

Friends of the Meadows

Update on
Meadows
Management

Andy Ingham's
Meadows Log

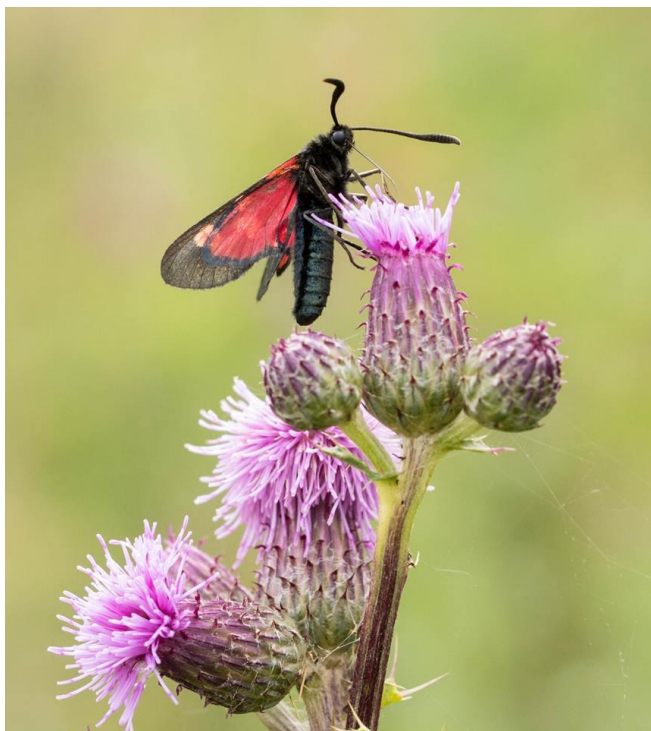
Review of the
Gomphus
Survey

August's events
and poetry

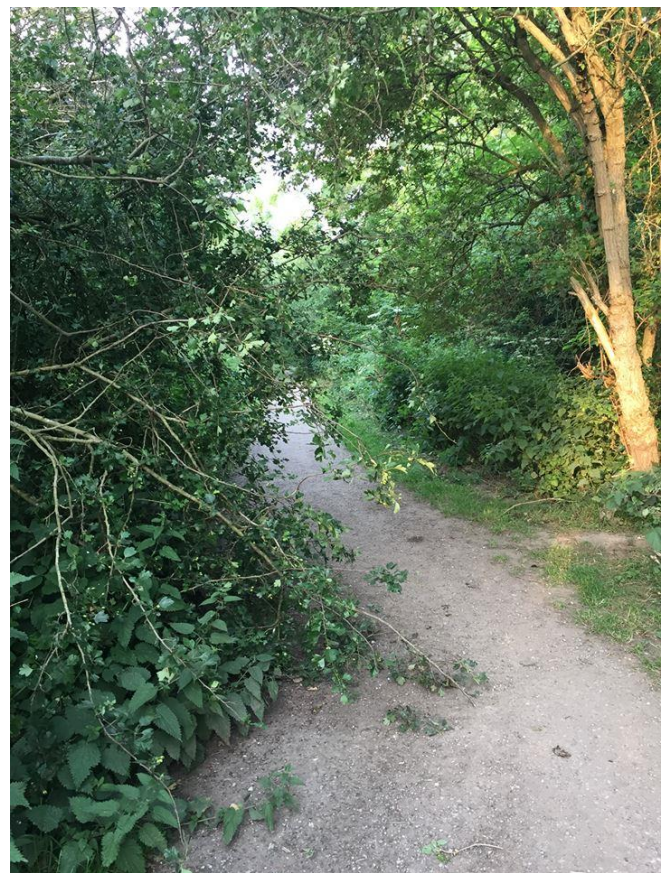
Out and About on the Meadows in pictures

Welcome *to our Newsletter for Summer 2017*

It was National Meadows Day on 1st July, a growing event which celebrates wildflower grasslands. Many people who come to the Meadows here in Chester do so just to walk or sit by the riverside, but there is also a wealth of nature to be found in the diversity of the flora and insects. And yet since 1940 over 95% of our wildflower meadows have disappeared. We have a jewel in the heart of our city and we must treasure it. On National Meadows Day our Meadow was humming with Bees and other pollinating insects.



One of the most important issues for us at the moment is to know what resources there will be to manage and maintain the Meadows since Amanda, our last Countryside Ranger left. Andy Ingham has been progressing this with the Council especially after high winds took their toll on trees along Bottoms Lane track in early June. The picture here shows a tree trunk hanging over the footpath and another was causing an obstruction.



Andy was recently informed that Greenspace Office Stephanie Hefferan will be taking over on a temporary basis until staff recruitment is finalized. She will provide cover to cover to deal with emergencies and queries at the site. Although Stephanie, who works from Winsford has visited the Meadows with regards to organising a Big Dee Day event, is a little unfamiliar with our site she expects to be up to speed soon!

I hope you enjoy this Summer Newsletter. As usual, I am always looking for articles, photographs or anything that might be of interest, so please let me know if you'd like to contribute!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor

Email: rachelcross789@gmail.com

Cover image: View towards Boughton from the Meadows, June 2017 (Julie Savory)

Update on the Gomphus Survey

Julie Rose reviews the results of the surveys undertaken in May



Club-tailed dragonfly (Gomphus vulgatissimus) Photo by Chris Cooke from www.dragonfly-images.co.uk

Andy Ingham, Jon Wainwright and I went to Holt on 17th May to be shown Club-tailed dragonfly exuvia and, if we were lucky, adults. This training event was jointly organised by Dragonfly Conservation and North Wales Wildlife Trust. It was cool, drizzly and far from ideal conditions, but the club-tails had other ideas and we saw several adults, both male and female and exuvia.

Our Chester Meadows squares were surveyed on 20, 23, and 25th May 2017. We found no evidence of the adults, exuvia or larvae, but may be a little late; the Holt population was past its peak. There were plenty of banded demoiselles flying though. It was obvious that the tide and wash from boats soaked the river edges periodically and might not give a safe place for the larvae to emerge. Having said that, some of the Holt larvae had crawled 2-3 m from the river. There's always next year.



If you want to know more about dragonfly conservation, go to the British Dragonfly Society webpage where you can also find local groups: www.british-dragonflies.org.uk



For more information on the North Wales Wildlife Trust, go to their website: <http://www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk>

Events in August

Grass, Sedge and Rush Beginners Identification Morning with Julie Rose

Saturday 12th August 10:00am to Midday

Not for the faint hearted, you must bring a handlens and whatever identification book you use.

This is aimed at beginner greenery identifiers, but probably not beginner botanists because these are difficult groups.

Please book so I know who to expect, either using the website or Facebook because we will have to be inside if it's raining.

Website: www.friendsofthemeadows.org.uk

Facebook: /friends of the meadows-chester



Duke's Drive and Meadows Walk

Led by Rachel Cross

Sunday 13th August

2:00pm at Duke's Drive Gates

We had lovely weather last year so we're hoping for the same again!

This will be a gentle stroll down the Duke's Drive, cutting across Eaton Road and descending to the river by the Diamond Jubilee Wood and back along the riverside and Meadows to Handbridge.

Once again we'll just take in the nature and some of the history of the countryside on our doorsteps.

Come rain or shine, I'll be there! Just join up.



August

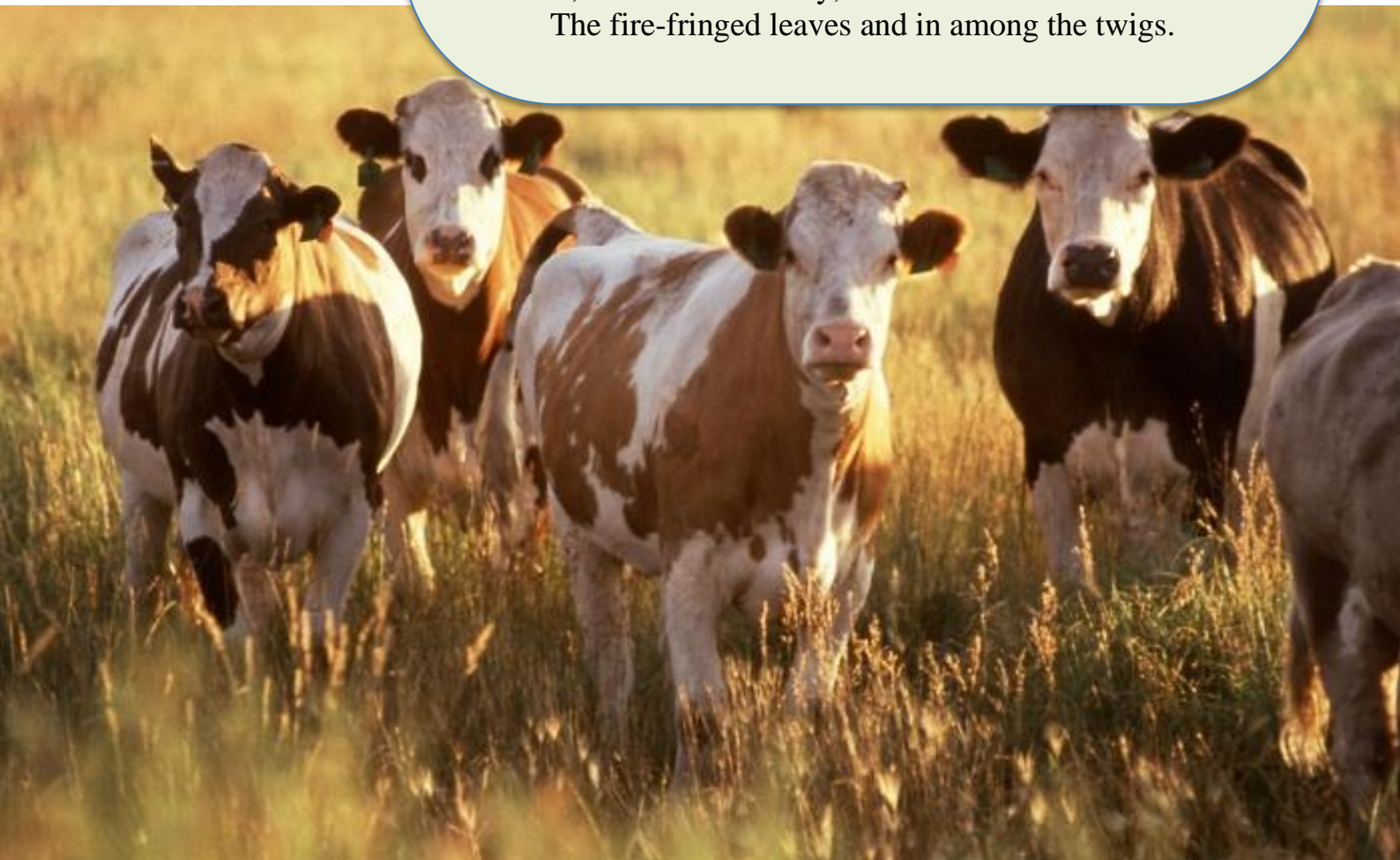
A poem by Andrew Young

The cows stood in a thunder-cloud of flies,
As lagging through the field with trailing feet
I kicked up scores of skipper butterflies
That hopped a little way, with lazy heat.

The wood I found was in deep shelter sunk,
Though bryony leaves shone with a glossy sweat
And creeping over ground and up tree-trunk
The ivy in the sun gleamed bright and wet.

Songs brief as Chinese poems the birds sung
And insects of all sheens, blue, brown and yellow,
Darted and twisted in their flight and hung
On air that groaned like hoarse sweet violoncello.

No leaf stirred in the wood-discouraged wind,
But foliage hung on trees like heavy wigs;
The sun, come from the sky, was close behind
The fire-fringed leaves and in among the twigs.



A little history of... Heronbridge

Rachel Cross discovers the unseen history of this area of the riverside

Walking along the riverside by Heronbridge today and there is little to see that suggests its rich and varied history. In fact, evidence of its Roman connections was only found by chance by a member of the Chester Archaeological Society in 1929.

The Roman Township

A Roman settlement was established here about AD 90. It became a significant settlement, with many established stone buildings. A natural inlet of the River Dee here was also turned into a quay by cutting into the bedrock. Rectangular buildings were laid out along Roman Watling Street (now Eaton Road) which connected Chester to Whitchurch, Wroxeter and London.

This settlement was rebuilt in the early 2nd century with new stone buildings laid out in blocks of three. These 'strip-buildings' are associated with commercial activity and would have functioned as a shop, workshop and living quarters.

After Roman occupation ended, around AD 350, the town decayed into ruin.

The Battle of Chester

Then nothing seems to have happened for the next 250 years, until... in c.616 Aethelfrith of Northumbria marched on the British kingdoms to the west. The two armies met and fought in a bloody battle here, known as the 'Battle of Chester'.

The Northumbrian army annihilated a combined force from the Welsh kingdoms of Powys, Rhôs and Mercia.



A Digital recreation of 3rd Century Heronbridge courtesy of Take27 Ltd

According to Bede, a large number of monks from the monastery at Bangor on Dee who had come to witness the fight were killed on the orders of Aethelfrith before the battle. He is reported to have said "If then they cry to their God against us, in truth, though they do not bear arms, yet they fight against us, because they oppose us by their prayers".

The battle changed the history of the area for ever. The Welsh were cut off from their compatriots in Cumbria and Cornwall, and the history of Wales as a separate nation can said to date from this time.

If you take the time to walk over the site you will see evidence of an earthwork enclosure which overlays the old Roman town. There are a number of theories as to what this is. It may have originally been thrown up after the Battle of



Chester and reinforced with masonry recovered from the Roman ruins.

The Viking period

However, much later, around 902, Norse Vikings who had been expelled from Dublin settled in the Wirral after an agreement between Æthelflæd, Queen of Mercia and the Norse leader Ingimund. It was a brief peace and attacks on Chester followed. To avoid further conflict, Æthelflæd gave them the land at Heronbridge to settle and the enclosure was built (or re-built) to surround it.

Aethelfaed's Defence of Chester

But Ingimund grew jealous of the comparatively wealthy City of Chester and secretly gathered a host to attack it. Æthelflæd learned of this and filled the City with her troops in defence.

By this time, Æthelflæd had enlarged and strengthened Chester's fortifications. The Norse army of Norwegians and Danish together with Pagan Irish moved up from Heronbridge to attack the city at the present Bridgegate.

One account suggests they were met with a force outside the city gate who then retreated to be followed inside by the attackers. Then the gates were closed and the trapped Vikings set upon by another hidden force.

Aethelflaed then negotiated with the Irish in the opposing army to side with the Saxons and attack the Danish Vikings (who they were less friendly with) which they did.

But the Norwegians carried on the attack and under cover of hurdles made a hole in the Walls. The Anglo-Saxons and the Irish hurled down huge boulders so that they crushed the hurdles on their heads. Then the Anglo-Saxons scattered all the beehives there were in the town on top of the besiegers, which prevented them from moving their feet and hands because of the number of bees stinging them. After that they gave up the city, and left it.

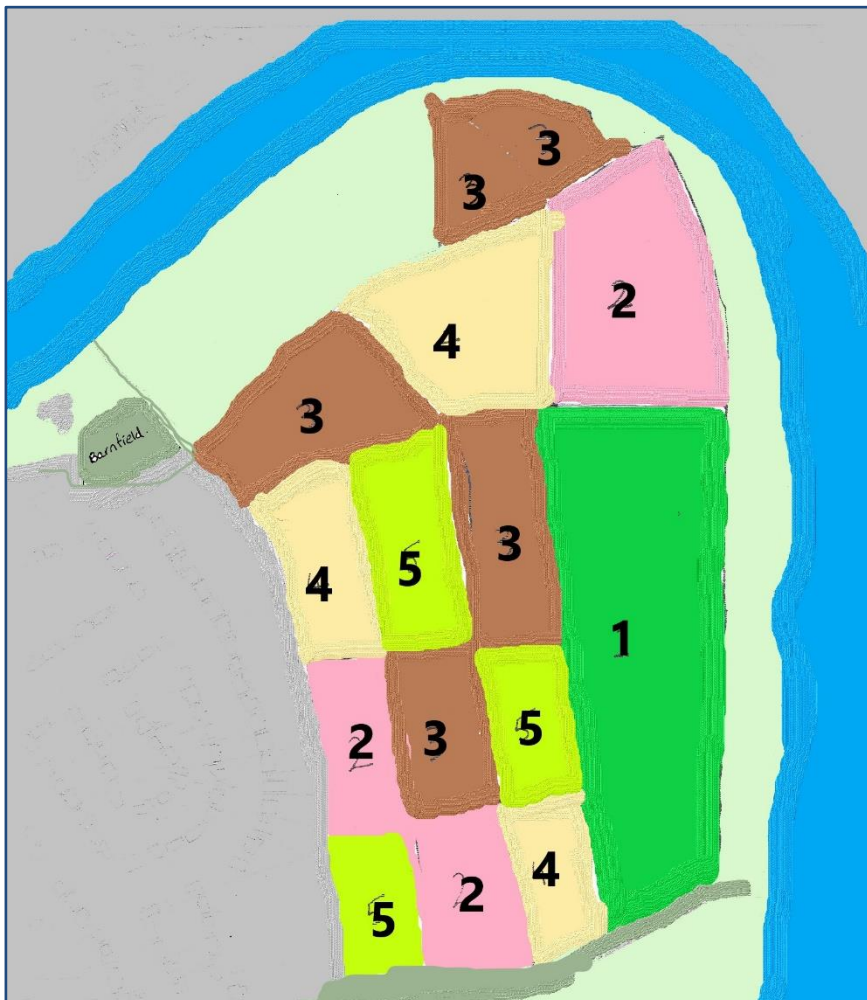
Not long afterwards there was fighting again and eventually, Aethelflaed made peace and allowed a Scandinavian settlement in the area of Lower Bridge Street and Heronbridge was gradually abandoned.

A Final bit of History

As a final piece of the history of Heronbridge if you walk up from the river to the road you will find a deep pit. This is actually a bomb crater from World War II made by a German bomb dropped after a raid on Liverpool.

Ditch Rotation and Cut Removal on the Meadows

A summary of the work schedule planned for the Meadows



The ditch rotation relies on volunteers (eg Cheshire Wildlife Trust and others) to carry out between September and February. The ditches need strimming and then the outfall pipes exposing/clearing. It is expected that Cheshire West and Chester Council Commissioning will allocate the mowing to a contractor for carrying out late summer as in previous years. Compartments numbered 4 in the diagram opposite are due to be cut/removed this year (2017).

Regular mowing contract

The Meadows is down for seven cuts – these are the entrances by Lower Park Road, Bottoms Lane and Elizabeth Close.

The “events” area will get four cuts – to coincide with the events on the meadows.

This will be carried out by the same contractors that did the mowing last year. No spraying on any part of the Meadows has been requested or instructed

Rotational Conservation Mowing on the Meadows

Key to annual mowing schedules:

1 – 2014	2 – 2015	3 – 2016
4 – 2017	5 – 2017, then back to 1 in 2018	

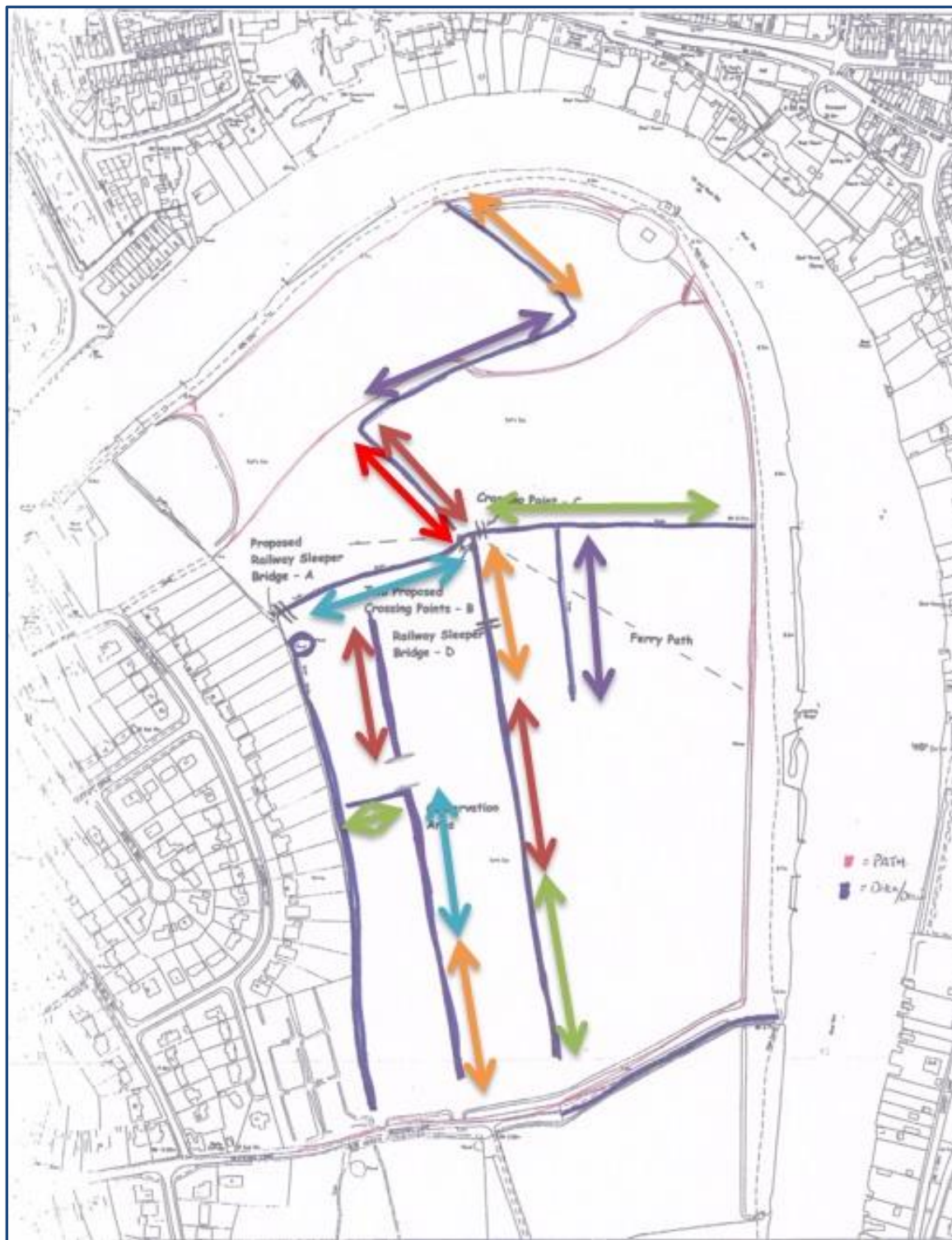
Cattle grazing







Our previous Ranger had suggested to Charles Steer of Grosvenor Farms that if they secure cattle to graze their sections then it would be great to include a low density on the Earls Eye say August – end of September. However, there was never a chance for her to progress this and it is very unlikely to happen this year.

The main management issue for summer will be Himalayan balsam. Groups of volunteers to help hit it would be fabulous. Otherwise, we may be asking Cheshire Wildlife Trust for help.

The diagram on the opposite page shows the schedule for ditch rotation cutting and clearance.

Diagram of the rotational ditch cutting schedule 2015-2025



Rotation	Ditch Section
Autumn Winter 2015 (completed)	
1 (2016, 2021)	
2 (2017, 2022)	
3 (2018, 2023)	
4 (2019, 2024)	
5 (2020, 2025)	



April to June 2017

1st April 2017

A flyover Cattle Egret was the first of 2 rare birds on the Meadow. It flew surprisingly towards the city. However on reaching urbanisation it promptly did a u turn and headed back up the river.

2nd April 2017

A very early Redstart put in a brief appearance on the neighbouring Dukes land. A quick flash of its vivid red tail & it disappeared over the hedgerow.

The first male Orange Tip of the spring flew along the hedgerow on Bottoms lane track.

An unfamiliar call emanated from the flooded marsh as darkness descended over the Meadow. The bird called continuously but unfortunately remained hidden from view. It was an extremely rare SPOTTED CRAKE!!!

The Crake could be heard across the Meadow and by Sarah from her garden in Elizabeth Crescent. The Spotted Crake was heard for the final time at dawn the following day

Sarah also recalled hearing as a child on the Meadow its close relative the Corncrake. Unfortunately, Corncrakes are now long gone and are restricted to remote Scottish islands.

10th April 2017

The first Swallows of the spring were observed up river from the Meadow by Jon & Rob.

13th April 2017

The first Common Sandpiper of the spring waded through mud by the ferry landing stage and sightings were regular over the next 2 weeks.

18th April 2017

Tim found the first of 3 Wheatear to be recorded on the Meadow.

20th April 2017

House Martins were observed for the first time above Water Co land. Numbers of House Martins in the area appear to be well down on previous years.

23rd April 2017

A dawn or dusk visit is usually required to see or hear a Grasshopper Warbler. Rob was out early with his dogs to hear the first of the year. Later that day the first "rattle" of a Lesser Whitethroat came from the hedgerow on neighbouring Dukes Land.



Great Crested Grebe on the river 26th April

24th April 2017

Sand Martins are usually one of the earliest spring migrants to pass through the Meadow. This year they were one of the last. Approximately 6 were feeding on insects above the river.

28th April 2017

A Sedge Warbler, the first of the spring called from deep within the centre of the Meadow. It remained well hidden from view.

1st May 2017

A pair of Whinchats, the first & last to be recorded by Mark on the Meadow this season. It's always a delight to find these lovely birds on migration.

3rd May 2017

The first Swifts to be recorded in the sky above Queens Park/Handbridge were seen by Jon. Chester RSPB group have surveyed our area this year for nesting Swifts. Hopefully something can be done to reverse the decline.

24th May 2017

BLACK TAILED SKIMMER dragonfly is another first for the Meadow and a very early spring record. Jon recorded the event with this excellent photograph.



3rd June 2017

Two RED EYED DAMSELFLY were found on Lily pads just up river from the Meadow. Red Eyed are not rare and can be found on any stretch of water with a significant amount of floating vegetation. As we only have small areas of Lily Pads we are never going to have many but it is a possibility they have previously gone undetected.

14th June 2017

Only 2 Common Spotted Orchid spikes appeared on the Meadow compared to 5 the previous year. After last year's discovery, Tubular Water Dropwort was again flowering on the Meadow.

21st June 2017

An adult Common Tern probably from the breeding colony at Shotton fished the river next to the sailing club.

Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder

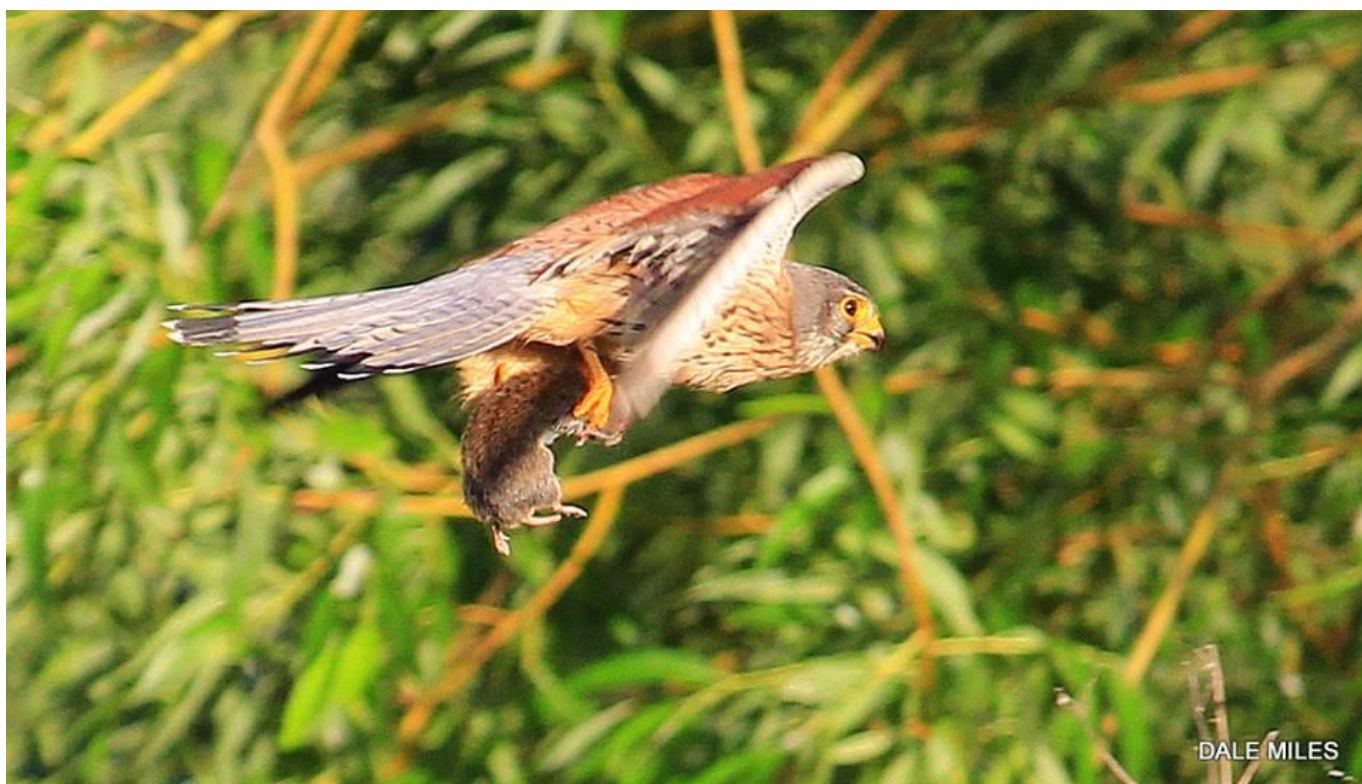
01244 677135 or get in touch via our Facebook page:

[/friends of the meadows-chester](https://www.facebook.com/friends-of-the-meadows-chester)

Out and About on the Meadows



Early June on the Meadows. A peaceful rural haven with horses grazing on grasses, golden buttercups and earthy red sorrel and yet just a short distance from the city on the other side of the river. *Photo by Julie Savory*



Catch of the Day! A superb picture of a male Kestrel flying off with a vole in its talons on the Meadows in early June *Photo by Dale Miles*