



The Peninsula Guardian

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Peacock Butterfly
© Steve Williams 2013

OPENING LINES

These are very exciting times. The peninsula is on the point of having the UK's largest coastal realignment site connected to the sea. The area at Medmerry to the west of Selsey will become an intertidal zone and gradually develop habitats similar to those which exist in Chichester and Pagham Harbours- habitats such as mudflats, salt marsh, saline lagoons and wet grassland. The Environment Agency (EA) time-lapse cameras are now up and running. They can be viewed through our web page www.environment-agency.gov.uk/medmerry. Follow the link on the right-hand side of the page "Look at our time lapse images of the Medmerry site".

During September, construction work is continuing to lower the beach along a 100-metre stretch to allow seawater into the site. The area will remain a closed construction site and a number of large construction vehicles will be in operation throughout September in order to create major new channels. The beach itself will be closed until the middle to end of the month. The plan is then for the EA to hold a celebratory event at Bunn's leisure centre in Selsey on 4 November.

Meanwhile, also during September the EA reported on a water vole survey they had carried out. This revealed that populations of this very rare mammal had reduced by a further 20% since 2011. Under the former Biodiversity Action Plan approach to rare habitats and species the EA led on this species, with Alastair Driver heading up the work. This is a prelude to the wishes of the EA to create 10,000 more acres of wetland habitat.

The MWHG work on water voles benefited originally from help from the Big Lottery Community Wildlife Fund, enabling us to retain the services of Jane Reeve to bring together the results of all former work done on the peninsula. We will then be in a position to publish an Action Plan for Water Voles on the Manhood Peninsula for 2011-2020. This will be produced in line with the UK and Sussex Plans and commitment, enabling the group to draw up priority actions and to pursue the aim of ensuring that the native population remains viable and sustainable.

Current funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund is supporting a three-year water vole project for which Jane undertakes sessional work. The project is now at its halfway mark and runs until March 2015. HLF staff will be joining MWHG on the Chichester Canal in October. It is hoped to see both water voles and the work of the project.

This water vole project has enabled the group more effectively to link up sites and actions across the peninsula as witnessed by links with local parishes, flood action groups and organisations with an interest. MWHG has also received a request from West Sussex County Council asking us to draw up a leaflet providing guidance to people undertaking ditch management work to ensure they bear wildlife in mind.

It's a shame therefore to report that in July work by the EA strimming banks at Chichester Golf course on the peninsula resulted in water voles leaving the site. The work was being done at the wrong time of year. This is not the first time that EA management work has been done with disregard for the needs of water voles and in stark contrast to the aims of the MWHG, the local parishes and the Manhood Peninsula Partnership.

Jill Sutcliffe



Photo © 2012 Jane Reeve

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I have a dream...*that one day there will be no need for conservation groups like MWHG. Because man will have realised that this world was made for all creatures, large and small. No matter where they live, no matter what they are. Birds in the air, fishes in the sea or animals and all mankind on the land.

As I write this, I am thinking of all the conflicts going on around the globe. Not relating to the numerous wars and armed struggles; goodness knows, there is enough reported about those in all the newspapers. For instance, the devastation of large areas of rain forest, thus denying a habitat for orang-utans and all the other wildlife in Borneo. The mindless slaughter of all types of animal in such countries as Africa and India as a sport. The raising of pheasants, grouse and partridges specifically so that they can be released in front of people with raised guns. And of course not forgetting the barbaric killing of badgers currently taking place. This on the basis of no more than a 17% drop in the outbreak of TB in cattle at best. And not before the death or serious injury of whole families of badgers, who remain untested for TB.

Hey, Ho. There goes my shattered dream. But, with a little bit of good will, things could be so much better. Well, couldn't they?....

David Devereux

*1963 © Martin Luther King Jr.



Photo © Katy Devereux 2013

SELSEY FESTIVAL WALK

It was a pleasant summer's evening on Thursday 8 August, when nearly one hundred people gathered at the Medmerry windmill. This was for the annual MWHG walk organised as part of the Selsey Festival. The walk was led by Sarah Hughes, Community Wildlife Officer and Adrian Thomas from the RSPB. They were supported by Pippa Lewis and a colleague from the Environment Agency, with Carole Hampton and Dave Haldane from MWHG. From the windmill the route went along the shingle beach to the new Medmerry alignment barrier. At various points along the way the Leaders gave talks on heritage, wildlife and the environment. We were privileged to be allowed inside the fenced off area so that we could see over the Medmerry site. When everyone had arrived at the barrier, Adrian Thomas gave an excellent talk. His subject was on the re-alignment and its effects on the local flora and fauna. We were somewhat overwhelmed by the number of people who came. In the past these walks have attracted an average of about thirty! We should have taken megaphones.

Pam Barnes



Photo © 2013 Sarah Hughes

MEDMERRY OPENS

Sea water was allowed into the Medmerry site in the week of 8 September 2013. This is the largest open coastal realignment project in the UK. It will lead to wetland habitats developing similar to those in Pagham Harbour Local Nature Reserve - but amounting to some three-quarters the size of the Pagham. We had been told that it would be a slow, trickling process. However, a site visit led by the EA and RSPB for 8 members of the Medmerry Stakeholder Advisory Group (MStAG) revealed a more dynamic process with the tide clearly rushing in along the 100-metre break in the coast. This gap also includes a 30-metre wide deeper channel to take care of scouring, etc.



Photo © 2013 Jill Sutcliffe

Construction is still continuing to finish the breach so that the sea enters the new intertidal area (the breach) and begins its task of creating new habitats. Already birds such as the Little Egret are making use of it.

Medmerry remains a closed construction site. A number of large construction vehicles will be working on site and major new channels are being created. For information see the EA's fact sheet and web site:

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/floods>

Photo © 2013 Jill Sutcliffe



Footpath 70 from Great Ham Farm to the beach is now permanently closed. The only footpath that remains open at this stage is footpath 75 from Ham Lane to Chainbridge Sluice. Any unauthorised persons found on site will be escorted to safety. The beach has been fully closed since 14 August. The EA anticipates it will reopen mid- to end of September.

Background:

In 2008, Peter Midgeley of the Environment Agency produced a plan for managed retreat to the west of Selsey. There was a great deal of local interest and concern. The Manhood Peninsula FOE group sought to ensure that the proposed plans were clear to local people and took their concerns into account. Roland O'Brien translated the plans and FOE ran two meetings. One in Selsey Town Hall was attended by some 120 people. And a second at Bunn Leisure for the further 350 people who wanted to hear what was happening. Then Roland set up the Save Our Selsey group. The EA sought local community involvement via the MStAG on which initially Joe Savill represented MWHG. Now, it is happening and there will be a great new internationally important wildlife area. And a reduction in flood risk for 350 houses in Selsey.

Jill Sutcliffe

WATER VOLE PROJECT OFFICER'S REPORT

We have had a very busy summer and an equally busy autumn is planned too.

The Water Vole Patrol has met all the challenges thrown at it so far- with coir-roll moving and positioning and, more recently, parrot's-feather pulling. This difficult alien invasive species is an aquatic plant that originates from the Amazon basin in South America. In its natural environment it has lots of predators and grazers that eat it. But, unfortunately, unchecked in the UK, it has become a rampant pest that clogs up waterways and overwhelms native species. A pond in Bracklesham that joins two ditches leading across the peninsula is full of parrot's feather. Water voles have previously been recorded, but they would do better with a bit more variety to eat! A crack team of water vole patrollers jumped in and pulled over 12 tonnes of vegetation in 2 days. This was hot, muddy work and we all got wet, sweaty and tired. However it was also super fun and rewarding. This is a work in progress though and we need to have future pulling parties!

Photo © Jane Reeve 2013



Day two and our happy band of volunteers are still 'pulling' despite shoulders threatening to give up.

Photo © Jane Reeve 2013



As well as the physical work, we have also been helping with research. We have been carrying out hair-tubing work with Rowenna Baker of Brighton University and vegetation survey work with Maria Cranfield of Bournemouth University. Thank you to all the volunteers who helped with this work, which was extremely hard going in the heat. Especially the Maria helpers – you know who you are and should really get a medal!!!

The flooding events of 2012 have resulted in central government releasing money (£8.5 million) to WSCC to tackle flooding issues. This money is available for local parishes to bid for under the title *Operation Watershed*. The MWHG are creating a booklet, to be funded from this source, about managing ditches. Among other things, it will deal with legal responsibilities, the dos and don'ts, the biodiversity gains etc. The booklet will be reviewed by Ben Rainbow (WSCC Ecologist), the CHC and other interested parties. I have also been involved in the bid for funding by the Sidlesham Flood Action Group and I am pleased to report that we have been awarded £25K+ to tackle problems in this parish. Our bid also included the opening up of culverts and the creation of two tanking ponds, as well as ditch improvements. The overall long-term benefits should be a joined-up riparian network with good bio-diversity and a planned schedule of management.

We will have the Trust for Conservation Volunteers to keep occupied. And then a water vole trapping session on the Chichester canal with Rowenna.

Thank you for all your help, support and humour!

Jane Reeve

GUIDED BAT WALK 30 AUGUST 2013

Four bat lovers arrived at the Weald and Downland Open-air Museum, for a guided bat walk with leader and expert, Sue Harris.

Sue was joined by another expert from the Sussex Bat Group (SBG), who began to put up display boards with the words we are all so familiar with: 'decline', 'insecticides', 'loss of habitat', 'reduction in suitable trees', 'changes in building techniques',- in fact a whole raft of reasons, but all related to human activities. SBG members brought out a covered clear plastic box, And we were treated to a surprise close up of a pipistrelle, sleeping snugly between folds of a tea towel.

At 7.15pm on a warm damp night, we headed for a stand of mixed broadleaf trees to see pipistrelles. The first to emerge from their slumber. The pipistrelle, once thought of as a single species, has now been identified as three separate species. This discovery was largely due to the advent of bat detectors, and enthusiasts listening-in on their conversations.

Two of the most common pipistrelles are referred to as Pip 45, and Pip 55. The frequencies in KHz at which each bat 'broadcasts'. The Pip 55 is the Soprano Pipistrelle, and the Pip 45, our very own Common pipistrelle. Also nicknamed 'bandit', due to its dark face. There are 17 species of bat that are known to breed in the UK, including the two above. We also have the Alcathe bat, Bechstein's bat, Brown long-eared bat, Leislars bat, Lesser horseshoe bat, Barbastelle bat, Brandt's bat, Grey long-eared bat, Daubentons bat, Greater horseshoe bat, Nathusius' pipistrelle, Natterers bat, Noctule bat, Serotine bat, and Whiskered bat.

Bats make a sound like a 'raspberry' when feeding, as the echo-location speeds up when bats home-in on their prey. Small midges for small bats such as Pipistrelles, and larger moths for the larger bats such as Serotines, and Noctules. At the Weald and Downland we were fortunate enough to hear distant Serotines. But the highlight of the evening was our trip to the lake, where Daubenton's bat could be seen and heard.

Skimming just a few millimetres above the surface, the Daubentons bat has adapted its skills to feeding over water. While our bat detectors boomed the staccato of different sounds unique to Daubentons bat, our experts were able to pick out these specialized bats. By using spot lights to track their erratic paths as they chased insects.

As the bat walk concluded we were given a much welcomed hot drink, with biscuits, and a chance to ask the experts more questions. The evening was a lovely experience, ideal conditions for bats, interesting and thoroughly enjoyable.

Bat sounds can be heard on many websites such as:
http://www.gwentbatgroup.co.uk/about_bats.html

Anthony Burnand

Photo © Istock





Aerial view of Selsey looking across to the whole of the Manhood Peninsular
Courtesy of BBC South Today © 2013

CROW'S COURT

During the autumn and winter months on the outskirts of London, large flocks of Carrion crows congregate on an open area of grassland, before retiring into the nearby woodland for their evening roost. This was a nightly occurrence but what I witnessed one late afternoon was far from common.

I became aware of what has been described as a 'Crow's Court' The spectacle consisted of well over 100 Carrion crows forming a wide circle. In the centre of which stood a solitary crow, its head bowed in submission. The birds forming the circle appeared agitated and were cawing loudly and yet the rough circle remained intact. After a few minutes, two crows broke away from the circle and approached the lone bird. They then proceeded to viciously and repeatedly peck the victim. The bird being attacked offered no defence or tried to escape. The pecking continued and the two executioners, for that is what they appeared to be, were joined by two other crows who continued the attack while they backed off.

I estimated the savage attack to have lasted no more than ten minutes during which time the circle of crows continued their raucous chorus. Finally the executioners left the arena and like a crowd leaving a sporting event, the circle broke up and dispersed. On close inspection I found the body of the victim to be massively bruised and broken and the eyes had been pecked from their sockets.

Some time ago I repeated these observations to an on-line wildlife group and comments came back thick and fast. It was suggested that I was just perpetuating a rural myth and should get out a bit more. Another person suggesting I was attributing human behaviour to the crows (anthropomorphism), which I guess was a reasonable assumption. Others stated there was little documented evidence to support my observations. What I had witnessed was a gathering of crows merely excited by the spectacle. Despite several theories and some rude comments, four subscribers to this debate said that they too had witnessed a similar occurrence.

So was this simply a dispute, or a mercy killing, possibly some mysterious ritual. Or was it an execution carried out in accordance with the law of the Crow's Court?

Dave Haldane

Photo from copyright-free-photos.org.uk



CARRION CROW

It's difficult to understand why such a handsome bird as the Carrion Crow gets involved with such horrific conduct.



ASHE GROUP

Moth Trapping. After the cold Spring, it was not until 8 June that we were able to record any moths in our trapping programme.

A dip was taken at both Morgan's and Hayden's ponds. Both surveys showed that there was plenty of life under water. Robin Gatehouse and Campbell Thorp erected a barn owl box in a quiet field, courtesy of farmer Mr Bushell. Long-distance viewing has so far revealed no inhabitants.

The community orchard at the recreation ground is looking healthy. Once again, we are very grateful to Robin and Campbell who have watered the trees and mown the grass around them.

We are very thankful to see that the water vole(s) are still living on Florence pond in Sidlesham. Jane's busy schedule will shortly be including work at this lovely site. Much tidying etc. was done earlier this season.

Val and Robin invited us to visit their lovely flower meadow again this Spring. Fortunately, it was a lovely sunny day. But what a treat. Gloria and Eddy Jupp showed us their beautiful flower patch in Rotten Row. Again, a great pleasure.

Stop Press: Both Morgan's and Hayden's ponds have completely dried up in the last few weeks. And we are all very concerned for the little water vole family. They seemed to be thriving in the ponds and the ditches in Almodington.

Veronica Wilkes

COMMUNITY ORCHARD

It is unfortunate that the orchard had to be sited in the most exposed part of the Manor Green Park. The result of this is that the apple tree leaves were badly 'wind-scorched' during the late windy spring. The strength of the wind during this period was almost gale force. Even with each apple tree secured to a stout wooden post, some are leaning badly.

On top of this, the very dry summer weather was a difficult time for the trees. The volunteers did an excellent job in digging out each tree border during the springhaving the effect of loosening the heavy clay around each tree. This allowed what moisture was around during this dry season to reach the tree roots. Despite this attention, one of the apple trees suddenly dropped its leaves and died.



Photo © Suzie Devereux 2013

General picture of Selsey Community orchard

Remembering what Veronica Wilkes told me, I checked to see if the bark had been attacked by an animal. The protective sleeve round the tree appeared to be mostly intact. There was no evidence of a burrow anywhere near the tree, so that ruled out rabbits and rats. We are therefore left with the only other option. That the dry weather was just too much and the tree just gave up. If anyone has a different idea we would welcome any help. A last thought, is there any apple tree infection about that could be responsible?

Apart from the above problems, the orchard is coming on well, if a little slowly.

David Devereux

EAST BEACH POND

We were pleased to have been awarded Gold, once again, in the South East Britain in Bloom competition. Our biggest disappointment was the rained-out Open Day held this year in conjunction with Love Parks Week on 30 July. It was not a question of waiting for the rain to blow over, as it poured all day. However, despite the weather, some intrepid children braved the rain in order to do some Pond Dipping. Another highlight (or rather lowlight) was the discovery of complete sets of fishing tackle, including hooks and lead weights dumped in the pond. We suspect this was carried out unseen during the hours of darkness, as there is a complete ban on fishing. It makes one shudder to think what damage this might have caused to swans and other pond- bottom scourers if the volunteers had not found them.



Photo © Suzie Devereux 2013

The six remaining sygnets being shown how to fly by dad demonstrating up front his wing flapping capabilities. Mum's not so sure!



Photo © Suzie Devereux 2013

All the hard work trying to keep reeds at bay, so that the wild flowers can bloom, is gradually working.

On the work front, our programme of maintenance continues. During the summer months this consists of clipping back overgrown bushes and trees, and digging up some of the stinging-nettle and thistle roots. Thistle seeds and nettle flowers are popular with a number of different species of birds, butterflies and bees. However, without our intervention, the whole site would become a 'No-Go' area infested with these plants and with all other plant life choked out of existence.

All the hard work trying to keep reeds at bay, so that the wild flowers can bloom, is gradually working.

The new peninsula, created by dumping the annual dredging from the pond, is slowly taking shape. The range of wild flowers this year was encouraging.

David Devereux

Selsey Common

A team leader's lot is not a happy one.

During the early months of 2013, Chichester Contract Services assisted the volunteers by cutting out a large area of bramble which was proving difficult to manage. Capitalising on this we spent our next two visits taking out bramble and honeysuckle roots that had survived the onslaught of the cutter blades. It was hard but very satisfying work. Our workforce only meet on the first Tuesday of each month and are sometimes rained off. And so by the time late spring arrived we had made slow but visible progress.

Unfortunately our job satisfaction was short lived. The CDC-sub-contracted group Landscape Services were contracted to cut paths and verges. This included a 3-metre wide path through the Common and a 200-metre long verge parallel with Kingsway. But they failed to return after only one monthly visit. For the following three months there was no sign of them. Despite repeated e-mails to CDC and assurances from them that they would turn up, the paths remained uncut. Meanwhile the path which served as a route through the site and helped control the spread of bramble was disappearing. Grasses and hardy perennials flourished during their most productive months. Disillusioned, I withheld our labour, which amounted to cutting off the nose to spite the face as the areas we had so painstakingly cleared were soon swallowed up by hardy perennial growth again.



Selsey Common showing some of the volunteers 'getting down to it' cutting a new path through very thick grass and brambles.

In early August I met representatives from the CDC Parks Department and a promise of additional help was given. At about the same time, grass cutting along the path and verges resumed. Unfortunately, it was merely a token cut. The operator followed the line of least resistance and only cut along the very much reduced narrow path.

The workforce are all volunteers from the East Beach Pond Group. They have now resumed work on the site. Two recent sessions involving hacking and cutting out heavy vegetation have been satisfying but exhausting under a hot summer sun. Today fortune finally smiled on us when I met Paul Hickly of Chichester Contract Services (the good guys) on site. They have now opened up all the overgrown areas and given us a fighting chance to get our management plan back on course during the coming winter months.

Dave Haldane

The Common clipped © 2013 Dave Haldane



PUBLICATIONS

After many months of work, September saw the publication of the Group's *Annual Report and Financial Statement* for 2012-2013. This has been printed and is also now available on the MWHG website. Our thanks go to everyone for their contributions, particularly Jill Sutcliffe. We are indebted to David Scott and Richard Whittle for their sterling work on the Accounts and Financial pages.



Walks Around Sidlesham



Also in September, the book *Walks Around Sidlesham* by Bill Martin was published. This is the result of two years' hard work by the Publications Team. It contains instructions and maps for eight walks all starting in Sidlesham. Bill created the walks and wrote the text, Peter White drew the maps, Sue Martin did the illustrations, Carole Hampton and Pam Barnes undertook the design and layout. Other contributors were Sarah Hughes, Jane Reeve and Jill Sutcliffe. Copies can be purchased from Bill Martin for £5.

Carole Hampton

You are invited to the launch of **Walks Around Sidlesham**

by
Dr. Bill Martin

Produced by MWHG (Pam Barnes and Carole Hampton) with maps by Peter White and illustrations by Sue Martin

Join the celebrations
at
The Church Hall, Church Farm Lane, Sidlesham PO20 7RE
on
Tuesday 8th October
at
5.00pm

RSVP (Telephone: 641154 or billm89@hotmail.com)



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2013/14 DEADLINES

10 November (Winter)

10 February 2014 (Spring)

10 May 2014 (Summer)

10 August 2014 (Autumn)

MWHG Website

www.mwhg.org.uk

email: newsletter@mwhg.org



**The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service**



LOTTERY FUNDED

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