



Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Autumn 2010 no 76

Through The Chair

Welcome to the autumn edition of the RVCG Newsletter. It's been six months since I became chair and I'm glad to say the troops have rallied behind me and things have begun to take shape. Janet Bowring has moved from 'Events to 'Press Officer' and will ensure that all our events and achievements are well publicised. We have had two excellent speakers so far although the Paul Richards talk on biological recording wasn't particularly well attended, he is one of the most knowledgeable individuals I have ever met on insect life. He could walk around the garden and discover hundreds of bugs most of which you probably never knew existed. In November, I am pleased to see the return of Kathy Burkinshaw with another topic from her own farm, 'Working Sheepdogs'. Kathy's talks are always interesting and entertaining as she delivers her presentation with passion backed up by wonderful photographs.

I still see the RVCG's main focus as maintaining the footpaths and mill ponds within the Rivelin Valley which Keith Kendall does an incredible job of managing. So make sure you go and have a look at the task team's handy work. The committee also work hard to organise walks and talks and other events but it's up to you to support these and to influence our direction. So please come to our meetings and speak up or talk to me or any other committee member as your opinions and suggestions are important to us.

Graham Appleby

Donations

Once more thanks for the following donations - Ollin, Mason, Hall and Ward. So far this year, you have given

donations of £522 with your membership renewals and without these, our work would be difficult.

Jean Moulson

We are also very grateful to receive the special donation of £1000 in memory of Jean Moulson who enjoyed being in Rivelin Valley. Amounts such as this are hard to come by, especially in these times of economic difficulty so this donation will bring a huge benefit to our valley and will be an invaluable memorial to Jean.

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Task Team

26th Sept 2010

On Sunday 26th September, we decided to attempt a repair on the leak at Swallow Wheel having discussed this problem with council officials. It was decided that the best option was to try to control the water leaking rather than try to find the source of the problem which would have taken a huge amount of time and machinery.

The best course of action was to dig a sump a metre and a half long and half a metre deep to channel the leak into and then culvert this under the footpath and into the river.

More or less from the start we ran into problems when we discovered that the two pipes that already run under the footpath from the overflow had been encased in concrete by the council

making it impossible to dig into or around. We suspected that the two leaks were probably coming from the same source and as we dug into the bank this proved to be the case which made channelling the water a little easier. A very hard day was had by all and my apologies to the team who dug away at the original sump idea just to have to fill it in again.

We did manage a compromise with the directing of the leak and culverting it. It seems to be working very well as after all of this heavy rain this section now seems to be one of the driest in the area.

My thanks go to all of the fresher students who turned out in force to help the group on this Task Day. Roger met them all at Rails Road and gave them a guided walk down to the Swallow Wheel explaining the history of the valley along the way. We put them to good use clearing the self sets out of the edges of the dam walls at Wolf and Hind Dams. We hope to see you all again soon.

Many thanks to Mr Dawson of Peterborough Drive for his kind donation of garden tools for the group. These will come in extremely useful in future projects. (Donations of tools are always welcome.)

Keith Kendall

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North Derbyshire

A painting of a cuckoo hanging on the wall of the chalet at Adelboden in Switzerland, from where I have recently returned, reminded me that those very birds I saw haunting the conifers of Dennis Knoll below Stanage Edge in April are now heading south across the heights of the Bernese Oberland, quitting the British autumn for the sultry climes south of the Sahara.

There are certainly solid signs of autumn now on the broad moorlands below Stanage Edge. Fading heather carpets are replaced by moor grasses taking on russet hues, flashing warm tints where the sun shines. These very moor-tops were, until the fairly recent legislation created "open country", strictly kept grouse territory. The other day, though, we trod the now well-used path along the top of Bamford Edge. What a vista there is on such a quiet, sunlit day as we enjoyed broad views across Derwent Dale to the mammoth eastern flank of Win Hill. Further away to the north-west, the limpid surface of the Derwent arm of Ladybower Reservoir led the eye towards vast Bleaklow, symbol of true south Pennine remoteness. The climbing routes on Bamford Edge are not particularly long but their superb position makes them memorable; the effect is of a lofty mountainside far above the everyday world. Usually we are only observed by the foraging hill sheep and the occasional red grouse. On shooting days the air may sometimes echo to distant gunshot reports, but it will be another seven months before the cuckoo's call sounds upon this escarpment. Who knows, one of those high flying aviators crossing the glacier above Adelboden may be one of the actual vocalists I saw and heard below Stanage Edge last spring.

Roger Redfern

21/22 July Himalayan Balsam Bash

You might have seen the huge influx of Himalayan balsam in the valley. It was thought to have been introduced in the 19th century, possibly to the gardens of stately homes and is now invading our countryside. There is no place it will not visit. Its seed capsules are programmed to catapult its offspring into every accessible corner and the river carries it

to the inaccessible as well. If there is bare soil, it will find it. If there isn't it will go in anyway and before you blink, there are dense thickets. It has attractive flowers and is popular with insects but in a few short weeks it will grow up to 2.5 metres. It is no respecter of nature and blocks out our own native plants.

With this in mind RVCG joined with the City Council and Sheffield Wildlife Trust to get to grips with the problem.

Fortunately it is easy and satisfying to pull out. We started at Rivelin Mill Pond and worked downwards. On the first day, the balsam took revenge and some of us were stung by angry wasps that were nesting in what they thought was a safe haven. A few intrepid (and young) balsam pickers scaled a steep drop into the river to attack where the enemy had taken a strong hold on an island. Then they had to haul it all back to the footpath. Soon there were piles of balsam along the riverside.

Two afternoons were not enough to rid the valley of the balsam so it has to be an ongoing event to prevent it from multiplying but it is certain that it is here to stay and all we can do is to control it.

Footnote – Are the Himalayas disappearing under a swathe of English bluebells and Scottish thistles?

Margaret Sanderson

Bowcroft Burial Ground

Back in RVCG beginnings, I wrote about 'Bowcroft', the Quaker burial ground at Stannington and here is a little more information.

It stands on High Riggs Road overlooking both the Loxley and Rivelin Valleys, marked by a few windswept trees and enclosed within a stone wall. At the bottom end are a few weatherworn gravestones. One especially is notable for its inscription.

HERE LIES
THE BODY OF
GEORGE SHAW
LATE OF BROOKE-SIDE
WHO DEPARTED
THIS LIFE ON THE 5th
DAY OF THE 5th MO
1708 IN THE 75th
YEAR OF HIS AGE
HE SUFFERED MUCH
FOR BEARING HIS
TESTIMONY AGAINST
THE PAYMENT OF
TYTHES

The graves of George's brother William of 'Hill' and the brothers' wives Fines and Frances can also be seen. Also it is possible that there are more unmarked graves there. Both 'Hill' and 'Brookside, are farms on the slopes leading down to the Loxley.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Quakers were persecuted, being non-conformists. They refused to pay their tithes - a tenth part of their income which was used to support the clergy and church of the parish. Quakers believe that the path to God is a personal one and not through the ministrations of a paid priest. At this time Stannington was in the Bradfield Chapelry, part of Ecclesfield parish. Quakers were not allowed to be buried in the parish graveyard so this is how Bowcroft came into existence. The land for the burial ground was purchased in 1675 by George and William Shaw.

The brothers were relentlessly pursued for their tithes. Goods far in excess of the amount owed would be distrained if a payment wasn't made. In Sheffield archives there is a Quaker Record Book which tells of goods taken from John Aldam in 1757 consisting of corn worth £4/2s. This might have been the same John Aldam who was one of the first trustees of Bowcroft. Other items taken from Quakers in Sheffield include 'cash from a drawer', pewter, a cleaver, a fire shovel, a looking glass and a coffee pot. George and William were prosecuted by the Prior of Ecclesfield for non-payment of tithes and imprisoned in York Castle prison in 1698 for five years and five months. Both brothers would have been over 70 when released. The Shaw brothers had a previous history of prison. In 1661 they both spent time in Derby Jail for attending a Quaker meeting in Eyam. The brothers were active in their faith. In 1678, William arranged a meeting at his farm for George Fox, the Quaker founder. Both brothers were trustees of Thomas Taylor's Charity for Poor Quakers and William was a trustee of the

Broad Lane Burial Ground as well as Bowcroft. Bowcroft is now beautifully maintained by Bradfield Parish Council and worth a visit. Just don't get stuck when you squeeze through the very narrow entrance.

With thanks to the Quaker Archivist Richard Hoare, Sheffield Archives and Malcolm Nunn of Bradfield Parish Council.

Margaret Sanderson

Wadsley and Loxley Commoner Events

All events at Wadsley Church Hall, Worrall Road at 7.30pm. Contact 2335331

Monday 13th December

Iceland A Summertime Look at Varied Landscapes. Talk by Edith Vincent and Phil Lockwood.

Monday 17th December

A History of Barkers Furniture – an old established local company. Talk by Neil Barker.

Some Recent Events

RVCG Barbecue 1st August

Once more, back to Ken's garden for our annual event and it was fine as usual. We have only had one rainy barbecue. Thanks to everyone who helped from the furniture arrangers and food organisers to Glenda, our BBQ cook and Ken for the loan of his ideal garden which has lots of space for games, also to Graham for providing guitar accompaniment.

Is Sheffield Weather Changing? 1st Sept

Gaynor Boon, Curator of Meteorology at Weston Park came to talk about Sheffield Weather.

This talk was full of facts -

July 2006 was the hottest month on record.

The hottest day was 3rd August 1990 at 34°C.

The coldest day was 10th February 1895 at -14.6°C.

June 2007 was our wettest June ever.

1998/9 was the mildest winter.

1962/3 was most severe winter and 1979 was the snowiest.

The sunniest February was in 2008.

Yes, our weather is changing. We are now getting dryer winters and wetter summers.

Recording weather changes is an important part of the museum's work.

Bat walk 28th September

Twenty three adults and seven children enjoyed a spooky trip into the dark woods of Rivelin Valley. It's strange how the familiar looks so different at night. This year there were lots of bat detectors waived around to make contact with these little creatures of the night. It was hard to catch a glimpse of them though we knew they were there from the twittering of the detectors. Fortunately it was a fine night and it

was good to see newcomers to our events.

Please come to our meetings in Stephen Hill Church if you haven't already. You can bring anyone else with you and enjoy Glenda's coffee and cakes.

Wildlife Recording

A recent Radio 4 programme said how important it was for amateurs to join in natural history recordings.

Recordings from the past are now very valuable and used in plotting climate change.

This is one reason why our recorder, Joan Buckland will be very glad to hear from you.

It doesn't matter whether it is a lonely dunnock feeding on your lawn or a kestrel hovering overhead – please tell Joan. Your record could become valuable in years to come.

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THE RECORDER

Autumn is upon us and so far it has been wet and windy. The lovely weather in June is a distant memory. The swifts are long gone and most of the martins and swallows also. I last saw house martins when I attended a river invertebrate monitoring course, on the River Don with Keith Kendall on 25th September, which, luckily, turned out to be a sunny day after the previous one, which was very wet and windy. The course was organised by the Riverfly Partnership which includes anglers, environmental, wildlife and other interested groups. The idea is to set up regular monitoring groups on as many rivers as possible to find out how healthy they are and, hopefully, to catch any pollution incidents quickly. We will monitor the River Rivelin probably twice a year. The presence of stonefly and mayfly larvae and caddis nymphs are indicators of a healthy river. We will keep you informed of our results.

The wildlife trusts have pioneered 'Living Landscape' schemes which aim to restore and reconnect wildlife habitats. Let's hope it works and that the Government listens. We are at the top of the animal kingdom chain but we act as if we are not part of it. We are trying to manipulate nature rather than live with it. When I was a child in the 1940's-50's I remember regularly watching a flock of lapwings coming into roost in the field opposite our house as the sun was setting behind them. Their haunting cry is one of my favourite sounds. The field is now a housing estate and there are no lapwings. The A1(M) cuts through another once favourite haunt we used to call primrose valley. There was also an open rough grassy area at the back

of the house where my father would show us skylark nests. I remember them walking up the garden path, and their beautiful song. This area is now down to hardcore and garages. The skylarks have disappeared. We have lost so much in just 50 years. Do we want a future where people are unaware and do not care about the natural world or where wildlife lives on isolated reserves for the dedicated few to go and peer at, or do we want it all around us. I know which I prefer. Everyone can do their bit by having a wildlife friendly garden. Given the chance nature is resilient, but once a species is extinct it is gone forever.

Things to look out for:-

Winter visitors – redwings, fieldfares, waxwings, skeins of geese. If you see more than normal numbers of blackbirds in your garden some will be visitors from Scandinavia.

Has the hedgehog disappeared from our gardens? The only record sent in was from Ken Shail in June.

I thought it would be interesting to see what is in flower in our gardens on Christmas Day. Please send me your finds

Records sent in:-

Margaret Sanderson – 7.7.10 – Orchid in top Carver Field also lots in field near Rivelin Valley Road. 1.10.10 – Little Owl in the garden in the daytime. 4.10.10 – Lots of fungi on Carver Fields including Russula sp. And Amanita Muscaria (Fly Agaric). 30.9.10 – Buzzard flying north over Hagg Lane allotments.

Margaret made what she thought would

be an interesting cake with whisky in it, which turned out to be very unpleasant. She threw it out for the birds who ignored it but it was descended upon by lots of wasps and it soon disappeared. Pity it was not found by Graham's bees then we could have had whisky tasting honey!

Steven Eccleston - 6.7.10 - 3 goldfish in Rivelin Pond.

Task Team - 26.7.10 - Buzzard circling over valley seen from nature trail near former King Edward VII hospital.

Roger Kite - 21.8.10 - Insects on tansy in garden - 2 Harlequin ladybirds; 2 x 2 spot ladybirds (*Adalia bipunctata*); 1 x 7 spot ladybird (*Coccinella septempunctata*); several small bees (*Colletes succineus*); 2 Flesh flies (*Sarcophaga carnaria*); 1 wasp and several hover flies:- *Metasyrphus corollae*, *Episyrphus balteatus* and the most numerous being *Syrphus ribesii/vitripennis*. A must-have plant for late Autumn.

Joan Buckland - 6.7.10 - Young mole running up and down patio trying to burrow into stone wall. Found dead 2 days later in neighbour's garden.
1.9.10 - mating flight of Black Garden Ant (*Lasius niger*). First time occurred in garden. They appeared from a crack in the concrete drive.

18.10.10 - Buzzard being mobbed by 10+ rooks directly over my house
Seen regularly over summer months - wall brown, speckled wood. Dunnock, goldfinch, long tailed tit, blue tit, great tit, coal tit, robin, greenfinch, sparrow, chaffinch, wren, wood pigeon and a family of bullfinches.

26 & 28.8.10 - Kestrel hovering over Stephen Hill allotments.

14.9.10 - Female sparrowhawk in plum

tree.

27.9.10 - blackbirds back in garden.

29/9 & 1/10 - songthrush.

12.10.10 - Nuthatch - back and forth to sunflower heart feeder for half an hour.

Graham Appleby:-

I made a rare visit to the back of my garage through all the debris and was surprised by the number of dead wasps lying around. After a couple of hours of sorting and tidying it was then I noticed a huge wasps nest in a dark corner of the garage. Although classed as an unwanted pest by most people, I find them interesting. The nest is made of small strips of wood chewed by the wasps and mixed with saliva and stuck together. Inside are lots of cells where young wasps are reared. Wasps belong to the group of insects known as the Hymenoptera which also includes the sawflies, ichneumons, bees and ants. There are many species of wasp but the group these belong to are the 'Social Wasps' belonging to the family Vespidae. The needle-like sting is concealed near the tip of the abdomen. It is a modified ovipositor and is therefore only possessed by the female - male wasps do not sting. Both the queens and the workers are females and develop from fertilised eggs. Workers are smaller than queens and never lay fertilised eggs. Male wasps are also smaller than queens and they develop from unfertilised eggs laid by queens or sometimes by workers in the autumn.

Joan Buckland RVCG Recorder