

# Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

## Occasional Titbits, issue 64, May 2020

[www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk)

### Birds along the Brook

The first Sunday in May is International Dawn Chorus Day and the birds have been singing as if they knew! May is when most of the summer migrants have returned to breed in the UK and they join the resident birds to proclaim their territory by singing loudly. This year has seemed even more full of bird song, with less traffic about and people more absorbed in the wonders that nature can offer as solace. Indeed it is one of the positive things to hold onto – that other creatures and nature all around is thriving, even more than usual on our currently less polluted roads and open spaces.

All the warbler species have returned from wintering in Africa. Blackcaps with their sweet melody and Chiff Chaffs calling out their names are frequently heard along the Brook. One Cetti regularly bursts into its explosive song near St Bedes Crescent and the plaintive descending notes of the Willow Warbler was also heard for one day before flying onto a more suitable nesting site. Cuckoos have been heard over the lakes in the last couple of weeks, just for a short time in the mornings. Perhaps they too are passing through to Lakenheath or Wicken Fen where each year several predate the nests of the Reed Warblers on the more expansive fens. A Tawny Owl was heard by several residents of Burnside in late March – again this was a bird passing through our patch seeking a more rural location. Although Swifts had been seen in the north of the city around 8<sup>th</sup> May the first report of them on Burnside was on 11<sup>th</sup> May. Two Common Terns were spotted in early May.

Corvids such as Jackdaws, Rooks and the colourful Jays are all thriving, although sadly often at the expense of nestlings such as Robins, Dunnocks and even Blackbirds. But, in spite of this, the smaller birds are managing to produce enough young and the trees and plants alongside the Brook are full of busy parent birds collecting food for their youngsters. One Mallard has raised a small brood of ducklings and the Moorhen chicks should be seen any day now on the Brook.

### Other wildlife along the Brook

As we reported Peter Pilbeam saw no Water Voles, droppings or feeding stations during his survey on 15<sup>th</sup> March, but we are now getting more and more sightings of this little animal. They have been spotted several times, usually near St Bedes playing fields but also nearer the Burnside allotments, between lamp posts 1 and 8.

We have had several reports recently of a grass snake – quite harmless to us, though it will eat frogs and chicks of water birds. Video here: <https://twitter.com/TomSharrock/status/1250774136135262208>

***Please help us keep Cherry Hinton Brook clean, for the benefit of the wildlife whose home it is, and so we can all enjoy it looking attractive and litter free.***

### A possible invader on Snakey Path?

The plant Alexanders, or horse parsley (*Smyrnium olusatrum*), has been recorded in the Cherry Hinton area for many years according to the *Flora of Cambridgeshire*. This celery-flavoured plant was introduced to the UK from the Mediterranean by the Romans, who called it the “pot herb of Alexandria” as all parts of it are edible. It grows very rapidly in early spring along hedgerows, banks and roadside verges and looks like a tall yellow, thicker stemmed version of cow parsley. It used to be found mainly in coastal areas and warmer parts of Britain as its Mediterranean origins means that it does not survive long hard winters.



Photo (above) tackling Alexanders © Sue Wells

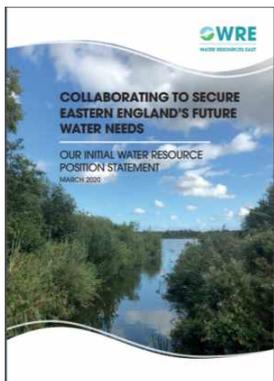
By the 1960s Alexanders had started to spread. Over the last few years, with milder winters, it has been spreading more rapidly, particularly in Norfolk, and is appearing in ever-increasing quantities. In recent springs, it has been abundant along Snakey Path, adjacent to the Blacklands allotments, and we think it may be expanding its range there. As the Norfolk Wildlife Trust website (below) explains, it is very aggressive and can shade out smaller vegetation – the abundant larger shiny black seeds germinate very readily – and as climate change progresses it could become a problem. Guy Belcher, the City Wildlife Officer, suggested we should help control it by removing the flower heads before they go to seed (these can be composted without causing further problems), and so some of us have been having a go. The Wildlife Trust is tackling it at the Lime Kiln Hill nature reserve. This year it almost completely covered the road verges from the Robin Hood pub out to Fulbourn, so there is a potential problem developing.

<https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife-in-norfolk/species-explorer/plants/alexanders>  
Further information about invasive species can be found here <http://www.nonnativespecies.org>

## Tackling over-abstraction in Cambridge

At the end of April, the Cam Valley Forum (CVF) organised a meeting (held virtually) with Water Resources East (WRE) and other interested parties to discuss approaches to sustainable water management in Cambridge. The CVF's River Cam Manifesto, which lays out the problem, has been widely circulated <https://camvalleyforum.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/The-River-Cam-Manifesto-final2.pdf>.

WRE is one of five planning groups set up around England to develop regional water resource plans. The East (stretching from the Humber south to Basildon and west to include Northampton) is predicted to face a gap between supply and demand of a quantity of water equivalent to 40 Olympic sized swimming pools daily, if water resources continue to be managed as they are now.



Regional planning is needed because the statutory water company plans alone (in our case Cambridge Water) are unlikely to provide the solutions for the country as a whole. WRE has to produce a Regional Water Resource Management Plan by September 2023. Further details are available here: [www.wre.org.uk](http://www.wre.org.uk). CVF and its partners are anxious that the plan should fully address the concerns in Cambridge. The current water deficit is already damaging the environment and CVF will engage with WRE as planning proceeds, to try to ensure that the Cam and its tributaries do not suffer further. FCHB will continue to take part in the discussions to ensure that the planning reflects the needs of Cherry Hinton Brook, its wildlife and all those who benefit from its presence. The importance of the Brook to Cambridge residents has never been so evident, with many enjoying the peace and quiet that it brings.

**Data protection** To ensure that we comply with the General Data Protection Regulations, we inform you that you are able to withdraw your consent to be on the Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook mailing list should you wish. Your email address and contact details are currently held in our database to receive our email newsletter and other occasional messages about our activities and your membership. We do not sell or share your details with anyone outside the committee of Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook. Should you have any concerns whatsoever about the way we use your data, or wish to withdraw from our database, please let us know.

**JOIN US!** See [www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk](http://www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk) for our aims and activities.

Please email sightings of interesting birds, mammals or other species, for our records. We also welcome your photos for use in the newsletter.

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