

# Issue 100 WATERCRESS 2015

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



The AGM took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2015 at the Sub-Aqua Club in Cottonmill Lane.

There have been a number of changes to the committee this year as two members have stepped down and one new member elected. Derryn was a founder member of the WWA and served on the committee continuously since 1991. So a huge 'Thank You' goes to Derryn for all her help over the years. But, as she says, she will still be volunteering for the Association, making her delicious jams and helping out at work parties and events. So it is less of a 'Goodbye' and more of an 'Au Revoir!'

Penny is the other committee member who has stepped down after nine years, as she now has a family to look after and lots of other commitments. So another vote of thanks goes to Penny, especially for the lovely cakes that she made for our monthly work parties!

And finally, the Association would like to welcome Cath, who has joined us. Cath, and her partner, Nick, have been volunteering at the work parties for some time now and it is great to have a new face on board!

Following the election of the committee for 2015 the audience were lucky to have a visit by Sue Mitchell from 'Birds of Bray'. Sue brought along various birds of prey including some Barn Owls, an American Kestrel, and the rare, but lovely little Owl (pictured above) whose species name the Editor has forgotten!

Sue gave a fascinating talk on falconry and the care needed in looking after birds of prey. WWA members were able to experience handling the Barn Owls and watch as they flew around the room.

## WORK PARTY DATES 2015

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July:** We will be ready to open up the new section of the Allotment to the public at this work party. We just need some finishing touches and then we can dismantle the section of chestnut paling that is blocking the access at present and cut the ribbon!

**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August:** General maintenance, scything, grass cutting, clearing the channel in the boggy area, etc.

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September:** Bench renovation, general maintenance and more scything.

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> October:** Possibly, the next section of hedgelaying around the Pyghtle can be started.



The Herb Garden is looking lovely

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

## WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The Association would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new members.

Tom

Graham

Craig & Laura

Mr. & Mrs. Cooper

Andrew

Giles

## WORK PARTY NEWS

**March:** This was well-attended and volunteers made a start laying the section of hedge in the Pyghtle between the gate and the bird feeding station. They managed to finish half the length and the rest was completed later in the week by the Reserve Manager and the Editor's brother. Well done, all, especially those of you who had never tried hedgelaying before! Other volunteers ferried piles of woodchip to the new path that is being made in the Allotment.

Andy Gardner's arboreal team completed all the works that we employed them to undertake. Andy has a mobile chipper that runs on caterpillar tracks so can be easily moved anywhere on the Reserve. All the branches were chipped and added to our woodchip paths, so the Reserve paths are looking really smart.



**April:** The new chestnut paling and posts arrived in readiness for opening up the Allotment walk. At the work party, the volunteers created a log pile in the Shady Place, following Andy Gardner's tree work.

The entire section alongside the new hedge and fence adjacent to the Allotment had been colonised by Dogwood and Nettles so the whole patch was dug over, all saplings and roots removed and the area levelled and made safe.



New paths and log piles

## WORK PARTY NEWS



Stand back, everyone!

**May:** The meadow in the Allotment was scythed beautifully by Roly. What a star! And such a lovely smile, too! The rest of the team went around the Reserve cutting back the paths and then helped Roly by moving all the cut material to the compost heaps. Graham strimmed back the weeds in the section that is going to be opened up to the public.

**June:** With quite a few regular work party members missing the remaining volunteers concentrated on clearing the entrance area of Nettles, Hogweed and Brambles. They did a great job and visitors can now see the Quince and Medlar trees once more!

### Wednesday working parties:

**March:** Bat boxes were put up, a bonfire took care of all the waste material that had been lying around the site and the chicken wire on the bridges was repaired where it had worked loose.

**April:** The final section of chestnut paling was erected in the Allotment in readiness for opening up the area to the public.

**May:** Following an inventory of all the tools by Vanessa, all the shears went sent away for sharpening and Steve reorganised the blockhouse with new shelving and tool holders.

**June:** Steve is in the process of replacing the handrails and posts that lead up to the bird hide as the originals have rotted through and are unsafe. He has concreted in some of the main posts but the job is not finished – hence the orange barrier tape.

Howard trimmed all the hedges around the site and cut back the Dogwood in the Butterfly Meadow.

Grass cutting, filling the bird feeders, repair work and a host of maintenance tasks take place at the Wednesday work party so if you would like to help out please send e-mail your address to the Reserve Manager to be put on the volunteer mailing list. We usually meet around 10am for two or three hours work, depending on the weather.

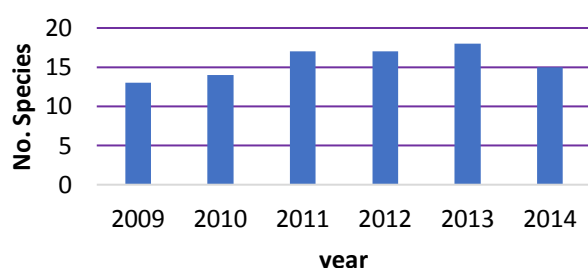


## **WATERCRESS WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION BUTTERFLY MONITORING REPORT 2014**

Every week was recorded at least once.

The number of species seen was 15. This represents a small decline from what was a rising trend (see graph below). It's too early to draw any conclusions but needs monitoring in case it reflects a decrease in suitable and diverse habitats.

### **No. species recorded on WWA reserve**



Species not seen this year: Painted Lady (national numbers low this year), Common Blue (expected with bird's foot trefoil available as a food plant and increased regionally by 40%), Small Skipper (there is a regional decline), and Marbled White (seen occasionally in previous years).

2014 was a mild year with a mild winter and warm spring. July was warm and dry but August noticeably cooler, duller and wet. Some species emerged early in spring but later in the summer the poorer weather inhibited second generations and many butterflies went into hibernation early.

The Brimstone and Green Veined White did not produce any clear peaks in spring, and again in July, as they did regionally. Both the Large and Small White followed the regional trend, the former peaking slightly earlier than average.

The Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and Red Admiral all followed regional trends. The Small Tortoiseshell continues to recover in numbers. The Peacock is also doing well although we seemed to have a mid-year surge in June when numbers usually drop between generations.

The Ringlet is another species expanding its range. Together with the Gatekeeper and Meadow Brown it is a butterfly of high summer. The Ringlet likes shadier grassland than the other two species which may explain its success in colonising this site over the last 3 years.

## **WATERCRESS WILDLIFE ASSOCIATION BUTTERFLY MONITORING REPORT 2014**

Holly Blue did reasonably well considering that regionally it had a poor year. This species requires both holly and ivy – we have plenty of the latter but only one bush of the former.

The Large Skipper is another butterfly of high summer but was affected by the poor weather in August, suddenly disappearing. Like the Ringlet it can tolerate shade more than its open meadow counterpart the Small Skipper. Hopefully the new allotment area will encourage more meadow loving species but this year it appeared dominated by members of the White family.

None of the above would be possible without the dedication of our recorders: Alison, Julie and Derryn. Their systematic surveys tell us not only what is there but also is a measure of the success of the management of the Reserve. Our data is shared with Herts & Middlesex Butterfly Conservation.

### **Margaret 2015**

Margaret has also provided a set of graphs in addition to her report above. These show all the flight times of the recorded butterflies but as it stretches to four pages I will include it as an attachment to the newsletter. Hopefully, it will also be up on the website soon.

### **Editor**

## **ALGAL BLOOMS**



If you have visited the Reserve recently you will have noticed that the water turned into a nasty 'milk soup' for a while. The Environment Agency recommend that people have no contact with the water as these algal blooms can, occasionally, cause skin irritations and illness if ingested. The water is clearer now but the WWA committee are still advising visitors not to touch the water, especially those with children, until further notice. There is a notice board on the main bridge to that effect.

## FIRST SIGHTINGS



A first for the Reserve is this sighting of a White Admiral butterfly. Both photos were taken in a shrub just above the 'Hibernaculum' sign near the WWA shed at the base of the railway embankment. Can anyone help us identify if this is a male or female specimen?

The White Admiral is a woodland species and a delight to behold as it literally glides along forest rides, flying from tree to forest floor and back up with only a few effortless wing beats. For this reason, some of its closest relatives on the continent are known as "gliders". When settled, the adults are unmistakable, with their black uppersides intersected by prominent white bars. The undersides of this butterfly are, however, in complete contrast to the black-and-white uppersides, and are surely one of the most beautiful of all species found in the British Isles.

The butterfly is found in central and southern England, south of a line between South Devon in the west and North Lincolnshire in the east, as well as in a few scattered colonies in the eastern counties of Wales. It is not found in Scotland, Ireland or the Isle of Man. The distribution of this species in the early 1900s had declined to the point that it was restricted to southern England. However, there seems to have been a reversal of fortunes, with the butterfly reaching its former distribution that extends as far north as Lincolnshire. One explanation is that global warming has allowed the species to thrive at sites that had become too cool. Another is that the cessation of coppicing, that has been detrimental to so many woodland butterflies, has benefited this species which requires Honeysuckle growing in shady woodland for the successful development of its larvae.

Adults emerge in the second half of June and peak in the first part of July. There is usually one brood each year but, in some years, there may be a partial second brood in late summer.

The primary larval food plant is the native wild Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) so the WWA are now planning to obtain some more of these, to try and encourage this species onto the Reserve.

Adults feed primarily on HoneyDew, Bramble, Hogweed (of which there is plenty on site!), Angelica, Privet and Thistles. It is not uncommon, on good sites, to see several White Admiral all feeding from the same Bramble patch. A downside of this, however, is that their wings can get tatty very quickly, as they move around Bramble blossom, probing for nectar. The adults will also feed on salts and minerals from moist earth and animal droppings.



Males and females are similar in appearance, although females are slightly browner and larger, and have more-rounded wings.

The behaviour of the female when egg-laying is in complete contrast to the normal soaring flights, making her easy to spot. The female flits low in undergrowth or through shaded woodland, stopping every now and again on the food plant to lay a single egg. The female selects Honeysuckle that is in partial shade, often at the edge of a woodland ride or in lightly-shaded woodland. She also selects leaves on straggly pieces of isolated plant, rather than the lushest leaves that are often growing in full sun.

For more on all things butterfly- related check out the excellent Butterfly Conservation website:

<http://butterfly-conservation.org>



## BIRD HIDE CODE



Don't lean too heavily on that old hand rail, guys. It may just give way!!

The code to enter the bird hide is XXXX. 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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## WWA COMMITTEE 2015

### Officers

**Steve/Chairman**

**Janet/Secretary**

**Howard/Reserve Manager &  
Membership Secretary**

**Mandy/Treasurer**

### Members

**Sheila/Newsletter Editor**

**Pat**

**Sam/Webmaster**

**Cath**

**Margaret/Management Plan Advisor**

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

## WILDLIFE



The Reserve Manager and Editor were lucky enough to disturb a Grass Snake by the main bridge and watch it swim away and disappear into the reeds. It had a striking yellow neck 'collar' which made it easily identifiable.

The Grass snake is Britain's largest native terrestrial reptile, and is the most common species of snake. It can grow to over a metre long, and is strongly associated with water habitats, such as ponds and ditches. It is completely harmless to man, and almost never bites, even when caught. As with all native reptiles, it is illegal to harm or kill them.

As mentioned earlier, the Grass Snake is most easily identifiable by the interlinked black and yellow collar which usually forms a band or ring immediately behind the snake's head. The upper body is normally olive green or olive brown with black vertical bars along the flanks. On the underside, the ventral scales are buff, cream or white and have an equally individual chequered pattern in black.

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Other notable sightings include a pair of foxes that are often seen in the Allotment but run off when disturbed. There is a female Mallard with seven ducklings that arrived at the beginning of July. The ducklings are quite large so should survive any predators, unlike the Coot family that had three chicks but are down to just the one. This particular pair of Coots that we have at the moment is particularly aggressive and chased away most of the other water fowl earlier in the year, but as their last chick is growing up, they seem to have calmed down a little!

Dragonflies are just starting to appear now and WWA member Katie saw a group of four Kingfishers on the 12<sup>th</sup> June although they seem to have disappeared this month. This could be because the water was so 'milky' that they couldn't see to fish! The Parakeets are growing in number and so we have purchased some new bird feeders that are designed to be squirrel-proof. But they are Pigeon and Parakeet-proof too so it is hoped that this may help in keeping the Parakeet numbers down. Love 'em or hate 'em...they sure are noisy!



**The Watercress Beds in 1955. Note the houses in Riverside Road ...as they were before modern additions**



**Photos courtesy of A E Bennett/transporttreasury**