

KINGS DYKE NEWS

MARCH 2018

GOODBYE ANDY MOONEY

Last year we said a sad goodbye to a much loved member, Andy Mooney, who sadly passed away on the 28th September 2017. He was a dear friend to many who visited the reserve, and kindly shared his wide knowledge of wildlife with those he met. He is deeply missed. A donation fee of £1.00 was added to the price of this year's reserve calendar, in memory of Andy. This raised a total of £100, which was donated to the British Heart Foundation. A commemorative plaque is currently being arranged to honour Andy and will be erected in the bird hide.



Andy Mooney - © Copyright Mandy Mooney/Terry Mckenna



Fantastic fox following us around the reserve
© Copyright Phil Parker

A STUMPY SURPRISE

Whilst undertaking newt surveys recently, we were surprised to find that a fox was following us around, almost like it wanted to see what we were doing (see left picture). The fox was nicknamed Stumpy due to its characteristically short tail. The same fox has also been noted several times on trail cameras positioned around the reserve, so is clearly making Kings Dyke its home.



Fox investigating hole - Trail camera
© Copyright Terry Mckenna

PETERBOROUGH GREEN FESTIVAL 2018



The 2017 nature reserve public open days were yet again a huge success, with **almost 500** people attending.

We ran a wide range of activities, including bird watching, pond dipping, nature trails, fossil hunting, snake handling, owl pellet dissection, face painting, plus lots of fun quizzes and games.

Several special events also took place including a walk with the warden, bug hunting, brickworks tours, a nocturnal walk, nature reserve talk, moth trapping and bird ringing. We also welcomed local artist Charron Pugsley-Hill who created a fabulous piece of artwork representing the nature reserve and the wildlife within it.



Nature Reserve painting - Artist Charron Pugsley-Hill
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The details of the 2018 events will be confirmed soon and posted on the website/Facebook page. **Prior notice for your diary - this year's open day dates are as follows:**

Tuesday 29th May, Thursday 31st May and Saturday 2nd June 2018 from Midday until 6pm.



Left - Small rib fragment (top) Ichthyosaur rostrum fragment (bottom) - Probably Ophthalmosaurus). Right - Impressive display of belemnites © Copyright Nathan Enriquez



Stamford Geological Society visit
© Copyright stamfordgeolsoc.org



Unidentified fish scale
© Copyright stamfordgeolsoc.org

FOSSIL FUN

The fossil hunting area has been host to several visiting groups eagerly hunting for fossil treasure during 2017. Several hundred children enjoyed day trips during last summer with their home schooling groups and guided visits were made by Fossils Galore. In March 2017 Stamford Geological Society escaped the rain and managed a successful but soggy fossil hunting trip. Fossil hunting remains a popular activity at the reserve with more organised group visits booked in for 2018.

Nathan Enriquez wins the prize for the longest distance travelled to visit the fossil hunting area! Nathan, a palaeontology student from Australia visited over the Christmas period, discovering some Ichthyosaur bones and a fantastic selection of Belemnites (see photograph).

Fossil clay extraction and replenishment has been challenging during the winter months. But as the spring progresses and the ground dries up, turning over and refreshing fossil clay material in the fossil hunting area should be easier to achieve.

NEW STAR OF THE RESERVE

For years, many people have visited the bird hide to catch a much appreciated glimpse of the beautiful kingfisher. However, it now seems that the tables have turned, and that our resident water rail is the much eagerly awaited bird. Although water rail are present all year round including breeding pairs, they are best seen in the winter and can often be seen picking up scraps under the bird feeders. Even when not visible, their presence can be betrayed by their call which sounds like a squealing pig!



Water rail
© Copyright Tony Esposito

BIRD RECORDS

In 2017, 107 species of bird were recorded on the nature reserve. One of these, tree creeper, was new and ended up being recorded 6 times (see attached list). An assessment of records between 1995 and 2017 shows 158 species have been recorded over this time. 12 species have only been recorded once. The most common recorded species is coot with 3220 records, followed by mallard at 3135. This illustrates the value of recording your sightings. Please ensure you submit any sightings in the book in the bird hide when you visit. Every record is extremely valuable in monitoring the species that occur at the nature reserve. Thank you.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS

You may recall that 3 years ago a housing development for 68 houses was given outline planning permission for the Old Westhaven Nursery, next door to the nature reserve. This is located behind the conifers when viewed from the main bird hide. The site has now been bought by a housing developer and a Reserved Matters Application has been made to Fenland District Council.

We were concerned that the proposed layout did not take into account the value of the nature reserve, nor did it provide adequate protection. Following concerns outlined to the applicant (including objections from over 100 members), concerns have now been raised by the Local Authority ecologist, Natural England and Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust. Hopefully these will enable us to enforce appropriate buffers to the nature reserve and ensure that all wildlife on the development site and nature reserve is adequately protected. For the latest update on the proposals, please visit fenland.gov.uk and search planning reference F/XR18/0128/RM.

GREAT CRESTED NEWT UPDATE

During the great crested newt survey on 22nd March 2018, 807 great crested newts were recorded in the brickpit complex, including 626 in the reserve. This is the best ever March count and just goes to show how well the management works undertaken (see below) is helping the population.

This compares to our best ever count over the whole brick pit complex of 1207 in the brick pit complex on 5th April 2016, of which 673 were located in the nature reserve. Given that peak counts are normally found between mid-April and mid-May, we are hopeful of beating this count in the next few weeks. Surprisingly, only small numbers of smooth newt, common frog and common toad are ever recorded. This is perhaps an indication of the dominance of and predation by the great crested newts present on site.



Great crested newt
© Copyright Phil Parker



Great crested newts under torchlight
© Copyright Phil Parker

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT WORK DAYS

During 2017, management works were undertaken to remove New Zealand Pygmyweed, otherwise known as *Crassula* and maintain the reptile meadow. In recent years, *Crassula* presence within the great crested newt ponds has proved problematic, as it is very aggressive and has potential to choke a water body if unchecked. It is important therefore that its density is controlled to provide breeding amphibians with open areas to display during the breeding period.

Within the reptile meadow (in the reserve extension) open areas were maintained through cutting and raking vegetation to maintain vegetation structure within the grassland and provide areas for reptiles to bask. We are thankful to nature reserve member volunteers who joined in with the hard work. Many thanks also go to contractors Cut and Clear and Karl Charters.

We have a number of upcoming volunteer days for members to get stuck into this year. Details will be uploaded onto the King's Dyke Facebook page in due course.



Crassula removal
© Copyright George Waltheu



White Park cattle visiting the reserve in March 2017
© Copyright George Waltheu

A MOO SPECIES FOR THE RESERVE?

In early March 2017, we received reports of a new species visiting the reserve, one that you might not have expected to see! Unfortunately it wasn't a new rare species of bird to add to the list, but these two cheeky chaps! A pair of White Park cattle wandered around in the extension reedbed, newt ponds and regularly made their way onto the washes.

They had escaped from the eastern side of Whittlesey and took up residence at King's Dyke, looking quite content in their new home. Unfortunately for them, it was not a permanent residence and they were caught and removed by their owner a few weeks later. During their visit they undertook some of their own reserve management, maintaining some of the open areas and creating micro habitats via their hoof prints. This type of habitat management using cattle is something that will be considered for the future.

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