

FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 181

Summer 2011

Meadowsweet (Filipendula ulmaria)

Meadowsweet is a tall plant whose blooms grace our riversides and meadows throughout the months of July and August. Many species of insects are attracted to the tiny, creamy-white flowers of this plant that are in clusters known as cymes; each flower has long stamens giving a fuzzy appearance to the inflorescence.



The flowers of meadowsweet have a strong sweet smell, whilst the almond-like fragrance of the leaves is quite different; these characteristics made meadowsweet a favourite strewing herb for the floors of cottages in days of old. Meadowsweet was a favourite of Queen Elizabeth I who desired it above all other herbs in her chambers. Whilst the scent of flowers is sweet, the ridged, oval seeds smell less well, one of this plant's common names is 'courtship and matrimony'!

The name meadowsweet derives from the Anglo-Saxon word 'medu' for mead, a drink made from fermented honey. The Anglo-Saxons used meadowsweet to flavour their mead, the original name for this plant was

medesweet. Meadowsweet is one of the ingredients in a drink called 'Save' mentioned in Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale' the first of 'The Canterbury Tales' written in the 1380s.

Large quantities of seed are produced that can float for several weeks; this is an important means of colonising water systems. The plant also spreads by means of creeping rhizomes. Meadowsweet's generic name Filipendula is from the Latin for 'hanging by a thread' referring to the way the tuberous rhizomes hang from thin, fibrous roots. The specific name describes the resemblance of the leaves to those of elm. Meadowsweet is the food plant for the larvae of several moth species including, the Emperor moth, grey pug, Hebrew character, lime-speck pug, mottled beauty, and the satellite.

Meadowsweet has been used as a medicinal plant for thousands of years and was one of the three sacred herbs of the Druids. Like willow bark, meadowsweet contains acetylsalicylic acid and it was from this plant in the nineteenth century that the pharmaceutical company Bayer isolated the chemical, synthesised it and registered it as Aspirin. Aspirin is used to treat many conditions including, pain, fever, inflammatory diseases, strokes and heart attacks. It is one of the most widely used medications in the world, 40,000 tonnes being consumed every year.

Ron Iremonger

Chairman's Page



The holiday season is with us once again and I am busy getting the Summer newsletter ready for printing before our extended family head off for two weeks in Corfu. We are looking forward to relaxing by the pool, playing with our granddaughters and drinking a few glasses of wine.

Since the last newsletter we have had three successful events and short reports on the Dawn Chorus and Butterfly Walks are included on the back page. Many thanks to Andy Ingham for organising these walks and writing the reports.

I was particularly pleased that so many of you joined us for the Dawn Chorus, it was a very early start but everyone agreed that it was a good time to be on the Meadows!

Our Summer Garden Party was also a great success with the weather being warm if a little overcast. Younger members enjoyed the trampoline and table tennis while the older ones drank wine, chatted and consumed the good food supplied by Cafe.com. A big thanks to Richard and Helen Lydon for making us so welcome and allowing us to use their lovely garden.

Our next event is a Fair Trade Wine Tasting on Friday 16 September at Bishop Lloyds Palace which is the home of Chester Civic Trust in Watergate Row. This magnificent timber frame building was built for George Lloyd Bishop of Sodor and Man; he was also Bishop of Chester from 1604 – 1615. There are fine fireplaces and plasterwork in both rooms and it is a privilege to be able to hold one of our events in these wonderful surroundings. Please do support this event which will be promoting Fair Trade in Chester.

The last event of the year is as usual our Annual General Meeting in November and full details will be included in our next newsletter. Don't forget this year's Photographic Competition the theme of which is 'The Meadows through the Seasons' - the closing date is during October and prizes will be awarded at the AGM,

Finally I am pleased to note that after a long absence the cattle are back grazing on the Meadows!

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

A Green Cornfield

The earth was green, the sky was blue:
I saw and heard one sunny morn
A skylark hang between the two,
A singing speck above the corn;

A stage below, in gay accord,
White butterflies danced on the wing,
And still the singing skylark soared,
And silent sank and soared to sing.

The cornfield stretched a tender green
To right and left beside my walks;
I knew he had a nest unseen
Somewhere among the million stalks.

And as I paused to hear his song
While swift the sunny moments slid,
Perhaps his mate sat listening long,
And listened longer than I did.

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Important Dates for your Diary

Friends of the Meadows The Remaining 2011 Events

Friday 16 September
Fair Trade Wine Tasting
at Bishop Lloyds Palace
at 7.30pm

Thursday 17 November
at 7.30pm
Annual General Meeting
at St Marys Church Hall



May and June 2011

Birds

01/05 A migrating female Wheatear paused briefly to feed on the Meadow. It flew to the top of a Hawthorn bush, clearly showing her distinctive white rump.

The usual view of a Common Sandpiper along our stretch of the river is a fleeting glimpse of a bird flying low over the water. So it was a pleasure to see 3 birds, tails bobbing and happily feeding in the shallow waters opposite Deva Terrace.

07/05 The Swifts finally arrived with 5 birds descending on Handbridge. A Garden Warbler was singing on the bank below Andrews Crescent with a further bird singing high up in the trees along Bottoms lane track.

31/05 Probably the most unusual sightings of the year so far were the 4 male Peacocks perched on top of the terraced housing in Percy Road, Handbridge. After about 10 minutes the birds took flight and were never seen again. There are 1 or 2 feral populations of Peacock living wild in this country, but the most likely sources for this mini invasion are Chester Zoo or the Dukes Estate. RC

10/06 A Grasshopper Warbler burst into its reeling song on the Meadow side of Bottoms Lane track & probably had a nest somewhere nearby.

25/06 2 Great Crested Grebe continued to be seen fishing on the river. One desperate fish jumped out of the water to avoid being caught. However, the Grebe quickly moved in for the kill.

Butterflies

08/05 1 Male Common Blue was on the Meadow at the lower end of Bottoms Lane track. It was joined by 2 Small Copper.

04/06 A number of Large Skipper started to appear on the Meadow for the first time this year. Approximately 10 were favouring the Red Clover.

16/06 The first Meadow Browns started to appear on the wing & they were joined by a couple of Burnet Moths.

26/06 After a spell of wind & rain, butterflies on the Meadow had become a little difficult to find. So the return of a little sunshine was very welcome. Enjoying the sunshine were 4 Small Skippers, 1 Large Skipper 1 Common Blue, 2 Comma and an increasing number of Small Tortoiseshell & Meadow Brown.

Flora

21/05 A carpet of white Pignut was an impressive sight and covered a very large section of the Meadow. Flag Iris started to flower in both the enclosure opposite Sandy Lane & also in the ditches.

25/06 Those with an eye for colour will have noticed the white carpet gradually being replaced by a predominantly red one, with Sorrel being a key contributor. Meadow Sweet also started to flower in great swathes along the riverbank. One area favoured by the Meadow Sweet was the bank which had been cleared of willow in the early Spring.

Undesirable Activities

16/06 Fire on the Meadow is an increasing concern. A large area of grass about the size of a tennis court was scorched by flames. The local community police are aware of the problem, promising to make regular high visibility patrols and remove anybody causing a nuisance.

Another rising problem and forbidden on the Meadow is camping. For good reason too as it appears the modern camper is unwilling to take their tent and their belongings home with them. Not only is a strewn tent unsightly, but it is also a hazard to wildlife. One large pop up tent was removed from a ditch on the Meadow.

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Meadows Log continued.....

Desirable Activities

24/06 The Deva Triathlon was again staged by the River Dee and involved a 1500m swim, a 40km bike ride to Marford and a 10 km run along the banks of the river. Any Friends of the Meadows wishing to take part in next year's Triathlon should keep an eye on the website www.chestertri.org.uk for further details!

03/07 The annual Rotary raft race was staged on the Meadow. This year's theme The Good, The Bad and the Downright Ugly drew a large crowd judging by the number of people we saw while on the Butterfly Walk.

Andy Ingham Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135

Dawn Chorus Walk 14 May 2011



19 "Friends of the Meadows" descended on Bottoms Lane track at 5:00am to hear the dawn chorus. We were initially greeted by Blackbirds singing from the rooftops. Further down the track we heard the song of a Garden Warbler, the explosive sound of the Wren and the metronomic call of the Chiffchaff.

A highlight of the morning included the delightful scene of 2 Great Crested Grebes fishing on the mist covered waters of the Dee. Further excitement was had soon after with the discovery of a Whinchat pausing to feed on the Meadow. We all had good views of this delightful little bird before it continued on with its migration.

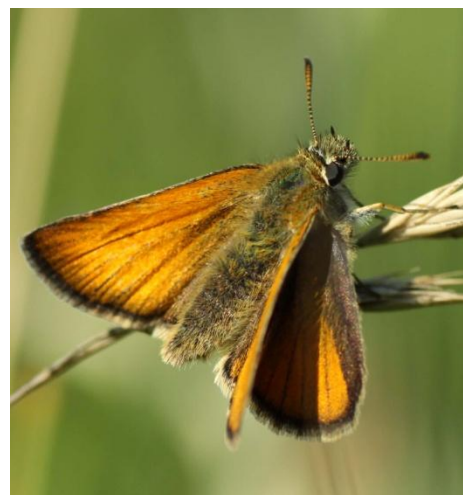
We rounded off our enjoyable morning watching Blue Tits feeding their young in one of the bird boxes put up in the previous year.

Butterfly Walk 03 July 2011

On a warm summers morning a group of 10 "Friends of the Meadows" gathered at the entrance to Bottoms Lane track for what turned out to be a relaxing amble through the long grasses and colourful flowers on the Meadow.

A good number of butterflies were enjoying the sunshine. Small Skipper and Meadow Brown were both plentiful. We also found a handful of Small Tortoiseshell and a couple of Large Skipper. In addition we also saw a few 6 Spot Burnet Moths, 1 each of Harlequin & 24 Spot Ladybirds.

Although one or two butterflies failed to put in an appearance we all enjoyed the walk. I for one certainly enjoyed the chatter of a very enthusiastic and knowledgeable group



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.