

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook: Occasional Titbits, No. 34, October 2013

www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Please forward or print out and pass on to anyone else who may be interested.

JOIN US!

FOR THE CHERRY HINTON BROOK SAFARI!

Sunday November 3rd - 10.30am
meet outside 95 Burnside

Join us in clearing litter and rubbish from our beautiful local brook. Help look for signs of Water Voles, our rare neighbours, whom we've not seen recently. Gloves, litter pickers and bags provided - just brings friends and lots of enthusiasm!

Finish at lunchtime with tea and coffee.

For further info, ring Sue Wells on 01223 711017

Vole Volunteer by Mike at sheepsbank.org

Next litterpick: Sunday 3rd November at 10.30 am.

Meet outside 95 Burnside, Cambridge. Equipment will be provided. All welcome, including families with children.

Tree works: Cambridge City Council are carrying out tree works and scrub clearance along Snakey Path. Last year the committee of Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook walked along the brook with Guy Belcher, the City Council's Nature Conservation Officer, and discussed what work should be done. Cutting back the willows and scrub will allow more light to reach the brook which will benefit wildlife, especially aquatic plants and invertebrates.

Although the whole path has an official closure order, the Council has said that they will only actually be closing sections when the contractors are working and so access to the brook will still be possible.

In the near future the willows along Burnside will also be cut back. These trees are subject to a Tree Preservation Order and the proposal is to lower the crown of the trees by 3-4 metres, cutting to the nearest suitable growing point.

The trees have grown to a considerable size and this year two partially blew down in high winds in the summer, cutting the phone lines to several houses. FCHB supports this proposal; we have to remember that only about 50 years ago, the willows were not here at all as can be seen from this photo. (Sue Wells)

FCHB response to Local Plan: We submitted our response to the Cambridge City Local Plan. Our response to Policy 15, concerning the proposal to open the lakes to the public and create an urban country park, can be seen on our website.



Photo from County Archives

We also commented on Policy 69 Protection of Sites of Nature Conservation interest (we supported the continued protection of City Wildlife Sites, noting that four lie within the area covered by Policy 15) and Policy 70 Protection of Priority Species and Habitats (we supported the need for this policy, noting that the water vole is now a confirmed breeding resident of Cherry Hinton Brook). (Sue Wells)

The voles are spreading! We had sightings of a vole in spring this year. As reported in Newsletter 32, a vole was regularly seen in the brook close to St Bede's Gardens. But was it just one vole or were there several? The habitat was clearly right for them, but would they breed? The answer came in August when I was walking up the brook. Close to St Bede's Gardens I saw what I thought was a baby moorhen chick sitting on the broken reeds. When it plopped into the water and swam off I realised I'd glimpsed a baby water vole. As they are half the adult size by the time they are weaned, this was a very young one (2 or 3 weeks old) and would have been part of a brood of up to 8 babies.

Continued overleaf

Water voles are territorial so the youngsters need to move away from the burrow in the bank where they are born to find their own space. This autumn we saw that this was happening; a vole has been regularly seen along Burnside opposite 109 and 95 Burnside where the reeds are broken and lie on the water. Voles eat grasses and plants by the water and this one can be seen balanced on the carpet of reeds happily munching away. The reeds growing thickly in the brook are excellent camouflage so it is difficult to know just how many voles are around but as there can be several broods each year between spring and autumn it is likely we now have a spreading colony of voles. We hope the people and traffic along Burnside and Snakey Path will not disturb them.



Photo by Sue Wells

This is bucking the trend; they are one of the UKs fastest declining mammals. The *Cambridge News* on 30th September ran an item entitled “Why Ratty is at serious risk”. So our chalk stream is a vital habitat for this endangered species and it is even more important that we protect the health of the brook. (Holly Anderson)

There are concise summaries about water voles on the Environment Agency and Wildlife Trust websites or google water vole ecology for more information.

Name the vole: Can you come up with a good moniker for our new resident mammal?! All contributions made prior to 31 November will be considered by our expert vole-naming panel and the winner announced with appropriate ceremony in the next edition of Titbits. Please email your entry to committee@friendsofcherryhinton.org.uk

Snake along Snakey Path: Keith Jordan reports that he saw a grass snake swimming along the brook by (fittingly) Snakey Path. He says “I was cycling down towards Cherry Hinton Hall, about half way along St Bedes playing field – more looking out for water voles – and came across this delightful creature between lamp posts 3F & 4F – about 2 ft long + characteristic yellow and black collar around the neck. It was swimming slowly then stopped as it saw us. Have never seen one along Cherry Hinton Brook before, but know they are resident at Barnwell nature reserve.”



Photo by Keith Jordan

It is not the first sighting. We had an email two years ago, on 30th September saying “This evening I saw a snake in the brook along Burnside (close to the beginning of Snakey Path) ... It looked a bit like an adder, but had a striking black and white or yellow band across its forehead, and its markings were not as clearly defined and v-shaped as an adder's. It was about 70 or 80 cms in length. It was lying on the bottom of the brook, and brought its head up to the surface, then swam off into the vegetation.” We are sure it was a grass snake, as they have a pale band across the neck, and are common around water. We have also had reports of them on the Burnside allotments.

JOIN US! The aims of Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook are

- Maintaining the appearance of the Brook, for example, by removing litter
- Raising public awareness about the importance of the brook for wildlife
- Improving the Brook as a home for wildlife
- Observing and monitoring the wildlife of the Brook and surrounding area
- Working with other organisations with similar interests

Please email membership@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk to register your interest.

To be taken off this email list, please email membership@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Monica Frisch (editor@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk) 21st October 2013