

**The year November 2011 to October 2012 saw us with Lottery money still to spend on plantation thinning, and also funds for plants, nestboxes and other improvements available until May. Further free trees were on offer, this time from the Woodland Trust. So after a busy first year there was plenty to do!**

Calendar of events

### **Nestbox building day**

In November we had a well-attended nestbox building day, with families working together to hammer together pre-cut bird and bat boxes. We made and put up 10 bat boxes and 15 bird boxes, bringing the total for birds to 21. When we checked later in the year, we found 19 had been occupied, one hadn't, and one had been knocked off the tree. This is a very high occupancy rate, and as one Bluetit was seen nesting in a bat box, it is clear we have not yet saturated the demand. Unfortunately, due to the wet spring there was a higher than usual failure rate, with several broods dying in the nest.

### **Tree planting**

In December as part of our plan to increase tree diversity, we planted some seedling trees that members had grown in pots, and added protection against deer to those we had planted earlier in the year. In January we received 105 trees, 15 each of oak, birch, rowan, blackthorn & hawthorn, from the Woodland Trust as part of their Jubilee Forest project, which a team came together to plant out in February. In March we added a range of shrubs (hazel, holly, dogwood, guelder rose, buckthorn), both bought and home-grown, to provide further diversity. Although the winter was dry, the subsequent wet summer has meant that the survival and growth rate of these trees and shrubs has been generally good, though nettle and bindweed has threatened to stifle some of them, and we held work parties to clear them.

### **Knotweed**

After last year's weedkiller blitz on Japanese Knotweed, the patches were weakened but there was still some to be cleared and burnt so that we could easily mow the new shoots when they came. We had a working party to do that in January. The two patches on either side of the cinder track were sown with grass and wildflower mixtures, and during the year new growth was pulled regularly – these patches are now grassy with flowers and few knotweed shoots. The third patch along the middle path is being controlled solely by scything and not sown with additional plants. This patch is full of teasels, mullein, weld and other plants whose seed must have long lain in the soil – but there's still quite a lot of knotweed.

### **Litter picking**

We had two clean-up days for litter, in January and March, the latter part of OxClean, during which we removed the remains of three further old rough-sleeper camps that remained. The result of these efforts is that much less litter is now being left on the Eyot, and one actually sees people departing with bags of rubbish! There are of course still some thoughtless people who leave cans and plastic bottles.

### **Rough sleepers**

Possibly due to the wet weather, there have been fewer rough sleepers camping this year, although a persistent pair of youths in a copse by the Cherwell lasted two months. The police's excellent homeless liaison officer Harvey Wareham has been moved to other duties,

and the current response by police when alerted is unfortunately less effective than he was. There was only one noisy rave, and the police did eventually successfully close it down by temporarily confiscating the amplifier.

### **Thinning the plantation**

Using our Lottery funding, our local contractors thinned about a third of the over-dense plantation in February, creating glades into which we were able to plant undershrubs. The timber extracted (mostly ash) was sold as firewood to the benefit of Friend's funds, as kindly agreed to by Christ Church, to whom it technically belonged. As we have numerous incidental expenses that are not covered by grants etc., this was a most useful one-off contribution.

### **Meadow project**

Another developing project is the 'meadow' near the Jackdaw Lane entrance, which is part of a long term project to return parts of the area to flower-rich grassland, as it was in the early post rubbish-dump years. This will benefit insects, rabbits, voles and reptiles. This area has been regularly mowed this year to get it established. next year it can be allowed to flower. apart from the establishment of grassy bays along main paths, much of the area is however destined to remain as nettles, which protect wildlife in summer and are themselves a valuable habitat for many insects.

### **Pollard willows**

The old willows along the Thames were pollarded by Christ Church in March, making the riverside path much lighter and creating good piles of brash for wildlife habitat alongside.

### **The Kidneys**

As the Kidneys Nature Park is adjacent to Aston's Eyot and shares its wildlife, we decided, when a move was made to create a 'Friends of Meadow Lane Nature Park' that it would be logical if we approached the City Council to have some input on the Kidneys. After discussions with Carl Whitehead of the Parks Department we applied to become the official Friends group also for the Kidneys. The Council will continue with their normal mowing etc., but we will be enhancing the biodiversity of the central field, putting up nestboxes, and possibly creating more of a sheltered pond in the 'houseboat creek'.

### **Public education**

We held some public educational events in spring and summer: bird-song at both dawn and dusk, the latter twice, and also a pond-dipping day which again revealed the surprisingly lively fauna of what appears to be a rather dull ditch. We also held a public information day for learning common flowers and trees.

### **Wildlife recording**

Recording of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and moths has continued on a regular basis; 70 bird species were seen in 2011. The bird breeding records were added to the British Trust for Ornithology's atlas database and also to the Oxford Ornithological Society's proposed local bird atlas. Plants including mosses are also being closely monitored, with regular plant identification sessions for interested members.