

Meeting of Friends of Landport Bottom
Monday 9th November 2020 – 7.30 pm. Meeting held via Zoom.

Present: Stephen Watson; Thyone Outram; Vicki Trenhaile; Rob Elvery;
Sarah Neels; Jenny Keen.

Apologies: Councillors: Rob Handy; Ruth O’Keeffe; Matt Bird.
Sarah Flynn

1. Minutes from the last meeting:

The Minutes were agreed.

2. Action points from previous meeting:

i. The Hawkenbury Way path. (An Action from the previous meeting: Matt Bird had emailed Andy Frost – Lewes District Council about the path).

Rob E. gave an update about the current state of the path. Currently it has dried out but in another month will probably be in a bad condition again. It is a difficult problem to resolve in that there are two manhole covers in situ. To make a proper repair would be very expensive, however a truckload of filler could provide an effective solution. Thyone O. asked if the path was an official right of way. Rob said that it was not a designated footpath and did not appear on the O.S. map. However, the path affords very important access to the Southern Water reservoir and to Landport Bottom. ESCC own the first 30-40 metres, and the remainder is owned by the Iford Estate. The responsibility for the problem area of the path is that of the District Council. Thyone said that contacting Andy Frost was probably the right thing to do. She will follow up and check if he received Matt Bird’s original email. **Action: Thyone O.**

ii. Persistent puddle by Gate 15 (Pond field), during wet weather.

Rob confirmed that at the moment there was not a problem. But as suggested at the last meeting a barrow load of stones, chalk or wood shreddings would solve the problem for the future. Soil should not be used as a filler. **Action: Thyone will organise this.**

iii. Bonfire – sheep being frightened by fireworks. Thyone said she had spoken to the shepherd, who is aware of the problem. Thyone informed her that Bonfire was cancelled this year due to Covid.

iv. Look into converting the Friends Facebook page into a Group page. Following the last meeting Stephen had set up a Friends of Landport Bottom Group Facebook page. The Friends currently has a Facebook page but only they can post things on it. A group page however, would allow interaction with other people. Initially it would be additional to the current Friend’s page. Thyone asked if the group page could be linked to the general page, which sometimes receives nice comments about Landport Botttom. Stephen said that the group page would be private but that anyone could apply to join, and therefore be entitled to post things on it. He said he would moderate the page for any offensive posts; as yet he has not advertised the group page.

v. Remove skylark notices from the gates. Stephen confirmed that Kym and Nina M. had now removed the notices. He said that the other unofficial notices which are still positioned in various parts of the Pond Field, should also be removed. Rob said he would mention this to the *anonymous* person who was responsible for installing them. Stephen said he might also begin removing them himself.

3. Ranger's report and discussion:

Grazing

Two separate groups of sheep were tugged at Landport Bottom in August. The group being serviced in the small field did well and the shepherd reports many successful pregnancies. The group in the Tumuli field did not do so well with few pregnancies. This could have been because the ram was young and inexperienced or could have been increased disturbance or some other factor. This group were removed for a second attempt back at Plumpton College

- All ewes – a mixture of pregnant and not breeding ewes – were then moved to the pond field where they will spend most of the winter. They will spend some time in the tumuli field also.

Pond

- The pond dried out over the summer – good for great crested newt population since drying out kills any fish which will eat newt eggs and young. Adult great crested newts can live for 10-15 years. Drying out is not good for other invertebrates where the young aquatic stage does not survive. Some e.g. dragonfly larvae can survive short periods as long as there is damp vegetation to shelter under and stay wet. *Rob commented that the pond had not completely baked dry.*
- Annual vegetation clearance took place in October with some of the vegetation – reeds and sedges as well as willow saplings being cut back to allow some open water in the spring. Vegetation has been left beside the pond to provide shelter for amphibians, insects, voles, etc.

Infrastructure

- Some new permanent oak signs warning of sheep in fields have been installed and others are being repaired. These signs have a significant effect on the amount of sheep worrying.
- Contractors continue to repair gates and fences as needed. There is currently no volunteer input.

Surveys

- The SADR organised a flora survey in July which attracted some Friends of Landport Bottom as well as skilled plant surveyors from all over Sussex. Many thanks especially to Stephanie Miles and her partner Tim who are very knowledgeable and were very thorough discovering species that we did not know were at the site.
- The results showed that the flower species that indicate good quality chalk grassland habitat had increased – the grazing management at Landport Bottom is working and the site is slowly reverting to flower rich chalk grassland. There are targets put forward by Natural England as part of the Countryside Stewardship scheme that partly funds the chalk grassland management. Though Landport Bottom is getting better each year not all parts achieved the targets set.
- Flower highlights this summer included:

- the very small patches of Round-Headed Rampion in the Pond Field, and Harebell in the Small Field had increased numbers of flower heads. Thyme-leaved sandwort not recorded since 2011, found again in the Small Field;
- numerous chalk grassland indicator species still recorded after 3 and 5 years including pyramidal orchids, kidney vetch, stemless thistle, rough hawkbit, squiancywort, milkworts and eyebright;
- Birdsfoot trefoil and Fairy flax are both still doing particularly well;
- Creeping thistle and Ragwort decreased in most areas.

Jenny K. said she had identified a Wild Chicory plant growing at the side of the old Motor Road. Thyone said that it had probably been brought in through the wild flower seed mix that had been sown there.

4. Issues and Concerns:

Confrontation with horse `trainers`:

Stephen said that a walker had been subjected to unprovoked threatening abuse from one of two women in the Small Field who appeared to be training an unbridled horse on a long leash. The incident had been reported to the police. Vicki T. said that the practice is called lunging and is used after a horse is injured and cannot be ridden. The horse is tied on a long rope and exercises in circles.

Stephen asked Thyone if people were allowed to train a horse on Landport Bottom, as opposed to just riding it. Thyone confirmed that it had not been specified whether training was allowed, only that riding is permitted. She said that there would be a problem if this kind of activity happened on a regular basis as it would wear down the chalk grassland.

Woodland clearance:

Vicki raised an issue which was not directly related to Landport Bottom. She said that a lot of clearance in the woods near the reservoir field had taken place. This was along the path which runs around the edge of LB. Local people had posted their concerns on the Nevill Residents What's App group, asking what was going on. Thyone said that someone had reported this to her and she had given them the contact details for the Southdown National Park Ranger, to see if he or the landowner knew any more about the work.

5. Wildlife updates – surveys:

Wild flower survey:

Refer to the Ranger's report.

Lark survey:

Rob referred to a minuted discussion at the last meeting about conducting a lark survey. He said he had spoken with Kevin Murphy, who is a regular surveyor for the BTO. Kevin had responded that it wasn't worth doing a formal lark survey, as this would cause too much hassle, also disruption to the birds. He felt that the result wouldn't be a lot different from what is already known, i.e. that there are 4 or 5 pairs of larks nesting in the Pond Field. Stephen agreed the larks should not be disturbed.

6. Celebrations:

None.

7. Protection / identified threats:

None.

8. Any other business:

The Changing Chalk Project:

Thyone is in the process of putting forward an application in the form of a bid which stretches across the South Downs, with partners e.g. the National Park; S.W.L.T, other councils etc. She confirmed that Lewes and Eastbourne District Council are putting together a bid to get a Community Ranger to work with local people on engagement, and learning about the downland environment. One of the sites that Thyone has put forward for them to work is Landport Bottom.

Something that would specifically be included within the role of community ranger, is dog ownership, and the need to engage with people as to how dogs impact the sheep and chalk grassland. Thyone suggested that there could be dog ambassadors who would talk to dog owners. The ranger would also engage with the Friends e.g. carrying out reptile surveys, and involving other people from Lewes. The ranger would work across several sites in Eastbourne and Lewes, including Landport Bottom.

Thyone asked the meeting if they felt it would be good to have a community ranger; everyone present agreed that it would. She said that as part of the bid it may be necessary to demonstrate that the local community were in favour of the appointment. She therefore asked if the Friends would write a letter of support to the effect that they thought a community ranger working at Landport Bottom, alongside all the other sites, would be a good thing. Stephen asked Thyone to forward him more information, and the necessary contact details. He agreed to draft a letter. Vicki said that since the start of Covid a lot more people had been using Landport Bottom; it would be good therefore to get them involved with the wildlife etc. ***Actions : Thyone and Stephen.***

Future Landport Bottom Management Committee Meetings:

Thyone confirmed that no future meetings had been scheduled.

9. Date of next meeting:

Monday 8th March 2021 – venue dependent upon the Covid-19 situation.