



Friends of
Holt Island
Nature Reserve

SPRING 2013
ISSUE 23

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PHOTOGRAPH © NIGEL SPROWELL

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PHOTOGRAPH © RANDY PLETT

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Dates for your diary

1 May
Walking Festival
Meet on the Island
2 pm

31 May
Family Fun Day
On the Island
11 am – 3 pm

27 June
Opening of the Holt
12 noon

 Like us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/HoltIslandNatureReserve

The Friends Group is a voluntary organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of Holt Island, Wilhorn Meadow and The Thicket in St Ives for the enjoyment of all.

The Islander

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF HOLT ISLAND NATURE RESERVE www.localgiving.com/holtislandnaturereserve

Chairman's Comments



PHOTOGRAPHS © NIGEL SPROWELL

▲ *The Thicket Path (left) awaits tarmac: the roller soon follows (right).*

SPRING? What can I say? As I write, snow blankets Hemingford Meadow again and the gulls huddle against a freezing wind. The receding flood (our fourth this winter) has attracted some interesting ducks – see *Bird's Update*, but what we really want now is a few more signs of spring. Apparently when it does come 'it could be absolutely spectacular' (National Trust). So, if you spot a Brimstone butterfly, or a ladybird, please tell us on our new Facebook page (see left) set up by Committee member Colin Knott – we'd like to hear from you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS Despite the weather we are looking forward to two important events this spring: the launch our Education Pack, and our Family Fun Day – see inside for details. Plus, in June – wait for it – the opening of the Holt, our wonderful new hut. Please come to all these events. After all, you have helped make them possible.

FUTURE DIRECTION Once the new interpretation panel (see inside) is installed and The Holt is 'open for business' we shall be looking for new projects. Paul, our Ranger, plans to focus more time on The Thicket, another green space looked after by HDC, and so we too,

along with the Volunteers, will be involved with and reporting on new activities from there. Our constitution defines not only the Island reserve, but also The Thicket and Wilhorn Meadow as our 'objects'.

For this reason, it is good to see Cambridgeshire County Council's refurbishment of The Thicket path this winter. With the main section newly resurfaced, we await the same treatment along Barnes Walk to our entrance!

MYSTERY ANIMAL I'd like to congratulate Graham Noyce (first) and Bridget Halford (second) for their quick identification of the swimming Grey Squirrel shown in the last *Islander*.

IAN JACKSON CHAIRMAN

SAY HELLO!

You'll be able to spot a Friends committee member, or a key-holder, by noticing the badge. Don't be shy, come and talk to us.



Ranger's Report



WORK PARTIES The normal pattern has been maintained throughout January, February and March contributing 142 hours. We have focussed work on the Holt (the new hut) but have also continued general Island maintenance.

THE HOLT Progress has been good despite the weather, and the boardwalk extension was completed in February. It now awaits a decent spell of dry weather before we can apply the non-slip surface to this section, and also to that alongside the pond.

The internal security shutters to the doors of the interpretation area have been fitted; those for the window will follow once the bench seating planned is constructed. Steve Moller has finished the exterior painting. The Friends are now able to get on with the interior fit out. Meanwhile, alongside the Holt, we have installed a bike rack for four bikes.

I have arranged for the construction of a steel framework to support a bird food store above the flood level, to be sited behind the Holt.

OTHER VOLUNTEER WORK Harvesting of the willow from the first osier bed (nearest the entrance) has been completed, and the willow bundled up. Some is retained for use on-site and some has been used for hedge-laying at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve. It serves as top bindings to hold the hedge

securely. The second bed (opposite the *Willow and Baskets* interpretation panel) was harvested by Colin Knott in February and is awaiting use at, we hope, Holywell School.

The Harrison Willow donated last year has been planted this month (March).

THE THICKET We have cut back branches along the lower path to enable access with machinery for the contractor refurbishing the path. The work to improve the surface to cycle-way standard has just been completed. The contractor has very kindly added three concrete foundations to enable us to install some benches along this stretch. He will now turn his attention to the Houghton private road end, and Barnes Walk – the path from the Copeley Scouts building to the Holt Island entrance.

As always, I am very grateful to the Volunteers for all their hard work, especially during the current hard winter. The Island habitat could not function without all the tireless hours they contribute.

VOLUNTEER WORK PARTY DATES

April	7, 19	Work parties usually start at 10 am and finish at approximately 3 pm, although Volunteers can attend for shorter periods if more convenient. Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended. All tools and training provided, along with coffee and tea. Bring packed lunch. Please call Paul on 07810 637545 if you plan to attend.
May	12, 17	
June	2, 21	

PAUL CLAYDON RANGER



◀ It's done – almost! We need to tar-and-chip the boardwalk extension and complete the fit out.

▶ The bike rack was submerged as soon as it was installed and still shows the 'tide mark'.



PHOTOGRAPH © IAN JACKSON

PHOTOGRAPH © COLIN KNOTT

Bees Still With Us

You'll recall our hive was installed in summer 2011, but it wasn't until last year that a swarm stayed, and it looks as if it is surviving the winter. The pictures tell the story of the bee keeper's February visit.



▲ In January, after heavy snowfall, we noticed a melted patch on the hive roof. Could this be a bee hot spot?



▲ (ABOVE RIGHT) Empty combs were revealed where the bees had consumed the honey during the winter.



▲ (ABOVE RIGHT) Three weeks later David Hetherington gently lifted the lid. The temperature was well below 15°C and so he had to move fast.

▶ To our joy bees were present. Fondant – a kind of icing made from sugar and water – was left as extra food until the weather warmed up.



PHOTOGRAPHS © NIGEL SPINKWELL

Arrived at Last!

The Chair has often reported that the EDUCATION PACK, first started in 2009, was 'underway'. Finally, it is finished, and will be published on **Thursday 9 May**. We have invited over 20 headmasters and teachers from surrounding schools to come to the Island between 4 and 5 pm to receive a complimentary copy. Do come along if you would like to see the pack for yourself.

It comprises over 60 projects and activities for children between 4 and 11 years old, and is designed to make it easy for teachers to prepare for class visits. All the pages can be removed for copying, or printed from the CD-ROM. There is also a mini SPOTTER GUIDE to help children identify many of the plants and animals that they may see on the Island.

This is our way of promoting the benefits of engaging with the natural environment, especially for children. If it encourages schools to bring children to our reserve, who then become excited by their direct contact with nature, then we will have done our job.

The Friends group is grateful to HDC for the idea and contributions, and to funding and assistance from COMMA (Community Aggregates Fund) and Cambridgeshire ACRE.

IAN JACKSON CHAIRMAN



PHOTOGRAPHS © RICHARD BOLAND

Double the Fun

Our popular Family Fun Day this year offers added value – we have joined forces with the Norris Museum, our neighbours across the backwater – to present even more children's activities. Bring the children and just drop in between 11 am and 3 pm. It's FREE.

Here are the highlights:

- The Norris-Holt two-way quiz
- Meet a willow weaver at work
- Make bird cake and kebabs
- Dip the pond
- Help make a giant willow structure
- Construct a bug hotel
- Scavenger Hunt and Eye Spy
- Colour a Creature
- Spot-the-Bird Trail
- Design and stamp your own badge



PHOTOGRAPHS © RANDY REIT

The New Panel

Watch out for this new interpretation panel on your next visit.



ARTWORK AND DESIGN © CORAL WALTON



Common Reed makes up our reedbed and also grows along the river bank. Reed and Sedge Warblers nest between its tall stems. Reedbeds are among the most important habitats for breeding birds. Ours is managed so that invading willow does not reduce its size. The large feathery flower spikes turn purple in late summer and look beautiful as they wave in the breeze. Larger reedbeds are cut for thatching, but not here!

Birds Update

ADOPTABOX Our third campaign has got off to a flying start – a big thank you from us, and from the birds, to all those Friends who have already sponsored a box. Your contribution is absolutely vital and makes a real difference in helping us to enhance the visitor experience. There is still plenty of time to choose a number! An ADOPTABOX certificate makes an ideal gift for a child and, we hope, will encourage them to get closer to nature. Forms are available from Robin Waters – his contact details are below.

THE BIRDS I don't need to remind you how awful the winter has been – as I write we are experiencing our fourth flood. This has been challenging for the wildlife, and also for me as I try to keep the feeding station topped up – wellies and waders have been the order of the day.

Talking of waders – a Black-tailed Godwit has been seen on the meadow across the river and Pintails, Shovelers and

Wigeon have recently visited as the levels drop to suit their feeding behaviour. Flooding has brought benefits to some birds, but spring flooding is devastating for ground-nesting birds, so we hope this will be the last for a while.

We will soon see the back of the winter and can then welcome the spring, along with the migrants returning from Africa – the warblers and hirundines (Swallows, Swifts, Sand and House Martins). Tits are already visiting the boxes as they start to build nests, and before too long they will be laying eggs. The chicks will start hatching as the grubs they will be fed start to emerge – such is the wonder of nature.

I will be keeping our ADOPTABOX sponsors updated with news of nesting activities, and again arranging a guided walk on 11 May. This will also be the time to enjoy the wonderful cacophony of birdsong, so please do visit the Island and share this wonderful experience. I hope I see you there.

NIGEL SPROWELL FRIEND

Ducks Galore



▲ Pintail are elegant ducks with a slender neck and long tail, a key distinguishing mark from a distance. Normally seen on the coast in winter they will venture inland to feed on flooded grasslands like Hemingford Meadow.



▲ The male Shoveler's plumage is easy to pick out. It's huge, broad bill and feeding behaviour – scything through the shallows – are also characteristic.



▲ Wigeon are seen in large flocks. The male sports a yellow head stripe and they make a soft wee—ooo sound as they keep in contact with each other.

PHOTOGRAPHS © NIGEL SPROWELL

YOUR COMMITTEE

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 These are your elected committee members plus HDC representative. If you have any concerns about any aspect of the Island, please be in touch with any of the committee listed below:

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

Yes, I want to help protect, preserve and promote one of St Ives best kept secrets and become a Friend of Holt Island Nature Reserve.

Name _____ Telephone _____
 Address _____ e-mail _____
 _____ Signature _____
 _____ Date _____

- 1 Please find enclosed my/our subscription for the next year of £5.00 (individual) £10.00 (household) 2 I/we wish to become a life member(s) and enclose a cheque for £50.00 (individual) £100.00 (household) 3 Please find enclosed a donation of £ _____ 4 Other organizations welcome to join on application

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By signing-up for Gift Aid you will enable us to claim an extra 25p for every £1.00 received.

I would like Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve to treat all subscriptions and donations that I make from the date of this declaration (until I give notice otherwise), as Gift Aid donations. I confirm that I am a UK taxpayer.

Please make cheques payable to: Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve and return to the Membership Secretary: Robin Waters, 18 Hemingford Road, St Ives PE27 7HG

The information provided will be stored on a computer and used exclusively for managing your membership of the Friends. It will not be disclosed or released to any other organization. By completing this form you agree to this action.