

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 33 - Autumn 2013

Registered Charity No: 1122293

www.fknnr.org.uk



A Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* watches activities on Wychall Lane from its vantage point in a dying willow tree on the 7 September 2013 (PRE).



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Newsletter 33

55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton

Registered Charity No. 1122293

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Chairman's Notes

These notes are written following a leisurely amble about the whole of the Nature Reserve on the first Sunday in November. Autumn is well advanced but the habitats and the wildlife still show well as the days grow shorter. Merecroft Pool becomes a rough and energetic place as the wind gets stronger but this does not seem to bother six diving Tufted Ducks and a solitary Goosander. A Buzzard circles overhead and a flock of various Tits call out as they all move through the remaining leaves. At Wychall several Heron patrol as usual, the Teal are there in fair numbers again this year and yet another flock of Long-tailed Tits move through the undergrowth. Working party activity is evident at this time of year as viewpoints are created along the cycle path at Wychall and the annual maintenance of scrapes and reedbeds begin to thin out the tall Grasses and Umbelliferae. The new hedgerow and wetland scrape in the extension area (Pea fields) are now well established and plans can now be made to build upon such features. This autumn there is an abundance of fruits, nuts and berries, which results in a Hawthorne bush with 8 Blackbirds feasting on the berries whilst the rich crop of acorns keeps the resident Grey Squirrels busy harvesting.

Your Committees, both 'Friends' and 'City Management', have had to wrestle with several fundamental issues in the last three months and we shall have to wait to see if we have achieved positive outcomes. Firstly, the City has decided to divest itself of some liabilities and revenue income via a leasehold disposal of the grazing meadows and stable block adjacent to Merecroft Pool. This land forms an essential part of the Local Nature Reserve and it was only through some concerted lobbying from local interest groups that foiled the City's initial freehold sale proposal. We now trust that the existing covenants on the land and some additional restrictions to be applied by the City, will dissuade unwelcome developer interest. We want to see that piece of land continue to be grazed as it always has been throughout living memory.

The second issue relates to the 'Flood and Water Management Act 2010' which introduces amendments to 'The Reservoirs Act 1975'. All good stuff you may think since it aims to reduce risks to life

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

and property from those increasing number of freak weather events. However, this means that Merecroft Pool, holding more than 10,000 cubic metres of water and silt, will be caught by the legislation (in 2015?). The City is therefore considering how it can fulfil its responsibilities to ensure the safety of earth dams and at the same time mitigate the increased costs of maintenance. The removal of all tree cover on the Merecroft dam is therefore highly likely unless the 'Friends' can devise a plan to manage the area through selective clearance and coppicing. Similar issues arise at Wychall but several constructive meetings with EA staff should result in only limited tree removal so that water flow is not impeded if the dam is breached. Several tall trees will also be removed since the 'sail' effects of wind upon a tall tree in leaf are claimed to loosen roots and soil. In addition EA contractors, who have now taken over River Rea maintenance from the City engineers, will be undertaking structural works to allow better access to the overflow sluice at Popes lane.

It is a sobering thought that our local environment faces threats at the same time that the City is faced with huge financial problems. We are very lucky to receive continuing Ranger support from the Hub at the Lickeys but staff and budget cuts do have an impact on the Local Nature Reserve and it is hardly surprising that some tasks performed by contractors, such as knotweed control and wildflower meadow maintenance, both Management Plan items, fall short of expectations. As for the formal designation of the 'Pea fields' extension area as part of the LNR – time will tell.

I will finish this piece on a more promising note. The working party activity on each Tuesday is now second to none. We all owe a great deal of thanks to the hardy bunch of volunteers who toil away and achieve such high standards – they really know what they are doing these days! Work on or about the EA scrapes achieved a very satisfying result and it proved that the group – 20 people present on that particular morning – can produce a lot in a very short period of time.

My thanks to you all. Have a good Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Phil Evans, Chairman.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Flower Beetle Oedemera nobilis



Other names: Swollen-Thighed Beetle, Fat-Legged Beetle, Thick-Kneed Flower Beetle.

Size: Approx 10mm long

Months seen: April to September.

Habitat: Gardens, hedgerows, woodland rides, waste ground.

The photograph was taken on the LNR by D Mantell.

Flower beetles get their name from the fact they're usually spotted on flowers in spring and summer feeding on pollen. They're also sometimes called 'Fat-legged beetles' on account of their swollen looking hind legs, but it's only the males, which have this feature. The male - Long and thin in appearance. Elytral cases do not meet and taper towards the rear, showing parts of the membranous hind wings and the tips. Long, thin legs except for the rear pair that have enlarged femora. Large dark eyes and long antennae. Overall colour is a metallic green, with a copper sheen. The female - similar to male but lacks the enlarged femora.

Location: Western Europe (including the UK) and North Africa. UK Status: Widespread from southern England northwards to the Wash and north Wales, but less common further north than that.

Education Update - Autumn 2013

The summer holidays, by definition, curtail any work with schools. However, some initial contacts made before, are now coming to fruition. As reported in a previous newsletter, Amanda Cadman and me led an early evening walk around the LNR for the local Brownies. Two of their leaders teach at Kings Norton Boys School and they have subsequently been in contact with me to say that

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

they now have a group of boys with special educational needs with whom they want to apply for the John Muir award. This is based on being involved with conservation work in the local area, something that the Local Nature Reserve would be ideal for, so we are meeting in November to discuss this in detail.

At the end of the summer term Brian Hewitt, committee member, 'Tuesday Work Out' volunteer and retired teacher from St. Thomas Aquinas school suggested that as he was attending a gathering at the school for former members of staff, it would be a good opportunity to publicise the Local Nature Reserve. We compiled an introductory letter, which Brian left in staff pigeonholes along with one of our leaflets. A follow up email and letter to the Head Teacher this term has resulted in the Head of Geography contacting me to arrange for us to discuss how the LNR could be used as part of the pupils' learning. Again this will be in November. So hopefully by the time of the next newsletter, two of the local Secondary Schools will be actively using the LNR.

Andrew Nabbs, Education Liaison.



An unidentified school group enjoy the freedom of Pinehurst Meadow on the 27 September 2013. BH.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

A lepidopterist reports on the summer of 2013.

The long, cold spring delayed the emergence of summer butterflies so the sight of Ringlets flying in the Waterways meadow on 1 July was most welcome. They heralded the first good summer for 7 years and were followed a week later by Meadow Browns, Commas and Burnet moths. At the same time, nests containing many hundreds of caterpillars of the Peacock butterfly were defoliating the nettles by the Beaks Hill Road gate.

By the middle of July the White butterflies were putting in an appearance and Small Tortoiseshells gave a colourful display in the 'Pea fields', the females seeking out nettles on which to lay their eggs. By the new reed bed a Black Tailed Skimmer Dragonfly was seen darting about. A female Lime Hawk moth was noted resting on a tree trunk in the Old Orchard. These moths usually hatch in late May or early June. On the same day, a Painted Lady was sunning itself on privet close to the LNR.

On 16 July, the fully-grown Peacock caterpillars were leaving the clumps of nettles in order to pupate and a number of commas were seen by the stream that feeds Merecroft Pool. Warm sunshine followed thunderstorms on 23 July, encouraging Large and Small Skippers to visit flowers in the Waterways meadow. A Marbled White was also spotted. This is the fourth consecutive year that a solitary specimen of this gorgeous butterfly has been noted at this location.



The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Peacock butterflies (see PRE photograph above on the right), began to emerge in good numbers on 2 August and on the following day an Eyed Hawk moth was seen in Pinehurst meadow. Holly Blues made an appearance in the middle of the month and Silver Y moths were often disturbed whilst walking in the long grass. You may have discovered these in your house!

A few Small Coppers flitted around the old Horse fields on 15 August - clearly a second brood - and the following week the grass in the 'Pea fields' was full of Latticed Heath moths flying in the sun. An examination of the undersides of Sallow and Willow leaves adjacent to Wychall Reservoir revealed the eggs of the Eyed Hawk moth and also young caterpillars. A caterpillar of the Sycamore moth was found crawling across the cycle path. It is stunningly beautiful; being covered in bright yellow hairs with a series of longer orange/red hairs along it's back (see above on the left for a Brian Hewitt photograph taken in Pinehurst Drive). The adult moth, by comparison, is a disappointing dull grey!

Beautiful Yellow Brimstones were flying on 22 August with Small Tortoiseshells. A few days later the banks of Merecroft Pool were alive with Damselflies and several Brown Dragonflies were noted hawking in Waterways meadow.

An Old Lady moth, which was resting on the trodden path of Waterways meadow, was gently transferred to nearby foliage before it became a meal for a hungry bird. Throughout the remainder of the month the commonest butterfly was the Speckled Wood that flew even in dull weather. A single Red Admiral put in an appearance on 7 October but only a small number of Common Blue butterflies were observed during the whole of the summer.

Bill Edge

Anchor Away?

Yes, you may have guessed it. Following the ad in the last magazine the anchor is away. For the princely sum of £20 towards our funds the anchor was secured for a garden feature in Meadow Hill Road. Many thanks to the purchaser.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Wildlife Report - Autumn 2013

The late arrival of summer weather followed by a very wet period has not produced the expected number of wildlife sightings. All of the usual resident birds appear to have had a successful breeding season apart from some of the warblers e.g. Blackcaps and Reed Warblers, which were late arriving on site. However, second broods of both Coot and Moorhen have been observed which is not common. Buzzards and Kestrels (see front cover) have been seen very frequently but there was a report of a local Sparrow Hawk being killed by a car on West Hill Road. The appearances of a Kestrel points to the presence of small mammals. Common Shrew have been recorded at the Camp Lane entrance, in the 'Pea Fields' and the BW Meadow whilst Short-tailed Vole are regularly disturbed all over the LNR, most recently in the Old Orchard and along the cycle path at Wychall Reservoir.

The single Mute Swan that arrived at Merecroft Pool in March finally departed in September and was enjoyed by many. It was feisty and any foolhardy dog approaching the water was promptly warned off in convincing fashion. Three Tufted Duck were regularly seen at the same location and towards the end of the summer up to 50 Mallard visited at one time. Wychall reservoir is again becoming a winter roost for Corvids and large numbers of Jackdaws are gathering there already on most evenings. Both sites saw good numbers of Mallard ducklings throughout the year.

Workings Party activity inevitably turns up numbers of Common Frogs and Toads together with the occasional newt. Such delicacies mean that up to 4 Grey Heron can be seen regularly at Wychall with a further two at Merecroft Pool.

Now that autumn is upon us and 2013 is reportedly a bumper year for berries, beech mast, acorns etc, we can look forward to further bird and mammal activity this winter – hopefully not just the abundant Grey Squirrels. Certainly there were blackberries in abundance in the Reserve (and a good few human pickers too!) and the Hawthorne berries are already attracting large numbers of Blackbirds. We shall see what winter now brings.

JB, BH, PB, AC, PRE.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

An Update On Our Membership

Welcome to a brief update on our membership. I am conscious that each one of my updates is a moan about how many of the 'Friends' need to renew their membership. So this time I am not going to moan, I am going to focus on the positives and the bright outlook of the membership. Since the last newsletter our membership has grown to 218 after 8 new Friends joined over the summer months. I will not name everyone but a very warm welcome to you all. In addition to the great benefits that more members bring to the Local Nature Reserve, it is encouraging that many of the new members do not live "on top" of the LNR, so to speak. Addresses include West Heath, Selly Oak and Brighton! Yes, Brighton. As the membership grows in numbers and with a wider Catchment area, it shows us that the LNR is being appreciated and that it is being promoted to a wider community. I know a couple of the new 'Friends' joined after enjoying one of the monthly-guided walks. So thank you to everyone who has helped with the promotion and hard work to make the LNR a better place.

One of the other activities that I have been working on recently is the email communication to you all. You may have recently received an email from the address "fknnr.membership@virginmedia.com" advertising the recent Tuesday Work Out activities. If you did not receive this email, firstly please check your Spam filter, it may have got hooked up there. If it is not in Spam then that means I do not have your correct email address. So could you please drop me a quick email, no need to say much more than confirming your name and to add you to the distribution list and send it to "fknnr.membership@virginmedia.com". I will then be able to send news and information out to many more people very easily and very quickly. I appreciate some do not use email and so do not worry, the notice boards will continue to have the information posted on them regularly. Finally a massive thank you to everyone who has added a donation onto his or her annual subs. We have received some very generous donations this year, which is much appreciated and vital to keep the LNR going. Thank you.

Alistair Howard, Treasurer & Membership Secretary.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Bird Ringing – the theory.

For well over half a century keen bird watchers have entered into the world of ornithological research by becoming trained as bird ringers. Bird ringing and ring recoveries have been important sources of information for ornithologists and have made a significant contribution to the knowledge of bird movements, especially migration, and the location of migration routes. However, there are gaps in the knowledge and information is still required on a large number of species especially those of conservation interest. The continuance of bird ringing is therefore essential to provide the basic science and to inform practical conservation action.

The considerable volume of information produced over approximately 100 years has enabled the complex picture of migration to be better understood. The comprehensive analyses possible from such data is well documented in Migration Atlases. Migration data are extremely important when analysed in depth for an individual species within the habitats it occupies, including its wintering and breeding grounds and in between the two.

The current objectives of the British Trust for Ornithology [BTO] ringing scheme are stated, as “The primary aim of the Ringing Scheme is to contribute to our understanding of population changes by monitoring the survival rates, productivity and dispersal of a wide range of species”. The BTO also state that “The Ringing Scheme makes a vital contribution to studies of population dynamics by providing data on survival rates and productivity, and sometimes also on numbers”. Population dynamics models based on such data can make an important contribution to understanding the causes of population declines. Where the population of a species is changing in size, models allow the identification of the stage in the bird’s life cycle that is giving rise to such a population change. Such monitoring should also allow the establishment of thresholds where action for conservation can be recognised as necessary or desirable to safeguard species.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

The development of ringing has gone hand in hand with the development of techniques to catch and ring the birds themselves. Mist nets, spring loaded nets and cannon nets have been adapted to enable the capture of all sizes of bird and thus enabling data to be gathered on the majority of species. These standardised trapping methods allow large numbers of birds to be ringed in order to increase sample sizes for ornithological research.

A Robin near Merecroft Pool, 8 July 2013 – complete with a BTO ring (PRE).



Birds have adapted to exploit almost all the available natural habitats on the planet and it can therefore be expected that populations vary within such diverse environments and within the ecological niches occupied. Bird populations are also dependent upon many external factors and demographic factors. Changes in populations will also be influenced by the highly mobile nature of birds themselves and therefore populations may change due to immigration and emigration factors.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Demographic factors regulating avian populations have been the focus of a great deal of recent attention. These factors, especially birth and death rates, are relatively well-understood and scientific information through ringing and recoveries together with other surveys and techniques can usually be used to provide data on population movements, breeding numbers, mean age of first breeding, adult survival rates, clutch size, egg survival rates, chick survival rates, juvenile survival rates; etc. It is through this important work that the 'red' and 'amber' listings are produced to identify and protect those species, which are threatened, or declining. However, ringing is usually accompanied with the collection of data relating to the individual bird being ringed, this data may include weight, sex, age, fat levels and physical attributes such as wing and leg measurements. New techniques can also now be employed for the ringing of individuals – thus colour marking, radio transmitters, data loggers, transponders and satellite tracking now enhance the traditional ringing practices.

The process has been replicated throughout the world; the "banding" of birds in North America has contributed to the conservation of species not only for their protection but also for sporting and harvesting practices. European ringing is now coordinated to the extent that EURING enables the dissemination and distribution of data over a much larger area focussing not only on migration but also on the causes of variation in the survival and distribution of birds. These factors are gaining importance in the discussions relating to conservation and the quality of the environment.

Whilst previous work has mainly informed the understanding of bird migration it now has a major role in the development of "Integrated Population Monitoring". Thus it is important that ringing continues to collect data on as wide a range of species as possible and over a wide range of habitats. This ensures that information is available on future areas of environmental concern, on potential conflicts with human activities and to highlight species of conservation concern. It is therefore of great value if keen bird watchers do become experienced ringers and assist in the continued provision of the information, which has, been collected by others for decades. PRE.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Bird Ringing – Local Activities

Readers of this Newsletter may remember several comments relating to the sighting of ringed birds on the Local Nature Reserve. We can reveal that most of these ringings will have been performed by one of our members, Clive Griffiths, who lives adjacent to the LNR. Clive gave some demonstrations for us at our first 'Open Day' and on that occasion placed rings on 1 Robin, 2 Wrens, 1 Coal Tit and 3 Great Tits. He is usually more productive in his own garden where the bird feeders act as the necessary 'honey pot' for incoming birds.

| | 2011 | 2012 |
|--|------|------|
| Some of Clive's other ringed birds were as follows:- | | |
| Sparrow Hawk | 1 | |
| Wood Pigeon | 4 | 1 |
| Dunnock | 4 | 1 |
| Wren | | 1 |
| Robin | 4 | 6 |
| Blackbird | 9 | 16 |
| Mistle Thrush | | 1 |
| Blackcap | 1 | |
| Long-tailed Tit | 2 | 2 |
| Coal Tit | 5 | |
| Blue Tit | 12 | 10 |
| Great Tit | 5 | 2 |
| Jay | 1 | |
| Chaffinch | 28 | |
| Greenfinch | 8 | |
| Goldfinch | 17 | 3 |
| Bullfinch | 13 | 3 |

Clive comments – "Since I started ringing local garden birds in 1979 the figures have changed dramatically, for many years the top 3 were Blue Tit, Great Tit and Greenfinch. Blue Tits and Great Tits seem to be having very poor breeding success at the moment and the Greenfinch population is suffering from a bronchial virus. On the bright side Bullfinches & Goldfinches seem to be doing very well locally". In July 2012 he caught and ringed a juvenile Pied Flycatcher in the garden which is a rarity for Kings Norton and this leads us to speculate whether it was just early on migration or whether it was from a local brood – we don't know.

We can also draw some further interesting facts from the data e.g. the high count of Blackbirds last year in Kings Norton was mostly due to birds from Northern Europe (in this case eating apples in the garden).

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Some of the ringed birds have been subsequently “recovered” dead e.g. a Chaffinch and a Blackbird both killed by local cats, a Wood Pigeon shot by a farmer in Bromsgrove and another killed by a car in Warwick. That should surprise people who think that it is the same birds they see in their garden every day.

The Ringers hold of the bird is well demonstrated in the following photograph where a local Sparrow Hawk is skilfully ringed.



Clive's tailpiece, "If you put the info in the newsletter can you also ask that anyone who finds a ringed bird, logs on to the BTO website, clicks on the 'report a ringed bird button' and completes the form".

Bye Sam

Sam, June McCoy's dog and constant companion, has been a regular part of the Tuesday Workout team since the Friends were founded, enjoying every part of the Reserve, yet always refusing to go through water! He had been increasingly frail in recent weeks and it is with great sadness that we mark his passing on 13 November and send every sympathy to June in his loss. AC.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

FKNNR Diary Dates 2013/14.

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

| Date | Location | Details |
|------------------------|--|--|
| 5 November | BW Meadow | Tidy up/Tracmaster work |
| 12 November | Wychall Res – cycle path | Coppice Willow/Bench & hedge maintenance |
| 19 November | Wychall Reservoir rear | Tidy up pool areas |
| 26 November | Pea Fields extension | New hedge line – prune/Clear ditch |
| 30 November | Saturday: Guided Walk | |
| 3 December | BW Meadow | Tidy up/Tracmaster work |
| 10 December | Camp Lane entrance | Tidy up, tree work & scythe |
| 17 December | Wychall cycle route – 2 ponds | Reedbed maintenance + tree work |
| 24 December | Pinehurst Meadow | Tidy up, litter pick & scythe |
| 28 December | Saturday: Guided Walk | |
| 1 January 2014 | Old Orchard/Beaks Hill Road | Tidy up, litter pick & BBQ |
| 7 January | Pea Fields – New scrape | Scrub clearance/ log piles & scythe |
| 14 January | Beaks Hill triangle | Willow tree removal/Dead Hedge |
| 21 January | BW Meadow | Tidy up/Tracmaster work |
| 25 January | Saturday: Guided Walk | |
| 28 January | Popes Lane - Pool area | Dead Hedge/Bank clearance. |
| 4 February 2014 | Pea Fields – Meadows | Scrub & tree prune/ log & brash piles |
| 11 February | BW & Sheila's Meadow | Tidy up, cut willow & scythe |
| 18 February | Wychall Reservoir rear | Path maintain/trim back scrub/hedges |
| 22 February | Saturday: Guided Walk | |
| 25 February | Wychall cycle route | Bench seat/view pint creation |
| 2 March | Sunday: Spring Clean Up | Litter Pick across all LNR |

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.

Please note our Spring Clean Up on Sunday the 2 March 2014 (10.30 to 13.30 hrs) – meet at the Burman's Drive entrance on Wychall Lane – Everyone can do their bit on this day for as little or as much time as you can spare.

All dates – weather permitting. Instruction provided.

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Newsletter 33

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The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



2013 - An excellent year to see feeding Grey Squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis*. There are no Red Squirrels on the LNR or in the West Midlands generally (PRE).

Contacts

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

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------|---------------|
| Chairman | * | Philip R 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.

Newsletter: Peter Cage (0121 433 3486) plus Phil and Amanda.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 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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