

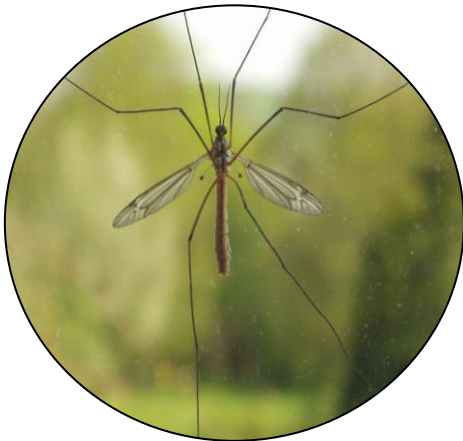
FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 197

Autumn2014

The Cranefly *Tipula paludosa*

The Cranefly, more commonly known as the Daddy long-legs, reaches peak numbers during the month of September and will no doubt prove this by crashing around your house, if you leave a combination of lights on and windows open. Craneflies are usually nocturnal and are often attracted to lights. Unfortunately their legs are only weakly attached to their bodies and often break off if caught to release outside. But this is probably an evolutionary tactic which allows a leg to be simply discarded should anything grab them, allowing the individual to fly away “relatively” unharmed.



In recent years, the late summer/autumn peak of cranefly activity has been observed to happen later in mid-October to due climate changes, so it will be interesting to see what we get this year.

Much of their life cycle is spent as root eating larvae called leatherjackets that are certainly not loved by crop-growers or lawn-lovers. Over the past 30 years increased arable farming and the end of crop rotation, in which fields were left fallow every fourth year, has heavily reduced the extent of grassland available to them. As adults, they live for about two weeks when their main function is to mate. Shortly after mating, an adult crane fly dies.

Many species of birds feed voraciously on both the larval stage and the adult fly. Sometimes Rooks can be seen gathering in large numbers feeding at close quarters in an otherwise ordinary looking grass field; the chances are that they have found a high density of leatherjackets – a favourite food. You may also observe Swallows hawking low over grass fields this autumn - on closer observation you may note that they are catching good numbers of Cranefly.

The Daddy-long-legs has been the subject a children’s poem by Edward Lear:

*Once Mr. Daddy Long-legs,
Dressed in brown and gray,
Walked about upon the sands
Upon a summer's day;
And there among the pebbles,
When the wind was rather cold,
He met with Mr. Floppy Fly,
All dressed in blue and gold.
And as it was too soon to dine,
They drank some Periwinkle-wine,
And played an hour or two, or more,
At battlecock and shuttledore.*



As with all nature, everything appears to be so intricately linked, and the possible demise of something as common as the Daddy long-legs could have knock on effects that nobody has yet considered. So try to be patient with the next one that comes crashing into your house, they may be a nuisance, but if nothing else they are an important part of the wider food chain.

Rachel Cross

Notes from the Chair



The Dog Days of September are now over and at the time of writing, Autumn is upon us. Looking back over the summer we have had some mixed success with our events. The walk along the Duke's Drive in August fell victim to the weather, and only Andy Ingham and myself turned up! However, the sun came out for us and we enjoyed a lovely stroll, cutting through the recently planted Jubilee Wood above the river to return to Handbridge. Our Bat walk attracted just six people this year, perhaps because publicity was quite late. We had a clear, dry evening with a full moon on the 7th September and saw and heard (with bat detectors) lots of pipistrelles along Bottom's Lane and Daubenton's flying low over the river.

The news from the Meadows is that we have been fortunate to secure Members' Budget funding from our local Councillors Razia Daniels and Neil Sullivan to plant new willow trees to replace those that have been felled because of old age and disease. The trunks of the felled trees have been left *in situ* to naturally decay and provide wildlife habitat. We understand that the old willows along the river were planted to mark the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935, which makes them about 80 years old and that a pupil from each school in Chester was picked to plant one of them. It would be good to know if that story is true and if anyone knows one of those pupils! The funding will also help us to buy much needed equipment as well as the stakes, ties and guards to protect the new trees. Our Greenspace Ranger, Paul Taylor will supervise the work with the help of volunteers, perhaps with the help of a local school and planting will take place in early November.

We are still working on forming an up-to-date Management Plan for the Meadows and have managed to get hold of documents from the 1990's which will prove valuable for a lot of background material as well as data from species surveys undertaken this year. Julie Rose will be writing this up over the winter months!

Our next event will be our Annual General meeting which will be held on Thursday 20th November. This year we are back at the Church Hall of St. Mary's Without-the-Walls in Handbridge after being within the walls for the last two years. Please come along and show your support – there will be complimentary drinks and nibbles, and a talk about the work of the Greenspace Team in Cheshire. An agenda for the meeting is enclosed with this newsletter.

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

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 20th November 2014 at 7:30pm

St. Mary's Without-the-Walls Church Hall,
Overleigh Road, Handbridge

Talk by the Greenspace Ranger, Cheshire West and Chester

Followed by

Complimentary Drinks and Nibbles



August and September 2014

06/08/2014 After the initial sighting of a Common Tern back in July, their frequency increased as the month progressed, 1 adult and a juvenile were flying above the river by Sandy Lane. The highest count of Common Terns though was 6 flying up the river on the 26/08.TD.

Having written off the Shotton Ternery prematurely in the last newsletter, Common Terns returned to breed there after a few years absence. 250 to 300 pairs nested on the manmade rafts, rearing approximately 500 young. 480 of the chicks were ringed by the Merseyside ringing group. If you look closely at the photograph of the juvenile Common Tern, you will see it has been ringed. Further evidence, if any were needed that these Terns have flown up the river from Shotton. Let us hope Common Terns become a familiar summer sight in Chester for years to come.

23/08/2014 Kingfishers returned to the river and were observed anywhere from the Old Dee Bridge up to Heronbridge. 2 Kingfishers were flying along the Sandy Lane stretch of the Dee. One landed on the ferry landing stage, all too brief for a photograph.

31/08/2014 A Small Copper butterfly was on the Meadow. Sightings of this dainty butterfly are definitely down on the previous year. 14 Speckled Wood butterflies appeared along Bottoms Lane track. It was no surprise to find a Southern Hawker taking advantage of this bonanza. The Southern Hawker was perched by the kissing gate chomping on an unfortunate Speckled Wood. (see photo)

07/09/2014 A juvenile Great Crested Grebe was observed fishing on the river by the United Utilities water mound (see photo).



Juvenile Common Tern



Juvenile Great Crested Grebe

Southern Hawker and Speckled Wood

14/09/2014 A few Warblers were moving through the hedgerow at the lower end of Appleyards Lane, a single Lesser Whitethroat, along with 2 Willow Warbler and 2 Blackcap.

21/09/2014 You would be forgiven for thinking it was spring with Chiffchaffs singing everywhere. Singles in Cross Hey & Elizabeth Crescent and 3 around the Meadow.

28/09/2014 2 Little Grebe were observed fishing along the Sandy stretch of the river. Little Grebes don't nest around the Meadow and are therefore absent during the summer months. Maybe a sign that winter is not far away.

Andy Ingham Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135

Bell Ringing a Very English Tradition



Every Sunday morning I delight in the sound of bells pealing across the Meadows to reach the far side of the Dee. What could be more English than bell ringing? It seems it is peculiar to these islands. Where other countries merely toll their bells or rely on mechanical carillons, we have created the tradition of change ringing. It dates back to at least 450 years ago, and it is a complex method of ringing that is rather like weaving in sound. A simple peal is one bell rung immediately after another in numerical order: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Change ringing is ringing in a set pattern and, as its name suggests, changes of sequence are made during the ringing, called out by the Tower Captain. There are great numbers of combinations of change ringing: at St Mary's, Eccleston, Cheshire, a peal of "Grandsire Triples" was rung on September the 14th 1911; it involved 5040 changes in sequence and took three hours and fourteen minutes to ring!

In many towers in the past it was the custom to fill a "Ringers Jug" with ale and have it ready for bell-ringing is thirsty work. After all, a ringer is responsible for something like the weight of a small car swinging to and fro up there in the belfry! These jugs were frequently inscribed, for example "Success to the hearty ringers of Tawstock" on a Devon jug.

Bells also were inscribed, as on one treble bell (which is always the leading bell) "In sweetest sound let each its note reveal, I shall be first to lead the dulcet peal." Or, more unfortunately, as was the case on the tenor bell at Stroud parish church: "I'll come when you call, God bless you all." It honoured its promise too literally in 1814 by crashing through the belfry floor at a ringing practice, splitting another bell in its descent and fracturing itself, but miraculously not damaging any of the ringers!

The weight of the bells is huge and sometimes towers have crashed. The ringing peal at Exeter Cathedral, for example, carries remarkable weight: more than 13 tons of metal! And Chester cathedral actually has a separate bell tower, the Addleshaw tower, to house its bells as housing them in the cathedral itself posed too many structural problems.

It is interesting to note the items felt essential to have in ringing chambers. When a ringing band was organised in 1909 for St Mary's church, Eccleston, Cheshire, it was thought necessary to provide a hairbrush, comb and mirror. Since at that time most ringers were male, who says men aren't vain? Or sometimes a motto would be hung on the wall of the ringing chamber as this one: "Feet together, eyes wide, ears open, tongue tied" but I can't remember where I saw this.

Even so, what could be more English than the sound of bells calling across the sleepy Sunday morning Meadows? It is a wonderful sound, and a wonderful tradition. Long may it endure!

Gill McEvoy