

## WASSAIL

**Sunday**

**2pm**



The delightful Wicket Brood have generously agreed to support us again this year, which is great news. Many of our members are regulars at this event so know what to expect, but for those who haven't been along before, here is a quick explanation.....

A group of people dress up in warm clothes, head down to the Nature Reserve and meet in the social area (the old allotment). From there, they follow the drummer and musicians from the Wicket Brood Border Morris to the oldest apple tree on site. Following a short introduction about the history of Apple Wassailing, the audience sing songs to the tree, beat the tree with sticks to awaken the tree, hang toast in the branches to feed the robins (the guardians of the orchard) and pour cider around the roots to nourish the tree. Then party poppers are fired into the tree to scare away any bad spirits (in olden times, shotgun fire was used but this custom has become rather anti-social, and illegal on our site!). More songs are sung, the people follow the musicians back to the social area where they will be entertained with a display of dancing and music from The Brood, and served with hot apple and ginger cordial, and assorted cakes.

Simple, really! Except that things are never simple when trying to organise an event in January for an unknown number of attendees. One problem may be that the site gets flooded again, but we will just adapt the ceremony to suit conditions. The Wassail will still go ahead, albeit on a different part of the site. We have never yet cancelled in eleven years...we had a blizzard one year, and gale force winds another year, ripping the awning apart, but still we soldiered on.

Whatever the weather, it will be another Wellington boot event, as the site is getting very soggy already.

And the usual request goes out to anyone who can help out, either by making something to eat, helping

to serve drinks, putting up the awning or tidying away afterwards. Just contact the Editor if you can help out. Thanks.

There will be a flyer going around before the event as a reminder, but please do put this date in your diary. This is our main fundraising event in the year and we welcome the additional funds it provides.

**Please note that this event is intended for WWA members and their families only**

Last year, there were people sending out the details via twitter and other social media that resulted in notices being placed in the local newspaper and a local school newsletter. This caused an awful lot of concern for the organisers, as there is a limit to the number of visitors we can cope with along with various safety issues.

## BRIDGE WORK COMPLETED!



And we're not talking dentistry here! After many months the work on renovating the final bridge has been completed (except for replacing the top hand rail – a minor issue) and all the volunteers who helped on this are to be congratulated on their fantastic efforts. An extra special 'Thank You' must go to Steve who 'quantity surveyed' the materials needed for the job, ordered and handled them after delivery (and it was a lot of timber and wire netting!) and has spent many Wednesday mornings developing his technique for lifting the old boards and replacing them with new ones. You're quite an expert now, Steve. And special thanks to Howard for helping Steve staple down the new wire netting on a damp, dreary day in November, and Janet for keeping everyone's spirits up. Well done! Let's hope that job won't need doing for another 20 years.

## WORK PROJECTS PLANNED

Now that all the bridges have been renovated we can start to concentrate on another large project. This is to finally open up the last piece of available land to the public, but this can only be done when the ground is made safe to walk through and the area fenced off from the social area. We also need to construct two simple viewpoints, one overlooking the old allotment and bird feeder, and one to the River Ver. But first, the whole area needs to be cleared of the bramble and scrub that has encroached over the last couple of years. It is amazing how quickly nature takes over untended land.

So the rough timescale is to clear all the vegetation at the November and December work parties and get the waste material composted, and the bramble burnt, to see what we are working with. Then we can plan where the viewpoints are going. If we can manage this, we aim to get new chestnut paling put up at the January work party. As soon as that it is done we can cut through from the open part of the Reserve. Job done!

And we still want to do some hedgelaying! This has been postponed to February and March, but as John Steinbeck wrote in his famous book 'Of Mice and Men': "The best laid schemes of mice and men / often go awry. Of course, the title was taken from Robert Burns' poem 'To a Mouse', which read: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft agley."

Everything depends on whether we flood again or just weather!

## AN UNUSUAL CASE OF VANDALISM



Back in the summer, the WWA volunteers came across this strange case of vandalism, where someone had stripped the bark off the lower part of the tree. This was definitely not animal damage, and a similar case happened at Highfield Park to one of their apple trees. This is one of our best trees and it will now die as it has been 'ring-barked' to an extreme level! It is very disheartening when this sort of thing happens and hard to understand the mentality of the person/s that did this.

## WORK PARTY NEWS

**June:** Stakes were cut in readiness for repairing the little fence around the Butterfly Beds.

**July:** The allotment area was scythed early in July, the edge of the Orchard bridge concreted, and the allotment given another scything at the end of July.

**August:** Paths cut and mown. The Pyghtle hedge was trimmed, and the entrance area cleared of nettles and brambles.

The main work party was well-attended. The Boggy Area was cleared of watercress, the ripe damsons picked, and the area around the donation box cut back (quite severely, but necessary!)



**September:** Large piles of cut material were moved from the 'snake-heap' to the bonfire site. The grass was mown, the allotment scythed once more, the grapevine trimmed back, bird feeders cleaned, more watercress was cleared in the Boggy Area and the pond in the Pyghtle cleaned out. Finally, the large dogwoods by the steps were coppiced down to a more suitable height.

**October:** The final grass cut of the season was done, a huge bonfire dealt with all the brash that is too thick to compost, more watercress was cleared from the boggy area, and work continued on renovating the main bridge.

**November...to date:** Bridges completed! A start is made to open up old allotment to public.

## VISITOR SURVEY

There is now an online version of our visitor survey. The Association likes to hear the views of our members and visitors to help us in our decision making at committee meetings.

[www.watercresslnr.org.uk/visitor-survey](http://www.watercresslnr.org.uk/visitor-survey)



## RESERVE NEWS

Here are future plans and an update on the following areas of the Reserve, from Laurie, who has responsibility for them.

### Allotment area:

The bed has been roughly dug. Planting the area with annuals has not worked too well over the last two years; therefore I propose to plant it with perennials - Ox-eye daisies, Lesser Knapweed and Red Campion.

### Flowering meadow:

I have given it its annual cut. Some areas have too much rough grass so I'm going to dig up a part like this and replace with some better grasses. There are not enough flowering plants on the meadow yet, therefore I'm going to experiment with various plug plants until I find some that work.

### Tufted grass area:

It is on my list to cut down half of it but I'm waiting in case we get a volunteer as a result of the newsletter appeal. **Update: this has now been done.**

### Michaelmas Daisy area:

Most of these died last year! It seems they do not like this area. Hemp Agrimony like it and so does Red Campion so suggest we go with the flow. I have done some rough digging to start this process.

### Butterfly Beds:

The usual weeding and cutting back is underway. I need to wait to see what comes back and what doesn't. Garlic mustard is looking good. Some areas will need to be planted with new flowers.

If we are to avoid heavy expenditure we will need to have a number of people growing a reasonable quantity of plants each ready for planting out in the spring. Are there any volunteers who would like to have a go at this? The WWA will provide the seeds.

### I WANT TO HELP BUT DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME?

There must be lots of members who love our little Reserve and would like to help, but family and work commitments mean that they have little time available or perhaps are not free on a Sunday morning for the monthly working parties.

Is this you, keen to assist but only have limited time? Well we have a number of very small jobs that take only a few hours per year but it would make a great difference if we had reliable volunteers to take them on. Not only is the time commitment minimal but you can do it whenever you can fit it in so there is no set time when you have to be on the Reserve.

### Tufted meadow:

This meadow is to encourage invertebrates which will, in turn encourage birds etc. Once a year half of

## RESERVE NEWS

it needs to be chopped down, the cuttings removed and clear the boundary between it and the surrounds. In the spring it is necessary to dig up any nettles, or hogweed that has decided to come in. All in all we are talking about six hours per year.

### BUTTERFLY BEDS

This area near the entrance is planted up to attract butterflies, bees and other insects. We need people to take responsibility for parts of it. You can choose the size of the area you want to manage. You would look after the plants there, weed round them from time to time and replant if needed after consultation. This would take an hour or two per month during the summer and, say, half an hour per month for the rest of the year.

### Flower growers

It is expensive to buy plants for the Butterfly beds so to reduce expense we need people with green fingers to grow flowers from seed for us. We will provide the seeds and, if you wish, compost, pots etc. You can grow as few or as many as you wish - we always have room! So, if you wish to try one packet of seeds or twenty - just get in touch.

### Laurie

If you are interested please contact our organiser, Laurie. He will answer any questions you might have and discuss how you might assist. Remember - 'every little helps!'



Work parties are definitely not 'all work and no play'

## BIRD HIDE CODE

The code to enter the bird hide is **XXXXX**. Please make sure the door and windows are closed when you leave, for security reasons. There are plenty of books, wall charts and posters to help with identification purposes, and it is a great place to shelter if it starts to rain! If you do see anything unusual, feel free to write it up on the sightings board inside the hide, or on the blackboard outside. We are always interested in recording what is found around the Reserve.

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## WORK PARTY DATES 2014

**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> November:** The WWA would like to open up the last piece of land to the public early in the New Year. Clearing the land completely is the main task for this work party.

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> December:** A post Christmas social, perhaps? And more clearing and removing trip hazards from the old allotment area that is soon to be opened up to the public.

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> January:** Putting up new chestnut paling and cutting through from the Reserve to the newly cleared area.

**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> February:** Hedgelaying?

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March:** Hedgelaying?

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

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## MEMBERSHIP

We have 184 members at the moment, this year. I would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new members, who have joined since the last newsletter.

### Welcome to new members:

Toni  
Christian  
Carol  
Iain and Jill  
Sarah and Caroline  
Jude and Steve

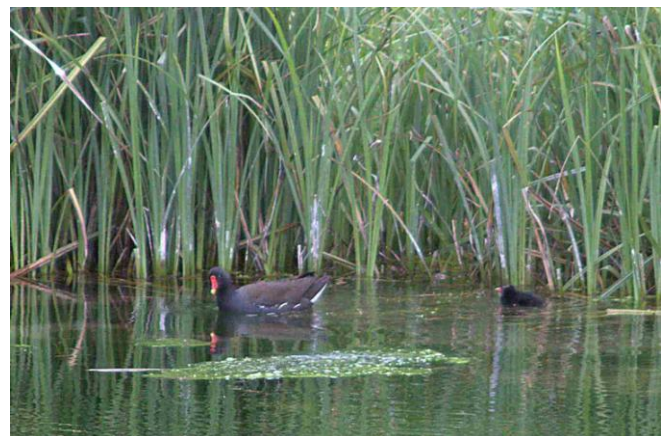
And anyone who joined after September has their subscription carried through to the end of 2015.

## WILDLIFE

There have been some quite interesting sightings, the loveliest being two Little Grebes popping in at various times. There was a brief visit of a Grey Wagtail but it seems to have disappeared again. Two cygnets turned up back in the summer but one was found dead, and it looked like it could have been attacked by a fox. There have been many sightings of a large fox so it is quite a reasonable assumption. The other cygnet disappeared soon after.



One of our visiting Little Grebes



Moorhen with chick

The moorhens have had a very successful breeding season. There are at least seven on the Reserve.

Moorhen with 'teenage' chick- growing up fast!





## FUNDS FOR THE FUTURE



The Association are very pleased to have received the final instalment of £250 from the St. Albans Fund for the Future Grant, via the Hertfordshire Community Foundation. This grant has run over a period of five years and we have received £1000 in total. Our thanks go to the Foundation for their support over the years. The money has been carefully spent, including the purchase of our lovely, warm fleeces, and chicken wire for the bridge renovations. Thank you.

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## WWA COMMITTEE 2014

### Officers

**Steve /Chairman**

**Janet /Secretary**

**Howard /Reserve Manager & Membership Secretary**

**Mandy /Treasurer**

### Members

**Sheila /Newsletter Editor**

**Pat /Member**

**Derryn /Member**

**Penny/Social Secretary**

**Sam /Webmaster**

**Margaret /Management Plan Advisor**

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## HOUSE OF COMMONS PARTY

**Thursday 4th Dec**

**6.00 – 8.30**

The WWA has, once again, received an invitation for the annual 'Volunteer Thank You Party' held by Anne Main at the House of Commons. We can send two representatives and this year Robert and Janet are attending. It is an ideal opportunity for our volunteers to talk to representatives of other local charities. There is a light buffet and a visit to St Mary's Undercroft Chapel that is not usually accessible to non- House of Commons staff.

## SOME OF OUR VOLUNTEERS



Clearing the pond and surrounding area



Finished!!

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## GREY WAGTAILS

The name, Grey Wagtail is rather confusing as this delightful bird is quite yellow in places! And of course, this mustn't be confused with the Yellow Wagtail that is very yellow, indeed. No one has yet managed to photograph one at the Reserve (as far as I am aware – please feel free to correct me if I'm mistaken! And please let us publish your picture if you have one). See if you can spot a Grey Wagtail next time you are down at the Reserve. Thanks to BBC Nature for this photo.



## HISTORICAL SNIPPETS FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Below is a scan of a Ministry Of Defence WW2 bomb record from 15th November 1940.  
If one plots the run of bombs from Prospect Road one may well have landed on our site!

Card No. 4.

### AIR RAID DAMAGE - CITY OF ST. ALBAN

15th November, 1940 (contd.).

1 woman and 1 child slightly injured.

1 High Explosive Bomb fell at Blue House Hill, no damage, no casualties.

1 High Explosive Bomb fell at Hypercaust Verualanium, no damage, no casualties.

1 High Explosive Bomb fell in football ground, The Causeway, no damage, no casualties.

1 High Explosive Bomb fell on River Bank on school playing field, main sewer damaged, no casualties.

1 High Explosive Bomb fell on 19, Prospect Road, minor damage to property, no casualties.

1 High Explosive Bomb fell on allotment at Cotton Mill, no casualties, no damage.

1 High Explosive Bomb fell in watercross beds, slight damage to property, no casualties.

16th November, 1940.

5 Incendiary Bombs fell in Park Street, no damage, no casualties.

And referring to the Hertfordshire Tithe Map of 1840, part of the site was owned by a notorious man who had made his fortune in the slave trade (Joseph Timperon of New Barnes). *Do you have any more on that one, Steve?*

Did you know that Riverside Road was known as Longmire Road before 1964?



And this is how it looked in the early 1980s. Hard to believe, isn't it? Editor