

BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST – AGM, 21 September 2021

Chairman's Annual Report

Like every other organisation, Bergh Apton Conservation Trust has had another difficult year, with our activities continuing to be severely curtailed by Covid-19. At least our 2021 AGM is being held in person, rather than on Zoom as last year. Furthermore, on Sunday, two days ago, we met for a very belated village litter-pick, thanks to Bob Kerry. Another consolation is that many more visitors have again benefitted from the tranquillity and beauty of our reserve over the last year. Currently, we are welcoming Bergh Apton Community Arts Trust's 'One for the Rook' event to the reserve, as part of a 'trail' for meditation and contemplation.

Notwithstanding the challenges, the Trust has achieved an important milestone. The purchase of a 12-acre extension to our nature reserve, more than doubling its size, was completed in October 2020. We are grateful to founder member and supporter Robert Waters for agreeing to sell us this land and for his most generous terms of sale. It is also a pleasure to acknowledge the organisations whose grants have enabled the purchase: Bergh Apton Parish Council, Bergh Apton Village Hall Committee, South Norfolk District Council and the Geoffrey Watling Charity. This acquisition, on the far side of the River Chet from Valley Marsh, will be known as Welbeck Marsh. Apart from the eponymous tall-herb marsh, it also includes areas of wet woodland, scrub and rough grassland and so further diversifies our portfolio of habitats.

Of course, new land comes with demanding prescriptions for conservation management in order to maximise its value for wildlife and biodiversity – not to mention improving access. Our loyal band of volunteers plans to get properly to grips with this in the coming year. However, the increased call on our human resources is going to be taxing and we would be delighted to see any new faces who can spare at least a little time on Saturday or Thursday workdays each month. A priority is to install bridges across the River Chet to allow access to Welbeck Marsh for members and visitors. Ideally, we will have two bridges to make a circular route. The logistics of bridge purchase and installation have been proving problematical; potential suppliers claim to be hampered by inflation in costs of materials and are currently unable to meet demand. We hope to have more news about bridges in the near future. In the meantime, Bergh Apton Parish Council has made another generous grant that is allowing us to proceed with the bridge project. Jacquie and Doug Ratcliffe have kindly donated a picnic table and chairs for the relief of volunteers and visitors on Welbeck Marsh, when they are able to fight their way to them.

Another bright spot has been the fine progress made by the Chet Valley B-Line, our project to protect pollinating insects along the 17-km corridor of the R. Chet. Our funders have granted the project an extension because of the pandemic and, despite unavoidable delays with face-to-face events, we have now successfully delivered many aspects of the work. We have recruited many organisations and individuals to enhance their provision for pollinators (and distributed a distinctive roundel sign displaying our logo to them). In March 2021 we finally had an official launch (exactly a year late) that coincided with BugLife's national

launch of B-Lines. Our press release got us good coverage on the local ITV news – in fact the only TV coverage for B-Lines nationwide as it turned out. Among other things, we have also engaged with enthusiastic young people, planted a pollinator-friendly hedge in Bergh Apton and, with the collaboration of Norfolk FWAG organised a pollinator-oriented farm walk for local farmers.

A high point was on Thursday 16 September 2021, just last week. We were invited as finalists to the Norfolk Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) awards ceremony in Dereham, where we were delighted to be announced as joint winners in the 'Biodiversity Champions' category. Now we are proud possessors of a framed certificate and a fine enamelled plaque. This recognition of the dedicated work of the management committee (Rodney Aldis, Andrew Milner, Bob Kerry, Matt Jones and myself) and our valued collaborators will be a great encouragement to all our supporters. The publicity can only help promote the conservation of pollinating insect and their habitats in our area.

The Trustees have continued to meet periodically on Zoom and, latterly in summer, in the open air. Socially distanced workdays have continued on most months, although with understandably reduced attendance. We hope to resume field meetings on 25 October 2021 with a return to the fungus foray led by Dr Tony Leech, depending on circumstances prevailing at the time. There will be an announcement nearer the date. At the last AGM, Stephanie Crome and Shirley Rimmer retired as trustees; Rodney Aldis and Dennis Moya were elected as Trustees. At the first Trustees' meeting of the year, Rodney Aldis was elected Secretary, and Tony Davy and Bob Kerry were re-elected Chairman and Treasurer, respectively.

Last year I paid tribute to the great enthusiasm, contribution and achievements over many years of our retiring Secretary, Stephanie Crome. This year it is my sad task to record, what you all will already know, her tragic death on Christmas Day. The Trust, its Trustees and many members have lost a much-loved friend and servant far too young. I again extend our sympathy to Richard, Ben, Will and their families. We are working with them to provide a fitting memorial on our nature reserve.

Tony Davy