



Slipper Mill Pond Preservation Association

Registered Charity: 277744

www.smppa.org.uk



Flowers on Slipper Road

Photo: Nick Madinaveitia

Newsletter — September 2013

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Introduction:

After a disappointing start the sunny weather arrived and was enjoyed by everyone. Autumn is just around the corner, the days are getting shorter and the weather is starting to deteriorate. As usual this newsletter outlines the major issues facing the Association and describes the actions being taken to address them.

We are preparing for our Annual General Meeting and have a vacancy on the Committee. We would very much welcome another member to join us, especially representing the interests of the West side of the pond.

The Agenda with more details is being circulated with this Newsletter.

Nick Madinaveitia, Chairman

Wildlife Report

General

Our resident Greater Black Backed Gulls left at the start of August after a successful breeding season. This heralded the return of our more normal bird population and the large number of cormorants and herons are witness to a healthy pond supporting a large fish population.

Egrets have taken to nesting in the large conifer trees overlooking the West bank of the pond.

On some of the windier days less usual birds, including Canada geese, have been sheltering here.

This year the area at the North end of Slipper Road alongside the recently planted hedge had many wild flowers making a spectacular display. Residents and visitors alike have commented on how colourful and appropriate they were.



Egret roosting

Photo: Nick Madinaveitia

Greater Black Backed Gulls - *Larus marinus*



Greater Black Backed Gull

Photo: Richard Somers Cocks

These are the largest gulls in the world, even bigger than the mighty herring gull. It's fair to say that these are not 'nice' birds: they are voracious opportunists and not much is safe from this greedy gull: weak and injured birds are easily overpowered, marine creatures are easy prey and scavenging from rubbish dumps and landfill sites adds to their varied diet. The great black-backed gull's greatest weapon is a wicked curved bill that smashes, stabs and tears with ease. Found around the coasts, these gulls move inland during the winter.

The adults are blacker than the smaller lesser black-backed gull, have a heavy flight and can look quite hunched when perched. They are at the head of the local food-chain and will fight off other gulls and chase to snatch food. Britain and Ireland have much of the world population and they breed mainly in the Outer and Inner Hebrides and the Northern Isles of Scotland. Recently their breeding range has expanded with nests almost exclusively in coastal habitats, but they will occasionally nest inland at freshwater sites as well as on the roofs of buildings. The UK has some 16,800 individuals being almost 10% of the world population

It has a Conservation status of AMBER - listed in [Birds of Conservation Concern 3](#) (2013 update) because of recent non-breeding population Decline (1981-2007)

In 2012 a pair successfully nested on the central bird raft on Slipper Mill Pond, raised two offspring and returned this year to raise a further 3. They were often seen patrolling the area for forage and their early morning calling wakens many. Their appearance and predation has resulted in the decline of the local indigenous population of ducks, coots and swans.

Initial enthusiasm for them has waned and many residents and visitors have commented on dwindling the local bird population. Even local naturalists are concerned and agree they should be discouraged from nesting on the pond again.

The Conservancy have noted in an e-mail that:

- *Great Black-backed Gulls are actually a fairly rare breeding bird in the UK with only around 1,500 pairs, so in nature conservation terms they are a higher priority than the breeding Mallards, Coots and Moorhens.*
- *The multi-purpose nature of the site and therefore your desire to manage this issue is appreciated.*
- *The gulls have been removed from the general licence allowing control for public health/safety, serious damage and/or for conservation of flora and fauna. However, in certain circumstances an individual licence can be applied for to undertake control, but evidence would have to be presented that the control is necessary to prevent significant harm to the public and or species of nature conservation importance, which in this case is probably unlikely.*
- *Please note that should you wish to progress this work it should be undertaken well before the nesting season, to avoid disturbing nesting birds which would constitute an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.*

Amongst the solutions put forward are:

Killing the birds	Not legal given their AMBER status.
Moving the raft to the side of the pond to discourage nesting.	Unfortunately not practical as the fringes are too shallow
Removing the raft altogether	Would require a crane to lift it out at the bridge at the head of the pond and low loader to take it for disposal – at considerable cost.
Making the raft an unacceptable nesting site for these gulls	Removal of all vegetation and cover Protecting it with a fence or net and providing roosting for cormorants and nesting boxes for coots/duck on perimeter Disturbing the nest during its preparation - not a legal activity

What the displaced bird will do?

- take over a smaller raft? – it would be easy to move them to the edge to discourage this.
- move to Peter Pond and cause problems there
- transfer out into the harbour – to Fowley Island or beyond

Ideas please! We will discuss this at our Annual General Meeting.

East Bank Matters

How do you solve a problem like *Phragmites australis*?

Phragmites australis or the Common Reed is a very sculptural and attractive plant. It is also a very invasive one and hard to manage. Evidence of this can clearly be seen on the East Bank of the pond adjoining Slipper Road.

Our aim for the Bank has been to provide an environment to allow as much biodiversity as possible.

Planting and its management have been explored at length at our recent Annual General Meetings and the overall approach agreed. We also have to ensure that the use of Slipper Road is not impeded. The reeds are now threatening both of these needs. We do not want to eradicate the reeds altogether from the East Bank as they do provide a habitat for certain species we want to encourage. However left unchecked they will eventually conquer all.

Over the last few years we have tried to keep the reeds in check with a robust programme of summer and autumn cutting which, in particular, has not discouraged our regular Reed Warblers. Regrettably though this has not stopped their spread along and across the bank, into the pond and in some areas even under the road.



Reeds along Slipper Road

Photo: Nick Madinaveitia

The committee was already exploring solutions when it was approached by the Trustees a few months ago to develop a more robust management plan. After exploring all options, the experts on such matters lead us to believe that the best solution available is a controlled and fully approved spraying of unwanted reeds with the herbicide glyphosphate. The following link may be useful in understanding the difficulties we face:

http://www.ceh.ac.uk/sci_programmes/documents/reeds_rushes_grassesand_sedges.pdf

In addition to the East Bank, there is a small spreading clump of *Phragmites australis* on the West Bank of the pond. Its rhizomes were nested in with the original planting of the Sea Club Rush and need to be cleared before it creates similar issues there.

We have consulted Natural England, West Sussex Council, Chichester Harbour Authority and the Environment Agency. Waterland Management Ltd, a fully qualified professional organisation, has obtained approval on our behalf and plans to carry out the works with their trained specialist operatives by the end of September.

We hope that by engaging such a licensed and professional team that disturbance and damage will be kept to a minimum but there is a high likelihood that there will be some collateral damage and that some replacement will be necessary. Because of the technicalities of the approval process their timetable is unknown at present. In any event we will be having a work party to cut down and dispose of the reeds.

Planting

The old Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*) on the East Bank died early in the Spring and we planted a replacement some metres away hoping to enjoy its flowers again. Unfortunately the dry summer has taken its toll and it has died. We are looking for a replacement to plant in the Autumn.

The Southern section of the *Eleagnus* (Russian Olive) at the bend in the road failed and has had to be cut back – its stump is starting to sprout again and the *Correa* it previously overwhelmed has started to send out new shoots. Their progress is being followed with interest.

The hedgerow and the others planted at the same time have taken and are making satisfactory progress.

The River Ems

The early part of the summer was wet and the River Ems continued to be full. The white band marking the high water level is a clear indication that the river has included much chalk bearing groundwater, Our recent spectacular dry July and August has meant levels have now dropped to the point that Portsmouth Water are starting to augment the flow to maintain the ecosystem.

Whilst flooding is not an issue at the moment the Association is continuing to press both West Sussex County Council and the Environment Agency. Both authorities have verbally agreed the findings of the Burgess Report and its supplementary information but formal confirmation remains outstanding. (See our January and April Newsletters).

Until formal agreement confirming that the management of the pond is independent of flooding up stream the Association will not undertake any further works that could imply, however remotely, such responsibility.

Pond Structures

Tidal Gates

The finishing works to the gates have not yet been carried out as in the Spring there was too much water flowing. In October the gates will be opened and the leaks around the frames will be addressed.

Sluice

The sluice and its structure are very near the end of their useful life and need replacing. The overloading caused by the Environment Agency's insistence that the gate should be left open in the winter, though it was not necessary, has taken its toll (See above). The downstream apron has suffered particularly badly – and now is seriously undermined in addition to the damage threatening the outer face of the sea wall,

Once the Ems Report is accepted the issue will be addressed, due approvals obtained and grants sought.



Erosion at apron

Photo: Nick Madinaveitia

Summer Party

The now traditional Summer Party was held on a very sunny Wednesday 21st August and enjoyed by all. Many thanks to Betty, the Urrys and everyone for making it a very special occasion.

Email Addresses

If you have not already done so please send an E-mail to membership@smppa.org.uk so we can keep you informed of events, workdays etc. It will only be used for SMPPA business.

Please note that our Newsletters, including this one, are also available on our web site: www.smppa.org.uk.

Annual Dinner

The Annual Dinner will be held at the Brookfield Hotel, Havant Road, Emsworth, on Friday 22nd November 2013. Tickets are £22 each and will be available from Sarah Titley and Betty Smith who would be grateful if you would bring any donations you may have for the Dinner to this meeting.

Dates for your Diary

Saturday	28 th September	Specialist work party – cutting and disposing of the reeds or pruning shrubs and attending hedgerow.
Friday	1 st November	Annual General Meeting
TBA	November	Work Party
Friday	22 rd November	Annual Dinner, Brookfield Hotel.

Contacts:

General:	Nick Madinaveitia	01243 377749
Treasurer:	Mark Phillips	01243 376756
Membership & Social Events	Betty Smith	01243 371576
	Sarah Titley	01243 379947
Wildlife:	The Downland Surgery	01243 377141
	RSPCA	01239 667541
Environment Agency	Pollution	0845 9881188
	Flood line	0800 807060
	Mention the local rangers in any calls – Paul Reynolds & Trevor Page	