

The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

# Newsletter 54 – Spring 2023

Registered Charity No: 1122293

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Fritillaries on the reserve by Brian Hewitt



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Newsletter 54

55 Wychall Lane, Kings Norton Registered Charity No. 1122293

## The Friends of Kings Norton Nature Reserve

### The Editor's Piece

Amanda Cadman

You are probably expecting to see a piece here from Chairman Andrew Nabbs, but sadly he has been ill and in hospital. He is back home now, but he is still rather under the weather. In the midst of all this they are in the process of moving house, so it would be fair to say that he is a bit preoccupied! I agreed to write something instead, and of course the first thing to say is "get well soon Andrew; we all send very best wishes!"

The Friends have suffered a major loss recently in the death of David Hampson, who was a founder member of the Friends as well as chairing the Links Residents' Association. A formidable character, he died on Christmas Eve after a long and brave battle with sarcoma, undergoing two major operations to remove tumours. He continued to be an active member of the Friends right to the last. Anyone who knew David will have been struck by his terrier-like tenacity in pushing forward with projects, particularly of the engineering sort. He was the guiding light behind the "Hampson Barrier" across the reservoir, which seeks to raise the water level slightly to allow waterfowl an area to go about their business unencumbered by reeds. This structure is clearly in need of a little repair after recent heavy rains, and it cannot be said that the water level has risen significantly. But it was David who, when representatives from the Environment Agency were discussing 'biodiversity net gain' benefits of their recent dam strengthening project, insisted that a quantity of reeds should be dredged out of the reservoir upstream of his barrier to offer a significant area of clear water. It looks great and the waterfowl are clearly enjoying it. David's family have kindly allowed us to print the eulogy given at his funeral. David and Maureen's house and garden overlook Merecroft Pool, and we plan to erect a bench in his memory overlooking the length of the pool. Maureen is hoping we can celebrate David's life and his contribution to the Reserve with a 'bring and share' party in the summer.

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The Environment Agency has completed its work at Wychall dam, finishing the downstream side with wildflower-rich turf. This is now bursting with life, and should be a riot of colour very soon. See later for a full report on the work undertaken and the 'biodiversity net gains' we are to expect. We look forward to welcoming a group from the Environment Agency in late June. Under their "Outcomes Day" banner they are looking forward to working with us on a couple of projects on the Reserve, probably bashing balsam and possibly helping to create a new path round the back of the reservoir.

Thanks are due to all who took part in our Community Litter Pick on 25 March. Twenty-three adults and five children managed to collect 43 bags of rubbish, including a splendid array of empty beer bottles along Popes Lane. Our clean-up was registered as part of Keep Britain Tidy's Great British Spring Clean. We also ran the community stall at Kings Norton Farmers' Market on 8 April, where we still found a good many people who were surprised to learn about the very existence of the Reserve. We gave out lots of leaflets, and a modicum of sales of bird seed etc. were made.



We are now planning our annual Spring Event, which will take place on 13 May. Well, it was to have been on 6 May, till we learned that King Charles had other ideas for that day ..... Anyway, we are calling it Dawn to Dusk – and Family Fun. The day starts with a Dawn Chorus walk led by Adrian Platt (starting at 5 am; meet by Wychall dam, foot of Wychall Park Grove). We end with a Bat Walk led by Chris Sherlock of Brumbats. Fifty people turned up

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for that last year! Our annual celebration of spring and new growth based on Waterways Meadow also includes woodland crafts using materials from the Reserve, duck racing on the canal feeder, children's competitions, river-dipping and a treasure trail, not to mention a botanical walk led by Mary Green and a voyage of discovery round the back of the reservoir led by Ian and me.

We have become aware of a number of 'grey water' incidents across the Reserve. These are a great cause of concern as all flows into the Rea. One is an outflow opposite Downcroft Avenue, which flows into the stream flowing out from Wychall reservoir before joining the Rea at the foot of its chute down from its roadside canalisation to its original route on the valley bottom. We have also observed grey water flowing into Merecroft from the stream that flows under Meadow Hill Road AND from a stream that flows in from under Beaks Hill Road. An earlier inflow from below the stables into the Merecroft outflow seems to have stopped. If you see 'grey water' – evidence of a foul water drainage mis-connection – do please report it to Severn Trent (0345 7500 500). A photograph will be helpful, and you could also log it on Facebook.

A number of people over the years have told us that they would love to work with us on the Reserve but are not available on Tuesdays. We are proposing a trial period of six months, starting in June, when we do not run a WorkOut on the first Tuesday of the month, but instead meet on the first Saturday. I do hope that this will prove popular, and that ultimately a second team of 'organisers' will be trained up to give instruction and guidance to volunteers and deliver appropriate tools to the various meeting sites.

"Butterfly Bill" Edge tells us that, with illness behind him, he is looking forward to a summer wandering the Reserve to see what butterflies and moths are around. Good luck Bill, and we look forward to hearing what you find.

**Friends of Kings Norton  
Nature Reserve**



# **DAWN to DUSK and Family Fun**

**Saturday 13th May, the Meadows,  
Wychall / Meadow Hill Road**

- \* Dawn Chorus walk (5am)**
- from 10am:**
- \* Woodland Crafts**
- \* Duck races**
- \* River-dipping**
- \* Competitions**
- \* guided walks**
- \* Treasure Trails**
- \* Bat walk (8.45pm)**

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### David Hampson



*A eulogy delivered at his funeral by his family, and offered here as a tribute to David's major contribution to the development of the Nature Reserve*

We are here to celebrate the life of David Hampson. David would be delighted that so many friends and family have gathered. He loved family gatherings and the opportunity to catch up with everyone, particularly nephews and nieces. He would want you to renew friendships, share affection and maybe reminisce about happy times.

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David had a long, healthy and happy life. He was able to continue with his interests, particularly gardening, and got enormous pleasure from it.

He was born in 1934 in Weoley Castle when times were hard. He told us the tale of friends in America sending him a pair of shoes. The only problem was that they were two tone – cream and tan. There was no option but to wear them but he worked out that no one needed to see them so he walked everywhere with his feet in the gutter. He never did want to be the centre of attention, maybe that is where it started.

In the mid 50s he met Maureen. She was hanging around in Selly Oak Park. He told her he knew her aunt, Auntie Peg who managed the Co-op on The Square, and romance blossomed.

First David had to serve the Queen. He did his National Service in the RAF as an engineer based in, then, Malaya. He had great memories of the time and it fostered his interest in aircraft and love of travel and discovery of life in other countries.

Returning to UK he and Maureen married in 1957. They had 65 happy years together.

With David's usual focus on getting things done he set off to get an additional education at night school, achieving a degree in engineering. He started work at Triplex and his connection to Kings Norton began.

He loved life in Kings Norton and dedicated 40 years to working with the Links Residents' Association to ensure that as far as possible change was only for the good.

In 1978 his job moved us to St Helens and the family all experienced life in the North West, it was a very different place from Kings Norton. There were many good experiences including visits to the Lake District particularly for walking weekends.

The return to Kings Norton gave the opportunity to move to Meadow Hill Road and a house and garden that he loved and worked on to the last.

When an opportunity came to move to Nigeria he went for three years. He missed his family but loved the experience and the

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opportunity for the family to visit and experience Africa. He learned much about working with people whose experience is different but equally valid, and how to make that work.

The shared purchase of a house in France gave him his ultimate opportunity for endless house and garden projects in the sun.

David was a good man who got pleasure from making a difference. The Kings Norton Nature Reserve offered him the perfect opportunity over the past 20 years to combine love of nature with putting things right. He loved the companionship and the achievements.



Finally David's family was his great strength and love. He was devoted to Maureen and his daughters and immeasurably proud of his grandchildren. We were privileged to have him in our lives.



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### **Wintering Birds (and other creatures) on the Reserve**

Adrian Platt

November 2022

19th Highlights today included Kingfisher, Little Egret, Raven, Siskin, Bullfinch, Little Grebe, Buzzard and best of all: Water Rail, the first one I've encountered since last winter.

December 2022

11th Probable Woodcock early afternoon flushed by a dog round a corner towards me, before it disappeared over a fence into a back garden. Brown all over, bulky, lumbering, low-flying, but only a brief view so I can't be 100% certain.

30th My final visit of the year was rewarded with 8 Goosander (a high count for me this winter), 1 male Shoveler, and a Sparrowhawk at Merecroft Pool; plus Teal, Grey Wagtail and Raven at Wychall Reservoir.

January 2023

1st 48 species heard or seen around the wider area including: at Merecroft Pool the long-staying male Shoveler, 3 Goosander, Sparrowhawk, and 2 Treecreeper; at Wychall Reservoir 3 Bullfinch, Buzzard, and at least 2 Teal; in Kings Norton a Grey Wagtail and a pair of Mistle Thrush; at Lifford reservoir a Little Grebe & another 2 male Shoveler.

2nd In the vicinity of Wychall Reservoir: Pied Wagtail, Fieldfare; in the extension a pair of Reed Bunting in the small reedbed and a Collared Dove. The woodland around Kings Norton Junction proved productive with Siskin, at least four Lesser Redpoll & a fly-by Little Egret.

15th At least 8 Teal at Wychall Reservoir. Redwing numbers building in the paddocks at Merecroft Pool, at least 22.

23rd Lots of birds everywhere including Kingfisher, Water Rail, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Lesser Redpoll, Siskin, Bullfinch, Goldcrest, Grey Wagtail, Treecreeper, Nuthatch with bonus fox and muntjac.

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February 2023

19th Blackcap singing in Bunbury Gardens on my approach to the Reserve.

25th This afternoon's highlights: Teal x8, Goosander x2, Shoveler, Raven, Bullfinch, Siskin x3, Lesser Redpoll x3, Reed Bunting x2, Little Egret, Kingfisher, and Peregrine. Thanks to the dog walker who told me they had just seen the peregrine fly past. I managed to catch up with it as it alighted for a while on the spire of St Nicolas' church in Kings Norton.

March 2023

11th Lifford Reservoir late morning. Highlights: Kingfisher, Great Crested Grebe 2x2 pairs, Little Grebe, Cormorant, Buzzard, Little Egret, Grey Wagtail x2, Pied Wagtail x3 and 260+ Black-headed Gull.

12th A pair of Gadwall at Merecroft: first there for me in 7+ years of visits. Supporting cast: male Shoveler still, Little Grebe, Raven, Siskin, Bullfinch x6.

18th First Chiffchaff of the year.



Goosander take-off by K Reilly

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### We're not the only people who have been working on the Reserve recently!

Amanda Cadman



We have all been caught up in watching the work being undertaken for the Environment Agency at Wychall reservoir to re-profile and strengthen the dam for its role in flood prevention. It all seemed to take a long time, and a number of people were saddened to see the trees removed from the downstream face of the dam. But the final look of the dam seems, to me at least, to be very attractive. The

downstream face has been turfed with a 'sacrificial' wildflower-rich meadow mixture. 'Sacrificial' means that, if we ever have that once in a thousand years flood event that over-tops the dam over the widened spillway, the downstream turf and the soil beneath it will be washed away. But in the meantime (and, let us hope, for a VERY long time) we will be able to enjoy the sight of campion, ragged robin, vetches, yarrow and no doubt several other meadow wild flowers that we have not yet identified in full flower on the dam. We have even planted several of the pre-existing primrose plants back into the turf. I hope the other vegetation will not be so vigorous that it drowns out the primroses. Various bulbs were set out under the turf, and some rather large leaves have appeared, but so far we cannot identify them, except that they are an allium.

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When the trees were removed there was a stipulation that, I think, five trees for every one felled should be planted in recompense. Since we have an abundance of trees on the Reserve we suggested that the new trees be planted elsewhere in the neighbourhood. Some were planted at West Heath Park, and it is a matter of great sadness to learn that some unidentified idiots cut them down – yes, not just twisted and broke them, but actually sawed them down! People living around the Park are furious, as you can imagine.

As other 'biodiversity net gain' developments connected with the Environment Agency's dam works, we are to receive a number of willow tit nests to set up along the reservoir area, and the 'shark's tooth weir', locally known as 'the stepping stones' is likely to be by-passed to allow fish and invertebrates to move freely up and down the river.

You will have noticed that an area of open water has been created in the reservoir by removing the reeds that were totally engulfing it. It is wonderful to see birds active on the water again, and we are very grateful to the Environment Agency for arranging for this reed removal to be undertaken. The resultant reedy sludge up the bank will soon green over, and a cheery



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patch of Marsh Marigold has already sprung up near the cycle path (though eventually it should be moved down to the water's edge, for it needs damp conditions).

More recently work has been undertaken along the course of the Rea to raise the tree canopy and increase light levels down to the understorey so that a wider range of waterside vegetation can be encouraged. This is part of a Natural Rivers and Green Corridors project that aims to improve woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and watercourses along the River Rea and its tributaries in south-west Birmingham and the River Tame in west Birmingham. The project is a partnership between Birmingham City Council, the Environment Agency and the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, and has been part funded by the European Regional Development Fund. Little of the project has to date taken place on the Reserve, just some cutting down and thinning out of vegetation, but further downstream much work has been undertaken to re-naturalise tributaries of the Rea in, for example, Woodgate Valley and Senneleys Park (in the latter the Stonehouse Brook has been removed from culverting, while weirs have been removed at Woodgate). A second stage of the Natural Rivers and Green Corridors project (running till 2027) seeks to continue the re-naturalising (where safe to do so) and slowing down of watercourses on the upper Rea from its source on the Waseley hills down to Cannon Hill, and there is every possibility that our canalised section of river will receive at least some re-naturalising (through the Peafields, I am hoping). Major work will be undertaken very soon at Daffodil Park, upstream from us: the straightened river there is threatening to undercut the railway line in the very near future. Severing the railway line from Birmingham to Bristol and beyond would not be welcomed!

We wait with bated breath to welcome representatives from the Project to see what they think we could do on the Reserve to enhance the condition of the Rea as a living watercourse, improving its wildlife habitats and reducing its propensity to flood.

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### Tuesday WorkOut report

Brian Hewitt

It seems an age since Christmas when we enjoyed mulled wine and other refreshments after our labours in Pinehurst Meadow. Balsam-bashing and the 'Blockade of Burmans Drive' are also distant memories. But a remarkable amount of work has since been done by volunteers to maintain the Reserve, some visible and some 'behind the scenes'.

The Reserve is in some ways a victim of its own success, the footpaths heavily used by dog-walkers and many people taking their leisure and enjoying the wildlife and green spaces. Last year we laid several tons of chippings at £50 a cubic metre from our own membership funds, but it needs doing again soon, judging by the mud after recent snow and rain.

Tuesday has become our day for volunteer work, though we realise many younger people can't join us; most of us are well retired but keen to give something back to the local community. The age of our volunteers ranges from 18 to 80; locations for Tuesday sessions are published on our website 'Diary page', and an email is sent to the 'regulars' in case of any last-minute changes. (*Ed: look elsewhere to see details of a six-month trial of Saturday working*)

We follow our management plan to ensure conservation work is undertaken appropriate to the season. Each week tools are collected from the rented garage by Brian and Jean, and taken to a new location – bowsaws, loppers, spades, rakes, scythes, litter-pickers, mattocks, and of course black bags for rubbish. Usually we have about a dozen helpers, tackling tasks appropriate to their capabilities, such as trimming branches, clearing undergrowth, tidying fallen trees, hedging, cutting bramble, picking litter and raking up grass.

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Clearing fallen willow behind the reservoir by B Hewitt.

Now the Wychall cycle path has reopened we have been able to access the rear of the old reservoir across the dam, cleared several fallen trees, and opened up overgrown ponds. We have cleared large areas of scrubland at the Peafields, pruned hedges, and cleared the cycle path of autumnal leaf-mulch which had made the path very slippery. At Merecroft we removed some of the ash trees affected by dieback, improved the hedges, and maintained the wetlands in Sheila's Meadow. Waterways Meadow has benefitted from clearance of some bramble to encourage wild flowers. We still live in hopes of seeing more results from our wildflower seeding from previous years.

We have liaised with the Environment Agency on the work at Wychall Reservoir, and hope that the open water created by the clearance of reeds, and the wild-flower planting on the new dam will be a great improvement in time.

City Council tree-surgeons last year decided several old poplars in Pinehurst were dangerous, so had to be felled – a decision borne out by the exposed hollow trunks once the trees came down.

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However, one poplar refuses to die and has already started sending up lots of new shoots! Pinehurst and Old Orchard have benefitted from discreet replacement tree planting, some in memory of people no longer with us, and who loved the Reserve.

We are encouraged in our work by 'the professionals', Ian and Dave – who often continue working into the afternoons! They guide us in our conservation efforts and carry out some of the more ambitious tasks. They also work in Solihull and other Reserves during the week.

We can't use power tools such as chainsaws, due to Council policy, but for many years have had the use of a Tracmaster power



scythe which was bought by the City from the now defunct

'Community Chest', and it certainly helps clear rough undergrowth. We have been trained in its safe use, and pass on our knowledge to new recruits as needed.

By B Hewitt

New volunteers are welcome! Sadly several important members have suffered health issues recently. We are increasingly conscious of time marching on, and of the need to recruit a new generation of enthusiasts to carry forward the work on the Reserve, and maintain it for people and for wildlife. The best way to learn is to join us – training is given, and all you need is good boots, gloves and enthusiasm.

Check out the website diary and come along – or ring Brian (07753 224 652) or Amanda (07887 512 382) if you can help.



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### Reed Removal

As part of the 'Biodiversity Net Gain' developments that followed the Environment Agency's work on Wychall Dam, and largely at the insistence of David Hampson, an area of open water has been



created upstream of the 'Hampson Barrier' by a large digger. The resulting reedy sludge has been spread on the adjoining bank and it should very soon green over. The reeds will not enjoy the dryer conditions on the bank, and should fade out, but we can already see flag iris (which will probably survive there, at least for a while) and a patch of marsh marigold, that we will seek to transfer back down to the water's edge once it had flowered, since it most certainly won't like being so far from damp conditions.



Already the rather ghastly sight we have in these photos taken on 7 March has changed a great deal. It will be very interesting to look again in a year and see how the area has developed. And there is no doubt that mallards, herons, and egrets are all enjoying the open water. Long may it last (??)!

Egret by J McGowan

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### Keeping Kings Norton Nature Reserve Tidy

Amanda Cadman

Back for its eighth year, the Great British Spring Clean, organised by Keep Britain Tidy, is the nation's biggest mass-action environmental campaign. The Great British Spring Clean and Great Big School Clean 2023 took place from 17 March to 2 April, and we signed up to do our bit on the Reserve on Saturday 25 March: I pledged that we would field 20 volunteers and 40 bags of rubbish. To be honest I wondered how much we would find, for we have been blessed with the presence of several regular litter collectors since the beginning of the pandemic, and they have generally managed to keep litter levels low. However, 23 adults and five children assembled at Burmans Drive on a cool but sunny Saturday morning, keen to get searching in brambles and mud. Spread out to cover all of the Reserve and working for no more than two hours, our harvest was 43 bags of rubbish and recycling, one car tyre, one road works sign, one personal shopping trolley and two large paint pots.



I was particularly taken by the pristine collection of Stella Artois bottles displayed by one of our volunteers at Popes Lane before she bagged them up for recycling. We left our findings at various locations: Wychall Lane foot of Meadow Hill, Wychall Meadows, Burmans Drive, Popes Lane entrance and Wychall Road entrance. They were all collected by the City Council by Tuesday morning, and we even received a letter of thanks from Birmingham's CleanerGreenerStreets Thanks to all who joined us. It was especially good to welcome the children, who so often are the most diligent and enthusiastic litter pickers!

## **Join us on Saturdays!**

Many of you have said that you would like to work regularly on the Reserve, but are unable to join us on Tuesdays. We have decided that, for a trial period (six months in the first instance) we will hold our weekly WorkOut on the first Saturday of the month, leaving the first Tuesday free. The intention is that a new group will be trained to give instruction and guidance to volunteers and to deliver appropriate tools to the various meeting sites.

We start in June, so come and join us on

**Saturday 3 June, 10.30 am.**

See the website for details.



Christmas drinks, always a bonus!

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Muntjac Deer in Pinehurst Meadow  
by Brian Hewitt

### Contacts

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Newsletter Production: Amanda Cadman, Sarah and Peter Cage

Environment Agency Hotline	0800 80 70 60
City Parks Department Call Centre	0121 464 8728
Lickey Hills Rangers	0121 445 6036
W M Police Neighbourhood Team	101
Anti-Social Behaviour Hotline	0121 303 1111, option 5
Severn Trent	0345 7500 500
RSPB Birmingham Office	01767 693777

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