

After a two year gap the Dr Anne family activity day returned in August. This, the sixth event, was held at the Ewelme Watercress Beds on 11<sup>th</sup> August. Dr. Anne (Millar), who died in 2013 after serving the local community as it's GP for three decades, was passionate about wildlife and involving children in the outdoors and nature activities.

16 Children aged six to 11 attended and enjoyed a fun morning of activities in the (sometimes too hot) sunshine. The morning kicked off with opening a moth trap which had been set overnight. Dr Marc Botham from Centre of Ecology & Hydrology kept the children and adults engaged with his extensive knowledge of the trapped moths before their release. The children were delighted to find three Poplar Hawkmoths, and over 10 of the spectacular Jersey Tiger moths.

The activities on offer following the moths included:

### **Boats**

A channel through one of the cress beds was partitioned off as a "race course"

Assorted recycling materials were provided from which the children had to construct a boat. Prizes were awarded for design and speed.

### **Dream-catchers**

Ready-made willow hoops were provided for this new and very popular activity. A demonstration was given and children were absorbed and very creative. Some American Indians use these to hang this over their beds where they block bad dreams and catch good ones.

### **Photo competition**

The cress beds cameras were supplied and the children had to take pictures on the theme of 'symmetry' perhaps better explanation could have been given? But the winning photo was spot on.

### **Creative caps**

White cotton baseball caps were provide for the children to decorate. Some very creative designs resulted and taken home.

### **Who am I**

A clever quiz which might have drawn more interest in cooler weather. This used the whole of the meadow and involved photos of animals, child-friendly cryptic descriptors, and then an anagram.

### **Heads and Tails**

A bird quiz designed to involve the adults. Photos of birds' heads had to be matched with the right tails. Pretty hard – but some succeeded.

The event is organised and run by the Ewelme Watercress Beds education team and the Benson Nature Group. The team are all passionate about nature and the environment and the importance of getting children involved from an early age. The Ewelme Watercress Beds gives plenty of scope to offer a wide variety of educational activities and is a great resource to have on our doorsteps.

### **The Drought**

Some of the local effects of the drought are evident to everyone with parched grass and many of the trees shedding leaves early. On the cress beds the wildflower meadow finished flowering very early which will have had a knock-on effect on pollinating insects such as bees, butterflies and moths. It will be interesting to see the results of the ongoing butterfly transect surveys at the end of the summer. You may have noticed that the Buddleja bushes had fewer butterflies than normal. It is thought that the lack of rain reduced the nectar produced that the butterflies feed on.

The question I am frequently asked is "will the stream dry up as it did in 2012?" I'm not sure I can confidently answer that question though I am hopeful it won't. The stream flow is dependent on the level in the aquifer which, in turn, depends largely on winter rainfall. Summer rainfall mainly goes to feed trees and plants and much is lost through evaporation. Looking at the six winter months rainfall in 2021/2 the total was 94% of the average whereas in 2020/21 it was only 64%. Unfortunately the bulk of the rainfall last winter was early in the six month period, in October, so how this affects aquifer levels is unknown. To sum up I am hopeful but not putting my money on it not running dry. Fingers crossed for a wet winter!