

### 40th Birthday

A group of Wirral Wildlife members met at Brotherton Park, Dibbinsdale on November 12th to mark the 40th anniversary of the group. Many had given 30 years or more of support.

The afternoon was dry and mild and two native Black Poplars were planted. A thousand years ago Black Poplars thrived on floodplains but it is now Britain's rarest native timber tree. In 1993 scientists warned that this great tree could be extinct by the end of the century. To reduce this risk clones from Cheshire trees have been raised at Chester Zoo with the aim of re-establishing the trees in suitable habitats. Our planting was to help to save what is becoming known as 'The Forgotten Tree'.

Also a quince was planted in the walled garden in memory of Ray Walkup who organised valuable recording work at Dibbinsdale.

After these commemorations tea and homemade cakes were happily consumed. We are very grateful to the Rangers for enabling us to have this celebration at the park.



Black poplar planting at Dibbinsdale  
Photo: Hilary Ash

### Reserves Round-up

#### Cleaver Heath

Encouragingly young heather is now growing in most of the areas damaged by fire in 2010 and rosebay willowherb and hundreds of tiny birch seedlings have been removed to encourage this. CWT volunteers have removed an area of very tall and dense birch, non-native trees and gorse on the west side of the heath. Recent sightings have included great-spotted woodpecker, nuthatch, kestrel, jays and a juvenile sparrowhawk mobbing a young buzzard.



Young shoots of heather at Cleaver Heath

#### New Ferry Butterfly Park

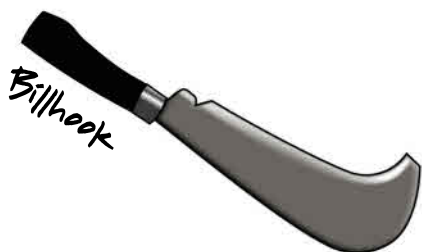
This last year has been the most successful visitor season with 1639 visitors. Although there was a 30% decline in butterfly numbers due to a cold summer, Holly Blue, Brimstone and Small Copper numbers held up. Also a new species was recorded - a black darter dragonfly. Maintenance work is ongoing: the brick-pit pond has been cleared and the calcareous meadow has been scythed.

## 1,2,3 over the Dee

The friendliest of the local hedgelaying matches is one organised by the Flintshire Farmers Ploughing Society. In this contest no ploughing is involved, just hedgelaying. This is the third of three matches at the beginning of the hedgelaying season, so the hedgelaying muscles and skills have been honed up. Most agreeable is the sit down lunch, with the farmers' wives making fresh sandwiches and gallons of tea to quench the parched tongues of hedge layers and wash down the Bara Brith.

It is five hours of physical graft, this time in the sun. The Flintshire Farmers Ploughing Society have been holding such matches since 1908. The match recognises the functionality of the layered hedge as a stock proof fence and the skills required.

The match judges are looking for clean cuts, the hedge laid off so sunlight reaches the bottom of the hedge to aid regrowth, the hedge stakes evenly spaced and in a straight line, an even build of hedge and level top.



At 3.30pm more tea and cake are consumed, prizes awarded and £15 cutting money given to each hedgelayer who completes their length to the judges' satisfaction. The prize and cutting monies are sponsored by Flintshire County Council. This year Wirral Countryside Volunteers were placed first, second and third in the novice class: a great triumph. More importantly Wirral Countryside Volunteers mix with others of greater hedgelaying experience and thereby raising the group's hedge laying standards. A well laid hedge is a delight to the eye.

The Wirral Countryside Volunteers' hedgelaying skills improve through the groups free hedge laying training days and participation in local hedgelaying matches. We have recently been invited by the Friends of Greasby Library to lay a hedge at the library's reading garden and give a talk on hedgelaying. Some justifications are required as hedge laying is radical and does look severe but the hedge is renewed from its base and thickens up considerably.

If you would like to know more about hedgelaying there is a free talk, "Hedgelaying: what it is and how to do it" on Thursday 12th January at Greasby Library at 7pm. Please book with the library: telephone number 677 5714. To see hedge laying in action come along to the library on Sunday 22nd January from 9.30am to 3.30pm.

Paul Loughnane

## Ravens In Wirral

Recent surveys of breeding and wintering birds in Britain have shown an increase in the population and range of the raven. The Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society (CAWOS) confirmed this trend during surveys for its publication, 'Birds of Cheshire and Wirral: a Breeding and Wintering Atlas', published in 2008. This year, the Society has been carrying out another survey to establish how many breeding pairs there are in Cheshire and Wirral.

The deep 'kronking' call is often the key to identifying ravens flying overhead, but size – they are noticeably bigger than crows and rooks – and the large wedge-shaped tail can also separate them from other corvids. Crows and jackdaws will also mob ravens, and this also draws attention to them. In late October of this year, for example, a mixed flock of around thirty jackdaws and crows were seen mobbing a pair of ravens near Thurston, not far from where ravens have been seen displaying in the breeding season.

In the same area, a pair of ravens was observed chasing off three buzzards, and a photograph of this event, taken by Wirral Wildlife member Ed Samuels, shows quite clearly how big and powerful the raven is. You can view this image on our website: [www.wirralwildlife.co.uk](http://www.wirralwildlife.co.uk). The buzzards – another species which has shown a dramatic increase in its population and become a familiar sight across Wirral – were no match for these birds which must have been defending a breeding territory nearby.

We would be pleased to receive any reports of raven sightings in Wirral, particularly in the breeding season, which usually starts as early as February or March. Details of time, place and behaviour would be welcome, and all reports will in turn be passed on to CAWOS.



## Wirral Wildlife committee

The Wirral group committee consists of Chair Stephen Ross, Treasurer John R Gill, Conservation Officer Hilary Ash, Fund Raising Ruth Dann, Publicity Linda Higginbottom, Recording Officer Ed Samuels, Reserves Officers Paul Loughnane and Mike Maher. We welcome as Secretary Margaret Jackson and thank Jim Gilmour for holding that post for the past 20 years. He is now handling Membership and Distribution. We also welcome Laura Jakobson. To contact any of us telephone 342 1395.

## 2012 Birthday Celebrations

2012 is Cheshire Wildlife Trusts's 50th birthday, and the 100th birthday of the Wildlife Trusts movement. Coincidentally, Wirral Council's Tourism Dept. decided to make it their "Year of Coast and Countryside", when they will particularly promote Wirral's natural assets to residents and visitors.

This was too good an opportunity to miss, so Wirral Wildlife have got together with the Tourism initiative. We have organised 10 guided walks, and 5 wildflower plantings, for the Year of Coast and Countryside programme, which will benefit from much wider publicity than we normally get. Look out for leaflets soon, and on our websites: ([www.wirralwildlife.co.uk](http://www.wirralwildlife.co.uk), [www.cheshirewildlifetrust.co.uk](http://www.cheshirewildlifetrust.co.uk)) and the Tourism website ([www.visitwirral.gov.uk](http://www.visitwirral.gov.uk)). The first few events are in the listing below. We hope to see you at some of them in 2012.

Thanks to funding from Wirral Tourism Dept. and Wirral Society, nearly all the events are free.

**Wed 15th February, 10.30am**

### **New Ferry Shore: birds and shipping**

Watch birds feeding at low tide, walk along past the fever hospital site, talk about history of area including Great Eastern. No need to book.

**Meet:** Shorefields open space, New Ferry. SJ340857.

**Sunday 11th March, 2pm**

**Help plant 50 wild flowers at New Ferry Butterfly Park** to celebrate the 50th birthday of Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

Disabled access.

BOOKING ESSENTIAL phone 0151 327 5923.

Ideal for families

**Meet:** New Ferry Butterfly Park, adjacent to Bebington Station car park, off Bebington Road, New Ferry. SJ333851. Come by train or bus, or park inside the Park (disabled especially) or in Port Sunlight.

**Saturday 14th April, 2pm**

**Help plant 50 wild flowers at Birkenhead Park** wildflower meadow to celebrate the 50th birthday of Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

BOOKING ESSENTIAL phone 0151 327 5923.

Ideal for families

**Meet:** outside the Visitor Centre, Birkenhead Park, SJ310892

**Saturday 21st April, 2pm**

### **Woodland management the traditional way. Thornton Common and Thornton Wood.**

See what hedge laying, coppicing, pollarding look like, done by Wirral Countryside Volunteers.

Thornton Common is flat, but Thornton Wood has steep slopes.

BOOKING ESSENTIAL phone 0151 327 5923.

**Meet:** Thornton Common, Thornton Common Road, Clatterbridge, SJ323814 (adjacent to Wirral Rugby Club). Some car parking by bridge over motorway.

**Tuesday 24th April, 10am**

### **Ancient woodland.**

**Walk through Dibbinsdale** for bluebells, wood anemones and other flowers of ancient woodland, and some local history. Finish with lunch at the Dibbinsdale Hotel if you like! No need to book.

**Meet:** Bromborough Rake Station, Bromborough Rake, SJ342819. Come by train - or park considerately in the nearby housing (no parking at station).

## Wirral Wildlife Events Programme January to April 2012

### **Friday 13th January**

Room B, Heswall Hall, 7.30 p.m.

**"Cheshire's wildlife : the last 50 years and the next"**, a talk by Professor David Norman, Chairman of Cheshire Wildlife Trust. Admission £2.

### **Friday 10th February**

Room B, Heswall Hall, 7.30 p.m.

**"The Wirral Society : preserving Wirral's natural beauty for the past 80 years"**, a talk by Rod Tann. Admission £2.

### **Friday 9th March**

Room B, Heswall Hall, 7.30 p.m.

**"A Flora for North Lancashire"**, a talk by Eric Greenwood. Admission £2.

### **Friday 13th April**

Room B, Heswall Hall, 7.30 p.m.

Speaker to be confirmed. Admission £2.

**Work Days** are held at our reserves at Cleaver Heath, New Ferry Butterfly Park and Thornton Wood. Dates and further details can be found on our website [www.wirralwildlife.co.uk](http://www.wirralwildlife.co.uk)

## Online Newsletter

Many members enjoy receiving their newsletter through the door and like to collect them. However, we know that many of you are concerned about climate change and deforestation or would just like the money that the group raises to go directly into our conservation work instead of on printing costs.

If you have internet access you can opt to read your newsletters online complete with extra photographs. We will send you an email to let you know when a new newsletter is published. It is entirely optional, and we respect your decision either way, but to opt out of a paper newsletter simply email us at [members@wirralwildlife.co.uk](mailto:members@wirralwildlife.co.uk) giving your name and address.

## Wirral Birdlife in Winter

We are blessed on Wirral to be surrounded by diverse bird habitat and winter is possibly the best time to enjoy it. A scope is the ideal tool of the trade but pocket binoculars will allow good views of birds.

Eastham and Shorefields on the Mersey will produce small numbers of oystercatcher, curlew, turnstone and shelduck. The north Wirral coast from New Brighton to West Kirby is renowned for massive flocks of gulls, dunlin, oystercatcher, knot and sanderling. Further offshore hundreds of great crested grebe can often be viewed in calm weather.

The foreshore from Red Rocks to West Kirby can also throw up good numbers of waders and the odd little egret. Early mornings at West Kirby marine lake can reveal red breasted merganser and goldeneye. At low tide all along the mudflats and sands from West Kirby to Heswall huge numbers of redshank, knot, dunlin, oystercatcher, curlew, black-tailed godwit, shelduck and pintail feed furiously between tides. The marsh is a winter home for a few short eared owl, hen harrier and merlin. Sometimes flocks of pink footed geese visit the marsh.

Inland, Wirral has parkland, pools, woodland and farmland. The lack of leaves on trees during winter can make bird observation much easier. Look out for winter thrushes feeding on hedgerow berries or even in supermarket car parks! Each winter kingfishers are reported at Arrowe Brook and the Birket. A field of cattle can churn up the ground attracting lapwing, curlew, thrushes, starling, wagtail and woodpigeon looking for an easy meal. Rough ground can attract flocks of seed-eating finches. Small mixed groups of tits can be seen and heard flitting from tree to tree along many footpaths. On sunny days buzzards will often reveal their presence by mewing as they glide high on thermals.



Redwing. Photo: Matt Thomas

Simply feeding and watching birds in your garden can be enjoyable but looking and listening on a winter walk can make the experience much more rewarding.

Dave Edwards

## Plantlife in the Winter Months

Winter is a good time of year to notice the low-growing plants, such as mosses and liverworts. As the taller vegetation dies down, look out for the green cushions or wefts of mosses. Some liverworts form wefts, others flat plates. Many fruit in winter: the fruits are the small brown pixie-caps on the mosses, or little green cups on the flat liverworts. They are more common in damp places, woodland and heathland - but look for drought-resistant forms on stone walls, in cracks in pavements - or even round the edge of the car window.

Hilary Ash



### Visits to Red Rocks Reserve: rewarding at any time of year

The reed bed may have turned golden brown but, surprisingly, even in November there are still flowers brightening up the dunes, especially during a mild autumn like the last. Thus, Yellow-iris were encouraged to produce late 'flags' and there were a few remnants of the Kidney-vetch summer carpets as well as white flower clusters on some Gipsy-wort plants. The Sea-radish was boasting a few bright yellow flowers although its beaded fruits were more conspicuous, ready to start a new generation next spring. Clumps of Michaelmas daisy were adding a tinge of violet to the autumn colours of the vegetation. In places, fruit spikes of Southern marsh orchid were still standing, revealing how well this plant is doing at the reserve.

Although the warblers, swallows and house martins will have flown to their warmer winter quarters, resident species may still be spotted during a winter visit: reed buntings, moorhens, flocks of starlings, occasionally linnets and stone-chats are easily seen whereas water rail usually only reveal their presence through their squealing calls. A short-eared owl may be seen flying low over the reeds and dunes. In the distance, beyond the salt marsh, large wader flocks may be seen feeding or roosting. So far this autumn, the noisy oystercatchers have been the most numerous species, joined by curlew, bar-tailed godwit and the smaller grey plover, knot, dunlin, redshank and sanderling.

Mathilde Baker-Schommer