



SPRING BLUEBELLS AND WOOD ANEMONE IN DOLE WOOD

# The Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust



*Founding Honorary Secretary and now President of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, Ted Smith CBE looks back at challenges faced and achievements made over 60 years.*

Pictures: Geoff Trinder

The Lincolnshire wildlife trust which came into being on 2nd December 1948 (as the Lincolnshire Naturalists' Trust) was only the third such county Trust to be formed in the UK.

The Trust originated from a committee of the Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union set up in 1945 to compile a list of sites of wildlife interest in the county as part of a national plan for nature conservation. At the end of the first full year in 1949 the Trust had 131 members and an income of £82. We already had a major task, however, and it was the experience of that to which much of the early success of the Trust and its influence elsewhere was attributable.

That task was the management of the nature reserve at Gibraltar Point in association with the former Lindsey

(now Lincolnshire) County Council, an agreement for which had been concluded at the same time as the launch of the Trust. A reserve open to the public and providing opportunities for education and enjoyment of the natural world was a relatively new concept, and the Trust had to pioneer methods of reconciling the conservation of habitat and wildlife with such uses. Appointment of the first full-time field staff, acquisition of the former Coastguard House as a field station in 1959, and the subsequent building of a visitor centre and residential study centre in 1974, further enlarged and refurbished in 2006, were milestones in the realisation of the original concept.

Meantime, however, the new reserve had been threatened in 1953 by a proposal to develop a large caravan camp at Sykes Farm near the main

entrance. It was a threat only averted by the County Council's compulsory purchase of the site which was confirmed following a Public Inquiry.

Securing the retention of unspoilt stretches of the coast in the face of the rapid spread of holiday facilities was indeed an urgent task for the Trust in its early years. In 1956 it had established a reserve on the Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes, another unspoiled coastal area rich in wildlife. This too was threatened by the expansion of caravan sites in the early 1960s which the County Council as the planning authority successfully resisted, in one case applying a Discontinuance Order to an existing site. After a three-day Public Inquiry at which the Trust strongly supported the County Council, the Order was confirmed by the Minister and the owner compensated.

The Trust and the County Council then urged the Nature Conservancy to participate in the management of the Dunes reserve which – like Gibraltar Point - was subsequently declared a National Nature Reserve (NNR).

Further north the Trust later secured a lease from the Ministry of Defence to manage sand dunes and saltmarsh at Donna Nook. Designated a NNR in 2002, the reserve has become famous for the large breeding colony of grey seals, a very popular public attraction.

Also high on the Trust's priority list were the heathlands in the north-west of the county which had already been severely reduced in extent by ironstone mining, by the development of Scunthorpe and by extensive afforestation. The acquisition of part of Scotton Common in 1954, of Linwood Warren in 1957, and the Epworth and Haxey Turbaries in 1958 safeguarded some of the best remaining tracts of heath and bog with a wealth of characteristic plants and animals.

The need to safeguard special places became increasingly urgent in the 1960s and 1970s

as agricultural production, driven by new technology and fuelled by a generous subsidy system, swept away hedgerows and other landscape features and eliminated meadow and pasture in favour of intensive arable cropping. Among many precious sites lost was Waddingham Common – a botanical treasure house - in spite of the Trust's efforts to save it and its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Old flower-rich meadows too were disappearing at such a rate that the Trust launched a salvage operation to save some of the best examples. From Heath's Meadows at Bratoff to Moor Closes at Ancaster, they are places of great interest and beauty, reminders of an older countryside, and they form a special feature of our nature reserves estate.

In the wider countryside the drastic decrease in grassland lent special importance to road verges, and in 1960 the Trust concluded an agreement with Lindsey and Kesteven County Councils for the protection and appropriate management of a selection of verges. The agreement was the first of its kind in the country and was widely adopted elsewhere. Today the Trust is funded by Lincolnshire County Council to manage 64 stretches of

verge mainly on chalk and limestone soils.

To effect quicker land drainage for arable cultivation many rivers and streams were deepened and straightened so losing important wildlife features. In 1970 the Trust entered into discussions with the then Lincolnshire River Authority which agreed to involve the Trust on methods of retaining the wildlife interest of rivers and streams where improvement operations were necessary.

In the 1970s attempts were made to secure a better understanding between farming and wildlife interests, and the Trust played a major role in the establishment of the Lincolnshire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group which gives practical advice.

By the time of its twenty-first anniversary in 1969 the Trust had acquired thirty nature reserves covering more than 2,500 acres. Working with education authorities, schools and universities, it was also providing opportunities and facilities for field studies at Gibraltar Point where an information kiosk – the precursor of the Visitor Centre – was opened in 1963. It had mounted

in 1968 one of the earliest nature trails in the country. It had established a Junior Section which later became part of the national Watch Club. A film about its work 'Nature in Trust' had been shown to enthusiastic audiences and had helped to promote membership.

A full-time warden had been appointed at Gibraltar Point in 1960, and a Field Officer in 1965. Otherwise developing and administering the organisation had been almost entirely the work of a handful of dedicated volunteer officers, nature reserve wardens and helpers. In 1968, with new headquarters established at the Manor House in Alford, a full time Administrative Officer, partly funded by grant-aid from Lindsey and Kesteven County Councils, was appointed, followed by a Conservation Officer in 1974. Those appointments were designed in part to encourage and co-ordinate more voluntary participation in all aspects of the Trust's work which continues to be an essential element of

its success. Another important development was the establishment of Area Groups of members – beginning in 1967 – which have remained an invaluable feature of the Trust's organisation.



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