

Newsletter Issue 22, January 2024

Welcome to this edition of the Felbeck Trust Newsletter. You are receiving this as a supporter of Felbeck Trust. Thank you for your continued support – whether as a donor, a volunteer, or simply a supporter of the work we do to improve habitat for wildlife in Norfolk.

Focus on Funding our Habitat Management Work

By Val Stubbs, Trustee

When Felbeck Trust was set up, its founding members decided that our focus should be on practical habitat improvement. As a result, we are not a campaigning group in the way that some of our partners are. However, from time to time we come across studies which are highly relevant to our practical aims, despite crossing into areas of debate and campaigning by others. One particular study has recently given us food for thought:

*“Examining 316 Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*) colonies at 106 agricultural sites across eight European countries, researchers found that despite tightened pesticide regulations, European agricultural landscapes still negatively affect non-target organisms. The scientists showed that pesticides found in bumblebee-collected pollen were associated with reduced colony performance – or, in other words, a lower number of young produced. In addition to this, they found that pesticides do more harm in landscapes with less natural habitat.*

“This suggests that habitat restoration efforts can, to some extent, mitigate pesticide effects.”

(Bird Guides, based on research by Nicholson, C C; Knapp, J; et al. 2023.)

This is interesting to the Trust because all our sites – including our new surveyors' allotments – sit within a mosaic of agricultural land.



Buff-tailed Bumblebee ©Nick Owens

We are working hard to restore the habitat there for the benefit of wildlife – creating and restoring ponds, establishing and nurturing grasslands, planting and tending hedgerows, coppicing and managing woodlands... A lot of expertise goes into formulating our habitat management plans, but it is nevertheless a welcome boost to see independent scientific evidence supporting the kind of work we do within a largely agricultural landscape. This research in particular gives us hope that we are making a meaningful contribution to protecting Bumblebee colonies – and other wildlife – in our corner of North Norfolk.

All the activities outlined above are done by our wonderful willing team of volunteers free of charge; in 2023 alone, they put in over 1,000 hours. But, in order to carry out this habitat management, we inevitably incur costs for tools and materials and the ongoing running costs of the Trust.

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Registered charity number 1169619

These costs include bird seed for our feeders at WBOA and Sustead; materials; tools and equipment; and the dull but essential insurance and IT. In the period from April to November 2023 alone, we paid out around £2,400 on items like these (and this excludes spending that was funded by grants).

So, at this time of the year, we ask you to donate to support us in our charitable aim. Any donation, however small, will be gratefully received and carefully used by the Trustees of the charity, for the benefit of wildlife. And if you are a UK tax-payer, you can increase the value of your donation by 25% by Gift-Aiding it. If you would like to make a regular donation, please consider setting up a Standing Order.

You can make a donation to Felbeck Trust directly via our website:

<https://www.felbecktrust.org.uk/donate>

For details of other ways of making a donation, please contact enquiry@felbecktrust.org.uk

Recent Work Parties

By Peter Maingay, Volunteer Coordinator

The past three months have been quieter than the summer but we certainly haven't been idle. Between mid-October 2023 and early January 2024, we held nine work parties.



Marsh Insurance volunteers get pond digging

Our first, in mid-October, was a double one, with 10 Marsh Insurance corporate volunteers digging a new pond on the far side of the site while 12 regular volunteers moved, then burned, a pile of brash and dock seed heads.



Tracey keeps the bonfire fed with Docks and Ivy

Ed, our tree surgeon, reduced the height of the hedge alongside the shed. The Ivy was added to the bonfire, while the Hawthorn was used to dry-hedge gaps in the east boundary of the site. Andrew, our chief dry hedger, is now known as the 'architect of dry hedges'.



Andrew the dry hedge architect

A few days later, a small group did more work to the new pond, trimming the edges of the liner and adding stones and turf to create a bank. Work also began on a hibernaculum near to the pond – a shelter for hibernating amphibians and reptiles.

High winds and rain postponed the next work party by a week but the new date proved dry and bright. More work was done on the hibernaculum and to the east side hedges, while, elsewhere, paths and saplings were tidied. The next work party had us back at West Beckham Old Allotments, continuing hedge work, and at East Beckham Common, where we cut back nettles and brambles.



Flints, pipes and branches fill a shallow dip to form the internal structure of the hibernaculum

The main focus of the final November work party was Wood Norton where really valuable work was done clearing the ponds of branches, using the winch, and creating more light by removing willow around the ponds. Finally, firmer paths were made – what Ed calls ‘corduroy paths’ – consisting of two-foot sections of cut branches, laid side by side.



Stu tests the start of a ‘corduroy path’



Trevor, Ed and Peter R set up the winch at Wood Norton

Early in December, a large party descended on Spurrell's Wood for the annual nestbox clean and repair. Four teams of three volunteers managed to tackle all the nestboxes in Spurrell's Wood and most of them on the Common and Surveyor's Allotment. The highlight was the discovery of what was almost certainly the remains of a Marsh Tit's nest, with eggs in it – a first for Felbeck Trust.



Susan, Bea and Tracey record nestbox contents at Spurrell's Wood

At the end of the year, six of us paid a brief visit to Gunthorpe (Bale No 1) Surveyor's Allotment – a site we had only worked at once before, when we put an access gate up. This time, on a short shift, we began to create a path around and across the site, skirting the pond in the far corner and avoiding one very steep area.

Two Gresham's School work parties at Brinton Nine Holes in November saw five very keen Gresham's students help to coppice Hazels, using the material to create dry hedges on the eastern boundary of the site. They also removed thistles and nettles from the wildflower area and planted Yellow Rattle to help reduce the dominance of the grass.



Our Gresham's student volunteers coppiced Hazels at Brinton Nine Holes

So, 2023 was a brilliant year – we totalled nearly 1,050 volunteer hours, working at 11 different sites: WBOA, West Beckham Green, East Beckham Common, three Sustead sites, Wood Norton, Hindolveston, Brinton and Felmingham Stow Heath – not to mention occasional work at North Walsham's Sadler's Wood and Cromer Green Spaces' North Lodge Park. What will 2024 bring? Doubtless, continuing useful and enjoyable gatherings of friendly, enthusiastic volunteers, helping to improve biodiversity in North Norfolk!

Species Monitoring

By Val Stubbs, Trustee

With many of our volunteers and trustees having a birdwatching background, it's no surprise that a lot of the new species we spotted in the last quarter were birds.

New at a work party in October at Wood Norton were Collared Dove, Magpie and Wren, while at Brinton we added Pheasant to the list, and at Hindolveston our species surveyor identified a Grey Wagtail, a Linnet and a Woodcock.



Linnet, a new record at Hindolveston

During a routine visit to West Beckham Green, Val was delighted to see three amber-listed Bullfinches in the trees near the entrance.



A beautiful Bullfinch

Several visits to West Beckham Old Allotments delivered treats for the attendees – Brambling in the Hawthorn hedge, a Meadow Pipit, and seven Common Crossbills that flew across.



So many treats at WBOA, including Brambling...



...and Meadow Pipit

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We also added other taxa to our growing species lists. Although we were past the moth season, there were still some invertebrates around. A local couple who regularly walk around WBOA pointed out a Small Copper butterfly in the late autumn warmth in October, while at Wood Norton there were a number of Harlequin Ladybirds.



Small Copper ©Francis Farrow

Back in the summer we had spotted some bugs on the stinging nettles at Wood Norton, and these have subsequently been identified by our experts as the final instar (developmental stage) of Nettle Ground Bugs.



Nettle Ground Bugs-to-be

Also new at Wood Norton are three species of fungi: Blushing Bracket, Cushion Bracket and The Deceiver. We continue to find new plant species, including Broad Leaved Pondweed in the pond at WBOA, Sweet Chestnut at West Beckham Green, and Wood Avens and Broom at Wood Norton. Meanwhile, telltale mounds of soil at West Beckham Green revealed the presence of Moles at that site.



The Deceiver, a new fungus record at Wood Norton

Glad Tidings from the Gur

*In November, **David Harper**, one of our specialist species monitors, joined Val and Peter M on their monthly citizen-science water analysis of the Gur Beck (part of the National Trust's 'Riverlands' programme). David writes:*

I brought my net and tray and took a look at the animal life in the stream at Sustead.

As a result of being a freshwater biologist in my, now distant, earlier life, I am involved in two other citizen science initiatives in Norfolk: Riverfly and Priority Habitats. Riverfly is a national programme that has been running for over a decade, recognising eight common groups of river invertebrates (not even families in most cases) and scoring them by abundance on a logarithmic scale, after examining a timed sample. That means 1-9 individuals score 1; 10-99 score 2; 100-999 score 3. It was originally designed to enable anglers to detect pollution events upstream, recognising a drop in the score from one month to the next, below a 'trigger level'.

A theoretical maximum score would be 24 (3x8) but, in reality, a clean, lowland river is likely to score 14-16. A dirty or polluted site would be 5 or lower. At this time of year many individuals are tiny (1-2 mm in size), having been born in late summer and growing up to overwinter for emergence in the spring, so even clean sites will be lower at 10-12.

We were excited to score 10 at our Sustead site. Moreover, the shapes of individuals within some of the eight groups made it clear there were several species. One group – caseless caddis larvae – contains six families and many more species, and we could see that our sample held at least four families. 'Cased caddis' contains twice as many families and even more species, and we saw at least five families.



Cased Caddisfly Goera

Another programme that has only just started, called Priority Habitats, aims to use citizens to identify stretches of flowing water that have – at least partly – retained their naturalness over the past 100 years of land drainage.

Small streams have never been the target of agency monitoring, unless they happen to be part of a larger landscape unit, such as an SSSI/NNR. This programme hopes to enlist naturalists from all over the country to identify the small 'gems' that may still exist.

As soon as one looks on a map, it is clear that the Gur Beck has been historically straightened for much of its length from source to well below Sustead, so it isn't going to reach a top habitat score, but despite this it has many features of naturalness. In particular, several of the species characteristic of high quality habitats, particularly caddis flies, might be present. I didn't take any samples away for identification to species level because they were too small to be confident, but I shall collect some more in the Spring – watch this space. I shall also be happy to show people the treasures inside the stream when we have a work party at Sustead in the New Year.

No Need to Wait Until National Nestbox Week...

By Bev Taylor, Trustee

Every one of Felbeck Trust's established sites features nestboxes, carefully positioned and maintained to offer a clean, sheltered environment for nesting pairs to lay eggs and raise chicks.

The loss of hedgerows and older trees, with the natural crannies and holes which birds would otherwise use, means providing alternatives can help increase the chances for successful breeding. And the Trust's already wild-ish sites aren't special in this regard – offering those other options can be even more important in tidy domestic settings, like a back garden.

Just one nestbox in a small garden makes a difference. If you don't already have any – even if you do – look at the advice from the British Trust for Ornithology on [how to choose \(or build\), position, and look after a nestbox](#). One size (and shape, and position) does not fit all!

Around this time of year, Felbeck Trust volunteers review, clean and repair the boxes at our sites in preparation for the nesting season. The January work party where we open last year's boxes for the first time and record evidence of occupation is one of my absolute favourites in the whole year. The used nests are often very beautifully crafted, there is usually something surprising, and something icky, and sometimes there is something entirely new – this year we had the first evidence at any of our sites of breeding Marsh Tits. So exciting!



The remains of a Marsh Tit nest – we believe!

Birds need all the help we can give them, so with National Nestbox Week approaching (February 14th-21st, because – of course – birds are traditionally thought to have paired up by Valentine's Day), get ahead of things and get some boxes up now.

And because it's a big no-no to open nest-boxes during the breeding season (February to August), the BTO will be live-streaming a range of nesting species on their website from March. I, for one, will be watching.

Hedging Our Bets with Ivy

*Recent visitors to WBOA may have noticed some dramatic hedge reduction there. Ivy which had become top-heavy was causing hedge roots to rock and destabilise, with the risk of the whole thing toppling. Given the rather stark ivy-free look now sported by sections of the hedge, we asked **Peter Rushmer, of our Habitat Management Sub-Group**, for his views on what makes a healthy hedge, and whether Ivy is a friend or a foe.*

A significant proportion of Britain's hedges are believed to be ancient. Some, experts tell us, can be traced to the Bronze and Iron Ages as cultivation and settlements developed.

The development of farming through the Roman occupation, the medieval feudal system, and enclosure acts from the 17th to the 19th centuries, had an impact on hedge planting (and fencing and stone walling), the intention – not always altruistic – being to delineate ownership, contain livestock and to exclude unwelcome individuals and animals.



A managed older hedge

Some of us have been around long enough to remember the impact of policies in the 1960s & 1970s on field rationalisation, and conversion of otherwise marginal land, woodland, meadows and even orchards into arable land, in the interests of food security. Demand for road, residential and commercial development over many decades has also had a significant impact, and these pressures continue. I was reading an online source recently which referred to a figure approaching 120,000 miles of Britain's hedges having been lost since the 1950s.

What this source did not go on to say was that thousands of miles of new or reinstated hedges must also have been planted in the last four decades at least. There has certainly been some improvement since the 1980s, including legislation like the Wildlife and Countryside Act, and a move to encourage less intensive land management. A growing understanding and awareness of the fragility of the countryside and its biodiversity has led to an increasing demand from scientists, conservationists and the public for their protection.

Existing and more recently planted hedgerows have very much been an integral part of all this.



A well-established 'new' hedge

Older hedgerows often support the richest variety of plant, animal and insect life, where species richness and lack of damage and disturbance has led to them developing a wider local biodiversity. But hedges of all ages have a vital part to play in the conservation of biodiversity as they evolve, not only providing cover, refuge, habitat and food, but also acting as green corridors or 'highways' linking a network and variety of habitats together.

So it is not surprising to find that Felbeck Trust has a focus on hedgerows around and within the sites for which it is custodian.

Much maligned and misunderstood amongst hedgerow plants is Common Ivy (*Hedera helix*). It is too often believed that Ivy will strangle trees and hedgerow plants as it climbs their stems into their branches. This is a misconception; it may be an opportunist but it's not designed to damage its host plant.



Hedera helix is an opportunist

Its growth habit is both ground-covering and vertical, the latter when it meets a vertical structure which it will use to support its climb towards daylight to optimise photosynthesis. Where this 'host' is a bush or tree the Ivy does share water and soil-borne nutrients, but not sufficiently to compete for them to any significant degree.

Being evergreen with dense foliage, Ivy provides vital shelter and cover throughout the year, especially in autumn and winter when deciduous plants lose their leaves and other flora stop growing.



Dense and evergreen means year-round cover

Better still, it provides breeding and nesting sites for a rich variety of wildlife throughout the year, producing flowers, nectar and fruit particularly when other sources are becoming scarce or exhausted.



Ivy berries persist long after other fruit has disappeared

Consequently, Ivy supports a range of wildlife from birds to bees, bugs to butterflies, and moths to mammals; it is an ecological oasis, both literally and metaphorically buzzing with life most of the year.

As with other plants, Ivy is best managed to ensure a complementary and appropriate contribution to conservation hedgerows. Given its head, it will produce excessive growth, particularly where its host is failing or under stress, when it will out-compete if left to its own devices.

Being dense with foliage all year, this can lead to windblow, and loss of both it and its host, thus damaging the integrity of the whole hedgerow.

But, as with so many things in life, given the right attention Ivy will prove a richly rewarding partner in the management of any conservation hedgerow.



Wind-blown ivy-clad hedge – what we are working to prevent at WBOA

Site profile: Gunthorpe (Bale No1) Surveyor's Allotment

The latest in our series of in-depth profiles
of Felbeck Trust's newest sites

By Peter Maingay, Trustee

Although this is correctly called Gunthorpe (Bale No 1) Surveyor's Allotment, we are already referring to it as Bale, pure and simple. Or even Bale Pit – for a pit it truly is.

Situated a couple of hundred yards west of the centre of Bale village, it is a two-acre site with quite a deep pit with steep sides and a pond in the south-west corner. Whether it was originally a marlpit or became as deep as it is through surveyors removing a great deal of gravel in the past we will probably never know.



Bale is a true pit, with steep sides

The OS map marks it 'Pit (disused)' while a larger scale map has it as a gravel pit. The marlpit theory is unlikely as, if it was originally dug for marl, gravel was probably not present – and vice versa. And marlpits tended to be in the middle of fields, not on the edges.

Our survey of the site, on October 10th 2020, resulted in this brief description:

- 2 acres of mixed woodland and scrub, with Field Maple, Alder, Small Leaved Lime, ancient Hawthorn, Elder, ferns
- Small patch of water in deepest corner
- Steep-sided on south side
- Neighbour reports Tawny, Barn and Little Owl, Sparrowhawk

After an initial work party put up an entrance gate on the road side of the site, a small group of us spent two hours there in December 2023 creating a path as close to the perimeter as we could manage – though this proved impossible in the south-west corner.

This visit revealed a fair amount of 'furniture', in the shape of Butler sinks and bits and pieces of bins and corrugated iron, probably related to pheasant or chicken-keeping.



Bale has a pond in the south-west corner

Here is some of the detail from the site Habitat Management Plan:

- Improve the site for biodiversity by improving light penetration to enhance understory, and increasing shelter
- Create safe access into the site to allow habitat management work
- Create and maintain a network of paths which provide access for conservation and monitoring work
- Gap up hedge around perimeter where necessary, using appropriate local native species, to create dense hedge from the base, providing suitable nesting and sheltering sites for birds, and a wildlife corridor for mammals
- Appropriate management of existing hedgerow
- Selective thinning or coppicing to let in light and encourage tree regeneration, creating a succession of heights and maturity, to produce a progressive age range in species, resulting in a mosaic of maturity to benefit wildlife
- Selective clearance to create a grassland/wildflower area and habitat for butterflies
- Removal of garden escapes
- Remove overgrown vegetation and debris from pond
- Selective felling/pruning of trees over pond to allow light to penetrate
- Create log piles from felling/coppicing to provide habitat for invertebrates
- Other felled/sawn branches left in situ to encourage invertebrates and fungi

- Selective Ivy control/removal
- Erect bird and bat boxes as appropriate
- Erect relevant interpretive signage, subject to funding and any approvals
- A programme of species monitoring

So, there is much to be done at this, one of our least developed, sites. It's an exciting prospect working here to increase biodiversity so look out for work parties and come and join us!

And while we are talking about new sites...

We are pleased to announce that we have now taken on a 99-year lease for Aylmerton Number 2 Surveyor's Allotment from North Norfolk District Council.

This lightly wooded 1.5-acre site is located on the northern side of the A148, opposite St Andrew's School. By managing the habitat here, Felbeck Trust will ensure that another wild oasis along the Cromer Ridge will be protected, thereby preserving and enhancing biodiversity in North Norfolk.

Operation Turtle Dove

By Val Stubbs, Trustee



**Operation
Turtle Dove**

SAVING A BIRD ON THE BRINK

In its latest [Operation Turtle Dove blog](#), the RSPB is upbeat about its programme to halt the decline of the Turtle Dove, whose population slump has brought it to the brink of extinction.

The project, which began in 2012, is building momentum: in 2023, over 260 farm holdings – covering over 68,500 hectares – and a further 107 land managers participated, resulting in 620 foraging and supplementary feeding sites being created for Turtle Doves in 2023 alone – almost double the number in 2022.

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Mike Shurmer, Head of Species for RSPB England said:

"The ambition of the communities and landowners we work with to help save these iconic birds is nothing short of amazing, and if we continue with this momentum, it won't be long before we can expect to see Turtle Dove numbers starting to rise across the UK."

In 2024 Felbeck Trust will also explore working alongside other local landowners and land managers who are taking part in Operation Turtle Dove, to investigate ways of sharing information and coordinating conservation efforts, aiming to work at landscape scale.



The iconic Turtle Dove

Felbeck Trust - the Early Years Part 2: Developing the Sustead Cluster

**By Trevor Williams, Chair,
and Helen Dawson, Secretary**

The first part of this trilogy, "Felbeck Trust - the Early Years" was published in the April 2022 Newsletter, issue 15. Helen and Trevor, friends and erstwhile work colleagues, who share a love of nature and a concern about declining wildlife habitat, decided that something practical needed to be done to improve the situation for wildlife in Norfolk.

Convinced and spurred on by the urgency of reports like ["The State of Nature"](#) (national surveys that depicted the serious decline in nature in the UK), Felbeck Trust was formed and registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in October 2016.

Little did we know back then but the benefit of CIO status, which allows charities to own land, was about to be realised...

Once Felbeck Trust had been registered as a CIO, the Board of Trustees signed leases, each for ten years, on previously identified sites of interest: Sustead Surveyor's Allotment (later extended to 99 years) and Sustead Common. Then we started looking to make contact with key people: those who shared our objectives, who were willing to work in collaboration or to become partners, who were to become instrumental in growing the Trust.

Aside from our 'landlords' The National Trust and North Norfolk District Council, we made contact with Norfolk Wildlife Trust and Norfolk Rivers Trust. As the Gur Beck, which separates Sustead Common from the Surveyor's Allotment, is part of the Upper Bure catchment, we were introduced to the Upper Bure Valley Partnership, spear-headed by the National Trust, aiming to improve water quality and reduce pollution downstream in the Broads. Through this connection we became a partner in National Trust's "Riverlands" project – a project we continue to support through our regular water quality testing programme.

We were approached by Norfolk Wildlife Trust's "Living Landscapes" project, which was a call to restore the UK's battered ecosystems for wildlife and people by extending living landscapes, potentially creating a wildlife corridor from the coast to Norwich which could include the Sustead sites.

Trevor: *"Peter did a bit of early research on the Sustead site – trying to identify the extent of the original Common. He unearthed a copy of an illustration by Humphry Repton (the landscape gardener and successor to Capability Brown) which depicts the site Felbeck Trust was now managing, with cattle grazing the water-meadows by the side of the Gur Beck – it dates from around the end of the 18th century."*

Along with Norfolk Rivers Trust, our near neighbours, Aylmerton Field Studies Centre and North East Norfolk Bird Club, came on board to work in partnership.

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The Field Studies Centre included our Sustead sites in their programme to introduce children from urban areas to the countryside. Links with NENBC helped provide volunteers for habitat management and to survey the sites.

Other organisations also mucked in: Norwich Men's Shed supported our work by making up dozens of bird and bat boxes from sustainable timber, North East Norfolk Conservation Volunteers (at that time Norfolk Conservation Volunteers) joined us to tackle the brambles on Sustead Surveyor's Allotment which was covered in dense scrub back in early 2017.

We joined up the Surveyor's Allotment and the Common by bridging the Gur and erected rustic benches providing a place for volunteers to rest and visitors to sit in quiet contemplation.



A new bridge joined the Surveyor's Allotment and Sustead Common

We contacted Norfolk County Council, and were granted an extension to the Roadside Nature Reserve (RNR) to the south, to protect scarce orchids. This meant the RNR included the whole boundary with the Common. The designation RNR protects the habitat from unnecessary frequent cutting and new signs were installed to make its status clear.

Trevor: "We quickly realised that there was an established Roadside Nature Reserve close to the site but oddly it didn't cover the verge, adjacent to the Surveyor's Allotment, which hosted a thriving colony of Early Purple Orchid. An application to NCC, supported by NWT, was assessed and an extension to the RNR approved, on the understanding that Felbeck Trust would take on the management of the

entire length of the designated verge – work we have happily undertaken ever since."



New signs made clear that the Roadside Nature Reserve had been extended

A bird screen was erected, and christened the "Outdoor Classroom", where visitors could watch the birds on feeders across the Gur Beck and young students from Aylmerton Field Studies Centre could quickly see the contrast with the agricultural fields on the other side of the boundary hedge.

Volunteers cleared a blocked culvert to allow road and field run-off to drain away, resolving a long-standing flooding issue, making the road safer and building positive relationships with residents. Through Norfolk Rivers Trust, we were introduced to Dom, who, with his digger, created the winter flooding scrape, a natural filtration system to prevent road and agricultural run-off from reaching the Gur, a tributary of the Upper Bure. This work was sponsored by a local benefactor.



The scrape – full story in Newsletter Issue 2, August 2017

Trevor: *"The morning 'Dom the digger man' arrived to dig our winter scrape was cool, clear and dry. Under the watchful eye of our friends from Norfolk Rivers Trust he set about realigning the channel through the Surveyor's Allotment and directly into the Gur Beck, and creating a seasonal pond which would hold up the water and facilitate biological filtration. By lunchtime it was raining. The heavens opened and – in a biblical deluge – the newly created scrape was full to overflowing."*

We were invited by Norfolk Wildlife Trust to participate in their Wildlife in Common initiative. A programme of wildlife species surveying and habitat management work in each of the Sustead sites, together with the rich biodiversity including a number of key plant species, created a mosaic habitat worthy of designation as a County Wildlife Site (ratified in 2019). CWS recognises areas of land rich in wildlife that are outside the nationally protected areas (such as SSSI and National Nature Reserves) – they are some of the best areas for wildlife in Norfolk. While they have no direct legal protection, local wildlife sites are recognised in the National Policy Planning Framework which gives them some protection from being developed.

It seems 2017 was a year of much activity. In August of that year, the owner of Spurrell's Wood agreed to a two-year Management Agreement. Spurrell's Wood is located across the road and opposite to Sustead Common and Surveyor's Allotment.

Alongside this Management Agreement, the owner suggested a time-limited purchase option and this plunged us into full-on fundraising to buy the wood outright.

Trevor: *"I remember the day I met the land-owner (Spurrell's Wood) to review our habitat management activity under our recently signed Management Agreement. He was pleased with our progress and at the end of our meeting said he had no particular interest in the wood and would we like to buy it. When I asked 'how much' he said he didn't know but it would be below market value. Now he had my attention! A subsequent independent valuation (a*

requirement of the Charity Commissioners) confirmed that our agreed price was indeed significantly below what it would fetch if it went to market. A 'bargain, but how on earth could we, a brand-new charity, raise that kind of money?'"

Helen: *"Our status as a CIO meant that we could give serious consideration to this purchase option and I recall the meeting where this was discussed by the trustees. Although all trustees were enthusiastic, the thought of raising such a large amount in a short time was somewhat daunting. I wondered if I was the only trustee to privately harbour some doubts".*

In September 2017, Felbeck Trust launched the appeal to raise funds to buy Spurrell's Wood. We exploited lots of different opportunities during our fundraising campaign: we sought donations of cash at every opportunity, supporters made pledges of larger sums which would create match funding against an – eventually successful – bid for funding from the People's Postcode Lottery. We collected items to put up for sale on eBay, we arranged a series of open days and guided walks, a BioBlitz – all with home-made refreshments – and a folk concert in Aylmerton Village Hall, a memorable success thanks to performances by Threescore, The Occasional Ceilidh Band, and Tony Hall.



A folk concert was one of the creative ways we found to raise funds to buy Spurrell's Wood

Regional TV and local radio covered Felbeck Trust in February 2018 when we participated in the British Trust for Ornithology's annual Nestbox event by erecting nestboxes, all made

of sustainable timber, across Sustead Common and Surveyor's Allotment. Friends, residents and other supporters responded to our invitation to sponsor a nestbox to raise funds for the Spurrell's Wood campaign. We continue to maintain these boxes and monitor breeding activity – this year recording the first successful record of breeding Marsh Tit.



The first Felbeck Trust nestboxes – numbers today are well over 100

When seeking out funding opportunities, we realised that very few organisations were willing to grant funding for the purchase of land. We had raised over half the required amount and felt that the time was right to make an application to the People's Postcode Lottery. This was successful and local charity Geoffrey Watling made a grant for the final amount. In a little over one year, we had raised the total amount required to buy Spurrell's Wood and cover the professional fees, months before the time limit expired.

Helen: *"When the email arrived from the People's Postcode Lottery saying that our bid for funding had been successful, I was extremely thankful that I hadn't expressed those doubts that were in my mind 12 months previously! I knew Trevor was having lunch with friends on that day. Generally, he and I respected each other's privacy, but I was unable to contain my excitement so phoned him. I can remember that he asked me to say it again – "Are you sure?" he said! So maybe I hadn't been the only trustee to harbour initial doubts!"*

The legal purchase was completed in November 2018 and, on 20th May 2019, Spurrell's Wood was registered with HM Land Registry as belonging to Felbeck Trust. We had done it! The ownership of Spurrell's Wood, combined with managing the Roadside Nature Reserve and the lease agreements for Sustead Common and Surveyor's Allotment, brought these sites – now referred to as the Sustead Cluster – under one management organisation and safeguarded their future for Norfolk's wildlife and for generations of visitors to come.



Trevor, Jane and Peter M toast the successful purchase of Spurrell's Wood

The official opening took place on 20th July 2019, attended by 40 supporters including three generations of the Spurrell family, who had owned the wood, some of whom travelled a considerable distance across continents. The Spurrell children's grandfather was responsible for planting the trees in the 1980s. We provided information and refreshments, and hosted guided walks. North Norfolk District Council Chair, Councillor Clive Stockton, performed the opening ceremony, cutting the green ribbon.



The ribbon cutting in July 2019

Helen: “The official opening took some organising, making sure that everyone was invited who had made donations to our appeal for funds, so they could celebrate with us, and so we could properly thank them. Fortunately, I remembered to bring my dressmaking scissors! This was also a day for me to introduce family and friends to the Trust, for them to see first-hand the site that had got under my skin. It was a day of opportunity too – one of the attendees who had recently moved to the area became a member of our Board of Trustees.”

In addition to fundraising, we began a comprehensive programme of management in the Wood. Our local ecology experts met and considered the best way of protecting and improving the habitat for wildlife, whilst facilitating limited public access – two objectives which required careful balance. A Habitat Management Plan was developed (this was recently upgraded with funding granted from Norfolk Resilient Coast) and our volunteer workforce started to remove hundreds of old plastic tree guards and stakes, clearing ditches, gapping up the boundary hedges. Links made at one of our early fundraising events with a Senior Executive at Marsh Insurance resulted in a corporate volunteering day – with employees carrying out habitat management work and clearing invasive bramble scrub to create “The Ride”.

Trevor: “An early task in Spurrell’s Wood, to complete the circular path around the perimeter, was to clear a ride on the northern boundary of the Gur Beck. It was a long stretch of impenetrable bramble and scrub. We’d been approached by Marsh, an insurance company based in Norwich, to see if they could help us with corporate volunteering. This seemed like an ideal task! By the end of the day, they’d cleared a broad path around the site, including an area adjacent to the beck which we had an ambitious plan to restore to grassland. We did, and I’m delighted to report that in 2023 we saw the return of Common Spotted Orchid to the wood.”



Our first volunteers from Marsh Insurance, still making a fantastic contribution to the Trust’s work

Additional funding from British Birds Charitable Trust and the Big Society Fund, managed by North Norfolk District Council, paid for essential tools and materials to expand our habitat management work. We started a rolling programme of coppicing Hazel to allow more light onto the woodland floor, encouraging the growth of wild flowers in the seed bank; created well-defined paths to manage visitor access to protect wildlife; and reinstated boundaries and installed field gates. Making use of our volunteers with experience in carpentry, we installed a bird hide which improved wildlife observation opportunities across a new flooding scrape – more collaborative working with the local farmer and Norfolk Rivers Trust and Riverlands.

We continued to raise our profile by contributing to other wildlife events: Wild about Swanton, a Community and Wildlife Day at Swanton Novers, and the CPRE Summer Fair at Wolterton Hall.



Helen demonstrated some of her rather more relaxing skills at the CPRE fair

With all this activity and publicity, Felbeck Trust was becoming better known, and we started to be approached by organisations and land owners for advice and help with habitat care and management. At the same time, we were involved in exploring the development of other sites. It wasn't all plain sailing and there were a number of false starts:

Helen: *"I remember a day in January 2018, standing in pouring rain under an ineffective umbrella, meeting members of the Parish Council and a few hardy residents of a pretty north Norfolk village. We presented a draft plan for restoring their unused recreation ground to a wild-flower meadow with mixed habitat which had been commissioned by the Council previously. A consensus about their preferences could not be reached, and an ownership issue further frustrated the process. The ground remains as it was: unused, and with untapped potential for wildlife."*

This growing status as a credible wildlife conservation charity attracted the attention of Patrick Barkham, who referenced Felbeck Trust as one of the 'micro-local conservation groups that are seeking to restore wildlife', in his Guardian article "Making a big difference in small ways". Patrick Barkham subsequently became one of our patrons.



Ian and Peter M with our patron Patrick Barkham

Another of the sites we had been contacted about was in "The Beckhams" and, in a future edition of this newsletter, you will be able to read the third instalment in Felbeck Trust's early history: "The Beckhams & Beyond...."

Funding Felbeck Trust's Work – More Funding Ideas

By Val Stubbs, Trustee

eBay

You can donate items to be sold through our eBay account. Recently Jane sold a pair of Doc Marten boots for £72.



One person's unwanted pair of boots is someone else's dream present – and helps us raise funds!

Jane will sell quality items that can easily be packaged for delivery by post. Collectible items sell best, but good quality branded items also realise good prices. Some larger items can be advertised for collection only.

Any items that aren't sold on eBay will be taken to a charity shop or, on request, can be returned to the donor (collection only).

If you are having a clear out and find something we might be able to sell to raise funds, please contact Jane: jane.williams21@gmail.com

Raffle

Overindulged over Christmas? Looking for a new home for chocs or booze to reduce temptation in the New Year? We are planning to hold a raffle at an event in the spring (more details to follow soon!), so would be happy to take these off your hands if they are in-date. If you have these, or any other suitable good quality items, please pass them on to one of our volunteers or trustees, or let us know so that we can arrange to collect them.

Dates for Your Diary

Mini BioBlitzes

Instead of holding one large 24-hour BioBlitz event at a single site, as we have done over the past few years, we are planning to hold several mini BioBlitzes at our smaller sites during the course of 2024.

They will be morning-only events, primarily for our species surveyors and conservation volunteers, although we are always delighted to see any of Felbeck Trust's supporters – bearing in mind that there is very limited parking at the sites.

During these mornings we will be searching for plants, birds, mammals, fungi and an assortment of creepy crawlies for our experts to identify. We will also carry out some bat detecting and moth trapping the night before.

A survey was last conducted at East Beckham Common in 2019 as part of Norfolk Wildlife Trust's *Wildlife in Common* project, and the aim of the 2024 mini BioBlitz there is to confirm that we are going in the right direction.

The new Surveyors' Allotments have never been surveyed systematically, so we are hoping to find plenty of species to give us a good baseline – allowing us to monitor the effects of our habitat management work.

Sat May 18th East Beckham Common, morning

Sat Jun 15th Stow Heath, morning

Sat Jul 13th Wood Norton / Hindolveston, morning; plus volunteer walk in the afternoon

Grey Seal Coffee Nature Month

Each Wednesday in March, Grey Seal Coffee in Cromer will be open from 7pm and hosting an evening featuring a local wildlife group.

Felbeck Trust will be participating, and will run its event on March 13th. As well as displays about our conservation work, we are planning to deliver a talk entitled *A Year in Sustead*. A number of Trustees will also be present to

provide any further information about Felbeck Trust and its activities.

The event is free but there will be a collection box for donations. The evening will start at 7pm and finish at about 9pm. Grey Seal will serve their usual menu of food and drinks.

The full programme is as follows:

Wed Mar 6th Cromer Green Spaces

Wed Mar 13th Felbeck Trust

Wed Mar 20th Cromer Peregrine Project

Wed Mar 27th North East Norfolk Bird Club

Work Parties

Our provisional plans for 2024 are outlined below. They are subject to change at short notice so please check the website for any updates.

January:

Thurs 18th Sustead

February:

Thurs 1st WBOA

Thurs 15th Wood Norton/Hindolveston

Sat 24th WBOA/East Beckham

March:

Thurs 7th Sustead

Thurs 21st Stow Heath

April:

Thurs 4th; Thurs 18th

May:

Thurs 2nd; Thurs 16th

June:

Thurs 6th; Thurs 20th

July:

Thurs 4th; Thurs 18th

August:

Thurs 1st; Thurs 15th

September:

Thurs 5th Sustead haymaking

Thurs 12th WBOA haymaking/BBQ/AGM

Thurs 26th

October:

Thurs 3rd; Thurs 17th; Sun 27th

November:

Thurs 7th; Thurs 21st

December:

Thurs 5th; Thurs 19th

Next Issue

Copy deadline for the next edition of the Felbeck Trust Newsletter is **March 31st**. We are always happy to receive your contributions to the Newsletter – please send any copy or ideas to the Editorial Team via our *new email address*:

Peter Maingay, Val Stubbs & Bev Taylor:
ftnewsletter@aol.com

Contacts

See our website: <https://www.felbecktrust.org.uk>



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