



# FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 177

Autumn 2010

## Fungi



Their mysterious way of life combined with their variety of colours and shapes make fungi an intriguing subject of study. Some fungi are edible, a few species such as the death cap or the destroying angel, if eaten, can result in death, the brown roll-rim if eaten regularly can cause liver damage, many others such as the yellow-stainer cause nausea and stomach problems. We British, unlike our Continental cousins, have been cautious about eating fungi gathered from the woods but times are changing and it is becoming fashionable to gather fungi for the pot; be warned a number of people die every year from eating poisonous mushrooms. Join a fungus group or go on organised fungi forays until you are certain you can identify edible species. Even then, some people have allergic reactions to species classed as edible; try a little first to be on the safe side. Consumption of alcohol with certain species of ink cap can result in alarming consequences.

The hallucinogenic properties of fly agaric and magic mushrooms have been important in shaman rituals; it is wonderful to see groups of youths taking an interest in the Meadows in autumn! Remember, no matter how early you get up in the morning springtails and flies will have discovered the mushroom first and their larvae will be feasting on nature's bounty.

Mushrooms, toadstools and brackets, rusts, mildews and moulds are just some of the words used to describe organisms that belong to the Kingdom Fungi. Fungi are accorded a separate Kingdom on the basis of the way they obtain nourishment. Fungi are unable to manufacture their own carbohydrates by photosynthesis as they lack chlorophyll so they obtain these nutrients by either adopting a parasitic life-style on living organisms or a saprophytic existence on dead organic matter. Mushrooms, toadstools and brackets are the fruiting bodies of certain species of fungi. The main body of a fungus, the mycelium, permeates the medium from which it obtains its nutrients and consists of many cotton-wool like strands called hyphae. One connected mycelium of *Armillaria lutea* was found to spread over an area of 15 hectares, weigh an estimated 100,000 kg and be over 1500 years old. If the mycelium grows outwards from the centre, the fruiting bodies can form a 'fairy-ring' that increases in diameter every year; the oldest one known is 1 km in diameter and about 700 years old. There are 'fairy-rings' of *Marasmius oreades* on the hills around Stonehenge that are 100 m in diameter and 300 years old.





Fungi have three basic lifestyles. Some are parasitic on living tissue; examples are birch polypore and honey fungus. Some are saprophytic feeding on dead organic matter such as dead wood and leaf litter. Over 90% of dead organic matter is broken down by fungi. Fungi are among the few organisms capable of breaking down the lignin and cellulose of plants, converting them into nutrients that are useful to other forms of life. A quarter of the larger species of fungi live in a symbiotic relationship with the roots of plants. The mycelium of these species forms a mycorrhiza that envelops the roots protecting them from drying out, heavy metals and parasites. The mycelium spread from the roots, improving the stability of the tree and providing a network of hyphae that bring water and dissolved nutrients to the tree; the fungus in return receives carbohydrates from the plant or tree. Over 90% of the higher plants enter into a symbiotic relationship with a mycorrhizal fungus.

**Ron Iremonger**



**A Group of Early Countryside Rangers**



## Chairman's Page



It is nearly a year since I took over from John Makinson as Chairman of Friends of the Meadows at the 2009 Annual General Meeting; time seems to rush by so quickly! We are now starting to prepare for this year's AGM and I hope that as many as possible of you will be there. Agendas for the AGM and an Extraordinary General Meeting are enclosed with this newsletter.

There will be several vacancies on the Committee and we are looking for volunteers to join us. If you are interested or know someone who may be interested please let me know.

Unfortunately due to family commitments I was not able to be at our last event, but I understand that Andy James gave a very interesting talk about the Ranger service. He has given us a copy of an interesting photograph of some early Rangers which is reproduced on the opposite page. He has also provided this photograph of himself and Justin Dyke who is the Ranger now responsible for The Meadows. I think Andy and Justin should each get one of those hats that the early Rangers are wearing! What do you think Andy is saying to Justin? There is a prize of a bottle of wine for the best caption which will be presented at the Annual General Meeting.



For several years we have had a bird feeder on our window at home which has attracted the blue tits and this year we have added more bird feeders in the garden. These have become very popular and we now have great tits, coal tits, blue tits, long tailed tits, robins and sparrows feeding from them. We also have a very brave collared dove which leaps from an adjacent branch onto a rather small covered platform. On the ground we get blackbirds, dunnocks, wood pigeons and occasionally a wren feeding from the seeds that are dropped by the other birds. We are also visited by a squirrel who hangs upside down to reach the food. If any of you would like to share stories of your gardens please let me know and I will include them in future newsletters.

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

### At Needlehole

How lovely the land lies in October,  
Still as the moon.  
The new wheat is planted.  
The drivers are gone  
To pile up their wood  
Or be soothed by a screen.

The felled tree is sawn,  
The robin's cross cry  
Now liquid and long,  
Uncannily high.  
The cold finds my fingers.  
The moon fills the sky.

*Alison Brackenbury*

**An Important Date  
for your Diary**

**Friends of the Meadows  
Annual General Meeting**

**Thursday 18 November  
at 7.30pm**

**at St Marys Church Hall**  
(£1.00 donation requested)

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

## Friends of the Meadows Newsletters

I have been delivering Friends of the Meadows newsletters in my local area from very nearly the time the newsletter first started. It gives me good local knowledge, exercise and, best of all, the chance to view people's gardens and also meet the owners sometimes. It also helps if you are a bit nosey or maybe it is better to say interested!

I see big gardens, small gardens unusual gardens, gardens in pots and gardens at different seasons of the year. I think this is much the best part of the job. Sometimes I see things that are very unusual and new. Spring is my favourite time as that is when all the bulbs emerge and the trees are in blossom. To me the very earliest and most delicate blossoms are like bride's veils.

Quite often I see something I really covet and I have to resist the temptation to knock on doors to request cuttings or bits of plants that are due to be divided. I won't say where it is but at one house I go to there is a pot outside the front door with nice bits of different things including a tender plant that is easily grown from a cutting. Before the frosts arrive I may ask if I can have a cutting with the promise of returning next year with new plants like the original one. I shall be very disappointed if it is no longer there when I go back in October.



Seeds are another thing I like. As the season wears on many people tire of cutting things back, so a few seeds from something nice and desirable is a lovely way of remembering their owners. I've got some seeds from a pink hollyhock that is hanging over a wall that remind me of the owner who died earlier this year. If I succeed in getting them to germinate and there is no reason why they shouldn't, I shall think of her when they flower in future years.

I am sure there are many more people like me who enjoy their rather mundane job because of the secondary advantage to be gained from it. After many years of daily dog walking duties on the meadows I find myself without a dog. My last one Pip, a tri-colour cavalier, died in July and apart from a couple of trips on the ferry to get from my home in Sandy Lane to the other side I have had to restrict myself to long distance viewing. I miss my fellow dog walkers and their charges very much but am glad to have had all the years of pleasure from the daily task and to have viewed the meadows from close quarters for so long. A stray mother cat presented me with kittens, three beautiful ones, two years ago so if another dog needed a home it would have to co-exist with cats.

Finally I would like to say hello to my friends in Michigan, USA Tom and Lavina Cahape. They have been members of Friends of the Meadows. for many years. Tom wrote an article some years ago of his experiences in England during the Second World War and visited more recently for a Burtonwood reunion. The years are going on and with all the recent Battle of Britain viewing on television it once again reminded me of our American allies who came here in large numbers later on in the war. Greetings Tom and Lavina I hope to get a few lines from you or young Tom soon. I hope you are keeping well.

**Rita Hibbert 19 September 2010**

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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.



## August/September 2010

### Birds

07/08/2010 Water Rail have not been heard or seen for a while & the one squealing on the Handbridge marsh was probably a returning bird. It was glimpsed briefly fluttering over the bulrushes.

27/08/2010 Hiding in the long grasses on the Meadow a covey of approximately 10 Grey Partridge burst out of cover & disappeared over Bottoms Lane track on to the Dukes land. This was the first recorded sighting of this game bird on the Meadow for many a year. The Grey Partridge has dramatically declined in Cheshire & is a Red list species.

30/08/2010 Hot on the heels of the Hobby hunting over the Meadow 24/06, another bird sped across the Handbridge marsh from the direction of the Meadows. The birds "red socks" were clearly visible as it flew overhead. Also moving through, but in the hedgerow were Lesser Whitethroat, Whitethroat, Willow Warbler & Chiffchaff.

07/09/2010 Not on the Meadows, but a noteworthy internet report anyway were 3 Spotted Flycatchers stopping off on their migration to feed in Grosvenor Park. Once a common breeding bird around Chester sightings of these delightful little birds have plummeted in recent years.

18/09/2010 High above the Handbridge Marsh a flock of about 60 hirundines fed energetically. The group consisted of about two thirds House Martin & one third Swallows. I seem to remember them gathering here last year before departing for warmer climes.

25/09/2010 With most of the hirundines gone the Meadows & wider area seemed strangely quiet. Only the odd Swallow swooped over the Meadow. A high pitched whistle broke the silence with 2 Kingfishers whizzing along the river in front of Deva Terrace.

27/09/2010 The severe winter took its toll on the Grey Wagtails. This had been noticed by their absence along the river this summer. So it was good to see 3 birds wagging their tails by the water's edge under the Old Dee Bridge. The Grey Wagtail was the 99<sup>th</sup> bird recorded on & around the Meadow this year!

29/09/2010 The 100<sup>th</sup> sighting & the best of the month was the Ring Necked Parakeet breakfasting on peanuts in Westminster Terrace. It enjoyed them so much it came back for lunch & tea. MP

### Butterflies

08/08/2010 A good selection of butterflies were found on the Meadow: 7 Green Veined Whites, 8 Gatekeepers, 2 Speckled Woods, 1 Meadow Brown CW

14/08/2010 2 Small Copper butterflies were on flowers besides the river bank. These dainty little butterflies (see photo) are easily missed but with a little bit of patience they can be found in small numbers on the Meadow.

30/08/2010 4 Common Blue & 2 Small Coppers were recorded in the long grasses on the Dukes land.

08/09/2010 A garden in Elizabeth Crescent had 7 Small Tortoiseshell visiting which is an excellent count for a butterfly which was very difficult to find this time last year. Also in the same garden adding more colour 1 Red Admiral & 1 Peacock. JC





## Flora

The Chicken of the Woods fungi continued to grow on the willow & put on a superb display all month. (see photo below)

18/09/2010 Aster added a splash of colour to the Meadow with 2 or 3 clumps growing on the Meadow. Seed has no doubt spread down from the gardens bordering the Meadow.

## Operations

23/09/2010 The Big Dee Clean Up included the stretch of river from the racecourse to Sandy Lane. Unfortunately the Meadows were not included due to a shortage of volunteers & having the distinction of being the cleanest stretch of river in Chester. 4 Bags were collected from the Suspension Bridge to the Old Dee Bridge, 8 Bags & wooden panels from the Old Dee Bridge to Grosvenor bridge (Handbridge side) & 40 bags collected by BTCV from the Old Dee Bridge to the end of the racecourse (city side) 5 bags were also collected on Sandy Lane. (Information kindly supplied by Andy James Green Space Ranger).

**Andy Ingham (Meadows Log Recorder) 01244 677135**

