



Friends of Anderton and Marbury (FoAM)

NEWSLETTER Autumn 2013

A Great Time to Visit the Woodlands in their Autumn Splendour

From the Chair

Summer has come to an end, but at least we had a summer this year. The better weather hasn't just been appreciated by us; butterflies and dragonflies have been much more visible especially on the Scrape Meadow.

The old sign for Marbury Arboretum fell victim to natural decay earlier in the year and so improved access and signage are planned. We have just heard that our application to INEOS for funding has been successful. Read more about this inside.

By the end of October the second-round application for the Saltscape Project will have been submitted. Saltscape is a Landscape Partnership Scheme funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The partners include Cheshire West and Chester Council, Groundwork Cheshire, Mersey Forest, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Canal and River Trust, Middlewich Town Council, Weaverham Trust and Weaver Valley Partnership. Saltscape is the unique landscape modified by industry, stretching from Frodsham to Middlewich and Winsford and taking in the River Weaver and the Trent and Mersey Canal.

As part of Saltscape, FoAM and the Rangers hope to establish a waymarked trail through Northwich Woodlands between the Lion Salt Works and Anderton Boat Lift showing the impact of the salt industry on the landscape and wildlife. We have been successful in getting £25,000 ear-marked within the total Saltscape budget to enable this work to be carried out. Let's hope the second-round application is approved in spring 2014.

You may have noticed the temporary arrangement at Marbury that allows the recording of recent sightings in Northwich Woodlands. A new board is on FoAM's list of possible projects following the vandalism in May, when the old one was removed and set on fire.

About 70 children attended the Teddy Bears' Picnic in August, with 50 accompanying adults. The children listened to a story while some were still finishing their picnics before the activities began. These included a Bear Trail, Sculptures using materials in the woods, Treasure Hunt and some imaginative play using equipment rescued from Northwich Memorial Hall. After two hours of fun refreshments were welcome. It seemed hectic at times, but the efforts of volunteers and rangers were much appreciated by adults as well as children.

In September, Fungalpunk Dave led the two Fungal Foray sessions with his usual enthusiasm. There was concern that there might not be any fungi, but Dave listed more than 70 species on the day.

FoAM's next two events feature autumn and Christmas, so it will soon be a new year. Let me be the first to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Mary Jeeves



Bee orchid flower – one of several found by volunteers working in the Woodlands

Extracts from Mary's Journal

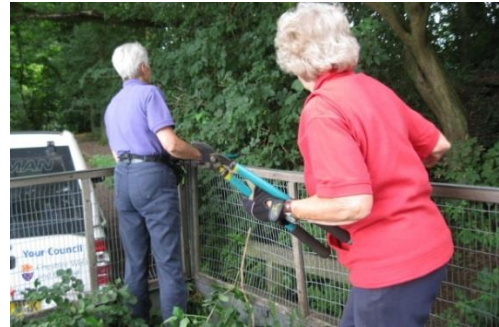
Jul 31st. Dave asked Sandra and me to help with the Holiday Pond Dipping Activity. Fifteen children with accompanying adults set off for the Ice Pond. The rain didn't seem to bother the children, who were excited at the sight of smooth newts, efts, water boatmen, water fleas and dragonfly and midge larvae. The afternoon group was smaller, probably put off by the weather forecast. It rained even harder, but still the children didn't complain; they were engrossed in their catches. Sandra and I were dripping wet and filthy, but it was a rewarding day.



Aug 21st. Chris persuaded Sandra and me to sort some sacks of rubbish for recycling. We loaded bins with cans, glass and plastic bottles onto the small trailer and climbed into the pick-up. It wasn't until Winnington Bridge that I asked where we were going. The recycling depot in Winsford was the most likely place to accept our offerings. Almost immediately after arriving a man agreed to receive our cargo, once they had dealt with a household recycling lorry. Then a man with a clipboard was less sure and needed to check with the 'gaffer' before they helped us unload. Our next port of call was the vehicle maintenance depot to collect the large trailer following its repair. We took the empty bins out of the small trailer and tried to load it onto the large trailer. Chris had recruited the wrong volunteers and extra muscle was hailed from the garage to boost our efforts. Once everything was back on board we returned to Marbury.

Chris was keen to put the large trailer to use. Elna, Sandra and I climbed aboard with a pair of loppers each. Chris drove very slowly and precisely down to the mere, beginning a journey through to Big Wood.

Our task was to remove encroaching vegetation. It was a test of balancing skills whilst cutting back from a slow moving vehicle over uneven ground. The trailer gradually filled up with brash, making it difficult to move around. As we headed downhill, Elna was suddenly catapulted into the back of my legs. Chris didn't hear our shouts of 'Stop!' as Elna struggled to regain her feet. We emerged from Big Wood and returned via Marbury Lane. We were shaken up and bruised, but it's the nearest I've come to riding on a carnival float.



Sep 5th. The charcoal burner had burned well on Tuesday night and was cool enough to empty. Jim, Clive and I riddled and bagged the charcoal. The masks protected our noses and mouths from the dust, but we looked like coal miners. We tried to clean ourselves in the limited facilities available, but our clothing remained contaminated and so our hands were soon black again.



Mary Jeeves

Photographic Competition

2012 Photographic Competition pictures will be taken down from Weaver Hall Museum in October. Thanks to the Museum for allowing us to exhibit them. I will pack the prints and they will be ready for collection from the Rangers' Cabin at the beginning of November. If entrants wish prints to be posted to them then please send me a stamp and delivery details. We have now put the photos on the FoAM website at <http://www.merseyforest.org.uk/foam> Please have a look and let us know what you think.

The closing date for the next competition will be 31st December 2014. It seems a long time off, but any photos taken now will be eligible and it gives two chances for autumn colours. The 'Fun in the Park' category is being given a new title 'Work, Rest and Play' as it was felt that the previous category was too restrictive. The other categories will again be 'Landscape' and 'Wildlife'. Details for entries will be found on the FoAM website in November. Any questions please contact me at jmjeeves4867@btinternet.com

Jim Jeeves

Marbury Country Park and Dairy House Meadows

As the leaves start to change colour and drop we start our winter woodland work. This involves hedge laying predominately at Anderton Nature Park, although I would like to lay the hedge between the two fields here at Marbury.

The majority of felling this winter will again be at Anderton, although the scrub woodland rotational felling alongside the Mere here at Marbury will continue, along with some small scale clearances around the park. The large sycamore in the car park at Marbury is due to be reduced as it dropped a limb on to a car roof during the summer. This was due to squirrel damage in the tree and high winds when the tree was in full leaf.

Some of the regular visitors may have noticed a large Turkey Oak tree felled along Marbury lane in Witton Mill wood; this was due to a fungal infection called *Meripilus giganteus* or Giant Polypore which infects the roots of the tree rendering it very unsafe.

Over the summer I have had several complaints about dogs running loose in the play area; one even took sandwiches from a picnic table! To reduce this happening we have created a dead hedge around the far side of the play area, leaving just two gaps for access. If the problems continue I may look at gating these accesses.

The other area which is under threat for dog owners is the caravan field, I have had several complaints from caravaners about the amount of dog foul in this area, I may have to look at stopping access to this area if this situation continues. If anyone witnesses a dog fouling in this area and the owner not clearing it up please inform either me or Dave James and we will pursue it.

Please enjoy the autumn colours and prepare for Christmas!!

Chris Moseley
Marbury Country Park Ranger

Anderton Nature Park and Carey Park

We are in the midst of a wonderful autumn, which has followed a fantastic glorious summer; can't help feeling we need to make more of the bounty which has been provided by the fruiting trees and shrubs. The Rotary Club has arranged with me to plant a further 450 trees under the heading of "jams, jellies and chutneys". Planting will take place in November; not sure of the date yet, but it will coincide with the volunteer days during the week. A "Food for Free" activity will be in the programme of events next year, so if you have been involved in the past you know what to do! If you want to know more give me a call.

The Rotary group has also been involved in maintaining the viewpoint at Carey Park. We retrieved several bags of litter, two shopping trolleys and gave several trees and shrubs a severe haircut to maintain the view. Many thanks go to the Rotary Club for all your help, now and in the Future.

The gorgeous Hebridean sheep are back busy grazing the scrub on Ashton's Flash and Carey Park. Watch out for them; the more they eat the less we have to cut, mow, strim, chop and wipe. Let's hope they are hungry!

Our Woodland Improvement Grant application has been successful and work has started at Anderton. The loop path from the car park will be upgraded, wood thinned, way markers installed and hedge laid. So next season we will be able to inform visitors about the all ability access path. The way markers are being made by the volunteers at Marbury, and they are using 5 foot lengths of turkey oak. They look really good, and in our next issue of the

newsletter we might have a couple of pictures. The woodland is being thinned by a retired colleague who is helping to train people to use chainsaws. Help yourself to any of the timber as we need to extract it all. It would be great if you made a donation to FOAM.

The wood allotment enters its third year, with more than 15 people / couples interested in felling timber (predominantly for fuel). I am sure there are more people out there who might be interested, so do get in touch with me here at Marbury if you think you would like to join them or would like to know more.

Lots to do!
Cheers Dave and Blue



Councillor Stuart Parker visited in August to present the Green Flag Award to Northwich Woodlands, meeting with volunteers and Ranger Dave James

When is a Fungal Foray not a Fungal Foray?

'To foray: To pillage in search of spoils'

Three days before FoAM's 'Fungal Foray' event in September, I dutifully did a tour of the park in search of interesting fungi to mention to the walk leader, Fungal Punk Dave. I was presumably walking around with my eyes shut, as I only found three species. Determined to do better, I tried again the following day, only to discover that one of the three clumps had been run over by a tractor...

Convinced however that Dave would be able to spot many a mushroom seconds before I could tread on it, I kept the faith and was rewarded by Dave identifying seventy seven species on the day, from the lovely Orange Peel Fungus to the minute Eyelash Fungus.

Dave lists his fungal highlights of the day as the aptly coloured Plums and Custard (*Trichomolopsis rutilans*), Mint Rust (*Puccinia menthae*) – I suspect that Dave's fascination with this one is through a microscope! - and the tiny Glazed Cup (*Humaria hemisphaerica*). The common names of the fungi we found range from delightful to graphic – Earth Potato, Orange Jelly, Candle Snuff, Chicken of the Woods, Turkey Tail, Slime Mould, Elder Whitewash, Dead Moll's Fingers, Dead Man's Willy... (I think we found this one near a Blushing Bracket).



But this year was a fungal foray with a difference. Whilst Dave has never been one to promote foraging for fungus to eat, this year saw a marked shift in emphasis. The rash of programmes and articles on searching out fungi for food, and the fashion for high profile restaurants serving wild fungi in lieu of the cultivated kind, leaves Dave shuddering. Without a thriving population of fungus, says Dave, our planet is doomed.

So what's wrong with helping ourselves to this free feast? Well, nothing (always assuming you have correctly identified your fungus!) if it's just the occasional fruiting body from a large clump.

But for starters (no pun intended), Dave pointed out the role fungi play in the great recycling process that makes our planet tick. They play a vital role in our ecosystem, breaking down and decomposing dead plants and animals, eventually re-releasing nutrients into the natural cycle.

The current fashion for restaurants serving wild fungi has resulted in the devastation of fungus populations in large areas of woodland in some parts of the country. Collectors in search of an easy dime have been gathering every scrap of fungus they can find in a given area; they then take the booty to a person who can identify them, sell the edible ones to restaurateurs and ... dump the rest. Will that in itself spread the spores around and produce fungi elsewhere? Most unlikely, as each fungus will only grow in certain conditions – field or woodland, stump or leaf litter, under this tree or that.... And so the great recycling system collapses.

In any case, Dave says, many edible fungi are little more than just that – some may not do you any harm, but they do have a tendency to taste of wallpaper paste or plastic. A slice of giant puffball fried in butter tastes good, but it's probably the large quantity of butter titivating the taste buds rather than the puffball itself. Dave cheerfully offers a quid for us to go and buy something that tastes better from the supermarket!

So is Dave just a big spoilsport? Far from it. His walks are filled with enthusiasm and humour and his love of the natural world and the planet are obvious. He is also a very knowledgeable enthusiast in other fields of natural history. His interests include retro Horror films, and he reads widely and loves the theatre and art galleries. 'There are many flavours to one fruitcake!' as Dave puts it.

And will Dave continue to do his fungal walks? Yes he will, although you'll notice on next year's FoAM calendar, he's named the event a 'Fungal Hunt'

Brenda Yates

Your Newsletter

We welcome comments, ideas photos and articles for inclusion in future issues of the newsletter. Email items to Joanne Redley at jarhillcliffe223@aol.com or hand them in at the Rangers' Cabin marked for the attention of Joanne. **Items deadline for the winter issue: Friday 3rd January 2014. Many thanks.**

A Perspective from a Mobility Scooter

I have a particular fondness for Marbury Country Park and, as a disabled person, it is my preferred place to take my dog for her daily walk. The main reason for this is that Marbury Park is very “disabled friendly”. In the past I also enjoyed taking my dog to Anderton and other parts of the Northwich Woodlands until it became necessary for me to use a mobility scooter. Then the limitations of my small “boot” scooter with respect to gradients and distances meant that these areas became practically inaccessible to me.

Aside from the obvious attraction of the beauty of the park itself, there are many things about Marbury that add to its appeal to a visitor confined to a mobility scooter or wheelchair. For instance, a good proportion of the extensive network of the well-maintained paths is usable on my scooter because the paths are metalled, almost level and relatively mud-free. In addition, what gradients there are on these paths are within the limitations of my small scooter. (A minor drawback to the shared use of the paths by bicycles and horses is having to negotiate around deposits of horse manure here and there. Pity there are no poo-bags for horses!)

Something important I want to mention is that I feel safe riding round Marbury Park on my scooter. It is the haunt of many regular dog walkers and others so I feel secure in the knowledge that should the scooter break down for any reason help will be forthcoming. (This has, in fact, happened to me twice.)

At this point I would like to express my thanks to both the Rangers and FoAM for what they have done in helping to make the park disabled friendly.

In addition to keeping the metalled paths clear of overhanging and encroaching undergrowth, they have made improvements including the little slope that was made to fill the kerb of the main path leading from the car park into the park and the recently laid brick paths from the road to the lodge. Then there is the new tall dog poo bin that can be reached easily from a wheelchair or mobility scooter. Able-bodied visitors may not realize how much difference the paving of the area for the weekend mobile coffee stand has made to those of us on wheels. (No more getting bogged down in mud on wet days.) I also appreciate the convenience of the disabled toilet.

Marbury is possibly the only park in the vicinity in which tricycles are available for a small charge to disabled users. The tricycles are provided on Wednesdays by the volunteers of a charity. One of the tricycles has been designed to transport a wheelchair. It is a delight to see the enjoyment of those using these tricycles.

A final note: an added bonus for blue badge holders visiting any area of the Northwich Woodlands is the free car parking and at Marbury there are four disabled parking spaces. What more could I ask for?



Paula Kelly

Project News – Marbury Arboretum

The Marbury Arboretum was originally designed by William Andrews Nesfield as part of the major estate re-design undertaken in the 1840s, with trees from Europe, America and Asia as well as those native to this country. Sadly, the wooden ‘tombstone’ plaques installed some 15 years ago to help visitors identify tree species have reached the end of their useful life and are in poor condition, whilst the entrance feature has already been removed.

We are delighted that INEOS has generously approved funding of £12,000 to enable a programme of work to be undertaken. Our project will involve replacement of the ‘tombstones’, installation of an interpretation panel and re-alignment of the entrance path to encourage visitors to explore the Arboretum. Our thanks to Jo Sayers of the Mersey Forest team who supported our application and will manage the funding from INEOS.

Alan Redley



One of the tombstones to be replaced



Ranger Chris Moseley planning the route for the re-aligned path

Our Final Events of the Year – do join us!

Saturday 2nd November The Shapes and Colours of Autumn – A Walk in Marbury Country Park

Come and enjoy the park at one of its most beautiful times of the year. A leisurely 1 – 2 hour walk.

Meet: 10.00 am at the Rangers' Cabin, Marbury Country Park

For information contact: Mary Jeeves 01606 77688

Sunday 15th December Christmas Decorations

Our annual opportunity to create some stunning decorations from natural materials gathered in the Woodlands. For all the family. Donations welcome.

From: 10.00 am – 12.00 pm by the Rangers' Cabin, Marbury Country Park

For information contact: Joanne Redley 01606 44728

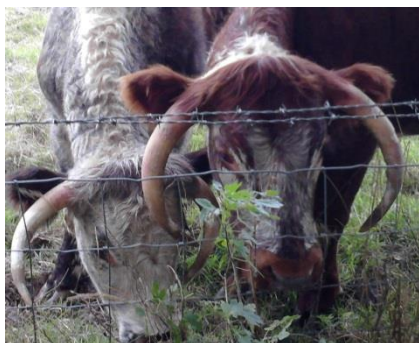
Also, please put our first event of 2014 in your diaries: Bird Walk in Big Wood – 2.00pm, Saturday 25th January.

Meeting the neighbours

Recently a lady told me that she and her husband had a piece of woodland. I was envious, I admit. And then she went on to say it was a tree allotment, and I realised that we had a piece of woodland too!

Today, October 6th, we signed on the dotted line, paid a small fee and took our instructions from Ranger Dave James. First job: find our allotted rows. An easy task - or not, depending on how many clues Dave gives you. Fifteen minutes of scrambling around in the undergrowth resulted in locating the tags which identified our three numbered rows (last year took longer!).

So today we moved onto our plot for this winter, a spot with idyllic views high up on Carey Park. The curtains were already twitching next door, and within a moment or two our new neighbours peered over the fence and introduced themselves – a herd of Longhorns.



We've signed a contract to fell with hand tools, by the end of March, the thirty-six trees in our rows marked with a coloured flash. We have mainly ash trees: ash is good for our stove - one log goes a long way, so you need less storage space for logs than if you had, say, predominantly birch. Plus quite a few field maples. Nothing too challenging here for the hand tools we must use on the tree allotment. And this is our third year, so Dave will just need to check that we have remembered our basic training in taking small trees down safely.

Suddenly the autumn and winter take on a new perspective, Christmas pales into insignificance and we start to function by the natural cycle. We can

start any time now, as the birds are no longer nesting - but the temperature today is 19°, the leaves are still on the trees, the sap is still up and the trees are likely to fight back if we start too soon. It's probably better to wait a little while, and to keep warm on dry winter days by felling trees then, if we can curb our enthusiasm for a while.

But even today, we wanted to make a start, so we set about making the area safe to work in. First job was to trim off those branches which prevent us from moving freely around the plot. The maples look harmless enough, but their lower branches tend to die off and the little monkeys lie in wait for you, snagging your clothes and trying to poke you in the eye when you are not paying attention. So it was off with their heads today, or their brittle, spindly branches, at any rate. These formed the beginnings of a brush pile or dead hedge, useful cover for wildlife. (We had to move the brush pile away from the fence, as the neighbours were reaching through the barbed wire fence to eat the leaves, and we thought they might get their heads stuck.) The ash are on the whole better behaved, although the more mischievous amongst them like to drop long, thin, dead branches into the leaf litter to trip you up; best to take these off to the brush pile too. The most naughty of all are perhaps the brambles, which snake across your path to catch you unawares, and the nettles still feel the need to sting you until very late in the year, so up they came as well.



As we were leaving for home, what at first glance looked like a patch of dark brown fungus at the base of an ash tree turned out to be a Noctule Bat. The fact that it was out so early and pestered by flies suggests that it is not well, and we are contacting the Cheshire Bat Group for advice.

Brenda Yates