

WANT TO HELP YOUR LOCAL WILDLIFE?

IT'S EASY TO GET INVOLVED IN....

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AT PAXTON PITS

SUNDAY WORK PARTY NEWSLETTER AND PROGRAMME

October 2011 - March 2012

These Working Parties are organised by the Friends of Paxton Pits Nature Reserve and supported by Bardon Aggregates and Huntingdonshire District Council Countryside Services



Welcome to the Sunday Work Party newsletter and programme for the 2011/12 season.



Feel free to join us in these varied wildlife management activities. We are a very sociable group and our first job is always to put the kettle on!

- No previous experience is needed.
- We'll show you how to do the work.
- Range of tasks to suit all abilities, energies and ages.
- Meet new friends who also enjoy wildlife and the open air.
- Find out how management benefits wildlife.

Your work will make Paxton Pits an even better place for wildlife!



We would like to thank Bardon Aggregates for their considerable support given to the Sunday work parties.



The Countryside Services rangers are an integral part of the Sunday work party activities and we are very grateful for their help and guidance.

Sunday 2nd October- **Willow coppicing on Hayling Lake**

This reed bed is a valuable habitat for a variety of birds and insects and has recently been host to the rare Norfolk Hawker dragonfly. We will be continuing the willow removal programme and should be able to join together the two sections of reed bed.

Wildlife note

There are a number of birds that breed in the reed beds. The reed warbler and reed bunting tend to prefer the reeds themselves whereas sedge warbler and Cetti's warbler tend to be found in the drier more scrubby areas on the edge of the reed bed.



Sunday 23rd October- **Pond management**

Q (see notes inside back page)

There is a pond on the quarry that is an important habitat for the Great Crested Newt. Whilst we try to minimise disturbance to this area, we need to manage the encroaching willows to maintain the habitat. If left unmanaged the pond will become over-shaded and the excessive leaf fall will lead to it silting up. This reduces the viability of the pond as a breeding site for newts as there will be fewer suitable positions for egg laying.

Wildlife note

The Great Crested Newt is our largest and most threatened newt and is protected by law. Not only do they require a pond for breeding, they also need a large area of terrestrial habitat. Young newts leave the water when they are able and can spend up to three years in the surrounding area before needing to return to water to breed. Adult newts can travel large distances, say 500m, to find suitable habitat.

Sunday 13th November- Pumphouse Pit shoreline

Q (see notes inside back page)

There have been major changes to Pumphouse Pit over recent years. There are now some very shallow gradient banks, ideal for wading birds, and two vertical banks built for Sand Martins. When established this will be one of our best habitats. It is important to control willow regrowth along the shoreline to maintain this habitat.

Wildlife note

The profiling of the banks of ex-gravel quarry pits has a major impact on the future success as a habitat. The older pits on the Reserve have near vertical banks and so are susceptible to water level changes. The long shallow gradient on Pumphouse Pit, down to 1 in 40, means that whatever the water level there will always be shallow habitat for wading birds and marginal plants.

Sunday 4th December- Island Pit silt marsh

Q (see notes inside back page)



Image: Mike Thomas

This area is part of the SSSI and is an important habitat for invertebrates. A recent study has shown that the encroaching willow trees have reduced the viability of the habitat so our job will be open up the area.

Wildlife note

Dragonflies and damselflies are amongst our most spectacular invertebrates and have been around since the dinosaurs with hardly any changes. Although they spend most of their life as nymphs crawling about in the sediment they are best known as adults for their bright colours and amazing flying ability. The four wings on a dragonfly act independently. Not only can they hover and fly backwards but they can hit 15 meters per second from a stationary start! Perhaps it's not surprising then to find out that a substantial part of military research budgets is being spent on trying to work out how they do it!!

Sunday 8th January- **Sailing Lake Islands**

Our annual mowing and vegetation control on the two islands maintains the right habitat for a common tern colony and nesting waders. A recent spraying experiment has worked well so the plan is to follow up our mowing work with further spraying before the terns and waders return for the season.



For this work party meet in the Sailing Club car park. Wellies useful for getting in and out of the boat.

We thank Paxton Lakes Sailing Club for support for this work.

Sunday 5th February- **Pumphouse Pit North Scrub**

Q (see notes inside back page)

Continuing with the management work started last year to expand the clearing in the scrub area to the north of the pit. The Wildlife Monitoring Group completed a survey here last April and picked up encouraging signs of early flowers and early butterflies in this area.



Wildlife note

You may remember that this time last year we did a bit of scrub clearance on the bank at the bottom of the Meadow to encourage the growth of the Field Scabious colony. This has worked well and a survey has found up to 30 plants (now marked with green milk container tops)!

Sunday 19th February- **Hedge planting**

Q (see notes inside back page)

Today we will be extending the hedgerow that we planted along the boundary of the fields by Pumphouse Pit Meadow. The initial take last year was very good despite the wet ground but the later drought did a bit of damage so we have a bit of infilling to do as well.

Sunday 4th March- **Southoe Brook**



Image: Howard Birley

The vegetation on the banks of the brook is periodically cut and removed to maintain the biodiversity of the margins. The habitat is valuable for waterside flowers, dragonflies and damselflies. It is also an important route for otters moving between the River and the Heronry Lakes.

Wildlife note

The Otter is an iconic species of the river and we are lucky to have them visiting the Reserve. Otters are very territorial and live alone for most of the time. A typical territory is 11 miles long and is defended against members of the same sex. Hunting takes place mainly at night so we are only likely to see them early morning or late evening. Otherwise we are reliant on finding spraints (poo) or paw prints to tell us of their existence.

Sunday 25th March- **Sycamore removal on Heron Trail**

Although Sycamores are nice trees and their timber is good for furniture the invasive nature of the species does make them a problem on the Reserve. We will be removing selected trees from along the Heron Trail before they get out of hand.

This is our last work party of the programme so the normal bribery (bacon butties) applies.

Please note:



Working Parties are run under conditions set by Huntingdonshire District Council.

Volunteers must be aged 16 years or over.

All work parties start at 9.30 a.m. and go through to somewhere around 1.00 p.m.

Work parties with a **(Q)** notation are taking place in the quarry so you need to be at the Visitors' Centre by 0930 to pick up transport. There is no other access to the quarry.

With one exception (8th Jan 2012), other work parties take place on the Reserve. Meet at the Visitors' Centre at 0930. If you are coming later, follow the direction map provided at the bridge-end of the car park.

Wear stout footwear and warm clothing. Tools, safety equipment and refreshments are provided.

Bad weather alert system. Sometimes we have to cancel work parties at short notice due mainly to the wet weather making conditions unworkable. We operate an email alert system where a note will be sent on Friday or Saturday if there is a probability of cancellation. If you wish to be alerted in this way please make sure we have your email address.

How do we know what to do?

You will notice references to a number of wildlife surveys in this programme, some completed by our own Wildlife Monitoring Group and some by external organisations. The data from these surveys is used to inform the management plans for the Reserve and for areas currently in the quarry.

Many of the volunteers in the WMG are new to survey work and the programme includes a number of training courses. We have recently had very good courses on the identification of fungi and on the life cycle and identification of dragonflies and damselflies.

If you would like to join this group please contact Mike Thomas.

If you have any questions concerning this Programme, please contact David Cobham (01480 475576), Ray Matthews (01480 215277) or Mike Thomas (01480 387749).

If you'd like to volunteer during the week, contact Jim Stevenson (01480 406795).

Health & Safety

Many of us are aware of the increasing emphasis on health and safety issues in this modern world. This applies as much to the volunteer work that we do as to anything else. Some of the precautions we need to take are obviously dependent on what we are doing and on the site itself. However there are a number of precautions that are universal and are listed below.

Remember - do not work alone.

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| Clothing | Wear clothes that protect you against the weather, including sun and the work e.g. skin abrasions, cuts, dust, plant sap, flying debris. |
| Footwear | Use boots that protect and support with a good tread, preferably with steel toecaps. Wellies if needed. |
| Fitness | Only attempt what you are personally capable of. Work at a rate that matches your own level of fitness. |
| Slips & Trips | Check for uneven ground, steep slopes, wet ground, dense ground vegetation, accumulated debris, trenches and holes. |
| Handtools | If you don't know how to use a specific handtool ask the leader. Pay particular attention to the condition of blade and handle. Grip is reduced if wet or using gloves! |
| Workspace | Be aware of what's happening around you; allow plenty of room. Make sure a fellow volunteer is aware of your approach into their workspace. Use voice warnings. |
| Health | Ensure wounds stay clean. Cover wound and wear gloves. Make sure your anti-tetanus is up to date. |
| Lifting | Always lift and carry safely. Use arms and legs and not the back. |
| Digging | Use arms and legs, and not the back. Stop when tired. |