

Main Work Party Reports

Nov 02 – Jary’s Meadow – Raked and cleared to fire sites/spoil heaps all areas mown on Oct 28. Some bramble cut back with Hedge trimmer then raked and cleared. 8 members

Nov 09 – Snowdrop Acre – Annual maintenance carried out. 7 members

Nov 30 – Howes Meadow – Area B raked and cleared to spoil heap. Attempt made to burn spoil heap in centre of B, some success. 9 members +1

Dec -14 – Walsham Fen - Areas F, K, J &H plus boardwalk from hide to end area K all raked and cleared to spoil heaps. 8 members

Dec 21 – Railway Wood – Annual maintenance carried out. 7 members

Additional Work

Oct 26/27/28/29/30 – Howes Meadow – N boundary ditch preparation for digging out. Reed cut using Hedge trimmer. Raked and cleared cut vegetation.

Oct 28 – Jary’s Meadow– Central section of meadow mown. Nettles around East fire site and main gate area mown.

Nov 01 – Howes Meadow – Continue boundary ditch clearance.

Nov 05 – Limpenhoe Church – Conservation area mown (second cut this year).

Nov 06 – Howes Meadow – Continue preparation boundary ditch clearance. Northern hedge approx. 1/3rd cut. Most of cuttings raked out of ditch from West end towards Eastern boundary.

Nov 08/09/12 – Howes Meadow – Northern boundary large Hawthorn by woodpile cut back. Further hedge cutting carried out.

Nov 14 – Howes Meadow – Continue ditch clearance. Northern boundary hedge further cutting with chainsaw. Cuttings and previously cut reed raked and cleared to fire sites.

Nov 18 – Howes Meadow – Sections of Northern side of meadow mown in preparation for main WP.

Nov 20 – Walsham Fen – Boardwalk network - top and a mower width both sides mown. Sections of boardwalk requiring repair/replacement marked with spray paint. Boardwalk spaced at 360 –approx. 350metres.

Nov – 22/25 – Howes Meadow – Clearing cut vegetation to fire site.

Nov 26 – Lingwood Pond – Some coppicing carried out.

Nov 26 – Howes Meadow – Area A fire site – unsuccessful attempt to burn. North West section some raking and clearance carried out.

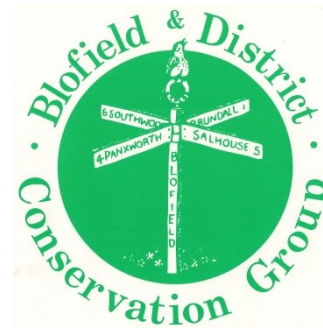
Nov 29 – Howes Meadow – New main gate transported from Lingwood to site. Old gate dismantled and new gate installed.

Nov -30 – Howes Meadow – Attend to fire site started earlier at WP.

Dec -03 – Howes Meadow – New gate, completed fitting gate catch and attached BADCOG sign. Filled gap by gate using hazel stakes as temporary measure.

Dec- 04 – Walsham Fen – Areas F&J and approx 90% of K&H and all of area G mown.

Dec 18 – Walsham Fen – Area G raked and cleared following unsuccessful attempt to burn fire sites in Jary’s Meadow.



BADCOG NEWS.

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Chairmans Update—January 2025

As we enter a new calendar year, it may be worthwhile having a recap on a busy period on the run-up to Christmas.

To start with there's been a lot of work carried out at Howe's Meadow. Despite the weather interfering with our work party schedule, we are now back on track at this site and managed to cut, rake and clear the final section of the meadow, that being on the north side of the stream. A small section in the north west corner is the only area not cut and this is to provide some cover/shelter to a wide range of creatures over the winter months.

Also, the ditch along the north side of the meadow has been scraped out with a mini digger, reinstating the ditch. This work should prevent any run-off from the adjacent arable fields affecting the meadow's delicate ecosystem.

The well-established hedge

alongside the ditch has also been cut back which should benefit this important wildlife habitat. We are very thankful to John Service who organised the ditch work and to John Elvin for his work in cutting back the hedge with his chainsaw. We now need to burn the large heaps that are the result of all this hard work.

Howe's Meadow now also has a new gate which was assembled and installed by a small team of volunteers in mid November and well done to them for a very professional job. Once again BADCOG is very grateful to Cllr Paul Newstead of BDC for the funds towards this project.

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Howe's Meadow gate.
Work party 30th November 2024

We have also been busy at Walsham fen, our largest site. The middle section of the fen has been cut, raked and cleared and the whole of the boardwalk has been cut both sides. In addition to this, an area has been cut and cleared for a second time this year, something we don't normally do. It will be interesting to see if this second cut improves this area which is slowly being invaded by rank vegetation.

At the work party at Snowdrop Acre, it was nice to meet members of Postwick PC. The PC were there to see what we do, as the site is being incorporated into their neighbourhood plan. This action should give the site additional protection from any development in future. It has been suggested to the PC that a new entrance gate would benefit the site, giving better access for us when undertaking work parties.

On the 4th December I had an interesting time with the 2nd Brundall Scout Group. The evening was dedicated to the Scouts achieving their environmental conservation awards and I was invited along to help with this project. I took along the BADCOG Display/Stand and gave a short talk about what we do in the local area. From that the evening continued with games and quizzes, all with an environmental/wildlife theme. I found it all very rewarding knowing that this group of young people are well aware of some of the wider problems the world faces.

Our final work party for the year was at Railway Wood, a site which we own. As normal, there wasn't too much to do here, but at some point we do need to return and do some work on a tree that is leaning too far towards the rail track. As we own this site we need to make sure any trees here don't cause any sort of hazard. After this work party, some of us retired to the 'Shoulder of Mutton' PH for a well deserved pint.

BADCOG EVENING MEETINGS.

**Every 2nd Friday of the month, starting at 7.30pm
Strumpshaw Community Hall, Mill Road**

10th January— A talk by Kathy Phillips from the Hedgehog Society.

14th February — TBD

14th March — A talk on Bird Watching from the BTO

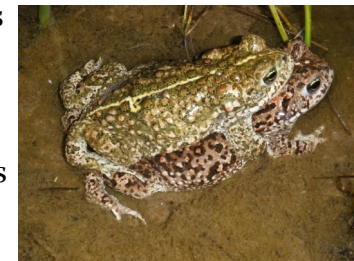
11th April — The Papillon Trust

Natterjack Toads

Over the last century, the natterjack toad has experienced a significant decline in population and range primarily because of habitat loss and fragmentation. They are now highly protected alongside their habitat. Syderstone Common is one of only 60 sites in the UK where the natterjack toad is found – and one of four sites in Norfolk. Now largely restricted to coastal sand dunes, including Holme Dunes and Holkham, Syderstone is one of the few examples of an inland natterjack breeding site in the country.

Anne Simpson-Large, Deputy Norfolk Wildlife Trust Reserves Manager for West Norfolk, said: 'We have been monitoring natterjacks at Syderstone since 1974. We follow the national recording scheme that is led by ARC (the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust) and record the number of strings of spawn each year. This tells us how many breeding females there are, and how many toadlets emerge from the ponds – so we can compare success year on year.

'Natterjack toads lay their spawn in 1-2m strings in temporary, shallow ponds, warmed by the sun. One clutch can contain up to 7,500 eggs. This year was record-breaking with 61 strings of spawn found and probably thousands of toadlets emerging from the ponds. The previous record was 36 in 1983!' *Thomas Roberts*



As well as monitoring the toads, habitat management is key to success. Natterjacks have relatively short legs so need open terrain with sparse vegetation so they can move around. They also need access to sandy soil in which to burrow, places to shelter during the day and shallow, gravelly-bottomed pools in which to breed. Reserve staff have been known to conduct 'rescue missions' with tanks of water to prevent the ponds from drying up before the toadlets are ready. Anne adds: 'We are delighted with the success of the natterjacks this year. However, the fact is that they are a rare species in significant decline and the population here remains incredibly vulnerable. It's vital for visitors to always be mindful of any activity that might disturb these special creatures so they can continue to recover.'

Then and Now - a Challenge

Then did nature's sights abound
In the air, the water and on the ground.
Now in the countryside at dawn
Few are the birds to herald the morn.

Then in our gardens did birds delight,
With tuneful song and plumage bright.
Now such birds are rarely seen,
Gone the wagtail, redpoll, finches bull and green.

Then did waysides and meadows gleam
with red, yellow, blue and cream.
Now rare is seen such gay flora
and our souls are thus much poorer.

Then was unknown the urgent cry
The housing boom and roads to pass by.
Now we know the damage done
The increased power of radiant sun.

Now we must work to save our treasure,
So strive on BADCOG and endeavour
For another forty years or more
To turn the tide of days of yore.

BADCOG WORK PARTY DATES

Work parties start at 10.30am and finish at about 1pm.

All welcome.

4th January 2025—Lingwood Pond

18th January—Jary's Meadow

1st February—Howe's Meadow

15th February—Walsham fen

1st March—Buckenham Woods or Planting scheme (Check details on Website).

15th March— Holly Lane Pond

19th March—Walsham Fen

Check website for any changes!

A Hedgehog Conservation

*The first ever National Hedgehog Conservation Strategy has been published by leading wildlife charities People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) and The British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS). The strategy has been created in response to trends highlighted in the *State of Britain's Hedgehogs 2022* report, also published by BHPS and PTES, which revealed that native hedgehogs have declined by between 30 -75% in rural areas since 2000. To tackle this ongoing decline, BHPS and*



PTES have worked collaboratively with over 30 leading conservation NGOs (including Suffolk Wildlife Trust), academics, educational institutions, hedgehog rehabilitators and organisations within the transport and farming sectors, to create a top-line, national strategy that can guide*

the change that's desperately needed.

The strategy has been designed for conservation NGOs, local councils, farmers, land managers and Government. It highlights the factors causing a decline in native hedgehog populations which urgently need addressing over the coming decade in order to halt the decline and restore numbers in rural and urban Britain. It was developed through a collaborative process facilitated by the Conservation Planning Specialist Group (CPSG) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Species Survival Commission. The CPSG has supported governments, NGOs, and civil society groups worldwide for more than 40 years, designing and facilitating strategies to recover threatened species.

The process to develop the National Hedgehog Conservation Strategy brought together experts to identify key threats - including habitat fragmentation and a decrease in natural invertebrate prey - and how to overcome them. The strategy will evolve as new research findings become available and will act as a framework and reference point for all actions relating to hedgehogs in Britain. It also complements the National Hedgehog Monitoring Programme, launched earlier this year by BHPS and PTES, which will provide invaluable data on population changes

The future for water voles looks brighter.

The success of the Waterlife Recovery Trust's first 2 years of mink eradication brings hope that a century of destruction by mink can be brought to an end and, as the project now expands westwards into 8 further counties - from Lincolnshire to London - hopefully much sooner than was imagined.

American mink were brought to the UK in the early 20th century for fur farming. However escapees and deliberate releases led to feral populations establishing themselves. Mink belong to the Mustelidae family along with weasels, otter and ferrets. Mink are sleek, carnivorous, solitary animals with few natural predators, and pose a significant threat to our native wildlife, in particular our humble water voles.

A threat to native wildlife.

The devastating impact of mink on water voles in Britain is undeniable with water voles experiencing a staggering 90% population decline by the turn of the millennium. Habitat loss played a role but the pressure from mink predation dealt the most severe blow to our favourite riverside rodent. Water voles were made famous by Kenneth Grahame's 'Wind in the Willows' where the main character, Ratty, was actually a water vole.

Mink are excellent hunters and strong swimmers. They navigate waterways effortlessly entering water vole burrows and quickly killing small colonies. They also hunt fish, birds, eggs, amphibians and other small animals. Their habitat adaptability is highlighted by their wide ranging distribution with sightings from the Scottish highlands to urban canals in London.

Mink control efforts are proving successful.

Although there are mink control projects in effect across Britain none have claimed total eradication, until now. Amidst the challenges and pressures we face from mink, there are glimmers of hope. Mink can be caught in cage traps that sit on floating rafts. They are incredibly inquisitive animals always in the hope of finding prey.

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) invented the now distinctive 'mink raft' - a floating platform with a tunnel on top where a cage trap can be inserted. However, by law, active cages must be checked every day to avoid animals being trapped for more than 24 hours. Checking traps daily requires huge amounts of volunteer time and effort and most organisations don't have enough capacity for this.

In East Anglia the Waterlife Recovery Trust (WRT) spearheaded a regional scale mink eradication project. In 2020 over 500 mink rafts were deployed across East Anglia which have since been monitored by trained volunteers and staff. Each mink raft was fitted with a small white box containing remote monitoring technology. This transformed a traditional mink raft into what we are now calling "smart rafts". The remote monitoring software sends an email and text alert to its user, notifying them of cage door activations and allowing 'dispatchers' to respond quickly. Even more improvement came with the use of scent lures - pungent anal gland secretions harvested from dead mink were placed on rafts to attract other mink into the traps. Thanks to the remote monitoring technology, volunteers were able to manage multiple smart rafts concurrently.

In 2023 no evidence of breeding mink was found within the project's 'Core Area' which covers 5,852 km² or about 5% of England. Water voles are beginning to thrive in East Anglia though their populations are still only a fraction of what they were 50 years ago.

Sightings of mink should be recorded to Local Environment Record Centres and PTES' National Water Vole Monitoring Programme asks volunteers to record mink signs too.

***Footnote:** In the past there has been sighting of Water Vole at both Walsham Fen and Howe's Meadow, but nothing has been seen recently. Also, on the 4th December, an otter was seen at Jary's Meadow and on the 18th December a stoat was seen at Walsham Fen. This is really nothing to be surprised about, but it's nice that we have a record of these sightings.*