



Langdyke
Countryside Trust

Langdyke Countryside Trust

Annual Review 2023



Langdyke's work revolves around nature and people

The chair of Langdyke Countryside Trust, Richard Astle, on the importance of engaging our members and looking after the wider countryside

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Wherever we can, we aim to bring these two objectives together, allowing our members, local people and visitors a chance to enjoy and understand their local environment, while at the same time creating or maintaining areas where nature can thrive undisturbed.

Over the course of the year, **we engaged our members** and other visitors through a programme of monthly events, ranging from walks around our reserves, visits to other local sites, training and identification courses and illustrated talks. A number of members took part in bird identification walks.

Membership has declined slightly over the year, but the number of active volunteers continues to increase, and our People and Communities Committee is developing a structured membership recruitment and retention strategy. Details of our recent membership survey can be found later in this annual review.

Encouragingly, 83 per cent of respondents think we are doing either a very good or good job in making a difference to the local environment. Equally there are many other areas where we can evolve our work and do more for both people and nature.

Our Artists in Residence delivered a full programme during the year, including workshops for members and a wonderfully curated exhibition of their work, while our Poet in Residence was able to join

several events and give readings of his poetry, inspired by the Trust's reserves and work.

Our reserves are all managed under the supervision of the Trust's Reserves Committee and benefit greatly from this co-ordinated approach, allowing shared best practice as well as health and safety oversight. A number of training courses were held during the year for our volunteers, including on key tasks such as strimming and a refresher first aid course.

As well as the weekly work-parties on our existing reserves, we were able to commence work on a new reserve at M'Lady's Pond, where removal of some surrounding trees will enable more light to enter the pond, which will encourage biodiversity.

We were unfortunately unable to complete the purchase of another new reserve at Christ's College Pits during the year, due to unforeseen legal issues, but these have now been resolved in 2024 and initial management work will start on site this year.

Specific outcomes for nature include a record year for the rare Autumn Ladies Tresses at Swaddywell Pit and of Pyramidal Orchids at Etton-Maxey Pits where the new scrapes immediately attracted Great Egrets and several species of wading bird.

The work of our volunteers was recognised by a conservation award grant from the Hardy Orchid Society.

Just off our land, two pairs of Avocet nested on the pits south of Vergette Meadow. There was also a welcome return of the Nightingale to our Bainton Heath reserve, although management work here was curtailed due to ongoing access issues over neighbouring land, which we are addressing through our landlord, National Grid.

The appointment of a new treasurer during 2023 provided a neat opportunity for the Trust to review its overall strategy and objectives over the summer, with a consensus that the current objectives continue to reflect the strategic intent of the Trust. A key reflection of that review was that the Trust will need to consider carefully what additional commitments it can take on within the capacity of its current voluntary structure. The new Treasurer also instituted an ongoing review of



Volunteers raking wet grass at Swaddywell in a project to save future orchid growth

our governance structures and documentation, which will result in an updated and more detailed risk management plan.

We continued our work to help nature recover across **the wider countryside**, working with partners 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.

Langdyke acts as the co-ordinating partner for a cluster of five parishes within the project area (Helpston, Etton, Maxey, Deeping Gate and Uffington) and is actively engaged with volunteer groups in each of these parishes. A number of projects were delivered during the year, including planting several new hedgerows – including a long stretch along the western side of the road between Southey Woods and Top Lodge Farm – and the creation of new wildflower meadows. There was also an active programme of bulb planting across the parishes.

Significantly our role within the John Clare Countryside partnership allowed us to bring together the major local

landowners in a new partnership to design a landscape scale nature recovery programme across their land.

This could be a significant step forward as it would involve thousands of acres of our local countryside, with the creation of new habitats for nature and linking those up with more hedgerows and field margins. Key habitats for creation include limestone grassland and wetlands.

So as ever there is much to celebrate as the Trust enters its 25th year, and a lot of potential for the creation of further nature rich habitats. But at the same time, we cannot forget just how much nature needs our help. The scale of loss remains devastating – we only have to think about how few Swifts we see over village roofs every summer to be reminded of the biodiversity crisis – and of the role we can all play in addressing it.

As ever a huge thank you to all our volunteers.



Hybrid Marsh-orchid

Exciting projects alongside the waterways

The Maxey Cut is at the heart of local nature. Langdyke is spearheading some important projects on and near its banks as Richard Astle reports

The Maxey Cut is very much a man-made waterway, widened after the Second World War to protect the Deepings from flooding; at first sight it seems to be the archetypal unnatural river – totally straight, with just a few trees hanging on to the side, its banks frequently mown and for many months of the year, just a torrent of fast flowing water.



A view of the Maxey Cut

And yet, the Cut has in recent years been at the heart of nature recovery in the John Clare Countryside.

Within the constraints of its primary purpose as a flood defence mechanism, it has been carefully repurposed and managed to create a corridor for nature. While trees remain an issue, because of the damage their root systems can do to the banks; a lot of work has been done by the Environment Agency to enhance habitats for

fish and to maintain the banks for glow-worms and four spotted moth. Eels and brown trout have increased in numbers in recent years and any walk along the Cut in the summer will be rewarded with views of Common Tern, Little Egret and Grey Wagtail. And if you're patient and lucky, an Otter or two!

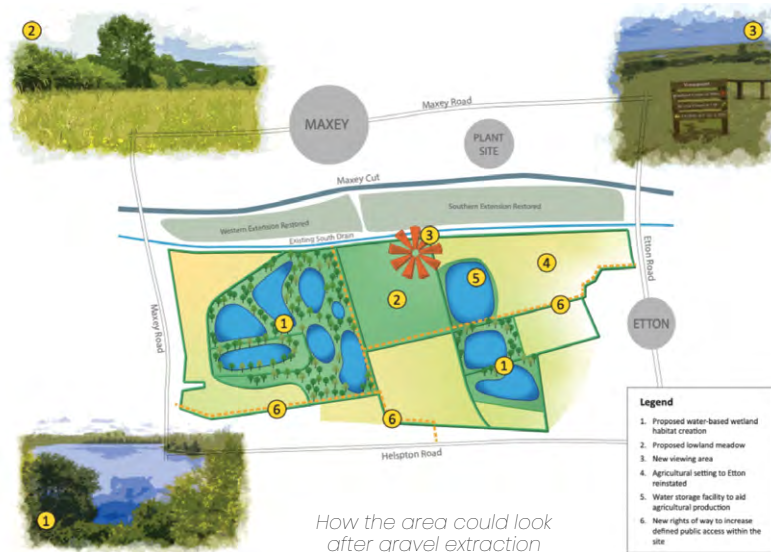
But what is even more exciting is the potential for the Cut to sit at the heart of a huge nature rich landscape, vibrantly alive already with breeding Marsh Harriers and Avocets, booming Bittern and purring Turtle Dove. Noctule bats

overhead, Otters in the water and Roe Deer crashing through the scrub.

In future, could we even hope for a return of Nightingale and the arrival of other wetland specialists such as Crane and Bearded Tit?

This vision for the future has been made possible by the combination of the improvements along the Cut, the restoration of land after gravel extraction and by the gradual extension of Langdyke's reserves.

With the prospect of much larger areas of restoration to come, there is every opportunity of nature thriving further in the years ahead.

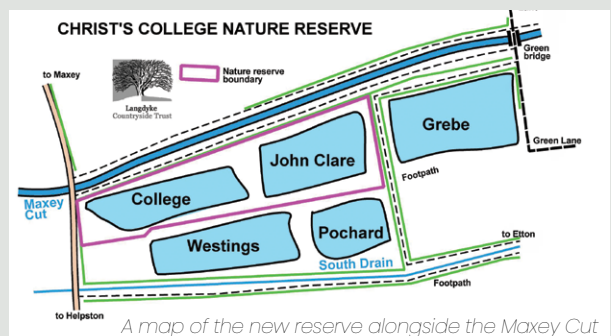


Christ's College Reserve

The Trust's purchase of Christ's College Reserve, immediately south of the Cut is an important part of this vision. The two pits – College and Clare – are in themselves home to many aquatic insects and provide food for Swallows, Swifts, House Martins and bats. In the winter they are home to several species of duck and in the summer Great Crested

and Little Grebe nest on the site.

Our plans for the management of the reserve include creating view points so that visitors can see across the reserve from the banks of the Maxey Cut and from the footpath that runs along the eastern boundary. We hope to



encourage nesting Turtle Dove, Sand Martin, Kingfisher and Glow-worm and Four Spotted Moth.

And in that sense, the landscape is returning to its past. Millions of years ago, it would have been a stretch of tropical sea, hence the amazing fossil heritage that the gravel extraction continues to expose.

And then in prehistoric times, it was home to early human settlements and the Bronze Age Sacred Ways that Frances Pryor discovered in the 1970s.

In Medieval times, the land between Maxey and Helpston would have been a dense wetland, part of the Welland river system, a maze of small channels and wetland meadows.

Kathryn Parsons' research has established the history of Westings Meadow, a complex of grazing land, managed in common by the residents of Helpston, Maxey, Deeping Gate, Glinton and Etton, and heavily regulated by the manorial courts of Maxey cum Membris with rules around how many animals could be grazed each year and where they could be penned each night.

Langdyke has recently entered into a partnership with the Environment Agency to create a joint vision for the future

Perhaps the landscape was at its least biodiverse throughout the 20th Century, drained and then intensively farmed.

The drainage of the wetlands was driven by economic development and the transformation of the landscape in the late 20th century was driven by the same demands. Gravel extraction has completely changed the landscape.

This process began in the 19th century with the extraction of gravel at Franks's Pit, continued immediately south of Maxey in the mid-century and accelerated in recent years as the gravel pits extended to the South Drain and

most recently south towards Etton and the Helpston to Glinton Road.

As a result, the Cut now lies at the heart of an already nature rich area. And with the potential to flourish even more in the years to come. As restoration continues, we can look forward to the creation of even more wetland habitats – including wildflower meadows and several more pits.

We can expect to hear more booming Bitterns, see more hunting bats, and ever more glow-worms lighting up the mid-summer grasslands. New footpaths will be created too, with a new viewing mound.

As part of this process, Langdyke has recently entered into a partnership with the Environment Agency to create a joint vision for the future and more immediately to develop a nature and heritage trail, designed to help visitors learn more about the history of the area and its wildlife.

Over the coming months, we will be developing a series of information points – a combination of signs and QR codes – all linked to the Langdyke website.

And working with the Environment Agency, Tarmac and local landowners, we hope too to be able to take advantage of new Government schemes to create even more new habitats.

A place where a winter evening can be alive with murmuring Starling, roosting Rooks and Jackdaws and flocking Geese, while in the summer a visitor can listen to the Turtle Dove, have to brush away the June Bugs and watch Otters playing. A place we can all cherish and enjoy and where, nature can flourish.

John Clare, of course, described this landscape vividly in his poem *The Mores*

Far spread the moorey ground a level scene
Bespread with rush and one eternal green
That never felt the rage of blundering plough
Though centurys wreathed spring's blossoms on its brow
Still meeting plains that stretched them far away
In uncheckt shadows of green brown, and grey
Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
Nor fence of ownership crept in between
To hide the prospect of the following eye
Its only bondage was the circling sky
One mighty flat undwarfed by bush and tree
Spread its faint shadow of immensity

Surely you can spot a Withy Weevil

So what is volunteering with Langdyke like? Board member and work party volunteer David Rowell takes a light-hearted look . . .

First an admission, I don't know much about nature.

I love being in it, but when it comes to identifying a bird flying several hundred feet above my head I'm useless.

I'm not that well up on wildflowers either. Or insects.

You see, I can't tell the difference between a Striped Hawk or Hummingbird moth. And when it comes to spotting a Withy Weevil crawling through the undergrowth then count me out.

But I'm a Langdyke volunteer. . . and proud of it.

What I can do is chop down overgrown willow, rip out unwanted brambles and repair fences I can also chase and round up sheep (well sometimes) and count them as long as they stand still for long enough!

For me the most important thing is that after many years of being a journalist – working under pressure and constantly coping with deadlines – I'm out in nature!

I do my bit for the Monday work party at Etton. Join in the banter. Have a good laugh. And work off a few pounds that justifies (to some extent) my weekend pints in the pub.

But most importantly. . . I'm enjoying learning about nature.

And at the age of nearly seventy I've even got a new City and Guilds qualification – in how to safely use a brush cutter strimmer!

What I do know a bit about is writing and editing stories and publishing a website. And that's a skill which the Trust finds useful.

In the same way that we have qualified money people

volunteering to keep an eye on our accounts. And people with admin skills looking after the organisation. And highly skilled lawyers voluntarily advising us on things that only legal eagles understand.

My regular work party and board member mates come from a variety of backgrounds. Among them former engineers, IT experts, teachers, accountants, wildlife experts and college lecturers.

Oh, and a retired fire fighter – he's particularly useful for climbing ladders and doing heavy stuff!

These people are able to share their knowledge and skills with the rest of the team to make us an effective nature unit. Some unde

... the most important thing is that after many years I am out in nature

rstand meadow management, others are birders or small mammal experts. Like me, they all love being out in nature.

We also have in our midst expert botanists who know all about plants and creepy crawlies. And even brilliant photographers and talented artists. What's more important is that we are all volunteers.

As well as doing our bit for nature – the serious side of our work – we also share knowledge and experiences.

We celebrate the things we get right. Things like the work we have done in dykes to restore a water vole population to Etton

David Rowell



Checking the Langdyke sheep

Maxey Pit or the attention given to encourage wild orchids at both Etton and particularly at Swaddywell. The annual return of the Turtle Doves to the area is also partly down to the work of the volunteers in putting out supplementary feed.

As well as revel in our achievements and experiences we can laugh off things that weren't 100 per cent perfect.

Like the time we spent hours in the barn building a walkway bridge – only to discover it was at least a metre too short to go over the dyke.

So you can see that life as a Langdyke volunteer is varied, thoroughly enjoyable and very rewarding.

There are jobs to do to suit people from all backgrounds with various abilities. Why not give it a try ...

By the way, for those of you – like me – who can't spot a Withy Weevil I've attached a photo. So now we all know what it looks like!



A Withy Weevil

Why I bought my daughter a mattock for Christmas

Jackie Robinson explains why she volunteered to help the western reserves team which covers Swaddywell, Torpel and Bainton Heath

I volunteered at Swaddywell Pit Nature Reserve . . . eventually!

Despite having lived in Helpston a little over 17 years, I knew virtually no one until about two years ago when, having retired from working I went along to Helpston WI.

It was there that I met Ann who talked about her weekly volunteering at Swaddywell. I was really interested as I had driven past the Langdyke car park often but was too much of a wimp to actually go and have a look. (I hate being told off for being where I shouldn't be!).

Ann suggested I go with her on Thursday morning as it was a 'Fifth of the month Thursday' treat; a talk instead of a work party, so I did. It was one of the best decisions I have ever made. The presentation was at Torpel Manor Cabin, by Stuart, a volunteer, and it was a superb talk about Dragon and Damselflies. I was absolutely fascinated and everyone there was so welcoming. I decided I'd go along the next week to 'work'.

Swaddywell has a good number of friendly, regular volunteers. I was surprised at how big it was with two distinct and diverse areas; the top meadow and the pit. It felt more like a nature day out than 'work' (until raking that is!!)

... you become attached to a place and feel responsible for its wellbeing

Among my friends and family I thought I was pretty good at naming plants, birds and wildlife, I soon came to realise I know practically nothing, but with the varied knowledge of fellow volunteers, I am gradually garnering more information . . . and it's free!

By volunteering for LCT you become attached to a place and feel responsible for its wellbeing.

With guidance from the Reserve Managers and our experts, we are able to manage the landscapes to be as good as they possibly can be for wildlife and nature.

There are tasks which are less pleasurable than others but we laugh through them. I have also learned many new tool names (some I have to look up when I go home so I don't look too silly!)

Mattock? I was so taken with a mattock that I bought my daughter one for Christmas, she loves it!

Volunteer on one of the LCT reserves, it's good fun.



Volunteer Bob Titman checking the Sand Martin box



Pond maintenance



Langdyke volunteers enjoying a day out looking for Chequered Skippers at Fineshade Wood

Become a Langdyke volunteer.

Email us for more information at volunteer@langdyke.org.uk or come along to either our **Monday** (Etton) or **Thursday** (Swaddywell) work parties.

A not so hot summer!



Summer 2022 will probably live long in memories for its extreme heat, with temperatures topping 40 degrees for the first time, writes Richard Astle.

I think we all wondered what would follow in 2023, but after a very wet spring, summer was much more typically British, with plenty of cloudy and wet days. Nothing to write home about, really. And nor did the extreme temperatures of 2022 seem to have done too much damage to the natural world – there had been a fear that the heat would have a negative impact on bird fledgling rates and the ability of insects to find homes in the scorched grass.

Summer 2023

The highlight of the summer's birds were the two pairs of Avocet that nested on Pig Jaw Pits, drawing a lot of attention – the first pairs since 2012, when there was a pair at Etton Maxey Pits. Sadly, although the eggs hatched and the chicks grew to quite a size, they all disappeared before they fledged, probably falling prey to the local Fox. Equally of interest was the goosander and chicks that appeared on the Maxey Cut for the second year in a row – another previously unknown breeding bird locally. Pochard also bred successfully at Vergette Pit, there are only 700 or so pairs in the country, so another good example of the importance of our reserves.

There were only a few records of Bittern this year from the Maxey area, but we know they are breeding well in the region, so we can hope they will return in the future and perhaps become another regular breeding species?

Elsewhere, Nightingales were singing at Bainton Heath again, as well as at the Hanglands and there was a bird singing at Ben Jonson pit too. Mandarin Duck were also seen regularly at Swaddywell and Ben Jonson Pits throughout the summer. Two immature Black Terns were at Pig Jaw pit in August.

Two bat surveys over the summer/autumn at Bainton Heath produced

Unexpected highlights including at least **8** species ... a rare **Barbastelle**

some unexpected highlights, including at least 8 species and in particular the rare Barbastelle. This is a rare species found across southern Britain and East Anglia. As the bat surveyor reports, "This species was most unexpected to be found in this area." Other species included Noctule, Leisler's and Brown Long-eared Bat.



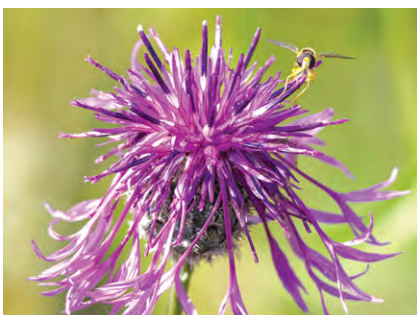
Hot summer: cold winter – a frozen pit



A Reed Beetle Donacia clavipes

The Langdyke Annual Meeting in July gave Peter Kirby and Sarah Lambert some time to do an ad hoc invertebrate survey at Vergette's Meadow resulting in records of several interesting beetles, including the Black Oil-beetle the first record for a LCT reserve. The Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn is a large and very distinctive longhorn beetle with a golden iridescent bloom on the elytra and thorax. And the Rufous-shouldered Longhorn is an attractive small longhorn beetle patterned in red, grey, black and white. The larvae feed for two years in dead wood of various broad-leaved trees. The adults then visit flowers to feed, particularly favouring Hawthorn.

Another great record was the discovery of a small group of Wasp Spiders at Swaddywell by Jackie Robinson. They had been recorded from Bainton Pits by Pete Kirby in 2022 but this was a first for this reserve – at least eleven were found.



Greater Knapweed Centaurea scabiosa

Sticking with Swaddywell it was a very good year for Autumn Lady's-tresses with approximately 150 plants recorded, including a number with multiple flowering spikes. This is a significant increase on previous years.

Clustered Stonewort was also recorded from close to the bubbling spring at Swaddywell. This is the second record from the site of this very local species of unpolluted, lime-rich water bodies.

The Roe Deer population around the South Drain continues to grow, with a regular group of up to 11 seen in the area throughout the year. Other mammal reports included regular sightings of Otter along the Cut, the discovery of Harvest Mice on The Drift (one of the fields just north of the South Drain which the Trust manages), and the continued presence of Water Vole on the Etton Maxey Pits reserve.

The annual
Glow-worm
walk in July
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beetles

The annual Glow-worm walk in July found over 100 of these wonderful beetles.

Marbled White butterflies were out in good numbers in July, but it seemed a quieter year for many other local butterflies, perhaps down to the fairly dull and often wet weather. Black Hairstreak were seen at the Blacklands, as well as at Castor Hanglands, and there was also a rather nice population of Brassy Longhorn moth on this site too, although no sign this year of Liquorice Piercer moth.

There weren't many reports of big nights of moth trapping either, again the weather probably having an impact on moth numbers, but also on moth trappers too.



Mother Shipton Moth Euclidia mi

The annual Swaddywell survey of Concolorus moth produced 37 individuals of this national rare species, plus the second county records of Little Grass Veneer.

A new Four Spotted moth colony was found on the Maxey Cut and individuals were trapped in several Helpston gardens. On 19 August a Langdyke moth night at Vergette Meadow turned up three rather uncommon species – the Gypsy moth, Little Slender and Rosy-Striped Knot-horn. While two notable records from Helpston were the Oblique Striped and True Lovers Knot (only the second record in the county since 2000). Five larval webs of the nationally scarce, Small Eggar were found at Swaddywell and a further three at Castor Hanglands.

Blackening Waxcap *Hygrocybe conica*Bleach Cup *Disciotis venosa*

Autumn 2023

2023 was the best autumn for fungi for a long time. Five species of waxcap were recorded from Swaddywell Reserve including lots of Blackening Waxcap, Persistent Waxcap, Limestone Waxcap (very local), Golden Waxcap and Snowy Waxcap. A superb Blue Roundhead was found in the reedbed at Etton Maxey Pits.

Elsewhere there was a super-abundance of many woodland species including Fly Agaric in Castor Hanglands and Southey Wood. While the wonderful Wrinkled Peach was seen by many on decorticated dead elm at Rice Wood. The tiny Earpick Fungus found growing on pinecones in Rice Wood by Jackie Robinson and Paula Mason, is also apparently new to the area.

The Starling murmuration along the Cut was at its best again with 10,000s of birds in the flock on some evenings. The roost changed several times during the season, often at Franks' Pit, sometimes at the Woodgate Lane Pit. Other bird highlights of the season included 12 Mandarin Duck at Ben Jonson

Pit in October and a regular Great White Egret around the Maxey Pits complex.

Leaf mining moths don't often (if ever) get a mention in these reports, they are so tiny they are very difficult to identify, but the advent of ever better digital technology means that they can be identified through the shape and location of the mines they leave in the leaves. These moths are so small that they create mines between the top and bottom of a leaf. A walk around Rice Wood in October revealed a number of species including Scarce Maple Pygmy, Nut-leaf Blister Moth, Apple Leaf Miner and Hawthorn Slender.



Etton Maxey reserve



Limestone wall at Swaddywell

Limestone Waxcap *Hygrocybe calciphilia*White Willow *Salix alba* on South Drain

*Mute Swans*

Winter 2023-4

The winter months saw some impressive flocks of Greylag Geese along the Cut and Drain, with several hundred coming into roost on the pits. A single Pink Footed Goose (1 March) and two Barnacle Geese (several occasions) were among the flock too. There was a Short-Eared Owl seen regularly hunting across the Drift, along with

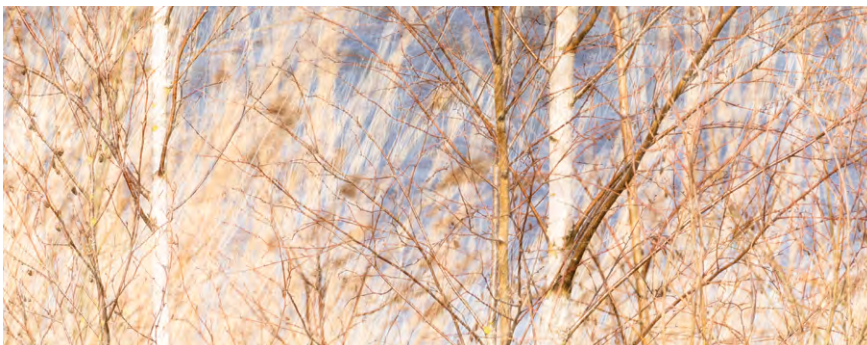
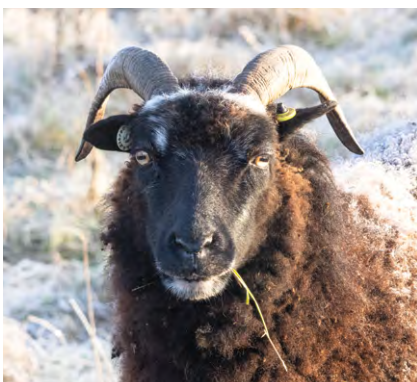
the more regular Barn Owl. Any walk along the Cut at dusk was also full of the sound of thousands of Rooks and Jackdaws coming into roost in the woods surrounding the Old Maxey Pits. Grey Partridge could be heard calling from the fields west of the Helpston Road too.

Also in this area were at least six Stonechat, often to be seen sitting

on top of tall grasses in the Drift. A male Merlin was also seen over Helpston on 7 February and there were several sightings of Peregrine Falcon and Marsh Harrier.

Up to eleven Jack Snipe were found on flooded fields north of Martin Pit in January and there was a Smew on Pig Jaw pit that month too, the only record this winter.

Otherwise it was a mild but very wet winter. Conditions in the Hanglands because so wet that some of the paths actually had to be closed off to prevent damage. Long-Eared Owls were heard calling in the usual location during February and March. Ravens however, proved more elusive this winter.

*Birch at Etton Maxey reserve**One of Langdyke's Hebridean sheep**Common Whitethroat *Curruca communis***Common Lizard*



Large White butterfly on Marjoram

Spring 2024

The first Chiffchaffs were singing on 18 February and were well established by early March. While they were singing Whooper Swans were still with us too, that exciting cross over period when the first migrants are arriving from southern Europe and Africa and the last winter birds are still with us. Sand Martins arrived on 15 March. The Short Eared Owl stayed in the area into early May, with several sightings, including of two birds on one occasion.

The pit complex turned up a lot of exciting wading birds throughout March and April – just as an example on 17 March there was an Avocet, a Little Ringed Plover, 3 Snipe, 4 Oystercatcher and 6 Green Sandpiper. Other wading birds seen during the spring included Curlew, Turnstone, Greenshank, Bar Tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Sanderling, Whimbrel and Knot. Another notable bird of this early spring period was the Corn Bunting with three males located in the fields south of the Drain and Pig Jaw Pit. A Glossy Ibis was briefly seen near Silt Pit on 30 March.



Cetti's Warbler

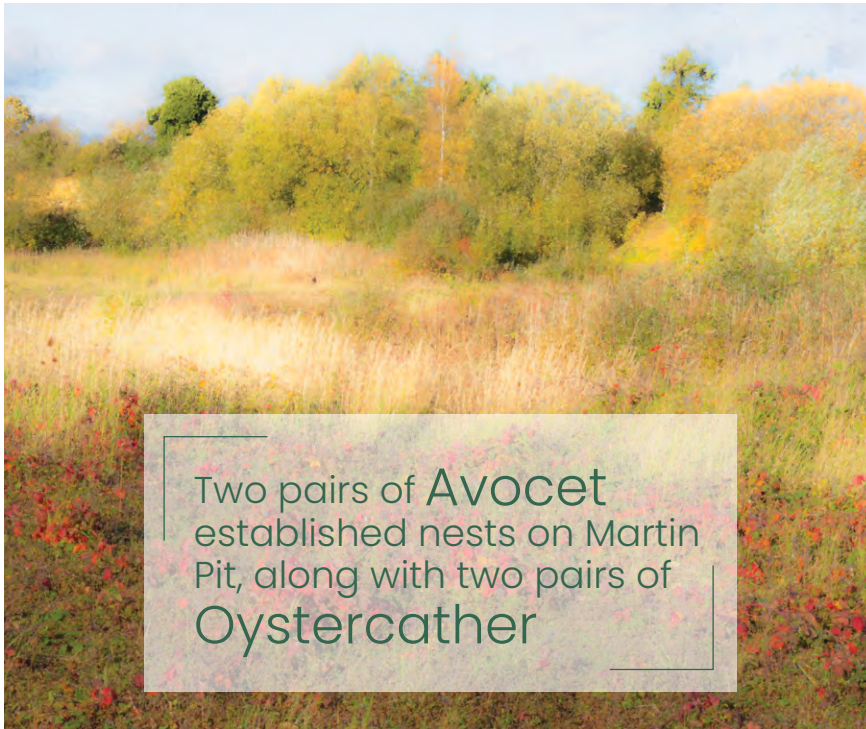
Two pairs of Avocet established nests on Martin Pit, along with two pairs of Oystercatcher. A male and female Marsh Harrier were nest building at Vergette Pit and there was a Bittern booming regularly from the reedbed there too throughout March and April.

Turtle Doves were first reported on 9 April in an Etton garden and were then reported through the Spring in gardens in Maxey and Northborough as well. Langdyke continues to participate in the Operation Turtle Dove programme, providing supplementary food to help the newly returned birds to build up their energy after migration. The earliest bird in 2023

was 23 April and there were 7 seen on the EMP reserve on 22 May. Nightingales were early too, but numbers in the Hanglands were relatively low with only about 20 singing males – there were two singing birds again at Ben Jonson Pit. A Cuckoo was calling from the Maxey Pits area on 11 April. The first Swifts were seen on 25 April.

Despite this flood of early arrivals, cold winds seemed to hold a lot of migrants back in early May and the first Common Terns weren't seen until 8 May. There were two singing male Spotted Flycatcher at Southey Woods on 11 May, but no reports from anywhere else. And while temperatures in May were above average, hours of sunshine were low.

For the third year in a row, a female Goosander with chicks was seen on the Cut in early April. Lapwings took advantage of the flooded fields to the north of the Green Lane and produced at least 14 chicks by 26 April. And on the 27 April, there were two Cranes overhead – could they be



Two pairs of **Avocet**
established nests on Martin
Pit, along with two pairs of
Oystercatcher

Swaddywell in October



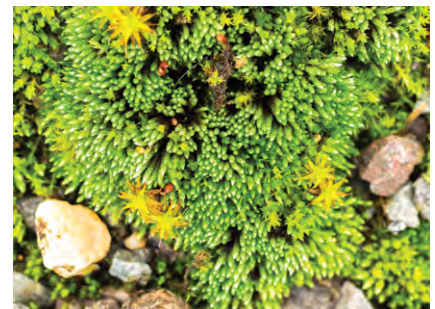
Early Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata*



Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*



Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pretense*



Silver Moss *Bryum argenteum*

tempted to land in the Langdyke area one day soon?

A number of butterflies were on the wing in May, including sightings of Grizzled and Dingy Skipper at both Swaddywell and Ben Jonson Pit. Green Hairstreak were out at Hills and Holes. Moth numbers continued to be low – the season was described as the worst in over 40 years, as nights remained cold and windy. There was, however, a successful moth night on 31 May, when 79 species were found, including 77 Concolorus and the beautiful Netted Pug. The moth webs of Small Eggars were found in even more locations this Spring, with one at Willowbrook Farm, and

over 50 webs in the wider John Clare Countryside!

Surveys at Christ's College Pits located a number of interesting insects in late May. Open-structured vegetation is a key feature of the site, supporting a thriving population of the Nationally Scarce Bombardier Beetle at one of its most northerly UK Locations. When alarmed they eject explosive pulsating jets of noxious gas from their rear end which can be directed against an attacker (such as an ant or another beetle), appearing as puffs of smoke with a popping noise. As expected, the site supports a good range of damselflies, with impressively large numbers of the Near Threatened

Variable Damselfly present among the Azure, Common Blue and Red-eyed Damselflies.

The Natural World is always very weather affected. We have just been through the wettest 18 months since records began, but also experienced above average temperatures and a virtually frost free winter. We know that the weather is going to get more and more extreme and above all unpredictable as our climate changes. What we don't know yet is how that will impact the local wildlife in the long-term. One of Langdyke's key objectives is to provide a much nature rich habitat to allow local species to adapt and survive.

Acting on your feedback

In early 2024, Langdyke invited members to tell us their views on the Trust, how it operates and what we can do to improve the way we work and how we help nature locally. Membership secretary Angela Trotter reports . . .

65
200

Sixty-five members and former members replied to the membership survey, which is a significant proportion of our 200-plus members.

Interestingly 15 per cent of those replying were former members, which helps gives us a perspective on perhaps what we aren't getting quite right.

26%
10 years+

We do have a pretty loyal membership base with 26 per cent of respondents having been with us for more than ten years, and another 28 per cent for over three years. Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority live in the villages of John Clare Countryside (60 per cent), but it was pleasing to see that 15 per cent are based in urban Peterborough.

54%
RSPB
members

And our members are pretty committed to the cause of nature and heritage, with 54 per cent also being

62%
National
Trust

members of the RSPB and 62 per cent the

42%
Wildlife
Trusts

National Trust. 42 per cent are also members of the Wildlife Trusts.

Perhaps, as a result, it is not surprising that 71 per cent of members who responded say that nature is one of their main interests, but just as good to hear was that more than a quarter of them don't see nature as one of their main interests but are keen to learn more.

That's good because we don't want to be seen as only relevant to those who are passionate and probably already fairly knowledgeable about wildlife and nature. It is one of our key aims to help local people learn about nature, that's why we have started doing walks focused on learning about particular species, such as our birdwatching and glow-worm walks.

Effectiveness of the Trust

A key question that we were keen to hear your views about was the overall effectiveness of the Trust in fulfilling its core objective of making a difference to the environmental and cultural heritage around Peterborough and Stamford. It's obviously pleasing that 83 per cent of respondents rated the Trust's work as either a 1 or 2 (1 being the top mark), but a concern that seven respondents rated our work as a 4 or 5 (with 5 being the lowest).

We do need to continually review our work to make sure we are making a positive difference.

Membership Fees

We were delighted that 90 per cent feel that Trust membership fee represents good value for money. This again is important to us – our income from membership is very important, representing a fundamental part of our total revenue, so we need to make sure that our recommended fees are in line with what people can afford and that they feel the fees are being used wisely.

Communication

Just as important is to make sure we are communicating with our members well. Again, the responses to this question were largely positive, but there were some comments that we can build on. Members wanted a simpler list of upcoming events and more notice of work parties. There was also a desire to see more about Langdyke in the local press.



Walks and Talks

Langdyke's events are a key part of our offer to members – designed to help people know more about the local landscape, introduce them to the key places to see and hear nature and explain about the rhythms of the natural world. So it was interesting to discover that the majority of respondents only attend meetings once or twice a year and 18 per cent never attend our events. Given that the overwhelming majority of respondents have said they will renew their membership, this clearly isn't a particular problem, but we do want to reflect on how we can attract more members to our events, more frequently.

One suggestion was that we should invite new members to an introductory event within six months of joining to help them understand more about the Trust and how they can get involved.

Ideas for what we could do to encourage people to attend more events included

- More weekend and after work events (21 per cent)
- Walks/visits to new and different locations (32 per cent)
- Online talks (40 per cent)
- Tutorials and workshops (30 per cent)

38% would attend a work party on weekends or evenings

- Relaunching the heritage and history group within the Trust (19 per cent)

68 per cent of people didn't have a preferred time for attending Langdyke events, but 27 per cent

expressed a preference for events on Saturdays and Sundays. And 38 per cent of respondents said they would be more likely to attend a work party if they were held at weekends or in the evenings. This is something we will be reflecting on as we develop future work programmes and we are already planning weekend work parties for the autumn and winter of 2024.

Continued overleaf

Swaddywell and Etton Maxey Pits are the **favourite reserves** to visit.



Visitors to last year's annual meeting

Reserves

34 per cent of respondents visited a Langdyke reserve every week and another 17 per cent once a month, but 9 per cent have never visited the reserves! We need to help with that.

Swaddywell and Etton Maxey Pits are the favourite reserves to visit.

In terms of what we can improve on the reserves, there was a desire for more information, but without too many intrusive information boards. There was also a desire for better access for those with mobility issues and for toilet facilities. Some also mentioned how many of the reserves are not open to members other than as part of organised walks.

Being a member

The penultimate question was about people's experience of Langdyke membership. Overall comments were very positive, some examples are

"I really enjoy it."

"I feel proud to be part of a voluntary organisation that supports local nature."

"Worthwhile and rewarding."

"It is very special to be part of a group that is so passionate about local nature and the cultural heritage."

Very enjoyable and I have made some new friends and learnt a lot. I hope to continue to enjoy being a member.

"It is such a pleasure to be able to visit these well-run, nature rich reserves, so close to us."

"Gives me a chance of getting away from the world. For me very beneficial."

But we also had some less positive comments such as

"Average."

"Feel it's a bit too Helpston Maxey orientated for a small group of enthusiasts."

What can we do to improve?

We had a number of very helpful comments in answer to this question, all of which we are actively discussing in the People and Communities Committee.

"Increase the number of sites with open access to members."

"Maybe loan out moth traps or other equipment to make members more in tune with nature. I've borrowed one & it was amazing."

"Return to the Zoom talks from the lockdown period."

"Greater access to more reserves."

"More open access to reserves."

"More educational content. Sometimes it feels a bit elitist."

"If possible with so many interested and enthusiastic participants, make it simpler and more focused."

"Perhaps more social interaction."

How is the Trust responding to the survey?

We are really grateful to everyone who took part in the survey. We have already started to look at how we can respond to specific comments and have put the following initiatives in place.

Access to more reserves – at the moment, only Swaddywell and Torpel have full, open access. All members can visit Etton-Maxey Pits with a code for the gates, but we don't have public access at High Meadow or Vergette Wood-Meadow. Partly that reflects our agreements with the owners of these reserves, partly a desire to keep areas undisturbed for nature. But we can do more and this summer, both these reserves will be open from June to the end of August, with pathways cut through the meadows so that people can wander through and enjoy the wildflowers and insects that thrive

on both sites. Unfortunately we are not in a position to offer any improved access at Bainton Heath, due to its location and the terms of our agreement with National Grid. The proposed viewing facilities at Christ's College Reserve will mean that this new reserve will be effectively open 24/7.

Disability access – during this year a new fully accessible viewing platform will be installed off the Green Lane, Etton, looking over Vergette Wood-Meadow. This will include a wheelchair graded ramp. There will also be viewing screens along the Green Lane. The new car park at Swaddywell also offers a much improved access, and we intend to maintain the path from the car park so it is as level as possible for all visitors. Viewing screens will also be installed in the autumn at Christ's



College Reserve, and these will be accessible by wide steps off the bank of the Cut (over time we will look to see if we can work with the Environment Agency to create wheelchair friendly graded access to these viewing points).

Weekend work parties – we will be organising at least three weekend work-parties in the autumn.

Online talks – there was clear support for more online talks during the winter months, so we will be building ideas for that into our events programme.



Membership

Membership remains steady at a healthy 206 family and single member units.

As we entered our 25th anniversary year, we were delighted to welcome our first Lifetime Members. If you would like more information about Lifetime Membership, please contact membership@langdyke.org.uk

If you have any friends, family or neighbours who you think might be interested in joining Langdyke,

further information is available on our website: <https://langdyke.org.uk>

We have an online membership application form, which is simple to complete.

We also have an online gift pack, which makes a great present.

Gift aid is very important to us with 150 of our 206 members (73 per cent) having gift aided their membership donations, which allows the Trust to claim an additional 25 per cent of those

fees from HM Revenue & Customs. Together with one-off donations, the additional income from Gift Aid for 2023/24 amounted to more than £1,300, which is extremely valuable in helping the Trust to achieve its aims.

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 for further information.



Sweet-briar Rosa rubiginosa

Enjoying nature

Events organiser Claire Noble looks back on another busy year

Our programme for 2023 was packed with opportunities to meet up and connect with nature and 232 people turned up to support Langdyke over 17 events.

We introduced a new series of events including opportunities to "Improve your bird skills" Artist in Residence "walkshops" and several opportunities to get involved in surveys for Glow Worms, Bats and Moths.

Langdyke's annual meeting was a joyous occasion with an excellent barbecue cooked up by our very own David Cowcill and inspiring updates on the purchase of our new nature reserve, Christ's College Reserve and Bainton's nature recovery program.

We have taken a similar approach to planning events for 2024 with a variety of opportunities to connect with nature and Langdyke friends.

We are always grateful to anyone who would like to volunteer to help to organise or lead events so please do get in touch if this interests you and you can reach us at events@langdyke.org.uk.

Working safely for nature

Board member Justin Tilley has the difficult job of keeping an eye out for health and safety issues. He hopes you will read on ...

So, I wanted to write a little about the importance of Health and Safety in the work that Langdyke does . . . hey wait, come back!

I know it's traditionally a topic met with an eye roll, thoughts of mountains of paperwork, and people telling you to stop doing things you want to do. But honestly, it's really important and with proper consideration actually helps us do even more for nature.

It's about getting the balance right. We're all volunteers with a passion for our local landscape, and the wildlife within them.



No danger here

no one wants someone to have an unavoidable injury on our reserves

Whatever role we play in that, we'll have to have some regard as to how we keep ourselves safe, our fellow volunteers safe, and reserve visitors safe.

This is both a moral obligation, and a legal one. No one wants someone to have an avoidable

injury on our reserves, but it's about being proportional, working out what the risks are in advance and how we can put sensible steps in to manage them.

What it certainly isn't about is avoiding risks entirely. If we are going to do our best for local wildlife, we need to use big bits of motorised kit that could potentially squish you; wield things with sharp edges and slicey bits; work near waterbodies; be out in isolated places at dawn or dusk; get something done in hot, cold or rainy weather, and also get acquainted with the array of biting invertebrates our reserves host!

But we want to ensure we can assess risks and think about how we can get the job done in a way that minimises potential for harm.

A lot of this is common sense, but we need to record it somewhere to show that it's been considered. First aid training, having well maintained tools, keeping accurate records, being certified to use potentially dangerous equipment, having a leader give a verbal run through of risks at the start of a task or guided walk, or being reminded to bring sunscreen or insect repellent are all simple ways of us minimising potential for harm.

We want a culture here that is open and transparent about how best we can complete our aims, provide people with the right equipment and training to do it well, and for it to be enjoyable for all concerned.

By doing this, we can ensure that our efforts to help wildlife do not come at the cost of our own or others health.

Hard work is rewarded

Swaddywell Pit Nature Reserve is one of the top sites for viewing orchids as Sarah Lambert reports

Thanks to the Langdyke Countryside Trust, Swaddywell Nature Reserve has become one of the most important sites for orchids in the John Clare Countryside.

Nine species have been recorded over the last twenty years as well as several different hybrids. This is roughly a fifth of the British orchid flora, and approximately half of all orchid species recorded in the local area.

It may seem surprising that a former quarry and rubbish tip site should have such a rich flora, but orchids are good colonists. They produce vast numbers of dust-like seeds which are carried high into the atmosphere (35000 seeds can be produced by a single spike of Pyramidal Orchid!).

Most seeds will perish, but a few will find areas of sparsely vegetated, low-nutrient soil that contains the mycorrhizal fungi necessary for germination and to support the early stages of orchid growth.

The symbiotic relationship between fungus and orchid continues below ground for three years, and then also as the young plant emerges above ground, through to flowering, six to ten years after germination.

Orchids are not only beautiful, but fascinating. They mostly rely on insects for pollination and have a variety of strategies to achieve this.

Some, such as Pyramidal Orchids, lure insects with nectar, but others use mimicry to attract insect visitors. Bee Orchids mimic the shape and scent of bees in order to lure them into



Clockwise from top left: Pyramidal orchid, Lizard Orchid, Man Orchid, Early Marsh-orchid, Twayblade, Common Spotted-orchid, Autumn Lady's-tresses, Southern Marsh-orchid, Bee Orchid

Orchids are not only beautiful, but fascinating

'pseudocopulation', where the male insect attempts to mate with the flower. However, sadly, the bee involved in this partnership does not occur in the UK, so our Bee Orchids engage in self-pollination.

Some species of orchids hybridise easily and backcross to produce a variety of fertile intermediates, challenging the traditional concept of a species.

At Swaddywell, Common Spotted-orchid, Early Marsh-orchid and Southern Marsh-orchid all hybridise resulting in a puzzling range of forms, some of which show hybrid vigour, being taller than the parent species.

Two species of orchid found at Swaddywell are of particular interest. Man Orchid is endangered in Great Britain and is found especially in chalk pits and limestone quarries. It can tolerate shade but is damaged by continuous heavy grazing. There are two established colonies in the quarry, and several plants have recently appeared elsewhere on the site.



Restharrow Ononis repens at Etton Maxey

Autumn Lady's-tresses were first recorded in 2016. It is near threatened in the UK and has experienced a striking retreat to the south and west, leaving only scattered relict populations in central England. Losses from habitats that still appear suitable for this species suggest that climate change – specifically, increased continentality – may have contributed to its decline. The Swaddywell population is increasing, bucking the national trend.

In 2023 Langdyke volunteer Beryl Dennis successfully applied to the Hardy Orchid Society for a Conservation Grant which was used to buy a brush cutter to manage vegetation around the key orchid areas, and materials to help with monitoring the orchid populations.

This grant was recognition of all the hard work that the volunteers have put into maintaining this wonderful site, including scrub clearance, strimming of long grassland and looking after the sheep that are key to maintaining the open-structured sward needed by the orchids.

Striving to find a balance in nature

Our reserves are managed by teams of volunteers led by David Cowcill, Stuart Irons and Chris Topper. In this article David describes the many challenges they face

As members our expectation of the reserves tends towards a familiar constancy – there will always be orchids at Swaddywell, warblers at Etton Maxey Pits, lichens at Bainton Heath etc.

However this view is not as well founded as perhaps we would hope. The reserves are in a constant state of flux and natural development and it is an irony for a conservation organisation that we spend so much time and effort cutting vegetation back and making other interventions to retain a near status quo – thankfully with some obvious successes.

The majority of what we see as 'the countryside' is largely a man-made view.

There are very few local situations whereby the landscape is genuinely 'unmanaged' over a long timescale – I can only think of

the areas in the Hanglands where the woodland hides the ghosts of the ridge and furrow from centuries ago.

But we are not alone in our interventions for nature – the headline rewilding sites need livestock to bring a natural balance; Castor Hanglands needs scrub management albeit on a decades timescale; Maxey Cut and the Welland need artificial berms to manage the flow.

Some of the factors which lead to the underlying changes are:-

- Natural sequential plant development:- scrub of hawthorn and bramble, willow, saw sedge, old mans beard, mosses in a very wet and warm winter
- Invasive species: calamagrostis, crassula,
- Global warming: loss of plants



One of the new scrapes at Etton Maxey



Our Hebridean sheep on a winter morning at Swaddywell

and invertebrates reduces the population of many higher species in the foodchain; warmer conditions allow niche new entrants from the south – eg the egrets.

- Man made introductions: carp, mink, deer, rabbits, nettles

The goal has to be to achieve a balance – bramble supports many invertebrates and small mammals, crassula provides habitat for frogs and hence herons but covers the muddy margins coveted by waders; carp eat out the water plants but their fry support little egrets, deer create an open heathland but deny nightingales their dense scrubland; calamagrostis supports the nationally scarce concolorous moth; otters out-compete mink (thankfully); nettles support several butterfly species; common terns on the rafts are displaced by black headed gulls which are actually

more in decline. So the extreme goal of “no threatening species” is not so simple.

Set against this backdrop of natural development, the reserves volunteers make various interventions sometimes to restrain some of these changes and also positively to encourage specific species outcomes.

The biggest species interventions are at Swaddywell where areas of ground near to existing populations have been scraped clear to encourage growth of host plants for the two varieties of skipper butterflies– the Grizzled Skipper and the Dingy Skipper.

Secondly at Etton Maxey Pits the two water scrapes created in late 2022 have had their first full year.

What was rank willow woodland, then after clearance by Langdye volunteers largely coarse grassland has now become a mosaic of

water and plants supporting a much wider natural population.

The provenance of the quarry infill soil may be unknown but its seedbank was rich; strangely the species mix of the two scrapes is rather different. On both scrapes water mint really thrived – so lots of butterflies; on the south, a remarkable band of Celery-Leaved Buttercup appeared – I recall only one plant on island meadow before; the north scrape is more grass and reed, but both have a strong growth of common club rush which will become a maintenance problem going forward.

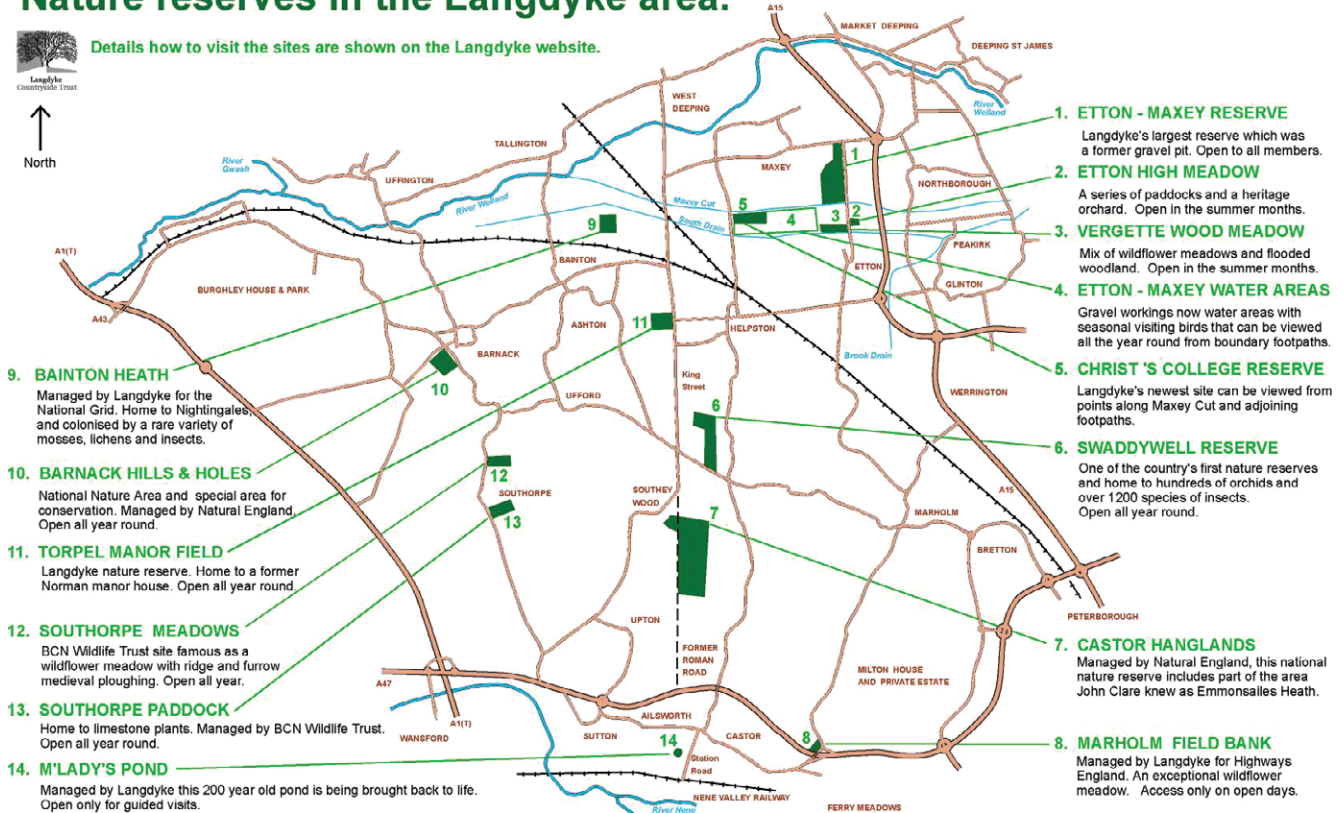
Some “target” species of birds did sample the scrapes – a pair of avocets eventually moved off to the silt pit across Maxey Cut, but one or two Great White Egrets could be seen for most of the winter. This is all very rewarding and hopeful.

Summary of activity across our reserves in 2023

Nature reserves in the Langdyke area.



Details how to visit the sites are shown on the Langdyke website.



Langdyke Countryside Trust map update September 2023

Swaddywell Pit

(Open at all times)

The northern banks have been substantially cleared of bramble (mainly by the Perkins Retired Club volunteers) which will encourage invertebrates on the open slopes; the area and number of the Autumn Ladies Tresses orchids is growing; the southern paddock has been 'cut and collected' to avoid rank grassland. (Cutting is easy, cut and collect takes a lot more trouble).

An award was given by the Hardy Orchid Society for the ongoing success and access to the variety of orchids on site. (See report page 18)

The wet conditions and particularly the ground water level led to

leaching across the pathways and use of the boardwalk becoming a necessity to circumnavigate

the site. Some impact will be seen on plants and invertebrates that require a dry period.



Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Torpel

(Open at all times)

A hay crop was taken for the second year across most of the site. The transition from a horse-grazed enriched grassland to a rich flower meadow takes a very long time – we are still in the early stages. Progress is hindered by the inability to disturb the surface (an English Heritage condition) but some change is aided by natural activity of rabbits moles and ants in abundance in the NE corner particularly.

transition to a rich
flower
meadow
take a very long time

Bainton Heath

(Not accessible – work parties and visits only)

Very little has been possible this year. Although National Grid have made generous funding available and have a five year development plan in place, difficulties in arranging access to the site have prevented any progress. The consequences of “natural change” described above will be foremost when conservation work is able to restart.



Midsummer sunset over Etton Maxey

Etton Maxey Pits

(Accessible at all times to members who need a gate code)

The expected disturbance from the Anglian Water pipeline activity has been delayed to 2025. The preparatory work which has taken place shows the scale of the planned invasion – the eventual scar will take quite a time to heal.

Apart from the scapes, the action on the reserve was “steady”. The grassland is generally in better condition, but Island Meadow was not cut – so will be less bird friendly in 2024; the crassula and high water levels discouraged passage birds and waders – but the starling murmuration was again populous; otters and water voles continue to co-exist (but no mink) and the north to south Anglian Water fence may actually reduce predation by foxes and badgers;



Small Tortoiseshell Aglais urticae

Etton High Meadow

(Not accessible – work parties and visits only)

Just as at Torpel there is a slow progression from enriched arable land to flower meadow. A hay crop was also taken and first signs of widening of flower species was seen – including orchids. The seeded wild flower area within the orchard established well for a first year. The pond by the barn is now “mature” with good plant coverage, and dragonflies, damselflies, frogs, common newt and grass snake seen.

Vergette Meadow and The Drain

(Accessible for a limited period in the summer – then work parties and visits only.)

The early summer wildflower coverage was again spectacular – a footpath was cut to allow access to members during the peak display time. Just as at Swaddywell a “cut and collect” was achieved later in the year – the arisings make good habitat piles.

Better natural bank facilities in the new local gravel workings kept most of the sandmartins away – but some tubes in the nest boxes were used successfully. All the elm tree saplings in the “avenue of the future” are still alive – but not yet taking off into strong growth.



Marjoram and wild carrot at Swaddywell

M'Lady's Pond (Ailsworth)

(Not accessible – work parties and visits only)

Initial survey work was carried out and some limited removal of surrounding overgrowing scrub took place – but the main plan to dredge out the leaf litter and sludge did not happen due to the wet conditions throughout the year.

Marholm Field Bank

(Not accessible – work parties and visits only)

This “hidden gem” just off the A47 is a perfect example of the pressures on long term ecological value. The wildflower varieties and display continue to excel, but the vigorous incursion of hedgerow and scrub (after 30 years development) is a threat that has to be continually pushed back.



Southern Marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*



Weeping widow fungi *Lacrymaria lacrymabunda*

Monitoring

The Reserves Committee has set in place a monitoring programme, which if kept active long enough may just put into real data terms some of the changes described here.

The “master plan” control spreadsheet extends to eight sheets – one for each reserve, each with four main sub-headings – Hydrology and Water Quality; Vegetation Plants and Fungi; Invertebrates; and Vertebrates, giving for example twenty seven rows for Swaddywell. The recording frequency has to reflect the resource available so is not too intense. The butterfly transects started in 2022 and were fully repeated in 2023. Training in grassland and plant monitoring was given which will start to be fully deployed in 2024.

There are two opportunities for members to volunteer and help here.

Firstly directly carrying out some of the monitoring activity. This is generally a modest walk-over on one of the reserves, or a walk

with a purpose (after some observational training)!

Secondly Steve and Liz Lonsdale (who are our small mammal specialists) organise surveys which are part of the LCT published events programme. You get up close to whatever is caught in their live traps and can help record the details – or just admire some of the wonderful creatures found on the reserves.

The results of the recent butterfly survey are available on the LCT website at <https://langdyke.org.uk/welcome-to-langdyke-countryside-trust/about-langdyke/science-and-surveys/> (*projects tab, science and surveys*).

Thanks

And finally a large part of the ability of members to enjoy the reserves is due to the hard work of the volunteers. We offer a big thank you from the Board and the members who enjoy the fruits of your labours. The year on year results are encouraging for nature recovery and lead always onwards to 2024!

Balancing the books

Andrew Curwen reports on how the Trust is faring after his first year as treasurer . . .

Thankfully, 2023 was the first full year largely unaffected by the Covid-19 pandemic with a full return to planned works at our various reserves.

Subscription income in the two years to 2022 had increased

significantly, possibly as an unanticipated but potentially beneficial side effect of the pandemic. 2023 however, saw a reduction in this income of nearly 12 per cent meaning it is now very similar to pre-pandemic levels.

Despite the fall in subscriptions we now have a very good picture of the membership base and changes that happen to it through the outstanding work of our membership secretary Angela Trotter.

Income

The Trust receives two types of income. First there is general 'unrestricted' income e.g. Members' subscriptions and Government Agricultural Subsidies and second, 'restricted' income, which can only be used for the purposes specified by the donor/grant giver.

Total income for the year amounted to £89,584 – a decrease from 2022 (£103,674) but still significantly higher than 2021 (£35,772). Restricted income dropped from £73,893 in 2022 to £60,116 in 2023. This variation mainly results from the differing fundraising activities in each of the years.

In 2023 the restricted income arose from:

- Further fundraising for Christ's College Nature Reserve – £32,866. An additional £23,000 is expected to be received for this fund from Augean in 2024.
- Gift aid of £7,500 on the Capital Projects donation of £30,000 received in 2022.
- Grants received from Peterborough Environment City Trust (£8,000) and ongoing funding from National Grid plc in connection with Bainton Heath (£10,750).

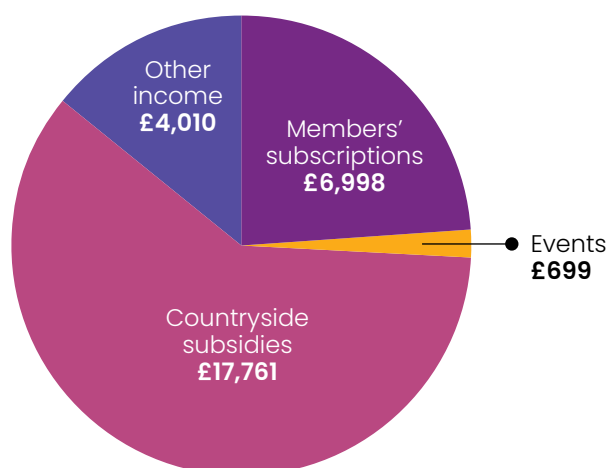
Unrestricted income in 2023 was £29,468 (almost identical to 2022)

and comes from two main sources: Membership subscriptions (£6,998 in 2023 – 23 per cent of income) and Government Subsidies – down 16 per cent in 2023 to £17,761. The regime around such subsidy payments from Government, which still represent over 60 per cent of our revenue, is changing and we can continue to expect further reductions in the future.

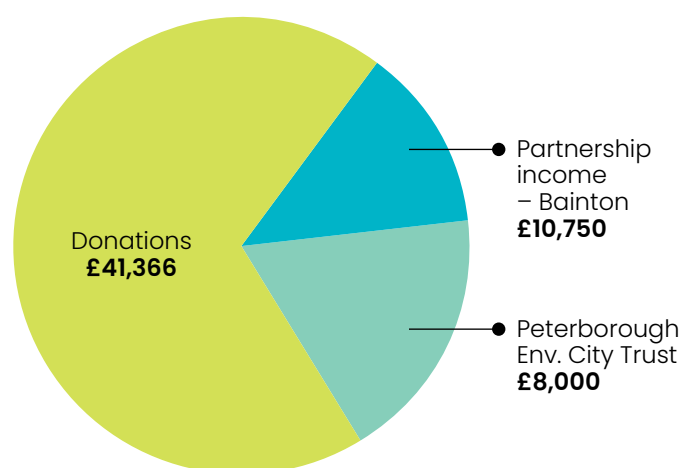
Against this background the Trust made a small surplus on our general unrestricted fund during 2023 of £2,320. Given the sense that we have not felt constrained in the essential work to be undertaken and funded at our reserves, this is a positive result.

Total Income in 2023: £89,584

General Unrestricted Income: £29,468



Specific Restricted Income: £60,116



Expenditure

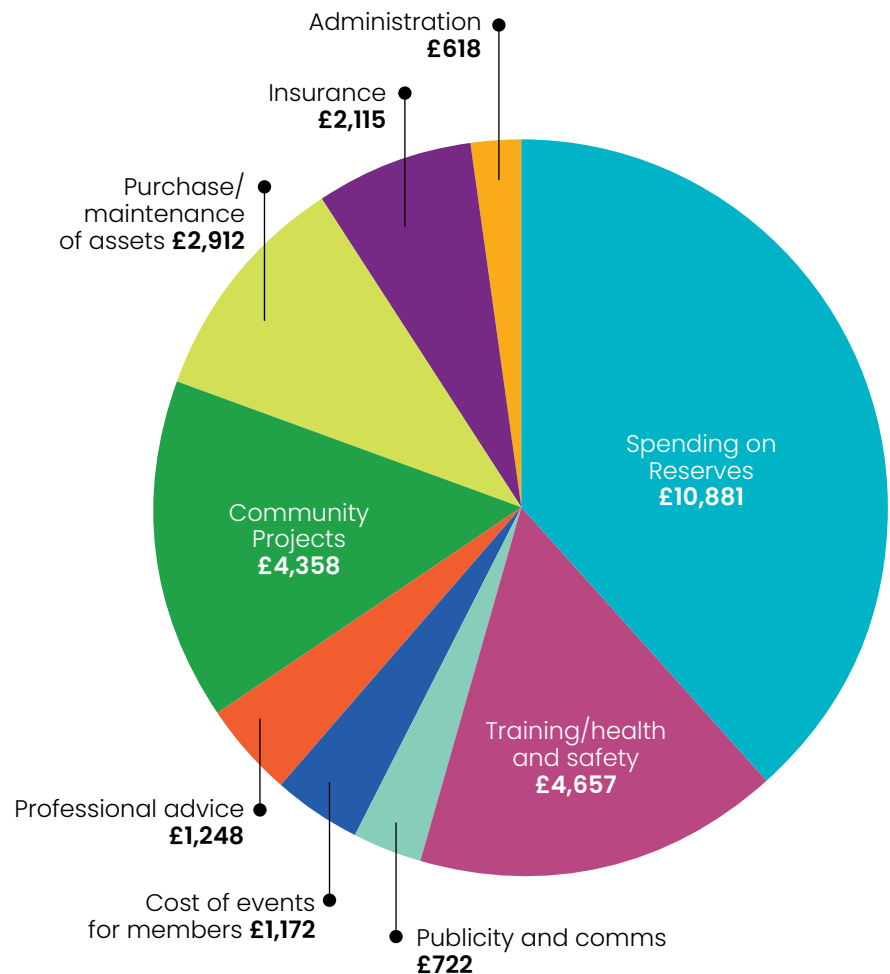
Expenditure totalled £28,683 (£44,757 in 2022). The major changes from 2022 included:

- the relative absence of Professional fees – £13,640 in 2022 – but only £1,248 in 2023.
- a significant increase in Training/Health and Safety costs to £4,657 (£26 in 2022) mainly from our essential programme of triennial first aid training for volunteers and the purchase of two defibrillators.
- Community projects which totalled £4,358 versus £7,600 in 2022.
- Expenditure on reserves of £10,176, a decrease from £16,834 in 2022 but higher than the £8,906 spent in 2021. The majority of this decrease relates to Bainton Heath where we could only spend £679 in 2023 against £4,553 in 2022 due to issues which have arisen relating to access to the site. The spend on the remainder of the wider reserves' portfolio is not dissimilar to the previous year.

Nearly 80 per cent of our total expenditure of £28,683 related to: work on, or health and safety at, the reserves, equipment purchase and maintenance, and community projects. Of the remaining 20 per cent (£5,875), 7.4 per cent was on insurance, 6.6 per cent for publicity and members' events, 4.0 per cent on professional fees and 2.2 per cent on administration.

The analysis of income and expenditure over the various headings is shown in the pie charts.

Expenditure 2023: £28,683



Cash position

Unrestricted cash reserves rose 6 per cent from £43,574 at 31 December 2022 to £46,188 at 31 December 2023 while restricted cash reserves increased from £69,178 to £127,463 at the same date. After a low level of spend in restricted funds in 2023 we expect a significant increase in 2024. Over £52,000 was paid in April 2024 for the purchase of Christ's College Pit and significant expenditure is planned from the Capital Projects

fund for: Swaddywell, a viewing platform at Vergette and ponds at Etton High Meadow.

Finally, huge thanks to Ellie Hall for helping us navigate through the introduction of the new Xero accounting system this year and to Sheila Dunford, our Finance Manager, who has operated the new system and ensured the smooth running of the day to day finances.

A copy of the full annual accounts can be found on the Trust's website or are available from the Honorary Treasurer at treasurer@langdyke.org.uk



Pictured are the examples of wool dyed using colours from plants across Langdyke's reserves.

Capturing nature in art

Our artists in residence, Kathryn Parsons and Sarah Lambert, write about another creative year

2023 was a busy year for Langdyke's two Artists in Residence!

We ran three well-attended workshops at Swaddywell Nature Reserve, offering creative ways to connect with nature.

On a showery April afternoon, mindful photography was followed by arranging collected natural objects. In June we sketched and photographed Swaddywell's wild orchids, while learning about their fascinating lifecycles and in October we captured Swaddywell's autumn colours using in-camera movement to produce abstract images.

On Midsummer's Eve, twenty people joined us for a lovely

evening walk to hear about the place historically known as Westings Meadow, which has been a focus of our research and a source of inspiration over the last two and a half years, and now includes land owned and managed by Langdyke.

Cuckoos and Turtle Doves called for much of the walk, and we finished by reading John Clare's poetry as the sun set. It was just magical!

Later in the summer, we shared a small portion of Westings Meadow with a group from the Centre for John Clare Studies, giving them an understanding of John Clare's local landscape and the work of the Trust.

In November, we held our annual exhibition in the Torpel cabin. More than 150 people visited and appreciated the artworks while enjoying cake and hot drinks.

As well as photography and sculpture, we'd focused on exploring and recording the botany of Langdyke's reserves through natural dyeing. Using slow techniques with minimal environmental impact, we were able to share the fascinating (and beautiful) results, which opened up many conversations about Langdyke's work and biodiversity.

We're very grateful for the volunteers who helped us 'man' the cabin and welcomed everyone so warmly



An Artists in Residence workshop

We look forward to another creative year in 2024 as we continue to research Langdyke's reserves and create artworks in response to the beauty and stories held within this land.



The Artists in Residence created a wonderful artwork to mark Langdyke Treasurer Brian Lawrence's retirement from the role using the Langdyke tree. It was presented to him by Langdyke chair Richard Astle.

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

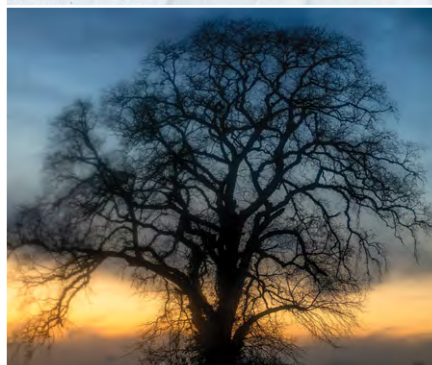
Langdyke Main Board 2023

Richard Astle * – Chair
Andrew Curwen * – Treasurer
Adam Saunby – Legal and
governance
Antony Mould – Board Secretary
Lauren Bennett *
David Cowcill *
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Sarah Lambert
Brian Lawrence *
Claire Noble *
Martin Parsons
David Rowell
Justin Tilley *
Chris Topper

*Note: * denotes Langdyke
Countryside Trustee*



Rosy Plant Bug on an Ox-eye Daisy in Vergette Meadow



Mature Elm on the South Drain



Volunteer raking grass at Swaddywell

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.



www.langdyke.org.uk

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