LIFE Update

It never ceases to amaze me that time is supposed to be a static measurement of equal interval, as far as I can see this year has speeded up compared to the first year of the project.

We are now well past the half way point of the project’s projected timescale, much has been done but there is still much to do. We are making good progress across all fronts. Of course progress is not equal across all fronts, we are close to or exceeding our targets on some actions and on others we are not doing quite as well.

We submitted our mid project report in early summer – this is a fifty page report with lots of appendices. It’s always a mammoth task putting together reports but they help clarify what progress has been made and what is still to be done.

Excellent progress was made with the scrub clearance last winter and we have achieved 313ha against a target of 322 ha, slightly behind target but given the fact that no large contract was let in the first winter, a remarkable achievement, which bodes well for at least achieving the target by the end of March 2017. We are currently planning if all goes well with the scrub clearance to exceed the LIFE target by around 50ha.

Progress with the water level management works at Thorne is ongoing with the three large tilting weirs now in place and anecdotal evidence suggests that water levels within the site have remained remarkably high over the summer months, hopefully the tilting weirs are doing their job. Works on the pumping station, which is required to try and stabilise winter water levels, are making slow progress, whilst work was expected to start in September unfortunately it is currently delayed. Along with these structures we are hoping to start work on the bunds and plastic dams and also begin work in the autumn. At Hatfield Moors 38 plastic dams were constructed by the LIFE Estate Team over early summer on New Porters and New Moor South which should help with surface water retention and importantly surface water wave action reduction. Currently we are appointing contractors to design and draw up specifications for small tilting weirs in the same area.

Lucy Ryan the PhD student from York University and her gang of volunteers and NNR staff have been busy continuing their exploits with nightjar research, tagging twenty birds with GPS tags with eleven of the tags being recovered. A lot of data will be generated from these tags and we look forward to Lucy’s analysis. Meanwhile Hannah the second PhD student at York University has been busy collecting data on the cultural ecosystem services that the NNR provides to the local community and visitors alike.

Community engagement is an important part of LIFE projects and That’s LIFE project is no different. Over the summer months many events have been undertaken and well attended, it is always nice to have more attendees and everyone is welcome. To book or see what events are forthcoming you can now look on our exciting recently launched website http://humberheadpeatlands.org.uk You can also download reports and previous editions of Moor Space via the web page.

As we arrive into autumnal weather there is much more to do over the winter months and I look forward to writing further updates to inform you of progress with the project.

David Hargreaves,
Life+ Project Manager

A sphagnum moss pool on Thorne Moors
Sherlock Holmes and the case of the missing plume

The year? 1891: Queen Victoria has recently celebrated her golden jubilee; the adventures of Sherlock Holmes enthral the nation for the first time and, during a visit to the raised bog of Thorne Moors, a Yorkshire moth collector makes a rather special discovery...

As G.T. Porritt negotiated his way across the peat bog, he came upon ‘a very fine and large specimen’ of a rare moth: the sundew plume (named after its feathery wings, but in reality a tiny insect). Previously only known from the Cambridgeshire Fens and mires in Dorset, this was surely a remarkable find, so far from its usual southern haunts. Mr Porritt recalled, ‘It is with much satisfaction that I record the occurrence of so interesting a species in Yorkshire.’

More interesting still, the sundew plume, *Buckleria paludum*, leads a unique existence. Its caterpillars feed on the sundew plant, itself one of the fascinating denizens of peat bogs. These plants have adopted lethal tactics to thrive where there are few soil nutrients: their leaves are sets of ‘dew’ traps that lure insects to a sticky end, then digest their bodies. And yet the sundew plume has somehow turned the tables, avoiding the plant’s irresistible booby traps.

So Thorne Moors, with its miles of bog and sundews, seemed the perfect home for the sundew plume at the end of the 19th century. But most mysterious of all, G.T. Porritt’s first sighting was also his last. In fact, the sundew plume was never confirmed in Yorkshire again. With the advent of industrial scale peat milling and the devastating drainage of Thorne Moors in the 20th century, this diminutive specialist of the Moors appeared to have gone forever.

Fast forward 125 years, to 2016: another venerated monarch has recently celebrated a jubilee, Sherlock Holmes continues to enthral the nation and a new generation studies the wildlife of Thorne Moors.

The monitoring work for the ‘Restoring the Humberhead Peatlands’ LIFE+ Project demands a lot of crouching down in the vegetation. On a warm summer’s day, with the horse flies biting, you can watch sundew plants nestled on pillows of *sphagnum moss*; a wolf spider lurking on the water’s surface, or a gnat fluttering erratically among the cotton grass stems.

Until you realise it isn’t a gnat at all, but a plume moth, the smallest you’ve ever seen: the sundew plume. Here all along, clinging on in a boggy refuge, alongside its food plant. Undetected, perhaps, because it doesn’t look like a moth at all, but a nondescript gnat. A chance masquerade that helped it evade the attentions of entomologists for over a century.

While the LIFE+ Project can’t claim to have brought back the sundew plume moth, its rediscovery is a symbol for the future. By restoring the peatlands and expanding a rare habitat, we give a chance to the special animals and plants that call peat bogs home. Well, Dr Watson, case closed?

Richard Smith, LIFE+ Project Monitoring Officer
Team Volunteering – an experience

Mexborough Operations Intelligence Unit organised a Team Community 10,000 day, enthusiastically supporting Natural England in restoring and maintaining the Humberhead Peatlands National Nature Reserve.

Split over two days in May and June, between them the team cleared invading brambles and willow from a meadow to improve habitat for wild flowers, painted fencing and became expert willow builders, maintaining a much needed willow hide, so visitors can observe the wildlife without disturbing it. Some of the team even undertook a short orchid survey.

Fortunately both days were bathed in glorious sunshine (where some of us spotted an adder!), and at the conclusion of each day, staff led a short tour of the site.

It was a fabulous opportunity to team build outside of the office whilst knowing we contributed to the Peatlands regeneration – a task only possible with the participation of volunteers – and a relationship with Natural England the team would like to maintain.

Scott Swinbourne, Service Manager

Take care

・ There are many old peat workings, drains and water courses. You are strongly advised to keep to way marked walks and existing tracks.
・ Please take responsibility for your own safety. In hot weather you will need a sunhat, drinking water and insect repellent.
・ Dogs must be kept under effective control at all times. You must keep your dog on a short lead between 1 March and 31 July and all year round near farm animals.
・ Camping, fishing, barbeques, motorcycles, horses and cycles are not allowed. Cycles are permitted on the designated route only at Hatfield and horses by permit only at Hatfield.
・ Do not leave valuables in your car.
・ Danger deep water. No swimming.
・ Snakes live here. Do not touch them.
・ Prepare for your visit by wearing suitable outdoor clothing – you will need to wear stout shoes or wellingtons.

Please follow the Countryside Code

・ Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs.
・ Leave gates and property as you find them.
・ Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
・ Keep dogs under effective control.
・ Consider other people.

Facilities

・ There are toilets on Hatfield Moors at the Boston Park car park but none at Thorne Moors – the nearest being in the town.
Autumn Migration

Autumn Migration is underway once again with literally tens of millions of birds on the move throughout Europe. Nearly all migratory species from Europe winter in Africa, with a few oddities amongst seabirds. In autumn migration there are up to twice to three times as many birds on the move as spring due to all the young. The huge mortality in the non-breeding season accounts for the huge difference in numbers so many will not make the return journey back to breed where they were born. The longest passerine (perching) migrant is the northern wheatear which breeds in the most northerly latitudes and winters in Africa and passes through the Humberhead Peatlands in small numbers, some of which will be British breeders others do very long non-stop flights over oceans to and from Greenland and Iceland. Of the non-passerines, the Arctic tern takes the laurels spending summer in the Arctic and winter in the Antarctic, thus also being the creature that sees more daylight hours than any other. They pass through our area in May, and are recorded in small numbers annually on our reserve.

Amongst the earliest migrants to leave are adult cuckoos in late July. Having no parental duties means as soon as eggs are laid they can leave to winter again in mid-western Africa, even into the Congo. Young cuckoos have to migrate a route they do not know without any guidance and it has been shown that one of the main ways in which birds migrate to the right areas is by flying in a certain direction a certain amount of time before changing direction and repeating. They have trace amounts of magnetic material in their brains and also use polarised light and stars to find direction. Many diurnal birds migrate solely at night to avoid most predators and in many areas the heat of the day. Cuckoos feed on hairy caterpillars and often target warblers’ nests to lay their eggs in. The Humberhead Peatlands therefore meet their requirements well and despite national declines they are still easily seen here.

As cuckoos begin to leave so the first Arctic waders begin to move south. These early leavers will be failed breeders, not having the luxury of time to try again so far north. They do not appear on our shores straight away though as they often have much further to travel. Waders are fast flying long distance travellers with the ability if required to land on water to maybe sit out a storm. If however, the winds are favourable some wader species can stay on the wing for days on end sleeping on the wing with one eye open (Unihemispheric slow-wave sleep) and arriving at their destination having not only used all their fat reserves but also with shrunken vital organs due to muscle wastage. Upon arrival they must feed immediately or die. In this way they can cross whole continents or oceans non-stop. Due to their exceptional powers of flight and distances they travel, waders are high on the list of turning up as rarities far from their destination.
Most years on our reserve a rare wader turns up, usually from the Americas.

Other remarkable facts about migrants are the heights some species attain, this is particularly true for waterbirds such as swans and geese which are sometimes reported at the heights of aircraft. These heights are lethal to most other vertebrates with temperatures 50°C below and little oxygen. Birds’ feathers are amongst the best insulating material known to man and birds have special organs called air sacs fore and aft of the lungs, which is an adaptation to supplying a constant oxygen supply to the blood (unlike mammals which cannot oxygenate the blood constantly) but also pre-warms the air thus preventing damage to the delicate lungs. Long necks of the highest flying birds and a horny bill also help. Whooper and Bewick’s Swans as well as pink-footed geese are regular species which migrate to our reserve to spend the winter.

Swifts start moving in late July and early August and by late August it can be hard to see any. Swifts are unusual in being the only family of birds that habitually never lands except to breed. Later than this many small birds such as warblers begin to pass through in their thousands on their way to wintering grounds in Africa, where they will moult before starting the whole journey again in reverse in the spring.

**Bryan Wainwright,**
*Reserve Manager*

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**LIFE+ Project launches website**

We have launched the LIFE+ Project website [humberheadpeatlands.org.uk](http://humberheadpeatlands.org.uk) The website offers you quick and easy access to essential information on the LIFE+ Project and what is happening on Thorne and Hatfield Moors.

You can find:

* Details of the Project’s aims and objectives.
* The practical works that are taking place on Thorne and Hatfield Moors, including videos.
* Upcoming events – guided walks, open days, workshops and conferences, family activities and specialist events e.g. Plant Identification.
* Downloadable maps of Thorne and Hatfield Moors.
* The reports that we have submitted to the European Commission.
* Minutes from our Project Steering Groups.
* And there are lots and lots of great photos of the Moors!

Please do take a few minutes to check out the website at [www.humberheadpeatlands.org.uk](http://www.humberheadpeatlands.org.uk) and find out more about what is happening on the Moors!
What’s gone on

We’re nearing the end of another year of events in our LIFE programme of community activity and can reflect on our engagement with the local residents around Thorne, Hatfield and Crowle – those closest to the NNR.

We started the year with a spring reptile walk with a glimpse of adders along the Deer Ride at Hatfield. Let’s hope for better weather on a 2017 walk but these late February and March days when sunshine is catching the edges of tracks and brown leaf litter from the previous year warms quickly on a bright blue sky day are, the best chances to catch emerging adders. May heralded the dawn chorus with a tuneful early start for a lucky few.

LIFE+ Project staff held drop in sessions at the three main libraries with displays portraying the work and ambitions of the project. The nightjar walk didn’t disappoint with an early fly past of several seconds from a summer visiting bird in Packards. The continued churring as we made our way around Hatfield’s red route was pleasing in the darkness and made for a unique walk. Tim Kohler, the Senior Reserve Manager gave a Plant ID walk and course in May around the Dragonbacks and Boston Park area. These events are kindly supported by Flying Futures. Our regular evening and health walks continued to be well attended despite a rainy start to the summer.

We have hosted three school day visits on Hatfield and two on Crowle and two Beaver group visits where we pond dipped and found curious creatures to identify in our bug pots by the ponds in Dragonbacks. Flying Futures helped deliver a spine-chilling Halloween event last October and a chocolately themed Easter Egg Hunt. We have just pond dipped, bug Olympics, bug hunted and moth trapped our way through the summer holidays with events for families to enjoy and learn more about the special link with nature Hatfield Moors provides. If you have ideas for different event and walk themes then we would be pleased to hear from you – contact moorspace@yahoo.com.

International Bog Day in July was celebrated with an event on Crowle Moors and venturing with walks onto the eastern side of Thorne. Hanna from York University continued her collection of feedback via a photo-mapping activity and of course Moor Space 4 included Hanna’s prize draw questionnaire.

Facebook and Twitter have helped us keep you up to date with events and inspiring photos of the two Reserves and you’ve submitted your own visit highlights. Keep your pictures coming and see the website launch information in this issue.

Janet Canning, Reserve Manager

To receive future issues of Moor Space and to contribute please contact us at moorspace@yahoo.com

Follow the Humberhead Peatlands National Nature Reserve on http://www.facebook.com/humberheadpeatlands
How do I get to Humberhead Peatlands NNR?

The closest towns to the NNR are Goole, Thorne Doncaster, Scunthorpe, Crowle and Hatfield.

By public transport

Rail stations – Thorne North and South. Contact South Yorkshire Transport on 01709 515151.

Moorends is served by bus from Thorne. Contact Doncaster Tourist Information on 01302 734309.

Crowle is served by rail and bus. Contact Brigg Tourist Information on 01652 657053.

Hatfield Woodhouse and Wroot villages are served by a limited bus service.

The winner of the prize draw from Issue 4 is Steven Ellis from Thorne. He has won £100 of Argos vouchers.

Walks and Events coming up

Drop in Sessions

Sunday 30th October 1pm – 3pm
Sunday 20th November 11am – 2pm

We are running some sessions on Hatfield Moors at the Canberra Compound (direction to here will be sign posted from main car park). Come and see the work of the LIFE+ Project with the Reserve and LIFE+ Managers.

Autumn Colours on Thorne Moors

15 November 10.30am

– approx. 5 miles to see the seasonal change as we head into winter on a brisk walk to the viewing platform via the Limestone Road and with a chance to see deer.

No need to book.

For more information or to book where stated, call 07766 420290.
Moor Space is produced and edited by a Steering Group who can be contacted at moorspace@yahoo.com

The Steering Group includes representatives of the following organisations:

North Lincolnshire Council – Own and manage land on Crowle Moors and maintain access to this and other land nearby.
Contact: 01724 729000  ✻ environmentteam@northlincs.gov.uk

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council – Publicises access to and around the Moors.
Contact: 01302 736000  ✻ publicrightsofway@doncaster.gov.uk

Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust – Owns land on Crowle Moors and manages it as a Nature Reserve.
Contact: 01507 526667  ✻ info@lincstrust.co.uk

Natural England – Natural England owns land on Thorne Moors, Goole Moors and Hatfield Moors. It is all part of the Humberhead Peatlands National Nature Reserve.
Contact Senior Reserve Manager: 07827 280405.
www.gov.uk/natural-england

Thorne & Hatfield Moors Conservation Forum – Prioritises science and publishes research, see website for list of publications. It also campaigns on issues affecting the conservation of the Moors.
www.thmcf.org and see also thmcf.wordpress.com
Contact: execsec@thmcf.org

Restoring the Humberhead Peatlands – LIFE+ Project (LIFE13NAT/UK/000451) – Funding from the European Union’s Biodiversity and Nature Programme (EU LIFE+), Doncaster East Internal Drainage Board and Natural England is helping the restoration of lowland raised mires of Thorne and Hatfield Moors
Contact: Humberhead.Peatlands@naturalengland.org.uk

JBA – Is a multi-disciplinary environmental and engineering consultancy specialising in wetland ecology, river restoration and the management of water with offices throughout the UK, Ireland and in the Far East.
Contact: Kieran Sheehan on 01302 720313
kieran.sheehan@jbaconsulting.com

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FRONT COVER IMAGES: Main Image: Dragonbacks pond from the Easy Access route at Hatfield © Janet Canning Small Left: One of the tilting weirs at Thorne Moors © Bryan Wainwright Small Right: Spraying regrowth of rhododendron on Thorne Moors through the summer © Mark Outhwaite