

BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST – AGM, 25 September 2019

Chairman's Annual Report

This year is the Trust's Silver Jubilee; it really is a quarter of a century since the first discussions that led to our foundation took place. Our main celebratory event was on Saturday 20 July, when a guided walk around our nature reserve in the afternoon was followed by a bring-and-share supper at the village hall in the evening. At this, Tony Davy gave an illustrated presentation explaining the origins, history and remarkable achievements of the Trust. We were delighted to have several of our far-sighted and public-spirited founders present. The other dimension to the celebrations has been commissioning a 20-minute video about our nature reserve. This permanent record provides both graphic testimony to our management successes and a virtual tour for anyone unable to visit in person. We are grateful to Graeme Taplin of Drone Photography Ltd for producing this video and hope you will enjoy its world premiere in a just a few minutes time.

The exciting development of the year is the Chet Valley B-Line. Populations of bees and other insects in Britain are declining at an alarming rate, posing a significant threat to British both conservation and agriculture. The cumulative effects of pesticides, habitat fragmentation and climate change are devastating. One remedy proposed by the charity Buglife is to establish nectar-rich (and otherwise wild-life friendly) corridors that link 'stepping-stones' of remaining biodiversity and allow dispersal across the countryside. Bergh Apton Conservation Trust has taken the lead in promoting a B-Line along the valley of the River Chet from Poringland to Hardley – the first one in Norfolk. This is in collaboration with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and with support from Buglife, the Woodland Trust, local Parish Councils and private landowners, among others. Helpful media coverage for the B-Line on Radio Norfolk 'Drive Time' and in the Eastern Daily Press arose from the talk given by Paul Hetherington of Buglife on 14 March. In July we were successful in obtaining a grant of £5000 from *Water, Mills and Marshes: the Broads Landscape Partnership Scheme* to organise the B-Line and now look forward to a formal launch in the new year. It is being developed by a small management group comprising Tony Davy, Matt Jones (NWT), Rodney Aldiss, Bob Kerry (Treasurer) and Andrew Milner.

During the year, our nature reserve has been embellished with two splendid Interpretation boards to inform our visitors, one each at the entrances to Church Plantation and Valley Marsh. The dispensers they incorporate for our promotional leaflets and membership forms have already recruited some new members. We thank Kaarin Wall for the design and production of these boards, and also for the new edition of our leaflet.

We had our usual full programme of events and meetings, including the regular monthly work days. After the last AGM, Andy Brazil, the County Butterfly Recorder gave us a beautifully illustrated talk on his charges. The expertise and communication skills of Dr Tony Leech on the fungus foray lived up to our perennially high expectations. The year finished with the ever-popular Christmas party at Flint Cottage. Activities resumed in the spring with the annual village litter-pick afternoon. The pond dipping on 18 May was a

great success, featuring once again our new pond. More than 30 adults and children enjoyed dipping for curiosities in the dykes and gin-clear water of the new pond – which admittedly wasn't gin-clear once a spot of paddling had been done. It is always a popular event, if the weather is kind. Only one person fell in! Bob Kerry found us more new hedges in the village to survey and we had another two successful sessions this summer. The midsummer celebration and BBQ in the garden at Flint Cottage attracted only six members, including the hosts. For a third time, we joined with the Bergh Apton Local History Group for our summer excursion. This time our luck with the weather ran out; it drizzled all day and only nine members attended. The historians won this year, as the flint mines and associated Interpretation Centre at Grimes Graves were under cover, but we did have a brief walk around the surrounding chalk grassland to see many Breckland speciality plants.

One of our better attended events was on a fine, slightly chilly evening in early September, when about 20 folk assembled in the Church Field to learn about bats. After an introductory talk we were led around the reserve enthusiastically by Ben Jervis and Christine Hipperson of *Bench Ecology* with various bat-detecting devices that rendered their calls audible. In addition to 'hearing' Daubenton's bats, Common and Soprano Pipistrelles, and the rare and declining Barbastelle, we were enchanted by dozens of flashing glow-worms in the vegetation around the new pond. The prize for best exhibit went to Chris Johnson, who produced mummified Brown Long-eared and Common Pipistrelle bats (found dead in his garden) for people to examine and handle.

We enjoy continued contact with Brooke Scout Group. Appropriate to the various age groups (from 5 to c. 16), their visits incorporate observations of different flora and fauna, with work on the Trust lands. This year, using materials from our own woodland management, their labours were mainly repair of badly deteriorated steps. This facilitates access for bat walks, fungus forays and the like. Young Explorers from the Wheatfen Forest School have enjoyed another couple of visits to the reserve to explore it further. We still benefit from the occasional visit from young offenders and their supervisor, Richard. Their contribution on workdays is invaluable, and Richard sometimes comes to lend a hand even if he has no youngster to oversee. We were very grateful for their help when pulling Himalayan Balsam in August – hard work on a very hot day.

Overall, it has been a remarkably successful and eventful year leaving the Trust in a strong position for exciting developments, both in the near future and over the next 25 years.

Tony Davy