

Annual Report 2023

Now we have five tubs sunk into the ground to retain water and small aquatic life over the dry summer period, we are finding an increase in biodiversity in and around the pond as a result. The Open Day on Sunday 23rd April was successful, despite being slightly earlier than the peak of bluebell flowering. The pond-dipping proved to be of great interest, and we were rewarded by the discovery of three adult Palmate Newts, two males with their distinctive black webbed hind feet and one female, along with the usual water beetles, dragonfly and mayfly larvae, small crustaceans, etc. Later in the year Slender Ground-hoppers, an unusual grasshopper relative were found around one of the tubs. They like damp places (even jumping into the water on occasion) and provide more evidence that the tubs are effective. Roe deer have been seen on several occasions, and leave plenty of evidence of their activities, as do badgers and foxes.

Identifying and recording the occurrence of wildlife (including animals, birds, insects, plants, fungi, etc.) in and around the pond is important scientifically and is also of great interest to us, local residents and visitors. Some fungi are now being identified, and a plan is being developed to add a searchable catalogue of species records to the web site.

Bishop's Pond is a SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation), recorded by the Hampshire County Council in a spreadsheet of the Hampshire SINC sites, dated 3 March 2017, where Bishop's Pond in the NFDC district, map ref. SU14411456, area 0.26 hectares, is listed for its "Social Value" with criterion 7A ("sites of nature conservation interest which occur in areas otherwise deficient in such interest, and/or are known to be of particularly high value to local communities").

Management work at the pond during the last year included hazel coppicing, cutting back birches and willows at the edge of the pond, improving the path in front of 12 and 14 Cottage Mews, pulling out young sycamore saplings, cutting back brambles and blackthorn where they threaten to overrun area of bluebells and other flora, reduction of the invasive floating fairy fern (*Azolla*), etc. We have enhanced the wildflower bank with additional seeding, and created a hibernaculum for over-wintering reptiles and amphibians and several stacks of logs and branches as refuges to encourage invertebrates, small mammals and fungi.

The bee-hive roof has been repaired, but we don't have any bees in residence. Advice from a beekeeper on cleaning and refurbishment would be helpful, as would the provision of a swarm at the appropriate time. Edward Hale reported that the council carries out tree inspections on a three-year cycle, important because of the increasing ash die-back disease, but it was not clear in which year Bishop's Pond will next be checked.

Jane Ward provided a list to help us plan future activities for the maintenance or management of the pond area. The list organises activities into key areas around the site: the wildflower bank on the left after entering, the bank in front of 12-15 Cottage Mews on the right after entering, the bank alongside Normandy Way (which has native English bluebells), the woodland area at

the north end (which has bluebells and native daffodils), and of course the pond itself and its sunken tubs.

Our financial position is stable but our balance is not large, so we must take steps to ensure that income, including membership donations, will allow us to make minor expenditure when needed. We are adopting principles to improve safety when working at the pond, including not working alone, safeguarding and the supervision of children, and the use of safety goggles and perhaps “hi-viz” jackets at working sessions when needed. Personal data privacy (GDPR) also needs to be addressed.

Sue Bennett has continued to send items to local journals, highlighting our activities, dates of working sessions and news such as the discovery of the Palmate Newst and the Pyramidal Orchid which appeared unexpectedly in June. Help with our Facebook page and Facebook group and other social media would be beneficial.

The Team ran a stall at the Damerham Fair and Horticultural Show on Saturday 29th July. We decided that a 3-fold double-sided colour A4 sheet should be printed for future use at similar events. Stocks of the 8-page leaflet on the history of the Pond are running low, but Romany Wood-Robinson kindly scanned a copy so we have the basis for a future edition.

Jane gave Richard authorisation for use of the email address fordingbridgeconservation@gmail.com which she had set up to send emails to members on matters such as the dates of working parties and any cancellations, and for others to contact us. We also maintain the web-site www.fordingbridgeconservation.uk which includes working party schedules, contact details, photos and other information.

Jane Ward who helped to run the Fordingbridge Conservation Group as secretary and vice-chair has moved to the Middlesbrough area after thirty years in Fordingbridge. We would like to express our gratitude for her dedication, inspiration and hard work for the Group over many years. She recently wrote: “Over the years I have seen a lifeless pond overloaded with nitrates and phosphates transformed into a seasonal pond which is full of life. The surrounding area which was dominated by brambles is now being well maintained to create a much more diverse ecosystem. This is despite the extremes of weather we are seeing due to climate change. Increasing the biodiversity at the site in the future will only be possible if we have enough volunteers.

“I have really enjoyed working at the pond over the years and I will miss it and all the great people who come to the working parties. It’s the volunteers who are essential to build on our achievements and we definitely need more people who are prepared to come along and help.”

Her departure left a vacancy on the management team, now filled by Ian Ruddock. The team meets only three times a year and is responsible for the planning of the working parties, open days and our participation in local shows. Do let us know if you would like to join the management team.

The Management Team