

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 44 - Spring 2018

Registered Charity No: 1122293

www.fknnr.org.uk



Waterways Meadow in the snow
Brian Hewitt



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Newsletter 44 55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton Registered Charity No. 1122293

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Chair's Report

Happy New Year to everyone. 2018 looks like being quite an active year on the Reserve.

For some time now there has been talk amongst members about applying for the Green Flag award. This is a national award that sets a benchmark of excellence for public open spaces such as parks and reserves. To progress this and to establish what work needs to be done on the Reserve in order to achieve the award, on a cold and damp January afternoon nine members walked the entire Reserve accompanied by Joe Hayden, Parks Services Manager, and Steve Hinton, Senior Ranger.



Joe is a national judge for the Green Flag award and did a no-holds-barred scoring of the Reserve as it stands. This resulted in an overall score just a few points off the pass mark. The main points for action being only cosmetic including: litter removal,

repairs to fences and railings, signage and improvement of the very muddy footpath at the bottom of the grazing fields. Our best marks came from our conservation work, so apart from on-going general maintenance no specific work in this area was identified.

This is a very encouraging result especially as the Reserve looked rather beleaguered after several months of rain and snow.

The application needs to be submitted by the end of January 2019 and the judges will visit sometime in April, May or June with the results published in July.

This gives us plenty of time to complete the work required, especially as some of this is already underway. This would be a joint application with the City and they have accepted responsibility to supply the extra signage at unmarked entrances

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and repair broken fences and kick rails. We have already planned to paint the new gate and railings around Beaks Hill Triangle. An essential contribution of the City will be an up-to-date Management Plan; the one we are currently using is way out of date! Hopefully this will be ready in good time.

Most encouragingly, it was agreed that the City would help to apply for funding for a gravel pathway to be established along the bottom of the grazing meadows and down towards Waterways Meadow. This will be a great improvement for those who walk around the Reserve, and it was fortunate that our tour took Joe and Steve through some very muddy, wet and slippery paths!

We have obtained a grant from Veolia for an interpretation panel at the Wychall Road entrance to the Peafields. We hope to have this in place by the end of May this year.

You may have noticed that recently there has been more water in Wychall Reservoir helping to improve its appearance. Unfortunately this is only temporary, as the drainage vent on the dam is currently blocked with flood water debris. Once this is cleared the water levels will recede. All attempts by David Hampson to get silt removed from the reservoir have been unsuccessful. This is in no way due to lack of effort on David's part, but rather to the fact that removing 20% of the silt would only provide 1% extra water capacity. So, the next step is to return to basic methods – it is suggested that we try using faggots (bundles) of hazel sticks to form a series of permeable barriers near the inlet so that overflow water from the river will be slowed, causing silt to be dumped there where it can later be removed. Once plans for this have been submitted to the Environment Agency we hope to begin this work.

This year we are again holding a Community Litter Pick: on Sunday February 25th. You are most welcome to join in this rewarding experience. Litter is becoming an increasing problem in certain areas of the Reserve so we will be holding a further Litter Pick sometime in the summer.

Our annual ***Walking On The Wildside*** event is on Saturday May 5th and will follow the usual format of dawn chorus walk, botanical

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walk, pond dipping and hopefully this year duck racing! The day concludes with the bat walk in the evening.

So, there will be lots going on around the Reserve this year and a warm welcome awaits people who would like to take part in any of these activities, just turn up!

We have decided to name the area in the north of Wychall Reservoir as "Phil's Wetland" in honour of all that Phil Evans has contributed to the Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve.

Andrew Nabbs, Chair



Cutting back willow growth on Phil's Wetland, January 2018

By Amanda Cadman

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



By Brian Hewitt



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Butterflies in 2017

A lady told me, on 24 March 2017, that she had noticed a small Tortoiseshell on a Celandine flower near the Camp Lane entrance. Prior to this report I had not seen any butterflies on the Reserve. On the following day, however, they were out in force. I came across good numbers of Orange Tips in Sheila's Meadow and several Holly Blues in Waterways Meadow. In addition, a Brimstone, Peacock and Small White patrolled the path between Meadow Hill Road and Beaks Hill Road, accompanied by about a dozen Small Tortoiseshells which danced around each other, forming a ball shape in the air.

Commas began to put in sporadic appearances early in the following month and on 24th April I encountered the season's first Speckled Woods alongside Merecroft Pool.

During May, Green Veined Whites began to visit the wildflowers. On 24th, Red Admirals were much in evidence, becoming quite numerous over the next 6 weeks. Common Blues were emerging on 31st May, giving dazzling displays in Waterways Meadow. Also, by the end of the month, Orange Tips were starting to reduce in number and no more were to be seen after the first week of June.

Large Whites were flying from the start of June and I also chanced upon the occasional Brimstone in the second half of the month. Ringlets were on the wing from 15th June and could be seen fluttering through the tall grasses. Meadow Browns joined them on 27th June when the meadows throughout the Reserve were alive with both species.

A stroll around the Peafields, on 2nd July, confirmed that Small and Large Skippers were out and about. I also ran into plenty of Meadow Browns, a few Commas, Red Admirals and various Whites. Dragonflies hawked around the perimeter. On 11th July I noticed that Hedge Browns (also known as Gatekeepers) were showing themselves along the little track between Sheila's Meadow and the horse fields.

Sunny days in August were marvellous, as is usually the case, for watching the Reserve's many butterflies. It was the abundance of

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Red Admirals during September and October that was most surprising. I cannot recall seeing so many since they were very common in the 1950s. Their numbers gradually dwindled as autumn approached but they were still around in late October. In fact, my last sighting was on 31st October, a cool, breezy day.

Unfortunately, I have not stumbled across the Marbled White during 2017, despite recording single specimens over the last 7 – 8 years. Neither have I seen the Small Copper. I look forward to renewing my acquaintance with both this summer.

Many moths have crossed my path during my walks through the Reserve in 2017, and I have made a note of the more interesting ones below:-

- March Broken Barred Carpet
- May Ash Pug, Treble Bar, Small Swift, Scalloped Hazel
- JuneB Buff Ermine, Chimney Sweeper, Latticed Heath, Common Pug, Ghost, Fruit Tree Tortrix, Brimstone, Blood Vein, Eyed Hawk
- July Scalloped Oak, Six Spot Burnet
- August/September Thorn, Purple Thorn, Yellow Shell, Ebulia Crocealis, Burnished Brass, Green Silver Lines
- September Caterpillars of Large Elephant Hawk Moth feeding on Willowherb in Pinehurst Meadow

Bill Edge

***Electrophaes corylata*, the broken-barred carpet.**

Wikipedia



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Motorised Vehicles on the Reserve

It has been reported that over the Christmas holiday a child was seen riding a child's petrol-driven quad bike on Wychall Meadow.

I need to make people aware that no motorised vehicles can be driven on the Reserve or in fact on any city open spaces.

In this particular instance the area being ridden on has been planted as a wildflower meadow and so any vehicles being ridden on this will damage the plants.

Motorised vehicles pose potential risks to other users of the Reserve, and the noise and pollution emitted are damaging to wildlife and vegetation.

These bikes can be seized by the Police and crushed. For full details of what you cannot do in the City's parks and open spaces please see the relevant bye-laws on;

www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20087/parks/401/park_policiesandby-laws

Andrew Nabbs

Chair

Guided Walks on the Reserve: a change of strategy

For a good number of years now we have offered a guided walk on the last Saturday of each month to all comers. As well as being noted in the Diary in the Friends' Newsletter and on the website, a notice has been displayed on all our boards giving the date and indeed the name of the walk leader. In the early days there was a regular turn-out, particularly of members, but perhaps because people feel they know the Reserve in its seasonal changes, the number of people (members and non-members) turning up has been very low or non-existent in recent months. This is disappointing and time-wasting for those who have agreed to lead the walks. To my knowledge there has only been one non-Tuesday WorkOut volunteer who turned up to walk in the past six months! Certainly he was very enthusiastic and keen to learn: a

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pleasure to take around the Reserve ... but only one in six months?

Your Committee has now decided to try cutting back the frequency of the guided walks, in the first instance to just four in the year. We will ask two or more people to be walk leaders, and to theme the walks more particularly to the season. Our Walking on the Wild Side May event is of course included in the four, and we are proposing:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 17 February | Springing to Life |
| 5 May | Walking on the Wild Side |
| 21 July | Start of the Summer Holidays |
| 13 October | Berried Treasure and other autumn delights |

As before, unless otherwise stated all the walks will start at 10.30 am from the Reserve entrance at the foot of Meadow Hill Road, and good stout footwear is recommended.

While of course there will be several walks on the May date, I would expect there to be only one on the other dates, though with more than one leader it would be possible to offer a range of lengths of walk if the clientèle on the day so desired.

Please note that we are always happy to arrange group or individual visits to the Reserve at mutually agreeable times. Contact Amanda to arrange details.



Digging a new pond.

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The Great Snow

Well of course some of us remember the major and long-lasting snows of the 1960s, and some substantial falls in the 1980s too, but the snow that fell on 9/10 December was certainly the greatest amount that I had experienced here in Kings Norton. I measured 8½ inches on the table in our garden. The weight of the snow caused a number of trees on the Reserve to fall: a cherry across the cycle route opposite Wychall Lane, and an ash across the footpath at Beaks Hill Triangle needed fairly speedy attention.



Clearing a fallen tree

Clearly it was not possible for us to do our scheduled work on Tuesday 12th so we decided that we would go for a bit of a walk-round to enjoy and maybe photograph the Reserve in the fresh snow. Armed with bow saws and loppers we cleared the ash from the pathway at Beaks Hill Triangle, and in the new year returned to clear the site thoroughly. We cut up much of the fallen wood to place on the path to mitigate its muddy state (see p.12).

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Volunteering on the Reserve

The Tuesday volunteers have continued to work across the Reserve practically every week over the past few months (a couple of rains-stopped-play, and more elsewhere about how the great snow affected us). The first thing to say is that having the B&SMCV group – henceforth known as “Ian’s group” – working alongside us rather than in a separate location is proving really successful and enjoyable for us all, and with an enlarged group so much more work can be undertaken. I for one have learned some new skills from them. It was helpful to have both groups on the walk-round with Joe Hayden that Andrew mentions in his Chairman's piece, and it really feels as if we are all singing to the same hymn sheet and recognising the same needs and objectives for the Reserve.

While delighted to hear of his promotion, we are saddened to lose the support and encouragement of Steve Hinton our Senior Ranger, who is now Ranger Services Manager for the City. We just hope that he will be able to complete a new Management Plan for us before he moves on! And we look forward to meeting and working with his successor.

The walk-round with Joe showed up several very obvious issues for the volunteers to address. The most glaring issue, which will not go away, is to seek to keep on top of the litter which is strewn along the more public parts of the Reserve. One might say that we are not responsible for litter on the highway, but with much of the Reserve right alongside Popes Lane and Wychall Lane, the slightest breath of wind or the stronger throw from a car window will take the litter on to our patch. More shocking is the increasing cases of fly-tipping we are encountering, especially along Popes Lane and a dreadful instance of over-the-fence tipping of children's play equipment behind a house in Westcroft Grove. The Council is aware of this! All this is very unsightly to our human eyes, and much of it is very probably dangerous to our wildlife. Do please consider joining us for the big Community Clean-up to be held on 25 February. There will be more to come during the year!

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Brian Hewitt and Peter Cage have taken over general responsibility for organising our work schedule, largely based so far on 'what we did last year' but tweaked here and there to deal with specific issues that are identified. Please note that we have decided that, rather than publish a diary of WorkOut days in the Newsletter, we will maintain the diary instead on the website and on our notice boards. This will allow much greater flexibility to react to issues and to differences in the seasons year on year (eg in 2017 we were scheduled to pull up balsam at the same time as had worked well the year before, but after a warmer spring the plants set seed several weeks earlier so that our work was far less effective than it had been in 2016). We are grateful to Peter for taking on these organisational responsibilities, which also include collecting and delivering all necessary tools to our working site each week. It is fortunate that, when Peter Cage is not around, Peter Childs also has a ball hitch on his car and is willing to step into the transportation breach.

Mud, mud, glorious mud! It is good that so many people wish to walk, with or without dogs, around the Merecroft area of the Reserve. This is a peaceful country-like area, and we have always wanted to keep the paths as informal as possible to reflect that country atmosphere. But the level of footfall after rain has meant that the paths are thick with mud, and tend to get wider and wider as people try to avoid the mud. We need to bite the bullet and put down a good layer of stone chippings in the worst-affected areas, and are now seeking funding to achieve this. with support from the Ranger Service.



Improvements to the path using fallen Ash limbs.

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Several recent volunteers have become Tuesday WorkOut regulars. One who sadly left us very recently is Christian Hughes, a young man with a difficult start in life but who has been a regular member of the WorkOut team for several months and very much endeared himself to us with his enthusiasm and affection. Christian and his family have now moved to Pembrokeshire, and we wish them all a very happy new life there. We will miss you Chris!

We were shocked to hear that Jean Perring, a long-standing volunteer, had suffered a minor stroke back on 25 November. She seems to have made a full recovery but tires easily. It's lovely to see her back with us for light(ish) duties.

Amanda Cadman, Volunteer Co-ordinator

South Birmingham Ramblers walking festival

Walk round the Reserve, 18 May

This year is the 25th Anniversary of South Birmingham Ramblers. As part of our celebrations we are holding a walking festival in May, from Wednesday 16th to Sunday 20th. We will have a programme of 2 or 3 walks every day, between 2 and 9 miles long, and there will be a mixture of urban and local countryside walks, to give a range of options to anyone who is interested.

As part of this, Peter and Sarah Cage will be leading a short walk (2-3 miles) round the Nature Reserve on Friday 18 May starting at 9:30. It will be muddy so you will need appropriate footwear.

We intend to start from the Kings Norton Playing Fields car park, and do a figure-of-eight through the Reserve. Please check the FKNNR website for further details nearer the time – and if you are interested in the rest of the SBR programme check their website www.sbramblers.co.uk

Sarah Cage

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Tracmaster at Fields Millennium Green

On 16th September the Fields Millennium Green volunteers were delighted once again to welcome the Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve with their wonderful Tracmaster machine. Our wildflower meadow needs cutting once a year to encourage new growth of grass and wildflowers in the spring. There seemed to be fewer brambles this year – possibly as a result of the regular cutting each year, and we look forward to the fantastic display of cowslips which appear each spring. We have re-seeded some patches with wildflower seeds so hope they will spread. Thanks to the strong men who push the machine, but also to the rakers-up!

Maggie Sweet, Fields Millennium Green Trust



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Scything at Coleys Lane

with the Rea Valley Conservation Group

About a mile upstream from the KNNR on the River Rea, there is a small 'Pocket Handkerchief' Conservation area managed by the Rea Valley Conservation Group. Unusually the site is owned by Housing not Parks. The site has been made up and also used over many years for illegal tipping. Our Group has been managing the site for eight years and the area fronting Coleys Lane has been developed as a wild flower patch (we have been advised not to call it a meadow). In line with general wild flower management the patch has been cut and raked in late Autumn to discourage soil enrichment. It is very arduous work to do this using sickles so we have been very fortunate over the years to enlist the help of the KNNR band of Scythers. On 4th November last it was again very satisfying and enjoyable for our Group to welcome them to do what they do best. We greatly value this co-operation along the Rea Valley and are pleased to donate to the KNNR for services rendered.

Roland L Kedge, Chair RVCG



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Swans go a-walking

plus other wildlife snippets and a plea

Back at the beginning of September I returned home to find several anxious phone calls reporting that 'our' family of swans from Merecroft Pool (parents plus four surviving well-grown cygnets) had been sighted walking along one of the footpaths towards Wychall Lane. Somehow they crossed the road (no mean feat!) and carried on along the cycle route towards Westhill Road. A very emotional and sometimes weepy Friend, Julie, later rang to say that she and a young lad had managed to escort the swans across the Park, Pershore Road and across the Playing Fields to the canal. She said it was clear that that was the direction they wanted to go and she warded off much criticism and abuse from young people down by the skate park. The RSPCA and the police had not been willing to take action in spite of traffic jam all the way down Westhill Road and past the Wychall Lane junction, before they were shepherded back across the footbridge near the Camp, and into the park.

It's amazing that the swan family had crossed the Pershore Road intact, though why they wanted to get to the canal I failed to understand given the previous experiences of one of the parents. I thanked the lady very warmly - she feared abusive postings on Facebook etc., although she and her husband had been watching the cygnets since they were hatched. She even got the young lad back to his mum – what a star! The next day she contacted me to say that she and her son had just returned from trawling the canal and Lifford reservoir for sightings of the family. They saw no swans but people on a passing canal barge reported having seen two adults and four cygnets swimming beside them near to Selly Oak. The more we thought about it, the more it seemed likely that the swans were on the move to find a suitable supply of nutritious food, since six swans (and a juvenile cormorant) on Merecroft was quite a big ask for a small and now rather shallow area of water.

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I personally have seen and/or heard a good number of Teal on Wychall Reservoir recently, where water levels are slightly higher than usual. I have also seen a Little Egret flying along the river downstream of the reservoir, and saw it, or another individual, fishing in the downstream end of the reservoir though it didn't stay around for me to photograph it. I understand that a badger was recently spotted on the cycle route near Camp Lane.

But all this is very patchy reporting I fear. While there are some lovely reports and photographs on our Facebook Group site, it really would be good to have a report in each Newsletter akin to the wonderful 'Butterfly Bill' report in this Newsletter. Is there anyone out there who could make regular walks around the Reserve and give a fairly detailed account of what s/he saw in terms of birds, invertebrates, plants etc. etc. over the past season? If you could help us in this way you would be giving valuable information not only to the membership but also to Ecorecord. I'd be very happy to hear from you!

Amanda Cadman, Volunteer Coordinator

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Tuesday WorkOuts

Volunteers meet every Tuesday 10.30 - 1.30 (weather permitting) to develop and maintain the Reserve for people and for wildlife. The meeting places and the work to be undertaken are advertised on the website <http://www.fknnr.org.uk/> and on our notice boards. Details may alter at short notice to take account of seasonal requirements, weather conditions etc., so please check on the website before setting out.

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.

Community Litter Pick

Our first Community Litter Pick of the year is scheduled to take place on:

Sunday 25 February at 10.30 am.

Meet at Burmans Drive

(by Wychall Dam, foot of Wychall Park Grove)

Please do come and join in this big effort to clear the worst of the litter that has spread across the Reserve – especially along the boundaries with Popes Lane and with Wychall Lane. Wear old clothes and stout footwear. We will provide gloves, sacks and litter pickers!

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Guided Walks

As explained earlier, we have decided therefore to cut the frequency of the guided walks to just four in the year. Two or more regular volunteers will act as walk leaders, and the walks will be more particularly themed around the season.

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5 May	Walking on the Wild Side
21 July	Start of the Summer Holidays
13 October	Berried Treasure and other autumn delights

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While of course there will be several walks on the May *Walking on the Wild Side* date, there will only be one on the other dates, though with more than one leader it may be possible to offer a range of lengths of walk if the clientèle on the day so desire.

Please note that we are always happy to arrange group or individual visits to the Reserve at mutually agreeable times. Contact Amanda (624 3865) to discuss details.



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Jay at Merecroft Pool by Karen Palmer

Contacts

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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, 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

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