

# The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

## Newsletter 11 – The first for 2007



### ***In this issue:***

Chairman's notes

Cotteridge Exhibition & Rosie's word search

Working parties & other activities

Wildlife Focus – *sightings reported recently*

People Focus – *Committee news and departed 'Friends'*

Dates & Notices – *working parties and more – **back page***

## ***Chairman's Notes***

With the weather veering wildly from violent storms to almost balmy spring days, it is something of an amazement to me that Tuesdays recently seem to have been pretty much dry, so that the stalwart small team of **Green Gym**-ers has managed to undertake a good deal of work around the LNR. The most obvious effect of their work is to be seen on the British Waterways land that we are now managing on lease from BW. Anyone who has driven or walked past the Wychall Lane/Meadow Hill Road junction will surely have noticed that the field is now being cleared of brambles, scrub and rubbish, and that the fence line is being renovated. The refurbishment of the metal fence itself is largely at the hands of David Hampson, who seems to have taken this on as a personal pilgrimage. We've also worked by the Mill Race on Wychall Meadows, clearing it out, reducing scrub, planting reeds and trees and building log piles. More log piles and dead hedge too have been produced at the Old Orchard below Beaks Hill Road.

We have continued our bramble and scrub clearance at Pinehurst Meadow, planting a new hedge line and preparing a path line, along the lines of the plan set out in the last newsletter, and we are seeking funding to develop and interpret the area further. Unfortunately we suffered another arson attack along the dead hedge there early in February, the young offenders having the cheek to set it alight while the Green Gym was going on in the BW meadow! Again the fire service had to be called, and the working party on Sunday 18 February had to concentrate its efforts on building a replacement dead hedge instead of tackling new assignments. Well, the incident was photographed, and the young offenders identified at a local school and they have apologised for their actions. I would dearly love to see the local youth helping us with our work rather than hindering, and I sincerely hope that out of this incident we can build up our educational links locally.

---

Merecroft Pool about the 1880s – we think: Victorian days possibly soon after the construction of the pool. The Cotteridge skyline is in the left of centre distance and the building immediately above the boat on the pool is believed to be New house Farm now the site of Kings Hill Drive.



A photograph from the collection of David Hampson.

# *The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve*

## Chairman's bit continued:

You will also have seen the very smart wooden welcome notices, which the Rangers at the Lickey Hills have kindly produced for us in their workshops (see one photo below). Most have now been installed during our workdays although one has needed to be re-instated after a little overnight vandalism at the entrance by the Camp pub.

Many thanks to all our Tuesday volunteers, including our good friends from Birmingham and Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers (and we send very good wishes to their leader Dave, who is currently very unwell). The Tuesday work is currently the backbone of our attempt to improve the site for wildlife and for the benefit of the local community. A very few people are making quite a difference to the site, but we are only scratching the surface of what needs to be done. If you can join us you will – I promise – find it exhilarating and enjoyable. Please help us!

A big clean up on the Wychall Reservoir/Rea corridor took place on 21 January. This had a good turnout, and a great deal of rubbish was shifted. Thanks are due to Alan Bakewell for masterminding the day, to the Friends who turned out to help, and to the Rangers and Community Wardens who supported the day magnificently. Please note that another such clean-up is planned for Tuesday 20 March, where we will be joined again by a party of keen volunteers from a company having a "Management team building exercise". Again, please join us!

A small group of your Committee have been developing a long-term strategy plan and future vision for the LNR, which will be put to the Management Committee meeting later this month. We dream of extending the area managed for wildlife, for people and, indeed, for improved drainage across the Rea corridor, both up and downstream of the existing site. We envisage that, working in co-operation with other conservation bodies and Friends groups, we can create a major wetland and environmental education resource for the West Midlands, right here in Kings Norton/Northfield. We are encouraging the setting-up of an Environmental Group for the Northfield Constituency, and will be represented at a Constituency Forum in March.

So far as publicity events are concerned, we should have had a stand at the February Farmers' Market, at which we would have given our new display stand its second outing (the first being the week before, at a Ramblers' Club meeting in Cotteridge). However, it was not to be! That was the Great Snow, and the Market had to be cancelled. Oh well, we have a stall at the August market, and will hope to recruit lots of new supporters then – and we hope we won't get snowed off! We are planning an Open Day in September, which promises to be much bigger than last year – watch this space!

Finally, I'd like to remind you about the International Dawn Chorus Day walk which we are undertaking, in fact, on Monday 30 April under the expert guidance of Peter Bromley and Phil Evans, ending up with a celebratory breakfast. Also, please put the date of the **AGM**, Wednesday 16 May, in your diary. My Good Wishes.

Amanda Cadman  
Chairman



February activities: Above: Debbie and Brian prepare for the Ramsons. Whilst below, Peter plants one LNR sign.



# The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

## Cotteridge exhibition:

Cotteridge Church on Saturday 3rd February was the venue for the Midlands AGM of the Ramblers Association. Over a hundred members attended from all over the area. One leader, Andy Page, arranged a walk to enable members to visit Kings Norton Green and part of the Nature Reserve. He also invited the 'Friends' to put on an exhibition at the Church, as an additional subject of interest to walkers and as a means of illustrating part of the route of Andy's excursion. This event was a great opportunity to show kindred spirits the work of the 'Friends' and to raise awareness of the LNR amongst the Ramblers membership. Fortunately we had just taken delivery of our new display system, so Brian Hewitt completed the transfer of the display boards onto the new panels. They look very effective.

Brian and David Barraclough put up the display, which attracted considerable interest, especially as a shaft of sunlight illuminated the exhibit just at coffee time! Brian and David were on hand for the whole morning to provide information and leaflets on the work of the 'Friends'. Quite a number of our leaflets were taken by those interested and we hope for a few more members as a result. As well as the historic Green, the walk included the footpath and meadows between West hill Road and Meadow Hill Road, the River Rea and Wychall Reservoir and then continued along the Rea towards Northfield Station and Longbridge to enable walkers to return to Cotteridge by train (*Ed: This is well worth repeating this Summer by any member who fancies a weekend stroll*).

## Merecroft Word search: By Rosie Human

M	E	R	E	C	R	O	F	T	E	I	U	W	U	H	H	R	P	J	Y
Q	K	N	U	T	H	A	T	C	H	N	Q	G	H	A	I	V	Y	H	R
T	W	N	U	V	U	X	U	R	E	H	S	I	F	G	N	I	K	T	G
U	E	Z	G	L	F	N	T	B	Z	T	W	D	I	M	J	O	Q	G	R
F	R	H	N	M	O	J	G	C	T	R	X	Z	A	A	X	B	D	E	E
T	Y	D	X	R	O	W	D	A	R	E	P	S	C	L	K	W	D	F	A
E	K	J	E	J	Z	P	W	N	C	E	H	U	Z	L	A	H	N	U	T
D	G	H	C	G	S	N	F	A	X	C	E	R	O	A	Y	C	W	P	C
D	Y	V	R	Q	Y	B	S	D	F	R	A	O	B	R	L	N	D	Q	R
U	V	B	E	O	I	C	G	A	I	E	S	A	T	D	A	I	E	D	E
C	H	K	W	W	B	A	O	G	X	E	A	V	P	M	Z	F	I	Q	S
K	T	L	G	D	W	P	E	O	V	P	N	F	R	S	T	D	R	K	T
P	F	G	A	E	C	X	H	O	T	E	T	Q	E	K	B	L	C	S	E
P	S	F	J	Q	R	S	H	S	Q	R	L	N	J	D	P	O	O	L	D
M	W	Z	V	A	I	C	A	E	X	T	E	A	C	E	X	G	T	S	G
D	A	L	S	R	U	W	L	K	M	M	Y	M	O	O	N	J	V	M	R
F	N	G	B	W	O	O	D	P	E	C	K	E	R	L	C	L	Y	A	E
Y	S	O	P	T	O	R	M	L	K	U	O	T	T	F	I	W	U	Y	B
J	K	Z	Z	I	I	C	W	J	N	E	H	R	O	O	M	N	S	O	E
F	H	P	N	Y	E	N	J	Q	B	V	P	Y	H	G	L	M	C	I	M

### Words to look

#### for:

Canada Goose	Merecroft	Pool	Magpie	Coot
Great Crested Grebe	Woodpecker	Tufted Duck	Moorhen	Jay
Goldfinch	Nuthatch	Tawny Owl	Swan	Heron
Mallard	Pheasant	Treecreeper	Kingfisher	Crow

# *The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve*

## People Focus 1

As previously reported four of your Committee were re-elected at last years' AGM. We have heard from two of them and we now explain how one more, David Hampson, came to be involved and how his interest in hornets, mosquitoes and bluebirds lead him to settle in Kings Norton.

A Birmingham lad, David was born in the Weoley Castle area back in 1934 and was educated at George Dixon Grammar before an extensive career in production engineering. He gained skills in a engineering drawing office and as a machine tool apprentice before various engineering positions pointed him towards a world of glass at Pilkingtons. On our local patch these skills are evident (*as reported by Amanda on the front page*) as he is single-mindedly sorting out, with an ingenious collection of hand made tools and various drawings, the metal fence line on the BW field and on the footpath between Meadow Hill and West Hill roads.

At Pilkingtons he was mainly based in Kings Norton interspersed with time in St Helens and over two years in Nigeria. He graduated to the position of Factory Manager before leaving the company as the Company Manufacturing Engineer. Time at Pilks was spent on many aspects of specialised glass manufacturing including windscreens for Aircraft, Donald Campbell's boat (*Bluebird*) and Paddy Hopkirk's famous Monte Carlo Rally Mini Cooper.

David is well known locally for his long association with the 'Links' Residents Association – which he represents on the City's local Ward Advisory Board and the LNR Management Committee – and for his passion for protecting the existing character and landscape of Kings Norton. It was therefore no surprise that he had plenty to say on the protection of Merecroft Pool and the formation and approval of the Local Nature Reserve. Some of his photographs of the pool are reproduced in this issue. If you wish to speak to him on his role within the 'Friends' please contact him direct or, better still, come along to one of the Working Party events and talk to him and assist him whilst the fences are knocked back into shape! And the interest in Hornets and Mosquitoes? Well David spent his time on National Service with the RAF in Malaya, and as an Aero Engine Engineer helped keep those two types of aircraft flying during what was a particularly difficult time for our armed forces. He is now learning nature conservation and particularly how to distinguish between the droppings of Muntjac Deer and rabbits.



David Hampson: A well earned rest in October 2005 after coppicing willow at Wychall

---

## Birmingham Open Spaces Forum [BOSF]

The 'Friends' actively participate in this Forum which brings together people from all over the City who have an interest in protecting and maintaining public open spaces including parks, cemeteries, allotments and, of course, local nature reserves. BOSF is starting to act as a real pressure group to ensure that the City takes its responsibilities on open spaces very seriously since the provision of such 'green' areas is vital to the well being of all residents. As part of the development of community involvement in such initiatives the 'Friends' have been awarded a sum of £486, which we have committed to an increased level of presentation and publicity material. Thanks go to the 'Real Time Community Change' partnership [RTCC] that provided £10,000 for BOSF affiliated groups across the City.

# The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

**Merecroft Pool:** More photos of the pool, these are thought to be late 40s or early 50s.



The boathouse at the site of the present exit weir in the corner of Merecroft pool before the dam was altered.

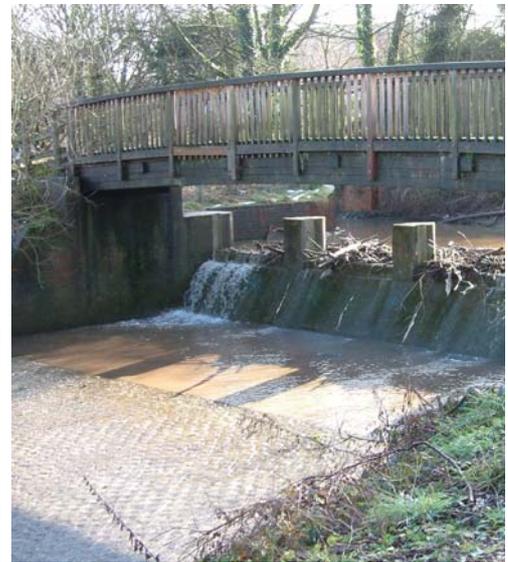


View to the south of the island in Merecroft Pool. Note the diving board.

## Wychall Reservoir



**Wychall Reservoir – Eastern (Dam) End - Full of flood water in February.** The top photo was taken by June McCoy in 1999 and shows the reservoir filling up with rubbish but with a greater surface area of water than is present today. The reservoir has been dredged twice since then. The scene is replicated (below - left) on the 11.02.07 after the recent snow. Rubbish is still washed down the River! Below right shows the floodwater and debris entering the site over the weir near Popes Lane.



# *The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve*

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

The long wet winter has continued interspersed with the occasional cold spell, snow (once) and high winds. The winds have been a particular problem this year with a high number of trees being blown over. It is not the fault of the ivy – so let's leave some on the trees! As previously reported this weather is not conducive to wildlife reporting with fewer observations coming forward. However, working party activities have been brightened up by the regular appearance of Jays, Finches and the Kingfisher. Other regular sightings continue to include many of Teal, Mallard, Grey Heron, Moorhen and Coot – there were three pairs at Wychall staking out their territories throughout February. Redwings were present at Wychall in mid January; whilst several Fieldfare and Mistle Thrushes were observed on Rowan berries one working party day as we planted more on these trees just off Wychall Lane. The LNR has also attracted a large number of Corvids over the winter period with peak counts of 28 Carrion Crow, 24 Jackdaw and 72 Magpies being recorded. A walk through the LNR now regularly produces counts of approximately 20 different bird species at Merecroft and 26 along the River Rea through Wychall. There have been no reports of Muntjac Deer this winter but regular sightings of Fox still occur. The latter are occasionally observed near Popes Lane foraging in the wetter areas. Further bad news is that a second badger was hit and killed by a car on Wychall lane in February. One unconfirmed event on the morning of 24 December was the sight of 14 Whooper Swans flying in formation in a Southwesterly direction over Kings Norton. Can anyone confirm this?



*Winter frosts in the Merecroft Meadows*

On the smaller side the late days of winter are also the time to observe the small British birds especially Goldcrest, Long tailed Tit and Tree Creeper and these have been seen along the cycle path that parallels the Rea. A pair of Blackcaps has been visiting gardens along Wychall lane. And then the occasional spell of warm weather results in singing Blackbirds and Song Thrushes - so spring is on the way.



*No Pheasants reported this year although plenty can be seen in North Worcestershire – is their absence in the LNR the result of the mild winter?*



*However, Robins have sung for most of the winter.*

# The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

## People Focus 2

### Friends on the

We wish two of our active members all the best on their move to Yorkshire. Ken & Heather Fradley left us in February and their presence on and about the LNR will be missed. We hope they will keep in contact.



### Committee News

If you wish to serve on the Committee of the FKNNR then please let the Secretary know. There will be at least one vacancy to fill at the AGM and all the Officer positions are up for election.

### Web site reminder

We now have a live web site at [www.fknnr.org.uk](http://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.

In addition we have commenced work to establish a database of information relating to the LNR. Specific thanks to one of our members, Julie Brown, for attempting this project as part of her degree course for the Open University.

### CJ Wild Bird Food Account

We reported in issue number 7 that the 'Friends' had opened up an account for members to purchase food and feeders for wild birds in their garden. The 'Friends' benefit by retaining the discount on the orders. In 2006 we received £52, which was reinvested in bird boxes and seed for sale on our display stand. We have therefore increased the net profit to £87. If you wish to help the LNR even further then please let the Secretary know – bird seed orders

**Help the 'Friends' to stay in touch with you:** *Have you emailed us yet? Please send us one 'hello' message, so that we can maintain up to date address lists & email data. Recent mail outs have been returned to us from several email addresses – obviously our records need updating but only you, the members, can help us.*

### Join our 'green gym' working parties:

Every Tuesday, as much time as you can spare between 10.30 and 13.30. Please let us know in advance on [KingsNortonlnr@aol.com](mailto:KingsNortonlnr@aol.com) or by ringing a committee member..  
Next dates: Every Tuesday in March & April.

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

Thanks go to Ken Fradley, Rod Dixon, David Hampson and Alan Bakewell for donating surplus tools and equipment to the FKNNR – more still wanted!

### Planting Day on Pinehurst Meadow.

**Alan Bakewell reports:** The 'Friends' have been successful in negotiating a grant of £800 from the 'Community Safety Champions' scheme and it has been used for a Community Planting Day. The grant enabled us to acquire plants and tools (supplied from Earlswood Nurseries who were very helpful and supportive) for part of the project in Pinehurst Meadow as reported in the last newsletter. Thus, in November volunteers came together from the different bodies involved in the Champions scheme, including West Midlands Police, Groundwork, Community Wardens, local Street Champions and of course members of FKNNR.

It was a beautiful Sunday morning and it was heartening to see a wide age range of participants as several people had brought their children to help. Everyone joined in the work and a new native hedge line was soon planted. To date the plants seem to have taken well and are now beginning to show us that spring is nearly here. The grant enabled us to buy such a large quantity of plants that we have been able to use the extra hedging and trees in other areas of the nature reserve.

We would like to thank Donna Carter from Groundwork and Theresa Gordon and Sergeant Andy Gregory of WM Police for their help in obtaining this grant and for their participation on the day. Many thanks to everyone else who helped make it such a successful event

# The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

## Diary Dates

Date	Location	Details
13 March (Green Gym)	Cycle path – Nr Popes Lane	Complete the dead hedge started last winter. Limited planting.
18 March (Sunday activity day)	Wychall Reservoir	Two areas to be cleared for location of benches. Coppicing. Dead Hedges & Reed bed.
20 March (Conservation volunteers day)	Wychall Reservoir	River & Reservoir clean up day. Coppicing. Dead Hedges.
27 March (Green Gym)	BW Meadow	Fence Line – continue work. Rescue iron railings. Remove sycamore. Log & brash piles.
3 April	BW Meadow	New fence construction.
10 April	Old Orchard – Beaks Hill Rd	Finish laurel clearance
28 April	Sutton Town Hall	Birmingham Open Spaces Forum
30 April	Wychall/Merecroft	Dawn Chorus Walk (05.30 hrs)
16 May	Kings Norton Tennis Club	AGM of FKNNR (Grange Hill Rd)
14 July	The Green & Church	Kings Norton Festival
11 August	The Green	Farmers' Market
4 September	Wychall/Merecroft	Bat walk at dusk
15 September	Wychall/Merecroft	Open day on the LNR
2 October	Wychall	Start of 2007/08 Green Gym season.
10 November	The Green & Church	Farmers' Market & Christmas Fair.

For working party days - please meet on site and wear stout footwear and old clothes. The appropriate equipment & materials will be provided. Please spare one or more hours of your time to assist us in progressing the Management Plan.

Tuesday Working Parties (The 'Green Gym') – 10.30 to 13.30 hrs

All dates – weather permitting.

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

Chairman	Amanda Cadman
Vice Chairman	David Barraclough
Treasurer	David Human
Secretary	Phil Evans
Membership Secretary	Jil Bromley
Education	Vacant
Newsletter Editors	Amanda Cadman & Phil Evans
Beth Ashley, Northfield District Ranger	
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*

*Street Champions*

*0800 807060*

*0845 113 5000 ext. 7826 6363*

*07769 882113*

*0121 303 1111*

*0800 0730528*