

Spring Newsletter 2021
ISSUE 41

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

FAMILY FUN DAY

(A joint event with the
Norris Museum)
Friday 13th August.
11.00 - 3.00
Nature trail and
craft activities

CALENDAR COMPETITION

See back page
for details



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.

CHAIR'S REPORT

Spring is in the air, and the Island has a new sunny outlook. After a very tough winter and early spring period, which caused significant damage to various features of the Island, some impressive work has taken place to bring it back to a safe condition for the public. The Island opened in early May, and we hope to open the Holt soon.

Adverse weather conditions and COVID restrictions have caused us a number of issues this year, which is also why we are still playing host to our friend Chill Bill, somewhat beyond the planned time. His presence has clearly not been an issue for our local swans, however, who have nested nearby. Once the cygnets have fledged, providing that none of our other guests try to use it for similar purposes, it should hopefully be able to be brought down until next Christmas.

So, overall, the current message is that we've all been through hard times – but better times are on the way, so watch this space and let's enjoy! Here's to a great summer.

Daniel Rowe



Caddis Fly. An important food source for many of the Island's birds. Also eaten by fish. Photo: SL

REDSTART – A WELCOME VISITOR

On 21st April we caught an adult male Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) on Holt Island, a bird one usually associates with the continent. These birds migrate, spending the winter in Africa south of the Sahara desert and then return to Europe, Britain, Scandinavia and Russia in spring to breed. This bird must have been on passage to Wales or the northwest of England.



Their food is mainly insects and beetles. They breed in holes in trees and rocks from May onwards laying 5 -7 blue eggs which are incubated for 12 – 14 days. The young are fed by both parents for 14 – 15 days before fledging. They then become independent after about two weeks.

Redstarts are related to Robins and Thrushes; their closest relative is the Black Redstart (one was seen regularly a couple of years ago near



the bus station in St Ives). They had a major decline in the 1970s mainly due to the drought in the Sahel (Sahara Desert), but have never really recovered in this country.

Julian & Sue Limentani



Photos: SL

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE BIRDS! FLOWERS AND INSECTS TO LOOK OUT FOR THIS SUMMER

MARSH BEDSTRAW – FLOWERING JUNE TO AUGUST

Marsh Bedstraw (*Galium palustre*) is a straggly plant seen in the wetter areas of Holt Island Nature Reserve. It grows to about 50cm height and so the flowers are often just level with the boardwalk during the summer months. The

flowers are very dainty, white with four parts. The stems are square with whorls comprising four or six simple leaves.

There is no folklore associated with Marsh Bedstraw. It is simply a plant with delightful white flowers brightening up the growth of nettles and mint, and worthy of a second glance!

Sue Limentani



Marsh Bedstraw. Photo: SL

HEMP-AGRIMONY - FLOWERING FROM JULY.

Eupatorium cannabinum, commonly known as Hemp-agrimony, (or Raspberries and Cream) is a common herbaceous plant of the daisy family. It favours damp woodland and is a robust perennial. There is a large clump that flowers during the summer in the meadow, close to the large Ash tree.



Hemp-agrimony flower head. Photo: SL



Hemp-agrimony Photo: SL

Hemp-agrimony displays frothy clusters of tiny, lilac or pink flowers on top of long reddish stems. Its leaves look like those of Hemp, although not related. It has a great volume of flowers that are very attractive to all kinds of insects, and are pollinated by bees, flies, beetles, moths and butterflies including the Red Admiral and the Whites.

There is considerable recognition of the use of Hemp agrimony as a herbal medication over the centuries to treat fevers, colds, flu and infected wounds with poultices, tinctures and teas. Nowadays because of its alkaloid content, the plant should only be used under professional supervision.

Sue Limentani

FOUR-BANDED LONGHORN BEETLE – FROM JULY

The Four-Banded Longhorn Beetle (*Leptura quadrifasciata*) is a large vivid beetle which can be 11-20mm long. It has four yellow bands which can vary in pattern and it has very long antenna. Its distribution is widespread but is locally abundant, in woodlands.

The adult lays its eggs in dead wood and a larva grows inside the dead wood for two years before pupating near the surface. The adults emerge from July to August and feed on the pollen of brambles, hawthorn or thistles.

Julian Limentani



Four-Banded Longhorn Beetle
Photo: SL and JL

MUSK BEETLE – FROM JULY

The Musk Beetle is so named because it emits a musk secretion. It is a Longhorn Beetle that is again widespread in England. It is 25 to 40mm long and has a long body which is an iridescent metallic blue/green in sunlight.

The female lays her eggs in living Willow trees and the larva burrows in, feeding on the wood. It pupates after 3-4 years and the adult emerges in July and August to feed on nectar.

Julian Limentani



Musk Beetle Photo: SL and JL

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

Earlier in the year the beekeeper would have regularly inspected the hives to ensure the bees had sufficient food before the early flowers bloomed. If the bees had used all their winter stock of honey they would have been fed fondant if necessary. The hive would also have been inspected for winter damage, for example water ingress, woodpecker holes and disturbance caused by badgers, who can smell the sweetness of stored honey and sometimes push over a hive. Inspections would have been made for varroa mite, which is an endemic parasite in our bees, and appropriate treatment put in. Old frames and their wax sheet foundations, which the bees use for building comb, will have been replaced.

The bees have been building up their colonies in preparation for their busiest time of the year. There is an abundance of nectar and pollen to be collected from a wide variety of flowers and blossoms, which the bees use for themselves and for rearing new bees. The worker bees have their own tasks; looking after newly hatched bees, cleaning the hive, guarding the entrance to stop insects like wasps from entering, and collecting nectar, pollen or water.

As the weather has become warmer and the days have lengthened the queen has increased her egg laying rate and a good queen will lay from 1000 to 1500 eggs per day. Most of these are fertilised and will grow into worker bees, however she will lay about 10% unfertilised eggs which will turn into drones. Drones do not collect pollen and nectar but are fed by the

workers; their sole purpose is to mate with a virgin queen. Nectar is what bees need for energy and pollen contains, amongst other nutrients, vitamins, minerals and protein.

If the hive becomes very crowded it might swarm. Swarming is a natural process when most of the flying bees leave the hive with the queen and search for a new location to build a new colony, therefore creating a second colony. In the old hive queen cells will have been produced from fertilised eggs which are fed royal jelly by worker bees. The beekeeper will have been inspecting the hives because they don't want the hive to swarm which would mean the queen would be lost with most of the worker bees and the honey producing capacity would be much reduced. If the beekeeper gets the timing right the original colony will have been split into two in the same location. A new queen will emerge from the queen cell. She will go on a mating flight on a dry, warm day and return to start her life laying eggs and controlling the colony with her pheromones.

A good colony will be producing honey by the end of May, weather dependant of course. Early honey tends to be light in colour and lacking the flavour and colour of honey produced in July and August.

If you should find a swarm please let me know on 07481 543011 and I will endeavour to pick it up to give to a new beekeeper to help them to get started in beekeeping.

David Hetherington

Queen cells, capped and uncapped cells *Photo: Shutterstock.com*



Swarm *Photo: Shutterstock.com*

RANGER'S REPORT APRIL 2021

Since my last report, we have carried out 2 of 6 scheduled work parties, totalling around 50 hours of practical volunteer support. In addition the Friends' committee and volunteers have also put in around 45 hours. Roy, Colin, George and Doug have been continuing to install non-slip panels for us.

Thanks to the Friends for contributing once again to the cost of purchasing some non-slip grid, which will soon be able to be used to replace the fanned sections of the boardwalk. However this work has to start and be finished in the same session to avoid any gap in the boardwalk, so can only be carried out on weekday work parties until after October.

The new otter holt is part assembled but time constraints have meant that installing the non-slip panels and board replacement has had to take priority.

The new fedge (willow hedge) in front of the dipping pond is currently growing well. Sadly the one along the grass path may have to be redone with our own willow next winter as it is not so strong (I suspect we may have over-pruned it during its first two



Fedge in front of the dipping pond Photo: HC

seasons- we'll try again and hopefully lesson learnt for next time!).

We have the replacement carpet tiles for the Holt. With any luck, the timber also needed for the job – including some longer boards for replacing declining boards in the passing places – will be with us soon.

I have reviewed our risk assessment as milestones on the government's Covid roadmap have been met, and restrictions eased and we no longer need to have a one-way system around the Island.

The meadow had its annual trim to encourage the dodder after the flooding finally dissipated. The nettle bed along the front of the Island has also had a trim.

As always, thank you to the volunteers, committee and "Opening the Island" volunteers (when able to do so) for their continuing hard work giving up time to promote and look after the Island when safe and allowed this last year.

Paul Claydon



Willow arch leading to bird feeding station Photo: HC

HOLT ISLAND CALENDAR 2023 COMPETITION

Each year the Friends produce a desktop calendar to raise funds for our work on the Island. For the 2023 calendar we would like to feature photos taken by our members, or indeed any visitor (of any age) to the Island.

The theme is "nature" and the photo must have been taken on the Island (it doesn't matter when). If you would like to enter your photo (or photos! Up to a maximum of 3) please email to holtislandcalendar2023@gmail.com. Minimum file size of 1MB is required.

Don't forget to include your name and (if you would like) a few words about your photo. Entries must be received by 30th April 2022, so there is plenty of time! Twelve photos will be chosen for inclusion in the calendar. Winners will receive a calendar.

All winning photos will be fully credited and used in the calendar and the Islander only. If we would like to use them on our website we will ask for your permission.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT – HOLT ISLAND WEBSITE

Unfortunately we don't have room for everything in the Islander. Have you read "A walk around Holt Island in March" and "Fish rescue on Holt Island"? There are also some photos of the Holt Island swans with this year's brood of eight cygnets, along with recent bird ringing reports <http://www.holtisland.org>

ADOPT-a-BOX 2021

We are very pleased to report that this year has been our most successful to date, with 88 sponsorships.



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