

Issue 103 WATERCRESS 2016

WWA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



The Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday 20th March at the Sub-Aqua Club in Cottonmill Lane.

Once the reports from the WWA Officers were read out, a vote was taken and the committee for 2016 duly elected. After a break for refreshments, committee member Sam gave a fascinating talk "Exotic and Amazing: nature in your back garden". It was most enlightening and we didn't even have to pay Sam a fee! Although we did take Sam and his family out to Sunday lunch as a 'Thank You'.

VOLUNTEER 'THANK YOU'

We are hoping to hold a small, informal BBQ for those of you who regularly attend either our Wednesday or monthly work parties. This is to say 'Thank you' for all the hard work you have done over the last year. This will be immediately after the August work party (Sunday 28th) - weather permitting. The WWA will provide sausages, jacket spuds, a veggie option, some salad, ketchup, apple juice, squash and water. If you would like anything else to drink with your lunch (beer, wine, Coke) please bring this with you. Cutlery and napkins are provided. Let's hope the weather stays good for us. We look forward to seeing you all.



MONTHLY WORK PARTY NEWS



April: Steve and Derek continued replacing the blockhouse roof. Howard and Emma painted the entrance gate.

May: Everyone concentrated on scything the Old Allotment. Once the cutting was done, all the arisings were gathered and taken to the compost heap at the end of the Allotment. Well done, all... a great job completed.

The Reserve Manager trimmed the Pygmy hedge.

June: This month we made a concerted effort to dig over a section of the Butterfly Meadow, removing some stubborn Hogweed roots. This area has been replanted with plants to attract butterflies.

July: The vegetation in the Old Allotment is still growing like mad so we had to scythe it again. Once again, all the cut material was gathered and taken to the compost heap.

We had a large bonfire to get rid of some non-compostable material.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

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

Mr. & Mrs. B
Richard & Romanie
Rachel
Liz
Gabriel
Jonathan

Thank you to all the members who have renewed their membership this year. If you still wish to renew, but may have overlooked it, the Membership Secretary would love to hear from you!

www.watercresslnr.org.uk

WEDNESDAY WORKING PARTIES

March: Volunteers moved the last of the woodchip pile, topping up paths around the Reserve.

April: Using some of the cut logs left over from previous tree works, a small group created an upright log pile. These log piles are good for insects and beetles, and provide shelter for small mammals and invertebrates.

The sign on the gate has been removed and will be repainted and varnished before going back up. The entrance is looking a lot smarter with the new gatepost and freshly painted gate. Janet and Sheila cut down the nettles, brambles and hogweed that had taken over the entrance area.

Steve and Derek continue work on replacing the blockhouse roof. Others gave the wooden shed a good cleanout and tidy.



May: Emma, Janet, Howard and Sheila gave the exterior of the wooden shed a good scrub with wire brushes, followed by treating with fence preservative. The blockhouse was painted too and this now looks a lot more aesthetically pleasing.

Being in a 'smarten everything up mode' we scrubbed the bench in the Orchard and gave that a coat of wood treatment.

The Reserve Manager has been treating the Mere with Barley Straw extract to try and control the algal blooms. It is difficult to know how effective this treatment is, because there are still algal blooms. Of course, they could be a lot worse without the treatment.

Katie continued clearing a channel in the boggy area.

The refurbished sign goes back on the gate. Thanks go to Howard for doing all the sanding and varnishing.

One of the willow trees in the Orchard was pollarded to give the crab apple tree more light.

June: Janet and Sheila cut the entrance area that had grown back at an alarming rate since they last did it in April. Howard donned his waders and started clearing out the boggy area. We also sorted out the wood store.

WEDNESDAY WORKING PARTIES

July: Sheila cut the paths and social area with the ride-on mower.

A small team cut down the ever-encroaching Flag Iris that was obscuring the view from the bench overlooking the Mere. It's amazing the amount of material there was to be taken away for composting.

August: Ruby, Steve and Howard donned waders and made a start on clearing the watercress and Flag Iris that is taking over the boggy area. Janet and Sheila stayed bankside and ferried the cut material to the nearest compost heap.

WORK PARTY DATES 2016

Sunday 28th August: Clearing the Pyghtle. Volunteers will be rewarded with an informal BBQ, weather permitting.

Sunday 25th September: Apple picking, possibly?

Sunday 30th October: Details to follow

Sunday 27th November: Details to follow

December: No work party as it falls on Christmas Day so this will be postponed until the 1st January 2017 instead.

The **monthly work party** is always held on the last Sunday of the month. All ages are welcome. Work parties start at **10am** and finish around **1pm**. Light refreshments are served around midday. Tools and gloves are provided.

The regular, **weekly Wednesday morning work party**, 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.

BIRD HIDE



The code to enter the bird hide is: **XXXXXX**

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

Please add any interesting sightings to the board.

VANDALISM

The WWA site is fairly lucky in not attracting too much anti-social behaviour, and the committee try not to dwell on the negative aspects of running the Reserve but there have been a few noteworthy incidents this year.

The original donation box has been repeatedly broken into and now finally damaged beyond repair, but this has been replaced by a more robust version. We decided to continue with a donation box as the income it generates is still greater than the losses! Thanks go to Chairman Steve for his patience in running repairs of the old box and final installation of the new.

Unfortunately, the new box was damaged beyond repair yesterday (16th August). How tedious.

On the afternoon the old box was destroyed, the same group of lads smashed a boulder through the side of the shed, leaving a large hole. Both incidents took place in broad daylight in front of witnesses. Unfortunately, they ran off before anyone could catch them. One of the witnesses did report the incident to the police.



In July we had another group of lads (or possibly the same one) who climbed over the gate into the Old Allotment and smashed up our large pond-dipping polystyrene collecting boxes and scattered around the contents of the storage shed. All jolly annoying. On this occasion the Editor was on the Reserve and heard what was happening. Not knowing the age or number of people in the Allotment, and having no phone with her she went home and phoned the police. They did respond very quickly but didn't get there in time to catch them red-handed. The police do take these events seriously and even sent a forensic chap down the next day who took away cigarette ends and other items for DNA samples.

The lads came back the next day and one of them was spotted going directly to the gate into the private Allotment and climb over, looking for his mates, who were actually seated on a bench overlooking the Pyghtle. One doesn't have to be Sherlock Holmes to work out it was the probably the same group who smashed our stuff the day before! Two committee members were on site at the time watching what had happened, unseen by the lads, and had a few strong words with them. They left pretty smartly and haven't been back since!

VANDALISM

Our local PCSO Benjamin Colley met with the Reserve Manager and Editor recently to introduce himself and have a look at the Reserve. He left his business card so please get in touch with him if you see any anti-social behaviour. He is keen to help and his contact details are below.

**Police Community Support Officer 6363
Benjamin Colley**

Email: Benjamin.Colley@hertspnn.police.uk

Verulam & Sopwell Wards

Safer Neighbourhood Team Desk: 01707 806311

Non-Emergency: 101

If an incident is in progress, just phone 999. The nearest address to give to the police is: The driveway adjacent to 236 Riverside Road, AL1 1SF.

But please remember these incidents are very rare so please don't be put off visiting!



The new box, already vandalised.

WWA COMMITTEE 2015/16

Officers

Steve/Chairman

Janet/Secretary

**Howard/Reserve Manager and
Membership Secretary**

Mandy/Treasurer

Members

Sheila/Newsletter Editor

Pat Bate

Sam/Webmaster

Cath

Margaret/Management Plan Advisor

READER'S PHOTOS

Many residents of Riverside Road are aware of this family of foxes that have taken up home at the WWA. There are mixed feelings about this; some people love them; others are not at all pleased. At first some were excited by the five fox cubs but this changed once food cartons and rubbish was strewn around the streets, and gardens dug up! The WWA has no opinion either way, except for having to clear up the initial mass of rubbish that suddenly appeared around the Reserve. This has now stopped so it seems possible that the family has dispersed.



Photo courtesy of Mary B

Foxes are truly omnivorous, so it is not surprising that they live in many of our towns and cities. Overgrown areas and spaces under garden sheds provide shelter and food is abundant. There are many food sources available to foxes in towns. They are not dependent on food from dustbins, although if rubbish is not properly contained they will take anything edible – as do cats, dogs, squirrels and birds. They eat large beetles, crane flies ('daddy-long-legs'), earthworms, field voles, small birds, blackberries, windfall apples and pears. A warm, wet night can provide hundreds of worms that are easily picked off lawns for a substantial meal. They may also scavenge from bird tables or compost heaps.

Foxes occupy and defend their territory – the abundance of food determines how many may live in an area. For example, in a well-studied area of Bristol the number of fox families varied from about two, to nearly five per square kilometre. In such areas a fox family comprises the dominant male (dog) and female (vixen) and a litter of cubs. It is also likely to include one or more subordinate animals that may help rear the cubs. In late summer the group may break up, with many of the young foxes moving off to find their own territory.

Each year a large proportion of the population dies. The greatest single cause is traffic accidents, accounting for over 60 per cent of deaths. In the early 1990s there were an estimated 33,000 urban foxes in the UK. Since then, in some areas, it is believed that they may have increased, while in others mange epidemics have decreased numbers. Recent data however, indicates that the national urban population of foxes has remained about the same.

How can I help foxes in the area?

If you regularly see foxes in your garden, they have probably already found a good food supply in the area, and foxes are excellent scavengers. If you decide to provide food for foxes it's important to bear in mind that whilst you like to see foxes your neighbours may not share the same view and may see foxes as a problem, which could result in action taken against the animals. As a result, we would always recommend caution when feeding foxes. Don't try to make them tame, never hand-feed them or put out too much food as foxes may not move far if all the food they need is available in one garden – they may bury some, defecate or cause other problems in neighbouring gardens leading to ill-feeling against the foxes.

How can I deter foxes from using my garden?

- ❖ Remove access to any potential food supplies.
- ❖ Provide food for wild birds in feeders that are less likely to spill, preventing foxes from scavenging.
- ❖ Protect fruit and vegetable crops – use fencing or solid weld-mesh; avoid using netting and use at least a 4cm mesh to reduce the risk of wildlife getting tangled or caught in it.
- ❖ Clear away any windfall fruit.
- ❖ Use securely sealed dustbins and composters.
- ❖ Keep pets such as rabbits indoors overnight, or in secure enclosures. Clear up any spilt pet food on the ground.
- ❖ Cut or clear any areas of long grass or dense vegetation – dense cover can provide a safe, sheltered location for a fox to lie up undisturbed during the day.
- ❖ Keep garage, greenhouse and shed doors closed.
- ❖ Prevent access to areas under sheds, as these provide an ideal location for digging an earth to raise cubs.
- ❖ Put up fencing or plant prickly plants around the garden.
- ❖ Use an animal repellent approved for use with foxes. Repellent products are widely available from garden centres or hardware stores. Take care to read the label and carefully follow the instructions, as each product is prepared and approved for use against certain animals in the specified way. It is illegal to use any substance to deter foxes that has not been approved for such use.
- ❖ If you find a fox earth in the garden, **don't block it unless you are sure it is empty**. To check, lightly block the entrances with loose soil or sticks, through which a fox can easily dig out. If after a few days the holes are still blocked, pack them more thoroughly with soil. **Take great care in the spring to avoid blocking cubs into an earth** – instead, block earths during autumn and winter.

Further advice on humane fox deterrence can be found at:

www.foxproject.org.uk.

POND DIPPING

At the July work party Cath, Ruby and Steve did a pond dipping survey.

"The pond dipping volunteers used waders, nets and clear tanks to dip in two distinct places - near the banks of the Pyghtle pond and in the boggy area. The two sets of tanks were kept separate in order to avoid possible cross-contamination and maintain the water nutrient balance that the plants and animals are used to. Samples were collected in two ways. First, repeated dipping with nets, putting individual creatures into tanks of clear water. Second, a 'kick sample' technique to stir up the sediment: then scoop up a tank of very muddy water. This was poured bit by bit into a wide, shallow, white-bottomed tray which made for easy viewing. The aquatic creatures were identified using sheets readily available on the internet that show photos, range of sizes and points indicating water quality."

Cath

And here are their findings.

The Boggy Area results

Flat coil snails (2-4mm) 11

Pointed snail (3mm) 7

Water mite (red, 1mm) 3

Leech (1-10cm full stretch) 3

Minnows* (3-5cm) 3



Minnow

Water slater (1cm) 3

Small water beetle* (fast moving, 6 legs visible, black, 7mm-1cm) 2

Mayfly larvae* (4 cm) 1

Water Boatman

POND DIPPING

The Pyghtle pond results

Water slater (1cm) 40

Eft* (baby newt, 2-3cm) 30



Eft (baby newt)

Large pointed snail (black, 3cm) 13

Water shrimp* (frilly gills underneath, (1-2cm) 6

Small water beetle (fast moving, 2 large 'oar' legs visible, black, 7mm-1cm) 2

Small pointed snail (0.5-1cm) 1

Leech (10 cm at full stretch) 1

* = a good sign of healthy water quality.



Small water beetle



Water boatman

WOODPECKERS

One of the highlights this year, on the avian front, must be the nesting Great Spotted Woodpeckers who set up home and raised their family in the tree adjacent to the Wild Spit.

Visitors were delighted to see the birds feeding their young at such close quarters. Our very own 'Springwatch' in action!

WWA Chairman, Steve, sent through these photos for you to enjoy.



WOODPECKERS

One interesting fact about the Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus major*) is the derivation of its name. The genus name *Dendrocopus* is a combination of two Greek words: *Dendron* meaning 'tree' and *kopos* meaning 'striking'. The 'major' comes from the Latin 'maior' meaning 'greater'. A perfect description, indeed. That's if Wikipedia is to be believed, of course! Many people call these birds the **Greater** Spotted Woodpecker but that is considered incorrect.



We were unable to tell if there was more than one fledgling. There was certainly a lot of noise coming from the nest with the chick/s squawking constantly for food. We only ever saw one youngster, poking his head out of the hole in the tree, just before he flew the nest.

If anyone managed to take a photo of the young bird, we would love to have a copy to post on our website.

WASTE BIN ON THE ALBAN WAY

After many years of lobbying, the waste bin sited on the Alban Way at the viewpoint overlooking the Nature Reserve has been removed. And what a difference it has made, so far. There hasn't been any rubbish left since the bin was removed ten days ago.

This bin was being used by local householders to get rid of their landfill rubbish. Some of it inevitably found its way onto the railway embankment leading down to the WWA and our volunteers have repeatedly cleared it away although it is not technically our responsibility. The Council's contractors will not climb down the bank so our (very active) 74-year-old Reserve Manager often does it. Surely, this is a ridiculous situation? There was talk of relocating the bin (possibly by Orient Close), but it is hoped this won't happen as the problem will start up again. Let's hope that common sense prevails for once!