

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 10 – The last for 2006



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Chairman's Notes

Greetings Friends! After a long period of non-autumn, at last we have some lovely colours around the LNR and now piles of swirling leaves to walk through as we go to see what's going on, bird-wise, at the reservoir.

The 'Friends' seem to have had another busy period since the last Newsletter was issued, telling the world of our existence and ensuring that interested parties take away one of our lovely new information leaflets. We staffed stalls at the Kings Norton Millennium Green Mediaeval Day on 16 September, and at the Farmers' Market on 14 October, on both occasions getting a good deal of interest from passers-by. Our 21 October Open Day on Wychall Meadows was well-received by those who came, but I have to say that we were disappointed at how few members

The flowers in the meadow north of Merecroft pool provide food for bee & Common Blue butterfly in September 2006.



came down to talk with us and to go on the excellent guided walks which allowed us to explain what had already been carried out, and what we planned to do in the various areas of the LNR. The promised Bat Walk that evening, sadly, had to be abandoned as bats like pouring rain even less than we do! We plan to organise something bigger and better next year, which will we hope be widely advertised to bring in visitors from across the city to experience the riches that we are so lucky to have on our doorstep.

I am grateful to all who came along to the 15 October Tidy Up at Merecroft and Pinehurst Meadow, and especially to all those, including volunteers from accountancy firm Ernst & Young, who joined the 'Friends', Service Team, the Rangers and the Community Wardens at Alan Bakewell's splendid Big Clean-up Day on 19 September. That was a really excellent occasion, which was obviously very much enjoyed by all who took part; the results were spectacular!

We now have a live web site at www.fknnr.org.uk. Do visit it and let us know what you think! This will be an important additional way of letting you know about current activity and forthcoming events and will certainly help to put us on the map. Our thanks go to Peter Cage who has developed this attractive site for us. We have just received a "Real Time Community Change" grant to allow us to widen awareness of the Nature Reserve and its place in the local community.

The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

Thanks to our District Park Manager Joe Hayden and his team at the Lickey Hills, we are now the proud possessors of six smart wooden notices to welcome visitors to the LNR. I hope that we can get these set up at the entrance points very soon.

A number of the 'Friends' have recently become 'Street Champions' under a community project organised by environmental charity Groundwork and financed by B:Cen through Home Office grants. Each Street Champion is allocated a certain amount of funding to equip them with resources to undertake the litter-clearing and environmental improvement work on their patch. It was agreed that this group could pool its resources (some £800), and they have recently bought, in addition to hand-tools and other equipment, a supply of young trees to enhance the LNR. Some have already been planted, during a working party on 26 November (thanks to all involved), and a further tree-planting session, generously supported also with supplies of trees from the Woodland Trust, took place on Sunday 17 December. Further events are planned so please join us if you possibly can, to ensure that all our new trees can get their roots down well before next year.

Sadly, in addition to all the good work done by the 'Friends', the LNR continues to suffer from bouts of vandalism over and above the regular graffiti on notices etc. Would-be anglers alongside Merecroft Pool cleared quite an area of undergrowth and young trees – the site now boasts a smart new "No Fishing" sign just where their line might be cast over the water. The dead-hedge alongside the footpath between Meadowhill and Westhill Roads was set alight recently. Luckily our grazier Susanne Ashley was at the stables and raised the alarm, and our thanks go to her and to the Fire Brigade who dealt with the fire in a very efficient and good-natured manner. Yet more thanks are due to those 'Friends' who set to and rebuilt the hedge so that the damage is now only visible in the scorched trees.

Negotiations with British Waterways are almost finalised to allow the 'Friends' to manage the meadows at the bottom of Meadow Hill Road under a 364-day grazing agreement. This will be a very important development, allowing the two parts of the LNR almost to join together – only Wychall Lane itself will now separate them with, unfortunately, the threats to wildlife that its speeding traffic makes. There is as yet no significant progress to report on the wetlands assessment and feasibility study which we wish to put in place for Wychall Reservoir, but in the meantime we are certainly proposing to respond to the City's SMURF (Sustainable Management of Urban Rivers and Floodplains) consultation document, which could have some very significant and, we hope, beneficial consequences for the Reservoir and the River Rea corridor. The 'Friends' Committee is working on a Long-term Strategic Plan for the LNR, to be submitted shortly to the City-led Management Committee.

I would like to send our warmest good wishes to Friends Shirley Bakewell and David Barraclough, who are both currently recuperating from major operations. I hope that gentle walks on the LNR will be a help to their recovery.

Finally, are you Unfit? Obese? Depressed? Bored? Are you available on Tuesdays between 10.30 and 13.30? – Then why not join the Green Gym on the LNR, where all your problems will be, if not cured, then at least put into perspective! There's nothing like a bit of work in the fresh air with friends to cheer you up – and you will have done something very useful for your neighbourhood too!

All Good Wishes and a Happy New Year.

Amanda Cadman

A subscription reminder.

There are a few members who have not yet renewed their annual subscription to the 'Friends'. If you wish to continue membership please send your details and £5 to the Treasurer at 27 Meadowhill Road, Kings Norton.

The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

Wildlife Watch: observations reported on or about the LNR over the past three months.

Last time we commented upon the long dry spell. We spoke too soon. This was followed by a very wet period well into September and the changeable weather has continued ever since. This weather has had an effect on the wildlife reporting front with not a lot of observations coming forward. However, we can report that the Teal started to arrive back at Wychall Reservoir from the 3rd September with a maximum count of 31 so far in the autumn. There has also been a regular gathering of Black-headed Gulls together with a growing number of the larger Lesser Black-backed species, which now breed successfully at several sites in and about Birmingham. A Mute Swan cygnet was in residence for a week at the start of November. Other regular sightings continue to include many of Grey Heron and Kingfisher and also Water Rails at Wychall Reservoir in November.

Often commented upon are the resident 'feral' ducks in the River Rea at Popes Lane.

These appeared some twelve months ago (released by someone?) but they appear to thrive on a diet of bread and chips. Wildlife does come in all different shapes and sizes.

A highlight of the period of Autumn bird migration was the brief appearance at the beginning of September of a Spotted Flycatcher in the BW meadow. Your Secretary will now be attempting to maintain the habitat in a form to encourage more sightings of a bird, which is in serious decline throughout the UK. Limited working party activities during the



A local Mallard (left) watches his larger feral relatives on the banks of the River Rea.

past few months also confirmed what we had suspected. The good news was that we had detected some Badger activity on the LNR but the bad news is that this ceased following the death of a young male on Wychall Lane in September. The 'average' traffic speed of 35 mph proving to be too fast for the local wildlife but too slow for the installation of traffic calming measures. This topic will, no doubt, be the subject of further discussion.



*Left: An addition to the list of butterflies on the LNR is the Small Copper (*Lycaena phaeas*) seen here on the flower of Devil's Bit Scabius on 7th September.*

Below: The Badger is no more.



The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

Wildlife Focus – The Woodpigeon

Love them or loath them but Wood Pigeons (*Columba palumbus*) are common in and around Kings Norton. Those with allotments or vegetable gardens do not appreciate their fondness for fresh green shoots and they do cause a great deal of agricultural damage. However, in the wider context these birds feature in national farm bird indices and their overall populations are therefore seen as indicators of the general health of the environment. On this basis alone we can be encouraged that in November some 50 birds were regularly roosting near Wychall Reservoir and they can always be seen or heard when walks through the LNR are undertaken.

The Woodpigeon (pictured right – sexes similar) should not be confused with the slightly smaller bird, the Stock Dove (*Columba oenas*) that also occurs on the LNR.

As can be seen the Woodpigeon has a white collar and when in flight a prominent white wing bar on each wing – none of these are present on the Stock Dove.



The Woodpigeon is not just a British bird. Its range extends from west Siberia to the Faeroes and from Scandinavia to North Africa. However, whilst continental birds may migrate from north to south in winter those in Britain are mainly sedentary. This situation in the UK has been related to agricultural practices and in particular the introduction of oilseed rape in the 1970s. Prior to that date the birds fed mainly on crops that became depleted such as cereal stubbles and therefore they had to move further to seek out suitable food. After oilseed rape crops began to be grown the birds had an abundant and reliable source of food, which reduced the need for, limited migration.

Lifespan: Can be to 16 years.

Diet: Green leaves, seeds, berries, buds, flowers and root crops. Occasionally invertebrates. Food taken mainly on the ground but they can be very agile when clambering among small branches or in ivy.

Young Woodpigeons (as with other species of pigeon) are fed by crop milk by both parents initially but the amount reduces as they approach fledging after about one month and as natural foods are introduced in to the diet. This practice adds to breeding success and probably explains why you see young birds well before or after other species.



On the left we have a photograph of one of the many clumps of fungi that appeared throughout the mown areas of grass on the LNR during November. It is believed to be *Lyophyllum decastes*, an edible mushroom. In the absence of an expert in fungi it was not eaten!

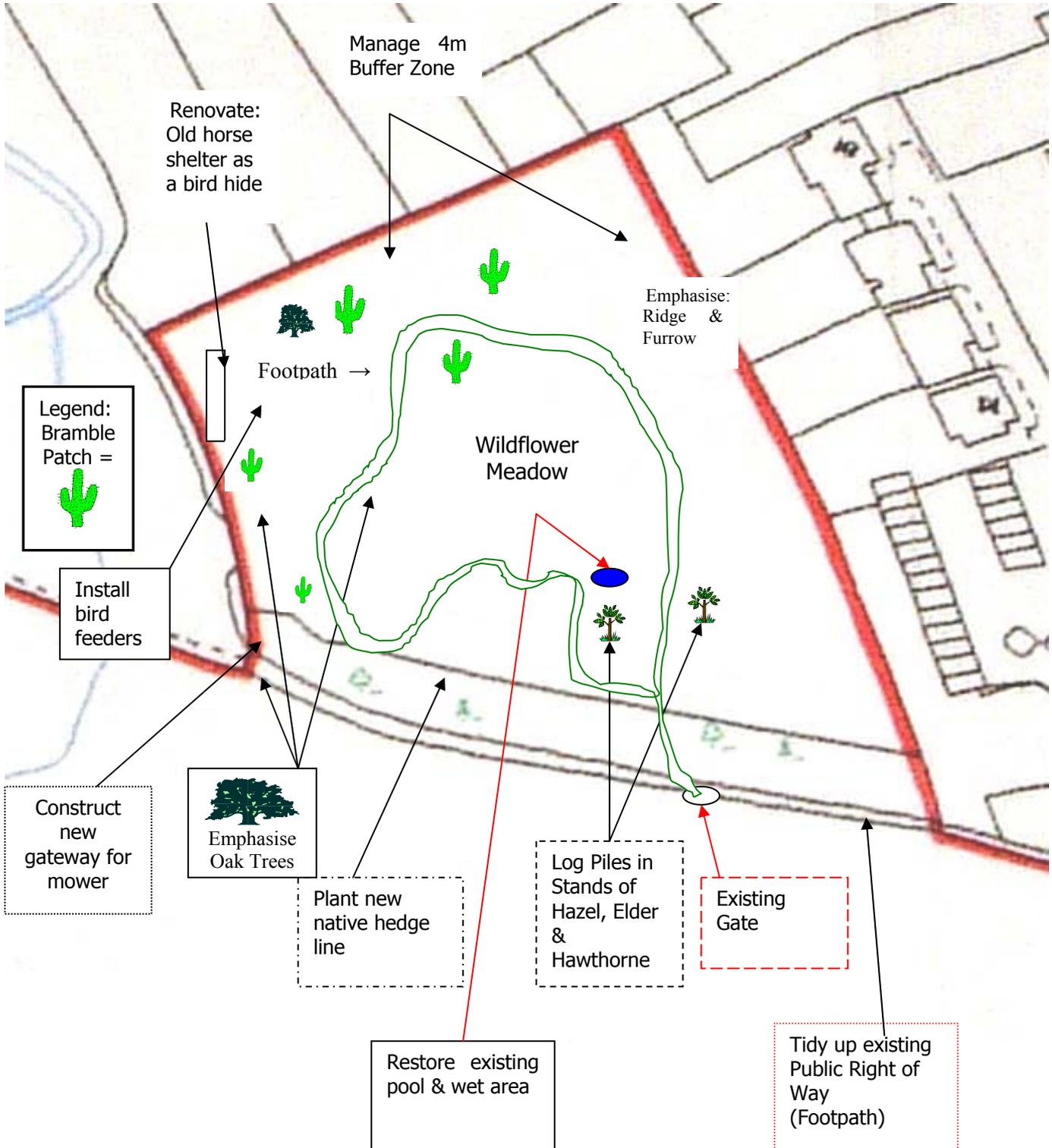
Any budding mycologists please contact the committee.

The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

Development Proposals for Pinehurst Meadow

October 2006

↑
North



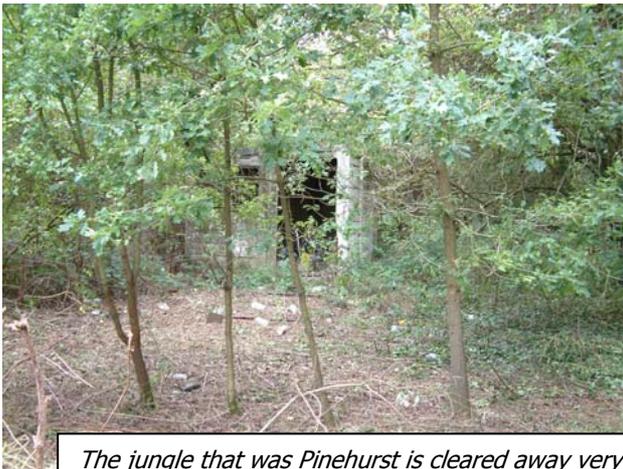
A development sketch for Pinehurst Meadow: Interpretive Boards on new footpath and at relevant locations about the Meadow. Bird hide, feeders & demonstration plots for wildflower meadows and the wetland/pool area

The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

Development Proposals for 2007

The focus for recent working party activity has been in and about the southern section of the LNR - this activity is not only related to the Management Plan for the Reserve but also because we see the longer term potential to develop the area for the benefit of local people and wildlife. As mentioned elsewhere we have managed to secure an agreement with British Waterways to manage the meadow that fronts on to Wychall Lane and we are now examining ways in which the site boundary can be maintained and improved. This is an area, which contains important grassland habitat and one that supports a large number of invertebrate species. We shall investigate ways to maintain its character without recourse to traditional grazing techniques.

To the south, the meadow grassland between Beaks Hill Rd and Meadow Hill Rd will come under a revised mowing regime and the Crack Willow trees will, over time, be coppiced or replaced with more resilient wet area species. The former Orchard site adjacent to Beaks Hill Rd is currently receiving a makeover with the removal of non-native Laurel and Sycamore and the strengthening of the boundary line with a dead hedge and additional planting. These measures should not only improve the appearance of the area but also allow for the access of mechanical means to cut the grass – perhaps in the longer-term we can then bring in livestock to manage this grassland in an eco-friendly manner. Views on this would be welcomed.



The jungle that was Pinehurst is cleared away very slowly to reveal a potential bird observation hide (above) in amongst young Oak trees and the possible route for an educational walkway (below).



Pinehurst Meadow is now used as a term to define the area to the north of the public footpath that stretches up to Kingsway and Pinehurst Drives. (This footpath has been called the 'Dark Path' by one resident recalling childhood experiences – any other local names would be appreciated). This area will require more detailed attention and a draft sketch has been produced to explore ways in which it can be used as an educational resource as well as providing improved areas of habitat for the benefit of local bio-diversity. The sketch has been reproduced opposite. An attempt is being made to identify possible sources of finance that will enable us to progress some of the basic ideas such as footpath construction, wild flower meadow creation and the transformation of a derelict concrete horse shelter into a usable bird watching hide. It is anticipated that we will require several thousand pounds to achieve the necessary transformation. An appeal to the membership, perhaps!

The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

People Focus

Departed Friends

We recently heard of the untimely death of Sheila Hughes, a Friend of the LNR, a Committee member of the Rea Valley Conservation Group and long-term champion of the Edgbaston Guinea Gardens. Who can possibly forget her appearance on that site with TV presenter and gardener, Monty Don! Always feisty and challenging, Sheila was hugely committed to conservation issues around the City. She attended a meeting of the 'Birmingham Open Spaces Forum' in late November, very much her usual self. Sheila was always ready to offer comments to the Committee on every aspect of conservation and there was a certain inevitability of dead hedges going up in flames thanks to the activities of certain local youths – just as she predicted.

Sheila was enormously supportive and valiant in her backing for the campaign for the Victoria Jubilee Allotments, whilst always being realistic about the forces they were up against. She once said to Simon Baddeley of Handsworth Allotments Information Group "I took up gardening for peace and quiet and I've ended up being a vexatious troublesome old bag defending my wish to do that." Some bag, some trouble, some vexation. Go in peace Sheila! Make trouble in paradise - you will be much missed.

.....ooOOoo.....

In addition we heard the news at the beginning of December of the death of member Tony Ward, former Tory Councillor for Kings Norton, and a long-time supporter and advocate of the LNR. This news has come as a great shock to us all. Tony was Treasurer to the former 'Friends of Wychall Reservoir' and had been very active recently in pursuing his interest in the environment through involvement as a Trustee of the 'Kings Norton Millennium Green Trust' and as a member of the committee of the 'Birmingham Open Spaces Forum'.

Tony had very strong views on the Birmingham Parks and Open spaces Strategy and the priority given to open spaces vis-à-vis other City policies. His contribution to an ongoing debate will be sorely missed.

.....ooOOoo.....

Our condolences go to both families.

Your Committee

David Barraclough is your Vice-Chairman.

David sees himself as the quiet studious type who hopes to bring some sense and reason to the discussions within your Committee. He is well qualified in this role after graduating with an MA in Employment Law and Industrial Relations and his award of an FCIPD. He started his career in the Civil Service but soon transferred into the railway industry where he has been based at most of the major centres, including Crewe, Derby and Paddington. He met his wife, Gaynor, whilst working for the BRB in Industrial Relations at the Saltley depot in Birmingham. He is now a Human Resources Manager with Virgin Trains.

Born in 1960, he has lived in and around Kings Norton for most of his life (Downcroft Ave & Wychall Park Grove) and his involvement in environmental issues stem from the sight of Wychall Reservoir as a derelict overgrown area used for illegal dumping and other antisocial activities. [See photo next page] {Still work to be done here - Ed!}. In 2001 he became the vice chair of the 'Friends of Wychall Reservoir' when it was established on a formal basis and supported Alan Bakewell in the clean up and development of the site. His two sons also assist in the delivering of the newsletters.



Despite saying they are not into practical work, David & Gaynor get stuck into coppicing ash trees along the banks of the River Rea in January 2005.

David also says he enjoys travel and football. This despite his long term support of Aston Villa! We wish David well after his recent major operation and hope he continues with his daily exercise by walking through the Local Nature Reserve.....

The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

Diary Dates

Please come and support us at these events:

Sunday, 21st January 07, 10.30 – 15.00 Planting & clearing, Wychall area.
Sunday, 18th February 07, 10.30 – 15.00 Conservation activities, Pinehurst Meadow.
Sunday, 18th March 07, 10.30 – 15.00 Spring-clean up River Rea & Wychall Res.

Tuesdays, 10.30 – 13.30 – Green Gym – Every Tuesday in January & February.

Help the 'Friends' to stay in touch with you: Have you emailed us yet? Please send us a 'hello' message, so that we can maintain up to date address lists.

Join our 'green gym' working parties:

Every Tuesday, as much time as you can spare between 10.30 and 1.30. Please let us know in advance on

KingsNortonLnr@aol.com or by ringing a committee member – see below.

Next dates: Every Tuesday in January & February.

Display Stand Manager

The 'Friends' will be continuing to attend open day events, galas, the local farmer's market and other occasions where we can promote the LNR and recruit new members. We have a good display stand but need more volunteers to staff it.

Have you the ability to manage this facility?

If so we would like to hear from you.



A David Barraclough photograph of the Wychall Reservoir site in October 2001. Work continues to prevent a repeat of this mess. Please help us with our clean ups on the 21st January & 18th March 2007.

Tools wanted: If you have any unwanted garden tools then please let one of the Committee know.

Honorary Officers, Committee Members and Advisors c/o The FKNNR, 55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton, B38 8TB

Chairman	Amanda Cadman	0121 624 3865
Vice Chairman	David Barraclough	0121 458 2244
Treasurer	David Human	0121 458 1300
Secretary	Phil Evans	0121 628 6769
Membership Secretary	Jil Bromley	0121 244 7483
Education	Meredith Andrea	0121 451 3243
Newsletter Editors	Amanda Cadman & Phil Evans	0121 624 3865
Beth Ashley, Northfield District Ranger		0121 447 7106
Committee Members	Jon Anson, Suzanne Ashley, Alan Bakewell, Peter Cage, David Hampson, Nicola Human, Brian Hewitt & John Smith.	

Environmental Agency Hotline

PC James Bennett

Community Police

Anti-social behaviour Hotline

0800 807060

0845 113 5000 ext. 7826 6363

07769 882113

0121 303 1111