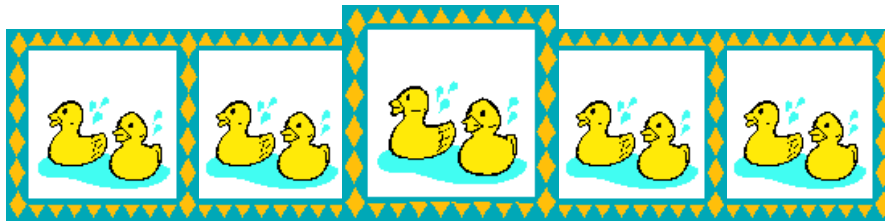


WATERCRESS

Summer 2008 Issue 76



WWA NATURE DAY Saturday 28th June 3pm onwards

Come along and join us down at the Reserve and help celebrate National Insect Week. Starting at 3pm, there will be activities for children including mini-beast hunts and pond dipping. You can be temporarily “tattooed” with either an insect or butterfly motif and then have a go to “Splat-the-Rat”.

Kathryn Holt will be running a ‘Discover Dragonflies’ workshop with stories, and craftwork – making dragonflies with materials found around the Reserve. For the younger children there will be mini-beast identification charts to colour in.

At around 4pm our annual duck race will take place on the River Ver, and following the prizegiving, the Reserve BBQ will become available for you to cook on (please bring your own food and drinks – water is provided).



Going on into the evening (regardless of the weather as we will put up a waterproof awning) we invite adult members to join us around the camp fire to get to know other members of the Reserve. As it gets dusk, we’ll also be watching for bats using our new bat detector and there’ll be a further opportunity to have a go at “Splat-the Rat”!

The BBQ will remain available for cooking on, so please feel free to bring food and drink with you. There is not much seating available so bring a rug or picnic chair if you want extra comfort. Charcoal, paper plates, plastic cutlery, serviettes and drinking water will be provided.

There will be a small charge for these activities as we need to cover our costs and, hopefully, boost our funds a little! We are not charging an entrance fee but there will be a donation box instead so please be generous – and have a great time, of course!

It may be a good idea to arrive promptly at 3pm if you want to fit in every activity!

General Safety Guidelines

Clothing and footwear:

Pond dipping can be messy, so make sure your children are suitably attired for the task and the weather. It is recommended to wear old clothes and either trainers or wellies. Wear sun hats and cream if sunny, or waterproofs if wet. Don’t forget we have lots of stinging nettles if you are joining in the ‘bug hunt’- so cover those arms and legs with long sleeves and trousers.

Water hazards:

Don’t fall in! Unlike the Editor who did just that recently – but that’s another story! Children should kneel down at the edge to keep their balance when dipping, and then move 2 metres away to look at what they’ve found. There must be no running or standing near the edges of the bridges.

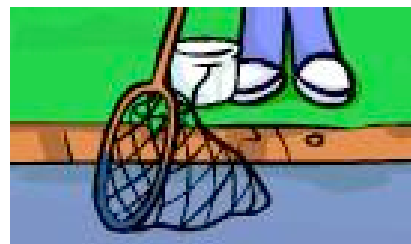
Pond water can carry Weil’s disease but this is not a problem if hands are kept away from mouths, eyes and noses until they have been washed when the event is finished.

Make sure any cuts are covered with waterproof plasters if your children are taking part in any of the water activities and make sure they wash their hands before eating or drinking. There will be fresh water and antiseptic hand gel/wipes available. It may be an idea to bring along your own hand towel.

Parents are responsible for their child’s general safety. Although the committee and helpers are there to oversee events, it is not possible to keep an eye on everyone at all times!

The animals we find:

It is not just the children that need looking after. The animals we will catch are very small and delicate, so we must handle them with care and not pick them up with our fingers - and return them safely to where they were found.



But

basically, let common sense prevail!

Reserve Manager's Report

As you may have read in recent newsletters, much of the work during the last few months has centred on the Butterfly Meadow. Laurie and Margaret continue with their marvellous efforts to improve and extend this part of the Reserve and have just purchased, collected and planted over 400 plants in the last two weeks! This is a magnificent effort which is greatly appreciated by the WWA committee. Thanks are also due to all those volunteers who spent hours preparing the area in the pouring rain! Plants purchased and planted were: Nicotiana, Golden Rod, Birds Foot Trefoil, Greater and Lesser Knapweed, Red Campion, Cone Flower, Dahlia, Tree Stock, Knautica, Sweet Rocket, Viper's Bugloss, Hemp Agrimony, Onethera, Sweet William, Marjoram, Devil's Bit Scabious and Sedum.



The newly planted section of Butterfly Meadow

I was away on holiday when Laurie and Margaret did all this work but apparently they brought Alan Downie and his helper, Malcolm, to see how things were progressing – and they were very impressed with the results so far. Alan did say that it has not been a good year for butterfly sightings and not to get too despondent if we don't have as many 'visitors' as we hope for this summer.

The next stage (yes, there's more) is to try and clear the adjacent area, which is mostly brambles at present, and create a specialised grasses section – as grasses are as important in a good Butterfly Meadow as the nectar plants.

Pictured right is a Speckled Wood butterfly, photographed by committee member Sam Carr. This butterfly is found throughout the British Isles, especially in southern England, Wales and Ireland. Its favoured habitat is shady woodlands and rides, verges, lanes and hedges. This brown woodland butterfly does not feed from flowers but can instead be seen feeding on the honeydew (a sticky sugary substance) secreted by aphids as they feed on plant juices. The caterpillars feed on various coarse grasses (*Agropyron repens*, *Dactylis glomerata* and *Poa annua*).



Some male butterflies claim particular areas and defend them from rival butterflies. Speckled Woods choose areas where the sunlight breaks through the trees. They patrol the patch and investigate every insect in the neighbourhood. They are on the look out for females to mate with or male intruders who they attack and chase away. You might see them spiralling up into the tree-tops, clashing wings with each other in battle. The butterfly that claimed the territory first usually wins.

Bird hide code



The bird hide code is XXXX.

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.

**Butterfly meadow – summer 2008.
What a difference a year a year makes!**



Other Reserve news

There is surprisingly little waterfowl activity around the Reserve at the moment. There are three moorhen chicks that have survived, but all the ducklings have disappeared – including one brood of 13 (unlucky for some!) and both attempts by our pair of Coots to rear any young have so far failed. This may be due to the presence of our resident Heron who maybe eats the chicks as tasty snacks.

The entrance area (Mediaeval Garden) is looking particularly splendid this year. Both the new Medlar and Quince trees are doing well and should bear fruit this year. There is a fine display of Bloody Cranesbill and Meadow Cranesbill which are gradually spreading year by year. A few Foxgloves have been introduced and we hope that they will increase by themselves next year.

In other parts of the Reserve, flowers that are showing well include Hedge Woundwort, Green Alkanet, Oxeye Daises, Comfrey and some remaining Red Campion.

The hedges around the Pyghtle are thriving and attracting moths and other insects which fly out when you brush past.

**Howard Artiss
Reserve Manager**

Can you guess what has caused such extensive damage to our beautiful (and only) Hornbeam tree which is located in the Sanctuary?



We were puzzled for a while, but have done some research and it appears it is the work of those (love'em or hate'em) pesky little aliens – the Grey Squirrel. This Hornbeam was planted on our official opening day in 1992 when David Bellamy had a tree planting race with the Mayor of St. Albans so it is rather sad to see this tree in such a sorry state.

The following article is taken from the Chilterns Woodlands Project (2003) and explains the seriousness of the problem.

The last couple of years have seen a lot of damage by grey squirrels stripping the bark from young trees, many of which were planted after the 1990 storms and have now reached a particularly vulnerable stage. The impact of grey squirrels on the Chiltern woods means that is perhaps the most threatened area of woodland in the country as grey squirrels will survive in beech / oak woods.

It has been known for some time that beech, sycamore and maples are favourite trees for the squirrels to strip bark from, and other locally native species including oak, ash and wild cherry have been planted as they were considered a lower risk.

Evidence from a number of woods is that they too have been damaged. This can affect survival, reducing choice at the thinning stages, but perhaps the biggest impact is on the quality of trees as the majority suffer some damage, frequently to the leading shoot so that side shoots then develop into the leader.

Most native broadleaved trees (and also some conifers) suffer bark damage. Hornbeam, birch, goat willow, sweet chestnut and hazel are other trees that are affected.

Grey squirrel damage can also be severe in the canopy of mature beech trees. It is believed this is the most common reason for branches to snap from the canopy and this has three impacts. Firstly there is the safety risk of branches dropping on to paths. Second there is the appearance of the trees where the crown suffers repeated breakages of branches and thirdly there is likely to be an impact on seed production from damaged canopies reducing the chance of natural regeneration occurring in sufficient quantity. There is also growing concern that the high population density of grey squirrels is having an impact on the survival of some woodland birds, as the squirrels may take eggs and nestlings, they may also be competing with dormice for food. Grey squirrels have already driven out the red squirrel from most of England and are spreading a virus to the reds that still survive in other parts of the UK.

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On a lighter note, it appears that there will be some other 'alien' species arriving on the Reserve very soon! See if you can spot them on our 'Nature Day'



And referring again to our 'Nature Day' the committee would like to ask if there are any members who would like to help with the activities, especially if they have any experience of pond dipping or mini-beast hunts. Just contact the Reserve Manager if you'd like to give a hand.

An urgent note to our regular working party members.

If you are able to help anytime on Saturday 28th could you please contact Howard or Sheila as we were not at the last working party to ask you in person. We shall be putting up the awning on Friday evening and finishing setting up on Saturday morning. Any assistance, either before or during the event would be hugely appreciated. We shall be dismantling and tidying up at the regular Sunday working party the following morning. And we may even have some fun?!

Bats

The Association has now purchased a super new Bat detector (the Bat Box Duet) which our Chairman is rapidly working out how to use before our event. This is an excellent piece of equipment, and in time, the WWA will be able to help with surveying and recording bat activity in and around St. Albans. *"The Batbox Duet is a dual-mode bat detector, with both heterodyne and frequency division, designed for single-handed operation. The large LCD back-lit display is extremely accurate and easy to read at all light levels. Frequency amplitude detection allows post-recording computer analysis of sonar peak-frequencies. There is a voice commentary button for annotating recordings. The unit is extremely easy to use and comes supplied with a soft carrying case".*

So there you have it...easy!

Dates for your diary



WWA Nature Day 28th June 2008

- 3pm..... Start of event
- 3-5pm..... Ongoing childrens' activities
- 4pm Duck race
- 5pm..... Prizegiving and lighting of BBQ
- 6pm onwards..... Evening BBQ and Bat Watch



Insect photos courtesy of Sam Carr – check them out on the WWA website blog

..... Earthworks Summer Fair – Sunday 6th July from 11am until 4pm

This is just a reminder that the WWA are manning their stall at this event, so don't forget to pop along and see us, and also enjoy all the other activities that are happening. There will be food and drink stalls, craft and plant stalls, demonstrations, workshops, games and competitions. The Earthworks site is in Hixberry Lane, St. Albans.

..... Working parties

Sunday 29 June

Clearing up after the Nature Day + general maintenance

Sunday 27 July

Work on Mediaeval Garden/Shady Place to clear nettles and brambles

Sunday 31 August

General maintenance, path clearance, pond digging

Sunday 28 September

Fruit picking, hedge trimming, pond digging

Weeding the new Butterfly Meadow and grass cutting are regular ongoing tasks. Any volunteers?

Tea, coffee or juice (and **cake** if you're really good!) are provided along with all tools and gloves. Work parties start at 11am and all are welcome.



www.watercress-net.org
Registered Charity 1011944

WATERWHEELERS UPDATE

Despite a late start to this year's tandeming (we only surfaced from our winter hibernation mode in mid-April) things soon got into full swing. Committee members Pat, Steve, Howard and Alison, along with Yvonne, Graham and his wife Gill, all enjoyed the St. Albans Rotary Club Charity Ride in May. The weather was so much better than last year that it was a real pleasure. Yvonne is still training regularly with her co-rider Graham as they are taking part in the London to Oxford Bike Ride on the 6th July, so if anyone would like to sponsor them just let the Editor know. Mandy, our Treasurer, completed her first London to Brighton bike ride, a route of 55 miles recently. She obviously didn't try hard enough in the London Marathon and St. Albans Half Marathon to still have so much energy!



WWA Committee 2008

Chairman: Steve XXXX

Secretary: Pat XXXX

Treasurer: Mandy XXXX

Reserve Manager and Membership Secretary: Howard XXXX

Editor: Sheila XXXX

Website: Alison XXXX

Website Technical Support: Sam XXXX

Social Secretary: Penny XXXX

Committee Member: Jack XXXX

Archivists: Derryn XXXX/Bud XXXX