

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 229

Winter 2023

Welcome

to our Newsletter for
Winter 2023

Happy New Year to all our members! Thank you for your continued interest and generosity that contributes significantly to supporting the various projects and tasks we undertake to look after The Meadows.

It's that time of the year when **Membership Renewals** take place, so thank you to all those who are renewing by Standing Orders – you don't need to take any action for renewal.

However, for those who want to renew by cheque (or even cash), please complete and return the Membership Renewal Form enclosed.

Of course you can also set up a new Standing Order using the enclosed form, or change your existing subscription to add a voluntary donation. You can also find and download the form from our website Home Page: friendsofthemeadows.org

We also include details of a community event on 3rd February at St Mary's (see p.6) so I hope you get this in time! I hope you find the rest of this edition of the newsletter interesting and informative. As ever, any contributions gratefully received!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
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This edition's cover photo is by Andy Ingham and is of a Raven in an ash tree on Bottoms Lane, taken in March last year.

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The Darkling Thrush

by Thomas Hardy

I leant upon a coppice gate,
When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the
sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted
nigh
Had sought their household fires...

These are the first lines of Hardy's poem, composed on the last day of 1900, which takes a single frosty scene, a moment of wintry wonder, and reflects on the events of the nineteenth century, his own feelings about the future, and his attitude to nature.

Meadows Management

Holes

Repairs to the holes in the areas opposite the sailing club that were reported to the Asset is scheduled for early in the New Year – I have no specific dates yet but want this to be completed soon.

Path works

We were working with a restricted budget last year due to emergency works elsewhere but I've now managed to negotiate a decent sum that should

finish off the remaining pathworks on site; this will be completed before the end of the financial year.

Other funding

Also, I've applied for funding for willows and wildflowers. It's not a great amount as we are all applying for the same pot. I had hoped to have heard by now but fingers crossed we will hear soon – this also needs to be completed in this financial year.

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer

The Celandine

A delightful early spring flower the Celandine, *Ficaria verna*, is a member of the buttercup family and we are very used to seeing bright splashes of its vibrant yellow flowers around our area.

They thrive in damp places and our rainy winters make perfect conditions for them to flourish. And we should be glad because the celandine is one of the most valuable food plants for early insects such as emerging queen bumblebees who need to refuel themselves urgently after their winter hibernation: their energy supplies are low and in order to make their nests and lay their cargo of eggs they must find food. The celandine is like their larder, its flat, wide open, star-like flowers offering plenty of pollen for hungry bees.

In the ancient days when the Doctrine of Signatures prevailed in medical matters, plants were viewed as curative according to their 'signs or signatures': the celandine was then known as pilewort as its knobby root-tubers, its 'signature' resembled haemorrhoids. However we now know that the celandine is poisonous if eaten, and that it has no power to cure haemorrhoids whatsoever. So never encourage anyone to try eating any part of it.

Enjoy it simply for its early and joyful presence in the natural world, and value it for its ability to provide food for so many early insects. As well as bees you will often see the bee-fly visiting the celandine: this fly has a body like a fat bee but a very long mouth part, like a small spike protruding from the head. Celandines brighten the end of our winter enormously. And we need every bee we can save to ensure pollination for our garden fruit trees and our commercially grown fruit trees. And the young bees that hatch from the nests made by these early queens will be ready to emerge just as our fruit trees begin to flower. Nature knows what she's doing; I wonder if we ourselves are as careful in what we provide for insects?



Gill McEvoy

Further Special Oak Trees on The Meadows *by Richard Cain*

In the Spring 2022 Newsletter I wrote about some oak trees that have been planted in recent years but omitted to mention the trees that were planted as the Avenue of Oak Trees on the meadows side of the railings at the bottom of the track leading to the Meadows from Bottoms Lane.

In 2006 one of our members, David Yorke sadly died. His widow Margaret and his family very generously requested that in lieu



of flowers, donations be given to Friends of the Meadows and a substantial sum was raised. David was very fond of the Meadows. The picture, left shows David in his lovely riverside garden at Sandown Terrace with that wonderful view of the Meadows. It was agreed with the family that this amazing donation be used to complete the Avenue of Oaks that are now well established. These four oak trees were planted in 2007 by friends and family of David.



The generosity of the donation also enabled Friends of the Meadows to replace the railings and gate at the Lower Park Road/Elizabeth Crescent entrance to the Meadows with traditional Cheshire Railings. These black and white, and now often badly corroded or damaged railings, are a familiar site to anyone that ether lives in Cheshire or has driven through the county.

They are a unique feature of our more rural roads and date back to the mid / late 1920s. The railings were installed at all sharp bends and junctions, possibly to provide a means of stopping vehicles that had lost steering control. The rolled top is an early attempt a crash barrier safety!

Many thanks to Margaret Yorke for help with this article and I'm delighted that Margaret continues as one of our very valued members.

Richard Cain

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

We enjoyed another excellent talk this year, after our AGM, this time from Chloe Aldridge, Monitoring Officer at RECORD, the Local Biological Records Centre for The Cheshire Region. With clear, detailed photos, she focussed on some of the very small wild life that inhabits our gardens, and its often very strange behaviours.

First up was the **Lacewing**, a very common insect, which lived on this earth long before the existence of dinosaurs, flies and bees. Its pupae are great allies in our gardens, each one devouring about two hundred aphids per week. The oval holes in leaves which we see in some of our plants are the work of the **Leaf-cutter bee**. It wraps the leaf section into a parcel, fills it with pollen and an egg and then inserts into a deep hole in wood. This could well be in a 'bee hotel', available for purchase at many garden centres.

Some creatures, mostly insects, insert their eggs in holes with an ovipositor, a long tube. These tubes have the ability to taste as well as place the egg. This way, the insect can identify a larva in the hole and lay its egg on top of it. The larva will then serve as food when the egg hatches.

Mimicry is a common ploy to avoid predation. A number of insects masquerade as wasps, for example. Some flies pretend to be bumble bees. The **Elephant hawk-moth** caterpillar has a tail which looks like a head; this it waves about and puffs up like a snake when it fears attack.

Towards the end of her talk, Chloe turned her attention to what we can all do to encourage wild life in our gardens. Leave a patch of grass long; make a pile of logs; cut perennials down in Spring, not Autumn; let some ivy flower, to provide valuable pollen; make a pond, even if it is little more than a large metal tub. All this depends on how much space we have available, of course!

Recording your observations of wildlife

If your interest in wildlife is sharpened, you may well like to log your observations. Attendance at a recording workshop at Chester Zoo would be useful, but not absolutely necessary.

You can enter your records directly into the database for Cheshire (RECORD), by registering on: record-lrc.co.uk/swift.

You will need the following info:

What you saw

When (date)

Where (location)

Who you are (name)

If you want to be on the mailing list for RECORD, the Cheshire Local Environmental Records Centre, to learn about any workshops, talks or recording events on offer, then email: info@record-lrc.co.uk

James Holroyd

The Nature Recovery Corridor Project

FREE Community Event with Chester Zoo on **3rd February at 7pm** at St Marys Handbridge Centre.

Sponsored by **Incredible Edible**, Chris Ablett from Chester Zoo is coming to speak at their February Community Event on the **Nature Recovery Corridor** project.

The purpose of a wildlife corridor is to connect patches of fragmented habitat to form a functioning ecosystem over a large area. At completion, the Nature Recovery Corridor will cover a massive 10-mile stretch, connecting habitats reaching south of Chester (*including The Meadows*) through to Ellesmere Port in the North and turning the area into a thriving example of what the British nature can be.

This is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about ways to encourage and protect wildlife in and around Handbridge. The talk is also suitable for school children (12+) interested in the natural environment. Refreshments. Free parking.

Incredible Edible Handbridge 🌱

Incredible Edible Handbridge was started in 2019 by people living in the local area, enthusiastic about the environment and healthy living, who wanted to see our community thrive. The first project was to transform a neglected urban space at Industry (former Boy's Club), Overleigh Road, from a derelict patch of bare earth, bricks and pigeon poo into an edible oasis aka community allotment providing veg, salad and herbs to our community.



Their current project is **The Arches Wildlife and Wellbeing Garden**

The Arches is the walkway that runs from Meadows Lane to Prenton Place. The former Handbridge council estate was originally designed in the Abercrombie style, with many green spaces on street corners. But this particular area has become overgrown and an eyesore. Residents have tried to clear it up, and trim back the weeds, but it needs proper excavation and replanting to function as a small garden again.

Hopefully The Arches project will generate more enthusiasm for similar restoration of green urban spaces. IEH has been successful in securing Council funding, so the project will go ahead, starting around March 2023. This project is supported by Chester Zoo, and will provide free fruit, a place to relax, and opportunities for schools and families to encourage children to discover wildlife. We may even get a Hedgehog Cam from the Zoo! We do still need and appreciate your pledges from small to large. You can also pledge volunteer time which will be very helpful (*see back page for contact details.*)

Lisa Rossetti



November and December 2022

13th November 2022

Three Jack Snipe and seven Snipe were flushed from the Handbridge marsh. Above the marsh pair of Buzzards (see pic) and Kestrels. A Peregrine was observed flying from the Shot tower.

14th November 2022



Buzzard over the Meadow - see 13th November (Andy Ingham)

At dusk a Barn Owl appeared briefly out of the gloom and vanished just as quickly into the night.

24th November 2022

Two Little Grebe were on the river opposite Deva Terrace.

25th November 2022

The unusual sight of a Linnet plummeting to the ground near Bottoms track. The bird was clearly distressed, wings spread and panting heavily. Was it suffering from Bird Flu, trichomonosis or had it just

escaped the clutches of a Hawk? As I approached it, it somehow miraculously recovered and flew away seemingly with no ill affect.

26th November 2022

A peak count on the relatively undisturbed Handbridge marsh of 4 Jack Snipe and 20 Snipe, 10 Lesser Redpoll in the hedgerow off Bottoms lane track.

8th December 2022

Just before daybreak a Woodcock flew over Bottoms Lane track and the neighbouring gardens.

10th December 2022

Another Woodcock flushed from the edge of Handbridge Marsh. Nearby, a wintering Chiffchaff searching for food in the tall grasses, eight vocal Bullfinch and in the hedgerow.

11th December 2022

A wintering male Blackcap, a resident Cetti's Warbler and a very tame Robin (see pic) moved through bulrushes on the Handbridge marsh.

A single Fieldfare alighted at the top of a tree by the Handbridge marsh and a Little Egret flew overhead.

A flock of 200 Linnet descended into their roost below the Handbridge Allotments.

15th December 2022

The cold snap was starting to bite with one or two displaced birds looking for food/shelter in unusual locations. A Snipe briefly landed and probed in mud by the Weir and a pair of Teal were in the ditch on Bottoms Lane track.

Water Rail are normally shy and elusive, therefore it was a surprise to see one running across a garden patio in Andrew Crescent. (Keith). No doubt the freeze had forced the bird to go searching for food away from the sanctuary of the Handbridge marsh.

17th December 2022

A Redshank was heard flying up river beyond the Meadow but remained hidden from view behind the riverbank Willow.



Sparrowhawk above the Meadow - (Andy Ingham)

It was slightly surprising to see a Sparrowhawk in display flight at this time of year. The sparrowhawk advertised its presence by puffing out its white ventral feathers and circled round the Meadow on slow, deep wing beats. (See pic above)



Robin - see 11th December (Andy Ingham)

20th December 2022

Barn Owls can struggle to survive in cold winters so it was good to see the Barn Owl again, this time at dawn trying to escape the attention of a couple of marauding Crows.

24th December 2022

Eight Goosander milling around on river by the Weir, including four dapper males.

**Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder,
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Facebook: [/friends_of_the_meadows-chester](https://www.facebook.com/friends_of_the_meadows-chester)

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Incredible Edible Handbridge

Find out more on our new website:

<https://iehandbridge.org.uk/>

Also visit our project:

<https://www.spacehive.com/the-arches-wildlife-wellbeing-garden#/>

Join our Facebook group:

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