

Issue 111 - WATERCRESS

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR MEMBERS

I wish you all a 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 2019, as your membership carries through to January 2021). At present the number of paid-up households stands at 153. This is slightly down from last year (163) but still a reasonably healthy number to keep the Association running. A membership renewal form is attached and full details of how you can pay (either by bank transfer, cheque or cash) are on the form.

I would like to thank **all** our members for their support, whether financial and/or by volunteering at the Reserve. Some of you have supported us for many, many years and some have made extra financial donations. They are much appreciated by the Association.

Our donation box is still proving to be quite a money-spinner and we collected £350 during 2019. This included money taken for the apple sales.

We spent some fairly hefty sums throughout the year. A complete run down will be given at our AGM but one of the biggest expenses was having tree work done by our regular arborist, Andy Gardner and his team. This cost £1800. There is a lot our volunteers can manage but scampering up trees with chainsaws is not one of them! Overall our expenditure so far this year has been around £3,500, including site insurance.

The annual membership subscriptions are vital to keep the Association going and to complete important site maintenance as we receive no funding from outside sources. If you wish to Gift Aid your subscription please sign the form, even if you did so last year. We claim back the tax separately for each year and it is a lot simpler for the Treasurer to do so this way.

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, the Wednesday work party 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 any of our work parties.

Howard
Membership Secretary

www.watercresslnr.org.uk

Registered Charity: 1011944

APPLE WASSAIL

19th JANUARY 2020

2pm prompt – 4pm

The Wassail is back on this year! We have invited the colourful Wicket Brood to liven up proceedings with a display of dancing and music. If you've never had an opportunity to see them in action, here is your chance. Also, check out their website/Facebook page to get a taste of what to expect. As their website states:

"A show by Wicket Brood is a thrilling and spectacular for performer and audience alike. Our Morris dancing side includes both men and women and we principally perform dances in the Border Morris tradition. We are active throughout the year, performing at major UK folk festivals as well as events overseas."

www.wicketbrood.org



Wassailing is an ancient tradition that is still celebrated, usually on the 17th January, this being the date of the Old Twelfth Night, before the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1752. Wassailing has survived down the centuries, although it is most celebrated now in the cider and perry area of the UK, notably in the West country of Somerset and Gloucester. We here at the WWA revived the tradition in Hertfordshire 15 years ago and now other local orchard owners have followed suit including Shenley Park Orchard.

There is a reference to wassailing going back to between 1486-93 for payments for wassails at St Mary De Pre Priory in St. Albans. The Priory stood in the grounds of the current Gorhambury estate, on the corner of the road that leads down to the water pumping station. So, we are continuing a very ancient tradition, indeed! Ceremonies vary, but all have similar core elements. The word 'Wassail' derives from the Anglo Saxon 'waes hael': to be whole; in good health. In olden days, the Wassailers were made up of farmers, farm workers and villagers who would go from orchard to orchard in a noisy procession.

APPLE WASSAIL

The idea of Wassailing is to protect trees from evil spirits and ensure a plentiful crop the following season. A Wassail King or Queen will lead the song or processional tune to be played. The best or oldest tree is chosen to represent the orchard. Cider is poured on the roots, and either toast or cake, soaked in cider, is placed in the forks of the tree, or hung from the branches for the robins (thought to be the guardians of the orchard).



Photo courtesy of Keith Chapman. WWA Wassail 2012

Then an incantation is recited:

Stand fast root, bear well top,
Pray God send us a good howling crop,
Every twig, apples big,
Every bough, apples enow.
Hats full, caps full,
Full quarter sacks full,
Holla, boys, holla.

(Sussex "howling song")

The trees are rapped by the assembled crowd who will sing, shout, bang pots and pans (or dustbin lids, in our case) until the gunmen fire a volley through the tree to conclude their work (we use party poppers!)

Songs are performed accompanied by much merry making.

The Association provides hot apple juice (£1 a cup to cover costs) and a feast of cakes and assorted snacks to enjoy after the ceremony. We don't charge for the food but do ask for a donation as any money raised is used to help fund the running of the Nature Reserve.

There will be a jam stall where you can obtain, in exchange for a donation, Derryn's home-made jams made with fruit from the Reserve. Varieties available will be Blackberry & Apple, Damson, and Bramble Jelly.

If anyone can bake a cake, or bring something tasty to add to the feast, please contact the Editor who will be pleased to hear from you!

There will also be a raffle, with some great prizes, that is usually drawn around 3.30pm.

Please note this event is only for WWA members and their close friends as we need to limit numbers to a manageable and safe level!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General meeting is being held on the 29th March 2020 at the St Albans Sub-Aqua Club in Cottonmill Lane. The proceedings start promptly at 11am. The AGM is a very informal affair, and we spend the first half hearing reports from the Chairman and other Officers. The committee is then elected for 2020. After a break for refreshments we usually have an illustrated talk on a nature – related theme. Further details will be sent out nearer the date.

This means there will not be a Sunday work party in March.

WORK PARTY NEWS 2019

August: We have a great team of helpers who work tirelessly every Wednesday morning, come rain or shine. This month they cleared the entrance area of nettles and brambles and then did the same around the newly planted Damson trees in the Pyghtle. Roger worked on the Herb Garden and it is looking fab.

September: This month saw the start of the apple picking season. We put the apples out at the entrance and ask people for a donation of £1 a bag. This works well and provides extra income.



Look at all those lovely russets!

Other tasks this month included clearing the Orchard of unwanted vegetation, working on the Butterfly Meadow, general grass and hedge cutting and de-nettling the Shady Place.

October: Work continued in the Orchard, starting with clearing the water channel of wild watercress and Willowherb. The entrance bank was cleared once again of nettles and brambles to make way for the snowdrops that are planted there. The riverbank was cleared for the same reason. One of the Osiers was pollarded in the Boggy area.

WORK PARTY NEWS 2019

November: There has been a lot of work along both sides of the river, digging out unwanted saplings and cutting back overhanging branches. Some of this has been done by the WWA and the rest by the Council. There are now good views of the Ver from our newly upgraded viewpoint. Other tasks include pollarding another willow, clearing the inlet channel from the river, digging out self-seeded Blackthorn bushes. Oh, and watching Mike fall in the channel in slow motion!

December: The chestnut paling fence between Riverside Court and the Reserve was in a poor state so has been improved with new fenceposts and should now last a good few years. The Allotment and Orchard have been 'made ready' for the Wassail to make sure all is safe for the public.

There has been so much work done this year that it would be dull to go through it all in detail, but the Reserve is looking great for all that effort!

Getting ready for the Wassail



WORK PARTY DATES 2020

Sunday 26th January: Pruning the apple trees. Thinning out Flag Iris and Bulrushes in backwater alongside the Allotment. General maintenance. Clearing river channels of watercress.

Sunday 23rd February: Hedgelaying.

Sunday 29th March: Annual General Meeting. No Work Party.

Sunday 26th April: Grass cutting, general maintenance.

Sunday 31st May: Hedge trimming, grass cutting, general maintenance.

Sunday 28th June: 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 it is cancelled for any reason.

ONGOING TASKS FROM THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

- ❖ Removal of Flag Iris in the Mere where it is becoming too dominant.
- ❖ Clearing the Bog of invasive and weedy species by 25% each year and keeping the Willows under control. These are difficult jobs that keep being overlooked so we need to have a concerted effort this year!
- ❖ Maintaining fences, paths, bridges and seats to a good condition

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Herts Bird Club (www.hnhs.org) sightings in December mention Siskin and Lesser Redpoll. These are some of the birds to look out for in January.

A Grey Wagtail was spotted at the main December work party and Blackcap, Bullfinch, Long-tailed Tits were seen on the feeder by the bird hide at the last Wednesday work party.

GREY WAGTAIL

People sometimes say, "I've just seen a Yellow Wagtail" and although the bird was probably a Wagtail that did sport a flash of lemon-yellow beneath the tail, it was most likely a Grey Wagtail. If there was a prize for most unsuitable British bird name, the Grey Wagtail would win hands down. Most people are more familiar with the Pied Wagtail, that charismatic little bird that picks tiny insects off pavements and lawns, and roosts in trees along our high streets, up and down the country. Grey Wagtails are not as common as their black-and-white cousins. Slender and elegant, they have a distinctively sharp, metallic, high-pitched call. Usually found by fast flowing rivers or streams in summer, in winter they can be seen almost anywhere.



Male Grey Wagtail (Motacilla cinerea)

The rarer Yellow Wagtail is a spring and summer visitor from Africa, mostly found on wet meadows. Sadly, this species has declined in recent years, and so is far less likely to be seen than before.

"WATERCRESS BEDS CHRISTMAS TIME DITTY"



Some of the Wednesday team enjoying a festive lunch

We're the Watercress Bed Babes, one + us all
Divas at digging + trying hard not to fall

We look for the work that is such a great task
And shout with delight when it's time for a flask

Hot coffee or tea, we really don't care
Except Xmas time when mulled wine is our fare

So cheer and good will to all of the crew
And nature can rest, as we will so do

Our thanks to our Janet, she of the bake
We love all your offerings, the stuff that you make

And to our Sheila and Howard, we know that you care
As you bring us hot water for all the team to share

Then there's our man Steve, with his toolbox and kit
It's no wonder we all stay so slim and so fit

To Sheila and Howard, to Steve, to Janet and the rest
Hurrah for your patience, we are such a test

Congrats to the Team, and our leaders to boot
Now we're off at a trot to the pub for a hoot

Merry Xmas and New Year to each of you here
Enjoy your whatever's and sup on your beer!

Cheers!

Caroline C.

Thanks Caroline. That's great. Any other offerings to add to the newsletter will always be considered! **Editor**



Mission accomplished -new insect hotel installed!

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR THIS MONTH



See if you can spot this amazing bracket fungus that is growing on one of the willow trees in the Shady Place.

WWA Committee 2019

Officers

Steve /Chairman

Janet /Secretary

Howard /Reserve Manager and Membership Secretary

Mandy/Treasurer

Members

Sheila /Newsletter Editor

Sam /Webmaster

Cath

Margaret – Management Plan Guru



What a lovely smile!