

WildCookham 2020 Report

2020 was a tough year for everyone and every organisation. The dramatic changes brought on by Covid19 impacted every aspect of our lives and certainly at WildCookham it put many of our activities and plans onto the back burner. But there were compensations as many people discovered the value and variety of our natural world and, with less activity everywhere, our planet experienced some relief from the accelerating onslaught of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Thanks to the efforts of many supporters we did ensure that much of WildCookham's work could continue and this report sets out the highlights.

Knowing what we have

We recognise that the first step in planning for the future of our local natural habitats is understanding what we have today. Our survey work continued through the year, though hampered by having to rely on fewer people involved. We have undertaken surveys of both our local habitats and specific species.

Habitat surveys have covered the Odney Club grounds in Cookham village, at the invitation of the John Lewis Partnership; Harwood House care home in Cookham Dean; and White Place Farm. This is in addition to the on-going survey work at



Early results from wild flower seeding at Harwood House

Battlemead between Cookham and Maidenhead (aerial photo right).



Aerial view of Battlemead

We also started work on surveys of land owned by Cookham Parish Council – the Alfred Major Recreation Ground and a small riverside plot beneath Winter Hill - where the hope is to develop some more habitat-rich features in the coming 12 months. Our thanks, in particular, to Adrian Doble, Clare Padmore and Gilly Blake for their support for this work and to the members of the seven survey

teams involved at White Place Farm.

Species surveys have looked at the existence of Hazel Dormice in one of the woods in Cookham Dean. This is a threatened species, fast disappearing as its habitats disappear. It is an on-going survey and our hope is that we can link this with studies of other nearby woods to create corridors for these small mammals, as well as for other species. Our thanks to Damian Carter for his help with this.



Hazel Dormouse (photo: Woodland Trust)

With the help of several WildCookham supporters we also undertook a short survey of Glow worms in Cookham, with the aim of extending this in 2021. This revealed the existence of a significant population in the Strande Lane area, which we were able to use in our submission to the local Council during the hearings for the Borough Local Plan. We also initiated a study of river-based mammals (mainly Otter, Mink, Water Vole) which continues into 2021. Damselflies also had their own survey during the year with the discovery of several rarities for the area.

The annual Toad Patrol programme, now led by Mike Slade, continued in the Spring. The team of patrollers helped a significant number of toads on their migration but we still witnessed a further drop in the numbers compared with previous years. We are also looking into nesting sites for Swallows. These are being lost due to housing development and loss of farm and related buildings. We are looking into action to address this and create additional potential sites for these summer visitors.

Planning for a Natural Future

2020 saw a big increase in our involvement in local planning issues, under three main headings:

RBWM Environment and

WildCookham wildlife groups, notably Wild the local Climate Emergency input to and comment on the Environment and Climate important improvements to form approved by the 2020. We are now looking at strategy as specific plans are



Climate Strategy

worked with other local Maidenhead, as well as Coalition, to provide Council's draft Strategy. This resulted in the strategy in its final Council in December ways to support this rolled out.

The Borough Local Plan was the subject of extensive hearings by a Planning Inspector in the Autumn, following submission of views on the previous draft plan. WildCookham was represented at several of the hearings and commented on the specific development allocations proposed for Cookham. We await the outcome of these hearings.

During the year Cookham Parish Council began work on the development of a **Cookham Neighbourhood Plan**, and we were pleased to be asked to participate in this. Still in its early stages, the Plan offers the opportunity to inject fresh thinking into local planning and we hope that the result can be a set of proposals that take full account of the importance of protecting and enhancing our local natural habitats.

Wildlife protection

We are keen to encourage residents to think about the needs of our wildlife when planning housing and garden developments. To this end we have been developing a scheme to encourage gardeners needing outside help to call on contractors who are committed to wildlife-friendly gardening. This scheme, with a selection of contract gardeners already signed up, is due to be launched early 2021.



We also continue to experience threats to specific local habitats as various authorities, as well as residents, take action which destroys sites favoured by our wildlife. Local residents increasingly call on WildCookham's advice and support when dealing with these situations so we have been developing guidelines, as well as sources of help, for this which will also be rolled out early 2021.

Wild gardens

Our flagship *Wild About Gardens Awards* continued in 2020, hampered to some extent by Covid19. Even so, we were able to take the number of gardens in the scheme above 100, providing a great basis for future plans to extend this scheme much more widely across Cookham. We were helped in this by



the BEE Friendly scheme launched by Thomas Lee in Cookham Rise: the virus also got in the way of this initiative but it still resulted in some 30 gardeners taking advantage of a special offer on wild flower plants made available through the scheme with the support of the local plant market organisers, Vernon Brown. Our thanks to Thomas and also to Pam Campin for the lead she has given in supporting the committee with the Awards scheme.

Drawing on our reserves

Covid19 limited our ability to undertake further hands-on work on our various landscape projects. Mike Day continued his care for the Harris Woodbridge nature reserve and we were delighted to witness the range of wildlife there since we took on the management, with surveys focusing in particular on the insect and plant life. Derek Tyler kept things under control on the Marsh Meadow pond on land owned by Copas Farms which we now manage for the Marsh Meadow Management Trust. And John Southgate and his team kept any eye on the National Trust Commons in Cookham Dean where we have been encouraging wild flower growth. Our thanks to all of these people, and other supporters, for keeping these projects alive during a difficult time.

Spreading the Word

Our followers on Facebook saw a dramatic increase in numbers during the year, sparked no doubt by the lockdown and demonstrating the growing interest in the natural world on our doorstep. Follower numbers were up by more than 45% to 636 by year end, with 1550 posts and loads of comments. Our thanks to all who have contributed to this. During the year we launched a WildCookham Film Festival for local amateur film-makers, though sadly this has become a Covid victim: we hope to bring it back for 2022. Also launched towards the end of the year was our monthly Podcast, produced by Rob Castell. We look forward to this developing in the coming year and providing a regular entertaining update on our activities and local wildlife issues.



It's also been good to see the 'Wild' movement developing in our Borough. There are now seven groups focused on wildlife and the natural world and we have begun working together on projects, including responding together to the Council on various issues.

Growing as a Charity

During the year we took the decision to seek registration as a full charity approved by the Charity Commission. The process for this should be completed by Spring 2021 when we will become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. This should help us if we are seeking grants as well as giving a slightly more formal presence.

The Money



Our inability to hold events during most of the year meant that revenue was well down on previous years. Our finances, however, are still in a satisfactory state for our present needs. The total funds stood at £3400 at year end, with just over £1000 of this committed to specific projects. Our main expense during the year was a payment of £482.50 as a half-share of the cost of an ecological report as part of the Battlemead project.

Without whom....

WildCookham's work is only possible thanks to the work of the many people who support and encourage. Special thanks are due to the Committee who, during a very trying year, have maintained their enthusiasm and energy to ensure that we did as much as we could during the year. We are conscious that the environmental challenges we face have not gone away during 2020. Some may have been slightly lessened, due to less traffic, business activity and the like but, once we get beyond the Covid crisis, levels of global warming, pollution and habitat loss will return to their upward path. We hope that this year we can draw more completely on the support of local people to continue the fight.

The Team at WildCookham

January 2021