



Ver Valley Newsletter



Published quarterly for members of the Ver Valley Society

Number 94

www.riverver.co.uk

July 2007

Chairman:

(also News & Publicity)

Andy Webb, 30 Queens Court, Hatfield
Road, St Albans, AL1 4TG.

Tel: (01727) 839573.

Deputy Chairman:

(also Bailiff co-ordinator)

Mrs Jane Gardiner, 18 Claudian Place,
St Albans, AL3 4JE.

Tel: (01727) 866331.

Email: jane@gardiner33.fsnet.co.uk

Hon Secretary:

Peter Fox, 23 Fish Street,
Redbourn, AL3 7LP.

Tel: (01582) 793303.

Email: fox@fishstreet23.freeserve.co.uk

Hon Treasurer:

(also Membership Secretary,
"Newsletter" Editor)

John Cadisch, 14 Prae Close, St Albans,
AL3 4SF.

Tel: (01727) 862843.

Email: john.cadisch@ntlworld.com

Minutes Secretary:

(also Bird Note Co-ordinator,
Webmaster)

John Fisher, 92 High Street, Redbourn,
AL3 7BD.

Tel: (01582) 792843.

Email: john.fisher@btclick.com

Newsletter Layout:

John Trew
(Verulam Angling Club)

"Cleaner, Greener St Albans" Hotline:
0845 125 8000

EA "Pollution Hotline": 0800 807060.

EA "Floodline": 0845 9878 1188

President & First Chairman:
Richard Thrale

July Open Meeting

Please note that our July meeting returns to Markyate:

TUESDAY 24th JULY (7.30 pm)

at Markyate Village Hall, Cavendish Road, Markyate

Go to the Dunstable end of Markyate High Street, look for Cavendish Road (narrow turning) on the west side. The Hall is adjoining Markyate School.

The guest speaker this time will be Allen Beechey, Chiltern Chalk Stream Project Officer from their Chinnor office.

We can always learn something more about chalk streams and their habitats! Usual refreshments and time to meet other members and friends.

Notes from the Chairman

Andy Webb

The Open Meeting held in Bricket Wood proved to be a very interesting one. Guest speaker was Rob Sage (Water Resources Manager, Three Valleys Water) and in attendance was Vicky Kidney (RSA Officer, EA, Hatfield). Here are some salient points:

- Bow Bridge PS remains "off-line" following the Buncefield fire (Dec. '05). This has a "dividend" of 6 Ml/d for the Ver aquifer, and this situation will persist for the foreseeable future. (Interestingly, at the time of the meeting, Rob was representing 3VW at the public enquiry examining legal issues surrounding bromate pollution in the aquifer below Sandridge from where water was taken to supply Hatfield.. Bear in mind that this came to light seven years ago and rights and responsibilities are still uncertain. Will the Buncefield fire and its aftermath produce the same legal wrangling?
- There will be no hosepipe ban this summer after groundwater levels increased dramatically following good autumn/early winter rain. I am writing this at the beginning of July and am sure recharge occurred even in May and June - remember how dry March and April were? Our weather seems upside down at the moment.
- The EA now believe a National Grid for water is not an option for meeting future demand. Carbon emissions caused by the power needed to pump the water north/south would be unacceptable. Regional and local initiatives are now considered to be the best way forward when addressing water supply issues and low flow in rivers. An idea proposed recently to alleviate low flows in the river Beane by using treated water from water sources currently exported many miles away remains a serious but long-term solution to the troubles of that interesting stream.
- Computer modelling of the Ver aquifer is continuing. W.S.Atkins are undertaking this project for the EA and it is being led by the Thames Region chief hydrologist at Reading. This should be ready by Christmas. Vicky Kidney and colleagues at EA and 3VW are carrying out an Options Appraisal for the Ver which should, allied with the aquifer hydrology model, lead to a feasibility study some time in 2008 to, hopefully, increase the Ver's flow.

And finally . . . Our river Ver/Ver Valley exhibition was displayed in Redbourn early in June for the "Best Village" judging.

I will be attending the final meeting of the Colne CAMS Stakeholder Group on Thurs. 23rd August, representing the VVS and other "local interest" consultees.

Membership Matters

A few members have not renewed their subscriptions which became overdue as from 31st August last. This will have to be their last "Newsletter".

If anyone is in doubt about their subscription, please contact John Cadisch (01727 862843).

Verulamium Heritage Park Project

The bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Project Planning Grant of £55,000, submitted in January, was largely successful with £48,100 being awarded in May.

The VVS withdrew as one of the stakeholders for this Project when it was redrafted with the river and lakes being only a small part of a much larger whole park project.

We were also unhappy with the chosen scheme 6A for the river corridor but this may be reappraised and we expect to be consulted where the plans do involve the river. We continue to maintain our interest in the project.

Railfreight Depot, Radlett Airfield Site

This worrying proposal, gone to appeal with neither side showing signs of backing down, does not at first sight involve our Society. On the VVS's behalf, Jane Gardiner has submitted a further written objection to Heliosphere's Appeal against the Council's decision to turn down the original proposal.

However, if the developers are successful they have undertaken to create a series of "country parks" to the north and west of the site, primarily to appease local residents.

These may have some merits but would undoubtedly alter ("urbanise") the character of the Ver Valley and its riverside walks close to Park Street and Frogmore.

Ver Valley Walks

John Fisher

Since the last newsletter the committee have been busy assisting CMS to plan and then test the walks. We now have eight circular walks which all seem to work pretty well.

Many of the walks traverse the valley and give stunning views from the ridges either side of the Ver.

I particularly enjoyed the views of the St Albans Abbey, Flamstead Church, Markyate Cell, Gorhambury and Hanstead House.

If you want to see these you will have to do all the walks!

We are now at the stage CMS call auditing where we decide what improvements in the way of kissing gates and signage etc are required before bids are made for funding.

Ian Gibbon of CMS will be coming to our AGM in October to tell you more.



Comma at Redbournbury

Bailiff Notes

Jane Gardiner

After the record hot, dry April, both May and June have had high rainfall (see figures below, May breaking long-term records) so our Bailiffs have been reporting much healthier flows than this time last year. Groundwater figures also show good recovery being above the monthly average since February (see table).

Steve Barnes, the Environment Advisor to Balfour Beatty for the M1 widening works, has been keeping in touch with us and run-off from J9, cleaned in settling tanks etc and piped into the Ver and the Red, has successfully established flows in clear gravel beds, so the river now starts well north of Redbourn.

The warm, wet weather has encouraged verdant vegetation growth causing the Ver Valley Walk to become very overgrown in many places - these are reported to the Footpaths Section of HCC and permissive sections the path are cleared when possible by CMS volunteers.

The growth of watercress, reeds and weeds does mean there are places where the river channel is rather blocked. The meadows and fields adjacent to the river are still very wet in places.

Bow Bridge pumping station was due to come into operation again from early March, having been out of action since the Buncefield fire but so far has not come on line again. This means Friar's Wash may have to be used this summer if necessary.

2007	Groundwater level at Ballingdon Farm in meters and [Long-term average] (figures from EA)	Rainfall in millimetres [\pm average] (figures from Dave Yeoman at Rothamstead)
April	136.26 [133.6]	2.8 [-50.7]
May	135.6 [134.1]	135.8 [+86.1]
June	134.79 [133.32]	72.4 [+12.2]

I have still not had anyone volunteer to bailiff the stretch of the river from Moor Mill to the confluence off Drop Lane, although one of our existing Bailiffs is kindly helping out there for the time being. It only involves taking a pleasant stroll by the river for an hour or so once a month and sending in a simple report form. Please do email or phone me [01727 866331] if you might be interested or just would like more information.

The Bailiffs always report a wide variety of flora and fauna and while it is useful to have a record of all the species they see, I can only cover some of the more interesting here. The only mammals seen recently are rabbits and squirrels! But there have been frogspawn and frogs about.

Quite a variety of fish have been noted recently including chubb, roach, brown and rainbow trout, pike, tench, perch, carp and grayling which is pleasing.

As far as birds are concerned see John Fisher's Bird Notes, but Bailiffs have reported:- buzzards, red kites, grey wagtails, a few kingfishers, various warblers, skylarks and breeding lapwings, tufted ducks, moorhens, great-crested grebes, coots, mallards, herons and of course Canada geese!

In early summer yellow flag irises have been a feature at many places on the river as have bull rushes and ragged robin made a good display in the water-meadows for a while. Unfortunately Himalayan balsam and even worse, Japanese knotweed are thriving in the Park Street/Bricket Wood areas.



Red Admiral



Ringlet

Butterflies reported include, red admirals, tortoiseshells, various whites and browns, commas and peacocks but not many dragonflies have been seen yet, just a few damselflies are active.

On the web-site there are now lists of wildlife to be found on or near the river.

The Phyllis Hammon Bequest

John Cadisch

The best way of utilising this has been exercising our minds and a special meeting was held in May with our President, Richard Thrale, and immediate past Chairman, Peter Smith, present. We are still giving considerable thought to some permanent reminder of Miss Hammon's great generosity, but the overwhelming view seems to be for the money be kept intact in a high-yield account, with the VVS benefitting from the interest.

In the meantime, our Hon. Secretary, Peter Fox, has received from Phyllis's cousin some most interesting notes, the following is an abbreviated version::

Phyllis Thelma Hammon was born in 1914 in Cricklewood, London. She was educated at the Henrietta Barnett School in Hampstead and subsequently qualified as a pharmacist at the London College of Pharmacy. She started dispensing in 1933 before becoming a hospital dispenser in 1948. She subsequently worked at the Watford Peace Memorial hospital and finally became a Laboratory Technical at Hatfield Polytechnic until she retired in 1979.

She knew the Latin names of most plants and used this knowledge to great effect (and no little irritation to her friends!) when creating her garden at Chiswell Green, having moved there in 1948 with her parents. At that time the area was essentially rural countryside, Phyllis viewed the steady increase in nearby housing with considerable disquiet. She continued living in the same property after her parents died, being fiercely independent almost to the end of her life, which occurred peacefully at home in February 2006.

A remarkable lady, if only we could thank her personally.

Bird Notes

John Fisher

It is not often we get a rare bird in Redbourn so it was a real surprise when a ring ouzel turned up in the Redbournbury Water Meadow one Monday morning in late April. Ring ouzels are the mountain version of the blackbird with a distinctive white collar and pale wing panels. They pass through the southern counties each spring on their way to their breeding areas in the uplands of Northern England and Scotland. Most springs I get to see them for a few days either at Stepps Hill near Ivinghoe Beacon or Blows Down in Dunstable. These are traditional stopping off points where they recharge before continuing their migration northwards.

April was very dry this year which meant that the usual sites were probably poor feeding areas so I think this bird found better conditions at this lower and damper site. This bird was first seen at about 7.30 am and remained in the area all day as it was seen again later that morning and in the early evening. I heard a report that it was seen on the Tuesday but after that it was not seen again. This was just a brief stop over by a very special visitor to Redbourn.

A pair of kestrels has nested again along the green lane which is a section of the Ver Valley Walk that runs from Harpenden Lane to Porridge Pot. For the last two years they have raised a total of five young in an old crow's nest in a fork in the huge oak tree but during the winter gales the nest was blown out. Early this spring a pair of crows started building a nest at the top of this same tree and the kestrels, which will not build a nest from scratch, were battling to take over the nest. Eventually the crows won and were seen feeding their young in early June. The kestrels eventually moved to another crow's nest in a smaller oak tree which had been used by probably the same crows last year. The kestrels also seem to be successfully raising a brood again in their new premises.



Ring Ouzel



A Grey Heron on Alert by the Lake

One of the VVS barn owl boxes has been used again this year and four fledglings were ringed in late June and another of the boxes was used by a pair of stock doves. After been seen along the valley this spring I was delighted to learn that a pair of tufted ducks had bred at Redbourn Fishery. No doubt the deeper water here suited this species of diving ducks. A few pairs of spotted flycatchers have been recorded and it is highly probable that they have bred. Lapwings which usually only breed in the Ver Valley in Gorhambury have been seen with young close to Redbournbury. This is the first time they have bred in this area for many years.

If you read this and have any interesting bird sightings in or around Redbourn I would be pleased to hear from you on 01582 792843 or email john.fisher@btclick.com.

Picture Page



*The Holy Well - De Tany Court,
St Albans off Holywell Hill*

Moor Mill,
St Michaels



*Peter Wilkinson installing a VVS
sponsored Barn Owl box*



*Ernie and John rest and refresh after
testing Ver Walk No 8*