

Issue 109 WATERCRESS 2019

A MESSAGE FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

I would like to wish all our members a Happy New Year, both from myself and on behalf of the WWA committee.

At the end of 2018 we had 155 paid up household memberships. 40 members paid by Bank Transfer and the remainder by cheque or cash. This is about the same as last year and means that, financially, the Association can continue to maintain and improve the Nature Reserve to a high standard. In addition, our donation box generated just over £500 in 2018. Much of this came from donations for bags of apples picked from our orchard.

I would like to thank everyone for their continuing support, some of you having been members for many, many years, and I look forward to receiving your subscriptions for the coming year. Once again, this will remain at £10 (£5 for students and senior citizens). If you would like to use the Gift Aid facility, please do sign the declaration at the bottom of the form. Although you may have signed before it is a great help to our Treasurer, who claims back the money on a yearly basis, and it greatly simplifies our record keeping! If you renew by Bank Transfer, would you kindly fill in and return (either the old-fashioned way or electronically) the attached membership form. This confirms that we have your most up-to-date details. We do not give your details to any outside persons or organisations. We keep this data for us to keep you informed of the activities of the WWA.

If you do not wish to renew this year, your details will be removed from our current membership database, in accordance with the latest General Data Protection Regulation.

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

Once again, may I wish you a very Happy New Year and I hope you have many enjoyable visits to the WWA Reserve throughout the coming year.

Howard
Membership Secretary

www.watercresslnr.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 1011944

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE WASSAIL THIS YEAR IS CANCELLED

Our annual Wassail has always been a great success, that developed over many years into a very popular event, but this year, the fabulous Wicket Brood Border Morris are unable to join us. Therefore the committee has decided that the event would not work well without the music and dancing that our guests regularly enjoy so we have decided to take a break this year. We are considering an alternative event for our members later in the year. Hopefully, we will start the Wassail again in 2020. Usually we sell our home-made jams and jellies at the Wassail. These will be available at our monthly work parties and the AGM.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

The Annual General Meeting will be held on **Sunday 24th March** at the **St. Albans Sub-aqua Club** in **Cottonmill Lane**. The meeting starts at **11am** with brief reports from the Officers. The new committee for the year is then elected. Any nominations must be sent to the Secretary at least two weeks before the meeting. There is a short break for refreshments that is followed with an illustrated talk by a guest speaker. The meeting usually finishes at 1pm.

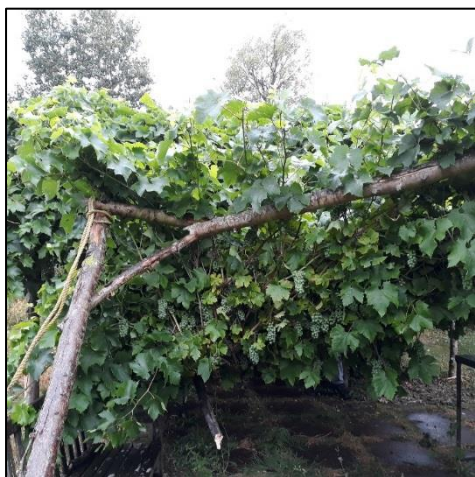
The AGM is an ideal opportunity to meet your committee during the break and discuss any issues/ideas you may have about the management of the Reserve.

SUMMER BBQ

This was a great success and a lovely way to say a huge 'Thank You' to the volunteers who come and work on the Reserve throughout the year, either at the weekly or monthly work parties. You are all greatly appreciated by the WWA management committee for your tremendous efforts!



WORK PARTY NEWS SUMMARY



July: The lovely grapevine in the Old Allotment was so prolific because of the fabulous summer heatwave, that the supports holding it up collapsed under the weight of the fruit! This created an ongoing construction job for our Chairman who has designed and made a superb new structure to accommodate the, now drastically pruned, vine! This will quickly grow back again. At least the grapes were not wasted as a local winemaker asked if she could harvest them and we collected bucket loads for her to take away.



Can you build the same in my garden, please?! (Editor)

We made a start on clearing an area in front of the bird hide for a new 'insect hotel'.

The regular grass and hedge cutting continues.....

August: Steve persevered with working on the 'pergola'. Volunteers cleared the bank in the entranceway of nettles and brambles and the bank alongside the 'Bog': an ongoing task. Reserve Manager, Howard, continued to treat the water in the Mere with barley straw extract.

September: The apple crop was exceptionally good this year so some of the work party time was taken up with fruit picking. The apples were bagged up and put out at the entrance, by the donation box, with a request for £1 a bag. This generated an income of over £200. Not bad for a few mornings work!

Sadly, our best quince tree blew over in a storm and had to be removed. We managed to salvage the fruit

WORK PARTY NEWS SUMMARY

and turn it into Quince Jelly. As mentioned earlier, this will be available at our monthly work parties.

Neil and Mike cut various hedges around the site.

October: Volunteers picked the Quince from the trees in the entrance area. These trees haven't fared well in recent years but they obviously liked the long hot summer we all enjoyed last year. Committee members helped pick grapes with the wine-making lady. The last of the Howgate Wonder apples were picked and put out for sale at the gate.

The insect hotel was finally completed!

November: We concentrated this month on clearing the very overgrown bank in the Orchard, and generally tidying up that whole area. This involved vigorously pruning back the buddleias, freeing a large holly bush of brambles and pulling up the ever tenacious nettles!

Volunteers also started to clear an area inside the Pyghtle in readiness for planting a new Damson tree. The original one on the Reserve is no longer usefully productive so will be removed as part of a programmed schedule of tree work planned to be done before the spring.



December: Roger B has done a fantastic job of revamping the herb garden by the entrance gate and he gave it some further TLC in December. It is looking good and nearly all the newly planted herbs survived last year's hot summer. Apparently, there were only a few losses.

January: At the first Wednesday work party this year volunteers continued digging out unwanted Dogwood around the site. Had we realised 27 years ago how vigorous it is we would not have planted any in the first instance! The other main task was to have a bonfire to get rid of the, increasingly growing, piles of cut brambles and prunings from around the site. The morning ended with our helpers enjoying some delicious lemon cake, mulled wine, Stollen and coffee. Very nice.

WORK PARTY DATES 2019



Sunday 27th January: Hedgelaying, pollarding, digging over an area in the Pyghtle in readiness for planting a new Damson tree. Prune fruit trees

Sunday 24th February: Treating the sheds and bird hide with wood preservative, weather permitting. General maintenance. Hedgelaying. Clear pond of excessive vegetation.

Sunday 31st March: Thinning out Flag Iris and Bulrushes in backwater alongside the Allotment. General maintenance

Sunday 28th April: General maintenance

Sunday 26th May: Maintain paths, trim hedges, general maintenance.

Sunday 30th June: Cutting grasslands and meadows and remove arisings.

ONGOING TASKS FROM THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

- ❖ Removal of Flag Iris in the Mere where it is becoming too dominant.
- ❖ Clearing The Bog of invasive and weedy species by 25% each year and keeping the Willows under control. These are difficult jobs that keep being overlooked so we need to have a concerted effort this year!
- ❖ Maintaining fences, paths, bridges and seats to a good condition.

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 W, 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 it is cancelled for any reason.

A NEW INSECT HOTEL



The completed insect hotel doubling up as a temporary coffee table. Well done, all!

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. There are plenty of wildlife books and identification charts in the hide so it is a great place to watch the birds feeding on the bird feeder in comfort.

And to see if there is anything colonising the new insect hotel!

HERONWATCH 2019



Photo courtesy of Andrew Steele

Every Spring, the RSPB St Albans group runs HeronWatch from the edge of Verulamium Lake in St Albans, to show members of the public the nesting herons near the city centre. The Little Egret colony on the island is growing too.

From 23 March to 12 May 2019, why not go down to the lake between 11.00am-3.00pm every weekend and bank holiday to learn more about these fascinating birds, as eggs hatch to chicks and grow into young birds. If you'd like to volunteer as a HeronWatcher and show the herons to visitors to the Park, please email st-albans-rspb@hotmail.co.uk. No experience is required, and there will be an RSPB volunteer on hand to guide you.

Dan

WWA COMMITTEE 2019

Officers

Steve: Chairman

Janet: Secretary

**Howard: Reserve Manager
and Membership Secretary**

Mandy: Treasurer

Members

Sheila: Newsletter Editor

Sam: Webmaster

Cath

Margaret: Management Plan Advisor

BIRD SIGHTINGS

WWA member Peter has kindly sent in his bird records for 2018. Some of his more interesting sightings have been Blackcap, Bullfinch, Chiffchaff, Gadwall, Little Grebe, Redpoll, Redwing, Ring-necked Parakeet, Siskin and Water Rail. There will be a more detailed report in the next newsletter. Thanks, Peter.

Herts Bird Club sightings for our site, since October 2018, include Grey Wagtail, Kingfisher, Redwing, Siskin, and Water Rail. Teal have been sighted but not officially reported.

www.hnhs.org

This time of year is when the bird sightings usually get more interesting. Tawny Owls have been heard but there is still no sign of them using the 'des res' that we put up especially for them to use. We live in hope...

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR THIS MONTH

The snowdrops are beginning to peep through and the best place to see them is along the riverbank, looking left from the Ver inlet at the far end of the Reserve. The first Hazel catkins are out, and some of the Marsh Marigolds are already in flower.



Clearing a space to make a new composting area.....

And so it's time for another bonfire. Nearly done!

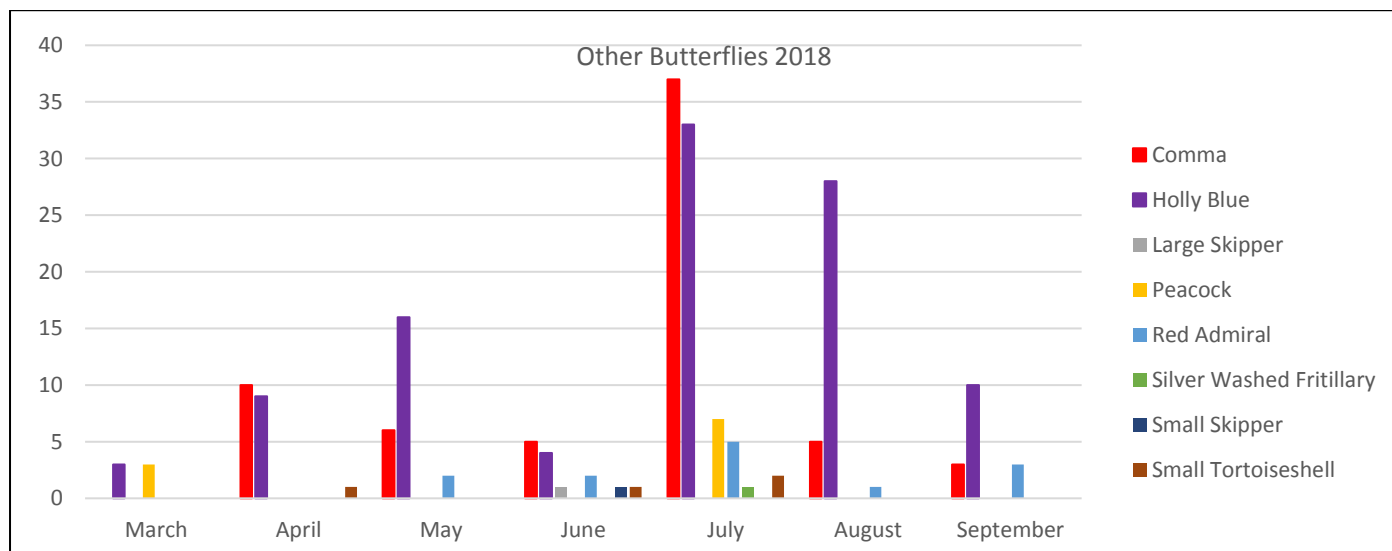
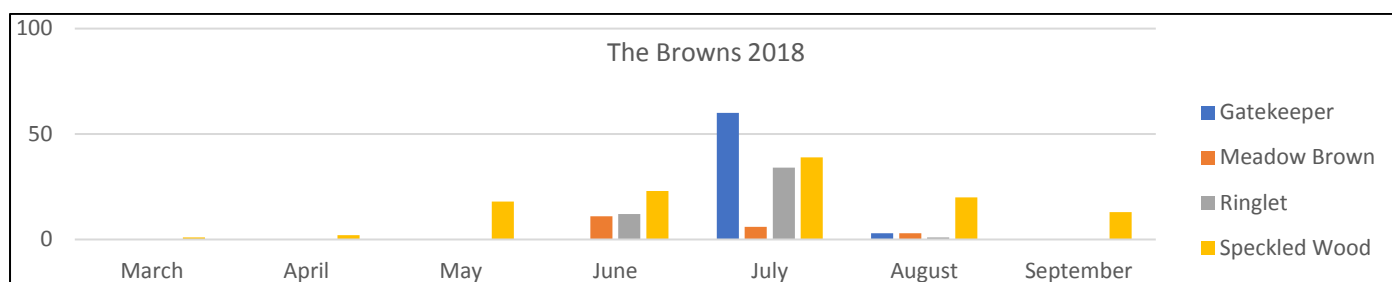
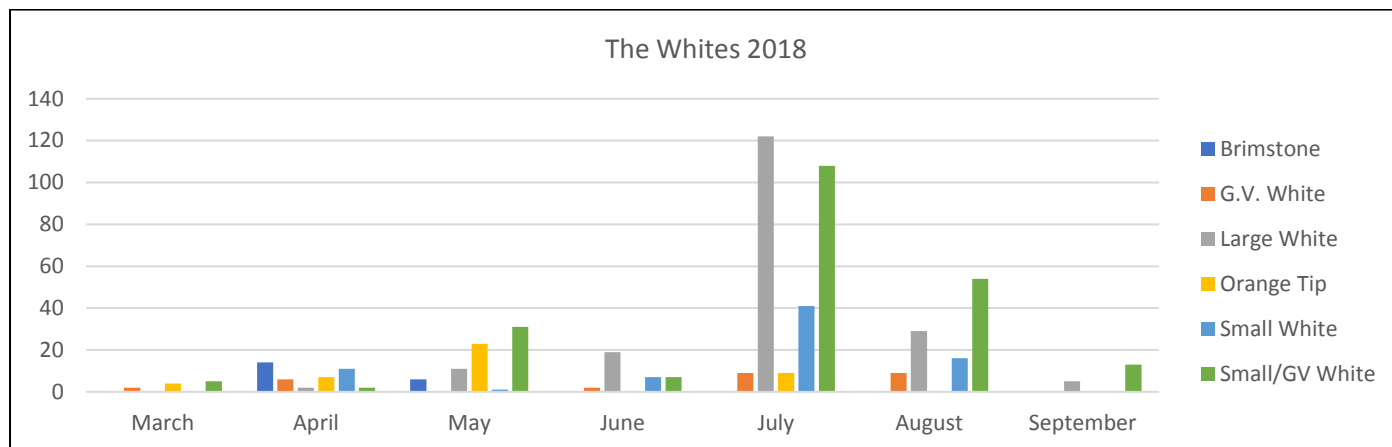


2018 – A Bumper Year for Butterflies

Following 2017's rather wet and cold summer, in 2018 we experienced the hottest May for several years and this fine weather continued for much of the summer, creating excellent conditions for butterflies.

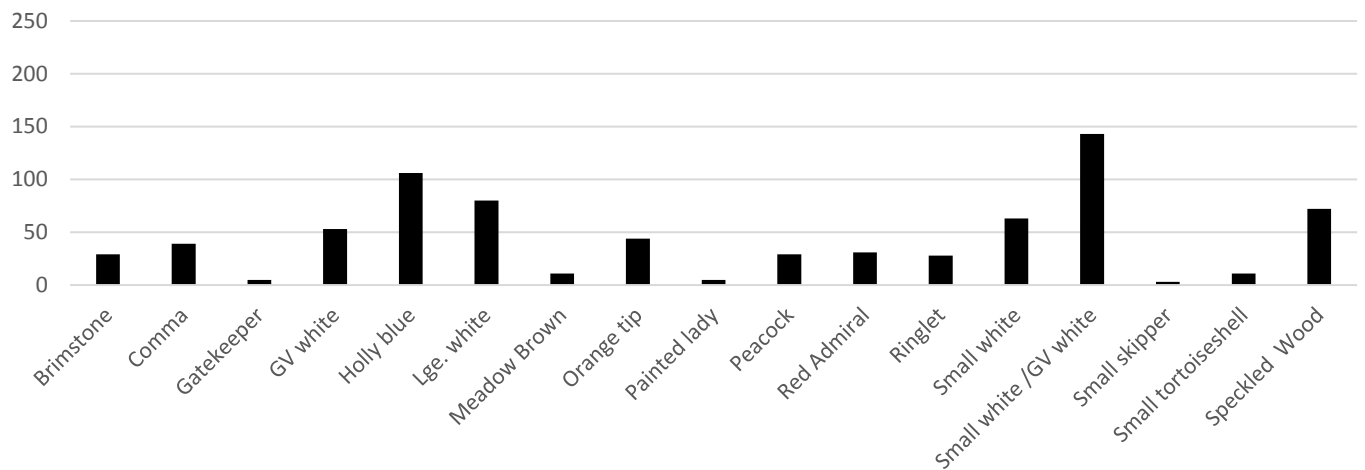
Our intrepid and loyal recorders, Alison, Derryn and Julie, completed 50 visits to the Reserve this summer between the start of April and the end of September during which they counted 1020 butterflies. The average number seen per visit was over 20 compared with 5 in the previous 2 years. Not only were there more butterflies but many species emerged earlier than usual and were often able to have a second brood which meant they were visible over a longer period.

The graphs show what and when, and then the second set compares with previous years.

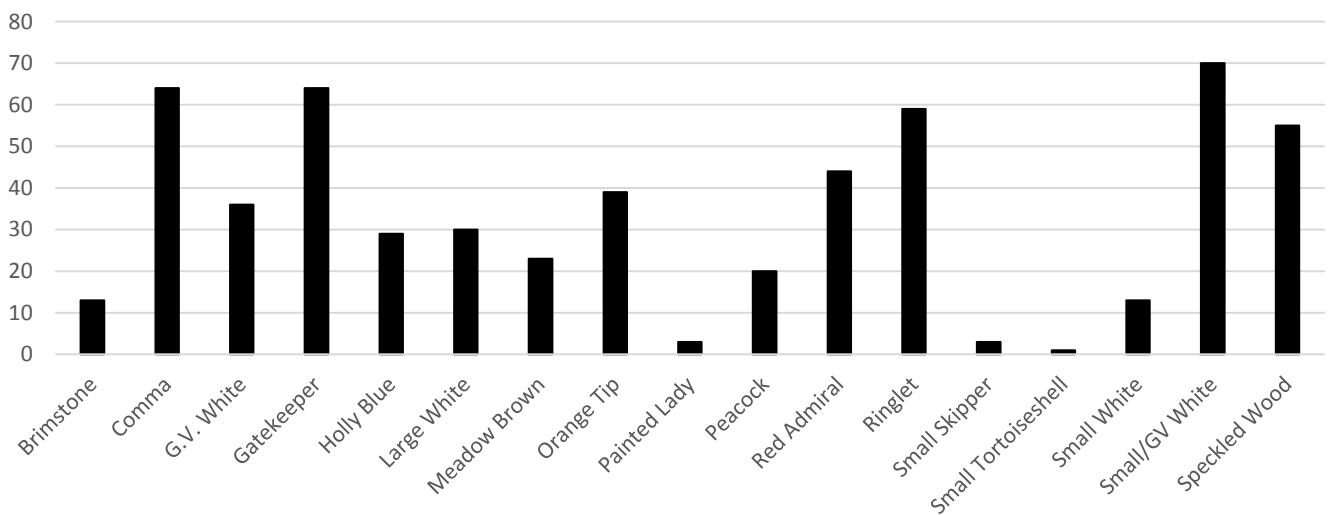


The biggest increases were seen in the Whites particularly the Small White and Large White. To the relief of vegetable gardeners the previous two years had been poor, possibly also reducing the numbers of predators that depend on these butterflies, so this year in favourable conditions, their numbers boomed. Also doing well both on the Reserve and nationally were the Holly Blue. However, whilst the Common Blue did well nationally, we did not manage any sightings. We have planted Bird's-foot Trefoil, their favourite food plant, which had now become established so hopefully it's not too long before we see some Common Blue butterflies fluttering around. The Red Admiral and Ringlet did less well this year both on the Reserve and nationally. Also not recorded at all were Marbled White and Painted Lady butterflies. This year we recorded 18 different species and now have reached 20 different species recorded since we started surveying. This rising trend for the Reserve suggests we must be doing something right! Particularly exciting was confirmation of a new species for the Reserve - the spectacular Silver-washed Fritillary.

Numbers of Butterflies recorded by species 2016



Number of Butterflies Recorded by Species 2017



Number of Butterflies recorded by species 2018

