



Langdyke Countryside Trust Winter 2005-06

Nature round-up

Snow and ice at Christmas? About as likely surely as butterflies in November? Whether it is the result of global warming or just the plain old unpredictable English weather, the last three months have certainly been varied!

Winter seemed on its way with the arrival of a flock of redwings in Helpston on 16th October, with fieldfares turning up shortly afterwards. But warm, sunny weather in early November brought less seasonal sightings of butterflies - red admirals, small tortoiseshells – and dragonflies – red darters and migrant hawkers.

Hornets too were very active late in the season, with a very prominent nest visible in one of the nest boxes on the main ride in Royce Wood, the nest cells covering the outside of the box, like some kind of honey coloured veil!

The more recent wintery weather has brought in large numbers of winter birds to Swaddywell, with flocks several hundred strong recently, feeding in the game cover and at the bird feeders. They are mainly made up of yellowhammer, greenfinch, reed bunting and tree sparrow, but Trevor Valentine reported a couple of bramblings in early December.

Not surprisingly such large numbers of small birds attracts birds of prey too, with a male merlin hunting across the reserve on 21 and 24 December. Buzzards, kestrels and sparrowhawks are also regularly seen in the area. There were two buzzards flying over Heath Road on 5 November and several people reported red kites over Helpston again.

Winter ducks were also back in good numbers at Bainton and Maxey Pits. Wigeon started arriving from northern Europe in late September with over 100 at Bainton by 1 October. There are also between 15-20 goldeneye and great crested grebe and three red crested pochard, a

relatively rare visitor – the male is an unmistakable bird, looking like a punk rocker of the duck world, with a bright orange head!

Maxey Pits is always a great place for bird watching in winter and this year was no exception. By early January there were up to 20 goosander on the pits, but of most interest was the arrival of a couple of hawfinch in early January. The starling roost too has been a pretty impressive sight recently with over 2,000 birds wheeling above the pits on 3 January.

There have also been several reports of water rail at Bainton – with one seen flying along the drainage channel, north of the main pit on 30 October, another in late December and one flying along the side of the main pit on 5 January.

Badgers have been the latest animal to take up residence at Swaddywell in recent months. We first noticed signs of activity there in the late summer and there is now a fully developed set, with a pair of badgers.

Maxey Quarry

Over the last three months the Langdyke Countryside Trust has been discussing with Tarmac how to involve the local community in the creation of the new wildlife habitats on the old workings at Maxey Quarry. You may have noticed a lot of activity in the sunken pit area as you drive north out of Etton. This area will see the creation of a large reed bed and wet woodland over the next few years and we are keen to offer opportunities for the communities to be involved from the start.

We will be holding, in conjunction with Tarmac, an open morning at Maxey Quarry at 1000 on 11 March. This will involve walks around the site and a chance to get your hands dirty planting trees.

As this is a new venture for the Trust, we do hope as many of you as possible will come along and see this new site for yourselves.

Pickworth Quarry

Talking of new sites, we are also in the final stages of completing the purchase of our second reserve at Pickworth, near Stamford. If all goes well, we will establish a nature trail at this small site, which contains the nineteenth century lime kiln where John Clare worked in the 1820's. Once we have completed the purchase we will hold an opening event at Pickworth and invite you to come and see the site yourselves.

Bridges to Nature

Froglife, the national wildlife charity, is running a 'Bridges to Nature' project with communities in Peterborough to help increase understanding of the rich array of wildlife that lives on the former gravel and brick pits that surround the city.

The Trust is working with Froglife to promote this project in the Helpston, Etton, Maxey, Bainton and Ufford area and we will be jointly holding a number of events in 2006, including a couple of evening talks. For further details see the events schedule.

Ufford Parish Council

We are delighted that Ufford Parish Council has once again offered financial support to the management work at Swaddywell.

This year Ufford PC has offered £350 for the installation of two new gates at Swaddywell, to provide easier access for elderly and disabled people and indeed for anyone (including me) who struggles with the stiles we have there at the moment! This grant is very much appreciated.

Barnack Wildlife Watch

We were delighted to welcome members of Barnack Wildlife Watch to Swaddywell on 18 December. Nine children plus parents visited the reserve. We are planning another visit in the summer.

Events 2006

Attached with this update is our events calendar for 2006. We would be delighted to see as many of you as possible at the events, but would also welcome your feedback on the programme and how it can be improved to reflect your interests, in terms of the timing – and nature - of the events.

Membership

Many thanks to all of you who renewed your membership this year and a big welcome to our new members. Membership now stands at nearly 90 households.

Botolph's Barn

The Trust has also been working with the Botolph's Barn committee to help create an exhibition in the barn, including interpretation boards looking at different aspects of the natural heritage around Helpston and the connection with John Clare. The exhibition will have a web site, including Langdyke web pages which will contain details of all our projects and events. We will let you have details in due course.

Winter Fayre

Many thanks to all those involved in the Christmas Fayre on 26 November, especially Jean Revell. The tombola raised

over £200 for the Trust which will fund a new electric fence to help keep the sheep in the right places at the right time!

John Clare's Cottage

In addition the Trust has had several meetings with Barry Sheerman MP and Paul Chirico of the John Clare Society to ensure that our work supports the project to establish an education and environmental centre at John Clare's Cottage. This is a very exciting project and we are confident that it will complement the Trust's work.

New Treasurer

Eileen Cumberpatch has very kindly agreed to become the Trust's treasurer.

As the Trust expands, we are looking for other volunteers to help organise and manage various activities. We need help in particular with managing our membership lists and renewals and with organising specific events. If anyone is interested please contact Richard Keymer on 01733 252065.

Contacts

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