

Cove Brook Greenway Group

Hilda Anscombe, Chairman of the Cove Brook Greenway Group gave a presentation on the brook and the work of the Greenway Group. The talk was followed, the following Saturday, by a short guided walk along the Greenway with Clive Andrews.

Cove Brook is a short minor stream whose main source is the Long Valley area below Ceasar's Camp. It flows under the Basingstoke Canal, the Airfield, and Elles Road (A327) to emerge in Rafborough, just east of Southwood Golf Course, where it is joined by a branch from Southwood (West Stream) and by the Marrowbrook stream, which rises under the Queensmead shopping centre. The Brook then runs for a further 3 miles, joining the Blackwater River at Hawley Meadows. Most of the central region from Hazel Avenue to Hawley Road is accessible to the public and forms both a linear park for our enjoyment and a green corridor that is important for wild life and biodiversity in our urban environment.



Flooding after heavy Rain

Course. Thus after these periods of heavy downfall, these surrounding areas become an unusual and interesting lake-like landscape.

The area adjacent to Hazel Avenue is often referred to as Southwood Meadows, and traditionally would have been a water meadow. The original flood prevention measures were scenically unsympathetic with the Brook flowing along a straight concrete lined course. In the mid-1990s the Cove Brook Greenway environmental initiative began as a partnership between the Environment Agency, Rushmoor Borough Council and Hampshire Wildlife Trust. The Environment Agency did major works to re-naturalise the southern section of the Brook, removing the concrete channel, creating a more natural course and generally improving Southwood Meadows, with new paths, new bridges and the installation of a dipping area with safe access.



Cove Brook Southwood Meadows

The Greenway passes through a surprising variety of habitats; grassland, meadow, marsh, woodland and hedgerow, so that the green spaces beside the brook support a wide range of animals, such as roe deer, foxes, birds, including woodpeckers, finches and house sparrows, and butterflies. As for Cove Brook itself, although the water quality is not good, which is to be expected of an urban stream, nevertheless it contains good numbers of fish including chub and

bullheads which depend on shallow gravels to breed, as well as supporting a lot of other wildlife, such as moorhens, blue herons, kingfishers, dragonflies and amphibians. One problematic resident of Cove Brook is the large American crayfish, which not only feeds on its indigenous cousin but causes the stream's banks to collapse because of its burrowing.



Pond dipping area by Blunden Hall

local awareness of its importance as a local green amenity. The responsibility of maintaining the flow through the Brook, keeping the stream clear of vegetation and fallen trees, and the important work of local flood prevention lies entirely with the Environmental Agency whilst maintenance of the green areas and open spaces adjacent to the Brook lies with RBC as the riparian owner. However the Greenway Group augments this work by organising regular volunteer work parties that contribute to enhancing the environmental value of the greenway. Such tasks as cutting back excess vegetation, maintaining and creating paths in the wooded areas as well as tree planting and hedge laying are all carried out by the volunteers. The despoiling of the area by litter, dumped rubbish and fly-tipping is a constant problem in the Cove locality making it necessary for the volunteers to organise litter picking sessions throughout the year and the Greenway Group is also proud of its contribution to the annual Prospect Estate litter clearance and tidy up event.

The Cove Brook Greenway Group was set up in 1996, with support from Rushmoor Borough Council (RBC), Hampshire Wildlife Trust, and Hampshire County Council and is run by and for residents to improve the brook and the area around it, as well as to increase



More Road Pond Dipping Area

The Group has an additional education role in widening the awareness of local residents to this amenity which it does by organising a number of talks and other events throughout the year. All of these are free

for anybody interested to join in and details can be found in their regular newsletter that can be downloaded from RBC's website¹. The Group also jointly arranges 'pond dipping' events with local scout, cub and brownie groups allowing young people to discover for themselves the wealth of life in our local waterway. They have organised litter clearing and planting events with the local Scouts and Brownies, as a way of fostering social responsibility amongst our young people, and have organised a number of successful open 'Fun Days' in the larger park/recreation areas beside the Brook, at which they and invited groups can promote their environmental interests.



Birchett Road Reserve



Cattle Grazing at Bramshot

In 2000, a small area of allotment near Birchett Road and the open area around Blunden Hall was set aside as a Wildlife Reserve, managed by the Group. They plan to improve the shallow, safe, pond dipping areas by the addition of extra gravel, and to create signage along the Brook. Their current most ambitious project is to look into the possibility of introducing grazing into the Southwood Meadow area. Some grassland areas are now cut only occasionally in an attempt to encourage wildflower growth- but this can be done in a more natural fashion by the introduction of cattle to control the grass and keep scrub at bay. Grazing creates a mosaic of different grass lengths, which provide a variety of habitats for insects and plants. Grazing also

reduces the competition from coarse grass species, allowing more sorts of flowers and other wildlife to thrive. Even cattle dung can be good for wildlife. Grazing has proven successful both at Bramshot near Fleet Pond and at Hawley Meadows by the Blackwater.

¹ Link for most recent Cove Brook Greenway Newsletter :- <http://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=12557&p=0>