

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



www.fknnr.org.uk

Newsletter 14 – Autumn/Winter
2007



*The highlight of the September open day was the falconry display.
A Harris Hawk was a star performer on Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve –
the hawk was demonstrated by 'Heart of England Raptors'.*

In this issue:

- Chairman's notes
- Working parties & other activities
- Wildlife Focus – *sightings reported recently*
- Open day report & photographs

*Please let us have your views on the first 3 years of work on your
Local Nature Reserve, we would welcome comments on any of the
'Friends' activities. **We wish you a merry Christmas and
prosperous New Year.***

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Chairman's Notes

As we head in towards Christmas, with our weather currently seasonably cold and frosty and grateful birds flocking to the bird feeder in my back garden, I have to admit that it's a treat to look across the road at the major bramble and scrub clearance that has gone on along Wychall Lane. A great many bulbs have been planted and an area is cleared ready for the planting, in January, of a number of young native trees – mainly oak and hazel for coppicing. This planting is made possible by a grant awarded by the Civic Society in partnership with Birmingham City Council, for which we are most grateful. Do come and join the fun digging holes on 15 January.

The last Newsletter advertised our Open Day on Wychall Meadows on 15 September. There is a full report of this elsewhere in this Newsletter, but I should like to reiterate my thanks to absolutely everyone who was involved in making the day so very successful and enjoyable, and to our funding partners for making the day possible. We plan a second Open Day on Saturday 13 September 2008 – please put the date in your diary now!

Late September was a frantic time for the Friends, with a Big Clean-Up session on 21 and 22 September that involved our friends from the Northfield Constituency as well as support from our Community Wardens Adrian and Paul. The new manager provided a hearty lunch for us in the Camp pub on the Friday, which was very much appreciated. Thanks as ever go to Alan Bakewell and Groundwork for magicing up a skip into which we could pour our (particularly unsavoury) litter finds from Popes Lane, the Reservoir and the Rea itself. The following Tuesday found us joined by a second group of staff from Bank of Ireland Group and a report on this also appears later in this newsletter.

The Bromford Junior Wardens, who made such a hit at the Open Day with their enthusiastic litter-picking, visited us again in October for another big clean-up with their parents. Extraordinarily, they all enjoyed it so much that they came back the next day to plant bulbs under the trees in Pinehurst meadow. All thanks are due to this lovely group of local kids and to Maria Challinor their leader; I hope they will be back in the spring to see 'their' plants in bloom. It really is lovely to have young people positively involved on the LNR and I hope that our recent 'open day' discussion for local schools will bear similar fruit.

In addition to clearing and dead hedging in Pinehurst and along Wychall Lane, a certain amount of tidying-up has gone on along the cycle path by the Reservoir. Our efforts will be crowned by the addition of a couple of simple benches, kindly provided by the staff at the Lickey Hills Country Park. One

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

will overlook the new reedbeds, which are now developing quite well. How long, I wonder, will it be before a reed bunting takes up residence?

I have thanked Paul and Adrian already for help with our Big Clean-Up. The 2 noblest hour with us came probably when, at the very end of November, they set to and cleared out the worst of the debris left by squatters in the horse shelter in Pinehurst meadow. It was unspeakably dreadful and we are so grateful for their help. It's not finished yet, but we are hoping eventually to convert the shelter into a hide and to set up a bird feeding station as part of our development and interpretation of the meadow.

We are hoping that the Friends' Group will very soon receive charitable status from the Charity Commission. An Extraordinary General Meeting was held on 27 November at which those members present agreed unanimously to amend the Objectives as set out in the Constitution in order to state clearly the public benefit that lies at the heart of our support for the LNR: "to promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment of Kings Norton LNR; to advance the education of the public in conservation, understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the flora and fauna at Kings Norton LNR and to provide Kings Norton LNR as a recreational facility for the benefit of Birmingham residents and visitors". We also had the opportunity to preview a presentation on the development of the LNR, which Phil Evans has produced for publicity and advocacy purposes: his photographs certainly show what a difference we are making.

The LNR Management Committee met at the beginning of December. As well as receiving a report on practical work undertaken by the Friends, public access issues and our conservation mowing regime, the Committee also took the first steps in rolling out our agreed vision: seeking to extend the LNR designation upstream of Popes Lane and to develop the Reservoir site's potential as a wetland for wildlife. We also started the process to develop a Management Plan 2009 – 2012 to follow on from the present one.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

So – a very busy period, and I thank all who have taken their part in whatever way in supporting Kings Norton LNR over the past year. Have a great Christmas – what better than a walk on the LNR to shake down the Christmas Dinner? If you join us for a Green Gym at Merecroft on New Year's Day, drinks and nibbles are promised.

Amanda Cadman
Chairman



*The Duck Race on the River Rea reaches
its climax at the recent Open Day*

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

The Bat Night - September 2007

On a warm evening (September 6th at dusk) our group of about a dozen gathered on Burman's Drive for a Bat Walk. We were met by Beth Ashley, our retiring Ranger, and by experts who were conducting a survey of bat activity at Wychall Reservoir that very evening for our baseline survey work (see separate article).

There are sixteen different species of bat in Britain; they eat only insects, and have a wingspan of between 20 and 35cm. Some weigh only a 1/3 of an ounce (about 8 grams); others may be up to 30 grams or more. Bats have to eat large quantities of insects - perhaps 300 in an hour - to maintain their bodyweight and to survive the cold winter as they hibernate from October onwards - hopefully in some of the bat-boxes we have provided on the Reserve!

Bats use ultrasound for echolocation purposes, well above the range of human hearing, in the 20 -100 kHz region. We were able to borrow electronic bat detectors, and after an introductory talk about what we might hear, we were soon listening to a hissing noise from our loudspeakers and tuning our dials to the predicted bat frequencies. Sure enough, there were some chirruping noises almost immediately and bats could be seen and heard flitting amongst the trees. Bat detectors work on the 'heterodyne' principle in which the ultrasonic signals from the special microphone mix (or beat) with another tuneable signal produced inside the set; this produces a 'difference tone' within our hearing range, which is then amplified, filtered and fed to the speaker or headphones.

To try and find more activity, we moved to the edge of the cycle path by the reservoir and walked along a few hundred yards; but apart from the waterfowl there was little happening; a return to the Burman's Drive end of the reservoir brought much excitement - little bats could be seen fluttering above our heads, and over the water, and careful tuning of the dials around 50 kHz produced a remarkable chorus of chirrups and clicks from the speakers, the trademark sound of **Pipistrelle bats**. One sound the bats made was likened to a 'raspberry', on a rising scale, and it was explained that this was the actual sound pulses of a bat homing in closer and closer to an insect, before hitting the target!

Later at Merecroft Pool, we found our way in the gathering darkness to the water's edge; Rossa Donovan our bat expert produced a powerful torch and aimed the beam across the surface of the lake. We again adjusted our detectors and various twittering noises from the speakers were heard, this time at about 45Khz on the dial. These were a different sound quality, and cutting across the light beam on the lake could be seen the bats, skimming the water - a pale tummy sometimes the clue - these were **Daubenton's bats**, which have the ability to snatch insects from the water with their hind claws.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Bat detectors of various types are available to buy online - the kind we borrowed were made by 'Magenta' from Alana Ecology at about £55; There are 4 available, and circuits online to build your own, if you can use a small soldering iron. Components are available from Maplin, in the City centre - the writer has just put one together, and it works! - Three transistors, two IC's, two knobs, a few resistors and capacitors, a piezo mike, and the most expensive item was the case at £5.95!

Look at: <http://bertrik.sikken.nl/bat/index.html>
and http://www.njas.org/projects/bat_detector/populel_ch.html
More on bats: <http://www.bats.org.uk> and
<http://www.londonbats.org.uk/batdets.htm>

The writer is willing to advise on kit construction - contact via email - brlan.maz@virgin.net.

Altogether a fascinating evening was had, shedding new light on these small mammals, which are the little-understood residents of Kings Norton Nature Reserve, and of course all bats are protected species. So pencil in a date for next year - probably the first week in September, again.

Brian Hewitt



The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

*Find out more on the bats that can be found in Kings Norton:
<http://www.bats.org.uk> and read about the Common Pipistrelle, Noctule
and Daubenton's bats.*

5

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Wildlife Watch: observations reported on or about the LNR over the past three months. Please send to LocalNature@aol.com

The changeable weather since the summer has tended to depress the number of wildlife reports. Cold and wet periods were a mixed blessing with many small birds having to resort to garden bird feeders, however it did give the opportunity for one member to film a family of five Foxes playing and enjoying the novelty of snow in Pinehurst Meadow. Warm nights meant that Pipistrelle Bats were still active along the cycle path at Wychall on the evening of the 1st November. Other regular reports include many of numerous Black-headed Gulls, Moorhen, Mallard and Grey Heron at both Merecroft Pool and Wychall Reservoir. Those working party members who have cleared an area on the banks of the River Rea regularly report the presence of a Kingfisher. Throughout the period there were also observations of Buzzards over Kings Norton, several noisy Tawny Owls on mild nights in October and numerous sightings of Greater Spotted Woodpeckers.

The usual pattern of bird migration was noted with the last record of Chiffchaff being the 16th September. Teal returned to Wychall Reservoir on the 28th August with a maximum of 25 being recorded so far. A Water Rail was also seen in October and November. The value of the River Rea corridor as an aid to migration and navigation was also evident with large numbers of Redwing passing through on nights at the end of September. There was also a report of a migrating Hen Harrier!

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

The end of October resulted in several exotic events. Working party activity on the 30th was interrupted by the calls of a small parrot perched in a tall crack willow tree by the River Rea whilst on the previous day over 50 Corvids, mainly Crows and Magpies, were intent on mobbing a serious predator. This turned out to be an Eagle Owl, which we believe was previously kept at a location not far from Grassmoor Road! A good sighting of the Owl perched in a sycamore tree helped explain previous Corvid discontent in the area. Has anyone any further information on local aviaries?



One Eagle Owl on display at our open day. But...

Local Nature Reserve Open Day – 15 September 2006 ⁶



A general view of the stands and displays

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



Boris the Boa Constrictor liked having his chin tickled

⁷
We were extraordinarily lucky in the weather for our Open Day, held ... the Meadows alongside the River Rea beside Wychall Lane. A clear cold start for the set-up, with mist rising from the grass, was followed by brilliant sunshine all day, allowing visitors to spend generous time looking at the exhibits and chatting with friends and neighbours.

The 'Friends' planned the Open Day in order that the local community could enjoy the areas that have been enhanced by the group over the past three years, to celebrate our achievements to date and to act as a means to recruit further members to assist in the development of our longer-term objectives. The Day also provided an opportunity for other environmental groups in and around the Northfield Constituency to showcase their own projects and achievements, and to demonstrate the advantages of a community-based approach to the delivery of local services.

We were most grateful for the partnership with and financial assistance from Community Network South West (£1,500) and the Kings Norton Ward Community Chest (£500) that provided vital support for the event. There is no doubt that the Open Day provided a magnificent opportunity for the local community to get together and to enjoy their local open

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

spaces, and all the feed-back we have received – from visitors and from stall-holders alike – has been tremendously positive.

As well as offering informative guided tours of the Local Nature Reserve and homemade light refreshments we had face-painters, a falconry display (including two fabulously exciting flying demonstrations), pony rides and animal petting (starring Boris the Boa Constrictor). The Ranger Service was there showing people how to make besom brooms and bug houses from moss and twigs, while the Wildlife Trust offered pond-dipping and mini-beast hunting. West Midlands Police (and their dogs) were much in evidence, and the Community Wardens not only marshalled but also took charge of the megaphone, directing visitors to the duck races and scything displays. Richard Burden MP drew the raffle with help from the Bromford Junior Rangers who also picked litter for us throughout the day.

I offer thanks to all involved, especially Graham Layton, who organised the logistics for the day, and the rest of the Open Day planning team, those who staffed the stalls and all who visited the LNR to make the Day such a great success.

Amanda Cadman

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



The raffle is drawn by Richard Burden MP (above) whilst Shirley Bakewell sorts out the prizes (below).

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9

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Open Day - Quotes

“It was an excellent event and lots of people also told me how much they enjoyed the bits I missed – like the falconry. The inter-generational feel of the day was also very impressive. Congratulations to all concerned.” (Richard Burden MP)

“Congratulations to you all for the superb event last Saturday – from what I saw everyone was having a very enjoyable time. It was good to see the various voluntary organisations who were exhibiting and promoting their own community work and involvement.” (Councillor Margaret Sutton)

“Congratulations on a successful event – lots of good feedback at this end.” (Joe Hayden, Northfield Constituency Parks Manager)



Paul Kennedy masters the megaphone (left) as Boris arrests the police (above).

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The pony and the professor keep an eye on the scything demo.



10

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Working Party Progress

The working party activity over the past three months continued to be focussed on those Management Plan requirements related to conservation and maintenance. This, as we have said before, means keeping bramble and nettles in the places we want them, tree management, scything the grass, keeping paths open and the inevitable litter picking. These Tuesday workdays continue to be supplemented with occasional weekend working party activity and special events as explained elsewhere in the newsletter.

One area which has received a lot of attention recently is the 'woodland compartment' between the River Rea and Wychall Lane – and this activity proved that apart from some magnificent Oak trees the rest of the habitat was quite poor with invading crack willow, ground ivy and Himalayan Balsaam running wild. Some heroic activity by the membership has resulted in a clear south side riverbank that will be wide enough to sustain several Hazel coppices. Some additional Oak will also be planted to fill in gaps in the tree line. Clearance of the ground ivy at some locations has permitted the planting of native Bluebells and Narcissi. We are also informed that this area once supported several clumps of Wood Anemones and we will wait to see if they survived under the blanket of ivy. Footpath re-creation at this location is now a possibility and several people have suggested that an informal path down and across the stepping-stones in the river should be considered. Has anyone any further views?

Other routine maintenance on the LNR has occurred along the cycle route, in the BW Meadow together with other corporate activities as described elsewhere. Luckily, the spate of anti-social activity has receded somewhat although damage around Merecroft Pool has required remedial action. The new palisade fence was also completed along the boundary on Popes Lane – a good result following 30 months of lobbying the City.

We have started a project in Pinehurst, which was described in the newsletter (*Issue 10 – 2006*). Following a lot of hard work to clear the bottom third of the field, the old horse shelter has been cleared of rubbish (*Thanks again – Adrian & Paul*) and we have removed its insecure roof (*Thanks due to David & Peter*). Several loads of scrap iron from fences, shelter and roof were carried to the corner of the BW meadow and it subsequently "disappeared" – a sign of the cost of scrap metal! A second dead hedge has been created in the meadow and bulbs have been planted. We now need some finance to finish the job – this will include an accessible footpath and interpretational features so that the meadow can be used on occasions for educational purposes.

So please come and join us – an hour of your time will make a real difference.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Phil Evans

11

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Social Activities: There has been a request for some joint social activity over the winter period and we are suggesting that some of the 'Friends' may wish to join in with the Rea Valley Conservation Group's 'Walks and Talks' programme. Details are shown below and further information can be obtained from June McCoy on 0121 4582186. We are advised that the walks are about 5 miles long but are taken at a leisurely pace. The talks are held at 19.30 hrs at the Friends Meeting House, Cotteridge (*opposite Woolworths*) that has ample car parking space.

Walk	30.12.07	Frankley Church via Merritts Brook. Meet at Manor Farm, Bristol Rd at 11.00 hrs.
Meal	25.01.08	The annual meal and social gathering at the Bull, Kings Norton Green. 19.30 hrs.
Walk	02.02.08	Weoley Castle via the Bourn Brook. 11.00 hrs Meet at junction Harborne Park Rd & Gibbins Rd.
Talk	08.02.08	Slide show Phil Evans. Wildlife on recent visits to Antigua and Namibia.
Talk	14.03.08	Explaining his hobby – Roland Kedge. Stone and pebble polishing.
Walk	16.03.08	River Rea and canal walk. Meet at Kings Norton Church at 11.00 hrs
Talk	09.05.08	The City's policy on plastic recycling – A speaker from the Waste Disposal Dept.



Graham Layton surveys his handiwork at the West Hill Road entrance in January 2007 – come and help maintain this area on the 26 January 2008

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Wychall Surveys: Below is a brief synopsis of the findings so far:

Mammals: small mammals on site include wood mouse, field vole, water vole and brown rat. The water vole record is somewhat dubious as it relies on a direct sighting (a sighting, which as it happens was a brief glimpse, but most likely a water vole as this glimpse was accompanied by a characteristic 'Plop'). It is perhaps prudent to commission a full and comprehensive water vole survey. Signs of badgers were encountered, and it is likely that they are using part of the site where pedestrian access is limited. The site has potential to support otters, though no evidence of otter was observed during the initial survey. Bats using the site include common Pipistrelle and Noctule – it is likely that both these species are roosting on site.

Reptiles: the site is suitable for reptiles; indeed viviparous lizard was encountered during the survey. **Amphibians:** the site is suitable for great crested newts. It is recommended that a full great crested newt survey be commissioned in order to ascertain their presence/absence and influence management protocol. Other amphibians noted on site include common frog. **Invertebrates:** the kick-sampling surveys revealed little of interest with regards invertebrates. The most common species being fairy shrimp, bloodworm and water boatman (species indicative of poor water quality), with a couple of records of water beetles.

Flora: No schedule 8 floral species, or species of particular note were encountered during the survey. However, this survey was not carried out at the optimum time of year to assess its botanical value. Himalayan balsam is a serious problem on site, its eradication would be of benefit ecologically, but may not be economically viable – an assessment of the associated costs will be included with the final report.

Management: a broad management outline will include the creation of a series of wetland scrapes and settlement lagoons; these will act to increase the ecological value of the site and reduce flooding risks.

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.*

Please visit our web site at www.fknnr.org.uk. Do visit it and let us know what you think!

Please join our 'green gym' working parties:

Every Tuesday, as much time as you can spare between 10.30 and 13.30. One hour of your time makes a real difference. Please let us know in advance on KingsNortonlnr@aol.com or by ringing a committee member..

Next dates: Every Tuesday in December and January, February & March 2008.

Tools wanted: *If you have any unwanted garden or workshop tools then please let one of the Committee know or phone 0121 6286769.*

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

FKNNR Diary Dates

Date	Location	Details
18 December 2008	Meadows, Beaks Hill Rd	Green Gym: Planting/pollarding
1 January	Sheila's Meadows & ponds	Tidy up & new year drinks
8 January	River Rea Wychall Lane	Green Gym: Clearance work
15 January	River Rea Wychall Lane	Green Gym: Tree/bulb planting – Woodland Trust day.
22 January	BW Meadow	Green Gym: Clearance work
26 January	Wychall Reservoir & Wychall Meadows/Rea	Saturday: Big clean up of Rea & BEP/BOSF planting day.
29 January	Wychall Reservoir	Green Gym: Willow coppicing
5 February	Wychall Meadows/Rea	Green Gym: Clearance & Planting with nursery school
12 February	Merecroft Pool	Green Gym: Dead hedges
17 February	Pinehurst Meadow	Sunday: Clearance & planting
19 February	Wychall Reservoir	Green Gym: Willow coppicing
26 February	BW Meadow	Green Gym: Clearance work
15 March	Wychall Reservoir	Saturday: Big clean up
21 May	AGM	
13 September	Wychall Meadows/Rea	Open Day

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. Instruction provided.*

**Support our sponsored weekend working parties on
26 January & 17 February 2008**

Incoming Funds

The 'Friends' wish to thank several organisations for their recent financial support: From the "Trees for Life" project promoted by the Birmingham Civic Society (£2,644), the Woodland Trust (£100) and the BEP/Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (£1,000) for tree/bulb planting events, and the River Rea Conservation Group (£100) towards the cost of plants in and about Sheila's ponds.

Subscriptions

There are several outstanding membership renewals from May 2007. Please send a cheque (+ donation?) to the Treasurer if you wish to continue your membership. We do appreciate all financial support that helps protect and enhance Kings Norton LNR.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Corporate Day 2: Bristol & West

On 25 September 2007 we hosted a second group of volunteers from Bristol & West B Soc/Bank of Ireland under the banner of their "Give Together" scheme. See photos below.

The volunteers experienced a range of activities including scything, slashing and nettle clearance in an area previously cleared of scrub by 'Friends' working parties in 2006. Two amphibian ponds now exist in this wetland location now known as Sheila's meadow. However the main activity on this particular corporate day involved the planting of water and wetland plants, wild flowers and bulbs in and about the two ponds. Some wild flower seeds were also sown. This area will be allowed to develop further as a wetland area with future activities solely devoted to the control of nettle and bramble.



A big thank you goes to everyone from the group who contributed to the work undertaken on the day and to the Bank for sponsoring the activity to the tune of £500. We know everyone enjoyed the day out!

Engineering work: We have been made aware that works at the dam end of Wychall Reservoir over this winter will involve a new roadway to the water to allow ease of maintenance as well as minor grill repairs. The trees either side of Burman's Drive will be pollarded – so plenty of wood for log piles and dead hedges!

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



Another of our falconer's friends poses at the open day.
A Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* appreciates a sunny event.

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

Chairman	Amanda Cadman
Secretary	David Barraclough
Vice Chairman	David Human
Treasurer	Phil Evans
Membership Secretary	Jil Bromley
Education	Matthew Osland-Barker
Newsletter Editors	Amanda Cadman & Phil Evans

Northfield District Ranger, Post vacant 0121 447 7106

Committee Members

Jon Anson, Suzanne Ashley, Alan Bakewell,
Brian Hewitt, Graham Layton, Peter Cage, David Hampson,
Jenny Bodycote, Nicola Human.

<i>Environmental Agency Hotline</i>	<i>0800 807060</i>
<i>West Midlands Police</i>	<i>0845 113 5000 ext. 7826 6363</i>
<i>Community Police</i>	<i>07769 882113</i>
<i>Anti-social behaviour Hotline</i>	<i>0121 303 1111</i>
<i>Street Champions</i>	<i>0800 0730528</i>