

Friends of the Meadows

A scenic view of a river at sunset. The sky is a warm, golden orange, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright reflection on the water. In the foreground, a swan is swimming in the water. The background shows a church spire and other buildings on a hillside, partially obscured by trees. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

Newsletter 212

Summer 2018

Welcome *to our* Newsletter for Summer 2018



The Meadows looking dry and arid in the July heat. Photo by Rob Bale (Handbridge Weather on Facebook)

I'm writing this in the hot days of Summer while we are "enjoying" this extended heatwave. By the time you all read this it might be over and we've returned to our normal British Summer weather!

This newsletter is a shorter than usual, just eight pages, but I hope you still enjoy reading it and looking at the photos kindly provided by "The Pieman" who gave permission for our cover photo and the centre spread photo.

As for other news, the proposed Watersports Hub development on Barnfield has not moved significantly further this year and seems to have come to a hiatus. The field itself is being left in its natural state for the benefit of wildlife, especially hedgehogs which will enjoy the cover.

The Committee has met and discussed paying for replacement notice board laminate covers as the existing ones have become stained. We may also consider another small information board about the newly planted black poplars, if they survive. There is also a

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plan to re-use one of the old tree guards to protect a tree in memory of Phyllis Brown, perhaps on Barnfield itself which she bought and donated some years after the main Meadows gift she and her husband Harry Brown made?

The next Newsletter will be out in October; in the meantime, enjoy the Summer!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
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This edition's cover photo is provided by The Pieman (@idreamofpiesphotography on Twitter)

"At 6:00am a Swan glides slowly upstream against the flow of the languid golden misty River Dee. Just a beautiful silent start to the day interrupted only by the squabbles of rooks"

See also our centre spread photo

Kiss-me-on-the-mountain!

Countryside Ranger Stephanie Hefferan on the invasive Himalyan Balsam



Himalayan Balsam (Impatiens glandulifera) in bloom

Policeman's Helmet, Bobby Tops, Copper Tops, Gnome's Hat-stand and the curiously named Kiss-me-on-the-mountain. All names that conjure up wonderful images for a plant that has sadly taken hold across the UK, to the detriment of our own native plants – Himalayan balsam.

Introduced by the Victorians in 1839, this plant was considered to be the poor man's orchid, growing easily and rapidly from seed. Its virtue of 'splendid invasiveness' as a great selling point has proved to be exactly that; invasive.

Spread easily by seed, this annual plant is now an established feature in our field margins, river-banks and woodland edges. Its pretty, pink nodding flower heads (shaped like policeman's helmets) often stand tall above most of our native species commanding attention. However, over the years it has become an increasing problem as it spreads and out-competes our native plants and will continue to do so if action isn't taken.

Heard of Balsam bashing? This is a method of removal whereby the plant is uprooted by hand and then crushed under foot *in situ* and then left to rot; over time, the plant is eventually eradicated or at least kept under control. It's preferable to the use of chemicals and as it can be easily pulled and can be a satisfying pastime. It can be pulled at anytime but best is before the flowers have gone to seed which is approximately June-October; if the flower is seeding, the pods can explode and shoot seeds up to 30ft, so can increase dispersal rather than reduce.

But a word of caution! If 'having a go' does appeal on your walk in the countryside – be confident that you know exactly what you are looking for and look only for this plant. Other invasives like Japanese knotweed and Giant hogweed whilst they are unlikely to be confused with Himalayan balsam require specialist removal and can contain harmful toxins, so be sure, be safe and be respectful of other plants

Stephanie Hefferan

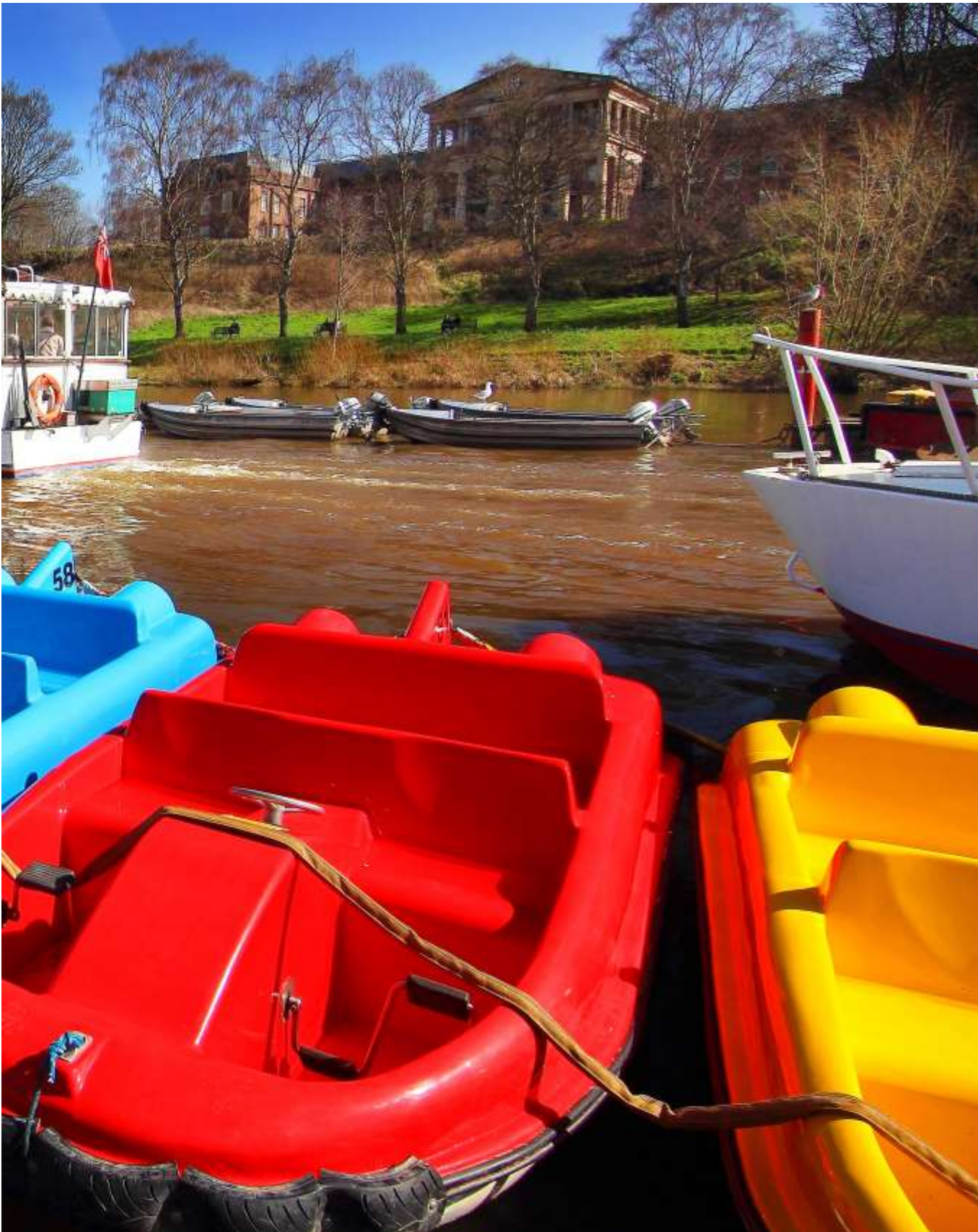
Read Julie Savory's account of Balsam bashing along the Meadows on page 6



The Groves on the River Dee looking very colourful in the April sunshine this year.



Photograph by The Pieman @idreamofpiesphotography on Twitter



An Evening of Balsam Bashing

Julie Savory recounts the joys of bashing balsam



On a warm evening in May a small team of volunteers from the Friends of the Meadows Committee donned old clothes and wellingtons and set about “bashing” the Himalayan Balsam that every year invades the riverbank which edges The Meadows.

The aim is to try and reduce the spread of this invasive weed. The date was chosen as the best time before the plant flowers and creates seed pods. Himalayan Balsam grows to 2-3 metres (6-10 feet) in height. Between June and October it produces an abundance of purplish pink flowers which can initially seem attractive but the plant very quickly multiplies and spreads, taking over whole areas. It tolerates low light

levels shading out and smothering native plants and vegetation which struggle to survive as they are deprived of light and other nutrients. It is designated as a weed by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and has become a major problem especially along riverbanks.

The plant has become established in river catchment areas and seeds travel downstream to spread further afield. This makes tackling the Balsam an essential annual task.

If you would like to help look out in our newsletter or on our Facebook page for the annual call for assistance which comes out each Spring.



April to June 2018



Ragged Robin (see 8th June)

7th April

A migrating male Redstart was observed feeding along the new fence line on the neighbouring Duke of Westminster land. It remained here for a few hours until dusk.

8th April

The first Willow Warbler of the spring was singing in trees long Bottoms Lane track. In close proximity was a calling Nuthatch.

14th April

Rob Sidwell's reward for getting up at the crack of dawn was to hear the first reeling Grasshopper Warbler of the spring.

Later in the day, a Swallow drifted over the Meadow and a rise in temperature saw the emergence of two Peacock and two Small Tortoiseshell butterflies.

19th April

The first Lesser Whitethroat of the spring was singing in the hedgerow on neighbouring Dukes land.

21st April

A period of cool weather no doubt halted the emergence of Orange Tip butterflies, 2 were eventually seen in fields up river from the Meadow.

22nd April

The first Common Whitethroat of the spring was singing from the gorse lined path in the centre of the Meadow. John Wainwright flushed a Red Legged Partridge as he walked from Belgrave Park down towards the river. This is the first sighting of a Red Legged Partridge since the log began.

23rd April

House Martin were late to arrive back this spring, the first six were above the river by the water mound.

29th April

A lone Swift arrived back on time & ahead of the pack, 1 was observed flying into the eaves of a house on Cross Hey, Handbridge. Generally Swifts were very slow in returning to the skies above Handbridge & Queens Park.

1st May

Sedge Warblers were also late to return. Mark Warren found the first one singing on the Meadow side of Bottoms Lane track.

12th May

The water level in the ditches remained high & may be the reason for a brief and unexpected visit of a Water Vole swimming through a flooded area of the Meadow.



Broad-bodied Chaser (see 10th June)

26th May

Great Spotted Woodpeckers nested in a dead tree located in the hedgerow between Barnfield & the main Meadow. In Barnfield Meadow the first Small Copper, Common Blue butterflies of the spring & also Silver Y Moth.

8th June

After a number of barren years Ragged Robbin was flowering again on land bordering the Meadow along with a single Marsh Orchid.

10th June

It is amazing how quickly wildlife has moved into the new pond by Bottoms Lane track. In its first year it has hosted a family of Moorhen and numerous tadpoles/froglets. Dragonfly

not previously recorded on the on the Meadows were attracted to the pond. These included four Broad Bodied and two Four Spotted Chaser (see photos) with ovipositing females of both species. The pond also hosted good numbers of Azure Damselfly, 1 or 2 Blue Tailed and Common Damselfly.

19th June

A poor year for Common Spotted Orchid on the Meadow after much searching only 1 spike was found.



Four-spotted Chaser (see 10th June) c David Kitching

Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder

01244 677135 or get in touch via our Facebook page:
/friends of the meadows-chester



Duke's Drive and Meadows Walk

Sunday 19th August, 2:00pm

at Duke's Drive Gates led by Rachel Cross

This will be the fourth year we've done this walk and last year proved quite popular with lovely weather again! This will be a gentle stroll of about 5 miles 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. To be organised with Friends of the Duke's Drive. Come rain or shine, I'll be there! Just join up.