

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 27 - Autumn 2011

Registered Charity No: 1122293

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A school group working with a butterfly net
in Pinehurst Meadow during July.

Aren't the green coronets splendid!
See the school report on page 10



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Chairman's Notes

By Amanda Cadman

Here we are heading into November and it's still so warm that the occasional butterfly can be seen around. I led the October guided walk last Saturday, and we were bowled over by the autumn colours to be seen around the Reserve. By special request we went right round the reservoir (normally the north side is locked off from general access), and we saw teal, two herons having a stand-off and a kingfisher. I never cease to be thrilled at the variety of habitats we have here at Kings Norton, so very close to the centre of a major city.

Our Tuesday WorkOuts have continued to take place right across the Reserve, mainly dealing with grass-cutting and scrub clearance and general tidying up, though we have also done a good deal of path re-surfacing with barrow-loads of wood chippings being wheeled and raked in a splendid example of teamwork. Again we have been pleased to see one or two new – and younger – faces turning up regularly, and I am grateful to all for their devoted service to their local environment. Thanks as ever are also due to the 'Solihull Boys' who join us weekly, allowing twice as much work to be undertaken as we could do on our own.

We pride ourselves on being one of the very few 'Friends of' groups across Birmingham who are allowed to work on site without a member of the Ranger Service being present. This allows us to achieve a great deal more than might otherwise be the case, and we have recently held a site visit with the Rangers to discuss improved ways of communicating and ensuring that we are appropriately trained for the work we do. As a result we have instituted a series of quarterly Training Days to cover a range of topics, and 27 September saw the WorkOut volunteers and the Solihull group up at the Lickey Hills visitor centre for a day's course with Senior Ranger Steve Hinton on Tree Felling. In addition to a refresher on safe and effective methods for felling of trees with hand tools (and hands-on practice thereof), we learned all about the various legal frameworks (environmental, planning and health and safety) within which

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we must work. Future courses and experience-sharing may include survey work, specific habitat creation and maintenance, health and safety, event management, first aid and tool maintenance, and we are most grateful to the Rangers for ensuring this valuable information is available to us and to other local 'Friends of' groups. Particular thanks are due to Steve Hinton who led the Tree Felling course, and who also gave an introduction to Butterfly surveying back in August. We have also agreed to arrange quarterly site walks with the Rangers to discuss future work schedules and identify any particular issues that may not have been included in the Management Plan.

A case in point is the possibility of developing something of a Community Orchard on the LNR in association with Northfield Ecocentre, who have been awarded funding to develop such orchards across Northfield constituency. A formal orchard of rows of trees seems inappropriate as such for a nature reserve, but we are certainly keen to plant a number of fruit trees – in the Old Orchard, on the Peafields, and perhaps one or two along the cycle path, as well as adding fruiting trees and shrubs to our hedge-lines. The idea is that the fruit would be freely available, as are the existing blackberries and wild plums to be found on the LNR. Watch out for details of planting sessions over the next few months!

I am grateful to those valiant souls who took the Tracmaster up to the Millennium Green in September for a further session of grass-cutting in preparation for the 'Magical Nature' event there on 22 October. This was obviously a very successful occasion, and our stall had a good number of visitors. We also took the display stand to an event on Kings Norton Park on 20 August.

We have received funding from the Kings Norton Community Chest for two further interpretation panels, one to go along the cycle path at Wychall Meadows and one for the entrance to British Waterways Meadow at the foot of Meadow Hill Road. They will follow the layout of the existing interpretation panels, and are currently being designed by Brian Hewitt (thank you again, Brian!). We hope to have them completed and installed by the spring. We also have funding to replace a number of litter bins that have been removed, vandalised, or in some

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cases never existed in essential locations. Again, I hope they will be on site soon, and that they will reduce the need for litter-picking (a fine hope!).

More vandalism



Sadly there has been another incidence of arson on the LNR, this time causing much damage not only to the bench (made of recycled plastics) but also the surrounding trees. The bench will be replaced in wood, to reduce the height of any future flames!

Anchors Aweigh! – a flight of fancy from our friend BRH

The Assay Office hallmark for Birmingham silver is an anchor. Why? We have been wondering, since a recent dredging operation by the Environment Agency at the old Wychall Reservoir unearthed unexpected treasure.



Now retrieved and safely in storage awaiting conservation, this large anchor weighing in at about 1cwt may be evidence that Birmingham was once a seaport.

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Kings Norton currently lies at about 500ft above sea level, so there must have been considerable movement in the earth's crust since the anchor was thrown overboard by a passing ship. Sadly there is no chain, so we may never know to what vessel it was once attached. And of course most of the water in Wychall Reservoir has since drained out.

One person has suggested the anchor got here by a fluke; others say it is evidence that the construction of the British canal system in the 18th and 19th Centuries was an attempt to keep the city navigable to large craft, and retain its maritime importance.

As the city rose above the surrounding landscape, many locks had to be constructed to keep pace with the changes of level, as evidenced by the Tardebigge flight near Bromsgrove. Similarly, the Lickey Incline had to be built uphill when the railways were constructed.

Of course we have the Sealife Centre in Birmingham to remind us of our sea-going heritage. Maybe our anchor will be presented to them as part of their exhibit... or in view of rising scrap-metal prices we may put it on eBay to increase FKNNR funds....

PS. For the real reason for construction of Wychall Reservoir see the 'History' section of the website, or the display panels on site....

This is your magazine. Please let Amanda know if you have an article for publication or photos of wildlife on the LNR. We will be glad to try and answer your questions about the LNR, its history and management, its wildlife or any other issue that may be of interest to the Friends. Please note that the copy deadline for the next issue will be Thursday 8 March 2012.

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Falling From the Herons

By David Human

We were somewhat bemused initially by the white murky 'paint' which suddenly appeared besmattered over our recently cleaned cars. Then something similar occurred to some of our more attractive border plants. Eventually we worked out that this was not vandalism or graffiti and we couldn't even blame our own kids, this was an aerial defaecation by one of the Nature Reserve's Grey Herons. Those of you lucky (?) enough to live under the regular flight path of these odd looking giants of British wetland may well have had similar experiences.

It is thought the Herons foraging on the Nature Reserve come from the heronry at Bittell Reservoir near Hopwood. They can be seen regularly at the water's edge at both Merecroft Pool and Wychall Reservoir. Their lengthy periods of immobility can also lead however to them being missed until, disturbed by your presence, they noisily flap into the air.



The Grey Heron is carnivorous, living on live aquatic fare such as fish and frogs as well as small mammals and birds. The digestive process must be intense for the end product to be a murky white 'paint'. According to Webster's Dictionary the heron gained its name by its habit of defaecating when startled – obviously the airspace above Meadow Hill Road is more unpredictable than might be imagined!

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Developing the natural habitats of Kings Norton Park

By Lynn Horsnett

Chair, Friends of Kings Norton Park (and also a member of the LNR Friends' Committee)

Each green space in Kings Norton has woven its own distinctive character to form the rich environmental tapestry we are so fortunate to have upon our doorsteps. Leaving the LNR and crossing West Hill Road at Camp Lane you catch a glimpse of the River Rea as you walk up to meet the beginning of Kings Norton Park, a change of gear just long enough to distract and arouse you from your stroll through the former mill lands of the nature reserve and to prepare you for the rush of sweet acreage, still bearing signs of ridge and furrow, as you step from tarmac to the wide open space of the Park.

The major focus for the Friends of Kings Norton Park has been an exploration of the Park's history and potential through many conversations with our visitors. We have unearthed a rich and diverse range of interesting angles to the Park – signs of the area's history of arable farms, orchards and the camp of a royal army – and we have begun to get a feeling for what our green spaces mean to people now.

The first practical project was thrust upon us: 'Save the Shrub Beds' or be grassed! Our campaign, after two icy false starts, resulted in a hugely successful planting event. Those relaxing on nearby benches can now enjoy a bouquet of colourful, sweet scented shrubs. Other more structural changes are planned: the resurfacing of Kings Norton Playing Fields Car Park will be a huge improvement on the current pot-holed surface. The cost of this will be met with Section 106 monies, as will refurbishments to the Park's car park and children's play area. We visited nearby school and nursery children, and hopefully the architects will include some of the dreams of the children. We should also see some additional benches, bins and repairs to canal feeder bridges. A Parks Watch Scheme, an initiative also involving Kings Norton Local LNR and the Fields Millennium Green Trust,

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is being developed by local PCSO Andy Ryan and the Parks Department, and will be put in place in 2012.

Future projects for the Parks Friends will concentrate on enhancing the River Rea corridor right through the park, and hopefully, playing fields, to the Kings Norton Toll House on the canal by the Stratford Canal junction. Through initial discussions with the LNR Friends, our ideas will be planted up as native trees, reeds, flag iris and wild garlic, etc. The Rangers are guiding us on how to encourage a desirable wildlife habitat ... so far we know there are Little Owl, Red Polls, Kingfishers, Willow Warblers and bats along this stretch, and baseline surveys may identify further interesting wildlife. The first signs of this natural corridor will be seen through the development of a small meadow as the mowing regime is to be altered slightly.

We have many groups and individuals to thank for your support during our first year. You are probably one of those people ... so, thank you, and please do continue to support us!

If you would like to join our group, and for all other enquiries, then please email us at: info.foknp@gmail.com.

FKNNR Monthly Guided Walks

These guided walks take place on the last Saturday of each month, starting at 10.30 am and ending around 12 noon. We meet by the British Waterways meadow entrance, at the corner of Wychall Lane and Meadow Hill Road. Waterproof footwear and tough outdoor clothes are essential, and binoculars, if you have them, are recommended. The walks tend to alternate between the south side of the Reserve and the Wychall/River Rea corridor.

Forthcoming walks take place on 26 November and 1 January (actually a Sunday). This latter will include the by-now traditional New Year's drinks at the Old Orchard.

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An Update On Our Membership

By Alistair Howard Membership Secretary

Membership of the FKNNR is currently 220. The membership has been bubbling around this level for a few years now, with some new Friends joining and sadly some Friends leaving. The number of members we have is very important to us for numerous reasons. Obviously it reflects the level of interest in the life and development of the Reserve, and additionally it provides us with one of the greatest investments too, that is to say the time many of the Friends put in on the reserve – the Tuesday WorkOuts being a good example.

However it does also provide us with some much-needed income. We do apply for funding and grants to help cover specific costs, but in the current market, such grants are increasingly hard to obtain. Therefore it is essential the membership subscriptions are received each and every year. The subscriptions are the one area of income we should be able to rely on, but unfortunately they too are a struggle to bank. Looking at the membership database today, **we have received only half of the subscriptions that were due on 1 June. That means 100 Friends are still to pay for this year.**

How do you know if you are one of the Friends whose subs are outstanding? On the address label on this newsletter, if there is a note saying "please pay this years' subs" then your account is outstanding. Alternatively you can send me an email at fknnr.membership@virginmedia.com.

How do you pay? There are two ways to pay. Firstly you can send a cheque (payable to FKNNR) to me directly, accompanied by the membership form which is on our website under the 'join us' link (www.fknnr.org.uk/join.htm). If you are a tax payer, please also tick the Gift Aid box as this provides us with further income. Alternatively, and preferably, please fill in the standing order mandate that is included on the membership form, and send to me. The standing order makes it all very easy as it allows the subs to be transferred each year without fuss or bother – and no nagging messages from me.

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As I mentioned at the beginning of this update, we do rely on your membership subscriptions and I hope you enjoy everything that being a Friend offers to you. It is incredible value at £7 per household which is the equivalent to less than 2 pence per day.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to being inundated with cheques and standing order forms.

Managing the LNR – find out more

The Annual Meeting of the LNR's Management Committee takes place at St Nicolas Place at 7 pm on 8 December. This meeting is open to all, and is your opportunity to put your point of view to the Councillors and representatives of other relevant local groups who serve on this City-led Committee, as well as to learn more about our position within the context of the City's policy for its public open spaces.

"School Report"

By Graham Layton

The 2010/2011 school year saw a significant and encouraging development in the involvement of schools with the Nature Reserve. Wychall Primary School took advantage of the opportunities the Reserve has to offer, in the pursuit of their Silver Eco Award. Classes of up to 30 Year 4 children visited the site on at least 9 occasions. On 7 of the visits, with the guidance of members of the Friends, they undertook activities such as planting of whips (young trees, 20/30 cms high), coppicing willow and constructing dead hedges, and creating pathways. They also did 'balsam-bashing' (there is always plenty of Himalayan Balsam to remove, unfortunately!), and identifying plants and insects (Nature Study to the older generation). Owing to poor weather at the time, Hollywood Primary School had to cancel a visit planned with the Friends, although they had visited the Reserve on previous occasions.

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A member of the Friends' Committee, Nicola Human, works with Inner City children in Birmingham, and brought parties to the Reserve on five occasions during the summer, to give them the opportunity to experience a more rural environment – an experience which sadly is still denied to some children.

By comparison, the autumn term of the new school year has started quietly. Arising from discussions in the summer, on 1st September Amanda Cadman and I escorted the headmistress and 11 staff from Kings Norton Nursery School on a walk around the Reserve. Some staff were unaware of its existence, others had not appreciated its extent. The purpose of the walk was to show them the variety of habitats on the Reserve, so that they might consider how they might use them in the educational programme of the school. Fortunately, the weather was wonderful and they saw the Reserve at its best. Also, I understand that Nicola brought another party of Inner City children to visit recently.

I am currently in contact with Wychall and the Nursery School to see if or how they intend to utilise the Reserve this year. I am also aware of two other schools that have expressed an interest in learning more about the Reserve, and will be contacting them shortly. The prospect for increased school involvement is promising. We are still just into the start of the school year and I am mindful that the practical work with Wychall did not commence until after January.

I am sure that there is plenty of scope for linking the Reserve with a school's curriculum, whatever the level – from simply surveying a small area to identify plants, insects, birds and mammals; 'hands on' practical activities as mentioned earlier; to the wider issues of environmental management and conservation of natural resources. It does, however, take time to contact and work with a school to encourage staff to integrate the Reserve into classroom activities. If anyone wishes to help in this endeavour (particularly if you have a background in education or other relevant experience), I would be pleased to hear from you.

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An anecdotal postscript – following a visit by some 8/9 year-old children from the Kings Norton area, to do some planting, one of the staff later told me that three of the children said they had 'never done anything like that before'. I found that a sobering comment.

Some quotes from children in year 6 from Slade Primary School in Erdington. The grammar is their own!

"We walked from the train station and collected conkers. We had so much fun! I wish we went again there because today at Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve it has been perfect. Also that I never used to like animals but now I've been there to Kings Norton I am not afraid anymore."

"We all felt really happy and active."

"Another bit I found interesting was making habitats for a mouse. In our habitat we had to include a shelter, food (pine cones), leaves and escape route from hiding from foxes and it was truly marvellous."

Pictures from the Nature Reserve:



Working on the proposed extension to the LNR at Popes Lane Public Open Space

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A Green Woodpecker at work checking for grubs in the grass (actually in our Treasurer's garden, but these birds are frequently seen and heard on the Reserve)

Bats are still about.... And not just at Halloween!

By Brian Hewitt

The continued warm weather meant there were still quite a few bats in evidence around Merecroft Pool in late September, so I agreed to lead a Bat walk on 30th, when over a dozen Friends and visitors turned up.

As well as our own detectors we were able to borrow several more from the Ranger service at the Lickeys, though some care was needed in tuning in to the bat sounds and avoiding interference.

We succeeded in seeing and hearing quite a few bats, and recorded some on tape in the process, despite less activity than had been anticipated. The bats seemed to be Pipistrelle; no Daubenton bats were in evidence across the lake on this occasion.

Nonetheless a worthwhile evening and one we hope to repeat after they emerge from hibernation!



Lucky flash photo of Pipistrelles at

Merecroft.

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Get Walking across Northfield!

Northfield Constituency Environmental Forum has developed a series of walks across the four Wards of the Constituency, making best use of its large and varied Public Open Spaces. A supporting leaflet, sponsored by St Modwen, is currently at the printer, and will be launched in December. At the same time the NCEF website (www.ncef.btck.co.uk) will give fuller details of each walk; eventually details of more walks will be added. Several of the walks, needless to say, feature Kings Norton LNR. I hope that you will pick up a leaflet and get out and about to discover more of our local open spaces. And if you have a favourite walk that doesn't appear on the web site, let me know so that it can be included – Amanda



Heron stalking prey along the edge of the Reservoir

Big Winter Litter Pick – Saturday 26 November from 10.30;

assemble at Burman's Drive, opposite Wychall Park Grove

Let's try to clean up the Rea corridor, removing all the litter along the cycle track and the reservoir and woodland areas before winter sets in. Please join us for as much or as little time as you can offer, wearing waterproof footwear and clothing. If you have work gloves please bring them; if not, we can provide gloves as well as litter-pickers and black sacks. We may even hold a draw as a bit of an inducement!

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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
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
2012		
1 Jan	Old Orchard/Beaks Hill Road	Tidy up & New Year drinks
3 Jan	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up/Repairs to viewpoint
10 Jan	Wychall two ponds/Reedbed	Reedbed maintenance/coppice
17 Jan	Wychall Reservoir rear	Clearance – Reservoir rear
24 Jan	Pea Fields extension	Prune trees/bramble clearance
31 Jan	Old Orchard/Beaks Hill triangle	Prune trees/Paths/Dead hedges
7 Feb	River Rea – North Bank	Paths/chippings/remove laurel
14 Feb	BW & Sheila's Meadow	Tidy up & scythe
21 Feb	Wychall Reservoir rear	Clearance – Reservoir rear
28 Feb	Camp pub entrance	Clearance/pruning & shaping
6 Mar	Pea Fields extension	Prune trees/bramble clearance
10 Mar	Meet Burman's Drive	All LNR Litter Pick etc
13 Mar	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up/Tracmaster work
20 Mar	Wychall Reservoir rear	Clearance – Reservoir rear
27 Mar	Wychall Reservoir (cycle path)	Clearance/path/hedges

*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.

Come for a New Year's drink on the 1st January, 10.30 to 12.30 in the Old orchard, Beaks Hill Road.

Please support our Saturday Work Out on 10th March 2012 (Tidy up & Litter Pick - start at 10.30 hours.

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Tail Piece

Common Blue Butterfly (male)
in Pinehurst Meadow
Photo by Brian Hewitt



Contacts

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 451 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 445 6036
West Midlands Police	0845 113 5000 ext. 7826 6363
Community Police	07769 882113
Anti-social behaviour Hotline	0121 303 1111

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