

Friends of The Withey Beds Newsletter



In common with many organisations, FoWBs have had to curtail their activities this year. The Rickmansworth Festival did not take place, so we were unable to showcase the Reserve in the Environment Tent. The annual walk had to be cancelled. The Reserve had an episode of vandalism in March, when person or persons unknown thought it would be a good idea to use the field as a car race track. The car entered the field and immediately got bogged down up to its chassis. I wonder what part of 'Wetland Reserve' was not understood? Although attempts were made to use fencing and reptile mats to get it out, these were unsuccessful so a fire was started to remove evidence. Thankfully, the cattle had been removed a week or so before.

TRDC's new Biodiversity Officer left at the end of March, with a then temporary replacement being appointed, so this all happened at a difficult time. Even so, with the challenges of a lockdown and additional pressures on services, the Council managed to remove the car after a few weeks, the fence was repaired, and sheep were put into the field in late May.

The Reserve carried on growing during lockdown, and it became evident what happens without any maintenance, when parts became inaccessible. However, CMS (Countryside Management Service) paid a visit in early September, and cleared the worst of the overgrowth and fallen trees. It is now possible to walk around again, although it is very wet. The reptile mats have been replaced, some already hosting baby slow worms.

Committee member, Evelyn Fox, continues to maintain the planted area of basket willow, but, at the time of writing, the hide needs a good prune. We are hoping that this will be able to be done over the next few months.

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

Nature News by Anna Marett

Spring and Summer 2020 will be remembered for the Lockdown but wildlife matters at the Withey Beds continued with the usual high water levels in the ponds followed by completely dry ponds! Redwings and Fieldfares fed off hawthorn berries, a group of 30 Fieldfares still present on 3 April.

Whitethroats, Garden warblers, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs were all singing on the Reserve. Long tailed tits with 5 young were observed 14 June. Coot nested on the largest pond. A 10pm walk in July looking for glowworms, (none were found) produced a calling male Tawny Owl. Buzzards were regularly seen. Butterflies seen: Green-veined White, Small Copper, Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Large Skipper, Small White.

Dragonflies: Southern Hawker, Blue-tailed Damselfly, Banded Demoiselle, Brown Hawker, Common Damselfly, Emperor. Two Emperors clashed audibly over the field in a territorial fight and a female was observed laying eggs in one small pond.

Perennial plants: Comfrey, Meadowsweet, Purple Loosestrife, Marsh Woundwort, Common Sorrel, Bittersweet, Thistles, Teasels. Other wildlife: Grass snake, Slow worm, Muntjac.



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

CMS volunteer party improves access to The Withey Beds by Richard Young from Countryside Management Service

The Countryside Management Service has been involved with The Withey Beds since the successful compulsory purchase in 2001 by Three Rivers, providing management plans and volunteer work parties. Typically, these groups constitute around 20 volunteers led by a CMS officer and are able to execute a wide range of tasks, from tree planting to scrub clearance, fence repairs and everything in between! This “blitz” approach is designed to complement the work of local groups, such as the Friends of The Withey Beds, who engage in day-to-day upkeep and monitoring.

2020 has been a year of unprecedented challenges. Safeguarding measures were implemented such as a reduced group size with limited tool use. The greatest challenge, however, was adapting to the sudden changes in use of some greenspaces and rights of way with litter, vandalism and misuse skyrocketing overnight.

Fortunately, things have returned to an even keel recently, allowing a return to more normal activities such as ensuring greenspaces like The Withey Beds are accessible and welcoming to visitors. As the photos illustrate, the boardwalk especially had become very overgrown and had the look of being “reclaimed by nature”! The team cleared back encroaching vegetation in a sympathetic manner, allowing pedestrian access along the boardwalk and main path on site.

The Withey Beds remain a firm favourite amongst the CMS volunteer team given the rarity of wetland sites in the area and the peace and quiet to be enjoyed during breaks. Over the winter months we plan to return to remove vegetation and silt from the large pond north of the main access path to improve both pond conditions and the view from the path.

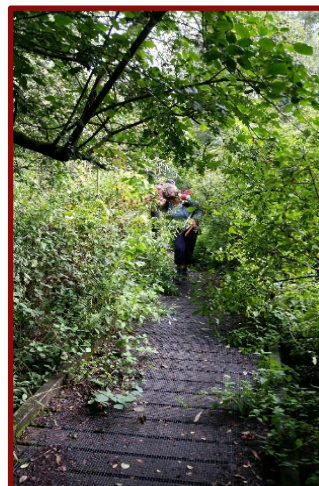
www.facebook.com/HertsCMS provides updates on what the CMS volunteers around the county have been up to. If you wish to join a CMS volunteering group local to you please go to www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/CMS



1 Jean standing on the boardwalk before work



2 Osier grows rapidly



3 The vegetation was often thorny or stingy



4 Work in progress