



# A ROBERT'S REEDS NOVEMBER 2014 No. 3



This is the Volunteer Newsletter of the Anne Carpmael Charitable Trust, which owns and manages Withymead Nature Reserve and Little Meadow Reserve in Goring (Robert, a key volunteer, started it at Withymead, a wetland reserve).

Britain's wildlife is wonderful, but also sadly in decline. The Trust is run entirely by volunteers and aims to boost biodiversity in the area, both directly via practical conservation measures and indirectly by inspiring local people to enjoy wildlife and help to save it.



"I told him to stoke up-wind!"

**Wildlife News** - at least one Little Grebe returned to Withymead Nature Reserve in October for the winter.

'Dabchick' is the old name for these small, diving birds which fish underwater & then pop up again like fluffy corks. For two years running we've hosted a trio of them. Listen for their trilling call - Kingfisher Hide often affords close-up views.



## CHRISTMAS PARTIES & VOLUNTEER MORNING



**Saturday 6th December** - We'll be planting the 2nd stage of our Bridleway wildlife Hedge with 350 native trees chosen to provide food & shelter for wildlife. There'll be flowers, nuts, berries, fruits galore in a few years time with Hazel, Hawthorn, Guelder Rose, Field Maple & Sloe, + wild apples, pears & plums **all being planted by you!** (please ☺) We'll also be felling a couple of trees; there'll be a bonfire.

☛ **NOTE Health & Safety Advice in Jake's cartoon!**

**At 1pm** we'll provide a variety of **hot, tasty food & drink**, with some you can cook your -selves on the bonfire, + festive music.

We'll make colourful, natural decorations for dressing our outdoor native Christmas tree (materials like cones, seed heads, willow sticks, paint provided).

**Saturday 13th December** - enjoy a **GUIDED WALK** at Withymead: 2.30pm to explore what has been & will be happening (lots!) then **REFRESHMENTS** at the house from 3.30pm, with **SLIDESHOW REVIEW OF THE YEAR**. **RSVP for 1 or both ☺**

### LOOK!



**WITHYMEAD WILDLIFE CLUB CHRISTMAS CARDS FOR SALE** from 1 November. **ALL PROFIT goes to run the Club.** £5 for a pack of 5.

### *Dot and Keith's amazing evening.*

"We'd been enjoying our evening meal on a mild, still night on the landing stage at Withymead, & were gazing contentedly over the moonlit river, coffee cups in hand when we heard a distinct disturbance off-shore, not far out, maybe 15 to 20 feet away. It sounded like someone in the water. However, in spite of the landing stage competing with Blackpool Illuminations - a bright, crackling fire in the brazier on the river edge, two hurricane lamps and candles on the table - it turned out to be a beautiful, big otter, right there in front of us! To our amazement it hauled itself onto land behind the fire, paused (we could hear this, rather than see it because of the firelight) as if to weigh us up & then set off northwards. After a few minutes, during which we were both still transfixed with our mouths open, we heard eerie whistles and squeaks from the direction of the backwater, as presumably a moonlit rendezvous took place. It was such a beautiful, wild, primaeval experience reminding us that wild animals have been living in wetland habitats for aeons, much longer than humans - otters have been around for over 20 million years; hominids just over 2 million years.



### *Withymead gets even better...*

**Robert** has built a smart, new, robust bridge over the old boatyard slipway to start some more improvements to the Withymead grounds. The circular route for visitors will be made more interesting and scenic by diverting it away from the work area and fire-site. The bridge viewpoint will be the same as that from a century-old photograph which shows a launch of a Saunders' boat, so it will provide a time-travelling glimpse into the past as a seat will be installed and the photograph displayed. Sam Saunders was the famous, pioneering engineer and boat-builder who had his first business at 'Springfield Works' here.



**Robert** has dismantled and rebuilt quite a lot of the old footbridge too, replacing rotten wood & strengthening the whole structure. He has also made 2 new noticeboards for Little Meadow & Withymead, explaining the habitats & the conservation at the reserves. The Withymead one will also show Study Centre opening times, events and what facilities are available.



### *From microscope to full screen.*

Thanks to our **anonymous fund-raiser** £1000 has been donated by the Englefield Charitable Trust to help to buy a trinocular microscope & video camera equipment. This will mean that for the events & courses run in the Study Centre, a live image of microscopic details can be beamed to the large screen, a fantastic educational facility. Thank you.



*Robert* has provided and installed a much-needed, new, wall-mounted kitchen cupboard in the Study Centre.

*Mike* has donated another beautiful taxidermy specimen to join the Tawny and Little Owls he has already given the Trust - this new one is a female Guillemot Mike picked up himself, oiled sadly, on an Anglesey beach. Soon, all the specimens will be installed in glass display cabinets. Guillemots have, surprisingly, been recorded not far away from here.

**October Volunteer Morning** - Lots of lovely people from our own Volunteer Group and Abingdon Green Gym turned out and worked hard in the pouring rain to finish this year's annual wildflower mow at Little Meadow to promote floral diversity. *Sue* and *Carol* have completed and sent in the results of the annual flower survey - this shows that species numbers are increasing with 6 new flowers recorded. 'Nice to know that the hard work pays off. Below: tea under the Bridge



Earth Star fungus, recently found at Withymead.



A Common Marbled Carpet moth recorded at our recent moth night.



*A new sign outside Kingfisher Hide! Hibernating Peacock butterflies are hanging from the ceiling inside ☺*

*Richard and Keith have cleared the view outside.*

**Good with spreadsheets? Can you help us?**

**Volunteer Book-keeper needed** to collate Trust records of donations, sales and expenses into a spreadsheet at the end of each month. Please contact us if you would be able to take up this role - it would be much appreciated and help us to achieve more for Nature conservation.

All Bats are European protected species and its good when we can help them...Maiaia has donated a large, bat-hibernation box which is now on a large oak tree in the Study Centre grounds as this area is where roosting bats have been recorded recently (in a 'woodcrete' Blue Tit nest box). The box is made of 'woodcrete' - a mix of sawdust and concrete, a good insulator. Bats are 10 times more likely to use a woodcrete box than a wooden one.



← Shirley has cleaned and replanted the Study Centre hanging baskets and containers - pansies are bringing a nice bit of colour to the garden for winter.

Robert has made a 'wee hoose' for the O's and X's game counters; they'll be dry & available to use now right next to the large game-board in the Study Centre garden.



← Isaac has re-fitted, mended and serviced the powerful rotavator donated by Sandra, & used it to prepare some of the ground ready for the 1<sup>st</sup> November Volunteer Morning - see below.

### WHAT'S HAPPENING SOON...

**Saturday 1 November 10am - 1pm** Volunteer Morning, will be at Withymead Nature Reserve & 'Sonning Common Green Gym' will be with us - tools & refreshments provided.

Come and enjoy the fun as we create our **Cornfield Annual Wildflower areas** which should bloom next Spring - we'll be preparing the ground and sowing thousands of seeds of Poppy, Corncockle, Corn Marigold, Cornflower etc. Other tasks on offer are:

- removing a bramble patch
- clearing felled trees to the fire
- laying down compost for next month's task of hedge planting.
- fencing the work area
- wigwam making.
- Enjoy bonfire-cooked potatoes afterwards. Supervised children and Duke of Edinburgh participants welcome (D of E please contact us first)

**Every Monday from 10am - 1pm** (unless specified on the website - please check or phone) 'Monday Morning Brews Club' at Withymead Nature Reserve - light gardening and conservation tasks in a friendly social setting with tea and cake.

**Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> November** - Regular, 1st-Friday-in-the-month 'Moth Night' from dusk 'til late - join our volunteer moth experts (thanks Paul, Peter and Roy) at Withymead Study Centre to monitor these fascinating creatures via harmless light traps.



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