

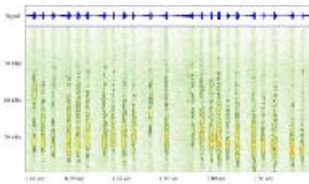
# WATERCRESS

## Autumn 2008 Issue 77

### BATS

Bats are traditionally mysterious creatures. Only out on the wing after dark, they are rarely seen or appreciated by most people. There are 16 species that live and breed in the UK, ranging from 'widespread and common' to 'restricted and rare'. All are protected in law and it is an offence to handle or disturb a wild bat unless specially licensed to do so.

Bats have been noted flying low around the WWA Reserve on many occasions, mainly by local residents who have the opportunity to view the site after dusk from the comfort of their own gardens, but identification has always been a matter of conjecture based on flight patterns, habitat and time of appearance



Earlier this year the WWA purchased a purpose made bat detector, which, together with special analysis computer software, has made positive identification a possibility. Bats locate their insect prey and obstacles to flight in the dark by

recognising returning echoes from their ultra high frequency sonic calls (inaudible to the human ear). The bat detector enables recording and analysis of these individual echolocation calls. Using a handheld recording device and a home computer an audio spectrum is generated as a colourful chart, and information about call frequencies and repetition rates can be easily produced. Reading this information in conjunction with other observed details has enabled identification of two species so far: Daubenton's and Pipistrelle. The Daubenton's bat favours foraging low across the Mere about one hour after dusk, while the Pipistrelle seems to prefer habitat edges, particularly flying along the Alban Way footpath just after sunset.

Pictures of Daubenton's and Pipistrelles are taken from the FSC publication 'Guide to British Bats'



These are both common species throughout the country - and at this time of year, while still feeding and building up fat reserves for the winter, are actively looking for hibernation sites.

One intention of the WWA is to identify possible sites so that the bat population can be protected and encouraged. If anyone has seen any bat activity in their homes or gardens in the area please let the Association know (email via

the website). As yet their roosts or hibernation sites are unknown; if we do find anything it will however remain a closely guarded secret!

This article was submitted by Steve (WWA Chairman and generally batty person!!)  
Only teasing, Steve.....

The Nature Day was a great success with various activities taking place around the Reserve. Kathryn Holt entertained the children with a storytelling session followed by a craft workshop where the children had a go at making felt dragonflies. Kathryn's daughter and friends 'tattooed' nearly everyone with insect motifs. The 'Splat-a-rat' always goes down well with the young and old, along with what is now becoming an established event - the WWA Duck Race on the Ver! There are some lovely pictures on the WWA sightings blog of the event - but for those who don't have a computer.....here is a snapshot of the day's events.

### Kathryn's craft workshop

The pond dipping proved to be very popular and turned up an unexpected mixture of aquatic creatures discovered (see below



for list). This activity was expertly supervised by Sam and Penny Carr who appeared to have as much fun, if not more, as the kids!



Tadpoles - quite big ones, some with legs  
Small diving beetles - pure black - max 1cm long  
Water louse  
Caddisfly larvae - wrapped in debris, with just head and legs poking out of the front  
Some sort of nymphs  
Three spined sticklebacks, including pregnant males and very showy red bellied males  
A baby newt - found the next day during clear up  
Small shrimps



Duck race stragglers

Oops...missed

A Barbeque followed the day's events - luckily this time it didn't rain, as it had done in the two previous years - and everyone relaxed over a glass of wine or two.....

## Reserve Manager's Report

Sometimes it feels as if little has happened on the Reserve, but, refreshing my memory from my diary I was surprised by the amount of work that has been carried out since the last newsletter.

Our summer event was a great success after all the preparation and planning..

A Red-eared terrapin was 'rescued' from the boggy area and re-housed with me until the RSPCA came and collected the abandoned creature. Although an interesting addition to our wildlife list, I felt it not appropriate for it to stay as apparently they can damage our native Moorhens nests and eat their chicks.



Our two bird feeding stations now have anti-squirrel protection - they're just upturned buckets - but are proving to be successful so far.

The main paths are now cut regularly with the ride-on mower but the rougher areas still need the use of a hand mower, especially inside the Pyghtle hedge (which needs regular cutting until it is fully established). This takes two to three hours every two weeks, during the main growing period

At our regular work parties, great progress has been made on the Butterfly Meadow, with new paths being created and topped with bark chippings. Some of the fencing at the entrance has been repaired, and large swathes of brambles have been cut back around the Reserve, especially near the lovely Spindles, as they were beginning to encroach too far onto that area. The channel that runs from the Ver through to the outlet under the Alban Way has been cleared of vegetation to give the impression of a stream running through the boggy area.



Blackberries have been picked to make jam to sell at our annual Wassail and the surplus is left for the wildlife. Apples are frozen in readiness to make pies, tarts, etc also for the Wassail. The Editor likes to make Quince jelly for the event but was most upset to find that all the fruit had been picked by person/persons unknown!

Some trays of apples have been stored and will then be put out in small batches to feed the wildlife throughout the winter months. This year any surplus is going to St. Peters School for their cookery project. Enjoy!

We are also starting a weekly 'Green Team' work party which is in addition to the monthly work parties. This will take place every Wednesday from November to March (weather permitting) and start around 11am (check out the new notice board on the bird hide for details or contact the Reserve Manager). Winter is the time when most of the tree/shrub/cutting back work needs doing – and many hands make light work! Our stalwart volunteer Jack Hill has been taking as much green waste as possible away in his trailer to the Waterdale recycling site at Garston. Large branches are sawn up and added to the various log pile habitats in the Pyghtle. Some of the waste is discreetly piled up in heaps as habitat piles for slow worms, grass snakes, frogs, etc. But it is not possible to compost everything and so the remainder is burnt. The sheer volume of this remaining material (mostly woody stems and brash) would mean Jack having to make dozens of trips every week to the recycling facility (apart from the added problem that the recycling facility manager will only accept a certain amount before he thinks it is 'commercial' waste and inform us we need to hire skips. The WWA could hire skips to take the waste away to a landfill site, but paying £200 a time would soon bankrupt the Association and is not a sensible option for us. Catch 22 it seems! It is for this reason that the Association has to have these occasional bonfires to deal with this waste. We always have our bonfires during the week when people are at work and try and keep the nuisance to a minimum – but things don't always go to plan and I apologise for any problems this may have caused to local residents. We will endeavour to inform people in advance of any bonfires.



With the leaves now falling, the two leaf bins are filling up and next year the leaves will have turned into mulch that can be used on the Butterfly Meadow. Some of the signage around the Reserve has been updated and replaced. Unfortunately the signs don't last long as the sun fades them quite quickly.

Autumn is the time to give the bird boxes a good clean out and to record which have been used this year.

These activities are just a sample of what happens at this time of year. There is, in addition, the regular grass cutting, the manning of outside events, newsletter writing and organisation of our own fund-raising events.

This is why our volunteers are so important to the running of the Association and they are all very much appreciated, however they help – so I personally would like to say 'Thank You' to you all and hope you get as much pleasure out of the Reserve as I do.

**Howard Artiss**  
Reserve Manager

## WILDLIFE

There have been reports of a pair of Muntjac deer in and around the Reserve. A single Muntjac was seen under the Pyghtle bird feeder recently – followed shortly by a fox that appeared to be scavenging for dropped seeds.

## BIRDS

A Little Grebe has returned (we assume it is the same one that arrives each autumn but that may be wishful/wistful thinking!) and a Kingfisher is a regular visitor. There is also a resident Sparrowhawk that swoops past the bird feeders in hope of a ready meal. Herons are nearly always around – usually just the one, but occasionally two appear, although they keep their distance from each other. Moorhens bred successfully again this year and there are at least half-a-dozen youngsters lurking in the reeds. Earlier in the year we had reports of a single young Nuthatch feeding on the peanut feeder. Although Nuthatches are a common bird, they have only rarely been seen on the WWA Reserve. WWA members Ken Thornton and Keith Chapman managed to obtain photos for the Association and thanks go to them both.

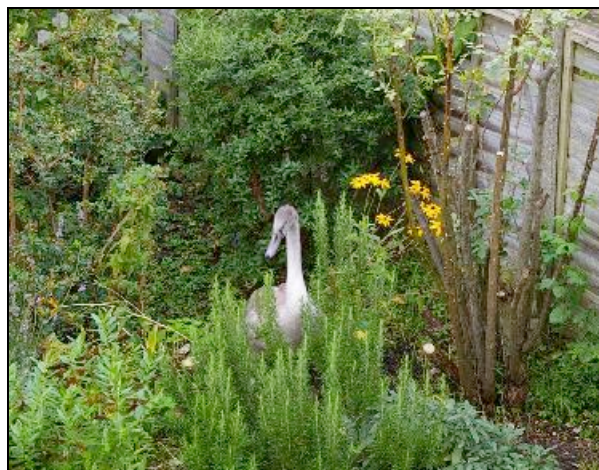


There is the only one species of Nuthatch in the UK. Unlike Woodpeckers and Treecreepers, they descend tree trunks headfirst. They can live for up to 11 years - in woodland, parks and gardens, and sometimes visit bird tables. They feed on insects, as well as nuts and seeds, which they hammer into trees and split open with their sharp beak. Nuthatches are agile birds that spend the majority of their time in the trees. They are able to run headfirst down trunks as well as upwards, picking insects from the bark. They are a resident species in the UK, nesting in holes in trees, often plastering up the hole with mud if it is too large. They lay 6-9 eggs, which are incubated for 14-15 days. The chicks fledge after 23-25 days. Nuthatches have a loud ringing 'tuit, tuit, tuit-tuit' call, as well as a loud rattling 'pee, pee, pee' trill.

## SWANS



It's amazing – the Reserve Manager and Editor go away on holiday for three weeks and miss all the action. Apparently five swans suddenly appeared (parents with three fairly mature cygnets) over a period of days in September. By the time the holidaymakers returned only two cygnets remained and they left within a couple of days. Sam Carr has captured a lovely moment (above) of an adult swan 'snoozing'. One cygnet seems to have 'crash-landed' into one of the gardens in Riverside Road and was rescued by the RSPCA and re-united with its family back onto the Mere. The rather surprised resident took this rather amusing photo of a rather bemused cygnet.



*"I thought you might like to see this picture of one of the young swans which was discovered in the garden of 208 early last Thursday morning. Jean and I called the RSPCA and they came in the afternoon to rescue it and return it to the water. The officer said that it would not have been able to get out by itself as it did not have enough space to run and take off. (I wonder how it got there?!) It hissed the whole time it was being rescued but was quickly hooked around the neck and stuffed into a bag! It was lovely to see it reunited with its siblings".*

Helen

## DRAGONFLIES

It has been a good year for dragonflies and damselflies and Keith Chapman managed to take this excellent photo for us. We think it is a Southern Hawker – but please let us know if we are wrong – we are only beginners on identification of these lovely creatures and are learning all the time. We will eventually (?) get around to digging out the new pond in the Pyghtle – hopefully this winter - to create even better habitat for damselflies and dragonflies on the Reserve. One of the main reasons for digging this pond some distance from the main lake is that it is away from the Mallards and other predators that can eat the dragonfly larvae. Dragonflies are a symbol of a healthy environment and by managing habitat to conserve them, many other organisms are also protected.



Dragonflies are among the most ancient of living creatures. From fossil records we know that these amazing insects were flying some 300 million years ago, before even dinosaurs roamed the earth. Over the centuries an extensive folklore has seen dragonflies revered in some cultures as symbols of strength, regeneration and pure water, and feared in others as shamanistic creatures with supernatural powers. However you might look upon them, it is true that they are a reliable indicator of good water quality, and recent research finds they can be useful for the biological control of mosquitoes. They're also fascinating, beautiful and quite harmless - they have no sting and will not attack or bite.

## Dates for your diary

### WASSAIL 2009

The provisional date for the WWA Annual Wassail is Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Events should begin at 2.30pm with a display of dancing from the Wicket Brood Morris (if we can persuade them to come along again!). The gathered crowd then sings to the trees, makes lots of noise to drive out bad spirits and has a generally silly time. Apple-based snacks (made by WWA members and local residents) and hot spiced apple juice (from the St. Albans Farmers' Market) are available in exchange for a donation to our funds. So put this date in your diary – there is nothing better to cheer yourself up on a winter afternoon than having a good old sing-song in the fresh air! There will be confirmation and more details of this event in the January newsletter. If anyone is willing to help with this event, especially the catering, please contact the Editor.

**THE DATE: SUNDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2009**

**THE PLACE: WATERCRESS WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION ORCHARD**

**THE TIME: 2.30PM PROMPTLY**

#### Working parties

##### Sunday 30 November

Work on Mediaeval Garden and Pioneer Woodland to clear nettles and brambles

##### Sunday 28 December

Come and enjoy some fresh air and exercise after all the excesses of Xmas, perhaps followed with a glass of mulled wine and a mince pie??

##### Sunday 25 January 2009

It would be good to make a start on the pond in the Pyghtle – this will involve some heavy digging so if anyone wants an alternative to going to the gym – come along and flex those muscles!

Work parties start at 11am and last around two hours. Tools and gloves are provided along with light refreshments. Everyone is welcome.

#### The Green Team

As mentioned earlier, there will be additional work parties over the winter on Wednesdays (starting from the 12<sup>th</sup>. November) if the weather is reasonable. These will begin at 11am and finish around mid- afternoon, although any help, even for a couple of hours, will be appreciated. Much of this work will be trimming back trees that are outgrowing their situation. It is amazing how large some of the saplings that were planted in 1992 have grown!

To check whether the work party is on, or to find out more, either see the notice board on the bird hide or contact Howard Artiss, the Reserve Manager.

#### Bird hide code

The bird hide code is XXXXX.

It has been reported that occasionally the lock mechanism doesn't always engage properly, so if you use the hide, could you be kind enough to check that the door is secure after you leave. Many thanks

#### Grant application

The WWA has applied to the Gannett foundation (through the St. Albans and Harpenden Review newspaper) for funding towards new tools, including a replacement Hayterette lawnmower (our original is now 18 years old and fading fast), some large 'farm' wheelbarrows, assorted loppers, secateurs and rakes. The amount requested is nearly £1500 so we are hoping we are successful in our bid, as the tools are needed to continue the high standard of maintenance that we attain around the Reserve at present.

Chairman:  
Steve XXXX

Reserve Manager and Membership Secretary:  
Howard XXXX

Editor:  
Sheila XXXX

Secretary:  
Pat XXXX

Treasurer:  
Mandy XXXX

Website:  
Alison XXXX

Website Technical Support:  
Sam XXXX

Social Secretary:  
Penny XXXX

Committee Member:  
Jack XXXX

Archivists:  
Derryn XXXX  
Bud XXXX

The Association Chairman can also be contacted via the website

## WATER WHEELERS

Graham Spencer and Yvonne McCarthy just before their successful London to Oxford Bike ride earlier in the year – a distance of around 60 miles. Well done to you both. Keep on pedalling.....



[www.watercress-net.org](http://www.watercress-net.org)