



## Autumn 2010

As the rain pours down outside, it certainly feels like we are moving quickly into autumn. The sheer profusion of fungi in the countryside around us (see below), is another sign of the changing season. And yet still there are swallows and house martins around us, several on the Maxey Cut on 2 October for instance, and our winter thrushes, redwings and fieldfares are not yet here in any number.

Our last newsletter was at the beginning of June. Since then we have held the very successful launch of the Geology Trail at Swaddywell and a rather magical evening at Torpel as part of the John Clare Festival.

The Geology Trail event on 13 June was the culmination of an awful lot of work over many months, led by Frieda Gosling. We tend to forget that Swaddywell is an important geological site – in fact, as always it is the geology that dictates the landscape and wildlife that lives off it. 160 million years ago, Swaddywell was under the sea, which is why you can still find fossils of shells and oysters there to this day.

We had a good turn out on the day, hosted more visitors from the Open Sunday at Willowbrook Farm, and put on a special extra event to show the Deputy Mayor of Peterborough around the trail. Do have a wander round yourself – you can pick up a special leaflet at the main entrance and use it to guide you around.

We are currently working on developing a podcast that can be downloaded from our website and used to help people explore and enjoy both the geology and wildlife elements of the reserve.

Our summer event at Torpel on 9 July was part of the John Clare Festival. We set up a range of 'stations' across the field, giving people the chance to wander around and learn about its history and wildlife, listen to music and to watch local artists at work and hear poets reading out Clare's poems and their own work. About 130 people visited on the evening and enjoyed a wonderful summer's evening, celebrating the heritage of Torpel. Pupils and staff of John Clare School also entered into the magic of Torpel as part of their Big Arts Week event at the end of term. Groups from Years 4 and 5 experienced the history and natural history of the site, and built this into their end-of-week showcase of tableaux, dance, music and drama.

We were also grateful to Chris Hughes for allowing members to join him on one of his ringing visits to Bainton Heath on 27 June (I was watching England lose to Germany in Bloemfontein, so missed this one!). It was an early start for all concerned, but rewarded with the opportunity to view close up the warblers and nightingales. We will be re-running this event next year.

As an example of the fantastic opportunities it offers take a look at the photo below of a treecreeper that I was able to handle when ringing with Chris in September.



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Also during the summer, the Trust hosted walks around Etton Maxey Pits with the Peakirk Horticultural Society and the hardy orchid society.

We were also very grateful for the wonderful work of Hugh Boycott Thurston who joined us to complete his Duke of Edinburgh Award and has been helping us out ever since, supporting events and doing surveys. Thank you Hugh!

### **The Natural World**

Sadly the avocets that nested at Etton Maxey Pits for the second time in the last three years failed to raise any young. Three chicks fledged and were seen on the reserve but disappeared immediately afterwards, presumably the victims of the resident fox or possibly mink.

It was certainly a wet August, as Peter's weather reports makes clear. But nevertheless, we had some interesting records of butterflies around the area, particularly the discovery of silver-wash fritillary by Trevor Valentine at Castor Hanglands on 26 July. This beautiful butterfly had disappeared from the local area, but seems to be making a recovery recently. Mick Beeson found some in Oxey Woods also and there were dozens of them at their stronghold at Bedford Purlieus. This site was also host to an amazing number of white letter hairstreak, another beautiful butterfly that feeds on elm.

The main feature of September has been the remarkable number of fungi that have popped up all over the local woods and fields. I don't think any of us can remember quite such an abundance of mushrooms, probably due to the combination of drought in the early summer and heavy rain later on. Royce Wood in particular was full of a range of boletes and ruselas and a walk around Castor Hanglands in late September revealed the fatal death cap growing innocuously under an oak tree!



Deathcap – photo Richard Astle, hand of Mick Beeson

Trevor Valentine has posted photos of some local fungi on the blog, including the poisonous fenugreek milkcap at Bainton Pits and the beautiful turkey tail.

### **What to look out for in autumn!**

Apart from more mushrooms, now is the time to be looking out for the arrival of our familiar winter thrushes, redwing and fieldfare, and also for the piping sound of the golden plover as they arrive from their upland summer homes to take up residence in the flat fields around Maxey and the Deepings. Small flocks of lapwing have already been seen in the fields around Etton/Maxey, and good numbers of tufted duck are back on The Welland river.

Keep a look out too for the starling roost – last year it started at the western end of the old Maxey Pits and then moved into Bainton Pits – it is a fabulous site and sound, thousands of birds swirling backwards and forwards across the sky in dense, constantly moving smoke like clouds.

Most excitingly several people have seen otters on the Maxey Cut in recent weeks, both on the Etton-Maxey Reserve and on the Cut itself, usually towards the Etton end.

This is another mammal that has recovered dramatically in recent years after declining across the country as a result of pollution. Hopefully they will have an impact on the local mink population – mink are a terrible destroyer of bird nests, eating up eggs and

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young, but don't seem to be able to co-exist with otters.

### Weather Report by Peter Holt

The summer months will be remembered for the exceptionally wet weather in the second half of August, more later, but prior to that, dry weather had predominated starting from the end of February. Apart from two very wet days in early June there were long dry spells. Our area had had about two-thirds normal rainfall and lawns etc were looking very parched by mid-August. However the last two weeks of August saw exceptional rainfall with 40 mm being recorded in one 24 hour period on the 26<sup>th</sup>. This high rainfall was associated with persistent low pressure over Eastern England. The total rainfall for the month of 126 mm was the highest recorded at Helpston for August in the past 35 years, just exceeding the 125 mm of 2004. Spells of wet weather are not that unusual in August and it is on average the second wettest month of the year, October being the wettest.

Apart from July which was a little warmer than average and contained the highest daytime temperature of the summer at 30°C on the 10th, the temperatures for the period were not far from normal although daytime temperatures for September were a little below average. On the very wet day of August 26<sup>th</sup>, the temperature did not get above 14.5°C compared to an average August day temperature of 21°C.

The chart shows the actual and the long term averages rainfall for the last four months.

	Actual	Long term average
June	64.0	51.3
July	25.5	51.8
August	126.0	58.1
Sept	58.0	51.8

### Forthcoming events

Why not join the Trust and support nature conservation around the villages?

**Sunday 17 October**, work party at Torpel Manor Field, 1.30pm

**Sunday 31 October, Fungal Foray**, meet at Torpel Manor Field at 2pm

**Thursday 18 November, indoor talk** in Glinton, 7.30pm, A Walk along the Maxey Cut, illustrated with photos and with bird song!

**Sunday 28 November, work party**, 1.3pm at Etton Maxey Pits

**Saturday 11 December**, the annual and cold Nene Washes walk, meet at 1.30pm at Helpston Post Office

**New Year's Day Walk** – meet at 1pm at Helpston Post Office for walk around the southern part of Castor Hanglands and Upton.

The parishes in Barnack Ward are co-operating to create wildlife corridors between the villages and a progress report on this year's achievements will be given at the Wildlife Meeting on **Friday October 22nd at 7.30pm** at Barnack Village Hall. There is no charge and refreshments will be provided. All welcome.

### Contacts

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