



News from the Ouse

ISSUE NUMBER 12

December 2014

Nigel Holmes - river doctor

We were saddened to hear of the sudden death of Dr Nigel Holmes in October.

Nigel supervised the river channel restoration work on our stretch of the Little Ouse last year, and many LOHP members heard him give an enjoyable and inspirational talk at our 2013 AGM. He was a nationally recognised expert in river ecology and restoration techniques, and he brought enormous enthusiasm to all his projects. He will be very much missed by everyone who had the good fortune to work with him in the quest to improve the health of our rivers and restore their natural functioning in the landscape.

Jo Pitt



WELCOME

to the newsletter of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project. 2014 has been a wonderful year for wildlife, with the mild winter and long warm summer allowing many species to recover from the trials of last year. Although this is a welcome development, many of our familiar wild birds, mammals and insects are still suffering long term decline in their numbers in the wider countryside. While the reasons for this may not be completely clear, we know that maintaining a large enough area of suitable habitat is essential. Thanks to the efforts of our volunteers and contractors, and the support of our funders, our sites support an amazing amount of wildlife - **I'd like to thank everybody** for their contributions over the last year.

Jo Pitt, Chair

Q: What has 20 legs, walks very slowly and speaks Latin and Greek?

A: The group of moth experts who explored Betty's Fen and Hinderclay Fen in October!

The leaf-mining moths they were hunting don't have common names so the conversation was peppered with such tongue-twisters as 'Bucculatrix', 'Stigmella' and 'Phyllonorycter'.

The group was extremely welcoming to beginners, and showed clearly the delight of being able to search for these creatures anywhere - at any time. The mixture of habitats on the LOHP sites yielded a very rich species list, amongst them some nationally scarce species, and some which hadn't been recorded in west Norfolk before.

Read more on p5.



Nil desperandum!



Who's living in the gorse? See page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| School's action | 2 |
| Ash tree disease | 3 |
| Fab photo | 4 |
| 'Burrowing' moths | 5 |
| Owl triumph & tragedy | 5 |
| LOHP Creative Group | 6 |
| 'Small game' hunting | 6 |
| Mud and fungus | 7 |
| Membership + calendar | 8 |



Apologies for the mistake in 'News from the Ouse' Issue 11. The photo of Webbs' Fen on page 3 was by Arthur Rivett, not Reg Langston.

Garboldisham Primary School - learning on LOHP sites

Cherry Tree class children's summer paintings, based on Broomscot Common, were proudly made into a map on their wall in the autumn term. Rosemary Humphries, now working with the school as a volunteer, said, 'I'm really pleased with it. The children understood how to use the colours of the common to show the nature of the site. Pond and wet areas are to the left, grading towards the drier common to the right.'



Mapping and painting in one

Years 3 & 4 meet the bees

A beautiful October afternoon saw Rowan Tree Class's first visit of the school year to Broomscot Common. For some of these children it was their first visit so it needed to be special. Awe and wonder is an amazing teaching tool - this afternoon certainly fell into that category.

We had been told that there was a wild bees' nest hiding within the gorse bushes so we set out to explore. It certainly encouraged the children to look closely at the environment. They noticed colour and texture as well as signs of wildlife. Eventually the nest was spied. The gasps of amazement were audible, calming down took some time but it was worth it. Slowly and quietly the children crept closer to get the best view and take photos.

The children were very eager to observe and learn; community structure and communication were top of the agenda. The children made up their own bee dances, which were difficult to create and to follow. A new respect for bees emerged.



Some role play ensued to explain the roles of each type of bee and what their 'jobs' entail. The structure of the hive was studied and compared to 'bubble wrap!' 'It's an amazing sight, aren't we lucky to be able to see it,' was one comment.

Tamsin Young

Real, outdoor geography

In September, Beech Tree Class (Years 5&6) enjoyed a geography lesson on Broomscot Common, studying the difference between physical and man-made features. As Garboldisham is not blessed with large physical features such as mountains, waterfalls or cliffs the children had to think sideways. They looked at the almost pure sand at the entrance to the recreation ground and then followed how the soil changed, moving into stony, sandy soil on the southern part of the Common. They considered whether this was a good area to build a settlement or not.

Mary Feakes



Garboldisham Church Primary School still makes good use of both Broomscot Common and Scarfe Meadows.

To have these facilities within walking distance of the school helps staff enhance the curriculum, and provides the children with an appreciation of their local environment.

Mary Feakes,
Chairman of governors

How sick are our ash trees?

Pete Fox describes how volunteers are monitoring ash dieback

In June Anne Edwards, from the John Innes Centre, Norwich, ran a training course for LOHP volunteers to learn to recognise symptoms of ash dieback. This disease, caused by a fungus initially called *Chalara fraxinea* (now re-named *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) infects the vascular tissue of the leaf stems and twigs. It makes the leaves wilt and turn black and it discolours the bark.

In August and September, Becky Whatley, John Preston and I recorded ash dieback on the LOHP sites. (Huge thanks to Becky and John for their time and energy). We also number-tagged 101 trees to monitor the spread of the disease and its effect on individual trees over the coming years.



Sometimes it's hard to see what's going on up in the canopy

How does the disease work?

In late summer the fungus fruits on the leaf litter under the trees. The spores are borne on the wind up into the canopy where they settle. The fungus grows into the leaf and leaf stem. Where the stem joins the branch the fungus damages or blocks the vascular tissue. This kills the branch, twigs and leaves above the blockage. It seems that, in saplings, if affected twigs are close to the trunk then some or all of the trunk can be blocked, killing all of the tree above.

Where are all 'our' ash trees?

Our sites have a hugely variable number of ash trees. The Frith, The Lows, Webbs Fen, Parkers Piece, Bleyswycks Bank, Broomscot Common and Scarfe Meadows each had between one and seven. On Betty's Fen, Blo' Norton Fen, Hinderclay Fen and New Fen we could only record and tag sample trees because there were too many of them and not enough of us.

Is that ash sick or normal?

Recording infection was difficult because our inexperience meant we **couldn't always distinguish between** leaves dying from dieback or from other factors. Also, with large trees, the canopy is hard to see. Even so, there were some definite signs: two of the trees planted on Parkers Piece a few years ago and many of the small saplings on Blo' Norton Fen showed the typical symptoms. Having seen the dead leaves in association with darkened bark we felt more confident that the dead leaves on some larger trees were a symptom of the same condition. Overall the sites which had the highest numbers of trees infected were Blo'Norton/Bettys followed by New Fen and Hinderclay. Of course, these sites have the most ash.

Most trees look OK so far

The majority of trees were showing no sign of infection. Out of the 33 tagged trees on Hinderclay only four showed signs. At Blo'Norton and Betty's 18 out of 47 tagged trees showed probable

signs. These figures are slightly misleading because we didn't tag smaller trees for fear of damaging them. Unfortunately many of the saplings on Blo' Norton were quite badly affected. This can be seen from the recently replaced boardwalk.

Young trees die quicker

Smaller trees are inevitably going to die more quickly because of the way the disease works. Affected twigs easily make a blockage in the trunk which kills all the growth above. If all the saplings die there will be none to replace the large trees over time. By monitoring the tagged trees over the coming years we will be able to tell if any are showing resistance which might be passed on to offspring.

Pete Fox



Typical symptoms: darkened bark where an infected twig meets the trunk

Could you help?

With more people we could do an even better job.

If you would like to take part in re-surveying the trees next year please contact Pete through the LOHP e-mail enquiries@lohp.org or by phone on 07500 044587.



Arthur Rivett

A frozen moment

Arthur Rivett describes the joy he gets from capturing wildlife with his camera

Natural history photography has been a passion of mine for well over fifty years. As a youngster I started with an old Box Brownie camera and have progressed through to the latest digital cameras. I now use a Nikon D7000 SLR and a high spec Sony RX100 compact.

I have been involved with the LOHP since it was first set up and have built up a large collection of photographs taken throughout the project area, copies of which are in the project photographic library to be used for newsletters, displays etc. The picture shown was taken on a crisp clear day in February 2012 on Scarfe Meadows, looking west along the main stream. The only footprints to be seen in the snow were those left by the local

wildlife, particularly a fox as it did its rounds. The same picture taken now would be completely different as all of the dykes have been cleaned out and re-profiled, with a new sluice being installed to maintain a high water level, which will make them much better for wildlife.

Looking back at photographs taken at the beginning of the project it is very rewarding to see how restoration work is improving large areas for a wide range of wildlife, and is also providing wonderful places for local people to quietly enjoy.

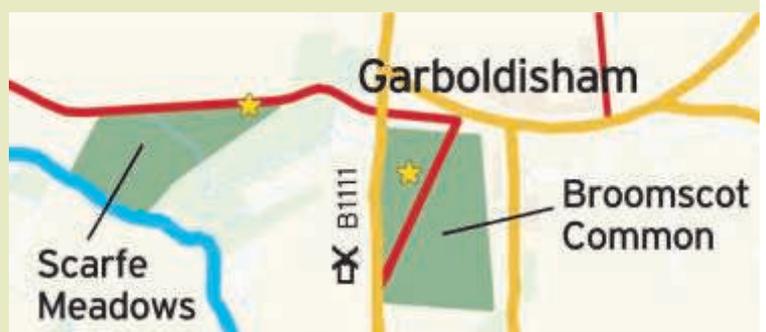
Long may it continue.

Arthur Rivett

Scarfe Meadows is a great place to explore

Don't let the cold keep you indoors. Crisp winter weather can turn any place into a dazzle of frost or snow. Complicated sets of tracks left in fresh snow, show very dramatically that these sites are home for hundreds of wild creatures which we never see.

Scarfe Meadows is in Garboldisham, near to Broomscot Common and **(like all the LOHP sites) it's open all the time.**



Life inside a leaf

Ken Saul (Norfolk moth group) and Tony Prichard (Suffolk moth group) led a joint expedition in October on both sides of the river, to record leaf-mining moths. They were joined by John Langmaid and Brian Elliott, national moth experts, who were kept busy identifying the more difficult species. Given that records are kept by county it was satisfyingly fair to spend the morning in Norfolk and the afternoon in Suffolk.

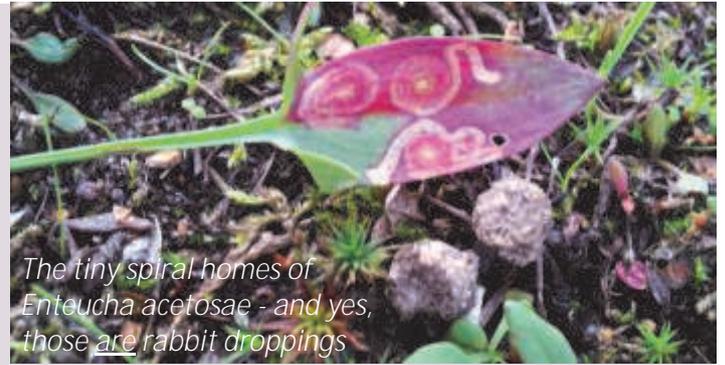
A bright beam of expertise Between them, these ten experts brought 308 years of moth-studying experience to focus on Betty's Fen and Hinderclay Fen. Moving slowly and scrutinising the leaves of every tree and bush they picked out the tiniest of mines on leaves high and low. Gradually the species total crept up to reach around 50 for each county.

Britain's smallest moth

All the moths which make mines are micromoths. But at Hinderclay, the group found the smallest of all. In beautiful spiral mines in sheep's sorrel leaves nestled caterpillars of *Enteucha acetosae*. With a wingspan of just 3mm, the adult moth is rarely seen, since, like most miners, it is not attracted to light. This was an exciting find since it's nationally scarce.



John Langmaid sorts out a tricky mine



The tiny spiral homes of *Enteucha acetosae* - and yes, those are rabbit droppings

Tiny farmers

The lives of leaf mining moths are complicated and varied. *Ectoedemia quinquella* caterpillars, for example, show that we are not the only species to change our environment to meet our needs. Here's a leaf mining moth which preserves an 'island of green' in a dying oak leaf, to provide itself with fresh food.



Good sites in good care

The group agreed that the LOHP's management of the sites has certainly improved them for wildlife. They hope to come back in summer and see what adult moths can be found using a light.

More info see: www.suffolkmoths.org.uk/; www.norfolkmoths.co.uk/ and www.leafmines.co.uk also the *Field Guide to the Micro-moths of Great Britain and Ireland*, Sterling and Parsons, British Wildlife Publishing.

Barn owl family - ups and downs

2014's owl drama on Hinderclay Fen sounds like the worst soap opera plot you ever read. When LOHP volunteers checked the barn owl box in early September there were three chicks. 'Probably these were a second brood, laid by a pair whose first brood failed,' said Reg Langston, who holds a special licence to check boxes and ring owls, 'This turned into one big fat chick on 19th when we checked again.'

Barn owls have a pragmatic approach to family life. When there are plenty of voles, a pair may rear several young, but in a lean year the oldest chick will eat the younger ones. This tough but efficient strategy avoids losing all the babies to starvation.

'2014 was a bumper summer for our local birds of prey', added Reg, 'Not just barn owls but kestrels as well. Even the runts were fat!' The pair in the nearby box on Thelnetham Fen (Suffolk Wildlife Trust) fledged four young this summer.

These boxes are all included in the hugely successful Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project active all across the county. Every LOHP site which has a chance of barn owls breeding now has a box.

Sad postscript

Alas for us - and for the owls - by the end of October this young bird was dead, though it had grown most of its proper feathers and was nearly old enough to fly. Maybe this was because the parents were inexperienced. We'll never know, but at least our sites are well set up for next year's breeding season.



R Langston

This owlet made good use of its siblings - but later it died too.

John Preston (right) putting up a new box, provided by Suffolk Wildlife Trust, on The Lows.

Scene of triumph and tragedy
This old owl box, (left) put up nearly 10 years ago on Hinderclay Fen, is visible from the Angles Way. Tawny owls have used it several times.



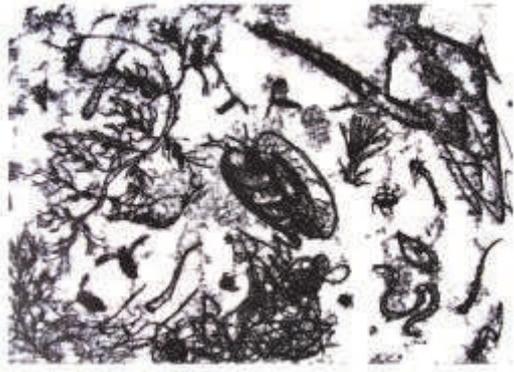
R Langston



R Langston

The LOHP Creative Group still going strong

Originally set up with grant money from the Heritage Lottery Fund the group continues to meet and share information useful to each other's practice. They meet monthly and invite a guest speaker or organise a site visit.



Becky Whatley

Portraits of aquatic life
September saw the group enjoying the first of two workshops with Shelia Tilmouth, funded by Arts Council, England, exploring the wildlife of Redgrave and Lopham

Fen (Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve, just on the Waveney side of the watershed) where Deborah Key organised pond dipping. 'We had a great deal of fun pond dipping and then drawing what we found crawling/hopping around in the water and printing up the results,' said the group's co-ordinator Lyn Bennett. 'Later we added colour and used pressed plant life to print with. Some very good artwork resulted from the two days thanks to Sheila's patience and encouragement.'

Sheila took a step-by-step approach and was very pleased with the prints which emerged. 'We used basic techniques of monoprint, plant stencils and overprinting to introduce basic printmaking techniques to anyone new to the skill,' she said. 'A second workshop next May will include making a linocut and using the press at Francis Cupiss Ltd in Diss to print the results.'

This workshop has limited places and is (at the moment) fully booked.

Tiny creatures – amazing lives
Helen Smith will give a talk about invertebrates on LOHP sites on Tuesday 24th Feb 6.30 - 8.30pm. Open to all creative group members.

New members welcome

The group offers a warm welcome to everyone interested in painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, poetry, prose, music and other media who would like to celebrate or be creative about this very special place. All levels of creative skills and local knowledge are very welcome. The group is planning to hold local exhibitions next year with the theme 'Life in the Fens'.

To find out more and to join the group, contact Lyn Bennett on lyn.bennett16@btinternet.com

This young newt was one of the biggest finds of the day



Lyn Bennett

The plan is to have a guided walk on one of the LOHP sites next May before the second workshop.

Volunteers preparing for 'small game' hunting

When you look at what we know about the wildlife of the LOHP sites, it's clear we know woefully little about the small mammals. Some of the Heritage Lottery Fund's grant money was therefore put to good use this summer to buy a set of traps, which catch small mammals alive and keep them safe until they can be identified and released.



Arthur Rivett

Having heard good reports of a new design of 'tube' trap on the market we bought some. These are proving to be just as effective at catching small mammals as the familiar Longworth trap design but have the advantages of being much cheaper, easier to use and carry and easier to keep clean.

Will the captives be comfortable?

Heat loss can be a problem for a mouse, vole or shrew trapped overnight but these traps are double-skinned so they keep the heat in better. The little captive is also able to snuggle into the bundle of hay provided. The bait on offer includes sunflower seeds for the vegetarian rodents, and castors (maggots to you and me) in case the trap attracts insect-eaters like shrews.

Successful tests

The new traps have been trialled this autumn to get some initial records and to establish the best places, times and ways to use them. Arthur Rivett, who is co-ordinating the survey, is delighted with the traps. On their very first trial outing - in his garden - he set just five traps and caught three different small mammal species: a wood mouse, a bank vole and a common shrew.

Look out for more details of the survey's progress on the LOHP website.

Conservation can be an extremely messy business



What's happened here?

'Foot drains' to help winter birds and spring chicks

These shallow channels - or foot drains - excavated by the RSPB's rotary ditcher on the Lows, will hold surface water in spring. Research shows that small, isolated areas of water in fields help attract wintering waterbirds and provide habitat for breeding waders and, in particular, their chicks which feed on invertebrates in wet mud at the water's edge. The ditcher throws finely-chopped spoil up to 30m away, allowing it to break down very rapidly. The work was funded as part of our Higher Level Steward scheme.



Hinderclay Fen's

October work party saw volunteers engaged in the centuries-old practice of digging 'turf ponds'. Years ago the diggers wanted the peat. Nowadays we want the holes, and the open water and wildlife which they attract.

Foot fetishists on the Common?

Should anyone have been passing Broomscot Common on Sunday 26th October they might have wondered why a group of people were wandering around all looking at their feet. **Not a shoe fetishists' convention but looking for fungi!** Su Gough from the British Trust for Ornithology had offered her expertise to help us identify them, so 27 of us (and three dogs) set out on the search and soon calls of, 'Found one' were heard. This continued over the next 3 hours whilst exploring Broomscot Common and some of Scarfe Meadow, avoiding the field containing the bull!

Poetic names for common and uncommon species
The final total was an impressive 30 species. Su explained that though the damp late summer and early autumn had made this a good year for fungi we would probably have found even more if it hadn't been so dry for the last two days. Nearly all species we found were fairly common but were still of interest and beauty - mostly! Some of them had self-explanatory names such as sulphur tuft, little Japanese umbrella, blushing bracket, toughshanks and little yellow cowpat fungus. We found edible species such as parasol, common puffball, wood blewitt and red staining mushroom and the prince. This last one is not common and is very tasty. We also found ivory funnel which is deadly poisonous and the false chanterelle which is hallucinogenic. Most significant



Common yellow club

finds were 2 species which indicate ancient grasslands: blackening waxcap, a family that is in decline, and common yellow club. Though not impressive to look at, this was probably the best find, as - despite its name - it is not common, and we found two extensive areas of it on Broomscot.

Worth a walk
Thanks go to Su for an enjoyable and illuminating morning. She thought the area worth revisiting and I would urge everyone to get out and have a look for themselves - though best not eat them - just in case!

Sue Lawrence



Di McDonald



Su Gough explains fungal structure

Di McDonald

Membership application (not renewals)

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Phone:

E-mail:

I wish to support the LOHP as a

| | | |
|---------------------|----------------|--|
| Ordinary member: | £2 a year | |
| Friend of the Fens: | £10 min a year | |
| Junior member: | 25p. a year | |

Please tick one category and write the amount paid for Friend of the Fens. Cheques payable to 'Little Ouse Headwaters Project'.

I wish to donate £..... to the Little Ouse Headwaters Project

I want all my subscriptions and donations to the LOHP to be Gift Aided until I notify you otherwise. I pay Income Tax/Capital Gains Tax at least equivalent to the value of my contribution.



Signed:.....

Dated:.....

Registered Charity No: 1098232

Note on renewals: All renewals are due in April. We send a letter to all members. Please **don't use this form to renew your membership.**

A big thank you to all those members who have sent donations along with their renewal. We greatly appreciate this extra support for **the work we're doing to enhance the valley and its wildlife.**

The LOHP needs you!

The LOHP relies on volunteers to run the charity and help with conservation (and other) work. Might you have some energy and some time?

If so we'd love to hear from you.

To get involved, and for more info, send an email to enquiries@lohp.org.uk or ring: Bev Blackburn, Volunteer Coordinator and Event Manager on 07747 691285 or Pete Fox, Hon. Secretary on 07500 044587.

Work parties

Get out and enjoy yourself whatever the weather at an LOHP work party or event. Work parties are monthly on Sundays (dates below) and weekly on Wednesdays.

Check details on the website or ring for information:

| | | | |
|--------|-----------------|------------------|----|
| 14 Dec | New Fen | Scrub clearance | PF |
| 11 Jan | Blo' Norton Fen | Scrub clearance | JP |
| 8 Feb | Broomscot Cmn | Sallow clearance | RL |
| 8 Mar | New Fen | Scrub clearance | NC |

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Pete Fox | 07500 044587 (New Fen) |
| Jo-Anne Pitt | 01379 898684 (Blo' Norton) |
| Reg & Rowena Langston | 01379 898009 (Broomscot) |
| Nigel Clark | 01379 890460 (New Fen) |

Ashes to Ashes: the latest on ash dieback

A talk by Professor Allan Downie + (short) AGM
Thursday Dec 4th 7.30pm Blo' Norton village hall

All welcome; free for members
Non-members - donation would be appreciated (£2).
Please bring a plate of food to share.

Winter Walk

Sunday Jan 4th - 10.30 am

Meet - Thelnetham Village Hall car park

All welcome, including polite dogs and owners on short leads.

Wear stout footwear and clothing appropriate to the weather.



Contact the LOHP

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