Welcome

Midsummer greetings! We are now approaching the halfway point of what has been another strange and difficult year so far. Things are starting to improve for everyone which means that Long Lands Common can start to take shape.

The trees are in leaf, the birds in full song, the sun shines and the meadow grasses are high. It is almost as if the Long Lands land is breathing a sigh of relief that it now belongs to you, the wonderful community of owners and it is to be allowed to rest a while before the hard work really begins.

We would like to take a moment to thank our fantastic team of ecologists who have volunteered their time for us and begun surveys on just about everything from grasses to bats to butterflies. The results may take a while but they will certainly be worth the wait and the site will benefit from it greatly and assist with site design.

Speaking of design, our volunteer hero in this issue is Richard Lord who, as a wheelchair user, is able to assist with issues around accessibility and gives us his views on what he feels is essential to include in ongoing site development. This is a very important topic for us and everyone involved in the project. We want to make sure that each and every person who visits Long Lands Common benefits from a positive experience. Nature doesn’t exclude and we don’t either!

Our species spotlight comes from new contributor Ian Murdie and shifts from mammals to trees with the intriguing Alder. Who would have thought that water would reinforce wood and make it hard as rock? We finish the issue with a delve into our wildflower meadows from Ralph Hipps. Alarmingly, these beautiful areas have almost vanished from our countryside. You can find some pointers on how you can create a small meadow in your own garden in the article too!

If you would like to contribute to The LongLander by writing an article or want to send us your letters and photographs, then get in touch at: thelonglander@yahoo.com

Your Long Lands Common Team
Contents

02 Welcome

04 News from Long Lands Common
A round up of news since our last issue

07 Volunteer Heroes
Meet this month’s Long Lands Common Champion

09 Tree Species Spotlight - Alder
We take a closer look at this remarkable tree and how it benefits our environment

11 Our Wildflower Meadows
How much have we got left and how can you grow one in your garden?

13 Your Wildlife Finds
we want your wildlife discovery photo's! Here's how to send them in to us.

Contributors

Artemis Swann, Editor
Ralph Hipps, Writer
Ian Murdie, Writer
The Long Lands Common Team
Young Oaks

Since our last newsletter, we are pleased to report that the 2,000 young oak trees that Long Lands Common took delivery of are doing very well in their secure nursery beds at Henshaws College.

Now that spring is here, they have begun to leaf up nicely and will continue to grow until they are ready for planting in the late autumn. A huge thank you goes to student Alex Grkinic and staff member Gemma Sharpe for planting and of course to Henshaws College for providing the nursery beds.

Groundworks

Now that the ground is drier and any nesting birds have had their little ones, we are able to begin preparing the ground for laying pathways.

A route has been mown around the perimeter of the site as well as the beginning of surface and drainage works around gateways to ensure they don’t become waterlogged and muddy in winter.

Whilst this work is being carried out, can we ask that you don’t visit the site as there is heavy machinery in use and uneven ground surfaces.
News From Long Lands Common

Ecology Surveys
It’s been a busy last few months for Long Lands Common. Our visiting ecologists began the lengthy processes of surveying the site for existing flora and fauna. It’s a very exciting time as it will also give us an insight into what and who is currently living on the site.

So far we have seen our wonderful visiting ecologists come and observe signs of: breeding birds, reptiles, botanicals, bats, invertebrates, badgers and had soil samples taken. The photo on the right shows Dan Carne, Woodmeadow Officer from the Woodmeadow Trust, taking the soil samples that are being sent for analysis. We have also invited a specialist to look at the hedges who has discovered some historical remnants.

Keep an eye out in future issues for reports on the findings as they come in!

Grand Opening Day
We are currently planning to hold our grand opening day to officially open the Long Lands Common site on Saturday 24th July.

There will be a very short Annual General Meeting, followed by a Bio Blitz and bulb planting. Picnics are encouraged with dedicated areas to sit in and enjoy the surroundings.

So we can anticipate numbers, please follow this link to register your interest in attending the event.

Please note that this is a dog free event and we respectfully ask that no dogs are brought onto the site.
At long last, after months of painstaking cross-referencing and checking of data, we are on the verge of being able to print over 2000 share certificates in the first print run for individual applicants, having now matched payments with corresponding application forms and postal addresses.

This week we will be working with the printers to organise the data into their required format and, all being well, the first batch of individual certificates, along with the remaining gift and organisation certificates, should be ready for delivery by July. We will then continue working on the remaining applicants who have either a missing form, payment, or other error that needs rectifying before the second (and hopefully final) print run can commence.

To say that this has been an extremely complicated task is an understatement. With the benefit of hindsight, there are many things we would do differently with the share sales system if we were starting out again, but we were all new to this work and didn’t foresee just what we were letting ourselves in for: setting up multiple ways to apply and pay using systems that made it easy for errors to be made.

Thank you all, as ever, for your patience and understanding whilst we have been working through this ...and, again, please be reassured that everybody will get the certificates they paid for no matter how long it takes!
Meet Richard Lord

Richard is advising the Long Lands Common team on accessibility issues around the site as we want everyone to be able to enjoy the new nature area. As a nature lover and frequent visitor to other sites, he explains what it all means below.

“As an outdoor enthusiast & power wheelchair user who has had mental health issues in the past I know how important getting out into nature can be. The more wild and wilderness I feel, the happier I am. I’m sure that can be said for many of us.

Accessibility is more than just step-free access routes for wheelchairs. It’s about everybody feeling included and not excluded from enjoying and participating in a society on equal terms. It can mean different things to different people depending on whether they have mobility, sensory limitations or mental health problems.

So what does this mean for our nature reserves? A nature reserve’s focus should be on nature. A park or tourist destination should provide what it is designed to do but also focus on creating an inclusive space.
Nature, when left to be wild, or managed to encourage particular species, is obviously best for our native flora and fauna. Unfortunately, it can develop into one of the least accessible places. So the challenge is to create both an environment that is best for nature and also accessible to all.

If we want to make Long Lands Common accessible to all, what things should we consider? Currently the site has no step free access, no signage and no facilities. Creating step-free access onto & around the site is essential as are places to sit and enjoy the atmosphere or rest for those with limited mobility. Fortunately, apart from access from the old railway line, the site is predominantly level beside the lower North West corner. The incline of pathways shouldn’t pose an issue at the site entrance.

Should the site be gated or not? If so, why? If it’s to prevent motorbikes then I’d say there are many good examples, but not those currently along the old railway line or Beryl Burton cycle path. The former is tight and imposing to wheelchair users whilst the latter, although good, is not perfect for independent wheelchair users. Large kissing gates (without the gate part) of the style near Rossett’s nature reserve or onto the old railway at Spofforth are ideal.

The smoother and more substantial pathways are, the less natural they become, but the longer they last. There are, however, good examples of living paths. These might have a sub-structure of crushed stone with strong plastic meshing in the top layer which can be overlaid with turf, or some type of rocky soil through which plants can grow.

Moving onto sensory impairment: as the site is very near to Henshaws College for the partially sighted, I feel it is important to encourage flora and fauna that makes sound or movement. So when those with sight loss visit the site they can hear nature rather than the built environment. Shielding traffic noise with tree or hedge planting also has the benefit of encouraging bird life whilst providing aural benefit.

For those with hearing loss, movement and colour may be more important. It also handily includes things that others would enjoy, so would maybe be less challenging to design or plant.

Lastly, I’ll mention facilities. To provide an accessible toilet or not. Personally, I’d say no, as it’s a nature reserve not a park. However, if people think we should have one, there’s a great example of a compostable accessible toilet on the jubilee allotments on Bilton Hall Drive."
Tree Species Spotlight - Alder

By Ian Murdie

The common Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) is a dull tree is it not? No blossom in spring, rubbish autumn colours, doesn't grow to impressive sizes, hasn't got a particularly elegant form, and when did you last see a piece of furniture made from Alder? What is there to like about the Alder tree? Well from an ecological point of view, there's lots.

The Alder is a pioneer plant which means that when a piece of land has been cleared of vegetation, by either natural or unnatural means – flood, fire, landslide, volcanic eruption, earthquake, tsunami, fire, bulldozer etc., pioneer plants are the first to recolonise the space. Typically, they are fast growing, thrive in full sunlight and poor soil, they stabilise the soil and improve its structure and fertility. Eventually, as a forest reaches maturity, pioneer plants get pushed out by the bigger, slower growing plants that have benefited from the fertile soil and protection from the weather provided to their tender saplings by the pioneer plants. Alder can often be seen covering abandoned industrial land and can grow up to 90 cm a year when young.

Alder is a nitrogen fixer. Keen gardeners will be familiar with this as a characteristic of legumes - peas, beans and clover. The plant has a symbiotic relationship (one that benefits both partners) with specific bacteria, which it hosts within nodules on their roots and feeds with carbohydrates. These bacteria take atmospheric nitrogen and lock it into soil-based nitrogen compounds which are available for all nearby plants. Nitrogen is a key building block of chlorophyll, so nitrogen compounds in the soil are hugely important nutrients. They stimulate leaf growth, and as you probably know, leaves are the food factory for the plant and where carbon is removed from the atmosphere.

Unlike other tree species and because Alder has its own plentiful supply of nitrogen, it has no need to recover chlorophyll in autumn, so it drops its leaves while they are still green.
Gardeners will know the importance of mixing greens and browns for a productive compost heap, so the fact that Alder leaves on the forest floor are green while all the other trees are dropping brown is another way in which the Alder tree contributes to fertile soils.

The common Alder is native to most of Europe. It loves waterlogged ground, growing in marshes and next to rivers and lakes. On riverbanks, the roots bind the soil together and protect it from erosion by dangling into the water providing shelter and hiding places for water creatures, from tiny bugs to otters. The leaves that fall in the water rot quickly becoming the foundation of the food chain. They provide nutrients for a number of water bugs that are then eaten by fish. The bark of the Alder is rough, providing a useful surface for epiphytes (air plants) to cling to. Given they grow in damp conditions, the trunks and branches of Alder trees are often covered in mosses and lichens. The tree also has symbiotic relationships with many fungi: some of these fungi will only grow on Alder trees. The Alder provides food for more than a hundred different species of plant eating insects, supporting different species in different parts of the world. The seeds are a favourite food of birds like the siskin and goldfinch.

Alder is wind pollinated. That means the pollen is blown by the wind from the male catkin to the female and the flowers do not produce nectar to feed bees and entice them in thus carrying it to the next flower. It would be easy to then assume that it is of no use to bees, right? Wrong! Bees eat pollen also. Alder is one of the earliest plants to flower each year, and because it relies on the randomness of the wind, it produces huge amounts of pollen, so the male catkins are a vital, and often, only food source for early emerging bees that are so important to the world.

The timber, when dry, rots easily. It is favoured by the woodworm, so much so that people used to put a stick of Alder in their wardrobe. The woodworm would eat the Alder and not touch the structure of the wardrobe. The wood however does not rot when wet and goes very hard and a trunk that falls in the water will lock up carbon for a long time. Alder wood was used to make canal lock gates and bank protection, and Venice is built on a foundation made of Alder wood.

Alder is an unassuming but truly remarkable tree - the NHS worker of the forest. If young Longlanders are wanting to plant some seeds and grow some trees for Longlands forest, they could do worse than trying to grow some Alder. Seeds ripen in October. They are wind and water borne (they can germinate while floating) and are very small, so catch them before they blow away. After keeping them cold over winter, they should germinate in April. For more details on growing Alder visit this website here.
By Ralph Hipps

The countryside used to look very different. England was replete with wildflower meadows and grasslands where wild poppies, ox-eyed daisies and other wild flowers grew in peace and played an important role in agriculture. They would attract insects and pollinators and small mammals were to be found scurrying around enhancing the biodiversity of the area they were in. Nearly 90 years on, the picture is very different. We have lost a whopping 97% of these areas which equates to 7.5 million acres (3 million hectares) leaving us with only 1% of the UK covered with grasslands and meadows.

Why do Wildflower Meadows Matter so much?
The answer is a simple one. They create biodiverse habitat, a term that refers to the amount of variety in the wild. The more diversity, the better for our planet because it is this that gives planet earth its resilience and its adaptability. Plants of different species absorb carbon which in turn stabilises our atmosphere and our seasons. Jonathan Hughes tells us in David Attenborough: A Life on This Planet that it was during the early Holocene period (approximately 11,650 years ago) that the planet developed most of its biodiversity and settled into regular seasons.

Wildflower meadows are home to diverse species of plants and insects, being especially important for insects that pollinate our crops, known as “pollinators”. Bees are perhaps the best known of these pollinators, but hoverflies also serve a vital role. Recent studies show that the UK is seeing more of certain key species of pollinator, but less diversity in pollinators overall and, according to studies, a third of bees and hoverflies are dying out. This is a big worry for farmers as they rely on diversity in pollinators, knowing that environments can swiftly change and the preponderant species can die out in a worst case scenario. Safety lies in the multiplicity of species, just like healthy finances depend on a wide range of investments rather than one single investment.
How Can We Grow Wildflower Meadows Ourselves?
Growing wildflower meadows is relatively straightforward and it is something we can do in our own
gardens and is best done in the autumn. Pick an area that you want to turn wild and reduce the fertility
of the soil by removing 3-6 inches of top-soil, which you can do with a turf-remover or a spade,
removing any weeds whilst turning the soil into into crumbly tith.

When you're ready to sow, portion out the seeds and sow them evenly across the soil then walk over the
seeds to push them in. They'll need watering regularly and the grass maintaining by removing dead
material in midsummer and careful cutting. It is recommended to vary cutting time each year so that
different species can thrive at different times.

If you aren’t the green-fingered type, you can buy a Wildflower “Meadow-mat”, which is a pre-grown roll
of wildflower meadow that you can lay on your garden with no fuss. This option is more expensive but
worth the investment for your garden.

You can read more on creating a wild flower area in your garden on the RSPB website with their step by
step guide.

If you’d like to visit some existing flower meadows for inspiration then have a look at the national sites
here. There are some fantastic ones in the local area around Nidderdale and the Yorkshire Dales.
Your Wildlife Finds

The summer months with their light mornings and late evening sun mean it’s a great time to get out and about for a spot of nature watching. It’s always exciting to see what you can discover and there is so much to see no matter what you’re into.

The Long Lands Team love to see what they can find and wear their nature nerd badges with pride!

We would love it if you sent us your captures of what you’ve found and we’ll do our best to feature them!

Email your photographs to: thelonglander@yahoo.com
or
tag us in your pictures on twitter @LongLandsCommon or over on our Facebook page.