



**Friends of Barnet Environment Centre CIO
Charity no. 1165515**

Annual Report: September 2018-August 2019

The aim of the Friends of Barnet Environment Centre is to advance the education of school age children and of the public in natural history and nature conservation, to welcome a diversity of visitors and enabling them to gain a positive attitude, lasting interest in and an appreciation of the natural environment. We also aim to maintain and develop the ecological and educational value of the Byng Road nature reserve in Barnet.

We have had another excellent year of Educational visits. 1980 children from 54 schools and 12 youth groups have visited along with 385 adult helpers. All school visits were from Primary Schools except for 2 secondary visits. There has been excellent feedback with all schools giving good or very good scores on all criteria (booking procedure, teaching quality, suitability for the group, learning outcomes met). A typical comment is 'We love visiting the Environment Centre! The wide range of hands on activities and learning experiences fit in perfectly with our curriculum.' The highlight of the year was regular viewings of grass snakes in the meadow.

Caroline Gellor, our Environmental Education Manager, is working hard to get back to full fitness following her major operation, but in the meantime, we are fortunate to have the services of Sam McCabe providing regular cover for Caroline. Sam has fitted in very well with life and work here at the Environment Centre and is highly thought of both by schools and our volunteers. Bookings for 2019/20 school year are already looking good and we are working on increasing the number of secondary schools visiting the Centre. The College of North East London (CONEL) sent us two work experience students a week for much of the summer term and they were a great help to Caroline and Sam.

Our Community Open Afternoons, new public drop-in during volunteering sessions and Battle of Barnet Open House weekend have gone from strength to strength this year. 150 people walked around the Reserve during the Battle of Barnet weekend and 80 people have visited on the Drop-In weekends (one interesting piece of feedback from visitors is that 'they preferred the peace and quiet of the drop-in sessions'). We have also held a dawn chorus walk, a very popular bat event and a half term activity day.

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To facilitate all of this, our volunteers have worked extremely hard to keep the Reserve looking wonderful and to keep it safe for visitors as well as developing the site to open up new experiences for everyone. Major projects this year have been the completion of the bird hide (out of the old Donkey shed) and planting bird friendly plants nearby, renewing Bottle Pond, work by Gristwood and Toms to make sure the trees were safe, clearing an area to accommodate bee hives and getting the blackthorn on the North Path under control (Make A Difference Day on 9th March). We were very pleased to welcome the Barnet Beekeepers and their hives (4 currently) back onto the Reserve. An area beside Crab Apple Dell was prepared for them and the bees seem very happy with their new territory. Alongside all that, work has continued on the meadow and in the Centre Garden, there has been new planting in the grass verge outside the Centre entrance and general maintenance has, of course, continued. The butterfly corner has had quite a lot of work done on it over the last year and one of our volunteers has carried out an excellent survey of the butterflies and moths on site this summer.

The site is owned by Noah's Ark Children's Hospice and the hospice building was opened on Thursday, 26th September 2019. We have again supervised several Corporate Groups who are volunteering for Noah's Ark Children's Hospice by carrying out work on the Nature Reserve – they have done a great job clearing undergrowth and keeping paths free of weeds.

In addition to working on the nature reserve and maintaining our tools, our volunteers have helped with the setting up and clearing up for school visits, the organisation of open days, supervision of the corporate groups, publicity, and many administrative tasks. There were 2,706 recorded volunteer hours caring for the nature reserve and approximately 2,000 on other tasks.

So, these are very exciting times with a lot going on to make the Barnet Environment Centre and Nature Reserve a really important local community resource. I am sure the next 12 months will be full of new challenges, but I think we are in a strong position to meet those challenges and to continue to make the site more widely accessible to interested people in our local area.

Bernard Johnson

Chair, Friends of Barnet Environment Centre

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