

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook: Occasional Titbits, No. 17, February 2011

www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Chairman: John Collins Secretary: Holly Anderson

Please forward or print out and pass on to anyone else who may be interested. If you have items suitable for inclusion please let me have them as they arise. If you wish to be taken off this group email list please let me know.

1. Spring nature notes

Spring is on its way (13 February), with lots of fresh green feathery foliage of cow parsley coming up and a patch of sweet violets in full flower near St Bede's Gardens. Shoots of other bankside plants are emerging, including the water figwort, willowherbs and nettles. There are catkins on the alder trees, recognisable by their cones which persist from one year to the next. Hazels have similar catkins but usually grow as bushes and don't have cones (but, in due course, hazel nuts). The leaves on the weeping willows are just beginning to open and the young catkins can already be seen, while the sticky horse chestnut buds are getting fat.

Monica Frisch

Birds too are showing signs that spring is coming (17 February). The song thrush has been singing to proclaim its territory since mid January and in February it was joined by dunnoek, wren and chaffinch. Robins sing all year, but have now replaced their mournful winter song with a more upbeat tune, hoping to attract a mate. In spite of the major bridge work at the entrance to the Tins path the birds do not seem to have been daunted by the machinery and a melodious dawn chorus begins every morning in the willows along Burnside at about 6.30am.

On the brook itself the water birds are beginning to pair up. Male mallard glide close behind the females of their choice, jealously guarding them from any other potential suitors. Males are notoriously aggressive and have been known to drown females whilst "defending" them in a frenzy of passion. On the lakes, grebes and coots (resident), tufted duck and black headed gulls (which winter here) are all getting ready for the start of their breeding season. The tufted duck will soon fly further north and the gulls move to the coast but both grebes and coots stay for the whole year, producing their young here in late spring.

A new addition was sighted on the brook during the cold snap: two little egrets (small white heron-like birds) were in the water near the path leading to Sainsbury's for a week before flying off. Twenty years ago egrets were almost unknown in the UK but warmer weather has meant they now breed here; in Norfolk and on the South Coast they are quite common. Although it was exciting to see them on Burnside, it is probably beneficial to our resident kingfishers that they have moved on, as both species would be in competition for the small fish in the brook. "Our" kingfishers give such delight to so many people, it is a real privilege to have regular sightings of them in a City environment.

Holly Anderson

2. Friends' Litter Pick, Sunday 20 February



A jolly good time was had by 13 lucky Friends. Efforts were concentrated on the far bank from Snakey Path where one or two decade's worth of half-buried rubbish had accumulated. Access to the rubbish depended largely on volunteer waders equipped by Andrew Walters of Keep Britain Tidy who also advised us on the risks of such a hands-on, or rather feet-in, project. Many thanks to the model workers. On 6 November we shall probably go downstream where large quantities of litter accumulate in the vicinity of Sainsbury.



3. Giants Grave Edward Turnham leads the way in PM Cameron's Big Society. The photograph on the left was included in the January 2011 edition of the Cherry Hinton Conservatives newsletter. Edward and friend Tim Haire, being fed up with the state of the pond, 'took matters into their own hands'.

David Brooks 01223 244528 25 February 2011