



Annual Review 2014-2015

Annual Report of the Trustees

for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015

From the Chair

This year has been an unexpectedly busy one for the LOHP – we were anticipating a slow-down in the pace of events after the completion of our three year Heritage Lottery Funded project at the start of the year, but to everyone's surprise we found ourselves applying for further funding and setting up a new project. When we were offered an opportunity to purchase a new piece of land bordering Parkers Piece and Thelnetham Middle Fen we really felt we couldn't refuse – it is another piece of the "fen jigsaw" in the valley, though in the case of New Fen there is currently limited evidence of fen habitat. A study of old aerial photos shows clearly that part of the site was once very 'fenny' indeed, but it has been covered with trees, both a dense plantation and those invading naturally as a result of drying out and lack of mowing. A restoration plan is being drawn up, and we now have plenty of work to keep our volunteers occupied for the next few years.

As small organisation we think very carefully before taking on new commitments, because we have to be sure we are not over-stretching our resources. The joining up of patches of land for wildlife habitat in the valley is one of our core activities though, and there is much evidence that the larger the area of habitat available the more resilient wildlife populations will be to other pressures and changes in the environment.

As ever, our success in attracting funding for our purchases and projects is a result of a team effort among trustees, volunteers and the professionals we work with, and I am very grateful to everyone involved for their continuing support and enthusiasm.

Restoring Habitats

Land Purchase

In May 2014 we purchased 2.2 hectares of land on Fen Lane in Thelnetham. Now referred to as New Fen, this site is another important piece of the Thelnetham Fens complex, having boundaries with Thelnetham Middle Fen (managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust) and Parkers Piece. The site was purchased with the help of another Heritage Lottery Fund Grant, which also included some funds for restoration work on site, project management costs and some training sessions about fen history, ecology and restoration. Ultimately we hope to restore the wet eastern section to fen and the larger drier western side, currently a derelict tree nursery, will be managed as coppice woodland, with a circular path allowing access from the road (which is also the route of the Angles Way footpath).

Site Management

It has been a quieter year on existing sites because many of the capital works from the Higher Level Stewardship had been completed in the previous year. The main outstanding work was the creation of "foot drains" on the bottom field of The Lows, to create wetter conditions suitable for breeding waders. We also created some more turf ponds at Betty's Fen and Hinderclay Fen, ensuring we retain some open water habitat and the associated plants and animals. The old pile of cut vegetation arisings was removed from Parkers Piece and sent for composting. There was some pollarding of trees on the Blo' Norton Fen road edge for safety reasons, and an oak tree had to be felled on Betty's Fen river side because it was considered dangerous. It was leaning over the riverside path, the root plate was being pulled out of the

ground and it was resting on one of a group of three ash trees that were themselves leaning over the path. Consequently the ash trees had to be removed at the same time.

The Estates Management contract, let to Peter Frizzell last year, was renewed for another year. The majority of work in the contract is the annual mowing and collecting on a number of our sites. There have also been a number of minor infrastructure repairs the most common of which has been replacing rotted fence posts on The Lows and Broomscot Common. Peter also makes regular safety checks on our sites.

Denis Jenkins' sheep and cattle, including rare breed Suffolk Redpolls, have been continuing their important job of succession repression on Parkers Piece, Bleyswyks Bank, the Frith, Broomscot Common, The Lows and Webbs Fen. Brian Lambert's cattle were periodically on Scarfe Meadows.

As always we are grateful to our volunteers, to our contractors Peter and Tim Frizzell and their team, Henry Walker and our graziers Denis Jenkins and Brian Lambert, for their assistance with the management of our sites.

On a sad note we were sorry to hear about the death of Dr. Nigel Holmes who organised the in-channel restoration works along the Little Ouse in autumn 2013 and gave the talk at the members' evening that year.

Project Management

In April the LOHP let a contract to Farm Conservation (now re-named as Norfolk Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group) for the provision of two days a month project management support by Henry Walker. This helped us meet our commitments under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, in particular completion of the capital works items and ensuring our land management activities were compliant with the rules of the scheme. Henry knows the LOHP sites well as he previously helped us with our application to the HLS scheme, and he has also been involved in the organising and delivery of some of the training we have done

Wildlife highlights

Evidence that our management is succeeding emerged on Bleyswycks Bank this year in the form of six early marsh orchids which flowered in May. This area, some members will recall, was originally under the deep shade of trees with next to no ground flora. On Broomscot Common there was a brief but spectacular flowering of lady's-smocks where previously there had been overgrown willow. Yellow sedge, a plant that should be typical of wet fens, was found for the first time in the middle of the wet area of Parkers Piece.

We were very fortunate in the numbers of cuckoos seen and heard regularly over the LOHP fens, especially during May 2014. This remains a local stronghold of this declining species. Although marsh tits are declining generally, they are hanging on in LOHP's wet woodland, but sadly no willow tits have been recorded for several years. Kingfishers were seen and heard along the river throughout the year, and bred successfully. It was a good year for nesting blackcaps with many fledging in the scrub and hedges. During the winter flocks of siskins and redpolls were seen regularly feeding in the tops of alder and birch along the river. A pair of barn owls reared one chick on Hinderclay Fen, but unfortunately it died just before fledging.

Water voles were seen frequently (or the distinctive "plop" heard as they dived underwater!) on more stretches of the river and some lucky members actually saw otters, instead of just their spraint (droppings). The bat boxes were occupied by over twenty pipistrelle bats this year, an increase on previous counts. There was a variety of dragonflies over the fens with good numbers of hairy dragonflies on Hinderclay Fen. On the heathland, several small copper, common blue and brown argus butterflies were recorded in August.

Involving people

The volunteer input to the Project has continued to grow. Our regular work parties have been well attended. We continue to run a midweek group on Wednesdays - many thanks to Reg Langston for his leadership - and a Sunday party once a month. We have continued to offer training opportunities to our volunteers. During the year 2 volunteers were trained in the basic use of MapInfo, computer software that is used for

mapping.

In June we had a short training session run by Anne Edwards from the John Innes Centre looking at the symptoms of ash die back disease. We also organised coppicing and woodland management training for volunteers. This was delivered over 3 sessions in February by the forester David Mitchell, supported by Henry Walker. A dozen members attended the first half day at Redlingfield Wood and learned about coppice management. The second morning was at New Fen and focused on practical skills. A third session was held at Redlingfield Wood on a Saturday for volunteers who could not attend in mid-week. Feedback on the training was very positive. Three more volunteers successfully completed the training and assessment for using chainsaws.

Our volunteer photography group has continued its excellent work continuing to record changes on our sites using fixed point photography.

We are fortunate that a significant number of volunteer naturalists, both individually and as members of natural history groups, continue to visit our sites and provide us with their records. The Norfolk and Suffolk Moth Groups held a joint visit in October specifically to search for leaf-mining moths. Particular thanks go to Sylviane Moss for entering all of the LOHP's biological records onto our database, and to Stephen Baillie and Helen Smith for ensuring the information is available on our website.

During the year we published two editions of the News from the Ouse (with further editions just before the start and after the end of this period), with contributions of articles and photographs from a wide range of volunteers, ably edited by Nicky Rowbottom.

Activities

We are delighted that the Creative Group has carried on meeting and arranging its own events since the end of the HLF project.

There were a variety of guided walks during the year. Forty people taking part in the Suffolk Walking Festival Challenge Walk passed through the valley and were shown some of our sites by Helen Smith. In May a Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) organised walk visited some of our sites and Theltenham Mill. In June the Blackbourne U3A (University of the Third Age) group were shown round by a trustee. Volunteers from LOHP and BTO put on a bird ringing demonstration on Hinderclay Fen as part of the ongoing Constant Effort Site ringing programme to monitor the bird population of the fen. In October Su Gough led a large group round Broomscot Common and along the edge of Scarfe Meadows, during which 27 species of fungi were identified. On January 4th there was the ever-popular Winter walk, which attracted a record number of over 60 participants (and a number of enthusiastic but well-behaved dogs).

Other notable events included the annual volunteers barbecue, the AGM with a talk on Ash die back by Professor Allan Downie, and LOHP stalls at the Suffolk Wildlife Trust plant sale in April and the Apple Day in October, at Redgrave and Lopham Fen.

Membership

The total number members at 31 March 2014 was 208. Membership included 144 Friends of the Fens and 64 ordinary members.

Funding our work

Our second Heritage Lottery Fund grant and the River Link Appeal both bought in similar amounts of money this year, as ever we are grateful to Sarah Grieveson, our Appeal Director, for the continuing success of the fund raising appeal. Higher and Entry Level Stewardship agreements and the Single Payment Scheme also brought in significant funds for ongoing site management. We are very appreciative of the support given to the project by all of our funding bodies.

Members of the Board of Trustees

Jo-Anne Pitt (Chair and trustee nominated by Blo’Norton Parish Council)

Reg Langston (Honorary Treasurer and trustee nominated by Hinderclay Parish Council)

Rowena Langston (Vice-chair)

Peter Fox (Honorary Secretary)

Nigel Clark

Helen Smith

Bob Hayward (trustee nominated by Redgrave Parish Council)

Martin Ward (trustee nominated by Thelnetham Parish Council)

Peter Coster (trustee nominated by South Lopham Parish Council)

Paul Brown

Lindsay Medus (Membership secretary)

Norman Groves (Retired July 2014)

John Sears (trustee nominated by Garboldisham Parish Council)

David Hodgkinson (Elected at AGM, December 2014)

Acknowledgements

The Little Ouse Headwaters Project is a voluntary, charitable organisation whose work is dependent on the commitment, goodwill and financial support of individuals, partner organisations and sponsors. It does not employ any staff and so is entirely dependent on the volunteers who contribute in many different ways to its success. We gratefully acknowledge their hard work and support.

LITTLE OUSE HEADWATERS PROJECT SUMMARY OF ACCOUNTS FROM APRIL 1 2014 TO MARCH 31 2015

	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total	Total
	Apr 2014-Mar 2015	Apr 2014-Mar 2015	Apr 2014-Mar 2015	Apr 2013-Mar 2014
INCOME				
Agri-environmental grants (RPA)	6090.49	18396.73	24487.22	24742.93
Appeal	-	37450.00	37450.00	24450.00
Bank Interest Earned	323.27	-	323.27	363.29
Clothing Income	101.50	-	101.50	-
Donations	3340.50	-	3340.50	316.84
Gift Aid Income	357.30	-	357.30	323.70
HLF	-	48830.00	48830.00	52609.00
HLF 2	-	37500.00	37500.00	-
Miscellaneous Income	-	-	-	140.50
Subscriptions	1665.50	-	1665.50	1762.45
Total Income	£11,878.56	£142,176.73	£154,055.29	£104,708.71
EXPENDITURE				
Access and Education	-	2000.00	2000.00	13374.87
Appeal costs	-	3960.54	3960.54	2700.19
Consumables	240.40	641.76	882.16	1249.21
Depreciation	-	-	1440.11	3314.10
Habitat Management	-	22359.61	22359.61	37999.75
Insurance	629.87	-	629.87	529.01
Miscellaneous	48.98	4.20	53.18	8.98
Monitoring	-	6382.31	6382.31	4634.80
Professional Fees	1367.22	21054.01	22421.23	34595.94
Promotion and Voluntary Recruitment	183.16	13191.36	13374.52	10641.77
Rent	1883.00	-	1883.00	1883.00
Training	106.00	6224.56	6330.56	4275.80
Water and Drainage	203.10	-	203.10	277.05
Total Expenditure	£4,661.73	£75,818.35	£81,920.19	£115,484.47
NET INCOME			£72,135.10	-£10,775.76
ASSETS				
	2014-2015		2013-2014	
Land	£254,275		£199,275	
Tools and equipment	£5,073		£3,419	
Cash at bank	£131,203		£130,487	
Represented by: Land purchase and management fund	£83,000		-	
Funds in bank	£48,203		£130,487	

Reserves and Investment Policy The Trustees have reviewed the needs for reserves in line with the guidance issued by the Charities Commission. The Trustees seek funding from various sources and are grateful to the many trusts and grant providers who have contributed so far. As most income is generated in this way and varies widely, and regular membership income is insufficient to meet regular ongoing costs, the Trustees will endeavour to set aside sufficient unrestricted funds to enable the Charity to meet its basic commitments for one year. These funds will be kept in an interest bearing account. These basic commitments include the cost of rent, insurance, health and safety requirements, conservation management obligations on designated sites and basic maintenances such as keeping paths open and safe. The Trustees believe that at 2014/15 prices this reserve should be £15000. Trustees believe that reserves need to be at this level to ensure that the Charity can continue to function should there be a shortfall in grant revenue. This will be reviewed annually. The annual accounts were approved by LOHP Board of Directors on 14 October 2015.

