



Crack-willow
(Withy)

Friends of The Withey Beds

Spring 2016

Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Update

You will hopefully have had the opportunity to see all of the recent work that has taken place at The Withey Beds Local Nature Reserve and the adjoining river. The works on the river were carried out in partnership between the Environment Agency and the Watford Piscators. The aim of the work is to restore existing features as well as creating new ones. Gravel riffles have been constructed from cobble sized stones which have had finer gravels placed on top. These riffles will help restore the natural flow of the river and provide shallow areas for fish, such as brown trout, barbell, chubb and dace, to spawn. Once hatched, the vulnerable fry will be able to swim a little down stream to the backwater that has been created on The Withey Beds to take shelter from the variety of predators in the area. The backwater consists of a channel linked to the River Colne with a deeper pool and marginal shelves. This provides a fry nursery and flood refuge area. The shallow margins ensure that the river water warms up quickly in the sun which creates productive conditions for fish to grow as well as increasing their survival rates. It also provides a nursery area for juvenile amphibians and invertebrates as well as a host of other creatures.

The final phase of the work will include installing two new interpretation boards as well as a pasture pump, so the soon to arrive grazing cattle can draw water from the river when they are in need of a drink, as well as a couple of tweaks to the fencing.

The annual guided walk around the picturesque lakes of the Watford Piscators and The Withey Beds will take place on Sunday 15 May. We will meet at the Batchworth Lock Centre at 2pm where we will have a short talk on the history of the canals before setting off along the Ebury Way until we reach the Watford Piscators. Following the tour of the private fishing lakes we will make our way over to The Withey Beds.

The Friends of The Withey Beds will be hosting their usual stand at the Rickmansworth Festival at the

Aquadrome on 21 and 22 May. The Festival opens at 10am each day so please do come along and support the Friends as well as taking in some of the entertainment and the great variety of stalls.

Don't forget that the Friends of The Withey Beds now have their very own website where you can find out more about the wildlife that can be spotted, learn a little more about the history of the site or read back copies of the newsletter. Why not take a look for yourself at:

<http://www.thewitheybeds.org.uk/>

Nature News by Anna Maret

The high level of water has attracted shoveler, several mallard and a pair of teal. Herons are enjoying the shallow water at the far end of The Withey Beds and there have been three kingfishers chasing and being very vocal along the river.

There have been several sightings of fox and roe deer at the Local Nature Reserve. Molehills are also present in the field. Stock doves, ring necked parakeets, kestrel and sparrowhawk are all regularly seen at the site as are bullfinch and goldfinch with the occasional siskin and redpoll turning up. Presently, great spotted woodpeckers are calling and drumming and the see-saw song of great tits resounds throughout The Withey Beds. Robins, wrens and mistle thrush are in full song also. Nuthatches are becoming more vocal as well.

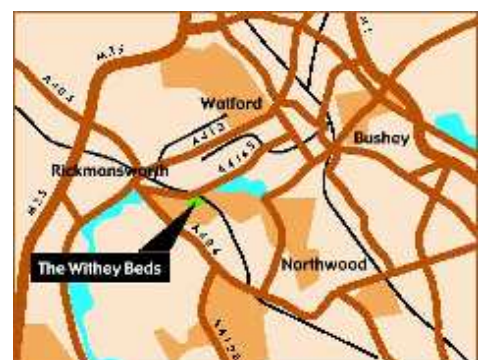
Membership subscriptions are overdue. If you have not yet renewed for last year please contact the Membership Secretary at 14 Sandy Lodge Road, Rickmansworth, WD3 1LJ with your £5.00 or the completed Standing Order form. The Friends would be grateful if you could pay by Standing Order as it makes administration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

www.thewitheybeds.org.uk



Wasps and Hornets

Of the 9000 species of wasp in the UK only nine are social, that is they live in colonies rather than leading a solitary lifestyle. You may be surprised to know that hornets are actually wasps, in fact they are our largest species of social wasp. The queen can measure up to 3.5cm with the workers being around 2-3cm. Wasps are considerably smaller with the queen measuring around 2cm and the workers being 1.8-2cm. Another key difference between wasps and hornets is their colour. Wasps are yellow and black whilst hornets are chestnut brown and yellow. As you can see in the below pictures wasps have very little hair and hornets have a downy covering. Wasps and hornets prefer to nest in natural places such as hollow tree trunks but, as you may be aware from your own experience, they also show a fondness for making nests in the safety of lofts. Unlike bees, neither wasps or hornets swarm and both can be seen flying around in to the late summer and even later in to the year if the weather is mild, as it has been this autumn and winter.

Hornets may look fearsome but they are actually less aggressive than wasps and will only sting if they are antagonised. However, I am told that if they do sting this tends to be a considerably more painful experience than that of a wasp sting. Added to the sting a hornet may also be inclined to bite you at the same time to make it doubly painful.

Wasps and hornets have very similar life cycles. They both build papery nests in the spring to house the queen and her larvae. The queen builds the first few cells and once the initial larvae have matured these female workers then make the rest of the nest, as well as feeding any subsequent larvae. Just a few males are produced and their only role is to mate with the queen, after which they will die. The nests are built from wood which has been scraped from trees, buildings such as sheds and roof beams and the like. This wood is then mixed with saliva to make a pulp before being transformed in to an intricate nest of hexagonal cells. The nests are active for one year as come the autumn the queen, the workers and males will all die – only new mated queens survive by leaving the nest to hibernate somewhere safe before emerging the following spring to start building their own nests.



Hornet



Wasp

Although wasps and hornets can be annoying when you are trying to enjoy a picnic they do have advantages and no matter how tempted you are you need to refrain from swatting wasps as they contain a pheromone that causes other wasps to become more aggressive. One of the benefits of having wasps and hornets around is that they are fierce predators and feed on numerous garden pests, such as aphids and caterpillars, to their larvae. Both adult wasps and hornets eat sugar so they have the added benefit of pollinating some plants. Their nests may also provide homes to a number of hoverflies, which are also very important pollinators.

You may have heard in the news about the possible threat of the Asian hornet in the UK. Whilst it is yet to arrive on our shores it has been recorded in France and Spain and it is officially considered that it is 'likely to arrive soon' by the UK Non-Native Species Secretariat. If, and when, it does arrive our native honey bees may have another threat as they can kill up to 50 honey bees a day in order to feed their larvae. Asian hornets are a little smaller and darker than our natives and have just one yellow stripe on their abdomens with a black head and an orange face. Keep your eyes peeled and report any sightings to alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk or on online at <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/alerts/index.cfm?id=4>