



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

The MBE for volunteer groups



ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022



Chair's Report

I have been looking back on this second year since the global pandemic, and am pleased to say that we have managed to resume much of our previous activity. This is thanks to great efforts by everyone involved to maintain our existing projects and to enthusiastically develop new ones.

With the end of the Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands, the FLOW project, still much work is needed to maintain the achievements. We were fortunate to receive support from Portsmouth Water to continue the work of water vole conservation, and, from the Woodger Trust, to continue the work of FLOW. We are delighted that Jane Reeve has continued this work with Louise Barnetson joining her in the task. Our wonderful group of volunteers continue to turn out in all weathers to staff the working parties and the species surveys.

We have seen the continued development of the West Wittering Tree Nursery with Alex Ainge leading the group with financial support being provided by the Hendy and Chapman Trusts. A second tree nursery is under development in Selsey thanks to financial support from the Sussex Community Foundation on land provided by David Langmead. The work is being led by Joe Savill and so far, 11 land has been identified, fenced and preparations are going ahead the collecting of seeds.

MWHG has been involved with West Sussex County Council on the Pollinator Highway project. In order to increase the numbers of pollinating insects, a series of verges in Selsey and along the road to Chichester are to be treated differently. They will not be mown during the summer and thus allowed to grow and, in addition, they are seeded with wild flower seeds. At the end of the season the verges are mown and raked and the material composted. We have run a trial site in Selsey this summer which has, despite the dry summer, yielded an enormous range of wildflowers! Next year further verges will be developed.

The East Beach Pond and Manor Park Gardens continue to be looked after by our Volunteers. I am sad to report that Dave Haldane, who has been the great strength of the East Beach Pond group died in March 2022. He will be greatly missed. His contribution to MWHG has been enormous, and he and Anne have developed the group and the wonderful resource that is the East Beach Pond over many years, all our sympathy goes to Anne, and to the other volunteers who miss him greatly.

The Sensory Garden in Manor Green Park continues to be a quiet space of great beauty in Selsey. The group took part in the Selsey Open Gardens in 2022, and continue to work with Selsey Town Council to keep up their high standard.

Front page: postcard illustration
Peter White

We also saw the passing this year of our President Richard Williamson on the 21st of May at the age of 87. Richard was Warden of Kingley Vale nature reserve for many years. It was Richard who ensured that the wonderful wildlife sites on the Manhood Peninsula were seen to be important places designated and thus received extra protection.

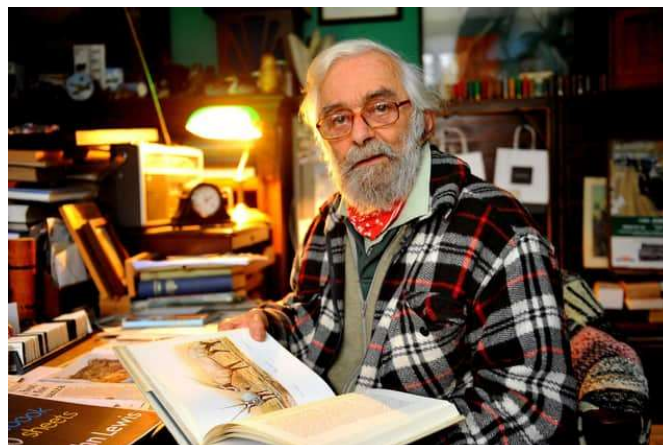
I would also like to take this opportunity in our 25th year to give a special thanks to some of our long term volunteers who have provided the backbone of MWHG Anne Haldane, Sheila Wilkinson, Gerry Williams, Barbara Bond and Sheila Knight in particular. The work is only possible because of our dedicated volunteers and their loyalty and hard work. Thank you for all your efforts from all of us.

This year we have also seen a great deal of activity in the Heritage area. The Selsey Photo Archive, which goes from strength to strength produced an exhibition of Royal related photos for the Platinum Jubilee celebrations which was very interesting. They continue to upload photos from various collections to their website. Bill Martin, who has been very involved in the Land Settlement Association and the Railway Carriage stories has this year succeeded in opening up a walk along the route of the Selsey Tramway. Volunteers have cleared one of the old stations and an inaugural walk was held at the end of the summer. There is still work to do in putting up the signs for the walk.

This year we have been most fortunate to recruit a new Trustee. David Gilbey will be joining us as a Trustee at the AGM. David brings many skills to the team, he has been involved in other charities and has in his 'day job' been involved in digital marketing which will be invaluable to our group. So a big welcome to David, but at the same time our long standing Trustee Gina Carrington is going to stand down from the Trustee role. Gina has given so many thousands of hours to MWHG that **Thank You** is hardly an adequate response to her efforts. She will still be a member of the group, but relieved of some of the responsibility!

Once again I would like to end by thanking everyone, volunteers, management team, sponsors, supporters, all who have contributed over 25 years to MWHG, for their sterling efforts and we look forward to the next 25 years with anticipation of even greater achievements!

Dr Lesley Bromley



Richard
Williamson

Water Vole Biodiversity Action Plan update 2020 – 2030

Introduction

This project to update the Biodiversity Action Plan to protect Water Voles on the Manhood Peninsula 2011-2020 began in Sept 2021. It will broaden its scope looking at the Manhood Peninsula in its wider context.

Water vole numbers continue to decline with around 132,000 believed to now populate Great Britain (PTES 2022) and the mammal is included on the IUCN GB Red List as endangered but in the UK mammals evaluation as Critically Endangered, ie the most threatened status.

Connectivity to the wider area is the key to long term survival of this charismatic small mammal to allow them to respond to local environmental change by moving to more suitable habitat, and to disperse during the breeding season and the need for careful associated management. This new action plan focuses on the different priority habitats water voles use and provide suitable management and improvement guidance.

What have we been doing?

Many organisations have been contacted to gain as much data about water vole presence, and absence as possible. We have received information from the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre, the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, the People's Trust for Endangered Species, the Environment Agency, Chichester Harbour Conservancy, Arun and Rother Rivers Trust, Mammals Society, the Mid Arun Valley Environmental Survey, and Chichester District Council. Despite making request we have not received data from the South Downs National Park, which is a shame as solidifying important wildlife corridors to their water vole populations is a priority.

We have also carried out water vole surveying training sessions and presentations to get the word out that water voles are still endangered and hugely vulnerable to disappearing from our landscape. We have focused our training on surveying and included the RSPB and CHC staff to ensure that they have water voles on their radar.





Chichester Ship Canal Trust volunteers, management and trustees were given a guided walk and talk including a section on sensitive management, net biodiversity gain and water vole habitat.

Water voles are under huge habitat pressure with continued development, lack of or over management of water ways plus climate change. The dry winter, spring and summer of this year meant that many water vole sites dried up early and this will have had an impact on the colonies that make up the meta population of the Manhood Peninsula. We cannot take our foot off the pedal and must keep our focus on continued good wetland management and recovery across the MP and the wider area linking with other water vole colonies.



A water vole surveyor's dream scenario – a burrow, a feeding station, AND a latrine 😊.

The Water Vole BAP on the MP

This document will be available to download on MWHG's website in spring 2023. The BAP will be invited for review by a steering group made up of key partners and then hopefully used to reinforce policy in the future to ensure the conservation of this important species.

Jane Reeve

The Black Poplar in Sussex

The Black Poplar (*Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*) is the rarest native timber tree in Britain. There are thought to be around 7000 mature trees, of which only 600 are females. Many have been lopped but at its best this is a magnificent tree, rugged and heavily burred. Old trees frequently show a marked lean, and the branches typically curve downwards, with twigs sweeping upwards at the tips. The leaves vary but are often triangular or diamond-shaped and have hairy stalks when young. They flutter in a breeze and are said to be especially audible in the downdraught preceding a shower. Male trees have brilliant scarlet catkins in spring. Female catkins are yellowish green, producing copious white fluff when in fruit.

The species has long lost its native habitat of floodplain woodland but it was formerly often planted and, as it will have been cloned from native stock, is regarded by botanists as an honorary native in most sites. The wood was valued for its reluctance to burn (good for the upper floors of houses), its curved branches (cruck houses and ships) and its ability to absorb shock (rifle butts, clogs and wagons).

Planting largely ceased when faster-growing hybrid poplars were imported from North America in the mid-nineteenth century and, as Black Poplars live for only 150-200 years, the British population of mature specimens is nearing its end. In the 1970s, botanists realised that there was little data on the UK distribution and surveys were instigated. Until 1975 no Black Poplars were known in Sussex but new specimens were discovered, and the Sussex Black Poplar Group was formed in 1994. Originally adopted by the Sussex Wildlife Trust, we have recently crept under the wing of the Arun and Rother Rivers Trust. We have recorded 50 mature trees, although several have died and others are just hanging on. We work in partnership with Kew at Wakehurst Place. They maintain a stoolbed containing specimens of most of the Sussex trees. Cuttings are harvested from the stoolbed and supplied to landowners who request them – so far around 9000 have been planted across Sussex. Our trees are also in demand farther afield – some were even used in landscaping around the Millennium Dome.

Most of the Sussex trees are privately owned but there is a fine specimen at Arundel which can be seen beside the public footpath which runs across the Brooks east of the Castle. Another is on open access land on the Cowdray Estate near Benbow Pond at Easebourne.

Two populations of mature Black Poplar are known on the Manhood Peninsula. There are two trees in a scruffy little wood close to the shore at Church Norton. One was damaged about 40 years ago and was barely alive in 2018. And there is, or was, a row of four Black Poplars with a couple of hybrids along the remains of an old hedge at Birdham. The hedgeline is now beset by new estates and squeezed between Walwyn Close and Old Common Close. Only one tree is still accessible, one other can be seen above fencing – and goodness knows what has happened to the others. Black Poplars are resilient and can sprout from stumps so they just may be there in some form...



Frances Abraham
Black Poplar Working Group



Tree Nursery No 1 West Wittering

This year marked a big step in the life of our West Wittering tree nursery. We received some much needed help from the Woodger Project, as Jane Reeve and Louise Barnetson acted as care takers, helping to grow on seedlings that had developed over the last winter. With a donation of a cold frame, we were able to watch the first leaves develop on some Blackthorn and Hawthorn seeds. These seedlings were transplanted into our raised beds and now wait for a year or two until they will be strong enough to be transplanted into their final place on the peninsula.



As the seedlings grow, so does the help from enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers. Cathy, Joanna and Phil have come forward to keep the seedlings watered over the hot summer months and look forward to continuing to give their time to help the tree nursery flourish.

As the summer comes to an end, our thoughts switch to collecting more tree seeds to germinate and grow on. As the nursery develops, we hope to expand the raised seedling beds area, as demand for sustainably grown trees increases. Thanks to David Thompson (chairman of the allotment where our nursery is located) whose support has been invaluable; and to the funders, the hendy and Chapman Trusts.

As West Wittering is about to enjoy the fruits of our labour, Joe Savill has had talks with Langmeads in Selsey and we now have a new piece of land to develop into our second tree nursery. I will let Joe explain.....see page 11.

Alex Ainge

Wittering Area Community Conservation Project

The Wittering Area Community Conservation Project kicked off in November 2021 after the group secured generous funding from the F. Glenister Woodger Trust to work across the Parishes of West Wittering, East Wittering, Bracklesham, Earnley, West Itchenor and Birdham. The aim is to improve wildlife habitat, control flood management, encourage community involvement with the local environment, and promote community and personal well-being. The funding allowed for the creation of a Community Conservation Officer role for a three-year period, a role is shared by Jane Reeve and Louise Barnetson.

The project continues the important work of the Fixing and Linking Our Wetlands, the **FLOW** project – which ended in June 2021 – as well as work with children and young people in the parishes. The project includes continuing habitat management and wildlife surveying of FLOW sites, as well as working with the Parish Councils and other land-owners to enhance the wildlife value of the land they manage. This includes reducing or eliminating mowing of some areas, wildflower seeding and planting, and tree and hedge planting.



Volunteers planting trees at Cakeham Manor in West Wittering.

Volunteers carrying out a plant survey at Snow Hill, W. Wittering, where we secured agreement with WWPC and WWE to reduce mowing. 50+ plant species were recorded.





At the start of the project, we met with West Wittering PC's Environment and Green Spaces Working Party and discussed some potential biodiversity improvements that could be made across the parish. This led to the development of a Biodiversity Improvement Plan incorporating all of the PC's green space assets.

The plan has seen the council embrace different mowing regimes –retaining long grass and wildflowers where possible – as well as planting and sowing wildflowers and pollinator-friendly plants, planting native trees and gap filling hedgerows.

We have provided WWPC with an updated review of the condition of their main drainage ditches and recommendations for ongoing actions and maintenance to reduce flood risk in the parish.

Similarly, with Birdham PC, we have developed a plan to improve the biodiversity value of their recreational ground and reduce mowing to allow wildflowers to develop for pollinators.

Volunteers bedding in young trees at the West Wittering Tree Nursery Open Day organised in December 2021.



Pollinator-friendly, beach-themed, flower bed created in Marine Drive, W. Wittering, in conjunction with WWPC



New wildflower area created on West Wittering Village Green by WWPC.

During the 2021/2022 winter season, regular weekly sessions with volunteers carried out habitat management, wildlife surveying, and tree planting activities. Up to the end of March 2022, 21 volunteer work party sessions took place with between 2 and 46 volunteers attending across the parishes. Further work parties, focussing on floral surveys and moth surveys took place during Spring and early-Summer 2022. A number of volunteers have also committed to carrying out wildlife surveys of five sites over the summer.

Additional funding for tree planting activities was secured from John Wiley & Sons Ltd and Lewis Brownlee Financial Services to pay for canes and biodegradable tree guards. A team from Lewis Brownlee Financial Services also enjoyed a corporate volunteering day in March 2022 where they planted 145 trees in West Wittering. Very good feedback was received from the Lewis Brownlee team and we hope to expand on this and offer more corporate volunteering days to local companies.

Also in March 2022, two large-scale tree planting initiatives took place. The first saw 40+ volunteers plant 350+ trees at the Birdham recreation area. The event was organised in conjunction with 1st Birdham & Witterings Scout Group, and we were also joined with members of Birdham Parish Council and some hardy local people. The event kicked off our engagement and education activities with this local Scout group, which have involved all ages groups and included pond dipping, bug hunting, building bat and bird boxes, and learning about the importance of trees. The second event saw 500+ trees planted at Downview Recreation area in East Wittering by children and young people - and their grown-ups - from the 1st East Wittering Rainbows, Brownies and Guides. The tree planting day was organised in association with East Wittering & Bracklesham Parish Council who own the Downview site, and Jacqui Manuela, leader of the Rainbows, Brownies and Guides.

Team from Lewis Brownlee Financial Services enjoying a rewarding day planting trees in West Wittering.



We go to local schools – discussions have taken place with West Wittering Parochial Church of England Primary School about improving their grounds for biodiversity. We also plan to improve the site opposite the school, which is owned by West Wittering Estate, and make it into a useful outdoor education area for the school.

Discussions with Birdham Primary School led to the development of a successful day for the whole school on the subject of Water Voles, and the delivery of a number of after-school ‘eco club’ sessions (subsequently re-named **‘Wildlife Warriors’** by the children!) which was delivered in the Spring term. This involved children with weekly after-school sessions involving pond dipping, bug hunting, tree identification, and owl pellet dissection. This was so successful that we have more demands from children and parents to continue this and potentially make the club a ‘paid for’ activity. We also created an opportunity for a Seaford College Community Action Day involvement at East Wittering. Further engagement with schools will take place over the rest of the project.

Making bats boxes with the Cubs and Scouts in Birdham.



Delivering an education day about Water Voles in Birdham primary school.



Louise Barnetson
**Part time Community
Conservation officer**

Tree Nursery No 2, Selsey

We are very grateful to David Langmead for providing the group with a piece of land in Selsey for the tree nursery. A licence agreement has been signed and water has been connected to the site. Plans are being developed for the nursery and fencing to enclose the growing area is to be erected in due course, with an official opening, hopefully, in the autumn.

The nursery will be dedicated to, and named after, the late Beryl James. Beryl, a long-term member of MWHG, made a huge contribution to the conservation of the local area especially through her volunteering at Pagham Harbour Reserve and as a bird recorder.

Thanks also to the Sussex Community Foundation for providing funding which enabled us to establish our tree nursery.

Selsey Photo Archive Project

In 2018 Selsey Town Council received a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project to preserve and make accessible a significant collection of photographs from Selsey Society's archive. This year, through the leadership of MWHG and an extremely dedicated group of volunteers, a significant milestone has been reached. All of Selsey Society's collection has now been passed to the West Sussex Record office for safe storage, having been carefully scanned and catalogued so that selected photos can be made available to the public via the website and through exhibitions. To date, more than 5,500 have been catalogued.

Another major piece of work that has been undertaken is the researching and writing of descriptions for all the different categories of photos that appear on the website e.g Railway Carriage Houses, Selsey Tram, 2nd World War etc.

As well as this, the project has been receiving donations and loans of photos from people's personal collections and these are also being scanned and catalogued. The focus of the work is now to continue to with this, to further develop the website and to promote the project through the media and a variety of events.

Joe Savill
Co-founder MWHG

Heritage

Walk The Selsey Tram Way

Funding has been secured to reprint an updated version of the walking guide, provide signage to be attached to WSCC footpath posts, create an interactive map for use of mobile phones and provide information boards at points of interest, including the sites of the 11 stations, along the route. The project will be launched on 27th August 2022, the 125th anniversary of the first train to run from Chichester to Selsey.



Sidlesham Heritage Centre (PO20 9QQ)

The Heritage Centre was established in January 2021 in the windows of a former LSA glasshouse to maintain interest in the Land Settlement Association display. Displays are regularly updated and also include information about other local history/heritage items, including the Selsey Tram Way Project.



Land Settlement Association

An LSA house was dismantled in September 2017 and is in storage at The Weald and downland Living Museum, awaiting funding to be re-erected – then the LSA Story will have a permanent home. The website remains active and still attracts additional stories. A film about the origins of the LSA (1937) and our version with interviews with former tenants and staff (2015) can be found on the timeline of the website www.sidleshamheritagetrail.co.uk



25 years Heritage Publications and Events

- 2007/08** Publications - *A Sense of Place* (5 local Selsey walks) & Walk *The Selsey Tram Way*
- 2011** Publication - *Selsey Blue Plaques*
- 2011** SWALKs, Sidlesham Walk and Lunch Klub, (Sidlesham Walk & Lunch Klub) started – now completed 146 monthly walks.
- 2013** Publication – *Walks around Sidlesham*
- 2015** Exhibition at Novium *on Land Settlement Association* & launch of MWHG film
Publication – Land Settlement Association Heritage Trail
All Aboard (Selsey Railway Carriages)
- 2017** LSA house dismantled & in storage at Weald & Downland Living Museum
- 2018** *Exhibition* in Selsey Town Hall (Fishing & Tourism in Selsey)
- 2019** *Exhibition* at LSA Weald & Downland Living Museum (LSA)
Exhibition (Chaplins) on History of Selsey High Street
- 2021** Publication – *Sidlesham 2 Heritage Trail*
- 2022** Publication – *Walk The Selsey Tram Way* and guided walk from Chichester Railway station

Dr Bill Martin

*Left: Site for new Beryl James Tree Nursery is about to be fenced ...
and (on right) is fenced!.*



Photos: *Joe Savill*



Planning issues

Pressure for development, mainly focused on housing, has continued to grow across the MP. The absence of a current District Local Plan for some months and a defendable five year housing supply enabled developers for a short time to continue a speculative regime of expanding the margins of existing settlements and infilling important green gaps and open spaces. Chichester District Council announced a 5 year housing supply in July and prior to that a decision in the High Court protected the policies already in place.

However. Many areas providing important 'corridors' for wildlife across the peninsula are being squeezed or completely fractured.

Concerns over the lack of capacity for sewage treatment that already existed are now further exacerbated as new housing is connected to treatment works such as that at Sidlesham and can mean that overflow discharges into the highly sensitive Pagham Harbour report being drawn up by Natural England/Chichester harbour (report done by NE). Flows of untreated sewage that occur particularly during wet weather are highly damaging to the local environment and ecosystems but the combination of nitrates in the discharges combined with nitrate run off from fertiliser use on agricultural land presents a growing environmental hazard to aquatic life and sensitive wetland areas. The need for '*nitrate neutrality*' for new development is now a planning requirement and the increasing costs of carbon based fertilisers will hopefully slow its application on farm land.

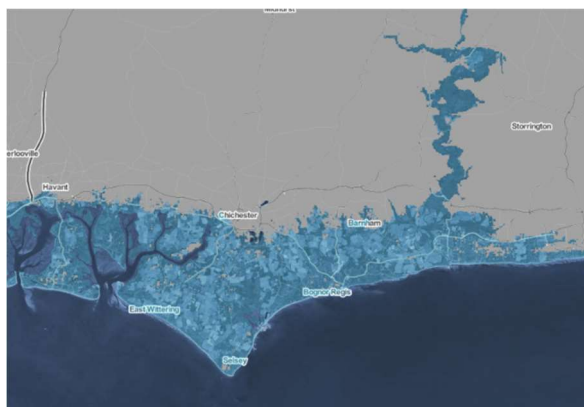
Experience of damage to important wetland areas caused water extraction and changing weather patterns such as Amberley Wildbrooks in the Arun Valley have focused attention on '*water neutrality*' for development and has created a current embargo on new development in areas including parishes in the north of the county of West Sussex and Horsham. It is supported by evidence gathered by Natural England which found that populations of the rare snail had decline.

Given the demands from intensive horticulture along with now large numbers of tourist accommodation problem for the Manhood. Failure to keep to targets for reaching a carbon neutral position to try and combat the impacts of climate change do however continue to represent the Manhood's biggest problem for its future. Sea level rise, increasing severity of extreme weather especially rainfall leading to surface water flooding call for an integrated planning led approach to sustainability and informed environmental management.

MWHG has continued to represent the environment and the heritage of the Manhood Peninsula responding to over forty planning applications / issues in the last year and appearing at appeals presenting expert evidence in support of the peninsula's unique but threatened environment.

Paul Bedford

***Sea level rise postcard
1.5 °C. See Surging Seas and
NASA websites.***



Funds and Finances

This is the funding the MWHG received during 2021-22 to facilitate the work of the group and we are extremely grateful for the financial support received from Trust Funds, Parish Councils, local businesses and individual supporters to carry out a range of activities described in this Annual Report.

The Woodger Trust is supporting 3 years of **habitat restoration** work in the Witterings Parishes and surrounding areas; and North Mundham Parish Council also made a donation. And the Water Vole Action Plan for the MP is being updated courtesy of funds from Portsmouth Water Biodiversity Grant.

The Tramway has received support from the Lady Nevill Skinner Trust, Ferry Farm solar site and the Selsey Walking Group.

Mink Monitoring has been paid for by local businesses with grants made by both Barfoots and Vitacress.

Tree nurseries have been set up with kind assistance from West Wittering Parish Council on their allotment funded by the Hendy Trust, Chapman Trust and the Woodger Trust; and in Selsey, the **Beryl James tree nursery** is being established funded by Target Professional, Selsey Town Council and the Sussex Community Fund.

The Pollinator Highway is being supported by Vitacress.

Jane Scotland
Hon Treasurer

POLLINATOR HIGHWAY:

Pollinator Highway, one of 3, planted out in Selsey using different techniques to see which provides the most effective approach.



MWHG Staffing:

Jane Reeve+Louise Barnetson, Joint PT Community Conservation Officers; Nikki Timney.

MWHG Volunteers: Chair Dr Lesley Bromley; Secretary Alex Ainge, Hon Treasurer, Jane Scotland; Management Team: Paul Bedford, Gina Scott, Dr Bill Martin (Heritage), Joe Savill, Jill Sutcliffe; and new Trustee Dave Gilbey with professional assistance from Wendy Peters accountant. FLOW volunteers; Christine and Felicity McStea.

Regd Charity: 1147335

<https://www.mwhg.org.uk>

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