

Greenspace Groups Forum no. 11

Meeting held 27/04/15 at War Memorial Hall, Morecambe

Present: Andrew Halladay (Whalley Fields), Ian Procter (Fairfield Association), Louise Belcher (Thwaite Brow Nature Reserve), Pete Turnbull (Barley Cop Woods), Roger Frankland (Civic society), Kathy Barton (Claver Hill), Sarah Blackler (Greaves Park), Simon Gershon (Lancaster Green Spaces), Rita Gerrard (Pouton Cemetery), Brian Jones (Carnforth Coke Ovens), Fiona Sturgess and Sue Widden (Storey Gardens)

The meeting was preceded by a tour of Poulton Old Cemetery, led by Rita Gerrard. The City Council has been able to restore a lot of damaged headstones in recent years and Rita have been planting wild flowers and managing wide verges as wildlife habitat.

Fairfield Association manages their FAUNA site as a nature reserve. Part of it is 'improved grassland' and they are managing it as a hay meadow with the grass taken off; this will reduce the fertility and be much better for wild flowers in about 10 years. They have also sown Yellow Rattle which is parasitic on grass. Various grants obtained through Natural England to do capital works, which constructed fences, gates and paths/walkways, created ponds and scrapes and blocked up drains. The grant has also paid for some maintenance, tools and tuition.

Laid hedges are the business for encouraging wildlife; they need a high density near to the ground and then you will get lots of birds nesting. Leggy hedges that have been clipped or flailed are pretty useless in this respect. Tarja Wilson (county council projects officer) runs free hedge-laying courses in Oct/Nov each year led by hedging champions– ask her to let you know when they are:

Tarja.Wilson@lancashire.gov.uk. Fairfield has a robust hedge-laying team that this season has laid about 1000m of hedge.

They have also allowed a farmer to grow a barley/wheat mix on one field, but leaving a 3m field margin and harvesting quite late. The net result is that many birds are now nesting there, including several species never seen before. These include linnet, partridges and lapwings. The wet areas suit birds such as snipe but need work to prevent them from turning into rush beds.

Any wood cutting should leave brash piles, standing and lying deadwood – you can ring bark trees and also cut them at a high level to leave dead trunks.

Barley Cop Woods inherited very dense tree cover so a lot of work to date has been removing trees (thinning) to allow light to get to the ground. This results in a shrub layer developing and tree seedlings getting away. There is also hazel which is being coppiced, but clearing a large area encourages brambles which need to be kept in check.

Freemans Wood has had no management and has been taken over by sycamores. There are very few birds nesting there and little understory plants as it is so dark. In the light areas, the brambles prevent anything else taking hold. Essentially, the best results come by creating some disturbance to nature – you create more ecological niches.

Ponds and other water features are great – all animals need to drink and most insects have an aquatic phase in their life cycle. Frogs too. Seasonal ponds will attract different species. But there are safety issues with young children. The answer is in a)

location - not where very young children are likely to play, and b) design – have a wide gently sloping muddy edge so you can't just fall in.

Thwaite Brow Woods have put up lots of bird boxes, as have most other groups. They do an annual survey (next one 7pm 12th May, all welcome) and find around 50% of boxes occupied. They don't always clean the boxes out but find that the birds often do so. Woodpecker attacks common, putting a metal plate around the entry hole helps. Sometimes bees nest in the box (Fairfield has two such boxes currently) and the large owl box may be home to a squirrel. Bring back the Pine Marten! Bird boxes should be put up before March 1st as birds will look around well before they breed. But many birds will raise several broods, and if one is predated then they will nest somewhere else. Furniture Matters might still make birdboxes, or you can buy them from Wilkinsons for a fiver.

Doing a wildlife survey is worthwhile in itself, and also gives you a baseline so that you can see what's changed when you survey in the future. 'Bioblitzes' are becoming more popular

Help is available from several sources, although many organisations have had staff cuts. These include: Lancashire Wildlife Trust, RSPB, British Trust for Ornithology, Parish lengthsman and County project officers. Some commercial firms will give advice for free or reduced cost to voluntary groups. A list of these is now being set up on the Lancaster Green Spaces website [here](#).

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The next Greenspace groups meeting will be on **Monday June 9th, 7.30-9.30pm at Claver Hill, Lancaster**

This will be preceded by a tour of the site with Kathy Barton, meeting at 6.30pm.

The Claver Hill site is off Ridge Lane. From Crag Road start to go up Ridge Lane. The entrance to the site is on the right side after the first house. You can park on site.

Have a look at the Claver Hill Facebook page to see what they've been up to:
<https://www.facebook.com/ClaverHill>