



News from the Ouse

ISSUE NUMBER 20
December 2017

WELCOME

to the newsletter of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project.

In the last edition I welcomed Rob Martyr to the project – in this edition we talk about his first 100 days. My, how time flies! I am sure that by now many of you will have met him and experienced the buzz of his enthusiasm.

This issue features work from the Creative Group whose art will be exhibited next year, a report on the latest activities of the young people of Garboldisham Primary School and an appeal to you to send in your records of things seen and heard on LOHP sites, to add to our database of biological records.

We draw near to the end of another year which has seen the first stage of our restructuring completed and the beginning of a new phase in our development. We now seek a wider audience and even greater involvement with the community. Our public events have been very successful and attracted record numbers. If you have not yet participated I would encourage you to join us at one of the many events we organise every year.

Peter Coster, Chair

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Hawthorn berries - favourite food of fieldfares and redwings

Rowena Langston

Winter wanderings

You may not yet have discovered LOHP's newest sites. Volunteer, Rowena Langston, describes why Carr Meadow in Hinderclay makes an excellent place to explore in winter.

Carr Meadow is one of our latest land acquisitions. Its particular appeal is the mature hedge of many species, which makes it a good location to practise winter identification of trees and shrubs. Its field maple, hawthorn, blackthorn and dogwood are typical of hedges in the area.

Vital corridors

Bare twigs help to reveal the remains of various plant galls, including knopper galls on acorns and oak apples on oak twigs, both produced by species of tiny gall wasps. The hedge also makes a corridor of habitat for passing flocks of birds, often mixed flocks of blue, great and long-tailed tits, or finch

flocks, retreating from feeding on the surrounding fields, including goldfinches and chaffinches with the occasional yellowhammer.

A well-stocked winter larder

If the hedges' fruits haven't been eaten by blackbirds before the winter thrushes arrive, fieldfares and redwings may drop in to feast on the bright red haws. Barn owls and kestrels often hunt over this meadow and the wet boundaries attract little egrets and sometimes kingfishers or water voles turn up.

High-pitched squeaks

Small mammals, such as bank voles and shrews (both common and pygmy have been recorded here) use the field and the hedges, feeding on fallen fruits and nuts, among other tasty morsels.

Rowena Langston



Carr Meadow - well worth exploring in all seasons and weathers

Peter Hughes

Surviving in the wild at Broomscot

At the end of the summer term, Year 3 and 4 visited Broomscot Common to take part in a carousel of activities. Teacher, Carol McGahan, describes their adventure.



Rowena Langston

To complement last term's whole school topic 'Survival', the children had been studying the book, *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George in literacy. After learning about the adventures of Sam's survival in the wild, the children were encouraged to think about their local habitat and how they might survive.

Shelter-building

Mr Langston oversaw den-building activities and supported the children in their choices of materials to ensure they were successful.

Freya B. and Theo said, 'Mr Langston was really good and helped us accomplish things quickly. He said, "Find the biggest branch you can and put smaller logs around it to make a natural shelter". We had a great time.'

Looking more closely

Rosemary Humphries, who is a Garboldisham School governor, supported another group who were doing some close study drawings of berries and flowers. They looked at shape, colour and texture and, thanks to our changing seasons, were lucky enough to

have lots to observe. Logan said, 'We saw some interesting plants and drew some of them, looking closely at shapes and colours.'

What's safe to eat?

The third activity was to find plants that could and could not be used as food and involved plant identification,

using books, identification sheets and magnifying glasses. Corin said, 'We sketched as many plants as we could and identified some of them and then decided which ones were safe to eat.'

We are very grateful to Reg and Rowena Langston and Rosemary Humphries for helping us to set up and run the activities. The children had a wonderful afternoon.

Next half term, Year 5 and 6 are hoping to do some peat digging and learn more about this ancient and important skill.

Carol McGahan

The children were encouraged to think about their local habitat and how they might survive in the wild.



Rambling outside the box

Many of you know the LOHP sites well, but do you know the other attractions in this lovely valley?

We thought we should run a short series of articles about other places local to the LOHP wildlife conservation sites to provide you with suggestions for places to rest your legs and quench your thirst, or sites of interest to visit, or places to stay so you can meet up with friends from further afield.

To kick off the series we're highlighting some of our local pubs (we have to get our priorities right!).

Thirsty in Thelnetham?

A lovely old pub, The White Horse, in Thelnetham, is within easy walking distance of the LOHP sites Hinderclay Fen, Webbs Fen, New Fen and Carr Meadow. For the more energetic

The White Horse in Thelnetham



among you, a longer walk could incorporate Parkers Piece, Betty's Fen and Blo' Norton Fen. Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Thelnetham Fen, renowned for its orchids, is also only a short walk away. Check their website for more info: whitehorsethelnetham.co.uk

Restoration in Garboldisham

The Fox in Garboldisham is convenient to combine with a visit to two LOHP sites: Scarfe Meadows and Broomscot Common. It's a Grade II listed, 250 year-old building that had been shut since 2007 until, in 2016, members of

the community fought to raise the money to buy it and were successful in their quest. They were handed the keys in October 2016.

We spoke to Peter Smith, the director, who reported that they are restoring the pub gradually with the support of hard-working volunteers, who not only run the bar but also use their DIY skills, and have now restored three rooms. They hope to fulfil their vision of a traditional country pub and with the support from the locals, their regular 'Food Nights' and special events are well attended. They plan an annual Beer Festival following the



The Fox in Garboldisham

A creative approach to volunteering

By Judith Tooth

Becky Whatley greets me on crutches, her knee having 'snapped' while dancing earlier in the week. After the interview we fix another time for the photo shoot in the hope that she will be feeling more comfortable – but opting all the same for the easy access of Parker's Piece. Come the day she is much better, but the road is closed. We consider The Frith, but decide to carry on to The Lows. Becky has brought with her a new canvas, easel, palette ... everything to mock up an 'artist at work' photo. But, such is the quality of the October morning light and the beauty of the alders along the valley bottom with the Suffolk Red Poll cattle grazing in their shade, that Becky is soon painting for real.

Fellow artist, Rosemary Humphries, introduced Becky to the LOHP and she became part of the project's Creative Group: 'Rosemary was very inclusive and encouraging and positive. I dipped my toe in and was very keen indeed. The group kept me going back and back: I needle-felted, printed and painted in oils.'



Becky at work, painting, on The Lows. Becky also helps with plant surveys and helps monitor ash die back on LOHP sites.

Becky might have struck a close relationship with the project area much sooner: looking for some land long before the LOHP began, she visited The Frith and Parkers Piece, then for sale. 'I couldn't go and save the rainforest like I wanted to - I was a mum with children and had a full-time job as a teacher - so I wanted to make a nature reserve, plant woodland, possibly keep animals. But the fields came with restrictions - good restrictions - and I couldn't see how to put together a proposal, so I bought some other pieces of land instead. And, lo and behold, the LOHP is doing there what I wanted to do, and with lots of help!'

Growing up in the American countryside, natural things always appealed to Becky. Her first ever painting was of a squirrel. She loved to go to the natural history museum, where her father worked as a geologist, to see fossils being sliced open. She went on to study at

Philadelphia College of Art. Then, keen to travel, she joined an archaeological summer dig. Hoping to travel to Greece, she ended up instead in Winchester, and the man she asked to look after her art materials while she

returned home, became her husband, David Whatley.

As the project reunites and restores the fragmented fens in a physical sense, it has also made the whole valley more joined up in Becky's mind. Returning again and again - for the guided walks on insects or birds or life on the river that she so loves - little by little she learns more, adding to her knowledge that then informs her visual response. Her favourite spot is Hinderclay Fen, with its mix of alder carr, heath, reed bed and even the river: it has everything you could want, she says.



The finished painting

'What makes the LOHP so particular for me is that although I'm unable to do all that hard physical work, it's set up so that people - who are able - can. And there are so many experts involved. So I can bathe in their glow and respond visually, as that's one of the only things I can do. I could be creative there for ever.'

'I think the sort of cooperation that occurs when LOHP and Suffolk Wildlife Trust share labour or machinery is splendid. And anything that encourages younger people to get involved is great, too: all groups need 'smaller' people.'

After just a few brushstrokes Becky's canvas is coming to life. I leave her to her work and walk home.

Judith Tooth

success of their first one in July. For all their upcoming events search *GarboldishamFox* on Facebook or *#thefoxreturns* on Twitter. Or just go and enjoy a pint or two after, of course, a lovely walk and a bit of fresh air on our nearby sites.

Redgrave refreshment

Lastly, The Cross Keys in Redgrave has been fundraising to become a community pub

and by the time this edition reaches your doormat it will, we hope, be in need of your continuing support. This location is ideal for walking around Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Redgrave and Lopham Fen plus LOHP sites The Frith and The Lows. For further information, check their website: redgravecommunitysociety.com.

Sue Lawrence and Bev Blackburn

If any of you reading this know of good places to visit, to eat and drink - or accommodation from which to explore the area - then do please email enquiries@lohp.org.uk or contact Bev and the intrepid LOHP team will investigate.

Almost 10,000 records – can you help us pass the mark?

Records are essential to show how habitats and conditions on our sites change - for better or worse. Volunteer and record keeper, Sylviane Moss, describes what we have - and why we need more.

We have been monitoring the fauna and flora on LOHP sites for several years now, and all the records have been entered in a database that allows us to track the progress made in restoring and improving the habitats in the Little Ouse valley. To date, we have 9,821 records; yes, more than NINE THOUSAND RECORDS! That is 2,627 individual species observed on sites managed by the LOHP or nearby.

Our records are good but very patchy
Most observations are from the last 10 years, but we managed to get hold of records from the late 1980s and even the mid to late 1950s. A notable example is saw-sedge - also known as great-fen sedge - which has been

found mainly on Blo' Norton Fen since the late 1950s (and which we're sure must still be there), but we have no record on the database since 2012. The same applies to hairy dragonfly for which the most recent records in the database are from 2007.

Marsh tit is an interesting example of a very under-recorded species. Our only data on them at the moment is from bird ringing at Hinderclay Fen. Where else are they?

Our record set is invaluable but very patchy. We need records to keep coming in so we can build up a fuller picture of the changes.

Can you help?

All you need to do is to let us know when you identify plant or animal

*Alien spacecraft?
No, a moth trap set on Little Fen*



Rowena Langston



Rowena Langston

Hairy Dragonfly is recognisable from its 'hairy' thorax and its very early flight period in spring.

species in the project area. We need some specific information such as location (map or GPS/national grid is even better); common name (with the Latin name too, if possible); date; quantity and developmental stage if possible (e.g. larva or adult); method of observation (field observation, moth trapping, etc); finally recorder and identifier (very often the same person).

If you think you can help, please get in touch with me (Sylviane.moss@lohp.org.uk), and remember, all reports count. What may seem a common sighting is valuable to us, we need the whole picture, not just the occasional rarity.
Sylviane Moss

Caught on camera ... life on a mink raft

What is a mink raft, I hear you ask. It's a floating wooden platform with a tray of modelling clay under a cover to protect it from rain. The clay captures tracks and prints of passing animals. Originally these platforms were put out to detect mink during the successful regional collaboration to eradicate mink and help water voles recover.

Caught in the act

As part of the LOHP otter project, we have been placing trail cameras in various locations, including overlooking some of the mink rafts which otters often use as sprinting (dung) locations. The resulting videos have revealed not only otters using these platforms. Other interesting

records include water shrew, water vole, brown rat, fox, and even a badger, which nearly capsized the platform! Bird visitors have included kingfisher, water rail, tawny owl, moorhen, little egret, wren and robin.



R Langston + otter

The footage doesn't rival the BBC - but it does show how much is going on when we aren't looking!

We have film of a kingfisher perched on the roof of the platform, beating its unfortunate fish prey against the wood before swallowing it whole, in characteristic fashion. The videos of water rail fly-catching are both informative and amusing, as the bird 'dances' around the platform leaping and twirling, catching insects on and off the platform.

24 hour coverage

The cameras capture images both at night and during the day. Most, but by no means all, footage of otters is at night, and we have built up records of a mother with two cubs in each of two years, and additional lone individuals. Although we cannot reliably recognise different individuals, these observations augment other sources of information that we are collecting. All these animals are going about their daily business, but we never expected the mink rafts to be such focal points!

Rowena Langston

Mysterious and beautiful moths

It's 8.30pm on a Saturday night: shall I put on my sparkly top and high heels and head for a nightclub? No, much better... I'm going to meet some interesting people in fields near Redgrave Fen – The Frith!



Matthew Owain Davies

It's the LOHP moth weekend and under the wise tutelage of Rowena and Reg Langston, we are going to catch and identify our local moths. Reg, Rowena and Tim Frost are staying on the Frith to set up

moth traps, monitor them overnight and then identify what we trap the following morning. Teresa Frost didn't stay overnight but was an essential member of the team, sweep-netting and identifying several micro-moths in particular.

The moon is full and bright, so at first we catch only day-flying moths, but I'm fired with enthusiasm so back I go at 6am on Sunday morning to see what we have caught.



Antler moth - often flies by day

Matthew Owain Davies

Rowena has brought transparent tubes and glass jars with foliage to keep the moths in while we identify them - and what a haul we have!



Matthew Owain Davies

Elephant hawk-moth (some people think the front end of the caterpillar resembles an elephant's trunk - but smaller!)

The ones that stand out in my untutored mind are an elephant hawk-moth, a buff tip, a cinnabar, a yellow tail, a large emerald, a ruby tiger and the wonderfully named common footman. These are just a few of the larger moths: Rowena tells me that there are hundreds of tiny moths,

many identified only by their scientific names.

What a perfect way to spend a Saturday night and

Sunday morning. I learnt such a lot and am left with a desire to know more. I now have two ambitions (birthday presents maybe?): to get a much better moth book and a small trap so I can discover the moths of my own garden.

Pam McMillan



Matthew Owain Davies

Poplar hawk-moth and elephant hawk-moth

Dead birds of prey - and dead otters?

Predatory birds - post mortems

The Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH) runs the national, long-term Predatory Bird Monitoring Scheme (PBMS), quantifying the levels of contaminants in the livers and eggs of certain species of predatory birds. This research has its origins in the 1960s, when scientists were searching for the cause of substantial declines in birds of prey, including peregrine falcons, through direct death or sub-lethal effects such as thinning of eggshells and breeding failure. Predatory birds and mammals are especially vulnerable to the effects of toxic chemicals because, being at the top of the food-chain, the chemicals ingested via their prey become highly

concentrated in their bodies. The PBMS acts as an early warning system. For further information, see <http://pbms.ceh.ac.uk>.

We have sent a tawny owl and a little owl found locally for analysis.

Dead otters go to Cardiff

Otters found dead across England and Wales can be sent to Cardiff University for post mortem examination, on behalf of the Environment Agency (EA) as part of its environmental monitoring programme. The post mortem assesses the age class, sex, reproductive condition and general body condition of the otter, both externally and internally including injuries and any signs of disease or

parasites. Screening for pollutants such as organochlorines or PCBs is carried out by the EA. This project makes an essential contribution towards understanding the health of the otter population as well as contributing to our knowledge of the general health of our environment.

In late June, we were alerted to a dead otter at Garboldisham, which is now at Cardiff University awaiting analysis. We will provide an update when we receive the report, which may take quite a while. Meanwhile, for further information, see www.otterproject.cf.ac.uk.

If you find a dead otter or raptor in the valley, please tell Rowena or Reg on 01379 898009.

100 days on the headwaters

Rob Martyr, LOHP's Conservation Manager, describes the first few months of his job.

It has been a most enjoyable and rewarding start as the LOHP Conservation Manager. I have felt very welcomed by the trustees, local community, and most importantly, the volunteers.

Warm and dry in the Mill

Thelnetham Windmill have very kindly provided me with a warm and dry working space. Every Tuesday is like watching an episode of Grand Designs, when the mill volunteers use their ingenuity to continue their heritage restoration project.

Wednesday wonders

Wednesdays are currently my favourite working days, as I get the opportunity to spend time with the weekly volunteer work party, an eclectic, cosmopolitan mix of local people who help manage our precious sites. I am both inspired and captivated by the LOHP volunteers, who work tirelessly with great humour, enthusiasm and camaraderie. There is a very special and unique atmosphere on weekly or monthly work parties where friendships have been forged through a common love of nature, emphasising that the countryside is beneficial to mind, body and soul. There are always delicious cakes during the tea break and in the Great LOHP Bake Off final, John McCormack reigned supreme with his rock cakes

with Laura Cox coming in a close second!

Other vital volunteers

Our other LOHP superstars, whose unassuming work goes largely unheralded, are the sheep and cows, who assist as biological lawnmowers, ensuring that sward diversity is maintained within our many habitats. We are very lucky to have two very helpful local graziers, Denis Jenkins and Brian Lambert, who are so accommodating to our habitat management requirements.

Wildlife on all sides

There's wildlife a-plenty on the LOHP sites and I regularly see the glorious marsh harriers or common buzzards

Field grasshopper



Rob Martyr

on patrol over the fens, or a sparrowhawk getting mobbed by irritable crows. It has been a very good autumn so far for jays and I cannot remember a year where I have seen so many. Water voles continue to flourish in the river along Parkers Piece and Bleywycks Bank and otter spraint is found regularly on the banks of the Little Ouse. Invertebrates thrive within the mosaic of LOHP habitats and I have seen some wonderful grasshoppers, beautiful butterflies and dazzling dragonflies, and there are quite literally hundreds of species to be seen.

A botanist's delight

LOHP sites are botanically rich with some rare fen species such as saw sedge and long-stalked yellow sedge flourishing. Large areas on the Frith are returning to Breck grassland and this is a splendid site on a warm evening when a light breeze sways the delicate grasses in rhythmic waves.

Water quality issues

Water quality within the slow flowing Little Ouse River is a worrying issue, with high ammonia levels. Nitrates and phosphates can influence aquatic flora and fauna and may indirectly lead to reduced levels of dissolved oxygen thus decreasing biodiversity. The Little Ouse is very susceptible to agricultural run-off and sedimentation and the river has been heavily modified with natural processes removed. Soil erosion from crop fields contributes to this poor water quality. However, without the commercial agricultural operations that surround us in Norfolk and Suffolk, many of us would be unable to eat. It is therefore important that LOHP work with our partners and local land owners and find solutions to improve river water quality and reduce soil erosion and run-off.

Heavy autumn work - some volunteers prefer to go incognito



Bey Blackburn

Pilot project

Recently the LOHP was awarded an Anglian Water Flourishing Foundation Grant for a restoration pilot project to create a resilient, self-sustaining stretch of river improving water quality and, subsequently, biodiversity. The project will begin with an Environment Agency Geomorphology Technical Officer analysing flow rates and working out where the pilot site would be best located. This will be followed by a full river survey by the



Volunteers and livestock do a great job for wildlife on the LOHP sites



Environment Agency Catchment Coordinator and a River Ecologist from the Wild Trout Trust. The LOHP will be working in partnership with multiple organisations and land owners, ensuring that this project is beneficial to all parties.

There is never a dull day being the Conservation Manager and I look forward each day to being part of the LOHP...

Rob Martyr, LOHP Conservation Manager



**From the Bridge by
Thelnetham Windmill (August).**

Watercolour by Sue Downie

Sue plans to use the same view from the bridge in a series of paintings through the year.

LOHP Creative Group invites you

Monthly walk + drawing/painting/photographing/taking notes. Afterwards we have tea and cake. Everybody is welcome to join us.

See back page for details of next meeting or contact Sally Mills on 01953 681539 or sally@davidandsallymills.net.

Membership application

(not renewals)

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Phone:

E-mail:

I wish to support the LOHP as a:

Friend of the Fens: £10 min a year

Ordinary member: £5 a year

Junior member (<18 years) £1 a year

Please tick one category and write the amount donated below.

I wish to donate £..... to the LOHP.

Please make cheques payable to the 'Little Ouse Headwaters Project'.

We can reclaim the basic rate of tax that you have paid on the gross equivalent of your donation so, for example, a membership payment of £10 is worth £12.50 to us. Therefore, if you are a UK taxpayer, we would be very grateful if you would Gift Aid your subscription by simply completing the Gift Aid section, and date and sign this form.

I want to Gift Aid the above donation to the LOHP

Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts of money made today and in the future.

I am a UK Taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in the current year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations to charities it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

I understand the Little Ouse Headwaters Project will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Signature:..... Date:.....

Please notify the LOHP if you 1) wish to cancel this declaration 2) change your name or home address, or 3) no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains. If you pay income tax at the higher or additional rate and you want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Note on renewals: All renewals are due in April. We send a letter to all members. *Please don't use this form to renew your membership.*

A big thank you to all those members who send donations along with their renewals. We greatly appreciate this extra support for the work we're doing to enhance the valley and its wildlife.



The LOHP needs you!

The LOHP relies on volunteers to run the charity and help with conservation (and other) work. Might you have some energy and time? If so we'd love to hear from you.

To get involved, and for more information, contact **Bev Blackburn**, Volunteer Coordinator and Event Manager at beverly.blackburn@lohp.org.uk or 07747 691285, or **Nick Lingwood**, Hon. Secretary on 07772 769025.

Work parties

Get out and enjoy yourself - whatever the weather - at an LOHP work party or event. Work parties are monthly on Sundays (dates below) and weekly on Wednesdays. *Check website for details and confirmation of location.*

Dec 10	Sallow clearing	New Fen
Jan 14	Pollarding	Broomscot Common
Feb 11	Path maintenance	Betty's Fen entrance
Mar 11	Turf pond	Betty's/Blo' Norton

Jo-Anne Pitt	01379 898684	Blo' Norton Fen
Reg & Rowena Langston	01379 898009	Broomscot
Nigel Clark	01379 890460	New Fen



LOHP on Facebook & Twitter

for news and *great* photos go to www.lohp.org.uk and click on the icons



Events

Nov 27 Mon AGM and members' evening - Redgrave Activities Centre, IP22 1RL. 7.30 pm start. Short AGM followed by a talk from Pam Taylor - **East Anglian Dragonflies**. Free for members but a donation from non-members would be appreciated (£2). Please bring a plate to share. Seasonal refreshments and raffle. All welcome.

Dec 1, Jan 5 and Feb 2 (the first Friday of every month) 2pm. **Creative Group** meet at Thelnetham Windmill to walk on the fen, take photos, notes and sketch. Afterwards at Church Farm Barn, Blo' Norton we have tea, cake, discussion and, if time, do some work. Workshops and outings to be decided. Everyone is welcome, no need to book. Contact - see p 7.

Dec 31 Sun - Annual Winter Walk meet at Redgrave Activities Centre, IP22 1RL, at 10.15am for 10.30am for a gentle amble in the Little Ouse Valley. All welcome, including polite dogs. Wear robust footwear and suitable clothing. Soup available afterwards, please book for this with Bev (see contact details above). No booking required for walk itself.

2018 - May (date to be confirmed) a celebration of Peat Activities on Parkers Piece. Thelnetham Mill open. LOHP Creative Group art exhibition in Blo' Norton village hall. Refreshments available.

To contact the LOHP (Reg. charity no: 1098232)

Email: enquiries@lohp.org.uk

Write: LOHP, Waveney Cottage, Redgrave Road, South Lopham, Diss, IP22 2JN

Phone: 07919 912045 (Rob Martyr, Conservation Manager)

Website: www.lohp.org.uk