



THORNCOMBE VILLAGE TRUST NEWS

Spring 2009

Number 40

Wildlife in Lower Holditch



When our wildlife pond was dug about eleven years ago we had no idea of the amount of pleasure and interest it would give. Each spring the grass carp show themselves after a winter submerged, and each year they grow larger. Small birds use the water-lily leaves as baths, and wagtails, in particular, are clever at walking on the surface weed looking for flies and insects.

A pair of mallards visit each spring but, so far, have not had the courage to nest on the island. Dragonflies too emerge as do the damsel flies.

When the River Blackwater floods the kingfisher visits us to see what food he can find. His speed when he dives into the water is amazing. If he finds something to eat he flies into the nearest tree for his meal. Even the occasional heron visits.

Last December, however, was really exciting when a sandpiper appeared. Never having seen one before, it took me a while to identify the bird, but he stayed about 40 minutes, flying from one side of the pond to the other and feeding around the shallow shelf. That was his only appearance but I keep a close watch each day to see which species will visit me next.

Linda Timms

A change to Members' meetings.

There will be a change to the format of members' meetings, beginning in July: as a trial run we will serve refreshments **at the start of the meeting** at 7.30, instead of after the talk. In this way we hope there will be a smoother transition from the talk into the question & answer session. The talks will start at 7.45 after refreshments.

The TVT committee meets on the last Tuesday of the month at 7.30 pm in the Community Room at Thorncombe Village Hall. Trust members are welcome to attend, to find out what we discuss and learn more about the Trust.

RSPB Birdwatch Results - Surprise in the top ten

"For the first time in the survey's 30-year history, the **long-tailed tit** has flown into the Big Garden Birdwatch top ten. This highly sociable species increased by an astonishing 88% from last years count.

We believe this pleasant increase is because this insect-eating bird has adapted to feeding on seeds and peanuts at birdtables and from hanging feeders. This result highlights perfectly the positive impact that our feeding and bird care can have on some birds."

"Unfortunately..... the house sparrow, despite retaining its top spot for the 6th year running, has declined by 63% since the survey began in 1979, and the starling has dropped by 79%. And the yellow siskin, which made it into the top 20 for the first time in the survey's history last year, and who was a striking addition to many people's gardens, dropped back to number 26.....Gardens are an excellent habitat for birds. As more and more people realise the importance of feeding and gardening for wildlife, we are seeing a stunning array of birds on our tables and feeders." www.rspb.org.uk

See the notice board at the next meeting for the full list of the 2009 top garden birds.



Buttercups and daisies



Those that attended the talk given by Roy Vickery about wild plants may recall that he asked for examples of local names for common wild plants. We are so used to calling flowers by their everyday names – such as buttercup, forget-me-not and goosegrass – that many, if not most, of us would be taken aback if asked to identify *Ranunculus*, *Myosotis*, or *Galium aparine*. These are their 'proper' names and certainly make identification easier when using reference books, or when communicating with a botanist or a non-English speaker. But, although we appreciate the importance of botanical classification of plants, we tend to use names that fit our purpose, and the names we give to common plants and flowers are often the ones our parents or friends use, and so can be extremely local. The same plant may have entirely different local names across the UK. Plants that were very common, and those used as medicines had many names. Bird's-foot Trefoil for instance has been given 72 different English names.

The common Lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis*) is known as Joseph and Mary by many. What do you call it? I call Columbine (*Aquilegia vulgaris*) Granny's night-cap, others call it Granny's bonnet. There are doubtless many other local names for it. *Cardamine pratensis*, or Lady's-smock, is also known as Cuckoo Flower – do you have another name for it?

One example of the wide variety of local names is that of the Great Hairy Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), which is also known as Codlins and Cream, Sun (or Son?)-before-the-Father, Apple Pie, Cherry Pie, Plum Pudding and Fiddlegrass.

These wonderful names enrich our language and should not be lost or forgotten. Take a few minutes today to jot down your 'family' names for plants and flowers – I would love to collect them, and I can pass them on to Roy. Please contact Rachael Whitbread 01460 30525



Chard Junction Quarry – Nature Reserve.

This project is the result of hard work put in by both Dorset and Somerset Wildlife Trusts, with input from the TVT and Hansen Aggregates. DWT has been mainly responsible for the initial design and for coordination, while SWT has taken on the role of managing volunteers. If you would be interested in helping please contact Toria Hare, Community & Volunteering Facilitator, on 01823 652440 – extra hands are always welcome!

Access to this new local Nature Reserve is from Headstock Lane. Near the 'quarry' end of the lane is a stile, go left diagonally across the field from the stile and on to the corner of the next field by the trees, where there is another stile leading on to the footpath which leads to the reserve. There is a Public Footpath sign on the stile from the road, and all other signs should be in place within a few weeks. Work is progressing on making firm paths and steps on the slopes. A lovely new bird hide has been installed by the lake in a perfect position to observe birds on the islands and in the rushes around the lake. A second hide is being built overlooking reed beds in a little valley. A hurdle fence and hedge will be planted to screen people as they access the top hide. Anyone interested in helping with the hedge planting should contact Joy Wallis on 01305 264620.

Eventually there will be information boards, benches, and clear signing – but do go and explore – it's open to all. We are grateful to Brian & Jean Ellis who have been monitoring the bird visits at the Reserve – they have seen (amongst many others!) cormorant, heron, kestrel, snipe, sand martin, stonechat and jay. But even if you don't know a wren from a buzzard, it's still a very peaceful place for a walk.

There will be a Public Open Day on 17th June, with guided walks around the quarry and nature reserve, plus a hog roast – definitely a date for the diary!



Beavers in the Blackbrook River ?



Several beavers are to be introduced to a remote part of Scotland in May following a 10-year long battle between conservationists and landowners, and there are plans to reintroduce them in Wales.

Beavers were a natural part of the British countryside until they were hunted to extinction for their fur and the secretion from their scent glands that was believed to have medicinal properties. They mostly died out in the 16th century although there is evidence some hung on until the 18th century in some northern rivers.

Many landowners are dubious about the plans, fearing damage to crops and woodlands, although studies from all over the world have shown that they can increase the variety of plants, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians, as well as mammals such as water voles, otters and shrews. Reintroductions have been successfully made in most European countries, but according to the report by *Natural England* and *People's Trust for Endangered Species*, there needs to be wide public consultation before going ahead in England.



Don't forget our Spring Sale – lots of plants, produce, crafts, cakes and refreshments. Saturday 23rd May from 10 am - please come along and support your Village Trust! ..plant contributions can be delivered on Friday 22nd at 6.30 pm at the Community Room.