Friends of The Withey Beds

Autumn 2008

Local Nature Reserve Update

The Friends of The Withey Beds had a busy May. They led the **annual guided walk** around The Withey Beds and the Watford Piscators Lakes as well as hosting a stand at the **Rickmansworth Festival**. The Festival proved to be the most popular to date with record numbers of attendees. The Friends stand was as interesting as ever with Hazel Godfrey, the artist who created the willow hide at The Withey Beds, demonstrating the interesting and intricate art of willow weaving.

There was a **wildflower and butterfly guided walk** in June. Although many of the butterflies were not brave enough to venture out in the poor weather it was not sufficient to put off many people and a host of wildlife. We were lucky enough to spot mating dragonflies, many birds, a couple of butterflies trying their best to warm up as well as a female common chaser basking on the boardwalk which can be seen in the photo opposite. Although its name suggests it is common this is no longer the case so we were fortunate to see this dragonfly at The Withey Beds. We were also able to identify many of the wildflowers and grasses on site thanks to the help of Jez Perkins from the Countryside Management Service.

June also saw Three Rivers District Council collect their second **Green Hero Award**. The ceremony was hosted at the Tower of London and the award was presented to the Council by David Bellamy in recognition of the conservation work which has taken place at The Withey Beds Local Nature Reserve.

As usual a summer **wildlife activity** took place at The Withey Beds as part of the Council's programme nature sessions. In fairly poor weather there were lots of children running around the LNR on a measurement scavenger hunt. They were looking for things of all different shapes and sizes such as something green that was longer than their fingers and something that was taller than their knees!

Future Events

On **Monday 3 November** The Friends of The Withey Beds will be holding their **AGM** at the Council Offices. The meeting will start at 7:30pm. If you fancy joining the committee then why not come along to see how things work and to meet the rest of the team.

Nature Notes by Anna Marett

Many warblers were to be seen on the reserve during the summer - chiffchaff, whitethroat, blackcap, willow, reed and garden, and excitingly, a male sedge warbler was performing its territorial song and flight display. Breeding was not proved.

A female mallard had ten young on the big pond, and a young cuckoo was observed making its thin reedy call from a post by the river. A reed warbler with food in its bill was seen near it making it the likely host though feeding was not recorded.

Several glow worms were again found on the main track. Butterflies seen were meadow brown, green-veined white, comma, large white and gatekeeper. Some of the flowers identified were marsh woundwort, water figwort, great willowherb and purple loosestrife.

Autumn will be the start of seeing tits, treecreeper and goldcrest in small flocks searching for food. Green and great spotted woodpeckers will be more obvious, and nuthatches will be calling frequently. Teal, mallard and moorhen all frequent the pond in winter. Herons and cormorants regularly alight on the tall dead trees on the river side by the road, and kingfishers can often be heard and seen.

If you would like further information on The Withey Beds, or any of the Council owned Local Nature Reserves, contact Kay FitzGerald at kay.fitzgerald@threerivers.gov.uk or on 01923 727105.

GLOW WORM FACTS

- There are about 2,000 species of glow-worms, distributed worldwide. (Family Lampyridae). In Britain there are two native species – the common glow worm (*Lampyris noctiluca*) and the lesser glow worm (*Phosphaenus hemipterus*).
- The lesser glow worm is very rare and can only be found in the southern counties in Britain.
- Glow worms are normally found on grassy slopes, verges and hedge banks, on heaths and in open grassland; especially in chalky and limestone areas.
- Glow worms are nocturnal.
- Adult glow worms are around 15mm in length.
- Adults are normally active from May to late August, with females actively glowing in June and July.
- The females are wingless, unlike the males which can fly.
- Adult glow worms eat and drink very little. However, the larvae predate upon slugs and snails which they inject with a digestive fluid which liquefies them ready for eating.
- The larval stages look similar to the wingless females, but they are smaller. The larvae usually live under stones and logs on the ground.
- The females are larger than the males.
- Only the females 'glow' brightly. The luminous organs, contained in the last three abdominal segments, give off a greenish glow at night and attract winged males for mating.
- When the females are ready to mate they find a good spot in a grassy area and start to emit light which can be seen by any males flying above, which have much larger eyes than the females.
- The luminous organs are made up of a protein layer, called luciferin, and a reflective layer of tiny crystals.
- Light is produced when the protein is mixed with oxygen which then breaks down to produce light. This reaction produces lots of light and very little heat.
- Glow worms can manipulate their glowing by controlling the amount of oxygen that reaches the protein layer.