

Issue 104 WATERCRESS 2017

WASSAIL

January is here so that can mean only one thing. It's nearly time for the annual WWA Apple Wassail. This popular event is taking place on **Sunday 15th January**, this date being the nearest Sunday to the Old New Year, the traditional day for this ceremony.



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.

WWA members dress up in warm clothes, head down to the Nature Reserve and meet in the social area (the Old Allotment). After a short display of dancing from the Wicket Brood, we all follow their drummer and musicians 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 further display of dancing and music from The Brood. Refreshments are served including hot apple juice (produced from our orchard), along with delicious home-made cakes and other tasty treats.



There is no charge for entrance or the food but any donations are most welcome. We do charge £1 a cup for the hot apple juice.

Home-made jams, Quince jelly and our own apple juice will be available in exchange for a donation.

WASSAIL PROGRAMME Sunday 15th January

2pm: Display of dancing by the Wicket Brood in the Old Allotment

2.30pm: Wassail ceremony in the Orchard

3pm: Refreshments and another display of dancing at the Old Allotment

3.30pm: Raffle

Raffle prizes will include a £20 voucher to spend at Aylett Nursery and tickets for the fantastic Odyssey cinema.

The usual request goes out to anyone who can assist with the event, either by making something to eat, helping to serve drinks, putting up the awning or tidying away afterwards. Just contact the Editor or Reserve Manager if you can help. Thanks.

Please do put this date in your diary. This is our main fundraising event of the year and we welcome the additional funds it provides. And we go ahead, whatever the weather. Last year it snowed (the only day all winter) but that just made the event more atmospheric!

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

One of the benefits of being a WWA member is being invited to the annual Wassail. Although it would be lovely to allow the public to the Wassail it was agreed by the WWA committee to have it as a 'Members only' event, (including family and personal friends) because of the need to limit the number of visitors to a safe, manageable and enjoyable level.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting is being held on **Sunday 19th March** at the Sub Aqua Club in Cottonmill Lane, starting promptly at **11am**.

All nominations for the committee need to be sent to the Secretary within two weeks of the AGM.

We aim to make the AGM as relaxed and informal as possible, maybe even entertaining! There are short reports from the Chairman and other key Officers, followed by refreshments and an illustrated short talk. This year, one of our regular helpers, Derek is giving an account of his time volunteering abroad, titled 'A Kenyan Adventure' where he spent time with the charity 'Cricket Without Boundaries'.

<https://www.cricketwithoutboundaries.com/>

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR MEMBERS

I would like to wish all our members a very Happy New Year and thank you for your support throughout 2016. The Association relies entirely on membership subscriptions, donations and the occasional grant to maintain, and continue to develop, the Reserve.

The outgoings in 2016 came to almost £6000 but we did undertake some major projects last year that won't need repeating for many years, hopefully!

Much of the major expenditure has been on the continuing use of professional arborists, as a lot of the trees that were planted 25 years ago are outgrowing their welcome. When we started the WWA we didn't think that in the distant future the small trees we planted would now be a problem. We shall probably be employing our regular chap, Andy Gardner, to do some more work before the spring.

Subscriptions are now due for 2017 and you will find a membership renewal form attached with this newsletter. We are introducing an additional way of paying subscriptions by the way of Bank Transfer. Details are on the form. If you wish to pay by this method, it would be helpful if you can add the payment reference using your first initial and surname: e.g. **JBLOGGS**

We still like to keep paper records of our membership so could you return the form, either by post or electronically, to the Membership Secretary.

We've also updated the Gift Aid section of the form. Although it is not necessary to have to send out the form each year, it is easier for our Treasurer when it comes to claim back the tax.

Howard
Membership Secretary

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

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

Mr & Mrs W
Stephen
Sue & Dave
Karin
Matthew
Toby & Nicki
Neilson

Any members who joined after 30th September have their membership carried through to 2018 and don't need to renew.

VOLUNTEER 'THANK YOU' PARTY

The August work group also doubled up as a 'Thank You' party to many of our regular volunteers. Over 20 people enjoyed a welcome BBQ on a lovely sunny day, following a hard morning's work on the Reserve. The Management Committee likes to look after all its volunteers and we greatly appreciate and value how much you contribute to the running of the Reserve. We couldn't manage without you and you all do a fantastic job. Well done, everyone. The BBQ was a great success and gave people a chance to sit back, enjoy the sunshine and relax with the other volunteers for a chat.



MONTHLY WORK PARTY NEWS

August: The entrance bank was cleared of nettles and brambles, and all the waste material barrowed away to designated compost heaps. One of the grassy meadows was also cut down. Work was followed by the volunteer BBQ.

September: Volunteers cut and cleared away all the dead Willowherb that had sprung up in front of the new hedge adjacent to the Old Allotment fence. The grass in the Allotment was cut using the hand mower.

October: There was a good turnout of helpers for the work party so everyone concentrated on cutting and clearing the Orchard of brambles and nettles. The Orchard has been rather neglected in recent years so the next few work parties will continue improving this area of the site. We are going to re-route some of the grass paths as the maturing trees are gradually obstructing the way round.

November: Volunteers shifted the huge piles of cuttings that arose from the ongoing work in the Orchard. Waste was sorted into compostable piles, burnable waste or large logs suitable for one of our many log piles. We had a huge bonfire, finishing with refreshments including jacket potatoes cooked in the embers. Delicious.

December: Cancelled, as it was Christmas Day.

There will be a work party on **Sunday 8th January**, at the usual time of 10am to around 1pm, to get the site ready for the Wassail.

WEDNESDAY WORKING PARTIES

August: Volunteers cleared paths and one of the willows by the 'Russo' bridge was cut back. Howard cut back the Pyghtle hedge, Steve donned waders and continued the project to strengthen the river bank that was badly damaged in a previous year's floods.

September: Work to improve the damaged river bank continued. Sheila and Janet pulled out the nettles from the bank adjacent to the Mere to make room for the daffodils next season.

October: Roger picked the last of the Howgate Wonder apples and put them out for sale by the donation box. They proved to be very popular and soon all disappeared.

Ruby, Sheila and Janet gathered up barrowloads of loose gravel from the entrance drive that was left over from a project at the nearby angling club. This has turned out to be very useful as ballast to help stabilise the river bank.

Just messing about in the river!



Work continues in the clearing the Orchard. Any remaining windfall apples were raked up and composted and the Reserve Manager mowed some of the paths.

November: More Orchard clearing. Sheila and Janet had a marathon Quince jelly making session, held over two days, so were excused from the work party duties! The jelly will be available at the Wassail.

After yet another attack on the donation box (at the end of October) Steve has replaced the destroyed box with a new design, nicknamed 'Mark 3'. This is still in place. These kids are not going to beat us!

The lads carried on with the river bank work while our resident pyromaniac and helpers (you know who you are) had another bonfire to try and keep on top of the huge amount of waste that maintaining the Reserve creates.

As work continues in the Orchard it has become clear that some of the apple trees, that we planted many years ago, have failed to thrive so we are having a rethink about the management of this area. Two of the smaller trees have been moved to the Old Allotment where they will receive more light and

WEDNESDAY WORKING PARTIES

space. Ironically, the trees that produce the most, and best fruit are the original ones that we think were planted in the 1920s.

Neil, Roger and Howard trimmed down the sprouting willows in the Pyghtle and then raked out the wild watercress from the stream in the Bogy area.

The WWA joins the 'Mannequin Challenge!'



WORK PARTY DATES 2017

Sunday 8th January: Preparing the ground for the Wassail.

Sunday 29th January: General maintenance, raking out watercress from the boggy area. Making a new compost area.

Sunday 26th February: Planting hawthorn along the boundary in the Orchard.

Sunday 26th March: Hedgelaying, if we get organised in time!

Sunday 30 April: General maintenance.

Sunday 28th May: General maintenance.

The **monthly work party** is always held on the last Sunday of the month. All ages are welcome. Work parties start at **10am** and finish around **1pm**. Light refreshments are served around midday. Tools and gloves are provided.

The work parties are a great way to get to meet new people. Come and give us a try!

The regular, **weekly Wednesday morning work party**, starts at **10am** and lasts for a couple of hours. If you are interested in coming along it is a good idea to give Janet, our Secretary, your contact details as she sends out an e-mail in advance of the work party to let you know what is planned that week. Also, she can let you know if the work party is cancelled for any reason.

www.watercresslnr.org.uk

READER'S PHOTOS



This very strange photo was sent in by Alison, one of our butterfly recorders. She was rather alarmed by finding this in the butterfly Meadow until another visitor investigated further and realised it was a Halloween mask! It certainly looks quite disturbing at first glance.

WWA COMMITTEE 2015/16

Officers

Steve/Chairman

Janet/Secretary

**Howard/Reserve Manager and
Membership Secretary**

Mandy/Treasurer

Members

Sheila/Newsletter Editor

Pat

Sam/Webmaster

Cath

Margaret/Management Plan Advisor



Donation box Mark 3....still standing

BUTTERFLY REPORT



Speckled Wood seen on the Reserve in August

Committee member Margaret has sent in the final Butterfly report for 2015.

"A small dedicated group of volunteers each year undertakes regular surveys along a set transect around the Reserve recording all the butterflies seen. Surveys are conducted between the beginning of April and the end of September. This regular and systematic survey gives us information about the state of butterflies on the Reserve, the species, their numbers and changes. Numbers can fluctuate wildly from year to year as some species have boom and bust cycles and butterflies are very sensitive to weather conditions. However, over time we can build a picture as to what species use the Reserve and whether any change is occurring. We can use this information to assess whether we are managing the Reserve well and meeting our objectives. The butterfly survey data is also shared with Herts and Middlesex Butterfly Conservation and becomes part of the regional and national dataset where it can be used to monitor changes of climate, habitat etc. One off observations are also useful; in particular, they can alert us to the unusual which might be missed on a regular survey."

The full report is too long for the newsletter but it is on the WWA website.

<http://www.watercresslnr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Butterfly-report-2015.docx>

BIRD HIDE



The code to enter the bird hide is: **XXXXXX**

Please make sure the door and windows are closed on leaving. If you see anything interesting at the Reserve feel free to please put it up on either of the sightings board.