

THE BEACON

NEWSLETTER FOR THE STAFF & VOLUNTEERS
OF THE MALVERN HILLS CONSERVATORS.



Issue: 34 February 2010

Send your news and views please to the Beacon Editorial Team at the Malvern Hills Conservators office, Manor House, Grange Road, Malvern, WR14 3EY:
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Current topics the Conservators are discussing.

By Val Moore

The 125th anniversary year has now passed and in his report at the Annual Meeting Ray Roberts recalled the achievements over the last twelve months and projects which he hoped would come to fruition during the last 12 months of his chairmanship. One major project is St Ann's Well and unusually 36 members of the public attended the Annual Meeting, six of whom asked a total of 26 questions regarding plans for St Ann's Well and their concerns for the tenant, as with the current lease expiring at the end of March 2010 Board members decided to give notice to the tenant of the intention to terminate the lease and apply to manage the café themselves. There is no intention to alter the ambience of the café but under their management they could ensure that it was open and available to walkers, visitors and the increasing number of sponsored walkers at times convenient to them and to have information available to enhance their experience. In view of the legal process it is not possible to make public at this stage all the reasons for this decision but it is hoped that there will be a satisfactory conclusion for both parties.





The new toposcope plate, standing up well to its first test.

Those who regularly visit the toposcope on Worcestershire Beacon will know that the glass regularly gets misted up in bad weather. When asked for projects to be funded from the Gift Fund, the idea came forward for refurbishment of the toposcope plate to try and prevent this. Thanks to the tenacity of the Chairman of the Board who found a company who were able to laminate a new disk between two sheets of special glass, the problem has been solved and the new plate is now in position.

At the last Land Management Committee meeting, Chris Rouse, a local farmer and representative for West Malvern, was elected Chairman, with Terry Hunt as Vice Chairman. Matters discussed included a report on community help on MHC land. Ian Rowat gave examples of three initiatives currently being undertaken by volunteers which helps foster an interest in conservation and also enhances understanding of MHC's management and promotes wider support for our work:-

Malvern Community Forest had offered their help to manage the Community Woodland off Townsend Way under the guidance of the Conservation Officer, Rob Havard.

Dave Jackson of the Malvern Coppice Network is currently working on a hedge at Brockhill Road teaching volunteers to traditionally lay hedges.



The Champions Project, a Heritage Lottery Project, aims to raise awareness of the importance of geology. Working under the guidance of the Wardens, a Conservation Day was held at Upper Dingle Quarry to clear vegetation.

Future Meeting Dates:

Annual meeting of the Board - 11 March 19:00 at the Elgar Room The Council House, Malvern.

Land Management Committee - Thursday 4th Feb 16:00 at Manor House.

Administration and Resources Committee - Thursday 18th Feb 19:00 at Manor House

Full reports of the meetings can be viewed on the web site at :

www.malvern hills.org.uk

1999-2009 Conservation Volunteering on the Malvern Hills Celebrates its first 10 years!



Many thanks to all of you who came out into the cold in December last year to help us celebrate 10 years of all the fantastic work that you have achieved on the hills and commons. Particular recognition must go to Brian and Colin Davies who have been volunteering for the Conservators since our very first project in December 1999; they are still very much a core part of the team. Also, Trevor Wilson who is a Voluntary Warden and joined us in 1999 as well, continues to be a valued member of the Wardening team. Thank you all and we look forward to carrying on working with you in the future!

If anyone would like to order a copy of Rich's booklet "10 Years of Slashing & Burning" which is full of photos of volunteers over the years, please let either Rich or Nicky know. The cost is £11 per booklet. *NQ*

How we are Funded

By Ian Rowat

For those who are not familiar with this organisation comments that we are spending tax payers money do not always reflect the true picture. The levy does form the bulk of income and is collected by the District Council in respect of the parishioners of Guarlford, Malvern, Malvern Wells and West Malvern; the parishes of Colwall and Mathon are collected by Herefordshire Council. The powers to raise a levy on the above go back to the 1924 Act and today represent approximately £27 on a D band property, this levy gives us a budget of £375,880.

We are also able to derive considerable income from car parking fees and throughout the year this contributes £ 160 000 to the budget. We hope that by not increasing the levy but increasing the car parking fee for 2010 that the users of the Hills will help to contribute a little extra to their up keep. The other area where we have been successful is obtaining grants. For the last 11 years the Board have encouraged grant aid for projects and for managing the Hills. The Malvern Hills are a national asset and as such should receive government money. Higher Level Stewardship helps to pay for the grazing on the Hills. We have in the past applied for grants for one off projects such as the path up the south side of Herefordshire Beacon. We have projects that we would like to put forward in 2010 for grant aid.

As landowners we receive money from utility companies for wayleaves and when roads or tracks cross our land we have a land agent operating to ensure we get the commercial rate for the access. This money can only go towards capital and cannot be used to defray everyday running costs.

As we all recognise public money is going to be tighter in the foreseeable future and we are preparing for that by increasing our profile on promoting the opportunity to donate and give to our organization, making use of our charitable status.

The Administration Committee have a very hands on quarterly report on expenditure and the Financial Consultant and Assistant alert us to any problems.

Wild about the Hills

By Nicky Quinn

WAXCAP FUNGI (*hygrocybe species*)

This is an attractive group of fungi known for their highly coloured caps, shades of green, purple, orange and pink. The slimy, oily surface to their cap and stem are also an aid to identification.

Waxcaps are considered to be predominantly but not exclusively species of sub alpine and montane regions. They are found on unimproved grassland habitats such as meadows, pastures, old churchyards and even lawns. They must be grassy sites that have not been treated with fertilisers or herbicides, had any disturbance such as ploughing and are well grazed to achieve a short sward of vegetation. They need a free draining soil, but also rely on a high level of rainfall to provide the moist conditions that they require to produce the resplendent coloured mushrooms that appear from August to October. Without the damp humidity of Autumn, waxcaps like many fungi will not appear above ground at all. The network of the fungi's mycelium spreads under the earth gaining it's nutrients by decomposing leaf litter and from the decaying roots of grasses.





Waxcaps are widespread across north western Europe but are usually quite localised, and in small groups with small numbers of individuals. Their numbers have decreased rapidly due to the intensification of farming practices, causing populations to become fragmented.

Great Britain has a large proportion of the different species of waxcap as compared with the rest of Europe. All of the waxcaps are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, but two species the pink waxcap and the date waxcap are both Biodiversity Action Plan species and are of conservation concern.

Mycologists consider a site important if it contains 10 species of waxcap. More than 13 species and it is an area of national importance. 17 species or more it is classified as being of international importance for waxcaps. Results from fungi surveys on the Malvern Hills in 2008 produced 33 different species!



Conservation Volunteer Activities

By Rich Vale and Nicky Quinn

Hangman's Hill Friday 9th October.

As most of you know the Hangman's Hill site is a unique area which has an abundance of Spring Ephemeral Plants. Obviously as the name suggests these plants only flower in the spring for a short time, *Blinks* and you misses um! Get it? Never mind. We are looking to link this site with a neighbouring one by clearing the scrub that lies between the two. Nicky had the chain saw and concentrated on clearing some larger trees at the bottom of the slope to allow more light onto the ridge. Brian, Jenny, Gerry, Tony, Angela, Peter and myself (hey, The Magnificent Seven, ok maybe not) got on with clearing the thick bramble and scrub further up the ridge. The weather was good early on (rain later) and we were able to have a fire to clear up all the cut materials. Good job. *RV*

Park Wood 23rd October.

One of the Conservators best kept secrets is Park Wood, a very picturesque area of ancient semi-natural woodland in West Malvern. It was great to be working in the woodland with the volunteers for the first time, and especially as we had Dave and Jenna from the Malvern Coppice Network to guide us through the days proceedings. They gave us some of the background history to the coppice woodland management of the site, and indicated plans for future coppicing and wildlife measures. All the work is done under the guidance of our conservation officer Rob with the long term health and biodiversity of the woodland species in mind. Mind you for some of the volunteers all this amounted to really was a licence to cut down trees! Their appetite for a bit of bow saw action was soon satisfied and one compartment of hazel was duly coppiced. Meanwhile others in the group had a couple of very successful bonfires. Dave was really pleased to have our help, so watch out for a bit more of this again at the end of the year. *NQ*

St. Ann's Well Bilberry site 7th November.

When only 2 volunteers arrived for the conservation day near the café, I began to suspect something was amiss. What could have tempted them away from our usual Saturday slot? Were England playing a world cup qualifying match? Was George Clooney making his debut at the Malvern Theatres? Or more likely, had everyone just decided to have some early refreshments at the Red Lion on the way up? I was wrong on all counts, and wrong again in a new way that I hadn't thought of. The volunteers accused me of sending out the wrong project details so that they all went to Tank Quarry. Some might see it as test of initiative in which case the volunteers failed dismally. Only Esme and Brian stand triumphant. When the rest of the team finally found us we set about clearing rowan trees from the bilberry patches on the north side of the Worcestershire Beacon. What a brilliant job they did, it was very impressive to see a large space open up where the saplings had been and securing the future of the bilberry which would have soon been overgrown. We had a bonfire too which smoked and smoked and smoked some more, then really got going at about 7pm! *NQ*

The Dingle Quarry Friday 13th November.

This site has been earmarked by the Earth Heritage Trust for their Champions Project due to the interesting geology. Eve Miles, from the Trust, came along to help out and gave everyone a short talk on the geology in the quarry. Our job today was clearing back bramble and tree growth to expose some of the bare rock (sorry, interesting geology). It was also Eve's Birthday and she bought along some cakes, I was expecting Rock cakes or should that be interesting geology cakes? *RV*

The Dingy Skipper Field Friday 27th Nov.

The dingy field damp and dull again. Actually I just looked at my notes for the day and it wasn't dull at all it was damp but bright. Made all the brighter by a roaring fire and the unwavering enthusiasm of the volunteers. When I say roaring fire, it only started roaring about 5 minutes before we packed up! We were clearing bramble from the top part of the field to try and encourage the Birds Foot Trefoil, which, I'm sure everyone knows by now is the main food plant of the Dingy Skipper. *RV*



Swinyard Wet Flush 11th December.

The day started well, if a little cold and damp, clearing bracken, scrub and small trees to try and encourage the wet loving plants. And the day just got better and better. We stopped for coffee and Nicky had bought mince pies and Alan had brought a Stollen. He may even have stolen a Stollen, who knows? And then Tony and Jane were singing carols, here is a sample – Words by A.Gooding to the tune of Oh come all ye faithful-

*Oh come ye Conservators, come ye to the Malvern's
Come by any means of transport you can.
Clamber up the hillside, and then a little further,
And then a little further and then a little further
And just a little further and cut down the trees.*

We then retired to the Marlbank for a Christmas drink and a bowl of chips. *RV*

What's that Snake?

Rich Vale.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of the warden's job is meeting interesting people on and around the hills. A few months ago I was approached by a lady at British Camp car park. She had taken a photograph of a snake on Broad Down (*see below*) and wanted to know what it was. I told her it was an Adder. The lady in question was Margaret Carpenter, a local artist and poet, who was thrilled at the fact that she had seen an Adder let alone had the opportunity to photograph one. She offered us the photograph for our records and I passed it on to Nigel Hand who is Herefordshire county recorder for reptiles and amphibians (which I am sure many of you already know).

Nigel was really pleased to get the picture and phoned Margaret to tell her it was one of the finest examples of a male adder he had ever seen. Over the following weeks Margaret learned a lot more about Adders, their habits and lifecycle. She also started to write some poems about them, one of which is reproduced on the following page with her kind permission.



***The Discovery.** By Maggie Collier*

I found an adder on the hill,
curled in sunshine very still,
I did not know that was his name;
to me all snakes look the same!
I took a photo-he slithered away,
across the path - to a wooded glade,
I took another - not so good,
as he disappeared into the wood.
As days passed by - I got my pictures
developed for the world to see,
to the Conservators - went one good one,
to establish what he could be,
eventually a message came-
from a man excitedly,
about this lovely well marked creature,
what he was and where he had been,
that he was the most perfect example,
of an Adder – just lost his skin,
pristine and shiny – a young male,
quite the best example he had ever seen,
he went on to tell me
about the creature so shiny and bright,
how he had studied over many years-
these poor creatures and there plight.
How they do a courtship dance,
a ‘poem’ I said quite by chance.
I got a picture of writhing and darting,
like snakes when they are being charmed.
So that is how it all started,
now I am completely hooked,
I want to know more and see them dancing
and of poems I now have almost a full book!

Personality Profile No. 23

Trevor Wilson - Volunteer Warden



Trevor was born in Leicester in 1937 but the family moved to Coventry when he was still very young. He was evacuated from Coventry during the Blitz and went to live with his Grandparents in Leeds. Trevor's family then settled in Royal Leamington Spa where he spent his remaining early years, going to school in Leamington and Warwick

On leaving school 1955 Trevor was called up for national service. He really enjoyed being in the army and transferred to being a regular soldier within 6 months of starting his national service. Trevor spent the next 26 years in the army attaining the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Most of that time was spent with the Worcestershire Regiment but he did spend some time with the Devon and

Dorset Regiment and the Ulster Defence Regiment. He also got around a bit whilst in the army serving in

Jamaica, Belize, Germany, Gibraltar, Libya, Canada, Northern Ireland and Cypress. Trevor left the army in 1981 and got a job as bursar at the Royal Grammar School in Worcester, where he stayed for 11 years. He then moved to St James School in West Malvern where he spent seven very happy years doing a similar job. Feeling like a complete change he resigned from St James in 1999 and did some work with the Teenage Cancer Trust. This involved spending 2-3 months in Peru leading guided walks. Trevor also joined the Hills Conservators in 1999 as a volunteer warden. He was telling me this was partly to get fit for his walks in Peru and partly for his abhorrence of litter on and around the hills.

Trevor has a general interest in sport and used to play cricket, football, Rugby and squash. He has also run 3 marathons, although he doesn't class marathon running as a sport. (I know what he means, its more of a warm up thing in between playing proper sport). These days Trevor enjoys walking and gardening, and wardening of course.

Trevor also does regular voluntary work for the Worcestershire Regiment Museum in Worcester. He was saying that this is mainly research work, helping people researching their Grandfathers in the First World War.

Trevor is married to Pat and they celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this year. They have two daughters and 4 four Grandchildren.

Rich Vale