



Friends of The Withey Beds

Spring 2012

Crack-willow
(Withy)

Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Update

Back in November, a relatively dry November for a change, Hazel Godfrey returned to weave in the spring and summer growth of the **willow hide**.

The hide has been growing since 2006 and Hazel



has now decided to implement a new management regime. As such, in November the hide was pruned harder than normal to promote new shoots. By May/June it will then be time for a mid-season weave and prune and then the following autumn growth will again be pruned and woven in. This should not only make the hide easier to manage by reducing the amount of annual growth by almost half but also make for a tidier hide throughout the year. There might also be the possibility of clipping with shears in the second season with the new routine, however, as the growing conditions are so good at The Withey Beds it may take a while to get to this status.

The two plots of willow which were planted just to the right of the main entrance to the Local Nature Reserve are doing well. Only a few of the young willows died and these have recently been replanted.

Just before Christmas the metal surfaces of the two footbridges were, unfortunately, stolen. Three Rivers District Council thought that it would be prudent to replace the bridge surfaces with wood so they are now in a similar style to the rest of the boardwalk.

Future Events

On **Monday 16 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 or write for the newsletter then why not come along at 7:30pm and meet the rest of the group?

At 2pm on **Sunday 13 May** the Friends of The Withey Beds will be leading the annual **guided walk** to the LNR. The walk will start at the Batchworth Lock Centre where we will hear all

about the history of the canal. We will then walk about a mile along the Ebury Way until we reach the Watford Piscators. After a tour of these special fishing lakes we will cross over Moor Lane to learn all about The Withey Beds and why it has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve.

19 and 20 May sees the return of the **Rickmansworth Festival** to the Aquadrome. The Friends of The Withey Beds are now a regular feature in the Environmental Marquee. If you come along you will also have the chance to meet Hazel Godfrey as well as see her at work as she weaves willow cuttings in to some wonderful creations.

The Countryside Management Service will be leading a **guided walk** on **Sunday 17 June**, starting at 10:30am. The walk will be a tour of the Local Nature Reserve and will focus on particular aspects of the wildlife that can be found at the site. Parking will be available on the opposite side of Moor Lane, at the Watford Piscators, just before the bend in the road where Moor Lane becomes Tolpits Lane.

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

Anna Marett is no longer able to write Nature News for the newsletter. After many years of providing our wildlife updates it is with great regret that we say goodbye to Anna. We thank Anna for her support since the beginning of the Friends group as she was an enthusiastic and encouraging member of the group and will be greatly missed. We wish her well for the future.

If you would like further information on The Withey Beds, or any of the Council owned Local Nature Reserves, contact Kay FitzGerald at kay.fitzgerald@threerivers.gov.uk or on 01923 776611.

BIRD LIFE AT THE WITHEY BEDS

BY DR STEPHEN COHEN

I made my first daytime visit to the reserve (my only previous foray was on a dark summer night to look for glow-worms) with the Treasurer of the Friends of The Withey Beds on a cool, overcast, late February morning.

It was hard to recognise the habitat diversity listed on the information board at the reserve entrance as all the wetland had dried out. The only water seen was the sluggishly flowing River Colne, meandering along outside the northern boundary of the reserve.

A flock of long-tailed tits were the first birds we saw, flitting through the alders. Great tits and blue tits darted between the bare branches and single greenfinches sang from tree tops. Over near the Pill Box there was a line of mole hills and a mixed flock of overwintering redwings and fieldfares seemed to be finding plenty to eat around them. A noisy jay, with its distinctive white rump crossed the field, above them. A sudden movement in a nearby tree alerted us to a pair of great spotted woodpeckers who chased each other up and along the branches. A green woodpecker was heard several times, with its typical "yaffle" call but didn't show itself.



A great tit



A long-tailed tit



A blue tit

Whilst walking past the Pill Box, a common buzzard, flapped lazily over the course of the river before taking avoiding action when it was mobbed by a crow. Pairs of mallard, greylag and Canada geese flew across the reserve heading for Rickmansworth's lakes.

Walking back, along the southern border with its dried up stream, a grey heron passed overhead and goldfinches twittered on a stand of teasels. As we came back to our starting point, a fast-flying screeching group of bright green ring-necked parakeets landed in top of the tallest tree. These exotic birds, originally from India, have become an established part of our local fauna and so far, at least, do not seem to have ousted any of our indigenous bird species.

We certainly need some rain!

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 the Lodge).

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.

