

A Report on the 2018 Arlington Bluebell Walk & Farm Trails

Delighted to say this year marks another milestone by having raised £1,057,096 since 1972, for the 73 local charities involved in helping to run the event!

This year the weather, especially for those first two weeks, badly affected attendance, as it was dull, dank, cold, and wet on many days, so there were virtually no bluebells due to the 'Beast from the East', but we had a stunning display of the white wood anemones, the best for many years. The car park was closed for several days to protect the surface, but with few visitors on many days the road verge easily accommodated their cars.

The weather thankfully changed on 19th April as we had the warmest April day since 1949, which quickly brought forth the bluebells and visitors! But we had our calamitous days as on Monday 30th April it rained all day, which meant that Cruse Bereavement Care only had 8 visitors who went through the Gate House, so all that thought, planning to ensure they had sufficient volunteers and food for at least 100 expected visitors was wasted. It is a recent record, but many years back I remember it snowed hard on the day we opened and we then had 6 visitors! It proves again that having a successful year is totally reliant on the weather, so Arlington Village and St Pancras Church were on a winning streak, as later that week they had 3 gloriously hot days over their Bank Holiday and raising £9714, plus the Church Plant Stall raised over the five weeks a record £3664.

We were proud that the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) thought that the Bluebell Walk was unique and warranted two prestigious prizes, presented to us last year by Lady Egremont at a memorable evening in Petworth House. I hope we will have similar success this year with other competitions we are entering, so will only give details if we are successful! Pleased to hear we have just been awarded a Certificate of Excellence by TripAdvisor for the great reviews that visitors have posted. We did receive a similar Certificate in 2015, the suddenly found our page had been removed with no notice, apparently due to their head office realizing we are only open for 5 weeks a year and their criteria is Attractions must be open for at least 6 months a year. It will be interesting to see if they act in this arbitrary way again!

We must not forget that the Farm Trails element plays an important part in attracting families in particular to visit, which is due entirely to the generosity of the Appleton Family and their staff. We should like to thank them tolerating the inevitable disruption from having hordes of visitors whilst trying to carry on with their day to day farming activities, which this spring has been difficult.

This annual event could not happen without the involvement of the 23 charities, so to them and their hardworking dedicated volunteers a special thank you, especially to those where the weather was not on their side, so the sum they could add to their funds was far lower than expected, but next year their fortunes here may change.

Thanks to those persons who help us in their various vital ways, by boosting our presence on the vitally important social media platforms, by ensuring all goes smoothly at Bates Green, so our visitors have such a great day out, that they recommend their friends visit and all want to come back next year. Planning for next year starts immediately, and is an on-going process until we open next year! We must ensure that Beatons Wood is kept in tip top form to encourage the profusion of white wood anemones followed by the English bluebells, also some minor changes to facilitate the experience to all those who will visit us in 2019.

John McCutchan on behalf of the Bluebell Walk Partnership