



FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 180

Late Spring 2011

Red Campion

(*Silene dioica*)

The delightful deep-pink flowers of red campion are a welcome sight in late spring to early summer, they come into bloom just as bluebells are going over, the combination of these two species together is striking. The flowers of red campion are borne on long, downy stems above a mat of oval, hairy leaves. It has to be said that the colour of red campion can vary considerably and white-flowered varieties are common. As if this state of affairs was not confusing enough, red campion also hybridises with the closely related white campion, *S. latifolia*, to produce a further range of colourful flowers. The plant grows easily from seed and makes an attractive garden plant.



Taxonomy is fun, learning the botanical names of plants and discovering their meaning opens up a whole new world. Red campion's genus name, *Silene* derives from, Silenus, the drunken, merry god of the woods in Greek mythology. Individual red campion plants may be male on which there are flowers with pollen producing anthers or female, with flowers containing seed-producing ovaries; red campion's specific name, *dioica*, comes from a Greek word meaning 'two houses' reflecting the plant's sexual dimorphism. The common name, campion derives from the word champion and was a boy's name of Middle English origin since when it has become a popular surname: Albert Campion is the fictional detective in Margery Allingham's murder mysteries, Edmund Campion was a Jesuit priest committed to the Tower of London in the reign of Elizabeth I, he acknowledged Elizabeth as the true Queen of England but refused to renounce his Catholic faith, sentenced to death as a traitor he was hung, drawn and quartered.

Bumblebees, butterflies and a number of moth species visit red campion for its nectar. The 24-spot ladybird is one of only two plant feeding species of ladybird found in the British Isles and red campion is one of its favourite food plants. This insect is a small orange-red and black beetle with 24 dark brown spots of various sizes making it easily identified; unlike most ladybirds it is slightly hairy.

Ron Iremonger

Chairman's Page



This newsletter follows hot on the heels of the last because we need to let you know about our events in June and early July. I hope that many of you will join us at the Garden Party and on the Butterfly Walk – there are more details elsewhere in the newsletter.

The weather continues to be fantastic and my umbrella and waterproof jacket have continued to stay unused in the hall. However the gardeners would like to see some rain and the sailors amongst us would like to see the wind change from easterly!

There are a number of people who regularly contribute to our newsletter and in this issue I would like to recognise the tremendous input from Andy Ingham. He regularly assembles the Meadows Log and arranges events such as the Dawn Chorus and Butterfly Walks. He has also written the back page article about the Meadows through the Seasons which is also now on our website.

Andy has also provided this photograph of an Orange Tip butterfly on the Meadows (see the Meadows Log). I guess that this is an ideal opportunity to remind you about this year's Photographic Competition the theme of which is also entitled 'The Meadows through the Seasons'. The closing date will be during October and prizes will be awarded at the AGM, so there is plenty of time for you to take lots of pictures!

We welcome contributions to the newsletter from members and their friends so please do put pen to paper and let me have something to include in one of our future issues.

Peter Hadfield 01244 341378 or peter.j.hadfield@gmail.com



Butterfly Walk on the Meadows

Sunday 03 July 2011 Start Time 11:00

You are invited to join us for a relaxed amble through the Meadow. We will hopefully find, identify & count the butterflies we see in the long grasses & wildflowers which flourish on the Meadow. No knowledge on identifying butterflies is required as this is quite easy to pick up. We will then pass on the information to the relevant conservation groups.

If you are interested in photography then bring your camera along and allow others to find the butterflies for you. Butterflies with their colourful appearance make great subjects to photograph.

Meeting point:
Bottoms Lane entrance to Meadow

For further details call Andy on 01244 677135

Important Dates for your Diary

Friends of the Meadows 2011 Events

Saturday 18 June
Garden Party

Sunday 03 July
Butterfly Walk
(see details on adjacent panel)

September (date to be confirmed)
Wine Tasting

Thursday 17 November
Annual General Meeting



April 2011

Birds

05/04 A male Brambling briefly joined 2 Chaffinches for "breakfast on the hoof" at a garden in Browns Lane. It was quickly off again presumably en route to Scandinavia for the summer. MP. Although the British Trust of Ornithology garden bird watch reported very high numbers visiting gardens during the winter this is indeed a very rare bird in our area.

08/04 Heron numbers on the weir have been high all month. At one sitting a total of 10 birds were counted. Is this a record for the weir? AM. Have you seen more by the weir at any one time?

09/04 The first Willow Warbler heard this spring was one on the Boughton side of the river. A further 2 birds were singing in Oak trees along the Water Co track.

10/04 At sunset a pair of Goosander fished below the weir. The male caught an Eel but refused to share the spoils with his mate.

13/04 2 Common Sandpiper skimmed low over the river along Sandy Lane. 3 were seen on the 22/04 in the same area.

16/04 There was a large fall of migrants around the Meadow with Blackcaps singing from almost every bush. They were joined by 2 Grasshopper Warbler reeling on Dukes land, a Reed Warbler on the marsh below the Handbridge Allotments & nearby a Whitethroat feeding in the small copse.

19/04 2 Swallows catching flies above the horses on Water Co land were surprisingly the first of the spring. Swallow numbers appear very low on our stretch of the river at the moment, let's hope they are late and a few more arrive soon.

2 Shelduck in flight above Handbridge was an unusual sight as they were some way off their breeding grounds nearer the estuary.

20/04 On the river the exotic looking male Mandarin duck ventured as far as the Groves. Nearby 3 Moorhen chicks were spotted swimming around after their nest had been swamped by a high tide. RH

22/04 3 Mandarin flew low over Bottoms Lane. Further down the track the distinctive rattle of a Lesser Whitethroat in the hedgerow.

26/04 Joining the Lesser Whitethroat were 3 reeling Grasshopper Warblers on the Meadow.

29/04 On its journey from Africa, a stunning male Whinchat paused briefly on the edge of the Handbridge marsh.

Butterflies

10/04 The warm spring sunshine brought out plenty of butterflies. 4 male & 1 female Orange Tip were cruising up & down Bottoms Lane track. They were joined by 2 Small Tortoiseshell, 1 Holly Blue & a Peacock.

Flora

16/04 The white flowers of the Bird Cherry burst open along Bottoms Lane track. Underneath the hedgerow both Bluebells & Garlic Mustard began to flower. Several Marsh Marigolds on the Handbridge marsh also started to show but were partly obscured by the willow growth.

Operations

The 6 horses on Water Co land disappeared towards the month's end presumably to graze fields with longer grass. This particular group of horses was very well behaved during their stay ignoring walkers who ventured on to Water Co land.

Fires are a constant threat in hot dry weather, 2 small fires occurred on the Meadow. A Gorse bush was set alight and nearby a 2 to 3 metre area of grass was also scorched.

Other activities

The Meadows cater for a wide variety of hobbies and interests. The more common ones being dog walking, rambling and picnics. A new one which can be added to the list is mole hill collection. A local collector out on the Meadow this month informs me the earth brought to the surface by the mole provides an excellent top soil for the garden border or seed bed.

Andy Ingham Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135

The Meadows through the Seasons

First impressions will lead you to believe not a lot exists on the Meadow apart from a large expanse of rough grassland grazed by a few cattle. However if you take a stroll along the River Dee, or cut through the centre of the Meadow you will come across a few of its more secretive inhabitants. What you find may well depend on the season, but a visit at anytime of the year offers the city dweller a chance to reconnect with nature.

Winter

In winter the water levels rise becoming very wet under foot creating perfect conditions for the Snipe to probe with its long bill. On approach the Snipe bursts from cover, rising high in a zig zag fashion usually disappearing out of sight further up the river. Occasionally the Snipe is joined by its larger heavier cousin the Woodcock. The Woodcock is largely nocturnal spending most of its time in cover but you may inadvertently disturb one from its resting place.

Other birds to be found in winter include the Meadow Pipit which rises from the long grass in front of you in a series of weak erratic wing beats. The larger Reed Bunting is also found on the Meadow and can often be seen flicking its tail nervously on top of one of the Gorse bushes. The Kestrel is often seen hovering above the Meadow before plunging into the grass for a mouse or vole. Other raptors to be seen regularly in winter include Buzzard & Peregrine Falcon.

Spring

In spring the meadow changes in character with wild flowers adding a splash of cover to the grass canvas. These include Speedwells, Pignut, Vetches and Birds Foot Trefoil. One of the first to flower is the Lady's Smock which is the larval food plant for the very distinctive Orange Tip butterfly.

If entering the Meadow from Bottoms Lane, you will be forgiven for thinking you are deep in the English Countryside. Blackthorn or Hawthorn will be in bloom and the resident birds will be joined by numerous migrant songsters. In the treetops you will find Blackcap, Chiffchaff, and Willow Warblers. In the hedgerow Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat and out on the Meadow adding their voices will be Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers. An early morning walk may also reward the visitor with a passing Wheatear, Whinchat or Redstart.

Summer

Impressive displays of Purple Loosestrife, Tansy, Meadowsweet, Water Speedwell and Ragged Robin are to be found along the path circling the meadow. The grasses and flowers support a whole host of insects including Red tailed Bumblebees, Grasshoppers, Burnet Moths and numerous Butterflies. Among the butterfly species adapted to this environment include large numbers of Small Skipper and Meadow Brown, with smaller numbers of Large Skipper, Small Copper and Common Blue. If the water levels remain high the ditches will be alive with Common frogs, Smooth Newts, Leeches and if you are very lucky you may catch sight of an elusive Grass Snake.

At the height of the summer Swallows & House Martins weave acrobatically through the avenue of willows at break neck speed catching flies centimetres above the ground.

Autumn

On a fresh autumn morning a walk through the centre of the Meadow you may well be surrounded by either a carpet of spiders, suspended in dew or on their frost spangled webs. On the perimeter of the Meadow leaves of Oak, Black Poplar, Hornbeam and Willow, Alder, Horse Chestnut begin to change colour, while in the hedgerow fruits of Rosehip, Hawthorn and Blackthorn ripen to provide a bumper crop for the winter thrushes.

The increased rainfall at this time of year creates the necessary conditions for Fungi. In recent years terrific displays of Chicken in the Woods fungi have provided great interest to both walkers and photographers alike.

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.