

Sun Rising News

The twice yearly newsletter of
Sun Rising Natural Burial Ground and Nature Reserve

Winter 2009-10



Welcome to the natural burial ground's winter newsletter. With it, we send seasonal greetings of peace, warmth and wellbeing.

Feeding the Birds

Since our Summer Newsletter, our first birdfeeder has been installed near the pedestrian gate. So far we have seen a good half dozen species taking advantage of this new source of food, including willow tits, blue tits, goldfinches and chaffinches.

Winter has always been a difficult time for birds but the situation has been exacerbated in recent years by the switch from spring-sown to autumn-sown cereals.

Common farmland birds such as finches and buntings, which are seed eating species, are no longer able to forage amongst the stubble for food during the winter, and consequently their numbers have fallen nationally. The bird feeder at Sun Rising will help to ensure their survival through the winter months, getting them off to a good start when the nesting season begins.

As Sun Rising develops, the trees, shrubs and wild flowers we are planting will provide food and shelter for birds and other creatures; visitors can see how the young hedgerow around the car park offers a 'wildlife corridor' for the birds to reach the feeder in safety. Our mature hedgerows already provide a valuable habitat for wildlife, but because of the joy

they bring to visitors, there will always be a place for the bird feeders. We have had some donations towards a second feeder; if you'd like to contribute, get in touch. As the birds discover the feeder we'll be getting through a fair amount of bird seed though - If you would like to donate towards keeping the feeders replenished, please do let us know!

Spring Watch 2010

In 2010 we shall be holding a series of naturewatch events, the first being our Spring Watch on **Saturday 3 April**.

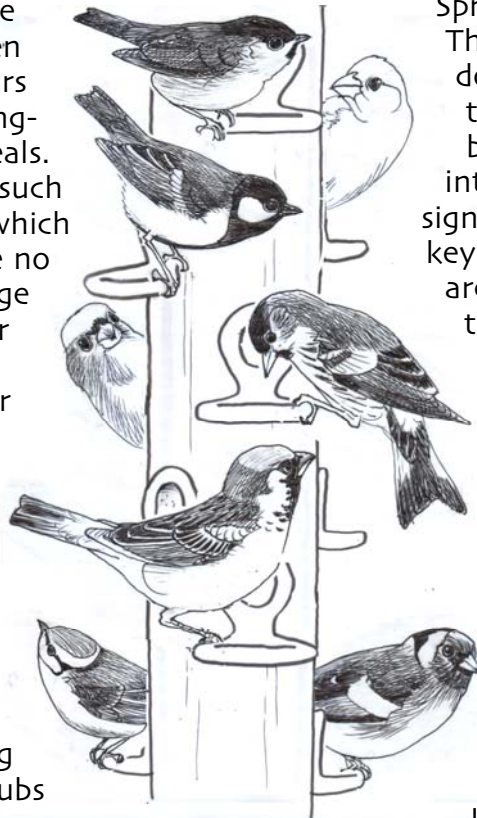
The purpose of these days will be to document the flora and fauna of the site: spring flowers in bloom, birds on the wing, trees coming into leaf or blossom, any insects and signs of mammals. The birds will be a key focus of this spring day, as they are generally easier to see before the trees are fully in leaf, and we are excited to have Robin Restall – author and illustrator of a number of bird books – to help during the day.

If you would like to come along, to share your own expertise or to join in the adventure, please let us know, or just turn up on the day. All are welcome! Dress warmly, bringing any field guides you may have and sharp eyes. The day will run from 11 am - 4 pm.

Information can be found on our Activity Days page on the website.

Summer Watch and Open Weekend

Following on from our Spring Watch, our next naturewatch will be held over the weekend of **22 – 23 May 2010**, to coincide with our annual Open Day.



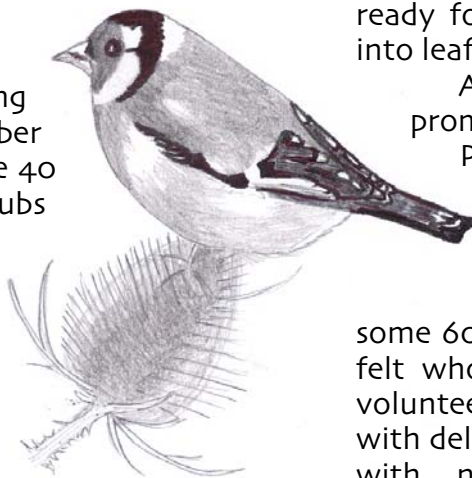
We hope to have a representative from Coffinopolis at the burial ground. This is a local organisation promoting ethical and biodegradable coffins, which are of course particularly suitable for use at natural burial grounds.

Tree Planting 2009

Over our Tree Planting weekends in late November and early December, some 40 memorial trees and shrubs were planted at Sun Rising, including dog roses, holly and gorse at the burial ground's entrance. After a better summer than we've had for a few years, this year's saplings were sturdier and, planted into soil that wasn't quite as wet, we hope they will thrive.

The trees we plant are generally 40 - 90 cm in height, known as whips. Planting smaller trees is always preferable to planting larger ones - less shock is caused to a younger tree when it's moved, so it tends to recover more quickly. In fact, after 3 - 4 years a whip will usually have grown taller than a larger tree planted at the same time. The survival rate for smaller trees is also better than for larger trees.

Our heavy clay soil is not the most hospitable environment for any plant to establish itself in, baking hard in summer and holding water on the surface during the winter, and for several years after transplanting tree growth above ground can be limited. However, during this period the trees are re-establishing their root systems in order to support future trunk and branch growth. Tree roots also maintain a readiness to grow even in winter: though mostly inactive, they can function and grow whenever soil temperatures allow, even if the air above ground is brutally cold. The minimum temperature for root growth is thought to be about 3°C. So, if soil temperatures warm to or stay above this, winter roots can break dormancy and become active.



This winter quiescence - when roots are resting but ready - is extremely important for the health of individual trees and for woods in general. Indeed, it gives trees the opportunity to expand their root systems in search of water and nutrients ready for the spring when buds will break into leaf and blossom.

Although the weather forecast had promised heavy rain over our main Tree Planting weekend in late November, in the event we had two beautiful days, with magnificent cloudscapes, sunshine and keen breezes, with very little rain. With some 60 to 80 people visiting each day, we felt wholly blessed. Many thanks to our volunteers, not least Judy who supplied us with delicious rock buns and flapjacks, made with nearly all organic and/or local ingredients.

Memorial Plaques

Some families will have noticed that the older slate memorial plaques at Sun Rising have started to weather. The rich deep grey has become paler and the white wording darkened. While regular cleaning and polishing makes a difference, we have been in search of a long term solution.

What makes the slate pale grey is calcium leaching out of the stone; this only happens for a few years, but it is those first few years after a plaque is in place that are the most important for a family grieving. As a result, we have encouraged our slate engraver to find a new source of slate, and this he has done: all plaques ordered in the late autumn are made from a new slate that is said not to calcify. We'll see how it settles.

Looking into the problem of the wording becoming dirty, we discovered that it is algae in the letters, attracted by the slate oil used to polish the plaques! We are now looking at an alternative polish.

In the meantime, some plaques have been thoroughly cleaned, and others will be cleaned over the coming months, as we settle on a new policy. If you have any queries, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Nature Reserve Burial Grounds

tel : 01608 684600 / 0779 229 4414 email : office@nrbgrounds.co.uk www.nrbgrounds.co.uk