

Newsletter 26 - Summer 2011

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One of our wonderful new interpretation panels designed by Brian Hewitt and paid for from Community Chest funds.



Chairman's Notes

Ever since the Friends were set up, our attractive and increasingly professional Newsletters have been produced by Phil Evans, who supplied much of the text (especially wildlife reports and his splendid 'grumpy old man' articles) and many of the photographs, as well as doing all the layout work and proof-reading. It probably comes as no surprise that, now Phil has 'retired' as Newsletter Editor (and thank heavens that he is still taking charge of the Tuesday WorkOuts!) he needs to be succeeded by a whole team of Newsletter operatives! This is the first Newsletter, therefore, where the design and layout has been undertaken by Peter Cage with photographic help from Brian Hewitt, proof-reading by Sarah Cage, and distribution by Val and Paul Saunders. I have acted as commissioner of articles and time-keeper for the project. I am so grateful to all contributors, and I hope you will continue to enjoy a good read! And again I pay tribute to Phil for the tremendous contribution he has made to the Friends in his role as Newsletter Editor, as well as having been our highly efficient Treasurer for the past five years, and of course leading our work on site.

You've probably noticed that we have some wonderful new interpretation panels at Wychall Reservoir and Merecroft Pool. Funding for the panels was made available from Kings Norton Ward Community Chest – and we have just heard that we have been awarded funding for a further two panels. The design of the panels was undertaken by our own Brian Hewitt, to whom I am enormously grateful. They are attractive and informative, a magnificent example of the professional skills which are given voluntarily by our Friends. Dare I say that they have not yet been the target of our local graffiti artists?

I have been delighted to see one or two new faces joining the regular Tuesday WorkOut team over the past few months, including increasingly useful work from the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Trust. The 'Solihull boys' have worked on the Reserve weekly too, and there is no doubting the impact of this regular week-by-week work on the general condition of the

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Reserve. I am hugely grateful to Phil, who devises the schedule, collects the relevant tools and directs the work, and to all the workers who have contributed so much to our weekly progress.

We have of course done a few 'special events' over the past months. On 12 and 15 March we held a 'welcome spring' tree-planting and clean-up session to the south of the new scrapes, with trees provided by the Environment Agency and Trees for Life. On 19 March we held a major clean-up (again!) along Popes Lane. Again Veolia Environmental provided a skip, and Street Champions led the clear-up, and a vast amount of rubbish was collected – mostly food-related, I noted – so that Popes Lane looked really good for a brief moment.

A group of staff from Lloyds Banking Group, whose originally planned tree planting session back in January had to be cancelled due to icy conditions, finally made it to Kings Norton on 9 June, cheerfully bashing Himalayan balsam (cunningly nestled amongst head-high nettles) for a morning before doing some path clearance work along the Rea. We are most grateful for their support for the Kings Norton community. We are delighted, too, to have made contact with our neighbours at GKN Aerospace. Their site abuts the north of the reservoir, and waste materials had, unwittingly, been allowed to fall into the Reserve. They were mightily impressed by what we are achieving, and not only have they fixed their fence to ensure that no further rubbish blows through, but they have cleared up their mess, and propose regular working trips to help us – the start, we hope, of a valuable relationship for both sides.

It's that time of year when our display stand takes to the road. We were out on three consecutive weekends: at the formal re-launch of Moseley Bog (26 June), the CoCoMAD Festival on Cotteridge Park (2 July) and the St Nicolas Festival in Kings Norton on 9 July – at all of which events we spoke to many visitors and gave away large numbers of our leaflets. We've also taken the Tracmaster up to the Millennium Green for the first grass-cutting session of 2011, and have helped with shrub bed planting on Kings Norton Park as well as passing on native plants for FoKNP to plant along their stretch of the river. We've continued to play a part in the development of both Birmingham

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Newsletter 26 55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton Registered Charity No. 1122293

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Open Spaces Forum and Northfield Constituency Environmental Forum (watch out for our leaflet of walks across Northfield's Public Open Spaces!). We're excited to hear that the Ranger Service is playing a lively part in Be Active, and that parks and open spaces are now being seen as a valuable resource in developing a fit and active lifestyle among Birmingham's citizens – so do come cycling, walking, buggy-pushing or (dare I say it) WorkingOut on a Tuesday morning. It could change your life! Our monthly walks have continued to attract visitors who enjoy developing their knowledge less-well-known areas of the Reserve, its history and wildlife, and learning about the developments that we are undertaking.

At our AGM in May the Committee said farewell to Phil Evans as Treasurer, as noted above, and also to Suzanne Ashley whose horses graze the meadows to the east of Merecroft Pool, and who has been on the Committee since our Foundation. I am enormously grateful to both of them for their massive service to the Committee, and also to Ged Hickman, who was co-opted to the Committee last year. Amazingly Alistair Howard, already a very effective Membership Secretary for the Friends for the past year, volunteered to take on the Treasurer role AS WELL! I have no doubt that he will combine the two roles smoothly, and am enormously grateful for his generosity. **(Subscriptions became due on 1 June. Please, unless you have already renewed, or have set up a standing order, remember to let Alistair have your subscription for 2011-12.)**

After the formal AGM we were treated to a presentation from Neil Wyatt, Chief Executive of the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, on Living Landscapes (a national scheme of landscape-scale and joined-up environmental enhancements) and the Trust's plans for Birmingham rivers in this context. We hope that this scheme may perhaps bear fruit here in Kings Norton in the not too far distant future. We understand, by the way, that the 'Peafields extension' to the west of Popes Lane has passed several hurdles on the way towards formal designation as a continuation of the Local Nature Reserve, and I hope that perhaps I can tell you something positive in the next Newsletter.

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Newsletter 26 55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton Registered Charity No. 1122293

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Finally, I want to pay tribute to someone who has lived here for most of her life, and is a formidable contributor to the life both of the Friends of Kings Norton LNR and of the much older-established Rea Valley Conservation Group (as well as several other local community groups). June McCoy recently celebrated her 80th birthday in great style, and has just completed her annual Norfolk Pink Ladies Tractor Run in aid of Cancer Research UK. Congratulations June, and thank you for all you do for Kings Norton!

Wanted: Volunteer Co-ordinator

Amanda has been receiving an increasing number of expressions of interest in volunteering on the Reserve from both individuals and groups over recent months: corporate bodies and educational establishments wishing to give something back to the community, and individuals perhaps made workless in the current recession. Building up a strong pool of regular Tuesday Workers-Out and of those willing to join us at special work events is key to achieving our aims for the Reserve both now and into the future. Amanda is increasingly aware, however, that she is not able to give this side of the work the time it deserves: building relationships and initiating or following up new volunteer possibilities. If you are a people person and have some time to offer to help us develop our volunteer base, please contact Amanda, who will be very happy to discuss the issues involved.



Park Watch

There are plans afoot to extend 'Neighbourhood Watch' to some of the green areas of Kings Norton – specifically the Nature Reserve and the Park. This new project will involve increasing the

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

public's awareness as to what is welcomed and not welcomed in these areas, and that these areas are also being 'watched'. It also aims to improve the reporting and recording of concerns about illegal or anti-social activities, so that in regard to persistent issues, police action can occur.

The project is being led by the Police service at Kings Norton. Over the next few months posters will appear carrying the logos of the West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council and the Friends of Kings Norton Park as well as our own.

Painted Ladies visit the Local Nature Reserve

Two species of Butterfly not recorded so far have made an appearance on the LNR. The new scrapes at Wychall reservoir are now well vegetated, partially via a wildflower seed mix and also an abundance of tall herbs, especially thistles and nettles. A visit on 3 July revealed Small White, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Ringlet, Speckled Wood and, for the first time, Large Skipper and Painted Lady.

A dozen or so of the migratory Painted Ladies have been attracted to the site by the vast developing bed of thistle, which is the food plant for their caterpillars. It's a long way to come from Africa for Kings Norton thistles!



Join the Friends for a butterfly survey on the Reserve on Friday 19 August at 11 am, led by Senior Ranger Steve Hinton. We will meet at the bottom of Meadow Hill Road, at the entrance to British Waterways Meadow.

Schools Liaison

We have been thrilled to have regular contact these days with a number of local nursery and primary schools, though we still struggle to get involvement from the secondary schools. The Fairway Junior and Infant School come weekly with their teachers to spend time 'doing science' on the Reserve, and Graham Layton (who has kindly taken responsibility pro tem. for schools liaison) is currently working with Hollywood Primary and Kings Norton Nursery School to develop programmes for the children to work with us next term to develop the Reserve. His main involvement has been with Wychall Primary School, whose children are working hard towards their silver Eco School award. Graham has worked with them at the school and parties have come to work with us on Tuesdays several times in the past term. Last week, for example, they learned how to cut willow branches and trim them before weaving them into a dead hedge around one of the benches along the cycle route by the reservoir. They seem thoroughly to enjoy the work, and ask lots of searching questions about environmental matters. This is brilliant, and I really hope they will keep this interest for the rest of their lives. I'm really grateful to Graham for the huge amount of work he has done with schools recently. **If anyone out there has a background in education, Graham would love your support and guidance in this important work.**



Before and after

Greeting the Dawn

On 30 April a group of 22 intrepid Friends assembled at Burmans Drive by 5.30 am to take part in International Dawn Chorus Day with a walk around the Reserve. The walk was led by Phil Evans and Peter Bromley, whose combined recognition skills helped us to identify no fewer than 24 different bird species. Being out and about at that time of the morning is always magical, and the birds' territory-marking songs are to human ears such a paean of praise for spring. We walked first alongside the reservoir, moving back through the woods to the north of the Rea, and through the meadows to Merecroft, learning to identify the various birdcalls that we heard in these different habitats. Even on a good day, however, the cold gradually creeps into one's bones, so it was wonderful to end in the warmth of Molly's Café on the Green, where we were made most welcome with the famous Molly's breakfasts: thanks guys! And many thanks to Phil and Peter.

Birds identified, in order of appearance:

Mallard
Crow
Robin
Blackbird
Wren
Wood Pigeon
Magpie
Canada Goose
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Great Tit
Moorhen
Jackdaw
Willow Warbler
Blackcap
Green Woodpecker
Blue Tit
Song Thrush
Green Finch
Chaffinch
Duncock
Chiff Chaff
Jay
Nuthatch
Coot
(plus, on the way to Molly's:)
Long-tailed Tit
House Sparrow

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

FKNNR visit to RSPB Middleton Lakes (Tamworth)

One of the advantages of being a volunteer or indeed just a member of Kings Norton Nature Reserve is the chance to go on a 'Works Outing'.

In previous years we have visited the Christopher Cadbury Wetland Centre near Upton Warren, Droitwich (where we were lucky enough to see a Bittern and hear a Cetti's warbler!) and the Attenborough gravel pits near Nottingham, another excellent day out, with sight and sound of a grasshopper-warbler.

On the 31st of May this year, despite showery weather, a dozen of us made the short trip to Tamworth, to see the newest and most extensive RSPB reserve in the Midlands on its opening week.

The area, like the Nottingham reserve, is an expanse of reclaimed gravel workings, between Drayton Bassett (NW of the picture) and Tamworth, bordered to the west by the Coventry and Fazeley canal, and on the east by the River Tame. There is a watersports centre at the bottom right, which is separate.



We again relied on the expertise of Phil Evans for bird identification, though we also had an RSPB volunteer guide for our booked visit.

Such visits are valuable not just for an insight into wildlife and habitats but also to give us ideas for improvement to our own nature reserve, and to see good practice in action. Although we have had assistance from the City and the Environment Agency in recent years at Kings Norton, it was amazing to see what could be achieved at Middleton with a larger workforce, some mechanisation and substantial funds, since the RSPB acquired the site in 2007.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Considerable funds were made available to ensure the old workings were restored sensibly and sensitively, so that the site would be a good overwintering and breeding area for birds and other creatures.

Indeed the landscape has changed markedly around Middleton Lakes even since the satellite picture was taken, when there was still gravel machinery in evidence. Now it is returning to nature, and looks less damaged.

On our trip, we saw great crested grebes, and tufted duck. Later there was the sight and sound of reed buntings, reed warblers and whitethroat, lapwings were seen dive-bombing a heron, and house martins gathering mud for their nest construction.



House-martins gathering mud

Oystercatchers and many other wading birds were noted; there was a fine aerobatic display by tern swooping for fish in the river.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



Tern



Reed-bunting at Middleton Lakes with black head, bib, and white collar. These were recently seen at Wychall on one of our monthly guided walks!



A lesson in woven willow for our group

A canal side pub lunch rounded off a very enjoyable day. The Middleton Lakes RSPB reserve is easily accessible from the M42 and well worth a visit. The website address is printed here for your information.

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/m/middletonlakes>

Brian Hewitt

Birds of the Nature Reserve Added to National Atlas

This summer is the final survey season of a four year project by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to survey all the bird species of Britain and Ireland. The output from this huge effort will be an atlas showing the patterns of bird distribution covering every 10-km square across the British Isles, and whether birds are breeding, over-wintering or are present all year round. This will be the fourth atlas, over 40 years since the first was pioneered by members of the West Midlands Bird Club.

Volunteers sign up to survey tetrads (2 km x 2 km squares) and then undertake two visits (of one or two hours) over the winter (November/December and January/February) and a further two in the breeding season (April/May and June/July). The Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve falls across two tetrads: the area adjacent to Popes Lane and along to the end of the Wychall

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

reservoir in one (SP07J); the remaining area along Wychall Lane, the British Waterways Meadow and around Merecroft Pool in another (SP07P).

Surveying these sites has been a real pleasure. We certainly aren't bird experts but since taking on a Breeding Bird Survey (another BTO scheme) three years ago our knowledge has slowly increased. It definitely helps to be able to recognise a number of birds by their song. Each year we add a few more species to our repertoire during the spring and summer, but at the beginning of the next breeding season it can feel like starting all over again! We learn something new on almost every survey and it can be as exciting to record common species we have got to grips with, as it is new species we are just learning about.

There have been some real highlights including the group of six Goosanders on Merecroft Pool on our first winter visit. We were disappointed to only see a couple on the second survey, until we continued up to Lifford Reservoir to find the remaining four on the water there. At the end of one survey we came across a group of children playing next to the river, they were having a great time and making a lot of noise so we thought it unlikely we would get anything else, only for their commotions to have flushed a Kingfisher along the Rea. The laughter of the Green Woodpecker on the old allotments next to Popes Lane was a constant in each survey whilst a summer high was the Reed Warbler heard on the early visit along with a pair of Reed Buntings heard and seen in the reed beds near Wychall Reservoir. The list could go on, with a total of over 50 species seen during the surveys.

We know from Phil Evans (who we were lucky enough to see on site one day, Phil knowing far more about birds than I suspect we ever will!) that other interesting species have been visiting the Reserve, especially over the winter. You may well have seen interesting birds yourself and it isn't too late to share this information (it can be added to the BTO data as a 'roving' record). It would be really useful to have any details on nocturnal species you may have seen or heard, and breeding evidence such as sightings of fledglings or birds entering

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

nesting locations. If you have any records you would like to share please email lisaworledge@o2.co.uk

Bird surveys are great fun, from the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch in January, to the BTO's Garden Bird Survey, which runs all year round, from the Bird Atlas to Breeding Bird Surveys, there is something to suit all levels and abilities. To find out more please see the BTO website at: www.bto.org.uk/volunteer-surveys

Lisa and Simon Worledge



FKNNR Monthly Guided Walks

On the last Saturday in the month, 10.30 am to 12.00 noon. Meet at the corner of Wychall Lane and Meadow Hill Road (The BW Meadow entrance).

For all walks - please meet on site and wear stout waterproof footwear and oldish clothes (It can be wet and muddy!). We will alternate the walks between the South side of the LNR and the River Rea/Wychall corridor.

Future Dates: 30 Jul, 27 Aug, 24 Sep, 29 Oct, 26 Nov, 31 Dec

Join the Friends for a butterfly survey on the Reserve on Friday 19 August at 11 am, led by Senior Ranger Steve Hinton. We will meet at the bottom of Meadow Hill Road, at the entrance to British Waterways Meadow.

The FKNNR has a new Email address:

enquiries@fknr.org.uk

If you wish to send an email to a particular person, enter their name instead of enquiries, e.g. PeterCage@fknr.org.uk

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

FKNNR Diary Dates

Please spare one or more hours of your time to assist us in progressing the LNR Management Plan. Changes may be made at short notice, please check the web site www.fknnr.org.uk

Date	Location	Details
2 Aug	River Rea – North Bank	Paths/chippings/pruning
9 Aug	Wychall Reservoir rear	Clearance – Reservoir rear
16 Aug	BW Meadow	Tidy up/Tracmaster work
19 Aug	BW Meadows	Butterfly survey
23 Aug	Wychall Reservoir (cycle path)	View point clearance & hedges
30 Aug	Camp pub entrance	Clearance/scythe/paths/pruning
6 Sep	Pea Fields extension	Prune trees/bramble clearance
13 Sep	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up/Tracmaster work
20 Sep	Wychall Reservoir rear	Clearance – Reservoir rear
27 Sep	Sheila's Meadow	Tidy up/Tracmaster work
4 Oct	Pea Fields extension	Prune trees/bramble clearance
11 Oct	BW Meadow	Tidy up/Tracmaster work
18 Oct	Wychall new scrapes	Scythe/clearance/coppicing
25 Oct	Extension – Wychall Road	Prune trees/Fence line feature
1 Nov	Wychall Reservoir rear	Clearance – Reservoir rear
8 Nov	Old Orchard/Beaks Hill triangle	Prune trees/Ponds/Paths/Dead hedges
15 Nov	Wychall Reservoir (cycle path)	Clearance/path/hedges
22 Nov	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up/Tracmaster work
26 Nov	Meet Burman's Drive	Saturday Litter Pick etc
29 Nov	Wychall two ponds/Reedbed	Reedbed maintenance/coppice willow
6 Dec	River Rea – South Bank	Prune trees/Clearance/Tidy Hazel
13 Dec	BW Meadow	Tidy up/Tracmaster work
20 Dec	Wychall Reservoir rear	Clearance – Reservoir rear
1 Jan	Old Orchard/Beaks Hill Road	Tidy up & New Year drinks

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

For working party days - please meet on site and wear stout waterproof footwear and old clothes. The appropriate equipment and materials will be provided.

Please support our Saturday Work Out on 26th November 2011
(Tidy up & Litter Pick - start at 10.30 hours, Burman's Drive).

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Newsletter 26 55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton Registered Charity No. 1122293

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Tail Piece

Thanks to Phil Evans for all the hard work editing previous Newsletters. We hope the load on his shoulders is a bit easier now!

Picture by P Cage

at the FKNNR Open Day 2008.



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

Chairman	*	Amanda Cadman	0121 624 3865
Vice Chairman	*	David Human	0121 458 1300
Secretary	*	Graham Layton	0121 458 4712
Treasurer and			
Membership Secretary		Alistair Howard	0121 415 3082
Education		Graham Layton	0121 458 4712
Trustees	*	Alan Bakewell	0121 603 1127
	*	Phil Evans	0121 628 6769

(* Denotes Trustee of the Charity No 1122293)

Committee Members

Peter Cage, Anne Price, Brian Hewitt, Val Saunders, David Hampson, Elizabeth Parker, Nicola Human, Mike Lawrence, Lynn Horsnett.

Newsletter: Peter and Sarah Cage (0121 433 3486) and Amanda Cadman

Environmental Agency Hotline	0800 807060
City Parks Department Call Centre	0121 464 8728
Northfield Rangers	0121 447 7106
West Midlands Police	0845 113 5000 ext. 7826 6363
Community Police	07769 882113
Anti-social behaviour Hotline	0121 303 1111

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