

Boughton Fen Newsletter 2009



YOUR NEWSLETTER!

We can't believe that over a year has passed since our inaugural newsletter, how time flies!

We hope you enjoy our second offering with further information of the activities being performed 'behind the scenes' by the Boughton Fen Committee and the progress of the work being performed on the Fen by the various working parties, specialists contractors and nature groups.

To supplement this Newsletter information is regularly placed in Group4 News, on the Village Notice Board, presented at Parish Council meetings and available on the internet website www.group4news.co.uk. We hope you enjoy this latest Newsletter and would be grateful for any feedback you may have and we look forward to welcoming you to any of our future activities or events.

If you are new to the village and would like a copy of our first newsletter, then please contact Angela on 501335 or look on the website.

The Boughton Fen Committee

TARKA THE OTTER

We have been honoured with sightings of Tarka and friend in Stringside Drain, by the appropriately named Otter Bridge. The Badgers and both species of deer (Roe and Muntjac) continue to do well on The Fen. Less welcome was the Mink that had been sighted from time to time during the spring and early summer. The really good news is that the Otters (being the dominant species) may have displaced the Mink.

After the discovery of a Harvest Mouse nest a couple of years ago, the Reed Cutters found no less than 4 nests this year. Though seen very rarely, there is clearly a sustainable population on The Fen.

WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

During January and February 2009 successful working parties removed all stumps on the ride into Highland Fen and created a further pathway. Two benches were installed along Stringside Drain, one near Otter Bridge and one halfway between the two bridges. In addition to that smaller working parties also worked to clear some of the re-growth of willow on Highland Fen.

In March our scrub clearance contractor cut down an area of thick dense scrub in the north eastern corner of Highland Fen. At times this work was carried out in very wet conditions with Lee of Greenfingers and his men accessing the site in waders for the majority of the work. Lee and his gang of merry men came back in the Autumn and cleared various pockets of scrub on Middle Fen.

The ride into Highland Fen and the path along Stringside Drain have been mowed and maintained by an army of enthusiastic volunteers, especially Geoff Proctor for turning out with his tractor and cutter when required and David Cooper with his heavy duty mower. We are also greatly assisted by the Environment Agency who alternate cuts along Stringside Drain. Keeping the paths mowed allows you, the people of Boughton easy access onto the Fen.

BIRDS GLORIOUS BIRDS

After breeding successfully in 2008, our Marsh Harriers were less fortunate this year. A nest was built but sadly the breeding attempt failed. Perhaps the local foxes, who are doing rather better than we would like, were responsible.

For the vast majority of species 2009 represented a superb breeding season. No less than 72% of the 167 Reed Warblers trapped and ringed during July and August were juveniles. The equivalent figures for Sedge Warbler were 68% of 79 birds, and for Blackcap 86% of 42 birds.

A Long-tailed Tit ringed back in 2003 was re-caught during the summer, when it was a little over six years of age, impressive for such a tiny "ball of feathers" that weighs a mere 7 grams or so. The rarest bird of the year was a Hawfinch which was caught and ringed during February. This was the first ever to be identified on The Fen. Another first was a pair of Cetti's Warblers that appeared during the spring and probably bred. This was less unexpected since the species is expanding its range in Britain. The first ever record of Cetti's Warbler in Norfolk was as recent as 1973.

Of The Fen's "speciality birds" two pairs of Nightingales and 3 pairs of Grasshopper Warblers bred during the year. The Willow Tit retains its tenuous hold on The Fen, and although this species is declining dramatically at a national level, at least one pair still remain with us and may have bred.

BLESS OUR FEN

On the 17th May as part of the Rogation Service, a number of Parishioners, carried on Geoff Proctor's trailer, met up with Parishioners from Beachamwell, Eastmoor and Barton Bendish, and en-route The Fen and its' wildlife was blessed by Robin Blackall and he also blessed the water in Stringside Drain which brings life to the area.

REED ON.....

In October we employed 'Jed the Reed Cutter' to cut an area of reeds, approximately 1.25 acres on Middle Fen. This is a first 'proper' cut in many, many years. David Cooper tells a story of a guy who used to regularly set fire to the Fen to clear the reeds and as a consequence of his actions occasionally ended up in jail. Thankfully we have much more modern (!), safe, lawful methods nowadays. Trouble is it involves an awful lot of hard work.....

Once the reeds had been cut we made contact with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) in Norwich and nine volunteers arrived towards the end of October and cleared almost half the cut reed in a day. Whilst they were clearing the reed we, the Committee, watched them at work and we were able to pick up the 'expert techniques' of reed clearing – or so we thought! Watching those volunteers was hard work but the hard work was yet to come with 'Reed Clearing' work parties on 14th and 29th November and 5th December. After attending one of these working parties an enthusiastic 'reed clearer' was quoted as saying "I ache in places I didn't even know existed". As you read this newsletter there is still some clearing of reeds to be accomplished before the re-growth of reeds in the Spring – so if you are handy with a sturdy garden fork or, even better a traditional hay rake then we welcome you with open arms!

FUN(D) RAISING EVENT

Due to popular demand, Allan, with assistance from another bird enthusiast Andrew Goodall kindly agreed to host another Dawn Chorus.

On the 10th May we met up at the Fen at 4:30 am (although one of us arrived ½ an hour early! Give you three guesses?) and we enjoyed an amazing early morning of bird song. Once again a very informative 'walk and talk' providing us with insight to the birds that inhabit the Fen. We were lucky enough to hear a pair of cuckoos attracting each other with their call. The event was drawn to a close with breakfast served on Highland Fen, coffee and bacon rolls going down a treat. £185.64 was raised.

GUIDED TOUR

Do you know where **your** Fen is? Have you ventured up there yet? Would you like to know more, if so then we are willing to meet you up at the Fen and point out the three areas of Boughton Fen, access into the Fen, hopefully see some interesting wildlife and answer any questions. Contact Angela on 501335 to register your interest.

IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE FEN TODAY YOU'RE IN FOR A BIG SURPRISE.....

During September there were two separate sightings of a Melanistic Leopard - a Big Black Cat to you and me! This is not the first time that we have heard reports of sightings although the others were a good few years ago. Is there one or not? The first with a corroborated photograph wins first prize!

FEN HISTORY

There once stood a chapel on the Fen. About 1907, a Miss E.A. Pratt (housekeeper and niece of Richard Harwin) financed the building of a small chapel for the residents of Boughton Fen. Unfortunately it no longer stands.



MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

In our last newsletter we explained that by entering into Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) with Natural England we would receive funding to maintain and restore Boughton Fen. Our first payment of £2,206 arrived in February and the same amount in August. Without this income we would not be able to clear the scrub as was done in March and November or have the reed cut in October.

We were also able to purchase specific tools to assist with the clearing of reeds, these were purchased from Bonnetts and we thank them for the discount given! It is much appreciated.

DO(N'T) FENCE ME IN

An on-site meeting was held with the Open Spaces Society in May regarding our intention to fence part of Highland Fen for grazing. The OSS have confirmed that they may not fully oppose our Section 38 application, which we consider to be good news! Also, our fencing plans have been publicised to ensure interested parties, such as rights holders, are informed of what we are doing. It is hoped that the fencing detail and all documentation can be completed fairly soon and sent to the Planning Inspectorate.

Mike Bushby from Beachamwell came to the 'Boughton Fen through the Seasons' evening and was very impressed with what we are doing, in fact so impressed that he very kindly gave us about 700m of fencing wire. If we bought this new it would have cost us about £500. Thank you Mike, a most welcome donation.

IT'S OUR PARTY.....

.....and we'd love you to be there. A WORKING PARTY that is! Please come along and help us. Our dates for 2010 are Sunday **21st February** and Sunday **14th March**. Look out for details on the village notice board and in Group 4 News or contact Mark on 01366 500461 for more details nearer the time.

AND FINALLY.....

A huge thank you to those of you that have supported us during our second year, it's no mean feat maintaining a 44 acre fen but with your continued help and contributions we feel that we can achieve our aims.