

Issue 108 WATERCRESS 2018

ANNUAL WASSAIL



The Wassail was a great success and the weather was much better than the previous year. A nice touch was the Wicket Brood inviting the audience to join in with one of their dances and they gave an impromptu lesson to young and old alike. The Association also took £450 on the day so a great result all round. Our thanks go to everyone who helped out on the day and especially to the Wicket Brood, who always support us and make the event so special.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



The WWA Annual General Meeting was held on the 18th March 2018 at the Sub-Aqua Club in Cottonmill Lane. Following reports from the Officers and light refreshments, Andrew Wood from Butterfly Conservation gave a fascinating talk on the butterflies and moths of Hertfordshire. Unfortunately, the central heating system broke down on what was a particularly cold day but we WWA members are hardy souls and carried on regardless! The committee for 2018 was duly elected and the contact details are listed later in this newsletter.

A MESSAGE FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

I would like to thank all our members who renewed their membership subscriptions so promptly earlier in the year. If you have overlooked renewing and would still like to remain a member, it's not too late to hear from you! The subscription remains at £10 per household (£5 to Senior Citizens and unwaged). If you do not wish to renew, your details will be removed from our current membership database at the end of the year, in accordance with the latest General Data Protection Regulation.

You can renew your subscription by cheque, cash or bank transfer. Bank transfer details are:

Watercress Wildlife Association

Sort code: xx-xx-xx

Account number: xxxxxxxx

Please reference your payment using your first initial and surname: e.g. JBLOGGS

Gift Aid

Mandy, our Treasurer has been busy catching up claiming back the Gift Aid for 2015 and 2016 and we are now in receipt of £656.31 and £638 respectively. This is mostly gained through the membership subscriptions, but we are now able to claim on money obtained from our donation box. This averages out around £10 - £15 a week.

I ask you to please fill in and return (either the old-fashioned way or electronically) the membership form, if you are renewing by bank transfer. This confirms that we have your most up-to-date details. And for those who do Gift Aid, it makes claiming it so much easier for our Treasurer to do on an annual basis if we have a copy of the form.

I hope that you will continue to enjoy visiting the Reserve, which is open all year round, from 7am to dusk. Occasionally, the Reserve is closed for vital maintenance.

Howard

Membership Secretary

General Data Protection Regulation

Most of our members have already received an e-mail stating our policy on the General Data Protection Regulation but those who have not given the WWA an email address will have not done so. Therefore, I shall include it for those members, in their copies of this newsletter. It wasn't sent out earlier to save on postage costs.

Sheila (Editor)

RESERVE NEWS

The work on the Reserve goes on apace with always enough jobs to keep the weekly and monthly work parties busy. A lot of the tasks, especially at this time of year, are keeping the pathways open and clear. This is a major priority.

We usually concentrate on one area at a time, so our volunteers can see the real difference that their efforts make.

One of the areas that was cleared recently is just beyond the second bridge where there is a stand of alder trees. These were planted 25 years ago but were getting choked with dogwood. It took three or four of our work parties to remove them all, along with the stumps.



Trying to shift the Dogwood stump proved challenging

The river channel through the boggy area is constantly getting overgrown with wild watercress, bulrushes and reeds so this is regularly cleared out by anyone who is prepared to don a pair of waders and get stuck in. Sometimes literally! But there is always a helper on hand if needed, of course.



Volunteer Andy clearing the channel

RESERVE NEWS

This year we have tried to be more methodical in treating the Mere with barley straw extract. The extract needs to be added on a weekly basis to be effective and in the past some weekly treatments have been overlooked. The purpose is to keep the algal blooms in check and it does seem to keep the problem under control to a certain degree. There is still a lot of algae on the base of the Mere, but the treatment seems to stop it rising to the surface and turning black and putrid, which it has done before in the summer, especially when it is hot and dry. It isn't an exact science, but we believe it is worth persevering with, and it costs about £300 a year so not a huge outlay for the possible benefit.



You can never get Howard out of his waders!

NEW TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

With the Reserve requiring ever increasing maintenance the committee agreed to buying some new tools and equipment to make life easier for our volunteers. One very useful piece of kit is this rechargeable hedge trimmer that is both powerful, light to use and the battery lasts for one hour on one charge and can be recharged in around 15 mins. We have one already but have now purchased another. We wouldn't normally endorse any specific product but this Bosch AHS 50-20 LI certainly ticks all the boxes for us. We've also bought extra pairs of garden shears and are going through all our tools to see what needs updating.



WORK PARTY NEWS SUMMARY

January: There was a special work party to prepare for the Wassail. Later, at the monthly work party, we had a huge bonfire of accumulated brash that couldn't be composted, and some overhanging tree branches were cut back and burnt. Chairman Steve repaired the wire netting that had come adrift on one of the bridges.

February: Mike pollarded the 'Willow Sculpture'; another team did a lot of pruning in the Orchard and cleared the inlet ditch of brambles and other vegetation. Another team cleared away all the Orchard prunings.



Pollarding the willows

March: Volunteers pruned a couple of the willows in the boggy area and cleared away the arisings to a bonfire. As mentioned earlier, the dogwood was removed from the stand of alder trees. Reserve Manager, Howard, donned waders and had a go at clearing the backwater of vegetation but fell over in the silty water, much to the amusement of other volunteers. Chairman Steve is seen hanging out Howard's waders to drain while the extremely fragrant Howard disappeared home for a much-needed wash and brush up!



Anyone seen Howard?

WORK PARTY NEWS SUMMARY

April: We had to have another bonfire to get rid of all the remaining dogwood (sorry, neighbours, but there is no alternative to dispose of the huge amounts of waste material that running the Reserve entails) but hopefully that will be the last one until the autumn.

Howard continued treating the water with barley straw extract on a weekly basis. The blockhouse was stripped of all the ivy that had started growing up the walls. Last time it covered the roof and caused a lot of damage that Steve repaired, but he doesn't want to have to do that again in a hurry, so it had to go!



Ed and Howard clearing the Flag Iris

May: Grass cutting has started in earnest as it grows so fast at this time of year. Thank goodness for the ride-on mower. That was your subscription money very well spent. In earlier times we cut all the paths by hand. It's hard to believe, now, but we were all a lot younger then!

Another prolific plant is the Flag Iris, and these were growing up under one of the bridges causing the chicken wire to come loose, so Ed and Howard donned waders again and spent a morning pulling them out.

Howard continued with the barley straw treatment throughout Mayand fell over again. There is a theme developing here. We really need to buy him a pair of waders that fit him properly instead of the huge size 12s he's been using.

June: Several volunteers cleared the river bank of nettles and hogweed while Derek trimmed down the height of the Pygmy hedge.

Howard didn't fall over in the water this month whilst doing the barley straw treatment!

The Wednesday group weeded and watered the Herb Garden one morning; then cleared the (very overgrown) entrance area of nettles, hogweed and brambles the following week.

WORK PARTY DATES 2018

Sunday 29th July: Grass cutting, clearing paths, general maintenance. Possibly create a new 'insect hotel'.

Sunday 26th August: Treating the sheds and bird hide with wood preservative, weather permitting. General maintenance. Create the 'insect hotel' if not already done.

Sunday 30th September: Volunteer BBQ. This is being held immediately after the work party.

Sunday 28th October: Hedge trimming, cutting the Allotment meadow.

Sunday 25th November: General maintenance,

Sunday 30th December: Preparing the site for the Wassail



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 it is cancelled for any reason.

A NEW INSECT HOTEL

One job we would like to do at one of the monthly work parties, as soon as we have enough material, is to create another 'insect hotel', like the one pictured. We already have plenty of wooden pallets but particularly need some bricks with holes in, pantile roof tiles and clay drainage pipes (or old terracotta pots). Other materials that can be used include moss, straw (we have some barley straw already), dry leaves, old logs, pine cones, bark, hollow stems cut



from shrubs and herbaceous plants and hollow bamboo canes (we have them growing on site).

So if you are coming along to the next working party do please bring along anything you think may be suitable for the project. Insect hotels (also known as wildlife hotels or stacks) can be built at any time of the year and they can shelter anything from hedgehogs to toads, solitary bees to bumblebees, and ladybirds to woodlice.

We can probably find quite a lot of useful material around the Reserve.

I wonder if we can create anything as neat as this one in the photo? Or do we want to?!

Pictured below are just some of the volunteers finishing at the end of the Wednesday work party, having just completely cleared and barrowed away the overgrown vegetation at the entrance to the Reserve.

What a difference a handful of willing volunteers can achieve in just a couple of hours. Well done, all.



ART INSPIRED BY THE WWA



Zoë is currently undertaking her A Level art course which includes a written essay (see below). She has taken her inspiration from the Watercress Wildlife Association and created paintings based on the environment there and sent in her work for inclusion in the newsletter.

"I was interested in responding to the environment at the Watercress Wildlife Association due to its impact in St Albans. I think the importance of preserving and protecting wildlife can be helped through art as it can help to expose issues as well as drawing attention to good examples of environmental conservation such as the Watercress Wildlife Association.

The concept of layering is important to my work because I like the sense of place it creates. I have explored this by painting on top of photographs of my original drawn responses to my primaries. I find this to be a useful technique as it allows more of the atmosphere to be understood from observing the painting, which is important for me, as by showing more of the art, it may create a greater incentive to work towards conserving the environment (the Watercress Wildlife Association) depicted in the paintings. I also find that the way I have adapted the use of layering helps to create a more informed and holistic response to my primaries as I am layering more initial and organic responses of my primaries underneath more considered but more expressive

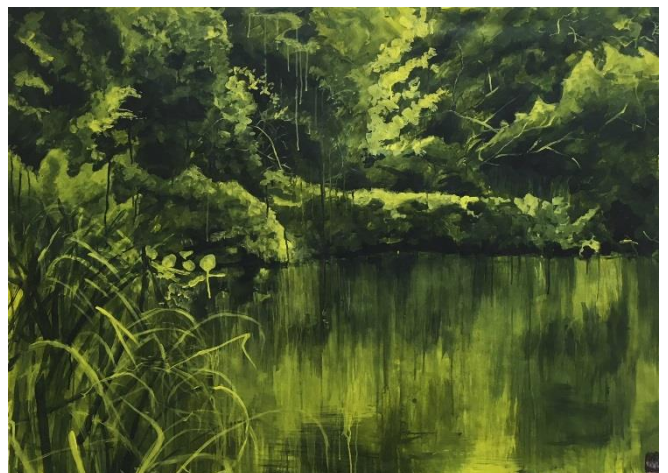
ART INSPIRED BY THE WWA



responses which have more of a sense of place and are less focused on replicating what I see.

I have discovered what is important to me as an artist which is a more implicit idea of environmental conservation as I think that it will lead to greater appreciation for the environment and therefore more genuine desire for environmental conservation. This is something I try to demonstrate by creating a powerful sense of place as I think that the environment that I am trying to conserve should be more prominent in the art than the idea of environmental conservation. In creating a sense of place I have found layering and colour to be the two most important aspects of creating a sincere response to the environment. This is necessary to me as it creates a unique relationship between the viewer and the landscape which is imperative to cultivating a desire to respect and conserve the environment."

Zoë



We are always pleased to receive original work that reflects the special place that is the WWA, whether it be paintings, poetry or photographs. Thanks, Zoë.

And it makes the editor's job a lot easier!

HERB GARDEN

Roger has done a fabulous job of revamping the Herb Garden but already the weeds are attempting a take-over coup! A group of volunteers did a splendid job of weeding and watering it recently, but Roger could do with a regular volunteer who can help him keep those pesky weeds under control. If you think you might be able to help, please contact the Reserve Manager or Editor.



WATERWHEELERS

Not all WWA members may know that the Association has two tandem bicycles, that we obtained with a grant some years ago, primarily to enable two of our visually impaired members to take part in some of our social activities.

One of those visually impaired members, Yvonne, has asked if there are any WWA members who could act as 'Captain' to be the front rider for her, on one of the WWA tandems for just a few rides, of around 15 miles, in July. She is hoping to go on a tandem cycling holiday in Holland in September but would like a bit of practice first, to get 'bike fit'. She is a very experienced rider and has completed many long distance tandem rides before, including the London to Paris event one year. If you are an experienced cyclist and feel you could help her, please contact the Editor.



Yvonne and Graham at the finishing line!

WWA COMMITTEE 2018/19

Officers

Steve/Chairman

Janet/Secretary

Howard /Reserve Manager and Membership Secretary

Mandy/Treasurer

Members

Sheila /Newsletter Editor

Sam/Webmaster

Cath

Margaret/Management Plan Advisor

www.watercresslnr.org

THE 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.

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR THIS MONTH

See if you can spot any unusual or unseasonal sightings.

Some of the butterflies that might be seen on the Reserve in July include Comma, Gatekeeper, Green-veined White, Holly Blue, Large White, Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Peacock, Red Admiral, Ringlet, Small Tortoiseshell, Small White, Speckled Wood and White Admiral. This is not a complete list and if anyone spots anything unusual please do write it up on the sightings board outside the bird hide.

There are three Moorhen chicks that are growing up fast. Only two out of five of the Coot chicks survived. It is not known what predated them, but the likely suspects are Heron or Crow. Sometimes the Coot parents will kill their young. There were seven eggs in the nest originally and five hatched out. Perhaps the parents didn't think there was enough food to go around for them all? Who knows.....?

The Apple blossom was spectacular this year so we are expecting a bumper crop of fruit. We didn't press and juice the apples last year but it may be worth considering it this autumn. Shenley Orchards provide a processing service for a fee so that is one possibility.