



Slipper Mill Pond Preservation Association

Registered Charity: 277744

Web site: www.smppa.org.uk



December 1990

Photo thanks to John Brown

NEWSLETTER - December 2006

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Introduction

The Annual Dinner signals the start of the Festive Season - Amanda Thomas, manager of the Brookfield Hotel tells me - so it must be time to write the Christmas Newsletter.

The Association has had another successful year. The pond continues to thrive, with an exceptional number of shoals of fish providing food for many cormorants and egrets. The West Bank has continued to cause concern. We are having "Volunteer Days" in January and February to plant reeds to protect the inside face - and to which all are invited. Whilst there is no immediate danger to its outside face we are taking action following the detailed geotechnical report.

As ever 2007 will bring known and new challenges for the pond.

A Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year to you all

Nick Madina, Chairman

Wildlife Report

Gavin Millar reports:

Winter is supposed to have arrived, and with recent heavy rain and wind the deciduous trees are appropriately leafless. With the mild temperatures, however, some of the plants may have got confused. White Dead Nettle often flowers well into autumn but the numbers in flower at present suggest they think it's already spring. Black Horehound is also in evidence. Maybe labiates are easily misled. One member of the family, Common Calamint gave us all great pleasure in September, not having been noted previously in these parts (its name is misleading).

Similarly, apart from the usual wintering Coots who have joined the residents, there have been none of the winter visitors we associate with cold weather with the exception of a brief visit by a Great Crested Grebe. Earlier there were Ospreys (I only ever saw one) at Thornham on their southward journey and one was reported flying over the pond. The two Cygnets who arrived rather late after two duff attempts by the parent birds have now got to the stage of flying and are virtually full size, their rather pathetic-sounding squeaking giving way to some aggressive snorting. While it was great to have these hatched actually on the pond, there are some mixed feelings around, given the effects on the Sea Club Rushes, which we need to protect the inside of the West bank from wave action.

Speaking of which, the experimental planting with varying depths of topsoil and gravel inside wooden frames suggests it may be a viable way of extending

the existing reeds. Very welcome offers of help from the Harbour Conservancy and Chichester Wildfowlers give us the opportunity to get the whole of the West bank planted, starting in the New Year.

A note from Arthur Townsend - past Chairman.

There are few swans on the Pond, because a breeding pair need all of the pond and drive away any intruders. Most intruders are chased away but occasionally a fight ensues. The spectacle of the enraged male Cob surfing down the pond with neck arched and his wings raised is awe inspiring. The object of the fight is to entwine their opponent's neck and force his beak underwater - death by drowning will occur. Only intervention to separate the birds will avoid this. For fifteen years or so a Cob and Pen have bred on the little island adjacent to the A259 in the upper pond, Peter Pond. This has been unsatisfactory because the island can easily be reached by dogs, foxes and two-legged predators. Also Spring Tides wash over it. This year the Pen nested on the bank of Peter Pond - I think some disaster resulted because I did not see any cygnets raised there - later they nested on the bank of Slipper Mill Pond.

Bird Flu

The threat from Bird Flu is ever present and clearly the wild birds on the pond pose a potential threat. As noted on our Web Site the Chichester Harbour Conservancy has posted full information on their Web Site with links to the DEFRA. The following extract from their "Questions and Answers" page addresses some of the basic issues:

11 My dog found some dead birds. Does that mean it will get 'flu?

There is no evidence that any type of avian influenza (AI) has passed from avian species to dogs. So even in the unlikely event that the reported dead birds had died from AI, the risk to your dog would be extremely low. Cases of dog 'flu have been recorded in the USA, but in this case the virus is believed to have originated from horse 'flu.

12 Am I at risk from touching dead birds?

Wild birds can carry several diseases that are infectious to people. If dead birds are handled, it is important to wash your hands with soap and water as soon as possible. Avoid touching your face and certainly do not eat until you have washed your hands. Clean any soiling on clothing with soap and water.

13 What am I at risk from?

Although the risk of AI may be low, birds carry other respiratory infections. Birds can also carry infections which can cause gastrointestinal infections such as Salmonella and Campylobacter....

Reed Planting

As we have already described the inside face of the clay-cored bank is made up of concrete filled sandbags placed some 20 years ago. They have protected it well, but have deteriorated over time. We have repaired the toe but the joints between the corners of individual bags have been washed out in places and wave action can penetrate and weaken the bank core. Our solution to alleviate the problem is to protect the bank with a fringe of reeds which will act as a wave break and, as an additional benefit, increase the habitat



We have been experimenting to find the best way to plant reeds at its toe. In Spring 2005 we tried using patent environmentally friendly coconut Coir Roll to provide shelter for the root system. We found that the rhizomes inserted into the roll itself did not take, and those planted behind in silt dredged from the pond survived but did not thrive probably as the medium was being washed away by wave action and the silt being sterile. In Spring 2006 we tried plain timber frames with their sides deliberately rising to above normal water level and using varying depths of topsoil dressed with gravel to overcome the problem of any remaining wave action

The frame test was very satisfactory and we are now preparing to line the Southern end of the bank, a length of some 170m

We have evaluated the volunteer effort needed very carefully and we need volunteers! We have planned two major "Work Days" - Sunday 14th January 2007 and Sunday 11th February 2007 - when we will be fixing frames, back filling with topsoil and planting reeds.

The Conservancy have been very generous and are giving a grant of £1,000 to cover the costs of the materials we will need.

Volunteers - please make yourselves known!!!

West Bank - Outside Face

Unfortunately we have little progress to report. We have had budget estimates from two contractors both of which are not precise enough. We are using their figures to start looking for financial support as, using their costing, we expect the repairs to cost in the order of £50,000. We fear that, at earliest, we might start work next Autumn.

Display Panels

The present Display Panels were installed in 1999 and have been much admired by all for their completeness and detail. With the raising the profile of the Association and to draw attention to the reed planting along the West Bank the Committee has agreed to use the opportunity to refresh them.

Our intention is to continue to use the same themes but to have less text and to invite the reader to investigate our leaflet and Web Site.

The notional cost of replacing the panels is about £1,200. The Conservancy has made a Grant to cover the Design and Production costs of £340 and the Association is using Artwork from its archives. As ever volunteers will be volunteered to refurbish the existing frames!

Hermitage Housing

The latest Planning Application proposes to uproot four oak trees with preservation orders and to plant substitutes. We have lodged an objection which reads:

“ The recent Planning Application - NoSB/06/05011/TPA – seems like an innocent proposal to fell four oak trees and plant substitutes. Looking at the accompanying plans and correspondence in the public domain it is immediately apparent that the developer has not made the final holding pond of the Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) big enough. We are very concerned about this as it does call into question the whole issue of the quality control of the construction of the SUDS system and potentially the whole development. You will recall that we have frequently expressed our concerns about its validity and eventual management and feel very frustrated. All we can do is to only reiterate our anxieties and remind you again and again about our concerns about the system and the pollution threat it is to both Peter Pond and the Slipper Mill Pond We object to felling protected trees as a matter of principle especially as they were allowed for in the agreed scheme. More importantly we draw your attention to our increased concerns about the viability and management of the Sustainable Urban Drainage System and seek your formal reassurance that the scheme will perform correctly.”

Flooding

The storms and high tides at the start of this month are a timely reminder of the threats that are posed by the sea. Spring tides can be raised by low pressure and strong winds and the uplift we have had recently has been about 0.6m. Under these circumstances the pond bank becomes submerged and the tide can even surge up the Ems valley as far as the railway line.



For more information about flooding and to receive early warnings please contact the Environment Agency's "Floodline" service Tel. No. 0845 988 1188. Their relevant areas are:

Title	Description	Reference Number
River Ems from Westbourne to Emsworth	River Ems from Westbourne to Emsworth including Lumley	01232111
West Hayling and Emsworth	tidal areas on the West side of Hayling Island, and Emsworth	0122156 0122151

Annual Dinner

95 Association Members and their friends enjoyed an excellent dinner on Friday 24th November, at the Brookfield Hotel, our traditional venue, the whole evening more than lived up to expectations. This year the Guest of Honour was Alison Fowler of the Chichester Harbour Conservancy, who explained briefly her role as Manager of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The event raised nearly £500 for the Pond! The ever-popular Raffle raised £378; our thanks go to the raffle ticket sellers and folders; Sarah and Mike Titley, Julie and Bill Warren, Jill Millar, Charlotte and David Brightwell. May we thank all who contributed so generously with prizes. We would like to thank to our sponsors this year as follows:

- the Brookfield Hotel (Sunday lunch for two)
- Chichester Harbour Conservancy (a family trip in their solar powered boat)
- the Sussex Brewery (a Sausage Supper for two)
- the Emsworth Co-op (£20 voucher)
- the Mill Pond Bed and Breakfast (2 bottles of wine)
- and not least - Key Print, who, every year, kindly print our dinner tickets

E-mail Addresses

To make communications easier and faster please can all members who can send an E-mail to:

Webmaster@smppa.org.uk

Please give it the title "SMPPA Member". We will build a circulation list from this solely for Association Business.

Dates for your diary

Sunday, 14th January	Volunteer Days - reed planting
Sunday, 11th February	
Friday, 20 th April 2007	Spring Talk To be given by Chris Hallam, Major (Retd), based at the Baker Barracks on Thorney Island
Thursday, 18th October 2007	Annual General Meeting
Friday, 23rd November 2007	Annual Dinner

Contacts:

General:

Nick Madina (01243377749)

E-mail: webmaster@smppa.org.uk

Wildlife:

Gavin Millar (01243 377071)

Please let him know if you see any wildlife activity out of the ordinary.

The first point of help is the RSPCA (01329 667541). The Downland

Surgery (01243 377141) offers a support service in the event of real need.