



# FoAE Newsletter

May 2012



Brown Hairstreak

## Welcome to the first FoAE newsletter

The FoAE was established in September 2010 and in a short period we have brought about some substantial improvements on the Eyot, both for wildlife and local people.

This is the first of an occasional newsletter designed to keep members informed of new developments and forthcoming events.

Please do come along to the events and also the working parties, if you are feeling fit and want to get more involved!!

If you have any ideas about how the Eyot can be further improved or managed do let us know –

[info@friendsofastonseyt.org.uk](mailto:info@friendsofastonseyt.org.uk)

## Butterflies

The hot sunny March brought butterflies out early this spring - seeing seven species so early was a surprise. As spring moves into summer we would like to hear from anyone who sees any of the occasional rarer butterfly - such as Marbled White and Brown Hairstreak, a fritillary or any skipper other than the common two (Large & Small). Marbled Whites appeared on the Kidneys last year for the first time in a decade, but were only seen on one day, so could easily be missed - keep a look out!

Part of our planting programme had been directed to adding food plants for butterfly caterpillars, such as buckthorn for Brimstones. Caterpillars of the scarce Brown Hairstreak feed on blackthorn, of which we have plenty, but so far no-one's seen the adults, though a few eggs have been found by diligent searchers from the local butterfly group. They are also looking for people to take part in garden surveys.

Contact the group at <http://upperthames-butterflies.org.uk>

## Mowing meadows

Parts of the open area near the Jackdaw Lane entrance were sown with wild meadow mixture last September, after removal of the nettles and creeping thistle there. One section nearer the plantation is doing very well with many different plant species growing; another section sown a week later rather less well as it was caught by the early autumn heatwave at just the wrong moment, though it may yet recover. Most of this area will be mown all this summer to discourage the nettles and thistles and to allow smaller plants to establish. Next year we can let it flower. Meanwhile butterflies are enjoying the nettles and the ground ivy (the small blue flower everywhere) in the middle section here.

## Can you Add an Adder??



The newly revived Oxfordshire Reptile Group is looking for records of snakes, lizards, frogs, toads, newts etc. On Aston's Eyot we know we have Grass Snakes, Slow-worms, Frogs and Toads, but there's a bit of a mystery about Adders.

The county recorder Rod d'Ayala is sceptical, but we have reliable-sounding reports from two individuals from 2005, 2010 and 2011 on both the Kidneys and Aston's itself. So please keep a sharp look-out for snakes, especially basking in sunny places, and photograph them if you can - even a distant blurry shot may be good enough to confirm identification.

Adders (see top) are essentially brown with a zigzag pattern down the back, while Grass Snakes (below left) are grey-green with black dashes along the upperside and two clear yellow 'ears' at the back of the head. Slow-worms (below right) are legless lizards and look like snakes - they are smaller (a foot or less), and glossy unmarked brownish-silvery (snakes have matt skin).

Good hunting!!!

For sightings contact Dr Angela Julian:  
[angela.digges@clara.co.uk](mailto:angela.digges@clara.co.uk)



## Knotweed Vanquished!!

Well, not quite - but we were so impressed with the reduction in the number of shoots coming up on the two main patches this spring, that we decided to take advantage of the bare soil and rainy weather to sow wild grass/herb/ flower mixtures. A wide range of species have been sown, expecting some to like the drier bits and some the soggy bits. We'll cut or mow the surviving shoots of knotweed as they appear, until they give up (eventually...). These patches were cut until mid-summer last year and then treated with glyphosate in September. A third patch which was repeatedly mowed last year but not sprayed still has a lot of shoots coming, but we hope that another year of cutting will really begin to set it back.

## Don't forget the Website!

Many of you will have looked at the FoAE website in the past but probably don't return to it very often.

Do have a look from time to time as it is updated with information and new photos.

The activities tab has details about future events and also pictures of past events - links to Flickr take you to further pictures.

The Management tab gives details about the way in which we are trying to maintain and improve the Eyot.

And if you haven't already seen them, there are lots of interesting historic photos of the Eyot dating back over 100 years - see the Bygone Eyot tab.

<http://friendsofastonseyot.org.uk/>

## Bird Atlas

The Oxford Ornithological Society is extending the national bird atlas recording for a further year in this area to produce a new local distribution atlas to replace the one published in 1992. In and around Aston's Eyot the challenge is to prove breeding of some of the more elusive species - there are Stock Doves, Kingfishers and Buzzards around, but where do they nest?

- Have you seen a Nuthatch in East Oxford - if so, where and when?
- Are there still any nesting Grey Wagtails - or even Pied Wagtails.
- Are any of the Kites we see sailing overhead secretly nesting in our area?
- Can you locate any House Martins nesting, or have they completely gone from East Oxford?

Your chairman, Anthony Cheke (who used to study local House Sparrows in the 1960s) is doing a 3-year street by street survey in East Oxford to establish the current position. Numbers have crashed dramatically since the late 1980s, as they have in many other parts of the country.

Please inform Anthony of sightings of any of the above birds (particularly if you have sparrows in your street) as he would like to get maximum coverage for East Oxford.

[anthony.cheke@virginmedia.com](mailto:anthony.cheke@virginmedia.com)

## Successful Birdsong Evening



About 20 people came along to the first of three Spring events focusing on helping people improve their recognition of bird song. The weather had been rainy for much of the day but we were fortunate that the sun came out in the evening at just the right time for us. The birds were a bit subdued because of the chilly weather but we heard good performances from migrants such as Blackcaps and Chiff Chaffs, as well as resident Wrens and Blackbirds.

The second event was on 6<sup>th</sup> May - International Dawn Chorus Day - and a hardy few got up for the 4.45am start!! Miraculously we had another dry day!!

If you missed these dates it's not too late to come along to the final evening on Tuesday May 15<sup>th</sup> - see Forthcoming Events box left.

## Forthcoming Events

- Bird song evening – Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May at 7.30pm – meet at the Kidneys Bridge Gate
- Scything and mowing – Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> May at 2pm – meet at the Jackdaw Lane entrance
- Flower and Tree Identification – mid June
- Pond-dipping day – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July
- Bat evening – September
- Bird and Bat box building – October/November

*PS If you came along to the bat and bird box building event last autumn, have you been back to check whether your box is now occupied. Many of the boxes are being used by Great Tits and Blue Tits. We've also seen a Blue Tit going in and out of a bat box so there is obviously a demand for even more*

## Pollarding the willows

Once a willow has been pollarded the cutting needs to be repeated about every five years. Failing this, the branches become too heavy, causing the trunks to split open. During March Christ Church employed a contractor to pollard all the willows along the Thames. This is done principally in the interests of rowing. About the same time we got our contractor to deal with selected willows along the southern end of the Shire Lake Ditch. Apart from saving the willows this opens up the ditch to light and improves the water quality for wildlife. Next year we intend to continue this work along the Cherwell and northern end of the Ditch.

## The Kidneys and Meadow Lane Nature Reserves

Green spaces in urban areas are an immensely valuable resource but they are frequently threatened by development and are constantly diminishing. There is a growing awareness of the need for local people to get involved and play a role in protecting, managing and caring for the green spaces on their doorstep.

The FoAE is a reflection of this movement and in a short period we have made significant improvements in the value of the Eyot to both wildlife and local people. Now people living near Meadow Lane have expressed an interest in helping to look after the two Council-owned nature parks on Meadow Lane - the Kidneys and Meadow Lane Nature Park.

Oxford City Council manages the reserves and is very keen to improve links with local residents and so has welcomed this initiative. This campaign has been supported by David Williams, local Green Councillor, and the proposal was discussed at the Donnington Tenants & Residents Association recently. Plans are now underway for a 'Friends of Meadow Lane Nature Park' to be set up

There was some discussion about whether this new group should also take an interest in the Kidneys but it was felt that, as it adjoins Aston's Eyot and in many ways is part of the same site from the point of view of walkers and wildlife, it might be better for the FoAE to take on this role.

Several members of the committee met recently on site with Parks Ranger Carl Whitehead, and had a very positive meeting. The Parks Department would continue with what they do now, so anything we did would be extra. We plan to go ahead with this initiative, and are discussing with them what we might do this year to make a modest start – nothing drastic!

If anyone has a particular interest in the Kidneys and would like to be involved with this please let us know. And of course we'll keep everyone posted on developments.

## The Plantation

In early March we employed a contractor to carry out thinning of trees at the southern end of the plantation. We hope to complete the northern end next year. The work was necessary as the trees were very overcrowded. By removing approximately one third we have created open glades and generally let in more light. This will help the remaining trees but also allows the creation of an understory. Accordingly we have planted species such as hazel, hawthorn, holly and dogwood as well as suitable wild flowers.

The extracted timber which is stacked beside the path has been sold. Removal has been held up firstly because the purchaser was out of action due to an injury but more recently by the wet conditions. It was feared that a heavy vehicle would cause excessive damage to the path. When we finally get a dry spell removal will take place.

Those who walk through the plantation will have seen that two large ivy clad poplars came down in the strong winds on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April, blocking the path that follows the Shire Lake Ditch. Clearing work has since been carried out and a diversionary path created. The more agile can choose to clamber over the trunks, keeping to the line of the original path. The trees will be left lying as they create a useful habitat for wildlife.



Contractors Ian and Graham hard at work

## Join us!!

If you are not already a member of the Friends of Aston's Eyot please do consider joining. Having a healthy membership raises essential revenue and also confirms that the Eyot is valued by local people. For a membership form, collect a leaflet from the Eyot or download a form from the website –

[http://friendsofastonseyot.org.uk/?page\\_id=96](http://friendsofastonseyot.org.uk/?page_id=96)