



Hay Bridge News

The Newsletter of the Hay Bridge Nature Reserve Society. Registered Charity No. 501384

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A Roe deer on the lawn at Low Hay Bridge

NEWS FROM THE RESERVE

It has certainly been a quiet winter, both for people and wildlife. First the lockdown, then the snow, then the bitterly cold winds and then the flooding – even the wildlife has been “staying at home” or at least, staying very sheltered.

Although not particularly welcome (because we can't get out!). The snow in January looked magical, especially along the boardwalk – a veritable winter wonderland. We had plenty of small birds coming to the feeders, but only saw one Red Deer, one of last year's calves that wandered through the open gate from the Moss and decided to trim the side lawn. It didn't seem to mind us on the other side of the glass, so we got as close a view as we have ever had, showing clearly the very thick winter coat.

Following the thaw came the very cold easterlies, really bitter winds that left the ground like iron. We didn't venture out much, and neither did the wildlife, except for the birds. We had a Brambling on the peanut feeder and even a Robin clinging on there (which is a first for the

feeder). We did have a two-day visit from the local Roe Doe which sheltered from the South easterlies on the banking behind the house, eating both on the banking and on the lawn. Again, she didn't bother with us – just lifting her head when anyone walked through on the public footpath (which wasn't often) until some people came through with five dogs. The dogs were all on leads, but it was too much for her and she retreated, as did the Hare (at speed) even though it had been laid up in the orchard some distance away. It just shows what effect dogs can have on wildlife, even dogs under control.

Within a month from the snow, we got floods, which we have had two or three times since. We did see some swimming Reds, as the few left on the Moss decided to join their compatriots in the wood; we kept seeing little clouds of water droplets as the deer shook themselves while traversing Fogmire and Sammyfield.

We haven't had any 'exotic' visitors over the winter – small numbers of teal and Fieldfare/Redwing and a small flock of Starlings (which we don't normally see). Regular sightings of up to four Little Egret, the Hare, Stoat, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk, plus all the usual smaller birds.

Hedges have been trimmed, the Orchard pruned, the steps in High Hay Woods resurfaced and the Reserve readied for Spring and (hopefully) the easing of the rules. The wild daffodils are showing in sheltered places, bumble bees are on the wing, the days are very noticeably lengthening, and we eagerly await the return of our summer visitors. Hopefully, you will soon be able to join us.....

RESERVE PROJECTS

Although the Society Committee has been unable to meet face to face, contact has been maintained during the various lockdowns and restrictions. During this time, the Committee has reviewed several projects which it believes will benefit the Reserve and Members. So far it has been agreed that when restrictions are lifted the Committee will be planning, financing and undertaking the following:

- Working with the JSCF to locate and have built another Hide.
- Carrying out improvements to the Study Centre to include blackout blinds, redecoration, a new light in the main room and light sensors to switch lights on and off.
- Removing the Notice Board from the Study Centre window and replacing it with a new one on the wall outside (this would make the smaller room much lighter).
- Continuing educational support (providing transport to Hay Bridge) as and when educational visits or events are possible.
- In agreement with the JSCF carrying out a programme of tree planting where appropriate on the Reserve.
- Updating the Society website.

If any Members have additional ideas or projects for the Reserve that they would like the Committee to consider please do contact the Secretary. The Committee would also be really pleased to hear from any Member/s that might be interested in project managing any of the above.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Obviously the 2020 AGM was not held, and it seems unlikely that we will hold one this year either. As Members are aware the main business of the AGM is to elect a Committee and key officers for the year ahead and to approve the Annual Accounts. Fortunately, all the current Committee have agreed to stay on and the Chair (Robin Cope), Treasurer (Helen Speed) and Secretary (Nick Chaloner) have also agreed to continue in their current roles. They have all agreed to remain in place until an AGM can be held.

The following is a summary of the Society Accounts for the year from January to December 2020:

Bank Balances brought forward:	£18,227.19
Receipts (Subscriptions and donations):	£14,747.76
Payments:	(£ 7,953.35)
Current balance (December 2020)	£25,021.60

Total memberships of all types number 712. It should be noted this includes 366 family memberships of 3 or more family individuals, which would imply that the actual number of individuals who are members of the Society is in the region of 1,400 people or more!

HAY BRIDGE NATURAL HISTORY GROUP – THE RAISED BOG SURVEY

Surveying the raised bog was Bernie Young's idea and she masterminded the way it was to be achieved. Yes, she has had the support of several dedicated and enthusiastic friends and experts, but it was Bernie who first conceived the idea, having asked about the fish scale bunding being carried out on Hay Bridge Moss at that time. It seemed a big, expensive, and muddy upheaval and she wanted to know if it really was going to restore the bog and at what cost to other non-bog species. She learnt that Natural England only re-visited SSSI sites every six years, and no study was being undertaken. This seemed to be the opportunity she was looking for. On joining HBNRS, she had said she wanted to do something practical. At this point though, she admits, she didn't know very much about bogs! But this is how it started.

Together with a small group of interested friends she held the first meeting of the Hay Bridge Natural History Group in April 2015. There were several more meetings to discuss ideas and she began to research Raised Bogs. She discovered that there are 'key species' of vegetation which are indicative of the current 'state' of the bog. It was agreed that a vegetation survey was imperative, and one should be carried out, at the same time, every year. It was also decided to take photographs twice yearly from the same points, to create a visual record.



Matthew Powell, Natural England, helped with identifying 'key' species and gave her small team a day's training. The first proper vegetation survey was carried out in September 2015. However, Bernie felt something more was needed. She also decided to do a general animal survey. This would record key species of Mammals, Birds, Insects, Reptiles, and the Raft Spider. The first animal survey was carried out in August 2015. The intention was that the surveys be carried out regularly by small teams of the volunteers.

So it was particularly helpful when Paul Bainbridge joined the group and volunteered to set up a Google Diary to co-ordinate these survey teams. His diligent commitment has ensured a minimum of two surveys a month, twelve months a year, since 2016, except during this Covid period.

To help with species identification Bernie has organised several winter workshops: Birds and Bog Moss identification, Dragonfly and Butterfly workshops and a summer Dragonfly Field Day. She has also organised annual social get-togethers.

As with all projects the simpler they are to use, the more complex they probably were to set up. Apart from the paperwork associated with this survey, the data sheets to be designed, the health and safety considerations and risk assessments to be done. Bernie has had to create the means by which the data is stored, analysed, and recorded. Bernie will say it was a TEAM effort, right from the start, and of course it was. But she has stuck with it and tweaked and perfected it over the years to maximise the usefulness of the data we collect.



Bernie has now handed over the running of this project to Jane Chaloner and Hazel Dole. Fortunately, she remains a surveyor and our 'trainer', continuing to educate us in all her newfound Raised Bog knowledge! We are so lucky to be taking over such a robust and tested survey but also having her still to hand. We have a lot to thank her for. Her project has withstood the test of the last five and a half years; we now have the challenge of taking it forward.

Inevitably the group has changed over time; members join, and leave, but there continues to be an enthusiastic team of volunteers to carry on the survey into the foreseeable future. Anyone interested in joining this group should now contact Jane, janechaloner@btinternet.com or Hazel, hazeldole@btinternet.com for more information. Previous experience of wildlife surveys is always useful but certainly not essential.

IN MEMORY OF GLYNN WARMAN

The Society has recently received a very generous donation from the estate of the late Glynn Warman, which is very much appreciated. In discussion with his family, it has been agreed that the donation will be used to help fund projects on the Reserve. The first of these has been to replace the bench outside the Study Centre with a long-lasting bench made from recycled material.



The new bench in place outside the Study Centre



The FUNgi Guy kids foray coming this autumn - watch this space!