

Valley Conservation Society

Holder of the KCC Award for Volunteering Excellence

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MEMBERS NEWSLETTER No 111 February 2011

WATER RAIL SEEN IN CRISBROOK

The rare and extremely shy water Rail has recently been spotted in Crisbrook Pond. It has not been seen in the Valley for some time and we would like to think that this is due to the continuing conservation efforts of the members. More frequently heard than seen its call has been likened to a squealing pig. Its body is designed for easy movement among reeds and is brown to the upper body with a metallic grey breast. Water Rails have long legs and toes, with short rounded wings.



DONATION OF NEW BANNERS.

The Society is grateful to Members Linda and Paul Amner of UGP Printers for the generous donation of two new society banners which will help get the Society recognition at the many public events attended through the year.

Valley Conservation Society

doing nothing is not an option

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FILM NIGHT SUCCESS



More than 70 members and their guests enjoyed a nostalgic film night on Saturday 26th February. A wide collection of films were shown by Barry Littlechild. Themes included Village life in Penshurst during the 1950's, a film sponsored by the National Benzol Oil company, keen to promote its products. An award winning colour film showing holiday scenes from the 50's and various other treasures from Barry's historical collection

RESTORATION WORK TO REEDS POND.

The weekly work party has been very busy in spite of the inclement weather at this time of year. The picture shows the footpath leading to Mount Ararat with its fine new chestnut fence. Underneath the clearance has continued revealing a supporting stone wall. This will need renovation in the future (another job for the boys!)



Photo Dennis Usmar

MEMORIAL PLAQUE



A plaque has been added to the memorial bench situated on the Lower Crisbrook Pond. With the spring weather gradually emerging the bench makes a fine place to sit amongst the snowdrops and enjoy the views overlooking the pond, don't forget to take some food for the ducks.

ROYAL WEDDING GARDEN PARTY



AGM MEMBERS ELECTION.

The Annual General Meeting took place on the 19th February 2011. Committee Member Gary Stead indicated that he would like to take a break from his considerable contributions to the Society and was awarded with thanks and a gift from a collection by the existing committee members. Member Peter Hobden of Hayle Mill was duly elected as a replacement for Gary and we would like to welcome Peter, a retired local business man from Hayle Mill to the committee. All other members have been re-elected.

Bryn Cornwell Chair

Jane Holman Vice Chair

David Fleck Secretary

Tony Day Treasurer

Executive Committee: Colin Holman Membership Secretary

Joy Creasey--Maggie Davis--Toni Gilbert--David Hill-- Jill Lee

Alan Smith-- Peter Hobden--Dennis Usmar

REPORTS FROM THE AGM.

Land Management: The committee and the work party had a very productive year. First project was to complete the stone wall restoration to the retaining wall at the boundary of treacle Wood and Hayle Mill road. We then moved on to the rebuilding of the stone wall adjacent to the tunnel outlets at Reeds Pond and the retaining wall next to the bridge opposite Crisbrook House.

Come summer Liveseys' informed us that VCS could manage Hayle Mill woods and they were preparing a license to cover such work. In November they had a change of mind stating it was not acceptable to their insurers.

In the mean time we had started work tidying Bockingford wood. We were later contacted by the management company at Hayle Mill and asked if VCS would manage Hayle Mill pond for payment but we declined the offer.

A second bench kindly donated by Ann King in memory of her husband Dave King has been installed at Lower Crisbrook pond.

Another big project carried out this year was the replacement of the derelict industrial chain link fencing at the boundary of Reeds pond and Mt Ararat with a more rustic looking chestnut paling fence. This exposed a fantastic area of Ragstone wall which is in urgent need of repair. Our thanks to Jim and Maureen from Mt Ararat for the use of electricity (not to mention the lovely cake).

We have planted 125 mixed hedging whips behind the new fence leading up from Mt Ararat bridge which makes a total of 740 young trees planted during our first 10 years plus 300 bluebells, 300 snowdrops and 200 wood anemone.

The major project of the year was the dismantling of the collapsed pond wall adjacent to the sluice at Lower Crisbrook pond, laying new footings, building a new section of wall and shoring up the existing wall. Despite the early arrival of adverse weather, this was a great success and has stopped the leaks on the northern boundary wall of the pond. Whilst digging we exposed more of the foundations at the Old Mill and created a safe path for members to enjoy a walk around this heritage site.

All this work and progress would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and dedication of the regular Tuesday work party and weekend volunteers to whom we owe a debt of thanks.

Development Control: The majority of the Society effort this year has been the objection to the application for a Building Materials recycling Facility in the SBS quarry. The quarry is located in Straw Mill Hill opposite the Fire Service Headquarters. The objections are based on the polluting effect of such a facility so close to the conservation area (dust, heavy lorries, noise). The site has existing consent for light business use and the applicant suggested the new use would be less damaging to the local environment than if the existing permission was exercised. Initially the KCC planning committee gave the application its blessing but following a judicial review it was forced to reconsider all decisions recently taken. Fortunately common sense prevailed during the second hearing and with objections raised by Parish, Borough and County councillors as well as member Gary Stead and the local Tovil residents action group, it has now been rejected. The applicant is entitled to appeal and we await the outcome but we are ready to fight again.

Other significant applications which have received approval are;

- New Archbishop Courtney school in Ecclestone road.
- Two blocks of apartments in Ecclestone road.
- Houses and apartments on both the pub sites The Rose in Farleigh Hill and The Victory in Church street.
- Houses and apartments in the Council depot and park and ride sites in Armstrong road.
- Wind Turbine in East Farleigh.

VCS are continuing to pressure the enforcement control department of the Borough Council over illicit development and members will continue to be updated on a regular basis.

Hayle place development; Although this has remained quiet for some time it is now apparent that some movement is taking place. A ransom strip alongside the concrete road to the top of Postley road has recently been sold by the MBC. There has also been a fresh outline application lodged for 231 dwellings on the Hayle Place site but there are no details available currently on this or the prospect of the tri-partite agreement to share management of the potential nature reserve.

The government is discussing Neighbourhood Development Plans. These have been promoted as a way for communities to have more influence over inappropriate development. However on inspection this scheme is intended for communities to over-rule local government plans only to increase enterprise and housing development not curtail them. Given that developers already have approval for at least another 500 dwellings in the immediate vicinity of the Lower Loose stream valley we would hope that our local government representatives will fight these proposals.

Treasurer's report: You will see from the accounts summary that we appear to have made a profit of only £17.55 this year. However we have already paid some expenses for 2011, including the rent for Boughton Monchelsea Village Hall for our February Film Night, rent for the hall hire for today's AGM and printing of membership cards for 2011. These total some £230, which would give a working surplus of approx £247 for 2010.

We have had quite a bit of expenditure this year, including the work undertaken on repairing the leak in Crisbrook pond, erecting a new fence to Mt Ararat and obtaining for ourselves two certified chain saw operators!

We were able to send Bryn and John on a training course to become chainsaw operators and we owe a thank you to Councillor John Wilson for his contribution from his MBC devolved budget which helped pay for the course and the necessary safety clothing. This training was required by our insurance company, you will have noticed an increase of more than £170 to our premiums for this year. This was partly as extra cover for the chainsaw operators and also because we now have extra areas under land management.

We were successful in obtaining a grant from Grass Roots for £1,350 which helped to pay for the repair of the leak in the wall of Crisbrook pond. Many thanks to Dennis Usmar for his fast work in getting the application submitted on the last day by personally delivering the application. We would also like to the UGP Print Group for their generous donation to our funds and for our new banners.

Another big thank-you goes to John Smith for making bird boxes and tables, which have been sold at a profit.

Lastly, thank-you to all our members who give us very generous donations each year. We try to ensure that the money is used effectively to maintain and conserve our ponds and land.

Loose Valley Conservation Area Partnership Report: The prime purpose of the Partnership is to co-ordinate the activities of the various organisations and land owners that have interests in the Loose Valley Conservation Area and to facilitate communication between them.

The current LVCAP partners are.

Valley Conservation Society

Tovil Parish Council

Loose Amenities Association

Loose Parish Council

Loose Swiss Scouts

Boughton Amenity Trust

Medway Valley Countryside Partnership.

Members Activities in brief:

Loose Amenities Association; have cleared their land of cut scrub and cut back the brambles which enabled the introduction of a flock of Hebridean sheep for conservation grazing. New kissing gates have been installed and fencing improved. Volunteers now work the land on a regular basis.

Swiss Scouts; New fencing, pond de-silting, path clearing and repairs to the Ragstone wall damaged in Salts Lane thanks to a generous donation from Councillor Hotsons budget.

Boughton Amenity Trust; continues to obtain parcels of land to reduce the impact of new housing and retain a rural feel to the area. Efforts to link the two conservation areas are being thwarted by political waffle, but remain our long term aim.

Tovil Parish Council; has had issues with MBC regarding the lack of planning enforcement and with the Highways department regarding the poor quality of the road enhancements through the lower valley.

Loose Parish Council; has been unrepresented since Cllr Roger Thornburgh left the area and his replacement broke his leg.

Medway Countryside Partnership; has assisted other partners in particular LAA with their land management and sheep in the valley.

Invasive species No 6: Creeping Water Primrose.

Ludwigia peploides



This native of South America likes still or slow flowing water. It is quite distinctive in floating form but more care is needed when it is growing in the margins and requires expert opinion. It is best recognised when in flower (July–August). Spreads by seed dispersal and fragments. It has only been found on a few UK sites and has been eradicated on these.

Introduced into Europe as an ornamental and water garden plant it causes severe negative impacts, including out competing native species and clogging waterways. Creeping water primrose is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and it is an offence to plant or otherwise allow to grow in the wild.

CONSERVATION IN THE LOOSE VALLEY THROUGH A CHANGING CLIMATE!



How green is our valley ?



Will your children's children have the joy of green fields, woodlands, waterways and its supported flora and fauna?

Join with us the

Loose Valley Conservation Area Partnership in a discussion evening @

Boughton Monchelsea Village Hall

19th April @ 7.00pm

for a chance to understand the impact that Climate Change

could have on your valley and the surrounding areas. Look into the future and have your say.

How green was our valley



Further information see <http://loosevalley.tripod.com>

REMINDER: Please ensure that you have renewed your subscription for 2011 as this will be the final newsletter for non-renewed members. Thank-you again for all of the generous donations given when renewing. Contributions and ideas for the newsletter are much appreciated.

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