

Welcome to the summer 2010

edition of the WNCF newsletter. Here comes the sunshine, long lazy days, flowers and bees, swallows and house martins, tall grasses and hopefully lots of beans, peas, lettuce and strawberries in our garden – if I can keep the dog from eating them.

Our family is very lucky to live close to an area of accessible deciduous woodland where the spring flowers have been wonderful with so much colour and smells. I've been trying to teach my kids some flower names and have been reliving my days as a Ranger doing woodland environmental games and activities. I'm not sure who has enjoyed themselves more! Another woodland adventure involved wading upstream, our wellies filling with cold water, and then scrambling up muddy banks with kids and dogs in tow. Lots of shouting and laughing involved!

We had our first meeting of the year with a cockchafer beetle. It flew into the upper window of our local Tesco express and dropped at our feet. Look out or more likely listen out for them hitting windows at this time of year. They are quite clumsy in flight and often collide into things as they swarm around trees and bushes feeding on leaves.

The field mice seem to be breeding like mad in our garden and have attracted the attention of a black and white cat. During the day it's been watching the tadpoles in the pond, during the evening it sits watching the wall where the mice live. We get some good views of them dashing across the patio or scrambling round the wall. Spotting small mammals in your back garden, watching and even photographing them can provide hours of entertainment. Try small mammal trapping with some humane traps. Don't forget bedding and food and to check your traps regularly (please read-up on the legislation regarding shrews as well if you're not familiar with it).

The next meeting of the Forum is on Saturday 5th June. We'll be off outdoors exploring the mossland off the A57 towards Rixton. Please join us from 10am for an update, the chance to do some group survey work and a nice walk!

Don't forget the swift surveys. The Forum is trying to cover as much as Warrington as possible in this third consecutive year of the current survey. These amazing birds are back from Africa. Look out for the typical boomerang shaped silhouette and listen for the screaming.

This edition of the newsletter is, once again, full of nature conservation things you can do if you've got some free time. Lots of organisations are running surveys that come with full instructions, help with species identification and can be done locally. Enjoy the next few months of warm weather, wildlife activity, noise and general excitement in your garden, local park or further afield. If you have any articles or items of interest please email mel.bradley@sky.com



Contact the Forum! We'd love to know your thoughts on the newsletter or meetings, if you have any comments or questions please get in touch with Helen or Melanie.

If you do not have internet access and would like any further information on articles please contact Helen.
Helen Lacy WNCF General Secretary 01925 442839 hlacy@warrington.gov.uk

A word from the Chairman

It's an over used phrase 'The previous Chair is going to be a hard act to follow' but in Brian Martin's case, it's definitely true. He only stepped in as Chair for a few weeks to help out and stayed on for over two years. Like most Forum members he is a specialist and in his case it is birds, particularly swifts and black-necked grebes. He was featured in the BBC TV 'Nature's Calendar' with Chris Packham in 2006 at Woolston Eyes.



Chris Packham with Brian on a visit to Woolston Eyes

Brian revived his Warrington Town Swift survey in 2008. As part of the process he has trained WNCF members in surveying techniques and they will be out again surveying this year. As a direct result of this, we have new information to add to the baseline population data collected in the 1990's. The findings show a decline in swift numbers. However the knowledge gained whilst observing the birds is leading Brian to develop strategies to help them. He has recently advised a housing association in Macclesfield about how and where to drill holes to allow swifts to get to their old nests when they return from Africa to breed. He aims to pass this knowledge onto housing associations in and around Warrington.

We are also indebted to Brian for two campaigns he has championed. The first was to draw Warrington Borough Council (WBC) attention to the damage that they were doing by cutting down bushes and trees down during the breeding season. Brian, along with other committee members met with WBC staff and reached an agreement to minimise disturbance. In addition further training was given to the Arboriculture team on what to look out for. They have recently written to me and confirmed that it has been incorporated as part of best practice.

The second campaign was to get WBC to reinstate the service levels agreements with rECOrd and Cheshire Wildlife Trust. These organisations provide a valuable database of species that planners can reference when considering applications. Our concern was that without them development might be approved that might have a severe impact on nature and conservation and in extremes rare species. At our January meeting our General Secretary, Helen, announced that Warrington had made the commitment and signed up to a new agreement to help delivery the council's biodiversity aims. WBC was one of the first authorities in the region to do this.

Without Brian's drive and tenacity during both of these campaigns we may well have still have been battling on. But don't think that he has retired completely. He will still be around helping out, sharing his knowledge and no doubt making valuable contributions. He is after all a mentor to so many members but most of all a dear friend to everyone he comes in contact with and to the bird community a very wise owl.

As for me I summed up my Wildlife Knowledge at the excellent Introduction to Local Wildlife site recording training course given by Mark Ambrose in early May. I pointed in the direction of fellow WNCF members and said **'they are the people with the knowledge. I know about 2% of what they know'**. After the course I now know a lot more and I did study Geography, like Mel our Treasurer, at Lanchester Polytechnic. One thing I did learn there that has stood the test of time is **'the more you know the more you realise how much you have to learn'**.

As a member of the WNCF you will get many opportunities to learn and take part in surveys but more importantly you will get to meet like-minded people who take an active interest in nature and its conservation.

Kind regards

Geoff Settle WNCF Chairman

Can you baaaalieve it!

If you've visited Rixton Clay Pits recently you will have noticed the SSSI has some new residents- sheep! These are Hebridean's owned by Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the council is now using them as part of the site management of this special reserve.

Hebridean sheep were bred to cope with the barren conditions on the Hebridean Isles and thrive on land not suitable for other breeds. Their ability to eat coarse grasses and young tree seedlings make them ideal for 'conservation grazing' – a system where animals are grazed on land specifically to maximise it for biodiversity.

The council already has one other conservation grazing scheme at Paddington Meadows using Long Horn cattle (also owned by Cheshire Wildlife Trust) which has been working very well for over 5 years.

Traditional grazing with the sheep will play an important part in conserving special wildlife features at the site. The Local Nature Reserve and SSSI consists of rare calcareous grassland and a large Great Crested Newt population. The rare plants which grow on Rixton Clay Pits grasslands are under threat from scrub-invasion and rougher grasses. The plants need a short turf to survive and the sheep will graze out the scrub to allow the plants to flourish.

Mik Lees, Ranger at Rixton Clay Pits, said "Without maintenance the meadows would be overtaken by coarse grasses and scrub reducing its diversity and value to wildlife. Managing this area by mechanical means is labour intensive and the sheep are a much more environmentally sensitive way of managing the land."

Agile traditional breeds of sheep like Hebridean are known for their conservation grazing and are excellent at grazing hillsides- being a former clay extraction site the terrain at Rixton varies considerably in places which is no problem for the sheep.

Ranger Mik Lees said it was important dog walkers keep their pets under control when visiting the reserve. He said: "Rixton Clay Pits is a very popular site for dog walkers and we need to make sure dog exercising and livestock grazing can coexist happily. We do expect all owners to have their dogs under control and on a lead when they visit Rixton Clay Pits, regardless of whether there are livestock present."

Naturally the sheep leave behind droppings which many beetles and insects are attracted to. These in turn provide an excellent source of food for birds during the day and also bats at night.

It's hoped the traditional grazing will further enhance this special site for the benefit of everyone.



Photo: M Walsh RCP Ranger



Bee Scene! New national children's survey of wild flowers launches this spring

Plantlife and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust are asking children to 'Bee Scene' in 2010 by taking part in a new survey designed especially for them.

The Bee Scene survey is simple and quick to complete and provides an easy way for children to become citizen scientists and contribute to monitoring the natural environment by spotting different types of wild flowers such as dandelions, red clover, thistles or campion.

Visit a local park, field or other natural space, between April and July, and complete a simple wild flower survey. Children across England can link their findings online by creating a virtual flower meadow. Recording the numbers of wild flowers and the different types present will help Plantlife and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust know whether local bees have enough sources of pollen for them to thrive.

Bumblebees are vital for the health of our countryside, as many of our most colourful wild flowers and our food plants are pollinated by them, and some rely entirely on bees.

The survey is supported by an education pack for teachers and educators with extra activities so they can lead a Bee Scene expedition in their local green space. The survey can be done in an hour or with the education pack could form a fieldwork or activity day or basis of a topic for investigation.

The survey and activity pack are available online at www.wildaboutplants.org.uk. Once groups have completed the survey, schools are asked to feedback their survey results online where their results will help plant a virtual meadow across England.

For more information, please contact Sue Nottingham (Plantlife Senior Press Officer) on 01722 342757 or by email sue.nottingham@plantlife.org.uk

or Felicity Harris (Wild about Plants Project Manager) on 01722 342740 or 07506 428580 or by email felicity.harris@plantlife.org.uk

OPAL Water survey - join in now



**How healthy is
your local lake?**

**Tell us about animal
life in your local pond**

By taking part in the OPAL water survey, you'll help scientists learn more about how polluted our lakes and ponds actually are – something we know surprisingly little about.

Good water quality is essential for the many animals and plants that live in and around our lakes, ponds and rivers. Unfortunately, water is easily affected by pollution from agriculture and industry, waste we throw away, and even pollutants in the air.

Look for clues in the water

Animals living in the water can tell us a great deal about how polluted the water may be. Some species struggle to survive in polluted waters, while others are more tolerant. By telling us what life you see in your local pond you'll discover more about the water's health and contribute to valuable scientific research.



Please show care and respect to our environment.

Ponds and lakes are home to many important creatures.

Simple tests for water clarity and pH, will provide further clues to the water quality.

How to take part: It's easy to join in. Start by downloading our free survey pack, which includes full instructions and identification guides.

<http://www.opalexplornature.org/?q=WaterSurvey>

As with the previous OPAL surveys, the survey is easy to do, the instructions are clear and straightforward and the identification guides are great!

Sankey Valley Park

Wildlife Update



Greetings and welcome to what will hopefully be a regular update on the sightings of the local wildlife, in and around the Sankey Valley Park area. My name is Chris Gaughan and I am one of the rangers here at SVP, I probably know quite a few of you already, but for those I don't HELLO!

In the past few months we have had some really interesting sightings on the park including, good numbers of Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*), Greenfinch (*Parus palustris*), and Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) around the Gatewarth area of the site. The phase 3 area which overlooks Richmond Bank on the Mersey has produced several sightings of Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*) and a surprise sighting of a male Marsh Tit (*Poecile palustris*), which was sat on a fenceline right next to the path.

Butterfly sightings include Orange Tip (*Antochlaris cardamines*), Holly Blue (*Celastrina argiolus*), Peacock (*Inachis io*), Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*), and Large White (*Pieris brassicae*).

After the crisp, cold winter we have had, there was some concern about the fatalities of our native amphibians. We can confirm that on SVP we have had good numbers of frog & toad spawn in most of the water bodies, which just shows how resilient our native wildlife really is!

We had a dawn chorus walk starting from Waterways Car Park on the 8th of May which was a great opportunity to see some flying friends that are not usually associated with a dawn chorus walk, BATS!! I did go down early with a bat detector to see what was in the area and came across, Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*), Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), & Soprano Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), all feeding over the canal and the wetland area. I also observed two Noctule's (*Nyctalus noctula*) commuting above the line of trees from the car park. The Common Pipistrelles were feeding for a good 15 minutes after first light, in and around the car park. Keep a look out for our Bat walks later on in the summer if you are interested.



The Herons have been busy setting up another Heronry in Ladies Walk Wood this spring, with five birds sat on nests the last time we looked. As I sit typing this, we have just discovered that the Swans nesting near Hospital Bridge have six cygnets on the nest, which is GREAT news! This is the same pair of swans that had their eggs stolen last year and the year before that, the Cob lost his Pen (female swan) to a pair of dogs on the canal towpath. This year the pair nested in exactly the same spot where the incident with the dogs took place, which was really worrying. After losing two eggs, they moved to their current nesting site, so it looks they have finally decided to nest somewhere they will be more productive!

If you would like any more information about the park, please do not hesitate to contact us on 571836 and if you spot anything on the park which you may think is interesting, it would be great to know.

Chris

Training Workshops - 'Natural Know-how' 2010

Whatever your interest or previous experience, Cheshire Wildlife Trust has developed an exciting range of training workshops. The workshops cover a wide range of topics & there should be something here to inspire you and help you to see the natural environment in a new way. These workshops will suit whether you are a complete beginner, have more experience or hope to gain skills for a career in conservation. They are open to all members of the public as well as CWT members.

New Saturday 29th May- Identifying birds by their character (beginners)

Trainer: Jeff Clarke **Location:** Norton Priory **Cost:** £10 members / £15 non-members

A practical guide to recognising common birds in a variety of habitats. Join Jeff Clarke, one of the regions most experienced bird identification specialists as he shows you how each species has its own special character, (general Impression, size, shape and sound) which helps to improve your chances of making a correct identification.

Saturday 5th June- Identification of Aquatic Invertebrates

Trainer: Dr Mike Tynen **Location:** Bickley Hall Farm **Cost:** £20 members / £35 non-members

This workshop is open to anyone interested in aquatic invertebrates. It provides a basic introduction to the identification of freshwater invertebrates and will include an indoor session and an outdoor session to observe the animals discussed in their natural habitat and to practise basic field identification skills.

New Sunday 6th June - Water Vole Survey Techniques

Trainer: Andrea Powell **Location:** The Grange Farm, Mickle Trafford **Cost:** £20 members / £35 non members
Learn about the biology, ecology and habitats of water voles. Develop the skills to identify the signs of water voles in their natural environment. With both indoor and outdoor sessions this workshop is aimed at beginners or anyone interested in the water vole.

Sunday 20th June- Identification of Summer Wildflowers

Trainer: Liz Blackman **Location:** Sale Water Park **Cost:** £20 members / £35 non-members

This workshop will include both indoor and outdoor sessions. Learn to identify the summer flowers of Sale Water Park. This identification workshop will be conducted at a level suitable for a Phase I Habitat Survey.

Saturday 24th July- Identification and Survey Techniques of Dragonflies and Damselflies

Trainer: Stu Burnett **Location:** Sale Water Park **Cost:** £20 members / £35 non-members

This workshop is open to anyone interested in entomology. It provides an introduction to the ecology, biology and behaviour of dragonfly and damselfly species and will include an indoor session and an outdoor session to practice survey techniques.

Sunday 25th July- Bumble Bee Ecology and Identification

Trainers: Tony Parker & Carl Clew **Location:** Norton Priory **Cost:** £20 members / £35 non

This workshop is open to anyone interested in entomology. It will provide an introduction to the ecology and biology of bumblebee species. The day will include an indoor session with information on bumblebee conservation and the future for bumblebees and an outdoor session to practice basic field identification skills.

Saturday 7th August- Otter Ecology & Conservation

Trainer: Richard Gardener **Location:** The Grange Farm, Mickle Trafford **Cost:** £15 members/£20 non members. Learn all about the UK's largest carnivore. A classroom session will provide an overview and introduction to otter ecology. This will be followed by a visit to see otter tracks and signs in the field and examples of habitats used by otters.

If you would like to book onto a workshop, please call Cheshire Wildlife Trust on 01948 820728 to check for availability, as places tend to fill up fast. If the workshop is full we can put your name on a reserve list.



WOODLAND
TRUST

WOODLAND COMMUNITIES PROJECT in Runcorn & Warrington
SPRING WALKING FESTIVAL - Events in Warrington, Spring 2010

Individuals and groups are welcome, but places are limited so **BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL**
To book please call Gill Dobson on 01352 742143, or email gilldobson@woodlandtrust.org.uk
All walks will be between 1.0 and 1.5 hours, followed by refreshments.

GORSE COVERT MOUNDS Tues 11th May: Bird Watching Woodland Walk, 6.15 – 7.45pm

Join the Guides, Brownies and local bird expert Phil Guest for a beautiful spring walk in the woods, looking out for baby birds and learning about how to identify them. Meet at Gorse Covert Primary School on Gorse Covert Road.

Sun 13th June: Fonetography, 1.30 - 4pm

Join a woodland photography workshop. Use your mobile phone to take stunning photos of the woods in their springtime glory. The best images will be displayed at the Warrington Museum art gallery. Meet at The Poacher pub on Gorse Covert Road.

SEEDS PLANTATION Callands

Mon 31st May: Storytelling Woodland Walk, 2 – 4pm

Join our entertaining storyteller for a beautiful spring walk in the woods. Meet at The Hoop & Mallet pub on Callands Road.

Tues 15th June: Fonetography, 6 – 8pm

Join a woodland photography workshop. Use your mobile phone to take stunning photos of the woods in their springtime glory. The best images will be displayed at the Warrington Museum art gallery. Meet at The Hoop & Mallet pub on Callands Road.

MARY ANNE PLANTATION Westbrook

Mon 24th May: Storytelling Woodland Walk, 6.30 - 8pm

Join our entertaining storyteller for a beautiful spring walk in the woods. Meet at St. Philips Primary School near Asda.

FUTURE DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

WOODLAND SURVIVAL & BUSHCRAFT SKILLS

Are you a budding Ray Mears? Could you survive a night in the woods? Try your hand at shelter building, finding wild food, fire making and campfire cooking.

Sat 25th Sept: Seeds Plantation, 11am – 5pm & Sun
26th Sept: Gorse Covert Mounds, 11am – 5pm

FONETOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS Join a woodland photography workshop. Use your mobile phone to take stunning photos of the woods in their autumn glory. The best images will be displayed at the Warrington Museum art gallery.

Sun 19th Sept: Small Woods in Oakwood, 1.30 – 4pm
Sat 30th Oct: Mary Anne Plantation, Westbrook, 1.30 – 4pm

To find out more about the Woodland Trust's woods close to you, or to find out how to get involved in the Woodland Communities Project visit www.woodlandtrust.org.uk



Local Woods
for Local People



Follow the **FLAMING BATON** around Warrington

(A walk in countryside around Warrington celebrating 75 years of the Ramblers)

This year sees 75 years of The Ramblers and to celebrate this milestone, a 75km circular walk is being organised in countryside around the Warrington and its neighboring boroughs including some of the green spaces that permeate some of the urban parts of the town. It will be divided into five approx. 15 km (9mile) sections held on Saturdays throughout June and into July and is open to both members and non-members. People are welcome to join any or all of the walks and for those wishing to walk only part of a section, "escape points" will be identified. However, those who complete all sections will be awarded a certificate and embroidered material badge.



Situated between the two major conurbations of Greater Manchester and Merseyside, the town has developed as a thriving business and commercial centre in the North West. However, the countryside around it is both attractive and diverse offering great escape from the expanse of busy urban areas. As a result a thriving Warrington Ramblers Group has become established within the Ramblers promoting many great local walks.

"The Flaming Baton walk therefore provides an opportunity to explore and learn something about the area as each section is being led by people with a considerable amount of local knowledge keen to pass it on. The walk will pass through country parks, nature conservation sites, industrial heritage features and woodlands as well as tracks and trails alongside rivers and canals; so please come along and join us" Says Roger Lamming, Footpath Secretary for Warrington and Event Organiser.

Full details showing maps, photos, features of interest, start times, start and finish points together with leader contact details can be obtained via the following link <http://nmc-ramblers.org.uk/RA75>

CHESHIRE OTTERS CAUGHT ON FILM!



The longest-ever film footage of Cheshire's rare otters was shown on BBC's Northwest Tonight on the 17th May. Once almost extinct in Cheshire, otters have returned and colonised all of the county's large rivers in the past 30 years. This remarkable comeback is largely due to the increasingly good water quality in our rivers and the banning of pesticides, which affected otters significantly.

To record this conservation success story and encourage more people and landowners to take an interest in the health of their local wildlife, the Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership (CrBP) set out to capture this elusive river mammal on camera, with help from amateur film-maker Ron Thomas.

"Otters mostly come out at night or early in the morning so it is rare to see them," said Sarah Bennett, CrBP Co-ordinator. *"Because otters have a territory of 20-40km, it is also incredibly difficult to film them, so it can be like trying to find a needle in a haystack. The fact that we managed to get this film footage is a landmark event for all the conservationists and landowners in Cheshire, who have worked for many years to improve the health of the rivers and create ideal habitats for the otters to return to and live within."*

Richard Gardner, Living Landscape Manager for Cheshire Wildlife Trust, which is a partner of the CrBP, was equally excited about the film: *"This is truly a highlight of our work to make Cheshire's rivers and landscapes a better place for wildlife. We have for years been monitoring the wildlife on rivers – including otters and water voles –and often we come across signs that otters are there, such as footprints and spraints. However it has always been extremely difficult to see the creatures in the flesh and sightings are few and far between. This film footage now means everyone in Cheshire will be able to take a look at one of the wild otters living on their doorstep!"*

If you missed the BBC's Northwest Tonight programme – which also contains filming from the landowners otter habitat training day run by CWT earlier in the year - you can view it online on BBC iPlayer. The CrBP film footage of the otter can be viewed on YouTube.

A special information sheet about otters can be found on www.cheshirebiodiversity.org.uk and if you would like to learn more about otter conservation, Cheshire Wildlife Trust is holding an Otter Ecology and Conservation Training Day on Saturday 7th August – to book a place see www.cheshirewildlifetrust.co.uk or call 01948 820728.

The YouTube address for the otter footage is: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheCrbp>



Alcathoe's bat discovered in Yorkshire and Sussex

(Article from BTC website)

A new bat species has been added to Britain's native species in the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity.



Researchers led by Prof. John Altringham and Prof. Roger Butlin have identified *Myotis alcathoe* or Alcathoe bat for the first time in the UK. Alcathoe bat is relatively new to science being first identified in 2001. It is thought that this bat may have been in the UK for generations, only recently being identified due to its similarity to two other native bat species: whiskered and Brandt's. This new discovery takes the total number of bat species in the UK to 17, making up around a third of all our mammal species.

Alcathoe bat is not the first new bat species to have been identified in the UK. In 1997 one of Britain's most widespread bat species, the pipistrelle, was found to be 2 separate species. These new discoveries illustrate how much there is yet to learn about bats and with UK bat populations under threat it is vital to increase our knowledge about bats to inform conservation efforts.

Julia Hanmer, Chief Executive Bat Conservation Trust explains:

"It is incredibly exciting to learn more about bats every year. These fascinating animals live alongside us, often roosting in buildings and feeding in our parks and gardens, but there is still much more to learn about these mysterious and beautiful creatures. This summer thousands of volunteers will be watching the skies and listening to bats for the National Bat Monitoring Programme which tells us how bat populations are faring. Who knows what other discoveries are waiting to be made. With another species to add to our books the Bat Conservation Trust will be looking for new recruits to count bats and help us learn more about our vulnerable bat populations. Anyone wishing to take part can find details at www.bats.org.uk/nbmp and new volunteers will be trained on becoming a bat detective"

Interested in bats? The Cheshire Bat Group carries out bat surveys and activities throughout the year across the Cheshire Region for more information contact:

Ged Ryan (Cheshire Bat Group)
gedryan@cheshirebat.fsnet.co.uk 07765898532

Building Dams to Protect Rare Habitat in Warrington

By Mark Cozens (WBC Ranger) & Paul Thomas (Natural England)

Risley Moss is one of the last remaining fragments of the raised bog system that once covered large areas of South Lancashire and North Cheshire. The surface of the Moss has previously been drained and cut for peat, however a significant part of the peat body remains. The extent of the damage to the peat dome of Risley moss from past peat cutting was extensive. It was necessary to construct a system of bunds to restore the hydrological integrity of the wetland, flooding the old peat working and re-establishing conditions needed for bog growth.

Risley Moss is one of only two examples in Cheshire where the water level has been raised and steps taken to encourage the regeneration of an active mire surface. Sphagnum and cotton grass have now re-established over large areas of the bog.

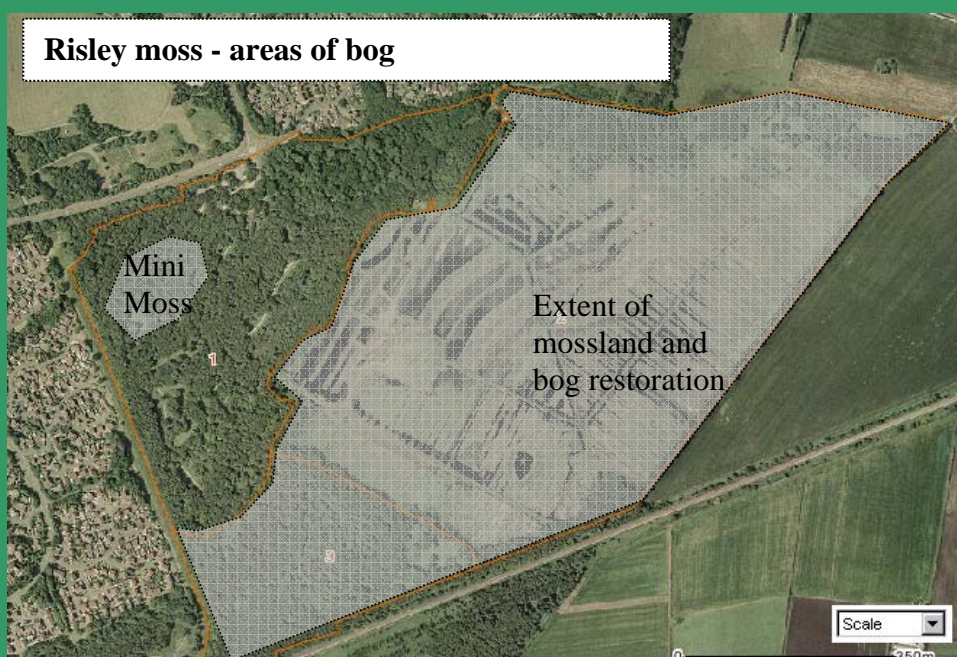
Recently, work has begun on damming areas of Risley Moss. The first stage of this work involved the re-installing of a 12metre-length dam across one of the main ditches leaving the site. The acidity of the water had caused the original metal pile to fail over the years and it was leaking extensively. It is hoped that the improved hydrology of the area will lead to further mossland rewetting along the adjacent woodland edge and increase the development of sphagnum within the grips nearby.

The project was organised by the Ranger Service in consultation with Natural England and a local landscape contractor was employed to complete the works. Further re-wetting consolidation has been planned for the next few years as part of the site Higher Level Stewardship agreement.

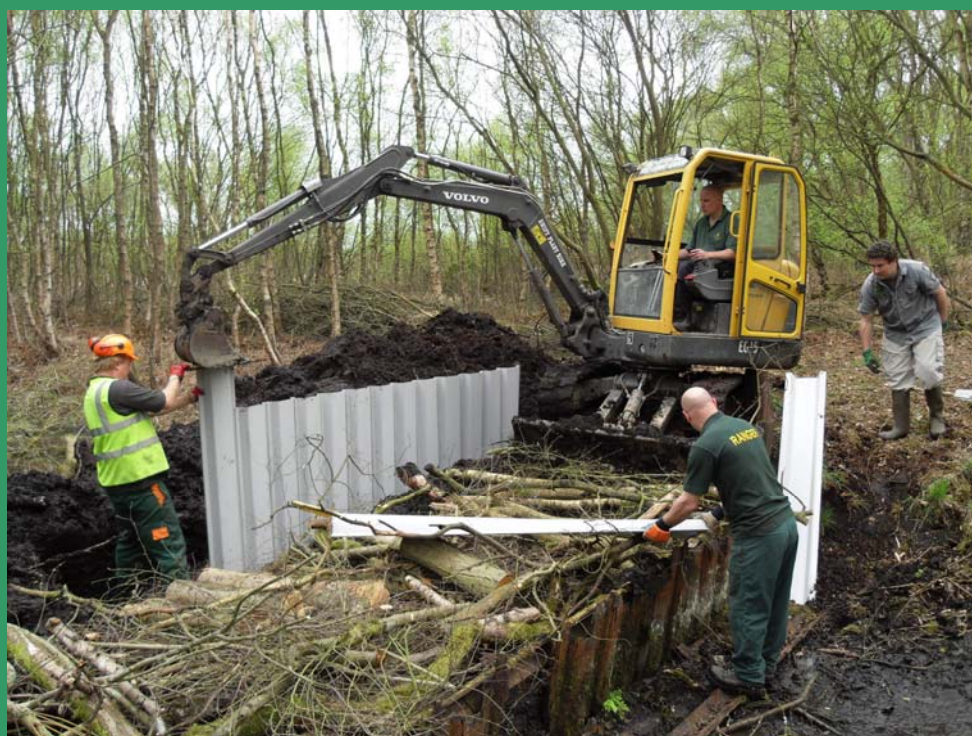
The Mini-Moss

Deep water on the main mossland site limits public access to this area for health and safety reasons so the mini-moss is one of the few areas of mossland habitat that visitors can walk through. The drainage and peat cutting in this area has been very low key. This mossland has been damaged by drainage, but with some small scale works, it should be recoverable.

At the moment, the two hectares of mossland habitat on mini-moss is a typical example of the damaged bog. The ground cover is dominated by purple moor grass with occasional bracken and buckler fern in dryer areas.



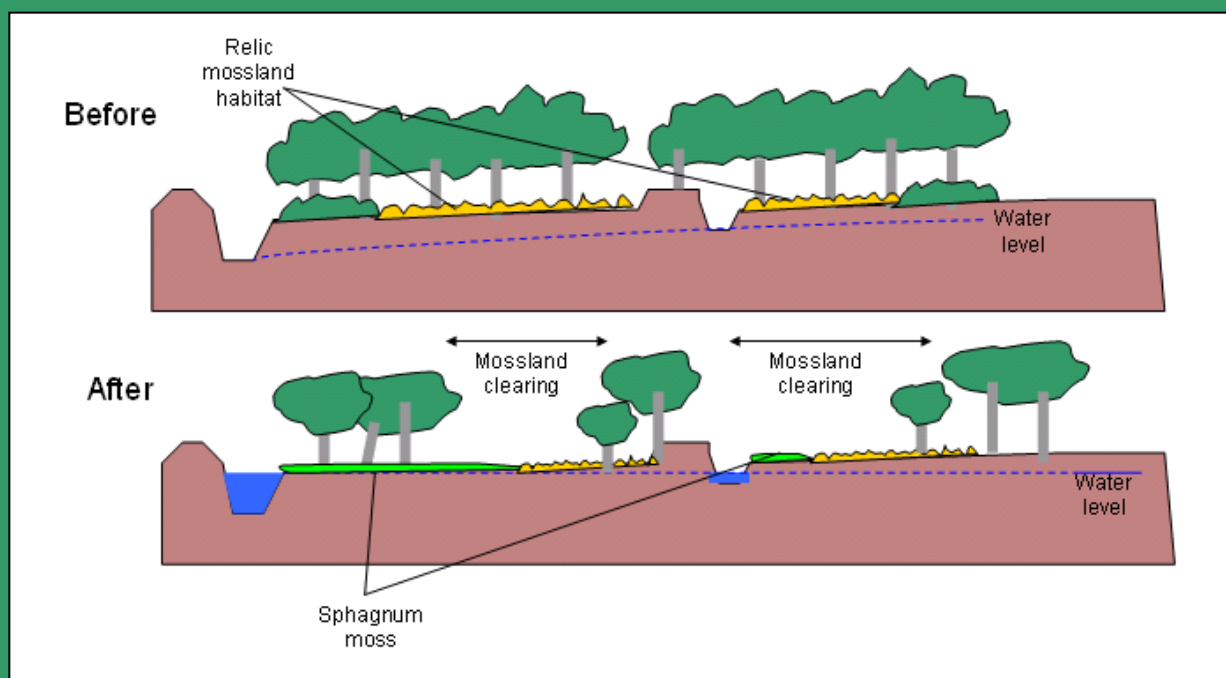
Along the ditches sphagnum and common cotton grass are locally frequent. The area is, in effect, woodland dominated by birch with the occasional rowan and oak. Rhododendron and bracken are also starting to invade the mossland where the peat has dried out along the edges.



Ranger Mark Cozens with Dr Paul Thomas from Natural England working with contractors.

The vegetation on the mini-moss suggests that it is drying out. The site has a network of shallow ditches that feed in to deeper ditches up to 1m deep. The past peat workings on the mini moss has affected the topography of the bog and combined with the drainage taking place, the moss woodland has been able to develop.

Given the value of the moss woodland itself and the localised areas of bog developing within it, a small scale enhancement project is seen to be the best way forward. The first stage will be to install small scale dams within the ditches to raise water levels within the woodland and encourage the spread of sphagnum moss. This will be followed by rhododendron removal and targeted tree removal to open up small areas of bog within the woodland. Path improvements in areas next to ditches are also planned. Have a look next time you visit Risley Moss!





House Martin survey 2010

As our House Martins arrive, now is the perfect time to join in with this survey and help to monitor them throughout the UK. The survey involves just a few questions about the House Martins nesting on your house. You can [take part here](#).

The House Martin survey is just one of a number of surveys that the BTO organises. They are an **independent research charity dedicated to producing unbiased scientific information** about the state of wild bird populations. They make a direct and vital contribution to bird conservation by enabling both campaigners and decision-makers to set priorities and target resources. By becoming [a BTO member](#) you can support their work whilst enjoying the benefits that membership offers. [Join the BTO today](#). You can also support them by contributing information about the birds you see to one of their [surveys](#).

Take a look at the results of the [House Martin survey 2009 here](#).

Recording invasive species with the National Biodiversity Network (NBN)

If you haven't seen the NBN website, it is well worth a look: <http://www.nbn.org.uk/Home.aspx>

One survey you can take part in on their website is the Recording Invasive Species Count which is looking at three non-native animals and 3 non-native plants. The survey information, identification charts, distribution maps and photographs are really good.

Here's the Chinese mitten crab which arrived here in ballast water in ships. Found in our tidal streams, rivers and estuaries and has been spotted in the Mersey in Warrington town centre! (See autumn 2009 newsletter).

<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/nonnativespecies/index.cfm?sectionid=81>



Hot off the press from the Bumblebee conservation Trust:

Introducing BeeWalk...

Help us to monitor changes in bumblebee populations!

Why walk for bees?



While previous bumblebee surveys have focused on collating individual records in order to accurately map bumblebee distributions, **BeeWalk** will be the first scheme to enable us to collect bumblebee abundance data.

This information is integral to monitoring bumblebee population changes and will allow us to detect early warning signs of population declines.



All data collected will contribute to important long-term monitoring of bumblebee populations in response to climate and land-use change.

BeeWalk will be invaluable in helping us to conserve this dramatically declining and much-loved group of buzzing insects.



Methodology: not only is it useful, it's also good fun!

Volunteers will walk a 1-2km route of their own choosing once a month between March and October recording all of the bumblebee species and the number of each species they see.

BeeWalk starter packs will be provided to all volunteers and will comprise of a bumblebee identification guide, recording sheets and detailed instructions. **Stop Press!!!** The first 30 volunteers will receive a bumblebee net, sampling pots and a copy of Edwards and Jenner's "*Field Guide to Bumblebees of Great Britain and Ireland*."

Volunteers will receive regular updates throughout the season and feedback following data analysis.

You could choose to upgrade to **BeeWalk Pro**, a more detailed survey in which the flowers that the bees are foraging on are also recorded.

With your help, we'll gather enough information on bumblebee populations to steer conservation efforts in the right direction!



To sign up for **BeeWalk** email us at beewalk@bumblebeeconservation.org

My experiences of Local Wildlife Sites Survey Training

By Geoff Settle

A number of WNCF members signed up for Mark Ambrose's 'Local Wildlife Site survey' on a sunny Sunday in May. We arrived at Wigg Island and entered what can only be described as a Lunar Module that has a great view from the roof of the Mersey Estuary and Jubilee Bridge. For more on Wigg Island and the Visitor Centre use this link:

<http://www2.halton.gov.uk/pdfs/environment/nature/wiggislandlnr>

After brief introductions, Mark, who is the Cheshire Wildlife volunteer co-ordinator, set the scene about the need for and importance of surveying and assured us that he would liaise with the farmers or landowners. Mark has a great personality and in his previous life was a social worker before he got the calling and headed off, from his native Australia, to Papua New Guinea or some other exotic place.



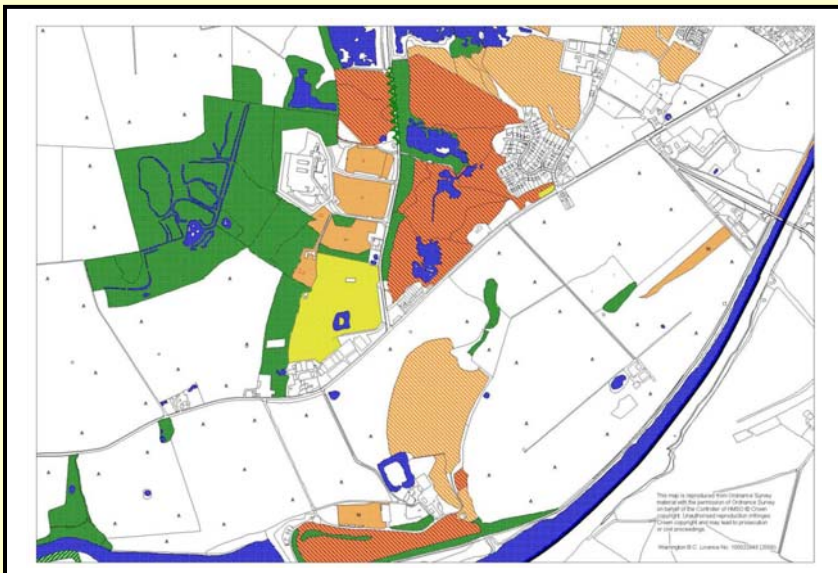
During the morning he went through the methodology and techniques of Wildlife Surveying. I was a bit daunted by the thought of identifying species but when I saw the field guides I relaxed. After all I had been on the Beetle id course just up the road at Rock Savage and that was like a bit like using decision trees to discover the answer. This method wasn't as technical. When Mark introduced the concept of recording the information on paper that involved 'colouring in maps' I was in my element as an ex-Geography student. I could at last make a worthwhile contribution by getting my crayons out.



We spent lunch picnicking on the grass slopes outside the spacecraft before we divided up into 3 groups to practice what we had learnt. Paul Speake, a fellow WNCF, joined three enthusiastic ladies and me as we headed off to survey the far side the Wigg Island. Being in Paul's group was a bonus because he seemed to know everything by sight and only occasionally had to refer to his guide.

Half way around our study area we bumped into Mark who seemed to appear from nowhere, obviously another skill that we had to learn. He then proceeded to test our newfound knowledge. His questions got us thinking even more about the environment and its history. After about two hours we returned to the visitor's centre and compared habitat maps with the other groups who had surveyed the other two thirds of the site.

As they say in Blue Peter here's one prepared earlier back in 2008, not by me but by our General Secretary Helen Lacy in an article on Rixton Clay Pits that she produced for the Cheshire Region Biodiversity Partnership's Newsletter. It just happens to be the venue of our summer meeting.



Digitised Example of the Phase One Habitat Survey in the Rixton Clay Pits area.

Here is a link to the article

<http://www.cheshire-biodiversity.org.uk/news/CrBP%20newsletter%20Dec%2008.pdf>

Here is a link to the Handbook for habitat surveys detailing method and colour codes.

<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/pdf/JNCC%20A4%20Handbook%20for%20Phase%201%20habitat%20survey%20April%202008.pdf>

Hopefully our members will soon be making a contribution to Warrington Wildlife Surveys.

Summer events 2010

WNCF Activities

Next meeting: Saturday 5th June 2010
Rixton Clay Pits 10am

Bat survey Whittle Hall Farm early June-
please let Helen know if you are interested,
date to be confirmed.

Cheshire Active Naturalists

<http://www.cheshireactivenaturalists.org.uk/>
Activities so far have been well attended and
jam packed with information. For summer
events see the web site.

Want to go further a field?

There are more events across the
Cheshire region, for details see
rECOrds events calendar.

CWT Halton & Warrington Group events

Wednesday 26th May *Appleton Dingle*

An area of woodland south of Warrington home to a variety of spring
flowers and summer migrants.

Meet: 7 pm, parking along Dingle Lane (SJ627847)

Watervole Habitat Surveyors Needed

In Partnership with the Lowland Water vole Project we are looking for volunteers to assist with habitat surveys within Sankey Valley Park. This will not be a full phase 1 habitat survey but will look at water vole habitat along watercourse and assess how good/bad they are for watervoles. A short training session will take place one Saturday morning in July in Sankey Valley and we'd love to hear from those who are interested. No previous experience is necessary, please contact Helen if you are interested. hlacy@warrington.gov.uk 01925 442839

What's on in Warrington's Parks

<http://www.warrington.gov.uk/Leisureandculture/Parksandopenspaces/parks/index.aspx#0>

Ranger Service led events and more can be found in the events leaflet (see link above).

Wed 2nd June **Burtonwood Bounder** 1.30- 4pm Sankey Valley Park 01925 571836

Thurs 10th June **An Afternoon Stroll** 1.00-2.30pm Walton Gardens 01925 601617

Biggie! Sun 13th June **Birchwood Carnival** Birchwood Forest Park 01925 824339

Tues 22nd June **Plough the Fields and Saunter** 7-9pm Culcheth Linear Park 01925 765064

Wed 23rd June Gatewath **Gamble** 1.30-3.30pm Sankey Valley Park 01925 571836

Biggie! Sun 27nd June **Risley Moss** Green Safari 824339

Sun 4th July 11-3.00pm **Talking up the Trees** TPT 01925 758195

Wed 14 July **Dragons Damsels and Scorpions** 1.30-3.30pm Sankey Valley Park 01925 571836

Wed 21st July **How Not to Get Eaten** 7-8.30pm Rixton Clay Pits 0161 7779726

Thurs 22nd July **Bats for Beginners** 9-10.30pm Walton Gardens 01925 601617

Sat 24th July **Winwick Walk** 9.30-3pm Sankey Valley Park 01925 571836

Sunday 25th July **Just for the Sake of it** (9 mile walk) 11-4pm Walton Gardens 01925 601617

Wed 28th July **Dipping at the Dam** 1.30-3pm Lymm Dam 01925 758195

Wed 4th Aug **Batty about Bats** 8.15-9.45 Sankey Valley Park 01925 571836

Wed 4th Aug **H2O & Co** 1.30-3pm Rixton Clay Pits 0161 7779726

Sun 8th Aug **Damsels and Dragons** 2-3.30pm Risley Moss 01925 824339

Wed 11th Aug **Bat Patrol** 9-10.30pm Lymm Dam 01925 758195

Plus much more!