

Freshwater Habitats Trust

Proposed Work at Raleigh Park

Friends of Raleigh Park AGM – Thursday 12th September 2019

Introduction

Raleigh Park supports a variety of freshwater habitats, including a pond, a stream, and alkaline fen habitat fed by tufa-forming springs, the latter of which is internationally important. There are two areas at the bottom of the park that are currently liable to flooding following periods of high rainfall. Additionally, there is recent evidence of Common Toad at Raleigh Park, a species which has undergone significant declines over recent years (and which is a Priority Species under the NERC Act 2006).

As Raleigh Park is one of Oxford's most valuable wetland sites, Freshwater Habitats Trust is interested in funding some management work to help improve habitat quality and restore the areas of alkaline fen.

Management Opportunities

Scrub has encroached on to areas of the fen habitat at Raleigh Park, which has led to the loss of shorter fen plant species. The first step in fen habitat restoration is the removal of woody growth and tall vegetation to open up the fen area, helping to promote the growth of shorter fen plant species that have disappeared due to shading and competition. Freshwater Habitats Trust is able to fund some scrub removal at Raleigh Park.

Drying out has been one of the main drivers of species loss from Oxfordshire's fens, and the fen habitat found at Raleigh Park is no exception to this. The site would benefit from re-wetting work to help retain water on the fen; this will increase the suitability of the habitat for fen species, and will also help to ameliorate the flooding at the bottom of the park, by increasing the water-holding capacity of habitat further upstream. This can be achieved by the creation of semi-permeable dams using turves and/or roundwood, which will be installed along the stream. These will help to slow the flow of water, allowing the surrounding areas to wet up. Freshwater Habitats Trust is planning to fund this important re-wetting work, to help restore the fen habitat at Raleigh Park.

Restoration of Raleigh Park's fen habitat will lead to the re-establishment of fen vegetation and associated invertebrates. It will also make Raleigh Park a suitable site for the introduction of some rare fen plants such as Fen Violet, which are currently being cultivated at Oxford Botanic Garden, that are in desperate need of new habitat.

Funding

There is currently funding available for management work through our 'Saving Oxford's Wetland Wildlife' project, which is now in its second year. 'Saving Oxford's Wetland Wildlife' is funded by Thames Water and TOE, with funding from Grondon Waste Management.

There is some funding available for scrub removal and vegetation clearance at Raleigh Park in the project's second year, subject to approval from TOE. This work will have to be undertaken between September 2019 and the beginning of March 2020, to ensure it is completed in time for the claim date for Year 2 of 'Saving Oxford's Wetland Wildlife', and to comply with bird nesting regulations. Funding will also be available for management work at Raleigh Park in the project's third year, from April 2020, to include both scrub removal and re-wetting works.