



Official Quality Control of Raft Work!

Newsletter — January 2017

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Introduction

Twelfth Night has come and gone and the twinkling lights have disappeared. The bacchanalia of Hogmanay are a distant memory putting us firmly in the middle of January and gearing up for the year ahead. The skeins of Geese passing noisily overhead are a welcome sign that winter is passing and Spring is just around the corner.

The Committee gave a full report of the Association's activities in 2016 to the October Annual General Meeting and the Minutes are enclosed with this Newsletter. Since then the Main bird raft has been re-moored and the Northern replaced and now the coots are waiting for a house to be provided for them!

The committee hopes to have a successful 2017 building on the achievements of the last and previous years. The banks are in good shape and ready for the Spring and with our involvement with the LERMG we hope to progress on the Sluice and Apron issue.

*Nick Madinaveitia
January 2017*

Wildlife report

Birds

Swans – This year's pair plus one nearly mature cygnet seen often

Coots – in cold weather there are a host of visitors

Ducks – visit from Peter Pond

Kingfishers – have been seen streaking along the pond bank

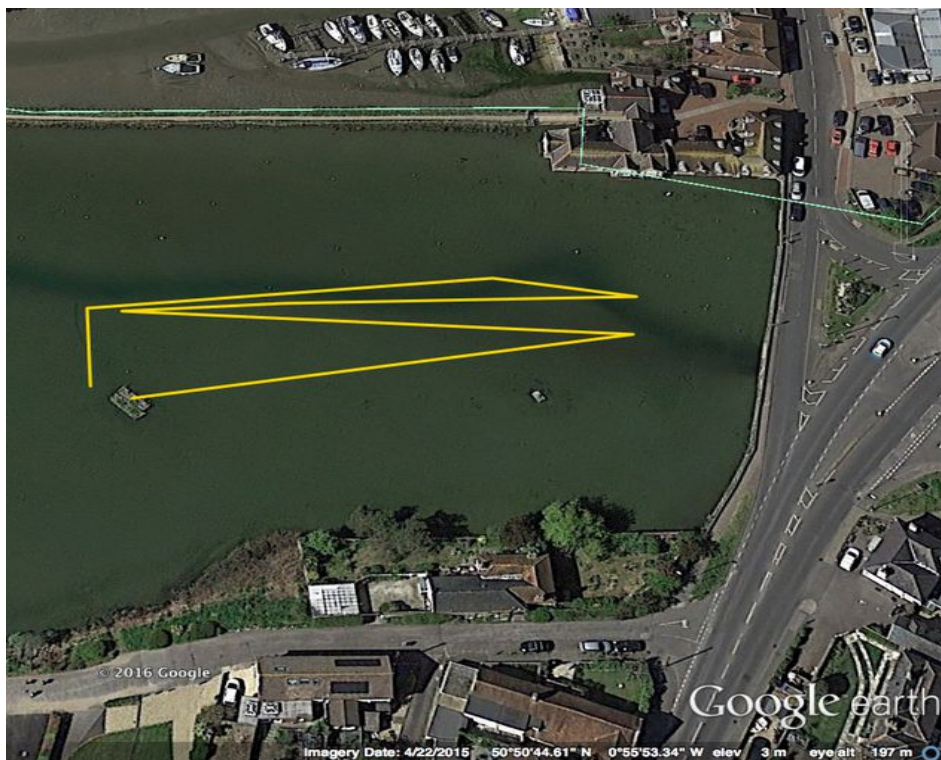
Fish

Regular visits by cormorants, herons and egrets suggest that the pond is/was well stocked!

Bird Raft Adventures

Main Raft

In September during rough weather the Main Raft's chain failed and it drifted northwards towards the main road. Doughty volunteers soon installed a temporary anchor and preparations were made to return it to its usual position.

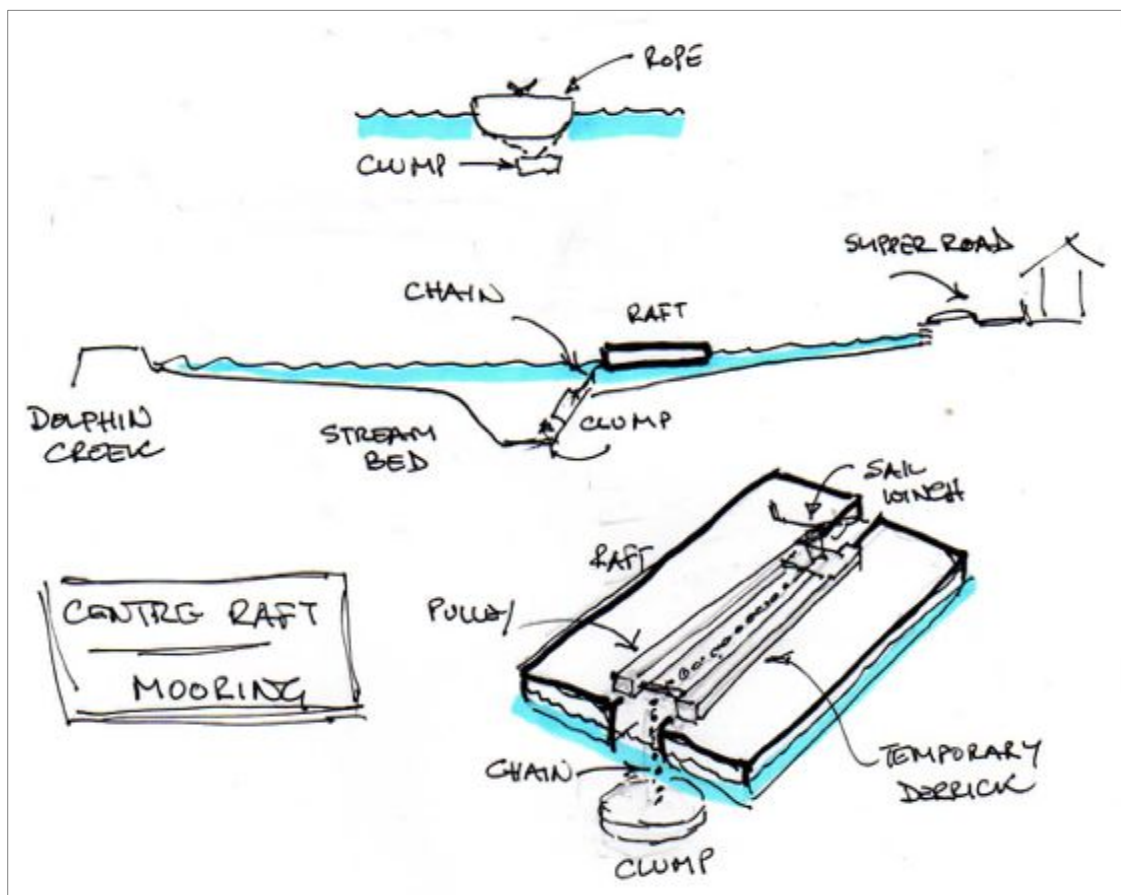


Path of the travels of the Raft

Enquiries were made and Sid, the Emsworth harbour master, was persuaded to offer us an old mooring clump which he agreed was what was needed.

The following weekend we turned out to meet Sid on the beach by Slipper Mill and, with due ceremony, he showed us how to sling the clump underneath the dinghy and helped us through the now open tidal gates and into the pond. The dinghy was very heavily loaded and even with a second dinghy helping, progress was painfully slow. By now the tide had returned and so the decision was made to drop the clump and then take advantage of the remainder of the tide to tow the raft to this new position.

We had been asked by Peter Pond and Lumley Road residents to leave the gates open and we discovered that the mooring clump had slipped down the side of the central channel and that, as the tide dropped, the raft grounded sitting precariously on the edge of the central channel. We closed the gates on the next tide and made plans to move it into a better position on the next Spring Tides.



Prior to opening the gates again we explored the pond bottom as the water was so clear and were happy to find a substantial mooring rope firmly anchored – or so we thought! On the next Spring Tides we pulled the raft

to this new position and made plans to move the clump the following week.

Shock, horror! Several days later after a wild and windy night the raft had disappeared! Was it the GBBG's getting their revenge? We found it close to the main road, towed it along the channel as far as we were able, and used the temporary anchor again.

On land we prepared a winch and pulley lifting device ready for the next Spring Tides. Using a line fixed to the clump we hauled the raft to it in preparation for the next day when we successfully raised the clump so it lay within the draught of the raft and pulled it into its current position. This is intended to be its permanent home provided that the GBBGs do not take it into their minds to flee with it again.



North Raft

The Committee had explored alternatives and, after due discussion, agreed to reuse the old tidal gates together with old polystyrene floats donated by the marina; all appropriate recycling.

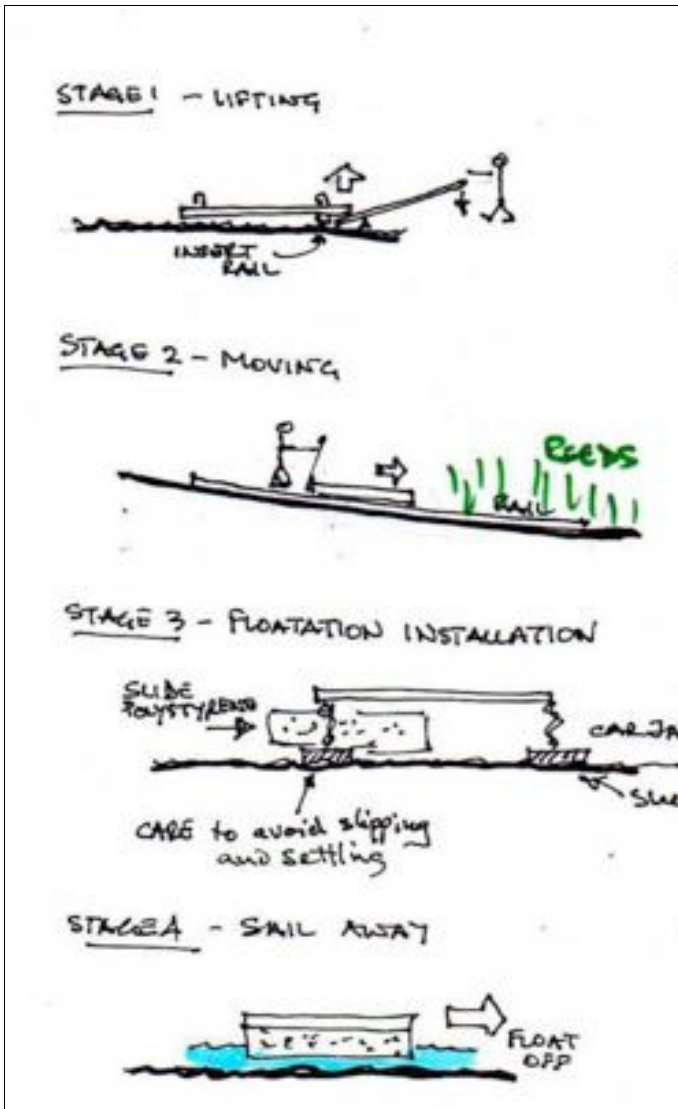


Old gates being lifted out - April 2012



Assembly Area - note soft ground

We had to take even more care during construction as the pond bank was even softer than anticipated. We even resorted to a block and tackle to help drag them into position as the spreaders we used were sinking under their weight. By the time it came to lifting them high enough to be able to slide the polystyrene floats underneath we had developed our techniques making that operation easy even though we did take great care handling such heavy elements.



We waited for the mid-December Spring Tide and duly floated the two sections obediently in our 'dry dock' but forcing them out into the open water was a major effort as we had underestimated the stiffness of the remaining fringe of reeds.

It was with great satisfaction we later towed the new raft components out to position and linked them together. As we were checking the connections between the sections the swans came up to see what we were doing and sailed gracefully away after giving their approval. We then used the now more stable platform to remove the remaining old raft debris from the pond bottom.



Launching on the Spring Tide

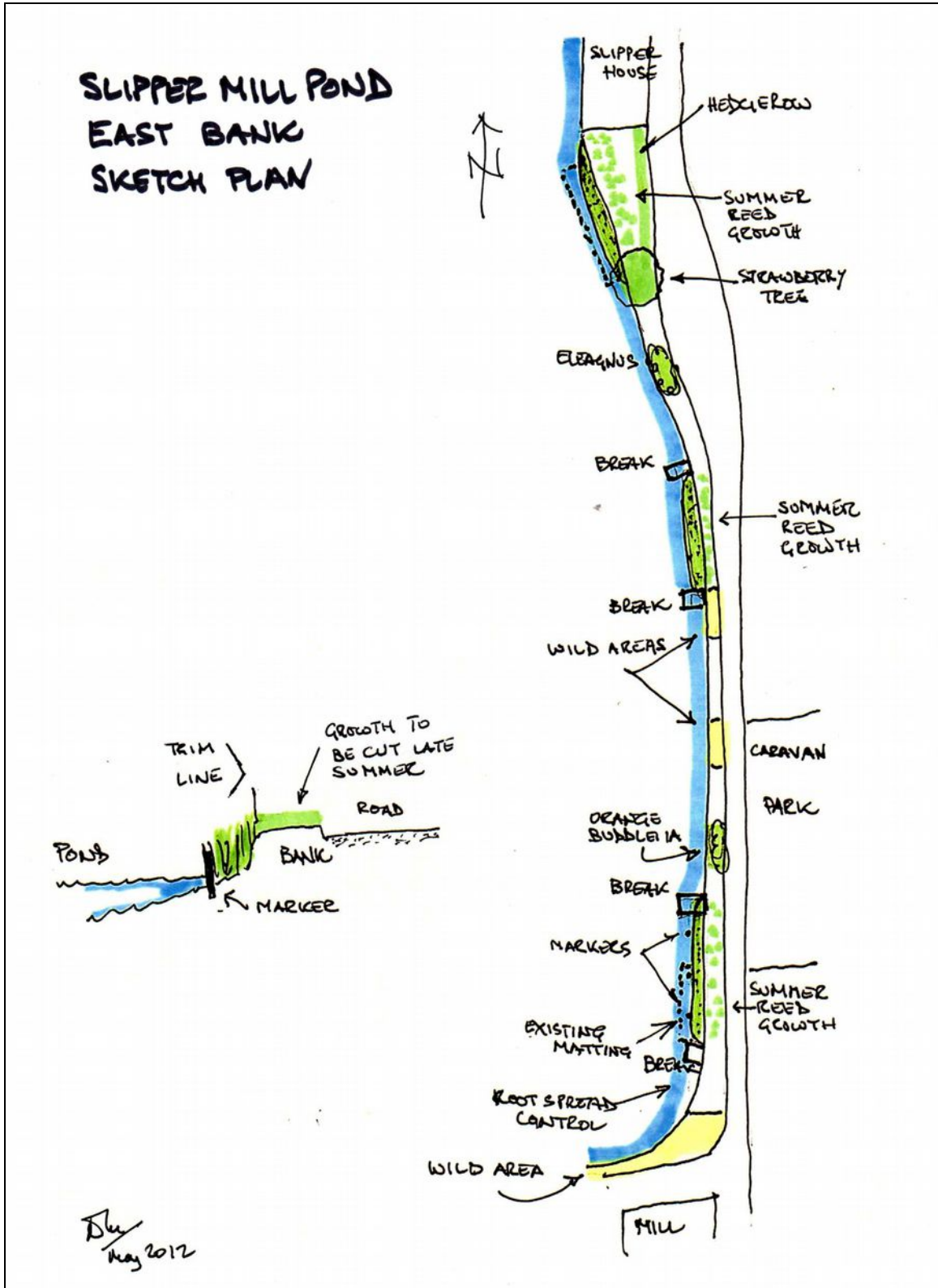


Connecting the gates

All that remains to do is to rebuild a coot nesting box and fix into position.

East Bank Matters

Suggestions for a less managed and more natural approach made by a local member were recently considered by the Committee. However, the possible alternatives having been carefully examined in depth, it was decided to adhere to the present strategy.



The bank is divided into zones each of which is managed to match their character. The grassy sections are treated as open meadow so natural vegetation can flourish and bloom in spring and summer, the wilds are contained to avoid bramble and other growth causing nuisance and the reeds are restricted to flank the pond itself. Shrubs are controlled to keep their structure sound and to maintain the necessary sight lines along the road. Whilst the Autumn trim of the bank every year seems harsh and temporarily changes its character, it restrains the natural trend to an overgrown woodland.

We have some pernicious plants that, if left unchecked, will take over the bank – and have established a plan of action:

Common Reeds (*Phragmites australis*)

We have marked the pond-ward extent of the reeds to keep a check on incursion into the open water and installed weed-control matting at each end of the clumps at water level to try to limit their spread along the banks. Our containment has given the other plants a chance to show – like the daffodils in the Spring – but it is inevitable that they will re-appear from time to time and need dealing with.

Nettles and Brambles

We appreciate their value but we are very concerned that they are becoming a dominant species in designated open areas. To keep them reasonably under control there is a regular cull and taking care to limit disturbance to grasses and plants whilst those in the 'wild' areas remain untouched. In this way we maintain habitats for a wide range of insects and spiders whilst allowing the vegetation to diversify.

Infrastructure

General

Our pond and its banks continue to be in good condition apart from the sluice and its apron.

Sluice and Apron

Good news - West Sussex County Council have agreed to help by funding Opus International to prepare the necessary report to help us in organising funding etc.

Pond Draining

For maintenance purposes the gates will be left open to allow the Pond to drain on the High Tide Friday to Sunday 13th to 15th January. Likewise Friday to Sunday 10th to 12th February.

LERMG - Projects

The Lower Ems River Management Group continues with its work on the river valley between the A27 and the sea and the following elements are active:



Looking North from Rose Cottage towards the railway

- Lumley Cottages Phase 2
Precast units forming the bridges and retaining wall have been installed and faced with brickwork to tie in with the phase 1 works. Essential minor works still need to be completed.

- Lumley Cottages Phase 3
A full ecological study is underway at the moment and the design of the protective bank to the rear awaits its outcome.
- Slipper Pond
See above – Sluice and Apron repairs

Dolphin Quay

We have not heard any further news about the development.

Work Parties

As ever many thanks to our volunteers who helped trim the East bank and prepare it for next season's growth.

As Spring approaches and the bank comes to life we are planning a session on 11th February to take advantage of the lowered water level in the pond. More details will be sent nearer the time.

Spring Talk

To be held on 24th March starting at 7.00 for 7.30pm when the Station Staff Officer of Thorney Garrison has kindly agreed to speak. His presentation is planned to cover the base, its military history, current activities/strategic importance, role in preservation of wildlife and their flood prevention plans. The Army's website has detail about the Thorney Island base and includes a Unit Overview.

More details can be found by going to www.army.mod.uk and search for Baker Barracks or Thorney

Photographic Competition

The Photographic Competition will be launched during February/March with presentations to the six participating schools. After judging has taken place, the prize giving ceremony will be held in the Community Centre at 4.00p.m. on 28th April. The winning pictures will subsequently be displayed as part of the Emsworth Arts Trail.

Annual Dinner

The Annual Dinner was held at the Brookfield Hotel on Friday 25th November 2016 and greatly enjoyed by everyone.

Our thanks go to those who donated gifts for the much-enjoyed raffle and our sponsors:

- Brookfield Hotel - Tea for Two voucher.
- Sussex brewery - Sausage Supper for Two
- Coop - £20 worth of chocolates for the Raffle.
- Keyprint in Emsworth - Dinner invitations free of charge

A random guest captured the spirit of the event thus:

*I've never won the raffle, though I've tried for many years,
but when The Chairman got up to speak
I didn't mind a bit my dears;
soon frantic shouts were so funny
it appeared he'd lost his little list,
which he very sorely missed.*

*I could scarce believe my ears.
The Committee helped, with music and with dance,
and finished the evening in a bacchanalian prance.
It was summertime, and the livin' was easy; they'd gone fishing
with 7 dwarfs and the chain-gang. How much more fun
than a normal Chairman's staid harangue!*

Dates for your Diary

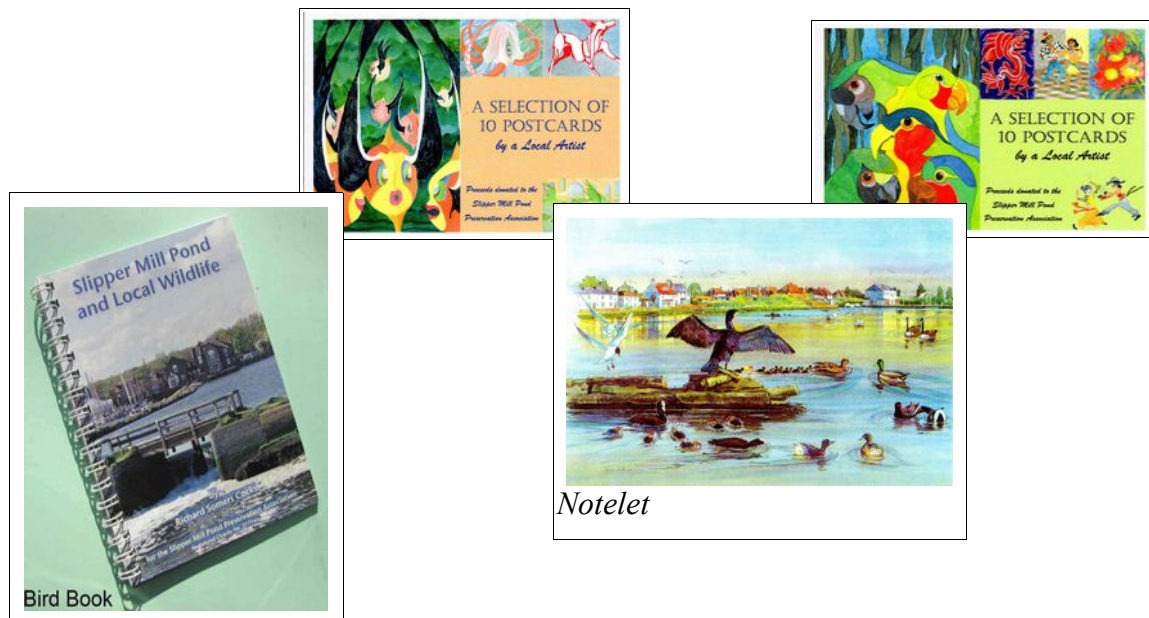
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|----------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Saturday | 11 th February | Potential Work Party |
| Friday | 24 th March | Spring Talk |
| Friday | 28 th April | Photographic Competition |
| | July | Summer Party |
| Friday | 27 th October | Annual General Meeting |
| Friday | 24 th November | Annual Dinner |

Contacts

| | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| General: | Nick Madinaveitia | 01243 377749 | chmn@smppa.org.uk |
| Treasurer: | Mark Phillips | 01243 376756 | treasurer@smppa.org.uk |
| Membership | Sharon Corbett | 01243 389994 | membership@smppa.org.uk |
| Social Events | Jo Greenfield | 01243 371134 | info@smppa.org.uk |
| Work Party | Rob Turner | 01243 376508 | workparty@smppa.org.uk |
| Photo comp. | Mark Phillips | 01243 376756 | Photos@smppa.org.uk |
| Wildlife: | Downland Surgery | 01243 377141 | |
| | RSPCA | 01239 667541 | |
| Environment Agency | Pollution | 0845 9881188 | |
| | Flood line | 0800 807060 | |

Publications

Please contact Jo Greenfield if you wish to purchase the Bird Book, Notelets or Cards all on sale to support the Association.



Unless noted illustrations by Nick Madinaveitia