



Crack-willow
(Withy)

Friends of The Withey Beds Spring 2017

Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Update

The willow hide was reworked earlier this year as it was too big to maintain easily. The domed top was cut away as it was mostly dead wood which had become too thin or brittle to support anymore weaved in growth. Instead new growth was taken laterally to make a rim around the open top. Hazel Godfrey, the willow artist, said that dieback was a bit of an issue but that it was difficult to know whether it was due to the very wet growing conditions or weaving growth into places that it didn't want to be! In truth it is probably a bit of both. As you can see from the below photograph the hide does look a little different now but it will soon be growing all over the place again as soon as the weather warms up a little more. The willow hide is probably going to remain open topped so we may have to start calling it the willow watch tower from now on!



The cattle will soon be making a welcome return so they can continue to munch through the vegetation.

The Friends will be holding their AGM on 24 April. The meeting will take place at the Council offices in Rickmansworth at 7:30pm – everyone is welcome.

As usual the annual guided walk to The Withey Beds and the Watford Piscators will be taking place as part of Ricky Week. This year the walk will take place on Sunday 14 May, starting at 2pm. We will be meeting at the Batchworth Lock Centre from where we will walk along the Ebury Way before moving on to the fishing lakes of the Watford Piscators and then The Withey Beds LNR.

As Ricky Week comes to an end the Rickmansworth Festival is in full swing. The Festival which takes

place on Saturday 20 and Sunday 21 May at the Rickmansworth Aquadrome, as well as all the way along the canal between the Batchworth Lock Centre and the Aquadrome, will host an array of canal boats, trade stands, musical entertainment and, of course, the Friends of The Withey Beds stand. Do come along and say hello to the team.

Nature News by Anna Marett

All of the ponds are full at the moment so it will be interesting to see which wildlife takes advantage of the extra water.

A pair of buzzard, red kite and a pair of kestrels are visiting frequently with a sparrowhawk occasionally being seen.

A woodcock flew up (17 November) from the very wet area, this habitat being ideal for these birds which use their long bills to probe into the wet soil and under the leaves for invertebrates.

Chaffinches, goldfinches and greenfinches are often spotted in the surrounding trees with bullfinches regularly feeding in the surrounding trees. Treecreepers and nuthatches are being heard currently. Long-tailed tits are active at the far end in the bramble. Great spotted and green woodpeckers are calling all around the Local Nature Reserve. Two Egyptian geese were on the field in March and a Green sandpiper visited (13 March).

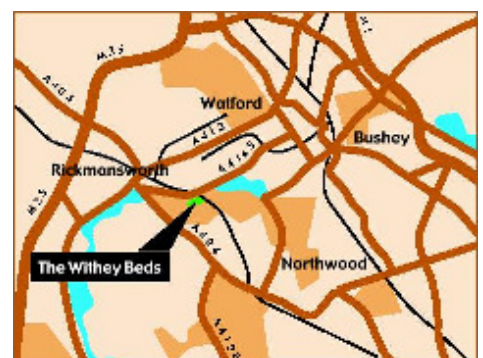
Red admiral, comma, male brimstone, small tortoiseshell and a peacock butterfly were found on the same date during the sunshine. A chiffchaff was also heard and seen singing on the same date.

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

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.



Tree Pests and Diseases

Trees, at the moment, are not having it easy. There are a number of pests and diseases which are attacking several of our more familiar species. You have probably heard about ash dieback which, unfortunately, is confirmed to be in Hertfordshire including both Rickmansworth and Chorleywood. However, the latest consensus is that ash dieback had probably been in England for more than 10 years so rather than being a 'new' disease it has been slowly spreading across the country for many years. Ash dieback is caused by a fungus which results in the ultimate death of any tree it infects as it blocks the trees water transport systems. Young trees die fairly quickly whilst mature trees may die over several seasons.

One of the many tree pests which was recorded in Hertfordshire for the first time last year is the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM). It is aptly named as the hairy caterpillars have a tendency to follow each other in a long line. Several nests were found in the Watford/Hertsmere area and quickly removed. Care must be taken around the caterpillars as their hairs are an irritant for both people and animals. OPM caterpillars can affect the health of oak trees – sizeable populations can defoliate large parts leaving them vulnerable to attack by other pests and diseases – but they don't directly kill the trees.

The horse chestnut leaf miner has been in the UK for around 15 years and is recognisable from some distance away as the affected leaves turn quite brown. This is due to the leaf miner eating the leaf tissue. The results of the leaf miner are not attractive but, fortunately for now, they don't cause any significant harm to the trees which will continue to grow and produce a healthy chestnut crop that will meet all of your conker playing requirements!

Regrettably, there are many more tree pests and diseases than can be written about on one page of our newsletter. These have various effects on different species and, of course, the loss of any trees from our landscape would be many-fold. Not only would there be a direct reduction in biodiversity from fewer trees but also a reduction in the wildlife they support. Trees also quietly go about regulating air temperature, decreasing the potential impacts of flooding, improving water quality and cleaning air – these are just a few of the valuable contributions trees make to our everyday lives. Trees have a beneficial influence on how we view places and can make them more attractive as well as having a positive impact on our mental well-being. As such, you will be pleased to know it is not all doom and gloom. Scientists are working on various ways in which they hope to protect our diverse landscapes in to the future. For example ash trees which are less susceptible to ash dieback have been used in breeding trials to produce trees which have an increased chance of surviving infection. One such tree, nicknamed Betty, has been identified in Norfolk. Scientists compared genetics of trees with differing levels of tolerance and developed three genetic markers which enable them to predict how tolerant a tree is likely to be. Betty was shown to have strong tolerance. It seems these genetic markers are more prevalent in UK trees.



One of the signs of ash dieback



The caterpillar of the oak processionary moth



Evidence of the horse chestnut leaf miner

In conjunction with on-going research there are various restrictions and programmes relating to what and how trees and tree products can be brought in to this country. For example a new scheme was put in place at the start of the year which aims to protect trees from potential threats from imported firewood – importers from outside the UK must give the Forestry Commission notice of their arrival so they can gather the necessary information and decide whether to carry out a risk-based (or random inspection) of imports.

One easy way you can help is to follow the simple biosecurity guidelines which ask us all to clean our shoes, car tyres, bikes (and even the dog!) before visiting an area to help reduce and prevent the spread of pests and diseases.

For more information on tree pests and diseases and what you can do to help you might like to visit the highly informative Forestry Commissions website at: <http://forestry.gov.uk/pestsanddiseases>