us for advice about making this more accessible to parishioners. This is unlikely to be a popular spot, for various reasons, and it would be difficult to maintain paths, but we agreed to try to identify a route around the site that could be maintained for public use. It is an interesting little site and houses an important rookery. A flier was distributed to the local residents and a meeting was to be held in early December to discuss this further.

Ponds

We have had little involvement with ponds this year except for some advice-giving and a bit of work towards the restoration of the pond at Glencove.

Following the recording last year of the mass mortality of toads on roads around the village, Jon Wood worked on Highways Department to get some signs installed at one or two key crossing places. We thought nothing was going to happen but were surprised to find that we might be the first parish to have official toad signs in East Sussex installed in time for next spring. We will be delegated to open and close the signs at the appropriate dates.

One of the main crossing spots is Novington sand pit, which has now been abandoned for two years. We are keeping a watch on this interesting area (a monthly Wetland Birds Survey there for a national project) and ensure that ESCC is aware of our interest in the site should it become available.

Swift

The machine playing swift calls from the tower of All Saints Church, where we have 30 nest chambers for swifts, is now working well, thanks to Peter Baxter. But no swifts yet. At least two pairs of starling have nested there, but from experience elsewhere, it may be some years before we get swifts moving in.

Kingfisher

One of the main nesting sites for kingfishers on the Plumpton Stream was destroyed when a tree fell on it last winter. With Gerald Geoghegan, a local film man, we prepared a few new banks that we thought might be suitable for nesting and augured the birds a 'starter hole', but we don't think any were used this year.

Nightingale walk

The results of our annual nightingale walk were people 25: nightingales 0. And that despite the best efforts of Peter Baker to get the birds going with his phone app. But nobody seemed very upset and a number of people reported that they had come back on a later evening and been well rewarded.

Nightjars were a bit erratic on Chailey Commons so we didn't organize a walk for them, although I believe one bird did settle down there and was churring well later in the season.

Dormouse

Two areas were surveyed for dormouse. No evidence was found at either site. This was the first time no evidence has been found in the Parish in the four years of the survey and despite the fact that at least one of the areas looked eminently suitable.

We will probably need some new tubes and to repair some tubes for next year, and may register the one good site we have identified as a site for long-term monitoring under the national scheme, with the installation of some more permanent nest boxes.

Bats

We are still trying to track down the summer breeding colony site of pipistrelle bats in the village. At one house near the shop 125 settled in late May, but suddenly disappeared just as the birth period was approaching.

Meanwhile two student projects have been working in the parish. A student from University College London carried out a survey of five of the tributaries of the Bevern Stream for about a kilometre from their source. We have a lot of useful data from that.

The other project is a Plumpton College student who is collecting the moth wing debris left by long-eared bats at their feeding perches. He plans to look at the diet of the bats and how it varies from site to site (he has five sites, including one in Plumpton) and through the season. More importantly, he will be able to compare this with similar samples dating from some years ago and that are now in the Booth Museum. These were collected between 1910 and the early 1940s and might show changes in diet for various reasons.

Bug hotel

We were delighted that the school asked us to look at their Bug Hotel and to re-instate it. Through an afternoon in September, James Otway, his son Martin and I, with the help of 40 children in batches of 10, took the existing structure apart, retaining all the insect contents. The kids had a great time and we collected about 40 different types of invertebrate, which were put back into the structure as it was rebuilt. The children certainly seemed to enjoy it – and I think we did too. We hope we can do more activities with the school in the future.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan is a legal document provided by the Parish to Government, setting out what the residents want in terms of future development (housing, leisure, facilities and business etc) up to 2031. But it has to act within certain constraints set by local and national government. PW&HG is working on a general report on the parish's landscape and biodiversity and is well represented on the Steering Group, with wildlife and environment being one of the five Topic Groups established. A lot of public comment has been and is being accumulated and will contribute, with our report, to the development of policies for the Neighbourhood Plan.

We have already provided some outline assessments of sites proposed under LDC's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and are ready to comment on individual planning applications.

?2015

For at least the first half of next year we expect to spend a fair amount of time on the Neighbourhood Plan. Our survey work will continue, some new (perhaps some led by concerns arising through the Neighbourhood Plan) and some continuing.

Species surveys could include contribution to the national house martin survey next year and, to follow up on a recent parish magazine article, to survey for hares. We also hope to continue with advice and contribution to the management of local areas of interest. And we

may try to increase the number of public events, although, of course, anybody is welcome to join in on any of our surveys and other activities.

One other point of interest is the recent designation of a Brighton & Lewes UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. A large chunk of Plumpton is included (the part that is in the National Park). This is a significant international designation, but as yet we do not know how it might impact or benefit us. A partnership of organizations is currently agreeing priorities, which will probably concentrate on developing community interest and involvement in the maintenance and enhancement of the wildlife of the area.

Tony Hutson
Chair
Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group
November 2014