

Issue 96 WATERCRESS 2014

WASSAIL

Sunday 19th January

1.30pm

One of the perks of being a WWA member is the chance to be invited along to our annual Wassail. Last year it snowed; this year looks like we may need to issue waders if the current weather pattern continues. But whatever the elements throw at us, we shall carry on regardless! The wearing of wellington boots, however, is compulsory!

Once again, we have the pleasure of being entertained by the lovely Wicket Brood Morris (always guaranteed to liven up any function) and we are especially pleased to announce that the Right Honourable Mayor of St. Albans, Councillor Annie Brewster will also be in attendance. So it should be a lively afternoon.

This year we will be providing hot Apple and Ginger juice to keep you warm and plenty of cakes to keep you fed, in exchange for a donation towards funds.

Programme for the afternoon

1.30pm



Chairman Steve and the Mayor will welcome WWA members to the event.

1.45pm

There will be a display of dance by the Wicket Brood in the old allotment, who will then lead/paddle the way to our traditional Wassail ceremony in the Orchard.

2.30pm

The Wicket Brood will lead us back to the old allotment for refreshments and more dancing – with a chance to have a word or two with the Mayor. There will be a raffle, with some great prizes. The Mayor or Chairman will draw the raffle around 3pm so make sure you get your tickets early! All proceeds of the event are going towards the cost of renovating the bridges...a priority task.

Our very own apple juice (made with fruit from our orchard) is going to be available along with a selection of jams and jellies. We suggest a donation of £2.75 for the juice and £2.50 for the preserves. This is the first year that Medlar jelly, made from our Medlar tree in the driveway, is on offer. It will be interesting to hear what people think of the taste so some will be available to try out on the day.



A MESSAGE FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

I would like to wish you all a very Happy New Year on behalf of the WWA Management Committee.

Once again, the annual membership subscriptions are due (except for those of you who joined from September 2013 as your membership carries through to January 2015). At present the number of paid-up households stands at 184. This is slightly down from last year but still a reasonably healthy number to keep the Association running. In conjunction with the New Year renewal date, we are actively campaigning for more local members with a mail drop as there have been many changes in the local resident population in the last couple of years.

I would like to thank all of our members for their support, especially the ones who have been with us for many, many years and also to those who have made extra donations. They are much appreciated by the Association.

Extra contributions that we were pleased to receive came in from a number of sources. The Ramsbury Road fete in June raised £380, the fourth instalment of the 'Fund for the Future' another £250 and WWA member Julie conducted a 'herb walk' and very kindly donated £60. Thank you all very much.

Our donation box is proving to be quite a money-spinner and we collected £377 during 2013. And donations for the apple juice and jam have so far raised £464 (although our expenditure on having the juice produced cost £325). There is still plenty of juice and jam/jelly left and this will be available at the Wassail.

Balancing this income we spent some fairly hefty sums throughout the year.

Tools, bird seed, petrol, printing costs and general items came to £1,388. Site insurance was £362, barley straw extract for trying to keep the water healthy was £297, new tablecloths and bunting came to £144, garage rent £260, plants were £90 and the biggest amount was £687 for wood and wire to start refurbishing the bridges.

As you can see, the outgoings soon mount up! This is why the annual membership subscriptions are so vital to keep the Association going and to complete important site maintenance.

Once again I would like to wish all our supporters a happy and enjoyable New Year and look forward to meeting you either at our monthly work parties or at the events we hold during the year. And if you ever just fancy saying hello, you are most welcome to join the volunteers for a coffee and piece of cake around noon at our work parties (always held on the last Sunday of the month).

Howard

HELP NEEDED FOR WASSAIL

If anyone can help on the day of the Wassail, either by helping to set up in the morning or by baking a cake or something tasty for the refreshment stall, we would love to hear from you. Please can you e-mail the editor (see below) if you are able to bring something along on the day so we have an overall idea of the quantity to expect. Thank you

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SUNDAY 16th MARCH

11am – 1pm

The Annual General Meeting will take place on Sunday 16th March at the Sub-Aqua Club in Cottonmill Lane. Proceedings will start promptly at 11am. The first part of the meeting covers the more formal business of reports for the year and the election of the Management Committee. This is followed by a break for refreshments where you have an opportunity to meet your committee members and quiz them on any aspects of the WWA. There will then be an illustrated talk for about 45 minutes on a subject relevant to the Association. Although we have an idea of what this is going to be, we need confirmation of the speaker and this will be publicised just before the event.

All nominations for committee members must reach the General Secretary at least two weeks before the meeting.

WILDLIFE REPORT

Birds

So far this year there have been sightings of Siskin, Lesser Redpoll, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Water Rail, Tufted Duck, Greenfinch (once common here but unusual in recent years), Kingfisher, those pesky Parakeets (love 'em or hate 'em), Grey Wagtail, Wren, Redwings and Goldfinches.



There has been a solitary female Tufted Duck visiting the Reserve for some months but nobody has managed to get a photo of her, as yet. Thanks go to the RSPB for their drawing (above). Tufted ducks are our commonest diving duck, nesting on flooded gravel pits and lakes and reservoirs, and gathering in large flocks in the winter, often mixed with Pochard and Coot. They feed on waterweed, plant seeds and aquatic invertebrates. The adult male is all black except for white flanks and a blue-grey bill. It has an obvious head tuft that gives the species its name. The adult female is brown with paler flanks, and is more easily confused with other diving ducks. In particular, some have white around the bill base which resembles the Scaup species, although the white is never as extensive as in those ducks. The female's call is a harsh, growling "karr", mostly given in flight. The males are mostly silent but they make whistles during courtship based on a simple "wit-oo".

It is great to receive photographs of the flora and fauna of the Reserve. Our visitors and members are the people who are helping us keep records of what is around at different times of the year. So please keep sending them in to the Editor or Chairman. And if you are happy for some of your pictures to go onto our website, please just forward them to info@watercresslnr.org.uk. We now have our own 'flickr group' on the website. How modern!

WATERWHEELERS REVIEW 2013

It was a fairly quiet year for the WaterWheelers. Yvonne and her co-rider, Graham, went out on a few training rides to build up to the St. Albans Rotary Club Ride in May, but Yvonne had to pull out at the last minute as she had a bad cold. Graham did the ride instead with his partner Jill, using solo bikes instead of the WWA tandem. As Graham and Jill raised a certain amount for the charity they were entered into a prize draw and won a bottle of champagne.



The next WaterWheelers outing was a planned ride to the Bocket Arms at Ayot St. Lawrence, and at Jill's insistence, after only a couple of miles, in the grounds of Oaklands college, the group stopped to enjoy a glass of that prize champagne. Then a funny thing happened; there was a loud bang, we all looked round and saw that Alison's front tyre had exploded! Cue –a repair job by Graham while we all helped by standing around holding various tools! Off we went again, down to Sandpit Lane...then the same thing happened but with a much softer bang. Alison decided to call it a day and walked back home with her bike. We realised that her tyre had worn right through and a piece of wire was rubbing against the inner tube...beyond repair!

With all the delays caused by quaffing champagne and repairing punctures the group decided to cut the ride short and went to the Wicked Lady in Wheathamstead for refreshments (soft drinks only, of course!)



The WaterWheelers are mostly a fair-weather group of cyclists and if you would like to take part in any of our rides please do join us. Apart from Graham and Yvonne who take on quite challenging events, the rest of us just like gentle rides of no more than 20 – 25 miles; quite often a lot less if champagne is involved! The Association own two Landscape tandems that are available for people to try out. Just contact the Editor if you would like to give tandeming a go.

Howard

WORK PARTY AND RESERVE NEWS

October: Howard, Nick and Robert cleared the channel (from the inlet to the fallen willow) of watercress, reeds and invasive vegetation), finishing at the Shady Place.

Everyone else picked around 2000 apples! More on that later....

November: Katie, Janet, Pat and Robert cleared the brambles from the entrance area. Cath, Angela and Fred moved a vast pile of willow, cut down by Howard and Steve, to the bonfire area.

December: Volunteers gathered recently cut material from the orchard and moved it to the old allotment where it was burnt. Laurie tended the Butterfly Meadow; Margaret did a survey of any flowering plants and cut back the brambles by the Tussock meadow.

Fire raiser Sheila, with help from Robert, tended the bonfire.

MAJOR WORK PROJECTS PLANNED FOR 2014

There are some urgent, and quite major, maintenance tasks that need to be tackled as soon as possible. The blockhouse roof is leaking badly and on inspection it seems that, in addition to all the ivy that is growing on the roof, there are baby Horse Chestnut trees taking root. This is not good! You may have heard of 'living roofs' – ours is certainly living, but not in the way we envisaged. All the dense vegetation will have to be stripped back, along with the old roofing felt, and the damage assessed. The best case scenario is that the felt can just be placed. The worst (and most likely) case is that all the roofing boards are rotten and will need to be replaced, too.

You will know from the last newsletter that one of the smaller bridges has been repaired and all rotten boards replaced with new ones, and the whole bridge overlaid with new chicken wire. Laying chicken wire is the best anti-slip method around, and is used extensively at RSPB reserves and National Trust properties. We now need to press on and do the same with the two remaining bridges. Renovating the main bridge is a big task and may involve closing the Reserve for a while. Our Chairman is working out the logistics of how to do this with the minimum of disruption. This could mean plenty of volunteer help on a particular day to strip off the old chicken wire, then additional work party days, mid-week, to replace any rotten boards. If you can help outside of the regular monthly work party at any time, please contact the Reserve Manager.



The new bridge under water already!

HERB GARDEN AND BUTTERFLY MEADOWS

Volunteers are always needed to help with digging and tidying the Butterfly Beds or Herb* garden on a regular basis. If you feel you can spare a couple of hours, once or twice a month, please contact the Reserve Manager.

*We are pleased to announce that one person has stepped forward to take on the task of maintaining the Herb garden. Her name is Margarita and she is a Lithuanian lady who has recently moved in with her daughter and son-in-law and loves gardening. And she lives right next to the Reserve.

WORK PARTY DATES 2014

Sunday 26th January: Bridge renovation - this involves removing the old chicken wire as a first task before replacing rotten boards with new.

A programme of pollarding and coppicing commences.

Sunday 23rd February: Bridge work; pollarding and coppicing

Sunday 30th March: Hedgelaying? Weather permitting, this good be a good day for tackling another stretch of hedge.

Sunday 27th April:

All ages are welcome. Work parties start at **10am** and finish around **1pm**. Light refreshments are served around midday. Tools and gloves are provided.

WATLING VIEW SCHOOL

The WWA are delighted to regularly welcome a small group of students and staff from Watling View School. They visit every Wednesday morning (weather permitting) to help with an ongoing project in the Orchard, and to enjoy the peaceful and calm atmosphere of the Reserve. So far, staff, students and WWA volunteers have pruned and cleared away almost all of the overgrown Buddleias and Elder trees on the Orchard bank. Next task is to remove all the bramble and nettle roots, and then we can put down grass seed to help stabilise the bank, and perhaps plant some Primroses, Snowdrops and native Daffodils.

One of the Watling View teachers, who is also a WWA member, is seen here paddling (is that quite the right word?) Chairman Steve's home-made coracle, after one of our Sunday work parties. Another one of the very, many benefits of being a volunteer.....!



A study in concentration, indeed

AUDREY



It is with great sadness that I have to report the sudden death of a much-loved local resident and WWA member, Audrey.

Audrey loved to walk, and this brought her into contact with many people every day in St. Albans but especially in the Riverside Road area, where she lived. She, and her husband Ian, moved there in 1997 and they soon became well known in the vicinity. After Ian died she found solace and companionship in her cat Willow. Unfortunately, Willow died in August last year.

Being very keen on wild flowers and fauna, Audrey knew all the names of the wildflowers and she was a great asset to the WWA when she decided to join as a member in 2000. Her son, Martin, and his wife Anne, were founder members of the WWA so there has been a family connection with the Association for over 22 years.

On many an occasion I can remember being puzzled by some particular plant at the nature reserve, and inevitably Audrey would turn up on one of her walks, have a chat and take away a specimen of the (mysterious to me) plant and later post the identification of said plant on a slip of paper through my letterbox!

Audrey was born in Manchester in the county of Lancaster but moved around extensively as a child following her father's job as cellist in the Halle orchestra. The family lived in places as far flung as Bognor Regis and Buxton but always returned to Maureen Avenue in Manchester.

She was a stay-at-home mum during the 1960s but was keen to strike out a career in education in the 1970s and 1980s, and ended up teaching at Bolton College of Further and Higher Education for many years where she was held in high esteem by the mathematics department.

Audrey was happy with her lot and was not one for extravagant meals at the fancy restaurants – in fact in later years she liked nothing better than a Morrison's cheese and onion slice!

On behalf of the WWA committee and members I would like to offer our condolences to Martin and all his family. We shall all miss our little chats with Audrey, in the street and down at the Nature Reserve.

Sheila (Editor)

APPLES GALORE

What an amazing year 2013 turned out to be for fruit production. As mentioned in the last newsletter, the WWA thought that it would be a good idea to have a go in 2013 to harvest a large number of apples and send them for juicing by Apple Cottage Cider in Baldock. Our amazing volunteers managed to pick enough apples to fill two car loads (and a special mention goes to Angela and Jude who tirelessly reached up using extending fruit pickers for hours). The Chairman and Reserve Manager took the fruit to Baldock and then collected 250 bottles of freshly pressed and pasteurised juice a couple of days later.

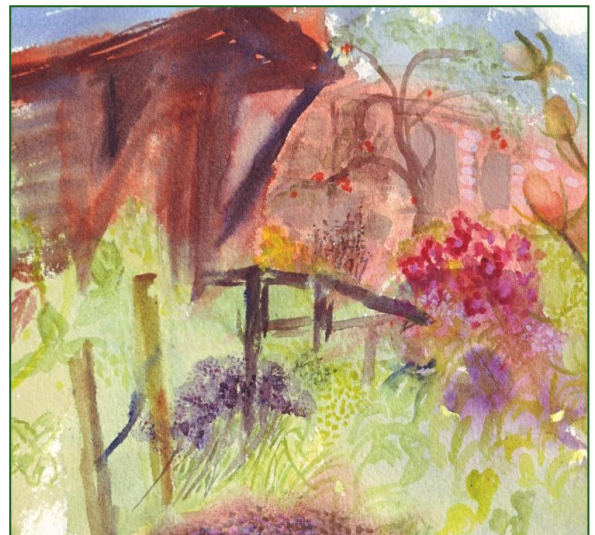
Everyone who has tried the juice has reported that it is very tasty! If the harvest is as good again this year we will probably repeat the process.

The Association also raised some funds by putting out bags of apples in exchange for a donation of £1 a bag. All the Ashmead Kernel and Howgate Wonder varieties went to good homes. Chairman Steve's produce stall is proving to be quite an asset!



BIRD HIDE CODE

The code to enter the bird hide is **XXXX**. Please make sure the door and windows are closed when you leave, for security reasons. Thank you.



Watercolour of the bird hide (courtesy of Rosemary)

NOSTALGIA PAGE



Pictured above are early WWA volunteers taking a well-earned break

Opening day with David Bellamy

