

**FRIENDS OF THE RIVER ARROW NATURE RESERVE**

# **RESERVE MATTERS**

ISSUE 9

SPRING 2011



Great Spotted Woodpecker - Photograph A. Yeomans

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# Editor's Comment

After one of the coldest winters in recent years we are enjoying one of the warmest springs. The dawn chorus on the reserve is worth getting up early for! It has been a difficult winter for many animals and birds but nature has a remarkable way of recovering.

One bird that has been spotted in the reserve is the great spotted woodpecker, and many thanks to our member Tony Yeomans for the excellent cover photo. This was one of the photos that appeared on our 2011 calendar. We are currently working on our calendar for 2012.

Thanks to all of you for your continuing support through the year. Some of us have recently been involved in the Community Orchard project, more of that later. We planted more trees over the winter period and are currently working on installing and renewing steps around the reserve.

We are always pleased to meet and chat with members of the Group of Friends. Even if you can't help out do come and see us at our monthly working parties. These are held on the third Saturday of the month from 10.00 to 12.00.

Best wishes

Stephen Godfrey - Volunteer Warden Tel 0777 3293968



## Reserve News

Vandals recently damaged the fence at the north end of the reserve. Many thanks to Alcester Town Council, the owners of the fence, for carrying out speedy repairs.

In a further act of vandalism grass piles which were left when the grass was cut in the south field have been set on fire and the fire brigade was called out twice in one day on Saturday 23rd April. The piles provide a superb habitat for grass snakes in particular and at least one snake was killed.



We will shortly be erecting a notice board at the reserve entrance which will allow us to post information about our activities and events. We will also use it to promote and publicise Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. Many thanks go to past High Bailiff Mike Clark and Alcester Town Council for their financial support with this project.



The pond viewing platform has long been a safety concern and the volunteers have been asking Stratford District Council (owners of the reserve) to do some remedial work for some time. The council have now carried out the work to fill in the gap on each side of the platform.



An unusual visitor to the reserve spotted recently on the river near the weir was this goosander duck. These handsome diving ducks are a member of the sawbill family, so called because of their long, serrated bills, used for catching fish.

The recent spell of sunny weather has brought on a superb display of spring flowers on the reserve.



*Cowslip*



*Butterburr*



*Lady Smock*

The slow worms (not a worm at all but a lizard without legs) are also breeding well. There is an article on slow worms later in the newsletter.

If you spot any unusual plants, invertebrates, animals or birds on the reserve please tell us about it and send a photo if possible.

Contact : [info@alcester-nature.org.uk](mailto:info@alcester-nature.org.uk) or 07773293968.

## Who's Who in the Friends?

You are welcome to contact any of the members of the committee if you have any queries. If you have any matters to report about the reserve please contact the Volunteer Warden, Stephen Godfrey on 0777 3293968 or email [info@alcester-nature.org.uk](mailto:info@alcester-nature.org.uk).

### The Committee

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# Dates for Your Diary

## WORKING PARTY DATES

Working Parties meet at 10.00 at the Main entrance on the third Saturday of each month, all are welcome but children under 16 yrs must be accompanied by an adult. Please bring a few tools with you if possible such as secateurs, spade, saw and of course protective gloves.

Saturday 21st May  
Saturday 16th July

Saturday 18th June  
Saturday 20th August

You can contact the Volunteer Warden to check whether the working party is taking place on 0777 3293968.

### Tuesday 3rd May

BAT WALK - Come for an evening stroll and search for bats on the reserve using a bat detector. Meeting at the reserve entrance, Ragley Mill Lane at 8.30 (finish by 10.00). If you wish to come please register with the volunteer warden as places are limited. Please bring a torch as the ground is uneven and it will be getting dark. In case of wet and windy weather the bats will not fly so please contact the volunteer warden first on 07773293968 or check on [www.alcester-nature.org.uk](http://www.alcester-nature.org.uk) for an update.

Cost £2 donation to Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

### Sunday 15nd May

GUIDED TOUR - a ramble around the reserve with wardens and other members of the group. It's a great way to find out more about the reserve, it's history and inhabitants. Meeting at the reserve entrance, Ragley Mill Lane at 2.30.

Cost £2 donation to Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

### June (date to be confirmed)

NATURE WATCH - come along for an evening nature watch organised by Alcester Grammar School and the Friends. Further details will be circulated later.

## Code Breaker Puzzle- Find the Animals seen on the Reserve

1 = a 2 = b 3 = c etc.

19 17 21 9 18 18 5 12

23 15 15 4 16 5 3 11 5 18

2 1 14 11 22 15 12 5

6 18 15 7 19

13 15 19 8 19

4 1 16 8 14 9 1

# The Community Orchard Project

Just across the river from the reserve a an area of land has been turned into a community orchard.

The orchard idea was originally conceived by Alcester Opportunities, but since the organisation disbanded last September, the responsibility now lies with the town council, which is working with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. A grant of £8,000 has been awarded by Warwickshire County Council to fund the project. A further grant has been applied for through Orbit Housing Association to fund the establishment of a Friends of the Orchard group and courses to help residents learn how to maintain and tend to the trees.



Around 40 fruit trees have been planted with many old English varieties of fruit represented. It is hoped that when these mature the local residents will be able to benefit from the harvest.



The Friends of River Arrow Nature Reserve have been giving assistance and were involved in scrub clearance, wild flower planting and tree planting.



# Winter Birds January / February 2011

Visits to the Reserve during January and early February yielded sightings of two unusual birds, the Goosander and the Little Grebe.

In early January there were at least three female Goosanders seen on the river at various places between Gunnings Bridge in Alcester and the old railway bridge at the head of the Reserve. They were seen regularly until the end of the second week of February. The Goosander is a large duck from the sawbill group – with a very characteristic bill shape. It is longer than a Mallard, but with a sleeker body, designed for diving for fish which is its principal food source. The bird is resident in Scotland, Scandinavia, the Baltic States and Russia. In winter some migrate southwards, especially after prolonged hard frosts. This year, with many of the UK freshwater lakes deeply frozen after the record cold spell in December, they dispersed and were seen on many rivers further south than usual.

The Little Grebe, or Dabchick, is the smallest of the Grebes seen in Britain. It is resident and common in small numbers on many ponds and lakes throughout the Midlands. Usually only one or two are seen at once. In most years during the Autumn and Winter little grebes can be seen on the river adjacent to the reserve. They hunt for small fish in the slower flowing deeper water. Again they are more likely to be seen in rivers during hard weather when lakes and ponds are frozen.

There have been the usual numbers of Redwing and Fieldfare. They arrived en masse in November and by late December all the hawthorn berries in the reserve had been stripped from the trees and many of the birds moved on, presumably to west Wales and the south west of England. A few remained in the district and could be seen on the reserve, feeding mostly in the ivy where the very late crop of berries also helps to sustain our resident thrushes and blackbirds.

A small party of mixed finches including chaffinch, goldfinch and siskins have been seen regularly feeding in the alders around the reserve, where they take the seeds held in the small alder cones. The siskins are a very attractive small green and yellow coloured finch, the males have dark heads and by mid February were beginning to twitter their spring song.

Glyn Morley

## The Slow Worm

*Anguis fragilis*, or slow worm, slow-worm or slowworm, is a limbless reptile native to Eurasia. It is also sometimes referred to as the blindworm or blind worm, though the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) considers this to be incorrect.

Slow worms are semi-fossorial<sup>[1]</sup> (burrowing) lizards spending much of the time hiding underneath objects. The skin of the varieties of slow worm is smooth with scales that do not overlap one another. Like many other lizards, slow worms autotomize, meaning that they have the ability to shed their tails in order to escape predators. The tail regrows, but remains smaller.



These reptiles are mostly active during the twilight and occasionally bask in the sun, but are more often found hiding beneath rocks and logs. They are carnivorous and, because they feed on slugs and worms, they can often be found in long grass and other damp environments.

The females give birth to live young (ovoviviparous birth). In the days leading up to birth the female can often be seen basking in the sun on a warm road.

They are common in gardens and can be encouraged to enter and help remove pest insects by placing black plastic or a piece of tin on the ground. On warm days one or more slow worms will often be found underneath these collectors of heat. One of the biggest causes of mortality in slow worms in suburban areas is the domestic cat, against which it has no defence.

Although these lizards are often mistaken for snakes, there are a number of features that differentiate them from snakes. The most important is they have small eyes with eyelids that blink like lizards. This is a feature that is not found in snakes. They may also have visible ears like lizards do, which snakes do not have. They shed their skin in patches like other lizards, rather than the whole skin as most snakes do. Slow worms also shed tails (autotomy) by breaking one of their tail vertebrae in half, as a defence mechanism, as lizards do. Also, the pattern of their ventral scales is totally different from that of snakes.

Adult slow worms grow to be about 50 cm long and are known for their exceptionally long life; it has been said that a slow worm is the longest-living lizard, living about thirty years in the wild and up to fifty-four years in captivity (this record is held by a male slow worm that lived at the Copenhagen Zoo from 1962 to 2009).[2][3] The female often has a stripe along the spine and dark sides while the male may have blue spots dorsally. Juveniles of both sexes are gold with a dark brown belly and sides with a dark stripe along the spine.

*Information from Wikipedia*  
*Photograph - S. Godfrey*

## **CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER ARE ALWAYS WELCOME.**

If you see something unusual please send a report. Or why not contribute a photo or short article all you have to do is email or post them to the editor.

Email : [info@alcester-nature.org.uk](mailto:info@alcester-nature.org.uk)

Post : S Godfrey, 6 Georgian Close, Alcester, B49 5EU

## **WEB PAGE**

You can find our web page at

[alcester-nature.org.uk](http://alcester-nature.org.uk)

WHY NOT SEND A CONTRIBUTION TO OUR PHOTO GALLERY?