

## Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

### Occasional Titbits, issue 51, February 2017

[www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk)

#### Managing Cherry Hinton Brook: balancing wildlife, recreation and public access

Sue Wells and Monica Frisch will be talking about this to the Cambridge Local Group of the Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs and Northants on **Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> February**. The talk will be at 7:30 pm in St. John the Evangelist Church Hall, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 8RN. Admission £2.50. All welcome.

#### The Lakes and Coldham's Lane land

The Anderson Group are holding a public exhibition related to their emerging proposals for the land at Coldhams Lane. **Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> February** from 4 pm – 8 pm, and **Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February** 10 am – 4 pm at Holiday Inn Express, Coldhams Business Park, 15-17 Norman Way, Cambridge CB1 3LH.

#### Winter nature walk along the Brook

##### Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February

Meet outside the dentist at 97 Burnside at 2 pm. Wear suitable clothing; if very wet, walk will be cancelled.

After two successful nature walks last July for Cambridge Wild Weekend, we thought we'd have a winter one too. Join us for an informal walk along the Brook to spot some winter nature. We will walk towards Cherry Hinton Hall and then back to Burnside. Bring cameras in case we see our favourite egret or a water vole. As the path is narrow in places and there are cyclists and runners, if we have a large crowd, we will split into smaller groups.

Those who want to can then walk back along the Brook to Sainsbury's, to join the volunteers who do monthly monitoring of the Brook here. We may grab a hot drink in the supermarket café together. Look forward to seeing you.

Photo © Monica Frisch



#### Spring clean the Brook - litter pick

**Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> March** Meet outside the dentist at 97 Burnside at 10.30 am

This year it is timed so that we are formally a part of the **Great British Spring Clean** which is taking place all over the country that weekend ([www.greatbritishspringclean.org.uk](http://www.greatbritishspringclean.org.uk)). Note that this is on SATURDAY, not the usual Sunday. We will provide all necessary equipment but wear suitable footwear and clothing. If you can't join us, the Brook and its wildlife love to be kept free of litter all year round - just be sure you pick up and dispose of items safely.

#### Dates for further Brook restoration working parties

**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> March** Strengthening the flow deflectors (topping up with gravel). Meet at gate to Burnside allotments at 10.00 am.

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March** Planting up the stream bank at Sainsbury's. Meet by the bridge outside the store at 10.00 am.

#### Cherry Hinton Hall

At Cherry Hinton Hall, the Brook flows into a complex of lakes and channels that was constructed by John Okes, who built the Hall in the 1830s and modified the original watercourses that were used for the mills. Over time, the water flow has slowed down considerably, with resultant very heavy sediment build-up.

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Work is therefore underway, through the Council, to both improve the appearance and recreational value of the lake area and to make it a better home for wildlife. Huge volumes of silt have been removed from the central part of the lake using “Truxors”, amphibious machines that can extract large volumes with minimal impact on the environment. This has created a deeper, narrow channel through the lake which will speed up water flow. The silt has been put on each side of the lake to create marshy areas which in due course will be planted with a variety of reed bed and marsh loving species. Flow deflectors have been installed in the Brook just below the weir. Explanatory boards near the works give more details.

### Keeping the triffids at bay – invasive water plants

Experts on the invasive species Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) (right) gathered in Cambridge on 31<sup>st</sup> January for a workshop convened by Cam Valley Forum and Cambridge Conservation Forum. Though Floating Pennywort has not been found in Cherry Hinton Brook, it does occur downstream in Coldham’s Brook (near the football stadium). The workshop was an important step towards understanding and controlling this species, which can totally block waterways once it gets a hold. If there are new sightings, these should be reported to the environment agency ([anglian-invasive@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:anglian-invasive@environment-agency.gov.uk)) with a photograph, an OS grid reference and any other helpful information. Further information at <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/factsheet/factsheet.cfm?speciesId=1766>



Of more immediate concern is New Zealand Pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) which occurs in the Brook in the Cherry Hinton Hall area. The ongoing works there have caused some pieces to become dislodged and it has been found in the Brook below the weir; a netting fence is now in place across the Brook to catch any fragments. This plant is more difficult to identify as it looks rather like Water Starwort (*Callitriche stagnalis*) which is a native species in the Brook. If you think you spot the “alien” get in touch with us immediately.

<http://www.nonnativespecies.org/gallery/index.cfm?searchtype=s&query=Crassula%20helmsii>



New Zealand Pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) (left) – not to be confused with Common Water Starwort (*Callitriche stagnalis*) (right)



### Birds on the Brook

Even though it is winter and the overnight temperature has often fallen below freezing, the birds along the Brook are already starting to prepare for the mating season ahead. Most numerous are the tit family and, with no leaves on the trees, it is possible to spot the four most common varieties as they flit from tree to tree calling to each other. Long-tailed tits, smallest of all and easy to identify with their tiny pink, black and white fluffy ping-pong ball sized bodies and long tails, tend to be in small flocks and are the most sociable. The whereabouts of the great tits, largest of all with their black-capped heads and a large black stripe down their yellow breasts (males with thicker stripes than females), are given away by their bell-like two note calls. Most people recognise blue tits, with blue caps and yellow breasts, darting quickly from branch to branch. Less easy to find are coal tits, a much smaller version of the great tit. They have paler breasts and a white “badger” stripe down the back of their black caps. Listen out for their high squeaky calls in the conifer trees.

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Most of the common winter birds such as robins (singing throughout the winter), wrens, blackbirds and chaffinches can be seen along the Brook most days. As the days lengthen the males will sing, both to attract females and mark out territory. Sadly there have been no reported sightings this year of winter visitors such as brambling and siskins, but a flock of waxwings was present for a couple of days feasting on berry-laden trees in Fishers Close, Cherry Hinton, attracting groups of keen birdwatchers. Waxwings come to the UK in search of food from Scandinavia when the winters there are especially harsh.

Waxwing feeding on berries in Cherry Hinton, January 2017 © Kip Loades

Kingfishers have been regularly sighted at both ends of the Brook, as have little egrets, once again overwintering with us. Both these species rely on the Brook in the very cold weather for their food as the Brook, unlike the lakes, does not freeze over. Indeed, all the birds use the Brook to drink, another good reason for monitoring the water quality.

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