

Meadows Log continued

24/07 Approximately 70 Gatekeeper butterflies were on flowering thistle on Water Co land. They were joined by 3 Small Coppers. The butterflies have benefited from the re-growth of vegetation in this area.

Flora

Purple Loosestrife, a few Yellow Loosestrife, Tansy, Yarrow & Meadow Sweet have all put on an impressive display along the river bank & Meadow this summer.

Events

04/07 The rafts again set off from the meadows. A good piece of advice for any observer is not to stand next to a spectator throwing flour bombs. Anything thrown at the competitors generally comes back with interest as I found out to my cost.

31//07 The National Canoe & Kayak Marathon Championships have been staged on the Meadow for the first time.



The picture to the left is of a female Common Blue which is fairly uncommon on the Meadows. It was taken during mid June in the area below the Handbridge Allotments.

The picture on the right is of a plant found growing on Water Company land. It is not a plant I recognise; can anyone help with identification please?



Andy Ingham Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135

Nature Walk in and around the Meadows



At the beginning of July, at 7am on a glorious morning a group from "Friends of The Meadows" (pictured above), gathered by the entrance to Bottoms Lane track.

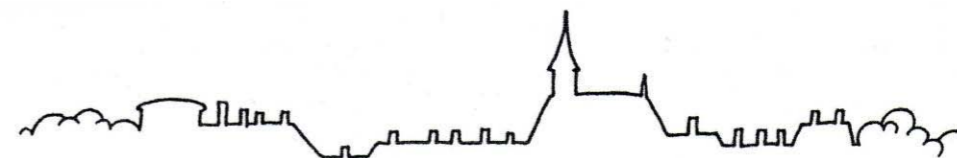
Walking down the track a Chiffchaff was heard repetitively singing its own name high up in a sycamore tree. On the Meadow itself a number of plants were in flower including a carpet of yellow Birdsfoot Trefoil.

Further along the path a Sedge Warbler was singing with great gusto from the riverbank. After skirting around the edge of the river we headed back through the centre of the Meadow. Here we found the Pignut plant growing in large numbers and above us a Skylark filled the air with its song,

We moved on to Water Company land and found most of the horses were laid down either side of the path in the long grass. A little further along the river we found the Mute Swan sitting on her nest and Banded Damoiselle Damselflies in the riverside vegetation. From here we moved away from the river and returned through the field below the Handbridge allotments, back onto Bottoms Lane track.

All in all it was a very enjoyable walk.

Andy Ingham



FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 176

Late Summer 2010

Bracken (Pteridium aquilinum)



The world's most widespread fern, Bracken is a woodland plant that is invading valuable moors, mountain pasture and arable land. Unlike other ferns bracken throws up a single green stem that can reach a height of 10 feet (over 3 m). The name bracken comes from an Old Norse name meaning fern. The plant's genus name Pteridium comes from the Greek 'ptēris' meaning fern while its specific name aquilinum is from the Latin meaning 'eagle-like' after its large wing-like fronds. The word frond comes from the Latin meaning 'feather'.

Ferns have no colourful flowers, all pteridophytes, as they are known to botanists, reproduce by spores rather than seeds. Other groups such as algae, mosses, liverworts and horsetails also reproduce by producing millions of tiny, wind-borne or water borne spores that disperse far and wide to further the existence of these species. Reproduction by spores from ferns consists of a two-stage lifecycle. The first stage, dedicated to sexual reproduction, is the 'gametophyte' that takes the form of a small, insignificant flake of tissue known as a prothallus. The prothallus gives rise to the second generation 'sporophyte' that manifests itself as the fern we all recognise. Sporangia or spore capsules are produced in clusters called sori on the underside of the fern frond. Each sorus is protected by a membrane called an indusium. In this particular species of fern the frond is pinnate, these divisions are known as pinnae. Bracken can also reproduce by vegetative means from deep rooted rhizomes. In old established locations, rhizomatous bracken clones have been found to have spread over areas in excess of 120 metres in diameter and be hundreds of years old; some may be over 1000 years old. The deep-rooted rhizomes of bracken that can be found at a depth of up to 40 inches make it resistant to forest fires. Fossil evidence suggests bracken has been around for at least 55 million years, over this time the plant has evolved a suite of chemicals to prevent attack from diseases, grazing animals and insects, and it has potential as an insect repellent. Bracken also exhibits allelopathy, producing chemicals that suppress other vegetation.

In the Middle Ages, bracken was considered valuable even being used to pay rents; its uses included: as thatch, as fuel, a source of potash for the soap and bleach production, its rhizomes were used in tanning leather and to dye wool yellow, as livestock bedding, as a green mulch and compost. Its most common use today is as food for humans. The newly emerging crosiers or fiddleheads are picked in spring and either consumed fresh or preserved by salting or pickling. A cautionary note, all parts of the bracken plant has been found to be carcinogenic in rats and mice usually causing stomach or intestinal cancer!

Ron Iremonger

Chairman's Page



I hope everyone who attended our Summer Barbecue at the Sailing and Canoeing Club enjoyed it as much as I did. We had gorgeous weather, tasty food and good company! My thanks go to Ruth Davidson, Clive Gregory and Richard Cain who organised the event and to Crumbs for the efficient way they cooked and served our burgers and sausages.

The weather was also good on our nature walk around the Meadows organised by Andy Ingham, and we all enjoyed our early morning stroll.

We were not so lucky on our guided walk around Caldley Valley when it was overcast and rainy. Despite the wet weather we all enjoyed looking round the Park and hearing about its inception, the activities that are arranged and the maintenance and improvement work recently carried out. Our thanks must go to Pam Atkinson and her colleagues on the Friends of Caldley Valley committee who showed us round and provided very welcome cups of tea and coffee at the end of the evening.

Our next event is a talk by Andy James the Cheshire West and Cheshire Ranger responsible for the Meadows and many of the other of the green spaces in and around Chester. He will be telling us about the work and history of the Ranger service over the years and what they do now involving everything from litter picking to management planning.

STOP PRESS We have just heard that a second Ranger has joined Andy in Chester and will take over primary responsibility for the Meadows. Andy and Justin Dyke (the new Ranger) will be working closely together on a day to day basis and Andy will still be our second contact for any queries or problems. We have invited Justin to come along to Andy's talk on the 9th September so that you can all meet him. This is your chance to influence what happens on the Meadows and to ask questions about the Council's plans so please do support this event.

Several of you have asked why there have been no cattle on the Meadows this year. We understand that there was a problem with the lease which is now resolved and that they will return next year. In the meantime there will be an extra mow to keep the grass in check.

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

Summer Shower

A drop fell on the apple tree,
Another on the roof;
A half a dozen kissed the eaves,
And made the gables laugh.

A few went out to help the brook,
That went to help the sea.
Myself conjectured, Were they pearls,
What necklaces could be!

The dust replaced in hoisted roads,
The birds jocosely sung;
The sunshine threw his hat away,
The orchards spangles hung.

The breezes brought dejected lutes,
And bathed them in the glee;
The East put out a single flag,
And signed the fete away.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Important Dates for your Diary

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

**Thursday 9 September at 7.30pm
St Marys Church Hall
(£1.00 donation requested)**

**Annual General Meeting
Thursday 18 November**

**Please note that as we will be
proposing amendments to the
Constitution this will also be an
Extraordinary General Meeting**



June/July 2010

June 2010

Birds

19/06 A pleasant surprise was a Reed Warbler singing from the few reeds which grow on the Meadow. The bird is usually found a little further up the river on the Handbridge marsh.

24/06 Bird of the month was a Hobby hunting above the meadow. This dashing bird of prey was upsetting the local House Martins & Swallows. PS

26/06 Hidden in the long Meadow grass was a reeling Grasshopper Warbler.

30/06 Swift numbers appear to be up on last year. 30 birds screamed across the Handbridge skyline.

Insects

16/06 The first Large Skippers appeared by the old horses paddock & also a female Common Blue below the Handbridge allotments (see picture on next page).

19/06 A few Large & Small Skippers started to appear on the Meadow & also a male Common Blue at the lower end of Bottoms lane track. By the month's end numerous Small Skippers were fluttering in the long grasses.

26/06 The first Meadow Brown butterflies began to appear on the Meadow.

26/06 A large Southern Hawker Dragonfly was a visitor to a Cross Hey garden.

Mammals

03/06 A good number of bats were flying along Bottoms Lane track & also between the avenue of willows. Does anyone have, or know anyone with a bat detector? It would be quite interesting to know what species can be found hunting over the Meadow.

Flora

16/06 It has been a good year for flowers on the Meadow. Ragged Robin is in the river enclosures & also in one of the ditches. Goats Beard flowered in the long grass below the Handbridge marsh.

Operations

The horses disappeared from Water Co land before the month's end allowing easy passage for walkers along the river.

July 2010

Birds

07/07 On the small island below the weir a Little Egret stood next to its larger cousin the Grey Heron. It stayed for a while only moving off when the tide came in. JC. Sightings of this small white heron may well become a common sight on the river in Chester over the next couple of years as they continue to expand their range.

08/07 A Grasshopper Warbler was again reeling on the Meadow this time underneath a fantastic sunset.

10/07 A relaxed looking juvenile Great Crested Grebe was loafing around on the river just beyond the Red House, it may have come from the Eaton Hall Estate.

20/07 The yaffle of a Green Woodpecker shattered the silence on Water Co land. It took flight towards the Meadow & then headed over the river into trees along Sandy Lane.

Insects

10/07 A count of 11 Small Tortoiseshell butterflies on & around the Meadow was encouraging. This butterfly has suffered a severe decline in recent years. 2 Comma butterflies were on the bramble below the Handbridge allotments.

10/07 A large Black tailed Skimmer dragonfly was hawking up & down the side of the Handbridge marsh.

22/07 2 Small Skipper, 4 Meadow Brown, 5 Gatekeepers, 1 Small White, 2 Green Veined White, 2 Speckled Wood were counted along Bottoms Lane track & also the path down towards the river. CW