



# Friends of The Withey Beds

## Spring 2023



### Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Update

I am hoping that this newsletter finds you all well and even with the wet and cold conditions you may have had a chance to visit the Withey Beds.

The reptile mats remain in place, and I have had reports of both grass snakes and mice, or possibly shrews, being found under them. Members always have great anticipation on what might be hiding there. Please remember, if you are going to move them, to pick them up 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. [friendsofwitheybeds@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofwitheybeds@gmail.com).

Membership subscriptions - If you have not renewed for last year please contact the Membership Secretary by [email](mailto:friendsofwitheybeds@gmail.com) 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](http://www.friendsofwitheybeds.com).

### Nature News

Water levels at times have flooded the field and for several days stayed above the boardwalk. This has attracted a lot more wildfowl such as Mallard (8 were seen on 8th Jan), Gadwall (4 on 5th Feb), Teal (25 were seen on 8th Jan) and several occasions Mandarin have visited (11 were seen on 12th Nov). Two were recorded on the riverbank.

A pair of Egyptian Geese were observed on the flooded field as well as a pair of Mute Swans on the big pond. One Snipe (5 Feb) was present near the first gate. Water Rail have been heard regularly.

Buzzard, Kestrel and Red Kite have been regularly seen. Grey Wagtail, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Nuthatch, Redwing, Siskin, Long-tailed Tit groups, Great Spotted and Green Woodpecker also observed. Wrens seem to like the underneath of the boardwalk and a Cetti's Warbler was heard calling.

Other species seen include field mice, water and common shrews, voles, and grass snake (early Dec) under the matts. Muntjac, grey squirrel and bank vole were also sighted. A Fox was seen curled up on the grass at the far end in the morning sunshine (15 Feb).



### 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.





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### BATS AT THE WITHEY BEDS

There are 17 species of breeding bat in the UK. An 18th species - the Greater Mouse-Eared bat has been found hibernating in the south of England. A lone male bat which has been ringed and found in previous years. This year there was exciting news as another was recorded in West Sussex.

In Hertfordshire we have 13 of our native species although some are rarer than others (see below). Our knowledge of their distribution is achieved through survey work using bat detectors or licensed trapping. Detectors are used to detect the ultrasonic calls bats make while they fly and search for food using echolocation under cover of darkness. This statement is a bit simplified as some bats use the same frequency when using echolocation! Detectors that enable recordings to be downloaded or visualised as sonograms provide more accurate identification. Bats produce their calls through their mouth and /or nose depending on the species, the sound wave passes through air, hits a moth or midge, and will bounce back to the bats ears in the same way we can hear an echo. The bat processes this information to home in on prey. Echolocation is also used to visualise their environment while flying. Their eyesight is perfectly good but like ours isn't good at night-time!

We are lucky to have a variety of bat friendly habitats in the Three Rivers Area. Lakes, rivers, woodland, grassland and farmland all support the insects that our bats feed on. There are also a good variety of buildings, trees and barns that bats can roost in. These roosts are protected by law even if bats are not present all the time, such is the protection of our bats. I'm often asked "why are bats protected?". In the UK, bat populations have declined significantly mainly due to habitat loss due to building and development, use of certain building materials and pollution. Other factors include light pollution, wind turbines and predation. Results from the national Bat Monitoring Programme carried out since 1996 show only slight increases in numbers of some bats species, while others have remained at the same level or declined further.

Because bats are protected, licences from Natural England are necessary to carry out many Bat Group activities and Building work may need to have bat surveys as part of the planning application. At the Withey Beds we usually find our 2 smallest UK bats: **Soprano pipistrelles** that particularly like to forage over riverside vegetation which harbours their favourite midges, and occasionally a **Common pipistrelle** have been detected. We mostly see pipistrelle bats just as it is getting dark.

Larger **Serotine** bats fly over the site, while still light in the evening, and sometimes swoop down to forage over the grassland or fly around the treetops taking larger insects such as moths and flying beetles. **Serotine** and **Noctule** bats echolocate loudly and can be easily picked up on a detector. **Daubenton's** bats have been seen over the river. Also known as the Water bat they have large feet and fly close to the water's surface where midges and moths are plentiful. They catch their prey in their feet and pass it to their mouths whilst flying.

**Brown Long Eared bats** are probably present but are difficult to pick up on some detectors because they can echolocate very quietly due to their large ears. They are known take spiders directly from webs. The photographs are of bats taken into care by the Herts and Middlesex Bat Group. Bat care is very specialised and should not be undertaken unless you are a bat group member.

If you find an injured bat please contact the bat group on [07517 123 200](tel:07517123200) you can also visit their website [hmbg.org.uk](http://hmbg.org.uk) or make enquires via [enquiries@hmbg.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@hmbg.org.uk)

