

As conditions get back to “near” normal activities on the cress beds are returning and we need to make inroads to the list of jobs that has grown over the last couple of years. PLEASE if you can spare a little time come along to one of our work sessions held on the first Saturday and third Wednesday every month. Don’t worry if you think it is too heavy for you to manage, we will find something to suit your ability. It is a brilliant way of keeping fit, meeting people and contributing to your community. We were recently approached by the Oratory School at Woodcote who are looking for some environmental work in the community for some of their students and we are actively pursuing the possibility.

You may have noticed the bridge on the lower site is very close to completion – hopefully on the March Saturday workday. With the cress dying off during the winter months we have been trying to remove some of the accumulated silt from the beds. This heavy work is mostly being carried out by our few younger volunteers and the amazing Sonning Common and Wallingford Green Gyms. We have also been helped in recent months by groups from Amey plc and Vertex Pharmaceuticals. If any readers work for companies that offer a day’s work in the community for their employees let us know.

Guided walks on the first Sunday of the month have resumed, though numbers attending have been small to date, probably as a result of the long period when they were not taking place. We are planning to provide better information on the Visitor Centre notice board about the guided walks and the open days that replace them on the first Sunday from May onwards. We now have printed notes about points of interest on the upper site, that visitors can take round with them on self-guided walks, as an alternative to be taken round by one of the guides. Hopefully, by the time the open day season comes round we will be able to offer the whole “cress beds experience” which includes the historic film about cress production at Ewelme in the 1960s and tea, coffee and cakes as an optional extra. We will also be able to take payments by credit card – virtually essential in this increasingly cashless age. If you find yourselves with visitors on the first Sunday of the month a visit to the cress beds open day is a sure way to impress them with an experience of important local history.

Keep your eyes on the notice boards as there are likely to be some “special” open sessions to tie in with the jubilee, chalk streams restoration and, hopefully, the ever-popular Dr Anne family day will return.

I am sure you will be aware of a couple of sewage leaks into the beds recently. We were lucky that the flow down the brook was fairly high and the contaminant was diluted and dispersed without causing lasting damage. Volunteers undertake monthly surveys of the invertebrates living in the water and, although these creatures are the first to be affected by contaminations, there was no resultant drop in their numbers following the spills.

You may see elsewhere in this copy a request for committee members of the friends of the beds. The management team are also a committee member short and if you feel you would like to help let us know. We try to limit the team to those who work on the beds as that provides a better understanding of the management limitations.

It has been an interesting winter for birds on the beds with regular sightings of Water Rail, Little Egret and Green Sandpiper. Unless I have just been unlucky the Kingfisher sightings have been few

and far between and I have a theory that this is because they have been able to fish on the Thames with the water being clearer with the relatively low flows down there this winter. Winter thrushes have been around in good numbers and it has been good to hear the cronking of ravens on several occasions.

I have recently completed a summary of the wildlife sightings on the nature reserve for 2021 which, hopefully you can access here.

Keith Tibbs & Tom Stevenson

