

Botany Bay Restoration Project

Botany Bay News 2019 At a Glance

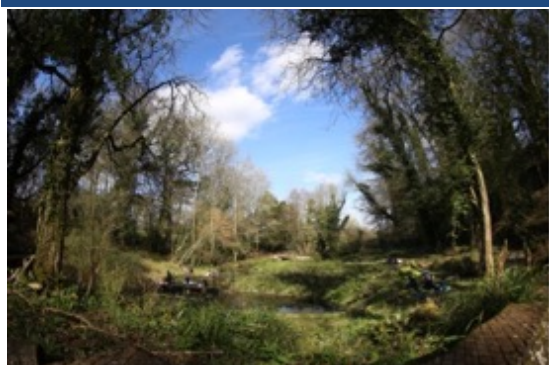


Photo by Karen Grantham-Smith

This year we have been working on two main restoration projects: the remodelling of the three deep fish ponds and the restoration of the meadow. We've had lots of visitors and even more volunteer helpers, so here is our year in brief.

January



- The chalk ramps for the bridge were finished by Seaford's Grounds Team. This has greatly improved access to the site.



- With support from Sussex Wildlife Trust we were able to reprofile the three deep fish ponds to provide three interconnected still ponds of differing depths.

February



- On a very snowy day John Bentley and his team from Arun Trees carefully cut the dangerous limbs off the large Ash at our entrance; managing to leave the main trunk to provide a rich habitat for wildlife.



- We also had a visit from Chichester District Council Staff to see how their funding had been used towards the building of the shelter.

Botany Bay Restoration Project

March

- It was a busy month. Hedging plants arrived from The Woodland Trust which we planted along the boundary of the site to replace Cherry Laurel which we have been removing.
- With the first signs of spring we started preparations for our visitors, including adding netting to the dipping platform to provide a safer non-slip surface.



- We also welcomed a walking group from Duncton.



- Matthew nearly lost his boots planting Yellow Flag and Marsh Marigold plugs in the reprofiled still ponds!



- At the end of March we hosted 90 children from Seaford's Prep School as part of their Water Project Week. Working in small groups, the children recorded the invertebrates that they found in the stream and the still pond and compared their findings.



Photos Karen Grantham-Smith

- SDNPA volunteers took out more Cherry Laurel to restore a beautiful area of wild flowers including Primroses, Wood Anemones, Bluebells and Wild Garlic.



April

- In April we enjoyed the site!

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May



- Chloe Goddard and Charles Winchester came to put Dormice tubes in the wood. Britain's native Dormice have declined by more than a third since the year 2000. The SDNPA have a monitoring programme and have been placing Dormice boxes in woodland areas along The Downs. We now have ten tubes in the wood and on a recent inspection SDNPA reported possible Hazel Dormouse use in one. We plan to move some of the unused tubes to the other side of the ghyll next year.

June

- Michelle Clifford came to teach the basics of Willow weaving to a small group from East Lavington and Graffham. We had a relaxing and rewarding day making platters, dragonflies and baskets. Thank you Michelle!



- Fran Southgate came with The Sussex Dragonfly Group and here is their report:



"Although the weather wasn't particularly on our side, we managed a reasonable list of dragons and damsels including :-

- *Azure damselfly (in cop)*
- *Banded demoiselle*
- *Common blue damselfly*
- *Blue tailed damselfly*
- *Large red damselfly*
- *Beautiful demoiselle (f)*
- *Black-tailed skimmer (m)*
- *Emperor (exuviae)*

There was a fairly spectacular list of other species that we saw as well—not including all the luxuriant ferns, mosses, lichens and liverworts that we couldn't identify. A rare and marvellous encrusting algae called Hildenbrandia is also prolific on the site. Other species that we saw included Firecrest, Tree creeper, Kingfisher, Wild angelica, Hornet, Field

Botany Bay Restoration Project

maple gall, Grass vetchling, Red kite, Cream spot ladybird, *Depressaria daucella* (caterpillar), Tufted duck, *Andrenan cineraria*, Marsh tit, Orange tip caterpillar, and Mistle thrush.”



July

- At last Alfie's GCSE exams were over and he could continue our riverfly monitoring. The survey results continue to show large numbers of Gammarus, Mayfly, Cased Caddis and Bullheads, but we have been concerned about low water levels in the stream and will monitor this carefully next year. Thank you Alfie.



August



- It is early days, but we started to see the results of the experimental scrape in the meadow which showed largely grasses and annuals, these included Yellow Rattle and Wild Carrot. Perennials included Self Heal, Small Scabious, Ox-eye Daisy and Yarrow. The scrape became a magnet for Common Blue butterflies.



September

- We were very happy to have a visit from SDNPA Sustainable Community Fund panel, to see the shelter and other improvements to the site which they have supported.



Botany Bay Restoration Project

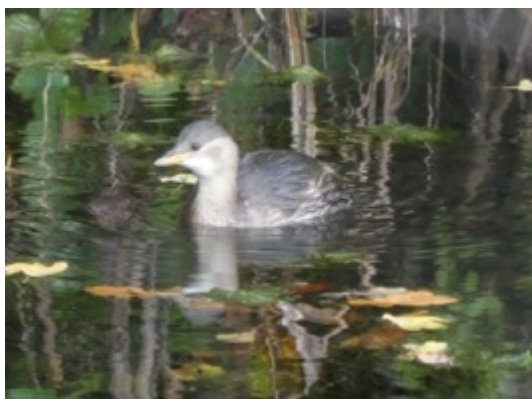
- The work on the restoration of the meadow began in earnest. Jim Kirke (Graffham Downs Trust) cut the meadow and Matthew then mowed the area where the turf was to be removed.

October / November

- We had a visit from Dr Laurence Jarvis (Science and Research Manager for Froglife) and the SDNPA rangers, as part of a Froglife course on Habitat Creation, Restoration and Enhancement for Amphibians. This was particularly helpful in light of our work to improve our still ponds; we will be putting their advice into practice in 2020.



- Sadly we trapped four mink within two weeks (thanks to Graham West and Steve Batten for despatching them). However, this Little Grebe chick managed to survive despite the mink and was happily feeding itself.



- Great Ballard Year 5 class came for a geography fieldwork morning. They studied our mini river system following East Lavington stream, from the springs, through the steeply sided and fast flowing ghyll section down to the slower meanders and finally into the lake. Alfie Dudley-Warde showed the children a kick sample from the stream while others measured the speed of the stream and made field sketches.

- **The Meadow Project** (Report by Matthew Sennitt).



"In 2016 it was decided to attempt to increase the floristic content of the meadow south of the lake in order to boost the available biodiversity of the meadow and its environs and to provide an additional facet for teaching. Initially the trackside verge was brush-cut in November 2016 and wildflower seed, largely Ox-eye Daisy, was spread in the cut area together with small patches of Yellow Rattle. Ox-eye Daisy appeared in reasonable numbers the following year together with patches of Yellow Rattle and have continued there since aided by brush-cutting and annual mowing of this area as appropriate. It had been hoped that seed from this margin would spread into the meadow which was grazed by sheep in 2017 and 2018 to aid this. Seed from the trackside verge did not produce the hoped for

Botany Bay Restoration Project

result of wildflowers in the meadow and after an abortive attempt in 2016 to grow a selection of wildflowers from plants in the meadow, none of which survived to flower it was decided that the coarse grasses in the meadow were too vigorous to allow species other than Hogweed and Nettle to compete. More drastic action was needed, and turf was removed by hand from a test plot of some 100square metres. This was sown with wildflower seed in October 2018 and several species of grasses, as well as perennial and annual wildflowers appeared and flourished in the spring 2019. As this small area, turf-stripped by hand, demonstrated that wildflowers could be introduced successfully, a project of turf-stripping and sowing wildflower-mix over 1,000 square metres was carried out."



- With support from SDNPA and help from some wonderful local volunteers, the turfs were stripped (this time using a machine skillfully operated by Robin Bray) and carried to the top of the meadow where they were turned over and seeded. After this the main seedbed was prepared and seeded. This may all sound simple but believe me, it was a mammoth task!



December

- One of the trees affected by Ash Dieback was felled and we cut back some trees around the still ponds to allow in more light.
- Finally, despite the weather we have seen signs of germination of the chalk grassland seed in the meadow.



Thank You

Many thanks to all our Botany Bay volunteers and supporters! These include: our ranger Charles Winchester and SDNPA, SWT, PSFFA, Seaford College, Graffham Downs Trust, Andrew Golding, Karen Grantham-Smith, Michelle Clifford, Graham West (Weald Woodsman), Arun Trees, AGD Groundworks and Artisans of Wood. We are also extremely grateful to Matthew Sennitt who has done an excellent job managing the site whilst Clive and I have been away working in Uganda.



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