



Caring for Wildlife and Heritage
Reg. Charity No. 1084566

NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 21 September 2008

Local Nature Reserve

Skylarks

One of the wonderful features of Hob Moor is the sound of a Skylark singing hundreds of feet above. The numbers of these ground nesting birds have been in serious decline in the UK over the last 20 years and are consequently “red listed”, so Friends of Hob Moor (FoHM) and the Council have been doing their best over the last few years to protect them. This has meant improving their nesting areas by removing tall trees which predators can use and allowing the grass to grow on three unused sports pitches in the middle of the moor.

FoHM monitor the numbers and the average over the last six years has been seven singing males (males are counted as they sing to attract females). However, the continuous presence of the cattle over last winter due to the Bluetongue restrictions had a serious impact on the birds. Because the cattle were eating the grass all winter, it was too short for the birds to nest in during the spring, reducing the Skylark numbers to two singing males this year.

Meadow Pipits, another species of ground-nesting bird on the Moor, have also decreased in number. We can only hope that the populations of these two birds will increase again next spring.

Cattle

The Bluetongue restriction zone has been extended and now includes the farm to which the cattle normally return at the end of October, so this year it should be easier to move them from the Moor.

Thistles

The edges of the cycle path and other areas were mown by the Council, very little thistle hoeing took place this year and larger scale action on the thistles is planned by the Council for next year.

Railway Underpass

Following a concerted effort by FoHM and Councillor James Alexander, work has recently been carried out by the Council to improve drainage and prevent flooding, paint over graffiti and to install a light. A chicane has also been put in place, to reduce the speed of cyclists approaching from the Tadcaster Road end of the tunnel.

York Council Representative

Annemarie Heslop has taken over from Clair Suddaby with responsibility for Hob Moor. We thank Clair for her work and wish her well in her new post.

Events

Bird Walk – May 18th

This spring our annual bird walk was of special interest because of the presence of the cattle throughout the year. The Bluetongue virus meant that conditions on Hob Moor were changed for the breeding Skylarks. The ideal vegetation height for these ground-nesting birds is 20-50cm. We had reports of Skylarks singing in February, March and April and on May 18th we saw and heard at least two Skylarks. Hooray! So we must hope that in 2009 conditions will improve.

Other hazards for the Skylarks are the presence of Magpies and Carrion Crows. On May 18th we counted 15 Carrion Crows – numerous enough for some people to assume that they were Rooks. We also saw a male Reed Bunting in the Hawthorn tree on the central path. No Meadow Pipits were sighted on this walk.

If you are interested in comparing the Skylark/Meadow Pipit song flights then there must be no better place than the cliff top fields at R.S.P.B Bempton. Go in June for a wonderful variety of sights, sounds and smells (!) of our native bird life.

Hob Moor Day – May 31st

As a lightweight gazebo went flying past on a particularly strong gust of wind before being firmly pegged down, we were especially glad to be putting up our sturdy new FoHM gazebo in preparation for the annual Hob Moor Day. The new gazebo, complete with FoHM name, logo and website, can hold much larger displays and has detachable wall panels to suit all weathers.

After the gusty start, the sun shone all afternoon, bringing a large crowd of people of all ages to enjoy the celebration day. There was a range of family activities and entertainment, including live music, a falconry display, a fun dog show with prizes for dogs of all shapes and sizes, face-painting and story-telling, and crafts and bakery stalls. Several local and environmental groups had stands with informative displays. If you couldn't make it this year, don't miss out on the fun next year!

Summer Nature Walk – June 15th

Those who have walked with Mark Tyszka in previous years will know what a fascinating walk this is – his enthusiasm is infectious.

We met at North Lane Pasture where Mark suggested we look for specimens of the Creeping Buttercup and then take note of any flower we might spot with more than the normal five petals. Seed is not produced by Creeping Buttercup and so the plant is propagated by creeping and developing plants. From time to time mutations (i.e. faults in the genes) occur. Usually mutants die, but sometimes the “mistakes” build up over hundreds of years. Work is being done at Aberystwyth University to substantiate the theory that the number of Creeping Buttercups with more than five petals in a sample of a hundred, could provide a method of dating an ancient meadow. We spotted flowers with six, nine, ten and even one with twelve petals.

We then looked at the species rich hedge at the end of North Lane Pasture, where we identified Blackthorn, English Elm, Hawthorn, Guelder Rose and Elder in a 30m stretch. This number of different species suggests that the hedge is likely to be 500 years old.

As the walk progressed, we identified many more wild plants, learning their folk names and uses. It is a delight to find such diversity in what to the untrained eye simply looks like an area of grass. See the attached list for details of more of the plants we found.

Landscape History on Hob Moor – July 16th

Whether this walk was an introduction or a chance to learn more about Hob Moor and its history, it is always a rich experience to share Elizabeth Smith’s wealth of information.

Coinciding with National Archaeology Week, the walk took us over the main part of the Moor and onto Little Hob Moor and North Lane Pasture. It is thrilling to be able to find visible traces left from previous times, from golf course greens dating from between the wars to a pathway which may be Roman in origin.

You can read more about the history of the Moor on the attached sheet.

News

Vacancy on the Committee

After eight years on the committee, Pauline Walker is standing down, so we are looking for a new member to join this friendly group. We hold six meetings a year. If you think you might be interested you can contact David McCloy or Gwen Berwick (on 788018) or Simon Palmour (on 784616) for more details.

Newsletter

We are proposing to email our Newsletter in May 2009 to those on email, which will save on cost and make distribution easier. If you are currently not on our email list, then do let us know when you renew your membership, or email us at: friendsofhobmoor@yahoo.com.

In Brief

- A member of FoHM noted ten pairs of Magpies at one time, earlier this year.
- The Marston Moor Internal Drainage Board (on behalf of the Environment Agency) cut back the banks of the becks to keep drainage clear and observable.
- The Edmund Wilson Pool site is to be sold. FoHM are concerned that the land should continue to be used for leisure purposes (for which it was originally taken from Hob Moor).
- The Press reported recently in their column "The way we were" that a local schoolboy on April 18th 1908, threw a sealed bottle into the beck which flowed across Hob Moor. A paper with his name and address and a request that the finder should return it to him was enclosed within. His paper was returned to him by a lady who found the bottle on May 28th on the Lincolnshire coast near North Coates coast guard station.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

at

West Thorpe Methodist Church, West Thorpe, York

on

Monday, 20 October 2008 at 7.30pm

Parking is available

Refreshments will be served

Before the business part of the meeting, there will be
a talk given by members of the

Holgate Windmill Preservation Society

Useful telephone numbers etc.

To report damage on Hob Moor, contact Leisure Services	613161
To report damage urgently, out of office hours	625751
To report motor cyclists riding on Hob Moor, contact the Police	0845 6060247
For removal of fly tipped debris	551551
Emergencies regarding health and safety of cattle	07872 003266

Don't hesitate to contact us with your comments and suggestions about Hob Moor, Little Hob Moor and our group. You can contact us by email at friendsofhobmoor@yahoo.com or via the website, and by phone on 784616.

Our website is www.friendsofhobmoor.org.uk

Plants found on Mark Tyszka's nature walk, 15/6/2008

Creeping Buttercup, Blackthorn, English Elm, Hawthorn, Guelder Rose, Elder (see Newsletter)

Bittersweet or *Woody Nightshade*, *Common Vetch*, *Sweet Vernal Grass* (which has the characteristic odour of newly mown hay) and *Elderflowers* (which used to be planted near privies in days gone by to keep flies away) were all spotted. *White Bryony* is a creeping and poisonous perennial – the root similar to a carrot or a parsnip was mistaken for an edible food by poor people, wiping out whole families.

Greater Plantain has broad leaves with tough prominent veining, which won't tear and doesn't mind being trodden on. Known locally as Banjos, Beatle Guitars and Angels' Harps it also seems to have followed the migrations of our colonists to every part of the world and in America has been called "White Man's Foot" by the Native American Indians. It is also used as a herbal remedy for toothache.

Ribwort Plantain has long thin leaves and has been variously known as Fighting Cocks, Jack Straw, Kemps (from the Anglo Saxon word "cempa" – a warrior) and an old game amongst country children was to strike the heads one against the other until the stalk breaks (hence the use of these names). In Scotland they were called "Carl Doddies" – the game represented the battle in 1746 between Bonnie Prince Charlie (Carl) and George II (Doddie).

Nettles (Urtica Dioica) support a vast number of insects and four butterflies – Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Peacock and Comma. Sometimes male and female flowers can be found on one plant, but usually a plant bears either male or female flowers, hence the name *Dioica* which means "two houses". We saw a caterpillar of a small tortoiseshell – these are in decline and this could be due to a parasite arriving from Europe causing the caterpillar to become lethargic and too tired to eat.

"Homes" for insects can be in the form of *Galls* – the eggs are injected into the leaves which then develop into the larvae and different insects develop galls in many different forms. Cuckoo spit is the froth exuded by the developing bright green Froghopper for its protection.

Ground Ivy or *Ale Hoof* resembles true Ivy, has blue flowers and was used by early Saxons to clarify their beers before hops were introduced. Known also as *Gill-run-by-the-hedge* and *Robin-run-in-the-hedge*.

Ground Elder or *Goutweed* is reputed to have been brought by the Romans, belongs to the Umbelliferae (carrot) family and the stems and leaves are edible, tasting like celery.

On Little Hob Moor, we noted *Common Vetch*, *Yellow Rattle* (an annual semi-parasite, which causes the surrounding grass to be shorter), *Meadow Cranesbill*, *Mallow*, *Tansy* and *Hedge Woundwort*.

Hob Moor History notes from Elizabeth Smith's walk, 16/7/08

Hob Moor was known as “Yhorksmore” or “Yorke Moor” for centuries, but gradually became known as “Hob Moor”, which may have got its name from “Hob” – spirit of the moor.

We set off from the Edmund Wilson Pool entrance and our first stop was at a point beyond the area of a former claypit (Kelsey’s Pond). Here, a depression in the form of a right angle marks part of the original boundary of Hob Moor. Present day boundaries are irregular as a result of additional fields, thus extending those distances considerably.

An Ordnance Survey map of 1852 shows a footpath from Askham Richard and Askham Bryan crossing Hob Moor to the centre of York, along the line of the present central path. This causeway may date from Roman times and certainly must pre-date the Napoleonic wars.

From the main track we cut across to stop and listen to the huge volumes of rushing water in a big diversion chamber in Chaloners Whin Drain. This, together with a flood-control chamber on Holgate Beck (which rises on Severus Hill) is part of a well-managed drainage scheme to protect the surrounding area.

Onwards to the North East corner of Hob Moor where the soil is sandy, compared with the mostly clayey loams of the central Moor. Part of the slope near to the underpass is thought to have been a quarry in mediaeval or even Roman times. Adjacent to this is evidence of the Golf Club’s use (1920 to 1946) of Hob Moor – Green no.15.

We re-joined the old Causeway near a footbridge at the Holly Bank entrance and thence on to the Triangle, which is in reality leaf-shaped. This was part of the original grazing and has no ridge and furrow. The existence of Folly Mill was well documented in 1563 and was known to have housed plague victims in 1604. It stood in the North East corner of Hob Moor, but the exact location remains a mystery. FoHM are considering the possibility of putting in a trench in the hope of locating any related material.

Little Hob Moor was originally part of Hob Moor and only became separated by the Railway, which had originally been planned to go through the middle of Hob Moor. As it was a stray (a common), these plans were forced out. Samuel Parson’s map of 1624 shows a boundary bank at the edge of Little Hob Moor which is still evident today, surmounted by trees. The foundations of a row of terraced houses, which were demolished in the early 1970s, can still be seen after very dry weather.

We returned via North Lane Pasture, where the mediaeval ridge and furrow is much wider (having been ploughed by a heavy team of 12 oxen) than the Napoleonic ridge and furrow on the central Moor, which is straight, narrow and not very deep and ploughed by horses. A short walk along North Lane and back onto the Moor we walked along an informal track between Hawthorns that would have led to the claypits (later to become Kelsey’s Pond).