



Christmas 2012

Happy Christmas to all our members and supporters!

It has been seasonably cold in recent weeks, and also remarkably wet – leaving water levels at Swaddywell back at the top of the gauge board, a welcome return after many months of low water. The pond at Torpel too is as high as we have ever seen it.

There is plenty going on in the Langdyke World at the moment – and plenty too out in the countryside, so let's start this round-up with some natural highlights.

I feel that I am tempting fate by mentioning the starling roost at Maxey, last time we talked about it, it promptly disappeared to the disappointment of members who had braved the cold in search of this spectacle. But it is back! Chris Topper first reported a swarm over the pits in late November and by 8 December it has built up into a roost of some 15,000 birds – an amazing sight as they wheel and curl backwards and forwards over Woodgate Lane. The time to go is around 3.30pm, although as ever with nature there can be no guarantees, some nights the birds go straight into roost without swarming. Look out too for raptors, hanging around in hope of a juicy bird before bedtime – buzzard, sparrowhawk, kestrel and merlin have all been seen there. There are some great photos and a video by John Saunders on the Langdyke blog – www.langdykeworld.blogspot.co.uk

There a number of theories as to why starlings swarm before entering their roosts, including the possibility that they use the occasion to swap notes on suitable feeding grounds for the next day. But a much more compelling theory is that they swarm because they enjoy it – a last social moment after a hard day seeking food and fighting for survival.

Another returning visitor this winter is the waxwing. These striking birds from Scandinavia 'invade' our area from time to time when the berry crop fails or is exhausted in northern and central Europe – usually every decade or so, but we are lucky enough to have them back with us in numbers for the second time in two years, and once again in large numbers. There were about 140 at the Crab and Winkle in early December, feeding on the same sorbus trees as in 2011. They were also reported from Swaddywell and Bainton and Trevor Valentine had two in his garden in mid-December – see photo!



Another bird to look out for over the Christmas holiday is the goosander – a large duck with a hooked bill that can be found on the Maxey Cut or on Gerard's Carp Pit often towards dusk. These birds too join us in winter from northern Europe – the male is particularly distinctive with its long white body and breast, flushed with pink.

There are large numbers of fieldfare and redwing with us too this year – another sign of the poor berry crop in Europe, driving many more than usual to our area. A drive

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down to Etton from Maxey on 6 December was like the parting of the Red Sea, with birds springing up from the road in their thousands.

Finally, another 'feature' of the area at the moment is the flock of crossbills that is regularly seen in Southey Woods, usually quite near the car park. The male crossbill is about the size of a bullfinch and is a bright red bird, with the characteristic 'crossed-bill' quite visible through binoculars. These over-sized beaks provide the leverage required to crack open pine cones and extract the seeds.

Torpe! Project

We have been talking about the Torpe! project for some years now, but are finally at a stage when exciting things really are happening on the site. Nearly 60 members of the community joined us for the 'Unlocking Torpe!' event on 8 December, and heard updates from Roman historian Stephen Upex and Steve Ashby and Aleks McClain of the University of York, who reported on 2012 progress.



In the afternoon there was an opportunity to have 'finds' from the site identified: the finds included pottery fragments dating back to the 9th Century, a 14th Century brass buckle, pieces of 16th or early 17th Century venetian glass, a 17th Century crotal bell and a 19th Century brooch and button– clearly Torpe! has a long history of occupation! The picture shows some of the finds currently held in Peterborough Museum.



In 2013 we plan further non-invasive surveys at the Manor Field, also further research of the archives and also detailed field-walking to see what more we can find and reach a better understanding of settlement patterns over the wider area. University Centre Peterborough has offered to run workshops to train those interested in participating.

Community Involvement is key to successfully 'unlocking' Torpe! and this is your opportunity to help! We need volunteers to help with:

- Historical and Social Historical Research: What did Torpe! 'village' look like? How was the Manor organised? How did it 'fit' within the area?
- Archaeological Research: Finds collecting and recording; Field-walking in and around the Manor Field; Helping with surveys.
- Publications: Progress reports; Educational materials; Display boards; Website.
- Building the Visitor Centre: Fitting out; Weatherproofing; Landscaping (herb garden); Fences and paths.
- Management of Site and Centre: Upkeep of Centre, herb garden, etc; Grassland management; Guiding parties around the site.

After much fuss and delay – particularly over transport issues – we submitted our planning application for the visitor centre on the field at the beginning of December

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(we are greatly indebted to Jim Daley of Peterborough Planning Department who has been a real help in sorting things out). With a bit of luck, we might have our building up and running by the spring!

If you would like to volunteer to help us 'unlock' Torpel, or if you would like to discuss further, please contact:

Frieda Gosling (01780 740343; frieda.gosling@yahoo.co.uk), or
Martin Bradshaw (01733 380564; m.j.bradshaw@btinternet.com)

Reserves Round-Up

One of many unwelcomed features of the wet summer has been the rapid growth of grass and vegetation at Bainton Heath, making it almost impenetrable in places. More importantly the weather had a dramatic effect on breeding success for many birds, with Chris Hughes reporting the lowest number of young birds ringed on the site since records began. Even so several of us enjoyed a morning with Chris in early August, getting to see birds such as bullfinch and treecreeper in the hand.

Over the summer we have created a new trail at Etton Maxey, providing access around the northern end of the reserve and views across the reedbeds to Etton Church. Our main task on the reserve continues to be controlling the willow and we have reached an agreement with Tarmac and City Council for a programme of willow removal over the next three years. We have also strimmed down some of the reeds to provide new views from the northern hide. We will be flooding the bottom of the reserve over the next couple of weeks, so it should be an excellent place for a walk if it freezes over Christmas.

At Swaddywell the regular Thursday work parties continue to focus on willow removal and clearing the rock faces. The main grazing flock of sheep is on site at the moment, doing their work to create

optimum habitat for next summer's wild flowers.

Langdyke events

This autumn saw the first Langdyke Annual Meeting, held on 14 September at Botolph's Barn. Artists from View 5, our artists in residence, presented some of their work and there were updates on the Trust's work from Rick Keymer, our chairman.

Fungal Foray 14th October - this successful event, led by Mick Beeson to Castor Hanglands was supported by members of Peterborough Wildlife Trust, who had previously had a lecture on fungi. An interesting range of toadstools and other fructifications were found.

The next events are:

Thurs December 27th Swaddywell Work Party 11am onwards.

Tuesday January 1st 2013 New Year's Day Walk Meet at 1pm at Barnack Church. Wear warm clothes and strong shoes or wellies. Well-behaved dogs on leads welcome. Finish at the Millstone Inn.

Saturday January 26th Torpel Manor Field Work Party 11am onwards

Contacts

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