

# THANET COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

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Registered charity No: 285972    Founded: 1971    Charitable status: 1982

## Members' Newsletter

February 2013

**Monkton Nature Reserve is open seven days a week from 10am to 3pm during winter. Now is a good time for a bracing walk around the nature trails, followed by a browse around our museum and second-hand bookshop. If the flag is flying we are open!**

### News from the reserve

Those of you that braved the weather in December and January had to take a slight detour on your wanderings round the reserve. With the constant rain over past months, the water level of the central pond kept rising and rising, flooding the adjacent paths, the 'new' pond and even the bat cave. At times the water reached a depth of more than three metres and all we could see of the dragonfly willow sculpture was the tip of its tail poking above the surface! The water was only just beginning to subside when the snow fell in January, leaving the reserve looking very picturesque and giving 'trackers' a chance to practise their identification skills.



Photo: Peter Wigley

## Big Tree Plant at Monkton

Volunteers at the reserve have been taking part in the Big Tree Plant scheme. They have been planting trees since November to help bridge the gap between the woodland and the boundary hedge.

Launched by Defra and the Forestry Commission in 2010, The Big Tree Plant will see a million new trees planted by 2015. The scheme aims to encourage and support community groups to plant trees where people live and work and to take responsibility for establishing, protecting and enhancing green spaces in their local area. It will help improve the quality of life of those living in England's towns, cities and residential areas by making them more attractive, healthy places to live.

The native British trees being planted at Monkton are field maple, hawthorn, blackthorn and holly, and will give cover to wildlife, help with security and improve the look of the skyline. They will eventually also help astronomy groups using our observatory, by reducing light pollution.



Duke of Edinburgh volunteers Abbie and Vicky

Conservation Manager Dave Edgar said, "Through the efforts of our volunteers, we are able to improve the reserve for visitors and wildlife alike. In particular, I would like to thank those taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, who have put a lot of effort into this task".

## Looking for some exercise?

Are you looking to get out in the fresh air and get a bit more exercise? If so, we have just the thing for you. We are looking for volunteers for our Saturday work parties, to work on practical projects around the reserve. This could involve anything from tree planting to keeping the footpaths from becoming overgrown and maintaining the benches around the reserve. All you need to do is bring a packed lunch, boots and a sense of humour and we will provide the rest (including tea and coffee!). These work parties will meet on the **second Saturday of each month, from 10am-2pm**, starting on **February 9th**. If you can't make it then we will have other work parties on **Saturday March 9th, April 13th, May 11th**, etc. Come and join us! For more information call Dave or Sam at the reserve. (Please note: under 16s must be accompanied by an adult.)

## **An unexpected visitor**

On Monday 19th November we had a surprise visitor in the Study Centre. It was lunchtime and as I walked to the front desk a huge bird shot up in front of me and crashed against the window. I half expected it to be a wood pigeon, but when I looked up I saw it was a male sparrowhawk! It had obviously wandered into the building (probably stunned after hitting a wall or window) and got scared when it heard footsteps. I felt this had to be seen to be believed so I gathered Trustee Tony Harman and the volunteers that were around. I had a spare shirt with me, so I put this over the bird and Tony got a firm hold of it. Luckily volunteer Louis Brophy was at hand with a phone camera and we were able to get a few shots with Tony and the bird before we released it.



Sam Richardson

## **Monkton Reserve gets Asda vote**

Asda shoppers have voted Monkton Nature Reserve as one of their favoured charities. In a recent in-store poll customers used tokens to vote for their favourite local charities and Monkton came runner-up.

After receiving a cheque for £25 from Asda's Community Life Champion Kay Smith, Conservation Manager Dave Edgar said, "It's good to know that the hard work put in by staff and volunteers is recognised. The help we have had improving the reserve for wildlife is invaluable and I would like to thank Asda and their shoppers for their support".

"We have also arranged to hold a promotional event at the Asda store in Broadstairs on Friday 22nd March, where we will be handing out leaflets and promoting the reserve to shoppers. If anyone feels they can offer an hour of their time to help us out on the day please call on 01843 822666 or 07955 364510. Any help would be much appreciated".

## Bird feeding success

You may remember reading in the last newsletter that the new film on the window of the field centre means that more birds are coming to the bird feeders. As well as blue tits, great tits, chaffinches and the occasional jay, some new visitors have been spotted over winter. Goldfinches love the niger seeds and we often see them queuing up to take their turn at the feeders. On one occasion we counted seventeen of them outside the window! Redpolls are becoming more frequent visitors too. It seems they are no longer disturbed by movement inside the field centre and it also means that we can get close-up views of them.



However, there is a (very slight) downside to this. The birds are getting through our supplies of food at an alarming rate! **If you can donate any fat balls, birdseed, nuts or niger seed, we would be very grateful**, not only to keep the birds fed through the winter but to keep this wonderful spectacle going. We could also use any **carpet squares or rugs** for our bird viewing area.

Thanks to Tony Burgess for his spectacular portrait of a goldfinch.

## Wanted: Craft materials

As part of our events programme for 2013 we will be holding some craft days. To prepare for these, we are looking for donations of craft materials such as:

- coloured paper and cardboard
- tissue/crepe paper
- coloured cellophane, foil or sweet wrappers
- buttons and beads
- sequins and feathers
- ribbons and wool
- felt
- old wallpaper rolls
- old xmas/birthday cards
- any glittery stuff, etc.

All donations gratefully accepted!

## What's your specialist subject?

Do you know a thing or two? Do you have a tale to tell? Or do you have a great selection of slides or pictures that you would be happy to share?

As part of our events programme we would like to run a regular series of talks at the field centre. It doesn't have to be about the reserve, its orchids, or its birdlife, it could be about local history, fossils you have known and loved, or 101 ways to make a birdtable. All subjects considered!

If you would be interested in spending an hour sharing your hard-earned knowledge with others, please call Dave, John or Sam at the reserve or drop in to see us.

## A word of thanks

As a member of Monkton Nature Reserve for many years, and lately a trustee for the reserve, I've seen Monkton go through a lot of changes. The new team has pulled its socks up and the reserve is beginning to shine once again. Thanks to all that have been involved, whether with the bookshop, in the reserve or even just promoting this oasis in Thanet. I have done two site visits this year and people are still turning up for a whole day's work: strimming, burning brushwood and tree-planting. Hopefully with more new volunteers, we can push forward - after all we are just caretakers trusted to do our best for the wildlife on the reserve.

Many thanks.

Trevor Shonk

## Books

As many of you know our extensive second-hand bookshop sells a wide range of books, including natural history, science, the arts, gardening, children's books and paperback fiction. The bookshop is open every day in winter from 10am to 3pm.

We are now selling some of our more specialised and more expensive second-hand books on e-bay. If you would like to donate any high-quality books that might be better suited for sale this way rather than in our bookshop, please let us know when you bring them in or give us a call beforehand.

### Wanted:

Another computer system for our reference library. Please contact Dave, John or Sam if you can help.

## Thinking of a holiday?

With all the snow around, it's only human nature to want to escape to warmer climates. And with many people hunting for holidays online, now is the time to remind you about **easyfundraising.org.uk**. Most of the biggest travel and holiday companies take part in easyfundraising and have some fantastic travel offers available, meaning you could save AND raise money when booking your getaway.

Did you know the average family spending thousands on their annual holiday? This means that Monkton Nature Reserve could benefit from some really big donations **without costing you a penny** more. All you have to do is register first at:

<http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/monktonreserve>

Even if you don't then book a holiday, you can still support Monkton Nature Reserve for FREE when shopping online with over 2,000 popular retailers, including Argos, NEXT, M&S, John Lewis, and many more.

So far you've raised over £100 for us using easyfundraising – thanks!

Ros Facey

## A Palaeolithic find at Bishopstone

In January 2013 a flint hand axe of Acheulean type, together with several other undefined flint tools, were found on the foreshore between Bishopstone Glen and Reculver.

Knowing that the channels of an ancient river system are exposed in the cliffs between Bishopstone Glen and Reculver, a few hours after high tide I set out for a walk along the foreshore with the specific intention of looking for Palaeolithic flint tools. Months of heavy rain had contributed to cliff falls. Together with a high tide and a north-easterly swell there was a good chance that implements had been recently scoured out of the fallen earth.

In the previous week the cliff face was very much alive with many small and continuous falls in progress, so I didn't want to proceed with a close inspection of the base of the cliff. However, on this subsequent walk the cliff face appeared to have stabilised, so I felt confident enough to go closer, although with some trepidation as I had witnessed a landslide in this spot a few years previous.

Over the course of an hour I collected a few flint eoliths that had some vague resemblance to Palaeolithic flint tools, but I wasn't able to convince myself. Placing the assemblage on a flat stone near the base of the cliff I walked back a few metres and there, lying as if it had been placed for me to find, was a perfect example of an Acheulean hand axe (see opposite). The shape was classic ovate, about the size that fits comfortably in your hand.



The tool had clearly been worked on both sides, but being noticeably flatter on one side. I also collected some flint scrapers or flake tools on subsequent visits to the site. These are very interesting tools that may fit into the Clactonian category, although further examination of these is required as they do appear to have been retouched, which is uncommon for Clactonian flake tools. There is some debate at the moment as to whether the Clactonian technology predates Acheulean or is contemporary with it. If flake tools and axe tools are being found together at this site it could be very significant.

Tools in the gravel river deposits in this area are generally accepted to be between 400,000-180,000 years old (Lower Palaeolithic), this means the tools found in this locale would have been potentially made by *Homo heidelbergensis* or *Homo neanderthalensis*. Acheulean and other stone tools are still regularly found on the foreshore between Bishopstone and Reculver. It's now time for all the stone tools found at these sites to be brought together for a professional scientific study.

P G Knowles

Do you have any interesting pictures of our museum at Monkton? If so, we'd love to see them!

