

"Protecting and enhancing the Emm Brook"

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AGM

Friends of the Emm Brook Annual General Meeting 2nd June 2009 at 1930hrs Woosehill Centre

**Offers of help and nominations for the committee especially welcome
There will be a short presentation by Colin Mitchell on "More Industry along the Emm"**

Old Pollarded Willows along the Emmbrook

Barbara Stagles and Miriam Laurent, surveyors for the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association (WDVTA) have just recorded 17 old pollarded willows on the banks of the Emm where the brook meanders in marked curves along Riverside Walk. We think they are crack willows but are waiting to have this verified. Willow trees have enormous value for biodiversity. They support a huge number of insects and provide homes in their hollows for bats and birds. When Barbara and Miriam were surveying, blackcaps and chiff chaffs were singing in the branches and a fox was disturbed, sheltering in one of the hollowed trunks. Some of the willows have fallen or have broken branches but their damaged trunks are providing rich habitats not only for invertebrates but also for mosses, lichens and epiphytes, i.e. plants that grow on trees.



The roots of willows help to stabilise river banks. According to Oliver Rackham, author of acclaimed books on Woodlands and the Countryside, when trees are pollarded they have permanent bases that live longer than those that are uncut. This means our willows must be of some age. They would have been pollarded when the land was still being cultivated as farmland, possibly for hurdlework. It would be good to know more about the agricultural history of this section of the Emm Brook. If you have any information please get in touch with Barbara at chair@wdvta.org.uk or phone 0118 9784013.

"Go with the Flow"

*Top ten do's and don'ts for visiting the Emm Brook .
The children of the Emmbrook Junior School have designed a new notice board for the Emm Brook . It's title is "Go with the Flow"
It was unveiled on 24th April .
Watch this space for a photograph*

Dragonflies: The Banded Demoiselle

The flashing blue wings of a male flying in the Summer sun or the bright metallic blue of his body when perched make the Banded Demoiselle one of the most beautiful insects found along the Emm Brook. The deep metallic green body of the female and green wings make her more elusive, but no less beautiful. What more attractive indicator could there be of the unpolluted nature of our brook?



NB AGM 2 June at Woosehill Centre 1930hrs, Do come!



Cowslip Success: on 23rd September the Woodcraft Folk helped members of FOTEB plant 100 baby cowslip plants in the wildflower patch near the Emm, in Riverside Park..

On 9th April members of the FOTEB wildflower group found the cowslips growing well – see photograph. There was one group of 14 plants and several others of 6-8 plants.

Well done **Woodcraft Folk!** And thanks for helping to enhance the wildflower patch with clusters of these lovely scented spring flowers. Have you been to see them?

Further Successes with Nest Boxes Along the Emm

The majority of the 40 or so nest boxes put up by Friends of The Emm Brook (FOTEB) along the Emm were occupied in 2008. Encouragingly most of the chicks probably fledged successfully too, because there were very few dead chicks or clutches of eggs in the nests when the boxes were checked and cleaned last autumn. This contrasted with 2007 when many of the nests contained skeletons or eggs, the young birds probably having starved or perished in the cold, wet weather of that spring and early summer. This happened all over the country in 2007 and the poor breeding season was reflected in the much lower numbers of birds recorded the following spring (2008) in the survey of birds breeding along the Emm that FOTEB have now carried out for four years. It will be interesting to see whether the numbers have recovered this year. The nest boxes have been in position now for up to four years, the majority having been bought with grants from Wokingham Borough Council Countryside Service and The Wokingham Society. The old nests were full of invertebrates when they were cleaned out, the commonest being fleas which became very active by February and March – inside the bags in which the nests were stored! This shows how important it is to clean nest boxes every autumn.

Almost all the nest boxes with circular entry holes, designed for tits, were used, but fewer of the open-fronted boxes, designed for robins, blackbirds etc. were occupied. An exciting exception was one installed under a bridge over the Emm, which it is believed was used by a grey wagtail; certainly this species is frequently seen along the river. Encouragingly, and somewhat surprisingly, half the wedged shaped tree creeper nest boxes were used by the intended species. Tits will use these boxes too, but their nests of moss, grass and feathers are easily distinguished from the much simpler nests of small twigs made by tree creepers. One of the two round, 'wren houses' was also used.

Members are looking forward to seeing how many of the boxes are used again in 2009, particularly whether the tubular box built into a bank on the Emm is used by the kingfishers that are seen regularly nearby. **Mike Saynor**

Another Success Story: Kick Sampling in the Emm – April 2009 Results

FOTEB continued with their biennial 'kick sampling' to assess the numbers of invertebrates present in the river last week. The numbers and types of invertebrates present in a river tell you much about the quality of the water in it and its biological health – see recent FOTEB Newsletter. The spring samples were taken this year on 19 April. The results were much in line with previous samples, which all indicated that the water quality in the Emm was 'Good' the second highest of the six categories that the Environment Agency uses to classify the quality of water in rivers.

This is encouraging in two respects. It is good that the water, in a relatively slow-running river that runs through a small town, is so pure. Identifying the invertebrates in these samples is not easy, so obtaining broadly similar results each time suggests we are at least identifying what is there consistently - and hopefully reasonably accurately too! FOTEB now have results from four year's worth of sampling. Should the river ever get polluted some time in the future, further sampling would provide useful information about how serious the problem was, and also whether and how quickly the wildlife in the river recovered. **Mike Saynor**

NB Don't forget the AGM on 2nd June at Woosehill Centre at 1930 hrs and the talk by Colin Mitchell on "Industry along the Emm"