

Railway Land Wildlife Trust



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www.railwaylandproject.org
Registered Charity No. 800655

Heritage Lottery Fund – Grant success!

We are extremely happy to announce that we have been awarded a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'Resilience Programme'. The grant of £41,800 will fund the delivery of an 18 month project, **'Resilient Railway Land'**.

Given all the changes that the Trust has been through in the last year, with the stepping down of John Parry as Director and the loss of East Sussex County Council funding, this project was drawn up to inject valuable expertise and capacity into forging a clear, well supported path for the Trust in terms of income, community involvement and governance. While much of this work will be going on behind the scenes, members and supporters of the Trust will see some of the results soon - we will be relaunching our membership scheme in May, providing all sorts of training opportunities for volunteers and striving to engage with new audiences. Jim Hillage, our new Chair, said of the grant, ***'We are delighted to have been awarded this grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It provides us with a great opportunity to place the Trust on a more sustainable footing and build our capacity to bring environmental sustainability to the heart of Lewes'***.



Helen Meade, Programme Coordinator

Dates for your Diaries

Our Monthly Sunday afternoon series of illustrated fundraising talks and events continues, and from May onward, the Linklater will be open to all, from 2-5pm, including festival based activities

'grey mullet' photo© Steve Homewood



Sunday 12th March **'Murmurations of Mullet'** Steve Homewood will share his fascinating underwater photos and research into the amazing antics of mullet at the Winterbourne outlet into the Ouse.

Wednesday 5th April **'Signs of Spring'** 10am-12.30pm. Family drop-in activities - see pg 5

Sunday 23rd April **'What's a Green Funeral?'** Belinda Chapman on the ecological aspects of funerals

Saturday 6th May **Dawn Chorus Walk 4.30am + breakfast at the Linklater** - see pg 4

Sunday 7th May **First Sunday afternoon opening 2-5pm:** Learn how to use willow and tissue to make festival decorations

Sunday 14th May **'Bee Sunday' 2-5pm:** Talks and activities about bees and how to support them - something for all ages!

Sunday 21st May **Sunday afternoon opening 2-5pm:** craft activity

Sunday 28th May **'Vert Woods - past, present and future'** Stewart Boyle's illustrated talk about establishing Laughton's Community Benefit Woodland at 3pm

Sunday 4th & 11th June **Sunday afternoon opening 2-5pm:** festival based activities

Sunday 18th June **RLWT Festival: 'Striking the Balance'** see pg 5

Weekend 24th / 25th June **Lewes Poetry Weekend** : for details see <http://www.sdpf.org.uk>

New Faces of Trustees

Belinda Chapman: has been a trustee for 18 months now, considers herself still a newbie and still learning! Her house looks over the Railway Land and she enjoys walking the land on a daily basis with her dog, Luna, meeting friends and neighbours along the way and sitting on her favourite bench overlooking Chilly Brook.

Belinda was born in Ashington, Northumberland and lived as a child in the Sahara Desert where her father was a member of the Desert Rescue team. It was here her interest in geology began. She's happily in her sixties now and has had a varied working career: a primary/secondary school teacher working with disabled children, farming a Scottish Croft near John O'Groats, acting in repertory companies across the country and for BBC radio, running a theatre company, and building an Eco self build house in a sustainable co-housing community just outside Lewes where she lived for ten years. Belinda is now a leading expert on the ecological aspects of funerals and holds workshops to help others plan their final wishes.



Simon Cooper:

A keen photographer and regular visitor to the Railway Land, Simon spent many years working in the software industry where he held a variety of technical, sales, marketing and managerial positions. Simon is now a freelance website developer and lives on Cliffe High Street.



Jim Hillage, Chair:

I am delighted to become a trustee of the Railway Land Wildlife Trust. As some-one who lives opposite and regularly walks our dog around the reserve I totally appreciate what a wonderful asset we have on our doorstep. I recently retired from being a Research Director at a local social research institute and hope to bring that experience to ensure the Trust goes from strength to strength and exploits every available opportunity to promote the understanding of environmental sustainability to the entire Lewes community.



Mark Sawtell, Treasurer:

I am a retired Chartered Accountant. During my working life I had experience in both the profession and business, having been a partner in an accountancy practice and finance director in a family publishing company. Like many accountants I have been treasurer of a number of clubs and charities in a voluntary capacity.

I live in Lewes with my wife Romey and we really appreciate and enjoy the Railway Land and the Linklater Pavilion. We fully support the work of the Trust and I am looking forward to working with my fellow trustees to ensure that this wonderful facility in the heart of Lewes is continued to be appreciated and enjoyed by future generations.



A replacement bridge for the Leighside Pond

Many of you will have stood on the Leighside Pond Bridge in the past and may have been lucky enough to catch sight of some frogs mating, watch dragonflies and damselflies, or just admire Irises and Purple Loosestrife flowering. Recently the bridge was becoming increasingly rotten which made the action of a few vandals particularly destructive last year. The bridge was closed for some months.

With the help of the East Sussex County Council Rights of Way team it has been rebuilt with a very similar design to the original bridge, with two big bays to allow you to stop and ponder. The finishing touches were added by the Meadow Minders and Brighton Conservation Volunteers, who spent a morning pulling a large amount of debris out of the pond, it's been a real collaborative effort. We have given the pond edges a good vegetation cut to keep some of the woodier plants at bay - so it may look a little bare at the moment - but the frogs and newts will still be rushing in to breed. Come and admire the bridge and watch the pond change as the year progresses.



Old bridge rotten and vandalised



Bridge building makes you smile



New bridge finished



People of all ages now giving it a try

Dan Fagan has moved on to a job at Natural England and after 16 years of the LDC Community Ranger being called Dan – Dan Ross and then Dan Fagan – I was tempted to change my name to Dan!! If you don't already know me (and even if you do!) please stop me and say hello if you see me out on the Nature Reserve.

Thyone Outram

above photos © Thyone Outram

Springtime on the Railway Land

As we go into spring, whatever the weather - the birds will be going into their spring routines. The early nesting **ravens** who have been on the cliffs for the last few years will already have built their nest and hatched their eggs. I always regard them as Railway Land birds as, if the Reserve was just a desert of tarmac they would have fewer places to forage and might well not be able to breed on the cliffs. We have seen them picking up carrion from our land.

In March the early arriving migrants, the **chiffchaffs**, are coming in, although some stay all winter and we do not know which are which. It is possible that those who hang around in the shelter of our woodland in the coldest months have moved back north and we are getting the African returnees making their unmistakable chiff chaff song. It is wonderful when you first hear that two note promise that spring is coming. Another three regular and fairly numerous migrants usually become noticeable in April. The **whitethroat** (the name gives it away) starts its display flight not in the woodland but in the scrub around the Heart of Reeds and around the edge of the sidings. The **blackcaps** (male black cap, female brown cap) have a beautiful melodious song a bit like a speeded up blackbird and they are in the smaller trees in the woodland. The **reed warblers** who start arriving in April are of course to be heard in the Heart of Reeds. They are one of the big success stories of the Reserve as they colonised it very soon after it was planted with reeds. "Create the habitat and the creatures will arrive". The males can be easily heard making their churring "song" but to see the large numbers that we have breeding you have to go later in June and July to see the reeds alive with tiny brown birds recently fledged who are building up their strength to fly to Africa.

A very rare migrant with us and now sadly increasingly rare in this country, is the **cuckoo**. A couple of years ago a reed warbler was spotted feeding a baby cuckoo to which it was being an inadvertent foster mother so our reed beds are helping two species under pressure.

Of course all our residents: **robins, blackbirds, great tits, blue tits, wrens** will be singing away proclaiming their territory or looking for a mate. You might hear our **great spotted woodpeckers** drumming on a tree to establish their presence. If you move quietly and slowly- or just sit and watch -you may see birds feeding their young.

There are many more bird species making their home on the reserve. It always surprises me just how many fit into what is after all quite a small area. If you see something special or would like to join our group of birders regularly monitoring the birds, do email me leonie.m46@gmail.com

Leonie Mercer



whitethroat



reed warbler

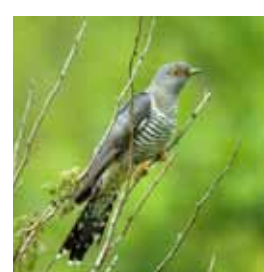


blackcap

photos © rspb



chiff chaff



cuckoo

**Dont miss the 'Dawn Chorus' bird walk on Saturday 6th May
Get this 'Ranger Event' date in your diaries NOW!!**

Please book your place by emailing Thyone Outram , LDC Community Ranger on: Thyone.Outram@lewes.gov.uk. The walk will conclude with a continental-style breakfast at the Linklater. *Donations towards RLWT funds appreciated.*

So many ways to get involved!

RLWT Summer Festival – ‘Striking the Balance’ 18th June - Save the Date!

The date and theme for this year’s festival have been set! The theme, ‘Striking the Balance’, came about as a result of revisiting the reports written by Hantanirina Rasamimanana on the project in Madagascar that the RLWT supports (more on this in the next newsletter!) and Alison Jolly’s wonderful conservation diaries, ‘**Thank You, Madagascar**’. The inspirational work undertaken in Ambohimanga sacred forest brings into sharp focus the balance that needs to be struck between conservation and development – not only in far flung countries like Madagascar, but here in Lewes as well.

The theme is a broad one and we hope that it will resonate with individuals and organisations in many different ways, and that this will result in a vibrant and diverse celebration of how we can get the balance right. We would love it if as many people as possible could get involved; whether this is by helping with the planning and running of the festival or, if you’re involved in a local organisation that focuses on sustainability or social inclusion, by running an activity or having a stand at the festival.

For more information, please contact Helen Meade at coordinator@railwaylandproject.org

Volunteering update

We have held the first meeting of our new fundraising group, which has got the ball rolling in looking at different ways that we can raise funds and increasing the involvement of volunteers in doing so. One element of the Resilient Railway Land project (pg 1) is to provide training in different aspects of fundraising for those volunteers who feel they would benefit from it. ***If you would like to be involved in the fundraising group, please get in touch.***

We are always looking for new volunteers and can give them a warm welcome and a wide variety of roles – both regular and ad hoc. At the moment we are gearing up for the summer season and would be very happy to hear from people who would like to help with the open days on Sunday afternoon. We are also looking for someone who could take on the role of membership secretary – there would be plenty of support available for anyone who would be interested in this.

School holiday activities

We are aware that we could be running a much fuller range of family activities during the school holidays, and are keen to expand this area of our work. If you have skills or ideas that you could bring to this, please to get in touch to explore possibilities.

‘Signs of Spring’ Wednesday 5th April:

Come down to the Linklater to enjoy all manner of activities to celebrate the coming of Spring. Make a bird feeder, a bug hotel, go for a guided walk through the woodlands, enjoy all sorts of arts and crafts!

the ‘air bnb’ bug hotel at the entrance to the Reserve



Donations towards materials, suggested donation £3 per child. Suitable for 3-11 year olds.

The Linklater RATS - Raising Awareness of Tides and Sea levels

John Parry continues to lead the RATS project with students from Ringmer and Priory School. This group replaced the Junior Management Board which involved children aged 8-14 from local primary schools for 20 years.

Over the last year, the Linklater RATS have had a masterclass on flooding from the East Sussex Emergency Planning Officer, have worked on a mini flood erosion project on the Railway Land which was a challenge handed to them by the first RATS group along with designing a logo which the current RATS are now undertaking with the help of Chris Smedley pictured here with Chris, Emma, Ben and Patrick with Jo Higgs from the Environment Agency.



photo © Dr J Parry

The group are also charged with explaining to the new recruits this forthcoming July what they have done on the Railway Land itself and here Brandon, Patrick, Emma and Jo can be seen working on the Powerpoint that will be presented to Assemblies at Ringmer Academy and Priory School in July.



photo © Dr J Parry



My thanks to graphic designer Chris Smedley who has so kindly given his time and expertise regarding the logo which will be ready by the next Festival and to Lawrence Quinn from Priory School who often accompanies the pupils. But also a big thanks to Jo Higgs from the Environment Agency. Despite her huge responsibilities, she has been nothing but a massive support to the RATS project in many ways including what her job entails when flooding alerts such as the latest sea surge alert on 13th February take place. Newhaven missed being flooded by centimetres.

East coast Flood Alert map

Whether this project will run its intended course of 150 years is yet to be seen! but I salute the two groups of RATS who have responded to the challenge so far. Their work can be seen at <http://www.railwaylandlive.org/climate-change/linklater-rats/>

As the current RATS themselves said, 'We found this experience very inspiring, and it educated us on what threats face us during floods. It has boosted our confidence with sharing our ideas as well.' Members might like to also know of a very interesting website on environmental change run by Alex Kirby at www.climatenewsnetwork.net

John Parry

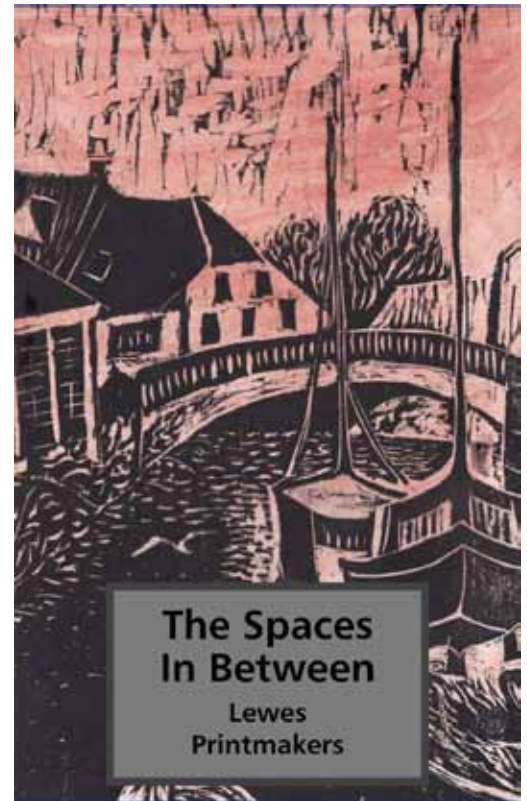
Why we value the Printmakers

The launch of the Printmaker's latest book 'The Spaces in Between' was a great event just before Christmas not only for the lovely prints on sale but for Carolyn Trant's description of some of the techniques that are used. The Printmakers were the very first group to book the Linklater on a weekly basis, having had a problem with their previous site and so it was good to be able to offer the space that had just been created in 2010.

From time to time, I would need to drop in during some of the sessions to collect something or drop something off and I was always struck by the calm and peaceful atmosphere of both learners and the talented striving away to produce some special art, much of which now records aspects of change in Lewes – both for the worse and the better.

But what was also pleasing at the launch was the way Carolyn suddenly described how she saw the space that is the Linklater which I felt was worth sharing and which she very kindly wrote in her own words.

photo © Carolyn Trant



'The Linklater is so special in being a place where pop-up events can still take place that are hopefully beneficial to all parties; in hard times it seems even more important that this sort of gathering can spring up in a place which can appeal – as we hope our books do – to a wide spectrum of interests and people.'

When I agitate about the gradual eroding of communal spaces in Lewes to put on events at reasonable expense, I am told – 'oh but there are art galleries in Lewes'. Yes, but they can be daunting and are certainly expensive to hire – especially since we have lost Thebes, as well as alternative spaces on the Phoenix estate (I refuse to call it Quarter – a gentrified term in my opinion) , and empty shops entail rates the minute anyone steps over the threshold.'

Every organisation is fighting for money, but the people getting left behind in the current situation are the most in need of socially comfortable places to see cultural events and enjoy space to walk and have fun. Lewes prides itself on its diverse cultural events but it shouldn't be blind to the divisions that can sneak up so easily.'

We hope our books cross lots of boundaries – providing interest for those interested in art, nature and ecology, history and topography, and just as a record of Everyone's town.'

The Spaces in Between was chosen as a subject in order to highlight the importance of 'fallow space' – for nature and for us to think and breathe and reflect more easily; an important consideration alongside the desperate need for more housing, we need to nourish our souls as well as house our bodies for a healthy society. The Linklater is an oasis in which to cogitate on these sort of thoughts.'

So thank you, Carolyn, for this two way relationship which is also manifest in other groups such as Angels with Attitude who, from the start, took a second weekly evening slot. It gives great pleasure to know that such activities are seeping into the fabric of the building! Thank you.

John Parry

Environmental Educators sought

We will shortly be launching our new package of resources for school visits. Because the spring and summer are such a busy periods for people working in environmental education, we would like to identify a small pool of people who could deliver school visits for us. We are looking for dedicated, experienced outdoor educators to work with our existing team in the delivery of our new schools programme. Candidates need to have recent experience of delivering outdoor education to primary school groups and be passionate and knowledgeable about the natural world. Work will be undertaken on a day rate, self-employed basis, primarily during the school term.

Could you be a Railway Land Trustee?

Our Trustee Board has been strengthened considerably in the last 6 months through the recruitment of 3 excellent new trustees who have brought important skills and enthusiasm to the Board, and the funding we recently received from HLF will help build on this over the next 18 months. However, some of our long serving Trustees will be stepping down in the next year or so, and there are areas of expertise that we know will need replacing. We are particularly looking for people who have current experience of primary or secondary education – preferably as a teacher or teaching assistant, and for people with expertise in conservation.



'Keeping fit on the Railway Land' photo ©David Stacey

For more information on either of these roles please contact Helen Meade - see panel below

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