



Friends of
Holt Island
Nature Reserve

SPRING 2014
ISSUE 27

In this season's issue:

- CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS
- RANGER'S REPORT
- BIRDS UPDATE

PHOTOGRAPH © NIGEL SPOWELL



- IT'S FAMILY FUN DAY!
- NEW PICNIC TABLE
 - THANK YOU NIGEL KEMBER
- PLANT TO NOTE
- YOUR COMMITTEE
- MEMBERSHIP FORM

REMINDER DATES

FAMILY FUN DAY
Friday 30 May
On the Island and in
the Museum Garden

AGM
Wednesday 30 July
Corn Exchange
Speaker:
Robert Burton
**WILDLIFE ON
YOUR DOORSTEP**



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

The Islander

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF HOLT ISLAND NATURE RESERVE www.localgiving.com/holtislandnaturereserve

Chairman's Comments



PHOTOGRAPH © NIGEL SPOWELL

▲ A baby wren begs for more. Look at the size of his gape! There are fledgling birds all over the Island at the moment. See Birds Update inside.

SPRING HAS SPRUNG It's that beautiful month of May again: willows shedding drifting clouds of white down, nettles shooting, birds frantically filling the beaks of hungry youngsters – I love it. And judging by the comments in our new Visitors Book, I am not the only one. It is heart-warming to read the notes left by families and children saying how much they have enjoyed their visits. It confirms that what we are all doing to improve the visitor experience is worth while. But above all it is the Island itself that weaves its magic on so many people each year – long may it be so.

THICKET THOUGHTS Earlier this year, a number of your committee accompanied Paul the Ranger on a recce to the Thicket. This year we shall be focusing more on this second, highly important green space in our town which is now also in need of some attention. In January, one of the earliest woodland flowers to show, Winter



▲ One of the first flowers of spring, Winter Aconite, carpets the woodland floor of the Thicket in January

Aconite, was putting on a fantastic display, creating yellow splashes in the dappled sunlight on the woodland floor. Further up the sloping ground, we noted a less spectacular but nonetheless interesting plant, Spurge Laurel. Read all about in on the back page. Marney's eye was caught by the dominant ivy smothering the ground flora, and we identified quite a number of other jobs that we and the Volunteers can help Paul tackle. Already we are ordering three new bench seats for the recently re-surfaced main path.

SURVEYS Marney has also since completed her first botanical survey on the Thicket. This is fascinating to read and, as soon as we have our own website (another project in the pipeline), we shall post this, and the others to follow for the Island and Wilhorn Meadow, for all to access.

I hope you all have a chance to enjoy this beautiful time of the year.

IAN JACKSON CHAIRMAN

PHOTOGRAPH © IAN JACKSON

Ranger's Report



WORK PARTIES Between December and the middle of March we held seven scheduled and a couple of unscheduled work parties which clocked up a very pleasing 125 volunteer hours. We continued clearing the willow trees felled by strong winds, and several volunteers worked tirelessly to destroy the bulk of the timber, though a good amount was also placed into habitat piles.

help us identify the work to be carried out to help preserve this old woodland.

WINTER WORK The three-year programme of willow and sallow clearance, to remove excessive growth of trees growing out in to the backwater opposite the Waits, has been completed for this, the first year. We'll get back to this difficult and messy job next winter.

THANKS Many thanks from myself and HDC, as always, to the Volunteers. We are really grateful for all the help and support you give. I'm sure that recent visitors to the Island will agree that our cheerful band of local heroes do a tremendous job to help make their outings a very pleasant experience. The comments in the new Visitors' Book seem to suggest they do.

PAUL CLAYDON RANGER

THICKET TASKS The many weeks of flooding on the Island resulted in the work parties continuing with work diverted to the Thicket. We cleared patches of ivy on the ground to allow and encourage a greater variety of plant species to grow. We also cut back the ivy from many of our mature and juvenile trees to promote their growth, but still left plenty for the birds and invertebrates to feed and live in.

With the help of Rangers Peter Hobbs and Brian Gardner from Hinchingbrooke Country Park, we have now carried out a full tree survey of the Thicket. This will

VOLUNTEER WORK-PARTY DATES	
May	16
June	1, 20
July	13, 18

Work-parties usually start at 10 am and finish at approximately 3 pm, although Volunteers can attend for shorter periods if more convenient. Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended. All tools and training provided, along with coffee and tea. Bring packed lunch. Please call Paul on 07810 637545 if you plan to attend.

Birds Update

WEATHER WATCH What a contrast! This last winter has been mild but very wet, and yet the island has not suffered with as much flooding as in previous years, and we have been relatively well off compared to many other parts of the country. The mild winter and warm, sunny spring has seen a surge in plant growth, and the wildlife, notably the birds, have had a flying start!

Many of the boxes are occupied with brooding tits, and Blackbirds, Robins, Dunnocks and Wrens (see front page) are feeding young already, with many other species showing signs of breeding activity. The migrants are returning from Africa with Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps and Sedge Warblers establishing their territories. Reed Warblers are also singing along the reedbeds. Hirundines (Swallows, Sand and House Martins) can be seen, and the Swifts have just arrived. A very active and vocal pair of Kingfishers is also being seen.

ADOPTABOX Our fourth year is up and running and we have over 60 box sponsors which is wonderful. Thank you so much for this amazing support. It's not too late to choose a box – do have a careful look at our boxes and see which ones are being used – there is plenty of activity. ADOPTABOX forms are available from Graham Noyce – his contact details are on the back page.

There is so much happening. The Island is looking beautiful as the leaves emerge, and the blossom is attracting our wild bees. All this is accompanied by a cacophony of bird song and so there is no excuse – come down and enjoy it. I look forward to seeing you there!

ACTIVITY Our resident birds are very active at this time.

NIGEL SPROWELL FRIEND

▼ Three juveniles for you to watch out for now. From l-r: Robin; Dunnock; and Great Tit. Wherever you spot juveniles, the parent birds will not be far away – keep still and keep watching!



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS © NIGEL SPROWELL

It's Family Fun Day!

Be busy bees at Holt Island Nature Reserve and the Norris Museum

JOINT Family Fun Day!
FRIDAY 30 MAY
11 am-3 pm
FREE!
Donations welcome - bee generous

- Bee curious I-spy game
- Bee colourful badges
- Meet Mr Waggle the Bee Man and bee amazed
- Under 10s must be accompanied

▲ Remember last year's fantastic event, presented in collaboration with our friends at the Norris Museum? It was such a success we are repeating the joint effort this year, and this time it will be even bigger and more fun.

The poster highlights some of the attractions. The bee theme also includes a Bee Trail, Make a Bee and other projects and bee refreshments. Buzz on down! It's free but donations will be welcome

New picnic table

▲ Our two picnic tables in the meadow area have proved so popular we decided to add another. The new one seats eight and, like the others, is designed to accommodate wheelchairs between the seats. All seats have backs. It has been installed by the Volunteers just opposite the Holt, in a shady glade which has been cleared of nettles. A new ramp has been built for easy access, and this also serves cyclists heading for the cycle racks in their new position.

Thank you Nigel Kember

▲ We note with sadness the passing of one of our first Life Members, Nigel Kember, in December last year. Nigel was a great fan of the Island and the work of the Friends group, and recruited some of his family for good measure. In recognition of his strong connection to the reserve, his son Matthew and daughter-in-law Amanda suggested at his Memorial Service that donations could be made to the Friends group. Thanks to the generosity of his friends and family we have received a useful contribution to our funds. Thank you Nigel.

PHOTOGRAPH © ANDY REITZ

PHOTOGRAPH © THE KEMBER FAMILY

Plant to Note

There is an interesting plant growing along the top path of the Thicket. It's commonly known as Spurge Laurel, and its Latin name is *Daphne laureola*. Confusingly it is neither a spurge nor a laurel. It is an evergreen however, and its yellow-green flowers are hidden among the leaf bases and appear at the end of winter. The fruit is a black berry. Whatever you do, don't touch it with your bare hands. Not only is every part of Spurge Laurel poisonous, but the sap will cause a skin rash.

It loves the damp and shade of old woodland and so is very happy in our Thicket, growing up to a metre in height.

Local names for Spurge Laurel include Fox Poison (in Lincolnshire). Despite its poisonous nature my copy of *The Englishman's Flora* reports that its bark was once used as a cancer cure, and the whole plant sold in markets as a horse medicine. Horses must have stronger stomachs than ours!
IAN JACKSON CHAIRMAN

PHOTOGRAPHS © JILL BURT



▲ The tiny flowers are just opening and seem to be attractive to a Ladybird.

YOUR COMMITTEE

.....
These are your elected committee members plus HDC representative. If you have any concerns about any aspect of the Island, please be in touch with any of the committee listed below:

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

Yes, I want to help protect, preserve and promote one of St Ives best kept secrets and become a Friend of Holt Island Nature Reserve.

Name _____ Telephone _____
Address _____ e-mail _____

Signature _____
Date _____

1 Please find enclosed my/our subscription for the next year of £5.00 (individual) £10.00 (household) 2 I/we wish to become a life member(s) and enclose a cheque for £50.00 (individual) £100.00 (household) 3 Please find enclosed a donation of £ _____ 4 Other organizations welcome to join on application

giftaid it By signing-up for Gift Aid you will enable us to claim an extra 25p for every £1.00 received.
I would like Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve to treat all subscriptions and donations that I make from the date of this declaration (until I give notice otherwise), as Gift Aid donations. I confirm that I am a UK taxpayer.

Please make cheques payable to: Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve and return to the Membership Secretary: Graham Noyce, 93 Bursellars, St Ives PE27 3YG

The information provided will be stored on a computer and used exclusively for managing your membership of the Friends. It will not be disclosed or released to any other organization. By completing this form you agree to this action.