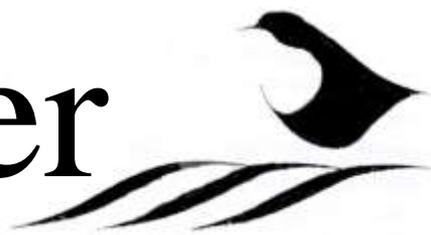




Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Winter 2010 no 73

Through The Chair

Resolutions

A New Year means a new beginning and that's very apt for Rivelin Valley Conservation Group this year especially. We have a number of challenges to resolve, not the least of which is how we reorganise the Group's structure if I am to devote more time to my growing family's commitments. The other is to ensure the work the group does continues in our collective conservation of Rivelin's wildlife habitats and the public access by which we all are able to enjoy them and the amazingly diverse animal and plant life that lives there. This can only happen if supported by a smooth running administration. We have had so many notable achievements over the past couple of decades – from planning enquiries to major structural works and this has been effected by a strong team of committed enthusiasts. That will, I am confident, continue, but we may well need a few more individuals strong in their resolve, to help the Group to operate as efficiently as it has done. Please read the notes about the roles and the selection of a new Executive Committee inside this newsletter and give careful consideration as to how you could help.

The Valley has looked brilliant over the Christmas season – all shiny and bright, and I hope you have all enjoyed getting out there in the snow and ice. We are having a photo competition at the AGM in April and I expect there will be some

winter scenes among them. Bright light shining off the sparkling snow may help in the resolution of a picture postcard scene.

May it also help your resolve to do a bit for the Group and its work.

Roger and

Out

It is time to renew your subscription. Please remember – if you are a new member, joining after 30th September 2009, then you have your membership for 2010. Also, a few of you have already paid for this year. If in doubt, contact M Sanderson. (see contacts)

Contacts

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A New Look Committee

With the impending resignation of the present Chairman your committee is proposing that this year's AGM looks to approve a slight change in the various roles taken on by members. The eventual structure will need to be approved by the AGM but here is some food for thought!

Chair – the effective Leader of the Group who chairs committee meetings, hosts the Open Meetings and ensures smooth running of the various areas of activity. (Vacancy)

Secretary – deals with correspondence and other necessary clerical work to help the Chair (a possible new post)

Treasurer – keeps the financial records, holds the cheque book and produces annual accounts.

Minute Secretary – Records the minutes of the committee meetings and after approval makes them available for members to see at Open Meetings.

Planning Adviser – Checking Planning Applications usually via the Council's web site, advising committee and dealing with subsequent correspondence, Public Enquiries etc.(an Assistant vacancy exists here – possibly concentrating on the north side of the valley)

Newsletter Editor – pulls together articles and makes them fit. Check with Chair and send for printing.

Newsletter Distribution – collect from printing, ensure any collation with other papers and get out to the post people (another possible new post)

Membership Secretary – keeps track of renewals and new members and welcome packs (these are held and sent out by another at present)

Recorder – holds the wildlife records for the group and liaises with other bodies and writes the insert in the Newsletter

Website Manager – keeping the website up to date, liaising with others as necessary and also doing the group printing.

Task Team Coordinator – heads up the team and usually with others determines the programme of work and takes responsibility for each Task. (Could there be a deputy out there?) Grant Applications and liaison with other volunteer bodies.

Events Organiser – researches sites for visits and Field Trips and coordinates transport

Conservation Adviser – ensures that advice on ecological good management is available liaising with the council officers and other bodies as appropriate.(a new post)

Speaker Finder – Organises the series of open meetings in conjunction with the Chair, looks after speakers at the meetings in conjunction with treasurer

Publicity – Production of posters and their distribution, advertising meetings and events. (a new post)

Refreshments – open meetings could not happen without them.

This list should not be taken as definitive - any other thoughts will be welcome. Not all these posts would need to be committee positions but they cover what needs to be done to keep the show on the road.

Down on the Farm

Back to Pam and Frank Revitt's Coppice House Farm for another visit and it looks as thriving as ever. What stranger would believe that three miles from the city centre there could be such an idyllic spot? It's a good sight along Rivelin Valley Road to see a working farm.

When Pam's daughter was little, they bought three lambs from Chelford market, costing only £1 each because they were weak. Pam gave them 'Quickstart' to give them a boost which cost £3 for each lamb and they survived. Two were put in a pen with the calves but one called Harry had to be kept by the Rayburn for three months and became housetrained. He was good mates with Timber, the Yorkie. The lamb slept in the dog's bed and the dog slept in the lamb's bed. They both went out for walks on a lead. Eventually, Pam had to put him out and he came to the gate every morning for a bottle of milk. When he was two, he was found dead but he had a happy life. Around eighteen years ago, Pam's grandson, Thomas was taken to a farm on the Snake by his grandfather and came back with two lambs that became pets. They were called Sophie and Sam. Sophie had two lambs every year.

Jamie Oliver's cookery has given mutton a boost recently and the Revitts breed Texels which give good meat but stock buying is expensive and at the moment of writing the Revitts would have to buy for £2.90 a kilo, around £100 each and for shearing, they would have to pay to have the fleece taken away. Cattle can be bought from far afield, their pedigree Galloways coming from Scotland. The farm also has Aberdeen Angus, Limousins and Longhorns. The Revitts are experimenting breeding with a Longhorn heifer and a Galloway bull to see what kind of meat is produced, as they are both liked by chefs. Meat from Coppice House Farm can be found in the farm shop. Some of you might remember from a previous newsletter when the once fruitful bull lost his powers and was to be sent for slaughter. You will be pleased to know that this did not happen and he was sent off to pastures new in this world instead of the next. The Revitts look after local wildlife and while I was there, Frank came in with two nesting boxes for the tawny owls. The bird feeders by the door are very busy and Pam has already noticed a buzzard flying overhead on the lookout for rabbits.

The farm also has a well set up self-catering cottage for hire. Contact Pam for more information on 01142301753. The farm shop is open Thursday to Saturday (9.00 – 5.00 and Sunday 10.00 – 3.00) and its sign can be seen from Rivelin Valley Road.

Moonbow

Last autumn we received a letter from our cousin, who lives at the southern end of Duddon Valley in Cumbria and I quote:-

"...despite my three score years and ten out and about in the countryside, I

have never before seen a rainbow after dark! Albeit a colourless silver rainbow, but in a complete arc. After a sunny afternoon, the clouds started to build up again in the Northwest. Sitting that evening with my neighbour in his conservatory, watching the darkness fill the valley, Thwaite Fell to the Northwest was lost in blackness at about 21.20hrs, although Caw and the Coniston Range in the Northeast could still be seen as black silhouettes with stars above. Then suddenly in the valley was a complete silver rainbow! After looking in the opposite direction there was a virtually full moon in a clear sky high above Burney Hill and Kirby Moor to the east. Of course a few minutes later the rain pattered on the conservatory windows and the silvery magic disappeared in the advancing storm. "Please note we were only drinking tea!"

What an amazing experience – I hope I shall see the same one day. Hilary Kite

Foam in Rivers

Foam on streams and rivers is often associated with pollution particularly from domestic sewage. Following the introduction of synthetic detergents into the domestic market after the Second World War both sewage works and rivers often disappeared under blankets of foam on the traditional Monday washing day. These blankets could reach heights of over 2 metres with sections breaking off in the wind and floating away. These floating blankets of foam even gave rise to reports of UFOs.

Early detergents were difficult to break down by the biological process employed at sewage works and over 50% of the original concentration often flowed into the rivers unchanged giving

rise to foaming rivers.

In the 1960's concerns over the impact of these detergents on fisheries and down stream abstraction from the rivers led to the development of a new range of products that were more easily broken down by biological processes and the problem was significantly reduced. People however still associate the foam with pollution particularly from sewage.

Foam is caused by water turbulence trapping air as bubbles. The process is helped by many substances which dissolve in water, lowering the surface tension of the water. These can include detergents, slurry from building sites, waste from industrial processes etc. Modern fire fighting foams can also produce a similar effect on rivers. Locally the most likely cause will be a natural run-off from areas of high organic content e.g. peaty areas, wetlands and woods.

In these areas natural decomposition of plants and leaves release chemicals into water such as polypeptides, fatty acids and tannins which can stabilise foam giving rise to concerns that the water course could be polluted.

Where there is foam consider the following points:-

- the extent of the foam
- wind direction
- proximity to possible sources of pollution
- presence of plants and organic material in the area
- feel it – natural foam is light not slimy to the touch

If there appears to be a pollution incident contact the Environment Agency.

Notes of a walk done on Sunday 7th March 1954 by F Brazil and friends.

Bus to Bradfield at 9.20 am. Lovely morning! Agden reservoir, First House

and up to Smallfield. Along Duke's Drive and over to Featherbed Moss, along the top of Cranberry Clough to Bull Stones shooting cabins. Bad weather on approach to cabins and one or two of us had bad luck during the morning. The snow laid concealed traps for the unwary and lessons for the walker who frequents moors on their own. We arrived very wet and tired, more than ready for the big drum up at Bull Stones cabins at about 1.15pm, menu soup, soup and more soup. Leave cabins at 2.15pm and take the path which leads to below Horsestones then turn left for Lower Smallclough and up to the Round cabin. Drum up and light scoff! Off again up to Round Hill, up to Barrow Stones. A really grand view from here over to Winn Hill and Lose Hill, what glorious countryside. A pause for photographs (hope they come out). Turn over the top of Far Back Clough. Going dark now and Lassie having trouble fording the river at various points. All of us very wet now below the knees but in good spirits, even Kaye! Down Far Back Clough in semi darkness. We arrive at the bottom with a problem, how do we ford the river? Find a spot to cross, Tick and Campy lead the way, dark now and makes this sort of thing difficult. We all make it except Lassie and Danny, the latter tries his luck further down stream. Lots of encouragement given to the former, she whimpers at first but then with great courage and a couple of good leaps she makes it in great excitement. Danny finally makes it. A quick drum up at the cabin by candlelight then off for the 7.30pm Manchester-Sheffield bus. On arrival in the big city we make for the 'Cossack', ham sandwiches all round.

Don, Danny, Ted, Tick, Campy, Lassie (dog) and me. Really good walk and a great day.

Thanks to Mary Brazil for sending this

and for saving this interesting snippet from the past.

You might have remembered Campy from a past article. He died last year and was a founder of the Mountain Rescue service which started in WW2 to rescue RAF crew downed in our mountainous areas. He became a Peak Park Ranger

Donations

Many thanks to Seaman, Ward, Allinson, Cousins, Goodwin and Revitt. Your donations this year have been a great contribution to our funds. Also thanks for all your appreciative comments on RVCG work.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO RENEW MEMBERSHIP

Recorder

After the lovely, warm, sunny Autumn – which seems such a long time ago – we are back to the cold, wet and windy weather. This is a hard time for the birds, getting buffeted and drenched regularly. If they do not find food and a dry sheltered roost they can soon become weakened. It is never too late to put up a nesting box or a roosting pocket. The birds will appreciate the protection from the weather and predators.

There may still be hedgehogs desperately trying to fatten up for the winter. There was a dead one on the road outside Lydgate Middle School on 23rd November. Sadly hedgehogs are in steep decline. It is thought that they could even be extinct by 2025. This is a horrifying prediction. Imagine our great grandchildren only knowing about hedgehogs from story books. A lot are killed on the roads and others poisoned by chemicals. I despair when I see piles of blue slug pellets in gardens. There are other methods friendlier to wildlife, and I would prefer to see a hedgehog than perfect rows of plants any day. The U.K.'s gardens are the

nation's biggest nature reserve by area. They provide corridors for wildlife when so much of their natural habitat is being destroyed by human activity. We should strive to provide as safe a haven as possible for our native species. We also benefit physically and emotionally from the pleasures of gardening. If you are lucky enough to have a visiting hedgehog, a saucer of cat or dog food will help them fatten up – milk is not good for them.

Has anyone seen a waxwing yet? Last year they were here on 28th November. Please let me know when and where you see them, and also if you have seen a hedgehog this year. Foxes are also becoming more vocal now. I hear the shrill cry of the vixen regularly. They are noisier in the mating season of January and February. Another spectacle at this time of the year is the rooks weaving their way to their roosts, often flying in pairs, just before sunset. On 24th November I saw many hundreds converging on Ecclesall Wood from all directions. As this is ancient woodland, rooks may have been roosting there for many centuries. We have 250+ rooks daily in our valley. Where do they roost, and has anyone got a rookery near them? The flight path of our rooks changes according to the time of year. In the summer they fly up the valley then turn SE beyond Bell Hagg. As the days shorten, they fly in the same direction but directly over Den Bank.

For the last few years I have picked a rose from my garden on Christmas Day. An interesting project would be to see what was in flower in our gardens on that day. If enough people do this we could publish the results in our next newsletter, and maybe it could become an annual event, giving us interesting

information on changing climate.

Reports

Margaret Sanderson – continues to get a variety of birds including female Great Spotted Woodpecker and male Bullfinch.

Graham Appleby December – Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Long –tailed Tit and Great Tit

Joan Buckland – Blackbird, Sparrow, Wren, Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, Starling, Chaffinch, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Robin, Dunnock, Jay, Magpie, Goldfinch, Jackdaw and Rook

Derek Hastings 31/12/09 Lodgemoor Road - First thrush sighted in garden in 2009. 5 starlings - also first in the garden this year. 2 male, 1 female blackbird. 4 sparrows, two blue tits

Bob and Margaret Townrow 12/2009 - 5 redwings stripping berries off cotoneaster; 3 siskins and 6 goldfinches on niger seed. Also Mrs Townrow had the lovely experience of a robin trying to land on her knee whilst she was eating cheese and biscuits at Chatsworth on New Years Day.

If anyone else has had a 'nature experience' we would love to hear about it.

While sitting in my study recently, I heard a squabble in the garden and taking a peek through the window saw the bird feeder swinging wildly and a group of raucous magpies nearby. Minutes later I heard another squabble and became suspicious and as I peered through the window again, I saw a fox tripping down the garden, with my prize hen, Drix, (Hen-drix!) hanging limp in its mouth. I shot through the house and ran down the squelchy garden in my house slippers... but, no sign of the fox or Drix. It was about 3:30pm and just going dark. My dog Megs was running round the garden barking but hadn't a clue what all the fuss was about. I entered the hens enclosure with trepidation. Sophie, my White Suffolk was on top of the coup

feverishly delivering the alarm call and there in front of me was a pile of Drix's black feathers. Gulp!

Joan Buckland – RVCG Recorder

I checked my remaining three hens were ok and locked them safely in for the night. I spent all evening listening to Sophie's alarm call and telling myself that it was just nature and beating myself up over not securing the perimeter properly and not locking the pen gate earlier.

First thing the next morning I flung back the bedroom curtains to find Drix outside my window on the garden covered in a layer of frost! My charge of the slipper brigade must have forced the fox to drop her and make good its escape. In the twilight I failed to see her in the undergrowth. I wanted to hold her safely in my arms but she avoided my advances (not the first female to do this) so, as not to increase her obvious distress, I ushered her into the enclosure and monitored her closely. After a few days of not eating and some unusual behaviour of keeping herself almost solitary as the others pecked their way around the garden, she has now reintegrated and apart from a few disfigured and missing feathers from her rump, Drix seems to be back to normal.

Graham Appleby

Xmas in Rivelin

Despite a cold, showery start to our Christmas in Rivelin event the sun came out and brightened up the day. We listened to delightful performances by Stannington's Nook Lane Junior School choir and Lydgate Junior School Brass Band . We also raised £52 for Radio Sheffield Childrens Scanner Appeal. If you did not attend you missed the chance to make your own Christmas wreath - free of charge courtesy of the Council Rangers - which was very popular. Thank you and well done to all who participated and attended.