

Fairfield Association
Fauna and Orchard sub-Group [FOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 2nd May 2013, 7.30 pm
at Thorneycroft, Fairfield Road

Present: Andrew Brennand (mins), Graham Brandwood, Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton (chair/mins), Helen Hicks, Ian Procter, Rebecca Procter, Chris Workman.

1. **Apologies:** Dave Brookes, Ken Capewell, Glenys Ferguson, Matt Homewood, Sue Nieduszynska, Hilary Short, Mick Short.
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Agreed.
3. **Current/recent developments:**
 - **Break in barbed wire:** In Big Meadow, towards the west end of the Fauna footpath. Caused by the cattle. Temporarily fixed by the graziers.
 - **Vandalism by crossroads:** Sapling protectors removed and smashed across the Pads path, Fauna 'rules' notice hanging by one screw. Happened mid afternoon. Damage repaired during 13 April volunteer session.
 - **North Lancs volunteer amphibian recorder:** Visit by Linda Renshaw and companion to survey the Fauna ponds. Report and photographs submitted to Oliver. Linda will also attend the Bioblitz on June 7th.
 - **Squirrels in owl box** (box on lime tree at Hicks' garden boundary): Observed by Linda Renshaw. **Helen** will investigate. Agreed that probably not much can be done this year, just clean out next winter; but **Oliver** will consult Richard Storton. Fraser has agreed to keep an eye out.
4. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - **Orchard noticeboard:** Andrew reported it had now essentially fallen to pieces and is just being held up by two screws. **Helen** will take measurements and arrange repairs.
 - **Woodland Trust tree pack:** Cannot be ordered until we take possession of Flora (**Ian**).
 - **Dumping at northern end of Orchard:** Cleared at 13 April volunteer session. No further dumping so far.
5. **Report from the FA meeting:** Noted that the Flora Steering group will report to the FA meeting; FOG to be kept informed as needed (e.g. volunteer items).
6. **Fauna:**
 - **Monthly maintenance and monitoring inspection:** Full reports available. All fine apart from grass height, poaching in School Pond and Big Meadow, and Anna's Pool leak. Green algae will be raked out by Graham. Barley straw was suggested: **Oliver** will check with Richard Storton that this is appropriate.
 - **Repairs to Anna's Pool:** Leak was inspected by Richard Storton on 19 April. He proposes to leave the repair until it can be combined with pond-digging works on Flora.

He suggests switching to a smaller diameter pipe, and moving the opening in closer to the bank, so that the greater weight of soil will (hopefully) prevent movement being caused by the wind.

- **Cattle access timetable:** On hold until cattle access to Flora can be incorporated. Poaching and grass height should be resolved once the cattle have more grazing and an alternative water supply.
- **Water trough, track extension and other works:** The graziers have approached the allotment association about using their water source. Once a water source is identified, **Dave** will liaise with Hanafins. The track extension is on Hanafins' list but is not urgent as the ground is currently very dry. We are still awaiting estimates from Hanafins for this and the remedial footpath works.
- **Breeding birds and hare surveys:** Dan Haywood's results from last year are about to appear on the website. He has agreed to repeat the survey this year free of charge and include Flora, but would like us to ask NE if there could be a payment for surveys from 2014 onwards (**Oliver**). The North West Brown Hare Survey appears to have issued its final report in December 2012, so the database into which we were recording sightings is no longer being used. Clare Brown was thanked for her efforts as liaison on this. People are now encouraged to report hare sightings in Flora/Fauna through the wildlife blog on the FA website. **Philip Turner** will be asked to telephone Julia McDowell directly so that his sightings can be added to the blog (**Glenys**).
- **Rural payments agency remapping:** This will now be included in the Flora mapping (**Oliver**), required as soon as the Flora sale/transfer is recorded at the Land Registry.

7. **Volunteer activities:** Ian's full reports of April's work and the tasks for May are attached at the end. Ian also described how he will use the existing volunteer database and contacts list to try to raise volunteer numbers by improving how we follow up with volunteers and increasing repeat attendance at sessions. In May, daffodils will be thinned and replanted to increase the area covered, provided the ground is dry enough to dig them up without damage. It was agreed to remove the badly cankered apple trees as soon as possible (**Ian/Keith**). A decision on whether to replace – and with what – will be made in the autumn, once we know the outcome of the tree survey recommendations. It was also agreed to replace the broom - probably with bare-root plants in the autumn, but **Ian** will investigate prices for pot-grown plants. **Ken** is leading the session on 11 May and has been briefed by Ian.

- **Treatment of stumps:** Dave's suggestion of covering them with black plastic (supported by research) will be implemented.
- **DBS check:** Tony visited CVS to enquire about the process. It is now dealt with by CVS in Burnley who will email him the procedure and forms. It is "free" but with a £13 admin charge per name. It was suggested Ian, Graham and Tony get a DBS and **Ian** will approach Mick about joining the list. Agreed that this is now urgent. **Tony** will forward copies of forms and information to those named, plus Michael Sheppard as our nominated trustee.

8. **Tree survey:** Report received and discussed. Noted that Andy Lee is recommending annual monitoring. Mick has emailed Andy to ask whether this change from a two-yearly interval is

necessary. It was agreed to accept the recommendations for the sycamores at the Martins' boundary, and to invite Andy to contact the Tree Officer and open negotiations (**Oliver**, who will also inform him of the canker in nearby apple trees caused by over-shading). **Oliver** to inform the Martins, who have previously shared costs of tree work.

9. **Monitoring of Natural England Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Success Indicators:**

- **RSPB: Reedbed and wetland indicators:** Richard Storton inspected on 19th April. Overall he was pleased with the state of the reed beds and wetlands, and encouraged by the level of wetness given the lack of rain. Written report expected soon (**Glenys** to chase).
- **Orchard:** The fruit trees have been assigned numbers, tagged, identified on a sketch map and listed. The health check will take place in the next couple of weeks (**Glenys**).

10. **Local Nature Reserve designation & Fauna Management Plan:** No progress (**Oliver**).

11. **Educational activities:** Going well with two schools. **Tony** will re-contact other local schools in an effort to achieve our 8-school Sustainability Grant target.

12. **Edenbreck boundary & garden, Concessionary Path Agreement:** No progress (**Oliver**).

13. **Health and Safety Policy:** Guidance for external contractors. No progress (**Dave**).

14. **Tool shed: progress, green roof, hardstanding area:** Most tools now in. Keys will be held by Ian, Mick (Oliver until Mick's return) and Glenys. **Ian** will investigate how easy it is to get copies made. The green roof will be delivered on Friday 3rd, time not yet confirmed. Ian requested permission to use bricks to make a boundary between the concrete and the earth and to buy some wild flower seeds and plant them. Agreed. Fraser has asked for the boundary between us and the Granell-Watsons to be permanently fenced off but it was agreed that the ball is in their court since their land purchase first needs to be resolved with the City Council. The final payment for the shed has been made. Buildings and contents insurance is now in place with Zurich.

15. **Flora**

- **Update:** Currently waiting for solicitors to ensure vacant possession before purchase can be completed. Unclear when this can be achieved, but no later than end July. We need to be prepared to take over at fairly short notice.
- **Jacob's Join celebration:** Date cannot be fixed until we take possession. If it happens in the next few weeks we can do something, but this is unlikely, so see item 16 below.
- **Litter picking:** The tidy up of the small plantation will be done in the next volunteer session with due care for sharps and other potentially hazardous materials (**Ken**).
- **Tree Survey:** Andy Lee has agreed to give a talk on the wood as part of any Go Wild activities. To assess the state of the wood, Andy has agreed to an informal walking survey with Oliver and Graham, in part to identify a suitable sub-section for woodland activities. Following completion of the purchase, he will survey this section, and the perimeter to be followed by the footpath, in more detail, and then undertake the work to

make it safe. These latter two activities will be paid work, but the initial walk and the Go Wild talk will be at no charge to the FA.

16. **Go Wild arrangements:** Plans as regards Go Wild in Flora are in limbo due to the delay gaining vacant possession. It was suggested that our main Go Wild plans for this year could be delayed until summer 2014, and that we could instead do one joint picnic/Go Wild event, perhaps in August to cover our HLF obligations and show off Flora to donors and the community. This could include the Andy Lee talk, a talk/tour by Richard Storton and some activities organized by Tony and Graham. Little point in making concrete plans at present.
17. **Wildflower surveys and ragwort campaign:** The earlier wildflower survey should be part of the Bioblitz on 7th June (**Chris** is endeavouring to recruit a suitable wildflower leader). The ragwort campaign, as detailed by Ian (see below) was authorised.
18. **AOB:** Before the meeting Rebecca said that she had met a wheelchair user who had pointed out that the catch on the Cromwell Road gate to Fauna is out of reach of anyone unable to stand. **Oliver** to discuss with Dave.
19. **Date / place of next meeting:** 7.30pm Thursday 6th June: It was agreed to try a smaller room at the Friends Meeting House (Room 1, FMH; to be chaired by Dave); 7.30pm Thursday 11th July (venue to be confirmed, Chair to be decided).

Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:

Report on volunteer morning 13th April 2013

14 volunteers gathered on a bright if breezy morning but it was warmer!

- 1) We strimmed the grass tufts in a section of the Orchard although the grass had not grown enough to justify mowing. Hopefully this weekend's warm and rain will start the Spring.
- 2) Brambles behind the fruit hedge were cut back to keep them under control.
- 3) The remaining prunings from the fruit hedge were cleared.
- 4) Two broken boughs of a willow near the Towneley path were sawn off and cleared to the adjacent brash pile along with several other piles of brash which have accumulated over time.
- 5) The unwanted growth at the base of the oldest sycamore was removed, to encourage it to concentrate on where it should be growing
- 6) Encroaching grass was cleared from the remaining Orchard benches.
- 7) Pruning of the apple trees continued along with the consultation on canker (below). The cankered wood was stored separately for burning.
- 8) A considerable amount of rubbish from the north end of the Orchard was cleared to black bags and the Sunnyside Close rubbish bin. Two boards were retrieved and stored for possible use as shed shelves, along with some stakes.
- 9) The plastic protectors and supporting canes removed by vandalism at the north end of the Pads footpath were replaced. Fortunately it seems that no damage was done to the saplings.
- 10) The gathered volunteers were consulted on the following matters for report to FOG and decisions there:

- a. Daffodils. It was agreed that it was a good idea to thin out some of our existing groups. It was thought best simply to expand these groups rather than starting new ones.
- b. Sycamores in the Pads hedge adjacent to the Orchard. For attention next autumn. Working south from the crossroads:
 - i. Remove the first one but replace it with a more appropriate tree such as a bird cherry.
 - ii. The three adjacent to the Orchard middle entrance – remove the middle sycamore and radically prune the northerly one to produce a straight main trunk.
 - iii. Remove the next sycamore to the south of the middle entrance.
 - iv. We were unsure what the next two trees were so will wait and consider again next year.
- c. Badly cankered apple trees. Keith Taylor's advice was to remove these and replace with new specimens. It was noted that a possible cause of the canker was the overhanging sycamores in the Martin's garden. This underlined the recommendation for 9) b. i. above as that specimen will cast shadow over the fruit trees. (Perhaps inform the Martins of this opinion).

Report on volunteer evening 24th April 2013

8 volunteers attended the first evening session of the year.

1. The grass paths and stump circle were mown.
2. Broom and gorse bushes were pruned and staked where feasible and dead ones removed to Fraser's bonfire site. An inconclusive conversation about whether to plant more.
3. Apple prunings with canker infestation were removed to the bonfire site.
4. Accumulated brash piles in the Paddock were moved to the bonfire site.
5. The bramble enveloping the laid hedge near the Fauna Stones was cut back.
6. Some of the redundant plastic protectors were removed from maturing saplings. Some of these were stored for future use.
7. Others were used to protect new saplings in the Pads hedge.
8. The nearly completed shed was inspected and some queries raised to take to the architect / builder.

Proposed tasks for volunteer morning 11th May 2013

Note: In my absence the session will be led by Ken. I will be briefing him both on leading the group in general and the specifics of this session.

1. Mow the grass.
2. Strim / cut back a section of growth around the apple trees.
3. Litter pick along the Long Pads path and in the Flora copse: NOTE:
 - a. Volunteers MUST wear protective gloves
 - b. There must be a container in which unsafe objects are placed.
 - c. The remaining rubbish to be black bagged and barrowed to the shed where I shall transport it to the tip another day.

4. If we have access to the Flora fields then a litter pick along all the hedges would be beneficial.
5. Thin out the daffodils between the stump circle and the notice board path and under the sycamore tree. The consensus at the last session was that the thinning should be used to enlarge the existing areas. Keep 'in the green'.
6. Inspect the small tree alongside the Fauna / School footpath which has blown over. If it is dead, clear, if alive, stake.
7. Move the brush pile in the Paddock (near the Fauna Stones) to Fraser's bonfire site.
8. Tidy around the Shed (can't be specific at time of writing).
9. If there are still tools in the Short shed bring them down to the Shed.

At the end of the session all tools to the new Shed. HURRAH.

Ragwort Campaign 2013

It is the time of year when we have to address the Fauna ragwort infestation. For reasons stated below, I hope this is the last year that we have to use such a description and indeed to mount a 'campaign'. In 2012 by a combination of spraying early in the summer and pulling/digging out later we prevented the second year ragwort plants seeding¹. Therefore there should be very few first year plants in 2013. However, there will be second year plants from 2011. Whilst some of these were addressed last year many were too small and numerous to totally eliminate. These are the challenge for this year. As they are now second year plants they will come early and visibly and most of them should be included in an early summer spray. But we must then be vigilant and any that are missed must not flower / seed. This again must be our watchword. However, the prize is significant. If we were successful last year, and I think we were, then there should be insignificant numbers of first year plants from seed set in 2012. Thus in 2014 the fields should be clear apart from invaders from outside. My only worry here is the Grammar School field, see below.

So, it is important to spray again this year. My Ragwort Reports from last year suggest:

- Review the situation from early May. In effect this is what this report amounts to. The ragwort is appearing as expected (see above) but the late spring will have delayed its development.
- I thus suggest we aim to spray in late May / early June. To start too early in a late spring year risks missing too many small plants.
- I propose once again organising ragwort working parties. To qualify people must be born before 1st January 1965, once again this legalistic ageism works in our favour.
- I will prepare all backpacks and give training and instruction to our volunteers, for example, last year our strips across the fields were too wide and they need to be limited to 7 feet.
- We will again systematically attack the fields using my flag system.
- We will begin with the Hay and Carr House meadows to allow time for a second round of spreading there. Again, elimination of ragwort is vital for harvesting the hay crop.
- I will co-ordinate with Fraser to keep cows out of fields we are working in.
- Can we include the Grammar School Field? Last year volunteers cleared flowering plants after Fraser's initial 'wipe'. But I fear there is still infestation there which will prevent us reaching non-infestation.

¹ Ragwort is a biennial plant and flowers in its second year (or later if it becomes established as a perennial).