

## **BERGH APTON CONSERVATION TRUST – AGM, 26 September 2018**

### *Chairman's Annual Report*

It has been a busy year with much to report. Mammals have come to the fore on our reserve this year. Although we have previously seen signs of otters, stoat, muntjac, foxes, rabbits and various small mammals, we have never had an expert survey. This summer, Graham Moates kindly carried out a preliminary survey of Church Plantation and Valley Marsh by live-trapping, analysis of barn owl pellets and other signs. His magnificent, illustrated report revealed 12 mammal species (including useful records for yellow-necked mouse, water shrew and water vole). Graham's observation of signs of water vole activity were fully vindicated a few weeks later when Clive Britcher (who has provided many fine images from the reserve in the last year) photographed one ploughing across the duckweed in our original pond. Following Graham's recommendation, we have signed up with the Norfolk Mink Project (NMP) to ensure mink control within our part of the Chet, as these American invasives are the scourge of water voles. We have purchased a 'mink raft' to deploy on the reserve and, if this detects any mink, the NPM will provide a suitable trap.

Another interesting discovery, by the eagle-eyed Dennis Moye, was 'ram's horn' galls of the tiny wasp *Andricus aries* on an oak sapling in the loke, alongside Church Plantation. It was identified by Anne Edwards of the John Innes Centre, was noteworthy enough to be recorded by the Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service (NBIS). It was introduced to the UK in 1997 and nationally records are very scarce, although there are a few in Suffolk and Norfolk.

Our new pond, first reported last year, has continued to develop well, although water levels have been lower than usual as a result of the drought this summer, and there has been extensive growth of filamentous algae. Happily, the stoneworts continue to prosper. This pond contributed to probably our most successful pond-dipping day yet on 19 May. It was beautiful day and we proved to be the superior attraction for some 40 adults and children. One of the highlights was watching dragonfly larvae crawl out onto the reedmace leaves and to see the new dragonflies emerge from their old exoskeletons; it took about two hours for their wings to expand and harden before they took to the air for the first time. Again, we have recently received an expert survey report of the invertebrate life of our ponds by Dr Dan Hoare and his group (sampled in 2014 and 2017) with 37 different items; Dan plans a direct comparison of the two ponds soon.

We had a full programme of events and meeting, including the regular monthly work days. After the last AGM, our chairman Tony Davy gave a talk summarising his life's work on the ecology of saltmarshes. The fungus foray, led by Dr Tony Leech was fantastic as ever, notwithstanding a disappointing turnout, limited by poor weather. The year finished with the ever-popular Christmas party at Flint Cottage. Activities resumed in the spring with the annual village litter pick afternoon. 'Breakfast with the moths' returned this year, thanks to Dr John Geeson's expertise and help. Ideal conditions for light-trapping the previous night yielded a beautiful array of 60 moth species. Another event that we had not done in recent years was the wild flower identification walk on our reserve, proving a good opportunity to update the species list for Valley Marsh. Astonishingly, Bob Kerry still manages to find us new hedges in the village to survey and we had another two successful sessions his summer. The midsummer BBQ transferred to the garden at Flint Cottage this year and was blessed with a wonderful summer evening. Our exhibit at the village Welcome day aroused considerable interest, if no new members!

For the second time, our summer excursion was joint with the Bergh Apton Local History Group. We took our picnic to How Hill, near Ludham in the Broads, where there was much of interest to

both constituencies. A fascinating tour of the dykes and reedbeds on the Electric Eel boat was magical on an otherwise blisteringly hot afternoon. It was generally agreed that we need to go back there.

Our engagement with the wider community is well exemplified by our developing relationship with Brooke Scout Group, thanks to Shirley Rimmer and Jacquie Ratcliffe. A succession of age groups visited us in June: Beavers (5-7 years) enjoyed a nature walk and experienced the thrill of finding grass snakes and slow worms; Cubs (8-11 years) repaired one set of steps in the wood and Explorers (14-18 years) reinstated another; Scouts (12-14 years) raked cut vegetation and cleared felled sycamores. On our September workday, 10 youngsters ranging from Beavers, Cubs and Scouts, and their parents, made a tremendous effort, working tirelessly to rake and stack cut vegetation from our marsh in pretty warm conditions.

Young Explorers from the Wheatfen Forest School visited last autumn, and in spring and summer this year. I can only quote from their leader, Rose Hoare: 'They loved to see how it had changed, appreciated the bluebells in spring and finding reptiles in summer. They love the physical diversity of the site - the variety of plants and animals, paddling in the stream, running up and down the flinty slopes, or swinging from a tree. It is a truly magical spot! Now that they have made an emotional connection to the place, they also take pride in being able to help look after it in some small ways, whether that's cutting back some sycamore or raking reed litter.' We are grateful to Lisa Flatman for liaising with Rose to organise this outreach.

It is a pleasure to report that our long-awaited website ([berghaptonconservationtrust.org](http://berghaptonconservationtrust.org)) is currently under rapid development by Paul Wright and has recently become mobile-phone compatible. We anticipate that the current 'skeleton' will be fully populated with images, reports, species lists and other information within a few weeks. During the year, Neil Headon resigned as a trustee, in anticipation of moving from the village. We thank Neil for all his help over the years. The trustees co-opted Lorie Lain-Rogers for the remainder of the year.

Looking to the future, we are seeking the establishment of a 'B-line' along the Chet Valley. B-lines are a national initiative from Bug-Life being promoted locally by Rodney Aldis. The idea is to establish a network of nectar-rich corridors for increasingly hard-pressed populations of bees and other insects. This proposal has support from Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT), NBIS, South Yare Wildlife Group, the Broads Authority and Cllr Henry Gowman (S. Norfolk Tree Wardens' Network and Poringland PC) amongst others. We hope that one end may be in the Poringland Community Land Project, a substantial amenity site donated by Norfolk Homes, that includes springs feeding tributaries of the River Chet. Potentially our reserve would be at the mid-point, with Chedgrave Common (managed by NWT) downstream; we would hope to engage other landowners with sympathetic management in the Chet valley. This is an exciting proposal with huge conservation potential.