

COVE BROOK GREENWAY GROUP NEWSLETTER



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WHAT ON IN 2009?

Another busy and productive year has gone by, but we don't intend to rest on our laurels.

Our regular tasks such as wild life surveys, work parties and of course the never ending litter picks (*including our involvement with the annual Rushmoor Spring Clean*) will continue. However, we have other things planned.. Grants have been applied for and, among other things, we plan to plant wild flowers on the banks of the brook in the Cheyne Way area and have a Spring Watch Event at Southwood Meadows.

Recently, there has been much consternation about the decline in the bee population. What is happening to these vital pollinators and what we can do to help? With this in mind we have Geoff Galliver, of Fleet and District Beekeeping Association as our speaker in February. (*see back page for details*)

There will be other events throughout the year. Keep your eyes open for our annual Dawn Chorus Walk in May, it's well worth getting up at this unearthly hour and you don't need to be a dedicated birdwatcher to enjoy it.

Sadly the local Star newspaper no longer prints information about forthcoming local events so keep your eyes open for posters in the library, at the Community Centre and on our notice boards along the brook.

A NEW YEAR OUTING - *Hilda Anscombe*

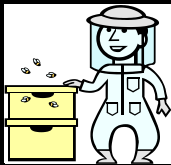
On a bright frosty day after Christmas, we were fed up (literally) with festive food so decided to go on a cycle ride along the brook. It's an attractive picturesque place with lots of life in and around it. People taking a stroll, walking their dogs, or bird watching;. I enjoyed the naturalness of it all, rather like walking along a river in the countryside.

We stopped so many times just to admire the different views and saw small groups of Mallards spaced out along the brook, a pair of Moorhens, a Heron near the wooden bridge, several Greenfinches and a Grey Wagtail. However, the icing on the cake was the Little Egret, an elegant white bird standing on the edge of the water, which flew leisurely down the brook giving us a good view of its black legs and bill and its striking orange feet.

We made our way home via Hawley Lake thinking how lucky we are to have such lovely open spaces in Farnborough.

A GOOD NIGHT OUT - *Antonia Hebbert*

Our best-attended meeting of 2008 was the Halloween Quiz Night on 28th October. Quiz master Peter set the scene for the evening with his smoking cauldron (how did that work?), ably assisted by Sybil who also masterminded the catering. Kathy's creepy (actually delicious) cakes helped the brainwork, and a fun time was had by all. There were even some very decent bottles of beer to cheer up the losing team. Thanks to Bob and Mary for suggesting this event and running the raffle – it was good to have a social evening and helped with fundraising too. Definitely one we'll do again.



WHERE HAVE ALL THE BEES GONE?



Blunden Hall,
Blunden Rd, Cove

Find out, and learn how
you can help

on
17th Feb
7.30 pm

WORK PARTY UPDATE — *Paul Sanders*

Sat 12th July

Although this was advertised as a grass cutting event we were unable to borrow a mower. So, instead of cutting the grasses at Southwood we decided to identify them. Armed with no knowledge but one chart we used the pictures and key to identify 5, possibly 6, grasses in one small area. We also cleared several paths of overgrown vegetation and collected many sacks of rubbish. Amongst this we found 120+ cans and over 20 bottles, which were recycled.



A break from grass cutting

Sat 9th Aug - No task

Sat 13th Sept

Six of us met on a surprisingly rain free morning to do some cutting and raking of grass in Birchbrook Reserve, near Houseman Road Bridge

Also in September, Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership brought their Tuesday volunteers to Southwood, where they cut and cleared a large amount of grassland near the mound, which hadn't previously been tackled. The mound was also cleared of all rubbish. Similarly, the paths were all mowed and cleared of rubbish. Many thanks to them for their hard work.

Sat 11th Oct

A good team of 15 people turned up in Cheyne Way to clear the brook and the surrounding area, including the Curly Bridge itself. Once again we were left with the thought of how much more work we could be doing to beautify the brook if we didn't have to clear up after the thoughtless few. Maybe, one day, dog owners won't throw their bag of dog poo down for someone else to clear up, maybe drinkers won't throw lager cans into it and maybe the children won't be scared to set an example to their friends by saying "I'll take my rubbish home". We live in hope.

Sat 8th Nov

For our next brook cleaning task we met in the rain at the bridge in Mayfield Road and picked up litter and rubbish on both banks and channel towards Blunden Hall. Unfortunately Dan found a deep part of the brook and had a short, cold swim in his waders.

Sat 13th Dec

If we thought the November task was wet, the December task was far worse. After heavy rain on the Friday night and unrelenting rain in the morning, it was amazing that seven people still volunteered their free time to help, once again, in the unglamorous task of picking up more rubbish. The brook was far too deep to venture into it but we still collected a large amount. At least we were able to reward everyone with mince pies and mulled wine at Blunden Hall afterwards. Thanks to RBC who collected all the rubbish from each of the last three work parties exactly at the times requested.

THE ROLE OF THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Jo Harkness, Biodiversity Officer, Environment Agency



In the summer of 1997 the Environment Agency began work to enhance the physical habitat of the Cove Brook as it flows past Southwood Golf Course. This was aimed at restoring some of the negative effects of previous physical changes to the brook. Recent ecological monitoring reveals that there are now more animal species living in the brook than previously, i.e. there is greater species diversity. Some of the findings of our routine ecological surveys can be seen below, but first, a bit about the history and benefits of the enhancement works.

In the 1970's changes were made to the natural course of Cove Brook, in line with the thinking of the day for flood management: It was over-widened and the channel lined with concrete (see Fig. 1). Since then we have realised it is important to re-naturalise channels and break them out of concrete. In 1997, the water-course was returned to its original route, putting the meanders back into the river. The banks were allowed to re-colonise with plants from the seeds in the banks, and the local Wildlife Trust helped us to preserve some areas of vegetation for replanting. This was a sure way to ensure that the plants returned to the water-course were of local provenance; we didn't want to introduce anything that wasn't there already.

The benefits of this approach include:

- Improved fish habitat
- Improved diversity of plants and animals
- Increased flood storage
- The system is “self-sustaining”, i.e. requires less ongoing maintenance from the Environment Agency, e.g. less routine dredging, which is better for the ecology
- Educational facilities (dipping areas for local schools)
- Improved aesthetics
- Improved recreational value
- Increased access to nature and wildlife for local residents and visitors

Last summer we walked along the Cove Brook and found it to be thriving, with many Dragonflies and Damselflies in evidence, such as the Banded Demoiselle. The larvae of these insects rely on a high quality aquatic environment in which to develop.

In addition to the works completed in 1997, the Environment Agency still undertakes routine maintenance along the Cove Brook. The work programme has been drawn up specifically to balance the need to maintain flow along the watercourse and decrease flood risk, whilst maintaining biodiversity. The work programme works on yearly cycles of different lengths for different activities. A leaflet describing the work programme and the timings of works has been produced by Nicola Sims, Biodiversity Officer at Rushmoor BC and our team here at the Environment Agency. This should be distributed to local residents early in 2009.



Fig 1 - The concrete lined channel of the 1970s



Fig 2 - Cove Brook today, now alive with wildflowers and flying insects in summer.. Part of the re-naturalised channel

WINTER VISITORS — *Franc Hall*

Some tips to help identify two members of the thrush family who visit the UK in winter.



Redwing

The Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*) - is a winter visitor from northern Europe and Asia, which can be seen in UK on open ground or gardens, where it feeds on earthworms, insects, fruit and berries. The smallest European thrush, at 21cm (8”), it is a plump looking bird, which is recognisable by its striking red flanks and olive brown upper parts similar to its cousin the Song Thrush. It has a creamy coloured eye stripe above the eye and a dark brown streak running down under the bill, a yellowish buff breast fading to white streaked with light brown, a yellow bill and its feet and legs are brown/yellow. Its flight calls sound like “seek” or “chuck”, with a repetitive song of short variable phrases.



Fieldfare

The Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*) – is another winter visitor often forming large flocks with Redwings on migration flights and with similar feeding habits. Its name comes from the Anglo-Saxon *feld-fer* meaning “traveller through the fields”, probably from their constantly moving, foraging habits. At 25.5 cm (10”) it is almost as big as a Mistle Thrush and sports a slate grey head and rump with a reddish-brown back and black tail. Its throat and chest are a golden yellow fading to white with black regular markings graduating from blotches on its throat to crescent shapes on its underside. The bill is yellow, with a dark tip in wintering males and its feet and legs are dark grey. Vocally, it is not very musical with an alarm/flight call of “chak, chak” or a nasal “weeeis” and its song consists of squeaks, warbles and whistles..

For more information try www.birdguide.com



Cove Brook

GREENWAY



Hi,
I'm
Pi

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PI'S PERSPECTIVE - Sybil Godden

The Brook has lots of guises. Sometimes it's so shallow you can paddle in the pebbly areas getting nice and muddy; but other times, when it is over the grass, Mum calls me away. My people take me out quite early in the morning, when I play with my friends Phoebe & Charlie, and also quite late in the evening so it's often dark. I didn't like it at first, but am used to it now. At night I can see the ducks gathered in a group, asleep in the middle of the Brook, it took a while for my humans to realise they were using a jammed branch to stop them floating away.

I went to the Halloween Quiz at Blunden Hall, where my Dad was the Quiz Master. I sat by him all evening, quietly chewing a carrier bag into as many bits as I could before starting on his wizard's cloak. It was great fun with all those people, cake, biscuits and lots of pats. A good evening all round.

Have you noticed that the Environment Agency has cleared the banks in parts? Now you can see the water and the path is wider; it looks so much better - so thank you. One day, down by the water, I saw a whole flock (20+) of sparrows paddling and pecking in the mud. Sometimes I follow the grey heron; it keeps just ahead of me along the brook and now there's a white one too. (Dad says it's called a Little Egret and is here on its winter holiday.)

As our garden backs onto the Brook and has lots of bird feeders, we see lots of birds; over thirty different types. Recently Dad was delighted to see Long Tailed Tits looking like fluff on a stick and Mum was highly smitten with a Firecrest, the first she'd seen.

Hope you had a good time at Christmas.—Happy New Year



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

All talks are **FREE**, followed by meetings, and are held at **BLUNDEN HALL, Blunden Rd, Cove**. All welcome, refreshments provided. Any donations always appreciated. All volunteers welcome at Work Parties. Children **MUST** be accompanied by a responsible adult.

TALKS & MEETINGS

Date	Time	Subject
Tues 17 th Feb	7.30 pm	WHERE HAVE ALL THE BEES GONE? - Geoff Galliver, of Fleet and District Beekeeping Association Find out more about these vital insects and how we can help them Venue: Blunden Hall, Blunden Rd, Cove

WORK PARTIES

Sat 10 th Jan	10.00 am	SOUTHWOOD MEADOWS (North Area) Clearing scrub from Driving Range area Meet at: Grasmere Road Car Park
Sat 14 th Feb	10.00 am	SOUTHWOOD MEADOWS (North Area) Clearing scrub (area yet to be decided) Meet at: Grasmere Road Car Park
Sat 14 th Mar	10.00 am	CHEYNE WAY Near the Curly Bridge over M3) Working on paths and the pond Meet at: Curly Bridge footpath, at the end of Cheyne Way
Sat 11 th Apr	10.00 am	SOUTHWOOD MEADOWS (North Area) Grass cutting & raking Meet at: Grasmere Road Car Park
Sat 18 th Apr	10.30 am to 12.30 pm	RUSHMOOR SPRING CLEAN Meet at: Curly Bridge footpath at the end of Cheyne Way, Farnborough