

LOHP Members' Newsletter: August 2003

Welcome to the third LOHP newsletter. It's now a year since we produced our first one, and during that 12 months we've seen an incredible amount of activity connected with the project - success in obtaining Heritage Lottery funding, active management restored to all of our sites and much more as you'll see ...

TEN- Transnational Ecological Network

More good news for the Project - the re-submitted bid by Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils to this European fund has been successful. As a major partner in the bid (which covers projects in both the Little Ouse and the Waveney valleys), LOHP will benefit from £75,750 of funding towards a £151,500 project to further promote site management and acquisition.

Heritage Lottery Project on the Frith and Lows

The installation of new and very high quality livestock fences around these fields is now complete. Thanks are due to our contractor Peter Frizzell, who has had to overcome various technical problems and suffered dreadfully from horseflies on these difficult sites. We also have new wooden entrance gates and pedestrian access via kissing gates to both sites (these gates have been designed to be self-closing but to allow access with a wheelchair or pushchair).

Having completed the fencing and the installation of a new water trough on the Frith, we now have a flock of weaned lambs munching their way through the vegetation on both sites, and we hope they'll shortly be joined by some cows on the Lows. The extensive beds of stinging nettles that were a prominent feature of the Frith last year, are already declining as a result of regular 'topping' and last year's grazing. Flowers, including cowslips, lady's bedstraw, harebells and lady's smocks, are already reappearing. Our next task will be to mark out the permissive footpaths around these sites, including the installation of two wooden footbridges across ditches on the Lows.

Guided walks and access to our sites

We've now led a total of three guided walks on Blo' Norton and Hinderclay Fens, looking at changes on the sites through the seasons, and hosted a walk for the Eye group of Suffolk Wildlife Trust on the Frith and the Lows. The headwaters barn owl and roding woodcocks have been delightful and obliging features of recent walks.

Most of our sites have permissive footpaths, rather than public rights of way, and we have a policy of open access to our sites - anyone can walk on our land, but on sites where grazing stock are present we ask that all dogs are kept on leads. We advise that visitors should use the marked paths: some of the former peat diggings in the fens are deep and potentially hazardous. Visitors should also bear in mind that many of our sites are wet, particularly in winter, and some paths may become impassable. We may occasionally have to close paths temporarily, for example when work is being carried out, but in general we want to promote access and encourage everybody to visit our sites. There is a map showing the location of these sites on the website and a new footpath map will soon be available (see below for details). The new access paths around the Frith and Lows are now open and DEFRA boards and way-markers showing the routes will soon be on-site.

If you would like a guided introduction to these new walks, please come along to our next guided walk on Sunday 7th September. We will be exploring the paths and explaining the management work we have done and are planning for the future.

Members and non-members are all welcome.

Biological recording day

Experts from all over East Anglia converged on the Little Ouse headwaters for our biological recording day on 15th July. Flies, snails, spiders, as well as birds, plants and butterflies all came under the spotlight. Even our horse flies, clegs and mosquitoes were greeted with interest rather than the usual slap! On Saturday night the valley was lit by 12 moth lamps, which attracted a total of 153 species: glow worms on Blo'Norton Lows found it hard to compete. Highlights included poplar, eyed, elephant and privet hawk moths. The amazing caterpillars of the lobster moth were found on Blo'Norton Fen and are featured on our web site.

Recording the wildlife on the sites that we manage plays a vital role in assessing the success of the project. Restoration management, together with increasing the number of links in the chain of wildlife sites along the valley, should result in recolonisation and expansion in range of typical and rare fen and heathland species. If you would like to help with biological recording in the valley please get in touch. By this winter our web site will give access to computerised biological records for all of our sites as well as having up-to-date information about the wildlife you can see in the valley each season.

Trustees meetings

The trustees have been holding regular meetings to deal with the business end of the project. We are now a registered Charity and are also registered with Companies House. We are about to submit our second quarterly report to the Heritage Lottery Fund and will soon be claiming payments for our first year of Countryside Stewardship funding.

Website

Luke Broome-Lynn (nominated trustee from South Lopham), has been working on the development of our website - you can now visit us at www.lohp.org.uk, for details of our sites, forthcoming events, wildlife news and links to related websites. We are keen to use the website to publicise other local amenities and businesses, so let us know if there are sites to which you think we should be linked.

Can you help?

The LOHP is entirely run by volunteers and so help is always very welcome. There are many ways in which you can make a contribution. Here are a few suggestions:

- Recruit a new member. The support of members is vital both to the success of the project in the community and to our ability to demonstrate to our funders that our work has popular appeal and support.
- Maintain or house our store of tools for work parties
- Help to warden one of our sites by visiting it regularly
- Help with organising publicity for work parties and guided walks
- Become the editor of future newsletters!
- Organise a fund-raising event or join a fund-raising group
- Become our Gift-aid co-ordinator

Come to a work-party - even if you can only spare an hour-or-two. We provide tools and work gloves and this winter will also be offering training courses for regular volunteers. As well as the satisfaction of contributing to the restoration of our wildlife sites, you can have fun, fresh air, company and even free fire wood! Your help also counts towards the "matched funding" we need for some of the grants we have received - many funding bodies will only provide a proportion of the total amount required for a project, and your volunteer time can help us to make up the shortfall.

So far, work party volunteers at work parties have contributed £2100 of matched funding towards the project.

Work parties

We've been holding work parties on the second Sunday in each month throughout the year: many thanks are due to all who have participated. At the next two parties we hope to be raking hay while the sun shines: raking-up cut sedge is an essential job to keep the fen areas open and increase the diversity of the vegetation. Sedge needs to be cut in the summer, when it is still growing, unlike reed which is traditionally cut during the winter months. Heaps of cut sedge make excellent "habitat piles" for reptiles, amphibians and insects. Our winter work party programme will include removal of scrub from wet fen areas, and hedge planting and restoration. It will be circulated to members and posted on the web site next month.

Work Party Dates for your diaries:

Details can be found on the work parties page.

Wildlife features of the Headwaters in high summer

Dragonflies and butterflies are still a prominent feature of the fens at this time of year. Look out for the electric blue Emperor dragonfly, the huge Brown Hawker (our only dragonfly with brown wings) and the green and blue southern and migrant hawkers, all of which can be seen patrolling along river and on Lows ditches. The smaller Darter dragonflies, with red-bodied males and yellow females, have emerged more recently and will remain on the wing until mid-autumn. The tiny Purple Hairstreak butterfly should be visible around the foliage of the oak trees around the Frith for a few more weeks.

On the heathy edge of Hinderclay Fen, along the Angles Way, the purple display of heather will soon be at its best. Here, and around the margins of the Frith, delicate blue harebells are coming into flower. Giant puff balls, 30cm or more in diameter, are a feature of the Frith grassland in autumn: many other fungi, including the strange and aptly named stinkhorns, are starting to appear in the woods on the fen margins.

Although the bird breeding season has finished, our summer migrants are still busy feeding fledged young and stocking-up on both insects and the maturing harvest of berries and crab apples in our hedges. Look out for reed and sedge warblers in the wet fen areas and for blackcaps feeding in the hedges. Just before dusk, flocks of swallows can be seen heading for the reed beds to roost: hundreds and even thousands of birds may congregate together. Hobbies, the small falcons that follow the swallow migration from North Africa in spring, are often involved in spectacular aerobatic chases amongst the pre-roost flocks. More often however, they can be seen catching dragonflies over the fens on hot afternoons.

After dark, young tawny owls are now noisy in the valley woods and the barn owl can usually be found patrolling the grassland areas for small mammals. Sadly, snipe failed to breed in the valley this year: breeding snipe numbers have declined by over 50% in the last 25 years in lowland England. By October, however, wintering snipe should again be feeding on wet grassland on the Lows and on the cut sedge beds on the fens.

Who's who at LOHP?

The LOHP trustees are all local residents, and each parish council in the project area has nominated one trustee from their village. The trustees are:

Reg Langston, President (Hinderclay PC nominee, Hinderclay Fen warden)

Jo Pitt, Vice-president (Blo Norton PC nominee, Blo Norton Fen & The Lows warden)

Helen Smith, Hon Secretary (Warden for the Frith & Lows)

Mike Wraight, Treasurer

Luke Broome-Lynne (South Lopham PC nominee)

Dan Haskin (Thelnetham PC nominee)

Paul Brown

Rowena Langston (Hinderclay Fen Warden)

Nigel Clark (Hinderclay Fen warden)

Redgrave Parish Council have recently nominated Mr. Bob Hayward as a new Trustee and we look forward to welcoming him to our meetings.