

Issue 95 WATERCRESS 2013

RAMSBURY ROAD FETE 2nd JUNE 2013



The Association was invited to run a stall at the annual Ramsbury Road Charity Fete. The WWA was their chosen charity so volunteers set up the stall with lots of lovely display boards telling the story of how the Nature Reserve has grown and developed over the years. Steve (WWA Chairman) collected an assortment of aquatic creatures from various parts of the Reserve, including some newts and a bullhead fish (more on that later)*. There was a lot of interest in our stall and the whole event was great fun. There was even a local ukulele band playing that included three WWA committee members!

Around £350 was raised for the Association and this money has already been used to help pay for the urgent bridge repairs that have just been completed.

NATURE DAY

Well, it certainly turned out to be a 'Nature Day' indeed. After lovely weather the previous week, the forecasters predicted torrential rain and thunderstorms between 2pm and 5pm on the afternoon of our event. And between 2pm and 5pm we experienced torrential rain and thunderstorms. It was such a shame as volunteers had put so much effort into organising the event, including making a brand new awning, baking a feast of cakes and making the Reserve look really special the week before. But some brave souls ventured down to the site, with their children, to listen to Kathryn Holt's storytelling magic in her Story Tent. Unfortunately, the waterproofing had worn off the tent and the rain dripped steadily through the fabric, but did Kathryn flinch... absolutely not....what a trooper!

Thanks go to all the hard-working volunteers who gave their time and energy to try and make the day a success, and who resolutely stood at their posts all through the afternoon. We even managed to make a small profit of around £50 from the small number of visitors that did turn up. So it was not a complete wash-out, so to speak!



HERBS & HISTORY WALK

Saturday 28th September ~ 2.30pm

Enjoy a stroll through the beautiful natural environment in the vicinity of Sopwell Open Space (near Cottonmill Lane.) Walk leader, Juliana, will show you plants along the way that have been used medicinally in past centuries, and describe how they were used. She will also share some traditional home remedies that can be tried today, folklore associated with the plants, and something of the history of the places we pass through.

The cost is £8 per person, 50% of which will be donated to the Watercress Wildlife Association Nature Reserve, which will form part of the walk.



Woodcut of Elder in 17th century herbal

www.healing-in-history.co.uk

FILMING IN 'THE GARDEN'

Visitors to the site late in July would have been surprised by the unusual amount of activity as local film maker Andy Pearson, actors and crew were taking advantage of the good weather to shoot some idyllic countryside scenes for a forthcoming short feature. We look forward to seeing the results.



WORK PARTY AND RESERVE NEWS



Refurbished bridge

May: Everyone tidied the site in readiness for 'Nature Day'. If only we had known in advance what that day would bring....we could have built an ark!

June: Volunteers cut back the dogwood by the herb garden, and all the brambles and nettles in the main driveway.

July: Everyone concentrated on clearing the paths as they had become very overgrown, along with weeding the Butterfly Meadow.

August: Work started on repairing the 'Russo' bridge, with Steve, Robert and Howard removing the old chicken wire. Janet and Mandy picked blackberries in readiness for Derryn's jam making marathon.

September: Steve (with help from Howard, Richard and Robert) has done a brilliant job of finishing refurbishing the 'Russo' bridge. Many of the boards were rotting, especially the ones that are sometimes under water in wet winters. The wire netting was beginning to lift and cause a trip hazard so this was removed (the worst part of the job as the netting was fixed down with dozens of staples). The next problem was removing the rotten boards. Lifting the boards was not too hard but getting the old nails out was almost impossible, so after experimenting with various tools (even breaking one of our grubbing mattocks in the process), Steve adapted an old iron bar which did the trick.



The other two bridges are going to have the same treatment over the winter and then, hopefully, they will last another twenty years. Apparently, when they were built the life expectancy was only ten years so we cannot complain.

WORK PARTY DATES 2013

Volunteers are always needed to help with digging and tidying the Butterfly Beds or Herb garden on a regular basis. If you feel you can spare a couple of hours, once or twice a month, please contact the Reserve Manager.

Sunday 29th September: Possible apple picking (with the apples then being sent for juicing). To be confirmed

Sunday 27th October: Bridge work; removing chicken wire

Sunday 24th November: Bridge work/Hedgelaying.

Sunday 29th December: Post Christmas fresh air meet-up! Work optional!

All ages are welcome. Work parties start at **10am** and finish around **1pm**. Light refreshments are served around midday. Tools and gloves are provided.

JAM MAKING—JARS REQUIRED PLEASE.

The blackberry and damson harvest has been spectacular this year. In fact, the weight of the fruit on the old damson tree was so prolific that it brought down one of the largest branches. All the fruit was salvaged, so jam making has begun in earnest, and committee member Derryn has already made over one hundred assorted jars to date. These will be on sale at the Wassail and at the gate (adjacent to the donation box) once we have built a 'jam shelter'.

If you have any 1lb jars or smaller please contact her.

BIRD HIDE CODE

The code to enter the bird hide is **xxxxx**. Please make sure the door and windows are closed when you leave, for security reasons. Thank you.

WWA COMMITTEE 2013

Officers

Steve /Chairman

Janet /Secretary

Howard /Reserve Manager & Membership Secretary

Mandy Neale/Treasurer

Members

Sheila /Newsletter Editor

Pat /Member

Derryn /Member

Penny /Social Secretary

Sam /Webmaster

Margaret/Management Plan Advisor

READER CONTRIBUTIONS

"At the summer event back in June, the pond dipping was great fun as always. My favourite find was this bullhead lurking in the mud. It's perhaps 7cm long and quite chunky with a great big head, hence the name bullhead, and the alternative name miller's thumb.



They tend to live at the bottom of fast flowing stony rivers, feeding on invertebrates at dusk. They are very well camouflaged – unless you stick them in a white tray of course."

Sam

...and more from Sam.....

"A kindly male kingfisher was in the mood for posing and I got possibly the best shots I ever have done. He spent a while over the pool in the middle of the site but then moved to the river at the back where he fished for a while and I got these pictures.

Interestingly he caught a fish then somehow attached it to the branch he was perching on. Perhaps it was tucked in a crook or impaled on a twig, and I really can't be sure whether he meant it or not. He left it there.

The pictures have come out with a slightly other-worldly almost flash-lit look to them as he was perched in a shaft of sunlight above the shady river. Also I messed up a bit with the camera and had to rescue it in post-production, which contributes to the look in a funny sort of way!"



Sam's photo's can be seen in much better detail on the WWA website at:

www.watercresslnr.org.uk

READER CONTRIBUTIONS

"My name is Pete and I've been visiting the Nature Reserve taking Photos. It's a fantastic place and all praise to the volunteers. I have spoken to some of the volunteers and they told me to contact the Chairman to send in some of the pictures I've taken there. Feel free to use them on the site if you wish. If you do, I would ask that you just credit me".

Thanks, Pete, and pictured below is one of a shield bug that you took. More will be published as space allows.



It is great to receive photographs of the flora and fauna of the Reserve. Our visitors and members are the people who are helping us keep records of what is around at different times of the year. So please keep sending them in to the Editor or Chairman. And if you are happy for some of your pictures to go onto our website, please just forward them to info@watercresslnr.org.uk



These two photos were sent in by Lee. Lee has been a regular visitor to the Reserve for over ten years, and he helped to publish editions of the newsletter in those early digital days.



APPLES GALORE

Apple Cottage Cider (based in Baldock) offers an apple pressing service, and we are planning on using it to turn our apples into bottled juice that we can use at the Wassail and to enjoy all year long. All we need to do is pick our apples and deliver them to Baldock, and they will return a delicious finished product. They can even help to design and print our labels.

If you can help with the picking, please contact the Editor. It is likely to be quite soon as some of the apples are ready for picking now.

"Great juice can be made by mixing different types of apples, as in cookers and eaters. There are a few eaters that make really great single variety juice on their own. Contrary to what most people believe - only premium grade apples are used for juicing - for making the best juice that is. So, no bruises, or bird damage, natural scarring is ok and shouldn't affect the juice. The apples need to be:

Freshly picked the day before pressing, they have a greater juice yield if left for a day to relax.

Apples are better picked straight off the tree (windfalls can carry a multitude of germs). As mentioned above, great apples for pressing are best if they're free from bruising, or holes (from birds). The better the quality of apple the better quality juice you will receive as an end product.

There needs to be enough for 100 bottles of juice, which is around 6 bushels. The boxes in the pictures below are the volume of a bushel and are commonly referred to as bushel boxes.



Pressing & pasteurising is very labour intensive, it takes around 3 hours to set up & clean down before getting to the job of pressing & pasteurising. This is why we have a minimum press quantity of 100 bottles. This also happens to be the amount of fruit we can get into our press in one cheese.

A bushel unit of volume or capacity in the British Imperial System equal to 2,219.36 cubic inches

1 bushel equals in apple terms:

42-48 pounds

126 medium apples

Apple Cottage Cider

www.applecottagecider.co.uk



WILDLIFE MATTERS



There is a very tame heron on site at the moment that Chairman Steve captured on film during a break from his bridge repairs. He is often found perching on top of the bird hide (the heron that is...Steve has already replaced the roof!).

INVERTEBRATE SURVEY

If you wonder what these grey mats are doing dotted around the Reserve, they are part of an invertebrate survey that is being conducted. Please do not look underneath or move them to a rubbish bin thinking they are just discarded litter!

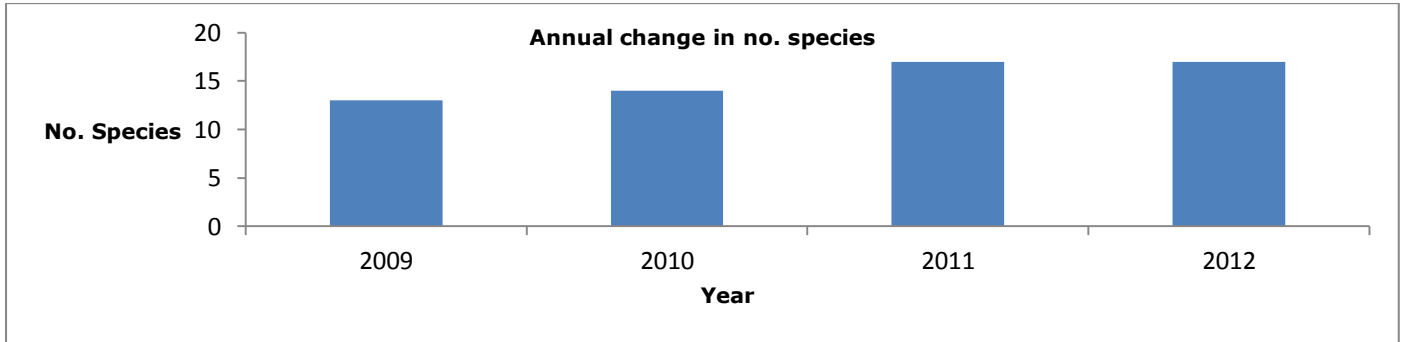


Further details and a report on the findings will be in a future newsletter.

Watercress Wildlife Association: Butterfly Report 2012

In 2012, we saw 17 species (possibly an 18th species) during the survey period April to September. This was encouraging as it equalled last year's record for the Reserve despite periods of appalling weather for some of the summer. March was warm, so some butterflies were about early on but we don't start our formal survey until 1st April, so these are not captured in our data. The flight period for many April and May flying butterflies was delayed for up to 3 weeks because of the poor weather. However, our surveyors were not too daunted by the weather and managed to record something every week except for the two middle weeks in April.

17 species matches the previous year and builds on the improving trend since we started regular surveys in 2009.

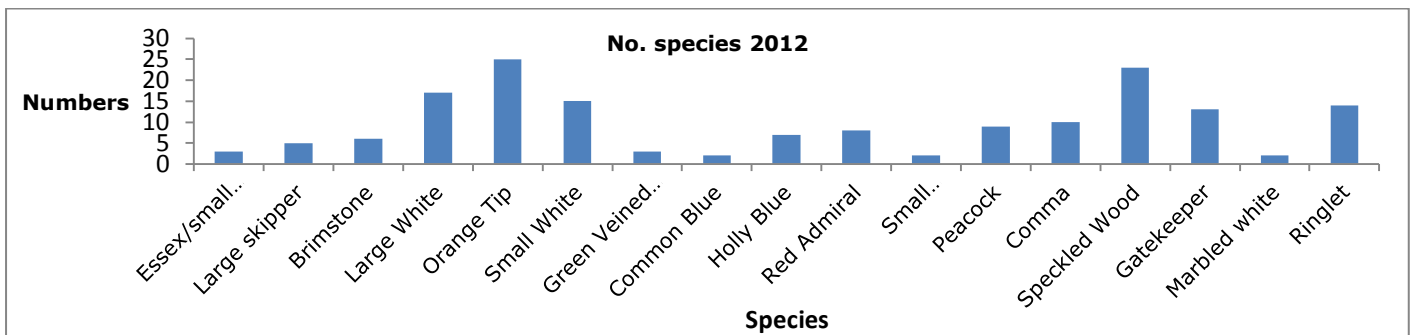


Is this due to better recording or are our efforts to improve the habitat for butterflies starting to show results? Certainly our recorders are becoming more experienced and confident in identification. We are also doing quite a lot to improve the habitat. The buckthorn trees planted four years ago are growing and can provide a food source for brimstones. The butterfly beds provide nectar sources throughout the summer for butterflies (and also bees and hoverflies). The reseeded meadows provide more grasses that are favoured food plants for the larvae and we are trying to ensure that the trees (by some judicious pruning) can provide shelter but don't grow too big and create too much shade.

Our new sighting this year was the Marbled White. Butterfly Conservation reported marbled white numbers increasing by 31% and extending its range across the county. Let's hope it has found a regular home on our reserve. It is thought 2012 was a good year for this species because the young larvae found plenty of food in the wet rapidly growing grass. However, Meadow Browns are also thought to have benefitted from the wet conditions when their larvae were emerging but for the first time in four years we had no sightings recorded. Unlike 2011, we saw no Painted Lady but they have only occasional bumper years and are scarce in the in between years. Skippers seem to be increasing on the reserve despite regionally their numbers being down. Last year's possible sightings have become this year's confirmed. These are grassland species and maybe the new meadows are attractive. Ringlets – new for us in 2011, reappeared again in 2012. The Whites (large, small and green veined) were scarce during the early part of summer but the Small white had a late surge.

Each year we have one or two unconfirmed sightings. This year at the start of September there was a possible Purple Hairstreak around the base of the large oak tree on the embankment. Something to keep an eye out for as this would be quite exciting if we could confirm a colony.

The following graph shows the numbers of each species recorded.



Many thanks must go to our two main recorders Alison and Julie. Often looking for butterflies is very pleasant – surveys normally are only undertaken when it is warm, dry and not too windy and between 11 and 4 (unlike, for example, birders who have to get out early or bat recorders out late) but last year meant often venturing out in the hope of seeing the odd butterfly braving less than favourable conditions. Although overall numbers were down we achieved a complete record.

We can always accommodate new recorders. You don't have to be an expert but you can learn 'on the job' with our help and support and any additional records are always valuable. If you would like to get involved please do let us know (info@watercresslnr.org.uk).

Margaret August 2013

NOSTALGIA PAGE



Two similar views of the entrance area - not long after the construction of the fencing and bird hide had been completed

