

2016 (19th) Friends of Weir Wood Society Annual General Meeting.

Minutes of the AGM held at Forest Row Community Centre on 8 April 2016. The meeting commenced at 7.18pm.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 7.18pm. by welcoming members to the 19th AGM of the Society. A notebook was on the table at the back for members to record their presence at this meeting.

Present: Bob Johnson [Chairman], Glenn Tocher [Treasurer], Alan Caulkett, Peter Erridge [Minutes Secretary], Phil Holland, Peter Johnson, Richard Lowe, Shaun Taylor, of the Committee. Twenty four other members attended.

Apologies for absence: Doug Roberts [Auditor], Andrew Guest [Member], Tom Howard-Jones [Website Editor], Barbara Mortlock (Committee), Mark Roberts (Member).

1. Approval of 2015 AGM Minutes.

Copies of the 2015 AGM minutes were available at the back of the room. No alterations were suggested. The Chairman asked that they be accepted as a true and accurate record. Given by a show of hands.

2. Matters arising.

A] Management plan 2015-2020.

Since last year's AGM this plan has been accepted and approved by Natural England.

B] Open Day – Sunday 12 July 2015.

Despite the drizzly weather many families came for the popular pond dipping, bird ringing and moth displays. Those who gave up their day to steward were thanked for helping to show off this wonderful wildlife haven. Nine new members joined and we made a profit of almost £50.

3. FOWW website.

Since the last AGM transfer of data from the old website has been completed and the site is running well. Tom Howard-Jones, website manager, in his absence had asked [the chairman] to give his report.

'On behalf of all of the Friends he expresses his thanks to Peter Johnson for creating the new site and to Bob Johnson for moving the data and archives from the old site. My thanks to those who submit sightings and photographs which help to keep the site lively and relevant. I would like to hear from more of you. The website had some 30,000 hits in the last year, and visiting is a good way for you to find out what is happening and what is being planned.'

4 Chairman's report.

I would now like to update you with the latest position regarding the running and management of the Society and also the Nature Reserve.

A] Management of the Society.

Section 7 of our Constitution rules state: The Honorary officers of the Society shall be the Chairman, the Secretary and the Treasurer. The Committee may appoint other Honorary officers, as required. Your Committee has decided to add two Honorary Officer positions whose roles directly deal with the membership. These are Membership Secretary and Website Editor. Are there any objections to this proposal? None.

The Honorary Officers of the Society in Section 7 of the Constitution will thus be amended to recognise all the following roles, and will now read:

Chairman, Treasurer, General and Minute Secretary, Membership Secretary, Website Editor.
For those wishing to see a copy of our Constitution, it is available on our website.

B] Management of the Reserve.

Renewal of the Wildlife Conservation Management Contract with Southern Water & ESCC was a less tortuous process than last year. The contract for the 2016-17 period is on the same terms i.e. 45 Ranger visits from ESCC plus a £700 fund which contributes towards things like grass cutting and other approved necessary reserve management costs. The contracts were signed and came into effect on the 1st April. During the past year there was a shortfall in Ranger attendance due to sickness etc. Made aware of this ESCC agreed a programme of extra Ranger visits in March and better arrangements for the future.

C] Work programme 2015-16 highlights.

We laid approx. 40 amphibian/mammal refugia covers were spread between Whillet's meadows and Pintail bank to an agreed plan. A wildlife recorder from the Amphibian Society, with some helpers, will now be carrying out regular survey work. They are particularly interested in monitoring the relatively high numbers of Grass snakes around the reserve in summer, as well as other reptiles and small mammals. Survey work on the reserve. We lack expertise to carry out insect surveys, and if anyone is knowledgeable on general insects and interested in carrying out some Survey work within the reserve, please let me know. Also any plant experts interested in carrying out surveys, particularly with regards to grasses, ferns, trees.

You may be aware we have been carrying out extensive work on the North bank area, directly opposite the Nature Reserve Car Park viewing area. Most obvious is the clearing of a number of Willow trees growing along the water edge to increase the open area where waterfowl can rest. Less obvious is the Bracken and Bramble cleared from within the meadow behind, as we try slowly to bring the area back into a more open meadow habitat. A 70m section of hedge, planted some years ago, along the fence line behind the open area reached a suitable height for hedge laying, a process which enormously improves the hedge habitat for wildlife. It is a labour intensive time consuming process so 50% of the hedge was laid this year by members of the Tuesday work party, and we plan to lay the other half next year.

Views across the water from the north bank picnic area have been improved by clearance of some large Willows from along the water's edge. This will allow better viewing of the winter gull roost. At a few points along the north bank path views into the meadows has been enhanced by tree removal.

Work carried out includes nest box care plus more bramble & Grey Alder clearance. Overall a huge amount of work has been completed this year. My thanks go to the many Tuesday Volunteers who have helped make it another very successful year for our habitat management. Thanks also to the non-Tuesday volunteers who make up the bird feeder team, and fill the bird feeders.

It is sad to report that one of our regular volunteers, Colin Webb, died recently. Colin, a retired carpenter, had been volunteering with the Friends since 2011 using his skills on a number of our construction projects. He will be missed by his friends on the Tuesday team.

Many of you are interested in our nesting birds. I am advised that our heronry is currently the largest in Sussex with over 30 active nests, so far 8 nests have hatched chicks, an unusual White Grey Heron is with a conventional mate as a nesting pair, but they have no young yet.

The nest box team advise that we have at least 6 Mandarin pairs breeding, Tawny Owl are breeding, nearly 30 boxes are already in use including nesting Stock Dove & Nuthatch. Barn owls are being seen again, so we are hopeful. It would seem the early signs do look good for the nesting season.

A lot of effort has been made over the past year to control the numbers of mink at our site, for which we have legal approval. We hope a reduction in mink numbers, will help reduce predation of the Great Crested Grebe and Common Tern nests, both species failed to produce any young last year, and mink predation was the suspected cause, time will tell. Finally, all are interested when the migrating Ospreys visit, our first spring sighting was on 26/3 and there have been regular sightings since.

5 Treasurers Report.

I will pass you over to Glenn our Treasurer for his report. He will then take any questions before he asks for acceptance of the accounts and auditor.

Glenn reminded members that a copy of the audited accounts had been circulated with the March Newsletter; copies are available at the top table. In response to a question about a bulk expenditure item in the accounts Glenn advised that he did not have the papers tonight but would contact the questioner.

Membership. This stands at 204, including a few yet to pay for 2016, a 14% rise on last year. At present 51% of members receive the Newsletter electronically, helping to keep down the subscription; last raised in 2010. Donations last year were £600 already £580 has come in this year. These donations support the conservation work of the Friends for the benefit of wildlife and visitors.

Acceptance of the accounts.

Can I have a show of hands please for acceptance of the Accounts? Unanimous agreed.

Doug Roberts has for a number of years ensured that all of our records and accounts are in good order. He has kindly agreed to continue.

Auditor

Can I have a show of hands please for acceptance of Doug Roberts as our Auditor? Unanimously agreed.

6 Forthcoming Events

Members' spring flowers & birds walk on Saturday 7th May.

A walk/amble for members and their family which will be split into two parts. Starting at the hide Car Park at 9:15 the first part will take you into our woodland study area to show the habitat, the spring woodland flowers and bluebell wood and some of our nesting birds before returning back to the Car Park for a meadow walk leaving at 11:00. This will take you into Whillet's meadows with its flowers, butterflies, damselflies, the pond and reed bed, returning to the Car Park at around 12:45.

No booking, just turn up, please wear stout walking shoes or boots as the paths as could be wet/muddy and are uneven in places.

Public 'Open' Day on Sunday 3rd July.

We will be having another 'Open Day' this year. Many of the popular events from last year will be organised again, including the moth display, and telescope views of the birds over the water. Hopefully there will be breeding Great Crested Grebes and Common Terns amongst others to be seen from the hide area.

Whillet's meadows will give opportunities to see the insects, butterflies, flowers and general wildlife of our meadows. Bird ringing demonstrations offer close-ups of birds in the hand, and pond dipping at the meadow pond.

We will finalise our full programme detail and give further information nearer the time. We hope many of you will come along. Bring friends who you think may join. Website will give details nearer the time.

7 Election of Committee and Officers.

A. Committee changes.

i] Barbara Mortlock, who was the last founder member of the "Friends" still on the Committee, has announced her retirement and has moved away from the area.

I wrote in our recent Newsletter on her pending retirement and of her considerable achievements. Barbara had several vital roles over the years, including Secretary, and was one of the main driving forces in the setting-up of the "Friends". She wrote the "Friends" Constitution which we still use, plus two well informed books about the birds of Weir Wood Reservoir having been the official site bird recorder for over 30 years. She was always active and dedicated to the conservation of wildlife at the Nature Reserve.

She could not be here today, but in her absence I would still just like to thank her again for all her past work, and her generosity towards the reserve. She did not publicise the fact, but also gave generous donations to help with the costs of bird food. I ask you to show your appreciation – a loud round of applause.

Glenn has been Treasurer and Membership Secretary since 2003, as well as being involved with running the work parties. He would like to reduce his work load and give someone else a chance to take on these roles and is not standing for re-election. I would like to thank him, for how well he covered those roles over that long period, and he justifiably deserves our notable thanks. Applause.

ii] Glenn has agreed by popular demand from the Committee and myself in particular who knows his knowledge and experience would be greatly missed, to stand for re-election on the Committee but in a lesser capacity. He will then be able to help with the transition of the Treasurer and Membership Secretary roles to other members, and his working party knowledge is still invaluable at meetings. Approval given by a show of hands for Glenn to remain on Committee in this reduced role.

iii] Treasurer. I now propose a member Bob Hastings to stand for election as Treasurer role. Bob having had a past academic career dealing with maths so he is very familiar with figures. He is a keen bird watcher, and attends our Work Parties including being involved with our new Amphibian Survey. Can I have approval by a show of hands for Bob please? Unanimously agreed.

iv] Tom Howard-Jones has offered to take on the Membership Secretary role, whilst retaining that of Website Editor. As no other candidates wished to stand for the Membership Secretary role, I am proposing that Tom adds this role to his Committee Work and cover both jobs - Website Editor & Membership Secretary.

Can I have approval by a show of hands for Tom please? Unanimously agreed.

B. Thanks_

I would now like to thank my hard working Committee:

Peter Erridge for his good work as our Minute Secretary. Dragonfly Recorder, Peter also manages our Publicity, organised the venue here tonight, gives Guest Speaker talks on the nature reserve and recently has had articles about Weir Wood Reservoir published in local magazines.

Peter Johnson for his work as our IT man, and he also deals with the production of our popular newsletters.

Shaun, Alan and Phil our bird ringer, make up our nest box recording team, they also build all our nest boxes, whilst Shaun also designs and carries out a lot of our project work such as Tern Rafts etc.

Richard is our butterfly transect co-ordinator and also deals with the data records for our yearly butterfly report.

C. Election of Officers:

i] Chairman - Bob Johnson

I have agreed to stand again as Chairman. We have had no other nominations put forward for this post.

Can I please have a show of hands to approve I continue? Unanimously agreed.

ii] Minute Secretary – Peter Erridge

Peter has agreed to stand again. We have had no other nominations put forward for this post.

Can I have a show of hands to approve Peter continues? Unanimously agreed.

iii] Treasurer Already dealt with under item 7 A iii]

iv] Committee Members standing for re-election.

Alan Caulkett, Phil Holland, Peter Johnson, Richard Lowe and Shaun Taylor are all seeking re-election.

Can I have a show of hands to re-elect all five members? Unanimously agreed.

8. AOB. There was none

9 Question & Answer session.

In reply to a question about mink Bob reported that several were seen on Open Day last year followed by further sightings of up to five at one time. There were reports of mink present at other close-by properties. This led to our seeking approval to control this menace.

10. Closure. I would like to bring the meeting to a close by thanking you all for attending.

Thanking Glenn & Peter who were involved in organising the event.

My final thanks goes to our volunteer refreshment ladies team of Judy, Julia, and Marie.

The meeting closed at 7.47pm.

[5 Treasurer's report. Post meeting response to question posed by a member, Roger Jackson. The £703.31 was for Materials £281, Traps £206, Meadow mowing contractor £216]

Peter Erridge

11 April 2016