

### Nature Day

The Nature Day in July was a great success in terms of attendance and weather. Children who were interested in pond dipping or mini-beast hunts were supervised in the use of equipment provided by the WWA to gather specimens.

As usual, the pond dipping was a great favourite (not only for the children!) and a good number of species were netted, then transferred into viewing trays for identification.



Equally popular was the mini-beast hunt. After instruction, groups dispersed around the site in their quest to find new species (or anything interesting, really!). The hunters returned with their specimens to the 'Field H.Q.' to identify their catch.

WWA committee members were on hand with reference charts and books. The process of classification was made more interesting with the aid of a microscope connected to a laptop (courtesy of chairman Steve). All involved enjoyed having a closer look at the different bugs that were collected.



Can you identify these aquatic creatures?

### Arts & crafts

Younger children were enthralled by professional storyteller, Kathryn Holt, who also encouraged them to create wonderful pictures from her collection of pebbles, stones and wood, to which they added natural items found on site. The committee would like to thank Kathryn for her kindness, in always helping us out at our events. However busy she is with other activities in her life, she always manages to fit us in to her schedule. Kathryn – you are a star!



For the first time in years, the evening BBQ went ahead without any downpours. We were joined by the Wicket Brood Morris (dressed in their everyday attire, so it was difficult to recognise them) and we all had a jolly good sing-song.

### Wassail 2011

The Wicket Brood Morris are keen to dance again at our annual Wassail – and are going to learn the tunes for a rousing chorus on the day. The Wassail date has been set for **Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> January**. Full details will be in the January newsletter. Our regular attendees already know what a great event this is and that it is also our main fund raising activity of the year. We may also have some cider, donated by a local cider maker – more on that later.....

# The Chairman's page

## Batwalk

Steve Simpson (WWA Chairman) sent in this report of an organised batwalk in September that he attended.

“Standing by the Sopwell ruins in the gathering gloom of a clear, but chilly evening was not a promising start, but the batwalk organised by Countryside Management Service and the Herts and Middlesex Bat Group turned out to be a real treat.

Guided by expert Hazel xxxxxxx, a group of keen local residents were armed with an array of bat detectors before setting off along the river to look for signs of bat activity. As bats generally emerge after sunset they are difficult if not impossible to see and bat detectors are essential to enable location and identification. To navigate and detect prey, bats use ultrasonic calls generally inaudible to humans. The detectors effectively reduce these high frequencies to a level that can be easily heard, the pattern and frequency of call being different and specific to each species.

After an introductory talk, the walk started by following the River Ver upstream, and soon the Common Pipistrelle was making itself known. Several of the group (with better eyesight than others!) actually spotted bat activity under the tree canopy, looking in the right direction at the right moment being more a matter of luck than judgement. To the bottom of Holywell Hill and back to our site via the St Albans Footpath/Cycleway, Hazel was able to identify Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule and Serotine while at the same time fielding any answers about bat behaviour and habitat, and avoiding the hazards of walking over uneven paths in the dark.



Daubenton's photo (courteous of 'Wild about Britain')

Once on to our Reserve, the group gathered on the first boardwalk and, with red-light illumination across the water, were treated to the appearance of several Daubenton's bats flying just above the surface of the Mere. At times they appeared to be chasing one another rather than catching insects and for some time provided an entertaining display before disappearing back into the darkness of the surrounding trees, a fitting climax to the evening.

We look forward to more sightings next year when these mysterious creatures re-emerge from hibernation”.

To learn more about bats and how you can help protect them visit [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk) . Check out the Herts and Middx Bat Group at [www.hmbg.org.uk](http://www.hmbg.org.uk) (although their new website was still under construction at the time of writing).

## Pond survey

The pond in the Pyghtle is just over a year old and Janet and I took part in a national survey run by the Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) back in the summer. The pond health score was 42. High health scores (above 31) suggest good water quality and indicate the presence of invertebrates such as caddisfly, damselfly and dragonfly larvae. Absence of these species suggests poorer water quality and results in a lower score. The water clarity score was 12. Clear water (above 9) means more sunlight is getting through - which is important for the survival of many plants and animals. If the water is murky or not so clear, then some plants or animals may not be able to live there.

To learn more about the OPAL survey and to read about all sorts of fascinating, nature related stuff, follow the link below for

[www.opalexplornature.org/](http://www.opalexplornature.org/)

## Committee Matters

The WWA management committee meets regularly every two months or so. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions relating to maintenance and/or management of the site, feel free to contact a committee member or email me:

[steve.simpson@dacorum.gov.uk](mailto:steve.simpson@dacorum.gov.uk).

## Footpaths

Two thirds of the Reserve's paths are crushed concrete laid some 15 years ago, by WWA volunteers, creating a defined circular walk around the site. The remaining third is over grass that can become soft and waterlogged in places, particularly at this time of year. Potential problem sections have previously been dressed with straw and woodchip to maintain accessibility, and most recently a 'corduroy' and woodchip system has been used (see Reserve Manager's report) but the question of extending the hard surfacing has been raised. Grass is the natural and preferred option, the current policy being to monitor and address any problems as they may occur. It is stating the obvious to say that visitors should be prepared for uneven ground, but we would appreciate any comments regarding overall accessibility. If there are any members who would wish to visit the site, but may be deterred by ground conditions, please let us know.

Please send any comments to the above email address.

**Steve Simpson (Chairman)**



## Reserve Manager's Report

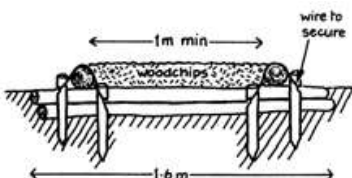
Now that autumn is well and truly underway, the Wednesday working parties have re-started and will continue until the spring. This is the time when a lot of the maintenance work is undertaken around the Reserve, especially once the leaves have fallen from the trees. As Reserve Manager it falls to me to check for any problems on site, and the main task at the first Wednesday working party was to deal with a short, seasonally muddy, section of path. A new and successful method (recommended by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) has been the creation of a 'corduroy' path as mentioned earlier.



### Corduroy paths

Bundles of brushwood or small size roundwood poles are a traditional material for making paths over soft or wet ground. These are then covered with a surfacing material. We have used woodchips to keep the path in a usable condition. In woodland locations, corduroy paths are a very useful technique for crossing damp ground, or for heavily shaded areas where grass will not grow and which become muddy when trampled. Most of the materials can be gathered from within the wood itself (our woodchips will be provided by a local arborist in exchange for some of our apples) and the process of coppicing, and then constructing the path, is an ideal activity for involving our volunteers. It is also useful for encouraging local involvement in woodland management. Only simple tools and techniques are necessary. A corduroy and woodchip path not only provides a well drained walking surface, but also creates an attractive and easy route to follow. Topping up the path with woodchips can be done as necessary.

The base is made by laying roundwood poles across the width of the path. They are best cut from fairly straight coppice about 1.6m long, and up to about 75mm in diameter. Thinner material can be used, tied in bundles as necessary. The length is important to allow the ends to be secured by edging poles, and to give stability to the path. A finished path width of about 1m is the minimum. The poles can be laid in two or more layers as necessary according to the softness of the ground. Birch, hazel, oak or sweet chestnut are suitable. The largest poles are saved for using at the sides of the path, to anchor the corduroy and contain the woodchip surfacing. If necessary, the poles can be secured with stobs (short stakes) and wire as follows:



Cut a stob between 300-500mm in length, and make a notch at the upper end to hold the wire.

Wrap the end of a length of wire around the stob and twist it to secure, and then knock in the stob on the inner side of the edging pole, so that the top of the stob is buried within the corduroy, where it will not be a hazard to walkers. Knock in another stob on the outer side, secure the wire, and then knock it in a little further to tighten.

Woodchips can then be spread in a layer about 100mm thick.

### New cycle racks



There are now three new cycle racks installed, under the dogwood near the main bridge, following requests from our visitors for somewhere to lock their bikes.

### Work party news

Volunteers planted 500 native daffodil bulbs and 200 snowdrops at the September work party. The fleece covering the soil by the main bench is not the latest art installation but a method of keeping the squirrels from grabbing a convenient free meal! More work continued on the newly acquired allotment. Some of the smaller conifers have been removed as a practice run for felling the big ones. We are hoping to keep two or three conifer trunks to use as fixing points for bat boxes. We have eight boxes waiting to go up and have been advised by the Bat Trust to mount them together to encourage the bats to colonise them.

### Surveys

The Association has been very active in surveying this year. Apart from the ongoing mink monitoring, there has been a butterfly survey undertaken by a group of volunteers, an invertebrate survey of the Mere, and a 'kick and sweep' survey in the River Ver (with the help of wetland expert Alison O'Dea from the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust).



Alison and volunteers preparing for surveying in the River Ver

## Waitrose Collection

If you shop at Waitrose you will know that they hold regular collections for local charities. One of our members kindly nominated us, and we are pleased to announce that we will be receiving £307 as a result. We are thinking of spending the money on either a permanent donation box or a new laser printer.

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## Work Party Dates

Sunday 31 October	10am - 1pm
Sunday 28 November	10am - 1pm
Sunday 26 December	10am - 1pm
Sunday 30 January	10am - 1pm

Some of the tasks to be completed over the next four working parties will include:

- ❖ Felling conifers/removing tree stumps in the allotment area.
- ❖ Putting up bat boxes.
- ❖ Creating a viewing point into the Pyghtle using picket fencing
- ❖ Digging and preparing ground adjacent to the Orchard – ready for planting with grasses in the spring.
- ❖ Weeding the Butterfly Meadow
- ❖ Removing hogweed, brambles and nettles from various parts of the Reserve

That should keep us busy for a while.....

Tools, gloves and light refreshments are provided. We appreciate any help – even for just a couple of hours – and you will always be made to feel welcome.

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## Water vole champions

Volunteers were honoured to be recognised by the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust as 'Water Vole Champions' and are shown below receiving their certificate of thanks in August.



“With thanks to the Watercress Wildlife Association in grateful recognition of their outstanding contribution to the work of the Wetlands for Water Voles and People Project and for assisting the conservation of water voles and wetlands for future generations”

## WWA Committee 2010

### Officers

Steve Simpson.....	Chairman
Howard .....	Reserve Manager Membership Secretary
Mandy.....	Treasurer
Janet .....	Secretary

### Members

Sheila.....	Editor
Pat .....	Member
Derryn .....	Archivist
Penny .....	Social Secretary
Sam .....	Website technical support
Margaret .....	Management Plan Advisor
Alison .....	Website advisor
Jack.....	Member

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## Bird Hide

The code to enter the bird hide is **xxxxx**  
We are still asking members to keep an eye on the Reserve and let the Manager know of any anti-social behaviour problems. Alternatively, contact:

P.C. Ben Kirby  
Safer Neighbourhood Team  
Victoria Street, St. Albans AL1 3JL  
01727 796042  
[ben.kirby@herts.pnn.police.uk](mailto:ben.kirby@herts.pnn.police.uk)

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## Apple and jam sales

The sale of surplus apples proved to be popular again and we made £150 in total. Jack's Damson & Apple jam was a hit too (we have kept back about 30 jars to be sold at the Wassail). The smaller apples were taken by a local cider maker/arborist who offered to donate five gallons of cider and free woodchips in exchange. What a great deal! That should liven up the Wassail.....

He also identified an apple tree that is growing on the disused allotment, as the Howgate Wonder (and subsequently confirmed by one of our members). The apples themselves have a traditional green and red colouring and are one of the largest, if not the largest, of all apples. For this reason they are often used for exhibition at shows. They produce their flowers slightly later in the season compared to many apple varieties which makes them good for cooler areas. They were first introduced in 1915 from the Isle of Wight. Its parents are Newton Wonder and Blenheim Orange. They have excellent storing qualities so we shall save some to feed to the wildlife over the winter.

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## Bonfire night

The Association needs to have a bonfire, as a huge pile of waste material unsuitable for alternative use is growing at an alarming rate. The fifth of November seemed appropriate so don't be alarmed if you see a lot of activity that evening. Feel free to join in.