



Friends Of the River Crane Environment

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our Winter Newsletter. Despite a couple of days of snow it is still difficult to convince ourselves (or the local wildlife) that winter is upon us and as I write this the birds outside appear to be preparing for nesting already.

Report on Recent Volunteer Days

The December Volunteer Day is now a regular annual event, working with London Wildlife Trust (LWT) volunteers to **pollard the osier willows** on Crane Park Island. The willow branches produced are put to use by our volunteers, not least in local allotments as bean poles. This year though we had an additional use for them; working with Anthony Wilson, a **sculptor in natural and found objects**, we have created a new sculpture in the Mereway Nature Park . You may have seen this and wondered what it is – as it is created with live willows we are hoping the spring will see it burst into life and we can then sculpt its full form as a pair of prehistoric creatures chasing a man into a tree!

The sculpture work was part of our January volunteer day on **Mereway Nature Park**, another regular event designed specifically to encourage children to get involved. A combination of good weather and interesting activities resulted in **over 50 volunteers** during the day, many of them youngsters, so thanks to all of you who took part.

Our February Volunteer found us clearing rubbish from along the banks of the River Crane in Crane Park behind **Fulwell Park Avenue**. A large amount of junk more than filled the skip provided by the council.

Volunteer Day Programme

The programme for the rest of our 2006-2007 season is as follows:

- Sunday 11th March: River Crane in Crane Park (meet at the Shot Tower)**

Another regular event, transplanting reeds from the island to the river downstream. Our work over the last two years has resulted in an unprecedented amount of new reed growth along the river, creating attractive and valuable new habitat. This year we are working alongside Richmond's Reedbed Habitat Action Plan group. Note that this group is also undertaking preparatory work on Crane Park Island the previous day, Saturday 10th March, and would welcome any help on that day as well.
- Sunday 8th April: Duke of Northumberland's River by Harlequins Ground**

This is another new site, created by the setting back of Harlequins fence to allow the widening of the path by the DNR and, we hope, creating suitable conditions for water voles to re-colonise.

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Everyone is welcome to come along to volunteer for the day or an hour or just to see what we are up to. All days start at 10-30am and we can be found by calling 07932 599208. Boots or stout shoes and old clothes recommended and a packed lunch if you are staying the day. All tools provided.

Crane Park Island Nature Reserve

Many of you I hope know the island and its Nature Reserve as well as the **Shot Tower** beside it. We have learnt a lot by seeing how the LWT volunteers have managed this site to encourage diverse habitats and a range of interesting species. FORCE is now providing **volunteers for every first Sunday** of the month to man the Shot Tower - it is currently open to the public on both the first and last Sunday of every month – we encourage you to see it and we are also keen to identify more volunteers to help with the manning schedule (drop us a line or call if interested).

A special thank-you to James Royle and his employers HSBC who have **donated £400** to FORCE as part of the **Earthwatch** volunteering scheme. This is being used to support the essential maintenance work on the island.

EDF Power Line Proposals

We are currently, along with the Council, engaged in negotiations with EDF regarding the routing of a **new underground power line** from the sub-station in Hamilton Road to the RFU ground. We hope to be able to set out more details in the next issue.

Other Planning Proposals

We have submitted objections to proposals to install **new flood lights at Whitton School** playing fields and to construct a new **car washing facility** adjacent to Orchard Road and the River Crane in St Margarets. We anticipate providing evidence to the Planning Committee on both schemes in due course.

The African Queen

And finally, as they say on the news, we heard recently that **“The African Queen”**, the epic film by John Huston with Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn, was part filmed in the River Crane. Initial research revealed the indoor scenes were shot at Isleworth Studios (now home for Worton Hall Industrial Estate) in 1951 and viewing the film shows the later scenes, including the famous leech scene, could easily be in the Crane. **Does anyone know any more?** It would be great to get to the bottom of this and we'd be grateful for any information.

Regards,

Rob Gray (Chair of FORCE)

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