



News from the Ouse

ISSUE NUMBER 7
APRIL 2013



R Langston

Professor
Tom Williamson

Landscape history brought to life

Around 50 of us met in Thelnetham on a February Saturday for a walk led by Professor Tom Williamson of the University of East Anglia School of History's Landscape Group.

At Thelnetham Church Tom explained something of the development of churches in East Anglia and various group members added local details.

The route took us to St Mary's Well, which Tom explained could once have been a pagan shrine site, and Hinderclay Fen, where we learnt about the Enclosures and the establishment of Commoners' rights. The group then followed the Angles Way to Thelnetham Fen and across the Little Ouse where we heard about the different uses of Poors Land in Norfolk and Suffolk. A quick look at land and buildings above the flood plain in Blo' Norton and then back across the river and to the village hall for a packed lunch. The afternoon was spent at Thelnetham mill where we met some of the team who rescued the mill from dereliction in the 1980s. Although there wasn't enough wind to turn the sails, everyone had the chance to admire the inside of the mill.

Reg Langston



R Langston

WELCOME

to the newsletter of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project. Spring is now on its way after what has seemed a very long winter – with better weather and lighter evenings ahead, I hope many of you will be out and about exploring the valley. This issue contains a new map showing all our sites and footpaths.

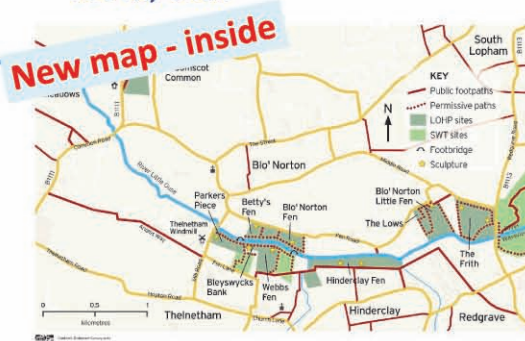
We may sometimes restrict access to protect breeding birds, or for safety reasons, but in general our land is open to everyone.

As the weather and ground conditions improve the grazing stock will be back to do their bit for conservation too – look out for rare breed sheep and cows on our fields (and please keep dogs on leads).

Jo Pitt, Chair

IN THIS ISSUE

- What do the children want?... 2
- Focus on The Frith..... 3
- Map of sites & paths..... 4-5
- Wildlife highs and lows..... 6-8
- Volunteering and events..... 9
- Membership & calendar..... 10



**Was it
a duck?
Was it
a bear?
Who went
where?
See page 9**



Peter Hughes

We don't want people eating all the wildlife

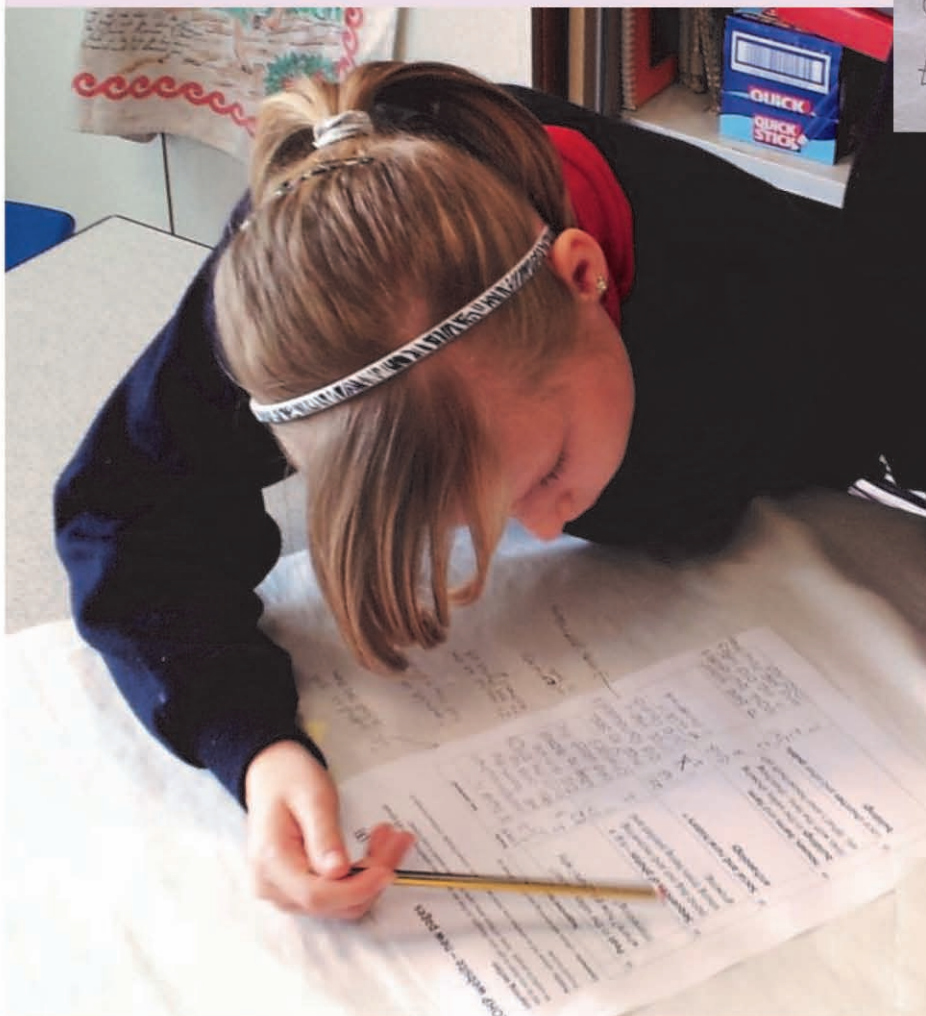
In December Garboldisham Primary school students and staff gave LOHP the benefit of their thinking and advice when Reg Langston and Nicky Rowbottom visited the school to find out what they wanted to see on the learning pages of the project's website.

Each class reflected on what they knew already about the project and its sites and what they wanted to know. Asked whether they might be interested in recipes and learning about edible wild plants, one slightly unexpected reply was, "We don't want people eating all the wildlife".

"We came away with a much better idea of what to cover and how to cover it", said Reg, "and best of all we had offers of help with creating the content. We're really looking forward now to working with the children on this section."



Do Zoomed in Pictures of the bugs and plants at the L.O.H.P Sites.



This is (some of) what was suggested:

- What time of year to see things and where.
- Do zoomed in pictures of the bugs and plants.
- Maps are good but a bird's eye view would be better.
- Do a bit about what will happen to the wildlife if LOHP didn't get the support they needed.
- Quizzes are important to get children interested.
- There should be something about endangered animals or animals which will soon be endangered.
- Archaeology is fun.
- I think we could do some (cool) geocaching.

Garboldisham Primary School

Time lines are good to see what happend in the past

The Frith - where the Little Ouse begins ...

The Frith, a great sweep of heath grassland and wet rushy pasture, marks the head of the Little Ouse valley in the east.

Once rich in wildflowers

In years gone by the Frith was grass heath, similar to the fine-leaved grass swards found in the Brecks. The shallow droughty soils, naturally infertile, supported only very poor grazing for stock. The resulting habitat would have been rich in wildflowers which favour sandy places and there are even memories of stands of heather among the grass. Heathy pastures were characteristic of the light soils all along the margins of the Little Ouse valley, and good examples can still be seen at Hinderclay Fen, Market Weston Fen and Broomscot Common.

Coarse grasses loved the manure

Like many ancient pastures, the Frith was levelled after the Second World War and used for arable agriculture before being reseeded to provide grazing for sheep. The new pasture was strongly affected by spreading of pig manure aimed at enhancing its fertility and boosting agricultural productivity. This promoted the growth of vigorous coarse grasses at the expense of wildflowers

Turning back the clock

Since LOHP took on the management of the grassland, we have been restoring the heathy grassland. Nutrients have been reduced by cutting and grazing, reversing the effects of manuring. The dense grass and stands of tall nettles, the legacy of agricultural improvement, have gradually faded while many of the characteristic wildflowers have returned. It's a long term business though, and it will be many years before the original vegetation can be fully re-established.



Mike Harding

Far from flat

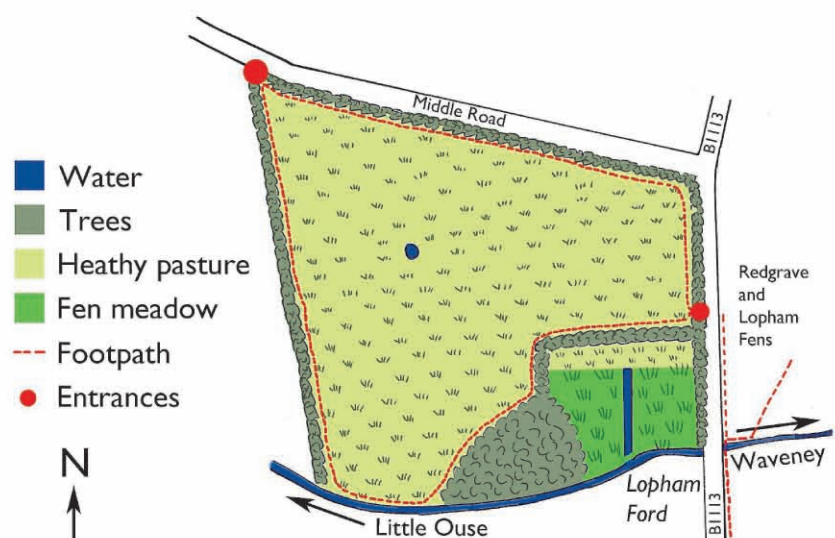
Although the field looks flat, there is a very gentle slope down to the tiny watercourse. Flanking the stream, where the ground becomes wet and peaty, lies an area of rushy pasture dominated by wetland plants. LOHP is again using cutting and grazing to improve the habitat, but here our aim is to create a flower-rich fen meadow.

Not really a ford

The Ordnance Survey map marks the Frith as the 'Source of the Little Ouse' and, just over the road, there is the source of the Waveney. The road between Lopham Little Fen

and the Frith marks the watershed between these two important East Anglian rivers. At one time, the crossing point, known locally as Lopham Ford, would have been the only dry land passage between Thetford and the sea. It must have been of enormous strategic importance, especially before the days of cheap and easy bridges. The status of the Frith as the true 'source' of the Little Ouse is perhaps open to debate, but there is no doubting the importance of this sweep of heathy grassland, both historically and to wildlife.

Mike Harding





Comings and goings in the LOHP ark

The wildlife of the Little Ouse headwaters is precious. It rewards those who walk the valley's fens, meadows, woods and heaths, with unforgettable moments: an otter crunching a fish in the quiet of evening, the flash of a kingfisher below Bob's Bridge, a barn owl carrying a vole across Webb's Fen or simply the repeating reflections of a buttercup in the mist droplets on a cobweb. But it is easy to forget that the importance of the valley's wildlife extends beyond the local and personal to the national and even international. Most of our sites are recognised in some way for the importance of their rare wetland wildlife – at a local scale as County Wildlife Sites, at a national scale as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and at an international scale as Special Areas of Conservation.

What have we got...

The LOHP and its many volunteers work hard to create and maintain conditions in which this rare wildlife can flourish. But how can we measure our success? This important task is shared between amateur and professional experts who have been busy recording the valley's wildlife over the last decade. 2012 saw a major stock-take with new surveys and a 'biobash' in May when experts converged on the LOHP area to record its wildlife. All these data are logged by Sylviane Moss who, so far, has amassed over 8,000 records covering around 2,500 species. Find the summary lists set up by Stephen Baillie, at www.lohp.org.uk/our-area/list-species-records.

Have you had a special wildlife moment on an LOHP site? Please send in a brief description for us to publish.....



...and how many?

As well as discovering which species live in our area, we also need to know the size of their populations and whether they are increasing or declining. We can assess long-term changes in the valley's wildlife thanks to the records left by naturalists from the 18th century onwards. Our own decade of records helps us assess the success of our work in restoring the valley's special species. As part of this assessment, we also need to look at records from further afield. These help us judge whether the changes we see in the valley result from local land management changes or are part of wider trends, beyond our influence.

Species ebb and flow

The historical records show that the late 1940s and '50s saw a sharp decline in many species as agriculture intensified. Our habitat restoration work has started to reverse this on some sites. Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank, for example, have seen rapid recolonisation by fenland plants including stoneworts, blunt-flowered rush,



marsh lousewort, meadow rue and brookweed. Colonisation by water beetles was also amazingly rapid with 39 species, including several national rarities, recorded after only two years.





Water vole

Arthur Rivett

Spectacular returns

The wetland at Betty's Fen, reclaimed from invading woodland in 2005, is now home to one of Britain's rarest and most endangered snails. The tiny delicate Desmoulin's whorl snail is critically dependent on tall wetland vegetation and summer-wet soils. On The Lows, this snail's cousin, the equally diminutive and endangered narrow-mouthed whorl snail, is benefiting from the diversity of

habitat structure created by low intensity stock grazing. Perhaps more spectacular than the success of the pinhead snails is the very welcome

from the valley fens - and of grass of Parnassus and bog bean at Hinderclay Fen all now gone.

Wider factors

Other fen species have failed to respond to local habitat restoration because of more widespread factors. Alec Bull's diary, (extracts published in *News from the Ouse No.5*), documents a wealth of birds now lost or almost lost. The wheatears, wood lark and tree pipits he describes are long gone as breeding birds, but other losses occurred more recently. We can no longer boast the magic of nightingale song or the display flight of woodcock in the dusk of spring evenings. Lesser spotted woodpeckers no longer excavate nest holes in our wet woodland trees. The tumbling lapwing and drumming snipe are now rare. In 2012, although lapwing clearly appreciated the restoration of ideal nesting habitat at Webbs Fen, our huge population of predatory crows, thriving on broadcast pig feed on the local fields, soon raided their eggs. The warming climate has meant that in recent years dainty, white-



Sylviane Moss

Some marsh orchids have returned

return to the Little Ouse River and wetlands of one of Britain's best loved mammals, the water vole, after a long absence. Water voles were virtually wiped out by the misguided release of American mink from fur farms. Ratty's return results from positive conservation action by the LOHP, working with Suffolk Wildlife Trust and local landowners to reduce numbers of mink.

Some lost for ever?

Despite these gains, some special fen species have not returned. Some are now too rare and too immobile to do so despite the restoration of suitable habitat. Records from the 1950s for example, tell of dark green fritillary butterflies and fen orchids - now lost



Otter

Rob Strachan

feathered, yellow-footed little egrets have appeared on our wetlands as their range expands north. Other additions - returning after long absences caused by persecution or organochlorine pesticides - are the otters splashing in the river and the haunting cries of buzzards circling high over the valley. These are wonderful rewards for our changing attitudes to wildlife. For other new arrivals in the valley's wetlands, the reasons for their change in distribution, are less understood. The hairy dragonfly for example, recorded here in the 1950s, later retreated to the Broads and then greatly expanded its range, re-establishing itself in the Little Ouse Fens by 2005.



Little egret

Arthur Rivett



Hairy dragonfly

Arthur Rivett

Unwelcome arrivals

Other new arrivals are less welcome. Although some introduced species, like little owls, do not harm our native wildlife, the pace of arrival of new species has greatly increased and some are seriously invasive. Wetlands are particularly at risk from invasive species because they spread along watercourses so easily. We are lucky that, to date, the headwaters of the Little Ouse have proved to be enough of a backwater to avoid the damage being done to nearby wetlands by invasive plants like New Zealand pygmy weed and floating pennywort, or animals like white-clawed crayfish and killer shrimps, all of which can out-compete or kill native species.

Diseases

Perhaps most insidious of new arrivals in the headwaters are plant and animal diseases. Ash dieback dominated the news in the autumn and will hit the headlines again when buds break in the spring. Ash is an important species in the wet woods of the headwaters as well as in many local hedgerows. Although we found no symptoms on LOHP sites last year, loss of most of our ash trees and the species that depend on them - around 27 invertebrate species depend solely on ash - now seems inevitable. The impact on landscape and wildlife will be substantial. Less conspicuous in death, but with a huge impact on



Norfolk horn sheep hard at work helping biodiversity

R Longston

our wetlands, frog and toad populations in the Little Ouse headwaters have crashed in the last two years. Sites that formerly heaved with croaking, spawning frogs and toads in spring are now silent. We are seeking expert advice on whether this is due to Ranavirus, a lethal disease probably introduced to the UK with fish or amphibians from N. America.

What of the future?

Clearly the doors of the LOHP ark are open - our wildlife is changing rapidly and the future holds new threats as well as new opportunities. But amongst these we need to do everything we can to ensure that the Little Ouse Headwaters retain as many as possible of the wetland species that make this area so special. Careful habitat management, targeted management of key species, and active involvement in wider environmental issues that affect our sites, all contribute to this process. Recording our wildlife is an essential part of assessing and improving what we do. We are very grateful to those who give their time and expertise to help keep tabs on the contents of the LOHP ark and, in so doing, contribute to our work to keep it afloat.

Helen Smith

What can you do to help?

It is very important that wetland species are not moved around - either accidentally or deliberately. To help control the spread of amphibian diseases, don't introduce frogspawn to your garden pond or give away plants or fish from your pond. If you are fishing, boating or pond dipping, **check, clean and dry** your equipment before you leave to reduce the danger of moving invasive plants or animals - even as small as tiny shrimps - to other wetlands.

You can also help us to monitor the state of our amphibian populations. Send your records of frogs and toads from the Little Ouse headwaters area to: enquiries@lohp.org.uk giving the date and exact location of your record.



Jo-Anne Pitt

A not-so-common, common toad



UEA students help identify beetles

Will the gorse get past the hungry rabbits this year?

On a cold January morning, 20 volunteers gathered on Broomscot Common for the first work party of the year. Our task was to cut back an area of gorse. Usually, we would coppice it (cut it to ground level). However, all the gorse we coppiced last winter put on very little re-growth because the rabbits ate the new, less prickly, shoots!

Rabbits doing topiary

Pupils from Garboldisham School built rabbit-proof exclosures round some of the cut gorse, with chicken wire and posts sunk in the ground. The coppiced bushes inside these exclosures were the only ones to put on significant new growth. One plant, having grown to fill its 'cage' had most of the shoots that grew through the wire nibbled off, giving the impression of topiary.

Over their heads - we hope

In view of the rabbits' depredations we decided to try cutting the gorse stems back to new shoots, above rabbit height, and to use the resulting prickly cuttings to protect the new buds and, we hope, new shoots. This has worked



R Langston

well on Hinderclay Fen but there are fewer rabbits there. We'll keep a close eye on the bushes at Broomscot to see if this is successful or whether we have to try something else - probably temporary rabbit fencing.

What's it all for?

Our aim is to have a mixture of gorse of different ages and heights, with some dense old growth to provide safe nesting places for birds such as linnets and long-tailed tits and younger plants to encourage invertebrates.

Reg and Rowena Langston

New Year Walk, 2013 - foggy and floody but fun

Fifty people joined Jo Pitt and other trustees and volunteers to explore some LOHP sites.

Words and pictures by Peter Hughes

"We left home in Rickingham in bright wintry sunshine but by the time we reached Thelnetham the fog had rolled in. At the start of the walk, Jo Pitt, the new Chair, explained that areas of the fen had recently been



flooded and we were therefore to expect mud!

Wellies highly recommended.

The board walk between Middle Fen & Parkers Piece was under water so we entered Parkers Piece through the gate by the ford.

Parts of the route were indeed tricky for those not wearing wellies! However we all got through in the end & made it to the calm of Hinderclay Fen.



Everyone enjoyed the walk, despite the mud and the fog, and learnt a lot about the Project's wetland restoration aims and achievements."

Peter Hughes

Picture on front page - an otter's tracks on the riverside path



Membership application

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Phone:

E-mail:

I wish to support the LOHP as an:

Ordinary member	(£2 per annum)	
Friend of the Fen	(£10 minimum per annum)	
Junior member	(25p. 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.

giftaid it

Signed.....

Dated.....

Registered Charity No: 1098232

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.

If you would like to get involved, or 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 on 07500 044587.

Work parties

Get out and enjoy yourself whatever the weather at a LOHP work party. Monthly on Sundays (dates below) and weekly on Wednesdays.

Check details on the website or ring for information.

April 14 Pond digging/thistle control*

May 12 Fen species identification training*

June 9 Fen species identification training*

July 14 Blo'Norton cutting/fen meadow

Aug 11 Blo'Norton fens hay & sedge raking/pond digging

Sep 8 Hinderclay Fen sedge raking/pond digging

* watch our website for venue details

Reg & Rowena Langston 01379 898009 (Broomscot)

Jo-Anne Pitt 01379 898684 (Blo' Norton)

Nigel Clark 01379 890460 (Hinderclay)

Bird ringing - come and watch

15/16th June (evening) - Hinderclay Fen

Weather permitting.

Further details on the website. Booking essential.

Please phone Nigel and Jacquie on 01379 890460 or

Reg and Rowena on 01379 898009.



We've changed to a coated paper because it shows the images better. It is as environmentally friendly as the previous paper.

Contact LOHP

Email: enquiries@lohp.org.uk

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

Phone: 07500 044587 www.lohp.org.uk

Newsletter editor:

Nicky Rowbottom 01502 578470

Creative group

We are celebrating the area by making beautiful arts and crafts. Performances are also planned.

Themes we're exploring include plant species, products and materials, recipes, images, music and writings...

Come to our 'Local Knowledge' evenings to share ideas, show work in progress and listen to guest speakers.

Fortnightly at **Redgrave Activity Centre** from

Tuesday 16 April – 30 July, 6-8 pm

Info from Liz Ballard: ballardliz@hotmail.com