

BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST - AGM, 29 September 2011

Chairman's Annual Report

This year we have made very significant progress with clearing of the Cricket-bat willows on Valley Marsh. Apart from our own efforts in the winter we have had considerable assistance with tree felling in August from contractors working for UK Power Networks. Their remit is to remove trees overhanging the 11 kV power cables crossing the reserve in order to maintain a clearance of 8 m; we have negotiated with them several times in the last few years, to no previous effect. This year was different: they organized a power shutdown and felled eight large willows that we could never have tackled ourselves, because of the manifest safety problems. As a concession to our status as a nature reserve their team of about 12 men kindly logged most of the felled trees in the same day, not something they normally expect to do. Another benefit is that these trees are in addition to the meagre quarterly felling quota allowed by the Forestry Commission. This blitz has made quite an impact on the landscape (skyscape?) and the improved light and reduced transpiration of water should bring benefits for the vegetation next year. However, our work days are mapped out for several months to come, burning the brushwood and moving the logs. Volunteers will be rewarded with the customary sausages and baked potatoes, cooked in the huge bonfires to come!

Ironically, within a few days of this carnage we were surveyed by the County Council and Norfolk Wildlife Trust in relation to our longstanding application for County Wildlife Site status. At least it was clear that we are managing the site actively. Other parts of the marsh were fine testimony to our previous management efforts, the cutting and raking repeated in the autumn having further contributed to plant diversity and the general attractiveness of the vegetation. We await the outcome of this survey and the eventual decision.

On a broader canvas, we have had highly enjoyable interactions with the newly formed, neighbouring South Yare Wildlife Group, including showing their members around our reserve on two occasions, not to mention participating in their monthly field meetings. We were also very pleased to host our old friends from the Blofield and District Conservation Group (BADCOG) for a visit; they were impressed with the development of the site over the interval since their last visit in 2007. The Guides, Brownies and Rainbows finally braved the weather this year and had a good evening on our reserve.

Our own programme of events was somewhat curtailed by a diversion of efforts to the triennial Bergh Apton Sculpture Trail – as a Trust we ran the Church car park, as previously, but some members also needed to attend to their own gardens before daring to allow visitors access. As a result we did not run several of our usual summer events, although they will doubtless return in the future. There was an unexpected benefit though: Pip Collyer surveyed our reserve for spiders in between wearing his sculptor's hat and found nearly 50 species, including one that is nationally scarce and another that has been recorded only twice previously from Norfolk.

The fungus foray, led again by the ever-popular Dr Tony Leech, was very well attended and an acclaimed success (17 October 2010). The 'Christmas' party in mid-January was so well-received that it may become a fixture at this time of the year. Notwithstanding all the early-summer activity, Bob Kerry managed to lead two more productive hedge survey evenings (16 June and 7 July 2011). More surprisingly, the midsummer barbeque and bonfire on the Meynells' millennium field was not rained-off this year. Later, we actually had a novel activity (a Dragonfly afternoon on 14 August 2011, kindly led by the Norfolk Recorder, Dr Pam Taylor). Although conditions on the

day were not particularly propitious we eagerly anticipate a promised return visit next year. This was followed by a resurrected activity: it is many years since we had a bat walk, but the evening with Mike Finnimore on 15 September 2011 rekindled interest and reminded us what a rewarding experience it can be in the hands of an expert; several of our members and associates now have their own bat detectors.

The trustees met formally four times during the year: 28 October 2010, and 10 February, 19 April and 26 July 2011. 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.

In our most recent initiative, we have had a professional quotation to build a wooden platform, projecting out into the pond, in order to facilitate pond-dipping and safe access to open-water habitat. We are still investigating how to finance this but we hope to proceed before next summer. We hope that the improved accessibility will help to attract more young people to our future events. In summary, we have had another fruitful and enjoyable year and look forward to the coming year with keen anticipation.