

# Issue 107 WATERCRESS 2018

## ANNUAL WASSAIL \*\*



The annual WWA Wassail is being held on **Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2018**, to raise funds for the Association and have some fun at the same time. This is our thirteenth Wassail and many of you will know the format, but for those new members here is a description of the event.

We meet up in the old allotment (the part of the Reserve not normally open to the public) at **2pm** where the Wicket Brood Border Morris will open the proceedings with a couple of dances. We then follow their leader to the Orchard where the Wassail ceremony begins. After a brief history about Wassailing we all sing ancient songs, pour cider onto the roots of the apple trees, hang toast in the branches and make lots of noise (allowed just once a year!) to scare away any bad spirits that might be lurking in the Orchard. This is to help ensure a good crop of apples in the coming year. It's certainly worked so far.....



We then return to the old allotment where there will be more dancing and music. Refreshments include hot apple juice (£1 a cup) and plenty of cakes.

Well that's the rough idea although it never quite works out as planned...it's all very casual.... but that's half the fun. It's a great way to cheer up a January afternoon and raise some extra cash.

There is no entrance charge, but we do ask people to give a donation in exchange for the food and entertainment.

Home-made jams and jellies, made with fruit from the Reserve, will be available to purchase. There will also be a raffle with some great prizes, including gift vouchers from the Odyssey cinema, Aylett Nursery and Bunnings.

## ANNUAL WASSAIL \*\*

It is likely to be **very soggy underfoot** so please wear your wellies or stout shoes!

We have never yet cancelled a Wassail, even in a blizzard, so fingers crossed all will be well. And the food will be under cover, so no-one will go hungry!

**\*\***

One of the benefits of being a WWA member is being invited to the annual Wassail. Although it would be lovely to invite the general public to the Wassail it was agreed by the WWA committee to have it as a 'Members only' event again, (including family and personal friends) because of the need to limit the number of visitors to a safe, manageable and enjoyable level.

---

### Order of events

**1.45pm (for a prompt 2pm start)**

Gather in the old Allotment for the first dances of the afternoon and sale of raffle tickets

**2.30pm**

Wassail ceremony in the orchard

**3pm**

Back to the old Allotment for refreshments and entertainment

**3.30pm**

Raffle winners announced

If anyone can bake a cake, bring something tasty to add to the feast, or help in any way on the day please e-mail the Editor or Secretary who would love to hear from you. Contact details are on the last page of this newsletter.

---

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

The WWA Annual General Meeting will be held on the **18<sup>th</sup> March 2018** at the Sub-Aqua Club in Cottonmill Lane from 11am to 1pm.

The AGM is a very relaxed affair and we try to make it as interesting as possible. There are display boards showing how the Reserve has developed over the last 25 years, with lots of lovely photos taken by our Chairman Steve, along with early press cuttings. We usually have a guest speaker who gives an illustrated talk, but nobody has been booked yet!

And there are home-made biscuits and coffee!

Full details will be sent out in the next newsletter.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

I would like to wish all our members a very Happy New Year and a big 'Thank You' for your support in 2017.

At the end of the year we had a total of 162 household memberships. This was slightly down from the previous year but still a healthy number. 42 joined (or re-joined) by direct bank transfer, and the remainder by cheque or cash. Last year was the first time we trialled paying by bank transfer and this proved to be a much more convenient way for many of you to pay your subscription than by cheque or cash. Therefore, we will repeat the process this year.

Once again, the subscription remains at £10 per household (£5 to Senior Citizens and unwaged). This rate is unchanged since 1991 but the committee feel that this is a reasonable fee and there is an opportunity for members to make an extra donation if they so wish.

As I mentioned earlier, you can renew your subscription by cheque, cash or bank transfer. Bank transfer details are:

**Watercress Wildlife Association**

**Sort code: xx-xx-xx**

**Account number: xxxxxxxx**

**Please reference your payment using your first initial and surname: e.g. JBLOGGS**

### Membership/Gift Aid Forms

I ask you to please fill in and return (either the old-fashioned way or electronically) the attached membership form, if you are renewing by bank transfer. This confirms that we have your most up-to-date details. And for those who Gift Aid it makes claiming it so much easier for our Treasurer to do on an annual basis if we have a copy of the form.

I hope that you will continue to enjoy visiting the Reserve, which is open all year round, from 7am to dusk. Occasionally, the Reserve is closed for vital maintenance.

**Howard**

**Membership Secretary**

---

### Things to look out for this month

See if you can spot any unusual or unseasonal sightings.

There are already hazel catkins on the trees and there were some Marsh Marigolds flowering at the beginning of December, which is a record for the Reserve.

Winter bird visitors are arriving and there have been sightings of Siskin and Lesser Redpoll. There have been large flocks of Long-tailed tits flitting around.

We are still hopeful that Tawny Owls will take up residence in the new Owl box in the Pyghtle. They are nearby as a pair were heard recently in Cornwall Road.

## WILDLIFE PHOTOS

Whilst holidaying in Norfolk last year Howard and I stopped to look around a wildlife shop in Brancaster, and on an uncharacteristic whim, I purchased a Bushnell Trophy Cam HD Essential camera trap. It is basically a weatherproof, motion-activated camera that records directly onto an internal SD card. Images and videos are in full colour during the day, and at night or in low light the camera switches to black and white.

So where better to try it out than down at the Reserve? This is what has been seen so far, in the same place, at the end of the Allotment.

**Sheila**



Muntjac deer



Handsome heron



Furtive fox



## WORK PARTY NEWS

**September:** Volunteers cleared the compost area in the Pyghtle and picked apples to put out for sale. The embankment, from the main gate down to the sheds, was cleared of nettles and brambles. Some of the large dogwood stumps were dug out. The end of the allotment was cleared to regain access to the Mere and exit tunnel. The volunteer BBQ was held at the monthly work party and was most enjoyable.

**October:** The river bank from the inlet to the Pyghtle gate was cleared of vegetation and the hedge height lowered to a manageable level. This was quite a large task and took up a couple of the Wednesday work parties. The Wassail area was cut back and 'de-nettled' in preparation for the forthcoming ceremony.



**November:** Most of the volunteer work has concentrated on renovating the herb garden just inside the main gate and breaking up the concrete base.

The broken-down fence on the driveway has been removed and will not be replaced as it looks better without one there.



## WORK PARTY NEWS

**December:** Four large bags of topsoil arrived on an icy and frozen day at the beginning of December. The purchased apple juice for the Wassail arrived, thanks to the efforts of Laurie, Margaret and Janet who braved the snow to collect it from the Farmer's Market earlier in the week.

The topsoil has been shifted and now the herb garden is ready to be planted up when conditions are right.

## WORK PARTY DATES 2018

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> January:** Apple pruning, opening sight lines in Allotment. Hedge trimming.

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> February:** Digging out dogwood saplings. Clearing Pyghtle in readiness to plant damson tree. Hedge trimming.

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> March:** Clearing channel of wild watercress

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April:** General maintenance.

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> May:** General maintenance.

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 work parties are a great way to get to meet new people. Come and give us a try!

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.





## WATCH THIS SPACE!

Visitors to the site may have noticed the area close to the entrance gate has recently been cleared.

This was the herb garden set up by Margarita which had become overgrown and needed updating. Our thanks go to Margarita for the fantastic amount of work she put into creating and maintaining the herb garden. But the time came for her to hand over the reins and I volunteered to be that person. Apart from digging up the old herbs and weeds the Wednesday gang hit concrete which appeared to be an old shed base. This was quickly broken up and removed with some other interesting finds including a two-pronged fork head which certainly had no links with Roman Verulamium, so we will not get rich claiming treasure trove.



The end result was the need to get some additional top soil to raise the levels and 4 large bags were delivered and wheelbarrowed down to the site just before Christmas. Hopefully all the humpers have not been nursing back pains since and resorting to a few tots of seasonal cheer.

The plan is to recreate the herb garden with culinary, medicinal, aromatherapy and decorative herbs early next year. There are over 600 varieties of herbs and space will allow only a selection of them, some of which are well known to you, possibly through the jars of dried and ground herbs seen on supermarket shelves. However, we are keen to provide background historical information to the herbs, some off which date back to the Vikings and the Romans. It is planned to include an article on herbs in future editions of this newsletter. In addition, we are investigating having an educational board erected which will help to identify the planted herbs.

**Roger**



An unusually (for the Reserve) frozen Mere

## WWA COMMITTEE 2017/18

### Officers

**Steve/Chairman**

**Janet/Secretary**

**Howard/Reserve Manager and Membership Secretary**

**Mandy/Treasurer**

### Members

**Sheila/Newsletter Editor**

**Sam/Webmaster**

**Cath**

**Margaret/Management Plan Advisor**

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

## THE BIRD HIDE

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

Please make sure the door and windows are closed on leaving. If you see anything interesting at the Reserve feel free to please put it up on either of the sightings board.

## VOLUNTEER'S BBQ



The volunteer's BBQ was well attended and a perfect opportunity for the committee to say a huge 'Thank You' to everyone who has put in such a great effort throughout the year in helping to run the Reserve. Unfortunately, we all forgot to take many photos (almost unheard of in this day and age!) so do not have much record of the day. But it was great fun and we look forward to doing the same again later this year. The volunteers also did a full morning's work before the BBQ. As the old saying goes: "There's no such thing as a free lunch!!"