

Coleorton and New Lount Volunteer Group



REVIEW OF 2018

2018 the 8th year the group has been in existence and we continue to make fantastic progress. 2018 has been another really great year when, with the help from other organisations, we have been able to achieve the greatest ever number of volunteer hours.



Throughout the year we have been ably supported by the Country Park Rangers; David continues to make slow progress with his interpretation of “on-time” but we are always thankful for the much appreciated help received from him and the other rangers.

Coleorton Parish Council has also been very supportive of the group and the work we have been carrying out at Coleorton Wood.

So let us look at what has been achieved across the two sites in 2018

NEW LOUNT NATURE RESERVE.

Most of our habitat management at New Lount has been the continuation of the thinning of the woodland areas around the top of the pit bank, and by the end of 2018 we have almost completed this enormous task.

Due to the amount of thinning required we have created a large number of windrows, had numerable fires, with the assistance of “Mick the Flame”, and created many stacks of cut timber. We have also cleared a large area of saplings towards the top of the pit bank.



“Mick-the-Flame” surveys his work.

There have been large areas to strim and rake-off including the species rich open grassland, open glades and the edges of pathways throughout the site.



Clearing one of the open glades.

The warm weather through the summer encouraged more than normal growth in these areas which lead to another year of an increase in the number of species, with a wonderful display of orchids.



One of many orchids in the open grass area.

The increase in overall growth this year has meant that we have also spent time cutting back along the rides to keep them clear. We have also managed to strim the area of Norfolk reeds as well as the areas around the entrance to the reserve.

The group has also managed to do some clearing around the areas where the heritage trail boards are located, and the two picnic areas have been maintained throughout the summer period.



One of the maintained picnic areas.

Swingboat Nurseries have set up a Forest School in one area of the site and the group has given them assistance whenever this has been required. The children have now been using the site almost daily throughout the week and they have created many interesting “attractions” in their specific area.



Swingboat Nurseries’ Forest School area.

We have spent some time during the summer removing Ragwort from the open grassland areas at the top of the pit bank. This work has proved to be very successful with a much decreased quantity of Ragwort each year.

A disappointment in 2018 has been the total absence of sand martins in the sand martin wall. It was generally a very poor year for martins in any case, but we will be making some improvements to the wall in an effort to attract sand martins in 2019. Contractors have created a large new ride around the back of the pit bank and we have spent time initially strimming this area and making any alterations at both ends to prevent horse riders using the new path. This path is now widely used by visitors.



Part of the new ride with gates to deter horse riders.

We have also surveyed and cleared the entire length of the permissive bridle way across the site, to ensure the horse riders have adequate access to this facility. The group has also created a stone pathway between the large boardwalk and the top of the steps as access across this area was extremely difficult once the area became wet and muddy.

We have had a number of work sessions at the reserve this year where volunteers from Cadent Gas Limited, Hinckley have worked with the group. They helped with the creation of the stoned path mentioned above and with other work across other areas of the site. Their assistance has been extremely beneficial and we hope they will continue to work with us throughout 2019.



Some of the Cadent volunteers helping with new stone path.

Throughout the year the group has been carrying out a great deal of site maintenance work. This has included repairing broken fences; maintaining the two picnic areas and clearing pathways of fallen trees and other obstructions. We have replaced the equipment on the bird feeding station after the feeders were deliberately cut down and stolen. This facility has proved to be much appreciated by visitors to the site and we are intending to create a bird hide in front of it.

We were pleased to have had a special visit from Beverley Smith the Chief Executive of North West Leicestershire District Council who joined in the work of the group for one of our work sessions. We have received a number of grants from NWLDC over recent years and were pleased to have the Chief Executive take an interest.

We have been working with the rangers to develop a new management plan for the next five years.

We continue to receive very encouraging feedback from visitors to the site who comment to the effect – “you are doing a wonderful job”, “the whole site is much improved”, etc. This feedback makes doing the work that much more rewarding.

COLEORTON WOOD

The Group has continued with the work required in the management plan. This has included the coppicing and clearing of the shrub areas that surround each of the planted areas of woodland and the strimming of the ride edges throughout the wood. We have completed all of the areas required over the two calendar years and we are now working on all of the remaining areas.



Coppicing and clearing woodland shrub areas.

A new management plan for the wood has been agreed by the Parish Council and this requires us to move from an eight year cycle to a five year cycle, which means we have additional work to complete in 2019.

During the year the group has made good use of the Stihl Clearing Saw to assist with the coppicing work.

As with New Lount Reserve the hot weather throughout the summer has led to very vigorous growth and we have had to survey the site on a number of occasions to keep the pathways clear. The group has paid particular attention this year to tidying up the car park area, both strimming and cutting back other vegetation. We have not had to treat the car park with herbicide and will continue to monitor the area. The group has also strimmed areas along Pitt Lane as well as trimming the hedge towards the bottom of Pitt Lane.



Clearing the car park area.

We have spent some time throughout the year cutting down a small number of fallen trees, although none were in a particular dangerous location. We have taken down most of the Grey Willow trees near the pond as they were either leaning or had already fallen.

The pond has required quite a lot of attention over the year as we have had to clear the infeed channel of the large amount of vegetation which had grown. Unfortunately due to the hot weather the pond was completely dry for most of the summer. We will be looking at how this situation can be improved. We have however been successful in maintaining a clear area in front of the pond.



Clearing the area in front of the pond.

We have been maintaining the picnic area and in particular the lower level which had additional strimming to control the non-grass plants.

The group has removed more rabbit fencing so that we can gain access to continue with laying the perimeter hedge. We have started this although we still have about 100M to complete.



Hedge Laying.

The other perimeter hedges will be tidied-up and where necessary we will fill any gaps with new plants. We have cleared a number of Elder trees in the Post Office field to give us clear access to that particular hedge.

Two large trees, which were not actually in the wood, had fallen into the neighbouring field and we spent some time cutting-up these to ensure the farmer had clear access.

We have also been active with the new Stihl milling attachment cutting planks from a number of the fallen trees. It is hoped to make a bird hide at New Lount Reserve with this timber.



Cutting planks with the milling attachment

WORKSHOP

The small workshop group has been particularly busy throughout the year. We started by completing the bench seats for LCC, which are now stored ready for installation. Following the production of cut timber utilising the milling attachment we have made a large number of planters which were sold at the May plant sales.



Two of the planters.

A majority of the year has been dedicated to manufacturing a memorial bench for Coleorton Parish Council as part of their celebrations for the centenary of the end of WW1.



The memorial bench under construction



The memorial bench installed next to the war memorial

Christmas saw the manufacture of reindeer, again utilising wood from New Lount Reserve. Some of these were manufactured in the workshops, but we also had a social evening where individuals were assisted in manufacturing both reindeers and snowmen.

The Cadent volunteers also wanted to make Christmas reindeers so these were made at the end of one of the New Lount work sessions.



The volunteers with their Christmas Reindeer and Tilly.

More recently the workshop group has started to manufacture a number of picnic tables for LCC.

SOCIAL & FUNDRAISING.

The major fundraising event for the year was the two plant sales, with one being held at both the group sites. They were very well attended and raised around £1,000; our thanks to all the local businesses that donated plants.



Some of the plants on offer at Coleorton Wood sale.



Visitors to the New Lount sale.

Plants were grown by members of the group and also donated from local businesses. As well as selling plants on the day some were also successfully sold outside member's houses, thus contributing additional income.

In April the group had a joint social evening with Newbold Heritage group at The Kings Arms in Coleorton. Vera put on a quiz which consisted of impossible questions, but a good evening was had by all.

We have found a growing interest in New Lount Nature Reserve with a number of events throughout the year which started with a New Year's Day walk around the reserve with the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. The Leicestershire Bat Group carried out a bat survey in July and the Ashby District 41 Club held their Bat Night in September.

The Lions club also had a tour of the New Lount Reserve in July and during September Newbold Heritage group took part in NWLDC's "Hello Heritage" fortnight with two programmed tours of the site.

The group also had its annual Christmas dinner at Snibston canteen, our thanks to James and Vera for ensuring we were all well fed. Eating has been a strong feature throughout the year with the supply of food and drinks for the Saturday work sessions; this also gives the volunteers an opportunity to socialise.



Vera offering another Saturday lunch at New Lount.

Other significant events which were included in the year were:-

- We purchased a significant number of new tools, including a new Stihl strimmer and several hand tools.
- We rewrote and updated the group's First Aid procedures and updated the first aid equipment to make it more suitable for potential accidents.
- We have now got new management plans for the next five years for both the sites.

This is just a taste of the activities of the group throughout the year; a year which has been both busy and very successful. The two sites continue to receive very positive feedback on the changes that have, and are being made, which does give motivation to the volunteers. I am sure 2019 will be just as busy!

John Macdonald.

January 2019