



Winter 2014

It remains pretty mild out in the local countryside, but as we welcome the New Year many of our familiar winter visitors are already with us and the Christmas and New Year break offered a great chance to catch up with a view of the our winter natural world!

A walk along the Maxey Cut this afternoon, for instance, turned up a flock of 120 linnet and a small group of goosanders flying down the length of the Cut. There was a kingfisher hunting up and down the Cut on Christmas Day and a water rail skulking along the water line on Boxing Day.

There were also 15 little grebe on the large pit south of the green bridge. There is always a flock of little grebe on this pit. I often wonder why they prefer this particular piece of water rather than any other, something to do with depth and fish stocks, I guess? This pit also attracts 3-4 of the much larger great crested grebe, which looks so very different in its sleek black and white winter plumage from the rufous colours of the summer.



Little grebe

Our Etton Maxey reserve is a good place to see brown hares in the winter. I have seen one each time I have visited in the last few weekends, shooting out of the rough grass as I approach. There was also a jack snipe in the northern wooded area on 20 December – this is a smaller bird than the common snipe with a smaller beak and a habit of returning to cover quickly when flushed, rather than ‘towering’ up and away like the common snipe.

Over the last few weeks, the annual starling roost has built up a little and there was a brief ‘murmuration’ across the reserve on 6 December, on the most recent Langdyke walk, rising up in smoke like plumes above Woodcroft Lane before twisting down into the reed beds.



I was delighted to find a barn owl in our barn at Etton on 20 December, flying out of the box at the back to the barn when I went in to fetch the sheep food. It’s been seen here a couple of times recently, so watch out for it hunting along the south drain and the Cut at dusk.

Otherwise there are large numbers of both redwing and fieldfare in the area, particularly at Etton Maxey, where there was a mixed flock of several hundred on 13 December and again on 27 December. And if you want to see birds of prey, there are plenty around too, with kites, buzzards, sparrowhawks and kestrels very noticeable as they hunt across the open countryside. There was a beautiful kite hunting over Swaddywell on Christmas Day.

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Tree sparrow

There was a tree sparrow back at Swaddywell in late November. This is an enigmatic bird, not that long ago we had flocks of over 100 there in the winter and a breeding population in Helpston itself. Historically they seem to be a boom and bust bird – one year, they're here, the next they've gone!

It has also been a wonderful season again for fungi. A team of experts visited Bainton Heath on 17 November and returned with an impressive list of 57 species, including some very unusual species. Bainton just keeps on turning up rare species – insects, mosses and now mushrooms too.

David Cowcill also had found a marvellous display of 45 fly agarics in just a couple of square metres in November at the Hanglands (see picture below).



And finally, not unusual in summer, but I saw a small tortoiseshell butterfly on 30 November on a mild day out at Holme Fen, along with a bumble bee! Winter? Really?



Small tortoiseshell

Get Involved - Langdyke Positions

We are always keen to welcome new or even prospective members at our events and to encourage members to get involved in the Trust's activities.

In particular, we are 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! And we also need more people on our eastern reserves team – helping out with conservation tasks and even a bit of stock management (sheep!).

Or indeed if you would just like to be more involved, let us know, there is plenty to do!

And do remember our weekly Thursday work-parties, contact Chris Topper on 01733 252506 if you want to come along

Torpe! Project

We celebrated the opening of the Torpe! Visitor Centre in September, with the Mayor of Peterborough and the Chair of Vivacity and over 100 supporters coming along to mark the occasion; the fruit of a lot of hard work by many of our members over the last two years. All the display boards are up and there is a detailed trail around the site, and this can all be found on the new website (see below).

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Opening ceremony at Torpel on 12 September

This was followed by another very successful public meeting on Oct 26 at which updates were given about progress at Torpel. Steve Ashby and Aleks McClain, who have led the team from the Archaeology Department at York University outlined the techniques used so far, topographical survey, magnetometry and resistivity, and explained how this progression is yielding valuable evidence about the position of buildings on the Field and their chronology. Linear features are being revealed on the mound which could be evidence of Torpel House. South of the pylon there is evidence of walls, possibly of the old barn. There is still a big question mark about a circular structure south east of the pylon, 10-11 metres in diameter. The team will be back to continue the resistivity surveys in the spring of 2015.

The volunteers were thanked for all their contributions in 2014, notably their help with the magnetometry and resistivity surveys, investigation into the wall behind Torpel cabin and determination to identify and date the pottery fragments which we collected in the field to the north of Torpel. Following a workshop session most of us can now distinguish between Stamford ware and shelly ware but there is a determination to improve our skills. Mike Clatworthy took the sherds we collected to be identified and dated by Northampton expert, Paul Blinkhorn, and he has agreed to give us a workshop session on April 17th.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has allowed us to complete the fitting out of the cabin, the

educational resources are ready for use and we look forward to opening for parties and individual visitors by prior arrangement in the spring.

New website

We now have a new Langdyke website. You can find details of all our reserves and a list of our events at www.langdyke.org.uk

There is still a bit of work to get it all up-to-date, but it looks good!

And we are also on Twitter, follow us @Langdyke! Facebook to follow.

Langdyke Reserves and Events

Working with Natural England, we were part of the Castor Hanglands 60th birthday party on Saturday 18 October with over 200 local people and many families visiting the reserve and enjoying a range of activities, including practising woodcraft and a nature treasure hunt.

View 5 held another exhibition at the Torpel cabin on 29-30 November, decking out both the building and the pathway with their art work and creating a very seasonal feel.

There was a gentle Langdyke walk along the Maxey Cut on 6 December – no rarities seen but good views of our regular birds including yellowhammer, tufted duck, little grebe and fieldfare.

Contacts

Newsletter and walks

Richard Astle 01733 252376
richard@athene-communications.co.uk

Membership

David Cowcill 01733 252655
Email dcowcill@aol.com

Forthcoming Events

11 January – work party – 1pm at Etton High Meadow to focus on building sheep shelters!

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7 February – work party at Etton Maxey pits, putting up nest boxes and removing willow.

14 February – Nene Washes Walk, meet at Helpston Post Office at 2pm, with a chance to see cranes, hen harriers and short-eared owls!

5 March – evening lecture at Flag Fen on the Torpel project – details to follow.

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