



Friends of Dibbinsdale

Supporting Brotherton Park & Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve

Email: friends@dibbinsdale.co.uk

www.dibbinsdale.co.uk

Well done Alan and all the Dibbinsdale 'team' of volunteers who have helped Dibbinsdale LNR to maintain its standard of excellence for another year. The Green Flag Award is a scheme that honours public open spaces that achieve a high standard with regard to a variety of criteria- public involvement is one of the categories that is judged.

Letter from Dibbinsdale



Bodens Hey Meadow and orchids in mid summer

Green Flag Success



Again!



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We would like to invite all members of the Friends to our

Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 15th July at 13.30hrs

At the Visitors Centre, Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve, Bromborough



Dave and Liz 'bear arms against a sea of...balsam' at Spital Dam

The Summer Hots Up?

It may have been a miserable summer so far for the humans in the reserve, but this is not true of the wildlife that likes it wet. (Read inside on our focus on willows)

If you would like to be kept in touch about what goes on in the reserve, contact Alan the Ranger. By joining the Friends of Dibbinsdale, we will regularly send you this and future news updates. [See our website. www.dibbinsdale.co.uk](http://www.dibbinsdale.co.uk)

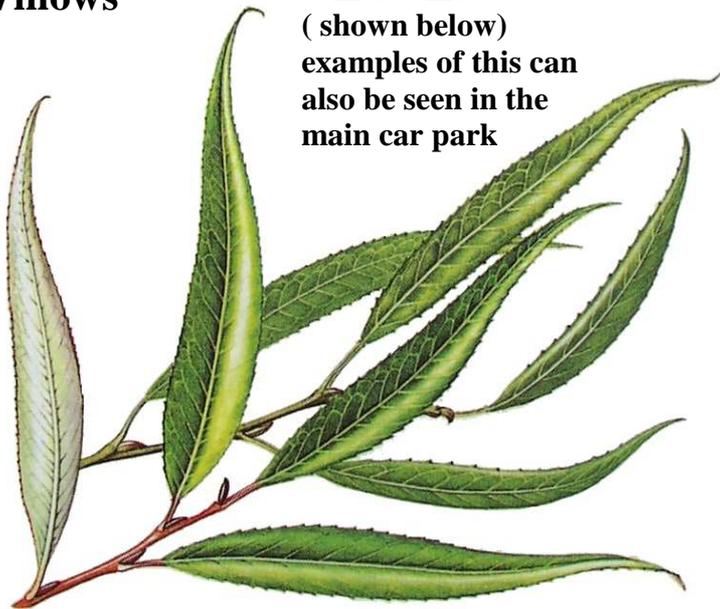
Balsam beats down!

Can it be true that the reserve has finally beaten the back of our most unloved plant –himalayan balsam? Continue work by hand this summer in cutting it down will hopefully see the end of it.

Tree Profiles

Willows

White Willow
(shown below)
examples of this can
also be seen in the
main car park



willows'. The large and furry catkins are soft to touch and make a glorious show at Easter. The leaves of the willows are not as thin and long as the white and crack willows. The trees in summer are often non-descript and featureless.



The Willows of Dibbinsdale

The willow is a typical wetland tree along any water course and in Dibbinsdale this is no exception. The willows stand out from the flood plain of the River Dibbin in defiance of the poor waterlogged conditions that many other native trees find such a problem of adaptation. In winter the green, yellow and orange hues of the bark make them a focus of interest in an otherwise dull colourless landscape. Standing at the top of the sandstone escarpment overlooking the reed bed the willows often wave gracefully in the breeze above the 'sea' of reeds and grasses.

The Willow Carr

The mature crack willows are truly architectural landmarks in the 'willow carr' -the wetland woodland of the Dibbin. In many instances the main trunks of this willow have split leaving the crown of the tree draped upside down like an inverted umbrella wedged in the silt in which it grows. The tangle of branches makes an impenetrable thicket that wildlife finds so attractive here. Not only that, the contact these 'cracked' willow branches have with the rich fertile alluvium results in the growth of new trees from the layered shoots- it is as if the trees produce new offspring by a form of 'piggy back' . The crack willow and the white willow very easily hybridise. This means that in the process of pollination from the catkins the two species produce hybrids that can have the characteristics of both plants. It is the white willow (*salix alba*) that has produced many of the cultivated and ornamental willows hybrids found in our towns and gardens. These include the coral bark, the silver and golden willow with its attractive variant the weeping willow.

Pussy Willows

Types of willow, or goat willow, (*Salix caprea*) are also represented in Dibbinsdale. These willows have very attractive catkins and are often referred to as 'pussy

The vigour of its root system and the speed of its growth have been cleverly put to man's advantage in places where steep slopes have needed securing. Osiers, a type of willow, were used to bind the sides of the Manchester Ship Canal as it was being built. The rangers have used it in Dibbinsdale as a willow sculpture

Vices and Virtues

The willow is an incredibly fast growing tree. It is probably the fastest growing tree in the country. Unlike practically any other tree, any branch or trunk of the willow can be put into the ground and it will sprout new growth. It is one of the few trees that can often start off in life as a washing pole in someone's garden. It is also a tree that can have dreaded consequences if allowed to grow close to a house because its water seeking root system will penetrate concrete and house foundations to survive.

Willow Sculpture

The first foundations for a living willow sculpture have been laid down on the wet grassland that leads down from the pond into the reserve (up from Point 2 on the nature trail) In 2009 some cuttings of a type of willow called Osier were taken and the following year they were transplanted into the ground. These willows are quite attractive because they have very yellow stems. It makes any work with them stand out even in winter when the leaves fall. The number of willow cuttings has been added to and the willows that were planted have been 'arranged' to make an avenue that will hopefully become a tunnel in time. The development of a willow sculpture area will add art and interest to the park. Send us your ideas for other willow sculptures.

Feeding the giraffes

It has been an old and unfulfilled goal to have links with Chester Zoo. The first attempt was to explore whether the zoo animals would be able to use the grass when cut from Bodens Hey Meadow (Newsletter 2005) The rough grass might have been attractive to some of the African grazing animals. It was very disappointing when this didn't work out. A new avenue of interest has been the leaves from the fallen willows. Willows are a wetland tree at Dibbinsdale that wants to take over the wetland world. They compete with the balsam in that regard. Where the willows grow adjacent to reedbeds they are particularly unwelcome because it is the reeds that are more desirable. The reeds will act as a river water filter. So taking away willows by cutting them is a good conservation management task. Having a good use for the cut willows is a bonus. The only snag is that the willows need to be freshly cut. Giraffes are clearly fussier than you might have thought. Over the summer the reserve will try to parcel off some juicy willows branches for them to tuck into. We will let you know what the giraffes thought of them.



Wind in the Willows

Dibby is on the telly. The BBC came to do a filming session of Wind in the Willows here at the reserve in June. The programme is a Something Else production part of BBC Learning and "Bringing Books to Life." Kieron Richardson (of Hollyoaks fame) came to do a piece to camera. If you would like to see what was recorded go to the Blue Peter site at www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/clips/p00vzlnm.

The BBC film team came to Dibbinsdale on what could only have been described as 'wet'. The presenter, Kieron must have welcomed the Rangers Office and the wood burning stove, installed with money from the Friends, shown on the clip



Dibbinsdale Bug Hunt

Date: 15th August 2012 9:30 to 12:30
Cost: FREE but Booking Essential



Come along and explore Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve and help us to investigate what types of insects and other invertebrates are living here.

Various methods of catching and surveying invertebrates will be used on the day. Identification of what we find and the differences between the main insect groups will be explored. Microscopes and hand lenses and will be available to help with identification. We will then consider how they form part of the wider natural history of the area. Any notable finds will be reported to the official local wildlife record service based at Chester Zoo. Expect to find some interesting animals and learn some fascinating facts about them.

This event will be suitable for those aged between of 12 and 16 years who have an interest in wildlife. Suitable outdoor footwear and clothing will be required (including rainproofs if rain is forecast on the day). Organised and run by the Friends of Dibbinsdale in conjunction with the local Ranger Service.

Booking is essential. To book a place please ring the Ranger on 0151 334 9851 or email him at alansmail@wirral.gov.uk leaving your name and contact phone number or email address.



Alison and Jenny inspect our furry friend

Tip-top Trapping

Alison from Nottingham University and Jenny from Manchester Uni have combined to form a small mammals trapping project on the reserve. They are researching the distribution and population of small mammals (rodents) in the Babbs Meadow area. A very brief interim description of results seems to suggest a very high proportion of bank voles.



A wood mouse is brought under close supervision

Bodger Russ

Russ has found a very welcome home here at Dibbinsdale's walled garden. Russ has a wealth of knowledge and a wide range of skills in woodland crafts. These he will be exploring with those wishing learn more and who share his interest in such crafts. The walled garden is a wonderful setting for craft work. For more information, contact Alan.01513349851



Russ in the bodger shed

Lever Research Volunteer Day

A big thank you to all the volunteers from Lever's Research and Development at Port Sunlight who came to Dibby to help. Under supervisor Mike Ingers guidance they constructed a pathway leading to Woodslee Pond



News in Brief.

River Revetment

Work on the riverbank by the Otters Tunnel is underway to help address bank erosion and improve the habitat and access. This is an area of the park that is liable for flooding. This work will help reduce the impact of extreme flooding when finished in autumn and provide a better more attractive walking surface.

Woodslee Pond Development

Work continues throughout the summer to help combat algal blooms. Barley straw has been used to counteract the de-oxygenation of the water.

In a partnership with funding from the Environment Agency, work will be undertaken this autumn to improve access to the pond for anglers with disabilities.

Wheelchair friendly fishing platforms are a feature of this work.

Wildflower Meadow Update

The wildflower meadow is in its second summer. In 2011 the area adjacent to the car park (the former site of Woodslee House) was seeded and prepared for wildflowers. Over the winter work will begin to cut and remove the vegetation and so encourage the seeding down of wildflowers. The vigor of perennial weeds and coarse grasses will slowly diminish as the soil fertility reduces. Some reseeded and the introduction of yellow rattle (a grass parasite) may also improve next years flower show.



Dog of the week:
Chester in Bodens Hey Meadow