



Friends of The Withey Beds



Autumn 2023

Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Update

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

We have been informed by TRDC that the boardwalk, will be out of order for some time with consideration being given to a full replacement. This might take some time. At the moment, the access is via the field, which has cows in residence.

The reptile mats remain in place, and there have been 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 was held 21st/22nd May, the weather was good, the new individual gazebos rather than the large marquee worked well. The following Sunday we had a great turnout for the the Withey Beds walk with over 20 participants. This year our AGM will be held at 19:30 on 6 Nov at Rickmansworth Golf Club, please join us if you can.

Please let us know of anything which needs doing in the Reserve, or if you have ideas for the area. Most members now receive the newsletter by email. If you receive a paper copy and can go digital, please inform the membership secretary at friendsofthewitheybeds@gmail.com. Membership subscriptions - if you have not renewed, please contact the Membership Secretary by [email](#)

or 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](#).

Nature Notes – Anna Marrett

Water has covered the boardwalk several times this year and the field has been underwater for some considerable period.

In Apr 4 Lapwings were seen regularly on the field with some display behaviour. Buzzard, Red Kite, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel were also recorded during Spring and Summer. Mandarin often appeared flying up from the river with their whistle like calls and remained very wary. A pair of Egyptian Geese and Little Egret were also present.

Coot, Moorhen and Mallard had broods. A pair of Herons nested in one of the conifers, 3 young were seen in flight. Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, Nuthatch and Treecreeper were regularly observed as were Stock Dove and Ring-necked Parakeets. Whitethroat, Blackcap and Chiffchaff had territories and Cetti's Warbler possibly nested.

Sloughed Grass Snake skins were found under a mat. Slow worms also present.

Butterflies: Gatekeeper, Small White, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood, Peacock, Meadow Brown, Large White, Orange-tip were seen.

Dragonflies: Banded Demoiselle, Brown Hawker, Emperor, Common Darter, Southern Hawker.

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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The Oak Jewel Beetle

The Withey Beds Local Nature Reserve is a valuable habitat for many species including some nationally notable Diptera (true fly) species such as the oak jewel beetle (*Agrilus biguttatus*). Oak jewel beetles are a 'deadwood' species, meaning that they are dependent on the process of decaying wood and so the larvae feed directly on undecayed dead wood. However, the wood needs to be dead in order for the oak jewel beetle to eat it and even then, they require specialist microorganisms within their digestive system to assist in digestion; the oak jewel beetle is not a species that can overcome the defence systems of the living tissue.

It is rare to see the adults, the females of which will be laying their eggs within the bark of dead/dying trees, because they are not attracted to blossom to feed, instead they feed within the high canopy on leaves. Due to their history, it is possible to assume that the oak jewel beetles are true natives within Britain and a "relict old forest indicator species;" however, individuals have also been found within imported wood as their range extends into central Europe.

Once considered to be threatened, their condition has greatly improved within the last 40 to 50 years; however, this is naturally mirrored by deaths of oaks. The British range was first noted to be expanding following an extensive recording scheme which suggests that the oak jewel beetles have prospered following the great storms of 1987 and more recently, chronic oak decline.

Dr Keith Alexander highlights that oak jewel beetles have 'inaccurately' been linked to oak death and some consider the species to be pests in need of control. However, due to their biology, inability to eat living wood and only being interested in wood that is dead or dying, it is a tenuous and fragile link that the oak jewel beetles are responsible for the decline of oaks.

For more information on this interesting species, I would recommend reading Dr Keith Alexander's "What do we really know about the oak jewel beetle and acute oak decline?" I found it a fascinating read which inspired and fuelled this abstract for your newsletter. The article can be found on this link to the Ancient Tree Forum: [Oak Jewel Beetle](#) link:

Community Biodiversity Officer
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