



# FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 194

Spring 2014

## Primrose

There are over five hundred species of *Primula* worldwide. Most species come from cool, moist, mountainous woodland regions of Asia. The genus is thought to have arisen in the Himalayas. The short walk between Heronbridge and Eccleston Ferry is as far as you need to travel to see wild primroses in Spring growing on the opposite bank of the river Dee. There are five British *Primula* species: primrose, cowslip, oxlip, bird's-eye primrose and Scottish bird's-eye primrose. All three possible hybrids between cowslip, primrose and oxlip have been found in the wild.



In four of the five British *Primula* species, two types of flower are found in every population in roughly equal proportions. 'Pin' flowers have long styles so that the stigma appears like a pin in the mouth of the flower. 'Thrum' plants (named after the loose end of a warp thread) have short styles but the anthers, bearing the pollen, appear in the mouth of the flower. All the flowers on a single plant are of the same type, the character being under genetic control. 'Pins' and 'thrums' also have differences in style cells, stigma shape, anther height and pollen size. Seed is rarely set in the absence of cross-pollination by long-tongued insects such as hoverflies, bee-flies, long-tongued butterflies and moths. The ripe seeds have a gelatinous body rich in fatty acids termed liposome, this is 'attractive to ants that carry the seeds to their nests providing a means of dispersal. Seedlings

are also found outside the burrows of voles and mice. The flowers appear to be very attractive to slugs and snails that eat petals and often the stigmas of 'pin' flowers and the anthers of 'thrum' flowers.

The primrose or 'prima rosa', first flower of the year, was the favourite flower of the Conservative Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli and Queen Victoria regularly sent him a bunch from Windsor. After Disraeli's death in 1881, Sir George Birdwood, the Botanist, suggested a fitting tribute to the great politician and 'Primrose Day'. The custom of placing primroses on Disraeli's statue outside Westminster Abbey on the 19<sup>th</sup> April continues to this day.

Primrose has a number of uses in herbal medicine, as an astringent, an antispasmodic and an emetic. The plant has expectorant and sedative properties being prescribed for headache, restlessness and insomnia. The medicinal utility of primrose is greatly exceeded by the beauty of its luminous yellow flowers that are such a delight to see after a long, gloomy Winter.

**Ron Iremonger**

## Notes from the Chair



It's always nice to get letters and recently I received one from Simon Cussons who wrote about his views of the flooded meadows. It is included below. We experienced some high water levels on the river and the meadows came under flood. However, compared to many other people around the country we were fortunate that it was not too disruptive to our everyday lives. Now Spring has begun, we begin to see the levels receding and hope for warmer days to come!

Over the last few weeks we have been working to put together the basics of a future management plan for the Meadows and to discuss this with the Ranger. It will be an ongoing process but will cover ditch management, juncus and gorse control, tree replacement, path maintenance, cattle grazing and public events. The Meadows has many uses from across the community and we have to be sensitive

to all.

Some of you may have noticed the state of the willows on the river path. Now coming to the end of their lives, they are cracking and breaking, so it is necessary to fell them. The trunks will be left *in situ* to naturally decay. The planting of replacements is under consideration.

Finally, may I thank everyone who has subscribed to their memberships for this year! We are still a little down from last year, and I am sure there are some for whom it has slipped your mind. Please remember to contribute – we need your continued support!

We are also grateful for the following Corporate donations:

Bithell Boats

NW Media

Dee Valley Water

Oakbase Properties

Homelet & Homesales Chester

Thank you to everyone and enjoy the Spring!

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

*From Simon Cussons, Dee Hills Park:*

I have been intrigued in witnessing the effect of the recent weather conditions on the River Dee and the land of the Meadows over the recent weeks. So far as we are concerned it has rained every day this year! One moment I shall not forget was a day forecast for severe weather in mid-February, I looked out of my window and saw the birds flocking on the meadows – obviously someone had told them what was about to happen. I did a count of the number of passing birds; there were over 200 in the space of three minutes, which seemed to me a substantial number!



The ferry landing stage under the floodwater.  
February 2014



## January, February and March 2014

04/01/2014 Approximately 50 Teal above the flooded Meadow was quite a sight. Even more unexpected a pair of Shoveler ducks swimming on the path which cuts through the centre of the Meadow. This is the first recorded sighting of Shoveler on the Meadow since the log began back in 1995!

05/01/2014 The wildfowl had departed as the Meadow was frozen, however there was still a large number of Gulls, a dozen Meadow Pipit and a flock of 25 Pied Wagtail.

7/01/ 2014 A wonderful winter for Snipe continued with approximately 30 still enjoying the high water table. The Jack Snipe was also observed but this time on the other side of Bottom Lane track.

14/01/2014 The unexpected appearance of an Eagle Owl perched in a tree in Charles Crescent created quite a lot of local interest. Attempts were made to capture it and return it to its owner. The Owl however had other ideas though and flew off over Queens Park.CG



Over the next few days the Owl was sighted at a number of locations in Handbridge and Queens Park including Bottoms Lane and Edinburgh Way.

Was it possible for the bird survive in the wild? This was partly answered by a 5 inch pellet found on a lean-to in Northern Pathway. Proof, at least the Owl had the instinct to hunt. Sightings became less frequent and stopped altogether in the final 2 weeks of February. The Owl was later rediscovered sitting on a rooftop in Chester Business Park on 05/03/2014 and then 23/03/2014 flying between the Zoo and the Shropshire Union canal.

01/02/2014 The wintering female Stonechat remained on the Meadow feeding in the marshy area. The Jack Snipe made the return flight over Bottoms Lane track back to the Meadow.

22/02/2013 With the Meadow continuing to resemble a lake it attracted 8 noisy Coot. The Coot immediately engaged in a territorial dispute, chasing each other up and down the Meadow.

04/03/2014 The first of the summer migrants arrived in the form of an early singing Chiffchaff. DN. A welcome sound even if it does get a little monotonous towards the end of the summer.

09/03/2014 Butterflies began to appear with a Peacock in Cross Hey, and best of all a yellow Brimstone (the original butter-fly) in Elizabeth Crescent. AE

13/03/2014 A good find and not seen previously this winter, a pair of Goosander paddling their way round the weir. DN

**Andrew Ingham**  
**Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135**

## Urban Foxes



Foxes have been present in many towns and cities for a long time, so their presence is not a novelty. However, their arrival in some urban areas, particularly in northern England, is relatively recent.

They are generally fearful of people and try to avoid both adults and children. Occasionally, they are a little bolder and will enter gardens in broad daylight to search for a quiet place to rest, look for food scraps or just because they are curious. This boldness isn't a sign of aggression - a healthy fox would only attack a person if provoked.

Many people get great pleasure from watching foxes in their garden but it's important to remember they're wild animals that could carry disease. Therefore, you shouldn't try to touch or tame them.

If you choose to feed foxes, they'll eat meat in almost any form - cooked or raw - and cooked vegetables too. Only put out enough food for one meal, otherwise leftovers may go off and cause sickness or attract other unwanted animal visitors.

The RSPCA has in the past funded scientific research into foxes in urban areas, the general conclusion of which was that they were for the most part only a minor nuisance and that most people enjoyed seeing them. The size of fox populations in urban areas is held in balance by the foxes' own system of spacing themselves in family territories. The territory sizes are linked to the availability of food supplies.

Some people suggest that relocating or destroying foxes that are present in one part of town is the answer. However, this will simply encourage other foxes to move in from other areas and take their place. Therefore, this option is not only disproportionate to the problems the animals are alleged to commit but is also ineffective. It also conflicts with those who gain a great deal of pleasure from seeing foxes and enjoy the idea of wildlife thriving in a seemingly hostile urban environment. In the past destruction of foxes has been undertaken by some local authorities but was stopped because of greater awareness of the animals, the ineffectiveness of such a policy and the expense of such a policy. Additionally, moving foxes from one area to another is not appropriate and not considered humane.



We are very grateful to Steve Howe for permission to include two of his photographs of the flooded Meadows in this newsletter. More pictures and lots of other interesting information about the area are available using the following <http://www.chesterwalls.info/meadowsflooded.html>



# Chester Croquet Club



## Summer's coming, make the most of it!

Welcome for new members and learners

Why not try a new outdoor leisure activity this summer? Croquet is an interesting and enjoyable game which, with its handicapping system, can be played on equal terms by men and women of all ages and abilities.

Perhaps you have played garden croquet with family or friends and would like to learn more about the game. Perhaps you have hung up your boots or trainers after playing a more strenuous sport and would like to switch to a game that involves challenge and skill but does not require the strength and stamina of more energetic activities. Perhaps the children have left home and you find you have more time. Perhaps you have just retired or moved to the area and would like to try something new. Or perhaps you would just like to escape from the phone or computer or kitchen or daily round of work and enjoy a stimulating game in the fresh air? Why not try your hand at croquet?

Chester Croquet Club meets in Westminster Park off Hough Green in Chester. It is a friendly and successful club with about a hundred members and is always pleased to welcome new members of all standards from absolute beginners to more experienced players.

**There will be an initial taster session at 6.30 to 8.30 pm on Tuesday, 29 April, for which there is no charge. This will be followed by a comprehensive beginners' course at the same time on Tuesday evenings for five weeks from 6 May to 3 June 2014. The fee is £30 but is free for new members joining the club at a subscription of £52 for the full season.**

Coaching is also available for people who have played before and would like to improve their skills.

No previous knowledge of the game is needed and all equipment will be provided by the club. The only requirement is that players must wear flat-soled shoes.

If you would like to enroll or would like more information, please contact the club secretary, John Dawson, at 01244 675929 or [johngdawson@onetel.com](mailto:johngdawson@onetel.com).

**Come and join in, and bring your family or friends!**