



# FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 186  
2012

Summer

## Buttercups



Throughout the summer months buttercups adorn the Chester Meadows, specks of gold in a sea of green. In the British Isles there are seventeen species of buttercups and closely related swearwords belonging to the genus *Ranunculus*, a name derived from the Latin, *rana*, a frog, alluding to the damp meadows where certain species are to be found in the company of frogs. Most buttercups possess acrid and poisonous juices containing the glucoside *ranunculin* which is why, in a grazed meadow, buttercups stand alone, unmolested. The genus *Ranunculus* includes the aquatic water-crowfoots whose floating tresses display a mass of delightful white flowers in high summer and that harbinger of spring, lesser celandine, the poet Wordsworth's favourite flower.

Three common species of buttercup found on the Meadows look similar and are often confused: the bulbous buttercup has reflexed sepals and a bulbous base, the creeping buttercup is more spreading and produces runners that root at the nodes and the meadow buttercup, tallest of the three with finely-cut stem leaves. During a walk between Eccleston Ferry and Iron Bridge I once found an interesting member of the genus, wood goldilocks that closely resembles a slender meadow buttercup. The flowers of goldilocks often have a bird-pecked appearance as some of its petals may be distorted or even absent. Goldilocks is interesting in that it exhibits 'apomixis', the ability to form seeds asexually without pollination or fertilisation; each group of genetically identical plants or clones are often recognised as separate species or 'microspecies'. Dandelion, small reed, ladies mantle, sea-lavender, white beam and bramble also exhibit apomixis.

The 'cup' of buttercup is probably a corruption of the Anglo-Saxon word 'cop' meaning head, thus the original name may have been butterhead. Generations of young children have picked buttercups; thrust them under a friend's chin and on seeing a golden reflection on the skin declared this was a sure sign that they liked butter. The appellation, buttercup did not become commonly used until the late eighteenth century, prior to this there were many local names such as goldweed and soldiers buttons.

Ron Iremonger

## Notes from the Chair



The holiday season is starting and finally the weather seems to be summery! Do you remember the talk of drought back in the early Spring? When we planted up the trees on the meadows in Winter we actually thought that we might have to water them from the river! However, warmer and hopefully drier, weather is with us as I write this.

Since the last newsletter we had our Wildflower Walk on the meadows at the beginning of July. It was very pleasing to see a turnout of 16 people who enjoyed a lovely amble around the meadows in the company of botanist Jack Swan. And the sun shone for us! Several of those who came also demonstrated their own knowledge and expertise and contributed to the recording of over 70 plant species, including some lesser-spotted orchids. We avoided the cattle now grazing on the meadows, but by the following

week, the cattle had decided to munch away all the orchids, a reminder that the maintenance of the meadows continues to be a balancing act between all those who use them.



At our last meeting, the committee met with Justin Dyke, the Greenspace Ranger and we discussed a possible management plan for the meadows. It is clear that the Council will be unable to fund such a thing, so we are looking to submit our own plan.

In anticipation that the weather will remain good, we are planning a Meadows Barbeque to take place on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> September. Andy James, Greenspace Ranger, will be providing the cooking equipment and the invitation is open to any of our members and their guests to bring their food and drink and enjoy the afternoon.

The last event of the year is our Annual General Meeting which this year will be held at St Mary's Centre on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> November. We are planning special Cheshire-themed events to follow the AGM, including a quiz, food and drink. Full details will be in our next newsletter. Put the date in your diary!

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## June/July

Late news for May- A further attempt was made by the pair of Great Crested Grebe to breed with the discovery of a bird sitting on another nest. The first nest had succumbed to the elements in early May. (DL) It appears this latest attempt may well have ended in the same way as no further reports have been received.

15/06 Oystercatcher have become a regular sight and sound in recent months with one or two birds regularly flying over. 6 birds in flight over Queens Park may indicate a further movement away from their usual coastal haunts. TD

17/06 Trees planted in the winter have appeared to benefit from the rain; Lime, Ash and Oak all doing well. The only casualty so far is a single Aspen Tree however the 3 Alder's were showing some signs of stress with the leaves on the lower branches turning brown. Hopefully this is a temporary decline as the upper branches continue to look healthy

Perched on one of the tree guards were 2 juvenile Whitethroats patiently waiting for a parent bird to feed them. They didn't have to wait long as the adult flew from the long grass below with its beak full of insects.

It is interesting to see the regeneration of plants in a small section of the Meadow that was scorched by fire last summer. Both Bedstraw and Common Skullcap appear to have benefited from the blaze and also the damp conditions this year.

23/06 Red Poppies flowered in good numbers by the water mound. Movement of soil by Dee Valley Water staff doing repair work in the winter inadvertently created ideal conditions for the seed to germinate.

Finding butterflies this spring and summer has not been easy. A single Large Skipper below Andrews Crescent and a Small Skipper by the Handbridge marsh was a low tally.

25/06 A break in the rain allowed a few Meadow Brown butterflies to take to the wing and a single male Brimstone butterfly which flew purposefully over Bottoms Lane track.

A report of a Bee using a nest box in Andrews Crescent is likely to be that of the UK's newest Bee. (Mrs D) The Tree Bee was first recorded in 2001 on the Wiltshire/ Hampshire border. Since then it has moved rapidly north and has now been recorded as far as Scotland. It likes to nest in cavities and is most obvious in May and June when it visits gardens. A 2<sup>nd</sup> brood is also active in late summer. It is one of the easier bees to identify with its brown thorax, black abdomen and white tail. This photo is of a Tree Bee in Cross Hey.



01/07 2 juvenile Siskins were spotted feeding on Nyger seed in Anne's Way for several minutes. Siskins generally nest in coniferous woodland so it seems unlikely that they have fledged any nearer than Delamere Forest or North Wales.(TD)

07/07 A female Common Blue joined the increasing number of Meadow Brown butterflies on the Meadow. Nearby it was also good to see the Little Owl reappearing after a long period of absence.



Where the Common Spotted Orchids were found to be growing the previous week (see wildflower walk and photo) they had all but one been eaten by 30 ravenous cattle. This raises concerns about the optimum time for introducing cattle if we are to increase the number and range of wildflowers that grow on the Meadow.

A field bordering the Meadow benefited from a late autumn cut with masses of wild flowers now in bloom. These included Betony, Trefoils, Meadow Sweet, Yellow Loosestrife and also the lollipop headed Great Burnet. (see photo)

14/07 A few Common Sandpiper pass by the Meadow each spring. A single bird pausing to rest on the Sandy Lane slipway was probably a bird on its return journey south - a sign that autumn migration has already started.

21/07 A female Goosander was observed bathing by the landing stage, droplets of water cascading off the birds feathers sparkled in the early morning light.



Comma Butterfly



Great Burnet

23/07 A Reed Warbler was again heard singing along Bottoms Lane Track and have possibly nested in this area. 2 Comma butterflies were also enjoying the sunshine on the Meadow. (see photo).

**Andy Ingham Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135**

## **BBQ on the Meadows**

**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 at 2pm**

**Bring Your Own - Cook Your Own!**

Join us with Andy James, Greenspace Ranger, for an informal barbecue on the Meadows. All barbecue cooking equipment will be provided with gazebos erected!

This is a great chance to mix and meet and have fun in a lovely setting.

Find us by the Ferry Landing Stage from 2pm