

Moulsecoomb Allotments Nature Site

Review 2019 and 2020

by Liz Yeats

As there was no real life AGM last year, this report is a flying tour of work for the years 2019 and 2020.

History: The Nature Site started in 2015, with the permission of the Allotment Officer. A small group of allotmenters cleared 3mt brambles from a very steep, north facing bank at the back of the Allotment site. No allotments had been on this patch for at least 20 years.

Over the last 6 years we've expanded the area, created paths, built and maintained countless steps. With collected local seed we've sown wildflower banks. We've installed benches, dug and planted 2 wildlife ponds and planted around 130 native trees.

The work group: The work has been greatly helped by occasional visiting work groups from Sussex Wildlife Trust and City Council Countryside volunteers. Some people from these groups have liked the site so much they have become regular monthly work group members. Over the last 2 years the regular work group has included 7 plot holders and 8 people who don't have plots.

So, what's the point? Nature is currently struggling & species are becoming extinct at an alarming rate. As gardeners, we know how important wild creatures are for crop production, not just pollinating insects, but soil creatures and microbes, insects in our compost bins, up the food chain to birds to eat the aphids. We have created on the nature Site a wide range of habitats to support the maximum number of 'creatures'. We also hope it will be beautiful and welcome all plot holders to visit and spend time on it. To measure if we are achieving our aims, we count all the species of plant, bird and butterfly we see and can identify each year.



	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Plant species	64	134	157	175	210	205
Butterflies & moths	16	15	15	25	21	23
Bees & other insects			11	15	29	23
Birds			14	21	23	29

"The Moulsecoomb allotment nature site acts as an important part of the "green corridor" linking the wild areas that run down from the hills above Bevendean and Whitehawk . This allows wildlife to move around in search of shelter, breeding and food relatively easily within the urban environment. The site offers excellent habitat for a wide range of creatures in an increasingly busy city."

Huw Morgan. (Sussex Wildlife Trust, Brighton & Hove Project officer).

Developments:

2019 - New pond, paths, steps, benches, trees and flowers: We developed a whole new, huge area during the winter of 2018 to 2019. By Jan 19 we had terraced the slope & dug a large pond. We created paths around it, including building steps down the very steep bits. Over the next few months, we planted up the

pond, sowed and planted wildflower plugs on the surrounding banks, and planted around 15 new tree saplings below the pond. We extended the wildlife hedge at the bottom of the site with donated saplings.

By May 2019 we had frogspawn in the new pond. Also Damsel and Dragonflies laying eggs in it! We had flowers on the pond plants, and the new tree saplings were coming into leaf.

The Nature Site welcomed around 20 visitors at the Allotment Site Open Day in June 2019. The site looked glorious with so many wildflowers, bees, butterflies and birds!

By September 2019 it was obvious that lack of summer rainfall was a problem for a large pond, it kept drying out! Luckily, one of our group is an architect, and he designed a 'water roof' to funnel rain into a water butt and a feeder hosepipe directing it underground into the pond. Timber came from Stanmer Park courtesy of the Countryside Ranger Neil Doyle, felled and prepared by us.



2020 - The Year of Covid Lockdowns!: In the first work session of January 2020 we started work erecting the 'water roof'. Wow! this is going to look good! We managed one more group work session before Covid Lockdown in March! And we hadn't yet got a roof! By May we were allowed two people work sessions. This enabled us to complete the rain roof using corrugated iron.

2020 was a really hot and very dry summer. Plot holders seem to appreciate spending time on the Nature Site and every time I visited I saw other people doing the same. The wildflowers, and consequently the insects, thrived in this intense heat.



By August we were allowed 6-people work groups, and maintenance work resumed. Of course this was followed by another lockdown in Jan 2021!

Many thanks to the following people and organisations:

Sean Howes: who made us several wonderful benches from felled trees.

Henry Christy: donated hazel saplings

Special Branch Tree nursery : donated many native saplings

Neil Doyle, BHCC Countryside ranger: timber for rain roof, and volunteer work groups

Huw Morgan, SWT: groups of work volunteers

All the plot-holders: who've donated cash enabling us to buy a few things.

The core work group: who work every month developing and maintaining the Nature Site. (Sally. Rachel, Tara, Simon, Jonny. Liz, Jim, Dave, Kasturi)



Money	Income	Expenditure	Bal
Balance as AGM April 2019			£38.23
Donation box in shop 3.12.19 & 8.3.20	14.85		
Pond plants May 19		29.21	
Poster printing		1.00	
Balance at May 2021			£22.87