



# FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 174

Spring 2010



## Colt's-foot and Butterbur

Colt's-foot, *Tussilago farfara*, is one of the earliest of spring flowers, its bright sulphur-yellow blooms and scaly stems can be found from February to April. The flowers of colt's-foot resemble those of dandelion but are smaller and more compact, as evening approaches they close up. Closer examination of the flower stem reveals scale like bracts from top to bottom. The leaves of colt's-foot do not appear until the flowers have died, a phenomena that has provided its folk-name, 'son before father'. The distinctive shape of the leaves gives rise to the plant's common name, they are ovate, 20-30 cm across, have purplish stems and veins and black-tipped teeth; the down on the underside of the leaves was once scraped off for use as tinder.

Colt's-foot is a creeping perennial that grows in clumps in open places often on waste ground or on dry banks where little else grows. The seeds have very long, hairy parachutes needing only the slightest wind to keep them airborne which accounts for this plant being so widespread.

Colt's-foot leaves were dried and smoked in a pipe as a cure for asthma. The scientific name for colt's-foot, *Tussilago*, means 'cough suppressant', this is derived from the Greek *tussis*, 'a cough'. An infusion of the plant's leaves in boiling water, sweetened with honey was used to treat coughs. Stockley's Sweets, a company based in Accrington, Lancashire, produce 'Colt's-foot Rock Sticks' that are sold to ease sore throats and chesty coughs. The flowers of colt's-foot make a good wine. The leaves are a good source of vitamin C and have been used in salads. Colt's-foot is the food plant of several moth larvae including the Gothic and the small angle shades.



Like colt's foot, the flowers of butterbur appear before its leaves, the erect flower spikes are dense and cylindrical, resembling dwarf conifers; individual flower heads are white with a purple tinge. The plant is a dioecious perennial, male butterbur plants are found throughout the British Isles but female plants are found mostly in northern and central England. The female flower-heads are longer stalked and develop plumed seeds. Occasionally, a female flower appears on a male plant facilitating seed production. The large rhubarb-like leaves of butterbur, *Petasites hybridus*, were once used for wrapping butter, hence the plant's common name. The heart-shaped leaves can be up to 36 inches, (90cm) across and have a dense felt of hairs underneath. The plant's genus name comes from the Greek *petasos* for a broad-brimmed hat; the 16<sup>th</sup> century herbalist, John Gerard wrote that the leaf, 'Is bigge and large enough to keepe a man's head from raine and from the heat of the sunne'. Butterbur is found by rivers, ditches and on damp waste ground and can spread to cover large areas by means of its creeping rootstock.

In herbal medicine, butterbur has been used as a painkiller for stomach and intestinal complaints. The plant's leaves and flowers have been used to reduce bleeding and treat swollen veins, (the leaves of colt's foot are a similar shape but smaller). In the Middle Ages the dried and powdered leaves of butterbur were used to clear spots and skin blemishes.

Ron Iremonger

## Chairman's Page



I hope you enjoy reading this Spring newsletter and that there is some Spring weather by the time you receive it; even my granddaughters are fed up of snow! A big thank you must go to Ron Iremonger who continues to provide our interesting front page article and to everyone that is involved in the preparation, editing, printing and distribution of the newsletter. Without them there would be no newsletter!

We would appreciate feedback and any suggestions for future issues; please contact me or any of your committee members with comments or ideas.

I am pleased that so many of you have already renewed your membership. For those that have not yet done so we have included another copy of the subscription renewal form with this newsletter, and I hope that you will complete and return this to our Membership Secretary in the near future. If you have renewed your membership can I ask you to give the renewal form to a friend or neighbour and encourage them to join the Friends.

In my short time as chairman I have come to realise that there are many important issues to address (some large and others small, but all important), and the continuing involvement of the Friends is vital in the maintenance and development of this fantastic amenity. In particular we need to continue our liaison with Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWAC) and input into the development of their Meadows Management Plan. There are also the issues of the proposed new Dee Bridge and the River Dee Park Plan where we need to put forward our views.

We have now finalised our events for 2010 and a list of important dates for your diary is included below. I hope that you will be able to support these events and look forward to meeting as many of you as possible. There is also a photographic competition for you to enter with prizes to be presented at the Annual General Meeting, so there is plenty of time for you all to enter.

We need to make minor administrative changes to our constitution (included on the opposite page) to reflect the change in council, and we will put these amendments forward at the AGM. In the meantime we also think it is time to carry out a review to ensure it reflects our current aims – if you have any suggestions for changes that you would like to see please let me know. Can we also seek your help, we think that sections 7 and 11 of the constitution were amended in 1996 but can find no record of the changes. If anyone knows what these changes were please let me know.

**Peter Hadfield** 01244 341378 or [pete.hadfield@btinternet.com](mailto:pete.hadfield@btinternet.com)

### The Awthorn

I love the awthorn well  
The first green thing  
In woods and hedges-black thorn dell  
Dashed with its green first spring  
When shallows shine in golden shene  
These white thorn places in the black how green

How beautifully green  
Though March has but begun  
To tend primroses planted in the sun  
The roots that's further in  
Are not begun to bud or may be just begun

I love the white thorn bough  
Hung over the mole hill  
Where the spring feeding cow  
Rubs off the dew drop chill  
When on the parsley pips and glossy thorn  
The dews hang shining pearls at early morn.

*John Clare 1793-1864*

### Important Dates for your Diary

**Friends of the Meadows Summer BBQ  
Saturday 26 June**

**Guided Walk at Caldy Nature Park  
Date to be confirmed**

**Talk by Andy James  
Green Space Ranger  
(Cheshire West and Cheshire)  
Thursday 9 September**

**Annual General Meeting  
Thursday 18 November**

## **Constitution of the Friends of the Meadows**

(as approved by the Annual General Meeting, 10 November 1994)

1. **Name**  
The name of the group shall be 'Friends of the Meadows', hereinafter called 'the Friends'.
2. **Aims**  
Through the involvement of local people, to support the management of The Meadows as an important area of local nature conservation with emphasis on wildlife and recreation value.
3. **Objectives**
  - To stimulate involvement and interest in The Meadows by imparting information to groups or individuals.
  - To assist in the monitoring of The Meadows by carrying out frequent observations.
  - To contribute to the City Council's Management Plan, and to the achievement of agreed objectives through the implementation of practical projects under the guidance of the Countryside Officer.
  - To seek funding to realise these objectives.
4. **Membership**  
Membership shall be open to anyone who fully supports the aims of the Friends and pays a membership subscription.
5. **Subscriptions**  
The subscription shall be set by the Friends' committee.
6. **Committee**
  - The Friends shall be organised by a committee of at least five but not more than twelve elected members.
  - The Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary, Membership Secretary and other members of the committee shall be elected by the Annual General Meeting. Nominations may be received by the Secretary in advance or from the floor of the Annual General Meeting.
  - The committee may co-opt up to three additional members in any year, and shall have power to fill casual vacancies as they arise.
  - The quorum of the committee shall be five.
7. **Annual General Meeting**
  - The Annual General Meeting shall have the powers to approve audited accounts; to appoint an honorary auditor, who shall not be a member of the committee, to elect officers and committee members; to receive reports from officers; to affiliate the Friends to other organisations; and to conduct any other business.
  - The Annual General Meeting shall be held within two months of the Friends' financial year end, with a minimum of twenty one days notice given to members.
8. **Finance**  
The Treasurer shall annually prepare a balance sheet and statement of the Friends' financial affairs, which shall be audited and presented to the Annual General Meeting. The financial year end shall be 30 September.
9. **Extraordinary General Meeting**  
An Extraordinary General Meeting shall be called by the committee as necessary or at the written request of at least ten members, with a minimum of twenty one days notice given to members.
10. **Constitutional Amendments**  
The constitution may be amended by a two thirds majority of members attending an Extraordinary General Meeting called for that purpose.
11. **Dissolution**  
The Friends may be dissolved by an Extraordinary General Meeting. Any assets held on dissolution are to pass to Chester City Council, to be spent furthering the aims and objectives of the Friends.

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## **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.



## February 2010

### Birds

01/02 A male Goosander was again on the river below County Hall. It remained by the Sandbank for most of the month. The tidying up of the willow here may well hasten the Goosanders departure to its breeding grounds in the Welsh uplands.

07/02 A Blackcap singing at the end of Bottoms Lane track was probably not a summer migrant but a winter invader from Germany. Ringing has shown these winter visitors migrate east to west & back again.

Further up the river, opposite the Red House a mixed flock of 30 finches fed among the branches of Alder trees. The flock included equal numbers of Goldfinch, Siskin & 1 or 2 Redpolls. A male Pochard on the river opposite the Reuben & Joan Wesley seat took flight as a rowing team approached. The distinctive "yaffle" of a Green Woodpecker could be heard somewhere on Water Co Land but remained out of sight.

On the river below Deva Terrace a Cormorant caught a large flat fish. The fish was considerably wider than the birds gape. A number of minutes passed before the cormorant flipped the fish 90 degrees and swallowed it whole- extremely effective in its execution but not very elegant.

13/02 A pair of Bullfinch were busy collecting nesting material off Bottoms Lane track. Their bills were stuffed full with what looked like dog fur. 4 Redpoll also joined the Bullfinch along Bottoms Lane track.

20/02 Male Reed Buntings on the Meadow started to take on their summer plumage. 30 or so Meadow Pipits pipped & squeaked their way over the meadow.

### Animals

20/02 A Fox was seen below the Handbridge Allotments before skulking off on to the marsh & upsetting the resident Water Rails. Possibly the same or another fox was seen later in the day in Edinburgh Way. (RL), & 27/2 scampering away from the horses paddock on to the marsh.

At least 4 squirrels continued their presence along Bottoms Lane track & were eating the few remaining leaves/seeds of a sycamore tree.

### Plants

13/02 First signs of spring on the Meadow were catkins appearing in the hedgerow either side of Bottoms lane track.

### Operations

The entrance to Bottoms Lane track has been cleared of weeds & other unsavoury objects. The earth was then turned over & numerous bulbs planted. This will hopefully provide a splash of colour for all who enter the Meadow over the next few weeks. BR.

With the possible return of the grazing horses again this summer a number of hedges have been cut back to the right of Bottoms Lane track & also on Water Company land. RL

### Things to look forward to this spring, after the cold winter.

#### Birds

Our resident bird population will soon be joined by summer visitors which will stream in to the country in the next couple of months. Keep a look out for the first Swallow, House Martin or Swift above the Meadow. Listen out for the Chiffchaff usually the first migrant to return to the Meadow. The Chiffchaff is then followed by Willow Warbler, Whitethroat & Sedge Warbler. If you are really lucky you might still here the call of the Cuckoo, a once familiar sound on the Meadow.

A flick through the log over the years shows the earliest returning dates for our summer migrants to the Meadows to be

Chiffchaff 04-March (2000),  
Swallow 02-April (2007)  
Willow Warbler 04-April (2004)  
Sand Martin 05-April (2009)  
House Martin 06-April (2003)  
Cuckoo 17-April (1996)  
Whitethroat 18-April (2009)  
Sedge Warbler 20-April (2002)  
Swift 26-April (2007 & 2009)

#### Frogs

Frog Spawn should start to appear in the ditches in March. Unfortunately, in 2009 the ditches dried up very quickly and most of the frogspawn was left high and dry

#### Butterflies

If we have a warm March this spring keep a look out for the first Peacock, Comma & Brimstone Butterflies coming out of hibernation.

#### Flora

The first blossom to appear in the hedgerow along Bottoms Lane will be the white petals of the Blackthorn. These attractive little flowers appear on dark branches before their leaves from mid March to April.

**Andy Ingham Meadows log recorder 01244 677135**