

Summer Newsletter 2021
ISSUE 42

Open 10:00am –
4:00pm weekends and
Bank Holidays from
April until October.
At other times the key
may be borrowed from
The Norris Museum or
One Leisure with a £20
deposit.

UPCOMING EVENTS

HODS - Heritage Open Days

Saturday 18th
September

CALENDAR COMPETITION

See back page
for details



like us on facebook:
Holt Island Nature Reserve

Visit our website:
www.holtisland.org

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

CHAIR'S REPORT

At last! Summer is here and we have many reasons to be cheerful. Brandishing our masks and our vaccines, we have been able to leave our homes and go exploring again, and where better to take in the glorious weather than in the tranquil beauty of Holt Island?

It gave me great pleasure to step onto the boardwalk again, especially when we welcomed the Rotary Club and the installation of their new state-of-the-art bench in memory of long-term member David Godfrey. This step towards the future, using recycled plastic in place of traditional wood is both an exciting and impressive, as those who have taken advantage of it by the pond will attest, I'm sure.

Our events this summer started with our much-anticipated Family Fun Day on Friday 13th August. We look forward to HODS on Saturday 18th September, with more exciting events to follow!

It's great to have you all back, and I hope you enjoy the Island during this wonderful summer season.

Daniel Rowe



Red Admiral. The most important food plant for the Red Admiral caterpillar is the nettle, which is found in abundance on the Island. Photo: Paul Claydon

DAVID GODFREY MEMORIAL BENCH

The Rotary Club of St. Ives have generously presented us with a new bench in the pond dipping area, as a memorial to their very long-standing member David Godfrey, who sadly passed away last year.



(Left) Our Chairman Dan Rowe being presented with the bench by St.Ives Rotary Club President, Adrian Acton. (Above) Members of David Godfrey's family, Rotarians and members of FOHINR
Photos: Nigel Sprowell

OUSE VALLEY WAY BOARD

Have you noticed a new information board on The Waits? We are delighted to note that it directs walkers to the Island just across the backwater. It has been created by the Great Ouse Valley Trust, of which we are a Partner Member, and is one of a series marking the route of the long-distance footpath through our county.

Last year the County Council decided the path needed some TLC and invited the Trust to take a look at the 12 information panels in our section and update them. The Trust was set up to 'protect, promote and enhance the special landscape of the Great Ouse Valley' and so it was delighted to take this on.

The original panels are completely redesigned, the nature notes rewritten and a new feature – heritage items – added. Navigation hints for the routes and circular walks are provided plus updated safety points and a reminder of the Countryside Code. The work revealed that an additional panel was needed for St Ives and the Trust was delighted when our Town Council agreed to fund it. To find out more about the work of the Trust visit www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk

A close up of the board will be uploaded to the Holt Island website.



The proud installers Photo: FOHINR

HOLT ISLAND HONEY BEES – A YEAR IN THE LIFE – SUMMER

It was a pleasure to walk through the Parish churchyard on several late June days and listen to the humming in the blossom of the Lime trees. Many of the honey bees would have come from Holt Island: bumble bees and flies would have been contributing to the humming. Honey bees will fly up to 3 miles to find a good source of nectar if they have to, but the Island bees will find good sources in the town's trees, shrubs and flowers.

During spells of hot weather many flying bees will stop foraging for nectar and pollen and start searching to collect water to counteract evaporation and keep the hive cool. If water is short the hive can overheat, the queen may stop laying and larvae may not develop.

In hot spells, a colony may need several litres of water per day. Every water-collecting bee usually makes



Bees drinking Bees collecting water
Photo: Shutterstock.com

about 50 trips, each time collecting about 25 mg of water in her crop. The water is transferred to the waiting in-hive worker bees by trophallaxis, the direct transfer from one to another. If the in-hive workers are slow unloading, the foragers will sense the water need has lessened and fewer will go out for more water. The water carriers will spread their loads around the hive and fan with their wings to help evaporation and cooling. Bees find water in a number of places including damp soil, muddy puddles, pond edges and the river.



This frame of honey shows about 20% uncapped cells which means the bees haven't yet reduced the water content to about 17% before capping. It will be put back into the hive for the bees to finish their work.

Photo: David Hetherington

It is best to site hives so they are out of direct sunlight from late morning until evening.

In summer, honey bees face the threat of wasps, which have finished rearing their young, are bored and want to find sweet food, when their diet of the sweet secretions of aphids and similar pests declines. They can invade a weak colony to rob honey and take larvae. Some beekeepers put wasp traps baited with jam or marmalade solution to capture them. Many beekeepers will reduce the size of colony entrances which enable the bees to defend their entrances.

Honeybees will continue producing honey through the summer which they store for raising their young and for their winter needs. The beekeeper will take some, leaving enough for the bees' winter needs.

David Hetherington

RECENTLY SEEN ON THE ISLAND - CORN BUNTING

The Corn Bunting (*Emberiza calandra*) is a bird which has declined in numbers over the last seventy years. It was a common bird around farmland, especially meadows, and could be heard singing from the vantage points most of the summer with its strange song which sounds like jangling keys. It has virtually disappeared from Wales and south west England and is commonest in Yorkshire down to the Wash. It is now on the Birds of Conservation Concern Red List.

On 28th May one was caught on Holt Island by the reed-bed. It was an adult female, probably in its first breeding season. They are heard regularly on the southern side of Hemingford Meadow, but have never been recorded on the Island before.

The Corn Bunting is a bulky bird; the male is the largest bunting. The female is about 10% smaller. They are buff coloured and heavily streaked with a heavy bill for seed eating. The males take up territories in January but the females remain in winter flocks until April or May. They start breeding mid-May to late July. They mostly nest on the ground but will use bushes, laying 3-5 eggs of varying



Female Corn Bunting *Photo: Julian Limentani*

colours from greenish-grey to light brown. The eggs are brooded for 12-13 days and the young fledge very quickly in 9 to 13 days. They often have two broods.

Julian Limentani

METHODIST CHURCH AND HOLT ISLAND

We have always had a good relationship with the Methodist Church on The Waits, just opposite the Island. In the past they have held 'reflective quiet services' on Holt Island on July evenings which have been much appreciated by their members – just another example of how beneficial it can be to relax and be thoughtful in such beautiful surroundings.

This year the Church has undergone a major refurbishment. We have been honoured to be asked to contribute photographs to be displayed in the first of a series of 'exhibitions' from local groups to show different features of the town.

The photographs selected by the Church show our Mute Swan on her nest with cygnets, a Kingfisher, a Muntjac deer, a pair of Great Crested Grebes and Mallard ducklings, all taken by Nigel

Sprowell, and a beautiful Banded Demoiselle damselfly by Sue Limentani.

The Church's link with the reserve is also strengthened by the design of the new outside railings, specially commissioned to reflect riverside bulrushes harbouring typical wildlife.



NORRIS MEN'S GROUP VISIT

We also enjoy good relations with another neighbour, the Norris Museum. Susan Bate, their Community Officer, contacted us recently to ask whether we could entertain a visit from the museum's Men's Group. This comprises a group of gentlemen of a certain age who meet fortnightly on a Thursday to discuss topics of mutual interest and plan outings. They had expressed an interest in visiting the Island as most had not crossed the bridge for a very long time. They wanted to discover what we have been up to, learn a bit more about the history of the place, and explore for themselves. Of course we said yes, and Committee Members Ian and Alison did the honours.

Meeting on the bridge the first highlight was a brilliant sighting of a swimming Grass Snake which passed under us as if on cue. Thereafter a very pleasant hour-and-a-half was spent ambling round the boardwalk with much conversation, questions raised (most answered), and tales recounted. Eagle-eyed Alison was quick to point out interesting minibugs on leaves and then, just as we finished, she trumped that by persuading an enormous Brown Hawker Dragonfly to perch for some time on her cheek! What a finale. The men were impressed and expressed a desire to come again. Job done.

If you are interested in the men's group please contact Susan at communities@norrismuseum.org.uk

Ian Jackson



The Norris Museum Men's Group pose with Ian at The Holt
Photo: Susan Bate

RANGER'S REPORT JULY 2021

Over the period we had seven scheduled and eleven unscheduled work parties, totalling 153 practical volunteer hours. The Friends' committee also contributed around 183 hours.

Roy, Colin, George and Doug have been continuing to install non-slip panels for us, as well as those installed by our regular work parties.

We have now only around 350 left to install, then we can do the fanned sections when the Island is frequented less by the public. We may get one or two done sooner if we can get them done on a Friday, otherwise they will wait until after October when the Island is not generally open to the public.

Our otter holt kit is now fully assembled and awaiting installation, with a few modifications required first to the access pipe(s). This also needs consideration on how to prevent moorhens/coots building a nest in it which they tried to do when the pipe was on our boardwalk.



Banded Demoiselle; male. One of only two UK damselflies with coloured wings
Photo: Paul Claydon

Upon opening on the first

Sunday in May it was wonderful to see so many people using and enjoying the Island, stopping to ask questions and being really grateful and happy the Island is once again open to the public.

Of course, we had to have the grass path closed until the swan and cygnets had left the nest, then the snowman was removed, but once this was done the grass path was back into full use.

Our work on managing the vegetation for Greater Dodder has paid dividends this year with a fantastic display of it on the nettles in both the meadow and along the front of the Island by the main river.

There is a great variety of pond life in our new pond too this year and so far, conditions have not been favourable for the blanket weed to form.

Paul Claydon



Harlequin ladybird pupa. What is the name and purpose of the small white structures seen at bottom right of the photo? Answers please to secretary@holtisland.org who is not an expert on beetle anatomy
Photo: HC

CALENDAR 2022 – AVAILABLE NOW

Available NOW a desk calendar featuring pictures of Holt Island and its wildlife. At £7.00 exclusive of postage, this will make an ideal Christmas present. Free delivery in St Ives, otherwise £2 postage. All profits to the Friends.



Photo: Julian Limentani

THE HOLT HAS A NEW CARPET - OUR THANKS TO SUPERIOR FINISH CONTRACTS LTD

As a result of the winter's floods, the carpet in the Holt needed replacing having become saturated.

We considered various options and costs were in the region of £400. We decided on an option to lay a temporary floor that could be lifted for winter storage to avoid future damage.

With grateful thanks to John Bufton of Superior Finish Contracts Ltd who supplied all the carpet tiles and adhesive free of charge we have a fantastic new floor. We purchased plywood cut in four strips costing approximately £60, to which we applied the tiles which will be easily lifted in the winter months for storage.

Nigel Sprowell



The Holt open again Photo: Nigel Sprowell

HOLT ISLAND CALENDAR 2023 COMPETITION

Each year the Friends produce a desktop calendar to raise funds for our work on the Island. For the 2023 calendar we would like to feature photos taken by our members, or indeed any visitor (of any age) to the Island.

The theme is "nature" and the photo must have been taken on the Island (it doesn't matter when). If you would like to enter your photo (or photos! Up to a maximum of 3) please email to holtislandcalendar2023@gmail.com. Minimum file size of 1MB is required.

Don't forget to include your name and (if you would like) a few words about your photo. Entries must be received by 30th April 2022, so there is plenty of time! Twelve photos will be chosen for inclusion in the calendar. Winners will receive a calendar.

All winning photos will be fully credited and used in the calendar and the Islander only. If we would like to use them on our website we will ask for your permission.

Chair: DANIEL ROWE chair@holtisland.org 07596 294575

Treasurer: BASIL BELCHER treasurer@holtisland.org 07704 142990

Secretary: HELEN CRIPPS secretary@holtisland.org

Membership Secretary: JULIAN LIMENTANI membership@holtisland.org 07802 166722

Committee Members:

JILL BURT jillburt@btinternet.com 07796 326931

PAUL CLAYDON (HDC Ranger) paul.claydon@huntingdonshire.gov.uk 07810 637545

IAN JACKSON ianjackson@ntlworld.com 07836 248360

STEPHEN MOLLER mollerfam@hotmail.co.uk 07867 685475

NIGEL SPROWELL nigel.sprowell@btopenworld.com 07899 908336

TIM REED

JADE GUNNELL jade@fieldfare.info 07419 341638