



The Longlander

DECEMBER 2023 ISSUE 13

WELCOME

Yuletide greetings Longlanders on this Winter Solstice of 2023.

For our Celtic ancestors, the annual festival of Yule, held around the shortest day of the year, celebrated dormancy in winter and marked the middle of the dark half of the year for a people who divided the year into two parts: the dark half and the light half.

For the Celts, this division held spiritual significance and symbolised the recurring cycle of death, renewal, rebirth and growth.

For us modern day Longlanders, wanting to tap into their reverence for the natural world and escape briefly from the commercialism that surrounds us, this time of year offers us a chance to connect with our ancient roots by being aware of the celestial changes, noting the rise and fall of the sun and the beauty of the brief light we get at this time of year. We can also mark the dormancy of winter by bringing the evergreens into our homes and bring light into the dark with the burning of the Yule log, that would burn for days during the Yule festivals of yore.

As we too look forward to the return of the light, the renewal of Spring and the promise of another significant year ahead for the Long Lands Community, we can also take the opportunity, during this dark and dormant period, to look back at how far we've come as a community since we came together in 2017 to fight for the protection of our land and take on the forces that threatened to ruin our natural world.

In this edition of the Longlander we hope you get a flavour of the steady progress we are making, doing what we can, to create our Community Woodland Nature Reserve on land that was previously earmarked for the Relief Road Corridor.

As we move into 2024 and what promises to be another momentous year ahead, with the creation of Knaresborough Forest Park just around the corner, we hope you feel inspired to get involved and do what you can to honour the ancestors by being a good ancestor to future generations.

Merry Yule to one and all!

Chris Kitson – Secretary of the Long Lands Community

If you would like to contribute to The Longlander by writing an article, or want to send us your letters and photographs, then get in touch at: info@longlandscommon.org

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KEEPING IN TOUCH

The Long Lands Community has a number of social media channels and email contact addresses (and we'll probably be spawning more over the next few months!). Please feel free to follow them all, and contact us with enquiries too.

LONG LANDS COMMON



[FACEBOOK LINK](#)



[YOUTUBE LINK](#)



[INSTAGRAM LINK](#)



[EMAIL LINK](#)



[TWITTER / X](#)

KNARESBOROUGH FOREST PARK



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MAINTENANCE AT LONG LANDS COMMON

By John Jackson

After Richard (a neighbouring farmer) moved Carls Shed to its present position, we started work on insulating and boarding out the inside. We started by making a framework inside the shed. The frame is more or less free standing with only a batten on the floor screwed down. The battens on the ceiling stop the walls falling in. To insulate the inside we used sheep's wool, as it was not in a roll we used the old plastic straps of packaging to hold it in place. On the ceiling we used netting as the wool fell through the strapping. Before the boards were screwed on electrical wires were put in the cavity to provide lighting and charging facilities using power from the solar panel charged battery.

Once all that was done we finished by varnishing all the inside and fixing the lights in.

Thank you to the many volunteers that helped including Dave who spent many hours helping me.



Dave and John fixing on wall boards.



And the nearly finished product



Including a room with a view!

MAINTENANCE AT LONG LANDS COMMON

After finishing Carls Shed we also had the smaller shed moved to near Carls Shed This is to be a tool store/ workshop. The same process was used to insulate and board out this shed.



Now the tools, mostly what we have been given, are sorted out and given places to live where hopefully (!) volunteers will put back in the right place, hence the labels.



We needed a way to store long handle tools such as spades and forks as every time we wanted a tool the whole pile became a jumble so I came up with this racking system.



MAINTENANCE AT LONG LANDS COMMON



Work is still ongoing to get tools into some sort of order, hence the pile stuff on the bench.]



A few bird boxes have been put up, this one being an owl box



Dave and John along with other volunteers are in the process of laying a hedge. The existing hedge was too wide and high (wafting about in the wind) for birds to nest. In all of the hedge we have laid no nests were found. The newly laid hedge in a couple of years be ideal for nesting birds.

MAINTENANCE AT LONG LANDS COMMON



The new hedge planted a year ago by volunteers. Brush from the hedge we are laying has been put around the new hedge, to protect it from deer.



A garage compartment has been constructed within Carls shed to store our small lawn tractor and trailer.



We have been donated a gas cylinder cage to keep gas bottles outside. We use the gas for the stove and hot water boiler. It has now been painted black thanks to Rick S.

WEEKEND VOLUNTEER DAYS AT LONG LANDS COMMON

Once a month on alternate Saturdays and Sundays we hold Volunteers days where volunteers can join in with some of the work which is happening at Longlands Common. If you visit Longlands Common web site you can see future dates by clicking on “getting Involved” and then “Working Party Days”. Here you can sign up. Volunteers are welcome to join the Volunteer Days for any length of time between 10.00am to 4.00pm. Tea and coffee always provided free !

There is quite a list of jobs completed recently, here are some :

Tree and hedge planting

Hedge improvements

Ditch improvements

Lining and insulating the two sheds

Fitting the outside gas cage

Hedge laying and moving the brash

Laying a water supply to the lower end of LLC

Erecting a shed for the barrows

Fence repairs

Grass cutting

Collecting meadow seeds from another site

Sowing meadow seeds

Helping to run our AGM

The list goes on.....

Weekly Day Volunteers Days at Longlands Common

We also meet every Thursday from around 9am to 4pm to improve and keep the site in good order. Future planned jobs include;

Build a small ramp into Carls Shed to be able to drive the lawn tractor into its garage

Erect a shed as a bird hide near the middle pond

Renovate the hedge from the great oak to the bottom pond.

Widen our entrance drive

If you fancy helping on a Thursday please send John an email. cjfencing@hotmail.com

Donations

We are looking for donations to help Longlands Common improve:

Blue MDPE water pipe (any useable condition)

Tyre pump, 12 v or manual

Metric socket set

Metric spanner set

12v mains battery charger

Lastly from the maintenance team :

Surprising what you see !

Dave D and I were taking a break from working and having lunch outside Carls Shed, I happened to glance at the 2nd oak tree up from Carls Shed and initially thought there was a rabbit sat in the tree with its ears sticking up, then we realised it was a bird, a large one at that ! I tried to get closer but of course it flew off. Out came the bird books and we are certain it was a long eared owl.

DOGS POLICY

Just a quick reminder here that, as a nature reserve, our policy is for dogs to be kept on a lead when visiting Long Lands Common. As the paths go in, and access is improved, we'll also be adding more signage to remind people of that, but for the moment, if you bring your canine friend to investigate the sights and smells of the Common, please remember that the deer appreciate it when dogs wear their leads. Many thanks!

A NICE RELAXING BATH

By Rick Sweeney

With no formal water supply, Longlands is fortunate to have a continuous flow of water from the neighbouring field through drainage pipes into the ditch that runs along the southern border behind Carl's Shed. At the point of the inflow John and Dave had widened and dammed the ditch and created a safe place to stand, allowing water to be collected to water the trees.

Unfortunately gathering water from this pool caused mud, leaves and other debris from the ditch to also be collected, resulting in the filtration system in the slow-release tree watering bags to become blocked. The solution to this problem was to sink an old bath into the ditch to collect the clean water flowing from the drainage pipes.

At the working party on 4th November volunteers were needed to enlarge the ditch and create a hole wide and deep enough to accommodate the bath. This would require two healthy, muscular, young people, with appropriate technical skills. Fortunately, one person (Ian Murdie) fulfilled these criteria, assisted by a 9stone OAP weakling, whose only appropriate qualification was the possession of a pair of wellington boots (me).



A NICE RELAXING BATH



Many large stones were in the wet and heavy clay, making the digging a slow process, further complicated by the clay sticking to the spades and mattock and being difficult to remove. The banks were very slippery and, as the hole was deepened, the water level rose ever higher, further complicating the work.

By lunchtime a hole approaching the size of a bath had been created and into the afternoon, after several test fittings, Ian and I had 10% of the mud removed adhering to us (this may be an exaggeration) and the bath was stable, level and satisfyingly filling with clear water. We would have raised our arms in triumph, if only we had the strength to do so.



The plan for the future, such is the reliable flow of water into the bath, is to run pipes from the bath to a water tank near to the Celebration Trees in the West field, enabling watering of the trees without carrying the water all the way from the bath.

SITE RANGERS' CORNER

The Site Rangers are our team of active volunteers, who form a combination of site wardens, wildlife monitors, and a friendly face to meet and greet with any site visitors.

In recent months we have welcomed two new cohorts of rangers. We now have over 40 people who have completed the induction day and visit the site regularly - logging the wildlife, sharing photos and reporting back any issues they find. If anyone is interested in becoming a site ranger please contact rangers@longlandscommon.org to arrange a taster session with one of our experienced rangers.

So, what's been seen on Long Lands Common lately?

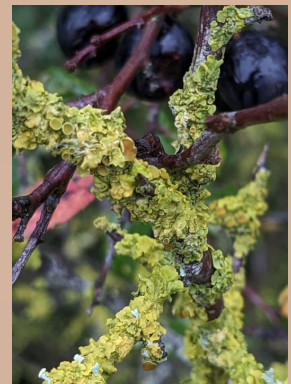
Here's some photos, by Sandra Sweeney, Mark Campey, Melanie Birdsall, Steve Holroyd, and Ian Burl...



Ranger Workshop, 19th Aug



Hawthorne Berry



Lichen



Sloe Berries



Raindrops on grass



Common Darter Dragonflies

SITE RANGERS' CORNER



Field Maple Seeds



Pirate Wolf Spider



Common Darter Dragonfly



Holly Berries



Droplets on a web



Ruby Tiger Moth Caterpillar



Frosty Oak Leaf

SITE RANGERS' CORNER



Magpie



A Snowy View

Bottom Pond



Alder Cones



Oak Leaves



Rose Hips

A VISITOR WITH LONG EARS?

The maintenance team did a double take when they first saw a large shape in the ash tree near the mound. At first glance they noted squat shape and ears thinking, "Is that a rabbit?". Not likely in the branches of a tree!

Closer inspection allowed them to verify that this was in fact a long eared owl; Long eared Owls have been described as wise and regal with elusive nature and imposing stare.

The orange eyes with an elongated face gives them the appearance of being permanently surprised.

Long eared owls (*Asio Otus*) are native to the UK and Yorkshire. Although during the autumn and winter there is some migration from Scotland, Scandinavia, eastern Europe and Russia so it is possible that the owl was not resident to longlands.

The ears are not true ears they are tufts above the eyes that the owl can raise, especially if alarmed.

They have good hearing and eyesight and are very quiet in flight which helps their hunting and can fly over 30 miles per hour. When it flies it makes deep jerky beats and also glides.



Photo from Wikimedia

Long eared Owls are usually night hunters with food being small mammals eg mice and voles small birds and insects. They normally roost in trees during the day, the owl is well camouflaged looking like a branch stump. In size the owl is around 13-14.5 inches long (34-37cm) with females being larger than males but it has an impressive wingspan of around 85-95cm. It is similar size to the more familiar Longlands resident barn owl. The plumage is light brown with darker brown streaks.

The Long eared owl's call is more commonly heard late Jan-April when birds become more territorial and breeding pairs establish territory. The call described as being a low moaning hoot is usually made by the male owl. The sound which has been described as similar to the noise made when blowing over top of glass bottle and can be heard 1km away. The owls can also produce other noises that sound more like bark or screams, they can also clap their wings together as part of display flight.

A VISITOR WITH LONG EARS?

Breeding pairs often adopt other birds discarded nests eg crow or magpie or may even nest on the ground.

According to the british trust for ornithology the oldest owl recorded in Uk was almost 13 years old, but a more likely typical lifespan is thought to be around 4-10 years.

The uk numbers are not known but it is a green listed species, the owls being in greater numbers where there is less competition from tawny owls

Although usually solitary the collective known for Long eared and other owls is a Parliament.



Composite Image from Wikimedia

We do hope that the owl is seen again so please report let us know of any sightings and submit any photos!

THE FOX : NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL HISTORY

Cate Quinn

It's that time of year when a fox thinks of changing its usual solitary lifestyle and pairing up to breed (December to February). You may be awakened by the vixen's eerie scream late at night, accompanied by the dog's more canine bark. Their calling is usually reserved for the mating season, communicating via scent and body language throughout the remainder of the year.

Both sexes are sexually mature at 10 months but do not normally breed before turning one. A litter comprises four to six cubs, which are born between March and late April, peaking in mid-March. The cubs can accept solid food at about 3 weeks old and emerge from the den in early May when they are six weeks old. They are fully weaned at eight weeks and independent between three and five months of age.



Young foxes on Long Lands Common, photo by Niall

The temporary family unit disperses in the autumn, with the males roaming further than the females. However, in urban environments, foxes may wander in pairs or family groups if resources are plentiful. This has the advantage of the subordinate older cubs on hand to help care for subsequent litters.

Their dens or 'earths' are mainly used during cub rearing times, but also during bad weather. The den may be underground, in a cave, among rocks, or in a hollow log or tree. Sometimes they will take over the home vacated by another animal.

The burrow may be up to 75 ft long, with several chambers for nesting and storing food, and have several entrances. One burrow may accommodate two pairs.

A rural fox's territory is between 500 and 1500 acres, which may overlap with other territories, except for the main core area.

The male is about a kilo heavier than the female at around 6.5kg, but one animal recorded in Scotland in 2012 reached a whopping 17.2kg! They can reach speeds of about 30mph and can jump up to six feet high.

The oldest fox dying in captivity reached 24 years, but typically they live 4-6 years in the wild

THE FOX : NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL HISTORY

Cate Quinn

The red fox is widely distributed across the UK and most of Europe, North Africa, North America, Canada as far north as some arctic islands, and parts of Asia. It is also found throughout China, northern India and Australia where it was introduced for hunting. They like environments with a mix of habitats.

Foxes have had a long association with humans, but they are regarded in two diametrically opposite ways - some people see them as fascinating, skilled and welcome part of nature, whilst others view them as vermin that should be exterminated, especially when our interests overlap.

Love them or hate them, foxes have an important role in our terrestrial ecosystems.

The fox is an apex predator in the UK. Their main threats come from hunting by humans, traffic incidents and mange. However, cubs may also be subject to predation in Scotland by golden eagles, eagle owls and other carnivores.

They are mainly active at dawn, dusk and night-time, but may also be found lying in vegetation or patrolling their territories during the day.

The fox is a highly opportunistic feeder and has a varied diet including mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, fish, amphibians, fruit, vegetables, grass and human rubbish. They play a key role in controlling rodent numbers and seed distribution.

They have an excellent sense of smell and hearing. Apparently, it can hear a mouse squeak from a distance of 100ft! They have good motion detection but may not spot a still object.

Their tendency to overkill and cache leftovers is what gives them a bad reputation just like us humans who are also prone to taking more than we can possibly manage at that 'all you can eat' buffet and are generally very wasteful when it comes to food. But, we shouldn't project our moral values onto wild animals.



A fox on Long Lands Common, at night.

THE FOX : NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL HISTORY

Cate Quinn

This does not mean that foxes “kill for sport” or are evil as is often reported. Caching food is a programmed behavioural response in predators whose prey abundance fluctuates. It is not a conscious choice on behalf of the animal.

As the author, Michael Chambers writes in his 1990 book *Free Spirit*:

“... man spends so much time in his relationships with his fellows, and particularly with the animal kingdom, demanding that they behave in a manner he prescribes, and often killing them if they do not.”

“In the role of defending advocate for wildlife, I would first demand recognition of the basic tenet: it is not a pre-requisite that wild creatures shall benefit man in order to qualify to be left unmolested.”

If a fox does manage to break into a chicken coop, the birds are likely to panic. This triggers the fox's instinctive predatory drive - a deeply embedded survival mechanism that triggers the chase, catch, kill behaviour aimed at securing food. It is the same reason that we're told not to run screaming if we meet a big cat or bear in the woods.



A fox on Long Lands Common, at dawn.

Getting the birds out of the coop is a other matter. The fox can generally only remove one at a time and may be disturbed in the process. Left alone to its own devices, it would most likely retrieve all of the birds, but is easily scared away. Hence, the scene of devastation found later. If left in situ, there are recorded instances of all the carcasses being removed over the course of several nights.

Foxes are also reputed to kill and eat hedgehogs. Although this does happen, a healthy adult hedgehog is a strong adversary and badgers are more likely to contribute to their demise. Young hoglets are a different matter though.

Foxes also have a relatively small stomach for their size and therefore cannot consume large amounts in one go. They eat between one and two pounds per day. So it makes sense to store leftovers for later.

THE FOX : NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL HISTORY

Cate Quinn

Foxes exhibit both scatter caching (small amounts over a large undefended area) and larder caching (clumps of food in one place which they frequent regularly). Food is stored under leaves, snow or dirt and the proficiency varies by individual.

The Mammal Society and the Animal and Plant Health Authority estimated in 2017 that the British fox population was around 430,000 animals, which is double that of the previous estimate 17 years earlier. A recent analysis from Brighton University suggests about a third of these live in towns and cities, about 4.5 times the estimate in the early 1990s. The urban fox population appears to be growing in the North of the UK but remains stable in the South.

However, there is no evidence to support a population explosion since the 2004 Hunting Act, which banned the hunting of foxes on horseback with dogs. This is partly because the Act did not prevent the shooting of foxes by farmers or gamekeepers.



A fox carries some prey on Long Lands Common, at night.

Folklore is a means by which humans share cultural history, teach life lessons, and try to explain unknown phenomena. Symbolism and metaphor are regularly used to explore emotions and, rightly or wrongly, animals have provided a rich source of inspiration to reflect on human behaviour.

The fox has been associated in folklore across millennia and continents and few other species feature more commonly.

On the positive side foxes have been associated with cleverness, independence, playfulness, beauty, protection, and good luck.

The more negative associations include mischievousness, cunning, trickery.

They are also considered to have magical powers and be capable of transformation.

For example, in Dogon mythology, the fox is reported to be either the trickster god of the desert, who embodies chaos or a messenger for the gods.

Closer to home, people were discouraged from growing foxgloves near to chicken coops as the petals were said to be used to cover a fox's paws, making it easier for them to approach the coop unheard.

THE FOX : NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL HISTORY

Cate Quinn

Whereas in Northern Finland, the fox is said to conjure the aurora borealis while it runs through the snowy hills. When the fox's fur touches the snow it creates magical sparks and sets the sky ablaze. Still today, the Finnish word for the aurora is "revontulet" which literally translates to "fox-fires".

And in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean folklores, foxes are powerful spirits that are known for their highly mischievous and cunning nature, and they often take on the form of female humans to seduce men.

In contemporary Chinese, the word huli jing (meaning fox) is often used to describe a mistress negatively in an extramarital affair.

But there are also numerous stories and myths that cast the fox as the helper or guide. Rather than being called sneaky and cunning, they are clever, quick and wise, and are instrumental in the success of those they aid. This portrayal of the fox can be found in the mythology of Northern California tribes. In their creation myth,

Silver Fox (Kwahn) and Coyote (Jamul), are the creator gods of the earth and are considered cultural heroes. The details vary with tradition, but Silver Fox is consistently more hardworking, serious, and wise than their companion, Coyote, who is actually the trickster.



A fox takes a drink on Long Lands Common, at night.

And the Moche people of Peru believed the fox to be a warrior that would use his mind to fight. The fox would not ever use physical attack, only psychological.

Consequently, the fox's many characteristics have translated into common vernacular language. For example, the term "foxy" in English ("having the qualities of a fox") can also connote attractiveness, sexiness, or being red-haired. The term "to outfox" means to win in a competition of wits, similarly to "outguess", "outsmart", and "outwit".

I hope that gives you a tour of some of the evidence-based facts about these interesting animals and some of the unproven claims about their abilities and characteristics.