

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 213

Autumn 2018

Welcome *to our* Newsletter for Autumn 2018

After our long, hot Summer, the season has definitely turned into Autumn as we see and feel the changes around us.

We are now starting to prepare for this year's AGM which will be at the new St Mary's Handbridge Centre on "our side" of the river. We're grateful to James Holroyd for continuing to find excellent speakers for our meetings. This year we have arborist John Tuer who hails from Much Wenlock in Shropshire who I am sure will give a fascinating talk all about trees!

More details on the AGM can be found on page 3 and I hope to see as many as possible come along to show your support.

All the news in and around the Meadows is included elsewhere in this newsletter, which again is a more compact eight pages long.

Our next newsletter is due out in January and will be accompanied by our request for membership renewals. These are vitally important to keep the Friends of the Meadows going, both to fund the printing of these newsletters and to support the extra work on the Meadows itself which the Committee wishes to undertake. The scope and extent of what is done on behalf of you, our membership, will be one of the subjects up for discussion at the AGM.

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This edition's cover photo of a swan on the River Dee in Chester is provided by Dale Miles

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To Autumn by John Keats, 1819 (excerpt)

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing
sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and
bless
With fruit the vines that round the
thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd
cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the
hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding
more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never
cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their
clammy cells

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 8th November, 2018 at 7pm

**St Mary's Handbridge Centre,
St Mary Without-the-Walls, Handbridge, CH4 7HL**

This year's AGM talk and presentation will be by John Tuer on:

Trees of the Shropshire Hills



The talk takes the form of a virtual walk of seven miles through the south Shropshire Hills. On the way, we shall look particularly at the trees, many of them being native species although there are a few introduced species among them (e.g Wellingtonia, Leyland Cypress, Rhododendron, Douglas Fir, etc.).

Along our way we shall be looking at tree related issues: ivy on trees, root compaction, dead limbs, what to use as hedging trees, when to use native trees or introduced specimens. This will give material for discussion later, if time allows.



John worked in senior management in a comprehensive school before retirement, subsequently training as a tree surgeon. He has given this talk successfully to groups with a wide range of interests.

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

Meadows Site Management

An update from Coutryside Ranger Stephanie Hefferan

Willow pollarding by the Ferry

pontoon: A job has been raised to pollard all stems at 2.5 metres above ground level in the main forks. Given that it is a mature multi-stemmed Crack willow with a number of old cavities this is probably the best and safest way of managing it. The work will be carried out under the new Tree Contract, starting November.

General maintenance: Cutting back and general maintenance etc has taken place.

The steps at Bottoms Lane – this has been submitted to our Asset Team at the Council for repair work and will continue to chase.

Cut and collect on the Meadows has taken place

Anti-social Behaviour: I have been liaising with police and Community Safety Wardens regarding issues of ASB reported around the 'Friends' bench and patrols will continue. It is an issue but the problem does not seem to be as

severe as first reported. The situation will be monitored.

There was also a report of camping on the Meadows in the Summer. This appears to have been very temporary and the "campers" moved on.

Events: All events went smoothly with no site issues reported.

We have already had requests in for next year's annual events – I will keep all up to speed regarding dates, etc. nearer the time.

Big Dee Day: No events ran on the Meadows this year for the Big Dee Day week. We had a group from Tesco's tidying up the Riverside Walk from the bridge to the Meadows entrance.

Winter Work: Members of the FOM Committee plan to coppice willows and apply some herbicide. It was also proposed planting a tree to commemorate the great contribution made by Phyllis Brown.

Tree Survey on the Meadows



In late May, Richard Smart, a former Chair of Friends of the Meadows (FoM), helped current committee members identify trees that have been planted on The Meadows over the years by Friends of the Meadows. The information will be added to the Meadows Management Plan.

It was very interesting to see the range of trees and to have fun identifying them from their leaves and other features.

Trees which have been planted include: Black Poplar, Small Leafed Lime, Oak, Hornbeam, Field Maple and Rowan. See if you can spot the different species when you are out and about on the Meadows.

Other News

Watersports Hub

After the 2017 planning consent was quashed last December following a judicial review brought by Clive Sykes (based on inconsistent statements about whether it was a members-only facility or open to the public), the Council's Planning Committee will meet on 6th November to decide on a renewed application.

However, there is a funding shortfall, so progress is expected to be slow even if approval is granted for second time. It is probable that if funding is not forthcoming in the next nine to twelve months the project will be moth-balled.

In the meantime, an inventory of protected species, ie. bats, water voles etc. is to be undertaken.

Barnfield

On Barnfield itself, the Committee has discussed erecting a notice to explain that the field has been purposefully left in its natural state to encourage wildlife. The Ranger's views are being sought.

Black Poplars

It is hoped that the black poplars planted will survive and if so, an Interpretation Board could be erected to provide details of this important native tree. Funding sources have been looked at as well as the work entailed.

Notice Boards

Much correspondence has taken place to identify someone to provide and replace the faded polycarbonate covers, but so far no-one has been able to fully provide the service that is needed. This is ongoing.

Conservation – by Gill McEvoy

Look, a dandelion! Quick,
put a bell-jar over it, and only
when it's safe uncover it
to let the bees have benefit.

We must take care of what is wild
and beautiful, for

on one side my neighbour's
kneeling on her lawn,
rooting out her dandelions
with trowel and fork –

on the other a second neighbour
walks about, a heavy pack
of Round-up on his back,
poisoning his dandelions –

so many being put to death!

We must protect the dandelion,
afraid
that soon there'll be none left.



The Perfect Sloe Gin

Ruth Davidson shares her recipe to give as a gift or to keep in the cupboard

Sloes are wild plums in season from September to November. BUT be certain you know what a sloe looks like – use a good foraging book but BE CERTAIN!

Makes about 1.5 litres

Don't worry about waiting for the first frost – pop the sloes in the freezer or prick with a needle – your aim is to pierce the skin.

Ingredients

1 litre of gin
(use vodka if you don't like gin – or make both)

500gms sloe berries

250gms caster sugar



Method

1. Place the sloes and the sugar in a glass jar (with a lid)

2. Add the gin

3. Store in a cool, dark place

4. WEEK 1 Shake the jar every day

5. WEEKS 2-12 Shake the jar once a week

6. Strain the sloe gin into a bottle (or smaller decorative bottles) using a funnel and muslin (or a paper coffee filter)

7. ENJOY!

The sloe grows on the blackthorn bush (*Prunus spinosa*), a very thorny common hedgerow shrub.

These are easily identifiable due to their inch long black thorns.

They are a wild form of plum and so expect the bush to look like a miniature plum tree. They will have slightly serrated leaves. But sometimes the thorns are hard to find.

You might find something bigger than a sloe: a bullace or a damson. Cut it open and look for a pip that looks like a plum.





July to September 2018



Ruddy darter (see 8th July)

8th July

The pond on Duke's land continued to act as a magnet for Dragonflies. Three new species were recorded for the first time since the pond was re-profiled as part of a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

The first species found were two **Ruddy Darter** perched up on pond side vegetation (see picture above).

Nearby, a **Brown hawker** Dragonfly carefully laid eggs (ovipositing) on a



Brown hawker (see 8th July)

partly submerged piece of wood (see picture opposite).

The third new species, the **Emperor dragonfly** flew in at speed and oviposited by frenetically dipping its abdomen into the deepest part of the pond. It did this for only a couple of minutes before flying off as quickly as it came.

If you live near the Meadow why not put in a pond? There can be no better way to attract wildlife to your garden and you will be amazed at how quickly it does move in.



The striking Mandarin duck (Stock image from markyharky on Flickr) (see 24th July)

24th July

Mandarin duck are occasionally recorded a little up river from the Meadow or by The Groves.

Rob Sidwell recorded a group of 15 up river of Heronbridge.

They were probably a family group and had either nested on the river or on one of the lakes on the Dukes estate.

6th August

Searching for **Purple Hairstreaks** usually involves a good degree of patience, and a sore neck as you scan the top of Oak trees, their favoured habitat.

Julie Rose and I were in luck with a couple of these tiny butterflies flying around one of the Oak crowns at the foot of the terraces. Although we have many Oaks around the Meadow, this is the only place I have recorded this butterfly.

Another look around the pond off Bottoms Lane showed the continued presence of **Ruddy Darter** but now joined by the similar looking **Common Darter**.

An extended search of the neighbouring Dukes land found good numbers of both **Common Blue** and **Small Copper** butterflies along with a single **Goldspot moth**.

11th September

A question often asked by the older generation is, where did all the **Swans** at the Groves go? The answer is they were poisoned with lead weights.

Numbers did increase again across Cheshire when lead weights were banned, but for some unknown reason they never did return to The Groves.

It was therefore a delight to see a party of eight swans in addition to the two resident birds.

They were seen again, on and off, over the next few days. Let's hope they become a regular feature again.

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)



The delightful sight of eight swans on the Dee as the Mark Twain passes by. Photo by Dale Miles. (see 11th September)