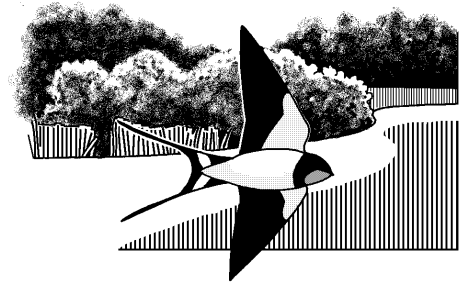


# Little Ouse Headwaters Project (LOHP)

## Members' Newsletter

April 2006



### **LOHP wins national award!**

We've always thought our project is a bit special, and now it appears we're not alone - as some of you already know, the LOHP has won the **CIWEM/RSPB "Living Wetlands Award" 2006** (CIWEM is the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management). This award is made annually and there were a record number of entries for the 2006 award. In winning the award we beat off competition from professional conservation organisations and commercial companies. This is a great achievement for the LOHP - our success is due to the commitment and hard work of all our volunteers and supporters, and the financial support we have received from funding bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, the EU TEN Project and DEFRA's Countryside Stewardship Scheme over the past few years.

The award consists of a cheque for £1500 towards our work, and the Mance Memorial Trophy - a bronze sculpture of a snipe, which will be proudly displayed at every possible opportunity! The award was announced on World Wetlands Day in February, and was presented at the CIWEM Annual Dinner in London on April 5<sup>th</sup> (our chair had to buy a posh frock!).

This award has generated lots of publicity for the project with items on local television and radio and articles in the EDP, EADT, Diss Express and, apparently, Drain Trader magazine (though we've yet to see evidence of that one).

### **TEN Project - the end in sight?**

Over the last three years the LOHP has benefited greatly from involvement in the EU Transnational Ecological Network (TEN) Project. In the UK this project covers parts of both the Little Ouse and Waveney valleys, with a number of different organisations involved. TEN has provided 50% funding for a number of our initiatives, including the restoration work at Betty's Fen and Hinderclay Fen, footpath improvements at Blo' Norton, production of information boards and perhaps most spectacularly the new footbridge over the river at Blo' Norton Fen, which was helicoptered into place last November.

The current TEN project is now almost over - the final event will be a three day international seminar at the end of April, which will include a field visit to a number of TEN project sites, including the LOHP. This will co-incide with the official opening of the new footbridge by the Chairs of Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils on 27<sup>th</sup> April.

We now have to look to the future, and those organisations that have been involved in the TEN project are considering the feasibility of a new EU project to carry on the work, or whether there are other ways of continuing to develop the links between the various people involved in managing the Little Ouse and Waveney, their surrounding wetlands and the wider river catchment areas.

### **River Link fundraising appeal**

Our Appeal continues to be successful - thanks to the efforts of Appeal Manager Sarah Grieveson we have now received, or been promised, a total of over £42,000 from a variety of charitable trusts. However, there is still more to do: in particular we need to raise funds to enable us

to secure the future of the routine management work on the sites, such as mowing sedge and maintaining footpaths.

### **Land management news**

Through the autumn and winter, work has continued to restore our wet fen sites. At Betty's Fen the peat scraped from the dried-out reedbed has been built up into a raised path across the site, from the road to the river bank, with a shallow mere on either side. The path surface has been strengthened with a "Netlon" mesh (laid in place by volunteers at a very wet and muddy work party). This is quite visible at present but will be hidden and stabilized by the growing vegetation by late summer. The path is currently closed to allow the work to be finished off, but will be open to all in the next few weeks. Much of the new mere is expected to colonise rapidly with reeds and sedges although we hope to maintain the deeper areas as open water. As we write, frogs and toads have already made it their home, with tadpoles expected in the near future!

Along the river bank at both Betty's and Blo' Norton Fens the larger willows have been pollarded (cut at around head height) to re-invigorate their growth and prolong their lives. This management technique looks rather drastic at first, but the trees will soon recover - some large willows on the edge of the Lows were pollarded a couple of years ago and have since put on a large amount of new growth. The dense knotted wood that grows where the branches are cut becomes very valuable for wildlife: holes in it provide homes for bats, birds and invertebrates. On river banks, these 'boles' are a favourite haunt of otters - so remember to look up as well as down when searching for these delightful animals! The path around Blo' Norton Fen has also been given an upgrade, with a mixture of Netlon and new boardwalk installed over the wettest sections (although it's so dry at the moment that they don't appear all that wet!). The boardwalk is constructed from recycled plastic, which is much more durable than timber.

On Hinderclay Fen the very deep pools excavated in the droughts of the early 1990s have been partially filled in, creating shallower ponds with less steep sides, which should be much more hospitable for wildlife. The high bank of spoil left by excavation of these pools, and which was thought to disrupt the natural drainage of the fen, has been levelled out.

The most spectacular feature of the Frith this winter has been the enormous pre-roost gathering of rooks and jackdaws that has literally turned the field black. Large flocks of fieldfares and redwings on both the Frith and the Lows shows that these fields are now providing a good source of both hedgerow berries and soil invertebrates. The other feature of both of these fields this winter has been the appearance of very comfortable and attractive oak benches, built and installed by Kenninghall craftsman, Pip Wittles. Sponsored by Radio Norfolk and the Aquarius Charitable Foundation, these have been positioned so that visitors can sit and enjoy the view over these lovely sites. Similar benches will be soon be installed on our other sites. On the Frith, volunteers completed another section of new hedge along the northern boundary, making of a total length of 400m planted over the last three years. The sheep have just returned to start work on the grassland for the summer.

Nest boxes have been appearing on all our sites, thanks to a generous donation to the River Link Appeal and the efforts of Reg Langston, Nigel Clark and Mike Wraight. The latest versions are made from recycled car seats and should last much longer than conventional wooden ones - they are also much more resistant to attacks by great spotted woodpeckers and squirrels which cause enormous damage to wooden nestboxes and occasionally result in losses of eggs and nestlings.

### **Events**

Since the last newsletter was published we've held a number of events. A very successful *Bat Walk* was held in September when, as well enjoying seeing Alto pipistrelles squeezing out between the door and arch at Thelnetham Church, and we recorded some exciting new species for the valley: our

bat detectors picked up the calls of Nathusias's Pipistrelle for which there are few UK records, Barbastelle, a species of Conservation Concern, and Serotine, an uncommon species restricted to southern England. Many thanks to Arthur Rivett and Nick Woods for sharing their expertise in bat identification - we hope to repeat the experience later on this year (see forthcoming events below).

Our *AGM* was held on 1<sup>st</sup> December in Blo' Norton Village Hall and was followed by a talk by Gerry Barnes, from Norfolk County Council, on Heritage trees and hedges in Norfolk. Thanks to all those who donated raffle prizes and bought the tickets - small fundraising events like this do help a lot. At the *AGM* we made some changes to the officers and trustees - Reg Langston stepped down as Chair and Mike Wraight as Hon. Treasurer - many thanks to them both for their hard work. However they both remain as Trustees, and haven't escaped yet - Reg has taken on the role of treasurer and Mike is now warden for the Frith. Jo Pitt is now Chair and Nigel Clark Vice-chair. Helen Smith has heroically agreed to continue as Hon. Secretary, and Peter Coster has joined the trustees as our publicity officer.

Winter walk - held just as we experienced a rather belated "white Christmas" on 27<sup>th</sup> December, this circular walk from South Lopham to the Little Ouse was attended by 20 people who braved a grey and snowy start and were rewarded with brilliant sunshine. LOHP trustee Rob Webb led us along the ancient green lanes and paths from the village to the fens through a sparkling snowy landscape.

### **Forthcoming events - Dates for your diaries**

#### **Work parties:**

We continue to hold practical work parties on the second Sunday of each month. In recent months we've planted more hedging on the Frith, cleared scrub on the wet fens at Hinderclay and Blo' Norton and laid "Netlon" mesh to protect parts of the path at Blo' Norton and Betty's Fens. Details of the programme for the next few months are at the end of this newsletter, and up-to-date information is posted on the website. Everyone is welcome - even if you can only spare a couple of hours it makes a real difference to what we can achieve on our sites, so with the warmer weather (hopefully) on the way, why not come and join in?

#### **Other events:**

Details of all events are posted on our web site, or you can phone or e-mail us for further information on times and meeting places - we usually carry on whatever the weather. Everyone is welcome to attend - we make no charges for these events, but donations are always welcome.

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Thursday 27th April</b> | <b>Official opening</b> of the new footbridge at Blo' Norton Fen at 11.30 - members are very welcome to attend  |
| <b>Sunday 21st May</b>     | <b>Dawn Chorus walk</b> - you'll have to get up early for this one - starting at 6am, come and hear the sounds of spring and, weather permitting, see a demonstration of bird ringing by BTO volunteers. Meet at Thelnetham Village Hall (TM 015782).       |
| <b>Sunday 11th June</b>    | <b>Frith and Lows Open Day</b> - co-inciding with a summer work party on the Frith. Details to be announced nearer the time (see our web site, but please note this will be a more low-key event than our big open day in 2004).                            |
| <b>Sunday 13th August</b>  | <b>Blo' Norton Fens Open Day</b> - again coinciding with a work party, visit Blo' Norton and Betty's Fen to see the recent restoration work and some of the wildlife of these sites - we're encouraging people to arrive on foot or by bicycle for this one |

**Friday 1<sup>st</sup> September**

**Bat walk** - an evening walk to see bats leaving their roosts and identify the species with local experts and their bat detectors

In addition, on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalist's Society are holding a field day on **Blo' Norton Fen**. Expert naturalists with many years experience will be recording the fauna and flora of our sites. Members are welcome to come along, although this isn't an official LOHP event.

The Suffolk Moth group will be recording at Hinderclay Fen on the evenings of Friday 26<sup>th</sup> May and 28<sup>th</sup> July from 9pm onwards. Again, the group would welcome LOHP members who would like to join them to see some of the nightlife of the fens.

### **Subscriptions**

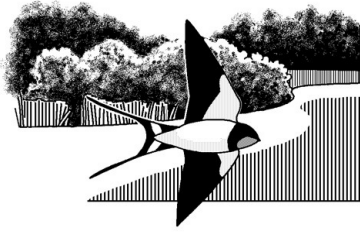
Annual subscriptions are due in April: your subscriptions renewal form should arrive by post. Our new membership secretary, Lindsay Medus, will be in happy to receive your renewals.

*We normally try to send our newsletters out to as many people as possible by e-mail, saving paper and reducing postage costs - if you currently receive the newsletter by post but would be happy to get an e-version, please let us know your e-mail address. Members who receive e-newsletters also receive work party reminders and other short communications by email. All the information in this newsletter, and much more, can also be found on our website at { HYPERLINK "http://www.lohp.org.uk" }.*

How to contact us:

Phone: 01379 687680, e-mail: { HYPERLINK "mailto:enquiries@lohp.org.uk" },

Post: Little Ouse Headwaters Project, c/o Waveney Cottage, Redgrave Road, South Lopham, Diss, Norfolk, IP22 2JN



## Little Ouse Headwaters Project

# Spring/Summer 2006 WORK PARTY PROGRAMME

Our work parties are held on the **second Sunday** in the month:

Date	Venue	Task
14 May	All sites*	Biological Recording*
11 June	The Frith	Rush cutting/raking
9 July	The Lows	Thistle/ragwort control
13 August	Blo' Norton Fen	Sedge cutting/raking
10 September	Hinderclay Fen	Sedge cutting/raking

All work parties start at 10-30am. Please come for as little or as much time as you like and bring your friends along - all contributions are valuable. You will need wellies or strong boots, old clothes and a drink. We will provide tools and gloves and other refreshments.

\*Experts and beginners all welcome - a chance to learn about and see more of the plants and animals in the valley

**Please don't be put off by bad weather! If it is too wet for the planned task we will meet at an indoor venue for nest-box-building and tool maintenance**

Venues can change, depending on weather and ground conditions, so for up-to-date information nearer the time, e-mail { [HYPERLINK "mailto:" }info@lohp.org.uk, look at our web site { \[HYPERLINK "http://www.lohp.org.uk" } or phone:\]\(http://www.lohp.org.uk\)](mailto:info@lohp.org.uk)

for Hinderclay Fen, Reg and Rowena Langston on 01379-898009

for Blo'Norton & Betty's Fen, Jo-Anne Pitt on 01379-898684

for the Frith and the Lows, Helen Smith on 01379-687680