

BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST - AGM, 22 September 2010

Chairman's Annual Report

The most significant event of the year has been the extension of our nature reserve, with the acquisition of a triangle of land of about half an acre on the southern boundary that had been on our wish-list for a long time. This excellent addition provides us with a more coherent southern boundary, along the track, and helps to tie together the two parts of the reserve (Church Plantation and Valley Marsh). Previously, this triangle had been a repository for unsightly corrugated iron and other debris, which we have now been very happy to clear on our work days. We are very grateful for the generous donation of this land, at minimal cost to the trust (legal fees). Unfortunately we were not able to obtain the small area of wet meadow mentioned last year, and so no fund-raising was initiated.

The Trust appeared in '*Putting local wildlife on the map: a practical guide for volunteers, parish projects and community groups on recording wildlife in your local area*', published by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust in May. Two case studies, one describing the founding and establishment of the Bergh Apton Conservation Trust, and another dealing with the Bergh Apton hedgerow project, were contributed by Lorie Lain-Rogers and Bob Kerry, respectively. Four trustees subsequently attended workshops based on this initiative. Once again, the Trust is punching well above its weight.

The Trust's display boards were as usual enthusiastically deployed by Bob Kerry at '*Wild about Norfolk*' and manned by various trustees (Acle School, 3 September 2010). There was more good publicity on the back of the programme for the Dixieland jazz concert in the Church (11 June 2010) organized by Dennis Moye. We have recently commissioned a splendid embroidered version of our new logo (designed last year by Kaarin Wall) and this now available on various items of apparel (t-shirts, sweat shirts, polo shirts etc.), as and when there is sufficient interest to make up orders. We are grateful to Jacquie Ratcliffe for organizing this.

We focused more this year on the management of our water resources. In November, we dug out most of the length of the two dykes running across Valley Marsh, with the aid of a 3-ton digger, expertly operated by John Guymer. We are grateful to Christopher Meynell for arranging the use of the digger. Our aim was habitat diversification, rather than improved drainage, and so dams have also been built to retain water within in the dykes. By the summer, the deepened dykes were teeming with invertebrates and had good colonization with Stoneworts and other aquatic plants. We are still seeking a way to reduce the nutrient loading (and consequent duckweed coverage) on our large pond but it harbours much wildlife nevertheless.

Once again we had cut and raked-off most of the vegetation on the non-wooded parts of Valley Marsh on work days between August and November, yielding continuing enhancement to floral diversity this summer. Kevin Parker expertly felled a tree that was leaning at a dangerous angle - and well beyond our capabilities. Andy Campbell brought another chain-saw course in the autumn, to fell and dismember another two of our biggest unwanted Cricket-bat willows. As usual, it took us most of the remaining winter work days to stack or burn the resulting debris. Not only did we receive valued assistance from Norwich young offenders but also from several parties of recovering drug addicts, and Barney Mewton, who put in many hours towards the Duke of Edinburgh's award Scheme. Workers were again rewarded with baked potatoes and sausages from the bonfires.

We repeated the 'Open afternoon' at the reserve this year and attracted a good number of people. There were special visits in the summer from Brownies and Rainbows, organized by Jacquie Ratcliffe and Lorie Lain-Rogers (24 June 2010). This year's excursion was to the RSPB Reserve at Strumpshaw Fen, where 11 of us had a marvellous day out. In collaboration with the Bergh Apton Local History Group and the Anteros Centre, we co-sponsored a fascinating talk by Adam Wolfe entitled '*Western Australia, Whaling and the World*' on 26 June 2010. A number of members supported the interesting 'OPAL' session on air pollution and lichens on trees at the Village Hall (13 February 2010).

Calendar of regular events:

- Fungus foray, led by Dr Tony Leech (18 October 2009).
- Christmas party at Flint Cottage (18 December 2009).
- Breakfast with the Birds, led by David Lester (9 May 2010).
- Breakfast with the Moths', led by Judy and John Geeson (15 May 2010).
- Open afternoon on our reserve (16 May 2010).
- Village Hedge survey, organized by Bob Kerry (evenings of 6 May and 3 June 2010).
- Wildflower walk, led by Tony Davy, on our reserve (13 June 2010).
- Midsummer barbeque and bonfire on millennium field, courtesy of Christopher and Liz Meynell (19 June 2010).
- Pond-dipping on Valley Marsh (18 July 2010).
- Day excursion, to the RSPB Reserve at Strumpshaw Fen (25 July 2010).

The trustees met formally three times during the year: 19 November 2009, 4 February 2010 and 30 July 2010. 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. We are grateful to Stephanie Crome for again hosting the excellent trustees' soiree on 6 March 2010.

Looking to the future, the trustees are about to engage in discussions with the Rockland Wildlife Group about the possibility of a joint enterprise to establish a nature reserve on orchid-rich wet pastures and marshes, should the opportunity arise in the near future.