

Newsletter



HOW IS THE NATIVE HEDGEROW DOING

A big thank you goes out to the small group of volunteers that have been regularly watering the native hedgerow since it was planted at the beginning of the calendar year.

The team have been out with their watering cans, ensuring that as many of the hedgerow whips survive and grow into a beautiful hedgerow.

The 'watering crew' have battled the searing sun and the majority of the whips have survived the drought.

Also, a thank you goes out to our BHCC Ranger who placed a water bowser on site and has been regularly filling it, so our team have been able to fill their watering cans.

How the whips planted in phase one have coped with the weather, will inform the mix of planting species selected for the remaining section of hedgerow due to be planted in January.

DOLLY'S MEMORIAL BENCH

Dave Bell has had a bench constructed by Men in Sheds to commemorate Dolly Bell, who was the group Chair for many years and a founder member of Benfield Wildlife and Conservation Group.

The bench is a lovely addition to the reserve and is located in an area where the regular volunteering team usually sit for a break, when working on the reserve.

Hopefully, everyone who uses the reserve will take advantage of the bench.



NEW SEATS ON THE RESERVE

Our BHCC Ranger (Sally MacLeod) supplied the wood to replace the two broken seats on the reserve.

With the help of the regular volunteer team, the supporting holes were dug, the seats put in place, the ground levelled and the seat edges sanded off.

Hopefully, you are enjoying them, when taking a stroll around the reserve.

The seats will hopefully allow you to stop and take in the surroundings the reserve offers.



BUSY SUMMER FOR THE CHAIR AND THE RESERVE

We have hosted over nine events on the hill this summer, which is probably a record.

So many of our Friends of Benfield Wildlife and Conservation Group came out to see the reserve in all its glory and the wildlife that it supports.

Thank you everyone for your continued support.

It is extremely difficult to select a single highlight, so we not going to try but will summarise what we have been up to.

Spring talk and AGM

It all started way back in April with our AGM and Spring Talk.

David Taylor from the Friends of the South Downs gave a fabulous, illustrated talk on the nature he had observed and photographed on the Downs. His photographs were stunning.



School visit

In May our Chair hosted year five from Benfield Primary School, who had a lovely sunny day to explore all the nature on the reserve.

One young man even found a glow-worm larvae in a rabbit hole, a cardinal beetle and a dead wood mouse, which caused a queue of young people to come and have a look.



A budding Attenborough perhaps!

Lloyds Bank volunteers

The month of May also saw Lloyds Bank volunteers coming to work on the reserve on one of the hottest days of the year.



LLOYDS



It was over 30 degrees, but they did a grand job clearing the scrub.



Saturday scrub bashing

In June we had a Saturday scrub clear and were joined by people from the local community and some young volunteers, which is always good to see.



Southwick Camera Club

Also, in June we hosted the Southwick Camera Club.



Some members armed with cameras, flashes and tripods spent a lovely couple of hours photographing the flowers, bees and butterflies on the reserve.

Some of their stunning photographs now feature on our Facebook page.



Flower identification walks

We held the first of our flower identification walks in June, with Sally Milne recording over 40 different species of flower, on the reserve.

The sun continued to shine on our events, as it has all summer long.



We had a really good turnout of enthusiastic nature lovers, who wanted to know more about the chalk grassland flowers, that could be found on the reserve.

Those attending, were lead around the reserve, in small groups, by knowledgeable guides.

The guides pointed out small flowers that most people would just walk past.



With the use of magnifying glasses, those attending were able to fully appreciate the detail and delicate parts of the flowers.



The second flower identification walk took place in July.

It was just wall-to-wall sunshine, colourful wildflowers and flitting butterflies.



Glow worm walks

Following the flower identification walks came the ever-popular glow-worm walks.

More detail on the glow-worms and how famous they have become can be found on page 4 of this newsletter.

Moth trapping reveal

A moth trapping and reveal event also, took place in July, in case you thought the diary wasn't full enough.

This was a pretty special event, and all the details can be found on page 5 of this newsletter.

GLOW-WORM WALKS

The ever-popular glow-worm walks took place again this year in June and July and they did not disappoint.

The peak times for glow worms on our reserve is June to mid-July.

We held two glow-worm walks this year, during this period.



The first event was filmed by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) team to feature in their Dark Skies festival in February next year.

Professor Alan Stewart Professor of Ecology at Sussex University led the first walk and the group Chair Sally Wadsworth led the second one.

OUR GLOW-WORMS ARE BECOMING FAMOUS

The press release and article produced by the SDNPA promoted an approach by BBC South East Today's environmental correspondent Fiona Irving, who chose to come and film glow-worms on the windiest night of the summer on the 13 July.

The windy conditions made filming very difficult and tested the cameraman's skills to produce a good film.

They also interviewed Jan, biodiversity officer for the South Downs National Park Authority and Sally our Chair.



BIOLUMINESCENCE

In addition to our glow-worms being featured on national television, our group Chair Sally Wadsworth is also assisting a film company called Passion Pictures, who are producing a documentary on Bioluminescence for National Geographic.

They made an approach after the article was aired on BBC South East Today.

Our group Chair, was asked to collect five Glowing females, which would be filmed and then returned to the site where they were found.

Sally checked with Professor Stewart that this would not harm the glow-worms.

Sally and two volunteer colleagues went onto the reserve to collect the females.



Not only was it a full moon but it was at the very end of the mating season, and they were definitely playing 'hide and seek'.

Even though the female glow-worms were being allusive, the last one of the five was eventually found at midnight.

Once filmed the glow-worms were duly returned to the reserve in good health, the following day.

This is probably not going to be shown for another year, but we will let you know when it is due to be screened.

Not only are our glow-worms now famous they are going international!!

MOTHS AND MUFFINS

This year's event was run slightly differently, with the moth trapping equipment being set up the night before, and the reveal taking place early the following morning.

The moths were released early in the morning before the day heated up.

Thank you to our moth experts Dave and Penny Green from the Sussex Moth Group, for sharing their knowledge and identifying most of the moths caught in the traps.

Dave and Penny took a few of the moths back home with them, to confirm identification.



Once identification was completed, everyone finished the morning off with enjoying a lovely selection of muffins and doughnuts.



MORE ON THE MOTHS

One of the moths identified during the moths and muffins event was an Elephant Hawk moth.

This moth is being shown off in all its glory on the hand of one of the attendees of the event.



SCARCE FORESTER MOTH SIGHTED AGAIN!

This small vibrant green moth was spotted by a volunteer on the reserve, for the first time last year, when a single moth was sighted.

This year three were seen on the reserve, which could indicate that they will colonise the reserve.

The moth is part of the Burnet Moth family and is Nationally Scarce, with only a few areas in Sussex known to have them.



PRIVET HAWKMOTH

During our monthly summer task days, one of our volunteering team, Johnny, found a beautiful adult Privet Hawkmoth, which had just emerged.

These are the largest moths in the UK.

This find on the reserve featured in a press article in the Brighton and Hove Argus, and also in Sussex Life.



Later in the summer, Johnny, also found a Privet Hawkmoth caterpillar. Clearly, he is a magnet for this species.



Bishop Hannington Church CAMEO Group talk

In case you thought having delivered all these varied events, August would be quiet, no such luck.

Our group Chair Sally Wadsworth managed to squeeze in a talk to the Bishop Hannington CAMEO Group on the Wonderful Wildflowers of Benfield Hill.

The talk was very well received, and the church has generously donated £150 to support our work, particularly our hedgerow planting and Dormice.



Network for International Women

Last but certainly not least, the Chair had the privilege of taking the Network for International Women for a walk and picnic in August. This was a return visit as they had enjoyed it so much last year.

Everyone had a wonderful time and enjoyed their picnic under the walnut tree – the only truly shady spot on the reserve.



FUNDING SUCCESS

Sussex Community Foundation (SCF) – Rampion Community Benefit Fund 2026 - £1,000 awarded

In July, we were awarded £1,000 from the SCF towards our native hedgerow project.

This substantial piece of funding will allow us to complete this project. Extending the current hedgerow around the top edge of the reserve. We will be asking for volunteer to help us plant this in January 2027.

Hangleton and Knoll Project – Healthy Neighbourhood Fund 2026 - £395 awarded

We have been awarded much needed core grant funding.

We are able to use this funding to cover a significant part our most expensive 2026 cost – the insurance bill.

Without having Public Liability insurance to cover our volunteers and the work they undertake on site and insurance to cover our equipment, we would not be able to complete our work on the reserve.

National Lottery – All England Environment fund 2026 - £4,398 awarded

Awarded on 28 August just in time for the newsletter!



We made an application to the National Lottery for £4,398, which can be spent over two years.

The funding request covers a variety of expenditure including advertising materials, training, insurance costs, a portable defibrillator, equipment repairs and maintenance.

Thanks go to Kathryn Trower for all her work on the funding applications.

VERY WELCOME DONATION

The local RSPB Brighton and Districts group raise a small amount of money each year, which they donate to local charities.

They appreciate the work that is required to manage the habitat on the reserve and have made us a 'donation' of approximately £100.

They are unable to give us the cash or a cheque but are going to buy us our much needed updated first aid kit, which includes some pieces of equipment that we should have but hope we NEVER have to use, such as a tourniquet and eye wash solution.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

AUTUMN TALK

25 November 2026 19:30 – 21:00

West Blatchington Windmill – Holmes Avenue, Hove, Sussex. BN3 7LH

Subject: Downs to Towns.... the WFCS (Wild Flower Conservation Society)

Led by:

Paul Johnson Chair of the Wild Flower Conservation Society – Brighton and Hove, which is based at Stanmer Park

WEEKLY SCRUB BASHING

Tuesday scrub bashing sessions commence on 15 September 2026

Starting time 10am

All volunteers are welcome

NEXT EDITION OF THE NEWSLETTER

Look out for the next edition of the newsletter in December, when we will bring you all the highlights of the activities undertaken in the Autumn and looking forward to the new calendar year.



Protecting and Promoting
Benfield Hill Local Nature Reserve
30 Years and Counting...

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Join us for...

- Volunteering
- Talks
- Walks
- Surveys
- Projects
- Events

And make a difference!