



Issue 29 – July 2009

# REED ALL ABOUT IT

## Newsletter for Forest Volunteers

### A Saturday Walk

What a fantastic environment the Millennium Park is at any time of the year but particularly now for the abundance of wild flowers and butterflies. On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July, armed with a flower guide and compact camera, my walk led me across the callow mounds and on to the path by Stewartby Lake.

There is a mass of common centaury with their pretty deep pink flowers that would not look out of place in the front of any garden border. There are big beds of yellow birdsfoot trefoil. The lesser spotted orchids are now dying off but the delicate agrimony are showing well. I was sharply reminded of the “dangers” of identifying wild flowers, having inadvertently been so preoccupied that I did not notice that I was lying on top of an ant hill. The mass of ants soon let me know that I was not welcome! Further on, walking the trails and meadows of the wooded area, I came across an “explosion” of bristly ox tongue and thistles well frequented by butterflies. In the short time that I was there I saw meadow browns, small skippers, common blues, large whites, a marbled white, a comma and a six-spot burnet moth, ( a daytime moth). I am sure that had I stayed longer and been patient I would have seen more species.

At this time of the year one has to tread carefully in these damper areas to avoid small frogs and toads.

Perhaps the highlight of the walk was spotting an occupied wasp nest, hanging in a bush about 5 feet from the ground, along one of the woodland trails parallel to the perimeter path near the rail track. Wasp nests are quite beautiful yet almost sinister and I attempted to get a photograph, although it was quite well hidden. I relied on the small zoom of my camera since I did not want to get too close. They can be pretty dangerous if disturbed. I reported the find to Reception.



In spring and at this time of the year we hardly notice wasps because they have access to plenty of sweet things and insect prey, only becoming a nuisance to people from about August onwards, when they head for fruit, gardens and cakes etc.

**Mike Green, Volunteer Walk Leader**

## Extended holiday in Australia

I had visited on 5 previous occasions since my daughter emigrated in 1998, but this was to be the 'biggie' .I'd finally retired at the end of 2008, so now had few time constraints. Time for some birding, I thought, and raided C's bookshelves for a field guide but no joy, so off to their favourite bookshop to buy one. Prices look awful in \$AU but a quick conversion at 2 to 1 and it's not so bad!

The regular garden visitors were fairly easy to identify, and I already knew the pterodactyl-looking ibises (which are almost more common than pigeons, I found) and you don't need an alarm when the kookaburras join the dawn chorus! Rainbow lorikeets and sulphur-crested cockatoos were also noisy old friends, so it was good to identify miners and honey eaters, similar to look at, but the blue heads marked out the honey eaters. Trips to Uluru and Kakadu showed me egrets, cranes and herons – quite easy to see, then brolgas, jabiru, kingfishers of several sizes and colour combinations, and the wonderful red-tailed black cockatoos. Eagles soaring on high were a common sight, too. Crocs, lily beds, brumbies, 'roos, wallabies and a buffalo were wonderful features of the trip, and the waterfalls and swims in the clear pools were so refreshing in the heat. I still have yet to see a koala in the wild....

Back on the Gold Coast plans were going ahead to move house, so opportunities to spot the smaller garden birds were restricted, not helped by the evergreen gums and the birds' sheer speed of flight! After the move up the mountain I was seeing all sorts of 'new' birds, satin bowerbirds, king parrots and black cockatoos being the outstanding sights (and sounds!). The smaller birds were as elusive as their lowland friends, but we figured out that we'd got silver eyes, fairy wrens and willy wagtails, with flocks of finches darting by. Even though it was winter by the time I came back the days were warm at 20 degrees and most trees are evergreens. I came to realise very quickly how my keenness for bird-watching was no match for my sheer ignorance about what I was seeing, so I hope that the more knowledgeable readers here will forgive the shortage of erudite details! My pleasure is in being out and about, binoculars to hand and frequent calls of 'What was that?' whilst attempting to keep the picture in my head till I could get to the field guide. You have no idea how many kinds of black and white birds are in that book – I was happy to identify the magpie and currawarra..... I think.....

**Sue Livens**

## We're Back!

What a busy few months we have had, out on loan to the Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership to check out some new walks, which will be published in the near future.

We think that we very nearly know every inch of the landscape between Fenny Stratford and Stewartby within walking distance of the railway line now; some of the walks we checked were in decent underfoot conditions but on others it was mud up to the boot tops. Weather-wise we only got caught in one rainstorm and that was at Ridgmont on the new footbridge for the bypass and there was nowhere to hide! The thing about doing this project was that it was in an area neither of us had been to before and we found it very interesting. We also met some very pleasant people who were interested in what we were doing and thought "what a great idea" and this gave us a chance to hand out "Lets Go" leaflets.

The walk through the woods between Bow Brickhill and Woburn Sands was the most challenging, the section from Bow Brickhill to the church in the woods being in places like an army assault course. The Ridgmont to Lidlington section has a steep incline but, once it is conquered, the view is splendid and well worth the drag up the hill.

The walk from Lidlington to Millbrook can have its distractions as it goes around the top end of the proving ground; on one trip the army were out testing their large vehicles, which added more time to the walk, with us having to be spectators!

Life is now back to normal or normal as it will be, and on with the Lets Go audits.

**The Haynes Two (AKA Robin Watkin and Terry Stevens)**

## **Confusion on a Sunday Morning!**

When I arrived at Reception on 7<sup>th</sup> April to lead the Sunday Stroll I was expecting the usual 1 or 2 people, perhaps half a dozen. I was rather taken aback to find the area thronging with 17 people, some of whom were apparently from the RSPB! Not being a bird expert (the average postage stamp could contain my knowledge about 10 times!), I nervously explained that I could only impart the most general of information on our resident avian life forms. Their somewhat baffled look led me to wonder if I was addressing the right group.

We set off around the Park, stopping occasionally to talk about the Park and the surrounding area in a way I have done dozens of times before. Everyone seemed very interested but very few questions about birds were forthcoming and those that were raised were at the level that even I could answer! Earwiggling on a conversation between 2 of the "RSPB" group about a dinner party led me to ask myself if I had got the wrong end of the stick. So I asked them which group they were from. "We're from RSVP Introductions," the lady said. "We're all widowed or divorced and RSVP organise numerous social events so we can meet others in the same situation."

No wonder they looked baffled!

## **Millbrook Station Fun Day**

The Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership (MVCRP) held another Fun Day on 16 May at the Station House, Millbrook Station and Marston Vale Volunteers were there to "fly the flag", encourage people to visit our Park and woodlands and, additionally, to encourage volunteering.

When I arrived in David and Jenny Thomas's back garden some time before the public were due I found David, Stephen Sleight (Community Rail Officer), Richard Crane (Chairman of Bedford/Bletchley Rail Users Association) and several others trying to erect a large gazebo in the teeth of a howling gale (well, a very strong breeze, if you insist!). We eventually subdued the gazebo and managed to peg it out. At this point it was agreed that any further shelters be erected on the other (sheltered) side of the garden, where I managed to grab a space for our display next to the face-painting lady!

Apart from us and the face-painter, there were various other attractions, including model railways, a band called Prop Idle (I think!) as well as David Thomas showing off the old Millbrook Crossing signal cabin, acquired when the Marston Vale line was resignalled and lovingly re-erected brick by brick in his garden.

At lunchtime I was relieved by another of our Volunteers, Robin Watkin. During the day an estimated 250 people visited the site, so it was a worthwhile effort to show off what the Forest can offer.

**Andy Brocklebank**

## **Volunteers' AGM**

The Volunteers' AGM was held in the Forest centre on 19th May. The usual formalities were dealt with fairly speedily, with Guy Lambourne (Chairman), Joan Ferguson (Secretary) and Andy Brocklebank (Treasurer) being re-elected for a further year and June Rogers, Terry Stevens, Lynne McEachran, Robin Watkin, Robin Morgan, Maggie Milne, John Buxton and Bob Hook being elected as committee members.

Following the formal meeting and a break for refreshments we were given a rare treat - a reading by Bedfordshire poet Frank Batt of some of his works. Whether poignant, nostalgic or downright funny, his poems were thoroughly entertaining and before we knew it his performance was over and it was time to go.

## **Fund Raiser at Cranfield**

Sue and I volunteered to man the Forest Volunteers' stall at the "Cranfield Past and Present" exhibition in the lower school. The exhibition, originally intended to be held in the village hall, had to be moved to the school following the closing of the hall on safety grounds. The village hall committee is now trying to raise a large sum of money to repair the building. We knew it would be a long day, and so we set up our allotted table. Helped by Marjory Cotton and her son Keith we soon found out that due to the rainstorm prior to our arrival the electricity was off. Just as well I had bought a flask of coffee. The hall was soon buzzing with people and Sue and I took it in turns to go round the exhibition. I was soon engrossed looking at the black and white photographs of school children, shops, a manor house, a windmill and old cottages, and many of the buildings which have now been demolished, some due to World War II bomb damage. The airfield was of course the target, and there were numerous accounts of what bomb fell where and what was damaged, including during the latter part of the war when a doodlebug (the notorious silent approach flying bomb) fell. I could go on and on about the various stall holders' exhibits, but for now I will tell you of the welcome we received by the villagers. We were soon recognized by our t-shirts with the embroidered Forest logo. Electricity now restored we were invited to help ourselves to a buffet lunch and numerous cups of tea. Everybody had something to say about Rectory Wood, and what an asset to the village it was. We met a local poet, a retired guardsman, (complete with bearskin), local historian, lacemakers, bellringers..I must stop, but leave you with two of the compliments the Forest received. A lady came to our stall and all she said repeatedly was "thank you". A man called Patrick told me that during these late evening he has taken to walking the dog in the wood and sitting on benches in the dusk to watch the barn owls gliding silently past, with the occasional lazy flap of their wings. These events that the volunteers attend are very rewarding and we feel that the effort we put in in Cranfield and beyond is appreciated.

## **A421 and Tree Planting**

The Highways Agency had a stall next to the Forest Volunteers. Their Public Liaison Officer was in attendance and we learned some very interesting facts, not only about the landscaping of the A421 but about other developments which the company had been involved in. Terminal 5 at Heathrow was a real eye opener. Part of their landscaping plan included importing 500 twenty-year-old oaks trees from Holland at £1000.00 each to make it look as though they had been at terminal 5 for ever. The 500 oaks soon dwindled to 450, in spite of watering each oak with 200 litres of water daily in the hot summer of 2006. The A421 is being landscaped by the same people and, following advice from FMV, they are using locally sourced whips from the Community Tree Trust, the nursery in Clophill that supplies the trees which we use at our winter planting events. Jan Bath from The Highways Agency was very helpful and agreed that we could use her information in RAAI.

**Maggie Milne**

## **Dawn Chorus Bird Walks**

On Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 30 people plus 5 of our expert bird watchers set out at 4.30 in the morning to do the dawn chorus walk. A good selection of species, 21 in all, were seen and heard. By the time they got back to the Forest Centre they were ready for the hearty English breakfast prepared by our catering staff. Thanks to the efforts of Bob Hook and his fellow bird experts and despite the early hour everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves. For those unable to contemplate the idea of getting out of bed in the middle of the night, a later walk was arranged for the following weekend. 13 people turned up for this walk and Volunteers Neil, Paul, Martin and Phil led the way. Four new bird watchers were among this group and two were so enthused that they have since returned to watch on their own.

**June Rogers**

## Diary Dates

**Alexis 01234 762614      Joan 01234 360178**

Sun. 26<sup>th</sup> July **Conservation Task**. Cutting carpark hedge for safety and access. Ring Alexis  
Tues 28<sup>th</sup> July **Volunteers Group meeting** 7.30 at Forest Centre. Ring Joan

Sun 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug. **Sunday Stroll** 10.15 for 10.30 start. Meet in Reception

Thurs 6<sup>th</sup> Aug. Kids Event. **Dragonfly walk and activity** 10-12.00. Bookable £1.00 per child.  
Volunteers needed. Ring Alexis

Sat 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug. **Conservation Task**. Removal of tree guards in Long Meadow and Lake View  
Wood along with wildflower plug planting. Ring Alexis

Sat 22<sup>nd</sup> Aug **Merlin the Magician . Open Air Theatre** 2.30 Adults £12 Children £8 Families  
£35(2+2) Book at Reception

Thurs 27<sup>th</sup> Aug. **Kids Craft session - Hibernation houses** Bookable sessions. £1.00 per  
child Ring Alexis.

Sat 29<sup>th</sup> Aug **Tribute Music night** prebooked tickets £19.50 Children £5 On the night £25 £5  
contact 01234 767037

Sun 6<sup>th</sup> Sept. **Sunday Stroll** 10.15 for 10.30 start. Meet in Reception

Sat & Sun 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> Sept. **Woodworks** Lots of Volunteers needed Contact Joan

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> Sept. **Conservation Task**. Cutting back trees and scrub on the wetland islands  
and adding gravel to some areas for nesting birds. Ring Alexis

Sun 4<sup>th</sup> October **Sunday Stroll** 10.15 for 10.30 start. Meet in Reception

Sat 17<sup>th</sup> Oct. **Conservation task** . Monitoring, fixing and building bird boxes for different birds  
around the site. Ring Alexis

Fri. 30<sup>th</sup> Oct. **Halloween Kids Crafts**. Bookable sessions £1.00 per child Volunteers needed.  
Ring Alexis

Sun. 1<sup>st</sup> Nov. **Sunday Stroll** 10.15 for 10.30 start. Meet in Reception

Sun 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov. **Conservation Task**. Hedgelaying around the childrens play area and sensory  
garden. Training and tools supplied. Ring Alexis

Sun 6<sup>th</sup> December **Treeplanting event. Details to be confirmed**

Sun. 6<sup>th</sup> Dec. **Sunday Stroll** 10.15 for 10.30 start. Meet in Reception

Sat. 12<sup>th</sup> Dec. **Conservation Task**. Cutting and burning hawthorn scrub to open up areas for  
wildflowers and butterflies. Ring Alexis

Tues 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec **Kids Craft session - Winter Magic decorations**. Bookable  
sessions £1.00 per child. Ring Alexis