

REED ALL ABOUT IT

Newsletter for Forest Volunteers

Winter Scrub Bashing

Volunteers work for butterflies

On Sunday 10 January, twenty-three Volunteers turned up in snowy conditions for our annual post-Christmas bash. Steve Gascoigne organised us into groups to open up glades and cut down undergrowth in the nature reserve (supervised by several fat robins!). This enables sunlight to penetrate and the subsequent plant growth encourages bugs and butterflies to breed. In previous years we have seen rare butterflies such as dingy and grizzled skippers and green hairstreaks along this stretch of hedgerow so we'll be looking carefully next spring and summer. We stuttered and slipped as we dragged the cuttings to the fire and, once the tea had brewed, enjoyed a catch-up chat. The Trustees kindly provided a jacket potato lunch in the café bar, which was much appreciated after all the hard work in the cold air.



Volunteers enjoy the cold in January

Evening Guided Walks

June Rogers will start evening guided walks on Tuesdays and Fridays from 30 March. Walks will start from the Forest Centre car park at 6pm.

For further information contact June on 01234 767037

Volunteer Trustee

As readers will probably know, the Marston Vale Trust has on its board one trustee representing the Forest Volunteers. In the past, Sally Williams held the post and was replaced after two years by Joan Ferguson. Joan's two-year stint has now come to an end so the position has now been filled by Andy Brocklebank.

Andy has been a Volunteer since 2003 and is currently the Volunteers' treasurer, a position which he is retaining for the time being.

Tour Woburn Gardens

The long awaited tour of the Abbey gardens has at last been booked!

Saturday 22nd May, arrive at the car park 10.45.a.m. for 11.a.m. start. Please meet outside Duchess Gift Shop. The tour will last approx. 1.5-2 hours, and afterwards we can take advantage of the facilities in the Duchess's Tea Rooms.

The tour is limited to 12 people, so don't delay in phoning me on 01234 852920 for your place. There will be a charge of £6 per person payable on the day. Maggie Milne

GOT

Gardeners' Question Time

On 24th March we will host our own version of 'Gardeners' Question Time'. Alexis has charmed a panel of three plant experts to come and answer our questions – so start thinking up detailed questions either to ask on the night or to register in advance when you buy your tickets.

Tickets, which include tea/coffee/biscuits, will be available from Reception (01234 767037) at £6.00 each (£5 concessions) and will also be on sale at Poplars Nursery, Dobbies Garden Centre and Buckingham Nurseries & Garden Centre.

Spring Walk 24 April

Despite the recent inclement weather we have to remember that spring is not far away and what does spring mean? No, not prizes, the Volunteers' Walk! Now, as Volunteers Terry Stevens and Robin Watkin went to a lot of trouble surveying walks from Marston Vale railway stations for the Community Rail Partnership, we thought it would be good to make use of their expertise. So this year's walk, on Saturday, 24 April, will be from Ridgmont station to Lidlington, where we will retire to one of the village hostelrys for a spot of lunch.

We will start from Ridgmont at 1030 (the 09.33 train from Bedford arrives 09.58 and the 10.01 from Bletchley gets in at 10.18) and we hope to arrive in Lidlington about 12.30. After lunch there are trains at 14.15 towards Bletchley and 14.22 in the Bedford direction. We will supply you later with details of the pub, menus etc. In the meantime, put the date in your diary.

Tree Planting in Rectory Wood

On Sunday 6th December we set up our tents on Plunders Hill and boiled the kettles in preparation for the public tree planting event. It was a beautiful day with a strong south-west wind blowing which made erecting the tents a bit of a challenge.

The first bus from the Forest Centre delivered 14 volunteers to join the 7 already there setting up the tents. These were closely followed by 242 members of the public and the various tree adopters. Over a 1000 trees were planted and then the whole bus catching and tent struggling process was reversed.

Joan Ferguson



Yet another tree goes in at Rectory Wood

Take a Walk on the Wild Side

Maggie Howarth, who is a qualified medical herbalist, will be continuing her series of walks and talks. The "Roots" walk in the autumn was a great success, so we are offering "Shoots" on 7th March, "Flowers" on 16th May and "Fruits" on 12th September. Each event will last about 2½ hours, a 1½ hour walk to collect material,

followed by 1 hour indoors being shown what can be done with the material collected.

Places are limited to 20 so buy your ticket early from Reception. Tickets cost £5 each, half of which goes to the Forest of Marston Vale.

Want a sweatshirt? Read this!

I have been asked if I am ordering any more sweatshirts in the future. I would if I can get a minimum of 6 orders as this would enable us to get the discounted price.

If anybody is interested please ring me on 01234 852920 or 01234 762604 and leave a message. I still have a Forest Green size XL left from the last order if anybody would like it price £14.00. We have a choice of colours and the logo is embroidered which makes for easier care. I will require a £5 deposit.

Maggie Milne

The Grange Estate

As part of the Bedford River Valley Park works are steaming ahead to create a new wet woodland habitat at the Trust's site in Willington known locally as the Grange Estate. Trees have been felled around the edge of the site to increase light on to the woodland floor and also to improve conditions for the remaining trees. The edges of the woodlands have also been scalloped to create a more natural feel and native shrubby species will be planted to help warm up the edges.

The next stage of works will be carried out over the next couple of months and will involve the following:

- Excavating a new back channel from the River Great Ouse to provide a refuge for fish and formalising a new pedestrian-only path that will cross the channel via new culverts;
- Excavating new back channels of the Elstow Brook to encourage the flooding of the surrounding woodlands to recreate wet woodland habitat. Because of the amount of material that will be excavated the a section of the perimeter route will be closed from the beginning of February to March but the Sandy to Bedford cycleway and central route will be unaffected;
- A new 5ha woodland will be planted;
- The lowest point of the perimeter

cycleway will be raised above flood level.

BRVP volunteer tasks to be held on the 28 Jan, 16 Feb and 25 Feb.

A new BRVP website is currently being designed and should be up and running very soon. A public update meeting regarding BRVP is to be held at the Harpur Suite, Bedford on the 4 March at 13.00 by invitation (please register via website

www.bedfordrivervalleypark.org if you are interested) or at 18.00 for general public.

Darren Woodward
Project Officer
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Hedge Laying

In October, my son Andrew and I went to Rectory Wood to meet other Forest Volunteers and members of BTCV for an introduction to hedge laying. Some participants had come from as far away as Canterbury and Norwich. The event was led by BTCV, who provided training, tools and, most importantly, tea and biscuits. We enjoyed it so much, we did it again with the Forest Volunteers near Millbrook Station in November. For centuries, hedges were laid to create a strong barrier, to contain livestock. However, during the last century, barbed wire and other materials were introduced; simpler to erect, cheaper to maintain and easier to move to suit changing requirements. In fact the government paid grants for hedge removal up to the '70s. So hedge laying declined and so did the birds, insects and small mammals which lived in them. This had a knock-on effect on numbers of birds of prey and larger animals. Reintroducing hedge laying in conservation areas should reintroduce these habitats. At both sessions we were given a comprehensive safety talk on the

use of the tools and protective clothing. Hedge laying is only undertaken from September to March, when there's little risk to nesting birds and the sap is not rising (and when it's blowing a gale!) Hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, oak and ash are commonly found in hedgerows. The first task is to clear out the base of surplus material, brambles, dead wood, rubbish etc. and to trim back and remove side branches. Sometimes, some of this growth may be left on one side to present a greater deterrent to livestock crossing the boundary. Then we decide which trees should be laid and which cut out. This is done progressively as the work proceeds, since one tree may interfere with the laying of another and therefore has to be removed. It's very hands on and there is not always a single course of action.

Prior to laying the first trees, we need a supply of hazel stakes and binders. The stakes are sharpened so that when hammered into the ground they won't re-grow. Having chosen the tree to lay, it is sawn close to the ground, almost right

through, so that only sapwood and bark are left. This is called the pleacher. Then, with a billhook, the back of the tree is pared away, gradually slicing deeper into the cut. A bit like sharpening a pencil, but only from one side. This is so that when it is laid, the pleacher doesn't just break off. When ready, the tree is lowered to between 30 and 45 degrees. The tree is propped up on the stakes and is trimmed of excess branches. Because of the angle, the sap will rise up through the pleacher and produce new growth. Finally, when there are enough stakes, the binders are woven horizontally to provide strength and support. The hedge should last approximately 20-25 years. Andrew and I have enjoyed our introduction to hedge laying, which is definitely an art and not a science. Each hedge is different, containing trees and shrubs of numerous varieties and sizes. Each tree in a hedge is a challenge and we're looking forward to helping to tackle some more.

Graham White
Volunteer

Diary Dates—2010

For more information call:
Alexis 01234 762614
Joan 01234 360178
Darren Woodward 01234 762603
Andy Lingard 01234762617

January

Sunday 3rd Sunday Stroll. Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sun. 17th Coppicing trees in Millennium park. Alexis for more details
Thurs 28th Thinning and burning on the Grange Estate at Willington 9.30 to 3.00 . Darren for details
Sat 23rd Wildflower planting. in Millennium Country Park. Contact Alexis

February

Sun 7th Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Wed 10th Hedge laying in the Park. 10.15 start Ring Alexis. Wear warm old clothes and sturdy footwear and bring a packed lunch.
Tues 16th Bird and Bat box construction at Willington Village Hall. 10.00 to 3.00 Contact Darren
Friday 19th Kids Event "Fossils", Book early to avoid disappointment. 01234 767037
Sun 21st Tree planting at Willington. Ring Darren
Thurs 25th Bench construction/installation and thinning—Grange Estate Willington 9.30-3.00 Ring Darren
Sat 27th Willow weaving in the Millennium Park. Ring Alexis

March

Sun 7th Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sun 7th Walk with Herbalist "Shoots" Book early to avoid disappointment. 01234 767037
Sun 21st Sowing wildflower seeds on the wader scrapes. Ring Alexis for more details
Wed 24th Gardeners Question time at the Forest Centre. Book early 01234 767037

April

Sun 4th Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sat 17th Gardening in the Sensory Garden . Ring Alexis for details

May

Sun 2nd Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sun 16th Walk with Herbalist talking about **Flowers.** Book early to avoid disappointment. 01234 767037
Sat 22nd Woburn Abbey Garden Tour. Details 10.45 for 11.00 £6.00 Contact Maggie 01234 852920 to book
Sun 23rd Post and rail fencing . Ring Alexis for details

June

Sun 6th Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sat 19th Tools maintenance and BBQ. Ring Alexis for details

July

Sun 4th July Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sun. 18th July Otter Survey. Ring Alexis for details

August

Sun 1st Aug. Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sat. 21st Aug. Wetland island clearing. Ring Alexis for details.

September

Sat & Sun 4th & 5th Sept. WoodWorks!!
Sun 5th Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sun 12th Walk with Herbalist talking about **fruits.** Book early to avoid disappointment. 01234 767037
Sun. 19th Hay Raking in Little and Bramble meadows. Ring Alexis

October

Sun 3rd Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sat. 23rd Dead hedging around Stewartby Lake. Ring Alexis

November

Sun 7th Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sun 21st Creating Hazel coppice in wetlands. Ring Alexis.

December

Sun. 5th Sunday Stroll Meet in reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start
Sat. 11th Cutting and Burning scrub. Ring Alexis for details