

BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST - AGM, 24 September 2008

Chairman's Annual Report

The Trust's public profile has never been higher than in the last year. We were delighted when our new acquisition, 'Valley Marsh', was selected as one of only two projects to represent Norfolk in the '*Biodiversity Inspirations*' calendar produced by the East of England Biodiversity Forum. Not only did we represent 'August 2008' but we were featured as the front-cover picture. This attractively produced, colourful calendar has been sent to every parish council in the six counties of the East of England (EEDA) area, in order to encourage and inspire them to play a key role in conserving and enhancing biodiversity, as required by the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006*. Once again we manned our display stand at the '*Wild about Norfolk*' event on the weekend of 6-7 September 2008 and exchanged information with many like-minded enthusiasts.

We have received good support from South Norfolk District Council. A generous grant has enabled us to buy our own Power Scythe for managing the marsh. Then, on 27 March 2008, Bob Kerry and Tony Davy received Civic Awards from S. Norfolk, in recognition of the work of the Trust in enhancing the environment, at a delightful Civic Reception in Wymondham Abbey.

Further recognition came when the Trust received 'honourable mention' (runner-up) in the Group Category of the 2007 Community Biodiversity Awards from the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership (a large consortium of local authorities and conservation organizations in Norfolk). These awards are presented annually to organizations and individuals who have contributed to wildlife conservation in Norfolk and engaged local communities in the process. Our handsome certificate was presented at an event at the Assembly House, Norwich, earlier in the evening of our own AGM.

We have had visits from two expert groups to record species on and around the reserve. The Norfolk Fungi Study Group, led by Dr Tony Leech, came on 11 November 2007 and made some interesting finds of 'waxcap' meadow communities. The Norfolk Flora group, led by Bob Ellis, came on 2 August 2008; a number of additions were made to our list and an unusual double-flowered form of pearlwort (*Sagina procumbens*) was identified on our loke as a result. Furthermore, signs of water vole activity were seen on the margins of our pond. In another development, the pool created by Bob Kerry's team of Tax Inspectors last year, while digging out a section of dyke, now supports a highly gratifying population of stoneworts (charophytes) – an indicator of good water quality.

It has been a year of intense activity on our work days in managing Valley Marsh. During the spring and early summer, we made a start on felling the over-age and unwanted cricket-bat willows. A row of seven trees has been cut down and the timber stacked near our boundary. In the summer and autumn we have used our new power-scythe to remarkable effect in cutting and raking-off the rank marsh vegetation over a large area. In September we received welcome help from the Norwich Offending Team and one of their young-offender charges. By November we should have cut the entire area, as planned.

This year we reinstated our tradition of day excursions to sites of conservation interest. Tony Davy took a party to Brancaster salt marshes in N. Norfolk and demonstrated how new salt marshes could be formed behind breached seawalls, as a result of managed coastal realignment (9 August 2008). Our usual cycle of meetings included: our own fungus foray (30 September 2007), the Christmas party (15 December 2007), 'Breakfast with the Birds' (led as ever by David Lester, 4 May 2008), a wildflower walk on Scop Hill, the closed land fill site (15 June), summer barbeque (21 June), 'Breakfast with the moths' (led by Judy and John Geeson, 6 July), and pond-dipping on Valley Marsh (14 July). The usual group of enthusiasts has been attending to our

routine conservation tasks on Church Plantation, planting new hedges around the village and expanding the continuing village hedge survey (9 July 2008).

At the last AGM, Dr Annette Ford was elected as a trustee, and Denis Moye, Lorie Lain-Rogers and Bob Kerry were re-elected. The trustees met four times during the year: 15 November 2007, and 12 February, 6 March and 3 July 2008. At the first meeting, Tony Davy, Stephanie Crome and Bob Kerry were re-elected chairman, secretary and treasurer, respectively. Sandie Schröder kindly continued as Membership Secretary.

As predicted last year, the challenges of managing Valley Marsh are proving fascinating and enjoyable for the members and volunteers participating in our regular work days (the third Saturday of each month and following Thursday). The experimental cutting we did in 2007 has already been rewarded with a succession of colourful displays of flowers this summer, notably of Red Campion and Meadowsweet. All the indications are that we are beginning to restore the communities dominated by stinging nettles and bindweed into more diverse, attractive assemblages. The increasing recognition of the work of the Trust is also an indication of our success and will spur us on in the coming year.