*WetlandLIFE: taking the bite out of wetlands* Project

Part of the *Valuing Nature* Programme

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**Hello everybody, welcome, thank you so much for coming along this evening on this dark February evening. I know that we would all rather be somewhere tucked under a blanket watching the Hairy Bikers or something like that but I thank you from the bottom of my scientific heart for coming this evening and sharing your views with us. For those who don't know me, I'm Mary, I'm part of the University of Brighton and I'm the researcher for Brighton for the Wetlands Life project. At this point now I might have to hand over to REMOVED to do some safety information about the fire escapes and the toilets.**

[safety/timing/consent forms - not transcribed]

**If you would very kindly just say your name and which organisation you represent and you can say no more than that, you could also say where your interested in getting involved with the project or what you'd like to get out of the project, that would be great but a name and which organisation you're from is also helpful too. So I'm going to start with the lovely REMOVED.**

A1 Hi I'm REMOVED and I'm, work for the REMOVED, I'm the REMOVED over at Millennium Country Park in Marston Mortaine team.

M1 I'm REMOVED and I volunteer for girl guiding.

M2 I'm REMOVED and I am a volunteer river warden on the River Ouse at REMOVED.

A2 I'm REMOVED, here on behalf, in three capacities, History Natural History Society, Beds Invertebrate Group and Herts and Beds Fungi Group.

M3 I am REMOVED and I'm a bird ringer ringing at Millennium Country Park primarily.

P1 REMOVED, I'm a ringer, I'm a bat worker, consultant ecologist now, erm, REMOVED, I work for the European Commission part-time, at the moment drafting new regulations on wetlands protection in the REMOVED.

D1 I'm REMOVED, I'm a Priory Country Park volunteer, I lead the REMOVED at Priory Country Park.

A3 REMOVED, I volunteer down at the Country Park and I've been a member of the sailing club for REMOVED years.

B1 I'm REMOVED, I'm here representing various groups, Priory Water Sports which is the facility here and REMOVED and I also work for the national body of sailing, the RYA.

T1 I'm REMOVED and I do Nordic walking in the park here.

D2 I'm REMOVED, I represent the Bat Group and I'm also a REMOVED.

JM Joe Morris from, it sounds like a blind date.

**It does, doesn't it?**

[laughter]

JM So I am associated with Cranfield University and a member of the research team.

**So thanks everyone for that and just to kind of recap what this focus group is all about basically helping us get a sense of what are the key issues for the two different wetlands in Bedfordshire that we're looking at. The project is focussing on three things which I hope to try and talk about with you tonight, so the first one is a sense of place, what these wetlands mean for you in your day to day activities, part of your organisations. Also I'm really trying to find out about contemporary social representations of wetlands and what that means is in the past wetlands always had a bad deal of being sort of murky out of, you know, kind of somehow difficult areas to, to be in but not it's also wetlands are changing in terms of how people feel about them, so we're really trying to get a sense of from your experience, from the organisations that you work in what do these wetlands mean for your members and for you and how do you think the wider public are involved in the wetlands and how would you encourage them to use the wetlands in different capacities or maybe more frequently? And the last part of what we're trying to explore tonight is thinking about mosquitoes. Now I've described to some of you the idea that mosquitoes are if you like a metaphor for climate change, we know that climate change has given us warmer wetter atmosphere which is also ideal for mosquito populations. Mosquitoes are very important for the ecosystems of wetlands, it's really thinking about mosquitoes and where they fit into this sense of place for wetlands. And just to explore that a little bit more about what you understand by mosquito population in the wetland. So I've given you all a sheet that has some photocopies on of the wetlands, so one's Bedford Country Park and the other one, Priory Country Park and the other one is Millennium Country Park.**

[06.33]

B1 I, photos.

**Oh yes, the photos, thank you. It's on the consent form, would everyone be happy to have their picture taken as part of this focus group? It's really just to have on our website just to kind of capture what we're doing here. If you're uncomfortable having your picture taken please let me know. If you'd rather say later in confidence then please let me know, we don't have to use your photos but yeah, if you'll be happy to have your photo taken that would be good going back to the photocopies. Just to kind of begin to start thinking about the wetlands, I wondered if you could take a look at these maps and just for the next couple of minutes think about how and when you use these sites and how often do you access these sites, whereabouts do you access these sites? Do you use all of the different spaces or is there a particular area that you like to go to? You've also got bigger scale maps here if that's easier for you it would be really helpful for me if you could jot down on the pieces of paper at the back the three key benefits that you get from using the site and also the three factors I think that maybe restrict you, would deter you from using these sites it's just about on a day to day organisational level, what are the main benefits and the main disbenefits if you like of the site? And then when you've had a little chance to write that down just going to come up and add here on I.**

A1 So have I got my REMOVED hat on me using the wetlands?

**Well I would say your REMOVED hat on, I would say, because trying to find out from an organisational perspective of the groups that you represent or you can put your hand up and say I feel this but my organisation might respond in this way.**

A1 I use all of it, because I REMOVED to and I have to.

**Yeah, that's it, that's it, yeah. Okay, how's everyone getting on. I, can I ask you? I know, go on. Could I ask you to maybe list out for you for your organisation what are the three main benefits of these wonderful sites?**

[12.20]

B1 Okay, erm, the benefits for, for me is, erm, you know, a fantastic work environment, you know, it's, erm, fantastic work environment, it's out in the open, nature, I tried to break it down in that, erm, in that we use the lake, the river, the park in different, different ways in terms of the, of different sporting activities, erm, so, you know, there's multi, it's a multi-sport environment in terms of water sports but not only that, you know, cycling for the parks also use that as a fun nature, erm, exploring, orienteering, erm.

**And you said before that you get quite a lot of youth groups come along.**

B1 Yeah.

**So do you kind of see that it's part of the next generation of sailers and?**

B1 Yeah, absolutely, I think it's a, an environment that we can, that we introduce people to, to the outdoor world, yeah. I was always very struck and I always use it as an example, few years ago there was a gentleman came in when we had an open day here at I, he lived in Barkers Lane, he'd lived there for twenty three years and he had never been into the park and, you know, there are people within Bedford that have never been into this park and to me that's a very sad, in the management of, either not knowing it's here or not understanding what we have to, have to offer.

**Yeah. I mean for instance did that gentleman saying why it was that he never went into the park? Was there, did he feel there was nothing there for him or was it about?**

B1 He, I don't know, erm, he just said he'd always just driven by it, you know, it's a very unassuming entrance to something that is within, within Bedford.

M3 I think that's very much the case, I mean I know a lot of people who say they've never been here, you say well why you have not been here? Don't know where it is.

B1 Yeah.

M3 How do you get in? [laughs]

B1 You see all this environment and yet to get into it is just a, is just a little bit gateway that, you know, drive.

M3 Yeah.

B1 That could be leading, be leading.

M3 And those that know it use it a lot.

B1 Yeah.

M3 Those that don't know it.

B1 Whereas if you drive by Russell Park, Bedford Park, you actually drive actually by the park so that you can actually almost see what's, see what's in there.

**Interesting isn't it? Okay, so if we just stick on the benefits for now, REMOVED what would you, what for you?**

[14.58]

T1 Erm, well thinking about the whole park, is it three hundred and sixty acres is it? But it's amazing, fantastic walks, you know, along the river, along the lakes, everything accessible, wonderful views of the water and it's in the, like in the evenings, the embankments are really well lit, so that's fantastic to have all that for nothing.

**Yeah. And it feels a safe environment to go in as a?**

T1 Yeah, really safe, yeah.

**You know, any time of the evening it's still okay, yeah.**

T1 Well that's really well lit and say you've got really good walks all around there, so Russell Park isn't but you've got the embankment up on the cycle to here, it's all lit everywhere so that's really, really helpful and there's lots of runners and everybody out in the evenings, it's quite a hive of activity if you go down to the Butterfly Bridge in the evening, you've got runners, cyclists, kayakers, you've got lots and lots of different people using that space.

**Yeah. So like REMOVED was saying, it's kind of multiple use by lots of different kinds of people.**

T1 Yeah, you get quite a shock actually, a lot of my walkers, the first time they come out in the evening they think oh, going to get, and then they feel part of something straightaway because you've got the boot campers in Russell Park and then you've got, you know, loads of different people using that space which can be a bit of a problem but most of the time it's really good.

**Yeah, brilliant, and REMOVED?**

D2 Well my, my purposes here, I mean I, I enjoy REMOVED the habitat, the wildlife so we're actually preparing the park for everything that uses it. I'm a bat specialist so I enjoy monitoring bat populations, seeing bats, we trap here, we, we've got bat boxes so we're, we're monitoring what's going on, so there's a scientific side of it, I mean it's a fabulous resource from a scientific point of view, there's over nine hundred species on the species list here. For those of you that are birders who, I think it's two hundred and twelve birds on the species list, so you've got fantastic resource there and just being able to use it, I work in it so I'm out in it all the time, which is amazing but, yeah, its.

**And to have it right in the middle of an urban area as well.**

D2 It's, it's right on the edge of Bedford, I mean that brings all sorts of people in to the park. I mean you're talking about usage at night, I actually do use the park at night, literally the park, there's not that many people around at night, erm, so people have a fear of safety in the dark but the reality is that I've been here god knows how many times at night and you hardly ever come across any trouble at all and, you know, we can be here at one o'clock in the morning, erm, night fishermen are the only people about, it all goes quiet after about half ten.

**Yeah. So they get to enjoy this lovely space and it's also safe for them as well?**

D2 Yeah, yeah.

**Perfect.**

D2 I mean it, you can count the amount of issues we get overnight one in hand, that we, we find out about, it's that small.

**Yeah, I mean that's really amazing for, you know, an urban area isn't it?**

D2 Yeah, it is, it's, we, we get remarkably little problems, we get a bit of antisocial behaviour but it's all early on, there's, through the night there's nobody here essentially.

**Yeah, yeah, that's wonderful. And REMOVED would you say, I mean your benefits are they similar in that you've got similar roles to REMOVED, are they quite different would you say?**

AC Probably a bit of both, I mean one of the great things about Millennium Country Park is it's been created in the aftermath of industrial brick making, erm, so twenty odd years ago it wasn't even there and now it's there providing a great multifunctional space, erm, and me personally, it's a great job being able to make a difference to wild life and for people as well, erm, there's opportunity to do other things from running twenty miles round and round and round to sitting under a book, under a tree reading a book so, erm, I think it's important, erm, providing a space where people feel they can get away from life and I mean it's stuck right in an urban area but you don't often walk very far to feel like you're miles away, erm.

**And you get all different ages using the park and at all different times of the day, like, you know, REMOVED was saying and REMOVED was saying that you, you know, it's not a case of it's nine to five and then people disappear, they use it early in the morning and then late in the evening.**

A 1 Yeah, I think you probably get different user groups kind of congregating on different times of day or days of the week but, erm, yeah, great variety of people whether they're fishing or cycling or horse riding.

[19.52]

D2 Do you get the six o'clock in the morning dog walkers as well?

A1 Absolutely. [laughs] And we get the, yeah, nine o'clock at night, local youths as well so.

D2 Yeah.

A1 They all come up afterwards. [laughs]

**Ah okay right, lovely. REMOVED, what about for you?**

M1 Erm, we, we love it as an outdoor space and getting the kids active and into nature and it's educational and cheap and straight.

**Yeah, yeah.**

**JM That's for this site is it?**

M1 Well for either site but there's, Girl Guiding Bedfordshire covers north, central and East Beds is it? Erm, so it, it, we go as far as Luton and Dunstable and Fenton, so it would be both sites.

**Yeah, and, you know, is it, if it wasn't for you taking the girls to the sites, do you think they would, I mean do some of them ever say we haven't been to these wetlands before?**

M1 For some of them it would, some of them it would be no and for some of them, the things we do with them would be new, so we water sports here and we do geocaching and pond dipping at Marston Montaine but there's lots of different things that they've never done before, erm, but.

**Yeah, which is exciting when you're younger, you get a chance to try these different things out.**

M1 It's exciting for me.

**Yeah.**

[laughter]

**That's brilliant. And REMOVED what about you, what did you list as your…?**

M2 Erm, I, to be honest being, erm, a REMOVED, so I, so the benefits, I can't say particularly for the REMOVED but for me for personal use, we actually, erm, use both Priory Country Park and Millennium Country Park for walking, so it's a good recreational use, erm, I think when the, both of them is ease of access, erm, so it's very easy to access, it's very easy to park so, erm, I mean we arrived by car, so we're car users, so that's one of the things. Erm, and like the Priory Country Park particularly, they've got cars, it's a circular walk, you can come out, you can, erm, do the walk and that's fine, erm. The Millennium Country Park, oh it's probably because I remember it as the pits, erm, I feel, erm.

[laughter]

**Literally, literally a pit.**

A1 … say …

M2 Yeah.

A1 And why, this is.

JM Shall we write that down?

**Terrible joke by REMOVED.**

M2 The thing is, erm, so I mean both, both parks have got a very, very good centre and, but I think because Millennium Country Park is, is a fairly new park, erm, for me and for the me it lacks biodiversity, erm, so we walk round there, to be honest I got bored, whereas Priory Country Park there was, there's plenty and taken grandchildren and Priory Country Park has got more to do.

**Okay, because of the different habitats? Because I know when I've walked round with REMOVED before some of the spaces are quite wild and.**

M2 Yeah.

**You've got the Finger Lakes as well haven't you?**

M2 Yeah, yeah, so it's, erm, I think it's just perception that, that was it, so, so really it's, so it was, erm, interesting walks, good variety, very well maintained so hats off to the parks, do a really good job. Erm, and so ease of access for, for, erm, everybody so, you know, disabled people can, can get down and.

**Okay, yeah, that's very important.**

M2 Yeah, yeah.

**That's brilliant. Lovely, thank you. REMOVED?**

A2 Right, well the three groups which I'm representing, the raison d'etre for all of them really is recording biodiversity and all, both of these two sites have got a good wildlife habitat with a diverse range of species groups, erm, this site is better for some things, Millennium Country Park is better for other things but both of them very good sites. I'm surprised your biodiversity list is as short as that, it should be a darn site longer.

D2 I'm sure it would be, there's lots of.

A2 I'm sure we've got more insects than that.

D2 Oh we're bound to, we won't know half the things.

A2 But they've all gone through to the Record Centre. Erm, it's a good site as well for teaching for, as far as the Bedford Natural History Society is concerned teaching both children who love pond dipping, becoming increasingly popular with Young Gnats as we call them and right up to adults and good opportunities for doing that and superb opportunities for observing and photographing wildlife right from fungi fraction of a millimetre up to big birds, so plenty of opportunities there.

**Yeah, wonderful. And you find it, is it easy site to access and there's no?**

[25.00]

A2 Yeah, for, for the most part, I mean the, there are limited places where you can safely take children down to the water's edge at both sites, erm, but providing you're careful with it it's okay but you can perhaps do with a few more opportunities in that regard but for the most part no, the access is fine, both, I mean both of them have got good parking and.

**Brilliant. Yeah, okay, do you think, we talked before, touched before about, you know, the cheapness of being able to access, would you say that also that's the other good benefit of these sites is that they're currently free to park?**

B1 Yeah, definitely.

A2 Yeah, yeah.

**I know there's a voluntary contribution at Millennium but, yeah.**

A2 Yeah, but there's, I mean you've actually got to pay to access the wetland, they haven't, but it's well worth it as far as I concerned. I know a lot of people grumble about it but.

**Yeah. REMOVED?**

M3 Okay, if I give you two lists, one for Priory and one for Marston. Priory, erm, we've been, I first ringed birds here probably about nineteen eighty one, erm, I came to Bedford in nineteen eighty to work, never been to Bedford before I got the job interview, erm, but we, we've been running, running a, erm, what's called a constant effort site in the rough which is the area just on the east of the main lake, between that and Finger Lakes for.

**Can you point out where that is?**

M3 Yeah, so it's just.

D2 It's a non-public access.

**Is this the rough?**

M3 Yeah, it is.

D2 Just up there, the rough.

**The rough, there we are.**

[laughter]

M3 So it's, so it's a fenced off, it's a fenced off area, erm, the gate into it is the actual little gate, is that locked as well?

D2 Yes, it's locked.

M3 Yeah, so it's all locked and basically which overcomes one of the challenges with ringing about how do we deal with avoiding catching large mammals, two legged mammals, erm, but we've been ringing there for must, in the crossover site must have been going for twenty odd years now, not.

D2 More than that.

M3 Right, I started here in nineteen eighty one or so, at that point the park was very different entity from what it is now, it's very, there's obvious, there's, a lot of it's landfill and it was very Spartan, you know, was just, and it's matured dramatically over, over that thirty, thirty odd, nearly forty years, five, you know, so it's fantastic how, how it's evolved and obviously much more been put in over that time to make it more diverse and attractive to the general public, erm, so from my point of view as a ringer, the rough and what we've been doing here is really helpful, erm. My son is a cub leader at REMOVED, erm the, the cubs go down here, erm, once or twice a year.

A3 Yeah, well they're probably through war times in terms of sailing.

M3 Plus the scouts and so they do sailing, they do raft, making rafts and that sort of thing.

A3 Building, yeah.

M3 And that's a great opportunity for the kids to do that, erm, so that's fantastic and the, generally, sort of the whole, just the leisure experience and things, you know, that everyone, the general public is, is great and, you know, there, there are different paths people can use here and obviously there, there is the new cafe which does make it a bit more, you know, lot of people can't go far away from a I can they?

[laughter]

M3 Erm, so, erm, that's, that's quite good, I think, you know, on a good day when the weather's good you just get some great people down here, relaxing, walking, erm, which is great. Erm, so, for, for Millennium Country Park, so I been ringing there for about five years, seven years, I not sure how long it's been but.

A1 I been there seven so …

M3 So it's fairly soon after you started I think and we've been ringing there mostly in the wetland area, erm, so in the reed bed or next to the reed bed but also adjacent to the various, erm, birthing stations, erm, so it's been really useful to get any variety of species we've been catching there, erm, in the summer, it's been warblers and in the, also swallows at times and then just general things as well, erm, so it's been a really nice site to ring at, erm. It's also, I enjoy it very much because it is essentially, it's outdoors and it's peace and quiet, you know, I, I normally operate behind a desk, you know, by the laptop and it's great to be out, out and about. Erm, and, and again, you know, the visitor centre and the, the staff, cover your ears, the staff are very friendly, erm, at.

A1 On a good day.

M3 Yeah, so it's, so it's a nice, nice place to operate at.

**Yeah, so it feels a nice relaxed, both space are nice relaxed environments to go into.**

M3 Yeah.

**Yeah, so it's a real joy actually to have that time to see somewhere develop over a number of years.**

M3 Um.

**You've seen Priory Country Park then from, you know, almost I origins I guess.**

M3 Um.

**You know, to where it is now.**

M3 I think it'd all been designated but I think the important point is we have to recognise these things, it does take time, nature takes time to establish itself and become natural, so, you know, over time it will develop in the same way, I mean you've made the challenges, all that sort of bits of, you know, the old, some of the older trees which are busy collapsing and you're trying to grow new ones and it's, you know, it's the big task, it's a long task and you can't rush and it requires planning and, you know.

[30.25]

**Yeah, long term investment in these spaces.**

M3 Yeah, definitely.

**Yeah, wonderful, thank you. REMOVED, another birder, I know you've got many hats.**

P1 Ooh, well birds and bats. Sadly I can trump that here because I used to ring at Marston in nineteen eighty two before it existed.

A3 Before it was. [laughs]

P1 Yeah, yeah, I used to get a farmer away, across the railway line to dump his tail corn on the corner of what's the, the far pit now inside it? We used to get yellow hammers and things on there in the winter. I used to ring here with REMOVED back in the eighties so I've got a history with both sites that go back thirty years but mostly it's changed, you know, my, my involvement's changed, I used to be a general ringer, I'm now a specialist bird of prey ringer, so I do a couple of thousand bird of prey a year and across and up and down the country. Erm, what I put down is, is a great way to preserve natural habitats and species, which obviously REMOVED’s sort of alluded to, erm, and I'm unashamed person here trying to groom the next generation because it's excellent place to unwind and bring my grandchildren and I bring my grandaughters, both to Priory and to Marston and we'll go for a cycle and we'll go and have a mooch and all the rest of it and in time they will be ringers, they have no choice in this matter, they will be.

[laughter]

P1 They will be the next generation of bird ringers.

**The cult of the ringer.**

P1 Or bat workers, you know, equally they can become bat workers. Erm, but the biggest thing for me, I feel that sentimental attachment because with me I've got a history of say with, with Marston in particular that goes back thirty plus years, before it was developed, erm, when it was going to be developed and designated, I was somewhat concerned with what they might do with it but I've got to say that actually it's a lot better now than it was when I first went there, you know, I dare say you don't have too much trouble putting mistnets and catching a variety of birds, we used to have to quite heavily put down bait to bring the birds in and keep them into various parts of the site where it was just farmland so I think the value added over the years, particularly with Marston because I wasn't involved with this site when, when this was being done but particularly with Marston, the value added to that part of the county is actually quite tremendous, you know, and, and the scope to do more, particularly now that the pits across the other side of the railway line are being developed, is also there, particularly in relation to things like waders and, and migrating birds. The fear I have is East West Rail going straight through the site, you know, it's.

**This is this Oxford, Cambridgeshire footbridge.**

P1 Yeah, you know, I'm going to, I, I'm involved professionally in some of the East West Rail which I'm not at liberty to discuss but it literally goes straight down the railway line and will change what at the moment is a bank of water with maybe four or five trains a day into something that's going to have eight to ten trains an hour, possibly, erm.

M3 Bit more.

P1 Sorry?

M3 Bit more than four or five a day.

P1 Yeah, possibly, I don't I didn't bump into many trains when I was surveying it but, erm, so for me it's a biggest, and a sentimental attachment that I put down but, you know, I think, I think both sites are, are good in terms of providing that space where you can go and actually just unwind and almost every time, my wife gets sick of me, I come round, that's when we used to dump tailcoat thirty years ago, [laughs] can't be that, you know, sorry, but, but it is, it's just like, you know, it's almost like those thirty years cease to exist when you get back into places like you, you've known over, for a long time and you've seen them develop over a long term, erm, but I also think that's maybe why some of these people in Bedford don't go in there and find them because if a place you always went to or it's a place where (phone rings and masks audio) you see it, if it's not, if it's somewhere new, something's got to draw you in, if you're not a person who naturally goes to these sorts of environments then you actually need someone to have that big splash of an open day or something to bring you in and I think, you know, you said you drive past Russell Park and you see it, yeah, and the other thing, people don't want to, they won't go far from a cafe, they won't go far from a car, so oh I can park here and I can walk across the road and I'm Russell Park, they may not realise that they can actually drive here and park and they're straight in the park, if they did they might be more inclined to use it, so I think that's partly marketing.

**Visibility.**

P1 Erm, but from a personal point of view don't do the marketing, just, just leave, leave it as it stands.

[laughter]

P1 I'm quite comfortable with it being a little secret retreat.

D2 I was happy not to have a road going straight through it.

P1 Yeah, yes, absolutely.

[35.02]

**Yeah, lovely, thanks. REMOVED?**

D1 Well a lot of points already been covered, erm, from a volunteering point of view, being involved with the volunteers since REMOVED really at Priory so that's been fantastic. I've learnt so much, erm. We've been given the opportunity to train on some of the kit and that that we need to use things like chainsaw with brush cuts and that which has opened up a sort of semi new career for me in, in my semi-retirement now, so that's, that's been.

**I'm hearing a lot about retirement actually.**

D1 [laughs]

**I don't want to hear it anymore.**

D1 So that's been, that's been a real boon for me and also helps keep you fit basically as well so that's fantastic. Erm, on a sort of personal side of things, I really like wildlife photography, so Priory is a fantastic resource for that because it gets you close to a lot of, erm, animals and birds, which some other sites, you might not be able to do. At Marston Vale's, I think the wetlands will be a fantastic resource again for that but things like, make it so large that should actually be able to get close enough to photograph some of these things is almost impossible whereas with Priory it's, it's much more there for you, particularly the Finger Lakes area, erm, and it's also, I mean with that I tend to come down very early in the mornings at, pre-dawn and so there's no people around, which is great, erm, and you can sit quietly somewhere and just, things just come to you, so.

**It's like your own little paradise.**

D1 Yeah.

**That portion of the morning.**

D1 Yeah, and one of my favourite areas here is actually, well for both sites I tend to go a little bit off piste and keep away from the main area, so, erm, don't know if it's on that map for Priory but hundred acre, which is just across.

D2 This one says hundred acres.

D1 Yeah.

M3 It's a cunning map.

D1 Off to the right, up, right, now down, stop.

D2 Yeah.

D1 Yeah.

D2 And that's.

P1 Bernie the bolt.

D2 That's an area that's still, erm, under management by the gravel company, erm, but it's been gradually brought back into, there's a habitat.

**But it has, but it's got public access, even though it's, yeah.**

D2 Yeah. I mean even though there's not, they're not working on there anymore so there's no gravel extraction going on, it's gradually coming back, they're basically, erm, it's leased out to a farmer now as well so he, he puts his cattle on there for part of the year, which is a bit of a pain because you really don't want a cow coming into your hide at six o'clock in the morning.

**Not really, no.**

D1 But, er.

D2 That's where, that's where we're at odds because we asked it to be.

D1 Yeah, yeah, yeah.

D2 So that, that's a management style, yeah.

D1 But that's aside, yeah, yeah.

D2 Yeah.

D1 Erm, but simply because there's less people, you go down there, it's usually just a handful of dog walkers really and the bird life over there is fantastic, tend to get a lot of waders over there, it's, it's really incredible piece and just really looking forward to it becoming part of Priory really.

**Yeah. Do you think that's going to be in the next five, ten years or is it all up for negotiation I guess?**

D2 Yeah, I guess so.

D1 Well.

D2 I think as, as far as I'm aware the current lease finishes in two thousand and nineteen.

**Okay, so it's not far away really.**

D1 But.

D2 Well I mean it, it's supposed to be up in the next five, ten years.

D1 Yeah.

D2 Essentially it got re, reset because it was supposed to be a, a meadow and it was supposed to be a nutrient poor meadow but it used to be a sludge dumping area for the sewage works and they didn't invert the soil profiles so it couldn't possibly go back to that, so it was four, four years into its restoration plan at the point which they decided they couldn't possibly meet the restoration plan so it got renegotiated and it's in year two I think now of a five year restoration plan based on a totally different restoration, more that is possible.

**Yeah.**

T1 All is good.

**Hopeful, a hopeful restoration plan.**

D2 Yeah, and of course that's supposed to be part of wider River Valley Park as is Priory and that goes all the way to Willington, so supposed to be three and a half square miles or something.

**Right, okay. So that would be part of that big complex when it comes onboard then.**

D1 That's, yes, as will Priory, as will the REMOVED which is run by yourselves.

T1 Yeah, over.

**Right. So then you've got these two, almost counterintuitive things, you've got the railway linking across the county but you also have this green space linking across the county and how will they sit together is the question?**

[40.04]

D1 Yeah, I mean the River Valley Park also has development and potentially a road, lake and other usage in there to help fund it, you know, so it's a much larger scheme but yes, essentially you have wetlands and meadows covering a vast area and wet woodland and it would be a really fantastic thing if it ever happens.

A1 It will …

B1 I propose what, you're not allowed to call it a canal is it, a waterway.

A1 Waterway. [laughs]

B1 It's skimming across the county as well allegedly.

D2 Yeah.

**Right, okay, so there's big plans.**

D2 Yeah, there are, there are big plans for the area.

**And the wetlands are central to it.**

D2 Yeah, they are.

**And REMOVED, you, probably most things are already covered but.**

A3 Yeah, I can play the top trumps game because I can remember coming swimming down here in the early seventies when it was the pits, erm, as a young teenager, erm, probably with REMOVED, in Boys Brigade we had a tour of the power station which was where the River Field Estate now is, and on the grass down there there is still marked out circles of one of the, erm, chimneys.

**That's where, I remember REMOVED showed me, yeah.**

A And I've got photographs from eighty four, when the chimneys got demolished, erm.

D You've seen those as well.

**Yes, yes.**

A3 This place has basically been my home for, second home for the last thirty years, so, erm, I brought my kids up down here, I know bring the grandchildren back down here, we go windsurfing, I come to priory for two completely opposite reasons, erm, one is tranquillity, since working with the volunteers the wildlife part of my brain has just exploded and then I come down here once, twice a week just to go otter spotting, erm, and there's a, part of that is actually sitting on your own but the other part of it is the social life, one of the places we go is the sewage works bridge and there are so many people come past there at the same time of day every day and either tell you a sight, their sightings or ask what you've seen, erm.

**Ah, so it's like an informal otter swapping network.**

A3 Yeah, very much so.

**Yeah, and that's just from only sort of bumping into each other because you see each other such a lot?**

A3 Yeah, yeah.

**Yeah, that's very special isn't it?**

A3 And on some, on some days there can be eight or nine people down there on the bridge with cameras just, just waiting to see if the otters are going to pop up that day, erm, so I come down here basically to hide, to be on my hide but the other reason I come is for the social life, having retired.

[laughter]

A3 The thing I miss from work is, erm, banter, so coming down here and volunteering I get that.

D2 And you get to abuse the REMOVED.

[laughter]

A3 But coming into the sailing club there is the same thing, there is always someone to chat to, so.

**Yeah, so you can kind of choose when it is you'd like to be sociable and then you can choose a time you'd like to be on your own?**

A3 Yeah.

**Which is a real joy isn't it?**

A3 Yeah, and certain days I won't come anywhere near this place, I'll go up to one of the other woods because I know the woods will be empty, I can go and hide in there rather than come down here and bug people.

**Yeah, and do you feel, you know, you said you brought your children here and your grandchildren here, do your children have the same love of this space as you have?**

A3 Erm.

**Is it different somehow?**

A3 Wind surfing's a lifestyle, it's not a hobby or sport, it's a lifestyle, so my kids started down here in eighty nine, erm, which was only four years after my son was born, erm.

**You start them young in Bedford.**

A3 Yeah, erm, both my grandchildren now windsurf as well at seven and nine, so, yeah.

**Yeah. So it is a kind of place where your whole family come, do they, is it just Priory Country Park or do you ever go to Millennium Country Park?**

A3 I've never been there.

**Have you not?**

A3 I've got no idea where it is. [laughs]

A1 15 minute drive.

P1 Hiss boo. [laughs]

[laughter]

**Because you don't feel the need to go anywhere else?**

A3 No, no, I come here for the wind surfing and the sailing and the nature and the volunteer, if I want to go proper wind surfing I go down to Southampton, so, every, everything I've got is part of this, erm, how many sites have you got altogether?

D2 About twenty seven.

A3 Yeah, I visit about five of them.

**Yeah. You've found the place that means something for you, yeah.**

A3 Yeah, but I can, I can walk down here in half an hour, I can drive down here in five minutes, a fifteen minute walk and I'm at, erm, Clapham Park Woods, erm, Brownswood is also just up the road, so I've got plenty of sites I can go to which are all completely different.

[45.07]

**Yeah. I think that, what comes through from what you've all said is that idea of accessibility and being able to get to these spaces easily and safely and being able to park there and that makes a big difference to using the site doesn't it? If it's too hard to get to you may find that you, puts you off going maybe. So I'm going to have to move on to the disbenefits of these spaces, of which you may find that there are none but, REMOVED if we could start with you, or the nuisances, things that maybe deter you from using the site, so.**

B1 I know it sounds silly and my apologies to those that have dogs but.

[laughter]

B1 Or more importantly dogs that aren't in control.

T1 Yeah, big time.

B1 I, it's one of my big bugbears of dogs chasing wildlife.

A1 Um.

B1 You know, I, my family nickname is, is Swan Boy because I've been out rescuing swans before because I can get them to quite easily in a canoe and, erm, as you know I've done several, well quite a few and it really annoys me, you know, dogs chasing swans, even dogs killing ducks.

M3 Um.

B1 You know, it really grieves me.

**And it happens quite a lot I presume from, you know.**

B1 Well I, I, I would, I would say most times that I'm down here that you, you will generally see some form of dog chasing up and down the bank and, you know, I think dogs should be kept on leads in these parts.

M3 Dog mess isn't cleared up as well.

Um.

B1 Yeah, I suppose because I'm on the water a lot more.

D2 I get a lot of dog fouling down on my one.

M3 Yeah, that's right.

B1 Well dog bags actually too

A1 Yes, yes.

B1 Because quite often they are responsible supposedly dog owners that will clear it up but for some reason they think the trees and the fairies rand it disappears that way.

M1 They … yeah.

B1 It disappears that way.

A1 That generally means that they were being watched when they picked it up and weren't when they threw it.

B1 Yes, that's right.

M3 Good point.

B1 But other than, no, I don't really see any, erm, there's.

D2 Yeah, I think the chasing, the dogs chasing wildlife is, is a regular occurrence, them actually catching wildlife is much less frequent but, erm, yeah, I mean it's certainly one of the, the pair of swans on Finger Lakes from, which was for several years the same pair have broken up this year simply because the male was caught by a dog last, last year and had its win damaged and that was put into that because another pair now have moved in and kicked him out and kicked the, the female out as well, so yeah, it's, it's very frustrating, I find it very frustrating and the thing is that most people who let their dogs run wild like that, they seem to think it's funny.

B1 Yeah.

A1 They're not causing a problem.

D2 No, yeah.

A1 They're just having a nice time.

D2 Yeah, the dog's having a nice, so that's all matters

M2 The dog …

A2 Yeah, the dog …

D2 Sort of think well let's, let's have a dog scaled up chasing you and see how you feel about it, you know.

A3 Having, having said all the negative stuff it really should go down on the benefits side as well because this is Bedford's premier dog walking spot and you perhaps notice it more here because there are more dog walkers here than there are in any other park in Bedford, speaking as someone who for six years walked a German Shepherd here, erm, and it is the same people every day at the same times and the vast majority of them are actually responsible.

D2 Um.

D1 But they don't.

A2 Yeah, I agree.

M1 Yeah.

D2 Although we get other sides of it as well, so we have to break up the pack at one point.

A3 Yeah, yeah.

D2 There was about twenty dog walkers, so there was about thirty dogs running with the pack and that was intimidating against some other people so we asked them to rein it in slightly and they, they did, so they're responsible, they, they drifted out in terms of small groups, so it's not a problem but we had to keep track, track of it.

**You had to be.**

B1 And we were starting to get complaints so we intervened and said look we're starting to get complaints, would you mind sort of breaking it down, make it smaller groups? People are getting intimidated by this amount of dogs running as a pack.

**Yes, yeah. REMOVED do you have any disbenefits or deterrents and things that?**

T1 There's a couple of things, erm, it can get really, really muddy round the lake and I had a lady the other day came Nordic walking for the second time and she was about eighty and she just went flat on her face in the mud.

**Gosh.**

T1 So as a site because you think it's going to be a, a lovely path all the way round and you get halfway round and it can, and Marston's really, really muddy and quite puddly as well isn't it in places? So we come back from there, because I use both sites but, erm, Marston is more, worse than, for mud, but I love mud so I mean it's not a problem for me and most of us do love mud, so it doesn't matter but it's just the safety aspect, you know, trying to walk on, slide about, and the other thing, this place is not on a bus route, it's not got, is it, a bus doesn't come right in front of the door which I think is, that's perhaps why people don't use it as much as they could do. There is a bus goes up by the …

[50.37]

D2 There's one that goes up Riverfield Drive, Barkers Lane.

T1 Yeah, but not actually.

D2 It doesn't stop here, no.

T1 There's no bus stop, no. So, but for some older people that's a problem, especially getting, if you wanted to come, if you lived in the, if you lived in Castle Road area and you want to come here I think you'd have to go along.

D2 I don't know the bus routes.

T1 So it's a bit, I think it's, that, that's (speaking over each other so inaudible) or something.

D2 You could walk, Castle, Castle Road to here you could walk quite easily.

T1 Oh yeah, you could do but some people can't though can they REMOVED?

D Yeah, some people won't, no, but we, we've had people that come on mobility scooters, then walk around and get back on their mobile scooter and.

T Yeah, but.

**That's a powerful site then isn't it? It's kind of rejuvenating them out of their chair**

[laughter]

D2 Yeah, yeah, I'm not quite sure that I'd go that far, they use it because they can't walk the whole way, so they, they use their ability to get so far and then do what they can here and then go back out again, so it's like somebody driving essentially.

**Yeah, yeah, yeah.**

T1 But I've had people, they say where's the walk? And I say Priory and they go well how am I going to get there? I don't know. Oh I'd rather go to Bedford Park because I can walk to it which actually it's most probably not any more accessible from the town than this place is is it really?

D2 No.

T1 But it's just, erm, it's perceived.

D2 It's the perception.

T1 Yeah, because it's not got a bus stop, that.

P1 It's got number ten.

T1 Where does it go to?

P1 It's …

B1 Long …

**You can?**

T1 Yeah, to here I mean, a bus stop, bus stop here?

P1 Oh no, no, saying, but for, for Bedford Park you can get a bus.

T1 Yeah, but, erm, but they've still got to get on a bus to get there haven't they?

P1 Yeah.

T1 But people generally think older people like Bedford Park because they're safe place to get to.

P1 Right.

T1 It does put a lot of people off when I tell them it's at Priory, it seems like a million miles away for them.

**Yeah, yeah.**

JM I just, I, I mean have you got an idea how many of your visitors walk with dogs? Is it more than half or less than half do you think?

A1 I would say (D1 cuts them off)

D2 I would probably say somewhere around half …

B1 It's probably less …

D2 It's probably, I mean winter most of our users are dog walkers, apart from people commuting through the park to get to the business park, I mean you've been here for, I've been here during the day in winter.

T1 Um.

D1 And there's always people here, they're walking around the lake and you've got people cycling, you've got disabled, they, they bring them out and some of the special schools, get them out into, into the open there's always people.

JM Just one more question on this, how many of your visitors come here to walk with children? More or less than half?

A1 Week days or weekends?

D2 I mean I would say less than half but if you come on the right days you'll find there are a lot of children around, the play areas are well used, school groups come in as well and use the park, so that's an education resource as far as they're concerned, they're, some of the schools within walking distance so it's totally free for them to come in, make, make use of it, you know, we'll lend pond dipping equipment and that sort of thing, you know.

**That's wonderful.**

JM Okay, right, interesting.

**So to kind of, I want to talk about a couple of other things after this but just to talk about for a couple more minutes about the deterrents, the disbenefits, so REMOVED have you?**

D 2 Er, well working here I get, I come across all the disbenefits, so things like people littering, I've cleared up two fly-tips this morning, so.

**You have mentioned, yeah, so people have what, dropped mattresses and?**

D2 This morning it was somebody's flooring so, laminated flooring and, and carpet this morning, it's builder's rubble, it's everything, anything up I can imagine pretty much gets dumped.

**Always in the same spot, I mean could it?**

D2 No not always in the same spot.

A1 No.

D2 It was always in the same spot until they put the camera up, erm, but there are several hot spots if you like, so yes, that's something that is a disbenefit. People don't see it because we tend to tidy it up first thing in the morning, we're in early and we go round making sure the park is nice and tidy for other people.

M3 I suspect that will get worse as well but with garden waste now that certainly central Beds is going to start charging for garden waste.

D2 Strangely enough it gets worse when the travellers are around as well.

M3 Yeah.

D2 We can't, we can't possibly say that.

[laughter]

M3 I used to work, I used to work for Herts County Council, one of the big problems there was people took the attitude that if backed on to a woodland it's perfectly acceptable to throw their grass and their garden waste into the woodland.

[55.04]

D2 Yeah, we, we've had.

B1 Yeah.

M3 And when you start charging for garden waste people would think well we'll just dump it in the countryside, then why should be pay for it?

D2 Yeah, we've, we've had … people who’ve (multiple voices here)

M3 Got no idea that it's detrimental.

D2 Who dumped tree shreddings across a fence into.

M3 Yeah, yeah, well that …

**Because it seems that green space is okay to have more greenery put on it?**

M3 That's right.

**It's natural compost.**

M3 Yeah.

D2 Yeah.

A1 It's not, it's not just green waste though, I came across a situation in Clapham Park Wood last year where a woman was throwing her dog mess out of her garden into the wood.

M3 Oh right.

D2 You didn't come across the pile that we did in Riverside did you?

A1 No.

D2 That was about three foot high.

**Oh.**

D2 The Enforcement team went and had a chat with them and they removed it slowly as opposed to, to getting any, an enforcement against them.

**Oh dear. Yeah, and they'd just put it over their fence presumably.**

D2 Yeah it's about this, this high, it was bigger than the table but yes, it took them a while to remove it but they.

**I, it did.**

D2 They did so rather than.

**So presumably then for some people the wetlands are just green spaces and it didn't matter what you do on them.**

M2 Um.

**You know, they're always there to absorb anything you want to throw at them.**

D2 The, the vast majority of people respect the, the places that we work, there is a minority that just see it as a dumping ground, but these are the things that the general public don't necessarily see, it's the fact that we work at these places we're into all the different bits and pieces, I mean the other thing is that access here can be difficult when it's very wet, certain parts of this path flood, they do it deliberately as part of Bedford's flood defences, so you can't necessarily get from Riverfield Drive into the park on a direct route because the meadow there is three foot under the water. You can't necessarily walk all the way round the lake either in winter because one, the back meadow sometimes go over welly boot depth in water, erm, you know, the park's doing its job there but people don't think the park's a flood defence but that is part of its job but.

**It's an invisible part of it.**

D2 People don't expect to be part of I job.

A2 Um.

**Yeah, okay.**

D2 So yeah, there are, there are some disbenefits but, erm, I think there's a lot more benefits then there are disbenefits.

**Brilliant, would you say that accords?**

A1 Absolutely and I suppose one thing from a, more from a kind of professional point of view is one of the challenges is that there's never enough money and there's never enough time and the public expect, have an expectation about what they want to see and the facilities they want and the condition they want them in but actually from my point of view, working for a small charity we could probably have five times the number of rangers and probably still not get through the jobs list and the same with money, all of these wetlands and parks take a huge amount of investment to keep them how the public expect them and that is a, you know, daily challenge, erm, yeah, and a big challenge, it is that balance of people versus wildlife as well can be kind of opposing and people versus people, so you've got the, say the mountain bikers or the horse riders or the families with children, all think their thing is more important than the other thing and they all get hacked off with the other people and it's kind of, as, yeah, it's a balance of trying to keep space for all those user groups and space for wildlife as well.

**So when they have those disagreements does that happen sort of in the wetlands and then you actually see it happening and have to intervene or is it that they email you or call you and say I had this interaction with this really bossy person on a horse or, you know.**

A1 Probably. [laughs] Both really, erm, but we'll, we'll get, luckily it's not high levels but we'll get complaints about harping on about dogs, dogs, dogs are probably the highest, erm, cause of complaints.

D2 Dogs and, dogs and fisherman, that's one of the, the bigger ones, dogs crashing into fisherman and eating bait. [laughs] Well if you're going to put food next to them when you should, should expect something and then you can just sort of, but dog walkers tend to think they're always right.

A1 Yeah, and you're talking about their children so you're, yeah, insulting.

D2 And, yeah, and if the dog's not on a lead then the dog walkers drop, you know, so getting that across to them can be challenging.

A1 It's just trying to get everyone to respect everyone else's thing, whatever that thing is.

D2 Yeah.

A1 Erm, and also again not a huge problem with us but, erm, antisocial behaviour, particularly for our wetlands nature reserve, the kind of more designated area, we have wildlife watching hides, perfect place for the local youth to come and hang out so we're pretty good centre for cannabis smoking and drinking, and actually I was chatting to one of our regulars who said that they'd been avoiding one of our hides recently because they're sick of going up there to, finding it completely trashed.

[1.00.08]

D2 Um.

A1 And from, from a, going back to the resource point of view we've got two and a half rangers with two hundred and twenty five hectares and when one of those rangers is spending an hour virtually every day clearing up rubbish and cigarette ends and that's who they've now started shooting up the hide with air rifle, is kind of quite big impact, so.

**Yes, yes, a real challenge.**

A1 And I think as the population increases it's great and it's so important that these green spaces are there to provide that, that space but with the high proportion of lovely people you always get that little fraction of antisocial people so the numbers of them go up and that challenge becomes bigger.

**Yeah. And have you found it gets worse in the summer time or is it always really a problem?**

A1 Until last year it was almost always confined to spring and summer but we've been going up every night this week we've been in there and we're still in February so we're really excited about what summer will hold this year. [laughs]

D2 Yes, we just call summer silly season because those sort of issues do go up dramatically, school holidays with the kids basically, you notice the, you notice the difference.

A1 Absolutely, well yeah, last week was half term so.

D2 Yeah.

**Yeah. So I mean you're saying that's something that as rangers you're more, you're acutely aware of because you have to deal with them.**

D2 Yeah, we, we deal with results that you see, it's quite likely that the general public never come across them at those times because they're not using the wetlands at that point in time, they're not being there in the evenings in general because a lot of this happens after, after dark and.

A1 And we'll aim to clear that up before they come but that can also have a negative effect because sometimes the public never see the things that we're dealing with on a daily basis to make this, try and make this lovely place.

D2 Until you find that they've set a fire in your hide and there's a hole in the floor and things like that.

A1 Oh god.

**Dreadful.**

D2 Yeah, there's, we've got a patch on one of ours, on the floor at the moment, where somebody had set a fire on the floor.

A1 That was where, where they blew up a, an aerosol can in the hide which was quite scary when I was there at, first thing in the morning and there was a group of kids in the hide and there's suddenly there's this massive explosion. [laughs]

**Oh gosh.**

D2 Three times last year one of the benches came out of one of the hides and it took us as a group, a whole half a day to work out to get it back in.

**Gosh.**

B1 They got it out, they got it out of the window.

A1 Because there's that tiny bit of you that's almost impressed when they've done some of these things [laughs] in between hating them for it.

D2 They are now chained to the actual hide so they can't do it.

A1 Yeah.

A1 It's depressing but it has to be like that.

D2 Yeah, yeah.

P1 It's interesting, can I just say, there are lots of negatives, there are lots of negatives but there's also things that can be done to overcome negatives, I mean I think just touching base on, touching back on the topic of the dogs chasing the wildlife, for instance on that, on that main path down the eastern side of the main lake, there is that, because you've got that bit of a fence haven't you that sort of separates out the reeds? So you've got the path reeds and then water's edge.

D2 Yes.

P1 Actually dogs can't get near the birds there for most of that, so.

D2 It makes it a lot harder for them but.

P1 So that, yeah, so that helps.

D2 You don't, also don't want fences everywhere.

P1 No, you don't.

D2 Because that's a total visual intrusion and people feel that they're being excluded.

P1 But it doesn't, well actually people wouldn't go through there because there's no, nowhere for them to go but, you know, with a bit sort of design techniques, I think you can overcome some of them problems. I think I mentioned, mentioned to you REMOVED, I was last year I worked up in Stafford a lot and I was getting out and about, one of the local nature reserves on the edge of town in Stafford they've got what look like, well they're basically hides made out of breeze blocks, you know, really bomb proof, literally bomb proof I think and, and, you know, you cannot move the benches. Okay, the guys were on top of the hides smoking their cannabis while I was inside watching the birds but, you know, the hides themselves were safe.

D2 Yeah.

P1 They, and they were actually going to get that, yeah.

D2 Yeah, it is, it's having that visual side of it as well.

P1 Yeah.

D2 Because we would rather, I mean our, our hides were replaced, they're now oak so they're, they're more resilient to being burnt and this sort of thing.

P1 Yeah, okay.

D2 So it but it's having that visual intrusion versus having something that's totally safe.

**Yeah, can I? I'm just going to try and move it on just a little bit because I want to still talk about mosquitoes before we end.**

M3 Can I just say that, I mean all these problems that we're encountering there, they're all minorities.

D2 Oh yeah.

M3 And this is, I think important to realise that, you know, most dog walkers are responsible, most people are responsible and so on but we have had, certainly the last year across a large number of nature reserves in the county, considerable amounts of anti-social behaviour going on and it is a problem which does seem to be escalating and also it's minority it's becoming more prevalent and takes a lot of monitoring and a lot of sorting out.

[1.05.02]

M1 Yeah.

JM Can I ask, does it come in waves and then goes away or is it?

M3 Well it's, as we said it's more prevalent in the summer and Flitwick Moor really took a hammering last summer with lots of fires being lit, fire brigade had to be called out. Duck End there was similar problem and again the fire brigade had to be called out and if you set light to peat it can burn for weeks and so potentially there, there is a huge problem and it's basically started from, erm, barbecues and things like that and you clear up all the bottles on the cans and the drug paraphernalia and the condoms and all that sort of thing but then if the fire gets out of hand, cor this is fun isn't it? You know, and it's.

P1 Well that's, I don't think that's a new problem because as you know I used to be the REMOVED, I covered all of that site, Marston, and we regularly putting patrols out, Flitwick Moor.

M3 Yeah.

P1 Malden Woods, car parking there, we had no end of problems.

M3 Yeah, I know it's not you but last year was exceptionally bad.

P1 Theft from vehicles, criminal damage.

M3 Yeah.

P1 The, the same on the road going out to Barton, trying to think what the reserve is, not … the next one over.

D2 Sharp …

P1 No, no the other side, going, going towards Hitchin, up on the right hand side.

D2 Oh that's the … then, that's.

P1 Pegston Hills, Pegston Hills, well known for it, you know, so it, it's a perennial problem and I think unless you're actually working as, as you guys are on the ground or doing as I used to do being the one getting your complaints about keeping more patrols out, I don't think you see it because you clear up and get it out the way and it's gone.

B1 Yeah, it's gone.

P1 And all the rest of it and I think that's a big issue because it's the, there's no visibility to it and the other thing I would say is when we used to collar the kids and take them home, no my Johnny would never do that, well I'm sorry, yes he did, I caught him, [laughs] you know, in the act, you know, he was doing it and, and they, there's this big disconnect between sort of throwing kids out and letting them go and, and just almost run riot to the sort of things that you would do, organised activities, taking them out, teaching them to respect the environment, I think there's a big difference and I think that's behind a lot of these problems.

JM I mean it's interesting because these things probably pale into insignificance compared to in seventy ninety six on Flitwick Moor the dragoons were called out when the Moor was enclosed and two people were shot and a few people were sent off to Australia so I mean I think.

[laughter]

B1 Sounds good.

P1 It is, it is a pressure on the natural resource, it was a good thing.

A1 Yes.

**So just to wrap a little bit about disbenefits, I haven't heard yet from REMOVED and REMOVED, would you say that you, any other perspectives that we haven't talked about, that hasn't been talked about so far?**

M2 Erm, I mean not, not a user, I mean I agree with everything that people said, erm, and I haven't actually lived in this area long enough but I'm sort of quite interested in, in wild flowers so I haven't seen a whole season go through to see what the population of wild flowers is but living opposite the, erm, REMOVED, erm, and that, that potential flood plain, I know that, that isn't, that isn't, there aren't any, it's, it's just grasses so I don't know what the parks are like, erm, all that, so, but I agree with everyone.

**REMOVED?**

D2 The meadows are managed totally differently here so you'll find them.

M2 I've come down outdoor botanic classes so I can come down … stuff. [laughs]

D2 Yeah.

**And REMOVED?**

M1 I'd just say with access, so it's very, it's quite car centric so you have to transport to get here and being a youth organisation that requires parents to want to take them, so it's.

**About how you juggle then to.**

M1 And, and if you don't get the parents buy-in then some units say they can't do something, not all of the girls can access it and things and not all, all of them have cars but also particularly hard but it's really good if you're in Cranfield.

[laughter]

T1 Yes.

**I'm going to, we haven't got, oh sorry.**

P1 I think you're missing one I was going to say.

AN Can we talk about mosquitoes then please?

**Exactly, this is what I'd like to, so.**

P1 There's one thing you're missing and that is a big disbenefits, these sites are not properly taken into account in the planning system, and as somebody who's worked at a fairly strategic level with the planners and developers when they're looking at particularly area plans and new development and things so they try and site wholly inappropriate developments right next to wetland sites, which are going to impact on the drainage of the sites and everything else, so I, I think that there's actually a big problem that places like this, they're viewed as something that's there in isolation but actually they're not, they sit in a wider environment and the wider, you know, the, the planning, erm, framework for the wildlife, you know, the wider environment has to take them into account and I don't think it does adequately and I think it's a risk.

D2 Even, even straight on to the survey, they surveyed Fenlake Meadows to see if they put the cloth pitches on it.

P1 Yeah.

[1.10.00]

D2 Couple of years ago, that's a local nature reserve.

P1 Yeah, complete lack of understanding amongst developers and planners and, and the people who are the decision makers about where, and particularly infrastructure projects but also things like that are being done.

D2 Yeah.

P1 Sorry.

**And REMOVED, REMOVED, you didn't have any other disbenefits, you talked about the dogs so I'm presuming that's like the main disbenefits for you?**

A3 I'd say, the only thing I was going to say is quite bad I mean, but is people really.

[laughter]

A3 The place, the popularity at times is, is a problem because it just gets so busy that you just don't want to be here to be honest.

**Yeah, it's too crowded to enjoy the space.**

A3 Yeah, yeah.

D1 Apparently volunteers now have t-shirts to do volunteering across the, because one day last August we went out for the morning litter picking, I left the Visitor Centre just with four empty bags, I came back with a shopping trolley of six full bags and three times on the way back people were sarcastic saying Tesco's is the other way and I had to explain to them that that was the amount of litter.

**That you'd picked up.**

D1 That I'd picked up in three hours and there were six other people out doing exactly the same thing, so as far as I'm concerned you could put a barrier across the front, lock it and keep the people out.

[laughter]

D2 I would say that was after a really, really heavy weekend with only one person on duty covering two parks but.

**Now to keep everything on time, when we've talked about the disbenefits nobody here has at all mentioned mosquitoes, biting insects, so just as a kind of quick sort of scoot around, I'm going to start with REMOVED.**

M3 Well can I give you my perspective because obviously I'm ringing at Marston, ringing, targeting swallows that are coming in to roost or feeding in the evening and trying to trap them into my nest and I've come, remember that last year was really peculiar in that there were very, very few mosquitoes, because normally you'd sit of an evening and of course it's getting dark and we catch them right at the point of dusk, you know, and what happens, mosquitoes pile out and it's, I believe is it the female mosquitoes that are biting ones?

M2 Yeah, yeah.

M3 Apparently, some strange but anyway, but last year there was not a problem, you know, and actually equally there were hardly any swallows, so caught one swallow last year of, only tried about three or four times because there weren't any more birds to be seen, previous years we've caught a number of hundred, I can't remember the exact numbers we caught.

**So it's a massive, massive decline.**

M3 But including like a one, at least one that I've caught more than, more than two hundred, you know, of a, and at the same time, you know, you're sat there and we're covered in, you know, protective clothing and, erm, anti-mosquito, you know, liquid, whatever it might be and, you know, and there's been a lot of mosquitoes but that's literally by the edge of the reed bad at dusk and I think when you're away from the reed bed, when you're, and during the day it's not a problem, you know, yeah, they're there but they're confined to that sort of typical area, erm, and, and that, and that particular time of day, so I think for the general public walking around the country park is, is not, I don't they're going to, I don't think they're typically going to be affected by them.

**Yeah. And in your organisation when you're, with other ringers, you don't have a discussion about oh do it but I'm going to get covered in bites and stuff, so mosquitoes are part and parcel of what you do I guess?**

M3 Well, you know, it's, yeah, exactly, yeah.

P1 It's part of being a macho ringer.

M3 That's it, you know, just suck here, you know, take.

**Okay, take it all.**

M3 Yeah, so.

**And REMOVED would you say that's the same given that?**

PC Yeah, but I've got a slightly different take which I think we've discussed because a number of years ago at a wetland site on the Beds Herts border, not one of these two, we actually did a research project for the Government looking at house martins, taking blood samples from them and we were looking for West Nile virus which is obviously transmitted by mosquitoes, we did actually find it.

A2 Yeah.

P1 So I, I've got a slightly different view on mosquitoes and global warming because I see a massive problem.

A2 It's massive.

P1 With, basically as a vector for transmission of West Nile virus which currently doesn't really exist so, so the risk to the human population isn't great but if you go to Florida, you go to the, you know, south southern states of America it is an issue and they have, you know, in, in the low tens but they have fatalities every year from West Nile virus being transmitted from wild bird populations via mosquitoes into humans.

**So you think that's something that because there would be an issue for the wetlands over here?**

PC The Government, the Government thought it was going to be an issue, this is now, I can't remember exactly when we started it, we did it over three years and it was probably around about fifteen, fourteen, fifteen years ago that it started and the end result was yes it's here but the vector to transmit it to humans isn't, so the virus was in the population but essentially you had the same, you know, populations coming up from, from Africa bringing it with them, erm, and the Government, you know, there was, there was concern at the Government level. I think I've still got that same level of concern, particularly having been involved in that, that there's West Nile virus and there's other things which, which can be, erm, you know, there can be a reservoir within the wildlife populations of different species which if things like, erm, mosquitoes start to increase then there is the risk of transmission over to humans.

**Yeah, yeah.**

M3 I mean I've been out, I went out once with the Harris County mosquito control division in Houston.

P1 Okay.

M3 And they use, they catch birds to ring them and they take blood samples from them. In order to identify where the hotspots are for West Nile and then they spray. Because basically Houston is a massive city in a bog. So they can’t spray everything. They work out where the hotspots are and they spray selectively.

P1 It’s only been researched in targeted research projects, at least as far as the UK.

**So I’ve enough time to capture all of these wonderful perspectives, REMOVED, when you are round and about, accessing the wetlands, you know do you think oh I better get some cover on…**

D1 I usually do cover up because I do react badly, with massive lumps, to mosquitoes. But I concur with Mark last year there were very few bites compared with previous years, and around the Finger Lakes is a hotspot and that is usually where its bad for mosquitoes and I usually spend a lot of my early mornings around there. Normally I get bitten quite a bit, but last year…

A2 Are you sure they’re mosquitoes biting you, not biting midges?

D1 Yeah, no,no, I don’t react to midge bites…

A2 Mosquitoes get blamed for a lot of things that they’re not responsible for..

D1 They can give you far worse bites as well!

**So actually, being bitten is not something that would deter you from accessing the wetlands?**

D1 No, no. It’s just part and parcel…

Yeah, yeah, you just accept it as part of the wetlands..

**Is that the same for you REMOVED**

A3 Give that I’m someone who is out on the lake in the summer wearing as little as possible….(group laugh)

**I’ll hold that thought in my mind!**

A3 I haven’t for the last couple of years…

B1 Can we count that as a disbenefit? (group laughter)

A3 Worse is the horseflies that we get because of the goose dropping

**Right right, because you’re on the lakeshore then …**

A3 Especially on this beach

D2 Horseflies hurt when they bite don’t they…

**Would you agree with that**

B1 To be honest, I can’t remember the last time I was bitten by a mosquito.. I’m not sure if that’s a good thing or a bad thing. I don’t see them as a problem. But horseflies are worse…I’ve actually had a few instructors go off sick because of horsefly bites. Foot swelling up twice the size or anything, or a half again.

**And REMOVED would you say…**

T1 yeah, I’ve got it next on my list. On our evening walks we are constantly – the gnats just follow us around. I don’t think we are bothered by mosquitoes, it’s just gnats. Sometimes they get in your mouth, sometime you get a mouth full of them. But you can’t get rid of them, they come with you, don’t they.

REMOVED for you, mosquitoes?

D2 I get bitten now and again of course. I work in place, I don’t normally bother putting anything o during the day. If I’m doing a bat walk in the evening I’ll tend to wear a repellent as I’m more to be stood around, we’re by the water most of the time. It’s just part and parcel – you know when you’re more likely to get bitten. So you just put more stuff on at that point.

A1 They hate me! I could sit with a vest, shorts and top on and I’ll never get…(group laughter) so personally, for me, it’s not a worry. I’ve not had many comments from volunteers or visitors, you might get the odd volunteer that would join in with a particular task as they think they’re more likely to get bitten but as you pointed out, it probably isn’t mozzies it’s some other bitey thing, and as far as annoyances its people are more likely to moan about wasps at the café than anything else so…

**The old wasps and scones…**

A1 Indeed. From a mosquito point of view I’m generally pleased to see them around….it’s good for the wildlife…

M1 I don’t think they’re an issue

**You’ve not had any of your guides saying I’m not going back, I’ve been bitten…**

M1 No. We always carry first aid kits and generally it’s fine. It’s slips and falls rather than bites.

**And presumably you also go out at different times of the evening**

M1 Well, generally 5.30 to 8.30 so..

**That’s prime mosquito time though generally I guess…it’s good news it’s not a problem, and REMOVED, you?**

M2 No

**Mosquito clear, good. And you REMOVED**?

A3 Well, recording mosquitoes and other fliers. We’ve certainly had fewer recorded cases of mosquitoes in recent years. And I’m not sure what species we’ve got around here, but far more people are bitten by Simulium flies than by mosquitoes. They are very painful and very tiny. You often won’t notice them until you’ve been bitten. The ones that fly around you are chirranees and they don’t bite at all. Non biting midges are very common and we’re certainly seen a decline in the population of those. In terms of mosquitoes, we’ve seen fewer of those in recent years.

**Well I know it’s almost eight o’clock and I don’t want to take up any more of your time, so thank you for all of your perspectives….(more thanks and wrapping up)….**

END OF INTERVIEW