



the Forest of
Marston Vale

REED ALL ABOUT IT

Newsletter for Forest Volunteers

Hurray for Grey!

The Dawn Chorus walk on 2nd May was an excellent example of the triumph of optimism over disappointment; glass-half-fullers were victorious. It's not something I'd like to do every day - hauling myself out of bed at 3am after a restless four hours slumber, wondering if the alarm would succeed in waking me. But once in a while, being up with the lark is a thrill.

Getting close to wild birds at this hour is rather dependent on the weather. Too cold, too windy or too wet and many species just aren't that enthusiastic. And who can blame them? This morning's pre-dawn was damp, pierced by a cold north-easterly wind and always threatened by more heavy showers. Our usual starting point in amongst dense hawthorn scrub to the south of Stewartby Lake yielded blackbirds, song thrushes, wrens and eventually chaffinch and chiff-chaff. Finally and thankfully a Cetti's warbler opened up in full trumpeting voice. Still, a poor show for what is usually a crepuscular cacophony. There was a garden warbler, which as ever, I missed; and a question arose that beat the birders - "why is a garden warbler so named?" More of that later.

Here's a thing that proved what a dismal morning it was. We didn't make it to the edge of Stewartby Lake to brave the wind. Even the treat of roseate tern that Martin mentioned several times failed to make that diversion appealing. So a sprint through the meadows and scrub - usually the place to get to grips with grasshopper warbler, whitethroat and lesser whitethroat,

blackcap, willow warbler... today somewhere to get beyond into the relative warmth of a bird hide.

There on the Pilling Lake was a bird worthy of note and worth the cold and wet! I've never seen Martin so agitated. No further mention of roseate terns was to be heard. Here's where being in knowledgeable company really counts. I could have sat in the nice warm hide for several hours, days even and never seen the [grey plover](#) that stood, looking rather cold, on the tip of one of the lake's many islands. If by some fluke I had identified this minutely lighter speck as a bird, there is no possibility that I could have made an accurate diagnosis. Martin however, was on it, telescope focused and jiggling about before I'd got inside. And here's another thing. For me, the presence of a grey plover had no context; I couldn't have said this was the first in the Country Park for 12 years, or that a trip to the North Norfolk coast would yield lots of them. I wouldn't have thought (or known how) to get the news out on the wires (with the swallows?), but thanks to our volunteer leaders, I do now. The reason for Martin's particular excitement was that this was his first GP at the Park and he got some good images of it. [Click here](#) to take a look at Martin's blockbuster grey plover at Vimeo - still no idea how he got this.

A rather quick hike back to the Centre was interrupted by a brilliant view of a cuckoo and another Cetti's. One sedge warbler managed a half-hearted warble but no reed warbler provided a song for comparison.

Issue 40 - June 2012



Grey Plover

Thanks to all our volunteer leaders who make this and all the other bird walks at the Country Park possible - Bob, Neil, Paul, Rolf, Martin, Tony - we couldn't do this without you.

Footnote: so why is the [garden warbler](#) so-named? Well I did try to find out (if only to get one over on Bob!) Not much success though. Here's a piece from *Birds Britannica* (Mark Cocker, Richard Mabey; Chatto & Windus 2005). "The bird's name is singularly unhelpful as an identification aid because only the largest and most rambling gardens include the kind of thick shrubbery and woodland it requires. The garden association may have been obvious in mainland Europe, where the bird has a reputation for raiding fruit trees. In Portugal it is known as the *felosa-das-figuieras*, 'fig-warbler', while in Italy it is called the *beccafico*, 'fig-pecker'. The French call the bird *La fauvette des jardins* - literally garden warbler. So not really much help - interesting none-the-less.

Guy Lambourne

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

Wildlife Bioblitz!

Noon Saturday 23rd June until
noon Sunday 24th June 2012

Join the Marston Vale Trust and the Bedfordshire Natural History Society for 24 hours of wildlife fun in the Millennium Country Park.

Local experts will be recording everything that flies, jumps, swims, crawls, hops, slithers and scurries in this mass wildlife recording day.

There will be a whole host of guided walks in which to get involved. But note that the evening moth trapping is strictly advance booking only.

Saturday

1pm	Dragonflies and damselflies
2.30pm	Bumblebees
2.30pm	Butterflies
4pm	Birds
9.30pm	Moth trapping

Sunday

8am	Bird ringing
10am	Hoverflies

All walks are £2 per adult and £1 per child

For more information contact Anna Charles on tel. 01234 762614 or anna.charles@marstonvale.org.

Marston Workshop – is the ball rolling?

Plans are afoot, so rumour has it, to investigate the possibility of providing a new, bespoke workshop for use by the Volunteers and Rangers at the Millennium Country Park.

The existing arrangement is extremely limited both in space and facilities, comprising no more than part of a double garage attached to one end of the Forest Centre. This has to serve a variety of purposes, including, as you would expect, the housing of agricultural plant & equipment, not much space left over for workshop activities - hardly big enough to swing a cat as we like to say.

It seems that when the Centre was on the drawing board little thought was given to the wider construction & main-

tenance activities that would be necessary once the park began to develop into what it is today. It's amazing how much work is required just to keep things ticking over. If done in house by the Rangers and volunteers it reduces expenditure and the money saved can be put to other purposes. There are also a variety of minor construction tasks, so essential to the ongoing function of the various park areas and woodlands including benches, signboards and habitat boxes through to the repair of hides and fences and other installations.

Last Summer, during a tea break and in one of our more serious discussions, the subject came up of how the situation could be improved so that more tasks could be done in-house. Seemed like 'pie in the sky' stuff but the idea began to take shape and we wondered how we could start the ball rolling. This would be a largish project, albeit in our view a necessary one, probably requiring external finance. The funds that Marston has at its disposal are very limited and most are earmarked for tree-planting & related projects, well into the future.

Where are we now? Well, after consultations with various parties, a scoping report has been prepared to make the case for improved facilities and setting out some basic ideas of what we might need. This initial report has been accepted in principle by the Centre management and Trustees who are 100% behind the idea. We are now awaiting a report from a friendly architect, on a nil cost basis, that will put some flesh on the bones for us on the technical aspects. When this is to hand the optimum way forward will be considered. Achieving sufficient financial backing will be a big task and the project may have to be phased over some time. Whatever happens, careful planning is required to avoid the pitfalls that can lurk in any construction project. There are quite a few obstacles to overcome on what looks to be the stony road to success but we think the improvement will be worth it and better position the Centre to service the forest environment it is creating.

Nigel Davis (Trustee)

Elm Project Update

The elm project is up and running! Having submitted an application for funding to Biffa Small Grants Programme under the category 'Rebuilding Biodiversity', the project has assumed the name 'Returning Elm trees to the Forest' - not the best I know, but 6 words was all I had to play with. Anyway, the application will be considered at Biffa's meeting in July, and we'll take it from there. Happily, the Forest Volunteers are making a significant contribution in 'match funding' for the project and, if the bid proves unsuccessful, will tip in the rest as well. This was very important because the elm plugs themselves are shipped out of the plant nursery as spring gets underway, because the cells themselves are just not big enough to accommodate the roots of the growing plants. So in effect we just had to go for it and buy some, and 200 healthy looking seedlings duly arrived at the Forest Centre on Tuesday May 29th.

The trees were bigger than I expected (20cm or so) having put on some good fresh growth already this year. More important than to get them potted on; which was duly done a few days later by the regular Thursday volunteer crew. 0.75L pots were used, leftovers from the acorn planting activity at the public tree planting event at Top Farm last winter, so that worked out quite nicely as well. There are 5 elm varieties, and each pot has been labelled to allow us to begin the monitoring progress as they grow, both now and when they are planted out in the forest in two winter's time. Volunteers will now help to make sure the plants are watered and well looked after over this summer.



Caged primate Nigel helping to set out the elm seedlings after potting on by forest volunteers.

Further information from Andy Lingard
- 01234762617 e-mail

AGM Synopsis

The AGM was held on 8th May and was attended by 19 volunteers along with Nick Webb and Guy Lambourne. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and the only item arising was regarding Shocott Spring where the survival rate of the trees planted during the exceptionally dry spring was better than expected and discussions are ongoing regarding the access path from Shortstown.

Guy's Chairman's Report comprised a series of photos detailing all the activities during the year. Looking forward, there are numerous exciting opportunities including the Elm Project, the BRVP Project, new hides and scrapes in the wetlands, a calendar for 2013 and the campaign for a new workshop.

Guy highlighted the fact that in 2010, volunteers put in 7000 hours. In 2011, this had risen to 8339 hours and, in the first 4 months of this year they had already done 2550 hours. He thanked us for our support and enthusiasm and urged us to keep it going. Nick Webb, our new CEO, is very impressed with the level of support in all areas by the volunteers.

Andy Brocklebank reported that the finances were healthy and our funds are used to support the work of the Trust. The accounts were approved

by the meeting.

Nigel Davis presented his Trustee's Report. The Trust is looking for new opportunities to raise money including a new servery for drinks and snacks. Money is being saved by the photovoltaic cells on the roof and security has been improved following the recent break-in. Debbie Hassall had replaced Fiona Chapman as Chairman of the Board. Trustees thanked the volunteers for all their hard work and support.

The current officers (Chairman – Guy Lambourne, Treasurer – Andy Brocklebank and Secretary – Joan Ferguson) were unanimously re-elected.

The meeting concluded with a walk round the wetlands in the sunshine, followed by drinks and sandwiches provided by the Trust.

Wands in the Willow

The weather may have been very wet and wild for June, but this didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the kids who came to the workshops. Instead of playing Tree Bingo outside, the trees (or samples of them!) came indoors and the children had to match up the various leaves on their bingo card as Jane described the characteristics of each tree sample. The chil-

dren were encouraged to shout "Tree" when they got a match and "Bingo" when their card was complete.

The kids were then invited to the storytelling area where Jane held them spellbound with her story about the enormous willow tree, the woodland animals and the magic happenings that went on deep inside the tree trunk. One of the treasures to be found inside the tree was a Wishing Wand and that's what the kids then had to make. Thin willow twigs were gently bent to form a star shape and then tied in place with lengths of coloured wool and decorated with beads and feathers. The children's wishes were then transferred onto "leaves" and stuck onto Jane's Wishing Willow. We had wishes ranging from wanting to fly to wanting a unicorn. I think that might take more than one wave of the Wishing Wand!

This was, without doubt, the most difficult craft activity that I have undertaken! One little boy, who was clearly not satisfied with my efforts, wanted the "real lady" to help him!! Needless to say, Jane soon made him a perfect wand.

Diane, Dave and I had a great time helping over 50 children during the course of the day. Let's hope summer has come in time for pond dipping in July.
Jean Sargeant

Woodworks Attractions 2012

There will be something for everyone at this year's WoodWorks festival. From Robin's Reach archery to Woodland Ways bushcraft and survival demos. Other "have a go" opportunities will include willow weaving, pottery, ferret racing, pyrography, Kidz Painting Party, craft activities and Battlefield Live!

If you prefer watching someone else doing the work, there will be a sheep-dog demonstration, horse logging,



chain saw art, a falconry display, story-telling and the Vikings will be back!

There will also be lots of shopping opportunities, great food and real ale. On the music front, we are genuinely thrilled to have two of English music's living legends playing at this year's festival. Martin Carthy has been one of folk music's greatest innovators, one of its best loved, most enthusiastic and, at times, most quietly controversial of figures. His skill, stage presence and natural charm have won him many admirers, not only from within the folk scene, but also far beyond it. And Dave Swarbrick hardly needs any introduction to seasoned folkies and newcomers to this music alike.

"Swarbrick is an absolute revelation, as instinctively sympathetic and wick-edly inspirational as he ever was. It's like they were a couple of twenty somethings again. To hear Swarb bowing with such soul and tenderness and dynamism too is an unconditional joy." fRoots music magazine.

This fantastic duo will be top of the bill on Sunday 2 September. But you may need to come both days to make sure you don't miss anything! One of last year's highlights, Musa M'boob with his band Xam Xam, who came on in the rain and cleared the skies to conclude in bright sunshine, will be back on Saturday afternoon. Musa M'boob is from The Gambia in West Africa and his music draws heavily on these roots but with unmistakable European and American influences – unmissable.

Bedfordshire's own and Woodworks! firm favourites, The Half Moon Drum Circle round off Saturday, along with Edinburgh based band The Last Battle. Sunday kicks off with two acts new to Woodworks! – local band Ragged Staff followed by Sarah Mc Quaid, a solo artist, singer-songwriter. North-country band Tyne, will set the scene for Martin Carthy and Dave Swarbrick. I think we are in for another great weekend – do come along and join in the fun!

Diary Dates

For more information call:

Stephen 07745 786307, Joan 01234 360178, Anna Charles 01234 762614,

Darren Woodward 01234 762603, Andy Lingard 01234 762617

Sun. 17 th Jun	Conservation Task	Tools maintenance and BBQ. Ring Anna or Stephen.
Sat. 23 rd Jun/ Sun. 24 th Jun	Wildlife Bioblitz	Noon till noon. All walks £2 per adult, £1 per child. For more info contact Anna Charles.
Sun. 1 st Jul	Sunday Stroll in Millennium Country Park	Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. 1½-2 hours. £1.00 per person payable on the day.
Sat. 21 st Jul	Conservation Task	Ragwort pulling. Ring Anna or Stephen.
Thu. 26 th Jul	Kids Event – Pond Dipping and Design	Inside and out. A chance to find out who lives in the pond. Pond dipping, then make your own pond on a plate! Need to book on 01234 767037.
Thu. 2 nd Aug	Kids Event – Sunshine and Flower Power	Create a sunflower collage and make your own sun clock. Join our sundial challenge – can we work out the time without a watch? Need to book on 01234 767037.
Sun. 5 th Aug	Sunday Stroll in Millennium Country Park	Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. 1½-2 hours. £1.00 per person payable on the day.
Mon. 6 th Aug	Kids Event – A Story Safari	Come and explore the Park, solve riddles and hear stories of the animals that live here. Need to book on 01234 767037.
Mon. 13 th Aug	Kids Event – Buzzing About!	Games, activities, quizzes and crafts – themed on bees. Need to book on 01234 767037.
Sun. 19 th Aug	Conservation Task	Hay meadow raking. Ring Anna or Stephen.
Fri. 31 st Aug	Woodworks Set Up	Setting up tents and getting stuff in the right place from 10am
Sat/Sun 1 st /2 nd Sep	Woodworks!	11am to 5pm each day. See separate article for details.
Sun. 2 nd Sep	Sunday Stroll in Millennium Country Park	Meet in Reception at 10.15 for 10.30 start. 1½-2 hours. £1.00 per person payable on the day.
Mon. 3 rd Sep	Woodworks Clear Up	Clear up and put away from 9.30am

Snippets

Have you bought your Marston Vale trolley token yet? This is the latest "must have" accessory for your key ring. At only £2, surely the best value for money item ever. On sale at reception.

Nola Todhunter from Malden has written to thank the volunteers on the early bird dawn chorus walk on 28th April. The experience has opened up a whole new dimension for her in terms of listening and identifying individual songs. Marvellous!

We will be having a stall at Bromham Village Show on Sunday, 8th July. Would be great to see you there!

RAAI Copy Deadline

Please note that the copy deadline for the next issue of Reed All About It is Monday 3rd September 2012. Any notes, thoughts, articles, pictures welcome—to Joan Ferguson at the Forest Centre.