



## NEWSLETTER

### Issue No. 23 September 2009

The Moor has looked particularly lovely this summer with the late arrival of the cows allowing the grass to grow longer than at any time since Foot and Mouth in 2001 kept the cattle away. Early summer saw the landscape of the Moor altering daily as the grass grew longer and colour and texture changed with each day's growth. Rocking gently in the wind as if under the sea, it was first studded with yellow buttercups which seemed to last longer than usual, then tinged a rusty red by the sorrel as it came into flower unchecked by munching cows. Now the Moor looks rather like a moth-eaten blanket, with the pale gold drying grass scattered with patches bare but green after thistle strimming and around the edges swathes flattened by the vehicles which have cut the hedges and banks of the becks. The profusion of thistle seeds in some places looks like the stuffing from a child's toy and there is still the odd harebell giving a glimpse of skyblue amongst the old grass straw.

The skylarks have now disappeared for the season but the last of the swallows and swifts are still around and a kestrel is a regular visitor. One of the volunteers cutting thistles remarked on how many little creatures such as field mice and voles had been disturbed, so there's obviously reason for the kestrel to hunt here.

### **Cows**

There are currently 35 cows on the Moor (down from 59 last year), owned by a different farmer from previous years. They are South Devon breed (again different) and ranged in age when they arrived from a tiny 8 months to 11 years. It has taken them a while to get established as a herd, possibly because there were so many young cattle, but also because there was so much grass for them to eat they didn't need to move around very much. They're now behaving more 'normally' and wandering around the Moor as a herd. They were very late coming onto the Moor this year (1st of July) while the Council waited for an independent agricultural report on the optimum number of cows for the size and nature of the area. By the time they arrived the grass was very long and they tended to stay around areas that had been cleared of thistles.

There will be a similar number of cows next year and, depending on the weather, the plan is for them to come onto the Moor at the end of April. This is linked to the perennial prickly problem of -

### **Thistles**

Hob Moor was designated as a statutory local Nature Reserve in 2003 in recognition of its importance as a wildlife site and as a recreational and educational resource. A strategy for dealing with thistles was part of the management plan for Hob Moor drawn up six years ago but this has not yet been properly implemented. The problem of creeping thistle has become worse as the plant spreads its way across the Moor, reducing the areas suitable for ground nesting birds and smothering wildflowers.

Plans for dealing with thistles this year have met a variety of setbacks which have necessitated some ad hoc arrangements for keeping them in check. The swathe of thistles near the Baths was only partly mown as the terrain was found to be too rough and uneven for the machinery, with the tractor at one point almost upending in a rut a metre deep. It was difficult to see smaller patches of thistles until they were almost at the flowering stage because the grass was so long since the cows were so late arriving. Regular work details of volunteers and probationers with strimmers dealt with some areas of thistles before they flowered to limit their spread. Most of the cuttings have been removed so that they don't fertilise the soil as they decay - low soil fertility is necessary for wild flower growth. The plan is for the thistles to be cut again before the autumn to further weaken them.

Next year the cattle will be brought on slightly earlier than normal at the end of April in order to graze the grass short so that growing thistles can be easily seen. Once the thistles have grown proud of the other vegetation around June they will be treated with weedkiller. Thistle re-growth will then be closely monitored and a second application may be necessary.

## Reports

In early May, **Margaret Weeden** led a dozen people round Hob Moor on her annual **Bird Walk**. Although no skylarks were seen this year, we did see a number of meadow pipits and some swifts, amongst other birds, and spent a very pleasant 90 minutes strolling on the Moor. We were also privileged to see a huge skein of about 150 geese flying overhead. Interestingly, there is a new addition on the south side of the moor this year – a rookery of six nests.

On 31<sup>st</sup> May, **Mark Tyszka** led another fascinating **Nature Walk** on the Moor. This was his tenth walk and as he pointed out, this year is also the tenth anniversary of the founding of Friends of Hob Moor. It was a glorious sunny afternoon and the Moor was looking particularly beautiful with a profusion of wild flowers and grasses. Mark pointed out different plants and insects; in particular we identified three buttercups (creeping, bulbous and meadow). As always, Mark was extremely well prepared. Between his mine of information and his folklore stories we were all fully absorbed and the time went all too quickly.

The annual **West Bank Park** garden fête at the end of June was a great success, with a big turnout of people of all ages enjoying the sunny weather. The FOHM stand, which included the usual extensive display of photos and information about the Moor, was constantly busy throughout the whole afternoon. We were extremely pleased to welcome eleven new members, and were very grateful for donations made by members of the public. Some new greetings cards featuring photos of Hob Moor proved popular, so more will be produced for sale at the AGM.

Thanks in part to the sunny weather (a great relief after the winds of last year), **Hob Moor Day** on May 23<sup>rd</sup> was a great success this year and with around 1,000 people attending through the afternoon, the most popular so far. There were more activities this year including a bouncy castle (the owners of which made a generous donation to the Friends), slide, trampolines and climbing wall which all attracted more children, as well as the popular falconry display and fun dog show of previous years. The schools' band had also brought in people from all over York. The live music directly opposite the Friends tent entertained us all afternoon and there was the usual range of local groups with information about their activities, games for children and scrumptious home baking and preserves.

## **Litter**

As ever, litter is a perennial problem on the Moor with an increase in cans and glass and plastic bottles over the summer months. A thank you to all those people who pick up debris and either take it home or leave it in the cattle grid by Hob Moor Drive, from where it is cleared by helpful local residents. The Council have been asked why there are no litter bins at the entrances to the Moor and to provide some.

## **Dogs**

The vast majority of people who walk on the Moor are dog owners, so there's no apology for doggy news. The dog bin at the Hob Moor Drive entrance is now being emptied twice a week, on a Tuesday and Friday after the Council was told it was overflowing. The Cleansing Department was sympathetic about a request for more bins, but the problem, as ever, is money and also access to empty them. We are waiting on a reply for a request for more bins and/or the re-siting of some existing bins.

The response to notices from Keep Britain Tidy pinned at the entrances to the Moor in June, encouraging dog owners to bin their dogs' waste, was depressing, as all of the notices were torn down within 24 hours. But on the up side, there is at least one public-spirited user of Hob Moor who deserves special thanks for clearing dog waste from the Hob Moor Drive access to the Moor, a thoroughly unpleasant task. Any ideas on how to get more dog owners to 'scoop the poop' would be welcomed.

## **In Brief**

- In early July the fire brigade was called out three times on the same evening to deal with small fires started in piles of cut thistles awaiting collection.
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- The Friends of Hob Moor's new colour leaflet – "A Walk Round Hob Moor" - is close to printing. It will include information about the Moor and its history and a map showing present day features including benches and the evidence of how the Moor has been used in the past.
- The Friends are paying for 2 new benches to be erected by the Council. Their position is still to be decided.
- The Council has cleared areas of Japanese Knotweed from the corner of Little Hob Moor
- The mown area near North Lane Pasture has been drawn again as a football pitch, goal posts erected and a game played on there for the first time in a few years.
- Friends of Hob Moor and the Council have together commissioned and funded Martin Hammond to do another study of the flora and fauna of Hob Moor. This study, which should be available towards the end of the year, will be in a similar format to that of the previous one Martin made in 2000. It will describe the ecology of the Moor, give an evaluation of the natural conservation issues and make recommendations for the Moor's management.

## **Friends of Hob Moor Committee**

One of the committee members is standing down this year and we have a need for some new blood. You do not need any expertise (but if you have it will be welcome!) just an interest in Hob Moor. One of the challenges coming up is the future of the site of Edmund Wilson Swimming Baths which is due to close in the autumn. The budget supermarket Lidl is considering buying the site from the Council, but it is only one of several potential sites in the city and nothing has been finalised. We expect that there will be local opposition to this and certainly the Friends would prefer the land to be

put to another use. Further ahead from this is the future of the site of Our Lady's Catholic Primary School, which is due to close in a couple of years. Whilst Edmund Wilson Baths is at least on the edge of Hob Moor, the school takes a bite out of the Moor itself, so any future use would have much more of an impact on it.

If you have an interest in these or any other aspects of the Moor and would like to get involved, contact David or Gwen on 788018.

## Subscription Renewals

It's that time of year again, when we ask you to give us your £2s. You can do this at the AGM (see below - please come), or you can send a cheque by post or drop off cash in person. Please see the attached renewal form for details.

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

**7.30pm**

**West Thorpe Methodist Church, West Thorpe.**

(Parking available)

Before the business part of the meeting there will be talk from Stephen Sayers, an expert in folklore from Leeds Metropolitan University, who will give a talk on "The Hallowe'en Feast"

## Still to come in 2009

**Bat Walk** Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 8.00pm – 9.00pm

Discover the secrets of the moor at dusk! Come and spot the bats that come out just when you thought there was nothing to see on the moor. You'll need a torch, suitable footwear and warm clothes.

**Haunted Hob Moor** Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 7.00pm – 8.00pm

Leading this walk will be famous storyteller and poet, Adrian Spendlow. As we plunge into the dark, eerie silence of Hob Moor, Adrian will tell us stories of ghosts and times gone by. It will be a walk you will never forget. Bring a torch. All children must be accompanied by an adult. Not recommended for under 8s.

For both of these events meet at Edmund Wilson Baths car park. Booking with Annemarie Heslop is essential: 07767 318103 or [annemarie.heslop@york.gov.uk](mailto:annemarie.heslop@york.gov.uk)

Please note that walks will not take place if it is raining heavily.

## USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

|   |   |
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| To report damage etc. urgently on Hob Moor (24 hours)                             | 625751  |
| To report motor cyclists on Hob Moor, contact Police                              | 0845 6060247  |
| For removal of fly-tipped debris, litter, graffiti etc. York Pride                | 551551  |
| Emergencies regarding health and safety of cattle                                 | 07949 892 771   |
| Contact us with your comments and suggestions about Hob Moor and the Friends      | 784616  |
| email: <a href="mailto:friendsofhobmoor@yahoo.com">friendsofhobmoor@yahoo.com</a> | website: <a href="http://www.friendsofhobmoor.org.uk">www.friendsofhobmoor.org.uk</a> or <a href="http://www.fohm.org.uk">www.fohm.org.uk</a> |