

## W.W.T. Rugby Local Group - 2013 AGM

### Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Rugby Group AGM 5th February 2013 Minutes

Present:-

Steve Batt, SB; Phil Parr, PP; Cyril Cleaver, CC; Jan Elliott, JE; Frank Ollerenshaw, FO; Karl Curtis, KC; Tony Landless, TL; Gerry Allen, GA; Wendy Grant, WG; Chris Godding, CG; Neville Weston, NW; Derek Lill, DL; Margaret Richards, MR.

1. SB welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.
2. Apologies from Steve Trotter, Christine Rundle and Amanda Evans

#### **Reports from local conservation areas.**

The volunteer hours worked on the local sites were very impressive, increasing by 73 to a total 2868 hours. The volunteer groups helping towards this total were our own Sunday & Thursday groups, our school groups, WWT Nature Force Groups, extra work sessions particularly to complete the marsh job, and time spent doing species surveys and collating results.

These are available on a separate report if needed.

SB thanked PP for all his work in collating these numbers that can be used as important evidence when applying for grants and other dealings with Councils.

PP reported that he went to a meeting where somebody raised concerns about Rugby Borough Council's (RBC) support for the County's Habitat Biodiversity Audit unit (HBA). It has since been learnt that although they haven't contributed annual funding for the last 2 years they do still use the unit when needed for specific survey's and pay accordingly.

There is some concern that up to date biological information may not be available when the Rugby Borough Plan comes up for review, which may be very soon.

RBC is to employ the HBA to survey Clifton Road cemetery prior to improvement.

For more info on this unit see -

<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/B3A796AFD343625580256A2500433071>

#### **Ashlawn Cutting.**

Pytchley Marsh.

SB reported the successful completion of the first stage of restoration of the marsh. The contracting was excellently done by Phil Betts and thanks go to RBC for their support. Feedback from members of the public as the year progressed has been very positive and heartening. We have had a few more kingfisher sightings.

PP reported an excellent year at Ashlawn Cutting and gave special thanks Steve for leading the Marsh Project and to Cyril and Diana for their work with the Rugby School pupils on Thursday afternoons during term time.

#### **The proposed crematorium**

This is opposite the reserves most important grassland, plans have been approved and the project is waiting full funding. Talks with RBC about the creation of a wild flower meadow to extend habitats for our pressured species and a buffer zone between the Cutting and the crematorium need to be followed up and we need to see the latest plans of the site to suggest ideas.

**Jubilee Wood** is below the crematorium nearer Rainsbrook. The council was able to get funding to help with planting woodland but would have found funding a country park more difficult. Some of us voiced concerns that dense woodland was not in keeping with the open landscape of the valley but the Trust had to judge its response on just the matter of biodiversity loss or gain. Woodland won over the open landscape but we can't help thinking that species such as The Brown Hare, Skylark and Short-eared Owl will lose out.

Volunteers and contractors are now planting trees.

CW of RBC is creating a database of people interested in doing other conservation work in the borough. This could help with getting more help on our reserves.

### **Ashlawn's Grasslands**

The wet summer caused exuberant growth causing a lot of extra work, but this could be good news for the grassland habitat because in cutting and raking, we have removed a higher proportion of nutrients, poor soil favours wild flowers. However, the excessive water and the poor state of drainage have resulted in flooding that will destroy some low lying species rich grassland. The drains are old and have silted up, Sustrans (the cycleway organisation) have responsibilities for the path, and the rest of the Cutting's drainage is the responsibility of RBC & Severn-Trent.

### **"Healthy Living Walk"**

This is being created on part of the reserve that used to be a field south of the old station beside the railway.

Steve Batt & Neil Sandison worked together to apply for a grant from Warwickshire County Council. This was successful but only provided some of the money. RBC again came to our rescue with work in kind. Dave Whitlock the contractor has battled against appallingly wet conditions to clear a woodland ride and chip wood for the path. In essence the walk is now there but more work will be needed to finish the job.

**The Forester Moth** has not been seen since 2005. Ashlawn Cutting was one of very few sites where this moth survived. David Brown, the county moth expert, said it might still be present. "Don't give up hope yet"!

### **Ashlawn Cutting's Management Plan.**

This came up for review in 2012. PP has created new more detailed maps to help those not familiar with the reserve.

### **Species Databases: -**

PP has compiled databases for the flora, fungi, frogs, and butterflies.

SB continues with bird surveys.

Local expert Dave Champion has helped with fungi

Continued survey input from others is needed to keep them up to date.

Studying grassland species may enable us to spot changing environment in the Cutting and potentially enable us to understand why certain species are in one area and not another.

KC (representative of WWT) said that PP's management database of volunteers, volunteer hours worked and brushcutting hours done and the wildlife data will guide what we do in the future.

## W.W.T. Rugby Local Group - 2013 AGM

SB reminded everyone that Ashlawn Cutting won Gold at the Rugby in Bloom Competition 2012. He suggested that Swift Valley and Cock Robin Wood should enter too.

### **Malpass Site.**

We held a successful work party here on 27<sup>th</sup> Feb 12 and a Guided Walk on 24th May, On the guided walk we recorded 63 Grizzled Skipper - by far the biggest number ever seen here, and 7 Dingy Skipper - not seen on the site since 1997.

SB kindly agreed to stand in for PP at a meeting (14-2-13) with BC, & Sita (the developer), and CEMEX's conservation adviser from RSPB to discuss mitigation for wildlife as site work on the new Climafuel plant is about to get underway.

The county ecologists have done a very good job in picking up the points and ideas we put into the mitigation proposals for this site in 2008. Feedback from the meeting sounds very positive. Butterfly Conservation's help with this and their input to other CEMEX sites is much appreciated.

**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 HBA surveys and puts forward appropriate sites for designation and this helps during planning issues and perhaps helping to get funding for improvements. Several sites had planning issues this last year and these were seen as test cases for how much protection LWS status would give in the recently approved government guidelines for protecting the countryside. Sadly we were rather disappointed. See below.

### **Leicester Road Cycle Track / Hunters Lane Embankment LWSp**

This track is being created by Sustrans in partnership with RBC. We together with Butterfly Conservation - Warwickshire asked for a new cutting near Consul Road to be left without topsoil so that it could be seeded with wild flowers. We have now partly done this. The Hunters Lane Embankment has elms supporting a remnant population of the uncommon White-letter Hairstreak butterfly and also uncommon plants including C. Centaury, Ploughman's Spikenard and the path below C. Calamint, which is only present on 6 other sites in the county. The site has now been surveyed by the HBA and is being put forward as an LWS. (Not sure if funding problems are slowing this)

### **Kilsby Lane Meadow LWS**

Although recently designated LWS it almost immediately came under pressure for the building of an indoor sports facility that will encroach on the meadow.

We and the WWT Planning officer put in objections to the new building encroaching on the LWS. We voiced concerns that increased activity near the LWS would affect more timid wildlife such as the Brown Hare, and Short-eared Owl, and the lights from evening use would adversely affect moth populations and the creatures that feed upon them.

There is room for the football pitches to be moved to accommodate it.

Sadly the planning Committee approved the application.

PP is not sure what mitigation has been agreed to compensate for this loss.

PP continued to monitor wildlife here. The meadow became increasingly difficult to get round due the exuberant growth and wetness, and being so waterlogged RBC were unable to cut it.

### **Allan's Meadow LWS - Lower Hillmorton.**

A privately owned wet meadow with exceptional flora. Marsh Valerian has been recently identified there. We hope the recent LWS designation will help protect it as the old radio station's Mast Site is developed.

### **Hillmorton Ballast Pits LWS**

The Borough Plan classed this site as Open Space – an important part of the urban area. It used to have locally uncommon species including Small Heath, Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper and uncommon plants.

As the site has been neglected for so long large areas have scrubbed up. If it was reassessed it would probably not currently be approved as qualifying for LWS. Recent owners fenced it to keep people out and have long been trying to get the site built on. I believe the number of houses has been reduced to 76 and the plans include a strip of restored species rich grassland running parallel with the railway - hardly enough to replace what was once a very good site.

Building plans were to be resubmitted towards the end of 2012 and may now have been approved.

### **Newbold Quarry**

Nature-force groups with some of our members from Rugby continue to carry out management work. A local volunteer continues to monitor butterflies – report available. The excessive rain this year has caused a landslip blocking a path at both ends.

**Hillmorton Mast site:** PP heard recently that the County Council have raised issues about Ashlawn Road and Hillmorton Road being inadequate for the huge increase predicted in traffic and this is holding up the development.

SB thanked PP enormously for all his work.

### **Treasurer's report.**

FO gave out copies of the statement of accounts for the Group y/e 2012. The finances are in a healthy state but SB would like to wait a while before we make any decisions where to use the money. SB will be asking CW for more funding for this current year.

SB thanked FO for his work

**Swift Valley.** Report from CG as follows:-

*During the previous year we have put in about 390 working hours between various personnel, the work has consisted of, clearing plastic from around tree bases, tree thinning and Ragwort pulling. We've also had the help from a local company (through the Trust) Experian Identity and Fraud who help with some Ragwort pulling. During the summer we have struggled with the Ragwort. In 1 field we got on top of it, with help from Nature Force, but in the others it got to much to control it, this was due to weather and me not getting enough dates in with the nature force calendar. There was also a number of hours spent sorting out the entrance to the site. Mud had collected at the bottom of the tarmac slope, stopping the rainwater draining away.*

*At the 2012 AGM, I pointed out the deterioration of the footpaths through out the site, to which, there has been no improvement as yet. The council did cut the edges once. I think this should be at least twice a year. In 2013, the pathways and gateways are going to be improved (through a grant) to suit the disabled people that visit the site.*

*At the back end of 2012 the Environment Agency did some work on the River Swift (redirecting) and one of our Ponds, I believe they will be returning in the spring to plant some reeds etc.*

## W.W.T. Rugby Local Group - 2013 AGM

*A real big change to Swift Valley is the start to the new Eden Park Housing project to the east of the site, which will enclose us with the Swift Valley Industrial Estate. I have concerns with safety of the canal, which I have mentioned to Karl Curtis.*

*We still need some experts down Swift Valley to tell us what species we have there i.e. Flowers, Moths and Butterfly's etc. - questions are asked of us.*

*We've had a request from Mark Pawsey, to come down, on one of our work party days, I have not replied to his request, as I feel we need to get risk assessments up to date and First Aiders trained before we invite people like this to the site on work parties.*

The fence near the lakes needs some attention. The problem of the water near the entrance needs to be solved by RBC.

There is a gap in the fence near where the river has been redirected, this is the responsibility of the Environment Agency, also the canal is leaking and is the responsibility of the Canals and Rivers Trust, KC said he would follow both these problems up this up. KC also said he would see about getting first aid training for the Swift Valley volunteers.

A wild flower survey was done on the site 2 years ago but a visit from WWT Brandon Survey Force would be very welcome in order to give the volunteers information about the species on the site that they can pass on to visitors.

The grass needs cutting on a more regular basis, KC recommends three times a year. The paths need attention and are the responsibility of RBC and Chris Worman is the person to contact. PP suggested that any member of the public expressing an opinion about the state of any of the paths in any of the reserves should be given a card showing names and contact details of the relevant authorities and be encouraged to express their concerns. NW said that costs of disabled access (initiated by Rugby Disability Group) were very high and though RBC were in favour of the project they did not get the full grant that they asked for in order to complete the job. What will be the way forward? KC said he would look in to it.

SB thanked CG and NW for all their work.

**Cock Robin Wood.** Report from DL as follows:-  
***Report on Cock Robin Wood February 2013***

*Another varied year, with some tasks more enjoyable than others.*

*Litter picks continue each week, the car park being the most needy although we do find strange little caches of cans in odd places!*

*Scaloping along the field edge has been completed and the existing scallops cleared of brambles and brush this year.*

*The hedge laying section was completed and greened up over the spring/summer. A new section is to be started next week as we progress down towards the Sainsbury roundabout.*

*Our plant survey this year was conducted in two parts. The first we completed earlier when the flowers were in bloom. This made identification easier for the inexperienced. Bernie Watson kindly came along later and added a few we had missed. 67 species identified.*

## W.W.T. Rugby Local Group - 2013 AGM

*Nature Force conducted the Opal survey this year, and although the results have not been published, I am confident that the ponds continue in fine fettle. This year the 'small' pond is considerably bigger and may, if it continues to maintain its present level, produce some interesting survey results for the first time since we took on the maintenance of the wood.*

*This year we decided to make a start on some major thinning of sections of the wood. Consequently, Ian Drummond kindly offered his time and a chain saw, and we dramatically thinned a section along the estate edge of Compartment A. It will be interesting to see how the wood floor develops over the next few years.*

*Bilton Junior School have expressed interest in running a Forest School and The Trust have had some meetings with the school. I have designated Comp C which is as far from the beaten track as you can get in CRW, has a few open areas, and lots of trees which they can thin. We are waiting for staff to be trained and I believe the intention is to start this spring.*

*The bird boxes have been checked and about 60% this year had empty nests, there was one failed nest ( six small white eggs) and the remainder were unused.*

*Current work has involved clearing out dead G. Rose which has helped open up parts of the wood floor, and cutting back the huge briars which reach to the canopy. Keeping the pond clear of logs and a few bits of rubbish has developed a skill with a half brick fastened to a piece of rope which we never would have considered as a management technique!*

*Finally I would like to express my thanks to our worthy volunteers who turn up rain or shine on Monday mornings.*

*Derek Lill  
Voluntary Warden*

New Zealand pygmy weed is a problem in the pond.

In spring 2013 Bilton Junior School will be starting to take groups of pupils to the wood for nature classes.

There is some Section 106 money for Cock Robin Wood, KC and DL to discuss where best to spend it.

SB thanked DL for his work.

**Rugby Wildlife Website and WWT Magazines** - Report from JE as follows:-  
**Ref: Magazine Deliveries**

*Good news is that since the advertisement on the packaging of the magazines, 4 people have come forward in this area. We are now delivering nearly 2/3rds of Rugby and Rugby villages with 30 people. Main outstanding areas/villages are as follows:-*

## W.W.T. Rugby Local Group - 2013 AGM

### **Outstanding areas**

New Bilton, off Lawford Road	24
Warwickshire College area	18
Crescent School area & Overslade Lane	19
Abbots Farm	6
Hillmorton	34
Kilsby	9
Clifton-upon-Dunsmore	32
Southam and surrounding villages	41
Long Lawford town end	28
Willoughby	15
Grandborough	12
Woolscott	2
Flecknoe	5
Monks Kirby	12

*Bad news is we still haven't replaced the other Magazine co-ordinator.*

*On a different tactic I have co-opted 2 people (Fern Hodges in Brownsover & Ann Boulton in Percival Road) to help with picking up the bundles of Magazines to reduce my load as I take on extra people. Today, I have spoken to Wendy in Long Furlong, another deliverer coming on board, who can also help retrieve bundles from Brandon.*

### **Ref: Website**

#### Current

*The WEBSITE has been up and running for 24 months now with contributions from a limited number of people.*

*It includes minutes from the AGM's.*

*A BLOG to give a history of activities on the various reserves, currently only Ashlawn/Draycote and a couple from Swift Valley.*

*A CALENDAR, which if you hover over highlighted dates leads to the Blog.*

*A list of forthcoming WORK PARTIES currently Ashlawn & Swift, with reference to Steve, Phil & Chris's phone number. I'm not sure we have had any response from this.*

*Any COMMENTS we received are disposed of and a note on the site is asking if anyone local would like to contribute to speak with Steve or Phil. I guess no-one has been forthcoming?*

#### Future

*I would like more people to contribute, either themselves or by emailing me details to add ([jobran@care4free.net](mailto:jobran@care4free.net)). E.g. Swift Valley, Cock Robin & Newbold Quarry. For each work party two or 3 sentences and a few pictures would be good.*

*It would perhaps be more help to add details for each forthcoming work party as to the nature of the work to be carried out, to encourage would be volunteers. A few words like the Nature Force meetings, which I have added.*

*Where else can we advertise the w/site? Website no longer appears on W.W.T. site. Warwickshire County Council Service Directory under Wildlife groups shows our group, but has the wrong website. Karl Curtis is the contact @ WWT. I emailed him in January. He has come back to me and asked for ours to be included and this has been actioned.*

*Jan Elliott, admin./coordinator*

*We need to advertise the website, perhaps putting a poster up in the library. MR to investigate.*

W.W.T. Rugby Local Group - 2013 AGM  
**Rugby Natural History Society**

TL is the Chairman.

There is a link to the RNHS from our wildlife website.

The membership continues to grow. At the moment there are 93 members.

In winter there is an indoor lecture programme with museum/field trips in the summer. Meetings are at 7.30 sharp in the Foxcroft Lecture Theatre, Science School Buildings, Barby Rd, Rugby.

**AOB**

**Rugby Local Plan:** - PP said that this plan is coming up for review.

The plan is the framework for the growth of the town. See -

[http://www.rugby.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents\\_info.php?documentID=204](http://www.rugby.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=204)

There will be announcements in the press and opportunities to influence this plan, and it is most important that you make any comments at an early stage, as the Draft Plan is being created, for it to be effective.

KC said that Gina Rowe, Head of Living Landscapes (Projects) at WWT had met with CW (RBC) re possibility of some money from a Nature Improvement Area's grant. A plan is to spend £1000 clearing some more of Pytchley Marsh – there may be more monies available elsewhere.

Rugby Urban Green Space has some money, which could be allocated to Jolly's Field to get the contractor to complete the job.

Mill Gardens, which is not a reserve, is under discussion for wildlife ideas.

Clifton Road cemetery and St Peter's Rd are having surveys to see if it is up to nature reserve standard but RBC is not funding this.

Rugby Urban Green Space has some money, which could be allocated to Jolly's Field to get the contractor to complete the job.

**Brownsover Mill Gardens:** - RBC hopes to improve this area that is adjacent to the recreation ground, but it is not a reserve. They have asked if we can help with ideas to improve wildlife habitats.

PP to send earlier records from this site to CW and also do a site visit to help with ideas.

The mill burnt down in 1956 but the reservoir is still there – see

<http://www.search.windowsonwarwickshire.org.uk/engine/theme/default.asp?theme=1346&text=0>)

RBC is to employ the Habitat Biodiversity Audit unit to survey Clifton Road cemetery prior to improvement.

3. There have been no nominations for new committee members and so the existing members will continue as before.

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

Those present thanked SB for hosting the meeting.

As there was no further business the meeting was closed.

Margaret Richards (Secretary)