

A low-angle photograph of a meadow. In the foreground, several yellow buttercup flowers are in focus, some fully open and some as buds. Their green stems and leaves are visible. In the background, more flowers and grass are blurred, creating a sense of depth. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall lighting is bright and natural, suggesting a sunny day.

Friends of the Meadows

Newsletter 223

Summer 2021

Welcome to our Newsletter for Summer 2021

As I write this, there is hope that many, if not all, social restrictions imposed because of Covid will be lifted on 19th July and I hope I'm not tempting fate by mentioning this!

On 13th June, the Deva Triathlon run route included the Meadows paths and some of you may have been up early enough to have seen them! If you didn't you can view some excellent videos of the Triathlon in and around the city on their website at chestertri.org.uk

Although the Raft Race due to have been held on 4th July has been cancelled for a second year, the Diva Devas Women's Triathlon even will take place on the Meadows on Sunday 11th July. The "Event Field" on Near Meadow will have received its cut in time for the event, so expect to see a lot of activity on that morning!

On Saturday 7th August, the Event Field will be in use again for the Dee Mile swim which will start a little upriver from 5:30pm, finishing at the Suspension Bridge.

More details on all of these events can be found on their website.

The next newsletter will be out in October when we hope to have news of our Annual General Meeting. In the meantime I wish you all a pleasant summer and the hope that we may enjoy more of our "lost freedoms".

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
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This edition's photos on the cover and the next page are of the buttercups on Near Meadow taken by Pie Man (@idreamofpies)



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All the sightings in the last few months.

Sonnet 18

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of
May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a
date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course
untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his
shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can
see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

William Shakespeare.

Meadows Site Management

An update from Greenspace Officer Stephanie Hefferan

Paths

Submission has been made to the Capital Funding Programme for the areas agreed as the next priorities (Water Mound - Riverside - Lower Park Road entrance).

We will also monitor the work Welsh Water did on the central path; we've requested some extra funding in case areas need topping up.

We also costed up Bottoms Lane track and submitted these but this may get put onto the next year's priority as part of the rolling programme of path maintenance.

Mowing

The new contractors have started and are now on a regular scheduled programme as per normal. This includes getting the events area on Near Meadow ready for the upcoming events.

We have made our line manager aware of the disappointing quality of work re the cut and collect and we have again requested him to approach a new contractor for

quotes. We have provided him with several contacts who would like to quote for the work.

Severn Trent/Hafren Dyfrdwy

I am liaising with our Property Services Department to establish a formal access agreement. We would look to do the same with Welsh Water.

(Hafren Dyfrdwy is the Welsh branch of Severn Trent - Ed.)

Scrub removal

This will be scheduled in for the upcoming season and will target the main meadow and adjacent ditches.

Noticeboard (Riverside)

It needed a repair which I managed to do, so it should be fine now!

I'm off on annual leave in July and will be back at it on the 26th. If you have any queries or issues, please report in the usual way to enquiries@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer



Grasslands and Wildflower Meadows

Julie Rose offers her personal perspective

Reversion of intensive grassland to species rich meadow is thankfully becoming popular.

There are two Meadows groups in my area, North West Wales. People own a few acres of land - 2-10 acres, often in small parcels, surrounded by wildlife friendly boundaries such as stone walls. Sometimes they are bought to graze ponies or stock, sometimes bought for wildlife. Inadvertently a Scout group have become Meadows managers because it happened to be what they were offered, and it is a superb area, reverting back to SSSI quality. These small parcels give wildlife a "connected" landscape to move in. Large fields are simply too big for small birds and mammals to cross safely, there are no places to hide from avian predators.

Within the fields there is variety - no monoculture of perennial rye-grass here. People are experimenting with the best ways to get to "species rich". Trevor Dines of



Trevor Dines of Plantlife on the meadow by the River Conwy (YouTube)

Plantlife has a talk on YouTube on the reversion of his own meadow (*find it on the PlantlifeVideo channel*).

The basic problem is that the ground is too fertile because of residual fertiliser, so grasses which respond quicker to fertiliser out compete the forbs. Mowing and removal or grazing removes vegetation and takes energy by the plants to grow. Intensive agriculture would add fertiliser to turn the grassland back to fertiliser green; meadows reverting to species rich have no fertiliser or pesticide application so the grass growth becomes weaker. The grass doesn't have that lawn like bright green, and of course, there are all the different greens of the flower leaves, sedges, rushes and different grass species. Grass hemiparasites such as Yellow Rattle can be sown and lucky are those who already have Eyebrights and Bartsias to suppress grass growth.

Cattle and ponies are excellent management tools - they remove the grass and make holes in the sward to allow forbs to grow. In his video, Trevor Dines makes the point that



Yellow rattle is now often used to turn improved grassland back to meadow - by feeding off the vigorous grasses, it eventually allows more delicate, traditional species to push their way through.

his meadow does his old fashioned breed (Highland cattle) very well whereas the Charolais cattle grazing the intensively managed pasture didn't do so well. The dry matter volume of vegetation can be as high as intensively managed meadows, but it isn't all grass - a lot is flowers.

Chester Meadows

We are lucky on Chester Meadows, it is a relatively large area - over 50 acres, divided by ditches, patches of scrub and some tall trees. It is already species rich; it hasn't been used for agriculture since the 1940s.

We have rare plants such as Tubular Water-dropwort, and swathes of various buttercups and pignut. The meadows group members would be delighted if their meadows were as diverse. (*See Andy's Meadows Log entry for 8th July - Ed.*)

But - there's always a but - Chester Meadows needs good grassland management to maintain the diversity, and diversity has reduced over the last few years. We have a plan, the grassland should be grazed, and mown in rotation and the arisings removed. Our most excellent Ranger knows the issues well, however higher management has seen fit to refuse grazing (political interference?) and the mowing is shambolic. The arisings are not removed, they are left as a mulch to



Tubular Water-dropwort is a plant which used to be common but is now much less so. It is found typically in wet areas near old ponds but doesn't usually find its way to new wet habitats very quickly.

add fertility to help the grasses out compete the forbs, yet again. Yet again, our wildlife suffers.

Welsh Water has done us a huge favour - by digging they have turned over the seedbank, brought all sorts of seeds to the surface and left us bare ground for plants to germinate. It will be exciting to see what may appear, as long as no re-sowing with any non-native inappropriate seed-mixes has happened.

Cornfield annuals anyone?



Information and Interpretation boards on the Meadows

James Holroyd summarises the current situation

After many months of negotiation over the design of the boards and their funding, we are now nearing the end of this surprisingly complex process.

Friends of the Meadows have paid for the planning permission (£259) and The Postcode Local Trust accepted our bid and has provided the majority of the funding (£2,000). The additional costs (£300) were covered from the budgets of Councillors Razia Daniels and Neil Sullivan.



The type of interpretation board that will be installed (photo from Shelley Signs)

The exact position of the two information boards has been agreed with the Council, which will be by the paths on Meadows after entering from the riverside and from Lower Park Road.

The design and fabrication of the boards will be by Shelley Signs based in Shrewsbury. Content will include reference to the gifting of the Meadows to the people of Chester by Harry and Phyllis Brown, the role of the Meadows in flood management, some early history and the range of flora and fauna to be found in this green lung at the heart of Chester. The boards will also show a simple site map of the Meadows marking the paths, ditches and historical meadow names.

All that remains is to reach a consensus on the very fine details of design and for the Council to approve the wording.

Black Poplar interpretation board

At the same time, we are working on a small interpretation board to be placed near the four black poplars, male and female, with different clone numbers, now established near the river in the north-east corner of the Meadows. These have been planted in partnership with Chester Zoo, as part of the initiative to increase the genetic diversity of this species now rare in Britain.

The Meadows map design is still being finalized but may look something like this, drawn up by our Newsletter Editor Rachel Cross using various computer applications to enhance the original design.





May 2021 to July 2021

1st May 2021

The only migrating Wheatear to be seen on the Meadow this Spring was spotted by Rob while walking his Dog.

6th May 2021

Two Migrating Whinchat spent the day feeding along the temporary fence line in the centre of the Meadow.



Whinchat (see 6th and 11th May)

8th May 2021

Swifts were late to arrive this year. The first three were noted in the sky above Handbridge with numbers doubling the following day.

Four noisy Oystercatchers flew over the Meadow

11th May 2021

A single Whinchat was seen on the Handbridge marsh.

A Water Rail was briefly seen in flight by the fence line on the Handbridge Marsh. Two

Water Rails were heard in the same area the following day squealing like little Piglets.

13th May 2021

Two Reed Warbler were singing in the hedgerow either side of Bottoms Lane track. A slightly unusual place to find them as the name suggests closely associated to Reeds.

14th May 2021

Brimstone butterflies are a rare sight around our neck of the woods so it was a surprise to see one flying in the village past Edge & Son Butchers.

13th June 2021

A round dozen Red-eyed Damselflies were loafing on the river Lily pads.



Great burnet (3rd July)

Further up river in vegetation by the Swans old pool were ten Blue-tailed Damselflies.

Above the Meadow a Peregrine repeatedly “dive bombed” a passing Buzzard. The Buzzard was left in no doubt its presence was not welcome. This behaviour backs up previous reports of the Shot Tower Peregrines attacking Buzzards. Aggression to other birds of prey may well also explain the disappearance of our Kestrels. Where have the Kestrels gone and will they return?

3rd July 2021

Great Burnet flower every year on land further up river but have never colonised the Meadow. So it was a pleasing to see a clump of the crimson lollipop heads swaying in the breeze. Let us hope it continues to spread around the Meadow (see Pic).

8th July 2021

The rarest plant on the Meadow is probably the Tubular Water-dropwort and it was again staying faithful to the same ditch where it was rediscovered a few years ago. (See pic).



Tubular water-dropwort (8th July)

A huge emergence of pristine Small Skipper butterflies on the Meadow just as the season for the Large Skipper (see pic) was coming to an end.

A few day-flying Moths were recorded on the Meadow including Six-spot Burnets, a Cinnabar and also a Common Carpe

One or two Elephant Hawk-moths were also coming to light in Cross Hey (see pic)



Large skipper (8th July)



Elephant Hawk-moth (8th July)

13/07/2021

Patience finally paid off when a single Essex Skipper was found among the plentiful & similar looking Small Skipper, the Essex Skipper having colonised the Meadow last year.

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Yellow rattle (photo: Julie Rose)