



Crack-willow
(Withy)

Friends of The Withey Beds

Autumn 2013

Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Update

After delaying her plans, due to a lot of bad weather which kept The Withey Beds wet for a very long time, Hazel Godfrey finally managed to return to the site to work on the **willow hide** in June. She carried out a lot of work, particularly to the top of the dome which had partially collapsed. Hazel then made the most of the nice weather and returned in August to trim and weave in the new growth. Hazel is now hoping to return to The Withey Beds twice a year, rather than once a year, as, in theory, this should make the on-going maintenance far easier.

The annual **cut and lift** has been carried out in the main field at The Withey Beds. Rather than having to dispose of the cuttings this year we were able to arrange delivery to a local farmer. The same local farmer is able to provide some Dexter cattle to graze the site in the future. This would mean that the cut and lift was no longer needed and that the diversity of wildlife should increase at the site. By having three or four cows on the site, for around six months each year, the vegetation will get munched down which reduces the amount of nutrients in the ground. As wild flowers thrive on nutrient poor soil this is an ideal, and very traditional, way to manage The Withey Beds. Cows will also increase the number of insects at the site which has the added bonus of attracting animals from further up the food chain such as birds and bats.

Dexter cows are a friendly breed of cattle which originated in Ireland. They are the smallest native breed in the British Isles reaching a height of around 111cm (44"). They can be farmed for their beef or milk production and are perfect for conservation grazing.

The Friends of The Withey Beds had a busy May as they not only lead the annual **guided walk** to and around the site as part of Ricky Week but also manned their ever popular stand at the **Rickmansworth Festival**. The Festival was a great success as the weather, fortunately, stayed fine. Many people were able to take the opportunity to see some of the fascinating finds from The Withey Beds which were on display. Everything from a

shed snake skin and the wing of great spotted woodpecker to several insects were on show.

In mid-August the Countryside Management Service lead a **mini beast safari** around the LNR. They were joined by around 40 people who searched high and low for all sorts of creepy crawlies and learnt more about the importance of insects and spiders in the foodchain.

Bird Watch

All birds, great and small, have been seen at The Withey Beds recently. Everything from the occasional sighting of a barn owl to the frequently observed bullfinch and goldfinch.

Many birds have been heard but not seen as they sing from amongst the vegetation around the site or swoop over after dusk. These birds include tawny owls and reed buntings.

Of course there are also the birds that are seen *and* heard and these include increasing numbers of noisy ring-necked parakeets.

As you would expect lots of birds, such as green sandpiper and snipe, were at the LNR to make the most of all of the water that stayed around for so long.

Whitethroats, blackcaps and garden warblers have all bred successfully at the site this year.

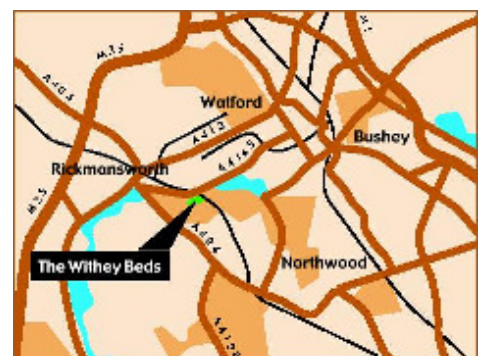
Other sightings include stock doves (which have, again, made the barn owl box their home), chiffchaffs, willow warblers, kingfishers, mistle thrushes, song thrushes and nuthatches.

Membership subscriptions are overdue. If you have not yet renewed for last year please contact the Membership Secretary at 14 Sandy Lodge Road, Rickmansworth, WD3 1LJ with your £5.00 or the completed Standing Order form. The Friends would be grateful if you could pay by Standing Order as it makes administration easier. You can contact the Membership Secretary at friendsofwitheybeds@gmail.com

WHERE IS THE WITHEY BEDS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE?

As you travel along Moor Lane, from Rickmansworth, the entrance to The Withey Beds is on your right - about 150m after the entrance to the Moor Park estate (where the security guards sit in a small building).

The LNR entrance has a green vehicle barrier and kissing gate. If you go over the River Colne on to Tolpits Lane, then you have gone too far.



The call of the wild (en plein air* painting at The Withey Beds)

By local Artist Andrew Schofield.

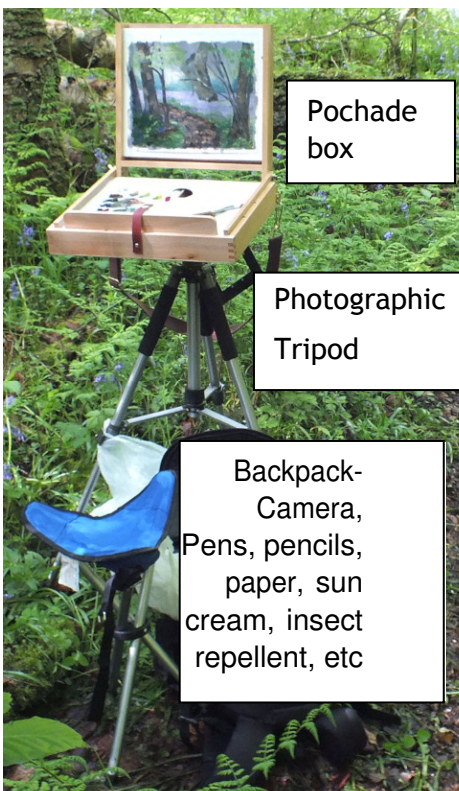
In the summer of 2012 I made a determined attempt to improve my en plein air painting by going out regularly on local painting trips...

On the afternoon I arrived at The Withey Beds it was glorious sunshine. I made a quick tour of the site to scout for a suitable location to paint. I decided to paint the view across the meadow towards the pill box as I think this is the most evocative view of the site. When I began to paint several clouds had blown across. I quickly sketched in the clouds this would set the light for the painting. One of the keys to painting nature is to try and remember the lighting conditions and not to chase the light. As the painting progresses you forget yourself and become one with nature and the countryside and in turn you are accepted by nature - The small mammals begin scurrying about in the undergrowth the birds begin to show themselves, of course you are now just another element in the landscape. (Sigh)... What an idyllic scene, unfortunately this was the summer of 2012, one of the wettest since records began. As I painted the clouds built up I had almost completed when the heavens opened, I had to quickly pack up and run for the car (Ah the joys of en plein air painting).

I was introduced to The Withey Beds when I attended a guided tour during Ricky Week. I really enjoyed the tour. I was immediately drawn to The Withey Beds by its quiet isolation. The variety of landscape over such a small area offers a wealth of opportunity for the landscape painter.

Sketching from life is an enjoyable pursuit in its own right, the finished result isn't necessarily the enjoyment but the act of sketching on location is a reward in itself. When you sketch from nature you will find that you get to know the look and feel of a place intimately. After an hour or two sketching you can go home and even several weeks later you will be able to produce a sketch which is quite accurate. Why not give it a go? All you need is a pencil and paper. (Do not be discouraged by your early attempts, you cannot expect to produce a Monet after your first couple of attempts).

Sketching Equipment



Pochade box

Photographic Tripod

Backpack- Camera, Pens, pencils, paper, sun cream, insect repellent, etc

I am a part time artist working almost exclusively in oils. I paint many commissions for people, painting their much loved pets, please visit my website www.AnimalisticArt.co.uk

When not painting pets I like to sketch and paint the local landscape, which I find very rewarding. Rickmansworth has such a diverse and beautiful environment that I never tire of. Visit www.AnimalisticArt.co.uk/exhibit.html to see the paintings that I exhibited April 2013 at the TRDC offices. Check out my exhibition next year at TRDC offices April 2014. I am a member of the Rickmansworth Art Society, anyone interested should pop along to one of our meetings.

I would like to give a big thanks to the special interest groups, such as the Friends of The Withey Beds, for all their hard work. It is thanks to these dedicated people that our environment is enhanced to be enjoyed by people such as myself.

*('En plein air' is a French expression which means "in the open air" and is used to describe painting outside. En plein air painting was particularly popular in the mid 19th century with the Advent of Impressionism.)