

[Dr Judy Webb](#), Oxford ecologist and founder member of the [New Marston Wildlife Group](#) was invited by the [Oxford Civic Society](#) to give a talk on

The Wildlife of the Lye Valley and Hogley bog: part of Oxford's Rich Natural Heritage



*Tim Treacher of the Oxford Civic Society introducing Dr Judy Webb
Magdalen College Auditorium, 16 January 2013*

Using slides showing the many species supported by these rare alkaline wetlands, which date back thousands of years, Judy explained why these areas are so important and how future development in Headington seriously threatens this important natural heritage within the city.

To see Judy's submissions to Oxford City Council with regard to planning matters, click [here](#).

[Slideshow](#) of photos taken during Judy's talk.

Some of the main points made by Judy Webb during her talk:

The [Lye Valley](#) (a 4.5 hectare site east of the Churchill Hospital, managed by Oxford City Council) is fed by 'flushes' of water that have been running deep below the surface for thousands of years - so deep, that they have not been affected by agricultural chemicals. They are high in calcium because of the geology of the land. The calcium binds with nutrients in the water and prevents them being taken up by plants. This lack of nutrients makes it easier for wild flowers to grow, as they thrive in poor soil, which stunts the growth of grass. Therefore, if the ground becomes contaminated by nutrients getting into springs that run into the fens or by nitrous oxide (car exhaust) pollution from the air, the grass will benefit and the wildflowers will suffer.

Judy is becoming increasingly concerned about the effects of intensive development of the land surrounding the fens. Continuing building and paving over of gardens for parking has dramatically reduced the area of green land through which rainwater can flow to supply the underground aquifer that is needed to keep the peat sufficiently wet for the plants to survive. This is especially worrying given the predicted climate change, which will result in the South East getting far less rain over the course of the year. Development at the Churchill Hospital site is having a particularly damaging effect on the fens.

Furthermore, road run-off water is routed into the Lye Brook and Boundary Brook and gushing of water after heavy rain is causing serious damage to the stream banks. (Further information on this can be found under 'Threats to the site' in Judy's article for [The Weasel](#), the Newsletter of the Oxford Conservation Volunteers.)

As the [Lye Valley fens](#) provide rare and important habitats for a large number of species, Judy argued that there was a strong case for considering such areas as important a part of our 'heritage' as any aspect of the built environment and equally worthy of preservation. She praised the help given by Oxford City Council in 1985 with pulling out invasive scrub in the Lye Valley North and South Fens. Without this help the fens would have looked far different today, as illustrated by Judy's slide showing the difference between unmanaged and managed areas of fen 'Fen Management Today' - slide 10 on the [slideshow of photos taken during Judy's talk](#).

Threats to the Lye Valley wildlife in 2013 - Judy listed the following:

- Drying-out of fens due to erosion and housing development starving springs
- Insufficient cutting and raking to simulate grazing - hence scrub and tree invasion
- Nutrient enrichment of water to springs or nutrient enrichment by nitrous oxide from air (car exhaust) - pollution of water in brooks
- Isolation and breaking of continuity of wildlife corridors
- Arson (vegetation set alight when long and dry)
- Climate change
- Inflexibility - wildlife dependent on the springs that run through the Lye Valley cannot be moved to an alternative site.