



Friends of The Withey Beds

Spring 2022



Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Update

I am hoping that this newsletter finds you all well. We hope, with lockdown rules having been relaxed you are, if comfortable, able to get out more and take the opportunity to revisit the Withey Beds as things, fingers crossed, continue to improve.

Following last year's issues, the reptile mats are now back in place. Those on the pond side attract field mice, water shrews, grass snakes and slow worms, depending on the time of year. I always have great anticipation on what might be hiding there. Please remember to pick up the mats slowly and put them down carefully so as not to surprise any wildlife or yourself!

The Rickmansworth Canal Festival is on this year, 21st/22nd May and we expect to have the Withey Beds walk on the preceding Sunday. Please look out for our usual table in the Environment Tent.

Please let us know of anything which needs doing in the Reserve, or if you have any ideas for the area. Most of our members now receive the newsletter by email. If you receive a paper copy and can go digital, please inform the membership secretary. friendsofthewitheybeds@gmail.com.

Membership subscriptions - If you have not renewed for last year please contact the Membership Secretary by [email](#) or by post at 14 Sandy Lodge Road, Rickmansworth, WD3 1LJ with your £5.00 subscription or the completed SO (Standing Order) form. SO and membership applications forms are available via the [FoWB webiste](#).

WHERE IS THE WITHEY BEDS LNR?

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.

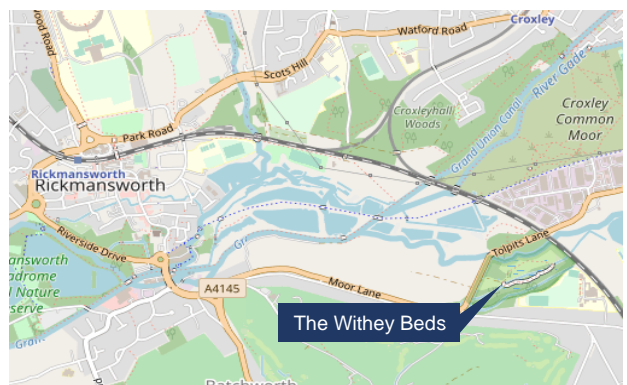
Nature News

This editions nature news is being taken over to provide an update on the conditions you can now expect to find if you visit the Withey Beds.

Water levels have been very high throughout the winter but fortunately have not overwhelmed the area. The sheep were taken away last autumn but we expect them, or the cattle, to return as things begin to dry out.



The recent weather challenges and lockdown meant that nature had taken over leaving the Beds in need of a bit of attention. A big thanks to our local Countryside Management team who took this in hand as the lack of traffic and recent storms had meant the boardwalk was almost hidden beneath debris with plants growing up between the planks, but we are pleased to report that the area is now back to its best and ready for visitors.





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Harvesting The Willows at The Withey Beds – Evelyne Fox

The Withey Beds Local Nature Reserve is named as such because this wetland area was once used to grow a variety of different species of willow which were used for coppicing (coppicing of willow takes place once the leaves have fallen and before they start to grow again). The willow poles were then used for basket making and thatching. It seems it was a major industry.

To revive this tradition the Friends of The Withey Beds, in the spring of 2010, planted two small patches of basket willow at the bottom of the slope beyond the notice board on the right as you come through the gate.

The cuttings, planted through a black plastic weed membrane, were supplied by Hazel Godfrey from her plantation. Hazel harvests her poles annually for her basket making which she regularly demonstrates at the Rickmansworth Festival. The straight willow poles grow from their base and are cut once a year, in the winter, when the leaves have dropped (see images below)

After the initial plantings, with a few replacements needed at The Withey Beds, the plots are said to be doing well. Later a third bed was added, but this one had always struggled because the patch where it is located is traditionally much drier. This year, with all the rain, the first bed and some of the second bed have shown vigorous growth with stems up to two metres long, fingers crossed for the third bed. As mentioned earlier in the in this newsletter everything at the Withey Beds had become overgrown including this area and a visit was needed from Richard of the Countryside Management team to not only address the boardwalk but also to reopen the pathway down through the brambles so I could access the withey area. Once accessible there was further work needed to prise a considerable amount of bindweed from the willow stems.

At the end of the year, I will coppice all the willow. Jenny Fox from Yorke Mead Primary School, Croxley Green - which also has its own Forest School on site - collects the cut poles. The older children then use the willow to make objects to decorate, as well as obelisks to support plants. Any remaining willow will be used to make obelisks for an outdoor area with allotments for the youngest children. Jenny says, 'we believe that access to the outside and learning about nature encourages children to become inquisitive, develop independence and generally become more in tune with nature, which supports children's mental health.' Hopefully they should benefit from a good harvest this year.



Cut withey's



Willow stems after the willow poles are removed



You can see Hazel's work at: <https://www.hvaf.org.uk/galleries/hazel-godfrey>