

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

*Newsletter 30 - Autumn 2012*

Registered Charity No: 1122293

[www.fknnr.org.uk](http://www.fknnr.org.uk)



The new reedbed near Wychall Road

This is the latest development on the LNR.  
See the article on page 8 to learn more about the partnership that enabled this exciting project to take place on the Peafields extension.



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Newsletter 30

55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton

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## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *Chairman's Notes*

Amanda Cadman, 27 October 2012

In the last newsletter I drew attention to the beginnings of a partnership between the Friends, the Ranger Service and the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country to develop a reedbed on the low-lying part of Popes Lane Public Open Space to improve water quality and develop the area's wildlife habitat potential. This has borne wondrous fruit, and the completion of the digging and planting-up of the reedbed is the major news for this newsletter. See the separate article to learn how much has been achieved.

What has not yet been achieved, however, is formal LNR designation for this area. Full documentation was presented to Northfield Ward Committee, and received the Councillors' warm support, on 24 September, but has yet – so far as I can tell – to be finally signed off by the City Council. Surely this will have taken place by the end of the year ...

If you see the Tuesday Workers Out at work you may notice our rather smart new baseball caps, the latest addition to our monogrammed workwear. Graham Layton shows elsewhere in this Newsletter that this is a great way for us to Fly the Flag for the FKNNR wherever we are. They are wonderful, too, for keeping the low winter sun (when you see it!) out of your eyes when driving. Do contact me to buy yours!

A new leaflet about the Reserve and membership of the Friends is currently at the printers (our good friends Harlequin Print Ltd., who have also just produced some lovely note cards for us – see the separate article). The new leaflet, as before, has been beautifully designed for us by Brian Hewitt, and folds out to show a brilliantly clear map of the whole Reserve including the 'extension', all the watercourses and an indication of the terrain. I expect the leaflets to have been printed by the time this is ready for circulation, and we will enclose a copy for you to pass on (please) to a neighbour. **If each current member enrolled just one new household, that would double our membership and be of enormous financial benefit to support our work**

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**on the Reserve. And if you have not yet renewed your subscription for 2012/13 (subs fell due on 1 June) please do so, and consider setting up a Standing Order and Gift Aiding your subscription if you are a tax-payer.**

The Friends' display stand has had its regular July outings to CoCoMAD (7th) and the St Nicolas Festival (14th). We were delighted to support our neighbours at Kings Norton Park in their 13 October celebration of the refurbishment of their children's play area and the Civic Garden. Towards the end of September a group of Friends took the Tracmaster up to the Fields Millennium Green for a challenging afternoon of grass and scrub-cutting and clearing. Our Monthly Guided Walks have continued to receive small but enthusiastic take-up, and prove a good occasion to get to know people, and the Reserve, better, to see what's around in terms of wildlife and to take note of shopping trolleys to be removed from streams, etc. Brian led an excellent bat walk at Merecroft (further details in a separate article). This was well attended, but I'm glad we didn't have quite the 79 who turned up the following week for Kings Norton Park's bat walk! I am enormously grateful to everyone who has helped with these 'extra-curricular' activities over the past few months, as well as the faithful band of Friends, and the 'Solihull boys' for their regular week-by-week work across the Reserve during the Tuesday WorkOuts. I should also thank your Committee members, who have met twice, and members of the Management Committee who have also met formally with the Council (as represented by the Rangers in the absence of any elected Members) during the past four months. Without the input of all these people, there would be no achievements to recognise, and the LNR would soon show the signs of lack of hands-on management and care. Thank you all!

**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 is Thursday 21 February 2013.**

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### *School Report*

By Andrew Nabbs

Since I took over the role in May of this year the main activity has been attending the action committee at Kings Norton Nursery and Children's Centre as part of their application for the Eco-school Green Flag award. This is a nationwide scheme for schools at all levels to encourage pupils to be aware of and participate in environmental issues.

The deputy head, Gemma Weaver, is leading the project and the school have already been awarded bronze and silver awards and are now in the process of applying for the highest award, the Green Flag, which is externally assessed.

Clearly the nature reserve provides excellent opportunities for the children and parents to explore themes such as water, waste, energy and nature. Details of how they will do this will be discussed at the next meeting at the end of November. The staff at the school expressed how much they had enjoyed the tour of the reserve led by Graham Layton, particularly in learning the truth about the "lovely " Himalayan Balsam! In order to raise parents' awareness of the reserve Graham has kindly agreed to lead a tour for parents on a weekday.

Having volunteered to take on the education role in May of this year after only having been involved with the Friends for a month I soon realised how much time and effort is put in by members in looking after the reserve particularly the Tuesday WorkOut (TWO) and would encourage anyone with time to spare to come along. As well as the exercise it's a great opportunity to get to know the reserve and see some of the more "wild" areas that aren't normally accessible to the public.

I would like to thank Graham for supporting me in taking on the role and will follow up the many contacts he has made as well as continuing his (and others') efforts to encourage senior schools to see the reserve as an education resource rather than for some

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pupils as just "somewhere secluded" to meet on the way home from school.

### *Kings Norton Nature Reserve through the Seasons*

The Friends have recently produced a set of note cards, blank inside, showing scenes on the Reserve at different times of year. These are available at a price of £1.50 for an assorted pack of six, with envelopes.

Please contact Amanda at [55wychall@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:55wychall@blueyonder.co.uk) (0121 624 3865) if you would like to purchase a supply. This is a fantastic way to advertise the rich variety of habitats on the Reserve whenever you need to send someone a short note. Thanks are due to Brian Hewitt, who took all these lovely pictures, and to Harlequin Print who produced them beautifully and to a very tight deadline.



### *Membership Report*

Welcome to a brief update on our membership with some good news and some not so good news.

The good news is that our membership currently stands at 227 with 4 new members since my last update. A very warm welcome to Christopher Rose, Gillian Morrell, Eleanor Thorne and Jerzy and Lesley Lukowski. It is great to welcome new Friends and I hope you will enjoy the Nature Reserve and all the delights it has to offer.

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The not such good news is the fact that out of the 227 members, a substantial 108 are still to forward their annual subscription for 2012/13 which fell due on 1 June. The finances of the Friends are very tight and our main source of income is the annual subscription of the members. Without the subscriptions, we are not able to invest in the reserve and so its conservation and development will be heavily curtailed. So please do forward your membership to me at the address below as soon as possible. As a reminder the annual subscription is £7 per household or £5 for concessions. We also accept very gratefully donations over and above the annual subscription, so do feel free to round up!

If you are unsure if you are up to date or need to send me some money, please have a look at the address label on your newsletter and it will let you know. Apologies for being a nag, but we really do need your subs, and we need them now. Thank you.

Alistair Howard  
16 Grassmoor Road, Kings Norton B38 8BP

### *Bat Walk*

By Brian Hewitt

A cool dry day followed by a dull evening and drizzle did not bode well, but a Bat Walk led by Brian on 31st August attracted about twenty human Friends and visitors.

After a short introduction to bats' echo-location methods and their ultrasonic squeaks, some information leaflets were distributed, and then hurriedly put away in case the ink ran!

In the gathering gloom, armed with three bat detectors and some very useful torches the group followed the footpath towards the banks of Merecroft Pool, off Beaks Hill Road.

Our bat-detectors work by mixing the inaudible squeaks of the bat at around 40kHz with an internally-generated tone, or 'heterodyne'; the difference between the two signals is thus within our human hearing range, and is fed to headphones or a speaker.

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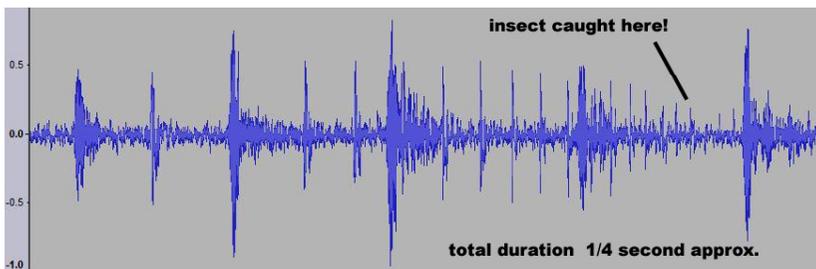
The first stop on our walk was not promising. A steady drizzle continued; we had not realised that raindrops hitting water also generate sounds in the ultrasonic region! No bats were in evidence. We moved on to the place known as the (unauthorised) 'fishing hole' by the dam.

One young person in our group was pleased to borrow our own bat-detector and headphones, and another keen visitor had actually brought her own! It was also possible to relay any sounds detected, using a tape recorder as amplifier.

While tuning the bat detector, and becoming very pessimistic about our chances on such a damp evening - suddenly a faint fluttering noise was heard from the speaker - it was the sounds made by a bat, brought into the range of our human hearing! These tiny animals, weighing only a few grams, have to catch their own body-weight in insects each evening to survive.

As we waited, and pointed our detectors around, more fluttering noises were heard - then more and more, until quite a cacophony was being produced in the headphones and the loudspeakers. The rain had stopped, and bats seemed to be out in large numbers. They could be seen against the darkening sky, and we could also see them flitting across the lake in front of us, as insects were there for the taking.

The noises produced by the detector sounded like variable-speed machine-gun fire as the bats homed in on insects. A characteristic speeding-up of the pulses was heard as the bats caught insects - sounding much like blowing a raspberry! We think these were mostly Pipistrelle bats.



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Later we shone our torches across the lake, and were pleased to see a different species, Daubenton's Bat, quite clearly. These tiny bats hunt by skimming the water and plucking insects from the surface! They emerge to feed later than do Pipistrelles, and have a different characteristic sound; we were not really able to discriminate with our basic detectors, other than by seeing them in the torch beams.

This was a most successful and interesting event, which we hope to repeat when conditions are right.

### *Our New Reedbed at Wychall Road*

In the last Newsletter Amanda drew attention to the beginnings of a partnership between the Friends, the Ranger Service and the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country (WT) to develop a reedbed on the low-lying part of Popes Lane Public Open Space to improve water quality and develop the area's wildlife habitat potential. This project grew from the fact that the WT was in a position to apply for funding from a central pot administered by the Environment Agency under the terms of the European Water Framework Directive which seeks to improve water quality and wildlife habitat. An outline project was drawn up by the partnership and this resulted in the award of £12,000 towards the development and implementation of a project to excavate a new reedbed on low-lying ground alongside the river Rea at Popes Lane Public Open Space to improve habitat while maintaining the area's increasingly important floodwater retention capacity.

At the same time the WT became the lead partner in one of only twelve Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) (and the only urban one) declared across the country subsequent to the publication of Professor Sir John Lawton's report to Government *Making Space for Nature – a survey of England's wildlife sites*. This report sought to create 'joined up' landscape-scale networks of wildlife habitat across the country to help wildlife live and move across the area whilst creating beautiful open spaces for people to enjoy. An application to the NIA for additional funding allowed the completion of the excavation and the profiling of the spoil on higher ground alongside the railway line, as well as providing for

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seeds and hedging plants to increase biodiversity on site. Local residents were advised as to the work intended, and concerns about the possible shake-up of existing fauna (see Letter to the Editors) were addressed. Some recently-planted fruit trees, now threatened by the spoil heap, spent a couple of months on an allotment before being planted back on the Reserve. Work began on 8 October and was completed by 22 October. The contractors, JPR Environmental of Berkeley, Gloucestershire, did a fantastic job in very wet conditions, and have left the site generally in very good order. The reedbed is planted up, and surrounded by a temporary fence to allow the plants to establish undisturbed by larger birds and animals. Further linear scrapes have been created, and it is now up to us to manage this large new area of accessible ground. The top soil was placed under the spoil heap to reduce fertility there and also, we hope, bury deeply the myriad Himalayan Balsam seeds that must be in that soil. Soil tests have been taken from the spoil heap for analysis, to help us to choose the right meadow seeds to enhance that area, and we are very very pleased with the results overall. I hope you – and also of course the wildlife – will be too!



The pictures show before and during the work, the front page shows the site after work was completed.

As a finishing touch, the City Council has allocated funds to improve access to the site both at Popes Lane and at Wychall Road, to deter motor bikes, dumping etc. The new boundary fencing should be installed very shortly.

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*Dear Editors*

The proposed area for tipping spoil from the new reedbed near Wychall Road supports wildflowers, some of which I have not seen elsewhere on the reserve.

It is also the only place, apart from Sutton Park, where I regularly find the BURNET COMPANION moth during May & June each year. If this is the only colony of the moth, locally, it will be destroyed by the spoil heap.

I hope that my fears are unfounded and I will look carefully next year for evidence that the moth is still breeding on the reserve.

Yours truly

C.W. Edge

Having consulted the Ranger Service and the Wildlife Trust, Amanda replied: "I myself was concerned for the future of a small patch of *Geranium sanguineum*, Bloody Cranesbill, and have transplanted some of it elsewhere on site. I since gather from the Rangers that it occurs in a number of other places on the Reserve. The spoil heap will, when finally profiled and settled, be sown with an appropriate meadow wild flower mix and should therefore increase, rather than reduce, the variety of wildflowers on the meadow. Our Senior Ranger tells me that the Burnet Companion moth should not be significantly affected by the site works. I understand that the larvae feed on clover (*Trifolium*) and trefoil (*Lotus*), of which there is a good supply across the meadow." Realising that Mr Edge had made a careful study of this area over a period of time she encouraged him to share his wildlife records with EcoRecord, the biological record centre for Birmingham and the Black Country.

*Fly The Flag!*

Have you seen the latest addition to the Friends' wardrobe? It's a rather smart baseball cap, dark blue, with the FKNNR logo emblazoned on the front.

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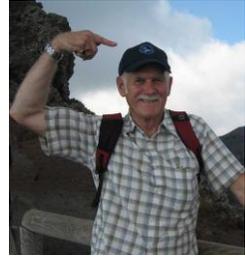
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Now, I'm not a lover of baseball caps. The main problem to me is that they're not British. They're an American import – always a bad start, as far as I'm concerned. However, when Amanda emailed that she had invested in a few for sale as work caps at £11, I thought 'Well, £11 isn't bad for a limited edition number. I think I'll have one. It might come in handy.'



When it came, I tried it on. One size fits all. Not bad, actually. Snug fit, around your head, rather than perching on top like Just William's cap. Sensible curved peak, with a good depth. Nice and cosy, in fact, but not too warm. Ideal for the "follically-challenged" man such as myself.

I like to promote the Reserve when I can, and this is a practical and stylish way of doing it. Why not "Fly the Flag"? I took mine on holiday to Italy. I didn't actually enrol any new members as a consequence but the cap was very useful. The photo is taken at the crater on Mount Vesuvius – I know it looks a bit like the local quarry but it isn't!



On my return, I suggested to Amanda that we should encourage members to do likewise – get a cap and take photos of themselves wearing it at different places in the world, and we could include some in the Newsletter. Amanda embraced the idea, hence the photo of Peter and herself at Paestum (again, it could be Wroxeter in Shropshire but it isn't – the weather looks too good).

So come on, readers. Buy your cap from Amanda – a snip at the price. Take it with you and let's see some photos from around the globe. We'll hold the competition after next summer, and there will be a bottle of wine for the best photo!

Get out there and Fly The Flag!

Graham Layton

FKNNR Fashion Guru

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*SUMMER Wildlife Report 2012*

The leaves are turning colour and falling from the trees. A typical autumn is now with us following an unusually wet summer with rainfall much higher than usual (154% of the 1981 – 2010 average). The UK had 371mm of rainfall, with only the summer of 1912 wetter, since 1910. It was also particularly dull, with approximately 82% of the usual amount of sunshine. The temperature in June, July and August was on average 13.9 degrees, which was 0.4 degrees below the 1981 – 2010 average. These figures mask the fact that in terms of sunshine and temperature the weather was better in August than the other two months. One of the consequences for us has been that the path in Sheila's Meadow became very muddy and finally the decision was taken to restrict access in order to allow the ground to recover. There are other paths on the Reserve that are also under pressure due to the wet conditions. The wildlife has been affected as well. This quarter's report focuses particularly on butterflies and moths. It is amazing what a variety we have present here.

The poor weather adversely affected some species of butterflies. Only a few Small Tortoiseshells were seen and Small Coppers and second brood Commas were extremely rare. Meadow Browns were less in evidence this year as were Common and Holly Blues. The Whites, Speckled Woods and Ringlets seemed as abundant as usual and there was a late summer surge of Red Admirals. The pretty little Skippers were also around. Peacocks put in sporadic appearances during the rare spells of sunshine and on 28 July, a solitary Marbled White was flying over the British Waterways meadow. Interestingly, this is the third sighting, at the same location, in consecutive years.

Moths noted during strolls through the Reserve included the Lime Hawk in the old orchard and the Eyed Hawk near the road gate to the British Waterways meadow. Burnet moths, which usually fly in the summer sunshine, were sparse this year. A Red Underwing and several Engrailed

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were spotted resting on tree trunks and a few Burnet Companions on the site now buried with spoil taken from the new reedbeds. Small Yellow Underwings, Silver Ground Carpets, Yellow Shells, Clouded Silvers and Latticed Heaths are quite common. They rest in the longer grass and wayside hedges and were seen when disturbed. Caterpillars of the large Elephant Hawk, Spectacle and Pale Tussock were seen wandering around looking for suitable places to pupate. Many others, too numerous and common to mention were encountered and it is pleasing that our urban Reserve has such large numbers and such a variety of these spectacular creatures.



Wychall Reservoir:  
Southern Hawker  
*Aeshna cyanea*



The EA scrapes:  
Red-veined Darter  
*Sympetrum fonscolombii*



Popes Lane scrape:  
Black-tailed Skimmer  
*Orthetrum cancellatum*

**This year we have noticed an increase in the number of dragonflies (see below – are we correct?). If anyone has identification skills in this area then please step forward! We can be sure that as reedbed enhancements occur and water quality improves then further species will be noticed.**

**As for the birds, the Great Crested Grebe successfully raised three young at Merecroft much to the delight of many. It is wonderful that they are back on the Reserve and breeding again. Other highlights of the summer were the presence of a number of young Tawny Owls made clear by their calls, late in the summer. Buzzards were seen from time to time, more often than in previous years, individuals sometimes sitting in the horse fields. A Kestrel**



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was seen hovering over Wychall meadows on 2 October and obligingly settled on a tree branch, which allowed close observation. During the previous week a Cormorant was seen on Merecroft Pool. The first Mallard ducklings were observed on the 30 April and many broods have been spotted this year up to a new brood seen on the 22 September. However, despite some 50+ young, overall it appears that only one brood of 5 made it to become adults. A list of the usual predators including Heron, Crow



and a Mink at Wychall all took their toll this year. Whilst high water levels washed out Reed Warblers and Reed Buntings, we have had some success with Chiffchaffs – family groups of 7 and 6 were observed to the rear of Wychall Reservoir on the 29 July and 10

September respectively. Teal returned to Wychall in the first week of September; the highest count to date is 22.

Plant highlights included the stunning Yellow Flag Irises around Sheila's pond and Ragged Robin. In fact the volume of Yellow Flag across the Reserve is now substantial and additional plantings have taken place in and around Wychall reservoir. A few tadpoles made it into froghood in Sheila's pond and work in that area inevitably shows up good numbers of both Common Frogs and Toads. A working party on the Peafields extension in September were entertained by the scurrying of a Common Shrew.

We now think that we are starting to benefit from the habitat management and improvement work undertaken by FKNNR volunteers since 2004. The diversity of plant life and hence insect varieties and numbers is on the increase. The presence of small mammals and amphibians is encouraging. The extension of the Reserve with a focus on the wetland areas can only lead to further wildlife encounters. Long may it be so.

**BE, JB, PB, PRE and others**

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### *FKNNR Diary Dates*

Please spare one or more hours of your time to help us implement the LNR Management Plan. Changes to the schedule may be made at short notice, please check the web site [www.fknnr.org.uk](http://www.fknnr.org.uk)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Details</b>
20-Nov	Pea fields extension	Tree work, Dead Hedge & Litter pick
<b>24-Nov</b>	Meadow Hill Rd	<b>Monthly Walk</b>
27-Nov	BW Meadow	Tracmaster, Litter pick & scythe
04-Dec	River Rea – South Bank	Clear rubbish/Coppice Hazel
11-Dec	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up, Litter pick & scythe
18-Dec	Wychall Reservoir rear	Reedbed clearance of willow
<b>01-Jan</b>	Meadow Hill Rd	<b>Monthly Walk</b>
01-Jan	Old Orchard/Beaks Hill Rd	Tidy up, Litter pick, <b>BBQ at noon</b>
08-Jan	Pea Fields extension	Tree work
15-Jan	Wychall Reservoir rear	Reedbed clearance
22-Jan	Camp Lane entrance	Tidy up, Litter pick & coppicing
<b>26-Jan</b>	Meadow Hill Rd	<b>Monthly Walk</b>
29-Jan	Pea Fields extension	New reedbed work
05-Feb	Pea Fields extension	Tree work
12-Feb	Wychall Meadows	Tidy up, Litter pick & dead hedge
<b>17-Feb</b>	<b>All LNR</b>	<b>Sunday Litter Pick</b>
19-Feb	BW & Sheila's Meadow	Tidy up, Litter pick & dead hedge
<b>23-Feb</b>	Meadow Hill Rd	<b>Monthly Walk</b>
26-Feb	Wychall – Two Scrapes	Reedbed maintenance
05-Mar	Wychall Reservoir rear	Reedbed clearance
12-Mar	Pea Fields extension	Tidy up, Litter pick & dead hedge
19-Mar	Old Orchard/Beaks Hill Rd	Tidy up, Litter pick & dead hedge
26-Mar	Wychall Dam	Rake up grass cuttings
<b>30-Mar</b>	Meadow Hill Rd	<b>Monthly Walk</b>

*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.

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### *Tail Piece*

This kestrel was warming its toes on Brian's radio aerial, and scanning Pinehurst meadow for prey, unperturbed by his pottering around with the camera. Our management of Pinehurst must be working well for the local vole population



### *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 (co-opted)		Andrew Nabbs	0121 458 6983
Trustees	*	Alan Bakewell	0121 603 1127
	*	Phil Evans	0121 628 6769

(\* Denotes Trustee of the Charity)

**Committee Members:** Peter Cage, David Hampson, Brian Hewitt, Nicola Human, Mike Lawrence, Elizabeth Parker, Jean Perring, Anne Price, Val Saunders. Andrew Nabbs (co-opted)

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

Environment Agency Hotline	0800 807060
City Parks Department Call Centre	0121 464 8728
Northfield Rangers	0121 445 6036
West Midlands Police	0345 113 5000 ext. 7826 6363
Anti-Social Behaviour Hotline	0121 303 1111

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