



## Winter 2010-11

For the first time this morning (15 January) the pits at Bainton are totally ice free. Over Christmas and New Year the big freeze left just a few areas of open water both here and at Maxey, and at times even the Cut itself was frozen in places.

So finally it really feels a bit milder and perhaps by the time you read this, there will even be snowdrops out and song thrushes in song. It is amazing how quickly signs of life are all around us, even in what seems the depth of winter. Those of us who went on this year's Langdyke New Year's walk around the Hanglands found plenty of catkins already on the hazel trees.

Nevertheless, the weeks of freezing conditions had and will have a significant impact on our local natural world. During the cold many unusual birds turned up, seeking new homes as the cold and ice drove them out of their usual habitats.

Local gardens saw influxes of reed bunting, long tailed tit and brambling. Redwings and fieldfare scoured the hedgerows for berries and devoured them voraciously when they found them.

Further out in the countryside Ivan Cumberpatch and others saw a bittern feeding along Maxey Cut on several occasions and a flock of redpoll at Bainton Pits caused excitement amongst the bird-watching community as it was made up of Scandinavian redpoll, not our local species.



Bittern – photo from [www.northeastwildlife.co.uk](http://www.northeastwildlife.co.uk)

Most spectacularly, many people were able to enjoy watching the antics of a marauding flock of waxwings in Werrington over New Year. This spectacular bird visits England every year in small numbers and then every decade or so descends on the country en masse, when the berry crop in Russia and northern Europe fails. The Crab and Winkle pub hosted up to 160 of them and others turned up in Bainton, Scotsman's Lodge and West Deeping.



Waxwing – photo from [www.northeastwildlife.co.uk](http://www.northeastwildlife.co.uk)

Longer term though we know from experience that the cold weather (and we are not through the winter yet!) will have an impact on local bird populations. We can expect reduced numbers of those small birds such as blue and great tits that struggle to maintain energy levels in severe cold. Small birds mass together in the winter to try to keep warm and one report from Peakirk of 15 wrens flying out of a night time nest box roost is typical. It must be fairly snug in the middle of that mass of feathers! Further afield there is a report from Northumberland of a lizard taking refuge deep in a sheep's fleece.

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We will have to wait and see what has happened to other vulnerable birds. Traditionally kingfishers and barn owls suffer badly during bad weather, so we will keep an eye on local populations this spring to see how they are faring.

### **Reserve update**

We have had quite a lot of work done on our reserves over the autumn and winter and there is more to come.

Thanks to the support of volunteers from the Environment Agency in Peterborough we were able to get a lot of conservation work done at both Swaddywell and Etton-Maxey. The Agency gives its staff an annual day off for charity and this year they offered their time to Langdyke. With great help from the Wildlife Trust, we organised three work parties for them from October-December, although the final one had to be postponed due to bad weather.

At Swaddywell the team concentrated on removing willow from the pond areas and clearing scrub from the rock faces. At Etton-Maxey they focused on building a tern raft to float out in to the water and removing trees that will obscure the views over the reserve from the hard standing on the Etton Road.

At Etton-Maxey, Tarmac have finished work on creating a car park on the hard standing and this is now open to permit holders. The combination lock on the gate has the same code as the other gates. Please do shut and lock the gate behind you, if you park here.

We also hope very soon to install one, possibly two, bird hides on the reserve. These will be overlooking the open water and reed-bed in the trees and scrub opposite the new car park.

Thanks to a grant from the Big Lottery Fund we will also be able to put up interpretation signs here and to erect a pond-dipping platform. We also have money for surveys

of the insects and lichens at Bainton and for helping to manage the grassland at Swaddywell.

At Torpel we are still in the process of bidding for money to put up a small building for hosting visits and events.

### **New Sheep**

The Trust's grazing flock now includes five Jacob sheep, another traditional breed that takes its name from the story told in the Old Testament Book of Genesis of how Jacob became a selective breeder of pied sheep.



This year's lambs will appear on Torpel Manor Field in April – look out for them!

### **Reserve Warden**

Following his fantastic work of the Trust as part of his Duke of Edinburgh award, Hugh Boycott Thurston has agreed to become our Volunteer Junior Warden at Swaddywell and will be keeping a regular check on the site, including keeping the bird-feeders filled.

### **Weather Report by Peter Holt**

The weather in this period started quite benignly. October was a fairly quiet month with temperatures not far from average and regular although less than average rainfall. There were no air frosts. November started mild but from the second week became chilly and the last week saw the start of a

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prolonged cold spell. The temperature fell below freezing for the first time on November 24<sup>th</sup> and from then until the end of December there were 30 nights with frost and 18 days when the temperature did not get above freezing. The lowest temperature in November was on the 28<sup>th</sup> at minus 7°C at night and only up to minus 2.5°C by day. In December the coldest night was minus 9.5°C on the 7th and coldest day minus 4°C on the 20<sup>th</sup>.

During this cold weather there were two periods with snow cover, none of it exceptionally deep in our area. Initially the snow fell in showery accumulations from the 27<sup>th</sup> November and this lay for around two weeks. The second event was one fall of 10cm on 22<sup>nd</sup> December and this gave a covering for Christmas. The weather eventually turned less cold in the last few days of December and really mild wet weather arrived associated with low pressure and strong westerly winds by mid-January.

Factors leading to the very cold weather were similar to that of the previous winter. High pressure became established to the north of the British Isles and pulled in air from the Arctic and Northern Europe. During this period the jet stream was to the south west of the UK, resulting in only cold air coming our way.

The last week of November was the coldest recorded at Helpston for that time of year (since starting records in 1964). December was the coldest month since December 1981. Temperature comparisons are shown below:

	1981	2010	Normal
Daytime maximum average	0.5C	1.6C	5.9C
Night minimum average	-5C	-2.4C	+1.3C

Actual rainfall figures recorded at Helpston (in millimetres) for the past months were:

	Actual	Long term average
Oct	48.5	59.8
Nov	48.5	55.2
Dec	20.0	52.1

### Forthcoming events

**Saturday 29 January** – work party at Etton-Maxey, 1.30pm start at the main Tarmac entrance.

**Wednesday 16 February** Indoor talk at Botolph's Barn 7.30pm "Wild flowers from Caithness to the Channel"

**Sunday 27 February** Work Party at Swaddywell. Meet at 1.30pm

**Saturday 19 March** Work Party at Torpel Manor Field. Meet at 1.30pm

**Tuesday 26 April** Evening Walk, Castor Hanglands. Meet at 7pm meet at Willowbrook Farm

**Wednesday 18 May** Evening Walk Bainton Pits, 8pm, meet at Torpel Manor Field

### Contacts

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