



Friends of  
Holt Island  
Nature Reserve

Summer  
Newsletter 2022  
ISSUE 45

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

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

Saturday 17th  
September



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Holt Island Nature Reserve

Visit our website:  
[www.holtisland.org](http://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

## SECRETARY'S NOTE

In July we held our first in-person AGM since 2019 in The Free Church in St Ives. We enjoyed highlights from our trail cameras (with thanks to Nigel Sprowell) and also a very interesting and entertaining talk given by Brian Eversham (CEO of Wildlife Trust BCN) on "Bumblebees and other bees". We also welcomed our new Chair, Tim Reed. Tim introduces himself and his thoughts on the future of the Island below.

Helen Cripps

### AN INTRODUCTION FROM OUR NEW CHAIR

With the departure of Dan Rowe as Chair of the Friends, I have a big pair of shoes to attempt to fill.

As a former mayor of St Ives, Dan was a well-known face to most. Following him is a little daunting.

Having lived in the area for the last 40 years, I've come to appreciate the water meadows of the town at dawn and dusk, and especially the sometimes-flooded Holt Island.

As a professional ecologist, I bring with me a range of interests, including birds, bats and site management planning developed in the UK and around the world.

Nothing stays the same in the natural world. That is especially the case on Holt Island. It is changing rapidly as the willow cover expands and ages. With it come changes in plant and animal communities. Something will happen whatever we do, so now is a good time to ask: What do we want the Island to be, and to look like, in the future?

Unless we know what we have now, then we can't make a reasoned decision for the future.

Accordingly, working with other members of the Friends' Committee and Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC), I've helped lead on the production of a draft management plan which we'll finish it off once we have completed a range of biological surveys later



this year. With that information to hand, we can look forward to managing the Island for a biodiverse future: one that keeps the Island as a place of enduring fascination and pleasure, and education, to be enjoyed by all from St Ives and beyond.

The management plan isn't just about biodiversity, it looks at the public access and other uses of the Island, and especially the costs that come with managing boardwalks and other aspects of the Island's infrastructure. All of these cost money: much of which the Friends contribute to keep the Island ticking over.

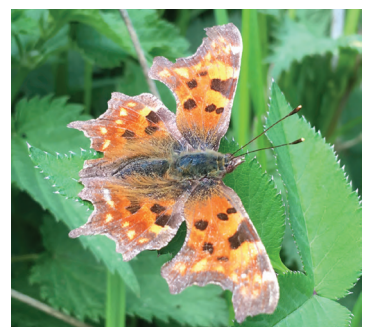
I see it as my role as Chair to make sure that our financial and biological futures are ensured, and that we can all enjoy the Island: its birds, bats, bugs and biodiversity for years to come. In the meantime, I look forward to meeting many of you as I wander round the Island with my binoculars.

Tim Reed, Chair

### COMMA (*Polygonia c-album*)

Named for the small white marking – resembling a comma – on the underside of the hind wings. Widespread in England and Wales. The adults hibernate in winter in sites such as tree trunks and log piles. Comma caterpillars' main food source is the common nettle which is found in abundance on the Island. They will also eat willow, hops and currants and these plants too are also to be found on the Island.

Photo: Paul Claydon



# THE BOB PONTING BENCH

My sister Susan and I are so happy to have sponsored the bench on Holt Island in loving memory of our father Bob Ponting - a countryman and ornithologist. The bench has a wonderful location, a quiet corner surrounded by nature and he would love it.



Joanne Florentine. Photo: Rae Florentine  
Inscription on bench reads:  
"IN LOVING MEMORY OF BOB PONTING 1936 – 2016  
A COUNTRYMAN AND ORNITHOLOGIST"

Dad was born in Leighton Buzzard and followed in his father's footsteps, joining the air force as a boy entrant, aged 16. His final air force job was 'bird control' which meant keeping birds off the airfield to stop them flying into the engines and stalling the plane.

This was a dream come true job for dad who had always loved the countryside and bird watching. It meant he was

able to spend lots of time driving around the airfield in an old Landrover, spotting birds and catching rabbits for our dog.

He loved nature and taught us to love the world around us – we learned lots during our Sunday afternoon walks which would usually include a little memory test of bird names which I'd like to think I still remember!

Coming from an air force family the location of home changed many times, but as a family we always had a strong connection to St Ives and the surrounding area as our parents had good friends that lived there.

Life can take funny turns and dad found love again in his 50s with his friend Joan who still lived in Bury. After he discovered Holt Island we would often pop over together to enjoy its peace and tranquillity. He and Joan enjoyed more than 18 married years together and visited St Ives regularly.

Susan and I thought about the words for the bench carefully with Joan and like to think that the school children learn what an ornithologist is when they come on their day trips.

Joanne Florentine

## GIFT OF BIRD FEEDERS FROM DAVID WILSON HOMES

In early May The Friends of Holt Island received a gift of various types of bird feeder and the protective cages from David Wilson Homes, part of Barratt Development PLC.



Julian and Nigel with the new feeders

The gift was for £250 of RSPB equipment, similar to the ones we use on the Island, which has enabled us to replace many of the old feeders. It includes six seed feeders and three peanut feeders, most are already in use. David Wilson Homes have worked in partnership with the RSPB since 2014.

Nigel Spowell and Julian Limentani accepted the feeders saying "We are very grateful to receive the donation by David Wilson Homes. The equipment will help maintain

our population of native birds and hopefully means that over the summer months those visiting the Island will see a wide variety of birds using the feeders."

Julian Limentani



Goldfinch on feeder  
Photo: JL/NS



Blue Tit on feeder  
Photo: JL/NS



# NATURE NOTES

## LESSER REDPOLL (*Acanthis cabaret*)

It has recently been decided by the British Ornithological Union that the Lesser Redpoll is a separate species from the Common Redpoll which now includes the Mealy Redpoll. The Lesser Redpoll is the smallest finch, they are predominantly brown and the female is streaky, whereas the male has a pink-tinged breast. Both have red caps.



Male Lesser Redpoll

The Lesser Redpoll is the commonest redpoll but is still on the Red List, meaning it is endangered. It is resident over the whole of the British Isles and in winter months can be found in flocks often with Siskin. They also winter in France, the Netherlands and Germany.

Six were caught on Holt Island at the beginning of March. They were in a small flock with Siskin at the east end of the Island by the reed bed. They were roosting in the Willow scrub and at day break went down in to the reed bed to feed on the Alder seeds which had fallen from the nearby trees. They then went up into the Alder trees and moved west by the river along the willows feeding as they went.



Female Lesser Redpoll  
Photos: Sue Limentani

We ringed six Lesser Redpolls on 7th March this year. On 28th March one of them was re-trapped by another ringer at Budby Corner Plantation (Carburton) in Nottinghamshire having moved 122 miles north north west in 21 days.

Julian Limentani

## AQUEOUS FORGET-ME-NOT (*Myosotis Scorpioides*)

One of Holt Island Nature Reserve's little gems, the Aqueous Forget-me-not can be seen growing beside the boardwalk in the areas that regularly flood and remain muddy, from late spring and throughout the summer. The scientific name comes from the Greek *Myos* or *mus* for mouse and *Otis* for ear, as the young leaves were thought to resemble mouse ears.

This plant was widely called Scorpion-grass as the young flower heads are curled and look like a scorpion's tail. Coleridge popularised the name Forget-me-not in the poem "The Keepsake" published in 1802. Coleridge added a note to the poem: "(Forget-me-not... One of the names (and meriting to be the only one) of the *Myosotis Scorpioides Palustris*: a flower from six to twelve inches high, with blue blossom and bright yellow eye. It has the same name over the whole Empire of Germany and, we believe, in Denmark and Sweden."

There was a well established German folk tale of a knight who picked some flowers for his lady when on a riverside

stroll. The knight fell in, and with his heavy armour dragging him down the doomed knight threw the posy to his lady crying out "Vergisz mein nicht" or "Forget me not".



Photo: Susan Limentani

Poultices of the leaves of the Forget-me-not have been used for wound dressings in the distant past but otherwise there seems to be no therapeutic benefit other than the delight of the striking flowers.

Ref: Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, The Keepsake, 1802

Susan Limentani

## WAYS OF DETECTING AND RECORDING BIRDS ON HOLT ISLAND

There are three ways of seeing and recording birds on the Island: from visiting the site itself, from standing on the Waits, and from walking along the river edge of Hemingford Meadow. Site visits are definitive: you see/hear what you find. On the Island, you look out. From the meadow and the Waits you see and hear in. Even in the deepest of floods you can record things from the Waits.

Looking at sightings on the Island recorded from the Meadow and the Waits, most species are held in common.

Yet, from the Meadow, you can see species such as barn owl, snipe, corn bunting and egret that skirt the island, or land briefly, are normally missed from island visits. The Waits view picks up kingfishers, but normally misses cormorants, and produces flycatchers on passage. In addition, dawn visits produce different species lists from those made at later times. So, if you want to add to the tally of species being recorded on the Island, you don't have to set foot on it, or even go at any particular time. Just go, look listen, and submit records to Nigel Spowell: all records gratefully received.

Tim Reed

# RANGER'S UPDATE

The Friends and practical volunteers between then have carried out over 200 hours of work since the last update, including scheduled work parties.

The grass path and meadow have received several trims. The last of this season's new planting of willow in the fedge was completed in April and the rest trimmed for the new season's growth.

The new storage shed base has been installed, concreted in and a base frame constructed ready for the flooring to go in, and the new picnic bench for the meadow has been installed.

In the last few weeks a good number of butterflies and damselflies have been seen.

Paul Claydon

## HOLT ISLAND HONEY

This year the Holt Island bees produced honey for 60 jars. All the jars have now been taken and at a suggested donation of £5 per jar this makes a welcome contribution to our funds.

Photo: Ian Jackson



## ADOPT-A-BOX

This year was our most successful to date, with 102 boxes being sponsored and a further £147 given as donations. Those that adopted a box received an interim report in May and a final report in July. Both reports included photos of the boxes' occupants, detailed updates on their progress and some fascinating facts. Did you know that a Blue Tit chick eats 100 caterpillars a day? Average brood size for Blue Tits on the Island this year was seven, so that's a lot of work for the adults!

Many thanks to Julian Limentani and Nigel Sprowell for all their work in maintaining and monitoring the bird boxes, photographing the nests and compiling the reports. Here are two photos from the interim report.



Blue Tit on young



Blue Tits

Photos: Julian Limentani

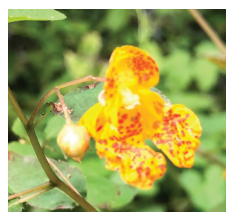
## WE ARE NOW A REGISTERED CHARITY

This spring we reached a significant milestone in the development of the Charity by applying for and being granted registered charity status by the Charity Commission.

The Charity Commission register and regulate charities in England and Wales with the aim to ensure that the public can support charities with confidence. All charities with an annual income in excess of £5,000 are required to register by completing an in-depth series of questions that demonstrate its charitable purposes and the public benefit it provides. We completed our application in April and on 10th May 2022 were granted our registration number 1198894.

The benefits of registration are we can continue claiming Gift Aid and our status is enhanced when seeking support from both the public and other organisations.

Basil Belcher



**Orange Balsam (Impatiens capensis).** A non-native species originating from North America.



**Hedge bindweed (Calystegia sepium);** flower and seed capsule. Considered a weed by some but on the Island a source of food for bees.



Photos: HC

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