

## **Fordingbridge Conservation Group**

### **Vice-chair's report 2021**

Owing to the Covid situation, it has been two years since our last annual general meeting. Our work on the pond was halted during the first lockdown. After that we did manage to carry on with our working parties whilst taking all necessary precautions to minimise risk.

Very sadly, in September 2020, Graham Long died. He founded the group in 2009 and is greatly missed. His knowledge of the natural world was vast. His enthusiasm and hard work ensured that the conservation group made much progress in increasing the biodiversity of the pond and the surrounding area. I know that we all want to carry on the work that he started.

### **The Pond**

The pond continues to dry out in the summer months. We are continuing to clear the *Juncus* so it does not become overgrown again. The past two years has seen a flourishing population of *Persicarias* and bur marigolds once the water has gone.

In the last report in 2019 we had been given the results of the pond survey which had been carried out by Robert Aquilina. His results showed that the pond had many invertebrates living in it in the winter and that some species survived in the damp mud in the summer. This is very encouraging because the wildlife trust said they could find no life at all in the pond in 1992 because of high levels of nitrates and phosphates in the water. At present, the plants flourishing in the pond in summer, particularly the flote grass (*Glyceria fluitans*), take up the nitrates and phosphates and so the eutrophication of the water is prevented.

The pond drying out over the summer did mean that species which require water over the summer to complete their life cycles were absent. We sunk two plastic tanks into the pond in August 2019. These have held water all year round. In the following two years we were pleased to find a dragonfly larva, various water beetles and newt larvae living in the tanks in the summer and recently I saw a large frog jump into the water. Several adult dragonflies have also been seen around the pond in the past few weeks.

We now have flag irises, purple loosestrife, meadowsweet and water figwort growing around the margins of the pond.

### **The Wildflower Bank**

After a slow start, this has really come into its own. We have had large amounts of teasel and ox-eye daisies along with many other species. The full list of plants can be seen in the display. We also successfully sowed some yellow rattle seeds which hopefully will keep the growth of the grass in check.

### **Steep Bank by Normandy Way**

The continued clearance of vegetation here has increased the light for the bluebells. From two small patches when we started, the bluebells now have spread across a large area and we really noticed the wafts of scent from them this spring.

## Raised bank to the west of the pond

We have been continuing with the hazel coppicing each year. This results in creating a variety of habitats for wildlife.

In 2019 we were given a hive along with its bees. Unfortunately, we were unaware that the hive had previously been occupied by other bees and the hive had never been cleaned out after they left. This meant that much of the space for building honeycomb was already used up. Sadly the bees suddenly died next February, we think they simply ran out of food reserves.

## Woodland Area

We have planted snowdrops and wild daffodils here. The bluebells which are now clear of brambles have spread across the woodland section. They all create a great display in spring.

The hedge we planted on the edge of the wooded area alongside Normandy Way has mostly survived with only the loss of a few plants. It does have to be regularly weeded to ensure the plants get sufficient light.

## Trees

There are trees all across the site. Every year they are assessed by the district council. Last year, it was found that all our ash trees were in the early stages of ash dieback disease. Immediate action was only required to be taken on one of the trees which was already in a poor state before being hit by dieback. The tree was cut back to about 10 metres in height and left as a habitat pole.

Three willow trees were also felled, because either the whole tree or large branches on the tree were falling over. We have noticed that when goat willow branches reach a critical size, they tend to break or collapse. It has been proposed that we maintain the willows by cutting out the larger branches each year and so restrict their size.

We have installed bird boxes in a few of the trees and hope to increase the number of them this year.

## Open Day

Our open day was on September 18th. We were pleased to have 15 visitors to the site. It was encouraging that some of them said they would like to help with the working parties.

## Thanks

Thanks are due to all our volunteers who have helped in what has been a particularly difficult two years.

In particular I'd like to thank Sue and Richard who do a great job on the organisational side of the group but who have also been absolute stalwarts on the working parties and are instrumental in keeping the Fordingbridge conservation group going in the right direction.

Jane Ward

27th September 2021