

# FoLV Chairman's Report at AGM 2022

## Highlights

### Practical volunteer work in the Valley.

There have been 51 sessions since August 2021, taking place from around 9am-1pm on Wednesdays. With an average of five volunteers per session, working an average of three hours per sessions, this equates to 765 volunteer hours in the year. Judy expressed her gratitude for all the volunteers' time and efforts.

Practical volunteer work includes scything, raking, chopping and digging up problem plants. Volunteers also repair streams, move plants to speed colonization, collect seeds and maintain barriers. Some people grow rare plants at home.

Additional volunteer hours are provided by Oxford Conservation Volunteers (three sessions per year) and student volunteers from Oxford Brookes and the Oxford University Conservation Society. They learn how hard the work is!

Thanks to the volunteers, the valley looks beautiful and has increasing numbers of rare species. The Grass of Parnassus was only present in the South Fen in 2006, with 22 flowers. By 2021, it had spread to the North and South SSSI sections and over 1000 flowers were counted. Some seeds have been given to projects at other fens to help restore them too, and the plan is to keep building up the population at Lye Valley so there is plenty of seed available for other fens.

### Education

There have been two successful MSc studies completed since the last AGM. The first, by Adam Bows, involved measuring the success of fen restoration, and his results showed that the fen is improving. His study is available at <http://www.friendsoflyevalley.org.uk/about/index.html#bows>

The second study was by Darcey Haldar, and focused on calculating the carbon storage in the Valley's peat. Darcey took cores from the North Fen and was able to establish that the fen stores 229 tons of carbon per hectare. This means that in the North Fen SSSI area, there is 284 tons of carbon. Much more exists in peat if you consider the whole valley. For context, a ton of carbon is what you'd find in a mature 200-year -old oak tree. The carbon needs to stay safe from oxidizing and increasing Climate Change by keeping the peat wet. Darcey's study is available at <http://www.friendsoflyevalley.org.uk/about/Estimating%20the%20Carbon%20Stock%20in%20Lye%20Valley%20DH%20dissertation%202021.pdf>

Professor Adrian Parker from Oxford Brookes University has been using the Valley to teach students how to take cores from the peat. In a core from South Fen, he Radiocarbon dated

sedge seeds from the very base of the core and found they were 14,000 years old, meaning the fen started at the end of the last Ice Age.

## **Developments**

FOLV has been objecting to developments in the water catchment areas. Objections are not always successful because the pressure to provide housing is so great.

At Warren Crescent in Town Furze, a plan to build 10 affordable/social housing houses (which FOLV has been objecting to since 2011) is going ahead. The houses will be built on dumped ground of clay and builder's rubble. It is directly above an important spring which feeds the SSSI fen. FOLV held a public picnic on the green last year, to take advantage of it before it disappeared.

One of the conditions of the development was testing of water quality in the SSSI fen, but this hasn't started, so FOLV will have to keep an eye on this. At the time of the AGM, the drought meant no run-off from the site into the fen, but rain could overload or chemically change the fen spring.

Another development of two very large houses is also planned 50 metres above South Fen. FOLV is continuing to object to this.

FOLV have written a request for Special Planning Guidance to be applied to all planning applications within the water catchment area of the fen (which relies on groundwater supplying spring flow). The Council has said they will try to tighten regulations but have not specified how. They have recently put a tender out for a new hydrological study, which Judy suspects is their way of seeing how much building they can get away with. The fen and its wildlife will die without special spring water.

Leaflets were available at the AGM to guide people living in the water catchment area on methods they can use to help the fen; for example, directing downpipes to water butts which they then use to water their gardens.

## **Publicity**

There are regular updates on the FOLV Facebook page and Twitter account, thanks to Judy Webb and Tony Gillie. The Twitter account now has 1600 followers, including Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, who grew up near the Valley.

Committee members represented FOLV at the Headington Festival and the Bullingdon Road Street Fair to hand out leaflets and chat to local people about the Valley.

Judy Webb led two walk and talk sessions at Rock Edge, as well as volunteer sessions with the Oxford University Nature Based Solutions group and Freshwater Habitats Trust.