



Langdyke
Countryside Trust

Langdyke Countryside Trust

Annual Review 2022



Our work centres on three key areas

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The Chair of Langdyke Countryside Trust RICHARD ASTLE reports on another year of hard work and success

A member of the Trust recently asked me to summarise what Langdyke does – why does it exist? It's a great question and one that made me think! We are often so busy with our day-to-day work on the reserves or with the administration of the charity, that we rarely stop to consider what we are trying to achieve.

But I think we can answer the question relatively easily – in fact it's there on our website.

Langdyke has two main purposes: to help nature thrive – both on its reserves and in the wider countryside – and to help local people appreciate and treasure the natural world around them.

And both these objectives are not just nice things to do, they are not harmless pastimes that we can enjoy but not worry too much about. Nature absolutely needs our help – sadly it continues to disappear all around us, all the time.

The British Trust for Ornithology has recently issued evidence that in the last 50 years, 73 million birds have vanished from our country! And people more and more realise just how much they need nature to support their physical health and well-being.

So, our work divides into three areas:

- maintaining our own reserves;
- supporting the creation of new habitats for nature in the wider countryside;
- and our programme of events for our members and visitors.

And on that basis, 2022 was another year of hard work and general success for the Trust.

Our reserves continue to prosper under the stewardship of our reserve wardens, Mike Horne, Chris Topper, Stuart Irons and David Cowcill. As you can read in this report, whether it's the return of Nightingale to Bainton Pits, the increasing number of Man Orchids at Swaddywell and the continued success of Operation Turtle Dove at Etton Maxey Pits, the reserves are in great shape for nature. There was a new project at Swaddywell working with Butterfly Conservation to increase habitat for key butterfly species and two new scrapes were dug at Etton Maxey Pits, creating new habitats for wetland birds and insects.

Most notably we have also been able to increase our reserves, meaning more land is being managed for nature locally. We entered into an agreement to manage an additional meadow immediately west of Vergette Wood Meadow and agreed a long-term management agreement with Nene Park Trust to look after M'Ladys' Pond near Ailsworth.

Our efforts to buy two more pits south of the Maxey Cut, Christ's College Pits, were a big focus of our work too, and at the time of writing, having raised the money we need to buy the site, we are waiting for the lawyers to finalise the deal. Hopefully in next year's report, we can feature the site as our ninth reserve!



A hare grazing limestone grassland at Southorpe: Photo: Sarah Lambert

In **the wider countryside**, I can't think of a year when Langdyke has been busier – working with our friends at Nene Park Trust, Natural England, the Wildlife Trusts and PECT as part of the John Clare Countryside project to help deliver nature projects across 25 parishes. Led by Mike Horne, the project has planted 1.6 km of new hedgerow, more than 400 native trees and established 280 square metres of wildflower meadow. The team also engaged over 800 people at more than 70 walks, work parties and talks. A big thank you to Mike for all his hard work – he has made a huge difference across the parishes, leading the partnerships' efforts to help nature recover.

The annual review offers a chance to thank all our volunteers for the incredibly hard work they put in over the year. Just one example tells the story – 35 volunteers turned out at short notice to help rake up bramble and cuttings at Swaddywell to ensure space for Orchids, after bad weather meant that we couldn't get machinery on to the field to collect it manually.

Perhaps less visible is the hard work that goes on behind the scenes to make the Trust function – managing our membership recruitment, organising events and keeping our finances in order. On that note, we are delighted to welcome Andrew Curwen as our new Treasurer, taking over from Brian Lawrence, who stepped down after 11 years in the role at our April Board meeting.

On behalf of all the Trustees, I want to thank Brian for all he has done for Langdyke during that time, overseeing our transformation into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and managing our finances with care and integrity. We certainly could not be the organisation we are now, without his hard work and wise counsel.

I very much hope you enjoy reading this annual report – it takes a lot of work to put together, and we are indebted to David Rowell, our editor, for making it happen! It provides a great record of our collective work and reminds us that we have much to celebrate – not just in the success of our work, but in the beauty of the natural world around us.

Thank you to all our members for being part of Langdyke! We hope you continue to be proud of the Trust and your place within it.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Richard Astle'.

Thank you!

Richard Astle

Chair, Langdyke Countryside Trust



Orange tip butterfly nectarine on Bastard-cabbage at Swaddywell. Photo: Sarah Lambert

A big thank you to our volunteers

Whatever their roles, all of them are essential to the success of Langdyke

Some - like Angela Trotter (membership) and Sheila Dunford (finance) carry out critical administration roles. Ian Willson leads the team of volunteers putting out seed for Turtle Doves and Jean Stowe can be seen out and about with her clipboard surveying wild flowers. Others turn out in all weathers to do manual tasks at our weekly work parties. We asked some of them to tell us why they do it.



Name:

Sue Welch

Q: Why do you volunteer?

A: I love nature and want to protect it and I

also like working outside

Q: What aspect of nature interest you the most?

A: Birds, but also just being out in our wonderful countryside

Q: What's good about your volunteering role?

A: Learning loads from other volunteers who have particular skills. I also get the benefit of enjoying a workout while saving money on gym fees. There are also lots of free training courses and I love being with like-minded people and making new friends.

Q: What's not so good about the role?

A: I can't think of anything

Q: Which Langdyke reserve is your favourite?

A: Bainton for its secrecy, Swaddywell for its beauty and orchids and Etton Maxey for its birds. It seems I don't really have a favourite.



Name:

Graham Boyden

Q: Why do you volunteer?

A: I volunteer for both work parties because

if feels good to give nature and areas of interest a helping hand.

Q: What aspect of nature interest you the most?

A: Ornithology is my main interest

Q: What's good about your volunteering role?

A: Seeing the wildlife, enjoying the chance to be in the fresh air and being with like-minded people.

Q: What's not so good about the role?

A: To be honest, nothing comes to mind

Q: Which Langdyke reserve is your favourite?

A: Tricky! All sites have their pros and cons, but I think the Etton Maxey reserve is my favourite because of the type of landscape.



Name:

Adrian Hallam

Q: Why do you volunteer?

A: I wanted to do something positive to

help the environment and give something back, as I enjoy the natural environment. The work, if you can call it that, is varied and keeps me fit. Langdyke was something I was involved with in the past and is local, hence the ideal choice.

Q: What aspect of nature interest you the most?

A: I enjoy bird watching and the challenge of finding particular birds or identifying a bird I have seen. It fascinates me how different birds come and go at different times of the day or year.

Q: What's good about your volunteering role?

A: I get to give something back and work with a good bunch of people. It is not all work, we have a chat and laugh particularly at the end of the working party over lunch. We also see more of the reserve and the wildlife there.

Q: What's not so good about the role?

A: Getting my feet wet when I was sure my boots did not leak last time I used them.

Q: Which Langdyke reserve is your favourite?

A: Etton Maxey pit as it is local to me but I also like Swaddywell, so I am torn between the two. It is nice to be able to visit so many nice natural spaces locally.



Name:

Ann Bell

Q: Why do you volunteer?

A: Officially it is to help nature and keep fit -

but I guess it is to eat Sue Welch's cake if I'm really honest! Seriously though, I just love it. It's been great also that I've been able to spread the word to others and I have recruited two new volunteers in the last year who enjoy it as much as I do

Q: What aspect of nature interest you the most?

A: My main interest before working at Swaddywell was birds, but now I'm interested in butterflies and I help with the weekly count. I also love orchids

and newts ... well everything really. I love to protect what is there.

Q: What's good about your volunteering role?

A: Learning new skills and meeting like-minded people. Feeling a sense of achievement, even though sometimes you can't always see what we've done. My body always tells me I've worked hard!

Q: What's not so good about the role?

A: No sooner we get rid of brambles, willow and silver birch they grow back. But I guess it's all part of the joys of nature.

Q: Which Langdyke reserve is your favourite?

A: Swaddywell to work in, though I love to walk around Etton Maxey.

If you would like to volunteer we would love to hear from you.

We can find jobs for people working from home or coming to our reserves.

We can also match the roles with your abilities. **Why not give it a go.**

Please contact us at volunteer@langdyke.org.uk

Board is made up of a wide range of talent

The people who steer the progress of Langdyke are all volunteers and come from a wide range of backgrounds as **DAVID ROWELL** reports

Langdyke's board

Langdyke's board is made up of a diverse mix of people from many different backgrounds - but all with a common interest ... helping nature to thrive.

It is chaired by **RICHARD ASTLE** who wears a large number of nature supporting hats. As well as Langdyke, Richard is a driving force behind the John Clare Countryside project and is chair of Natural Cambridgeshire - the local nature partnership for Peterborough and Cambridgeshire.



Richard, who actually owns the Trust's flock of sheep - a mix of Hebridean and Jacob - is an enthusiastic bird watcher and nature champion.

He spends countless hours representing the Trust, seeking out new opportunities and championing nature projects.

In recent times he has also been involved in raising funds, medical equipment and other support for Ukrainian families, having made a number of trips through Europe with supplies.



After many years as treasurer, **BRIAN LAWRENCE** has finally stepped aside from the role but will remain as a board member and trustee for the time being.

Brian is a former local government finance expert and nowadays spends many hours pursuing his passion for birdwatching. He is a regular volunteer attendee of work parties and also helps out at the Frampton Marsh RSPB reserve.

He has been replaced as treasurer and trustee by **ANDREW CURWEN**, who has been a Langdyke member for some years and lives in Etton. Financial advice is also provided by **ELLIE HALL**.

Accomplished photographer **SARAH LAMBERT** combines her role as a botanist with an expert knowledge of other wildlife and as well as being a board member she is also one of the Trust's Artists in Residence. She is also a leading light in the Wildlife Trust locally.

She works as a freelance ecologist undertaking detailed habitat and plant surveys throughout the country. She is a regular contributor to the Trust's Facebook pages answering the questions of users and helping people develop their plant identification skills and increase their understanding of plant ecology.



Another stalwart member of the Langdyke team is trustee **DAVID COWCILL** who brings a wealth of experience from his time tending, loving and championing the countryside in the areas around his Glinton home. He has been a leading figure in the recent discussions, fighting hard with Anglian Water to ensure the Trust gets the best possible outcome from the major pipeline work that will affect the Etton Maxey reserve.



David has a leading role across the reserves - and in particular the Etton ones - acting as a warden and leading the weekly work parties. He can regularly be seen either walking his dog Brecken as he observes nature and monitors water levels on the Etton Maxey reserve or driving his vintage tractor and trailer across the land. He lovingly maintains a variety of vintage farm machinery including ploughs and grass cutting contraptions.

He is also a leading member of the Trust's reserves committee working with Chris Topper and others to ensure our reserves are kept in tip top condition.



Board secretary **ANTONY MOULD** loves crawling around in roof spaces and caves indulging in his passion for bats. He enjoys visits to Barnack Hills and Holes, near to where he lives, and Castor Hanglands.



Two board members **MIKE HORNE** and **DAVID ALVEY** hold key roles with the John Clare Countryside vision project. Both are heavily involved in the work of the project, working closely with landowners and other key figures in ensuring the future success of

the vision. Mike also leads work parties in various locations, particular around the Castor and Ailsworth area and was key to the addition of M'Ladys Pond and Marholm Field Bank as Langdyke nature project areas.

David also takes responsibility for the important area of Health and Safety which has become a top agenda item at board meetings.

CLAIRE NOBLE is responsible for the many great events that are available to Langdyke members. As well as being the organiser she has become a familiar face to the many people to attend them. She is a regular visitor to the reserves with her family and enjoys the benefits of the nature in the great outdoors.

Another nature expert on the board is **JUSTIN TILLEY**.

His experience as a senior member of the Natural England team is invaluable to Langdyke. He has also led a number of walking visits to our reserves pointing out important features to members.



Etton resident **DAVID ROWELL** - a former regional daily newspaper editor - is not only an enthusiastic working party member. He uses his journalism skills to look after the Trust's publicity and edits the website and regular newsletter updates to members.

With the many complications of land ownership and getting good legal advice is an important element of the board's work. This is provided by two of the newest members - husband and wife **ADAM SAUNBY** and **LAUREN BENNETT**.

After a career with Perkins Engines **MARTIN PARSONS** is combining his role as a board member to pursue his passion for landscape restoration and wildlife conservation.

He has just completed an MSc in applied wildlife conservation and has a strong interest in peatland restoration.

One of the latest people to join Langdyke as a trustee and board member is **PETER HILLER** - a Peterborough city councillor who represents the rural wards surrounding his Maxey home.

Efforts continue to boost membership

Membership Secretary ANGELA TROTTER reports

At the time of the 2021 Annual Review, membership stood at 216 family and single member units. Since then, unfortunately we have lost several members, for various reasons. However, we have still managed to attract a steady stream of new members, so membership remains at 216, which is great news, particularly in the current economic climate.

And a number of efforts are being made to recruit new members - including the publication of a new brochure, and an exhibition in Peterborough is planned where a new video about the trust will be shown.

If you have any friends, family or neighbours who you think might be interested in joining Langdyke Countryside Trust to support our work, further information is available

on our website:

<https://langdyke.org.uk>

We also have an online membership application form, which is simple to complete: <https://langdyke.org.uk/.../about.../membership/1326-2/>

We are also using a QR code on our literature and posters which takes potential new members straight to the online form.

We have also produced an online gift pack, which makes a great present. It contains details of membership benefits and information about our main reserves. For more information about this, please email Angela at membership@langdyke.org.uk

157 of our 216 members (73%) have gift aided their membership donations, which allows the Trust to

claim an additional 25% of those fees from HM Revenue & Customs.

If you are a UK tax payer who has not already gift aided your membership donation and would like to do so, please email

membership@langdyke.org.uk or treasurer@langdyke.org.uk or finance@langdyke.org.uk for further information.

Many thanks to all of our members – long-standing and new - for your loyalty and support. At a time when nature is in crisis, and the cost of living is proving difficult for so many people, we really appreciate your contributions. You are all helping to make a difference by supporting the work we are committed to doing in our local countryside.

Health and safety is top of the agenda

DAVID ALVEY reports on how we keep volunteers and members safe

The Langdyke Board took the opportunity in 2022 to review its Health and Safety Policy and general performance in this area. I volunteered to take up the role of Health and Safety Co-ordinator to facilitate keeping health and safety on the agenda at all board meetings and thereby ensure the Trust's excellent health and safety record is maintained.

A health and safety professional visited Swaddywell during a weekly work party and reviewed both our activities and documentation. The outcome of the review supported our own view that we were undertaking the majority of appropriate requirements to keep ourselves, our volunteers, members and visitors safe. Whilst there were a number of recommendations these primarily related to our record keeping

and documentation. A Trust wide Risk Register has been compiled and a new layout to our Risk Assessments implemented as well as a notification system to ensure we report all incidents. This will enable us to continue to improve our systems and prevent more serious accidents occurring.

Given the high temperatures last year, equipment was purchased specifically to reduce the risk of fires causing significant damage. Fire extinguishers were sourced and installed at Torpel and Swaddywell cabins and fire beaters purchased for the reserves. The equipment is in place for Spring 2023.

First Aid training and further brush cutter and strimmer training was

undertaken by a number of volunteers to ensure we continue to have appropriate trained personnel at work parties and events.

Whilst board members and many volunteers continue to put time and effort in, to ensure our activities are as safe as possible, we would remind everyone that health and safety is a joint responsibility. So please do follow any instructions and advice provided, wear appropriate personal protective equipment and bring to the attention of a board member or leader of group activities any potential risks you notice or any incidents that you observe.

The Board will continue to improve its documentation and communication relating to health and safety during 2023 to all members and volunteers.

Health and safety course



Seasons of delight

A round-up of sightings across Langdyke country by RICHARD ASTLE

Summer 2022

The long hot, dry summer of 2022 provided lots of excitement for those busy with their moth traps. A number of rare or indeed completely new species for the area were recorded by Malcolm Hillier and Hugh Wright, including the wonderful Striped Hawk-moth in Malcolm's Helpston garden. David Radcliffe also had a similarly uncommon and impressive *Convolvulus* Hawk-moth in his garden.



Striped hawk moth by Malcolm Hillier

Another striking moth that delighted many members over the summer was the Hummingbird Hawk-moth. This was until recently a relatively scarce, if regular, visitor, a day-flying migrant from warmer climes, but this year it was seen across the area, including in many gardens, feeding particularly on red-coloured flowers such as Red Valerian.

Sarah Lambert found caterpillars of this moth in her garden at the end of August. Talking of caterpillars - there was also an impressive web full of Small Eggar larvae at the entrance to the Swaddywell car park in June.

The Four-spotted Moth was also at several sites along the Maxey Cut and the South Drain – an important discovery of what seems to be a large new colony of this nationally scarce moth.

There seemed to be fewer Glow-worms along the Cut this year, but there were also glowing females at Swaddywell and Hills and Holes.

Butterflies too were out in good numbers, enjoying the sunshine. There were several sightings of Purple Emperor at the Hanglands as well as Black Hairstreak, White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary. Purple Hairstreak seemed to be



Silver Washed Fritillary, Valezina Form, Matt Webb

buzzing around the top of every oak tree. Matt Webb recorded six separate female Silver-washed Fritillary of the Valezina form (an uncommon variant form of the usually orange wings) at the Hanglands on July 7 and fifteen Chalkhill Blue at Hills and Holes on July 15.

Marbled White were seen on several occasions at Swaddywell, where it has not been a frequent visitor in the past. Two Small Copper butterfly were seen at Etton Maxey Pits by Chris Lines in late August and another migrant – the Clouded Yellow butterfly was seen there too.

There were several reports of Willow Emerald Damselfly, including from Royce Wood. This is another recent arrival to our area, which is spreading fast. It spends much of its time in the trees, laying its eggs into the bark of willow or alder.

And what about this for an astonishing bit of nature – a pink form of Meadow Grasshopper, found in Jackie Robinson's Helpston garden!

Otters continue to delight watchers along the Maxey Cut on summer evenings and were regular visitors on



Hummingbird moth by Sarah Lambert



Meadow grasshopper



Cuckoo at Etton Maxey Pits, Steve Lonsdale

our Etton Maxey Pits reserve. Langdyke members also reported lots of Hedgehog sightings in their gardens - Sue Welch had five in Marholm on August 12!

Perhaps the most watched bird of the summer was the female Goosander that made her home on the Cut and its neighbouring pits and successfully raised at least seven young (she started with ten). This is the first breeding record locally. On one occasion, the young were seen running along the top of the water to avoid a passing otter (who seemed bemused by the whole thing!).

There were some initial concerns that our Turtle Doves had failed to make it back from Africa this year, but eventually up to five males were found in the area. It was also a good year for Nightingale at Castor Hanglands, and there was the added

bonus of at least one heard singing at Bainton Heath. Spotted Flycatcher, another long-distance migrant whose numbers have declined significantly locally were also found at their usual home in Southey Woods.

Wader passage in the spring brought Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers to the most recently excavated pits, as well as two Avocet. One Bittern was heard booming again. Cuckoo seemed to have had a good year along the Cut, but less so in the wooded areas – Steve Lonsdale took this lovely photo (above) of a young Cuckoo in late July.

A guided walk around Southorpe Roughs (thank you to the owner, Archie Dennis and to our guide, Sarah Lambert) in July produced 114 species of flowers, including Common Milkwort, Hounds Tongue and Vervain.

Elsewhere it was another good year for Man Orchid at Swaddywell and Twayblade (another orchid distinguished by its two large leaves) were out in profusion at their stronghold in the Hanglands.



Vervain, Sarah Lambert



Redwing – a winter visitor



Spiny Puffball



Split-gill

Autumn

Perhaps the most striking thing about the autumn of 2022 (and indeed last year too) was the absence of many of our common bird species. Fieldfare and Redwing, winter visitors from central and northern Europe, were hard to find and many people have commented on the absence of the Starling murmuration along the Maxey Cut. Similarly, after the excitement of the summer breeding record, there were few reports of Goosander on the local pits, and duck numbers generally seem to be low.

There was a lot of comment about this nationally too, it wasn't just a local thing. There are several theories, including sadly that this is just a reflection of declining numbers of birds generally. But we know that many of the winter migrants are still common on their breeding grounds and that winter numbers of ducks and geese have increased in places such as the Netherlands and the Baltic coast.

One theory is that climate change is helping many species that would normally head for the milder temperatures of Britain in winter to stay closer to home. They can avoid expending energy on long flights and are able to find food and shelter in more northerly and eastern locations than before. As examples the numbers of Bewick's Swan and Great Grey Shrike have declined notably in Britain, but overall their populations are stable.

Nevertheless, there was still plenty to see in our gardens and countryside. Exciting garden birds included a Moorhen on feeders in Steve Lonsdale's garden and a Sparrowhawk unsuccessfully attacking a Green Woodpecker in Sue Welch's!

Other notable birds during the period include three Whooper Swans (October 11), a Bittern and a Cattle Egret at Etton Maxey Pits and a flock of ten Mandarin Duck on a private pit near Helpston. A Great White Egret flew over the Cut on October 30. A Rock Pipit was at Rectory Pit on a couple of occasions in September and a Kittiwake on November 20. A flock of approximately 200 Linnet and Yellowhammer were seen feeding on a conservation mix in Station Lane, Ailsworth on December 10.

Sarah Lambert found a number of beautiful mosses and lichens at Swaddywell Pit on December 1 including the three in the photo below. White-tipped Bristle-moss, the greyish lichen *Physcia adscendens* and a tiny bright pink lichenicolous fungus *Illosporopsis christiansenii*.

It was a good autumn for fungi too, with many members posting photos of some very beautiful local examples



Lichen Photo by Sarah Lambert

found on the reserves and woods. They are in the photos above by Jackie Robinson – a Spiny Puffball and a Split-gill.

We don't often report on butterflies at this time of year, but Ann Lees found a Painted Lady in her garden on November 4. John Parsonage reported a Red Admiral and bumblebees in his garden on October 29.

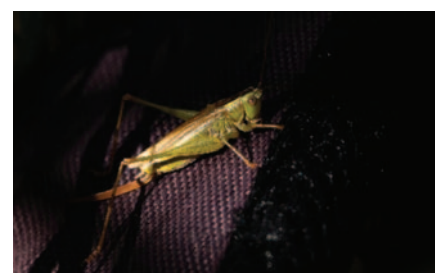
And there was still some moth activity during the period too, with Malcolm Hillier finding this beautiful Vestal moth on October 15, along with Large Wainscot, Yellow Lined Quaker, Black Rustic and Merveille du Jour.

And this Long-headed Conehead was at Swaddywell on 15 October.

The family of Roe Deer were very noticeable throughout the period in the fields between Helpston and the South Drain, with a group of three running across the South Drain during the Trust's walk on December 10.



Vestal moth



Long-headed Conehead by Sarah Lambert

*Planthopper*

Winter-Spring 2022-23

It ended up being quite a cold winter with ice on the local pits and ponds for many nights in January and again in early March. As a result, many of the signs of Spring were quite late in arriving, not least the Blackthorn which in some years can be out in late February, but this year was at least 3-4 weeks behind.

The Maxey Pits complex continued to host a lot of interesting birds over the late winter, not least a large and very noisy flock of geese that roosted in Pig Jaw Pit every evening. The flock included Greylag and Canada Geese but also eight White Fronted Geese and a couple of Barnacle Geese. The flock of Whooper Swan (19 in total) were present on the fields north of Helpston throughout, with two still around in early April (and one still on April 26).

Both Merlin and Peregrine Falcons could be regularly seen hunting over the area. A Greater Scaup was resident for most of the period on Pig Jaw Pit too, and by mid-April this pit was alive with passage waders, including Bar Tailed Godwit,

Grey Plover, Dunlin, Common and Green Sandpiper, plus a Little Gull on April 23 and 25.

This was the first winter for the new scrapes at Etton Maxey Pits and they were quickly attracting a lot of birds, not least Cattle and Great White Egrets. By April there were Redshank and Lapwing feeding around their edges and early Yellow Wagtail too, and an impressive seven Greenshank one April morning!

Other notable birds during the period included several sightings of Ringed Neck Parakeet in Helpston and Bainton; Lesser Redpolls on several garden bird feeders and Mandarin Duck at Ben Jonson and Swaddywell Pits in April. Long Eared Owls were found again in the area, three Avocets turned up at Silt Pit in early April, and by the middle of the month there were lots of reports of Chiffchaff, Swallow, Sand Martin and Little Ringed Plover. There was even a Bearded Tit at EMP!

Water Voles were reported back at EMP in April, and there were several reports of Otter along the Cut too.

Many Members reported Common Toad and Common Frog in their

gardens in March and April, although Sarah Lambert wins all prizes with the 62 toads she heard calling from her garden ponds on March 21. How do they all fit in!

The moth traps were back out in late January, with a Pale Brindled Beauty the first of the year in my Helpston garden. Malcolm Hillier was back at the Hanglands on February 18 and collected more than 300 individual moths, including Yellow Horned, Spring Usher and Dotted Border. Brimstone butterflies were also out on the wing early as usual, and there were reports across the reserves of Orange Tip, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell.

A rather nice planthopper, *Asiraca-Clavicornis*, was in Judy Staines' Glington garden in late March. A Green Tiger Beetle was found at Swaddywell on April 9 and there were several reports of early butterflies, including Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral.

Primroses were bursting out across the area by early March, most notably in Bainton church yard, where Primrose Day was celebrated on March 16.

A new toolbox for nature recovery

Trustee and board member JUSTIN TILLEY looks into the future

This year has brought further change in how we can look after our natural environments, with several new tools and funding options coming to land managers, local authorities, and charities such as Langdyke Countryside Trust. I wanted to provide a few headlines on a couple of these that you may hear more about over the coming months.

One of the biggest changes is that the Government recently published guidance for creating **Local Nature Recovery Strategies**. Production of these documents will be led by a responsible authority (the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority will do this for most of the Langdyke area) and will set out the ambition for nature recovery across a particular county or borough. They will describe important wildlife residing there; the opportunities that can be taken to enhance the area, and the actions that we should collectively prioritise to help our habitats and species.

The strategy will be accompanied by a map showing where the existing areas of wildlife importance are found, and where beneficial action can take place. The aim will be to make those sites bigger and better, look at where to create new wildlife habitats, and ensure that they're joined up so species can be free to spread around the landscape and move to new areas.

The word "recovery" is really important here – it isn't about just slowing the loss of nature or maintaining our existing special places, it is a plan to actively reverse the declines we've seen over recent decades.

Another key point is the importance of hearing a diverse range of voices in shaping these strategies. To achieve success they must not be something created behind closed doors, but be a genuine collaborative and locally led process. Details are emerging as to how we will be able to contribute, but we'll update members on what this means for the Langdyke area when we have that information. As one of the key areas in Cambridgeshire, we'll be expecting great things to be planned for our local patch in the coming years!

Another new tool is **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**. This approach means that as well as developers showing how they act to avoid harm to areas of importance for nature, they now have a legal requirement to provide clear improvements for wildlife. Projects will need to demonstrate a 'net gain' and describe how the natural world is left in a measurably better state than before the development took place. The improvement should be planned into the development site itself, or in close proximity, and must include funding for positive management actions to take place for at least 30 years.

Whilst these new tools offer a significant opportunity for welcomed change, as ever, the proof will be in the pudding. New systems inevitably face teething problems and take time to deliver, but these should offer new ways to create and fund long term improvements for our beleaguered wildlife, as well as enable appropriate "nature positive" projects.



Varied events programme is a success

Events organiser CLAIRE NOBLE reports

More than 240 people supported Langdyke's varied events program in 2022.

Stu Irons hosted almost 50 people over the course of the year at Langdyke's Bainton Heath reserve, Jean Stowe hosted a magical, mid-summers evening orchid walk at Swaddywell and Hannah Bushnell provided more fantastic opportunities for all ages at Swaddywell and Castor Hanglands.

We hosted seven partner events in 2022 and with a special thank you to David Alvey, Justin Tilley and Ruth Angrave and our partners at Burghley, Walcott, Natural England and Peterborough Cathedral who, provided some great opportunities for Langdyke members to visit sites that are not usually open to the public including, Burghley's Walled Garden, Southorpe Roughs, Eastern Hornstocks and Collyweston Great Wood.

And finally, 30 people joined us in December to support Langdyke's fund raising appeal for a new nature reserve, Christs, College Pits with a walk, led by Langdyke's chair, Richard Astle, taking in the sights and sounds along the South Drain and the Maxey Cut and stopping, mince pie in hand, to view the proposed new reserve.

We have a wide variety of events planned for the year ahead and look forward to as many of you as possible participating in them.

It's all change on the financial front

A new treasurer at a time of changes in the way the Trust is financed. Outgoing treasurer BRIAN LAWRENCE reports for the final time on the charity's finances in 2022

The year 2022 was a transition year for the finances of the Langdyke Countryside Trust.

For the last decade the costs of running the Trust have been met from subsidies under the various Countryside Stewardship Schemes and members' subscriptions.

However, following Brexit, the UK Government has decided to make a major change in the way it supports agriculture and nature conservation in England. It has adopted a new ethos 'Public Money for Public Goods'.

Although it has issued guidance papers on the intended new system, the details are still uncertain but there have been significant reductions in one element of support, which will result in reduced support for the trust in future years.

The Trust Board has been aware of these changes and has been looking for different sources of funds to support our work.

There has been a drive to increase membership and last year income from members' subscriptions rose by £773 (almost 11 percent on the year). The Trust also entered into an agreement with National Grid who are now supporting the maintenance of Bainton Heath with income of more than £10,000 pa for ten years after an initial payment of more than £19,000.

In Autumn 2022 the Trust launched an appeal to buy Christ's College Pit. By the end of 2022 we had received donations of £14,600, together with a separate anonymous donation of £30,000 to establish a fund for other land purchases.

During the year the general fund of the Trust made a deficit of £4,300. This was anticipated and was mainly caused by the cost of engaging a fund raiser to help raise funds for the Christ's College appeal and two sets of solicitors' fees for the agreement with National Grid and the leases on the new reserves at Vergette Wood Meadow.

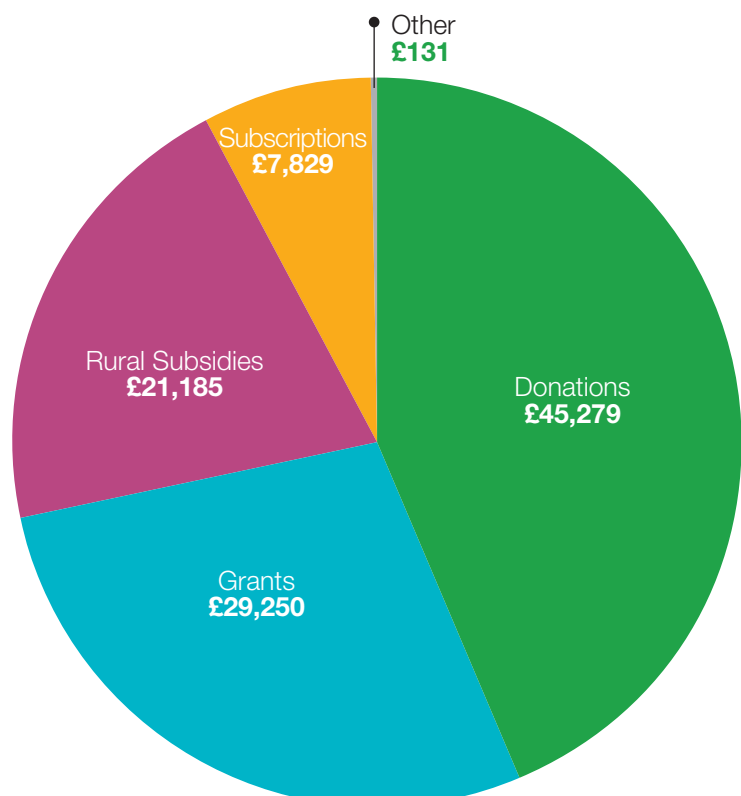
However, spending on our reserves increased by more than £7,000 from the previous year. Almost 57 per cent of spending went directly on reserves or community projects, with only just over 7.5 per cent being spent on administration, which includes the insurance premium for the trust.

Income

The Trust receives two types of income. There is general income, such as members' subscriptions and countryside subsidies that can be used for any charitable purchase as approved by the board, and there is specific income, which can only be used for the purposes specified by the donor. Examples of specific income are donations made to the Christ's College Pit appeal and the payments made by National Grid plc for the maintenance of Bainton Heath.

Income in 2022 rose by £68,000 from the 2021 figure but this was almost entirely specific income - either donations for the Christ's College appeal or income from National Grid plc in respect of the Bainton Heath Agreement.

Total Income in 2022 £103,674



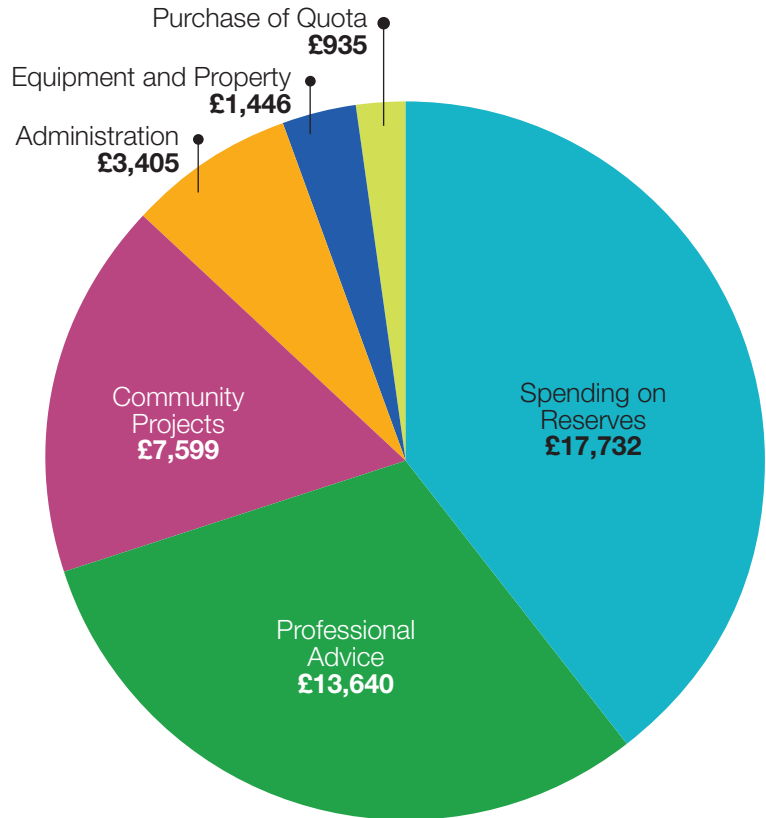
Spending

Spending rose by £17,500 between 2021 and 2022. The additional professional fees accounted for £13,640 of the increase with the other arising from spending on reserves.

Purchase of Quota relates to the right to claim subsidy on some land which the Trust has not previously claimed quota. The additional quota receivable will reimburse the cost in less than two years after which the Trust will continue to receive quota for at least two years. The analysis of spending over the various headings is shown in the diagram below.

These summarised version of the Trust's annual accounts are an extract of the annual accounts which have been certified by the Trust's Independent Examiner of Accounts. A copy of the full annual accounts can be found on the Trust's website or are available from the Treasurer at treasurer@langdyke.org.uk

Expenditure 2022 £44,757



Long-serving Langdyke treasurer Brian Lawrence has stepped aside from his role looking after the charity's finances - but is staying on for the time being as a trustee.

He is replaced by a new treasury team.

Andrew Curwen, who lives in Etton, has taken on the role of treasurer, assisted by **Sheila Dunford**, the new assistant treasurer. Andrew has many years experience in financial governance.

Gently does it

Climate Change and Re-wilding are much in the news currently - so DAVID COWCILL has taken them as themes around which to narrate the progress of the Langdyke reserves during 2022

It seems to me that the essence of re-wilding is to take a reasonably large area of land which has been subject to prolonged intense and unnatural treatment, whatever the source, stop the maltreatment, and then allow and encourage natural life forms to re-colonise and reclaim the landscape, to the benefit of all accessible species - including man.

It does not mean just letting the land go to untended rack and ruin, indeed some of the iconic re-wilding examples are very carefully curated with grazing and management routines.

We know that all bar one of the Langdyke Reserves meet the first condition (M'Lady's pond possibly being the exception).

They have in the past been trashed by human activity - quarrying and landfill, urban occupation, road construction etc. It is also a Langdyke philosophy to carefully and sympathetically maintain and conserve or occasionally manipulate the ground and water resources to allow whatever natural processes and outcomes will happen.

Only in exceptional circumstances are species of interest and local origin imported. The results are staggering, with all the reserves showing steady progress - species re-appearing or just appearing anew. So maybe we have been re-wilding all along? Who knew?

The impact of Climate Change is a vector that cuts across this natural process. Here in the East of the UK it is not just about warming. In the

last twelve months we have seen record temperatures, but also deep cold (-80 C) along with dry spells and intense (usually cold) rainfall periods, so all sorts of threats and consequences follow, some good, some bad.

However the main overarching fact is the warming, and the "conveyor belt" effect of new species arriving from the warmer south, or marginal species becoming more common, balanced by a reduction or loss of colder-loving organisms. In Brian Eversham's (Wildlife Trust) words, pity the species that reach the north of Scotland in their flight from the warming - luckily we are "stuck in the middle" here.

It is very difficult to be specific to the Langdyke reserves but amidst the background noise of local unrelated landscape changes there are some warming signs. An example would be seeing over twenty Little Egrets feeding at Etton Maxey Pits.

This allows me to mention one other element of achievement in 2022 - around monitoring and

record keeping. From the personal interests of individual members over many years we have both ad hoc and very consistent records of plants and birds and some invertebrates. However the Reserves Committee has started on a much more intense and wide reaching monitoring and recording programme.

With the participation of dedicated members following observation transects at the reserves we now have a first year of butterfly records for 2022. Perhaps in 2032 they will be the basis of a more scientific conclusion of the impact of Global Warming - that will be a good outcome. More volunteers are needed for this activity - it is a simple and not too energetic way to become familiar with the reserves and their attractions, and helpful to the achievement of LCT goals.

So using the framework of re-wilding and climate change as drivers for conservation here are the stories from the reserves for 2022.



A spectacular starling murmuration Photo: Sarah Lambert

Swaddywell Pit NR

Conservation effort – progress

Swaddywell hosts small populations of two “at risk” chalkland butterflies - the Grizzled Skipper and the Dingy Skipper. The Butterfly Conservation Trust (BCT) has been working in several local woodlands to open out rides to encourage these and other at-risk species. They need warmth, shelter and sparse vegetation. With funding and guidance from BCT two suitable areas of the top meadow near to the observed population and suitable food plant locations have been scraped clear to provide increased habitat potential.

The impacts are
unknown
but the
crested newt
population
varies wildly

Climate Change and environmental threats

The base ground water level and rainfall across the Nassaburgh Ridge determines the water coverage on site. After several years of high levels and seepage across the quarry trackway, the most recent years have seen a lowering of the ground water and early loss of water in the bottom

pond. The impacts are unknown but the crested newt population varies wildly from year to year. The rain water feed to the pond by the cabin ceased and 14,000 litres of fresh (and filtered) lake water from Etton were imported to keep it viable over the summer.

Observations and achievements

There are typically at least six orchid species on a regular basis - but varying in numbers as orchids are notoriously inconsistent year to year. Man Orchids and the Autumn Ladies Tresses are the rarest of the six. Good news is that a second area of Man Orchids has developed and the Ladies Tresses are spreading - although still in a very restricted area of only a few square metres.



A digger scraping Wood Small-read at Swaddywell to create bare ground for butterflies. Photo: Sarah Lambert

Torpel

Conservation effort – progress

It can take up to fifty years to return a “spoilt” meadow (ie too much richness and nitrates from horse grazing) back to its natural self. We are only twenty years in at Torpel. Some progress can be observed by the overall reduction in nettle coverage - especially fewer rich patches in the main grassland areas.

Even
stranger
the buttercup
reproduces
without
requiring
pollination

Climate Change and environmental threats

The large and very old oak tree near to the West Street entrance sheltered an isolated example of the Goldilocks Buttercup and a clump of English Bluebell - both woodland or woodland edge plants and possibly vestiges of the “old Torpel”. Have they fallen foul of environmental issues as they seem to have disappeared? Even stranger the buttercup reproduces without requiring pollination, so lack of pollinators is not a factor.

Observations and achievements

Reflecting the increased neutral grassland quality, for the first time in many years a good crop of clean and organic hay was taken - more than 200 bales, which were spilt between the LCT for winter sheep feed and the local farmers who did the mowing, rowing up and baling.



A Hebridean sheep on a freezing morning

Bainton Heath

Conservation effort – progress

In 2021 Langdyke's occupation of the site was given more security by a long-term agreement with National Grid (NG), encompassing the concept of Biological Net Gain.

**We now
have a
plan!**

Comprehensive surveys were completed in order to set out the present condition and establish actions

going forward - funded by NG and to be carried out by LCT. Picking up the re-wilding theme, the natural assets on the site have been rather undisturbed for perhaps sixty years but now require some more active management as not all the changes are balanced or beneficial.

We now have a plan! However progress in 2022 was limited to minor manual works because we are awaiting a revised agreement on site access.

Climate Change and environmental threats

The uniqueness of Bainton Heath derives from the way the quarry was filled in and its later use as a coal storage depot. The dominance of non-local conditions - eg acidic soils, leads to locally rare insects plants and lichens. However many of these are threatened as local species and situations encroach - calamagrostis grass crowds out the lichen, the black poplar trees have reached maturity, the scrub hosting the nightingales is eaten out by grazing deer now present in large numbers in the local landscape.

Observations and achievements

The Black poplar trees line the North and North Eastern edge of the site adjacent to the public footpath and the stream that eventually becomes South Drain - and on the boundary with the fishery. They are exactly in the right environment (floodplains and wet ditches) so someone knew what they were doing in planting them. According to the Forestry Commission and the National Trust the Black Poplar is now the UK's most threatened native tree - only 7000 left, with an active programme of rescue. The site plan encompasses their conservation and renewal whilst having to respect modern tree risk analysis.



The large pond at Bainton Heath in October Photo: Sarah Lambert

Etton Maxey Pits

Conservation effort – progress

The major change for 2022 was the creation of two water-filled scrapes in the South and Central Meadows. Until now there has been one water level across the entire site governed by the pump, leading to the meadows being too dry in summer. Due to the steady

We are now able to keep about
50%
of the meadows either wet or under shallow water



Orchid

influx of ground water from the North East we are now able to keep about 50 per cent of the meadows either just wet or under shallow water - a better fenland edge environment for all the life forms to thrive.

Climate Change and environmental threats

Being mostly below the surrounding ground levels, the site is perhaps sheltered from some climate impacts. Although we do have botanical records, they have not been analysed to look for trends - similarly for the bird recording. However anecdotally there are more avian incomers (eg both little and great white egrets). The biggest climate change driven threat is the indirect one from Anglian Water's (AW) strategic plan to build a pipeline transferring a water surplus from North Lincolnshire to save water extraction (and hence chalk streams) in the south of East Anglia. Throughout 2022 discussions continued to try to limit the consequences of the chosen route of the pipeline down the length of the reserve. The details are set out on our website.

Observations and achievements

"The Turtle Doves are back" - is the cry around mid-May hopefully each year. The feeding programme continued for a third year, and there was a reasonable (but not record) population observed. The ringing activity was also repeated. To meet the potential disruption from the AW activity feeding was spread over different locations on site - success being captured "on camera" as a criteria for AW's planning acceptance. The ready accessibility at the car park led to visitors from far and wide.

Otters are also a recurring theme - a consequence of their growing numbers in the river systems of England. We have monitoring programmes for both mink (nill) and water voles (fairly frequent) and when using trail cameras the otters frequently star in the movies. Otter tracks from the Maxey Cut through the ditch systems and land bridges into the main lake could also be seen, as well as the occasional fish remains - but they have more work to do to clear all the carp!



One of the new scrapes at Etton Maxey Photo: Sarah Lambert

Etton High Meadow

Conservation effort – progress

A key addition to the site (and recommended for all re-wilding activity) is the rainwater-fed pond. Now four or five years old it has matured to a sunny and also shaded area, fringed by local water's edge plants, with dragonflies and damselflies, newts and an occasional (swimming!) grass snake. A real pleasure to sit and watch after exertion on the allotments or the reserves.

Climate Change and environmental threats

The dry mid-year conditions required significant watering effort for the survival of the fruit trees and the wildflower enrichment area of the orchard. Luckily there is the odd local lake to hand - and the LCT bowser was repaired after frost damage and then coaxed into operation several times - as well as to refill the pond.

Observations and achievements

Just as at Torpel the meadow areas are recovering from agricultural use - this time arable so already less nutrient rich. Slowly slowly the wildflowers are returning - some bee orchids and black medick seen amongst the grassland - which is too thin for a hay crop after grazing by the sheep. Just under fifty species have been recorded on the meadowland areas. By contrast the ungrazed orchard grass is much thicker - we are waiting to see if yellow rattle can take hold to hold it back more naturally than the current annual haircut by flail.

Slowly, slowly
the wildflowers are returning . . .



An Otter. Many have been seen along the Maxey Cut and there have been signs at Etton Maxey as well.

Vergette Wood Meadow

Conservation effort – progress

No radical action during the year - steady application of the management plan of grazing and an annual flail (preferably with a collector to remove the cuttings), with segregation at the hedgerow to allow the hedge bottom to thicken up.

Climate Change and environmental threats

The benefits of plants in carbon capture?? Just a few years ago the 3.5 hectare wet woodland area was an arable field, then after gravel

extraction a sculpted raw earth basin with a little water in the bottom.

Thanks to more water, willow, reed, bullrush and crassula the whole area is now a dense green mat of vegetation. The story of the vanishing fenland peats and CO₂ emission is well known - perhaps we have the beginning of an upland bog and carbon capture here?

Observations and achievements

Maybe because it was meadowland much later into its recent life than the meadow at Etton High Meadow, Vergette Wood Meadow is already

...the whole area
is now a
**dense,
green mat**
of vegetation

much more species rich. In the meadow area alone more than 90 plant species have been observed, with a consequent richness of insect life, especially the common butterflies and dragonflies patrolling the lee of the hedgerow.

In one of the rare LCT “imports” the five elms trees in an “avenue to be” up the South Drain side are hanging on with both plant protection and watering support - a long way to go yet to match the wych elm across the drain.

M'Ladys Pond

The most recent (2022) addition to the Langdyke Reserves, LCT look after this feature by agreement with Nene Park Trust. It is an ancient pond, at the intersection of two Roman Roads, just to the west of Station Road Ailsworth. There is no public access, but those keen to visit can always join a work party there!

Conservation effort – progress

The pond has been isolated and left to decay for many years, and has become overgrown, silted and dark. Having only gained formal access late in the year, there was just enough time to start to reduce the overhanging trees, recycling the trimmed wood into hibernacula and

dead hedges for shelter. Dependent on water levels the big clear out push will come later into 2023.

It is too early for any observations and achievements or comment on Climate Change and environmental threats.



Survey work at M'Ladys Pond

Marholm Field Bank

Conservation effort – progress

The A47 Castor Bypass opened in 1991 - creating this “lost corner” of botanical delight on the edge of the lane to Marholm. There is a study of conservation over time here - as almost thirty years elapsed to enable the site to develop before LCT became involved. As elsewhere on the reserves, the enemy of botanical variety is scrub encroachment - in this case mainly hawthorn, which if unchecked would now threaten the woodland flower areas. The main ongoing conservation effort is to peg the encroachment back to reasonable limits.

Climate Change and environmental threats

There is nothing specific to comment upon at our level of study or engagement.

Observations and achievements

I’m cheating a little - with this photo of the area in 2023- but in common with much of John Clare Countryside the display of early plants was remarkable after the vagaries of 2022’s weather with extremes of heat and cold. In this case the reserve was awash with primroses.



Marholm Field Bank

And finally ...

A big thank you to all the Langdyke Conservation volunteers who turn out week after week to ‘do their bit’ on the reserves at the regular Monday and Thursday work parties.

Also to the Perkins Retired Employees group who regularly assist mainly at Swaddywell, and to those members of Corporate Social Responsibility events who chose to exchange their workplace for the outdoors for a short but enervating time.

For the bigger tasks we now have an established roster of contractors who bring in the big machinery from time to time - but this just sets up the space for the volunteers to make the difference and encourage the variety of the natural world that is so important we conserve and that all LCT members can all enjoy.

Thank you all.



Restoring the WhiteWater Brook

A major JCC project is unfolding in a limestone brook as DAVID ALVEY reports

During 2022 Langdyke I have been working with our John Clare Countryside partners, local landowners and the Environment Agency to develop a vision for the WhiteWater Brook at the western edge of the John Clare Countryside.

The aim is to create a flora and fauna rich 18km length of limestone brook with its associated tributaries and seepages, which contain abundant tufa formations.

The brook runs from the southern edge of Burghley Park down through Walcot Estate and William Scott Abbot Trust land passing under the A47 and joining the River Nene. It passes through the land of three major landowners, Burghley Estate, Walcot Estate and William Scott Abbot Trust, all very supportive to see an increase in the bio-diversity of the brook and its surrounding valley.

The aim would be to reconnect the brook with its historic floodplain in appropriate places, encouraging it to follow a more natural course and have a variety of depths, widths and flow rates.

The valley will be a mix of woodland, regenerative arable farmland, conservation grazed wood pasture and wetland. For the majority of its length the valley will be bounded on the east by a contiguous length of limestone grassland, rich in native flora and to the west by a significant shelter belt of native trees.

In 2022 early work, led by the Environment Agency, added a couple of riffles made of local limestone to evaluate how these can be used to create variations in flow and water levels.

In the autumn Walcot Estate have added in the region of 2km of new hedgerow to provide connectivity and better define the valley from the surrounding arable farm land. During the year botanical and invertebrate surveys were carried out along the length of the brook by Sarah Lambert and Pete Kirby. (See Sarah's report on page 24)

These yielded some very interesting findings, provide a great benchmark and added considerable support to the plans to develop this area of countryside. 2023 will see further development of the plans with more specific detail and investigation as to how blended finances would work to fund this significant project.

Initial funding bids have already been submitted, along with the development of appropriate countryside stewardship agreements and engagement with Peterborough City Council on the potential for bio-diversity net gain funding, arising from developments within the Unitary authority, to feed into this project.

The project will hopefully be the pilot for many landscape transformation projects across the rest of the John Clare Countryside.

What's been happening in numbers, so far?

903 people engaged in **81** events.

The JCC project was presented to over **380** people.

200 children planted sunflower seeds at an event in May 2022.

370 packets of native wildflower seeds given out.

9 'wellbeing walks', **2** geocaching days and **70** environmental events.

All **6** primary schools engaged, and **6** JCC lessons plans created.

3 BBC radio interviews, with a reading audience of over **87k** people for each interview.

Attended **5** village fetes and festivals between May and August 2022.



The WhiteWater Brook Photo: Mike Horne

Project to double nature progresses

The great work to restore our countryside continues as MIKE HORNE reports

The John Clare Countryside team started in October 2021, with the intention to 'double nature' over a ten-year period in the 19 parishes that inhabit the (approximately) 30,000 acres of John Clare Countryside.

We're now eighteen months into the project, and we've been able to engage and work with all of the parish councils (and several of the landowners) on more than 100 projects. We've also set up working groups which have responsibility for Landowner Engagement, Access, Verges, Heritage, and Education.

In the last few weeks of 2022, we worked with local groups to plant a total of 18,800 wildflower bulbs and plug plants in 16 locations in JCC.

One of the exciting projects - which we hope will make great progress in 2023, is the restoration of the White-Water Brook, which runs for over four miles from just south of the Burghley Estate near Stamford to where it joins the River Nene, in Sutton parish.

Working with local landowners Burghley Estate, Walcot Estate, Sacrewell Farm, and Nene Park Trust, the Environment Agency have slowed the flow of water by creating leaky dams using fallen branches and raised the water level slightly by adding locally quarried limestone. More details in David Alvey's report.

The JCC team have also engaged with the BCN Wildlife Trust, Natural England, local contractors, and ecologists, to start the process of making environmental improvements to the habitats that are within one hundred metres either side of the brook, and which will eventually restore several 'riparian' habitats that were lost during the

straightening of the Brook carried out in the 19th Century.

Sarah Lambert and her team of ecologists have been very busy, and between May and September 2022 carried out 27 site reports of targeted areas in JCC, resulting in 11,694 records being made. There were 491 plant species recorded, and 2,051 kinds of invertebrates recorded (159 species with formal conservation status) which include several that either haven't previously been noted in this area or haven't been seen for many years - including a type of pseudo-scorpion, a Withy Weevil and several plant species. A particular species of Long Footed Fly (found in Ailsworth Marsh) took three days to identify because it's only the third record of it being present in the UK!

The detailed survey results will allow Sarah to provide tailored nature recovery management proposals for each of the sites they've surveyed, which - if followed, will increase the areas of ideal habitats that are beneficial to the key species which live in each of those habitats.

There are many more environmental events being planned for the remainder of 2023, with several



JCC Planting

corporate groups being keen to help us plant more trees and hedgerows, construct JCC's second water harvester, finalise the preparations for M'Lady's Pond renovation in Ailsworth (in October this year) and carry out a litter picking event along the River Nene.

At least one major landowner is planning to plant several acres of new woodland in JCC, and several other farmers and landowners are also set to carry out environmental improvements on their own land, so things look very promising for wildlife.

With so many of our projects having already been achieved, we must remember that this is still only Year Two of our ten-year effort to 'Double Wildlife' in JCC. We've very quickly made great progress in what promises - with our support over the next eight years, to be a brilliantly encouraging and successful project.

What's been happening in numbers between October 2021 and April 2023?

591 native trees planted.

280m² wildflower meadows were created or restored.

1.8km of double hedgerow planted.

2 new Barn owl boxes put up.

6 ponds restored and **3** bog gardens created.

1 rainwater harvester made to a unique design.

18,800 plug plants and wildflower bulbs planted.

Survey reveals rare species

SARAH LAMBERT and her team report on some excellent finds



Ecological survey

Between May and September 2022, a team of three ecologists -myself, Peter Kirby and Chris Kirby-Lambert - conducted botanical and invertebrate surveys of land within the John Clare Countryside Project area as part of the Green Recovery Funded project.

Priority sites were identified in April 2022 by a group including Peterborough Environment City Trust, Langdyke Countryside Trust and the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire.

The surveys were focused on the Whitewater Brook and Nene Valley, where landowners were actively considering proposals for nature recovery, but several sites outside these core areas were also visited including Christ's College Pits in Helpston and Ailsworth Marsh County Wildlife Site. The core fieldwork was carried out on eighteen days, with some follow-up visits undertaken towards the end of the year.

A total of 1,995 records of higher plants and bryophytes were made from the survey area in 2022, comprising 469 different taxa. These included sixty-five habitat quality indicator species listed in the Cambridgeshire Wildlife Sites Selection Guidelines, many of which are rare either at the national or local level.

Considering the small area of land surveyed, the range of plant communities present was extensive, with fifty-six different National Vegetation Classification Communities identified. Unsurprisingly, given the focus on the Whitewater Brook and the Nene Valley, most of the communities were associated with high water tables and included springs, mires, swamps, wet grassland and wet woodland. The slopes of the Whitewater Brook also contained areas of calcareous and acid grassland.

The survey also produced 9,454 records of 2,051 kinds of invertebrates.

Of these, 159 species have a formal conservation status. Many of the species recorded, even those with status, are already known from the John Clare Countryside or nearby areas, or are not unduly surprising discoveries; some, for example, are actively spreading species which would be expected in the area sooner or later, and it is not surprising that this survey should be the first to record them. Some, however, are surprising and/or important.

One species of note is The Large Tree Chernes Dendrochernes cyrneus, a Red Data Book pseudoscorpion, which was recorded from three new locations. The John Clare Countryside is a key area nationally for this species. It is associated mostly with old open-grown trees, and it seems likely that it is widespread in the area, on oaks on higher ground and willows in the river valley.

In addition to the invertebrate species with a national status, several have

*Withy Weevil**Large Tree Chernes*

been recorded which, though nationally not exceptionally uncommon, are predominantly northern and western and very infrequent in this area; these are all associated with seepages, springs or small streams. Collectively, they form an assemblage which is important at the county, and perhaps regional, level.

The data gathered from the survey has highlighted the importance of previously undervalued habitats such as shaded willow carr and poplar plantations along the Whitewater Brook.

One hundred and two species of craneflies have been recorded from these, comprising almost 30 per cent of the national fauna. It has also highlighted the presence of previously overlooked species such as the Withy Weevil *Cryptorhynchus lapathi* which was formerly common in osier beds and is now Nationally Scarce.

The Nationally Scarce dung beetle *Onthophagus medius* is new to the

area from Normangate Meadows. This species may be a more widespread feature of the Nene Valley, and points to the potential value of the rather poorly known dung fauna of the area.

The survey has allowed evaluation of existing County Wildlife Sites (CWS) and identified previously overlooked areas of high ecological value, including discovery of new populations of key indicator species such as Southern Marsh-orchid and Quaking-grass.

Within existing CWSs, key plant species that had not been seen for many years were sometimes still found to be present. This was particularly the case for areas with limited public access, such as the headwaters of the Whitewater Brook in Burghley Park, where damp seepages were found still to support a suite of plants including Changing Forget-me-not, Fen Bedstraw, Common Spotted-orchid, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil, Corn Mint, Tormentil, Bugle, Marsh-marigold, Lesser Pond-sedge, Glaucous Sedge and Blunt-flowered Rush, last recorded from the area between 1969 and 1972.

The surveys have provided a much better understanding of the ecological processes, particularly in the Whitewater Valley, where springs, seepages and tufa barrages are vital and sensitive elements of the ecosystem.

Detailed data should ensure that future nature recovery proposals do not cause damage to existing sites of high ecological value. It is hoped that key members of the John Clare Countryside Project, including Natural England and the Environment Agency, will refer to the data set when considering schemes such as the English Land Management Scheme or river restoration.

The data has been made available to all landowners who kindly gave access permission for surveys, and the detailed species information will be stored securely in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Environmental Records Centre.

*Tufa Barrage Whitewater Brook**Southern Marsh Orchid*

Ancient 'Westings Meadow' brought back to life

KATHRYN PARSONS explains how she and fellow artist **Sarah Lambert** have taken their work forward in 2022

At the start of 2022, Sarah and I had several ideas for where we wanted to take our work as Langdyke's Artists in Residence.

In February though, I chanced upon a mention of a place between Helpston and Maxey that was once called 'Westings Meadow'. Looking at its outline on a map I realised that three of Langdyke's nature reserves are now located in this area ...

It turned out that for hundreds of years Westings Meadow was an important resource for the surrounding villages, and shared between them. It was mapped in Tudor times, and mentioned in documents dating back to at least the 1260s! Its use was governed by an intricate system of farming and community land ownership (inter-commonable land).

Through archives research and talking with others in Langdyke, Sarah and I became more and more interested in this little-known piece of landscape history. It is a compelling thought that after a gap of 200 years, Langdyke's work on its Eastern

Reserves brings part of the old meadow into the hands of the wider local community once again.

Langdyke has always had a strong heritage strand to its work and we are particularly grateful to Robert Beasley, Julie Stanton and Ian Abbot-Donnelly for their assistance in our research (Robert has written a fascinating book, 'The Topography of the Lower Welland', and knew about Westings Meadow before we did).

With such rich stories to uncover and share, Sarah and I decided to make Westings Meadow a major focus of our work that year. We set about exploring its boundaries, looking for traces of the Meadow's outline in the landscape, and working out how to best capture its heritage, landscape and nature through our photography and artwork.

Our research has led to some wonderful discoveries. I've identified a description written by John Clare as being of Westings Meadow! And Sarah has found some stunning veteran White Willow trees on the Meadow's eastern boundary - and captured them beautifully through her photography.

To some people, this depth of research might not seem like 'what artists do', but for us it's a very important part of the process. Through our work, Sarah and I both share the stories of the land, and sometimes it takes a lot of time to



Westings Meadow (1560)



Medicine cabinet for Westings

seek out the stories that interest us and that we think will fascinate others too.

In November, we shared the artworks that we had created in response to Westings Meadow at our exhibition at Langdyke's Torpel Manor Field. There were Sarah's cyanotypes, hand made papers and beauty-filled photographs taken in John Clare Countryside. And I created a Medicine Cabinet for Westings Meadow - referring to the work of the Trust and nature to heal land and ecosystems that have been impacted by gravel extraction (many of Langdyke's eastern reserves are on post-extraction land), along with several other site-inspired works.

We had about 150 visitors in all, and we were delighted by the responses. Many Langdyke members came (thank you!). And we found that our social media posts and advertising attracted many who were new to the Trust as well.



Contrasting perspectives of Westings Meadow



Langdyke AGM group cyanotype for CCD-CE

We were able to have conversations about Langdyke's work and the Westings Meadow research, as well as art and photography - and to sell some of our work too, which was very helpful! Copious amounts of cake were eaten, and more than £120 was raised towards Langdyke's Christ's College Pit Appeal. Particular thanks to the western reserves team who did a wonderful job of getting Torpel ready for visitors.

Earlier in the year Sarah and I also held some 'In Residence' days on

Langdyke's nature reserves. These were times when we were working on-site and invited others to come along and talk with us, or even join in by working on their own projects. These sessions proved to be so popular that we were kept talking the whole time and rarely got any of own work done!

We also led a 'community workshop' for Langdyke's members at the annual meeting, where we all worked together to create two beautiful cyanotypes that captured memories of a sunny summer day at High Meadow. We're absolutely delighted that early in 2023, thanks to the Trust's main board, agreements were put in place that mean Sarah and I can now also offer workshops and walks, including one on cyanotype, on Langdyke's reserves.

We look forward to another creative year and offering new and engaging ways to share the stories of Langdyke's work, our local heritage and nature with Langdyke's members and the wider public.



Gravel Extraction sculpture



Medicine cabinet for Westings

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all those who have contributed articles in this year's annual review and to all of the volunteers who through their offices make the Trust the success it is.

Annual review:

Editor: David Rowell

Design: Steph Norman

Majority of photos by Sarah Lambert

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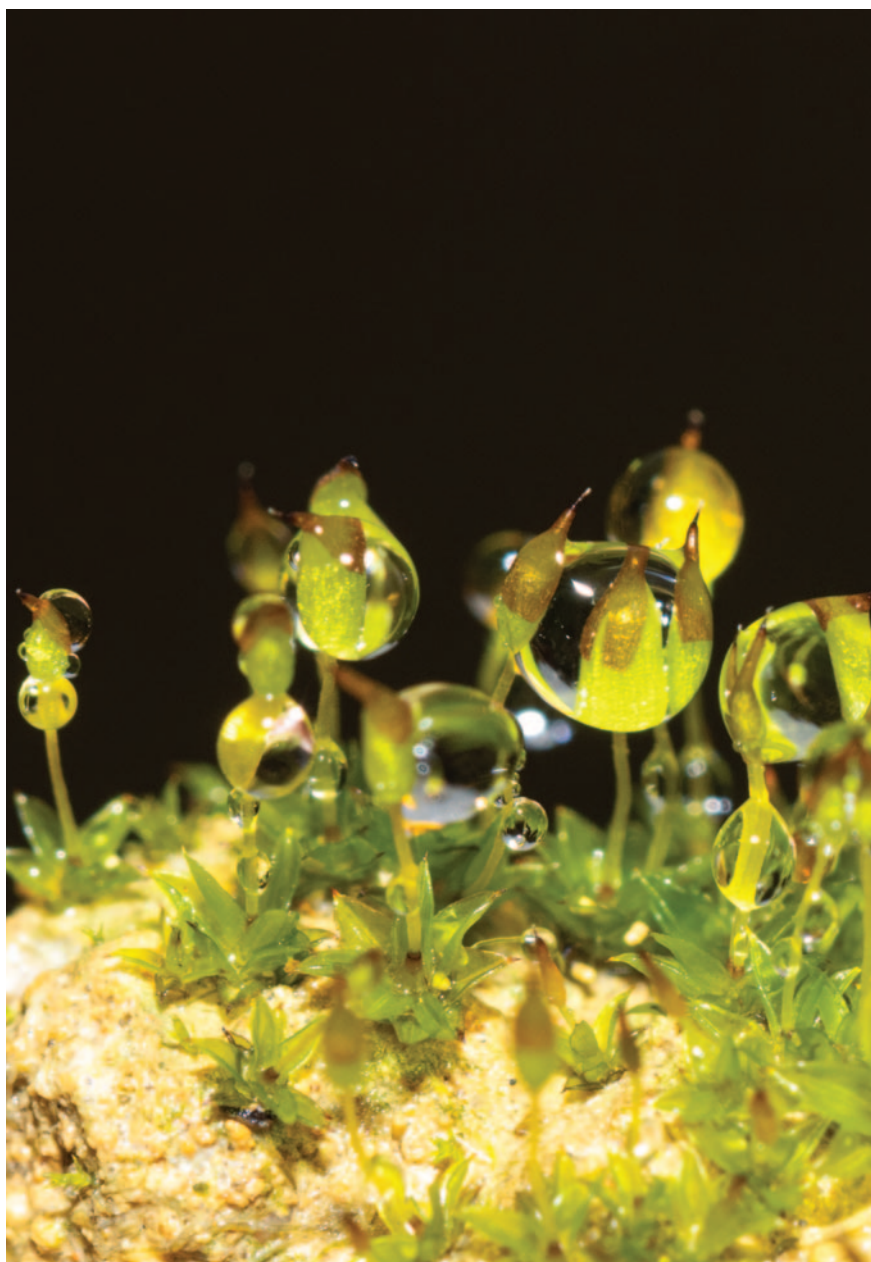
Ellie Hall

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*Smallest Pottia, a short-lived moss that grows on bare soil
Front cover image: Limestone Waxcap, a very local species first recorded at Swaddywell in 2022.
Both images by Sarah Lambert.*

We are grateful for the support we have throughout the year from our friends and partners in many organisations including Natural England, The Wildlife Trusts, John Clare Society, John Clare Trust, Tarmac, National Grid, Peterborough City Council, Milton Estates, Burghley Estate, the Internal Drainage Board, PECT, the Environment Agency, Walcot Estate and Welland Rivers Trust.



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