



Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

Spring 2009 no 70

Through The Chair

It Colours Your View

Many of you will have seen a fantastic rainbow display recently. Although, as we cannot stand in exactly the same spot, and each person's rainbow is unique, it was possible to share with others the thrill of the early morning sky being lit up so brilliantly. For those of us on the south side of the Valley, that pot of gold was most definitely centred in Rivelin and quite a few have photographs to prove it!

Of course the scientists among us will say there's nothing magical about it – it's merely the sunlight being refracted through raindrops and being reflected back off the rear surface. For me though, the magic of the view out over Rivelin Valley was much enhanced. A walk down the nature trail is always double the beauty when on a quiet morning the views are reflected across one of the ponds. Important then to retain the few remaining clear water bodies we have. Serious work is needed at Wolf Wheel; should we be thinking about dredging Nethercut? We are talking about a package to improve the interpretation at Holmehead – but wouldn't it be good to retain some water there instead of all that yellow mud and let folk see the wheel pit with water coming over it? Having shown what can be achieved at Rivelin Mill, this could be the next challenge.

Celandines, violets, bluebells and fresh green shoots – the colours are returning. Happy Springtime.

Roger and Out

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HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2009?

**Please send your £3 subscription and name and address to – M Sanderson
35 Den Bank Cresc, Sheffield S10 5PB.
Please make cheques payable to
Rivelin Valley Conservation Group**

Donations

Once more you are being very generous, especially at the moment when times are difficult for some. So far this year you have raised over £400 with donations to our group.

Many thanks to – Aizlewood, Beardshaw, Betts, Bissenger, Bowring, Brazil, Burnett, Cressey, Culmer, Dakin, Davidson, Dean, Drinkwater, Dutine, Farrelly, Fletcher, France, Glaves, Goulding, Grace, Hague, Hanson, Hastings, Hodkin, Horsefield, Humphries, Jones, Keen, King, Large, Lawrence, Lewis, Liddell, Lyon, Malham, Mason, McLaney, Morrell, Morton, Ollin, Owen, Parker, Purdey, Pyatt, Richards, Roe Saunders, Shail, Thompson, Toseland, Warrender, Warrington, White, Whiteley and Woodhouse.

You can be sure that we will put this to good use. Our Task Group is always in need of equipment and tools.

Thanks also to everyone involved in our group for their many talents that has made our group successful.

Return Visit to Potteric Carr Nature Nature Reserve

Sunday June 9th 2009-04-03

A return visit to Potteric Carr but in the summer this year. We will meet at Potteric Carr at 10.30 for coffee, take a tour around part of the reserve and visit some of the hides, then return to the café for lunch, followed by visiting more of the reserve after lunch. You may, of course, do your own thing, depending on your particular interests. There should be plenty of flora and fauna to see at this time of the year. The cost will be £2 per person (concessionary rate for group visits). Please forward with your booking form. If you wish to join us, please complete the enclosed form and return to Janet Bowring **no later than Monday June 1st**. We have to let them know the numbers for lunch so please book by this date. If you require details of how to get there, or need a lift (a car share cannot be guaranteed) please get in touch with Janet on 2307570.

Beginnings of the Mountain Rescue Service

Some of you may have remembered a talk we had some years ago by 'Campy' Burrows who died in March aged 85. During WW2, he was in the RAF and there was concern about rescuing crew from crashed planes, usually in hilly areas when limping home from a mission so he combined his RAF duties with his knowledge of the countryside to start this service, firstly in Wales, then in the Peak District. In the beginning the rescuers knocked nails into their own boots, bought their own gear and had to carry heavy service stretchers. All were volunteers. His most notorious rescue was a crashed plane on Denby Moors, found nose down in a bog. The pilot was nowhere to be seen and it was thought impossible that he would be found alive so after a long search the men returned down the hill to the local pub where the pilot was found eating strawberries and cream. Unfortunately, most pilots were found dead in harrowing circumstances. His legacy lives on in the Mountain Rescue Service, still served by volunteers. Campy became a Peak Park Ranger and kept in touch with them until the end of his life.

M Sanderson

In and Over the Garden – March

After the longest sustained period of snow and frost for over the decade, things are stirring in the garden. Birds are mating and the dawn chorus is intensifying day by day. I have three pairs of blackbirds nesting as usual – very useful for getting rid of moss in the borders. This year is the first time I have seen the males sparring so aggressively. One of them is more territorial than the others. Perhaps he is one of last year's pairs and the other two are newcomers. I have also seen a female blackbird frequently hovering at and landing on the perch of the bird feeder. This is another first for me and shows how they are evolving – it will be interesting to see if her offspring follow suit.

The pond is full of frogspawn. I have several washing up bowls scattered about the garden (nurseries for tadpoles) but frogs have completely ignored these and chosen two ice cream containers which are bulging with spawn. Bumblebees are making an appearance. The frogspawn and the bees are a week later than they were last year.

As well as watching nature in the garden, I keep an eye on the sky. One of my Christmas presents was a book on cloud spotting, which is fascinating. We have amazing cloud formations and weather phenomena over the valley – mainly caused by the orographic updraft of westerly winds over the Pennines. I did not realise clouds were so complicated. They are classified in the same way as plants and animals with Latin names, according to their shape and altitude. One of the most easily recognised clouds – *Cumulus* – meaning heap – are white fluffy fair weather clouds, commonly seen in cartoons (i.e. The Simpsons) and children's drawings. It's fun looking for shapes in the clouds. Mine often look like Greek gods, dogs or crocodiles. I

have also learnt that the aeroplane trails are called contrails. A clever cloud spotter can tell the forthcoming weather by their characteristics. They are so numerous that they are having an effect on temperature change. The other day in an otherwise clear blue sky, I counted 23 contrails. I am old enough to remember the days when they were a novelty. Sadly, clear blue skies are a thing of the past.

If anyone sees any unusual cloud formations or weather phenomena over the valley, we would be interested to hear from you.

Joan Buckland

Knowle Top Chapel – Stannington Methodist Church

Last year we had an Open Meeting at Knowle Top Chapel, Stannington. For those of us on the opposite side of the valley, this was quite an eye opener with its delightful tiered seating and simple Victorian interior. A history of this Methodist Church, including the school tells the story of how the chapel was built on land purchased for £15. The history takes us through difficult Victorian times for Stannington folk with smallpox, scarlet fever and whooping cough to cope with and school days being interrupted by children taking father's dinner to his workshop or going bilberrying. The story continues into the 20th century where the ladies would provide a Shrovetide tea for a shilling in the 1930's and at Whitsuntide there would be a walk where each church would carry its own embroidered banner. The Wesley Guild's Christmas dinner would be cooked by the ladies but the men would prepare the vegetables and Mrs Hardy, an elocutionist gave a recitation. Brass bands, charabanc outings and May Queen concerts are just some of the pictures accompanying this story. These are just a few snippets of a bygone period of Stannington.

This book is available for £2 from the Knowle Top Chapel coffee morning on Saturdays (except the 2nd Saturday of the month).

You can also contact Rita Whiteley on 01142346037 or Kathy Smith on 01142346560 if you would like the book delivered for £2.50 – including postage and packing.

M

Sanderson

River and Pond Dipping 21st March

Last year the weather was very cold but this year it was a perfect day for pond dipping. The new pond at Rails Road is looking better all the time and is a wonderful place to stop for a while and it has easy access. We managed to catch sight of one reluctant frog that managed to dive below as soon as we approached – it saw the net coming. Frogspawn was very evident so the pond's ecology is developing fast. It's always an education to look at pond life under a magnifying glass when these creatures look as if they are from a horror film with their waving antennae and legs. The amazing leech changed shape under our gaze from a roly-poly, round blob to a long, thin wormlike creature. Our catch from the pond and river included snails, water spider, mosquito and mayfly larvae, stonefly and freshwater shrimp. A caddis fly larva in its portable home of a rolled up leaf trundled across the bottom of the tank. After inspection, all were returned to their rightful home.

M Sanderson

A Wadsley and Loxley Commoner Event

Saturday 16th May

Dawn Chorus led by John Robinson
Meet at 5am at Rural Lane Car Park
Tel 335331

RECORDER

Second week in Jan - Gillian Drinkwater reported at least 60 honking geese flying North. Two skeins of geese; 5 minutes apart, calling! Forty in one and twenty in the other. Seen from her back garden at Tapton Crescent Road.

During January, Margaret, Roger and Graham had all witnessed flocks of long tailed tits in their gardens. Usually these are accompanied by great tits, blue tits and coal tits in these winter months.

Sunday March 1st Hi. On today's walk was privileged to see 100s of mating frogs. Am hoping that are afforded protection by one of groups and wanted to report them between dam 2&3 just after rhododendrons in the mud pond on right. Am sure your groups have seen them! No reply necessary but please pass to relevant people (if it is actionable). Because there was a lot of spawn I was worried with cold weather forecast.

J winn

5/3/09 Derek Hastings on fields off Soughley Lane, Lodge Moor, late afternoon - three lapwings and a large goose. The latter was too far away to identify accurately but definitely not a canada goose

April 1st - Matt North from SSVP has left a message today to say that they are carrying out a stickleback project on various sites, one being at Rivelin Valley. He is checking numbers or absences of sticklebacks and is laying some water bottles down as traps. So if you get any enquiries regarding this, that is what they are doing and Matt is available on 2830880 for further information.

Some Recent RVCG Open Meetings

13th January 'A Look at the Scilly Isles' Mavis Roadhouse.

This is certainly a place with an unspoiled natural landscape, 28 miles from Cornwall and with an airport that sounds a warning horn when a plane lands. The plant life is extensive, ranging from exotic Hottentot figs and New Zealand flax to pitcher plants and campions all warmed by the mild Gulf Stream.

10th February 'Chasing Hebridean Wildlife'

Roger Kite

Chasing wildlife here was done from a sailing ketch in stunning scenery and idyllic surroundings, with evocative place names such as Mingelay, Berneray, Tobermory and Staffa, the home of Fingal's Cave. The multitude of wild life would have filled this newsletter. We saw red deer swimming in the loch, cormorants flapping their wings dry and puffins designed for under water swimming.

10th March 'A Year on a Hill Farm' Kathy Birkenshaw'

Kathy is a sheep farmer in the Derwent Valley but it soon became evident that she is a Jack of all trades, encompassing sheep breeding, dog handling, dry stone walling, muck spreading and helping with heather burning which is done on a 7-10 year rotation. Her photography is superb for which she has an artist's eye. The Swaledale sheep are bred for intelligence not looks and will stand the cold weather but even so a new lamb with hypothermia has to be nursed near the Aga or a heat lamp. Once more we had some informative and interesting meetings and look forward to a new season.

M Sanderson

April 1st - This is just to inform you that our contractors will be carrying out tree works in Rivelin Valley some time in the next 12 weeks. Most of the work will be on the various extant and defunct allotment sites along the valley, but some will be along the paths in general, where there is a health and safety issue.

Please let me know if you need any more information

Regards,

Nathan McWhinnie Tree Inspection
Officer Sheffield City Council Parks &
Countryside Department Meersbrook
Park

Carolyn Warrington - Early March- was lucky to see a hedgehog snuffling about under plants in her garden at half past midnight having set off the security light

Margaret Sanderson April : All seen in her garden – siskins, black cap. greenfinch, bullfinch, jay and goldfinch. Also a pair of dunnocks fighting almost to the death. House sparrows nesting in the gutter. Also Snakes Head Fritillary flowering again in field above river

Tuesday 7th April Roger and Ken Shail saw a 6" goldfish swimming in Rivelin Mill Pond – this is the second goldfish seen by Ken and Roger but probably not the same one. Sticklebacks have also appeared in Rivelin Mill pond. Primroses and native bluebells have been planted to cheer the place up and reeds are required in the pond to attract dragonfly. Also lots of wild spring flowers along the valley. Wood sorrel, wood anemone, violets, daffodils and wild garlic.

Jo Flower reported seeing two lapwings at High Riggs / yellow hammer at Underbank and curlew. Also curlew and lapwing at Redmires and a hare at 21 Fields

Margaret Sanderson reported her frogspawn being caught in the frost. Roger Kite pond is full of frogspawn and tadpoles

Graham Appleby has three blue tit boxes occupied in his garden and Margaret Sanderson has house sparrows nesting in the gutter (there is a worrying decline in these birds so this is good to hear)

Roger Kite has a regular pair of bullfinches on his bird feeder and recently a goldfinch on his niger feeder

Carver Fields has had its usual show of daffodils and the blackthorn has been just lovely

RSPB - BIG GARDEN WATCH –
RESULTS

24th & 25th Jan is when we were asked to view the birds in our garden over a 1 hour period

For the first time in the surveys 30 year history, the long-tailed tit has increased by an astonishing 88% from last years count.

The results show that the average numbers of all but one of the top ten birds have increased slightly since last year. Only starling numbers dropped, although they retained the number two slot. After putting in a strong performance last year, and appearing in the top ten for the first time, goldfinches dropped out of the top ten rankings last year. However, this isn't as bad as it sounds - along with greenfinches, who also slipped a place

this year, both species have actually been steadily increasing in numbers in recent years.

Others have fared even better, and our 30-year data shows an increase of 825% for the wood pigeon and 414% for the collared dove.

Unfortunately, the longer term picture of some of the UK's most loved species is not so rosy. Many have suffered huge declines in the last three decades.

The house sparrow, despite retaining its top spot for the 6th year running, has declined by 63% since the survey began in 1979, and the starling has dropped by 79%

The yellow siskin, which made it into the top 20 for the first time in the survey's history last year, and who was a striking addition to many people's gardens, dropped back to number 26.

The 2009 garden top ten looks like this:

<i>Position</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Average per garden</i>
1	house sparrow	3.70
2	starling	3.21
3	blackbird	2.84
4	blue tit	2.45
5	chaffinch	2.01
6	woodpigeon	1.85
7	collared dove	1.44
8	great tit	1.40
9	robin	1.36
10	long-tailed tit	1.34

Many thanks to Mrs Sheila Gladwell who sent me a very professional report of her bird watch results at Moorbank Road, Sandygate. She had 13 different species on 4 feeders despite the interference of 3 squirrels and a cat.

Just a quick note. The local documentary maker and film programmer at Sheffield Doc/Fest, Hussain Currimbhoy, is making environmental films called 'Green Documentaries'

Thank you for all your reports and I look forward to receiving many more

Graham Appleby
RVCG Group Recorder



