

Visit to Gelder Group Environmental Project,

24 July 2013

Some two dozen Gainsborough Group members and friends arrived at the Gelder Group Head Quarters on Tillbridge Lane, to find a new species of Gatekeeper, the *Linda Woodwardus*, fluttering back and forth opening the employee car park gates. Linda, who had organised the visit, handed over to Jean Blades, who introduced Gelder's Simon Blaydes (not a known relation but she's sure there's a connection between the families somewhere in the past). Simon is the Groups Environmental Project Warden, and gave an introduction to the Award winning Environmental Project before leading the walk, along with his colleague and nature enthusiast Kate Brown.

We gathered by the very impressive information board showing a layout of the Project including the various habitats and features that had been specifically created. The Project was an early dream of company founder and Managing Director Steve Gelder and was formally opened by the Duke of Gloucester in 2010, when a commemorative oak was planted.

The Environmental Project has been in development for some 8 to 10 years and is starting to mature nicely. Covering 16 acres, and planted up with 3800 native trees of fifteen species with extant trees and valuable Hawthorn hedges retained, it provides habitat for a wide variety of typical mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish. Perhaps the most spectacular and visible is the family of Kestrels; as we entered the network of paths, two of the recently ringed, newly fledged chicks were visible and audible on the roof of the brick-built Kestrel/Owl tower, with an adult perched nearby. Since the Tower was sited 3 years ago it has been inhabited each year by Kestrels and Barn Owls. The Project is equipped with numerous nest boxes with Blue Tits, Great Tits and Robins all fledging with success this year alone.

After taking a good look at the surprisingly large Kestrel fledglings, we passed the amphibian pond, which Simon told us contained frogs and toads and hopefully newts will soon find it. The paths had been constructed of recycled Carboniferous Limestone; (a white inert by-material produced in the manufacture of construction aggregates) and form several opportunities for exploration as they meander through areas of vigorously growing grasses and flowering plants.

A variety of butterflies including Large White, Small White, Meadow Brown, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Large Skipper and Gatekeeper (the usual one). Lively conversation ensued following the identification of Cinnabar Moth caterpillars.

A pair of Yellow Wagtail was seen from a distance on the playing field area near the car park, and when we approached the lake, a pair and youngster of this attractive species were bathing at the base of the reeds. Simon explained that the lake contains mostly Rudd, Ghost Carp and Skimmer Bream along with Gudgeon, Roach and Ide. The Lake offers several fishing platforms and is topped up with controlled amounts of pumped fresh water from the adjacent River Till. This action helps balance seasonal evaporation and subsequently creates a wet meadow habitat to the east that is attractive to specific plants, insects and waders that to date have included Snipe and Green Sandpiper. A Kingfisher perch had been created in the eastern corner of the Lake

As we continued to follow the sinuous path, we noted several plants of Bristly Ox-tongue. Log piles and decaying timber debris have been specifically located around the Project and provide valuable terrestrial habitats for amphibians, homes for small mammals, beetles, Wood Louse and lots of other creepy crawlies!

The site is bordered by the Till to the west, and there are public footpaths along its bank and on the eastern boundary. We eventually reached the eastern footpath, just about

the same time as the Red Arrows RAF display team performed a few spectacular manoeuvres and then peeled off one by one to land at RAF Scampton.

Our route took us behind the Kestrel Tower near which a Barn Owl was flying. A pair has been seen recently near the Tower which has some vacant spaces, so perhaps they may nest soon.

The Gelder Group head quarters is serviced by its own Bio-Treatment Plant which discharges clean water back into the River Till. A rainwater harvester services the Groups toilets and supplements water for washing the company vehicles. The Group recycles over 90% (compared to the 72% industry standard) of its own site waste at its recycling plant – Greentech located a few miles from HQ at Dunholme.

The walk concluded on the bank of the River Till, where Yellow Water Lily was spotted. Simon noted that if one wished to walk along the riverbank in this area, it was probably better to park at Thorpe Bridge, some $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile north, and walk south as there isn't much safe parking on Tillbridge Lane at this point.

After a group photo at the starting point and an invitation from Alison and Rodger Brownlow to come for refreshments at their Westwood home, we left the site, having enjoyed a most interesting and pleasant visit. This enjoyment continued at the Brownlow's; they served lovely homemade cake, home-grown cherries and cuppas, and the conversation about what we'd seen and other countryside matters rounded off an excellent field meeting.

by Karin Negoro with additions by Simon Blaydes