

BORO BECKS

Inspiring local
people to love their
wild spaces

Newsletter; Edition 3 Summer 2011

Welcome

The fantastic spring weather was such a boost after the long winter and we made the most of it with our guided walks, the family events in the Easter Holidays, our bug hunts in the half term and our big Minibeast Roadshow in June.

Thanks to everyone who joined in with planting wild flowers along Spencer Beck, solving our Middle Beck tracks trail and helping us mark Local History Month with our walks to the Eston Mines and Ormesby Hall and Stewart Park. We also delivered a series of outdoor sessions in partnership with Sure Start and the library team at Charlbury Road Community Centre and had lots of fun hunting for minibeasts, following trails and making butterflies and rainbows. An evening walk along Ormesby Beck with the council's Chief Executive Ian Parker, David Beavis, the Regional Director of the Princes Trust and officers from

the Environment Agency was an ideal opportunity to discuss improvements along the beck and partnership working.

Join the growing number of people who keep track of the latest news on our facebook page and twitter feed @BoroBecksTeam and upload your becks photos, old and new on our flickr site. We'd also appreciate feedback on any events and activities in which you've taken part and we're always open to ideas for different things to try or local events we can support.



Go with the Flow

Since 1974, Middlesbrough Council has had the responsibility of clearing the channels of the town's main becks to maintain the flow of water. The team carry out a full length clearance of each beck 3 times a year and offer a 48 hour response service to reports of items dumped in the becks. In addition, a 24 hour emergency response service is available to deal with potential flooding concerns. The team deserve a huge thank you for tackling such a difficult task and tribute must also be paid to past team members such as Phil Illingworth who gave 7 years of dedicated service before sadly passing away.

Using the becks as a dumping ground creates a real flood risk. Items in the beck channel will collect debris to make a dam behind which water can spill out over the beck sides. The most commonly dumped items remain garden waste and shopping trolleys while an average of 300 tonnes of rubbish are removed from the becks each year. This is a shocking statistic when you consider how vital the becks are for one of Britain's most threatened mammals, the water vole. We can all do our part from taking litter home to recycle to reporting any large items or quantities of rubbish dumped in the becks using the hotline number given at the back of the newsletter.



Boro Becks Round Up

The beck valleys are vitally important to Middlesbrough, acting as sponges to soak up rainfall, cooling the air temperature and bringing wildlife right in to the heart of the town. Play your part in making these areas even better for you and nature; see what we've been doing and how you can get involved in the sections below.

Ormesby Beck

The fantastic spring weather caught us out in our plans to dig a new pond and fill in the existing one, currently being swallowed up by the invasive plant New Zealand Stonecrop. With reports of both frogs and toads in the old pond, we've postponed our work until later in the season, when the young frogs and toads leave the water and move in to the surrounding area. However, this didn't stop the young artists from Berwick Hills Primary School visiting the workshop of artist Graeme Hopper after Easter to see at first hand how their designs are being turned in to a beautiful metal bench to install next to the new pond in the coming months.

Further upstream of our pond, the Environment Agency has enlisted the help of our ranger Barry and the volunteers to monitor water voles in the areas of Ormesby Beck where the major realignment work is being carried out. In spring, the banksides were trimmed bare of plants to encourage the protected water voles to move out before the construction work begins.



Marton West Beck

The Boro Becks Project has money to spend and we want to use it to improve the beck section between Devils Bridge and Keith Road for both people and nature. Initial proposals have been drawn up and delivered to houses on both sides of the beck. Please look out for these and take time to make your voice heard by calling at one of our drop in sessions for a cup of tea and a chat at the following locations;

Saturday 9th July;

Sutton Estate Resident's Association on the corner of Collin Avenue and Sutton Way, 10am-12pm

Tuesday 12th July;

Newham Bridge Primary School, main hall, 3.30-6.30pm

Help to shape a scheme that will be attractive to wildlife and enable you to get the most out of your local green spaces.



Spencer Beck

Following the sterling work carried out by the Durham Tees Valley Probation Trust to thin out the woodland close to Caldicotes School, we noticed how bare the woodland floor was with most plants having been shaded out by the dense tree cover. This resulted in us working with local residents and Wildflower Ark to reintroduce such spring delights as dog violets, primroses and wild strawberry to this area; a big thank you to all who took part.

Our stall at the Party in the Park event saw us give away lots of wildlife themed prizes and enabled us to chat with local people about the improvements they want to see along Spencer Beck. We hope to make these plans a reality in the coming months and will be carrying out more consultation.



Middle Beck

We had a great time at our Easter Tracks and Trails event at which the holiday club and local families made their own plaster casts of real animal tracks and followed our trail to claim a tasty chocolate treat. We also ran some outdoor walks and indoor craft sessions in partnership with Sure Start and the library service in June to show young children and their families what they can find along Middle Beck and how much fun it is to explore together.

We've been amazed to find a healthy population of bullhead fish thriving in the beck alongside the usual sticklebacks. Bullheads need clean, fast flowing water and lots of insect food such as caddis larvae and freshwater shrimps which they hunt for at dusk. Their presence in Middle Beck is good news for herons and kingfishers and also shows what a good habitat this is for fish and other aquatic creatures. Please report any rubbish dumping in the beck to the council's hotline and help to keep it in good condition.



Events and Activities

Fingers crossed for a good summer as we launch another action packed programme with lots of free events to enjoy. For our outdoor events please dress for the weather, with good footwear and warm, waterproof clothing or sun hats and sun cream. Bring a packed lunch and drinks for all day walks.

The events are aimed at helping local people explore what is on their doorstep so in most cases, parking is extremely limited; please walk to the events or use public transport.

For more details or to book where needed, ring 01642 515618 or email borobecks@middlesbrough.gov.uk.

Please note; all children (16 years and under) must be accompanied by an adult.

Minibeast Mayhem

Come and track down the bugs that live along our beck valleys and join the craft session to decorate your own insect to take home;

Tuesday 2nd August

Bug Hunt 10.30am-12pm at Middle Beck; please meet at the Charlbury Road Community Centre.

Design a Bug 1.30-3.30pm at the Charlbury Road Community Centre.

Thursday 4th August

Bug Hunt 10.30am-12pm at Ormesby Beck/Berwick Hills; please meet at the sculptured gateway off Bradhope Road, opposite Burnsall Road.

Design a Bug 2-4pm at Berwick Hills Library.

Wednesday 24th August

Bug Hunt 10.30am-12pm at Marton West Beck; please meet at the Sutton Estate Residents' Centre at the corner of Collin Avenue and Sutton Way.

Design a Bug 1.30-3.30pm at the Sutton House Centre, Sutton Estate Residents' Centre at the corner of Collin Avenue and Sutton Way.



Teddy Bear's Picnic

Bring your favourite teddy for tasty treats, trails, games and crafts at the following locations;

Wednesday 10th August 1-3pm

at Charlbury Road Community Centre.

Thursday 18th August 2-4pm

at Park End Community Centre.

Beechwood Ward Community Festival

Saturday 6th August 12-3pm

Track down our stall for free children's crafts, quizzes and fantastic prizes!

Beck to the Farm

Thursday 22nd September 10am-12.30pm

Join us on a 5 mile guided walk as we follow Marton West Beck upstream to Newham Grange Country Farm for tea and cake in the new café.

Meet at the small car park area off Holmwood Avenue, near St Chad's Church.

Minibus provided for return to start of walk. Limited numbers, booking essential on 01642 515618 or borobecks@middlesbrough.gov.uk.

Volunteer Update

The volunteer team is continuing to work hard on a regular programme of litter picks, practical tasks, patrols and wildlife surveys throughout the summer.

Barry will carry out regular litter picks every Monday during the school holidays so please let us know if there are any beck valley hotspots which need attention. He will also be organising training sessions and continuing regular practical task days.

September will see a big push to cut the flower meadows along the becks and remove the grass cuttings to encourage more flowers and less rank grass as well as making the beck valleys look tidier. Some areas of rough grass will be left as important habitats for small mammals and insects seeking shelter over winter. This process began back in June when Barry joined forces with another Tees Valley Wildlife Trust volunteer team to carry out an early summer grass cut along Ormesby Beck to mark National Volunteer Week.

Still on the subject of flowers, Barry and the volunteers provided a new

home for wild flower rich turf that had been rescued from an unusual meadow growing on top of an underground reservoir in Dalton Piercy in Hartlepool. Hartlepool Water, who own the reservoir, needed to replace the roof to protect the quality of Hartlepool's drinking water. The soil on top of the reservoir had been colonised by thousands of cowslips so Hartlepool Water called on the Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership to join a rescue mission to move as many plants as possible to wildlife sites in the Tees Valley. Our share of the turf sections were laid in the Ormesby Beck meadows so watch out for cowslips, orchids and other floral delights next year.

New recruits to the team are always welcome so if you enjoy fresh air, meeting people and learning new skills, contact Barry on (01642) 515618 or at borobecks@middlesbrough.gov.uk for more information.



Out and About

Summer is the season of insects and flowers as the meadows along the becks bloom and a host of bugs make the most of this floral bonanza.

Walking along the becks during spring illustrated just how important they are for bees and butterflies as we saw numerous tawny mining bees, queen bumble bees and butterfly species such as the small tortoiseshell, comma and speckled wood. We even spotted the Tree Bumblebee at Ormesby Hall while checking out a guided walk route in May; it was first spotted in the south of the UK in 2001 and has been expanding its range northwards ever since.



It would be great to get the beck valleys recognised as good butterfly habitats and everyone has the opportunity to do this through the annual Big Butterfly Count during 16-31st July, where just 15 minutes of your time are needed to record the numbers and types of butterflies you spot either from one place or during a walk. You can download an ID sheet and get more information at www.bigbutterflycount.org. Last year's count saw the small white take the top spot nationally with the large white and gatekeeper not far behind. Barry, our ranger, will be carrying out some surveys; email or ring to find out when and join in.

Another familiar and extremely useful insect is the ladybird which we first spotted back in March as the warm spring woke them from their winter hibernation. As well as the common 7-spot ladybird, the tiny black pine ladybird has also been seen along Ormesby Beck and is closely associated with trees, particularly willow of which there are plenty in the beck valleys. Again, you can help scientists track how the ladybirds are doing by taking part in the Ladybird Survey; more details and ID sheets are available at www.ladybird-survey.org.uk. You can also play your part in tracking the spread of another invader, the Harlequin Ladybird. Bigger and bolder than the native species, it was introduced to North America in 1988 and reached our shores in the summer of 2004. However, it is not as friendly as the Tree Bumblebee as it snacks on native ladybirds and may also help spread disease so it's important that we remain vigilant to highlight any problems early on.



Competition

Send your answers to the following questions to the Boro Becks team for the chance to **win a fantastic digital camera worth a minimum of £100**. All the answers can be found in the newsletter. The competition is open to all Middlesbrough residents, the closing date is 31st August and we'll announce the winner in the autumn newsletter. Please contact us for full terms and conditions and good luck!

- 1) Which rare mammal lives along Middlesbrough's becks?
- 2) What did Barry and Wildflower Ark plant along Spencer Beck in the Easter Holidays?
- 3) What type of ladybird is invading the UK?

Photos: Sammy Brown, Kenny Crooks/Wild Places, Barry Jobson, Steve Ashton, Chris Corbett, John Buchan

This Newsletter is printed on 100% recycled paper



Important numbers

If you spot a problem when out on the becks, use the numbers below to report it;

Pollution incidents
Environment Agency's 24-hour pollution hotline
0800 807060

Rubbish in the becks or along the valleys
Middlesbrough Council Environment hotline
01642 726001 or Freephone 0800 0136001