

# The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve



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## Newsletter 15 - the first for 2008



*A look forward to Summer.  
The Devil's bit Scabius on our Local Nature Reserve plays host to numerous species of insect including bees.*

£2  
to non  
members

# The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

## Chairman's Notes

The Friends of Kings Norton LNR is now a charity! This is a great achievement for us, and will enhance our opportunities to seek funding from outside bodies to support site development. The application process was long-drawn-out and detailed, and I am very grateful to David Barraclough for pushing it forward for us.

You might expect that January and February would be a quiet time on the Nature Reserve, but not a bit of it! Indeed we started the New Year in fine style with a barbeque and mulled wine in Sheila's Meadow after some hearty exercise to work off the extra Christmas pounds. It now looks like 2008 is promising to be the Year of the Tree for us. At the end of last year we were awarded a large number of young native trees ('whips', mostly of hazel) and some larger trees, through the Civic Society's "Trees for Life" scheme run in collaboration with the City Council. We cleared a good deal of ground along the Rea on Wychall Lane and advertised a tree-planting day on 15 January. Our advertisement prompted a call from Herefordshire College of Technology to see if they could bring a party of students to help with the planting as part of their course assessment. In the event it became clear that the trees could not be delivered by 15 January! Thank heavens, the Woodland Trust & the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum were able to step in and provide cash for some whips. A cold wet day saw a good party of tree-planters, including the students, planting around 400 hazel whips to form a coppice alongside the river. Our January & February clean-up events around the reservoir and river included further hazel and bulb planting while yet more whips were planted in Pinehurst and the British Waterways meadows. Eventually the "Trees for Life" whips arrived and we have continued our planting along the side of the river at Wychall Lane. In all we will have planted some 1,500 young trees this spring to enhance our neighbourhood for people and for wildlife and we are most grateful to all who have given financial support to this venture and to all who have put in their time to help with the planting. The bigger trees are yet to arrive and will need professional planting equipment rather than our spades and mattocks.

We have had active support from Kings Norton Nursery School too. A party of children had a lovely time one morning walking up to the reservoir dam, ably guided by Shirley and Alan Bakewell and watching some of the tree planting. As well as splashing in their wellies and playing Pooh Sticks, they also helped us by planting some primroses by the footbridge (away from the mower's path), which should spread to make a lovely carpet for us all to enjoy.

Behind the scenes, your Committee, who met in January, looked particularly at publicity and promotion, recognising the need to have someone working

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specifically to build up awareness of where we are, what we seek to achieve, and how people can become involved as visitors and as volunteers. We need someone with energy and vision, and with the time to ensure that promotional material is up to date and available. Can you help us? A number of groups are looking, too at 'joined-up' promotion of Kings Norton's assets: heritage, open spaces and buildings. With the newly formed Friends of Kings Norton Park and the KN Millennium Green we are looking at ways in which collaborative working can benefit us all.

Neighbourhood Renewal Funding comes to an end at the end of this month, and with it the Community Wardens will cease to work around the city. We in Kings Norton have been particularly blessed in having Paul Kennedy and Adrian Smith working as our Community Wardens. They have been the eyes and ears of the community, cleaning up graffiti and litter and helping to sort out people's environmental problems. The Local Nature Reserve has been particularly lucky due to the huge amount of time they have given to our clean-up days and other projects (such as cleaning out the revolting mess in the Pinehurst horse shelter). They were a constant source of enthusiastic support for the Open Day last year (remember all the loudhailer work Paul did with such glee? They also patrolled the river and marshalled the duck races). They have done a spectacularly good job for Kings Norton and indeed Paul has just received a major award from national environmental charity ENCAMS as their "Cleaner Safer Greener" Champion [see the ENCAMS website]. Many congratulations to Paul, and our warmest thanks to you both for all you have done for the LNR and for Kings Norton in general. We are desperately sorry to lose you.

We have now received the results of the survey undertaken last year on and around Wychall Reservoir by Land Care Associates Ltd. This gives us baseline data from which to work to enhance the area for wildlife. The survey showed that the area already has

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quite a range of fauna – most excitingly, a viviparous lizard was found on the reservoir dam, but the evidence for water vole is now extremely tenuous. Thus, the site has great potential for developing a rich diversity of plant, insect, bird and animal life. The quality of the water, however, is dismal, though significantly improved in the small areas of reed bed we have planted. And there is the problem of flooding - more of that later in this newsletter!....



*Amanda Cadman*

*Chairman*

*Another colourful fungus in the Chairman's hand - found along the banks of the Rea.  
(Elf cups – Pezizacoccinea – we think!)*

# The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

## Tree down - March 1st

The high winds on the night February 29<sup>th</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup> resulted in several trees blown down on the LNR. These photographs show the entrance to Burman's Drive, Wychall Lane following the winds. We were impressed with the speed at which the tree was then dispatched by the City's contractors, leaving us with just a pile of chippings.



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River Rea South Bank -  
Clearance then Hazel coppices

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*Above: A view across the river to the south bank area that was subsequently cleared.  
The stages of clearance are shown below.*



The River Rea area clearance work and Hazel coppices have cost approx £3,000:

Planting days have been sponsored by the Woodland Trust, BOSF (BEP funds), Street Champions, 'Trees for Life' and the Kings Norton Ward Committee (NRFC).

We thank all the volunteer labour and all our sponsors for this assistance.

# The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

**Wildlife Watch:** observations reported on or about the LNR over the past three months. Please send to [LocalNature@aol.com](mailto:LocalNature@aol.com)

It has been a strange year already. Mild spells alternating with warm periods meant that many birds started to build their nests very early. Moorhen, Magpie, Blackbird and Wren were all observed carrying nesting material in February and Frogs were also on the move with the first spawn being recorded on the 29<sup>th</sup>. All this whilst we experienced the annual influx of migratory birds such as Redwing & Fieldfare and the usual increase in numbers of Chaffinch and Blackbird. One Brambling has been recorded locally as have up to four Blackcaps – possibly related to the amount of supplementary food located on the bird tables and feeders within Kings Norton. The maximum number of Teal at Wychall Reservoir remained at 25 as reported last time.

Other regular reports include many of numerous Black-headed Gulls, Gt Spotted & Green Woodpeckers, Mallard and Grey Heron at both Merecroft Pool and Wychall Reservoir with a single Mute Swan visiting both sites in January. Working party members who arrive early have also listened to the song of a Song Thrush near the banks of the River Rea and up to 4 singing males have been recorded on the LNR – the habitat improvements must suit them. Throughout the period observations of Buzzards over Kings Norton continued and we now know where the Eagle Owl resides following the comments made in the last newsletter.

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On the mammal front there have been many reports of Foxes at Merecroft Pool and Wychall Lane, Badgers (at a location not being disclosed) and Muntjac Deer at Wychall Reservoir. Unfortunately a car on Wychall Lane hit one more Muntjac in February. Mink have been noticed in several gardens near the River Rea – we suspect they were checking out garden ponds. The moral here is if your fish disappear don't assume it was the Heron!



*Teal numbers at Wychall Reservoir have not reached the level of winter 2001/02 when 70 birds were recorded.*

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## *The LNR Working Party Report for 2007*



*A happy band 'dig in' bulbs on January 1<sup>st</sup>.*



*A group from Hereford college assisted with the planting of trees.*

# The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

The 'Friends' are one of the best-supported groups in the City in terms of willing volunteers who are prepared to turn up and undertake conservation activities. The occasional winter weekend workdays and the Tuesday 'Green Gym' activities have resulted in a magnificent improvement in the quality of the local environment. It is now quite usual for up to 10 people to be involved in any one practical event and the results are easy to see. The committee is therefore grateful for the time spent by individuals be it for one hour or five hours. The work keeps you fit, is not too demanding and, hopefully, is both rewarding and enjoyable. Long may it continue.

This effort by the membership in the year 2007 has significantly reduced the backlog of maintenance work necessary to bring the LNR up to a standard that will allow the approved 'Management Plan' to be progressed. The table shown below shows the work undertaken analysed over the main areas of the LNR. Some 2,230 hours of volunteer time was spent on activities ranging from scrub clearance/dead hedge creation/rubbish removal and tree & flower planting.

The locations for these activities were:

**The River Rea, Wychall Reservoir** – continuing clean-up activities with litter picks and substantial rubbish removal. Our two small reedbeds have been maintained and several sites along the cycle path have been prepared to receive simple benches. Anti-social activities, esp. graffiti was a recurring theme requiring action.

**The River Rea (south side) in Wychall Lane** has, since September, undergone a major makeover and after the removal of a poor quality understorey and several crack willow trees. It will be the location of several hazel coppices. Dead hedges have been created with the redundant on-site material and trees and bulbs have been planted.

The **Wychall Meadows** continue to be maintained with the long-term aim of seeing more wild flowers although the 2007 wet weather did not assist. The improvements were noticeable when we held our open day on this grassland in September.

**Pinehurst Meadow** – Substantial clearance of rubbish, sycamore, bramble & nettle. The old horse shelter has been cleared and a dead hedge created. Meadow management via scything. Whips and native wildflowers have been planted. Damage from arson attacks has been rectified.

**The BW Meadow (corner Wychall Lane & Meadow Hill Rd).** This grassland is of good quality and effort has gone into the removal of encroaching bramble and sycamore. Traditional scything has been undertaken and our responsibilities in respect of the fence line maintenance have been supplemented with a hedge-planting scheme.

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**The old orchard adjacent to Beaks Hill Road** required a considerable amount of attention to control encroaching laurel and remove a site for anti-social activity. Again dead hedges have been created. Bulbs and wildflowers were planted when we hosted a corporate event.

The wet meadow below Merecroft pool dam (now known as **Sheila's meadow**) was the subject of an exercise to clear watercourses with amphibious ponds, coppice willow, dead hedge creation and the clearance of bramble & nettle. Bulbs and wildflowers were planted when we hosted a second corporate event.

The main weekend Working Party activities and River Rea clean ups (with thanks to Alan Bakewell and his contacts with Street Champions and the Bromford Junior Wardens) occurred on:

21 January 2007	21/22 September
18 February	19/20 October
18 March	24 November

Special thanks to David Hampson for his continuing engineering activities used to good effect on the metal fences in the BW meadow and public right of way leading to West Hill Road. We are also indebted to the work and experience provided to us by the "Birmingham & Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers" who have lead the way by keeping everyone fit in and about the Local Nature Reserve.

<b>Work undertaken 2007 Location</b>	<b>Volunteer Hours</b>	<b>%</b>
Wychall Reservoir	380	17.0
Burmans Drive area	56	2.5
River Rea corridor	368	16.5
Wychall meadows	116	5.2
BW Meadow	320	14.4
Pinehurst Meadow	528	23.7
Sheila's Meadow	188	8.4
Old Orchard Beaks Hill	208	9.3
Merecroft Pool surrounds	68	3.0
Total 2007	2,232	100.0

All are welcome to come and join in. Training, tools and materials are provided - so we look forward to seeing you at any of the activities shown in the 'Diary' section of this Newsletter. Do please support our Tuesday 'Green

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Gym' activities (10.30 – 13.30 or less) and bring a friend with a view to increasing our membership.

*Phil Evans*

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*A dead hedge gang at work in Pinehurst Meadow during February 2007.*



*Live hedge laying in March 2007. Location – Eric's fence – Burman's Drive.*

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## *Committee*

### *Focus:*

*Graham Layton*

As the most recent member of the FKNNR Committee, I have been requested for several months, exhorted and even bribed by our esteemed newsletter editor, to provide an "auto bio pic" for the magazine. So here goes.....

I was born in Birmingham, and lived in Great Barr and Streetly for the first 27 years of my life. My wife, Jean, comes from Kings Heath. We were married in 1973 and first lived in Great Barr before we moved to our present house, in Wychall Park Grove. We have two daughters – Kate, who is a biomedical scientist at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London, and Jennie, who teaches Art at Alcester High School.



# The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

I left school in 1968 and joined Aldridge-Brownhills Urban District Council and subsequently became a Committee Clerk. I continued further education on a day-release basis and in 1976 I obtained the Diploma in Municipal Administration, which was then the qualification for local government administrators. In 1972 I moved to Warley County Borough Council as a Committee Clerk, dealing primarily with the Planning Committee. With the reorganisation of local government in 1974, Warley merged with West Bromwich County Borough Council to form Sandwell and I relinquished the committee-side of work to help establish the Estates Section of the new authority, which is now the Property Management Division of the Council. I remained in estates management for 11 years. I became an Assistant Democratic Services Manager in 2000, with specific responsibility for the teams dealing with the scrutiny and regulatory committees of the Council and for meetings of the Council itself, before leaving in 2006 after 38 years of service in local government. Little did I realise that my experience in arranging events was but training for helping to arrange the FKNNR Open Day!

When I retired, I wanted to continue to keep active but also to "put something back" into the community that I'd lived in for thirty years. The "Green Gym" seemed a good solution and indeed it has proved to be so. I'm happy to be one of the "usual suspects" who turn up on a Tuesday, and it's very satisfying to see the difference that the activities of the Friends as a whole have made to the Local Nature Reserve and to contribute towards maintaining the individual character of Kings Norton.



# The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

## Floods & Flood Control

We are all aware that the River Rea and thus part of our LNR form part of the flood defence system for South Birmingham. The FKNNR have been contacted during a period when consultants have examined the recent performance of this system – not just the river but also sewers, drains and culverts in conjunction with the general public awareness and flood warning processes. We have tried to stress the point that if we can develop the Wychall Reservoir site as a wetland centre then we need to retain more of the excess water that flows down the Rea.

Your Chairman and Treasurer attended the final workshop of this Defra-funded "Integrated Urban Drainage Pilot scheme" based on the upper Rea catchment, which set out "to investigate the viability of greater integration in urban drainage management". The steering group made up of representatives of Birmingham City Council, the Environment Agency and ST Water, had sought input from local businesses residents and voluntary organisations such as us, Balaam's Wood LNR and Northfield Flood Action Group (FLAG). The presentation of the pilot report, including modelled flood projections produced by Hyder Consulting, offered an opportunity for us to discuss with all these parties our aspirations for the sustainable and sensitive management of the Rea. It was also note worthy that future extreme events are likely to result in more frequent flooding incidents along the length of the river.

*Below: The Rea at a high level on 15 January working party day following 24 hours of rain.*



bucketed down all afternoon, and it was salutary to drive home, in company with Norma Boyd of FLAG, stopping to check on the river level at

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West Heath Road bridge. It is comforting to note that FLAG continue to take the flooding risk on the river Rea so seriously.

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We recognise that the lie of the land and urban developments makes the Rea extremely susceptible to flash flooding, but we found it very satisfying to find that most agreed that "get rid of the water downstream as fast as possible then it won't be our problem any more" was no longer seen as the best and only way to handle this.

Whilst we sat in the magnificent new Innovation Centre at Longbridge however, the rain absolutely

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**Planting Days:** On the LNR 15th and 19th January 2008.

The Street Champions in Kings Norton, in conjunction with the 'Friends' of the Nature Reserve held a combined work day to plant an extensive hazel copse on land that had been recently cleared. On the Tuesday we were joined by a group of students from Hereford College who were gaining work experience for their horticultural course.

The conditions were dreadful owing to the incessant rain, but with more than thirty people there a great deal of work was accomplished and the copse completed. However, there was still planting of beech trees to be done, these plants being provided under the auspices of the Street Champions scheme, so on the Saturday, the stalwarts turned out again to finish the project. In addition, a separate group of Street Champions did a litter pick on the reserve to ensure that the area looked pristine. We had a 100% turnout of the Street Champions and I would like to thank them and all other participants for their involvement in what was a real community effort. I would also like to offer my personal thanks to Donna and John from Groundwork for their efforts over the years, which have very much appreciated.

*Alan Bakewell*

An addition from Amanda: We were shocked to hear that Groundwork Birmingham & Solihull has been placed into voluntary liquidation. We will miss their support for our big clean-up days (when they have provided some hard workers as well as skips to receive our pickings). Their Street Champions scheme has also had a major effect on the cleaning up of our area. I send our warmest thanks to Donna Carter and her team at Groundwork, and look forward to hearing if the Street Champions are able to rise again in a new format.

**Help the 'Friends' to stay in touch with you:** Have you emailed us yet? Please send us one 'hello' message, so that we can maintain up to date address lists & email data. Recent mail outs have been returned to us from several email addresses – obviously our records need updating but only you, the members, can help us.

Please visit our web site at [www.fknnr.org.uk](http://www.fknnr.org.uk). Do visit it and let us know what you think!

**Please join our 'green gym' working parties:**

Every Tuesday, as much time as you can spare between 10.30 and 13.30. One hour of your time makes a real difference. Please let us know in advance on [KingsNortonlnr@aol.com](mailto:KingsNortonlnr@aol.com) or by ringing a committee member..

Next dates: Every Tuesday in December and January, February & March 2008.

**Tools wanted:** If you have any unwanted garden or workshop tools then please let one of the Committee know or phone 0121 6286769.

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## **FKNNR Diary Dates 2008**

Date	Location	Details
18 March	Camp Lane entrance	Tidy up & coppice willow
25 March	Old Orchard Beaks Hill Rd	Dead hedge & planting
29 March	Wychall Lane/River Rea	Saturday clean up
1 April	Wychall Meadows/cycle path	Tidy up & coppice poplar
8 April	Pinehurst Meadow	Grass & bramble scythe. Rubbish removal
15 April	Old Orchard Beaks Hill Rd	Clear laurel. Dead hedge & planting
22 April	Hill Hook LNR	A visit to see how others do it. Train KN to Blake St station
29 April	Wychall Reservoir	Install benches & Dead hedges
6 May	All LNR @ 05.30 hrs	<b>Dawn chorus walk</b>
13 May	Wychall Lane/River Rea	Green Gym: Clearance work
20 May	Trip	A visit to see how others do it.
21 May	AGM	
13 September	Wychall Meadows/Rea	Open Day

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 Management Plan.

**Tuesday Working Parties (The 'Green Gym') – 10.30 to 13.30 hrs**  
*All dates – weather permitting. Instruction provided.*

**Support our weekend working party at the end of March in conjunction with Street Champions**

**Accommodation wanted:** FKNNR need some storage and workshop facilities within walking distance of the Nature Reserve. The Friends have a quantity of tools and other materials (including leaflets) that require a dry and secure area for storage and maintenance purposes. A reasonable rent will be paid. Our bid for using an outbuilding at the Bowling Club has not succeeded so we must now look elsewhere. Is there a garage vacant nearby?

### **Subscriptions**

There are several outstanding membership renewals from May 2007. Please send a cheque (+ donation?) to the Treasurer if you wish to continue your membership. We do appreciate all financial support that helps protect and enhance Kings Norton LNR.

# The Friends of King's Norton Nature Reserve

## **Compost Day: A Visit to the Berkswell Composting site**

A recent visit was made to the Berkswell Composting site near Coventry to see how Birmingham's green bag waste is converted into a product for use as a soil improver. The visit was made jointly by the FKNNR, the Rea Valley Conservation Group and the Easy Gardening Group, and was organised by June McCoy. She reports as follows:

The site is operated by Simpro UK Ltd (the name is derived from Simple Process). A 35-ton lorry collects the green waste from Tyseley, bringing in approximately 15 tons of material that on arrival is put, via a conveyor belt, through a huge £250,000 shredder that can gobble up even large pieces of tree trunk. The shredded remains are then transferred to a long, triangular heap or 'Row'. The site only has room for six of these 'Wind Rows' each of which has to reach a temperature of 65° C – a high enough temperature to kill any pernicious weed roots in the mixture! Over six weeks each row is turned to encourage the build up of oxygen to help the rotting process. The site also contains an underground 18,000-litre water tank that collects the site's rainwater, which can then be sprayed on to the 'Rows' if they get too dry. After six weeks on the 'Rows' the material is put through a screening machine to remove any un-rotted – or un-rottable material (e.g. plastic) and it is then ready for the farmer.

The site is in a corner of a farmer's field, rent free, as he is able to collect as much of the finished product as he can use – the rest is sold to local farmers. At the moment the product is not suitable for use as garden compost since the size of particles is too large.

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Now you know what happens to your garden waste ..... and it's so simple!

June McCoy

*A message from the Chairman:*

*We send our best wishes to June, a keen Green Gymer, who fell and broke her hip in the new year (not out on the LNR however). She has had a full hip replacement, and we look forward to seeing her back out with us soon.*

*Amanda*



A Grey Squirrel enjoys the August sunshine. Squirrels and the FKNNR support the formation of a friends group for Kings Norton Park.

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

Chairman Amanda Cadman  
Secretary David Barraclough  
Vice Chairman David Human  
Treasurer Phil Evans  
Membership Secretary Jil Bromley  
Education Matthew Osland-Barker  
Newsletter Editors Amanda Cadman & Phil Evans

**Committee Members**

Jon Anson, Suzanne Ashley, Alan Bakewell,  
Brian Hewitt, Graham Layton, Peter Cage, David Hampson,  
Jenny Bodycote, Nicola Human.

*Environmental Agency Hotline 0800 807060*  
*West Midlands Police 0845 113 5000 ext. 7826 6363*  
*Community Police 07769 882113*  
*Anti-social behaviour Hotline 0121 303 1111*