

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 32 - Summer 2013

Registered Charity No: 1122293

www.fknnr.org.uk



A Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* at Wychall Reservoir (PRE).



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Newsletter 32

55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton

Registered Charity No. 1122293

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Chairman's Notes

Well, the AGM made a selection and I am now in post. As your new Chairman I will, first of all, pay tribute to the work done by Amanda over the past few years and I can say without contradiction that the high standing and reputation of the 'Friends' throughout Birmingham is testament to the hard work she has done. I will do my level best to maintain the position we have risen to and I hope that my past experiences gained as Secretary and then Treasurer of the 'Friends' will stand me in good stead. Your Committee was in the main re-elected for a further two years at the AGM and the combined wisdom of those willing to give of their time quite feely for the cause is something we should all be truly thankful for.

The Local Nature Reserve [LNR] means a lot to me and the desire to see it maintained and improved has grown since I first attended a local meeting in October 2001 called by Alan & Shirley Bakewell to discuss improvements to the Wychall Reservoir site. It was the inspired actions of these two individuals that saw city cash spent on site environmental improvements. Later in 2004 the 'Friends' of Wychall Reservoir expanded to embrace the whole of the LNR. I shall look forward to some interesting discussions with Alan, our first Chairman and still a Trustee at one of the local coffee shops!

Well, what has come my way since the AGM on the 20 May? The first issue of concern was the decision of the City (Property Services) to dispose of their interest in the stables and the grazing rights which form an important element of the LNR next to Kings Hill Drive. A freehold sale was mooted splitting the stables from the grazing. This idea, which defies all logic, became the subject of discussions with the local Councillors who, like us, had been omitted from the consultation process. An urgent meeting was called on the 3 June. We firmly believe that the land, with LNR status and long-standing covenants, must remain integral to the LNR. It was agreed that the City should seek to maintain the existing use of the meadows through a long leasehold sale of a combination of the land and buildings. We expect confirmation of the way forward this coming October.

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Other issues, which are current, include the possible felling of tall trees on the dams at Merecroft Pool and Wychall Reservoir. The Environment Agency [EA] are worried of the 'sail' effects such trees have on the earth of the dams themselves. They also wish to spray herbicides on areas of the Wychall site to aid their inspection regime. The EA are keen to consult with us and it is reassuring that they also sympathise with our desire for a self-sustaining wild flower meadow on the western slope of the Wychall dam.

Elsewhere, recent improvements include the completion of the wetland development on the 'Pea Fields' extension area courtesy of 'Birmingham Nature Improvement Area' [NIA] funds, the clearance of the old (now new) scrape at Popes Lane courtesy of Kings Norton Ward Community Chest Funds and new stylish fencing on Wychall Road and Popes Lane. Thanks to the City and especially Sue Amey for finding the finance for the last item and to the Rangers for two rapid repairs to combat vandalism. The Rangers have also been busy trying to combat problems with Japanese knotweed across the LNR and I wish them well with the task given the issues that are arising at the Lickey Hills.

I now turn to the future and to a vision for development. I believe the LNR can become a centre of excellence for an urban wetland. Given its importance as part of the Birmingham flood alleviation measures, there should be scope for an expansion of open water and new reed beds. So following discussions with the City and the EA, I trust we can raise the funds to start some work this coming winter. Approaches will be made to the NIA and Lottery for the cash to make some progress. We have also registered our interest in acquiring some additional trees (Birmingham Trees for Life) in order to replace some removed along Wychall Lane for the H&S cause. Finally I must comment on the continuing need for your support (and finance) since such support is the essence of the community spirit that has driven us since we were formed. It is my intention that we introduce some weekend working party activity so that those who miss out on the current Tuesday fun have the opportunity to participate. We shall also be asking for donations from local householders. We are the best LNR in the City – let us all work hard to keep it in that position. My thanks to you all.

Phil Evans, Chairman.

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This is your Newsletter. Please let us know if you have an article for publication or photos of wildlife. 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.

An Update On Our Membership

Welcome to a brief update on our membership. At the recent AGM, I distributed the membership numbers as at the 31 March 2013 as 206. The membership fluctuated throughout last year with the welcome news of 14 new members, but we did also lose 33. The loss of 33 members is a shame as many of them are as a result of not paying their subscriptions for 2 or more years, in spite of reminders in the Newsletter and follow ups to chase the subs. Additionally we have another 30+ members owing for the 2012/13 year. But it does not stop there.

1 June 2013 marked the start of our new subscription year! Yes time does fly by. It is the June bank statement, which lands with a pleasant thud on my doormat, as it is a bumper statement with many members paying their subs via a standing order. It is so easy to set up and takes all of the worries away such as "have I paid?" or "do I need to write a cheque, and where do I send it?" Please consider setting up a standing order if you have not already done so, I am very happy to forward you a form to complete.

Finally I would like to reiterate the decision made at the AGM to keep the subscriptions at their current level for another year. That is £7 per household and represents incredible value. This does not mean it is a maximum amount to pay, we are extremely grateful for donations over and above the subscription and if you can flag this for 'gift aid' too, then we can claim extra from HMG coffers. So I am looking forward to receiving the last few subs for 2012/13 and all of those now due for 2013/14.

Finally a warm welcome to our newest members, Kathy Jeffery, Richard Hunter, Margi and Dave Slade.

Alistair Howard, Treasurer & Membership Secretary.

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Wasp Beetle *Clytus arietis*



The Wasp Beetle is a small, narrow-bodied longhorn beetle. The larvae live in warm, dry, dead wood, such as fence posts and dead branches, and particularly favour willow and birch. The adults can be found feeding on flowers along woodland rides and hedgerows during the summer.

The Wasp Beetle lives up to its name by mimicking the Common Wasp in both colouration and in its behaviour, moving in a jerky fashion similar to a wasp's flight. This mimicry keeps it safe from predators, even though it is actually harmless.

The Wasp Beetle is black with yellow bands on the body, and relatively short antennae. There are several other black and yellow longhorn beetles, but most have more pointed bodies and longer antennae. It is widespread in England and Wales, but rare in Scotland.

Fact: Wasp Beetles sometimes hatch out of firewood that has been brought in to the house to dry over the winter. This photograph was taken on the LNR by D Mantell

Education Update - Spring 2013

Helen Thurston, Head teacher of ARK Rose Academy (formerly Primrose Hill) kindly invited me to talk to her pupils about the LNR, which I did at the end of April. I spoke separately to years 3 and 4 followed by the whole school in the end of day assembly. As this was only a few days before the Spring Day it was an ideal opportunity to make the children aware of our spring event and encourage them to ask their parents/carers to bring them along.

This age group always shows great interest and enthusiasm and these children were no exception, asking a wide variety of questions particularly about Hedgehogs although I had to admit I

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did not know if any had been seen on the LNR (*Ed – sightings always welcome, last one seen in Pinehurst Meadow in 2010*). Helen is very keen for the children to be far more aware of nature, particularly as the main catchment area for the academy is on the Three Estates development.

On the day of the event Gemma Weaving, (Kings Norton Nursery and Children's Centre KNNC), came to help run a stall making bird feeders using plastic water bottles, the perches being made from young willow branches cut from the abundant crack willow on the LNR. This activity proved very popular with children of all ages as well as their parents. By the end of the afternoon what at the start has seemed to be a more than adequate supply of bottles had run out and to avoid disappointment to one child it was necessary to empty out our own bottles of water! Gemma had the good foresight to bring along some nursery-size tables and chairs together with some bright green play dough, shape cutters and pattern makers. This was also very popular with a steady stream of children sitting down and concentrating on making all sorts of interesting models. One young girl asked for ideas about what to make on the theme of food so it was suggested it could be something green, the colour of play dough, from the green grocers. Without hesitation she responded, "I know, a pizza!" Interesting! KNNCC continue to make good use of the LNR and for their recent charity week have held two sponsored walks from the West Hill Road entrance along the cycle path to the reservoir. The money raised will be shared between two charities, the local Acorns Hospice for children and an African project for making wells. About 80 parents took part in total, many of whom were not fully aware of the extent of the LNR; hopefully they will now take the opportunity to explore it further.

Having been a co-opted committee member since May last year my thanks to those at the AGM who voted for me to be a full committee member. It has been commented that the academic year limits the amount of time available to liaise with schools. I have found this to be very true but I think my next objective should be the secondary schools. "Must try harder!"

Andrew Nabbs, Education Liaison.

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Wildlife Report - Spring 2013

Yet again we have had unusual weather this quarter, and it has inevitably had an impact on the wildlife in the Reserve. This spring was the coldest since 1962 and March was exceptionally cold with a mean temperature of 2.2 degrees. Snow lay on the ground for long periods as winds from the north and east brought cold air from polar and northern European regions. Merecroft Pool and Wychall Reservoir froze over and large areas of ice remained for considerable periods of time. If you were out and about around Merecroft Pool in March you will have undoubtedly seen the unusual site of yellow dwarf daffodils in full bloom poking through the snow.

In summary, everything has been held back this year because of the unusual conditions. Who could fail to be surprised at the sight of Bluebells in mid-June? More recently many parts of the Reserve have had a stunning display of flowers with yellow Buttercups in wild abundance filling the triangle field by Beaks Hill Road and Yellow Irises standing proud both there and in Sheila's pond and Wychall Reservoir. The white umbellifers and pink Campion on the bank above the Sheila's pond have been beautiful and present in large numbers (taking over from the Snowdrops that also like this spot). Walking into the Reserve by Merecroft has of late meant treading on a carpet of Red Horse Chestnut petals that never fails to impress. Finally the smell of Wild Garlic wafting up, even to Wychall Lane, from along the River Rea was at times almost overpowering this year.

After the terrible start, all the plants seemed to be in a mad rush to get a move on and catch up. Our butterflies also put in a late appearance this year, with the first Peacocks flying at the beginning of April despite the lying snow! Sunny spells brought out several Brimstones on 6 April when the last of the snow was melting and a Small Tortoiseshell was seen in Pinehurst on 17 April. All these species were noted regularly taking advantage of sunny days during the last 2 weeks of April when they were joined by Whites, Commas and a single Red Admiral. There is also some good news to report! A Burnet Companion moth was observed in the Peafields on 13 June. There was some concern last year that

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this moth might disappear from the LNR after the tipping of spoil from the new reed bed onto a possible breeding site. Thankfully, it seems to have clung on despite this (no doubt inadvertent) threat to its survival.

During May, Orange Tips *Anthocharis cardamines* were abroad in good numbers and Speckled Woods were seen enjoying the dappled shade of the trees on the LNR. A Waved Umber and a Common Quaker (two of the commoner spring moths) were found resting on fence posts.



The fields previously grazed by the horses are now a sea of wildflowers and as a result on 9 June they attracted large numbers of Small Coppers *Lycaena phlaeas*. It was an impressive sight watching these tiny, colourful butterflies flitting from flower to flower in the warm sunshine. On the same day a female Orange Tip was seen laying eggs on its food plant in Sheila's Meadow, and a number of Peacocks and Commas basked in the sun by one of the small watercourses.



Two photographs of a Small Copper (above) and an Orange Tip (below) by PRE.

Amongst the **birds** the star sightings have probably been the Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* at Wychall Reservoir, seen on 29 March and also the Common Tern seen on 24 June at Merecroft Pool. A

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single Mute Swan has been present at Merecroft Pool since about 23 March but sadly also only one Great Crested Grebe has returned periodically (so no nest and offspring this year). The Goosanders were with us in small numbers up until about 11 March and a male Pochard was seen on 1 April. A pair of Tufted Duck has been present at Merecroft on and off (sometimes 3 or 4) but they don't seem to have stayed on to breed, whilst wintering Teal remained at Wychall Reservoir and nine were spotted on 3 March. A splendid male Wood Duck *Aix sponsa* was observed at Wychall Reservoir on the 31 March.



Some interesting bird photographs. Above left, the Little Egret mentioned above (R Belfield), on the left a Bohemian Waxwing at the KN Bowling Club (PRE) as mentioned in the last Newsletter and above right a Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* (PRE) arrives early in trees fronting Merecroft Pool. At the latest count there were at least 10 Blackcaps and 4 Whitethroats on the LNR – a sign of some good but late insect activity!

On the subject of photographs how about a competition with the winning photos for each month being used in a calendar or for the next set of cards? Jil Bromley. Comments please.

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Earlier in the spring the LNR played host to large groups of noisy Siskins, whose numbers have been rising across the country. Also in March, Redpolls were seen at a feeder in a garden near the Reserve. Redpolls have only recently started to take advantage of garden bird feeders in this way, seemingly just 'topping up' for a short period in the early spring before heading off to their breeding grounds.

Many of the spring migrant birds were late – no Chiffchaffs until the second week of April (normally very reliable, arriving in numbers on March the twenty-something) and they turned up at the same time as the Willow Warblers, which arrived at more or less their normal time. Swallows too were late, but they also stayed late. There were up to 7 feeding over Merecroft Pool (which they tend to do on wetter and cooler days) and a pair was still present until early June, giving rise to thoughts that they might be nesting locally, but they haven't been seen for a few weeks now. They like to 'hawk' for insects around grazing animals, so maybe the disappearance of the horses made the area less attractive.

Swifts also arrived late, they normally arrive in the first week of May – they were a couple of weeks late, and sadly their numbers seem to be dwindling away, a national trend. All the insect-eaters have been affected by food shortage because of the cold spring and have modified their behaviour - on May 30 there was an unusual sight when a large evening emergence of insects from the water in Merecroft attracted both bats (out early) and 2 Swifts (out late), swooping together through the columns of flies!

Finally, the possible location of the nests of a Goldcrest and a Treecreeper were identified and a pair of Kestrels was seen possibly with a nest in the vicinity. Pairs of both Great Spotted Woodpecker and Long-tailed Tit have bred successfully near Wychall Reservoir and we have our usual numbers of young Coot at Merecroft. Moorhen at Wychall and Mallard at both. So a slow start has been rewarded by a very interesting and productive late spring.

JB, BB, PB, PRE.

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Farmers Market at 100

The Friends were thrilled to receive a £100 donation from Kings Norton Farmers' Market towards our 'Welcome to spring' event, and we look forward to taking our place again on the Community stall at the Market in due course.

You may not be aware that the Farmers' Market on Saturday 14 September will be the 100th since the Farmers' Market came into existence. There is no doubt that the Market has made a huge difference to the life and community spirit of Kings Norton and we offer our sincere congratulations to all involved in helping the Market to reach this milestone. Do come along and join in the celebrations!

A Return Outing to Middleton Lakes

On the 7th May we had a day off from our Tuesday work on the LNR and went off to Middleton Lakes. This is a new RSPB Reserve where we have been before, so it was interesting to see how it has come on in the last two years. Starting from scratch is a process that we can mimic on our own LNR. We didn't have a conducted tour this time but were left to wander at will – which wasn't quite as far as we hoped as work is still in progress with diggers on site. The route starts by a Heronry and then goes through woodland where we saw or heard a variety of birds. As we didn't have an expert with us it was not possible to identify all the calls. There were also many Orange Tip butterflies, which wouldn't stay still long enough for a photo. Then it was on to the lakes where there were lots of Black-headed Gulls taking over the little islands along with Ducks, Coots and Mute Swans. We were told of a Kingfisher on the river Tame but this did not reveal itself to us.

Since our last visit the very smart willow bird hide has weathered a bit but is still looking good and a lot of work is still being done. We were not able to walk right round as indicated on maps but nevertheless had a very good day and, as expected, there was a meal by the canal at a nearby pub to finish!

Jean Perring

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A Week in the Life ...

As my phone number is printed on the Friends' leaflet, making me first point of call for general enquiries and since I'm a regular WorkerOut and have a good idea what's going on where and when, somehow it seemed to make sense to take on the role of Volunteer Coordinator! I thought a good way of explaining what I expect to do would be to look at what roles volunteers have played on or for the LNR over the past week or so (see below) and then at what the Volunteer Coordinator needs to do to make things run smoothly and safely. The past week has been extra busy for a variety of reasons, but there are different demands for volunteers throughout the year.

Tuesday	10.30 - 1.30: Tuesday WorkOut at two sites. 16 volunteers involved.
	10 - 2: Grass-cutting at Woodbrooke College with Tracmaster. 4 volunteers involved, raising income for Friends.
	7 - 8.30: Scout group coppicing willow and mending dead hedges. 4 volunteers involved and 14 scouts.
Wednesday	10 - 2: Ground preparation and hay strewing on Peafields spoil heap. Part of NIA project. 3 volunteers involved.
Saturday	9 - 2.30: Display stand, sales and tombola at St Nicolas Festival. 7 volunteers involved.
Tuesday	10.30 - 1.30: Tuesday WorkOut. Balsam bashing by 14 volunteers.
	7 - 8.30: Scouts group hay raking. 5 volunteers involved + 12 scouts.
Wednesday	7.30 - 9: Guided walk for Birmingham Organic Gardeners group. 1 volunteer involved

That's a lot of front-line volunteer involvement, and these figures don't include all the planning, tool transportation etc. that goes into the successful running of these events.

I see the role of the Volunteer Co-ordinator as being:

- First and foremost to ensure that we have full contact details (and any other necessary information such as allergies and emergency contacts) for everyone involved in the WorkOuts, stall-manning etc, so that we can be quickly in touch with each other and, in case of emergency, with family and the emergency services. To deal with any particular issues

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that volunteers may raise about safety and to ensure that all necessary risk assessments are made and appropriate clothing recommended;

- To ensure that we keep a full record of attendance and such statistics as will help the Friends to 'tick boxes' with funding organisations, to show how we are involved with enhancing the local environment and quality of life and health of local residents and, of course, improving habitats for wildlife;

- To encourage involvement of such groups as the local Scouts, Cubs and Brownies, schools and university groups, the police and corporate bodies. Work on the LNR offers endless opportunities for team-building, community engagement and the development of 'corporate social responsibility'



The Volunteer Co-ordinator points the Scouts in the right direction on 2nd July.

There is no doubt that the Tuesday WorkOuts form the backbone of our activity on site, and are integral to the management and development of the LNR. Ideally we would set up a regular Weekend WorkOut too, but this relies on us having several more volunteers suitably trained to lead working parties. The Tuesday group already commits at least three hours a week to the LNR, and we can't expect anyone to give more time however much we love the work. So if you would like to work regularly at a weekend (say monthly for starters) we would love to hear from you. If you would like to help more 'behind the scenes' we have plenty of opportunities for newsletter labelling and distribution and such like. Do please be in touch!

Amanda Cadman, Volunteer Coordinator.

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Anchor Away?

Members possessing the Autumn 2011 edition of the Newsletter may remember the report of the discovery of a one-hundred-weight anchor during excavations at Wychall reservoir by the Environment Agency. This writer offered several theories for the origin of this anchor, even suggesting movement of the earth's crust. Wychall Reservoir is about 500ft (150m) above present sea level, yet it implies a very large vessel must have been moored here at some time in the past. There was also speculation about connection with the origin of the Birmingham Assay Office hallmark, which is of course an anchor.

The Wychall anchor 'surfaced' again during a tidy-up session in our storage area, and has now been transformed by wire-brushing and a coat of Aldi's metal-protection paint, the trowel being included to give scale.



Does anyone know of an 'Anchor' pub or other establishment that could take the anchor off our hands? For a suitable contribution to the Charity, of course.

A Return to Popes Lane



Muntjac Deer activity continues to be reported to us on an occasional basis. One Tuesday Workout encountered a male trapped behind fencing on Popes Lane and it took some time to free. The birth of a fawn at Wychall has been observed. The photograph on the right sees one oblivious to the traffic, again, on Popes Lane.

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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
23 July	Wychall Reservoir rear	Balsam clearance/Path maintain
27 July	Meadow Hill Road	Monthly Walk
30 July	BW Meadow	Tidy up/Tracmaster work
6 Aug	Old Orchard/Beaks Hill Road	Tidy up, litter pick & scythe
13 Aug	Wychall Res – cycle path	Balsam clearance/Bench maintenance
20 Aug	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up, Litter pick & scythe
27 Aug	Popes Lane Pool area	Balsam clearance/Path maintain
31 Aug	Meadow Hill Road	Monthly Walk
3 Sept	Pea Fields extension	New hedge line – weed/prune
10 Sept	Camp Lane entrance	Tidy up, tree work & scythe
17 Sept	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up, Litter pick & scythe
24 Sept	Wychall cycle route – 2 ponds	Bench seat/reedbed maintenance
28 Sept	Meadow Hill Road	Monthly Walk
28 Sept	Meet Burman's Drive	A SATURDAY WORK EXPERIENCE
1 Oct	Wychall Reservoir rear	Tidy up pool areas
8 Oct	BW & Sheila's Meadow	Tidy up, litter pick & scythe
15 Oct	Wychall cycle route	Bench seat/view point creation
22 Oct	Pea Fields extension	Hedge – weed/prune, tree work
26 Oct	Meadow Hill Road	Monthly Walk
26 Oct	Meet Burman's Drive	A SATURDAY WORK EXPERIENCE
29 Oct	Wychall Reservoir – EA Scrapes	Maintenance/scythe surrounds

For working party days - please meet on site and wear stout footwear and old clothes. The appropriate equipment & materials will be provided. Please spare one or more hours of your time to assist us in progressing the LNR Management Plan.

Tuesday Working Parties – 10.30 to 13.30 hrs. If you wish to experience the Workout please try our Saturday activity on the 28 September or 26 October 2013.

All dates – weather permitting. Instruction provided.

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Late spring Bluebells by Merecroft Pool (*PRE*).

Contacts

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

Chairman	*	Phil Evans	0121 628 6769
Vice Chairman	*	David Human	0121 458 1300
Secretary	*	Graham Layton	0121 458 4712
Treasurer and Membership Secretary		Alistair Howard	0121 451 3082
Education		Andrew Nabbs	0121 458 6983
LNR Sage	*	Alan Bakewell	0121 603 1127
Volunteer Coordinator	*	Amanda Cadman	0121 624 3865

(* Denotes Trustee of the Charity)

Committee Members: Peter Cage, David Hampson, Brian Hewitt, Nicola Human, Mike Lawrence, Jean Perring, Anne Price, Val Saunders, Andrew Nabbs.

Newsletter: Peter Cage (0121 433 3486) and Phil Evans

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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