



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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THE ELECTIONS, in May, didn't change the councillors in our three (two-and-a-half) wards; where existing councillors were up for re-election, they were all returned. Control of the Council, however, passed to the Labour Party, whose Leader, Helen Holland, is one of 'our' councillors - congratulations to her!

There was a change 'next door', however; Peter Crispin, who was councillor for Bedminster Ward and a very good friend to M.V.C.G., was replaced as Labour candidate by Colin Smith, formerly a councillor for Whitchurch Park. Colin was elected and is back on the South & East Development Control Committee, where, in the past, he has been known to say nice things about M.V.C.G.! Our congratulations to Colin, and very many thanks to Pete for all his support and encouragement ever since M.V.C.G. started.

It *is* summer, despite the unpredictable weather, and this *Newsletter* reflects that with reports of many outdoor activities, especially in Manor Woods Valley. It's good to see it so well used - Highridge Infant School are making increasing use of it - and the City Museum recently had one of their summer walks there. We helped a bit, though the main guide was Libby Houston, a botanist, who on her recce of the meadow counted over 100 bee orchids and a pyramidal orchid! The kingfisher made an appearance right on cue, and rabbits were seen, the first, so far as I know, for some time. We returned via the nearly-finished woodland path - our thanks again to YANSEC for making this possible. Less good news is the accidental removal of the *Rosa rugosa* we planted behind the railings, where the Tabernacle were doing an otherwise commendable bit of tidying-up!

The Garden Party went well; our thanks to Paul and Christine and to all who helped with donations and/or labour. A good time was had by all, and £81.00 raised for our funds. A jacket was left behind, so ring me if it's yours.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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PLANNING MATTERS

HERE'S a quick round-up of some planning applications on our patch. Some of them have been reported before and some have been and gone since the last *Newsletter*. It's worth remarking that this is par for the course; the South & East Area Team who deal with 'development control' - i.e. planning applications - are on a constant treadmill as new applications continually come in. Some are dealt with quickly under 'delegated powers' - this means that the individual planning officer takes the decision if there are no contentious elements and the laws, policies and guidance documents which govern development control point clearly towards permission being granted or refused.

Other applications take longer, either because they are controversial and the planners want to make sure all views have been expressed, or because a decision is finely balanced, with different arguments pointing in different directions. The really tricky ones which depend on weighing different types of argument, or which raise issues of principle, go to the South & East Development Control Committee for decision. This Committee consists of elected councillors who vote according to how each individual member sees the arguments. They don't vote on party lines, and as a regular observer of these meetings in the public gallery, I have often seen party groups split and councillors of different parties voting the same way. But it's important to realise that a planning decision is *never* a referendum. It doesn't matter if public opinion is overwhelmingly in favour or totally against a proposed development; the decision is taken on the relevant *planning* arguments.

One application which has received wide-spread local support is the application by BrunelCare to build a Very Sheltered Housing scheme on Queens Road, running back from the site of the former caravan sales yard to the playing field of the former Redhouse School. What has delayed a decision here is the fact that the proposed South Bristol Ring Road is adjacent to the site, and this application will go to a South & East Committee in due course.

We support the BrunelCare plan, but we opposed an application which came in since the last *Newsletter* to build two houses in the back gardens of 32-34 Grange Road, with access from a new lay-by on Queens Road. We objected to the loss of the hedge here and to the difficult and dangerous access. The application has been turned down under delegated powers.

Speaking of the Ring Road - which, of course, is nowhere near being a planning application, but these things acquire a momentum which means that it is important to comment well in advance - there was a meeting on 24 May at St Peter's Rooms, Bishopsworth (our usual venue). This was organised by the Alliance against the South Bristol Ring Road and was held to encourage the formation of a Bishopsworth group. The place was packed - standing room only! - and was a positive event, with the arguments against set out and questions and comments dealt with. M.V.C.G. is against the Ring Road through our patch and we will continue to keep in touch with the Alliance (their website is at www.southbristolringroad.co.uk).

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

SPREADING THE WORD

A SMALL GROUP has been re-designing our membership leaflet - which, to be honest, was put together in haste soon after we started and never really reconsidered.

We wanted to make it easier to read and to explain more clearly what we're about. We've designed it in colour to make it more attractive so that people are encouraged to pick it up and have a look.

The new leaflet made its first major debut at the Festival of Nature on the weekend of 2-3 June, the big event at Canon's Marsh which attracts thousands of people. Sally Oldfield very kindly ran off some of the new leaflets for us and distributed them from the Council stand she was on - thank you, Sally!

We'd like your ideas, please, for how we can distribute the new leaflet to let local people know about us and to encourage new members. And if you would like one or two to give to friends or neighbours, just ring 964 3106.

MARIE JO COUTANCHE



SPRING TIME IN THE MALAGO VALLEY

THE STRANGE WEATHER of April brought quite a few new visitors out to enjoy the green oasis of Malago Valley and Manor Woods. Some were surprised to hear the richness of birdsong, with the cascading trills of blackbirds, robins and wrens and the sharper calls of their smaller cousins. Greenery has been emerging in the woods quite early, and many small mammals including squirrels and rats have been seen near the river Malago.

A larger and noisier species has also been seen, working in the woods. These are the Path Builders whose work has been funded by a grant from YANSEC. The aim is to make a safe and firm path through the wooded side of the valley on a footing of gravel over a strong membrane. Where this was done, from the Interceptor end some years ago, it has remained usable. This will help with the incredibly slippery conditions of the wet clay banks, and hopefully encourage further use of this small jungly wood. The work is due to finish not long after this *Newsletter* is published.



It has also been reported that the ongoing battle with the dreaded Japanese Knotweed has continued from where the stalwart volunteers left off. A couple of autumns ago a gang of us chopped down the dried stems and then the Council people treated the areas with weed killer and only odd clumps of yellow oilseed rape managed to grow. This spring the Council workers have sprayed the surviving knotweed and we hope it will all die! Perhaps Himalayan Balsam might meet a similar fate too.

On a more positive note, Tony Titchen, a biologist, (*left*) led a group of visitors on an evening 'Tree Gazing' walk. We were soon spellbound by his wide knowledge of the sycamores, field



maples, oak, ash and thorn trees and shrubs which inhabit the area. There were technical discussions of ‘nectrines’ on cherry stalks to feed ants, the poisonous qualities of laurel and hemlock water dropwort, and time flashed by yet we had walked along a path for less than a quarter of a mile. Everyone learned how to look at trees in a new way.

On Thursday 31 May there was a ‘Mini Beast’ safari to encourage children to recognise and value the many small creatures that inhabit South Bristol’s hidden green gem. Although there were several heavy showers, about 30 children and their parents came by. They explored the undergrowth for insects and saw

large caddis fly larvae in the river. They had their faces painted and played games with a parachute, and tried the ‘Lucky Dip, and despite the rain seemed to be having fun.

Top: On safari in Manor Woods Valley. Below, left: Making masks in the murk. Below, right: Parachute or umbrella? (Photos by Sally Oldfield)



We are all encouraged to try eco-therapy for the good of our bodies, minds and souls, and these small Bristol Parks are great places to start. As the BBC campaign is asserting, we all need ‘Breathing Places’.

MARIAN GREEN

VISIT TO ELM FARM

IT WAS a fine sunny evening on 12 June when 16 members met at Elm Farm, Burnett, for a walk around the fields. John and Philippa Paget who own and manage the farm welcomed us. John told us a little of its history. The farm has been in his family for 250 years although Philippa, a comparative newcomer, arrived 26 years ago when she married John.

The farm is 112 hectares in size with 17 hectares of arable crops, 6 hectares of woodland and 9 hectares of crops including buckwheat, millet and mustard, beneficial to birds and other wildlife. It is a working farm, which is in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and is overseen by Natural England.

As we set off on our walk we were delighted to watch the antics of the swallows and house martins as they flew around us. Our first stop was at a small pond full of baby frogs. Here John explained that they are being very careful with the management of the grassland. They had been losing wild flowers due to the nitrogen rich soil.



However, by haymaking later in the year they felt they were improving the conditions for flowers. In general they do not use chemicals, but are allowed to treat docks and ragwort.

The hedges have been cut right back in recent years. At first they feared it might be too drastic, leaving only a few inches above ground. Happily their fears were unfounded, as the hedges are now a good height and thickness and growing lushly. When groups of children visit they are given bug pots to fill, the hedges creating the ideal habitat for so many species of bugs. There have also been moth surveys, which have proved very productive, and Philippa told us that there are 6 different types of bats in the area.

As we continued we were delighted to see two hares in a field; unfortunately we were unable to spot any barn owls although we did see their nestbox nearby. John then arrived in a tractor and trailer to take us back up the hill to



the barn. Here we were given refreshments, including cider made from apples grown on the farm. The final high point of the evening came as we were shown a super video filmed at different seasons. Everyone agreed it was an excellent visit and we are very grateful to John and Philippa for giving up their time and making us so welcome. I am sure we have gained some knowledge about how management of the land for wildlife can make a difference.

BERYL HEATON

(who also took the photos)

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS

THE SUMMER 'lull' in activities is more than compensated for by Sally Oldfield's 'Nature in the City' programme, some reported on in this edition and some to come! As usual, the **M** symbol shows our own events.

Sunday 15 July: *Colliter's Brook Trek*, starting outside the CREATE Centre at 10.00am. See also www.bristol.gov.uk/ivers.

M Saturday 4 August: A *Garbage Raid* in Manor Woods Valley. Meet at 10.00am at the Bishopsworth Library entrance. Gloves and bags provided.

Sunday 5 August: The fifth *Malago Trek*, probably this year to be walked from Dundry to Bedminster. Keep an eye on www.bristol.gov.uk/ivers for details.

Tuesday 21 August: Be a Bat Detective! A *Bat Walk* in Manor Woods Valley Tuesday, from 8.30pm-10.00pm-ish. Sturdy footwear recommended in case of muddy areas. Please bring a torch. Meeting point is St. Peter's Rise, Bishopsworth. Free event but booking essential: contact Sally Oldfield on (0117) 922 4429 or e-mail sally.oldfield@bristol.gov.uk.

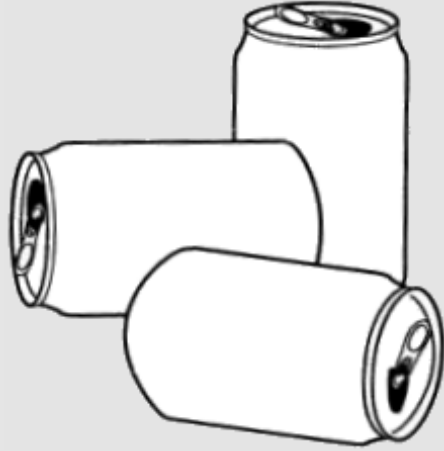
M Saturday 1 September: Our annual *Amphibious Garbage Raid* on the Malago in Manor Woods Valley. Meet - in suitably disreputable attire - at 10.00am at the Bishopsworth Library entrance.

Sunday 21 October: *Fungi Foray* in Manor Woods Valley from 10.30am to 12.30pm. Join expert Justin Smith in a hunt for both deadly and delicious mushrooms and toadstools. Meeting and booking as for 21 August.

KEEP CANS COMING ...

A REMINDER that we continue to recycle cans to raise money, some of which goes on planting daffodils. Please let us have your empty, clean drinks cans which will be separated into steel and aluminum - we sell the aluminium and put out the steel with the black box.

Either deliver to 14 Queens Road, or ring Marie Jo on 964 3106 and we will collect.
Thank you.



Malago Valley Conservation Group

Chairman	VACANCY	
Vice-Chairman	André Coutanche	964 3106
Hon. Secretary	Lis Pibworth	939 0698
Hon. Treasurer	Beryl Heaton	964 5780

Committee Members

Anton Bantock, Don Bartlett, Lola Hardingham, Paul Harvey-Worsley,
Paul Mizen, Mavis Palmer

Co-opted Committee Members

Valerie Gay, Diana Porter, Sue Walker, Kirsty Wilson, Cllrs Mark Brain, Richard Eddy, Royston Griffey, Helen Holland, Tim Kent, Kevin Quartley, Mary Sykes (*All the City councillors for Bishopsworth, Hartcliffe and Whitchurch Park wards are invited to become co-opted Committee members*).

Newsletter edited by André Coutanche, 14 Queens Road, Bishopsworth, Bristol, BS13 8LB; telephone 964 3106; e-mail andrec@mvcg.org.uk; website www.mvcg.org.uk.

Letters, articles and suggestions from readers are welcome.

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