

# The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

## Newsletter 9 – Summer 2006



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### ***Chairman's Notes***

Welcome to a late-summer edition of the Newsletter. I hope you had the opportunity to be out and about on the LNR during the summer. Those hot dry days of July now seem quite a distant memory. The Wychall meadows have received their summer cut, with the cuttings taken away to reduce the fertility and allow meadow flowers to proliferate. If you have walked up the footpath between Meadow Hill and West Hill Roads, you will have seen that Pinehurst Meadow, in particular, shows pretty spectacular signs of our work to develop the site. The stalwart Midweek Volunteers have done a fantastic job here and in the wet meadow below the Merecroft dam over the past few months. Dead hedges have been built, ground ivy cleared, brambles, willow herb and grass cut down, and wildflower seedbeds set in place. It's really starting to look very good, and we are now planning how we can develop access to and interpretation of the meadow to show what we are doing there, and why. When the river Rea ran very low we had a pollution incident, coming we think from the Middleton Hall Road area, which made the water below the reservoir smell pretty foul for a week or two. We should thank the Environment Agency for tracing the problem and for sorting it out.

*The Elephant Hawk moth disturbed during working party activities on the 4<sup>th</sup> July.*



### ***Developing Contacts***

During the past few months we have been developing contacts with a number of other people and organisations that can in their various ways, help us to develop the Nature Reserve. We have always hoped that British Waterways, owners of the field at the junction of Wychall Lane and Meadow Hill Road, might be willing to allow the field to come under the management of the Local Nature Reserve, not least since it forms the physical link between the Wychall and Merecroft areas. Following a recent meeting on site with their local agent and biodiversity officer, it looks likely that we may be able to enter into an agreement with them that will allow us to manage the fields for the benefit of wildlife, instituting an appropriate mowing regime and developing a solid hedgerow on to Wychall Lane.

Our Secretary is still in negotiation with the 'Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust' consultants at Slimbridge about the baseline survey and development master plan we are seeking to commission from them for Wychall Reservoir. All being equal this work should start very shortly, allowing us to look at what is possible for the site to improve its wildlife habitat (always bearing in mind the City's requirement of it for flood prevention purposes), and cost implications.

# *The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve*

With this information under our belt, we can really start work on developing the site to the best of our capacity. And there may be ways to develop and improve the flood-prevention function of the upper reaches of the River Rea that would, at the same time, improve the quality of wildlife habitat.

Phil and I had an early-morning walk along the Rea earlier in the summer with Professor Geoff Petts from the University of Birmingham, an expert on managed rivers. We were able to discuss with him our ambitions for the site. There is no doubt that he was very impressed with the richness and diversity he saw, as well as the potential for further development as a prime wetland site for the city. Furthermore, now that Kings Norton ward is part of the Northfield constituency, we have walked 'our' length of the Rea and looked across Popes Lane to the old allotments with Joe Hayden, Northfield's Nature Conservation Officer and Chief Ranger at Lickey Hills, again discussing our ambitions. I do hope that this boundary change will offer an opportunity to work with our 'upstream friends' to develop the entire Rea corridor. What a resource for the city that would be, a cycle-accessible linear nature reserve – a dream, but an achievable one if everyone works for it!

## ***On the Map***

With this Newsletter you are getting a copy of our up-dated and extremely attractive publicity leaflet. And it is all homegrown! I am enormously grateful to Brian Hewitt for the truly magnificent job he has done in designing the leaflet so that we now have really effective publicity information about the LNR and the Friends' aims and objectives. Especially valuable is the attractive foldout map, which Brian has produced for us, which at last makes it very clear where we are! If you would like a supply of leaflets to give to friends and neighbours, do please let me know. Soon, too, visitors will be greeted by signboards (constructed at the Lickeys) welcoming them to Kings Norton Nature Reserve. This is a major step forward, psychologically, and I'm sure we will get much more support by being better known.

We are planning an Open Day on the LNR on 21 October with guided tours and various activities, including an evening Bat Walk. Further details will be publicised in due course, but do please put the date in your diary. If you can help in any way on the day, do please let us know.

## ***Green Gym - Make Tuesdays Special***

The regular Tuesday "Green Gym" working parties (10.30 – 1.30, often followed by a trip to the pub!) have continued over the summer, and are very enjoyable. We spent several sessions making a start on controlling the Himalayan Balsam along the riverbank by the cycle path. Its pink flowers are very attractive, and insects enjoy its presence (that's where we found the Elephant Hawk moth) but it is a terribly invasive non-native species that completely smothers the native vegetation. Its root system is very shallow, so pulling up the plants is a very satisfying activity. The flower heads need to be carefully removed first, to ensure that the seedpods are not shaken into action (they burst asunder when ripe, scattering the potential next generation in all directions). If you fancy a little weekday workout, do contact us for details. In particular, do please come and join us for the Late Summer Clean-up on 19 September.

Our Working parties were very successful last winter, a special thank you to all those who took part. I would also thank those members who helped staff our display stand at recent Farmers' Markets and festivals on Kings Norton Green and at the '3 Estates'. Many new members were recruited.

The future dates for your diary are:

Tuesday, 19 <sup>th</sup> September, 10.00-15.30	A big clean up and a volunteers Training day on the LNR with the Birmingham Foundation.
Saturday, 14 <sup>th</sup> October, 09.00-13.00	Stall at Kings Norton Farmers Market on The Green.
Sunday, 15 <sup>th</sup> October, 10.30 – 14.30	Tidy up Merecroft and Pinehurst Meadows.
Sunday, 12 <sup>th</sup> November, 10.30 – 14.30	Planting & clearing, Wychall Lane woodland areas.
Sunday, 17 <sup>th</sup> December, 10.30 – 15.30	Community tree planting, Pinehurst Meadow.
Sunday, 21 <sup>st</sup> January 07, 10.30 – 15.30	Planting & clearing, Wychall Lane woodland areas.

## ***Amanda Cadman***

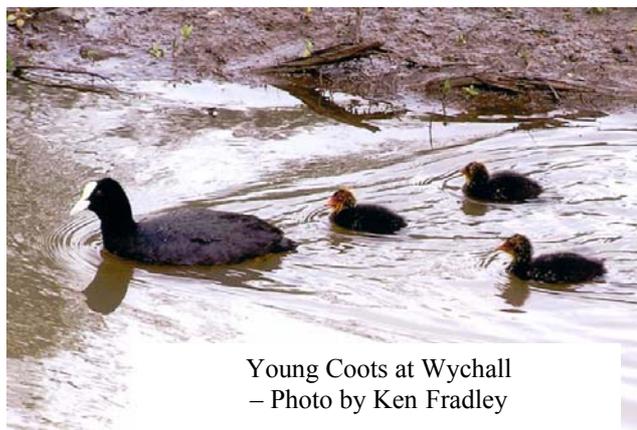
## *The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve*

**Wildlife Watch:** observations reported on or about KNNR over the past three months.

The long dry spell through to the beginning of August has, not surprisingly, had an effect on the appearance of the Nature Reserve. It has meant that no river water has flushed through Wychall Reservoir (but less silt and rubbish!) and that the meadows throughout have grown fast and furious. The stable water level in turn has resulted in successful broods of Coot, Moorhen and Mallard at Wychall Reservoir (8, 3 and 25 young respectively have been noted) and the successful rearing of 2 Gt Crested Grebe at Merecroft Pool. Several observers have commented upon the number of Mallard at Wychall. Other young noted out and about include Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tit, Dunnock and Chiffchaff. It is also suspected that the Sparrowhawks have nested in the vicinity of Merecroft. Other observations not only include many of Grey Heron and Kingfisher but also of Swift and House Martin swooping for insects over the trees along Wychall Lane.

The grassland areas have been left undisturbed pending the conservation cut planned for the end of July this year. In the long term it is hoped that this practice will result in more varieties of native wild flowers. However, the number and variety of butterfly observations is commented upon later.

Our limited working party activities during the summer have been enlivened by the occasional appearances of Foxes in the wet meadow to the south of the public footpath adjacent to Pinehurst meadow.



Young Coots at Wychall  
– Photo by Ken Fradley



*Above: A female Common Blue Butterfly in Merecroft meadows – 8<sup>th</sup> August.*

*Right: Small Skippers were a common sight throughout July in the BW meadow.*



An increasing number of people are now reporting the sighting of Muntjac deer (one with a fawn) from several locations across the Local Nature Reserve. Others are asking for further details relating to these animals so we have provided information in this newsletter courtesy of the Mammals Trust.

Further detailed facts and figures can be obtained from the address given.

# The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

## Kings Norton Butterflies

As mentioned in the last newsletter the Spring sunshine did bring out the butterflies with Orange Tip, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell species being noted along the cycle route. The continuing warm weather certainly encouraged the reporting of butterflies and moths throughout the Reserve. It is really pleasing to see an area planted with native wild flowers in Pinehurst attracting insects in significant numbers.



Meadow Brown butterfly (left) feeding on bramble in July together with a Gatekeeper (right).  
Photographs taken at Wychall Reservoir.

There are now less than sixty species of butterflies resident and breeding in the British Isles. They are usually grouped into seven families whose common names are the Browns, Blues, Whites, Coppers, Yellows, Fritillaries and Skippers. This compares with approximately 300 species of moth. Those butterflies recorded in our Nature Reserve now number 15 (these are listed below), which is 25% of all British species – not a bad start. The main features that distinguish butterflies from moths is the antennae, those of the butterflies are clubbed at the tip whilst those of moths can be of various shapes none of which end in a club. Other features include the fact that butterflies usually rest with their wings closed vertically over their backs. Butterflies and moths are the last stage of a four-phase life cycle consisting of the egg, caterpillar, chrysalis and adult. The majority hibernate in the chrysalis stage. The caterpillars of most species are particular about their plant food e.g. the common stinging nettle is essential to the family that includes the Small Tortoiseshell and the Peacock. Thus any reduction in the diversity of British wildflowers impacts upon the distribution and populations of our butterfly species. Our plans include the retention and development of many varied habitats so that we can provide for many of our native wildflowers. This in turn should ensure that we retain our resident butterfly species.

Speckled Wood	<i>Lasiommata aegeria</i>	May - August	Widespread
Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	June - August	Widespread
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	July	Pinehurst/Merecroft
Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	July	Pinehurst
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	July	Pinehurst
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	June	Cycle Path Meadows
Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>	April - August	Widespread
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	June/July	BW Meadow
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	June then August	Cycle Path & Merecroft Meadows
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	August	Wychall Reservoir
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	July & August	Widespread
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	May - July	Widespread
Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	May - August	Widespread
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	June	Burman's Drive
Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	July	BW Meadow

# *The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve*

## Wildlife Focus - Muntjac Deer

Muntjac deer are about the size of a labrador dog, and are the smallest deer in Britain (Shoulder height: 45–52cm. Weight: 12–15kg). They originated in southeast China and were brought to Woburn Park, Bedfordshire, by John Russell Reeves in 1838. During the 1920s, some individuals escaped and Muntjac now breed successfully in the wild. They have a deep reddish-brown glossy coat. When they are alarmed, they raise their distinctive long, dark tail to reveal the white patch underneath.



Males and females can be distinguished by the dark markings on their face. Both sexes also have very conspicuous dark pouches beneath their eyes, which are scent glands, used to communicate with each other. Males have short, straight, antlers, which point backwards and which are cast in May & June and subsequently re-grow by the autumn. Males also have a set of two large pointed teeth, which protrude from their upper lip and are used when fighting other deer. They are usually solitary, secretive animals, mainly active at night.

**Breeding:** Mating takes place at any time of year and females give birth 7 months later to a single spotted fawn. Fawns seem to survive even when they are born in harsh winter weather. Females can conceive when they reach about 10kg.

**Lifespan:** Up to 19 years.

**Diet:** Leaves, buds, honeysuckle, hogweed, berries, acorns, chestnuts, seeds, bark and grasses.

**Deer tracks:** Dainty tracks of 3–4cm long by 2cm wide.

Muntjac often communicate by making remarkably loud barking sounds for 20 minutes or more at a time and are consequently known as 'barking deer'. They have been spreading rapidly throughout central and southern Britain in the last thirty years and are now found as far north as Cheshire and Derbyshire. They are not found in Ireland.

Please support :

Mammals Trust UK,  
15 Cloisters House,  
8 Battersea Park Road,  
London SW8 4BG

E-mail: [enquiries@mtuk.org](mailto:enquiries@mtuk.org)

Tel: (+44) 020 7498 5262

Fax: (+44) 020 7498 4459



**Habitat:** Dense woodland with low shrubby areas and occasionally large gardens or small woodland copses. **Predators & threats:** Sometimes foxes, occasionally dogs and the traffic on Wychall Lane.

# The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

## People Focus – Your C

*On the 21<sup>st</sup> March the gate from the footpath into Pinehurst meadow provides the support for Brian Hewitt (left) and Alan Bakewell.*

The re-election of four of your Committee occurred at the AGM of the 'Friends' on the 28<sup>th</sup> June – namely Meredith Andrea, Brian Hewitt, Alan Bakewell and David Hampson. Here we hear from two of them. If you wish to speak to them on their roles within the 'Friends' please contact them direct or, better still, come along to one of the Working Party events and talk to them!

**Brian Hewitt** was born in Woking, a 'war baby' and lived till '66 near Watford. Interested in radio and electronics, he intended to join the BBC as a technician. But Maths proved his undoing and Art his vocation. Brian met future wife Maz in 6th form; an interest in Jazz brought them together, and while she continued her medical studies in Birmingham, Brian gained his Art Teaching Diploma at Priory Road, Edgbaston. A job arose at St Thomas Aquinas School and Brian taught there as Head of Art for thirty years, through the school's various transformations Brian taught painting and drawing, printmaking, ceramics and art history to senior students. Of course organising scenery and lighting for school productions was all part of the fun as well as the PA system for Sports Day.

Nine years ago early retirement was offered to teachers aged over 55 when it was discovered that their pension contributions had been used to fund the construction of the M25; Brian accepted.

Since retirement Brian has attempted to learn the saxophone; partly disentangled the Family Tree; and travel has been extensive - the Nile, India, Thailand, Namibia, Bali, Australia; China; and Canada is next. Having gained their PADI qualification at Stoney Cove and despite advancing age, Brian & Maz have been scuba diving three times in the Red Sea.

Brian is also a radio amateur, and has enjoyed chatting to hams all round the world, despite using modest equipment (*and a tall mast in Pinehurst Meadow – Ed*); he loves steam railways, Apple Mac computers, photography, music, and helps run the local walking group Cotteridge Country Walkers.

Brian has long been concerned about the local management of the community and its amenities, and welcomes the chance to lend a hand in restoring and actively managing Kings Norton's own Nature Reserve. He has played the major role in the production of the 'Friends' display stand, which is now taken to local events and has recently completed the design of the new recruitment brochure. All this as well as being an active working party member. Brian – please keep up the good work.



**Alan Bakewell** was the first chair of the 'Friends' when it was established on a formal basis following on from the 'Friends of Wychall Reservoir' – a group he started in 2001. Born in 1935, he has lived in and around Kings Norton for most of his life and his memories of this area, and the people who live here, go way back to the good old days when a pint in The Bull cost 1/3d!

His involvement with environmental issues came comparatively late, when he had all but retired from the daily grind and had some time on his hands. He became interested in the workings of local democracy, began to attend ward meetings and was amazed to find how little public participation there was. At that time, 1998, the city had sold Birmingham Airport and had decided that the money raised should be divided among the city wards to be used for worthy projects. By sheer chance, at about this time, Alan had begun to take daily walks by Wychall Reservoir, which in these days was a large mud hole, full of old furniture and traffic cones. The path alongside the reservoir was a rough track, not suitable for any but the most hardy to travel. Alan decided that some of the funds available could and should be allocated to, "develop the reservoir and adjoining land in such a way as to make more use of an amenity that is potentially of great value to the community, but which at present is underused and neglected". The special allocation bid was presented to the ward committee and accepted. A grant of £10,000 followed. The dredging of the reservoir was another difficulty that had to be surmounted and Alan called on the services of Ed Doolan and Radio WM to press the council to get on with this necessary work, during the "How clean is your city" campaign.

Alan says 'he is not really a committee man although he is very good at getting things done!' However, he still manages to bring all his valuable experience to bear on those with bureaucratic tendencies. He continues to organise the regular clean ups on the Nature Reserve but keeps saying he will give up after the next one.....

## *The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve*

In the last Newsletter we offered our congratulations to Chris Mansell, the Rea Valley Ranger, who has left us to work with the Forestry Commission. Will he be missed? It appears we have a replacement in the making – well at least an additional pair of hands for our working parties:

*Philip Barraclough, aged 15. writes on his own 'Work Experience':-*

I am currently a Year 10 pupil at King's Norton Boys' Secondary School. As part of the curriculum we are encouraged to seek a two-week work experience placement to gain skills and experience that cannot be found in the school environment. I was fortunate to be accepted by the Park Ranger Service and my placement would take place at both the Shire Country Park under the supervision of Alf Dimmock and the Lickey Hills Country Park with Nicola Human.

It was with a little nerves that I arrived at the Shire Country Park for my first day. I need not have worried. I was made very welcome by Alf Dimmock, the Park Ranger and after a health and safety briefing we went about our first task of cutting back overgrowth at various places along the River Rea corridor. My two-week placement coincided with the summer heat wave where record temperatures for Birmingham were reached so any physical work was extremely demanding and exhausting.

My second day was out at The Dingles where we went about placing wooden steps into a sloped bank to assist members of the public in wet or icy weather. This took all day and I can surely say that I have never worked so hard in my life! I was however, very proud of my achievement and hopefully the steps will remain in place for many years to come. During our various sorties out and around the Country Shire Park, Alf pointed out many species of wildlife. We saw a variety of butterflies but my favourite has to be the white admiral. I was also delighted to see a brown trout in the river.

Later in the week I transferred over to the Lickey Hills and was placed with Nicola Human. My first task was to help Nicola escort a party of school children on a scheduled tour of the Park. In the afternoon Nicola had arranged for me to go on a working party to cut down some diseased trees. This required me to wear all the necessary safety equipment and I felt very privileged to see how the professionals tackle such projects.

I feel very fortunate indeed to have undertaken my work experience with the Park Ranger Service and I am indebted to Alf and Nicola who allowed me the opportunity to observe and participate in a variety of projects and tasks. I learned how to use a variety of tools such as tree loppers and bow saws and appreciated the need for safety equipment when such projects dictated. I learned how and where to look for wildlife and how to maintain hedgerows and pathways to ensure the safety of the public. I thoroughly enjoyed my work experience placement and hopefully I will have learned skills that will stand me in good stead for the future.

### *Education piece*

The new school year is almost with us, and we look forward to developing the education programme already begun with local primary schools. We aim to encourage young people to be aware of the richness and excitement of watching wildlife through the seasons, and offer them involvement in the future development of the site. Making and hanging a nest box is fun: watching it in use (what bird, when, how many young?) should give a huge sense of achievement. Primary school 'nature study' has been the inspiration behind so many great careers in the world of natural history, and so much basic science, let alone joy in nature and a sense of community responsibility. We very much hope, too, to start work this year to develop tailored projects with local secondary schools, and in particular St Thomas Aquinas which borders onto the reserve. Already one or two members with relevant skills have been much involved in our education programme, though we have also relied heavily on the Ranger service – especially Chris Mansell of blessed memory. If you have a background in environmental education, or know someone who can help us to develop this essential service for the future of the LNR, please contact Meredith Andrea, our Education Co-ordinator. Similarly, if you have useful contacts in local schools, please let us know.

# The Friends of King Norton Nature Reserve

## Diary Dates

Please come and support us at these events:

Saturday, 16 <sup>th</sup> September, 11.00 – 17.00	Stall at the 'Millennium Green' Medieval day.
Tuesday, 19 <sup>th</sup> September, 10.00-15.30	A big clean up and a volunteers Training day on the LNR with the Birmingham Foundation.
Saturday, 14 <sup>th</sup> October, 09.00-13.00	Stall at Kings Norton Farmers Market on The Green.
Sunday, 15 <sup>th</sup> October, 10.30 – 14.30	Tidy up Merecroft and Pinehurst Meadows.
Sunday, 12 <sup>th</sup> November, 10.30 – 14.30	Planting & clearing, Wychall Lane.
Sunday, 17 <sup>th</sup> December, 10.30 – 15.30	Community tree planting, Pinehurst Meadow.
Sunday, 21 <sup>st</sup> January 07, 10.30 – 15.30	Planting & clearing, Wychall Lane.

**Tools wanted:** If you have any unwanted garden tools then please let one of the Committee know.

**Help us stay in touch with you:** Have you emailed us yet? Please send us a 'hello' message, so that we can maintain our address lists.

**Join our 'green gym' working parties:**

Every Tuesday, as much time as you can spare between 10.30 and 1.30. Please let us know in advance on [KingsNortonLnr@aol.com](mailto:KingsNortonLnr@aol.com) or by ringing a committee member – see below.

Next dates: 5 & 19 September, 3 & 17 October.

Do you burn logs? Remember -----

Beech wood fires are bright and clear,  
If the logs are kept a year.  
Chestnut only good they say  
If for long it's laid away.  
Make a fire of elder tree,  
Death within your house shall be;  
But ash new or ash old  
Is fit for Queen with crown of gold.

Birch and fir logs burn too fast,  
Blaze up bright and do not last.  
It is by the Irish said  
Hawthorn bakes the sweetest bread.  
Elmwood burns like churchyard mould  
E'en the very flames are cold.  
But ash green or ash brown  
Is fit for Queen with golden crown.

Poplar gives a bitter smoke,  
Fills your eyes and makes you choke;  
Apple wood will scent your room  
With an incense-like perfume.  
Oaken logs, if dry and old,  
Keep away the winters cold;  
But ash wet or ash dry  
A King shall warm his slippers by.

## The FKNNR Honorary Officers, Committee Members and Advisors

Chairman	Amanda Cadman	0121 624 3865
Vice Chairman	David Barraclough	0121 458 2244
Treasurer	David Human	0121 458 1300
Secretary	Phil Evans	0121 628 6769
Membership Secretary	Jil Bromley	0121 244 7483
Newsletter Editor	Paul Adams	0121 451 3003
Education	Meredith Andrea	0121 451 3243
Committee Members	Jon Anson, Suzanne Ashley, Alan Bakewell, Peter Cage, David Hampson, Nicola Human, Brian Hewitt & John Smith.	

Environmental Agency Hotline  
PC James Bennett  
Community Police  
Anti-social behaviour Hotline

0800 807060  
0845 113 5000 ext . 7826 6363  
07769 882113  
0121 303 1111