

WORCESTER CANAL GROUP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

5th June 2019 at the Paul Pry

1. Present: Jacky Hollis, George Squires, Helen Fairest, Matthew Jenkins, Peter Moorhouse, Joy Squires, Jenny Barnes, Andrew Foster, Graham Fowler. Welcome to all, to Helen and Andrew to their first meeting and to Andy Graham our guest speaker
Apologies: Dan Daye, Margaret Rowley. Bethany
2. GUEST SPEAKER: ANDY GRAHAM (WILDFOWL AND WETLANDS TRUST) 'THE WILDLIFE VALUE OF CANALS AND HOW TO IMPROVE HABITAT'

Before taking up his present job Andy worked for the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust on projects like the restoration of the Droitwich canal where the wildlife issues were the same as those we face. He is also a local resident and he has worked with us this year in looking at Diglis basin. This is the most serious obstacle to the movement of wildlife along our canal. Andy made a lot of suggestions of how the habitat could be enhanced and costed them on our behalf.

Canals are great for wildlife but it is easy for wildlife populations to become fragmented and go into decline. The main part of this talk then, was to show a series of slides of wildlife species that might be found along the canal and use the actions that could be taken on their behalf as illustrations of the kind of work that can be done. There was discussion of each as we went along.

Mink are often found in canals. So are water voles. The huge decline in water vole populations correlates with the arrival of mink. Water voles are a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species. Mink can be trapped. More than that eco rafts, the looking after of areas adjacent to the canal and working to a proper plan all play a part. Otters find it difficult to get past locks. A special underpass is easy to install and relatively cheap. The shrew is an example of a species about which not enough is known a survey would be useful. Similarly eels are very common but often ignored typical canal species. The white legged damselfly is a local speciality which would benefit from being monitored.

Bats eat approximately 3000 insects a night. Without insects bat boxes and bird boxes are not as effective as they might be. So promoting insects despite their worldwide decline is important. So is maintaining a number of old and or dead trees. So is planting trees for the future.

There are threats to all wildlife on canals. One example is the water hyacinth. In many parts of the world this plant has completely blocked waterways. It can be bought in shops and garden centres. Global warming means that it may soon be possible for it to over winter. If that happens it will be a disaster.

Plastic is a real problem. Discussion of this and our canal. The litter picking group has made a real difference. The conflicting interests of the many different owners of the land adjoin the canal make a real plan for the future difficult.

A really interesting and useful talk.

3. REPORT BACK ON PERDISWELL WILDLIFE SURVEY AND INTRODUCTION TO BRAMBLE WOOD

Helen explained that Wild and Rooted is a community interest company that has taken on the lease for a collection of allotments at Lansdowne road that were set aside for conservation some years ago. These allotments adjoin the canal in the Arboretum on the stretch which the Canal Group has adopted. The area leased is now known as Bramble Wood. For the past year they have been working to understand the ecology of Bramble Wood and to make it a place where local people can find a calm natural space, care for wildlife and create new nature and people based projects. One aim is to make it suitable to become a Forest School which is a way of offering support to children as they learn and explore in a woodland setting.

Graham said that almost everyone present at this meeting had taken part in the Perdiswell wildlife survey. It went very well with about 25 people taking part, many of them new to us. The talk from Andy demonstrated that what we are doing makes sense and is beginning to achieve its aims. To survey as far as the brook demonstrates how far the influence of the canal as a habitat stretches. The survey of the area behind Bilton road tip has taken us into an area about which very little is known where there is real scope for further work. It is one of the nodes referred to in the City plan. There are many others. Distributing flyers before the survey was useful and brought new interest in our group. Agreed to disseminate the results around the Perdiswell area.

4. CHAIRS REPORT ON THE YEAR

The minutes of last year's AGM were approved.

Joy thanked everyone for continuing to make this a positive and enjoyable group and thanked those like Dan and Peter who have made massive contributions and are moving on or away.

Highlights of the year's work:

The Wanderer was nominated for a national award and at a lavish ceremony in Birmingham it finished joint second. This is a real achievement.

5. TREASURERS REPORT

George provided a breakdown of income and expenditure for the year. This was adopted.

Income for the year was £7.51 Expenditure was £115.00. The balance in the account is £218.90. There is no money in petty cash.

It was pointed out that for the coming year there are some items of expenditure already committed to such as Arts Council membership and membership of WBDCS membership. Although we no longer attend Worcester Birmingham and Droitwich Canal Society meetings we are still members, we continue to receive copies of 58 and our insurance is still through them.

The Perdiswell Wildlife Survey went very well. As the discussion with the guest speaker demonstrated we are working to a plan. We are building up information and resources and applying these in forums like the Worcester Canal Corridor Group.

6. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Chair – Joy Squires

Vice Chair – Vacant

Treasurer- George Squires

Secretary – website and circulation Matt Jenkins, Minutes Graham Fowler

7. OTHER UPDATES

- a. The Wanderer – Dan Daye has sent in a letter of resignation from the Canal Group and as helm of the Wanderer. He will be a great loss as evidenced by the flood of emails thanking him for the work he has done. Further thanks from the whole group. In his absence Geri Lowman will be our representative on the Wanderer Steering Group. Andrew expressed an interest in finding out more about what is involved in being a helm, to discuss with Geri. Also suggested that those members of St Pauls Creative Group who helped get the Wanderer to Perdiswell for the survey might consider more involvement with our group.
- b. Noticeboards- David not present to update.
- c. Festival – Joy reported that unfortunately this has run into two main difficulties. Firstly, it is not possible to be sufficiently confident about the infrastructure. Secondly, the failure to secure a grant applied for meant that paying for things in advance and relying on recouping that through bar receipts became a risk too far. Instead there will be a weekend of music at the Chestnuts. Most of the stalls have had to be cancelled but for a few, such as plant sales, they will go ahead in the garden of the Chestnuts. A lot has been learnt and there will be another try.
- d. Litter picking – continues. It was suggested and agreed that as our two groups have been working closely for years but have never formally met it would be a good idea to arrange a social event soon, perhaps straight after a litter pick morning.

8. CANAL GROUP PLANS FOR THE YEAR – to be discussed more fully at the next meeting

9. AOB

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY 11th SEPTEMBER 7.15 AT THE PAUL PRY.