

Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve is a step closer

Our local Councillors at the Kings Norton Ward Committee meeting on the 14 September debated the declaration of Merecroft Pool and Wychall Reservoir as a joint Local Nature Reserve (LNR). A City Council official drawing upon the discussions and public consultations, which had been undertaken over the previous year, made a comprehensive presentation on the proposal. The consultation exercise conducted by the City indicated that of the local residents that responded over 90% were in favour of the LNR. This reinforced the results of the local petition submitted to the City Council containing some 546 signatures representing a 93% 'YES' vote from local residents. **Our local Councillors were happy to wish the application success in its passage forward.**

The next stage, after the Council's Cabinet Member for Leisure Culture and Sport has, we hope, given the application his blessing, is for it to be passed on to the Government Agency, English Nature, for the formal declaration of the LNR. Further legal arrangements would then need to be put in place, but we are very much hoping that the KNNR may be declared a Local Nature Reserve sometime during the spring of 2005. In the meantime the City will establish a formal 'Advisory Committee' to fulfil its legal responsibilities and to plan for the site's future protection and enhancement for the benefit of Kings Norton and the wider area. The 'Friends' will have a stake in this Committee and it will be through us, as the local community group, that we believe the best interests of the site will be served.

Whilst the whole process from inception to formal approval by English Nature, can be criticised for taking so long we believe the 'Friends' are ready to undertake the conservation and support role as soon as we are able to do so. In order to achieve many of the items contained within the draft 'Management Plan' for the site we will now need to deal proactively with the City Council and the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country. The 'Friends' committee are working up plans for regular working parties and events, which will enable the membership and the community to play an active role in the development of the site. Funds are being sought so that the appropriate training of volunteers in the necessary skills can proceed. In this respect the advice and assistance of the City's Parks and Recreation Dept staff and the local river Rea Ranger will be essential. We believe that with the envisaged partnership working and the will to conserve and develop the site we will have a local asset that we will all be able to enjoy for a very long time. Alan Bakewell.



Merecroft Pool - Autumn reflections 2004

The Swan Mussel (*Anodonta cygnea*).

Merecroft pool is important for its population of this mussel, which unfortunately, is also often sold in local aquatic centres. A 'Neighbourhood Watch' report some time ago described the activities of a certain kind of poacher who often raided the pool disguised in a wet suit and flippers. Well, one has been reported in the area of Meadow Hill and Beaks Hill again. If you suspect that the poachers are at work in the pool then please report it to the police and to the Ranger service. One of our objectives is to protect and preserve the aquatic life within the pool – it should not be removed.

Well, what is a swan mussel? The shell is an elongate-oval, shaped like an egg and fairly swollen. Reaches normally a total length of 12 - 16 cm (in exceptional cases up to 20 cm or more). Individuals living in stream water are often smaller. Colour shades of brown, often yellow - olive, sometimes with soft spots of green. The upper and lower margins of the shell are often almost parallel. The upper margin is straight and softly passed over to the dorsal end. The valves are equally thin, all along their heights. The inhalant siphon is narrow with long papillae. The colour of the soft tissues is often rosy - orange. There are no hinge-teeth. The species is mostly an inhabitant of lakes and ponds but can also be found in slow flowing parts of rivers. It is mostly found on muddy bottoms, where it occurs down to a depth of 20 m. It is a lovely large mollusc.

The Ranger Service

The 'Friends' are being assisted in their activities by the local River Rea Ranger, Chris Mansell, who has responsibilities all along the 'green' corridor for the Lickey Hills to Canon Hill Park. We welcome Chris back from his recent football injury and hope that he will continue to play an active and conscientious role in the development of the Kings Norton LNR. Chris is based at the Lickeys and can be contacted on 447 7106.

As well as undertaking conservation and education activities he also arranges a programme of wildlife & people events.

Keep an eye on **Out & About** leaflets (available from the Lickey Hills Visitor Centre, The Nature Centre, and the Library).



Education Activities

Representatives of the 'Friends' with Chris Mansell have met and staff at Wychall Primary School to discuss ways of working together to fulfil the school's aim of making maximum use of the local environment in their teaching right across the curriculum. We are in the process of helping devise projects that we hope will involve the whole school community (including parents and grandparents). The long-term value of the LNR will be enhanced through the involvement of the younger generation in its development. Watch this space.....

Some of us believe such activity will assist in reducing the growing problem of anti-social behaviour – what do you think?

Please report poaching or anti-social behaviour to Inspector Steve O'Grady at Kings Norton police station in order that he can record the true level of the local problem.

**Another successful clean up –
Sunday the 15th August.**

A clean up operation was undertaken in August by the 'Friends' along the River Rea riverbank between the reservoir and as far as Camp Lane. The cycle path in front of the new Catesby Business Park was in need of special attention.

A considerable amount of rubbish was 'black bagged' and taken off site. Thanks go to all those who participated and the Council's Service Team & Community Wardens for their assistance.

Please note the provisional date of Sunday 21ST November for a further exercise at the Reservoir.



The Chairman thanks all those present whilst Cllr. Laura Ross (on the right) selects the lucky raffle prizewinners with Shirley Bakewell and Meredith in attendance.

Future Events & Funding

The committee are considering a range of future activities, which will involve the membership and the wider community. As part of this programme we hope to undertake a series of training exercises so that we can operate efficiently and safely within the proposed Nature Reserve. Relevant courses would include hedge laying, coppicing, tree planting & aftercare, grassland management and reedbed creation. We also intend to build and install bird & bat boxes and floating islands for the reservoir.

Each month we hope to have a 'working party' weekend so please come forward with any help and ideas that you may have. The training courses will be available to all the membership on a first come basis but details will be circulated early in 2005.



In order to finance the above activities the Committee have submitted bids for finance from the City's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and the People's Places Awards Scheme (Lottery funds administered by BTCV). We should hear in the new year whether or not these bids were successful but other relevant bids to other funding bodies will be made in the meantime.

The area next to the cycle path from Camp Lane to the reservoir – a suitable training ground for willing volunteers? The photograph above taken on the 26th August 2004 shows that the scrub area on the right is starting to encroach towards the path.

Most people with reasonably sized gardens have found a fox or two there, or foxes may have been seen crossing the road, usually but not always at night. And even more people will have heard the banshee-like wails of courting foxes in the darkness of a winter's night. Surveys suggest that around 60 per cent of people in towns rather like the idea of foxes in their neighbourhood, 20 per cent dislike or fear foxes, and the rest don't really care one way or the other.

Foxes mainly succeed in towns because they have turned to scavenging. In the countryside, they feed on small mammals and birds, fruit and a variety of invertebrates, especially earthworms. Town foxes eat these things too, but a third of their food comes from rubbish tips, dustbins, bird tables and litter dropped from fast-food outlets.

Fox numbers recently dropped quite dramatically. The reason seems to be to do with mange, a disease that causes fur to drop out, leaving the animal vulnerable to cold and other diseases. The epidemic now seems to have died down, and numbers have recovered quite well. A fox mother (vixen) will normally raise two to five cubs, but sadly only a few will survive past their first year. The motorcar is the single most important cause of death.

Some myths: foxes don't kill cats (though they have been seen eating already dead ones) and indeed they tend to avoid them, but pet rabbits and guinea pigs are certainly vulnerable out of their hutches! Foxes don't hunt in packs – they are solitary hunters.

Some facts: if you have a neat and tidy garden, foxes are a pest because they will pee on the lawn and dig scrapes, or maybe even a den. But for most lovers of nature foxes are welcome additions to garden wildlife. Enjoy them!



Town foxes – a short article by Peter Jarvis (The Secretary of the local Wildlife Trust). Many thanks Peter.

We know foxes live in and about Kings Norton – but has anyone any photos to match these?

FOXES

Still Wanted: Any stories, reminiscences or photographs of Wychall Reservoir & Merecroft Pool in times gone by. We would like to publish articles on local reminiscences from members of the 'Friends'. Photographs would be copied and returned to their owners.

BATS

and

A **Bat Walk** took place on Friday 10th September, and participants (about 20 in all) met at dusk (8pm) at the Wychall Lane end of the Reservoir. Chris Mansell and two other wardens led the group very knowledgeably, and we were well supplied with bat detectors and a couple of searchlights. The bat detectors work by translating the particular frequencies used by different species of bats into tones detectable by the human ear, and soon the group were locating Pipistrelles, which could be seen darting about, hunting small flies.

We then visited Merecroft Pool. Here we were able to see Daubenton's bats skimming the surface of the water and feeding on insects in the beam of the searchlights, in the company of the Grebes. Chris supplied excellent handouts in both child and adult versions, and the evening was greatly enjoyed by all - my son, aged 9, said it was the best thing he'd ever done!

A further bat event is planned for next year. So take note of the date: 9th September 2005.

Bat Night – Meredith Andrea

Membership details:

We now have nearly 50 households signed up as members of the 'Friends'. This represents approximately 120 local residents – not bad for a new group. The Membership drive will continue. Membership is very good value at only £5 a year!

Membership will help prevent the mess on the right from reappearing.

No Swans here yet!



Do we want this view to reappear in the future? Traffic cones and supermarket trolleys. David Barraclough's photograph taken on 28th October 2001 shows Wychall Reservoir prior to the dredging activities. Positive local action will ensure that people & wildlife will benefit from an urban wetland site that offers real long term potential as an LNR. A larger membership base is therefore essential for the 'Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve'.

Wildlife Corner: The following notes have been taken on wildlife on about the LNR over the past 3 months.

A Mute Swan was a frequent visitor to both Merecroft Pool and to Wychall Reservoir. The photograph below was taken when in the company of Mallard at the reservoir. The Mallard have bred successfully at both locations with some 18 young noted on the 26th August. The evenings in early September were notable for the sight of over 50 ducks flying over Wychall Lane at dusk from the reservoir to a nighttime roosting site.

A Common Tern was a visitor to Merecroft in the summer and could be seen regularly turning and diving into the pool. Good sightings were reported on the 13th July. Three Little Grebe were present at Wychall Reservoir on the 12th September and have been seen regularly since whilst the Great Crested Grebe successfully raised three young at Merecroft. A juvenile Green Woodpecker has been recorded many times in the past two months and was seen on the grass area opposite Downcroft Ave on the 29th August. The reserve also provided a good breeding habitat for finches this year and young Goldfinches, Greenfinches and Bullfinches can now be seen regularly in and about the area. It is particularly pleasing to see young Bullfinches since this species has suffered in recent years and remains as a "Red Listed" species in the UK.

A pair of Sparrowhawks nested on the reserve during the year and instances of the female hunting down some of the local Wood Pigeons have been observed.

Finally, a rain forest experience or so we think. On the 31st August various tropical sounds were heard in the trees in the fields behind Meadow Hill Road. An expedition to locate the source was only partially successful. We think someone's escaped Mynah bird may have taken a liking to the locality but any information (esp. if a breeding pair were present) would be welcomed by the Treasurer.



The Mute Swan on Wychall Reservoir - 22nd August 2004

The FKNNR honorary officers

Chair	Alan Bakewell	0121 603 1127
Vice Chair	David Barraclough	0121 458 2244
Treasurer	David Human	0121 458 1300
Secretary	Phil Evans	0121 628 6769
Membership Secretary	Jil Bromley	0121 244 7483
Newsletter	Amanda Cadman	0121 624 3865
Education	Meredith Andrea & Nicola Human	0121 451 3243