

NATURE DAY

Our annual summer event went well, although numbers were slightly down from last year. All who came enjoyed the afternoon and one mother commented afterwards: "That was good old-fashioned fun – but educational at the same time". With guidance from Kathryn Holt, the children (and some adults!) made creatures from twigs, leaves, seeds and whatever else could be scavenged from around the Reserve.



Other activities included insect 'tattoos', Splat-the-Rat, bug hunts, pond dipping and the now obligatory duck race on the River Ver.



A BUMPER HARVEST

The WWA fruit harvest has been superb this year. Apparently, the cold winter of 2010, followed by a long, hot spring, was ideal for fruit trees and berry bushes. Keen volunteers were busy picking blackberries, damsons, quince, crab apples and plums throughout August and September. These have now all been turned into numerous jars of jams and jellies. Normally we have these products for sale at the Wassail in January – but we have such an abundance that the committee would like to offer them to our members in time for Christmas. We think they would make lovely Xmas presents! They will be available at the November working party (see back page for times). Just pop your donation in the box provided. We suggest a minimum of £2.50 for the 1lb jars (much cheaper than the Farmers' Market!) although as all money received goes directly to running the WWA we never say no to extra contributions. There will be a variety of smaller jars and 'taster' pots available too. If the weather is bad the produce will be on display in the bird hide near the entrance gate. Alternatively, just ask one of the volunteers who will be on site that day.



One of the most popular apple varieties we grow. This tree bore no fruit for years – until we started to wassail it. Now it is one of the most prolific!! It is strange – but it is true!

DROUGHT

Water levels on the Reserve throughout October were very low and the lake is in danger of drying out completely unless there is significant rainfall in the near future. The timing could not be worse, as fish stocks had grown to a good level and two kingfishers have been seen flying around the lake on a regular basis. Kingfishers were a common sight at the Reserve until a couple of years ago, so it will be very sad to see them disappear again in order to find food.

Sheila (Editor)

Why is the water so low?

Boreholes (pictured below) at the head of the Mere, dug during the days of watercress production, normally provide a supply of water directly from the underlying aquifer (water table), natural pressure pushing water up and onto the surface. Not quite artesian wells, but they do the job. The level of the water table rises and falls on a seasonal basis, being dependent on rainfall percolating through the topsoil and into the chalk substrata. In autumn, following on from the driest part of the year it is naturally at the lowest point, relying on increasing precipitation through autumn and winter to raise the level again. My personal rainfall statistics (from a nearby garden) indicate that this year, so far, has been the driest since my records began (2001!).



The boreholes have simply stopped providing water, the level having dropped enough to reduce the natural pressure. Close investigation of the boreholes shows that the water level is (as of the end of October) about 150mm below the top of the pipe.

It appears that the remaining Mere water is now being maintained by the trickle directly from the River Ver at the northern corner of the Reserve. A prolonged warm, dry spell of weather would now result in the Mere evaporating and drying up. The last time the Mere disappeared was during the summer of July and August 2006. Fortunately we're now into November and (fingers crossed) substantial rain will not be far away.

And on the subject of water.....

Although the low water level has reduced the Pyghtle pond to little more than an overgrown, muddy puddle it has been considered a great success in terms of habitat creation. A study earlier this year confirmed it to be particularly good quality with a good population of aquatic species. A more obvious and visible benefit though is the attraction of dragonflies.

Typically, the first visitor to a newly created pond is the 'Broad bodied Chaser', a striking blue and yellow creature, and the first one was spotted within two months of the pond being dug in 2010. These creatures favour shallow ponds in sunny locations and quickly colonise

new sites. They fly May to mid-August, mating on the wing and laying eggs on the water surface. The nymphs hatch and typically live under water for 1-3 years (depending on temperature and availability of food) before emerging, climbing up a suitable reed or branch and transforming into the adult dragonfly.



This newly emerged 'Southern Hawker' was seen earlier this year warming itself in the sun before taking flight. Adults live only for a few weeks, a month at most.

Damselflies are a similar species, two common varieties having also been seen, the large red damselfly and the common blue. For full details refer to british-dragonflies.org.uk



Steve (Chairman)

WORK PARTY NEWS

JULY: Volunteers took part in the 'Big Butterfly Count' on the 31st July. In the allotted 15 minute slot they recorded Gatekeeper (5), Speckled Wood (1), Small White (6), Green-veined White (2), Common Blue (1) and six-spot Burnet moth (1). The Big Butterfly Count is a nationwide survey (organised by Butterfly Conservation and Marks & Spencer) aimed at helping to assess the health of our environment. It was launched in 2010 and an impressive 10,000 people took part, counting 210,000 butterflies and day-flying moths across the nation. Many more people, some 34,000 in fact, joined this year's Big Butterfly Count (16th July - 7th August 2011). Next year's Big Butterfly Count will take place from Saturday 14th July - Sunday 5th August 2012. If you wish to know more follow the link: <http://www.bigbutterflycount.org/about>

Other work included clearing the Orchard, weeding the Butterfly Meadow and Herb Garden, cleaning out the Pyghtle pond and cutting the grass in the Allotment.

AUGUST: Many volunteers finally cleared the last of the rubbish from the Allotment. Jack, with help from Steve and Howard, loaded up the WWA trailer and took it to the recycling centre in Garston. This took three trips but did save the Association from having to hire another skip. These cost over £200 a time so many thanks go to everyone who helped out on the day.

The other main task was to prepare an area on the Allotment in readiness for three new Alder trees. These have now been planted, in memory of long - standing member, Amber Carroll (1947 - 2009) at the request of her friends and family. Amber took great pleasure in visiting the Reserve, especially during the last year of her life when she could visit with her friends for a quiet and peaceful chat.



Amber's memorial trees arriving by lorry

The WWA was planning to plant three Alders at the far end of the allotment, to screen the Alban Way fencing from view, and to improve the habitat to attract Siskins and Redpolls. The Association is sure that Amber would have been pleased to know that these trees, donated in her memory, will be a great source of food for the birds and an attractive feature for our visitors to see in the years to come.

SEPTEMBER: The entrance area was cleared of the hogweed, nettles and brambles that were beginning to take over the area, to the detriment of the Medlar and Quince trees.



An open invitation for our members to come along and pick a bag or two of apples resulted in many hundreds being harvested and taken away. This still left a huge number to deal with. Next year, if the harvest is as abundant as this year, the apples will be professionally juiced, pasteurised and bottled, and sold back to us at cost price. We can then sell it at our Wassail event in January.



Pictured below are friends and WWA members planting Amber's memorial Alder trees



BIRD HIDE CODE

The code to enter the bird hide is xxxxxx. Please make sure that the windows are closed and the door is shut on leaving. Thank you. And please do not disturb the Heron! He's obviously forgotten the door code.



WWA COMMITTEE 2011

Officers

SteveChairman

HowardReserve Manager and
Membership Secretary

Mandy.....Treasurer

Janet.....Secretary

Members

SheilaNewsletter Editor

PatMember

DerrynArchivist

PennySocial Secretary

SamWebmaster

MargaretManagement Plan Advisor

JackMember

2011 NatWest Community Force Award

Thank you to all who voted, and to those who posted leaflets and lobbied on our behalf. We now have to wait and see if we were successful in gaining some of the Award money. Up to £6000 is available in each area. We came under the Hemel group so it was quite a large catchment area. The results should be known by the end of November. Fingers crossed!

PICTURE GALLERY

They say a picture paints a thousand words. What do these say about the WWA? Most amusing answers will win the lucky entrants some home-made jam. Irresistible! Just e-mail the Editor.



St. Albans Community Fund

The WWA have applied to the St. Albans Community Fund for help towards replacing the fencing leading down to the main gate, along with other improvements to the entrance area. If we are successful in getting funding, the new fence will have a handrail fitted, to improve access for the disabled, as there is a very steep slope that leads down to the gate. A new handrail leading to the bird hide is also needed.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Work party dates

Sunday 27th November. 10am to 1pm

December – Postponed to **New Year's Day** with a later start date of **11am**. Come along and enjoy a well-earned mince pie and glass of mulled wine.

Sunday 29th Jan 2012. 10am to 1pm

All are welcome. Gloves, tools and light refreshments are provided.

WASSAIL 2012

The traditional date for Apple Wassailing is the 17th January (otherwise known as the 'Old Twelfth Night') but as this date falls on a Tuesday we are considering the nearest Sunday to it, which is the **15th January**. This could alter, as at the time of writing it has not been possible to contact all the people normally involved in this annual fund raising event. Confirmation of the date and full details will go out as soon as known.



Very tasty.....a Blenheim Orange, perhaps?

VISITOR'S GUIDE

The committee has produced a 'Visitor's Guide' which is now on the website (under 'Site Guide') The WWA has become increasingly popular over the years, but this does bring with it occasional problems of excessive noise and anti-social behaviour. We want everyone to enjoy their visit, but we do have certain rules to make this possible.

www.watercressLNR.org.uk

WWA BIRD SURVEY 2009

In 2009 David xxxxx kept detailed records of all the birds he saw and could confidently identify on the reserve. He visited regularly, up to 11 times per month. This may not be a complete record of every bird on the Reserve but it is certainly a very good and useful set of data and does provide a good basis for us to build a species list and to assess abundance. We are very grateful to David for sharing his records with us.

If there are other birders out there who either have records which they are willing to share or who would like to start collecting records we would be very pleased. These records are important to help us manage trends. The ownership or copyright of the data remains with you, the recorder. When you give us your records we will ask for your permission to publish on our web site or newsletter and/or submit to partners. We will try to ensure we always credit the record to you and you can decide to withdraw your record at any time. A record is an observation that correctly identifies the species, records the date, the name of the recorder and where the observation occurred. It is useful but not essential if there is additional information such as abundance, sex and age and any behavioural information.

Some trends will be due to changes in external factors but others may reflect the management of the Reserve. For example we have created a new pond, introduced meadow areas with a wider number of grass species but we are also aware the Reserve is becoming more wooded as trees grow up. All these factors may affect the number and abundance of species present and seen on the Reserve.

The following is a summary of David's records. There are 5 columns against each species. Firstly those seen all year round, secondly those seen in summer months and thirdly those seen in winter. Rare or occasional sightings are listed in the fourth column. The maximum number of each species seen at any one time is also listed. **Margaret - September 2011**

DAVID'S BIRD LIST

2009

Bird	All year round	Summer	Winter	Rare/ occasional	Abundance Max. nos	Comment
Little Grebe	x				2+3young	
Cormorant			x		1	
Little Egret			x		2	
Grey Heron	x				3	
Mute Swan	x				2+6young	Summer and occasional winter visit
(Canada Goose)						Seen flying overhead
Mallard	x				11	
Gadwall	x				9	Seen 7 months
Shoveller				x	3	Jan. visitor
Teal	x				4	
Pochard				x	1	Jan. visitor
Tufted Duck				x	1	July + Jan visits
Red Kite				x	1	
Buzzard				x	1	
Sparrowhawk				x	2	
Kestrel				x	1	
Hobby				x	1	August sighting
Pheasant				x	1	Dec sighting
Water Rail				x	1	March sighting
Moorhen	x				8	
Coot	x				9	
Snipe				x	1	Jan sighting
Black headed gull			x		16	Absent April, May, June
Common Gull				x	1	Feb and Dec sightings
Lesser Blk. Backed Gull	x				2	
Common Tern				x		
Stock Dove	x				2	
Wood Pigeon	x				13	

Collared Dove	x				12	
Swift		x			7	
Kingfisher	x				2	
Green woodpecker		x			1	
Gt.Spotted Woodpecker	x				2	
Swallow				x		April sighting
Wren	x				2	
Dunnock	x				3	
Robin	x				4	
Song Thrush	x				2	
Redwing		x			5+	
Fieldfare		x			50+	Flock of 50-100 seen in October
Blackbird	x				5	
Blackcap		x			1+2 young	(not seen June/July)
Chiffchaff		x			3	
Great Tit	x				4	
Blue Tit	x				4	
Long Tailed Tit		x			7	
Magpie	x					
Jay	x				3	
Jackdaw	x				~100	
Carrion Crow	x				2	
Starling	x				16	
House Sparrow	x				5	
Chaffinch	x				7	
Redpoll			x		~50	
Goldfinch	x				4	More winter sightings
Greenfinch	x				20	
Siskin			x		~14	
Bullfinch	x				7	
Reed Bunting			x		1	
Ring Necked Parakeet				x		April sighting

David 2011

Butterflies	WWA 2009	WWA 2010	Butterfly World	St. Albans area
Small Heath				
Meadow Brown				
Gatekeeper				
Marbled White				
Speckled Wood				
Comma				
Small Tortoiseshell				
Painted Lady				
Peacock				
Red Admiral				
White Admiral				
Holly Blue				
Common Blue				
Brown Argus				
Small Copper				
Purple Hairstreak				
Large White				
Orange Tip				
Green Veined White				
Small White				
Brimstone				
Large Skipper				
Small /Essex Skipper				
Clouded Yellow				

This is the second annual report. Butterflies are affected by the weather. We had a warm dry spring which is generally positive for butterfly numbers but July and August had less than average sunshine and August was wetter than average.

Monitoring was spread amongst 3 recorders and between them most weeks of the season from the start of April to the end of September were covered. Butterflies are recorded by species and numbers by the observer walking steadily along a defined transect, split into 5 sections that covers most of the site but not the new Allotment area.

Overall 15 species were recorded in the transect survey (3 more than in 2009) plus a casual recording of Brimstones making a total of 16 species for the site. This is the same overall total as achieved in 2009 including casual sightings. The species are listed at the end of this report together with a comparison for the overall St. Albans area and for Butterfly World. The latter is interesting as it is a new area and shows what can be attracted into the area but comparison with the WWA site is limited as Butterfly World is an open site with no woodland. The WWA site's most numerous sightings were for the Large and Small Whites and Gatekeeper. The latter had around 12 flying together. There were also relatively high numbers for Speckled Wood. No sightings were made of Small Tortoiseshell this year. This is in keeping with regional trends where numbers were down and in particular the later broods seemed to suffer from the poor August weather. Similarly the Red Admirals and Peacocks had quiet years. One Ringlet was recorded which is new for the Reserve. It will be interesting to see whether we attract more or this was just

passing through. Many thanks to our monitors without whose valuable work we would not be able to keep track of how attractive our Reserve is to butterflies. They are: Alison, Penny and Julie. In 2010, as well as trying to maintain the butterfly beds with flowers which are nectar rich for butterflies, we have tried to increase the extent and diversity of meadow areas which will, we hope, further encourage butterflies with not only nectar sources but also food plants for their caterpillars

Margaret 2011