

WINNERS ENJOY THE PRIZE!

At the 10-year Celebration Event held in August 2014 the Nature Trail prize was won by a member of the Townsley family. Their prize was a visit to the Wildlife Heritage Foundation and we are delighted to reproduce their letter below:

From Mr and Mrs Townsley, 18 April 2015

Hi,

We are the family who won the nature trail prize at the 10th Anniversary celebrations last year. We took a while to use the prize but now we finally have and we just wanted to write to say thank you and let you know that we had a fantastic day at the Wildlife Heritage Foundation.

Everyone at the park was so friendly and went out of their way to make sure we had a good time. As the park is not open to the general public the cats were really responsive and inquisitive, especially regarding our children! It was very interesting and a great experience all round.

We thought you might also like to see a few of the photos.

Many thanks

Sarah and Scott Townsley



Willson Avenue Path Reconstruction

Willson Avenue, one of the main entrances to BWT, has suffered from poor drainage and soft areas for several years. A cut-off drain installed and maintained by BWT improved the position, but after periods of heavy rain the path was clearly in need of more substantial measures, and routine filling with woodchips was not a long term solution. The route is part of KM 75, a Public Right of Way managed by KCC.

BWT's Management Committee obtained quotations for path reconstruction and on 13 April Arnold and Arnold Ltd, a local contractor, commenced work. The section from the church footpath entrance to the Elizabeth Harvie Field was reconstructed with a limestone sub-base and blacktop base course, finished with tar and chippings. The work was finished within four days. BWT was very pleased with the result and we have already received positive comments from walkers, KCC and others. Many thanks to David Ward who managed the project for BWT, and to Arnold and Arnold for their carefully-managed work. Also, thanks to KCC's Public Rights of Way Unit who agreed a contribution of £2,000 towards the cost.



Photos of each stage of the reconstruction of Willson Avenue in April.



BWT and its Volunteers: what is the significance of the number 5247?

As a charity funded via annual subscription BWT has no paid employees. All the work and management is carried out by volunteers. Most, but by no means all, live in or near the local community. We are very fortunate to have a wide range of professional and technical expertise, together with a willingness to put in the hours for BWT.

Each year we have to produce an estimate of volunteer hours for the "Green Flag" application and when we first analysed time committed to BWT we were amazed that the annual total was over 5000 hours. **In 2013/14 the estimated figure was 5247 hours!** This includes maintenance volunteers (22), trees and bench sponsorship, membership and subscriptions, newsletter and leaflet distribution (45), website development and management, photographic library and planning work within the management committee.

All this work helps to manage and develop BWT, but in order to sustain the effort and safeguard BWT's future we have to ensure we have continuing support from members and from the local community.

If we had no maintenance teams, for example, we would spend more than £10,000 per year on contractors and additional sums on specialist services.

Using the figure of 5247, and based on the national minimum wage of £6.50 in UK, the annual cost of ALL the volunteers' work within BWT would be **£34,105.50!**

We need to look to the future in order to find people who may be able to look after BWT for the community in years to come. The work is interesting, sometimes challenging, but always rewarding and enjoyable in that we all have a common sense of purpose: we want to nurture and develop BWT for future generations.

If you would like to learn more about becoming a volunteer – even if you can only spare a few hours per week - contact us via John Wale or Jeff Winn, or come and visit us at the Village Fayre on 27 June.

Green Flag 2015

This year's Green Flag Application was made in January and we have been notified that the judge will visit us between April and July.

WATCH THIS SPACE!

Access for All

Following extensive consultation with BWT members and dog walkers, our new code of conduct was introduced in January 2015. We are asking dog walkers to use a lead on about 40% of our land with about 60% being available for dogs to run freely off leads. New two-way gates have been installed to separate the two zones, along with signs at all entrances. BWT would like to thank those considerate members who keep to the new protocol and we are grateful to our members who conform to the policy by using a lead or taking their dogs elsewhere for off-lead exercise. The car park is often less busy than formerly, with fewer people travelling to BWT to let their dogs off lead.

However, some users still do not conform to the code. This is very unfortunate for the majority of members who want an area in which they can be sure of walking undisturbed by dogs... and for those dog walkers who are unable to walk their dogs in case other dogs approach them. We hope that over time more and more people will conform. To those who still find it hard to accept, we ask you to consider the views of the majority. We know there have been recent incidents where dogs have not been under control (in both areas) and this is very regrettable after the long and careful process we went through.

The system we have currently is being observed throughout the year, and we hope, in time, that everyone will come to respect it. It is our intention to review the policy after 12 months, i.e. in January

2016. BWT has received a number of suggestions for changes to the off-leads area to help dog walkers:

- Create a car park near Moore Meadow - we have looked at this in depth, but think it would not be practical because there is no point at which we could achieve safe access from the public highway, and also because of the risk of unwanted incursion on to the land.
- Build a hard path for dog walkers around Moore Meadow - this was considered when this land passed to BWT, but rejected because the results of our consultation showed that a large majority of members wanted to keep the area as natural as possible (this has been confirmed in recent conversations with users and was also the view of last year's Green Flag judge). Also, there is already a circular hard path walk in the off-leads zone around Gore/Barn Meadow and the Lilk Valley.
- Install a secure fence around Moore Meadow to prevent dogs escaping: - It was only by chance that the original BWT land was a secure area. It would be difficult and very costly to create this in Moore Meadow, and would only benefit one specific group of visitors. In addition, if dogs are under control at all times, as our code requests, a secure fence is unnecessary. For this reason we feel it would not be an appropriate use of general BWT funds. (However, if dog walkers wish to raise the funds needed, we would be prepared to consider this).

Development of Moore Meadow

Moore Meadow is now a well-used walking area for many. The open views and landscape are enjoyed at any time of the year and any time of day. With daffodils and blue bells now over, we can look forward to the summer wildflowers. We can also look at what has happened in the past four years:

- The southern hedge planted by the community volunteers in November 2011 is now maturing and has been given its first light cut this year.
- The planting along the northern area (November/December 2013) is now taking hold; there have been few losses.
- Planting of trees in the southern margins was carried out in February 2015; trees planted by the regular volunteers were for the canopy (75% of the total) and comprised 175 pedunculate oaks, 55 hornbeams, 15 silver birch, and 35 wild cherries. Additionally, 1 elm and two oaks were planted on the high ridge overlooking the ring. This area is very sandy, and has a relatively high acidity (pH 4 to pH 5); this coupled with the previous uses over many years, means that it will be difficult for wildflowers to become established.
- We are installing a new pedestrian access gate from Roundwell into Moore Meadow; this follows a number of suggestions on how the area can be more easily accessible to those living in the eastern margins of Bearsted and Thurnham.
- Fencing repairs have been carried out at specific locations around the southern perimeter, particularly where the fallen oak damaged the fencing.
- We have also improved the drainage along the grass path which forms the Public Right of Way towards Roundwell. This should make the area less boggy in winter. There are no plans to create a hard path in Moore Meadow, the general consensus being in favour of leaving the area as natural as possible.



Moore Meadow hedge after first cut
22 April 2015

Visit by Year 2, Thurnham CE Infant School —

On one of the rare sunny days at the end of March, BWT hosted the annual walkabout by 90 pupils from Year 2 (age six-seven) at Thurnham Infants.

As always, the children were fascinated to hear the history of the site and to learn that many of the trees and hedgerows had been planted before they were born! They were very interested in animal tracks and burrows and especially the rabbit droppings!

Jeff, Derek and John led each class in turn around the site, showing them the progress with planting in Moore Meadow and describing its past history. The children were amazed when they saw the huge fallen oak tree at the southern boundary and spotted the “elephant” likeness straight away; there were other views, some seeing a dinosaur and even a squid. The children also understood what makes a tree strong, how long it takes to grow to such a height, and how birds, mammals and boring insects make use of the newly created habitat when it has died or fallen.

We received some lovely letters of thanks from the children with very pertinent comments and observations: some extracts (using their own words) are printed below:

Ella wrote:

“Thank you for showing us around the Woodland Trust and sharing the information you know about fantastic Woodland Trust. I especially liked the bug hotel and my particular favourite was the fallen down tree. It was very interesting, it looked quite like an elephant (although) other people thought it looked like a stegosaurus.”

And also from Johann:

“The fallen down tree was amazing because it was shaped like a brown bumpy elephant... when you went to the field I didn’t want to build 200 HOUSES (sic). The grass maze was good but I was sad because we didn’t get to play on it. The bridge was nearly the same age as some people in our class!! I decided to call the fallen down tree the hurricane tree.”

And from Alex:

“Thank you for showing us around the butyful woodland trust because it was as fun as riding a rolacosta. My favourite part was when we went to the bridge because it was the same age as me! When we went to the fallen tree I thought it looked like a Tryceratops and the name I would give it is Crusher.”

Lily wrote:

“My favourite part was when we saw the rusty old farm equipment in one field. I really liked the wooden bug hotel because there was lots of spiders in it. Also when you told us about the rabbit guards I was really fasonated in them espeshaley when you said that rabbits were chewing them.”

And Maisie said:

“I loved the holo tree it looks like a jiyant squid. I would call it Legs.”

— 25 March 2015

Charlotte told us:

“When we saw rotten rabbit holes and funny fox holes I really loved them because they actually looked cosy and interesting because the unstable tree was held up carefully by ropes. Thank you for giving up your precious time to teach us about [what is] around us... you taught us about the hard, tall bug hotel (I wouldn't want to live there to be honest...)”

Thomas said:

“Thank you for taking us around the Woodland Trust. I really enjoyed the tour! I thought the tree ruined by a hurricane looked like a squid or octopus because of its tentacles at the back. My favourite part was seeing the mole hills and bug hotels because I saw lots of creatures there.”

Leah thanked us for the tour and added:

“Most of the holes were made by cheeky baby foxes... everything was interesting! I loved learning about all the things and enjoyed the maze and trying to get to the center.”

And Emily added:

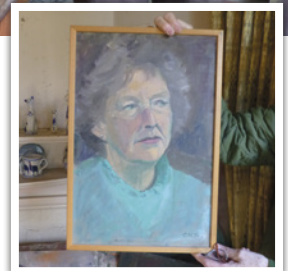
“It was interesting to know that all the log piles were homes for bugs and in about ten years time all them bugs that have been munching on them logs the logs will be gone.”

Portrait of Pauline Moore by Sorel Bagge

The painter Sorel Bagge was well-known in Kent and especially in the Bearsted area. Following her death in December 2014 her portrait of the late Pauline Moore has very kindly been donated by her niece, Caroline Chanter. The picture is a remarkable likeness of Pauline, who bequeathed 10 acres of land to us (now Moore Meadow). Pauline was a great supporter of BWT and its aims, and it is fitting we have such a lovely memory of her.



Our photos show the painting with Caroline and also a self-portrait of Sorel Bagge herself.



Donation from Bearsted Active Retirement Association

BWT has received a cheque for £140.00 from the Bearsted Active Retirement Association. The money was raised from the sale of second-hand books and was presented to John Wale after their AGM on 16 February 2015. John gave a short talk on BWT and left newsletters and membership forms to several who were interested. We have thanked the Association for its donation and assured its members the money would be put to good use. It was pleasing to note that Val Willson was in the audience.

IMPORTANT DIARY DATES!

Bearsted and Thurnham Village Fayre will be held on Bearsted Green during the afternoon of 27 June 2015. Come and visit BWT's stand on the north side, near The Street. You can renew your subscription, buy notelets, mugs, pens, bird boxes and chat to members of the Management Committee.

BWT's Annual General Meeting 2015 will be held on Sunday 27 September at 2.30 pm in the clubhouse of Bearsted Bowls Club, opposite our main entrance in Church Landway. The bar will be available from 2.00pm.

WILDLIFE SPOTS

One Wednesday in mid-April we had been working in Moore Meadow, cementing gateposts and securing fencing and within five minutes during our walk back we spotted or heard the following:

Great Spotted Woodpecker and Green Woodpeckers; Mistle Thrushes; two Pied Wagtails near the sand ring; Magpies; many Crows; a solitary Jay in People's Wood. Also we passed Blackbirds, Robins, Blue Tits, and Great Tits galore, looking for suitable trees and hedgerows.

There's a lot around us if you look and listen: if you have any unusual sightings do let us know!



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