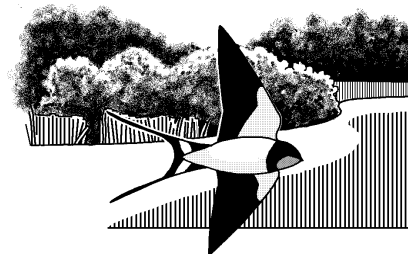


Little Ouse Headwaters Project (LOHP)

Members' Newsletter: Spring 2010



A long, hard winter is finally drawing to an end and with longer, warmer days ahead there is much to look forward to in the Little Ouse Headwaters. This newsletter tells you about some of our summer events and activities as well as the LOHP's winter news.

Winter work parties

The quiet time of year for wildlife is the busiest time for working on our sites. This winter saw record attendance - although the lure of mulled wine and mince pies in December may just have been a factor here! During the winter months the volunteers achieved a magnificent 430 hours of work on the LOHP sites. At Hinderclay Fen they cleared scrub from the reedbed and much of the forest of birch seedlings and aspen suckers from the edge of the open fen. On the Frith the old section of hedge on the western boundary, which had become overgrown with bramble has been coppiced to promote new, dense growth more suitable for nesting birds. New shrubs will be planted in the autumn to widen the hedge before bramble recovers. On Parkers Piece a band of willow scrub has been cleared to open up a 'window' through to Thelnetham Middle Fen nature reserve to encourage seed dispersal, by wind and animals, into our new fen. The Wednesday work parties have continued to make a huge impact on smaller jobs on all the sites.

Training

Training and regular refresher courses are necessary to ensure that work party volunteers have appropriate skills to use equipment - particularly power tools - safely. Our insurance cover, as well as our safety, depends on volunteers giving up additional time attending training courses. This winter has seen Sarah Day and Martin Forge attend an Easton College Course on the safe use brush cutters. Reg Langston, Sarah Day, Mike Wraight and Helen Smith qualified as First Aiders under the new Emergency First Aid at work certification and Reg, John Preston and Mike Wraight qualified in the safe use of pesticides and the use of hand held spraying equipment. The LOHP uses very little herbicide, but occasionally spraying of severe ragwort infestations and treatment of cut stumps to prevent re-growth is necessary and must be done safely.

A huge thanks to all the volunteers who gave up their time to attend these courses, to Reg Langston who had the unenviable task of arranging them, and to Biffaward who provided much of the funding as part of the restoration programme for Parkers Piece and Bleyswicks Bank.

Volunteering opportunities

The LOHP remains an entirely volunteer-run organisation. We need many different skills to help run the project and are always looking out for new volunteers. As well as practical skills to help manage our sites, we need help with legal and financial issues, computerising biological records, growing tree seedlings for hedging, checking our grazing stock, becoming our Company Secretary... and much more besides. If you have any time, or specific skills, that you could offer, please do get in touch.

Winter wildlife

This winter's extreme cold has meant that our wetland sites have been frozen for long periods and many water birds have had to move to open ditches and rivers or to the coast to survive. When

bird ringing resumes at Hinderclay Fen in May, we will start to be able to see what effect the winter has had on over most vulnerable resident birds, such as wrens. In the less cold periods good numbers of woodcock have been feeding in the valley, escaping even colder conditions on the near-continent. Large flocks of fieldfare and redwing, our winter migrant thrushes, have been feeding in the valley and roosting in Blo'Norton Little Fen, and flocks of siskins have been feeding on the alder cones along the river. Barn owls have continued to be a regular sight and we look forward to seeing whether they, as well as kestrels and tawny owls, will adopt some of our raptor nest boxes in the next couple of months. On the Frith, a huge mole population has once again made a spectacular impact on the field over the winter. The welcome return of lambs on the 14th March will start to level the field surface once again.

Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank

Completion and opening of the magnificent new footbridge over the river in October has led to a big increase in the numbers of walkers using these newly-restored sites which are already starting to look much more like fens once again. During the spring we regret that we will need to close the access ramps to the bridge to allow them to stabilise and grass to establish. The stepped access to the bridge will still be available during this period. By the beginning of May a section of boardwalk and a new footbridge over a ditch will allow the opening of another new path, linking Parkers Piece to Thelnetham Middle Fen, a Suffolk Wildlife Trust nature reserve. From there paths lead either to the lane up to the village or across to Thelnetham Old Fen and Hinderclay Fen. New finger sign posts, made by local craftsman Raymond Warren, are now in place to help to guide you round these fens.

Interpretative sculptures, that have been such a successful feature of our other sites, have been commissioned for Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank from Ben Platts-Mills and his team - these should also be in place by early May.

During the summer months the river bank path will be separated from the wet fen areas by an electric fence. This will prevent the cattle that will be grazing the site having access to the river bank, although grazing sheep will be able get under the electric wire and help maintain short turf on the path. Once stock are on this site, and the bird breeding season has begun, we ask walkers to keep their dogs under very close control.

Dates for your diary:

Friday 7th May Official opening of Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank, 6.30 pm

An event open to all to celebrate the official opening of these sites earlier in the afternoon. We will be serving drinks and conducting guided walks. More information on this event will be available on the web-site nearer the time.

The official opening will be performed at 3.30pm by the Right Reverend Nigel Stock, Bishop of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, and the Right Reverend Graham James, Bishop of Norwich. We will be inviting many of our sponsors as well as local people, so we regret that this will have to be an invitation-only event to limit numbers. However, if any members would particularly like to attend, they should contact Jo (enquiries@lohp.org.uk, 01379-898684).

Year of Biodiversity events

To celebrate the national Year of Biodiversity, we are hosting a series of courses on identification and conservation of some of the plant and animal groups that are characteristic of the Little Ouse fens. The first two of these are listed below. Please watch the website for information on courses later in the summer.

There is no charge for these courses but places are limited and booking is essential. To book, please email or phone Jo (enquiries@lohp.org.uk, 01379-898684).

Sunday 9th May: a course on reptile and amphibian survey, ecology and habitat management
3pm-ca 9.30pm, with an evening break for a pub meal (at own expense!). Course leader: John Baker of the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust. Details of where to park will be provided to attendees nearer the time.

Sunday 13th June: a course on the identification of grasses and sedges
10-30am to 4pm (please bring a packed lunch). Course leader: BSBI grass expert, Arthur Copping. Details of where to park will be provided nearer the time.

Spring/Summer 2010 Work Parties

Details of the Sunday programme for the next few months are given below: 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 most 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.

Date	Venue	Task
11 th April	The Frith	Thistle digging and hedge maintenance
9 th May*	Blo'Norton Fens	Amphibians and reptiles course
13 th June*	Hinderclay & Blo'Norton Fens	Grasses and sedges course
11 th July	Hinderclay Fen	Cutting/raking fen meadow
8 th August	Blo'Norton Fen	Raking fen meadow & sedge
12 th September	Hinderclay Fen	Raking sedge

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 - all contributions are valuable. You will need wellies or strong boots, old clothes and enthusiasm. We will provide tools, gloves and refreshments.

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 any of the above

*Identification courses in place of the usual work parties - booking is essential for these courses

News from our sites, and dates of events, are always available on our website - remember to check out **www.lohp.org.uk** to keep updated.