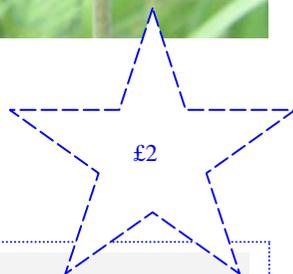


The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 19 – Spring 2009



Spring is here and our investment in one wetland area within the Nature Reserve begins to show us its diversity. A patch of Snake's-head Fritillaries (*Fritillaria meleagris*) attracts a local bee on 18th April 2009.



The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Chairman's Notes

The most significant piece of work to be reported this spring, I believe, is the clearance of some dead trees (some fallen, some waiting to fall at any moment) at the south end of Merecroft Pool. The resulting clearance has allowed us to develop a new reedbed. Planted with *phragmites australis* reeds, this reedbed will in time help to filter and clean a flow of grey water from an alleged mis-connected domestic out-pipe on Beaks Hill Road (we think) before it reaches the main body of the pool. Our thanks are due to David Hampson for developing the project and ensuring that it complied with the requirements of the Council & EA and the terms of the Management Plan, and most especially to local building contractor Mr L Healy who agreed to provide a digger and driver free of charge to clear this area. I was enormously impressed by both the speed with which the digger could do work which would take us weeks and weeks to perform, but also by the delicate manoeuvring of the driver to move trees stumps and clear the area with real precision. The work seemed to be accomplished with a gentleness I could not imagine of so large a vehicle. The general consensus of neighbours has been to welcome the improved views along Merecroft Pool, and we look forward to a greater diversity of wildlife taking advantage of the *phragmites* reedbed.

We held a weekend clean up on the weekend of 14/15 February, when a huge amount of litter was removed from Burmans Drive and along the Rea corridor. I offer my warm thanks to those who turned up and did a fantastic job. BUT, apart from two faithful weekend workers, everyone there was from the regular Tuesday group of volunteers. Where were all those of you who say you can't do mid-week but would be only too happy to help at the weekend?

We held another clean-up session on 24 March, again along the Rea corridor and Popes Lane, supported by the Northfield environmental workers and Community Service Volunteers. Again many bags were filled with rubbish, but soggy ground reduced the effect we might have had on Popes Lane.

We have a huge area to manage on the LNR, and we really do need all the help we can get, both on a regular basis and at these weekend bashes. It may not be glamorous work but it makes a major difference to our neighbourhood (and one's muscle tone), and I'm sure I'm not the only person to find it enormously satisfying. Please, if you are physically able, do try to support us on at least one day during 2009 (please see the diary).

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Another piece of work which has been undertaken during the period is at present less obvious for all to see: a small group of 'Friends' have been helping the Ranger Service to draw up a new Management Plan for the Local Nature Reserve which will set out targets for what the City hopes to achieve, with our assistance, on site during the period 2009 – 2014. This project has been co-ordinated by our Northfield Ranger Matthew Osland-Barker, who has frequently been seen striding around the site taking stock of its present condition. Once the final draft is produced – very soon now – it will be made available on our web site and in public places such as the Kings Norton Library for public consultation. Notices to alert you and the general public to this consultation will be placed on our notice boards and in many public places, and your constructive comments will be enormously welcome.

When looking at the old Management Plan it became very clear that one area in which we have been sadly lacking, with a few notable exceptions, is in undertaking surveys of the flora and fauna on the LNR. Happily one of our members, Lisa Worledge, is doing an MSc on Biological Recording at the University of Birmingham and wants to apply what she is learning in order to up a database of records specifically for the Reserve. This is a wonderful offer, and we are starting to draw up a list of volunteers to help with the work. So if you fancy learning a bit more about wild flowers, insects, grasses, small mammals, trees, birds – even user satisfaction – and how to record them, please me know.

We thank O2 via the Conservation Trust for a grant of £500 for the Merecroft Pool work and we are grateful to the Woodland Trust for providing a further supply of trees for us to plant in January, to CSV (Street Champions) for wild flower plants, and to the RSPB (through the good offices of the Environment Agency) for supplying 500 *phragmites* reeds for the new bed at Merecroft. These have all now been planted, as have many thousands of bulbs supplied by the Ranger Service: all making for an attractive site that has received many kind words of support from passers-by.

Finally, thank you to the 14 people who responded to my questionnaire about the Open Day, and especially to the 6 who thought they might be able to help to organise the event in future.

Amanda Cadman Chairman

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



The horse fields at Merecroft and the resident population of Canada Geese are grazing. Snow on the ground 2nd February 2009. (Photo: Phil Evans)

Gift Aid success: Are you a UK taxpayer? If so then please gift aid your FKNRR subscription and donations to us. This method is beneficial to the charity and costs the individual nothing. In the last financial year this scheme enabled the 'Friends' to increase its resources by some £320. Thanks go to the 105 members who have adopted this strategy and if you do not at present than please contact us for the appropriate form.

THE RIVER REA CONSERVATION GROUP

Sat 16 May	Walk: About Bellbroughton. 4.5 miles. KN Green 11.00.
Fri 12 June	Talk/Films: Birmingham Archive films with Paul Edmunds
Sun 20 September	Annual walk: Hawkesley and the Barge Horse walk. 6 miles. KN Green 11.30.
Fri 9 October	AGM: Friends Meeting House, Cotteridge.
For further details or transport ring: Cyril Ashmore 477 4764 or Geoff Ray 445 5126. All talks at 19.30 hrs at Friends Meeting House, Cotteridge.	

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Making memories of Wildlife:

According to BBC Wildlife Magazine (April 2009) "One of the best ways to help preserve the memory of today's wildlife is to record it". We need memories of the wildlife around now so that we can understand how it changes in the future. It is thanks to long-term projects like the British Trust for Ornithology's Garden BirdWatch and the annual Big Garden Birdwatch, that has been organised by the RSPB for the last 30 years, that we know how populations of garden birds have changed.

It would be great to know exactly how the wildlife is changing on the Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve. Through the great efforts of the weekly conservation activities and all the other people who have worked hard on the LNR there have been major improvements to the Reserve for the benefit of both people and wildlife. New wildlife memories are being made, my personal favorite is the regular sighting of a Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridus*) seen near the grassy slope of the Wychall Reservoir dam.

Wildlife memories are important from a conservation perspective. I have only rarely seen the amazing sight of a huge flock of Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) coming into roost and never in Birmingham but I know other people have memories of thousands of the birds wheeling around in the City. If we don't record the wildlife around us the danger is that our more recent personal experiences will set the expectation of what is normal and that may make conservation efforts harder when people are not aware of the impact of changes in the local environment on local wildlife. Understanding the plants and animals that are established on the Kings Norton LNR and knowing how these change over time will allow us to make decisions on the best way to manage the Reserve in the future.

Making lasting memories, or more specifically records of wildlife, is as simple as recording four things: **What** was seen, **When** was it seen, **Where** was it seen, and **Who** saw it. This is the basis for all wildlife surveying. A single record of an interesting sighting on the LNR can be very significant, for example the sighting of a Mink (*Mustela vison*) recorded last year may explain the lack of recent records for Water Voles (*Arvicola terrestris*) as discussed in the last edition of this newsletter. Of great value is baseline information on the plants and animals on the Reserve and now is a great time to take stock, literally, of the wildlife that we have and to understand whether the work based on the ongoing Management Plan is having the desired effect. We will be organising a number of surveys of plants, birds, bats, insects such as butterflies and hopefully other groups this year with the aim of repeating key surveys annually.

Lisa Worledge.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

We need a volunteer force to survey the wildlife on the Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve

We need volunteers to help and would welcome people of all ages interested in taking part. If you have a particular area of interest or would like to learn more about the wildlife on the Reserve and are willing to help with the survey work please get in touch. Through the website we hope to make all the records available for anyone to look at and we will be pleased to receive news about your interesting sightings (but remember to note the minimum **What, Where, When** and **Who** to make your sighting a record!).

ADVERT



For more information about recording your sightings or if you would like to get involved with organised surveys on the Reserve please email kingsnortonlnr@aol.com.

Lisa Worledge.

Email
kingsnortonlnr@aol.com to
find out more!

(or phone 0121 6243865)

Are you interested in flowers, trees, birds or bees? Would you like to find out what lives on the Reserve? Then join our volunteer survey force and make memories of wildlife.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Wildlife Watch - extra:

At the end of March, Merecroft Pool was visited by a pair of Goosander (*Mergus merganser*). The pair were there on and off for a two-week period and it can be assumed that they were on their migration to breeding grounds further north. Goosanders belong to a family of birds called 'Sawbills' and as the name implies the serrated bill is an adaptation that assists in the catching and holding of fish, which constitute their diet. (In certain areas of Europe they are culled to 'protect' fish stocks but such persecution has not prevented a gradual expansion in their range). It is believed that most sightings of these birds in the Midlands relate to birds that breed in Scotland or Northumberland but there is some evidence that migration to and from northern Fennoscandia and western Russia also occurs. The winter population in Britain is estimated at some 8,900 birds but in the early 1990s it was reckoned that only 2,600 breeding pairs were present. The pair at Merecroft were observed diving for fish as Grebes tend to do and appeared to be quite successful at it! A final point - the birds have been known to use nest boxes although holes in trees and burrows are usually used.



For further data see: Wernham C, Toms M, Marchant J, Clark J, Siriwardena GM & Ballie S. 2002. The Migration Atlas: movements of the birds of Britain and Ireland. T & AD Poyser.

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. Some mail outs still get returned to us from out of date email addresses – obviously our records need updating but only you, the members, can help us.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Local Nature Reserve Open Day - 2008 Snapshots



A general view of the event, the Rangers at work and (above) the ducks are sold for that great race down the River Rea.

Photos: Phil Evans



Open Day: 13 September 2008

The Wood Turner & his display. This proved to be an interesting and practical exhibit. Individuals had the opportunity to have a go.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Am I bovered? Are you bovered? Is anyone bovered?

On the first day of spring at 5.00pm on a pleasant evening I was enjoying a walk through our patch. On seeing 4 youths dismantling log piles and attempting to dam the river I thought I would tell them to desist whilst extolling the virtues of log piles and managed woodland for the benefit of wildlife. After a period, the 4 cycled off into the dusk on their mountain bikes. Job done, I thought. However, the bikers used the new woodland footpath – then kicked away a section of revetment, pulled up recently planted hazel and left graffiti all over the Wychall Reservoir signs. It's nice to win friends and influence people! Am I bovered?

In the last newsletter Amanda detailed the goings-on at the corner of Meadow Hill Road. This incident is probably the worst we have experienced – and by 'we' I mean your Committee members – since it usually means 'we' are telephoned for help or advice. Unfortunately, it is not wildlife sightings or ideas to improve the area that are relayed to 'we'; it is usually other LNR issues. Calls now reflect damage or theft. We have had dead hedges dismantled, attempted fires and continued graffiti attacks all along the cycle route – our new notice boards appear to be a magnet for someone who immediately rips off anything pinned to them. Why? Young trees and plants disappear soon after being planted – are community areas really a cheap alternative to the local garden centre? One evening, two youths with an air rifle were reported to be at large and 'we' can only surmise that they were responsible for the death of several Mallard and a Heron at Wychall Reservoir – but then, it could just have been the effects of that unusually cold weather. Are you bovered?

However, it is those log piles that appear to attract the biggest insects. Persons unknown have taken away many over the winter to keep the homefires burning and 'we' would really like to know who the culprits are. But beware, Amanda, politely requested some characters to stop cutting up trees and logs on the Reserve only to be told that the next cut with the chainsaw would remove her head from her shoulders. Nice one! All these incidents occur outside office hours when the services of Park Rangers, Community Support Offices, Police, etc, are all conspicuous by their absence. My plea therefore to all and sundry is – If you see attempts at theft, arson or wildlife crime – dial 999. A recorded incident will have much more effect than a phone call to me or 'we'. Is anyone bovered? If so please act.

PRE (alias a grumpy old man and getting grumpier).

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Merecroft Pool Focus:

In the last newsletter we said that the second major job for the winter period has been the clearance of scrub at the end of Merecroft Pool following on from some essential tree work undertaken by City contractors for H&S reasons. The task was being lead by David Hampson with the objective of creating a proper viewing area for the Pool and to plant a Norfolk reedbed to clean up some seriously 'grey' water entering the Pool via the storm water drainage system. Funds were being sought for the hire of a JCB plus operative for an extended day's activity.

We can now report that the scheme is substantially complete although further working party activity with planting and footpath improvement work will continue until the area "greens" over. It has received already much favourable comment from local residents. However, the project required a great deal of discussion with the City hierarchy and although several site meetings established the scope of the works it was still necessary for the 'Friends' to make a submission to the City for formal approvals. This task involved 'method statements', 'risk assessments', 'contractor indemnities', etc, etc, which all form part of current practice. We can say that our impatience was a virtue since with the support of Joe Hayden, Northfield Constituency Parks Manager, we were able to manoeuvre our way through the bureaucracy. Thanks go to Joe and other essential input from the Ranger Service.

Also a big thank you:

- To the Environment Agency for agreeing to a licence for silt movements and for the supply of 500 young reeds for the planting,
- To the 'Birmingham & Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers' for assisting with the footpath and other clearance activities,
- To 'The Conservation Foundation', administering the "O2 – It's your Community" scheme for a grant of £500, and finally,



- To L Healy Ltd, who provided a JCB and driver for a day at no cost to the FKNR so that essential heavy work to remove silt and tree stumps was undertaken in a safe and efficient manner. Quite an exercise given the soft nature of the ground being worked upon. This gift to the community by L Healy was particularly valued.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



January 2009:
Graham hard at work in the area where grey household water still enters the pool. Reeds to be planted in this area.

February 2009:
A site visit by City Council staff & instruction from David



24 March 2009:
Silt dredging and dropping

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



The new reedbed area awaiting planting at the end of March 2009.
Above: looking south.
Right: Final view to the north.



Final view of the new channel looking north from the new ramp at the end of the pool.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Other Working Party Activities

Our routine work programmes over the past three months, as required by the existing Management Plan, have kept the regular volunteers extremely busy. The usual tasks involve tree management, dead hedging, bulb planting, keeping paths open and the inevitable litter picking. A specific clean-up weekend on the 14 & 15 of February was well attended and thanks go to Alan & Shirley Bakewell for their efforts in organising this event and a follow-up with Northfield Council staff on the 24th March. The later day also saw Councillors Margaret Sutton and Barbara Wood in action wielding 'litter pickers' – well done.

The final touches to the woodland along the north bank of the river Rea in Wychall Lane have been undertaken and all that remains is to address the surface condition in certain places probably by adding wood chippings. Some selective planting of trees and bulbs has also been undertaken. There have been further attempts to remove bramble from the grass areas in both Pinehurst and the BW meadows. Thanks go to the 'Street Champions Scheme' (now no more) for their closing down donation of some £200 worth of trees and hedging materials and to Councillor Geoff Sutton who put his carpentry skills to good use by building us a supply of nest boxes. More are always welcome!

Keen observers may have noticed that some activity has occurred between Wychall Reservoir and Popes Lane in the area of the two small reedbeds created in 2005. Whilst maintenance of the beds will be required on an annual basis we have taken the opportunity to coppice much crack Willow in order to open up views of the area. A seat position will be built next to the cycle route. Some trial pits have also been dug in an old reedbed to ascertain if the water levels are conducive to reedbed and/or scrape construction. It is evident that the area contains a great deal of buried rubbish deposited in the Reservoir area when the River Rea floods. Further examination of this site is now required. The more volunteer hours on these tasks the better - so please do come and join us – no previous experience is necessary.

Phil Evans

Please take a look at our web site at www.fknnr.org.uk. Do visit it and let us know what you think or ring Peter Cage on 01214333486. The location of working party activities is shown on the site together with a map of the area. Otherwise, take a walk; you should be able to find us on site every Tuesday.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

FKNNR Diary Dates

Date	Location	Details
21 April	Wychall Reservoir	Bench install/Reedbed Clearance.
28 April	River Rea. Wychall Lane	Hazel planting, rubbish removal.
4 May	Dawn chorus walk (05.30 hrs)	Meet Burman's drive (Wychall Lane).
5 May	Wychall Reservoir	Bench install/Grass scythe.
12 May	BW Meadow	Grass cut/Bramble removal.
19 May	Pinehurst Meadow	Grass cut/Bramble removal.
26 May	Away Day	Visit a Nottingham LNR.
2 June	Merecroft Pool & Orchard	Bench install/Laurel Clearance.
6 June	Minibeasts** (11.00 to 15.00 hrs)	A Saturday activity run by the Rangers.
9 June	Wychall Reservoir	Bench install/Grass scythe.
16 June	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up & dead hedge.
23 June	River Rea – cycle path	Remove Himalayan Balsam.
30 June	Wychall Reservoir	Remove Himalayan Balsam.
4 July	Cotteridge Park	Co-Co MAD 2009.
7 July	Wychall Reservoir	Reedbed & Balsam Clearance.
11 July	The Green, Kings Norton.	Kings Norton Festival.
14 July	BW Meadow	Grass cut/Ragwort removal.
18 July	BAT night walk** (20.30 hrs)	A Saturday activity run by the Rangers.
21 July	Pinehurst Meadow	Grass cut/Bramble removal.
28 July	River Rea Corridor	Clean up/Litter pick/Balsam.
5 Septemr	Balaams Wood to Kings Norton LNR ramble & return**	A Saturday activity run by the Rangers. A River Rea walk at 11.00 hrs.

For working party days - please meet on site and wear stout waterproof 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 new Management Plan.

*Tuesday Working Parties – 10.30 to 13.30 hrs.
All dates – weather permitting. Instruction provided.*

Support our bank holiday dawn chorus walk on the 4 May 2009 (start at 05.30 hours).

****The events on the LNR run by the Ranger service start from Burman's Drive opposite Wychall Park Grove.**

Subscriptions – These are due on the 1st June 2009

Please send a cheque £7 to (+ donation? or ask for a standing order form from) the Treasurer if you wish to continue your membership. Please gift aid your subscriptions if you pay tax – this will provide additional resources for the 'Friends'. We do appreciate all financial support that helps protect and enhance Kings Norton LNR. There are still a few outstanding membership renewals from June 2008.

The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

Gulls (What colour are your legs?)

Over the winter period the Nature Reserve has seen its regular species of Gull but in greater numbers than have been recorded during the past five years. Every day Gulls have been seen circling over Kings Norton and these are usually the medium-sized Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) (Yellow Legs) that now breed on buildings in and about Birmingham City Centre, and the much smaller Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) (Red Legs), which are generally with us in substantial numbers between September and March. The two species can be seen regularly during the winter at both Merecroft Pool and Wychall Reservoir or on colder days sat on the roof of the Pilkington's Glass buildings! However we do occasionally see Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) (Pink Legs) which are also resident in parts of the conurbation and whose numbers are supplemented by an influx during cold weather. A pair was on Merecroft Pool on afternoon of the 30 March. Identification of immature birds is not simple but there is less difficulty with adults – if they are small they will be the Black-headed Gulls (even without those black heads!) and if they are medium sized then look at the top of the wing (or back) if it is black - no issue - it will be the Lesser Black-backed Gull but if it is grey then it will probably be a Herring Gull. That's if you cannot see the legs – these are the give away.



Gulls – Leg colour is an aid to identification.
Photos: Phil Evans



The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



The south end of Merecroft Pool on the 3 February 2009.
This location was cleared of crack willow, rubbish and scrub over the winter period in order to bring the pool water further south and to improve the views over the pool and the proposed reedbed extension (see article inside).

The FKNR, 55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton, B38 8TB Honorary Officers, Committee Members and Advisors (* Denotes Trustee of the Charity No 1122293)

Chairman	Amanda Cadman*	0121 624 3865
Secretary	Graham Layton*	0121 458 4712
Vice Chairman	David Human*	0121 458 1300
Treasurer	Phil Evans*	0121 628 6769
Membership Secretary	Jil Bromley	0121 244 7483
Education	Matthew Osland-Barker	0121 447 7106
Newsletter Editor	Phil Evans	0121 243 9906
Northfield District Ranger,	Matthew Osland-Barker	0121 447 7106

Committee Members

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

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