

12th AGM report

Covid-19 restrictions meant we were unable to enjoy our usual AGM... in a room with other people. A big thanks to all who braved Zoom technology to remotely join us. The business part was brief as there was no change of elected members. James Otway remains Chair, Ben Drummond Vice-Chair, David Phillips Secretary and Jean Stewart Treasurer. The rest of the Committee members are Lynn Baxter, Marie Bullough, Kate Gold, Jacqui Hutson, Tony Hutson and Carole Nicholson. Our Chair, James Otway, then reported on PECWHG activities during the last 12 months:

Chair's Report Monday 9th November 2020

Welcome to our Annual General Meeting.

I would like to thank all the members of the Wildlife Committee for keeping the show on the road. I must say a particular thanks to our past Chairs, Jacqui and Tony Hutson. They continue to provide meticulous and encyclopaedic knowledge of flora and fauna to the group.

You don't need me to remind you of the unusual year we have all experienced. Most plans and events have been cancelled due to government restrictions, unthinkable this time last year.

We have however managed to continue some wildlife and botanical survey work. During January we planted 13 disease resistant elms in East Chiltington TECT field and 2 in Plumpton on Hackmans Farm. Thanks to Antonia Price and Robert Thomas for their permission.

In early May, 40 reconditioned dormouse tubes were sited along the parish boundary from Odintune Place to Coppershaw. Returning in autumn we discovered live dormice and nests. We fully expect to expand the survey next spring. Due to COVID we have been unable to arrange inspection of our other dormice monitoring site around the Novington sandpit. Expecting occupation, we needed a licensed dormouse handler (Kim Dawson) to attend with us and this has not been possible under current restrictions.

Monitoring of badger sets and bat roosts are ongoing projects, coordinated by Tony through the group.

The TECT field has been surveyed this summer and autumn for plant species on behalf of East Chiltington Parish Council and TECT Committee by Jacqui and Kate. The TECT field, once farmed more intensively, is undergoing a partial re-wilding. Survey data will hopefully prove valuable as we watch the species recover and return. A large oak has been monolithed after losing the majority of its crown in high winds and we have advised that the timber is left to provide habitat. One hollow limb was already occupied by honey bees.

We proposed a management plan for both East Chiltington and All Saints churchyards which has been adopted by the PCC. The electronic swift caller screeched its way throughout the spring and early summer in the All Saints bell tower but appeared to have lured only a swarm of honey bees.

In October, 20 of us were able to go ahead with a visit to Knepp Estate to bear witness to the extensive re-wilding project. Many thanks to Carole Nicholson for organising.

During this lockdown, we are blessed to be living in the most beautiful countryside in the parishes of Plumpton and East Chiltington. My highlight was the 6 weeks during April and May when the sunshine was unbroken and there were no planes, trains or automobiles. Not the silent spring Rachel Carson so presciently forecast but, briefly, silent of man and machines. Magic! Clear blue skies, bird song and emboldened

wildlife. The PECWHG Facebook page continues to receive dozens of pictures from the gardens and surrounding countryside, plus frequent requests for identification. It is a great pleasure to see the community taking an interest in the natural wonders that surrounds us.

The majority of the landscape around us is in some way managed by farmers and there are big changes on the horizon with regard to the environmental subsidies they will receive and how they manage water and air on their estates. As a group, one of our main objectives is to promote the understanding, appreciation and conservation of the fauna and flora of the two parishes. We are therefore keen to engage with Plump-ton College, the largest land manager in the two parishes, to better understand how these new environmental initiatives will benefit wildlife and people alike. We are looking forward to meeting with the college in the not too distant future when lockdown restrictions finally allow.

Finally, I must congratulate Beth Bowen on her winning photo in the 2019 photographic competition and thank you James Honess for judging that for us then and for the decision you will make on this year's winner at the end of the meeting.

Thank you