

Beckford Nature Reserve

During the late winter months the level of the lake rose by approximately fifteen inches due to the rain and heavy snowfall, which also caused the collapse of the brambles on the west end of the reserve; this prompted us to employ a contractor to clear and shred them. This left a bare area that is already filling out with nettles and is a good habitat for butterflies and insects generally. During the coming autumn we are planning to sow a suitable wildflower mixture to improve the botanical diversity of the area to include native species of grasses and wildflowers.

We had a fantastic turnout for our last working party at the end of February, which included four children; it is very encouraging that they are keen to be involved, and were of great assistance in collecting four large plastic bags full of rubbish, the remains of an old wheelbarrow, and an almost complete roll of wire netting, all of which were later disposed of safely at the local recycling centre. Other projects undertaken included the laying of chippings, coppicing of trees on the edge of the lake, and the construction of a low barrier on the peninsula. Many thanks go to all who took part.

Members from the University of Worcester and Herefordshire and Worcestershire Earth Heritage Trust asked to visit the SSSI on the Reserve to examine the condition of the geological face, and subsequently produced a report that they kindly passed on to us. Richard Edwards from the EHT was so impressed with the Beckford Nature Reserve, that he offered to give us a talk on local geology, and in June he fulfilled his promise with a most interesting lecture on 'What the Ice Age did for Beckford'; this was attended by about fifty people at Beckford Village Hall.



It is interesting to see that the ant hills on the sides of the footpaths around the lake have been receiving interest from the green woodpeckers, who regard the grubs as a valuable source of protein. Some species of blue butterfly also have an interesting relationship with ants, in that the latter feed on secretions produced by the caterpillar, and in return the ants protect the caterpillar from enemies. The large blue butterfly has an even more bizarre relationship with them whereby the caterpillars are carried off into the ant's nest and are fed on the grubs and pupae of the ants. In return they provide their hosts with a sweet nutritious secretion from glands at their hind end. The caterpillars ultimately pupate and when hatched are carried out of the nest by the worker ants to find a mate and continue the cycle. It is noticeable that this year has not been very good for butterflies in general, possibly as a result of the hard winter.

We were very sad to learn of the death of Rupert Ellis in February. Rupert was instrumental in negotiating the purchase of the Reserve on behalf of the village, and guided us through some tricky false starts during that unsettling time; his calm, courteous and logical manner, however, won us the prize in the end. Evesham Round Table of whom Rupert was a valued member are organising a **Barn Dance on the 18th September** to help fund the new hide which will be dedicated in his name.

John Clifford