



West Midlands Region Newsletter

Winter/Spring 2009



Hednesford Hills Local Nature Reserve, Staffordshire

Happy New Year and welcome to the second CMA members' newsletter for the new West Midlands Region. Please send us photographs of your sites or events- we would like to feature somewhere different on each cover.

What a good first few months for the new West Midlands CMA region. I somehow have been surrounded by good and keen county reps that are making my life much easier. The appeal for help in the last regional magazine provided some good lines of communication, so thanks to everyone that got in touch.



In 2009 members in the West Midlands can expect to receive further study day opportunities and, if there is sufficient interest, training in Great Crested Newt survey techniques and handling, which would help in acquiring a licence for this protected species.

The national AGM on the 1st December was short (technically as a new company there was no business from last year to discuss). This was followed by a short informal discussion on the work of the board. The members present were broadly supportive of the approach being adopted by the board members. During and after lunch there were presentations from the Cotswold Water Park Biodiversity Officer and Dr Phoebe Carter on the beaver reintroduction at the Lower Mill Estate. A walk around the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's Lower Farm Nature Reserve rounded the day off nicely.

Phil Armshaw
West Midlands Regional Chair

Tuesday 23rd September saw The Museum of Cannock Chase in Hednesford, Staffordshire, host our new region's first study day. After a warm welcome, hot drinks and a bite to eat the CMA members accompanied children from a local primary school as they took part in "Heath Week" activities organised to help them learn about the importance of heathland.

The first activity, which was facilitated by Phil Armshaw, focused on how people living near to heathland used to utilise their surroundings. This gave us a vivid image of what was grown, reared, picked and harvested by our heathland-dwelling ancestors. In particular the idea of

using gorse to make a mattress sticks in your mind!



In the second activity children were given the opportunity to make their own house by weaving willow into a framework.

Next, we were taken on a heathland walk to look at some of the plants and animals that can be found on Hednesford Hills today. The children were particularly excited to spot the Dexter cattle, which graze an area of the heathland.

Finally, a musician helped the children to create their own heathland song, which was recorded for them to hear back at school. The children enjoyed thinking of rhyming lyrics and ended that session with lots of laughter as they took turns telling jokes.



The event enabled the children to learn about heathlands in a variety of memorable “hands-on” ways, whilst CMA members picked up some good transferrable ideas for environmental education activities.

The study day continued after the children had returned to school, with a visit to The Park Gate Pub at Cannock Wood, where our experiences of the day were shared. This preceded a guided walk around an ancient hill fort named Castle Ring. At 760 metres above sea level, the views and colours of the late afternoon landscape rounded off a very celebratory event.

Claire Faulkner

Details of our next two study days can be found later in this newsletter. Once again both of these study days will be FREE to CMA members, prospective members and volunteers, so we hope to see you there.



The second regional study day, which was held on 20th November, was organised by Liz Nether and what a great job she did too. Study days are about sharing good practice. To this end, having just gone through the green flag process on a LNR, Liz was well placed to share her experiences, as well as her tea and biscuits.

Thirteen people attended the day, including Lucy Heath from Natural England who was able to give some useful insights into the scheme. My interest was in green flags on LNRs. I'd always considered green flags to be an urban park thing and of little relevance to countryside sites. However, in the latest round of awards 20% were to LNRs.



The delegates had a mix of healthy scepticism and open mindedness which led to some good discussions around the topic. The afternoon site visit to Liz's LNR, which has just received a green flag, was most enlightening because it looked like any other LNR. I was inspired to suggest going for an award for one of the sites in Cannock Chase District. Whilst it may not be worth setting the management of a site purely for green flag status, if you can get one for doing what you already do, then why not? In these days of cuts it seems to be a good political tool to at least maintain funding.

Phil Armshaw

As an 'honorary Salopian' my background is slightly different to my fellow Reps from the West Midlands Region. Living in Telford I am currently based at DCAE Cosford having spent the last 26 years in the Royal Air Force as an aircraft technician.....a tentative link to countryside management in as much as my employer is one of the largest landowners in the country!!



I have always had more than a passing interest in the great outdoors and I am a member of many of the usual organisations – RSPB, Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Woodland Trust and so on. On a practical level I now have the opportunity to actively volunteer with Natural England at their Stiperstones Reserve.

I am conscious that I am still possibly a little naive with regards to the workings of the CMA but as a County Rep I hope to be able to act as a focal point for other county members, helping *you* get whatever it is that *you* want out of *your* organisation. I'm a firm believer that membership bodies such as ours should deliver value to their members in whatever form they want it.

To that end I would love to hear from any other members out there in the county.....what is it you want and how would you like to get it? Other counties in the region have run training days (Phil with his Heathlands and Liz with her Green Flags)....could or should we be doing something

similar here in Shropshire to benefit the whole region? Should we, at a county level, try to get together informally some time soon? How can we recruit more members? How can we increase our network for all of our benefit?

Please let me know your thoughts, either directly via the contact details at the back of the newsletter or through the newsletter itself if you wish to reach a wider audience.....I'm sure our Editor would love to have some more articles, letters or general comments to publish!!

Martin Noble

In my capacity as the Herefordshire County Rep my colleagues have come to me with a question to pose to the region. We had a mixed response to our programme of guided walks during the summer of 2008 and were wondering what others have experienced. Admittedly our programme was rather ad hoc and little thought had been given to its marketing or promotion. However, with limited numbers, and some "no shows", we are pondering whether people want guided walks any more.

Do you have a walks programme? Is it well attended? Does its success depend on content, timing, weather? Has anyone done any research or survey work and got any results they could share? Please get in touch with me or the newsletter (contact details on the back page)- we would be grateful for your feedback.

Paul Ratcliffe



As an existing member of the CMA I'm sure you already appreciate the benefits of being a member of a relevant professional organisation. Do you know anyone who might also be keen to access these benefits by joining the CMA? If so, let them have a look at this article...

CMA is for everyone with an interest in countryside and green space management - and there is a range of membership types which will provide the benefits of membership to all, as well as a structured path for members to develop as their career and experience advances.

Students and volunteers, the countryside managers of the future, are likely to be particularly interested in the affiliate membership fee, which I believe represents outstandingly good value.

Affiliate members are typically aspiring countryside managers, students, volunteers and retired volunteers. Annual membership fee: £10.

Members are typically countryside and green space practitioners whose job description demonstrates they are actively working in the industry. Annual membership fee: £30.

Accredited Members are typically countryside and urban green space practitioners/managers/policymakers who have reached a benchmark in terms quality, whether this is for broad or specialist delivery, management or policy development. Annual membership fee: £50.

Application forms and more detailed membership information are available from Heather Tarrant in the CMA administration office at Writtle College.

Telephone: 01245 424116 and Email: cma@writtle.ac.uk

or on the internet at:

<http://www.countryside-management.org.uk/membership/index.php>

Paul Shires



I had volunteered to write an article reporting back on this year's CMA conference, but unfortunately it was cancelled. The booking numbers were low and it was short of the break-even threshold, so the difficult decision was taken not to go ahead.

To try to establish why bookings were low, and to make a future conference more popular, a questionnaire was sent out to CMA members. About 100 people responded and apparently the feedback has been very useful. A full report will be produced soon, but what I understand from the National Executive is that one of the main barriers to attending was that the conference was in half-term. Financial considerations and content were also raised as issues.

Thanks to everyone who did respond – the comments will be used in planning future events.

Liz Nether

Thursday 26th February 2009

Hawks Green Nature Reserve, Nr. Cannock, Staffordshire.
Meet at the Countryside Service's base at Deavall's Farm.
OS Grid Reference: SJ997106

Time: 10am until 4pm

This hands-on event will focus on work to provide habitat for farmland seed-eating birds (and a splash of native colour) on an urban-fringe nature reserve.

An area of amenity grassland and some scrubbed-up arable land are being converted to provide habitats that are rich in British native arable wildflowers such as



corncockle and cornflower.

During this event we will be rotavating and harrowing the land and then broadcasting an arable wildflower seed mix.

This is an excellent opportunity to share ideas about habitat restoration and creation.... and to have a go on a Kilworth compact tractor. Places on this study day are limited, so please book early.

Contact Phil Armshaw for more information.

Wednesday 20th May 2009

Park Hall Country Park, Weston Coyney, Stoke-on-Trent
OS Grid Reference: SJ930447

Time: 10am until 4pm (at the latest)

Management work on many nature reserves is currently funded by Countryside Stewardship agreements, but during the next five or so years all of these agreements will come to an end. Their successor is the new Environmental Stewardship programme, which includes the "Higher Level Scheme" (HLS).

Come along to find out more about the scheme, how it is targeted and how to apply. This informal event is being organised by countryside staff who have put together HLS applications and there will be plenty of time to discuss the scheme and share experiences. During the afternoon site visit there will be an opportunity to see the spectacular Triassic geological exposures of Hulme Quarry National Nature Reserve, which lies within the country park. This event is limited to 30 places, so please book your place as soon as possible.



For more information please contact Paul Shires.



Regional Chair and West Midlands County Rep

Phil Armshaw

Telephone: 01543 450018

E-mail: countrysideservice@cannockchasedc.gov.uk

Herefordshire County Rep

Paul Ratcliffe

Telephone: 01432 260344

Email: pratcliffe@herefordshire.gov.uk

Shropshire County Rep

Martin Noble

Telephone: 07799 000046

E-mail: martin@noble06.wanadoo.co.uk

Staffordshire County Rep (and editing of this newsletter)

Paul Shires

Telephone: 01782 331889

E-mail: paul.shires@stoke.gov.uk

Warwickshire County Rep

Thomas Cavanagh

Email: tcavanagh@warkscol.ac.uk

Worcestershire County Rep

Liz Nether

Telephone: 01905 766155

Email: lnether@worcestershire.gov.uk

A large print version of this newsletter is available
upon request.