

# FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Newsletter 199

Spring 2015

## House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*)

Increasing numbers of house martins will be arriving here now, much to the delight of householders fortunate enough to have these iconic summer visitors breeding under their eaves. Where exactly they return from is largely unknown. We do know that they migrate to somewhere in Africa, south of the equator. But of all the birds ringed in Britain, only two have ever been found in that continent. As a result, it is suspected that they fly high above the equatorial rainforest and sleep in the roofs of the trees.

When they return from their mysterious winter sojourn, they are a familiar bird to us, and like the barn swallow, we name it after the places we inhabit. Yet unlike the swallow, the house martin travels these great distances. Their nests take up to two weeks to build, each a construction of a thousand beakfuls of mud, lining the nest with grass, feathers or hair. Their only time for settling on the ground is to collect the mud and grass for nest construction.

Both birds work at nest building: take the time to watch and you might see a bird fly up and dab a pellet of mud on the wall, then cling with head turned, twittering an invitation to its partner who will settle alongside. Spreading wings they then drop, performing a graceful arc before floating off for aerial courtship.

Despite being a colonial-nesting species, house martins can be surprisingly robust in defending their nest, seeing off rivals or house sparrows looking to use a nearly completed nest cup for their own breeding attempt. Indeed, there are some old legends that house martins would wall-up sparrows by closing the entrance of the mud nest with the intruder inside!



In William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, Duncan and Banquo enter Macbeth's castle. Duncan notes how pleasant a place it is and how sweet the air, to which Banquo remarks, in obvious reference to the house martins nesting there:

*"This guest of summer,  
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,  
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath  
Smells wooingly here. No jutting, frieze,  
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird  
Hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle.  
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,  
The air is delicate."*

Come the Autumn, their aerial exercises will intensify and the martin flocks will restlessly wheel. Then one morning the cables upon which they perch will be all deserted. Their long journey through France and across the Sahara will have begun again.

**Rachel Cross**

## Notes from the Chair



Hello everyone and welcome to the Spring Newsletter!

The current issue affecting the Meadows is the Watersports Hub proposals. A number of Friends members attended the public meeting at Queen's Park High School recently together with Queen's Park residents. The meeting was presented by the local Councillors, the Project Manager and Council managers. A number of views and concerns were expressed during the meeting although the plans are not yet fully formed. Of course, Friends of the Meadows has members with wide interests and presenting any consensus view on our behalf is always going to be difficult. However, I think it is fair to say that we would welcome a replacement of the Queen's Park High School Boathouse providing any new development is sensitive to the residential area with minimal impact on the environment of the Meadows. Of most concern to us is a possible plan that would include all of the Barnfield Meadow next to the current boathouse land. We have been advised that we (and local residents groups) will be kept updated and consultation will be part of the planning application process.

In other news, the Meadows Management Plan is nearing completion! The Final Draft will need to be sent to various people for consultation (this includes statutory bodies like Natural England as well as local council management,) before being adopted.

Some of you may have noticed that the jetty opposite Sandy Lane had become dislodged. This was due to the action of vandals and hopefully can be soon put right. This served as a reminder to publish here the telephone contacts for any anti-social behaviour on the Meadows, shown below. It is also worth mentioning that a new joint partnership between enforcement officers and dog wardens has been formed to reduce dog fouling, through a mix of publicity and sanctions. The group will target specific areas, including the Meadows.

With our last Newsletter we sent out our annual reminders for Membership Renewals. May I thank all of you who have responded so far, and a special thanks to those who included donations in addition! We also distributed newsletters to a number of non-member households in Handbridge and Queens Park hoping to encourage awareness of our group and new members. I will report on the state of our membership in the next Newsletter.

We are now on Facebook! Andy Ingham has created the page for us and news, photos and details of events will be posted there: [www.facebook.com/friendsofthemeadows](http://www.facebook.com/friendsofthemeadows)

Finally, we have planned a number of events in and around the Meadows this year, which are included in this Newsletter. I hope you can get to some of them, or if not, will enjoy reading here about what has been going on.

**Rachel Cross**

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

### **Reporting Anti-Social Behaviour on the Meadows**

If you see any issues of unsocial behaviour and any breach of bylaw and law you need to call **101** and report it to the police. If it's an emergency call **999**.

If it's an animal issue contact the Ranger on **0151 327 5145**, unless it could be seen as a police issue, eg. a dog attack.

The Ranger works closely with the police to target unsocial behaviour on the site but reports will only be prioritised if they come directly from the public



## Meadows Log January, February and March 2015

04/01/2015 A brief view of the over wintering Jack Snipe flushed from beneath my feet. It flew only a short distance before dropping into the marsh again and out of sight.

11/02/2015 A clever Sparrowhawk followed walkers as they made their way through the centre of the Meadow and attempted to intercept any Snipe that were flushed into the air. This is not the first time I have seen a Sparrowhawk on the Meadow using this hunting technique.

18/02/2015 A flash of turquoise blue as a Kingfisher flew from the bank by the water mound.

27/02/2015 Julie and I gave the small bird nest boxes a clean. In one box we found 3 Blue Tit eggs from the previous spring. While carrying the ladder from one end of the Meadow to the other we were treated to the magnificent sight of a Starling murmuration over Boughton .

07/03/2015 It was all quiet on the Meadow but it was clear a lot of activity had gone on the previous night with frogspawn in quite a few of the ditches.

14/03/2015 A Weasel bounded over the Meadow and swam across a ditch to the far bank. Unfortunately no pictures were taken as they move very quickly and certainly no Green Woodpecker was nearby to give it a lift over the ditch!

19/03/2015 Badgers are a rare site on the Meadow but occasionally wander down to the river. Two were seen scuttling along Elizabeth Crescent. Any further sightings around the Meadow gratefully received.

21/03/2015 Chiffchaff were the first spring migrant to arrive this year with at least 4 birds belting out their metronomic song around the Meadow.

There is a distinct possibility a pair of Nuthatch will nest on the Meadow for the first time this year. The Nuthatches were seen calling and prospecting for a nest site. Fingers crossed they decide to use the Meadows to raise a family.

### Andy Ingham

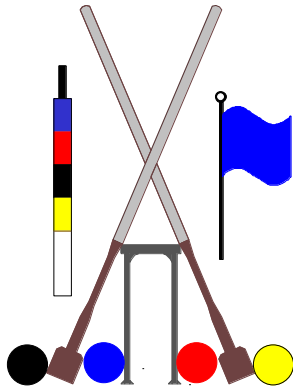
Meadows Log Recorder 01244 677135



Song Thrush on a Frosty Meadow



Buzzard over the Meadows



# CHESTER CROQUET CLUB

Welcome to new members

**Spring and summer are around the corner.  
Come and play croquet and enjoy being outdoors!**

Why not try a new outdoor leisure activity this summer? Croquet is an interesting and enjoyable game which 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 you haven't found a sport to interest you. 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 two 'Introduction to Croquet' sessions for which there is no charge. Part 1 will be held on Sunday 12th April and repeated on Sunday 19th April, and Part 2 will be held on Saturday 18th April and repeated on Sunday 26th April. Choose which Part 1 date and which Part 2 date you prefer. All sessions will run from 2.00 - 4.00 p.m. If participants then wish to join the Club, beginners' courses in association croquet and golf croquet will follow at the end of April.**

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 enrol or would like more information, please contact the Club Secretary, John Dawson, at 01244 675929, johngdawson@onetel.com or the Membership Secretary Sally Slater on 01244 677645, springboard\_sally@hotmail.com.

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