

Issue 101 WATERCRESS 2015

WWA APPLE JUICE NOW AVAILABLE



Following on from a previous, successful venture, the committee pressed ahead (pun intended!) with organising the picking, juicing and bottling of hundreds of our home-grown apples. At the September work party, we had a good turnout of volunteers who gathered three car loads of apples. Steve, Howard and Derryn then delivered them to Apple Cottage Cider, near Baldock, the following morning. The apples were washed, pressed, bottled, pasteurised and finally ready for collection on the Wednesday. The lady that runs this service has increased the charges but we still consider it a worthwhile project.

The last time we did this, back in 2013, we ended up with 250 bottles, but this time we have 377! They have all been labelled and the juice will keep for 18 months, if unopened. Once opened it should be consumed within three days.



Quality control!

The juice will be available at our monthly work parties in exchange for a suggested donation of £2.75. Just speak to one of the volunteers who will point you in the right direction.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

ANNUAL WASSAIL *

Sunday 17th January 2016

This popular event will take place in January on the customary date of the Old New Year. The wonderful Wicket Brood are supporting us once again and we always look forward to watching them dance. Here's something about their history.....



Wicket Brood Border Morris was formed in 1994 as a mixed-sex Morris Dancing Side principally performing dances in the Border tradition. They practice in the village of Bricket Wood in Hertfordshire, England. In their quest for an appropriate, original and witty name for the Side, they deduced that a spoonerism of their home base might conjure up images of a mysterious assembly of dark shadowy characters keeping alive ancient rituals and traditions. Maybe that was wishful thinking but it's a name and they like it!

The dances they perform originate from a number of sources. Some have been obtained from documented notations of dances performed many years ago by some of the original Border Morris teams from Shropshire, Worcestershire and Herefordshire. Some of these were very fragmented, some just based on personal recollections, and a certain amount of interpretation was required. Other dances are more contemporary, either being developed by the Brood, or obtained from other similar Sides. They hope that the variety provides an interesting contrast for their audiences.

The costumes are based on traditional sources and present a colourful and interesting sight. The 'tatter' jackets are purple, green, and black – all are similar but a degree of individual flair is allowed! Black trousers, stout boots of purple, green or black, and hats of similar colours complete the scene. In common with many Border Morris Sides, faces are painted, (originally thought to be a form of disguise), and again black, purple and green paints are used in varied combinations. Most of their dances are performed with stout sticks, either long or short depending on the dance.

The Side would not be complete without its musicians. Several members play in local Barn Dance or Folk bands, and the music for the dances is played on a variety of instruments – melodeons, accordions, whistles, saxophone, drums, tambourines and other percussion.

Please note: this is a 'Member's only' event as we need to limit numbers to a manageable and safe level!! Full details will follow in January.

MONTHLY WORK PARTY NEWS

July: The weather was dreadful but a few hardy souls turned out to open up the new viewing area overlooking the Allotment. This will improve the bird watching facility and is a welcome addition to the Reserve. It was planned to hold the 'Volunteers Thank You BBQ' but this was postponed until August.

This area is the last piece of land to be opened up to the public. The WWA believe we now have the right balance between public access and wildlife refuges.



Let me out!

August: Despite it being a Bank Holiday weekend we had a reasonable turnout of helpers. The weather was perfect for the 'Volunteers BBQ' and after the work party everyone enjoyed the sunshine, good food and great company. Some of the stragglers were still enjoying the sunshine well into late afternoon. Go home!



Cheers!

September: Apple picking day! Thanks to everyone that helped out...what a fantastic effort by all.

October: The entrance area embankment was cleared of nettles and brambles to make way for the emerging snowdrops and daffodils early next year.

Wednesday working parties:

July: Volunteers took it in turns to scythe the Allotment Meadow and clear away the cut material. All the grassy areas were cut with the ride-on mower.

August: A lot of work was achieved in August. Steve continued working on replacing the hand rails to the bird hide. Other volunteers cut back overhanging vegetation in the Pygltle whilst the Reserve Manager trimmed the hedges, cut the grass and cut down a large patch of the native Flag Iris in front of the main bench to improve the sight lines over the Mere. One group picked the Damsons ready for jam making.

September: Committee members had a site meeting to determine the priority tree work that needs to be carried out early in 2016. We shall be employing Andy Gardner again and the Chairman is in the process of gaining the usual permissions from St. Albans Council.

Volunteers scythed the Allotment again and cleared the bank in the Orchard. Regular grass cutting continues...

The Association has purchased a lovely new notice board and Steve and Derek made a start by concreting in the upright posts. This was not helped by the fact that the ground is made up of rubble from the demolition of a row of garages!

Apples were picked and taken to Baldock for juicing, and collected two days later.



October: Volunteers have been regularly picking the Russett varieties of apples and putting them out in bags by the gate in exchange for a small donation of £1 a bag. Unfortunately the donation box is becoming a regular target for vandalism although Chairman Steve keeps on repairing it.

Work continues on digging out the Dogwood in front of the Allotment hedge and fence. It is very tenacious stuff and we are regretting planting so much of it early on in setting up the WWA.

All the quince fruit has been picked and turned into quince jelly. More on jam making later....

WWA COMMITTEE 2015

Officers

Steve/Chairman

Janet/Secretary

Howard/Reserve Manager & Membership Secretary

Mandy/Treasurer

Members

Sheila /Newsletter Editor

Pat Bate

Sam/Webmaster

Cath

Margaret/Management Plan Advisor

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ALBAN WAY RAILWAY

The WWA played a small part in the 150th anniversary of the opening of the railway line between St. Albans and Hatfield with WWA committee members and volunteers offering guided tours at hourly intervals around the Reserve.

And three other WWA committee members played with the famous St. Albans ukulele band 'Katie's Jumping Fleas' at the Old Station in Orient Close. Yes, that was a shameless plug for the band in which your Editor and Reserve Manager (and not forgetting committee member Pat) are members! And WWA volunteer Katie is that famous Katie, although she couldn't make it that day. Can you spot the WWA polo shirts in the Fleas line-up?





Twenty bottles of our apple juice were shifted from the London Road Station marquee plus eight jars of quince jelly. Also £16.50 was taken for the bagged apples and other donations down at the WWA site. So, as our Chairman quoted, "quite a fruitful day all round".

JAMMING

Long standing WWA member and jam maker, Derryn, has been busy again this year gathering blackberries and damsons, aided by our volunteers, and turning the fruit into delicious jam. In addition, she has been running training mornings to teach new, willing chefs the tricks of this ancient art. They certainly looked pleased with their efforts! And Janet and Sheila have been busy making the quince jelly.



We're jammin', jammin', jammin', jammin' 
I wanna jam it with you
We're jammin', we're jammin', we're jammin', we're jammin'
Hope you like jammin', too. 

With apologies to the late, great Bob Marley!



Jams and jellies will be available at the November work party and at the Wassail in January (if any is still available- it goes quickly). They make great Christmas present stocking fillers and help a good cause at the same time. Throw in a bottle of WWA apple juice and you're sorted!

NEW BIRD FEEDERS

The new bird feeders are proving to work well in that only the smaller birds, rather than Parakeets, Collared doves and Pigeons can feed from them, so the WWA are making good savings on the amount of sunflower seeds we were buying.



One question WWA committee members are occasionally asked is: Should I feed birds in the garden all year round?

Studies have shown that feeding birds in spring and early summer does increase the success rate of nesting birds, especially when conditions such as cold, wet weather make foraging for natural foods more difficult. And regular feeding throughout the year will ensure that birds become used to the sites of feeders and bird tables.

Natural foods for many species are at a peak in late summer and early autumn and this is probably the time when birds benefit least from supplementary feeding, but continuing to provide suitable food will do no harm. Avoid feeding peanuts from feeders that allow whole nuts to be taken during the breeding season to prevent any chance of young birds choking.

In general, adult birds will keep themselves in good condition by using your bird feeders while continuing to forage for appropriate food such as young invertebrates to feed their young.

Winter feeding, especially during cold spells, can be a lifeline for many birds. As well as providing supplementary foods from feeders, it is also worthwhile managing the habitats in your garden to provide more natural foods.

*** Look out for Siskins, Lesser Redpolls, Goldfinches, Bullfinches and Greenfinches coming to the feeders now.**

WORK PARTY DATES 2015/16

Sunday 29th November: Clearing watercress from the boggy areas and clearing the overgrown channel from the river inlet to the 'Russo' bridge.

Sunday 27th December: Let's have a post-Christmas work-out.... go on...you know how good it will make you feel. Or let's just eat mince pies, drink coffee and have a chat. Or....perhaps we could make a start on clearing the sightlines from the 'Russo' Bridge to the outlet that runs under the railway line?

Sunday 31st January: Cutting hazel stakes in readiness for hedgelaying, and general maintenance. A programme of coppicing and pollarding will begin.

Sunday 28th February: Coppicing and pollarding. Possibly, the next section of hedgelaying around the Pyghtle can be started.

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

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We also hold a regular, weekly Wednesday morning work party, depending on the weather. This starts at **10am** and lasts for a couple of hours. If you are interested in coming along it is a good idea to give Janet, our Secretary, your contact details as she sends out an e-mail in advance of the work party to let you know what is planned that week. Also, she can let you know if the work party is cancelled for any reason.

We don't provide refreshments at these work parties but all tools and gloves are available for use.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The Association would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new members:

Elan & Gemma

Gill

David

Dan

Kate

Jo

Don't forget to put the Wassail date in your diary.... Sunday 17th January 2016

www.watercresslnr.org.uk

WILDLIFE

Earlier on in the year, during one of our monthly work parties, volunteers were shifting piles of woodchips and disturbed a nest of young slow-worms. So work ceased and we carefully put them back into the pile. The Reserve has perfect habitats for these shy creatures as they love compost heaps, and obviously, woodchip piles!



Despite their name and appearance, slow-worms are neither worms nor snakes, but are in fact legless lizards. They have the ability to shed their tails if captured, and can also blink with their eyelids. They can be found in heathland, tussocky grassland, woodland edges and rides: in fact, anywhere they can find invertebrates to eat and a sunny patch in which to sunbathe. They are often found in mature gardens and allotments, where they like hunting around the compost heap. However, if you have a cat, you are unlikely to find them in your garden as cats predate them. Like other reptiles, slow-worms hibernate, usually from October to March.

Slow worms are much smaller than snakes, with smooth, golden-grey skin. Males are paler and sometimes have blue spots, while females are larger with dark sides and a dark stripe down the back. They are common, found throughout the country, except for most Scottish islands and absent from Northern Ireland and most of the Channel Islands.

You can help look after slow-worms and other reptiles in your garden by leaving piles of logs for hibernating beneath, or having compost bins. But do be careful not to turn the compost heap between late October and March as you never know what may be sheltering there.

And never, ever consider one as pet. My family 'adopted' a slow worm in 1962 (quite rightly frowned upon in this day and age) and it survived 50 years! A slow worm is not just for Christmas....it really is for life! Not only did it live a long, long time, it became very fussy about its diet and would only eat white slugs. Worms and any other colour of slugs were not accepted. So we all had to go hunting round the garden with torches trying to find tasty morsels for dear 'Slowy'. And our 'adopted' tortoise that was found wandering down Beechwood Avenue by my brother the same year is still going strong...but that's another story.....

Editor

READER'S PHOTOS

It is always a pleasure to receive photos of the Reserve and its wildlife from our visitors, so please keep them coming in for consideration to be published in the newsletter.

This photo of a common frog (*Rana temporaria*) was taken at one of our Wednesday work parties.



Possibly our most recognisable amphibian, the common frog is distributed throughout Britain and Ireland, and can be found in almost any habitat where suitable breeding ponds are nearby. Garden ponds are extremely important for common frogs and many populations in suburban areas depend on them. Common frogs have smooth moist skin. Frogs are often found close to fresh water in habitats that remain damp throughout the summer. Outside of the breeding season they can roam up to 500 metres from a breeding pond.

Identification

Adults can grow to 9cm (nose to tail). They are generally a shade of olive-green or brown, with a dark patch (or 'mask') behind the eyes. Frogs often have bands of darker striping on the back legs. Many individuals have irregular dark markings on the back. Colouration is extremely variable: yellow, pink, red, orange and black individuals are often reported.

Spawning takes place during early spring, starting in the south of Britain as early as January. Tadpoles generally take up to sixteen weeks to grow back legs, then front legs before they metamorphose into tiny froglets, ready to leave the water in early summer (often June, but in some ponds this may be as late as September).

'Mature' tadpoles are faintly speckled with a gold/brown colouration which distinguishes them from the black tadpoles of the common toad. Common frogs feed on a variety of invertebrate prey, slugs and snails particularly. This makes them very beneficial, and very popular, with allotment gardeners.

NOSTALGIA PAGE



The entrance (now The Butterfly Meadow) with a glimpse of the old gasworks in distance

Can you spot the current Reserve Manager and Editor at this early work party?

