

# Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

## Occasional Titbits, Issue 75, Autumn 2024

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

### Autumn litterpick – 17<sup>th</sup> November

Our next litterpick is 10.30 a.m. – 12.30 p.m. on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The litterpick planned for World Rivers Day was rained off.

If you would like to help, we will meet in the dentists' car park at 97 Burnside. Equipment is provided but please wear appropriate clothing. All welcome.

### Merchandise based on Cherry Hinton Brook mural

FCHB and Rowan (an arts centre and forest school for adults with learning disabilities in Cambridge) worked together jointly to produce a lovely mural which is mounted outside Sainsbury's on Coldham's Lane. Funded by Cambridge City Council and Sainsbury's, the mural was unveiled by the mayor and Rowan student artists in November last year (see 2024 spring issue of Titbits).

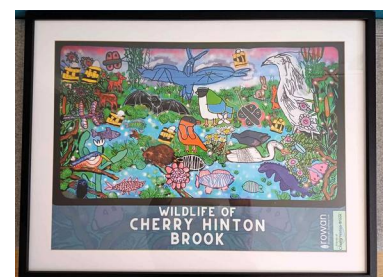
We have teamed up with Rowan to create some merchandise for their shop, the proceeds from which are being shared between Rowan and FCHB. The following items are on sale:

- Jigsaw (showing the whole mural) - 500 or 1000 pieces
- Greeting cards (8 designs, showing the whole mural or "Titbits" from it) examples below
- Posters (of the whole mural) shown below right in a frame

A memory game and tea towels will be available soon. Buy these as your Christmas gifts and help both Rowan and us at the same time!

Rowan's online shop: <https://www.rowanhumberstone.org.uk/online-shop/>

*Emmy Smart*



### Land south of Coldhams Lane, Cambridge

In September, the City Council Planning Committee gave unanimous approval to the Mission Street application for a new Science District in Cherry Hinton, to the north of the railway line, and the opening of Burnside Lakes as an 'urban country park'. This generated considerable media attention, given that local residents are very concerned about groundwater contamination and a range of other issues.

FCHB submitted a formal objection to the proposal (see Spring 2024 newsletter). The lakes were formed in the 1980s, when pits created by cement factories a century ago were used for dumping and then filled with water. As re-wilding took place, the lakes and their surrounding land became important natural habitats, to the extent that they are now designated City Wildlife Sites. The Local Plan makes it clear that the proposed urban country park should be designed for nature protection, as well as passive recreation.

However, the proposals submitted by the developer pay scant attention to nature and biodiversity and raise major health and safety concerns: the lakes are very deep and cold, and are known to contain hazardous materials. However, the Planning Committee agreed that further work is required on the Operational Management and Maintenance plan for the country park, and that a revision must go to the planning committee again before any public opening.

Our full objection, as well as our objections to previous development proposals, can be downloaded from Consultation Responses at <https://friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk/Newsletters.html> Sue Wells

## FCHB banner visits Parliament Square!

Sue Wells joined thousands of others in London on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> November on the March for Clean Water. Organised by a coalition of over 130 nature, environmental and water-sport organisations, the march went from Albert Embankment, near Vauxhall, to Parliament Square.

FCHB was among many Cambridgeshire organisations, including Cam Valley Forum, the Wildlife Trust and numerous local ‘friends’ groups, that were represented. A focal part of the procession was a container with water samples from rivers, lakes and beaches from all over the country. We made sure that water from Cherry Hinton and Coldham’s Brooks was added to this.



At the end of the march, high profile speakers, including Chris Packham, called for the following urgent actions:

- Reform of regulations – to put a complete stop to any industry knowingly and wantonly causing pollution;
- Enforcement of the laws and regulations that are already in place that can end water pollution;
- Requirements for all polluting industries to invest for the long term: upgrading infrastructure, reducing water wastage and leaks, helping farmers restore habitats, increasing efficient water use.

## Giant’s Grave

A restoration project for Giant’s Grave is in the process of being formulated, as part of the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project, to implement restoration and conservation initiatives to enhance the site’s recreational and educational value. Final plans will be shared with all stakeholders once a workable design has been confirmed.



Two FCHB committee members were invited by the project leader, Robert Martyr, to join an exploratory site visit in August 2024.

Worrying is the pipe shown in the photograph which, during rain, appears to funnel polluted water directly into the pond from the drain in the High Street opposite the bus stop, seen (along with a bus) between the trees. A possible mitigation of the damage caused might be achieved by the diversion of the polluted water through alternating, elongated gravel beds and planted buffer zones along the length of the grassy slope below the roadside footpath.

The four cast-iron pipes at the south end of the pond are ‘washouts’ for water-supply mains which feed Cherry Hinton, yielding drinking water if and when it is (rarely) necessary to reduce pressure for repairs to the system. This water would contain chlorine though.

Of particular interest was the possibility of removing vegetation and excavating accumulated silt, in the area to the left of the photograph, in the hope of revealing a spring head and one of the ‘tanks’ sunk in the Totternhoe Stone bedrock by the original Cambridge Water Company in 1853. Combined with tree-canopy thinning, additional native plants, and brushwood shelving along the edge of the pond to prevent siltation this should create an interesting and visually-appealing landscape, as well as encouraging public engagement.

The invasive *Crassula helmsii* (New Zealand pigmyweed) would be removed from the pond by hand, access improved, and more information supplied on display boards. Apart from the ‘citizen science’ recording of pollution, future monitoring could include solar-powered cameras to record habitat changes and visitor disturbance.

David Brooks



## Cambridge Nature Festival

We had a stall jointly with Abbey People and their chalk stream project staff and volunteers on a rather wet day in late May. Despite the weather, there was a lot of interest. Many thanks to Abbey People for helping with this.

## Thanks!

**Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers and supporters who helped us get this Certificate of Appreciation from Rivercare/Beachcare.**

We also appreciate the support we get from Rivercare which includes providing equipment for our litter picks, advice, insurance – and news of the many other groups looking after beaches, rivers and streams around the country.



## Grass snake

In early May we received an email saying “My partner and I were walking along the Brook last Sunday afternoon and spotted a grass snake swimming upstream between Burnside and Sainsbury’s. It was about 30-45cm in length. Never seen one before!” We have had other occasional reports of sightings of grass snakes, including one in May 2023.

## Water voles

We have had more reports of water voles along Cherry Hinton Brook this year than in 2023, though this may simply mean more people are remembering to tell when they have seen water voles. It is also interesting to see whether there are particular stretches of the Brook where voles are seen. Of the thirteen reports this year, five were in the area between lamppost 5 and lamppost 7 and three between lampposts 16 and 18. We have also had two reports of a water vole on the stretch along the path to Sainsbury’s. Peter Pilbeam of Cambridgeshire Mammal Group, who surveyed the Brook for us in April commented “The positions of the records made today are very similar to those found in previous years. No estimation of population size can be made from the information obtained.”



Kip Loades continues to amaze us with the wonderful photographs he manages to take of our water voles. We are really grateful to him for letting us use his photos – he took the one on the right in July this year – to enliven our newsletters. We are always pleased to get reports of sightings. Please remember to tell us when (date please, and preferably an indication of time) and where. The numbered lampposts provide handy reference points.

Photo © Kip Loades



## Wildlife along the Brook, Summer 2024

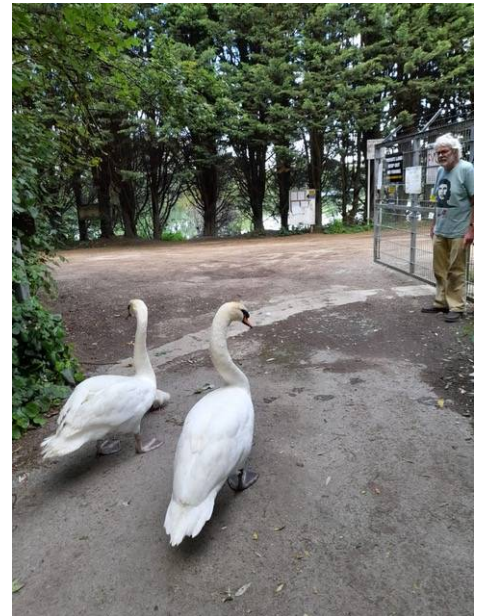
The sparrowhawks nested again this year in the trees close to Burnside and the Tins. Several chicks hatched and successfully fledged, causing many people to stop and ask what the plaintive calls were! From about five in the morning they would start begging for food and this continued even when they were able to fly quite well. Although they are big birds they are very well hidden most of the time so the occasional glimpses of them flying around were very rewarding. Their location was usually given away by angry magpies and rooks trying to dive bomb them out of the shared territory. At least four sparrowhawks were seen at times flashing through the trees, escaping the corvids ; they would fly along the brook towards Cherry Hinton before returning to their familiar perches.

The small birds did not seem to suffer as a result of having so many young birds of prey to feed and once the weather finally improved the usual broods of tits, sparrows and finches colonized the hedgerows along the brook.

The swans on the pits successfully reared two cygnets, although an improvised swan rescue had to take place when the parents took the youngsters for a swim along the Brook. The cygnets went under the gates back into the safety of the Lakes but the parents, who were too big, forgot they could fly over, panicked and caused uproar. A passer-by tried to help, a key holder was found to open the gates and the swans were reunited with no harm done.

Many birds and animals use the habitats both along the Brook and in the Lakes themselves. The Lakes provide a safe area for many creatures so any plans to have more people using them need to be carefully considered.

*Holly Anderson*



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**8<sup>th</sup> November 2024**