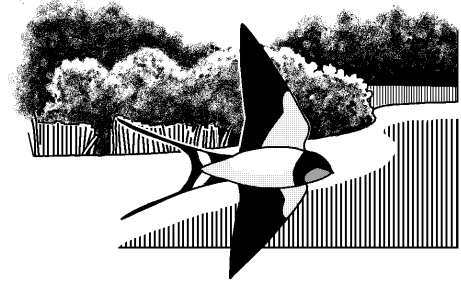


# Little Ouse Headwaters Project (LOHP)

## Members' Newsletter

October 2006



The last few months have, as ever, been a busy time for the project, as we've continued with our fundraising, land management, work parties and other events. We will be reporting on our activities at the forthcoming AGM, but for those of you who won't be able to attend, here's what we've been up to:

### **TEN Project - past and future**

The European-funded TEN project came to an end this year, with an international seminar in Thetford in April and a field visit by the participants to a number of the project sites, including the LOHP. We used this visit as an opportunity to hold the official opening of the new footbridge at Blo' Norton fen, with the Chairmen of both Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils declaring the trans-frontier bridge open by cutting strands of honeysuckle with shears, rather than the traditional ribbon and scissors. We were blessed with a lovely spring day, which was fortunate as we'd taken the risk of arranging a picnic lunch on the Frith for our visiting dignitaries. During the seminar Helen gave a well-received talk on the work of the LOHP, using it to illustrate how communities can become involved in local conservation.

With the work part-funded by TEN now complete, we are looking to the future and considering whether we should participate in a project being proposed to follow on from TEN - this will be a much more wide-ranging project, called the Waterline Economy, which aims to look at how management of river corridors can benefit local (and national) economies, in both urban and rural areas. One of our problems is that, although we would very much like to be involved, it can be difficult for us as an entirely voluntary organisation to find the time to participate fully in such initiatives.

### **River Link fundraising appeal**

Our Appeal continues to be successful - thanks to the efforts of Appeal Manager Sarah Grieveson we have now received a total of over £64,000 from a variety of charitable trusts. However, there is still more to do: in particular we need to raise funds to enable us to secure the future of the routine management work on the sites, such as mowing sedge and maintaining footpaths.

### **Wildlife News**

Throughout the summer we have been fortunate to be visited by groups of expert naturalists who have been recording the species present on our sites. Norfolk and Norwich Naturalist's Society have made a number of visits and intend to continue their involvement with our sites in future. The Suffolk Moth Group held two moth trapping sessions on Hinderclay Fen and recorded well over 130 species.

Recording wildlife of all sorts is important because it helps to build a picture of the "health" of our sites, especially once records have been built up over a number of years so that changes (good or bad) can be assessed.

### **Trustees**

Mike Wraight has resigned as a trustee due to his other voluntary commitments, though he assures us he will be continuing to support the LOHP as a volunteer. We are very grateful to Mike for his work as a founding member of the project and as our first treasurer.

### **Land management news**

The late arrival of Spring this year, followed by the hot dry summer, had an impact on our land. The new scrapes at Betty's Fen started out full of water, and provided a new spawning site, first for hundreds of frogs and toads and then for spectacular numbers of dragon and damselflies. There was also growth of a number of aquatic plants, presumably from long-dormant seeds in peat exposed by the digging. However as the weather warmed, the water levels dropped until there was little but mud to be seen. Because this was a fairly extreme year, we'll wait and see what happens next year before we decide on any future management here - the scrapes are gradually re-filling with water, and there has been good growth of reeds around them.

The raised walkway through the site has proved popular with walkers, and we have installed a wooden bench here, one of several now to be found on our sites thanks to funding from the Radio Norfolk Charity, the CLA and the Aquarius Trust.

Despite the dry weather the pollarded willows on the river bank have started to re-grow and Blo' Norton Fen itself does not appear to have suffered too much from the drought. We continued the rotational mowing of this site, cutting a block of sedge and reed that had not previously been mown as well as the more flower-rich "fen meadow" at the eastern end.

Livestock have once again been helping us to improve the diversity of the grassland on the Frith and Lows. Sheep have been grazing the Frith, and although the site became very dry at the height of summer, they are still there as we write, due to the prolonged mild weather and the continued late growth of grass. On the Lows we have had both sheep and cattle grazing, but on both sites we have had to supplement this grazing with mechanical "topping" on a number of occasions, principally to control the nettles and prevent thistles seeding.

We have been pleased to see an increase in the number of people walking on our sites. Unfortunately we have had a recent incident of uncontrolled dogs running amongst the sheep on the Frith - there were people on hand to capture the dogs on this occasion and no harm was done to the sheep, but if anybody sees anything like this happening again, please let us know.

As part of our Countryside Stewardship Scheme funding, we have recently re-instated a field pond on the Frith - this is on the site of a previous pond, identified with the aid of aerial photos and old maps going back to 1833. We don't expect this pond to hold water permanently, but it should be wet for at least part of each year. The spoil from the pond was spread thinly on another area of the Frith, and seeded with heather seeds harvested from Knettishall Heath - we are grateful to the Knettishall staff and to Suffolk County Council for their help. This is a fairly experimental procedure, so it will be interesting to see what grows here next year.

### **Catchment sensitive farming**

This is a new initiative, involving DEFRA, the Environment Agency and Natural England (the new body formed following a re-organisation of English Nature, the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service - see [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk) for more information). The Little Ouse has been selected as one of 40 priority catchments where action will be taken to reduce diffuse pollution caused by agricultural activities. We have been talking to the Catchment Officers responsible for our Area, who will in turn be working with landowners to promote good practice.

### **Events**

This summer has seen an open day and picnic on the Frith, and an open day with guided walks on the Blo' Norton Fens including Little Fen and the Lows. Our second successful *Bat Walk* was held on 1<sup>st</sup> September: we recorded soprano and common pipistrelles, brown long-eared and Barbastelle.

Our thanks once again go to Arthur Rivett and Nick Woods, and other members of the Suffolk Bat Group, for sharing their expertise in bat identification.

We continue to hold practical work parties on the second Sunday of each month. Over the summer we have worked on rush cutting and thistle control on the Frith (and made a real difference

to the density of thistle plants where we've worked, though of course there are always more! Work like this helps us to avoid the need to use chemical sprays while contributing to the restoration of this grassland site). We also cut and raked vegetation from parts of Hinderclay Fen, and pulled hundreds of ragwort plants from the sandy heath area - ragwort is poisonous to livestock and its spread must be controlled, although it is also the food plant of the Cinnabar moth caterpillar, which can sometimes be seen in their hundreds munching on these plants, exerting their own form of biological control.

### **Forthcoming events - Dates for your diaries**

#### **Work parties:**

Details of the programme for the next few months are at the end of this newsletter, and up-to-date information is posted on the website. Everyone is welcome: we always have tasks to suit all levels of fitness and skill! Even if you can only spare a couple of hours it makes a real difference to what we can achieve on our sites. With winter coming, work parties are also a great way to keep fit, so please come and join us.

#### **Other events:**

Details of all events are posted on our web site, or you can phone or e-mail us for further information on times and meeting places - we usually carry on whatever the weather. Everyone is welcome to attend - we make no charges for these events, but donations are always welcome.

**Tuesday 28th November** **Annual talk, members evening and AGM.** Hinderclay Village Hall, The AGM starts at 7.30 and the annual talk at 8pm. Non members are welcome.

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> December** **Christmas walk\*** - get you New Year exercise resolution off to an early start with our New Year's Eve walk, starting from Thelnetham Village Hall, and very possibly ending in the pub (although not by the most direct route!). Meet at 10.30 am.

**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> February** **Hinderclay Fen** - arrive by 1pm for a winter picnic (baked potatoes all round) and guided walk. Join us to find out more about the restoration of this site with a short guided walk and hot lunch. Or come early (from 10-30 onwards) and join in the work party!

\* we would be grateful for help with this event as many of our regular "guides" will be away - if anyone is willing to assist Helen and Jo with this walk, please could they get in touch (no previous experience necessary!)

#### **Communications:**

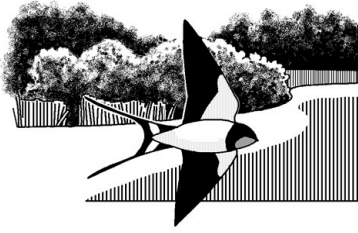
*Although this newsletter is being sent out in paper form with your AGM mailing, we normally try to send our newsletters to as many people as possible by e-mail, saving paper and reducing postage costs - if you currently receive the newsletter by post but would be happy to get an e-version, please let us know your e-mail address. If we already communicate with you by e-mail, please let us know if your address changes.*

*Members who receive e-newsletters also receive work party reminders and other short communications by email. All the information in this newsletter, and much more, can also be found on our website at { [HYPERLINK "http://www.lohp.org.uk"](http://www.lohp.org.uk) }.*

How to contact us:

Phone: 01379 687680, e-mail: { [HYPERLINK "mailto:enquiries@lohp.org.uk"](mailto:enquiries@lohp.org.uk) },

Post: Little Ouse Headwaters Project, c/o Waveney Cottage, Redgrave Road, South Lopham, Diss, Norfolk, IP22 2JN



## Little Ouse Headwaters Project

# Winter 2006/Spring 2007 WORK PARTY PROGRAMME

Our work parties are held on the **second Sunday** in the month:

Date	Venue	Task
12 November	The Frith	Tree and hedge planting
10 December	Blo Norton Fen	Scrub clearance/bonfire/ mince pies
14 January	Blo'Norton/Betty's Fen	Scrub control
11 February	Hinderclay Fen	Scrub clearance/bonfire/ baked potatoes!
11 March	Hinderclay fen	Scrub and ragwort control
8 April	The Frith	Thistle control

All work parties start at 10-30am. Please come for as little or as much time as you like and bring your friends along - all contributions are valuable. You will need wellies or strong boots, old clothes and a drink. We will provide tools and gloves and other refreshments.

**Please don't be put off by bad weather! If it is too wet for the planned task we will meet at an indoor venue for nest-box-building and tool maintenance**

Venues can change, depending on weather and ground conditions, so for up-to-date information nearer the time, e-mail { [HYPERLINK "mailto:" }info@lohp.org.uk, look at our web site { \[HYPERLINK "http://www.lohp.org.uk" } or phone:\]\(http://www.lohp.org.uk\)](mailto:info@lohp.org.uk)

for Hinderclay Fen, Reg and Rowena Langston on 01379-898009

for Blo'Norton & Betty's Fen, Jo-Anne Pitt on 01379-898684

for the Frith and the Lows, Helen Smith on 01379-687680