

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

Occasional Titbits, issue 65, October 2020

www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

World Rivers Day litterpick

On Sunday 27th September we had our Autumn litterpick to coincide with World Rivers Day. In line with government guidance we went out in three groups of six people, having asked people to book a place so we knew how many were coming. This worked extremely well and we covered a large portion of the Brook, collecting 95 cans and 64 bottles as well as a wide range of other items, both large and small. Thank you to all those who took part. We will be holding **another litterpick** on **Sunday 22nd November** - details to be announced. *Nicola Fawcett*

Citywide issues - water, chalk streams and green spaces

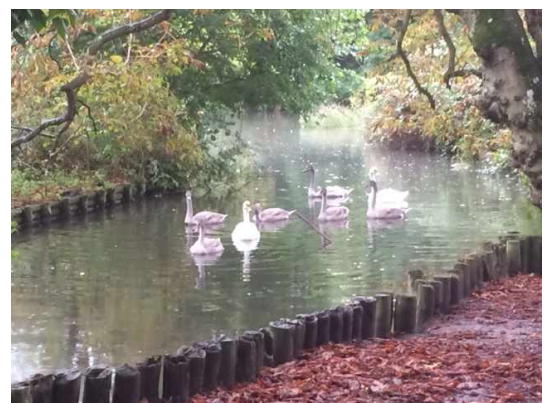
In the last issue of *Titbits*, we described the problem of water over-abstraction in Cambridge. We have continued to support the Cam Valley Forum in their efforts to generate action to resolve this problem. FCHB submitted a response to the South Staffordshire Water, Cambridge Region Drought Plan - Pre-Draft Consultation. FCHB has also joined the [Chalk Aquifer Alliance](#), a network of river groups and organisations that supports the restoration and protection of chalk streams and campaigns for the reduction of abstraction to sustainable levels.

This summer, the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Office put out a Green Spaces Consultation, followed by a Call for Sites, to gather information that would be fed into the exercise to compile the new [Greater Cambridge Local Plan](#) – a process that will take place over the next few years and involve further consultations. FCHB submitted a short document outlining the importance of the Brook as part of the green corridor, and completed an online survey providing further detail about the area. This resulted in one of the consultants working on the Plan contacting us for further information, and also assuring us that this area will be given due consideration in the new plan. *Sue Wells*

Birds and wildlife along the Brook autumn 2020

The Brook and its wildlife have continued to delight local people during these last challenging months. Joggers, cyclists, walkers, families have all been using Snakey Path and showing an interest in nature.

The resident swan family laid eggs on a nest inside the lakes and, once the brood of seven hatched, became the main attraction by regularly swimming up and down the Brook from Burnside Allotments to Cherry Hinton Hall ponds. At first they would return to the lakes at night but sadly one cygnet was unable to find its way through the fence to join the others and was lost. However the other six are now almost fully grown and the whole family stays on and around the ponds in Cherry Hinton Hall. They have a fan club which watches over them carefully and feeds them daily. [photo: Holly Anderson]



Mallards and moorhens have also successfully raised young and many small birds, such as blue tits, robins and dunnocks, have had several broods this year. At this time of year small birds often group together in mixed flocks to feed along the hedgerows at the side of the Brook. Occasionally a coal tit or even a goldcrest can be seen with them, so look carefully as they fly through the vegetation.

Although not seen regularly the kingfisher is still sometimes visible on the Brook and the little egret has recently been spotted for the first time this autumn. Grass snakes and water voles have also been seen along Snakey Path. We always want people to report any sightings, so please get in touch with us

by emailing wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk if you see any birds, mammals or butterflies along the Brook. With more people looking we can build up a better picture of what wildlife there is around in this Green Corridor so close to the City Centre. *Holly Anderson*

Water voles along Cherry Hinton Brook

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook have been noting sightings of water voles (*Arvicola amphibius*) since 2013 and Peter Pilbeam has undertaken more systematic surveys for us in May 2015, May 2017, May 2019 and in March and June this year. While Peter did not see any voles when he did his survey on 26th June this year he commented that “the vegetation was very well-grown and most of the far bank couldn’t be seen, so it is entirely possible there were signs on that side”. However, we know the water voles are still there as we have been sent photos, videos and reports.

Sightings of voles have been reported to us in almost every month though we get fewer reports in the winter (September to April) partly because probably fewer people are out looking for voles – and there’s less daylight for spotting them. This year the highest number of sightings were in June and July (10 and 11 respectively).

It is not possible to gauge the size of the water vole population from these sightings as we do not know how many people see voles and do not report them to us, nor how often people are looking for voles. In addition the amount of vegetation may make voles harder to spot, especially later in the summer. *Monica Frisch*

Willow Emerald sighting

Vanessa Willis took this lovely photo (right) of a Willow Emerald Damsel, which was a rare vagrant species but has increased in numbers over the past three years. As Vanessa says, “lovely to see a species buck the trend and increase in numbers!”



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.

Anti littering signs

In the April newsletter, we explained that we were preparing new signs. These are designed to make people realise that throwing away litter in the Brook damages the wildlife and vegetation, and also causes pollution. We have used the remaining funds from the Pebble Fund grant (used mainly for creating the gravel area in the Brook by Sainsbury’s), for this purpose. RiverCare kindly provided the designs.



We have put four signs up. The large one is at the side of Sainsbury’s where the staff go to smoke, and explains why cigarette butts hurt the environment. Three smaller ones (one outside Sainsbury’s and two on lamp posts on Snakey Path) focus on the wildlife and the water vole. I hope you like them. *Emmy Smart*

The Brook, litter and fencing

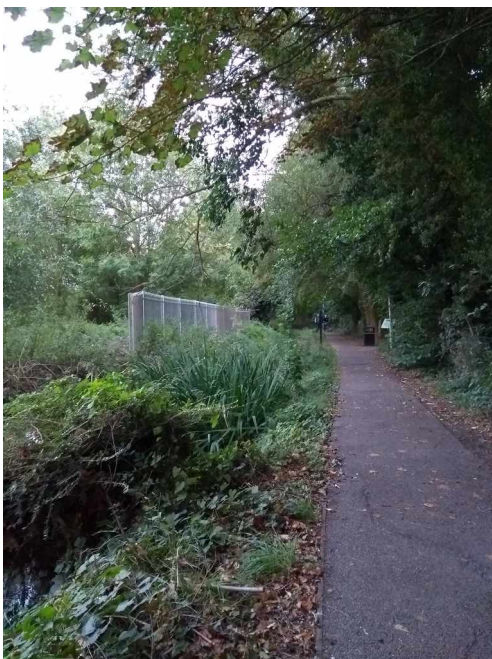
Many people have written to us about the amount of litter and debris in the Brook close to Blacklands Allotments, and about the new notices and industrial fencing erected along the stretch between Dawes Lane and St Bedes Crescent. Sadly young people have always trespassed into the lakes, some behaving irresponsibly. The very warm weather and lockdown exacerbated this over the summer, with the lakes being advertised on social media encouraging “wild swimming” and gatherings. This caused increasing upset among local residents, Blacklands allotment holders and the many users of Snakey Path. FCHB responded to several enquiries, helped to alert relevant authorities to the problem, and disseminated information about actions being taken.

First, we are all very grateful to Karen Olsen’s team of volunteers from Cherry Hinton for their regular litterpicks. She often organised these first thing in the morning after evenings when the lakes were particularly busy.



Second, action by local people and members of FCHB led to publicity in the local press, and then a visit from Cambridge MP, Daniel Zeichner and local councillors. The part of the lakes and adjacent land in the vicinity of Dawes Lane and the Spinney Wood are owned mainly by the University college, Peterhouse, who use Bidwells as their land agent. FCHB and several others wrote to both Bidwells and Peterhouse about the extreme disturbance and pointed out that the existing fencing needed securing and improving.

The result was that on instruction from Peterhouse, Bidwells has erected seven notices by Snakey Path, pointing out that the land is private and the water is deep and dangerous, and a series of barriers and new fencing was installed. Not surprisingly, given the ugly nature of the new barriers, fencing and signs (which rapidly attracted graffiti), the fact that some of the signs are have been placed on council land rather than on Peterhouse’s, and the failure of the new fencing to fully secure the lakes, residents continued to express their concern.



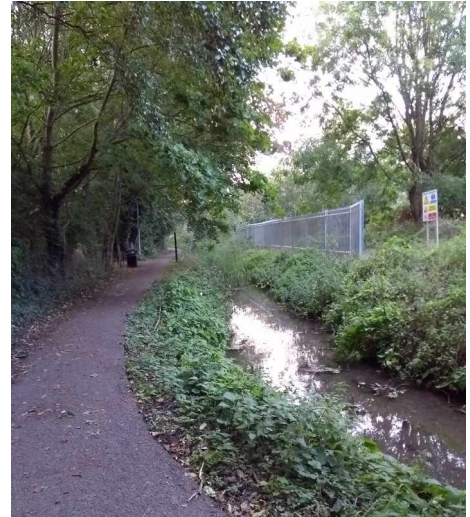
Most recently, one of the old and ivy-coated ash trees, by the Dawes Lane bridge, fell during as a result of high winds and led to contractors removing this and the similarly ancient adjacent tree. The Council has removed most of the branches from the stream – we think the remaining trunk will be left as it has done a good job in narrowing the channel and increasing water flow in this part of the Brook.

Photos on this and next page ©Monica Frisch



Bidwells have now erected further fencing so that access to the lakes is no longer possible along the bank of the Brook from the bridge (a popular entry point for those not wishing to cross the Brook).

With questions raised about the impact all this would have on the wildlife of the Brook and surrounding land, FCHB met with the Conservation Manager of the Cambridge Wildlife Trust. He had advised Peterhouse on ways that they could improve the area for wildlife, and at the same time make access more difficult. This would mainly involve increasing the growth of scrub and, in the Spinney, creating low level habitat for nesting birds. Over time such growth would also have the additional benefit of hiding the fencing; FCHB is also suggesting that native honeysuckle and wild clematis should be planted by the fencing. We understand the work will be carried out over this winter, so that improvements will start to be seen in the spring. FCHB will provide updates on this in future newsletters. Given the breaks between the new pieces of fencing, and the space underneath it, there is no particular impediment to wildlife, and the main issue is unsightliness.



In addition, the Council has received some funding for further restoration work on the Brook. A plan for this is being drawn up with the technical assistance of the Wildlife Trust and the Wild Trout Trust. The work will involve a combination of desilting, bank stabilization and introduction of gravel, all of which should improve water flow; it will probably focus on the area between Dawes Lane and St Bedes. Some of the work will require volunteer help, and FCHB has offered their support – once we have details of the plan and the timing, we will let members know. *Holly Anderson*

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 for our aims and activities.

Please email sightings of interesting birds, mammals or other species, for our records. We welcome your photos for use in this newsletter. wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Find us on Facebook www.facebook.com/FriendsOfCherryHintonBrook

Follow us on Twitter @cambridgeFCHB

To be taken off our email list, please email membership@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Monica Frisch (editor@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk) 26th October 2020

