

FKNNR

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve
2, Wychall Park Grove ~ Kings Norton ~ Birmingham ~ B38 8AQ

Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve – We inch slowly towards LNR status ...

While the designation of Wychall Reservoir and Merecroft Pool as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) seems to move forward very slowly, the City Council (so we have heard recently) has now submitted the final version of the proposed 'Management Plan' for the LNR to the Government Agency - English Nature - for their consideration. Once the Management Plan has EN's approval – and apparently all the paperwork was sorted at their end before Christmas, so this should not take long – it will be submitted to Birmingham City Council's Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Sport (Councillor John Alden) for his approval. The next stage is for the Council to appoint representatives of local groups to serve alongside City Councillors and officials on a Nature Reserve Management Committee (This will also include the 'Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve', the Links Residents' Association, the Rea Valley Conservation Group, etc., as well as representatives of the local police and perhaps of local business).

With any luck, then, Kings Norton LNR will become a reality within the next three months. Then, at last, we should begin to see some visible progress being made on the various management tasks relating to the site as provisionally set out in the site's 'Management Plan'.

In the meantime, our Secretary Phil Evans has been busy applying for funds to support our work. Already his skills in this respect have met with success! We have been awarded £4,680 by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers [BTCV], of which £3,740 can be used on the purchase of tools and materials and on training of volunteers. (The difference relates to what are euphemistically called 'compulsory costs' associated with the awards BTCV dispense: £25 to join their association, £550 for the cost of a mentor (so we know what we are doing!), and 10% of the total cash allocation towards BTCV overheads). This grant comes on top of an earlier start-up grant of £100 from the Chestnut Fund together with £100 from the Woodland Trust so that we can commence a tree-planting programme.

The 'Friends' are also applying for a sum from the National Lottery Fund - 'Awards for All' scheme in order to rebuild part of the reed beds at both Wychall Reservoir and Merecroft Pool as an introduction to the larger longer-term objectives set out in the Management Plan. We trust that the incoming resources will allow us to play an active role in improving the LNR for the benefit of all the community. Alan Bakewell.



The north side of the River Rea looking towards the Reservoir dam – Winter reflections in the early 1950's.
Photo courtesy of June McCoy

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Working Party news

A very productive working party was held on Sunday 21 November, when more than 40 volunteers helped with a comprehensive litter pick and clean up along the River and around the Reservoir. With Rea Valley Ranger Chris Mansell's help we were able to create some log piles on the north side of the Rea just below the Reservoir, while some Alder saplings were relocated. We were able to plant a good number of bulbs by the entrance (naturalised daffodil species). Half a dozen newly made bird boxes were set up in the woodland below the Reservoir. All in all we felt a great sense of achievement, so it was with great regret that we learned, two days later, that some of the boxes had been stolen. Who, we wondered, would go out to steal bird boxes? Whose Granny could expect to receive a bird box as her Christmas present? The next boxes we put up will be painted murk-coloured to blend in better with the trees!

Our Chairman Alan Bakewell expresses his thanks to all who participated in the November clean-up. In particular, he would like to thank Adrian and Paul, our Community Wardens, without whose enthusiastic support in providing the clean up equipment, we could not have gone ahead, and Simon Cooper and Paul Spink of the City Council's Service Team, who gave invaluable assistance in planning the day and for supplying the bulbs for planting, and all those who gave raffle prizes, especially Lloyds' Bank Kings Norton branch. By the way, everyone who won a prize has been contacted, but we still have several items awaiting collection ...



Mini picks. You may like to know that the Friends now have their own insurance arrangements. Don't go out on your own (except alongside the paths), but if you fancy a few hours out in the fresh air and want some company for a mini litter pick do let Phil or Alan know. A small group keeping a regular eye on a given area of the nature reserve could help us to keep on top of the litter problem. And you never know, it might start to get a message through to some of the litter-droppers.

The area next to the former 'Burmans' entrance has been cleared of rubbish. This is one of the entrances to Wychall Reservoir and it needs to present a good image for the proposed LNR. The photograph above shows bulb planting in progress on the working party activity day - 21 November 2004.

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The 15 and 16 January Working Party will be held at Wychall and Merecroft [10.00 – 15.00 hrs. Meet at the site entrance opposite Wychall Park Grove]. As usual, litter-pickers will be welcomed, but the principal activity will be tree-planting. We hope to have a number of oak saplings (which will come from Quinton Meadows, where they are surplus to requirements; (How's that for conservation!) plus elder, birch, blackthorn, bird cherry and hazel purchased via BTCV.

Our Working Parties on 12 and 13 February will carry out more habitat management including sycamore removal, bird box installation and perhaps a floating island plus the early year clean up and litter-pick. Watch out for further details.



Volunteers lifted several dozen Alder trees from one part of the site used by the City Engineers for relocation on the north side of the River Rea.

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Membership details:

We now have nearly 70 households signed up as members of the 'Friends' equivalent to approx 160 local residents. This is excellent news for a new group and should set us up for an exciting and productive future.

Some members give of their time, all give of their (subscription) money, but importantly, too, members are there to act as advocates for the Reserve within the wider community, and to explain what we are trying to achieve for the benefit of local people and wildlife.

Clearly we want to increase local support for the proposed LNR, and we will seek to increase membership considerably over the coming year. To this end a leaflet/brochure is being produced giving information about the Reserve and how to join the 'Friends'. We will ask for your help in distributing this around the neighbourhood and we will, in particular, seek to enlist support for our efforts from local businesses including those on Catesby Business Park.

The AGM of the 'Friends' will be held sometime in May 2005 so if you feel that you wish to offer even more support to the group either on or off a new Committee then you have several months to think about it! The current Chairman would welcome any views.

Another date for your diary is the 28 March when the River Rea Heritage Trail will be launched with events in Kings Norton Park. We await further details from the organisers.

Finance

The Committee have submitted a bid for finance from the City's Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for work near the reservoir and along the Rea valley. We still await the outcome of the NRF bid although it appears to have received the blessing of the Kings Norton Ward Advisory Board. We should hear later this month whether or not this bid was successful. If it is then we shall be able to instigate a training programme for volunteers and undertake further site development work. We are also pursuing other grants and sponsorship but further fundraising ideas would be most welcome.

Education Activities

Two parties of teachers have recently been shown around the site by Chris Mansell, and a third teachers' group is due to visit early in the new year. Our education liaison team, Meredith Andrea and Nicola Human, are developing these visits to show teachers how the LNR's ecology and history can be used to support teaching right across the National Curriculum and to develop 'community' awareness in younger people. These young people are Birmingham's future, and there is no doubt that active involvement in school projects at the Reserve, and even in helping with humble litter picks, has huge potential to develop their sense of responsibility for their neighbourhood and their neighbours.

... and further afield ...

Members of FKNNR joined members of the Rea Valley Conservation Group to visit the Energy from Waste facility at Tyseley on 4 November, where they had a great time. The introductory talks were fascinating and informative, and (I quote one of our members) the tour of the incinerator, which turns our waste into electricity, was "spectacular and wonderful. I feel much happier knowing where all that waste goes! ... My eldest (16) also really got a lot out of the visit".

A Social Event is being planned for the end of February or beginning of March, to which all members will be invited - we hope to also have a presentation on the latest state of the City's proposals from a senior official. In early May we plan to take part in the International Dawn Chorus Day. Again, watch out for details.

Note: You can report 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. This will now include bird box thefts as well as illegal dumping and graffiti! The City are also concerned with such events - please phone details to them on 3031111.

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Wildlife Corner: The following observations have been reported over the past three months on or about the LNR.

There have been numerous sightings of interesting fauna over the past few months including many for bats on warm evenings with 2nd November being of note at Wychall Reservoir. The occasional appearances of cormorants flying over Kings Norton had to result in them finally using local resources and 2 were observed fishing at Merecroft Pool on the 15th November. Notable wildfowl observations to supplement the ever-present Mallards comprised 3 Pochard on the Pool on the 4th December and a Gadwall at Wychall on the 28th October. Kingfishers have been seen at both sites. A visitor to the Rea and the Reservoir over the Christmas period has been a Mink – this will be unwelcome if it remains here into the spring but in the meantime it may well be satisfied by a good supply of the local Brown Rats!

Instances relating to winter thrush populations were recorded, with both Redwing and Fieldfare being seen in the fields used by Sue's horses. These were often accompanied by the local Mistle Thrushes and a pair of these is known to have nested in Station Road this year. On the finch family scene a growing number of Goldfinches are now seen in the many Alder trees along the River Rea so we can hope that in the years to come the recently replanted Alder will encourage even more. The winter influx of Chaffinches has not been as noticeable this year, yet, but on the 21st October a Brambling was seen with some of them near the reservoir. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was reported in the BW meadow in mid October.

Foxes have been noticed on several occasions along the river especially in the late evening – but in late December one was reported dead just off Popes Lane. Late evening activities included a very noisy Tawny Owl that seems to prefer the West Hill and Meadow Hill Road areas. Another raptor reported was a Buzzard circling over Wychall Lane on Sunday the 14th November.

And finally the star sighting has to be the Badger walking up West Hill Road early one morning in early November. More of this please.



Pochard at Merecroft Pool - 4th December 2004

The FKNNR honorary officers & advisors

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Winter 2004/05