

Autumn/Winter
Newsletter 2021
ISSUE 43

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.

**HOLT ISLAND
2022
CALENDARS
AVAILABLE**
See back page
for details



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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.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

We start this issue with a report on the boardwalk. It is now (since its completion) ten years old, and requires constant maintenance which is becoming increasingly costly. We are looking at ways to increase our fundraising, including the introduction of a plaque scheme to recognise donations which have been made to purchase timber for the boardwalk. We were most appreciative to receive a cheque for £333 from the Waitrose Community Matters scheme. This will fund around 20 boards.

In other news, after a Covid-related break last year, it was wonderful to be able to open the Island again for Family Fun Day, Heritage Open Days and other visits. Reports of some of these events are on page 2.

Helen Cripps

HOLT ISLAND BOARDWALK – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Over the summer months the volunteer work parties have been very busy working on the boardwalk, replacing the grit with non-slip strips. At the same time, they have been checking the boards and have had to replace a significant number (about 150). All our stock of boards have been used up.



The construction of the Boardwalk in 2009
Photos: Nigel Sprowell

We are greatly indebted to a very generous Friend, Philip Simpson, who has twice funded us to buy new boards and as a result, we have been able to keep the Island open for all to enjoy.

The Boardwalk was built and completed in April 2011, having been started in October 2009. It consists of 221 steel frames, 232 beams and about 2625 boards. Since building the boardwalk there have been a number of floods which are getting ever deeper, and earlier this year it was over a month before the water drained away. These floods are taking their toll on the boards causing them to rot at the ends and lose their strength so they become hazardous to walk on.

A significant number of boards will need to be replaced over the next year, and it is expected that this process of replacement will be an ongoing thing in years to come. Sadly, the tanalised timber (timber specially treated with a wood preservative) is not the quality it once used to be and although alternative replacements have been investigated, they are not financially viable long term.

The Friends were set up to help with the work to keep the island accessible, to promote the Island and to fundraise to support Huntingdonshire District Council in this work. Since being set up

there have been successive government squeezes, and funding to HDC has been cut so our support has become even more necessary. Recently, the Friends gave £7000 towards the cost of the boardwalk and the bridge reconstruction.

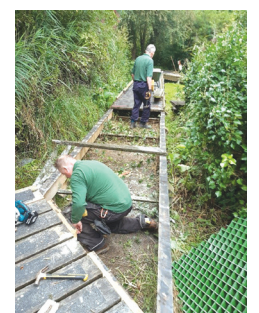


Boardwalk flooded in 2019 Photos: Julian Limentani

In order to fund the constant maintenance of the boardwalk, the Friends are going to have to raise a significant amount of money every year. It is estimated that we will need £5000 next year to keep the Island open, with costs going up steeply at present. The cost of boards has gone up this year from £7 per board to over £14. The end grain preservative treatment costs £60 per five-litre tin. Without our support, the Island will be closed by HDC for being unsafe, so it is essential that we start work to fund this.

The Friends' Committee is considering introducing a plaque scheme to recognise donations which have been made to purchase timber for the boardwalk. Details will be released in the near future.

Please be assured that your Committee are determined to do all in their power to keep the Island safe and open, but will need support to manage these increased costs.



Repairs to the Boardwalk this year Photos: Roy Allen

EVENTS ON THE ISLAND THIS SUMMER

FAMILY FUN DAY – 13TH AUGUST

After an 18 months break due to Covid it was great to revive our annual Family Fun Day on Friday 13th August. Our theme was "Beside the Riverside".

We linked up with the Norris Museum's Nature Week, so visitors could pass from one venue to the other and enjoy a variety of nature-themed activities.

On the Island we made dragonflies from pipe cleaners and coloured beads and celebrated the wildlife with our Riverside Nature Trail. Children were fascinated with the objects on our nature table such as a pike's head



Making dragonflies Photos: Ian Jackson

displaying around 300 razor sharp teeth, bird and wasp nests, snake skins, skulls and a variety of wildlife objects. Information was on hand with questions answered by our very knowledgeable volunteers!

We had around 250 visitors between 11 am and 3pm, the sun eventually came out and so did the dragonflies!

Many thanks to all the volunteers who made this day possible and FUN!

Jill Burt

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS (HODS) – 18TH SEPTEMBER

After last year's enforced break we enjoyed a very successful HODS again. The weather was perfect and we received lots of wonderful comments!

We had around 250 visitors, some from as far away as Portsmouth who commented on how friendly we all were in St Ives! Also plenty of local people who have never been on the Island before!

Jill Burt

ROTARY CLUB VISIT – 22ND SEPTEMBER

We were blessed with glorious weather when we welcomed the Rotary Club of St. Ives to the Island.

The visit was part of their annual "Tea Party" celebrations when they entertained guests from Rose Cottage care home, St. Ives Dementia Club and The Society for the Blind.

There were some 16 residents from Rose Cottage in wheelchairs with their carers enjoying a circuit of the boardwalk – one lady being tickled pink when a dragonfly landed on her. There were some 6 guests and carers from the Dementia Club and a small group from The Society for the Blind. 10 Rotarians assisted with the visit.

They had a very enjoyable, if short, visit and moved on to the Methodist Church for entertainment and refreshments.

This visit has been an annual event on the Island since 2012

(excepting last year due to Covid). We are delighted to have been able to host these events, which form an important part of our close working relationship with the Rotary Club of St. Ives.

Nigel Sprowell



Photos: Nigel Sprowell



NATURE NOTES

WILLOW EMERALD DAMSELFLY

There were only two sightings of the Willow Emerald Damselfly (*Chalcolestes viridis*) in England in the twentieth century. It was normally seen in southern and central Europe.

There remained only small numbers seen until 2009 when 400 sightings were made. Since then they have spread from Essex up through East Anglia and recently they have got as far as Lincolnshire.

On 24th August one was caught by Thomas Gower on Holt Island, on the Spindle tree close to the river. This Damselfly is a dark metallic green colour and has pale wing spots, and also has a green spur on the side of the thorax. The average length is 40 – 45mm.



Photo: Shutterstock



Caught on Holt Island Photo: Julian Limentani

It is on the wing from June to October and spends most of its time in Willow and Alder trees close to water, including ponds, lakes and rivers. They mate as other damselflies in the wheel position and with the pair in tandem lay the eggs in crevices in the bark of overhanging willow branches. The eggs remain in place until the next spring when the larvae hatch and drop into the water. A couple of months later the adults emerge.

This species has expanded its range throughout East Anglia in the last ten years and is fast moving west and north, it is nice to see it has arrived at Holt Island.

Julian Limentani

PEAR TREE LEAF RUST

There is a pear tree, quite old and large just at the entrance to the meadow. It seems to have reverted to the wild form and so most years it drops large numbers of very small woody pears. As summer progresses into autumn a proportion of the leaves

develop bright red to orange spots as in the first image. Closer inspection of the underside of the lesions show rather gruesome brown, gall-like growths with alien hair-like projections. These spots are caused by pear

rust fungus *Gymnosporangium sabinae*. This fungus attacks both pear trees and junipers in an alternating cycle. Fungal rusts are able to survive year-round by having two or more two host plants, with the pear tree rust fungus surviving overwinter by infecting juniper trees within a 1 km distance. In summer/autumn, the pear tree is host to the fungus. It then releases spores from structures on the underside of the leaves and these spores are released on the breeze to infect any neighbouring juniper tree. Being evergreen, the junipers harbour the fungus though the winter as small yellow jellylike growths, releasing spores in spring



Upper side of pear leaf Photo: Susan Limentani



Lower side of pear leaf; lesion area
Photo: Susan Limentani

Rust on juniper
Photo: Shutterstock



to reinfect the pear as its leaves develop. The infection can also cause cankers in the bark (isolated dead areas), which can make the tree more susceptible to bacteria, fungus and insect attack.

Susan Limentani

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

In October the bees were making the most of the flowering garden flowers and shrubs, especially the ivy flowers, collecting nectar and pollen to increase their winter stores.

The numbers of bees has reduced since their July peak now the drones (male bees) have naturally died. At this time of year the bees will live through the winter with their queens because they will not work as hard as summer bees, which were raising young and collecting stores.

The winter bees will spend time in semi-hibernation clustered together keeping warm when it is cold. On sunny dry days, even if it's cold, they will venture to find any flowers and to pick up water. The beekeeper will regularly lift the hives to test how heavy they are as an indication of how much stored honey they contain and if necessary put in Bakers' fondant to boost their winter stocks. During the winter, hives are often visited by mice which are attracted by the sweet smell but the beekeeper will have fitted a mouse guard to reduce the entrance size. Woodpeckers have been known to make holes in the hives' wooden sides and often it is necessary to enclose in chicken wire.

In addition to collecting pollen, nectar and water, honey bees will collect resin



Bees making propolis Photo: Shutterstock

from buds and some trees like poplars and pine to make propolis. Propolis is a bee glue used to fill small gaps up to 6mm to prevent draughts. Should there be any larger gaps they will use burr comb which is made from wax. When the beekeeper opens the hive for an inspection in warm weather things can become very sticky!

Propolis has been used in traditional medicine for centuries and is thought to have antiviral, antifungal and anti-inflammatory properties but scientific research is limited.

In the autumn the beekeeper will have treated the hives with thymol-based preparations to kill the varroa mite which is an endemic parasite in most colonies in the UK. If varroa numbers get too high it can lead to susceptibility to other problems, for example deformed wing and other viruses. The beekeeper should regularly check that the varroa drop is eight or less per week and if it's more than that treat for varroa.

In October the regional bee inspector checked the Island's colonies. He took samples of larvae, tested and declared them to be free from European foul brood, which was a great relief as there has been an outbreak in Godmanchester. Foulbrood is a bacterial disease that severely affects larvae which prevents colony development. The result was registered with the National Bee Unit in York, which holds location and health data on all registered colonies. An inspector's visit can be expected every 3 years or so but more often if there is a problem in the area.

It hasn't been a good year for the bees. In May, when the colonies should have been building up to the summer, with the bees bringing in lots of nectar and pollen to support the queen whose egg laying rate was rapidly increasing, it was cold and wet. After a reasonable July, August was poor and the bees ate much of the honey they had stored in July. Honey yields from hives in most areas of the country have been less than previous years.

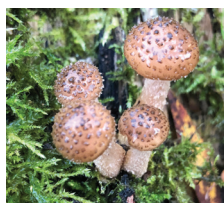
At the end of the season the beekeeper will have used frames of comb. Beeswax can be extracted by heating above 65°C to melt the wax.

David Hetherington



Male bullfinch

Bullfinches are shy birds and not common. In winter their main food source is seeds.
Photo: Sue Limentani



Autumnal fungi:
Armillaria sp Photo: HC

CALENDAR 2022 – AVAILABLE NOW

Available NOW a desk calendar featuring pictures of Holt Island and its wildlife. At £7.00 exclusive of postage, this will make an ideal Christmas present.

Free delivery in St Ives, otherwise £2 postage.

All profits to the Friends. Obtainable from Julian and Sue Limentani:
4 Links Way, St Ives, PE27 6DW.



Photo: Julian Limentani

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.

Details can be found on our website:

<http://www.holtisland.org/index.php/calendar-competition-2023>

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