



# REED ALL ABOUT IT

## Newsletter for Forest Volunteers

### Fencing Work at Stewartby

On a bright and sunny 19th March, a dozen or so volunteers and two rangers, Tony and Stephen, met up at the Universal Salvage entrance to Stewartby Lake to repair the post and rail fencing alongside the path and the picnic table nearby. A number of our younger volunteers were with us as well.

Following the normal tools safety briefing from Tony Croft, he showed us the stretch of fencing which needed repairing. We then split up into small groups to remove the rotten posts and rails.

When new posts were required, these were taken from the Ranger Pick-Up and hammered into the existing holes. Where new rails were required, these were cut to size, rebated and nailed to the posts.

In the meantime, our younger volunteers took on the task of pruning a willow and other vegetation down at the lakeside, under the watchful eye of

Stephen. In addition to this, they litter picked the area, recovering amongst other things an old TV set, dumped in the bushes. A bucket full of frogspawn was also collected for the pond. A steady hand and steady driving was required to stop it from slopping over the Ranger.

For me, a most gratifying part of being a volunteer is the camaraderie between all of the volunteers and the willingness to help each other learn new skills. Tea breaks and lunchtimes are always filled with laughter.

The work is sometimes physically demanding, but then there is no pressure to do any more than you want to and you get to gain new knowledge, skills and techniques. AND when I walk past that length of fence I can say "I had a hand in repairing that." Now that's satisfaction!

Graham White



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### Easter Egg Trail

This was my first volunteering event and I was a little anxious as to what would be expected of me! However, I needn't have worried. I helped to 'man' the desk in the reception area with Diane Hughes, aided and abetted by Anna Charles who had organised the event.

We had a steady flow of eager children (along with grown-ups) all wanting to take part. We collected their money, handed out quiz sheets and pencils and directed them to the start of the trail. We were a little anxious until they began to return with completed sheets – but no-one got lost. The most rewarding aspect was distributing the goodie bags to the excited children! Everyone it seemed had enjoyed the whole event - including me!

Jean Sargeant

Reed All About It is produced for Volunteers by Volunteers

Forest Volunteers work to further the aims of Marston Vale Trust (Registered charity No. 1069229), by freely offering their skills, time and enthusiasm  
For more information contact 01234 762608 Or email [volunteers@marstonvale.org](mailto:volunteers@marstonvale.org)

## Tree-planting at Shocott Spring with Hazeldene School

As I'm finding out, volunteering covers a variety of tasks and occasionally we are asked if we would like to assist with a public event, such as a public or corporate tree-planting session. It is important that the work of the trust is understood by all sectors of the community and that it reaches out to everyone for the future benefit of all concerned. Involving youngsters in the process of tree planting is a good way of awakening their interest in the environment, although not without a bit of assistance.

On this occasion it was to assist with children's tree-planting at Shocott Spring, one of the trust sites that is located not far from the Carlington hangars. This event should have been held earlier in the year but due to the cold winter it was cancelled until the weather and ground planting conditions improved somewhat. The fickle nature of the British climate being what it is, April was turning into a very warm month - the warmest since records began apparently.

The ground at the Shocott planting site is quite exposed to the prevailing winds and was drying up fast, therefore would soon be unsuitable for new saplings that need to become established in moist soil in order to survive prolonged dry conditions. The top soil was almost rock hard in places, so having unloaded all the spades for the children to use, Andy (Marston Centre) briefed us. "You'll probably have to get stuck in and dig the holes yourselves, make sure they are deep enough, if anyone's got spare drinking water pour it into the holes". Oh, it's OK for us to go thirsty then !!

Before long the young children duly arrived via the transport laid on for the occasion together with a bevy of teachers and parents. Andy gave his introductory talk, including how to plant a tree and the fitting of the tree guards (quite

tricky unless you have the knack) and the children scattered in all directions to do his bidding. The trees to be planted comprised a mixture of native species but unless you are knowledgeable on the subject, it's a bit tricky dealing with the many questions that children raise. "What sort is this one mister?" "How high will this tree grow; how many years will it take to grow ten feet tall?" "Will we be able to play under it soon?"

Apparently any lack of tree lore on the part of the volunteers went largely unnoticed as most children were just happy to get the young trees planted out and were enjoying the change from normal routine (don't we all). Everyone seemed to enjoy the activity and after an hour or so of busy planting it was time for the school to depart. The main issue now is will the newly planted saplings survive this extended period of dry conditions – only time will tell.

Nigel Davis

## Volunteers' AGM

Our AGM took place on 10<sup>th</sup> May in the Gallery at the Forest Centre. The Chairman made a point of thanking us for the wide variety of tasks that we fulfil and said that the organisation would crumble without our input.

The business part of the meeting was dispatched promptly with the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary being re-elected unopposed.

Barrie Mason then gave us the pleasure of his "Wildlife and Landscapes of East Anglia" talk. His portfolio of pictures has been built up over time and gives a comprehensive view of our part of the world.

This was followed by beer and sandwiches and lots and lots of chat!

Joan Ferguson

## In Search of the Green Man

Half term brought crowds to the Forest Centre to enjoy a week of sunshine. A big highlight was the crafty kids session that brought children together with some very soft mud and the great outdoors – a winning combination.

Activity leader, Jane Lambourne spent the day telling stories and riddles and encouraging everyone to create a green man in their imaginations and then in reality. Visit the Country Park very soon, and there's a chance you might catch sight of the resulting creations emerging from our trees.



## Hazel Coppice Farming at Gravenhurst

The e mail from Darren, Project Officer at BRVP sounded interesting. A day volunteering at Guy's place in Gravenhurst to do some 'hazel collection'. Apparently the hazel was needed to pin the new reed and grazing protection that will be installed at Dovecote Lake this year at the Grange Estate. The usual tea & biscuits included + Guy would be providing his own recipe home made cakes as well, who could turn down such an invitation!

After loading up all the necessary kit at Marston we were driven to Gravenhurst where, turning off the main road we bumped our way along barely discernable farm tracks, through gates and thickets until we reached our destination in the heart of the countryside - not a sound to be heard except for the birds. After an introductory talk by Guy on the history of the place, how the hazel coppice came into being and the various uses for hazel, we were detailed off on the various harvesting tasks & methods.

Hazel is a most amazingly versatile product and I can do no better than to mention a few uses:

- Twiggy, branched tops for pea sticks or herbaceous plant supports
- More or less straight sticks from 3'-12' - these get used for anything that people usually use bamboo for – mostly plant supports;
- Long, straight 8' stems for bean poles, arches, yurts, benders, dens.
- Hurdle uprights, hedge stakes and binders.
- Some of the best (straightest/un-branched) sticks can be split into very thin strips for use in basket making similar to an oak swill.
- Clothes props and walking sticks.

We were soon into the swing of it, cutting away at the hazel like old hands (well almost) to produce the raw materials for some of the uses listed above. At tea time, Guy produced a tin of the promised home made sticky flap jacks – delicious. It's times like this that volunteering really comes into its own.  
Nigel Davis

## Volunteers required for Picnic at Shocott Spring



On Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> July, volunteers are required for an afternoon event at Shocott Spring. Children and their parents from Cotton End and Shortstown schools will be attending, along with wood carver Ed Burnett who will be demonstrating his skills. The children have been involved in the Shocott Spring project for a couple of years, helping with planting, etc. and have also been doing work in the classroom. Ed will be translating their pictures and other ideas into wood carvings which will eventually be used as marker posts at 100m intervals around the perimeter path of the site.

Volunteers are required from 12.30 pm to help set up the tent, photographic exhibition, kids activities, etc and throughout the afternoon. A free shuttle bus will be available from Cotton End and the RAW Club in Shortstown.

Drinks and cakes will be available from 2-5pm.

If you'd like to join in the fun please contact Joan Ferguson



## Sunday Strolls

The Sunday strolls are held on the first Sunday each month. Led by Andy Brocklebank, they are open to any members of the public. Sometimes no one turns up, and on other occasions there may be as many as 8 people. Dogs are welcomed by Demi and Fran!

The route is fixed because at certain points we stop while Andy recounts a particular piece of the history of the Park.

Mostly the walkers are from Bedfordshire and they hear

about the walk in a variety of ways. For some it is their first experience of coming to the Park, and they all leave with the intention of coming back to explore further.

We meet at 10.15 for a 10.30 start and the walk takes about 2 hours. It is probably about 3 miles, but with the stops it is not a hard slog, is mostly on a firm surface and very little gradient.

We would love to see any volunteers who enjoy walking to come and join in. We ask £1 from members of the public, but it is free to volunteers!

Sue Livens

## Pyramidal Orchid

Every year about this time I never cease to be surprised by the variety of wild flowers and butterflies that appear in the Park, especially species that I personally have not noticed in previous years. This year's very pleasant surprise was a lone Pyramidal Orchid with two blooms growing on a bank by the bridle path near Millbrook station. I was leading our usual Wednesday walk when the orchid was noticed by one of the new walkers.

There are common Spotted Orchids by Stewartby Lake and I am told Bee Orchids near Millbrook station but this is the first time that I have seen the beautiful purple Pyramidal Orchid at this location; see photograph.



This year so far there seems to be an abundance of some species of butterflies: Orange Tip, Holly Blue, Meadow Brown and the very pretty red and dark grey, (almost black), Cinnabar moth, (a day flying moth), on the Southern edge of the park. All of which in the cloudy, breezy weather defy photography, at least with my camera. I did manage a picture of the moth which took flight just as I pressed the button. It's better to photograph butterflies on a sunny calm day when they are more likely to stay put on a plant a bit longer. Ah well roll on Summer!

Mike Green

## Hedge Laying and Dead Hedging around the Forest Centre

Over the last few Autumn & Winter months a team of volunteers led mostly by Stephen (Asst Ranger - Marston Centre) have been busily engaged in the above tasks. These have been taking place in Station Road between Millbrook and Marston Moretaine and alongside the northern section of the circular path between Stewartby Lake and the brook. Hedge laying is an ancient skill with many regional 'styles', e.g. Midland and Derbyshire, and done properly it is a most effective and attractive form of hedge management, lasting for many years.

The work is very labour intensive and for most of us it has been a steep learning curve to take on board new skills. Hedge laying, for instance, can be employed where there is suitable and sufficient growth in an existing hedge to enable the branches to be laid, whereas in the absence of such growth, 'dead hedging' has to be employed to fill a gap. It sounds easy, but the reality is that it is tough, demanding work, utilising a variety of very sharp hand tools, and other implements, so you have to keep your wits about you at all times.

For a start, dense growth (mainly Hawthorn in this case) has to be cut back and removed along with any dead wood from previous hedge-laying, often accumulated over many years, so that the branches to be laid can be identified and those unnecessary to the job, removed. This is a tricky decision and one where experience really counts. You find unexpected things during this process.....very recently one of our volunteers (Tony) discovered a vole had made a home in an empty Vodka bottle dumped into the hedge, apparently none the worse for the experience – the vole that is, not Tony.

Thick stakes, often Hawthorn or Hazel (or whatever is suitable & available) are then pointed up and hammered in to the ground, along the line of the hedge, at intervals of about 1 metre. The purpose of these is either to support the branches to be laid, or, where no branches exist, to enable green wood such as Willow, Birch or Hazel to be interwoven between them. The stakes have to be well hammered in - this finds all the muscles you never thought you had.

The actual cutting of the branches ready for laying requires careful and skilful use of the bill hook machete to cut & slice through the upright stems to leave a thin section. It is not easy to do. This is what Wikipedia has to say on the matter:

*"The theory behind laying a hedge is easy; the practice is much harder - requiring skill and experience. The aim is to reduce the thickness of the upright stems of the hedge-row trees by cutting away the wood on one side of the stem and in line with the course of the hedge. This being done, each remaining stem is then laid down towards the horizontal, along the length of the hedge."*

*A stem which has been (or is to be) laid down in this manner is known as a "pleacher". A section of [bark](#) and some [sapwood](#) must be left connecting a pleacher to its roots in order to keep the pleacher alive - knowing how much is one part of the art of hedge laying. It is also essential that pleachers are not laid down completely horizontal as some upward slant is required to ensure the sap will still rise properly through the plant - judging and achieving the required degree of upward slant is again a matter of skill."*

After all this, there is still the binding or whipping to be done using suitable green wood as available. This is another skill to be acquired as it essentially binds everything together, strengthening the hedge and making the finished job look professional and attractive.

Needless to say, the overall task has some similarity to painting the Forth Road Bridge, but it is pleasing to step back after a hard day and view the finished hedge. With practice and under Steve's expert tutelage we are gradually improving and honing our skills so that the finished job is something that we volunteers and Marston can be proud of.

Nigel Davis

## Volunteers' Spring Walk

In what has now become a regular fixture in the Volunteers' social calendar, 17 stalwarts met up on 16<sup>th</sup> April for a walk around Bedford's Green Gateway. With the kind co-operation of Lee and Lianne of the Chequers at Wootton Hall End, we parked our cars there and, after ordering lunch and with a few words from Joan about where we were going, we set off. The weather was very pleasant, warm but with a light breeze to stop us overheating.

The first part involved us walking to Kempston Wood, an ancient woodland owned by the Woodland Trust. This was beautiful, with bluebells in full bloom and with lesser celandine and wood anemone adding a contrasting splash of yellow. At the top of the wood there is an interesting view of Bedford (or there would be, were it not for the haze!) and Maggie was convinced that there was a hawk sitting on a dead tree across the field. It turned out to be a hitherto unknown species, the Bedfordshire wood falcon. Its main

identifying feature is that it never moves!

We then moved on to Kempston Wood End where we entered Buttons Ramsey, adjacent to the Cross Keys pub. Walking through Buttons Ramsey, The Kill, Ridgeway Wood and Wiles Wood we took particular note of the play trail and some members saw parts of the Forest of Marston Vale which they had previously only heard about.

The final leg of the walk involved following old-established bridal ways and footpaths through Wootton – the village has a surprising amount of open space behind the houses. And, amazingly, the last path terminated at the back door of the Chequers! So we ended our walk there with an excellent lunch and a glass of something and were joined by Margaret and Sue, who had been unable to join the walk but didn't want to miss out on the socialising.

We're always looking for new walks, so if you have an idea for one, let us know.

Andy Broklebank

tered access to the external structure. This took a while, but before long the real work of rubbing down the woodwork got under way. For this we had the assistance of a heavy industrial type 'belt sander'. This machine had a mind of its own and if you didn't watch it would soon be running away with the operator. It also had a voracious appetite for replacement belts, which is why we had to ensure all the old nail heads were driven into the woodwork beforehand – it's amazing how many were proud of the surface just waiting to 'catch' the belt and rip it to shreds. Looks like we used the entire belt budget for the year in one operation.....oops!

Susan said she would like to try the belt sanding as it looked 'cool'. Yes, it was cool all right, she switched on and disappeared at a rate of knots as the thing took her for walkies. Soon, however, her determination to master the beast won through and work continued apace. The specified job was almost completed by close of play, but boy is it nice when you stop!

### The Repair Day

Volunteer Terry had done an excellent job of rubbing down the wooden handrails to the small hide walkway and used his 'new' knife to good effect digging out some areas of rotten timber along the rail. In fact it was so good that Sven decided repairs were necessary. "There's 12ft of new handrail here, posts are 5ft apart, 2 areas to replace, you should have plenty to spare." Only one thing Sven, the posts are 6ft apart.....oh dear. A bit of gerryman-dering with the existing rails and we managed to make up the difference so no-one would know ....magic.

### The Painting Day

Loads of tins of forest green paint – very nice shade and brushes galore....definitely need the overalls today. Weather is warm and good for paint drying so all systems are go. For some reason we use more paint on the small hide than we do on the larger one but it looks very nice, in fact both hides look splendid in their new livery. All in all we think this has been a good project, hard work, definitely not a walk in the park, but worth all the effort – hopefully all the users will agree.

Nigel Davis



## Rubbing Down & Painting Bird Hides

When the bird nesting season starts is the time when other 'practical' tasks can be undertaken on the estate, such as fence and step repair and re-painting bird hides. Sven (Marston Centre Ranger) being a master of the casual understatement mentioned just such a thing as we were packing up one day in late April. "Anyone fancy a spot of work on the bird hides in May? They just need rubbing down and I'd like to re-paint them in forest green, if you're interested." He always makes work sound like a walk in the park.

### The Rubbing Down Day

The appointed day for the rubbing down arrived, nice and warm, it would be! There are two hides at Marston located on the wetlands & overlooking the lake. After the mandatory H&S talk some of us were detailed off to rub down the small hide whilst the bulk of the team tackled the larger hide.

First however, it was necessary to cut and trim away all the undergrowth that had sprung up all around the hides so we could gain unfet-

# Diary Dates

For more information call:

Stephen 01234 762610 , Joan 01234 360178, Anna Charles 01234 762614,  
Darren Woodward 01234 762603, Andy Lingard 01234 762617

Sun 3 <sup>rd</sup> July	<b>Sunday Stroll</b> in Millenium Country Park.	Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. 1½-2 hours £1.00 per person payable on the day
Sat.16th July	<b>Event at Shocott Spring</b>	2-5pm Volunteers required from 12:30 to help set up
Sun 17 <sup>th</sup> July	<b>Meet the Ranger Walk.</b>	10.00am Need to book on 01234 767037
Sat 23 <sup>rd</sup> July	<b>Conservation Task.</b>	Ring Anna or Stephen
Fri 29 <sup>th</sup> July	<b>Kids Craft Event</b>	Kite making and flying. Volunteers needed. Ring Joan
Sun 7 <sup>th</sup> August	<b>Sunday Stroll</b> in Millenium Country Park	Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. 1½-2 hours £1.00 per person payable on the day.
Mon 8 <sup>th</sup> August	<b>Kids Craft Event</b>	Make a Minibeast. Volunteers needed. Ring Joan
Fri 19 <sup>th</sup> August	<b>Kids Event</b>	Chasing Dragons. Volunteers needed. Ring Joan
Sun 21 <sup>st</sup> August	<b>Conservation Task</b>	Ring Anna or Stephen
<b>Fri 2<sup>nd</sup> September</b>	<b>Wood Works</b>	<b>Preparation Work . Ring Joan</b>
<b>Sat &amp; Sun 3<sup>rd</sup> &amp; 4<sup>th</sup> September</b>	<b>Wood Works</b>	<b>Please note in your diary! Volunteers needed. Ring Joan.</b>
Sun 4 <sup>th</sup> September	<b>Sunday Stroll</b> in Millenium Country Park	Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. 1½-2 hours £1.00 per person payable on the day
<b>Mon 5<sup>th</sup> September</b>	<b>Wood Works</b>	<b>Clearing up. Ring Joan</b>
Sat 10 <sup>th</sup> September	<b>Bird Walk</b>	Autumn Migrants. Book on 01234 767037
Sun 2nd October	<b>Sunday Stroll</b> in Millenium Country Park	Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. 1½-2 hours £1.00 per person payable on the day
Sun 16 <sup>th</sup> October	<b>Meet the Ranger Walk</b>	10.00am start Need to book on 01234 767037
Sun 23 <sup>rd</sup> October	<b>Conservation Task</b>	Ring Anna or Stephen

## Snippets

### Volunteers' Hours

We would like to remind you all of the importance of recording the hours you work. Apart from the obvious of seeing how much we do for our own benefit, the number of Volunteer hours worked is often needed to support grant applications and funding bids by us as well as by the Marston Vale Trust. So please tell us what you are doing, by recording it on the form which we can supply, or by emailing it to [volunteers@marstonvale.org](mailto:volunteers@marstonvale.org) or, if you have to, by writing it on the back of a fag packet! Any way you like, as long as you tell us!

### Spring Bingo

I have been a volunteer since September 2009 and really enjoy helping Jane with the Children's Craft Activities in the School Holidays.

On the 11th April, the activity was Spring Bingo. First of all, the children, with the help of their parents and grandparents, made markers out of plasticine, ready to play Spring Bingo later. Instead of having numbers on the Bingo Cards, there were pictures of baby animals, birds, insects and flowers. When everyone was ready, Jane called out the pictures on the cards. The children were very excited, hoping they would fill their card first.

I look forward to helping with future activities.

Pam Richardson

### Volunteers' Expenses

We'd like to remind you that there is a small fund available to cover Volunteers' travelling expenses. So if you are put off from volunteering due to the cost of getting there, please contact Joan or Andy and we will arrange the refund of any reasonable expenses.

### RAAI Copy Deadline

Please note that the copy deadline for the next issue of Reed All About It is Monday 5th September 2011.

Any notes, thoughts, articles, pictures welcome—to Joan Ferguson at the Forest Centre.