

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 31 - Spring 2013

Registered Charity No: 1122293

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Snow again!



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Newsletter 31

55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton

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Chairman's Notes

This Newsletter is late in appearing, and it's all my fault, with too many things taking me away from my office! I am writing as we find ourselves again covered in snow, though by the time you read this I hope we will be back to the approach of spring. The weather this winter has curtailed or cancelled a number of Tuesday WorkOuts!

One of the things keeping me busy at present is the development of a series of 'Kings Norton Trails' leaflets, the brainchild on the newly-formed Lifford Business Association and aiming to increase footfall in shops on the Green. One of these leaflets takes in much of the Reserve, as well as Kings Norton Park, and Lynn Horsnett and I have developed the walk. Ours is not going to be the first leaflet off the stocks (which will launch in May, in time for the May Farmers' Market) but I hope ours will follow soon. The generic front cover design for the leaflets is by young Friend of the Reserve (and my neighbour) Oliver Blackburn, who also designed the work on the railway bridge for Kings Norton Boys' School.

The Popes Lane extension to the Reserve still does not have formal LNR designation (the application in front of it is taking much longer than expected), but I can report that we have done a great deal of follow-up work on the Nature Improvement Area, sowing Yellow Rattle seed on the meadow area and planting the first half of a new hedge line (also with NIA funding). A second delivery of hedging plants is awaited to finish the job, and I am hugely grateful to all who have been involved in preparing the ground and doing the planting thus far – the TWO team and the Birmingham and Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers working together to plant a magnificent 400-odd mixed native young trees. On 16 November I attended a site visit to more or less sign off the contractors' work on the NIA site with the Rangers and the Wildlife Trust – though the contractors have still to return and finish the profiling of the spoil heap and reedbed surrounds when (if??) the weather allows the ground to dry out. In the meantime new fencing and entrance barriers (allowing pedestrian but not motorbike access) have been put in place at Wychall Road and Popes Lane, and the whole area suddenly looks

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much more 'cared for'. I was proud to give a presentation to a Nature Improvement Area conference on 6 March on the success of our project. I am so very grateful to all involved in this partnership working for the benefit of our site and the Rea corridor.

As if that achievement were not enough, the Community Chest found funds to allow us to have an existing scrape to the reservoir side of Popes Lane re-dredged to remove an incursion of crack willow. Without this work the scrape would gradually have dried out. This was a skilled task for the contractor, taking care to avoid disturbing some significant areas of Japanese Knotweed. I'm grateful to all involved – not least David Hampson, who drove the project forward.

The Nature Reserve Management Committee (of which I am Secretary) held its AGM on 6 December. At this meeting Graham Layton relinquished the role of Chairman, a position which he has held with great distinction for the past two years. David Human nobly stepped up to the plate, and promises to be a most thoughtful and thorough successor.

Your Committee is concerned to ensure the Friends' finances remain sound. We have recently had some large, but necessary, out-goings, especially in producing new publicity leaflets. These have been designed by our own Brian Hewitt, thus saving us considerably on costs, but printing is inevitably expensive. We now have a good stock to last us for some time, but this has dented our funds. We have been paying travelling expenses for the 'Solihull Boys' for the past several years to allow them to work on the Reserve – effectively at least doubling the work that can be undertaken week by week. But it is now clear that this will be impossible to fund in the future without an injection of funds. I have put in an application to the Community Chest but reduced funding there makes a positive outcome less than likely (in fact I've already heard that Northfield Ward cannot support the proportion I asked for from them to cover work on the Peafields extension). Of course, subscriptions from members form the backbone of our core funding. If you would like us to continue the level of development work that has been possible on the Reserve thus far, therefore, please ensure that your subscription (only £7

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per annum per household, and £5 concessions) remains up to date.

May I remind you that the Friends' AGM takes place on Monday 20 May. The minutes of last year's meeting are attached to this Newsletter. This is your opportunity to have your say on issues that concern you! Watch out for the formal meeting notice, and do please join us then.

We have recently learnt that Sue Ashley, who has been the grazier of the meadows by Kingshill Drive and tenant of the associated barn, is to give up her tenancy, taking her horse nearer to her home in Wythall. We wish her well, and thank her for her long service on our Management Committee. The future of the meadows and barn are somewhat uncertain, though I have received a detailed and fairly encouraging report from our Constituency Parks Manager. The meadows and barn are part of the designated LNR, and it is intended that the meadows will be re-let for grazing. The barn (which dates back to New House Farm days, probably early 19th-century, and is apparently full of historic stabling equipment) apparently has some significant structural faults, a potential financial hazard for the City Council as current owner. The City Planning Department is proposing a sale at auction on a long-term lease with conditions in place to ensure that the barn be retained for agricultural purposes. It seems very unlikely therefore that it could be sold freehold to be developed as a house, as some concerned local residents fear... Any future grazier would need access to shelter for horses, while we, the Friends, wonder whether the barn might offer permanent storage space for our tools and other equipment. So we are watching this space very carefully, and are working closely with the Rangers to clarify the present situation and to ensure that the grazing meadows and barn stay being just that.

The last couple of months have seen the 70th birthdays of regular Tuesday WorkersOut Brian and Maswyn Hewitt, so I send belated celebratory greetings and thanks to them from us all for all they do for the Reserve. I also send very best wishes to WorkerOut Mike Lawrence who is unwell and currently unable to join us on Tuesdays. And I regret to announce the passing of Cyril Ashmore. He was a long-standing and tireless member of the Rea Valley

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Conservation Group, serving as a committee member and walks organiser for many years. Rarely seen without his cap and jacket, even on the warmest day, Cyril was also a good Friend of Kings Norton LNR, turning out very recently to take part in our 17 February Litter Pick.

Returning to the issue of finances: one of our major financial outgoings is the cost of producing the Newsletter, though of course most are then delivered by hand, saving postage costs. If you would be willing to receive your Newsletter electronically, please let us know and ensure we have your up-to-date email address. The Newsletters are already available as a download from our website, and if we could circulate an email message to 'pick up your copy' from it, that would save us a great deal in production costs and delivery time.

Finally, you can keep up to date with news, and contribute your own wildlife sightings by visiting our Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/knreserve>. Many thanks to Ged Hickman for setting this up for us, and to all those who have already registered as Friends.

Amanda Cadman, 26 March 2013

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 27 June 2013.

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Membership Report

Since our last newsletter we have boosted our membership with 10 new friends joining. A very warm welcome to you all (names listed below). Thank you also to our existing Friends who shared news of the Nature Reserve and handed out the leaflets that were included in the last newsletter to their neighbours, as it is from your efforts that our membership has grown so well this quarter.

The other good news since my last report is that I have received many overdue subs. During the days of the (first) "deep" snow, I contacted many friends whose subscription were 2 years overdue and have been busy since banking their cheques. So thank you indeed for your continued support. However my work is not done yet as I still have a list of friends who have not yet paid for 2012/13. So please do not wait for me to contact you, send your cheque or standing order form to me now so that I can put a nice green tick against your name. Thank you very much.

Alistair Howard
16 Grassmoor Road, Kings Norton B38 8BP

New Members

P Childs, B Newman, A Adams, G Hobbs, D Johnson, M Payne, S Johnson, S Holmes, L Perks and W Greenaway.

Welcome to you all.

School Report

December was an active month working with Kings Norton Nursery and Children's Centre (KNNCC). On the 1st at the invitation of the nursery we had our display boards at their Open Day. This generated quite a lot of interest from parents for a variety of reasons. Although most were aware of the reserve in one way or another a number were not aware of the how large it is, having not explored beyond the limits of where they usually went. Perhaps surprisingly, some parents thought that the areas

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accessible from Meadow Hill and Beaks Hill were in fact private property and so hadn't ventured in. Let's hope they do now.

As part of the KNNCC application for the Eco-School Green Flag award parents were keen to take part in a guided walk in order to find out more about the Reserve as a local resource. Two walks took place just before Christmas and were arranged so that parents could bring their children to the nursery and then have a child-free hour or so exploring the reserve. The first was attended by 6 parents on what was a very cold bright day with foliage sparkling under a heavy hoar frost, definitely a great day to see the Reserve. The second walk, a few days later, was understandably less well attended due to the demands of preparing for Christmas. No frost this time, with the ground back to its sodden condition but this did not hinder us in any way. Both walks followed a similar route, along the cycle path to the reservoir and then back to British Waterways Meadow, round to Merecroft and along the side of Pinehurst to come back to Westhill Road.

As I had not led a walk before, I enlisted the help of Graham and Amanda and my thanks go to them for also giving up time in the run-up to Christmas. Thanks also to Deputy Head Gemma Weaving for her input and encouragement, as well as for the coffee and mince pies at the end of the walks.

Feedback from the parents on both walks has been very positive, with some who had grown up in the area recalling childhood adventures playing in the meadows, and with another being delighted upon discovering the wild garlic. At their request a spring walk has been arranged for 18th April and we will this time head for the Peafields extension. Several of the parents attend an art class at the centre and are keen to combine a walk with the opportunity to do some drawing. Thanks must also go to the parents themselves for their enthusiasm about the Reserve and to Claire in particular who seemed to acquire parents as we walked. Plans are underway for the parents to contribute to the forthcoming Welcome to Spring Day.

At the other end of the Reserve Wychall Farm Primary, led by teacher Sarah Douglas, similarly continue to show a great interest

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in what is happening. Intentions for some of the pupils to go out on to the Reserve were very much curtailed by the winter weather. However instead I was asked to speak about some of the problems in caring for the Reserve, being mainly Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed and litter. I was very happy to do this, and expected a class of around 30. Somewhat to my surprise I found myself in front of a group of 50 pupils aged 8 or 9 for what proved to be a very enjoyable 45 minutes. The children were clearly very well informed about environmental issues in general and the Reserve in particular. When I asked if they had any questions a forest of hands shot into the air with faces eager to be chosen to put a question, all of which were well articulated and thought out.

By Andrew Nabbs

Wildlife Watch – Winter 2012/2013

This winter has been particularly wet and has included two periods when snow lay on the ground for many days at a time accompanied by freezing temperatures. The number of, and variety of, sightings of birds seems to have been less than last year. Very few Redwings and Fieldfares have been seen with only the occasional glimpse of Redwing near Merecroft Pool and 3 Fieldfare on Wychall Reservoir dam. There was an eruption of Waxwings this winter into the UK but none has actually been seen on the Nature Reserve (perhaps because we don't yet have a significant number of trees bearing copious berries – a favourite food source), although a small flock has visited shrubs around the Wychall Lane Bowling Club car park, and another group (the same one?) was spotted near St Nicolas Gardens a short time later.



Waxwing

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The Goosanders appeared again on about the 4 November at Merecroft Pool and the maximum at one time has been 15. and in fewer numbers than last year. On one occasion in mid-February a total of 40 ducks were observed on Merecroft: 15 Goosanders and 35 Mallard. Had they been disturbed at their usual haunts on that day?

A pair of Ravens were heard and seen before Christmas and have been heard occasionally since then. The same can be said for three Buzzards that can be seen soaring over Kings Norton on an infrequent basis. Other LNR sightings have included Grey Herons, a Kestrel, Goldcrests, Bullfinches, Goldfinches, Grey Wagtails and a Kingfisher on 28 December. The importance of Wychall Reservoir as an over-wintering roost site for Corvids was evident again this year.



Redpoll

Some 400+ Jackdaws and several hundred Magpies and Carrion Crows were present at the bleakest points during the winter.

In surrounding gardens were to be found on feeders on a number of occasions. These over-wintering Blackcaps are migrants from Scandinavia, whereas the Blackcaps that breed here in the summer are also migrants but they arrive

in the spring and then depart for southern Europe in the autumn. There have also been sightings of Redpoll and Siskin but again not as frequently as we would like.

On the 19 February it seemed like spring was definitely in the air as the sun shone and the drumming of the Great Spotted Woodpecker could be heard loudly and repeatedly near Sheila's Meadow. A pair



Woodpeckers on Brian's patio looking for ants

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of Green Woodpeckers has been seen frequently on both sides of Pope's Lane inspecting the many Crack Willow trees and Starlings have already chosen their favourite nest holes. Snowdrops were showing well in several places (the first ones emerging in January). Another sign of the forthcoming breeding season was the raucous noise of a few Canada Geese on the island in Merecroft as they presumably fought for territory or females?



Muntjac

On the mammal front, we have several reports of Muntjac Deer sightings including those of one brave male (presumably the same one) seen up Wychall Park Grove and under the Pope's Lane railway bridge. These views have been

supplemented with many of Red Fox and Grey Squirrel.

It's now time to look forward to spring! The first Chiffchaffs are normally heard towards the end of March – it has been suggested we should all listen out for these instead of Cuckoos, which have become scarce. The call of the Chiffchaff sounds like its name, and is loud and distinctive. It is common on the LNR during the summer. Everyone can easily recognise it with just a little practice! (Come on our dawn chorus walk in May). Also at the end of March frogs will gather in the ponds and tadpoles can usually be seen a week or two later. In the woods Celandines and Wood Anemones are early flowering. Please keep watching.

PB, JB, GL, PRE and others

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REA VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP NEWS

This is our 25th Anniversary Year. So we hope that KNNR members will be able to join us during the year to celebrate what I think is an achievement.

All meetings take place at the Friends Meeting House, Watford Road, Cotteridge,(50 yards on the left from the mini roundabout), at 7.30pm.

Friday 12th April Annual Dinner, Toby Carvery, Marlbrook, Birmingham Road, Bromsgrove.7.30pm. Please ring 477 2629 to book your place by Tuesday 9th April as we need to know numbers. Also say if you require transport.

Friday 10th May. Meeting Jean Summers a RSPB volunteer will give a presentation 'A week on Ramsay Island'

Friday 14th June Meeting Don Hazzard Talk on 'The Austin Village and Longbridge Motor Works

Friday 12th July Meeting to be arranged

Friday 9th August Meeting Talk by Mo. She is a professional botanical artist and herbalist and she will appear in medieval pedlars costume. There will be items to buy

Friday 13th September Talk by Peter Childs, Founder Chair of RVCG, Twenty Five Years of the Rea Valley and The Thames Footpath Walk

Friday 8th October Meeting Phil Evans The Wild Life of North Spain and Belorussia.

Friday 11th October Annual General Meeting followed by a social event

Conservation work at our Coleys Lane site has continued steadily over the past year. We were grateful to the Friends of KNNR for coming to scythe our wild flower meadow ready for renewed growth this summer. We hope the display will be as good as last year – fingers crossed. Our own members have been busy cutting up and disposing of surplus crack willow trunks, making habitat

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piles of the smaller branches, clearing brambles and pathways, picking up litter. It looks as if City Housing are going to replace the broken-down fence fronting Coleys Lane. That all for now folks.

Roland L Kedge Chair RVCG

There's no such thing as the Dog Poo Fairy

There seem to be a good many dog-owners around here who believe in the Dog Poo Fairy. They take their dogs walking around the Reserve, carefully wrap up the resultant poo in little bags (tasteful black, or green) and then hang the bags up on trees or throw them into the brambles for the Poo Fairy to magic away. But there aren't any Poo Fairies around Kings Norton, there are no

anonymous 'they' to clear these bag-garnished trees and to fly with magic wands over the expanses of bramble to untangle the flimsy bags. Instead it is we Friends of the LNR, volunteers and local residents, who have to try to deal with this increasing



problem and, frankly, **WE ARE FED UP** with having to clear up after other people's dogs, or rather, after the owners themselves.

Seriously, increasing amounts of bagged dog faeces are being left behind as people fail to dispose of their bags after cleaning up after their pets. Research has also found that 70% of local authorities nationally have some sort of problem within their area. Keep Britain Tidy has launched a national campaign around the Dog Poo Fairy to encourage irresponsible dog owners to clean up after their pets. Their campaign is based around a case study on a toddler, Aimee, who hit news headlines after falling in dog poo and losing partial sight in her eye after suffering with toxocariasis.

Please please, if you are a local dog-walker, do take your dog's 'doings' home or put them in any of the bins on site. And if you sight someone else dumping dog poo bags (especially around

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Sheila's Meadow, which seems to be a hot spot for dangling bags), please point out that we volunteers don't see why we should do their dirty business for them!

A gentle reminder from a concerned Friend

Dear Friends

From previous issues, you may be aware that we are making an effort to increase our membership. Indeed, in her notes in the last issue our Chairman highlighted that if each current member enrolled just one new household, that would double our membership, and be of enormous financial benefit to support our work on the Reserve.

Our Honorary Officers, committee members and work parties all give of their time without payment, but there are necessary expenses incurred, and your support, both past and present, is most greatly appreciated. Thank you all so very much.

Perhaps when you meet with family and friends, you might talk about the work we do caring for and improving the Reserve, and the benefits to the environment, and suggest membership. Once again a very big thank you to you all!

Membership application forms can be obtained from our officers shown on the back page of the Newsletter. And if you haven't yet paid your subscription for 2012/13, please remember to do so now!

Welcome to Spring – Saturday 4 May 2013

We are planning a day of activities for Friends, Families and Neighbours to welcome in spring on the Reserve and to share enjoyment of being out in the fresh air. We would love to increase membership of the Friends (not least so that we can boost our finances and keep up the level of work we do on site weekly), so – **each one reach one!** Please bring your families, friends and neighbours to discover what the Reserve has to offer.

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The day will feature three main walking events: a 5.30 am Dawn Chorus Walk led by Phil Evans and Peter Bromley (last year we identified 32 different species), an afternoon family-friendly walk led by Amanda Cadman in association with South Birmingham Ramblers, and an evening Bat Walk led by Brian Hewitt with bat detectors at the ready.

We are planning a day of events on British Waterways Meadow, running from 10.30 am to 3.30 pm. Details are still to be finalised, but you can expect pond-dipping, a treasure hunt, woodland crafts, bird-spotting for young people, duck racing, bird-feeder-making and of course a tombola and catering.

Come and join us!



Friends preparing to plant a new hedge line on the Pea Fields.

Acknowledgements:

The Muntjac and Waxwing photos were obtained from the [Wikimedia Commons](#). Other photos by friends of the nature reserve.

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FKNNR Diary Dates

Changes to the schedule may be made at short notice, please check the web site www.fknnr.org.uk. Unless otherwise stated, all events start at 10.30

Date	Location	Details
2 April	River Rea – South Bank	Clear rubbish/Tidy Hazel
9 April	Wychall cycle route – 2 ponds	Bench seat/reedbed maintenance
16 April	Wychall Reservoir EA Scrapes	Maintenance/scythe surrounds
23 April	River Rea – North Bank	Paths/fallen tree/remove laurel
27 April	Meadow Hill Rd	Monthly Walk
30 April	BW & Sheila's Meadow	Tidy up, litter pick & scythe
4 May	"Welcome to Spring" Event	
4 May	(05.30) Burman's Drive start	Dawn Chorus Walk
4 May	(10.30–3.30) British Waterways Meadow	Family activities
4 May	(14.00) Kings Norton Green with South Birmingham Ramblers	Family walk to the Reserve
4 May	(05.30) Burman's Drive	Bat Walk
7 May	DAY OUT	Visit another Reserve
14 May	Pinehurst Garage	Carpentry – Bird/Bat Boxes
21 May	Pea Fields extension	New hedge line – weed/prune
25 May	Meadow Hill Rd	Monthly Walk
28 May	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up, Litter pick & scythe
4 June	BW & Sheila's Meadow	Tidy up, Balsam, Litter pick & scythe
11 June	Pea Fields – New scrape	Balsam clearance/ litter pick & scythe
18 June	River Rea – North Bank	Balsam clearance/Path maintain
25 June	Popes Lane Pool area	Balsam clearance/Path maintain
29 June	Meadow Hill Rd	Monthly Walk
2 July	Pea Fields extension	New hedge line – weed/prune
9 July	Wychall Res – cycle path	Balsam clearance/Bench maintenance
16 July	Pea Fields – New scrape	Balsam clearance/ litter pick & scythe
23 July	Wychall Reservoir rear	Balsam clearance/Path maintain
27 July	Meadow Hill Rd	Monthly Walk
30 July	BW Meadow	Tidy up/Tracmaster work
6 Aug	Old Orchard/Beaks Hill Road	Tidy up, litter pick & scythe

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Tail Piece

Eurasian Blackcap

Sylvia Atricapilla_male



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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