

New Ferry Butterfly Park Spreads Its Wings

New Ferry Butterfly Park has been awarded an 'Empty Shops Fund' grant by Wirral Council as part of a project to encourage the use of vacant shop premises for creative activity and to reinvigorate town centres.



The Comma Shop. Photo by Andrew Hall.

On 20 April Harriet Harman MP and Alison McGovern MP officially opened the Comma Project (named after one of our most regular resident butterflies) at its location on 66 Bebington Road, New Ferry. The aim of the Project is to raise awareness of the Butterfly Park and be a venue for free Community Art Projects.

Six artists were commissioned, one each month, producing nature based work. In April Gerald Curtis brought poetry, in May Julie Dodd filled the shop space with paper trees and in June Andrea Bassil painted paving stones to place within the Butterfly Park.

Over the next few months there are several free workshops. Details of these can be found on the Wirral Wildlife Blog. Another Project aim is to encourage people to plant butterfly friendly plants in parks, gardens and green spaces as well as in back yards, hanging baskets and window ledges throughout New Ferry. Carol Ramsay, Project Manager of The Comma Project, thinks there is no reason why, in the future, New Ferry can't have enough suitable plants within its open spaces to attract many more butterflies to the area. Maybe one day New Ferry could become a town of biodiversity, a Butterfly Town.

If anyone would like to volunteer to help in the visitor centre, telling people what the project is all about please email thecommaproject@gmail.com or pop into the shop.

Reserves Round Up

Cleaver Heath hosted a Dawn Chorus walk on May 7th and the 8 people who managed to arrive for the 4.30 a.m. start were rewarded by hearing 19 different species of birds. After an absence of at least 5 years Whitethroat have been heard singing. Blackcap and Chiffchaff are still present but sadly the two Willow Warblers recorded in April have moved on. There has been no return of the Yellowhammers following the fires in 2010. A Kestrel has been present throughout winter and spring suggesting there is a good vole population. On 29th May a recently fledged Kestrel, who was visited regularly by an adult bird, was forced to move away by a Jay which mobbed it on its perch. Monitoring of the common lizard population is just getting underway and one has been seen so far.

Thornton Wood has benefited from removal of Himalayan Balsam (see the article on page 2).

Red Rocks

Good news here as 8 male Natterjack toads were heard calling. Previously it was thought they might have died out.



Small Copper Butterfly. Photo by Jean-Pierre Magloire.

New Ferry Butterfly Park

The Open Day on May 6th attracted 350 visitors who enjoyed a walk round the nature reserve and art trail, pond dipping, face painting, dragonfly model making, cake and plant sales as well as a barbecue. Small Copper butterfly numbers are higher this spring with 6 seen on one day, possibly due to planting common sorrel over the last 10 years as a food plant for their caterpillars. However the recent cold, wet weather has a damaging effect on butterfly numbers and few eggs of the Orange Tip have been found. A grant awarded to the Park by 'Your Wirral' will be used to provide workshops and children's activities there in the coming months.

Property Ladder Special Beachfront Living:

The Story Of A Sand Martin Colony

The estate agents details would probably read something like this:

A unique opportunity has arisen to purchase a fantastic bespoke beachfront property with superb views of the Dee Estuary. The accommodation comprises, in brief, a metre long entrance hall leading to a charming, yet cosy and deceptively spacious nesting chamber. Decoration is in a "minimalist" style. Demand is sure to be high so an early internal viewing is recommended.

Footballers, lottery winners and dot com millionaires climbing the property ladder would pay silly money for a classy beachfront pad with these views. Lifestyle docu-dramas could be made about the grand design and build process, presenters would gush about the location, location, location. You certainly couldn't buy one of these unique homes under the hammer.

However, the Sand Martins that have moved in make little fanfare about their des-res. Their interest in this charming location is a little more practical and utilitarian than our more selfish ambitions. It is simply a great place to raise their young.

After a gap of over thirty years the cliffs at Thurstaston are hosting a colony of breeding Sand Martins again. The exact location of the colony is not something that is widely publicised but it is on a busy stretch of beach with easy public access and so the birds have become well used to, and largely tolerant of, passing people, dogs, horses, paragliders, kites and a host of other beach fun paraphernalia.

They swoop and jink over the meadows above the cliff face, each catching hundreds of flies to grow and sustain their young. While not quite a swarm they seem to fill the air and there is almost always one in sight.

The juveniles creep to the entrance of their nests and peep out. A food-bearing adult approaches. Mouths gape in an earnest request for food making the birds briefly appear frog-like. There are plenty of bugs disappearing down these wide gulleets too. You have to admire what these birds are doing for us, especially if, like your author, you are partial to wearing short trousers in the summer months. They are taking out a myriad of biting pests, horse flies are a particular nuisance, and it's good to see plenty being brought in as lunch for the chicks. Green Bottles seem a favourite prey item too.

The birds have no time to waste, there is much feeding to be done before they leave for their long and perilous journey south. They will spend our winter chasing bugs

under African skies, unconcerned that back at Thurstaston voles and roosting Linnets might be squatting in their vacant plots.

Matt Thomas, Coastal Ranger

Balsam Bashing

For some weeks now and continuing for a few more there has been a concerted effort to pull balsam from the banks and land around the Rivers Clatter and Dibbin. This has been organised by Lyn Byrne of the Wildlife Trust who is the new non-native species officer. Lyn also works on two other rivers in Cheshire including the Gowy, and is responsible for promoting awareness of non-native species. Himalayan Balsam is of course a pernicious, non-native invasive species which will quickly form dense stands if not eradicated. Three groups have been involved: volunteers from CWT, Friends of Dibbinsdale and Wirral Ranger Service, and Wirral Conservation Volunteers. Work started upstream at Clatterbridge Hospital and is now focused on Thornton Woods.

Why this river? Under the Water Framework Directive, (known as WFD) a major piece of EU legislation, River Basin Plans have been prepared by the Environment Agency and interested parties for most rivers and lakes in England, Wales and Scotland. This piece of legislation aims to improve the ecological quality of rivers and lakes. The Dibbin - Clatter river system is seen as a priority river within the local plan. Most of the Wirral falls into the Mersey estuary catchment; the exception being Wirral west of the A540 which falls into the Dee river basin district. Under WFD rivers have to achieve good ecological status by 2015, or at a set date after that if not achievable by that date. The River Dibbin and Clatter brook is at the moment classified as poor and is not estimated to achieve good ecological status until 2027. Classification is based on a number of biological elements including presence of fish, plants and diatoms, and a number of water quality parameters such as pH, temperature and pollution. The two rivers fail on a number of elements: fish, invertebrates, ammonia and dissolved oxygen. The Environment Agency are still investigating the causes for the poor water quality and I shall write a further article on what we can do to improve it.

As for the other major river system on the Wirral, the Fender and Arrowe, they are in a worse state, being classified as Bad status. This river system again fails on a number of elements but also on its channel morphology as the rivers in this area are heavily modified artificially through canalisation. If anybody wants more information on WFD or the river classification, or to look at information on the Environment Agency website please contact me via info@wirralwildlife.co.uk and I shall be glad to explain.

Tim Gannicliffe

Events Programme - July to November

Saturday 21st and Sunday 22nd July Fundraising Event

Royden Park Coach House

10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Wirral Wildlife members will be serving refreshments, manning a sales table and providing information about the group. For information telephone 0151 342 1395.

Sunday 26th August

Heathland Stroll

Cleaver Heath, Heswall

1.30 p.m. - 3.30 p.m.

Join members of Wirral Wildlife and Wirral Rangers for a stroll through some of Wirral's best heathland and learn about its wildlife and management. Sorry no dogs are allowed. Meet at the entrance to Cleaver Heath Nature Reserve, Oldfield Road, Heswall at 1.30pm. Suitable for families but not people with limited mobility.

For further details telephone 0151 342 4249.

Friday 14th September

Room B, Heswall Hall.

7.30 p.m.

'Living Seas'

A talk by Cheryl Nicholson, Marine Conservation Officer, North West Wildlife Trusts. Admission £3. All welcome.

Apple Days

Saturday 6th October

Brimstage Hall. 2 - 4 p.m.

Sunday 7th October

Eastham Country Park. 2 - 4 p.m.

Apple tasting, juice making and other fun.

Friday 12th October

Room B, Heswall Hall.

7.30 p.m.

AGM followed by

'Grey Skies and Redshanks: Autumn and Winter on the Dee Estuary'

A talk by Matt Thomas, Wirral Ranger. Admission £3. All welcome.

Saturday 3rd November

Members' Coffee Morning

Christmas card sale, Bring & Buy and raffle.

10 a.m. - 12. Telephone 0151 625 5570 for address.

Friday 9th November

Room B, Heswall Hall.

7.30 p.m.

'Nature Conservation on the Sefton Coast'

A talk by Andrew Brockbank, from North Merseyside National Trust. Admission £3. All welcome.

Are YOU Ready To Be A Volunteer?

Our Wirral group of Cheshire Wildlife Trust has been run by volunteers for the last 41 years. We have Committee meetings every 6 weeks, usually on a Monday evening beginning at 7.30 p.m. We always welcome new volunteers to join in the fun and are currently looking for people to help in several different areas:

Events Coordinator - With the imminent departure of our current Events Coordinator, we are looking for a volunteer to act as coordinator for our winter programme of talks at Heswall Hall (September to April). This would involve contacting speakers and making practical arrangements. Our programme to December 2012 is already confirmed, and preparation for January to December 2013 is well advanced.

Newsletter Editor - Our Wirral newsletter is issued quarterly and every member in the Wirral area receives a copy through the door or via email. We would welcome the services of a volunteer to help with preparation and editing with a view to taking over the editor role in the near future.

Wildlife Watch is the junior branch of The Wildlife Trusts and is the UK's leading club for young environmentalists. It is made up of a network of local groups, run by volunteers. Groups normally meet for a couple of hours once a month or in school holidays and provide enjoyable, fun, environmental activities for children. We urgently need Watch Leaders in Wirral as our previously very active group has been forced to suspend their activities. Although we have a great location for this group to meet and a number of enthusiasts happy to help - we need at least one more leader.

If you would like more information about any of these opportunities, please contact Linda by email info@wirralwildlife.co.uk or telephone 0151 342 1395.

New Constitution

Wirral Wildlife group has a new constitution which will be presented at the AGM. It can be viewed on our website: www.wirralwildlife.co.uk.

Online Newsletter

If you have internet access you can opt to read your newsletters online complete with extra photographs. This will save paper and ensure that more of the money we raise goes directly into our conservation work instead of on printing costs. We will send you an email to let you know when a new newsletter is published. To opt out of a paper newsletter simply email us at members@wirralwildlife.co.uk giving your name and address.

Year Of Coast and Countryside

To celebrate the 50th Birthday of Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Wirral Borough's "Year of Coast and Countryside" we have been involved in several public events across Wirral.

In March scabious, harebell, yarrow and meadow cranesbill were planted on the lime meadow at New Ferry Butterfly Park. In April more planting took place in Birkenhead Park where the Rangers are developing a wildflower meadow on an area disturbed when lake spoil was stored there during the restoration of the Park. This has left a heavy clay soil with poor drainage - good for damp loving wild flowers such as the ragged robin, marsh woundwort, cowslips and bugle which were planted. Anne Litherland, Senior Ranger, said "We are very grateful to Cheshire Wildlife Trust for helping to move this project forward. Because of the historic landscape, most of the Park is very formal, and this is one chance to have a more natural area." The wildflowers, attractive in themselves, will also provide nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies and other insects.

The remaining wildflower plantings for CWT's 50th birthday will be on 9th September at Dawpool, Wirral Country Park, and on 15th September at Bidston Moss former landfill site. On 11th November 500 native bluebells will be planted at New Ferry Butterfly Park. To join in email us at info@wirralwildlife.co.uk.



Rock pooling at New Brighton. Photo by Hilary Ash.

A rock pooling walk at New Brighton in May suffered from the weather - sunny, but a strong cold wind blew the sand across the shore and into the pools. The brave group that ventured out was rewarded with sea anemones, shrimps, prawns, whelks and a blenny, as well as Sabellaria reefs on the artificial groins. Margaret Coles, who led the walk, invites anyone who sees her rock pooling on New Brighton beach over the summer to come and join in! The rock pools are on the beach in front of the Floral Pavilion, with the circular holes where the pier supports rested forming some of the best pools.

The weather obliged (for once) for the bluebell walk through Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve. Pete

Miller, recently retired Ranger for the area, led visitors through the woods from Bromborough Rake station - a little-known end of the LNR, but some of the best woodland flora. We were able to see the last of the celandines and wood anemones, and the start of the massed native bluebells, with many other woodland specialities including sanicle, wood sorrel, golden saxifrage, ramsons, barren strawberry, violets and, on the flood plain, bright yellow kingcups. We also met some of the invaders - the relatively innocuous pink purslane, and the real problems of Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam.

Pete had many tales to tell, including the problems of creating new pools in the flood plain, when one large machine had to be rescued from the mud by an even larger one! Age range went from 2-year-old Lucy, who much enjoyed the puddles, to nearly 90 years young. We were very pleased that Caroline Lancelyn Green was able to come along and add to Pete's tales of the history from her own knowledge of the Lancelyn family archives. Did you know that one William de Launcelyn was fined for cutting down trees on his own land, but in contravention of the medieval Forest Laws? The family had to all chip in to pay the fine - plus ca change!

Paul Loughnane led a fascinating walk around Thornton Common, explaining its history as common land and why it survived enclosure, and the current management. Wirral Countryside Volunteers have managed the Common on behalf of Wirral Borough Council for over 20 years. They have opened up the ponds, at least one of which now supports Great Crested Newts and several dragonfly species. They have also pollarded trees, laid hedges and made a woodland ride, attracting Orange Tip butterflies to breed. Management of this site and Thornton Wood has won several awards, including the Dragonfly Award from Mersey Basin Campaign. From there we went down the road to Tom's Paddock (a grassland Local Wildlife Site, just showing cuckoo flower and orchids), into Foxes Wood (CWT reserve and part of Dibbinsdale SSSI). Bitter-vetch was just in flower - an uncommon species in Wirral and western Cheshire. Bluebells, moschatel and golden saxifrage were flowering. Across the road and back via Little Thornton Common into Thornton Wood, another CWT reserve, also managed by Wirral Countryside Volunteers. Here we were treated to excellent displays of native bluebells, wood anemones, wood sorrel, ferns, kingcups and other woodland plants. We visited the coppice coups, which are cut on rotation every 6 years to provide stakes for hedge laying and sticks for beans. Paul explained the process, and the increased yield each time they have been coppiced, following a long period of neglect.

Find out about future events at:

www.wirralwildlife.co.uk,

www.visitwirral.com/year-of-coast-and-countryside
or www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk