

## MANAGEMENT

Small areas of Osier beds produce robust long wands of high quality willow. These are harvested annually for use in basket making and living willow structures. The Meadow is cut regularly and provides a sheltered area for dragonflies to hunt their prey and butterflies to feed.



## EDUCATION

We can offer educational visits, an outdoor classroom (The Holt), talks and walks. An Education Pack DVD is available for teachers.



Willow Tunnel leading to the Bird-feeding Station (Ian Jackson)

## PLEASE REMEMBER

- ❖ Dogs must be on a lead at all times
- ❖ Take all litter home



## FRIENDS GROUP



Celebrating 10 years 2017

The very active Friends group supports the work of the Rangers through grant applications and fund raising activities. We also hold events.

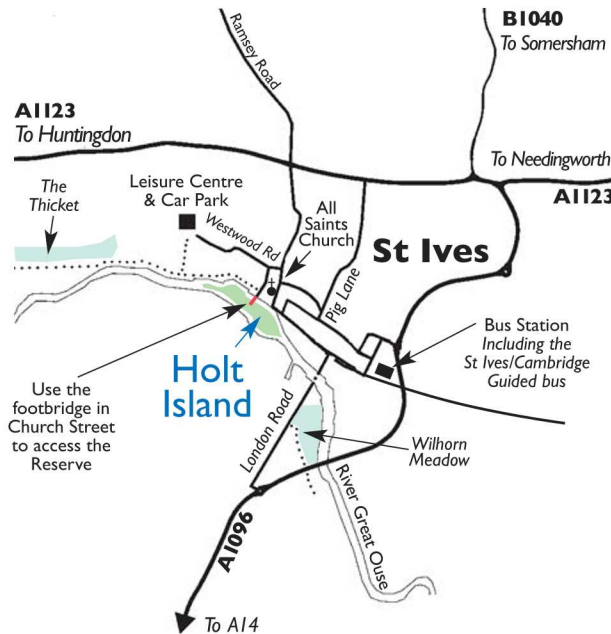
Contact [FOHINR@gmail.com](mailto:FOHINR@gmail.com) for details. Work parties are held twice a month with volunteers and Rangers working together to improve, manage and maintain the site. For details contact [paxtonpits@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:paxtonpits@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)

## LOCATION

Holt Island Nature Reserve is located beside All Saints Parish Church approximately 1 km from St Ives bus station.

The Reserve is open Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays between April and September (and October weather permitting), 10.00 am – 4.00 pm. If you wish to visit the island at any other time the key is available from the *One Leisure Centre* or the *Norris Museum*.

For further information and to book a visit here or at any of the sites managed by Huntingdonshire Countryside Services, contact the Rangers on 01480 388666.



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Holt Island Nature Reserve is managed by Huntingdonshire District Council's Countryside Services with the help and support of volunteers and Friends.

[www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk](http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk)

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Cover photographs: from top, left to right: The Holt (Ian Jackson), Banded Demoiselle Damselfly, Chaffinch, Muntjac Deer, Great Crested Grebes, Blue Tit (all Nigel Sprowell).

# Holt Island Nature Reserve







Yellow Flag Iris

# Welcome to Holt Island Nature Reserve



Blackcap

This 3-hectare riverside reserve includes the remnants of a once worked Osier (basket willow) bed, native tree species and beds of Common Reed mixed with Sedge. Whether you are enjoying the peaceful setting or photographing the wildlife, we hope you enjoy your visit.

## A WHILE AGO....

Some 70 years ago, the island was a thriving commercial Osier bed, providing work for many residents of St Ives. Men traditionally undertook the practical management of the willow beds, the harvesting of the crop and the task of making the baskets. Stripping the willow during the first few weeks of May to create white willow, however, was the time when women were employed and the island rang with the noise of chatter and singing - this was a very sociable affair.

The island was visually very different. It was remarkably flat and it was possible to see from The Waits across to the water meadows. The willow trees were planted in neat rows and interspersed with fruit trees providing easy snacks for the workers! Barges moored alongside the island to transport the prepared willow to the workshops to be made into baskets of all shapes and sizes - from fruit and potato to large post office and laundry baskets. The 'ridge and furrow' appearance developed because of the Osier bed. The ridges formed as alluvium was brought down the river by winter flooding (thus ensuring high quality willow growth), whilst the furrows were maintained for drainage.



## AND NOW...

The island today provides a wide range of habitats reflecting the past and riverside setting. Once the Osier bed was abandoned the area became overgrown, changing the appearance of the area and attracting different wildlife. It is once again being managed to encourage a wider range of plants, insects, birds and mammals. Plants include Purple Loosestrife, Yellow Flag Iris and Comfrey, and of course nettles provide food for caterpillars of the Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Red Admiral butterflies.

The island provides a peaceful haven for visitors and wildlife. Kingfishers are seen and the scrub and reeds provide excellent cover for Dunnock, Blackcap, Reed and Sedge Warblers.

Foxes live in the dense undergrowth and raise their cubs in dens by the river. The open river and pond, together with the tree cover, ensure a colourful display of dragonflies and damselflies during the summer months, and an ever-present range of insect life.



Purple Loosestrife