

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 227

Summer 2022

Welcome to our Newsletter for Summer 2022

Despite the cover of this edition of the newsletter, cattle grazing has not returned to the Meadows! But I thought I'd give everyone a reminder of how it used to be at least eight years ago now. Maybe sometime in the future we will see them return? We'll see...

This Summer edition also has a bumper Meadows Log compiled by Andy covering February to July this year with some gorgeous photos! As ever, Andy would be glad to hear of all your sightings of wildlife in and around the Meadows – see the back page for contact details.

At the time of writing, three of the four public events on the Meadows have taken place, with the "Event Field" on Near Meadow getting its cut beforehand. The women's Deva Divas Triathlon was held on 10th July and there's a great video of the event on Youtube – just search for "Deva Divas 2022". The last public event is the Dee Mile swimming race which takes place on Saturday 6th August at 5:30pm.

Another date for your diaries is our Annual General Meeting which is scheduled for Thursday 17th November. In the meantime, enjoy the Summer, stay cool and we'll be back in the Autumn!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
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This edition's cover photo is by Steve Howe of cattle on the Meadows (sometime before 2014!)

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Feb to July 2022

Balsam Bashing

We had a productive evening on 4th July removing Himalayan Balsam from various areas on The Meadows, organised by Andy. We were joined by Alison, an FoM member.



Meadows Management

Events

All the public events scheduled in with no problems reported as yet. Grass in the events area has been mown with further cuts scheduled – the arisings don't get removed as the cuts follow approximately every two weeks so they will naturally be short and more easily disperse.

Black poplar interpretation board

This is now installed and invoice sent. Well done everyone involved, it looks good!

Erosion (opposite the sailing club)

Vegetation is finally establishing but on my return from leave in August I will investigate the possibility of erosion control options which may help to

protect the area until it fully stabilises. I favour a more 'natural' system rather than any built structures but I'll run past any ideas with the group before seeking funding. At the moment, it's just an idea.

Ditches

As you know, the money I applied for to manage the ditches was removed by Defra, therefore we have been focussing on scrub management in and around the ditches to ensure they retain maximum water – although the scrub removal is technically to support the management of the grassland management we have focussed on the ditches to hopefully address both issues.

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer



The Black Poplar interpretation board was installed over the weekend of 2&3 July and is situated along the eastern pathway of the Meadows. The four poplars can be seen from this position.

Its installation was funded from the Members Budgets of Cllrs Razia Daniels and Neil Sullivan

Botany Walks on The Meadows

A review of the events by Julie Savory

We were very fortunate this year to be able to offer three Botany walks on The Meadows led by Martin Stead, an experienced recorder of plant life for the Botanical Society of the British Isles.

The walks were very well attended and we were lucky to have good weather and sometimes accompanied by lovely bird song, including a very vocal song thrush.



Although often hidden by the grasses, Martin helped us to identify an amazing number of flowering plants.

In addition to the more easily identifiable flowers such as cow parsley, common sorrell, red and white campion and buttercups, we spotted several less well known plants some with unusual names. These included: hemlock water droplet, mugwort, yellow melilot, spear thistle, lesser stitchwort, woody nightshade, hedge mustard, common mouse ear, meadow cranesbill, herb bennet and hoary cress.

Martyn introduced us to the 'keys' used to identify species and differentiate between the variations of different plants. Who knew for example that in addition to white and red clover there is also a zigzag clover!

This year, the grasses on The Meadows seem very dominant. Key species are Yorkshire Fog and Meadow Foxtail. Although attractive in their own way, enmasse they are more vigorous and grow higher than many of the flowering species, blocking out their light and making it harder for them to thrive.



February 2022 to July 2022



Male Brambling (see 12th March 2022)

4th February 2022

Finally, a late winter flock of Fieldfare to grace the Meadows. Twenty-five flew into hedgerow bordering the Handbridge marsh.

13th February 2022

The first Green Woodpecker sighting of the winter. Irregular sightings this winter, unlike last year when a pair were seen almost daily. *Denzil*

14th February 2022

Forty Siskin were in Alder trees up river from the Meadow. *Denzil*

11th February 2022

Three Chiffchaffs were observed singing from different points on the Meadow & marked the start of the spring migration.

12th March 2022

Four Brambling were observed in the Barnfield Meadow hedgerow. *Denzil*
They stayed in this location for a number of weeks with the males changing into full breeding plumage (see pic opposite) and becoming more vocal. The highest count was seven and they were last observed on 11/04/2022.

27th March 2022

The only sighting of a Woodcock on the Meadow this winter was a bird flushed from underneath a Willow tree. A Stonechat was again feeding on the Meadow.

8th April 2022

The first Orange Tip of the spring was found along Bottoms Lane track. *Denzil*

10th April 2022

An unusual sight of a Treecreeper carrying nesting material into one of the Bat boxes. No further sightings of this behaviour. *Denzil*

11th April 2022

Eight Sand Martin over the Meadow & a singing Willow Warbler. Both, firsts of the spring. *Denzil*

15th April 2022

The deluge of migrants continued with four Common Whitethroats "first of the spring". *Denzil*

16th April 2022

Two Grasshopper Warbler reeling on the Meadow and two Common Sandpiper at the Weir. Both "first of the spring" records. *Denzil*

17th April 2022

Very few rarities are found on the Meadow so it was a surprise for *Denzil* to find an American **Lesser Yellowlegs**! The bird was flushed from a shallow water gully. It is easily the most outstanding find in recent years.

Lesser Yellowlegs - *Tringa flavipes*

Lesser Yellowlegs is a fairly common species in North America and normally nests on the ground in open, dry locations in central Alaska and Canada. It winters in the West Indies and South America. It is a regular vagrant to the UK

The bird is similar to Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) but smaller and frequents the short grass areas of marshes, muddy freshwater pools or marshy perimeters of lakes.

It was last recorded in Cheshire near Capenhurst about 12 years ago

An excellent day for *Denzil* was rounded off with a female Whinchat & 2 Sedge Warbler singing on the Handbridge marsh.

18th April 2022

Seven House Martin circled high above the meadow, the first returning birds of the spring. *Denzil*

19th April 2022

Two Swallow breezed through the Meadow mid-morning (first of the spring). *Denzil*

23rd April 2022

A female Redstart in bushes below the Handbridge allotments another first of the spring. *Denzil*

24th April 2022

The distinctive rattle/machine gun call of the Lesser Whitethroat "first of the spring" from bushes on Gorsty bank & below Handbridge Allotments. *Denzil*

30th April 2022

A chattering Reed Warbler was heard from deep within the marsh below the Handbridge allotments. *Denzil*

2nd May 2022

A Cuckoo perched briefly in a tree on the Dukes side of Bottoms Lane track. It flew down to the ground but could not be relocated.

9th May 2022

A Garden Warbler was seen briefly in trees below the Handbridge allotments. *Denzil*

A Sparrowhawk nest was found on the meadow & watched over the following weeks with 2 juveniles eventually branching out & fledging in early July.

14th May 2022

Two Spotted Flycatcher paused on their migration possibly heading on their way up to Eccleston where they have bred in recent years two Little Egret were seen at first light on the Weir. *Denzil*



Jay (see 14th May)

A squealing Water Rail on the Handbridge marsh (probably breeding), a flyover Brimstone Butterfly and the first Azure Damselfly of the spring up river of the meadow.

A Jay was checking out the light fittings underneath the Salmon Leap flats to see if any Moths remained from the previous evening. The Jay didn't find any moths but did find a Cockchafer Beetle (see pic above).

28th May 2022

A good assortment of butterflies on the Meadow including the first Painted Lady of the summer, Common Blue, Small Copper. Moths included one Burnet Companion (see pic) & 5 Yellow-barred Long-horned moths.



Burnet Companion (28th May)

4th June 2022

Large Skipper butterflies were on the wing for the first time & along with single Silver-ground carpet. Ragged Robin was flowering on the Meadow and also on the neighbouring Dukes land

26th June 2022

Sightings of Hobbies in recent times have been non-existent so a single bird unsuccessfully chasing a Swift above the Meadow was another exceptional record.
Denzil

1st July 2022

A couple of wildflowers of note & possibly benefiting from soil disturbance were Musk Mallow (see pic) and Common Fumitory.



Musk Mallow (1st July)

8th and 10th July 2022

A weasel seen twice in four days: Friday 8th July by the Water Mound & Monday 12th July on Bottoms Lane, crossing in front of the Utilities track gate (*Anna P*)

There have been other sightings of weasels over the years but they are very infrequent and Anna did well to have two sightings in four days. My last personal sighting was back in March with one at the foot of the hedgerow, close to the Lower Park entrance. A clue sometimes is the alarm call of birds. That saying, I've probably had no more than 10 sightings in the last 15 years on the Meadow. - Andy

11th July 2022

Two Purple Hairstreaks spiralling up to the top of Oak trees on Barnfield Meadow. A couple of Essex Skipper were found among the plentiful & similar looking Small Skipper. A Yellow Shell moth was also noteworthy.

13th July 2022

After the excellent Botany walk we took an amble into the enclosure created by Welsh Water works. Hoping to find wildflowers due to the disturbance of the seed bank we instead found numerous Tomato plants, Nasturtium & Canary Grass. A possible explanation is the leaking drain/sewer providing a route in for the seeds. The red listed Tubular Water Dropwort was again found flowering in its usual place. *John*

16th July 2022

A juvenile Little Egret was again seen feeding on the Weir. Largely oblivious to the onlookers watching it feeding (see pic)

Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder

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Little Egret on the Weir (16th July)