

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 43 - Summer 2017

Registered Charity No: 1122293

www.fknnr.org.uk



The new gate providing access to the meadow for mowing
By P Cage



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Chair's Report, Summer 2017

Firstly, a warm welcome to two new committee members, Brian Wells and Stephanie Hyde, who were elected at May's AGM.

Brian and Stephanie are both Tuesday WorkOut volunteers and we look forward to them contributing to the overall running of the Friends. Brian will be a Committee Member and Steph the Membership Secretary, succeeding Alistair Howard.

Alistair has been both Treasurer and Membership Secretary for over five years, so we thank him for his work in keeping the membership system working smoothly, and appreciate him continuing in his role as Treasurer.

Graham Layton has kindly agreed to continue in the role of Secretary – this not only involves minuting meetings and maintaining notices and notice boards, but in addition to keeping the Chair in order at meetings!

You can't help but have noticed the newly installed gate allowing access to the Beaks Hill Triangle (frontispiece). This will make it easier for the Council mowers to gain access to this area rather than having to take out several fencing panels, which has been the practice until now. David Hampson must be given the credit for achieving this through lengthy negotiations with the Rangers where a number of different options were considered, including a bridge or a ford across the stream that divides Meadow Hill triangle from Beaks Hill.

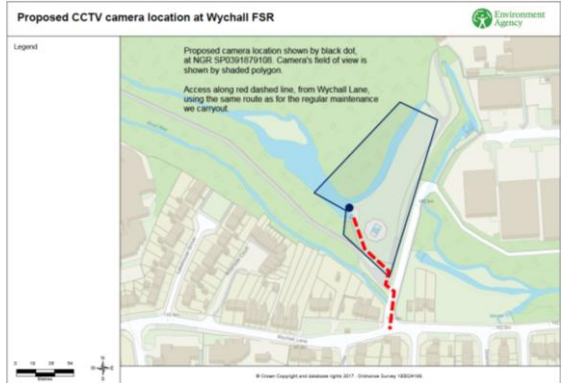
The gate was supplied by the City Council, and once the blackberries are gone the Friends will clear back the vegetation from the Meadow Hill entrance round to the original Beaks Hill entrance. Following this all the fence panels will be rubbed down, cleaned and repainted by the Friends.

David's other great project continues to be the de-silting of Wychall Reservoir which, as can easily be seen, now has virtually no surface water. Although the Reservoir appears to be full of silt we are assured by the Environment Agency that it continues to have the capacity to hold any flood water. As a consequence they will not fund the de-silting. However the Reservoir is an important

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part of the Reserve management plan in, which it is intended to be a wetland for wildlife habitat. David has arranged with the City Council to provide a quotation to clear sufficient silt to enable us to develop the wetland. Once we have this quote we will approach various funding sources to obtain the necessary monies.

In the meantime the Environment Agency are going to install a solar-powered camera on a six metre pole in order to monitor, in real time, the water level and any trash gathering at the outlet end of the Reservoir.



Over the past few years we have scattered Yellow Rattle seeds (right) over part of the Pea Fields Meadow, which are now growing well. The effect of this plant is remarkable as it parasitises grass, severely reducing its growth to make way for other wild flowers. As with other areas of the Reserve we will be planting more meadow flower seeds.



The absence of nesting Herons was disappointing but the wild life excitement this year on Merecroft Pool has been the nesting swans with four of six cygnets surviving. Concern was expressed by various members that dogs were worrying the cygnets. This was reported to the Rangers who advised that dogs are not allowed to swim in any of the City's pools but that action would only be taken against

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the owners of the dogs if they were actively encouraging them to chase the cygnets. The City have given us notices which you will see around the vicinity of Merecroft and the environs advising owners that dogs must be kept under control so that they do not disturb wildlife or jump up at people in general and especially small children.



By Brian Hewitt

A recent headline in the Sunday Times read "Glum Brum? No it's one of Britain's greenest city spaces". In fact 15.6% of the total area of the City is covered with green space accessible to the public. The only borough with a larger amount of green space is Richmond in London with 45%, although most of you will know that this is mostly Richmond Park.

The Reserve is an important part of this 15.6%. At our recent Walking on the Wildside Day Joe Hayden, Park Services Manager for Birmingham, gave a small opening speech to formally mark Peafields Extension being designated as a Local Nature Reserve. Joe has been involved since the formation of the Friends and in his speech he praised the work of past and present volunteers who maintain the Reserve as "one of the best in Birmingham".

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As a founding father of the Friends Phil Evans must be given praise for the development of the Reserve and his commitment and energy over many years, in achieving what we have today. Phil has held most posts on the committee and given a huge amount of time to the Reserve. He was a familiar figure walking the Reserve and photographing wild life. Tuesdays he would always be found leading the Working Party. Three years ago Phil migrated to Malvern but continued to arrange and take part in the WorkOuts. As this has now become more impracticable for Phil, he has resigned from his role of Tuesday WorkOut organiser as well as a Trustee of the Charity. We hope that Phil will still be able to attend frequently, and wish him every happiness for life in Malvern.

I am sure that many members have known Phil over the years and we will be organising a more formal "do" to mark Phil's major contribution to the development of the Reserve.



Andrew Nabbs, Chairman

Friends' Barbeque on Waterways Meadow

Saturday 9 September 2017, 4 - 7 pm

See us at Meadow Hill Rd/Wychall Lane

Food will be provided (carnivore and veggie), but please bring your own drinks. This is an ideal opportunity to meet your committee and tireless Tuesday WorkOut volunteers, a chance to ask questions and to tell us how we are doing!

To help us with catering, please let us know if you are intending to be with us, and how many will be in your group.

Contact Amanda on 624 3865 or
amandacadman@sky.com

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Volunteering report

Last Tuesday was the first time in a while when rain stopped play on the Reserve, but a few of us took the opportunity to look forward to our future work schedule, now published in this Newsletter. I know that Andrew has mentioned the retirement of Phil Evans as a Trustee of the charity and from the organising of our Tuesday working parties, a task he has undertaken during all the years of the Friends' existence. A full appreciation of his huge contribution to the development of the Reserve will appear in the next Newsletter, but I should like to pay my personal tribute to Phil for all he has done to train and encourage the volunteer team over the years, ensuring by our weekly activities that we maintain every corner the Reserve in good condition. As Phil hands over the reins I am grateful to Brian Hewitt and Peter Cage for working with the Rangers to develop our future programme – and especially to Peter C and Jean Perring for ensuring that we have the correct tools on site each week for the jobs that are scheduled.

Over the past few weeks we have welcomed two or three new faces to the team. They seem to be enjoying our style of working and the occasional chance to sit down with refreshments (thank you Brian and Maz for making us so welcome in your garden when we worked in Pinehurst Meadow on 1 August).



Our Walking on the Wildside event on 6 May is fully described elsewhere, but may I thank all involved in ensuring it was a lovely occasion despite some fairly grim weather. And may I draw your attention to the Friends' Barbeque which is planned for 9 September on Waterways Meadow. See the notice for full details, and do let me know if you are hoping to attend: catering is so much easier if we have a rough idea of numbers!

Amanda Cadman, Volunteer Co-ordinator

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Walking on the Wildside Day, 6 May 2017

The day began at 5.30 am with a record 20 people gathering at Wychall Reservoir for the Dawn Chorus Walk.

Led by Jane Tavener and supported by Peter Bromley we followed the previous route along the reservoir across and through Peafields returning along the cycle path and crossing over to Waterways Meadow and finishing at Merecroft Pool.

Amanda recorded 39 species of birds either seen or heard (somewhere) – these included a stock dove, chiff chaff, goldfinch, whitethroat, swift, buzzard and tree creeper.



By Amanda Cadman

At Merecroft half of the group continued on to Molly's Café on the Green and enjoyed a well-earned breakfast with the common denominator of a frying pan.

Events on Waterways Meadow began at 10.00 am and included pond dipping (Peter Childs) botanical walk (Ian Freake and David Fernie) treasure hunt (Val and Paul Saunders).

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The hoped-for improvement on the chilly start to the Dawn Chorus did not materialise and this did affect the number of people attending the events. Nevertheless very positive comments were given by people who took part. Thanks also to the people who manned the Gazebo in cold conditions which were not ideal for sitting around.

An afternoon break for the organisers was followed by the Bat Walk at 8.30 pm. About 25 Friends and guests attended, with several young faces amongst them. We were loaned a set of bat detectors by the 'Brumbats' group. There was less bat activity at Wychall reservoir this time, but along the cycle route in the clearings many Pipistrelle were heard and seen in the dusk as they flitted over the footpath.

Our walk took us as usual with torches to Merecroft Pool, there hearing more Pipistrelle activity. With help and advice from our member Matt Wall, a licenced bat handler and conservationist, several Daubenton's bats were heard hunting over the water, using the detectors, and were glimpsed briefly in the beam from our powerful hand lamp, though this had to be used sparingly for fear of disturbance. The evening turned damp at about 9.30pm, and activity was somewhat diminished, but those who attended were very complimentary and found the event a rewarding one. Thanks to those who donated in aid of FKNNR funds, to Brumbats and Chris Sherlock for loan of the detectors.

All in all the day was successful and thanks to all those who gave their time and effort towards this. The wildlife day is always held as near as possible to the International Dawn Chorus Day. This means that resources are spread thinly, limiting the activities we can provide on the day. So, this year we are going to set next year's date at the October committee meeting. This will mean that we can put on more activities – please do get in touch if you would be able to help, or suggest any activities.

Andrew Nabbs and Brian Hewitt

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Outing to Millison's Wood, 16 May 2017

One Tuesday in May the usual Tuesday WorkOut volunteers downed tools and went off to have a guided tour of Millison's Wood. Led by David Fernie of Solihull Volunteers (as well of course as being one of our own Friends) we drove through Meriden before turning off into Albert Road, a suburban cul-de-sac that ended in pedestrian access to a small (28 acre) woodland owned by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. In mediaeval times the Forest of Arden extensively covered the surrounding area but gradually roads and houses were built, towns and villages expanded, and changes in agriculture opened up the forest to arable land. Small pockets of the forest still remain with the original ecosystem still intact, and Millison's Wood is one such place. According to David the wood was scheduled in the 1930s for housing development but Hitler's expansionist dreams put housing on hold while the country was put on a war footing. After the war housing plans for the wood were dropped.



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On our visit we were still able to see bluebells under the tree canopy, along with dog's mercury and yellow archangel. The site is well (and responsibly) used by dog walkers and joggers using a network of paths every day, but there is also a calendar of volunteer work parties. Ancient techniques such as coppicing are used to open up the canopy and so allow light down to the forest floor in order to stimulate the growth of native flowers. Bracken can be invasive and take over. One of David's long term projects has been to ask volunteers to remove bracken by hand from several areas. This requires patience as well as repeated application. He says that after ten years he can begin to see less new growth!



Apart from the spectacular display of bugle (see above), bluebells, the proliferation of wild flowers provided a welcome distraction from the miserable weather, with pink campion, white stitchwort, yellow pimpernel, white and blue forget-me-knots and wood anemone growing abundantly in the more sheltered part of the wood and cow parsley, comfrey – together with a few fading primroses – gracing the perimeter.

By all means go and visit the site but be mindful of local residents. There is no allocated car parking, so it's best to car-share or arrive by bicycle, or you can walk in from public footpaths.

Peter Childs and Wendy Greenaway

Photos by Brian Hewitt

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/wood/?woodId=24210&woodName=millisons-wood>

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Day Out to Eades Meadow 13th June 2017

Our second day out this year was to Eades Meadow, part of the Foster's Green Meadows managed by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. At a time when 97% of meadow land has been lost since the Second World War such an area is a valuable and scarce resource.

Just south of Bromsgrove, the meadow covers some 12.5 hectares and benefits from not having been ploughed for well over 100 years nor having had any agricultural chemicals applied to it.



An example of the incredible richness of the plants,
photos by Brian Hewitt

Local history states that the farmer avoided ploughing the fields during the second WW (Dig for Victory Campaign) and narrowly escaped a prison sentence for doing so. The benefits of this are plain to see with the meadows having 180 species of plants over the annual cycle.

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Foster's Green Meadows is still farmed and Eades is grazed by cattle in late autumn and early winter before being left to grow for hay. The hay is cut late the following summer after the flowers have seeded. Following a period of growth the field is grazed and the cycle begins again.

The venue was suggested by David Fernie, who arranged for Mary Green, a local amateur botanist who has led botanical walks for us at our May events, to take us around. Mary is very knowledgeable and enthusiastic, introducing plants as if they were a long-lost cousin.



During the hour and a half that we were there 14 of us spread out in a single line along the narrow paths and in total 29 different plants were identified. Of these there were several orchids and indeed the relatively rare Green Winged Orchid (above) and the Bee Orchid (below), along with Meadow Sweet, vetch and, my favourite, Birds Foot Trefoil, otherwise known as "eggs and bacon".



Thanks to David and Mary for this outing which was certainly an encouragement for our efforts on the Reserve to try to develop our own wildflower-rich meadow areas.

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Foxes catching frogs in Pinehurst Meadow! by Brian Hewitt



Fallen tree fun, by Brian Hewitt

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Tuesday Working Parties and Events

All dates 10.30 to 13.30 hrs – weather permitting. Changes to the schedule may be made at short notice, please check the web site www.fknnr.org.uk.

Date	Meet	Location	Details
15-Aug	G	Peafields	Balsam removal
22	E	Wychall Reservoir rear	New scrape area – balsam
26 Sat	C	Waterways Meadow	Guided Walk
29	C	Waterways Meadow	Tracmaster, scythe (pre BBQ)
05- Sep	D	Camp Lane entrance	Pruning, tidy up, brash piles
09 Sat	C	Waterways Meadow	Friends' BBQ 4-7pm see advert
12	F	Popes Lane entrance	Pruning, tidy up, balsam removal, brash piles, Tracmaster
19		Wychall Lane	Balsam, hazel, weir, scything
26	A	Old Orchard	Tracmaster, grass, bramble
30 Sat	C	Waterways Meadow	Guided Walk
03- Oct	C	Waterways Meadow	Tracmaster, tidy up
10	C	Sheila's Meadow	Tidy up, Tracmaster
17	E	Wychall Reservoir rear	Wetlands maintenance, scrapes, create reed bed lanes
24	B	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up, hedging, Tracmaster (willowherb etc.)
28 Sat	C	Waterways Meadow	Guided Walk
31	E	Cycle route – North Rea	Clear woodland walk, cut laurel & sycamore
07- Nov	A	Old Orchard	Scythe, bramble, laurel, tidy up
14	E	Burmans Drive	Survey & planning walkthrough.
21	E	Wychall Res – Cycle route	Coppicing, viewpoint creation, scythe brambles
25 Sat	C	Waterways Meadow	Guided Walk
28	G	Peafields	Bramble removal, trees, hedgerow
05- Dec	B	Pinehurst Meadow	Tidy up, bramble, Tracmaster
12		Wychall Lane (opp. No.63)	Coppice hazel, tidy up
19	E	Wychall Res – Cycle route	Coppicing, Tracmaster – clear bramble edges
30 Sat	C	Waterways Meadow	Guided Walk

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Please meet on site and wear stout footwear and old clothes. The appropriate equipment & materials will be provided and training when required. Please spare one or more hours of your time to assist us in implementing the LNR Management Plan.

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		Alistair Howard	0121 451 3082
Membership Secretary		Stephanie Hyde	
Working Parties		Peter Cage	0121 433 3486
		Brian Hewitt	0121 458 2946
Education		Andrew Nabbs	0121 458 6983
Volunteer Coordinator	*	Amanda Cadman	0121 624 3865
LNR Founders	*	Alan Bakewell	0121 603 1127
		Phil Evans	01684 491564

(* Denotes Trustee of the Charity)

Committee Members: Peter Cage, David Fernie, Ian Freake, David Hampson, Brian Hewitt, Stephanie Hyde, Jean Perring, Paul Saunders, Val Saunders, #Matthew Wall, Brian Wells. (# co-opted)

Environment Agency Hotline	0800 80 70 60
City Parks Department Call Centre	0121 464 8728
Northfield Rangers	0121 445 6036
WM Police Neighbourhood Team	0345 113 5000, ext. 823 6260
Anti-Social Behaviour Hotline	0121 303 1111, option 5

Newsletter Production: Amanda Cadman and Peter Cage