

Natural Boxford report:

We continue to be very busy!

. Our river group, plus some volunteers, cleared Himalayan Balsam from Primrose Wood all the way to the end of the Causeway last year. We are about to survey that area and plan for this year, and aim to extend the area cleared to the Wash if possible. We have access permissions from all but a couple of residents to assist us in this, and wonder if the PC might be able to assist us with communication there. Our first big group clearing morning is on 16th May at 10 and all are welcome to come and help.

. The River Group continue monthly water quality testing, and riverfly surveying and now have a baseline established with the EA. We took part in the Rivers' Trust's Great River Watch, and Earthwatch's Water Blitz last year. We have just carried out our first Water Vole survey on 500 metres of the Box as part of the National Water Vole survey: we have reports of two sightings so far this year, and found several signs of their presence. Their habitat, as well as the animals themselves, is protected by law, so very important to keep river banks as undisturbed as possible, ideally allowing a 5m zone.

. We had a capacity crowd at the Pavillion for our talk earlier in the year from Darren Tansley, Wilder River's Manager at the Essex Wildlife Trust entitled "A brief (un)natural history of rivers" which was very well received.

. The River group received the Essex and Suffolk Rivers' Trust's Group of the Year award at a celebration at Colchester Football club at the end of last year.

. partly inspired by the River Group's activities, Roger Loose has written an excellent paper on the geological history of the River Box which will be available to read on the village website.

. We now have 36 supporters receiving our newsletters; and around 100 followers of our Instagram page

. We have a regular article in the BRN and receive some very positive feedback from readers

. We have a Swift walk planned for June 30th during National Swift Awareness week, and are looking forward to welcoming these charismatic visitors back again soon this year, hopefully with new breeding pairs ready to take up residence in swift boxes.

. we will have a focus on these birds as well as swallows and house martins on our stall at Open Gardens - come and say hello.

. Our churchyard wildflower patch is developing slowly and we are working on getting a boundary marker in place. We are hoping that the key species yellow rattle which established last year will have seeded and start helping to keep the grass down.

. we planted some wildflowers on the White Hart bank with Howard's permission and are pleased to see a cowslip in flower which will seed and slowly evolve into a patch, and some oxeye daisies have also thrived and will be flowering a little later.

. We won a SCC survey prize draw and purchased a solar powered generator which will enable us to carry out moth surveys 'off-grid'. We also have a 'moth breakfast' planned for June where members will gather for breakfast and investigate the previous night's moth trap - moth's are not harmed in this process!

- our intention to carry out biodiversity surveys of the Croft remains - on hold at present as we wait a bit longer to see what appears - seeds that have been dormant in the ground for decades will now start to germinate as more light gets in.

- finally, we were delighted to see that the PC has agreed to plant some small hedge species trees to the rear of the churchyard.