

BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST - AGM, 27 September 2017

Chairman's Annual Report

The major excitement of the year was undoubtedly the excavation of a new pond on Valley Marsh in November 2016. You will know, from past reports, of the intractable problems of nutrient enrichment experienced by our original pond, largely because it comprises part of the surface-water drainage system for the nearby closed land-fill site. Hence our decision to create a pond in the deep valley peat that would be groundwater-fed. It was expertly dug in a single day by Dominic Arnold, using his 13-ton digger, and it filled with water over the following week. Overall, the pond is more than 20 m in diameter, features a small island, and is 2 m deep at its deepest point. However, it is mostly much shallower, with tiered shelves giving a range of water depths. This arrangement will provide valuable new habitat opportunities for many types of wildlife and also provide habitat complementary to the existing pond. By the time of our pond dipping day in the spring, pond life, including tadpoles and pond skaters, has already begun to arrive. The pond (and marsh) have attracted distinguished visitors: Dr Geoff Phillips (recently retired from the Environment Agency) brought a party on 2 August, Rick Southwood (Natural England's Senior Reserves Manager for the Broads) came on 19 September, and Dr Dan Hoare and his pondlife enthusiasts will be sampling tomorrow. On 2 September we held an inauguration ceremony, attended by 24 members, on a delightful sunny afternoon; the Stoneworts in the pond were burgeoning, the water was gratifyingly gin-clear, the members enjoyed sparkling wine, and we were mesmerised by the aerial mating exploits of the dragonflies, as they helped to populate the pond.

This was also the occasion for unveiling our magnificent bench seat in memory of the late Phyllis Ride. Phyllis was a founding member and loyal friend to the Trust in many ways. We are most grateful to her cousins for donating the bench, which was made from English oak by Harry Stebbings of Great Hockham, and to Lorie Lain-Rogers for procuring and installing it. It can be found in a scenic spot at Valley Marsh for the benefit of members and visitors seeking a quiet moment.

We had two excursions this year. The first, on 25 June, was to see the wildlife and management at Marston Marsh, Eaton. We were shown round by Matt Davis of the Norwich Fringe project, who had first whetted our appetites for the area in his talk after our last AGM. It was remarkable to see 60 acres of marsh beautifully managed for wildlife and amenity so close to the city centre and obviously enjoyed by so many people. The second visit, joint with Bergh Apton Local History Group, was to West Stow Country Park on 16 July. Many of the participants were members of both organizations, so an exploration of the famous Anglo-Saxon village provided a focus for a day that also showed us many plants and animals of Breckland and the valley of the River Lark.

We have again been delighted to host visits by the Brooke scout group. As ever, these involve a happy blend of recreational and educational activity (such as pond dipping) with valuable management work (raking, cutting, sawing and pulling up sycamore seedlings). The Beavers and Scouts came first in the light evenings of high summer (19-20 June) and they returned last week (!8-20 September), along with the Cubs. We are grateful to Shirley Rimmer and Jacquie Ratcliffe for continuing to coordinate these activities.

Our local meetings have broadly followed the established and successful pattern. As usual, the annual fungus foray on 23 October 2016, on and around our nature reserve, was led by the magisterial Dr Tony Leech and was the most popular field meeting of the year, attracting as it

does, many non-members and many youngsters. The convivial bring-and-share Christmas party was at Flint Cottage on 17 December 2016. We organised a group of volunteers for the highly successful village litter-pick on Sunday 26 March 2017 and many bags of litter were duly taken to the tip. Our annual pond dipping on 20 May was exceptionally successful; some two dozen folk, including many of the children for whom it is primarily intended, explored our several watery habitats, including both ponds, dykes and the River Chet, and made many exciting discoveries. Bob Kerry led his customary two hedge surveys, on 14 June and 12 July; we are now close to having survey all the hedges in the village. The traditional midsummer barbeque on the 'millennium pageant' field was held on 24 June, courtesy of Christopher and Liz Meynell. With the lengthening nights of autumn, we held our first bat walk for some years on 4 September. Ben Jervis introduced the evening with a talk about bat biology in the church until the light faded and, as he predicted, the bats we came closest to were actually flying in the church itself. This was followed by a walk on and around the Trust reserve using bat detectors.

Our regular work days have focused on the reserve: cutting and raking vegetation, building bridges and dams, and the installation of a barn-owl box at a precarious altitude. They have benefitted from the assistance of visiting groups doing community service. The trustees met formally four times during the year: on 2 November 2016, and 1 February, 12 April and 19 July 2017. Tony Davy, Stephanie Crome and Bob Kerry were re-elected chairman, secretary and treasurer, respectively.