

Fairfield Association
FAUNA and Orchard sub-Group [FOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 5 September 2012, 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Sheila Beven, Ellie Bulman (part), Graham Brandwood, Ken Capewell, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Tony Finn, Helen Hicks, Sue Nieduszynska, Ian Procter, Rebecca Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair), Philip Turner,

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Brennand, Dave Brookes, Oliver Fulton, Chris Workman.
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Accepted
3. **Matters arising from Minutes:** None
4. **Apple Day:** **Ellie** is organising this year's event on 29th September. She intends largely to keep the same, successful, format adopted last year. **Ellie** and **Mick** will deal with publicity. **Tony** has agreed to arrange various games, and **Graham** will offer some woodcraft activities. Dressing an apple tree will be added to the usual craft stall. There will be apple pie and muffin baking competitions (adults and children respectively). Setting up of marquees etc. will commence at 11.30am. It was noted that small tables and chairs have previously been borrowed from the Friends' Meeting House. Ellie hopes to use an apple press. although this needs a fixed base. **Mick** thought that there might be a suitable tree stump. **Ellie** will talk to Simon Gershon about sourcing an apple crusher. **Helen** has arranged to collect and store apples from the Storey Gardens. Apples from the Orchard will be picked in the volunteer session on 8th September (leaving enough for subsequent tree identification) and stored at Helen's (**Ian**). **Ellie** will review and update the existing risk assessment.
5. **Current/recent developments:**
 - **Rats:** Noticed in the rubble pile on the site of the proposed tool shed at Edenbreck Cottage. The Council's pest controller has laid poison. His first inspection suggests that the control has been successful, but he intends to make a further check.
 - **Lock on Sunnyside Lane bollard:** This has now been installed. **Mick** will arrange for extra keys to be cut.
 - **Notice vandalism:** The FAUNA 'rules' notice at the Orchard end has been vandalised, with the frame being ripped from its mountings. A replacement frame, that attaches more securely, will be bought (**Ian**).
6. **FLORA:** No developments.
7. **FAUNA:**
 - **Lock on the Paddock:** **Oliver** has now installed a padlock. He has several spare keys, but no more small padlocks. He was given permission to buy some more. It was suggested that one should be installed on the gate between the Hay and Big Meadows after a cow was observed scratching against the unlocked catch, potentially allowing the gate to swing open. It was agreed that the combination lock be retained on the Cromwell Road gate until it fails as it removes the need for a keyholder to be present when access is required.

- **Leaking ponds:** The shoulders of Alder Pond have been strengthened by volunteers (see 11). However, the cattle are already starting to trample the repairs. At Anna's Pool. Richard Storton has installed plastic piping and infilled with clay. However, the water level still seems quite low. The ponds will be monitored by **Graham** (see item 19).
 - **Leaflet:** A map still needs to be sourced, and photographs selected (**Hilary** and **Helen**).
 - **Concessionary path agreement:** **Oliver** is continuing to chase the progress of this agreement, as well as the Local Nature Reserve designation.
 - **Haymaking:** Weather conditions finally allowed Reuben Neville (Lancashire Wildlife Trust) to cut the hay on 4th September. A group of 12 volunteers turned the hay to help it dry on the 5th. Baling and wrapping the haylage is scheduled for the 6th.
 - **Wildflower seed collection and sowing:** Sheila has already collected (and is storing) quite a lot of local seed, and has her eye on various other plants whose seed is not yet fully ripe. She noted that some of the species collected may be more appropriate for sowing in verges rather than in the Hay Meadow. It was suggested that she looks at the wildflower border on the Lancaster University campus. Lancashire Wildlife Trust has agreed to supply seed again (but not in hay), including more yellow rattle. Given that there will be less seed available this year, Reuben Neville's advice is to allow the cattle to trample the remaining grass before sowing. The seed should be scattered in bare patches of earth or in one metre square areas where the grass has first been cut and scarified. A date for seed-sowing needs to be set (**Oliver**).
8. **Orchard mugs:** It is not proving easy to identify a reasonably-priced supplier. **Sue, Hilary** and **Philip** will continue to investigate.
9. **Breeding birds survey:** **Oliver** continues to chase Dan Haywood for his results.
10. **Invertebrate recording results:** The results of Chris Workman's Go Wild session in the Hay Meadow were circulated. The list shows a number of different insects, but nothing 'out of the ordinary'. There was agreement with **Oliver's** suggestion that these (and other wildlife survey results) should be added to the FA website as well as being reported to Natural England and Lancashire Wildlife Trust.
11. **Volunteer activities (see end):**
- **Ragwort:** Overall, this year's efforts to control the ragwort have been highly successful, although Ian urges vigilance for a further month. It was extremely gratifying to know that the haylage for the White Park cattle is a safe crop as very little ragwort was spotted as the hay was turned.
 - **Reports for August:** It is pleasing to see how healthy the hedge saplings are once the vegetation swamping them is cleared. **Philip** (sometimes with another volunteer) has been supplementing the efforts of formal volunteer sessions by working on the hedge along the Pads path. He was asked to continue this excellent work and clear the remaining short stretch of the path in his own time, allowing the September volunteer session to focus on FAUNA. Ian noted that there had been an impressive turnout of volunteers through the year so far, with over 40 names recorded in his contact book,

- **Tasks for September:** Identifying and labelling the rest of the apple trees is to be added to the list for September 8th. Philip gave some advice on management of the Fairfield Green 'hedge', which currently comprises thickets of gnarled dogwood. Since its main purpose is to keep children away from the substation, he considers it is best treated as a hedge, allowing it to grow as tall as it wants, but trimming the face. **Mick** and **Ken** have agreed to mow the Orchard in preparation for Apple Day.

12. **Edenbreck Cottage:**

- **Boundary meeting: Oliver** is still pursuing Lancaster City Council to identify the exact location of the boundary. Fraser Granell-Watson has been advised that his chicken run extends onto the FA's land, but this will be permitted for the time being given his application to buy this land.
- **Allotment holders' fence:** Laying of the FA's hedge between Edenbreck Cottage and the allotments has been on hold because of the allotment holders' fears about security. The allotment holders have now raised enough money to install a fence. However, they will not go ahead until Lancaster City Council makes its decision about selling part of the FA's land to Fraser.
- **Tool shed:** A site visit by the Council is expected as part of the planning application process. Fraser has taken the asbestos off the roof of his building, so it is all now ready for removal as soon as possible. However, **Dave** has been having problems contacting the Contractor. **Hilary** is preparing an outline application for a grant from a recently-advertised pot of City Council funds.

13. **Educational activities**

- **Schools' visits update:** The wet summer term resulted in the cancellation of three school visits, one by a new school (St Peter's). **Tony** plans to distribute an email newsletter containing suggestions for activities and he will continue trying to establish new contacts. He has been approached by the University of Cumbria who are considering using the Orchard/FAUNA to help student teachers practise planning outdoor visits.
- **School visit booking form and risk assessment:** Finalised versions that take account of comments on earlier drafts, were circulated. It was agreed that **Tony** would ask some of his regular teacher contacts for feedback on these forms.

14. **August Forest Craft sessions:** Three sessions were advertised by Graham. The first – aimed at older children (7+) because of the motor skills required – had no takers despite the good weather. Five families attended the session for younger children, and four attended the third session for mixed ages. It is hoped that increased awareness of what is offered (generated, for instance, by Graham's contribution at Apple Day) should make it easier in future for Forest School sessions to compete against the many other holiday activities provided for children.

15. **CRB checks:** There has been little progress. Mick reported that Michael Sheppard had become aware of government proposals to relax the system which could reduce the number of FA members needing to be CRB checked.

16. **Website updating:** FOG's prime concern is to have updated pages related to FAUNA on the website as soon as possible. **Tony** and **Sue** have offered to help Oliver with the drafting and layout and **Helen** will provide photographs.
17. **Planning for October path edge trimming:** Encroaching grass has reduced the width of the FAUNA footpath by up to a third. It is intended to dedicate the volunteer session on Saturday 13th October to tackling this. **Ian** will publicise the session widely in an effort to recruit additional help, especially from regular users of the FAUNA path. Participants will be asked to provide their own shears (long-handled or bring kneelers) and strimmers. Philip also noted that spades could be used to turn the grass back on itself. Ragwort will need to be removed before the grass can be tackled. Clippings will need to be barrowed round to the cows. The student volunteer session planned for either November or December will be used to complete the task if necessary. Any grass growing into the gravel cannot be dug out without destroying the path. It will be sprayed in the spring. Philip advocated the use of a shield (e.g. a piece of perspex with a handle) to prevent spray-drift.
18. **Start time for Wednesday volunteer sessions:** Ian has been concerned that the 6.30pm start is too early for some potential volunteers. The 7pm alternative, however, risks curtailing the length of the session, particularly at the start and end of the season. It was decided to leave the time at 6.30pm, but make it clear that people were welcome to arrive later (**Ian**).
19. **Inspection register:** **Graham** will present a draft list of items that need regular checking at the next meeting. In the meantime, he will monitor the water level in Anna's Pool and check with Richard Storton that the pipe is set correctly.
20. **Toilet facilities:** Tony has recently had to call on the generosity of local residents to provide emergency toilet facilities during school visits. With the numbers of schools and volunteers increasing, and more coming from outside the local catchment, Tony expects these emergency demands to increase. Although the tool shed has been designed to permit the incorporation of a toilet, the meeting felt that the problem was not great enough to warrant the expense and other hassles. Instead it was agreed to make more systematic arrangements for neighbours' toilets to be available as a contingency during school visits, volunteer sessions etc. (To be discussed at the next meeting.)
21. **Health and Safety Policy:** The second draft of the policy document written by the Trustees was circulated. Oliver and Michael Sheppard will now be turning their attention to the implementation document and the appendices. Oliver's request for suggestions and help in developing these documents was not considered further. It was felt that the FA meeting, not FOG, is the appropriate forum for discussion and decisions on these matters.
22. **AOB:**
 - **FAUNA Fields Access List:** It was agreed to add Ken Capewell (**Glenys**).
 - **First Aid Training:** Helen has attended a refresher course and is now qualified until August 2015.
23. **Date / place of next meeting :** Thursday 4 October and Thursday 8 November at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close.

Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:

Ragwort Report III 5th September 2012

As I explained in my report Ragwort II our strategy this year has been based on removing second year plants before they set seed. This has continued in the last six weeks or so with a number of committed individuals tackling any plants the bore flower.

The exception has been the two hay producing meadows where first year plants have grown large enough to cause contamination of the hay crop. In recent weeks we have set about removing these. The meadows were mown yesterday and it was satisfying today, when turning the hay, that almost no ragwort was detected amongst the grass.

We will remain vigilant for another month or so but I think this year's battle is won and we are well ahead in the war.

Report on the volunteer session 11th August 2012

8 volunteers enjoyed a lovely summer's morning, the first when the Health and Safety briefing mentioned sun cream!

- The grass was mown
- A section of the Orchard was strimmed, concentrating on giant nettles toward the western edge where hedge saplings were exposed to sunlight. This hedge needs laying in the winter.
- A further section of the Fauna western hedge was cleared of enveloping vegetation. As we are not going to be able to do all the hedge, we concentrated on particularly dense patches. Once again it is good to report that the saplings underneath are strong and numerous.
- The fallen branch in the stump circle, which someone had kindly cut up, was cleared onto existing piles of insect friendly logs and brash
- Ragwort was cleared from the Big Meadow marsh and the Hay Meadow. The latter is almost ready for the mower.
- Thistles were cleared from the far end of Carr House meadow
- Wild flower seeds were collected from the Hay Meadow
- Instruction was received by myself on the proper pruning of the new Fauna western hedge.
- A check on the latch of the gate between the Hay and Big meadows showed that the glue has worked and the nut seemed secure to the bolt.

More than satisfactory!

Ian Procter

Report on Volunteering session held on the evening of 29th August 2012

11 volunteers set to work, latterly under a beautiful harvest moon.

1. The grass was mown
2. An area of nettles and long grass around the fruit trees was strimmed
3. Two areas of overgrowing vegetation were cleared toward the southern end of the Orchard, especially around the broom shrubs but also tackling a large bramble.
4. The shoulders of Alder Pond were slightly raised to prevent leakage

5. A big section of the Fauna / Orchard hedge was cleared of overgrowing vegetation to give light to the hedge saplings. Once again they appear to be doing well.

NOTE:

- a) All available warning notices had already been posted on the apple trees
- b) Richard Storton has finished work on the Sowerholme pond and we need to give it time before reviewing success

Thanks to all.

Ian Procter

P.S. on Ragwort. Several individuals have been assiduous in clearing ragwort over the last few weeks. Many thanks to them.

Proposed tasks for volunteer session 8th September 2012

1. Mow the grass
2. Strim the Oak Circle so that it can be mown for Apple Day. Strim the edges of Orchard grass paths so that can be mown a little wider.
3. Slash and strim long grass, nettles and other overgrowing vegetation in the Orchard.
4. Finish off clearing around the Fauna / Orchard hedge saplings.
5. Start to clear the growth around the Fauna hedge saplings
6. Remove thistles which may seed, particularly along the Fauna path.
7. Harvest some apples for Apple Day (consult with organisers).
8. Cut back the hedge around the electricity sub-station on Fairfield Green and check that the adjacent hedge is cut. (NB This is dependent upon the Council having already done their 'share', otherwise leave until October).

NOTE: the grass needs to be mown ready for Apple Day on the 29th but I am away at that time, returning on the 28th.