

BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST - AGM, 28 September 2016

Chairman's Annual Report

Our most novel activity this year has been participation in the 'Wild Patch' project, a project initiated by South Yare Wildlife Group and the Broads Authority, that aims to raise public awareness of the immense conservation value of being a little less tidy in the garden, among other things. Our involvement has been in the production of a short animated film, designed and animated by Phoebe Halstead. This was commissioned and funded by our member Rodney Aldis, through a charitable donation to the Trust. The video runs for a little over 3 minutes and has been kindly voiced-over by David Whiteley, on a *pro bono* basis. I think you will agree, when you see it, that this is a beautiful production that could have a lot of impact. We plan to make this as widely available as possible, including on our own website. We have now acquired the domain name 'berghaptonconservationtrust.org' and material will start to appear on the site within a few weeks.

The more traditional routes to seeking public engagement have continued, starting with our exhibit at 'Wild about Norfolk' in October 2015. Our work days have again benefitted from visiting groups doing community service on our workdays throughout the year. The dedicated pond-dipping afternoon on 21 May 2016 at Valley Marsh May was greatly enjoyed by the small group of young people and their parents, as well as us.

We greatly welcomed the recent visits by the Brooke scout group (12 - 14 September) at the start of their new season's programme of events. Jacquie Ratcliffe and Shirley Rimmer had met with the group in the early summer to talk about possible activities. Over the three evenings nearly sixty youngsters along with numerous leaders and parent helpers gathered in the Church Field before going down on to various parts of the Trust land. The groups were excited to find slow worms and grass snakes on the site, not to mention seeing numbers of bats flitting about while they worked, and hearing the tawny owls calling. We forget how lucky we are to have these things on our doorsteps, and the boys' excitement was great to see.

First came a group of Beavers (aged 6-8) on the evening of Monday 12 September. Accompanied by a number of parents, who seemed to enjoy the event almost more than the children, they took turns on the marsh to do some raking and pond dipping in the dyke. Plenty of sticklebacks and impressive dragonfly nymphs were found and admired, along with a good selection of pond beetles. Tuesday evening saw a group of 11-14-year-old Scouts split their efforts between raking on the marsh, trying their hand at some scything, and clearing steps of brambles, bracken and nettles on the plantation. A Lively group of 20 Cubs (8-11 year olds) came on Wednesday evening. They completed the raking on the marsh and repaired the steps on the plantation. Lisa Flatman, with her Forest School experience, was a valuable addition to the BACT crew.

The group is replacing and repairing bird nesting boxes that have been damaged by woodpeckers. Metal discs will now protect the nestlings from woodpecker raids next spring. The older Explorer Scouts are looking at the possibility of using the plantation for a 'zero-impact' camping expedition. We are grateful to Jacquie Ratcliffe, Shirley Rimmer and Lisa Flatman for organising and managing these visits.

The year started after the last AGM when Christian Whiting, Senior Ecologist with CH2M HILL gave a marvellously illustrated presentation on reptile conservation in the Broads. He dealt mainly with the mitigation of effects on species affected by work carried out for flood alleviation projects and

gave us interesting insights into the intricacies of the work involved. The annual fungus foray on 25 October 2015, on and around our nature reserve, was led as usual by our old friend Dr Tony Leech and attracted a huge following from far and wide; we are now accumulating an impressive inventory of fungi for such a small area. We organised a group of volunteers for the village litter-pick on Sunday 10 April 2016 and many bags of litter were duly taken to the tip.

A highlight of the summer was a delightful and extremely well attended evening tour of Wheat Fen with, on Wednesday 18 May; we are grateful to David Nobbs, the leader, for sharing his expertise and enthusiasm for the wildlife and its conservation, and to Lisa Flatman for organising it. Bob Kerry led his customary two hedge surveys, both this year at Bergh Apton Manor, on 15 June and 13 July. The morning of Saturday 18 June saw a very welcome return of 'Breakfast with the moths' with John Geeson, now sadly as a solo act; as ever people were amazed and delighted by the range and colours of the moths uncovered in the daylight. This was a nice prelude to the workday, and then the traditional midsummer barbeque on the 'millennium pageant' field, courtesy of Christopher and Liz Meynell. This was so enjoyed that we celebrated the equinox in like fashion last week the Church field. The second and similarly well-attended excursion of the summer was an afternoon tour of woodland at Kirstead with Simon Aylmer on 28 August. This was our third visit over nearly 20 years, having first been shown round by Simon's father, and it was fascinating to see how the plantings and management had developed. We thank Annette Ford for organising this visit. The traditional Christmas party at Flint Cottage was on 20 December 2015.

The trustees met formally four times during the year: on 11 November 2015, and 3 February, 13 April and 20 July 2016. At the first meeting we welcomed Lisa Flatman and Neil Headon to our number; Tony Davy, Stephanie Crome and Bob Kerry were re-elected chairman, secretary and treasurer, respectively. Management of the reserve is still following our long-term strategy but this year we have been developing exciting plans for a new pond, about 20 m in diameter and 1.5 m deep at its centre, between the south dyke and the river. This will, we believe, avoid the intractable problems of nutrient enrichment experienced by our existing pond and extend habitat diversification, by providing the new opportunities for the wildlife afforded by having a turf-pond or scrape.