

FRIENDS OF THE RIVER ARROW NATURE RESERVE

RESERVE MATTERS

ISSUE 12

SPRING 2013



Oak Tree Flowers - Photo by Stephen Godfrey

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Editor's Comment

Spring got off to a late start this year with an exceptionally cold March and April. This affects plants and animals on the reserve in many ways. Frogs can spawn between December and April but given the weather conditions the season will have been a late one this year. Many other species in the reserve rely on tadpoles and frogs for food. Adult frogs are especially important as a source of food for grass snakes. The cold start will also have affected the moth population, which are an important food source for our bats. However the good news is that now the temperature is nearer the seasonal average the breeding season for the birds on the reserve is in full swing. In February a pair goosander was spotted on the river, which is a species of diving duck and not common in this area. There have been recent sightings of a kingfisher although this is probably nesting further along the river. More worryingly I have had reports of a mink being sighted in the area which may account for a lower number of ducks and moorhens than usual, as minks will take young and sometimes adults.

Please tell us about any sightings of unusual species on the reserve, we are always pleased to receive your reports. You can email info@alcester-nature.org.uk or visit our Facebook page. Alternatively you will find links on our new improved website www.riverarrow.org.uk.

You will always be welcome if you wish to join us 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 . Details can be found in the events section of this newsletter.

Membership renewals are due on 1st June. I hope you will continue to support us. Thanks to all of you for your continuing support through the past year.

Best wishes

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

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Reserve News

River Bank Erosion

High water levels in the River Arrow have been a regular feature during the past couple of years in particular. This has resulted in sever erosion of the bank in places, especially near the board walk. This has resulted in part of the fencing falling in to the river. Stratford District Council have organised temporary fencing alongside the board walk and constructed new steps. Another interesting observation is that the underlying bedrock is now exposed in this section of the river. This kind of erosion is a natural phenomenon and the course of the river is continually changing. There are no immediate plans to take steps to stabilise the bank.



Erosion has also affected the far bank of the river with part of the path in the Conway Fields falling in to the river and having to be reconstructed. This land belongs to Alcester Town Council who are considering wooden piling to protect the bank.

Reserve News (continued)

The Board Walk

The board walk has been flooded a few times and one of our recent tasks was to give it a thorough clean and removal of weeds growing in between the boards. The photo shows volunteer Rebecca White hard at work and the temporary fencing can be seen on the left. When the river is in flood water passes under the board walk and into the pond.



The Pond Viewing Platform

The wooden surface of the platform used to be very slippery in wet weather. To overcome this wire netting was fixed to it to provide a non slip surface some years ago. As part of our regular maintenance we have replaced a section of the netting which had worn through, to avoid any risk to visitors or their dogs. Ian Greig can be seen here nailing down the netting, and his fingers!

The Abbey Field

You may have noticed that the Abbey Field has become rather overgrown. This field was previously grazed by sheep but we do not currently have a grazer to carry out the work. Cutting the grass in the field will now be the responsibility of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust as part of their Nature Force work programme.

Tree Planting

We have planted more trees during the winter month donated by the Woodland Trust. Thanks go to Martin German for arranging the supply of trees.

Notice Boards

When you visit the reserve you will see that we have installed two small notice boards to enable us to post notices at places other than the main entrance.

Farewell Ian Greig

Ian has been our membership secretary since we were formed in 2006. Ian is now moving to a new job in Bristol and has had to leave the committee. He has performed this role well, and had been one of our most steadfast work party volunteers. We wish him all the best in his new venture.

Calendar 2014

Our 2014 calendar is now available. This features photos taken on the reserve by our members and costs just £5. For further details please see our website www.riverarrow.org.uk, where you can preview the calendar, or contact the the Volunteer Warden on 0777 3293968.



Past Events

Alcester Street Market

The Friends of the River Arrow Nature Reserve ran a stall at the Alcester Court Leet Charity Street Market in Alcester on 9th June. We received copies of our new 2014 Calendar in time to sell them on the stall. We also sold a range of other trading goods and gave out information about the reserve and the Friends. The weather was good this year and a good time was had by all. Thanks go to Rita Godfrey, Sandra Covey, Ian Johnson and Stephen Godfrey for helping out.



The market had a regency theme, giving Stephen Godfrey and Ian Greig an excuse to dress up in silly costumes!



Stephen Godfrey, Sandra Covey and Ian Johnson managing the stall.

Forthcoming Events

Grass Cutting and Raking

The Warwickshire Wildlife Trust volunteers' Nature Force Team will be grass-cutting on the reserve on **Thursday 25th July** and **Monday 30th July**. The trust always welcomes extra volunteers so if you feel like a couple of days of fresh air and exercise why not pop along and help.

Conservation Days

Working Parties meet at 10.00 at the Main entrance, normally on the 3rd Saturday of each month and last for 2 to 3 hours. 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.

Conservation Days take place on the following dates :

Saturday 27th July - PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE

Saturday 17th August

NO SEPTEMBER CONSERVATION DAY

Saturday 19th October

Saturday 16th November

Saturday 14th December - PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE

You can check dates and any last minute cancellations by visiting our website www.riverarrow.org.uk, contacting the Volunteer Warden on 0777 3293968, or checking on the notice board.

SUMMER MIGRANTS TO THE RESERVE

Although Spring arrived very late this year, there was only a slight delay in the arrival of our usual summer migrant birds to the Reserve.

Chiffchaffs were the first to arrive and two were singing well by the end of March, although often they can be heard from the middle of March.

Our summer blackcaps arrived in good numbers at the beginning of the second week of April and on April

11th a party of five or six males was seen in bushes at the back of the Mill. The occasional blackcaps seen in the Reserve during the winter and those which regularly visit our gardens then for food are thought to be birds from Germany, Scandinavia and eastern Europe which seem to like the generally temperate winters of the UK, Ireland and north western France. Our summer birds move south in Autumn to Iberia and north Africa.

Also on April 11th there were at least five willow warblers in the hedge at the side of the north meadow.



These birds were presumably a migrating group moving to northern England or even Scotland, usually only the occasional willow warbler is heard on the reserve in early Spring and these birds move on – there has been no recent record of willow warblers nesting here.

By mid April there were at least three chiffchaffs singing and two pairs at least have nested here this year.

There have been three or four blackcaps singing regularly in the reserve since mid April, several females have been seen and these too are believed to be nesting.

A more unusual warbler arrived in late May (seen May 26th and 27th); a common whitethroat was singing well and displaying at the end of the south meadow and at the northern end of the Abbey meadow. A female was seen briefly and it is hoped that they may settle to breed here this year.

We have had a few swallows using the reserve for feeding, but with no suitable nest sites none will breed here. Swifts have appeared over the reserve since the second week in May, but again with no suitable buildings for nesting they will breed elsewhere, probably in the older buildings in the town centre.

House martins, which in previous years have fed in good numbers on insects over the reserve, arrived late this year and so far only the odd bird has been seen. Last year there were frequently parties of thirty or more feeding on insects in the lee of the large oaks in the north meadow. Hopefully they will arrive in numbers as spring turns to summer.

Sadly the Cuckoo has not been seen or heard on the reserve this year. If any reader has heard it locally the author or members of the Committee would be pleased to hear of the record.

Glyn Morley

(Photo of Common Whitethroat courtesy of Wikipedia)

[\(P.S. Please tell us about all your bird and butterfly sightings on the reserve, we love to hear from you! - Editor\)](#)

OUR FRIEND - THE BUMBLEBEE

There has been much in the press recently about the problems facing pollinating insects, and bees in particular. There is much concern about the use of neo-nicotinoid pesticides which many scientists believe have contributed to the decline in numbers.

Alcester Town Council is currently considering promoting Alcester as a "Bee Friendly Town". This means encouraging the planting of bee-friendly plants in public places and private gardens, and discouraging the use of harmful pesticides.



In this newsletter we are going to look at the bumblebee, one of our favourite inhabitants of the reserve.

A bumblebee is any member of the bee genus *Bombus*, in the family Apidae. There are over 250 known species, existing primarily in the Northern Hemisphere although they also occur in South America. They have been introduced to New Zealand and the Australian state of Tasmania.

Bumblebees are social insects that are characterised by black and yellow body hairs, often in bands. However, some species have orange or red on their bodies, or may be entirely black. Another obvious (but not unique) characteristic is the soft nature of the hair (long, branched setae), called pile, that covers their entire body, making them appear and feel fuzzy. They are best distinguished from similarly large, fuzzy bees by the form of the female hind leg, which is modified to form a corbicula: a shiny concave surface that is bare, but surrounded by a fringe of hairs used to transport pollen (in similar bees, the hind leg is completely hairy, and pollen grains are wedged into the hairs for transport).

Like their relatives the honey bees, bumblebees feed on nectar and gather pollen to feed their young. Bumblebees form colonies, which are usually much less extensive than those of honey bees. This is due to a number of factors including the small physical size of the nest cavity, the responsibility of a single female for the initial construction and reproduction that happens within the nest, and the restriction of the colony to a single season (in most species). Often, mature bumblebee nests will hold fewer than 50 individuals. Bumblebee nests may be found within tunnels in the ground made by other animals, or in tussock grass as opposed to Carpenter Bees that burrow into wood. Bumblebees sometimes construct a wax canopy ("involucrum") over the top of their nest for protection and insulation. Bumblebees do not often preserve their nests through the winter, though some tropical species live in their nests for several years (and their colonies can grow quite large, depending on the size of the nest cavity). In temperate species, the last generation of summer includes a number of queens who overwinter separately in protected spots. The queens can live up to one year, possibly longer in tropical species.

Bumblebees are in danger in many developed countries due to habitat destruction and collateral pesticide damage. In Britain, until relatively recently, 19 species of native true bumblebee were recognised along with six species of cuckoo bumblebees. Of these, three have been extirpated, eight are in serious decline, and only six remain widespread. Similar declines in bumblebees have been reported in Ireland, with 4 species being designated endangered, and another two species considered vulnerable to extinction. A decline in bumblebee numbers could cause large-scale changes to the countryside, resulting from inadequate pollination of certain plants. The world's first bumblebee sanctuary was established at Vane Farm in the Loch Leven National Nature Reserve in Scotland in 2008.

The orchestral interlude Flight of the Bumblebee was composed (circa 1900) by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov to represent the turning of Prince Guidon into a bumblebee so he can fly away to visit his father, Tsar Saltan, in the opera The Tale of Tsar Saltan, although the music is considered to more accurately reflect the flight of a bluebottle than a bumblebee. The music inspired Walt Disney to feature a bumblebee in his 1940 animated musical Fantasia and have it sound as if it were flying in all parts of the theatre. This early attempt at "surround sound" was unsuccessful, and the music was excluded from the film's release.

The archaic English colloquialism dumbledor (also used for cockchafers) is the source of the name Albus Dumbledore, a fictional character from the Harry Potter series (1997–2007). J. K. Rowling said the name "seemed to suit the headmaster, because one of his passions is music and I imagined him walking around humming to himself".

The genus name Bombus, assigned by Pierre André Latreille in 1802, is derived from the Latin word for a buzzing or humming sound.

Stephen Godfrey

(With Information from Wikipedia)



YOUR PHOTOS

This photo of a bee with well-loaded pollen baskets feeding on a celandine was taken on the reserve by Stephen Burston.

This is not a bumblebee as it has no hairs on the abdomen.

Can anyone identify the species?

WEB PAGES

We are delighted to report that our web site, Alcester Nature, which gives information about the reserve and other sites around the town has now had over 1,000 visitors!

You can find it at

www.alcester-nature.org.uk

We also have a web site dedicated to the Friends of the River Arrow Nature Reserve with contact details and forthcoming events. This is also the place to download copies of "Reserve Matters" past and present. You can also pre-view our new 2014 calendar on the web site.

You can find it at

www.riverarrow.org.uk