



The Islander

Newsletter of the Friends of Holt Island Nature Reserve

Autumn Newsletter 2020
ISSUE 39

Open 10:00am – 4:00pm weekends and Bank Holidays from April until October. At other times the key may be borrowed from The Norris Museum or One Leisure with a £20 deposit.

SAVE THE DATE!!



**NOVEMBER 28TH
QUIZ NIGHT**



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Holt Island Nature Reserve

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www.holtisland.org

The Friends Group is a voluntary organisation dedicated to the promotion and protection of Holt Island, Wilhorn Meadow and the Thicket in St Ives for the enjoyment of all.

CHAIR'S REPORT

It is with great pleasure that I write my first report for the Islander as Chairman of the Friends. I have had a passion for Holt Island since moving to St Ives in 2011, and I couldn't be happier to have this opportunity to help support the Island.

The pandemic has meant that Holt Island has had to stay closed for most of the spring and summer, but thanks to the sterling work done by our Ranger and his team, we are now in a position to reopen our gates to the public for the remainder of the season! I am sure we would like to express our gratitude to them in these difficult circumstances.

In spite of the challenges we have faced, things are far from doom and gloom! Firstly, a huge thank you to Waitrose for their donation via the Community Matters fund, which has allowed us to start the process of building our otter holt. Secondly, we have our annual Quiz Night provisionally booked for November 28th, but even if we can't host it due to COVID 19 restrictions, we intend to hold a Virtual Quiz on that day, so please save the date!

Daniel Rowe



Cetti's Warbler, a very welcome September visitor!
Photo:SL

HOLT ISLAND AND ST IVES METHODIST CHURCH

St Ives Methodist Church is undergoing major refurbishment. When the work is complete, the Church will open outwards, so that the inside of the Church is easily seen from the outside – and folk inside will have a view of the river and across to Holt Island. We were delighted to be asked to provide the Church with a series of photographs of Holt Island which will be displayed on the staircase wall, plus an information panel. The Church will choose from a selection of photos and hope to have them on display in late November.

Tracey Hipson



THE SEDGE WARBLER AND THE SPIDER

The closure of the island due to lockdown has been a disappointment to many. However, it has still been possible to enjoy many of the Islands birds just by sitting at the water's edge on The Waits.

It was early one morning on just such an occasion, as I sat enjoying the wonderful chorus of Reed and Sedge Warblers in a patch of Phragmites reed just opposite me across the backwater, that I suddenly saw the reeds twitching and to my delight a Sedge Warbler

darted into view. These chances are rare, so I raised my camera and at the moment of focusing noticed that the bird's attention was concentrated on a large spider. I hit the motor drive as a sudden quick stab sealed the spider's fate.

The results were very satisfactory!

It is so good to have these wonderful warblers returning year after year following their epic and perilous journey of some 6000 miles.

Nigel Sprowell, Friend.



Photos: Nigel Sprowell.

REPORT ON ADOPT-A-BOX FOR 2020

Thank you to our sponsors for your very generous support.

In these unprecedented times we still managed to have a good year for the birds nesting on the Island. It was very wet early in the year, but the spring was warm and the vegetation grew quickly along with the caterpillars and bugs that the birds feed on.

Repairs had been carried out on our 28 boxes before lockdown, and all the boxes had been cleaned out and disinfected last autumn. We have mainly tit boxes, the others being two Robin, one Treecreeper, one triple Sparrow and one Owl.

This year thirteen boxes were occupied. The number of eggs laid was a little disappointing, averaging 5 or 6, however two boxes had 8 and 9 eggs. Good numbers hatched and 49 young fledged which is higher than last year. Of these 11 Great Tits and 36 Blue Tits were ringed.



Blue Tit, Box 1



Great Tit, Box 27

Since fledging we have caught 4 Great Tits and 21 Blue Tits from boxes 1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 11, 22 and 28. Interestingly we have also caught three young from two boxes of Blue Tits ringed in the town, suggesting the young move fairly quickly to the Island where food is plentiful.

All the boxes will be serviced and cleaned in the autumn and we will add some more protective plates to deter those inquisitive woodpeckers!



Great Tits, Box 22



Blue Tits, Box 7



Blue Tits, Box 11

Photos by Nigel Sprowell and Julian Limentani

LARGE SKIPPER

We are thrilled to report that two Large Skipper butterflies were seen in the meadow on Holt Island. This is a new species to be recorded on the Island, although it is fairly common in southern England and Wales.

The butterflies are quite small with a 33 – 35mm wing span.

The males tend to perch on the border between long and tall vegetation so they can be seen by passing females, who are much duller. They lay their eggs on a number of different plants including the small wood reed and Tor grass between July and August. The adults then emerge from June to August.

They feed on nectar from a variety of plants, including brambles, and like damp, sheltered grassy areas which are uncut, including woodland rides and clearings.



Photo of a male Large Skipper by Iain Cowe

FALSE FOX SEDGE

False fox sedge (*Carex otrubae*) is often overlooked, growing amongst the dense foliage of the reeds and grasses in wet places and along the flood margins of the meadow on Holt Island. The plant has tufted triangular stems ("sedges have edges") up to a metre high topped by flower heads that consist of stacked star-shaped flowers, turning from green to a rusty red, and so resembles a fox's tail.

(There are small differences with the True Fox Sedge which is a rare species).

SL

The flowers and stems of *C.otrubae* lying on the boardwalk



Close up of flower head



HOLT ISLAND BRIDGE

During the lockdown our ranger, Paul Claydon, has been keeping up the maintenance on the Island. The volunteers were not allowed to work between March and July, but they are now back in action. In July, as part of the installation of non-slip panels on boards that have lost the tar chippings it was found that the main beams supporting the wooden bridge just inside the Island were in decline.

It was decided that the bridge should be replaced and new beams arrived on 30 July. They were floated across to the Island from the slipway. On the following weekend, volunteers made a start on the reconstruction by taking down the old bridge and getting the new beams in place.

Parts of the walkway at both ends of the bridge also needed some replacement, which was done at the same time. Work continued during the week and the three main beams were now in place. There remain the boarding and non-slips to install and the handrails.

Photos by Roy Allen and Julian Limentani



New beams



Bridge before works



Hand rail removed



Unfixed boards



Walkway at far end to be completed

RE-BUILDING OF THE BRIDGE, PART 2

Work progressed well, although some additional problems were encountered with some of the decking that joined the bridge which also needed replacing.

It was decided to install a composite grid where the fan shaped boards had been. This involved cutting the grid to shape and then fixing it in place.

The work then remaining was to finish off the decking and finish refitting the hand rail.

At the same time the Island was being prepared for visitors with the grass being mowed and the vegetation being cut back from the sides of the boardwalk. Just to help matters the recent storms have brought down several branches from the Willow trees which have also had to be removed.

Photos Julian Limentani



Boards placed on bridge



Non-slip panels added



Boards fixed



The grid in place



Decking complete



Part of handrail fixed

BRIDGE RE-CONSTRUCTION – COMPLETION

The work party has now completed all the work on the bridge and non-slip strips, with the volunteer group of Roy, Colin, Doug, and George paying regular extra working visits which greatly helped to speed things up.

Other volunteers have been putting up posts for signage for the reopening of the Island. The intention is for the Island now to be open at weekends throughout October, subject to any new COVID 19 regulations.

Photos Julian Limentani

September 2020



Re-constructed Bridge. Photos Julian Limentani. September 2020

HOLT ISLAND RANGER'S REPORT MAY 2020

For their safety, as a result of the COVID 19 lockdown in March, our Holt Island volunteers were unable to work on the Island, which lost us well over 100 hours of volunteer work - the equivalent of me working three full weeks on the Island.

In the first few weeks I was able to put in at least one day per week; this consisted solely of mowing and trimming to try to stop the Island becoming overgrown and much more difficult to manage. I also fitted around 100 non-slip panels where the boardwalk tar-and-chip had been badly damaged by being underwater for more than a week earlier in the year. At this point there were still quite a number of panels that needed to be fitted to keep the boardwalk non-slip when it gets wet.



Beehives in the dell, June 2020!

Following these few weeks of working weekly on the Island, due to increased working on other sites, primarily due to work created by anti-social behaviour, my hours on the Island reduced to about two sessions per month.

We have created a one-way system on the main boardwalk loop to try to avoid people passing each other in a space that would equate to less than 1m, with the exception of the passing places (unless someone is sitting on the bench in it); the same on the grass path.

The tricky area is from the road at the end of Church Street to just after the second bridge and from the second bridge down to the interpretation board. It has taken a while to consider how best to deal with these sections, but appropriate signage is now in place.

With the bridge replaced, non-slips safe and signage in place, the island reopened on Saturday 19th September.

All our practical volunteers have been trained on our new working systems as they have been phased back to work, as have many of our keyholder opening /closing volunteers.

Our wonderful volunteers have now resumed our regular tasks like willow harvesting, mowing, fedge and tunnel work, reed bed management, osier bed management, management of dodder and nettles etc.

It has been a real shame that the public have not been able to share my luck of enjoying the Island through the summer months this year (I have been working hard-honestly), but now the Island can resume opening, hopefully they can now enjoy it and maybe notice all the hard work carried out.

Paul Claydon



A rare sighting of idle volunteer work boots in June, now happily returned to their natural habitat!

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