



LOOSE LEAVES



Newsletter of Loose Amenities Association

February 2021

Supporting LAA could not be more important at this time, with our events income reduced to zero over the last year. We need people to be involved so that the association can continue in a strong position. So here is the plea, if you can join a committee, support a work party or contribute to the next newsletter then please contact us – plea finished – to the news....

Land Management

Again, the past year has been difficult in terms of completing all the tasks required to maintain and improve the valley. Regular work parties have not been possible but where we could these concentrated on keeping the footpaths open and wide enough to allow social distancing. Apologies but we cannot do much about the mud at the moment, however there is a long stretch of path which has a ragstone chip base, this does give a better footing.



In the early autumn we completed the felling of a number of trees in the middle of the valley which is part of a 10-year management plan agreed with the Forestry Commission. In general terms we aim to thin trees to regenerate the understory and allow more specimen trees to flourish. We will also remove any diseased or damaged trees, these will predominantly be Ash trees, which have hit by Ash Dieback. You may have noticed a large Ash near Great Ivy was felled last year because of the disease, this estimated to be over 60 years old.

Rainbow meadow (nearest the village), had an abundance of wildflowers last year, with the following all flowering at some point, Wood Horsetail, Water Mint, Agrimony, Hedge Woundwort, Germander Speedwell, St John's Wort, Meadow Vetchling, Knapweed and Meadowsweet. This does not happen by accident as we manage the meadow using specific sheep grazing patterns.



Fence repairs

In view of the current situation, we have concluded that repairing the post and spile fences will clearly be a cheaper option, and provide exercise for volunteers on a Sunday morning using the post rammer.... We are planning to repair the fences around Rainbow and along the boundary at Hillier's cricket field.

Bird Nest Boxes

We have now installed 4 bird nest boxes, around Rainbow meadow and shaw....see if you can spot them. The boxes are constructed of a concrete/wood mix which makes them more durable and cannot be penetrated by predators. We aim to maintain a record of their use throughout the year.

Don't forget volunteers needed!

LAA Christmas Tree 2020

We ordered a 30ft tree from the usual supplier, but at short notice they advised us that delivery would no longer be possible in time for the LAA working party to erect the tree in the garden of Tylers. We therefore rapidly had to come up with a plan B and decided to try to copy the amazing illuminated trees at Bedgebury National Pinetum, Goudhurst.



We purchased five powerful LED lamps that changed colour in a phased way and fitted them to branches and boughs inside one of the large evergreen trees in the garden at Tylers. We also ran the Christmas tree bulbs along the front of Tylers garden, by the stream, to add more colour.

Looking back, the positives were that we were able to avoid the very difficult and demanding job of erecting the Christmas tree and the coniferous tree we chose to light up from inside was much taller and therefore much more visible around the village. The cost of the lamps was around the same as for a Christmas tree but with the bonus of being reusable for a number of years and therefore reducing the cost of the annual event, if we continue to follow this approach.

Less positively, it was difficult to gauge how many LED lights would be needed inside the tree and their necessary power rating, to give a strong effect. It is likely that with more time we would have used more lamps or more powerful ones to create a stronger effect.

We would like to thank everyone who helped out with the project and in particular, Steve Pink for all his hard work in sourcing the lights and cables and designing a safe power supply for the lamps. We would also like to thank Chris Daws for kindly allowing us to use her garden and tree and the ducks for putting up with all the disruption.

We would like to hear what you thought of the new approach so please get in touch. See end of newsletter for details.



Roy's Meadow - History and Stuff

This area comprises a steep shaw on the valley side, an area of naturally emerging woodland mainly of willow to the north and a fairly small strip of more open land below the shaw to the south.

Historically the more open ground and the Willow wood were a Gage orchard which became disused and was grubbed out and left un-managed with some clearance by the Young Ornithologists Club in the mid to late 1960's. Once acquired by LAA this land was cleared and improved as an amenity although clearing potentially degraded the habit of the rare Grasshopper Warbler. At the time the awareness of the value of that type of rough, untidy and unmanaged habitat was not fully realised, even by conservationists.

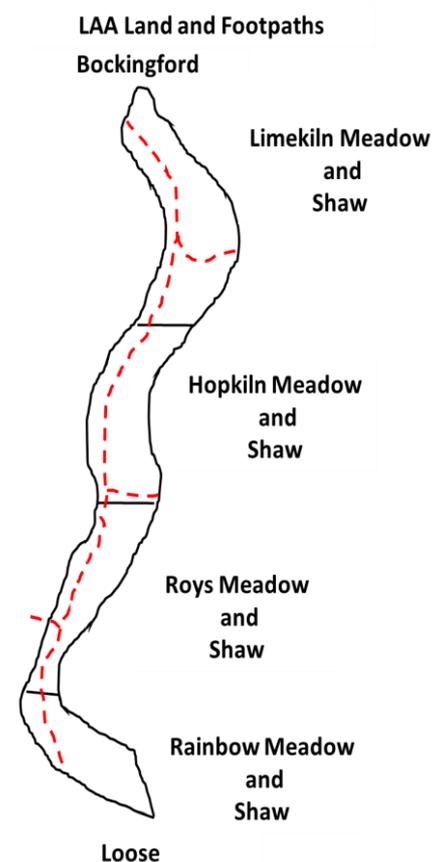
A herd of cattle were used until around 10 years ago as a management method and were pretty effective on the grass areas. They did not fully control the roots of the Gage trees that persistently pushed up Damson and Bullace suckers as they were protected by the vigorous brambles. The area was again, grubbed out more recently but has remained difficult to maintain as meadow. Cutting and sheep grazing has helped to keep it clear but has been less than totally successful as sheep grazing has had to be limited as the wooded areas are not fenced. The sheep would cause significant damage to the woodland if left in there too long.

Although the rough nature of this area does make it good for small mammals, a recent reptile survey failed to find any reptiles in this area at all. It seems probable that the absence of reptiles can be attributed to the lack of direct and sustained sunlight as is borne out by the presence of shade loving plants. Other areas of the valley have produced good results for Slowworms and Grass Snakes and evidence of breeding for both.

We are generally following a programme of tree replanting in the valley with the support of the BBC Countryfile show, the Woodland Trust and with Loose Primary School. The school and LAA have been collaborating over many years with one of the first community planting of trees at the top of Old Loose Hill to Herts Crescent, along the Linton Road. More recently they have planted two areas of new trees, named Wiggals wood in the northern end of Roy's.

Given the grass meadow and wild flowers have proved difficult to manage in Roy's Meadow, we are considering planting a number of tree whips in the open area. This would make for a more native woodland of broadleaf trees. Keeping the whips clear of undergrowth would be labour intensive and after a number of years the trees will have to be thinned.

Thanks to Pip Terry for the historical information.



A short story written by John Kenny

Running into the sunrise

It's cold in the hour before the dawn. Morning mist is rising from the Brooks and it looks like a fine day might be coming. But not yet. For the moment there are still a few stars in the shadows of the sky. Grace and I are off to see the sunrise on the Weald, heading for the field above the deer park where the Greensand Way runs south and east and the vale of Kent spreads out beneath.

Along Salts Lane we catch a savoury whiff of wild garlic. She lifts her nose to sniff the air. Breakfast is a long way off for both of us. We leave the road behind and start along the path that winds upwards through the woods along the stream. A gleam of light is growing in the sky but here, amongst the trees, darkness still lies along the well-worn track and I tread carefully, struggling to manage torch and lead and stick. Juggling is a trick I've yet to master. The path levels, we walk a little faster so as not to miss the sunrise. The birds are in full cry, a cockerel in the distance sounds reveille. The pre-dawn light's already in the sky. In half an hour the sun will raise her head above the eastern hills and we have two more miles to cover in that space of time. We gather pace along the damson path, me stepping out, Gracie in an easy trot, excited as we pick up speed.

Hasten along Haste Hill, chase the dawn down Church Street, past the school and the traveller caravans. Grace bristles at the barking of the tethered dogs, marking her scent on the campsite gates. Her season ended a few days ago so amorous entreaties come too late. She, after a month of walking on the lead, has no desire to find a mate, just to be free, to run, to stretch her long legs out and race towards the sun.

Before we reach the church, we turn to take the Greensand Way. Day is just about to break, white clouds over Egerton and Ulcombe to the east are uplit by the growing light. Southwards Staplehurst and Headcorn are laid beneath the gleaming shroud of mist that stretches past the edges of the earth. The grass before us glistens under dew.

Bribed by a biscuit she sits while I unclip the lead and let her slip.

"Off you go."

Four weeks, constrained, curtailed and now, set free upon this morning field she hesitates.

"Good girl, go on."

She looks to me, a cautious step or two.

"Go on, shoo."

I laugh, I make as if to chase her, see the tautening of her thighs, see her feint a lunge towards me, drop low to the ground, turn and launch herself into a run. She's gone.

Far across the field she's racing through the silver grass, sweeping her graceful swathe across the open ground, twisting around and tumbling like a harlequin buffoon, running with a lunatic joy that I cannot escape. The laughter's welling up inside me, bursting aloud into the chilly air, steaming on my breath and running in tears across my cheeks.

She's running into the sunrise, running and my heart is running with her, running until my heart is fit to burst.

Did you know?

'Loose' was probably derived from the old English word, 'Hlose', meaning 'a place of pigs'.

Ragstone quarried around the village was used in the construction of the Tower of London

Roy's meadow is named after one of the founders of LAA, Roy Hood. Roy contributed in many ways, for some 60 years which included the role of chairman.

LAA was formed in 1952.

Events

Clearly in view of the current situation, it is not possible to organise any of our usual events, we hope to be able to do something later in the year.

Please visit our Website at **www.loose-amenities.org.uk** and Facebook page for the latest updates.

We are planning to send a newsletter every three months.

If you have any comments or would like to contribute to future issues of the newsletter please contact us by e-mail, info@loose-amenities.org.uk.