

FKNNR

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve
2, Wychall Park Grove ~ Kings Norton ~ Birmingham ~ B38 8AQ

Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve – It's Official!

A huge amount of progress has been made since our last Newsletter. Most importantly, the Local Nature Reserve encompassing Wychall and Merecroft has now officially been granted LNR status. A letter of support was received from English Nature during January and formal approval was given to the scheme by the City Council Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture on 26 January. Following this approval the City Solicitor has been asked to prepare the necessary legal notices which will allow the different areas of land to be formally and legally placed under a single management. This may take several months to complete, but in the meantime the City is taking steps to set up the Management Committee for the LNR, which, according to the Draft Constitution, will bring together in conference, representatives of voluntary organisations, statutory authorities, other relevant bodies and individuals as appropriate for Kings Norton LNR to seek to safeguard and maintain the natural and historic heritage of the site through an agreed Management Plan. Up to two people nominated annually by the 'Friends' will serve on this Management Committee, as will a representative of The Links Residents Association, The Rea Valley Conservation Group, The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, the Grazing licence holder, the local Police and up to four local residents and possibly two junior users. Negotiations are still taking place with British Waterways over the management of land owned by them (the meadow at the corner of Wychall Lane and Meadow Hill Road). If approval is agreed to manage that site in line with the Management Plan then it will be added to the declared LNR at a future stage.

So, the Local Nature Reserve is a formal entity, and we are in business! Many thanks, and heartiest congratulations, to all those who have been involved in moving things forward to this stage. May the future management of the LNR allow the development of an increasingly attractive environment that will enhance our neighbourhood while offering a haven for many kinds of wildlife and an educational resource for our local young people.



But that is not all that has been happening. As you will read below, there has been a good deal of activity on site, resulting in a cleaner reserve and the start of active management of the landscape. Many trees have been planted and a second tranche of bird boxes has been set up. And we have recently received confirmation that our application for £5,000 funding through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund for environmental improvement and community involvement has been successful.

This should provide us with a substantial sum towards the purchase of tools and equipment and for training and education projects. A bid has also been submitted to the Heritage Lottery 'Awards for All' scheme for funding which would allow us to restore a small area of the reedbed at the reservoir site as a practical demonstration of something that would improve the wetland habitat considerably. With LNR status we are able to apply to a wide range of funding sources, and I am enormously grateful to Phil Evans for his hard work in this area.
Alan Bakewell – Chairman

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Working Party news



Merecroft Activities. Currently the working party activity at Merecroft Pool is planned to be significantly less high profile than in those areas where the public can actually see what the 'Friends' are up to. Nevertheless, work has been undertaken which we hope will improve the security and appearance of the pool environment. Below are snapshots of the exercise to remove several fallen trees whilst on the left the 'Blackthorn Gang' relax after a session of planting Dog Rose and Blackthorn in the dam area which we hope will assist in deterring access. Time will tell if helps alleviate a local problem.



First Stage: It is 20 October 2004 and several trees, which were a magnet for anti-social activity, were cut into manageable sections by Chris Mansell, River Rea ranger.



Second Stage: Next day. Forget the problems of modern machinery. Welcome William. The horse drags out the remains of the trees for the construction of woodpiles on-site. A sustainable exercise all round.

The FKNNR held a working party weekend on the 15/16 January 2005. The event was concerned with the removal of scrub and sycamore within an area of the LNR and its replanting with native broadleaf trees. The 'Woodland Trust' via the community tree-planting fund assisted these activities and a grant enabled the group to lever additional resources from the Local Authority. The 'Friends' wish to place on record their gratitude for the grant of £100 provided by the 'Community Tree Planting Fund 2004/5'. A total of 20 volunteers took part in activities on Saturday the 15 January with a further 26 involved on the Sunday. The group managed to recruit two new members with the possibility of others joining in the near future.

The main thrust of the weekend's activities involved the clearance of several areas adjacent to the River Rea. A number of long and brush piles were constructed from the cleared material. Whips of several native species were then planted to provide an area of mixed woodland that would prove to be useful to the local wildlife over the coming years. Thus the main planting consisted of 100 oaks with some birch & hornbeam. An under storey has hopefully also been created by the selective planting of hazel, elder, bird cherry and blackthorn. In addition some 40 young alder trees were relocated within the site from an area subjected to other activities. In the future it is anticipated that larger non-native

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species (e.g. poplar) will be removed from the area once the current planting has established – future activities being in accordance with an agreed management plan for the LNR.



The planting of oak whips on the North side of the River Rea (left) and on the South side (right).



Nicola and the children relocate alder and hazel into areas cleared of sycamore.



The Barraclough family (above) help clear overgrown areas of sycamore and ivy on the 16th January.

Ken Fradley (right) puts the final oak in place.



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Training News: In February we learn to clear scrub, fell trees, plant a wildflower meadow and litter picking reaches beyond the brambles – Amanda Cadman.

Thanks to a grant from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers [BTCV] 'People's Places' scheme we have been able to undertake three exhausting, fascinating and exhilarating training days to learn the skills of scrub clearance, tree-felling and wildflower meadow development. With our BTCV instructor, Luke, we learned how to use slashers and axes safely, how to sharpen them, how not to injure ourselves or our neighbours, how to stack wood neatly and how to encourage wildflowers on the various meadows within the LNR. All this is hugely valuable to us and to the future of the LNR, and we can only be grateful to BTCV for insisting that we undertake this training.

Of course, when you slash away at a bramble clump that has been there for some years, the litter you reveal is frightening. This is where I found a whole carpet, and a milk bottle containing a dead mouse, and various other unmentionable or unrecognisable items. We learned, too, that the best thing to do with Japanese Knotweed is not to bash it around. Every disturbance breaks up and encourages its prolific roots, while probably allowing new plants to set. We need now to practice the skills we have learned, and to share them with others. If you are available to join in further working parties to continue our scrub clearance and tidying, tree felling and wild flower meadow development, do please let a Committee member know.



Meredith & Ken decimate the scrub



Danger – Tree lopping in progress



Geoff attacks those brambles



Wildflower experts take to the field

A meeting has been held with City Council Officers and Contractors and we have agreement to changes in the mowing regime for the meadows along the cycle path eastwards from the 'Camp' pub. These will, hopefully, over many years become 'Spring Meadows'. This means that the grass will be left unmown from March to July when the wildflowers will be in bloom. The grass will then be cut and the cuttings removed in mid July when they have set seed. The grass will then be kept short for the rest of the year.

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Membership details:

Seventy-six households have now taken out membership of the 'Friends'. We are enormously grateful for this increasing support, which is essential to the success of the Local Nature Reserve. Some members give of their time, all give of their (subscription) money (and sometimes additional donations), but importantly, too, members are there to act as advocates for the Reserve within the wider community, and to explain what we are trying to achieve for the benefit of local people and wildlife. We are keen to increase local support for the LNR, and we will seek to increase membership considerably over the coming year. To that end we have produced an introductory leaflet, which will give information about the LNR and how to join the Friends and 2 copies of are enclosed. **Please give these to friends since we want more members.** If you can help us to deliver leaflets to every house around the area do please let a Committee member know.

The AGM of the 'Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve' will be held on the 6 June 2005 [19.00 hrs] at Grange Hill Tennis Club. Your Committee have agreed that all of the growing membership should be offered the chance to take the group and the LNR forward in partnership with the City. All Committee positions are therefore up for election by the membership. If you feel that you can offer even more support to the group on a new FKNNR Committee then nominations will be welcomed up to 14 days before the above date.

Visiting other sites

While the birds are nesting and other creatures are doing their thing on site from March to May, it's not at all clever to do any work on site that will disturb them. We are, instead, planning a couple of trips to other places around the country to see what they have achieved and how their work might be replicated here. Places that have been suggested include the London Wetland Centre (reclaimed reservoirs, looks absolutely fascinating and very new), Ryton Organic Gardens (Coventry) for wildflower information, Brandon Marshes (also Coventry – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust), Otmoor (Oxfordshire, also new). WWT Martin Mere (Lancashire) and Upton Warren, (very close at hand, managed by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, between Bromsgrove and Droitwich).

Have you – the membership – any preferences. Please ring Amanda (624 3865), to let us know your interests, and trips will be arranged at short notice. Individual costs will vary dependent upon entrance fees and travel arrangements but we intend to keep such costs to the minimum.

Education Activities

Our Education Officers Nicola and Meredith have been working hard with Chris Mansell to develop a strong relationship with Wychall Park School, introducing staff to key features of the site and enjoying some very successful and enjoyable sessions in school.

Pupils from Years 3 and 4 have been making bird feeders while Year 5 pupils made bird boxes. These were painted by the younger pupils, and will be set up on the reserve shortly. It was clear that the young people were positively buzzing with enthusiasm as they joined in this project.

They were all very proud of their work and looked forward to seeing which sort of birds chose to live in their boxes.

Encouragingly, the project proved particularly attractive to a number of pupils who usually need a good deal of help at school a good sign that teaching through nature study as it used to be called, can really involve everyone and encourage active involvement.

Other educational projects are in the pipeline, including a nature detective walk on 16 March, and we look forward to playing a significant part in engaging local young people in the observation of their environment.

Footnote: 10 of the bird boxes produced by the children have now been installed in trees near the river Rea cycle path. This makes a total of 36 boxes installed this winter in and about the LNR.

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The River Rea Heritage Trail

There are many sites of historical and environmental interest along the Rea Valley. Our upstream neighbours, the Friends of Balaam's Wood, inspired by the work of local historian Harry Reeves, are to be congratulated on their initiative to set up a Heritage Trail along the river. The Trail is a walking route from the source of the Rea on the Waseley Hills to Cannon Hill Park, and features interpretation boards at important sites. These include Gannow Green Moat, a scheduled monument and the site of a medieval moated manor house, Balaam's Wood, one of only 25 ancient woodlands in Birmingham, Northfield Mill, probably the best preserved remains of all the mills on the Rea and, on our own patch, Wychall Mill where the Boulton and Watt beam engine now at Thinktank at Millennium Point had its working life. An interactive website with 3D graphics and an education pack for local schools is also being produced.

The Heritage Trail is being launched by the Lord Mayor with a Family Fun Day on Kings Norton Playing Fields on Easter Monday, 28th March, starting at 10 am. As well as a (toy) duck race on the river you can join historical walks led by Dr Mike Hodder, City Planning Archaeologist, and George Demidowicz, industrial archaeologist. There will be representation from the Birmingham City Council Ranger Service, the Environment Agency, the Local Heritage Initiative and the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country AND the Friends of Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve will be running an information stall and a kid's area. Do come if you can!

TEAL



*Teal on Wychall Reservoir in March last year
before heading back to their breeding grounds.
But where are these?*

According to the BTO 'Migration Atlas' 2002: "Teal wintering in Britain & Ireland, as well as those passing through to areas further south, come from breeding grounds in Iceland, northern Europe, the Baltic States and a large area of the Russian Federation north of about 55°N and extending eastwards to about 60°E. -
--- This reinforces the importance of Britain & Ireland for birds from across a wide breeding range."

The Management Plan for Kings Norton LNR includes for the investigation of and the construction of a Teal 'scrape' to attract more of these birds back to the site during the winter.

In 1997 the West Midland Bird Club Annual Report (No 64) stated that an impressive 97 birds were at Wychall reservoir on the 1 January – more than the Sandwell Valley Reserve. However, the habitat changes over the past few years help explain how the maximum number birds seen at any one time has decreased each successive winter.

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|---------|--------------------------------------|
| 2001/02 | 70 birds |
| 2002/03 | 45 birds |
| 2003/04 | 28 birds |
| 2004/05 | 12 birds [PRE personal observations] |



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Wildlife Corner: The following observations have been reported over the past three months on or about the LNR.

Spring is now upon us and new life is starting to appear in and about the Nature Reserve. A pair of Long Tailed Tits was observed busy making their nest on the 13 March and that is always a good sign that things are on the move. These little birds are now seen much more frequently and such sightings are, we suppose, a sign of less harsh winters. The same can also be said about Wrens, Goldcrests and Tree Creepers – all of who have all been recently reported in Meadow Hill Road and Wychall Lane. The birds benefit from milder winters and this is all in stark contrast to past experience. We quote from the 1947 Report of the Birmingham Bird Club* in relation to the Wren: “Very few left in Kings Norton area ...appears to have been hard hit by the severe winter”.

*Mrs EM Butler of Rednall Road, Kings Norton who was, we think, a Committee member of the Bird Club in the period 1946 –50, made the report. Your Secretary would appreciate any further information relating to Mrs Butler or wildlife recordings in the area during this period.

There have been few reported sightings of mammals recently apart from the occasional Brown Rat and the numerous Grey Squirrels. Sorry we do not count dead mice! However, Foxes continue to be noticed quite regularly along the river and one report relates to three playing early one Sunday morning in the middle of the road in Woodglade Croft. Muntjac Deer have been seen on several occasions with a recently reported sight of two on the grassed area of the dam at Wychall reservoir.

The installation of the ‘trial’ floating islands (two old pallets!) as a wildfowl refuge on Wychall Reservoir appears to have met with some success. They are constantly in use by Mallard, Moorhen and the Canada Geese who returned to the site at the end of January. Keen observers may have noticed that one goose carries leg rings possibly from a group ringed at Cannon Hill Park. The ring numbers are now being checked out to obtain further details. Small numbers of Teal continue to be recorded at Wychall and although Coot are ever present at Merecroft they did not return to Wychall until the first week in March. The appearances of Cormorants at Merecroft Pool continue and we now know that the birds drop in occasionally on their way to or from the Bittell Reservoirs near Hopwood.

The on-site training days mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter provided ample opportunities to observe the local birds – Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Grey Wagtail and several views of the local Sparrow Hawk were noted. The Buzzard was back circling over Wychall Lane on Sunday the 13 February and several working party members watched it being ‘mobbed’ by 3 crows. The over-wintering Redwing were noted in the last newsletter but what was not anticipated was their abundance with at least 30 being noted on the Triplex Sports field on 4 March. Again on the finch scene a growing number of Goldfinches continue to be seen in the many Alder trees along the River Rea and into Kings Norton Park - one such ‘charm’ of 26 Goldfinches being seen (and heard!) on the 15 February. The Green Woodpecker has been seen regularly and was last recorded on the 14 March.

Now that Spring is here keep a look out for butterflies. The first Brimstone butterfly was noted in the Rea Meadows on the 18 March.

Notable - but unconfirmed - sightings on or about the LNR include a Woodcock and a Peregrine Falcon – more observers may help us to confirm such sightings so please let a Committee member know if you do see birds or animals of interest.

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International Dawn Chorus Day

We plan to take part in this event which is usually scheduled for early May each year. Should you wish to join us for an early morning walk to listen to the birds in the area then make a note of 6 a.m. on the 8 May. All welcome. We will start from the junction of Beaks Hill and Meadow Hill roads and walk north through the fields to Wychall Lane before joining the cycle route. We will then follow the Rea to Popes Lane. Please bring warm clothes and binoculars but you will need to be quiet!



The Geese on the pallet islands.

WANTED: Details of sightings of Toads (below) in Kings Norton. Do you know of pools or garden ponds where toads will be breeding this Spring? Help us locate and save an endangered species.



Know your Coot (centre) from your Moorhen(s).

Community Wardens

We have been building up a good relationship with our two Community Wardens, Paul & Adrian, and they explained to the trainee Wildflower Group on the 28 February how they approach their duties throughout Kings Norton. Please talk to them about local issues. In particular they will be able to direct any concerns you may have to the relevant authorities. They can be contacted through 0121 303 2127.

Please keep the above number to hand and that of the Refuse Dept. of the City Council – 0121 303 1112. They will take all large items away from your house so please spread the word. There is absolutely no excuse for illegal dumping any where in Kings Norton. AND Don't forget that anti-social behaviour can be reported on 0121 303 1111.

The FKNNR honorary officers & advisors

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|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Chair | Alan Bakewell | 0121 603 1127 |
| Vice Chair | 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 | Amanda Cadman | 0121 624 3865 |
| Education | Meredith Andrea & Nicola Human | 0121 451 3243 0121 458 1300 |
| River Rea Ranger | Chris Mansell | 0121 447 7106 |

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