

2016 AGM and guest talk



The group's AGM on 21 November was preceded by a talk on the Bevvern Stream by Sam St Pierre, Vice Chairman of the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust. He explained that the northern tributaries are really drains but the southern tributaries start as chalk streams from the downs and then become clay streams as they flow north through the parish. Most run dry in summer but Plumpton Mill Stream does not and is the most constant source of water in the Bevvern. The stream is renowned for its breeding population of sea trout, which spawn in the upper reaches between December and January. The fry emerge from the gravel as parr and after about two years go down to the sea as smolts, returning eventually to spawn. These trout attain the highest average weight of any population in Britain. Other fish in the Bevvern include brown trout, the internationally threatened bullhead and the brook lamprey.

The Bevvern suffers from pollution - septic tank overflows, agricultural fertilisers, slurry and soil running off the land, phosphates from domestic cleaning material and metaldehyde from slug pellets, especially from maize fields. All this as well as water abstraction by the water companies. It is a wonder, Sam said, that the Bevvern is as good as it is in supporting fish and their invertebrate food. It was devastating news that early on the 30th November there was a massive influx of slurry from Plumpton College, killing all the fish and other life forms, just as the seas trout were beginning to spawn. It will take a long time for the ecosystem to recover from this destruction.

Highlights from the Chairman's Report

- The new Facebook site has proved very popular and provides some useful records and news of wildlife in the area.
- We have been involved in the preparation of the Plumpton Neighbourhood Plan, including through a Topic Group to deal with issues relating to our landscape and biodiversity. This group has had input into decisions about development sites, including where they offer opportunities for wildlife enhancement and has also identified sites for designation as Local Green Spaces.
- Liaison with Plumpton Parish Council.
- Activities included nightingale and nightjar walks - the latter lacking nightjars but including a pair of mating glow-worms.

- Plumpton woodland surveys have been completed and the results are being analysed and written up.
- Five local churchyards (St Michael's, Streat, All Saints, East Chiltington, St Peter's in South Chailey) have been surveyed for plants as part of a project run by the Sussex Botanical Recording Society. All Saints came top with 109 species and a good range of native plants including common spotted orchids and adder's tongue ferns.
- House martins continue to be surveyed with volunteers making regular observations of the nests on their houses and this contributes to a national survey.
- We continue to manage the wild flower 'meadow' at the station and keep an eye on The Plough meadow, which is a good example of a traditional hay meadow. Our efforts featured in a promotional video for Southern Railway.
- We are part way through a badger re-survey.

Election of officers and committee members

Tony Hutson stepped down as Chair after three years in office and Jacqui Hutson was elected as the new Chair. Catherine Jackson stepped down as Secretary and Kate Gold was elected as the new Secretary. Simon Harding was re-elected as Vice Chair and Lynn Baxter as Treasurer. The Committee members were re-elected as follows: Denise Hall, Tony Hutson, Ben Drummond, Catherine Jackson and James Otway.

Jacqui Hutson

The Big Garden Birdwatch, 2017

This year The Big Garden Birdwatch is on 28-30 January 2017. People are asked to spend one hour watching the birds in their garden (mostly from the safety of a warm kitchen or bedroom) during the last weekend in January and to report to the RSPB the maximum number of each species that they see at any one time during that hour. The results are usually published by April and show the population trends for each species recorded. For more information see www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/.

I am happy to continue to receive copies of records from contributors to the Big Garden Birdwatch, so that over time we can build up a picture of Plumpton's garden birds and know which species are doing well (or even too well) and which could perhaps do with a bit of help. So, as well as sending your records to the RSPB, please also send them to me.

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