



Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Summer 2009 no 71

Through The Chair

Make a Stand For Wildlife

No – I don't mean our stand at Stannington Carnival or the Autumn Craft Fair! What we need are more people to stand up to be counted and be prepared to speak out in this mad world of the chase after material possessions, increased productivity and ever faster travel and communication.

Why can't we learn from the natural world around us which has lived in harmony and steady evolution for millions of years? The human race seems determined to rush like lemmings to its final destruction. Certainly the present rate of decline in the rich diversity of our world is going to have a dramatic effect on our lives. After all, we humans, in spite of our perceived intellect are just a small part of the whole fabric of creation. Whether we like it or not we are inter-dependent. Our use of the world's resources has to be sustainable if we are going to leave any sort of legacy to our children. Our management of the land has direct impact on our quality of life. Locally the rich experience of walking through Rivelin is nowhere near as diverse as it used to be. Are the gems of our wildlife to be restricted to a few nature reserves? What effect will that have on the number of pollinating bees? Yes we can go for the quick fix – buy your garden colour off the shelf with brightly coloured cultivars, or you could propagate native flowers and see which the bees prefer. It's obvious in my garden. The meadow cranesbill at the back or *Geranium psilostemon* in the front! A small bit of thinking locally to work towards saving the rainforest and therefore the world's climate!

Roger and Out

Contacts

Chairman Roger Kite 01142306194
Task Force Coordinator Keith Kendall 01142307144
Membership/Newsletter M Sanderson 01142306790
Treasurer David Lyon 01142302660
Group Recorder Graham Appleby 01142660203
Events Janet Bowring 01142307570

Mail to: rvcg@supanet.com
Web: www.rivelinvalley.org.uk

Donations

Thanks again to the following for your generous help towards our funds especially under present financial conditions. I hope everyone has been remembered - Hill, Maas, Brazil, Cotton, Couldwell, Dean, Beck, Howe, Walker and Machin. So far this year contributions through membership has been £515 which is remarkable, considering that it is only July and we had £555 by the end of last year. Also, thanks to those of you who send notes of appreciation for what is done in the valley by RVCG.

M Sanderson

Apologies for heading the last newsletter 'WINTER 2009' when it should have been SPRING, though it did feel like winter at the time!

In the Garden

At last we are getting some hot summer weather with enough rain to get the garden growing. This year the blossom was beautiful – it seems to get better every year. My apple trees were covered in blossom but, unfortunately, I cannot see many apples. There were some heavy downpours at the time and maybe there were not enough insects around to pollinate the flowers. On the other hand, the Victoria plum tree is laden with fruit.

This was in bloom a lot earlier than the

apple trees. It just goes to show how the weather can affect growth. Bluebells have also put on an amazing show this year. We are lucky to have such beautiful native flowers all around our area.

I have two cotoneaster bushes growing along a wall, which have attracted huge numbers of bees, mainly the buff-tailed, white-tailed and red bumble bees. I only saw two honeybees. This is very worrying. No one seems to know for sure what is causing this decline – a virus, a mite or environmental causes. I try to provide them with nectar rich plants throughout the summer/autumn. Early plants are bluebell, crocus, hellebore, red currant, daffodil, lungwort, forget-me-not and alkanet. Then come the cotoneaster, rhododendron, purple toadflax, honeysuckle, cranesbill, rosemary, sage, aquilegia, foxglove, raspberry, veronica and penstemon. Later there is fuchsia, lemon balm, sedum, rudbeckia, and inula. I have ivy growing through my holly tree which keeps the birds and insects happy until late in the year. If I had to recommend only four plants for the insects (after it is not only bees that pollinate) they would be cotoneaster and ivy, which also provide berries for the birds, and sage and sedum. Lavender does not grow well in my garden hence its omission. My weather phenomenon this issue is 'crepuscular rays'. I am sure everyone will have seen these, but like me, did not know their name. The best time for seeing them is as the sun is setting behind a scattering of cumulus clouds or through a hole in stratocumulus cloud. The shafts of light are caused by the sunlight being scattered by particles and droplets of water in the atmosphere. Italian painters were fond of depicting divine status with crepuscular rays; so keep your eye open for them when you are visiting churches.

Joan Buckland

Group Barbecue Sunday 24th August

You might receive this newsletter in time to remind you of our annual event. Last time the new venue at 10 Coppice View was very popular. The cost is £4 and don't worry if you have lost the form. Just contact Roger or Margaret – see Contacts List.

Some Recent Events

25th April Brodsworth Hall

This was a good day's outing to the hall and gardens, made even better because we were met by a very convincing Queen Victoria and her Royal Hussars – one of the hall's special events days. The estate, once owned by the Thellussin banking family is now beautifully maintained by English Heritage. The grounds have a topiary garden with a myriad of clipped cones, pyramids, cubes, globes and cylinders. Spring flowers were in abundance in the wilder parts and the more manicured formal areas were ready for their summer displays. The garden has a tiny 'Target House' where bows and arrows were stored for the ladies' shooting games. The house itself is beautifully kept in its Victorian glory. The dining room could cater with many visitors who came for the shooting parties and original menu cards remain. The billiard room is evocative of smoky evenings of leisure and the drawing room would be the centre of evening entertainment - even dancing once the carpet was removed. Upstairs, you can see ancient baths and lavatories and large beds which in more recent times might have proved uncomfortable, as modern mattresses have been placed on top of the ancient ones. The poor servants who serviced the house and its multitude of occupants were in cramped rooms at the top of the house.

Thanks to Janet for arranging the visit.

Evening Walk 19th May

This event was on the Stannington side of the valley and as we walked towards Flash Farm we enjoyed the views towards Lodgemoor and the moors beyond. It was a fine evening with spectacular clouds and a rainbow and though a bit muddy, it didn't rain. We were delighted to see a curlew and skylark and over towards the Bradfield area were fields of bright yellow oilseed rape below Kirk Edge Road looking slightly out of place in our landscape. We finished up at the Crown and Glove, which was a good end to the evening.

Our new season of Open Meetings starts on the 8th September at 7.30

pm. We will be pleased to see you.

Some Local Stories

It's good to think that our local area has given inspiration to novels. Two, in particular are worth mentioning. The first is 'The Northern Clemency' by Philip Hensher which has received good reviews. The author went to Tapton School so must know Rivelin quite well. Like many authors, he uses poetic licence but the valley is recognisable. These are just a few samples of his descriptions.

"Beyond and below the crag, heading down into the bottom of the valley . . . there ran the Rivelin through a thick line of trees."

"It was a place of mysterious lights and shadows, which under rain hissed and drummed; the river formed pools and deep sibilant cascades. It was always dark down there. Even when the sun shone, the trees met overhead and cast heavy green shades over the paths, carved by custom rather than arrangement."

"It seemed like a very old place, and was; probably the remains of a much larger forest that had extended right up the sides of the valley, where now were fields of sheep and stripped moorland, and even crawling masses of houses."

"The houses gave way at last to a garden centre, or nursery according to taste, as the Rivelin woods and the Rivelin valley began their sinuous path."

"Children often came here with their shrimping nets in search of frogspawn and sticklebacks, taking the the sticky produce home in funerary jam-jars."

The author sees the unsightly as well – "At the edge of the houses, it was full of rubbish, old bicycle wheels, plastic supermarket bags, a trolley from Gateway, which must have been pushed uphill before being dumped here." Maybe here, he was thinking of the river after it meets the Don. Thanks to Bob Purdy for information about this novel and for gaining permission from the publishers to reprint these passages.

Another novel based on fact is Covenant with Death by John Harris, published in 1961 by Hutchinson. This is a First World War novel written by a Sheffield journalist

who also wrote 'The Sea Shall Not Have Them', later made into a film. He based the book on experiences of surviving veterans of the war from the city, now grown old. These men were recruited in 1914 into the newly formed, voluntary city battalion which mainly consisted of professionals and university men. Sheffield and the York and Lancs Regiment are not mentioned by name but it is obvious that the novel is set here. The recruiting started at the Town Hall where enthusiastic men, egged on by the patriotic fervour of the time queued up for their 'Covenant with Death'. 'Earl Fitzjames' (Earl Fitzwilliam) offered to take command and after enlisting, the men went down to the Corn Exchange for their medicals. Then they went to the Drill Hall (possibly Edmund Road) for training and Suffolk (Norfolk) Park to practise digging trenches. Very soon, the men were at Blackmires (Redmires) to continue their training and to handle their first gun. This camp was to see a great number of WW1 soldiers. Here, they found life very harsh, a place of needling rain, stunted trees, sodden fields, whining winds and no electricity or coal.

The recruits would escape to the 'Four Merry Lads' where they met with injured soldiers from Ypres who were recovering at the isolation hospital (Lodge Moor). They were horrified at their torn flesh and missing limbs. These men had harrowing stories that chilled the new recruits. Sometimes they managed a night out in Sheffield, travelling through Sidepool (Crosspool) but escapades such as this could lead to being put on charge. The story continues with the men leaving the camp for embarkation, marching into the city led by a brass band, cheered on by crowds. Here they saw the persecution of German families who had set up shops and businesses and were having to flee for their lives.

The rest of the book shows the true horrors of war and the battle of the Somme where only seventy-eight men out of seven hundred and ninety-five in the city battalion returned home.

Many thanks to Rita Whiteley for the loan of this book which is now out of print,

rather unfortunate as it has much local interest. Fortunately two copies are held at the Central Library for borrowing.

It wasn't just Sheffield soldiers that braved the elements of Redmires in WW1. A York soldier, Digby Sutton was camped there with the Royal Engineers when he went on an errand to the Silcock's Fulwood Head Farm and ended up marrying their daughter. He wasn't impressed by the camp but he did enjoy his courtship of Lottie Silcock in the fields above Redmires.

Taken from More of Mayfield Valley with Fulwood by Muriel Hall 1974

M Sanderson

Revelling in Rivelin 31st May

This was part of Environment Week's Programme and included enthusiastic pond dipping by a group of children in Rivelin Mill Pond who were fascinated by the wriggling creatures that they found. A working party was busy clearing paths also thanks to the refreshment providers.

Welcome the new Recorder

I have been the RVCG recorder now for about twelve years and have found so much to write about within this small picturesque area of Sheffield. I also enjoy the task team events on the last Sunday of each month. It's good for the spirit being out in the fresh air, working with a team of public-spirited volunteers and just the sheer satisfaction of seeing a good job done. So if you fancy joining us, please give Keith Kendall a ring to come and join us. You can also contribute in other ways by making a donation towards our costs, suggesting areas of improvement or contributing towards the newsletter. If you have any Rivelin Valley experiences or fond memories that you would like to share then Margaret Sanderson would be pleased to hear from you. If you have any wildlife reports of the valley or anything of interest just in your back garden, then

please send your letter to the RVCG Recorder. Which brings me to the fact that I am very pleased to announce that we have a new RVCG Recorder: Joan Buckland. Unlike myself, Joan really does know a thing or two about the birds and the bees! She has quite a wildlife haven in her back garden and has a real love of nature so I look forward to reading some of her articles. For the moment please continue to send your own articles for the Recorder to me via post, email or the website and I will pass them on to Joan.

I asked Joan to write an introduction about herself and although initially reluctant being quite a reserved person, she gave me the following:

"I came to live in Den Bank in 1986 and have never regretted it. I have always been an outdoor type from childhood and loved being in contact with nature. The Rivelin Valley fulfils all my needs in this respect. There is so much happening under our noses in the natural world. You can learn a lot from books by experts but nothing beats personal observation. I look forward to hearing from you and sharing your observations"

Joan Buckland

I will still be contributing to the group in other ways and printing the newsletter. Thank You for your continued support of the RVCG

Graham Appleby

Reports

Joan Buckland June 09 – In the back garden Den Bank Close, fox, wall brown butterfly, flocks of mixed tits numbering 20 – 25 but mainly long-tailed tits. Male bullfinch, greenfinch, female sparrowhawk, immature sparrows and blackbirds, and Joan was also

entertained by two woodpigeon fighting in her garden. (I told you Joan's back garden was a wildlife haven!)

Margaret Sanderson June 09 – buzzard seen over the Rivelin Valley. Also there is a family of bats, probably Pipistrelle, living near the medical centre jct Holme Lane and Taplin Road.

Margaret also reported that the boggy area at the top of the sledging field which supports the marsh orchid had been churned up by the horses. We have been wanting to protect this area but the field occupier seems reluctant to co-operate

Derek Hastings 15 June 09 – two adult lapwings plus chicks in ploughed field adjacent to Lodgemoor Road. Adult flew low over passers-by (including Derek) making warning noises.

Several members of the committee also reported a healthy supply of bees in their gardens, which is encouraging after two years of summer deluge and constant reports of beehive decimation.

During May 09 I had several reports of painted lady butterflies – it must be a good year for them.

The 31st May 09 was a task day at Rivelin Mill and what a delight to see two mallard families on the new pond. One had about 10 chicks and the other 13.

Jo Flower April 09 – skylarks on High Riggs

Roger Kite April 09 – while Roger was entertaining a Beaver Group down at the pond dipping platform at Rivelin Mill, one young Beaver caught a fish which was not easily identifiable but

thought to be a young pike! We can't imagine how that would have found its way into Rivelin Mill pond

Jane Danes regularly has a greedy Woodpecker in her garden.

Peregrine Falcon

I work for BT and this article was in the last newsletter regarding Telephone House, Charter Row, Sheffield.

' As some of you are already aware, we have a peregrine falcon (which I have christened 'Perry') that is hunting from our building. Perry is a juvenile falcon, a female about two years of age and she is using the height of our building as a mountain top perch from which to look for prey; mostly pigeons and other small birds. Peregrine falcons are extremely rare, so I would ask you not to disturb Perry if you see her. She can sometimes be seen perched outside the windows of the fourteenth floor. They are also the fastest animal on the planet, so we are quite privileged that Perry has chosen us as her hunting base. Though she will be leaving us around September to seek out warmer climes for the winter, hopefully, she will be back next year.'

Valley Dredging

I have received a number of photo's from Mr J Aizelwood and Geoff Garret of a major dredging operation around 1967/68 when Wolf Dam and later Round Dam were dredged.



I would like to run a full article in the next newsletter. If you have any memories or information about this historic event then please send them to me.

Graham Appleby
grahamappleby@btopenworld.com

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