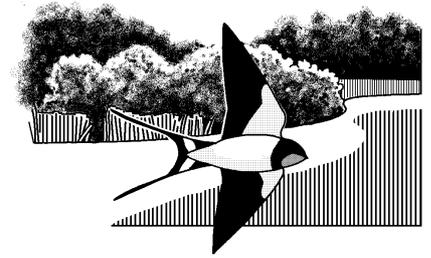


Little Ouse Headwaters Project (LOHP)

Members' Newsletter: Autumn 2010



Welcome to an action-packed newsletter. This has been an exceptionally busy period for the LOHP. We have been able to add two exciting new sites to our landholdings, while restoration work on our existing sites has been yielding dividends for wildlife. Our newly-restored sites in Thelnetham - Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank - were officially opened and we are also proud to report that the LOHP has won another award for its work.

Awards

At a ceremony in the Assembly Rooms in Norwich on 30th September, Steve Scott, East of England Regional Director for the Forestry Commission, presented trustees of the LOHP with Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership's Site Award. We are very grateful to the Biodiversity Partnership for this recognition of the project's work in restoring, recreating and reuniting our important wildlife sites on the Little Ouse.

We have just heard too that the LOHP has been short-listed from a field of 250 for the Environment Agency's national Environmental Pioneer awards. Whether or not we win, the project will gain national publicity from this achievement.

These awards also stand as a tribute to the hard work and dedication of the many volunteers who make up the LOHP and have made all of our achievements possible.

The LOHP moves west

We are pleased to announce that we have acquired two wonderful new sites in Garboldisham, immediately to the west of our area of operation to-date. These sites add significantly to the area and length of the valley that is managed for its unique wildlife and landscape and for public enjoyment.

On the west side of the B1111 we have purchased 5.7ha of very attractive river-side meadows. These will be called Scarfe Meadow's after David Scarfe, their late owner. We are very pleased that Mr Brian Lambert, whose cattle have grazed the fields for many years, will continue as our grazer. At present there is no public access to the meadows although they can be enjoyed from a public footpath that runs along their northern edge. We plan to install wide-access kissing gates to create a walk through the meadows, rejoining the footpath at the far end. Although currently relatively poor for wildflowers, we will be working to improve the diversity of the meadows and to encourage breeding waders such as snipe and lapwing. We are enormously grateful to our members who contributed so generously to the purchase of this site and hope that they will enjoy visiting it and seeing its changing wildlife in the coming years.

On the east side of the B1111, we have taken on a 22 year lease of Broomscot Common from the Garboldisham Parish Charity. Habitats on the 9ha common range from dry lichen heath with areas of gorse, typical of the Breckland to the west, to wet valley fen bordering a stream that crosses the site. The common has been left unmanaged for several years - the grassland areas are overgrown and losing many of their rarer species while the dry areas are

infested with ragwort. Restoration of the site will be challenging and take time. It will include fencing to allow grazing and some removal of recent scrub from the wettest areas. Areas of gorse will be cut on a rotation to encourage new growth and maintain ideal habitat for nesting birds, such as linnets. The Common is already crossed by a public footpath but, as on our other sites, we will progressively improve access and interpretation.

We are looking forward to starting work on these sites and to working with the residents of Garboldisham to ensure that their wildlife and landscape can be enjoyed by everyone. This year's AGM is being held in Garboldisham to mark the start of the LOHP's association with the village and to begin the process of recruiting the new volunteers who will be needed to help with this task. Our 12th December work party will be at Broomscot Common and will be a celebration (mulled wine and mince pies) of the start of our custodianship of this site (we may even manage to do some work!). Even if you are not a regular work party volunteer, please do come along to look round the site and to find out what work parties are all about. In the spring, we will lead a walk to introduce members and friends to these sites.

The Frith and the Future

In 2002, our inaugural year, the LOHP agreed a ten year lease of the Frith with the South Lopham Estates Charity. This length of lease allowed us to enter DEFRA's Countryside Stewardship Scheme, which has part paid for the restoration of this site. This year, the Estates Charity kindly agreed a new, 21 year lease that will allow us to apply to Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and ensure the future management of the Frith. We greatly appreciate the support and foresight of the Estates Charity trustees in helping us to ensure that this site will continue to be managed for its wildlife, unique landscape, and amenity value to the village.

Bridges, Bob and Bishops

The 7th of May was another red-letter day for the LOHP. It saw the official opening of our newly restored wetlands at Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank by the Right Reverend Nigel Stock, Bishop of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich, and the Right Reverend Graham James, Bishop of Norwich. The opening ceremony took place on the bridge that Bob built - LOHP trustee Bob Hayward masterminded the design, commissioning and construction (by a fantastic team of volunteers) of our second footbridge over the Little Ouse. Linking Parkers Piece (in Suffolk) with Betty's Fen (in Norfolk) the bridge has opened up new circular walking routes through the Little Ouse Fens. A new boardwalk was also completed for the occasion, leading from Parkers Piece to Thelnetham Middle Fen to the south, and creating even more opportunities for exploring the fens.

As well the new bridge and boardwalk, the LOHP's latest interpretative oak sculptures were installed in time for the official opening. Andy Manning's wetland wildlife totem pole stands next to the bridge while Ben Platts-Mills' adaptation of the LOHP 'swallow and river' logo welcomes visitors to Parker Piece - an integral 'perch' is ideal for anyone just wanting to sit and enjoy the view within a short distance of the entrance.

Speeches by the Bishops, Bill Nickson of Natural England and LOHP chair Nigel Clark, were followed by a buffet tea provided by Penny MacSheay of Sliver Nutmeg catering, who was remarkable as ever for her preparedness to serve up wonderful food in muddy and remote places. Despite poor weather this was much enjoyed by over a hundred guests from

the local community and our partner organizations. We were also very pleased to welcome Joanna Spicer, Chair of Suffolk County Council and councilor for the Thelnetham area, and Matthew Crutchley of Biffa Waste Services, representing Biffaward which gave generous funding for the restoration project. Our other major funders were Natural England, the Tubney Charitable Trust and Plantlife while a further 20 charitable trusts, and St Edmundsbury District Council made important contributions. We are very grateful to all of them for helping us to realise our vision of returning these badly degraded and neglected sites to wonderful wetlands.

After the official opening, and despite disappointingly cold weather, the celebrations continued for the whole village with guided walks, and a hog roast and beer, which very kindly organised by Eric Popp, our Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer, who was on hand to talk to local landowners about the CSF project.

A Year of Biodiversity

The LOHP celebrated the International Year of Biodiversity with two training courses and some exciting finds on our sites. On 9th May Dr John Baker of Amphibian and Reptile Conservation led a day course on identifying and monitoring these groups, which are well represented in the LOHP area. We are now more expert at spotting the eggs of different newt species and have corrugated iron sheets in place to enable us to find and monitor our reptiles more easily next summer.

We are also grateful to grass expert Arthur Copping who led a day course on 13th June, demystifying the identification of the many species of grasses, sedges and rushes found in our fens. Many of these are very characteristic of this rare habitat and are important indicators of habitat quality.

Monitoring of wildlife on our sites this summer has highlighted their importance for rare species typical of valley fens. Mollusc expert Toby Ebrhart discovered two nationally threatened, 'Biological Action Plan' species of tiny water snails on our sites. At Betty's Fen he found Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) while at Blo'Norton Lows he found a very dense population of the narrow-mouthed whorl snail (*Vertigo angustior*), which he regards as one of the most important in East Anglia. Most populations of this species are found in a narrow zone along coastal river banks and are seriously threatened by sea level rise. This makes inland populations particularly important - and the one on the Lows is the largest that he has discovered to-date.

Water beetle and bug expert Geoff Nobes found 67 species of water beetle on our sites. This includes 17 with designations that recognize their national rarity. Even in the scrape on Parkers Piece, completed only a year ago, he found 37 species including three national rarities. Seventeen species of aquatic bugs were found - 11 on Parkers Piece - including one 'Nationally Scarce' species. Geoff also strayed briefly on to his other favourite group - the solitary bees and wasps, finding 21 species, including two national rarities. His survey was carried out in September - he would expect to find many more species at other times of year.

The chalky waters of fen pools are also home to large and highly structured algae called stoneworts. The different species are notoriously difficult to tell apart but in October national expert Nick Stewart found six species, giving the Little Ouse fens the distinction of being designated Nationally Important Area for Stoneworts.

Our in-house bird expertise also revealed a bumper breeding season for some of our rarer birds. This was particularly true for the migrant warblers which were up by a third. Willow warblers have been declining for the past 15 years in southern Britain and so it was particularly rewarding to find that numbers ringed on Hinderclay Fen increased from 10 in 2009 to 33 in 2010. The song of the Willow Warbler is one of the iconic sounds of spring on the fens and one which we thought we were in danger of losing. But, with luck, these increased numbers will be back again next year. At Hinderclay Fen the increasing numbers of birds that are declining nationally is further evidence that the restoration management of our sites is paying dividends for wildlife. After one of the most severe winters for many years, we expected to see a decline in two of the most sensitive species, kingfishers and wrens. In fact we ringed nine kingfishers, the same number as in 2009, and wren numbers were only down by a third from very high levels in 2009. Barn owls once again delighted valley residents with their regular day-time hunting over the Blo'Norton Fens and Parkers Piece, successfully rearing four chicks in one of the Suffolk Trust's boxes on Thelnetham Fen. All in all, 2010 was a great breeding season for the valley's birds.

Work parties

Our two identification courses replaced work parties during the peak of the bird breeding season but since then our volunteers have been making an big impact on site management at our monthly Sunday work parties and weekly Wednesday parties.

Many of our tasks are seasonal, and have become something of a tradition. In July, August and October we raked and stacked sedge and reed cut by our contractor Peter Frizzell and his team on Blo'Norton Fen and Parkers Piece. Cutting blocks of the wet fen vegetation on a 4-5 year rotation, as was traditional in the past, ensures vigorous growth of Saw Sedge, one of the species for which our valley fens are internationally important. More frequent mowing can be used to increase the diversity of the rarer fen flowers and to control aggressive species such as stinging nettles which have invaded the enriched soils at the edge of the fens. In September a unrecognisably muddy band of volunteers opened up and deepened three old peat diggings at Betty's Fen to recreate ponds suitable for dragonflies, amphibians and our wonderful water beetles and stoneworts.

Once again, the Wednesday work parties (otherwise known as the Last of the Summer Wine parties!) have continued to make a big impact on the many smaller jobs that always need doing on our sites - their work goes largely unsung, so huge thanks to Reg Langston and all of the Wednesday team for all their hard work and dedication.

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, growing tree seedlings for hedging, checking our grazing stock, becoming our Company Secretary..... more opportunities can be found on the 'supporting us' link on the left hand menu of our web site. If you have any time or specific skills that you could offer, please do get in touch.

Dates for your diary:

Thursday 9th December 7.30pm - The LOHP Annual Talk and AGM, at Garboldisham Village Hall (see mailing).

Sunday January 2nd 2010, 10.30am - The LOHP New Year walk

Now a well established LOHP tradition, this is a brisk walk (brisk enough to keep warm but slow enough to enjoy the landscape and winter wildlife!) but definitely not a route-march, starting from Redgrave Activity Centre and returning in time for lunch. Stout footwear and warm clothing are essential. Phone 01379-898510 if you would like to pre-book lunch at the Cross Keys in Redgrave. Redgrave Activities Centre is on the right as you leave the village heading towards the Church - a location map can be found on the web site by following the 'events and guided walks' link on the menu.

Winter 2010/11 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** - please call Reg on 01379-898009 for more details.

| Date | Venue | Task |
|----------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| 12th December* | Broomscot Common | rubbish clearance |
| 9th January | Blo'Norton Fen | scrub removal from wet fen |
| 13th February | Betty's Fen | coppicing |
| 13th March | Broomscot Common | scrub clearance |

*This will be our traditional end of year work party, with mulled wine and mince pies and a first chance to look round this new site. Meet in the car park at the Garboldisham recreation ground on the Smallworth turning off the B1111. A map is available from the work party page of the website (follow the link on the left hand menu).

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:

Reg Langston on 01379-898009 or Jo-Anne Pitt on 01379-898684 or Helen Smith on 01379-687680.

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.