

The Friends of Barnet Countryside Centre Chair's Report, July 2013

Much progress has been made in many areas of the Centre's work in the last year.

The Reserve

We have been delighted to have recruited many new volunteers this year – we now have 67 active volunteers of all ages. On Monday afternoons the site has up to 10 volunteers working on a range of activities, either on the reserve or in the classroom, and the monthly Sundays are also well supported. We have been able to send volunteers for training on First Aid and Strimming courses - many thanks to the Skills Training Centre for their help here. Waitrose Whetstone sent six of their staff to work with us, and as a result we now have 3 more long-term volunteers.

Following the April 2012 Arborological Survey, a significant number of trees have been trimmed or felled by outside contractors, and only the lower priority trees remain to be dealt with. However, this is expensive work and not appropriate for volunteers to do.

Our four ponds have all had substantial time spent on their maintenance, and are now much better prepared for school visits – as ever, pond-dipping is a very popular activity!

On the negative side, the winter weather was not encouraging, and some planned school visits had to be re-arranged. We also had another water leak in the main supply pipe, but the repair has proved effective, and we took the opportunity to test the quality of the water.

Educational work

One of our primary aims is to provide activities for local young people to educate and inspire them in appreciating the natural world. School visits have increased this year to 53 and schools are pushing for visits in the Autumn Term. The feedback from the children and teachers is wonderful! Congratulations are also due to Annabel for successfully gaining her Master's degree in Environmental Management. You will see that the classroom is now more attractive than ever, and we have been able to buy more equipment and resources to increase the effectiveness and enjoyment of the sessions. The WRAP waste-free lunch challenge has proved particularly popular, and Annabel is providing the teachers with worksheets and other materials so that the children's enthusiasm can be capitalised on when they are back in school.

The arrangements for the Wildabout Nature Club have been modified and are now themed drop-in sessions for families, still held once a month. The last meeting, about bats, had a much improved attendance.

We are expanding our educational work this year and have two year 10 students from Mill Hill County School on Work Experience, and they are enjoying themselves a great deal as well as proving useful helpers to the Centre.

Events

Immediately after the 2012 AGM, the July **BioBlitz** took place. This was a wonderfully successful event, in spite of the somewhat disappointing weather, with many outside experts joining us to show us how to conduct effective monitoring and give us a comprehensive picture of the plant and animal life in the reserve.

In October we made our contribution to the **CSV 'Make a Difference Day'** by working on the meadow. Many of our established volunteers came along, and it was good to have support from

others who had never visited the site before. The meadow was transformed, and we are going to maintain it appropriately to add to our diversity of environments.

The **Autumn half-term's activity** was 'Pumpkins, Bats and Jumping Jacks', and this proved very popular, with 40+ children and their parents or carers.

In January 2013 we held our customary **Quiz Night** at the Pennefather Hall, which as usual was well attended and very enjoyable, in March we held our annual **Spring Event**, and in May Bob Husband led a **Dawn Chorus**.

Several long-serving Trustees got together during the winter to plan our special **21st Birthday celebrations**. This was held on Sunday 12th May, with over 160 visitors. A definitive history of the Centre was well displayed in its own room, and we were able to display Noah's Ark's plans for its Hospice and our purpose built Environment Centre. We were delighted that Theresa Villiers, our local MP, was able to attend and cut the cake, which had been decorated with a map of the centre. Special activities for children were much appreciated by the many families that visited.

On Saturday 22nd June we contributed to the **High Barnet Summer Festival** by opening the site, and the sale of refreshments and plants raised some useful funds.

These varied events are a very important part of the Centre's work – not just because they contribute to our funds, but because they increase local families' awareness of our work and help us meet many of our aims. It would not have been possible to run any of these without the willing support of so many trustees and volunteers, for which we are very grateful.

Funding

As you can see from the Accounts, we raise money in a variety of ways, but we are particularly appreciative of the donations from two bodies, the Hadley Trust and the Ernest Cook foundation. It was this which enabled us to contract with Annabel for her services throughout the year. The Hadley Trust is continuing to support us financially. We also obtained money from the Waitrose Community Matters scheme. We have put in an application to the John Lyon's Charity to enable the educational work to continue. Their Grants Manager came to visit us recently on a busy Monday afternoon and encouraged us to put in an application.

The new Environment Centre

We have very encouraging news for the future : Noah's Ark have secured a very substantial donation which covers all the costs of building our new Centre as well as a contribution towards demolishing the existing buildings. We have just heard that the planned start date is the end of October / beginning of November, with an estimated time of six months for completion of our building. We look forward to working with London Wildlife Trust in ensuring that our work can continue as fully as possible during the construction phase, that the new building will contain all the facilities that we would like, and that once in the new building we will be able to expand our activities in various ways.

In summary, then, it has been very successful year for the Centre, and we are looking forward to being able to meet next year in 'our' wonderful new building.

Dick Elms

Chair of the Trustees.