

News from the Ouse

ISSUE NUMBER 19
August 2017

WELCOME

to the newsletter of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project.

This summer we welcome a new member of staff, Rob Martyr, to the project and to the area. He comes brimming with enthusiasm and experience. Read more about him on page three.

Rob's post (and the Newsletter production over the next two years) are being funded by a generous grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Every year the East Anglian Insolvency practice of McTear, Williams & Wood sponsor an indoor bowls tournament in Diss. Each year they support a charity, and this year the LOHP was very pleased to be chosen. We are grateful for their very generous gift of £2160, and feel there are some distinct similarities between our organisations. McTear, Williams & Wood rescue individuals and companies from financial disaster, and where possible restructure companies to remain in business. The LOHP rescues habitats from decline, improves and restores the natural environment and conserves them for the benefit of current and future communities. I was able to encourage the tournament audience to visit our sites to see for themselves how donations help save and improve local habitats. Risking a groan-worthy pun I can really say we were 'bowled over' by the size of the cheque.

This is a time of year to enjoy our sites and admire the results of all the time, energy and money which goes into looking after them.

Peter Coster, Chair

Highlights of the season

High summer into autumn, particularly if it's warm, is especially good for seeking out invertebrates. Red admirals, small tortoiseshells and commas are distinctive butterflies to look out for. Migrant hawk dragonflies will be on the wing, often in groups over pools or at woodland edges. The larger, more colourful southern hawkers also will be around, with individuals patrolling territories or engaging in 'dogfights' with rivals. The small but vivid red (at least the males) ruddy darters are brighter than the similar common darter - both can be found on LOHP sites. Scrutinising patches of brambles and nettles, especially on sunny days, can be very productive for the sharp-eyed, as many kinds of insects, including bush crickets and shieldbugs, make use of these habitats. You might just catch the last of the striking hawkmoths: the lovely pink and green elephant or the more subtle eyed hawkmoth, which has a surprise for would-be predators in bright eyespots on the hindwings.

This year's crop of young birds

Young birds, out of the nest as the breeding season tails off, will be

changing from juvenile to adult plumage. The changes can be striking, as seen in the robin.

There are several broods of barn owls in the valley this year, which will be fledging by the time you receive this newsletter, so keep a lookout for them hunting. As summer transitions into autumn, the warblers that have spent the summer



Juvenile robin, just getting its red breast



Barn owls, breeding in a box put up by LOHP volunteers

with us will be fattening for migration, including blackberries in their diet.

Irresistible voles

We have been monitoring water vole activity (*see page five*) and are pleased to say that they are doing well. Quiet observation, especially from one of the bridges, may reward you with a sighting, usually of one swimming across the river, or perhaps of one sitting on its haunches munching through a juicy reed stem.

Rowena Langston

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Eyed hawkmoth living up to its name

Uninspiring river - to amazingly interesting river

In the summer term in Art, Year 3 and 4 at Garboldisham Primary School were looking at how rivers can be changed to flow more quickly and encourage wildlife to flourish. They learnt how to turn their ideas into beautiful sketches and focus on the colours which occur in our natural local landscape.

The river as just a drain

Rosemary Humphries, LOHP volunteer and Garboldisham School governor, explained to the children how for a long time the Little Ouse was managed so that the water was encouraged to flow away quickly. The river looked the same all the way along with lots of reeds and silt/mud, sometimes clogging up the river. Reed-loving birds and animals were happy, but not many other creatures were encouraged to live there.

Since then, work has taken place to increase the variety of habitats: to

keep the reed-loving creatures but to coax lots of other animals, birds, fish and insects to visit the banks and waters of the Little Ouse as well. Using part of the PowerPoint presentation available on the LOHP website*, Rosemary explained how the aim had been to change the river back to a more natural, meandering course, bringing new and varied plant growth, whilst still leaving areas of calmer water to encourage insects and their larvae. This also means more food for a wider range of different types of fish and birds.

Better habitats: more biodiversity

In their artwork, the children first sketched an uninspiring river - straight, with lots of reeds and very little else to encourage creatures to live there; you can

just see an odd bird or small creature. Their larger sketches show how different the Little Ouse became once the changes had been made. Very many types of birds, fish and mammals such as water voles and otters are thriving because of the increased range of plants which now grow there.

The children learned that the greater the variety in the river the greater its biodiversity. Their sketches are amazing and the children learned so much. Once again we are very grateful to Rosemary for giving up her time to come into school and support us with our art and maintain our link with the LOHP.

Carol McGahan

*Find it at www.lohp.org.uk/learn-more under 'Habitat management'.

One lad asked if he could include an eel, so that gave me the chance to tell them we wish we had them but haven't now. I suggested he could draw one just coming in at one end and that might help us!

Rosemary



Spotting the contrasts - Rosemary with Rowan Tree Class



Phoebe



Sienna

A new face on the fens

What a welcome Blo' Norton Fen gave to Rob Martyr, the LOHP's first ever member of staff, on his first visit there, on a balmy evening in May. Strong rays of slanting sun lit up the marsh lousewort's glorious flowers, a sedge warbler sang from the willow-fringed edge of the fen, dragonflies patrolled around the pools and best of all – there were NO MOSQUITOS! This was the idyllic setting for a conversation with newsletter editor, Nicky Rowbottom.

Early enthusiasm

Rob's earliest wildlife enthusiasm was for birds – he was a fanatical member of the RSPB's Young Ornithologists' Club, as a boy, and has continued and broadened that passion into his career. 'I thoroughly enjoy habitat management,' he said, 'Working through the seasons and experiencing the wonderful cycle of nature.'

Steeped in wildlife, conservation and communities

Rob is well used to getting his feet wet. His previous jobs have included being a senior warden for the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, a reserve warden for the RSPB, and being East of England project officer for RiverCare and BeachCare.

Best moments

Some of Rob's best wildlife moments have come from close encounters - kayaking with an otter, or watching a common seal clean up her new-born pup on the beach: some have been on a more spectacular scale - standing on a dune system in Lincolnshire with 80,000 waders flying overhead. But for Rob it has clearly also a tremendous thrill to have been able to support community groups in caring for their local wildlife sites.

In his previous role with Rivercare he worked with groups who started by cleaning litter from their river, then, with Rob's support, many progressed through training courses to learn more about river ecology and undertake

Arthur Rivett



Peter Coster, LOHP chair, and Rob Martyr, LOHP's new Conservation Manager

habitat improvement and restoration projects.

Inspired by volunteers

'I've worked on many nature conservation sites all over the UK,' said Rob, 'and on every one we've recognised that the work is only possible with a strong team of volunteers. I find it inspiring to work with people who have such a deep commitment to looking after their local sites that they'll devote hours of their precious free time to them - sometimes in the foulest of weathers. This kind of visible demonstration of passion for conservation amongst volunteers really energises me.'

Excited to be here

Rob is visibly excited by the prospect of working for the LOHP. His face lights up as he describes what he's looking forward to – working with the Trustees, the volunteers and the local community. 'I really relish the chance to be a part of continuing the development of the LOHP,' said Rob, 'It's so important to achieve a long-term sustainable future for these precious natural habitats.'

What made him apply?

The LOHP sites are already working their magic on Rob. 'These places are steeped in culture, history and nature,' he said, 'They should be a source of tremendous pride for local people. The main reason I applied for the role was because I was inspired by

what the LOHP and partners have achieved here. To me the LOHP are a community volunteer *tour de force*, demonstrating what can be done. It makes a powerful combination when enormous expertise and enthusiasm are brought together to maintain and improve areas for wildlife conservation and for people's health and well-being.'

Who will be doing what?

Rob is starting on an 18-month contract, four days a week. As Conservation Manager he will progressively take over the day to day running of the LOHP. He will make regular site visits and liaise with trustees, authorities, contractors, work groups, and graziers - to ensure that our sites are restored, maintained, & monitored. Having Rob in post will enable the Trustees to concentrate more on those aspects of the LOHP's work which they are best placed to do. This will include enhancing community involvement and the continuous corridor for people and wildlife along the Little Ouse river and also working to ensure the long term sustainability of LOHP for future generations.

Approachable and enthusiastic

Rob is looking forward to his first summer working here and meeting volunteers and site visitors. If you see him in the area introduce yourself to him. You won't be disappointed.

Nicky Rowbottom

I feel honoured to be chosen for the role and very excited about it.

Fluttering fragments of colour

Volunteer, Bev Blackburn describes the sense of achievement of surveying butterflies on the LOHP sites.

Sue (Lawrence) and I have been attempting to survey a designated transect in the Little Ouse Valley for butterflies, this being the third year. Various obstacles have occurred to prevent us getting together for this survey (how difficult should it be?) including inconsiderate weather, Sue going to such extraordinary lengths as fracturing her elbow, and the inaccessibility of New Fen (all in the past now). We are hoping for more luck this year!

Regulars and irregulars

We regularly glimpse the more common butterflies including orange tip, red admiral, large and small white, comma,

ringlet, small tortoiseshell, and green-veined white as well as having some less regular visitors.

What to look for

If you visit the fens later this summer, look out for the many gatekeepers and meadow browns along with peacock, painted lady, speckled wood, brimstone, common blue and holly blue.



Gatekeeper

Sheila Tilmouth

Dramatic hairstreaks

We were incredibly fortunate to glimpse our first purple hairstreak last summer, flitting around an oak tree on Hinderclay Fen. We didn't record it as we were not certain that we had correctly identified it at the time but our ideas were confirmed the following day on a dragonfly ID course we both attended. As luck

would have it, one appeared on Redgrave & Lopham Fen and was



Comma

Helen Smith

positively identified by the experts – we thought -YES - this was exactly what we had seen the day before. We would love to add green hairstreak to our list of sightings but that chance has passed us by for this year since this tiny, green gem of a butterfly is on the wing only from late April, through May and June.

Bev Blackburn

On your next visit, look out for gatekeeper and meadow brown ... painted lady, speckled wood, brimstone, common blue and holly blue.

Tiny plant: huge threat to ponds

In last November's *News from the Ouse* we wrote about New Zealand Pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) – 'the pygmy plant that does giant damage'. This invasive, non-native aquatic appeared for the first time at Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Redgrave & Lopham Fen reserve last summer. The plant is so difficult to destroy, spreading from even from the tiniest fragment, that the LOHP and Suffolk Wildlife Trust have been diligently searching the valley fens for new outbreaks ever since.

Very recently another infected pond has been found at Redgrave & Lopham Fen, highlighting once again the need to be careful as well as vigilant. The infected areas are currently fenced and covered with black polythene - current advice is that infilling infected ponds may be the only really effective method of control.



1 cm

It's clear that this species could have devastating consequences for our precious wetlands and their unique and beautiful wildlife.

What can you do to help?

◆ **Never release any species** - including surplus tadpoles - from your garden pond into the wild. This risks spreading plants like New Zealand Pygmyweed, as well as diseases such as the Ranavirus - a likely cause of the recent devastation to our local frog and toad populations.

- ◆ **Check, clean and dry boots** and other kit if you have been walking or working in a wetland.
- ◆ **Make sure your dogs** don't run in and out of water – this very easily spreads plant fragments. Keep them very closely controlled and on leads where asked.
- ◆ **If you see it, report it;** more information on identifying New Zealand Pygmyweed can be found at www.nonnativespecies.org.

Helen Smith

Vole survey results

Parkers/Bleyswycks in 500 m of bank:-
29 latrines/ 112 burrow entrances/
55 signs of feeding.

Scarfe Meadows in 300 m of bank:-
2 latrines/one burrow entrance/
29 signs of feeding. (These are minimum estimates because access for counting was more difficult here).

A water vole was seen at each site during the survey.



Any sign of water voles, this year?

On a beautiful Sunday morning in May an intrepid group set out to conduct their first water vole survey along the Ouse at Parkers Piece and in the ditches on Scarfe Meadows. John McCormack describes what happened next...

The survey was to tie in with a nationwide survey started in 2015 by The Peoples Trust for Endangered Species (PTES).

We knew that the vole population had been really thriving here in 2013, immediately after the major engineering works to improve the river's course. But how were they doing four years down the line?



Peter Hughes

Lots of positives

Rowena (Langston) was at the ready, clip-board in hand, to record our findings, if any. Oh, ye of little faith, there was indeed lots of evidence, so it looks as if there is a very healthy population of the little furry chaps in the river alongside Parkers Piece. Peter (Hughes) was on hand to take pictures of what we found.



A feeding station

What to look for and where

We had marked out 100 metre stretches of water a few weeks before and the idea was to look along them for evidence of water voles at two metre intervals. The tell tale signs are either feeding stations (a heap of nibbled vegetation hidden beside the water with one end cut at an angle of 45 degrees- unique to water voles apparently), a latrine (basically a heap of water vole poo) or burrows in the steep banks.

Right into the water

As Helen (Smith) and Laura (Cox) both own chest waders they were volunteered to go boldly - see what I've done there, Star Trek! - into the stream itself to seek out burrows at water level while the rest of us searched the rushes and reeds for latrines and feeding stations.



Water vole poo - a latrine

Only two mishaps

The only mishaps were Helen's waders springing a leak which forced her home for a change of clothes, and Laura having to be dragged out of a particularly muddy stretch of river by means of a tow rope!



Peter Hughes



Peter Hughes

Purposeful exploring of gorgeous places

Scarfe Meadows - a fleeting glimpse

It took us till lunch time to cover the 500 metre stretch and boy, were we glad of the break. We then moved over to Scarfe Meadows. To Laura's relief the ditches proved too deep for her waders so she contented herself with trying to spot burrows from the far bank, not to much avail I'm afraid, as the vegetation proved too dense. Said vegetation made spotting the signs difficult but we did find feeding stations and the odd latrine. However, we were rewarded at the end of a long hot day by a glimpse of a water vole fleeing along the river ditch.

The group, led by Arthur Rivett and made up of Reg and Rowena Langston, Helen Smith, Jo Pitt, John McCormack, Laura Cox, Graham Moates and Peter Hughes, went home tired but happy and content in the knowledge that water voles seem to be thriving on some of our sites.

John McCormack

Greeting the Spring - 2017

Meeting at the Redgrave Activity Centre on this bright April morning, with warm sun and a brisk breeze, we set off up the hill, between the emerging crops, with skylarks singing all around. As we descended again, the woodland in the chalk pit showed signs of spring with buds swelling, and some leaves unfurling.

Across the road, the path led down to the fen through ancient, coppiced hedge trees. Passing along the edge



of the fen, through dappled sunlight we noticed the emerging ferns. The lake to our right had a quantity of waterfowl activity. We followed the path to the side of the water and stood admiring the shelduck, geese, swans, tufted ducks, and more. We saw the work to try to halt the invasion of the New Zealand pigmy weed (*see page 4, Ed.*), and paused a while on the close-cropped grassy area to watch the marsh harriers.

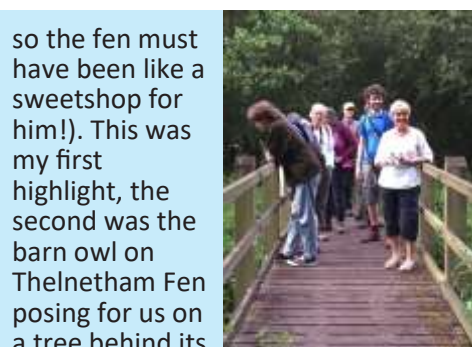
Passing the Konik ponies, we crossed the road to the LOHP land at the Frith. All around there were spring buds, blackthorn and gorse in bloom, hawthorn and honeysuckle coming into leaf. Butterflies fluttered about: tortoiseshell, peacock, holly blue, and brimstone among them. Woodpeckers and blue tits could be heard in the Frith as Helen Smith showed us woodrush, sheep sorrel and Good Friday grass.

We walked to the boundary at the far side with the neighbouring land and inspected the regrowth on the large pollarded oak, as well as the recently planted hedging, which is getting well established in places.

Becky Whatley

What on earth?

Bev Blackburn writes: 'This was something which has been on the Frith for a few months. I thought it was an old tennis ball at first, but then found another, and realised...!' *Answer on the back page*



so the fen must have been like a sweetshop for him!). This was my first highlight, the second was the barn owl on Thelnetham Fen posing for us on a tree behind its nest box. Between these two, we saw about 10 other species including grey partridge, long-tailed tit, swallows and swifts. However, we HEARD at least twice that number!

One of the many interesting facts we learnt was that the British Trust for Ornithology research has revealed some farmland birds such as linnets and yellowhammers may nest as late as August. This has led to the summer hedge-cutting ban for farmers and landowners being extended from 31 July to 30 August - a controversial ban.

I'm writing this sitting listening to the sounds around me. I can so far distinguish between a wood pigeon, collared dove, blackbird and next door's lawn mower. Well, you have to start somewhere.

Thank you, David, for a wonderful evening and thank you, Bev, for organising the event.

Belinda Sears

Midsummer birdwatching

On a beautiful June evening, fourteen of us met on Parker's Piece for some tips on bird identification with David Hodgkinson - and we weren't disappointed. We each had different knowledge and experience but all wanted to improve our skills.

For many of the party, learning to recognise birdsong was the main aim. For myself, having no musical ear, I've always thought there was no point even trying. I was wrong - David has inspired me to make an effort and I already feel I'm approaching bird watching with new ears!

To begin with, David gave us some basic pointers to notice when trying to identify a bird:-

- Size and shape - use known birds for comparison: was it bigger than a robin? Look for identifying features: long tail? curved beak?

- Colour and pattern, especially any obvious patches.
- Behaviour: is it feeding on the ground, on a feeder, in a tree? Is flight jerky or soaring?
- Habitat: where was it? Wood, water, garden, farmland?
- What's likely? If you see it in the winter, it's not a cuckoo!
- Song: listen for repetition, pitch, tone, variety of sounds.

David advised downloading an app of birdsong. If you're searching for a particular bird, listen before going out.

(Note It is NOT considered good ornithological etiquette to try to attract a bird by playing its song. This risks the birds wasting the time and energy they need for breeding).

We put all this into practice straight away as a hobby flew over (kestrel-sized but with longer, narrower wings, more like a giant swift, orange underparts, and partial to dragonflies



Sarah Bidewell

Wonderful walk in Thelnetham

Laura Cox was all aglow after this summer walk

Oh what a lovely evening!

I'm writing this after a (very small) white wine spritzer at the White Horse, while the sheer delight and enjoyment still envelops me!

This was more of an 'informed stroll', really, full of knowledge and background about the sites – how to recognise marsh orchids (and other sorts) and ragged robin. There were about seventy – YES – SEVENTY!!!! people and dogs who came for the walk, and what a

treat to end up in Pam and Ad's garden opposite the fen with enough cake, cheese scones, crisps, tea and coffee and juice for us ALL!

A big THANK YOU to Ad and Pam and Bev and Jo and Sue and Helen and Reg and Rowena and Nick and Richard (SWT) for making it all seem so effortless. And the weather was fab!

It was lovely to talk to people as we sauntered along and share the magical views of the beautiful warm sunny evening.

So simple, so memorable.
(And only a small spritzer!)

Laura Cox



Sarah Bidewell

Early marsh orchid



Bev Blackburn

Useful and beautiful - our new leaflet

This summer the LOHP published a new A5-sized leaflet for visitors to the area with a map showing our sites and the roads and paths which link them.

It's already proving popular with local pubs, cafes and B&Bs.

If you know a good place to distribute them, please contact the LOHP (address on back page) to get a supply.



Membership application (not renewals)

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Phone:

E-mail:

I wish to support the LOHP as a:

Friend of the Fens: £10 min a year ☐

Ordinary member: £5 a year ☐

Junior member (<18 years) £1 a year ☐

Please tick one category and write the amount donated below.

I wish to donate £..... to the LOHP.

Please make cheques payable to the 'Little Ouse Headwaters Project'.

We can reclaim the basic rate of tax that you have paid on the gross equivalent of your donation so, for example, a membership payment of £10 is worth £12.50 to us. Therefore, if you are a UK taxpayer, we would be very grateful if you would Gift Aid your subscription by simply completing the Gift Aid section, and date and sign this form.

I want to Gift Aid the above donation to the LOHP

Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts of money made today and in the future. ☐

I am a UK Taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in the current year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations to charities it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

I understand the Little Ouse Headwaters Project will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Signature:..... Date:.....

Please notify the LOHP if you 1) wish to cancel this declaration 2) change your name or home address, or 3) no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains. If you pay income tax at the higher or additional rate and you want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Note on renewals: All renewals are due in April. We send a letter to all members. *Please don't use this form to renew your membership.*

A big thank you to all those members who send donations along with their renewals. We greatly appreciate this extra support for the work we're doing to enhance the valley and its wildlife.



Newsletter printed by www.reflex-litho.co.uk

The LOHP needs you!

The LOHP relies on volunteers to run the charity and help with conservation (and other) work. Might you have some energy and time? If so we'd love to hear from you.

To get involved, and for more information, contact

Bev Blackburn, Volunteer Coordinator and Event Manager at beverly.blackburn@lohp.org.uk or 07747 691285, or **Pete Fox**, Hon. Secretary on 07500 044587.

Workparties

Get out and enjoy yourself whatever the weather at an LOHP work party or event. Work parties are monthly on Sundays (dates below) and weekly on Wednesdays. *Check website for details and confirmation of location.*

Aug 13 Hinderclay Fen west meadow - cut and clear vegetation

Sept 10 Blo'Norton Fen - clear cut vegetation

Oct 8 Hinderclay Fen - clear cut vegetation

Nov 12 Blo'Norton Fen - scrub bashing

Jo-Anne Pitt 01379 898684 Blo'Norton Fen
Reg & Rowena Langston 01379 898009 Hinderclay Fen



LOHP on Facebook & Twitter

for news and *great* photos go to www.lohp.org.uk and click on the icons



Events

13 Aug - Knettishall Fair: 11am - 4pm. LOHP volunteers will be attending this event run by Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Entrance £1 per car

8 Oct - Thelnetham Windmill Tour and Guided Walk

In conjunction with mill open day (11am - 4pm). Guided walk on LOHP sites starting at 10.30am. Have a lovely walk in the Little Ouse valley, meet the work party volunteers then find out more about the windmill.

Refreshments available. No booking required.

27 Nov - Annual talk with AGM and members' evening, Redgrave Activity Centre 7.30pm.

Come and learn amazing things about **dragonflies** from local expert Pam Taylor. Raffle and seasonal refreshments. Please bring a plate of food to share. Free admission for members, £2 suggested donation from non-members. All welcome.

Answer to puzzle picture p7. It's an (exploded) giant puffball. In late summer these spectacular fungi are common on the dry, sandy fields around the fens. In their full glory they are white and can be huge.

To contact the LOHP (Reg. charity no: 1098232)

Email: enquiries@lohp.org.uk

Write: LOHP, Waveney Cottage, Redgrave Road, South Lopham, Diss, IP22 2JN

Phone: 07500 044587 (Pete) or 07821 744922 (Rob)

Website: www.lohp.org.uk