



# THE ISLANDER

## AUTUMN NEWSLETTER

### ISSUE 31

**CO-CHAIRS' REPORT**

Welcome to our new style newsletter! It is still a work in progress, but we do intend to have more frequent issues.

We start with this year's AGM where we had some big changes. Two members of the committee, who have been with the Friends from the founding of the group, decided it was time for a change.

After seven years as Chairman, Ian Jackson has stood down, although he remains on the committee, and Robin Waters, our longtime Treasurer, has resigned.

**Thank you, and Presentations**

We could not let this exceptional moment pass unrecognised, and, after a short speech of thanks to them both, Ian was presented with a photo album recording the highlights of his Chairmanship, and Robin was presented with a canvas print of Nigel Sprowell's photo of 'our' two grebes.



Co-Chair Jill Burt presents Ian Jackson with his album  
*Photo: Peter Whatnell*

**Many thanks to you both for all your hard work for the Friends.**

**New Co-Chairs**

Jill Burt and Helen Whatnell were elected as Co-Chairs. Many of you will already know Jill, who has been a committee member for many years and has worked tirelessly on behalf of the island and the Friends. Helen is a recent addition to the committee, and has a special interest in bats.

**New Committee Members**

The committee is joined by Basil Belcher as our new Treasurer, and Julian Limentani who has taken over as Membership Secretary .

**Tea, talk, and a movie!**

After the business part of the AGM was finished, we were entertained first by a short video of the Hidden Secrets of Holt Island, produced by Nigel Sprowell and Howard Birley, which was greatly enjoyed by everyone.



A still from the video  
*Copyright Nigel Sprowell and Howard Birley*

The evening concluded with Chris Vine, Chairman of the Cambridgeshire Bat Group who gave a fascinating talk on 'Amazing Bats'.



Daubenton's bat *Unknown*

**Some of This Year's Highlights**

**Batty about Bats**

This year's Family Fun Day with The Norris Museum was our most successful yet! We had 427 people visit the island, taking part in batty crafts, and hunting for bat boxes.



Talking about bats

*Photo: Peter Whatnell*

If you walked around the island recently, you may have noticed that some trees have blue bats hanging on them. These are the trees with bat boxes. We have 17 boxes in total. The challenge was for children to spot 9 of the boxes. There were also toilet roll bats to be made, with googly eyes and spectacular glittery wings, of course.



Crafting on the meadow

*Photo: Peter Whatnell*

There were plaster of Paris bats to paint, and many soon displayed a very creative rainbow colours!

Chris Vine, Chairman of the Cambridgeshire Bat Group, Sue Hyde and Helen, also members of the group, were on hand to answer questions and talk about the bats we have on the island.

**Follow the Dinosaur Footprints**

We were delighted to be asked to be part of the celebrations for the re-opening of The Norris Museum in July, and were asked for a museum related event. So, of course, it had to be dinosaurs!

Mysteriously, two large nests containing dinosaur eggs appeared on the island the weekend of the celebrations, and a trail of dinosaur footprints led to their hiding places.



Dinosaurs!

*Photos: Helen*

**St Ives Library Summer Reading Challenge Animal Agents**

Jill, Helen and Daniel joined staff at the St Ives Library for an afternoon of batty fun as part of their Summer Reading challenge. Jill helped with crafts, while Helen talked about bats and the sounds they make.

Daniel wrote an original bat story trail, where the children followed clues to find items hidden in the library.



Some young readers with the results of their afternoon's efforts!!

*Photo: Jill Burt*

**Heritage Open Day (HODS)**

We took part in the nationwide HODS event again this year, and it was very successful with 251 visitors over the weekend. There was a Heritage pictorial display in the Holt including original Harrison baskets on loan from Charlotte Harrison.

The Brake proved to be an interesting tool for visitors to have a go at 'stripping the willow'.



"Stripping the willow" Photo: Nigel Spowell

Sandra Barker gave a basket weaving demonstration on the Saturday allowing visitors to have a go at making a woven fish. She also brought with her a selection of some of the baskets she has made, including an eel trap, and a duck basket which would be placed on a stake in the river for the ducks to nest in!



Sandra Barker and some fish weavers Photo: Nigel Spowell

**WILDLIFE UPDATE**

Many members saw our "hidden secrets" video at the AGM. I am pleased to say our badgers, all five of them, continue to do well, and it is difficult to distinguish the cubs from their parents.

The badgers and deer enjoy foraging around the feeding stations cleaning up any spillages, and so does the fox. I believe we still have up to four muntjacs including a fawn, and there are regular daytime sightings. I am hoping to capture on film other diurnal wildlife and if successful, produce another video.

**Birdlife**

Despite the difficult start to the breeding season with a period of chilly damp weather, our birds seem to have fared particularly well this year.

One of the highlights has to be our song thrushes; we have several pairs and now quite a few juveniles on the island. The conditions are ideal for them, with plenty of natural food. Sadly, this is not a bird we see regularly in our gardens these days.

Robins, dunnocks, blackbirds, wrens and chaffinches have all done well and there are plenty of young birds around to enjoy.



Sedge Warbler Photo: Nigel Spowell

I am particularly pleased to report the return of Sedge Warblers, one of our African migrants. We have not seen any on the island for three years, despite being regular in the past. They have bred successfully so hopefully they will return in increased numbers.

Reed Warblers, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs, also from Africa, have all bred, although the numbers seem down, but they have all contributed very vocally to the fantastic birdsong that we have once again been blessed with this year. Garden Warblers have also had some success and a number of young birds have been ringed. A full ringing report will be provided at the end of the year, but I am delighted to report that a number of our warblers that were ringed in 2014 have been re-trapped this year.

**ADOPT-a-BOX**

We are as ever extremely grateful to our sponsors for their invaluable support. We had 50 sponsors this year, which is tremendous. A full report to all box sponsors will be provided in the next few weeks and we propose to run the scheme again next year.

The monies raised are so important to help with the welfare of our precious birds, and I hope we can continue to rely upon your support. Some 10 boxes were used this year, and we had at least 30 fledglings. There are many more young tits around, as evidenced by ringing, so some must have nested in trees and we know of one pair of blue tits who raised a brood in our large communal bat box – we will have to give them clearer instructions next year !

NIGEL SPROWELL *Friend*

**STEP UP TO THE CHALLENGE!!!**

Join us for our first ever Quiz Night, questions set by our very own Daniel Rowe. Let us know any special dietary needs when you book your tickets.



**Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve**

**? Quiz Night ?**

St Ives Corn Exchange  
Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> November  
6.30pm for 7.00pm start

**PIZZA supper ?**

Teams 4-8 people  
£10.00 per person  
Bar

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**HOLT ISLAND RANGERS REPORT**  
**SEPTEMBER 2017**

Seven scheduled work parties between mid- June and the beginning of September. Volunteers have contributed over 300 hours of work so far, with more to be included when all the totals come in. Work completed this last 2 months:

- Commencement of clearing back upper path of the Thicket (approximately 1/3 cleared so far)
- Maintaining willow tunnel
- Completion of gates to beehive area
- Maintenance of vegetation around the boardwalk and the grass path and meadow
- Monitor and collect dodder seed for spreading
- Replacement programme for non-slip on boards where it has worn away continuing, about 40% of what was purchased has been installed/prepared so far

Thank you to Paul Claydon and his team of volunteers!



Willow tunnel installed *Photo: Paul Claydon*



Willow tunnel in mid-August

*Photo: Paul Claydon*

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