

FRIENDS OF THE RIVER ARROW NATURE RESERVE

RESERVE MATTERS

ISSUE 10

SPRING 2012



Hawthorn Blossom - Photograph S. Godfrey

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Editor's Comment

Why do the British like to talk about the weather? Possibly because it is never the same two years running. Last year saw a warm spring but a cool summer which then lasted right into early autumn with record temperatures in September. The winter has been mild generally without the weeks of below zero temperatures we experienced in the previous winter. This must be very confusing for our wildlife, many will have started preparing for winter and then spring seems to arrive early. As temperatures recover and more insects take to the wing our bats will soon be returning from their winter hibernation roosts in barns, derelict buildings and maybe even your loft!

Thanks to all those who have supported us by buying our calendar 2012. If you missed out there are still a few left! We are now trawling through our photos for the calendar for 2013. If you have any photos that we could use in future calendars please get in touch.

Thanks to all of you for your continuing support through the year.

We are always pleased to meet and chat with members of the Group of Friends. If you want some fresh air and exercise please join us at one of our conservation days. Even if you can't help with work on the reserve do call in and say hello, you are most welcome! These are normally held on the third Saturday of the month from 10.00 to 12.00. Information is displayed in our new notice board.

Best wishes

Stephen Godfrey - Volunteer Warden, Chair of Friends of the River Arrow Nature Reserve

Reserve News

Vandalism

In order to keep the fields in good order and encourage the growth of meadow flowers Warwickshire Wildlife Trust volunteers cut the grass each year in late spring/early summer. A particular problem through last spring and summer has been persons unknown setting fire to the grass piles. The Fire Brigade have had to attend on a number of occasions. This is obviously a disaster for any creatures using these piles, especially grass snakes which may have nests in them. In addition to this there have been a couple of incidents where fires have been lit against the trunk of our oldest oak tree. Although this is a strong tree, and unlikely to suffer any long term damage, it is extremely disheartening to think that anyone would want to destroy this tree. We are considering ways to try and reduce the chance of problems for this year. We hope these incidents will not recur but if you see anyone lighting fires we would appreciate a call to the local police or the volunteer warden on 0777 3293968.



The Pond Platform

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.



Reserve News (continued)

Biodiversity Day

We joined forces with Alcester Grammar School teachers and students for the annual biodiversity day last June. Many species were observed and recorded including plants, insects and aquatic organisms.

In the evening visitors were invited to join us for a bat walk led by Rita Godfrey on the reserve on which Pipistrelle and Daubentons Bats were observed.

There was an overnight moth-trapping session organised by Alan Prior and around 80 species were identified

A number of bleary-eyed volunteers arrived at the reserve at 4.00 a.m. to listen to the dawn chorus, with commentary by Glyn Morley.

The weather was dry and warm which helped us to have another successful day.

Alcester Scouts

In July we welcomed the Alcester Scouts and Cubs groups to the reserve for an activities day as part of their 50 year anniversary celebrations. Activities included pond-dipping and estimating the age of our oldest oak trees. The day started off rather wet but those taking part were undaunted and eventually the sun came out. A great day was had by all and we hope we can do this again this year.

The Notice Board Saga

If you have visited the reserve in recent months you may have noticed that there was a large silver notice board by the entrance, which had remained unused for some months.

Earlier last year we purchased a notice board (shown below) for the reserve. We contacted Stratford District Council (SDC) to inform them of what we were doing in case they had any objections. No objections were raised so you can imagine our surprise when, having received our notice board from the supplier, contractors from SDC arrived with another notice board and erected it where we intended to put ours!



Neither ourselves nor WWT were given any indication that SDC were going to provide a notice board.

We had made repeated requests to SDC for a key without success so we were unable to make use of it. SDC finally agreed that we could take out their notice board, and put ours by the main entrance instead.

You will now see our pristine new notice board at the entrance to the reserve, and we have started posting notices in it. We do, of course, have a key for it!

Many thanks go to past High Bailiff Mike Clark, the Court Leet and Alcester Town Council for their financial support with this project.

Tree Planting

We have continuing with our tree planting this winter to enhance the woodland areas and the margins of the reserve. This includes species such as hazel, ash, silver birch and hawthorn. We have received some trees from the Woodland Trust. We have also purchased trees from our own funds to further enhance the reserve.

We Need Your Help

We have a small collection of our photos on the web page but we would really like copies of your photos to add to our archive. These can be of anything you see on the reserve, even landscape shots.

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 or 07773293968.

Conservation Days

Working Parties meet at 10.00 at the Main entrance, normally on the 3rd 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.

You can check whether the working party is taking place by contacting the Volunteer Warden on 0777 3293968 Or checking on the notice board. There will be no Conservation Day in September.

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.

The Committee

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THE SLOW WORM

One of the more interesting inhabitants of the reserve is the slow worm. But is it a worm? No, it has eyes and eyelids. Is it a snake? No, snakes don't have eyelids. So what is it? It is a lizard which in the course of evolution has lost its legs. Another interesting fact is that slow worms can live for more than 50 years!

Anguis, or the slow worm, is a small genus of lizard in the family Anguillidae. It has two described species.



A Slow Worm nesting with a Grass Snake for warmth - Photo S Godfrey

Although they are lizards, slow worms have lost their limbs completely and are often mistaken as snakes. Slow-worms typically grow to between 40 and 50 cm (16 and 20 in), with the females slightly larger than the males. The tail makes up around half of its length, but is indistinguishable from the body.

As their name indicates, slow worms are slow moving and can be easily caught. Like many lizards, slow worms can shed their tails to distract predators. The tail re-grows but rarely to the length of the original.



Slow Worm - Photo S Godfrey

Slow worms can be distinguished from snakes by several features: their eyelids, which snakes lack entirely; their small ear openings which again snakes lack; and their tongues, which are notched in the centre rather than completely forked like a snake's.

Slow worms are typically grey-brown, with the females having a coppery sheen and two lateral black stripes, and the males displaying electric blue spots, particularly in the breeding season. They give birth to live young; the young are about 4 cm (1.6 in) long at birth and generally have golden stripes.

Slow worms have grooved teeth which allow them to grab and swallow whole their soft invertebrate prey, such as slugs, hairless caterpillars and earthworms. Snails are usually avoided, except when they are still very young and the shell can be easily broken.

Slow worms are frequently found in garden compost heaps, or any place where it is both warm and protected. They range across most of Europe, and into parts of Asia, although they are restricted to temperate and humid habitats. They hibernate from October to February/March, both communally and solitarily, and sometimes share hibernating sites with other reptiles.

They are protected in the British Isles.

[Stephen Godfrey](#)
(including information from Wikipedia)

The History of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

You'll all know that the River Arrow Nature Reserve is managed by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, but how many of you know the history of the Trust, or indeed of the Wildlife Trust movement generally? It all started in 1912, when banker and naturalist Charles Rothschild – yes, bankers are not entirely evil – set up the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves, with an office at the Natural History Museum in London.

In 1915, the SPNR identified 284 sites throughout the UK that were 'worthy of preservation', and acquired its first one in 1919 (Woodwalton Fen, Cambridgeshire) as a bequest from Rothschild himself. The first local trust was the Norfolk Naturalists' Trust, formed in 1926, and it was not until 1941 that the government became involved, when it was contemplating the needs of the country after the Second World War. In that year the Conference on Nature Preservation in Post-War Reconstruction was held under the auspices of the SPNR, followed in 1942 by the establishment of the government's Nature Reserves Investigation Committee. Other local trusts were established after the War, in Yorkshire (1947) and Lincolnshire (1948), with many others following during the 1950s and later. The 47th and last trust of all, the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, was set up in 2002, and national coverage is now complete.

The SPNR enjoyed royal support from the early days, gaining a royal charter from King George V in 1916, and a new charter from the present Queen in 1976. By this time the role of the Society was developing to cover wider issues beyond simply nature reserves, and to reflect this it changed its name to the Society for the Promotion of Nature Conservation, also in 1976. The Prince of Wales became Patron in the following year, followed by another change of name, to the Royal Society of Nature Conservation, in 1981.

From 1995 the movement has been collectively known as 'The Wildlife Trusts', with the badger logo as the national identity, many local trusts adopting names to include the words 'Wildlife Trust'. The most recent change came in 2004, when the RSNC became the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, in recognition of its role as national co-ordinating body for the local Wildlife Trusts, a role which, as the SPNR, it had first formally assumed in 1959; today all 47 local trusts are members of the RSWT.

Our local Warwickshire Wildlife Trust can trace its roots (sorry about the pun!) back to 1957, when the West Midlands Trust for Nature Conservation came into being, covering Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire, including Birmingham and the Black Country. This proved to be too large an area to manage effectively, and first Worcestershire (1968), then Staffordshire (1969) became separate organisations, leaving the rest as the Warwickshire Nature Conservation Trust, or WARNACT. The Birmingham and Black County Wildlife Trust (as it is now known) was set up in 1980, leaving those areas purely in Warwickshire plus Coventry and Solihull (which were historically in Warwickshire anyway) to continue in the form we know today, WARNACT changing its name to Warwickshire Wildlife Trust in 1990. It now has over 25,000 members, and manages 56 nature reserves covering over 800 hectares (1,977 acres), in some cases supported by local groups such as the Friends of the River Arrow Nature Reserve.

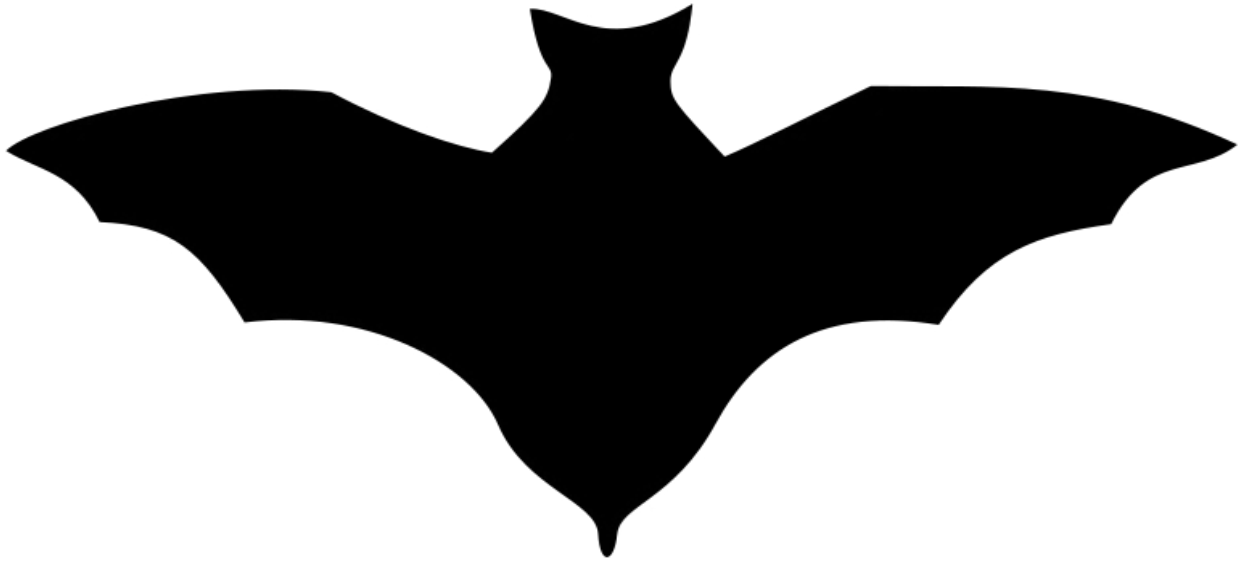
The information in this article is taken from The Wildlife Trusts and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust websites (www.wildlifetrusts.org and www.warwickshire-wildlife-trust.org.uk), except the date of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust for which I had to resort to Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>) – trust that as far as you normally trust Wikipedia!

Ian Greig

PLEASE JOIN US ON OUR BAT WALK, AND TELL ALL YOUR FRIENDS!!



Registered Charity No 209200



BAT WALK

Come and join us for an evening walk around
the River Arrow Local Nature Reserve
in search of bats.

Tuesday 8th May at 8.30
meeting at the Main Entrance, Ragley Mill Lane,
Alcester

PLEASE NOTE : Please contact the Volunteer Warden in advance
if you wish to take part, places are limited.

If weather is wet or windy please check our website or call us before you set out.

A donation of £2 pp would be appreciated.

To Register Or For Further Information Contact
Volunteer Warden Steve Godfrey

email info@alcester-nature.org.uk, or call/text 07773293968