

## **2017 Friends of Weir Wood Society Annual General Meeting (20<sup>th</sup>)**

Minutes of the AGM held at Forest Row Community Centre on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2017. The Chairman opened the meeting at 19:17 by welcoming members to the 20<sup>th</sup> AGM of the Society. A sheet was on a table for members attending to sign.

**1. Apologies for absence:** Tom Howard-Jones (Website Editor & Membership Secretary), Peter Johnson (Committee Member), Audrey Wende, Doug Roberts (Auditor). 35 Members were present for the AGM meeting.

**2. Approval of the 2016 AGM minutes.**

Copies of the AGM minutes were available for members at the back of the room. These minutes were accepted by a majority vote.

**3. Matters Arising from Previous 2016 AGM minutes.**

Member Roger Jackson queried part of the 2015 Audited Accounts. A £703.71 payment which was listed Books & other Conservation Costs and asked for a breakdown of these costs. At the time of the 2016 meeting that information was not to hand and could not be answered during the meeting. It was later found and confirmed all was spent on various conservation work. Materials £281 (included building replacement Tern raft & nest boxes), Purchase of Mink & Crayfish Traps £206, Meadow mowing contractor payment of £216. These details were included in the 2016 AGM minutes at the end, which were accepted.

**4. Constitution Rules (Amendment to Rule 7)**

The Constitution rules did not recognise the role of Membership Secretary as a separate Honorary role for election and it was agreed by a majority vote to amend the first sentence of Rule 7 to: The recognised Honorary Officer roles of the Society shall be the Chairman, Treasurer, General & Minute Secretary, Membership Secretary and Website Editor.

**5. Chairman's Report**

The Chairman started by announcing the sad news that Barbara Mortlock, who retired from our Committee last year, had passed away around Christmas time, but he had no details of the circumstances. Barbara had moved away to be nearer her family & friends in East Kent.

Better news was confirmation of a new 12 month contract with Southern Water & ESCC for the 2017-18 period on exactly the same terms as last year. The contracts were all signed and completed and had come into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> April.

The Committee however had concerns about what would happen at the end of the new ESCC contract, ESCC having last year advised of a proposal that they no longer wished to be involved with sites they do not own such as Weir Wood by summer 2018, and wanted to pass on their responsibilities to other suitable parties for these sites. The Committee would be taking this up with them to try and find out whether any decisions had been made, and what would happen next.

The Committee's concerns also applied to Southern Water who seemed to have no real positive active interest in the nature reserve. There was still no agreement from them on dealing with the repairs to the river bridges to allow tractor access for meadow cutting, one of which had been condemned as unsafe for vehicles. The

Chairman said that a year had passed and still no decisions have been made despite regular reminders by the Friends. It must be remembered Southern Water signed and agreed the 2015-2020 Management Plan which had included meadow cutting. They were responsible for the infrastructure and fencing of the site which meant they were responsible for the cost of repairs to allow access for management to be carried out.

The way that our bird sighting records were forwarded to the Sussex Ornithological Society had been changed. The holding of our records on various spreadsheets and then the forwarding on by a Recorder had proved less than ideal, particularly as the amount of data increased. Peter Johnson had therefore written a new database recording program. All our bird records from Jan 2016 onwards were now on this new database, which was compatible with the SOS system and allowed data to be forwarded to them directly, removing laborious manual inputting of data. Eventually we want our database to hold the records of other wildlife species such as plants, insects etc. but this was currently still a work in progress.

This spring over 60 amphibian/mammal refugia sheets had been laid out over at Whillet's. The increase was to try and monitor where the snakes hibernate. Chris the wildlife recorder from the Amphibian Society would be monitoring this project. Regular amphibian/small mammal surveys would be carried out during the summer, plus the usual Butterfly transect recording at Whillet's.

The Chairman said that work had been continued on the North Bank directly opposite the Nature Reserve Car Park viewing area. The bracken and bramble was being controlled to slowly bring the area back into a more open meadow habitat. A 70m section of hedge that was planted some years ago along the fence line, had 50% layered last year and layering the other 50% had just been completed with pleasing results.

To improve views of the water from the dam end picnic area, some large willows had been cleared. The access into the meadow had been widened to allow a tractor into the meadow, and last autumn the meadow had been mown to clear the increasing blackthorn scrub and maintain an open wildflower area.

The "Friends" now had some additional assistance with maintenance of the picnic area. The East Grinstead Rotary Club had volunteered to help, and had put the site on their rota for regular tidying and hedge and grass trimming. The Chairman thanked them for their support.

There had been a lot of bramble & grey alder clearance work done in the study area. There was a programme of ring barking the non-native grey alder to make some dead wood stands, at the same time preserving the more wildlife friendly native common alder trees.

The Chairman said that last year he had spoken about Mink and the problems for breeding birds. Mink had been regularly removed from the site and the situation had been under control. However, recently an adult mink had been seen, and in the last week a young mink had been removed. Trapping was now being actively carried out in the reserve area.

The Chairman thanked the many Tuesday Volunteers who had helped make it another very successful year for habitat management. He also thanked regular Rangers Justine & Matthew who had worked hard and been very helpful, also the non-Tuesday volunteers who fill the bird feeders, and those on the mink trap monitoring.

The Nest Box Team had advised that there were now several Mandarin pairs breeding, plus a pair of Tawny Owls. The first pair of Mallards with young had been seen. It was still early for the small nest boxes and box disturbance needed to be kept to a minimum.

The Heronry had seen another increase in nest numbers this year, with up to 42 nests showing activity by late March. The latest counts on Tuesday confirmed there were now hatching young starting to be seen, 12 chicks from 8 nests noted so far, but with the willows coming into leaf, several nests of that 42 were already no longer visible for monitoring.

A couple of weeks back, there had been some interest by the Kingfishers in our bank opposite the viewing area, but this seemed to have been just a prospecting visit. There had been no further activity at the bank, although the Kingfishers were still being regularly seen, so probably they were nesting nearby.

Finally the Chairman said that for those interested in migrating Ospreys, the first spring sightings had been 2 on 25/3, 1 on 27/3 and on 7/4 another was reported.

### **Forthcoming events**

#### **a) Members Spring flowers & birds walk on Saturday 13th May**

The date in our winter newsletter had been revised. The Spring flowers and birds walk/amble for members would now be on Saturday 13th May. The walk would be split into two parts as in the previous year. Starting at the hide Car Park at 9:15, the first part would take members into the woodland study area for spring woodland flowers and bluebells and hopefully some nesting birds. Returning back to the Car Park for a quick break, before leaving at 11:00 to walk over to Whillet's meadows with its flowers, butterflies, damselflies, pond and reed bed, returning back to the Car Park at around 12:45.

#### **b) Public "Open" Day on Sunday 2nd July**

It was intended to hold many of the popular events from last year, including the moth display, and telescope views of the birds on the water. Hopefully there would be breeding Great Crested Grebes and Common Terns amongst others to be seen from the hide area.

Whillet's meadows would give opportunities to see the insects, butterflies, flowers and general wildlife of the meadows. Plus bird ringing demonstrations with close-ups of birds in the hand, and pond dipping from the meadow pond.

Further information would be given nearer the time.

c) Fungi Foray – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> October

The Committee had been in touch with the Crawley Fungi Group who were interested in carrying out a fungi foray at our site, led by their Group Leader – Nick Aplin. It had been agreed those of our members interested would be welcome to come along. It would be on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> October and be from around 10AM to 1PM. The walk would be based around the Nature Reserve, further details would follow.

**6. Membership Secretary & Website Editor Report.**

The Chairman delivered a report from the Membership Secretary & Website Editor in his absence.

**Membership:**

There were currently 173 paid-up members. There were 42 members from last year who had not yet paid their membership for this year. Arrangements were given for those still needing to renew.

Thanks were given to the many members who made additional donations with their membership renewal, these were very much appreciated.

The Friends were now able to accept membership payments by direct bank transfer.

**Web Site:**

The website had been running throughout the year and been stable and reliable. There had been some 12,000 visitors and 37,000 visits over the last year. The aim was to try to get news of sightings up as soon as possible. It was hoped the site was being enjoyed overall.

Thanks were given to those sending in photos and sightings and encouragement given for more to take part. Suggestions and requests were invited for any features which could be added to the site.

**Facebook Group:**

In November 2016 a new Facebook Group was started called “Friends of Weir Wood Group”, with thanks to Peter Johnson for creating it.

It was a Public Group and currently 96 people had joined the group.

A number of members had started to post items directly - including sightings, photographs and comments. It was good to see members inputs and likes. Thanks were given for contributions. More were encouraged to take part. At present most of the sightings were duplicated from the web site onto the Facebook group. The advantage was that an immediate personal email update was received whenever sightings were posted on Facebook.

Tom welcomed feedback on this new facility and if there were any suggestions.

**7. Treasurers Report (2016 Audited Accounts)**

Although no copies of the 2016 accounts were available at the meeting. All members had previously been sent a copy of the accounts with their last newsletter.

Bob Hastings our Treasurer started his report by thanking Doug Roberts, our Auditor, for his work over a number of years, and advised Doug had agreed to stand as Auditor again this year.

The Treasurer then outlined the main details of the accounts to the members. Our overall total funds had increased by £713, our income coming from £605 from membership fees and £651 from donations. All donations went into our conservation fund. Member fees went into our General fund that covered admin, newsletters & leaflet printing & postage etc.

We had also negotiated a £700 allowance from the Southern Water yearly contract monies paid and held by ESCC, by agreeing a reduced number of ranger visits to that value. We could then claim back monies from this allowance for agreed wildlife conservation work.

In 2016 we spent £1067 on conservation, which included £180 on mowing costs, £122 for Snake survey refugia sheets, £134 for new buoy rope and buoys, £126 on our various fencing and security items. £120 on hide displays, car park seating, nest box materials etc. The monies were nearly all spent on materials as labour was covered by Tuesday volunteers and Rangers except where specialised equipment was needed such as large tractors for meadow grass cutting.

The Treasurer asked if there were any questions. A question was raised by Roger Jackson, who queried what insurance we had and its cost. This was answered by the Treasurer & Chairman combined – pointing out Southern Water considered us contractors, as such we were required to have our own Public Liability Cover with at least £5m cover to enter their land.

This insurance cost us just under £200 a year, but as we received no payments from Southern Water, this was effectively a charge to work for them. We felt this was unfair and ESCC agreed, therefore we were allowed to claim this money back from the £700 allowance as the cost necessary for our volunteers to carry out their conservation work.

The 2016 accounts were then accepted and Doug Roberts was also agreed as the auditor for 2017 by majority show of hands.

## **8. Election of Committee and Officers**

### **A. Members Standing down from Committee:**

Peter Erridge had decided to stand down from the Committee and was thanked for all his past work. However, Peter was still very actively involved with the “Friends” and was now focussing on giving “Weir Wood Nature Reserve” talks, and had very kindly been donating his fee to us. He was thanked for the generous contribution he was making helping the Nature Reserve.

### **B. The Chairman then went on to thank his hard working Committee:**

Bob Hastings had smoothly taken over from Glenn as Treasurer, and Tom Howard-Jones now ran both the website and facebook pages, whilst also being Membership Secretary. The Chairman thanked both Bob & Tom who had both been doing a fine job.

The Chairman thanked Peter Johnson the IT man, who dealt with the production of the Newsletters, and any technical website problems plus writing and managing our new database.

The Chairman also thanked Shaun, Alan and Phil our bird ringer, who made up the Nest Box recording team, they also built all the nest boxes, whilst Shaun designed and built a lot of the project work such as Tern Rafts etc. The Chairman also mentioned a non-committee member, Darrin Madgin, our other bird ringer who assisted Phil. Thanks were given to Richard our butterfly transect co-ordinator who also helped deal with the data records for the yearly butterfly report.

Finally the Chairman thanked Glenn who helped with running the work parties, and with the publicity side, posters etc.

The members gave all a deserved round of applause.

### **C. The election of Committee Officers:**

There were no nominations put forward for any of the officer roles, but all standing members were happy to continue. The following were re-elected:

Chairman - Bob Johnson,  
Treasurer - Bob Hastings  
Membership Secretary - Tom Howard-Jones  
Website Editor - Tom Howard-Jones  
Minute & General Secretary – Vacant. (Bob Johnson currently covering this role)

### **D. The election of Committee Members:**

There were no new nominations put forward for new Committee Members wishing to stand, all the current Committee were happy to continue.

The following were re-elected:

Committee Member – Peter Johnson  
Committee Member – Shaun Taylor  
Committee Member – Alan Caulkett  
Committee Member – Phil Holland  
Committee Member – Richard Lowe  
Committee Member – Glenn Tocher

### **9. AOB - Question & Answer session:**

No questions were raised.

### **10. Closure:** The meeting was brought to a formal close at 19:47

To be followed at 20:00 by the introduction of Steve Alton – Conservation Officer for the Ashdown Forest who gave an illustrated talk on the “Wildlife & Management of the Ashdown Forest”.

Bob Johnson  
9th April 2017