



# Newsletter



Rivelin Valley Conservation Group

## Summer 2010 no 75

### Through the Chair

Welcome to RVCG Summer Newsletter. I once looked down the Rivelin Valley from Millstone Edge on Carver Fields and expressed how beautiful it was. This culminated in my becoming chairman of RVCG in April this year after 12 years as a committee member. Roger Kite is not an easy person to replace as a key figure in our local community and has left some very big shoes to fill. You can help me fill them by continuing to support the group and indeed participate in its many events that are carefully organised by its committee and a handful of non-committee members. Let's make the next decade even more successful, innovative and interesting. Many of our events are organised for families with young children in mind and we really would like to see more young children getting involved. Parents can really do your children a big favour by getting them close to nature so they begin to learn how life ticks. How proud you would feel if your children knew the names of a few local wild plants, birds, animals, pond and river life. In fact how many do you know? We have an annual pond dipping event where specimens are inspected under magnifying glasses, identified and recorded. Next event is the 'Bat Watch' where we sneak around in the dark looking for Rivelin's more nocturnal creatures around the end of September. I'm not sure Nintendo do this yet!

Graham Appleby

**Welcome to new members.** You will receive a newsletter four times a year. If you think you are missing one, please contact a committee member.

### Contacts

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### Retiring Volunteers

Our thanks go to **Denis McDermott** who for the past 10 years has prepared our newsletters for distribution. Also thanks to **Michael Wildgust** who has transported these bundles of newsletters around the area to our many deliverers. Newsletter organisation is quite complicated and involves a lot of people collecting information, typing out, printing organising and delivering, all done by volunteers. Our deliverers have a four times a year dash up and down hills to get it to you. Thanks also to Margaret T who sends out new members welcome packs. Thanks to you all.

### Help Wanted

We are looking for volunteers to assist in various ways with the running of the group. We currently need someone to create posters to advertise our events and someone to deliver those posters to various locations in the local area. We also need someone to arrange for speakers and presenters to provide some entertaining evenings for us. These are usually held at Stephen Hill Church but Stannington and Malin Bridge are other options. We also have vacancies on the committee if you would like to contribute to the functioning of the group. Please contact Graham Appleby if you are interested in any of the above.

### **Willow Walk**

If you haven't done so far, why not take a look at the RVCG super-construction – a willow walk at Rivelin Mill Pond.

It is now greening up nicely and you do not need to be a child to enjoy it.

It was constructed by Keith Kendall with 26 Task Team members who put together 250 9' and 600 6' lengths of willow (*Salix viminalis*). These volunteers tied around 3400 knots to make a 165' long tunnel which winds its way along the footpath. Have a picnic in it, shelter from the wind/sun/ rain or get a bit of peace – an ideal place for parents and children to escape from each other. Next year it should have thickened up enough to make its occupants invisible.

### **Back to World War II**

Last summer I was playing in a tennis tournament and a Lancaster Bomber flew over. It was on the way to Ladybower Dam. It had a Hurricane and Spitfire flying with it as a tribute to the wartime pilots. In World War II the Lancaster Bomber flew over the Mona Dam in Germany to bomb it with the Bouncing Bomb invented by Barnes Wallis. During the war, my great grandfather was in his allotment down Stephen Hill and was very frightened when a lot of Lancaster Bombers flew very low just over his head and up Rivelin. When he came home he said, "Something's up!" He found out later they were on their way to Ladybower to practise the Bouncing Bomb. All the pilots flying these planes were very brave.

If I had been a Lancaster Bomber pilot I would try to be brave and help my country.

James age 11

### **An Early Immigrant?**

Way back in 1761, Edward Nichols was clearing a field known as 'King's Piece' at Lawns Farm, Stannington where he found the incomplete remains of a Roman diploma. It was thought that it had been deliberately placed there, rather than lost as it was hidden under a stone. The British Museum says it was made of a copper alloy

though some local history books say it is bronze.

The diploma would be given to a Roman soldier when he had completed 25 years service and was the equivalent of modern discharge papers. A copy of it would have been kept in Rome - efficient Roman civil service! It entitled him to land, to marry and to become a Roman citizen so it would be tempting to think that he set himself up on this sunnier side of the valley, perhaps as a farmer or using some skills that he learned while in service, though no remains of a Roman building has been found in the area. Lawns Farm was subject to extensive tipping in the 1990's making it difficult for future archaeologists. A Roman soldier usually stayed in the area where he was serving when discharged as he would have to pay his own, expensive fare home.

The diploma has been translated but the part that contained his name was missing when it was found. All we know is that he was the son of Albanus of the Sunuci tribe, ex infantryman of the cohorts (*division*) Sunucorum, commanded by Marcus Iunius Claudianus. The date was AD 124 under the reign of Hadrian.

The Sunuci tribe occupied present day Germany and Roman soldiers would have been recruited from here and all over the empire. His training as an auxiliary would be recognisable by a modern soldier and included foot drill, cross country marches and hand to hand fighting. He would have been well fed and clothed. Perhaps 'son of Albanus' had been an adventurous youth tempted by a good standard of living and promise of Roman citizenship.

The Rivelin area might have been known to him when marching up and down the road which passed up Sandygate to Redmires between the Roman forts of Templeborough and Navio (near Bradwell) though the Ordnance Survey map of Roman Britain says that this is only a 'possible' Roman road. The Navio fort controlled and protected the lead and silver mines in this area.

If this retired soldier really did settle in our valley, it would be hoped that he managed to keep his military boots, said to be as good as modern army boots. He would

need them to cope with our hills and winters. It would be tempting to think that he has left descendants still living here. You might be one!

The British Museum does not appear to know how the diploma arrived in London other than it was donated by George Young. You can see it in the museum's department of Prehistory and Europe though Weston Park Museum does have a copy. Can we have the real one back please? *Thanks to Weston Park and British Museums for information.*

M Sanderson

### **Wildflower Walk 19<sup>th</sup> June**

Our walk, led by Roger started at Carver Fields with a kestrel nicely hovering over the top field. There is an interesting variety of plants here ranging from campion, clovers, various vetches and cow parsley to the planting that took place when it was a sports field such as flowering cherries, lime trees, yews and rhododendrons, no doubt to provide shelter for the tennis courts which previously occupied this windy spot. It has now become quite a haven and preserve for little creatures with the help of RVCB bird boxes.

The bottom field has plenty of the parasitic yellow rattle, ox eye daisies and clover but we did not find the early purple orchid, though fortunately it did make an appearance a week or two later. (There has also been a good display of this orchid on the fields bordering Rivelin Valley Road.)

Then we walked to the edge with its plentiful heather and bilberries. Is there another city that has such a wonderful view just three miles from the city centre? The field below the edge did not appear to have the return of the marsh orchid but we will keep our fingers crossed for the future. Thanks to Roger.

M Sanderson

### **Family Walk 6<sup>th</sup> July**

This was also led by Roger and started with a tour of Carver Fields and a potted history of its change from sports field to being managed for recreation and a wildlife reserve by RVCB. Then, down the edge for a gentle stroll along Hagg Lane. What goes

down has to go up in this area so we carried on up the meadow which leads to Manchester Road and then on to Moorbank. Here we climbed the steep slope to the footpath between the edge and the golf course. Can anyone remember that many years ago it was known locally as Heights of Abraham? This is one of Sheffield's hidden gems with its widespread views over the valley from the top of the crags. You can get these views without the stiff climb if you approach it from the golf course footpath on Redmires Road. Our return took us to Stephen Hill Church for refreshments – good end to a pleasant walk.

M Sanderson

### **More Task Team Work**

The task team never stop. Sheffield Town Trust has given a grant to replace seating in the valley and eight have now been completed. Also a vandalised stile has been repaired on Carver Fields. Keith is always looking for more volunteers. Please contact him if you would like more information.

### **Some Wadsley and Loxley Commoner Events**

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

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> September

AGM and Archaeology of Bolsterstone Castle. Talk by Lloyd Powell.

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> October

Pennine Journey. Talk by Stephen Gay.

Monday 15<sup>th</sup> November

My Life as a Courtroom Artist. Talk by John Gilbert.

### **Donations**

Once more thanks for your generosity. Donations from Harston, Culmer Gregory Knott, Hill and Twigg swell this year's donations to over £480 – very welcome in our valley work.

### **Do you have anything you would like to contribute to this newsletter?**

We are always looking for interesting stories. Please contact M Sanderson

## THE RECORDER

I am writing this article on the longest day of the year, 21<sup>st</sup> June, and the weather could not be better. The hawthorn and blackthorn blossom has been spectacular again. There is, however, a threat in the form of a furry caterpillar, probably *Euproctis chryorrhoea* – the brown-tail moth, which denudes the bushes. This is spreading inland and northwards and I have seen a strip of several metres of hedgerow on the Snake Pass completely denuded of leaves and covered with the silken tents, which are created by the communal caterpillars of this moth; it seems much more common over in Cheshire. Did anyone notice the arrival of the greenfly? I was in the garden on the 18<sup>th</sup> May, which was cloudy but humid, and suddenly the air was filled with greenfly. I have never seen so many. The birds have done a good job as my plants have not suffered. The first broods of baby birds have fledged and there are plenty of insects around. A female blackbird is raiding a bucket, in which I keep my reserve supply of marsh marigolds, for muddy leaves to either line a new nest or replenish an old one.

For the past few years I have bred tadpoles (in my kitchen). This gives them a few weeks' headstart so they can better survive the winter (especially ones like the last one), and also the voracious palmate newts in my pond. The spawn was laid on 25<sup>th</sup> March and I brought some into the house on the 11<sup>th</sup> April, after I saw a local cat munching on it. Watching the tadpoles develop is absolutely fascinating – much more interesting than observing a goldfish in a tank! The first young frog was released near the pond on 31<sup>st</sup>

May. If you are worried about the level of water in your pond, tap water can be used after it has been left to stand for at least 24 hours, but, of course, it is always best to use rain water as certain pond creatures are adversely affected by the higher levels of nitrates in some tap water. Pond creatures can survive in quite shallow water. There is an excellent guide to keeping frog tadpoles by the Field Studies Council, which can be obtained from the RSPB reserve at Old Moor in the Dearne valley and similar places. This is ideal to get children interested in nature. If anyone wants to learn more please get in touch with me. Roger and I were at the Mill Pond for the pond dipping event on 30<sup>th</sup> May. No families came specifically for the pond dipping, but we had excellent coverage from the Sheffield Telegraph. We had a lovely time, on a lovely day, noting the difference in creatures from the fast flowing river and the pond. The caddis flies from the river were without cases but the ones from the pond had lovely cases made with gravel, leaves or twigs. We managed to pressgang a few passing children who discovered that pond life can be exciting. We really need to get our young people interested in nature – the future of our wild places depends on the generation caring for the countryside. The willow walk is looking good, despite the efforts of nibbling caterpillars – there are several moths that lay eggs on willow. We pulled up quite a lot of Himalayan balsam round the old part of the Mill Pond. It is easy to pull up – it is a glabrous, fleshy plant with a red stem and leaf veins, so please help to keep it under control by pulling some up when you are down there. Although the pink flowers are attractive to bees not all insects benefit from it. We need a diversity of native fauna and flora in the valley, although

there are several aliens which have become well established and seem part of the indigenous flora.

There was a noticeable increase in bee activity on 1<sup>st</sup> June when the *Cotoneaster* flowers opened. This is really a 'must have' plant for any wildlife garden. There was also excitement in town when beekeepers were called in to catch two swarms of honey bees at Castle Market.

The RSPB wants information about swifts. They want to know where they are seen and nesting. If you see swifts flying low and screaming they will be nesting nearby. Have you seen a swift entering a roof or a building? If you can see a nest it is not a swift! The best time to observe is on a warm still evening at dusk or early morning. Swifts are now on the amber list of species in danger, possibly because of loss of nest sites.

Things to look out for:-

Autumn butterflies, the date upon which the last swifts, swallows, martins seen. Second broods of chicks. Goldcrests – they had a very hard time last winter. Denuded trees, bushes, hedges of hawthorn or blackthorn caused by caterpillar.

Records sent in:-

Mrs Green, Stannington – saw red kite being mobbed by crows on 6.6.10, also saw one a month previously. 2 swifts on 15.5.10. She saw 5-6 magpies squabbling on her lawn and found a dead magpie after this. Her frogspawn arrived a week later than in 2009 on 20.3.10.

Mr King, Stannington – 31.5.10 = saw 7 lapwings in field off Spout Lane, 2 nesting and seeing off any birds getting too close.

Mark Bateman – Stannington – Tadpoles late hatching on 10.5.10.

Margaret Sanderson – Had sparrows eating honesty and primrose flowers. 1<sup>st</sup> frogspawn arrived 26.3.10 and tadpoles on 9.4.10. She also first heard and then watched a swarm of bees go through her garden (a daunting but exciting experience).

Derek Hastings – photographed what looked like a Goldeneye at Redmires Dam on 20.6.10.

Mary Brazil – on her dogwalks has seen 1 pheasant at Lodge Moor with a chick, 2 pheasants fighting on the sledging field, coots with 3 chicks at Hind Wheel, and a kingfisher at Hind Wheel on 19.6.10.

Roger Kite – birds seen in garden – male redpoll, chaffinch, male bullfinch, great tit, greenfinch, sparrow and on 27.4.10 a female yellowhammer.

Graham Appleby – 2.4.10 – male goldfinch, female linnet; 6.4.10 – pair linnets. 1.6.10 – great spotted woodpecker. Young bluetits and blackbirds. Graham also had an interesting beetle in his greenhouse, which, from his description (black and orange) sounds like one of the burying beetles – *Necrophagus* sp.

Ken Shail – hedgehog in garden 1.6.10 – 1<sup>st</sup> time in over 2 years. Great to see them back in the area.

Sheila `helmsley 2.5.10 Deer sighted in river just before hollins lane bridge rusty red coat white pompom tail only small size of a young calf it came out of the river and up the bank behind the holly bush pub – possibly a muntjac

Steven Eccleston, 6.7.10 - 3 goldfish seen in Rivelin Mill Pond. Unwanted pets?

Joan Buckland RVCG Recorder