

Queen Thorne Nature Watch Group (QTNWG) – Inaugural Meeting

Thursday 20th October 2022, 7:15 – 8:30pm

Sandford Orcas Village Hall

Minutes

14 Attendees:

Chair: Kim Creswell, Dip.Herb.Med.MNIMH (Sandford Orcas)

Secretary: Laura Palmer (Marnhull/Sandford Orcas)

Participants: Steve Carter (Over Compton), Vivienne Davies (Sandford Orcas), Helen Donnelly (Sandford Orcas), Rowan Duffy (Norton-sub-Hamdon/Sandford Orcas), Emma Etherington (Sandford Orcas), Monique Hustinx (Sherborne), David Pearson (Sandford Orcas), Marjorie Pearson (Sandford Orcas), Tim Rutter (Sandford Orcas), Alice Yeoman (Holway), Susan Yeoman (Holway)

Guest Speaker: Angus Menzies (The Riverfly Partnership)

Presentation covering matters arising from ‘ QTNWG Informal Meet and Greet’ August 2022 (accompanying ‘QTNWG 20/10/22’ pdf)

QTNWG News:

Kim Creswell opened the meeting with a power point presentation (‘QTNWG 20/10/22’) reiterating the group being underpinned with ‘an ethos of kindness to nature, to each other and especially to those with whom we disagree.’ Main points included:

- A reminder of the aim of the group: To protect and promote biodiversity within the Parish of Queen Thorne and provide a research and monitoring tool which will enable more effective environmental decision making by local people and businesses, Queen Thorne Parish Council (QTPC), other tiers of government and governmental and non-governmental organisations.
- The QTPC response to the decline of wildlife and habitat pressures in Queen Thorne: QTPC supports the aims of the QTNWG and agreed to extend the councils’ climate emergency declaration to include recognition of a biodiversity emergency - which should be taken in to account in all decisions and actions of the council.
- What’s needed for the group: four + trustees, chair, treasurer (E Etherington has kindly agreed to take up this role for now), secretary (currently L Palmer is working at a reduced rate), income to fund water monitoring equipment and group running costs, interactive website for uploading monitoring results and providing information to all.
- The potential group structures – it was suggested that a ‘Charitable Incorporated Organisation’ (CIO) would be most suitable.
- A bank account is needed to receive grants and donations. The Co-op bank was suggested as does not invest in fossil fuels and offers free banking to community groups as well as funding opportunities.

- Funding options available – QTPC, National Lottery Community Fund, Wessex Water, Co-op, Just-giving.

Emerging research: DEFRA :

Kim Creswell responded to the previous meetings' discussion on the possibility of agro-chemical applications, particularly glyphosates and other agricultural runoff, contaminating groundwater, influencing wildlife and human health, accumulating in soil and disrupting soil integrity by presenting up to date scientific research and studies.

DEFRA's environmental stance was recognised:

“We need to take urgent action to halt biodiversity loss to meet our commitment to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it. Our future target to halt the decline in species by 2030 embodies that commitment.”

but concern was raised that this stated aim is not necessarily being translated into action on the ground.

An arial photo of a local valley was shown which depicted fields and stream. A discussion was then had which included:

- Which fields had buffer zones, it was noted that buffer zones were not obvious and non-existent in many places, particularly up to hedges.
- How the shape of the valley may influence agricultural run-off which may or may not be affecting the quality of the stream.
- Derogations that DEFRA offered for permitted cutting of hedges during nesting season. It was noted that many of the hedges shown in the aerial photograph had been cut during August. It was remarked how heatwaves force birds to extend their breeding season, potentially making early mechanical hedge cutting detrimental. The question was raised as to what checks and measures were in place by DEFRA, in order to protect biodiversity, when offering derogations, particularly in areas where losses of bird life, aquatic life and other pressures on wildlife had been noticed. (This item was discussed further in the open forum)
- Kim Creswell suggested that we may not have all of the answers at the moment but we have noticed that there is a problem and the whole community working together should be able to resolve it.

Monitoring updates and events:

- 'Great village Wildlife Survey' to be looked at in more detail next spring, with a view to holding it Summer of '23 / '24 an opportunity to gain anecdotal evidence of trends in nature and assess the importance of interaction with nature and wildlife to the people of the village.

- Water monitoring : West Country Rivers Trust - 'Citizens Science' ; Dorset Wildlife Trust 'Water Guardians'; Riverfly project - to be looked at again in February with a view to organising some free training days for interested parties early summer 2023.
- An update on the meeting held on 27th September 2022 at 'By the Ford', with David Hall (Xylem Water), Kim Creswell, Laura Palmer, Emma Etherington and Alex Ferris where a demonstration of the water testing equipment was made by David Hall.
- An update on the meeting held on 11th October 2022 at 'By the Ford', with Kim Creswell, Laura Palmer, Emma Etherington and Helen Donnelly testing water samples they had taken from nearby water courses on that day with the Xylem equipment.
- A graph was shown detailing the results of the levels of Phosphate and Ammonia in these samples and benchmarked against acceptable levels of these chemicals given by Natural England and the Government. Three of the samples showed levels of Phosphate higher than recommended levels by Natural England with two being higher than the government's acceptable level. It was recognised that this water testing equipment appears to be an extremely useful tool in monitoring water quality and assessing pollutants.

Open Forum

A discussion was held about the following:

- The reasons DEFRA would issue a derogation for cutting hedges in August during nesting season – applicable only to oil seed rape and grass seed that is sown at this time, with farmers still having the option to choose whether to have a buffer zone or not.
- That some farmers voluntarily choose to have a buffer zone around their fields. Subsidies are currently available for 4-6m wide buffer zones under Countryside Stewardship/ Environmental Land Management Schemes - although there may be uncertainty over how long these subsidies will be available.
- The uncertainty of how environmental policies would progress under the current government.

Riverfly: Presentation by Angus Menzies

Angus Menzies then gave a presentation introducing the work of the Riverfly Partnership and how the QTNWG could become involved. Main points included:

- That the Riverfly partnership is a non-political organisation which accumulates information on aquatic invertebrae which can demonstrate the health of water courses.
- They wish to cultivate an ethos of joy and curiosity in their volunteers and the work that they do across their 35 regional hubs, 1600 sampling sites and 2000 volunteers.

- That river flies have been declining due to pollution, siltation, abstraction, poor land management, loss of aquatic weed and climate change.
- Volunteers are active between April and September when information is collected and reported on the invertebrae found in the rivers through a three-minute kick sample with 8 invertebrae groups being looked for.
- A scoring system for each invertebrae found is used and the information is uploaded online.
- Free training can be provided to the QTNWG in May or June on the river Cerne where participants will be taught how to recognise the distinctive shapes and movements of the different invertebrae.

A discussion was then had with Angus on the following points:

- That funds would be needed to purchase the equipment. One kit would ideally be provided for each testing site to avoid contamination. Approx. £100 per kit.
- That testing in the Queen Thorne Parish would need to be done from water courses that could be accessed on public land.
- To consider that when water testing in public spaces these spaces could have been contaminated by people and their pets. Dogs with collars that repel or kill fleas can release these chemicals in to the water courses. In France certain packets of dog collars have instructions to remove the collar from the dog if they are entering public water courses.
- The toxicity of milk entering water courses.
- Suggestion was made of one day each month being set aside for organised water monitoring during the summer and also a 'rapid response unit' being available for pollution incidents. This would be done concurrently with the other 'prongs' of water testing, the combination of which will enable consistent appraisal of the water quality and trends as well as possible clear identification of potential sources of pollution if/when extra-ordinary events occur.

Actions

- Date of next meeting TBC - Thursday 9th February.
- ASAP: Form And submit constitution for Charitable Incorporated Organisation. **(Kim and Emma to meet to look at this during November)**
- Set up bank account (Co-op) with at least three trustee signatories. **(Kim and Emma to meet to look at this during November - may have to wait until a charitable number has been received)**
- Have grant applications in place.
- Request to everyone to think about what kind of role they would like to play in this group ie. popping into meetings and attending events; water testing training; trustee; secretary; website specialist; grant applications; or anything else you can think of... we know many of you are very busy and won't be able to but you are still welcome to come to the meetings, your input is valued whatever it is. Kim can be approached directly: kim@kimcreswell.co.uk / 07765 654771