



Happy New Year to all of our FoSL Members!

CHAIRMAN'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE

Nigel Daley

What a year it has been! Our members have done so much. Where do I start? We have had 11 volunteer work parties who have accomplished much. One of them was attended by Cllr Paula Hiscocks, Chair, 3 Rivers DC who has become a real supporter of FoSL.

We have run 6 nature walks for water birds, spring warblers, herons, egrets, butterflies and dragonflies and wild flowers. Thanks to Linda Ascroft, Dick Beeden et al. Barbara James and Ray Buckton have organised our annual weekly April-September butterfly survey. We fenced and gated 3 of our meadows and introduced cattle to prepare the ground for wild flowers.

Emma Brading has not only converted a wartime pillbox into a bat roost but has been involved with the Trust and Patty Briggs in bat surveying and putting up 38 bat boxes. Russell Ball has organised recruitment days which have produced 32 new paid-up members. He has also led a group of members who check the mink rafts every week. Bob Sherren has set up a group of "cattle lookers" to help our grazier. Steve Carter has again produced his excellent annual bird report.

We have set up on Face Book. Simon Jones, our webmaster, is responsible for our outstanding website. Dick Beeden is making good progress with our nest cameras.

Our local Indian Jain community has joined up with us to pay for and plant 150 trees on the reserve over the year. We have also raised £13,850 from outside sources to help pay for what we do.

We now have our largest committee ever – but every member has a specific job to do. It is not just a talking shop.

All this makes me very proud to be Chairman of FoSL – a charity that does so much work in conserving and improving Stocker's Lake as a nature reserve and in involving the general public in Rickmansworth and surrounding districts.

FoSL Wins Top Award

At the Rural Living Awards evening at County Hall, Hertford, organised by the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE), FoSL received the top award "The Chairman's Award". This was recognition for the huge amount of wonderful work which FoSL members have done since we founded ourselves in May 1990.

I asked Ian Watson to accept the award as no-one now involved with FoSL has done more as a founder member, Treasurer, then Chairman and now Secretary, and at all times involved in the work on our reserve as the successor to Richard Drew as Warden, and in fundraising and membership recruitment. We should, however, never forget our founders Richard Drew and Jol Mitchell. Ian received our award from Paula Hiscocks, Chair of 3 Rivers DC who is a great fan of FoSL.

Finally, we had a very generous cheque for £200 from Simon Odell, one of the award judges, who has become a FoSL member.



SUBSCRIPTIONS – Dick Beeden

It is that time of year again. I would urge you all to renew again because in the main it is your £5 sub (plus any donations) that enable us to continue our good work on the reserve, particularly when outside contractors are involved as they were in 2019. Without it we will be stuck.

That is not the only benefit of renewing. The bigger we are the more influential we can be. Government, Local and National, tends not to heed one person speaking for themselves; but if that person is speaking for hundreds, Government tends to be more receptive. Stocker's is always under pressure and the position has changed little since last year. 40 years ago, it was the M25 now it is cutting the track for HS2 and the effect that could have on the water in the area. Land is still wanted for yet more housing. Both Three Rivers and Hillingdon having already identified 3 large pieces of land bordering our reserve as possible sites for

housing. We will of course voice our objections as strongly as possible. We would like to think that all of you are behind us. So please everyone, make a special effort to renew and help make our voice heard and heeded. And while you are at it, why not encourage a friend or other family members to join?



WORK ON THE RESERVE

Work Party Sunday 3 November
Ian Watson

Another morning spent at the lake edge clearing bushes and some trees to let in the sunlight on to this overgrown area. This time we allowed some of the branches to fall into the lake which will give protection to young fish (fry) from predators such as pike and heron and provide good territory for numerous aquatic invertebrates as well as guarding the banks from wave action during windy storms. Some branches were made into poles which were stacked ready for making dead hedges.

Josh Kalms from the Trust joined us and later sidled off with Tony and Sheila Lee to plant waterside flowers by the pond which he had excavated in the Summer on the causeway between Stocker's and Bury Lakes.

Ray Kristofiak bought a bang up-to-date first aid kit to replace our old one which dated back to 1990! Nigel Daley fitted new blades to all our bow saws which, not surprisingly, made sawing much easier.

Good biscuits were enjoyed by all and also some tasty, spicy Indian nibbles brought by Varsha Dodhia.

Good work was done by Russell Ball, Nigel Daley, Ken Davies, Nilesch and Varsha Dodhia, Peter Ewer, Phillip Gibbs, Josh Kalms, Ray Kristofiak, Tony and Sheila Lee, Alex and Rob Liddel, Mel Roe, Andrew Schofield, Paul Ward, Ian Watson and Jack Westbrook.

Work Party Sunday 1 December
Jack Westbrook

A nippy day but clear blue sky perfect for a morning's work party.

We started clearance work for a fourth cattle field near the Iron Bridge. This comprised a couple of tasks; clearing a sizeable dense bramble area which we largely completed and clearance work along the perimeter to enable future fence repair work.

We were joined by Nick Maksimovic, the grazier, who cut back some willow trees to stop encroachment onto the field and later took the cattle off the meadows for the winter. They will be back in March.

Splendid work was done by Russell Ball, Emma Brading, Ken Davies, Peter Ewer, Phillip Gibbs, Jeremy Shindler, Ray Kristofiak, Mike Lansdown, Sheila and Tony Lee, Eleana McFarlane, Eileen Petch, Paul Ward and Jack Westbrook.

EVENTS ON THE RESERVE

Tree Planting Ceremony – Saturday 7 December Ian Watson

A very delightful and touching ceremony took place on Saturday when we planted a 6 ft oak, the first of 150 trees to be planted to honour and commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi. In attendance were 15 members of the Indian Jain Community led by our members Nilesch and Varsha Dodhia and 8 other FoSL members. Our Jain friends sang a Gujarati Jain prayer and Russell Ball, our tree expert and professional arborist, conducted a brief seminar on how a tree grows and ended with an amusing routine which ended with all of us pointing our hands at the tree and exclaiming "grow tree, grow".



The Jain Community are giving FoSL £1500 to cover the cost of 150 trees. They have already given £500. But, above all, we hope many of them will become FoSL members. The remaining 149 trees will be planted in March 2020.

Ratty is back!

Martin Ketcher HMW Trust

Ratty was a water vole made famous by Kenneth Graham in "Wind in the Willows". He is a very cute animal, unlike the more plentiful brown rat with whom he is sometimes confused. We used to see Ratty quite a lot in the 1990s when he lived in the reserve at the Springwell Lane end of the River Colne.

Then the mink came and that was the end of our water voles and that has been the sad story of water voles in the UK. By 2005 the population had fallen by over 90% and since then it has crashed by a further 30%. At one time there were water voles in many Hertfordshire rivers and the HMW Trust is working hard to restore them to their old haunts. This year we started monitoring at Stocker's Lake and its adjacent River Colne using three mink rafts which record small creatures' footprints. We were helped by a special group of FoSL members who checked the rafts regularly. They are Russell Ball, Jacky Buckton, Jackie Knott, Sheila and Tony Lee, Nan Millette and Pam Pike.

Then joy of joys, on 20 September I was surveying with Josh Kalms of the Trust and Barbara James of FoSL when we found clear and unmistakable signs of water voles by a side stream of the River Colne on FoSL's own Margaret Partridge plot. When surveying we are not expecting to see the animals themselves (however delightful that would be). No, we are looking for evidence of their presence, in particular, piles of droppings (latrines) or the cut stems of bankside vegetation that water voles leave and we found plenty of that. This is a major find and shows the progress water voles have made up the Colne from Denham. They should do well as the habitat is perfect and FoSL have fenced off the Margaret Partridge plot to protect it from human disturbance.

If you would like to learn more about water voles and how to survey for them, please email me martin.ketcher@hmt.org as I run half-day training sessions.

Butterflies at Stocker's Lake 2019

Ray Buckton



The recording scheme

Once again a dedicated band of enthusiasts under the leadership of Barbara James recorded the number of butterflies seen in 12 transects around the lake each week between April and September, entering their results directly onto the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. A fully illustrated report can be downloaded from www.fosl.org.uk.

Total butterflies counted by year

Butterfly counts at Stocker's Lake are now available for 11 years in 2 periods, 1997-1999 and 2012-2019, so we are increasingly able to compare numbers counted and ascertain trends. 2019 was a good year around the lake with 826 butterflies counted, the second highest since the current surveys started in 2012 and comparable to 2017. The count was 26% down on 2018, but that was an exceptional year. The number and distribution of sightings over the recording period and from year to year is heavily influenced by the weather, and the summer of 2019 was generally hot and dry as for 2018 but with more periods of heavy rain.

The national picture

The report on Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count held each summer notes a huge influx of Painted Ladies, combined with a bumper year for Peacock, Marbled White, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral and Gatekeeper but a large reduction in the usual common whites and blues. It speculates that the latter may be due to predation by parasitic wasps, whose numbers were boosted following last summer's huge increase in those species.

Butterfly species counted by year

This trend is partly reflected at Stocker's Lake where counts for the common whites were well down on last year, but there were mixed fortunes for other species. Small white numbers more than halved, and Green-veined White crashed hugely along with significant reductions in Ringlet and Speckled Wood. To counter this, Red Admiral, Brimstone and the Skippers all did well, and we recorded easily our highest number of Painted Lady but nothing like the numbers reported in the Big Butterfly Count. We had one new species this year, Brown Argus.

2012-19 weekly data

As organised weekly counts have now been ongoing for 8 years, our data bank is steadily improving. This confirms that although the totals were well below 2018, they were still above average.

Tables and charts showing total numbers of butterflies and species counted and the wild fluctuations year by year as well as influencing factors can be seen on our website. www.fosl.org.uk.



Marbled White

OTHER FoSL NEWS

Ian Watson

Trish Jeneid

After over 20 years designing, editing and preparing our newsletter ready for printing, Trish Jeneid has decided to retire. She has been a tremendously good newsletter editor with terrific computer skills. She is also a real nature lover and her garden, which sits on the banks of a backwater of the River Colne, is always full of a wonderful variety of wild birds from sparrow hawks and kestrels through to many species of duck, geese, plus swans and moorhens, woodpeckers, owls and a wide selection of smaller birds. For many years she used to keep the bird feeders on the reserve well

stocked. I think of her as a latterday St Francis of Assisi and I have loved working with her from the early days when we used to take a stand in 3 Rivers hall on environment day. I shall miss her wry sense of humour.

Susan Thomas has kindly volunteered to take over as our newsletter editor. This is her first newsletter.

Shirley Jacobs

It was with sadness that we heard of the death of Shirley Jacobs. She was responsible for creating our first website which she did of her own volition and was very helpful when Simon Jones set up our present splendid website.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Working Parties for 2020



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 2020

Sunday 5th January 2020

Sunday 2nd February 2020

Sunday 1st March 2020

Sunday 5th April 2020

Sunday 6th September 2020

Sunday 4th October 2020

Sunday 1st November 2020

Sunday 6th December 2020

All start at 09.55am

Meet: usually at the Fisherman's car park (next to the wooden bridge from Inns Lake) but it is a good idea to check with Emma (07428 790460) before the date just in case we have changed the meeting place.

Committee

Nigel Daley (<i>Chairman</i>)	01923 282844
Ian Watson (<i>Warden & secretary</i>)	01923 282136
Dick Beeden (<i>Treasurer & membership</i>)	0208 4219958
Larry Hurst (<i>Fundraiser, publicity</i>)	01923 848440
Simon Jones (<i>Web Site</i>)	01923 285763
Linda Ascroft (<i>Events organiser</i>)	01923 772170
Susan Thomas (<i>Newsletter editor</i>)	01923 240764
Russell Ball (<i>Membership recruitment</i>)	07884426671
Emma Brading (<i>Volunteers organiser</i>)	07428 790460
Steve Carter (<i>Wildlife recorder</i>)	07917 796976
	Text preferred

2020 AGM

The AGM will take place at 7.30pm on Thursday 16th April 2020

Baptist Church, Field Way, Rickmansworth
WD3 7EL



Speaker: Nick Maksimovic our grazier

Subject: Cattle on the Reserve

Wildfowl Walks

Sunday 12th January 2020

And

Sunday 16th February 2020

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 29th March 2020

1pm - 4pm

Our annual look at herons, egrets and their young

Meet: on the causeway between Stockers Lake and Bury Lake

Leaving a Lasting Legacy

If you enjoy nature, a legacy can ensure the future of our wonderful reserve.

Please consider leaving a Gift to Friends of Stockers Lake in your Will. We are a Registered Charity and your legal advisor can help you to include a legacy in your Will. There are inheritance tax advantages in leaving a legacy to a charity.