

Rye Meadows Newsletter – No. 13

Welcome to the latest Newsletter from Rye Meadows. Writing this with heavy frost covering Rye Meadows means that Winter is fast approaching. Last winter we experienced burst pipes in the barn and in the water supply to the barn. Luckily one of the group is a retired plumber and for a bottle of scotch he repaired all the fractured pipes and joints. As we are due a period of cold weather, today I made sure the control taps were all turned off!

Heritage Days in September

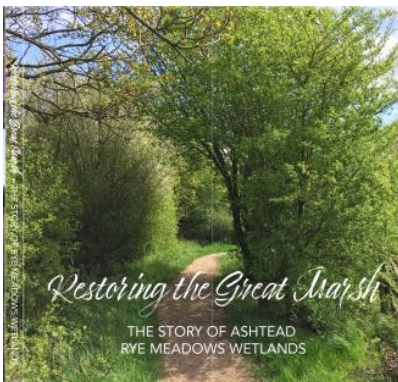


We had successful Heritage Weeks with all the fields being opened from 10am until 4pm. On 10th September we set up the stall on Footpath 596 and welcomed visitors in person. The Four Gables Cookery establishment, who are our near neighbours, generously provided scrumptious chocolate brownies and cool drinks for the visitors though, I admit, the volunteers helped to diminish supplies as well.

We sold some of the books we have in stock – “**Restoring the Great Marsh**” and “**The Birds of Ashtead Rye Meadows**”. The latter was written and compiled by Peter Firth, a local ornithologist, and typed up by Lizzie Hide, one of our volunteers. Very sadly, since this book was published, Peter has passed away. Until his illness prevented him, Peter would walk through Rye Meadows and identify all the different species of birds he saw. He would record these in a bird diary which we published on the web site. He will be sadly missed.

Fortunately, another local bird fancier, Roy Guy, volunteered to do the same task. His bird counts can be viewed on the web site.

What do we buy Dad for Christmas? ” **Restoring the Great Marsh**” – A great Christmas gift



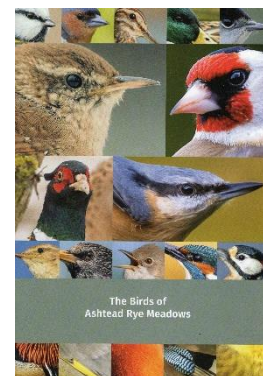
Sales of the book have rather diminished of late but this book would make an ideal Christmas present. All the proceeds are donated to Ashtead Rotary for the Charities they support. The price is still at £10 and is terrific value. It is a really excellent book and tells the story of Daphne’s vision for a wildlife corridor.

As one local author, Andy Smith, recounted in his magazine article for Surrey Life, Rye Meadows is “an oasis of rural tranquillity just a short distance from the M25. In Centenary Field there is a boardwalk so that the site is easily

accessible to visitors, even when at its wettest!” If you don’t have your copy yet we have copies available. We will deliver free of charge to any KT21 address, but if outside there we will have to charge P&P. To order your copy go to <https://www.ryemeadows.org.uk/shop/>.

Materials for Rye Meadows

We have to buy in much of the materials we use on Rye Meadows and rely upon funds coming in via the Mole Valley Lottery and Easyfundraising. This is our “bread and butter” income source. However, many visitors either lose sight of, or are unaware of, the huge financial commitment to Rye Meadows made by the land owners, George and Daphne Burnett. Without their overriding financial support none of this would be possible.



We do though also receive generous financial donations from local residents. Contributions to the wildflower meadow cost for example. We also receive donations of tools, trees and materials for use in the meadows.

Wildflower Meadow

In the previous Newsletter we told of the field Fraudings being set aside as a wildflower meadow. This autumn we have planted several hundred native bluebell, wild tulips and snakeshead fritillary bulbs. We hope these will complement the previously sown yellow rattle which looks to have become established. Yellow Rattle is often used to turn improved grassland back to meadow - by feeding off the vigorous grasses, it eventually allows more delicate, traditional species to push their way through.

This summer’s strong growth of waterside plants along the Rye has thrived so much that it is now shielding the water from light which is not ideal for the health of the river. Volunteers have been busy in and out of the stream cutting back this growth and the results are easy to see from this picture. Half of the Rye in Centenary Field has been cleared so far but there is still a long way to



go – and we can only do this when the river is low.



Surrey Wildlife Trust

As mentioned in the previous Newsletter 12, Rye Meadows Wetlands was nominated for the Surrey Wildlife Trust Community Champions Award. This award is divided into three categories and we were put forward for the “Rising Star” class. As a shortlisted community project, we received a visit from the Community Engagement team and Nature Based Solutions team to assess the nomination. Site visits took place in July and a short video was made with Chairman, Nigel Bond taking a starring role. We haven’t let his new-found film success go to his head though, and to my knowledge he hasn’t yet joined “Equity”!

The video taken at Rye Meadows was shown with videos from other nominees at the Community Celebratory Event which was held at West Horsely Place (scene of the "Ghosts" programme). There were six of us who attended the event representing Rye Meadows (pictured L to R Back Row - Nigel Bond, David Curnow, Rod Shaw & Richard Wassell; Front Row - David Baker, Angela Swarbrick Surrey Wildlife Trust's Chair of Trustees & Peter Williams).



We were treated to a lovely meal and the storyboards from all nominees constructed by Surrey Wildlife Trust were displayed around the room.

Sadly, we did not win our category and the 2023 Surrey Wildlife Trust Rising Star Award was presented to Unstead Nature Community Group who were worthy winners. Unstead Nature Community Group manage Unstead Nature Reserve - a 25.7-acre (10.4 hectare) site located in a rural setting in the River Wey valley.

To be nominated in the first three was though a feather in our cap and we were not too disappointed as it represented acknowledgement of the hard work and commitment by our dedicated group of volunteers and the land owners, Mr and Mrs Burnett.

Vandalism



Sad to say, but yes, we have experienced some vandalism in Rye Meadows. One of the wooden engraved seats in Centenary Field has had the back removed and thrown away. We have been unable to locate it and will need to have a new seat back made and engraved with "Rye Meadows".

In addition, we need to secure some of the fields with padlocks and chains. These fields are open for Heritage Weeks and Open Days, but for other times they are kept locked. Recently we have had locks and chains cut off and stolen. In addition, signage telling people this is private property have been either destroyed or stolen. Why we ask? It's a mystery to us.

We have also had unwelcome visitors to Centenary Field at night causing disturbance to our neighbours so, as a consequence, we have been forced to lock and close the gates between 4pm and 8am each night. Notices explaining why this has been necessary have been removed and thrown away!

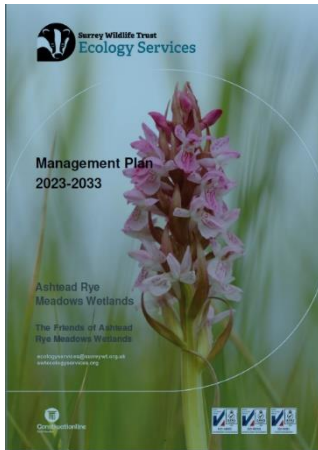
The dead hedge we erected at the end of Centenary Field seems to have had the desired effect in preventing people from entering from Kestrel Field next door. The tall hedge which comprises mainly cut blackthorn is some 4 feet high and goes all the way down to the river.

What's coming up

Following advice from Surrey Wildlife Trust, it has been agreed that we will lay three of the hedges in Rye Meadows. One newish member of the volunteers' group is an experienced hedge layer and he has agreed

to instruct the rest of the volunteers in laying a hedge. We will start on a small hedge alongside Footpath 24 and, after being trained on this, we move on to tackle a denser hedge. That hedge will need some cutting back before we can start the job of cutting the upright stems (called “pleachers”) and bending them over to form the laid hedge. So, chainsaws and billhooks will be at the ready and we will be ordering in stakes and bindings. We hope to start in the New Year.

Management Plan



This year we paid for ecological consultants from Surrey Wildlife Trust to undertake a detailed survey of Rye Meadows and to produce a comprehensive document (120 pages) for a 10-year management plan.

Rye Meadow Wetlands is made up of grassland, hedgerow, scrub, mature trees and ponds. The report identifies a need for a grassland cutting regime with the cuttings removed on priority areas which will create suitable conditions for a botanically rich sward to develop. This in turn will support a good diversity of species including invertebrates, small mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles. The hedgerows will benefit from decreased trimming and invasive species including snowberry being removed to improve the condition of the site. Grass

habitat piles will enhance nesting opportunities for grass snake on the site and deadwood piles will provide hibernation, sheltering and feeding opportunities for a range of species including invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles and small mammals. Surrey Wildlife Trust recommend bird and bat boxes be placed on mature trees to boost roosting and nesting opportunities. In addition, there are opportunities for install kingfisher banks and enhancement measures to the general river condition. We do have an owl box on one large mature tree. We sometimes hear and see owls but to date we haven't had any taking up residence in this luxurious accommodation!

There is much to be done and this will keep volunteers busy for a long time.

Donations and Income

No newsletter would be complete without the usual plea for funds. The tractor, brush cutters, chain saw and other equipment all need diesel, petrol, oil and annual servicing. The tractor alone costs £630 a year for its annual service. We have to insure our tools and ourselves for Public Liability and this costs £240 p.a.

We recently bought a wheeled brushcutter that “eats” through blackthorn invasive growth stems up to one inch in diameter. We have had this repaired recently because we used old fuel which gummed up the carburettor. It is a lesson to everyone with petrol driven garden tools to not leave old fuel in the machine, or try to use old fuel that's been sitting in the spare can for a while. In future we will need to use a specialist fuel, Aspen 4, which is more expensive than petrol but will at least save us expensive repair costs.

You can help by using Easyfundraising when you buy items on the internet. Several thousand retailers subscribe to the scheme and it costs you NOTHING. Just visit <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/support-a-good-cause/step-1/?char=100092&invite=26KLH6&referral-campaign=c2s> and sign up. Once registered, just visit Easyfundraising **before** choosing Amazon, Argos or any of **7,000** online retailers and **they** will donate to us a percentage of the value of your purchase. You can also download a small 'reminder' App from their web site. This App gives you a prompt if you visit a web site that is a member of the scheme and asks if you

want to use Easyfundraising. To date we have raised £1,830 from these purchases. It might be pence or pounds, but it all adds up and is very welcome. With Christmas around the corner and online purchases increasing, Easyfundraising will help us, but cost you nothing.



Another way to support us is to buy a regular weekly lottery ticket from Mole Valley Community Lottery, choosing us as your supported scheme. Visit <https://www.molevalleylottery.co.uk/support/find-a-good-cause> and in "Search for a Cause" type Rye Meadows, then follow the on-screen instructions to sign up. Tickets cost £1 each and from that we receive

50p. This year to date we have raised £1,526 from supporters.

IT ONLY REMAINS FOR ME TO SAY ON BEHALF OF EVERYONE AT ASHTEAD RYE MEADOWS WETLANDS, A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

David

