

Rye Meadows Newsletter – No. 10

It is perhaps fitting that Newsletter No. 10 should come out on the 10th Anniversary of Ashtead Rye Meadows Wetlands. 10 years ago, Daphne Burnett was a visitor to the Village Day Stand of the Surrey Wildlife Trust to advertise her vision for 14 acres of marsh land alongside the Rye Brook. She was supported by Helen Cocker from the Lower Mole Group and Jim Jones, then with Surrey Wildlife Trust. Also, at the same Village Day representing the Ashtead Residents' Association, were Geoff Ball and David Baker, neighbours of Daphne in Ashtead Woods Road. Daphne persuaded Geoff and David to come on board, and together with Ruth Hannify from the Environment Agency and Stefanie Weinmann, landscape architect, an embryonic plan was hatched to turn the 14 acres into a conservation area and to plant a Jubilee Wood. The rest, as they say, is history. 10 years on we have over 150 registered "Friends" and a core of 19 Volunteers. The Jubilee Wood is fast becoming established, substantial work has been carried out on the Brook itself, public access has been vastly improved with footpaths and bridges uprated and a wildflower meadow planted. More projects are now planned but see more of that later on.

Wildflower Meadow

In 2020 and the beginning of 2021 we opened the Meadow called Fraudings to allow greater access for residents "confined to barracks" by Covid 19. With more people at home, we felt opening this field would give greater access and join together Footpaths 24 and 596. The walk through proved very popular. Daphne Burnett has a long-held wish to create a wildflower meadow within Rye Meadows and this year these plans came to fruition. Chris Edge Tree Care were the contractors hired to create this meadow and Richard Marinas and his team scalped the field removing as much grass as possible. They then sowed Yellow Rattle. The field was then closed to visitors and the gates at either end locked. Despite the signage, some people though are still climbing over and walking through. We've even had signs torn off and thrown away. It's frustrating, but we cannot man the gates 24/7 to stop people trespassing.

We hope next Spring to have a good show of yellow rattle together with the "Milk Maids" flowers that should have survived in the seed bed.



Storm Waters

In recent weeks we had a severe storm with an excessive amount of rainfall in a short space of time. The Brook overflowed in several places turning some fields into true wetlands.

As well as the river in flood, many of the culverts that feed the river and run through Rye Meadows also



flooded. Such was the volume and power of this water coming from the Bushey Shaw area that it broke apart substantial railway sleeper bridges on either side of Footpath 596 – one into Centenary Field and one into Fraudings.

Rather than go to the cost of hiring a contractor, the volunteers decided to ‘have a go’ themselves. We de-constructed the tangle of sleepers and wire that had been tossed about like matchsticks and took the bridge right back to its bare supports. In Centenary Field we carefully lifted back each heavy sleeper, one at a time, to rebuild the bridges –

one a wide vehicle bridge and one the pedestrian bridge. On the Fraudings side, another team did a similar job rebuilding the bridge across another culvert. It was heavy, hard work, but a very satisfying conclusion knowing we had done it ourselves and saved several hundred pounds of contractor’s costs.

On a following volunteers’ day, we then tacked down chicken wire to the surface of the pedestrian bridge, plus areas of the boardwalk. This helps to create a non-slip surface which we hope will prevent accidents.

Footpaths

The additional usage of the two footpaths, 24 and 596, during lockdowns did cause quite severe damage to the surfaces and in many places the stone surface was completely trodden in, leaving a very muddy path. We secured a Grant from Mole Valley Council’s PIC funds to purchase deliveries of hardcore, and again, rather than use expensive outside contractors, we decided to do it ourselves.

We were lucky enough to be able to get on free hire, machinery from Sunbelt Rentals (A Plant as was) and obtained a 3 tonne Digger, a Dumper and a



‘Whacker’ plate. We tackled 596 first as this was the easiest path to navigate, being wide enough to drive the dumper down, turn round and head back to where the material had been deposited. With Richard Wassell (now known as “Digger”) using his JCB skills to fill the dumper truck, David Baker (now known as “Dumper”) drove the truck to the footpath where the material was tipped out and raked by more volunteers. Once roughly raked out, the material was compressed using the Whacker vibrating plate handled by Richard Inge (now known as “Whacker”). The whole job took two days to accomplish.



Two weeks later we moved onto Footpath 24. The bottom 2/3rds of this footpath were in a poor state, so again the same team moved Type 1 crushed limestone down the path to where it was being paid. This time though the path being narrower, the dumper had to be reversed all the way up! The final scrapings of the Type 1 were used to top up the head of the path to raise its level. This meant the surface was now higher than the remains of the stile, the stumps of which were trip hazards.

Debris Removal

We are always removing various pieces of debris and litter from the brook, some of which gets accidentally washed down, but other items are carelessly thrown in by visiting walkers. These include bags of dog poo. Removal of these items is a very unsavoury task for volunteers, and completely unnecessary if dog walkers either took the bags home, or deposited them in the bins in Preston Grove, The Railway Crossing and Bushey Shaw. Leaving them for others to dispose of is very un-neighbourly.

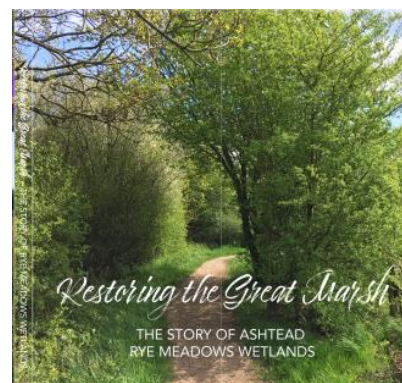


One huge piece of debris recently removed was a tree trunk some 8 feet long and two feet across. We believe it had been washed down from Ashted Common and become jammed in the stream in Rye Meadows. It was forming a blockage across the stream and needed to be removed. Using physics, ingenuity and brute force, four volunteers managed to pull and lever this out of the stream and onto a half-way shelf. We'll return next Volunteering Day to chain saw the trunk in half and move it away from the stream to stop it being washed in again at the next storm.

"Restoring the Great Marsh"

The book to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of Rye Meadows was intended to be published in time for Christmas, but missed deadlines and late editorial changes have meant the book will now be published early next year. Having seen draft copies of the book, it will be well worth waiting for with pages of superb colour photographs, history and anecdotes.

A lot of hard work by many different people has gone into making this a great book to own, and I can't wait to see the finished article on book shelves.



More Bridge Repairs

Two more bridges in Rye Meadows are showing signs of severe rot and we have recently placed an order for more old railway sleepers to replace the rotting timbers. These original sleeper bridges have only been there 25+ years – you just can't get the quality of materials these days! When delivered, we will remove the old rotting sleepers and replace them with new 'Old' sleepers giving the two bridges we hope another 25 years of life.

Fundraising



No Newsletter would be complete without a plea for more funds. We have three new projects in mind for Centenary Field; to re-establish meanders, to remove a large tree root weir and to remove a collapsing brick arch bridge alongside FP596 (See picture). We have hired Aquamaintain, a specialist company, to draft and submit a FRAP (Flood Risk Activity Permit) to the Environment Agency. The Rye Brook, although only two feet wide in places, is classed as a Main River and as such any work on the river itself and on the banks either side needs EA permission. I am pleased to say that we now have the FRAP for the three tasks. All we need now is to raise £100,000 to complete them. A mere bagatelle I hear you say.

We are looking at funding streams (pardon the pun) from the EA itself, MVDC, Thames Water and the Lottery Heritage Fund to name but four, but are on the lookout for other sources.

We still continue to raise funds via <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/ryemeadows/> and could not survive without a steady income from this source. Although each contribution is small, sometimes only pence, they add up and help pay for the essentials like diesel, petrol, two-stroke – tea and coffee! To date we have raised £1,273. I recently renewed my car insurance via GoCompare. They paid £14.50 to Rye Meadows. Cost me nothing. If you are buying Christmas presents online, go via Easyfundraising first and the vendor gives us a donation. No catch – free fundraising, and you get to feel virtuous! No need to remember each time either. Just download a small Donation Reminder App for your Browser and each time you visit one of the 6,100 retailers your PC will flag up a prompt to activate a donation.

We have moved into merchandising in a modest way and now have Rye Meadows Tea Towels and Mugs for sale priced at £5 each. Details are on our new web site www.ryemeadows.org.uk/shop/ If you want to have one, or some, you can buy through the shop and (if a resident in Ashted) we'll come and deliver them to you.

We have also joined the Mole Valley Lottery Scheme and for every £1 ticket bought, we receive 50p. First prize is £25,000 and to join and support us at the same time just visit <https://www.molevalleylottery.co.uk/support/ashted-rye-meadows-wetlands> We achieved our first target of 50 tickets and are now hoping, with your help, to reach 75 tickets sold.

Rehab

Have no fear, the volunteers are not all going into The Priory to cure drug and alcohol addiction – though I have to say Doreen’s cakes are very addictive! No – the rehab is for foxes. Wildlife Aid approached us to see if we would be prepared to house seven young fox cubs that had been reared at their centre. The plan was to bring the cubs to Rye Meadows and house them in a large wire enclosure. There for the first two weeks of rehabilitation they were to be fed and watered once a day, then for the second two weeks we would continue to put feed and water into the enclosure but leave the doors open allowing the foxes to roam. After the four weeks they were on their own.

We fed the seven cubs with seven tins of Winalot dog food each day, and on alternate days gave them a bag of dog biscuits. Their water bowls were topped up each day. After the first 10 days we were down to 5 cubs as two had escaped “over the wire”. We don’t think they copied Steve McQueen on a motor bike, but these animals are incredibly agile and two somehow managed to run up the wire cage 8’ sides and climb out and over the overhang at the top. With two on the loose, it was decided to release the other five earlier than planned but continue to put feed into the enclosure. We only saw one or two foxes after then, though the food did disappear. Whether it was eaten by our seven fox cubs, or a visiting fox who thought all his Christmases had come at once, we don’t know. Sadly, the survival rate for young foxes is not good, with 70% not surviving to their first birthday. We wish them well.



If you want to support the rehabilitation of young foxes at Wildlife Aid there is an excellent way to do this. It would also make a great and unusual present for children or grandchildren. Wildlife Aid have an [Adopt a fox](#), scheme this Christmas, which will help them provide the care and protection they need.

Not only will you be providing vital funds towards foxes’ care, but you’ll also receive an adoption pack, including a cuddly toy, certificate, glossy photo, fact-sheet, and

updates twice a year on their work to protect UK wildlife.

We wish all our supporters a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

David

Chairman, Friends of Ashted Rye Meadows Wetlands