



20p where sold – free to members

northern England and is full of mosses and lichens that wouldn't normally live here. It is also full of interesting moths, butterflies and insects. It also contains one beautiful pond and several acres of woodland, so a very diverse place.

This will not be a publicly accessible reserve at this stage, but we will be organising work parties there and walks throughout the year. We hope to announce an initial walk round the area in spring, so watch out for more news.

## Winter 2008

A very Happy Christmas to all our members and supporters!

As I write the frost lies hard on the ground - as it has all week, surely one of the coldest starts to the winter we have had for quite some time?

But if the weather is inclement, the news from Langdyke certainly isn't. We are delighted to announce that we have recently received a letter confirming a grant from government for the purchase of Torpel Manor field and the top field at Swaddywell!

This means that – legal contracts permitting – we can now secure these wonderful sites for the community forever. They are now very much in your hands! We have also raised nearly £10,000 for the restoration work at Torpel, including putting in a small exhibition centre and outdoor classroom.

Many thanks to all of you for your support and contributions to this great project. Watch out for community events, work-parties and may be even outdoor drama there later in the year!

We still need to raise another £10,000 if we are to fulfil our vision for Torpel and Swaddywell, so if you haven't contributed yet and fancy giving to a worthy and local cause this Christmas .....

And we can also announce the establishment of our third nature reserve. We have recently signed a lease with National Grid to look after about twenty acres of their land at Bainton!

This is the heath and scrub area immediately west of Bainton fisheries (not the fishery area) and is **the** home of nightingales in our area. It is also another example of man's impact on the land. The heath here sits on tonnes of fly ash brought down from the coal power stations in

Another recent Langdyke development is the launch of our Blog on the Botolph's Barn website. This gives all members an opportunity to share news of what's happening in the natural world around us and to ask questions or raise issues. Have a look: <http://langdykeworld.blogspot.com/> and if you need help using it, drop me a line [richard@athene-communications.co.uk](mailto:richard@athene-communications.co.uk)

## The Natural World

It seems to have been quite a quiet time recently in the natural world with not a lot to report, but as ever there are always highlights. Such as the peregrine falcon chasing starlings and collared doves round Helpston church spire in late November.

Or the flocks of up to 1500 lapwing and golden plover that are regularly feeding on the arable land between Maxey-Etton-Helpston throughout November and December.

Or the barn owls that have been seen hunting between Glinton and Peakirk, at Swaddywell and near Southey Woods!

To date the cold weather hasn't led to the arrival of large numbers of unusual winter birds, but there are the usual numbers of redwing and fieldfare around and several reports of the very beautiful crossbill at Sutton and Southey Woods. The male is a bright red bird with a long, strong and, yes, crossed bill, which it uses to prise open pine cones. The female is a more drab green, but a good sign of their presence is the noise of cracking cones! I saw five birds there on 20 December, including two males, feeding in the area where there are wooden tables and benches near the car park.

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Trevor Valentine reports a small flock of tree sparrow in his garden at Helpston, as well as the occasional fieldfare and a buzzard! This buzzard is probably the one that can be regularly seen sitting in the middle of ploughed fields on the Maxey Road, grubbing for worms and beetles – some raptor!

And there are also goosanders back on the pits at Maxey, with eight of these large, elegant ducks with their distinctive hooked and serrated beaks there in early December.

Finally, don't miss one of the most awesome sights of nature – and no it isn't on the TV at Christmas, but in the skies near you, now. The annual starling roost at Maxey Pits has built up to about 7,000 birds all wheeling backwards and forwards as dusk gathers, before bunching into a visible funnel in the sky and pouring down into the reed bed for the night. Don't miss the unmissable!

### Langdyke Events

We had a very successful event on 9 November with the children of Stamford Wildlife Watch at Swaddywell. Plenty to get excited about as we dissected stoat poo and inspected a variety of corpses in bird-boxes! Great fun for all concerned and yes, we did wash our hands well afterwards.

There was also a very good turn out on 13 November to learn more about the

history and wildlife of Castor Hanglands, from Chris Gardiner, the reserve warden.

And eighteen members and guests turned out in the bitter cold to venture out on the Nene Washes on 6 December to see owls, harriers, Siberian swans and various ducks.

### Weather Report

This autumn the weather both in terms of rainfall and temperatures was not far from long term average in our part of the country and we escaped the worse of the seasonal gales and once again were not excessively troubled by fog. However daytime temperatures were in the main somewhat lower than usual. Apart from a brief spell of warmer weather in the first half of October when the temperature reached 19.5°C on the 12<sup>th</sup>, the downward march to winter proceeded with little interruption and by October 29<sup>th</sup> the maximum day temperature

was only 6.5°C and we had the first air frost of the season at minus 1.5°C.

The second half of November saw a more significant falling off of temperatures with some snow on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

December started on a decidedly chilly note with temperatures well below average. After a series of very mild winters it will be interesting to see how this one eventually turns out. The last time there was a really cold December in our area was in 1981 when there was lying snow in the weeks leading up to Christmas with more than 15 cm on the ground although no snow actually fell on Christmas Day.

Looking at rainfall details, November was a wetter than average month with rain falling on eight of the first eleven days but the wettest day was on October 5<sup>th</sup> when there was 32.5 mm. which was the wettest day of year so far.

Actual rainfall figures recorded at Helpston (in millimeters) for the past months were:-

	Sept	Oct	Nov
2008	51.5	55.5	66.5
Average	52.7	60.1	54.3

### Forthcoming events

We have a number of events coming up, including a work party on 27 December at Swaddywell (2pm at the pit) and the traditional new year's day walk – this time led by Frieda Gosling around Southey Woods. Meet at Helpston Post Office at 1pm or at the woods at 1.10pm

### Contacts

*Newsletter and walks*

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*Membership*

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