

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Lye Valley :
Monday 11 August 2014, St Francis Church Hall, Cowley**

Present: Dr Judy Webb (Chair), Dr Terry Wood (Treasurer) Heather Armitage (Acting Secretary), Steve Dawe, Priscilla Grant, Pip Willcox, Sally Hemsworth, Carolyn King, Keith Frayn, Stephanie Jenkins (web support), Alison Kinnear, Theresa Frayn.

Apologies (by email) Merlin Wilcox, Pat Kennedy.

Dr Judy Webb welcomed all present.

The Minutes of 2013 AGM were approved.

The Treasurer's report was given and approved.

Membership fees for 2014/15 stand at £5 for individuals, £7 for a family, £10 for a group and £0 for unwaged.

The Chair (JW) thanked the Acting Secretary, Treasurer and Web support (Stephanie Jenkins) for their work and support during the year.

Chair's report summarised the activities and successes of activities of FOLV.

In the wettest winter on record the springs ran well in the fens. Judy Webb monitors wildlife and feeds back to natural England and Oxford City council (landowners).

The site is still threatened by the proposed development adjacent to Warren Crescent.

Natural England have not objected to the development but the Council is required to prove that there will be no damage to the fen.

FOLV have assisted with raking the reeds which have to be cut and removed to allow the important plants to grow. FOLV have also assisted with pulling the invasive Himalayan balsam which crowds out our natural flora. The Oxford University Hospitals Trust have also been helpful in cutting balsam to prevent spread to the north fen from their land. The 2004 Wild Oxford Project in conjunction with BBOWT relates to the fens /wetlands in Rivermead, Chilswell Valley and Lye Valley and aims to enhanced the site and clear the ponds, with support from the Freshwater Habitats Trust.

Future work will involve reed clearing in the north fen and scrub control.

In February the Oxford City Council Countryside Volunteers cleared the rock face of Rock Edge, which is the designated SSSI part of Rock Edge, under the care of the Oxfordshire Geology Trust. Clearing the scrub exposed the Jurassic cliff face and also provided good nesting for bees. The Volunteers also opened a glade through the woodland for butterflies.

FOLV joined the March Oxclean effort, working up from the South Fen and down from the North Fen. However, there was also evidence of fly tipping at the Warren Crescent site which was reported by JW and removed.

An Oxford Mail article on the Lye Valley by Teresa Thompson appeared in April.

June brought a disastrous arson attack on the north side of the North Fen – a 20m length of reeds burned, returning unwanted nutrients to the soil.

On 22 May Judy Webb gave a talk to the Friends of the Oxford Botanic Garden, titled *Twinkling Stars in the Shadowy Grass*, a reference to both the Grass of Parnassus and to the glow worms which live in the valley.

FOLV are making an input to the Headington Neighbourhood Plan, with the whole of the North Fen included in the designated Headington area.

In August, both 2013 and 2014, under the direction of Judy Webb, at Rock Edge, which is the nectar and pollen source for many invertebrates in the Lye Valley, FOLV members spread wild flower seed, much of it sourced from nearby Milham Ford Nature Park.

On 16 August a Wild Oxford work party cut and raked by hand reeds on the north side of the North Fen.

Election of Officers;

The following were proposed, seconded and elected by majority vote:

Chair: Dr Judy Webb (JW)

Treasurer, Dr Terry Wood (TEW)

Secretary: Heather Armitage (HA)

AOB

Steve Dawe offered to host a FOLV flyer at the Elder Stubbs Allotments Open Day on the Green Party stall – an offer gladly accepted; HA to action.

HA mentioned the opportunity to display flyers and sell jam at the Warneford Meadow Apple Day on 5 October 2014.

Talk by Dr Judy Webb: The Links Between Lye Valley and Rock Edge

Everyone enjoyed Dr Webb's talk and especially seeing, smelling and touching the plants and flowers with which she illustrated her talk.

Rock Edge lies on the site of a former quarry, which used to be known as Cross Road quarry, at the junction of Windmill Road and Old Road. It is an SSSI because of the exposed Jurassic coral rag which was formed 155-160 million years ago. Coral forms a porous but heavy structure. The exposed cliff face is much used by geology students of Oxford University. The rest of the area known as Rock Edge is Local Nature Reserve and has no protection from development.

Growing there are 'indicator flowers' which are relic flowers of limestone flora, which need a very alkaline environment – pH=8. They indicate high quality chalk grassland – the best within Oxford Ring Road, in fact.

Rock Edge is linked to the Lye Valley firstly by its hydrology as part of the rainwater catchment area for the calcium carbonate-rich springs which feed the fens. The rainwater percolates through the limestone and emerges as springs in the Lye Valley when it hits the impermeable Oxford clay.

Secondly, Rock Edge is important as a source of nectar and pollen flowers for invertebrates which live in the Lye Valley. The valley has relatively few nectar and pollen sources to invertebrates come to Rock Edge to feed and perhaps to hibernate, in the case of bees.

Thirdly, Rock Edge has important wild flowers such as knapweed (Greater and Lesser). It is the only site in Oxford where the small scabious survives. The Common and Small Scabious support two nationally rare insects – the Brassy Longhorn Moth and the Scabious Bee. Both creatures rely on scabious and scabious alone to survive.

Other pollen and nectar rich flowers include red clover, moon pennies, salad burnet ragwort and rest harrow. A recent discovery is a patch of clustered bell flower, an important 'marker' of chalk grassland.

Yellow rattle is beginning to thrive on the site, a semi-parasite which weakens the grass and allows the wild flowers to emerge.

The aim of FOLV is to upgrade the flora and fauna on Rock Edge Local Nature Reserve so that it can be re-classified as a Local Wildlife Site, whose importance is recognised within Oxfordshire.

With support from Oxford City Council this is being achieved by a combination of a mowing programme to cut and take away the nutrient-rich grass, spreading wild flower seeds in events to which the public are invited as 'flower fairies' and reducing nutrients by encouraging the use of dog bins to take away nitrogen-rich dog faeces.

Rock Edge and the Lye Valley, formerly part of Bullingdon Green, were important collecting sites for Oxford's botanists such as George Claridge Druce who compiled the *Flora of Oxfordshire* in 1894, revised in 1927. Since that time many species such as wild basil, wild thyme (first recorded in Oxfordshire in nearby Hogley Bog ie Lye Valley), rock rose and marjoram have been lost to Rock Edge. It is hoped they will once again thrive there with seeds brought from nearby sites such as Fairview Allotments and Marston Nature Park – and some assistance from FOLV.

At this time the Lye Valley is particularly under threat – from over-development nearby which reduces the rainwater catchment area, even by pollution from cars- Oxford's air quality falls below European acceptable levels.

Wildflowers in general are declining and England has already lost 90% of our wildflower meadows. The Lye Valley has 22 plants which are rare in Oxfordshire – we have a huge responsibility to look after them.

Members thanked JW for her excellent talk accompanied by specimen flowers.

JW was congratulated by FOLV for her award as top volunteer for Natural England - **Volunteer of the Year – individual award** as Lead Biological Recording Volunteer, [Aston Rowant](#), [Barton Hills](#) and [Cothill](#) National Nature Reserves (NNRs)

Suggestions for future events: an orchid –time walk to see some of the 1,000 Marsh Helleborines in the South Fen.

A glow-worm walk in the summer.

A bat walk.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm