

MAIN WORK PARTY REPORT

Mar 02 – Jary’s Meadow – Areas mown on 26 Feb raked and cleared to fire sites. Some coppicing and cutting back of bramble carried out. Old tree/shrub guards removed and taken away for disposal. Some investigation work carried out for the installation of a new entrance gate. 11 members +1.

Mar 09 – Jary’s Meadow - Old entrance gate removed, and the new gate installed. 5 members. **Walsham Fen - Areas A1 A2 & H** mown. 2 members.

Mar 16 – Holly Lane Pond – Annual maintenance. Main hedge trimmed. Area around pond scythed and back of pond cleared. All cut vegetation raked and cleared to spoil heap. 7 members. **Howes Meadow** – Area A- approx. 2/3rds mown working. 1 member.

Mar 23 – Howes Meadow – Area A – 2/3rd raked and cleared to fire sites. 6 members

Apr 06 – Walsham Fen – Area A1 – Reeds around the two ponds and around the ditches cut back using brushcutter. The old gate from Jary’s Meadow erected at entrance to fen and some rotten posts replaced. 10 members +1

Apr 20 – Jary’s Meadow/Walsham Fen – WF – Cleared the remaining trees/shrubs felled and left by UK Power Network. Attached the final bracket to the entry gate to the fen. **JM – W meadow** – cut back encroaching bramble on west side, mowed and cleared a 6metre strip between shrubs and meadow. Bramble patch in centre of meadow and path network on west side mown. 8 members.

Additional Work

Feb 26 – Jary’s Meadow – East meadow – section north side between orchard to centre path to WF- cut deep into bramble areas – also West meadow small area of bramble to E of seat.

Feb 28 – Lingwood Peters Wood access Footpaths – Following report to EH ref some damage done to oaks planted in hedge lines. Oaks checked and found damage. Repaired using secateurs, loppers and hand saw. Some lower branches removed, tidied up upper ones. 3 oaks by FP3 N of bungalow pruned as had been topped when main hedge was cut.

Mar 07/08/09 – Howes Meadow – Area A – burning W end fire site.

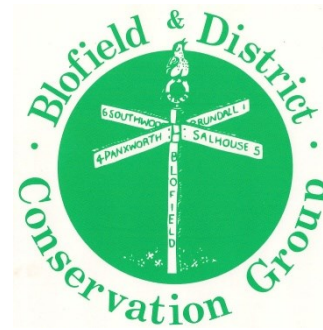
Mar 26 – Howes Meadow – All dry reed from WP on 23 Mar burnt at W & E fire sites

Mar 11 – Jary’s Meadow – Apple trees pruned.

Mar 13 – Jary’s Meadow – Apple tree prunings reduced and added to fire site.

Mar 25 – Howes Meadow – Area A - burning E end fire site, pile reduced by half, left fire smouldering.

Apr 17 – Walsham Fen – Area C/D – commenced the clearance of cuttings and timber from beneath the power lines following the trimming of the willows/shrubs by the UK Power Network team. Approx 80% of the lighter brush cleared leaving the heavy thick trunks to be cut into manageable sections to be removed and stacked at the next WP.



BADCOG NEWS.

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CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE MARCH 2024

We are once again very grateful to the Bure Valley Conservation Group (BVCG) for their help at Walsham Fen. On the 20th March the group raked and cleared the area directly in front, and to the right of the hide. This was the last remaining area of the fen to be cut until we restart the mowing program again in the autumn. The whole site is looking very good with the exception of the boardwalk. If you do intend to visit the fen, then please take care on the boardwalk as some sections are in desperate need of repair. This is something we have tried to do ourselves but this job is now beyond our capability.

Howes Meadow is also looking very good this spring, with all areas now cut, raked and cleared during the winter and early spring. In addition to our main work parties at this site, John Elvin has been down at the meadow cutting and clearing the dyke and other areas, so thank you John

Some of you may have seen in the NCC publication, 'Your Norfolk', the article titled 'One Million Trees in Norfolk'. This got me thinking about all the planting BADCOG has been involved in since November 2019. Fortunately, Tony Bowyer has for many years maintained a very good record of all our work parties, including any planting of trees and shrubs. From his records alone with some additional research, Tony has been able to compile a very detailed list of our achievements. Since November 2019, a total of 164 trees and 975 hedging plants have been planted in the local area. A worthy mention is that many of the trees have been planted independently by Ernest. This list has now been forwarded to NCC.

Finally, as mentioned in the last Newsletter, the new gate at Jary’s Meadow has now been installed. Thanks to all who helped with fixing it in place, and thank you to all who have turned up at any of our work parties in the past two months.



Cantley Sugar Factory ~Steve Cash ~ March 2024 talk.

Steve Cash joined British Sugar in 1970 and worked at Cantley from the 1980's. He is now the archivist for British Sugar. His talk and photos mostly covered the social aspects of sugar production.

By the 16th century crystal sugar was made from sugar cane grown in southern Europe and then in the West Indies. It was very expensive. Poorer people had to make do with molasses found at the bottom of imported barrels of sugar, hence the expression '*scraping the barrel*'. Alexander the Great is said to have chewed on sugar cane before a battle.

In 1747 Andreas Marggraf, a German chemist, isolated sugar from Beta Maritima (sea beet). In 1801 Franz Achard experimented with other beets, and found sugar beet to contain the most sugar. Selective breeding has improved the beet and yield to the levels we have today.

However, it was not until the Napoleonic wars when the British Navy blockaded French ports impeding the importation of sugar, that beet was grown for sugar production in Northern Europe. In 1811 the French started to plant large quantities of beet and small factories were built. By the end of the 1880's beet sugar had replaced cane in Europe. However, because of Britain's sugar production in the colonies, and reluctance of farmers to grow beet, it had not taken off here.

By the early 20th Century, it was decided to add beet into the crop rotation cycle in Britain. Joannes van Rossum was growing beet in the Netherlands, and saw the commercial opportunity of growing in East Anglia. Firstly, he grew the beet here and it was processed in his factory in the Netherlands. The Anglo Netherlands Sugar Corporation was born and a factory site was selected. Cantley was chosen as a good site with the rail station, River Yare and adequate road connections.

In March 1912, construction of the factory at Cantley was started, and was finished by November despite the flooding that year. A Norwich company, Hobrough and Sons, constructed the steel frame and machinery came from Dordrecht Sugar Factory in the Netherlands. Some migrant labour was used both on the land and in the factory. Coal, construction materials and sugar beet were delivered by rail, river (wherries until 1960's), and road. Production stopped during WW1 and the factory started to operate again in 1922 as 'The English Beet Sugar Corporation. In 1938 the Sugar act amalgamated factories and subsidized sugar production. Continues next page.....

White-tailed eagles in Suffolk

A pair of white-tailed eagles have been spotted near Bury St Edmunds
The white-tailed eagle is the UK's largest bird of prey and went extinct in the UK in the early 20th century, therefore the current population, including the pair seen near Bury St Edmunds, are descended from reintroduced birds.



White-tailed eagle are listed as 'Amber' under RSPB's UK conservation status, with resident birds found mostly in Scotland - with smaller numbers along the coasts of southern England and East Anglia, as their diet is largely fish, resulting in their nickname as 'sea eagles'.

The sight of white-tailed eagles further inland in Suffolk demonstrates how they are adapting in the face of habitat loss and climate change. However, it is common for them to be this far inland as they will travel vast distances cross-country given a fair wind.

One of the eagles seen near Bury St Edmunds is a younger bird believed to be from The Netherlands. Younger white-tailed eagles tend to be 'vagrant' - leaving their family of origin in search of food and potential new territories. The birds can be quite opportunistic and take advantage of quieter parts of the countryside to hunt on various prey. In the absence of fish, they will hunt terrestrial animals such as small deer, hare and geese.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust 1st February 2024

BADCOG WORK PARTY DATES

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

All welcome!

11th May—Buckenham woods

8th June—Lingwood Churchyard

22nd June—Hemblington Churchyard

6th July—Blofield Churchyard

Note: 9th July—Yarmouth Green Gym at Blofield Churchyard

Check website for any changes!

After breeding the adults die-off and the young shrews carry the population through the winter before becoming sexually mature the following spring, ready to breed in the summer following their birth. Species Fact Sheet: Water Shrew (*Neomys fodiens*)

Conservation Status Because water shrews are never very abundant, it is difficult to tell if their populations are under threat. They are still numerous in many sites where long-term studies have been conducted. The likely reasons for any decline in their numbers are habitat loss and water pollution. While they can tolerate a good deal of disturbance from human activities, drainage schemes and river-bank clearance may adversely affect them by altering the water supply, reducing their food supplies, destroying their burrows and the vegetation cover. They are very vulnerable to pollutants and pesticides in the water which they ingest indirectly via their prey and directly through their grooming activities.



Climate change effects.

The Copernicus Climate Change Service found February 2024 to be the warmest on record at 1.56C above pre-industrial levels. Encouraged by a more temperate climate, ring-necked parakeets have been colonising Britain since the second half of the 20th century. A flock in Glasgow is the northernmost colony of these parrots in the world. In Norfolk, bee eaters with their shimmering turquoise wings are breeding. A small number have taken up summer residency at a disused quarry in Trimingham near Cromer, and more birds have also been spotted nearby. These European bee-eaters like company, nesting together in small groups where they can be heard chattering away with a “prrrp prrrp prrrp” call. They dig their own nest holes in sandbanks or quarries and usually pair up for life, with males serenading the females with songs, aerial courtship displays and gifts of food.



Coal was required in large quantities for processing the beet, although gas has now been connected to the plant. The iconic high chimneys with steam belching forth during ‘the campaign’ from October to March has been a feature of the landscape for decades. Although the beet is still sliced and sugar processed at Cantley, the ‘steam’ has been absent for the last couple of years as animal feed, a by-product from the beet, is no longer processed and dried at Cantley.

The factory is automated now and employs few people compared to the estimated 600 when set up in 1912. Judith Robertson

Footnote: Our monthly evening talks have finish for this season and we have all once again enjoyed a wide range of excellent guest speakers, all of whom have broadened our knowledge of the natural world and our local area. A big thank you to John who has organised these talks, along with both Beryl and Judith for providing the refreshments. BADCOG evening talks will resume again in the autumn.

Weather snip from Lingwood

Ernest Hoyos

In January’s Newsletter I gave a report on last year’s weather records for Lingwood, but we were only half way through December 2023 when I had to send in my bit to meet the deadline for our Newsletter.

Dec 2023 finally produced 72mm (2.83in.) of rain, just above average at 103%, making a total for the year of 785.5mm (30.73in.) and our wettest year since 2014. I’ve been recording local rainfall since 1971 and it wasn’t until 1993 that we exceeded an annual total of 762mm (30in.). as we also did in 1999. 2001 was our wettest year on record at 854mm (33.63in.). We’ve also exceeded 762mm (30in.) in 2007, ‘12, ‘14 and ‘23.

Temperatures have been remarkable in the last four months, Dec. 2023 ended 2.0c above our average.

Mean temperature for January 2024 was 0.5c above average, February’s was an unprecedented 3.5c above and March was 2.0c above. In other words we haven’t really had a winter, hence only halfway through April the countryside is greening up and bluebells are rapidly coming into full flower.

As for this year’s rainfall so far, January was average at 57mm (2.24in.), a slight relief after the very wet Autumn, however this was followed by the wettest February I’ve recorded back to 1971 with over 100mm (3.93in.).

On 3rd March I measured the level of water in our well i.e. from the top of the brickwork down to the water. It was 1.73m or 5’ 7”, the highest I’ve seen. We really missed the wet March here in Norfolk that affected most of the rest of the country, only having 31mm (1.22in.) making it our driest month since June last year. I measured our well water again on 3rd April and it was 2.7m or 8’ 10”, quite a variation, but still a remarkably high-water table bearing in mind we are on a hill even if it is a Norfolk hill.

Regular wildlife sightings from All Saints Churchyard, Hemblington

The church stands remote from the hamlet of Pedham/Hemblington, surrounded by farmland with a small copse of trees nearby. For many years the wildflower-filled churchyards have been cut and raked up in mid-summer, on the south side by BADCOG and more recently on the north side by the Bure Valley Conservation Group.

Keen to understand and record the wildlife attracted by the churchyard flora, irregular wildlife surveys started in 2016. Since 2020 a small team of three experienced birders organises regular monthly one hour surveys, noting all wildlife heard or seen in, over or around the churchyard. Originally survey dates were publicised in advance, so that anyone interested could join. Sadly however this never attracted community support, so dates convenient to the group are agreed - and when the weather forecasts look good!

It is appreciated that these are not robust scientific surveys and reports, but over the last six years, a surprising number of species of bird and lepidoptera have been viewed from the churchyard and some excellent photographs taken. Reports are completed at year end and sent to the Norfolk Wildlife Trust churchyard section, Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service, ARocha Eco-church team and the Caring for God's Acre group.

It felt evident to the group that species numbers had declined in 2023, and this report had set out to compare and contrast numbers over the last four years. It is therefore rather surprising that the actual numbers do not seem to reflect the group's perception!

There has certainly been an increase in the number of raptors seen in the area, especially buzzards and red kites, with the very occasional merlin and hobby. In the report the date and timing of the survey is noted together with sky coverage in oktas, temperature in degrees C, wind direction and perceived windspeed.

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Bird species	49	49	45	44
Butterfly species	15	15	7	10
Dragonfly species	6	4	5	5
Bee species	6	9	4	7

The full reports are available on Hemblington church's website:
www.hemblingtonchurch.org.uk

Each survey is reported with many photographs on the Birds of the Heath blog run by local naturalist David Bryant: <https://birdsoftheheath.blogspot.com/>

A recent local record 3rd Feb; Walsham Fen: Water shrew (*Neomys fodiens*)

Recognition: Largest of Britain's shrews. Long pointed snout, small ears, tiny eyes. Fur is short, dense, velvety and jet black on the upper surface of the body, usually greyish white/ yellowish underneath. Most have a tuft of white hairs on ears and white hairs around eyes. Distinctive stiff white hairs on the margins of the feet, and underside of the tail forming a keel. Size: 67-96mm, tail 45-77mm. Weight: 12-18g. Life Span: Short lives lasting no more than about 19 months.

Distribution & Habitat The water shrew is found throughout mainland Britain but is probably rather local in northern Scotland. It is present on many of our larger islands, including the Isle of Wight, Anglesey, Arran, Skye and Mull but is absent from Ireland, the Scillies and Channel Islands. It is semi-aquatic and is most often found in habitats close to water, including the banks of streams, rivers, ponds, drainage ditches, reed-beds and fens. It is particularly numerous at water-cress beds. Occasionally it is found far from water in rough grasslands, scrub, woodlands and hedgerows, usually as young are dispersing. They have low populations densities compared with most small mammals.

General Ecology

Behaviour Water shrews inhabit burrows and come out to feed on invertebrates. The water shrew is most unusual amongst mammals in possessing venomous saliva. A mild toxin secreted into the saliva in the mouth helps to stun the prey. Even humans can feel the effects of this if bitten by a water shrew. Even though the shrew's bite rarely punctures the skin, a red rash appears at the site of the bite which is sore to touch. They do not hibernate; they remain active all through the year, diving for aquatic prey even in mid-winter. The fur is denser than in other shrews, efficiently insulating them against cold and wet.

Diet and Feeding Their main food source is freshwater shrimps, water skaters and caddis larvae which they obtain by diving and hunting underwater. Occasionally frogs, newts and small fish are eaten. They also feed on many terrestrial invertebrates such as earthworms, snails and beetles.

Reproduction Water shrews are generally solitary, each maintaining its own territory, although they frequently live in close proximity to each other in a favoured area of stream-bank. They breed throughout the summer, producing two to three litters, each with 3-15 young, between April and September. Females produce their young in a nest woven from dry grass, usually in a burrow or under a log.