



Crack-willow  
(Withy)

# Friends of The Withey Beds

## Spring 2014

### Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Update

I have never seen The Withey Beds so wet! The site was submerged for much of January and February. The boardwalk was also underwater for much of this time and its height was set at the level of the previous flooding – about 50cm lower! However, this is exactly what a wetland site in a floodplain is meant to do.

### Future Events

The Friends of The Withey Beds **AGM** will take place at the Council offices on at 7:30pm on Tuesday 29 April. The meeting will see the election of The Friends of The Withey Beds committee and discuss general matters relating to the site. Everyone is welcome to come along.

May sees the return of two annual events for the Friends of The Withey Beds – the guided walk which takes place as part of Ricky Week and their stand at the Rickmansworth Festival. The **guided walk** will take place on Sunday 11 May. The walk will start at 2pm at the Batchworth Lock Centre with a short talk on the history of our canals. This will be followed by a walk along the Ebury Way up to the lakes of the Watford Piscators where we will be led on a tour of the lakes and learn about how they are managed for fishing and to encourage wildlife. From here we will cross Moor Lane so that the guided walk can complete the final leg of its tour around The Withey Beds. Please come along and join us as we really would like to meet you!

The **Rickmansworth Festival** this year will take place on 17 and 18 May. The Festival will host its usual array of stalls and activities so whether you fancy a walk around a haunted house at the fun fair, want to admire the array of boats along the canal, buy some special treats, listen to some live music whilst sampling some beer or just want a relaxing trip along the canal then do come along.

**Bird and Photography Walk.** You may recall that Dr Cohen wrote a fascinating article on birds at The Withey Beds for the spring newsletter back in 2012. Dr Cohen has now very kindly agreed to lead a bird and photography walk at the site. He will not only be

pointing out the variety of birds that can be seen and heard but he will also be offering top tips on how to take the perfect bird photograph. We will be meeting on 29 June at 2:30pm at the entrance to the Watford Piscators. Parking will also be available at the Watford Piscators on the corner of Moor Lane, just before it becomes Tolpits Lane.

### Bird Watch

Our regular bird recorder, Anna Marett, reports that the last time she visited The Withey Beds it was quiet in terms of bird life. This might have had something to do with the fact it was under water! Anna noted that there were lots of mallard and coot making the most of the flooding. She also heard a kingfisher somewhere along the river and great spotted woodpeckers calling – there was also a bit of chasing behaviour showing love was in the air. Fieldfare and redwing were unable to feed in the field as they usually do so were flying around calling. A goldcrest was in the bushes by the first pond close to the path. Other sightings included long tailed tits, blue tits and great tits, goldfinches and a wren.

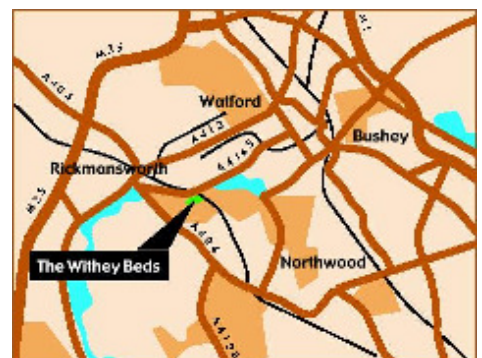
**Plea for help!** After many years of dutiful service the current treasurer has moved out of the area and the Friends are in need of a replacement. The job is not too onerous. It really entails producing a summary of the income and expenditure a couple of times a years and attending a maximum of two meetings each year – no experience required! If you would like to find a little more or know of anyone who might be interested then please contact the Friends at: [friendsofwitheybeds@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofwitheybeds@gmail.com)

**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](mailto: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.



## DEAD WOOD AND ITS BENEFITS

People often ask why we leave dead wood on sites such as The Withey Beds. Dead wood is an important but often overlooked part of good habitat management. Although it may look a little untidy it has a very important ecological role by providing habitat to numerous plants and animals as well as forming part of the nutrient cycling process. In fact one report noted that 1700 species of invertebrate were found to rely upon wood and decaying wood during at least one phase of their lifecycle. Around 40% of these species are known to be rare. This clearly highlights the importance of dead wood and, of course, dead wood is important for more than just invertebrates. Decaying wood is of great importance for other animals and plants. For example it may provide shelter during times of hibernation for animals, somewhere warm that invertebrates can pupate or simply just a point which is high up above flooded ground – something which has been very important of late at The Withey Beds.

Dead wood can vary in form from small logs and dead limbs right up to standing dead trees (also known as snags). Work to dead trees may simply involve removing any dead branches and leaving the main trunk standing or felling the entire dead tree and stacking it in lengths on the ground. In either case the dead wood provides valuable habitat; many species can not survive without dead wood as it is an essential part of their lifecycle. For example many species of fungi, moss, lichen and invertebrate live out some part, if not all, of their lifecycle in dead wood. Woodlice, millipedes, centipedes, worms and snails may not be your favourite of insects but they are just a few of the many insects that love dead wood, as you have probably seen when you lift up a fallen branch which has been left on the ground.

Anywhere that insects and spiders can be found birds will also be located. Birds such as woodpeckers, nuthatches and tawny owls rely on dead wood for nesting, drumming and courting displays as well as a precious food source. Birds, however, are not the only animals to take advantage of dead wood - mammals, amphibians and reptiles may also seek refuge in cavities and dens within dead wood. Frogs and toads, for example, benefit from the dampness, small mammals such as shrews and woodmice may take refuge from the midday sun and predators and bats will benefit from the warmth within cavities and use them to nest and roost within while insects and spiders are feeding on the decaying matter. Furthermore, fungi and bacteria will be thriving as they break down the organic matter and release nutrients back in to the complex ecosystem. It is these bacteria and fungi which make the nutrients available for insects and spiders. In turn birds and mammals feed on these insects and arachnids and so the cycle continues.

Decaying wood can also form what is known as nurse logs. These are logs which, because of their nitrogen concentration and water retention, provide ideal locations for seedlings to establish.



Greater  
Spotted  
Woodpecker  
drum and feed



Oak Jewel Beetle. A  
Nationally Notable  
species found at The  
Withey Beds.  
Larvae live in old  
oak and burrow

Your garden wildlife will benefit from dead wood too. Why not leave dead trees, dead shrubs and old stumps to decay naturally, as long as they don't pose a danger? On a smaller scale you could create a woodpile in a border using sections of tree that have arisen during gardening. Keep an eye on your new habitat and you might be lucky enough to attract species ranging from butterflies and solitary bees to lichens, mosses and fungi.