

Last time I wrote I said “the bridge on the lower site is nearing completion” well I am delighted to say we did it – some might say “about time too” but there were various mitigating circumstances like our chief engineer deciding to go and build a house down in Cornwall!

We seem a bit thin on watercress and although some of that might be due to the mammoth job of removing silt that had accumulated over many years that is not the sole reason as there are bare beds where we haven't removed the silt. I might have to get out the ouija board and see if I can get some help from Des. Whilst on that subject we (Watercress beds and friends of same) have organised a plaque to be fixed to the front of our building recognising the contribution made by Avril and Des. The grand unveiling will be on the next workday, 2nd July at 12:30. I have just realised that you will not get your copy of the magazine until after the event, so I am afraid you missed the unveiling but you can admire the plaque as you are passing.

The beds seem to have become something of a “playground” in the warm weather. Although I don't really like it as it disturbs the wildlife and potentially nesting birds, I realise there is little I can do about it. One of the problems is people moving some of the flow control structures. Although they do appear somewhat random, they are positioned to control the level and flow of the water. If you see anyone moving them, I would be grateful if you could explain their purpose.

Opposite the centre you may spot that the hedge has been laid. A group of volunteers from our regulars, Benson Nature group and Wallingford green Gym were tutored in the ancient art of hedge laying by Clive Leeke of “Hedgecraft”. This was funded with an SODC district councillor grant, for which we are most grateful. Although the hedgerow trees were a bit on the large size for laying it appears to have been successful and regrowth has been vigorous. Why not come along to one of the open days on the first Sunday of the month and take a look – feel free to criticize.

The vegetation in the wildflower meadow, this year, is generally about chest high which made the annual orchid count extremely difficult and, inevitably, some were probably missed. Nevertheless, a total of just over 200 were counted of 4 different species. I couldn't find a Bee orchid but, as they seem to be popping up everywhere this year, suspect some were hiding from me.

The regular breeding warblers have had a good year with 3 or 4 pairs of Blackcap and a similar number of chiffchaffs plus a single pair of whitethroats. There are good numbers of song thrushes this year and other common breeders are around in normal numbers.

We are planning for the Dr. Anne family's day which I'm sure you will see advertised elsewhere in this issue. As it is several years since we were able to hold this event it might be appropriate to explain who Dr Anne (Millar) was. She was a GP in Benson over many years, a founder member of Benson Nature Group (BNG) or Benson Environmental Survey Team as it was originally. Anne was passionate about wildlife, nature and involving children in outdoor activities and was a true friend to BNG and the Watercress Beds. Hopefully the weather will be kind to us as it is always a fun day.

We are always looking for help on our regular work sessions on the first Saturday and third Wednesday each month. You won't be asked to do anything you don't feel capable of – we can find jobs for all.

