

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

Occasional Titbits, issues 55 & 56, January and April 2018

www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Too busy picking litter!

Apologies for the long gap since the last *Titbits* – we have been too busy picking litter, doing habitat restoration work and generally looking after the Brook. So here, to compensate, is a bumper double issue! We will get back to our regular schedule for the newsletters from now on.

World Rivers Day litterpick 24th September 2017

river
care

To mark World Rivers Day, Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook organised a litterpick to clean up the Brook. Half a dozen volunteers collected about 12 kg collected, as well as a shopping trolley (which was returned to Sainsbury's), a paper trimmer, a cat basket with bottles full of cigarette butts and a nearly new car jack, which was claimed by a member. This was part of a national effort by volunteers to clean up rivers and streams around the country.



Autumn litterpick 2017

This was sparsely attended – perhaps Saturday afternoons are not as convenient for our volunteers as Sunday mornings and it was very damp. But thanks to the volunteers who turned up, and we retrieved a bike, as well as the usual litter.

Spring litterpick 3rd March 2018

The spring litterpick took place just as the snow melted and the temperature rose above freezing for the first time for about a week. Perhaps as a consequence it attracted 21 volunteers, plus some children who collected a record amount of litter: 173.2kg.

It is always sad to see what people throw into the Brook and this time was no exception. Amongst more general litter (bottles, cans, crisp packets) there was a child's tricycle, men's underpants and large pieces of metal. Fortunately there were no syringes this year but there were two large drums of flammable resin which could have polluted the Brook had they spilled out. The most distressing find was a dead kingfisher on the bank, its iridescent feathers still intact, probably killed by the cold weather.



The splinter gardening group - working under instruction from the City Council Biodiversity team – removed a lot of ash saplings from the Cherry Hinton Hall end of Snakey Path.

Rubbish near Sainsburys

The path by the Brook along Sainsburys is regularly strewn with litter, and some inevitably gets blown into the Brook. The managerial staff of the store are usually pleased to try to help once they are aware of the problem so please, as members of Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook or members of the public, do ask to speak to a manager if you see the litter is getting bad again. If we all keep drawing their attention to the litter then maybe more will be done!

2018 Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting will be held on 11th June 2018. Please put the date in your diaries. We shall be reporting on a busy year and there will be refreshments as part of our way of saying 'thank you' to all our volunteers. We would welcome suggestions for a speaker and any offers of help with the organisation of the event. If you have ideas or might be able to help please contact chairman2016@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk .

Bringing a chalk stream back to life

Biodiversity Partnership grant

In July 2015 the Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook received a grant from the Biodiversity Partnership to enable us to carry out improvement works along Cherry Hinton Brook. With the help of volunteers and this grant, we installed six flow deflectors and two riffles in the Brook. These are designed to diversify the channel morphology, increase oxygen levels in the water and create self-cleansing gravel for spawning fish and invertebrates. The grant also enabled us to improve 20 m of the bank, near Sainsburys, by installing coir rolls that are pre-planted with vegetation, and managing riparian habitat by reducing tree cover, letting in more light which helps to increase plant diversity as a habitat for invertebrates and water voles. Some scrub control was done to reduce silt input from leaf fall and increase light levels at Giants Grave.

We estimate that at least 75 volunteers put in about six hours each during the seven working parties between October 2015 and September 2016. Other volunteers helped collect data on water quality through the Riverfly monitoring programme. The work parties and associated organised walks along the Brook helped engage local people in understanding and appreciating the potential of our chalk stream. We were able to showcase the work at events such as the Cherry Hinton Festival, the annual Cambridge Natural History Conversazione at the University of Cambridge and via local radio.



A preliminary investigation by students from University Technical College suggested that water quality is better near the flow deflectors (oxygen levels, biotic factors) and thus that they are having a positive effect. The flow deflectors also seem to be effective in providing more versatile micro-habitats, as demonstrated by the sighting of species such little egret, yellow wagtails, bullhead and more invertebrate species near the structures.

Many thanks to the Biodiversity Partnership for funding this work, the support of Guy Belcher at the City Council with technical advice, Sainsbury's for providing refreshments for the work parties, and all the volunteers who took part.

Pebble Fund grant

In 2017, we successfully obtained some funding from Cambridge Water's Pebble Fund to do some follow-on Brook restoration work. Thanks to the enthusiasm and expertise of Rob Mungovan, of The Wild Trout Trust, at his suggestion we have trialled a new approach that has been used on other chalk streams – essentially raising a section of the stream bed with gravel, and in doing so, creating riffles and increasing oxygenation to benefit fish and other wildlife. This involved some extremely hard work from a fantastic team of volunteers, led by Rob and with the support of Vic Smith from the City Council.

At the end of March, over two days, working parties of about 10 people shifted some 26 tonnes of gravel and stone into a 35 m section of the Brook alongside Sainsburys, using wheel barrows and corrugated iron chutes. Rob directed where the gravel was to be placed, to ensure the correct outcome, and it was fascinating to see how quickly water flow speeded up. Even after the first day, a shoal of Stickleback was seen feeding at the edge of the gravel!



Above: the hard-working volunteers

Left: before the work

Right: after adding the gravel

Photos provided by Rob Mungovan: © The Wild Trout Trust

We could not have done this without the help of our dedicated volunteers and all the support from Rob and Vic. We will see how this stretch of Brook evolves over the summer and then decide what other further work might be necessary.



On the next page...

East Cambridge Country Park and the Lakes; Birdlife along the Brook

East Cambridge Country Park and the Lakes

Several representatives of Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook attended a meeting organised by Cambridge City Council to get an update on progress towards the opening of the lakes and formation of the East Cambridge Country Park. At the moment, the plans for development of the land to the north of the land appear to have stalled, but in the meantime, the Council is keen to start acting on some of the suggestions that have been made for improving the habitat and allowing Cambridge residents to enjoy this unusual city open space.

A working party to clear scrub in order to expose bare chalk suitable for solitary bees and wasps, and open up glades to encourage the development of chalk grassland was organised on 27th January. David Brooks and other FCHB members joined the group of about 20 volunteers, led by members of the City Council and cleared a substantial area on the north side of the main lake.

A series of regular open days for the public is also being planned. The first took place on 11th March, with the lakes open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. for visitors to walk around the unsurfaced 1.7 km circular route. Volunteer and City Council marshals, including some FCHB members, were on site to meet and greet visitors, provide information, and ensure safety. An estimated 1000 people took advantage of this opportunity over the course of the day.

Birdlife along the Brook

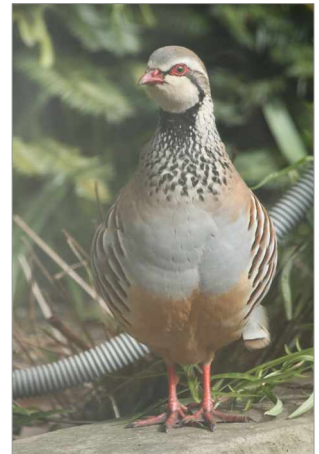
During winter the bare trees along the Brook afforded good views into both the lakes and St Bedes playing fields. Rooks, crows and jackdaws were often seen probing for worms and insects on the grass. Jackdaws, the smallest of these corvids, are easy to identify as they have grey feathers on their heads. A flock of jackdaws nested in the trees by the playing fields a few years ago and were still around this winter. Gulls too use both the field and the lakes, feeding on the fields and roosting on the lakes. Most of the gulls are black-headed gulls, the smallest of our most common gulls. In the summer they are easy to identify as black (actually dark brown) heads are their breeding plumage but in the winter there is only a black mark at the side of the head. Lesser black backed gulls can sometimes be seen too – these are much larger gulls with dark grey backs.



Coots, great crested grebes and tufted ducks (mainly black with white sides) also wintered on the lakes and the egret (*left*) was often visible.

Now there has finally been some warm sunny weather, birdsong can be heard all along the Brook. Resident birds such as wrens are very much in evidence and the summer migrants

have arrived. As well as the usual blackcaps, chiff chaffs and sedge warblers, willow warblers and Cetti's warblers have both been heard for the first time. There has even been a sighting of a red-legged partridge (*right*)!



Please continue to send your sightings of water voles and other interesting wildlife, to wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk Please include date, time and location, using the numbered lampposts on Snakey Path.



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Monica Frisch (editor@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk) 19th April 2017