



Friends of Thetford Forest

20th ^{OUR} YEAR

SPRING/ SUMMER 2015 NEWSLETTER No. 59
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We hope you will forgive us for this issue being a little introspective, but when we started the Friends no one had any idea what the future held for us being such a small group at the time, but looking back so much has been achieved but we are not resting on our laurels and the work goes on.

The first newsletters were prepared almost from the start, and I have been responsible for editing them for the last 17 years in which time the format has been changed a number of times to keep pace with technology – initially they were photocopied, folded, stapled and posted all by hand - These days it's a case of compiling the newsletter, putting it on a usb and handing over to our Corporate Member SPC to generate the final version to be displayed on the website and e mailed or posted to our members – Without SPC's help the task of generating over 1000 copies is not something to be taken lightly.

All the available issues of the newsletter are of course on our website together with many other interesting articles



Mildenhall Warren Lodge was the backdrop for the BBC's Countryfile team when they dropped in to film a feature on the forgotten industry of rabbit farming in the Brecks. Anne Mason told presenter Matt Baker the fascinating story of the warrens that for centuries formed the landscape of much of the area now covered by Thetford Forest.



You can now follow us on Twitter



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YOUR FOREST NEEDS YOUR HELP

FoTF works in partnership with the Forestry Commission and offers an array of volunteering opportunities across Thetford Forest.

If you'd like to enjoy the forest, learn new skills and meet new people then volunteer to help make the forest a fantastic place for people and wildlife.

Meet and Greet Volunteers

We are currently looking for people with infectious enthusiasm about the forest and the facilities we offer at High Lodge. If you enjoy talking to people and are available at weekends and bank holidays, why not join our Meet and Greet volunteer team.

For more information about other volunteering opportunities please see our website: www.forestry.gov.uk/highlodge-volunteer. Alternatively, email volunteer.thetford@forestry.gsi.gov.uk or telephone 0300 067 44 00

To celebrate the 20 years of FOTF, we've arranged some special free events for members, in partnership with the Forestry Commission.

1pm – 3pm Saturday 9 May : A guided walk around 'Hills and Holes' with the Forestry Commission's Ecologist Neal Armour-Chelu, with the focus on aquatic life.

'Hills and Holes' is where there are the remains of pingoes, ponds formed by the melting of ice lenses in the ground at the end of the last Ice Age and close by is Cranberry Rough, the site of a prehistoric lake. This amazing landscape provides habitats for a range of fascinating aquatic and plant species.

Please wear clothing and footwear suitable for the forest environment and wet conditions underfoot.

Please meet at the parking area on Fire Route 82 (TL95239156). Hills and Holes is just south of Great Hockham. At Great Hockham, just past the Eagle Public House, travel south down the small Little Hockham Lane (about 1/2 mile) to the entrance of Fire Route 82.

Travel the length of the fire route carefully (this is a forest track and not surfaced in any way) to the parking area at the end where we will all meet.

Places are free but an email to information@fotf.org.uk would be appreciated if you will be attending

9.30am – 3.30pm Sunday 24 May : Joint Open Day at Mildenhall Warren Lodge and the Rex Graham Reserve.

View the 600 year-old Mildenhall Warren Lodge, home to the rabbit warrener and discover how rabbits were farmed for their meat and their fur.

The warren lodge was given a new roof of forest timber in 2013 and this is the annual opportunity to see inside the building.

Close by, see the work of the FOTF conservation group to provide a new place for the Breckland Mugwort to grow.

Directions : The warren lodge is situated in Mildenhall Woods, north of the Barton Mills Roundabout. From the A1065, the minor road (on the left coming south from Brandon and on the right coming north from Barton Mills) is signed 'Household Waste Site and 'Road Ahead Closed'. Ignoring the 'Road Closed' sign, turn here and drive past the Household Waste Site to the Forestry Commission car-parking area, signed as 'Mildenhall Warren Lodge'. The Lodge is about ten minutes walk up the hill. Temporary signage will be on the A1065. Grid Ref TL735752

Visit the Rex Graham Reserve nearby to see largest colony of military orchids in Britain

The Rex Graham Reserve is situated at Ride 306 in Mildenhall Woods, on the A1101 towards Bury St Edmunds, off the five-ways roundabout at Barton Mills. Parking is via ride 306 and will be signed off A1101 on the open day (locked at all other times). There is a boardwalk and steep steps down to the pit and no dogs are allowed. Grid ref: TL 737746.

At both sites, Friends of Thetford Forest and the Forestry Commission will be there to help you enjoy your visit.

This event is Free – just come along as this an open day for the public as well as members of FOTF.

8.30pm – 10.30pm Tuesday 9 June Nightjar Evening

An evening especially for FOTF members, with Ecologist Neal Armour-Chelu and Nightjar Expert Ron Hoblyn as our guides.

Nightjars fly all the way from Africa to breed in the forest and sound like no other bird you will ever hear. They are most active at dusk and it is an unforgettable experience to be in the forest as the summer night falls and these birds begin to display, feed and call.

Please wear clothing and footwear suitable for the forest environment and for the drop in temperature as night falls.

Please come along to the entrance to Fire Route 5 off the B1106 Brandon to Elveden Road (Grid Ref TL792841) for 8:30pm.

Places are free but an email to information@fotf.org.uk would be appreciated if you will be attending.

If you are unable to make this evening, there will be another opportunity on Tuesday 16 June at the same time and place when the nightjar evening is for the public to attend.

We look forward to seeing you at one or more of the above events.

WILLOW WEAVING WIZARDRY IN THE WOODS

On a beautiful cold February morning, the sun's rays beamed through the woodland while a group of eager volunteers got together for a willow weaving workshop.

The day was led by willow artist Debbie Hall who passed on her passion and wealth of knowledge of willow. The volunteers quickly got to grips with the basic techniques and throughout the day created a wonderful willow dome to grace the 'Friends Grove' at High Lodge. The group was later joined by the High Lodge Monday group, who made some fantastic willow wreaths which were attached to the dome as decoration. The stunning dome has been well received by High Lodge visitors and it's made a fantastic natural play feature for all to explore.



photo: James Ratchford www.shootthemagic.com



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QUESTION TIME?

With no real forestry action happening in Parliament, Friends of Thetford Forest have set its sights on those who aspire to represent us after the General Election. What do those candidates standing for Parliament in our local constituencies think about our forests and how would they protect our Public Forest Estate for the nation in perpetuity?

Friends has asked exiting MP's and candidates these three questions.

1 Do you support legislation to set up the new Public Forest Estate Management Organisation and thereby safeguard our Public Forest Estate for future generations?

2 Do you support funding of £22 million per annum (the Independent Panel on Forestry's recommendation) to deliver wildlife and recreational benefits?

3 Will you advocate this legislation and funding being included in the first session of the new parliament?

To see their unedited replies visit our website www.fotf.org.uk and go to the [Save Our Forests](#) section. There, you will be able to see who is standing in your constituency, their reply to us and a link to their e-mail address.

Please challenge the candidates to commit their support to the PFE and for a sustainable level of funding!

In these times of austerity there will inevitably be pressure on budgets. However, DEFRA's Rural Payments Agency have recently abandoned a web site costing £154m to handle on-line applications for EU farm subsidies.

The money from this failed IT scheme would have run the whole of England's publicly owned forests for seven years! And provided public benefits from public money that would have vastly exceeded the simple monetary value.

This coming General Election gives us all the best opportunity to remind our politicians how important our woods and forests are to us and to make sure that they are committed to protecting and resourcing them

OUR HISTORY

Friends of Thetford Forest (FOTF) was set up in 1995 to help increase understanding, knowledge and enjoyment of Thetford Forest and to encourage the involvement and support of the forest users. Twenty years later, it is still fulfilling these aims but with a greatly- increased membership and many more active volunteers. There are also six local businesses who are corporate members, paying an annual subscription of £300 and this corporate membership scheme has generated over £20 000 towards projects to benefit the Forest.

For thirteen years, with an almost unbroken record, Friends has undertaken one conservation task a month to improve habitats for wildlife, including the repair, construction and replacement of over 400 bird and bat boxes; the establishment of a new site for the rare Breckland Mugwort; the re-opening and care of the Goshawk Trail; construction of tern rafts for Lynford Water and annual maintenance of particular sites to maintain their suitability for key species



In 2007, Friends took over the practical day-to-day management of Lynford Arboretum under the guidance of the Forestry Commission. The volunteers at the Arboretum meet on most Wednesday and Sunday mornings to carry out tasks detailed in an agreed programme such as the improvement of the shrub layer; the addition of understory trees; and the provision of seating along the 'all ability paths', at 100 metre intervals to meet the needs of less active visitors

An 'Awards for All' grant provided interpretation panels and the Forestry Commission generously donated a cabin as a permanent building for the Team and somewhere to display educational material.



Friends' members help at the summer concert series and at special events as well as taking a central role in the annual Discovery Day and the Open Day. Friends' volunteers at High Lodge Centre carry out a 'Meet and Greet' role for visitors at weekends and during busy holiday times and maintain the shrub beds (the latter carried out by members with learning difficulties).



At High Lodge and in the wider forest, more volunteers check the walking trails to ensure they are free from hazards and clearly signed.

Friends is also involved in archaeological investigations and the restoration of historic buildings and sites within the Forest. Along with the Breckland Society, volunteers have investigated the warren lodge sites at Brandon and Ickburgh and taken part in test pit surveys to determine the wider extent of Neolithic flint workings beyond Grimes Graves. Volunteers undertaking archaeological tasks receive specialist training from professional archaeologists who largely give their time free of charge and help oversee the work.



With a grant from Norfolk County Council, Friends consolidated the standing remains of Ickburgh Warren Lodge in 2012 and has twice conserved the scheduled ancient monument of Mildenhall Warren Lodge. During 2000-2002 with grants of £50 000 from English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Forest Heath District Council, repairs were done. In 2013, English Heritage and the Forestry Commission gave £80,000 for the construction of a roof whose timber came from East Anglia's Public Forest Estate. There have been 11 annual open days at Mildenhall Warren Lodge, attended by approximately 900 people.

Over the years, Friends has built up a network of supportive contacts with the media. Letters and articles have appeared in the Eastern Daily Press, Bury Free Press, Thetford and Watton Times and Let's Talk Magazine and in other publications and on the Grown in Britain website, all of which help raise the profile of the Forest. The Friends' Newsletter educates and informs members about the Forest, as did the Photograph Competition in 2009 and the Friends Calendar for 2010. We even managed an appearance on the lottery show in the early days as part of the funding for the first oak sculpture at High Lodge.

Undoubtedly, the most challenging time for Friends came in 2010 when the government proposed selling-off the Public Forest Estate. Friends led the campaign against this in the East of England; is one of six members of the 'Forest Campaign Network (FCN)', and is involved in the on-going plans and draft legislation for the future Public Forest Estate Management Organisation. It has been involved in visits by three Ministers for Forestry; by DEFRA and Treasury Officials and personally invited and hosted the visit of Elizabeth Truss MP, two weeks before she was appointed Secretary of State for the Environment.

Throughout its existence, Friends has been supported by the Forestry Commission with a membership link to the Discovery Pass; a meeting room for committee meetings and attendance at these meetings. Frances Evershed and then Rachel Riley have been the 'official' 'FC representatives and help with much-valued advice and guidance while the support of Jim Lyon, Forest Management Director and his Senior Team has been unstinting.

In fact, working with Forestry Commission staff has meant that Friends' members have benefited from their expertise and their willingness to share skills and knowledge in what has become a very successful and mutually supportive partnership.

In this twentieth year, there is much to be proud of, not least the dedication of the Committee who all give their time voluntarily to manage the membership and the finances; write the newsletter; maintain the website and social media; organise the conservation and arboretum volunteers, the archaeological projects and events; generate publicity and attend national forestry forums and consultations. Since 1995, Friends has raised £200 000 for projects to enhance the forest for people and wildlife and in the past five years, has given over 3 700 volunteer hours annually to Thetford Forest.

None of this would have been possible without the support of you, the members. Please continue to support Friends, as active volunteers and financially, with your membership subscriptions. Those of us who are committee members today, would like to think that there will be a Friends' organisation in twenty years time, adapted to changing circumstances but still valuing and enhancing Thetford Forest as a working landscape for its timber resource and for the benefit of wildlife, heritage and people.

BIRD-LIFE AT LYNFORD ARBORETUM

Lynford Arboretum is one of a select few places that the hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) can be regularly seen. Once widespread, this now Red Listed species can only be found in very special habitats such as ancient woodland.

The hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) is especially favoured as a nest site and the seeds of this tree are one of the main foods for adult birds along with wild cherry species. Lynford is of course not ancient woodland but the 18th century parkland contains an avenue of hornbeam that marks part of the old carriageway that linked the main Lynford Estate to St Mary's church at West Tofts.



Hawfinch are instantly recognisable as one of the largest of the finches with a large and powerful bill.

Many of our visitors actually come especially from many miles away just to catch sight of a hawfinch.

DISCOVERY DAY 2015

Sunday March 22nd saw FoTF at High Lodge for the annual Discovery Day working alongside and supporting FC to promote the sales of the Discovery Pass, and to encourage the public to visit the site. A number of other partners and concessions were also on site offering more activities, and by early afternoon the overflow car park was being used with over 950 cars arriving, and conservative estimates put visitor numbers at over 3000, and there were lots of happy faces to be seen all around the marquees.



CONSERVATION GROUP

Friends Conservation Volunteers with owl nest-boxes made at their December event to help the BTO study Tawny Owl productivity and dispersal in Thetford Forest.



LYNFORD NEWS

By the time you read this the Arboretum will have, right by the entrance, car parking for the disabled which is up to the latest standards. Wheel chair users will be able to access the 'all ability' path system directly without having to negotiate inches of mud. Early in the Friends tenure at Lynford, and after consultations with 'Birding for All' (then The Disabled Birders Association), seating was enhanced with somewhere to 'perch' at approximately one hundred metres intervals. Not long afterwards this scheme was extended to the adjoining Lynford Zigzag path system.

As part of the Olympic Legacy a one mile, way marked route, was laid out around the 'all ability' path system. This is one of 2012 around Britain, set up with the intention of encouraging people to walk for their health.

The badge of the Friends of Thetford Forest depicts a stylised Red Squirrel. In fact close examination of a much enlarged picture of it, shows it is composed of activities which can be undertaken in the Forest. As for the creature's nose, this reveals it to be one of the main wheels of a wheel chair.

Friends of Thetford Forest

Your current Committee

Anne Mason Chair/ PFE
Campaign

Alan Spidy Vice Chair / PFE
Campaign

Dave Goodrum Secretary
/newsletter + www /
Conservation

Sheila Hume Treasurer /
Membership

Mike Hume / Lynford Group

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