

# FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 191

Summer 2013

## Honeysuckle

*Lonicera periclymenum*

There is hardly a flower of our hedgerows that delights us more by its fragrance than does honeysuckle; the scent is at its strongest at night to attract pollinating hawk moths that can detect the plant a quarter of a mile away. Samuel Pepys, the seventeenth century Diarist, called honeysuckle 'the trumpet flower' whose bugles 'blew scent instead of sound'. Each flower has a long tube with a four-lobed upper lip and a tongue-like lower lip. The flower tubes of honeysuckle are often half full of nectar making them popular with night flying moths whose tongues are long enough to reach into the tubes. Pollen bearing stamens extend beyond the mouth of the yellow, orange and white flowers. Whilst feeding on honeysuckle's rich source of nectar, visiting moths transfer pollen from anthers at the tip of one flower's stamens to the equally obtrusive stigmas of other flowers. Once pollinated flowers deepen in colour and later in the year, rich clusters of round, crimson berries are produced.

Honeysuckle is content to creep around at ground level until it finds a suitable tree, it then demonstrates its true growth-habit as a robust, entwining climber reaching up to twenty feet into the canopy. So tight are honeysuckle's coils the plant can deform the trunk of saplings, ash or hazel marked by these coils make interesting walking sticks. The coils of honeysuckle follow the Sun in a clockwise direction and long ago the plant was given the name 'woodbind' or 'woodbine'. Both Spencer and Shakespeare also call this plant by the even older name of 'caprifole' or 'goat-leaf' as like the goat, honeysuckle climbs over craggy and almost inaccessible places. Honeysuckle has similar old names in other European countries, 'chevre-feuille' in France and 'caprifoglio' in Italy. Shakespeare mentions honeysuckle in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' when Titania says to Bottom:

'Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms...  
So doth the woodbine, the sweet honeysuckle,  
Gently entwine... the barked fingers of the elm.'



Adam Lonicera was a German Physician who practised in Frankfurt and in 1555 published a book on Natural History; in 1753, Linnaeus named honeysuckle after him. The Genus *Lonicera* contains about 180 species, 100 of which are native to China. Wood cuttings from the species *L. tartarica* native to Eurasia are sold as cat toys; the wood contains nepetalactone, an ingredient found in catnip. Cats react to the scent of the wood and will paw, lick or rub against it.

Honeysuckle is often the first plant to come into leaf, sometimes the buds burst open in December. We then have the powerful evening scent in summer followed by clusters of crimson berries in autumn.

**Ron Iremonger**

## Notes from the Chair



Since the last newsletter we had our Wildflower Walk on the meadows on 9<sup>th</sup> June which is now proving to be a popular annual event!. It was very pleasing to see a turnout of 14 people who again enjoyed a lovely amble around the meadows in the sunshine. Botanist Jack Swan was at hand to identify all the plants we saw as well as some of the birds and insects. We only spotted four species of butterfly which were conspicuous by their absence this year.

At the end of June, Andy Ingham and I involved ourselves in Big Dee Day – The Invasion and walked along the meadows riverside to pull up Himalayan balsam, an invasive non-native plant. Although there was none on the Earl's Eye, we soon found patches further upstream and did our best to remove it all, being helped by the horses! Finally, we made our way to Heronbridge to find a much larger site to work on. We did what we could but really needed more help. If anyone is interested in future events like this, please get in touch!



On 4<sup>th</sup> July, I gave a talk to the Local History Group in Chester on the History of the Meadows.

I was very thankful for all the notes left by Tim Finch on our web pages at <http://www.friendsofthemeadows.org.uk/> which helped me to produce something informative and well received by the group.

The Management Plan for the Meadows is still ongoing. A biodiversity survey will take place, arranged through Cheshire Wildlife Trust, which will serve to inform the Plan. We are working closely with Paul Taylor, our Greenspace Ranger who has managed to collect documents going back to 1997 including a tree report on the large willows that were pollarded, which also has recommendations to be taken into account. He is also arranging a meeting with Natural England to discuss the management of the river bank which, with the river, is a SSSI and get some advice on the larger management of the site.

Events being planned to the rest of the year include a Bat Walk, another meadows barbeque (see below) and our Annual General Meeting which will again be held at St Mary's Centre on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> November. This year we have arranged for a talk by the Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

Enjoy the summer, and I hope to see you at one or all of our future events!

**Rachel Cross**

01244 679141 or email [rachelm.cross@btinternet.com](mailto:rachelm.cross@btinternet.com)

### **BBQ on the Meadows**

Saturday 7th September 2013 at 2pm

Bring Your Own - Cook Your Own!

Join us 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



## May, June and July 2013

04/05 A Grasshopper Warbler reeling on the Meadow was the first record for this spring. Due to its skulking behaviour and reluctance to sing in cold wet weather this bird may well have been in residence for some time. Nearby on the Handbridge marsh at least 4 Reed Warbler were chattering away in the reed bed.

06/05 The first Orange Tip to grace the Meadow this year was almost a month later than its first appearance last year.

11/05 One or two Whinchat stop to pause on the Meadow every spring and quickly move on. This year's first Whinchat was a female happily feeding in the centre of the Meadow.

13/05 Another female Whinchat perched on a sapling in roughly the same area as on the 11/05. Was this the same bird?

In the air, 100+ House Martin were swooping in from every angle and gorging on insect life.

An unusual sight, 2 Shelducks flying low over the grounds of Queens Park high school.

28/05 22 Cattle were added to the Meadow.

04/06 Along the swollen ditches a number of Damselflies took to the air. Those which paused to rest were identified as Azure Damselflies. Nearby a loan Small Copper butterfly was also taking advantage of the rare ray of sun.

08/06 One or 2 Blue Tailed Damselflies started to appear alongside the increasing number of Azure Damselflies.

09/06 The first Common Blue butterfly of the summer was an excellent find before the Wildflower walk. **JS**

15/06/2013 The Mute Swans have failed to breed successfully in recent years so it was a complete surprise when one of the eggs hatched. **DW. The** cygnet was also seen on the river on the 26/06. **RC**



Common Blue Damselfly



Cygnet

21/06 5 Spikes of the Common Spotted Orchid were again flowering on the Meadow. **TD** Those of you that attended the wildflower walk last year will know where they grow.

29/06 Common Blue Damselflies are similar to the Azures but have slightly more blue on their thorax. This individual posed for a photo while eating a light snack. See *photo*

06/07 Large Skipper are usually out and about on the Meadow before their close relatives, the Small Skipper. Not so this year, 2 Small Skipper flitted through the long grasses by the gate at the lower end of Bottoms Lane track.

13/ 07 A Large Skipper eventually appeared alongside the 15 or so Small Skipper.

18/07 A Southern Hawker Dragonfly patrolled up and down Bottoms lane track. This dragonfly is very inquisitive by nature and this individual was no less so, checking out anyone walking to and from the Meadow. Its wing beats could be heard as it passed close by.



Ringlet



Sedge Warbler

27/07 It was a glorious butterfly day – well it was before the rain swept in. A walk along the boundary of the Meadow at the foot of Elizabeth Crescent gardens produced an incredible count of butterflies. Well over 70 Gatekeeper feeding on bramble, at least 30 Meadow Brown and Small Skipper, 20 plus Green Veined White, 4 Small Copper ,2 Peacock, 2 Speckled Wood, 1 beautiful male Common Blue, 1 Comma and best of all 1 RINGLET. Seasoned Lepidoptera watchers will know how rare a sight this is on the Meadow. Let's hope this species becomes a breeding butterfly.

**Andrew Ingham**

Meadows Log recorder 01244 677135

**Bat Walk on the Meadows  
Tuesday 10 September 7.30pm**

Come and join us for a twilight bat walk with local expert Julia Drage. Using bat detectors, you'll learn to locate and identify the nocturnal charm of our Meadows bats. With luck and good weather, these will include Pipistrelle, and Daubenton's bats. Unfortunately places are limited so booking is essential.

The event is subject to good weather only- Bats don't fly in the rain!

**To book a place call Andy on 07508246910.**

## House Martins and Swallows in Sandy Lane

Here in Sandy Lane we are very fortunate to have house martins and swallows nesting on the older houses. Some of the nests are on houses where everyone can see them. Others are more hidden behind walls and in open porches well out of sight of the public's gaze.



House Martins nesting at the sailing club in Sandy Lane

One such householder has reported to me a lovely little episode he has recently witnessed. His young house martins have been sitting on the guttering outside his conservatory along with baby house sparrows waiting for food. The house martin parents zoom in with beakfulls of insects and proceed to feed all the gaping mouths, house sparrows included. This to me is nature at its most delightful.

Although foxes are not my favourite animals a very small vixen and one little cub sometimes play in my garden. They have a purple ball and a chunk of polystyrene for their toys. My vegetable patch has suffered from their fun and games as the sweetcorn and shallots have been flattened although with a few sticks pushed in between the plants they are recovering reasonably well.

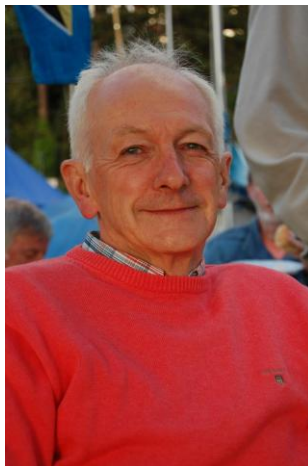
Over-the years the foxes have brought toys from other people's gardens to play with in mine and for years there was a scruffy little stuffed elephant that regularly put in an appearance. I don't know where they found it but no doubt it was once a treasured child's toy but I like the fact it finished its time being a plaything for wild animals. They can be quite charming at times. I'm not so keen on the parcels of chips they abandoned under bushes after scavenging on Sandy Lane car park but, with nature, you can't pick and choose.

I put apples out for the blackbirds. I cut them in half and a local male and female blackbird comes to feed on them. Unfortunately the grey squirrels like them too and there is nothing the blackbirds can do to prevent their apples being taken even whilst they try to eat them. I find though if I wait until lunchtime to put them out the squirrels have disappeared and the birds can have their fill. The blackbirds don't eat the skin but next morning that too has gone so squirrels, I conclude, must be less fussy.

It looks as though it will be a bumper year for fruit. My sister has a plum tree which is laden and my very old apple tree has a good crop too. The bees must have done their job well. There were lots of bumble bees about very early in the season as soon as a glimpse of sun came out and the first flowers were blooming. I very much welcome them.

**Rita Hibbitt**

## Obituary - Tim Finch



Tim from a very early age was fascinated by water. While still at school, a sailing holiday on the Broads, confirmed this strong attraction to water and specifically sailing. Once he left school he joined Pilkington Sailing Club, whose members sailed on the St Helens reservoir. Here he began to crew regularly in an Enterprise dinghy. Another member of the club was Jacky, also crewing in an Enterprise. One day Tim's helm had a bad back and decided not to sail in the then windy conditions. Tim asked Jacky to crew for him. Jacky, said 'Yes' without hesitation. There then followed their courting, to use an old fashioned word. Tim finally popped the question and this proposal led to a happy union which, as we know, lasted for many years. Even when married, sailing was not forgotten. Tim moved from Crossfields to Unilever Research at Port Sunlight. They travelled to the Southport Sailing Club for a while but then moved to Chester Sailing and Canoeing Club.

The latter was considered safer for Peter, their small son, who was now crewing for Tim, again in an Enterprise. Later on Jacky re-assumed the role of crew and in this combination they sailed regularly at Chester in their Enterprise, in Enterprise Opens and in Enterprise Nationals. There were also regular visits to Bassenthwaite in the Lake District for 10 days of continuous sailing. Tim was Club Secretary at Chester for many years and also became Commodore. One particular interest was to encourage young sailors into the Junior Enterprise racing circuit. Once Tim retired he continued to work for the Enterprise Association and ended up as Vice Commodore.

Tim's career did not follow the usual route of degree then industry. When he left school he joined Crossfields then, with a series of day releases and a final scholarship, he became a Graduate of the Royal Institute of Chemistry and a member of the Royal Society of Chemists. After 6 years at Crossfields he moved to Unilever Research in Port Sunlight. Tim brought significant intellectual qualities to his work on polymers in the division that dealt with how to make people and fabrics clean and sweet smelling. So successful was this division with Tim as its head that he submitted a total of 30 patents and wrote over a 100 reports. Besides being an outstanding chemist, his other qualities were more to do with managing his staff. He was able to recognize hidden talent and bring it on. He was also closely concerned with the development of projects overseas under the Overseas Research and Application Centre (ORAC).

Tim applied the same direct and enthusiastic approach to his many other interests, to his cycling, tennis, hockey and garden and his love of St Helens Rugby League Club, of which, with Peter, he was an avid supporter. When he retired he brought the same enthusiasm and detailed study to the Friends of the Meadows in Chester. Because the Meadows adjoin that part of the Dee, where the sailors and rowers are active, it seemed sensible to have sailors and rowers involved in the organization. Tim was Secretary and while he was in this position he researched the History of the Meadows and presented this as a slide show at the 2011 AGM.

As I have described, Tim was both active within the family and in a multitude of interests outside the family. He will be sorely missed by his wife Jacky, his son Peter and daughter in law Paula, his father and all his friends in the local and national organisations.

**Hamish Collin**