



Issue 34 – December 2010

# REED ALL ABOUT IT

## Newsletter for Forest Volunteers

### Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, London

In October a group of volunteers took the opportunity to experience a great day out at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Centre in London [www.wwt.org.uk/london](http://www.wwt.org.uk/london)

It is located in Barnes, near the Thames and not far from the heart of the capital, however many don't even know of its existence, and when you enter the beautiful grounds you leave London behind.

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust was founded in 1948 by the late Sir Peter Scott, famous conservationist, and son of Robert Scott also known as "Scott of the Antarctic". His father's dying wish was that Peter should become interested in natural history. He far exceeded this wish and whilst Peter never got to see the London Wetlands before his death, the 42 hectare centre is said to be Europe's best urban wildlife site.

We took part in a free guided tour of the centre and were lucky enough to see birds from all over the world, including some rare species that we would otherwise never get to see. The centre provides a safe haven for the birds to live and breed, and protecting threatened wildlife such as the Hawaiian goose. The main lake and reed fringes during the year are home to flocks of shoveler, gadwall, wigeon, redshank, lapwing, bitterns, heron, kingfisher and many more. The centre is home to over 180 species of bird, and you can spot some of these



*Photo of Nene Geese*

from one of several hides around the centre, including one heated, and one with three storeys that provides amazing views of the wildlife and wetlands

During our day out, we also had the chance to stroll through some beautiful walkways and gardens, spot the cattle in the distance, enjoy refreshments at the centre's cafe and even browse round the centre's shop for souvenirs or presents. I noticed that there were also activities for schools and children to take part in.

Peter Scott's vision when he set up the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust was: "Bringing people and wildlife together for the benefit of both". We had a really

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enjoyable day, learning a lot and seeing wildlife for the first time. We would certainly recommend a visit to the London Centre, and we would like to say a special thank you to June Rogers for having made the arrangements for this great day out.

Susan Henderson, Volunteer

# Everything's electric

Ok perhaps not everything, but we are increasingly using all this (not so) new media to let people know what's going on. You'll see elsewhere on this page mention of email addresses and Facebook and I wanted to tell you about a

## Facebook - 51 friends!

Yes, we now have 51 friends—are you one of them? If not, perhaps you should be—it's easy and actually quite useful thanks to the efforts of Forest Volunteer Kirsty Edwards who set things up and keeps everything up to date. Facebook could be the way you hear about what's going on in the Forest and finding out what others are saying about it. Not much being said at the moment, but things could change. Why not give it a try?

couple of other things of a similar nature.

First I started last July to use a special type of html email system which means we can send fancy looking messages to very many people automatically. This is proving successful so far but these are still early days.

If you've already received some of these, I hope you find them useful—it would be very interesting to hear what you think. Do you open them, do you view the pictures, do you read them or do they get consigned to your 'read later' pile from where they migrate to your deleted items box? If you haven't seen one and we have your email address—let me know.

Second, the relatively new [www.marstonvale.org/news](http://www.marstonvale.org/news) page is something that went live in the spring. It's actually a blog, so if you have looked at it, you've joined the blogosphere (or something). My cool niece tells me that blogs have had their day, but anyway...

I'm keen to make this into a real 'news' page and the only way to do that is to keep it up to date

with real news. Do you know any? I've already included several of Don Morris' fabulous photographs, but if you know something interesting that is news, do tell me.

[Guy Lambourne](mailto:Guy.Lambourne@marstonvale.org) 01234 762608

## Conservation Tasks

Volunteers have continued working at conservation tasks both at the Country Park and at other locations, including the Grange Estate. Activities like these attract volunteers over a wide age range and a good time is had by all, with breaks for tea/coffee/biscuits and a packed lunch.

Since the last issue of RAAI such tasks as hay raking, dead hedging and the creation of hazel coppicing have taken place in the Vale. At the Grange Estate work has continued with thinning trees and more water management. Still to come (at the time of writing) is the task on 11 December, which involves cutting and burning hawthorn scrub.

## Do we have your email address?

I know we keep going on about it, but it's really useful to be able to contact volunteers quickly and cheaply by electronic means. So if you have one or perhaps you've recently changed to a new provider, please let us know—we promise we won't bombard you with unrelated information and won't try to sell you anything (other than the idea of getting involved in the Forest). Send a message to [volunteers@marstonvale.org](mailto:volunteers@marstonvale.org) Volunteers who have agreed to get RAAI by email have already saved us over £200.

## Bromham Mill Apple Day

We had been invited by the organisers to set up a stand at the recent Apple Day. This has been a regular event for several years, becoming a popular day out for all. Andy supplied a gazebo as the weather forecast was not too good. However, it turned out to be a sunny day and we had the stand set up in good time. The public started coming in at 11.00am, and we were delighted with the numbers who stopped to chat, ask questions and buy bird boxes, ladybird boxes and other goods we had taken along. We had the chance to look around the other stands and there was a good range of things to see, eat and admire. Apples galore in various guises, hog

roast, ferrets, birds of prey and even collies herding geese!

It was an excellent venue to show off the Forest Centre and one that we would like to attend in future years.

To this end we would invite any volunteers to come forward to help out – and not only for Bromham, but any of the several events we now attend, and many more that we would like to attend next summer. Please let Joan know if you are prepared to help out at one or more of these events.

[joan.ferguson@marstonvale.org](mailto:joan.ferguson@marstonvale.org) or 01234 763608

Sue Livens, Volunteer

## Bats set to live it up on Grange Farm

For various reasons, Grange Farm Estate is apparently almost devoid of bats so plans are underway to reverse the decline. The first step commenced on October 29th when several volunteers led by Darren & Steve ( FMV Ranger) met with Danny (Priory Park Ranger) and we sallied forth into the woods. Our instruction in the fine art of bat box installation was about to commence. Once on site, two teams were formed, Danny leading those of us on the bat boxes, whilst the others cleared undergrowth and made tea, well they would have if the tea kit had been on board .....whoops!!

The boxes (comprising the 'Kent Box' design) had already been manufactured by Forest Centre volunteers. The wood has to be clean and remain unpainted or untreated on the internal surfaces but the exterior may be painted with a matt finish. The Kent Bat Group developed the approved prototype that has proven to be very successful and utilised in several country park locations in Bedfordshire. If you are interested, precise details of the construction, materials & installation of bat boxes can be obtained from the [Bat Conservation Trust](#) web site. Bedford Priory Park web site also has comprehensive information.

Priory Park guidelines on bat box installation says:

*"There is no hard and fast rule, but it is best to put boxes facing south or south east. North facing boxes tend to be too cold. They need to be placed sufficiently high above the ground to allow the bats to swoop down on exit.*

*The box must be placed out of the reach of vandals and cats, but not so that you cannot check the box. Research by the North Bucks group suggests that putting bird*



*boxes next to bat boxes dissuades birds from roosting in a bat box as birds in the bird box will defend their territory."*

After some time spent tramping around in the undergrowth, laden with gear, looking for the right trees in appropriate locations (not too many low branches / the right diameter trunk / not too close to pathways etc) it seemed we were close to installing the first one – only 7 to go. By then, the cold had penetrated (due to lack of tea!) and interest in climbing the ladder to do the necessary fixing had declined somewhat. After encouraging words (or threats) from the team leader, the approaching darkness of early afternoon spurred us on to greater efforts. Eventually we had 4 boxes fixed in place to the satisfaction of the Ranger who, quite rightly, takes no second best, these boxes have to be just right or not at all.

After this, the final activity was how to describe in the job sheet exactly where the boxes are installed to permit future inspection & monitoring. This proved a bit tricky so, if on your travels you spot the odd disorientated person looking up at the trees you know what they will be looking for... but we know where they are....don't we ??

Nigel Davis, Volunteer

## Disorganised Walks!

At the AGM it was suggested that some people may want to do walks at times and in places that are not on the 'organised' programmes.

A list has been started of names and phone numbers of those who would like to participate. This will enable people to contact each other with a view to going walking in company on a free day or simply on the spur of the moment.

If you would like your name and number added please let Sue Livens know on the Volunteers' phone 01234-762604, or email [joan.ferguson@marstonvale.org](mailto:joan.ferguson@marstonvale.org)

## Tree Planting

Tree planting postponed until Valentine's Eve.

Due to the cold weather making the ground frozen, it was necessary to postpone tree planting on 5<sup>th</sup> December until 13<sup>th</sup> February 2011. Come and join us at Shocott Spring from 11.00 until 3.00. Same arrangements as before, we hope, but we'll confirm nearer the date.

## Wildlife Pictures

If you've been in the Forest Centre in recent months you should have noticed the beautiful wildlife photos on display. These photos were taken by Forest Volunteers, who take no payment for their efforts. There are still a few left, at £25 each – if you are stuck for a present, why not buy one of them and boost the Volunteers' funds, thus killing two birds with one stone (if you'll forgive the unfortunate metaphor!)

## Diary Dates—2010 / 2011

For more information call:

Steve 07745 786307, Joan 01234 360178, Anna Charles 01234 762614, Darren Woodward 01234 762603, Andy Lingard 01234 762617, Priory Park Rangers 01234 211182

Sat. 11 <sup>th</sup> Dec.	<b>Cutting and Burning scrub.</b>	Ring Anna for details
Mon 20 <sup>th</sup> Dec	<b>Kids Craft, Christmas Robins etc.</b>	Volunteers needed, ring Joan
Thurs 23 <sup>rd</sup> Dec	<b>Thinning Wooded Areas</b>	at Grange Estate Willington. Ring Darren. Warm clothes and packed lunch.
<b><i>Please note that the Centre is shut on Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day. The Car park will not be available but it is still possible to walk around the Park.</i></b>		
Sun 2 <sup>nd</sup> Jan.	<b>Sunday Stroll</b>	In the Millennium Country Park. Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. Approx 2 hours. £1.00 per person payable on the day
Sat 22 <sup>nd</sup> Jan	<b>Conservation task</b>	in the Millennium Park. Removing redundant fencing on the meadow. Ring Anna for details
Sun 6 <sup>th</sup> Feb	<b>Sunday Stroll</b>	in the Millennium Country Park. Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. Approx 2 hours. £1.00 per person payable on the day
Sun 13 <sup>th</sup> Feb.	<b>Tree planting at Shocott Spring</b>	11.00 – 3.00 Volunteers needed. Ring Joan
Tues. 15 <sup>th</sup> Feb.	<b>Willington Conservation</b>	Thinning, benches etc. Ring Darren for more info.
Sun 20 <sup>th</sup> Feb.	<b>Conservation</b>	in the Millennium Park – Willow weaving and gardening . Ring Anna for details.
Sun 6 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	<b>Sunday Stroll</b>	in the Millennium Country Park. Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. Approx 2 hours. £1.00 per person payable on the day
Tues. 15 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	<b>Willington Conservation</b>	Thinning, benches etc. Ring Darren for more info.
Sat 19 <sup>th</sup> Mar.	<b>Conservation</b>	in the Millennium Park. Fencing. Ring Anna for more details

## Snippets

### Bird Walk

Bob Hook, Neil and Tony organised an enjoyable bird walk in November. A good crowd turned up, including four newcomers and a baby.

Several species of birds were seen, with bearded tit and Cetti's warbler being among the rarest to be found in the Marston Vale.

The walk was rounded off by a social gathering and breakfast in the Lakeside Café.



### Fundraising Opportunity

We've found yet another way to get money off you, but it won't cost you a penny.

ClickNow is a community search engine which has recently been acquired by The Weather Lottery, our lottery organiser. The way it works is this: you set up ClickNow as your internet search page and every time you make a search, a small (well miniscule!) amount of money is credited to the good cause of your choice. Although the amount per transaction may be microscopic, ClickNow estimate that the average person searching the internet on a regular basis could generate up to £50 per year for their chosen cause. If all our

on-line Volunteers were to adopt Marston Vale Volunteers on ClickNow, we could earn £10,000 per year. Even allowing for extreme optimism, the earnings potential of this arrangement are considerable – and it costs us nothing.

Full details of the arrangements will be given in the next edition of RAAI, but if you wish to make a start before then, we should be on the [ClickNow](#) web site in the next few days.

### RAAI Copy Deadline

Please note that the copy deadline for the next issue of Reed All About It is **Monday 28 February 2011**. Any notes, thoughts, articles, pictures welcome—to Joan Ferguson at the Forest Centre by then please.