



FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 192

Autumn 2013

The Mole

'The mole had been working very hard all morning, spring-cleaning his little home.' These opening words from Kenneth Grahame's 'The Wind In The Willows' endear the reader to 'the little gentleman in black velvet'. You may think differently should a mole take residence beneath your carefully manicured lawn and proceed to create volcano-shaped molehills hither and thither. We are content when moles confine their fossorial lifestyle to the Chester Meadows.



The mole is one of Europe's most common small mammals and yet very few people have observed the living animal. Moles are highly specialised for a subterranean lifestyle with broad spade-like forelimbs and muscular shoulders behind which is an almost cylindrical body ending in a club-shaped tail, usually held erect. The mole's tunnel system is an elaborate network of burrows. When the animal first colonises an area it creates a series of shallow tunnels, 5-10 cm deep, which provide it with prey items and protection. Once they have established a territory they begin to create a deeper more permanent maze of tunnels at several levels to one metre below ground level; it is the spoil from this deeper system we see as molehills. A mole may move about 6 kg of soil in 20 minutes, the equivalent of a human moving more than 4 tonnes in the same time! Moles are solitary and aggressive creatures, only getting together during the brief mating season. A female mole builds a subterranean nest in a specially enlarged chamber which she lines with a variety of materials, dry grasses, oak leaves, newspaper and lamb's wool. After a gestation period of four weeks the female gives birth to an average of four pink and hairless little ones. Following a diet of their mother's milk, the young will be fully grown and ready to establish their own territory at nine weeks old.

The mole's elongated head tapers to a hairless, fleshy, pink snout that is richly supplied with blood-vessels and highly sensitive to odours, changes in temperature and humidity. The nasal region also has a bunch of touch-sensitive bristles. The mole's sense of smell is the most important of these attributes for locating prey. Moles are insectivorous eating, beetles, millipedes, slugs and snails although their favourite prey are earthworms. Moles need to eat up to 50 grams of worms each day, about half their body-weight. Sometimes moles will establish larders, one such cache contained 1,500 earthworms. Moles are in turn eaten by buzzards, herons, foxes, weasels, owls, cats and dogs but the greatest threat to them is from man who relentlessly persecutes these creatures for the economic damage they cause to agricultural land.

Ron Iremonger

Notes from the Chair



Another year passes and the season changes to Autumn again... but the memories of the end of a good Summer are still in our minds! We held our Barbecue on the Meadows at the beginning of September, but many people seem to have decided that the weather that day wasn't going to be good enough. Nevertheless, the rain stayed off, the sun peeked out and eight people and a dog enjoyed the barbecued fare.

Our Bat Walk on 10th September attracted many more people and we enjoyed a lovely calm evening as we sauntered down Bottom's Lane in the dusk with bat detectors and listened for the tell-tale sounds. We were treated to a number of pipistrelles flying about our heads. Our walk continued around the meadows and down to the Salmon Leap where we tried to find some Daubenton's bats flying low over the river. Our thanks go to Julia Drage who provided her expertise on the night! See Andy's Meadows Log for more details.

The Meadows Management Plan hasn't been forgotten, but it is proving difficult to engage people who have the time and resources to contribute. We have been thankful to Julie Rose who has compiled a biodiversity survey of the meadows. We are following this up with contacts at Cheshire Wildlife Trust in the hope that they can help us further and progress this next year.

Paul Taylor, our Greenspace Ranger, is very stretched and operates with a limited budget. The erosion of the river bank is a concern and options to prevent this are being considered. Other ongoing concerns include car parking during events on the Meadows; habitat maintenance and cattle grazing numbers. In the New Year it is also hoped to make a submission for Heritage Lottery funding to obtain Green Flag status – the benchmark national standard for parks and green spaces in the UK.

A few weeks ago Ruth Davidson and I had a meeting with representatives from Dee Valley Water, as part of a wide consultation on their Strategic Plan for the future. It was interesting to hear about their activities on the meadows in the water pumping mound, which also monitors the eel population.

Finally, it's that time of the year again, and our Annual General Meeting will be taking place on Thursday 14th November at St Mary's Centre. This year, we will welcome Roger Prescott from the Cheshire Wildlife Trust to tell us all about the work they do. The agenda is included with this newsletter. I hope to see many of you there. We are, of course, always on the lookout for new faces who can contribute to the work of the committee. If anyone is interested in giving up a little of their time, please get in touch!

Rachel Cross

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Friends of the Meadows - Annual General Meeting
St Mary's Centre, St Mary's Hill, Chester CH1 2DW
Thursday 14 November 2013 at 7.30pm

Finger Buffet and Wine
Talk by Roger Prescott of Cheshire Wildlife Trust



August & September 2013

03/08 At the bottom of Gorsty Bank a couple of butterflies chased each other round the crown of one of the oak trees. When one of them eventually settled it showed its silvery grey under wing confirming its identity as a Purple Hairstreak. Perhaps surprisingly there are no previous reports of Purple Hairstreaks in the Meadows log. This may be due to their secretive habit of feeding almost entirely on honeydew at the top of oak trees and rarely visiting the ground to take nectar.

17/08 Small Coppers have been few and far between, 2 were found on the Meadow bordering Bottoms Lane track and a further 10 the other side of the track, on neighbouring land.

31/08 A Lesser Whitethroat was feeding on Elderberries along the track which leads to the water mound.

The fields bordering the Meadow support a diverse range of wild flowers including Betony & Great Burnet. Growing among the blooms, in a fairly tight group, were approximately 10 Field Scabious plants.

02/09 Not a single report of a Brimstone on the Meadow this year so a single butterfly flying above Lower Park Road was surprise.

08/09 Where the Lesser Whitethroat had been the previous week, 4 Common Whitethroat have taken up residence and gorging on the same crop of Elderberries.

2 Kingfisher were flushed from the river bank, flying fast and low they disappeared further up the river to find quieter spot to fish- if that's possible!

Flushed from a ditch on the Meadow were the first 2 returning Snipe, a good 3 weeks earlier than last autumn.



There are plenty of berries starting to appear in the hedgerow including Hawthorn, Blackberries, Sloes and Guelder Rose starting to ripen. Also in the hedgerow Hops beginning to flower. (see photo).

10/09/ On the Bat walk we were able to observe and detect Common Pipistrelle Bats flying above our heads along Bottoms Lane track. 1 or 2 Daubentons Bats were detected flying over the river by the water mound. We were also able to detect the Soprano Pipistrelle by the West end entrance to the Meadow. Thanks to Julia Drage for leading both an informative and enjoyable walk.

15/09 In a sunlit corner of the Handbridge Marsh a few migrating Chiffchaffs were feeding on the abundant insect life. They were joined by a Spotted Flycatcher pausing at the top of an Alder tree before continuing with its raids on the insect life below.

16/09 2 croaking Ravens headed over the Meadow. Ravens are always a delight to see not just because of their recent association with the city, but also their spectacular twisting, tumbling and rolling display flights.TD

23/09 Above only blue sky and 10 chirruping Skylarks. They did not pause to feed on the Meadow and continued with their migration. Rising up at every angle were half a dozen Meadow Pipits. Meadow Pipits have been very noticeable by their absence this spring and summer and let us hope the Moorland Mars Bar does not disappear like the Skylark as a breeding species on the Meadow.

Andrew Ingham

Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135



Grey Heron with Frog



Comma butterfly on Bottoms Lane track