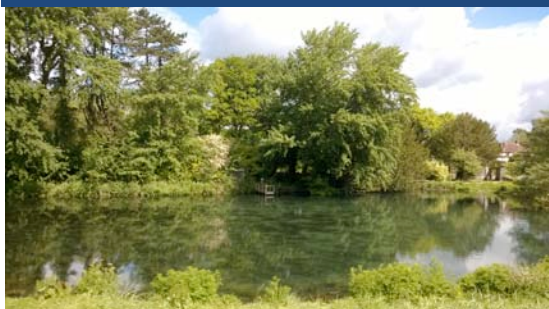


Botany Bay Newsletter August 2014

By Anne Dennig



Botany Bay pond

1st February 2014: First Ideas

We have progressed a long way from the initial meeting between members of the Johnson family with Clive Thorpe from Seaford, when we discussed the possibility of restoring the meadow, stream and woodlands of Botany Bay with the help of some of the Seaford Students. This is a short summary of the background, planning and work that has been done so far and an indication of our next steps.

Historical Background



Lavington House in the 1800s

We know that Botany Bay was a popular walk for the owners of Lavington Park in the 1800s. Samuel Wilberforce (son of William) was married to Emily Sargent in 1828 and lived here with his family. The following is written in "Lavington; The History of a Sussex Family" by A.M. Wilberforce, published in 1919.

"The walks about Lavington are endless; down to Domnies Wood to hear the nightingales, to the Tumbling Bay at Maine, through "Botany Bay", full of rare ferns, to the Commons, to Pot Brook to lunch with the shooters, and the shortest to the trout ponds to catch a fish".

Botany Bay and Lavington Fishery

Botany Bay is an area within Lavington Park of approximately ten acres, owned by Canon Johnson's four daughters. It comprises a chalk stream and wooded valley, a small area of meadow, some still ponds and a fishing lake. In short, it is a small area of great natural biodiversity (*file: Botany Bay map). From the 1970s Botany Bay was used as a small fishery, with ponds created for growing trout. In 2010 this was discontinued and the area was left idle, but much pipework, concrete and metal remains and this now needs to be removed in order to restore the area to its former beauty and biodiversity.



Collapsed old fish farm dams

13th February: Our Vision and Objectives

The Headmaster, John Green, with members of the Seaford College staff, arranged for a discussion with Sir Sebastian Anstruther, Chairman of Arun and Rother Rivers Trust. At this meeting at Seaford College we outlined our vision and objectives for the project, as follows:

To return the Botany Bay area to a natural state after its use as a small fish farm by:

- Restoring the stream and ponds back to their natural state and encouraging water life to flourish.
- Restoring the woodland and bankside areas and encouraging native species, taking out any invasive plants and improving biodiversity and through this encouraging wildlife.
- Restoring pond meadow from pasture to wild flower meadow.

To provide an educational resource for local schools and an opportunity for students from Seaford College to learn about ecology, and to acquire practical skills involved with the project.

Botany Bay Restoration Project

13th May: Visit to Botany Bay

Advised by Sir Sebastian Anstruther, a visit was arranged for representatives from: The South Downs National Park (Bruce Middleton and Graham West), The Wild Trout Association (Andy Thomas) and The Sussex Wildlife Trust (Fran Southgate). The recommendations that we were given then led us to develop a detailed project plan. (see file attached: BB Project Plan August Update).

30th May: Surveys Begin

From all the advice that we received, it was clear that we must begin with surveys of the flora and fauna of the area before any work on removing the fish farm structures could begin. In cooperation with Shaun de Burgh and Donald MacPherson the survey included the ponds and stream above Beechwood lane.



Howard Matcham and Frances Abraham

Bruce Middleton, Howard Matcham and Frances Abraham surveyed the plants in and out of the water (*file: Records from BB) and Martin Willing surveyed the aquatic molluscs (*file: BB Aquatic Mol Report).



Martin Willing

13th June and 8th July: Andy Thomas

After these surveys, we were given the go-ahead to start work on removing the old fish farm structures and Andy Thomas visited to advise us on this.



Assessing the dam. Andy Thomas with Robin Bray

17th July: Much needed Road Repair

Concerns were raised about the erosion under Beechwood lane where the stream flows from the pond above into the Botany Bay woodland; without repair a breakthrough of water, silt and debris from the road could damage the streambed and the ponds below. Bruce Middleton arranged for the Council Highways Department to look at the damage to the road and has asked for an engineer to assess the problem. The state of the erosion is worrying, but at least we did have a high point to the day - seeing a purple emperor butterfly at the edge of our wood.



The original outlet on the left of the photo, and the erosion under the road leading to the water ingress on the right

28th – 31st July: The First Working Party

To help us to start the clear up, Arun & Rother Connections (ARC) project (Heritage Lottery Fund) funded a skip, the hire of a mini digger and posts for the spalling to stabilize some silt. Robin Bray took charge of the working party including Paul Herrington and Nigel Smith (keepers from the Portsmouth Services Fly Fishing Club)

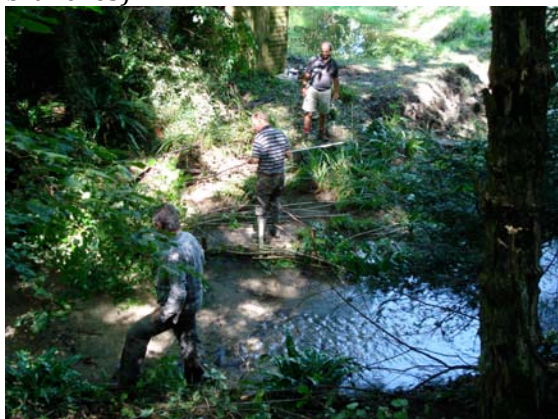
Botany Bay Restoration Project

with Bray and Johnson family members. With the digger we managed to take out many of the old fish farm structures, filling a skip with pipes, corrugated iron and metal poles. We lowered the level of one of the ponds and planted the banks that had been re-levelled by the digger with willow whips and reeds.



Digger action! Clive Lightfoot and Robin Bray

In order to stabilize an area of silt above the dam we planted reeds taken from the other areas of Botany Bay and put in some spialling (posts intertwined with hazel branches).



Constructing and...



planting up the silt barrier

We were unable to take down the concrete dam but managed to take out the connecting pipe to three of the small artificial ponds.



Taking out the pipes



Our first skip load

30th July: Visit to Botany Bay and Seaford

Fran Southgate (Wetlands officer, Sussex Wildlife Trust) came to give her advice and to see the work in progress. She then visited the grounds of Seaford College with Paul Boarer (the Estate Manager) and discussed the potential to restore shaws and hedgerows across the college campus.

4th August: Mink Control

We know that in the past we have seen water voles in Botany Bay and we would like to create a habitat to re-establish them. In the last few years we have had sightings of mink and were advised to attend the mink control course at Peppering farm run by the Arun and Rother Connections (ARC). We were supplied with a mink raft to enable us to check for mink tracks on a clay base

within a floating tunnel and should tracks be seen, a trap to catch mink. We then placed the raft at the top of the main pond.

Siting the mink raft



15th August: Visitors

We had more visitors in August. Fran Southgate came in to show the project to:

Botany Bay Restoration Project

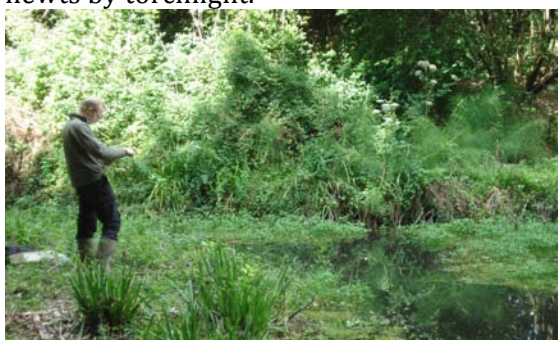
Rachel Carless, Project Manager, ARC project; Debbie Coggles, Project Assistant, ARC Project; Sarah McIntyre, Conservation Officer / Invasives Species Officer, ARC Project; Veronika Moore, Project Development Officer, Arun & Rother Rivers Trust; and Claire Thirlwall, Heritage Lottery Fund Advisor Assigned to ARC project.



Visitors discuss restoration plans with Clive Thorpe from Seaford College

19th August: A Survey of the Still Ponds

Jon Wood came to survey four of the still ponds. He gave us advice on creating the best conditions for increasing the biodiversity in the still ponds. It was a beautiful day and we were lucky enough to see a kingfisher and various dragonflies and damselflies. His report (*pending report: Ponds Survey) shows variations between the ponds, with newts and dragonfly larvae in some, small trout and bullheads in others. He will return in the spring to search for newts by torchlight.



Jon Wood surveying a potential dipping pond

Next Steps for the Autumn

- We are taking steps to create a wild flower meadow next to the fishing lake; the field has been cut and the grass will be removed to reduce the nutrients in the soil. We are also looking into the possibility of having a few sheep in the field.

- We will be arranging some volunteer help to remove the gunnera and bamboo (non-native species) from the area.
- We will be replanting an area of the woodland, which has been eroded by run off from the arable field behind.
- With advice from ARC project members, we are going to develop a plan for the creation of a dipping pond area for local schools.
- Penny Green, the manager of the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre will be coming in to do some moth trapping in September, with a return visit in June/July 2015 in order to pick up the spread of species across the season.
- Seaford College students (coordinated by Clive Thorpe and Paul Boarer) will be working in the autumn term with Graham West (South Downs Ranger) who has agreed to show the students how to lay a hedge along the boundary of the woodland.
- In October we will be doing the next stage of the fish farm structure clear up with Robin Bray and members of the Portsmouth Services Fly Fishing Club.

Many thanks: to ARC for the funding that we have received; to all those who have surveyed the area; and to everyone involved for their help, encouragement and advice. We look forward to updating you on the continuing progress at Botany Bay in our next newsletter.



*If you would like more information or copies of any of the surveys, maps or files referred to in this newsletter contact:

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