



### Langdyke September Update

It has been a while since the last Langdyke newsletter – many apologies, but I hope that you have all received, read and enjoyed your copies of the Langdyke annual report 2005. Please do let us have your feedback on the report and tell us how we can improve it in future years.

It has been a relatively quiet summer for the Trust following the very successful official opening of Swaddywell Pit on 15 July. Thank you to all of you who were able to attend on the day and to all of you for your support for the establishment of the reserve.

On which note, can we ask you please to **consider renewing your membership** of the Trust if you haven't already. We do absolutely depend on the income from membership to pay for the lease of the top field and the management of the whole site.

In the natural world, all the sights and sounds point to the end of summer I am afraid.

Many of our summer migrants have already left – swifts of course disappear in early August. But the flocks of house martins flying around the centre of the village remain and swallows too can be seen flying through on their way to Africa. House martins are one of our latest nesting birds, with occasional reports of young

in nests into October. Most of them will be gone by early October, although odd birds will stay around until the middle of the month. Interestingly, no one has ever discovered exactly whereabouts in Africa most house martins go for the winter – perhaps they really do hibernate in the bottom of ponds!

Another very conspicuous bird at the moment, but by sound rather than sight, is the tawny owl. A pair is busy establishing its territory in Royce Wood and can often be heard calling along Broadwheel and Heath Roads just before dusk. Tawnys are unusual in that they establish territory in autumn and then start nesting early in the New Year.

I have a suspicion they nested this year in one of the owl boxes we have put up in the wood, certainly I saw a young owl in June sitting just above the box. But one thing you should never do is inspect an owl box – tawny owls are very aggressive. The famous bird photographer, Eric Hoskins, lost an eye getting too close to nesting tawnys!

The dragonfly season is rapidly coming to a close for this year. All species will have emerged as adults before the end of July and as they come to the end of their lives, the numbers "on the wing" gradually will decline until, by the end of September only the migrant hawk, ruddy darter and common darter are still around. Of these only the common darter will survive October and may still be seen flying in sheltered spots on warm autumn days into November and early December before the frosts finally finish them.

However all is not lost, the adults will have done their job by laying eggs in and around our wetland areas. The next generation will, in some cases, have hatched and are already growing ready for next summer.

## Swaddywell

It is a fairly quite time of the year at Swaddywell at the moment, with the flowers gradually dying away and few birds or insects to be seen.

One thing that does literally stand out at the moment though are the giant puffballs on the top field. These edible (quite good fried up in butter with salt and pepper) fungi have grown well this year, with one, in particular, growing to the size of a small dog, visible from quite a distance and surrounded by at least eight smaller – football sized – puffballs.

At the moment our flock of Hebridean sheep (now numbering 51 sheep and 1 ram) are at Wansford, grazing a meadow there. They will be coming back at the end of this month, joining the half dozen Dexter cattle currently on site and doing battle throughout the winter with the rank grass and bramble.

### Devil's Coach Horse

A strange looking – but relatively common – beetle that turned up at Swaddywell recently (under a sheet of corrugated iron left behind from the days of the race track) is the strangely named Devil's Coach Horse.

In mythology this beetle was a symbol of corruption, apparently able to kill on sight! It is said that it appears after meeting with the devil and that it will eat sinners!!

In fact it is a rove beetle, a carnivore and a scavenger, feeding on spiders and smaller beetles.

It defends itself by raising its tail and squirting two nauseous smelling chemicals from its glands whilst snapping its jaws!

Lovely!

## Walks and Work Parties

The next Langdyke Walk is on 23 October – a fungal foray at Bourne Woods, meeting at the Post Office at 13:30

After that there is a visit to the Nene Washes on Sunday 27 November (meet at Helpston post office at 1400), a great chance to see owls, birds of prey, swans and ducks. Wrap up warm!

We are also planning a series of work parties throughout the winter and will send out dates shortly. At least one will combine work with a bonfire as last year.

Some of these events will be at Swaddywell, but we also have some work to do at the school and we are hoping to start working at Maxey Quarry too, where this winter sees the start of the planting of the reed-bed and wet woodland as part of the restoration of the land. In time this will produce a fantastic wildlife habitat.

## Contacts

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