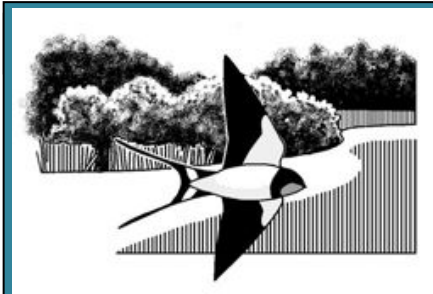


News from the Ouse

ISSUE NUMBER 2
JULY 2011



You told us ...

With the first newsletter we sent out questionnaires for local residents. 68 were filled in and returned and the results were fascinating.

The main things respondents said they want to see improved are:

- litter (and a few comments about dog mess)
- hedge planting
- information and events.

Not many people yet use the (very comprehensive) website.

A full report will appear in the next issue, along with the winner of the prize draw.



Where you can go

A useful map showing the project's sites and all the footpaths can be printed off from the LOHP website

www.lohp.org.uk



What are they looking for?
See page 3



WELCOME to the LOHP newsletter

The Little Ouse Headwaters Project charity was set up in 2002 by local residents to restore, conserve and promote the enjoyment of the wildlife and landscape of the Little Ouse valley.

The trustees believe this is a very special place. We hope you'll be inspired to pull on your boots and explore the valley. Our sites are always open for walkers to enjoy.

Our aims and actions

The main priority of the Project is landscape and wildlife conservation, but we're also interested in the valley's archaeology, local history and in promoting public access and enjoyment.

LOHP volunteers turn their hands to almost anything which will help the valley's wildlife or help more people get to know it better and enjoy it more. We work closely with and support other local charities.

Join us

If you have time, money, skills, knowledge or strength - please get involved. To join as a member and give regular financial support see back page.

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Two kingfishers starred

at a recent bird-ringing day on Hinderclay Fen - read more on p 4.

Growing little by little

The unique landscape of wildlife-rich fens and meadows in the Little Ouse valley was in decline for decades, but the process of protection and restoration is now well under way thanks to the voluntary efforts of local residents.

One of the lovely things about being part of the LOHP is the way more and more local people are being attracted into taking part.

Some of the volunteers are experts in wildlife, wetland management, conservation or landscape history. Others are willing pullers of thistles, rakers of meadows, pickers of litter or makers of tea and cakes.

All of us are united by our wish to see wildlife thriving here, and more people enjoying the valley fens.

The project is getting bigger and better

The Heritage Lottery Fund grant is enabling us to expand the project's work

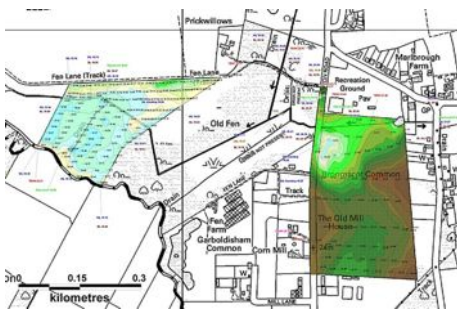
New wildlife sites:

Three new sites have been taken into management:

- Webbs Fen
- Scarfe Meadows
- Broomscot Common

Site studies

Careful survey of land and water levels are showing us how to manage the sites for the future.



Volunteer work parties

Always rewarding - this litter pick on Broomscot Common amassed over 20 sacks of rubbish.



Restoration and management

Conservation work sometimes looks very destructive but these non-native poplars, planted on Webbs Fen have made room for a new piece of open water.



Guided walks

Aiming to stimulate and satisfy people's thirst for knowledge about the valley's wildlife and history.



Not just a boring old panel!

Signs like this one at Hinderclay Fen make a dramatic statement in the landscape. Each of the LOHP sculptures incorporates information and interpretation panels. New sculptures are being commissioned for the new sites.



Things to do

The project is organising activities to encourage more people to enjoy more wildlife more often, through events such as the sculpture planning workshop held in the spring.



Working with schools

Classes from Garboldisham Primary school are getting creative with experts from the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts and also gaining practical experience of what life was like when people needed to use fen products such as peat. (See page 3).



Talking about the past

Volunteers are being trained to use simple, good quality audio equipment to record local people's memories of the valley. Please get in touch if you have stories to tell.



Local history and archive

Working with UEA and, we hope, local history societies, we are delving into the history of the area. The County Record Offices have a wealth of fascinating maps and documents giving glimpses into the lives and landscapes of the past.

Garboldisham Primary School

children are exploring the area in partnership with the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts - along with school staff, parents and governors and LOHP volunteers

We, the children of Garboldisham Church Primary School are having the most *amazing* time at the moment working as part of the Little Ouse Headwater Project.

We have been involved in all sorts of different activities but this report is on our fun-filled day - Monday 21st March.

The day began when 8 visitors from the Sainsbury Centre in Norwich turned up at our school to work with us for the day. They had brought with them original artefacts from Papua New Guinea for us to get first hand experience of what it actually felt like to hold these special items, some of which were very old. We were told how to handle the items carefully and had to wear rubber gloves so that we didn't damage



them.

We had huge bits of paper on each table and wrote down our own observations of the artefacts, and some questions too. These were answered by the specialists from the Sainsbury Centre.

For the afternoon, all of Key Stage 2, (51 children) and the Staff and visitors walked down to Broomscot Common. We looked like a huge luminous caterpillar, all wearing fluorescent jackets to keep us safe.

Once we had arrived at the Common, we saw some

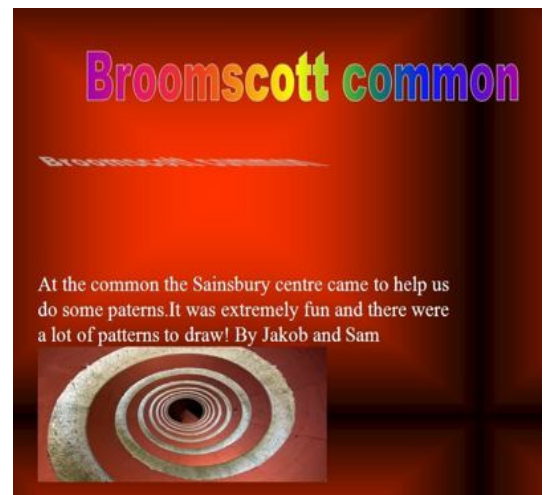
tree surgeons cutting down trees to clear some of the Common of the overgrown gorse and scrub to encourage new wildlife. We walked over the little bridge and found the land very soft and squidgy. We sat down near the edge of the stream and sketched some natural patterns, such as bark, leaves, bubbles and grass. Having walked back to School we practised making our patterns in clay although we didn't finish them completely. Our patterns are all going to be made into totem poles for our School grounds.

We are now looking forward to our next outing - to Redgrave where we will actually get to see the source of the Little Ouse River.

Digging for Peat

On the 9th of March our whole class went to Blo' Norton Fen to dig peat. We looked at some small ponds where people had cut peat before and Leo found a frog. At Bob's Bridge we played Pooh Sticks to find out how fast the river was flowing. We found out that the river was flowing at 33cm per second.

We went through a very boggy swamp on Betty's Fen and Mr Langston told us about the history. In olden times villagers used to have to cut loads of peat and leave it to dry over the summer. We all got a spade and started to attempt to dig. The whole class dug up loads of peat but nowhere near the amount they had to dig up in the olden days. People used to burn peat in their fires. The amount we dug would have lasted about a day.



This has been one of the most inspirational and enjoyable collaborations the School has undertaken with any group

Mary Feakes, chair of governors



Focus on Hinderclay Fen

Bird successes ...

Many sedge and reed warblers returned this spring, looking for nest sites and from the seat overlooking the wet fen it was possible to watch cuckoos as they daily checked these warblers for prospective hosts. Four male willow warblers sang on the fen this spring - the highest number for several years. Marsh tit and water rail are two other uncommon birds which breed here. The fen attracted birds in from the surrounding area during the very dry conditions.

... and plants too

This year the small colony of adder's tongue fern has bigger and better specimens than usual and when this was written we were waiting to see how many twayblade orchids would survive the attentions of the rabbits. Does anyone know why they so love biting off the flower heads?



Adder's-tongue fern

Long-term bird studies

Volunteers undertake bird ringing on the fen as part of a national population monitoring programme organised by the British Trust for Ornithology. So far this year a male and female kingfisher have been caught suggesting they may be breeding again. Other known breeding species ringed include a sparrowhawk and a great spotted woodpecker. Various summer warblers also featured in the catches, along with a family of newly-fledged treecreepers with the adult male. Great tit broods outnumbered blue tits in the nestboxes this year and many young long-tailed tits are about, having left the nest in the third week of May.



Lime hawk moth

Gorse brings in other wildlife

On the heathy edge of the Fen, along the Angles Way, the purple heather will soon be at its best. As the heath and gorse area increases other species arrive and thrive. A small colony of linnets is now breeding there. A freshly emerged lime hawk moth was seen in mid-May and several drinker moth caterpillars were ready to pupate. Brown argus, small copper and common blue butterflies have all been seen on the heath this year.



Kingfisher

Broomscot Common - stop press! Early marsh orchids have appeared on the wet fen area, recently cleared of scrub.

Restoration in progress at Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank

At the moment, the impact of our Heritage Lottery Fund project to restore Webbs Fen looks drastic. But just two years ago the LOHP's neighbouring sites - Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank - looked just like this. Recently planted trees were removed and the surface was scraped to remove dried out and rotting peat.



This created a lower and wetter surface on which our special fen plants could re-establish. A visit to these two Thelnetham sites shows just how quickly this happens.



A healthy wetland is establishing with fen flowers such as meadow rue already in evidence. The ponds have been colonised by another fen speciality - a complex algae called stonewort. This gets its name from tiny chalky 'stones' that are deposited over its surface – they even fizz when you add vinegar!



Survey work last summer also showed that over 39 species of water beetles and 12 water bugs, including several national rarities, had moved in.

The LOHP bought these sites in late 2007, and named them after former owners. Old maps show them as part of Thelnetham Fen, but they were farmed for many years. Bleyswycks Bank was planted as a tree nursery but abandoned and left to grow.

The major restoration work needed to return them to fen was made possible by grants from many sources, including Biffaward, the Tubney Charitable Trust and Natural England.

Most of the management is now left to rare breed cattle and sheep belonging to our grazier, Denis Jenkins. Some summer cutting is still needed to control the weedy species that would crowd out rarer fen plants.

These sites are always open and you can walk from here to Betty's, Blo'Norton and Thelnetham Fens. Please keep your dogs on leads to avoid frightening livestock and nesting birds. And in case you were wondering - yes, the sheep are meant to get under the electric fence! We let them graze the river bank, but need to keep the cows away from the water.

Look out for ...

... a summer festival of flying wildlife

Dragonflies and butterflies are a prominent feature of the fens in high summer. 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 the river and ditches.

The tiny purple hairstreak butterfly is often visible around the oak trees surrounding the Frith for a few more weeks.



Although the birds' main breeding season has finished, our summer migrants are still busy feeding their young and stocking up on insects and the ripening berries and crab apples in the hedges.

Just before dusk, large flocks of swallows can be seen heading for the reed beds to roost together. After dark, young tawny owls are now noisy in the valley woods and barn owls can often be seen patrolling the grassland areas for small mammals.



What makes fens special?

Fens are different from moorland bogs. **Bogs** are acid habitats, fed only by rainfall. **Fens** are fed by rainfall and also by water moving through the ground or by river water. Because of its long contact with rocks and soil, fen water is chemically very different from bog water.

Preserved plants make peat

Most fens grow on peat that has formed over thousands of years from the preserved remains of dead plants which do not rot back into the soil when they die because the ground is constantly waterlogged.

These fens are not like Broadland fens

There are two types of fen in East Anglia:

Floodplain fens grow on the wide, flat marshes of Broadland, fed from the surface by river water

Valley fens - found at the head of narrow valleys drained by small brooks

A varied chemical make-up

Valley fens are kept wet by ground water rising into the peat from

below. This groundwater can be alkaline if it comes from chalky groundwater, or more rarely, acid if it comes from the sands at the valley edges. This means the peat's chemistry can vary over just a few metres.

A valley fen's ups and downs

Valley fens have very uneven surfaces. They typically have much more varied contours than the flat floodplains of large rivers. Hummocks and hollows were also created by centuries of digging peat for fuel. This surface variation creates a great diversity of water availability and movement, again over just a few metres.

A rich mix of soil conditions

When chemical variation combines with the very uneven surface, a diverse range of soil conditions arises. This creates opportunities for a wide range of plants and animals to thrive.

The rarity of valley fens

All of the fens in the Little Ouse are valley fens. Because of the peculiar geology, water regime and land formation needed to create them,

they are uncommon. Valley fens provide habitat for a huge number of species of plants and animals, many of which are rare.

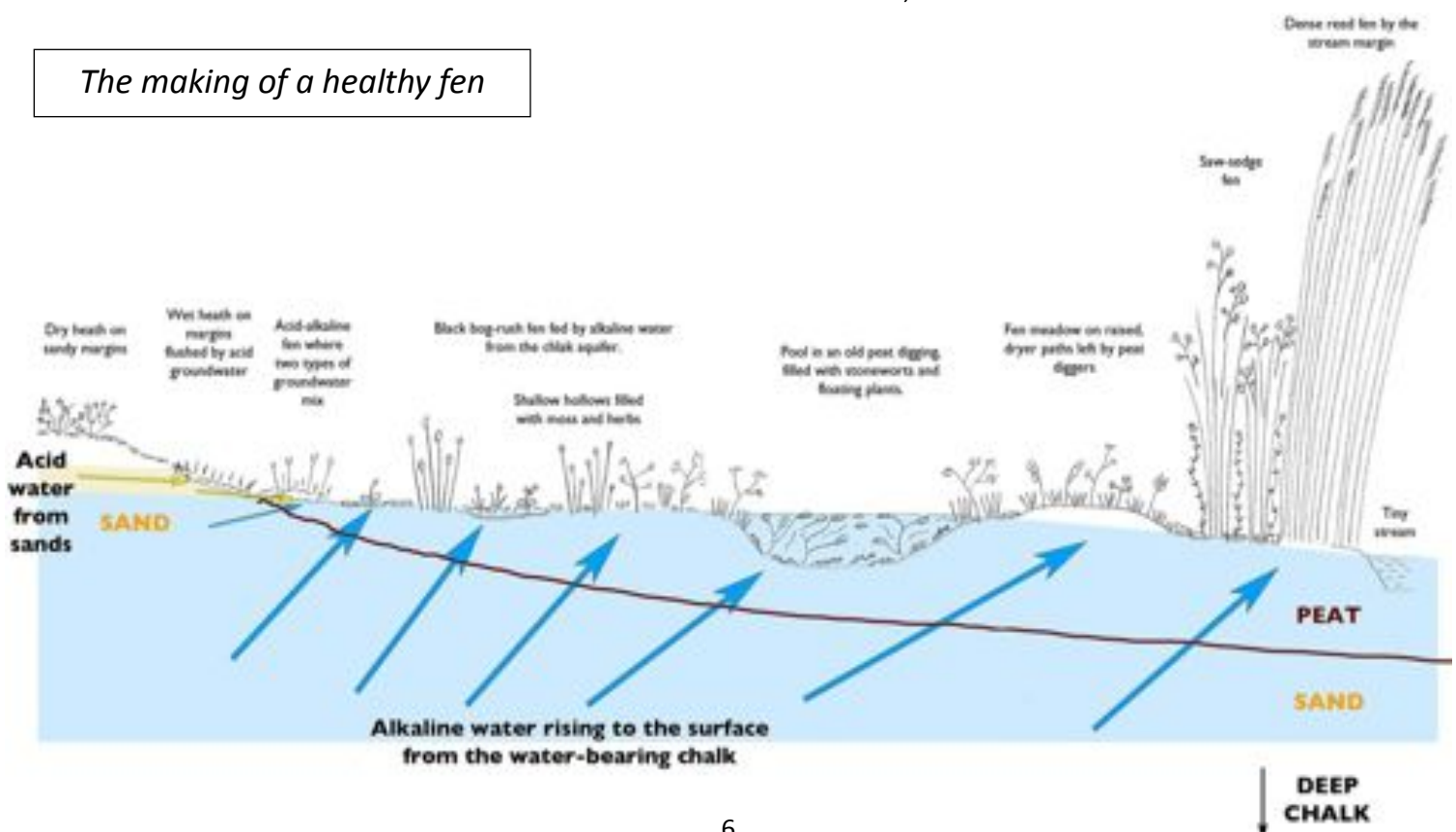
We've got western Europe's treasure trove right here

Norfolk and north Suffolk have the greatest concentration of valley fens in Western Europe. The fens of the upper Little Ouse valley are part of this family of East Anglian fens and some areas are internationally protected because they are so valuable for wildlife. Peat is also an important store of carbon and helps slow down global warming.

A delicate balance

The ecology of valley fens is very finely balanced, and very fragile. Any change in the water levels or water movement (such as drainage or groundwater abstraction), or any change in soil chemistry (such as addition of nutrients) can destroy their wildlife value. That is why it is so important to protect the last remaining fens, and to restore fens that have been damaged. This aim is at the core of what the LOHP do in the Little Ouse Headwaters area.

The making of a healthy fen





Work party news

Easing the climb for voles (and others)

The Frith - 18 May

On another dry dusty morning a group of eleven volunteers met to widen a ditch on the southern side of the Frith, almost at the source of the Little Ouse. A previous work party from Easton College had dug out the pool at the southern end of the ditch a couple of years ago and we were pleased that it retained open water even through the spring and summer droughts. On this very dry site any water is invaluable for wildlife. The pool had been dug a metre deep but with rather steep sides for wildlife, so we made the ditch less deep and with much more sloping sides. It was hard work. Four-spotted chaser dragonflies flew around as we dug and we hope they will lay their eggs in this shallow water. We stacked the turves on one side of the ditch to provide sites for solitary bees and wasps.

Reg Langston

Postscript

Penny Hemphill (Suffolk Wildlife Trust water vole expert) has confirmed that water voles have now recolonized the whole of the LOHP stretch of the Little Ouse Headwaters—after a long absence.

Events

Book with Bev Blackburn on 08432 892849

Sculptors' Guided Walk along the valley.

25 Sept 10.30-4pm A walk with the makers of the wooden sculptures, talking about the sites and their inspiration. Meet at the Frith.

Arts workshop for all ages with Rosemary Humphries.

23 Oct 10-4pm Explore two sites and use your eyes and your imagination to create artworks. Bring packed lunch. Tea and coffee provided. Garboldisham Village Hall.

History day - revealing and discovering the valley's past.

20 Nov 10-4pm Local and social history.

Experts from University of East Anglia and county record office will be there. Please bring your old photos, maps, and artefacts to show us. Venue to be announced

You don't always get wet on a LOHP work party but you always have fun and see radical changes because of your hard work. It's incredibly rewarding. Come and join in. Second Sundays and most Wednesdays.

Check the website or contact the people below for up-to-date details of work party dates and times.

Reg & Rowena Langston	01379 898009
Jo-Anne Pitt	01379 898684
Helen Smith	01379 687680
Nigel Clark	01379 890460

The June Heritage Walk was a great success, despite the weather.

24 people came and enjoyed discovering more about the geology and history of the valley. Professor Richard West gave a superb summary of The Frith in his characteristically spirited manner and Tim Holt-Wilson's knowledge and enthusiasm rubbed off on everyone during the day. Jonny Stone was also on hand providing a wealth of information. Having surveyed the area extensively by taking peat cores, he was able to relate the flora on the surface to the geology below. *Bev Blackburn*



Membership application

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Phone:

E-mail:

I wish to support the LOHP as an:

Ordinary member:	(£2 per annum)	
Friend of the Fens:	(£10 minimum per annum)	
Junior member:	(£0.25 per annum)	

Please tick one category and indicate the amount paid for Friend of the Fens. Please make cheques payable to 'Little Ouse Headwaters Project'.

I wish to donate £..... to the Little Ouse Headwaters Project

I want all my subscriptions and donations to the LOHP to be Gift Aided until I notify you otherwise. I pay Income Tax/Capital Gains Tax at least equivalent to the value of my contribution to LOHP.



Signed:.....

Dated:.....

Registered Charity No: 1098232



How to contact LOHP
Email: enquiries@lohp.org.uk
Write: LOHP, Waveney Cottage, Redgrave Rd, South Lopham, Diss, IP22 2JN
Phone: 01379 898684
www.lohp.org.uk

Key volunteers still needed...

If you have already given us your name thank you. We will be in contact soon.

Photographers - we need good photos for talks and publications and to record our work and archive important documents. We particularly need help with: Reportage-style photos of project events, activities, meetings, contractors working.

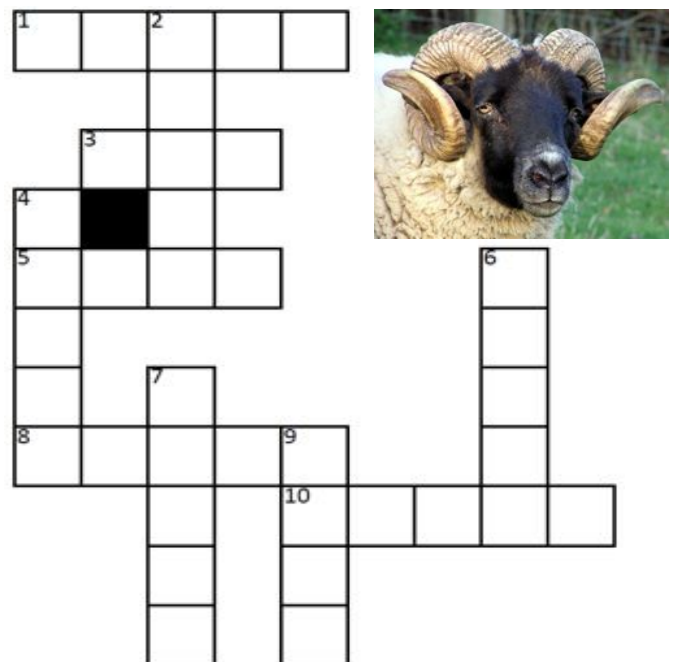
Technical photographers for fixed-point schemes monitoring our sites' management and changes. Restoring/retouching old photos and scanning photos, maps and documents. We have a hundred jobs for anyone with scanning equipment, Photoshop skills or photo-quality printing equipment.

Putting up posters - can anyone print off and put up a poster occasionally? Please let us know if you can help, and where you would be able to put them.

Bev Blackburn, Volunteer co-ordinator and event manager - 08432 892849

Cryptic wetland word puzzle

1. Invading bushes need a wash? (5)
2. Phragmites from tears swapping east for north (5)
3. Part of leaf end for a kind of wetland (3)
4. Loves in a muddle for these small mammals (5)
5. River sounds like trickle (4)
6. Parsnip eater swallowed long-billed bird (5)
7. Line of trimmed trees from here on a boundary (5)
8. Woolly grazers from note in 1970s Blue Peter dog (5)
9. Frog home extracted from despondency (4)
10. Endless game of chance gives fish-eating mammal (5)



Photos Many thanks for photos and graphics to R Langston, H Smith, Garboldisham Primary School, Suffolk Record Office - Bury St Edmunds, M Harding, A Rivett, N Rowbottom, A Shepard