

# FRIENDS *of* LONG LANE PASTURE

## NEWSLETTER

No. 10 August 2008

The interminable negotiations with Barnet for the site's **lease** continue, and a number of difficult issues now appear to have been resolved. In addition, we have had a site visit to record the state of the fencing. However, a few points *still* remain to be agreed and we await some background documents. Progress is being made, but we wish it could be a lot quicker.

**Wildlife:** the **moth** trap has been out on two nights – once on 26 June for the **Open Day** and again in July – and we hope to run it again over the night of 22-23 August (weather permitting). So far we have identified nine new species for our site moth list. These include Ingrailed Clay (most welcome as its caterpillars feed on brambles!), Poplar Grey (which presumably live in the poplars by the footpath), Marbled Minor (a grassland moth), and the Scalloped Oak (a total of 4 individuals all from one night, which is most unusual). Although new for the Pasture, these are typical moths for the place and the time of the year, and are all UK residents and relatively common. A 6-spot Burnet Moth (a day-flying species) turned up, and no doubt there will soon be others. There is ragwort in the Pasture so, sure enough, Cinnabars appeared.

If you are interested in finding out more about moths, come along on Saturday to see if we have any new species to add to our expanding site list.

26 June was warm and sunny, a perfect day for local residents to come along to see how the Pasture was progressing, and some 50 or so did just that, recalling the Pasture when horses grazed there and when there were allotments on part of it during and immediately after the war. It was a perfect day, too, for **butterflies** as there were lots of flowering plants to supply nectar for the newly emerging adults, and plenty of places for them to lay their eggs to ensure a new generation. Species included Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Skippers and Gatekeepers (in *huge* numbers, especially in the long grass where they lay their eggs and feed on the thistles). There were Peacocks on the buddleia, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell and Large Whites. At other times we have noted Small Whites and Speckled Woods.

At this time of the year **insects** abound: hoverflies, dragonflies, damselflies; honeybees, mining bees, bumblebees; grasshoppers, ladybirds, longhorn beetles (red, and often in pairs) – would anyone like to undertake a more detailed investigation?

**Birds** too. Swifts have been zooming over the pond to drink, and two flew round a sparrow hawk as it circled high overhead. The whitethroat and blackcap have been singing through the summer, suggesting that they probably bred, as the wrens, arriving with their fledglings, certainly did. We have observed young greenfinches, goldfinches, house sparrows (increasingly rare in many parts of London), robins, song thrush and starlings all feeding on the Pasture.

Perhaps the most rewarding sight was of Jack (aged 8) and his older sister May (10) busily identifying, recording and illustrating their finds from pondskaters (23) through red insects mating (10) to five-petalled buttercups (7). Two enthusiastic young naturalists in the making.

The Pasture has grown ever more lush in the near perfect early summer conditions. Grasses move gently in the slightest breeze and we realise that many of the species are unknown to us so two of the work team have started identifying them, a rather more difficult task than you might think.

Suddenly all the poppies are in flower: pink, orange, mauve, dark red, scarlet all standing about 3 foot tall and breathtakingly beautiful. The whole butterfly border is looking good despite attempts at strangulation by the ubiquitous bindweed and bramble intrusions and is beginning to repay all the attention given to it.

Shay is pleased with the **big pond**, which is now nine months old. Most of the plants we planted in the autumn have survived through the winter. The water is very clear and has been colonised by many species.

Diving beetles, waterboatmen, backswimmers and smooth newts can all be seen coming up for air. While netting in the shallows in mid June we caught two smooth newt larvae with external gills still present. By now their metamorphosis will be complete and they will have lost their gills to become air breathing adults and will be looking round for places to hibernate. It takes three years for smooth newts to become sexually mature, and then they will return to the pond in early spring. After mating, the females will lay 7 to 12 eggs a day onto aquatic plants where they will hatch in two to three weeks. The smooth newt spends a lot of time on dry land hunting insects, worms and slugs to eat. Though they can live for up to twenty years they usually live for about six.

Earlier in the year we had a problem with blanket weed, a filamentous algae, *genus* spirogyra, also known as mermaid's tresses or silk weed. Mats of it appear on the water surface during the sunshine, kept afloat by tiny bubbles of oxygen created by photosynthesis. When the sun goes down the mat sinks and photosynthesis is reduced leading the algae to extract oxygen from the water and produce carbon dioxide as a waste product. Left uncontrolled, large mats develop leading to fluctuations in the Ph value of the water and the death of aquatic organisms. We have regularly removed mats from the pond and the Ph has shown no large fluctuations.

**Brambles** are still abundant, and if you come on Saturday between 10 and 12 you are welcome to pick blackberries. To encourage you, Maureen has provided a recipe for blackberry jelly (and there will be some she made earlier for you to taste).

Pick berries that shine: dull ones may be overripe and would spoil the jelly. Weigh, and rinse in a colander. Collect together and thoroughly clean your jam jars (you will need roughly 2-3lb jars for 1.5 lbs of fruit).

Put your rinsed fruit in a large saucepan without adding more water and simmer, stirring occasionally, for about 5 mins. until the fruit is soft. Then put the mixture in a sieve over a bowl and mash out the juice.

Return juice to the saucepan. Add about the same amount of sugar, or a little less (try a mixture of jam sugar and demerara) and stir over a medium heat until the sugar has dissolved. Meanwhile, warm your jamjars to prevent them from cracking.

Once the sugar has dissolved, turn up the heat and boil for about 5 mins. this time without stirring. Test for setting by dropping a teaspoonful onto a cold plate and leave for a minute. If it is at setting point it should not be runny.

When you think it will set, pour it into your prepared jars and screw on the lids. Keep out of the reach of children until the jars are cool.

***Blackberry jelly is a treat on toast, bread and butter, and ice-cream and fantastic with natural yoghurt.***

This Newsletter is issued by the Long Lane Pasture Trust, 1 Princes Avenue, Finchley, London, N3 2DA

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