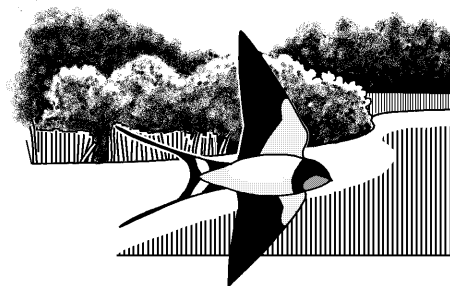


Little Ouse Headwaters Project (LOHP)

Members' Newsletter: April 2008



This time last year we wrote that 'the last few months have been relatively quiet ones for the LOHP': as you'll see from the letter below, this year has been very different!. Since we bought our new land holdings, Parker's Piece and Bleyswyck's Bank, in the autumn, the LOHP has been a hive of activity. We have been raising the funds for the restoration of fen habitats on the new land whilst maintaining active management of our six other sites and planning a major event to celebrate the achievements of our HLF grant for the Frith and the Lows.

Parker's Piece and Bleyswyck's Bank

Thanks largely to the continuing success of the River Link Appeal, we have raised the funds not only for the purchase but also for much of the restoration work - nearly £150,000 to-date. We are delighted to announce that this total includes a grant of £40,900 from Biffaward, one of the major Landfill Communities Fund schemes: it awards grants to community and environmental projects, using funds raised from landfill tax credits (the tax paid by landfill site operators) donated by Biffa Waste Services. We still need to raise another £30,000 to complete the public access and interpretation elements of the project next year. The LOHP is extremely grateful to Sarah Grieveson, our Appeal Director, for the enormous amount of hard work and expertise that she gives to this project.

Land management

At the end of February our contractors started to fell the plantation woodland on Bleyswyck's Bank. In little over a week the site was transformed, with all the dense rows of spindly trees removed and only the older oaks, field maples and sallows left standing. The removal of the tall Scots pines, that cast a cold shadow over Betty's Fen, was particularly rewarding, opening-up new views down the valley towards Thelnetham Windmill. The felling makes way for the restoration of fen habitats: much of the area should eventually resemble Thelnetham Fen (immediately to the south), with a mixture of open water, and flower-rich wet fen as well as areas of willow scrub and woodland. The next steps in the restoration are to fence the site for grazing and to lower parts of the surface to re-create suitable conditions for the establishment of some of the rarer fen plant communities. Public access will be opened next year, once contractors are off-site. Initially, the site will look very raw but, as at Betty's Fen, this phase will be short-lived, with new vegetation establishing very quickly.

The winter has seen the LOHP volunteers out in record numbers, undertaking many tasks including clearing the abandoned pig arcs from Parker's Piece, coppicing blackthorn at Betty's Fen to increase the amount of dense cover for breeding birds, and planting more new hedgerow and field trees on the Frith. In addition to our usual monthly Sunday work parties, Wednesday work parties have made a big contribution to site management.

On the Frith, a group of Southdown rams have kept the grazing going throughout the winter. The new lambs that replaced them just before Easter had an unexpectedly hard start in weather that felt - and looked - more like Christmas. The rams have moved to the Lows where they were joined by Dennis Jenkins' delightful cows, making a welcome return for the spring.

The LOHP sites now boast groups of very smart 'Woodcrete' bat boxes, funded through the Riverlink Appeal and installed thanks to the hard work of local bat experts Arthur Rivett and Nick Woods, together with Reg Langston and LOHP volunteers. We will report on their success in providing homes for the valley's bat species later in the year. Competition for our many bird boxes is now

underway - the kestrels on both the Frith and the Lows are in residence for the third successive year and can often be seen displaying over the fields, or sitting on their 'front door steps'.

Events

Our AGM in November saw a packed house at Redgrave's newly-extended Activities Centre for Prof. Tom Williamson's wide-ranging talk on historical perspectives on Norfolk's fields, woods and fens. We were pleased to welcome the Eye Group of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust as guests at the meeting and look forward to taking them on a guided tour of some of the LOHP sites at their May meeting. At the AGM Lindsay Medus, who many of you will know as our Membership Secretary, was appointed as a trustee, having been co-opted by the Board of Trustees earlier in the year.

Our now traditional Winter Walk over the Christmas holidays attracted 26 people and almost as many dogs for a tour of the valley, starting and ending at the White Horse in Thelnetham.

Geology

A transcript of the talk given by Professor Richard West at our 2006 AGM is now available as a pdf file on our website (follow the Landscape/Geology link on the left-hand menu). His theory on the formation of the Little Ouse-Waveney Valley and its fens is also described in the 2007 edition of 'Suffolk Natural History' (Transactions of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society, 43). The detailed evidence supporting his theory will be published by the Suffolk Naturalists Society later this year. If you missed his talk, do read one of these publications - it will transform your view of our landscape!

Forthcoming events - Dates for your diaries

Sunday 29 June -The Frith Fayre will be a celebration of the success of our Heritage Lottery Fund 'Your Heritage' grant. As some of you will know this grant was the first major funding award for LOHP, and along with others, has enabled us to turn the Frith and Lows from impoverished nettle and rubbish-strewn pasture to well managed wildlife rich fields, open to the public with permissive paths, and increasing in their biodiversity.

Many of you will remember the first event we ran on the Frith in 2004, at the start of much of the work. Despite being a wet day, the Trustees and volunteers were amazed at the attendance which we estimated at 600, judged from the number of times we had to keep increasing the size of the car parking area.

This time we can't promise you fine weather but can promise many of the same attractions such as working sheep dogs, barn owls, hog roast, tea and coffee and guided walks. There will be more this time. We will have a thatching demonstration, beer tent and photographic display to name a few. We will also have live music. The full list of events is being continually expanded. A display of all our sites and their development will also be prominent.

So, please put **29 June** into your diary: further details will be posted on our web site (www.lohp.org.uk) nearer the time. With such an ambitious event, the LOHP trustees would appreciate help. If you could help in the run-up to the event or on the day, even for a short time, we would be most appreciative. Please contact us by phone (numbers below) or e-mail (enquiries@lohp.org.uk)

Work parties

Details of the programme for the next few months are given below and up-to-date information is posted on the website. Everyone is welcome and even if you can only spare a couple of hours it still makes a real difference to what we can achieve on our sites. In the last year volunteers have contributed over 380 hours of work to the management of our sites. Over the last five years they have contributed £20,000 as 'in kind' match funding towards our Heritage Lottery Fund 'Your Heritage' grant on the Frith and the Lows.

Access

With the exception of our new land during the restoration phase (see above) all our sites are open for you to visit at any time. We welcome dogs if kept under close control - please remember always to keep your dog on a lead when there are grazing stock on site and during the bird breeding season. Many ground-nesting species of birds use the LOHP sites and are easily disturbed by dogs, to the extent that they may abandon their nests. Our sites have a mixture of public and permissive footpaths, so not all the paths will appear on Ordnance Survey maps - do contact us, or check on the website ('where to walk' on the left-hand menu) if you're not sure where the paths are. Please note that the paths we maintain are for pedestrian access only and are not suitable for cycling or horse riding.

Spring/summer 2007 Work Party Programme

Date	Venue	Task
13 April	Parkers/Bleyswycks	Fence line clearance
11 May	The Frith	Thistle control
8 June	The Frith & Lows	
13 July	Hinderclay Fen	Mowing/raking fen meadow
10 August	Blo' Norton Fen	Path and sedge cutting

All work parties start at 10-30am and are on the second Sunday of each month. 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.

Venues can change, depending on weather and ground conditions, so for up-to-date information nearer the time email enquiries@lohp.org.uk, look at our web site www.lohp.org.uk or phone:
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

How to contact us:

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