



NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 27 September 2011

It has been an odd summer on the Moor this year. The cows went on in huge numbers very early, and kept the grass very short indeed. Despite this the buttercups were as magnificent as ever although the hawthorn blossom was not as breathtakingly frothy as it can be. Despite this, there is an abundant crop of hawthorn berries and the blackberries around the edges of the Moor have fruited heavily. We had a wonderful spring and then a dry early summer which stopped the grass growing but it is now long and lush again. The first fungi have appeared and there have already been several patches of field mushrooms.

There have again been no skylarks nesting on the Moor this year and not even a transient presence as there was last year. This is very sad and the Moor just isn't the same without them. They are also an important factor in the designation of the Moor as a nature reserve and therefore a protected place. Although the reasons for their absence are many, the Friends want to do everything possible to enhance the conditions which will enable them to return. This was the context for the proposed felling of the Sycamore trees (see below) and with this the removal of one of the things that contributes to making life difficult for them.

The crows and magpies have still been a noticeable presence and the grass was so short that there was barely a tussock to hide a nest, so the birds have had a lot to contend with. On the plus side, the number of dogs seems to fall once the cows appear and there does not appear to have been any motorbike activity on the Moor this summer with Police and Community Support Officers a regular presence on bikes on the cycle track.

Thistles

It is a great disappointment that once again thistles have a paragraph to themselves. After so many years of the Council failing to tackle them, the Stewardship Scheme seemed to promise that something would at last be done. The year started well with grass being kept short by the cows as planned, but the dry start to the summer meant that the thistles were slower growing than usual, which delayed the planned weed wipe. This did not take place until mid August, by which time the thistles had once again flowered and already gone to seed. The wipe seems to have been very efficiently carried out on the area of the Moor behind Lidl (which is the area of least ecological interest) and the plants and seed heads there are dying. This area was also sprayed by tractor at the end of June to kill weeds and nettles well before they went to seed. On the rest of the Moor, the weed wipe seems to have been more haphazard, with large areas apparently missed having been missed altogether and only sporadic plants hit in areas that have been targeted, with the great majority going to seed.

Sycamore Trees

The plan to fell a stand of Sycamore trees on the north-east side of the Moor has been temporarily suspended following a petition against it organised by a local resident. The Council will hold a formal meeting to discuss the issue further. Sycamores are not native to Britain and are certainly not native to the Moor. They were planted by the council some years ago when they had a surplus of saplings and they will soon (in tree terms - sycamores are fast growing trees) grow into huge trees and therefore present more of a problem for skylarks and pipits.

The felling of these trees was recommended in the very thorough and detailed ecology report on the Moor commissioned and paid for by the Friends and the Council in 2010. The Stewardship Scheme is to a large extent based on this report. In it Martin Hammond makes the point that the Moor is not a park, but is what the name suggests, open moorland and has been such for hundreds of years. It is home to species specific to this kind of habitat, especially ground nesting skylarks and meadow pipits, which have to be protected against predators such as crows, rooks, magpies and sparrow hawks which need trees to roost in and fly from. The report recommended that trees therefore be confined to the periphery of the Moor in order to help to protect skylarks from predators and that any future tree planting be confined to Little Hob Moor.

The Friends vigorously and successfully opposed the felling of the black poplar near the Holly Bank entrance on the grounds that, although it was a large tree, it was too near the edge of the Moor and other trees there to be a problem for skylarks, so are certainly not tree vandals and reluctantly supported the removal of the sycamores in the wider interests of the Moor.

Although no-one likes to see trees felled, the Friends' committee has been disappointed by the way in which this issue has been raised, as it has not given those concerned about the trees an opportunity to hear the reasons behind the decision to remove them. We hope that if there is an issue in the future that provokes concern over the management of the Moor, the committee of the Friends is brought into the discussion early on so that the problem can be examined in depth and a satisfactory resolution arrived at.

Cattle

The cows were already on the Moor in large numbers at the time of the last Newsletter in April. They did their job of keeping the grass short so well that in the middle of July they had to be taken off because there was not enough grass for them to eat after the dry weather of early summer. They should be returning shortly although there is not a date for this as yet.

The piping for the new cattle trough near Lidl was in place by mid summer, but so far no trough has materialised. Various people have been held responsible, including the water board and the farmer (but not the Council - credit where it's due!) As there have been no cows on the Moor since mid July, the absence of a trough has not affected them, but it has meant that the implementation of the Stewardship Scheme with regard to North Lane Field has not been possible this year: ie it has not been set aside from the cattle and cropped for hay.

Dogs

As mentioned in previous newsletters, the Friends have bought two new dog poo bins for the Hob Moor Drive entrance to the Moor. They have still not been installed as the chap at the Council who was responsible for organising it has left and apparently no-one else has taken over the task. The existing bin is regularly filled beyond its capacity so these new bins cannot come too soon but as yet there is no date fixed for their installation. The impression is that there is less dog poo around the Moor but this does seem to be the case in the summer with fewer dog walkers using the Moor than in the winter.

Litter

There is far less litter around too, not because less is being dropped, but because more people are clearing up after the few making the mess. So once again thanks go to all the quiet civic heroes.

News in Brief

- ❖ The most underwhelming excitement of the summer on the Moor was a hot air balloon almost landing on the afternoon of the 30th July. It looked like it was going to land, then changed its mind and took off again.
- ❖ The most appalling news of the summer was that a man had been attacked and sexually assaulted by a group of men on Little Hob Moor in the early hours of the following day but the police have informed local residents that the allegation has subsequently been withdrawn.
- ❖ The Hob Laine sign, paid for by the Friends, has been erected at the top of Little Hob Moor.
- ❖ The installation of the pedestrian gate at Lidl will be delayed as it turns out that the land on which it stands was mistakenly sold to Lidl. The Council will adopt it back, but the process will take about a year. This only affects the summer fair, for which the fence will have to be temporarily removed to allow for vehicular access, as people already have gated access.
- ❖ The 70 small hawthorns planted along the fence by Hob Moor School at the beginning of April as part of York in Bloom were trampled by curious cattle within days and eventually had to be cleared away. The Council will make sure they put a fence round new hedge planting in future.
- ❖ The new footbridge to the west of the gate to North Lane Field has been built and very unobtrusively splendid it is. The construction, organised by Council Ranger Jenny Cairns, was carried out in the middle of May by British Trust Conservation Volunteers and included a committee member of the Friends in the working group.
- ❖ We have to thank our Ranger Jenny Cairns for all her hard work on behalf of the Moor and for providing such efficient and patient liaison between the Friends and the Council.

Past Events

A large group of intrepid bird watchers including 3 children set their alarm clocks and turned up at 4am for the Dawn Chorus Bird Walk led by Bob Missin from COYC. He identified many birds' songs which opened everyone's ears. They saw dawn rise over the Moor and at least one person went back wondering why she didn't get up at that time every day

Hob Moor Day in May was again well attended and although a bit windy it didn't rain - always a bonus. There were fewer stalls this year as there was a clash with an environment event at the Minster, but the Friends' gazebo was busy and we recruited half a dozen new or lapsed members and sold many greetings cards of photographs of the Moor.

On a pleasant June evening, Elizabeth Smith led a fascinating walk over Hob Moor and Little Hob Moor, bringing the history of these places to life with tales of Romans, plague victims, a medieval water mill and even a golf course. She explained the significance of ditches, humps and bumps that it would be so easy to walk past without ever noticing, helping us to appreciate the richness of the Moor's history.

Friends of Hob Moor had a stand at the West Bank Park Summer Fair and signed up some new members as well as getting a number of visitors to see our displays, buy photo cards and aerial photos and play a 'Count the Conkers and Cones' game. As usual it was a well attended show and the weather was kind to all.

Mark Tyzka led a group of twelve around the Moor on a walk entitled Bugs, Butterflies and Blossoms. As usual, Mark gave us a fascinating time showing us things few of us had noted before and making it even more interesting with explanations of the derivations on many of the various folklore names of plants. The walk went across Little Hob Moor, North Lane Field and ended up at the Triangle where the spread of Great Burnet was measured.

Sixteen people (nineteen in the end) met in early July to be led on a walk around the Moor by Bob Missin to discuss the Stewardship Scheme, which the Council has agreed with Natural England. Bob explained the proposals and the developments taking place, which largely follow the recommendations proposed in Martin Hammond's 2010 survey, paid for jointly by Friends of Hob Moor and the Council. The proposals were generally well received by all though there were heated discussions about the recommendation to remove the sycamore trees.

A perfect sunny day greeted the 20 or so butterfly explorers at the end of July. With nets and jars provided by the Council's ranger service, small children led the way in finding a range of butterflies before letting them free once more to patrol the moor. The range of species that expert Tony Fairburn was able to point out was a surprise to all of us on the walk: Large White, Small White, Green-Veined White, Small Skipper, Holly Blue, Small Copper Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood, Peacock and Comma.

The Bat Walk was held earlier in the year than in previously and was fully subscribed again with 20 adults and 15 children gathering on the Moor at dusk for a quick quiz set by Jenny Cairns, the Ranger for the Moor, to test our bat knowledge. This was followed by the children having great fun with clicking bat detectors and torches as the night came on and some pipistrelle bats came out.

The final event of the summer was Acomb Green Fair. The afternoon started off with sunshine but after an hour and a half the heavens opened and from then on we enjoyed a typical wet Bank Holiday afternoon. It was estimated that over 500 people attended, raising £400 for Medecins sans Frontieres, but very few of them found their way to the Friends' gazebo, at least until it rained, probably because Hob Moor is not local enough to Acomb residents to be of great interest.

Urgent: Help Needed!

Is there a member or two or three members interested in maintaining the website and dealing with Friends' emails? The committee member who used to do this has resigned and we need one or more people to take over the role. We have an excellent website and it would be a great pity if it were not maintained. There are 3 aspects to this which could be looked after as separate items by three different people or of course by one person. You would not need to join the committee (if you didn't want to) as any information you might need could be emailed to you. The roles are:

- 1) Maintaining the website - keeping the software up-to-date, dealing with technical problems, renewing domain names, etc.
- 2) Updating the website - adding photos, news, events details, newsletters, etc.
- 3) Sending out emails to members - about 6 times a year.

Please contact David McCloy: davidmccloy@hotmail.com

Coming Up

- ❖ A bridge is to be installed between the Triangle and the Moor over Chaloners Whin; the Council is getting quotes for different types of bridge which would be appropriate to different locations. This is to enable the hay from North Lane pasture to be removed.
- ❖ The positions of the three new information boards funded through the Stewardship Scheme will be: on the way onto the Moor from the railway tunnel, where the paths split on Little Hob Moor and at Tyburn on the Knavesmire.
- ❖ The gorse planting had to be missed this spring because of the dry weather but 30 people from local businesses will be planting wild flower plugs in September, including bulbous buttercup, knapweed, red clover and ox-eye daisy.
- ❖ Some work on the hedges behind Orchard Way will be done this winter. This will involve reducing the height of the trees along the fence line to allow the gaps to be filled and the hedgerow material will be burned as this is the cheapest method of disposal. The residents of Orchard Way have all received letters advising them that this work will be taking place.
- ❖ City of York Council Conservation Task Days programme includes an afternoon (1-3pm) on Hob Moor on Monday 28th November planting or improving the hedges surrounding the Moor, the aim being to establish a cattle proof hedge around the Moor. Contact Jenny Cairns for details: Email: jennifer.cairns@york.gov.uk Telephone: 07833 436832

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We always welcome any members to the work of the Committee and we are keen to know if there are any issues connected with Hob Moor you would like to be discussed by the committee and/or with the Council

contact Simon on 784616 or email friendsofhobmoor@yahoo.com

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USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

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
Contact us with comments and suggestions about Hob Moor and the Friends:	
phone: 784616	
email: friendsofhobmoor@yahoo.com	
website: www.friendsofhobmoor.org.uk or www.fohm.org.uk	

FRIENDS OF HOB MOOR
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 12th October 2011 at 7.30pm

West Thorpe Methodist Church, West Thorpe.
(Parking available)

Before the business part of the meeting there will be talk by Toni Bunnell from
Helping York's Hedgehogs

A Hallowe'en Walk on Hob Moor

Sponsored by the Friends of Hob Moor

Monday 24th October 7-8pm

Adrian Spendlow is back by popular demand with another spooky walk across the Moor for families and adults with tales of ghosts, hobbs and old folk lore.

Remember your torch.

All children must be accompanied by an adult. Not recommended for the under
8s

Booking essential with Jenny Cairns

Jenny is also organising other events on Hob Moor for children but details were not available at the time of writing. Contact Jenny for more information:

Jennifer Cairns: 07833 436832 or jennifer.cairns@york.gov.uk
