



# Friends of The Withey Beds

## Spring 2025



### Local Nature Reserve (LNR) Update

We hope that this newsletter finds you all well.

As communicated in our previous newsletters the boardwalk remains closed. TRDC have assessed the damage and repair works have started. Unfortunately, during the initial work further repairs were noted and as we were heading into the autumn/winter, undertaking these would have proved difficult because of rising water levels. Therefore, over the winter the boardwalk remained closed. Earlier in March it was noted that a further tree is collapsing across another section of the boardwalk. Whilst this tree it is yet to fall onto the structure it is likely to over the coming months. The FoWB will continue to work with TRDC to identify possible solutions so that all or some of the boardwalk can be reopened. Updates will be made on the website: <http://www.thewitheybeds.org.uk>. In the meantime, access is via the field.



The reptile mats remain in place, and there have been reports of both grass snakes and mice, or possibly shrews, being seen. Visitors lifting them always have great anticipation on what might be hiding beneath. 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! 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 email [friendsofthewitheybeds@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofthewitheybeds@gmail.com).

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

### Nature Notes – by Anna Marett

Once again water levels remained on the high side and, as a minimum, wellies were needed to cross the field. A Stonechat (27 Oct) was an excellent record for the reserve. Cetti's warblers were heard singing in October, November and February. Two Buzzards (5 Feb) were noted flying around the reserve and a Red kite became a regular visitor.

Duck species recorded have been Wigeon, Mallard, Teal, Gadwall and Shoveller. Canada geese are frequently seen as is Grey heron. Water rail (10 Nov, 30 Dec, 1 Feb, 5 Feb) was heard calling. A Song thrush was singing (29 Dec) and a Mistle thrush observed by the Mistletoe plant by the river (10 Dec). This species is known to spread the parasitic plant by eating the berries then wiping its beak on branches.

Two Ravens flew over (25 Nov) and a Chiffchaff heard calling the same day. Wrens can be heard calling, alarming and singing from various areas. Three Treecreepers were photographed on 5 Feb and Nuthatches are frequently very vocal. Green and Great spotted woodpeckers were calling in December and February. Also 5 Ring necked parakeets were seen arguing over tree holes (22 Feb).

Other wildlife recorded during the winter months were Fox, Muntjac and Common shrew.

### 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 Mighty Oak (Part 1)

Worldwide there are c. 500 species of oak tree. Some are deciduous like our native oaks and some are evergreen. In the UK our native oaks are the sessile and pedunculate oaks, but there are many introduced oaks too. Some of these introduced oak trees have since hybridised with our native trees and some were also grafted onto pedunculate oak root stock to be used for ornamental purposes. Oaks reproduce by producing acorns.

The sessile oak *Quercus petraea* has leaves which are not as deeply lobed as the pedunculate oak and the acorns sit directly on the twigs in small clusters.

The Withey Beds oaks are pedunculate oaks *Quercus robur*. This species can grow to 36m tall. It has dark grey bark which is thick and deeply fissured in mature trees. The branches spread widely and the leaves are deeply lobed. The acorns are produced on long stalks in roughly scaled cups. Oaks can be long lived - over 800 years. The first leaves of the year are eaten by insects and birds but a 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort of leaves grow in midsummer known as Lammas growth. Male and female catkins are produced alongside the first growth of leaves. The branches of oaks often appear bent at right angles. Apparently (according to a walk I attended at Kew Gardens) several terminal buds grow at the same time at the end of the twig but one will become dominant over the others and grow more strongly eventually resulting in the right-angled appearance of the branches.

Historically oak has been used for traditional timber buildings, furniture, flooring and firewood and ship building and bark in the tanning industry. The pedunculate oak would have been the predominant, readily available lowland species with green wood being better for wood working than seasoned. Our ancient woodlands were important for hunting purposes. It's not surprising that our oaks have become important for wildlife too. More on that in part 2.

Sadly, our native trees are under attack from various insects and disease e.g. Ash dieback and Dutch Elm Disease. For our native oak problems are Oak Lace Bug which decreases growth and weakens the tree, Acute Oak Decline caused by bacteria which stress the tree and can cause its death in 5 years and the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) Caterpillar. OPM was first found in London in 2006 and is now currently in our area. OPM caterpillars feed on oak leaves harming the tree. The caterpillars pose a risk to humans and other animals as their hairs are extremely irritating to skin, eyes and throat and can cause breathing difficulties. In rare cases it can cause allergic reactions and both humans and other animals that can become sensitised by repeated exposure. These hairs can be windborne, settling on vegetation which may be ingested. The greatest risk is from May to July when the caterpillars are active although the hairs can still be found on old nests. If exposed, you should seek medical attention or for an animal seek a vet!

Caterpillars have black heads and grey bodies covered in long white hairs. They are only 2mm when they emerge but can grow to 2cm long. They tend to stay high in the trees but cluster together and move in a procession. Nests are found in the summer. Should you find any nests or caterpillars do not attempt to remove them. They need to be correctly identified first, and restrictions need to be put in place.

Further information can be found of the GOV.UK website (enter OPM) or report the sighting to TreeAlert or [opm@forestrycommision.gov.uk](mailto:opm@forestrycommision.gov.uk). You will need a 10 digit grid reference or use what3words, the full address, your contact details, a photo and details of the land owner if know.



Picture: Antoine Lantin



Picture: Kees

OPM



Sessile



Pedunculate