



Friends of the Meadows

Newsletter 226

Spring 2022

Welcome to our Newsletter for Spring 2022

In this issue we bring you details of three walks on the Meadows in Spring and Summer which we hope will attract a number of you to come and enjoy and find the plantlife growing there. They are gentle strolls and no botany knowledge is needed, just your enthusiasm!

The Cheshire Bee Group's meeting on 21st May is for those with a more dedicated interest in the variety of bee species that may be identified. In the past, mining bees have been found in the sandy banks as well as Nomad bees and several others.

It's been a while since Andy Ingham led the Dawn Chorus Walks (and he's not doing one this year!) but for the early birds among you, you should find that a start of 5am in the first week of May should have you greeted by this magical experience. Or, for those less inclined for that early rise, you can listen to last year's on the RSPB website! In fact they held a vote for favourite birdsong last year and "pitched skylarks head-to-head with song thrushes, and cuckoos against wrens". And the winner? The blackbird's fluting song was the most loved.

You'll also notice that we don't have a Meadows Log in this Newsletter as Andy has been enjoying time away, but we'll be back with all the sightings next time. As ever, please share what you've seen or heard around the Meadows!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
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This edition's cover photo is by Julie Savory of the newly resurfaced path on Bottom's Lane track (see Meadows Management)

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Spring

from *Love's Labour's Lost* by William Shakespeare

When daisies pied and violets blue
And lady-smocks all silver-white
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
Cuckoo;
Cuckoo, cuckoo: Oh word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!

When shepherds pipe on oaten straws,
And merry larks are plowmen's clocks,
When turtles tread, and rooks, and daws,
And maidens bleach their summer smocks,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
Cuckoo;
Cuckoo, cuckoo: Oh word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!



Botany Walks on The Meadows

Friends of the Meadows have arranged for Martyn Stead, an experienced recorder of plant life for the Botanical Society of the British Isles to lead three botany walks on The Meadows.

We will gently stroll around The Meadows to spot and identify the wild flowers that are in flower in the different months. The impact of climate change on plant life will be highlighted.

There is no charge for the walks and it is not necessary to book in advance.



So please do come and join us and find out more about the biodiversity in this special area of grassland so close to the city centre.

Dates
Wednesday 11th May
Wednesday 8th June
Wednesday 13th July



Meet at the Lower Park Road entrance to The Meadows at 6.00 pm, ready to start walking at 6.30pm. The walks will last approximately 1.5 hours

Cheshire Bee Group on The Meadows

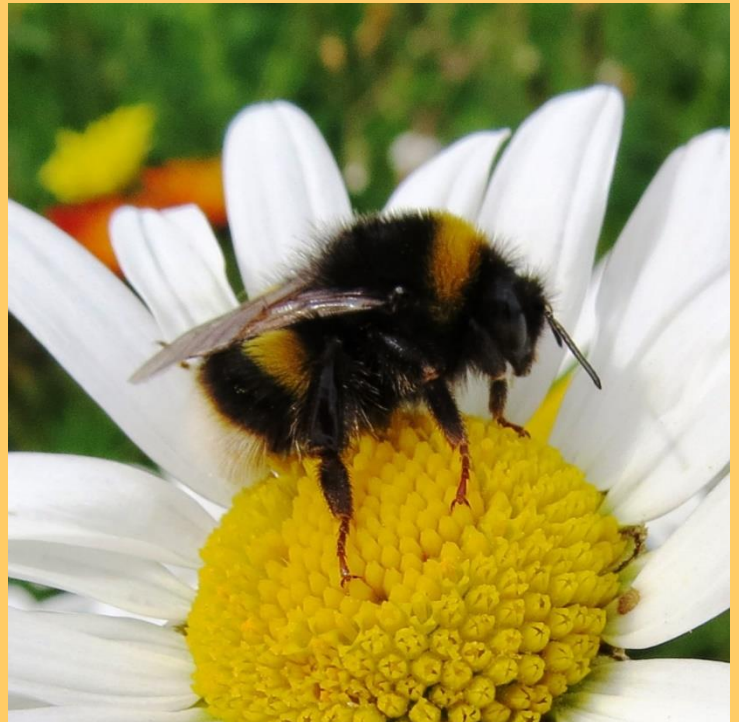
**Saturday 21st May at
11am**

Join the Cheshire Bee Group at the Meadows.

We will be looking for and identifying different species of bees on the site.

Please be aware that whilst we welcome bee recorders of all levels this won't be a taught or guided session

If you'd like to attend, and for details of where we'll meet, please email cheshirebeegroup@gmail.com



Invasive Non-native Species

Welcome diversity or serious negative impact? Julie Rose reports

Invasive Non-native Species – “INNS” for short. These species are anything that will dominate a habitat that have come from abroad. The Government lists 36 species of plants and 30 species of animals which are covered by INNS legislation in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Section 14, Schedule 9.

INNS cost a lot of money to control, and if not controlled cause infrastructure and environmental damage. It is illegal to release these species into the wild or sell them (some of them), amongst other regulations. So, if you trap a grey squirrel, it's illegal to release it. Interestingly, landowners are not obliged to remove INNS from their land, but they may not release them into the wild/supposedly natural habitats (do we have any of those left?).

The list includes many common garden thugs such as: Montbretia, several Cotoneaster species, and Variegated Archangel. Various water-plants that block waterways are listed such as New Zealand Pygmyweed, *Crassula helmsii*.

Buddleja davidii isn't on the list, but probably should be. It is a nectar source, but doesn't nurture the rest of the lifecycle of the insects.

Cotoneaster flowers are visited by pollinators and the berries are eaten by birds, then dispersed into the wild, where they become dominant vegetation, smothering everything thus reducing our floral biodiversity which reduces the species of specialist invertebrates which use our rarer native plants. Generalist species do well.

What INNS can we look for?

A few years ago groups checked Chester Weir looking for Chinese Mitten Crab; on the North Wales coast we're looking for Slipper Limpet, which is smothering mussel beds in South Wales, none of either found thankfully.



The flowers of Himalayan balsam

This preamble is to introduce the Chester Meadows INNS, our Himalayan Balsam. It is a tall pretty plant, large pink flowers, the bees love it, which is why some plant collectors brought it here in the 1830s. But it grows as a monoculture, it outgrows any other plant, and spreads by seed pods that explode large sturdy seeds that will float in waterways to new areas.

It's an annual, so germinates, flowers and dies in one season, and when it dies in autumn it

leaves bare soil that is eroded by winter rains and floods. On our side the seeds don't live for more than two years in the soil; it is easy to pull out and easy to identify. The seed leaves are huge, the stem has a translucent whitish or reddish colour and is fleshy and brittle. The roots are white. We should pull it before it has any flower buds, and definitely before flowering. Then you can just leave the plant to dry out either on a footpath, it will get trampled, or in a bramble bush, somewhere off the ground so it can't re-root.

It's very satisfying, even addictive to pull up. You can start now, I was pulling up seedlings on 22nd March but we would love you to join us balsam bashing for a couple of hours, or whatever you can spare, on a summer evening. Andy Ingham will be organising some bashing sessions, they might even finish in a pub. You don't need wellies or tidetables, just a pair of gardening gloves and midge repellent. Enjoy!

If you're interested in helping, contact us at fomchester@gmail.com

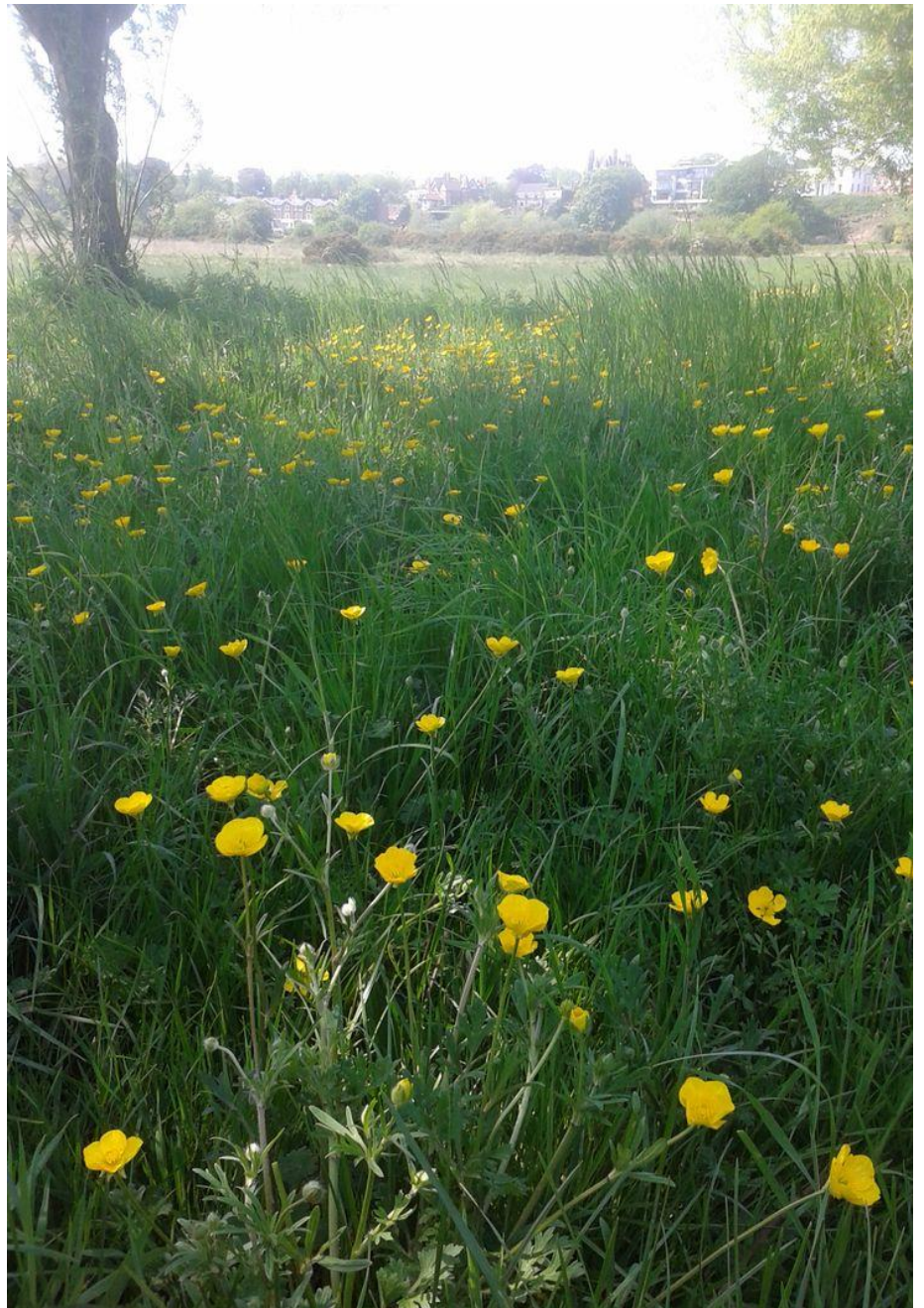
The Meadow buttercup^{or}

Ranunculus acris, is a widespread and common perennial in meadows and pastures, and is also found in parks, gardens and at woodland edges.

Meadow buttercup prefers slightly damper, calcareous sites, where it can grow so dense that it forms yellow meadows that dazzle in the sunshine. It flowers between April and October.

It has yellow flowers, about 2cm across, that comprise five, shiny petals and has rounded leaves, divided into three to seven lobes. It does not possess the runners of Creeping Buttercup.

This photo of buttercups on Chester Meadows was found on:
https://micronations.wiki/wiki/Chester_Meadows



Special Oak Trees on The Meadows

Richard Cain tells us about oak trees and those planted on the Meadows



Jackie's Copse on Barnfield

There are several special oak trees on the main meadow, the background to which I'd like to share with you.

First though, the oak tree itself. Two species of oak are native to this country, the English oak *Quercus robur* and the Sessile oak *Quercus petraea*. Worldwide, over 800 oaks have been described including numerous natural hybrids and about half are evergreen. The one major feature of oaks is that they all bear acorns. The English oak is capable of lasting for a 1000 years by which time it would have a girth of 14 metres.

The Oakbase Oak, FOM Oak and Mackie's Oak

The Oakbase Oak was planted in April 1999 near the gate on Bottoms Lane. It was donated by OAKBASE plc to celebrate the merger of Hartley Nock Walker and Axis. The FOM Oak, donated by FOM itself was planted near the above in March 2003. Mackie's Oak was planted in February 2005 between the two previously mentioned oaks. This Oak was donated by Ann and Brian Lewis in memory of their much loved 15 year old

Westie. Ann is a former Treasurer and Membership Secretary of FOM.

Jackie's Copse

There are seven oak trees in Barnfield to the right of Richard's Oak and known collectively as Jackie's Copse. This copse was planted in March 2006 in memory of Jackie Leech MBE who died in 2005. Jackie was known in Chester as the Swan Lady because of the work she did to protect the swans of Chester particularly on the River Dee. In those days we had many more swans on the Dee and Jackie would frequently take in injured swans before returning them to the river in full health. She also did a lot of voluntary work with Chester in Concert, Roman Days and was a Blue Badge Guide.

Richard's Oak

This oak tree was planted on 28th January 1998 by Richard Smart (right). Next time you walk through Barnfield see how substantial the tree is already despite oak being a slow growing tree.



Richard Smart planting his oak tree

Richard, as well as being a former chairman of FOM, is also one of the founding members of our organisation. Richard in his working life was a forestry consultant and travelled widely during his career. He also wrote "Trees and Woodlands in Cheshire" published by Cheshire Landscapes Trust.

FOM have benefited hugely from his knowledge and for many years Richard also kept the Meadows Log that is a regular feature in the Newsletter.

Chester Male Voice Choir Oak in Grosvenor Park

Lastly an oak tree that is not on the Meadows but in Grosvenor Park.

This oak tree was planted in 1991 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the choir. It is situated in the gardens you walk into when entering the park from Grosvenor Park Road/Vicars Lane near St John the Baptist church. Notice the girth of the tree opposite which was of a similar size to Richard's tree above when planted as a sapling.

The choir celebrated their 80th Anniversary in 2021 and because of Covid restrictions are belatedly celebrating this with a concert in Chester Cathedral on **Saturday 16th July in Chester Cathedral** with Foden's Band, currently ranked as one of the finest brass bands in the UK.




Chester Male Voice Choir Oak in Grosvenor Park

Black Poplar board



The funds for the Black Poplar interpretation panel are now in place and planning permission has been granted. The exact location for the siting of the panel has to be finally agreed but will be in the area of the bund that faces the four poplars that have been planted. After many versions and much tweeking of the panel's design – based on an original layout provided by the Chester Zoo Black Poplar Project - Rachel has perfected a final design that has been sent to Shelly Signs (who made the Meadows Information Panels last year).

Soon, we hope, the panel will be delivered and installed and we'll have some photographs to share in the Newsletter!



Meadows Management

Path resurfacing in February

We were successful in our grant bid for pathworks and resurfaced Bottoms Lane track leading down to the Meadows. The work took place over a week in February and has received lots of positive comments. It will look even better when it beds in! See Julie Savory's Photo on the cover.

Storm drain leak

A minor leak was reported to the storm drain on site on 28th March. This was repaired and the equipment removed from site in early April.

Meadows scrub management

This is an annual rolling programme of scrub coppicing to maintain the site as a conservation meadow. We have focused on removal along the lines of the site's historic ditches, thus the ditches get maintained whilst achieving our overall conservation aims for the Meadow.

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer

Meadows Log

Unfortunately, as Andy is away, we don't have a Meadows Log in this edition. But we'll catch up with all the sightings so far in 2022 in our Summer Newsletter out at the end of July!

In the meantime, please submit your sightings of birds, plants, insects, or indeed any wildlife you see in or around The Meadows. As usual, you can contact us as below.

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