Railway Land Wildlife Trust No 63

February 2009 **www.railwaylandproject.org**

Registered Charity No: 800655 - Company Address: 115, High Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1XY - Co Ltd by Guarantee Reg No. 2313579

Chairman's Corner Decision Time

I explained in Newsletter 62 that Lambert Smith Hampton had taken over the tendering process for the Linklater Pavilion and on 23rd January, they recommended a company called ISG Jackson which is a competent contractor with sufficient resources to complete a 'shell and core' proposal safely.

The RLWT Trustees unanimously say 'Yes'

Their proposal (based on what we can afford at the present time) would provide us with a basic two-storey structure supported by piling, limited lighting, some internal walls on the ground floor, the lift, a green roof, toilets, all drainage and one staircase. All internal walls, and underfloor heating pipes will be in place but not connected.

On 29th January, the trustees took the decision to go ahead and appoint ISG Jackson in order to get the Linklater Pavilion project up and running. It's a bold decision which shows a belief in our vision which so many of you have supported. We are confident that it is just the sort of action that Peter Linklater would have approved.

The shell and core approach provides us with a useable building to which we must swiftly bring additional funds which we believe will flow now that we have decided to build. These include the air source heat pump to heat the building, a low energy lighting system and power cables and a small fitted kitchen. This we are confident we can achieve.

We will have to build cupboards and shelves ourselves and also undertake the decoration with a variety of environmentally friendly paints which might be donated or provided at a reduced rate? A society or trust might sponsor a special closomat toilet. Another might help with a glass screen to make the lift feel less closed in.

There may also be opportunities to use re-cycled materials such as plaster boards, internal doors and ironmongery from other local works.

But there will be much more over the next year and once we have established a definitive list of what we need and what we think each item will cost, we can start to target our fund-raising efforts and will let you know.

We expect work to start in Summer 2009 for a handover in Spring 2010. Thanks again for your faith in us – we will keep you posted every step of the way.

John Parry

Contents:

Chairman's Corner - Decision Time	Pg 1
Editorial	Pg 2
Lest we forget & 'Minders'	Pg 3
Bird Surveys on the Reserve	Pg 4
A Date for your Diary - 2020 Vision	Pg 5
Railway Land Birds	Pg 5-6
Chilly Brook Update	Pg 6-7
JMB - All Change	Pg 8

Printed by Elephant Graphics

Editorial

It is fitting that in our 21st year the RLWT Management Committee has taken a momentous decision that will call on all our ingenuity, our ability to elicit practical help, tap into local talents and skills and create efficient working groups. If we thought the last two years of fund raising has been hard, we now face very testing times indeed. However I can assure you that we are up for the challenge!

Every project we have undertaken has been underpinned by careful thought, research and analysis of risks and much discussion of 'fall-back' positions. We secure funding and then act. The Linklater Pavilion project is a huge undertaking for a small organisation, but we have been heartened and encouraged by the very clear support of our membership and the faith shown in us by the general public and organisations of Lewes. This has been backed up by incredible financial support. We have together raised £110,000 from our own fundraising efforts, and donations from individuals. A truly remarkable achievement.

Thank you.

Please continue to help us by renewing your membership for 2009. Your £10 covers the cost of our newsletters, public liability insurance, and supports the monthly conservation working parties on the Reserve. I have enclosed a slip that enables me to keep our records updated and, if signed, brings us an extra 28% if you are able to gift aid your subscription. It is the form we've used during the appeal, and I am sure you will approve of us 'using up' these forms rather than spending money on reprinting.

Advance notice of the Trust's AGM.
Please put **Friday 3rd April** into your diary. The AGM and illustrated talk will take place at Greyfriars Court starting at 7.30pm. If you are interested in standing for the committee or feel you have particular skills that would help us in the coming years, please contact Jane McIntosh, Company Secretary on 01273-474505 or by email rigg@patspur.demon.co.uk

The Winterbourne was 'on air' in mid January and I hope many of you were able to catch Kaddie Lee Preston's second 'Inside Out' programme featuring a piece on 'the lost rivers of Sussex'.

John Parry and Kaddie Lee Preston stroll by the Winterbourne

Professor Rory Mortimer and John Parry were both featured as the nature of 'Winterbournes' was discussed and the efforts to improve these lost rivers were outlined.

Rory was interviewed by Kaddie on the banks of the Ouse

Our Winterbourne has largely ceased to run through the town, because as Rory explained, water abstraction has reduced the capacity for the winter flows. In the Reserve the Winterbourne flows because it is fed by springs welling up from the chalk bedrock

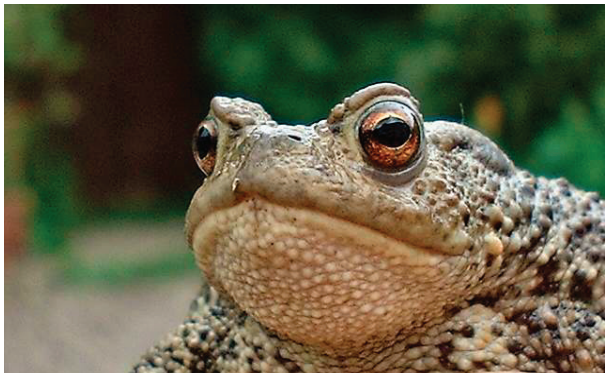
Rory Mortimore is an expert on chalk and he will feature more in our Newsletters as we develop the proposed 'Story of Chalk' exhibition in the undercroft of the Linklater Pavilion. This future project forms part of our 'Passerelle' proposal for EU Interreg funding led by East Sussex County Council Adult Social Care. We will hear whether we have been successful in June 2009.

Pat Rigg

Lest we forget

Those who work in wildlife conservation are sometimes thought of as sentimentalists ....Hello clouds! Hello sky! ....but of course in reality they are usually tough, practical people. One reason for this is purely economic: conservationists spend much of their time trying desperately to raise money, and it is the kiss of death to a grant application if you confess that the lesser whirlpool ram's horn snail is actually quite pretty. As a volunteer, though, I have neither grant nor salary to lose, so here, for the Hell of it, is a list of beautiful things seen in and around the Railway Land. Lest we forget.

The birds are easy, aren't they? A vic of mute swans creaking out of the low mists over Chilly Brook. A barn owl's wings, huge and white in the car's headlights. A charm of goldfinches on the teasels, and a siege of herons in the reeds. Cormorants drying their wings on the pylon by Glynde Reach, where poor Virginia was found. Rooks tumbling on a gale, a yellowhammer on the hawthorn, and the squeaking, twisting flight of snipe over the drainage ditches. (At night they sound like giant mice). The swoop and swerve of the house martins, the fluttering bounce of a magpie, and a kestrel, still on the wind. Bullfinches, lapwings, jackdaws, goldcrest and – never seen, but with a song to pierce the heart – the nightingale on a summer`s night.



Less obvious stuff too, like the toad's eye. Orwell likened it to chrysoberyl, but I wonder if he meant that gemstone known as `Tiger's Eye`. Perhaps we could get a toad and a tiger and compare them. And oh! the common darter. God forgive me, I had got into the habit of thinking, ah yes, one of them...until I left my spade on the side of a trench, and one of them settled on the haft to soak up the autumn sunshine, and I took a closer look. Do you know, they make Cartier's best effort look like something tawdry out

of a Christmas cracker. And smooth newts in the pond...a pair will hang side by side in the still water, and he will gently stroke her flank with a front foot. Really quite affecting.

If you live near a reserve, much of this will come into your garden, and sometimes into your house. Grass snakes basking on the doorstep, a wren on the fruit bowl, an angry pipistrelle chittering from the living room curtains. There is a large peacock butterfly hibernating on a bookshelf in the next room. Now, I would die in the last ditch to keep these things, because they are beautiful. But for those who don't think like that: the birds and the butterflies have lived beside us for thousands of years. If they find it hard to survive in the environment we have created, has something gone wrong that threatens us too? And will we find out before it is too late? I have searched around for a pithy way to sum that up, but I cannot do better than John Donne.

"Therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

Jon Gunson

Minders Programme

Don't think that you have to come to every session, new and returning volunteers are always welcome. This aspect of the Trust's conservation work is vital.

We still meet by the Railway Lane gate at 1.30 on the first Sunday of every month: (Bring wellies - tools provided).

Feb 1st, March 1st, April 5th, May 3rd - come and meet people and have some fun.

Bird Surveys on the Reserve

"We are running a bird survey on The Railway Land, a local nature reserve, which involves Excel spreadsheets and rising early on freezing/wet/windy and occasionally sunny mornings but I enjoy it." This is what I wrote to friends recently and you too could be a part of our group of "Bird Surveyors" and have the same enjoyable walk looking for birds. In fact, you no longer have to rise early if that does not appeal, as alternate surveys are done later in the day at a time of our own choosing. We have been surveying every two weeks since autumn 2007 and are keen to carry on but would really value more volunteers. Nobody is expected to go out alone and I, personally have learnt an enormous amount from my companions on these walks.

A long term survey gives us a picture of the changing bird life on the Reserve as it is affected by weather and season. Sometimes what you do not see is as interesting as what you do. My most recent foray was with Steve in that freezing weather when most of the water was frozen. No sign of egret, heron or kingfisher and on the grassy path beside the river where we usually have a high count of blackbirds scratching for food the turf was frozen so no blackbirds there.
There were also no sparrows hanging around at their usual bush (I get the impression that is what house

sparrows do!). However our house sparrow numbers were unusually high as we found a group benefitting from the feeder put up by our neighbours but perching in our bushes.

It is fun to look and listen out for certain birds in certain places and very helpful to get information from other walkers. Very occasionally we are lucky enough to see the secretive water rail in the reed bed and have been told that it has been heard making its strange call. During the autumn and winter we have seen flocks of gold finches on the teasels on the old sidings area and are pleased that these have been noticed by walkers and pointed out to us.
On a pleasant autumn morning but without good light we watched a 'charm' of goldfinch and using binoculars realised that among them was a small warbler, probably a chiffchaff.

The goldfinch were feeding on the teasels and I wonder

if the warbler was catching tiny invertebrates that they disturbed. We also hear that snipe have been seen. As we cannot see everything on our fortnightly surveys it is very helpful to be told of other sightings.

You may wonder what we do with all our survey results so carefully recorded.

We use them for two main things: to help Dan Ross, our Ranger, and Jon Gunson, who organises the Meadow Minders, decide on how to improve the reserve for birds and we also send them to the Sussex Biodiversity Recording Centre where they are kept on a data base for the county and are available for reference for e.g. planning applications.

Leonie Mercer

If you would like to help with our bird surveys or more information about them, you can email me on:
leonie.m@tiscali.co.uk
or Liz Williams on:
EWILL47223@aol.com

A Date for Your Diary

Lewes Railway Land Wildlife Trust - 2020 Vision Exhibition

Tues 16th - Sat 20th June 2009
The Foundry Gallery, North Street, Lewes BN7 3PL

Launch Event Tuesday 16th June 6.30.- 9.00pm.

The major RLWT educational project for 2009 involves 4 local primary schools:- Rodmell, Polegate, Meeching Valley and Lewes New School and 2 local secondary schools:- Ringmer and Priory.

The aim of the project is to involve pupils in thinking about the future through examining ordinary objects and their future and why a particular object might become obsolete and what might takes its place.

The 2020 Vision Exhibition will show how today's children view their future - through many different media.

The RLWT is working in partnership with Artemis Arts and the 2020 Vision Exhibition will be located at The Foundry Gallery, which is a great example of a semi-derelict building with a new lease of life and a new purpose.

Make sure you put the dates in your diary - this will be a must-see Exhibition.

Help will be needed with exhibition sitting from Wednesday 17th – Saturday 20th June. Members have generously given their time at previous RLWT exhibitions in Thebes Gallery, and nearer the time I organise a rota so you have company and support.

If you think you could volunteer for one or two hour stints between 10-5pm please contact Pat Rigg at rigg@patspur.demon.co.uk or on 487798. If you leave a message I will get back to you.

Railway Land Birds

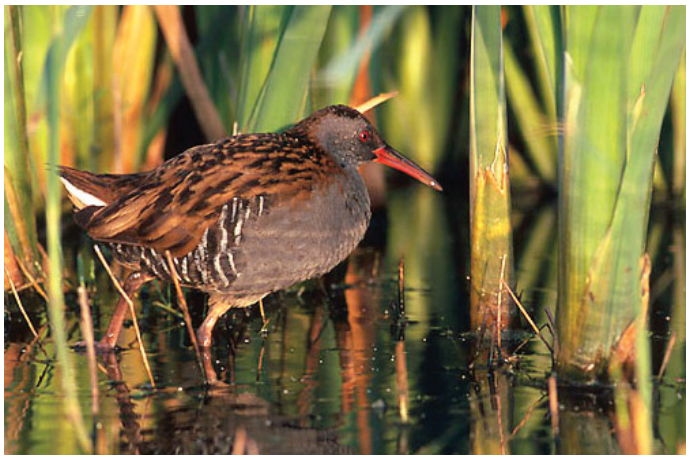
Mike Helps was a respected local ornithologist and architect who recently died. He wrote this article to help Liz Williams produce the display panels on birds for the RLWT exhibition at Thebes in November 2003. We are very pleased to publish it alongside our recent update on the bird survey being conducted on the Reserve.

At the crossover of the Sussex Downs and the River Ouse the habitat at the Railway Land is a mixture of woodland, scrubland, wetland and river. We can expect to find a variety of birds.

During the winter, the river itself can produce views of Great Crested Grebes Podicepes cristatus and Red Throated Diver Garvia stellata, (Dec 2001). Common Sandpiper Cetitis hypoleucos and Green Sandpiper Tringa ochropus also occur there.

Grey Wagtail Motacilla cinerea, so beautiful when seen well can, in winter, invariably be found. In 2002 a pair nested nearby. During the 1980s winters, up to 50 snipe Gallinago gallinago were regularly to be found at the old railway sidings but since the original flooding the numbers have declined. The Snipe is a species that should be attracted back by the new wetland proposals.

Water Rail Rallus aquaticus and Kingfisher Alcedo atthis can be found by the Winterbourne stream. Both are species that should be encouraged by the reed bed project.



Water Rail - Rallus aquaicus

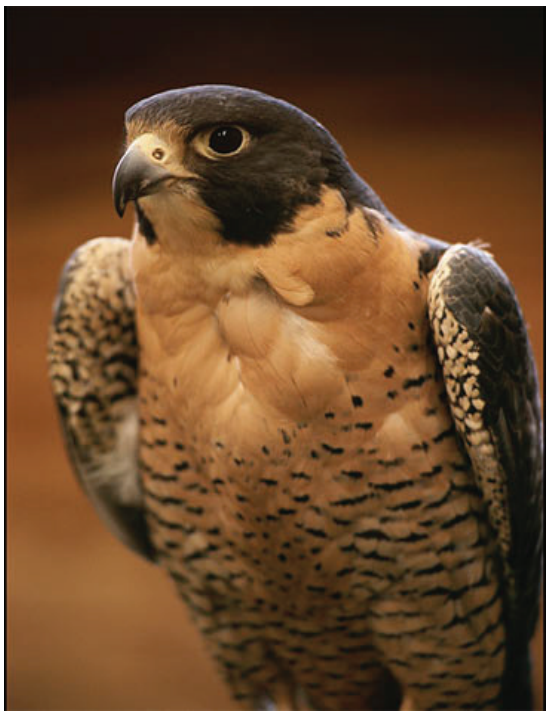
During the 1980s the scrubland areas produced breeding Yellow Hammer Emberiza citrinella and

Reed Bunting Emberiza schoeniclus. These have since declined but as reed and scrub cover has increased so too have Reed Warbler Acrocephalus scirpaceus and the Whitethroat sylvia communis.

The damp woodland holds good populations of breeding Blackcaps Sylvia atricapilla and Chiffchaff Phylloscopus collybita. Up to five Chiffchaff have overwintered (1994). Sparrowhawk Accipiter nisus, Stock Dove Columba oenas and Great Spotted Woodpecker Dendrocopos major also nest here. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker Dendrocopus minor, (1980/1984) and Wood Warbler Phylloscopus sybilatrix, (May 1990) were interesting records.

Spotted Flycatcher Muscicapa striata is a regular migrant that might in the future be tempted to stay and breed.

The Peregrines Falco peregrinus first put in an



appearance over the reserve during the mid 1990s and have since have regularly nested at the chalk cliffs at Southerham. In March 2002 a pair of raven Corvus corax also frequented the cliff face and were seen over the reserve.

Each species and for that matter each individual bird can be the subject of study. For example it has been noticed that the Reed Warbler's song can vary according to its habitat. Those nesting in reed beds have a familiar rhythmic song which, with some practice, the listener can differentiate from that of the Sedge Warbler Acrocephalus schoenobaenus. However, a few individual Reed Warblers choose to sing from bushes and nettles and this seems to cause them to sing with more melody so that they can at times sound like the much rarer Marsh Warbler Acrocephalus palustris. The identification and study of birds is a fascinating subject which can be enjoyed by all.

Mike Helps 2003

Chilly Brook Update 2008

For several years we have been planning to enhance the ditches and grassland of Chilly Brook, our meadow by the river, which was so kindly given to the Trust by the late Anne Grantham. The ditches have a varied and interesting Invertebrate population, including some particularly rare water beetles, all studied over many years by the entomologist, Peter Hodge. For this reason the area has been designated an SNCI, a site of Special Nature Conservation Interest, and has been managed under a Countryside Stewardship Scheme which included digging out the ditches over 10 years ago.

As part of a ditch cleaning up cycle to keep them free of decaying vegetation Dan Ross found us a contractor in sympathy with our aims, who not only avoided damaging plants we had already introduced on some of the banks but also managed to profile just one side of the ditches to give a 45 degree slope.

He also created some "scrapes" for cattle to reach the water. Our intention was to minimise the damage to wildlife, so, with the spoil deposited near the ditches it was easier for displaced creatures to make their way

back into the water.

Unfortunately, the flora of the meadows is not at all diverse, consisting mainly of coarse agricultural grasses, which must have been sown there sometime in the past, interspersed with docks and thistles. Our longstanding wish is to begin the difficult task of enhancing both the flora of the meadow and of the banks of the ditches. This autumn, as soon as the land was dry enough to bring in machinery after the very wet summer, Dan organised the root harrowing and seedbed preparation of the spoil banks left from the dredging. The Brighton company, Responsible Travel, whose staff volunteer for work on the reserve with Dan, have very generously contributed to the high cost of suitable seed of UK origin. It is very important on a Nature Reserve to use seed which is of as local provenance as possible.

We were advised to use an 80/20 wet meadow grass/ wildflower mix. As wildflower seed is very expensive and this was our first attempt, we decided to experiment on different areas, and then monitor the results to inform future practice. We sowed some stretches with the 80/20 mix, some with just grass seed alone, and left one stretch unseeded to see what sort of sward the dormant seeds, already in the ground, would produce. The ditch banks were sown with a special pond edge mix of suitable wild flowers and grasses.

The seed sowing team all worked very steadily and efficiently using weighed amounts of seed, bulked out with sand, to allow more even sowing. They included a group of volunteers from the South Downs Rangers, some of the participants from the Nature Corridors for All Project and members of the Management

Committee, with Dan in charge.

Already some of the sown grasses and wildflowers have germinated, and we are expecting to see a much greener cover in the spring. Of course some of the old coarse grasses, docks and thistles are breaking through, but we hope the new sowings will be able to compete with them. The farmer, whose cattle graze the meadows, has promised to keep them off until at least June, when the new seedlings should be reasonably well established.

Yellow Rattle

Sweet Vernal Grass

Please keep your eyes open to see if there seem to be more of the flowers and grasses that we have sown, such as Ox-eye daisy, Ragged Robin, Yellow Rattle, Knapweed, Meadow Foxtail Grass, Sweet Vernal Grass, and Crested Dogstail, as well as more butterflies, beetles and dragon flies.

Jenifer Barton & Liz Williams

JMB All Change!

Declan O'Keeffe and John Parry

After an incredibly successful year 'retirements' were looming amongst the remaining Junior Management Board members.

Christie, Amy Beth and Dan admire the cake at the opening of their Leighside Project!

Declan O'Keeffe and Amy resigned on the completion of the Leighside Bridge and Pond project. Christie and Beth felt that they needed to concentrate on GCSEs. What a legacy this talented group were able to bequeath to their successors!

JMB members past and present celebrate the launch of the video 'Young Impact'

John Parry and Dan were able to take the 'Young Impact' video made by the JMB into primary schools and show the children in yrs 5-6 exactly what could be achieved by working together.

It proved an excellent way of getting the message across and a valuable tool for recruiting new volunteers. To date Dan has signed up 20 new members. The youngest is 8 and the majority are 10-11 years old.

The schools currently involved are Ringmer, South Malling, Southover, Wallands and Kingston.

We expect some other schools will also respond to the presentation. If you have a child in a Lewes primary school who would like to become a JMB member, please speak with their teacher and encourage them to make contact with Dan Ross on 01273-484408.

There will be many opportunities for young and older members of the RLWT to work together on projects that will enhance the Reserve and make the best use of the Linklater Pavilion for the benefit of all Lewesians and visitors to the town. What exciting times!

Pat Rigg