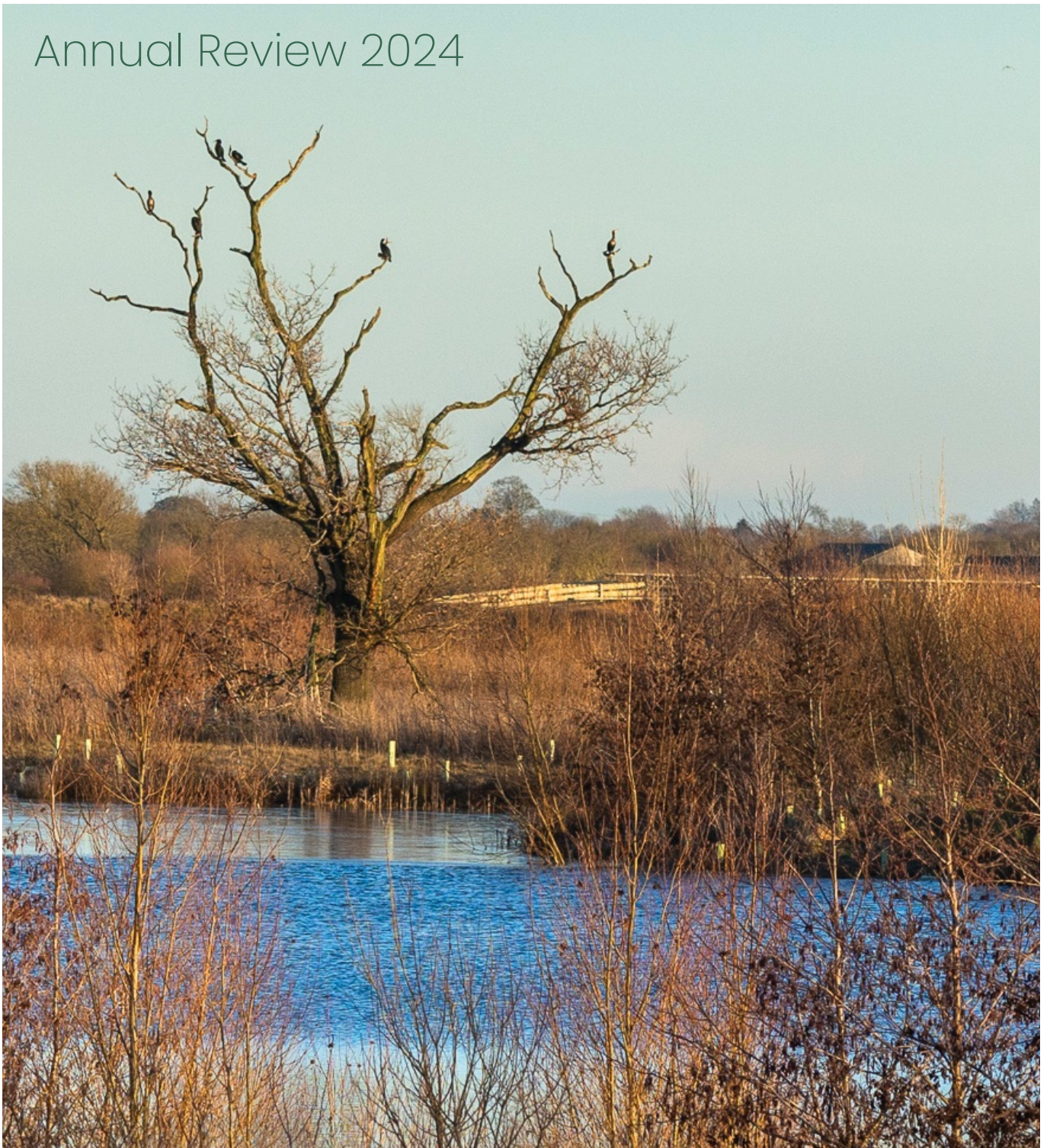


Langdyke Countryside Trust

Annual Review 2024



Chairman's Report 2024

Reflecting on Langdyke's activities in 2024, I am struck, as ever, by the sheer diversity of work that our volunteers successfully achieve.

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Reflecting on Langdyke's activities in 2024, I am struck, as ever, by the sheer diversity of work that our volunteers successfully achieve. Jackie Robinson's article in this Annual Review (page 4) highlights some areas of this work and makes a familiar plea for more volunteers to join our team. It isn't that we are short of volunteers, in fact volunteer numbers continue to grow, but rather as David Rowell points out too in his article (page 7) the demands on our time are growing even more.

Which is, of course, testimony to our success. Membership numbers rose significantly in 2024. Our revenues continued to increase and, perhaps most importantly, we added another 23 acres to our landholdings through the purchase of Christ's College Reserve. Since then, as I write this in late June 2025, membership has increased further, income continues to rise, and we have three potential new nature reserves on a list of future opportunities.

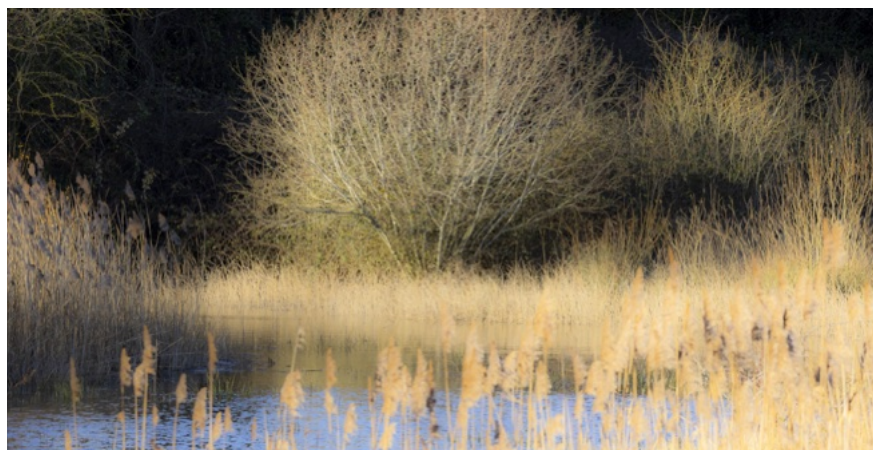
Langdyke is certainly growing. And as David notes, that brings

challenges for the way we work. In particular, can we continue to deliver our agenda as a purely voluntary organisation? Or do we need to team up with another local charity such as PECT or Nene Park Trust to manage our workload? Or do we employ people ourselves to administer the Trust and manage our reserves?

These are big questions. But they are questions that matter.

I think sometimes we all forget the biodiversity crisis that is the fundamental reason Langdyke exists. It exists partly because we have a shared love of nature and want to celebrate the natural world locally. But for me its main purpose is to do whatever we can to turn back the crushing tide of biodiversity loss – the disappearance from the countryside of what was once common and familiar.

I have just returned from a week in central Poland and was struck (again) by just how biodiverse landscapes are there. Swifts roam in profusion above the roofs of central Warsaw, every village is



Swaddywell Pit Nature Reserve

buzzing with Black Redstart, House Martin, White Stork, and Swallow. Out in the fields it's not that you can find Red Backed Shrike and Wryneck (birds that John Clare knew and wrote about but which are now functionally extinct in this country) – you can't miss them! On my daily walk I watched four pairs of Shrike in a mile and a half, along with innumerable Corn Bunting, and at least two pairs of Hawfinch. Butterflies danced in waves over the flower rich meadows. Huge bats patrol the river in flocks, not in ones and twos!

This would have been John Clare's world too. Something we have lost and continue to lose (farmland bird numbers fell again in the last five years). Turtle Dove numbers were low in our area in 2024 (and lower still in 2025). I don't have any House Sparrow in my



Small Eggar caterpillar

Helpston garden and the statistics generally for farmland birds are utterly depressing (for example: Mistle Thrush, 38 per cent decline; Yellow Wagtail, 53 per cent decline; Spotted Flycatcher, 67 per cent decline; etc etc)

If we are to stem the tide and indeed reverse the losses and start to see genuine nature recovery both locally and nationally, then we need three main things: Government policies that support nature (sadly that is just not happening, the Government's Planning Infrastructure Bill looks set to remove many of the safeguards for nature); landowners and farmers who manage their land sensitively for nature (and the story of the RSPB's Hope Farm near Cambridge – <https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-we-do/influence-government-and-business/farming/hope-farm> shows this is very possible without sacrificing profitability); and many more and much larger areas of land where nature comes first.

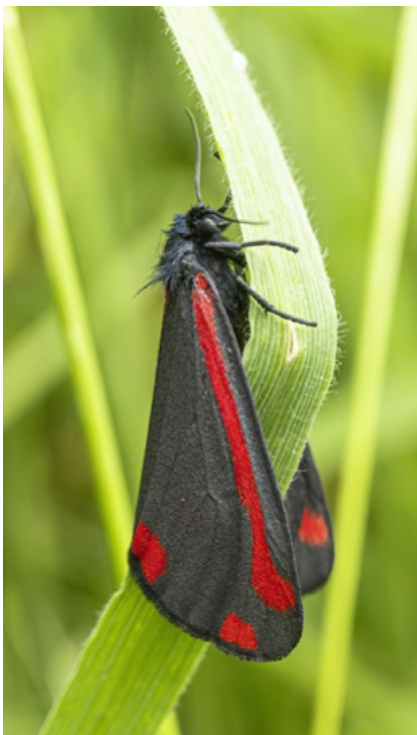
Nature needs Langdyke to keep growing and creating more landscapes where it can thrive – places that are dense in insect life, the foundations of the food-chain.

To do that we will need to create more capacity – ideally through our volunteers, but potentially by exploring other options for getting work done – not just the conservation work, but also to manage our finances, health and safety, membership and events.

What we already know after 26 years of Langdyke is that if we take action, we make a difference. You only have to visit Swaddywell at this time of year to see the profusion of orchids and other wildflowers, or visit Christ's College Reserve and see the huge numbers of dragon and damselflies; or take some time at Vergette to see Marsh Harrier and Bittern. The natural world can – and I believe will – flourish again in John Clare Countryside, and Langdyke will be at the heart of that work.

Let's continue to celebrate those achievements and continue to make a difference. Thank you to all our members and volunteers for all that they do to make this happen.

Richard Astle
Chair, Langdyke Countryside Trust



Cinnabar moth

Volunteers are our lifeblood

The work of Langdyke's volunteers is crucial and they perform a wide range of tasks. As well as turning out in all weathers to work on the reserves the Trust relies on them to look after a host of other duties including finances, membership, events and admin. Jackie Robinson – a member of the Thursday group – reflects on why she does it . . .

Why is weather so different on a 'Volunteer Day'? Thursday comes, I look out at the weather, a bit cold, so thermals and a hat! Every other day, it looks a bit cold, can't do the garden today then. (That's probably just me though!)

The camaraderie and the fact of being outside and learning more about nature, I think, is the answer why the weather doesn't matter. It also helps that healthy feel-good factor of being outdoors materialise, even if you didn't fancy it at 8am. Oh, and of course, there's Sue's cake at coffee time. Well, that's how we do it at Swaddywell, anyway.

At Swaddywell, where I volunteer the most, we have an ongoing issue with invasive saw-sedge (which apparently is in short supply in Europe!!) so quite a bit of the time is trying to keep that and the omnipresent Goat Willow and Old Man's Beard under control. It's always a surprise though, when suddenly your welly fills up with water because it was a bit deeper in the pond than you thought!

Health and Safety are always at the forefront of volunteering and Langdyke provides First Aid training for volunteers on a regular basis. Health and Safety reminders are given before the work party begins, but most of it is common sense. Be aware of deep water (not at the moment) and unstable cliff faces.

At the regular work parties there are nearly always individuals who share their special knowledge and sometimes, if we are lucky, we have an expert or two as well.

Monitoring is an important aspect of volunteering whether it be an ad hoc report of a species sighting, unusual butterfly, insect or a long-awaited bird call, or it might be a timetabled monitoring event for example, from April to October the Butterfly Transect (a predetermined track) is monitored weekly. It's quite galling when you've not seen many butterflies six feet either side of the track or six feet above and someone lets you know they've seen 'a Grizzled Skipper just off the path over there!' All you've seen and can report on is six Peacocks and White (of some description to be determined by the photograph taken!!)

... things of interest that you may not have realised existed before...

The results are recorded on a special monitoring sheet and sent annually to the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme by Ian Wilson. Of course, if butterflies are reported on the reserve by members of the public or Facebook group etc, we make an individual note of them in our reserve records, so we know what species are present.

Newt and moth, wildflowers and orchid monitoring all involve volunteers as well as experts, usually after an initial training session by the expert, to help with identification of some of the

lesser-known plants and orchids. Some of these monitoring sessions happen annually or three or five years apart.

Outsourced experts monitor and report back their findings on the more specific monitoring required, which helps us to recognise and look out for things to encourage or protect their habitats, during the work parties.

Volunteering also allows you to meet with like-minded people. Some volunteers just enjoy the physical aspect of the work parties, others learning about wildlife and wild plants. There are those who have an interest or expertise in certain types of plants, birds, insects or reptiles, (some all of them) and they just want to help make and maintain a suitable habitat for the species needs.

Butterfly scrapes have been introduced at Swaddywell to encourage the Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, grazing by sheep and rabbits helps keep the top field a suitable site for orchids. We are always looking to attract new



Erecting a lifebuoy to enhance safety at Etton Maxey



Thursday group volunteers clearing up at Swaddywell

species i.e. the Nightingale I was sure I heard and saw one dart into the middle of a hawthorn bush, but felt I needed a more experienced person to verify it and luckily since then another volunteer has reported it, so I feel relieved and thrilled.

Aside from the regular work parties there can be opportunities to visit other areas of interest locally or farther away i.e. Frampton Marsh RSPB Reserve. With Langdyke volunteer experts on hand it is an informative and enjoyable visit. Some of our volunteers at Swaddywell went to look and identify many interesting grasses along a local roadside verge.

By being a volunteer, you can often find things of interest that you may not have realised existed before. You find that you are

always looking for birds of prey on telegraph wires, scanning road verges and woods looking for the first sight of Snowdrops or Bluebells, peering in ponds for newts and frogspawn and looking for orchids wherever you go.

Warning – people who are not like-minded may get exasperated with you due to very slow walking looking for Lesser Centaury (a pink dot amongst the greenery) or walking three miles up and down the banks of the Maxey Cut looking for the Goosander with her chicks!!!

Recommended Solution – be a volunteer and go out for walks with other people who are looking for elusive plants and butterflies etc.

If you would like to see if volunteering on a Langdyke Countryside Trust reserve would suit you, you can enquire through



Having a break

the website or social media groups initially and someone will get back to you with information. You could also ask someone who volunteers at any of the reserves. Suitable clothing (usually involves long sleeves and something to keep legs covered) is advisable to avoid bramble and rose scratches and a hat to keep the sun off.

There are weekly work parties at Etton-Maxey Reserves (Monday) and Swaddywell Reserve (Thursday) as well as other volunteering opportunities at Christ's College Pit, (usually a weekend), Torpel and Bainton Reserves.

There are also other duties within Langdyke that would welcome volunteers. If you think you may have some experience or expertise to offer, please get in touch.

We look forward to meeting you in the future.

Anyone interested can email:
volunteer@langdyke.org.uk



Jackie Robinson takes a selfie of herself and colleagues at Swaddywell

The magic of the Skylark

Langdyke member Tom Chilcott writes a regular blog about his experiences in nature. Here he reflects on the Skylark – a bird synonymous with the John Clare Countryside

The wide open crop fields of the United Kingdom might at times not seem like the most nature-friendly environments, but I have found the ones around John Clare Countryside and the surrounding villages around Peterborough a great place to see, or rather, hear a rare and special bird, celebrated in UK literature, art, poetry and music: the skylark.

Physical description

If you are lucky enough to spot one, the skylark is a streaky-brown bird, smaller than a starling, with a white-sided tail and a small head crest which can be raised when the bird is excited or alarmed. The chicks, when very young, are covered in spiky white feathers to camouflage them against the grassy surroundings of their nests.



Skylark

Habitat

The skylark is a bird of open country, found in grassland, upland, heathland and even farmland. It can also be found on marine and intertidal habitats.

Breeding

Skylarks nest on the ground in short grass or crops, preferring

vegetation that does not grow higher than 60cm. The female builds the nest, a shallow depression in the ground lined with thick layers of grass. 3-4 eggs are incubated by the female for 12-14 days. Skylarks can raise up to 4 broods a year if the weather is good.

All the while, the male defends the territory using the technique that is a defining feature of the bird . . .

Display

Male skylarks do not sing from trees to attract a mate. Instead, they fly up 100 or more metres into the air and hover there while singing. Sharp eyesight is required to spot one in flight, but their uplifting melodious song is quite distinctive, as well as the only sign most people will get of their presence.

Extraordinarily perhaps, if a male skylark is attacked by a bird of prey, he will continue to sing even whilst fleeing for his life! This is surely an extreme example of a double message: advertising his fitness to potential mates and deterring his would-be attacker ("can't catch me!").

You can listen out for the song of the skylark on warm days from March to August.

Threats

Sadly, the skylark is a bird in trouble. Their numbers have been in decline since the mid 1970's,

making them a Red Data List species. The most likely cause is agricultural intensification and the switch from spring to autumn crop sowing, which disrupts the bird's breeding habits and risks destroying their nests.

There are signs that the skylark is starting to make a comeback, and their song is starting to be heard in more places.

Where to see them

The farmland and grasslands around John Clare Countryside and the Peterborough area are good places to come and listen for skylarks. Areas around Etton and Maxey are known to support them, in particular the Etton Maxey reserve. But I have found a true hotspot for them is my local area, the villages of Castor and Ailsworth and the fields around the Castor Hanglands nature reserve. Walk around this area during the spring and summer, and you can barely pass a crop field or grassy meadow without hearing at least one singing away over your head; I can hear at least two or three in some fields and may come across half a dozen on a single walk.

So check out the open grassland and fields of the local area, and you too may hear the beautiful song that has inspired many over the centuries, including our own John Clare.

"Up from their hurry see the skylark flies,
And oer her half-formed nest, with happy wings,
Winnows the air till in the cloud she sings,
Then hangs a dust spot in the sunny skies,
And drops and drops till in her nest she lies"

- *The Skylark, John Clare*

The dilemma facing the Trust

It's make your mind up time for Langdyke. Board member David Rowell asks whether the trust can grow without losing its uniqueness

For the past year or so Langdyke has been at a crossroads.

Board members and trustees are faced with a dilemma. The demands to grow are great. But the fears of doing so – and losing what Langdyke is all about – are of an equal concern.

Langdyke's success has always been about being a small fish in a big pond. When it came to preserving nature we would take on a site and work hard to improve it using our army of great volunteers.

First it was Swaddywell, a site being used as a racetrack rescued from oblivion by the founding fathers of Langdyke – four guys who realised its importance to nature and to the communities who lived around it. That was around 25 years ago.

For six years before that and after its foundation, the Trust owned no land and had no members! It helped out with local hedge planting and conservation work in churchyards. It put up nest boxes in Rice Wood, near Helpston and organised nature walks for its small band of supporters.

A lot has happened since.

Along came the Torpel Manor site, important for its history. Then Bainton Heath – a former quarry, covered in rubble from the London bomb sites and ash from power stations which created a unique habitat.

It was the Etton sites (Etton Maxey Pit, Vergette Meadow, High Meadow and Christ's College) which created the Langdyke we know today – a thriving nature organisation revered for its success by many because of the way it has



The colours of autumn

evolved its role as a champion for the natural world. More recently the acquisition of the Christ's College Pits reserve proved what a success the Trust is by raising thousands of pounds to buy the site within a few short months.

And how has it been achieved?

By the dedication of a handful of people – backed by a growing band of members – and supported with bloody hard work by its volunteers.

And all of this time it has proudly boasted the fact that it is a volunteer led organisation supported totally by volunteers, member subscriptions and grants to support its work.

That hard fought reputation, of course, brings opportunities along at the same time.

As I write this piece I'm aware that Langdyke is being offered other sites to either own or manage. Some of them are likely to be gifted to the Trust.

What a testament to our success that really is.

People want to give us land which they know we will nurture

and look after. They want to loan us sites which they know will be transformed into areas that nature can live on in.

Places that will become perfect for flora and fauna to develop, for birds to nest and for other species to thrive in.

Of course, all of this comes at a time when there is much uncertainty about how the Government is going to support agriculture and nature in terms of cash grants.

And that is the dilemma.

- How can we remain as we are but have the capacity to manage and fund the extra work?
- Will we find ourselves in a position where it is impossible to continue without paid-for staff?
- Can we possibly continue to recruit enough volunteers to do our important work?

Three big questions the Langdyke board is already chewing over and is going to have to create answers to sooner rather than later.

As an important supporter of Langdyke we would like to hear your thoughts.

Got an opinion? Please email editor@langdyke.org.uk

Richard receives New Year's Honour

Richard Astle, the chair of Langdyke, was awarded the British Empire Medal in the King's New Year's Honours List for services to charity and the environment.

His award recognises his services as a prominent charity and environmental leader in the Peterborough area.

He is chair of a number of charities and environmental organisations including Langdyke which he has led since 1999 and has been a driving force behind its success.

At the time Richard told local media: "The nomination was made by family and friends

"It was quite a surprise"

with references from across the charities and organisations that I have supported. I knew nothing about it until I got a letter at the end of November.

He added: "In particular, I want to do more to drive forward the John Clare Countryside project in 2025

and to continue to deliver aid to Ukraine, where the need and suffering remain acute."

The nomination is in recognition of Richard's work for charities and environmental causes that include

a 13-years-long service as chair of Shine, which is a national charity for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, and as treasurer of the Wildlife Trusts, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire from 2003 to 2010.

He was chair of Natural Cambridgeshire from 2014 to 2022 and spearheaded the John Clare Countryside project as well as being chair of Helping Our Ukrainian Friends.

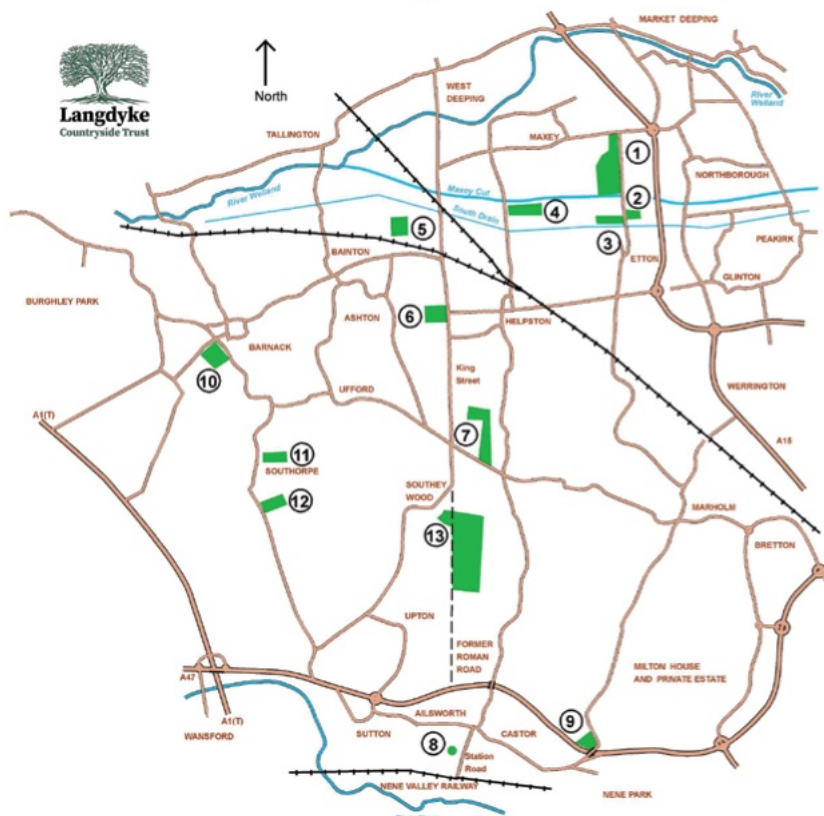
Helping Our Ukrainian Friends has raised more than £300,000 in financial support for Ukraine as well as over 100 tonnes of humanitarian aid, which the group has delivered over the course of 20 trips. Richard has also taken part in some of those trips.



Richard receives his award from the Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire Julie Spence

Langdyke Countryside Trust nature reserves & other local managed nature reserves.

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



LANGDYKE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST RESERVES

- 1. ETTON - MAXEY RESERVE**
Langdyke's largest reserve which was a former gravel pit. Open to all members.
- 2. ETTON HIGH MEADOW RESERVE**
A series of paddocks and a heritage orchard. Open in the summer months.
- 3. VERGETTE WOOD MEADOW RESERVE**
Mix of wildflower meadows and flooded woodland. Open in the summer months.
- 4. CHRIST 'S COLLEGE RESERVE**
Langdyke's newest site can be viewed from three view points along Maxey Cut and also from adjoining footpaths.
- 5. BAINTON HEATH RESERVE**
Managed by Langdyke for the National Grid. Home to Nightingales and colonised by a rare variety of mosses, lichens and insects. Open only for Langdyke Trust guided visits.
- 6. TORPEL MANOR FIELD RESERVE**
Langdyke nature reserve. Home to a former Norman manor house. Open all the year.
- 7. SWADDYWELL RESERVE**
One of the country's first nature reserves and home to hundreds of orchids and over 1200 species of insects. Open all the year round.
- 8. M'LADY'S POND**
Site in Nene Park managed by Langdyke Trust. This 200 year old pond is being brought back to life. Open only for guided visits.
- 9. MARHOLM FIELD BANK**
Managed by Langdyke for Highways England. An exceptional wildflower meadow. Access only on advertised open days.

LOCAL MANAGED NATURE RESERVES

- 10. BARNACK HILLS & HOLES**
National Nature Area and special area for conservation. Managed by Natural England. Open all the year.
- 11. SOUTHORPE MEADOWS**
BCN Wildlife Trust site famous as a wildflower meadow with the remains of a medieval ploughed ridge and furrow system. Open all the year.
- 12. SOUTHORPE PADDOCK**
BCN Wildlife Trust site home to limestone plants. Open all the year.
- 13. CASTOR HANGLANDS**
Managed by Natural England, this national nature reserve includes an area that John Clare knew as Emmonsals Heath. Open all the year.

The ups and downs of nature

Richard Astle reports on what the changing seasons brought us

Langdyke World – Summer 2024

For many, the Summer of 2024 didn't really start until early July. Before that the rain and cloud seemed never ending and there were few evenings to enjoy the sunset and the natural world at dusk. That inclement weather was certainly reflected in our natural world, with Matthew Hillier, our local moth expert, commenting that it was the worst summer he could recall for moth, and I am sure many would agree that was the case too for butterflies.



Black Hairstreak, Richard Astle

Equally, the poor weather, kept many, but not all, our local naturalists at home, rather than out and about so sightings of many local species were more limited too.

There were some Lepidopteral highlights, nevertheless: Three Current Clearwing came to a moth lure in my Helpston garden on June 18, White Spotted Pinion, Beautiful Chinamark and Oak Eggar were other notable arrivals there too. Leopard Moth appeared in Glinton on July 10 and there was a Scarlet Tiger locally on June 25. A Fox Moth caterpillar was found at Hills and Holes on August 3.

Marbled White butterfly appeared at Christ's College Reserve during our first summer as owners of these two pits. Black Hairstreak were seen at the Hanglands on June 22, and another was found at College Cottages by Malcolm Hillier. with Purple Emperor reported too on July 10.. Chalkhill Blue were as ever at Hills and Holes during August. But overall numbers of butterflies were significantly lower than usual – a national trend, hopefully reflecting the weather. Silver Washed Fritillary in particular seemed much scarcer. And I only found one White Admiral in Royce Wood this year on July 28.

Glow worm numbers were well down this year, with the annual glow worm walk on July 18 producing no more than 12 individuals. Sarah Lambert and Pete Kirby did, however, turn up some unusual invertebrates during their surveys at Christ's College, including the beautifully named Pygmy Striped Snail Killer. There were also Wasp Spiders on the reserves as well as again at Swaddywell. A small colony of Lesser Stage Beetle was found in the rotting trunk of the old Ash tree at Torpel.

Mammal populations seemed less affected by the weather. The Roe Deer family along the South Drain continues to grow and is often seen. Steve and Liz Lonsdale found Water Shrew, Bank and Field Vole at Christ's College during their small mammal surveys in July. Lovely videos of a family of three Otter were taken at Christ's College and Etton Maxey Pits in August. The bat count at St Pega's Church, Peakirk on August 4 was particularly successful.



Wasp Spider

There was a lot of bird reporting over the summer. Turtle Doves seemed to be down in numbers this year, although they were seen in gardens at both Etton and Maxey. Recent surveys suggest they have had very successful years elsewhere in Europe over the last couple of years, with an estimated increase in population of 400,000! So, we could see something of a rebound soon. Partly this seems to be down to continued bans on hunting in Spain, France and Italy. Long may that continue.

Lapwings did very well on the flooded fields just north of Vergette Pit, with up to 18 chicks seen in total. And two pairs of Avocet tried unsuccessfully to nest this year on the islands in Martin Pit.

Black Winged Stilts put in another appearance this year – there were two at Silt Pit on June 22. There were two Glossy Ibis at Etton Maxey Pit on July 2. Amazingly Hugh Wright found a Stone Curlew at Rectory Pit on July 13. There were several sightings of Osprey along the Cut, and a busy wader passage in late August, including Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Black Tailed Godwit, Greenshank.

It was another good year for orchids at Swaddywell, with the Man and Autumn Ladies Tresses doing well. Pyramidal orchids were unmissable on Etton Maxey Pits. Wall Germander was found at Swaddywell for the first time; the nearest known colony is in East Sussex!

Autumn 2024

Between September 1 and November 21, 2024, the Langdyke World experienced generally mild weather with notable fluctuations in temperature and rainfall compared to long-term averages.

September was warmer than usual, with average highs around 20C, occasionally reaching mid-20s during a warm spell early in the month. Rainfall was below average, with about 40 mm recorded, compared to the historical average of 52 mm, making it a relatively dry start to autumn.

Moths featured strongly in the posting on the Langdyke Facebook site throughout the autumn. There were notable finds from Sarah and Peter Lambert's garden in Peterborough, particularly the two Gypsy moths in early August, a Convolvulus Moth on September 8 and their first Clifton Nonpareil in late September. Antony Mould also found a Convolvulus Moth in his Barnack garden trap. In the same period, Richard Astle's Helpston garden turned up two Cypress Pugs, and the rather splendid, if very small, White Shouldered Smudge. There were also several Moth Flies (flies not moths!) in Helpston. Malcom Hillier was out mothing at the Hanglands in late November finding Mottled Umber, Feathered Thorn and December Moth.

Another insect capturing attention and photos in early Autumn was the colony of Ivy Mining Bees at



Ivy Bee, Swaddywell NR

Swaddywell. This bee (*Colletes hederæ*) was first recorded in the UK in 2001 and has rapidly expanded its range across southern England. It is now a common sight in many areas, especially near large stands of flowering ivy during its peak activity period from early September to November. This bee specializes in collecting pollen from ivy, making it one of the few late-season solitary bees active in the UK.

Talking of Ivy – there was, as ever, a lovely colony of Ivy Leaf Cyclamen on the Green Lane, Etton throughout October.

Southern Hawker dragonflies were found across the area throughout September, but there was only one reported record of the Willow Emerald Damselfly this year – in Steve and Liz Lonsdale's Maxey garden. And the Wasp Spiders continued to attract visitors and photographers at Swaddywell into early October.

Autumn is of course always the season for fungi and this year, with its mix of dry weather followed by heavy rain, was a good one. The Langdyke walk around Southey Woods on October 31 found over sixty species, including Fly Agaric, Wrinkled Peach, Beech Milkcap and Hare's Foot Inkcap and Oak Mazegill. Fly Agaric were also reported from the Hanglands, and there were Wrinkled Peach and Magpie Inkcap in Rice Wood, Helpston.



Willow Emerald damselfly, Swaddywell NR

Kingfishers were regularly reported in the Maxey Cut area throughout the Autumn too, with several sightings from the new visitor screen at Vergette Wood Meadow. Great Egret has become a regular visitor to this area too and there was an immature Spoonbill flying over Martin Pit on November 12.

A rare Ferruginous Duck attracted lots of birdwatchers to Martin Pit in early September. Late August also saw two reports of Whinchat in the fields north of Oldfield Pond. Heavy rain at the end of September/early October created a new wetland (Webster's Washes) on the fields south of the Cut, attracting hundreds of ducks, gulls and stand out birds such as Glossy Ibis, Mediterranean Gull, Pintail, Ringed Plover, Snipe and Black Tailed Godwit.

Up to three Goldeneye settled on Martin Pit, and reports of Goosander peaked at four individuals on October 30 (Angela Trotter). Elsewhere there was a late Hobby chasing Noctule Bats over Christ's College Reserve on October 6 and a splendid Bearded Tit entertained the work party



The fly Ochthera manicata at Etton-Maxey scrape

volunteers at Etton Maxey Pits Reserve on October 7.

While on about bats, Antony Mould's annual inspection of the boxes in Southey Woods revealed Leisler's and Soprano Pipistrelle on October 6.

November saw an influx of Fieldfare and Redwing to the hedges around Etton Maxey Pit and there were several sightings of flocks of Pink Footed Geese over the area. There was a national influx of Hawfinch in mid-November, with birds seen and heard locally at Etton, Maxey and Helpston.

It is also important to note the birds that are hard to find now. House Sparrows seem to have declined significantly (again) this year – with birds few and far between. Etton seems to be a particular remaining stronghold.

There were relatively few mammal reports in this period, although the resident Roe Deer population was up to ten individuals by the end of November. Trail camera footage also delivered more sightings of Otter on the Langdyke reserves and there were also several reports of Weasel around Pig Jaw Pit.

Winter

According to Chat GPT (other sources are available!), the winter of 2024-25, was fairly typical, with slightly milder conditions and average levels of rainfall and sunshine. Temperatures were close to long-term norms: December highs averaged 7.2C, January 6.3C, and February 7.1C, with nighttime lows hovering around freezing. Rainfall was in line with seasonal expectations—December saw about 49mm over 15 days, January 45mm across 17 days, and February was drier, with 17mm over just 10 days. Sunshine

levels were also consistent with historic trends: December and January each averaged 1.9 to 2 hours of sunshine daily, while February saw an increase to nearly 4 hours.

My own impressions were that this was a quiet winter for birds. I didn't see a single Siskin this year, although I know others did (Sarah Lambert found some along the Green Lane, Etton on January 10), and there were no reports of Red Crossbill.

Numbers of Fieldfare and Redwing seemed lower than normal and there was only a rather limited Starling murmuration in the early Winter. Bullfinch too were few and far between and Stonechat too seemed elusive – singles were reported but nothing like the six individuals that were found along the South Drain last winter.

More positively, Barn Owl were regularly seen hunting over Christ's College Reserve and along Heath Road, Helpston. The resident roost of covies was very noisily in place in the woods around the Maxey Sailing Lakes throughout the Winter. Jack Snipe were found on the South Drain and on the Etton Maxey Pits Reserve in February.



Persistent Waxcap, Swaddywell NR

Goosanders could be found on Pig Jaw Pit and moving along the Cut throughout the period and there was a single Red Breasted Merganser too on February 6. A pair of Marsh Harrier was back in the area from early January,



Roesel's Bush-cricket, Christ's College NR

Early in the winter, there were several reports of Pink Footed Geese flying over the Hanglands and over Helpston and the Etton Maxey pits. Eight White-fronted geese put in appearance on January 4. Ten Whooper Swans were reported on Christ's College Pits on December 9, but there was no regular feeding flock this winter. There were reports of Grey Partridge between Helpston and Glington and on the fields south of the South Drain.

The close of Winter was signalled in late February with the return of Oystercatcher, Shelduck and Lesser Black Backed Gulls. Long-eared owls were calling from their usual haunts and Little Owls were rediscovered in the Nunton area on January 19 by Hugh Wright, (there used to be a regular breeding pair here and on the Green Lane, Etton, but they haven't been seen for some time – part of a wider national decline). Mandarin Duck were back in the local woods too.

The resident Roe Deer in the Maxey Pits complex had grown to 21 members this Winter. There were reports of Weasel at EMP on



Scarce chaser Sarah Lambert



Pepperwort on the Maxey Cut, Richard Astle

January 16 and Otters on Christ's College Reserve on February 14 (both Steve Zealand).

Moth trapping resumed in early February, with Malcolm Hillier reporting Winter Shade and Spring Usher from the Hanglands, and I had Pale and Small Brindled Beauty in my Helpston garden on February 24.

Steve Lonsdale reported Cowslip out in December and there were Lesser Celandines out on the South Drain on January 9. Blackthorn however remained blossom free in this period, saving itself for a glorious display in Spring!

Spring 2025

Spring 2025 was not only dry, but it was also generally sunny too! After the long, grey winter the succession of blue-sky days was very welcome. Rain was scarce indeed, barely a drop between March and mid-May. Whether because of this long-streak of warm, dry weather or not, the Spring will also be remembered for a succession of vibrant blossoms! Firstly, the blackthorn, whose white flowers came late but seemed to last for weeks, then the Hawthorn and finally in May a bright mix of Dogwood, Elder and Wayfaring Tree.

As a result, invertebrate numbers

seemed high. Last year, 2024, was the worst on record for butterflies and a dreadful spring too for moths. This Spring seemed no better for butterflies, although the discovery of a colony of Green Hairstreak along the Green Lane, Etton, was notable. Green Hairstreak were also found at Swaddywell and at Hills and Holes on April 11. Grizzled and Dingy Skipper were found on numerous occasions at Swaddywell too in fairly good numbers, and also at the nearby Ben Jonson Pit (no public access).

There were, however, seemingly good numbers of moths arriving at the various traps across the John Clare Countryside throughout the period. *Tipula Maxima*, the country's largest crane fly also appeared in a Helpston moth trap in late May. Small Eggar cocoons were very common – Malcolm Hillier reporting 152 across the Soke, double the normal tally. Cocoons were found at Swaddywell, near Bainton and at Southey Wood. Ermine moth caterpillars were abundant, creating a significant impression in the hedgerows.

Day flying moths such as Grey Meadow, Grass Rivulet and Yellowshell were at Southorpe



Evidence of Water Voles at Etton Maxey Pits, Steve and Liz Lonsdale

Meadow on May 24 with Grass Rivulet at Swaddywell too on May 22. Chimney Sweep moth were also reported at Hills and Holes – only the seventh recording for the county!

Other notable invertebrate sightings included Wasp Beetle and Red and Black Froghopper at Christ's College Reserve in May. And there was the usual emergence of ordonta at the Maxey Cut sites in May too, with Variable, Azure, Common and Large Red-Eyed Damselfly along the Green Lane, plus Scarce (three on May 16), Broad Bodied and Four Spotted Chaser. And Anne Lees found

several pink grasshoppers in her garden in May – they are relatively rare because it is caused by erythrism – an overproduction of red pigment, caused by genetic mutation.

Great Crested Newts seemed scarce again in Swaddywell, we have definitely seen a worrying reduction in numbers there in



*Spotted Redshank at Etton Maxey Pits,
Howard Butler,*

recent years, but they are well established in Helpston gardens in seems, with five males in just one of my ponds in April.

Sarah Lambert found over thirty Green Winged Orchids at Southorpe Meadow in late May. Man orchids continue to thrive (April 25 onwards) and gently spread in the bottom of the pit at Swaddywell and a single Twayblade was found there as well as at the Hanglands. Adders Tongue Fern was also found again at Swaddywell.

There is a new mowing regime along the Maxey Cut this year, being put into effect by the Environment Agency, and although it means keeping the Cut side of the banks clear of vegetation with six weekly cuts, the south and north facing outer banks are being left for flowers. As result there is a lovely assembly of Red Campion and Ox Eyed Daisy as well as Pepperwort. As ever, there was a great display of Primrose at Bainton Church, not least at the Primrose Festival itself on March 30.

Water voles were evident at Etton Maxey Pits in early May, thanks to further surveys by Liz and Steve Lonsdale. Steve Zealand found a notable group (apparently the technical term is a husk) of 15 Hares on March 23. And there was some nice camera trap imagery of Badgers emerging from a sett near Helpston on March 4.

It was a busy time for birds throughout the period too, with the new workings in the Tarmac Quarry, known as Rectory Pit turning up a succession of migrant birds, including a long staying Wood Sandpiper as well as Turnstone, Sanderling and Grey Plover. Up to seven Avocet were there at the end of May and there was a regular non-breeding Great Egret. It was a good year for Curlew passage too.

Perhaps the highlight from this hot spot though was the Red Footed Falcon found one evening and again the following morning. There was an Osprey over Christ's on April 28 and two beautiful Spotted Redshank were at Etton Maxey Pits the next day, Lapwing successfully raised young on Webster's Field, immediately north of the Green Lane, Etton.

For the third year in a row Goosander successfully reared young on the Cut, but this time there were two families, not just one, with the first chicks seen on April 11 The installation of two new tern rafts at Christ's College was immediately rewarded as one pair settled to nest on each.

More generally, it seemed to be a good Spring for some of our migrant warblers, Garden Warbler and Common Whitethroat in particular. Lesser Whitethroat seemed less common. Pig Jaw Pit continues to attract large flocks of Sand and House Martin, as well as Swift hawking overhead. There were two Black Tern there too on May 13.

On a more negative note, there were relatively few sightings of Turtle Dove in May, although a lovely photo of a pair in a local garden on May 27 was a nice addition to the sightings list. With an extended ban on hunting Turtle Dove across Europe, we would hope to see numbers rebounding soon.

Cuckoo on the other hand seemed to be having a good year, with birds heard and seen in more locations than in recent years, regularly calling at the Hanglands, Ben Jonson and Swaddywell Pit, Helpston and almost continually calling and being seen along the Cut! Nightingale too were heard from several outlying locations, at Swaddywell, Ben Jonson, Southey Woods and the Lolham Road railway crossing and were in average/good numbers at the Hanglands. Other woodland birds such as Nuthatch and Treecreeper seemed anecdotally harder to find than usual.

Why your membership counts

Membership secretary Angela Trotter says helping Turtle Doves is a good reason to be a member

In the last two years, we have been delighted to have a Turtle Dove visiting our garden. I am quite sure that without the efforts of Langdyke Countryside Trust, working together with Operation Turtle Dove, we would be far less likely to see these beautiful endangered birds in our local area. Of course, Langdyke's work in the local countryside is far wider than this, but for me, this precious little bird is reason enough to be a member of Langdyke.

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

We also have 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 contact Angela at membership@langdyke.org.uk

I am pleased to say that at the end of 2024 we had a membership of 234 – a healthy increase on previous years.

Around 67 per cent of our members have 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 2024/25 amounted to more than £1,900, 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.

Many thanks to all of our members – long-standing and new – for your loyalty and support. Your contributions really help to make a difference by supporting the work we are committed to doing in our local countryside. We couldn't do it without you.



Turtle Dove

Events for young and not so young!

Events organiser Claire Noble reports on another jam-packed year and reflects on her favourite moment

We did it again. 2024 was another year jam packed with wonderful events and we could not do it without the support of our event leaders, thank you!

Highlights included a talk given by Jonathan Larwood on the life of William Smith and his ground breaking geological map, Skippers of Fineshade with Suzannah O'Riordan, A Bat Count at St Pega's with Antony Mould, Langdyke's annual meeting which included an interactive panel discussion covering climate change, local

nature recovery and pollinators, regular Book Club meetings and the Langdyke festive quiz.

Choosing my favourite event of 2024 is easy.

On a still morning in June, three very young naturalists gathered around a small box, wondering what they would find and deciding who would go first. Small hands shaking, and hearts thumping, reaching into the bag and gently, ever so gently lifting out a field vole just as they had been shown.

The three brave young naturalists took it in turns to weigh, measure and handle voles, mice and shrews and I have to say I was proud of them all and ever so grateful to Langdyke's small mammal experts, Liz and Steve Lonsdale for providing this magical experience.

If you would like to volunteer to organise or lead events please do get in touch at; events@langdyke.org.uk



And your garden makes ten!

As Langdyke continues to take on more land David Cowcill reports on what's happening across our nature sites

Now we are TEN! The addition of the new reserve at Christ's College Pits brings the total to ten – Swaddywell, Torpel, Bainton Heath, Etton Maxey Pit, Etton High Meadow, Vergette Wood Meadow, Marholm Field Bank, the virtual eighth reserve (our gardens – remember?), M'Lady's Pond, and now Christ's College Reserve.

After the generous fund raising and a protracted legal process the deeds for Christ's College Reserve were finally signed in April 2024. The Reserve is now fully owned by Langdyke Countryside Trust to be maintained for nature conservation in perpetuity.

There are some residual requirements to follow the restoration responsibilities of Tarmac (the quarry operator) but they are a light touch and we can look forward to influencing the site

to develop into a rich mosaic of water, woodland and grassland areas. The management team is beginning to form, with Steve Zealand leading, whilst trying to attract new participants into the development and maintenance tasks. You can read his report about the reserve on page 18.

Mike Horne is also successfully harnessing employee Corporate Social Responsibility time inputs from local businesses. More about this on page 19.

A baseline fauna and flora study has been carried out to inform

the activity plans and be able to measure and demonstrate conservation results in the long term. In the short term there is a common theme with other reserves to cut and clear areas of what is a very busy site before it becomes too thick and overgrown.

Christ's College Reserve can be found on the east side of the Maxey to Helpston road just after the Maxey Cut bridge – the quarried out land (and water) between the Cut and South Drain. Langdyke owns the northern half adjacent to the Cut; the southern half is still in the ownership of Milton Estate.



Etton Maxey Pits Nature Reserve

Eastern Reserves; the Monday work party group

– Etton Maxey Pit, Vergette Wood Meadow, Etton High Meadow



Flowers were the success story in 2024.

As the year progressed the big colour themes were the white of the Oxeye Daisies

in Vergette Meadow adjacent to South Drain and Etton Maxey Pit (EMP) central banks, then yellow at Vergettes and Etton Barn meadows with hawkweed and trefoil, moving to pink with the pyramidal orchids and a spectacular display of red clover at EMP, and also the wide sweep of pink grass flower heads, then deep green with the reeds and crassula especially in Vergette Wet Woodland, and eventually back to white with the drifts of wild

carrot everywhere. Not to forget to mention the growing areas of carmine-red flowered grass vetchling in Vergettes and the reappearance of the fourth orchid species at EMP, being the deep purple southern marsh orchid.

In other news butterfly numbers were markedly down after a cold start to the year.

The mammal activity held up well – otters continued to journey to EMP lakes from Maxey Cut. Surprisingly some carp still remain – which is good as the carp fry feed the herons and egrets. Water vole were present in the EMP ditches and harvest mice nests were found in

the EMP south meadow and The Drift (ironically outside the fencing set out to create areas undisturbed by the grazing sheep); the brown hares were often seen at EMP and roe deer at Vergettes.

A pair of Marsh Harriers looked at the Vergettes wet woodland to nest but moved elsewhere; similarly a barn owl box set in the sheep shelter at Etton Barn attracted a pair of barn owls (captured on camera) but they moved off. Only two sand martin nest tubes were used in the Sand Martin nest box as the natural walls of the new gravel workings proved more attractive; and the (more threatened) lesser black back gulls dominated the

nesting rafts to the exclusion of any common terns. However a bittern was frequently heard booming over EMP and Vergettes.

The full complement of technologies for grassland management was used – a larger and combined flock of Langdyke sheep, plus the Belted Galloway cattle until quite late in the year, plus the annual mechanical flailing of the meadows in order to comply with DEFRA specifications for grassland funding, and finally a crop of hay was taken from south paddock at EMP and the barn – the first for many years.

The other main management inputs were to create more water features. The crassula was scraped back from a substantial part of the Etton Reserve lakes, and with a machine and operator “in situ” the opportunity was taken to clean out and enlarge the scrape in Central Meadow and create a small new one in Island Meadow. The scrape in North Meadow was left alone after a survey found several interesting plant and insect species.

The water theme carried over to Etton High Barn where a series of small ponds was created to widen the habitat spread. Mike Horne brought in a variety of water plant species from his aquatic nursery.

The expected disruption on EMP from the Anglian Water pipeline activity did not occur as the programme was postponed. There were fewer Turtle Doves seen, partly as the supplementary feeding locations were changed in advance of the works.



Brimstone butterfly on an Oxeye Daisy

Marholm Field Bank – Flowers are the theme here too.

The main feature of the site is the spring/early summer flower display – primrose, cowslip, orchids etc. However (as last year’s report theme) this “hidden gem” display is threatened – naturally by scrub and hedgerow growth, and unnaturally by human incursion (ie unplanned visitors). No interventions were made in 2024, but some push back of the scrub will be required soon.



Wildflower grassland, Christ's College NR

M’Lady’s Pond (Ailsworth)

Finally after long weather-driven delays the major clearing of the overhanging trees and scrub was achieved, plus dredging of the vegetation settlement in the pond itself. This looks fairly brutal but is a necessary step to unlocking the ecological potential of the pond. The first signs are beginning to show – orchids and aquatic invertebrates.

Western Reserves – the Thursday work party group

A different theme here – climate change impacts.

Swaddywell alternated between early very wet and later very dry – quite a hostile natural environment for example for the crested newts, and also the impact of the rise (and later fall) of the water in the pond by the cabin and the lake at the bottom of the reserve where at the water’s height the boardwalk had to be used – the first time for many years.

However across the whole site there are also some winners facilitated by the consistent year-on-year management actions. Examples are the man orchids and autumn ladies tresses, an adders tongue fern colony and the grizzled and dingy skipper butterflies, all species extending their numbers on the

reserve. On a longer timescale, two more oak trees were planted (with the support of the John Clare Society) – meeting a need for regeneration of these iconic local landscape and eco giants.

As well as being the larder for the local swallows and swifts, a recent first was the appearance of a nightingale contributing its distinctive song.

The monitoring programme continues for butterflies, newts and concolorous moths – the latter being the most populous site in the UK.

However on the theme of undesirable natural development trends, continued attention has to be paid to push back Old Man’s Beard and Saw Sedge in the bottom of the quarry, and to maintain a good grassland sward in the upper meadow.

The Thursday work party participation has grown significantly. In addition the Perkins “retired” volunteers make light of more onerous tasks such as scrub clearance from the steep eastern wall, and another 30m or so of hedge laying.

The reserve continues to attract organised visits from local conservation and history groups.

Torpel

After a very late hay cut, a much more intensive sheep grazing was organised, leading to more complete exposure of the “anthill landscape” in the southern half of the site. This is itself a valuable conservation resource – allowing different invertebrate and plant species to develop on the sunny and shady sides. Also a conservation lesson, the devil is in the detail!



Female Black-tailed Skimmer, Christ's College NR

Bainton Heath

The planned conservation activity (funded by National Grid) was unable to be delivered due to unresolved issues over access to the site. The deer grazing depredation will continue until suitable fencing can be brought in to protect sensitive areas. However the potential of the site is illustrated by the presence of Peregrine Falcons and Ravens nesting on the NG pylons and (without supplementary feeding) a Turtle Dove presence (are they “local” or visitors from Maxey??).

Some felling was carried out to remove unsafe trees and allow for regeneration. The volunteers who managed to access the site for the one work party (with suitable tools) are to be congratulated for their determination.



Fallow Deer, Bainton NR



Yellow Shell moth, Christ's College NR



Blue-tailed Damselfly, Christ's College NR



Starling murmuration over Maxey Cut

The Eighth Reserve – your garden!

After participation in Langdyke work parties, your garden is probably the most direct and meaningful opportunity to help nature to thrive. And we know it works – Jacqui Robinson writes about it; Richard Astle documents his moth results; the Turtle Doves seen on the reserves are supported by feed in gardens in Etton and Maxey, and I assembled a photo-montage of wild flowers in my garden for ten months of the year as part of a talk on Langdyke and John Clare Country work.

So just a gentle reminder – if you made an eighth reserve pledge (maybe back in the dark and restrictive days of the Covid lockdowns) please give it a health check and an update; if you did not, please take a look at the link on the Langdyke website (under the Projects tab) and give nature some room in your garden plans and activities, be it a pond (the very best contribution), some “weeds” left to thrive, a bird feeding programme, or a hedgehog friendly space and fence line. It all counts!

And finally . . . a big thank you to all the volunteers (and contractors) who have contributed in 2024.

The positive outcomes for the natural world on the reserves are not a given – they require consistent dedication of time and application of knowledgeable effort which our volunteers deliver all the time. Thank you once again from the Board and Management Committee.

Our new site starts to excel

It's our newest reserve. And it is already showing signs of being a beauty. Steve Zealand reports on the work underway at Christ's College Reserve

At the western end of the historic wetland grazing area, once known as Westings Meadow, and placed between Maxey and Helpston, Christ's College Reserve consists of two flooded gravel extraction pits named College and Clare. Around the pits there are wild grassland areas which have been planted with a variety of native tree species, as part of the nature restoration plan.

Langdyke acquired the reserve from Christ's College, Cambridge during 2024 and three viewing points were quickly created to engage both the trust members and the general public. However, our conservation work didn't really get under way until January this year once a new entrance and gateway had been installed to facilitate access.

The grassland was found to be densely covered with a mix of tree slips, many of which were underdeveloped or had failed completely. Despite this, if all the remaining saplings were left

to mature, the reserve would eventually become enclosed and overgrown.

Willows and Alders have since been removed from the north bank of College Pit to open the vista from the new view point and the bank of Maxey Cut, for everyone to enjoy. This in turn will allow sunlight onto the grassland, which has been scythed and raked to expose the ground and establish a new wildflower area.

We are also planning
open days
and events ...

Habitat piles have been created in several places along the bank and a number of Smooth Newts have already been discovered.

A flight line has been cut across the central divide between Clare Pit and College Pit to encourage waterfowl on to both open water areas, whilst leaving sheltered

corners to provide them with cover and seclusion.

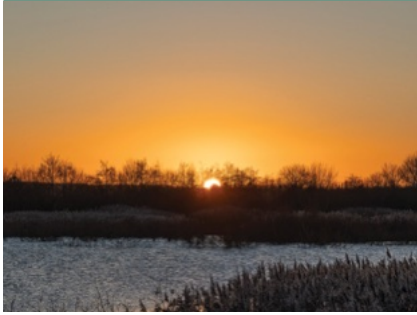
The west bank of the central divide is now mown short for use as a haul out and grazing area by waterfowl. The more developed trees, on the Clare Pit side, have been 'live felled' into the water margin to create additional habitat both in and above the water level. This will hopefully be used by spawning fish and water invertebrates, it will provide fishing posts for Kingfishers and perhaps become a nesting base for water birds.

The grassland area across the central divide benefits from full sunshine, it too has been scythed and cleared for the benefit of wildflowers, leaving patches of tussock grasses frequented by Snipe.

Aside from the waterfowl that can be easily observed on the pits, there are regular visits by raptors quartering for prey, and the hedgerow accommodates a variety of song birds.



An area has been cleared to create a flight path for birds



Sunset at Christ's College



Spring colour



Willow



Common Blue butterfly



Anchomenus Sorsalis beetle



Little Grebe

There is evidence of Otters, Foxes, Badgers and Roe Deer are regularly seen around the reserve. Also, Toads were heard calling in early April. Varieties of both land and water snails can be found easily, and ant hills proliferate across the grassland areas. Early butterfly species have been noted, and more varieties are expected, along with dragonflies, plus the Glow-worms and Four Spotted Moth that the area is known for.

Future plans include the creation of water scrapes and a Kingfisher bank, installation of bird and bat boxes, using Tern rafts, and a Sand Martin box to support future breeding programmes.



Live felling and habitat piles

We are also planning open days and events when we look forward to welcoming members to explore the reserve.

See you then!

Help!

A number of companies have offered help to Langdyke and the John Clare Countryside Trust in 2024.

The firms paid their staff and allowed them time off during the working week to get involved with nature.

The overall number of participants for 11 events was 176 persons, which is equivalent to 880-man hours of work on 11 environmental projects. (We work from 10am to 12:30pm, take an hour for lunch and then work from 1:30pm to 4pm, so each event is a 5-hour working day.)

Overall Corporate events held: 11

These took place as follows:

- Ailsworth parish (2)
- Castor parish (3)
- Deeping gate parish (2)
- Sutton parish (2)
- Upton parish (1)
- Wittering parish (1)



Viewpoint

A year of fund-raising and big spending

Treasurer Andrew Curwen reports on another successful year financially

2024 was a busy year for the Trust with continued fund raising and significant spend – principally on the purchase of the Christ's College Pit Reserve.

As a result, there was as planned, an overall deficit in the year of £41,616. However, after significant fund raising in 2023 and 2024 our

financial position remains good with an increase in unrestricted funds of 8.7 per cent to just over £50,000.

Pleasingly, subscription income has held up, helped by £1,200 of income from a small number of new lifetime members. Excluding the income from the lifetime members, subscriptions rose

around 12 per cent in 2024. As reported elsewhere, membership numbers have increased and we have a very good picture of the membership base and changes in 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 £86,972 – a slight decrease from 2023 (£89,584). Restricted income dropped from £60,116 last year to £52,770 in 2024. This variation mainly results from the differing fundraising activities in each of the years. In 2024 the restricted income arose from:

- further fundraising for Christ's College Pit – £28,520 of which £26,520 was received from Augean through the Grantscape fund
- grants received from the Environment Agency relating to work at Maxey Cut (£7,500), Compare the Market (£6,000

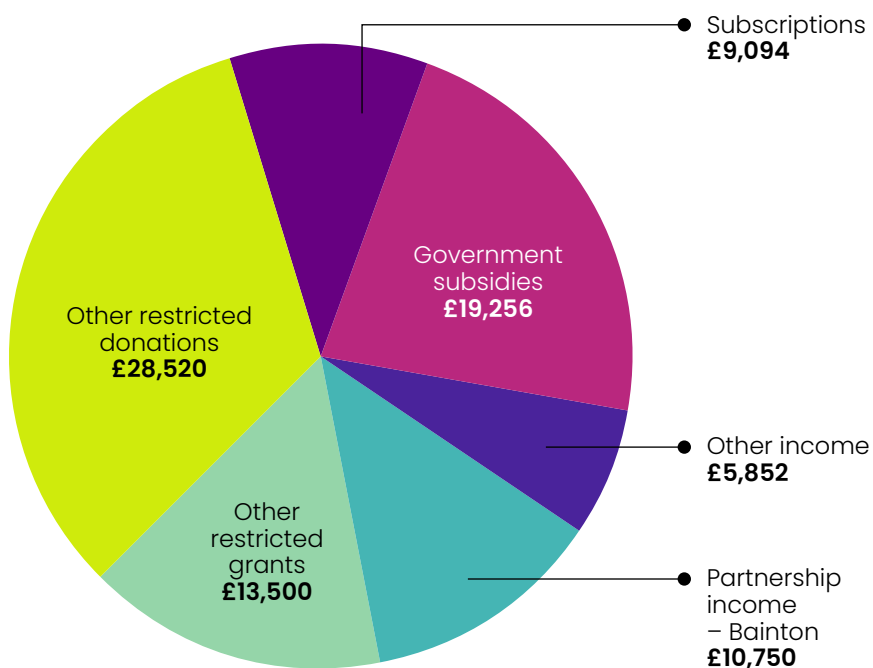


to allow staff time off to work on our reserves) and ongoing funding from National Grid plc in connection with Bainton Heath (£10,750).

Unrestricted income in 2024 increased 16 per cent to £34,202 from £29,468 last year. This year saw a meaningful increase in our interest income from £1,551 in 2023 to £4,724 in 2024 as a result of higher balances and significantly improved interest rates.

However, most of our unrestricted income comes from two sources: Membership subscriptions (£9,094 in 2024 – nearly 27 per cent of unrestricted income) and Government Subsidies which this year amounted to £19,256. The regime around such subsidy payments from Government, which still represent over 56 per cent of our unrestricted revenue, is changing and we can continue to expect further reductions of the amounts received for each reserve in the future.

Total Income in 2024: £89,584



Expenditure

Expenditure totalled £128,588 (£28,683 in 2023). Clearly this is major increase from the prior year mainly as a result of significant reserves spend, which increased from £10,176 to £118,536 and included:

- the purchase of Christ's College Pit for £52,701 (including professional fees) and subsequent spend at the reserve of around £6,500
- £29,500 of expenditure from the Capital Projects restricted funds including: three adjoining ponds at Etton High Meadow, a viewing platform and other work at Vergette Meadow and a car park at Swaddywell Pit
- emergency work to remove Crassula at Etton Maxey of £7,500
- an increase in spend at Bainton Heath of over £5,000 despite the access difficulties
- essential equipment purchased using the PECT restricted fund of around £2,600

After all the above items, regular expenditure on reserves was

around £14,700 versus of £10,176 in 2023 and £16,834 in 2022.

Excluding the reserves expenditure, the main changes from the prior year were:

- a reduction in specific Health and Safety spend as the £4,656 in 2023 included the purchase of 2 defibrillators and first aid courses for volunteers which are on a three-year rolling programme
- a relative absence of professional fees
- £1,296 of spend on community projects in 2024 versus £4,358 last year.

In 2024 nearly 95 per cent of our total expenditure of £128,588 related to: work on, or health and safety at, the reserves, equipment purchase and maintenance, and community projects. Of the remaining 5 per cent, 2.2 per cent was on insurance, 2.0 per cent for publicity and members' events, and around 1 per cent on administration.

An analysis of income and expenditure over the various headings is shown in the charts below.

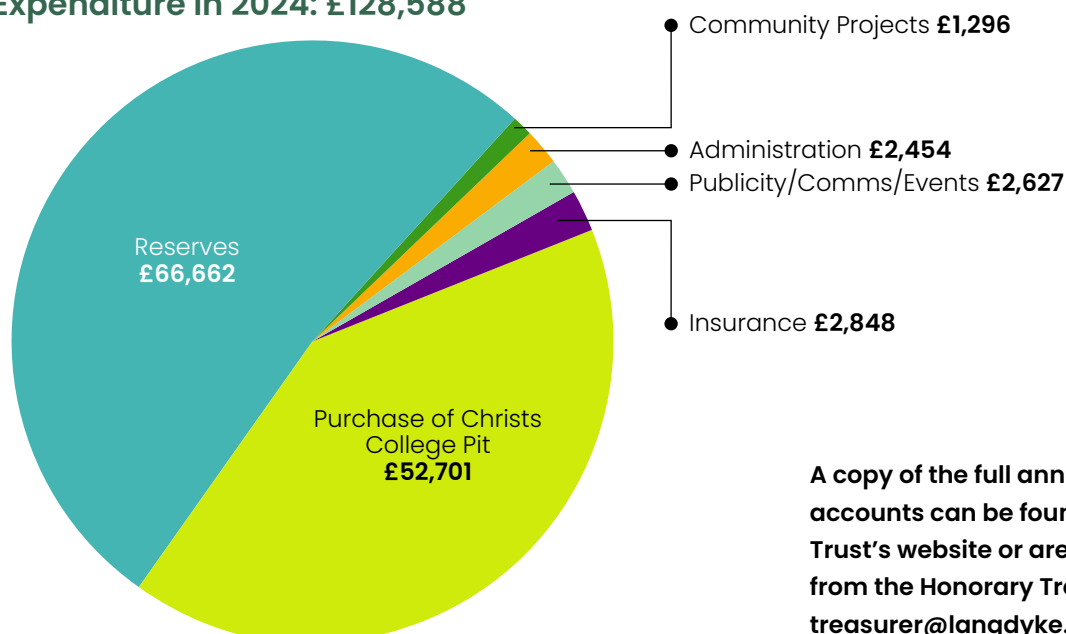
Cash position

Unrestricted cash reserves rose 8.7 per cent from £46,188 at 31 December 2023 to £50,219 at 31 December 2024. Restricted cash reserves decreased from £127,463 in 2023 to £81,817 at the 2024 year end. After a relatively low level of spend in unrestricted funds versus income in 2023 and 2024 we expect an increase in 2025 as various essential works at the reserves are planned in the budget.

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

The Annual accounts have been certified by the Trust's Independent Examiner of Accounts.

Total Expenditure in 2024: £128,588



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

Rivers of rust turned to riches!

Langdyke's artists in residence Kathryn Parsons and Sarah Lambert report on some unusual experiments

From experimenting with natural dyes to uncovering more of the history of Westings Meadow*, 2024 was another fascinating year for us as we explored and shared the stories of Langdyke's reserves.

One unexpected highlight came at Swaddywell, where the springs were unusually active. For several months, the path ran orange with iron-rich water, overlaid with a shimmering iridescent film created by iron-eating bacteria—identified by Sarah as most likely *Leptothrix discophora*.

Drawn to these vivid natural colours, Kathryn placed bundles of cloth in the water, leaving them to steep for several days. The results were surprisingly rich and full of character!

Our search for natural colour continued through the seasons. Using plants gathered from the reserves, Sarah dyed fleece and created felt 'pictures' inspired by her own in-camera motion photography.



A delicate thread

Meanwhile, Kathryn dyed long strips of fine wool fabric, which she hung between the trees at High Meadow for Langdyke's Annual Meeting—a fleeting, wind-dancing installation, deeply rooted in place.

We also led two hands-on creative workshops. The first workshop explored Torpel's medieval domestic history. On a warm August morning, we learnt finger-loop weaving and created braids of thread and natural treasures. It was a quiet, tactile way to link past and present.

The second, held in September, began at Swaddywell, where



The annual meeting display



An Artists in Residence workshop

a group foraged for leaves and flowers on a grey early autumn day. Later, at Torpel, we transformed our finds into a series of beautiful natural dyes—some subtle, others surprisingly bold.

In November, more than 120 people visited our exhibition at Torpel. It was sociable and full of the buzz of conversation!

Many stayed to chat, share stories, and connect with Langdyke's work (and eat cake!). We're hugely grateful to the volunteers who helped make it so very welcoming. We also exhibited work at the John Clare Countryside Conference, where we were proud to help share the stories of Langdyke's work and places.

*Langdyke's four eastern reserves are on land that was once called Westings Meadow. Shared between the surrounding villages, Westings was an important place for the communities and biodiversity. You can read more about it in the Artists' Blog on Langdyke's website.



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.

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*Note: * denotes Langdyke
Countryside Trustee*



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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