

Annual Report, June 2014 – May 2015

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 number of projects carried out either independently or in partnership with the local authorities and individuals or groups. The past year has been one of solid progress across the whole range of the Group's work, activities and supporting tasks which is now extremely wide.

Membership

2. BCG has been referred to as a "large" group but, in view of what it undertakes this is not the case. Currently there are 56 full members on the books but, as with similar voluntary organisations, not all are available all the time and in the past year the work sessions have been attended by 38 members. They make up an excellent team, taking pride in their work and prepared to undertake anything that comes up from building steps to litter picking, and from turning compost to scrutinising planning applications. Recruiting new members to help keep pace with the work and to serve on the committee remains a priority.

3. An encouraging feature this year has been the active participation of two youthful members, who have added much to our work with their enthusiasm and practical skills. In accordance with our new Safeguarding Policy for Working with Children and Young Persons approved in November 2014, both individuals have been able to join BCG with their parents' permission but without the need to be accompanied by adults. We are also fortunate to have a strong group of Friends that support the aims and objectives of BCG, and contribute to our work and activities in various ways.



Review of Work Undertaken

4. **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 70% of the work accomplished, an increased proportion from last year. In the current year both the number of hours worked at 1123 and the time taken up by supporting tasks at 1218 remained remarkably consistent with last year's figures. Together they give a total of 2341 hours spent on serving the community and reflect the range and complexity of activities undertaken. This has only been made possible by the excellent support of the whole membership.

5. **New Tasks.** Several new tasks have been undertaken in the past year as follows:

Langham's Recreation Ground. This open space lying between Shortheath Road and Aveley Lane was given to Farnham in 1925 as a play area for young children. Last year a revised grass cutting regime was arranged with Waverley BC which is now responsible for its management. Aimed at encouraging wildlife around the periphery, this has now been successfully implemented. However, a more detailed study of the wooded portion of the site revealed it to be ill managed and deep in litter. Therefore in February 2015 a litter clearing session was held over the whole site and

adjoining piece of common land, and it is planned to return in the Autumn to assist with woodland management.

Bourne Wood. At the invitation of the Forestry Commission we took part with other volunteers in a single session to help clear unwanted vegetation on some of the South facing slopes to improve the habitat for sand lizards and other heathland species. It is anticipated that further cooperation will take place in late 2015.

Sable Wood. This is a privately owned six acre plot (with public access) on the north side of Bourne Wood now being managed for the benefit of the environment. This is a great bonus for the Green Infrastructure of Farnham in the future. The owner, Bruce Callander, is a Friend of BCG and we have been pleased to assist him several times in his wide ranging task to better manage the site which is already showing excellent results.

BCG Projects

6. **Middle Bourne Lane (MBL) Community Wildlife Garden.** Although the basic design of this urban garden has not altered since the changes we made in 2007, ways of improving it are constantly sought, spurred on by its regular inclusion in the Farnham-in-Bloom (FIB) competition. This took place once again in July 2014 when we had the pleasure of presenting the site to two teams of judges. They were impressed with what they saw and Farnham achieved Double Gold in the South East Competition, and Silver Gilt at the national level. Their comments in the former were as follows:

“The work of The Bourne Conservation Group really speaks for itself. The Middle Bourne Lane garden is a real credit to all the volunteers and a great source of habitat for a diverse range of species.”

7. In Autumn 2014 the main effort went into maintaining the wildlife pond for two reasons: it appeared to be leaking water and the water lily had become too dominant, thus restricting the amount of open water. Problems were encountered in doing this work but these were overcome and by early 2015 the pond was recovering from the disturbance it had suffered. Additional planting was carried out in the rest of the garden in accordance with our formal Planting Guidelines (**Annex A**).

8. **Bioblitz 2015.** To check on the progress made in enhancing the biodiversity of this site, Martin Angel organised a Bioblitz at the end of May 2015, linked to the National Garden Bioblitz Week, thus emphasising the importance now attached to the role of gardens in supporting wildlife. In addition to the help of our own volunteers, Isobel Girvan of Surrey Wildlife Trust gave of her time to assist in the identification of the plants. With her help 163 plant species were recorded along with 86 animal species. These are conservative numbers because it was a very damp weekend and does not include any out-of-season species.



9. We are again indebted to Vivien Sinfield and Yasmin Osborne who keep the MBL bird feeders topped up all year.

10. **The Old Churchyard (OCY).** The OCY project has settled into the maintenance phase. A good balance is being achieved between a neat and tidy, closely mown churchyard seen in many places and a slightly wild environment that provides 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.

11. Visually 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. The stitchwort was particularly attractive in May 2015 and there were increased numbers of frogs, toads and newts in the pond. 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. BCG also remains grateful for the support of Mary Egan who

punctiliously fills the OCY bird feeders every day of the year.

12. In September 2014 BCG, led by Richard Sandars, once again participated in the Heritage Open Days organised by the Farnham Society 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. Also, for the first time, the reputed site in Middle Bourne Lane of William Cobbett's youthful cavorting with his friends was included, courtesy of new members Simon and Diane Bradbury. In the Old Churchyard emphasis was placed on former residents of The Bourne killed in The Great War including Private Arthur Culver who was buried here with full military honours in 1916. Amongst those attending the walks was Sue Bird whose great aunt was Sturt's housekeeper. We are grateful to Sue for letting us have some scarce, original photographs. Our presentation on the history of The Bourne remains available for local groups interested in local heritage.



13. **The Bourne Crossroads and Beautification Project (BBP).** In many ways BCG's first independent project at The Bourne Crossroads is still the one most in the public eye and favourable comments about it are often made by residents and passers-by. Although it remains a biodiversity project in its own right it has become inextricably connected with the BBP reported on last year. This is very much a joint project with The Bourne Residents Association (TBRA) and has not only produced fine results at the Crossroads but has led to greater cooperation between the two groups more generally. We are now awaiting commencement of another phase of the project in which SCC Highways

have agreed to rebuild the raised flower bed with a low natural stone wall which we shall be required to replant.

14. In July 2014 The Crossroads site was visited by the In-Bloom judges as an example of a community project in the town, and this went very well. The Judge's comments were:

"The improvement works at The Bourne Crossroads have made a real impact on a very busy road with great community involvement to plant and maintain an interesting display, and the new signage looks fantastic and classy"

15. The last phrase refers to the sign post with "The Bourne" roundel which was a new innovation at the time. Replanting of the tubs took place again in October 2014 and May 2015 ready for In-Bloom 2015. The importance of the whole project to BCG is the provision of a thin corridor for bees and other wildlife along the hostile environment of the A287.

Joint Work with Outside Agencies.

16. **Public Open Spaces in the Waverley Estate.** In conjunction with Waverley BC Countryside, work was again carried out in January 2015 in Burnt Hill Wood (West). After two years effort this little wood is opening up nicely. Langham's Recreation Ground, previously mentioned, is also part of the Waverley estate as is Paradise Wood where we have carried out some footpath clearance this year.

17. **Rights-of-Way (ROW).** Martin Wisdom, assisted by his team of BCG Footpath Wardens, has continued to pursue with energy the task of monitoring the state of the footpath network. In addition to minor maintenance, more major tasks have been undertaken including repair of wooden steps near The Bourne Stream. SCC has recently introduced a new on-line system which should ease the task of reporting and monitoring the many footpath problems that occur.

18. We regret to have to record this year a small number of anti-social incidents that have affected our sites. These included annoyance to neighbours near the MBL garden plus theft of the gate there, vandalism of the main sign post at The Bourne Crossroads at New Year 2014-15 and the disappearance of finger posts in the MBL- Aveley Lane area. Disappointed in the reaction of the Police to the vandalism we held, jointly with TBRA, a meeting with the Neighbourhood Police Team in January 2015. They assured us crime

in the area is at a low level and explained how they deal with the sorts of incident mentioned. We now better understand their method of working and have experienced reactions as a result.

19. **The Millennium Walk Footpath Network.** Within the overall network of footpaths the group of named paths is an attractive and distinctive feature of The Bourne. The fingers are installed on a mixture of posts, some plain and some inscribed "Farnham Ramblers 2000 AD." We have set ourselves the task of maintaining the network to the same state it was in at its inception and, to that end, we have acquired a number of inscribed oak posts and fingers to replace the originals as they become unserviceable. These have been funded by TBRA to whom we are grateful.

20. **Underdown Nature Reserve.** There has been further cooperation with Surrey Wildlife Trust to maintain this interesting site close to The Bourne stream. Two sessions were held in Autumn 2014 to carry out work in line with the Trust's Management Plan.

Biodiversity

21. Within the resources available to us everything is being done to support and enhance the biodiversity of the sites on which we have some influence. Quantifying results is not easy but there are indications to show that our efforts are proving successful. This is based on observations mainly at MBL and in the Old Churchyard, in both of which there is increased wildlife to be seen, with the ponds in particular doing well. It is particularly encouraging that the OCY pond has become a toad pond as these are comparatively rare. Both frogs and toads are suffering a decline in numbers in the UK, partly from fungal diseases, and so like bees and many other species, they need all the help we can give them. Under the leadership of Lisa Malcolm we again undertook toad watches at Rowledge in early Spring 2015, a difficult period this time because of frequent changes in temperature. An additional habitat-related move this year has been the formulation of planting guidelines for our sites already referred to and given in **Annex A**.



22. Previous survey results in OCY and the Bioblitz results in MBL this year provide harder evidence on the range of species present on these sites and we probably need to conduct such exercises at regular intervals in order to detect trends. Martin Angel already works tirelessly to increase our knowledge of the biodiversity of our area and to form a view of its health. His short report is given at **Annex B**. We fully recognise the importance of other efforts being made around us to support wildlife including those in Bourne and Sable Woods already mentioned, and further afield in Bishops Meadow and Farnham Park. These all help to keep Farnham as a good place to live and broaden the wildlife corridors across its increasingly urban environment. By the same token we deprecate the free-for-all that is going on in building development with scant regard for the environment.

Planning and Development

23. The steady erosion of the semi-rural nature of The Bourne reported in previous years is unchanged; indeed the situation has continued to worsen and the outlook for the future is bleak. In addition to the building of single and small groups of houses there is now, in common with the rest of Farnham, a series of applications for much larger estates. Most notably these include 157 houses in Waverley Lane (also known as Compton Fields), 50 in Frensham Vale and 43 on Gardeners Hill Road. There is much local opposition to all of these proposals for a wide variety of reasons, the most persistent one being the undoubted effect on the local infrastructure. To give an idea of the scale of feeling engendered one need look no further than the Waverley Lane application against which 1192 objections were registered.

24. BCG has for several years been greatly concerned by this trend because of the serious effect of increased building on the local environment and landscape in general and on wildlife habitats and corridors in particular. We have therefore opposed all developments which we perceive are likely to have a specifically adverse impact. We believe we bring to the debate unequalled knowledge of the local geography and its ecology. In the current year we have made 14 objections concerning sites in The Bourne. Additionally, an objection was made to one application concerning the Brightwells Scheme in Central Farnham because of its direct impact on access to The Bourne area. Each case requires study and research and typically involves more than one letter. With great thoroughness, Charles Fearnley has undertaken most of this work and is deserving of our thanks. A real worry is the number of applications conclusively refused at the local level which are readily approved on appeal giving the distinct impression that Localism is dead.



25. **Compton Fields Application.** We have taken a special interest in this application because the greenfield site lies in The Bourne Valley and is well known to us through the work done there over a seven year period including a major clearance project in 2013. During this time, thanks largely to Martin Angel, we acquired, with the permission of the landowners, a large amount of data on the wildlife of the site, mainly on the largest of the three fields. Using this accumulated knowledge we were able to compile a full Ecology Report with species list which proved the rich biodiversity of the site. This was submitted with our objection and also shared with the South Farnham Residents Association (SOFRA)

which is leading the opposition against building on the site.

26. The Farnham Society has now convened an information sharing group for resident's associations concerned about planning issues, and BCG is pleased to be a part of that. This is useful to us and we feel that our contribution on biodiversity is relevant right across Farnham.

27. **Future Planning.** We have continued to contribute to the Farnham Neighbourhood Plan (NP). In the November 2014 edition that went out for public consultation we were pleased to see that the Environment and draft policies relating to it were brought to the front to provide a foundation on which to build the rest of the plan. We were able to contribute some Group comments but were broadly content with what is proposed to guide local planning in the future and we congratulate our Bourne councillor, Carole Cockburn, for the considerable part she has played in this process.

28. Since the consultation on the NP ended at the beginning of 2015, further progress has been delayed for reasons beyond the control of Farnham. However, we have continued our liaison with the Surrey Wildlife Trust on the wildlife corridors through the town. They have done some useful work on this assisted by our identification of many of the green spaces in the town and have now produced a map showing their results which we hope will strengthen the evidence needed for NP to be successful.

Finance and Equipment

29. The financial position remains strong with income over the year balancing expenditure on both project and running costs. We are grateful to all who have donated in any way to our funds and we recognise the important contribution made by our fund raising effort at The Bourne Show in 2014. The joint income from the plant and bric-a-brac stalls was £775 which resulted from the excellent work of the team leaders, Hilary Dickson and Fiona Walberton, and all their helpers both on the day and in the run-up period either by contributing goods for sale or growing plants.

30. A complete list of the Group's equipment is given in **Annex C**. The only major new item purchased in this period is a fresh set of display panels. At the end of this period we ordered a small portable generator

to make us independent of mains power and thus widen the scope of activities such as moth trapping. This has now arrived and been taken into use.

Information, Publicity and Liaison

31. **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 (including one edition specifically for The Bourne Show) and occasional updates on particular 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 2015 was a welcome opportunity for members, partners and friends to meet up out of working gear.

32. Regular publicity has been given to the Group in the Farnham Herald. Good articles with pictures covered the February 2015 work in Langham's Rec and the May 2015 Bioblitz in Middle Bourne Lane. The chairman's award for Services to Farnham was also very much in recognition of the work of BCG. The Farnham Diary in June 2015 picked up our Spring Newsletter in a small piece entitled "Things are buzzing in The Bourne." This useful little publication now seems to be continuing as a web version only. A presentation was given to the Friends of St Francis Church in February 2015 and in the same month Martin Angel was invited to talk to the Farnham Society on Local Wildlife and this was very well received.

33. **The Bourne Show, July 2014.** Before the event, much thought went into how to maximise our impact at The Bourne Show. All the ideas put forward were implemented and a highly successful result achieved. The information theme selected was Pollinators, a subject that was very much alive at that time (and continues to be so) and fitted in with the Mayor's focus for Farnham in Bloom that year. We were assisted in this by local bee keeper Margaret Lennard to whom we are most grateful. Her clever display of how all our larders depend on the work of pollinators complemented the flower stall next door with live bees in evidence. A separate tent was provided for Wendy and John Maddox to publicise their work on local history on our behalf.



In addition to the good financial result referred to elsewhere, several good new members were recruited at the Show.

34. **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. This year for the first time we worked with the Forestry Commission in Bourne Wood. 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. Some members are active as River Searchers along the Wey as part of SWTs monitoring exercise, and others are Footpath Wardens for Surrey County Council. Regular queries from anywhere in the world come in via our website, most frequently concerning the Old Churchyard.

Organisation

35. At the AGM in September 2014 the elected committee for 2014-2015 remained the same as for the previous twelve months as follows:

Chairman
Secretary
Treasurer
Membership Secretary
Biodiversity
Horticulture
Footpath Coordinator
Planning
Webmaster & publicity
Without Portfolio

Noel Moss
Richard Sandars – also member for Heritage
Fiona Walberton
Karen Redman
Martin Angel – also Newsletter Editor
Hilary Dickson
Martin Wisdom – also maintenance manager MBL
Charles Fearnley
David Todd
Lisa Malcolm

Future Work and Activities

36. For the year ahead, subject to further deliberation in committee and any guidance received from members at the AGM in September 2015, 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:

- Planting the rebuilt raised flower bed at The Bourne Crossroads
- Continuing to evolve the landscape of the MBL Community Wildlife Garden
- Commencing management of the wooded portion of Langham's Recreation Ground
- Bringing the refurbishment of the named footpath network up to date
- Paying greater attention to wildlife recording

37. 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

Annex A BCG principles for planting and plant choice

Annex B Biodiversity in The Bourne 2015-16

Annex C Tools and Equipment



BCG principles for planting and plant choice

Design and planting aims:

- To support wildlife
 - Provide forage and habitat for as much of the year as possible for a wide range of animals
- To showcase good wildlife gardening to our visitors
 - Sites to be attractive and appeal to human visitors with colour, scent or sound
 - Set an example for others to copy
- To be appropriate to the location or site
 - Style of planting to be harmonious with surroundings
 - Include a range of woody, herbaceous, biennial and annual plants
 - Incorporate design principles of unity, proportion and rhythm
- To maintain sites sensitively
 - Pruning, watering, weeding, mulching, mowing with due regard to purpose of each area (eg need to leave areas of long grass)
 - Reviewing and replacing planting where necessary
- To work sustainably and source locally
-

Criteria for plant choice:

- Of use to wildlife for forage or habitat
- Be suitable for site, soil and aspect
- Low maintenance where possible
- Appeal to humans
- Native or near-native species
- Cultivars if not highly bred
- Exotics if known to have particular wildlife value
- Avoid double flowers
- Avoid 'Schedule 9' species
- Be mindful of other species not on Schedule 9 but with a reputation for being troublesome

Plant sourcing:

- Requirement for well-grown, healthy stock
- Grow within the group
 - Using good standard of horticulture (eg clean compost, clean roots, nipping out shoots of cuttings)
- Local nurseries
- UK nurseries

Biodiversity in The Bourne 2014-2015

By Martin Angel

This has been an unusual year in that after a brief warm spell in the Spring the nights have persistently been chilly throughout the summer. Comparing the last three years the number of moths and moth species have varied considerably. However, these numbers are indicative, but not directly comparable, firstly because the numbers of nights on which I have trapped have varied, and I continue to learn how to identify more and more of the micromoths.

Year	Moth numbers	Moth species
2013	2149	220
2014	4028	275
2015	3535	310

Even so, the low numbers caught in 2013 do reflect just how late and cold Spring was that year. In 2015 spring was warmer, but cooler than in 2014. In July 2014 I was catching up to 300 moths a night. Whereas in 2015 the persistently chilly nights reduced the nightly catches by over half. The increase in species numbers is largely the result of my learning how to identify more species, but is also the result of several species turning up in the garden for the first time – such as the small elephant hawkmoth, the streamer and the goat moth. The goat moth, so-called because its larvae which live under the bark of living trees is reputed to stink of goats, is quite a rarity. Another rare record, the first for Surrey, was that of an oak rustic.



The goat moth



The oak rustic

The garden bioblitz we ran in the Middle Bourne Lane Community Garden was not particularly notable for the animal species (81) we recorded, mainly because on the day (31st May) it poured with such heavy rain that no respectable insect would poke its nose out. But what was remarkable was the outcome of the botanical survey carried out by our own Hilary Dickson and Isobel Girvan of the Surrey Wildlife Trust. Hilary dealt with the 'garden' species while Isobel identified the 'native' wild species. Together they identified 164 species of plants. Some we had introduced, but many were native plants (considered by gardeners as weeds!) and part of our natural biodiversity. Perhaps if there is sufficient interest we may plan another bioblitz next year – may be in the Old Churchyard, but such an exercise will only be worth organising if there is good support from the membership.

Apart from contributing records to the county records centre (hosted by SWT at Pirbright), our records of species collected in Compton Fields have been used to argue against the proposed housing development in the fields. The developers wanted to make the lower field into a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and we were able to demonstrate that the field supported more than enough diversity for it to qualify as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). The environmental survey conducted by the 'experts' employed by the developers concluded that nothing living in the field is of conservation merit; but then if one conducts a survey in March it is not difficult to come to such a conclusion!

In the Spring Lisa Malcolm co-ordinated another series of toad watches. The rather late spring extended the days when patrols were needed. The outcome was that we succeeded in rescuing 45 toads, 39 frogs and 19 newts, but even so 7 toads, a frog and 3 newts were run over by the traffic.

The recent purchase of a portable electrical generator means that BCG now has the capability of surveying other sites, but be aware the surveys must be conducted during the appropriate season of the year.

Tools and Equipment

Items	Group	Unused	MBL Team
Tools			
Bow Saws 24" (Bahco – orange)	6		
Spare blades	5		
Bow saws 24" (Stanley – yellow)	3		1
Spare blades	2		1
Assorted Loppers	8	1	3
Small bulb planters	4+6		
Long handled Bulb Planters	4+3		
Assorted Secateurs	14	7	4
Sythetic	1		
Broom handle w detachable head	1		
Sickles	2	2	
Machette	1		
Assorted shears	4+3	1	2
Slasher	1		
Trowels and forks	9		3
Crow bars	2		
Garden forks	4		1
Spades	5		1
Round headed spade	1		
Rakes	1		
Lawn rakes	3		2
Wire rake	3		
Edge trimmer	1		
Assorted hoes	2		
Pick axe	1		
Mattocks	2		
Shovel	1		
Pole saws w detachable blades	2		
Tool bags	3		1
Carpenters saws	2		1
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	12		
Safety helmets	5		
Illustrated First Aid Book	1		
Goggles	4		
Medium grade wiring gloves	2		
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	2		
Lightweight panel sets in carrying case	2+1		
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	13		
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		
Honda portable generator	1		
Stand up clearance containers	2		
Rake & scoop device	1		
Warning sign on tripod	1		
Inscribed oak posts	5		
Named fingers for finger posts (standard)	3		
Named fingers Stan Cocketts Path	4		
Named fingers (new)	9		
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)			