

20TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT REPORT



Merely the Mayor on the Mere!

The 20th anniversary event was great fun and the WWA committee even managed to persuade Mayor, Councillor Eileen Harris to try her hand at navigating the Mere in our Chairman's coracle. We forgot to warn her beforehand to wear a wetsuit and not that smart linen outfit. Luckily, she, and the suit, came to no harm! The committee received some great feedback from those who came along including these lovely e-mails.

Thank you all so much

What a delightful event you and your colleagues organised for us yesterday. We do admire the hard work and creative imagination that gave us a very happy visit. We were very impressed by the care and attention that was given to our granddaughter Lucy when she had try in the coracle. Seeing the Mayor paddling about in the coracle was just marvellous! Lucy appreciated all the various activities that were offered and we enjoyed seeing the fun she had. The Duck Race gave us all a great deal of amusement. The 'Water Men' were most enthusiastic and appeared quite undaunted by the mud.

Roy and Christine

A big 'Thank You' to you and the committee for the most wonderful afternoon and evening: a lovely way to round off the summer. Also thanks to you all, for all your hard work, making the Watercress Nature Reserve such a special place

Rachel, Dave and Lucy

It is great that all the hard work that goes into organising these events is appreciated and that everyone went away with a smile on their face! Thank you all for your heartening comments which have now been passed on to everyone who was involved in making such a success of the special anniversary day.

20th ANNIVERSARY cont'd



Special thanks go to Kathryn (the original Membership Secretary for the WWA) for running her fabulous and inspiring 'Story Tent' and Veronika for showing us the fascinating craft of making Plaster-of-Paris leaf casts with the children. Other thanks go to all the committee members and volunteers who helped make the event run (almost!) smoothly. The Duck race was particularly popular – and vocal - this year, and the BBQ and refreshment tent were a great addition to the day. We even managed to make a small profit which was an added bonus.



Local artist Rosemary, a WWA member and Wicket Brood musician, sent in some of her sketches of the day along with a short article about herself:

"Originally from Cheshire, I have been living in St Albans since 2000. For as long as I can remember I have sketched life as it goes by and have drawings/sketchbooks dating back to the sixties. The Watercress Wildlife Association is a great subject area for me as I love trees, especially the ancient apple and willows, and events such as the Wassail and this Anniversary. I am a retired art teacher and worked for many years in Stockport schools and in further, and adult, education. Along with my sketching, I work in watercolour, mixed media and print making. Life drawing is a passion. I occasionally run courses and organise drawing groups.

I exhibit my work at local venues and Open Studios.

20th ANNIVERSARY cont'd



Thanks for that, Rosemary, and for allowing me to print your sketches. It is a delight to have contributions to put in the newsletter. As always, if anyone does have any interesting articles, photos or sketches they would like to see in print, please do contact me. **Editor**

VER PLAYERS

Some of the WWA committee, and volunteers, are members of the Ver Players ukulele group that played at the event. They meet on the second Sunday every month at the Rose & Crown pub in St Michael's Street.

Ver Players is open to all ukulele players – beginners to experts, and some people just come along and sing... which is just fine! It really is great fun and if you would like to know more just check out the website at: www.verplayers.org.uk



WATERWHEELERS

Yvonne and Graham's London to Paris Charity Bike Ride



Day 1

WWA member, Yvonne, and friend Graham, took part in this four day event, on one of the WWA tandems, between the 11th and the 14th of July. Ninety-seven cyclists started the ride, leaving Crystal Palace at 7am. The route was officially 306 miles long but Yvonne and Graham missed a turning on this first day and ended up covering 312 instead! The group faced a hilly 100 miles through Kent: it was a long day, finally arriving at their hotel accommodation in Calais at 10.30pm.

Day 2

The route took them from Calais to Abbeville - a distance of 78 miles. The first half was also hilly but then flattened out. Apparently the organisers provided some great food en route which was much appreciated, and much needed, no doubt!



Day 3

From Abbeville the pair followed the route to Beauvais on much flatter terrain, through quiet villages and gentle peaceful countryside. That must have felt like a rest day - only covering 68 miles!

The WWA tandems are truly international now; the other one having been used on a trip beside the Nile!

WATERWHEELERS

Their triumphant arrival at the Eiffel Tower on Bastille Day



Day 4

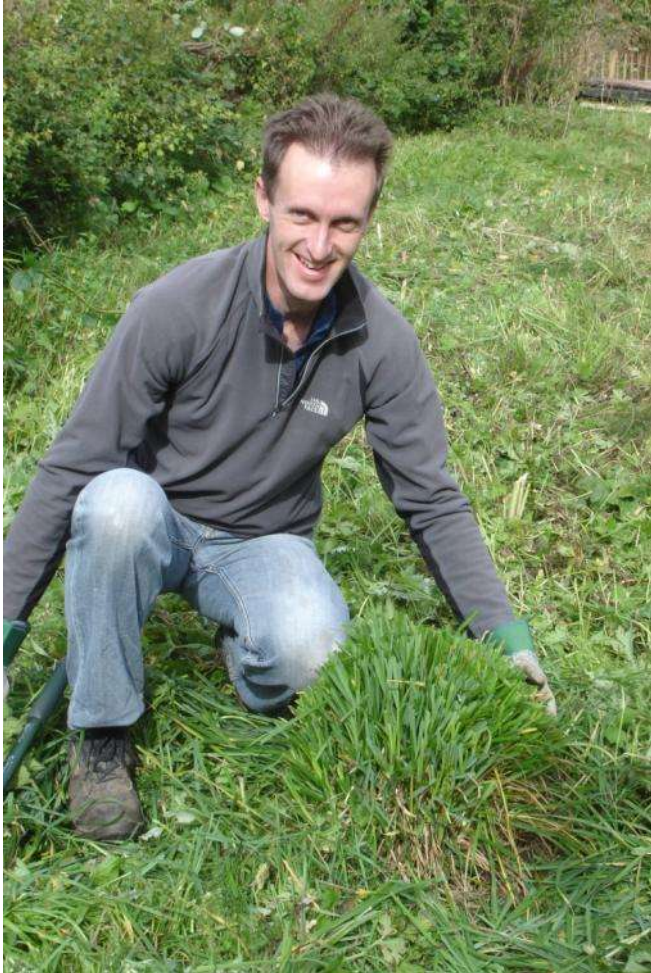
The final stretch of 60 miles went from Beauvais to Paris. Yvonne and Graham enjoyed a glass of wine on the outskirts of Paris whilst waiting for the convoy of the other cyclists to catch up. Meeting at the Bois de Boulogne at 3pm on Bastille Day the whole group of ninety-seven riders cycled the final two miles into Paris, cheered on by the spectators. The traffic even stopped for them at the Arc de Triomphe. The trip finally ended at the Champs de Mars, behind the Eiffel Tower. All enjoyed a well-deserved glass of sparkling wine whilst meeting up with friends and families. In the evening there was a celebratory meal and Yvonne and Graham were specially commended for their efforts: Graham being the eldest (71) on the ride and Yvonne being the only person who is visually impaired. The WWA would like to add their warmest congratulations to the intrepid pair.



Apparently, it is unusual for a tandem 'couple' to remain friends throughout such a taxing task but Yvonne and Graham are still on speaking terms - in fact he jokes how Yvonne has influenced his usage of gears for the better. He uses the easier gears more often now. You can teach an old dog, new tricks, after all!

WORK PARTY NEWS

August: All efforts went into preparing the Reserve for the 20th anniversary event. Path edges were trimmed, overhanging branches chopped back, the river bank vegetation cut down in readiness for the annual duck race and Barley Straw extract added to the lake. By the end of August the Reserve looked in great shape with plenty of Willowherb and Purple Loosestrife in flower to give a splash of colour.



September: The new meadow area on the Allotment was scythed and all the cuttings gathered up and taken to the newly created compost heap. This action exposed lots of tussocks of Cocksfoot grass. Volunteer Nick (above) is seen snipping this particular clump to match his haircut! The idea of regular scything, and the removal of the cut material, is to try and reduce the fertility of the soil. This can then be plug-planted with meadow species of plants.

The Butterfly Meadow and the back half of the Tussock Meadow were also scythed and the cuttings removed.

BIRD HIDE CODE

The code to enter the bird hide is **Cxxxx**

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

WORK PARTY DATES 2012

Sunday 28th October: The most important job is to start pollarding the many willows that abound on the Reserve. Thinning out of some of the unwanted self-seeded trees that have sprung up on site is fairly urgent too. Many hands are needed to shift the volumes of cut material to the bonfire site. Some of the material can be used to make 'dead hedges' and some can be put aside for natural fencing to contain compost heaps.

Sunday 25th November: The entrance area needs bramble and nettle clearance; coppicing continues. Clearance of the watercress in the boggy area is another job for anyone who would like to have a go. Waders are provided – as long as you are a shoe size 8 or over!

Sunday 30th December: Yes, even more coppicing and pollarding! And we need to get ready for our annual Wassail being held on the 20th January.

Sunday 27th January: Maybe a spot of hedge laying might make a change from all that coppicing!

We now have a great social area where we hold our work party refreshment break. If you have ever thought about helping out at the WWA but aren't sure about committing yourself, do come along and meet us, over coffee and a piece of cake, and find out if volunteering is for you.

All ages are welcome. Work parties start at **10am** and finish around **1pm**

Tools and gloves are provided.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 20th January 2013

Watercress Wassail

2pm onwards

The ever popular annual Wassail is our main fund raising event of the year. We try and introduce something a little bit different to the occasion each time to add interest. Hopefully, the Ver Players will be able to join in with some seasonal songs, in addition to the wonderful Wicket Brood, and stalwart Master of Ceremonies, Sandy G. There is talk of possibly having a willow lantern parade at dusk but at the moment this is just an idea under consideration (but only the Editor and a friend know anything about this!). If anyone would like to get a 'bit creative' for the event, or help out in any way, just contact the Reserve Manager.

Full details and timings will be in the January newsletter once finalised.

The quince harvest has been appalling this year so there will only be limited stock available. In fact, there are only 13 jars...so perhaps an auction at the Wassail could be fun!

WILDLIFE REPORT



The most exciting sighting has been of the three Kingfishers that were regularly fishing in the Mere throughout September. The above photo was taken by WWA Chairman Steve who spent some time patiently waiting to get this shot.

Kingfishers live around streams, slow-flowing rivers, ponds and lakes where they feed on aquatic insects and small fish, such as sticklebacks. When hunting for food, they perch on a favourite branch near to the water and watch out, with their keen eyesight, for a suitable fish. The bird has to rely on memory to predict where the fish will be after it has entered the water and will sometimes return to the surface with a stone in its beak if its prediction was wrong. After it has caught a fish the bird will fly back to the perch. The Kingfisher does not eat the fish immediately and, instead, will beat it against the perch to kill it and then consume it head-first.



A lovely photo, taken by Keith in December 2007, of a different male kingfisher at the Reserve

Kingfisher courtship occurs in early spring when the male will approach the female with a fish in his beak. He will hold it so that the fish's head is facing outwards and attempt to feed it to the female. If he is unsuccessful he will simply eat the fish himself. He may have to repeat this feeding behaviour for some time before mating occurs. Kingfishers make burrows in sandy riverbanks. The burrow consists of a horizontal tunnel with a nesting chamber at the end and is usually about a metre long. The female usually lays about 6 or 7 eggs, but sometimes will lay up to 10, and both parents will share the job of incubating them. The chicks are normally ready to leave the nest when they are 24-25 days old, but if the fish supply is poor, they can take up to 37 days. Once out of the nest, the young are fed for only four days before the adults drive them out of the territory and start the next brood.

During the breeding season, Kingfishers can often be seen hunting around the deep pools that form in the bends of rivers. These locations are rich in the young fish that the adults feed to their young. Kingfishers are very sensitive to cold weather and a particularly harsh winter can seriously reduce their populations. But luckily they have a long breeding season, from March to July, with most pairs having at least two broods and raising an average of 6.5 young per year: this high reproductive rate allows them to bounce back from these dips in their population after one of those harsh winters.

Their call is a shrill 'tsee' or 'tsee-tsee' call, often repeated rapidly, especially when in flight. This is the easiest way for birdwatchers to know if the Kingfishers are active around the Reserve and where to look out for them. Happy hunting, all.

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

www.watercrosslnr.org.uk

NOSTALGIA PAGE



Joe Masi is pictured here trundling manure to his allotment (now the Pyghtle). He used to spend days each year doing this. Note the posts in the water. They are where the running boards were fixed for the watercress workers to walk along.

