

# 10<sup>th</sup> AGM report



The guest speakers at our AGM were Jeremy Kerswell, Principal of Plumpton College, and Abby Lamb, Programme Manager, Countryside Management. They presented the College's Ecological Strategy which brings together key actions to ensure that the Plumpton College Estate is managed to the highest possible standards environmentally; provides high quality learning opportunities for best practice land and environmental management; and enables all external stakeholders to work collaboratively for the best interests of the environment.

Headline Actions in the strategy include:

- To continue wildlife surveying and monitoring work across the estate;
- To floristically enhance key field margins and increase stream margins;
- To implement a woodland management plan to enhance wildlife value of the woodlands;
- To undertake a range of actions to minimise the potential for farm run-off into water courses;
- To improve landscape connectivity through hedge restoration and creation;
- To improve stream habitats by creating leaky dams and pools.

Encouraging results from ongoing survey and monitoring activities include the presence of high numbers of Palmate and Smooth newts in the lake by Streat Lane and regular findings of Mayfly and Cased Caddis fly larvae - indicators of excellent water quality - in the chalk streams. Hazel Dormice, which are rare in the UK, are present on the College estate and there is a dormice monitoring project in Brocks Wood. The majority of fields now have a 6 metre non-crop margins, providing habitat for wildflowers, small mammals and birds. Students surveys of the field margins have found evidence of field voles and harvest mice. Dissection of barn owl pellets helps students monitor changes in the population of small mammals. Students also assist Reg Lanaway with bird ringing.

Read the full Strategy:

[https://www.plumpton.ac.uk/fileadmin/uploads/plumpton/Documents/Freedom\\_of\\_Information\\_Act/Ecological\\_Strategy\\_final\\_LR.pdf](https://www.plumpton.ac.uk/fileadmin/uploads/plumpton/Documents/Freedom_of_Information_Act/Ecological_Strategy_final_LR.pdf)

Following questions and a refreshment break, our Chair, Jacqui Hutson, reported on PECWG activities in 2018:

A Toad Patrol was organised, with 15 people volunteers donning hi-vis jackets and rescuing toads crossing to their breeding ponds in the sand quarry.

We put on a range of events – brown hairstreak egg hunting and two newt evenings in March, a nightingale walk in May, a bat walk in June, two moth trap openings and a drove-road walk. Badger surveys continued but there are still some sites to cover on the dip slope of the Downs. A survey for dormice in a wood in East Chiltington found evidence of a good population of these animals, which is encouraging. We recorded a total of 76 plants, plus a number of birds, butterflies and insects, during a meadow survey at Crossways, and sent the results to the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre.

The woodland survey, which we completed in 2016, was written up and transformed into a full-colour 74-page A4 booklet, soon to be available via our website (<https://plumptonwildlifegroup.weebly.com/>). We produced a poster of the wildflowers at the three churches in the parish and these have been placed in the porches. Thanks to volunteers, the churchyard at East Chiltington continues to improve for wildlife, and, with the churchwarden, we have also started to help manage the churchyard at All Saints, with the aim of improving it for both visitors to graves and wildlife. The wildflower area at the station was raked as usual but may be under threat because of the invasive horsetail that is threatening the platform and conduits and may need to be treated with herbicide next year. We will wait to see what happens.

Some time ago we approached ESCC to recommend that several verges in the parish be managed for their wild flowers. This year ESCC met its promise, designating four wildflower verges, which will be managed by cutting in the late summer after the main flowering season. Most importantly, all cuttings will be removed and this should gradually improve the wild flower populations by suppressing the coarse vegetation. We will be monitoring the effectiveness of this new management regime and also look for other verges worth designating.

We continue our links with Plumpton College through representation on the Environmental Steering Group and participating in the National Plant Monitoring Scheme with five permanent plots on the college estate.

The Facebook Group

(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1982455645313896/?ref=bookmarks>) is well used, with people from both parishes reporting various wildlife sightings and requesting help with identifications. A number of late summer reports of hedgehog sightings were followed up, and times, dates and locations were sent to the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre

### **Election of officers and committee members**

Chair: Jacqui Hutson

Vice-Chair: Ben Drummond

Secretary: Kate Gold

Treasurer: Jean Stewart

Committee: Lynn Baxter, Marie Bullough, Tony Hutson, James Otway, David Phillips.

### **The Big Garden Birdwatch 2019** [www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/)

The Big Garden Birdwatch takes place between Saturday 26 – Monday 28 January. Spend an hour watching the birds in your garden and report to the RSPB the maximum number of each species that you see at any one time. Please also send your records to Tony Hutson (01273 890341, [hutson.t@btinternet.com](mailto:hutson.t@btinternet.com)) so that we can continue to build up a picture of our local garden birds.