



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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WE'VE HAD 'MANOR WOODS VALLEY SPECIALS' BEFORE, but this time is a record – five full pages of news of work and improvements in our neighbourhood Local Nature Reserve. Read all about what Martin and the rest of the gang have been up to – with lots of help from other volunteers – between pages 2 and 6.

With Beryl's report of our enjoyable Summer Outing on page 7, that doesn't leave much room for an important planning update, so I'll fit it in here ...

The retrospective planning application for 131 Bridgwater Road – really an extension to Kings Walk – caused a lot of ill-feeling locally, not just because everyone was against it but because of how the Council planners handled it.

When the developers built the 14 houses for which they had permission, they built them too high and with added dormer windows. Council planners didn't pick this up – like all Council departments, they don't have the resources any more – and local people alerted them to what had happened. Instead of taking enforcement action, they allowed the developers to submit a new planning application for what had actually been built. For many people, this offended a sense of natural justice, but a planning application has to be judged strictly against planning law, and saying that the developers were untrustworthy and unprofessional wasn't relevant.

The application went to the Planning Committee on 30 August, with an officers' recommendation for refusal – but only on the limited grounds that no affordable housing was included, which is obligatory in developments of over ten houses. I and others made statements endorsing the refusal, but also drawing attention to what we see as a failure of process. The application was duly refused, and the houses remain unsold, but the developers may appeal, and they have already submitted a new outline application for nine houses – i.e. below the threshold for affordable units. The saga continues ...

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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NEWS FROM MANOR WOODS VALLEY L.N.R.

IT'S BEEN A BUSY SUMMER for M.V.C.G. and its Manor Woods Valley working group. Things have happened in parts of the Local Nature Reserve where we hadn't worked before, so we needed to give them a name. We've told you before that a large part of the 'Quarries' area is also 'The Orchard', because of the large number of apple and pear trees there. Now we've adopted the name 'The Rabbit Field' for the recently cleared area on the higher ground between the Wildflower Meadow and Ilchester Crescent. In the past, it used to be clear, and we used to see rabbits in it – hence the name!

Orchard and Rabbit Field

Manor Woods Valley Working Group, volunteers, Avon Wildlife Trust, GoodGym and the Parks Development Officer, Becky Belfin, have all made significant contributions to the development of these areas over the past three months. We continued the work of cutting back new bramble growth to allow the mixed grasses and wild flowers to grow back again. We are grateful to Avon Wildlife Trust volunteers, led by Rosie Maple, for the two days they spent with some of our own members wielding scythes, loppers and forks.



Work going with a swing

We're also grateful to GoodGym – they're a community of runners that combines getting fit with doing good; they stop off on their runs to help community groups like M.V.C.G. They spent a Saturday morning in the Orchard, working with shears to cut back the new bramble growth, and they'll be coming again.



Above: GoodGym hard at work



Right: Fruit for free!

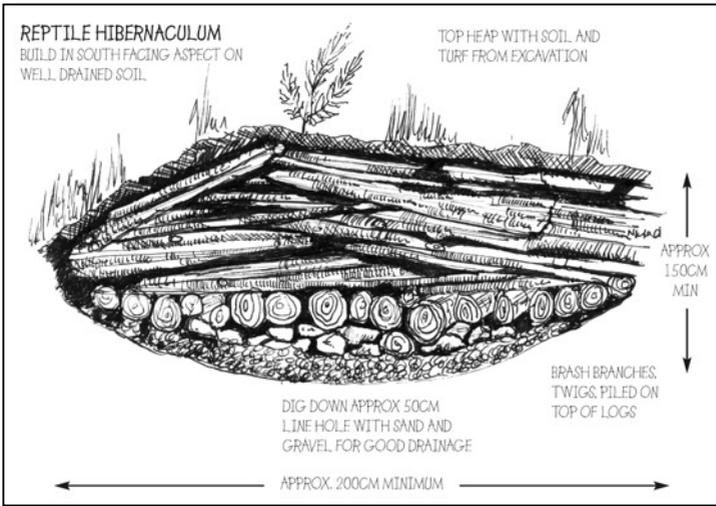
As well as improving the area for wildlife, this work is also opening up access to the apple and pear trees; there is now an abundance of fruit, ripe for the picking – and free. Overall, over 200 hours of volunteer time were devoted to work in the Orchard and Rabbit Field during June, July and August.

New arrivals in the Orchard and Rabbit Field

July saw the creation of two slow worm hibernacula in Manor Woods Valley, one in the Orchard area and one in the Rabbit Field. They are to house a population of slow worms that are being translocated from a construction site in south Bristol. A slow worm hibernaculum is a mound of earth and sand that conceals layers of stones, logs and brushwood, the ideal habitat for slow worms to hibernate in over the winter. Slow worms are lizards (without legs) and are a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.



Des. res. for slow worms ...



... and what it looks like inside

This project followed a reptile survey which showed that slow worms are thriving on the Orchard area and the Rabbit Field. We are extremely fortunate to have such wildlife diversity, animal and plant, in Manor Woods Valley, and the success of this project makes all the volunteering effort worthwhile. It is thanks to Becky Belfin that Manor Woods Valley was chosen for this project. She has now handed over the continued management of the project to M.V.C.G., with sufficient funding from the developer to continue the recovery of both areas to mixed grasses and wildflowers over the next five years.

Bicycles and trolleys

The Malago seems to have become the local graveyard for bicycles and shopping trolleys over the summer (*right*). Fly-tipping is an offence, so please report it, on the Council website, with a description of the location, details of what's been dumped and, if possible, a description of the persons doing the fly-tipping. Hopefully, multiple reports will be acted upon.



Himalayan Balsam

Since 2007 M.V.C.G. has taken part in 'The Big Pull', as we now call it, to control Himalayan Balsam which chokes native vegetation, as we have explained in previous *Newsletters*. We have halted the spread of the weed but not eradicated it. However this year our team was more determined than ever. Led by Neil Green from the

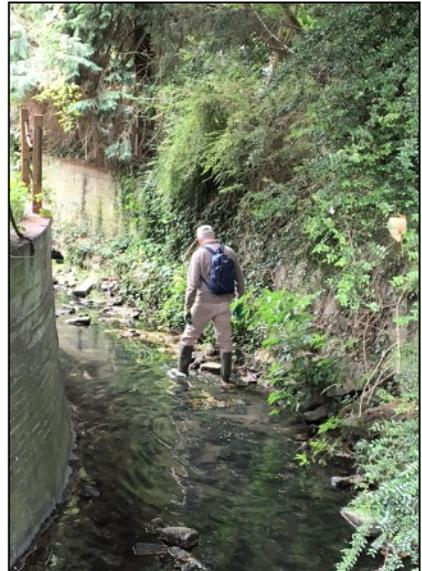


Avon Invasive Weeds Forum we spent a day in two main areas – the largest one was the silted island in the pond. There we pulled every plant we could see, some tiny ones and others rather tall. The second site was the stream near the interceptor where we were able to go down into the channel and pull out every plant. Several agile members even managed to go further up the stream in an area difficult of access and not inspected before. They found a few plants there.

We went back two weeks later to the island. The plants which had grown since our last session did not escape. In fact the island should not exist as it is the result of accumulated silt which should have been removed from the pond. It is rather frustrating to see it has now become the ideal ground for Himalayan Balsam to grow. However, we decided to tackle the problem from another angle ...

The Big Adventure up the Hill

We know that Himalayan Balsam seeds are transported by rivers, which explains why so many riverbanks have been infested. The Malago runs through Manor Woods Valley. Here was a challenge for us: trace the Malago upstream, starting from the entrance behind the Bishopsworth Library, on the lookout for the very pretty weed. Martin, Peter, André and Marie Jo turned into intrepid explorers. Who has walked under the road along the stream? Well, some people have. Then when you leave the edge of the city you are straight into another world: green meadows,



Dundry here I come ...



hedges, ditches, and, towards the top, the Malago which is by then just a trickle which runs down a deep narrow canyon, overhung by very old trees. However human traces are never far away – a derelict canoe was there in the channel. A rather eery scene!

A casualty of the last International Dundry Hill Canoe Slalom?

In fact we didn't find any Himalayan Balsam. But we must remember that the Malago has a few tributaries on the hill. Another expedition may be planned next year.

Spreading the Word

Heritage weekend at Zion Community Space on 1-2 July was a celebration of local history and skills where M.V.C.G. had a stall throughout the weekend. Marie Jo, Martin and Betty from St Peter's Rise allotments were there to talk to visitors about the work of M.V.C.G. and sell copies of *My Manor Woods Book*.

Looking to the Future

The drastic financial situation affecting the City Council isn't news – we spoke about it at our A.G.M. But it's having an effect on our work in Manor Woods Valley. For example, some of the work done with and by the Avon Wildlife Trust was being paid for by the Council and has now stopped. We will be relying increasingly on volunteers to keep up the momentum, and we may be using some of our funds to 'buy in' carefully selected labour in suitable cases.



MARTIN GRANT and MARIE JO COUTANCHE
on behalf of the Manor Woods Valley Working Group

SUMMER OUTING: UNIVERSITY BOTANIC GARDEN

THE IDEA FOR OUR SUMMER OUTING this year came from Lola. She suggested the University Botanic Garden, as Jo, the lady who looks after her garden, often works there and leads walks around the grounds.

On a pleasant summer evening a group of 15 of us assembled in front of the house where we were delighted to discover that our leader was Jo. We heard that the house, The Holmes, was used as a hall of residence and, apart from the café area, it was not open to the public. The house was built in 1879 and the site has a 1.77 hectare garden. The university moved there in 2005.



We set off to explore, with Jo enthusiastically leading the way. We looked at the pollination area and I was amazed to discover what a wide variety of creatures help pollination – birds, beetles and mammals. The pond had been created early in the making of the Garden and it took nearly two years to fill as no tap water was used. Steps have been taken to ensure the lining is protected against leaks.

One area was devoted to native plants such as those growing in the Avon Gorge. Notable among these was the Bristol onion. We then visited the Chinese herb garden accessed through a circular gateway. Jo explained the uses of many of the herbs but was quick to point out that no cures could be guaranteed. The evolutionary garden was a fascinating place where we walked through a million years of plant evolution passing a dinosaur on the way. At the end was the first flowering plant, the tulip tree. There was a Mediterranean garden and more familiar herbs. Another bed contained edible plants.

Lastly we made our way to the glasshouses. There was an abundance of fascinating cacti, carnivorous plants, and orchids. Then we came to the giant water lilies and were delighted to find one in flower and one just forming.

It was a great evening and so good to be led by someone who was enthusiastic, knowledgeable, had a great sense of humour, and spoke clearly. Thank you to Jo, and to Lola for her suggestion.

BERYL HEATON

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



TRADITIONALLY, this edition of the Newsletter brings news of two seasonal events – the Bishopsworth Quiz and our Christmas Party.

Monday 27 November: This is the likely date for the BISHOPSWORTH QUIZ, but it hasn't been officially confirmed as we go to press. If you've been before, we'll let you know when we've got the information. M.V.C.G. traditionally enters two teams. If you don't know about this fun and sociable evening held at the Royal British Legion, Bishopsworth, then get in touch with André (details below) for more information.

Thursday 14 December: M.V.C.G. CHRISTMAS PARTY at St Peter's Rooms (by the side of St Peter's Church, Bishopsworth), starting at 7.30pm. The usual fun and nonsense is already being planned, so get the date in your diary now. As usual, there will be an American Supper – so please plan to bring a little something for the refreshment table if you can – and a raffle for our funds. We'll confirm arrangements in the next *Newsletter*.

MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

Chairman	André Coutanche	964 3106
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Hon. Secretary	Peter Crispin	939 0256
Hon. Treasurer	Beryl Heaton	964 5780

Committee Members

Marie Jo Coutanche, Martin Grant, Lis Pibworth

Co-opted Committee Members

Richard Bevan (Highridge Forum), Diana Porter (Bedminster Down & Uplands Society), Sue Walker (HHEAG), Ken Kennedy (Volunteering Matters), Cllrs Mark Brain, Richard Eddy, Paul Goggin, Helen Holland, Kevin Quartley
(All the City councillors for Bishopsworth ward and for Withywood and Hartcliffe ward 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.