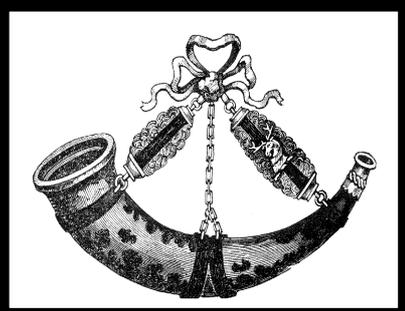


Letter from Dibbinsdale



Spring 2012

"Letter from Dibbinsdale" is a newsletter for the people who use the reserve and those who seek to support its conservation and management.

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Pond Progress

2011 saw the continued blight of Woodslee Pond due to another algal bloom. This is a crisis of pond ecology and the effect is that the growth of algae depletes the oxygen in the water and the most obvious result is fish losses. The causes of algal blooms are due to a variety of factors. Warm weather, low water levels, sediment and leaf litter in the pond, lack of oxygenating pond weed, and the stocking (numbers) of fish are a few of the factors. Maintaining a fine healthy balance of life within the pond is a target for 2012. A number of steps can be achieved with little cost and these are being undertaken. The first of these simple remedies is to have active in the pond 'sausages' of barley straw. These have the effect of absorbing the algae before it does damage. AWAC have donated £100 to buy a machine that bags up the barley straw, somewhat like when you buy a Christmas tree. The 'sausages' are then floated and tethered on the pond as a precautionary measure. The device has the added benefit in that it can be used to provide 'sausages' of barley straw for other ponds on the Wirral under threat this coming summer.



E.A net fish at Woodslee

The agency's aim is to encourage good fishing and fisheries and they have offered Dibbinsdale funding for materials to help build some better fishing platforms. It is hoped to provide platforms that would be of benefit to wheelchair users by having the right surfacing and access as well as a rail round them. EA's input has been most encouraging and has provided positive and on going help and advice.

The other positive aspect of what can be best described as pond restoration is the involvement of a variety of groups and individuals. Members of AWAC (Association of Wirral Angling Clubs) along with volunteers working with the Ranger Service have combined to help resolve matters of deteriorating pond conditions. Plans are being made to improve the amenity of the pond for all park visitors, including wildlife. For example, one of many suggestions is to create a cormorant free area to help protect the fish from these predatory birds. The increase in cormorants taking fish in fresh water ponds is a national problem.

The answers to better pond ecology will not be a quick fix and we would like to request the public's patience and understanding.



David Rome with Barley straw 'bagger'

The monitoring of fish populations is another simple test that was undertaken this spring. The Environment Agency fisheries department came to the pond early in the year to net the fish to see how many there were and of what type. The agency has an assessment of suitable population numbers of fish based on the size of the pond. The number of fish was assessed and also the variety. There was an excess of smaller 'silver' fish like roach and a dearth of predatory fish like perch. They removed a proportion of the silver fish and will reassess the pond in autumn. The presence of large numbers of 'signal' crayfish was also worrying. More about that in another newsletter I feel.



EA Staff set up by the pond

Balsam is back on the menu

The eradication of balsam almost reaches the proportions of compulsive behaviour disorder with some environmentalists...and regrettably it is getting to me too! The good thing that has happened recently is that Cheshire Wildlife Trust are coordinating an initiative (Lyn Byrne) to address the problem on a more sensible and sustainable all Dibbin catchment ! There is little point in cleaning up the reserve if the balsam is just waiting upstream to taunt us, or should I say seed us. Lyn has liaised with Alan to coordinate a volunteer bash at Dibbinsdale on the 19th April. (See advert) This summer season will also see the continued programme of balsam and Japanese knotweed eradication in the reserve by contractor that was begun in 2010. Hopefully the pink 'beast' will be showing signs of depletion by the end of this summer. Eternal vigilance is the name of the game...perhaps that is compulsive behaviour disorder kicking in again!(By the way, talking of menus, did you know that balsam seeds taste hot and mustardy and I think the leaves of Japanese knotweed are edible...help me with this obsession !)



Rhododendron Compromises?

Whenever was park management an issue of black and white? Here is a classic case, of purple and white, The rhodies (variety Ponticum) at the bottom of the valley, just before the river, have been flowering purple in a growing clump for many a year and looking pretty stunning in May for all to see. Then along come a big gang of volunteers , or even a few gangs, and cut them back and winch them out of the ground. We all know they are non- native and have little conservation value, but they look nice. So can there be a compromise? Do you have to get rid of them all? Isn't the problem that there are too many of them? We think so. The huge round clump of rhoddies were spreading out of control and looking rather straggly and unkempt. They had smothered a variety of small trees and created an unsightly den of inequity beneath them. So some of the amazing stumps of twisted trunks have been left to see how they will re-grow and to continue to provide a flowering show for the future. Can we call this preserving a bit of park heritage ? The area of ground that has been reclaimed will be reseeded with wild flowers and grasses so that the area doesn't look vandalised. Wirral Volunteering came for a day in March to help with the landscaping. They raked out the acid rhody soil and took out nettles and brambles before planting a grass mix to establish some vegetation this year. We will see what wild flowers colonise the area left by the rhoddies before a next step of landscaping in 2013.

Watch this space.

Events in brief

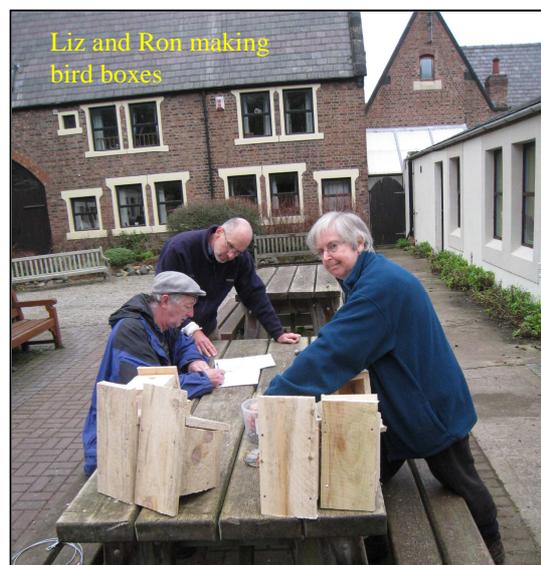
Woodslee Meadow. The wild flower meadow was a successful experiment last summer after a slow start. Seed was collected last autumn/late summer for future use. This seed has since been re-applied. Efforts have been made to dig out and reduce competition from invasive hardy annuals like nettles.

Light at the end of the Tunnel. Well, reflected light in the tunnel to make visibility better to be exact. Reflective yellow disks have been mounted on the railway sleepers that mark the side of the path through the tunnel. This is something that was flagged up to be done in a Green Flag Audit last summer.

Raising the path level. Also close to the Otters Tunnel, the path is being widened and raised so it remains above flood level. Some of the fallen/felled timber has been used as a path edge to reduce erosion.



Nestbox season. Ron and Liz have made an owl box for our tunnel roosting tawny owls to consider using this spring. The plywood structure was camouflaged and erected near the tunnel in a secret location...hope the owls find it. Other types of nest boxes have been made in a public event at the park this spring. Look out for new nesting activity in these (Near Bromborough Rake Station).The nestbox camera near the visitors centre has been redeployed and new visitors are encouraged(birds to set up and humans to view) Mice had eaten through the wire on last year's nestcam.



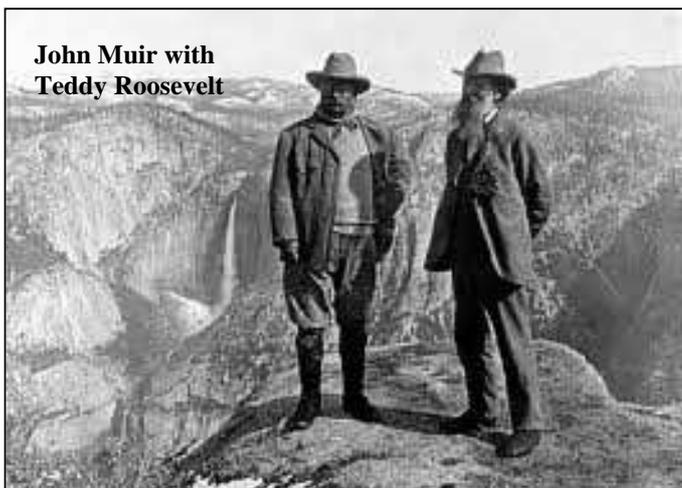
Crafts in the park. Some experimental woodland craft work has been started among the volunteers in the park. 1001 things to whittle and create from wood from the reserve. The idea is to develop opportunities for interested people to become involved and learn woodland craft techniques from experts. More on this to come. Malcolm Eleen, a craftsman in butterflies and moths (along with other natural things) has donated some wonderful pieces of art he has made for display. He has cleverly photocopied and coloured in the wings of butterflies and recreated them in paper- very attractive and quite life like.



Tree Wardens' involvement. Alan has had a meeting with Wirral Tree wardens this spring and they have asked if they can continue previous work done on Spital Field in the woodland that was planted on Spital Tip. The group have cleared an area on the cliff escarpment and are introducing some alder buckthorn trees to complement nature conservation and bio-diversity in the area.

Standing in the Footprints of Giants

It is not often in your life when you can truly say that you were inspired. I watched a documentary about the 19th Century Scottish/American environmentalist John Muir on the television recently. He moved to California in the last century and fought the battle to conserve the giant redwoods of Yosemite from industrial development and logging. These giants of over 300 feet tall stand in the high sierras of the Rocky Mts. Some have stood there for over 4 millennia. His campaigns in the latter half of the 19th century led to these giant trees being preserved and national parks being established.



John Muir with Teddy Roosevelt

In the same period, in 1870's at Woodslee, Bromborough a giant redwood (sequoia sempervivum) was planted as part of landscaping of a new Victorian estate over 6000 miles away. Another man of Scottish descent, David McIver, a ship owner, started his new family here and was the proud owner of Woodslee House. The baby tree was planted on the edge of the driveway and approaches to his front door. I play with the thought that the seed may have come from Victorian pioneer seed collectors in California. The tree has grown up and is now a tree toddler at about 100 feet tall and nearly 150 years old.

In the 1970s another campaign was fought to preserve our area of outstanding ancient woodland from industrial blight. Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve was the result. Dibbinsdale was saved from being filled as a massive waste tip. McIver's House was demolished after the war but his redwood still stands. Indeed early this year in 2012, volunteers working with the ranger have made the tree stand out more prominently. In recognition of some of the outstanding trees of Victorian Dibbinsdale, the areas around these latter day giant trees have been landscaped. The redwood, along with a scots pine, a holm oak and a monkey puzzle tree, that were all planted in the gardens of Woodslee, can all now be viewed at a distance in their own space.

In the new millennium I made a pilgrimage to Yosemite and Muir Woods near San Francisco. Here at Muir Woods, Muir had a historic meeting with Theodore Roosevelt. (See photo bottom) They made camp at the base of the trees. Roosevelt was so impressed with these giants that he pledged that upon election as American President he would take forward John Muir's ideas - that mankind is dwarfed by the enormity of nature and it is not diminished by finding its true place as one part of nature, no more, nor less important than any other. A score of national parks were created early in the 20th Century by his administration.

As a tribute to Muir, the new millennium and the existing redwood of Woodslee, some new sequoias were planted. Two sequoia gigantium, accompanied by numerous dawn redwoods (metasequoia glyptostroboides), are now part of an emergent arboretum in the grounds of Woodslee. I'm not sure they will all survive into the third millennium but they certainly grow proudly in the shadow of giants and the ancient woodland of today.



Sequoia leaves and trunk

Events in brief (continued)

Tree Safety appraisal. Alan has taken part in a council run tree safety appraisal training that has obvious implication in the management of the woodland in the reserve. The identification of and the scheduling of tree work is a key aspect in the safety audit of the reserve.

First Aid Course and Website. Ron, our Friends' Chairman, has also been busy successfully completing a council first aid course. He is making good progress in developing the Friends Website. See the site on www.dibbinsdale.co.uk.

Geocaching. Mark and Les Howard from the Geocaching Society have gained permission to construct a course for the public in the reserve. (Geocaching can be best described as a treasure hunt with a GPS device) The strict rules and code do not allow any damage to be done by the seekers. For more details contact www.geocaching.com. On St Patricks Day a group of Geocachers, organised by Mark, undertook a volunteer morning helping out in the reserve. Many thanks.



Mark Howard
volunteering in
the reserve

Cheshire Wildlife Trust

Events from Spring to early Summer.

Natural history, usually combined with local history. Shortish distances, but expected to last 1-2 hours with lots of stops to look at things.

APRIL 21st Saturday 2pm

Woodland management the traditional way.

Thornton Common and Thornton Wood.

See what hedge laying, coppicing, pollarding look like, done by Wirral Countryside Volunteers.

Thornton Common is flat, but Thornton Wood has steep slopes.

Booking essential ring 0151 327 5923.

Meet: Thornton Common, Thornton Common Road, Clatterbridge, SJ323814 (adjacent to Wirral Rugby Club).

Some car parking by bridge over motorway.

Leaders: Paul Loughnane and members of Wirral Countryside Volunteers.



APRIL 24th Tuesday, 10am

Ancient woodland.

Walk through Dibbinsdale for bluebells, wood anemones and other flowers of ancient woodland, and some local history.

Finish with lunch at the Dibbinsdale Hotel if you like!

Meet: Bromborough Rake Station, Bromborough Rake, SJ342819.

Come by train - or park considerately in the nearby housing (no parking at station).

Leaders: Pete Miller, Hilary Ash.



NEW FERRY BUTTERFLY PARK,

Open Day to start the new season,

Sunday 6th May, noon till 4pm.

Children's activities, craft and art stalls, pond dipping, guided walks to find mini-beasts.

Meet: New Ferry Butterfly Park, adjacent to Bebington Station car park, off Bebington Road, New Ferry. SJ333851.

Come by train or bus. Disabled parking only inside the Park, general parking in Port Sunlight.

The Big Balsam Bash

Do you want to :-

Get outside, get fit and make a difference for wildlife?

Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Wirral Ranger Service need your help to get rid of Himalayan Balsam this spring in the Dibbin Catchment.

Himalayan Balsam is not native to the UK and smothers our native plants and riverbanks, forcing out local wildlife. The reserve is now in its third year of a project attempting to eradicate this nuisance plant. So far the results have been very positive and success is in sight.

A one off taster event will be held at

Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve, on Thursday 19th April 2012, 10am to 3pm.

Meet at the Rangers Office CH62 2BJ. Bring along some lunch, waterproofs, wellies and a pair of gloves.

For more information about this event call Lyn at Cheshire Wildlife 01948 820728(email [lbyrne @cheshirewt.org.uk](mailto:lbyrne@cheshirewt.org.uk)) or speak to Alan the Ranger 0151 334985



Dog of the Day Millie

If you have a dog that enjoys the reserve, why not send us your photo of it here at the park. Dibbinsdale appreciates responsible dog owners. Please dispose of your dogs' poop' in the bins provided.