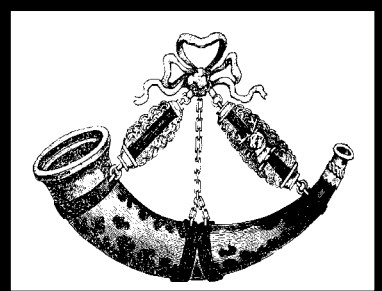


Letter from Dibbinsdale



Winter'11

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

A Year at Dibby!

Well, what a year. January was my first month as site ranger at Dibbinsdale and happily I had a great team of friends and volunteers to help me settle in. Lots had changed in south Wirral parks with Peter Miller and Vicky Hose leaving at the end of 2010. Fortunately Peter stayed in touch as a regular volunteer and source of knowledge and has continued to contribute to the reserve throughout the year. Vicky has been a regular volunteer in the walled garden working with disabilities groups from Eastham Centre and has continued to be an asset to the reserve in this role. All through this year I have tried to develop links with Reaseheath College. This has proved successful and we have regular visits from groups studying countryside management, these students carry out a variety of tasks as part of their practical module. We also work with their younger students who are still in high school education studying for their land based diplomas through Reaseheath.

We had a good year with our efforts to remove Himalayan balsam from the reserve with lots of volunteer hours following up work carried out by our contractor ELM (Environmental Land Management). This contract work was funded by a Forestry commission grant set up by Peter in 2010. This year the wetland area at the bottom of Bodens Hey Meadow is showing the first signs of balsam work being successful; this is due to a continuing regime of removal over many years.

The Walled garden goes from strength to strength with involvement from more and more groups and in 2012 we hope to install a bee hive in the visitor centre which can be viewed from indoors. I have been approached by two of our old volunteers who would like to use the visitor centre as a class room in the New Year; one has set up a short course in countryside management through lifelong learning. The first course will start in the spring. This could create a spring board for new volunteers.

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*Happy Christmas and a
prosperous New Year*



Photo.Carl Huxley

It has been an interesting year for me and the ranger service in general with the uncertainty of how the reserve would be managed in the future but at last a decision has been made and we can move forward.

As I see it there will be some changes but I am sure that these changes will be for the betterment of the reserve and all Wirral's green spaces.

I would finally like to say a big thanks to every one who over the past year has helped to make the reserve the great place that it is.

Regards Alan Smail Site Ranger:
Brotherton Park & Dibbinsdale LNR

40th Birthday Cheshire Wildlife Trust

A group of Wirral Wildlife members met at Brotherton Park, Dibbinsdale on November 12th to mark the 40th anniversary of the group. Many had given 30 years or more of support.

The afternoon was dry and mild and two native Black Poplars were planted. A thousand years ago Black Poplars thrived on floodplains but it is now Britain's rarest native timber tree. In 1993 scientists warned that this great tree could be extinct by the end of the century. To reduce this risk clones from Cheshire trees have been raised at Chester Zoo with the aim of re-establishing the trees in suitable habitats. Our planting was to help to save what is becoming known as 'The Forgotten Tree'.

Also a quince was planted in the walled garden in memory of Ray Walkup who organised valuable recording work at Dibbinsdale.

After these commemorations tea and homemade cakes were happily consumed. We are very grateful to the Rangers for enabling us to have this celebration at the park.

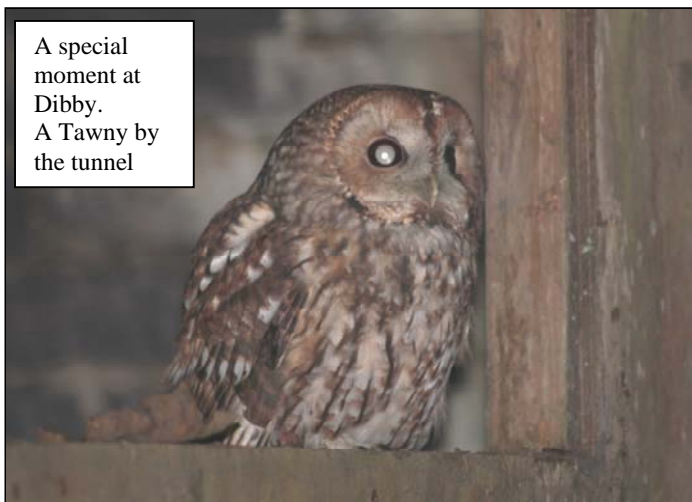


12th November
Black Poplar
planting

The four o'clock owl

I used to be able to set my watch to a heron that flew over Dibbinsdale at 8am in the morning. Then here is this 'brassy' and unbothered tawny owl that it is reported will sit for ages at the Otters Tunnel. When does it come, I ask? At 4 o'clock. So off I go with my photography gear, in case it is there. It's getting dark and as I walk down from Vanderbyl Avenue, I'm a bit 'late'. As I hurry, in front of me there are a couple of rough looking dog walkers throwing a stick into the river in front of me. As we get to the tunnel, I see the shape of a little figure sitting on the tunnel shutter. The dog walkers have seen it too. Its going to fly away, I think.

Awkwardly, I ask the dog walkers to 'make progress' away...they do! The owl could have been nailed there. I start photographing, adjusting camera and lens in a fumbling random way (it's so dark). Not only does it stay there, but turns every now and again to camera. Another pair of dog walkers come and go without a feather of concern. Then as I look at my watch its 4.30pm. Off it flew, as if on cue, into the gloom of St Patrick Wood...and tea. Magic.



A special
moment at
Dibby.
A Tawny by
the tunnel

Volunteer Diaries-The master wincher

Rhododendrons are an impressive and successful plant arrival in the ancient woodland. Unfortunately, over time, they will throttle every other bit of vegetation away. Since their arrival in the Victorian period, they have taken over and have 'thicketed' bits of woodland. The answer is their removal. At the bottom of Central Avenue path we made our first attack. Just cutting them down is not good enough, because they will re-grow with a vengeance. Could we pull them up by their roots, like a common garden weed? I now know the answer is yes. Ian and his winch have pulled them out of the ground like molar teeth. The trunks are twisted and gnarled like a wooden sculpture. The roots are mainly surface rooted. When they start to respond to the winch pulling them out, you hear a ghastly groan of breaking roots. It's quick and very effective. The hole created from the stump removal is also a neat planting pocket for the rhody's replacement. Another job done for the 'Master Wincher'



Ian uses the winch
to pull out rhodies
(stumps picture
right) in the valley
near post 9



Sitting down on the job

In early December the Friends of Dibbinsdale decided to fund the purchase of a new bench seat to provide a suitable relaxing location to enjoy the tranquillity of the park and especially the super wildflower meadow that is being managed within easy walking distance from the car park. It was delivered in pieces and the regular Wednesday volunteer team assembled and installed it the following day. Especial thanks to Phil and Gary who did the lion's share of the required hole digging for the very long support legs. The seat is made from sustainable new oak and with minimal maintenance should last for many years. Do come along, relax and enjoy the view.....

Ron Warne. Chairman

Message from Mary Bagley, Parks and Countryside, Principal Officer

Dear All,

I am very please to say that the Cabinet decided to keep the service in house. I know we have a lot to do to make this an excellent service for local people, but with your help and partnership working, I am confident that we can have outstanding parks and countryside in the Wirral.

We are arranging a Friends' Forum so that we can discuss the way forward together. Everyone will be welcome to attend.

I'd also like to ensure we have the best working relationship between all the Friends Groups and officers, and I'd like to hear your views on how this can be improved.

Please can you pass this on to all your fellow friends.

Warm regards

Contribution of Reaseheath College

This autumn has seen countryside management students from Reaseheath College doing valuable habitat improvement on Bodens Hey Meadow and within the woodland. Learning by doing is an opportunity for the students and the reserve. We thank them for their efforts.



Volunteers (and Ron's dog Chester) with newly installed bench

Another successful meadow cut

The unusually warm and dry autumn proved to be an opportunity not to be missed for Andy Young in the Countryside Stewardship hay meadow work. The grass on Bodens Hey has now been cut and baled 5 times as part of an on going programme of grassland restoration



Young's Agricultural Contractors (plus dog) baling and removal the grass



Volunteers from Environment Agency clear thicket on the meadow (left) Unwanted vegetation is cleared and burnt Cutting back rhododendrons in Brotherton Park (above) The stumps are then winched out

Autumn and Winter pictures of the park
courtesy of Carl Huxley

Events and activities for 2012

2012 Birthday Celebrations

Cheshire Wildlife Trust aims to conserve all sorts of wildlife, from fungi to trees and bumblebees to otters. The Trust is 50 years old in 2012, and to celebrate its Wirral group, Wirral Wildlife, has organised a series of guided walks throughout the year - go to www.wirralwildlife.co.uk/2012_YoCC,CWT_50th.pdf for details.

The first is on **February 15th at 10.30am:**

New Ferry Shore: birds and shipping

Watch birds feeding at low tide, walk along past the fever hospital site, talk about history of area including Great Eastern. No need to book.

Meet: Shorefields open space, New Ferry. SJ340857.

Leaders: Ed Samuels, Mathilde Baker-Schommer (birds),

Simon Petris from New Ferry local history group

Wirral Wildlife have also organised 5 plantings of native wild flowers - 50 at a time of course. The first is at New Ferry Butterfly Park on 11 March at 2pm - booking needed, 0151 327 5923.

Do come along and explore our Wirral natural history (and some local history as well). Events are free - thanks to funding from Wirral MBC Tourism initiative "2012 - Year of Coast and Countryside", which has fortuitously coincided with CWT's birthday.

See www.visitwirral.co.uk for the full list of 2012 activities.

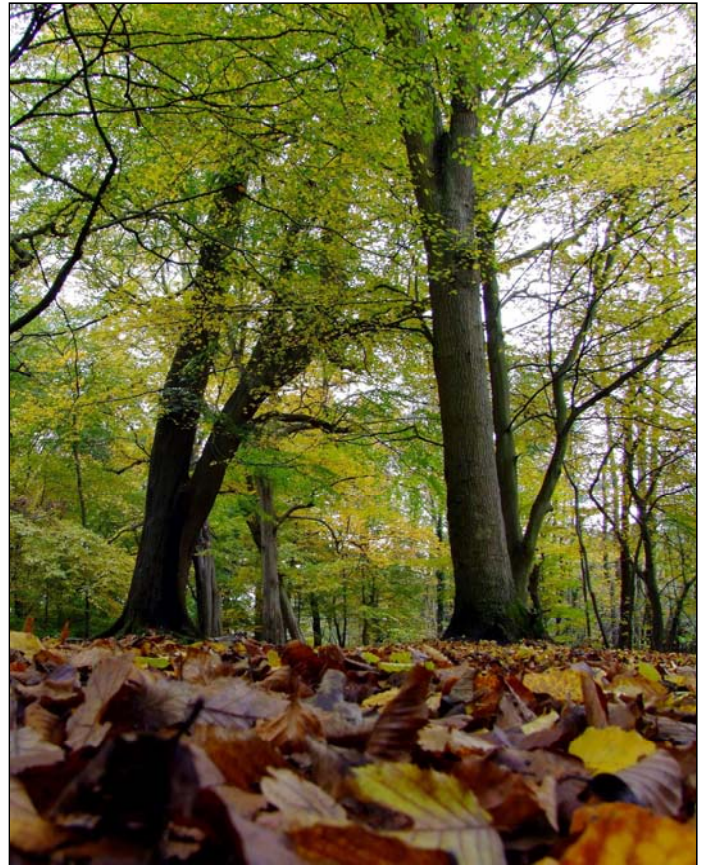
Hilary Ash Hon Conservation Officer



Tuesday 24th April, 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! No need to book.

Meet: Bromborough Rake Station, Bromborough Rake, SJ342819. Come by train - or park considerably in the nearby housing (no parking at station).



Thanks to Carl for these. If you have any images or stories about the reserve do let us know

