

Spring
Newsletter 2023
ISSUE 48

Open 10:00am –
4:00pm weekends and
Bank Holidays from
April until October.
At other times the key
may be borrowed from
The Norris Museum or
One Leisure with a £20
deposit.

**UPCOMING
EVENTS**

AGM

with guest speaker
Wednesday 19th July 7.30pm
See back page for details

FAMILY FUN DAY

Theme:

BRILLIANT BUGS!

Tuesday 15th August
11.00 - 3.00pm
Joint event with the
Norris Museum and St Ives
Methodist Church



like us on facebook:
Holt Island Nature Reserve

Visit our website:
www.holtisland.org

The Friends Group
is a voluntary
organisation dedicated
to the promotion and
protection of Holt Island,
Wilhorn Meadow and
the Thicket in St Ives for
the enjoyment of all.

Registered Charity Number:
1198894

The Islander

Newsletter of the Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve

CHAIR'S NOTE

Spring has arrived, eventually. Floods and cold weather seemed to keep winter around for longer than hoped. They did confirm that we need a safe boardwalk. The committee is working on the finer details of options, and will, hopefully, see a trial length of a new surface in place in the summer.

The return of floods washed out the first attempt at nesting by the mute swans. Fingers crossed, the second attempt will pass off uneventfully. The floods had a bonus for the list of bird species recorded on or over the island, with a range of ducks lured onto Hemingford Meadow bringing the tally up to, and then beyond, the 100 species mark. Otters are still being recorded on the Island, but mainly by tracks in the mud, although trail cameras have caught several individual otters in cameo roles.

In the reedbed, off limits to general access, we are now monitoring a study of how well blocks of the reedbed respond to cutting and clearing. If the result is an improvement in the condition of the bed, then we will cut more year by year. Like other aspects of the recording on the island, botanical recording was affected by water almost 1m deep in parts for a short time.

Hopefully, by the time you are reading this, the sun will be out, the summer migrants (insect and bird) will be dashing about, and you will be able to enjoy the island to the full.

Tim Reed, Chair



Hawthorn flowers Photo: HC

HOLT ISLAND PICTURES FROM THE PAST – THE SWIMMING POOL

As this postcard from the Norris Collections shows, with the creation of the swimming pool in 1913, Holt Island was split into two, linked by several small bridges. In this picture of the grand opening all of the local worthies were in attendance, and everyone seemed to be wearing their Sunday best. Note that it is

possible to see straight across to The Waits, as there are no trees in the way. The buildings along The Waits look pretty much the same more than a century later. This view now is blocked by the recent Sea Scouts hut, and mature willows and other trees on the nature reserve section. Otters were observed in the pool area last year.

Tim Reed

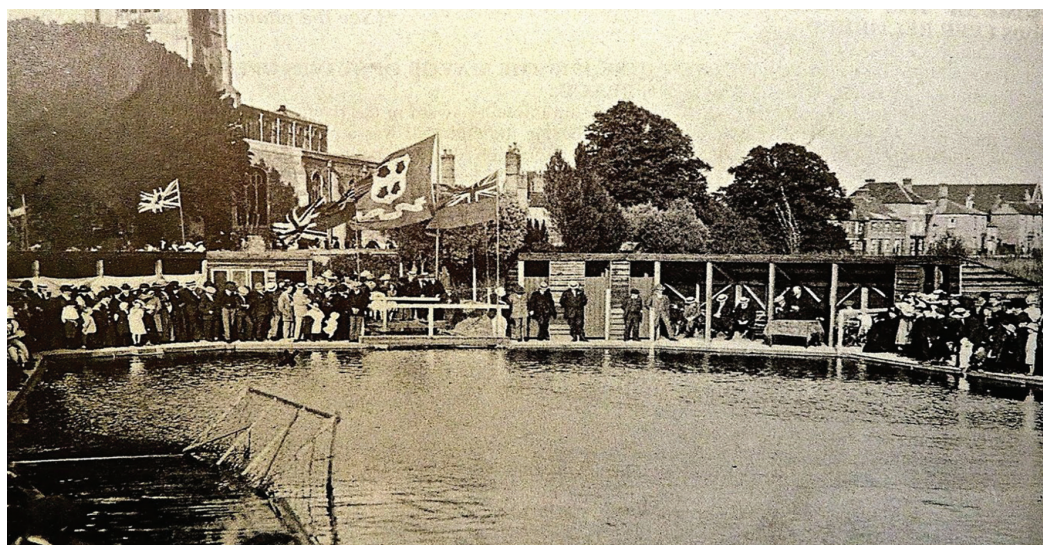


Image courtesy of the Norris Museum

RED-HEADED CARDINAL BEETLE *Pyrochroa serraticornis*

Adults emerge from May to July. They are around 2cm in length. Commonly found in England and Wales. Their habitat is woodland, hedgerows and gardens. They can often be found on flowers where they feed on smaller insects. A food source for birds.



Photo: HC

RAISING FUNDS!

EVENTS IN MARCH

We were very pleased to receive two donations in March.

An invitation arrived from our good friends The Rotary Club of St Ives to attend their monthly meeting at Sleppe Hall Hotel. Four of your Committee were dinner guests of Rotarian Andrew Holmes - thank you Andrew - and after the meal a cheque for £800 was presented to our Chair as a contribution to our 'Save the boardwalk' fundraising efforts this year. The photo shows from l-r, Nigel Sprowell (Holt Island), Sally Heffer-Martin (Rotary President), Andrew Holmes (Rotary), our Chair Tim Reed and Julian

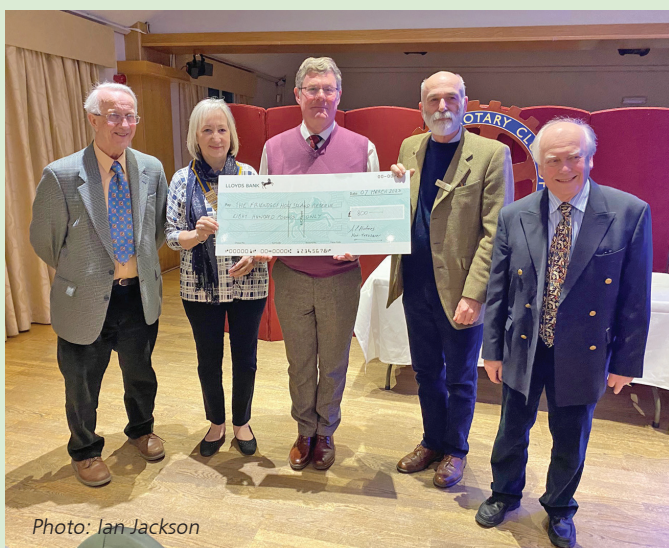


Photo: Ian Jackson

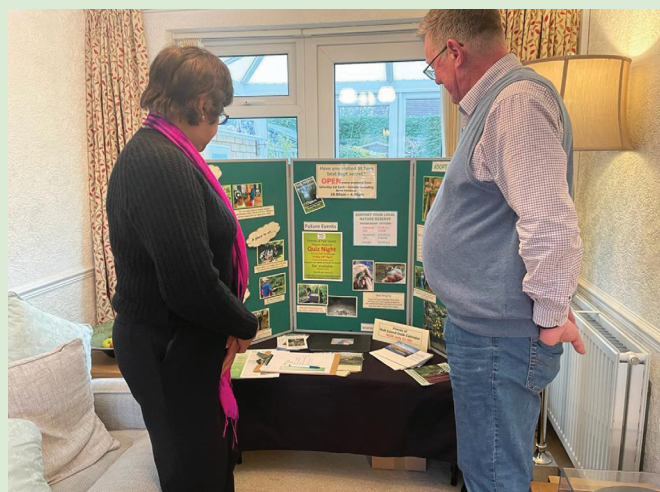


Photo: Jill Burt

Limentani (Holt Island). We are so grateful to Rotary for their continuing support for the Friends and we hope to see them on the Island again as soon as possible.

Then, only a few days later, at a Champagne Brunch hosted at his home, local benefactor and Rotarian Andrew Holmes - that man again - served up a delicious spread of kedgeree and full English to 20-plus guests to raise nearly £300 for the Friends. Our thanks to him, his chef Shanti, and all his enthusiastic helpers. The photo shows Andrew surveying our display board with a guest after the brunch had been consumed.

Ian Jackson

FRIENDS' QUIZ NIGHT A GREAT SUCCESS!

There's no question that the Quiz Night organised by the Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve raised much needed funds for the Island. The evening of Friday 14th April saw St Ives Corn Exchange packed with eager quizzers. A great night was had by all, and our thanks go to all who attended, to our eloquent Quiz Master Ed Goodman, and to everybody who donated raffle prizes. We raised nearly £900 which will be put to very good use!

Ian Jackson



Photo: Ian Jackson



Ian Jackson thanking Ed Goodman

ROTARY CLUB OF ST IVES SILENT AUCTION

The Rotary Club are running a Silent Auction. Half the proceeds will be given to FOHINR. There is a varied selection of lots to bid on, including vouchers for meals out, golfing days and hampers as well as a personal tour of Holt Island hosted by our Chair Dr Tim Reed.

The auction runs until 9pm 31st May. More details can be found on the Rotary's website or Facebook page.

NATURE NOTES

THE SELDOM SEEN

Looking at the long list of species recorded on the island, it is remarkable how many of these are seasonal, and appear, breed, and disappear again in what almost seems like the blink of an eye. Some are cryptic, visible only to a highly trained eye, and some need the skills of a specialist to find and then name them. Others are just a bit more obvious.

Flowers like **Large Bittercress** *Cardamine amara* are in flower for 2-3 weeks in the late spring: roughly the same time as their better-known cousins **Cuckoo Flower/Lady's Smock** *Cardamine pratensis*.

That common name gives a good idea of when you might see it by the board walk, or on the edge of the meadow. The Large Bittercress, which is actually a rather dainty flower in spite of its name, hides away a bit more, being found mainly in the eastern section of the pollarded willows. A few occur near the boardwalk there. It is distinguished from its relative by its distinctive purple anthers and watercress-like leaves.

By the time it has just about finished flowering it is swallowed up by the rapidly growing vegetation, and is soon lost to sight until the following spring. The same applies to our small population of **Marsh Marigolds** *Caltha palustris*, normally found half way round the boardwalk. Looking like super-sized



Cuckoo Flower Photo: Tim Reed



Large Bittercress Photo: Tim Reed



Marsh Marigold Photo: Tim Reed

buttercups they flourish for a while, then get lost among the reeds and sedges.

Most of our mammals are found all year round, but seldom seen. There is a small population of **Water Voles** *Arvicola terrestris* on the backwater near the church. They, too, are best seen before the vegetation takes over along the bankside. If you hear a 'plop' noise in spring or early



Water Vole Photo: Darren Frost (Eco-images)©

summer, you may well just see one 'motoring' its way across the water's surface, to disappear into its hole. Look closely on the bank and you may also see a small area of neatly cropped 'lawn' next to the hole, which is a handy snack bar for voles.

Perhaps the most enigmatic animal, and one we'd all like to see more of, is the **Otter** *Lutra lutra*. From signs of their droppings (spraints) which crop up around the island, normally left as visiting cards in areas where they come



Otter Photo: Nigel Spowell

ashore, they seem to occur almost year-round on the island. We tend to see their evidence most in autumn and winter, when spraints or signs of tracks are more obvious in short grass or on dead leaves. Our trail cameras have found them at a range of places on the Island.

Tim Reed

RANGER'S REPORT

In March our practical volunteers carried out five work parties, equating to around 160 hours of work. Our Friends' committee and volunteers carried out around 125 hours of work.

The fedge in front of the dipping pond has been trimmed and the willow tunnel part trimmed and also woven. We have cut back the vegetation on the meadow margins and along the front edge of the island in one nettle section to encourage these zones to continue producing Greater Dodder as it likes the disturbance. We have also used a rotavator on these zones to see if it encourages more nettle and less reed. The photos show how much growth there has been in both these areas since cutting.

In the reed bed, we have finished raking and clearing the loose debris from the cut trial areas.



Meadow margin - March
Photo: Paul Claydon



11th May Photo: HC



Front edge - March
Photo: Paul Claydon



11th May - Photo: HC

More boardwalk boards have been replaced. If you see boards around the walkway with small pieces of rope beside them, this is because we are being proactive in replacing boards before they fail.

As always, thanks to both the committee and the practical volunteers for all of their time and hard work.

Paul Claydon



Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 19th July 2023 7.30pm
The Free Church St Ives

With guest speaker Keith Grimwade on the topic of "Holt Island's landscape history: how it got there - lumps, bumps and all".

Holt Island has an intriguing history; indeed, it might not have been an island at all. The clues are in the landscape and some remarkable old maps. Keith Grimwade, a local historical geographer, will unravel the Island's past and suggest what this might mean for the future.

Also featuring:
Hidden secrets of Holt Island – highlights from our trail cameras – compiled and presented by Nigel Sprowell

Refreshments provided

All welcome. Non members £3

www.holtisland.org
also on Facebook

Photo: Hc

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