

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

Occasional Titbits, issue 67, Easter 2021

www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Spring litterpick 11th April

This will be done in groups of six people, to comply with current social distancing restrictions. We now have sufficient volunteers, and have started a waiting list. If you would like to be added to this, contact us at chair2019@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk and we will get back to you if anyone drops out.

Many thanks to all those who have been helping to keep litter under control on their own. Your voluntary efforts are much appreciated.

Clean-up at St Bede's School

On Saturday 3rd April, a group of FCHB volunteers cleared up the litter that had accumulated in the area between the sports field and the fence along Snakey Path. The Headteacher, Alistair Day, gave us access to the school,



took part in the clean-up and kindly provided refreshments. We collected about 17 bags of rubbish, which school employees will sort into the various recycling categories and dispose of with other school waste. We hope this will be the beginning of further collaboration.

Sue Wells

Improving water flow in Cherry Hinton Brook – volunteer work parties

In our last newsletter, we described the restoration work that is being planned for the Brook. An important step will be the addition of gravel, in order to raise the level of the streambed, in the Dawes Lane section of the Brook. This work is planned to take place over three days: Sun 18 – Tues 20 April. A group of six volunteers will be needed each day. The work will be led by the Wildlife Trust, with support from Council officers, according to COVID-19 guidelines. It will involve filling wheelbarrows with gravel, pushing these to the edge of the Brook, and helping to place the gravel in the water. It will be hard work! If you would like to help with this, please get in touch via chair2019@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk and let us know which days you would be available. We will get back to you with further details.

Sue Wells

Snakey Path improvements

Many will have noticed the deterioration of Snakey Path. Plans are being made for improvements, led by Greater Cambridge Partnership officers, in consultation with Guy Belcher, the City Council biodiversity officer and other key stakeholders (e.g. adjoining land owners and allotment holders). The improvements will be “low key” and will include “enhancements to the brook” (e.g. narrowing the Brook in places to increase water flow, and restoration of parts of the banks to benefit wildlife). A brief for the work is being prepared and, as we learn more, we will keep you informed. Katie Thornburrow, City Councillor for Planning Policy and Open Spaces, visited the Brook this month and also held a short zoom meeting with FCHB to discuss issues relating to chalk stream restoration, the cycle path and anti-social behaviour. We are very grateful for her help.

Sue Wells

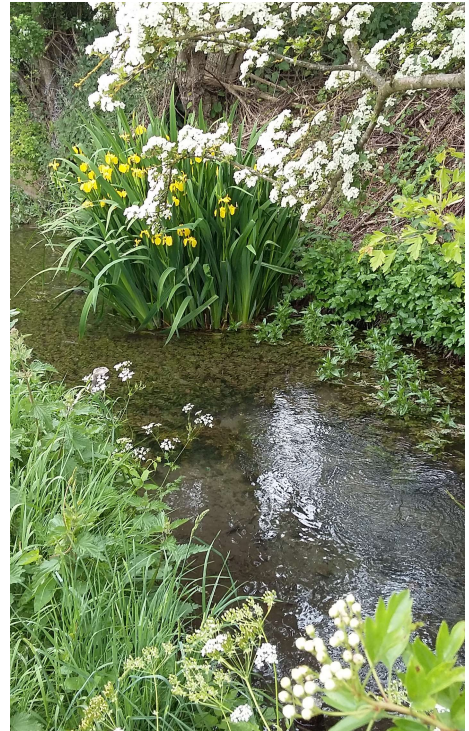
The Lakes

The Anderson Group (AG) provided a brief update on plans for the lakes at zoom meetings with the East Area Community Forum (24 March) and FCHB (31 March). AG is submitting their pre-application for the area north of the railway and the lakes later in April. The name of the lakes is to be "The Lakes" until such time (and if) another more suitable name is found. The lakes would be opened for passive recreational activities (primarily walking). Detailed proposals will be laid out in the consultation document, and there will be opportunities for discussion and submission of comments during the statutory consultation. The earliest that the lakes are likely to open is 2022. In the meantime, AG has taken direct responsibility for security of the lakes and are in contact with the police. They can be contacted directly via their website at www.landsouthofcoldhamslane.co.uk

Sue Wells

Chalking plant names

Now that milder weather is here fresh new vegetation is shooting up along the Brook. To help you identify the plants Emmy and Monica have chalked the plants' names by some of them. They are not all in flower yet, but the following were identified and labelled: Bindweed, Bramble, Coltsfoot with its cheerful yellow flowers, Cow Parsley (don't eat it; it's not garden parsley), Dandelion, Dogwood, Elder, Garlic Mustard (smells as the name suggests), Goosegrass, Hawthorn, Herb Robert, Hogweed, Hollyhock leaves, Iris (stinking – crush the leaves), Ivy, Lords and Ladies, Nettle (stinging), Redcurrant, Rose, Sweet Violet, White Dead-nettle. On the side nearer the Brook the ground is not suitable for writing on with chalk, but the Sedge is beginning to flower and the Meadowsweet is shooting up.



Monica Frisch

Photo of the Brook in May 2018 provided by Anne Rout

Cam Valley Forum

The Cam Valley Forum held its AGM in March. The business proceedings were upbeat. Due to an influx of additional expertise, energy, and new members, activity has moved up a gear. See their website for examples <https://camvalleyforum.uk/reports-consultations/>

The annual lecture was given by Charles Rangeley-Wilson whose work and advocacy on behalf of Chalk streams (England's "Great Barrier reef") is without equal. It is worth searching the internet to gain some idea of the breadth and depth of his involvement. His talk was recorded and can be viewed at <https://camvalleyforum.uk/blog/>. Charles is now the chairman of the National Chalk Stream Restoration Group which, it is hoped, will drive progress by government, and the regulators, water companies, land managers, NGOs and river associations - right down to the grass roots level of those passionate about their local rivers, not to mention the Friends of the Cherry Hinton Brook. David Brooks

Birds along the Brook: March 2020

In spite of some cold Easterly winds, the birds are now in full spring breeding mode. Small birds, such as wrens, robins and tits, can all be seen with nesting materials in their beaks, and bird song fills the air. Blackbirds have started to sing in earnest, joining the robins, wrens and thrushes. Tits and finches are heard and seen all along the brook, including many greenfinches whose numbers were decimated a few years ago from a disease affecting their upper digestive tract. Their wheezing song draws attention to their silhouette visible on the top branches of trees.

The first returning migrating warblers have also been heard, both blackcaps and chiffchaffs, so there is lots to look out for as you walk along the Brook at the moment, especially as the leaves are not yet fully out on the trees and bushes.



Photo: Egyptian Geese in Cherry Hinton Hall

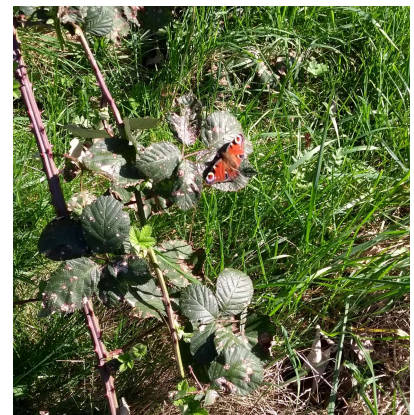
Water birds such as mallard and moorhen are now forming pairs and our resident swans fly between the pits and the pond in Cherry Hinton Hall deciding where to nest (last year they successfully reared 6 of their 7 cygnets from a nest in the pits). A pair of Egyptian Geese is also often seen strutting about by the Hall pond so maybe they will raise a brood this year. Originally escapees from private collections (they are native of South Sahara and the Nile Valley and were considered sacred by the Ancient Egyptians) there are now many feral populations in the UK, although these are the first to be seen near the Brook.

The shy water rail has again been seen near Burnside allotments recently, although it is more usually heard from within the confines of the pits where the water is shallow. The most exciting news was a brief sighting of two Common Scoters (sea ducks) on the pits by Mark Pettit, chair of Cherry Hinton and District Angling Club, which caused a stir and several birders with telescopes rushed to see them. Sadly they had moved on by the next morning, leaving just the more common tufted ducks, mallard and great crested grebe on the pits.

Holly Anderson

Water voles and other wildlife

The spring weather seems to be encouraging the water voles out and about – or perhaps just those who spot them. I have had six reports in March (three more than in February). There are also lots of grey squirrels about and also muntjac deer and rabbits. The recent milder weather and spring sunshine is bringing out the butterflies. Lemon yellow Brimstones are among the earliest butterflies to appear, and Peacock Butterflies (*right*) are beginning to be seen basking in the sunshine.



Monica Frisch

Please continue to send reports of sightings of water voles, and other wildlife to: wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Chalk Aquifer Alliance update

FoCHB recently became an affiliate member of The Chalk Aquifer Alliance: a network of river groups and organisations standing up for chalk streams across the chalk aquifer of England. The Alliance aims to:

- Raise awareness of the plight of all chalk streams. There are 224 English chalk streams and rivers, representing more than the 85% of the world's chalk rivers. 77% of these fail to meet Good Quality status and <5% benefit from special protection.
- Provide a platform to bring together all those working to protect chalk streams:
 - To enable sharing of knowledge and understanding
 - A stronger, collective voice for Campaigning
- Campaign to:
 - End unsustainable abstraction
 - Fight to end sewage release into chalk streams

They regularly run talks about issues facing chalk streams, campaigns and about restoration projects. Forthcoming and archive talks can be accessed at: <https://chalkaquiferalliance.wordpress.com/events/>

The Alliance is currently running a series of meetings for community river groups and their supporters to discuss the next steps for the Alliance and how it moves forward, as well as how groups and their members might be able to help. These meetings also aim to prompt discussion on how the Alliance can best support each other as river groups, as well as bring the issues facing chalk streams to a wider public, both locally in our own catchments and nationally.

It will be interesting to see how groups such as the Chalk Aquifer Alliance will feed into and support other Chalk Stream projects e.g. the National Chalk Restoration Group, which has recently released its draft Chalk Streams Restoration Plan (see www.chalkstreams.org).

Anne Rout

News from Parliament

Abstraction licences

Earlier this year, **The All Party Parliamentary Group for Chalk Streams** welcomed clarification that the *Environment Bill* gives Ministers the power to suspend abstraction licences in those cases where they are causing damage to chalk streams from low flow.

How will this damage from low flow be measured and who will be responsible for doing it? Will this power be acted upon and abstraction licences revoked? The Environment Bill already states that measures to allow revocation or variation of abstraction licences will not take effect until 2028 – and all other solutions must be explored with the licence holder first before these measures can be implemented.

Sewage (Inland Water) Bill

Shockingly, 40% of all of our rivers in England & Wales are polluted with human sewage. Much of this pollution enters our rivers and streams when wastewater is discharged from the very sewage treatment works whose purpose it is to clean it up. In response to this a Private Members Bill has been put forward by Philip Dunne MP, to *place a duty on Water Companies to ensure that untreated sewage is not discharged into rivers and other inland water, thus protecting these precious habitats for wildlife and people to enjoy.*

The Bill also requires the Government, Ofwat and the Environment Agency to seek to ensure water companies comply with that duty, requires water companies to take certain specific steps, and requires the Government to report both on a range of measures that might assist with the achievement of the duty and on the performance of water companies against the duty. For more info go to: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2625/publications>

Write to your local MP now and ask them to support the Sewage (Inland Water) Bill when it is debated in Parliament. This Bill is being supported by a number of charities and campaign groups including The Rivers Trust and Surfers Against Sewage. You can find a letter template to send to your MP on their Campaign Page at: <https://www.sas.org.uk/EndSewagePollution-SewageBill>

Anne Rout

Please help us keep Cherry Hinton Brook clean, for the benefit of the wildlife whose home it is, and so we can all enjoy it looking attractive and litter free.

Data protection To ensure that we comply with the General Data Protection Regulations, we inform you that you are able to withdraw your consent to be on the Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook mailing list should you wish. Your email address and contact details are currently held in our database to receive our email newsletter and other occasional messages about our activities and your membership. We do not sell or share your details with anyone outside the committee of Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook. Should you have any concerns whatsoever about the way we use your data, or wish to withdraw from our database, please let us know.

JOIN US! See www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk for our aims and activities.

Please email sightings of interesting birds, mammals or other species, for our records. We welcome your photos for use in this newsletter. wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

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Monica Frisch (editor@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk) 5th April 2021

