

The Nature Page

By ROY BAKER

Autumn Glory in and around Bridge of Allan during the third week of October. A rowan tree below overlooks Airthrey Loch on the University Campus. Further away are Airthrey Castle, the Hermitage and Yellowcraig Woods.



This horse chestnut (below) stands close to the Allan Water near an overgrown corner of the allotments. In the distance is the Mine Wood.

The Riverside path continues behind the allotments and the Fire Station up to the "White Bridge" (now painted blue, picture above right). Part of this path has become difficult to traverse due to the erosion of the riverbank. But further down the Allan there has been some dramatic erosion. The sand martins that I reported on in June suffered a catastrophe in July after heavy



rain caused the Allan to rise leading to a further collapse of the steep sandy riverbank. This was some 50 yards down river beyond the Centenary Walk and Haws Park football field. All of the 30 nest holes right below the path on the edge of the bank fell into the river. Fortunately, the birds had already raised one brood but normally they would have gone on to raise a second.

Anyone who has not walked along this stretch of the Allan Water for a long time will be surprised by what they see. Over the last six years the east riverbank has been collapsing regularly. The river has split into two and a large stony island has built up (right). The distance from bank to bank must be three times what it was in 2004. Nothing has prevented the collapse; trees large and

small have succumbed and fallen into the river. The path has been diverted several times by volunteers to preserve this riverside walk.

Alongside this path from spring to autumn there's a great variety of wild flowers such as Lesser Celandine, Jack by the Hedge (Garlic Mustard), Ransoms (Wild Garlic), Butterburr, Comfrey, White Deadnettle, Yellow Bedstraw, Ground Elder (Bishop Weed), Bindweed, Purple Loosestrife, Meadow Crane's-bill, Meadowsweet, Water Mint, Native Hogweed, Willowherb, Yarrow, Rocket and Michaelmas Daisy (the last two are garden plants). Rocket with white- or lilac-coloured flowers in midsummer has a pleasing scent; Michaelmas daisies add a touch of colour even in late October. There's a big patch of white ones too.

My favourite flowers are the Meadow Crane's-bills and the Meadowsweet. The Crane's-bills alongside



the river path are the cut-leaved variety of the Geranium family. Each plant has many small blue flowers and the resulting seed pods look like the upturned bill of a crane or stork, like the bird on the top of our Fountain of Nineveh. The Meadowsweet, as its name suggests, has sweet smelling flowers, which look rather like cream-coloured candy floss. The leaves can be infused to make meadowsweet tea, which is said to relieve coughs, colds, flu, fever and headaches. They contain salicylic acid, one of the constituents of aspirin. Another name for the plant is Queen of the Meadow.



The honeybees that I wrote about in the summer issue fared better than the martins. The swarm, pictured on the front cover, was collected and



hived by Les Slater, a beekeeper from Dunblane. The bees produced enough honey for some to be extracted. Recently Les presented us with an attractively labelled jar of delicious flower honey from the hive. This represents thousands of bee flights to collect nectar and make the honey - not to

mention all the work of the beekeeper in extracting this from the hive, straining it and filling jars. So we should really appreciate locally produced honey.

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