

## WWA OPENING DAY 1992

2<sup>nd</sup> September



### 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 'Open Day'

**Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2012**

It is amazing, and a real achievement, that the Watercress Wildlife Association has not only managed to survive as a voluntary group for 20 years, but that it has grown from the early attempts at creating and running a community project into successfully managing the Local Nature Reserve you see today. Well done to everyone – the WWA members who help finance the Association with their subscriptions, work party helpers, surveyors who record the flora and fauna, and the various groups that have kindly given us grant aid over the years, some amounts being quite substantial. A special 'thank you' must go to all the many different committee members who have served their time, now and in the past. Their enthusiasm over the years has been inspiring. The 'Big Society'? The WWA has been doing it for years!!

We shall be holding our annual summer event to tie in with this 20th anniversary. There will be the usual activities including 'Splat-the-Rat, pond dipping, mini-beast hunts and our own 'Duck Race' on the River Ver (assuming there is still some water flowing by September). There will be light refreshments available to purchase throughout the afternoon.

In the evening the BBQ will still be alight for WWA members to bring along their own food to cook. And if you would like to learn a bit about bat detecting, the WWA Chairman will be hosting a bat walk at dusk. Further details are to be found on the back page.

[www.watercresslnr.org.uk](http://www.watercresslnr.org.uk)

## HEDGELAYING EVENT and WORK PARTY

This was another great hedge-laying and hedge planting day. The weather was glorious and twenty-six volunteers turned out to help. We have been so lucky to have warm, sunny days at these types of events. We set up a BBQ and picnic tables so that all the workers could enjoy a comfortable and sociable 'al fresco' lunch, provided by the Association. The temperature in March was certainly a lot kinder than it was in June and early July!



The work party was split into three groups. Donato Cinicolo, and fellow hedge layer Tom, supervised the hedge laying team. The second group planted a couple of hundred hedging plants (donated to us by the Woodland Trust) and the third group created an upright log pile (pictured right). Everyone really enjoyed their day and gained satisfaction from seeing the difference that their labours had achieved. The hedge looked very bare immediately after the work was finished but is now growing well and in a couple of years will form a dense wildlife barrier.



The development of the Allotment is really beginning to take shape - in readiness for opening some parts up to the public but there is still a long way to go. The new Social Area makes a wonderful venue for the Association to host its regular events now that the rest of the Reserve is fully developed.

## THE FINISHED UPRIGHT LOG PILE



Credit goes to the team that built this rather splendid log pile - a sculpture in itself! This type of log pile is aimed at attracting invertebrates and rare species such as Stag Beetle. Thanks go to Lorna, Cheryl and Cathy for their design skills and hands-on work.



One unwelcome visitor on the day was this fearsome looking American Signal Crayfish. Unfortunately this invasive species has colonised the River Ver and wiped out our native White - clawed variety. The Signal Crayfish carry a virus that doesn't harm them but is devastating to the indigenous species.



## WORK PARTY NEWS



One of the early work parties – note the bridge made out of old garage doors!

**April:** It was such a miserable, drizzly day that the volunteers who braved the weather nearly decided to go home again. But Katie was having none of that defeatist attitude, especially as she had cycled over from the other side of town to help out! Volunteers made a start on the new fencing that is going up in the Allotment by driving in all the posts in readiness for the new chestnut paling that is to be fixed to them. Everyone was completely soaked through by the end but still enjoyed the morning.

**May:** The Insect Hotel (see below left) was finally completed, made with materials from around the Reserve, and other bits and bobs brought along by WWA members. A start was made in attaching the chestnut paling to the posts (below right).

**June:** The entrance area was cleared of hogweed, brambles and nettles, the Butterfly and Herb gardens were weeded out, the path edges trimmed back and a large Osier was pollarded in 'the Bog'.



The finished 'Insect Hotel'



Admiring the new chestnut paling



## A MESSAGE FROM THE RESERVE MANAGER

"Every now and then I receive letters from visitors that make all the hard work worthwhile. This is one I received recently. If you see some of the committee members wandering around with large grins on their faces you'll know why – and it won't just be the alcohol".

26<sup>th</sup> July 2012

Dear Howard Artiss,

Yesterday evening we walked back from visiting family in Mile House Lane into the City Centre via Verulam Golf Course. We saw the Watercress Wildlife sign and as we hadn't visited the area for about 15 years decided to explore.

**BRILLIANT!**

We had a very happy wander round, and were hugely impressed by what the Watercress Wildlife Association has achieved: – the planting, paths, notice boards, seats – its a joy. Membership is not practicable but the enclosed cheque for £50.00 is a "thank you". Use some of it to buy a bottle or two of wine for the Committee for all their hard work.

Yours sincerely,  
Janet Duke

One of the WWA founder members, Janet, has kindly given permission to publish her sketch 'Watercress Wildlife Association' in the newsletter. It is on display at the 2012 Summer Art Exhibition – held by the St Albans Art Society in the Old Town Hall until 4<sup>th</sup> August from 10am – 6pm.



The trees pictured are Silver Birch that were planted in memory of Gwen Jarvis – the original Editor and a driving force behind the setting up of the Association.

## WILDLIFE



This lovely butterfly was photographed by the Editor whilst she was having a gentle stroll around the Reserve. It is a Marbled White and this is the first verified sighting for the site. Very exciting, as the butterfly was photographed in one of the mini-meadows specially planted to attract butterflies. All the hard work put in by Laurie and Margaret is paying off at last!

Despite its name, the Marbled White is more closely related to the subfamily known as the "browns" than the "whites". This butterfly is unmistakable, its black and white markings distinguishing it from all other species found in the British Isles.

The butterfly is found in unimproved grassland where the grass may grow up to 0.5m tall. The largest colonies are found on chalk downland but even small strips of grassland, such as a road verge, field margins, woodland clearings and disused railway lines can contain smaller colonies.



Early morning is a good time to see this species, as it warms up with wings held open absorbing the sun's rays. This species can be quite conspicuous, even from a distance, as it may be the only white object among the grassland.

At good sites it is not uncommon to see a flower head containing several adults all vying for space as they feed. When the weather is dull and at night, the adults will rest on grass stems, as well as the flower heads of any of their nectar sources, such as Thistle or Knapweed.

Internet research shows that it is possible to recognise them from their underwings. The male is shown, above left, and the female on the right.

## WORK PARTY DATES 2012



**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> July:** Volunteers will be giving both the Herb Garden and Butterfly Meadow a thorough 'bindweed bash'. The stuff just gets everywhere! If there is time it would be good to replace any old log path edging with new logs – a job we've been meaning to do for a while now.

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August:** We need to get the Reserve ready for the 'Open Day' on 2<sup>nd</sup> September by making sure the grass is cut, the path edges are trimmed back and that all looks its best for our visitors!

**Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> September:** Regular maintenance – and the start of a vast programme of thinning out trees, coppicing and pollarding around the Reserve.

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October:** Continuing pollarding, coppicing and tree work plus any regular maintenance tasks

All are welcome. Work parties start at **10am** and finish around 1pm. Refreshments, tools and gloves are provided.

### BIRD HIDE CODE

The code to enter the bird hide is C1956

Please make sure the door and windows are closed when you leave, for security reasons. Thank you.



## WWA COMMITTEE 2012

### Officers

**Steve/Chairman**

**Janet/Secretary**

**Howard/Reserve Manager & Membership**

**Mandy/Treasurer**

### Members

**Sheila/Newsletter Editor**

**Pat/Member**

**Derryn/Member**

**Penny/Social Secretary**

**Sam/Webmaster**

**Margaret/Management Plan Advisor**

**Jack/Member**

## WATERWHEELERS



Yvonne and Graham successfully finished their epic 'London to Paris' bike ride on one of the WWA tandems. Well done to them both. What an achievement. Photos and a short account will be in the next newsletter.

## OTHER MATTERS

**Steve** must be congratulated on finishing the job of making replacement information boards for the whole of the Reserve. He has greatly improved on the design of the originals. They have served their function well, but are no longer 'fit for purpose' so it is time for an update. They should all be in place in time for the Open Day. Thanks, Steve.

**Pat** is also to be thanked for her design of a 'Nature Trail' leaflet and quiz for children. There will be copies available in the bird hide over the summer holidays. This is a first 'trial run' and any feedback would be appreciated. Eventually, the WWA hope to have the leaflet on the website for parents to print out themselves.

The new donation box is proving to be quite a money spinner and has already brought in an extra £110 for the funds.





## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Don't forget to put **Sunday September 2<sup>nd</sup>** in your diary for our special 20th anniversary Open Day and BBQ.

**2pm:** Official opening by the WWA Chairman

**2.30 – 5pm:** Bug hunts, pond dipping, insect 'tattoos', Splat-the Rat.

It is a good idea to have arms and legs covered if taking part in the bug hunts as there are nettles and brambles in abundance around the site. There will be facilities available to wash and dry hands before eating.

**4.30:** Duck race on the River Ver.

There will be a refreshment stall, running between 2pm and 5pm, where cakes, BBQ food and drinks can be purchased.

There may even be some **coracle rides** on the Mere during the afternoon – if the Chairman finishes building it in time and if there is any water in the lake! It might be like paddling through soup by then, looking at the current level of algal growth that is appearing! Come along and give it a go – just make sure you don't wear your smartest clothes.



And here's one he didn't make earlier! This one was brought to the WWA by the speaker at our 2010 AGM

After 5pm the BBQ will still be alight for anyone who would like to cook their own food and join in our social evening, complete with the Association's very own ukulele group! If you play an instrument or like a good old-fashioned sing-song come and join in the fun!

At dusk, why not stroll down to the Reserve and join in with the 'Bat Walk' and see (or hear) what may be flitting around the site. Learn how to use a bat detector by listening to the different frequencies that bats make when flying.

**We look forward to seeing you there**

## VIRGIN ON THE RIDICULOUS?



Under the terms of the WWA lease, we have a responsibility to encourage people to walk or cycle to the Reserve. Perhaps this may be taking alternative forms of transport just a little too far?



Eventually the Virgin balloon landed safely by the Marlborough club in Cottonmill Lane although the local farmer was none too happy about an earlier 'touchdown' in his field of cows!

## WILDLIFE UPDATE

Another species of butterfly that has been showing in good numbers (unless it's the same one flying around very fast!) is the Ringlet. This picture was taken at the Woodland Bank, near the entrance gate, at the end of July.

