



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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Winter
2014

THE END OF ANOTHER YEAR IS IN SIGHT. For M.V.C.G. members, that means our Christmas Party, notice of our A.G.M. and time to renew your subscription. All the details about those are at the back end of this *Newsletter*.

I hope you feel that being a member of M.V.C.G. is worthwhile. We have had some good results over the years, though there's no denying that things are tricky now, with cuts at the City Council not just in money – which is bad enough – but staff as well. Long-serving officers whom we have had friendly and effective relationships with have left, and those remaining are hopelessly overloaded.

Your modest £4 subscription helps us to keep going, and it also gets you this *Newsletter*, which goes out quarterly, in March, June, September and December. If at any time you think you should have received a *Newsletter* and haven't, please shout. Most of our members receive the *Newsletter* by e-mail, which speeds up the process and saves costs, but we will always produce paper copies for those who can't or don't want to be on e-mail. If you get an e-mail address in future, please let us know (and you'll get the *Newsletter* in colour!).

The year's end also brings (brought) the annual Bishopsworth Quiz, where another good time was had by all on 17 November – and one of the two M.V.C.G. teams was the winner! Congratulations to Kate, Lis, Margaret and Marian – and good luck for the organising of the event next year!

The shortage of officer time at the Council has delayed the start of work on the Elm Tree Corner traffic scheme, but a detailed survey of the ground will be the next step, with consultation in due course. That will one of the good things to look forward to in 2015.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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NEWS FROM MANOR WOODS VALLEY L.N.R.

THE MANOR WOODS VALLEY WORKING GROUP is a sub-group of Malago Valley Conservation Group and it meets every five or six weeks. Anybody who would like to join us will be very welcome, either on a permanent basis or for a particular meeting.

A few weeks ago we decided that instead of a meeting indoors we would go for a walk and have our discussions 'on site'. On 18 November five of us met at the entrance behind Bishopsworth Library (and one couldn't resist doing an impromptu litter-pick as we walked).

The main objective of our walk was to carry on assessing the general state of the Local Nature Reserve. Manor Woods Valley is the only LNR in a large area of Bristol south of the Cut and west of Brislington, and we feel it is time to take stock to see if it has received the care that a Local Nature Reserve deserves since the title was granted in 2008.

In the summer issue of the *M.V.C.G. Newsletter* we expressed our concern about the area around the interceptor, where the stream goes underground. This time we decided to concentrate on two other areas: the woodland on the right-hand side as you enter behind the Library, and then the Malago stream from the entrance to what is called 'the pond'.

THE WOODLAND

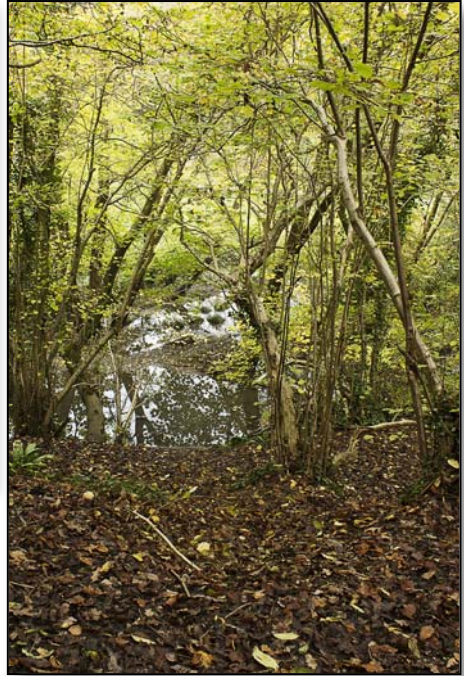
This area has been accessible to the public since the building of the path in 2007, which is a much appreciated asset. The path has received very little maintenance since its creation.

Although not official 'Ancient Woodland', there are good reasons to believe that parts of the wood have been here for a millennium. The very old oak trees look majestic but a few are dying. The hazelnut bushes and other shrubs struggle up and up towards the light. Very little coppicing or any type of pruning to help regeneration have happened for many years. There are few saplings apart from ash saplings which are becoming invasive. Some removal of branches or trees over the path has taken place when our group has reported blockages – or when we've done the clearing ourselves!

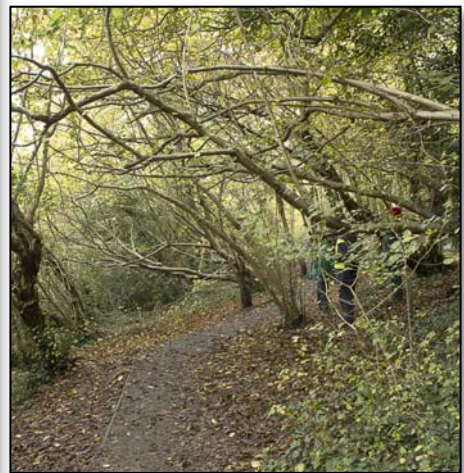
In some areas the ground under trees is bare apart from wild garlic in spring. We have noticed with some concern that erosion on steep slopes has accelerated in the past couple of years.



*Above: path surface broken and missing, with the membrane visible
Right: thick canopy reduces light and prevents new growth at ground level*



*Left: erosion on the slopes above the Malago
Below: leaning and collapsing trees obstructing the woodland path*



MALAGO STREAM, FROM THE ENTRANCE BEHIND THE LIBRARY TO ‘THE POND’

It is difficult to access the stream as large areas of tall grass have grown out of control on the edge of the stream. As you get closer to the pond the ground between the Malago Greenway cyclepath and the stream is now very swampy as the stream has overflowed. Recent rain is not the only cause. Branches and other debris have fallen into the water and have not been removed for a long time, creating blockages and even islands.



Left: the Malago is in there somewhere ...

Right: Malago wetland near the pond – but it should be grass



Thanks to Beryl for all the photos

Originally the pond was constructed to allow silt to settle, to prevent it flowing through to the interceptor and clogging up the tunnel which passes under south Bristol to the Cut. The pond was last dredged about twenty years ago and if you look at it today it is only a pond by name. The silt has accumulated in the middle, creating a large island where tall grasses and even tall shrubs grow.

As we raised in our summer *Newsletter*, could this long absence of maintenance lead to serious consequences? We can certainly confirm the negative effects on wildlife. Originally, the pond had swans visiting; now we don't even see herons any more. This will be a subject for another day.

We will carry on our assessment of the various habitats. If you have any suggestions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact us.

MARIE JO COUTANCHE
Manor Woods Valley Working Group



WHITE ELEPHANT UPDATE

We reported in the last *Newsletter* that M.V.C.G. is part of the 'Alliance to Rethink Metrobus' who are trying to get all three 'Metrobus' schemes reconsidered. Our special focus is on the South Bristol Link, where a road through the Green Belt and across Highridge Common will – if it goes ahead – be a lasting reminder of Bristol's year as European Green Capital.

The Alliance has a group of linked websites, but stopbrt2.org.uk is a good place to start. BRT2 is the Ashton Vale to Temple Meads route, and if it fails then the South Bristol Link loses its economic justification – even on the consultants' own figures. Costs are rising (of course) and the money from central government is fixed. Bristol and North Somerset will have to pay all the overruns of the South Bristol Link, and Bristol and South Gloucestershire will share all the overruns of BRT3 – the North Fringe to Hengrove line.

I and some other M.V.C.G. members were at the recent AGM of the Avonside Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. Their guest speaker was Bristol's Mayor, George Ferguson, and after his talk, I asked him about SBL. He has said elsewhere that Bristol City Council is tied into a 'contract' with North Somerset and could not withdraw support for SBL even if it wanted to.

I asked him whether he actually liked SBL anyway; whether the contract was as tight as has been alleged; and whether it would still be binding when costs escalated. George's replies were commendably unambiguous. He *didn't* like SBL; the contract *was* binding; and he hadn't been advised of escalating costs. He said that he *did* like 'Metrobus' – meaning BRT2 and BRT3. When I said that all three schemes, including SBL, had been re-branded as 'Metrobus', his response was frank: 'That's crazy – SBL is just a road with a bus on it'.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE



WILD BS13

WHERE HAVE ALL THE BLACKBIRDS GONE? Is it because, after the bountiful summer, there are a lot of berries and wild food around for them? Or is it because the gardens – around us particularly – are getting decked, paved, de-tree-ed (?) and now have climbing frames, patios, pagodas and trampolines? Whatever the reason it's very sad.

We had a pair of blackbirds regularly visiting our garden for years, flying in from Headley Park. Mrs B. was a real character. She would demand currants, tutting away if the pot was empty on the tree stump outside the kitchen door and practically take them from my hand. She would also sit in areas around the garden for 30 minutes or more at a time just having a peaceful rest. She was so relaxed here it was lovely, and, yes, I did chat to her while I gardened.

Coming home one summer's day, near the bottom of the road, in the gutter, was a dead female blackbird. I knew it was Mrs B, flying too low across Whitchurch Lane to get to her favourite place. I went down later to pick her up but the roadsweeper was further up the road and had taken her away.

We've always had a blackbird singing in our peartree – I do hope we'll get one next spring.

ANGELA JAMES

The day after sending this, Angela sent a P.S. ...

How odd is this – beautiful blackbird in our garden at 9 this morning, going all round for ages! 'Tis a sign!



Illustrations of male and female blackbirds from the RSPB website at www.rspb.org.uk

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



TWO ‘WINTER’ MEETINGS to note at St Peter’s Rooms, but it’s not too soon to think ahead. If you have any ideas for a summer outing in 2015, please let us know.

Tuesday 2 December: We announced this date for our **CHRISTMAS PARTY** in the last *Newsletter* but I hope this is in time to be a reminder. (Members on e-mail had a reminder a few days ago). As usual, we will have an American Supper, so please bring a little something for the refreshment table if you can. We will also have a raffle which raises some money for M.V.C.G. funds.

What is different this year is the room we are meeting in – we will be in the room at the far end of the range of buildings. There is a door at this far end which opens on to the car park, and one of our members will be standing at the door to show you in. If you are arriving on foot, you will have a little further to walk, past the usual entrance, to the end of the building and around the corner to the door.

If you are late and the door isn’t manned, ring the bell near this far door or knock on one of the windows. All M.V.C.G. meetings are open to all, members or not, so bring a friend if you would like to.

Tuesday 17 February: I hope you’ve got a 2015 diary, because it’s time to give notice that our **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** will be on 17 February at 7.30pm at St Peter’s Rooms. Please see the ‘official’ announcement on the back page.

MEMBERSHIP OF M.V.C.G. runs on a calendar year basis, so it’s time to renew your subscription. One member renewed last time for two years – thank you! – but, unless you’re receiving a complimentary copy of the *Newsletter*, please let us have your renewal subscription.

There’s no need to fill in the form unless your details have changed – just give us a note of your name with your cheque or cash. **Do please let us know if you have a new or changed e-mail address.**

The subscription – still just £4 per household – covers the costs of running M.V.C.G. (not much!) and also enables us to make direct improvements to our local environment when an opportunity arises.

Please bring your sub. to the Christmas Party, or the A.G.M., or send it to either Beryl Heaton (3 Kings Walk) or André Coutanche (14 Queens Road).
Thank you!

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND BIRTHDAY PARTY

THE TWENTIETH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of Malago Valley Conservation Group will be held on Tuesday 17 February 2015 at St Peter's Rooms, Church Road, Bishopsworth, starting at 7.30pm. The Officers and Committee members retire each year but are eligible for re-election. The names of the current Officers and Committee members appear below.

Nominations for either Officers or Committee members are very welcome and should be supported by a seconder and the consent of the nominee must first have been obtained. Nominations can be made to the Hon. Secretary, André Coutanche, at 14 Queens Road, Bishopsworth, BS13 8LB (phone number and e-mail address below). Please feel free to contact me or any Committee member for an informal chat if you'd like more information about joining the Committee.



The formal A.G.M. business will include a report-back to members on the year's events and a short topical talk. As usual, we will finish with wine/orange juice and cheese/other nibbles to celebrate our birthday. All members and friends of M.V.C.G. are invited to come to our birthday party.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE
Hon. Secretary

Malago Valley Conservation Group

Chairman	Peter Crispin	907 0623
Vice-Chairman	Mary Sykes	964 3712
Hon. Secretary	André Coutanche	964 3106
Hon. Treasurer	Beryl Heaton	964 5780

Committee Members

Anton Bantock, Heather Leeson, Paul Mizen, Lis Pibworth

Co-opted Committee Members

Richard Bevan, Diana Porter, Sue Walker, CSV Environment, Cllrs Mark Brain, Richard Eddy, Helen Holland, Tim Kent, Kevin Quartley, Naomi Rylatt
(All the City councillors for Bishopsworth, Hartcliffe and Whitchurch Park wards are invited to become co-opted Committee members).

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Letters, articles and suggestions from readers are welcome.

The opinions in this *Newsletter* do not necessarily represent those of M.V.C.G.