

Annual Report, June 2013 – May 2014

Introduction

1. Formed in 2002, The Bourne Conservation Group (BCG) comprises volunteers who undertake practical work in The Bourne area of South Farnham. The emphasis is on the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity through a range of projects carried out either independently or in partnership with the local authorities and individuals or groups.

2. Activities in the past year have been set against a background of increased concern nationally at the decline of many animal species, and in Farnham at the greatly increased pace of building development with much now proposed on green spaces. Because of its local knowledge backed by observed data, BCG feels able to contribute usefully to the debate on these issues but its focus remains on practical work. In a year of essential consolidation of previous projects the highlights have been:

- A programme to enhance the landscape of the Middle Bourne Lane Community Wildlife Garden
- Cooperation with The Bourne Residents Association in the Bourne Beautification Project (BBP)
- A more structured approach to planting plans
- Making a significant contribution to the Farnham in Bloom campaign
- Putting greater emphasis on recording and reporting wildlife sightings

3. **Membership.** The work depends on a core of exceptionally loyal members for whom no praise is too high. The number of active members stands at about 30 but it remains a priority to attract new volunteers to cope with the volume of work being undertaken. The support given by the Friends of BCG is invaluable and their numbers are growing steadily.

4. **Administration.** To reflect the wider scope of activities, a revised Constitution was approved at the AGM held in September 2013. In parallel the comprehensive Health and Safety Manual has been updated. It has also been decided to decentralise some tasks through the establishment of independent maintenance teams, the first of which has been operating throughout 2014. The current financial state continues to be healthy and the Group is now well on the way to having a sustainable income to cover annual running costs.



Stop Press



Since the closing date of this Annual Report the Group has once again enjoyed a very successful Bourne Show. In addition to raising a record amount from sales, a number of new volunteers came forward. In July also, the double judging for the South East and National In-Bloom competitions took place. It was a pleasure to present aspects of BCGs work and to receive favourable reactions from the judges, which it is hoped may be reflected in the results due in September.

Review of Work Undertaken

5. **General Approach.** The indications are that biodiversity is being enhanced on sites managed by BCG but a number of ways are being sought to widen the impact of the Group. The first is by contributing to the development of the town's Neighbourhood Plan which it is hoped will establish a basis on which the town's Green Infrastructure (GI) will be conserved and managed in the future, both for the well-being of the rising population and as habitat for wildlife. The second way is to increase the awareness of residents about what they can do to support and encourage wildlife. This has been progressed in the past year through:

- Highlighting the importance of gardens as a part of GI, and initiating a town-wide Garden Survey
- Working with The Bourne Scouts on a biodiversity project along Sturt Walk
- Supporting the Mayor's Pollinator Appeal including participation in Farnham in Bloom

6. It is reassuring to see similar excellent work being done by other groups in the town and BCG seeks to strengthen links with them. One avenue is through membership of the Farnham Rivers Group and there was an enjoyable conducted walk with the Friends of Farnham Park in August 2013.



Buff arches moth on ragwort

7. **Wildlife Recording.** Despite all the good work locally and in other areas (including some notable conservation successes), there continues to be depressing news on the status of many wildlife species. This encourages BCG to redouble its own efforts. Understanding the local environment and wildlife underpins all that it does, and for the sixth consecutive year a Survey Day was held in the Old Churchyard in conjunction with the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT), devoted this time to children. Dr Martin Angel has been indefatigable in coordinating biodiversity efforts and recording all sightings. A summary of his work is given in **Annex A**. Lisa Malcolm's expertise has also been well utilised both directly for BCG (including the organisation of toad watches near Rowledge in early 2014) and

by her contribution to other local wildlife groups. Her report is at **Annex B**.

8. **Pattern of Work.** The pattern of work consists of a main session on a Sunday morning each month, augmented by many mid-week sessions which account for 63% of the work accomplished. More notice is now given of the mid-week sessions. In the current year the number of hours worked increased to 1161, and the time spent on essential supporting tasks rose sharply to 1318 hours, reflecting the range and complexity of activities undertaken. The overall total of 2479 hours, the highest yet recorded, has only been made possible by the excellent support of the whole membership.

BCG Projects

9. **Middle Bourne Lane (MBL) Community Wildlife Garden.** When the results of South East in Bloom came through in September 2013 it was gratifying that Farnham achieved two gold awards and was adjudged best large town in the region. About the MBL Garden the judges wrote in their report:

"Bourne Conservation volunteers have made great strides in the wildlife garden with the introduction and management of various habitats. It was fascinating to see how this garden has impacted on the local environment and the recording of flora and fauna."

10. This inspired a programme to further improve the site to help prepare for the new challenge of taking part in the Nation in Bloom 2014. Significant work undertaken has included:

- Removing two small trees and the last remnants of the laurel hedge to create a wide, sunny bank as an extension to the old heather bed, backed by a low beech hedge to provide fresh winter colour.



- Replacing the revetment and wooden steps.
- Improving the whole site for pollinators by introducing more perennial plants (many grown by members) and by once again seeding the wildflower meadow with a cornfield mix.
- Introducing a bug hotel and other artificial habitats.

The administration was improved by setting up a maintenance team which is working extremely well thanks to the leadership of Martin Wisdom and his volunteers.

11. This is all helping to consolidate the site as a haven for wildlife as indicated by intense activity in the pond in March with large numbers of frogs giving rise not only to 12 clumps of spawn but also to an enchanting chorus. More bird species are being seen, as a result no doubt of the diligence of Vivien Sinfield and Yasmin Osborne in keeping the feeders topped up all year.

12. **The Old Churchyard (OCY).** The OCY project has settled into the maintenance phase. A good balance has been achieved between the neat and tidy, closely mown churchyard seen in many places and the slightly wild environment favoured here to provide a diversity of wildlife habitats. Nevertheless constant vigilance is required to ensure that brambles and other saplings are rooted out otherwise the site will quickly revert to its former grossly overgrown state.

13. The site continues to be at its most interesting early in the year because of the succession of springtime flowers (which are all spreading well) and the appearance of increasing numbers of frogs, toads and newts in the pond. This all provided a fine backdrop for the annual Palm Sunday service in April. Relations with the Church of St Thomas-on-The Bourne are excellent and gratitude is expressed for the support given by the Reverent Karen Hutchinson and her team. A formal policy for the upkeep of the site has been agreed which is believed to be satisfactory to all parties. Arising from that, more attention has been paid this year to the maintenance of the lychgate. BCG is also extremely grateful for the support given to OCY by neighbours John and Mary Egan.

14. In September 2013 BCG, led by Richard Sandars, responded to the wish of the Farnham Society to spread the reach of their annual Heritage Weekend beyond the confines of the town centre by offering guided walks in the Old Church Lane area, taking in both the church of St Thomas and the Old Churchyard as well as George Sturt's home at Vine Cottage. Despite highly inclement weather this was a successful venture which will be repeated in 2014. There is also now a historical presentation on The Bourne which was given to Farnham U3A and is available to other groups on request.



15. **The Bourne Crossroads and Beautification Project (BBP).** In many ways BCGs first independent project at The Bourne Crossroads is still the one most in the public eye and many favourable comments about it are received thanks to the care given by Sheila Musson and other helpers. Although it remains a biodiversity project in its own right it has become inextricably connected with the BBP reported on last year. This is now very much a joint project with The Bourne Residents Association and has not only produced fine results at the Crossroads but has led to greater cooperation between the two groups more generally. To a very large extent this has been due to the personal commitment of Valerie Nye the current chair. Other essential partners are councillors Carole Cockburn and David Munro, through whose good offices excellent support has been obtained from SCC Highways and Farnham Town Council to all of whom gratitude is expressed.

16. Much of BBP is about street furniture such as the new finger post, notice board and litter bins, but there is an important biodiversity element because the flower tubs and baskets planted to Hilary Dickson's innovative designs provide a thin "bee corridor" from the embankment both ways through the built-up area along the A287 road. This is absolutely vital until the cramped new development on the other side of the road greens up which it will to some extent in the future.

17. **The In Bloom Campaign.** The effort put into the competition this year was considerable but fully justified because the form of the Large Town Category is consistent with BCGs aims. Additionally it focuses

attention on detailed maintenance issues which might otherwise be overlooked, provides opportunities for networking and achieves good publicity. The price has been some delay to other tasks and occasional pressure on the time of members.

18. **Other BCG Projects.** Limited effort was put into the following smaller projects in 2013-14:

The Bourne Stream. The necessary check on Himalayan Balsam was carried out as usual in 2013. It was observed that the worst of the Japanese Knotweed had been dealt with by the tenant using Compton Field for grazing.

Roadside Planting and the Ridgeway School Embankment. The daffodils on Gravel Hill were very good again in early 2014 but, despite assurances given, Waverley BC cut the grass verge too early and so the showing may not be so good in 2015. The council's grass cutting schedules are something of a mystery and clarification of policy and practice is being sought. Some planting was done on the steep embankment of Gravel Hill but did not do well and neither did native daffodils planted near Frensham Vale. Maintenance of the Ridgeway School embankment continues.

St Peter's Church of England Primary School. In response to a request from Jo Booton, advice was given on the management of a small but promising area of green space in the school grounds. It has been agreed to write a Project Plan to assist volunteer parents to improve the site.

Farnham Scouts Project. In May 2014, in response to a request from the Group Leader, a joint project was arranged for The Bourne Scouts to improve the wildlife habitat of Sturt Walk which was recovering from the flood relief engineering works. Particular emphasis was given to helping pollinators. This gave rise to a series of hectic evening meetings in early June involving significant numbers of Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorer Scouts. Although affected by heavy showers, some very good work was done with great enthusiasm. It is planned to have follow-on sessions in the autumn and spring terms to cement this excellent piece of community activity.



19. **Sable Wood.** Several sessions have been held in Sable Wood (adjacent to Bourne Wood) to assist the owner, Bruce Callander, who is now implementing his management plan to improve the environment of this 6 acre site. This is enjoyable work which helps the overall biodiversity of the area and it is hoped to help again in the future.

Joint Work with Outside Agencies.

20. **Public Open Spaces in the Waverley Estate.** In conjunction with Waverley BC Countryside, work was carried out in Burnt Hill Wood (West) in January 2014, a site not previously worked on. There is concern at the reduced effort being put by Waverley into management of their estate and the likely effect on the sites they own in The Bourne. This has been discussed with the Head Ranger.

21. **Rights-of-Way (ROW).** Martin Wisdom, assisted by his team of BCG Footpath Wardens, has pursued with energy the task of monitoring the state of the footpath network. In addition to minor maintenance, a number of more major tasks have been undertaken including repair of wooden steps and improvements to drainage in both of which the skills of Charles Fearnley have been well used. There is concern at the lack of the close contact with the ROW staff at Surrey CC enjoyed in the past. One bright spot was liaising with the Environment Agency to effect the replacement of the seat on Sturt Walk which is a memorial to the late John Goddard, former chairman of Farnham Ramblers.

22. **Underdown Nature Reserve.** There has been further cooperation with Surrey Wildlife Trust to maintain this interesting site close to The Bourne stream, including the installation of a pedestrian gate and helping recovery from storm damage.

Development Issues

23. For some years the view of BCG has been that the semi-rural nature of The Bourne is being steadily eroded by over development. The Bourne Residents Association and the Farnham Society have expressed similar views as have other residents associations in connection with their own areas. This is both on the grounds of the inadequacy of the human infrastructure and the steady degradation of habitat and wildlife corridors. Last year this Annual Report drew attention to the growing seriousness of the situation and today the situation is worse. In addition to general building activity continuing at a faster rate, large tracts of green space are under imminent threat. Of direct concern to The Bourne are potential developments of 190 houses in Compton Fields, 80 houses in Frensham Vale plus 60 houses on Gardners Hill Road. This picture is replicated in other parts of the town.



24. The local authorities seem badly placed to deal with this situation and surprisingly the reaction of Surrey Wildlife Trust so far has been disappointing despite, as we see it, threats to what they are trying to achieve for the improvement of biodiversity in the Wey Catchment. On behalf of BCG, Charles Fearnley has worked exceedingly hard to keep a handle on local applications. A Total of 13 formal comments have been made to Waverley BC since January 2013 ranging from single dwellings to removal of trees to filming in Bourne Wood. Mainly these have been objections but a sensible balance has been achieved in the comments made. There has been some success, and some decisions are still outstanding

including the first of the major green space applications, Compton Fields.

25. There is general concern over this situation and it is regretted that a proposal made by the Farnham Society last year for a combined forum of residents associations to address these sorts of issues (which BCG supported) was not taken up. It seems likely that this may now surface in a slightly different form thanks to an initiative by the South Farnham Residents Association (SOFRA) who are concerned about the Compton Fields development. BCG would like to be a part of any such forum as the Group's knowledge of and interest in Green Infrastructure is generally applicable right across the town.

Finance and Equipment

26. The financial position remains very strong with income in this period more than balancing running costs. Outstanding results from plant and bric-a-brac sales at The Bourne Show are largely responsible for this and gratitude is expressed to all who contributed in any way, especially the team leaders Fiona Walberton and Hilary Dickson, the latter being responsible for the very successful Plant Growing Initiative (PGI). This activity has been greatly assisted by a substantial gift of Scott's compost by Mike Suter for which BCG is very grateful. Cllr David Munro is also warmly thanked for his grant of £500 which will support autumn planting in 2014.

27. A complete list of the Group's equipment is given in **Annex C**. This includes the extra gazebo purchased in time for The Bourne Show 2013 and a new set of equipment for the MBL Maintenance Team provided in early 2014. There is a need to purchase more tools to replace worn and damaged items.

Information, Publicity and Liaison

28. **Information.** Every effort is made to keep members, Friends and the public well informed of activities and events. The website is kept reasonably up to date, the newsletter has been published three times in the past year and occasional updates on specific issues have been sent out. The website is essentially a database and remains probably the best single source of information about The Bourne. It is linked to Twitter and Facebook, the potentials of which have hardly been tapped so far but would both benefit from more inputs from members. But there is no substitute for face to face contact and the repeat Social Evening organised by Karen Redman in January 2014 was a welcome opportunity for members, partners and friends to meet up out of working gear.

29. The nature of work this year has not generated much newsworthy material but nevertheless regular coverage has appeared in the Farnham Herald: as this report is being written, Charles Fearnley is quoted on the front page forcibly stating the Groups position on the Compton Fields planning application. Presentations have been successfully given to The Farnham and District Museum Society, the Farnham U3A Local History section and the Farnham 41 Club.

30. **The Bourne Show 2013.** BCG staged an impressive presence at the Show in 2013 with no less than three gazebos fully set up and manned. To the graphic displays on Green Infrastructure and Tips for Wildlife Gardening were added the sales stands which made a combined profit of £654 to help towards annual running costs. 19 members took part on the day and to them and all who contributed in any way a “big thank you” is due.

31. **Liaison.** BCG operates in an open manner and can report excellent and frank relations with the three local authorities, the Surrey Wildlife Trust and all relevant local groups. Much of this depends on good personal relations and in that context thanks are recorded to a large number of individuals for the enormous help, advice and encouragement they have given. In turn BCG is often able to assist other individuals or groups. For example help was given to the St Mary’s Byfleet Group by inviting them over to see MBL and OCY as an aid to getting started on their own churchyard project. A number of members have volunteered to help in SWTs River Search project monitoring the river and banks of the Wey in detail.

Organisation

32. At the AGM in September 2013 the following committee was elected for 2013-2014:

Chairman	Noel Moss
Secretary	Richard Sandars – also member for Heritage
Treasurer	Fiona Walberton
Membership Secretary	Karen Redman
Biodiversity	Martin Angel – also Vice Chairman and Newsletter Editor
Horticulture	Hilary Dickson
Footpath Coordinator	Martin Wisdom – also maintenance manager MBL
Planning	Charles Fearnley
Webmaster & publicity	David Todd
Without Portfolio	Lisa Malcolm

Future Work and Activities

33.. For the year ahead, subject to further deliberation in committee and any guidance received from members at the AGM in September 2014, the aim will be to continue to focus on practical work in The Bourne, balancing what is attractive to the human community with the enhancement of biodiversity. Some specific tasks for the coming year include:

- Formalising the planting strategy across all projects
- Continuing to evolve the landscape of the MBL Community Wildlife Garden
- Progressing the joint Bourne Beautification Project including upgrading the raised flower bed
- Evolving a general strategy for enhancing biodiversity in The Bourne Valley
- Developing ideas on the Green Infrastructure of Farnham and making further contributions to the Neighbourhood Plan
- Addressing the issue of over development of The Bourne, working with other groups

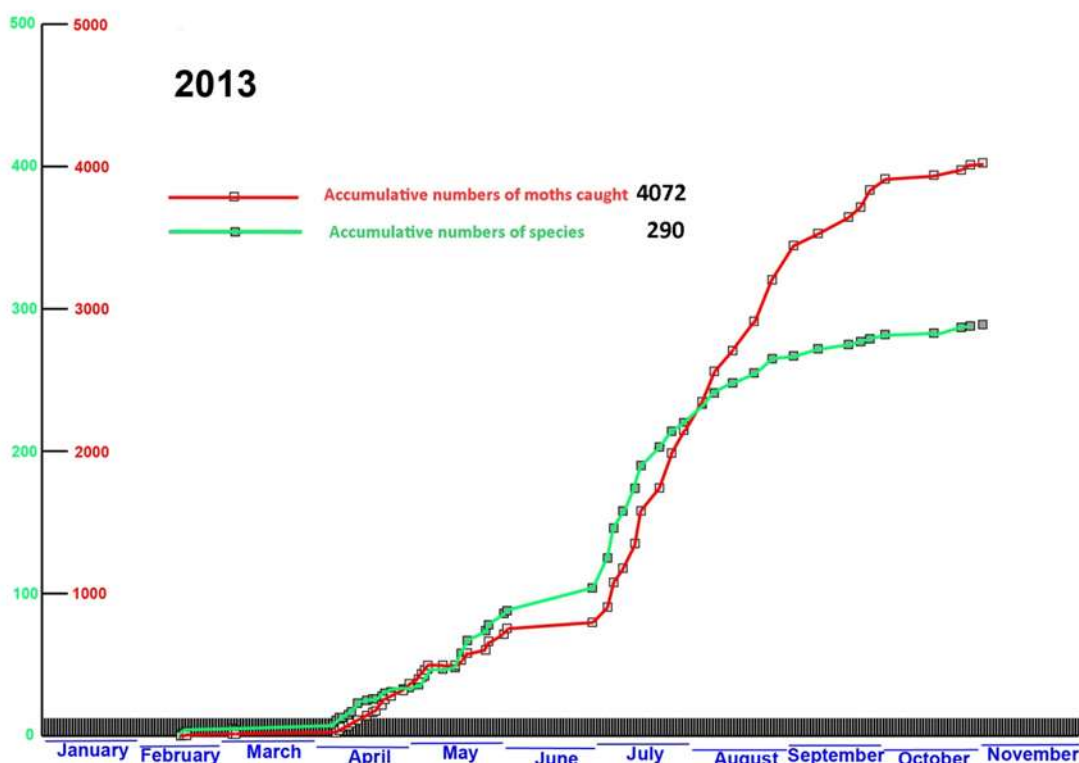
34. A pressing need remains the recruitment of more long-term, members to enable BCG to support the wide range of activities outlined in this report and perhaps to relieve somewhat the pressure on the existing core membership.

Noel Moss
Chairman

Biodiversity Summary 2013 -2014 by Martin Angel

So far 2014 has been a far better year than 2013, the first half of which was so cold. Comparing the two years up until the middle of August in 2013, 44 trapping sessions in my own garden produced 2708 moths belonging to 248 species, whereas this year 52 trapping sessions have produced 4590 moths belonging to 303 species. Additional trapping took place on two nights on Sturt Walk in support of the Scout project and in MBL in support of Farnham-in-Bloom. Compton Fields were visited on 8 nights to supplement records for these fields and a bat survey was also carried out there jointly with Lisa Malcolm in July. The overall numbers of moths recorded in The Bourne now stand at 322 macromoths and 235 micromoths (which are more diverse but much harder to identify). The reason for the higher numbers recorded this year is undoubtedly the warmer weather and this highlights the difficulty of demonstrating that our efforts have enhanced the biodiversity of The Bourne.

Our records for Compton Fields have been compiled to provide evidence of the rich diversity of the fields. 141 species of plant have been recorded and 396 species of animal. The animal records would undoubtedly be greatly increased (may be doubled) if we had greater expertise in groups like beetles, flies, spiders and molluscs. In the scoping document for the development of the field for house building, the developers carried out an ecological survey in March and concluded no species of special interest occur there! The plot of the year-round record of species of moth in my garden for 2013 shown in the graph below illustrates just how misleading such a survey conducted in March is in providing an adequate overview of the species present. At best only about 5% of the total fauna could be recorded and the figure for plant species is only marginally better.



Plots of the accumulative numbers of moths and species caught throughout 2013, illustrating that an ecological survey conducted in March will only reveal a tiny fraction of the species that occur there

The results of the Garden Survey are biased because only those interested in conservation of gardens will have responded, and also limited by which species untrained observers can recognise. The results are still remarkable. Over half of the respondents reported seeing frogs, toads and slow worms in their gardens. There were few surprises as to which birds were most common: robins, blackbirds, blue and great tits and magpies. But a surprising number reported seeing house sparrows. We have emphasised in the newsletters and at the Bourne Show the contributions we would like residents to make to help enhance biodiversity by planting the flowers in their gardens that will attract insect pollinators, providing honey bees in particular with the nectar they need during mid-summer and early autumn.



Cydia amplana A rare micromoth 10mm long, caught in the garden on 9th August – only the second record for Surrey.

Summary of Survey Experience by Lisa Malcolm

August 2013 – August 2014

In the last year, as well as working with BCG, I have also volunteered with Surrey Bat Group, Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group (SARG) and Surrey Wildlife Trust. I am working towards my rare reptile licence by surveying for smooth snakes and sand lizards around the Farnham/Hindhead area, mainly on heathlands. It is important to find out the numbers and distributions of these protected reptiles to help with their conservation. I was lucky enough to find and weigh a number of smooth snakes (*Coronella austriaca*) last October.



Smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*)

In February-March 2014, in a combined project with SARG and BCG, we also patrolled a well-known amphibian crossing to ensure that the toads, newts and frogs safely crossed the road from their hibernation sites to their breeding ponds. We enabled 141 toads alone (*Bufo bufo* - a Biodiversity Action Plan species) to safely cross, with only 5 reported squashed by cars.

I also continue to work with Surrey Bat Group on their latest research project for the Nathusius Pipistrelle. This is part of a national project to determine the range of the species as it has only relatively recently been identified as a separate species. It has therefore been previously under-recorded. The surveys involve trapping, identification and ringing by licensed bat workers.

Following a report from a member of the public of a high amount of bat activity around the Malting's bridge, I undertook a survey for Surrey Bat Group one evening this summer. No roosts, but I witnessed a fantastic feeding frenzy of Soprano pipistrelle bats (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) under the bridge – a truly magical sight.



Nathusius Pipistrelle bat (*Pipistrellus nathusii*)



Harvest Mouse (*Micromys minutus*)

Another protected species is the Harvest Mouse. In the autumn I have been working with Surrey Wildlife Trust to survey for Harvest Mouse distribution through targeted trapping surveys which involves early morning and late afternoon daily checks of the traps.

Tools and Equipment

Items	Group	Unused	MBL Team
Tools			
Bow Saws 24”(Bahco – orange)	6		2
Spare blades	6		1
Bow saws 24” (Stanley – yellow)	3		
Spare blades	2		
Assorted Loppers	7	1	2
Small bulb planters	3		
Long handled Bulb Planters	4+2		
Assorted Secateurs	9	7	4
Sythette	1		
Broom handle w detachable head	1		
Sickles	2	2	
Machette	1		
Assorted shears	3+2	1	2
Slasher	1		
Trowels and forks	7		4
Crow bars	2		
Garden forks	4		1
Spades	5		1
Round headed spade	1		
Rakes	1		
Lawn rakes	1		2
Wire rake	2		
Edge trimmer	1		
Assorted hoes	2		
Pick axe	1		
Mattocks	2		
Shove holer	1		
Pole saws w detachable blades	2		
Tool bags	3		1
Carpenters saws	2		
Post level	1		
Refreshment Kit			
Enamel mugs	12		10
3 litre metal thermos jug	1		
Thermos flask	1		1
Health and Safety Kit			
First aid satchels	2		1
BCG Hi Viz Jackets	10		
Safety helmets	5		
Illustrated First Aid Book	1		
Goggles	4		
Medium grade wiring gloves	3		
Display Equipment			
Pop-up Gazebo (2011) w walls	1		

Tools	Group	Unused	MBL Team
Pop-up Gazebo (2013) w 3 walls	1		
Old style gazebo 4m x 3m w sides	1		
2m x1m Display Panels w posts and feet			
Lightweight panel sets in carrying case	2		
Table top Display panel set	1		
"A" Frame	1		
Easel	1		
Heavy duty table cloths	2		
BCG Banners for gazebos	2		
Installed Equipment			
Sundry bird, bat & insect boxes			
Sundry bird feeders in MBL and OCY	5		
Water tank in OCY	1		
Water butt in MBL	1		
Machinery & Miscellaneous Items			
Bat detector	1		
Petrol driven strimmer w mixer bottle	1		
Honda petrol mower	1		
Stand up clearance containers	2		
Rake & scoop device	1		
Warning sign on tripod	1		
Named fingers for finger posts (TBRA)	5		
Named fingers Stan Cocketts Path	4		
Hoses on reels (MBL and OCY)	2		
Long handled pruner			1
Expendables			
Sundry nails and screws			
Post nails, tacks and wedges (SCC)			
Direction arrow discs (SCC)			