

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 231

Summer 2023

Welcome to our Newsletter for Summer 2023

We have quite a packed newsletter this time and are especially grateful to the team at Severn Trent Water on providing such an informative article on the eel screens. Many of you may not even know what lies beneath the mound on the north-east end of the Meadows (I'll confess that until some years ago, I was ignorant!)

Our Chair, Julie Savory, also writes about the exciting Chester Zoo project *Networks for Nature* which includes the Chester Meadows. We're certainly looking forward to see how this will impact and support the natural biodiversity of our precious "green lung" in the city.

The committee has also been looking at the tree "avenue" along the bund on the eastern side of the Meadows, particularly noting a number of empty or disused tree guards. We're working with the Greenspace Officer and other organisations who may help to source and plant new native trees and re-use the guards. More on this in the next newsletter!

In the meantime, while we're experiencing a rather soggy start to July, I hope that we'll be enjoying more sunny weather by the time you read this!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
Email: rachelcross789@gmail.com

This edition's cover photo was taken by Andy Ingham and is of a Little Egret in the shallows by the Horses Field in June this year.

In this Issue

- 3 Meadows Management
Botany Walks
Summit of the Dee
- 4 Eel screens at the River Dee Intake
- 5 Networks for Nature
- 6 Cheshire Bee Group
- 7-8 Meadows Log April to July 2023



Cuckoo!

Cuckoo, cuckoo... what do you do?

In April, I open my bill;
 In May, I sing night and day;
 In June, I change my tune;
 In July, far, far I fly;
 In August, away! I must.

In 1934 Benjamin Britten wrote a series of twelve songs for the school in Wales where his brother was a teacher. These songs, called Friday Afternoons (that was when pupils had their singing practice), started a long process of writing music for schools and Britten's lifelong interest in music for young people and in music education. Britten set to music text by many different poets and authors. The music always illustrates beautifully the mood of the text. All the songs are accompanied by the piano.

Cuckoo! is one of the Friday Afternoons songs. The text is by Jane Taylor, a poet and novelist (1783-1824), who wrote the words for Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star in 1806. Cuckoo! was taken from an anthology called Tom Tiddler's Ground, edited by Walter de la Mare.

Meadows Management

The council is in consultation with a number of organisations looking to improve access to those with mobility issues across the borough. This is in the early stages at the moment but the Meadows is included in this. I have highlighted to those leading the

project that any access improvements will be most welcome but their design must be both practical for the user and visually sensitive to the area.

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer

Botany Walks

Martyn Stead, a local botanist, is providing a series of botany walks on The Meadows. Walks are free, just turn up and find out more about the amazing range of plants to be found on The Meadows. After the early May walk when the weather was a bit on the cool side, the June walk was much better attended.

The remaining dates are **9th August** and **13th September**. Meet at 6.15pm at the Bottoms Lane entrance.



Summit of the Dee

The River Dee is a much valued feature of The Meadows area and indeed, of Chester itself. It is used for wild swimming, water sports, leisure boating and fishing. However, similar to national concerns about the polluted state of many of our rivers, local concerns have been raised about sewage leaks into the Dee.

Earlier this year, Samantha Dixon, MP for the City of Chester, set up an ongoing "Summit of the Dee" bringing together a wide range of interested partners to discuss broadly what is causing poor water quality with an agenda to reduce health risks and protect the local ecology. Friends of the Meadows were very pleased to have been asked to take part in the summit.

Over the past few years we have reported a number of incidents: in Autumn 2020 there

was a leak from a sewage pipe under the Meadows; in Winter 2021 a storm drain leaked and in January 2022 and 2023 there have been concerns about sewage and a noxious smell in ditches on the Meadows and adjacent land.

A major problem is an ageing infrastructure. Welsh Water are responsible for sewage in the Dee and spoke at the summit about how they are trying to improve the situation. We are also hoping to have a speaker at our AGM in November who will provide us with more insight into the history and heritage of the River Dee and why concerns about water quality are increasing.

In the meantime if you spot something that doesn't seem right, Welsh Water can be contacted on 0800 085 3968 and they will investigate.

Eel screens at the River Dee Intake

The team at Severn Trent Water has provided us with this information

Why are there eel screens?

In the last newsletter, we included information on the Severn Trent project to install upgraded eel screens at the Boughton river intake on the Meadows (also known as the Water Mound). This is required to take place to ensure the compliance with the Eels Regulations 2009. The works will consist of the installation of a new type of screen (passive wedge wire) which has been selected to minimise the visual impact on the Meadows. The associated equipment will be within the existing mound and fenced off area. The current band screens within the mound will be removed as part of the project.

Why Eels?

Eels spawn in oceanic waters and migrate into coastal and inland waters to grow to adulthood. Their need to move through estuaries and rivers to complete their life cycle puts them at risk of being drawn into water intakes. Adult "silver eels" are particularly vulnerable when they actively follow currents downstream, outside their migration periods; eels may simply enter intakes randomly.

Need for Screening

Unlike salmonids and most other fish, eels respond tactilely to screens (by touch) rather than using a visual sense. Where an alternative route is not immediately discernible, they can squeeze themselves through screen mesh or bar spacings that are smaller than their body diameter. This is particularly important for river intake solutions as they rely on screening to prevent eels entering intakes.



Photo: Jack Perks (Cheshire Wildlife Trust)

Screen selection

The most common standard solution for eel screening is installing Hydrolox screens. This requires the motors which sit above the river level and therefore cause a visual impact on the surrounding area.

Taking into consideration the conservation and protection of the Chester Meadows and the necessity to try and preserve the space for future generations, STW have selected an innovative design solution that will minimise the visual impact. The screens will be below the water level and only a small amount of air pipework will be visible. Periodically there will be a discharge of air within the river which will only last a few seconds to clear any debris from the screens to maintain their efficiency.

The new screens will have a smaller mesh size (2mm) than the existing band screen (6mm). This will prevent adult silver eels, yellow eels, juvenile glass eels and elver (as well as salmonid species fish) from abstraction into the intake.

Contact

If you'd like any further information please contact Tony Larnar at Severn Trent Water - Tony.Larnar@severntrent.co.uk

Networks for Nature

Julie Savory discusses this local initiative around Chester and Ellesmere Port



Water vole

The **UK's most rapidly declining mammal**, which has been lost from 94% of places where they were once prevalent since the 1960s. The species has **declined by 30% in the UK since 2006** due to habitat destruction and water pollution

Many of us will have been inspired by the recent David Attenborough series ***Our Wild Isles*** in which he explored the rich and amazing diversity of wildlife on our islands. There was however a serious warning in his documentaries about the global biodiversity crisis and how here at home in the UK 50% of all species are reported to be in decline.

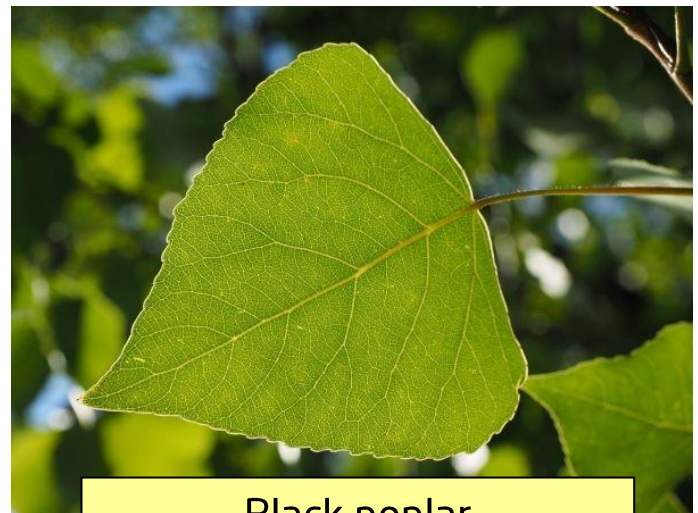
Over the past few years, Chester Zoo, with funding from DEFRA's Green Recovery Challenge Fund, has been working to develop a 10 mile Nature Recovery Corridor linking habitat areas in the south of the city to Ellesmere Port in the north. This has involved restoring wetlands, traditional orchards, hedgerows, grasslands and flower meadows across Chester with the aim of creating connected wildlife-rich habitats. This has included working with schools and community groups and developing a network of wildlife champions.

One member of the Friends of the Meadows committee undertook the wildlife champion training which has helped the Meadows be linked into this wonderful initiative which seeks to help local communities to be empowered to work together and develop projects which enable wildlife to flourish. Lots of contacts have also been made with other 'Friends

of' groups which helps with sharing information, skills and ideas.

The Zoo's work is now continuing, in partnership with a range of other key organisations such as the local authority and the Cheshire Wildlife Trust, through the Networks for Nature initiative which is being supported with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We are hopeful that this will lead to further support for preserving and promoting the rich biodiversity to be found on our precious Earls Eye meadows.

If you would like to get involved in practical activities looking after The Meadows such as planting trees and removing Himalayan balsam, please get in touch with Andy Ingham (see the *Meadows Log*)



Black poplar

Thought to be **Britain's most endangered native timber tree**, this species has been in decline for the past 200 years.

More information about the Nature Recovery Project and the Networks for Nature initiative can be found at

[Chester Zoo Nature Recovery Corridor - What we do](#)

[Chester Zoo awarded £318k to accelerate nature recovery in Cheshire | Chester Zoo](#)

Julie Savory

Cheshire Bee Group on the Meadows



On 17th May, the Cheshire Bee Group conducted a survey around Grosvenor Park and the Meadows. This has become an annual event for the group and since this visit they have also been to Leasowe Dunes in the Wirral, Anderton Nature Park, Northwich and the meadows of the World Museum, Liverpool.

On their Chester visit, they spent much of the time in Grosvenor Park. However, at the Meadows they recorded a number of bee species as well as wasps and butterflies which are listed below:

Mining bees

Buffish mining bee (*Andrena nigroaenea*) – female

Sandpit mining bee (*Andrena barbilabris*) – male and female – large aggregation on sandy river banks opposite Sandy Lane.

Ashy mining bee (*Andrena cineraria*)

Furrow bees

Lasioglossum leucopus. The common name is the White-footed Green Furrow-bee. This is a widespread and locally common species, found in a range of habitats foraging on a wide variety of flowers.



Blood bee - photo Henk Wallays 2012

Blood bees

Sandpit Blood Bee (*Sphecodes pellucidus*) – this acts as a cuckoo bee on the Sandpit mining bee – several were present.

Blood bees (*Sphecodes*) are cleptoparasites (i.e. "cuckoo" species), and as such, they do not gather pollen.

Crabronid wasp

Oxybelis uniglumis. Crabronids, or Sand Wasps, are usually associated with open patches of bare, loose sand.

Butterflies

Red admiral, Speckled wood, Orange-tip.



Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) on ivy (photo: Andrew Curtis)



April to July 2023



Banded demoiselle (Bob Wilkinson) see 8th June

21st April 2023

The first Lesser Whitethroat to be heard on the Meadow this year. (*Denzil*). It was a pleasure to hear it singing daily from the end of May and throughout most of June.

23rd April 2023

A female Cuckoo was heard at dawn "bubbling" from the back of the Meadow and again at the same location over the next few days. (*Denzil*)

3rd May 2023

Another migrating male Whinchat feeding in the centre of the Meadow using the fence line of the enclosure to search for prey and again on the 24th May (see photo). A juvenile Whinchat also on the Meadow 14th June. (*Denzil*)

4th May 2023

Three Swift were noted above the Meadow for the first time this spring and also a Garden Warbler in the willow. (*Denzil*)

6th May 2023

A Mandarin duck flying over the Duke's marsh and followed almost immediately on the same flight path by a Cuckoo.

17th May 2023

The Cheshire Bee Group visited the Meadows (see article on page 6)

8th June 2023

A good count of 30 Red-eyed Damselfly on the Lily-pads just up river of the Meadow with Banded Demoiselle (see photo), Blue tailed and Common Blue Damselflies nearby. Two Black-tailed Skimmer on the riverbank below the Belgrave Park entrance. *Bob*



Whinchat (see 3rd May)

10th June 2023

A Red Kite above Handbridge heading in the direction of the Meadow (*Gary*) and then twice over the Meadow on the 23rd June (*Denzil*)

16th June 2023

Ten Ringlet to hatch on the grassland below the allotments were the first of the year. Ringlet are one of the few butterflies that are increasing in number on the Meadow. (*Denzil*)

13th June 2023

Scarlet Tiger moth has not previously been recorded in the vicinity of the Meadow. It was therefore a nice surprise to find this stunning moth attracted to light in Cross Hey. (see photo)



Scarlet tiger moth (see 13th June)

16th June 2023

Cockchafer Beetles emerged by the river at dusk over several days. Anything, from 500 to a 1000 swarming the bank and nearby trees. The Kestrel was seen to take full advantage of the Beetle buffet. (see photo)

19th June 2023

A rare Rannoch Looper moth attracted to light in Cross Hey as part of a national influx from the continent this spring. Prior to this year only one record in Cheshire back in 1922.

23rd June 2023

One or two Little Egret were by the river most days in late June and early July.

Often by the Weir/Old Dee Bridge but perhaps more surprisingly over on the busy Sandy Lane side. *See the cover photo of this newsletter*

28th June 2023

Two Yellow Wagtail were heard calling as they flew over the Meadow. (*Denzil*)

4th July 2023

Another Hobby was hunting above the Meadow much to the annoyance of the local hirundine population. (*Denzil*)

7th July 2023

Six Essex Skipper were on the wing for the first time on the Meadow and two Purple Hairstreaks engaged in an aerial duel around the crown of one the oak trees on Barnfield.. A male Emperor Dragonfly also flew through the Barnfield Meadow.



Kestrel and the doodlebugs (16th June)

**Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder,
Tel: 01244 677135**

Facebook: [/friends_of_the_meadows-chester](https://www.facebook.com/friends_of_the_meadows-chester)

Website: www.friendsofthemeadows.org

Email us: fomchester@gmail.com
