

Issue 86 WATERCRESS Spring 2011

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Sunday 20th March 2011

This year's meeting is being held in the Sub-Aqua Club at the top of Cottonmill Lane, starting promptly at **11am**. The AGM is a very informal affair, where you can hear a summary of last year's activities and events, have coffee and biscuits, and then listen to our guest speaker, Donato Cinicolo (pictured below), talk about his passion for hedgelaying.



Donato Cinicolo is a local hedgelayer who has been practising the craft since 1989. He was taught by Welwyn Garden City based hedgelayer, Colin Wagstaff, but when Colin sadly died in 1991, Donato carried on with his newly-acquired skill. Since then, he has taught several young people the art of the billhook, including his son, Leo. Donato teaches the craft at agricultural colleges. He has laid hedges in most of the Home Counties and has been Herts County Champion five times. In addition to which, he gives talks and lectures in order to foster more awareness of our hedging heritage.

"A laid hedge is a thing of great beauty. There are no disadvantages, but many advantages. It promotes new growth from the roots, thereby thickening the overall hedge; the natural lifespan of the hedge trees are prolonged; small birds prefer to nest low down in tight hedges; mammals use the hedge cover as a wildlife corridor; extra blossom and thus fruit production is increased".



One of Donato's students from Easton College, Norwich, having completed a hedgelaying day said: "I enjoyed every minute, and I shall never look at a hedge in the same way again!"

The Association is thrilled that Donato has agreed to share his knowledge with us. I can also confirm that he will be running a hedgelaying workshop on the Reserve at the work party on Sunday 27th March.

The committee are always pleased to meet WWA members at the AGM – so please come along, introduce yourself, and find out about the work we do on your behalf. You will be made very welcome. In order to save printing costs, only a few copies of the minutes of last year's AGM will be available – but if you wish to have an electronic copy in advance of the meeting please contact WWA Secretary Janet Wyatt.



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER

I would like to thank all those who renewed their membership so promptly. There is a membership form attached for those of you who may have overlooked their renewal. It is so easy to do this when receiving an e-mail copy rather than a paper copy. People tend to fill in a paper copy straight away! So, please, if you have forgotten, and still wish to remain a member, send in your subscription to stop me nagging you!

Membership subscriptions last year paid for:

- ❖ A new laser printer and enough ink toner cartridges for one year
- ❖ Stationery supplies
- ❖ Cycle racks
- ❖ Vast amounts of sunflower seeds to feed the birds
- ❖ Petrol for the mowers
- ❖ Skip hire
- ❖ Insurance from BTCV, and council rent
- ❖ Plants, bulbs and seeds
- ❖ Fencing materials
- ❖ Hire of hall and fee for speaker at the AGM
- ❖ And a host of smaller sundries

As you can see, it costs a lot to run the association so all subscriptions are gratefully received.

Howard
Membership Secretary

GATHERING POINT



The sculpture - "Gathering Point"- being constructed on the opposite bank of the Mere is based on the woven baskets used to gather watercress from these beds in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It is made from willow and other natural materials.

The piece is one of five temporary sculptures which will form part of the Sculpture Trail along the 'Green Ring' around St. Albans. See if you can find them all.

Pauline O'Dell (artist)

WILLOW WORKSHOP AND HEDGE LAYING EVENT

Pauline is also going to hold a willow weaving 'drop-in' workshop at the next working party, on the 27th March. This is open to all WWA members, however old or young. Come along and have a go at making something willowy. All materials are provided so all you have to do is turn up. This is taking place between 11am and 4pm.

This event coincides with Donato Cinicolo's hedgelaying training day. We have organised a team of nine volunteers to do the hedgelaying but if anyone wants to learn about this ancient craft, pop along and watch us all at work. And perhaps even have a go.

WASSAIL



Once again, the committee were on tenterhooks as to how the weather would be for the Wassail, especially after all the snow and ice of the preceding weeks. Who else thinks about holding an outdoor event in January? ARE WE MAD!? But, although overcast, the predicted foul weather held off, and a successful afternoon ensued. This is the first year that we have had access to the new 'social area'. This is a great space for holding events like this, and the Wicket Brood had a firm surface to dance on for a change. Thanks go to Ross Parker for his delicious home-made



cider (which is made from locally harvested apples), and to Annette, for her surprise cake, that was so good it became an extra raffle prize). And a huge thank-you goes to everyone that helped make the event such a success. I know this is said every year, but the WWA committee never get complacent about all the kind acts that people do for the WWA on this day: from setting up the awning and laying out tables, or baking cakes and other goodies, making jam, and to clearing everything away afterwards. But what makes it even more worthwhile is the generosity of our guests, who this year donated just under £600 for the food, drink and raffle. Even after all our expenses, the Association will still be left with a good profit of around £350. Wonderful!

Some of you may have noticed the editor's deliberate error in the last newsletter over the new website address. To clear up any confusion (now get it right this time, Sheila!) the new website address is:

www.watercresslnr.org.uk

If you have any interesting photos taken around the Reserve, or reports of unusual sightings, we are happy to post them onto the sightings blog on the website. Just contact the Chairman or Reserve Manager.

BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH 2011

A small group of WWA members took part in the annual birdwatch on the 30th Jan and their results are recorded below. There was also a work party going on so there was a lot of disturbance around the Reserve. Even so, 19 different species were spotted, although some species we saw are not counted in the Big Garden Birdwatch statistics – as they would not be expected to turn up in an average garden. Those are starred in the list.



The RSPB hope to gather the most comprehensive set of garden bird survey results ever this year. Record numbers of people have submitted their results, with

Blackbird	2
Black-headed gull	1
Blue tit	5
Bullfinch	1
Chaffinch	4
Collared dove	2
Coot*	2
Dunnock	2
Goldfinch	2
Great tit	3
Greenfinch	2
House sparrow	2
Magpie	3
Mallard*	8
Moorhen*	2
Pheasant	1
Robin	2
Siskin	3
Woodpigeon	5

over 100,000 forms received in the first day.

<http://www.rspb.org.uk>

HERB GARDENER REQUIRED

To the immediate right of the entrance to our Reserve is an herb garden which used to contain a marvellous collection of garden herbs. Many are still there but the whole bed has become overgrown and neglected in recent years as nobody has cared for it. If only we could find someone to take charge of this area. Someone to clear away the weeds, plant it up with new herbs and maintain it thereafter. We do hope that someone in the Association, (maybe you?) has the time and interest to volunteer. Or perhaps a family might take on the job? The organiser would have a virtually free hand to organise the bed as they wish though, of course, advice would always be available from committee members. There would be money to buy new plants and, once a month at the working party, spare pairs of hands to help out if required. It would be wonderful if the bed could be returned to its former glory! So, if you feel that you might be the person for the job, please contact Laurie to talk it through.

WORK PARTY NEWS



Volunteers enjoying a well-earned cuppa

Activities completed at the January and February working parties included:

- ❖ Weeding and mulching with leaf mould around the fruit trees. In addition, Peter Botsford has completed the annual prune of the Orchard
- ❖ Pollarding the large Crack Willow in the boggy area. The cut material was divided into three piles: the largest being kept for future path edgings and another was added to the large log pile habitat. The remaining pile will have to be burnt when weather conditions are suitable.
- ❖ Taking part in the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch
- ❖ Preparing the hedge for 'laying' in March by removing the landscape fabric that was originally put down to prevent weed growth. Now that the hedge is well established it is no longer necessary to keep down any weed growth, and it is preferable to allow new species to flourish at the base of the hedge.
- ❖ Removing the chestnut paling from outside the Pyghtle now that the hedge has matured. The chestnut stakes are going to be used as uprights in the pending hedgelaying project.
- ❖ The entrance bank has been cleared of brambles and nettles to allow the snowdrops and daffodils to flourish.
- ❖ Sweet William has been planted in the Butterfly Meadow

The March working party, as mentioned earlier, will be pretty hectic! We haven't been able to get a skip lorry onto site yet but will now aim to hire one for the April working party. There is a massive pile of rubbish to move from the allotment to the main gate, so any help will be appreciated. It may be worth checking with Howard, the Reserve Manager if you are thinking of coming to help with this particular task, as the situation may change, depending on the weather.

Agreement has now been reached by the committee about how the newly acquired allotment will be developed. Full details will be published in the next newsletter but, basically, there will be a dedicated bird watching area, a permanent 'educational and social area' that will only be open at certain times, and an extension to the 'Sanctuary' that will be open to the public.

WILDLIFE

Committee members were pleasantly surprised to watch two bats (probably Pipistrelles) flitting around the main bridge area on the 24th Feb. It was still almost light so was quite unexpected. That reminds us - we really must get the bat boxes that are still sitting in the shed fixed up around the Reserve soon!

Most of the interesting species of waterfowl have gone, now that the snow has melted, but there are still regular sightings of Gadwalls and, occasionally, just the one little Grebe. A kingfisher has been reported to be in the vicinity and as there is a plentiful supply of 'tiddlers' in the Mere, we hope to see it on a regular basis.

NATURE DAY

The ever-popular 'Nature Day' is to be held on Saturday 9th July from 2-5pm. All the favourite activities will take place, including bug hunts, pond dipping, 'Splat-the-Rat' and the now famous Duck Race on the River Ver. Full details will be published in the next newsletter.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

AGM

Sunday March 20th at 11am

St. Albans sub-aqua club in Cottonmill Lane

Willow weaving workshop and hedgelaying day

Sunday March 27th between 11am – 4pm

On the Reserve Social Area

Nature Day – Members only

Saturday 9 July between 2pm – 5pm

On the Reserve Social Area

WWA Committee 2011

Officers

Steve Simpson

Chairman

Howard

Reserve Manager and
Membership Secretary

Mandy
Janet

Treasurer
Secretary

Members

Sheila

Newsletter Editor

Pat
Derryn
Penny
Sam
Margaret
Alison
Jack

Member
Archivist
Social Secretary
Website technical support
Management Plan Advisor
Website editorial advisor
Member

PICTURE CORNER

The first snowdrops (complete with bee!)



Volunteers working hard, getting ready for the hedgelaying day by removing the landscape fabric and old chestnut paling. It proved to be more difficult than first thought.



Especially for our Chairman and his lovely assistant!



An update on Mink control in Hertfordshire

For those new to the Association, I will very briefly explain that the WWA are involved in a county wide programme of monitoring and trapping of mink on the rivers of Hertfordshire. Mink have devastated the Water Vole populations throughout the U.K. and this programme has been introduced to try and save the remaining Water Voles before it is too late. The WWA monitor three mink rafts between the Reserve and Sopwell House. For detailed information on mink rafts and mink control follow the link:

http://www.gwct.org.uk/documents/gct_mink_raft_guidelineslr.pdf

As you can see from the table below, the River Ver appears to be relatively clear of evidence of mink –so perhaps soon, the Water Vole population will return. We live in hope.....

Sheila: Mink raft monitor

The table below shows how many rafts there are on the various rivers in Hertfordshire and the total number of mink caught, mainly since 2004. Due to theft, vandalism, loss and decay the number of rafts changes all the time so the numbers are indicative rather than precise. Moreover rafts are being added and replaced all the time.	Rafts	Pre04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11
River									
Ash	7	-	12	4	0	0	0	0	0
Beane	3	-	1	9	-	-	-	0	0
Chess	2	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0
Colne	6	-	-	6	5	0	0	0	0
Gade	5	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hiz	7	-	-	6	4	0	0	0	0
Lea	48	25	24	16	15	4	1	2	4
Lea upper	4	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mimram	12	-	0	1	0	0	0	0	6
Rib	25	16	45	20	1	-	-	0	0
Stort	23	-	0	15	17	44	8	8	9
Ver	12	-	4	1	1	0	0	0	0
Total	154	41	86	78	43	48	9	10	19

MR LLOYD'S BIRD COUNT

One of our keen birdwatchers kindly donated £50 to the Association when he reached 50 species on his bird count. Thank you, Mr Lloyd. Below are the species he recorded (up to 25/10/10)

PODICIPEDIDAE FAMILY

1. Little Grebe (male & female)

ARDEIDAE FAMILY

2. Heron
3. Little Egret



ANATIDAE FAMILY

4. Swan
5. Gadwall
6. Teal
7. Mallard
8. Shoveler



ACCIPITRIDAE FAMILY

9. Sparrowhawk
10. Red Kite



PHASIANIDAE FAMILY

11. Pheasant (m & f)

RALLIDAE FAMILY

12. Water Rail
13. Moorhen
14. Coot



LARIDAE FAMILY

15. Black-headed Gull

COLUMBIDAE FAMILY

16. Collared Dove
17. Stock Dove
18. Wood Pigeon



APODIDAE FAMILY

19. Swift

ALCEDINIDAE FAMILY

20. Kingfisher



PICIDAE FAMILY

21. Great Spotted Woodpecker

STURNIDAE FAMILY

22. Starling

MOTACILLIDAE FAMILY

23. Grey Wagtail



CORVIDAE FAMILY

24. Jay
25. Magpie
26. Jackdaw
27. Crow



PRUNELLIDAE FAMILY

28. Hedge Sparrow (Dunnock)

SYLVIIDAE FAMILY

29. Blackcap (m & f)



30. Chiffchaff

TURDIDAE FAMILY

31. Robin
32. Blackbird (m & f)
33. Song Thrush
34. Redwing



35. Mistle thrush

AEGITHALIDAE FAMILY

36. Long-tailed Tit



PARIDAE FAMILY

37. Coal Tit
38. Blue Tit
39. Great Tit



SITTIDAE FAMILY

40. Nuthatch

PASSERIDAE FAMILY

41. House sparrow

FRINGILLIDAE FAMILY

42. Chaffinch (m & f)
43. Brambling (m & f)
44. Greenfinch
45. Goldfinch
46. Siskin (m & f)
47. Redpoll (m?)
48. Bullfinch (m & f)



EMBERIZIDAE FAMILY

49. Reed Bunting (m)



TROGLODYTIDAE FAMILY

50. Wren

Also recorded on the Reserve but not seen by Mr. Lloyd are: Green Woodpecker, Sedge Warbler, Snipe, Tufted duck, Pochard and Treecreeper.

All images are courtesy of the RSPB.

www.rspb.org.uk