



REED ALL ABOUT IT

Newsletter for Forest Volunteers

Scrub Bash & Volunteers Lunch

Each year, the Trustees pay for a jacket potato lunch for the Volunteers as a “thank you” for all the hard work we put in during the course of a year. We usually precede lunch with a scrub bash (clearing scrub to enable other plants and insects to proliferate).

This year, the event was held on 26th January and we hoped and hoped that the rain would stop – but it didn't! We squelched and slithered and slipped across to the site – and couldn't quite believe that we were crazy enough to be out in weather like that. (Some people got so wet and cold that they sloped off home – see Wimp's Diary).

Actually, by the time we had got wet, we'd forgotten about the rain and just enjoyed being active and out in the fresh air. We cut back a good sized area of scrub – in the area where orchids bloom and butterflies breed in May and June – but didn't attempt a bonfire.

When lunchtime came, we felt we had earned our jacket potatoes which we devoured with hearty appetites. We were joined by some members of the Forest Team as well as the Volunteer receptionists who help at the desk at busy times. In all, it was a good winter event.

Our next social event will be the Spring Walk on 26th April.

Joan Ferguson
Volunteer Co-ordinator

Wimp's Diary

Sunday, 26th January was scrub bash day. It was also the day that I took out membership of “Wimps R Us”.

For anyone who doesn't know, a scrub bash is where you get the opportunity of some outdoor activity, have a bit of a chat with other volunteers and enjoy a lunch afterwards. When my wife Jill and I left home, the day was grey but not threatening. By the time we arrived at the meeting point we could forget either grey or threatening and use aggressive instead. It was hammering down and I had left the wet gear at home. So, enthusiastically led by Anna with Nick providing support, we made our way to the site.

Within the hour, both Jill & I were soaked to the skin. The prospect of eating lunch in waterlogged clothes got steadily less attractive a proposition than seeing Jo Brand in a bikini – so I

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made a run for home and signed up to the wimps club! To be fair, Jill would have stayed on but I had the car keys so she came with me. Perversely, after drying off and a change of clothing, I wished I was back there.

So, that is a lesson learned and if anyone is thinking of attending the next one, don't be put off. It really can be a pleasant experience if you apply a bit of common sense & dress for the weather.

Derek Edmunds

Photo: 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

Bittern by the Birding Bug



Photo: Martin Green

The bird walk on 1st February wasn't particularly out of the ordinary until the group of 15 reached the hide overlooking the Pillinge Lake. Volunteer leaders, Bob, Neil and Tony have led lots of walks around the Country Park but nothing like this had happened before.

A Mediterranean Gull on Stewartby Lake? Pretty exciting at the time but that's not what made the walk special. Green and great spotted woodpeckers were nice but not compared to the main feature seen from the Pillinge hide.

Apparently one of the participants, whilst looking at the Forest's web site, had found an earlier blog post describing a view of a bittern and suggesting that a repeat wasn't completely out of the question. Bittern numbers are on the increase in the UK, thanks in part to large-scale wetland creation projects such as the Great Fen in Cambridgeshire. We like to think that we are doing the right thing here in Marston Moretaine too. In 1998, when the bittern was suggested as a possible breeding species that could result from the creation of the Country Park, there was a certain raising of eyebrows in the birding world, but now that individuals are fairly regularly seen here during the winter, we might be forgiven for hoping that a pair might breed here in the future.

Whatever the case may be, to come to a guided walk expecting to see a bittern was pretty optimistic. However, that's what Bob & co were up against as they ventured out into the Park. I can imagine them playing down the likelihood of a bittern popping out

of the reeds, until of course a bittern popped out of the reeds. I hope they managed to remain calm. I suspect there was an amount of whispered whooping! Unsurprisingly, even when staring down a telescope at the bird, several people couldn't see it; something of a testament to its extraordinary camouflage. It's a bird that has reached a pinnacle of not being seen. There are more bird walks scheduled for the spring – there's one on 5 April and an early morning, migrants walk on 3 May.

Guy Lambourne

Wind Turbine—Latest News!

The blades are up! And the structure looks very, well, wind turbine-ish. Can you see it from your home? Let us know.



Photo: Sam Hayden

Elsbeth Dando - Fundraiser

I joined The Marston Vale Trust as Fundraiser in January, having previously worked for Save the Children, Macmillan and Asthma UK for the last 13 years, mostly in Community Fundraising but also co-ordinating emergency appeals and working with international partners at Save the Children. Before that, I spent many years running a family landscape construction company, while volunteering for charities.

I've lived in or very close to Bedfordshire all my life and grew up in Arlesey, which was a brickworks village (although outside Marston Vale), so I'm now delighted to be involved in the vision that has created the Forest of Marston Vale so far, and to be part of its future too.

Elsbeth Dando

Terry Stevens—Obituary

Terry Stevens, one of our longest serving volunteers has died. Terry had been an active member of our team for more than 10 years, having been involved in walks auditing, events staging, publicity at fetes, fairs and shows, etc. He contributed freely to the volunteers' co-ordinating meetings over the years and was the driving force behind setting up a fund to enable us to pay bus or train fares for volunteers to get to the Forest Centre. We could always rely on his incisive thinking to cut through the waffle to get to the crux of a problem and on his wry, dry sense of humour to amuse us when we were getting bogged down. We'll miss him.

We send our sympathy to his widow, Diane, and all his extended family.

Joan Ferguson

Elm Tree Project

Things are moving on! Recently, early fifty of the elm saplings were planted out by volunteers in woodland around Wootton –

Buttons Ramsey, The Kill, Wiles Wood, Wiles Wood Extension, Ridgeway Wood and Van Diemen's Land. Each site has a group of three trees planted together with an explanatory sign giving details of the project, so you will be able to spot them. The other trees have been planted singly. All will be monitored at least a couple of times a year for the next ten years. In the coming weeks, the remaining elms will be planted out in other locations throughout Marston Vale.

Andy Lingard

Doing the Blog!

There are some amongst you who are already blogging for us. Others may not realise this is an option and I guess a few would wonder what this all means. A weblog or 'blog' sounds a bit messy but it's just a way to write stuff and put up pictures on a web site. It allows readers to comment and for the author to respond – what may traditionally be called correspondence.

A few volunteers – notably Jean, Derek and Nigel have from time to time taken up a pen or keyboard and written something about an experience as a volunteer. I like the variety this adds to the blog and introduces different voices – both of which ought to be a good thing. It might also encourage others to consider volunteering with us. Would you like to have a go? Is there something you'd like to tell us (and the world) about? If so, here's your opportunity. Blog posts can be as short or as long as you like. They need to be somewhat related to the Forest or the Trust, however tenuously. I reserve the right to edit or even not to publish.

Send your piece, with a picture if possible, to me at the address below. And if you don't fancy writing for us, do take a look at the blog –

www.marstonvale.org/news you may read something that you'd like to comment on – do it, it all helps.

Guy Lambourne

Fenlake Meadows Restoration

Back in July 2012, MVT were granted monies from SITA to restore Fenlake Meadows to a Flood Plain Grazing Marsh. In partnership with Bedford Borough Council, and after detailed design work and flood modelling, work finally began in November 2013. The scheme involves ditch creation/clearance and the installation of two new penstock weirs to control water levels within the site to enable the water flow and level to be controlled across the site. The ditch restoration works will be phased over 2 years to minimise the impact on any existing ecological interest.

This restoration project will contribute at least 0.2% towards the East of England target for floodplain grazing marsh habitat restoration and 23% towards the Bedfordshire target for restoration. Left untouched, another area of biodiversity wet grazing marsh habitat would disappear.

Initial work involved Priory Rangers and volunteers cutting back vegetation and clearing work corridors. The first major task was for the contractor to excavate a shallow cross ditch to help drain the northern end of the site. Albion Archaeology were present on site to record any interesting finds, but nothing was found except for alluvial deposits and lots of water!

The winds and rain over Christmas flooded the site so work was delayed but it is hoped that completion will be achieved in the next few weeks. Looking further ahead, it is hoped that birds such as lapwing, redshank and snipe will return, along with plants such as goat's beard, meadow vetchling and black knapweed which, in turn, will encourage invertebrates like blue-tailed and emerald damselflies.

Darren Woodward

Tour de Forest

Sunday 31 August 2014 is the day for those who enjoy cycling and fancy a challenge.

The Tour de Forest sponsored cycle ride takes place from **10am to 4pm** and is an opportunity for everyone to get on their bike, perhaps with a group of family or friends, join the Tour Team and cycle to as many (or as few) of the different woodland areas in the Forest of Marston Vale as they like – while raising money to help plant more trees and create more green spaces for people and wildlife.

Participants choose their own route, check in at each woodland area to have their card stamped – and have a great day out.

Participants can start and finish where they like, and check in at the woodland areas in the order they prefer – all within the Forest of Marston Vale.

For more information email tour@marstonvale.org or call 01234 762605

Elspeth Dando

Small Woodland Owners' Group

On Sunday, 2nd March, we had a visit from five members of the Small Woodland Owner's Group—3 from Bletchley and 2 from Kent. They were interested in learning about the Forest of Marston Vale and how it developed. Fortunately, Andy Brocklebank was on hand to give them all the gen.

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 16 th Mar	Conservation Task – willow weaving and garden clear up	10.00am – 4.15 pm. Ring Anna or Stephen on 01234 762614
Sat 5 th Apr	Guided walk – early migrants and wildflowers	8-11 am. £3/person, £1 reduction for concessions, Volunteers and Friends. Book in advance but pay the leader. Call 01234 767037
Sun 6 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.
Mon 7 th Apr	Kids' Event – Weird & Wonderful Animal Orchids	Indoor activities and crafts for kids. Need to book on 01234 767037.
Sat 12 th Apr	Conservation Task – gardening	10.00am – 4.15 pm. Ring Anna or Stephen on 01234 762614
Mon 14 th Apr	Kids' Event – Hare's Hidden Treasure	Indoor activities and crafts for kids. Need to book on 01234 767037.
Sun 20 th Apr	Kids' Easter Trail	11.00am – 4.00 pm. £2 per person. No need to book
Mon 21 st Apr	Kids' Easter Trail	11.00am – 4.00 pm. £2 per person. No need to book
Sat 26 th Apr	Volunteers' Spring Walk and lunch	10.00 am. The Swan, Cranfield. Details to follow
Sat 3 rd May	Dawn Chorus Bird Walk & Breakfast	4.30-7.30am. £9/adult, £6/child. No concessions. Booking essential. 01234 767037.
Sun 4 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.
Sat 10 th May	Dawn Chorus Bird Walk for late risers	7.00-10.00am. £3/person. £1 reduction for concessions, Friends & volunteers. Booking essential. 01234 767037
Sun 18 th May	Conservation Task – Hay raking	10.00am – 4.15 pm. Ring Anna or Stephen on 01234 762614
Tue 27 th May	Kids' Event – Groovy Grasshoppers & Crafty Crickets	Indoor activities and crafts for kids. Need to book on 01234 767037.
Fri 30 th May	Kids' Event – Wands in the Willows	Indoor activities and crafts for kids. Need to book on 01234 767037.

Snippets

Volunteers' Spring Walk—Saturday, 26th April

Provisional arrangements for the Spring Walk are as follows. Meet at The Swan public house in Cranfield at 10.00 am. The walk will take up to two and a half hours maximum and will be followed by lunch at The Swan. Further details nearer the time.

RAI Copy Deadline

Please note that the copy deadline for the next issue of Reed All About It is Monday 2nd June.

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