

## **BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST - AGM, 27 September 2013**

### Chairman's Annual Report

This has been a hugely significant year for the management of the Valley Marsh part of our nature reserve. First, in November, we had a substantial, timber pond-dipping platform constructed at the edge of the pond; this gives easy, safe access to deeper water for 'pond-dippers' and we hope will serve to encourage young people in particular to take an interest in both local wildlife and Trust activities. However, for reasons that I will come to in a moment, we have not yet actually been able to use it for pond-dipping sessions in the first summer. The platform was funded by generous grants from Bergh Apton Sculpture trail 2011 and Norfolk County Council (under their Countryside Conservation Scheme), for which we are very grateful.

The second development, during the winter, was the removal of 27 unsightly and inconvenient tree stumps that had been left by our programme of gradually removing cricket-bat willows from the marsh. These stumps had become a potentially expensive hazard to our power scythe during the annual cutting of the tall marsh vegetation. They were professionally sawn-off and then reduced to ground level using a self-propelled stump-grinding machine. We are grateful to Stefan Ludkin for carrying out this work over more than two days.

The third and greatest event, at the end of July, was the removal of all 30 remaining cricket-bat willows in one fell swoop. J.S. Wright & Sons of Chelmsford had contracted to buy these, for their intended purpose of making cricket bats, in November 2011. Subsequently, felling and removal had been thwarted by the exceptionally wet summer in 2012, as it was not possible to deploy the necessary heavy machinery. However, the warm, dry spell in June and July provided conditions as good as we were likely to get and the contractors moved in at very short notice. We thank our neighbour, Robert Waters, for his co-operation with access across his land. Inevitably this has caused a dramatic upheaval: the familiar landscape has changed and the collateral damage to the vegetation that we anticipated was fully realized. The ground was seriously churned up, with wheel ruts up to 60 cm deep in places. Inevitably, an enormous fire was needed to burn the tops and branches of the trees. We still have many work-days' worth of clearing-up and repair ahead. That said, the advantages greatly outweigh the disruptions. It would probably have taken us another decade of hard labour to remove these trees at the previous rate of progress. The future benefits to the marsh vegetation arising from improved light penetration, reduced evaporative water loss and a generally more natural appearance should become increasingly manifest over the next few years. The Trust has received payment of £7490 for the timber to spend on future conservation work.

The Raptor Trust kindly donated 6 owl boxes (1 Barn, 2 Tawny & 3 Little), which were handed over at a ceremony on Sunday 27 January, and put up on trees on the reserve by Kevin Parker; this was covered in an almost-full page article in the EDP on the following day.

In the following month (23rd February) we hosted our second OPAL Lichen Workshop. This was based in Bergh Apton Village Hall with field work in the lichen-rich Old Cherry Orchard off Threadneedle Street. OPAL (Open Air Laboratories) is a partnership of nine regional universities, the Natural History Museum, the Open University, the Field Studies Council, the Meteorological Office, the National Biodiversity Network, the Royal Parks and the Environment Agency that seeks to encourage people to spend more time outside understanding the world around them.

The annual triumph that is fungus foray, led as usual by the charismatic Dr Tony Leech, took place on 28 October 2012. The traditional 'do-it-yourself' Christmas party was held on 15 December 2012. Our annual day trip to a site of conservation importance (4 August 2013) was an excellent visit by boat to Havergate Island, organized by Dr Annette Ford. Bob Kerry led two further, productive hedge survey evenings on 13 June and 18 July – this takes the total length of hedge surveyed in the village to more than 20 km. The midsummer barbeque and bonfire on the millennium pageant field was held on 23 June, courtesy of Christopher and Liz Meynell. This year we had our second Dragonfly Walk led by Dr Pam Taylor, President of the British Dragonfly Society (14 July); once again the weather was not sunny enough for many dragonflies to be active but we learned a great deal about these fascinating insects from Pam on a delightful afternoon on our reserve. During the summer, the reserve was used by large groups of guides and brownies/rainbows for field events, organized by Jacquie Radcliffe.

Following the closure of Bergh Apton Post Office, Sandie Schröder has retired after as Membership Secretary and this role has been taken over by Bob Kerry. We are very grateful to Sandie for having carried out this important task so efficiently for many years. Also, this summer, demolition of the shed caused our collection of tools to be moved finally from where Bernie and Jean Bobbin had kindly allowed us to store them for all of the previous history of the Trust; we thank them sincerely for such long-term practical support. The trustees met formally four times during the year: 30 October 2012, and 19 February, 9 April and 9 July 2013. At the first meeting, Tony Davy, Stephanie Crome and Bob Kerry were re-elected chairman, secretary and treasurer, respectively.