



Annual Review 2013-2014

Annual Report of the Trustees

for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014

From the Chair

This year was the third and final year of our major Heritage Lottery Fund project “Conservation and Learning in the Upper Little Ouse Valley”. This project was the largest we have ever undertaken, involving the purchase of one site (Webbs Fen) and the restoration of this and two other sites (Broomscot Common and Scarfe Meadows in Garboldisham). While we had experience of similar habitat conservation work at other sites, the project also led us into new activities and there was certainly much learning involved for all concerned!

Although the major site restoration works have been completed, this is only the beginning of the conservation story on these pieces of land. They are all now in the Higher Level Stewardship scheme, and will require active management over the coming years to maintain and enhance their value for wildlife, and ensure safe public access.

Our additional activities included work in partnership with Garboldisham and Hopton Schools, a study of the history of the river with UEA, and a foray into the world of creative arts with the Sainsbury Centre, resulting in fantastic exhibitions in some of our village halls of works inspired by our sites and created by local artists.

All of this activity was supported by a huge input of volunteer time and expertise. Although we remain a volunteer-led organisation, with no paid staff, the scale of our land holding and activities now means we need some professional support at times. We contracted Mike Harding to ensure the HLF project was expertly managed and met reporting and budgeting targets. We also established a new Estates Management contract covering routine site management activities. This means that Peter Frizzell and his team, who have worked with us for many years, have taken on the responsibility for day-to-day site management. Using contractors in this way has given our trustees more time to work on the longer term development of the LOHP.

Restoring Habitats

Work continued throughout the year to restore and manage our sites for wildlife and public access. The very wet conditions during the winter meant that some works, such as pond digging, had to be postponed, but despite this good progress was made.

At Scarfe Meadows a sluice was installed and some of the ditches were cleared and re-profiled. This will allow better control of the water levels, and wetter conditions to be maintained in spring and summer, to encourage waders such as snipe and lapwing.

On Broomscot Common a pond-dipping platform was built at the newly restored pond, so that the primary school can use it in their studies. We have encountered some problems with a lack of re-growth of the coppiced gorse, due to rabbits grazing the new growth. The intention of the coppicing was to promote a variety of structure and age within the gorse areas, but this may not be possible at the present time. More encouragingly, the amount of ragwort present has been reduced significantly since we began managing the site.

We continued to manage a number of our sites by grazing with cattle and sheep. In most cases the

grazing has to be supplemented with cutting to remove additional vegetation. This practice has been highly successful on the Frith, where nettles, which used to dominate the sward, have gradually been brought under control and much reduced. Mowing of vegetation produces a problem in terms of how to dispose of the cut material—our wetter sites in particular generate a large volume of material which needs to be removed in order to take nutrients away from the sites, which encourages a greater diversity of plant species. We have started sending some of the cuttings for commercial composting, but this involves an additional cost for the removal and transport of material.

On our wet fen sites at Hinderclay, Blo' Norton and Betty's Fen we continued to manage the fen vegetation by summer mowing and raking off the cut material. At these sites, we have created habitat piles from the cut vegetation, which encourage a range of insects and reptiles, such as slow worms and grass snakes.

Our Higher Level Stewardship agreements provide funds for routine management from year to year, but also include one-off "capital works" funding. This supported the planting of hedging along the southern boundary of Hinderclay Fen, pollarding of crack willows on the riverbank at Blo' Norton and Betty's Fens, and the removal of an area of scrub on Blo' Norton Fen, allowing further regeneration of the wet fen vegetation.

As a result of a partnership between the LOHP, Environment Agency and Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the channel of the Little Ouse River from the ford at Thelnetham to midway between Hinderclay and Thelnetham Fen was rehabilitated in a project directed by Dr Nigel Holmes, a national expert in this work. The aim was to improve the river for wildlife by creating a mixture of deeper sections and faster flows which will help make the river "self-cleansing", maintaining an open channel and prevent the silting up. Dr Holmes also gave our annual AGM talk about his work on rivers in various parts of the country. As the river work was proceeding, a survey of water voles was undertaken so that burrows of this protected species would not be damaged. The Little Ouse has a healthy, and increasing, population of water voles. Control of mink and the increasing numbers of otters have helped bring this about.

Biological recording has continued on many of our sites, with a mixture of volunteer and professional input. Prior to the river restoration works we commissioned surveys of the aquatic invertebrates and plants, which will be repeated in future to assess the effect of the channel works. We are also using fixed point photography to record changes over time in the river.

Rowena and Reg Langston have made extensive surveys of the birds at our sites, and volunteers from the British Trust for Ornithology continue to monitor populations by ringing birds at Hinderclay Fen.

As always we are grateful to our volunteers, to our contractors Peter and Tim Frizzell and their team, and our graziers Denis Jenkins and Brian Lambert, for their assistance with the management of our sites.

Involving people

The volunteer input to the Project has continued to grow. Our regular work parties have been well attended. We continue to run a midweek group on Wednesdays - many thanks to Reg Langston for his leadership - and a Sunday party once a month. We have continued to offer training opportunities to our volunteers. During the year more volunteers were trained in the safe use and maintenance of power tools (brushcutters and chainsaws) and an additional ten volunteers undertook first aid training. Three people were trained in the use of GIS (Geographic Information Systems), which will mean we can improve our records of site management using maps. Mollusc expert Toby Abrehart ran a workshop to train people in the identification of rare "pinhead" snails,

which we are fortunate to have on some of our sites. Our volunteer photography group has continued its excellent work, establishing a photographic archive and recording our activities and events, as well as continuing to record changes on our sites using fixed point photography.

We are fortunate that a significant number of volunteer naturalists, both individually and as members of natural history groups, continue to visit our sites and provide us with their records. Particular thanks go to Sylviane Moss for entering all of the LOHP's biological records onto our database, and to Stephen Baillie and Helen Smith for ensuring the information is available on our website.

Activities

Our major event of the year was the staging of a series of art exhibitions over two weekends in October. The exhibitions were the culmination of nearly two years of work by the LOHP Creative Group, guided by the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. Work in a variety of media was displayed, together with contributions from Hopton primary school where the students had worked with local artist Rosemary Humphries. The exhibitions were held in the village halls at the Lophams, Blo' Norton and Thelnetham and attracted a large number of visitors. After the exhibitions a special edition of our newsletter was produced and distributed, featuring the work of the artists. We are delighted that the Creative Group has carried on meeting and arranging its own events since the end of the HLF project.

There was a variety of guided walks during the year, including the ever-popular Winter walk at New Year. Denis Jenkins, our main grazier, and Richard Young, Suffolk Wildlife Trust's reserve manager at Redgrave and Lopham Fen, combined to show people the different types of management by grazing on LOHP sites and at Redgrave and Lopham Fen. There was a U3A (University of the 3rd Age) botanical walk led by Tim Pankhurst from the charity Plantlife, and LOHP Trustees led a walk on 7 July to explain some of the management techniques being used to help re-establish fen vegetation. This was followed by a successful volunteers' barbeque, which is now an annual event.

During the year we continued to publish the "News from the Ouse" and distribute it to all households in our area of operation. We also created a new website, changing the structure and adding two new sections. One is an archive section which will over time be able to accommodate a significant amount of information on the project area, forming a valuable resource for students, teachers and the general public. The other has some excellent learning resources for children of primary school age, produced by Nicky Rowbottom and Reg Langston, based on work done with local schools - another output from the HLF project.

Membership

The total number members at 31 March 2014 was 184. Membership included 124 Friends of the Fens, 54 ordinary and 6 junior.

Funding our work

The largest single source of funding this year has been our Heritage Lottery Fund grant. We are very grateful to Mike Harding for his expertise in managing this complex grant. Higher and Entry Level Stewardship agreements and the Single Payment Scheme also brought in significant funds for site management. The revenue from the River Link Appeal was also an important source of income, and we are grateful to Sarah Grieveson, our Appeal Director, for the continuing success of the fundraising appeal. We are very appreciative of the support given to the project by all of our funding bodies.

Members of the Board of Trustees

Jo-Anne Pitt (Chair and trustee nominated by Blo’Norton Parish Council)

Reg Langston (Honorary Treasurer and trustee nominated by Hinderclay Parish Council)

Rowena Langston (Vice-chair)

Peter Fox (Honorary Secretary)

Nigel Clark

Helen Smith

Bob Hayward (trustee nominated by Redgrave Parish Council)

Martin Ward (trustee nominated by Thelnetham Parish Council)

Peter Coster (trustee nominated by South Lopham Parish Council)

Paul Brown

Lindsay Medus (Membership secretary)

Norman Groves

John Sears (trustee nominated by Garboldisham Parish Council)

Acknowledgements

The Little Ouse Headwaters Project is a voluntary, charitable organisation whose work is dependent on the commitment, goodwill and financial support of individuals, partner organisations and sponsors. It does not employ any staff and so is entirely dependent on the volunteers who contribute in many different ways to its success. We gratefully acknowledge their hard work and support.

Little Ouse Headwaters Project Summary of Accounts for the period April 1 2013 to March

	Unrestricted income	Restricted income	TOTAL income	
	2013-14	2013-14	2013-14	2012-13
Agri-environmental grants (RPA)	6,270.44	18,472.49	24,742.93	25,071.01
Appeal	0.00	24,450.00	24,450.00	5,550.00
Bank Interest Earned	363.29	0.00	363.29	782.15
Donations	316.84	0.00	316.84	884.77
Gift Aid Income	323.70	0.00	323.70	134.87
Heritage Lottery Fund	0.00	52,609.00	52,609.00	53,907.00
Miscellaneous Income	140.50	0.00	140.50	991.00
Subscriptions	1,762.45	0.00	1,762.45	1,669.25
	9,177.22	95,531.49	104,708.71	88,990.05
	Unrestricted expense	Restricted expense	TOTAL expense	
Access and Education	0.00	13,374.87	13,374.87	15,156.13
Appeal costs	0.00	2,700.19	2,700.19	1,730.09
Consumables	0.00	1,249.21	1,249.21	2,038.55
Depreciation and residual value of equipment	3,314.10	0.00	3,314.10	1,573.00
Habitat Management	385.63	37,614.12	37,999.75	36,486.54
Insurance Expense	529.01	0.00	529.01	597.91
Miscellaneous Expense	13.98	-5.00	8.98	360.59
Monitoring	0.00	4,634.80	4,634.80	7,500.00
Tools and equipment	20,700	20,710		
Cash at bank	£115,532	£130,487		
Represented by: Land acquisition and management fund	£80,000	£0		
Funds in bank	£35,532	£130,487		

Reserves and Investment Policy

The Trustees have reviewed the needs for reserves in line with the guidance issued by the Charities Commission. The Trustees seek funding from various sources and are grateful to the many trusts and grant providers who have contributed so far. As most income is generated in this way and varies widely, and regular membership income is insufficient to meet regular ongoing costs, the Trustees will endeavour to set aside sufficient unrestricted funds to enable the Charity to meet its basic commitments for one year. These funds will be kept in an interest bearing account.

These basic commitments include the cost of rent, insurance, health and safety requirements, conservation management obligations on designated sites and basic maintenances such as keeping paths open and safe. The Trustees believe that at 2013/14 prices this reserve should be £5500.

Trustees believe that reserves need to be at this level to ensure that the Charity can continue to function should there be a shortfall in grant revenue. This will be reviewed annually.

The annual accounts were approved by LOHP Board of Directors on 14 October 2014.