

Newsletter for the Friends of Moorend Spout and Towerhouse Wood (January 2016)

Welcome to the ninth newsletter for supporters and friends of Moorend Spout and Towerhouse Wood. In this newsletter we review 2015 at Moorend Spout, investigate worms in the meadow and dormice in the wood, and report the findings of a Woodland Trust event on tree health. We also consider practical advice from a local gardener with a roe deer problem and set out the story of the watercress man.

Moorend Spout – 2015 annual report

It has been a busy year down at the nature reserve, with the second pond having been dug and the second stage of the Coronation Meadow having been undertaken. We have installed new gates on the footbridge over the Land Yeo river, at the top end of the footpath, and a new stockproof fence has been installed at the eastern end of the meadow.

The second pond was dug in the southern area of the meadow during the summer. It has been contoured to include shallow areas of 30cm depth, middle areas of 50cm depth and the



deep centre of the pond to around 1.2m in depth. This will provide a range of habitats for plant and animal life. Various oxygenator plants were planted but only a handful have survived. Despite this there are signs of life, including various diving beetles. The pond is filled via a syphon system from the Land Yeo. As riparian owners we are entitled to draw up to 20 cubic metres of water a day from the

river, which we use to top up both ponds and we are currently experimenting to get the balance right between the two. The second pond has had a filter installed to try and prevent fish reaching it.

The second stage of the Coronation Meadow was undertaken. This involved the taking of a hay cut across the site, harrowing the central third of the meadow and then spreading hay taken from Netcott's Meadow on the southern side of Nailsea. The idea is that the translocated hay will include wildflower seeds which will eventually grow on our land and provide us with a beautiful wildflower meadow.



To assist in the creation of the wildflower meadow, a planting day was held at our meadow to plant the plug plants that have been grown from seed collected at Netcott's Meadow last July. These have been nurtured on by the volunteers at "Feed Bristol" which is an Avon Wildlife Trust run community food growing project in Bristol between Stapleton and Frenchay.



About 16 AWT volunteers turned up to the planting day. The magnificent number of 635 little plants were spaced out so that each type was not planted all in one place. Species included Ox-eye daisy, Purple Knapweed, Yellow Rattle and Self heal. There was even time for some of the volunteers to tackle the massive amount of blanket weed on the pond – it just comes back as soon as we clear it, so that remains an ongoing job through the summer months.

Unfortunately this year we were unable to welcome the Dexter cattle back to our field to graze the grass and give the new wildflowers a chance to compete. The farm on which the cattle live has had cases of bovine TB and as a result the cows are confined to quarters. Hopefully 2016 will see their return, or some other cattle in their place.

A beautiful female Drinker Moth was spotted at our August work morning – see photo to the right. Drinker moths frequent damp habitats including marshy grassland, dykes filled with reeds and damp woodlands, so our site is perfect for them!

In November, we lead a small group from the Weston Super Mare Archaeological and Natural History Society for a two hour walk around the site. We were accompanied by Tony Smith, the natural history expert from Bristol, who was able to point out species of interest and also lead us in some pond dipping, where five different varieties of snail were discovered and we all looked at a water boatman under a magnifying glass. Despite a low turnout for the walk (due to heavy rain and strong winds in the preceding days – although the weather was generally dry for the walk itself), those who did attend found it very interesting and we hope that WANHS may return again in the spring to discover more.



Tim undertook brushcutter training in early December at Ham Hill Reserve in Somerset. The group discussed when and where it should be used followed by general safety issues. After coffee they spent the time learning how to do basic servicing and changing/using the separate head for grass management. They also spent time using both the brushcutter and trimmer, being careful not to hit various items of debris. Tim is now the proud possessor of a certificate of competence!

Following the December work morning, during which a very windy bonfire was held to burn some of the cut sedge and brambles, in 2015 we exceeded 400 volunteer hours on the reserve. Many thanks to all our volunteers for their help and enthusiasm!

We plan to continue our work into 2016, which will include the third stage of the Coronation Meadow and construction of new steps up the Land Yeo embankment on the line of the public footpath, to allow easier access to the pedestrian bridge.

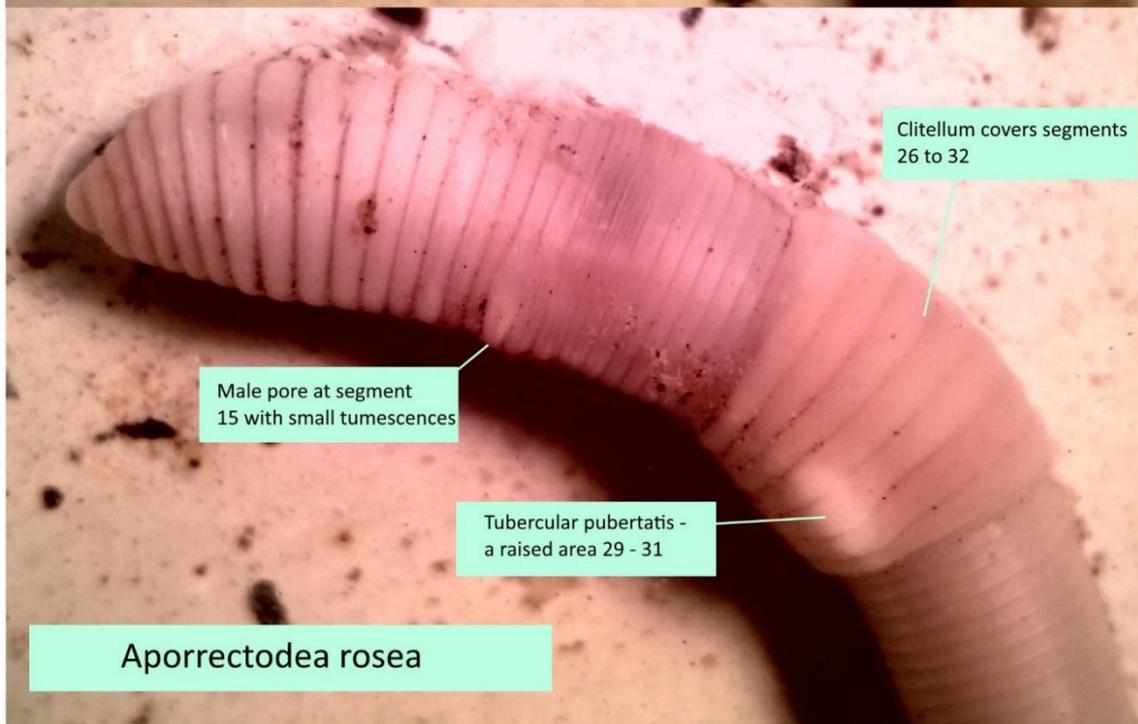
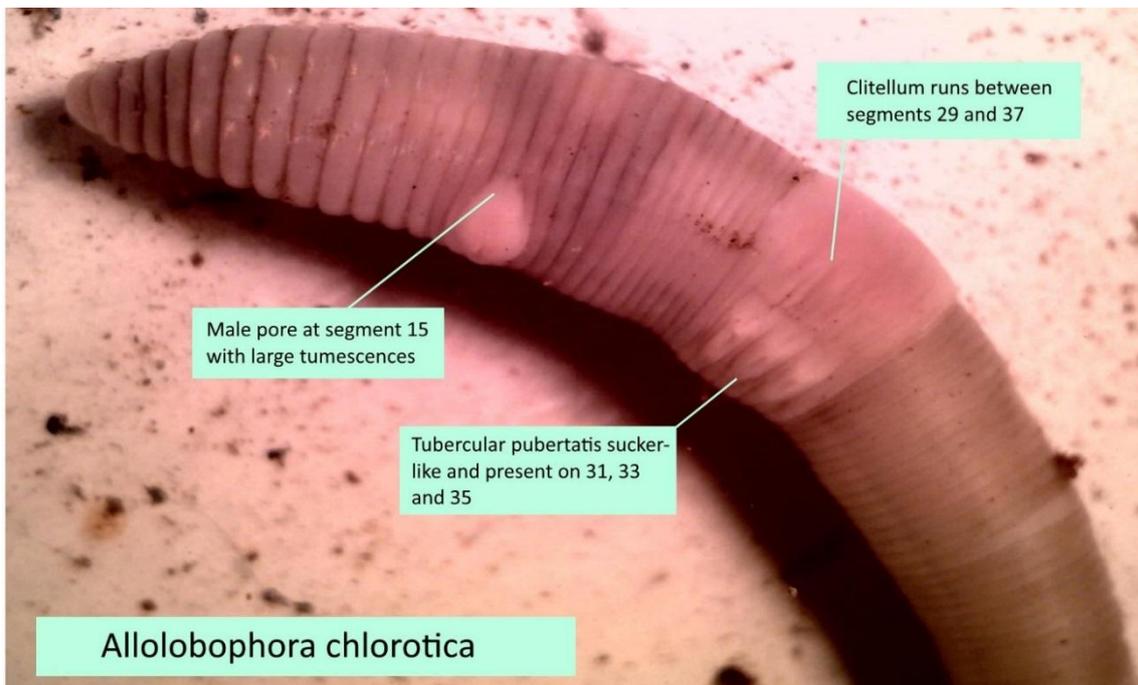
Worms at Moorend Spout – information provided by Ben Crabb

NEWT was recently approached by Ben Crabb, a biological recorder for the Earthworm Society of Britain. British earthworms are greatly under-recorded and the society is trying to encourage people to submit records of these important ecosystem engineers. Ben lives locally and has gained an interest in worms since he started composting.

In order to survey the site, he digs five soil pits, each 25cm x 25cm and 10cm in depth, in each area of interest. Any worms found are preserved in ethanol and removed from the site, for identification under a microscope. Ben undertook his first sample in mid-November in the main meadow, followed by a survey of the cut sedge area in December, as well as the microhabitat under the pile of decomposing sedge. The species he has found are summarised in the table below.

The five species found in the meadow are all fairly common species, while juvenile worms are impossible to identify to species level as they lack the necessary features. However, within the sedge area, Ben found *Dendrobaena pygmaea*, supposedly one of the rarest earthworms in the UK. It is the first time he has found this species and it may be the first record of it in this part of the country! The data has been submitted to the Earthworm Society of Britain via the iRecord website. Ben hopes to return in the future to undertake additional sampling. More information about earthworms is available from www.earthwormsoc.org.uk

Species	No.
<i>Location - Meadow</i>	
Allolobophora chlorotica	7
Aporrectodea caliginosa	6
Aporrectodea rosea	4
Lumbricus rubellus	3
Octolasion lacteum	4
Unidentified juveniles	53
<i>Location – Cut Sedge Area</i>	
Allolobophora chlorotica	6
Aporrectodea caliginosa	11
Aporrectodea rosea	21
Dendrobaena pygmaea	3
Eiseniella tetraedra	2
Lumbricus rubellus	7
Octolasion lacteum	3
Unidentified damaged	3
Unidentified juveniles	101
<i>Location – Below Sedge Pile</i>	
Allolobophora chlorotica	1
Aporrectodea caliginosa	4
Dendrodrilus rubidus	1
Lumbricus castaneus	4
Lumbricus rubellus	2
Octolasion lacteum	1
Satchellius mammalis	3



Dormouse News – by Gill Brown

Sadly the dormouse news from Towerhouse Wood isn't encouraging this year. I carried out checks on our boxes every month from May to October but, for the first time since we put them up, there were no signs of dormice in any of them.

It's been a bad year throughout our area. Numbers were low in Jubilee Stone Wood, my other monitoring site, and local colleagues have reported fewer animals and lower body weights on their patches too. The most likely reason is the weather. Dormice are more likely to rouse from hibernation in mild winters; this wastes energy and causes them to lose body fat. Those that survive hibernation will have extra weight to make up in the spring, and if it is unusually cold, as it was this year, that can lead to a lack of food and subsequent starvation.

It's too early to say whether the Towerhouse dormice are in serious trouble, there are plenty of nooks and crannies for natural nests, so it is quite possible that they have simply chosen to use these instead of the boxes. Time will tell...

On a much lighter note, I have just learned that The Peoples Trust for Endangered Species, who run the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme, are training a chocolate Labrador called Charlie Brown to sniff out dormouse hibernation nests. He indicates the nests without touching them, so the dormice sleeping within are undisturbed!

The watercress man – by Mike Woodley

Many years ago, possibly during the fifties a frail, greying old gentleman used to collect fresh watercress from around Moorend Spout.

He was a stranger to most people in the local area. Although he was always a welcome sight by the family living at Moorland View, at Jacklands Bridge. He was always greeted in the mornings with a hot sweet mug of tea. Usually he appeared around 6am! He had walked, coming from an easterly direction, wearing a flat cap, old tweed coat, ragged trousers &, boots that were badly cracked. Of course, on his back he carried a peck basket [A *peck* is an imperial of dry volume, equivalent to 2 gallons - Ed.]

The daughter that lived there remembered his smile; he had no teeth, and never spoke a word!

Anyhow, he came to Moorend Spout for many years, collecting the fresh cress from around the areas where the water flowed. He avoided going into the centre, as it was surrounded by prickly bushes. Apparently a calf had ventured into the muddy depths in the past, and disappeared, sinking in the muddy sands. Hence the reason for the barrier of bramble, and thorn type bushes!

It was one autumn day that this old fellow came to do his usual rounds of collecting cress, and it was noted that he changed his routine. Before he had left the house, Moorland View, he rolled up his trousers, visually exposing his very thin, bony legs. The owner watched him walk towards the river, whereupon he took off his boots, and placed them in his peck basket. Then the old fellow walked along the river bank heading west. That was the last time he was ever seen!

The following year workman came to clear the river. Amongst the weed they had discovered a peck basket with some boots inside.

Had the old fellow wandered into the spout, or had he retired from his work? We will never know; the family, from Moorland view at that time, had said he was deaf and dumb. So if he had got into trouble, he was unable to call for help! Of course this is a true story, and sadly no-one ever knew his name!

Adapted from The Somerset Magazine – 1999 by Mike Woodley

[The moral of this story is that we should not enter the carr alone, which has some dangerous swamps. Several of our volunteers have found themselves trapped in these, needing help to extricate themselves – Ed.]

Tree Health – by Terry Smith with invaluable help from Dom Collins

Terry Smith attended a 'Tree Health' event organised by the Woodland Trust held at Ashton Court on 26th September. The main speaker was Dom Collins, a senior entomologist at Fera Science Limited, who provide diagnostic, R & D and scientific consultancy services to the Plant Health Division of Defra. His primary role is identifying plant-feeding insects for Defra, as part of a government programme to prevent the introduction of plant pests and diseases of quarantine concern into England and Wales. He has also been involved in the provision of training to tree health volunteers in a project called Observatree, which is a collaborative project between Forest Research, the Forestry Commission, APHA, Defra, Fera, the National Trust, Natural Resources Wales and the Woodland Trust. See

<http://www.observatree.org.uk/> Our trees are being threatened on an unprecedented scale by diseases and pests imported from other countries, mainly due to increased trade in plants and plant products across the world. Without their natural controls, these aliens can flourish unhindered. Global warming is also likely to increase the incidence of these aliens.



*Ash sapling with Chalara Dieback
Photo © courtesy of the Forestry
Commission*

This topic has been considered in an earlier newsletter (January 2013, number 5). Other newsletters in this series can be accessed from the left of the home page of the website www.newt.btck.co.uk

Much publicity has been given to **Chalara dieback of ash** disease caused by *Chalara fraxinea*. This has now been found close to Shepton Mallet (<http://chalaramap.fera.defra.gov.uk>), and it seems inevitable that it will eventually affect the Ash trees around Bristol. However, perhaps of even greater potential significance to the Ash tree is possible invasion by a beetle, the **Emerald Ash borer** (*Agrilus planipennis*) (<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/emeraldashborer>), that can girdle entire tree trunks with its larval galleries. This beetle leaves 'D' shaped exit holes in the bark of the Ash tree, and affected trees can develop strong epicormic growth. Damage attributable to this East Asian beetle has still not been recorded in the UK, although it is well established in the United States and is rapidly moving westwards towards Europe, having already reached and passed Moscow.

Any sightings of this (or of other significant pests and disease cases of possible quarantine significance) should be reported to the Forestry Commission's Tree Alert scheme, either directly (<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/treealert>) or via the Observatree website <http://www.observatree.org.uk> Mountain Ash (also called Rowan, *Sorbus aucuparia*) is an important amenity tree which is susceptible to the disease Mountain Ash Ring Spot Virus. <http://www.observatree.org.uk/portal/european-mountain-ash-associated-ringspot-virus>.

This causes circular and linear lesions on the leaves leading to the decline and possible death of the tree. Although the pathogenesis of the disease is still not fully understood, the genome of the virus has been sequenced. The disease, which now seems to be established in Scotland, appears to be confined to Rowan, and the vectors are likely to be Eriophyid mites

Two species of invasive longhorn beetle have been especially destructive around the world. Notification of a recent isolated case of the **Asian Longhorn beetle** (*Anoplophora glabripennis*)

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/asianlonghornbeetle> in Kent necessitated the destruction of trees in the vicinity in order to eradicate the population and so prevent spread of the insects. This species, and the **Citrus Longhorn beetle** (*Anoplophora chinensis*)

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/citrusbeetle>, both originate in East Asia and have been imported into the UK in wooden pallets (Asian Longhorn beetle) or within live *Acer* trees (Citrus Longhorn beetle).



Citrus Longhorn beetle adult
– © courtesy of Fera

The **Pine Processionary Moth** (*Thaumetopoea pityocampa*)

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pineprocessionarymoth> has not yet been found in the UK although it is widespread around the Mediterranean and has been introduced into northern France. It appears that members of the genus *Pinus* are most susceptible, but attacks can cause complete defoliation if population levels are high.

The **Oak Processionary Moth** (*Thaumetopoea processionea*)

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/oakprocessionarymoth> attacks many species of oak sometimes causing complete defoliation. The caterpillars are also covered in irritating hairs which can cause serious health problems for humans. A few populations are now known in the vicinity of London. The following health precautions for both Oak and Pine Processionary Moth caterpillars are given by the Forestry Commission.

- Do not touch or approach nests or caterpillars
- Do not let children touch or approach nests or caterpillars
- Do not let animals touch or approach nests or caterpillars
- Do not try removing nests or caterpillars yourself

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/oakprocessionarymoth#threat>

Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/horsechestnutleafminer>, first found in the UK in 2002 is now well established. It is caused by the micro-moth *Camereria ohridella*. Although the appearance of the trees is spoiled by the damaged leaves, fortunately the trees have so far recovered in subsequent years. However they are potentially weakened and are then susceptible to other pests or diseases.

The **Oriental Chestnut Gall Wasp** (*Dryocosmus kuriphilus*) <http://forestry.gov.uk/gallwasp> causes leaf distortion of the Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*). The galls are formed on the midrib or the petiole of the leaves, causing infected leaves to drop early. The first British

population was found in 2015 at a wood in Kent. An Observatree volunteer then found a second population in St. Albans. Action to eradicate both populations was carried out by the Forestry Commission.

Phytophthora austrocedrae <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/paustrocedrae> attacks a range of trees in the cupressaceae, mainly Juniper. This has been found only in Argentina, Scotland and Northern England.

Some practical advice from a gardener with roe deer problems – by Vanessa Palmer

We have roe deer visiting our garden all year round. They are such a joy to see, sometimes a doe with her single faun; last year we had one with twins. We live adjacent to Towerhouse Wood and have a small amount of bluebell woodland linking to it. We are not surrounded by a deer proof fence, if there is such a thing, and a stock fence is not nearly high enough because of the height they can jump! It would cost a fortune to fence ourselves in. Also, we love to see the wildlife so close to us, so in they come!



I am a novice gardener who is learning all the time. I use slug nematodes that I water in, to try to save my vegetable plants from being eaten and encourage bees, moths and butterflies, with the plants that I have introduced. We have a pond full of frogs and palmate newts, where other wildlife also thrives. In the past, I have looked after hedgehogs and released them back into the wild. As a consequence, of all of this I do not use slug pellets.

I did not realise that deer were nibbling my plants at first, this was a few years ago now. I remember looking at one of my roses (deer love roses, especially the buds and flowers) and thinking “I didn’t prune it like that!” That is when I first realised that deer were coming in during the early hours....

In order to save my plants, I did some research and found out about a product called *Grazers*, from the *Green Gardener* website: <http://www.greengardener.co.uk>

It is a product that is diluted with water and sprayed onto garden plants through a sprayer. It is not harmful to wildlife, and has been used commercially for many years, however deer, rabbits, pigeons and geese do not like the taste of it. I just concentrate on spraying my flowers and shrubs, because my vegetables are cordoned off.

Introducing deer repellent plants such as lavender, poppy and other aromatics, has also helped, although I tend to spray everything in the flower borders, just in case.

I am taking out lilies because deer love the new shoots of those; however, last year I sprayed regularly with *Grazers* from the early signs of shoots in the spring, my lily bed was saved and they flowered. See photo taken before I started using the product!

I spray about every 4-6 weeks, sooner if I see that damage has been caused.

I have had some success from using the *Grazers* product; however one has to be organised about remembering to keep up the spaying!

I tell anyone who has deer problems to get some and try it. I am going to spray my neighbours' garden soon, so she can see if it makes a difference to her newly planted, nibbled shrubs.

