



FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 173
2009/10

Winter



The Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)

The rook is a member of the Corvidae Family in the Passerine Order of birds. The Corvidae include ravens, carrion crows, hooded crows, rooks, jays, magpies and choughs; the common English name for this group is 'corvids'. Members of the Corvidae Family are considered to be the most intelligent of birds having demonstrated both self-awareness in mirror tests and tool making ability, a skill recently regarded as solely the province of humans and a few other higher mammals. The Passerine Order includes all perching birds, the largest avian Order. Passerines have feet specialised for grasping horizontal branches, they have three forward-facing claws and one backward-facing. Linnaeus provided the scientific name, *Corvus frugilegus*, in 1758. The genus name *Corvus* is from the Latin meaning 'raven' whilst the species name *frugilegus* is Latin for 'food gathering'. There are at least

42 members of the genus *Corvus* worldwide with five UK representatives, raven, rook, carrion crow, hooded crow and jackdaw.

Rooks and carrion crows look similar but there are some distinguishing characteristics, the most obvious being the gregarious nature of the rook. If you spot a single bird or a pair in an open field then it is almost certain that they will be carrion crows. In winter rooks feed and roost in flocks often together with jackdaws; it is quite exciting being at a roost just as darkness is descending; the noisy flocks wheel about in the sky before they settle for the night. In spring, rooks nest in colonies whilst a pair of carrion crows nests in isolation. In summer rooks are most often seen in flocks on open fields or foraging in small groups, their diet consists of worms, insects and their grubs (leatherjackets and wireworms) and grain. The collective name is a parliament of rooks. Another distinguishing feature of the adult rook is its bare, greyish-white face and beak. The rook's call, 'kaa' is similar but flatter than the harsh call of the carrion crow. In flight the rook usually calls just once, the carrion crow in groups of three. It is interesting to watch a perching rook call; it fans its tail and bows with each 'kaa'.

Rooks being very sociable tend to nest in woods where there will be many nests in a number of neighbouring trees, a rookery. Usually there are several nests high up in the top of one tree; over forty nests have been recorded in one tree alone. The nest is built of sticks and mud, lined with grass, wool and hair; the sticks are almost always gathered from trees rather than picked up of the ground. Usually in March but often in late February, three to six eggs are laid; these are greenish, mottled with olive-brown. Eggs are incubated for 16-18 days. Both adults feed the young which are fledged by the 32nd day. The noise under a rookery in spring has to be experienced to be appreciated.

Ron Iremonger

Chairman's Page



To start with just a little bit about me; I have recently retired from my job as an Architect working in the City but with projects all around the UK and abroad. My granddaughters now keep me busy, as do my hobbies which include swimming, photography and classic cars. I am a keen sailor and can be seen out on the river sailing in my RS200 several days a week when the weather is a little warmer (look out for the purple spinnaker). I am the Sail Training Principal for Chester Sailing and Canoeing Club and a member of The Chester Civic Trust.

I am pleased to be able to tell you that Tim Finch has been co-opted onto the Committee and has agreed to be our Secretary; this just leaves the role of Newsletter Co-ordinator to be filled to give us a full complement. If anyone is interested in joining the Committee to help with this task please contact me; in the meantime we have agreed to work as a team to produce the newsletter and this is the result of our first combined effort. If anyone would like to contribute articles or has any suggestions of what they would like to see included in future issues please let me or any of the Committee know.

We now intend to produce four issues of the newsletter a year and to reflect this and in view of the healthy state of our funds, the Committee has approved the reduced subscription of £5.00 per household suggested at the Annual General Meeting. Your subscription renewal is included with this newsletter.

There are plans for various activities during this year including lectures, a social event, an art exhibition and photographic competition. Full details of these will be given in the next newsletter. We also continue our liaison with the Council regarding the management of the Meadows and have, and will continue to meet with those Officers responsible.

Finally here is a recent picture of The Meadows blanketed with snow and looking very beautiful in the morning sunshine.

Peter Hadfield
01244 341378 or pete.hadfield@btinternet.com



Snow and Spruce Forest

Home. What is home?
Snow and spruce forest
- that's home.

Ours as soon as we draw breath,
ours before anyone names it.
Snow and spruce forest.
And it never, never leaves us.

That drift waist-deep
around dark trees
- it's meant for us.
Its breath mixed with our breath,
it lives unseen within us
and never, never leaves us.
Snow and spruce forest.

Yes, the hill under snow
and tree after tree
as far as the eye can see:
wherever we are
we find ourselves facing this.

And with it this promise
about homecoming.
Coming home,
bending boughs
- so knowing what it is
to be where we belong
it flares in us.

And never, never leaves us,
until it's snuffed out
in our inland hearts.

Kevin Crossley-Holland

FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held on Thursday 19th November 2009 in the
Parish Hall of St Mary's Church, Handbridge at 7.30 pm.

The retiring Chairman John Makinson welcomed some 30 members and guests.

Apologies.

Adele Edwards, Bill Richardson, Terence Lee-Fisher, Valerie Gregson, and Richard and Helen Lydon. The Chairman reported that Adele Edwards had been ill and confined to the house for two months. It was resolved that the meeting send her good wishes.

Minutes of the 2008 meeting - taken as read.

Chairman's Remarks: The Chairman said that the Meadows were in good shape. The main objective of the FoM, to keep the Meadows managed but otherwise substantially in their uncultivated state, had been achieved. The person responsible for management under the new Cheshire West and Chester Council had recently changed and was based at Winsford. The effect of the credit crunch had not yet been determined. The summer boat trip had had to be cancelled for lack of early support. At the March meeting a talk had been given by Sarah Bird from the Zoo.

Regarding the Newsletter, a large vote of thanks was due to Richard Cain, who had co-ordinated it for two years. He was now standing down due to other commitments. No volunteers to take it on had yet been forthcoming. None was forthcoming from the meeting. The matter was left to the Committee.

Finance.

In the absence of the Treasurer the Chairman presented the accounts for the year to 30/9/2009. These were healthy and showed a credit balance of £4,822.83. There had been a drop of some £700 in subscriptions. The Membership Secretary said this was due to demands not being sent out because the newsletters were less frequent. It was suggested that the subscription should be reduced to £5 and this was left to the Committee.

Election of Officers.

Peter Hadfield was proposed by John Makinson as the new Chairman, seconded by Ruth Davidson. He outlined some of his plans for the FoM in the future, including creating a website. He was elected unanimously.

Other Committee members elected were:

Treasurer:	Bill Richardson
Membership Secretary	Clive Gregory
Events Organiser	Terence Lee-Fisher
Meadows Log	Andy Ingham
Committee	Richard Cain
	Ruth Davidson
	David Eglin
	Clive McWilliam
	Andrew Gaynor.

Richard Cain thanked John Makinson for taking the chair for the past two years and presented him with an ornamental container holding two bottles of wine.

Illustrated Talk.

Stephen Langtree, a Vice-president and long serving member of the Chester Civic Trust, gave a review of the first 50 years of the Trust and some of its achievements. Brian Lewis commented on the poor state of repair of Greenbank and asked that the Civic Trust should refer this to the Council.

New Members

Anyone wishing to join Friends of the Meadows, please contact the Membership Secretary
Clive Gregory, 6 Victoria Pathway, Queens Park, Chester, CH4 7AG, Telephone 01244
680242.

Please let us know who introduced you if appropriate.



January 2010

Birds.

01/01 2010 got off to a wonderful start. A large white bird, with long legs & yellow feet flew across a blue Handbridge sky. It was of course a Little Egret, a small heron more associated with the Dee Estuary.

06/01 The heavy snowfall over the previous 12 hours provided a picture postcard scene. It was a pleasure kicking through the powdery snow by the river. On the river by Sandy Lane were 3 Pochard ducks, a female Goldeneye & 18 Canada Geese. In a ditch by the Handbridge Marsh the normally very shy & elusive Water Rail briefly showed. Nearby 5 Redpoll were feeding at the top of Alder trees.

07/01 Cold weather forced out yet more Water Rails in to the open. One Rail was seen running along the waters edge by the landing stage, another took flight over the Handbridge marsh. Above the river 2 Lapwing & a calling Curlew were on the move. Further up the river by United Utilities within a mixed flock of tits was a single Marsh Tit.

09/01 Sections of the river were now frozen. Sandy Lane looked more like a scene from Martin Mere WWT. Joining the 200 plus Mallard were 19 Widgeon, 4 Pochard, 10 Coot, 4 Tufted Duck & 2 Teal. A Great Crested Grebe fished on a small area of open water below Deva Terrace.

10/01 Tufted Duck numbers increased to 11 on Sandy Lane & a single Shelduck also joined the above wildfowl. Away from the river 7 Bullfinch were in a single Blackthorn bush. Not many small birds on the Meadow, many now looking for food in nearby gardens. Elizabeth Crescent had a mixed flock of tits coming to feeders along with a wintering Blackcap. RS

13/01 Goosanders on the river below County Hall increased to 5, all males. Binoculars are not needed to see these birds. They are large white birds with dark green heads & if you peer over the side of the Old Dee Bridge they are generally swimming here in the shallow water.

Animals

No report of any foxes so far this month. Has the use of recycling bins instead of bin bags had an effect on the behaviour of Foxes in the neighbourhood?

Even in the big freeze, a few Mole hills were popping up out of the snow each morning. TG.

Flora

Largely covered by the Snow!

Andy Ingham

Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135