

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Newsletter 51 – Autumn 2021

Registered Charity No: 1122293

www.fknnr.org.uk



Goldcrest
By Keith Reilly



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Newsletter 51

55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton Registered Charity No. 1122293

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Chair's Report

As we approach the second year of pandemic restrictions, can we, can't we, shall we, shan't we, one continuing certainty has been the availability of the Reserve for everyone. Fortunately, Covid restrictions have had very little impact on the maintenance and development of the Reserve so to all intents and purposes life continues as usual here. As ever I need to thank all the volunteers, whatever their role, for all their time and effort working on the Reserve.

Development of the Reserve continues and shortly we will be sowing a large amount of wildflower seed on various meadow sites. Those of you who visit the Reserve regularly will have noticed that the Environment Agency are doing essential work on Wychall dam. Details of this can be found in a separate article in this newsletter.

The pandemic has meant that we have not been able to hold the annual Spring Day for two years and prior to that we lost a Spring Day due to storm Hannah. Fingers crossed for 2022.

Those of you who listen to Radio 3 may well have heard a recording of bird song taken on the Reserve by a local resident. This can be heard on our website. Thanks to Brian Hewitt for alerting us to this broadcast.

The recent death of Derek Angus, a member of the Birmingham and Solihull Volunteers Group who join us every Tuesday, was a very sad event. Several of us attended the funeral to pay our respects. Derek was the person you could always call on to undertake any heavy and dirty tasks and you may well have seen him emerging from Wychall Reservoir covered in mud when installing the Hampson Barrier. Derek was very skilled at his work and spent three days a week at various sites across the locality caring for nature reserves. We send condolences to his family. A full appreciation of Derek is included in this edition of the Newsletter.

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Corporate membership

The Friends of Kings Norton Local Nature Reserve are proud to be supported by corporate member Precision Spine



Volunteers are a very important factor in maintaining the Reserve to its current standard. Two of these volunteers, Peter Cage and Alastair Howard have retired from their roles. Peter has been a committee member and very active volunteer since 2008 and latterly, since the retirement of Phil Evans, had taken on the role of transporting tools from the storage site to wherever we were working on that day. This required Peter to start at 10.00 am, whatever the weather, and to return tools to the storage point at lunch time. The movement of tools is a necessity and therefore Peter's help has been essential. Peter is a great advocate for the Reserve and has also put in a lot of time helping and transporting for our spring day activities. Peter is very skilled at maintaining trees and can often be seen with a billhook checking on trees. Our grateful thanks go to Peter for all his hard work and we wish him a longer lie-in now that he is no longer responsible for the tool transport! Peter will continue to prepare the Newsletter for printing; many thanks to him for this help.

Alastair Howard held the post of Membership Secretary from 2010 to 2017, and of Treasurer from 2011 to 2021. Alastair is the only committee member also in full time employment, working especially hard for the Reserve as for several years he held both posts. Our thanks go to Alastair for his diligent work ensuring that our annual Trustees' reports are always submitted to the Charity Commission and keeping us on the financial straight and narrow. Again, many thanks to Alastair for his longstanding commitment to the Friends and we hope that he can now do his day job, managing huge budgets, without the thought of dealing with yet more figures when he gets home!

This year's AGM was held at the Triplex Social Club as unfortunately St Nicolas Place is still not letting rooms to non-commercial users. We were fortunate at the AGM to be able to elect a new Treasurer and a new volunteer to be part of our

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committee. Brian Lee is now the Treasurer and has a good number of years' experience in similar posts in other charities. The other committee vacancy was taken by Margie Hall. Margie like Brian is an active Tuesday volunteer and has much experience of working as a volunteer in conservation work. We thank Brian and Margie for joining us and welcome them to the committee.

Some volunteers have been involved from the beginning of the Friends in 2004. The maintenance of the reserve is dependent on the work of volunteers and the City continue to say that without this the Reserve would fall into disrepair. Therefore, we will shortly be developing a campaign to recruit new (and younger!) volunteers. If you have any ideas or can offer any help, please contact a committee member.

Andrew Nabbs
November 2021



Moorhen
By Keith Reilly

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Helping the Friends of the Fields Millennium Green



When we were granted the Tracmaster via the late lamented City Council Community Chest funding pot back in the mists of time, it was with the understanding that we would share it with the Friends of the Fields Millennium Green.

In practice they declined training on the machine and we have taken the Tracmaster up to the Millennium Green once a year to help their Friends group manage a large area of meadow and bramble (while they come and join us on litter picks and the odd WorkOut). On 16 September 2021, therefore, a good crowd of our volunteers joined them to get the work done, and a huge area was cleared, as can be seen from these photos. This is a lovely green oasis with several interesting features and a lovely view down to the village – and we get refreshments!



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Wildlife Photography, Facebook and Membership

In recent months many people have taken advantage of the Reserve for their recreation and exercise; it has also attracted interesting and beautiful wildlife, and we are fortunate to have some talented local photographers to capture these images.

Many such photos have been posted on our FKNNR Facebook page, for which we are most grateful, and with permission I was able to include some in the slideshow at our recent AGM. In particular Keith Reilly's pictures celebrate the profusion of insect and invertebrate life which now calls the Reserve home, also showing the water-fowl on Merecroft, the dippers and wagtails in the River Rea, and much else. Of course, the parakeets are an invasive species, rather too exotic; but we have not thought of discouraging them. We just need a grebe to come back, as our emblematic bird.



If you have not yet had a look at the Facebook page, which often gives updates on our activities, it is well worth checking out.

The link is at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/58488127590>



It is notable that there are over 500 'virtual' members of FKNNR on Facebook, but only just over 200 actual subscribers to our Charity in support of our work. It would be great to have more active supporters rather

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than just cyber-members. So, we hope existing members can encourage others to join, for which modest fee of £7 per annum (or £5 concessions) they can also receive the newsletters and know they are helping us – or even volunteer!

There is a downloadable application form online at our own website: <http://www.fknnr.org.uk/>
the pages are updated with new material as often as possible.

Thanks are due to Peter Cage for technical help with maintaining and hosting the website, which also gives details of our work schedules and meeting places each week.

On the site's 'Introduction' page is a short video clip of one of our Tuesday workout sessions, filmed by my grandson Charlie a couple of years ago. The film is accelerated in 'Keystone Cops' fashion, but as some of the volunteers are 'of a certain age' normally we can't work that fast. I love the modern jazz soundtrack.

Another tab on the website describes the history of the Reserve's land from medieval times to the present day.

Under the 'Wildlife' heading, as well as more photos, there is an audio recording of April birdsong submitted to BBC Radio 3 by a local FKNNR member, Mr. Pete Kirkman.

It was broadcast as a 'Sounds of the Earth' sequence - 7 minutes - interspersed with classical music.

I couldn't believe my ears when I heard the Nature Reserve mentioned on a Sunday morning, and managed to retrieve the clip via BBC Sounds. Mr Kirkman kindly gave permission to use it on our website.

I have just had an idea.... How about some bat recordings on Radio 3 next?

Brian Hewitt

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

Sabotage and Repair



On 26 August I was walking through to the Wychall Road entrance and saw that the lovely interpretation panel that Brian designed, and for which Andrew achieved funding from Veolia, had been taken apart. It was still all there, but in a pile on the floor.

Brian dismantled the frame, noting that the panel itself and backboard were intact. He ordered a new 4mm Perspex sheet and a spare for another one which is very cloudy @ £95 the pair, and ultimately was able to repair the frame with L-shaped corner brackets as the welds were all snapped. New bolts and locknuts were needed to secure to upright stands, and the panel is now back in situ, looking pretty much as good as new. Thank you so much for this detailed repair work Brian, but why on earth does anyone want to damage our notice boards? We get horribly used to spray paint, but this damage was of a different order of magnitude. Brian thinks the vandals were after the scrap aluminium of the frame. Do we need to use sticky black paint next time? Smart water? Fake security cameras?

Amanda Cadman



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The 4th Excursion Meeting of the Worcestershire Naturalists' Club

Berrow's Worcester Journal is a rich source of information about past life in this part of England. On 4th September 1869, it printed a detailed description of a nature ramble which began and ended at Kings Norton. It is reproduced here with the original spelling and punctuation for your enjoyment and edification.

The fourth excursion meeting of the present season was appointed for Tuesday last at Northfield, near Kings-Norton, and was numerously attended. The enervating fervid weather of the preceding week had given place to a temperature better fitted for out-door exploration, and the observant naturalists advancing to a work combining duty with enjoyment, took the language of Tennyson as their motto for the day -

"And forth into the fields I went, While Nature's living motion lent
The pulse of hope to discontent."

Motion is in fact the life and soul of science, and starting from the Shrub-hill station, the iron horse quickly conveyed the adventurous band to King's-Norton, where they formed a junction with another division of naturalists from Birmingham. Here the party was met by Thomas S. Stock, Esq., of the Priory, Northfield, who, as cicerone and host of the day, at once proceeded on the appointed route and led them first to the Rolling Works of Mr. Ellis, who had directed his manager to show the various operations carried on, which were interesting to contemplate. Here copper and platinum are rolled by machinery into large plates, duly flattened for the purposes required for further manufacture into various articles, and it was something curious to heave some small plates of platinum which is the heaviest of all metals, and so valuable that a little pile of them were said to be worth £2,000.

After the examination of the works, an exploratory party chartered a boat on the contiguous Wychall Reservoir, which is a fine expanse of water, and fishing for waterplants went on for some time with success. Several specimens of Potamogeton were observed in fine fruit, as well as dense masses of the Water Millfoil. Portions of the reservoir were beautified with floating

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masses of the red-flowered Polygonum amphibium, over which the beautiful blue-spotted dragon-fly [Libellula maculata) was sporting in airy divarications, and the Bladder Carex (C. vesicaria), was very conspicuous.

From hence by pleasant shady lanes, once the high road of commerce, when merchandise was chiefly conveyed by pack-horses, though now abandoned to ferns and brambles, the party passed on to Northfield, where Mr. Stock pointed out an ancient moat, still filled with water, that surrounds the rectory garden, though whether formerly a defence to a manor house once here, or some religious foundation, is not certainly known. Not far away is another very large moat that surrounds the site on which Hawkesly House once stood, which in the Civil Wars of Charles the First's time Prince Rupert burned down, when he found himself unable to hold it against a superior force of Parliamentarians. Thus it is that Worcestershire has, from the destruction of war or the dilapidations of time, more relics of weed-covered moats than of the mansions of olden days.

There follows a long-winded account of the party's exploration of Northfield, including "a most sumptuous luncheon" at The Priory, and a lecture on Fairy Rings. The article ends with an account of the club's final descent into "Kings-Norton":-

It was quite dusk when the naturalists reached the village and church of Kings-Norton, though its lofty tower and beautiful crocketed spire had been looming in view for a considerable time. The Rev. J. M. L. Aston, the vicar, was in waiting to show the church to the visitors, and had kindly caused it to be partially lighted up; but as the structure could only be imperfectly seen in the gloom, he considerably distributed copies of his Lecture on the Antiquities of Kings-Norton, for the careful perusal of the excursionists at home.

The party now rather tired and exhausted, made their way to the Saracen's Head Inn, a timbered house of some antiquity, perhaps in former days inhabited by a more important personage than a tapster, for here, according to the circular, tea was to be provided, and all were anxious to partake of the non-inebriating cup. But, alas, here was the only disappointment of the day, for the

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honorable secretary, with a mind abstracted from the petty appliances belonging to cups and saucers, and high in the regions of Metamorphosis, on which subject he had promised a paper, had utterly forgotten to order coffee or tea even for two - much less for twenty - and mine host could not manage it on the spur of the moment. So the secretary lost his vote of thanks, and amidst murmurs not loud but deep, those who were and those who were not teetotallers did the best they could with soda water, lemonade; and cold without.... from Kings-Norton the party returned by the last train home....

Reprinted with gratitude from the Kings Norton Parish Magazine of July 2021.

Fleeces and Baseball caps

At least one person is wanting to acquire a Friends' fleece. I have checked out current prices, and the Regatta fleeces with our logo cost £28. I have also checked out the price for proper baseball caps (not the Trumpian ones we managed to buy last time!). With the logo they cost £16.

Please let me know by the end of November if you would like buy a fleece or a baseball cap (giving me your size): amandacadman@sky.com

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Wychall Reservoir and the Great Rea Barrier



Members and passers-by have perhaps observed our attempts to hold back the flood in what remains of Wychall Reservoir.

People had commented on the loss of open water for wildfowl and wading birds, as a result of silt build-up and colonisation by reeds and other vegetation.

David Hampson devised a scheme to redirect and pen back some of the water which naturally trickles through, and the

reservoir also has a delaying function in time of flood, before the water discharges into the River Rea.

David negotiated at length with the Environment Agency, who for their own reasons were reluctant to dredge silt or clear reeds, but we finally got permission to construct a barrier across the water upstream from the outlet. It had to be constructed of natural materials, rather than the more substantial interlocking piling that David had envisaged.

Many hours were spent by volunteers in constructing willow hurdles and embedding them across the width of the area – firstly flat so we could walk across the water without sinking in, and then a line of upright hurdles to form the barrier itself. We attempted to render it more effective with a deep curtain of coir matting, which we obtained cheaply, with an under-layer of canvas. This was all hammered and embedded as far as possible into the silt by the

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valiant efforts of Dave, Ian and the late lamented Derek, our professional volunteers, as seen in the photo.

An increase in the water level above the barrier was certainly measurable but, despite our best efforts, water eventually began to find ways through.

However, the barrier was put to a more severe test in late June by massive storms, when a great flood into the reservoir overwhelmed it, as seen in the second photo. The force of water even pushed backwards the long stakes, hammered deep into the silt, which had supported and strengthened the barrier. Traces of mud on vegetation up the bank showed the water must have reached at least a metre above the barrier itself.



Further recent storms have again washed over the barrier, but it is still there, and we must wait for an opportunity to do running repairs when vegetation has died back in the winter.

Brian Hewitt

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Wychall Reservoir maintenance programme

All households close to the reservoir will have received a letter recently from the Environment Agency (EA) explaining that "as part of our ongoing maintenance programme we have found that some upgrade works are required at Wychall Reservoir. The key objective of this maintenance work is to modify the reservoir dam to address the statutory MIOS (Measures in the Interest of Safety) recommended by the appointed Qualified Civil Engineer who inspected the dam [earlier in the year]. This means you will see staff working on site and may experience some disruption over the coming months into 2022.

We have made the following progress so far:

- We are currently working on the detailed design of the reservoir
- You may have seen us on the ground carrying out various investigations
- We are liaising with Birmingham City Council, who own the land
- We have been engaging with the Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve"

The Friends have been told that the EA plans to undertake vegetation clearance at the end of November/beginning of December 2021, including cutting down all the trees on the dam. This has to be done early to avoid the nesting season, and is to enable safe access to the working area in order to strengthen the existing embankment. The Friends have removed as many primroses as they can from this downstream side of the dam (what a fantastic display this last spring!) We're replanting elsewhere on the Reserve, and hope to be able to start a new colony on the dam after the works are completed. It was difficult however to find the little primrose plants, as they had recently been strimmed ferociously by the EA! An area of reeds by the dam outlet has been dredged, by the EA, to provide an area of open water.

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The EA tells us that ecological surveys have been undertaken and appropriate supervision is planned where required to ensure minimal damage to the environment. The clearance work should take about 2-3 days to complete, and they will work during office hours only. The cycle route will be closed for the duration of the clearance works, so watch out for diversions if you are on a bike. Some foot access may be available on occasion during this period, but control of dogs and children will be imperative.

The main construction works are expected to start during spring 2022 and to take nine to twelve months to complete. Basically, the spillway needs to be widened and the whole dam needs to be raised somewhat and strengthened, ready to cope with the once-in-a-thousand-year flood event that we need to be prepared for. The downstream face of the dam, minus trees and primroses, will be re-profiled and strengthened with a solid underlay, but then, we understand, re-covered with a layer of soil to be sown with wildflower seeds (including primroses!).

Watch out for more details in due course when the detailed main construction works have been published. And the EA is working with the Friends on various environmental enhancements across the Reserve; again, more details in due course.



The new open area with the barrier just visible on the far side.
By Sarah Cage

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Derek Angus



It was with great sadness that we gathered at Lodge Hill Crematorium recently to pay our respects to Derek, who died in August after contracting coronavirus and spending two weeks on a ventilator and in an induced coma. Unfortunately, he could not be revived and died a couple of days later.

Derek was a member of the Birmingham and Solihull Midweek Conservation Volunteers and had been working Tuesdays at the Kings Norton Nature Reserve for around ten years. Initially, we worked separately from the Friends work parties, but when we joined forces a few years ago, the Friends on the TWOs soon realised what an invaluable member of our group he was. He entertained us all with his wit and humour, always on the lookout for a chance to make funny comments, even if his puns were sometimes excruciating. But, more importantly, he was a tireless and conscientious worker. In his younger days, Derek had been a body-builder and though a couple of inches had been added to his waistline, he still was very strong. So, it was to him we turned when a heavy log had to be moved or a felled tree walked out from where it was caught up.

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He loved the work we did. Almost every time I dropped him off after a day's work he would say "That was a cracking day, I really enjoyed it" or something similar. He was always enthusiastic and didn't mind undertaking mundane tasks that others weren't keen on doing. He hardly ever missed a day, and when he was prevented from coming out, he was most apologetic.

Derek was a fine musician. He played guitar and was good enough to play with the best, besides having a lovely voice. Many of you will remember him playing *Summertime* at JP's funeral, which coincidentally was also played at his own funeral.

He'd had a tough life. He brought up five children as a single parent and spent much of his life on the breadline. He married Sue 14 years ago and for various reasons they had been unable to live together. It was deeply saddening that when they finally got it together for her to move in with him, he was taken into hospital only two days later.

For me personally it was a great loss. We spent ten years travelling together to worksites, sharing our love of music and his jokes. He loved his food and would often enlighten me with the wonderful meal (consumed in prodigious quantities) he'd eaten the night before. We became very close friends and I miss him terribly.

So, farewell then, Derek. Our thoughts go out to Sue and the rest of his family.

Ian Freake

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Photography on the Reserve

Ben Creswell is a younger member who has made quite a study of insect life on the KNNR over the years and created some excellent pages of wild life photographs. Unfortunately, the newsletter is too small to do his art justice.

The following are extracts from his work in Sheila's Meadow (wetland) in early August 2014:



Pellucid Fly - *Volucella pellucens*
This 'bumblebee mimic' is a member of the Volucella genus, this is just one example of how hoverflies mimic bees and hornets.



Eristalis arbustorum,
feeding on water mint flowers, in front of the Yellow Iris that outline the pond in Sheila's Meadow.

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Stop Press!

A strange phenomenon is appearing in several of the meadows on the Reserve, namely rectangular patches of disturbed grass, around which twigs have been stuck in at each corner. The flattened and somewhat bare soil also appears to have a sandy deposit in places.



Some have suggested it is part of an autumnal fertility ritual, while others have likened it to crop-circles, as famously seen in cornfields, though these patches in the Nature Reserve are irregular and random, rather than the mathematical beauty of some crop circles.

A spokesperson for FKNNR has since dismissed the idea of a mystic origin for the strange patches in the meadows, suggesting it might, rather, be an attempt by volunteers to enhance the biodiversity of the meadows with wild flowers. We hope the truth will emerge.

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Goosanders By Keith Reilly

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Environment Agency Hotline	0800 80 70 60
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Lickey Hills Rangers	0121 445 6036
WM Police Neighbourhood Team	101
Anti-Social Behaviour Hotline	0121 303 1111, option 5

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