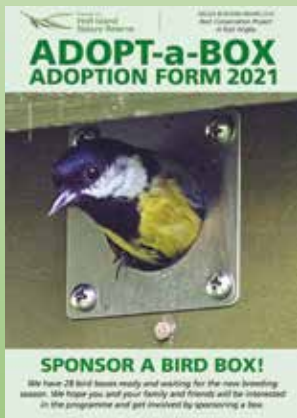


Winter Newsletter 2021
ISSUE 40

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.

ADOPT-a-BOX 2021



Now in its 10th year!
**See back page for
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*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.*

CHAIR'S REPORT

When I wrote my introduction to the last issue of the Islander, I had thought that this next message might be an easier one to write. The infection rate of the virus was beginning to reduce, and we were even able to reopen the Island for a short time. Vaccinations were being developed and making excellent progress and we were all hoping for a safer winter period.

Alas, this new strain has proven otherwise and 2020 even managed to provide a sting in the tail with the heavy flooding that we have witnessed in St Ives. It is a testament to the commitment and hard work by all our volunteers that the Island has managed to survive the conditions with as little damage as possible.

All that being said, we still have many reasons to remain upbeat. We enter the new year with a number of exciting new projects in the pipeline. Work is being done to make sure that Island is safe to open again once weather conditions improve and when the vaccinations hopefully begin to take enough effect to allow us all to leave lockdown safely.

Daniel Rowe



December floods (post-peak). Committee member Steve en route to the Holt (flooded for the first time!) to check for damage. Steve was accompanied by committee member Ian. Both were kitted out with full waders, buoyancy aids and guiding poles.

Photo: Ian Jackson

A FIRST FOR THE ISLAND – THE WOODCOCK

The woodcock is one of the waders that likes damp woodland where it can probe the ground for insects and earthworms. It is closely related to Snipe and Jack Snipe.



On 5th November 2020 we caught one on the Island near the Holt; this was the first to be seen on the Island. It was a first year bird.

They breed in this country and all over northern Europe including Fennoscandia (Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway). They cannot stay in areas where the soil freezes so they

migrate to the British Isles and most of northern Europe. There are more around in the winter months. A number have been caught in our area this November suggesting an influx of the Fennoscandia birds to this area.

They breed from mid-March through to mid-July, forming their nest in shallow depressions in the ground and lining it with dead leaves and feathers.

Male courtship is known as "roding" - flying over the canopy of woodland at dusk and dawn advertising their presence. This is followed by a series of ground displays. They lay an average of four eggs, which the females incubate for about 23 days. The young leave the nest straight away but are looked after by the females who can carry them in flight.

Julian and Sue Limentani



Photos: SL

WARBLERS ON HOLT ISLAND IN 2020

The year 2020 was a strange year with first the floods for several weeks in January and February followed by lockdown. This latter was a real setback putting a stop to ringing on the Island for a period but once we were allowed to ring again on the Island we made good use of the time catching 290 warblers of nine species, over 100 more than last year.

The number of all warblers seems to have been higher in 2020 and there are a number of possible reasons. The lockdown in Spain and Italy reduced the numbers that were shot, there was much less general disturbance during the breeding season and the birds seemed to make good use of this.

What has surprised us most is the number of new Blackcaps and Reed Warblers that were caught. One of the Blackcaps was first ringed in 2014 and has returned each year since but the competition must be strong with 32 new adult birds being caught. Many may have been moving through on their way to other sites, but there must have been 10 to 12 pairs breeding on the Island.



Adult Blackcap
Photo: Nigel Sprowell



Juvenile Reed Warbler
Photo: SL



Juvenile Sedge Warbler
Photo: SL

The Reed Warblers were also caught in large numbers with 35 new adults and nine re-trapped. It was, however, noticeable that many more Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers were nesting along the backwater in the new reed beds along the edge of the river. Again there must have been at least ten pairs, probably



Garden Warbler Photo: SL

more, nesting. Many very young birds were caught, including some hardly able to fly.

There was a small but stable population of Sedge Warblers, many of the adults were ringed two, three or four years ago. There were probably only five or six pairs breeding.

The Garden Warblers were all caught in the spring and they appeared to pass through and did not breed on the Island; none were caught in the autumn.

Chiffchaffs are present most months of the year, they were singing and calling most of the time but stayed high up in the tree canopies. There were probably more pairs breeding than the number of adults caught. A lot of the juveniles that were caught appeared to be moving through. They were still present in October.

Only one juvenile Willow Warbler was caught in the autumn, on passage.

The Cetti's Warblers were again all caught in September and were adults, some moving through but at least one stayed into the middle of October. One or two were heard singing in the spring. They did not breed on the



Juvenile Chiffchaff. Photo: SL



Cetti's Warbler. Photo: SL



Juvenile Lesser Whitethroat
Photo: SL



Whitethroat Photo: SL

Island, but did breed on Fen Drayton Gravel Pits, nearby.

The Whitethroats were probably from the other side of the river, being caught in the reed bed, very close to the river.

The Lesser Whitethroats were a new species for the Island and the first to be caught there. They may have been moving through, one was a juvenile, but both species were caught at the time when the hay was being cut.



Juvenile Willow Warbler. Photo: SL

From the above totals it is evident that the Island can and does sustain a significant population of warblers and must be able to provide suitable food for them. This is mostly in the form of aphids and other small insects. Without the various habitats of reed beds and tree canopies this would not be possible.

It is hoped that this year we will again be able to target warblers through the whole season and complete the story that is emerging.

Table shows the total numbers ringed in 2020 – a detailed breakdown can be found on the website.

Species	Total numbers ringed 2020
Cetti's Warbler	5
Sedge Warbler	41
Reed Warbler	102
Garden Warbler	6
Willow Warbler	1
Blackcap	104
Whitethroat	3
Lesser Whitethroat	2
Chiffchaff	28
Total	292

Julian and Sue Limentani

HOLT ISLAND HONEY BEES – A YEAR IN THE LIFE – WINTER

In January - and often into February - honey bees are in a state of semi-hibernation in their hives. They will have formed a rugby-ball-shaped cluster with the queen at the centre and will be feeding on their stored honey. On milder, dry days many will venture out on cleansing flights and to visit winter blossoms such as aconites, mahonia, winter flowering honeysuckle, evergreen clematis, primrose and willow catkins.



Honey Bees on aconite Photo: DH

Each hive has its own queen which is attended to by the female workers: there will not be any drones reared until late March. The workers will have been hatched in October and live through the winter as they spend most of their lives in the hive, unlike workers hatched in the spring and summer who spend long days looking after young, collecting pollen and nectar, living only about six weeks.

There are two hives on Holt Island on a purpose built platform. In the recent flood the hive floors were about 9 inches clear of the peak water level. Every two to three weeks I check to see if they still have fondant, which I put in to the top of the hive to supplement their stored honey. On a dry sunny day a few bees will come out on cleansing flights and visit winter flowers.

BEEKEEPING GLOSSARY

Fondant. I buy icing fondant in 13.5 kg blocks from a baker and split it up into polybags to give to the bees. They only take pure white sugar, unlike wasps which will go for jam and marmalade.

Cleansing flight. A cleansing flight is for the bees to defecate otherwise disease like dysentery can build up in the hive; they might also pick up some water.

David Hetherington

RANGER'S REPORT JANUARY 2021

Due to COVID our volunteers stopped/restarted/stopped working again on all our sites for their (and our) safety.

We have had a small, specially trained team working on the Island from August (except for November lockdown); Roy, Colin, George & Doug, who have been continuing to install non-slip panels.

We have now purchased the remainder of the non-slip panels to complete the straight section of boardwalk, thanks to a contribution from the Friends and some additional funding.

If you were able to visit the Island in the short period of opening last season, you may have seen the new grid we have used to replace the fanned sections where the boardwalk turns corners. This grid is a composite material harder than steel and should last 40-50 years or more, reducing the maintenance needed.

The recent flooding entered the Holt for the first time, ruining the carpet which we had to remove not only to dry out the floor but because it may have been contaminated.

Luckily, there was little else damaged; our new dipping pond has been moved by the floods but looks okay where it is, and one picnic bench floated off (not too far away) and is now back in position.

We have a new fedge (willow hedge) in front of the dipping pond to screen and shade it. This was constructed by our volunteers using our own willow grown specially for this kind of project on the Island.

My time during October-December has primarily involved reviewing around 100 risk assessments and now safe working practices, so hopefully I can get out on site more often once this is completed.

As always, thank you to all our volunteers for their continuing hard work in caring for and promoting the Island.

If time and conditions allow (flooding and COVID) we have some exciting new projects for the Island this year, so watch this space.

Paul Claydon

MARNEY HALL

We were sorry to hear of the death in November of former Holt Island committee member and supporter Marney Hall. You can read our tribute to Marney on our website (<http://www.holtisland.org/index.php>).

PRESENTATION TO HELEN WHATNELL

On 31st October, committee members met on the Island (socially distanced!) to present our out-going Chair Helen Whatnell with flowers and a garden centre voucher in recognition and with thanks for her support, enthusiasm and hard work over the years.



ADOPT-a-BOX 2021

Yes! We are running the ADOPT-a-BOX scheme again this year for the tenth year.

To ADOPT-a-BOX please complete the ADOPT-a-BOX form on our website (<http://www.holtisland.org/index.php/adoptabox>) and send it with a £10 donation to:

Julian Limentani, 4 Links Way, St Ives, Cambs. PE27 6DW or membership@holtisland.org (bank account details can be provided).

This would make a wonderful birthday present for a loved one or for a grandchild.

We will send you a certificate, a photo of the box and a map showing where the boxes are.

There will be an interim report and a final report on the progress of the boxes. If we are permitted we will do a guided walk but it will depend on the restrictions at the time.

Provided the Island can be opened it is a wonderful tranquil area to listen to the bird song and see the activity at the boxes.

Julian Limentani



Chair: DANIEL ROWE chair@holtisland.org 07596 294575
Treasurer: BASIL BELCHER treasurer@holtisland.org 07704 142990
Secretary: HELEN CRIPPS secretary@holtisland.org
Membership Secretary: JULIAN LIMENTANI membership@holtisland.org 07802 166722

Committee Members:

JILL BURT jillburt@btinternet.com 07796 326931
PAUL CLAYDON (HDC Ranger) paul.claydon@huntingdonshire.gov.uk 07810 637545
ALISON GRAY peruvianparrot@gmail.com
IAN JACKSON ianjackson@ntlworld.com 07836 248360
STEPHEN MOLLER mollerfam@hotmail.com 07867 685475
NIGEL SPROWELL nigel.sprowell@btopenworld.com 07899 908336
TIM REED