# Railway Land Wildlife Trust

January 2015 **Edition No. 84** 

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#### **Editorial:**

A Happy New Year to you all! 2015 starts with a flourish and three events we hope you will enjoy.

We look forward to receiving a flood of entries for the proposed Photo Competition by the closing date of **January 15th**. The exibition will be held during the weekends of the 14/15/th and 21/22nd of February at the Linklater. In partnership with the National Trust we had asked for photos in three categories, -'Battle' 'Weather' and 'Timeless Qualities' taken on either Black Cap Reserve or the Railway Land. With such little time left, I advise anyone who intends of entering this year's competition to email me at info@railwaylandproject.org

Change of Drop off Point: Please deliver hard copies to Linklater ground floor post box as Lewes Framers David Wood's 'Winterbourne Reflections' has moved.



Photo Competition entry 2014

On **Sunday February 8th**, we are delighted that the very talented wordsmith, story teller and musician, Lou Glandfield, will entertain us with his one-man show 'Doppler's Other Effect' as part of the 4@thelinklater series of fundraisers for the Trust. This will be an evening event, starting at 7pm, with a pay bar and light refreshments. (See page 4 for more details.) Tickets cost £5 and can be bought at Harveys Shop or reserved from me, Pat Rigg, by email at info@railwaylandproject.org or by leaving a phone message on 01273-487798. It promises to be a very amusing and musically varied sociable evening - why not bring your friends?

The fourth fundraiser in the 2014-5 season will be on **Sunday March 22nd** at 4pm when artist **Tom Walker** presents 'A Wanderer in Doubt'...an explanation of what he has been doing for the last sixty years in words, images and music! *Please put both of these dates in your diaries.* 

If you thought we were busy in 2014, I can assure you 2015 promises to be even more packed with public events, walks and talks during Sunday afternoon openings and a very busy schools programme. Hold onto your hats! Pat Rigg

# How can I help the Railway Land?

- Support the fundraising events and bring along friends and neighbours!
- Join the conservation group the **Meadow Minders** who meet with the LDC Rangers Dan and Thyone for practical tasks on the Reserve: Meet at the red dot gate at 1.30 on the first Sunday of evey month.
- Walk on the Reserve regularly, enjoy the different habitats and the creatures and plants that populate them. Tell us what you see, check out what you are not sure of, and introduce children to the gem on their doorstep.

#### **Director's report January 2015**

Several of you will know that we had to wait to finally sign off the Linklater because the Undercroft ceiling had not been completed properly and thanks to the determination of Roger Beasley in particular, we now have a wonderfully smooth ceiling and the Linklater has finally passed Building Control! I should also like to record our thanks to Roger Carsons at LDC Building Control for his advice and patience regarding a situation that was out of our direct control. So – we are truly up and running!

But we are up and running in many other important ways and this has been down to a lot of hard work by many people.

First, we are lucky to have two new and highly qualified trustees in the form of **Ruth Thomas** and **Sam** Smith and I know they will bring much to the Trust. At the same time we have had to say goodbye to Thurstan Crockett who is off to the West Country and Alison Brewer whose business is now so demanding that she cannot give any more time. Both have been superb to work with – Thurstan guiding us over the last year and Alison watching over our legal and financial responsibilities. We will miss them both and thank them for all their hard work and support.

Second, we are putting together a wonderful schools programme based on a Heritage Lottery Fund project called **Railway Land Live!** in which we will be broadcasting live underwater images from two of the ponds and one of the ditches on the site. This ground breaking initiative, in conjunction with Steve Savage and associates from the South-East Grid for Learning will see increased school activity on the

site in April and June which we will monitor carefully with **Dan Fagan** the

Ranger. We will also be asking dog owners to be as helpful as possible regarding keeping dogs out of the water. We have a wonderful wildlife habitat right on our doorstep and we need to both celebrate that fact but also have an even more watchful eye on the very thing that so many of us campaigned for all those years ago! Mention must also be made of Paul Webster of Naturequest who has given us invaluable help regarding trenching and cabling and a whole load more!

Third, we shall be advertising for two paid posts to help me in the running of the Linklater and the programmes that are now being generated. It will be wonderful to have this support from May and we shall be advertising widely. One of the posts will be a project / volunteer co-ordinator to expand and refine our volunteer support but we must thank Geoff Bush supported by Pat Rigg for holding the volunteer fort for the last few years. Sadly, we should also record the deaths of Vreni Smith and Giles Dickins who were such keen supporters and who helped out on many Sunday afternoons.



for a week

This year, I have suggested that we have several themed Sunday afternoons when for an hour between 3 – 4pm a walk or talk will be available on a given topic and I am pleased to say that we already have a vibrant mix including a puppet show, pollinators talk, a wheelchair ramble, two flower walks, two bird walks, two poetry sessions by our new resident poet – see page 7, a mason bee focus, artist Lil Tudor-Craig and monoprinting workshops! Details will appear in our Spring newsletter.

The winter has seen the redecorating of the inside of the Lil Tudor-Craig returns on the 4th July Linklater which is looking very smart now with a protective dado rail installed by **Dave Sykes** and a wonderful new sound system. The river walls have been strengthened by the Environment

Agency who will re-seed the areas with wild flower seeds.

The link with Priory School remains as strong as ever and I was



lucky enough to be 'taken over' by 5 pupils as part of the Children's Commissioner's idea to get pupils into their communities.

The Nature Corridors group will be creating a few more hurdles to have even better control over cars on the site and Sally Christopher has been planning a wonderful art project in conjunction with the National Trust and the Towner if funds allow – but more on that another time.





above right: Robert Cash and Sally Christopher work on a new banner illustrating



the hurdle making, left: leaf clearing by Matt and Stuart to reduce nitrogen levels in the wild flower planted areas is an important task.

For now, there is much to be thankful for and I hope you enjoy this bumper Newsletter and may 2015 be a good year for all of us and all the creatures that use and even depend on our Reserve.

John Parry

### Linklater R.A.T.S. - halfway there!

Hello, we are the Linklater RATS. Our name stands for Raising Awareness of Tides and Sea levels and we are a group of 15 teenagers who are at the start of a 150 year project with coastal communities, working on raising awareness and reducing the impact of flooding in the Ouse valley area.

We started by expanding our knowledge on flooding and how it affects the environment and the surrounding area. These meeting were mainly led by John Parry and Jo Higgs from the Environment Agency, however we are now taking control of the meeting ourselves. We also made an email account and found ways to share documents.

As well as learning about flooding, we have also been looking for solutions to control it in the Railway Land. We took GPS measurements and found the height of points across the Heart of Reeds. We are now working on a project to stop a path being flooded. In the past few meetings we looked at the area and presented solutions. Our solutions included walls, drains and a raised bund. We decided on a raised bund to divert the water to where it will not do damage to the path.



The path that we need to work on.



We are currently halfway through our time in Linklater RATS project and we are thinking about how to pass on our ideas to the next generation of the group. We have a baton with a memory stick and space for documents. This will be passed on to the next group at the end of the summer term 2015. The memory stick will hold what we have done so far, including photos and meeting notes.



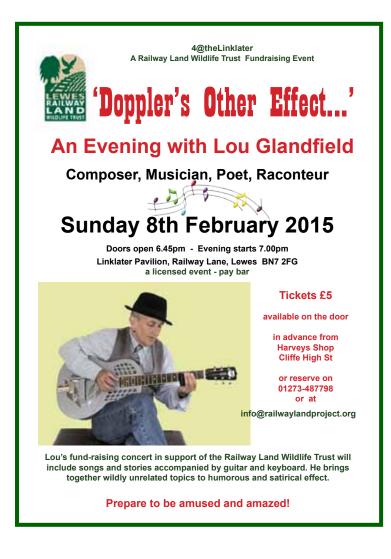


The group listening and taking notes from David Sykes a trustee of the Railway Land Wildlife Trust.

Using a GPS system with Colin Spiller from the Environment Agency.

We are really excited about this project, and we are glad that we could make a difference and help control the flooding situation in the Lewes Railway Land.

Jack, Ben, Tamara, Dylan, Iris, Alex, Joel, Sam, Nathan, Josie





Lou playing a Turkish 'saz'

# The mix of people, dogs and wildlife in our new Brighton and Lewes Downs Biosphere.

Following my request for thoughts about dogs we received several thoughtful comments and it is clear, as it has always been, that there is considerable tension between dogs running free and the wildlife in a nature reserve. Many years ago I brokered a meeting between dog owners and the Junior Management Board members to great effect and the time has arrived we believe for a similar meeting but of adult minds.

There will be a very substantial increase in school visits next year resulting from the exciting Railway Land Live! project that will see underwater webcams in parts of the Reserve and so we are at a

critical point.

Dogs are an important part of our community and for many people an important part of their lives. That's why it's so important to have somewhere safe for people and families to walk their dog away from the busy urban town. The Railway Land Local Nature Reserve offers a scenic and vibrant wild place that's as stimulating to a dog as it is to its owner. But this beloved sanctuary for people and their dogs is also a haven for wildlife and reaching a balance between wildlife and dogs is a challenge faced all over the country.

photo: © Paula Stanyer

Unfortunately, the natural behaviour for most dogs is not

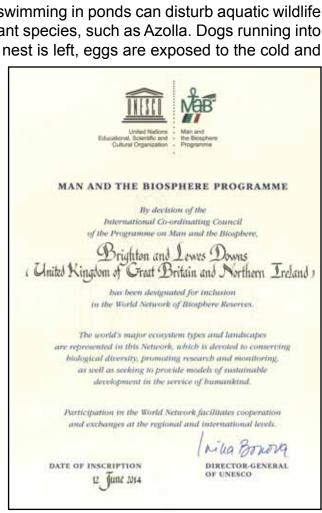
helpful in creating wildlife habitats. Behaviour such as swimming in ponds can disturb aquatic wildlife such as fish or newts and aid the spread of invasive plant species, such as Azolla. Dogs running into reeds and scrub can disturb nesting birds and when a nest is left, eggs are exposed to the cold and

are vulnerable to predation.

This behaviour is not normally an issue on larger nature reserves but due to the small size of the Railway Land habitats and the high frequency of dog walkers, disturbance could be a real threat to the wildlife populations. It's therefore important that we all work hard to manage the balance and that all visitors are aware that as a Local Nature Reserve the Railway Land is managed for people and wildlife as a special place where you can study and learn about nature or simply enjoy it.

For this reason we are calling a meeting at **7.00pm** on **Wednesday 4th February** at the Linklater between those who walk their dogs on the land and those who don't. Please make a note of this time and date whether you are a dog walker or not and we hope to see you there.

John Parry and Dan Fagan



#### We have a poet in residence!

We are fortunate to have attracted the interest of poet **Patrick Bond** who has been spending every Thursday since 6th November at the Linklater Pavilion. Here is his account so far.....

What is a Poet-in-Residence? The first part is easy, and also mysterious. I was claimed by poetry at the age of eleven. I knew then that no other pathway in life could possibly interest me, and have written steadily since that time – a period of fifty years. Words are my vocation, my self-medication, and a kind of fate.



Between 2007 and 2011, I conducted occasional one-day eco-poetic workshops in Fineshade Forest in Northamptonshire, close to Helpston, the birthplace of our greatest nature poet, John Clare (1793-1864). My intention was to bring Clare's poems to life in the woods and glades, and to foster the same attitude of open-hearted, detailed, engaged response to the natural environment.



John Clare is my mentor. He is a poet of the open heart. A peasant son of hardly literate parents, his intelligence is self-formed, not conditioned by the categorising structures which a formal education would have implanted. He grew up in a small village surrounded by open commons in the medieval three-field system of rotation. He saw Enclosure implemented when he was in his teens, and wrote profound laments for the destructive impact it had on landscapes in which he and his community were rooted. He is a poet of detailed observation, and a master of narrative in a tradition which we have almost lost: the aural/oral inheritance. His poems speak not *to* you but *beside* you, as if you and he were walking together. Uniquely, his poems sound better read outdoors under the open sky, than within a room. He was acutely aware of social injustice towards the poor – of whom he was one. He celebrates in nature a quality he calls "joy", a kind of troubled, intense, half-ecstatic, minutely

observed, infinitely crafted, self-renewing energy which arises in our relationship with and in nature. He speaks directly to the ecological and societal problems of our times.

The residency in the Railway Land Nature Reserve is my attempt to immerse myself in the natural and human presences of the place, before attempting to bring eco-poetic courses to the Linklater Pavilion. The purpose is fundamentally educational, in an era when a predominantly urban lifestyle and associated values are threatening to bring in train an environmental crisis. Without a renewed relationship with "nature", without each of us building a new way of seeing our fellow-inhabitants of the world, sentient and non-sentient, we stand a good chance of disaster.

What does it take, I ask myself, in winter of all seasons, to build a new way of seeing, a new way of putting ourselves into the context of nature? Conceptual answers to environmental issues, appealing only to intellect, will not have the desired results: vested and self-interests will distort the best plans. Real change requires an internal realignment more personal and more emotional. Cultivating a renewed, culturally challenging relationship to place, community and life itself, is crucial. It is what John Clare knew, and what his poetry enacts in his listeners. It is my hope to make myself a catalyst

of this change, through informed readings and enlivenings of Clare's poetry. The Linklater Pavilion seems the perfect hub for such an outreach, in its architectural quality and the values which it so eloquently embodies.

I have a set of six objectives for each Thursday visit to the Pavilion, and these are fully noted in my recording journal. So far, my remit to write a poem on each day has been met; I have talked to many people on site, noting their views on the experience of being there; I have come to know the people who use the Pavilion on a Thursday, and begun interacting with the Nature Corridors group; and I have reported back on wildlife sightings, seasonal developments, and human impacts such as litter.

It has been an immense privilege to devote so much time to the Railway Land and its surrounds. So far in my dedicated lurking, I have been spotted by two Herons, four pairs of Mallards, at least eight Moorhens, thirteen Black-headed Gulls sitting on a fence rail in the Ouse, at least a dozen Magpies, uncounted Rooks, several Crows, not many Pigeons, quite a few Wrens, Goldfinches and Robins, a Chiffchaff, a Dunnock, a Kingfisher and a Green Woodpecker. And a Field Mouse. And possibly a Water Vole. The other creatures have not revealed themselves so far – and most of the plants and flying insects are dormant. I look forward to meeting them in their own good time, as winter exerts its powers on land and water.

Patrick Bond

#### Heron

Elm log in the grate throws up a hand's-breadth of flame a dragon-dance across ropes and braids of smoke. Klara Würtz plays a dragon-dance of Mozart, a late piano sonata that curls and ebbs in my heart.

I have walked the water meadows in the windings of day, and the spooling out of darkness slow and little as light flowed away, and the River Ouse a brown fuse burning back to Newhaven and the Channel.

I have watched the Heron as it took stock of land and water, reed and bramble, mud and grass and the seepage between, as it leaned into one delicate step and then another, investing the waning light with cautious haste and warning.

The column of its neck a smoke plume in the dusk dim feather quill on a page notated in brown and yellow grey rising to the soot-black bar across its head

and the turn of its eye behind the flattened spear of its bill slowed the pulse of coming night to a dark and bright melody that rippled in and out of sight.

Patrick Bond, 17th November 2014 rev 18/11, 23/11 v 3



To see details of the day long course that Patrick is running this year, please turn to page 12.

#### **Bird Report December 2014**

The Bird Group was very pleased this last guarter to record a species new to our Railway Land records. Although the Cetti's warbler was first recorded in Britain in 1961 and first noted breeding in Britain in Kent in 1972, it has moved along the south coast and into East Anglia and can now be found as far north as south Yorkshire. Cetti's have been spreading up the Ouse Valley and we are delighted it has arrived on the Reserve. It needs what the Railway Land can provide: low-lying damp scrub with reed beds close by. Those of you who remember the creation of the Heart of Reeds may recall how guickly reed warblers moved in to the reed beds and what a joy that was. Now here is another species taking advantage of the habitat that has been created. So much wetland in Britain has been drained that it mainly flourishes in nature reserves.

It is a small brown bird slightly smaller than a house sparrow, looking rather like a large wren, which websites and books describe as "skulking" but I prefer to call "secretive". After all if you are that small and vulnerable you need to hide from possible predators. It is not a summer visitor and should be with us all year round and we really hope it will breed on the reserve. I should say that you are unlikely to identify it by sight BUT it has a most distinctive song which it shouts out from the middle of a bush when you least expect it. The books describe it as an "explosive sound". If you are interested in hearing the song search online for Radio 4's Tweet of the Day.



photo: ©RSPB

Why does it matter that we have a new species on the reserve (and in Britain for that matter)? For me because so many species are reducing in number because of loss of habitat and food sources and climate change and anything that helps biodiversity is marvellous. If anyone thinks they they hear a cetti's warbler, on the reserve, do email me with details.

Other birds to look out for in January and February include:



Goldfinches which feed on the teasels on the old sidings – a colourful sight if the sun catches them but if it is dull stand still and look closely.

Magpies can often be seen strutting their stuff on the short grass of the sidings and this is a good bird to start children with as it so distinctive.

Check the feeder on the Linklater for greenfinches and chaffinches.

A heron may be easier to spot on the meadows as the grass dies down. photo: ©RSPB

Reading our records of the last few years blue tits are plentiful in the woods at this time of year but if you look carefully you may also be lucky enough to spot long tail tits moving through the branches with them.

Leonie Mercer leonie.m@tiscali.co.uk

Phil Everitt's fascinating talk in mid November on the Sussex peregrines was very well attended. He had some excellent photos of not only our 'own' breeding pair, but also of some hair-raising stories: precarious nests on pylons, churches and flats in the South East.

#### Lewes District Council Ranger's Report December 2014

#### Tractor cuts and grassland management

The cutting of the sidings and the reed bed took place in late October. The removal of the grass from site helps reduces the nutrients in the soil encouraging a wider range of wild flowers. Pockets of thistle and taller grass have been left as an important habitat and food source for wildlife.

#### Improving the Tidal Sluice

The Environment Agency has been carrying out maintenance work on the tidal sluice and flood wall. Large diggers shifted silt from inside the sluice gates and concrete reinforcement was added to the flood wall. During the installation, I asked the contractors to install a Grey Wagtail nest box. This was purchased with Higher Level Stewardship funding from Natural England and is one of a number of different nest boxes we plan to install on the nature reserve.



Grey Wagtail

Motacilla cinerea

**Identification:** Bright yellow under tail and slate grey upperparts with very long tail. Females have white throat feathers whereas males have black.

Where to see them: During the summer they can be seen around fast flowing rivers where they hunt for insects amongst rocks and mossy patches and nest next to waterfalls, weirs or sluices. In the winter they seek the shelter of slower lowland streams or urban areas

**Conservation Status:** Expanding their range over most of England and Wales, but a recent decline in population has added it to the RSPB's Amber List for species of conservation concern.

#### Planning for the future

Behind every great Nature Reserve is a Management Plan and Lewes Railway Land Local Nature Reserve is no different. The Management Plan explains, in detail, information about planned practical work, ecological monitoring, community involvement and future projects. The current 5 year plan is due to be updated, so in the New Year I will be working hard with the Railway Land Wildlife Trust to improve and develop our management strategy for the next 5 years.

# See if you can spot these in January and February....



Its catkin time and these pendulous male flowers of hazel and alder stand a good chance of their tiny pollen grains being carried by the wind to the females before the leaves come out on the trees to obstruct them. Look for hazel from January onwards, checking the twigs below the catkins for the buds which have pinky-red sticky stigmas, all you can see of the female flowers, poking out to catch the pollen grains. The hazel nuts develop later



from the female buds and there is often a race between people and squirrels to harvest them as they ripen. A race I rarely win! Left

Left & Above: Hazel catkins and flowers

Alder catkins mature a bit later, probably mid-February, and you'll find a group of these trees along the path leading to the signal box. The female flowers are little woody cones and it is here that the seeds develop after pollination. Unlike the hazel nuts, alder seeds are small and are shaken out of the cones on windy days.



Male Alder catkins, female Alder flower cones and the Alder leaf

There is quite a lot of pollen at this time of year and any hardy insects which are around will take it to supplement their diet.

Also from mid-February you will see yellow lesser celandines in damp places and certainly along the Winterbourne. On first glance you might mistake them for buttercups but the leaves are dark green, heart shaped and very shiny and the petals golden yellow and glossy. They also produce plenty of pollen and have sugary nectar to attract the few insects flying at this time of year. Several poets have enthused about celandines as harbingers of spring and Wordsworth asked to have images of them carved on his tombstone.



Finally on any wander along streams and rivers on a mild evening at any time of year you will almost certainly encounter a cloud of midges. Before you brush them away just pause and admire their complex ballet. The cloud advances, the individuals don't bump into each other but weave and turn in a highly coordinated way. These are the males and the purpose of their display is to attract females which tend to fly at a lower level in smaller groups. There are lots of different species of midge and unlike the Scottish variety these ones do not bite! If you have a garden pond with lots of decaying leaves you may have seen their larvae feeding at the bottom and you've probably called them bloodworms.

Jenifer Barton

photos: ©wikipedia

#### **Cinnabar Moth Connections!**

Imagine my delight to receive this note from Marietta Van Dyck immediately after Newsletter 83 was circulated. "In the late 1950s early 60s it was my father L Hugh Newman 'The Butterfly Farmer' from Bexley in Kent who bred the cinnabar moth caterpillars which were sent to the New Zealand government in the pupae stage. My brothers and I helped count and pack 60,000!"

Jenifer Barton and I were unaware of this current Lewes connection to Newman, and how very involved Marietta had been as a child with her father's work.

Marietta told me that Leonard Newman, Hugh's father, a self taught lepidopterist, was regularly seen riding round on his penny farthing in rural Bexley in the 1890s looking over hedges for butterflies. He was persuaded to start the farm in 1894 when a wealthy city client said he'd guarantee him an annual income of £100 if he developed his hobby



above: Etta, aged 7 and her father with hibernating Brimstones photo: © Reuters

into a business. The Victorian / Edwardian eras saw huge interest in the natural world, especially amongst the aristocracy, and professional classes with wealthy patrons unashamedly collecting moths, butterflies, and, as we heard recently in Phil Everitt's talk, birds' eggs.

Marietta remembers being involved in packing, helping Mrs Chalmers the specialist employed by the Newmans. Mr Paverley was a full time carpenter who built and repaired the breeding cages, in which pupae and food plants were shrouded in protective muslin. 'Etta' and her two brothers Perran and Brian collected laurel leaves for use in Leonard's invention the 'Newmans Relaxing Tin'. This consisted of layers of plaster of paris, ground up laurel leaves and cotton wool into which dead insects were placed. The resulting miasma relaxed the corpse allowing enough time for butterflies to be 'set' with spread wings, and antennae at the right angle, before being boxed up and despatched. Unfortunately the laurel leaves were poisonous and she remembers vividly that after a session of crushing the leaves in a butcher's mincer they all had bad headaches! Etta learned how to prepare the complete kit for customers to do their own preparation of specimens - and she and her brothers were rewarded for all this toil by being allowed to go to the local cafe for a sausage, egg and chip lunch!

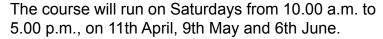
Etta went with her father to Chartwell when he advised Winston on his butterfly garden - he later advised the National Trust when they recreated Churchill's butterfly house. She met the eccentric naturalist and avid collector Miriam Rothschild, as well as Zoe Hart Dyke who kept silkworms at Lullingstone Castle in Kent, and she used her packing skills most memorably when sending the 60,000 pupae to New Zealand.

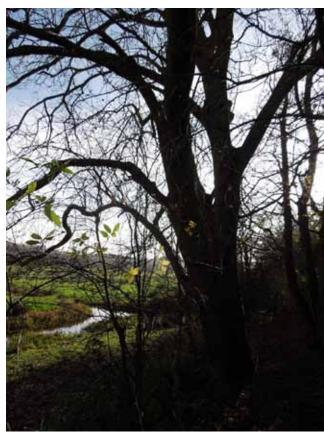
L Hugh Newman was a great communicator, writer and broadcaster. He helped devise the BBC's popular 'Nature Parliament' in the mid-fifties. His infectious enthusiasm encouraged many young naturalists. Although he retired from the farm in 1966, he then set up the Natural History Photographic Agency and discovered Stephen Dalton, who later took on the business. In the 1970s Stephen pioneered a sensing system using an invisible light beam which when broken by the subject activated an electronic shutter and several flashes to capture all types of creatures in flight.

# 'Finding Words for the Railway Land' - a new course

Finding Words for the Railway Land is a day-long course promoting a creative personal response to the nature reserve. The primary literary stimulus will be the poetry of John Clare, arguably our greatest poet of nature. Uniquely, the poems will be read aloud in the open air by Patrick Bond, currently poet-in-residence at the Linklater Pavilion and an expert reader of Clare.

The course will be tailored to touch on a range of issues including individual creativity and responsibility, and to sharpen awareness of how we understand the natural environment, in the language of the emotions, of science, of economics and of the human spirit. As a practising poet with a doctorate in creative writing, as well as a CV that includes nine years as a forest worker, Patrick brings to bear an unusual background and will be actively encouraging a deepening awareness of the Railway Land, and a release of the unique creative potentials which we all carry within us.





Cost is £35 per day and advance booking is advised. Please contact Patrick on **07425-011341** or email <a href="mailto:patrickgpbond@yahoo.co.uk">patrickgpbond@yahoo.co.uk</a> The Linklater Pavilion will act as a base for course participants.

The course could not run without the support of the Railway Land Wildlife Trust, to whom many thanks are offered.

For access to past newsletters or to see this printed version in full colour go to:

www.railwaylandproject.org
& click 'newsletters' in the left hand column

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