

# Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Rugby Group AGM 1st February 2016

## Minutes

Present: -

Steve Batt, SB; Phil Parr, PP; Tony Landless, TL; Jan Elliott, JE; Karl Curtis, KC; Gerry Allen, GA; Neville Weston, NW; Derek Lill, DL; Margaret Richards, MR; Chris Godding, CG; Steve Wright, SW; David Gelsthorpe-Hill, DGH; Matt Clements, MC; Diana Forbes-Powney, DFP.

SB welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

Apologies were received from Jon Bourne and Cyril Cleaver

### **Treasurer's Report**

Please see attached Statement of accounts.

The donations were:-

£500 from Rugby Borough Council (RBC)

£300 from private tree management in Stockton by SB and Ian Drummond.

£50 from SB's artist friend from the sale of a painting

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

#### **See Appendix C**

DL attended a course on pruning apple trees. It is not known which varieties of apples have been planted. Can we find out? The paths are the responsibility of RBC and are very muddy. Can Chris Worman provide chippings? The Forest School seem to be using the area (compartment) designated for them. There have been some changes to the personnel in charge of the Forest School so hopefully it will continue. DL got the pole saw slashers requested last year. KC said more tools could be available if necessary.

### **Swift Valley. See APPENDIX S for the report from Volunteer Warden – Chris Godding and Neville Weston**

Damage to the site from cattle grazing, heavy machinery replacing telegraph poles and wet weather conditions cause flooding problems to continue. KC asked NW to get some photos in order to apply for compensation, offset money from the Eden Park builders and money from the Disability Forum to help with the cattle damage. KC will talk to Dave Whitlock about grazing management and weed wipe contractor to attack creeping thistles in early July. Could the builders donate their work for a day?

## **Ashlawn Cutting. (Ashlawn Cutting Diary. See Appendix A.)**

The volunteer hours this year amount to 4780 and include the contribution from Rugby School and Nature Force. These figures are a great bargaining tool for funding.

Ashlawn has been designated a Local Wildlife Site. More emphasis has been put on rotation, leaving some areas uncut.

Silver Washed Fritillary and Small Heath Butterflies seen on the Cutting for the first time.

## **Malpass Site**

A group working with the Small Blue butterfly is showing an interest in the site. The chalk bank is in good condition and providing wildflower food plants for a variety of butterflies

PP and SB have been giving advice on plans for mitigation to RBC on the area that they own from Coton Park down to Clifton Brook.

## **Rugby Wildlife Website and WWT Magazines see APPENDIX W for report by JE**

Magazine deliverers were sent a WWT calendar which was much appreciated (fabulous photos). Please keep the contributions to the website coming! SB said that all that is required is a picture or two and a couple of sentences.

## **AOB**

KC thanked all the volunteers for managing the reserves and will try to resolve any problems arising

DFP Proposed thanks to SB and Belinda for hosting the meeting seconded by everyone!

MC thanked on behalf of the Paddox School and said that 500 children had accessed the Forest School using willow, hazel and ash from the Cutting.

DL took the Rugby in Bloom Trophy.

The same committee members will continue for the next year.

There was no other business and the meeting was closed.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **January 2015**

Cyril was unable to carry on with the Rugby School Group due to family commitments

Sightings:- Buzzard, Fieldfares

### **February 2015**

Steve Boswell finished off laying the hedge by the Healthy Living Walk (HLW) Willow regrowth was cleared from Pytchley Marsh.

The brushcutting and raking on the HLW and the area by the tennis courts was finished

Sightings:- Grey Wagtail, Small Tortoiseshell and Brimstone Butterflies and a Muntjac Deer

### **March 2015**

It was pleasing to see good numbers in our recently cleared marsh where I counted over 150 frogs and over 100 clumps of spawn.

Reservoir Pond had over 300 frogs and 120 clumps of spawn.

St Peter's grassland restoration

It was good to be able to advise those present on the project to restore flower rich grassland on the scallop, and what is needed for it to be completed.

### **April 2015**

1000 plugs of larval food were planted for the uncommon Grizzled and Dingy Skippers on the grasslands south of Ashlawn Bridge in an effort to encourage these species back to the reserve. Small colonies still occur locally on CEMEX land at Parkfield Road, and at Draycote Water

From the middle of April the Blackthorn blossom was glorious, many Violets were in the grassland, Marsh Marigold in the pools and now at the beginning of May huge number of Dandelion are flowering locally.

Richard Wright conducted a survey of the reserves many pools, but his initial report was that the water quality was poor as sewage continues to seep from the Onley sewer in a number of places and we have a huge problem with alien species from people releasing stuff from their fish tanks and ponds.

Considering it was a record year for frog spawn (over 1100 clumps counted compared with 600 or so last year) but only two tadpoles were found.

Sightings: - Willow Tit, Jays, Mistle Thrush Green Woodpecker, Brimstone, Comma, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell

### **May 2015**

Sightings; - Butterflies first appeared in big numbers on 6<sup>th</sup> April and this first really gloriously sunny warm day brought the hibernating species out in big numbers. 25 Brimstone, 21 Peacock, 15 Small Tortoiseshell and 5 Comma were seen on the reserve, but there wasn't a great deal of nectar sources ready for them, just a little Pussy Willow and Coltsfoot on which hovering Bee-fly's also feed on nectar. The next really good day was on the 21<sup>st</sup> with Orange-tip (13), Speckled Wood's (10), Green-veined Whites, Large and Small Whites and the first Holly Blues appearing.

Next to look out for are Common Blue and Small Copper in the grasslands.

## **June 2015**

A meeting was held with Chris Worman of RBC to discuss flooding and disabled access on the Great Central Way (Ashlawn Cutting)

Phase 1 would be a short-term solution to try to move the water into the marsh with a series of trenches and ditches.

Phase 2 would be a longer term plan including, re-establishing the track bed, better drainage, DDA access and signage

CW to speak to the Rugby Disability Forum about a joint funding bid with WWT, as any funding bid would need to be made by the third sector organisation.

General

Selective thinning works were discussed at the St Peters Road area - CW to liaise with Dave Gower.

Trench also needs clearing out, and planting along cemetery railing needs completing - autumn/ winter works.

Dog bins. - Could they be relocated near entrances for ease of use / emptying?

CW to arrange a follow up meeting later in the year.

Sightings: - Marbled White Butterflies

## **July 2015**

PP led a guided walk along the Cutting, a gloriously sunny day and our first meeting with Steve Wright!

Lots of mellilot pulling.

Linda Trost from the Flora Group provided PP with some records pertaining to the Cutting.

Sightings; - Dave Champion recorded seeing a White Admiral.

Silver-washed Fritillaries

## **August 2015**

**TREE FELLING**

**GRASS CUTTING**

**Please keep dogs under strict control**

A quiet time for workparties on the Cutting with this sign suggested as a warning notice for walkers when the workparties are active.

## **September 2015**

Ashlawn Cutting achieved Gold and 1<sup>st</sup> prize in the Rugby in Bloom Competition. Great progress on grass cutting with Gerry Allen and Steve Wright on the brushcutters.

## **October 2015**

For the 3rd year running the group of local Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh HSS people were volunteering at Ashlawn Cutting for their SEWA day. A day when they help local communities. Many thanks to them for a successful day's work. Great fun and much appreciated.

Brushcutting work carried on apace.

Sightings; - Grass Snake!

## **November 2015**

We had acceptance of our proposed management plan from the Trust and Natural England  
Please find the management plan on a separate attachment. (It is a thing of beauty and should be framed. Says Margaret)

Measured Mile introduced.

## **December 2015**

### **Ashlawn Update 1-12-15 by Phil Parr**

Our volunteers have been taking advantage of the recent mild weather over the last month with the aim of finishing the necessary management of the reserves grassland before Christmas.

We've finished Section 5 and Short-cut glade just south of Ashlawn Bridge and then had several sessions to cut and clear the abundant growth of the wildflower grassland of Jolly's Walk and Jolly's Meadow just south of the old station site.

This proved to be heavy work as the vegetation was so wet, but it is now done and we are really pleased with the result.

We are now working on Section 9 half way between Pytchley and Ashlawn bridges, Steve & Gerry have cut most of it and this just leaves raking off all the cuttings to encourage more wild flower diversity next year.

Some of us have even started working on the reserves hedges.

A woodland regeneration scallop being created by the enthusiastic group of young students from Rugby School just south of Section 9. A dead hedge is being created from all the scrub they have been clearing. This will provide habitat cover for many species and eventually a green hedge will grow within it from seeds dropped by birds and mammals.

You may have noticed the display of wildflowers that popped up naturally in the glade previously cleared. We were really surprised and pleased with the show but we will let nature take its course in these scallops and they will slowly progress back to woodland. During that time, they will provide lots of nesting opportunities and food for small birds.

Sightings; - Treecreeper is sometimes seen. Nuthatches are heard and we have reports of Raven being heard in the area.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Report on Cock Robin Wood February 2016**

So far as I can recall, we continued to complete the lower section of the hedge down to Sainsbury roundabout.

Some work was done this year on the various apple trees - pruning and thinning to allow the trees to develop. One tree was found to provide excellent 'keepers'.

A group of old hazel was felled with the help of Pete Thorn and a chain saw. A splendid display of wood anemone took their place.

Mainly this year we have concentrated on opening up areas of the wood to allow light in. The cross roads was cleared back (but last week some time the council decided to plant four trees - why?!!!!)

An are where we have cowslips just becoming established has been doubled in size and another apple tree discovered.

Overhanging trees where removed or cut back along the back path and this will allow the gras to re-establish after the wet start.

A further three scallops in some old hazel groves have been created in compartment A ( again with the help from Pete to remove the stumps) and some cherry trees thinned out.

It is no longer clear whether the forest school is functioning so we will probably get stuck into this area to thin, scallop and generally tidy up.

A fresh section of hedge is currently being laid (by the Dunchurch Road roundabout) and this is due for completion in a couple of weeks time.

I should like to record my thanks to the regular volunteers who turn out every week and whose enthusiasm for being told what to do has enabled us to continue looking after the Wood.

Derek Lill

Work Party Leader.

## **APPENDIX S**

### **Friends of Swift Valley – Conservation Report 2015**

Friends of Swift Valley completed their 6<sup>th</sup> year of operation and are steadily growing number of volunteers recorded a total of 624hrs of work on various tasks at Swift. We continued the work of winter 14/15 and completing the section of woodland from the previous year removing some trees to open up the canopy of the woodland, coppicing and dead hedging, to protect re-growth and create habitat. We have also completed 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 area's.

In March we planted a couple of hundred young tree's and thorn whips to improve the diversity of our woodland edges and hedgerows, supplied to us through one of Brandon's projects and contacts. Thanks to Karl C for his efforts in this matter.

We continued with breeding bird and Butterfly surveys throughout the spring & summer months. Survey Force visited us in the summer to conduct a "lowland

meadow condition survey” which again highlighted a need to improve the diversity of plant species on our grassland. (Bird Species =85, Butterfly Species 21. Small Copper & Common Blue’s crashing from a total count of 60’s in previous year to single figures in 2015.)

To the hours already quoted Nature Force visited the site on a couple of occasions helping with the woodland thinning project and fencing, contributing another 120 hrs to our total for the year.

Swift Valley and its volunteers were honoured again to receive our second gold award accreditation from Heart of England in Bloom last summer.

To bring us back down to Earth and on a slightly negative note, the challenges facing us are the continued erosion of the canal banks from ingress of the grazing cattle, damaging the footpaths and possibly adding the amount of leakage from the canal. The flooding problem in the fields has obviously been worsened by the wet weather we have encountered over the winter, then add to that the Electricity or power line operators crossing these boggy areas with large machinery to replace telegraph poles resulting in considerable damage to the grassland area’s and in what we considered to be our wild flower meadow. This leads me to mention, in the minutes from last year Karl was going to raise a creation of ponds project with RBC (request an update on this matter from KC)

One volunteer still waiting on a ladder course to be able to access and cleaning the bird box’s

Another challenge to Swift is the problem of Invasive plants, we cannot now manage the spread of Ragwort and creeping Thistle in some areas. This has become a major problem not only for the grazier but also a concern for us, as our small group of volunteers after a few years at this activity have become less inclined (for one reason or another) to keep turning up on this arduous and undesirable task. So we will require support in this matter for the coming year. KC.

Not wanting to end on a sour note, we’ve had another couple of volunteers join us over the last few months bringing our number up to double figure, and at present channelling the group’s enthusiasm for Hedge laying by working on the Hedge row along the path way leading from the car park.

## **APPENDIX W**

On Magazines - Deliverers have expressed appreciation of Calendars. Some are disappointed to loose round and doubt they will volunteer for other work, unfortunately.

On Website - feel it would be useful to put out details of plans for up and coming work on the blog. I have done this for Jan/Feb. This could encourage new volunteers. Need more pictures and feed back on work achieved.

On development - Phil P. has purchased a manual on Wordpress. I have written a report detailing creation & development of the site so far. Three new items were mentioned in the manual of which I have made a note. I will pursue when time allows.