



## Mayor In A Spin



The Mayor and The Eco Loo. Photos: John Gill

A record 592 guests enjoyed the May Open Day at New Ferry Butterfly Park which marked the opening of the season to the public. The event was presided over by the Mayor of Wirral Councillor, Steve Foulkes. He unveiled a new feature at the park, an "eco loo", and took it in good spirit with lots of jokes, setting a fun tone to the start of the day.

The eco loo was sponsored by a grant from the South Wirral constituency Your Wirral Fund from Wirral Council. This will be a big boost to volunteers, park wardens and guests at the park and the liquid gold collected will come in useful as a compost activator for the cut vegetation gathered when scything the meadows here. The finished compost is given away to local allotment societies.

Eight species of butterflies were on the wing, another record for an Open Day. Our newest resident species, the Brimstone Butterfly stole the show, with the bright yellow males darting up and down the hedgerows and some of the (paler) females spotted laying eggs.

The Mayor went to every stall - except the spider stall! He got into a spin making a healthy fruit smoothie with a pedal powered blender brought by Sustrans.

The Park is open every Sunday from 12 - 4 p.m. until 13th September. There are trails to follow and environmental games to play. So, if you want to explore wildlife on your doorstep, do come along. There are knowledgeable volunteer wardens to guide you..... and what is more it is free.

Paul Loughnane

See more photographs on our website Events page.

## Going Up In The World

1995 was European Nature Conservation Year. This was when Mel Roberts, the Butterfly Park's founder, invited Lyndon Harrison, West Cheshire MEP at the time, to preside at the official opening of New Ferry Butterfly Park to the public. Preparations had been going on for two years, securing the boundaries, setting out the paths and starting vegetation management.

The opening event on Saturday 15th July was a proud moment for Mel, who had campaigned for over two decades for this nature reserve to get under way. What patience! The hedges then were merely whips barely poking above the competing grass. Only the lower section of the Park had paths. The grass was rather rough tussock grass without sight of a buttercup or red clover. In many ways a rather rough looking nature reserve.

The Park has been transformed tremendously in the last 20 years. Mel's dream has carried on beyond his wildest expectations. Lyndon Harrison will return on August 9th to help us celebrate. Like New Ferry Butterfly Park, he has come up in the world and is now Lord Baron Harrison of Chester.

It has been a long and successful project, but there are still many opportunities to increase both the habitat quality and the participation of the public and volunteers at the Park. The initial enthusiasm for this project has not diminished over the last 20 years. In fact it has burnt even brighter as the Park's potential has been recognised.

Paul Loughnane

### Date For Your Diary 9th August, 12 noon - 4 p.m.

To celebrate 20 years of New Ferry Butterfly Park being open to the public, there will be a community BBQ. Bring along a contribution. There will be garden and environmental games to play and a display on the development of the Park over the last twenty years.

Free of charge. Public transport available - the Park is next to Bebington Train Station.

## **Reserve Management Groups**

The management of our extended nature reserve at Red Rocks presents a number of challenges, especially on the inland dunes. A Management Group has now been set up to draw together as much expertise as possible, including local naturalists, wildlife experts and organisations such as the Royal Liverpool Golf Club (the landowners), Dee Estuary Conservation Group, Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society and the Amphibian and Reptile Group. To help guide the management, soil samples were taken recently in the inland dunes, including the former poplar area at the north end, to help decide what to do there.

See photographs of the sampling in progress in our online newsletter.

A similar management group has now been set up to cover the woodland reserves (Thornton, Foxes, Intake and Patricks) and Cleaver Heath. New Ferry Butterfly Park has from the start had its own committee to run it - for over 20 years!

If you have suitable expertise to contribute to any of these groups, please contact Sarah Bennett by email [sbennett@cheshirewt.org.uk](mailto:sbennett@cheshirewt.org.uk)

Hilary Ash

## **Kestrel Nest at Royden Park**

Anyone visiting Royden Park's Café and Coach House at the moment will undoubtedly encounter the Kestrel camera. This was kindly installed by Ron Thomas (local photographer) last year and has provided a Springwatch insight to their nest since then. The camera shows live pictures of the nest located close to the Coach House from the Walled Garden.

This site has been used, by the same pair we think, over the last seven years. This year the adult pair of Kestrels returned again and a total of 5 eggs was laid between 23rd April and 5th May. The camera has provided good sights of the female bird sitting tight on the eggs with occasionally the male taking over these duties with a lot of commotion during this exchange.

The first egg hatched on the 26th May followed closely by the second, third and fourth. The fifth hatched on the 30th May. All five chicks are now being well fed by both parents and growing fast. There are clips on YouTube showing the parents bringing voles, mice and other prey such as a mole and even, we think, a small bird (although this is generally unusual for a Kestrel) to the nest and then plucking the kill and feeding it to their young. Normally they feed the young for about four weeks before they fledge the nest.

If you visit Royden Park in the next few weeks you should pop into the Coach House and take a look at the camera and hopefully see for yourself the chicks either with the adult or, as is often happening now, on their own while both parents are out feeding. You must be quick as once they are fledged they are gone until the adults return..... hopefully.... next year.

Paul Greenslade

See photographs of the kestrel nest in our online newsletter.

View our website at [www.wirralwildlife.org.uk](http://www.wirralwildlife.org.uk)

## **Frogspawn Rescue**

I have to admit to a bit of 'eco-meddling'. It happened several years ago and concerned a frogspawn-filled, tractor tyre rut on the Welsh coast near Portmeirion. The water the puddle contained was only a few inches deep and drying out rapidly. I decided to fill a plastic bag with spawn and water, take it back to where we were staying, transfer it to a more robust vessel, then transport it back to the small pond in the garden of our house.

The eggs were duly transferred and floated lumpily with the spawn already in my pond. In a short time tadpoles emerged from both sources but, to me, they were noticeably different. Small and black on the one hand, bigger and greener on the other. It could simply be that I was noticing different rates of development but I've always assumed that the more robust specimens came from the Welsh coast – hardiness there, it seemed to me, was a prerequisite for survival. And these tadpoles had certainly survived.

I hope I'm not misleading myself by saying that I've noticed this size difference in the years since the 'rescue'. I've also noticed that some of the young don't always mature in the current year but overwinter before disappearing.

The pond this spring was unusually green but it didn't deter returning frogs. The number in the water seemed up on past years. I don't know whether this was due to less predation by cats, foxes, etc., or because more tadpoles were successfully making their way through the transformation process. Greater numbers out mean greater numbers back.

The current tadpole batch is doing well..... and the water is clearing, slowly.

Les Roberts

## Events Programme August - November 2015

### **Monday 31st August** **The Beauty of Heswall's Heathlands**

**1.30 p.m. – 3.30 p.m.**

Join the Ranger and Cheshire Wildlife Trust on this guided walk and discover the wildlife of the heathland habitats of Cleaver Heath and Heswall Dales. Meet at Cleaver Heath on Oldfield Road, Heswall. Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended. No booking required. Contact: [info@wirralwildlife.org.uk](mailto:info@wirralwildlife.org.uk) or 0151 342 4249

### **Friday 11th September** **'From Sloths to Slaidburn: Rainforests Around The World'**

**Heswall Hall, Heswall 7.30 p.m.**

Botanists Barbara and Eric Greenwood will talk about their fascination with rainforests. Admission £3. All welcome.

### **Sunday 13th September** **An Industrial Legacy To Butterfly Haven** **New Ferry Butterfly Park 2 - 4 p.m.**

Heritage walk concentrating on the industrial history and heritage of the Park and how this has contributed to its wildlife diversity. Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended. Free of charge. Contact: Paul Loughnane email [jpl@liv.ac.uk](mailto:jpl@liv.ac.uk) or telephone 0151 645 8937.

### **Saturday 19th September** **Tackling Invaders**

**Thornton Wood, 9.30 a.m. - 4 p.m.**

Tackling the canopy invaders such as beech and sycamore and the ground floor invaders such as variegated yellow archangel. Free of charge. Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended. Contact: Paul Loughnane email [jpl@liv.ac.uk](mailto:jpl@liv.ac.uk) or telephone 0151 645 8937.

### **Friday 9th October** **AGM followed by 'Port Sunlight River Park: From Waste to Wildlife'**

**Heswall Hall, Heswall 7.30 p.m.**

Ranger Anne Litherland and botanist Hilary Ash will describe the creation of the River Park on what was once a landfill site.

Admission free. All welcome.

### **Friday 13th November** **'RSPB on the Dee: From the Mud to the Mere'**

**Heswall Hall, Heswall 7.30 p.m.**

Dan Trotman, Visitor Development Officer at the RSPB Dee Estuary, will give a talk.

Admission £3. All welcome.

### **Sundays 6th September, 4th October, 1st November**

#### **Cleaver Heath Workdays**

**Meet Oldfield Road, Heswall at 10 a.m.**

Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended, and volunteers should bring a packed lunch if staying for the whole session, which ends between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. Further details from Mike Maher, email [mj.maher@virgin.net](mailto:mj.maher@virgin.net) or telephone 0151 342 4249.

### **Sundays 13th September, 11th October, 8th November**

#### **New Ferry Butterfly Park Workday**

**9.30 a.m. - 4 p.m.**

Stout footwear and waterproofs recommended. Bring a packed lunch. Free of charge. The Park is next to Bebington Train Station. Contact: Paul Loughnane (see 13th September).

## Help Required

### **Saturday 12th September** **Wirral Earth Fest, West Kirby**

Wirral Wildlife runs a stall at this event with children's craft activities, plant and pocket money toy sales. We also distribute information on gardening for wildlife and about Cheshire Wildlife Trust and its reserves. This needs several people to transport, set up, staff and take down. Hilary Ash has co-ordinated it for the last two years, but would dearly like some help local to West Kirby. Members in West Kirby and Hoylake - please offer to help! Phone Hilary on 0151 327 5923 or email [info@wirralwildlife.org.uk](mailto:info@wirralwildlife.org.uk)

### **New Ferry Butterfly Park**

The Park continues to be very busy, and we could do with a few more voluntary wardens on Sunday afternoons, either 12 - 2 p.m. or 2 - 4 p.m. No particular knowledge needed - just a willingness to oversee pond dipping and learn how to open or close the park. Offers to Linda please - telephone 0151 342 1395 or email [info@wirralwildlife.org.uk](mailto:info@wirralwildlife.org.uk)

## Online Newsletter

Many members now read the newsletter online instead of taking a paper copy so we are able to use more of the money we raise to support wildlife on Wirral. The online newsletter has extra articles and more photographs. We will send you an email to let you know when a new one is ready to read.

**SO PLEASE if you are reading this as a paper copy and have an email address, could you be reading the newsletter online instead? Please send your name, postal address and email address to [info@wirralwildlife.org.uk](mailto:info@wirralwildlife.org.uk).**

## Changing Times for Wirral's Breeding Birds



Swallow nest. Photo: John Elliott

The picture of the motor bike wheel hanging on the wall of a barn at a farm in Hoylake shows the most unusual swallow's nest I have ever monitored. It was used every year from 2006 until 2012 and young fledged every time. I was always thrilled to turn up at the end of May and find the swallows there again. The swallows did not turn up in 2013, were not there in 2014 and now that I have checked again this year I finally have to admit that they will never be back. It is not all bad news though. There are nests in other parts of the farm now; none with young but four with eggs that are being incubated so I feel confident that the farm will add to this year's generation of swallows.

How fortunate we are on Wirral that the farmers and land owners are so supportive of wildlife conservation and so positive about helping. Everybody at the Hoylake farm is interested in the progress of the swallows and goes out of their way to support the monitoring of the nests.

Skylarks have long been a cause for concern in the UK with a huge decline in farmland breeding being recorded in the past twenty or thirty years. However Wirral does not have to rely on farmland for skylarks as the River Dee, with its salt marshes and dune systems, provides the perfect breeding habitat. Anywhere from the North Wirral Coast right down to Burton, it is hard to avoid singing skylarks at this time of year. Everywhere, that is, apart from Hilbre. Skylarks bred on the island up to 2002 but have not bred there since then. The reasons for this are probably complex but we were told that skylarks are very sensitive to the presence of crows when selecting nesting sites. Crows started to breed on the island in 2000 and carried on until 2013. However they were not about in 2014 as a breeding species, are not there this year and we have had a skylark singing regularly over the islands this year. We hope that the presence of crows was the main driver behind the skylarks failure to nest and that their disappearance this year will lead to a skylark recovery.

John Elliott

See our online newsletter for a photograph of a blue tit's unusual nesting spot, photographed by Richard Ash.

## The Recording Team

Our recording team survey some lovely sites round Wirral. Mike Griffiths did a survey of Tom's Paddock last year, a small species-rich grassland next to Foxes Wood, Thornton Common Road, Clatterbridge. If you are in the area, do stop and look over the gate into the field. The orchids are a hybrid swarm of southern marsh, common spotted and everything in between – a taxonomic nightmare!

Mike is skilled in naming various insects as well as plant identification. He found a bee new to Cheshire, delightfully named the sleepy flower bee (*Chelostoma florisomne*), as reported in our Spring 2014 newsletter (still available online). He also took some photos of other invertebrates - look out for similar ones in your patch this summer. They include a scorpion fly (*Panorpa communis*), lacewing (*Chrysocopa perla*), cardinal beetle (*Pyrochroa serraticornis*) and Silver-ground Carpet Moth (*Xanthorhoe montanata*).

Tom's Paddock is managed by Tom McCullough, with help from Wirral Countryside Volunteers. A third of it has to be scythed and cleared every year to keep the flowers thriving. If you would like to help, do get in touch via our website or Wirral Countryside Volunteers or ring Hilary on 0151 327 5923.

If you would like to train as a biological recorder with our volunteers, contact Ed Samuels on 334 4617 or by email [info@wirralwildlife.org.uk](mailto:info@wirralwildlife.org.uk)

Hilary Ash



Cardinal beetle (*Pyrochroa serraticornis*)  
Photo: Mike Griffiths

See more of Mike's photographs and more details about Tom's Paddock in our online newsletter. Our website can be found at [www.wirralwildlife.org.uk](http://www.wirralwildlife.org.uk)