

Friends of The Withey Beds

Spring 2008

Local Nature Reserve Update

Back in November 2007 Hazel Godfrey, who helped create the willow hide at The Withey Beds, returned to re-work and tidy up the hide. After almost a week of weaving, snipping, tying and re-planting in the cold the hide is now looking fantastic. There was enough growth to create a roof to the hide so now it is complete and will just require a bit of trimming and weaving every now and again.



November also saw the Friends of The Withey Beds AGM and it was nice to see some of you at the meeting.

On Valentines Day, the traditional day that birds begin to pair up, a children's activity was organised at The Withey Beds to build bird boxes. This very popular activity saw lots of children building boxes for robins, great tits and blue tits.

Future Events

Sunday 11 May sees the return of the annual **guided walk** to The Withey Beds. As usual the walk will start at the Batchworth Lock Centre and follow the Ebury Way to the lakes of the Watford Piscators. After a tour of the fishing lakes the guided walk will cross over to the Local Nature Reserve where there will be the chance to learn more about how this special site is managed. Meet at the Lock Centre at 2pm.

May also sees the Aquadrome hosting the **Rickmansworth Festival**. The Aquadrome is one of Three Rivers newest Local Nature Reserves so why not come along on 17 and 18 May to see The Friends of The Withey Beds, along with Hazel Godfrey who helped create the willow hide at The Withey Beds, as well as see how the two LNRs compare? Hazel will be demonstrating some traditional willow weaving techniques. We are in need of some people to help man the stand over the weekend. If you can spare a couple of hours please contact Kay FitzGerald or The Friends of The Withey Beds on jpch65@googlemail.com

There will be a **wildflower and butterfly walk** at

The Withey Beds on Saturday 7 June. Meet at the LNR entrance at 11am for this chance to learn more about the special flowers and butterflies that can be seen at the LNR.

Back in November the Council was lucky enough to be awarded a **Green Apple Award** at the House of Commons. Three Rivers District Council has now been honoured with a **Green Hero Award** in recognition of all the work and projects that have taken place at The Withey Beds. The Green Hero Award will be collected at the Tower of London in June this year.

Membership subscriptions are now overdue! If you have not renewed yet then please contact the Treasurer at 4 Sandy Lodge Road, Moor Park, Rickmansworth, WD3 1LJ with your £5.00 to continue your valuable, and much appreciated, support.

For more information on any of these activities contact Kay FitzGerald on 01923 727105 or at kay.fitzgerald@threerivers.gov.uk

The Committee are currently looking for new members. You don't need to have lots of spare time – just enthusiasm! Whether you fancy increasing your fitness and delivering newsletters at the same time, would like to be involved with the financial matters or have a creative flair and would like to help design the newsletter then just get in touch at jpch65@googlemail.com

Nature News

by Anna Maret

The resident birds are breeding on the reserve and song is at its fullest during the early hours of May mornings. Summer migrants such as Garden Warblers, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs find places to nest and the song flight display of Whitethroats can be seen.

Dragonflies abound during the summer months - Banded Demoiselle, Black-tailed skimmer and Emperor dragonfly. Good viewing from the first bridge over the stream.

Look for various butterflies - Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Red Admiral and Speckled Wood. Young foxes often sit or snuffle in the middle of the field, looking for beetles and worms and hopefully, glow worms will once again be present, fascinating little spots of green glowing during the warm summer nights.

The River Colne

Welcome to the living river and the world beneath it.

The Withey Beds is located to the south of the river and it is fortunate to own the river bank on that side. The other side, that is to say the north side, is owned and controlled by the Watford Piscators, an angling club of some 150 years standing. In 1886 the Fishing Gazette of that year reported that 12 anglers caught 46 trout between them whilst fishing the Colne. How things have changed?

Water quality and quantity have impacted along the length of most if not all water courses over the years. The Colne is no exception. That's the bad news.

Now for the good news, coarse fish are thriving and present day members of the club are catching roach, chub, bream, perch and carp and many other species.

However you may not see too many anglers on this water as the club wishes it to remain a haven for wildlife both in and out of the water. Allowing it to become part of the Local Nature Reserve (LNR) The Withey Beds.

In past years Emma Ross from the Natural History Museum has been carrying out a study on the vast range of Caddis that abound beneath the surface, she informs us that there are over 100 variants of caddis and quite a few can be found in your river. Because the area has not been corrupted by mans intervention over the years the site lends itself to a well established ecosystem and could be an attraction for study groups who would like to visit somewhere different.

A quiet walk along The Withey Beds bank during the summer, keeping as low as possible and you stand a good chance of spotting chub up to 4lb, and Carp in excess of 20lb. To make spotting easier wear a pair of polarised sunglasses. Keep your eyes peeled for the lone angler and give him or her a wide berth please. Watch out for your shadow on the water otherwise all your effort and care will send the fish to the bottom.

Sadly there is another piece of bad news, the white clawed crayfish has almost disappeared. It has been killed off by the introduction of Signal crayfish, an alien to this country. It carries a fungus that is fatal to the indigenous species.

For those of you who would prefer a more easy approach to spotting the fish, WITH CARE walk onto the road bridge and just peek over the edge on the LNR side and look to your right where the little stream enters the main river, this, if running is high in oxygen and nutrients and in early spring through to early summer some big fish can be seen. This is a popular spawning area for some fish.

With global warming rivers and lakes will undergo extreme weather conditions which will threaten the integrity of those waters. The Colne will be no exception, it is up to us to look after it.

This is the other side of angling that seldom gets a mention, most anglers are conservationists in their own right and that is one reason why the Watford Piscators has become involved with The Withey Beds making a good partnership. It would seem proper at this point to mention that if anything causes the observer concern about the state of the river, pollution, dead fish (often the first indicator that something is wrong) contact the Environment Agency 0800 80 70 60 what you will be asked is what and where. Always give the location as the River Colne where Tolpits Lane meets Moor Lane Rickmansworth A4145. Then wait for someone to come if you can. It is worth bearing in mind that fish do die, only report if the dead fish are in a great number 50-100 fish in a confined area.

A quarter of a mile down stream the Colne enters the Grand Union Canal and it is from here that most of those large fish migrate when boat traffic gets too much and the weather is hot. In the quiet setting of the river shelter can be found under the vast rafts of plant life including water lilies that offer shade and protection.

Don't be surprised to spot the odd terrapin sun bathing on a log or stone, another alien species.

I hope this has given readers an insight into the importance of the river and what a vital part it has to play in all our lives. Why not join us on our next walkabout on the Watford Piscators Complex?

To conclude - Only about 3% of water on this planet is drinkable ??? (Food, No water for thought.)

John Castle. Friend of The Withey Beds and president of Watford Piscators.



Common Carp 18lb 4oz, 2006 from the River Colne