

Minutes of the 125th Meeting of the Fleet Study Group

16th March 2019

Ilchester Estates Office, Abbotsbury

Present: Ed Harland (chair), Charlotte Bolton, Maxine Chavner, Jonathan Cox, Steve Hales, Alan Holiday, Don Moxom, Nick Owen, Angela Thomas, Rachel Waldock, Charlie Wheeler

Apologies: Lin Baldock, Jon Bass, John Dadds, Marc Kativu-Smith, Simon Pengelly, Emma Rance

Minutes of the 124th Meeting: John Dadds asked that the text regarding the little tern report be changed to reflect the true meaning. While the terns had a good year compared with some years ago, they still suffered significant predation which reduced the fledging numbers. Don Moxom asked that the text regarding Sue Eden's work be changed from 'discovered' to 're-discovered the rare four-leaved allseed'

Urgent business: There was no urgent business

Review meeting:

The main part of the meeting was a series of presentations reviewing the work of the Fleet Study Group and its members over the last ten years. A separate report will contain the presented papers and other contributions. A brief summary is included here.

Fleet Study Group activities – Ed Harland

Ed reviewed the group activities over the last 11 years since he took over as chairman. He set out the field days the group has organised and the events organised to celebrate the 100th Meeting in November 2011. He also reviewed a number of other studies that the group members are involved in.

Chesil Beach and the Fleet Reserve – Charlie Wheeler

Charlie set out a large number of activities and events in the Reserve over the last ten years. A pleasing event was the return of otters to the west Fleet. He also listed some of the management issues affecting the Fleet. Water temperature data for the west Fleet collected by various monitoring programmes was also shown.

The Natural England perspective – Maxine Chavner

Maxine set out the reasons for Natural England's interest in Chesil Beach and the Fleet. She then listed significant events of the last ten years relevant to the area. The challenge for the future is to do the same (or more) with less. While Brexit has led to a shift in resource of staff from NE to Defra through secondment the main drain on resources has been year on

year cuts to core funding by Defra. The approaches NE are taking to continue their statutory monitoring and evidence-collection with diminishing resources are: external funding, in-house surveys, partnership working, liaison with academia and citizen science. Maxine also covered a number of initiatives relevant to the Chesil and Fleet area.

Bird ringing and moth trapping at the Swannery – Steve Hales

Steve described the bird-ringing project at Abbotsbury Swannery and Clouds Hill. Since 1995 30,000 birds had been ringed. Species being particularly studied were the 'alba' wagtail, yellow wagtail, sedge warbler, aquatic warbler, woodcock and the swallow.

Steve is also working with Phil Sterling to trap moths at the Swannery and in the sub-tropical gardens and listed a number of interesting species they had found.

Bryophytes and small mammals – Jonathan Cox

Jonathon summarised the bryophytes he had found during surveys in recent years. He also gave examples of the more unusual locations he had found them, such as expanded polystyrene and discarded shoes. He also set out the small mammals he had found using Longworth traps and field observations. The most common was the wood mouse and these built their nests in some unusual places, such as discarded wellies. Their significant part of their diet was the seeds of sea campion but they also eat whatever was opportunistically available.

Storms on Chesil beach – Don Moxom

Don presented data gathered from the Channel Coast Observatory on storms over the last ten years. He then presented a series of pictures illustrating the damage that can occur during a storm. He also commented on the mechanisms by which the beach can move and made the point that the beach can be self-repairing after a storm, but that there may be a point beyond which the mechanism ceases to work.

The presentations were followed by a short discussion on future activities.

Field Days: It was thought that a return to the bio-blitz approach as used in 2011 at Clouds Hill and 2012 at Chickerell Hive and Butterstreet would be preferable.

FSG Archive: It was suggested that Bournemouth University may be able to assist with digitising the archive and re-writing the website to make the archive searchable. This would be a student project. It was agreed to pursue this option further.

FSG website: EH reported that the software used to write the current FSG website was no longer supported so many of the 'intelligent' links within the site no longer worked. It was agreed to investigate how the site could be re-written using current software so that multiple people could input content.

Funding: A discussion on group funding covered whether we should stay as an informal, unfunded organisation or transition to a formal group with committee and funding. No conclusion was reached but the consensus seemed to be to stay as we are now.

Date of next meeting:

The next meeting will be on the 18th July 2019, venue still to be decided.

Ed Harland

26th March 2019