

Chair's report

AGM 2015



We have a new name: Plumpton and East Chiltington Wildlife Group. The change was backed unanimously by members at our 2015 AGM in November. It recognises the fact that we have always worked across both parishes and that conservation of wildlife necessarily involves the conservation of its habitats across our parish boundaries.

The AGM also saw the election of new officers to the Committee. Tony Hutson was re-elected as Chair for a further year. Other elected officers were Simon Harding (Deputy Chair), Lynn Baxter (Treasurer) and Catherine Jackson (Secretary). Jacqui Hutson and Sally Huband both stepped down from the committee. A big thanks to both for all their hard work over the lifetime of the group. Happily both have said they intend to stay actively involved as members. Kate Gold and Ben Drummond were elected onto the committee. Following a fascinating and humorous talk from Dave Chelmick on Dragonflies and Damselflies, the Chairman gave a report on the past year's activities.

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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.

Our first event for the year was a Christmas social in The Plough for members and others who have helped us. Our usual spring nightingale walk in May was not so well attended this year, either by people or nightingales, but we did hear them and people seemed 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 in June 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 a wildflower 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.

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.

There was a national survey of selected areas for House Martin nests this year. None of the selected areas was in Plumpton, but we undertook our own survey, which we last did in 2009, and counted 120 nests 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. Another species that we have tried to keep an eye on is Turtle Dove. This is a highly threatened species in Britain (and elsewhere). 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.

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 a project from Plumpton College has found evidence of a good colony not far from the nearest place where we have found it, and some closer areas where we didn't find it. The Group now has two wildlife or 'trail' cameras, which are available to members on loan. 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.

We have continued our work on the wildflower areas at the station through the Station Partnership Scheme, which station users tell us they value greatly. Other meadows, such as that at the Plough, also looked very good this year. 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 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. We continue to give advice to a range of people about wildlife and their habitats.

In 2016 we hope to continue our programme of activities and expeditions, surveys and conservation work. If you would like to join us, please go to our website at <http://plumptonwildlifegroup.weebly.com/> or contact the secretary, Catherine Jackson, on 01273 890 219.

And please don't forget the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch on 30/31 January (details at <http://www.rspb.org.uk/>). Tony Hutson has been amalgamating local findings every year. Send him your results at Hutson.t@btinternet.com