

**HAWRIDGE & CHOLESBURY COMMONS  
PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

**MINUTES OF THE AGM HELD ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8<sup>th</sup> 2009**

The AGM commenced at 8.00pm, chaired by Linden Bevan-Pritchard, Chairman, and was the 42<sup>nd</sup> in the Society's history.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Charles Firth, Gill & Clive Fleckney, Sue Fletcher, Fletcher Nicholson, Ian Phillips, Francis & Paddy Sanger.

2 WELCOME

The Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, especially any newcomers. She particularly welcomed Rod d'Ayala, the guest speaker for the evening.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS AGM (3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008)

The minutes were agreed by the meeting and signed by the Chairman as being a true and correct record of that meeting.

4 MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman said that last year's Hunt Meet had been a great success and that the Society had been pleased to receive a donation from the Hunt towards its costs.

The issues of the Society's tractor and the Summer Party would be dealt with in the Chairman's report.

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman opened her report by thanking those who had helped the Society in various ways:

- Christine Stott, the owner of the Commons, for everything that she does to ensure that the Commons remain an asset for the whole community.
- The members of the Committee, Lindsay for her advice and John Cooper who resigned during the year.
- Isobel Clark who, assisted by Oliver Parsons, manages the working parties. She also spends much time with the tractor on the Commons.
- Working party attendees and Lindsay for providing the refreshments.
- The many others who put in time outside of the official working parties; in particular Brian Harris, Stephen Cheeld and David Collett.
- Steven Bevan-Pritchard and Stephen Cheeld for making signs to indicate where the permissive rides ran.
- Paul Hembury, Stephen Cheeld and Isobel for their research prior to the renovation of the tractor.
- Windsor Thomas and Martin Barber for their work on the tractor.
- Hemel Hempstead Conservation Volunteers led by Vicky Duxbury, who came to help the Society annually. This year they had worked on the heather regeneration projects.
- Summer Party:
  - Annie and Peter Alberto for offering the use of the paddock at The Full Moon for the Summer Party. They could not have been more helpful.
  - Local businesses and individuals, who had supported the Party: Chiltern Motors, MT Loos, Pauline and David Hawkes, Nanette Street, Ellie Redding, Doreen and John Cooper and Francis Sanger, the MC for the evening. Also members and friends who had provided food and additional marquees.
  - Toby and Amy Phillips who were in charge of the children's activities, using equipment provided by the school, Geoff the postman and Cathy Maund. Katie Thwaites who took photographs and Lindsay's grandson, Sam, and friends Seraphina and Jay, who entertained whilst the Cholesbury Swing Quintet, led by Paul Nicholson, ate their supper. John and Ann Caple who provided entertainment for the children.
  - The Summer Party committee and Joan Barnard for the planning beforehand.

- The several professionals who share their knowledge with the Society. The Chilterns Commons Network, Kath Daly from the Chilterns Conservation Board and Andy McVeigh, the County Council Ecologist.
- David Dennis for the very successful butterfly walk in the summer.
- The editors of Hilltop News for publicity and Steve Clark for managing the website.
- Lastly the Chairman thanked Windsor Thomas for the generous and invaluable help he had given with the tractor over many years. He now wanted to step back from this role to a large extent. To mark his "retirement" the Chairman presented Windsor with a gift to mark the Society's appreciation.

The Chairman then spoke about the two main aims of the Society in managing the Commons – firstly, making sure that all kinds of people could enjoy walking and riding along the paths and permissive rides and, secondly, managing the area for wildlife and plants. The Chairman observed that most residents would agree with the first aim but some were not convinced regarding the second.

#### Heather regeneration

With the second aim in mind the Society had started a heather regeneration project to the north-west of Horseblock Lane. Although local residents were informed about the work, the appearance of the site after the work caused some disquiet. Hopefully the work will bear fruit but the seed will need exposure to harsh winter weather first. The Chairman said that the Society had learned from the experience and will consult more widely if anything other than routine maintenance is considered.

#### Enhancing acid grassland

The Chairman outlined plans to enhance the acid grassland to the north of Horseblock Lane and, at the same time, open up some of the views that had been obscured by trees. The idea was to remove some of the larger trees that would eventually cast dense shade thus preventing the finer grasses thriving. The tractor would then have a clear run to cut and collect grass and flowers once they had set seed.

#### Tree management

Trees that are reaching maturity, or are weak and spindly due to being too close together, remain a cause for concern. Christine Stott had been in conversation with The Forestry Commission to see if they could provide a solution to the problem trees at the edges of roads, paths and rides.

The Chilterns Conservation Board has applied for a wide-ranging Heritage Lottery Fund grant to help owners and custodians of Commons with their management. If successful, this may allow the Society to undertake some work on the Commons. However, the Society would be competing for a share of any grant with other Commons in the area.

#### Unofficial barriers

The Chairman commented that for much of the year unofficial barriers had been built beside the permissive ride that runs to the north-west of Stoney Lane, presumably to stop horses churning up the nearby footpath. To make it clear where horses should go, the Society had removed some low branches that were obstructing the ride and put up signs on three trees.

#### Society tractor

The Society's tractor had been renovated mechanically, including a reconditioned engine, during the year. This had been decided as a better course of action than buying a new tractor. The present tractor has great manoeuvrability and was a perfect size for the work it does on the Commons – finding a new one that did the job as well would have been difficult. The Society had received a grant of £3,000 from the Sustainable Development Fund and a further £300 from the Chilterns Conservation Board – these sums had made a significant contribution to the cost of the renovation. The tractor's bodywork requires refurbishment and it was hoped to start this early in 2010.

#### First aid course

Isobel Clark and Graham Kersting had organized a first aid course which had been attended by six members of the working parties and six other local people engaged in conservation work. The Society had received support from the Chilterns Conservation Board for the course.

#### Chainsaw operators

The Society's chainsaw operators needed to have refresher courses if their insurance was to remain valid. This would be expensive but it was hoped to receive a contribution to the costs from the Sustainable Development Fund.

## Summer Party

The Summer Party had seen a new venue this year – the paddock at The Full Moon. The change had been made as the Committee had concerns about costs when the financial situation was very uncertain and the support of sponsors from previous years could not be relied upon. This year's event had been very successful. However, the Committee was considering having a different kind of social occasion next year, although no decision had been taken on what form it should take. There were many other events taking place in the village in the summer months and something in the colder months may be more appreciated. The Chairman asked that if anyone had any ideas for a different format would they let her know.

## 6 SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Secretary reported that there had been five committee meetings during the year but no extraordinary meetings.

The Secretary thanked those involved in organising the Summer Party and wished Windsor a happy retirement.

## 7 TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer reported that members were down slightly (153 from 156), but the number of families as members was up slightly.

Income: The Summer Party had been very successful financially and socially. Grants totalling £3,300 had been received from the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Sustainable Development Fund, which had gone towards heather regeneration, stump grinding, new posts, and the tractor overhaul. "Other donations" was mainly in respect of wood from the Commons. Bank interest was much lower than in the previous year because of much reduced interest rates.

Expenditure: "Commons clearance" was down compared with last year as a provision of £1,200 had been included in last year's accounts for work which was not, in the event, done. The largest item of expenditure was the tractor overhaul. However, the work was not yet finished and a further £3,500 or so was needed to be spent on refurbishing the bodywork.

The overall financial position for the year was a deficit of £1,971.74, but there were reserve funds of just over £8,000.

The Treasurer concluded by thanking Adrian Sparkes for his work as auditor and said that Adrian was willing to stand again for the coming year.

After the Treasurer had finished John Garner asked how the £525 on heather regeneration had been spent. The reply was that this had been for the scraping off thatch to a depth of several inches over an area of around 1/3 of an acre and moving it to a suitable position.

## 8 ELECTIONS

The Officers and Committee for 2009-10 were elected as follows:

Chairman	Linden Bevan-Pritchard
Vice-Chairman	Lindsay Griffin
Secretary	Graham Kersting
Treasurer	Mike Fletcher

Committee members:

David Barnard  
John Caple  
Steve Cheeld  
Isobel Clark  
Paul Hembury  
Veronica Mash  
Sue Phillips

Honorary auditor  
Adrian Sparkes

## 9 DISCUSSION/QUESTION SESSION

1. Mike Wallis asked how big an area was to be treated in the heather regeneration project. There were no plans for further work at present.
2. Mike Wallis asked why English broadleaved trees were to be cut down whilst leaving silver birches which he said were, in woodland terms, a weed? It was explained that as they became larger the broadleaved trees would cast a lot of shade and would also drop a lot of leaves in

autumn, both of which were detrimental to the acid grassland in the area. The silver birches were relatively short-lived but these could be removed if that was desired. The intention was to improve the areas where acid grassland was found, but there was no intention to extend these areas.

3. Windsor Thomas suggested that the Society should set a date and time for local residents to inspect the area where the work was to take place. The Chairman thanked Windsor for his proposal.
4. Tim Watts commented that he had a similar situation on golf courses some years ago where it was found that leaves from silver birches were found to smother heather.
5. Oliver Parsons asked about the Society's present policy for the "derelict land" at the Chesham end of the Commons. Christine Stott said that she had met with the Forestry Commission (FC) recently and was hoping to get some help from the FC in managing the woodland areas. Various grants were potentially available but before any could be applied for the Commons would need to be added to the Rural Land Registry. Both the Chesham end and an area near Braziers End needed work on them. Christine said she would let people know when she had more information

The formal meeting closed at 21:08

- 10 After a break, the Chairman thanked Paul and Emily for organising the refreshments before introducing the evening's speaker – Rod d'Ayala. The following is a summary of the main points from Rod's talk.

Rod used to work for Pond Conservation but is now a self-employed contractor in nature conservation in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. He has worked in reserves, woodland, grassland and wetlands.

Rod's talk was entitled "Ecology of conservation and management of ponds".

Pond Conservation is a leading body in Europe for pond ecology.

A pond is less than 2ha in area, whilst a lake is greater than 2ha. Lakes, being fairly large, tend to be deep with stratification of water and wave action. Ponds have no stratification or wave action. 1m<sup>2</sup> is the smallest practical working area for a pond.

Various types of ponds:

- Balancing pond – collects rain water;
- Mill pond – dammed river used to drive a mill wheel;
- Pingo – shallow pit caused by melting ice; generally round in shape.

What makes a good pond for wildlife?

- Good water quality – not good if enriched or dirty. Road run-off and field run-off are not good – nor is duck poo;
- Areas of open water and a variety of habitats.

The "drawdown zone" is the area between the summer low water mark and the winter high water mark – specialised plants live here.

Various pond plants:

#### Good plants

- Ragged robin;
- Soft rush – grows at the high water mark;
- Celery leaf buttercup – only germinates in bare mud; needs a pond to dry out;
- Water purslane;
- Staff root – quite rare; only germinates after a pond has dried out but needs water to grow;
- Bog pond weed – floats on or just below water surface;
- Float grass (floating sweet grass) – important for aquatic life;
- Yellow iris – needs bare mud to germinate;
- Reed mace – specialist invertebrates live in its seed pod, stem and roots.

#### Bad plants

- Bog bean – not good for village ponds as it will out-compete in these circumstances;

- Water fern – smothers ponds and stops oxygen getting to the water beneath. There is a beetle which will eat it;
- Parrots feather – takes over in a pond;
- New Zealand pygmy weed (also known as Australian Swamp Cress) – bad news; it grows on banks, is evergreen and kills other plants and will extend into water. However, it doesn't like shade.

Various pond animal life:

- Daphnia water flea
- Horse leech
- Great water diving beetle
- Dragon flies
- Common darter
- Southern hawkker – likes dead wood to lay eggs
- Amphibians:
  - Frogs – mallards eat spawn from frogs; grass snakes like frogs, toads and newts.
  - Toads – the male is smaller; female lays strings of spawn around plants. Toads have problems in that they breed in big ponds but then disperse over a wide area. In getting back to their breeding ponds the toads have to cross lots of roads; this is a particular problem at dusk. Toads are suffering from a lack of proper winters and are declining rapidly in the UK.
- Newts:
  - Smooth newt – 15-17cm in length. Males have a head-to-tail crest but not the females. Both have spots on the throat. Not nocturnal.
  - Palmate newt – 7-8cm in length. These like acid soil. They do not have much of a crest and have no spots on the throat. Not nocturnal.
  - Greater crested newt – common in the UK but rare in the rest of the world. These have white speckles and an orangey-yellow belly. Nocturnal.

Newts only lay eggs one-by-one not in batches. Eggs are laid in leaves at the bottom of a pond as well as around the edges. Kingfishers, herons and moorhens all eat newts.
- Water shrews – can live in ponds and on the land.
- Bats like ponds for feeding over.
- Comma butterfly – males feed on the salts of drying ponds.
- Cross bills – need mature conifers and water; drink 3-4 times a day.
- Soldier flies – live in wet areas but not water.

A perfect pond for humans does not equal a good pond for wildlife.

Nothing lives in open water. Life is in the leaves at the bottom of the pond. Clearing the leaves means animals living in them will die, they will not crawl back in.

Before managing a pond it is necessary to find out what is in it first. It can take a couple of years to get a reasonable understanding of what is going on.

If a pond is good already then small changes may be introduced at the margins to provide variation.

A Defra survey found that only 8% of ponds were in good condition.

Ponds are the most species-rich habitats on earth. Clean ponds are easier to create than rivers – a river catchment area is too big and picks up too much pollution.

Farmoor Reservoir pond complex (owned by Thames Water) – this is one pond in winter but dries to form several ponds in summer. The ponds may be viewed from a hide.

Herons walk, not fly, into ponds. They will not walk over trip wires set at the correct height.

Don't put tap water into a pond as it is high in nitrates and phosphates which encourage algae.

The informal session closed at 22:38.