

On the Common



NEWSLETTER OF THE

FRIENDS OF BARNES COMMON



Spring 2022

Thank you for being a Friend

**FoBC achieved a noticeable landmark
this February, notching up its 1,000 Friend.**

Of course, we are delighted to have all this support, but it really is vital on a number of levels. Firstly, much of what we do such as wildlife surveys, hedge planting, species monitoring, along with walks, talks and events such as our Wassail (see below), are all examples of some of the work we could not do without Friends support. You also give us a stronger voice on behalf of the community when it comes to expressing support or concerns about issues affecting our open, green spaces and provide us with valuable quantifiable proof of community support which adds significantly to the weight of our funding applications. With your continued support we hope to be able to do much more!

Wassailing away

After missing the previous year, it was great to be able to stage our annual Wassail event again. This ancient celebration is an opportunity to drink to the good health of our fruit trees and to an abundant crop. Organised by Paddy and Jackie, about 40 people attended and duly toasted the trees in the orchard, along with songs and storytelling from the Wassail master and his minstrel, finishing up with a glass of hot mulled cider.



From the Chair

Dear Friends,

As we come to terms with Covid and face the consequences of Mr Putin's actions in Ukraine, it is hard to focus on the immediate concerns of FoBC and to celebrate our successes and plan for the future. But if we, collectively and individually, do not go on trying to leave this world a better place than we found it, then who will?

The enormity of our task is highlighted by the existential nature of the climate change that we now know we are already facing: the exceptional rains of July 12th 2021 (in the order of 7.5cm in four hours) may soon not be so exceptional while the recent high winds destroyed ten trees on the Common. Through our involvement in Flood and Climate Resilience we hope to get the whole community involved in developing new solutions by using science to work with, rather than against nature.



A tree down in Paddock Wood by the station

We still know so little about the invisible elements of the ecosystems on which all life depends: in one expert's view, less than 6% of the world of fungi is currently understood. Still less the world of bacteria: we can only live with the help of billions of them – and yet we blithely accept advertisements that suggest it is good to kill 99.9% of them. We are slowly beginning to accept the idea of green corridors but dark corridors are still barely a consideration when floodlight and security lights are installed.

That is why we are proud that FoBC is increasingly looking beyond its original aims of conserving Barnes Common (still a very vital part of our Mission), by helping to conserve other sites as well, by making biodiversity a key part of our Vision, along with lifelong Outdoor Learning and wellbeing and putting Community Engagement at our core.



The Leg o' Mutton in January this year

Beverley Brook and Indicator Species

Breaking News
As we went to press, we heard of a catastrophic oil spillage in Beverley Brook. We will update everyone once we know more.

It appears that freshwater fish species are in global decline while 2020 Environment Agency data reveals that NO English river passes pollution tests. Ecologists acknowledge that any waterbody achieving less than a 'high' ecological status is unacceptable. The Beverley Brook is classed at 'moderate' status.

Freshwater habitats are under threat from raw sewage, agricultural pollution, heavy metals from road run-off, detergents, warming temperatures, low oxygen levels, plastic, fly tipping, invasive species, siltation and destruction from poor management techniques.

Ecosystems like the Beverley Brook are often overlooked. Used as waste disposal, it has been culverted underground, smothered by urbanisation and to a large extent forgotten. Underwater species are not perceived as 'cute' or 'fluffy'; sporting scales and fins, they are regularly disregarded when it comes to support.



Beverley Brook as it runs between the houses in Barnes

Sea trout, freshwater mussels and riverfly species such as mayfly are considered indicator species. Once abundant in the Thames and its tributaries, they ensured the health of river and land ecosystems. Birds, land and sea mammals, insects, invertebrates and plant-life all benefitted as a result.



As part of the conservation work FoBC carries out, we conduct surveys examining indicator species and identifying areas in need of attention. We then undertake projects to restore these delicate habitats like our upcoming Flood Resilience partnership project. Clean blue spaces don't just benefit nature but our mental health and wellbeing too. It is in our best interest to improve our watercourses. The more we recognise this, the greater the chance to have a national impact on blue space restoration.



Volunteers surveying Beverley Brook and a damselfly larva

New Faces

Since our last issue, FoBC are very pleased to announce we have four new members of staff and a new Trustee.

Bori Kiss joined FoBC in November 2021 and will be keeping an eye on all of FoBC's websites and social media during her two days a week.



Paddy Hayes joined in autumn 2021 as FoBC's Education & Outdoor Learning officer. He will be taking on FoBC's educational remit, focussing on 'Outdoor Learning', which should provide a really exciting way of engaging with all ages of our local community. Paddy works two days a week for FoBC, while his remaining time is spent at the Creekside Discovery Centre at Deptford where he is often to be found 'mudlarking'!



Tarun Ingvorsen joined in January 2022 as FoBC's Project Manager for the Defra / EA flood resilience project where FoBC is a partner alongside the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and Richmond Council. Tarun has a wealth of experience regarding rivers, wetlands and flood resilience, including being part of Derbyshire Trust's recent beaver reintroduction scheme. Tarun is looking forward to exploring the underwater world of the Beverley Brook and sharing its story with you all.



Eliza Daeschler also joined in January 2022 and is FoBC's Project Officer. While she will initially be helping with various tasks including the flood resilience project, she has a background in setting up and running parks in America and will ultimately be taking on the project management for the Vine Road project once we have the green light for this.



Ian Tottman joined as a new trustee in autumn 2021 and will be helping FoBC with his considerable experience in marketing and branding.



Paddy Hayes - Making connections

This winter has been busy spent making new connections and so far, our discussions with local schools and universities have been very encouraging, with a real appetite amongst teachers and education leaders to get young people outdoors.

Outdoor Learning activities such as our Wassail, Winter Walk, Family Half-term Learning and Yaffles have already met with a wide variety of learners, young and old so we are looking forward to the spring and summer to put some of our other plans in motion and encourage many more people to learn with us.



The Winter Walk lead by Paddy - photo by anonymous

As we start to schedule some school visits in, it would be fantastic to have some volunteers to help out – this would require a DBS check and experience/interest in working with young people. If you are interested in getting involved in outdoor learning volunteering, then please send an email to education@barnescommon.org.uk to find out more.

A Sense of Place

We all know now how important biodiversity and wildlife habitats are but what is also becoming apparent is that perhaps we should be approaching biodiversity conservation, restoration and appreciation with more attention to 'place'. Research tells us that a stronger 'sense of place' can provide positive solutions for both human wellbeing and our biodiversity.



A Peacock amongst the blackthorn

It has been fantastic to hear visitors sharing ideas at our learning events. It was suggested on our Winter Walk, that we could retrace our steps later in the year to see how the wildlife we had observed would change throughout the seasons. Similarly, those at our Family Learning event in February who had carefully identified the leaves of various wildflowers were curious to know what the flowers would actually look like!

By revisiting places on the Common, Vine Road and Beverley Brook and observing and understanding what thrives and where, people can form or extend positive relationships with these 'places'. Through our 'Outdoor Learning' programmes, we really want to encourage the local community to strengthen its 'sense of place' which will benefit everyone through enhanced wellbeing and healthier ecosystems.

Farewell to Sharon Morgan

At the end of 2021, after nearly seven years with FoBC, Sharon decided the time had come to return to her home in Dorset for good.

Sharon joined FoBC in the early days when an education department was just a gleam in Mike's eye. She soon started making connections with various local schools and organisations particularly Paddock School and Roehampton University, where FoBC still has great relationships today. Sharon was key in beginning the process of rejuvenating the Vine Road recreation ground, creating more of a buzz by bringing in people and activities. She also set up our current website which has been instrumental in raising FoBC's profile.

Sharon has left a real legacy behind, not least, introducing us to wassailing, ferneries, the dragon oak tree, sunflower superhighways, rainbow rock gardens, the Paddock pop up cafe and of course S.L.O.W.E.R – our sustainability policy that is central to FoBC's approach.

No doubt we will see her on her occasional visits back to London, but in the meantime we wish her all the best back down in Dorset.

Scraping a living for wildlife

You may see parts of Mill Hill that have been temporarily fenced off and are looking rather bare and sorry for themselves. This is where FoBC has removed the nutrient-enriched topsoil in order to help restore areas of our Lowland Acid Grassland (LAG). Nutrient build up usually occurs due to dog-fouling and atmospheric pollution from vehicles. In the absence of grazing, scrub encroachment can also damage and affect the sensitive pH balance of the soil.



The common by Mill Hill and one of the solitary wasps that we attract, the bee-wolf, with its prey



The growing area at Vine Road



These areas will be left bare in order to recolonise naturally, as they are already surrounded by prime acid grassland, but they will provide great habitat for solitary, ground nesting bees and wasps. Using the spoil, we will also create small hibernacula that will provide habitat for the Common Lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*). One of these was spotted nearby last summer, after not being seen on the Common for over a decade.

We realise that these areas may look unsightly, but they will play a hugely important role in helping to restore a nationally important habitat and provide refuge for rare flora and fauna. Each area was surveyed prior to the work being carried out so we can monitor the efficacy of such habitat restoration methods.



Following the success of last year's collaboration with Barnes Artists, we have decided to do it all again this summer, where the theme will be water. Andrew Wilson has already made a start and was in for a surprise when he captured this fallen blossom on the common, as a slug emerged from beneath its petals.

ADDRESS LABEL

Dates for your diary

Check our website and social media for details of our upcoming events.
There is something for everyone:

24th April – Join our own expert birder Adrian Podmore for a not too early Dawn Chorus walk on the Common and then pick up a special dawn chorus breakfast deal from our friends at the Feel Good Bakery.



A Chiff Chaff singing his little heart out

28th April – More of a night owl? then our evening bat walk is for you. Will Scott-Mends will take you for a walk around Leg o' Mutton reservoir, where you will have the opportunity to see and hear bats in their natural setting.

1st May – Yaffles nature sessions are a must for families with younger children and for May there will be an added afternoon session!

15th May – Our friends, the Barnes Community Gardeners will be hosting a very special event – the Bee Fair to Bees Fair promises to be a buzzing community event featuring local beekeepers, an observational hive, activities for children, demonstrations. All at the Vine Road Park.

21st May – the Community Growing Project is 'growing', come along and help us grow. We will be doing some sowing and transplanting of seedlings.

21st May – For dog lovers, Barnes Community Association will be hosting their annual dog walk. The BCA Barnes Dog Walk will meet at Vine Road Park and take a stroll through Barnes Common, Barnes High Street and ending at Tideway Yard - ***barnes-ca.org***



A dog enjoying an early morning walk