

Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall meeting, 7.30 pm, Wednesday, 18 January 2012
Cherry Hinton Village Church Centre, Colville Road, Cherry Hinton

Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall is a group that is concerned about the usage, environment, welfare and future of the Cherry Hinton Hall grounds for the benefit of those who use it

30 people were in attendance at the Village Centre, Cherry Hinton. There were apologies from Ian Simmons, Ralph Hawtry, Robert Dryden and Bob Daines.

1. In Bob Daines's absence, the Chair was taken by David Taylor who welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. The minutes of the 16 November meeting were agreed. There were no matters arising.
3. Guest Speaker: Sam Ovenden

David Taylor welcomed Sam Ovenden as guest speaker. Sam is Membership Development Officer (Corporate and Community) with the RSPB. Sam looks after the entire Eastern Region, which covers Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Bedfordshire, Essex, Northamptonshire, Hertfordshire and Norfolk. The Membership Development Team is 'the face of the RSPB'

Background:

RSPB is one of the largest nature conservators in the world, and the largest in Europe. The RSPB is funded entirely by donations, and has more members than all UK political parties put together. The RSPB looks after 300,000 acres of land across 202 nature reserves. These nature reserves are home to ~ 80% of the UK's most threatened species (not just birds but mammals, amphibians, plants, etc). Decision making is based on solid research work. The goals are to protect, restore and manage land – it's all about habitat.

History:

The charity was founded in over 100 years ago in 1889 by a group of women who started a campaign against the use of feathers from the Great Noddy Grebe which was declining as it was increasingly being killed for its feathers. Their campaigning eventually resulted in an act of parliament to protect the species and the formation of the RSPB.

Why help, why join, what should we do?

- To bring people into contact with wildlife
- To help fill gaps between green spaces (create 'stepping stones')
- Grow your own fruit and vegetables
- Composting / wormories
- Fun for the family

- Create a ‘nature reserve in your own back garden’

Anyone can do it –

For instance, put a bird box up; plant native species; it’s easy and the RSPB will provide you with all the information you need.

There are three basic principles in terms of what birds need:

1. Somewhere to shelter

Vegetation, shrubs, trees, log-piles

2. Somewhere to breed

Nest boxes. The RSPB encourages people to use different sized holes. Start with larger holes (helps sparrows)

Let some brambles grow (birds can nest safely here as cats cannot get to them)

Create insect habitats (examples of structures with bricks, logs, wood, pine cones, tiles, etc – a ‘wildlife hotel’)

Straw pockets (you can buy these) are good for animals including birds for keeping warm in winter

3. All year round food

Think about what you plant – best is native species

Unplanted soil (good for invertebrates)

Nectar (you can buy ‘feeders’)

Fruits and seeds

Dead and decaying wood and bark (food for insects e.g. stag beetle)

** “If you feed, feed all year round”

Winter: High fat e.g. fat cakes, peanuts* (NB do not use salted peanuts as feed)

Bird seed mixes e.g. sunflower seeds / flaked maize

Bulk sunflower seeds

Nyjer seeds (high oil content especially good for goldfinches and Siskins, but this can be expensive, so the recommendation is to only buy if you already get Goldfinches and Siskins in your garden)

Peanut feeders – NB the recommendation here is to only buy with small mesh as if birds are able to extract whole peanuts they will often feed these directly to their young which will be too big and result in the chicks dying)

* Some peanuts can be poisonous; to avoid this ensure they are ‘RSPB approved’

Please also be aware of ‘mixes’ – some cheap varieties from e.g. pet shops are bulked out with dog biscuits – please don’t buy these.

Water:

Very important; even small or medium-sized sources will benefit a variety of species. Please – no fish in ponds! They will eat everything. Please also ensure that you provide a way for frogs, toads, newts, hedgehogs, etc to

get out e.g. a gentle slope at one side or a small ramp made from a piece of wood – otherwise they will drown.

Bird baths – if bowl-shaped, please place a stone in the bottom for the bird to stand on – so the bird doesn't get the lower, downy layer wet – the bird can die of exposure.

Tips:

- Plant buddleia, foxglove, poppy, etc – anything to encourage bumble bees
- Or you can buy bumble bee boxes
- For solitary bees (the key pollinators for the UK), place a stick in the ground with a hole in it (sloping slightly downwards to stop the rain getting in)
- Stinging nettles – this is one of the best plants you can have - one bush can support 50 varieties of insect
- Varying lengths of grass
- A variety of nectar- and seed-rich plants
- Layered and stacked deadwood (hide behind the long grass)
- Plant native species
- Provide a boggy area

How?

- Just create (the wilder the better) an area
- Feed all year round
- Plant with wildlife species in mind
- Visit Flatford Wildlife Garden (see <http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/f/flatford/index.aspx>)
- Sign up to the 'Homes for Wildlife' scheme at <http://www.rspb.org.uk/hfw/>

The 2012 Big Garden Bird Watch takes place over the weekend of 21-22 January 2012. Over 10m birds were counted last year. This scheme is the largest social science survey undertaken in the world.

Top species –

Still the same top 3 (numbers recorded per garden)

	1979	2011
House sparrow	10	4.2
Starling	15	4.9
Blackbird	4	3.6

Stepping up For Nature has four categories. If you can, please try one of these.

DO	GIVE
VOLUNTEER	CAMPAIGN

The areas that the RSPB is currently concentrating on include:

1. Coastal areas – to clamp down on the protection of our coastline
2. Rainforests (the RSPB is an *international* organisation!)
3. Housing developments / new build – trying to ensure green space and nest boxes are incorporated as standard

92% of donations go *direct* to conservation. There are now over 1m supporters. There is no set membership fee – members decide how much they want to donate. But membership brings free entry to over 200 nature reserves in the UK, and helps to deliver greater political leverage.

▪ Questions and discussion

Bob Hall: What shouldn't you do?

A: Never feed white bread – it fills the birds up and offers little nutritional value. This includes for ducks, swans, etc so the RSPB tries to discourage it. There are other disbenefits – white bread sinks, ferments, and causes an algae bloom which in turn sucks all the oxygen from the water, killing the fish. St Alban's Park offer bird feed at 50p per bag, which is a good idea.

Feed hedgehogs dog/cat food – not milk.

Magpies – we witness them killing and robbing other birds. What can we do?

A: There may be pockets of high numbers but the magpie population as a whole has plateaued out. Locally they can be a problem (when they get together). In order to control magpies, a person needs to be registered and hold a licence. The RSPB takes a UK view and overall doesn't feel there is a problem. Again, be assured that overall the smaller birds are not suffering.

What can we do about collared doves and wood pigeons that eat the entire supply of bird seed from a table?

A: Get a ground feeding station, and place a cage over it so as small birds can get in, but larger birds and cats cannot.

What about squirrels?

A: You can buy 'squirrel-proof feeders', but I'm not convinced that anything is ever truly squirrel proof! Sometimes, mixing a small amount of chilli power into the bird feed works, as the birds don't mind it, but the squirrels are put off.

Harvest mice?

Cut a hole no bigger than a 2p piece in an old tennis ball, and place this in a tree. It makes an ideal home.

Mark Ashton: The City Council is in the early stages of making extensive changes to Cherry Hinton Hall grounds and adopting a master plan for its redevelopment. Is the RSPB able to advise the Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall along with Council Officers on aspects of the master plan works that may be tweaked to make it more bird- and wildlife-friendly?

A: Yes, please get in touch and we can see if one of our conservation officers can come and do a site visit with all appropriate people.

4. Maintenance issues

David, Stuart, and Sandra outlined some issues which the Committee is currently asking the City Council to address.

- Zip wire

The zip wire has been repaired and reinstalled, but the height of the platform is too high for small children to get on and use this play equipment (almost twice the height of the one on Cherry Hinton Rec).

- Daws Lane Fence

Missing uprights have now been repaired

- Main gate

This has repeatedly been left open and vehicles are speeding along the main roadway again. There is a suspicion that the person living in the lodge keeps opening the gate to make it easier for him to drive in/out. Obviously the safety of pets and small children is being compromised. People were asked to record registration numbers of vehicles and also details if seen of anyone opening and leaving the gate open. We will then provide this evidence to Anthony French to take appropriate action.

- Signs

Barbara Oxley reiterated that we need signs around the duck pond including on appropriate bird feeding. Sandra confirmed that signage is being included in the master plan works.

- Mopeds

Robert Dryden is in contact with the Police as there have been reports that mopeds are again using the Hall grounds at night. Sandra mentioned that there is a sign by the Daws Lane gate saying it is illegal to ride mopeds in the park – it would be good to have these visible at every entrance.

5. Update on progress with Master Plan delivery

Preliminary works as outlined by Anthony French are due to commence at the end of January / start of February once funding has been rubber stamped, including removal of hedges and fencing around the old propagation area, tree planting along the Daws Lane boundary, brook clearance, etc. The committee will liaise with Anthony French as this work proceeds.

- Jubilee Tree Planting

Sandra Day mentioned that she had found out that free packs of trees (including oak saplings) are available from the Woodland Trust to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. After discussing with Anthony French and Kenny McGregor (Tree Officer) from the City Council, Sandra and Stuart will look to purchase a pack for use

at the Leete Road boundary and by the skate park on Cherry Hinton Recreation Ground. Anthony and co already have planting plans for the Hall and can access these sorts of saplings at e.g. 30p each and have sufficient to do within the current master plan works.

- Ken Woolard Memorial Bench

Sandra mentioned that she is liaising with Joan Woolard and Anthony French and a way forward to incorporate a bench has been found.

6. AOB

The next meeting will take place at 7.30 p.m., on Wednesday 21 March 2012, at Cherry Hinton Village Centre. The guest this time will be Guy Belcher, Cambridge City Council Nature Conservation Officer.