



# Annual Review 2007-2008

## Annual Report of the Trustees for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008

### From the Chair

This has been a landmark year for the LOHP, as we have been able to extend our land holding in the valley by the purchase of two adjacent sites in the parish of Thelnetham. These sites, now re-named Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank after their former owners, have enormous strategic significance for us. As well as substantially increasing the continuity of the river corridor for wildlife they re-unite two isolated fragments of the Waveney and Little Ouse Valley Fens SAC: Blo’Norton and Thelnetham Fens. We have put a lot of effort into fundraising both for the purchase of the land, and for subsequent habitat restoration, and have been delighted with the response – thanks are once again due to Sarah Grieveson, our River Link Appeal director, for her fundraising work on our behalf. The restoration of these sites is now under way, but will take 2 – 3 years to complete. In the meantime, we have continued to manage our existing sites and are seeing real improvements in the habitats and associated wildlife. It is also very pleasing to see the numbers of people making use of the footpaths on our sites increasing – public access is central to the LOHP’s philosophy, and we will be extending the network of paths on our new land as soon as the major work there is completed.

The LOHP continues to function as a purely volunteer-run organisation, and this, together with our close links with the local community, means we are now recognised nationally as a leading example of community conservation in action. None of this could be achieved without the dedication of the trustees and the many volunteers who give their time and expertise to the project.

### Restoring Habitats

The restoration of fen habitats on Parkers Piece and Bleyswyck’s Bank was well underway by the end of this reporting year. It started with the installation of two culverts to allow machinery and, eventually, a footpath to cross the two ditches that run across the site to the river. By the end of the winter the depressing remains of an abandoned tree nursery - dense lines of pines and deciduous species - that dominated Bleyswycks Bank had been felled. As well as leaving a blank canvas for the restoration of open fen, it changed the landscape, opening up lovely views down river to Thelnetham Mill, and letting light reach the formerly dark and shaded southern margin of Betty’s Fen on the opposite bank of the river.

On our other sites, most of the major restoration works are complete but routine management is still required to maintain the improvements in habitat quality and biodiversity. On the Frith and the Lows we continue to manage the vegetation by a mixture of grazing and cutting – Dennis Jenkins has again grazed these sites for us with sheep on the Frith, and both sheep and (very popular) cows on the Lows. The animals have made a major impact on the vegetation with the sward on each site becoming more diverse, but there is still a need to supplement this grazing with cutting to remove nettle and thistle growth because of the previous enrichment of the fields.

On the wet fen sites we have a well established rotational cutting regime, with reed and sedge being cut and raked off areas within each fen on a 4 to 6 year cycle. We have also regularly mown the road edge at Blo’Norton Fen.

Betty’s Fen, where major restoration work was completed in 2005, now looks like a well established wetland and continues to attract new species, both in and around the large turf pond. Annual mowing of the more diverse areas of marginal vegetation to control the nettles and creeping thistles that threaten to suppress a diversity of less common wetland species, continued this year, although areas of tall reed are being left to attract breeding reed and sedge warblers. In the winter more of the blackthorn scrub was coppiced to maintain dense, low growth that is so valuable for breeding birds.

On the Frith, in addition to routine grazing and topping throughout the summer months, two annual volunteers events contributed to its restoration. In the winter another stretch of hedge was restored by planting appropriate shrubs. These included dogwood grown from cuttings from the one remaining patch in the original hedge line. Our annual thistle digging work party continued the good work of the previous

year, clearing another large area of species that can become very dominant in pasture. Both the Frith and the Lows benefited again this year from the attentions of sheep and cattle (on the Lows) belonging to local grazier Dennis Jenkins. We are very grateful to Dennis for his vital support in managing these sites.

Another feature designed to enhance the wildlife interest of all of our sites this year has been the installation of high quality woodcrete bat boxes. The team involved deserve particular thanks for this heavy work: they included local bat experts Arthur Rivett and Nick Woods, with Reg Langston, Paul and Martin Brown and Mike Wraight. We are also very grateful to the Animal Defence Trust for funding these boxes and look forward to finding out which species of bats will take up residence.

### **Involving people**

We continue to enjoy excellent support from our many volunteers, who have cleared scrub, cut and raked off vegetation, dug thistles, and created a new pond in Blo' Norton Fen during the year. John Dixon of Blo'Norton has kindly undertaken the regular mowing of the footpaths on Blo' Norton and Betty's Fens.

### **Activities**

During the year we organised a number of events, including a summer treasure hunt, a dragonfly walk led by Arthur Rivett (although the weather was less than kind to us), and our now traditional "Winter Warmer" walk shortly after Christmas. These events help to increase the number of people aware of the project locally and also help people to discover our permissive footpaths, which don't appear on Ordnance Survey maps. There was a full house at Redgrave Activities Centre for the AGM and annual talk, which was given by Professor Tom Williamson from UEA, who provided an entertaining account of the historical development of our typical local landscapes. Our monthly work parties have continued to contribute significantly to our routine site management work, and our volunteers are looking forward to working on the newly acquired land. Reg Langston has also started to organise mid-week work parties on Wednesdays, undertaking a range of smaller tasks that have often been difficult to complete in the past. Known in-house as 'the Last of the Summer Wine' parties, these additional, regular work parties make a very valuable contribution to the maintenance of our sites and belie the age profile of the participants!

### **Biological Recording**

We continue to record the wildlife of our sites with the help of many expert natural historians. We are particularly grateful this year to the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society, whose experts have made a series of visits to our sites, and contributed a huge volume of biological records from groups as diverse of diatoms and spiders. Star finds have been first records of hairy dragonflies in the valley and the re-appearance of green hairstreak butterflies and common lizards at Hinderclay Fen. Even the Frith, with its history of arable conversion and enrichment by pig slurry, produced over 55 species of fungi on a single late summer day. We now have a BTO "Constant Effort Site" for bird ringing at Hinderclay Fen, where some of our Trustees and other BTO volunteers set their nets in the same pattern, for the same time period at regular intervals through the breeding season each year. The scheme provides valuable information on changes in population size, breeding success and adult survival rates. The group ringed 9 kingfishers at this location during the summer and it appears that these lovely birds are breeding in the locality.

### **Membership**

At the end of the year our membership stands at 115 with many members being Friends of the Fens and signing the Gift Aid declaration, which allows us to reclaim tax at no expense to the member. These funds continue to be an important component of our unrestricted funds. The Board is grateful to Lindsay Medus for her work as membership secretary during the year.

### **Members of the Board of Trustees**

The Honorary Officer posts remained unchanged during 2007/08. At the end of the year the composition of the Board was as follows:

Jo-Anne Pitt (Chair and trustee nominated by Blo'Norton Parish Council)

Reg Langston (Honorary Treasurer and trustee nominated by Hinderclay Parish Council)

Nigel Clark (Vice-chair)

Helen Smith (Honorary Secretary)

Rowena Langston

Bob Hayward (trustee nominated by Redgrave Parish Council)  
Dan Haskin (trustee nominated by Thelnetham Parish Council)  
Peter Coster (trustee nominated by South Lopham Parish Council)  
Paul Brown  
Lindsay Medus (Membership secretary)

## **Funding our work**

### **Grants**

Our Heritage Lottery Fund 'Your Heritage' grant is now in its fifth and final year, and together with our Countryside Stewardship Agreement, has enabled us to achieve significant improvements to the Frith and the Lows. The Single Payment scheme also provided a small income for some of our sites. Additional funding for site management has been secured through the River Link Appeal. We would like to highlight a generous donation from the Will Charitable Trust to fund elements of our routine summer management work that are beyond the scope of our volunteer work force over the next three years.

### **The River Link Appeal**

The appeal has continued to be successful and provides a very important source of income for the charity. Much of this income comes from small charitable trusts and is the result of many letters of application throughout the year. Sarah Grieveson's work as our Appeal Director is supported by the appeal's Honorary Vice-patrons, The Most Hon the Marquess of Cholmondeley, Her Grace the Duchess of Grafton, GCVO and Dr Frederick Ratcliffe, CBE, JP, to whom we are also indebted.

### **Purchase and restoration of Parkers Piece and Bleyswycks Bank**

We have dealt with the need to raise these funds as a single major project involving land purchase and subsequent restoration. Purchase was supported by the Tubney Charitable Trust, the DJ Getty Jr Trust, Plantlife, the Kirby Laing Foundation, the Garfield Weston Foundation, St Edmundsbury Borough Council, the Fitzmaurice Charitable Trust and the Alan Evans Memorial Trust. We have received support from many organisations for the planned restoration work, including major contributions from the Tubney Trust, Biffaward and Plantlife. We are indebted to all of our funders for their generous support for this exciting project.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Little Ouse Headwaters Project is a voluntary, charitable organisation whose work is dependent on commitment, goodwill and financial support of individuals, partner organisations and sponsors. It does not employ any staff and so is entirely dependent on the volunteers who contribute in many different ways to its success. We gratefully acknowledge their hard work and support.

We are also grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund, Natural England, DEFRA, Biffaward, for their very substantial financial support in 2007-2008.

.....

The Little Ouse Headwaters Project- (LOHP) is a company Limited by guarantee and is governed under company law by Memorandum and Articles of Association. The Company's registered number is 4684054 and its charity registration number is 1098232. Its registered office is Waveney Cottage, Redgrave Road, South Lopham, Diss, Norfolk IP22 2JN

