

Woods Meadow Country Park – Newsletter February 2021

Just before the snow and cold snap this Winter members of the East Suffolk Norse Arboriculture Team put their climbing skills to an unusual use at Woods Meadow Country Park.

As I was putting up a Tit box on a mature Oak tree in the Park last year I heard the sudden wing beats of a disturbed bird but it wasn't the usual Wood Pigeon as the sound was softer altogether and as I looked up I saw a Barn Owl perched and looking down at me with a quizzical look. I said "sorry." But it flew off to another mature Oak for refuge. The bird had been roosting in a large cavity of the Oak. On reading about Barn Owls I learnt that if you are going to provide a nesting box it is good to provide two as the male Owl doesn't roost with his family. Not wanting to disturb the roosting Owl again, I planned to put a nesting box on the other mature Oak.

Could I persuade the busy Arboriculture team to help as fixing a large wooden box to a tree has risk written all over it. Rob Slarke the Arboriculture manager was happy to help and I met Dave Riddles and Leon Edwards a couple of weeks later. They were glad to have break from the normal tree work and very quickly had the box into position with a few directions from me, safely on the ground. It is important that the opening of the box is facing away from the prevailing winds and weather and not to have the box leaning backwards which could make exiting the box more difficult. The box was secured and the shelf which allows the young Owlets to stand on as they exit was fitted. I thanked Dave and Leon very much for their efforts and there was a palpable feeling among us of a job well done, as is often the way when you know that you are making positive difference for wildlife.



Barn Owl box installation



Interpretation board

The first interpretation board for the site has been installed at the Hall Lane entrance to the site. The board will help new visitors orientate themselves, take note of different routes and see how the Park will mature. It is important to highlight habitats and conservation aims so that visitors can understand some of the measures that have been put in place. The Skylark is the logo of the Park as this area is and has been a stronghold of this bird whose numbers have crashed nationally since the 1970's. An inner fence to the 'hay field' has been installed recently by Kiwi Fencing. The fence will restrict visitor access to the hay field during the Skylarks breeding season. After a late cut of hay has been taken visitors will be allowed access until the end of February.

Horse access is being installed and a bridle gate of the nationally accepted dimensions can now be found at the Wood Lane entrance. The original idea of anti-vehicle step over gates was dropped as at the time of enquiry they were not being made due to covid19, furloughing etc as I explained in the last Park news letter. However, since installing the bridle gate on Wood Lane several riders have voiced their opinions that they can be difficult to operate, even causing injury. On looking into step over gates again, we did find a supplier that had two available and we have since had one installed at the Hall Lane entrance. We will also establish further 'stepover' access along Wood Lane for horse riders coming from that direction.



Hall Lane vehicle access and 'horse stepover' gate (Kissing gate to be added)

Planning permission is going through the motions to site a wooden cladded container. The wooden cladding gives it a cabin style look and much easier on the eye. The container will be used as a volunteer hub and gathering point, a place to store small hand tools such as spades and as a workshop. On the odd occasion a place to escape the weather. The area will be planted with native shrubs and trees to further soften any views of the container.



Cladded container

A dog proof fence has been installed by Kiwi Fencing this uses horse friendly dimension wire netting. It was much easier to install the fence just the Park side of the original fence rather than trying to replace the original. It is plain to see that Kiwi fencing take pride in their work as the quality speaks for itself Further gaps in the vegetation along the boundary with the stables will be fenced soon to achieve the same goal. This will be a great relief to me as well as the stable owners as dogs running around uninvited in horse paddocks is definitely something to be avoided. Now that visitors will be in closer to the horse paddocks it is essential that visitors have a clear message that on no account should they feed the horses.



Paddock fencing



Hay field inner fence

Spring is with us and the Skylarks are back singing over their intended nesting areas. They won't start until early April though which still gives time to cultivate and sow. Skylarks have several nesting attempts all the way to late July, they do this because being ground nesting birds they are particularly prone to having their nests predated or destroyed. It's their way of ensuring some success. If you are not already familiar with this bird, listen out for a continual song coming from somewhere high above you when you are at the Park. Sometimes you can pick out the black speck that is making the song but often not. The ideal vegetation height for them to nest in is 20-50 cm but any longer they tend to stay away from it, that's why Winter sown cereals can be okay for a while but later in the season are generally too long for them.

It has been good to get positive feedback on how the Park is progressing and that the overwhelming majority are behind the aspirations for the Park. To enjoy it fully as it gets busier will mean considering each other probably more than before. It has been noticeable over the Winter how much more dog poo is not being picked up. Not forgetting that there is ultimately a potential £1000 fine for offenders. We will soon have another dog bin sited near the Wood Lane entrance.

Hopefully by the time of the next Park news letter things will be getting back to normal covid19 wise but until then carry on staying safe is the message.



Sky Lark Conservation



To allow these declining ground nesting birds to nest successfully, visitors have restricted access from

The end of February to August.

Access may also be limited to allow agricultural operations.

