

Friends of The Withey Beds

Autumn 2010

Local Nature Reserve Update

Sunday 9 May saw the annual **guided walk** around The Withey Beds Local Nature Reserve and the lakes of the Watford Piscators take place. Despite the chilly weather (but fortunately no rain) over 30 people ventured out to learn how both of the sites are being managed for wildlife and the public. Everyone had an enjoyable afternoon and managed to see a sample of the wildlife each of the sites has to offer.

The **Rickmansworth Festival**, which celebrates our canals and environment, took place on 15 and 16 May. This year the Friends of The Withey Beds stall benefitted from the addition of two, very professional, banners to help promote the Local Nature Reserve. Hazel Godfrey, the artist who created the willow hide at the site, was also in attendance. Hazel demonstrated the practice of willow weaving and attracted much interest.



Hazel Godfrey finally managed to get to The Withey Beds in mid-May to weave and tie in the additional growth of the **willow hide**. Hazel had been waiting for the site to dry out sufficiently since November. Finally, when she could wait no longer, she donned a pair of wellies and set to work. The whole process took her, and a helper, three days to complete. Before and after photographs are shown below.



Trevor James, a wildlife recorder for the County, led a guided **wildflower walk** on 25 July. Trevor, who is an expert on vascular plants and has an in-depth knowledge of flora, led a highly informative walk that was full of fascinating facts about the flora of The Withey Beds. One of the highlights was finding a white form (of the normally pink) Great Hairy Rosebay Willow Herb – a form that Trevor has only ever seen at one other site in Hertfordshire.

The Withey Beds LNR has received its annual **cut and lift**. The field, in which the WW2 pill box is located, is 'cut and lifted' around September each year. This is simply cutting all of the vegetation and then taking the arisings off site. The purpose of this management technique is to simulate cattle grazing. Wildflowers thrive in nutrient poor soils so by removing all the vegetation that is cut this means that the ground is not enriched with decaying grass – it removes the nutrients, just as a hungry cow would. The cut and lift is carried out once all of the wildflowers have flowered. The cut vegetation is then left on the ground, for around 48 hours, so that any seed can fall to the floor, ready to grow in the following spring.

Membership subscriptions are now due. If you have not renewed yet then please contact the Treasurer at 16 Sandy Lodge Road, Moor Park, Rickmansworth, WD3 1LJ with your £5.00 or completed Standing Order to continue your valuable, and much appreciated, support. You can also contact the Treasurer at peterrobin2007@googlemail.com

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 776611.

The Withey Beds for Photographers

The Withey Beds is a Hertfordshire based Local Nature Reserve of outstanding natural beauty. It is set in approximately 19 acres of mainly wetland, close to the River Colne. Other micro-habitats include wet woodland, mature trees, swamp, marsh and open ditches. This situation permits the area to support a range of plants and animals, particularly birds and insects that are characteristic of swamp and fen.



It is this diversity of habitat and wildlife, together with its carefully integrated amenities such as the boardwalk and bridges that make it so interesting for the photographer. He/ She can find a wide range of image types including fauna, flora, landscapes and history. There are considerable contrasts by season and time of day.



Some images previously captured at the Reserve are shown on the page, including this glowworm seen late one summer night in 2010.

Key challenges for a photographer include:

- Seeing a picture in a vast expanse of snow
- Seeing patterns in the fencing round the borders
- Knowing where to look for the less common species such as Roesel's Bush Cricket or the Oak Jewel Beetle.
- Adjusting for the sometimes high contrast lighting
- Fitting the correct lens, setting the aperture /shutter speed and then focussing in time for birds to take off or land. Capturing an exit from the owl box below can yield a particularly good shot.

Photographer of the Year

In this newsletter we offer our readers a chance to compete for the title 'Withey Beds Photographer of the Year 2010 / 2011'. Entries can be submitted attached to an e-mail addressed to peterrobin2007@gmail.com, with an upper size limit of 9.5 MB. If you wish to submit pictures in a printed form, rather than as a digital image, please inform the Treasurer at 16 Sandy Lodge Road, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, WD3 1LJ.

The title will be awarded to the originator of the picture that in view of the FoWB Committee and at their sole discretion presents the Withey Beds or some aspect of it in the most attractive way. Other entries may receive an honourable mention. The Committee's decision is final. The prize, which has no monetary value, will be to have the winning picture published in this newsletter and displayed on our stand at the Rickmansworth Canal Festival in May 2011. There is no obligation to award any prize. Members of the Committee may enter images but cannot be awarded the title. Image rights belong to their author. The closing date for the competition is 10th April 2011.



When you visit Withey Beds to explore its photographic opportunities, please take the utmost care not to trample on flora or disturb wildlife. This will help us to preserve the site for future generations.