

Notes from 17 January 2019 Spa Ponds Walkabout with Chris and Andy

On Thursday 17th January 2019 Lorraine, Jes, and Shlomo enjoyed a couple of hours walking around Spa Ponds with Chris Jackson and Andy Hollis.

Chris is the Biodiversity Officer at Nottinghamshire County Council, responsible for the Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Action Group (NottsBAG) of which FTNCG is a member, and driving force behind the Nottinghamshire Amphibian & Reptile Group (NARG). NottsBAG website: <http://www.nottsbag.org.uk/>

Andy is the founder of Eco-logic, a local environmental land management and training consultancy. Andy is a qualified and insured professional, licensed to use a chainsaw and a brushcutter. Andy has experience of chestnut palling (at Parliament Oak) which is relevant to a potential heritage project that could be delivered together with Matt Beresford. Eco-logic website: <https://sites.google.com/site/ecologiccic/>

The following notes provide a partial record of discussions and observations:

- We spotted the appearance of a first snowdrop ('Gibbo's snowdrop') near the gate at Pond 0.
- Overall, Chris was very positive about FTNCG's approach to managing biodiversity at Spa Ponds.
- Chris appreciated our achievements with wetland habitat recreation at Pond 1 and the 'backwater' at Pond 2. Chris indicated that, as we had intended, the habitat improvements should be of benefit for the site's toad population. The toads' fate this year will, as always, depend on the weather.
- Chris was supportive of our intention to remove some of the brooklime and water cress growing so prolifically at Pond 1 to reveal some of the pond water.
- Chris was excited to see the oak/birch woodland above Ponds 3 and 4, noting how the area was characteristic of Sherwood (including the relative paucity of diversity of the forest floor vegetation, being dominated by bramble).
- Chris agreed that the site offers plenty of potential for gainfully translocating trees, including rowan, holly, willow, hazel, etc.
- Chris admired the aspen growing between Spa Ponds and the farmer's field (in the vicinity of the glade area), noting how they contribute to the diversity of native tree species.
- We discussed tree management in general, including our plans to translocate some of the black poplar to spots nearer to Beeston Lodge ridge, only after EMEC have completed the tree felling work that they will be carrying out (expected in September/October 2019) as their contribution to the Lively Up The Maun project.
- We enjoyed further conversation related to management of the understory, with Chris signalling his approval of our approach to letting more light in by pollarding younger chestnut and replacing sycamore with various types of native trees already found on the site, e.g. elder, crab apple, holly, rowan, hazel, gorse, hawthorn, buckthorn, blackthorn, dogwood, wild cherry, etc.
- Chris suggested laying the hedge along the glade to let more light reach the glade area.
- We enjoyed showing off the sweet chestnut trees to Chris as we walked back via the chestnut walk.
- Chris will be heading up a series of 5 balsam pulling sessions throughout June and July 2019 as part of his ongoing efforts to control invasive non-native species, with 2 of these sessions falling within the Lively Up The Maun project (which features Spa Ponds). Some of the balsam pulling will take place at Spa Ponds, including on the river bank, and in the stretch of the Maun behind Warren Farm. It is hoped FTNCG volunteers will take part alongside other volunteers, including from Mansfield Woodhouse Millennium Green - see: <https://mwmgreen.weebly.com/>
- Discussions also took place with Andy. There may be opportunities for Andy to offer training (e.g. in laying hedges and building up dead hedges) to FTNCG volunteers and others that would also contribute to Spa ponds' site management plan.
- We expect Andy to help us with ongoing management of the bridleway, including undertaking (in early May) an initial brushcut along the length of the site (including strimming the glade).