



Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Spring 2008 no 66

Through The Chair

Tree Cheers

Sitting looking out of the window at Rivelin Pub (something you can do now they've had to replace one) it was good to think that spring is just around the corner. I have to say the rain was gusting past and the last weekend in March was unseasonably cold. Nevertheless there was that vague haziness that means each twig is beginning to break out of winter's austerity. Hedgerows are definitely showing green and the birds have started to sing again. Territorial display and nest material gathering time is here. Our resident magpies are swinging on the ends of birch tree branches to tear off a nice pliable twig. Rowan trees are already showing burgeoning flower buds and insects are on the wing. Those larvae we collected on the Pond Dip will soon be transformed into their imago stage and enhancing a Nature Trail stroll with the buzz of summertime – and we will welcome the shade of trees out in full leaf.

Trees are great for wildlife, the quality of the valley landscape and not least for their contribution to reducing CO2 in the atmosphere. We supported Crosspool Forum and their tree and hedge planting on Coldwell Copse and commemorative trees at Carver Fields to improve the diversity in the woodland there. Recently planted a Dogrose? Shout – "Hip Hooray".

Roger and Out

Membership Renewal

Thanks to all of you who have renewed membership. It's not too late if you haven't. If you can't find your membership form, just send your name and address to M Sanderson, 35 Den Bank Cresc, S10 5PB with £3. Please make cheques payable to Rivelin Valley Conservation Group.

Donations

So far we have received £389 in donations. We are very grateful for your generosity. Thanks this quarter to – Aizelwood, Allinson, Beardshaw, Betts, Brazil, Cousins, Cressey, Culmer, Dakin, Davidson, Dean, Drinkwater, Fletcher, Glaves, Grace, Hague, Hanson, Hastings, Horsefield, Humphries, Jackson, Jones, Keen, Kitchen, Large, Lewis, Liddell, Linley, Lofthouse, Lyon, Maas, McLaney, Bissinger, Morrell, Newsom, Ollin, Owen, Peter, Pyatt, Rankin, Richards, Rybinski, Saunders, Scholey, Shail, Shaw, Toseland, Tranter, Whiteley, M & R White M & J White, Woodhouse & anon.

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The Aliens Have Landed

We went to a free lecture at Weston Park Museum on 10th March during National Science Week

Paul Richards, the curator of natural history was talking about the small aliens which have been invading Sheffield. He said Sheffield was probably the second most surveyed area for wildlife. He highlighted the Harlequin ladybird, the Scolopendra centipede, the speckled wood butterfly, the red, and the tuning fork harvestman and the daddy long-legs spider as recent arrivals. The people on the survey with him when he found the centipede in north Sheffield had been doubly blessed, as not only were they present when he found the first specimen, but were also witness to it biting him on the finger. I saw a speckled wood butterfly in the garden last year, but did not know if it was rare in Sheffield, or locally common. He appeared to welcome reports of any sightings of wildlife for their archives. His next project is to look for lesser earwigs in dung heaps, so please let him know if you want your dung heap turning over or indeed if you have dung heap.

Margaret and Bob

Townrow

Please send any records to –

Paul.richards@sheffieldgalleries.org.uk

Pond Dipping

It was very cold morning on 22nd March when a group of adults and seven children complete with large nets gathered around Rivelin Mill Pond for this annual event. There were lots of cold fingers but all persisted until several little creatures were investigated. Already frogspawn had been deposited and fresh water snails of various sizes appeared. Mayfly and stonefly larvae were inspected under a magnifying glass and a caddis fly larva was found peeping out of its case made from tiny twigs and small stones. Our finds included freshwater shrimps, a hog louse and bloodworm. It was good to

see enthusiastic children, also that the new pond was gathering its own ecology.

M Sanderson

RVCG Barbeque

The next newsletter is due quite close to our annual barbecue so we have included the form here. It will take place on **3rd August at 4pm** on Carver Fields so please take note of the date. We usually choose good weather so come along and enjoy yourself – open to all.

Task Team News

Sunday 6th Jan 08

After a great Christmas, the team likes to meet early in January to make up for the missing working day in December. What a great opportunity to get straight back into it and work off a few of those extra pounds which mysteriously appear over the holiday.

This Sunday was back in Hagg Woods, back in the same corner where we started this management programme seven years ago. It is like the Humber Bridge. You just finish at one end and you have to start all over again at the other.

I don't think we envisaged the amount of work that the management of these woods would entail but in a corner that took us three months to clear last time it only took four hours so we are getting there.

A cold day was made warmer with Dave Mason (the group's resident pyrotechnic). Dave could start a fire in the Antarctic and welcome it was, along with the now famous mashing and biscuits.

A large turnout by the group's Task Team and we soon cleared the corner and had it looking something like it was seven years ago. What a shame we had to clear around fourteen bags of rubbish, which included a large amount of beer, wine and spirit bottles. It makes you wonder why the people who gather in this area

are not getting breathalysed.

A great day, well attended and everyone worked hard. Well done team!

Sunday 27th January 08

Back down in the Hagg Woods again, this time a little further in towards the donkey fields. Another great turnout and the wood was a little more dense in this area and so took a little longer to get into, but another big fire and another area which hopefully will be another seven years before we have to return.

When we have these big fires in the woods, we have to first inform the South Yorkshire fire control room with all details, location, name and contact number and then when we leave, we have to make sure that the fire is out completely and again inform the fire control room that we are leaving the site. So, if you see a fire in the valley, please report it. If it is genuine, the control room will have a record of it. If not, you may just save a bit of your valley or someone's allotment.

Sunday 24th February 08

This Sunday we found ourselves having to fit in a second visit to Carver Fields. Usually one cut back is enough to keep the fields looking at their best without trying to make them look too managed. But due to the activities of a few youngsters who see the fields as their own playground, we had to make a second clear up of the mess they left behind.

I am not against youngsters using these woods. We all did it to make dens and swings and after all we manage these fields as a recreational area for the local community. But with that said we do expect the local community to do their bit in clearing up after their dogs and we do draw the line at importing large amounts of material to build tree houses, then when they are abandoned to leave the area looking like a bomb site.

To have planks of wood nailed to

branches with nails so large that the only way we could get them down was to saw the branches off, to throw tins of white paint over trees and bushes, to hack out large squares of bark from tree trunks to make steps is not building dens. It is vandalism.

Let us not forget that these fields are privately owned and a management committee is in place to oversee that they are used correctly and as such action can be taken against anyone misusing the facilities.

When it takes fourteen people four hours to clean up after them, then it is time to say enough is enough. We have better things to do in the valley than to clear up this mess.

If parents could only see some of the disgusting things that we have to pick up in this area, I doubt they would let their children play down here again.

Keith Kendall (Task Team Coordinator)

In The Garden

On the day we moved into our house on the side of Rivelin Valley, (November 1986), it was raining, misty and windy, and I thought to myself, "Why have we moved here?" To make matters worse, we had to have an emergency plumber as the loo was leaking. We were sustained by steaming mugs of tea and biscuits from our new neighbour, Hilary. After a few days, when the weather cleared, we were amazed at the beautiful sunsets, which were photographed many times. I spent a lot of time looking at the lovely view from the bedroom window towards the moors and still do. That winter we had quite a lot of snow and Mr Mosley delivered the milk on his tractor – nothing was going to stop him! The boys made a ski slope down our sloping back garden and had a great time. We had not had as much snow since so it is a good job I took photos to show the

grandchildren how it used to be in proper winters.

That was our first winter and we soon came to love the area. All visitors were treated to a walk down the valley and were pleasantly surprised by the beauty of the scenery and amazed that it was once a hub of industrial activity. I love watching the weather change and hearing the wind thundering up the valley (usually when I am cosily tucked up in bed). I was very lucky to see the rainbow clouds in February 1996 coming up the valley. I saw it from the very beginning when there was only one cloud surrounded by rainbow colours and watched, transfixed as each new cloud took on the same colours, until the sun set and colours faded. I was so mesmerised I did not think to take a photo. Because of the landscape there are so many interesting weather phenomena. Twice I have seen a midnight rainbow. This happens when the moon is full and it is drizzling in the valley and is an amazing site.

I often see interesting wildlife in the garden. On the occasions I have to get up in the night, I always peer through the window. On one wet night, about midnight, I saw a tawny owl swoop down and take a frog from the front drive – probably a once in a lifetime occurrence. I often see foxes that have made a track through the garden. Once I saw a weasel weaving its way in and out of a stone wall in the back garden. There are always mice in there despite the number of cat around, ours included. Spring is my favourite time of the year when I look forward to the reawakening of the garden and emergence of the wildlife. The pond is filling up with frogspawn, which I have tried to protect against the cold as our garden is in a frost hollow. The bumblebees came out during a few warm days but have gone to ground again. When this current cold spell

finishes, there will be plenty of flowers and blossom to build up their strength for their new brood.

Joan Buckland

Some Recent Open Meetings **8th Jan Costa Rica Peter Mason**

A return visit from Peter Mason took us to Costa Rica, a narrow country sandwiched between Panama and Nicaragua and between two seas, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The first stop was the capital, San José with its grand architecture and open spaces. The country's main exports are pineapples, bananas and strangely, computer chips. Then on into the countryside where efforts are now being made to preserve natural habitats rather than convert to growing crops, so tourism is an important part of the economy. We enjoyed the exotic flowers and the Tarzan like vegetation in the tropical forest. A large dark lump glued to a tree was a sloth and the vicious eyelash viper was spotted. Visitors can view the forest from a perilous, treetop walkway or be pulled on ground by a tractor. Then we went on to the Caribbean coast and a wealth of wildlife. One-inch long green, tree frogs with popping out red eyes, howler monkeys, green iguanas and crocodiles are to be seen. Six feet long green turtles lay eggs in the sand and when hatched they are programmed to head down the beach into the sea. Now we all want to go there.

12th Feb History of Castleton Peter Harrison

Back near to home for a tour of Castleton. There has been a succession of people living in the area. Neolithic people had a burial site here, the Brigantes arrived then the Romans, Celts, Picts and Saxons. Several pack horse routes converge on Castleton and in 1255 the market had 71 stalls. The clutter of small houses to be seen today would have resembled those in the 12thc.

When the railway to Hope and Edale arrived, it brought days out for hard working Sheffield folk. Restaurants, cafés and pubs sprouted and private houses provided hot water to make your own brew. The police station had six cells for those who overstayed their welcome. With such a varied history, Castleton has given much archaeology. Roman artefacts from the castle area were taken to London. Bones from a family burial of the Celtic period disappeared to Manchester. None of these finds have been seen since so are probably gathering dust in a dusty museum basement. Industries from the past have largely gone. There was a chandler's shop where dead animals were rendered in sett pots and a rope-making walk in Peak Cavern. Lead and Blue John were profitable. Castleton still provides a good family day out but are the police cell still there?

11th March Icy Realms and Southern Seas Peter Robinson

The visit started in Buenos Aires, then on to the Falklands, looking very much like Yorkshire moorland – the sheep are there too. Nesting penguins greeted the visitors. Port Stanley has the southernmost whalebone arch, indicating its past occupation. On to South Georgia where the grey blobs of seals were collapsed on the beach and king penguins imitated lambs baaing. Antarctica came with its fiord like coastline, glaciers and icebergs – a stunning landscape in shades of blue, grey and white.

M Sanderson

Recorder

Margaret Sanderson has supplied the following:

Jan 08 – back garden....several chaffinches and greenfinches, a bullfinch and a pied wagtail.

Also male and female greater spotted woodpecker; the male just eating the seeds and the female walking up and down the tree trunk tapping her beak as she goes. She walks down the tree trunk backwards and also eats fatballs!

A jackdaw was seen sitting on the back of a Shetland pony on Rivelin Valley Road – no doubt finding some tasty insect.

A spider (probably *Zygiella x-notata*) has been sitting on the outside of a window pane since January guarding three egg cocoons which have been laid about one a month. Recently she has caught a huge moth in her web, about six times longer than she is.

In February, a lot of small bees were feeding from some flowering white heather.

On February 5th I found two dead frogs about three metres away from the pond. One had its front legs ripped off. Nearby, on the path was a pile of frogspawn. I was concerned that the frogs may have died from some disease so I rang the Natural History Dept. at the Sheffield museum for information. Alistair Mclean said that from my description they didn't seem to be diseased. The culprit was most likely to be a grey heron. They catch the frogs with their front legs, hence the damage and there have been reports of them taking frogspawn. At the beginning of March, a rat was

seen crossing the garden with an apple! It was holding it up in the air like a performing seal.

Janet Bowring saw a badger running across Rochester Road at 4pm on Tuesday 8th April 2008

Derek Hastings saw a stonechat and curlews at Redmires Upper Dam at the end of March.

Ed: If you, like me, would never recognise a stonechat even if one bit you on the nose, it is described under 'wheatears' in my bird book. Of the British birds identified in this group, it includes the 'wheatear', the male with its steel-grey back and with distinctive black and white stripes over the eye. The 'stonechat' male has a black head and back with a pale brown chest and white rump. The male 'whinchat' is similar but paler. The remaining four birds in this group are the 'redstart' and the rarer 'black redstart', 'robin' and the 'nightingale' found in the South and apparently frequenting Berkley Square.

Making a good impression

My daughter recently asked me to investigate a strange mark on her bedroom window as it looked like the imprint of bird feathers. Sure enough there was a perfect imprint of a large bird, I would guess a pigeon, on the outside of her bedroom window! Ouch!

Fly tipping figures worrying

Last year Nick Clegg made a statement about the flytipping in Sheffield. He was told by the Environment Minister Ben Bradshaw, that £10m had been spent by the Council and the Environmental Agency on cleaning up in the past two years. Despite more than

330,000 reported incidences of fly tipping, only one person had actually been prosecuted and so no money had been raised from the perpetrators. But walking through the Winter Gardens this week, Sheffield Street Force have now begun to address this with several recent prosecutions. If you find any rubbish dumped on the highway contact the Council on **01142734567**. If you find rubbish dumped on private land, contact Environmental Services on **01142037410 or 7411** and they will identify the owner and take legal steps to get the rubbish removed.

EXTINCTION – Life on the Edge

The Zoological Society of London is involved in a project called the 'Edge Project'. It has identified 521 endangered species worldwide based on an 'Edge Ranking'. The rank is obtained using a mathematical formula 'Evolutionary Distinctiveness x Global Endangerment (no. left). E.g. the Black Rhino has been a long time evolving and has few relatives. This would be a greater loss to global bio-diversity than say the Black Rat, which has many relatives. Our planet is currently experiencing the greatest wave of extinctions since the asteroid wiped out the dinosaurs about 65m years ago – and this time its all our fault. Whether by direct persecution or by destroying their natural habitats, we humans are driving an ever rising toll of our fellow creatures to the brink. Today over 550 species of mammal are seriously endangered. Bradt Travel Guides has produced a book '100 animals to see before you die'.

Black Rhino: Edge Rank 7

No. 3725 (540 in Kenya)

Grey two horned with a hooked lip and smaller than White Rhino. Has excellent hearing and smell but has

poor eyesight hence its notorious grumpiness. Its one ton bulk can shift faster than an Olympic sprinter. Found in Tansania, Kenya and Niarobi National Parks. Also Namibia and SA Infalosi Game Reserve. Encounters tend to be of the heart stopping variety.

Grevy's Zebra: Edge Rank 82

Larger size, bigger ears and fine pinstripe. This is the rarest species of wild horse. Total 3000 mainly North Kenya. Hunted for its coat.

Cheetah: Edge Rank 299

Greyhound in cats clothing 'built for speed' at 110km/hr. This feline Ferrari is the fastest of all land animals.

Relentless habitat loss and persecution is causing a steady decline. It also has an unusual lack of genetic diversity leaving it vulnerable to disease. A total of 12,000 fairly widespread but low density. Grassy plains of Serengeti and Masai Mara, Nimibia and Botswana.

Mountain Gorilla: Edge Rank 165

King Kong has a lot to answer for.

Forget the terrifying chest beating monster, this persecuted primate is a gentle leaf-munching giant plant eater. Immensley strong they number 400 in Uganda, Rwanda and Democratic Replic of Congo.

Article from:

The Traveller MSAFIRI

'Extinct is forever'

Edition 62 Feb-Apr 2008

It all seems a long way from the Rivelin Valley doesn't it. And, as long as we can drive to Sainsbury's and back with the weekly shopping, there's not much for us to worry about is there!

Unfortunately a bit closer to home, just this week I have heard reports that half of all European birds are in decline. Of the top ten, seven are British nesting birds. The Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Wryneck are no longer breeding in

Britain. Tree Pippit and Willow Warbler sightings have fallen by over 80%. Woodpecker sightings are down by 18% and the nightingale by 13%. The birds in decline most appear to be farmland birds such as the Grey Partridge, European Turtle-dove and the Northern Lapwing all heading towards extinction in Europe but still in numbers in Asia. Also woodland birds and those classified as specialist habitat types are in decline. On the other hand non-specialist habitat birds such as the Collard Dove, Hawfinch, Common Raven, Blackcap and common Buzzard are on the increase.

British butterfly conservationists said 2007 was the worst summer for butterflies in almost 25 years. Butterflies do not fly in rain and it's impossible for them in wet weather to reach the nectar they need for food. The heavy rain also meant they couldn't breed.

Last year I also wrote a rather scary article about the demise of the honeybee, thought to be affected by a parasite called the Varroa mite. You may have heard on the news this week that the government is so concerned that it is pumping thousands of pounds into investigating what the problems are and what we can do to abate the decline. This is not only threatening our honey supplies, but the pollination of many of our crops. As one beekeeper, Tony Riome, put it, 'No bees. No steak!' The same problems are affecting our wild bumblebee populations with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust warning of 'catastrophic declines'.

The US Government is spending £8.1m into the honeybee decline called Colony Collapse Disorder in the US and 'The Mary Celeste Syndrome' in the UK.

Fallow Land Subsidy Ends

Over the past 15 years, there has been a European subsidy to encourage farmers to leave land fallow called 'set-aside' land, which was to generate an agricultural landscape as a wildlife habitat. The fallow areas planted with perennials have helped the open-ground birds and mammals like skylarks, corn bunting, stone curlew, linnet, lapwing, barn owl, brown hare, field mouse, marbled white butterfly, bumblebees and many insects. Unfortunately, rising food prices and a demand for bio fuels such as rape seed is putting pressure on farmers to re-cultivate this land. And to make things worse, the European subsidy has now ended and DEFRA are developing monitoring proposals to assess the impact on wildlife.

Rivelin Mill



The March task day saw us construct this 'outdoor classroom' for children to pond dip and then record their catch and have their lunch. The area looks splendid and more work is planned to further improve the facilities.

Graham Appleby
Group recorder

THE RIVELIN VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

WILDLIFE REPORT FORM

If you would like to report anything you feel would be of interest to our members then please return this form or contact me on the number shown. Do you know you can also submit this form from our web page on www.rivelinvalley.org.uk under 'recorder'

Name Tele.....

What When.....

Where.....

Any further information?.....

.....

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Please return to group recorder: Graham Appleby, 30 Stephen Drive, Crosspool, Sheffield, S10