

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 42 - Spring 2017

Registered Charity No: 1122293

www.fknnr.org.uk



Clearing back the encroaching bramble and crack willow from around the new scrape in the Pea Fields.



<http://www.facebook.com/knreserve> enquiries@fknnr.org.uk

www.fknnr.org.uk

Newsletter 42 55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton Registered Charity No. 1122293

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Chairman's Report Spring 2017

What could be better than a walk around the Reserve in bright warm sunshine under an almost cloudless blue sky now that the storms have passed, looking at the various fallen trees which are in the process of being removed by the volunteers, or for the large ones – the City's contractors?

There is however, a dark cloud on the horizon in the shape of the City's ailing finances. The initial proposal is for a 20% cut across the Parks and Ranger services. This would have a significant impact on all open spaces, including the Reserve as we rely on the Rangers for support, advice and being present when we use the Tracmaster.

In January I attended a meeting arranged by BOSF (Birmingham Open Spaces Forum) at which there were representatives of Friends groups from across the city.

Councillor Lisa Trickett, Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling and Environment was the speaker and she was receptive to the concerns raised about any reduction in Parks and Ranger services.

We wait to see if the dark cloud will pass over, drizzle a bit or produce a downpour.

One immediate consequence of the reduction in the City Council's services may be the presence of two rough sleepers, one at Wychall Reservoir in a small tent, and one amongst the oak trees in Peafields in a more elaborate construction of blue tarpaulin laid over a frame of willow branches.

The Rangers have been informed and have decided that they are best left where they are during the cold weather – rather than having to sleep on the streets. This was generally accepted by committee members. However, the Peafields "resident" has caused damage to log piles, dead hedges and vegetation so it is to be hoped that the Rangers will move both on now that the weather is improving.

In contrast to the sun glistening on the water of Merecroft, Wychall Reservoir is a mere trickle due to the accumulation of silt

<http://www.facebook.com/knreserve> enquiries@fknnr.org.uk www.fknnr.org.uk

Newsletter 42 55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton Registered Charity No. 1122293

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

as it was last cleared ten years ago. Although it is becoming an eyesore and is no longer the wetland area it was intended to be, the Environment Agency assure us that, despite the silt, the Reservoir still has sufficient capacity to hold any flood water.

Fortunately David Hampson is taking up the "silt baton" and is tirelessly negotiating with various engineers to try and find ways to help improve the flow of water through the reservoir and thus reduce the depositing of silt and ideally a proposal to get sufficient silt removed to create some open water. Keep up the good work David.

In spite of the winter gloom the reserve continues to be well maintained by the TWO (Tuesday Work Outs) volunteers. Also the Community Litter Pick of February resulted in 21 people filling 42 bags as well as retrieving the very, very sodden mattress by the wooden bridge. There does seem to have been a transport theme to the litter dumping – a toddler's plastic trike, another child's bike, an adult bike from the river and a burnt out motorbike from Peafields.



The rotten and broken wooden kick rails along Wychall Lane have been replaced by far more permanent metal ones providing evidence that the reserve is being well cared for as well as giving protection against vehicles being driven onto the site.

This year three posts are falling vacant, we are very keen to have new members of the committee so please see "Your Committee Needs you" for details of the posts and get in touch if you would like further discussion.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Two important dates for your diary;

May 6th – Walking on the Wildside. Starting with a Dawn Chorus Walk at 5.30 am, followed by various nature related activities from 10.00 – 1.00pm and ending with a Bat Walk at 8.30 pm. Exact details to follow on the website.

May 15th – The AGM. This is your chance to meet the committee, raise questions and contribute to the running of the Friends.

Andrew Nabbs.

Chairman

Editing the Newsletter – a tribute to Phil

After producing the previous *Newsletter* Phil Evans announced that it would be his last. Friends may or may not realise that Phil is a real founding father of our group (along with the revered Alan Bakewell) and, despite moving to Malvern a couple of years ago and undergoing open-heart surgery to replace a heart valve, continues to be the leader of our weekly 'Tuesday WorkOuts' and deviser, in consultation with the Rangers, of our work schedules throughout the year.

We owe Phil an enormous debt of gratitude for everything he has done, and continues to do, for the benefit and development of the Reserve. If this was not enough, he has edited our *Newsletter* consistently since the setting-up of the Friends, barring two or three editions while he was dealing with his heart problems, when Peter Cage and I put the thing out (as we are this time, while we await a new Editor).

Phil's crisp editorial style and eye for both layout and the essential news about the Reserve have kept all Friends well informed wherever they live and despite the majority not being regular workers on site. Thank you Phil, and we hope that you and the new Editor will have a fruitful future in publicising the good work that we undertake here!

Amanda Cadman

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Volunteering Report

We have been out there pretty much every Tuesday doing our WorkOuts across the Reserve during the past three months.

I remember however one day when rain stopped play: I was doing the ring-round to regular volunteers to warn them that we would not be meeting when, looking out of my window, I witnessed a sparrow hawk catching a blackbird on my back lawn!

Our group of regulars has grown, and today there were 13 of us on site. We have had one or two new members of the group – hugely welcome when we all begin to feel a bit slower. Christian was saying today that he was approaching middle age; well a number of us are several decades beyond that! And still going strong. Maybe it's the varied exercise we get every week? But if you are a bit younger and can give us a hand now and then, it would be much appreciated! You might actually enjoy it too!

You may like to know that during January and February alone 129 volunteers (frequently the same ones, of course!) spent 225 hours undertaking conservation work on the Reserve, during which time we collected 74 bags of rubbish, one mattress, a dolls' house, a burnt-out motorbike and a child's cycle! This does include the Community Litter Pick that took place on Sunday 26 February which Andrew has mentioned. Thanks to everyone involved in this staggering set of statistics. You really do make a difference!

On 11 March we took the community stall at Kings Norton Farmers' Market. I am enormously grateful to all who helped to man the stall and who distributed a large number of leaflets, enrolled a new family as Members and sold bird food, newsletters, note cards etc. etc. The most important thing, of course, was to broadcast the message about the existence of the Reserve and the opportunities it offers for walking, cycling and quiet moments to watch and listen to our local bird- and plant-life

And we have continued to offer monthly guided walks around the Reserve. I know from personal experience that December and January drew no takers, which is a pity. But be assured that we will be there every final Saturday of the month to offer our experiences of the Reserve throughout the year, to show you what

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

wildfowl are on our water bodies, to look for seasonal plant life and for signs of the larger mammals that live here too. If you want to know more about our history, or can indeed contribute information to it, we'd love to talk to you on our walks.

We have spent some time recently preparing areas of our meadows and sowing wildflower seed provided for us under the Urban Buzz project to improve habitats and increase food sources for pollinating insects. I hope that there will be some evidence of success, especially in the small triangular field at the top of Meadow Hill Road. We are discouraging dog walkers from using this area as a free-for-all loo for their pooches, so that the flower meadow may be a pleasant place for humans to walk without treading in something horrid.



Volunteers with senior ranger, Steve Hinton; in Pinehurst Meadow.

We were so sorry to say the long farewell to friend and volunteer Mike Lawrence (see Graham's article) and we send our love and thanks to his wife June for her continuing support for the Reserve, which was clearly very dear to Mike's heart.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



Urban Buzz are to provide us with some very luxurious bug hotels, for which we need to find secure locations.

We are planning a **Walking on the Wildside** day of walks and other activities based at Waterways Meadow on Saturday 6 May. Starting with our Dawn Chorus Walk with Jane Tavener, and ending with a Bat Walk with Brian Hewitt and Matt Wall, there will be activities for all the family, and a special celebration of the newly-designated Popes Lane extension. Watch out for further information!

Amanda Cadman

Volunteer Co-ordinator



A volunteer, from the Birmingham and Solihull Mid-Week Conservation Group, doing some heavy digging in clay soil to create a new pond.

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Fallen or Dangerous Trees

As you will imagine, a number of trees on the Nature Reserve were damaged or uprooted in the high winds in late February. Large sections of trees fell across the Cycle path in two places, inhibiting passage by pedestrians and cyclists. Elsewhere, one tree brought down two others, thereby obstructing a woodland path alongside the River Rea, and a number of small crack willows came down on the new Reserve Extension (the Peafields). There is also a large tree down across the path at Merecroft.



The City Rangers quickly dealt with those causing obstruction along the Cycle Path. With the agreement of the Rangers, the other trees, provided they are not found to be dangerous, have been or will be dealt with by the Friends over the ensuing days and weeks.

In general, there is provision on the Council's website for members of the public to report trees on parks and open spaces which have fallen or which they consider could be dangerous.

The website link is

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20089/parks/170/keeping_parks_safe/4 Alternatively, an emergency number which may be used is 0121 464 6728.

In addition, if you have an urgent issue to raise with the Rangers, the Hub email is lickey.hub@birmingham.gov.uk, which is checked daily.

G Layton

Secretary



YOUR COMMITTEE NEEDS YOU!

At this year's AGM on 15th May three committee posts will become vacant;

- Secretary
- Membership Secretary
- Newsletter Editor

These are important and enjoyable roles which give you the opportunity to join an enthusiastic and supportive committee and be involved in the running of the Friends, particularly if you cannot attend the Tuesday workouts.

For more information about what each role entails please contact

Fknnr.membership@virginmedia.com

or andrewrnabbs@aol.com 07851 627 608

Andrew Nabbs

Chairman

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Mike Lawrence

We are sad to report the death of Mike Lawrence on Thursday 2nd February 2017, aged 68 years. A keen supporter of the FKNNR, he was an active member and also a member of the Friends Committee for several years.



Mike was born in Birmingham. He attended Lordwood Boys School and played rugby for the Old Boys for some years. He worked for the Civil Service at the Northfield branch of the Department of Health and Social Security until he was 58. He then worked for brief periods at Cadburys and at Birmingham Airport before finally retiring in 2009.

He was a kind and a gentle man, genuinely concerned about the welfare of other people and was always willing to help others. His concern

extended to animals and other creatures also. In particular, he and his wife June loved cats. They always shared their home with at least two cats, and were active supporters of the Cats Protection League at Wythall.

Like many of the Friends, Mike was keen to help preserve and maintain the local environment for the benefit and enjoyment of others, and following his retirement, he came to help at the Tuesday WorkOuts on the Reserve. He was undeservedly modest about his abilities, but he was always willing to work, whatever the job. His strength, willingness and good sense of humour were much appreciated on a cold, January day, standing knee-deep in water, digging out silt to form pathways alongside a pond! He learned to use a scythe, and for two or three years gave up a

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Saturday morning with a couple of other Friends, to help on the annual visit to scythe the meadow of the Rea Valley Conservation Group at Coleys Lane. He also joined the visits to Fields Millennium Green to mow the grass with the FKNNR Tracmaster mower. In 2011 he agreed to become a member of the Friends Committee, where his observations, based on experience and common sense, were valued. He served as a member from 2011 until 2015.

However, during 2012 Mike's health began to fail him and he was unable to attend the WorkOuts. He was diagnosed with leukaemia in 2013 and began treatment at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital over the next three years, interspersed with periods when the illness appeared to be in remission. Although he was unable to physically assist, during this period he would sometimes visit during the WorkOuts to see what we were doing, and his support was greatly appreciated. Mike will be sadly missed by all of the Friends who knew and worked with him, and our sympathy and thoughts are with June and his wider family.

Graham Layton

Secretary

Open Garden On 24 June

David Fernie will be opening his delightful garden at 48 Varlins Way to the public, splitting the entrance monies received between the Friends and the Birmingham and Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers, with whom he works at the Reserve. The attention to detail and variety of planting are extraordinary, and I heartily recommend a visit.

You will get a cuppa too!

Amanda Cadman

Walking on the Wildside

A day of walking opportunities
and so much more on
Kings Norton Nature Reserve

At junction of Wychall Rd/Meadow Hill Rd

Saturday 6 May 2017

Starting with a Dawn Chorus Walk led by
Jane Tavener

(followed by breakfast at Molly's on the Green)

Ending with a Bat Walk
led by Brian Hewitt and Matt Wall

With other themed walks during the day,
plus pond-dipping, children's activities,
a treasure hunt and
the formal opening of our extension within
Northfield Ward!

For full details contact Amanda at:
enquiries@fknr.aol.com or phone 0121 624 3865

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Last Call for Membership Subscriptions

As the days get longer and the chilly air begins to warm, it means we are rapidly approaching the "New Year". In fact "New Years" because for the FKNNR the financial year end closes on 31st March, so a new financial year on 1st April and the membership subscription year will start on 1st June.

Now I know there are two months between the end of the financial year and the start of the membership year, but I do look to get all of the outstanding subs in before the 31st March. This ensures the membership subscriptions for the year 2016/17 are included in the accounts for 2016/17 with minimum amounts due being carried forward. For those of you who are unsure if you are up to date, please do contact me to find out either on the email (fknnr.membership@virginmedia.com) or by phone (number at the back of the newsletter).

I will happily accept cheques, notes, coins or standing orders – in whichever way it arrives, it all ends up in our bank account to finance the ongoing upkeep of the reserve and the much appreciated newsletters, in addition to the less exciting but essential costs like insurance. So please do keep sending in your membership subscriptions, every pound is used on or for the Reserve. Thank you.

Alistair Howard

Membership Secretary

A spring walk through the Reserve

Peter (Cage) and I had a walk through the reserve on Wednesday 15 March. Spring is definitely here – there was lots of birdsong, and three buzzards circling over Wychall Reservoir (they didn't stay for a photo). But pussy willow was out in force, and there were lots of other spring flowers (see next page).

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



Daffodils at the bottom of Beaks Hill



Primroses in Pinehurst



Celandines and arum leaves in the Waterways meadow



Elder in tight bud, on Pinehurst



Alder catkins, near the Camp



The blackthorn isn't out yet, but there was plum blossom at the end of the Pea fields

Sarah Cage March 2017

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) by Paul Saunders 5/2/17

Contacts

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

Chairman		Andrew Nabbs	0121 458 6983
Vice Chairman	*	David Human	0121 458 1300
Secretary	*	Graham Layton	0121 458 4712
Treasurer and Membership Secretary		Alistair Howard	0121 451 3082
Working Parties	*	Phil Evans	01684 491564
Education		Andrew Nabbs	0121 458 6983
LNR Founder	*	Alan Bakewell	0121 603 1127
Volunteer Coordinator	*	Amanda Cadman	0121 624 3865

(* Denotes Trustee of the Charity)

Committee Members: Peter Cage, David Fernie, Ian Freake, David Hampson, Brian Hewitt, Jean Perring, Paul & Val Saunders, Matthew Wall.

Newsletter: Amanda Cadman and Peter Cage 0121 433 3486.

Environment Agency Hotline	0800 80 70 60
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

<http://www.facebook.com/knreserve> enquiries@fknnr.org.uk www.fknnr.org.uk

Newsletter 42 55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton Registered Charity No. 1122293