

**The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve**

*Newsletter 45 - Summer 2018*

Registered Charity No: 1122293

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Swans on Merecroft Pool  
Ann Walmsley



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## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *Chair's Report*

The best three words to describe the reserve since the last magazine are frozen, sodden and scorched. Despite this, work on the reserve has continued at a pace.

In January a number of committee members met with Joe Hayden, City Parks Services Manager, for a walk around the reserve and to discuss the possibility of applying for the Green Flag Award.

There is concern amongst the committee that the work needed to achieve this award may take away some of the "natural" appearance and feel of the reserve.

Noticeably all other sites listed as Green Flag in Birmingham are designated as parks. We are exploring what they have had to do to be successful and the impact on the sites and will make a decision about whether to progress this at the October committee meeting.

Nevertheless, several of Joe's recommended 'quick win' proposals for improvement have been quickly implemented. You can't help but notice some of the improvements that have been made to the reserve, in particular: the newly painted railings in Beaks Hill Road, the improved signage at the entrance to the reserve and the gravel on the path across Merecroft and the grazing meadow.

We are going to continue fence painting along Meadow Hill Road and would ask any members who would like to do so to donate towards the cost of this work.

Although we had too much water almost everywhere during the heavy rain earlier in the year, Wychall reservoir continues now to be a puddle of its former self. David Hampson has continued his communications with the Environment Agency and by the end of August should know if his new proposals to reduce silt ingress and also allow a shallow area of open water to be maintained in the reservoir are acceptable to them. Thanks must go to David Hampson for organising all of this and also for obtaining the gravel for the paths as a donation from Fitzgerald Construction.

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

On 3 February a surprise party was held to say a fond farewell to Phil Evans and to express our thanks for all he has done for the Friends since our inception, occupying at one time or another most of the Officer posts on the Committee including of course Chairman, and organising the Tuesday WorkOuts with enormous skill and determination. He was presented with a carved wooden grebe and an album of photographs of his time on the Reserve, beautifully created by Brian Hewitt.



Our work with the Rangers Service continues to be positive but unfortunately due to budgetary restraints and staff shortages their work with us is not as great as either us would like.

Particularly noticeable is the continued absence of a current management plan which would help guide our routine work and is an essential element of completing the Green Flag process.

Unfortunately (for us) Steve Hinton, Senior Ranger at Lickey Hub, has been offered a more senior post based at Kings Heath Park so we will be losing his support. He will be replaced. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Steve for all his support, guidance and patience with us in all the years that he has been involved. We wish him well in his new post.

David Human who has been a valued committee member in various roles since the formation of the Friends of Wychall Reservoir, has now retired as vice chair of the Friends committee. He has made a valuable contribution to the management of the Reserve and we would like to thank him for this. His continued support will be welcomed as chair of the Management Committee and an Ordinary Committee member of the Friends.

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Replacing David is Ian Freake. Ian has a huge amount of conservation experience having led the Birmingham and Solihull Community Volunteers. Ian and his team are a great asset to the Friends as they bring knowledge and skills to our work. We wish Ian well in his new role as Vice Chair.

As ever I must thank all those who give their time and effort to the reserve many of whom go above and beyond the call of duty, the reserve would not be what it is without all your hard work and commitment.

Andrew Nabbs. Chair

### *Improvements to paths, welcome boards and fencing*

When considering what action would be required in order for the Nature Reserve to achieve Green Flag Status, two items that arose were the condition of paths and the sign boards.

#### *Paths*

David contacted Mr Nick Coley, MD of Fitzgerald Construction Co (working on the Bristol Road in Longbridge) to see if it would be possible for his company to make a contribution towards the improvement of some 70 metres of muddy paths. We received a favourable reply within 24 hours inviting him to contact their Site Manager Richard Flanigan to arrange for deliveries of stone. We received 3 dumper trucks of stone within a week.

The pictures on the next page show the stages of the path improvements. Work on the muddy path from Meadow Hill to Beaks Hill had commenced with the placing of cut logs at the worst areas.

When the stone arrived 2 loads were dropped by the culverted stream and these were spread by the Friends. The improved Meadow Hill/Beaks Hill path is shown in the bottom right picture.

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The third truck's load was dropped at the Beaks Hill gate. This stone was used to start applying a new surface to the path by the grazing fields from Merecroft Pool dam to the right of way. The stone for this work had to be transported by wheelbarrow the length of Merecroft Pool and progressively further and further along the path and then complete the return journey (bottom left picture).

This stone was used up about half way, but a request to purchase further stone resulted in a further 2 free dumper truck loads which were dropped opposite the dam. Stone from this delivery was then used to complete the drainage and coverage of the Grazing Field path.

### *Sign Boards*

All the original " Welcome to Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve " boards had their routed lettering filled in white and the boards re oiled. This has resulted in the Welcome notice being visible from a distance.



### *Fencing*

Your Tuesday volunteers, after laying stone to improve the paths, took the decision to paint the railings surrounding the Beaks Hill / Meadow Hill Triangle meadows. It was decided to paint the length from the Beaks Hill gate to the apex of the triangle as the first stage. This has now been completed and for those members not local the photographs show the finished length.

The return length to the right of way (Meadow Hill entrance) is scheduled for cutting back and painting over the coming winter. The cost of this work is coming out of Friends' funds and it is proposed to ask local residents if they will contribute to the cost.

David Hampson

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



Various flying insects feeding on water mint and milk thistle at Sheila's Meadow. Photographed and compiled by Benjamin Cres  
July – August 2014

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *Swans, the dawn chorus and other bird-related bits*

As last year our resident swans at Merecroft hatched five cygnets, although sadly by now (July) only four survive. They look fit and healthy, and we wonder whether the parent birds will route-march them off to the canal again as last year when food supplies dwindle.



The dawn chorus walk this year was a lovely occasion, including several young birdwatchers. It was even warm, and we saw or heard 32 bird species. Last year's tally was 39, but the cold winter meant that many migrants had not yet returned. We did hear one or two chiffchaffs, but their main influx was much later, and Wychall has been full of their calls.

Several Friends are avid bird watchers and I asked them for any recent excitements to report in the Newsletter. Karen Palmer says "My spring highlights were a chiffchaff at Wychall and a male blackcap at Merecroft" while Adrian Platt spotted a reed warbler on 27 May and a red kite on 16 April. (Ed: I am very jealous about the red kite: I know there have been sightings around here before, but they must be few and far between). Stewart Hares says "I had my first willow warbler of the year at Merecroft on 7th April, singing garden warbler, whitethroat & 8 blackcaps at Wychall on 11th May. Noted great spotted woodpeckers nested at Merecroft and heard the reed warbler at Peafields reedbed on 2nd June. No



Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*  
by Dr. Raju Kasambe



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kingfishers this year yet which is worrying (Ed: and we didn't see any this year on the dawn chorus walk).

Don't forget that you can share your pics of birds and other wildlife from the Reserve on the Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve Facebook group site.

Amanda Cadman

### *Butterflies, Moths and Other Creatures*

A lady reported the first butterfly sightings to me. She had seen a Comma and a Brimstone on 25th March. My first encounter came on 14th April, with a Comma close to the Meadow Hill Road entrance.

Reduced mobility resulting from a hospital visit curtailed my regular walks, but on 18th April I managed a very slow stroll through the whole Reserve. It was a fine, sunny day with the temperature reaching 21°C. My effort was rewarded as I immediately came across a Small Tortoiseshell sunning itself on the pathway inside Meadow Hill Road gate. Shortly afterwards a Comma came into view as it flew along the footpath between Sheila's Meadow and the Horsefield. Waterways Meadow produced a Large White and a further Small Tortoiseshell.

I chanced upon the first Orange Tip of the year between Wychall Reservoir and Popes Lane and a little later, when entering the Peafields, I was delighted to see two Peacocks and another Comma. Exiting at Wychall Road, a Small White was enjoying the sunshine.

A shorter ramble the following day revealed more Orange Tips, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells and Brimstones. Lots of Queen Bumble Bees buzzed around, looking for nesting sites. The bulk of these were Red-Tailed Bumble Bees.



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On the way home, a caterpillar caught my eye. It was making its way along the Cycle Path so I decided to rescue it from the attentions of any eagle-eyed, hungry birds and attempt to identify it. Imagine my surprise when, having consulted my reference books, it appeared to be the caterpillar of the Scarlet Tiger moth. This puzzled me because I could not recall any previous record of this moth being found in the Birmingham area. I fed it on dandelion leaves and it pupated on 10th May. On 30th May, my identification was confirmed when a magnificent Scarlet Tiger moth emerged from the pupa. I released it that evening onto its recognised food plant at the place where I had found it.

My curiosity aroused, I made a few enquiries and discovered that this specimen of moth had been recorded in Martineau Gardens, Edgbaston, in 2015. It also occurs in the Dudley area. I had hopes that it might become established in the Reserve but passing the spot where I released it, on 23rd



June I noticed that the majority of the vegetation on the bank had been mechanically stripped to ground level.

My son reported seeing a Holly Blue by Merecroft Pool on 22nd April, and later that day I spotted a Brimstone in the same area. Two weeks later, on 5th May, Speckled Woods were on the wing. They seem to prefer areas of shade and dappled sunlight under tree canopies. I also noticed that Green-veined Whites had put in an appearance.

The first two days of the following week, 8th and 9th May, were exceptionally warm, peaking at 25°C. Butterflies were out in force with all the more common species on the wing with the exception of Peacocks, Brimstones and Small Coppers. However, I was pleased to come



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across a Small Copper in the Meadow Hill/ Beaks Hill Triangle on 13th May, as I had failed to find one in 2017. The following day I happened upon a Peacock and a Brimstone in Sheila's Meadow.

An examination of willow leaves on the bushes bordering Merecroft Pool, on 20th May, revealed some eggs of the Sallow Kitten moth. I had not previously met with this moth on the Reserve although I regularly find them around the Lickey district. I occasionally find eggs of the Poplar Kitten moth on aspen close to my garden, which is only a few hundred yards from the Reserve.

The afternoon of 1st June was pleasantly warm. I released an Elephant Hawk-moth, which I had reared from a caterpillar found on rosebay willowherb, in Pinehurst the previous October. I noticed that in Waterways Meadow, Common Blues and Small Copper butterflies were flying amongst the grasses while Whites and Commas patrolled the border trees and hedges. Soldier Beetles and Cardinal Beetles sat on the seed heads of the grasses. Blue Damsel flies gave a bright display around Merecroft Pool.

Large and Small Skippers were much in evidence on 10th June, chasing each other at a mad speed over the meadows. A colony of Chimney Sweeper moths fluttered through the grass stems in a little area of Waterways Meadow, where they are to be found every year. The Peafields was alive with Skippers and Silver Y moths darted to and fro amongst the tall grasses in company with Straw Dot moths and Burnet Companion moths.

Ringlets were out and about the following week and by 22nd June they were the most abundant butterflies. The following day saw the emergence of Meadow Browns, their numbers steadily increasing over the following days, which became very hot and sunny. Single specimens of the Six Spot Burnet moth and Cinnabar Moth were observed in the Peafields. A dog walker told me she had seen a Painted Lady butterfly by the Meadow Hill Road entrance about two weeks previously.

C W Edge

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### Reptiles and amphibians at Kings Norton Nature Reserve

The Kings Norton Nature Reserve appears to have several habitats that would be suitable for reptiles and amphibians. Quiet grassy and marshy areas and ponds could be desirable for living, breeding and having a swim (if you are a grass snake). The Reserve has connections with quite extensive green corridors so populations shouldn't be too vulnerable as a result of isolation. A quick visual check towards the end of April revealed several smooth newts enjoying the little pond in Sheila's Meadow.



Grass Snake (from Wikipedia:  
*Natrix natrix* byMarek Szczepanek)

A number of black refuge mats donated by the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust have now been placed on the Reserve to see if any reptiles and amphibians choose to shelter under them. The theory is that offering concealment in a warm, dark environment is attractive especially to reptiles such as slow worms and grass snakes. They are known to shelter under refuges placed in sunny spots so surveying using refuge mats can help in finding these elusive creatures. So far 20 refuges have been placed and inspected at least once but no reptiles have been found. Two toads were discovered under mats in Sheila's Meadow and two common frogs hopped away from under mats in the quiet grassland just west of Wychall reservoir. The aim is to continue the survey for the rest of the 2018 "season". This means checking the refuges a couple of times a month up to the end of September. These refuge mats should not be disturbed.

A 2019 survey may also be undertaken and then there will be more certainty about the potential presence or absence of reptilian and amphibian inhabitants of the Reserve. If you have any reptile or amphibian sightings to report please give Margo a ring on 07812 3326189. A spreadsheet of findings is being kept and data shared with the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust and the Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve.

Margo Dobson, 9 May 2018

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *Walk on the Wildside Day 5th May 2018*

This year the Walking on the Wildside day had much better weather than the previous year, which resulted in a much better attendance overall.

The dawn chorus walk although it had fewer adults saw more children attending, and it was great to see their interest and knowledge. Thirty-two bird species were seen or heard, a slight reduction on the previous year

The morning activities in British Waterways meadow were a great success, partly due to it being a warm sunny day. The attendance was far better than in previous years with visitors showing a lot of interest in particular topics and the extent of the reserve in general.

Thanks to Nicola Human for the pond dipping which not only needed her knowledge but also the pond in her front garden as the usual places on the reserve were too dry. Thanks also to Amanda Cadman and Ian Freake for leading the botanical walk (44 species spotted), and to Ian (again) and Paul Saunders for leading the walk to the rear of Wychall Reservoir.

The duck race and treasure hunt were very popular and several generous donations to the reserve were made.

Thanks to Val Saunders for arranging and "hiding" the "treasure" for the children's treasure hunt, while the "table-top" treasure hunt was also popular.

The evening bat walk led by Brian Hewitt and Matt Wall had a great turn out of some 30 people, quite a few children and very many bats.

Thanks to all those who gave their time and effort in arranging and taking part in the day.

Andrew Nabbs - Chair



## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *General Data Protection Regulation*

You will all probably have been bombarded with information about GDPR by all the organisations of which you are members!

Your Committee has looked carefully at the information the Membership Secretary holds on members, namely a list of addresses, essential for us to be in contact with you by post, and for those of you who have given them to us, a list of email addresses which allows us to keep you informed of up-coming events.

We believe that since you gave us this information, you are also willing for the organisation to maintain it until such time as you tell us that you wish to be withdrawn from our lists, in which case your details are removed straight away.

For those of you who pay by Standing Order the Membership Secretary will also have a record of your bank details.

As an organisation we will never divulge this information to any third party. Any email circular will hide the identity of recipient members. If you have any issue with this statement please contact us on [enquiries@fknnr.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@fknnr.org.uk)

### *Guided Walks*

As explained in the last newsletter, we have decided 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.

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.

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



Frogspawn hatching by Brian Hewitt

### *Contacts*

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(\* Denotes Trustee of the Charity)

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Environment Agency Hotline	0800 80 70 60
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WM Police Neighbourhood Team	0345 113 5000, ext. 823 6260
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