

Fairfield Association
Fauna and Orchard sub-Group [FOG]
Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 11th July 2013, 7.30 pm
at Friends Meeting House

Present: Andrew Brennand (chair), Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton, Sue Nieduszynska, Ian Procter, Rebecca Procter.

1. **Apologies:** Graham Brandwood, Hilary Short, Mick Short.
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Agreed.
3. **Current/recent developments:**
 - **Addition to fields access list:** Linda Renshaw, amphibian recorder for North Lancs Naturalists Group, was approved.
 - **Grass cutting in the Hay Meadow:** Because of a misunderstanding and concern for an animal's welfare the graziers mowed a strip of the Hay Meadow to provide fresh grass for a sick cow. Mick has phoned to make them aware that this is not an acceptable course of action and outline other options. Ian has since provided cut grass from the Orchard and the cow has revived (although still not in full health). **Ian** is to act as emergency contact for the graziers in the future.
4. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
 - **Tool shed snagging:** All but the coping stone repair has now been done (Sam pursuing). The builder still has a key.
 - **Cromwell Road gate catch:** Tarja Wilson (Lancashire County Council) has offered to supply a catch that might be more suitable for disabled access. For the FA to install. (**Rebecca** to follow this up.)
5. **Report from the FA meeting:** At the AGM it was agreed that Appendix 2 of the revised Constitution would be re-written to improve its clarity. This appendix is relevant to the operation of sub-groups such as FOG. Otherwise nothing of specific relevance to FOG.
6. **Flora Update:** The deeds of transfer for the Harries land were signed on 5 July. Completion of the purchase of the Gleasons Field is expected to follow in a couple of weeks.
7. **Fauna:**
 - **Monthly maintenance and HLS monitoring inspection:** Full reports available. The graffiti ('monkey tag') on the bench in Fauna has been spotted in other (non-FA) locations. It will be cleaned off at the Saturday volunteer session. PCSOs will not be contacted unless the problem continues. It was decided to wait for the RSPB's ecologist to reply before taking further action on the algae. Tony was concerned that barley straw would add more nutrients. Oliver advised that – depending on type – algae can be toxic and/or carcinogenic, and care needs to be taken by anyone handling it (**Oliver** to alert Graham).
 - **Water trough, track extension and other works:** With School Pond now dry, the cattle are being moved each day between the Grammar School field and Big Meadow, where they can access water. The water trough and associated works are to be added

to the extension of the Natural England agreement. Whilst the water source and the location of the trough have now been agreed, the specification and cost allocation are still unknown (**Dave** to contact the payments person at Natural England in Crewe). Dave has emailed Hanafins to ask for prices for these and the other pieces of work (including some on Flora), but they appear too busy to respond. They already have the materials in stock for the Paddock hedging job (see item 17), so may do the others at the same time. If not, an alternative contractor may need to be found to ensure any HLS work is done before the end of February.

- **Breeding birds survey:** **Sue** has offered to contact Dan Haywood. The results of this year's survey will be added to the FA website as well as reported to FOG. Other people with the expertise to conduct such surveys may be identified when the birding group is set up as part of the HLF grant for Flora (see also item 13). The question was raised as to whether survey leaders should or could be paid (using HLS revenue income), and in what circumstances. It was agreed that FOG should consider this at a future meeting, when the NE extension agreement is in place, and make a proposal to the FA (**Glenys** to add to appropriate agenda). This requires a list of surveys to be compiled and an estimate of the costs involved.
- **Bioblitz including wildflower survey:** Those who attended this event on 7th June noted that it was a successful evening. No report received. Deferred to September meeting (**Chris**).
- **LEF AGM invite and proposed visit:** Mick and Hilary have agreed to the speak at the Lancashire Environmental Fund AGM on the morning of 20th September. They will also provide a guided tour around Fauna, Flora and the Orchard in the afternoon, including a demonstration of apple pressing. **Ian** has located the press and will collect apples. Mick would like some helpers (arrange at September meeting).

8. **Volunteer activities:** Ian's full reports of June's work and the tasks for July are attached at the end. In the current phase of ragwort treatment about two-thirds of Big Meadow has been resprayed, in addition to pulling the plants out in the marshes and digging in the Hay Meadow. Three people have been beavering away on a regular basis (Ian, Ken and Josh). The sessions will continue into next week. **Ian** will arrange a substitute organiser to cover the volunteer evening scheduled for Wednesday 31st July.

Ian has had an approach from CVS to run a volunteer session for the Red Rose Recovery Group. Booking form, risk assessment etc. are in hand. Tasks are likely to include ragwort removal and path edging.

- **International student visit:** This has now reduced to a single day: 25th July for practical tasks on the reserve (such as ragwort removal, path edging, vegetation in the Orchard). About 20 students and two supervisors, from 10am to 2pm to include a lunch break. The request for FA helpers has so far fallen on deaf ears. Another appeal will be circulated the week before (**Ian**).
- **Playground repairs:** Andrew requested that FA volunteers be used to raise the soil in places where turf has sunk relative to concrete edging creating a slight trip hazard. **Ian** will add this to his list of tasks to be done in the autumn.

9. **Local Nature Reserve designation & Fauna Management Plan Edenbreck boundary & garden, Concessionary Path Agreement:** There has been no action on these items.
10. **Educational activities:** Tony reported that these have been going well. Two local schools continue to visit, and there have also been visits by the Brownies and the Beavers. The latter enjoyed activities such as birdwatching and orienteering during their camping weekend. Disappointingly, heavy rain meant that the Chernobyl children's visit to the site had to be cancelled. However Tony (with Emma Garston of LWT) provided activities based on the nature reserve in a church hall instead. Tony has had an approach from someone wishing to use the nature reserve for a children's project relating to wetlands awareness (believed to be RSPB funded).
11. **Health and Safety Policy:** Guidance for external contractors. No progress (**Dave**).
12. **DBS checks:** Tony has received the pack from Burnley/Pendle CVS, which includes step-wise guidance on how to complete. He has passed this to Michael Sheppard who, as a trustee, will be acting as the person in authority for these checks. The next steps are for Michael to register himself and then to call in the people to be checked to collate information. The meeting was keen for the DBS checks to be moved forward as a matter of urgency (**Tony** to prompt Michael).
13. **July/August wildflower survey:** **Sue** has offered to make the arrangements this year. Graeme Skelcher will be asked to lead this again on the usual terms. It needs to be done before haymaking. Given the state of the grass, this probably means before the end of July. In addition to contacting those who have participated in the survey in previous years, helpers will be requested through Jonathan Tansley.
14. **Haymaking and wildflower seed sowing:** Ian has been in contact with Rueben Neville, who is monitoring the state of the grass. **Ian** will speak to Rueben again, once the ragwort has been cleared, to clarify arrangements and establish whether he will be supplying extra seed. An offer of seed from Pyes Green has also been made by Cumbria Wildlife Trust via Richard Storton. **Ian** will contact Richard to accept this. Ian will also establish whether either of these seed batches will contain yellow rattle. If not, then Rueben's suggestion of collecting it from the existing clumps in the Hay Meadow for wider distribution should be taken up. It might be possible to collect the seed in conjunction with the wildflower survey (**Ian** to liaise with **Sue**).
15. **Orchard trees:** Andy Lee (Bowland Tree Services) has kindly provided extra advice to supplement his survey earlier this year, walking round the Orchard with Ian and Graham when he came for a preliminary look at Pony Wood in Flora (written report available). The question as to whether his formal survey should be annual or biennial was clarified. A two year gap is acceptable, but it must not be allowed to slip beyond this. Andy also recommended switching the survey to summer. Ian proposed that the next survey be scheduled for summer 2014 (**Glenys** to note for future agenda).
 - **Ancient sycamore:** Andy was concerned that this appeared to have deteriorated since April's inspection. Action has been taken to move away the log slices used for children's activities. Ian thinks it is not looking as bad now, but it will be monitored and Andy contacted should it start shedding branches (**Ian**).

- **Sycamores on the Martins' boundary:** Andy will notify the Tree Protection Officer of the intention to thin these trees in phases. **Ian** will keep an eye on progress, although no action is expected until October.
 - **'Excess' trees:** Andy considers that there are too many trees in the Orchard and so some are failing to thrive (written report contains specifics). More trees have survived than expected, with the result that the original planting has proved to be too close. The meeting recognised that the quality of light in the Orchard has been changing, indicating that it is becoming too dense. It was agreed that action should be taken. A list will be drawn up of those trees for removal this winter to be discussed at September's meeting. They will be identified on a sketch map and on the ground, so that effective communication with the public can take place before the trees are taken down (**Ian**).
16. **Managing chainsaw use by volunteers:** To date, individuals have used their own chain saws, without establishing their degree of training or work methods. **Ian** argued that the approach to chainsaw use needs to be brought into line with best practice, particularly as the number of tasks best tackled by a chainsaw is anticipated to increase significantly. Tasks undertaken with the use of chainsaws should be approved by FOG and coordinated by the Volunteer Organiser. Such tasks will be undertaken by a team of people trained in the use of chainsaws. To effect this policy, the FA must invest in such training. **Ian** was given approval to arrange training for four people in the autumn. To be held at the trainer's site, not the Orchard and to be financed through the HLF training budget for Flora (**Ian**).
 17. **Notice to allotment holders re Paddock hedging:** **Ian** will inform John Lambert of the Allotments Association that the work is intended to start from September onwards and ask him to alert the allotment holders affected. He will follow this up with a more specific date once this is provided by Hanafins (**Dave**).
 18. **Celebrate your Space:** Community Spaces has advised the FA that it is eligible to apply for a new grant of up to £2000. The requirement is that any event must be held on or relate to the project site that Community Spaces has already funded. The aim is to build on community engagement work already carried out and establish a legacy for the project. Application deadline is 30th September, with the event taking place within eight weeks of the date on which the signed declaration page of the application form is received by Community Spaces. The meeting considered this to be a great opportunity to thank the community, and that the event could also incorporate celebration of Flora (including some Go Wild activities), elements of Apple Day and possibly be used to undertake some public consultation relating to Flora. Location to be the Orchard and/or the Paddock. Ideas bandied about included an afternoon plus evening event, hiring a marquee, using outside caterers. **Dave, Andrew** and **Sue** volunteered to organise as a team. Item now to be handled by the FA meeting.
 19. **Financial control:** To appear as an item for report in future agendas. **Dave** noted that of the total £118 000 of Fauna money, £110 000 had now been spent (including £7000 vired to the toolshed). This leaves £8000 unspent of which £1000 is unallocated. £2000 is the retention for Hanafins. £4000 is for the additional works to be done by contractors (see item 7) and approx. £1000 of HLS money remains specifically for wildflower seed. The Community Spaces Sustainability grant has been all but spent.
 20. **AOB:** None.

21. **Date / place of next meeting:** August break confirmed; Thurs 5th Sept 7.30pm (Whitegates, Sunnyside Close, Chair Mick Short)

Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:

Report on Volunteer morning held on 8th June 2013

13 local volunteers were joined by 17 students from *Green Lancaster* on a beautiful summer's morning.

1. The grass was mown
2. The area around the logs hosting 'mini-beast' was trimmed
3. The area surrounding the orienteering position was cleared by slashing back the nettles and other growth.
2. and 3. Were in reparation for the visit of a troupe of Beavers in the afternoon.
4. A litter pick around some of the Flora field hedges was undertaken. The litter was bagged and barrowed back to the Storage Building.
5. The plastic protectors around the now maturing hedge north-east of the Big Ash on the Fauna footpath were removed, bagged and barrowed back to the Storage Building
6. Excess vegetation around the new saplings at the north end of the Pads footpath was removed.
7. Routine pruning of the apple trees continued along with consideration of the canker problem
8. Native wild flower plants were planted as follows:
 - a. Under the Millenium Oak: Primroses, Wild strawberries, Cicely, Betony and Salad burnett
 - b. Under the large ash tree on the Fauna footpath: Ransoms (wild garlic)
 - c. At the boggy side of the Hay Meadow, east of the middle gate: Common valerium, Meadowsweet
All watered in.

Tools and equipment were returned to the Storage Building and packed away – a far easier task now than in the past.

13th June 2013

Two volunteers erected a Weldmesh fence at the point on the Flora path where dog owners are gaining access to the Flora fields. A gap in the Long Pads hedge used for access to the western field was also blocked. Notices asking people to keep out were posted at three access points around the Flora fields.

18th June 2013

Two volunteers accompanied Andy Lee on a tour of the trees in the Orchard and Pony Wood noting work which needed to be done by professionals but also considerable tasks for volunteers notably over this winter.

19th to 22nd June 2013

A sick cow was fed from Orchard grass cuttings. It helped and the cow recovered

Whilst in the Big Meadow I was disappointed to see the amount of ragwort growing there. Evidently they are new plants which have sprouted since we sprayed. Perhaps we sprayed too early (first week of June) although I delayed the start beyond the end of May finish time recommended by the parish linesmen! I suspect we will have to have another spray campaign as well as digging out in marsh and meadow. Propose to FOG on July 11th.

24th June 2013

The highish winds over the weekend had brought down a sizeable bough of a willow over the main Orchard path by the southern most bench. The path was cleared although the remnants need carting away. This just underlines Andy Lee's point that the willows get too big and can't support themselves and should be pollarded.

Report on volunteer evening 26th June 2013

Seven volunteers gathered on a lovely summer evening.

1. The fallen willow (above) was cut up and carted to Fraser's bonfire site.
2. Long grass and nettles was cleared from around some of the fruit trees.
3. Encroaching vegetation was cut from around the rubbish bins.
4. Spreading fruit bushes were tied back to keep the path around the hedge open
5. Ragwort was removed from in the Orchard and along the Pads footpath
6. We toured the Orchard noting Andy Lee's recommendations from trees for winter work. This was to provide information for active volunteers for a more informed discussion at FOG and elsewhere.
7. We checked the location of orienteering posts and established their positions and accessibility for a coming children's event.

We did not have the person-power to mow the grass or strim but the cow feeding (above) means that the paths are in good order.

Tasks for Volunteering session on 13th July 2013

As FOG does not meet until 11th July, the joint acting Chairs have agreed the following.

- a) Mow the grass
- b) Strim around a section of the fruit trees and in front of the fruit hedge
- c) Cutting and slashing long grass around the fruit trees
- d) Digging out ragwort along the Pads footpath, the Fauna path and in the Paddock
- e) Another goat willow has cast one its major boughs which needs clearing
- f) I am informed by a member of the public that a quince shrub should be 'saved' from enveloping vegetation

IN ADDITION. We need to move to another phase of ragwort control. We need to start this soon as the imperative is to prevent the plant seeding and some flower is beginning to form. Thus I intend to use the regular call to Orcharders to ask people to come forward once more for ragwort working parties. These will include:

1. Digging out ragwort in the reedy areas, the Hay and Carr House meadows and the Paddock.
2. However, I fear that, in addition to these areas, trying to dig out all the ragwort in Big Meadow before seeding will defeat us so I propose a second round of spot spraying there. I hope to start this before FOG so I checked this with the joint acting Chairs.