

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 232

Autumn 2023

Welcome to our Newsletter for Autumn 2023

Our Autumn newsletter once again contains the announcement of our Annual General Meeting, which takes place at Handbridge St Mary's Centre on Friday 24th November. After the usual business of the AGM, we will have a talk about the River Dee and its drinking water – a very topical issue! See the details on the page opposite.

We look forward to welcoming as many members as possible who can come along and support us.

As I write this, the weather has turned to a quite wet and chilly Autumn and it seems not too long ago that we enjoyed some late summer sunshine (I did in Italy!)

Looking back over previous issues, I've been reminded that I've been editing this newsletter for eight years now! Back in Autumn 2015 I took over from Peter Hadfield which was also the first year when cattle did not return to graze the Meadows, as they have not done since. We have begun to see encroachment of willow scrub and will be liaising with the Greenspace Officer to discuss ways to better manage the habitat in the future.

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This edition's cover photo of a Robin seen on the Meadow in early October was taken by Andy Ingham.

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Fall, Leaves, Fall

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.

Emily Brontë



Annual General Meeting

Friday 24th November 2023 at 7.00pm

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

Our Drinking Water - The River Dee and Us

Our AGM talk and presentation will be by **Tim Ackerley** who will take us on a journey along the Dee and how it has provided our drinking water of varying quality over the centuries.

The River Dee is the largest relatively clean river left near to the local North West conurbations. Tim will talk about how this is and has been managed to safeguard the quality of our drinking water.



Tim Ackerley is a self-employed Technical Manager and Water consultant. He has previously worked for Chester Waterworks and as Water Treatment Manager for Dee Valley Water. Tim has given talks on the River Dee this year to Chester U3A as well as at an event organised by Samantha Dixon MP.

Meadows Management

Eel screen

The project, under the management of Severn Trent, is ongoing and will continue into next year. Severn Trent has already sent printed letters to all local residents explaining the background of the project and the works which will be undertaken.

Other utility works

I am aware (as of September) of some other works/sampling by Welsh Water, although I am unaware if there are any

implications for the site following results. When I know more, I'll let you know.

Trees planting

The FOM Committee has contacted me about planting new trees along the bund to replace dead/fallen trees which I will follow up on my return to work.

A site visit is being arranged for early November when tree species selectin and a planting plan can be agreed.

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer



In August, Julie Rose conducted a survey of part of the Meadows following the "W" pattern to identify and record species biodiversity.

Botany Walks in 2023

Another series of successful botany walks took place during 2023 starting in May and ending in mid September. Martyn Stead, a very experienced local botanist led the walks and it was fascinating to see how the plants changed with the seasons.



Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*) grows in damp, neutral or chalky soils at low altitudes throughout the UK and is often found along riversides and in fens, scrub and old hedgerows.

On the final walk in September Martyn looked at seeds and the different ways plants, often very ingeniously, manage dispersal so that they can reproduce and spread and thrive in new areas. We identified plants that disperse their seeds through the air by the wind, others that use the river to transport their seeds, and some which transfer their seeds through animals either by sticking to their fur or by being eaten and then excreted. Other plants have seed pods which explode and throw the seeds some distance from the plant.

On a day to day walk through the Meadows the variety of plants is often overlooked as many are hidden within the tall grasses but for example, on the August walk at least 20 plants were identified including: gypsy wort, water pepper, water chickweed, spear thistle, water figwort, tansy, common knapweed, marsh cudweed, pineapple mayweed, skull cap, angelica, silver weed, meadowsweet, great plantain, creeping buttercup, meadow buttercup, cinquefoil, purple loosestrife, and bird's foot trefoil.

In September we spotted non-native orange balsam sometimes called orange jewelweed, which is now growing in different parts of the Meadow. Unlike its larger and invasive cousin Himalayan balsam, it does not seem to pose a threat to native plants. This record of the different species being identified is helping Friends of the Meadows build up a picture of the current level of biodiversity on The Meadows so that this can then be monitored going forward.



Examining plants at the September Botany Walk

What to look out for this Autumn

A small selection of species provided by the team at RECORD, the Biodiversity Records Centre for the Cheshire Region



A particularly exciting benefit of the gloomier weather is the peak of fungi season this October. A venture into damp woodland areas will reveal a wide array of colours and shapes. One such example is the Saffron Milkcap (*Lactarius deliciosus*).

They vary from a carrot/apricot to a greenish colour, with distinctive bright orange 'milk' secreting from their gills. Their pitted stem separates them from the False Saffron Milkcap (*Lactarius deterrimus*).

We are also beginning to welcome many species of migrating bird, travelling to the UK to take advantage of our reasonably less harsh winter. Look out for the Fieldfares (*Turdus pilaris*) found amongst hedgerows and fields, with a blue-grey head (unlike the similar, smaller Redwing). They have a harsh "chack-chack-chack" call when flying and are renowned for their aggression towards any predators, helping to keep their colony safe.



Rosehips ripen around this time of year, found as bright red oval fruits on wild rose bushes such as Dog rose (*Rosa canina*). They are a nutritious food source for many birds and mammals and can also be used by people to create natural inks or dyes.

Look out for Rose bedeguar galls, also known as a Robin's pincushions, that look like a ball of moss growing out of the stem of the rose. The gall is formed by the Bedeguar wasp (*Diplolepis rosae*) whose larvae secrete chemicals that impact plant growth.



July to October 2023



Three Old Lady's having a natter (see 24th August)

The Old Lady moth (*Mormo maura*) hides by day in old buildings and sheds, and frequents damp localities as well as waste ground and gardens.

12th July 2023

A Great White Egret was observed on the small island by the Old Dee Bridge.

13 July 2023

At approximately 10:30pm an unfamiliar but distinctive "Kwok" call of bird flying low over the houses in Handbridge was probably that of a rare Night Heron.

29 July 2023

137 butterflies recorded on the weekly butterfly Transect. The highest of the year including 92 Gatekeepers and 26 Meadow Brown.

30 July 2023

A Red legged Partridge was briefly in view on the Meadow before disappearing into the long grass. *Mark*

17 August 2023

A Stoat scampered across Bottoms Lane track. The first of two sightings on the track this summer.

24 August 2023

It appears to have been a really good year for Old Lady's! Three of these moths were attracted to light in Cross Hey (see photo)

02 September 2023

A first moth trapping session on land bordering the Meadow. The highlight two Oblique Carpets, a rare moth for Cheshire (see photo). Other moths included Orange Swift and another Old Lady.

03 September 2023

The unusual sight of a Stoat coming out of the hedgerow by the Queen's Park High School field and then bounding down Percy Road.

05 September 2023

Another Stoat, this time on the path between the river and the picnic area. The fourth sighting of the summer!



Oblique Carpet (*Orthonama vittata*) inhabits marshy areas and other damp habitats, and occurs widely but locally over much of the British Isles.

16 September 2023

The first returning winter Pink-footed Geese were a flock of 120 over Handbridge while a flock of 140 Goldfinch were feeding on land bordering the Meadow.

21 September 2023

12 Comma and 7 Red Admiral butterflies were taking advantage of the flowering ivy on Bottoms Lane track. A Migrant Hawker dragonfly was patrolling the riverbank

25 September 2023

A Goshawk was noted flying high above the Meadows. *Denzil*

26 September 2023

A Kingfisher was observed flying over the river by the water mound.

30 September 2023

A late autumn Common Sandpiper in flight by the Old Dee Bridge;

Goosander again by the Weir and a Little Grebe by Deva Terrace.

Two Blackcap, 6 Reed Bunting, 6 Cetti's Warbler, 2 Chiffchaff were noted across the Meadow and neighbouring Duke's land.

07 October 2023

A Southern Hawker was seen at the lower end of Bottoms Lane track and also another Migrant Hawker near the centre of the Meadow.

15 October 2023

The first Stonechat of the winter was perched up on a Willow in the centre of the Meadow.



Blue tit (*Cyanistes Caeruleus*) seen on 15th October. Its favoured habitat is broad-leaved woodland, but is sufficiently adaptable to be abundant in a variety of other habitats, including gardens where they are often sighted in winter.

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