

# Friends Of Otterhead Estate



Otterhead Estate Trust

*Thanks to everyone who has become a “Friend of Otterhead” and especially to those who have volunteered to help during the year.*

*A lot has been happening since the Winter Newsletter Jackie sent out in February, soon after which the **Snowdrop walk** attracted good interest and raised some very welcome funds.*

**Path improvements** Thanks to a substantial grant from the **BHAONB & DEFRA** via **Farming in the Protected Landscape (FIPL)**, with further funding from **Wessex Water**, contractors have re-laid the pathway from the Bridge on the main drive, alongside the river and Royston Lake. (Note that this is a “Permissive Path”, not a Public Right of Way.) The work commenced at the start of February & necessitated a 2 month closure of the path. The inclement weather caused a few problems & visitors to the site didn’t like the path being closed. The work presented several challenges to the contractors, clearing the drain, levelling the surface, and erecting 2 small bridges BUT what a difference the work has made. There will be some further work in this area - the large footbridge will be replaced and some of the surfaces widened to provide improved accessibility. We are very grateful to Gavin Saunders for his help in getting this work done.

**Tree felling.** A large compartment of young Larch trees has been issued with a **Statutory Plant Health Notice** and are to be felled by Forestry England. The work will commence on **Monday 21<sup>st</sup> August** when the road bridge will be strengthened so that the Harvester & other heavy machinery can cross. We do not know how long the work will take and expect some disruption over a period of time. Signage will be put in place.

## *People news*

**Richard Denton-Cox** one of our 4 Trustees retired in April. He had been a Trustee for about 8 years, particularly assisting with matters of governance, looking into fund-raising opportunities and getting Charity status for Otterhead Estate Trust. We are very grateful for all that he did, and know he will still retain a keen interest in Otterhead.

**Mal Squance**, our wonderful Fund-raiser, also stepped back in April due to other commitments. Thanks to her work we were able to get funding to improve the steps from the car-park, and replace the Information boards. We’ll welcome her back anytime!

A team from **Neroche Conservation Volunteers** did work on Weds 3<sup>rd</sup> May on the slope up from Royston Lake, changing it to a series of “easy-rise” steps with hand-rail.

This concluded the work funded by **FIPL** for this year.

The team returned on Weds 10<sup>th</sup> May to help Nigel & David with work at the House Leat, constructing the sluice as part of the Hydro project.



## Micro-Hydro update

*Work is progressing well on Otterhead's micro hydro-electric project* and we hope to have a power supply to the Coach House this Autumn. The small turbine will be located downstream of the bridge, taking its power from a spring up in Frog Meadow at the top end of our site. An armoured cable will take the power from the turbine to the Coach House and feed into a bank of batteries. Even though the power supply will be small (less than half a kilowatt initially), this is plenty to run LED lights, computers and even a fridge! The batteries will effectively triple the available power, as the Coach House is only used for 8 hours each school-day, and the beauty of micro hydro is that it generates power 24 hours a day. If successful, this should make life easier for Forest School as they will no longer have to rely on their diesel generator.

Much of the preparation work for the project has been challenging but also interesting. The picture shows the clay pipe which conveys water through the stone culvert, built during Victorian times when the garden was landscaped. It takes the water from the House Leat and runs through the underground culvert (upstream end is just past the House Site and on the right) to join other pipes and eventually emerges in the Coach House Yard.



*Beavers & their impacts are monitored on a regular basis by a team of 6 of our Friends Volunteers working alongside Devon Wildlife Trust.*

Current activity seems to have moved to the Royston Lake side so is no longer in conflict with the Hydro project.

We hope to arrange a visit one evening in September for members of the "Friends of Otterhead"

Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> July was when a group of land-owners met with John & 2 Forestry Commission Officers for a *Training Day held for Devon Treescapes.*

The main focus was on problems associated with Ash Dieback.

**Taunton Mid-week Volunteers** continue with work clearing competing vegetation from around their planted saplings and have 2 further dates planned for this year. Their help is much appreciated.

Several members of **Somerset Rare Plants Group** led by Stephen Parker spent Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July surveying the Otterhead Estate Trust site. Remember this is classed as a *Local Wildlife Site*. They had an interesting day. We await their up-to-date list of species.

Contractors working for Wessex Water checked growth of Knotweed species & cut the vegetation down the banking from the main drive and bridge. This will help control the spread of Hogweed and other species which spread rapidly.

Forest School arranged with local farmer to mow the Watered Meadow & part of the House site on 4<sup>th</sup> August. "Sometime", the cut vegetation needs to be raked off so that this will decrease fertility and improve floral and insect biodiversity.

**Jim Scott, a keen bird-watcher and wildlife enthusiast, pays regular visits to Otterhead Lakes.** He'd noticed a large number "froglets" crossing the path near the lower bridge at Royston Lake early in July. This is good news as the spawning time coincided with the work being done in that area. Golden-ringed dragonflies have been out on patrol as well as Beautiful Demoiselles. (male left female right)



In a quiet moment, Jim captured this image of a young Roebuck

**Can you spare a few hours per month to help at Otterhead?**

*Jackie, our fantastic "Friends co-ordinator", is out of action for the time being. We greatly miss her help with the website, newsletters, work parties, and running the Friends group. Her absence has led to a lack of comms & events - for which we apologise. We wish her a good recovery.*

We're looking for help with any (not all!) of these activities:

- quarterly newsletter
- assisting with the Friends of Otterhead
- helping to organise work parties
- First Aider for work parties
- fund-raising
- updating the website

**If you think you could help, please get in touch by email at [info@otterheadestate.org](mailto:info@otterheadestate.org)**

**WORK Parties** Plenty of need for some help on site will include cutting back Sycamore re-growth on the banking below the Walled Garden, raking off cut vegetation at the Watered Meadow & House site, more cutting & clearance of Laurel. **Provisional dates** are the mornings of the **first Saturdays of the month 9.30am – noon** so Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept, Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> October, Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> November, Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> December depending of course on fair weather.

Make a note in your diary - **many hands make light work!**

## Information Boards.

In recent years, the 5 Information Boards had become very dilapidated and despite being only 9 years old they were struggling to remain upright on their wonky legs. Help had been sought for their replacement & it was only in May this year that Mal managed to raise the necessary funds from **Nineveh Trust**. BUT that was only for 3 of the panels. We were pleased that **Wessex Water agreed to match-fund** so that the 6 original panels could be replaced. **Then the fun started!** Where were the original graphics? (after some searching, found at WW). Had there been a price increase? (No that's OK). Would the type of stand meet accessibility criteria? (= needed to be changed). Who would manage the project? (**Valerie** stepped in). Did any of the text need to be altered? (Yes). Who would update the graphics? (**Peter**, a family member "volunteered" to help us out). What about delivery (**Ben** at KenWhite signs arranged for delivery to Bishopswood & **Martin** delivered to Otterhead in his trailer) and installation? (done in 2 phases by 2 **teams of 3 from Neroche Conservation Volunteers** with our help plus **Tim Hooper**). Could the deadline for the grant be met? (only just!) PHEW! Just a bit of tidying up still to do.



THANKS Peter, Mike & Peter (sunny 5<sup>th</sup> July)  
+ Mike, Chris & Dave (on a very wet 2<sup>nd</sup> August!)

When the displays were being sorted, Peter asked for a High res photo of **Philadelphus** for the panel on the House site. We didn't have one & couldn't recollect seeing it. When the panel was being installed on 5<sup>th</sup> July, there it was in full bloom.....so now we know exactly where it is & when to appreciate it at its best!



The panels now include the new Otterhead Estate Trust website address: **otterheadestate.org** and a QR code which links directly to the website. We hope this will generate extra interest & donations (always welcome especially if gift-aided)

## Friends of Otterhead

The Otterhead Estate Trust is a not-for-profit organisation run entirely by volunteers. Whether you use the reserve regularly or appreciate it from afar (!) we would love to have more "Friends of" members. It costs £10 a year. The money helps with the upkeep of the site and also means you have say in how the site is run and can attend members only events. Corporate membership is available at £25.

You can join up directly via our website [www.otterheadestate.org](http://www.otterheadestate.org).

If you'd like to know more about the Friends group, please contact [info@otterheadestate.org](mailto:info@otterheadestate.org)