

OTTERHEAD ESTATE TRUST

Wildlife Sightings / Nature Notes

25 July 2024

Took a photo on the House site overlooking the lake of what seemed to be an interesting spider in its web, seemingly encapsulating it.....held in a Knapweed plant with moisture drops. Made contact with Francis Farr-Cox who records Arachnids and he sent this information:- "The spider is **Pisaura mirabilis** the Nursery Web Spider. It is actually a hunting spider and the "web" isn't a web. It's the nursery the female builds for her spiderlings. Initially she carries what is often a huge egg sac in her jaws. Before they hatch she builds the nursery web and places the egg sac inside at the top. You can just make out a white mass in your photo. Very atmospheric picture!

Lizard seen 3 Aug 2024

We were over at Otterhead Lakes on the morning of Sat 3rd Aug for a work party and were delighted to see a small lizard resting on the fence just off the Main Drive. Have to admit, we'd been doing a bit of strimming/raking off nearby so perhaps that's why the tail had been shed. I got the photo but when I tried to get a bit nearer to check it was OK, it shot off! We contacted John Dickson of "Reptiles and Amphibians group so that the record could be added to their database. He gave this information: "FYI the lizard is a male and in generally good condition, although it has a couple of ticks in its armpit! You didn't cause the tail shed. If you look closely you'll see that the tip has already started to regrow, so I think it was lost several weeks ago."



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Message from the editor...

"Thanks to everyone who has become a "Friend of Otterhead", continued membership and especially to those who have volunteered to help and/or made a donation during the year. All interest in our work is much appreciated."

Introduction

Summer is always a good time to visit Otterhead and it is during the past 3 months that there has been a lot of management activity on site. As many will be aware from their own gardens, what you want to grow is struggling and what you don't want too much of is thriving! We are grateful for the help we have had from Forest School, TMCV and our own "Friends of Otterhead" volunteers as well as the donations and membership subs received. We would welcome further interest and involvement especially from members of the local communities who regularly visit the site and perhaps have some expertise to share: Do get in touch either via the website or in reply.



Pisaura mirabilis



Lizard

Swans There are now 2 pairs of swans at Otterhead, a pair on each lake. For some reason, the current "residents" on Royston lake didn't nest and produce cygnets so that was a change from previous years. On one of his visits in July, Jim Scott witnessed 2 new arrivals looking for their own patch and got these 2 photos.



Swans



Yellow leguminous plants are a welcome sight on the slope below the Walled Garden and attract the attention of bees such as *Bombus hypnorum*. This species is increasing in range from the South, having colonised Britain in 2000.



Work done on site in the past three months

Wessex Water Dry boot scrubber

Wessex Water Dry boot scrubber re control of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) has been installed at the car park and we hope it will get good and proper use. When people saw contractors working by the entrance to the car park, there was concern that equipment for payment for parking was being installed. "No" it was the boot-scrubber being put in the wrong place. It has now been re-located and although not in the agreed position, will remain in place.

We would welcome donations from visitors: Use the QR code to connect to the Otterhead website "Donate".



Dry boot scrubber

Interpretation panel frames

Repairs to Interpretation panel frames:- We had noticed a problem with the 6 new Interpretation panels, reported it to the manufacturers Ken White signs and are pleased that a design fault was acknowledged and soon remedied. Thanks to Ben White and Stewart Piper for sorting this out so promptly.

TMCV Group

TMCV group met at Otterhead Thursday 18th July and gave the Laurel hedge, alongside the saplings and main track, its annual cut. This is one of Otterhead's Heritage features.

WW - contractor

WW contractor during the last week in July strimmed the North face of the dam and did their annual control of Knotweed.

David Jackson spent a considerable amount of time doing work along the Millstream/leat. Some of the work was laying lengths of Willow and staking it in place in an attempt to lessen the amount of debris entering the water course. He writes "more light is now getting to the area which is great for promoting growth on the south bank, along with drying it out. I've also noticed a lot of bats and owls using the location recently". David is also helping with much of the preparatory work proposed.



Forestry work

Forestry work on clearfell Larch site:- Mid-August an Excavator was brush-raking to start to get the area ready to be re-planted = probably next year.

Local farmer mowed the three "Meadows" Saturday 31st August.



Otterhead Lakes Friends Work Parties...

6 July Four volunteers spent three hours at the car park giving it a general tidy up, clearing cut Laurel from alongside the ramp, cutting back encroaching bramble and some other Laurel at the entrance and cleaning the noticeboard and sign.

3 August Seven volunteers spent between two and three hours checking/controlling unwanted hogweed, docks and plantain by dead-heading and removing. This was done along the main drive and riverside path. Some strimming and raking off was carried out near the Laurel hedge and INNS sign.

7 September The aim was for the "Big Rake off" at the three "Meadows" but with just six participants and wet grass (+ not cut close to the ground) it was hard work. However, the team raked the cut material at the far House site "Meadow" and shifted it all into two large heaps where it will be left.

Looking ahead: Next work party is proposed for morning of **Saturday 5th October** when we shall cut back Sycamore and Laurel re-growth + some bramble and unwanted vegetation to clear the slope below the Walled Garden. Two of our regular volunteers are not available so why not join us?



September 7th Work Party

Coffee morning

Buckland St Mary Community Coffee morning will be held in our favour Saturday 12th Oct 10.30-12noon and is advertised locally. Do come along to support us. Bring produce and cakes to sell, make donations, join the "Friends" group.

Fund Raising

With at least £2 500 needed for annual core-funding (and rising costs) there is a need to find money to cover Insurance, Accountants, website and emptying the dog bin.

Valerie has co-ordinated the appeal for old money: coins, notes and foreign currency and so far £1,073 has been raised from 21 donors, three of which were quite substantial. The idea was to end the appeal at Easter but it has been left open and in 2025 will change to broken/unused jewellery: start looking and get your friends/family on board too.

Of course, we welcome all donations and membership subscriptions.

Beavers

Jake Chant ex DWT and now Natural England led a visit to Otterhead Lakes on 18th July with colleagues from NE and DEFRA legal team (lots of Lawyers). They do a lot of great work but rarely get out to see anything. I took them round Otterhead Lakes to show them beaver activity and talk to them about the benefits and challenges wild beavers bring. The site was looking and sounding great. Thanks."

There continues to be a lot of Beaver activity on site and our team of volunteer monitors and Forest school staff are kept busy checking their impacts mainly on the leat. Devon Wildlife Trust cover the River Otter catchment, visit regularly and give advice although this area is just within Somerset. Wessex Water are also involved in discussions

There is evidence of recent Beaver activity at the footpath and river side of Royston Lake.

Forthcoming projects this Autumn/Winter at Otterhead

1. Car Park Resurfacing

Over half term, week of 28th October - 1st November, the car park is going to get some much-needed attention. In heavy rain, water rushes down the road and has carved out a channel through the car park. We're installing a drain at the car park entrance to carry this surface water away and then repairing the car park surface. We'll also be creating a disabled parking bay and later on in the winter we will be replacing the OET noticeboard with something more in keeping. Unfortunately the car park will be closed for that week - and if the job goes to plan it should be open again on Saturday 2nd November.

Posters will be put confirming closure dates of the car park.

The project has been funded by Blackdown Hills National Landscape - many thanks.

2. New short circular walk and leat path repairs are matters in hand and weather permitting work on this will commence soon. This project is to be funded by Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL). Check out the notice board and website for latest details.

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 a 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. If you'd like to know more about the Friends group, please contact info@otterheadestate.org.

Plea for volunteers:- Can you or someone you know help us out by Volunteering?

Can you spare a few hours per month to help run the "Friends of Otterhead"?

Have you an interest and some experience in Fund-raising? Please get in touch.

If you think you could help, please get in touch by email at info@otterheadestate.org

Next Management meeting is scheduled for:- afternoon of Wednesday 16th October 2024