



# Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

## Autumn 2006 no 60

### Through the Chair Watch Out!

or

### Do Look Where You're Going

Yes it's finished. What on earth is there to see on TV now Bill and Kate have gone into hibernation? Whether you like Bill Oddie's style of presentation or not it's hard not to be inspired by his enthusiasm and a wide range of knowledge on all things wild. Over the last two weeks we have been taken to some spectacular wildlife sights to experience wonderful autumn scenery and activity. Rhum is drama personified at any time of the year.

How does Simon King get these jobs? I have been lucky enough to have been to those islands, the beauty of which is their remoteness and inaccessibility. Martinmere is the other side of the country and the sight and sound of the swans coming in to roost at sunset is just as brilliant as they portrayed.

There are red deer just up the road at Wharnccliffe. There's a fantastic RSPB reserve at Barnsley. Competitive dog foxes at Clough Fields may not be quite the same as rutting stags and a flock of starlings not as emotive as pinkfoot geese but they are out there to be seen in Rivelin. Be inspired – look where you're going right here. Enjoy the autumn season in Rivelin – and then let Graham know about it.

Roger and Out

### Footnote

Graham is of course our recorder. He is waiting for your wildlife reports. It doesn't matter if you haven't got the form we sometimes send out, he would just like to know of any flora or fauna you observe.

**Contact as below.**

## Contacts

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## Donations

Thankyou for the following donations received recently - Perrett, Lofthouse, Warrender, and Moulson This year we have received over £430 which will be a great help for the work of our group.

## Help Wanted

A lot of you are very generous with your time, doing jobs for RVCG. We would like someone (or more than one person) who would be willing to go around shops, Post Offices, libraries etc. in our area (Walkley, Crookes, Stannington and Crosspool and thereabouts) to distribute leaflets to publicise RVCG Open Meetings. Our meetings are well attended but the cost of hiring the hall and paying the speaker sometimes barely covers the takings. We like to keep the cost down and that is why we need your help. If you could do this job for us we would be very grateful. *Please contact Roger Kite for more details.* Also please encourage others to come to our meetings. They do not have to be members and we all have the added pleasure of Glenda's cake with a cup of tea/coffee at the end of our meetings.

**Carol Singing at the Rivelin Hotel  
Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> December 7.30pm**

There was some doubt about this venue when the winter programme came out. It will now definitely take place at the Rivelin Hotel as usual. This event where we sing the traditional Stannington carols is not to be missed. Try joining us at this seasonal event if you haven't been before

**Ganister Mining Around Sheffield  
9<sup>th</sup> Jan 2007**

**Roy Battye**

**7.30 pm Stephen Hill Church**

Please take note of this meeting because it is not on your winter programme list. Roy has recently written a book on this subject once an important part of local working life. Please bring your friends along too.

**Wadsley and Loxley Commoners**

This group has a meeting that may be of interest.

**Monday 11<sup>th</sup> December**

**Shepherdess – A Year on a Hill Farm**

**Kathleen Birkinshaw**

7.30 pm Wadsley Church Hall

**Do you have any stories or comments about the valley for this newsletter? Please send them to Margaret Sanderson 35 Den Bank Cresc S10 5PB. We would love to hear from you.**

**Thanks to Everyone**

This is the last newsletter of 2006 and we would like to thank you all for being members of a very successful group. We are grateful to all of you who do the many jobs a group such as ours needs – those who organise finances, speakers, meetings, visits, catering, planning, liaising with other organisations, new member information, advertising, organising the delivery and printing of newsletters, endless paperwork and last but not least, the task force for year round work in the valley.

**Thankyou to everyone**

**Rivelin Mill Pond**

Have you seen the signboard?  
Have you seen the action?  
Things are stirring down in the valley. Our

scheme is at last underway to recover a decent waterbody at this important location. The slow start is due to the scheme waiting for the right fill material at the right price but once that is in place things should move quite quickly and RVCG can be proud of what will have been achieved.

Roger Kite

**Recycling**

We have been given news of a recycling registered charity in Sheffield, Cot-age, that refurbishes nursery equipment, designs equipment for disabled children and makes safe play areas to help families in need. It also provides work experience places for the long-term unemployed and those with disabilities. They raise funds by making such items as garden furniture and bird boxes and much more from re-cycled wood. Example prices – benches £50/£65, bird feeders £7, hedgehog hibernation box £20, compost bin £12 If you would like to know more contact –

**Cot-age 0114 279 7971**

**Website [www.cot-age.org.uk](http://www.cot-age.org.uk)**

**Down on the Farm**

Nobby is a red Limousin bull who lives at Coppice House Farm. His name begins with N because that is the year letter for when he was born-1997. The Revitt's granddaughter aged 2½ picked him out at Chesterfield. Nobby is a happy bull and weighs nearly a ton. Visitors to the farm shop might have seen him, peacefully observing the goings on of a busy farm and giving out an occasional bellow just to prove that he's a bull. Nobby did a good job fathering the farm's calves with Friesian cows and revelling in the company of his kind. One day when he should have been happily frolicking with heifers in the field he was found to be missing. The Revitts searched all over fearing that he might have got onto the road. Eventually he was found with the milk cows and calves at the far end of the farm. Nobby had jumped over three walls to reach them. After this escapade he didn't do his duty. Few new calves arrived on the farm. He went off the boil. Pam thinks that his 'trinklements'

must have got damaged when he did his Olympic hurdling.

By now, you must have realised that Nobby is doomed or does anyone want a pet bull? It may well be that by the time you read this he might have made a final visit to Bakewell Market. He might even now be grazing in some evergreen field under a heavenly blue sky watching fluffy white clouds float by. Bet he's glad to be out of the rat race where he has to live up to worldly expectations. Can you hear his contented mooing?

M Sanderson

### **Further Improvements**

The up-grading of the footpath from Hagg Lane to the S-bend is complete except for the barrier work at Rivelin Valley Road. Making this available as a riding route has long been on our plans to establish better segregation and safer walking routes in the valley. We have been working closely with the Local Access Forum through which body this has been made possible. The new toilet block at the Paddling Pool is at last under construction. A winter of inconvenience will be followed by a spring of relief.

Roger Kite

### **Some recent events**

#### RVCG Barbecue

Last year the rain came down in buckets. This year it was fine. In 15 years, we have had 14 fine barbecues which is quite a good record. This year we were in a nicely cleared space in the old tennis courts in Carver Fields and everyone agreed it was much easier to reach. A working party had prepared the site and we had the luxury of plenty of seats and a marquee. Thanks to Glenda once more for all her work, this time using farm shop produce. Also thanks to all who brought a variety of second courses which we all enjoyed. We all went home well filled. A bonus was that we made a small profit for RVCG.

#### 12 Sept Patrick Harding - The Medicinal use of Plants

Here was another entertaining talk by

Patrick. We had a round the world trip from ancient times onwards on the history of how we use plants. Much use was by trial and error. In ancient Egypt remains of plants were found in the pyramids and the ancient Greeks were writing medical textbooks. Medieval monks had their herb gardens and it is known which herbs they used from pollen remains.

Many plants are still used today such as digitalis (foxglove) for heart problems. The poppy both used and abused is an opiate, known as laudanum to the Victorians and quinine was and still is used for malaria.

Mould produced penicillin in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but long before this, mouldy bread was used to help infected wounds to heal.

Ergot, a rather deadly fungus on cereal crops is still used to ease childbirth.

Sphagnum moss was used to prevent gangrene in soldier's wounds and meadow saffron has been used to ease aching joints.

Celandine known as pilewort was used for haemorrhoids and inflammatory conditions. The word 'wort' in a name indicates that it was used in medicine.

Aspirin had its origins in willow bark.

Cannabis (hemp) which produces hallucinations was also used medicinally by Queen Victoria. More recently rosehips were collected in WWII to help keep up our vitamin C levels, yew has produced taxol, a cancer treatment and Saint John's wort has produced a drug effective for depression.

#### 10<sup>th</sup> Oct Paul Hobson Peak District Wildlife

Here was an excellent photographer and a very knowledgeable wildlife expert. We ranged around all the variety that the Peak District offers. We saw how much in danger some of our wildlife is with falling numbers of birds once common yet some birds are on the increase. Curlews are now becoming rare but the dotterel, the male of which incubates the eggs is on the way up. In the Snake area, the golden plover has its largest density in the British Isles. Ravens are returning but the cuckoo has virtually disappeared in the north. Birds of prey are doing well though a hen harrier, recently returned to the area has been shot dead. Red squirrels have disappeared and there is little chance of them returning thanks to the grey squirrel. Paul had many harsh

words to say on this and believes their only hope is on islands such as the Isle of Man where they can be better protected. Grey squirrels do have one enemy and that is the goshawk. Bluebells, rare in the world, have their greatest concentration here in our country. A curious bit of wildlife surfaced when Paul was spending time in his hide – he can spend 14 hours there waiting for the perfect picture. A naked man approached very close to the hide, wearing only boots and a rucksack. He passed by without noticing the hide and happened to be the person who had many brushes with the law walking from Lands End to John O' Groats in the nude. We were not shown a photograph of him.

M Sanderson

### **RVCG aged Fifteen Years**

What was happening at our first year? We had 77 members. Our Task Force Organiser was pleading for more people to help out. The nature reserve at Wyming Brook/Redmires was being proposed and we were nagging Sheffield Council to programme more work in the valley. The first footpaths to be opened up were in the allotment area and Hag Wood. At our first barbecue we drank cups of tea and Stephen Hill Church donated £200 from their Flower Festival. Fifteen years later, we are still working hard and results are there to be seen and we still have many members who were with us from the beginning. Here's to the next fifteen years.

**WE wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year and thanks for your support.**

### **Recorder**

Too much sex and violence on TV? I generally think there is but you could not have failed to be enthralled by the red deer rut on the Isle of Rhum on the BBC Autumn watch with Bill Oddie that Roger has already mentioned. The quality of the filming and the production was excellent. It was almost like watching a full feature film. What does the Bible say about the meek and mild shall inherit the Earth? Not if you're a stag. It's a fight almost to the death each year and the prize? You get all the girls. Not just the best looking or the one with the cutest rump! Of course where only the fittest and strongest breed helps ensure the survival of the species but what would this be like amongst humans? Can you imagine enormous harems full of giggly girls partying, protected by burley bounces on the door and the unlucky males moping around in the parks and public places..... Mmm.... actually some of this does sound rather familiar.

Well one thing the unlucky males could turn their hands to is to become experienced naturalists. An article on the BBC website, Science and Nature, asks 'Are naturalists a dying breed?' How many of us could take our children or grandchildren down the Rivelin walk and describe the local flora and fauna with some confidence. There is a general trend towards the exciting rewards of technological innovations of mobile phones, play stations, computers and flat screen tv's. This technology does bring to us fascinating science and nature programmes giving new insights into some of the most intimate of places. Why would someone want to spend hours in the mud and the wet to discover well perhaps not very much when all the juicy bits are already captured for us on DVD.

But as we all know, a one hour nature programme could be the result of many days, months and possibly even years of filming. Professional naturalists, wildlife experts, technicians and programme makers forge together their knowledge and expertise to create these artistic feats. Unfortunately the number of

wildlife enthusiasts appears to be dwindling and the age profile of amateur naturalists is getting older. Should this be allowed to continue, the only place we will be able to view 'nature' will be on a DVD. Hence the recent film 'An Inconvenient Truth' depicts the theoretical outcome of global warming and the inconvenient truth is that the world cannot provide the resources that are required to fuel the technology enjoyed by the a few wealthy nations. The third world will never enjoy our material wealth unless we discover another world of resources on a nearby planet. Unless we begin to live in harmony with nature I am afraid it will be our undoing.

The current classroom science lessons keep our children safe from the perils of fieldwork and protect the school from possible litigation. These children could be the future saviours of our planet and unless they are allowed to get their hands dirty we could be in real trouble. The next time your child appears at the door with a worm, rather than shrieking and asking them to get rid of it, tell them that they aerate the soil, help convert old living tissue into compost and are hermaphrodites with both male and female sex organs although you still need two to make one!

If you do take a well-earned stroll down the Valley, look out for the recent addition to our flora as described overleaf. Himalayan Balsam (*impatiens glandulifera*) is a close relation of the Busy Lizzy's that adorn our hanging baskets in Summer. You may have also noticed its dramatic growth in our Valley over the last couple of years. The flowers are a beautiful pale pink to purple and look a little bit like 'snap dragons' and dripping in nectar so that insects visit them in preference to our native species. Each plant can produce up to 800 seeds distributed by exploding pods 12 to 14 weeks after flowering. The huge swathes of plants cut out the light and absorb a lot more of the minerals from the soil thus starving our native plants of light and food. The plants die back in winter and leave large bare areas more liable to erosion. Can we do anything about it?

Well, they are very fragile but can regenerate from a tiny piece of stalk or root. They pull out easily but how much effort is going to be needed over the coming years to control it? I have also noticed it growing rampant all over the country. It is a serious threat and could completely change our landscapes. It was introduced into Kew Gardens in 1839 as a greenhouse plant, escaped and has become a very invasive plant in the British Isles and we are not the only country in trouble. Neither is this the only invasive plant. There are also the Knotweeds. Giant, Japanese, Himalayan and Bohemian. They grow up to 12 feet tall on bamboo-like hollow canes. They too are here in our valley. One batch on the Rivelin footpath near the sub-station at Malin Bridge and another on the next path off Rivelin Valley Road after the park entrance. It is most prevalent along Long Lane through Hag Woods. This is not so easy to remove and requires systemic control. The most dangerous of all invasive plants is the Giant Hogweed. The enormous plant stems are covered in hairs which can cause blistering of the skin for up to 5 years.

### Reports

26/10/06 Rivelin Valley overlooked from Stannington View Road from about 9.00 until 10.30 I watched a huge passage of Redwings travelling west down the valley. There were thousands of birds moving through in small and large groups. What was surprising is that they were flying into a strong westerly wind and a series of squally showers. They breed across northern Europe but where were they going to spend the winter?

25/10/06 Over the valley looking west from Stannington View Rd was a Buzzard soaring with a Sparrowhawk

Stephen Kershaw

Over the summer I carried out an ecological survey of Blackbrook Wood for Sheffield City Council. On 30th August I came across some tracks by the stream, which I'm fairly sure were made by a roe deer. Have you had any recent reports of deer in the Rivelin Valley?

Roger Butterfield

No. I haven't but it sounds quite exciting. I'm sure our readers will let me know.

Hi Graham, hope you have had a good Summer! I have finally got round to sharing a very special experience we had with Nature this Summer!! It was in July that we first experienced the wonders of the leaf cutter bee when we actually saw her in action!! (we had seen evidence of the results of something manicuring our leaves before but now we had hands on proof) We were having lunch outside by the pond , when we spotted the tiny furry bee busily cutting neat pieces from the leaves of the roses by the pool.

Each piece was carefully rolled up between her legs and was carried skillfully to a tiny hole in the mortar between the bricks beneath the kitchen window! We watched in open mouthed amazement as she worked laboriously -sometimes going over to the dwarf French beans and cutting pieces out of these too. We were extremely intrigued and consulted our Naturalist friend Mari who lives close by. Apparently the tiny bee makes thimble shaped nests with the leaves she has cut. Into each nest she places "bee bread ",a mixture of pollen and nectar for nourishment when the egg hatches. She lays the egg before sealing the door with a round piece cut specially. She builds about ten of these nests and then seals the last one before leaving them. Apparently the last three eggs laid hatch first in the Spring. These are all males and they leave the nest in search of females. Their sisters then hatch and can leave the tunnel through the empty nests of the others. Thus the cycle continues. We did not get a photo of the bee as we did not want to miss any of this special event and the camera was indoors!!

I did a sketch of the tiny bee ,she was about 10mm-12mm if you would like a copy of this. I wonder if anyone else has shared this same experience.

Best Wishes Anne Ward.

I've run out of space this time for any more reports but if yours is missing I will include them in the next newsletter but do keep the reports coming in and many thanks.

Graham Appleby  
RVCG Recorder

# Rivelin Valley

## Himalayan Balsam survey July 2006



During July 2006, I walked the length of the nature trail and recorded the presence of Himalayan Balsam (*impatiens glandulifera*). The main concentrations are shown below in circles but there is a smattering of individual plants randomly spread across the valley. The areas are approximate and total 6425m<sup>2</sup>.

Graham Appleby – group recorder

