



Occasional Titbits, Issue 78, November 2025

www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Friends of Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks

Since the AGM the expanded group has been renamed Friends of Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks (FCHCB) and our expanded committee includes Caitlin Herman from Abbey People.

We also welcome Julia Laite who writes: "Hi, I joined the Friends last month as the new Social Media person, and will be updating our Facebook page and starting up a Bluesky account. I also have a little bit of Cherry Hinton Brook at the bottom of my garden, and learned about the Friends through my project to restore my small bit of brook bank. You can read about that project on my Bluesky account here! <https://bsky.app/profile/julialaite.bsky.social/post/3laj5hmcm2s26> I'm also a historian, and am very interested in the history of Cherry Hinton and Coldham's Brooks."

The new committee is clarifying roles, identifying officer positions to be filled and seeking new volunteers, and developing a joint programme of activities. **Please contact us if you would like to be involved – we still urgently need more helpers!**

RiverCare

Paul Robinson is our new point of contact at RiverCare. He joined Keep Britain Tidy in the summer as one of two new RiverCare BeachCare Programme Officers. We have met with him online and look forward to working with him.

Coldham's Brook litter picks

Abbey People run monthly litter picks in the area surrounding Coldham's Brook to keep the local area clean and prevent litter from entering the chalk stream. The litter picks are on the fourth Wednesday of the month 9:30am – 11:30am. Everyone is welcome at these community litter picks, you can find upcoming litter picks at <https://abbeypeople.org.uk/events/>

The next litter pick is Wednesday 26th November 9:30 am – 11:30 am. Meet the group at 9:30 am outside Abbey Pool reception. We'll walk around Coldham's Common & Coldham's Brook to collect litter. All equipment will be provided, and there will be 'Nature and Litter Loot' activity sheets for what litter children might find. This event is open to adults and children of all ages, all children must be accompanied by an adult.

12 volunteers have helped at the Abbey People litter picks from July – October 2025 collecting bags of litter from vapes to drinks cans, and sweet wrappers to shoes!



Caitlin Herman

Autumn litter pick along Cherry Hinton Brook

This went really well with a big turn out of volunteers, including Councillor Anna Smith, and Christine Berry, who is involved with the Cam Catchment Partnership. Some volunteers went to great lengths to retrieve awkward items from the Brook and there was a lot of fly-tipped stuff, though perhaps less general litter. Many thanks to all those who came to help – and to Cambridge City Council for collecting the litter promptly.



Cherry Hinton water voles



Noel Ellis, a Master's student at Anglia Ruskin University has done a study on water voles in Cambridge city, including Cherry Hinton Brook. He reports "The goal was to find out how water voles are surviving in this urban environment, and the stream conditions that support them. This included walking along the bankside surveying for voles, and taking measurements of the water depth, stream width, type and density of vegetation and other factors along streams. As it turns out, Cherry Hinton Brook was the single best place for water voles that I found, with lots of droppings, burrows and feeding stations dotted around. I also caught many glimpses of sometimes shy, but often very brave and comfortable water voles swimming or feeding on the banks (especially at Burnside where they were quite bold little animals).

Setting up trail cameras and floating platforms to study how they might handle brown rats in the city, it turns out that rats only really have a foothold right beside Sainsbury's. Water voles are living quite close by, seem to be able to slip past up towards Coldham's Brook, and have high densities at the park below without rats pushing them out. In fact, at Burnside the water voles are comfortable enough to swim up and eat while I was right in front of them setting up the cameras! I also caught glimpses of young water voles on camera and while surveying, showing that they are breeding in the Brook, and found that water voles leave their burrows and feed at night fairly often. It was a pleasure to study Cherry Hinton, and I hope you will continue your excellent work in caring for Cherry Hinton.

Noel Ellis



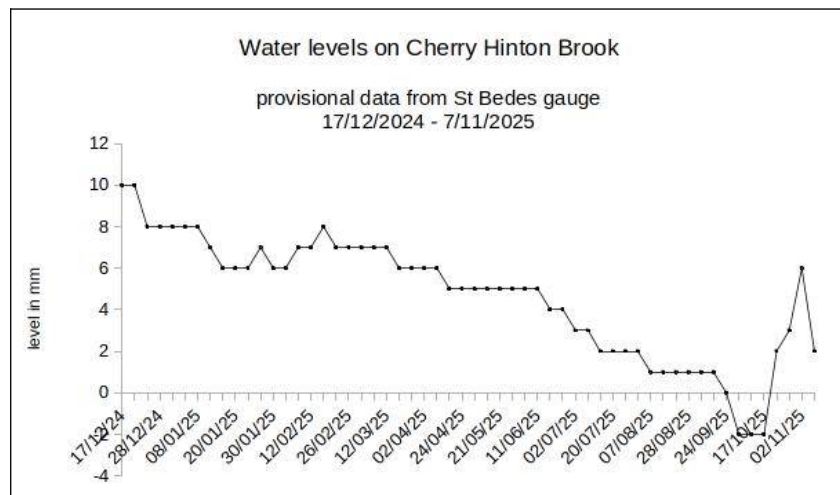
Water level monitoring

In early 2023, Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook (as it then was) obtained a grant from the Cam Valley Forum to install water level gauges to monitor the fluctuations in water level in Cherry Hinton Brook. These were installed at four locations – Forest Road and Brookfields (August 2025), and at Daws Lane (right; photo © Monica Frisch) and St Bede's (in December 2024) – by



Cambridge City Council on our behalf. The two at Daws Lane and St Bede's have been monitored since December 2024, and since the start of 2025 by Beate Pauschmann on a weekly basis. She photographs each board and also notes on a spreadsheet the water level.

These records show clearly the fluctuation in water level across this year, as shown in the preliminary graph for the board at St Bedes. The water level dropped steadily over the summer and was particularly low in September and October, but is starting to show some recovery now. The gauge at Daws Lane shows a similar pattern.



Weekly monitoring does not show the sudden rapid rise (and subsequent fall) in the level of the Brook following heavy rainfall (there have been several examples of this recently) but the longer-term more hidden changes in the water table, which affects the amount of water that discharges into the Brook from its source, the spring at Giants Grave.

The gauge at Brookfields (above; photo © Monica Frisch) was photographed occasionally initially, but subsequently the water level dropped below the bottom of the gauge, and so measurements cannot be taken (interestingly the level has yet to rise to the height it was at when the board was first installed). As yet, we do not have anyone monitoring the gauge at Forest Road – any volunteers? In addition, the gauges have yet to be calibrated by the City Council, so we cannot compare the measurements across them.

We will be producing a full report in early 2026 of the first year's results, by which time we hope the gauges will have calibrated.

Monica Frisch & Sue Wells

Cambridge chalk stream management and restoration projects – update

Cherry Hinton Brook, Coldham's Brook and the East Cambridge Main Drain (ECMD) are all case studies in the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project (GCCSP). See *Titbits* 77, July 2025 for an introduction to the project.

The initial baseline surveys and studies have now been undertaken and a public consultation was held in October, to seek the views of local residents about improving the environment in these locations. Detailed designs for restoration work in specific locations have now been drawn up, which will include repairing the stream banks where they are falling into the water, replanting with chalk stream vegetation, reshaping and narrowing the channel in suitable locations to speed up water flow, and installing gravel riffles (similar to those on Coldham's Brook at the entrance to Coldham's Common).

Work will start first at the ECMD/Coldham's Brook location, with the aim of completion by March 2026. For Cherry Hinton Brook, the location is the section from the Tins Bridge, to Sainsbury's, and through the car park up to Coldham's Lane. This work on this section may take a little longer as (a) there are discussions on how the footpath between the Brook and the Sainsbury's store can be reinforced; and (b) a detailed survey of water vole habitat is to be undertaken, given that over the years we have had many sightings of this protected species in this area.

A second component of the GCCSP is citizen science water quality monitoring, testing particular locations for a variety of parameters that will give some indications of pollutant, sediment and nutrient levels over time. Small volunteer groups are currently being set up, following training by ARU in early November. Water samples will be collected weekly from specific locations, as well as automated readings using a portable Hanna water quality meter. Additional volunteers are still needed.

For more information about the project, including the bi-monthly newsletters, and to sign up as a water quality testing volunteer, please see: <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/greater-cambridge-chalk-stream-project>

Sue Wells

Birdlife along the Brook, Autumn 2025

The leaves have finally fallen from most of the trees and bushes making it easier to spot the small birds as they flit through the branches in flocks. At this time of year they often join into groups to seek food, either as individual species or mixed flocks of long tailed, great and blue tits. These are sometimes joined by goldcrests, one of our smallest birds, which are often impossible to see because they move so quickly through the vegetation. Their high-pitched squeak, almost like a door needing to be oiled, is the give way.

There are also many robins and wrens, mainly individual birds, feeding hard for the Winter. Although the summer warblers have gone (apart from a few blackcap who seem to overwinter here now) I heard a cettis warbler along Burnside in early November. These are almost always hidden but their explosive burst of notes draws attention to them. They are now resident all year round, an indication of the warmer Winters we now have. Alarming the mallards seem to be pairing up already, also responding to a milder climate, although with plenty of chances for colder weather to come let's hope they have a long courtship before any ducklings are born.

Most animals and birds are preparing for Winter and there are several jays, the most beautifully coloured of all the corvids with their striking blue and pink plumage, taking any nuts they can find from the trees to hide away (cache) for the colder months.

The Brook and its environs are a feeding paradise for so many of our common birds and small mammals. However other, less common birds also feed here. Being so close to the city centre, and just round the corner from a busy ring road used by ambulances to and from Addenbrookes, it never ceases to delight when I open my curtains in the morning to see kingfisher and little egret right in front of my house!

Holly Anderson



Photo © Jon Fairbairn

Please do send reports of wildlife sightings to wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk so we can monitor what is using the Brook and the areas alongside it.

Monica Frisch

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.

Find us on Facebook www.facebook.com/FriendsOfCherryHintonBrook

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

Monica Frisch (editor@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk)

14th November 2025