

Backies News

NEWSLETTER FROM THE FRIENDS OF CLIFTON BACKIES



Water vole habitat improvement at Clifton Backies

As you may have noticed the Friends of Clifton Backies recently undertook to clear rubbish from the Bur Dike. Six volunteers turned up and managed to remove several large items from the beck including an old bed, paddling pools, boards, pipes and even a car bumper. We also cleared a lot of rubbish from the area close to the Sutton Way entrance. Not bad for a mornings work! The Bur Dike is home to a long established population of water voles, a protected species in the UK, so all efforts to keep this beck clean are going to be a big help for the wildlife.

Water voles like to live in small streams like the Bur Dike where there are grassy banks and plenty of aquatic vegetation. The voles nest in burrows and use the grass as cover. They also feed on a variety of plants growing both on the banks and in the water. Sadly, the local water vole population has been in decline in recent years as the banks have become overgrown with scrub and brambles. There is plenty of potential habitat but a lot of work will need to be done to restore this habitat to a suitable condition.

Last month a group of volunteers from the Environment Agency were able to clear about twenty metres of scrub on the banks of the Bur Dike close to the allotments. This will hopefully prove to be the beginning of a concerted effort to help improve the habitat for the water voles and allow it to extend its range downstream. The Friends of Clifton Backies will now be making a funding application to a charity called Healthy Planet in the hope of getting more work done.

The Friends group are organising a water vole survey on the upper reaches of the Bur Dike. We hope to confirm a date and time for this survey soon. And we hope to maintain an active interest so do look out for opportunities to get involved in the future!

Picture Key:

Left—Water vole

Right—Bank clearance work

Right (inset) - Rubbish collected

Upcoming events

Events and meetings already planned for Spring & Summer are:

- 26th April, 10.00am - Water vole survey training to take part
- 17th May - 10:30am - Drawing nature on Clifton Backies with Doug Heald
- 2nd June, 7:30pm - On site Friends meeting - meet Woodland Chase car park
- 15th July, 7:30pm - Wildflower walk led by Paul Knaggs
- 9th August, 1:30pm - Butterfly walk led by Tony Fairburn

Latest News

I'm very pleased to report that following the delivery of our first newsletter to all the homes in the areas surrounding the Backies we attracted 13 new members. The March meeting at the Burton Stone Inn was very well attended and it was great to see so many new faces - as well as some old ones! Jenny, the City of York Council Ranger, came along and we had a wide-ranging discussion about future projects for the Backies. Please see the Minutes for more details.

News from last meeting:

- Jenny, the Council Ranger, is applying for funding for our water vole habitat improvement project from Healthy Planet, an environmental organisation.
- Jenny will see if the council will fund improvements to the path from Minchin Close to the Backies.
- Tony will be carrying out a survey for Butterfly Conservation on the Backies this summer

Also

If you have any ideas for events, information or sightings you would like to report for Clifton Backies, please pass them to Tony Fairburn (antony.fairburn@gmail.com or 07714307709). We would be delighted to include them on our website or in our newsletter.

Please tell everyone about the great things we have planned at Clifton Backies and pass on a membership form - we always like to see new faces at meetings and events.

For further information regarding the Friends please see the Clifton Backies web pages : www.cliftonbackies.org.uk.