



Friends of
Holt Island
Nature Reserve

SUMMER 2013
ISSUE 24

In this season's issue:

- CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS
- RANGER'S REPORT
- FUN DAY PLUS
- THE WILLOW PANEL
- POND PROBLEM
- BIRDS UPDATE



PHOTOGRAPH © NIGEL SROWELL

- YOUR COMMITTEE
- MEMBERSHIP FORM



Like us on Facebook

www.facebook.com/HoltIslandNatureReserve

The Friends Group is a voluntary organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of Holt Island, Willhorn 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



PHOTOGRAPH © NIGEL SROWELL

▲ Long-tails line-up: what a great sight. High up in the willow canopy the parents of this new family organise things for easy feeding! See Birds Update.

SUMMER TIME Fresh from a visit to the Island, I am reminded of the song, but in our case it is the nettles that are high, rather than the cotton! In fact, almost 3 m high in places. The boardwalk creates wonderfully cool, green tunnels through the lush vegetation, making the reserve an ideal place to be when the temperature is soaring. And, for the first time, I have noticed the difference between the male (flowers erect) and female (flowers hanging down) nettle plants. Check out the illustrations on the new *Water-loving Plants* panel, and then see for yourselves.

HIGHLIGHT The last quarter has been significant for us. The new shed, *The Holt*, is practically ready for use and awaits its hand rails to ensure the rising ramp is safe. Then the interpretation room will be open to the public, and by arrangement, teachers will be able to sit children down before starting projects on the reserve. Let us have your feedback please.

I love the way *The Holt* sits back on its platform, blending perfectly with its green backdrop. It creates a good first impression for our visitors and we have already received many compliments. It has been an example of HDC,

the Volunteers and the Friends working together to realise a common goal, and I thank everyone involved for their contributions, and especially the Woodford Community Environmental Fund for the finance.

MORE FUN Our Family Fun Day in May was organised in conjunction with the Norris Museum and so extra activities were on offer, and the two sites linked by a Two-way Quiz. If you came along, you will know how successful this arrangement turned out to be – everybody certainly enjoyed double the fun. If you didn't make it please see the pictorial feature inside. We are already making plans for next year.

VACANCY If you are computerate, have a little spare time, and would like to help us manage our increasing membership database, do please be in touch with Robin – see back page.

In the meantime, do visit the Island with its summer hat on, and enjoy the season.

IAN JACKSON CHAIRMAN

Ranger's Report



WORK PARTIES have run successfully during April, May and June on the first Sunday and third Friday of the month, from 10 am to approximately 4pm. Six scheduled parties and a couple of additional ones between mid-March and mid-June resulted in an impressive 110 volunteer hours over this period.

THE HOLT The effort this quarter focused on more work on the new hut, and general scheduled Island maintenance. The final stages of non-slip surface treatments were added last week to the remaining ramp, the dipping platform and boardwalk extension to *The Holt*. The main ramp now needs handrails added to complete this part of the job.

The internal shutters were added to the window of the interpretive area and the painting finished, thanks to the efforts of Steve Moller and Basil Belcher. Steve also organised the construction of the bench seating, and we installed the display boards.

BOARDS, BOARDWALK AND BENCHES We have erected the new interpretation board *Water-loving Plants* funded by the Friends via the Woodford Community and Environmental Fund, refitted the opening/closed signs on the main gates, repaired the 'Open' banner to enable easier opening and closing, and cleared the muddy ground from around the Civic Society Ingle Holt interpretation

panel in front of the island entrance. It can now be read without standing in a puddle.

We have also built the framework and boarded the ramp for the bird feed store and started the annual restoration of the picnic and memorial benches.

The cutting of vegetation around the boardwalk is being monitored as we have reduced the number of cuts to enhance the biodiversity of the plant species that grow there.

The viewing points have been sensitively cut to keep the wonderful views across to Hemingford Meadow from the benches for all to enjoy, whilst maintaining habitat for the Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterfly caterpillars to feed on.

There are still two places suitable for benches at Holt Island, and four at The Thicket. If any Friends members would be interested in donating a bench, or memorial bench, please do get in touch with me.

Many thanks for the excellent continued support and hard work from our volunteer team.

VOLUNTEER WORK PARTY DATES		
July	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.
August	4, 16	
September	1, 20	

PAUL CLAYDON RANGER

PHOTOGRAPH © JILL BURT



The Willow Panel

Charlotte Jordan (*centre*), daughter of Jack Harrison, whose basket-making business harvested willow osiers on the Island until the 1970s, poses below the new panel commemorating this connection with the past. It is positioned in front of some pollarded willows, just seen in the background. With her are some friends from The Sleppe Hall School Old Girls' Association: I-r Margaret Moule, Bridget Wallis, Lillian Harrison (sister), and Moira Brooks.

Pond Problem

After the extensive flooding during the winter, the first long hot weekend of spring, in May, lowered the level. To our amazement we discovered that nature had stocked the pond with over 80 fish, including Roach, Bleak, Chub, Perch, and a very satisfied looking Pike. But all were suffering from lack of oxygen, cruising the surface and gulping air. Your Chair, and bird-man Nigel (who were both fishermen once), sprang into action and over two days netted the lot (we hope), and released them into the river. A Heron was seen slinking away looking disappointed ...



PHOTOGRAPH © NIGEL SPROWELL

Fun Day Plus

Whichever way you looked the Island was teeming on Family Fun Day in May. The cunning Two-way Quiz enticed visitors from the Museum to the Island, and vice versa. In the Museum garden basket weaver Sue Kirk demonstrated her skills and encouraged children to add to her gigantic willow globe. On the Island they discovered a Spot-the-bird trail, mini-beasts in the pond, bird-cake feeders, kebabs, and bug hotels to make, plus badges to design and ducks to colour. The pace was fast and furious, but such fun!



▲ Buggies and bikes (note the new stands) bring them in. And above it all the wood-peckers came and went, feeding their noisy young – see Birds Update.

► A view looking over the pond and its dippers to *The Holt*, presiding proudly over all the excited visitors.



▲ Even the central meadow area became busy as youngsters discovered the living-willow tunnel to the feeding station, and the badge-making bench.



▲ Meanwhile the bug-hotel factory was working flat out to meet demand. There must now be a lot of happy bugs in *St Ives*.

▼ It's a fiddly business making bird-food kebabs from popcorn and raisins, but very rewarding.



Birds Update

LATE STARTS I am delighted to report that despite the appalling spring weather our birds have shown much determination and resilience. They have provided, and continue to provide, much pleasure to visitors with their song and feverish activity as they get on with the important business of rearing their young.

It is true that numbers of warblers are down this year. This is presumably because they shortened their journeys from Africa by staying in Central Europe as a direct result of weather conditions in early spring. However there still are good numbers of Blackcaps with young, and a few families of Reed and Sedge Warblers. I also saw recently a family of Chiffchaffs. Sometimes, in spite of my best endeavours, a bird will escape my binoculars during nesting, and then pop up to surprise me with young!

FLEDGLING FUN One of the highlights this spring has to be our family of Great Spotted Woodpeckers. They have provided much entertainment, not least on our Family Fun Day. High above the pond-dipping platform and the bird-cake bench, the young were constantly

demanding food from their parents. I could not tell how many young were hidden in the nest hole but between three and six is not uncommon.

Another highlight has been to see a family of newly fledged Long-tailed Tits, all ten of them lined up on a branch, being fed by their busy parents – see front cover!

ADOPTABOX Our fund raiser has once again been a fantastic success and we are ever-grateful to our sponsors for their generous support. I recently updated all our sponsors regarding breeding success. Suffice to say, with one exception, all have fledged. Box 15, however, was a very late starter and a family of Great Tits is still in residence. There are still plenty of birds to see and enjoy on the Island. The bird-feeding station is a hive of activity as Chaffinches, Dunnocks, Robins and their young vie for food, along with numerous Great and Blue Tits. Do make sure you come along and enjoy this wonderful opportunity of being so very close to nature! (Editor's note: all statements re timing were correct at time of writing!)

NIGEL SPROWELL FRIEND



▲ The star of our Family Fun Day, the Great Spotted Woodpecker, brings food to his noisy brood in a hole just below a branch high up in the big willow opposite The Holt.

PHOTOGRAPH © NIGEL SPROWELL

YOUR COMMITTEE

.....
 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:

JENNY ALLAWAY Committee member
 01480 464 615
 jenny.allaway@gmail.com

JILL BURT Committee member
 01480 463 926
 jillburt@btinternet.com

PAUL CLAYDON HDC
 07810 637 545
 paxtonpits@huntingdonshire.gov.uk

TRACEY HIPSON Secretary
 01480 468 350
 traceyhipson@uwclub.net

IAN JACKSON Chairman
 01480 385 999
 ianjackson@ntlworld.com

STEPHEN MOLLER Committee Member
 01480 464 607
 mollerfam@hotmail.com

NIGEL SPROWELL Committee Member
 07899 908 336
 nigel.sprowell@btopenworld.com
ROBIN WATERS Treasurer and Membership Secretary
 01480 386 644
 Robin.waters@rswgeomatics.com

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

giftaid it 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.