

**The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve**

*Newsletter 47 – Summer 2019*

Registered Charity No: 1122293

[www.fknnr.org.uk](http://www.fknnr.org.uk)



Swans' nest on Merecroft Pool  
David Hanson



<http://www.facebook.com/knreserve> enquiries@fknnr.org.uk

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Newsletter 47

55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton Registered Charity No. 1122293

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *Chair's Report Autumn 2019*

The weather has not been particularly helpful to us recently: not least the arrival of Storm Hannah on the day which would have been our Walking on the Wildside event. Health and safety concerns about the risks of high winds led to the decision to cancel this at very short notice.

Arranging such an event requires much input to get relevant activities organised and so this meant that we have not been able to reorganise the event. We were however able to have a Dawn Chorus Walk with Jane Tavener a few weeks later which resulted in 31 different birds being seen or heard by 13 birders.

The heavy rain storms also resulted in several Tuesday WorkOuts being cancelled and as a result some work has been delayed. This is inevitable due to our busy programme of work, but we do prioritise work that is a health and safety risk such as fallen trees etc. It is very helpful when reserve users report these to us, and we respond as soon as we are able.

We are also grateful for reports of vandalism which we then try to rectify speedily. Two examples of which are wheelie bins and contents dumped in the river and, more seriously, severe damage to half a dozen young oak trees in the Peafields extension. These trees have been growing for about 30 years. Some were cut down completely, but it is to be hoped that others may survive with proper care and continue growing.

This year's AGM was held at St Nicolas Place due to the closure of Kings Norton Bowling Club. St Nicolas has the advantage of being at the centre of the village and also being the only suitable venue locally that has disabled access. It is intended that this will now be our permanent home for the AGM.

Those of you who attended will be aware that our current Treasurer Alistair Howard is relinquishing the post after over 10 years service. Alistair is the only member of our committee who works full time. He has agreed to stay on for another year and in the meantime we urge anyone with appropriate skills to come forward to apply for this post. Alistair is more than willing to support the new post-holder whilst they settle in. To discuss in

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

more detail please contact any committee member (contact details on the back cover).

At the AGM we had a speaker from the National Trust, Geraldine Taylor. Geraldine is the Operations Manager for Birmingham and the Black Country and is involved in several projects in the area. Interestingly they work very much with younger people and children out of school in order to develop skills for future employment. Some of these young people joined us recently when a group of Tuesday Volunteers and the Tracmaster went to the Millennium Green (opposite Kings Norton Cemetery) to help cut the meadow. It was great to see young people so keen to be involved in nature and it certainly dispels the myth that the NT is mainly for the over 60's.



There has recently been interest in people donating memorial benches to the Reserve. This is a very nice gesture and shows how much people value the area. However, the amount, type and location of memorial benches is closely managed by the Parks Department of the City. Should anyone wish to donate a bench they should apply at [Birmingham.gov.uk](http://Birmingham.gov.uk) and follow the links to

## **The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve**

Memorial Benches to complete an enquiry form, mentioning KNNR in the text box.

The current financial position of the City means that Ranger posts have remain unfilled, and as a result the amount of support that can be provided to the Reserve has been limited. We are delighted to learn that current vacancies are in process of being advertised, and we look forward to a close relationship with our new Ranger team.

The development of the Reserve is largely governed by a Management Plan which is usually revised every 5 years. Ongoing staff shortages since the last one expired in 2013 have meant that our plan is now 6 years out of date! Three committee members: Brian Wells, Ian Freake and Amanda Cadman, have undertaken to revise the plan and present this to the Rangers for review and sign-off.

It does not seem right to have a report without mention of the Wychall Project. It is great news that David Hampson has finally got permission from the Environment Agency to proceed with his plans. David has written an article elsewhere in the Newsletter detailing the work that needs to be done.

So, in summary, a continually busy period caring for an ever-popular reserve. Whatever nature and humans get up to, five cygnets continue to thrive on Merecroft and this year has seen an abundant crop of delicious blackberries – I hope that you have taken the chance to pick some!

Andrew Nabbs – Chair

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *'Berried Treasure': Guided Walk on 12 October*

Please join us for a guided walk around the Reserve on Saturday 12 October, when we will be keeping an eye open for seasonal developments as well as explaining our plans to enhance the site for people and for wildlife – not least our hopes to reduce silt in Wychall Reservoir and to restore some open water there for water fowl. We may find autumn migrants at Merecroft, and maybe there will still be some blackberries along the way! Meet at the junction of Meadow Hill Road and Wychall Lane at 10.30 am, and don't forget stout waterproof footwear and suitable clothing. We may go off the main paths, weather permitting, so you may find a stick useful.

### *Please Don't Feed the Horses*

It is great to have horses grazing at Kings Norton Nature Reserve, on the meadows near Merecroft Pool, and we welcome people coming to look at them. But there has been trouble recently with people feeding the horses – often with things that could make them seriously ill and could even be fatal. There are signs around the fields asking people please not to feed the horses. However, people are repeatedly ignoring these, and recently the grazer found a woman and children feeding the horses bread! She has also found people climbing into the fields.

**PLEASE DON'T FEED THE HORSES, AND  
PLEASE DON'T CLIMB INTO THE FIELDS WITH THEM.**

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *Outing to Broadmoor Wood*

The Tuesday WorkOut volunteers try to avoid disturbing nesting birds in the spring. This means we stop working on the reserve and instead book ourselves out to see other local reserves. At the end of April Ian Freake offered to take us on a guided tour of a patch of land called Broadmoor Wood.

I have been over the Lickey hills many times and linked footpaths up with the Waseley Hills. I thought I knew most places in between, but this was a new conservation area to me. If you drive out of Birmingham through Longbridge, take the A38 towards the M5, go past Rubery then take a left exit. Use the bridge to cross back over the A38, then take a left turn into Holywell



Lane. On the left, opposite the south car park of Waseley Hills Country Park, you will find Rubery Leisure centre. This has another name: St Oswald's Camp, a 1930's part of the Cadbury legacy with a community hall, a football pitch, and the remains of a swimming pool. At the back of this hidden part of the world is a lovely wood managed by Ian and his group on behalf of Worcestershire Wildlife

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Trust. It is open to the public with the usual requests to not cause damage or trespass off public paths. Full details can be found at <http://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/reserves/broadmoor-wood>

As you enter the wood you find good footpaths leading down a shallow valley and the first thing you see in the spring is a carpet of bluebells. After several years managing the wood Ian and his group are able to scythe the area in November. This keeps brambles down but allows bluebells to flourish before trees grow new canopy leaves. As you go down the valley a little stream feeds a marshy pond area at the bottom, and again natural habitat and



careful management results in a beautiful carpet of marsh marigolds. You can turn left by the marsh and skirt around on paths to return on the other side of the wood back to the original entrance.

Please visit with care and leave only footprints, take only memories.

Peter Childs

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *Our annual visit to the Fields Millennium Green*

When the City Council funded our purchase of the Tracmaster power scythe (for use unsupervised on non-City ground such as Waterways Meadow, and supervised by a Park Ranger on City Council land), they made it clear that this would allow mowing to take place on the Millennium Green at the top of Primrose Hill.



The Trustees of the Green lease the land from the City Council but get no Council support in terms of regular mowing etc. We are only too glad to support their work with an annual visit from the Tracmaster plus rakers-up. This year we went on 7 September, and were joined by the Trustees and some of their young 'urban rangers' (wish we had some of them!). A BBQ followed the session, courtesy Maggie and Clive Sweet, and was enjoyed by all.



## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *Severn Trent's Community Champions do their stuff*

On 12 July a large party of Severn Trent Water's 'Community Champions' came to work with us on the Reserve. This had been arranged through the good offices of Lee Coplestone of Keep Britain Tidy/WatersideCare who has been such a support to us over a number of years. (WatersideCare has supplied a goodly number of tools for us, as well as water sampling kit and practical support for on-site activities.)



The day was hot and sticky, but the visitors really got into the groove, most helping David Hampson to start work on the realignment of soil at the inflow end of the reservoir, with others doing some very valuable balsam bashing. They worked all morning, had a quick lunch at St Nicolas Place and then came back for more! Thank you guys, you did a magnificent job and we are hugely appreciative.

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *Outing to the Knapp and Papermill*

It took me a while to get my head around the name of the place we were going to – the Knapp and Papermill Nature Reserve. It sounded like two places – and, as I found out, it was that and more – created in several stages through various donations. Its present 84 acres lie within a huge loop of the Leigh Brook, which flows first north, then west and finally south toward the River Teme and onward to the Severn. It is owned by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, under whose stewardship this and over 75 other nature reserves flourish and, whenever possible, increase.



Our guide, who suitably matched our average age, could not have been more knowledgeable. Born and bred in the area, Garth had once been the Warden of the Reserve, living in Knapp House, which perches high above the brook and doubles as the Information Centre. After a briefing in the garden, we set off through the woodland and apple orchard which, together with the house, had formed the original 13 acres donated around 1970 by the nature-loving couple who had lived there for over 15 years.

It was a sunny day; wrens were calling across the orchard and all was incredibly right in that little bit of the world. The old trees, now providing a harvest only for wildlife, were each well protected by sturdy wooden posts and rails from cattle that are no longer pastured there. Reaching a weir on the river, the eagle-eyed spotted two Grey Wagtails on the far side, but no Dippers that day.

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



We took note of a newly-restored pond on our way towards the low three-arched Pivany Bridge, so named as the rent for the nearby field was historically due on Epiphany Day. As we walked up its slope away from the river, we spied an orchid, then another and another. Everywhere were low Green-winged Orchids, amongst a feast of other wild flowers – no field this, indeed it is now named Big Meadow. I read a recent report about disseminating wildflower species by taking hay from one wildflower-rich area and spreading it around another less rich. It made me think that perhaps we should arrange to go back to The Knapp and Papermill Reserve when their meadows are being cut next summer and bring some hay back in our cars for our own reserve.



And, of course, where there are flowers there are butterflies. Garth is a butterfly expert and pointed them all out as we gamely struggled upwards to the woodland that runs along the higher reaches of the valley. Amongst the trees he pointed out the relatively rare Wild Service trees and the dormice boxes placed two or three feet above the ground.

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

After a while we came out of the woods and descended the slope through another wildflower paradise – Papermill Meadow. The original mill was washed away long ago, and the remaining cottage is now home to birds, bats and bees supported by and supporting the flora of the meadow. A solar-operated pump in the garden brings water from the Leigh Brook to a trough in the field. This provides water for the cows who graze the meadows after the hay cutting and prevents them going down to the brook for water and damaging the edges. The cows are necessary to keep down the coarser grasses in the meadows. This finely-tuned system, of course, had been through many stages of trial and error to reach its present state and, in fact, people (doubtless volunteers) were apparently still tinkering with the best location and angle for the solar panels. I found myself wondering afterwards about the occasional cow leaning on the post that supported the solar panels.

As we started on the return leg of our circular walk, through woodland near the brook's edge, our guide's close connection with the Reserve was demonstrated yet again as he showed us individual, now tall, trees that he had been involved in planting years ago, some towering Wych Elms amongst them. In time we found ourselves back at Pivany Bridge where we bade him a grateful farewell.



Now hungry, we headed back towards our cars and let GPS technology guide us to the Live & Let Live in the back of beyond on Bringsty Common! The garden and pub were old and delightful, the food was good and filling – when it came. And somehow, just like any other Tuesday, the same group were left, eating sandwiches, when the rest of us were gone!

Margie Hall

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### *The Wychall Project.*

After several years of consultation with the Environment Agency we have finally been issued with a permit to carry out silt reduction work from the River Rea flood overflow area up to a line 17metres from the dam out flow.

We attempted to have the silt removed from what was an open area of water in order to regain open water in the reservoir, but no funding was available. We therefore changed our approach from removal of silt to one of future silt deposition being reduced by slowing the flow of flood water.

The proposal finally approved was that we could:

- (1) Raise / restrict the stream from the overflow area adjacent to the river to a level equal to the lowest level of the concrete apron.
- (2) Install 2 barriers on the outlet stream to slow the flow of flood water. They are to be constructed of horizontally laid timber with gaps to allow water flow. The timber is to be obtained from the Reserve.
- (3) Install a holding barrier 17metres from the outflow to a height of 0.5 metre above the concrete outflow.

The above work can commence on 20 October 2019.

Work has started on reducing the height of the soil on the left hand side of the outflow area by moving it across to the right to raise the washed away stream bed to the allowed height. The aim being to create a "golf bunker" shape to allow the flood water to spread across the area which should slow the flow. This work will not encroach on the location of barrier 1 until notice has been given to the EA.



## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



Barrier 1

Barrier 2 will be located in the area of the stone-filled gabion and will consist of 2 lines of upright stakes between which timber will be laid; each layer will have a gap to allow water flow at all times. This barrier will project 0.3m above the bank to cause flood water to flow back into an adjacent reed bed.



## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



Barrier 3, Holding Barrier, will be 90m from Barrier 2 and will be the same construction as Barrier 2 but will not be above bank level.

It is proposed to construct this 17m from the concrete outflow and with a height of 0.5m above the concrete. It will be 3 lines of vertical posts filled in with a mixture of timber sizes, the gaps it is hoped will fill with silt.

It is also proposed to remove the reed mace upstream of the barrier by cutting them off at silt level with pruning saws. The cut reeds will then be removed. It is understood that if reeds are cut below water level they drown.

David Hampson

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve



Little Egret at Merecroft by Keith Reilly

### *Contacts*

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**Committee Members:** Peter Cage, David Fernie, David Hampson, Brian Hewitt, \*David Human, Jean Perring, Paul Saunders, Val Saunders, #Matthew Wall, Brian Wells. (# co-opted) (\* Trustee of the Charity)

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Environment Agency Hotline	0800 80 70 60
City Parks Department Call Centre	0121 464 8728
Lickey Hills Rangers	0121 445 6036
WM Police Neighbourhood Team	101
Anti-Social Behaviour Hotline	0121 303 1111, option 5

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Newsletter 47

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