



Winter Wassail

The Wassail has now become firmly established in the WWA calendar and we shall be holding it again this year on **Sunday 17th January** - starting at **2pm promptly**. Committee members have been working hard in preparation for the day, to ensure all have a great time. The Wicket Brood Morris will be popping in to liven up the day with their colourful costumes and energetic dancing - and Sandy Glover will lead the singing. Sandy has created a webpage that has the tunes of the three traditional songs that we sing so if you wish to be better prepared then go to the link below where you can hear what it is all about. Song sheets are provided on the day for everyone.

<http://tinyurl.com/WWAsongs>

There will be a stall positively groaning under the weight of all our home-made jams and jellies that volunteers have made for you to enjoy. We will be asking for a donation of at least £2 a jar (to cover costs, and make a little profit for the Association). Other refreshments will include the ubiquitous hot spiced apple and elderberry juice (£1 a large cup) obtained from the Farmers' Market, and a feast of apple-based home-made cakes, tarts and other delights. The Wassail is our main charity event of the year which brings the community together for a little light hearted fun - so why not join in, bring the kids - and **(as the exception to the normal rule)** make as much noise as possible!! This is to drive away any bad spirits and help the trees be productive. Party poppers, sticks and dustbin lids are provided. An awning is put up to shelter under, so we will go ahead whatever the weather throws at us this year.

Kathryn Holt (from Trestle Theatre) has promised to come along and entertain us with one of her stories sometime during the event.

All money raised will go towards 'The WaterWheelers' - the tandem cycling section of the WWA for the visually impaired. There will be a raffle, with a special prize donated by Aylett Nursery, so don't forget to buy your ticket on arrival.



If you wish to find out more about this old custom of Apple Wassailing there are many excellent websites on the subject. In fact, wassailing is enjoying quite a comeback in Britain - and we are proud to have been at the forefront of this revival. We believe we were the first group in Hertfordshire to start the custom - and Shenley Park followed a few years later. They are holding their event on the 9th January at 6.30pm.

Dates for your Diary

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Sunday **21st March 2010** at the Sub-Aqua Club in Cottonmill Lane. The meeting will start promptly at 11am and will follow the usual format. This means getting the serious WWA business out of the way as quickly as possible, with reports from the Officers, followed by the election of the new committee for 2010. Any nominations for persons to serve on the committee must be received no later than two weeks before the meeting and sent to the Secretary. The second half of the meeting is less formal and usually takes the form of an illustrated talk. At the time of printing this newsletter, the WWA committee has not yet finalised arrangements for a speaker...but something will crop up to make the meeting interesting.....and we will let you know more details nearer the time - either by e-mail, post or on the website.

Apples-a-plenty



As mentioned in the last newsletter, a new innovation this year has been to ask people for a donation in return for some of excess fruit from the Orchard. This proved to be very popular and we shall be repeating the venture next year. All of the Crab Apples, Quinces, Damsons and the best blackberries/apples have been turned into jams and jellies. The Bramley apples have been pureed and frozen in readiness for the Wassail. The WWA like to leave some fruit for the wildlife. Some apples are stored - to be fed in cold weather to ground feeding birds like Blackbirds and Thrushes - and some blackberries were deliberately left on the bushes.

After only a few hours over two days, all the bags of apples had been taken - and the donations amounted to nearly £80 from just two trees. An excellent result from which everyone benefits.

Lost and found

A Canon Li-on battery Pack has been handed in to the Reserve Manager so if it is yours, please contact him at the address given in Committee member details.

Membership renewals

A sure sign of getting older is how time seems to pass by faster and faster. It seems unbelievable that it is time to send out reminders about Membership subscriptions – but a year has flashed by once again. Hopefully, the ‘Credit Crunch’ hasn’t affected too many of you – and you can still afford to support the WWA!!

It is vital to the Association that we retain a membership base of around 200 households to fund all the activities that are required of us as a Charity (maintenance, visitor information, running events, insurance, rent, etc), so I hope you can feel generous enough to continue to support us for the coming year.



Each year our core costs seem to rise but we still wish to keep the subscription at £10 per household (£5 for concessions) to enable as many people as possible to benefit from being members of the Association. We have been lucky to have received quite a few extra donations from members during 2009 for which we are very grateful. Last

year we received an extra 23 subscriptions, which brings our list up to 223 households.

Can I also remind people who wish to use the Gift Aid facility to sign that section of the membership form? We deal with claims on an annual basis so even though you may have signed before it makes our administration of the scheme much simpler.

It is important that our members know that their money is being well-spent, so I will just point out some of the more interesting items that the cash was spent on.

- ❖ Hire of mini-digger to create a (very successful) new pond
- ❖ Materials to make a new awning for our outdoor events
- ❖ Chestnut paling and posts for new fences
- ❖ One tonne of Siltex water treatment
- ❖ Lots of new pond dipping/bug hunting equipment, including nets, identification charts, books and magnifying glasses
- ❖ Catering equipment and supplies to keep the workforce happy.....
- ❖ Vast amounts of sunflower hearts to keep the other wildlife happy.....
- ❖ Ride-on mower service
- ❖ Printing costs (Newsletter/posters/information signs,etc)

Howard
Membership Secretary

Working parties



Working parties were a great success last year and the Association will carry on with the same format this year. Over the winter there has been the extra Wednesday ‘Green team’ which concentrates on all the pollarding, coppicing and Orchard work that needs doing every year (before the nesting season). We have had regular visits from students of Watling View School – helping us out for an hour a week – which involves shifting the huge volume of cut material to the bonfire site and compost heaps. Thanks, guys (and gals, of course!).



The Siltex water treatment that was mentioned in the last edition of the newsletter has now been done. Many thanks go to Susan and Jos xxxx, who kindly lent the WWA a small fibre glass boat, without which, the job would have proved to be very difficult. And thanks to Jack who collected the boat - and took it back in the trailer.

Now we wait and see if it works. Another application will go into the water in a couple of month’s time. If this is successful, Siltex will be applied on an annual basis to counteract the effects of large amounts of leaves and other organic material getting into the lake, to prevent it from completely silting up over time.

Barley straw treatment will begin much earlier than usual to give it a chance to start working before the algal blooms develop.

Reserve news



The next main project on the Reserve is to try and create a new meadow area next to 'Emma's Spinney' as it has become overrun with brambles, hogweed and nettles. This is proving to be quite a task but our regular volunteers are a tough lot and have made good progress at removing the stubborn roots. The area will be dug over a few more times and any persistent weeds pulled out before seeding takes place. It has not yet been decided which 'meadow mix' to use as the soil is too fertile for many specialist types.



**Mean...or what? (He's lovely really...)
2 jars of home-made jam go to the person
who can think up the most amusing caption.**

Planting

Pat is looking pleased with the results of her efforts to plant sixty Snake's Head Fritillaries under the Hornbeam in the Sanctuary (the leaves mark the spot where the bulbs are buried). These should keep company the solitary fritillary that is there at present.



Despite its exotic appearance The Snake's Head Fritillary is a native to Great Britain and unlike most bulbs - whose natural habitats tend to be nutrient poor soils with low moisture availability - this species prefers the damp environments of traditional meadows and pastures. Up until the beginning of the 20th century, meadows of fritillaries were common place around Britain but many of these areas were seriously affected during the "Ploughing for Victory" campaign of the Second World War. In an attempt to further increase food production much of our boggy pastureland was drained for agricultural use and this significantly reduced the overall number of sites which could support these beautiful plants. Today there are only three sites remaining - notably in Oxfordshire - where you can still find the Snake's Head fritillary in its natural habitat. Although now a protected species and rarely found in the wild the Snakes Head Fritillary is readily available from cultivated stock either as bulbs in late autumn or as pot grown stock in the spring. In the garden they are tolerant of most soil types so long as they are kept moist. However, if you intend to naturalise them you should try for a neutral to slightly alkaline soil in a sunny or partially shaded position. If the soil is too free draining add plenty of humus such as leaf mould, but the most important condition that is required for successful naturalisation is to not allow them to dry out over the spring and summer period.



If you are growing Snake's Head Fritillary from bulbs then you should get them in the ground as soon as possible - before the worst of the winter weather arrives - so too late for this year. Plant them to a depth of approximately 4-5 inches, again adding plenty of humus. The delicately purple, pink and white chequered flowers - which are both hermaphrodite and self-fertile - should appear from April to May on stems of around 12 inches high.

Bird hide code

The code for the bird hide security lock is xxxxx.



Please feel free to use the hide – and to record any interesting sightings on the whiteboard inside the hide. And don't forget to wrap up warm – there is no heating and it is very draughty with the windows open! This is a good time to look out for Kingfishers, Water Rail, Gadwall or Teal. These birds seem to show up more often in cold weather- possibly as the Mere never freezes over – and this creates a refuge for them. At the time of writing, the neighbouring Angling Club waters were frozen over and WWA sightings have included all of the above mentioned birds. Sightings are finding their way onto the Herts Bird Club website <http://www.hnhs.org/birds/> which is a great reflection on the way the Reserve is being managed. This extract is from their website on 5th January:

St Albans, 2 **Lesser Redpoll**, Watercress wildlife association
St Albans, 12 **Redwing**, Watercress wildlife association LNR
St Albans, 3 **Fieldfare**, Watercress wildlife association LNR
St Albans, 2 **Water Rail**, Watercress wildlife association LNR
St Albans, **Little Egret**, Watercress wildlife association LNR.
St Albans, 2 **Kingfisher**, Watercress wildlife association LNR
St Albans, c15 **Siskin**, Watercress wildlife association LNR.

WASSAIL STOP PRESS



If anyone can help with baking something 'appley' for the Wassail, please let the Editor know. We are short of help this year and any assistance would be greatly appreciated. At the time of writing we are in the middle of

a snow storm and the temperature is expected to be sub-zero for another week. But we still plan to go ahead with the Wassail whatever the conditions. The supplier of the spiced apple juice comes from rural Cambridgeshire so may not be able to get to us – but we will have the tea urn up and running – so we will concoct something hot to drink for everyone, somehow! So don't forget....

THE DATE.....17 JANUARY
THE PLACE.....WWA ORCHARD
THE TIME.....2pm PROMPT

Urgent

Your butterfly bed needs you!

In the last edition of 'Watercress' we appealed for people to grow plants for the butterfly beds. You need a couple of seed trays, some pots and compost. We will reimburse you. Plant as many or as few as you wish. Any at all would help reduce costs. The plants we particularly need are:

RED VALERIAN, MICHAELMAS DAISY, AUBRETIA, FLEABANE, and MEADOWSWEET

'Natural' varieties are preferred because the more developed varieties give more showy blooms but there is usually less of the nectar that butterflies and insects like. If you can help, please contact Laurie.

There have been some annoying incidents of vandalism during the school holidays. Someone keeps breaking into the bird hide after dark – for a nifty smoke, it seems – but in the process, has thrown various identification books into the mere, damaged the door (now repaired) and generally made themselves a nuisance. We have temporarily removed most of the remaining books and first aid kit until whoever is doing this gets bored. If anyone hears or sees anything suspicious, please don't hesitate to contact the Reserve Manager.

WWA Committee 2009/10

Officers

Steve : Chairman
Howard : Reserve Manager/Membership Secretary
Mandy : Treasurer
Pat : Secretary

Members

Sheila : Editor
Derryn : Archivist
Penny: Social Secretary
Sam : Website technical support
Margaret: Management Plan Advisor
Alison : Website advisor
Jack: Member
Janet : Member

Working party dates (11am-1pm)

Sunday 31 January
Sunday 28 February
Sunday 28 March

All are welcome. Tools, gloves and refreshments are provided. Working parties last around two-three hours.

WWW.WATERCRESS-NET.ORG