



REED ALL ABOUT IT

Newsletter for Forest Volunteers

Grant Money for Access Hub

What's an Access Hub I hear you ask? Well, if our grant application to Natural England, Paths for Communities is successful (and we are very, very hopeful!), it would enable us to establish a routes hub from the Millennium Park with a map showing bridleways, circular routes and longer walks, linking them with railway and bus timetables, etc. It would include:

- a new Forest area map board exhibiting our sites, access, sites of interest and villages/amenities, etc
- new exhibition display panels of the new access map
- a geocache trail
- 10 new walk leaflets
- upgrading the Jubilee and Timberland Trail leaflets. Plus a new Timberland map board outside the FC to replace the old and peeling one
- 2 listening posts
- Dedication of 1.6 mile of public bridleway along an existing permissive bridleway – basically a change of legal status

Marked routes from the Park would encourage our visitors to walk a bit further. The use of modern technology to enable download of maps onto phones would encourage the use of the hub and children particularly would be encouraged by the geocache idea.

We should hear within a couple of weeks whether our bid has been

successful. That will be just the start of the project! New routes, if and when they are established, will require regular maintenance, etc. And that, of course, is where you, dear Volunteer, come in! Watch this space for an update in our next edition.

Jean Sargeant

Quiz Night

Bedfordshire & Luton Archives

present a Quiz Night on

Thursday, 23rd May between 7-11pm at the Forest Centre.

Teams of six people.

£5 per head. Proceeds to Beds. & Luton Archives and Marston Vale Trust. If you would like to join a team, please email

joan.ferguson@marstonvale.org before 26th April. Alternatively, get a team together yourself and book a place on 01234 228833 or 228777.



Issue 43 - March 2013

In this edition...

- New playground
- The Barn
- Allen Scythe update
- Wildlife gardening
- Access hub
- Diary dates

Allen Scythe Update

In my initial report on this machine I said that progress was leisurely. Some four months on & that hasn't changed. Progress remains leisurely but some advancements have been made up to the point where it was time to "give it a go" &, with very little protest, in a cloud of two stroke smoke, the engine fired up answering that question "can you get it going"? So the engine is running & the cutter knives are operating as they should, but there is still a bit more poking around to be done before we can think about a test run. The next stage is likely to be more challenging & needs to be in an environment relatively free of dust & random debris so restoration is on hold until the new building can be occupied & some further head scratching & pondering can occur.

The photo reveals the effects of years of abuse — and the machine looks a bit tatty as well but I reckon that, with a bit of effort, I can tidy up at least one of them!

Derek Edmunds

Schools Planting at Wiles Wood

Over the past few weeks, there has been a lot of activity at the new extension to Wiles Wood with different groups getting involved with tree planting. In mid-February, on a sunny but chilly morning, three volunteers turned up to help children from the Ridgeway School in Kempston, Kempston Rural & Wootton Lower Schools plant trees.

First to arrive was the mini-bus with four children from Ridgeway School, accompanied by three adults. Unfortunately, the bus got stuck, ankle deep in mud, which the kids found very exciting and funny! After much pushing and pulling, the bus remained firmly stuck. So we got the kids off and they were soon hard at work planting trees. They were very enthusiastic and keen to learn. When would the trees start to grow, what kind were they, how big would they get? After an hour or so, their thoughts began to return to the mini-bus and how they would get back to school for lunch. Fortunately, our hero, Andy had been back to the Forest Centre for a tow chain. Loud cheers went up as he towed the bus out of the mud. It was a close call as to the most exciting event of the day – tree planting or the bus incident?! Meanwhile, children from Kempston Rural Lower School had arrived and were soon busy planting in the second field. Sadly, I was unable to stay in the afternoon but I'm sure the kids from Wootton Lower School had just as much fun too (they certainly did - The Forest aka Guy!). Since then, there have been more tree planters braving the grey skies and cold winds. Hopefully, by the time spring arrives in earnest, the whole area will be planted up and another part of the Forest of Marston Vale will begin its long life.

Jean Sargeant



As you know, the Forest Centre won Transform Your Patch's East of England award back at the end of last year.

The large sum of money we were awarded, together with some extra funds stashed for the purpose means that we will be able to build a new play area at the Forest Centre.

Work is currently underway to remove the old play equipment and to install an array of exciting, new kit for the kids to play on. The new equipment has been delivered and will include a sandpit (which can be covered at night) for the younger children, a climbing structure and cradlenest swing for the older ones and The Foxtail (a climb and slide) and the Riko railway which has static, chunky wooden engine and carriages.

There will be an official opening event (sponsored by Britvic) in due course. But it is hoped that the new playground will be open in time for the start of the Easter holidays.

So there will be lots to do for the kids, especially over the Easter weekend, with the Easter Trail on Sunday, 31st March and Monday, 1st April. Why not bring the grandchildren?

Wildlife Gardening

Jane Perrone, the gardening editor of "The Guardian" and author of "The Allotment Keeper's Handbook" came to give the inaugural Learning Lunchtime talk on 17th January 2013. About thirty five people showed up including a very anxious Shirley whose idea this initiative is. More chairs were moved in to accommodate the last few arrivals and Jane launched in with her photographs and gentle humour.

I thought I was gardening but apparently I manage a wildlife hotel and, as a good hotelier, I can make my "guests" more comfortable if I make a little effort. There are as many styles of gardening as there are gardeners but the initial decision is "messy or not?" With a little thought, even very neat gardens can accommodate wildlife guests.

The compost heap, tucked up a corner in the sunshine, can provide food and lodging for a surprisingly wide range of creatures: hedgehogs, field mice and birds as well as a range of creepy crawlies which all have their place in the scheme of things. The birds and hedgehogs forage, the field mice find warmth and shelter and the creepy crawlies help create the compost as well as being on the menu. Jane did stress that it's important not to throw cooked food waste on a compost heap so as not to attract rats.

By providing appropriate habitat, a wider range of wildlife "guests" will come to stay. Dead hedging is an excellent way of providing shelter for ladybirds and lacewings. Habitat boxes can provide homes for bees and butterflies especially if sited facing east into the morning sun. Bird boxes can be successful but need to be sited near cover and out of the way of pruning in the nesting season. Hedgehog boxes are available and hedgehogs will wander from garden to garden clearing up slugs and snails. They do need gaps in the fences and walls surrounding our gardens to enable them to get in. If you feed hedgehogs, Jane pointed out that cat food is more suitable to hedgehog digestions than the traditional bread and milk.

Ponds and bog gardens are an attrac-

tive feature of many gardens and give shelter in the edging plants for dragonflies and damsel flies. The plants provide cover for "guests" taking a bath or swim. Shelving margins provide access and oxygenating plants keep the water fresh but beware of invasive plants. Frogs and toads don't need water all the time but it is necessary in the breeding season. Jane told us about midwife toads, little creatures about the size of a 50p coin, which are a Bedfordshire speciality. They arrived about 200 years ago at a nursery in Ashburnham road (long gone) concealed in a consignment of plants. They make a beeping noise and make their homes in rubble piles. There are now three known colonies: the Fosterhill Road and Castle Road areas in Bedford and Biddenham (information provided by the audience).

Our flying "guests" need to be able to land so plants like daisies, cornflowers, Mexican fleabane (looks like a daisy to me), achillea, and ice plants provide better landing pads than double dahlias and flowers that have lots of bunched up petals.

We can provide food plants such as sunflowers, tobacco plants, roses, hawthorns, cotoneaster, pyracantha, honeysuckle as well as nectar plants for bees such as wallflowers and buddleia (and lots more that I can't remember) and ignore a patch of nettles which are beloved of butterflies.

Not all wildlife is welcome just as hooligans are not ideal guests, so creatures like the harlequin ladybird, that attacks native ladybirds, and the Spanish slug, that eats dog poo and spreads parasites, can occur and professional advice is best sought as they are not yet sufficiently wide spread for identification to be easy for the average gardener.

I found Jane's talk inspiring because I have a (fairly) tidy town garden and thought I couldn't do much for wildlife. This talk made me realise I already did some things and encouraged me to do more, maybe more "messy" bits - or is that a ready made excuse?

You can still catch a Learning Lunchtime session — see Diary Dates on the back page. Interesting subjects, and all free!

Joan Ferguson

The Barn

Anyone visiting the Forest Centre at the moment can't fail to notice the rather large building which has appeared at one end of the car park. The structure is largely of treated softwood, with a great deal of laminated posts that are strong, long-lasting and more environmentally sound than steel equivalent.

This development sprang originally from an urgent need for workshop space that would be safe, warm and dry – somewhere staff and volunteers could make things, repair things and, of course, put their feet up in relative comfort.

As you know, our volunteers are a pretty forceful lot and it took quite a small amount of time for things to get moving. It was clear that if a new building was to be put up, we could kill more than one bird with it; so when it's finished, it will house not only a workshop and mess room (fitted out with the help of volunteers) but also enough covered space for the Trust to venture into firewood production on a small scale.

Thanks to a significant financial contribution from Natural England, we have been able to build larger than was at first planned and to invest in some pretty exciting firewood processing machinery which will arrive shortly. Construction is due for completion in March and the whole thing will be ready to use later in the spring.

Guy Lambourne



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. 31 st Mar. and Mon. 1 st Apr.	Kids Event – Easter Trail	Follow the Easter Trail around the Park, answering wildlife questions as you go. Back at the Forest Centre, check your answers and receive a small prize. £2 per child.
Thu. 4 th Apr	Learning Lunchtime – Researching Army Ancestry	Come and listen to a different angle on researching family history with Nigel Lutt. 11-12 noon. No need to book
Thu. 4 th Apr.	Kids Event – Hop to It - Frogs	Need to book on 01234 767037
Sat. 6 th Apr.	The Early Migrants	At last, those first heralds of spring should be arriving. Be the first to see them here. 8-11 am. £3/person, £1 reduction for concessions, Volunteers and Friends. Book in advance but pay the leader. Call 01234 767037
Sun. 7 th Apr.	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.
Tue. 9 th Apr.	Visit to Tempsford Hall	Details will be e-mailed. Restricted numbers, so book early. Contact Joan Ferguson.
Thu. 11 th Apr.	Kids Event – Bluebell Wood	Need to book on 01234 767037
Sun. 14 th Apr.	Gardening	Getting the Sensory Wildlife Garden looking great for Spring. 10.00am – 4.15 pm. Ring Anna or Stephen on 01234 762610
Tue. 16 th Apr.	MVFCOG Meeting	7.00 pm at the Forest Centre. Please let Joan know if you will be attending
Thu. 18 th Apr.	Learning Lunchtime – Archives for Local History: The Bedfordshire Sources	Learn something new about the area that you live in with Nigel Lutt. 11-12 noon. No need to book
Thu. 28 th Apr.	Learning Lunchtime – The History of Italian Cooking	Christine Fellini runs an Italian cookery school and will talk you through the various twists and turns in its history with some great recipes. 11-12 noon. No need to book
Thu. 2 nd May	Learning Lunchtime – Long Term Care Funding	With all of us expecting to get much older, Rachel Efetha will give tips on how to prepare for funding long term care. 11-12 noon. No need to book
Sun. 5 th May	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.
Tue. 7 th May	MVFCOG Annual General Meeting	7.00 pm at the Forest Centre. Talk by Barrie Mason. Please let Joan know if you will be attending.
Tue. 28 th May	Kids Event – Kites and Windssocks	Need to book on 01234 767037
Fri. 31 st May	Kids Event – Beautiful Butterflies	Need to book on 01234 767037
Sun. 2 nd Jun.	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.

Snippets

Plea for Help!

It would be lovely to use some articles and/or photos in RAAI written by some different volunteers for the next edition. If you've got any ideas, please let Joan know.

Volunteers' Spring Walk

Maggie Milne is currently devising a walk which will take place on Saturday, 27th April, probably in the Ampthill area, followed by lunch at a local hostelry. Further information will be sent out in due course. But put the date in your diary NOW!

RAAI Copy Deadline

Please note that the copy deadline for the next issue of Reed All About It is Monday 27th May 2013.

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