

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Rugby Group AGM 4th February 2015

Minutes

Present: -

Steve Batt, SB; Phil Parr, PP; Cyril Cleaver, CC; Jan Elliott, JE; Frank Ollerenshaw, FO; Karl Curtis, KC; Gerry Allen, GA; Neville Weston, NW; Derek Lill, DL; Margaret Richards, MR; Jon Bourne, JB; Frances Bennett, FB; Chris Godding, CG;

SB welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

Apologies were received from Tony Landless, Peter Hanby, Diana and Colin Forbes-Powney, Malcolm Hall, Ken Monk, Matt Clements.

Everyone introduced themselves and the trophy from the Heart of England in Bloom Competition was passed around for everyone to see.

Treasurer's Report

Frank handed out a statement of accounts to everyone showing last year's expenditure (see attached). Frank said Goodbye after 10 years as treasurer and SB presented him with a gift in recognition and gratitude for his work. He accepted to a round of applause. Jon Bourne was welcomed as his successor and transfer of duties is under way.

Cock Robin Wood (CRW). Volunteer Warden - Derek Lill.

Report from DL attached.

There has been no contact with the Forest School, KC said that he would contact them and see what their intentions were. If they were no longer interested then he had other groups that would like to get involved.

Slashers and a pole saw are on a wish list, KC to help with achieving this wish. Coppiced wood is accumulating; chipping it would solve the problem. Nest boxes have been put up with new hole plates, home made from old tin cans!

Lots of positive feedback on the hedge around the site continues, SB was very complimentary. JE asked if there were plans to remove non native trees but DL said that that would leave only cherry, hazel and apple trees. DL to attend a tree-pruning course at Brandon in the near future. 506 volunteer hours of work done by 310 attendees. SB suggested that DL enter CRW in the Rugby in Bloom Competition this year.

Windmill Spinney is in need of some TLC. CRW volunteers have carried out a litter pick but more needs to be done. A tree preservation order makes it difficult to do anything, but a visit from Nature Force would help. A large cypress too near to houses needs to be removed and replaced by 5 hazels. Brambles and rhododendrons need to be cleared.

Swift Valley. See attached the report from Volunteer Warden – Chris Godding and Neville Weston

The banks of the canal are under severe pressure from the amount of water being pumped in from the new housing estate and from the wet weather. The canal needs fencing off or grazing will have to stop. The Canal and Rivers Trust cannot help because they have no money, though they would object to posts being put in along the edge of the canal. The creation of ponds has been suggested as a solution under “permitted development” and to this end Jamie Harris from WWT at Brandon has been asked to put forward a design for approval by Rugby Borough Council (RBC). The design could be implemented at the end of the summer. KC will talk to Chris Worman (CW) from the RBC about this and the fact that the path is disintegrating and is becoming unsuitable for disabled use. David Foster of the Rugby Disability Forum may be able to help.

Reports on local reserves by Phil Parr (See attached)

Ashlawn Cutting. See attached report (with lots of photos) from PP

None of the poppy seeds, commemorating the start of the 1st World War, distributed by the council and sown by the Group have grown. Perhaps they need disturbed ground? Maybe they will germinate this year.

Pond and marsh work has been successful with dragonflies in good numbers. Grass cutting usually takes place between September and December but this year we will do some early cutting in August because the wildflowers come up again which is beneficial to some butterflies. We are hoping that the habitat piles created by clearing scrub and grass cuttings will prove attractive to grass snakes.

PP has won in the “Pride of Rugby Awards” for his massive and tireless contribution as a conservation volunteer over many years. All agreed that this award was richly deserved not only for his practical work but also his meticulous record keeping and infectious enthusiasm. Congratulations Phil.

SB hurt his arm rendering him unable to use the brushcutter, GA stepped into the breach and has done all of the recent cutting SB said a big thank you to GA for the work that he has done at Ashlawn Cutting.

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) They are non-statutory areas of local importance for nature conservation that complement nationally and internationally designated geological and wildlife sites. The Habitat and Biodiversity Authority (HBA) does surveys and puts forward appropriate sites for designation and this should help to get funding for improvements.

However LWS status seems to offer little protection against development.

Malpass Site

Mike Slater of Butterfly Conservation is maintaining a good relationship with Cemex and is heavily involved in plans for the future of the site now that the Climafuel Plant has been built. Plans for wildlife include the maintenance of ponds, pools and the chalky bank and the use of wildflower seeds. Steve Cook from the council is showing an interest in wildflower sites in the area

See attached report by PP for the following local reserves

Leicester Road Cycle Track / Hunters Lane Embankment LWS

Kilsby Lane Meadow LWS

Allan’s Meadow LWS - Lower Hillmorton.

Hillmorton Ballast Pits LWS

Newbold Quarry

Newton Picnic Site

Ashlawn Crematorium

Parkfield Road Allotment Site and Coton Power Line

Ashlawn Jubilee Wood

SB thanked PP enormously for all his work.

Rugby Wildlife Website and WWT Magazines

JE said that more people were contributing to the website and hoped this would continue. SB said that all that is required is a picture or two and a couple of sentences.

Future Activities

Steve Boswell the contractor is to continue with hedge laying at Ashlawn Cutting.

Visitors to the Cutting complaining about the state of the car park and the water logging on some parts of the track bed are being encouraged to ring the council. Though the problem is lack of money.

Phil Bett has been contracted to clear the scrub on Newton Cutting, paid for with Nature Improvement Area grant the NIA grant also enabled us to clear an area by St Peter's Road and the contractor (also Phil Bett) kindly delivered the chips to the HLW for the path.

Neil Sanderson has been very helpful, he got the local cubs/scouts to plant bulbs etc on the Cutting by St Peter's Road perhaps he could get the scouts to take on a bit of grassland management and control the ash tree growth immediately north of the area of the cutting that WWT looks after.

AOB

Ben Devine at WWT has said that Ashlawn Cutting needs more indication that it is a Nature Reserve.

There has been a successful bid for a Health and Well-being Grant from the County Council for way markers to be erected so that you can tell how far you have walked along the reserve.

KC is to organise money for DL to purchase a pole saw and slashers.

KC thanked our Group and said that WWT appreciated the work done and the cooperation shown.

JE proposed the nomination of all the existing committee members to stay in their posts. DL seconded this proposal. The committee was duly re-elected.

SB presented FO with a gift in appreciation of his work as Treasurer.

PP and MR thanked our Chairman SB for his continuing commitment and hard work for the group.

SB thanked JE for hosting the meeting and for the excellent cakes.
As there was no further business the meeting was closed.

Margaret Richards (Secretary)

Report on Cock Robin Wood February 2015

My attempt this year to keep a diary of activities failed around mid summer. Must try harder!!

February 2014

- we continued to remove some large holly thickets from Compartment A. The amount of light which flooded in was amazing. Not sure what the Forest School are doing - if anything.
- Five packets of poppy seeds received from RBC
- A further 10 metres of hedging laid, staked and bound.

March 2014

- Frogs and frog spawn in both ponds
- no activity at badger sett
- broken branches and dead shrubs cleared from Compartment B
- 3 robin boxes put up
- seeded various areas - woodland, pond edge, wildflower and ride/hedge plus poppy seeds.

April 2014

- minor repairs to rabbit/deer fencing

May 2104

- Had a surprise visit from 2 classes from Bilton First School. I gave an impromptu chat to both,

It was really good and up lifting to see the wood being used in this way by the local schools. Something needs to be done with Windmill Spinney to make it accessible for the schools. (Nature Force day would make a real difference - must speak to Pete)

June/July 2014

- concentrated on clearing all the scallops along the field edge. Some trees too big for comfort with hand tools in the top scallop. Time for Mr Chainsaw. Also need to coppice several areas where hazel has been allowed to grow into unmanageable trees
- no plant survey this year - expert not available

Nov/Dec 2014 and Jan2015

- pressed on with the final stretch of hedging. The last 5 metres were a bit thin but time will see. Some new hawthorn shoots/holly from the wood will be transplanted to fill the gaps.
- Cleared more dead shrubs and cut back to allow light to the ride edges.
- a large willow has died on the cross roads and is dropping dead branches - our next task (a lot of willow is becoming dry and dying having been planted in the dry areas of the wood)
- Cleaned out all bird boxes. Repaired with homemade hole plates as necessary. Most used.
-

The threat of housing on the wood and surrounding fields has caused some consternation. We are hoping this is an aspiration by RBC and not a promise!!

Last but by no means least, I wish to record my thanks to all the volunteers who have attended our sessions over the past year. It has been encouraging to see this group grow over the past few months - I have had to buy more mugs and boil up three flasks - hooray!!

Derek Lill
Work party leader.

Swift Valley Report 2014

2014 was another successful year for the Friends of Swift Valley. Our small group of volunteers recorded 670 hours working on a variety of tasks on site, continuing the work of previous years removing of trees to open up the canopy of the woodlands, coppicing and dead hedging, to protect re-growth and create habitat. We have also carried out our first hedge laying project, along the entrance drive to the car park and lifting the crown of the trees in the adjacent wooded area to the car park, making a visual improvement to the entrance and car park areas.

Nature Force also contributed a further 266 hours on 4 visits throughout the year, assisting with the woodland work, stock fencing and control of invasive plants, making a total of 936 Volunteer Hours recorded at Swift Valley.

Neville W continued with bird and butterfly surveys throughout the summer months, and our thanks go to Butterfly Conservation Volunteers who supported us early in the year. We also had a visit in the summer from one of our colleagues from Survey Force who conducted a "lowland meadow condition survey" which highlighted a need to improve the diversity of plant species on our grassland.

We have continued our efforts on meadow improvement in grazing field 3, with the addition of 250 plus wild flower plants and seed supplied by WWT through Brandon. A continuing concern to our plans for this area is the amount of water leakage from the "Old Canal Arm" effectively turning a third of the field into a bog and resulted in us being unable to get a hay cut on the meadow this year. Control of the water level in the old arm is a contributory factor to the amount of leaks we have encountered this year, as a result (we understand) from the building site's permission to drain excess water into the canal, and this together with some damage to the banking caused by the grazing cattle, the water leakage problem is now a major concern to us and is now we believe damaging the structure of the site and has been again raised with Karl Curtis the WWT's Reserves manager.

The invasive plants are still a big problem i.e. ragwort and ground thistle. The thistle is becoming a big problem in grazing Field 4 along with ragwort, Field 3 has improved, but Field 1 is getting worse as the building site across the old arm, is overgrown with ragwort, so this is of concern for the coming years.

In 2014, Swift Valley attained its 1st Environmental Gold Award in the Rugby in Bloom competition, we also have had a number of positive reports and feedback from visitors and guests from Brownsver Hall Hotel.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Rugby BC (Steve Worman) and the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust who have donated tooling to our volunteer group and Nature Force for all their help and support over the last year.

Dates for your diary, Friday 17th July 8:30pm David Brown is running a Moth Night at Swift Valley Nature Reserve. Also Sat 13th June 8:30pm at Dollmans Farm Orchard, just outside Hillmorton, on the A428 road to Crick.