



Happy New Year!

CHAIRMAN'S LAST MESSAGE-*Ian Watson*

I retired as chairman at the end of the year after 13 years in the job. It's time to hand over to a younger man before I get too old and stupid.

Luckily, we've found the right man for the job in Nigel Daley who is a teacher and lives in Chorleywood.

I've known Nigel for many years. He was at school with my children at St. Clements Dane, Chorleywood at a time when Jenni, my wife, was on the staff. He became head boy. He is already known to some of our members from his work on our work parties. So, let's all wish him good luck and every success.

For my part I will continue to work on the reserve.

It's a good time for Nigel to take over as a lot is planned for 2017. The aim is to get our considerable financial reserves spent on projects that will improve Stocker's as a nature reserve. The committee has felt a little guilty at having so much money lying fallow. In 2017 under Nigel we're going to do something about it.

OTHER RETIREMENTS (SNIFF!)

We've lost 3 members of our committee this year – Andrew Moon, Rob Mitchell (Mitch) and Bill Sylvester.

'Mitch' has retired because his heart won't let him do physical work any longer. He leaves a legacy of wonderful work on the reserve – fences, gates, tern rafts, dead hedges strengthening and planting, hide roofs etc. etc.

As an engineer, he insisted on precise and accurate measurement – not for him wonky gates or fences sloping the wrong way. I personally will miss him greatly – we did a lot of good work together- always under his curmudgeonly direction. But he had a heart of gold.

Bill Sylvester found being hard of hearing made committee work difficult, so he resigned but carried on working for FoSL: he was a work party regular, he also kept our joining leaflets well distributed and in so doing picked up a lot of litter to keep the reserve looking good.

Finally, **Andrew Moon** who moves to Suffolk in January (he'll only be a few miles from our former and great, warden Richard Drew, not a bird in Suffolk will go unspotted!) Andrew was our wildlife recorder and his annual bird report was a valuable, informed and important document. We have annual bird reports going back to the 1970s. Andrew was an original committee member of FoSL at our beginnings in 1990. He was an immensely qualified 'birder'

being at various times chairman of the London Natural History Society Records committee, Editor of the London Bird Report, Recorder for Ornithology in the London Area, Partner in Bird line Southeast, Member of the Rare Birds Panel of Herts Natural History Society and the Buckinghamshire Bird Club. Phew! We'll miss him.

We now need a bird recorder who will also write the annual Bird Report

Apply to Dick Beeden, Ian Watson or our new chairman Nigel Daley.

MEETING WITH THE TRUST- *Ian Watson*

Dick Beeden and I met with the Trust at St Albans on the 14th October. Present were Director Lesley Davies, Dr Tom Day, Head of Living Landscapes and our old friend Rob Hopkins, our reserve Manager.

Recently the Trust were granted security of tenure by Affinity Water in the form of a 5 -year agreement with some funding.

HMWT are putting together a forward plan and would like our input. We've got plenty of ideas (and the funds to back them up) This should mean that we'll get the go-ahead to do things that we've been pressing for in the last 2 or 3 years such as good signage that spells out simply and clearly the rules of the reserve and the expected behaviour of visitors to it; also, cattle on the reserve to get our meadows cropped and filled with wild flowers.

It was a good meeting but plenty of work ahead.

SUBSCRIPTIONS - *Dick Beeden*

It's that time of year again. Please get your subscriptions off to Dick Beeden as soon as possible.



Our aim this year is to run down our reserves with work to improve Stocker's, so every penny is needed. Please send your £5 (and any donations) to Dick Beeden 1 Finch Lane Bushey WD23 3AH. There is a renewal form with all the details with this newsletter.

WORK ON THE RESERVE

Work Party Sunday October 2nd - Ian Watson

A small party did some useful work. We cleared the ground in front of the hedge at the canal entrance to the reserve and began the job of coppicing the hazels behind the hedge. this will stop them becoming trees and encourage them to produce 'withy' which we use in hedge layering. Much undergrowth was produced which we burnt in a very effective bonfire.



Thanks, go to Dawn Goodair, Tony and Sheila Lee, Nigel Daley and Ian Watson

Work Party Sunday November 6th- Nigel Daley

On a cool Sunday morning, Jack Westbrook and Markus Kang repaired a fence by Kingfisher Hide. Sheila Lee, Evelyn Fox and Nigel Daley carried out some coppicing of the hazel trees area near to the Stockers House entrance to the lake. We are planning on using the hazel stakes for hedge layering around Stocker's Lake over the coming months.

Work Party Sunday December 4th- Ian Watson

Another small party which completed the job of coppicing the hazels. This also produced more excellent posts for dead hedging. We also cleared the area where the large bittercress grows. Brambles and stinging nettles were beginning to take over. Stocker's is the only place in Hertfordshire where large bittercress is found.

Thanks, go to Steve Cohen, Nigel Daley, Evelyn Fox, Tony and Sheila Lee, Jack Scruton and Ian Watson. (It was good to see Steve and Jack again. It's been a long time!)

Work on the Margaret Partridge Plot

This is the strip of land on the river Colne opposite the car repair works at the Springwell end of the reserve. FoSL members purchased it a couple of years back.

We have now erected a lockable gate with a little fencing at the entrance in Springwell Lane.

We've also erected a buffer of tree branches on the bank of the plot where the river hits it with some force. When we took over this part was protected by dilapidated corrugated iron. Very ugly, so we removed it.

Work Party Sunday January 8th- Ian Watson

Our work party continued the good work by clearing spaces and planting 9 alders (very good winter feeding for small birds) We also thickened up our fence with a bit of hawthorn and dog rose. Finally, we cleared the site of corrugated iron sheets – leaving one or two strategically placed to give living accommodation to small mammals and reptiles.

Thanks, go to Dawn Goodair, Emma Brading, Jack Westbrook, Nigel Daley Ian Watson.

EVENTS ON THE RESERVE

Survey of Butterflies at Stocker's Lake 2016

The recording scheme

As in previous years, a dedicated band of enthusiasts under the leadership of Barbara James have recorded the number of butterflies seen in 12 transects around the lake each week between April and September. The recorders enter their results directly onto the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme database, one of the world's largest butterfly and moth recording schemes with records countrywide. Once again, we have some interesting results.

Total Butterflies counted by year

Butterfly counts at Stocker's Lake are now available for 8 years in 2 periods, 1997-1999 and 2012-2016.

It has been widely reported in the media that 2016 was a very bad year for butterflies, and this is confirmed by our data showing that only 474 butterflies were counted around the lake, 28% down on last year, but thankfully above the disastrous count in 2012. Although bad, our results are better than for the country as a whole reported by Butterfly Conservation (see below).

The National picture

Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count held each summer states that in 2016 "Common butterflies saw



their numbers collapse over the summer despite the UK experiencing weather conditions that usually help them to thrive. Widespread species such as **gatekeeper, comma and small copper** experienced their worst

summers in the project's history and were down 40%, 46% and 30% respectively compared to last year.

The **small tortoiseshell** saw a 47% drop in numbers and **peacock** slumped by 42% with both species recording their second worst years. Numbers of the colourful **peacock** have now dropped from an average of 3.6 individuals per count in 2013 to just 0.5 per Count in 2016, a six-fold decrease over three years.

Participants also saw the lowest number of butterflies per count since the scheme began with an average of just 12 butterflies spotted. These figures were even lower than those experienced during the cold and wet disaster summer of 2012 – the worst year on record for UK butterflies".

The 4 most common butterflies counted in England by order were **large white, small white, meadow brown**

and **gatekeeper** which at Stocker's Lake were ranked 2nd, 1st, 4th and 7th respectively.

A chart showing the top 10 butterfly species counted at Stocker's Lake in 2016, and how their ranking has changed since 2012 can be seen with other charts on the FoSL Web Page.

Grassland species meadow **brown** and **gatekeeper** both suffered large falls since last year, while **speckled wood** and **orange tip** did relatively well

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Working Parties for 2017

We welcome any members who would like to get more involved in practical conservation work. The work parties last about 2½ hours. Please bring wellies/boots and strong gloves also rakes and garden cutters if you can.



Working Parties 2017

Sunday January 8th 2017
Sunday February 5th 2017
Sunday March 5th 2017
Sunday April 2nd 2017
Sunday September 3rd 2017
Sunday October 1st 2017
Sunday November 5th 2017
Sunday December 3rd 2017
All start at 10.00am

Meet: usually by Stocker's House (next to Stocker's Lock) but it is a good idea to check with Sarah Coombs (01923 779008) before the date in just case we have changed this meeting place.

2017 AGM

The **AGM** will take place at 7.30pm on Thursday April 6th 2017

Rickmansworth School, Scots Hill.

Speaker: Lesley Davies, Director of the Herts and Middlesex Trust, will be giving a talk on the Trust's work and the new 5 year plan for Stocker's Lake.

Thanks again to the school for their kindness in letting us have their hall.

Wildfowl Walks

Sunday January 15th 2017
And
Sunday February 12th 2017

Guided walks to look at wintering wildfowl on the Lake.

Meet: 10am on the Causeway between Stocker's Lake and Bury Lake

Heron & Egret Watch

Sunday April 9th 2017 1 pm - 4pm

Our annual look at herons, egrets and their young

Meet: on the Causeway between Stocker's Lake and Bury Lake

COMMITTEE

Nigel Daley (<i>Chairman</i>)	01923 282844
Ian Watson (<i>Vice chair, work parties</i>)	01923 282136
Dick Beeden (<i>Treasurer & membership</i>)	020 84219958
Sue Sanderson (<i>Secretary</i>)	01923 445541
Simon Jones (<i>Web Site</i>)	01923 285763
Trish Jeneid (<i>Newsletter editor, posters</i>)	
Sarah Coombs (<i>Volunteers organiser</i>)	01923 770221
Required: Wildlife recorder, fundraiser, leaflet distributor and recruiting officer	