



Newsletter

Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Spring 2020 no 114

Through The Chair

Welcome to the Spring newsletter which I am writing during Covid-19 social isolation. Whilst we are all truly shocked by the fatalities on the daily news, I was also truly shocked by the realisation of all the DIY tasks I have managed to avoid thus far by having been 'too busy'.

For those who are well enough and do not have such over-bearing responsibilities, I hope you are taking regular exercise in Rivelin Valley. There are few better places to stretch your legs and lift the spirit. The Task team have spent many hours trying to make it a better place for you to visit so the least you can do is go and have look. Comments on past jobs or potential future jobs for the RVCG Task Team are welcome.

Having cancelled all our events for the remainder of this year, including the AGM that was to be held in April, I have included a summary of our organisation for you, covering the last 12 months. Apart from saying goodbye to our treasurer, David Lyon, who will be replaced by Christine Roe, the committee have agreed to continue – probably until the next AGM. You will also see that I have given 12 months' notice to stand down as chairman which you can read all about in the AGM section of this newsletter. If you would like to help the RVCG in any way or if you would like to make a comment about any aspect of the RVCG then I will be pleased to hear from you at: rvcg.chair@btinternet.com. Meanwhile, keep safe and I look forward to the day we can all be together again.

Graham Appleby
RVCG Chair

Contacts

Chairman	Graham Appleby	01142660203
Task Force Coordinator	Keith Kendall	01142307144
Newsletter	M Sanderson	01142306790
Treasurer	Christine Roe	01142665473
Group Recorder	Joan Buckland	01142305829
Speaker Organiser	Irene Harrison	01142335780
Membership	Graham Roe	01142665473

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

Membership Renewal

I know we are in lockdown at the moment but could I just give a reminder for everyone to renew their membership - cheques or Paypal only please. We have received a staggering total of £1234 in donations since January from those who have renewed. Thank you for your kind generosity.

Help wanted

If you have anything of interest about the valley which you would be happy to share, please contact the newsletter editor on the number given above or email: msanderson35@googlemail.com.

And could the person who gave me some information for the newsletter at the last open meeting at Stephen Hill please give me a call.

Frogs

On Monday 4th March my garden was full of frog spawn. Before this they had been croaking loudly from their hiding places in the stone walls which terrace my garden. Unfortunately, they have attracted a neighbouring cat who can be seen fishing in the pond with his paws.

M Sanderson

Open meeting – recent talk by Ted Hancock – 11 February 2020

The Creation of the tunnel from Ladybower to the Lower Rivelin Reservoir

The reservoirs at Redmires and Rivelin were constructed to help provide a supply of good quality water for the rapidly expanding town of Sheffield in the early 19th century. In part this was a response to the cholera epidemic of the 1820s. Cholera thrives where the water supply is polluted by sewage.

When the Rivelin Dams were approved there was a requirement to provide a specific flow of compensation water into the River Rivelin to support the work of the mills and other users downstream. In the late 19th century this was achieved by draining water from the Redmires Dams thus reducing their supply, which was not ideal.

Consequently, the four and a half mile long tunnel was specifically constructed to provide an alternative source of compensation water for the River Rivelin. Its construction was a significant engineering feat and took 6 years with completion in 1909. It is still in use.

Open meeting – recent talk by Joe Pye – 10 March 2020

The General Cemetery

The cemetery was opened in 1836 and it became the main burial ground in Victorian Sheffield containing the graves of over 87,000 people. It includes the largest single grave in the country, holding the bodies of 96 paupers.

The cemetery was developed by a private profit-making company in response to a severe shortage of burial space across Sheffield. Its design was intended to provide an attractive classical and garden-like environment, appealing to the expanding and prosperous middle classes.

The cemetery finally closed in the 1970s and for a while it was left to grow wild.

The site is now run by a voluntary organisation, the Sheffield General Cemetery Trust and as well as being of historic interest (with several listed buildings), it is also a local nature reserve.

The Trust's website provides lots of fascinating information – gencem.org

Beavers in the Rivelin Valley?

Sadly, not yet ...

However, there has been quite a lot of press interest recently, including in Devon where escaped beavers have formed a successful colony on the River Otter. This is part of a wider general interest in the concept of species reintroductions.

According to Oliver Rackham's *History of the Countryside*, the beaver was fairly widespread in Britain in the prehistoric period. It endured into Anglo-Saxon times and, rather surprisingly, it was a late survival in East Yorkshire, where it gave its name to the market town of Beverley. Ultimately, however, beavers were hunted to extinction for their fur and for a secretion from their scent glands.

Beavers are amazing creatures. They can grow up to around a metre in length and are the second heaviest rodent in the world. They are vegetarians with a diet consisting of aquatic plants, grasses and herbs and live in extended families comprising a monogamous pair of adults, subadults and the young of the year.

So, what are the prospects for reintroduction and why might this even be considered?

As we all know, beavers are famous for building dams which provide isolation and safety for their lodge where they live and bring up their young. Interestingly, the dams they construct seem to have beneficial effects in relation to flooding and biodiversity. For example, a recent study into the effects of the Devon beavers found that the dams reduced peak flows along the river (potentially reducing flood risk downstream) and that fish populations had increased. Studies around the world have shown beneficial effects on plant diversity and bird species. There can also be a tourism benefit.

Beavers can only be successfully reintroduced if the habitat is suitable for them and if there is a willing and supportive landowner. Reintroductions also need careful management to avoid crop damage and other adverse effects.

In terms of habitat, it has to be just right, or at least within certain parameters. For example, the gradient must be shallow enough to limit water velocity to an acceptable level, water levels need to be above 50cm and there must be a plentiful supply of food and woody material close-by to build dams and lodges. In addition, the habitat area must be large enough to allow a viable colony to thrive and human disturbance must not be excessive.

So, although there is potential for beaver to be reintroduced in the UK, including in the Peak District, it may be some time before we see them in the Rivelin Valley.

Thank-you to James Youle whose University dissertation informed this article.

Memories of King Edward VII Hospital by Ann Brookes

I was in King Edward VII hospital during September to October 1959 and had my 14th birthday there. I was born with no ulna bone in my left arm which meant I could not use it properly (the ulna is the one at the bottom of the arm, connected to your wrist). I could not turn it side to side or move it up and down and my hand was pointed backwards up my arm not forward. It was possible to move it with my right hand or using a table but was very difficult to do most things.

My Doctor was Mr Sherrerd and he said I had to be 14 to have the operation for the bones to set. I was in King Edward VII hospital to recover from a "wrist fusion". This means a metal plate was inserted at my wrist, making my arm from the elbow to the bottom of my fingers as one. This made it easier to use my fingers and have some movement but not much. Post op, my elbow cannot straighten to touch my leg and I can only raise it as far up to touch my mouth, it is in a 90-degree angle most of the time. I use it to steady things, carry light bags or hold things and compensate what I can't do with my right hand.

I was not in the main big building of the Hospital, but the newer long, one storey building on the front of the site. I was in a bed around halfway down the ward. I can't remember if it was 1 or 2 wards but it looked big and long to me!

I did not have the operation at King Edward's, but at Lodge Moor Hospital which was an ambulance ride away. It is the one thing I remember vividly to this day. The ambulance passed the post office and then up to the road on the right, which was very steep. I was lying down on my back and felt I was slipping backwards and going dizzy while we went up the hill. When we got to Lodge Moor I was transported on a trolley lying down, going into Theatre and it was a nightmare: seeing the lights in the corridor and passing the walls – seemingly going very fast, I started going dizzy and feeling it was all collapsing around me. Quite scary!! In the pre-operating room, a lovely Nurse held my hand and administered the anaesthetic; she was saying to count down from 10 and by 4 I would be asleep. It worked, as the next thing I remember was being in the recovery room and the nice Nurse saying it was done. I looked down to see a big plaster cast from my elbow to fingers, I could just wiggle my fingers out of the top.

I do not think I was there for too long and then had the ambulance ride back to King Edward VII hospital. I can't remember a thing of the journey back as I was still groggy from the operation.

Back on the Ward at King Edward VII hospital I was recovering in bed for a day or two and then I was up and about. I think I was there for about a week or 2, it seemed like quite a while!

The Ward was always busy, and the Nurses were lovely; they were helpful and put all minds at ease if there were any problems. They were always there when needed and just wonderful.

On one side of me was a girl called Fiona; she was in an iron lung from having polio and could not move. There was a window in the iron lung, so she was able to see what was happening. On the other side of me was Maureen, who had to be on her stomach as she had a back issue. Most of the children were bed ridden and I felt guilty as I was able to get up and walk about with only a "problem arm". Quite a few of the children were in iron lungs and I was able to go and chat with them. I am sure I was having school lessons, English and reading but uncertain if it was a Teacher on the Ward or just my School sending me books to do.

It was lovely having my mum and dad visiting; however they did not tell me until I was home that my sister Jean had had appendicitis and was also in hospital (Middlewood I think). They were going from one hospital to the other, so it must have been very difficult for them.

That summer was exceptionally hot and the moors were on fire when I was in hospital, but they were thankfully under control. On the day I was discharged we went to the Ladybower to see the dam which had very low water and we could see the moors smouldering and burning. I was off school until the half term holiday and went back for the second half of term. I was unable to take part in PE/games (thank goodness!), so my lovely maths Teacher, Mr Thomas gave up his free period for me to catch up with the maths I'd missed. It was really good of him and I appreciated it.

Thank you to Ann Brookes for sending us this article of her childhood memories.

**The RVCG would like to thank
Valleyside Garden Centre for
their continued support**

THE RECORDER – SPRING 2020

What a time we are going through after storms Ciara and Dennis. I have had a flu-type virus twice this winter and that was bad enough. I hope you are all well and keeping safe. We are only in the second week of isolation but it feels a lot longer. Last week we had some welcome sunshine and what a difference that made. People were in their gardens and chatting to passers-by, of course maintaining the necessary two metre separation. We walked to Carver Fields and the Blackthorn blossom looked lovely. Bumblebees and honeybees were buzzing around and quite a few coloured butterflies came out of hibernation, mainly Small Tortoiseshell and Peacocks. Cooped up children were also able to let off steam outside. Let us hope the weather improves so we can all enjoy the great outdoors, even if only locally, but what a lovely area to be isolated in.

Despite the wet winter dragging on, it has been quite mild and for the first time I have had leaves on my Fuchsia bushes all through the winter. Normally they should be pruned but I cannot see any sign of new shoots coming through, so I am going to leave them and see what happens. We have, in fact, had the wettest February in most of the country since records began. Many places were flooded and people are still suffering the consequences. One of the side effects of Covid 19 and worldwide isolation of people is that air pollution levels have gone down. This may have an effect on global warming depending on how long it goes on. Another thing is that bird song is more obvious as they do not have to compete with so much background noise. So there are some things to be grateful for.

On our exercise walks I have noticed that many people have been sprucing up their gardens, which look lovely with Spring flowers. My wild primroses are still giving a good display, and there is a lot of colour in the garden with violets, periwinkle, daffodils, wood anemone, forsythia, bergenia, heather and lungwort, plenty for the early insects to feed on. My frogs are still going strong and the pond is filling up

with frogspawn. I first noticed activity on the 2nd March, which was a very frosty day. Unfortunately I found two dead frogs, with mangled heads, on the path one morning. I am not sure who the culprit is, there are several candidates, but I have had to chase cats away from the pond on many occasions. I have put a small amount of spawn in a tank again to protect them from the hungry newts. Philip Walshaw, who you may remember had trouble with dragonfly larvae eating his tadpoles, has also decided to breed some frogs in a tank. This will give us something interesting to observe over the next few weeks. Fingers crossed that we are both successful. If you have a pond and a large plastic tank/box, you could do worse than watch tadpoles maturing. Make it into a project noting dates the different stages occur and any interesting behaviour. I am sure there will be information on Google on how to raise tadpoles, otherwise get in touch with me and I shall be happy to advise. As with looking after pets, it needs dedication to be successful. Please do not take any spawn from the wild.

Last week, when the sun came out, the birds were really busy collecting nesting material, and protecting their territory. The Sparrows were tugging at the grass and the Rooks and Magpies were pinching my plum tree twigs again. They really do like my plum tree. A Magpie was busy tackling a branch when suddenly two Rooks swooped in and chased it off. They have no problem pruning the tree with their huge beaks. One Rook, who I have called Corvid 19, because he is aggressive and clever, demolishes the fat balls in seconds. I have also got suet in half a coconut, which is suspended on a long string to stop pigeons eating it. The Rook sat on the branch next to it, cocking its head back and forth, then deftly drew up the string bit by bit until the coconut was on the branch. It gobbled up half of it with no trouble. I also had an unusual altercation with a ground beetle, *Pterostichus madidus*, which I found on the dining room floor. It was very lively and I picked it up to put it outside but the insect, much to my surprise, actually bit me. There's gratitude for you! They do have rather large mandibles though, which unlike ours work from side to side.

Since the beginning of March we have been putting our moth trap out but have caught nothing yet. It is still a bit too cold at night. On the 23rd March I found a moth inside the porch. It was a Beautiful Plume moth, *Amblyptilia acanthadactyla*,



Plume moth, *Amblyptilia acanthadactyla*,

which has beautiful markings. The caterpillar lives on plants of the cranesbill family, such as Herb Robert, which is plentiful in my garden. Plume moths are unusual amongst the group, appearing cross-shaped with very thin wings.

My sparrows, which live in the holly bush, have been very vociferous lately, as have the ginnel (snicket) hedge mob opposite. They are noisily chasing each other round the garden. They are also dust bathing in a bare patch up the garden, where the badger has been digging holes. Many of the other birds are also having a Spring clean in the bird bath. There is lots happening in the natural world at the moment so if you can, get in the garden or go a walk and enjoy it.

When I was walking home from the open meeting about the General Cemetery, on the 10th March, there was a lovely full moon (with a corona, a sign of rain) and a big night (rain) bow down over the valley. Did anyone else see it? It lasted about five minutes, and my husband took a good photo of it as proof! I have now seen this three times at this time of year. There has to be a full moon with drizzle down the valley. Keep safe and well and maybe we could wave to each other from a distance on one of our isolation walks.

Thank you to the following for their records:-

Mrs K Finch S6 –Dec 2019 – Sparrowhawk killed a pigeon on two occasions leaving grizzly remains on the path; 1/2020 – Wood Mouse eating peanuts in bird feeder; a Wren hopping about on the patio and round planters for last few months.

Paul Thompson S6 – 25.2.20 – Male Ring-necked Parakeet feeding on crab apple tree in garden (keep your eyes open for these as they are getting more common in our area); large Squirrel with hardly any fur on its tail.

Gillian Drinkwater S10 - 23.2.20 – 1 exuberant woodpecker drumming at end of Hagg Lane; 4 beautifully chocolate brown Muntjac (1 a fine antlered male) on Donkey field; 21.2.20 – frog activity in pond. Frogs laid their spawn within 24 hours of emerging from hibernation; 3.3.20 – skein of 11 loudly honking geese (probably Pink-footed) flying north, then immediately turned in a big curve and flew south (probably got the map upside down!).

J.A.Lee S10 – Janet has a variety of birds throughout the year in her garden, no doubt due to her many feeders and fat logs – Pigeons, Collared Doves, Blue Tits, Sparrows, Jackdaws, Blackbirds, Goldfinch, Long-tailed Tits and a winter visiting Squirrel. Lots to watch there.

Irene Harrison S6 - 1.3.20 – 4 male Bullfinch; 2 still coming on 10.3.20.

E.J.Frith S10 – 3.3.20 – had a Treecreeper on the Silver Birch outside the window. Used to hear an owl hooting but not recently as 3 bright lights have been installed nearby (what a shame). Also sees Sparrows, Blackbirds, Collared Doves, Magpies, Wrens and 2 Crows which challenge the squirrels on the lawn.

Neil Porter S6 – March, down the valley. Chiffchaff singing (earlier than usual); pair of Buzzards over the valley, also a Kestrel; 2 Linnet feeding in Oak Farm fields.

Sunshine brought out Comma, small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies and, surprisingly, in bright sunshine, a bat, presumably a Pipistrelle, flying for over half an hour along the tops of the trees.

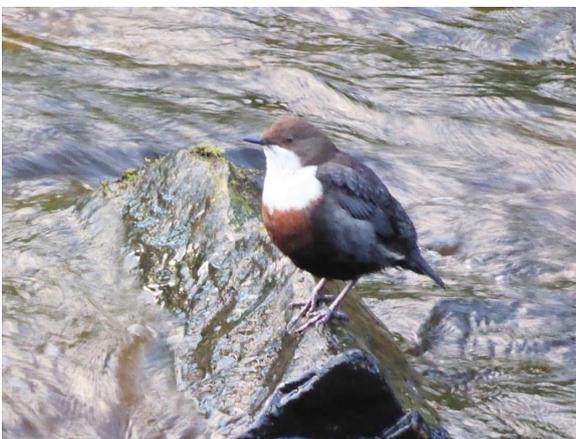
Roger Kite S10 – 8.3.20 – first lot of frogspawn in pond; 6.3.20 - 2 cute Wood Mice curled up in hopper seed feeder.

Jim Conibear S6 – 28.1.20 - Jim sent in some beautiful pictures of 2 young Roe Deer he saw down the valley



Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

and also, on the 13.2.20, a pair of Dippers near Roscoe.



Dipper, *Cinclus cinclus*

Joan Buckland
31.3.20

Task Team

Unusually, the RVCG was unable to field its Task Team in January mainly due to my absence while visiting my son in Australia. However, having had some more heavy rain during February, this presented the RVCG Task Team with its next project repairing the footpath surface; this time at Rails Road. The Sheffield City Council had recently upgraded a footpath and driveway to a permissive bridleway that passes close to the grade 2 listed Packhorse Bridge. To allow horses access from Rails Road, a retaining wall was opened up.



This retaining wall had been removed by SCC to allow horses to pass through.

However, as flood water surged down Rails Road it was diverted away from its original drain and instead ran through the newly created gap in the wall washing away the footpath down to Packhorse Bridge.



The severely eroded footpath

Therefore, the task was to replace the footpath topping and to also create a new waterway into the river to avoid any future repeat.



The RVCG 'cement mixer' in action



A new sill is concreted into place and a new waterway created for flood water.



The same entrance after task day. Wall repaired, drain installed, footpath repaired

It was very heavy work, but again the Task Team volunteers tackled it with great enthusiasm and energy and the result was very satisfactory.

Lest we forget, while all this was taking place, another small group of Task Team volunteers were spending their time, fettling the willow tunnel at Rivelin Corn Mill. The willow tunnel was originally the idea of Keith Kendall back in 2010 and was deemed to be one of the longest in Britain. However, the willow has grown strong at the top but shed its leaves at the bottom and also a number of stems have died. Also having bent the willow over at the top to form the arch, the stems have begun to die when below the horizontal. So, this is certainly not as easy as we thought and it really has become a labour of love.



The RVCG Willow Tunnel needing some loving care and attention.

Thank you to Keith Kendall for organising the 15 tons of footpath topping from Dore Paving Services of which we laid just 5 tons on the day. The remainder was primarily to resurface the carpark at the other end of the permissive bridleway but unfortunately, we neither had the time or the manpower to complete it the same day. No problem, that was to be our March Task day. However, covid-19 prevented that from happening and there can be no more task days now until the Government relaxes the social distancing rules.

Graham Appleby