



Friends of The Withey Beds Spring 2011

Crack-willow
(Withey)

Local Nature Reserve Update

After having to don waders last year to work on the **willow hide** Hazel Godfrey, who originally helped create the hide in 2006, returned to The Withey Beds in late November to weave in the additional growth when the ground was dry - well just a little soggy underfoot!



Last year the The Friends of The Withey Beds **planted some cuttings** of two types of willow traditionally used for basket weaving at the LNR. Over 75% of the Whissender willow and the Lancashire Dicks willow survived. Any willow that had died will soon be replaced. If you fancy taking a look at the progress of the two plots look to your right near the entrance to The Withey Beds, just before the noticeboard.

The Countryside Managements Service (CMS) and its **volunteers** made several visits to The Withey Beds over the last six months. The volunteers worked very hard to remove lots of the reeds that were taking over the pond. They also installed some spiling along the ditch bank, near the first bridge, in preparation for the installation of a dipping platform. Their final task on a very cold November day was to coppice some of the willow in the south-west corner of the site. Coppicing will allow light to reach the ground in these areas as well as prolonging the life of the trees themselves.

Future Events

On **Monday 4 April** the Friends of The Withey Beds will hold their **AGM** at the Council Offices. If you would like to be a little more involved in committee matters then why not come along at 7:30pm and meet the rest of the group?

At 2pm on **Sunday 15 May** the Friends of The Withey Beds will be leading a **guided walk** to the LNR. As usual the walk will start with a brief history of the canal at the Batchworth Lock Centre before following the Ebury Way to the fishing lakes of the Watford Piscators. After a tour of the lakes the guided walk will cross over Moor Lane to The Withey Beds to learn more about this special wetland site.

On **21 and 22 May**, the Friends of The Withey Beds will be at the Aquadrome hosting a stand

at the annual **Rickmansworth Festival**. Hazel Godfrey, along with some of her woven willow products, will be at the stand as will be a short video of The Withey Beds highlighting some of the interesting features. There will also be a variety of environmental and wildlife groups in the Environmental Marquee so why not come along over the weekend?



Judging of the photographic competition announced in the last newsletter has been deferred until the autumn to give Members more time to capture and submit images of the site. Please send entries to the Treasurer at the address below.

Membership subscriptions are overdue! If you have not yet renewed for last year please contact the Treasurer at 16 Sandy Lodge Road, Moor Park, Rickmansworth, WD3 1LJ with your £5.00 or the completed Standing Order form to continue your valuable support. The Friends would be grateful if you could pay by Standing Order as it makes group administration easier. You can contact the Treasurer at peterrobin2007@googlemail.com

Nature News by Anna Maret

Recent observations include Snipe, Kingfisher, Water Rail and Teal. Early March showed signs of departing winter visitors when the field had a large flock of feeding Fieldfares and Redwings.

Four Buzzards were seen flying high over the reserve. Nuthatch and Treecreeper are vocal now and Great Spotted Woodpeckers are drumming on several bare trees on either side of the field. Stock doves are attracted to the barn owl box once again and display behaviour can be observed from the bench!

Look out for the arrival of spring migrants in April such as Blackcap, Garden Warbler and Whitethroat.

Mistle Thrush and Song Thrush can be heard singing loudly and also Wren, Robin, Blue and Great Tits are singing more to attract a mate and secure a territory for the breeding season. Grey Herons continue to visit the far end of the LNR, also foxes can be seen on the railway embankment basking in the sunshine.

WILLOW

by Richard Ahrens, Committee Member

The name 'Withey Beds' surely implies that this piece of land was once used for commercial willow growing – possibly to supply a local basket making industry. My guess is that the baskets might have been needed to transport cress to the London markets. There is some mention on the internet that it was traditional to transport cress in wicker baskets. Almost all of the basket type willow that once grew on The Withey Beds has now grown into scrub or formed hybrids with the local 'crack' willow that grows naturally along the River Colne.

The Friends of The Withey Beds have planted two small patches of basket willow, just below the notice board near the entrance gate. Willow cuttings have been planted through some black plastic weed membrane. Without this membrane the small trees would have no chance competing with the stinging nettles. The willow was planted in the spring of 2010 and most (but not all) of the cuttings have grown. We will replant the ones that failed in the spring of next year. The cuttings are planted quite close together because we are trying to demonstrate how commercial willow is grown. The intention is not to produce large trees, but a dense cover of rods that are forced to grow straight up because others are growing near by. The willow cuttings we planted were supplied by Hazel Godfrey, who can be seen at the Rickmansworth Canal Festival making willow baskets and planters.

Here are two pictures of Hazel's willow plantation at Hitchin. In a year or two we hope that The Withey Beds will have willow like this.

