



Benson area Nature Group
Restoring our nature

“Brilliant, beautiful”

“I couldn't bear to tear myself away as it was SO interesting..... Such a great event and so inspiring for all ages.”

856 people visited “Wild about Benson” on 8 – 9th March and these comments were typical.

In his opening address Dr William Bird, local GP and pioneer of the “Green Gym” and “Walking for Health”, reminded us that we are all part of nature. Key messages were: being in nature reduces stress, loneliness, allergies, ADHD and more; government is encouraging “social green prescribing” to improve our physical and mental well-being; nature needs communities to care about it and leave it in a better state for future generations, so it can care for us; with sympathetic planning and land management, nature can co-exist with farming and development.



There were 69 entries in the photography competition, with the winning entries on display. The overall winner was Kevin Reynolds, whose picture of a dandelion (shown) mesmerised the judges. It was the winner of the macro category. It was an extremely hard decision for the judges, but Kevin’s photo took a simple subject and brought out every detail. Composition was great and the technique to get the focus spot-on throughout the depth of the subject was a masterclass in macro photography. Congratulations Kevin.

The category winners were: Primary School - Madeleine Montgomery; Secondary School - Daniel Snellgrove; Nature in the Landscape - Nicola Beasley; Animals - Nicola Beasley; Plants and Fungi - Simon Booker. Visit our BNG website: <https://www.bensonnaturegroup.com/> to see the winning entries.

25 of the 51 stands were by the BNG team themselves, covering our project areas - restoring the brook, surveying farmland and wetland birds, citizen science and recording together with nature in the built environment. 24 other organisations and local groups showcased the green spaces within our parishes and efforts being made to protect nature. An interesting stand by Crowmarsh Battle Farms provided a valuable insight into producing food at the same time as protecting nature. Microscopes enabled people to see the “mini- beasts” that make our soils healthy and productive. And a very popular stand by the Owl Conservation Project, with four beautiful captive-bred native owls, showed their work to halt their decline.



There were also various children’s activities including a nature table with feathers, skulls and other artefacts, a treasure hunt and quizzes. And 80+ posters by pupils of Benson Primary School were on display throughout.

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Find us on Facebook - <https://t2m.io/OXj6Tk>

Our volunteers played a vital role with Shirley, Louise, Phoebe and Carolyn helping with the catering as well as Stanley, Charlie and Julie who counted people into the event. Our thanks to all of you.

This event had been months in the planning. We will now focus on our programme for the rest of the year.

Val Siddiqui

12th March 2024





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“Our Most Exciting Time”

Our first members’ meeting was an opportunity to welcome new members who joined at the Wild about Benson event and to take stock of our current and planned activities.

The meeting opened with a premier of a 2-minute trailer video of the Wild about Benson nature event. There is also 30-minute version including the full opening address and short interviews with six representative stall holders. Both can be found on our YouTube channel, by Googling “Benson Nature Group YouTube”.

We have an exciting programme for the rest of the year too with a mixture of talks, outdoor activities and green volunteering opportunities. Feedback and ideas were taken from members, resulting in a good listing to draw on in future. The programme will be posted on our website in due course.

Non-members are always welcome at our meetings and activities for a contribution of £2pp, cash or card. In future, we will rotate our meetings around our four parish locations. Please keep an eye on social media for updates.

Our priority projects (Farmland and Wetland Bird Monitoring, Chalk Stream Restoration and Our Green Network) are all progressing well with ongoing activities in all four parishes. We have now counted 90 different bird species locally since we started recording in October and expect this number to increase when the summer migrants arrive. This is an impressive count, especially considering the habitat disturbance caused locally by housing developments and river pollution.

We also continue to monitor wildlife activity on Ewelme/Benson Brook, the stream in Berrick and the River Thame in Warborough. Although, sadly, the iconic brown trout seem to have disappeared from their previous haunts in Ewelme in recent times, excitingly, otters and water voles are making a comeback. Otters are playing a part in restoring the ecosystem’s natural balance by eating the invasive, non-native signal crayfish. Non-native mink have devastated water vole populations and are also being monitored. There is some evidence that the presence of otters is deterring mink and thereby helping water voles.

Our Green Network Project is progressing too, the aim being to get the best out of our green spaces for people and nature.

Pollinator monitoring also attracted a lot of interest at the March event. The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, based in Wallingford, has launched a national scheme that we are encouraging people to participate in. It is designed for non-experts and is simple and fun. For more, download the FIT Count App or see our Facebook pages.

One founder member remarked that now is the most exciting time for the group. With nature in decline, it would be easy to be despondent, but we can do a lot locally to help.

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Next Event:

Tuesday 14th May, 7.30pm – Tour of Ewelme Cressbeds followed by optional drinks at the Shepherd's Hut.

Val Siddiqui

12th April 2024

