

News from the Ouse

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April 2015

Get out and enjoy the spring locally!

Trustee and volunteer Rowena Langston shares her favourite reasons to visit LOHP sites in spring and early summer ...

Spring brings the heady scent of gorse flowers and the golden glow of marsh marigolds. Lady's smock, or cuckoo flower, coincides with the unmistakable call of the cuckoo which sounds across the valley. Meanwhile, in the wet fen, water rails are active. You'll be lucky to see them, but you may hear their call, sounding like squealing pigs!

Spring is a good time to test your tree identification skills as winter buds burst into leaves and flowers; blackthorn blossom hides its thorny stems, and catkins such as those on oak trees appear.

Listen and look for spring migrants in the woods and scrub. First chiffchaffs, then blackcaps, garden warblers, willow warblers and whitethroats proclaiming their territories and visible before the leaves open fully.

Yellow brimstone is usually the first butterfly on the wing, followed by the beautiful orange-tip, often seen on our sites.



Graham Catley

Water rails - much easier to hear than to see. Listen out for their 'squealing pig' calls

Check ponds and puddles, such as those on Broomscot Common and Bleyswycks Bank for frogs' spawn. On Bleyswycks Bank, seek out the early marsh orchids, before the sheep eat them! On higher ground around Hinderclay Fen, you may find common twayblades and, if you search carefully, diminutive adderstongue ferns.

Rowena Langston

WELCOME

to the newsletter of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project.

We have been busy all winter, finishing off the last of the 'capital works' funded under our Higher Level Stewardship agreements, and making a start on the management of the woodland at New Fen in Thelnetham, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. There is much more to do on this site, but - with the start of the bird nesting season - we will be taking a break from tree felling and scrub clearance until early autumn.

If you would like to learn more about fens and their management, why not come along to one or more of the talks and walks that Mike Harding will be running for us later in the year?

There are more details on the back page, and all our events are featured on our website. (www.lohp.org.uk)

Jo Pitt, Chair

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Arthur Rivett

What's that ball of red mist in the gorse?

See page 3



Garboldisham Primary School - local and global lessons

Once again the children and staff have been making the most of living in such a beautiful and interesting area of East Anglia.

Signs of Spring

Oak Tree Class this term are exploring growth and living things. Together with Cherry Tree Class, they plan visits to Broomscot Common and Scarfe Meadows to look for signs of Spring, as well as to investigate the creatures that live there. The Year 2 children will be mapping vegetation and making sketches.

Learning to *look* - like an artist

Meanwhile, our local artist friend and LOHP volunteer, Rosemary Humphries, has continued to work with the Year 2 children to study the local landscape. We looked at the work of John Northcote Nash, an artist famous for his landscapes of East Anglia. The children walked and photographed the autumn fields, then used the photographs as a basis for their own very effective landscape paintings.

Taking a different perspective the children collaged field patterns from a 'bird's eye view', noticing hedgerows and water sources. Later, Rosemary helped the children develop their skills, stressing the use of muted colours and adding texture. We were covered in couscous and sand! The children love Rosemary's visits and learn so much about our wonderful surroundings.

Many thanks to Carol McGahan, Nicola MacRae, Mary Feakes, Alison Nightingale, Lisa Howard and Suzanne Halliwell for their words and photos



Broomscot Common has proved to be a fantastic area for Rowan Tree Class to discover the natural world.

We have done bug hunts and compared what we found at the Common with other areas in the village. The children studied food chains and insect camouflage and survival by pretending to be birds looking for different coloured caterpillars (coloured wool). They found that the darker colours were harder to find in the grass.

Our photographic work continues. Groups of children have chosen an area to photograph throughout the year, noting changes to the landscape, the seasons and weather. Rowan Tree Class will go on with this at Broomscot Common and in the surrounding area.

Stories from the Rings

Mr Langston came to talk to Beech Tree Class about bird ringing and migration. He showed us the mist nets the ringers use and the different sizes of ring used for different birds. →

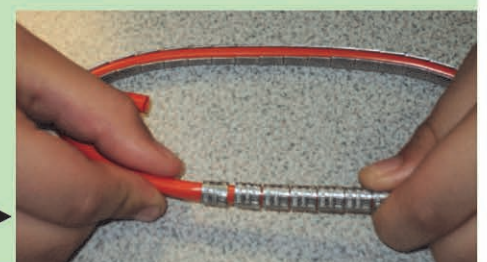
We saw photographs of people ringing birds and of them attaching tracking devices to birds' tails to follow them during migration.

One bird tracked like this was Chris the Cuckoo. Caught near Thetford he was tracked all the way to West Africa. Information about his journey is on the British Trust for Ornithology website.

Mr Langston then talked to us about how important it is to provide sanctuaries for migrating birds to rest and eat.



It's sad to find a dead bird, but we can learn a lot about its life, if it was ringed





Lyn Bennett

Do YOU want to be creative? Join the LOHP Creative Group!

Exhibition

The gorgeous artwork from last autumn's printmaking workshop with Sheila Tilmouth, and from a second workshop in May, will be shown at an **Exhibition at Redgrave and Lopham Fen on 20th and 21st June.**

Sheila reviewing prints from the first workshop...

The group very much enjoyed the workshop, learning new skills and thinking of ways to use them, drawing inspiration from the local invertebrates.

What would you like to learn - or share?

Would you like to learn new skills? The Creative Group would like to set up more workshops inspired by life in the Little Ouse Fens such as spinning, weaving, natural dyeing, felting, photography or other topics such as willow weaving, basket making, painting, creative writing, historical research or family research.

Illustrated talks

Helen Smith, an expert on the fen raft spider, brightened a dark February evening with a talk to the Group about Invertebrate Design. She reminded us that 97% of life on earth is invertebrate and we are very much dependent on them. She took us through the various and many groups of the invertebrate world illustrating them with examples of how artists throughout time have interpreted their colour and form. She showed us extraordinary examples in crochet, knitting, painting, drawing, modeling, felting and sculpture.



Lyn Bennett

Hungry for inspiration

We would like to arrange more talks about the area in order to provide inspiration. If you know and love the local Fens, could you share your enthusiasm by giving us a talk? We'd love to hear from you.

New members welcome

We need more people to take part in the activities. If you have ideas or want to get involved please contact Lyn Bennett at lyn.bennett16@btinternet.com

Local beauty

Helen showed us that there's no need to travel far to see amazing beauty on a tiny scale. Every local pool, ditch and pond is stuffed with exquisite animals which magnification brings into the limelight - this



hauntingly lovely little daphnia, for instance, complete with her 'internal backpack' of growing eggs.

(Note: Close-focus binoculars are great for watching daphnia and their friends underwater. Focus at 50cm - Ed.)



Arthur Rivett

Gaze at the gorse and you may get a surprise ...

... Arthur Rivett certainly did when he saw this ball of red gorse mites, in their silken web, on his walk through Hinderclay Fen. He'd never seen anything like it - and luckily for us he had his camera with him.

As you can see these mites live in colonies within a cobweb-like shelter of spun silk. They live only on gorse and eat by piercing the plant's tissues and slurping up the fluid inside. A heavy infestation may stunt flowers and branches.

Commoner in continental Europe, they have been exported and released into the wild in the USA, New Zealand and Hawaii in an attempt to control the spread of European gorse which was also introduced, historically, and has proved very invasive.

Look out for these red gorse mites on your walks, and tell us if you see them on other LOHP sites. They are a new record for LOHP.

Thinking ahead to summer

A few years ago, Chris Gay noticed a parish magazine article aimed at recruiting volunteer photographers for the LOHP

'As I'd recently retired from teaching Biology and was on the lookout for 'interesting projects' I attended the inaugural meeting of the LOHP Photography Group.

Wide range of assignments

'Since then I've enjoyed a variety of activities, from providing material to illustrate features in this newsletter to long-term seasonal photo-recording on Hinderclay Fen. Assignments from *News from the Ouse's* editor have been interesting and varied: I've been asked to track down a black poplar from a Google Streetview screenshot and I've covered the 'before, during and after' of the Little Ouse river re-profiling work.

Making use of the photos

'Over the last year we have begun to centralise and index the LOHP photo-archive, enabling better access for others – it's good to see our images being

used, for example, in the educational material rapidly appearing on the LOHP webpages, rather than just accumulating as files on our hard drives!

Repeat visits to Hinderclay

'Visiting Hinderclay Fen regularly has certainly increased my awareness of the natural variety which exists in a relatively small area – from the often-

flooded alders with exposed, moss-covered roots at the western end, through fenland, to the two contrasting heathland areas.

Getting very close-up

'Opportunities for close-up photography abound: I've been experimenting with oak galls, fungi, and heather flowers in particular last year. On a larger scale, the overall patterns of colour in

the landscape are quite fascinating, but I've still not found a satisfactory angle to capture the bands of green, tan and straw-colour across the grasses and sedges of the lichen heath. Greater height? Hmm - the tripod doesn't extend any taller – but I don't think my budget will stretch to adding a drone to my photography kit!



The heather on Hinderclay is at its best in late summer. Chris took this picture at the end of August

From Nottingham to the Little Ouse - via Vancouver!

New LOHP trustee David Hodkinson talks to Judith Tooth

It was his fiancée's new job with the British Trust for Ornithology that brought the LOHP's newest trustee, David Hodkinson, to the Norfolk-Suffolk borders a little more than a year ago. He had already heard good things about the project and soon started coming to work parties, planting a hedgerow on Hinderclay Fen, clearing scrub on Betty's Fen, and getting to know the trustees and volunteers.

'One of the reasons I'm so keen to be involved is that what has been achieved is so impressive, and in only ten years,' he says. 'Here I saw the recreating of habitats lost and restoring land from other uses as very inspirational, particularly as there was a period during my childhood when land acquisition for nature seemed to be stalled, but now more efforts are being made to acquire key sites again.'

'In some ways it reminds me of a project in Oregon, the Bear Creek Greenway, where a corridor of habitats has been created along the creek between two urban areas with a trail

running the whole length, maybe 20 miles. It's well-used and appreciated, and bike-accessible. It's made nature something people have on their doorstep – and we're recognising more and more that if you don't see nature every day you forget it's there. Here along the Little Ouse, you can explore and feel unconstrained.'

David grew up next to the Attenborough Nature Reserve in Nottingham. He went to school for three years until his mother, a botanist, decided to teach him herself. Home education makes you curious, he says: he followed his growing interest in natural history and was birding at the age of 10 and ringing birds not long after. Bird ringing led to a huge number of opportunities, he says: it's the skill that got him into all the work that followed.

He graduated with a Masters in Biological Sciences from the University of Sheffield in 2009, and spent the next three years assisting or leading teams on many research projects, mainly in North America, monitoring populations, migratory patterns and species survival. Back in the UK he pursued his passion for waders by volunteering with the Wash Wader Ringing Group, where he met LOHP trustee, Nigel Clark. Since moving to Suffolk he's set up his own ecological consultancy business, Landmark Ecology.

'I was only elected as a trustee in December so I'm very new and still learning how it all works, but I know as a group we are all well aware just how much potential there is in this project. I was previously

on the board of a not-for-profit group in Vancouver, WildResearch, which focussed on combining scientific research with developing training opportunities helping people find a pathway into ecology.'

Looking across the reed bed on Hinderclay Fen, we listen to goldfinches, reed bunting, a blue tit, a

Bird ringing was the skill that led to a huge number of opportunities.

yellowhammer and a fieldfare. What's David's favourite bird? No British songbird, but the Houbara Bustard, a desert species 'like a pheasant

with long legs' that appeals to his love of wide open spaces. And, having studied it in his bird book since the age of 10, he's about to encounter it for the first time on a six-week project with UEA in Uzbekistan.

Judith Tooth



Judith Tooth



Arthur Rivett

Norman Groves - moving on

At the December AGM and Members' Evening we said a very fond farewell to LOHP trustee Norman Groves who will soon be moving to the much hillier surroundings of Sheffield.

Norman has been an LOHP trustee for six years and will be much missed. As well as giving us the wise thoughts of a former bank manager, and the benefit of his experience as a voluntary nature reserve manager, Norman has been instrumental in guiding through all of our recent site purchases. To remind him of these achievements, LOHP Chair, Jo Pitt, presented him with a beautiful framed photograph, taken by Arthur Rivett, of Webbs Fen in springtime. We wish Norman and his wife Anne a very happy move north.

Helen Smith, LOHP Trustee

Prof. Allan Downie - sharing knowledge

Members and friends were treated to an excellent talk at the 2014 AGM, this time from Professor Allan Downie on ash die-back disease and other new threats to our native trees. Prof. Downie heads field-leading research on the disease at the John Innes Centre in Norwich and made the subject understandable and fascinating to all.

Ben Platts-Mills - one of a kind

Ben Platts-Mills died on Sunday 9th November, aged 66

Ben Platts-Mills and the team of sculptors he inspired have worked with the LOHP since 2005 when we commissioned the first of our hallmark oak sculptures in which our interpretation panels are embedded. Ben was one of the country's leading chainsaw sculptors and we feel enormously privileged to have had the opportunity to work with him, as well as grateful for his commitment to the LOHP and his shared love of the Little Ouse landscapes and wildlife. Ray Brooks who worked with Ben in Heaven (the old Coney Weston airfield site where they worked and lived in Ben's famous hazel wood bender tents) pays tribute:

I knew Ben for about 20 years and in that time we became very close friends and colleagues, sharing thoughts and dreams, ideas and inspirations, Ben was a one-off. He had such a way with people, accepting and listening. Many times I saw total strangers enchanted by this often shambling and scruffy wild man, who was genuinely interested in them and their story and seemed to care. Of course, when roused, he could launch into a powerful rant, making his own views and feelings known - and he was a wise man too - he had a lot to share.

As an artist he began carving marble in Italy many years ago, then became a prolific painter, then after the Great Storm in 1987 he seems to have discovered chain saws, a deep love of wood, and returned to carving.

I have watched him carve so many times - it was work and joy and meditation all in one. His understanding, skill and sensitivity for figurative carving was brilliant, especially the human body - the hardest of all forms to get right for artists. He could delicately trace a curve of a hip or an eye with a few touches of the saw—brilliant, and frustrating how he made it look so easy. But he also had a love and a way of interpreting all aspects of the natural world - animals and birds, spiders and butterflies - and now some of his work survives him down in the fens - excellent - enjoy !

Ray Brooks



Ben was an inspired sculptor, here seen working at Parker's Piece

Biggest ever New Year's walk

On a crisp, bright and beautiful winter's morning more than sixty walkers gathered at Thelnetham Village Hall for the ever-popular LOHP New Year's walk.

Rowena Langston led the party through the Thelnetham Fens, including a preview of this year's addition to the project patch – New Fen. Public access to this site will be opened in 2016 when the first phase of the extensive habitat restoration work is finished.

Passing through Blo-Norton Fen, those at the front of the group were lucky enough to catch a glimpse of a kingfisher on the river. Finally the route passed through Hinderclay Fen and back up the hill to Thelnetham White Horse for a well-earned pub lunch.

Alice Baillie



Sam Franks



Alice Baillie

Learning how to fell a tree - properly

In February, LOHP organised a training course on coppicing, with help from Henry Walker of Norfolk's Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. The training was led by David Mitchell who has been professionally involved with trees and woodlands for 25 years. He has the prestigious Professional Diploma in Arboriculture (Royal Forestry Society) and is a Fellow of the Arboricultural Association.

A dozen LOHP members and volunteers attended the first half-day at Redlingfield Wood, David's 22-acre mature, semi-natural wood near Denham. We heard about the condition the woodland was in when he acquired it over 25 years ago (just after the gales of 1987) and how he approached the daunting task of clearing up, opening up the ride system and bringing the whole wood into management. Dominated by oak and ash, the wood has some field maple and hornbeam and a dense understorey of hazel coppice. The current management goal is to create a mosaic of habitats by well-planned coppicing.

Learning and practice on New Fen

The second morning was practical instruction at LOHP's new site - New Fen. We started with an introduction to safety, danger zones, the requirements of the Forestry Commission, the Wildlife and Countryside Act, nature conservation designations and of course nesting times. I never realised there was so much to go through before felling a tree!

David demonstrated how to use the bow saw, pull saw, billhook and the wonderful Victorian log rolling bar and timber tongs. Before we started work on felling a line of field maple, Henry showed us how to estimate where the top of the tree would finish up when felled. A very useful technique. Next David showed us how to plan for the direction of fall, and then demonstrated the first 'beak' cut and then the main felling cut so that the tree falls on a hinge. Under David's supervision we all had a go. This was followed by clearing the brash (twigs and small branches) to leave the site ready for the next task.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable and informative course. Our thanks to David and Henry. Jon Kirby



Jon Kirby

Tools and their use



Jon Kirby

David's enthusiasm was infectious

Membership application (not renewals)

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Phone:

E-mail:

I wish to support the LOHP as a

Ordinary member:	£2 a year	
Friend of the Fens:	£10 min a year	
Junior member:	25p. a year	

Please tick one category and write the amount paid for Friend of the Fens. 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.

giftaid it

Signed:.....

Dated:.....

Registered Charity No: 1098232

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 have sent donations along with their renewal. We greatly appreciate this extra support for the work we're doing to enhance the valley and its wildlife.

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 some time? If so we'd love to hear from you.

To get involved, and for more info, send an email to enquiries@lohp.org.uk or ring: **Bev Blackburn**, Volunteer Coordinator and Event Manager on 07747 691285 or **Pete Fox**, Hon. Secretary on 07500 044587.

Workparties

Sunday 12th April and) Details on website
Sunday 9th August) or ring Bev on 07747 691285

Discovery Walks and Talks

See the fens at their best in spring and early summer, and find out more about them with Mike Harding. Discover their value and importance, their social and landscape history, their management and conservation. (These replace the May & June workparties).

Sunday 10th May - morning
Sunday 14th June - morning
Tuesday 30th June - evening (plus light meal beforehand)

Details will be on www.lohp.org.uk.
Booking and details with Bev on 07747 691285

Exhibition - LOHP Creative Group at Redgrave and Lopham Fen



Come and see the group's recent artwork, inspired by the local wild places, plants, and animals - a real treat for eyes, mind and spirit!
20th and 21st June

Will include gorgeous prints from the printmaking workshops with Sheila Tilmouth.

To contact the LOHP

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