

## **Fordingbridge Conservation Group**

### **Chair's report 2022**

This year has seen some particularly dry and hot conditions in the summer months. Our volunteers have tried to carry on despite the heat and great headway has been made in our clearance work in the pond and its surrounds.

Over the course of the year, we have put up 8 bird boxes and 2 bat boxes in the trees around the pond and in the woodland area. Blue tits were seen to be occupying one of the boxes and great tits were also in residence in a second box. Sadly we have seen the continuing progression of ash die-back disease in the trees around the pond.

#### **The Pond**

The water quality in the pond had last been tested in 2017 and high levels of nitrates and phosphates had been found. It was stated by a pond ecologist who visited the pond that these were used up by the plants which grow in the pond when it dries out and thus eutrophication is now prevented. It was encouraging to find very low levels of nitrates and phosphates in water samples which were taken in spring 2022. This has been reflected in the fact that invertebrates have been found in good numbers in the pond all year round.

The weather conditions this year caused huge growth of bindweed in the pond. This, along with the flote grass was strimmed down using a battery operated strimmer.

The clearance did allow the *Persicaria* and bur marigolds to flower.

Over the course of the year, three more tanks have been placed in the pond to ensure there is water for amphibians and insects to complete their life cycles. Some of the tanks have been found to contain more wildlife than others. We have found a frog and some young newts in them this summer.

Marginal plants continue to be added around the edge of the pond. These include, purple loosestrife, yellow flag iris, meadowsweet and water figwort.

#### **Wildflower bank**

There are now a good variety of plants growing on the bank. Some of them like the ox-eye daisies and the teasels have had to be thinned out as they have a tendency to take over. Yellow rattle has now been established in order to weaken the grassy areas and restrict its growth.

#### **Steep bank by Normandy Way**

The vegetation has continued to be cleared regularly to allow light for the bluebells. Those which grow adjacent to the Cottage Mews road appear to be declining as the trees and hedgerows surrounding them increase in height.

Further along this area, the holly bushes which were blocking the light were cut down or thinned out in spring. A number of hazels along the bank are being selected for coppicing each winter.

**Raised bank to the west of the pond**

Coppicing of the hazel has continued in stages in this area thus providing a variety of habitats. There are a good number of foxglove seedlings appearing.

**Woodland area**

The bluebells, daffodils and snowdrops continue to spread and produce a great display in spring. The hedge planted in the wooded area alongside Normandy Way has been drastically cut back by the hedge cutting. It is hoped that it will recover when the weeds are cleared from it.

A composting area is now well established and turning of the heaps is continuing.

**Wooded area on northern side of pond**

Wild garlic bulbs have been planted in this area as they prefer a shaded site.

A hibernaculum for overwintering amphibians and reptiles is in the process of being built in a more sunny spot, but was somewhat hampered by the discovery of old brick constructions where we were digging.

**Spring Open Day**

A successful open day was held at the end of April. This was peak time for the bluebells. There were 15 visitors during the afternoon.

**The Damerham Show**

The Conservation Group had a stall at the show. A good number of people stopped to talk to us and look at the display boards. Some of them expressed an interest in volunteering with us. Sue's Freddie the frog game did well at attracting a younger audience, whose parents we could then chat to.

**Thanks**

Thanks are due to our small but stalwart band of volunteers. Without them it would not be possible to carry out the work necessary to see an ongoing increase in the biodiversity of the pond and its surrounds.

Jane Ward