

## **Friends of Barnet Environment Centre: Chair's Newsletter, July 2019**

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As usual, there has been a lot happening over the last six months.

The Nature Reserve is looking wonderful, a fact that is really appreciated by all who have visited this year. A big 'thank you' to our excellent volunteers who continue to work very hard to keep the Reserve safe for all the visitors and to ensure that the groups of children who come from the local schools have a great experience on site. We have been fully booked this term and Caroline and Sam, our team of teachers, have also been kept very busy. A lot of help has been provided by work experience students from the College of North East London (CONEL) over this summer term and our school groups have really appreciated their presence.

Volunteer numbers have again been very encouraging, though numbers on Saturdays and Sundays are fairly low – so if you feel like helping out, please do come along. Work is mainly to keep the site safe for all visitors and to make sure the class groups get the most out their visit, but there are a lot of other jobs people can do. Volunteers help with opening and closing the Centre on days when schools visit, they help with our Open Afternoons and Drop-In sessions, they help us distribute leaflets and they help organise other events, such as our ever popular Quiz (soon after Christmas). So there is a lot to do and if you have some time to spare, please come along and talk to us to see how you could best fit into the team.

The Drop-In sessions on one Saturday afternoon and one Sunday morning a month (see below) have been reasonably successful. We will continue to run those through to September and will then review their effectiveness. As last year, we were open for both days of the Barnet Medieval Festival so that people could either just take a leaflet away with them or, if they had the time and energy, take a map and do a self-guided tour of the Reserve. About 125 people visited the Reserve over the two days, so that was a successful exercise again. Thank you to the volunteers who helped out on those days.

The old donkey shed has now been fully converted to a bird hide and the area around it has been planted with bird friendly plants – the hide will be in use across the summer. This work was started on our Make A Difference Day (MADD) in October. We held another MADD in March, this time to work on the dead and dying blackthorn bushes, particularly on the North Path. The area now looks a lot tidier, with dry hedging along the path, and the Blackthorn Arch has been preserved and looks as good as ever.

Gristwood and Toms, a local tree care company, have done a good job of making the trees on the Reserve safe so that our educational work could continue.

Another of our projects, the Butterfly Corner, is really coming into bloom and we hope for some good weather to attract more butterflies to the area. Our Butterfly Count also continues and we are keeping records of other wildlife visitors who find their way to the Reserve.

We have also welcomed the Barnet Beekeepers back onto the Reserve – two hives are now installed and we look forward to welcoming more bees onto the site in the near future. Now that the old willow tree in the hive area has been cut down, the bees have a much more open approach route to the hives. One of the themes of our next Open Afternoon (see below) on July 7<sup>th</sup>, is Bees; there will be Bee-related activities for children and the Barnet Beekeepers will be available to answer questions and to sell their honey.

Our annual Dawn Chorus walk at the beginning of May was a great success again. 27 bird species were identified and 14 people attended. It was a beautiful morning but there was ice on the meadow grass! Thanks yet again to Bob Husband of the RSPB for leading the walk and to Katherine Johnson for providing another excellent breakfast.

Corporate groups have continued to visit the Reserve, working on projects to maintain the site and to build in ever more interesting features for our Education Managers to use. Two more corporate groups are booked in to work on the Reserve over the next few weeks.

The Noah's Ark Hospice should be opening in July and we continue to have meetings with their senior staff to ensure the smooth running of the whole site. FoBEC is moving forward with the project to upgrade the paths on the site to enable wheelchair users, both from Noah's Ark and from our local schools and community, to access all the exciting environmental possibilities.

The weather so far this summer has been challenging but there have been no major problems, either with drainage or the cutting back of summer growth. No serious damage resulted from the heavy winds we experienced in the early part of the summer. All our machines have been serviced by a dedicated team of volunteers ably led by Peter Stern, and a big vote of thanks goes to Peter and his colleagues. We now have a new notice board erected outside the Environment Centre (thanks to Dick Elms and John Sawkins) and this will have information and news of upcoming events. Our Facebook page moves from strength to strength: thanks to Melvyn Dresner for all his hard work on that and for getting us known to a wider audience.

Finally, please remember our Open Afternoons in July (7<sup>th</sup>) and September (22<sup>nd</sup>), both 2.30 to 4.30pm. We also have Drop-In sessions on Saturdays 17<sup>th</sup> August and 21<sup>st</sup> September (both 1.30-4pm) and Sundays 4<sup>th</sup> August and 1<sup>st</sup> September (both 10am – 12.30pm). Information about all our activities can be found on our website: [www.fobec.org.uk](http://www.fobec.org.uk). If you would like to come to any event or if you would like to volunteer to do any of the jobs listed above, then please come along – you will be made very welcome.

I hope the summer is a good one for you. Thank you for your continued support and we look forward to seeing you at the Environment Centre during 2019.

Bernard Johnson

Chair of Trustees

Friends of Barnet Environment Centre