



## Spring 2014

The May Day bank holiday may be coming to an end as I write this, but spring remains very much in full swing, with migrant birds appearing in good and relatively early numbers across our area and bees and butterflies very noticeable. The dry and warm weather in April has encouraged nature in all its guises to blossom early – perhaps best shown by the wonderful display of bluebells and wood anemone in Oxy Wood, a vision in blue and white as you drive up Heath Road.



Oxy Wood Spring 2014, David Cowcill

Another botanical highlight of the year to date was the discovery of a rather strange and relatively uncommon red cowslip at Swaddywell in early April. Cowslips are of course usually a pale yellow. This red variety is unusual to say the least, but seems to be a wild specimen - but this may be an exceptional year as another has turned up near Upton in open country.

Butterflies too have been prominently on the wing early this season, with peacock, red admiral, brimstone, orange tip, speckled wood, small tortoiseshell and green-veined white all on display at the Hanglands on 13 April.

Last year of course saw the discovery of the majestic purple emperor on the reserve for the first time in many years – part of an overall expansion of the range of this the largest of the British butterflies – so we will be watching carefully to see if they reappear again this summer. Despite their size they are hard to find, and require serious time and commitment to pick out as they glide across the tops of the oak trees.



Cowslip at Swaddywell, David Cotter

But I guess that it is bird migration that is the most spectacular manifestation of the arrival of spring. Sometimes we focus a bit too much on the arrival of specific birds such as the first cuckoo (Bainton Pits on 18 April) or the sighting of rare migrants like the garganey (Etton Maxey Pits on several occasions in March), and forget the immensity of migration as a whole – literally millions of birds pouring out of the skies across the country, the termination of a massive natural journey that still – at least

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to me – is beyond comprehension – a true wonder of nature.

This year our migrants are turning up earlier than last year, which was a late spring owing to wet weather and northerly winds. A cuckoo was at Bainton Pits on 18 April and at Etton Maxey on 21 April. Turtle dove, usually a late arrival towards the end of April, were back on Bainton Heath on 18 April (although they remain an increasingly rare sighting these days, as their numbers plummet here and across the country) too along with singing nightingale and grasshopper warbler. And the delightful sand martin, the bird of summer on the Maxey Cut, were back inspecting nest sites on the banks of the new pit to the east of the Helpston Road from early April onwards.



Repairing the tern raft

Perhaps most gratifying was the arrival of four common terns on 16 April, taking up residence immediately on the repaired tern raft at Etton Maxey! An awful lot of hard work has gone into dragging this raft back to shore and giving it a thorough overall this winter, including some cold water expeditions in the Trust's new boat, so it is great to see the work bear fruit so quickly!

By early May there were four pairs on site, let's hope they raise young again this year. A big well done to all involved, particularly our Raft Meister, David Cowcill and Tugboat man, Richard Jagger.

Our annual newt, toad and frog count was held at Swaddywell this year on 9 April. Numbers of newts were a bit lower than last year – perhaps the good weather in early spring meant we were too late for the peak counts of displaying male newts!

And finally an osprey has been regularly seen in our area, along the Maxey Cut and even over the A15 – so do keep a look out for this magnificent and very large raptor!

### **Torpel Field Update**

Over 400 fragments of pottery were collected by the archaeology team members last November in the south east corner of the field north of Torpel Field, which was alongside the Roman Road that we now call King Street. Completion of the task of labelling them all occupied the entire meeting on March 8th. The identification workshop on March 22nd was led by Carole Fletcher of Oxford Archaeology East. We can now apply names such as Stamford Ware, shelly ware and sandy ware, but even the experts agree that medieval pottery was very localised, so more help will be needed to refine our knowledge.

We have evidence of pottery from Roman to late medieval times which suggests long term settlement. We believe that we have found the site of Torpel village and that it pre-dates the arrival of Roger de Torpel by several hundreds of years.

Next meeting: Saturday May 24<sup>th</sup>,  
Investigating Torpel Walls, 10 am - 1 pm at  
the Cabin at Torpel.

### **View 5 at Swaddywell**

Our artists in residence, View 5, will be back at Swaddywell Pit this year on 5-6 July as part of the Peterborough Open Studios

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weekend. Last year proved very successful with over 180 people visiting the exhibition in the Swaddywell cabin and the 'live' exhibits' around the reserve – so do come along and view this year's work!

Unearthed is a group of five Artists in Residence at Clare Cottage working to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of Clare's death. Two of their number, Anita Bruce and Sue Shields are Artists in Residence for the Langdyke Trust. A third, Kathryn Parsons, has worked with members of the Langdyke Trust at Swaddywell. Their first exhibition opened at John Clare Cottage in Helpston on 16 May and continues until 30 June. A full exhibition will be staged from 4 July until 29 September. Artists can teach naturalists a lot about observation, visit their website <https://www.facebook.com/UnEarthedClare>

View 5 will also be displaying their work in the Torpel cabin during the Saturday of the John Clare Festival on 12 July.

### Langdyke Reserves and Events

Our regular monthly walks, *Swaddywell through the Seasons* continue to confirm that biodiversity on the reserve is increasing. As well as flowers (red cowslip already mentioned) we're looking at birds and insects. A lattice heath moth and a hairy shieldbug *Dolycoris baccarum* (picture below) were found in late April.

There are also regular sightings of grass snakes and lizards. The work parties meet most Thursdays, at Swaddywell or Torpel Manor, 2pm. The walks are on the third Wednesday in the month. For both events contact [friedagosling@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:friedagosling@yahoo.co.uk) or call her on 01780 740343. Please join us.

This year's nightingale walk took place on 27 April and once again provided a wonderful opportunity to listen to the most famous of our song-birds. Fourteen people joined us for the walk and in total we found 9 singing males across the site, including one in full voice just as we returned to the

cars in the gathering dusk. This year instead of reading from John Clare's poems about the nightingale, we read out the views of Sir Edward Grey, the British foreign secretary at the start of World War One, who was also a notable ornithologist and author of 'The Charm of Birds' in which he writes, "The nightingale's song has compass, variety and astonishing power; it arrests attention and compels admiration; it has onset and impact; but it is fitful, broken and restless: it is a song to listen to, but not to live with."



Hairy Shieldbug at Swaddywell

Throughout the winter we have been tackling willow on a number of our reserves and, fingers crossed, with some success. At Etton Maxey we have had a lot of willow cut down and treated to prevent re-growth and we are also grazing the north of the reserve throughout the summer this year. This will reduce the area's appeal to breeding birds and wild flowers in the short-term, but the long-term aim is to create a sustainable mix of rough, wet grassland with pockets of reed and shallow, seasonal pools.

At Swaddywell the willows in the pit area have been cut and chemically treated too. If we didn't do this the whole area would rapidly turn into a woodland – there is nothing wrong with woodland of course, but Swaddywell's strength is also as a mosaic of habitats and we do need to keep the ponds open to create homes for the newts and dragonflies. Also at Swaddywell

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we have cut down a lot of bramble which was starting to encroach upon the grassland and would, in time, if allowed to continue reduce the habitat for the orchids and other wild flowers.

And work continues at Bainton Heath too, where again we are removing bramble and hawthorn in a few selected places to ensure there is open space for the insects and mosses that make the site regionally, if not nationally, significant.

### **Poppy Field**

To mark the anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, we have been working with Peterborough Regional College to prepare and sow a poppy strip at Etton Maxey just south of the main entrance. Work was completed in early May, we now await the results and will let you know when to visit!

### **Langdyke Positions**

We are still looking for people to help with our publicity and outreach work. If you fancy yourself as the Trust's Twitter Tsar and Facebook Fuhrer, then just get in touch!

### **Langdyke Accounts**

Although the accounts for 2013/14 have not been published we can reveal some aspects last year's spending. During the years the trust spent over £36,000 on construction and fitting out the new cabin and toilets at Torpel Field. The trust had obtained a grant of over £50,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the remaining monies will be used to provide display materials and teaching materials for visitors and especially for school groups and their teachers. We now have a very useful asset for the trust. In addition to the grant aid members of the trust have given their skills and time to ensure that the cabin has been completed on time and within budget.

In addition to the work at Torpel Field the trust spent over £7,500 on fencing our reserves so that we can safely graze the

sites to help with maintenance. Again most of this cost has been met from grants. The trust also spent over £7,400 on its reserves. Some of this money was spent on general maintenance such as keeping the paths cut but most was spent on projects such as the shingle spit at Etton Maxey, the improved vehicle entrance at Torpel or the new drainage at Swaddywell.

For the coming year the trust has set aside over £11,000 for spending on its reserves. Again some of this money will be used for on-going maintenance but a sizeable chunk of money will be available for improvements, such as moving the bird hide at Etton Maxey Reserve. If you want to know more about the accounts of the trust please come along to the Trust AGM on Friday 12th September.

### **Contacts**

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### **Forthcoming Events**

**Thursday 22 May – Nene Washes Summer walk**, meet at Helpston Post Office at 7pm. One of our annual events, a chance to see and hear the wonders of the Washes, including the voice of the elusive, seldom seen corncrake.

**Saturday 24 May** - Investigating Torpel Walls, 10 am - 1 pm at the Cabin at Torpel.

**Sunday 8 June** – Summer at Etton Maxey, bring a picnic and enjoy a walk around our largest reserve in search of flowers and insects and hopefully common tern chicks! 2pm onwards from the main car park on the Etton Road.

**Saturday 5-6 July** – View 5 at Swaddywell, exhibition in the reserve cabin.

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