

Friends of Towerhouse wood and of Moorend Spout. Newsletter for Autumn 2010

The year has been fairly quiet in Towerhouse Wood, although the birds sang sweetly for Jeffery when he held his annual Dawn Chorus walk on 9th May. About 12 people came on this walk, and about half were attending for the first time. Publicity from the BBC was a great help, especially in being able to distribute the CDs. I think that this is the fourth year when Jeffery has held his Dawn Chorus Walk, and he has already provisionally assigned Sunday 1st May for his walk in 2011.

I am still hoping to hold further conducted tours of the Wood. Our plans to do that this year have been prevented by the weather (again!) and by illness.

Funds raised from events in the Wood have helped to pay for the registration and transport of four tree enthusiasts to attend the Tree Wardens' Forum at Exmouth on 25th September. An account of this meeting is included below.

Of particular significance in December 2009 was the purchase of six acres of wet meadow at nearby Moorend Spout. A charitable trust has now been set up to manage this as a nature reserve. We are grateful to the local Community Landfill Tax distributors, YANSEC, for providing the funds to purchase this land.

We are still struggling to control the outbreak of Himalayan Balsam near to the Wood, with three working parties this year. This plant has now spread to an area close to Moorend Spout and we must try to prevent it from becoming established there.

With valiant determination, Gill Brown has installed 20 dormouse boxes in the Wood and she has monitored these for activity several times during the year. We are including her report on these fascinating and endearing mammals in this Newsletter.

Dormice in Towerhouse Wood

Towerhouse Wood provides an ideal habitat for dormice and is close to several sites where they are known to be present.



Shrew found in one of the
Dormouse boxes
Photo by Gill Brown

Several years ago James Field, then of Avon Wildlife Trust, gave some training on dormice and helped a number of us to install dormouse tubes in Towerhouse wood. Dormouse tubes are widely used to establish the presence of dormouse populations, and it is not necessary to have a license to install or check tubes until evidence of dormice is found. Over a period of two years I checked the tubes regularly and eventually, when I had almost given up hope of finding any signs of these elusive little animals, I found one tube containing a nest of skeleton leaves and a shred of honeysuckle bark. On this evidence Friends of Towerhouse Wood agreed to fund the purchase of 10

dormouse boxes, which I installed with the help of Terry Smith and Jon Burgess from the Woodland Trust.

Dormouse boxes look rather like tit boxes with the hole at the back. They have a sliding lid which allows easy access for monitoring. The boxes are attached to suitable trees at chest height with a loop of wire so that they can be removed easily. The boxes are well hidden to avoid interference as I know that there can be an overwhelming temptation to 'peek in', which is illegal and could disturb nesting animals.



A Dormouse box
Photo by Gill Brown

Having trained for, and obtained, my dormouse licence, I took responsibility for monitoring the boxes. At the end of last year I found dormouse nests in two of the ten boxes. Encouraged by this I applied for a biodiversity grant from North Somerset Council to install more boxes and we now have a total of 20 in the wood. So far this year we have found dormouse nests in two of the boxes and, rather surprisingly, a shrew in another. Two were also successfully used by blue tits. It is quite common for blue tits to nest first and for dormice to move in afterwards!

Although no dormice were present when I did the checks I am confident that there is a healthy breeding population and look forward to the time I set my eyes on my first 'Towerhouse Dormouse'.

Gill Brown

South West Region Tree Warden Forum

Judith Tranter (Rickford), David Glynn (Wrington), Mike Woodley (Portishead) and Terry Smith (Nailsea) attended this forum which was held at Exmouth Community College on Saturday 25th September. This is now an annual event, meeting at various venues in the South West.



The meeting opened with an address by Jon Stokes of the Tree Council. Jon referred to early achievements to promote trees, one with the slogan 'Plant a tree in '73'. Shortly afterwards, cynics complained that without after-care this became 'Pick up Sticks in '76', and Jon later established the national Tree Warden movement mainly to provide after-care for urban trees. This year celebrates their 20th anniversary and there are now several thousand registered tree wardens, who look after their local trees, organize tree planting schemes, remove or slacken tree ties, remove redundant tree stakes when these are restricting growth, name and label trees, map the trees, give advice to tree owners, help to manage local woodland, report dangerous and diseased trees, and request tree preservation orders.

Kate Tobin (East Devon District Council) talked about the need to preserve ancient trees and she appealed for photographic records to be sent to her. There are many important trees in Devon that deserve preservation, and we know that this also applies to North Somerset.

Many of these are lost through neglect and ‘development’. The Ancient Tree Forum (www.woodland-trust.org.uk/ancient-tree-forum/) has been established to promote and protect these relics, and recording these trees is now a major concern of the Woodland Trust (see also www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/project/hunt). When a tree dies it can still be of benefit to the wildlife, though regrettably many old trees have been felled just because they are ‘old’ and ‘untidy’. Holes in trees can provide shelter for bats and owls, and woodpeckers find it easier to make holes in older trees as the wood becomes softer.

Chris Knapman gave an account of the many important diseases that have recently arrived in this country. The Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner micro-moth (*Cameraria ohridella*) was first found in Macedonia in 1985 and it arrived in the UK in 2002. In the intervening 8 years it has spread across England and it is now found on most of the Horse Chestnut trees in North Somerset. Another worrying development is the lethal attack by *Phytophthora ramorum* on Japanese Larch. This fungus was previously only known to attack a limited range of non-coniferous species. Acute Oak Decline is a disease that has recently appeared. This seems to be associated with a variety of pathogens, but is probably due mainly to the bacterium *Pseudomonas syringae*, which in the past has attacked only species in the Olive family, like Ash. Many of these diseases are apparently being spread by the expansion of travel and the importation of foreign plant products. It seems that our warming climate may also be exacerbating these problems.

The importance of hedges was discussed in the talk by Rob Wolton (Chair of Hedgeline). He is anxious that we should map our hedges and do all that we can to preserve them. Even in the last 10 years we have lost 6% of our hedges. Many hedges are ‘over-managed’ being cut excessively and at the wrong time of the year, disturbing wildlife, especially nesting birds. Many landowners do not realize the importance of hedges as wildlife corridors, and even short gaps can deter movement of dormice. In the afternoon session we were shown a hedge in the nearby park which exemplified many of the problems associated with hedge management. Unfortunately the public expects neat and tidy hedges, with level tops and no ‘weeds’. The hedge that we were shown had even been treated with herbicide to prevent the growth of the herbaceous layer! We were told of the importance of hedge trees for wildlife, and the need for trees producing berries and nuts.

3rd October 2010

Have you seen Himalayan Balsam?

This alien plant which has been relentlessly advancing across the UK, has now reached North Somerset. In many parts of the country large areas of riverbanks are covered in its deceptively pretty pink flowers. On the river Frome in Bristol, it would now be extremely expensive to eliminate. This plant smothers our native plants and causes erosion of riverbanks – no insect will eat it and there is not satisfactory control other than by hand pulling which can be very time consuming and expensive. Seed is flung up to 3 metres from the plant by a highly efficient mechanism for dispersal and each plant produces up to 50 seeds. It is essential that the plant is removed before seed is set. When it is seeded it is too late! Several groups of volunteers have been pulling this plant from Spilsbury Wood for three years now, and although we may be seeing



some success here, it will probably take another three years to remove it entirely. We are concerned about an area to the West of the Wood, where a garden has been invaded by these aliens. Paul and Jacci Ramplin and James Attwood cleared many of these plants, on one visit in September, although many of them had seeded by then. It is inevitable that we will need further visits to that area if we are to control its spread. We are fortunate that the owner of the property now appreciates the magnitude of the problem and has agreed that we can proceed with further clearance next year.

We urge all those who use the countryside to report occurrences (t.a.smith@blueyonder.co.uk) and preferably to uproot it when seen leaving it on the ground to rot. It is particularly prevalent around Tickenham but it is also reported from Long Ashton, close to Ashton Court. Although it is an annual, growing up to 3 metres high in one season, the seed will last for 2 years in the soil. Please tell people that it should not be grown in gardens, however attractive it might seem. A small effort now will prevent an insuperable invasion within five years. We must try to keep it out of North Somerset. For further information please see the website of the Avon Invasive Weeds Forum on www.aiwf.org.uk

Moorend Spout Nature Reserve

The area known as Moorend Spout lying half way between Nailsea and Tickenham is well known for its natural beauty provided by the small woodland of Alder and Willow, the adjacent rhyne and the waterfall. This is a particularly valuable wildlife habitat: low lying and water logged, which is traversed by a well-used public footpath connecting Nailsea and Tickenham. Some water appears to be ducted in a large field drain at about 3m below soil level that runs from the east, eventually flowing into the Tickenham Boundary Rhyne. Other water arises in small springs near to the carr, accumulating in a pond under the trees, and the overflow runs in a channel towards the river Middle Yeo.



Corsican Pine to the north of Moorend Spout



Inauguration of the new Board walk at Moorend Spout

The land is in the flood plain, well below the level of the river Land Yeo that forms the north boundary, probably constructed in the 12th century by the Augustinians as a leete for their mill in Tickenham. The Middle Yeo to the South and the Land Yeo to the North flow westwards towards Clevedon. Further to the north, the Tickenham Ridge forms a very attractive setting for this idyllic area. The designated Regional Wildlife Site occupies about 2 - 3 acres and is bordered to the east by the (unmarked) north/south boundary about half way across the field, and to the west by a small rhyne.

The rhyne to the west of the site are part of the Tickenham & Nailsea Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), incorporated into the banks of the rhyne to the south and to the west of the waterfall. Access to the site from

Pound Lane in Nailsea is by the public footpath that runs adjacent to the SSSI on the West bank of the ditch leading to the Nailsea Boundary Rhyne.

In December 2009 we set up a charitable trust called Nailsea Environment & Wildlife Trust, (NEWT), taking the opportunity to buy these six acres of wet woodland and meadow, and to manage it for the benefit of the wildlife and as a public amenity. Finance for this purchase was provided by YANSEC, the administrators of the local Landfill Communities Fund at that time. (A tax is imposed on any waste that goes into a landfill site, and this money can be reclaimed from the government for local environmental projects, through what is known as the Landfill Communities Fund.) Additional financial support has been provided by the Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund, Nailsea Town Council, and Bristol Naturalists' Society.

We have now been working on this site for the past year, initially cutting some of the brambles and the sedges to try to restore the orchids that used to grow there. We have also installed a boardwalk to lead the public footpath across the very wet area to the west.

We have also had help from the accountancy firm KPMG in planting a hedge along the east boundary, and we have been given advice by Avon Wildlife Trust, Natural England and North Somerset Council on ways to improve the area. We know that the area is frequented by Otters and that there is a pair of Kingfishers that patrol the Land Yeo river. We want to manage the site to encourage the dragonflies, damselflies and Sticklebacks in the rivers, and to provide an environment conducive to the growth of the unusual plants growing there. We hope to install at least three large ponds on the south side of the field by use of a mechanical excavator. We are now applying for additional funding for this and we are writing a planning application for the consideration of North Somerset Council. In order to manage the field for the wildlife, it may eventually be necessary to introduce sheep or cattle to control the scrub.

The site is in close proximity to the schools in Pound Lane, and we want to encourage the children there to learn about the wildlife on the reserve. We hope that most of the site will be open to the public, when we plan to give conducted tours, but at present we are still in the process of trying to understand the complex water flow in the site and in recording the biodiversity. The nine trustees are grateful to all who have contributed financially to the purchase and management of this site, and we recognise with thanks the contribution made by our contingent of volunteers, now numbering about 25.

Further information can be found on the website www.newt.btck.co.uk

It will need much work to achieve our objectives there, so any offers of help will be very welcome.

Please contact, Ian Chambers (01275 463315) Terry Smith (01275 854317) or Hilary West (01275 853079) if you feel that you could help.



Otter spraint at Moorend Spout
Photo by Gill Brown

