



Annual Environmental Report – January 2016

This is a report of the environmental projects initiated by The Trustees for The Friends of Gedling Country Park. Many of the projects are ongoing and will continue into 2016 and beyond.

Bees

One of our first projects was to introduce native honeybee colonies into the Park.

After consultation with the owners of the Solar Farm (Foresight Group) we reached an agreement for beehives to be sited within the Solar Farm boundary fence. This provided a protected site for the hives and ensures no inconvenience to park visitors.

The Foresight Group provided us with a grant to purchase six beehives, which we have constructed and have collected six local swarms to occupy them, these are now established and despite the unusual winter are alive and well. Due to the time taken for us to organise health and safety induction for the beekeeping volunteers working within the Solar Farm and to construct bases on which to site the hives we decided to retain the bees locally and move onto the Park in early spring. The bees have produced some honey this year which the Friends Group are now selling.

We have also applied for and received in January 2016 a grant from Veolia to purchase a honey extractor to enable us to extract the expected larger quantities of honey during 2016.

The presence of bees within the park will increase the diversity of the habitat and assist in pollinating the local flora so providing a greater number of wildflowers on site. Another extremely important aspect of this project is that it will provide 'The Friends Group' with a sustainable source of income as well as providing a source of local honey, rumoured to be advantageous to Hay Fever sufferers. These beehives will be onsite in Spring 2016 and we have managed to obtain more hives and equipment enabling us to increase our production levels and income. We are also researching into the possibility of sourcing a strain of native black bees which are rumoured to still exist in the UK, the local beekeeping society however informs us this is not so. Should you have any information regarding Black Bees please contact us via our web site.

Flora within the Park

We are extremely lucky to have a very diverse selection of habitats within the park, probably the most important being the alkaline grassland* which covers a large percentage of the area. This habitat type is becoming rarer throughout the Country and we have a responsibility to conserve and manage our areas. It is intended to procure native wildflower seeds of a known provenance to sow within the park thereby improving the diversity of the flora and providing food sources for insect life, particularly bees and butterflies.

With the volunteers we have moved over one-hundred orchids within the park last summer. Three species of native orchids, of the five species and one hybrid so far recorded, were moved from the north-western area that has been taken for housing. The Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera* have successfully survived the move and are showing excellent growth. The other two species, the Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and the Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuschii* are not yet showing any growth (too early in the year) but they should appear during April. We must add that all plant movements were made with the permission of Gedling Borough Council, the landowners and with consultation with and permission from English Nature.



A gift of a native Yew Tree *Taxus baccata* from the Conservation Foundation's 'We Love Yew' campaign has been planted near the Spring Lane entrance to the park. This tree has been propagated from one of the oldest living inhabitants of the Country and hopefully will still be growing one thousand years from now!

Over four-hundred native young trees have been planted along the North-Western boundary of the park to act as a screen for the planned new housing development on Spring Lane. We have requested another four-hundred trees to add to these, ensuring we create a solid natural boundary to the park. The trees, canes and guards were provided, free of charge, by The Woodland Trust as part of their remit to increase tree planting throughout the country (Countryfile presented an article on this project last year). At present we are researching to plant a few larger tree specimens as free standing examples of native species in suitable spaces throughout the park, this will increase our list of trees in the park and will be used for educational purposes as examples of native flora.

**We have rigorously tested soil pH in areas of grassland resulting in results of a alkaline soil >pH 7.5, further measurements are planned for other environments within the park.*

Butterfly Conservation

We have contacted many groups for advice and assistance regarding conservation within the park and without doubt Butterfly Conservation (East Midlands) have provided us with the most tremendous support, both visiting the site and providing help and advice whenever requested. To them, and particularly William Bacon, very many thanks.

As a result of our research and advice received from William we have chosen a site along the Northern boundary, alongside Spring Lane, to create a Butterfly Walk. This was temporarily introduced last summer but plans are now in action to improve this area and provide more facilities for both butterflies and visitors (see 2016 projects). To date twenty-three species of butterfly, five species of day flying moths as well as numerous other insect species, have been recorded.

Grants

The Trustees applied for nine conservation oriented grants during 2015 and have successfully been awarded six of these, the other three not being decided until early 2016. We believe this indicates the support for our plans from the conservation movement within the country.

The awards are as follows:

- From The Postcode Lottery Fund funds for tools and equipment, beehives and accessories and a generator to run Moth trapping evenings.
- From The Woodland Trust four hundred and twenty mixed young native trees, guards and canes.
- From Veolia a motorised honey extractor (still to be purchased)
- From The Conservation Foundation the gift of a Yew Tree
- From The Greenwood Conservation Partnership trees, mulch stakes and guards
- From The Foresight Group six beehives with permission to site them within the boundary of the Solar Farm.

We are awaiting the results of grant applications to Grow Wild for trees, shrubs, wildflower seed, collecting equipment and construction costs for the Butterfly walk area (see 2016 projects); to Nottingham Building Society for shrubs and wildflower seed and to The Woodland Trust for another four-hundred and twenty native trees for the North-western boundary hedge.



Monitoring Wildlife

We require as much data as possible on the flora and fauna of the park this will enable us to better monitor effects of any alterations or changes within the park and to formulate a management plan to preserve and enhance the wildlife environment of the park.

At present our knowledge of the parks wildlife is severely limited and we desperately require volunteers to provide information on any observations of wildlife and conditions within the park and the surrounding area, so please send us your observations via our website.

Volunteers

The Trustees have had an exceedingly busy year and we are at present very occupied with future plans for the park - WE NEED HELP especially volunteers to collate and record information of the parks flora, fauna, weather, alterations and their within the park. Our volunteer base has increased throughout 2015 but we still require and welcome more as we have lots of projects coming on line and others are arising.

Volunteering can be much fun as you can commit as little or as much time as you wish. Families are welcome - during 2016 we have projects to build willow tunnels/houses which are ideal for youngsters. You can remain at home and record and collate park records as we really require these skills.

MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO VOLUNTEERED DURING 2015 - YOUR HELP WAS INVALUABLE AND WE COULD NOT HAVE ACHIEVED THE RESULTS WE HAVE WITHOUT YOUR HELP.

Special thanks must be made to Peter and Linda Wood for their unstinting work and observations throughout the year and to Mark Tyler for providing wildlife records on a regular basis. Thank You.

We intend to hold volunteer days on the following dates for the earlier months of 2016, times will be from 10.30am to 2.00pm. Turn up anytime within this period as details of the projects and where we will be will be posted on our notice board. Hopefully we will again be able to provide a hot drink. Do remember to wear suitable footwear and clothing suitable for working in the park, it is extremely cold when a wind is blowing, particularly during the winter months.

January - Saturday 23rd

February - Sunday 7th
- Sunday 21st

March - Sunday 6th
- Sunday 20th
- Sunday 27th

April - Sunday 10th
- Sunday 17th
- Sunday 24th

From May until October we will usually hold at least two volunteer days per month, details will be posted on our website given you adequate notice of the events.

All these dates, particularly the earlier ones, will be very weather dependent so please check website for updates or notice of cancellations.



Earlier in the year we will probably be working on woodland improvement such as pruning, scrub removal, planting, removing tree guards and creating some willow tunnels and houses.

Without doubt other volunteer days will be required throughout the year for one off and busy projects, times, dates and other relevant information will be posted on our website and park notice board.

It is planned that a member of the Trustees will be present one day on each weekend during the summer months to advise, assist and guide visitors.

Friends Plans for 2016

We will be working closely with Gedling Borough Council to implement the proposed five year management plan for the park. This includes implementing the fencing of grassland areas to protect the rare bird breeding areas and to prevent disturbance during the nesting season by dogs and the public. Fencing will also allow stock to be grazed on the park dramatically reducing the costs of necessary grass cutting and removal (To conserve the grassland areas as wildflower rich meadows regular cutting or grazing is required to prevent grasses and scrub invading the areas, also stock disturbs pasture creating bare areas for wildflower regeneration).

A survey of the drainage and waterways within the park is planned this will assist with making decisions regarding the ponds, lagoons, scrapes and waterways within the area. We have already discovered a hitherto unknown (to us) pond within the woods alongside the Spring Lane boundary. The watercourses within the park are heavily infected with the invasive New Zealand Pigmy Weed *Crassula helmsii* and we do need to formulate a policy to manage this weed and are working with Gedling Borough Council's Parks Department towards a solution to the problem.

More tree planting, to shield the planned housing along the north-western boundary, will take place this spring.

Consultations are taking place to plant shrubs around the small green sub-station to the North-west of the Solar Farm just outside the fencing, hopefully this will disguise this eyesore.

Our main volunteer conservation project for 2016 will be the area of the Butterfly Walk and the woods alongside Spring Lane to the east of the car park entrance (a grant application for funding for this project is being reviewed, results to be announced March 2016). It is planned to cut and remove scrub from the grassland area of the Butterfly Walk, plant native wildflowers suitable as insect food. Shrubs will be incorporated into the existing hedgerows to create a suitable habitat and food source for insects as well as creating a more robust hedgerow.

A dense strip of woodland consisting of nearly 90% self seeded Alder *Alnus glutinosa* scrub runs alongside the area of grassland through which the Butterfly Walk meanders. This has very little conservation value in its present form. Consultation with Butterfly Conservation decided both the woodland and its existing Rides should be opened out to allow more light into the wood to encourage more butterflies, wildflowers, birds and insects. Our plans are to clear glades and pathways through the wood and to create woodland play/learning areas for children. Trees and brush will be hand cleared, woven willow shelters, log seats and interconnecting willow tunnels run between open glades where wildlife can be studied. A greater diversity of native trees and wildflowers will be planted within the woods.

These plans will certainly improve this area of the park for both wildlife and the public, especially children. Work has already commenced on this project so should you wish to become involved and help in any way contact us on our website or just turn up on a volunteer's day. It is planned to involve local schools and youth organisations in growing seeds, planting trees, making bird and bat boxes as well as helping to create the willow structures.



In conclusion we, the Trustees of the Friends of Gedling Country Park, cannot overemphasise the help and co-operation we have received from the Councillors and the Parks Department of Gedling Borough Council and for that a very big THANK YOU!

January 2016

Brian Osborne, Trustee, Friends of Gedling Country Park