

Fairfield Association
Fauna and Orchard sub-Group [FOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 7th November 2013, 7.30 pm
at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close

Present: Graham Brandwood, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Sue Nieduszynska, Ian Procter, Rebecca Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair)

1. **Apologies:** Dave Brookes, Tony Finn, Ian Fraser, Oliver Fulton, Keith Taylor, Chris Workman
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Agreed.
3. **Current/recent developments: Dog in Hay Meadow:** Spotted during the flush count. This medium-sized dog found its own way back out onto the footpath somewhere near the single Fauna stone. This incursion reinforces the need for dogs to be kept on a lead on the Fauna footpath.
4. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - **Tool shed coping stone and key:** Mick will email the builder.
 - **Rowan in the Grammar School hedge:** Graham has taken advice from Richard Storton. The rowan is attractive, so Richard is happy to see it grow in the hedgerow, except where it is close to School Pond.
 - **Replacement broom:** Ian's source has proved unsatisfactory. The meeting suggested other potential suppliers as well as the idea of propagating ourselves by layering (**lan**).
5. **Report from the FA meeting:** There was a long discussion of dogs, as a result of which Andrew is drafting notices. Mick is developing ideas for attracting regular payments from supporters to contribute to a maintenance fund for Fauna/Flora.
6. **Flora update:** Purchase of the Gleasons field (no. 2) has finally been completed. It will be opened up for grazing by the White Park cattle. The feasibility of no-till seeding of the arable fields is being investigated. A meeting with Claire Harris (who has recently taken over as our Natural England adviser) has been scheduled. As regards financing, help from Lancashire County Council and the purchase of single farm payment entitlements are being pursued.
7. **Fauna:**
 - **Monthly maintenance and HLS monitoring inspection:** Full reports available. The amount of clear water in the ponds is gradually diminishing with the incursion of algae and mare's tail. Graham fears that this is affecting the birds. For instance, it was noticeable during the flush count that there were no birds on the ponds in Upper Sowerholme. Richard Storton has been asked for advice. His basic belief is that there is little active intervention that is worthwhile and the problem should be self-limiting. The algae will be dragged out and – if this is unsuccessful – barley straw will be used on an experimental basis in one pond (**Graham**). Highlights of the flush count (reported via the website's wildlife blog by Glenys) were a brown hare and 42 snipe in the Big Meadow marsh (a promising start to the winter season).

- **Water trough:** The trough has been delivered and its site cleared of vegetation. Now awaiting the material for, and construction of, the hardstanding. (**Dave** to pursue with Hanafins).
 - **Track extension and other works:** No report.
 - **Paddock hedging:** Hanafins have indicated that they will be starting shortly, once the leaves have dropped from the trees.
 - **Breeding birds survey:** Dan Haywood has produced a hand-drawn map, which is being scanned by Jon Carter. **Sue** will continue to press Dan for a written report.
 - **Results of wildflower survey 7 June:** Sue has clarified with Martin Sherlock that these observations – whilst given the ‘official’ attribution of Haverbreaks – do relate to the Hay Meadow. The meeting was grateful to Martin for stepping in at short notice to provide data on the early wildflowers (to supplement the later survey in July by Graeme Skelcher). It was noted that next year’s arrangements need to be better planned, and give clearer guidance on objectives, methods and reporting. It is hoped that these surveys can be carried out by the research group being set up as part of the Flora Heritage Lottery Fund programme.
 - **Bioblitz 7th June and 8th Sept: Chris** had provided for circulation lists of species observed at these events led by the North Lancashire Naturalists Group. Unfortunately he was not at the meeting to provide any commentary or analysis of the results. Again the point was made about improving the planning for next year and using the Flora HLF research group. Survey results will be added to the website (**Glenys**).
8. **Rural Payments Agency remapping:** The remapping and renumbering of the new landholdings on Flora has been done, submitted and accepted. **Dave** is still working on the changes required for Fauna and the Orchard.
9. **Volunteer activities:** Ian’s reports of the volunteer work undertaken during October and proposed for November are attached at the end. The Woodland Trust tree pack has arrived in time for the Green Lancaster students to help with the planting of the 225 hawthorn and blackthorn saplings in gaps in the hedges along the Pads and Long Pads paths. There are also 45 silver birch, 30 hazel, 75 rowan and 45 oak to be heeled into Ian’s garden to await planting in the Pony Wood extension later this winter. Much of the work proposed for the November session is in Flora, with starting to move the existing boundary between the two proposed arable fields (3 & 4) the biggest task.

Ian and Graham have been on a further training course provided by Lancashire County Council to refresh and improve their hedge laying skills. Two volunteers who are new to hedge laying are booked onto the course on 8th November. The four people who will soon be trained in the use of chain saws will form the core of the Hedge Working Party. The intention is for the HWP to undertake a considerable amount of management work over the winter, with a weekday session as well as a session on the first Saturday in December, January and February. The priority task is the western boundary of Field 1 in Flora. This requires consultation with other parties, so in the interim work will start on the hedges in the Orchard, including felling the sycamore in the Pads hedge as recommended by Andy Lee.

The HWP will eventually lead the tree planting to create the extension to Pony Wood (decisions on design, what to plant where, fencing, paths etc need to be taken before this can be done and are a matter for the Flora Steering Group). It was suggested that the inaugural planting session could be a “celebratory event” with refreshments provided and publicity – including press release – to try to attract new volunteers and for report to HLF.

10. **Local Nature Reserve designation & Fauna Management Plan, Edenbreck boundary & garden, Concessionary Path Agreement:** Mick has contacted Ann Wood at Lancaster City Council. The LNR designation and Concessionary Path Agreement are low priority tasks for her, and there has been no progress. Likewise there has been no activity relating to the purchase of the Edenbreck garden.
11. **Educational activities:** No report from Tony. However, the visit by the Beavers coincided with item 14 and so they were observed busily enjoying themselves by some FOG members.
12. **Health and Safety Policy: Guidance for external contractors:** No report.
13. **DBS checks:** Tony has submitted his form to Michael Sheppard. It may be some time before the results are notified to the applicants. Item to remain on the agenda until this point (**Glenys**).
14. **Fundraising: Guided walk for MA language students:** This took place on 19th October, and involved Mick, Hilary, Ruth Haigh, Chris and Glenys. It was a satisfying event for all involved. £190 was raised for FA funds and for the students’ tutors it was an ideal means of providing communicative language teaching. Hopefully some of the students were inspired to help on the reserve with the Green Lancaster volunteers.
15. **Financial control:** No report.
16. **Willow screening of School Pond:** Richard Storton is favourable to the idea. The Hedge Working Party will be pollarding the over-large willows in the Orchard and this will provide a source of material for **Graham** to plant up.
17. **LWT: payment for haymaking and wildflower seed, future plans (incl. access):** Ian has contacted Rueben Neville at Lancashire Wildlife Trust and received a breakdown of the costs for this year’s haymaking. An invoice has still to be submitted. **Ian** will re-contact Rueben and provide him with details as to what and where to submit. LWT are keen to continue acting as contractors for our haymaking. Consequently it was decided there was no need to take any action to widen the gates to accommodate larger-sized machines. Reuben also pointed out another potential difficulty of using larger-sized machines: they may not be able to negotiate Cromwell Road.
18. **Additions to Fields Access List:** Research groups for wildflowers (co-ordinator Martin Sherlock), birds (Jon Carter) and invertebrates etc (Chris Workman and Linda Renshaw) were set up at the Flora HLF Wildlife Evening at the Storey Institute on 17th October. Chris and Linda are already on the Fields Access List. It was agreed that Martin and Jon should also be added. **Glenys** will provide them with a copy of the access conditions, and advise all the co-ordinators that they must inform FOG and undertake a risk assessment if they are to take a group into Fauna and/or Flora.

19. **Feedback from visit to Wyre Estuary Country Park:** Report circulated. Ian visited with Ken as part of the Flora HLF volunteer training programme to observe the working of another organisation heavily dependent on volunteer activity. It was a most useful visit, generating a number of ideas. As a result, **Ian** will make greater use of existing notices (e.g. warning about work in progress) to invite participation in volunteering. He will also design a flyer that advertises volunteer opportunities on one side and has a simple form to express interest on the other.

WECP has a small area of woodland where children are encouraged to have secret places and dens. The meeting discussed whether this would be a suitable use for the north end of the Orchard (the current wilderness area). Graham noted that considerable work would be required to contain the undergrowth. It is already used unofficially for dens. The original intention for this area was to leave it as wilderness. It was decided not to take any action, but keep a children's area idea in mind as a possibility in the longer term (**Ian**).

The work undertaken by WECP is guided by a management plan. Ian is already working to the management plan for the Orchard produced by Graeme Skelcher and – as result of his discussions with WECP – feels that there should also be one for Fauna/Flora. Hilary noted that Graeme had in fact written a management plan for Fauna, several years before the nature reserve was constructed (**Hilary** to pass to **Glenys** for circulation). Glenys reminded the meeting that LNR designation (item 10) triggers the requirement to produce a management plan for Natural England within a year. To make a start on this a Fauna work programme had been drafted and circulated to FOG (7th March), but matters were put on hold (FOG 4th April) awaiting LNR designation and progress with Flora (so that it could be incorporated at the same time). It was decided to consider the production of a management plan for Fauna/Flora at the next meeting.

20. **Future of the Orchard fruit trees:** Following on from last time's discussion, the meeting felt that taking out affected fruit trees and replacing with an alternative type of fruit was the obvious, immediate, response to the problem. There were doubts about the appropriateness of planting fruit trees elsewhere in Fauna or in Flora as part of the Pony Wood extension. It was considered best to delay further consideration of such actions to see whether the current trees improve as soil fertility and overshadowing are reduced. Establishing a nursery was supported in principle. Tending the fruit trees is a substantial and year-round task. The FA currently depends heavily (and gratefully) on the efforts, skills and expertise of Keith Taylor. Although he is now starting to receive fairly regular help from another volunteer, the meeting considered that it might be desirable to go further and establish a sub-group of volunteers with a special interest in the fruit trees. Guided by Keith, this sub-group could focus on fruit-tree related tasks during volunteer sessions (or perhaps set-up their own sessions). They could also develop more detailed proposals for the nursery and the future of the fruit trees for consideration by FOG. (**Ian** to explore this with Keith.)
21. **AOB:** None.
22. **Date / place of next meeting:** Thurs 5th December 7.30pm (Whitegates, Sunnyside Close), Thurs 9th January (Whitegates)

Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:

Volunteer activities October 2013

9th October 2013

Two volunteers cleared away the abandoned debris from a camp in Little Wood.

12th October 2013

17 volunteers, including three new people, reported for duty on a bright autumn morning. So, a great deal was achieved.

- The grass was mown, hopefully for the last time this year.
- Rubber mats, borrowed from Mick, were placed in areas where the grass has turned to mud. Note these are not really big enough. *The FA agreed that mats should be purchased and this is in hand.*
- The grass adjoining some of the new safety surfaces in the playground was levelled to mitigate trip hazards
- Broken bird box number 1 was repaired
- Five sweet briar plants, donated earlier in the year from the Friends of the Storey Institute, were planted in the north end of the Orchard / Pads footpath
- The 'Don't pick yet' notices were removed from the fruit trees and stored
- Keith continued the apple pruning, assisted by Jean who is learning the skill. Unfortunately more canker was detected which will require more serious removal of branches. Debris was carted away to the bonfire site.
- Debris from the trimming of the Fauna / Grammar School field hedge was collected and carted to the bonfire site.
- Self seeded saplings around the bottom of the Towneley path were lopped.
- Broken red current branches were cleared away from the fruit tree circle path
- Fly tipped rubbish was cleared from near the Towneley path
- Two young volunteers were given instruction in the use of one of our petrol driven trimmers and they subsequently trimmed the area with the insect logs ready for the visit of Beavers next weekend
- Two quite large areas of the Orchard were cleared of nettles and other dying off vegetation.
- A section of the hedge along the track to Sunnyside Lane was trimmed and the results cleared

14th October 2013

Last winter during hedge laying on the Orchard / Pads hedge we cut down several elder and black bagged them to kill them. Several escaped our attention and this was rectified.

28th October 2013

Three volunteers secured the boundaries of Flora by:

- a) Driving in a stake as a gatepost for the Howson's gate. A chain was attached and the gate padlocked.
- b) The two gateways between Fields 2 and 3/4 were fenced across with a small gateway in each to maintain access. This means that Field 2 can be opened for the cattle to graze as soon as the purchase of Field 2 is confirmed.

- c) The fence at the Pads footpath 'dogleg' was reinforced with 2 metre stakes and barbed wire to prevent people bending the fence to gain access. The former gate cross planks were saw away.

Several re-usable posts were discovered and taken to the shed. A former metal gate was located and noted for later removal.

29th October 2013

The area in the Gun Range field proposed as the site of the water trough was cleared of brambles.

Tasks for Volunteer Session November 9th 2013-11-01

The following have been agreed with the FOG Chair as we needed to send them to Green Lancaster who are participating.

1. Plant Woodland Trust hedge saplings in a) gaps in the Pads hedge alongside the Big Meadow, b) gaps in the Pads hedges alongside the Flora fields c) If spare saplings - there is an obvious absence of hedge between Big Meadow and the Hay meadow.
2. Remove existing Flora boundary fence whilst preserving it for re-use. (I doubt we will have time but, if we have, we can start to re-erect the fence as the woodland extension boundary with Field 3)
3. Mark out lynchets with posts.
4. Dig out and re-erect old boundary stone in the Flora fields.
4. Retrieve stone from damaged wall alongside Aldcliffe Road and store safely nearby
5. Remove corrugated sheets in Field 3 and transport them to Fauna
6. Move old fencing from Pony Wood plus an old gate between Fields 2 and 3 to a dump we are creating
7. Mark with posts a) manhole covers in Fields 3 and 4 b) Field drain in Field 1 c) including re-erecting post in Field 1 knocked over by sheep

Tasks for the Hedge Working Party, November – December 2013

N.B. Four volunteers with previous hedge laying training are attending a chain saw course between the 11th and 14th November. During that time I hope we can agree on a regular day through the winter when the hedge working party can meet. Once agreed we will start work on the first opportunity after the course. In addition I propose organising hedge working parties on the first Saturday of December, January and February. As agreed at the last FOG (10th October item 7) I will make monthly proposals of work to be tackled and report.

1. The priority for the winter is the hedge forming the western boundary of the West Field (Field 1). However, we are in the process of informing the land agent for the adjoining land of our proposal and until we have his acknowledgment then this should be postponed.
2. The next hedge work is to continue to lay the Orchard hedge as it abounds the Pads footpath. As agreed last year we will do this in sections and endeavour to maintain the landscape vista.
3. FOG has agreed my management plan for trees in the Orchard with the proviso that we take it steady. As a first step I propose we:
 - a. Coppice the two large hazels as we will need a supply of hedging stakes and hazel is well suited.
 - b. Pollard the willows as there is general agreement that they are too large, several large limbs broke off last year.
 - c. Fell the sycamore in the Pads hedge as this is integral to laying the hedge