

# **Blame it on the Dutch!**

***Eddie Claessens 2001***

Let me introduce myself first. My name is Eddie Claessens, I study English at *Fontys Schools of Higher Education*, at Sittard, The Netherlands. Part of my graduation is working in an English speaking country for six weeks. The reason for me being here is basically improving my English, in the respect of pronunciation, fluency, and to learn more about the culture in the country of my choice.

When I read reports from students who went to Wheatfen Broad and looked at the pictures they had taken, the beauty of this reserve immediately astonished me. A visit to the Wheatfen-website was a worth one, because there were even more photographs, which made the decision to go to Wheatfen even easier!

When I visited Wheatfen the first time, there was water everywhere! Some of the paths were flooded and did not have a clue where the dikes or the paths were. After six weeks of having had dry feet, I was officially initiated when I sunk in the dike while brushcutting!

The only thing that struck me, was the fact that this heavy rainfall occurred from the moment I arrived! This and the fact that Norwich City Football Club did not win the matches I attended, was very peculiar! Even more when they won the match I did not attend! David and I agreed that I would take the blame for the floods and rainfall, and Roy Baker blamed me for the lost matches. Therefore: 'Blame it on the Dutch'!

The work was sometimes hard, but always nice. The main part of my job was to clear the dikes by cutting the vegetation that grows on the edge. These plants grow into the water and the dikes would get completely clogged up if we would not clear them. You can compare the dikes with our arteries, if they get clogged up, you really need to clear them!

Another job we started was mowing Middle Marsh. You will probably know this part of Wheatfen and the work that is done on that spot, but while mowing the Marsh, something exiting happened. The very famous David Bellamy paid Wheatfen a visit! He even brought a BBC camera-crew with him. And as if that was not enough, the EDP had sent journalists out to write about this event! And that all happened during my visit. Lucky me!

Together with David and Kate, I helped making a corduroy path with logs towards the river Yare. We provided an easier way to get a nice view of the river, which is very satisfying!

When the weather was wet and working was difficult in these circumstances, we had to think of other activities. One of them was repairing rakes and on other occasions, David and I went to the lovely Wheatfen Cottage and glanced through the many magnificent books, which are collected by Ted and Phyllis Ellis.

Another marvellous event was organised during my stay. It was Volunteer Day, on the 9th December. Together with Roger and George, who are two volunteers, I contributed to the building of a wooden path towards the jetty at Wheatfen Broad. This job was completely different from the other things I did, but I enjoyed it very much. I think we can look back at a very nice and productive morning! The afternoon very pleasant as well. Several volunteers had organised a wonderful lunch, with warm and cold dishes, and many delicious other things to eat. After that, David had organised 'David's Nature Quiz' and 'Who is it?' which I truly enjoyed. The only minor thing was, that everything was in English, and the fact that I am Dutch did not make life easier that day! I was not a great help with the quizzes! Blame it on the Dutch!

But probably the nicest thing of working at Wheatfen was, that David has taught me a lot about the course of nature, about conservation work, about animals and many other things. Also the people I met and the conversations we have had, made my visit worthwhile. During these six weeks, I have had many interesting conversations with both David and the people who work during the week as well, Jeremy, Matt, Kate and David Seddon. I also enjoyed 'snail hunting', together with Roy Baker and Derek.

Wheatfen can change dramatically in one week. On Monday, it could be dry and sunny, with a low

tide. On Tuesday, the tide could be very high, and paths could be flooded. If you would take a walk through the area, from the fen to the wood, you could notice thousands of differences in plants, insects, fungi, (new!) mosses, etc. This is what struck me most. I think it is a peculiar area, which entails great beauty.

By means of this article I tried to give an impression of my work at Wheatfen and the fun I have had. David and I, together with several other people who help on a regular basis, did many things during these six weeks. To put every single job in writing is practically impossible and would take too much space in this leaflet! But I sincerely hope that I inspired you to visit Wheatfen if you haven't, and to be amazed by the natural beauty of this small, but great place!