



Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

Chair's Report August 2019 - July 2020

Despite the pandemic, Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook (FCHB) have been very active this year. The importance of the Brook to Cambridge residents was highlighted when lockdown started, with large numbers of people using Snakey Path for their daily exercise, and others finding that this quiet green space and its wildlife brought them some peace.



The summer was also challenging, with a number of pressures on the Brook and adjacent lakes. So we would like to say a big thank you to all our supporters including:

- The many volunteers who have helped with litter-picking and provided moral support;
- RiverCare, which provides the equipment, insurance and moral support for our work;
- Cam Valley Forum;
- Cambridge City Council, particularly Guy Belcher;
- Last but not least, FCHB's very active committee.

Activities that we have undertaken since the AGM in July 2019 are described below.

1. Maintaining the attractive appearance of the brook

Litter picks: We were only able to hold one FCHB event this year, on World Rivers Day 29th Sept 2019. Special thanks to Nicola Fawcett for leading this and to RiverCare for equipment (this year they provided us with new gloves, vests, waders and litter pick tools), insurance, risk assessment, and general advice. The Great British Spring Clean litter pick on 29th March 2020 had to be cancelled but many individuals and FCHB supporters undertook their own litter picking on a regular basis. Thanks to their hard work, and despite the mess left by those who trespassed into the lakes in the hot weather, the Brook was kept remarkably



litter-free. Particular thanks to Karen Olden and her Cherry Hinton group for all the hard work they did clearing up the substantial rubbish left by the trespassers.

New anti-litter notices: with the remaining money from our Pebble Fund grant and technical support from RiverCare, new anti-litter notices were prepared (including an anti-cigarette butt one to go near Sainsbury's) and will be ready for putting up later in the summer. Many thanks to Emmy Smart for co-ordinating this.



2. Raising public awareness about the importance of the brook for wildlife

Newsletter: Four issues were produced this year (numbers 61-64). Many thanks to Monica Frisch, our newsletter editor, and to all our contributors. We were very grateful to those of you who contacted us to show us your appreciation for the newsletter during lockdown.

Colville Primary School, Cherry Hinton: One of the teachers from the school contacted FCHB to ask for help with a class project about the Brook and the importance of water. Holly and Sue provided information, and Sue visited the school in early March and gave talks to two groups of school children. Unfortunately the lockdown prevented subsequent activities (the children were hoping to write letters of concern about abstraction to relevant agencies and individuals). We hope that in the future we might be able to re-kindle this collaboration.

Website, Facebook and Twitter: thanks to Jon Fairbairn, in particular, and other committee members for maintaining these.

Other events and media: The Cambridge Natural History Society NatHistFest was sadly cancelled. However, we had several mentions in the local press: the autumn litter pick featured in the *Cambridge News* in November 2019, there were articles about the brook and lake problems in both the *News* and the *Independent* over the summer, and FCHB was mentioned in the Council's magazine *Cambridge Matters* in the summer 2020 issue. We provided a short article about the Brook for the Cambridge Conservation Forum website, given its popularity for exercise during lockdown.

3. Improving the brook as a home for wildlife

The dramatically low level of the Brook in the second part of 2019, and the extreme periods of heat this year fortunately did not appear to have any immediate effects on the wildlife. The brook continues to be a magnet for animals, particularly birds: warblers were abundant in the spring; unusually we had numerous visits from cuckoos, presumably passing through on their way to Wicken Fen and other nesting places (see recording on the FCHB website by one of our





supporters); and many people enjoyed and became very involved in the progress of the swan family – 2 adults and initially 7 cygnets - that took up residence in the Brook during lockdown.

Alexanders, a plant that is proving invasive, became abundant in early summer on the bank near Blacklands Allotments, and some of the committee helped to remove this on the advice of the City Biodiversity Officer and Wildlife Trust.

4. Monitoring the wildlife of the brook

We have lacked resources to undertake any regular monitoring this year and the Council-run Riverfly monitoring programme is no longer functioning. Peter Pilbeam, of the Cambridgeshire Mammal Society, kindly surveyed the Brook for voles again. The survey on 15th March 2020 produced very few sightings, perhaps because it was too early and so a second survey was undertaken in June, also resulting in very few sightings. Nevertheless, the voles are present. Monica continued to record the sightings of our furry friends and other interesting wildlife that are submitted via wildlife@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

5. Liaison and co-operation with other organisations

RiverCare: Lynsey Stafford, RiverCare officer for Cambridge, has continued to support us. We are most grateful for her help and encouragement.

Cambridge Local Plan: Consultations have started regarding the new future Greater Cambridge Local Plan Issues and Options. We submitted a response to the Green Infrastructure consultation and took part in the subsequent online survey.

Cam Valley Forum (CVF): Following the talk at the FCHB 2019 AGM by Steve Boreham on the problems with low water flow in Cambridge chalk streams, we have been helping to publicise CVF's River Cam Manifesto. We contributed to the [CVF's report *Let it Flow*](#), participated in a zoom meeting that CVF organised with Water Resources East at the end of April, and provided a response to the Cambridge Region Drought Plan - Pre-Draft Consultation.

Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall: We have continued to liaise with this group on a regular basis, sharing information about litter picks, and work on the water courses through the park.