

friends of Petersfield Heath



Spring Newsletter 2018

Dates for your diary

Annual General Meeting – Tuesday 15 May, the Rose Room, the Festival Hall, 7.30pm.

Peopling the Heath Conference – Saturday 24 March, the Festival Hall www.peopleoftheheath.com

Heath winter wildlife – Alf Smallbone

Here are some of my observations from the autumn & winter period. Cormorant numbers gradually increased through October and November with a peak of 53; these tailed off through December. In the New Year there have been daily visits but numbers have been in single figures.

Tufted ducks have been present throughout this period with a maximum of 15 noted. An influx of mute swans has brought the numbers up to 30 and they are all really hungry! Other winter wildfowl noted have included ducks - pochard, teal, widgeon, gadwall, shoveler, as well as goosander, great crested grebe and little grebe.

Waterside birds have been heron, little egret and water rail, the latter being notoriously shy. You might have seen our strange single Muscovy duck that visits in winter. The duck was placed on the pond around March 2017 by person(s) unknown. Its wings had been clipped so it had been a captive bird somewhere. The wings have now grown back and though it is now capable of flight, it seems to like the pond!

In January, both goldeneyes and a black swan were spotted.



Black swan

Badgers

Our indefatigable Chairman, Richard Warton, has been out on many dark, cold nights in December and January setting up special PIR operated infra-red camera, with the hope of recording nocturnal activity. He has met with success on almost every occasion, with badgers turning up to forage amongst the long grass, foxes investigating (sometimes both together) and even one albino badger!

View the short video clips on our website - <http://bit.ly/2IsoWLR>

Willow coppicing

Petersfield Town Council (PTC) Grounds Team have returned to a long-standing plan for willow coppicing and have opened up the southeast and northeast corners of Heath Pond. Rotational coppicing every 5-7 years allows for fresh new growth from the willow 'stools' and allows light to reach the pond margins, where it is hoped more reed-bed will now develop.



Cut stems at Sussex Road entrance

Proposals for the upgrading and environmental enhancement of Heath Pond were consulted and although we have not seen the results yet, we understand tendering for the engineering works will begin shortly.

Heath Management Plan

The new Management Plan 2017-21 (<https://bit.ly/2qhMdli>), commissioned by PTC via the SDNPA, and delivered by CHJ Consultants, arrived at PTC's Grounds Committee last Spring. Owing to a misunderstanding we were not consulted on the document before it was adopted by the Town Council. The Plan focuses on conserving the heritage aspect of The Heath.

Our response, which was heard at a meeting before Christmas, asks for a wider-ranging document.

This is currently being considered by the PTC Grounds Committee. Read more - <https://bit.ly/2IFWqpA>

Workparties

Work parties have been busy over the winter season. We now have a team of experienced and reliable work party leaders in Mark Greef, Les Bowden, Alf Smallbone and Jordan Bleach, who with the help of our volunteers have accomplished such a lot in a short space of time. So far, two areas of scrub encroachment near music hill have been cleared, in order to protect the heath and grassland habitats, as well as maintaining an open structure. Further scrub has been cleared close to one of the barrows. Old degenerate bracken has been removed from the centre clearing of the eastern copse, to allow the heather to flourish.

The tree popper has been put to good use in its first full season, being used almost every session to remove small to medium sized saplings and suckers.



Our new container, above, was installed in October last year by The Little School car-park. This is a great improvement, making for an excellent place for the work party to meet, as well as affording much more space for us to keep and access tools. Storage has been well organised by Mark and Richard. We thank EHDC Councillors Julie Butler, Bob Ayres and Ben Bentley for using their Discretionary Grant to help with the purchase.

Mark co-ordinated a new project to plant a native hedge to partly conceal the new container. Around 50m of new hedging, planted with native species

such as hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, field maple and spindle, was planted in February.



The species chosen will provide birds, mammals and insects with blossom, nuts and fruit. The SDNPA donated 125 tree guards. All other costs were covered by FoPH funds.

Commemorating John Pike

The family of John Pike, our previous chairman, has commemorated his memory on Petersfield Heath with a dedicated bench, which was installed by the Town Council's Grounds team and overlooks the cricket pitch near Heath Road East. The Pike family was grateful for donations from Petersfield Cricket Club and Friends of Petersfield Heath towards the project.

John, who passed away last year, had been a keen sportsman who played rugby and cricket for Petersfield Town, later becoming Vice-President and a trustee of Petersfield Cricket Club.

John was a founder member of the Friends of Petersfield Heath in 1991 and was Chairman from 2005 – 2015. He won the prestigious Mayor's Award for his work with the group, which included the creation of better public access and conservation work parties. With volunteers from the group, he oversaw the restoration of Victorian railings, and new boundary hedging, which won an award from The Petersfield Society and Best Local Community Initiative, run by *Life in Petersfield* magazine.

John was born in Petersfield in 1935 and was a pupil at Churcher's College until he joined the Royal Air Force during his National Service. He later had a fulfilling career in civil engineering. With his wife

Vivien, he enjoyed running the Turnpike Gallery in Dragon Street for eight years during retirement years.

John married Vivien at St Peters Church in 1961 and the couple had two sons, Ian and Richard. Four grandsons and a grand-daughter followed. Some of the family gathered to sit on John's new bench.



Friends' AGM

Takes place on **Tuesday 15 May at 7.30pm**. We invite all members and their friends to attend our Annual General Meeting. This is always a social occasion with an opportunity to discuss many aspects of Petersfield Heath with your committee.

Our speaker, to be confirmed, will come from the South Downs National Park Authority. We shall learn more about the management opportunities open to us for maximizing heathland wildlife, as well as hearing about the steps we can take to care for and monitor the wildlife of Petersfield Heath.

Help needed - Website & social media

We are looking for a member who would be interested to help manage the content on our website, and possibly also manage Facebook and Twitter posts. The brief includes finding news stories about the heath and its wildlife, reporting our own activities, such as work-parties and covering relevant Council matters. If you might be interested please contact Melanie melanieoxley44@gmail.com

Friends of Petersfield Heath March 2018

