

BLAST FROM THE PAST - THE DOFFCOCKER SAGA BEGINS!!

26th April 1986 was D-Day for Bolton Conservation Volunteers - Doffcocker Day that it - our most important task to date, involving Horwich and Bury conservation groups and Bolton R.S.P.B.

An armada of landing craft (well, a motorboat and a leaky dinghy actually) were used to transport the plants, materials tools and foolhardy volunteers across; and our task was to plant-up Doffcocker Lodge's new island to ensure its safety and to provide a sanctuary for the nesting water-fowl.

First of all, a layer of hessian was pegged down and around the waterline to prevent wave erosion of the banks. Next came the planting of bullrush, phragmites, sedge and marsh marigold

through the hessian. The idea of this being, that the growth of plants will stabilize the banks of the islands - these being collected the previous evening from Rumworth Lodge, via a rustic ride in Stan's tractor, and also from a marshland site, since destroyed, at Lostock Junction. This proved a hilarious task in itself, involving the various talents of Derek and his deranged driving and the outsized waders of our lad Jason, who almost disappeared under the swamp accompanied by howls of laughter from spectators watching safely from a considerable distance.

The rest of the island was planted-up with bramble, six alder trees and a mixture of grass and wildflower seed. (The money for which came out of

Bolton Conservation group funds, with a kind donation from the local Doffcocker residents). A shingle beach was also constructed after regrading the banks, to encourage the nesting of the Little Ring Plover.

The task was slow to begin with little understanding of the work to hand, but with the help of Rick and his magic clipboard, things soon got moving. With the sun on our backs, the cooling sea breezes and a stirring old sea shanty or two, the work was completed earlier than predicted. Now all we have to do is wait for the plants to grow and the water level to rise to produce a haven for wildlife.

Julia Spencer

First appeared in Newsletter No4, in August 1986

DOFFCOCKER - THE SAGA - TEN YEARS ON!

Having worked for over ten years on Bolton's only local nature reserve at Doffcocker Lodge, I feel its time for a review of the conservation work undertaken and an assessment of the beneficial effects for wildlife.

When we started work at Doffcocker our prime directive was to undertake practical conservation work, which would improve the reserve in terms of the numbers and variety of wildlife that it supported. Therefore, a management plan was drawn up which we helped to implement. The work undertaken fell into 4 broad areas:- 1. Erosion control on the Island. 2. Reedbed planting. 3. Hedge and tree planting and 4. Snipe management work.

In the absence of intensive field studies it is often very difficult to quantify the beneficial effects of any conservation work. However, there have been a number of indications that management is having positive effects.

Prior to Doffcockers designation as an L.N.R., the lodge was drained to allow essential repairs to the dam to be undertaken. This artificial drought led to a shortage of marginal vegetation. In

particular the huge beds of water-horse disappeared. These losses led to an acute shortage of safe nesting areas for waterfowl. The creation of the island was an instant success. In Spring 1989 I counted no fewer than 18 mallard nests on the island, although slower to establish, the reedbeds have over recent years had some positive effects. Observers note that most years, hundreds of swallows use them as a night-time roost. And over the last twelve months, Coot have shown a dramatic increase. I suspect the ever increasing reedbeds are again providing safe nesting sites. Two years ago Tufted Duck bred successfully and last year, for the first time in 20 years, Mute Swans reared 4 young.

The new hedges we planted took time to establish, but they are already beginning to produce lots of berries for the birds in winter and potential nesting sites in spring. From 2008 (or thereabouts), we can start laying the new hedges, and once laid, these hedges should offer a much greater scope for nesting. One beneficial effect of the hedges which I failed to anticipate was that it traps litter blown off the ring road and prevents it entering the reserve.

Tree planting was only undertaken in small areas since it was felt that large scale afforestation would lead to losses of wildfowl and waders. The small pockets of trees are now reaching maturity providing extra density in the vegetation without adversely affecting the wildlife.

In the absence of a comprehensive ringing programme it is very difficult to quantify the real beneficial effects of our snipe management work (including vegetation strimming and willow coppicing). However, on one of my reconnaissance visits this spring, I observed a numbers of snipe in the managed areas.

In conclusion then, ten years of conservation work at Doffcocker has had many beneficial effects and the potential for wildlife can only continue to increase as we enter the new millennium. The success of our work owes much to the on going support and encouragement from Bolton Leisure Services, and the practical support by local people, the Bolton Wildlife Project and Bolton R.S.P.B.

Rick Parker