

FRIENDS OF THE RIVER ARROW NATURE RESERVE

RESERVE MATTERS

ISSUE 1

SUMMER 2007

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Welcome to our first newsletter!

This is the first quarterly newsletter of the newly formed Friends of River Arrow Nature Reserve. This will provide an update of what is going on at the reserve, and news of past and future events. We will also feature articles about the wildlife which you can see and hear when you visit the reserve. In this edition we feature the bird song that can be heard, particularly during spring and summer. We would welcome any suggestions for subjects you would like to see covered. We would also welcome any contributions from members.

Who are the Friends of River Arrow N.R.?

Working closely with the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, the Friends provide support to the Reserve by promoting community involvement, helping with management and routine maintenance, and raising funds for the conservation and promotion of the Reserve. Friends can help on the monthly working parties on the Reserve - jobs include planting trees, clearing brambles, and clearing litter, so there is usually something to suit everyone (it's not compulsory; only if you want!). You'll also receive this newsletter four times a year, to keep you in the picture about what is happening on the Reserve - what there is to see, and behind the scenes. There will be meetings and other events throughout the year.

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 one of the Volunteer Wardens.

The Committee

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Stephen Godfrey | CHAIR | sgodfrey@freeola.com | 01789 765536 |
| Patsy Byrne | SECRETARY | patsy@pbyrne.freeserve.co.uk | 01789 762974 |
| Ian Johnson | TREASURER | iansarah.22@tiscali.co.uk | 01789 764619 |
| Rita Godfrey | EVENTS | ritagodfrey@freeola.com | 01789 765536 |
| Ian Greig | MEMBERSHIP | iangreig@freeola.com | 01789 765302 |
| Sarah Johnson | SCHOOLS LIAISON | iansarah.22@tiscali.co.uk | 01789 764619 |
| Glyn Morley | | gmorley@waitrose.com | 01789 762269 |
| Rebecca White | | r.t.white@bham.ac.uk | 01789 762584 |
| Andrew Byrne | | andy@pbyrne.freeserve.co.uk | 01789 762974 |
| Adrian Madge | | adrianfmadge@aol.com | 01789 762417 |

The Volunteer Wardens

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|-----------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Stephen Godfrey | sgodfrey@freeola.com | 01789 765536 |
| Adrian Madge | adrianfmadge@aol.com | 01789 762417 |

Letters to the Editor

We hope you will send your comments for inclusion in future editions of the newsletter. We would especially like to hear of any wildlife you spot on the reserve. The editor would also appreciate any editorial contributions which would be of interest to our members. Please send your contributions (preferably by email) to

Stephen Godfrey
6 Georgian Close
Alcester
B49 5EU

Email : sgodfrey@freeola.com

News from the Reserve

THE GREEN FLAG AWARD 2007 - The Green Flag Award is the national standard for parks and green spaces in England and Wales. The local press recently reported the fact that the reserve has failed to win the Award this year. We are very disappointed given that our volunteers have worked hard to maintain standards. We also hold regular meetings with Stratford-on-Avon District Council who have ultimate responsibility for the maintenance and management of the reserve. While we have yet to see the report we are aware that certain matters which were raised in the report last year have not yet been dealt with, although Warwickshire Wildlife Trust volunteers have put work in removing old sheds and the District Council have put in riverside fencing. A strong group of Friends can make a real difference as evidence of community support and involvement is crucial to securing the award. We will be making representations to both of these bodies to try and ensure that the green flag can proudly fly over the reserve again next year. We will publish further details of the report from the judges in our next newsletter.

SHED REMOVAL - A special working party provided by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust removed the old sheds on the reserve, one of which had collapsed. New fencing was then put in place to prevent sheep escaping from the Abbey Field. The working party also removed old fencing from the river bank.

FENCING - Stratford District Council recently hired a contractor to construct new fencing along the river bank in the North and South Fields. This is to make the area safer, especially for children, who could easily fall into the river, especially where erosion is causing the bank to collapse. The volunteer wardens are concerned that this fencing does not allow access to the safer area of river bank near the willow trees. A member of the public has already damaged this fence to make a gap, presumably to provide access to the river for dogs. We will be talking to the council representative about this fencing and access.

STILE - The contractor has also installed a new gate and stile to provide easier pedestrian access to the Abbey Field. **DOG OWNERS** - please do not take dogs into the Abbey Field because sheep are grazing.

THE POND - The pond has provided a home for many tadpoles this year so we expect an increase in the frog population.

GRASS CUTTING - This will be carried out soon by a contractor on behalf of the District Council. The grass will be cut with a flail. It is hoped that this cutting rather than grazing will provide a habitat for grass snakes.

Recent Events

On 17th May we had our first ever public event. It kicked off with a brief but informative presentation by our very own committee member, Steve Godfrey. He talked about the history of the reserve as well as the flora and fauna within it. He showed the audience some lovely photos of the reserve, most of which he had taken himself.

Then came the highlight of the evening, a talk by Daphne Neville who is amongst other things an actress, author and television personality. She gave a highly entertaining talk about otters and of her experiences in caring for them. Daphne's husband, Martin brought in their youngest otter, Rudi Potter, the Asian otter, for the audience to admire during the talk. I think it is fair to say it was a very successful evening and we recruited a large number of people to the "Friends". We have a number of ideas for future events but if you know of someone who gives talks about a subject relevant to the Reserve then please let us know.

Rita Godfrey

Future Events

The next open meeting will be in the autumn, the date and speaker are yet to be arranged.

We will also be holding a skittle match against a team of supporters of the Gorilla Organisation. This will be held at the BBC Club in Evesham in October or November.

Full details of these events will be circulated when they have been confirmed. If you have any good ideas for events please contact one of the committee members.

Working Parties

Working parties organised by the local volunteer wardens are held on the third Saturday of each month meeting at the reserve at 10 a.m. and finishing at 12.00 a.m. There will be no working party in September or December.

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust will be organising a special mid-week working party on Wednesday 25th July meeting at the reserve at 10.00 a.m. and finishing at 3.00 p.m.

Why not join us at one of the working parties and enjoy good company and fresh air? Contact the Volunteer Wardens if you would like to help.

WORKING PARTY DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 21st July
Wednesday 25th July
Saturday 18th August
Saturday 20th October
Saturday 17th November

Summer Flowers

Summer is the time to see the SMALL TEASEL in flower. This is quite a scarce plant nationally but is quite abundant on the reserve. It is a biennial, this means it flowers in its second season then dies to be replaced by new seedlings the following season. The spherical spiky green buds develop into white flowers during late July and early August.



Also look out for the sweet-smelling flowers of MEADOWSWEET. This is a perennial herb loves damp places, and can be found near the stone walls of the old sluice gate. It is common throughout Europe and is used by herbalists as an anti-inflammatory.

Bird Song on the Reserve

The reserve is a great place to hear bird song, especially early in the morning.

The main and most accomplished songsters amongst our resident birds are the song thrush, mistle thrush, blackbird, robin and goldfinch and amongst the summer visitors the blackcap and garden warbler.

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| Song Thrush | a very tuneful song with each phrase repeated two or three times. The song is loud and clear, often delivered from a high perch in trees. |
| Mistle Thrush: | a loud, ringing song without the mellowness of the Blackbird's call – usually sings from the topmost branches of tall trees, especially noticeable in stormy weather. |
| Blackbird: | a beautiful, mellow fluting song with great variety, the blackbird's song is often the mainstay of the dawn chorus, usually, but not exclusively |
| Robin | rather a plaintive warbling song, very varied and often characterised by short phrases. |
| Goldfinch | a pretty, tinkling song unlike any of the other common finches. |
| Blackcap | a rich and powerful melodious warbling song delivered usually from a perch in thickets or other deep cover – the song is generally short, lasting for a few seconds and finishes abruptly. |
| Garden Warbler | a mellower, sweeter warbling song than the blackcap, generally quieter and more sustained, often lasting for a minute or two. |

Other residents with very characteristic songs are the dunnock, chaffinch, wren, great tit, blue tit, wood pigeon and collared dove. The greenfinch song/summer call is a notoriously unmusical and tedious churring. All can be heard on most days.

Summer visitors, the chiffchaff and cuckoo have remarkably easy songs or calls for recognition but neither could be classed as musical, whilst the willow warbler is rather more musical and easy to recognise for the practised ear, but these are less commonly heard at the reserve.

Every day on the reserve you cannot fail to hear the noisy 'tchack' sound of the jackdaws from the tops of the older oak trees as they squabble with other adults or tend to nests and youngsters. Usually you can also hear the deep croaking calls of the mainly solitary carrion crows from the tallest oaks and ash trees in the dry woodland at the north end of the reserve.

The noisy chattering of magpies is also a common call on the reserve.

Help on bird song and call recognition is obtainable on CD and DVD ROM, on the internet and recently in a programme for MP3 players which allow you to take the recordings out with you into the field.

Glyn Morley