



FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 175

Summer 2010

The Daisy (*Bellis perennis*)

Perhaps there is no flower so peculiar to our native land than the common daisy. English and Scottish poets have sung the praises of this humble plant since the time of Chaucer who wrote of the daisy that there is no “English rhyme or prose suffisant this floure to praise alright”. The plant’s generic name comes from the Latin ‘bellus’ meaning beautiful whilst its common name comes from the Old English ‘daeges-eaye’ or day’s eye as Chaucer described it referring to the way the flowers open in the morning and closes at night. The eminent Scottish botanist George Gardner (1812- 1849) whilst searching for plants in the interior of Brazil wrote,

“I wander alone and often look
For the primrose bank by the rippling brook;
Which, waken’d to life by vernal beams,
An emblem of youth and beauty seems;
And I ask where the violet and the daisy grow,
But a breeze-borne voice, in whisperings low,
Swept from the North o’er Southern seas,
Tells me I am far from the land of these.”



Yes, the daisy is right up there with primroses and violets, why so? Well, daisies have pretty little flowers that are common to grassland and lawns throughout the country. Children throughout the ages have amused themselves on warm summer days making daisy-chains and playing games with this plentiful herb, thus the daisy endears us to its beauty and makes an indelible mark upon our minds. Daisies can be found in bloom throughout the year, in his journal of 1824, the poet John Clare noted that on Christmas day he “Gathered a handful of daisies in full bloom.”

Bellis perennis belongs to the Family Compositae, its flower is complex; many white bracts form an involucre around the central capitulum, a structure composed of numerous individual yellow florets all sharing the same receptacle. The daisy flower is a useful nectar source for solitary bees and flies meriting a place in the lawns of all but the most fastidious of gardeners. As William Wordsworth put it in his poem, ‘To The Daisy’,



“Her divine skill taught me this,
That from everything I saw
I could some instruction draw,
And draw pleasure to the height
Through the meanest objects sight”

And Wordsworth went on to describe the daisy as
“The poet’s darling”.

Ron Iremonger

Chairman's Page



It seems no time at all since I was writing the Chairman's Page for the Spring newsletter and here I am sitting at the computer wondering what to include on my page in the Summer issue!

Outside it has just stopped raining but it still looks very grey and overcast; not at all the warmer weather we are all hoping for. The garden at least has made the most of the rain with everything looking very green, and the roses on the wall in our courtyard are covered with buds. It will not be long before the hedge needs cutting!

On the opposite page you will see reports on the two projects we have been involved with this year so far. My thanks go to Andy Ingham for his work in organising the bird boxes, masterminding their installation and writing the report – it looks like they have been successfully inhabited. Andy also prepares the Meadows Log and there is a bumper issue covering the best part of 3 months in this newsletter. As usual the front page has been contributed by Ron Iremonger and it is good to be able to include Rita Hibbitt's article on wild flowers on the Meadows. Clive McWilliam has again chosen our poem. Without our regular contributors there would be no newsletter for us all to enjoy. If any of you would like to contribute an article please send it to me or any of the committee members.

Our next event is the Summer Barbecue and a poster giving more details is included with the newsletter. Can you please let Ruth Davidson know as soon as possible if you are able to attend, as this will make the organisation of the event so much easier. I look forward to meeting as many of the Friends as possible that day. This is closely followed by the guided walk around Caldly Nature Park which has been organised by Andy Ingham; Andy has also organised a nature walk in and around the Meadows on Saturday 5 June. More details of both these walks are given on the back page of the newsletter.

Finally I hope that you are all busy snapping away with your camera in preparation for our photo competition. Details of how to submit your pictures will be given in the next newsletter so that there is time for the judging before the grand prize giving at the annual general meeting.

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

Summer

Come we to the summer, to the summer we will come,
For the woods are full of bluebells and the hedges full
of bloom,
And the crow is on the oak a-building of her nest,
And love is burning diamonds in my true lover's breast;
She sits beneath the whitethorn a-plaiting of her hair,
And I will to my true lover with a fond request repair;
I will look upon her face, I will in her beauty rest,
And lay my aching weariness upon her lovely breast.

The clock-a-clay is creeping on the open bloom of May,
The merry bee is trampling the pinky threads all day,
And the chaffinch it is brooding on its grey mossy nest
In the whitethorn bush where I will lean upon my lover's
breast;
I'll lean upon her breast and I'll whisper in her ear
That I cannot get a wink o'sleep for thinking of my dear;
I hunger at my meat and I daily fade away
Like the hedge rose that is broken in the heat of day.

John Clare 1793-1864

Important Dates for your Diary

**Friends of the Meadows
Summer BBQ
Saturday 26 June at 5pm**

**Guided Walk at Caldly Nature Park
Tuesday 13 July at 7pm**

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

**Annual General Meeting
Thursday 18 November**

The Meadows Bird Boxes Project

The removal of dead wood from our hedgerows has greatly reduced the number of cavities for birds to nest & roost safely. So the Friends of the Meadows decided to put some of these cavities back in the form of six small bird boxes & one large bird box.

On a warm spring morning at the beginning of March Peter, Bill & myself (Andy) armed with a ladder, and seven boxes marched down Bottoms Lane track. The next few hours were spent with one of us precariously perched at the top of a ladder, no doubt to the amusement of any passer by.



Four small and one large bird box were placed either side of Bottoms Lane track. A further two small bird boxes were put up by the river entrance on the other side of the Meadow.

The small boxes are designed to attract Blue & Great Tits, but with luck a Nuthatch or even a Marsh Tit may take residence. The large bird box is placed in the fork of a tree and may attract a bird the size of an Owl or Woodpecker. However, it is just as likely to be used by a Jackdaw, Starling or Stock Dove.

Within days Blue Tits were investigating one of the boxes along Bottoms Lane track. A determined Great Tit was also pecking away at another box, unsuccessfully trying to squeeze his body into a hole only big enough for a Blue Tit. He seemed unaware a box with a larger entrance was only yards away!

Meanwhile, a Great Tit on the other side of the Meadow was surprisingly showing interest in the large bird box. Again, a suitable box with a smaller size hole was only yards away! Perhaps this Great Tit had a very demanding female to satisfy. Research has shown that the male Great Tit builds up to three nests before the female eventually chooses the best site to raise a family. At the end of April it appears at least four of our boxes are in use - three pairs of Great Tit and one pair of Blue Tit.

The Blue Tits have been busy feeding their young whilst the Great Tits continued in residence in the large bird box. This was in spite of considerable interest shown by a pair of Stock Doves trying to muscle their way in.

I think it's fair to say this has been a very successful project so far.

The Bottoms Lane Entrance Project



Many of you will have seen the improvements by the Bottoms Lane entrance to the Meadows; for those that haven't the work included clearing undergrowth and debris from within the fenced area by the gate and then planting with bulbs and wild flowers. This picture shows the daffodils and tulips in flower.

I hope that you all agree that this looks significantly better. The work was masterminded by Bill Richardson and Richard Lydon and was jointly funded by a grant from the Council with the remaining funding from Friends of the Meadows.

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.

Wild Flowers on the Meadows

The summer of 2009 saw a serious decline in wild flowers on the part of the meadows where I walk my dog each day. We walk on the main Earl's Eye meadow going straight across the river from our landing stage in Sandy Lane to the ferry landing stage opposite. We do a square walk which encompasses several well worn paths, which, in summer, are generally strewn with many common wild flowers.

The wet summer of 2008 probably put paid to that year's seeding of the annuals but I hope there will be seed lying dormant which will come back in future years. One very noticeable absence was that of the bright blue skullcap flower. This is usually extremely common alongside the centre path but I did not see one single flower in 2009.

The cuckoo flower did very well but the low growing selfheal was very scarce, as was the bird's foot trefoil. The blues and purples seem to have especially suffered quite badly, even the knapweed was less than usual and the tough yarrow was scarce in some places but plentiful where it grew in disturbed soil. One glorious plant that came to the fore in late August was the beautiful purple loosestrife. There were two large stands of this in the dried up ditch alongside the gorse bushes directly across from the Lower Park Road entrance. There was also loads of it on the riverside opposite Meadow View in Sandy Lane together with pink Himalayan balsam. Although the latter is a foreign invader it teams up very prettily with the purple loosestrife.

Early in the summer on this same stretch of meadow an extremely large wonderfully scented honeysuckle was clambering up through a tall hawthorn and not far away a self seeded rowan was growing at quite a pace. One morning when I passed it in August it was full of swallows as was a dead gorse bush alongside. Why they had all landed there that morning I can only guess but I did not see them again so they may have been gathering together to depart. It seemed rather early for this to be happening but perhaps they had had enough of our dismal summer weather.

In late summer the farmer mowed the tall grass on two parts of the big meadow. It had generally been a fairly dry year in spite of it not being sunbathing weather but there were a lot of drying winds and most of the streams completely dried out.

By the time you read this summer 2009 will have long gone and we will all be looking forward to summer 2010. Whatever the weather throws at us, how lucky we are to have our lovely Meadows. Thank you, Mr and Mrs Brown for bequeathing them to us citizens so many years ago.

Rita Hibbitt
March 2010

Nature Walk in and around the Meadows

If you would like to discover some of the wildlife which exists in & around the Meadows then join Andy Ingham on a morning walk at 7 am on Saturday 5 June 2010. We will attempt to find amongst others Mandarin Ducks, Grasshopper Warblers, Small Skippers & Banded Demoiselle. The leisurely stroll will take about 2 hours. If interested then give Andy a call on 01244 677135.

Caldy Valley Guided Walk

We have been given an invitation by Caldly Valley committee members for a guided walk around their park. It is a good opportunity for our members to meet up with another group who have similar aims & objectives as ourselves. Caldly Valley has undergone improvement work recently, so it will be interesting to see the results of these changes. So if you wish to join us for a stroll around Caldly Valley at 7 PM on 13 July 2010 then give Andy Ingham a ring on 01244 677135. As numbers will be limited early booking is essential.



March 2010

Birds

04/03 1 Great Crested Grebe in winter plumage fished the river by Sandy Lane landing stage. 2 Treecreeper climbed trees either side of Bottoms Lane track. A Water Rail continued to probe with its long beak on the marsh below the Handbridge allotments.

06/03 A Woodcock rose from the Handbridge marsh flying off towards the meadow.

20/03 A pair of Mandarin Duck flew out of a ditch on Water Co land circling the Meadow before dropping into another ditch.

24/03 The Chiffchaff was the first of the summer migrants. It announced its arrival on Gorsty bank with its metronomic call. Down on the Meadow a bird took flight revealing a white rump. It landed a short distance away, a scan with the binoculars yielded a superb male Wheatear.

29/03 It has been said that "One Swallow does not make a summer." How right they are! The first Swallow arrived above Elizabeth Crescent duly followed by a week of bad weather. This is the earliest returning Swallow beating the previous record of 2nd April in 2007. VG

Animals

Late news from February came with the report of a cat chasing a young Fox from a garden. This is remarkable, bearing in mind the difference in size of the two animals. However, the fox then reappeared a few minutes later looking for the cat so maybe it was just in a playful mood. RM

20/03 Frogs were busy spawning in ditches & flooded paths on the Meadow. In one such ditch 30/40 Frogs were poking their heads above the water.

Flora

The newly planted bulbs at the entrance to Bottoms Lane track started to push through with Hyacinths, Daffodils & Snowdrops.

April 2010

Birds

04/04 Mandarin Ducks were again on the river beyond the Red House. A Kingfisher took flight on the river by Earls eye. Sightings of the Kingfisher have become scarce since the cold snap. A male Peregrine was again seen dashing over the Old Dee Bridge towards the racecourse. The sweet sound of the first Willow Warbler came from Birch trees in Elizabeth Crescent. RS

17/04 A distinctive rattling call from uncut hedgerow to the right of Bottoms Lane track announced the arrival of the first Lesser Whitethroat.

19/04 The first Common Sandpiper took flight from the waters edge by Sandy Lane landing stage. A Grasshopper Warbler reeled but remained hidden in scrub below the Handbridge allotments.

24/04 The arrival of many migrants on a warm morning included two Sand Martins above the Meadow. Singing Sedge Warblers and Whitethroats also returned below the Handbridge allotments. Flying above Overleigh Road were the first returning House Martins of the spring.

Animals

04/04 A Vixen Fox has been a regular visitor to Andrew Crescent where it has been heard screaming in the early hours of the morning. BS

The ditches were still full of water and contained a plentiful supply of Tadpoles. This year looks like being a successful year for frogs.

25/04 A small Eel was seen briefly making its way along a ditch on the meadow.

Flora

Celandines were beginning to flower along Bottoms lane track and underneath the trees by the Meadows river entrance.

May 2010

Birds

01/05 20/30 Screaming Swifts over the meadows were the first of the spring and 10/5 Two Swifts were mating on the wing high above the Meadow.

The first Reed Warblers collected nesting material on the marsh below the Handbridge allotments. Near by, an elusive Grasshopper Warbler reeled away in full view. Four Mandarin Duck were in flight above the river, three drakes were in hot pursuit of a female.

04/05 Stopping off briefly on its journey back from Africa, a female Whinchat was a pleasant surprise on the Handbridge marsh.

09/05 At sunrise a drake Shelduck took flight from the Dee.

10/05 Above Queens Park attention was drawn to a large pale bird being mobbed by a Carrion Crow. A closer look revealed a magnificent Osprey. The Osprey continued to gain height before drifting off over the city. Had the Osprey been fishing in the river and will it return?

Butterflies

04/05 Green Veined White, Peacock, Speckled Wood and Small Tortoiseshell were on the wing. However the most numerous butterflies on the Meadow this spring have been the Orange Tip!

Animals

A Fox realised it had company and sped away over the Handbridge marsh.

Plants

Good numbers of Ladys Smock were flowering along the riverbank and also on the Meadow. Garlic Mustard has also been in flower along Bottoms Lane track & as the name suggests the toothed, heart shaped leaves when crushed smell of garlic.

Operations

10/05 Horses have returned to graze the fields on Water Co land. This is earlier than last year when they appeared for the first time in August.

Andy Ingham
Meadows Log Recorder
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