

Botany Bay Restoration Project

Botany Bay Newsletter December 2014

By Anne Dennig



Fly fishing lessons for Seaford College students

Botany Bay Fishing

During September and October the Seaford College students have been learning to fly fish on Friday afternoons with instruction from Miles Amin. The lake is stocked with rainbow trout but there are brown trout both in the lake and the stream above. Any brown trout caught are put back with great care.



Miles Amin with Seaford College students

A large amount of weed in the main pond in September was making fly fishing impossible. Therefore the Portsmouth Services Fly Fishing Club brought in a weed barge to remove some of this weed. This has improved the fishing for the students and fishing club members.



Robin Bray organising the weed clearing

Creating a Passage for Brown Trout

To create a passage for the native brown trout to move upstream to spawn, we needed to lower the concrete dam put in in the 1970s as part of the fish farm structures. Efforts with sledge hammers and chisels made little impression on the dam and we decided to call in Delta K Explosive Engineering Systems Ltd., an explosives technology company, to blow a hole at the top of the dam. A small charge was placed on the dam by Kevin Powell, and the resulting blast allowed us to lower the rest of the central section of the dam by hand.



The concrete dam; Robin Bray's first efforts with a hammer and chisel



Kevin Powell places the charge



Success! Precision work in lowering the dam

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Following advice from Andy Thomas (Wild Trout Trust Conservation Officer), we constructed four small dams so that the native brown trout in the ponds can move up stream. Since the completion of this work we have seen a number of small (4-8 ins) brown trout lying in the pools under the dams. These may be offspring from the original stocked fertile strains, or possibly closely related to wild Rother sea trout.



Four small dams allowing the passage of trout

Another Clear-Up Week

In October, with the help of the funding from Arun and Rother Connections (ARC), family members and Robin Bray's fishing club volunteers spent another four exhausting days clearing out the rest of the fish farm structures and removing most of the old huts. With the help of a digger, four skips were filled with pipes, metal sheets, iron bars etc. We also cut back some of the trees to allow more light into the still ponds. We will really be able to appreciate the results next spring as the banks naturalise .



Family and fishing club volunteers



Clearing huts with the digger

Before any educational visits or help from students could begin we had to remove two dangerous bridges crossing the stream in the steep gorge section of the wood. Phil Stevens and Richard Illman (from the Seaford College estate team) came to our rescue with a tractor and digger and pulled out the bridges and the metal girders that they were built on. In place of the bridges we plan to cut steps into the bank and place stepping stones in the stream.



Phil Stevens and Richard Illman help with the bridges

Laying a Boundary Hedge

In today's countryside where many of our wildlife species are disappearing due to lack of habitat, hedge laying has become increasingly important. Hedges are homes to nesting birds, small mammals and many insects. Apart from being a habitat they also provide a corridor for the movement of animals across field systems and between woodland areas. In October a group of Seaford Students started a project to lay a hazel hedge along the school boundary to the Botany Bay woodland.

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Graham West talks to Seaford students

Graham West, our local South Downs National Park (SDNPA) ranger, has been coming in to instruct the students in this traditional Sussex skill. As well as learning about the benefits of the hedge to wildlife the students have been learning how to use a billhook to split and lay the existing wood and how to put in the stakes and binders to create the structure.



Using a billhook to split the branches



Putting in the binders to the framework of the hedge

Week by week the hedge has been taking shape and both boys and girls have learned the skills involved. The students have also been helping to take out invasive plants including bamboo and cherry laurel.



Clearing invasive laurel

Fencing and Erosion work

Our first year of work on Botany Bay has allowed us to clear most of the old fish farm structures. To continue the restoration work our immediate plans are to fence off three steep sided still ponds which will be left as habitats to support breeding newt populations; and to work on two sections where the stream bank has been eroded. We will be working on the eroded areas with advice and help from SDNPA.

Planting and Woodland Advice

To guide us on managing the woodland, Nina William (Forestry Project Officer for SDNPA) visited the site and with her help we will devise a management plan. During 2015 we will be planting new hedges to stop further erosion and also reintroducing some black poplar trees, a declining species, which have been supplied through ARC.

Advice from RSPB/ARC

Sue Gee and Jackie Day (educational advisers from RSPB/ARC Pulborough Brooks) came over to give advice on the possibility of using the site for school visits. Their ideas will help us to plan for making a space for creative artwork, the development of a dipping pond and access to the stream for sampling activities.

Many Thanks

We would like to thank all those who have visited Botany Bay and given their advice and help with our project. These have included members from SDNPA, ARC, RSPB, Wild Trout Conservation Trust, DEFRA and Southern Water. We have also had support from Kate Bryant (Forest School teacher at Dorset House), Emma Amin (artist and designer) and Dylan Walker (www.artizansofwood.co.uk). Finally thanks to Robin Bray for organising his teams from Portsmouth Services Fly Fishing Club and Delta K Explosive Engineering Systems Ltd.; Paul Boarer and his Seaford College estate team; Graham West for his hedge laying expertise; and Clive Thorpe and his team of students.

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