

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 34 - Spring 2014

Registered Charity No: 1122293

www.fknnr.org.uk



Blowing in the wind: The Bulrush *Typha latifolia* (Reed Mace) starts to shed its seeds at the end of February in Wychall Reservoir (PRE).



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Newsletter 34

55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton

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Chairman's Notes.

It is already mid-March and Spring is here. I always consider that Spring starts when the first Chiffchaff is heard singing on the Local Nature Reserve and today (the 15th) there were three, one in Sheila's Meadow, one by Wychall Reservoir and one just off Popes Lane in the extension area. Thus we bring to an end the wettest Winter on record. Whilst the weather caused the cancellation of 3 days of working party activity on the LNR we can be pleased that the flood prevention measures up stream on the River Rea worked superbly and no serious floods were experienced on our patch. What we have seen though is a continuous stream of rubbish being washed down the Rea and into the Wychall Reservoir area and this is then supplemented at Popes Lane where we continually attract the worst that the local populations can throw at us. The City following our representations dealt with one illegal dumping occurrence. The Tuesday working parties continue to produce improvements to the local habitat and a growing band of volunteers have attempted some serious work over the winter period. Routine items such as Willow coppicing and grassland maintenance have been supplemented by work to create additional reedbeds at Wychall and scrub removal within the extension area. A special thank you to the 23 individuals who turned up for the early spring litter pick, more of this later in this Newsletter.

Your Committee has been grappling with those strategic issues over the Winter period that were outlined in my piece in the last Newsletter. The first continues to be the proposals to remove the trees from Merecroft Pool dam. It is fair to say that we agree with the City's objectives at this location but there is not a consensus on the best way to achieve them. Different City departments and a further consultant's report all led up to different interpretations and to further site meetings. Then the poor weather, safety concerns and the approach of the bird-nesting season have managed to delay the work until the autumn. We shall persevere and if those two Swans start to nest it will indeed be late autumn. Similar work by the EA at Wychall reservoir occurred without incident.

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The second issue was the leasehold sale of the Merecroft grazing meadows complete with stable block. Here, I can say that the outcome has met with our approval despite some real concerns during the disposal process. We look forward to working in partnership with the local resident who has purchased the lease and in assisting in any way possible to continue to protect the site. The horses will soon return to graze the meadows and we can all be pleased with that.

The City Management Committee continues to meet on a quarterly basis and it is via this forum that the City officers explain their priorities, express any concerns and monitor progress on the Management Plan for the LNR. A new 5-year plan is in the process of being finalised and we shall shortly provide the local input into that plan. We now know the outcome of the citywide consultation process on their budget for the next financial year, which will not impact upon us as badly as it could have done. In essence, the Council consulted on the proposed budget cuts and they received a large number of responses relating to all City services. The most responses were in respect of Parks and Open Spaces - no doubt because we and many others suggested to all community groups that they should send in a response. The City listened, well for one year, and the proposed budget cuts for Parks etc were reduced from a potential £2.7m to £0.6m - so no loss of Park Keepers or Rangers this time but the reductions to grass cutting and play areas will go ahead. So if you did participate in the consultation process – a big thank you.

Finally, the current challenges – Formal designation of the extension area (The 'Pea fields') as part of the LNR (*the end is in sight*), problems with those off-road motorbikes (*again*), the accumulation of litter and rubbish (*again*), implementation of stricter controls on those few inconsiderate dog owners (*hooray*) and improved results from the City's meadow mowing regime and Japanese Knotweed controls (*we hope*). A busy year in front of us especially with a 'Welcome to the Nature Reserve' event on the 17 May, please put the date in your diary.

Thank you for your continued support.

Phil Evans, Chairman.

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WatersideCare & FIN.

The Friends have recently joined WatersideCare, a partnership initiative led by Keep Britain Tidy, The Canal and River Trust, Severn Trent Water and the Environment Agency. WatersideCare seeks to encourage local volunteer groups to 'adopt' and enhance their local waterways by litter picking, conservation, water quality improvement projects and wildlife surveys. We are certainly already doing our bit on the litter picking, conservation and (to an extent) water quality fronts, but we look forward to developing water quality assessment and surveying techniques. Several other 'Friends of groups' along the Rea and its tributaries have also become members, and we welcome the 'joined up' nature of the statistics that will be achieved for Birmingham's waterways.



WatersideCare has already provided us with a large number of additional tools, first aid kits and hi-viz jackets, and will be providing additional first aid and water quality training for us. In exchange we are required to report back to them on our working party activities.

At least six events per year are required, so our weekly Workouts should provide a barrage of information for them. We will be telling them about numbers of volunteers, work undertaken and the amount of litter collected. We are grateful for the support they have given us. AC.

The Freshwater Invertebrate Network (FIN).

WatersideCare has been supplemented by another joint project financed by The Environment Agency and The Wildlife Trust. The River Rea Catchment area is now the subject of regular monitoring for invertebrate life. Two of your Committee volunteered for the initial training session and further training on the Rea will now commence. Do you know the difference between a Water Slater and a Mayfly larva? Do you want to see what lives in the Rea? If so let us know and training for the quarterly surveys will be arranged. AC & PRE.

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The Local Nature Reserve Clean up.



We have always been quite pleased with the way we keep the LNR clean and tidy. Some ten years of hard work, numerous skips and a multitude of black bags have resulted in many favourable comments. This year's litter pick was well attended with 23 volunteers braving the inclement weather for an hour or two or three. Successful again? Yes. A traffic barrier, light fittings, fire extinguishers, assorted lumps of metal a large bag of unused light bulbs together with 42 black bags of assorted rubbish. Well done everyone. PRE.



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The Saturday Experiment.

Over the past couple of months we have sought to respond to the frequent requests received for volunteering opportunities not taking place during the 'working week'. Many tell us that, because they are at work, they can't take part in our Tuesday Workouts but would love to get their teeth into some valuable volunteering work on the LNR at a weekend. So we have offered two Saturdays recently, keeping to our 'usual' 10.30 - 1.30 time slot. A good deal of useful work has been done on both days, but only **one** non-Tuesday Worker Out turned up on each occasion. They were both brilliant workers and we are very appreciative of what they achieved. But we did expect more than one person to turn up for these Weekend Workouts! What did we do wrong? Would you prefer Sundays? A different time slot? (and, if so, when, and on which day?) PLEASE get in touch with me to let me know how we can offer you valuable Weekend involvement on the LNR so that we can make the most of your energy and enthusiasm.

AC Volunteer Co-ordinator (amandacadman@sky.com: 0121 624 3865).



Tuesday Working Party Activity (1) – The BW Meadow or now more correctly called the 'Canal and River Trust' meadow. Grassland maintenance with the Tracmaster mechanical scythe with the resultant grass and bramble being raked up and deposited in strategic piles. PC.

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Working Party Activity (2). Reed bed creation the hard manual way. Define the area, build retaining hurdles, insert a pipe, build up an access route. Then shovel the silt and other unwanted material – Good clean fun! (Photos: AN, PRE, PC).



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Education Update - March 2014.

A planned walk on the LNR for parents of children at Kings Norton Nursery and Children's Centre in January began in the dry with two intrepid parents despite large amounts of rain in the preceding days and a very mixed forecast for the day itself. But having just entered the LNR at the Camp lane entrance the heavy rain returned and a hasty retreat was made. Hopefully a new date to be set for after Easter will prove more successful.

In contrast the weather was ideal when on March 20th Graham Layton and me met 10 Year 7 special needs pupils from Kings Norton Boys School with three teaching staff. These same boys had come on a tour last autumn and we had agreed they should return to coppice some Willow both as part of their application for the John Muir award and to provide the material for them to do some dead hedge weaving with willow in the outside classroom that they were making.

We met at Burmans' Drive with the boys all eager to get out of the school minibus and do some "cutting" so after a brief health and safety lecture we walked a few hundred yards along the cycle track by the reservoir to the Willow that other volunteers had coppiced last year. In order that everyone got a fair share of tasks Graham suggested that the boys work in 2 groups of 5 with 3 "cutters" and 2 "draggers" taking the coppiced branches up to the side of the cycle track ready to be taken to the minibus at the end of the session. This worked well and the boys seemed to find their own system for sharing and delegation of tasks with no cries of "miss/sir it's not fair".

Very few children living in a city and in their first year at secondary school would have any experience of coppicing and working with loppers designed for adults. This however did not deter them and it was fascinating to watch the different techniques tried when they didn't yet have the strength to cut a relatively thick branch in one movement. The boys showed determination to achieve this by a war of attrition on the resistant branch using a technique of continual numerous small cuts until the branch was finally free and held aloft with pride for collection by the draggers.

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After 45 minutes the boys had produced 2 very large piles of Willow many branches being well over 5 feet in length. Then a well-earned break. Graham then gave a demonstration of weaving a fence using the cut Willow in order to give the boys an idea of what they needed to do next.

Then the tidy up. Whilst the two of us cut the coppiced Willow trunks down to ground level, the boys took the residue to a brush pile and sorted the cut branches into piles in preparation for transfer to the minibus and taken back to school. Because of the quantity of Willow cut down it was decided that it would be potentially unsafe to take it all back in the minibus and the teachers would return at the end the day to collect it. However the amount cut far exceeded the schools requirement and the surplus was donated to West Heath primary school to use in their forest school. A very successful morning. The boys were the first secondary school pupils to actively use the LNR and were a pleasure to work with. They were polite, considerate, willing to learn and fun to be with. One pupil told me he had really enjoyed himself as it gave him strength and another ended the session with a thank you on behalf of the group to the two of us. We look forward to seeing them for balsam bashing in a few months time.

Andrew Nabbs, Education Liaison.

Welcome To Spring Day - Saturday 11th MAY 2014.

Following the success of the Welcome to Spring Day last year when a much-needed £400 was raised another is being held this year. It will mark the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Friends. The day will follow a similar format as before with a dawn chorus walk at 5.30 am followed by a barbeque breakfast in the meadow at 7.30 and then a variety of stalls open from 10.30. These include duck racing, woodcraft, pond dipping, tombola and the very popular cake and refreshments stall. Please put this date in your diary and encourage friends and family to attend. It is a very relaxed and pleasant way to spend a few hours on a spring Saturday and if you want to learn more about the Local Nature Reserve there are guided walks and the day ends at 8.30pm with a bat walk. Something for everyone so come along, enjoy yourself and spend a bit of money knowing that you are making a contribution to the LNR's upkeep.

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Kingshill Drive – grazing meadows.

Since FKNNR member Sue Ashley decided to move her horses nearer her home at Wythall there had been concern about the future of the grazing meadows and outbuildings that form an integral part of the LNR.

So, locally there was much worry about the City's declared intention to sell the meadows, and particularly the notion of selling the outbuildings and stables separately, an idea, which was subsequently reversed. But, the City Property Services department had a hardnosed attitude, with a remit to maximise income for the City, and refused our request to bring the land under our care via a Community Asset Transfer – this despite your Committee formulating a strong case which 'ticked all the boxes', and which was supported by last-minute appeals by local Councillors. There were some blunt exchanges with officials and the FKNNR Committee, but the City remained adamant. The sale was announced by way of a lease for 99 years at a peppercorn rent with various conditions attaching relating to existing use. The Site was disposed of via a Bigwood's Auction at the Aston Villa Holte Suite on Thursday 27th February. The Stables and Grazing was 'lot 3'.

Our observer had decided to not let the sale proceed without incident. Accordingly as the lot was announced, he stood up and faced the audience, and competing against the auctioneer's PA system, read out a prepared statement to the effect that the land was part of Kings Norton LNR and that the City had refused to deal with us appropriately. So that was that. The auction proceeded.

We can now say that the outcome has met with our approval despite all those concerns during the disposal process. We look forward to working in partnership with the local resident who has purchased the lease and in assisting in protecting the site for the long-term enjoyment of both people and wildlife. Work has already commenced in renovating the stable building. All's well that ends well. *BH.*

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Wildlife Report - Winter 2013/14.

The weather over the winter period 2013/2014 was exceptionally stormy and exceptionally wet. However, the westerly and unsettled conditions meant that it was mild, with fewer frosts than usual. How did this affect the LNR and its wildlife? As anybody venturing into the Merecroft area over this period can testify the paths became very muddy indeed and the seasonally flooded area in the corner field next to the entrance from Beaks Hill Road retains water even now.

Over the winter the Goosanders returned to Merecroft Pool and were present most days and in variable numbers, 15 having been the most observed at one time. In fact a small number are still visiting Merecroft at the time of writing. Tufted Duck have been seen more often than usual and in greater numbers (6 maximum). Occasionally 50 Black-headed Gulls were observed at one time at both Merecroft Pool and Wychall Reservoir. A trip to Merecroft is always interesting because of the variability. A Great Crested Grebe was seen on two occasions in February, but sadly the likelihood of a nesting pair this year looks low.

Grey Herons are a familiar sight throughout the LNR, but in March 3 were seen on the fringes of Merecroft Pool. They have been on regular hunting expeditions to the small ponds in nearby gardens due to the presence of frogs returning to their spawning grounds. Frogspawn is present in ponds in Sheila's Meadow and appeared at Wychall Reservoir before the end of February! It is to be hoped that there will be some rain to keep the areas damp for long enough for it to survive. On 1 February a pair of Mute Swans was seen for the first time this year also on Merecroft. A single male was present last year. Their appearance prompted speculation that the commencement of the proposed work on the dam would be delayed, as their habitat cannot be disturbed during the breeding season.

As Spring has commenced the Green Woodpeckers have been calling and a Greater Spotted Woodpecker has been drumming more frequently. Goldfinches and Greenfinches have been more in evidence and on 12 March a Buzzard was seen wheeling above the area. Also on 12 March, a Pied Wagtail was seen on the ground in

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the Beaks Hill corner field. These birds can be seen regularly on or about the shops on Wychall Lane. In November a ringed Blackbird was found dead in the BW field by Wychall Lane. Details were reported to the British Trust for Ornithology. As a result we found out later that it had been ringed on 5 February 2012 in Kings Norton. So it hadn't travelled very far at all! Over the winter there have been few reported sightings of visiting birds although Redwings have been observed near Wychall Reservoir and a few Siskin at a few other locations about the LNR. We suspect plenty of natural food remains out there in the rural areas.

Moving on to other wildlife, in February, Swan Mussel shells were found in the orchard next to Beaks Hill Road, and near the dam. There was speculation that heron, rats or mink might be eating the (tasty!) mussels and then discarding the shells. However, the shell found in the orchard showed no sign of damage, and in fact was in perfect condition. A mystery! A further mystery relates to dead mammals. Unfortunately over the winter period we have discovered 3 dead foxes on the LNR and the Rangers suspect local poisoning. The remains of a dead male Muntjac Deer in the 'Pea fields' and a dead young one in a flooded ditch were other gruesome Working Party discoveries. However, there is still plenty of life about with very many sightings of Short-tailed Voles, one busily collecting bramble leaves in February as on-lookers watched.

As is to be expected, butterfly sightings during the winter months have been few and far between. A Small White had the horse fields to itself on 19 October and on 29 October a Red Admiral was enjoying the glorious, early morning sunshine in Wychall Meadows in defiance of the chill in the air. The well-trodden path by Beaks Hill Road entrance revealed a miserable looking Comma braving the cold, windswept conditions of 29 November, while on the same path a few days before Christmas a bedraggled Small Tortoiseshell struggled amongst the leaf litter. Both are now hibernating in the comparative luxury of the writer's garden shed and will be released on the LNR when the weather permits. A Pale Brindled Beauty Moth resting on a tree trunk in the Old Orchard on 10 February was the last observation worthy of note. In March spring butterflies started to come out of hibernation and take

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advantage of the warm, sunny weather particularly Brimstone, Comma and Peacock. Full details will be in the next issue.

Finally, Snowdrops graced the bank above the ponds in Sheila's Meadow but are now dying down making way for the new star of the show, the dwarf daffodils. We shall now await the Snake's-head Fritillaries.

JB, BH, PB, BE, PRE.

An Update On Our Membership.

Welcome to a brief update on our membership. Since the last newsletter, we have three new 'Friends', a very warm welcome to the households of Dr Jones, Dr McLellan and Mr Yeo.

As the weather warms up, it means that we are coming close to the end of our financial year. The accounting year for the Friends ends on 31st March but the subscription year ends two months later on 31st May. Over the last couple of months I have received a flurry of subscription renewals as well as several donations. The donations have been very welcome and so I thank you all for these. I will shortly be preparing the annual report for the AGM and I will highlight just how significant these donations have been to the finances of the LNR when I present this in May. Again, thank you very much indeed.

As mentioned, the subscription year has only two months to go before we start all over again. I would kindly ask you to settle any monies due for the last year, 2013/14 as soon as possible. If you are unsure whether your subs are due, please check the address label on your newsletter and it will indicate if I am expecting this years' subs from you.

Please send your monies to the Membership Secretary at 16 Grassmoor Road, Kings Norton, B38 8BP. To help with the processing, please also supply your name & address and send it with your subs.

Thank you in advance.

Alistair Howard, Treasurer & Membership Secretary.

DOG OWNERS

Birmingham Dog Control – New laws coming soon

Following a full public consultation, Birmingham City Council is to go ahead with implementing Dog Control Orders under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005. These new orders will be introduced on **1 March 2014** and are seen as measures to tackle issues caused by irresponsible dog owners who fail to control or clean up after their pets. Offences will be dealt with by a Fixed Penalty Notice and fine of £80.

Dog owners need to be aware of the new laws as follows;

1. **The Fouling of Land by Dogs Order 2014** – it will be an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to remove faeces forthwith from any land to which the public have access. This Order will replace and extend the existing controls under the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996.
2. **The Dogs on Leads Order 2014** – it will be an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to ensure that a dog is kept on a lead at all times on all public roads, adjoining footways and verges.
 - **The Dogs Exclusion Order 2014** – it will be an offence for a person in charge of a dog to permit the dog to enter into or remain in any of the following areas:
 - any clearly demarcated children's play area, and
 - School land.
3. **The Dogs on Leads by Direction Order 2014** – it will be an offence for a person in charge of a dog to fail to put that dog on a lead when directed to do so by an authorised officer on any land to which the public have access and is open to the air.
4. **The Dogs (specified Maximum) Order 2014** – it will be an offence for a person to take more than four dogs onto open land in Birmingham.

Please note there are exemptions for assistance dogs.

For more information regarding Dog Control Orders, please visit www.birminghamcitycouncil.org.uk

River Rea Conservation Group: PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2014

These are all held at 7.30pm at the Friends Meeting House, Watford Road, Cotteridge (Fifty yards on the left from the mini roundabout, by the bus stop)

Friday 9 May: Hedgehogs - Presentation by a member of the Hedgehog Preservation Society.

Friday June 13: The Isles of Scilly with Jean Summers.

Friday 11 July: Metal Detecting with 'Bob's Bottles'.

Friday 8 August: Village Signs a presentation by John Smith.

Friday 12 September: Cyril's Evening.

Friday 10 October: Annual General Meeting, followed by a social event

Friday 14 November: Wild Life Photography with Phil Evans.

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FKNNR Diary Dates 2014.

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
18 March	BW & Sheila's meadows	Tidy up, litter pick & scythe
25 March	River Rea – North Bank	Paths/Remove laurel
	River Rea	FIN invertebrate surveys
29 March	Saturday: Guided Walk	
1 April	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up, litter pick & scythe, Fit bench.
8 April	Wychall cycle route – 2 ponds	Bench seat & Reedbed maintenance.
15 April	River Rea – South	Clear rubbish/Tidy Hazel.
22 April	Wychall Reservoir – EA scrapes	Maintenance/scythe surrounds.
26 April	Saturday: Guided Walk	
29 April	Pea Fields Extension	Dead Hedges/Grub up bramble. Fit bench.
6 May	DAY OUT	Visit to another Reserve
13 May	BW Meadow	Prepare for Saturday Event
17 May	Burman's Drive (start 05.30) BW Meadow BW Meadow (start 20.30)	Dawn Chorus Walk Open Day Evening Bat walk.
20 May	Pea Fields – Meadows	Dead Hedges/Grub up bramble. Fit bench.
27 May	DAY OUT	Visit to another Reserve
31 May	Saturday: Guided Walk	
3 June	BW & Sheila's meadows	Tidy up, Balsam, litter pick & scythe
10 June	Pea Fields – New scrape area	Balsam clearance, litter pick & scythe
17 June	River Rea – North & South banks	Balsam clearance, Path maintain.
24 June	Popes Lane pool area	Balsam clearance, Path maintain.
28 June	Saturday: Guided Walk	
1 July	Pea Fields Extension area.	Hedge lines/weed & prune
8 July	Wychall cycle route	Balsam clearance/Bench Maintenance.
15 July	Pea Fields – New scrape area	Balsam clearance, litter pick & scythe
22 July	Wychall Reservoir rear	Balsam clearance/Path Maintenance.
26 July	Saturday: Guided Walk	
29 July	BW Meadow	Tidy up & Tracmaster work
5 August	Old Orchard/Beaks Hill Road	Tidy up, litter pick & scythe

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. All dates – weather permitting. Instruction provided.

Tuesday Working Parties – 10.30 to 13.30 hrs.

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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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