



Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Autumn 2012 no 84

Through The Chair

Welcome to the autumn newsletter. The UK seems to have had a rather overcast and dampish summer with the rest of southern Europe having been baking hot. Local gardeners have reported a number of crop failures generally caused by prolonged damp conditions and associated diseases. The bees have also had a tough time with many beekeepers reporting very little honey this year with the bees having eaten most of their own stores due to so many non-flying days. Thankfully the RVCG barbeque was blessed with reasonable weather and most of our events managed to avoid the worst of the weather.

Our new autumn programme got off to a good start with a bat walk at Wymingbrook with Nick White and the Sheffield Wildlife group on a perfect warm evening followed by our first open meeting with Judith Hanson who gave us a fascinating illustrated talk of Crosspool. Professor Colin Beard then entertained us with his interesting stories of far distant lands at our second meeting at Knowle Top Church.

Keith Kendall's task team are as active as ever in the Valley and continue to work closely with the Sheffield Council carrying out footpath repairs and other maintenance that probably wouldn't otherwise get done especially with even more cutbacks expected. Please contact Keith if you would like to join us on the last Sunday of each month. Thank you for your continued support and hope to see some of you at the next open meeting.

Graham Appleby
RVCG Chairman

Contacts

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Donations

Thank you again for your generosity. Donations this quarter are from Hetherington, Paton, Bakewell Fly Fishing Shop, Lofthouse, Purslow, Scholey and Thompson. This now swells our coffers to £1050 for this year and helps to keep our task team slaving away to look after our valley and keeping it in good order.

Task Day News Sunday 26th August

We don't usually put in a task day in August as our team is usually up for a well deserved rest, but this year the work programme plus some urgent work on the dipping platform meant that we needed to fit one in.

A small group of us met at Rails Road car park with most of the work happening at the Willow Tunnel which has been ignored a little and was in dire need of a little love and attention.

The dipping platform was also in need of a few of the planks replacing after they had rotted. Having the best oak when we built this platform, it was hoped that the wood may have lasted a little longer than it has but we have now replaced the rotten oak with treated timber so we will have to see how long it lasts.

Sunday 30th September

This Sunday we had a lot of cutting back to do at Frank Wheel.

On the approach to the Frank from the top end of the nature trail, it has always had a special view with the fallen tree looking like some kind of medieval dinosaur stretching across the pond. In recent months, this view has been lost due to self set alders which have taken over this area. All of these alders were removed and the view restored. After the leaves have fallen off the trees it will look spectacular again along this stretch of the nature trail.

We have also removed a lot of self set trees which had set along the wall of the dam which were starting to erode the bank itself.

In one area the water has started to come over the dam and flooded the footpath. We made an attempt at trying to drain this but the outlet we tried to find proved elusive to us so we need to get a digger into this area and be a little more drastic with our actions.

Thanks to all the team for turning out and especially to Robin who decided to go for a swim in the inlet to the dam and to what must have been a very uncomfortable drive home, but well done mate for coming back.

Other Work

Those of you who drive up the valley on a regular basis will have noticed that the green gates have now received a few yellow bars on them. As the nights are now drawing in, it was agreed with the council that if we painted these yellow gates green, we would put yellow bars on them to stop anyone driving into them on dark nights. We have managed to get away without doing it through the summer but I thought I had better get it done before it gets too dark.

I have also constructed a boom across the inlet to Rails Road dam, hoping to

stop a lot of the leaves at this time of the year blocking the inlet. Time will tell but last year I was called out four times when the water level at Rails Road fell dramatically.

Keith Kendall

Keith is always on the lookout for volunteers. Please see contacts list.

Wanted

For many years, Glenda has been responsible for providing refreshments at our open meetings. She is now recovering from her recent operation but is not able to continue with this job.

We are looking for someone to keep on with this work, mainly at Stephen Hill church with one or two meetings in Stannington.

Many thanks to Glenda for her work over the years and we send best wishes for her continuing recovery.

If you would like to volunteer for this, please contact Margaret Sanderson or our chairman Graham Appleby. (See contacts) Please note you don't have to make cakes though we did appreciate Glenda's. Perhaps two of you would like to share this job.

Mistletoe

Christmas is getting near and perhaps you will be buying some mistletoe (*Viscum album*). It was regarded by ancient Druids as a charm against disasters, nightmares, fire and lightning.

I have been squashing the berries of this parasitic plant in crevices on my apple trees for twenty years. Last winter a little bunch of mistletoe leaves appeared on the Early Victoria apple tree. This year it has grown to a much larger bunch and a new sprig has appeared elsewhere.

It is said that an old apple tree is needed and mine is now aged 30. Unfortunately you need a male and female plant to produce berries and mine hasn't told me which sex it is just yet. I am waiting to see a flower. Maybe there is mate of the opposite sex growing nearby. If it ever has berries it might encourage a mistle thrush.

Do try planting some yourself. It helps if you can make a little groove in the bark if you can't find a suitable crevice.

Margaret Sanderson

Rogue Horse Rider

It appears that we have a rogue horse rider in the valley that thinks all of our efforts in maintaining the footpaths are for his benefit. At first I thought that this must be a young novice rider that doesn't know the difference between a footpath and a bridleway but it appears not and the rider is quite experienced and stables in the valley.

I have spoken to the council about this rider and they need a photo as proof before they will contact him. We know who he is. We just need the proof.

If you see a lone rider with no helmet on the nature trail, use your mobile phone to take a picture of him and email it to us so we can pass it on to the council officers concerned.

This rider is costing the group money just trying to keep him off our footpaths.

Keith Kendall

RVCG BBQ

Our annual August event once more took place in Ken's garden, an ideal place for children to run around and with good weather, good food and good company. We ended with musical entertainment from the Townrows and Graham, with us all joining in with a chorus of 'Messing about on the Rivelin'.

Thanks to everyone who helped to set it up, prepare food and to Glenda for providing the beefburgers and also to Ken for lending us his garden and for what is now his traditional finale with the round of chocolates.

Some Local Events

Wadsley and Loxley Commoners

Saturday 12th January 2013

Birds in Winter led by John Robinson of RSPB

Please do not bring dogs.

Meet Rural Lane car Park 9am

Contact Hannah 2335331

Bradfield Farmers' Market

Saturday 17th November and Saturday 15th December 9am – 3pm

Bradfield Village Hall

Craft Market Sunday 10am – 4pm 25th November

Life at King Edward's Hospital, Rivelin Valley in the 1950's

King Edward's Hospital, so much a feature of the valley but now turned into housing was opened in 1916 for the treatment of "crippled children", mainly for arthritic and tuberculosis conditions of the joints.

By the 1950's, the hospital was also treating children for Perthes disease, a non-inflammatory disease of the hip joint, also fragile bones, and the effects of polio. The patients were confined to bed, placed in a special frame or a plaster cast and regularly turned onto their stomachs until their condition improved, quite distressing for small children at first.

Marian Gould was matron from 1965-1972. Previously she was a sister and assistant matron from 1948. She has recently died but has left some notes about her years at the hospital.

The children had a rather Spartan existence as it was believed that fresh air was an important part of their recovery and so their beds were put outside unless it was exceptionally cold or raining.

Otherwise, the wards had verandas and were open all day with the beds being protected by tarpaulins. Some people may remember the beds being pushed out onto the field adjoining Rivelin Valley Road and Rails Road. "No self respecting germs would live under these conditions", said the matron.

The children were kept warm with extra

blankets, stone hot water bottles that were changed every four hours, warm clothes and mittens. They could spend several years in hospital and so education was important. The hospital was recognised as a Residential School and children had four hours teaching per day and special coaching was given for examinations.

At first parents could visit on two Sundays a month but by 1952 it was increased to every Sunday and many parents had very long journeys.

Keeping young children occupied was all important so a Boy Scout and Girl Guide Troops were formed. Lord Baden Powell visited in 1958.

Another divertissement came with visiting celebrities. Winifred Atwell, Joan Reagan, Gracie Fields, Dickie Valentine, Harry Secombe and 'Gloops' from 'The Star' all made an appearance. One Christmas Day, Wilfred Pickles made a broadcast from the hospital.

A big talking point was a circus visit with clowns. Amazingly, three elephants 'trunk to tail' solemnly plodded up the long drive. Marion never forgot the day 'A Spoonful of Sugar' programme arrived. It is not known if this was television or radio but it gave hospitalised children a treat. One boy was asked what his special dream was and he replied, "To ride in the driver's cab on a steam train". (See the accompanying photo)

This took a lot of arranging and a special frame was made for him by the hospital workshop that would stand upright. A nurse accompanied him on his journey ensuring that he had his hour's rest. At the evening ward round, he was found fast asleep with a dirty face, a railwayman's hat on and a whistle clutched in his hand. Fortunately there is less need for this kind of treatment now and there are less onerous ways of helping these children but there must still be adults around who benefited from their treatment in King Edward's.

Many thanks to Claire Toplis for letting me see Marion Gould's notes.

Margaret Sanderson

Is there anyone who can provide more information on Rivelin's hospitals including Lodge Moor and Crimicar Lane? Please contact Margaret Sanderson.

Some Recent RVCG Events

Judith Hanson 'Crosspool' 11th September

We had a tour of Crosspool which covered buildings long since gone to those familiar today but with a changed use. On a 1637 map, Crosspool wasn't mentioned. Only Lydgate, Stephen Hill, Sandygate, Benty Lane and Clough Fields are mentioned. Among a wonderful series of photographs were early buses, Andrews quarry, the original Crosspool Tavern and the police box on Lydgate Lane.

Professor Colin Beard 'From Amazon to Sheffield, 9th Oct

Colin Beard has had varied and interesting travel experiences from the Amazon to India. He is a trained zoologist and has travelled in old buses and rickety Dakotas. He once had to use a Spear and Jackson spade to paddle his boat. He also has eaten monkeys and a variety of creepy crawlies all making for an entertaining evening.

Margaret Sanderson

**Happy Christmas to everyone and
thanks for your support in 2012**

THE RECORDER AUTUMN 2012

Autumn is here and the nights are drawing in rapidly. After a wet summer the leaves are more colourful as they contain more sugar – that is, maybe, some compensation for the wettest summer for 100 years. Many people are saying their apple and plum crops are very poor and potatoes and tomatoes have been badly hit by blight. Not so long ago if crops failed, it meant animals could not be overwintered. They were either sold or killed to keep the farmer and his family from starving. Small farms have gradually been bought out and now we have large corporations running dairy and arable farms, with some hill farmers still struggling to make a living. Bad weather can be catastrophic for many creatures on top of what is already a precarious existence. Some, like scavengers, will profit from the demise of others, but many – from insects to the top of the food chain, will perish. Timing of wet weather is crucial. Nest building can be affected and if eggs and nestlings get cold and wet they will perish. Wet, cold weather is not suitable for butterflies and moths, which can mean fewer caterpillars. Also caterpillars can be washed off leaves or not coincide with hatching birds. Bats suffer if evenings are not warm and dry. This is the first year my water butts have not run dry. Needless to say, slugs and snails are having a great time. I counted 15 Great Grey Slugs (*Limax maximus*) in my compost bin. They appear lighter in colour than those in the garden, probably from the lack of light in the bin. Two were entwined round what I thought was a mauve petal. On closer inspection they were mating and the 'mauve petal' was the genitalia, which are normally pearly

white. This change in colour may also be accounted for by the lack of light in the bin as it appeared quite fluorescent. I have not seen many wasps this year – maybe because of the lack of fruit on my trees. I had six plums but only got to eat one as the others became rotten. The squirrel ate the few pears that ripened on my conference pear tree, and the wind and rain put paid to most of my apples. Luckily my soft fruit did well and we have plenty to see us through the winter. Coloured butterflies have been in short supply this year, even on my Buddleia, which I prune to flower late. I have had Holly Blue, Small White, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood and the odd Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell. On 23rd September I noticed the leaves on a Fuchsia bush were being eaten. On investigation I found these beautiful caterpillars munching away. They were about 8 cm long, chocolate brown with darker brown markings and four cream and black eye-spots on top of the head. They are still there (2.10.12) demolishing the leaves on my bush – a small price to pay if they succeed in becoming the lovely pink and greeny/brown Elephant Hawkmoth (*Deilephila elpenor*). To do this they will have to overwinter in the soil as a pupa successfully. My neighbours, Kate & Phil Neal, sowed a packet of wildflower seeds in a small, sunny spot, and were rewarded with a colourful display that attracted many insects. Did anyone else have success with their wildflowers? I always leave a few ragwort plants – mainly for Cinnabar moths, which have not appeared in my garden for several years now. Instead I am being treated to the sight of Goldfinches eating their seeds. I also saw sparrows eating the Buddleia seeds.

There are still a few swallows/martins wending their way south. I saw my last swift on the 10th August. My most thrilling 'nature moment' lately was on 14th September. It was a very windy day with some sun. I was looking at the clouds from my back garden when I saw a bird, that I thought was a sparrowhawk, spiralling very high on the thermals. All of a sudden it seemed to stop in midair, it turned, folded its wings back and hurtled towards the Rivelin, over Den Bank, at great speed. I had seen my first Peregrine. Maybe it was one from St. George's church in town. Please let me know your 'nature moments' and records.

Thank you for the following records:-

Gillian Drinkwater S10 – 29/30.8.12 - male nuthatch calling continuously whilst on peanut feeder in back garden. Gillian says the nest must be very local

and could be in a large chestnut tree nearby.

Garry Smith – 30.8.12 – Saw a fisherman catch an American crawfish, about 10" long, with very big claws. (at Havelock Dam).

Joan Buckland Recorder
Rivelin Valley Conservation Group



Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar
(*Deilephila elpenor*)