

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 228

Autumn 2022

Welcome to our Newsletter for Autumn 2022

This Autumn edition comes with the reminder of our Annual General Meeting, which this year moves to a **Friday evening on 18th November** at 7pm (not Thursday 17th as stated in the last newsletter – we had to move to avoid a clash of bookings!) The meeting will again take place at St Mary’s Handbridge Centre.

After our AGM business is concluded, our talk this year will be given by Chloe Aldridge, Monitoring Officer at RECORD, the Environmental Records Office for the Cheshire Region, who will talk about bee species on The Meadows.

In this newsletter, we’ve included a report of the visit by the Cheshire Bee Group’s visit in early Summer. They recorded many different species and for those interested, we’ll upload the details onto our website shortly. The recordings will also be sent to RECORD who will place them onto their database.

I hope you enjoy the rest of this newsletter. I’m always looking for new material (and photos!) to include, so please do get in touch at either through the website contact form or my personal email below.

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
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This edition’s excellent cover photo is by Vanessa Poole and is of a Wood (see Meadows Log 6th August)

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Fall, leaves, fall

by Emily Brontë

Fall, leaves, fall; die, flowers, away;
 Lengthen night and shorten day;
 Every leaf speaks bliss to me
 Fluttering from the autumn tree.
 I shall smile when wreaths of
 snow
 Blossom where the rose should
 grow;
 I shall sing when night’s decay
 Ushers in a drearier day.



Annual General Meeting

Friday 18th November 2022 at 7.00pm

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

The small stuff - the fascinating lives of the smaller wildlife all around us.

Our AGM talk and presentation will be by Chloe Aldridge

Wildlife is all around us! You might be surprised at the variety of fascinating creatures living out their lives on a smaller scale in our gardens, parks and public spaces around Chester. This talk will give you the opportunity to meet some of these tiny 'neighbours', and find out what they're up to, and how they live.

See how even small changes can make a big difference for our local wildlife, and give them a leg-up in tricky times by making spaces more wildlife-friendly



Chloe Aldridge is the Monitoring Officer at RECORD, the Local Environmental Records Centre for the Cheshire Region, based at Chester Zoo.

She describes herself as "enthusiastic about bees and wasps, entomology, and recording wildlife."

Meadows Management

Severn Trent pump works

I was informed (in early October) that Severn Trent hit a snag installing the pump as planned so they needed to be on site for another week. I am monitoring the works and have noted the ruts, which I will raise in my email reply to the Severn Trent officers.

Update (14th October):

Severn Trent phoned this morning to apologise for the delays in the works, they are potentially looking at a further couple of weeks. These are significant works and they have come across some unexpected snags that need to be resolved before they can finally replace the pump – these remedial works will require no further groundworks so will not cause any changes to the work site area.

They've promised to keep us in the loop and also to repair any ruts etc following completion.

Ditch work scrub removal

This has been booked and waiting for them to start. Again, this will be



Female Wigeon by The Weir (see Meadows Log 20th August)

undertaken to work to no more than one-third of the overall site.

Coppicing of willow (Deva Terrace volunteers)

The volunteers have been contacted to arrange a volunteer date and remain keen to continue. I am waiting to hear back from them with potential dates but we have until the end of the winter season so there's no immediate rush.

Pathworks

There will be pathwork repairs undertaken, but the extent to which this can be done has yet to be confirmed.

I have reported the water run-off issues on Bottoms Lane to the Asset Team. It is disappointing that the technique of adding cement dust to the top dressing which has been successful on other sites with similar slopes hasn't done so well here. I will monitor and continue to feedback to the Asset team.

Holes

The holes in the areas opposite the sailing club have been reported to the Asset Team and arrangements are being made to have this work done.

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer

Helping to save the Black Poplar Tree

Chester Zoo is working on a project to save the Black Poplar tree which is now the rarest native timber tree in Britain and protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act S13.

Once a familiar landmark (think of Constable's painting *The Hay Wain*, 1821) their wood was used for many purposes such as hedging and building frames as well as floorboards and arrows on the *Mary Rose* and matches and rifle butts for WW1.

Replaced by fast growing hybrids their numbers have declined over the past 200 years with only about 1000 trees left, mainly male ones, with a limited gene pool.

As the females produce lots of fluffy seeds that can spoil crops farmers tended to plant male trees but as the trees are dioecious both male and female are need for pollination by the wind.

Friends of the Meadows in partnership with Chester Zoo have planted four black poplar saplings on The Meadows and an interpretation board explaining why the Black Poplar tree needs our help has now been installed, generously funded by local councillors Razia Daniels and Neil Sullivan.

The saplings planted should thrive as they like flood plains and as they are a mix of male and female trees will increase the genetic diversity and provide the Zoo with further saplings to plant elsewhere.



Photo shows the board with Cllr. Neil Sullivan, Cllr. Razia Daniels, Rachel Cross and Julie Savory from FoM and two representatives from the Zoo, Alex and Osian

Cheshire Bee Group visit to The Meadows

Julie Savory gives her account of the visit



Visitors to The Meadows on Saturday 21st May might have felt somewhat bemused to see a group of people with large nets staring intently into the vegetation along Bottoms Lane and on the sandy soil banks of the River Dee. The people in question were members of the Cheshire Bee Group and are part of the RECORD initiative. This is a biodiversity information system for Cheshire, Halton, Warrington and Wirral which aims to collect data on numbers of different insect species, particularly bees and any changes in migratory patterns with a view to increasing understanding of why the number of bees is declining. More information can be found on the website: <https://www.record-lrc.co.uk>

I joined the group on their recording visit on The Meadows and was amazed at the range of different insects, including many species of beetles and bees, which were being spotted and identified. It opened my eyes to a whole new world of habitats and creatures which normally I am unaware of or pay little attention to as I walk around The Meadows for exercise and to enjoy the river views. I shall certainly slow down in future and take the time to look a bit more closely to spot the insect life that exists. The group were very knowledgeable and were able to identify insects by their scientific names as well as their more commonly used names and in the two hours I spent with them I became much more appreciative of the wealth of biodiversity that exists in our precious meadows.



Osmia bicornis, a species of mason bee, known as the red mason bee due to its covering of dense ginger hair

Bee species spotted included: sandpit mining bee (*Andrena barbilabris*), Ashy mining bee (*Andrena cineraria*), red tailed bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*) and Tree bumblebee (*Bombus hypnorum*). Other insects spotted included a Drinker moth caterpillar (*Euthrix potatoria*) and a black and red froghopper (*Cercopis vulnerate*).



July to October 2022

24th July 2022

Two Yellow Wagtail were feeding at first light on the Meadow picnic. *Denzil*

5th August 2022

A single Crossbill flew over Handbridge Allotments. *Denzil*

6th August 2022

The unusual sight of a Wood Mouse during daylight hours next to Bottoms Lane track. Clearly making the most of the bounty of blackberries. See the excellent photo by *Vanessa Poole* on the front cover.

13th August 2022

One flyover Green Sandpiper. *Denzil*

19th August 2022

A migrating Whinchat on the Meadow and Garden Warbler in trees below the Handbridge allotments. One Common Sandpiper on the Weir. *Denzil*

20th August 2022

A female Wigeon snoozing by the Old Dee Bridge. It remained in the vicinity through September and into October. Often feeding on the Weir or loafing on the river below Edgar's Field. (*see photo on p.4*)

24th August 2022

A rare Deaths Head Hawkmoth Caterpillar was found crawling across Bottoms Lane

track and was probably looking for a good place to pupate. This is a species more associated with Southern Europe and a first for the Meadows. *See photo below by Joy.*



Deaths Head Hawkmoth Caterpillar (24th August)

28th August 2022

Three Kingfisher flying together low over the river in front of Deva Terrace. At the same time a Common Sandpiper was seen flying in the opposite direction.

4th September 2022

A swarm of Bees were in Bramble on the edge of the Meadow and seen by Dawn while out Blackberry picking.

5th September 2022

Spotted Flycatcher in the hedgerow by the Handbridge marsh. In the centre of the Meadow a Hummingbird Hawk-moth was nectaring on Honeysuckle. *Denzil*



Female Stonechat (18th September)

7th September 2022

A Barn Owl was seen hunting at dusk on Water Co land. Rob. The same bird was disturbed from its daytime roost in October.

9th September 2022

Over 20 Chiffchaffs moved through the Willow by the ferry landing stage. A Water Rail broke cover on the Handbridge marsh due to the presence of a hungry Fox.

11th September 2022

Another Hobby moving through above the Meadow. *Denzil's* 4th of the year!

16th September 2022

A flyover Greenshank another sensational find by *Denzil*

18th September 2022

The first Stonechat of the winter, a female in the hedgerow on the edge of the Handbridge marsh. It was joined later in

the week by a male. Nearby, six Snipe were flushed from the marsh. Butterflies basking in the sunshine included 3 Comma, Red Admiral. 2 Common Darter in fields bordering the Meadow and a Southern Hawker Dragonfly on Bottoms Lane track.

26th September 2022

North westerly gale force winds were no doubt the reason behind the strange sighting of a juvenile Gannet flying over the Meadow. *Denzil*

30th September 2022

Visible early morning autumn migration included 49 Redwing, 5 Brambling and 5 Skylark all passing over the Meadow. *Denzil*

4th October 2022

Three Kestrels hovering simultaneously above the Meadow a good indicator of a high Rodent population on the Meadow.

9th October 2022

Another rare find, a Firecrest along Bottoms Lane track and the probably the same bird in trees below the Handbridge Allotments. *Denzil*

11th October 2022

More visible migration over the Meadow included the first Fieldfare of the year and the rare sight of a Hawfinch flying over the Handbridge allotments. *Denzil*

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