

Our small garden plays host to small whites, hedge browns, red admirals, commas, peacocks; the bees cluster on the flowering teasel heads; the persicaria, and figwort invite a whole range of bees, wasps, and other insects. A white swallowtail moth was spotted in early August. We use no pesticides and encourage wildflower and grass areas to thrive

Red Rocks reed beds
Natterjack toad country



A comma butterfly sunning in early August

- Some Current Society Casework -

Trees:

Noctorum Ridge: Since the unauthorised destruction of a small protected woodland adjacent to Pipistrelle Rise in June 2012, the Society has been pressing the Council to ensure the perpetrators were prosecuted. To date no prosecution has taken place, but the Society will ensure this matter is not allowed to drop.

Mollington: We have received a disheartening report on the deliberate mutilation and poisoning of a number of unprotected mature trees in the grounds of a property in the village, in order that the cleared land can be sold to a developer. We are enquiring as to what action can now be taken.

Former Champion Spark Plug site, Upton: Wirral Council has taken welcome action to see unauthorised signage is removed, but the Society is asking that the unauthorised removal of a tree 'screen' be followed up with a view to a suitable re-planting.

Emergency Contacts: The Society is trying to establish from our two main Councils, if they have 24 hour telephone numbers that can be published, should important trees be under threat.

Wild life:

Proposed Golf Resort, Hoylake: We are concerned that if the construction of this project goes ahead it will, amongst other things, severely affect established wild-life, whilst not bringing the anticipated economic benefits.



'Oh look, a woodcutter's cottage'
a HUNTER cartoon

SUMMER MEETING

Visit to Burton Manor

Some 20 members visited the Burton Manor Gardens for a conducted tour and tea. We were guided by members of the Friends of Burton Manor who told us about their work in restoring the Victorian greenhouse, walled garden, ornamental gardens by Mawson and icehouse. We learned about the history of the house and complex which is now home to a number of Friend's offices and craft workshops.

Altogether this was a most enjoyable visit, to be recommended to the casual visitor as well as groups like ours.
Diana Lane

Summer 2013 - all about nature

WILDFLOWER WIRRAL

WIRRAL MATTERS



NEWS and VIEWS from THE WIRRAL SOCIETY - FOUNDED 1928

THE WIRRAL COMMITTEE OF THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND (CPRE)

President: Professor John Tarn OBE DL FRIBA FRSA FRHistS FSA

A Comment from the Chairman

As you will see, this issue of Wirral Matters is mainly given over to issues relating to wildlife and the natural environment. We've decided to do this following the recent release of a national report 'The State of Nature', which was researched and published by 25 leading conservation groups. Sadly, the report does not make comfortable reading, recognising as it does that more than 60% of more than 3,000 plant and animal species studied in Britain have declined over the past 50 years; 31% of them declining rapidly including hedgehogs and skylarks, dormice, water voles and some species of butterflies.

The Society's idea then, in focusing in this and forthcoming issues on natural matters was to try and find out to what extent the Wirral Peninsula reflects the national situation.

Whilst trying to make a direct comparison is not a practical proposition, we have asked those in various organisations in the Peninsula which specialise in the natural environment, to let us have their reflections on how they see the situation from their perspective.

THE WIRRAL SOCIETY WEBSITE overhauled by its creator, Nick Lauro, is now interactive.

www.wirralsociety.net

We are hoping to have a dedicated members' section of the website so that members can print out invitations to lectures, hot pot supper, etc. Watch this space. Members can register their email address with their email address with wrlsoc@yahoo.co.uk

As we cycled along the Wirral Way on a blustery day in high June, both the cow parsley and poisonous bryony were turning to seed. The bold yellow flowers of buttercups were coming into their own as were the purple-pink flowers of comfrey and the intense blue stars of green alkanet. Both pink and white clovers and birds foot trefoil, low down, fringed the path. The Wirral Way, as the railway before it, provides a haven for wildflowers to flourish.

Nearing Caldy the aroma of honeysuckle led us to tumbling swathes of their flowers in the hedgerows, while oxeye daisies danced below. Purple flowers of toxic woody nightshade hung over the lake by the Thurstaston Visitors Centre as we leant on the rail and watched the moorhen chicks.

The bramble flower promises autumn blackberries



A less obvious place to flower-spot is Bebington Station, a more pleasant occupation than counting the litter there. While waiting for a train to Chester I counted wild poppies, purple tufted vetch, groundsel, bramble, speedwell, birds foot trefoil, marestail, ragwort, hop trefoil, scarlet pimpernel, greater and lesser willowherbs, hogweed, lucerne.

Near Bache, at the side of the track a clump of Giant Hogweed was in full flower. N. D.



Green Belt News

Again, Planning in Cheshire West and Chester (CW&C) is the main issue of concern. The Chair of the Planning Committee has been replaced on the directive of Leader Mike Jones. This has so incensed residents that there are petitions to have the prior Chair reinstated. (Is there Local Democracy?)

Then applications (from 2012) by Redrow for outline permission for 2,000 new houses and a first detailed phase of 145 houses off Ledsham Road went to Committee. CW&C Planners recommended both applications. This is not Green Belt land but is very productive agricultural land and was in the Green Belt. The Chair decided to hear the first phase before the overall outline application, which caused much consternation in the meeting. The first phase was approved but the outline for 2,000 houses rejected. This is a confusing result as it cannot be a "first phase" without an overall plan being approved. We have now learnt that the site is scheduled for some 1500 houses in the draft CW&C Local Plan, despite this refusal!

The "student village" at Mollington, has also just reappeared. Seemingly similar to the earlier rejected application. The reasons for reapplication are unclear as again the application is not supported by the University of Chester. This is Green Belt land and one hopes that the CW&C Committee will again reject this application.

The CW&C draft Local Plan is due out and residents are encouraged to read it and check what their Council is planning for their open fields, and then lobby their Councillors accordingly!

In Wirral Council's area there are numerous applications for Green Belt development, the largest number being for extensions of differing sizes. Most concerning are the retrospective applications that claim validity based on the fact they have been paying Council Tax on the property for years! We have written to the Council to ask how this can happen, and are awaiting a response.

Any further information on the Green Belt in the Wirral please email:-

neil101parry@gmail.com



Stinging Nettle, a valuable resource for over 40 varieties of insect. Butterflies - small tortoiseshell, peacock and red admiral all lay their eggs here. See www.nettles.org.uk
Forum.gardenweb.com

CPRE Cheshire County Writing Competition Subject - 'My Favourite Part of Wirral or Cheshire Countryside'

Children from Parkgate Primary School received certificates from Lord Grey of Codnor and the Wirral Society's Yvonne Sanné.

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HELP SUPPORT OUR WORK

send your name and address and tel.number to
Audrey with a cheque for £7 (£10 for a society) for
one year's membership (Jan to Dec)

Hilary Ash, Hon. Conservation officer for Wirral Wildlife, comments on the recent national 'State of Nature' Report. Find the report on www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk

You may have seen the report, produced by 25 nature conservation organisations "The State of Nature". The headlines are that UK nature is in trouble. 60% of 3148 native species studies have declined in the last 50 years, 31% strongly. The figures are similar across a range of habitats, but invertebrates are doing particularly badly, especially in the urban areas. Species with particular requirements are doing worse than the more generalist ones. The reasons are the usual - habitat loss, changes in countryside management, pesticides, climate change.

We have little similar numerical data for Wirral, but 2 local moth recorders have been light-trapping in their gardens over 40 years (the moths are released unharmed after identification). A serious decline in numbers started in mid-1980s and speeded up drastically in the last decade. 2012's weather made for the lowest numbers ever, and tiny catches this year.

We have numerical counts for the New Ferry Butterfly Park since 2002, with qualitative ones from 1990. Some species have disappeared (wall brown), others have increased up to 2012 as they move north with climate change (speckled wood, thick-legged flower beetle). Last year's weather combined with 2013's late, cold spring have hit bumble bee numbers badly, though they seem to be building up numbers, so we hope for a good next generation of queens entering hibernation.

One of the few groups to benefit from 2012 was amphibians. Natterjacks at Red Rocks moved to breed in the new pools on the 'Green beach' for the first time producing a good number of toadlets. This new habitat is benefiting specialised plants and insects as well, so please support its presence when some people criticise it.

One thing we can all do to help stem these declines is to act and lobby to mitigate climate change. That does not mean windmills in the wrong places - there is much to be done still on energy efficiency, adopting solar and developing tidal stream/wave power/micro-hydro. For the next few decades until other means of generation are in place it does mean some windmills in the right places, and putting up with the necessary infrastructure - like the recently started laying of HVDC cable across Wirral. See www.cat.org.uk for their work on Zero-Carbon Britain

Another help would be to campaign for more street trees and fewer "over-tidy" public spaces with more flowers to benefit bees and other invertebrates. Support efforts by Wirral MBC to change the way some parks are managed to reduce the amount of little-used amenity grassland and replace with open woodland and, in some suitable places, wild flower meadows. Ideas for suitable places would be welcomed by WMBC.

And do make your own gardens as wildlife-friendly as possible. Gardens are a major refuge for bumble and solitary bees, some moths and many other insects, some amphibians and birds. There is much advice on the web and in books about wildlife-friendly gardening www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk



A wildlife zoo on the sow thistle

Editor's note: The hot, dry weather in June and July have brought a more promising sight to the walkers of Wirral's non agricultural countryside. Butterflies have abounded among wild flowers and grasses on the dunes at Gunsite, Leasowe, the cliffs at Caldy and on the old seawall at Gayton at the bottom of Riverbank Road. Many grasshoppers were seen and heard there too. Along the Wirral Way butterflies danced among knapweed and St. John's Wort and often rested dangerously, for them, on the main path.