

Abbey Road Conservation Volunteers.

Progress Report for November 2023 to April 2024.

For Communities Committee meeting 4th June

Pond.

Unsurprisingly, given the rain we had over the winter and early Spring, the pond was completely full and overflowing for most of this period.

Unfortunately, the Tanyard Chalk Stream that overflows into the pond has all the run-off water from Mouse Lane added to it outside the Star pub, and so it is dirty and full of silt when it reaches the pond. This silt then lies at the bottom of the pond as the water recedes. Ideally this run-off water should be directed away from a precious Chalk Stream such as this.

Then the rains stopped, and as usual, the levels dropped quickly. At the end of April, the pond was about 50% full. We have been reminded by the Weald to Waves project team that an ephemeral (temporary) pond that dries up in the summer is an important and quite rare habitat. When we started work here, the pond was very shallow and dried up very quickly in the Spring. It now holds water until mid-May, allowing some of the wildlife such as frogs to complete their lifecycle before all the water goes.

That being said, we still intend to carry out more work on the pond in late summer this year to widen the banks and take out a little more depth in the middle of the pond to extend it. This will hopefully then hold water into early Summer each year

Trees

We planted 3 more Black Poplar trees adding to the 6 Black Poplars added last year. We have now planted 20 trees and 40 native shrubs here. The Black Poplar were again provided free through the Black Poplar project run jointly by the Sussex Wildlife Trust and Kew Gardens staff at Wakehurst.

But the dramatic 'Ash die-back' tree felling along the A283 adjacent to Abbey Rd has opened up the canopy, with the traffic now much more obtrusive than before. Another effect has been that the remaining trees along the highway, having lost their supporting neighbours, are now susceptible to high winds, with several falling across the boundary fence between the A283 and Abbey Rd. Hopefully WSCC can be prevailed upon to replant, to reinstate the tree cover along this part of the A283.

Meadow

After several years of trying different cutting regimes, we now cut half the field in early September, then the other half the following September. This allows long grasses to flourish for a year before being cut, stopping them from becoming too rampant.

Tony Whitbread (Sussex Wildlife President) reviewed the meadow area on his visit for our Open Day and agreed that this plan is probably the best for this site

Pathways

The new cut paths we introduced last year and the one we blocked off, continue to work well. The results of our Open Day survey on this topic confirmed that we have got the balance about right, between access for people, and quieter areas for wildlife.

Wildlife

Many of the migrant birds reappeared this year with several Whitethroats and Cetti's Warblers establishing breeding territories here. There have now been 42 bird species recorded here. In early Spring there were many clumps of frogspawn again in the pond. We recorded good numbers of early Butterflies including Brimstone and Tortoiseshell. Recently we have seen Broad Bodied Chaser Dragonflies and Beautiful Demoiselle Dragonflies over the pond.

A full Botany survey is being carried out on 13th June.

Orchard

Steyning Community Orchard planted a further 3 apple trees into the Orchard in February, attended by the tree donors, their families and many Abbey Rd Volunteers. They were all Sussex variety apple trees; Steyning Scarlet, Sussex Mother and Blackjack. There are now 9 trees in this Orchard

Working Parties/Volunteers.

We held 5 working parties in this period on the third Saturday each month, plus a few ad hoc sessions to deal with particular jobs. 10 different volunteers were involved in at least one of them, contributing 80hrs work between them. We currently have 17 people on our volunteers' list, plus 3 more who help with bird and botany surveys.

Report of the Abbey Road Open Day. 20th April 2024.

We had been planning to have an Open Day for several years, but finally managed to arrange it for this year.

The intent was to showcase the site and its habitats to the local community.

Simon Alexander, Simon Knowles, Gerard Bagley, Jenny Knowles, Adam Hollis and myself planned and delivered the day with help from several of our volunteers and families. Tony Whitbread and Katie Parker from the Sussex Wildlife Trust also helped us on the day.

It would have been good to have seen a few more people,(possibly some put off by the strong cold wind) but those who did come were genuinely interested in everything. Many of them had never seen the site before, or knew where it was. So, in that respect it was a success.

We estimate we had over 125 visitors, including about 30 children. We showed 50 people around the site on 5 site tours.

Abbey Rd Volunteers Gerard and Jenny, together with John Woodward (a local birding expert) had a stall showing the 20 commonest birds likely to be seen at Abbey Rd

Children's activities included a bug search, making a bug hotel, word searches and crosswords, colouring sheets and colouring wooden discs. (Thanks especially to Katie from Sussex Wildlife Trust for helping with this)

We also had live exhibits of frogs, tadpoles, toad and slow worms.

Tony Whitbread (Sussex Wildlife Trust and our key Abbey Rd advisor) led the walks around the site. We had scheduled these to last about 20-30mins, but most took 45mins, just in time to set off with the next group!

We asked visitors to complete a survey sheet asking what they thought about our work on the site; if they wanted more paths across the wilder area; their views on benches and waste and dog poo bins

(A separate report on this survey is a supporting document to this meeting's agenda. Thanks to Simon Alexander for setting this up and processing the results)

Key Points from this:-

1. Those asked, were very satisfied with the work of the volunteers and the grass cutting.
2. We asked about making more cut paths. Consensus was that we had the balance about right, and no more access paths were needed
3. Waste/dog poo bins. Yes, more needed. Propose moving one and provide 2 more. (see report)
4. Benches. Yes, more requested. Away from houses. (see report for locations)

Roger Brown. Abbey Rd Conservation Volunteer Coordinator. 29th May 2024