

Issue 90 WATERCRESS Spring 2012

HEDGELAYING EVENT and WORK PARTY

Sunday 25th March.....10am until finished!

A very busy work party is planned, with champion hedgelayer Donato Cinicolo providing his expert skills to 'lay' an old section of hedge that runs adjacent to the river Ver. It was planted over fifteen years ago and has never been properly managed. The idea is to create a dense hedge to give some privacy from the busy footpath on the opposite side of the river.

For those who attended the hedgelaying day last March, there is an opportunity to finish laying the section that didn't quite get completed then. Even if you were not part of last year's team, do feel free to come along and learn a bit about this ancient craft. Once this section is done there just remains the other half of the Pyghtle hedge to lay in a couple of year's time. Talk about a job creation scheme!



Extra volunteers are needed to plant a new 40 metre hedge on the allotment. Two packs of native hedging plants have been provided free by the Woodland Trust as part of their 'Jubilee Woods' initiative. Full details about the project can be found on their website:

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

The ground was prepared at the last two working parties so we are ready for the final stage in this project. The hedge mix is mostly made up of Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Hazel, Rowan and Birch. Chestnut paling fencing will be put up next to the new hedge to protect it until it grows into a reasonable barrier.



Yep...that definitely looks like tiring work!

As the work party may go on longer than is usual, the committee have decided to provide extra refreshments for the workers. Sausages from Hedges Farm will be on offer along with some jacket spuds and cheese. Coffee, tea and hot 'Apple & Ginger' cordial will be available.

Let's hope for a dry day!

AGM REPORT



The Annual General Meeting was held on the 11th March at the Sub-aqua Club in Cottonmill Lane. The formal business was quickly completed (very informally!) with the committee for 2012 duly elected. Following all the Officer's reports and the refreshment break, the audience was treated to a most interesting talk given by Peter Antram.

Peter is the lead for the local RSPB group and he wrote his talk with our Association specifically in mind. He had searched through the WWA sightings that are on our website and brought along slides of most of the birds that are recorded there. Each species of bird had a red, amber or green sticker next to its photo. These corresponded with the UK's three categories of conservation importance. Red is the highest conservation priority, with species needing urgent action. Amber is the next most critical group, followed by green. Detailed information is available on the RSPB website:

http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/status_explained.aspx

Officers elected for 2012

Steve /Chairman

Janet /Secretary

Howard/Reserve Manager & Membership

Mandy/Treasurer

Members elected for 2012

Sheila /Newsletter Editor

Pat /Member

Derryn /Member

Penny /Social Secretary

Sam /Webmaster

Margaret/Management Plan Advisor

Jack /Member

APPLE WASSAIL – JANUARY 2012



This was a great event, thoroughly enjoyed by all, and we made a good profit, after expenses, of over £400! What a lovely way to raise funds for the Association. It is hard to believe that this was our ninth Wassail and people are still keen to come along. Thanks go to all who helped make the event run smoothly, and especially to the Wicket Brood and Sandy Glover.

Local artist, and Wicket Brood accordionist, Rosemary, sent in these delightful drawings with permission to publish them in the WWA newsletter. Thanks, Rosemary.



WATERWHEELERS



Some of you may already know that one of our members, Yvonne, who is visually impaired, has started training with her co-rider, Graham, in preparation for the London to Paris bike ride to raise money for the British Heart Foundation. This takes place from 11th to 14th of July. They will cover a distance of around 300 miles over 4 days – the first day being the longest.

Speaking to Yvonne recently about how much having the use of the WWA tandem has meant to her over the last few years she said;

"It's been great to have the use of the tandem. It makes me do challenges that would otherwise be unavailable to me. And it is brilliant that I have the chance to do this London to Paris trip. Graham and I will be doing the St. Albans Charity Cycle Ride on the 13th May as part of our training. We'll be doing the 40 mile route so if anyone wants to join us, please do! I've also found another volunteer co-rider, Paul, who is a very experienced, and very fit cyclist and he is also going to help me with my training. Graham will take me out on Thursdays and Paul on Mondays. I am going to be very busy!"

The tandem that they are using has been serviced by the lovely Lloyd from Addiktion cycles in Victoria Street. A problem with the gear cables cutting into the bike frame was causing the gear changes to jam slightly. The problem has now been resolved by Lloyd, and Graham has reported the noticeable difference in performance. Both WWA tandems developed the same fault, so it appears to be a design error, but both bikes have now been fixed.

If anyone would like to sponsor Yvonne, she has set up a 'Just Giving' page.



WILDLIFE

The WWA Reserve is becoming increasingly popular with bird watchers and there have been visits from some quite famous 'celebrity birders'. Most notable was the, apparently infamous, Lee G.R. Evans (left) whose blog entries are shown below. Another was David Lindo (right –also known as The Urban Birder).



Watercress Wildlife Association LNR, St. Albans, Herts.

"Another new site for me and what a well-managed and well-kept Reserve it is, situated in the centre of St. Albans. It backs on to the river Ver and has a main lake and smaller tributaries – a major haven for wildlife.

Well, the reason I pitched up here was for its Lesser Redpolls – apparently up to 6 of them frequently visiting the feeder in front of the information centre. Well, not this afternoon, as the sunflower hearts were being hijacked by an army of 6 noisy Ring-necked Parakeets – and no-body else was allowed a look-in. I saw three Greenfinches, 7 Chaffinches and a continual procession of Blue and Great Tits but no Redpoll. Highlights were a Grey Wagtail and a RED KITE drifting overhead".

Watercress Wildlife Association LNR St. Albans, Herts.

"Needing to charge up my battery on a rarely used Vauxhall Corsa, I decided to drive the 22 miles to St. Albans, where once again I visited this delightful Reserve, close to the town centre. I met up with one local volunteer and she informed me of the tremendous cost feeding the birds on the Reserve entailed. No less than £1000 per year – a staggering cost – and no wonder the Nyger feeders were in need of a refill. Anyway, after a little time I eventually spotted a Lesser Redpoll loosely associating with the 8 or so visiting Siskins. A common Kingfisher was an excellent record, whilst 2 Grey Wagtails, 2 Coots, Great Spotted Woodpecker, male Greenfinch, 6 Goldfinch, 8 Chaffinch, Dunnock, Robin, Woodpigeon, Grey Heron, and Blue, Great, Coal and 6 Long-tailed Tits were seen".

Lee G Evans

I was that volunteer and I found Lee fascinating to chat with. He was very patient teaching me to recognise different bird songs and I saw a man passionate about his subject. A bit of a rebel, maybe – but that is what makes him so interesting! (**Editor**)

MEMBERSHIP

At the close of last year we had 217 paid-up household memberships. This is a little down on the previous year but is still a healthy number and brings in much-needed funding to carry on running and improving the Reserve.

This year, so far, subscriptions have reached 160. I would like to thank all those who renewed their membership so promptly. If you wish to renew, and have either mislaid the form, or just overlooked rejoining, I will be happy to send one out! Either phone me, or e-mail the Editor, and I'll get a form sent out to you.

I would like to give a special thank you to those that were able to give a little extra, in addition to their membership fee. We had a couple of very large donations – one of £500, another for £100 – and numerous smaller ones. I won't embarrass any individual by mentioning their name but those contributions are very much appreciated and have already been put to good use. It was decided at the last committee meeting to keep the current rates of subscription. We felt that a rise in 'subs' in these austere times might deter some of our members from rejoining. These rates have stayed the same for 20 years and will be reviewed again at the end of the year.

Howard
Membership Secretary

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Work party dates 2012

Sunday 25th March: Donato Cinicolo will be coming to lay the old hedge that is growing alongside the river in the old allotment.

Volunteers are needed to plant the new hedge on the allotment and coppice trees on allotment boundary.

Sunday 29th April: Replacing decayed log path edges with new logs + usual maintenance.

Sunday 27th May: Regular maintenance.

All are welcome. Work parties start at **10am** and finish around 1pm. Refreshments, tools and gloves are provided.

BIRD HIDE CODE

The code to enter the bird hide is XXXXXX

Please make sure the door and windows are closed when you leave, for security reasons. Thank you.

WORK PARTY NEWS



JANUARY: Volunteers dug over the hedge line in readiness for the planting day in March. One of the Buddleias in the Butterfly Meadow was pruned. Peter has given the apples trees the annual pruning. Thanks Peter.

FEBRUARY: Landscape fabric was laid down along the line of the soon-to-be-planted hedge. This is to suppress the weeds for the first few years while the hedge gets established. More buddleias were pruned.

The embankment between the main gate and the sheds was drastically cut back to allow the snowdrops, daffodils and primroses to thrive.

OTHER WORK.....

Chairman Steve has now finished building a donation/collection box that is just inside the main gate. It is made from recycled materials that were no longer needed around the Reserve.

There is still a small amount of home-made jam available, so when weather conditions are suitable, the jam will be on display adjacent to the new collection box. Please drop your donations for the jam into the box. Thanks.



Steve has just taken delivery of materials to repair the roof of the shed on the allotment (it is rotten and leaking badly) and he will do the work soon. I bet you are really glad you are now retired, aren't you Steve?

TREE WORK



If you have visited the Reserve lately you may notice a large gap has appeared in the bank, opposite the main bench, where four huge Leylandii conifers used to be. In addition, one of the large 'crack' willows has been pollarded by the river inlet, and another on the allotment. Arborist Andy Gardiner and his team finally managed to come and do the necessary work, having been delayed by the snow that fell earlier this year. They did a very professional job, leaving the site clean and tidy – along with a huge pile of woodchips and logs! The longer logs will be used as path edgings, and the woodchip and short logs have been used to make a seating area in the allotment for when we hold events.

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, half the cost of this work is being paid for with a grant from the Chiltern Chalk Streams Project. We were allowed to spend up to £2000 but only have to pay £1000 of the costs. Apart from the recent tree work, the fee to pay Donato Cinicolo for his hedge work is included. Also, 40 metres of chestnut paling, timber posts and extra hedging plants are included. Our half of the match funding has almost been covered by the donations of those generous individuals mentioned earlier. What a fantastic and positive start to the WWA year!



Jim (above) is in the final stages of pollarding the huge Willow by the river Ver. This guy made it all look so easy. The Chairman and Reserve Manager looked on in awe. Even the Editor was speechless (for once!).

VISITOR GUIDE

The WWA recently published a 'Visitor Guide' that is now on the website. It was thought appropriate to publish this in the newsletter as a reference guide for Association members.



"This four acre Local Nature Reserve (although on land owned by St Albans District Council) is leased, managed and maintained independently by the Watercress Wildlife Association, founded in 1991 by local residents and on an entirely voluntary basis. A management committee ensures that it is run in accordance with the current management plan. Volunteers help with practical work on site.

The Reserve is open for public access between 7am and dusk throughout the year and is best approached on foot or bicycle. There is no parking on or near the entrance and street parking is strictly regulated. The approach is from Riverside Road, via a steeply sloping entranceway. Dogs (other than guide dogs) are not allowed. Apart from the information hut/bird hide (accessible to members of the Association), there are no on-site facilities.

All visitors are welcome, but are expected to respect the wildlife, the peace and tranquillity of the area, and the diversity of habitat which makes the site so special.

There are natural hazards including uneven soft ground, water and stinging or poisonous plants. There is often maintenance work in progress, particularly at the regular working parties (the last Sunday of each month). Sensible footwear is essential. Young children should be supervised at all times.

Visitors should keep to the established paths. Under some conditions parts will not be suitable for casual access or for use by wheelchairs or buggies.

Schools, youth and community groups who wish to undertake educational or leisure visits are asked to give prior notice. Please email

info@watercresslnr.org.uk.

For the benefit of the Reserve and other users, to protect the wildlife and the local environment, we ask that all visitors observe the following rules:

VISITOR GUIDE Cont'd

Dogs are not to be taken on site.

Picnics are not allowed.

Respect the tranquillity of the area. This is a small site; noise disturbs wildlife, other visitors and local residents.

Observe instructions and other notices provided on the Reserve.

Do not feed the water birds. We enforce a 'No Feeding' policy to prevent fouling of the water and local area, and to maintain a natural balance. The ducks in particular are not pets!

Otherwise – enjoy your visit!"



Can you spot the Goldcrest disguised in this Alder tree?

DROUGHT WARNINGS

Everyone is surely aware of the serious problem of drought in this part of the country. We can only wait and see how this is going to affect the WWA. There is nothing we can do about the water levels. If the worst happens and the River Ver dries up along with our lake, we can look on the positive side and use this as a chance to do some desilting work. We can plan ahead and decide where to place any removed silt and try and get extra volunteers to provide much-needed muscle. Moving dried silt is hard work!

One job we would normally be thinking about this time of year is adding Siltex to the water. This is supposed to help reduce silt levels. Another annual task is the addition of a weekly dosing of Barley Straw extract to keep the green algae in check. These are quite expensive maintenance programmes and it seems prudent to hold back on this. If we have no water in a few months time this really would be 'money down the drain'.

www.watercresslnr.org.uk

IS THIS THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME?



AND AGAIN IN 2006



WHAT WILL 2012 BRING?