



South Wirral Watch

February 2010



Letting you know what to look out for this month at
Dibbinsdale LNR and Eastham Country Park

Welcome to February's edition of South Wirral Watch. This is compiled by the combined forces of The Friends of Dibbinsdale and Eastham Country Park, in conjunction with the Rangers service at both sites.

If you see, hear or photograph anything in either of the parks this month that may be of interest to other readers then just email Peter or Alan at

petermiller@wirral.gov.uk or alansmail@wirral.gov.uk

We will try to include your sightings and pictures in next month's edition.

Some of us may be glad to be leaving the snow that we had in January behind. However, the month of February can also be very harsh, with snow and freezing winds. This said, it will be possible to spot hints of better things to come. Although spring is still several weeks away the first signs will be here to see. **Hazel** catkins start to expand into golden tassels in order to release their pollen to the wind. The female part of the **hazel** plant, which catches the wind borne pollen, consists of a tiny red cone of red stigmas.



Male catkin



Female catkin (only 2mm across)

You may notice that during January and early February this year, the Rangers and some of our volunteers will have planted some two year old hazel whips and other trees. These can be seen in the area now known as Bill's Glade in Eastham and under the recently cleared trees to the north side of Spital Field in Dibbinsdale. Hazel was chosen for these areas for its ability to grow in shady conditions.

Hazel coppices well and the long flexible branches were harvested by our ancestors and used to make many traditional products from rustic furniture to fences and shelters.

Forked hazel twigs are still used to divine the presence of water and other substances. Traditionally hazel was used to ward off snakes and other creeping animals.

Returning Frogs

Frogs return to ponds each February or March to lay their frogspawn and then most of them disappear, just as quickly as they arrived. The timing depends on the weather and your actual location. Up North, it will be later than for those who live in warmer climes. Keep a lookout at Woodslee Pond and the wildlife garden at Eastham for the first signs.



Do frogs live in a pond?

Frogs spend the majority of their time on dry land, under stones or in a damp cool spot in your garden. They use ponds at spawning time to lay their frogspawn, but need to be on land to feed. If frogs cannot escape from your garden pond because your pond has steep sides and a low water level, or pavings that overhang the pond then they will die. You must make provision for them to escape.

Bird Watch.



The river Dibbin is often very high at this time of the year. Without the cover of leaves **grey wagtails** and **kingfishers** can be spotted more easily. We have had a number of sightings of the **kingfisher** already; If you manage to get any photographs we would be delighted to see them.

With the leaves off the trees, flocks of small birds including **great, blue** and other **tits** accompanied by **finches, nuthatches** and **treecreepers** can be seen moving around the woods at Eastham and Dibbinsdale. Feeding has a real urgency at the moment but they are easily spooked. You may be lucky enough to hear and see a **great spotted woodpecker** drumming against a tree trunk. There have been lots seen and heard near the Levers car park at the top end of the Long Plantation.



It is important that we all carry on feeding garden birds and putting out water. This can be the harshest time for birds as food supplies may be exhausted and your offering can make a real difference to bird survival.

We have had a number of reports of wintering **red wings** and **field fares** on both sites and in local gardens during January as they move around together in search of berries and other food.

Nest boxes should be cleaned and ready for this years tenant by mid February.

With this in mind, we are holding a nest box activity day at Eastham Country Park on Sunday 14th February. This will coincide with the 'British Trust for Ornithology' National Nest Box Week.



The scouts and cubs from the 2nd Bebington scout group have been working on nest boxes which will be erected near the visitor centre and Bill's Glade. These nest boxes will be monitored by the scouts over the coming years.

Woodland Plants:

In woodlands the most obvious leaves to emerge are those of the **cuckoo pint** or **lord and ladies**. These can easily be seen along the cycle path at the back of the visitor centre at Eastham.



Lords and Ladies



Italian Lords and Ladies

The leaves push up through the leaf litter furled up but then open out once above ground. **Dogs mercury** and **violet** leaves will also start to green up the woodland floor between the clumps of mosses. Other plants such as **ramsons** and **bluebells** are starting to poke through under the leaf litter and by the end of Feb the leaves should be visible. These will best be seen at the south end of Dibbinsdale LNR and in the Long Plantation at Eastham Country Park. Later on this month **primroses** may first appear.

Don't forget this months events.

Nest Box Activity Day

14th Feb 11.00am - 3.00pm

Find out more about birds and their nests, how to build a nest box and where to put it. Follow the nest trail through the woods plus lots of art and craft activities. Suitable for all the family.

History and Heritage walk

28th Feb 10.00am - 12.30pm

One of a series of walks/talks focusing on Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve, Bromborough. This months theme is the history of the Reserve. Strong footwear and suitable clothing is advised. Suitable for children 8+. Sorry no dogs. Booking essential. Call 0151 334 9851

UK Seasonal Produce

Don't forget, February is the start of the British Rhubarb Season.

Please feel free to forward this letter to your friends. A .pdf of this document and others related to the sites are available from www.dibbinsdale.co.uk

This document was produced by the friends of Dibbinsdale LNR and Eastham Country Park and the Rangers of South Wirral

