

# Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

## Occasional Titbits, issue 66, January 2021

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

### Further restoration work planned for the brook

In 2020, Cambridge City Council and Cambridge Water commissioned the Wildlife Trust and the Wild Trout Trust to undertake an audit of chalk streams in the upper Cam catchment, including Cherry Hinton Brook. The report is now publicly available at <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/chalk-streams>. It provides a brief overview for each stream of the main issues affecting it, and identifies some potential projects. The aim is to start conversations about what needs to be done, where, and by whom, and to facilitate funding and delivery of the projects. The Council is seeking comments and additional information on the report and project proposals – see the questionnaire on the same web page. FCHB will be providing a response – deadline is 4 March.

For Cherry Hinton Brook, six projects have been identified:

- Maintenance of existing restored sections at Cherry Hinton Hall and near Brookfields;
- Additional gravel placement in various locations (working with local volunteers), combined with some sensitive de-silting work downstream of Cherry Hinton Hall;
- Feasibility study of options for connection to the Coldham's Brook;
- Feasibility study for removal / notching the weir at Cherry Hinton Hall;
- Assessment of road run-off to brook, including flood risk and water quality, and potential projects related to this;
- Find a solution to prevent trespass to the lakes across the Brook. The need to avoid creating crossing points severely limits restoration options on this reach.

The second project has already started, with de-silting which took place the week of January 11<sup>th</sup> along the stretch of brook adjacent to Blacklands Allotments. Some 27 tons of silt were removed and there is a visible difference; the silt removed will most likely be used for capping on landfill. The de-silting was in preparation for the second phase of this project: introducing gravel to raise the stream bed, which will improve water flow and encourage invertebrates and spawning fish. The gravel work will require volunteer help, and once we know the dates we will contact members and supporters (this will not take place before lockdown ends).



Photos: Pipe used for drawing up the silty water (left); machine that separates silt from water. © Sue Wells

### November litterpick

Because of the pandemic we could not hold our usual late autumn litterpick on 22<sup>nd</sup> November. But a few people collected three bags of litter along the bank from Sainsburys to Cherry Hinton. The small amount of litter found may be because individuals have been collecting litter during lockdown. We know some people are doing so regularly and we really appreciate their help.

## Chalk Aquifer Alliance

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook has joined the [Chalk Aquifer Alliance](#), a new and very active network bringing together groups concerned with chalk streams across the UK. We'll have more information on this exciting initiative in the next newsletter. Another new group is Friends of the River Cam who are asking individuals and organisations to put pressure on local government, water companies and the Environment Agency by signing up to the [Cam River Charter](#).

## Chinton video

The Chinton Channel was set up by the Cherry Hinton Festival Committee to feature videos of local activity, and to lift everyone's spirits. So in mid-November some members of our Committee were filmed, walking along the Brook and talking about the importance of the Brook, its wildlife and how we look after it. The resulting video, filmed, edited and produced by Rebecca Bazeley, can be seen at <https://youtu.be/uiKe026zkSE> along with a variety of other videos. Many thanks Becca for doing this.

## Chalking plant names

A piece in *The Guardian* 'More than weeds' talked about chalking the names of wild flowers on pavements. Emmy suggested that we should do the same, and contacted the Biodiversity Officer who got us permission from the Highways Department for "the temporary chalk art installations".



So on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December, fortunately a dry day, Emmy, Monica and a couple of others went along Snakey Path labelling plants. There was not a great deal in flower – just some Herb Robert – but we labelled things anyway.

The leaves of Alexanders (left), Common Mallow, Goosegrass, Stinking Iris and White Dead Nettle all got marked, and Monica also put paper labels on the Clematis, Bramble, Ivy and Privet. However, the path is not ideal for chalking, as the tarmac is quite rough and in places it was a bit muddy – we need to take a brush to sweep away the mud/dust next time! We also chalked plant names on lamp posts and concrete fence posts when they were near enough to a plant. We decided it was fun and plan to repeat it in the spring. *Monica Frisch Photo: © Tom Maddox*

## Water voles

We have been collecting reports of sightings of water voles since 2013. Numbers of sightings vary considerably from year to year and month to month, probably because the number of people looking varies. Also the amount of vegetation, especially in summer, can make it harder to spot water voles. But we had 47 reports of sightings in 2020, in every month of the year apart from February, with the most reports, this year, in June and July. The last sighting of the year was one on 31<sup>st</sup> December. The same person reported the first sighting of the year to reach me. *"9th January 2021: Halfway between lampposts 23 and 24 (by the green at St Bede's Crescent). Vole trying to drag a large piece of some plant into its burrow. The piece was too big so the vole eventually let it go and vanished into the burrow."*

The photo of water vole (right) is by Janet Sparrow, who said *"I came out of Burnside dentists today [27<sup>th</sup> November 2020] and was thrilled (and surprised) to see a water vole in the brook, swimming along, dragging a stalk. I noticed how clean the brook looked - thanks for all your work!"*

Please continue to send reports of sightings of water voles, and other wildlife to:

[wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk](mailto:wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk)

*Monica Frisch*



## Birds along the Brook: winter 2020

With increased restrictions for the foreseeable future, the wildlife along the Brook continues to keep us connected with the outside world. And amazingly many birds are now beginning to prepare for spring and the breeding season ahead. Robins sing all year (although during the winter their tune becomes more melancholy and wistful) and the song thrush has now begun to serenade with repeated couplets from the topmost branches. Several can be heard, and seen, along the Brook. Male blackbirds are beginning to squabble over territories and groups of male mallard are escorting females in the hopes they will be the chosen one.

The small birds are still gathering in winter feeding flocks and a siskin (a small greenish yellow and black finch which is a winter visitor to southern UK) has been seen visiting local garden birdfeeders. Feeding the birds this time of year is especially rewarding and colourful species such as greater spotted woodpeckers, goldfinches and long-tailed tits all come into gardens to feed from the vegetation along the brook. Fortunately none were caught by a male sparrowhawk that dived at speed into my garden along Burnside this week.

The main attraction though this last month has been a water rail, seen on several occasions skulking in the reeds by Burnside Allotments/Snakey Path. Similar to, but smaller than, a moorhen it has a beautiful slate grey breast and an almost marmalade-coloured back with brown streaks. Its main identifying feature is a long curved red bill. Water rails are very shy birds so it has been very exciting to get some good close up views of one. There have also been regular sightings of kingfishers and little egrets, both near the Sainsburys stretch of the brook and towards Cherry Hinton Hall. Do please keep sending in your sightings of these and other birds to us.



[photo of Water Rail (above) : Holly Anderson]

And of course let us know when you have been lucky enough to see any of our voles! *Holly Anderson*

## Greater Cambridge Eastern Access Transport Scheme consultation

FCHB submitted a response to this consultation in December 2020. The [Cambridge Eastern Access](#) corridor provides the main access into the city from the east, and some of the options proposed will have a potentially seriously negative impact on the wildlife of the lakes and Brook. We therefore provided the [information](#) that we had submitted to the evidence gathering on green infrastructure consultation in June 2020 for the future Greater Cambridge Local plan. *Sue Wells*

## An urban country park for the lakes

Under Policy 16 of the current Cambridge Local Plan (approved in 2018), the lakes are part of an area that has been approved for development as an “urban country park” for “primarily passive outdoor recreation”. The Local Plan states that development of this area will only be supported where, among other things, a detailed feasibility report is submitted, the form and nature of public access to the urban country park are established, and existing sites of local nature conservation importance are recognised.

The Anderson Group (AG), who own a large portion of the lakes as well as the land to the north of the railway line that is to be developed, are now working on their planning application which they hope to submit to the City Council in March 2021. Under the conditions associated with the development, AG is responsible for preparing a Master Plan for the lakes. Many readers will have taken part in the earlier consultations (see FCHB’s [written comments in 2015](#) on our website).

In early December, FCHB was invited to meet with AG (by Zoom) to discuss their ideas for “a new and purpose-built cycle route from the existing vehicular entrance on Burnside, along the southern edge on the lakes site and then back on to the primary cycle network at the eastern end of Snakey

Path”. Whilst recognising the urgent need to improve Snakey Path for both cyclists and pedestrians, FCHB did not consider the proposal being put forward by AG to be sound, in terms of the environmental disturbance it would cause, the lack of attention to safety and security issues, and the failure to integrate this with other ongoing transport proposals and wildlife conservation initiatives. We understand that the proposal is being reconsidered and hope that further consultations and discussions will be held before the plan is submitted. *Sue Wells*



*The photo of a Little Egret above is by Kip Loades, a professional photographer who said we were completely welcome to use it. Examples of his work are on his website: <https://chrisloades.webs.com/>*

***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.***

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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](mailto:wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk)

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