

**Reserve Advisory Group meeting – Wyming Brook & Fox Hagg Nature Reserves**  
**Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2015**  
**St. Luke's Church, Blackbrook Road, 7pm – 9pm**

## **1. Present & apologies**

**Present:** Rob Miller (Sheffield Wildlife Trust; Living Landscapes Manager)  
Sarah Sidgwick (Sheffield Wildlife Trust; Community Wildlife Ranger)  
Phil Lawson (local resident)  
Steve Parker (local resident)  
Rob Hawkins (local resident)  
Neil Fawson (local resident)  
Catherine Downes (local resident)  
Howard Whittles (local resident)

**Apologies:** Charles Hird (local resident)  
Andrew Manasse (local resident)

## **2. Capital works and land management**

### **Fox Hagg:**

#### **Ongoing maintenance**

- Volunteer patrols undertake litter picking and small maintenance tasks every 2-3 weeks
- Continued cutting back of overhanging vegetation along the Public Right of Way (PRoW) network, normally 3 times during the summer to keep sight lines open. This mainly concentrates on low growing vegetation.
- Cutting back overhanging vegetation from the PRoWs, keeping bridleways clear to a height of 4 metres.

#### **Habitat management**

- [1] on map: Himalayan balsam control. Our land management team (LMT) have completed five days of balsam removal through both hand pulling and strimming, due to the size of the area to be tackled. Both techniques stop the plant from seeding, and 3-4 years of continuous management should allow us to reduce the amount of balsam in the reserve. The ultimate aim would be to eradicate Himalayan balsam from site entirely, but this is unlikely to happen unless adjacent landowners also control the spread on their land. In its place, woodland wildflowers, herbs, brambles, nettles etc should establish.
  - o Although removal of balsam may cause some disruption to the ground, the alternative of leaving it un-treated would only result in an even further spread and loss of more valuable habitat.
- **SITA Trust funding, £10,500 - [2]** on map: Bracken control and scrub management. LMT completed two days of bracken spraying in August, using a chemical called Asulox – a fern-specific herbicide which kills bracken without harming the underlying vegetation. The license for use here ran out a few years ago, and since then the UK has been granted a short-term license each year for 3 months in the summer. We are hopeful that this will continue, as it is far more effective than hand-pulling bracken. Asulox is sprayed in combination with an adjuvant that makes it dry and stick to the bracken, stopping it from running off. We only spray in warm, dry, sunny conditions, when rain is not expected for 24h, and wind is minimal. We also spray later in the season, to make sure that bird breeding season is complete before spraying starts.

Old bracken beds have also been scraped off and seeded with heather brash from Wyming Brook. We hope to get some young heather and bilberry re-established here. Scrub management has also been undertaken in these areas, with scattered trees kept for song posts and landscape features. We have also started to scallop the woodland edge to provide a variety of niche habitats and different light/shade conditions.

- **Forestry Commission EWGS Access WIG 2014-15 (£7,000)/Biffa grant (£8,500):**  
**[3]** on map: Installation of 24m of post and rail fence at the Lodge Lane car park to replace the old knee rail. Includes a new horse hop to allow appropriate access for bridleway users whilst making it more difficult for motorbikes to enter the site.  
**[4]** on map: Installation of 185m of fencing above Lodge Lane car park to highlight the boundary and protect the site from unauthorised users, whilst maintaining pedestrian access through a number of squeeze stiles.  
**[5]** on map: Installation of two new wooden benches, and enhancement of viewpoints through glade creation in the woodland.
- **Forestry Commission EWGS Biodiversity WIG 2014 – 2018 (£15,700) - [6]** on map: Woodland thinning (30-50%) of birch, sycamore, beech and chestnut to alter canopy and create glades. Some high stumps left for willow tit nest sites. Ring-barking to create standing deadwood away from PRowWs. This will be followed up with some tree planting to provide favourable conditions for willow tit – funded by the EA.
  - o Two willow tit were caught and ringed a fortnight ago by Phil Lawson and the Sorby Breck Ringing Group, near the Rivelin Dams.
  - o Update from Phil on nest box monitoring in the area: blue tits and great tits did a lot better this year, and one box became home to a nuthatch. Generally bigger broods and fewer failures this year. One buzzard chick also hatched in Rivelin Valley last year. Kingfisher and dippers have been seen on the river, and lapwings bred on the field at the back of Fox Hagg.

## Wyming Brook:

### Ongoing maintenance

- Continued footpath work, keeping sightlines open, cutting back overhanging vegetation, strimming the edges of Wyming Brook Drive and the grassland area adjacent to the Redmires Road car park in the spring/summer months.
- Cutting back overhanging vegetation onto Redmires Road to provide better visibility for road users, and filling in potholes in Redmires Road car park.
- Small scale wall repairs on the Foxholes Plantation boundary to make safe.
- Drains maintenance work along the driveway, including clearing out blocked culverts and removing silt/leaf litter in side drains to reduce surface water on the Drive.
- A number of fallen trees were cleared off the neighbouring land on the south of the reserve (as notified at the last RAG meeting.)
- This winter's heavy snows and gales have resulted in 40-50 trees coming down across PRowWs on Wyming Brook. It took 6-7 days to clear the majority of the blocked footpaths, with a few snags still to resolve. Apologies for any inconvenience caused by footpaths blockages over the last month or so. One uprooted tree adjacent to the Drive undermined the retaining wall and caused a small section of this to collapse. We are in the process of claiming for repairs on our insurance policy, hopefully we will be able to repair this over the next few months.

- Howard mentioned that another tree has come down more recently, pulling another bit of the wall down.

**ACTION:** Sarah to check and get photos ASAP; may also be able to claim on insurance.

- Old metal pins along the brook footpath are now defunct and have been removed or knocked further into the ground to remove potential trip hazards.

### Access and infrastructure

- **[1]** on the map: Stepping stones – we have temporarily installed some more stones to make the stream passable. We are in the process of applying for SCC/EA consent to install some larger stones that Sam Beaton at the PRoW department has offered us free of charge. We would also like to stabilise the banks that are yielding to erosion. Currently we are applying for funding to carry out this work.
- **[2]** on map: Drainage works at Foxholes Plantation. A blocked culvert is causing water to pool on Wyming Brook Drive. This is a bigger job than our internal team can manage and will need a digger. We have carried out some other drainage work in this area that seems to have helped the situation; the Drive is still wet and muddy, but it has improved.
- **[3]** on map: Blocked culvert at A57 layby entrance. This is still partially blocked despite two previous attempts, though it does seem to have improved. SCC PRoW have created a bund down one edge to help keep water off the path during heavy rain. We have now secured funding from the Rees Jeffreys Road Fund to repair the culvert, and need to assign contractors to carry out this work.

### Habitat management

- **SITA Trust funding, £10,500 - [4]** on map: Bracken spraying with Asulox along the heathland edge and Reddickar Clough. Heather cutting on Wyming Brook to create a mosaic of different aged heather stands, and provide opportunity for ground nesting birds. Scrub control across both sites, cutting back encroaching woodland to maintain the heathland habitat whilst retaining scattered scrub for songposts.
- **Forestry Commission EWGS Biodiversity WIG 2014 – 2018 (£15,700) –**  
**[5]** on map: Woodland thinning in Foxholes Plantation, 20% thin of beech, sycamore and conifer to promote opportunities for long term aim of oak/birch woodland. Retain large beech and conifer. In the next couple of months we will also be planting oak and hawthorn to replace the trees we are taking out (funded by the Environment Agency).  
**[6]** on map: Himalayan balsam control in two locations – this needs to continue for <4 years to eradicate it from site, but is also dependent on the management upstream.
- Tree safety surveys are currently being carried out by Anderson's Tree Care. We should have survey reports by the end of March and will act upon the recommendations where required.
- Winter bird surveys are currently being carried out at Wyming Brook, the report should be available on the website and by next meeting.

### 3. Events, education, community and interpretation

Mid-week community work days on the first Tuesday of the month, and third Sunday of every other month are continuing: **77** volunteers this financial year, with an average of 6 or 7 volunteers attending each day. Guided walks and family events have also been well attended this year:

- 17<sup>th</sup> May: Guided dawn chorus walk – 16 attendees.
- 28<sup>th</sup> May: River Explorers (family event) – 36 attendees.
- 9<sup>th</sup> September: Guided bat walk – 17 attendees.

**Future events:** Our nature reserves event programme is currently being reworked, looking at running more community engagement events on certain high profile sites, and considering alternative tactics for sites on which we struggle to attract attendees to events. It is likely that we will look to provide more school holiday events at Wyming Brook and Fox Hagg, as well as more frequent guided walks/adult events – suggestions welcome.

### 4. Future work programme (Feb '15 – Mar '16) and associated funding

#### Fox Hagg

##### **Forestry Commission EWGS Access WIG 2014-15 (£7,000)/Biffa grant (£8,500):**

- **[A]** on map: Installation of approximately 50m of wooden handrail on steep section of bridleway. March 2015.
- **[B]** on map: Installation of new reserve signs at Fox Hagg/Foxholes Plantation. This funding is also allowing us to create some new signage highlighting the countryside code etc.
- **[C]** on map: Installation of two new bridges, and anti-slip mesh on a third bridge.

##### **Forestry Commission EWGS Biodiversity WIG 2014 – 2018 (£15,700):**

- Funding secured for woodland management works in Fox Hagg (**[D]** on map), and Foxholes Plantation over the next 4 years, for the benefit of 13 endangered woodland bird species. The long term goal is to create upland oak/birch woodland within the valley whilst keeping a coniferous component in places to help support specialist species.
- The work will concentrate on thinning to provide more variety in the canopy and allow more light to the woodland floor. We will also be creating glades, removing rhododendron, creating standing deadwood, promoting establishment of a shrub layer, increasing deadwood resource through habitat piles, and leaving high dead stumps for use by willow tit. We would also like to retain wet woodland species such as alder, willow and ash within the wet areas.
- Installation of 15 bird boxes targeted for spotted flycatcher, pied flycatcher and willow tit.
- Rhododendron to be cleared from Fox Hagg. There are ~12 small clumps spread over the site – not a huge amount, but it is worth getting on top of whilst we have the funding.

#### Wyming Brook

- The main pieces of work that we are hoping to undertake will rely on funding being secured. This includes the stepping stones, stone pitching along the brook path, wall repairs, and Foxholes Plantation culvert unblocking (mentioned above).
- A57 culvert repairs (funded by Rees Jeffresy Road Fund).

- Foxholes Plantation woodland thinning (EWGS funding).
- Enhancement of viewpoints from the crags – one or two trees need removing to maintain and enhance what we have.
- We are in the process of submitting a funding bid to Biffa small grant fund (£10k) to cover the above un-funded elements, and to continue a variety of habitat management works such as bracken spraying and scrub control and woodland management.

## 5. Management plan (Apr '14 – Mar '19)

The first draft of the management plan for Wyming Brook is complete, and Fox Hagg is very nearly finished. Once finalised we will upload both the management plan and work programme to the website. Everyone on the RAG mailing list will be invited to comment, as will various partner organisations, and visitors to the site.

## 6. AOB

Query regarding river surveys. ~250 white clawed crayfish in Wyming Brook were transferred from the Porter in 2014, as Wyming Brook was identified as an Ark site - somewhere that signal crayfish aren't able to get to.

**ACTION:** Sarah to locate recent fish surveys and upload to the website.

Surrey Farm Plantation which is managed by SCC - opposite Wyming Brook - was felled a number of years ago, and has been re-planted with a native deciduous mix. This area is still something that we are potentially interested in taking on, should the opportunity arise in the future.

Steps from Fox Hagg extension down to the A57. Last May a large sycamore came down from the bank (rooted underneath the steps), and fell across the brook. The tree was cleared away by our LMT, but there are now some concerns that the steps may have been undermined.

**ACTION:** To be assessed and passed on to the PRow team at the Council as required.

## 7. Date of next meeting

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015 – on site at Fox Hagg, meeting at Lodge Lane car park, 7pm – 9pm. A reminder will be sent out nearer the time. Community Wildlife Ranger Rachel Stevenson will likely be assisting Rob with Wyming Brook/Fox Hagg RAG meetings from now on.

### SRWT contact information:

Robert Miller, Living Landscapes Manager (North): [r.miller@wildsheffield.com](mailto:r.miller@wildsheffield.com)

Rachel Stevenson, Community Wildlife Ranger: [r.stevenson@wildsheffield.com](mailto:r.stevenson@wildsheffield.com)

Phone: 0114 263 4335

Address: Victoria Hall, 37 Stafford Road, Sheffield, S2 2SF.