

FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 185

Late Spring 2012

Chiffchaff



The chiffchaff is a small, insectivorous leaf-warbler with dull, greenish upper parts and white to buff under parts, it also has a cute, black eye-stripe. This bird's name is onomatopoeic referring to its 'chiff-chaff' song. In Spring, birdsong is an exclusive male preserve being used to advertise its presence to females and to let other males know, '**This is my territory. Keep out**'. The chiffchaff's scientific name is *Phylloscopus collybita*, its genus name *Phylloscopus* comes from the Greek 'phylon' for leaf and 'scopeo', to see, as these little birds spend most of their time flitting about amongst the leaves of trees in search of prey. Many species of warbler are difficult to tell apart; Gilbert White was one of the first to separate the chiffchaff, willow warbler and wood warbler by their songs and detailed this in his book, 'The Natural History of Selborne' in 1789.

The chiffchaff over winters in the Mediterranean and North Africa, its return to the British Isles is a sure sign of Spring. I first heard the chiffchaff on March 22nd whilst walking our four year old Labrador, 'Junior', along the Severn Way in the Doctor's Field.

When a female enters a male's territory he uses a slow, butterfly-like flight as part of the courtship ritual. A male's core breeding territory may be only 20 metres across defended fiercely against other males and even dangerous predators such as cats and stoats; the feeding territory extends to an area up to 200 metres across. Nest building and the rearing of chicks is carried out exclusively by the female; low down, in dense vegetation, she builds a domed nest of dead leaves and grass, lining it with feathers. The clutch consists of up to seven eggs, incubation lasts about 14 days, brooding and feeding a further 14 days until the chicks fledge.

Ron Iremonger

Notes from the Chair



As I write the Notes for our Late Spring Newsletter, the weather has indeed begun to feel warmer more Spring-like! Before the cold and wet of April, I took a walk along the meadows in the sun of March and was met by an inquisitive horse – see the photo below! A more recent walk in the May sunshine on the Meadows showed that the trees we planted in the winter are doing well. Our earlier fears that a threatened drought would mean us having to water them with river water are thankfully allayed.

I'd like to express a big thank you to Andy Ingham who led a very early morning Dawn Chorus Walk on 5th May. Although only a handful of people managed to get out of bed to join him, it was very successful and many birds were heard and spotted. However, I was enjoying the comfort and luxury of a spa hotel that weekend, but I promised that I'd make it next year!

We have another event coming up shortly. In response to a suggestion made at last year's AGM, we have organised a Wildflower Walk on Sunday 1st July. This will be led by expert botanist Jack Swan, so please do come and join us. If you want to know your Purple Loosestrife from Ragged Robin this is a great opportunity. More details below, or look out for the posters in the Meadows Notice Boards.

Looking ahead, we are also planning a special event for our AGM on 16th November, which this year will take place at St Mary's Centre. Watch this space for more details...

We continue to receive very positive comments about our Newsletter and thanks again to Peter Hadfield who prepares and edits it. I'd like to encourage Friends of the Meadows members to contribute, whether an article or just a short letter or comment. We want to hear from you!

Meanwhile, I hope you all have a lovely Spring and Summer.

Rachel Cross
01244 679141 or email rachelm.cross@btinternet.com



Wildflower Walk on the Meadows

Sunday 01 July 2011 Start Time 2:00pm



You are invited to join us for an amble through the Meadows accompanied by expert botanist Jack Swan.

We will hopefully find and identify the many wildflowers that grow along Bottom's Lane and in and around the meadow and record what we find to pass on to relevant conservation groups. This is free of charge!

Meeting point:
Bottoms Lane entrance to Meadow

For further details call Rachel on 01244 679141



April/May

05/04 Herons are a common sight standing motionless on the fast flowing weir. It is quite possible to see 4 or 5 of them here at any one time, but an exceptional count of 31 Herons were observed coming in to feed in the fading light.ST

13/04 The faint sound of the first returning Willow Warbler drifted across gardens in Handbridge.

16/4 2 Swallows skimming low over the river & single Sand Martin flying purposefully over the Handbridge marsh were the first of the hirundinidae family. A Willow Warbler with an identity problem sang in trees by the west end entrance to the Meadow. The song started off in conventional Willow Warbler fashion but ended with a few chiff- chaff notes thrown in as well.

17/04/2012 A pause in the rain allowed the emergence of Orange Tip & Speckled Wood butterflies in the area below the Handbridge allotments.

21/04 Below the Handbridge allotments the first Lesser Whitethroat of the year called from deep within flowering Blackthorn. It revealed its location as it rose to catch an insect above its head.

22/04 The first House Martins to arrive back were a small flock feeding on the river in front of Riverside Court. In the same vicinity a pair of Great Crested Grebes fished the river.BN

24/04 Beyond the river garden of the Red House a Great Crested Grebe was discovered sitting on a nest. The nest was floating in the shallow water of an overhanging willow. A little further away the male gathered additional nesting material.

27/04 Common Sandpiper pass by the Meadow each spring in small numbers. The first birds to pause here were 3 along the sandy Lane stretch of the river. The area was also alive with 50 plus Swallows, half a dozen House Martins & 2 Sand Martins feeding after the deluge. A terrific sight! TD

27/04 A lone Swift sped past Andrews Crescent. The first record of the year.VG

05/05/ There was no sign of the Great Crested Grebe nest. It may have been predated by a fox, swept away by rising water or the wash from a boat. EG Grebes normally nest on calm lakes surrounded by waterside vegetation so the odds were heavily stacked against this pair.

28/04 The first Sedge & Reed Warblers of the spring were singing on the Handbridge marsh. Nearby a Common Whitethroat sang from the hedgerow.

13/05 Spotted Flycatchers were once a common sight in gardens around the Meadow, but are extremely rare these days. So to see one busy feeding in the dappled shade of a Sycamore tree along Bottoms lane track was a complete surprise.

24/05 The first prolonged spell of warm weather for well over a month encouraged the first Small Copper butterfly to take to the wing by the west end river entrance to the Meadow.

24/05 Blue Tit fledglings entered the outside world from the safe haven of a nest box in Cross Hey. On its maiden flight, one young bird landed on top of a parked van before flying straight in to a window. The dazed youngster sat on the sill for a while gathering its thoughts. Its next move was far wiser this time flying into a bush where the adult was calling frantically.

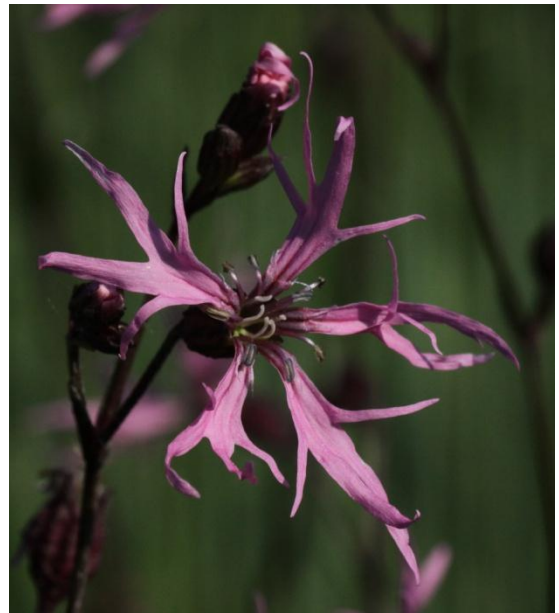
26/05 2 Small Copper (see photo), Green Veined White & Orange Tip butterflies were all enjoying the morning sunshine on the Meadow. However Skipper & and to a lesser extent Common Blue butterflies were still noticeable by their absence.

27/05 Last spring most of the ditches were dry on the Meadow. After all the rain over the last 2 months they were full to the brim and teeming with tadpoles. 4 Common Blue Damselflies also weaved their way daintily through the waterside vegetation along with a more direct flight of a possible Black tailed Skimmer Dragonfly.

Bordering the Meadow, Ragged Robin was in flower on Dukes land (see photo). At least 15 of these delightful plants have benefited from the rain & also the grass cutting in the autumn.

28/5 Concerns were raised about the health of the foal born the previous month on Water Co Land. The foal had looked very lethargic & had spent a considerable period lying down. The owner was contacted and a prompt visit to the foal made.

Andy Ingham
Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135



Dawn Chorus Walk - 5 May

4 Friends of the Meadow met at Bottoms Lane gather on a cold but dry morning to hear the dawn chorus. A Wren was singing in the big oak tree by the main entrance at Bottoms Lane. Further down the track we heard the rattling Lesser Whitethroat, and the metronomic song of the Chiffchaff. On the Meadow we added Common Whitethroat and Willow Warbler singing in the avenue of trees. With the thought of breakfast on our minds we headed back through the centre of the Meadow. Here we heard the reeling of a Grasshopper Warbler.

As we headed back up Bottoms lane track confusion reigned over the song of a Warbler which I incorrectly called as a Blackcap. I have more than a sneaking suspicion it may now have been Garden Warbler as one was singing in the same spot a couple of days later. So I apologise to Val and the others for that one!

We ended our enjoyable walk with the same Wren proclaiming its presence as loudly as when we had first set off at 5am.

Andy Ingham