



FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Welcome

This will be my last Newsletter writing my notes here as Chair. After five years, I have decided to step down from this position. However, I shall continue to serve on the Committee and prepare and edit this Newsletter. Both positions of Chair and Secretary will be vacant, so we will have to see how we manage in the future. Of course, the Committee will welcome anyone with a little bit of time to spare to get involved. Just get in touch!

While I have been Chair, the plans to build a Watersports Centre have materialized and we have kept closely involved with consultation – an issue which continues and is reported on in this newsletter more fully.

Included with this newsletter you will also find the Agenda for our Annual General Meeting and this will be followed by a fascinating talk on the history of Erddig by Jill Burton

I do hope to see lots of you at St Mary's Church Hall starting at 7:00pm on Thursday 3rd November.

Rachel Cross, Chair



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Event: Owls on the Meadows

Meadows Management

Amanda Pritchard, Countryside Ranger, reviews some of the recent work

Now that most of our native bird species have finished their breeding cycle, we can start planning some winter tasks on The Meadows.

These tasks include more work on the ditches – working to a rotation, clearing out old vegetation and digging them out. We also hope to carry out some coppicing of the willows and some more hedge laying along Bottoms Lane.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust joined us on the Meadows during week commencing 5th September and helped, along with my regular volunteers, to dismantle the tree guards and remove the buddleia by Lower Park Road entrance.

During September, the Meadows had its annual rotational cut, carried out by a contractor who also baled the cuttings ready to take away (see photo). The intention will be to also do a cut of Barnfield (which is due to be carried out at the time of writing). The central



meadow cut will be good for the Snipe if we get a wet winter. However, the scrub in this area will need to be kept in check as it can become predator perches for magpies and crows, which is not good news for other birds. Next up will be to coppice some of the willows in the meadow.

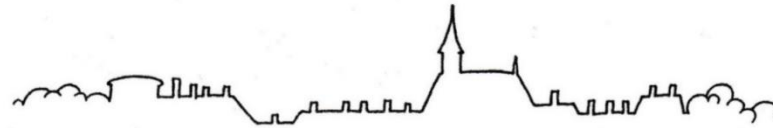
Thanks, Amanda

Want to help?

Would you be interested in joining a regular work party to help with these practical conservation tasks?

It's a great way to meet people, get fit and spend time outdoors helping manage habitats for our local wildlife.

If so, please contact Amanda Pritchard, the Ranger by email:
amanda.pritchard@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk



FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 3rd November, 2016 at 7pm

The Church Hall, St Mary's Without-the-Walls,
Overleigh Road, Handbridge, Chester CH4 7HL

The AGM will be followed by a talk and presentation by Jill Burton on:

Erddig, the Jewel in the Crown of Welsh country houses

Jill Burton was Education Officer for the National Trust for 21 years, with responsibility for Erddig and Chirk Castle. She retired in 2011, although still volunteers at Erddig and co-ordinates the servants records.

She will describe how the house and estate have developed over the last 300 years and how the National Trust continues the Yorke family's aims of protecting a country house, its estate and country park "for all foreseeable time".



Friends of the Meadows members and non-members welcome!

The Annual General Meeting will commence at 7pm, to be followed by the talk and complimentary drinks and cake!

Watersports Hub developments



Artist's impression of the proposed Watersports Hub building

Over the last couple of months, architectural plans have been put forward for the proposed Watersports Hub to be built on the Barnfield. Members of the Friends of the Meadows Committee have attended consultations together with Queen's Park residents.

At the time of writing, these broad outline plans indicate the demolition of the existing boathouse to be replaced by a two-tier building with a river-facing balcony and extending into much of the the eastern side of Barnfield.

While the memorial trees and some of the land surrounding them will be untouched, the existing entrance track will be

extended along the rear of the building and exit further down the current Meadows entrance path as a one-way system for vehicles. The original plans have shown car parking all along the trackway for up to 46 vehicles.

While we have remained generally opposed to any building on the Meadows, we do recognize that many Friends of the Meadows members would welcome a facility like this.

However we have voiced a number of concerns at the submitted plans and made a number of suggestions. Our view is that the planned car park spaces are far in excess of real requirements. One

The State of Nature

A personal view by Julie Rose

What do you think when you see the news about the State of Nature Report? More ecologists whining to save tiny spiders and preventing worthy use of land for development? Or, like me, a deep despair that the empty skies and silent meadows are real, not just a blip on a rainy day, that intensive agriculture, shorn verges, fertiliser green lawns, and signs of the terrible tidying tendency in action are really damaging the wild web of life.

The Meadows are for us nature fans the last wild space within walking distance of Chester. And very nice it is too: full of delicate and appropriate colour in season; full of interesting fauna and flora. Each new survey throws up a notable beetle, an interesting plant. Yes, there are invasives such as Himalayan Balsam, now cyclamen and other inappropriate urban park and garden plants, but we're working on them. It does need managing, but not "tidying". It is enjoyed by so many, come down on a summer night to do a bat survey, there are quiet groups of folk sitting, socializing; come down during the day, full of people strolling around.

How can we make The Meadows better for everyone, including the wildlife we care for? Natural space is a great stress buster for everyone, not just survey geeks like me. We already have neat paths, easy strolling places, and water sport based events.

Every management plan for the last 20 years has said that this is a naturally wet meadow. It is after all a flood plain. The totally natural state of the Meadows would be wet riparian woodland, which, for many reasons, would not be acceptable to many users of the Meadows and beyond. However because the Dee is managed to give us a water supply the Meadows rarely floods and has dried out. There are areas accessible now that weren't 30 years ago. In turn this accessibility has reduced breeding success for the larger fauna, there are

no larks or meadow pipits singing here now. We could rewet the Meadows: we could re-instate the Sluice Gates, we could dig ponds, we could find and break-up the 19th and 20th century field drains. All this takes either money to hire a contractor or volunteer hours and a site supervisor.

Any work has to be done according to the management plan, not just an *ad hoc* group, because of the risk that an over enthusiastic someone with a strimmer and chain saw will remove vegetation inappropriately. Last year we started a much stated management aim, to layer the hedges. Great fun, and most of it is thriving, as did we on jammy dodgers, exercise and competition: Saturday Group versus Amanda's Tuesday Group.

We have a fair inventory of Meadows species: Andy Harmer did a paid aquatic invertebrate survey, Clive Washington has kindly done a volunteer terrestrial beetle survey, our own Andy Ingham checks out the birds and butterflies. We do bat surveys and the band of eagle eyed botanists spot interesting species. We'll know if our efforts are working if we repeat the specialist surveys in 5-10 years.

The Meadows is under threat again, yet again from car parks and water sports- remember the proposed rowing lake in 1995? This time it's to concrete over Barnfield and allow vehicles onto the Meadows at any time: a exit route from the proposed new car park which will have the effect of allowing unsupervised access by quad bikes, 4x4's, motorbikes to all of the Meadows. This could trash any wild space, and compromise pedestrian safety. I used to live near Chester Water works, we had kids on motorbikes in regularly until the gates were more secure. The exit route legitimately used will destroy an old hedge, and cause light pollution, which will make those balmy summer evenings much less appealing to us, and feeding bats. They catch 1000's a midges, a double whammy for us. The hard runoff will pollute the Meadows ditch system and increase the risk of flooding downstream



August to September 2016

6th August

Patience is required to observe Purple Hairstreaks on Gorsty bank. You can wait a long time staring up at the upper most branches of an Oak Tree, without any success. Luck was in though, as within seconds of arriving a single Hairstreak took to the air with its familiar jittery flight.

8th August

Tubular Water Dropworts remained in flower and were appreciated by those who attended the final botany walk of the summer.

On the same evening a Snipe was flushed from a ditch.- a very early record for the Meadow.

As dusk fell Pipistrelle bats were joined by our largest bat the Noctule. Noctules were discovered by Julie Rose carrying out her Bat surveys during the summer.

18th August

In the centre of the Meadow two Lesser Whitethroats were embroiled in a territorial dispute, chasing one another round a Hawthorn bush. Slightly odd behaviour as the breeding season was all but over.

24th August

The yaffle of a Green Woodpecker is an unfamiliar sound on the Meadow. A single bird played hide and seek behind the trunk of a large Alder tree below Andrews Crescent. Jon Wainwright observed probably the same bird below Belgrave Park.

4th September

It is always good to see Kingfishers returning to our stretch of the river after the breeding

season. One was perched up in Willow below the Suspension bridge.

21st September

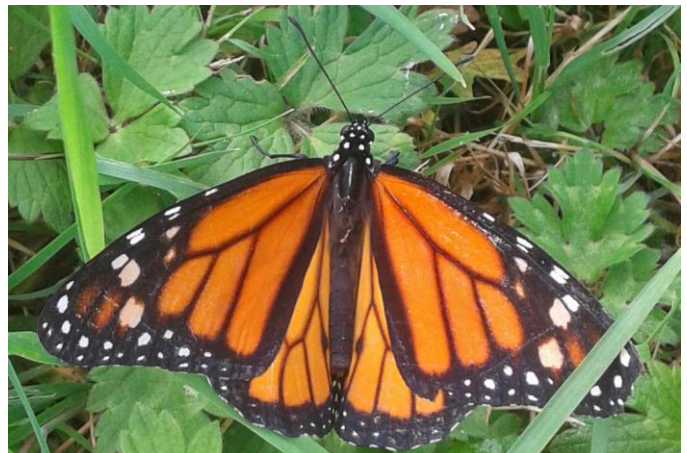
At dusk, approximately 50 House Martin were above the Meadow. The excitable chatter among the group suggested an imminent departure to a warmer climate.

26th September

A Kestrel alarm call by the entrance to the Meadow drew attention to a Peregrine Falcon flying with great speed above the Horse Chestnut trees. It did not catch anything but caused great panic among the resident Wood Pigeon population.

28th September

Not on the Meadow but well worth a mention was the discovery by Jon Wainwright of a Monarch butterfly in Overleigh Cemetery(see photo). It is highly unlikely the butterfly crossed the Atlantic to reach the Cemetery. As Jon discovered two more in the same location the next day, further weight was given to a release by a local butterfly breeder.





1st October

All but a handful of House Martin & a single Swallow remained above the Meadow.
The Meadow seems very quiet after their departure

Andy Ingham
Meadows log recorder

RSPB Field Trip – Owls at Chester Meadows

Sunday 20th November 2016
Meet at 3pm at Bottoms Lane

Join Julie Rose and the RSPB Chester Group on a dusk hunt for owls silently skimming through the meadows.

This event is FREE

Please book in advance for this event at least three days before the event and double-check the time and meeting place.

Call Roger on 01829 782237 or email:
chester1rspb@btinternet.com

Newcomers are welcome

Car sharing is encouraged. If you would like a lift or you can offer a lift, please let the trip leader know.



Friends of the Meadows Committee

Chair and Newsletter Editor: Rachel Cross (Tel: 01244 679141)

Secretary: (Vacant)

Treasurer: Bill Richardson

Membership Secretary: Richard Cain

Minutes Secretary: James Holroyd

Meadows Log & Social media: Andy Ingham

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Julie Rose

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