

Friends of The Withey Beds

Autumn 2007

Local Nature Reserve Update

The long awaited **boardwalk** at The Withey Beds had the finishing touches made in June of this year and it is now possible to go on a circular walk around the LNR throughout the year. The challenge now is to keep on top of the rampant vegetation growth through the boardwalk rather than having to remember to put your Wellingtons on before you visit the site!



Due to the further enhancement works that have taken place at this special site Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) has been honoured to be awarded a second **Green Apple Award**. This prestigious award is from an independent environmental group, The Green Organisation. The award itself is to recognise and reward environmental best practice around the world and TRDC is the only Council in the country to be awarded two Green Apple Awards for the same site. TRDC will be presented with the award at the House of Commons in November.

Back in May the rain managed to stay away long enough for the annual **guided walk**, at The Withey Beds and the lakes of the Watford Piscators, to take place. As usual the walk was very informative and took in a diversity of wildlife.

A range of **wildlife activities** were run at various Local Nature Reserves over the summer. In August more than 20 bird boxes were built at The Withey Beds for birds such as robins, blue tits and sparrows.

The Friends of The Withey Beds were again at the **Rickmansworth Festival** this year. Despite the pessimistic forecast the sun shone all weekend and around 25 000 people came along, many of which visited the stand to peer down a microscope showing one of the numerous spiders that can be found at The Withey Beds.

Earlier this year a **pasture pump** was installed at the LNR. The pump is linked to the river and will enable cattle to have a fresh supply of drinking water. It is hoped that two cows will graze the site next year. This will help improve the flower diversity in the field near the railway line.

The Withey Beds received its **annual cut** in September.

The **willow hide** has been growing nicely over the last year and the artist is due to return this winter. She will be weaving in the new growth and we will be looking for volunteers to help.



If you would like to assist with the willow hide contact Kay FitzGerald on 01923 727105 or at kay.fitzgerald@threerivers.gov.uk.

The September moth night spotted various moths including Green Carpet, Willow Beauty, Rosy Rustic, Clouded Border, Common Wave, Flounced Rustic and Square spot Rustic.

Future Events

On **Monday 5 November** The Friends of The Withey Beds will be holding their **AGM** at the Council Offices. The meeting will start at 7:30pm and everyone is welcome.

As part of TRDC's **Children's Nature Week** (11-15 February) and to coincide with National Nest Box week there will be a bird box building event at the LNR on Valentine's Day; the day birds traditionally pair up. This is just one of the many events that have been organised. For more information call TRDC on 01923 776611.

Bird News by Anna Marett

During the autumn months there is very little bird song to be heard but male and female Robins set up their own winter territories and quietly sing to announce this.

Upto a dozen Ring-necked parakeets are now regularly seen flying fast and noisily around the LNR, alighting in the tall dead trees. One sighting saw eight birds chasing off a female Sparrowhawk.

Small groups of Blue, Great and Long tailed tits rove through the hedgerows together with a Goldcrest or two, all picking insects as they go.

Look out for Green and Great spotted woodpeckers and this year the Lesser spotted woodpecker has been heard and seen more frequently.

PILLBOXES UPDATE - OCTOBER 2007.

Pillbox conversion works carried out at The Withey Beds were completed at the end of 2004. During the winter of 04/05, evidence of bat usage was indicated when we found a small quantity of bat droppings and remains of moths and butterflies, in the form of discarded wings, within the pillbox. These were found internally, adjacent to one of the old gun slits. Unfortunately no hibernating bats were observed during our winter visits. We were disappointed to have similar results during the winter of 05/06.

Internal temperatures had fluctuated slowly, with the structure holding the outside temperature changes in check, resulting in internal temperatures in the range of 1 to 8°C. This remained so for most of the winter even though external temperatures fluctuated from several degrees below freezing to 14 degrees plus. Our monitoring will be repeated again this year and in future years.

After The Withey Beds conversion, we were asked by the Environment Agency to look at a number of other pillboxes with a view to making these suitable for bats. Joint funding was arranged from the Environment Agency and Three Valleys Water Company. The water company funded, provided and installed the steel security doors and the blockwork infill walls for three pillboxes on water company land.

The Environment Agency obtained funding for the remaining works which comprised roofing over the raised gun turrets; supplying and installing a security door and supplying the materials for the internal fitting-out works; supplying data loggers to monitor temperature and humidity; and supplying lightweight props to assist with the internal installations, etc. The remaining security works, for all three pillboxes, was carried out by Andrew Denholm and his team from APD Building Services Limited of St. Albans, who so successfully converted The Withey Beds pillbox.

Security works to two of the pillboxes were completed in September and the third will hopefully be completed in October. Our own internal fitting activities will then begin. This will bring the total pillbox conversions to four. We have latterly been asked by the Environment Agency, who is seeking funding, to identify additional pillboxes with a view to possible conversion. All we need now is for the bats to adopt our converted pillboxes for hibernation purposes.

Now works to secure the pillboxes is complete, our immediate task will be to fit out the internal areas to make them more suitable for bats. At present the internal walls and soffits are "as struck" concrete which offers little cover and lacks crevices for the bats to hide themselves away. We aim to provide bat bricks, timber baffle boards, etc. to provide these missing elements.

Data loggers will be installed to monitor temperature and humidity, which should enable us to fine tune the air flow through the pillboxes and limit wide fluctuations of temperature, and achieve temperature gradients within desired limits.

Until bats start using the structures, we will be carrying out internal works and volunteers from the Bat Group are welcome to assist. However, once bats move into the pillboxes work will cease until late spring/early summer and only monitoring visits by licensed batworkers will be permitted, so as not to disturb hibernating bats.

Our sincere thanks go to Sarah Scott at the Environment Agency, Andrew Hodges at the Three Valleys Water company, and Andrew Denholm of APD Building Services Limited, for making these conversions possible.