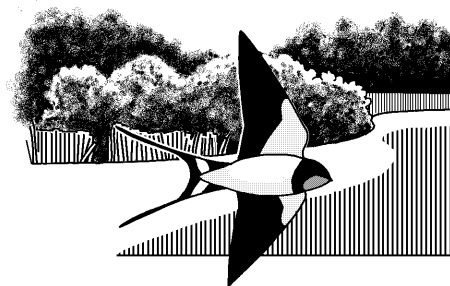


Little Ouse Headwaters Project (LOHP)

Members' Newsletter: Spring 2009



The spring has got off to an exciting start for the LOHP with the announcement by the Suffolk Strategic Partnership that we have been awarded **GREENEST COMMUNITY** for 'outstanding work to protect landscape and biodiversity'. The award is part of the 'Creating the Greenest County' initiative: we are delighted with this recognition for the hard work of the many volunteers who make up the LOHP.

Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank

We were very pleased to receive a fantastic boost to our fundraising for these sites when Natural England awarded us a grant of £43,990 as part of their Wetland Vision funding initiative. The LOHP was one of only 15 projects in the country to benefit: Natural England's regional director, Shaun Tomas, said "*We are absolutely delighted to be able to support the great work being done by a very dedicated group of volunteers*". The funding allows us to expand the area of the site on which we will be able to create conditions suitable for the re-establishment of the rare plant and animal communities typical of the valley fens.

We now have all of the necessary consents and permissions in place to start on the final phase of the restoration work. We will be lowering the surface over half of the site, by removing a layer of peat that has rotted and been degraded by past agricultural use. A small proportion of this area is expected to remain as open water, but most will be only surface-wet in summer.

During the winter, the Cambridge Archaeological Unit carried out a thorough investigation of the site to ensure that our plans would not damage any evidence of past human activity. Their only find was a horseshoe and so we will be able to start work, remaining vigilant for archaeological remains, as soon as ground surface dries out. While work is in progress the site will be unsafe, and closed to visitors. Although it will undoubtedly look rather a mess for a few months, our experience at Betty's Fen suggests that vegetation will re-colonise very quickly. We hope to have the new paths open by late summer.

Appeal for potted trees!

As soon as work to remove the degraded surface soil is complete, we need to plant trees and shrubs on the low spoil heap that will be created on the south west of Parkers Piece. This will have to be done at a time of year that is not ideal for tree planting, and so we need to pot-up trees now to ensure that they get off to the best possible start. We will only plant wild species that are already common in the area. *If you have seedlings of any of the following species in your garden and can pot them up and care for them until they are needed later in the spring, please let us know:* hawthorn, blackthorn, field maple, dog-rose, alder, guelder rose and ash.

Land management at other sites

Mid-March saw the welcome return of lambs to the Frith: we look to another year in which they contribute to the progressive restoration of Breck-like conditions and the further decline in the nettles and thistles on this sandy field. Once again, hand-digging of thistles by our ever-willing volunteers is on the spring work party programme (see below) - never the most popular task, but one that has made a real difference to the sward on these sites. During the winter our Wednesday work party volunteers have been busy planting further stretches of new hedge and fenced clumps of gorse, supplemented this year with broom seedlings, grown from seed from the Frith's last surviving broom

bush. Expert tree surgeons have been working on the re-pollarding of two oak trees and a field maple. To reduce the risk of severe stress to the trees, we are now re-pollarding progressively, in three stages. Although the trees don't look elegant during this process, they are certain to make a good recovery and benefit from the huge increase in lifespan that results from the pollarding process.

At Blo'Norton and Betty's Fens, winter management has included coppicing the growth on the huge, collapsed crack willow on the north side of the main scrape. This will result in dense new shoots that provide better cover for birds and the wonderful winter twig colour that was such a feature a few years ago. Our volunteer labour force was boosted by a team from the Environment Agency's Head Office, who took a day of "Environmental Leave" to work on the site - the rare chance for a normally desk-bound team to do some practical work was much appreciated by the participants.

We had an unfortunate incident of fly-tipping at the Lows a few weeks ago, when two full oil drums were left in the gateway. Fortunately there was no leakage of the contents, and they were removed by Breckland Council. If you find any problems at any of our sites, please let us know.

Winter work parties at Hinderclay Fen have seen record attendance and made a big impact on the perennial task of removing seedling birches that are invading the edges of the open fen and also to remove some young aspen trees which were threatening to become invasive.

Wildlife News

Barn owls have been a constant feature of the valley throughout the winter, delighting everyone by hunting right through the day, not just at dusk. Sightings of Little Egrets have also become very regular and snipe have been wintering on Blo' Norton Fen. We hope that these lovely birds will eventually return to the valley as a breeding species - perhaps the new fen at Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank will eventually attract them. Large numbers of other winter visitors are still in the valley - good flocks of redwings and fieldfares, as well as large and noisy flocks of siskins in the alder trees.

As we write, spring is rushing in. Apart from the lambs, new arrivals include chiffchaffs, first heard singing on 15th March at Hinderclay Fen, where shelduck have also been spotted prospecting for nest sites in rabbit burrows. Early butterflies such as brimstones and peacocks have emerged in the welcome sunshine of recent days. At the time of writing there has been little evidence of amphibian activity, but any day now we expect to see frogs and toads in our ponds and scrapes.

From Brandon to Bungay: Professor Richard West's study is published

Everyone who attended our 2006 AGM will remember Professor West's lecture on his groundbreaking study of the landscape history and geology of the Little Ouse and Waveney Valleys. His complete study has just been published by the Suffolk Naturalists' Society, price £12-00 (incl p&p, or £10 if you can collect from the museum) from SNS, c/o Ipswich Museum, High Street, Ipswich, Suffolk IP1 3QH. The soft-backed book contains 106 pages of text and diagrams, plus 20 colour plates, including eight full-page aerial photographs showing comprehensive views of significant features of the river valleys. If you would like a flavour of Professor West's study before you order, visit the LOHP website to read an illustrated transcript of his AGM talk (click on Landscape/geology on the left-hand menu).

Spreading the word: LOHP talks in demand

This winter has seen growing interest in the LOHP's work both locally and further afield. Trustees have given talks about the project to six interest groups in Norfolk and Suffolk and the project was featured in an article by Suffolk Biodiversity Officer, Gen Broad, in the national magazine Biodiversity News.

Access

With the exception of our new land during the restoration phase (see above) all of our sites are open for you to visit at any time. We welcome dogs if kept under close control but **please remember always to keep your dog on a lead when there are grazing stock on site, and during the forthcoming bird breeding season.** Many ground-nesting species of birds are easily disturbed by dogs, to the extent that they may abandon their nests. Our sites have a mixture of public and permissive footpaths, so not all the paths will appear on Ordnance Survey maps - do contact us, or check on the website ('where to walk' on the left-hand menu) if you're not sure where the paths are. We are gradually working towards signposting our footpaths, with carved oak signs made by Raymond Warren from Thelnetham.

Please note that the paths we maintain are for pedestrian access only and are not suitable for cycling or horse riding.

Forthcoming events - Dates for your diaries:

26th April: Spring on the Frith, 10.30-5pm

To coincide with the Open Gardens in Redgrave over the weekend of 25-26th April, we are opening the Frith and the Lows to the public on Sunday 26th. This is a free event. There will be parking on the field (off the B1113) but you may want to consider walking (x miles) or cycling from Redgrave after your garden visits. To help you enjoy your visit, experts will be on hand and there will be a self-guided trail. There should be plenty to see and hear - lambs, spring flowers, crab apple and hawthorn blossom in the hedges and newly arrived migrant birds as well as our residents, including kestrels. There will also be volunteers at work removing thistles on these sites, so why not come and join in for a short while?

7 August: Hinderclay Fen Open evening, 5pm 'till dark

Hinderclay Fen is at its most spectacular at this time of year, with carpets of heather in flower. Weather permitting, bird ringing will be in progress during the evening, offering the possibility of seeing some of the fen's specialty species at very close quarters. Nine kingfishers were ringed on the fen last year - and so you never know your luck! A combination of expert advice and self-guided trials will help you get the best out of your visit.

Work parties:

Details of the Sunday programme for the next few months are given below, and up-to-date information is posted on the website. Everyone is welcome - even if you can only spare a couple of hours it still makes a real difference to what we achieve on our sites.

Reg Langston is also running **mid-week work parties on Wednesdays**, which are really helping us to get through our list of smaller jobs on each site - please call Reg for more details if you'd like to join in with any of those.

Summer 2009 Work Party Programme

Date	Venue	Task
25 April**	The Frith & Lows	Thistle control
10 May	Parkers Piece	Tree planting
14 June	Hinderclay Fen	Ragwort control/ path clearance
12 July	Hinderclay Fen	Cutting/raking fen meadow
16 August	Blo'Norton Fens	Cutting/raking fen meadow
13 September	Hinderclay/Blo'Norton Fens	Pond digging

Most work parties start at 10-30am and are on the second Sunday of each month. 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 NOTE that the **April party** is an exception (to avoid Easter). This will be an **all day party**. Please come along at any stage.

Venues can change, depending on weather and ground conditions, so for up-to-date information nearer the time email enquiries@lohp.org.uk, look at our web site www.lohp.org.uk or phone:
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
for Parkers Piece/Bleyswycks Bank.....

How to contact us:

Phone: 01379 687680, e-mail: enquiries@lohp.org.uk,

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

The LOHP is a Registered Charity: