

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 234

Spring 2024

Welcome to our Newsletter for Spring 2024

Spring has sprung! Although so far it's been a rather wet one. Nevertheless, lots of work has been happening on the Meadows and this newsletter includes information about it all!

And we are looking forward to brighter, sunnier days ahead with another series of Botany Walks taking place from May to September – see page 5.

We are also thrilled to announce that we have secured British/Australian documentary photographer Jim Holmes, now living in Chester, to present his talk on "Afon Dyfrdwy to the River Dee, Source to Sea" at our AGM in November. This promises to be most interesting! Here's the details for your diaries:

Afon Dyfrdwy to the River Dee Source to Sea

A talk presented by documentary photographer Jim Holmes, at our AGM on **Wednesday 6th November 2024**
To be held at
St Mary's Handbridge Centre

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This edition's cover photo shows members of a working party re-installing the tree guards to protect newly planted tree whips. See page 6 for more! (Photo: Julie Savory)

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2024

Spring, the Sweet Spring

Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's
pleasant king,
Then blooms each thing, then maids
dance in a ring,
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds
do sing:

Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-
woo!

Thomas Nashe



Thomas Nashe was an English playwright born in 1567. 'Spring, The Sweet Spring' is a song from Nashe's play *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, that was notable in the development of the English Renaissance drama.

The main theme of the song, which has three verses, is nature, as Nashe constructs a pastoral and idealized scenery.

Meadows Management

Riverbank erosion

A site visit was arranged with Natural England to discuss ongoing concerns and appropriate ways to address the would enhance the conservation value of the riverbank at these points whilst addressing the progressive erosion. Various options will be investigated to id the best way forward.

Severn Trent

Works continue and seem to be on schedule. The Severn Trent Comms team encourage anyone that requires further updates to visit their website which is kept up to date with all the latest information regarding the works; this can be checked out at www.stwater.co.uk. From the website main page, click on the tab at the top Emergencies > Planned works> Chester, Boughton Intake Works. Should anyone have further queries they are advised to contact Severn Trent Comms team at communitycomms@severntrent.co.uk and they will responded directly.

Bramble management

At very short notice a small one-off fund became available which was utilised to restructure the denser pockets of bramble across the site. This will improve the age structure of the pockets to offer better habitat conditions for birds, insects and mammals. Only a percentage of each area was cut to ensure existing habitat remained until the new regrowth establishes. This won't require annual maintenance, just occasional upkeep to maintain a diverse structure over a longer period, ie every 5yrs or so.

Chester Zoo

At the start of the year, I attended the site with Chester Zoo reps to discuss their Networks for Nature programme. I await feedback from the Zoo on our discussions and subsequent discussions with the Friends group directly.

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer

Great British Spring Clean

On Saturday 23rd March, as part of Keep Britain Tidy fortnight, Friends of the Meadows joined forces with the Angling Trust and the Welsh Dee Trust to litter pick on The Meadows and along the River Dee. Twelve bags of rubbish were collected including a bike pulled out of the river! Many thanks to everyone who took part, it was fun to work together for a common cause.



Memories of the Meadows: My Favourite Tree

Richard Smart, a former Chair of Friends of the Meadows shares his memories of a certain tree

I first set foot on The Meadows in 1974, marvelling to find this open green space in the heart of the city. I walked down Bottoms Lane and on to the river and stile at the southeast corner of the meadow.

A large old ash tree with a wide spreading crown stood over the stile. A fine feature in the landscape and a haven for wildlife but there were signs of advancing dieback and some dead branches. Now fifty years on, the ash still stands there. There is more dieback in the crown of the tree which must be more than 200 years old. The top of the tree, which is 50 feet or so in height, provides a great lookout spot for kestrels, crows and pigeons over the river and meadows roundabout, while blackbirds, tits and other small birds feed and nest in the branches.

A few Ash saplings were planted some years ago to provide a replacement for this fine old tree and they are growing very well. Fortunately there is no sign of the invasive ash disease which was imported to this country on nursery stock some years ago, here or elsewhere on the Meadow. It is causing widespread deaths of ash throughout the country.



Friends of the Meadows has been planting replacements for any dying trees around the Meadows and riverbank when funds permit, together with their maintenance for some years now. New species can be introduced, such as the native Black Poplar planted five years ago in 2018, now well established. Long may this continue!

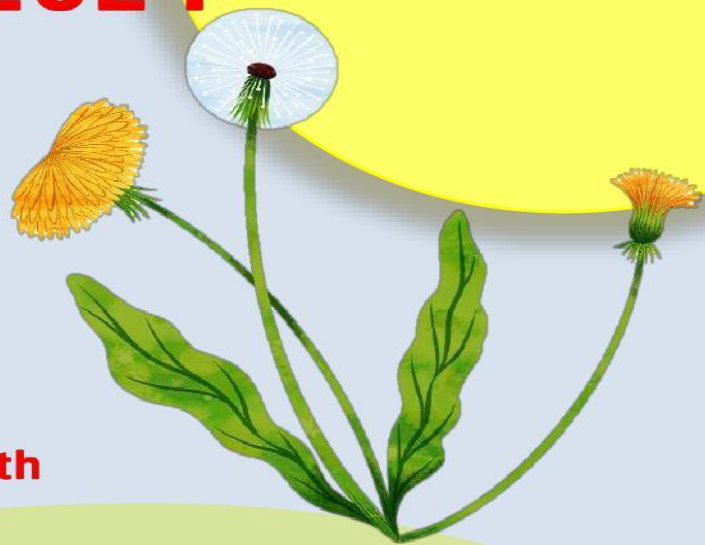
Richard was Chair of Friends of the Meadows during the 1980s until 1991. He was trained as a forester and his expertise and knowledge about trees continues to be drawn upon by the committee. On his retirement from the committee in 1992 an oak tree, which continues to thrive, was planted on Barnfield (the patch of land to the left as The Meadows are entered from the Lower Park Road entrance).

Botany Walks 2024

Following last year's successful Botany Walks led by Martyn Stead, another series is being put on and we hope that they'll be equally well attended!! All details below.

Spring and Summer Botany Walks 2024

- 🌻 **Wednesday May 8th**
- 🌻 **Wednesday June 12th**
- 🌻 **Wednesday July 10th**
- 🌻 **Wednesday August 14th**
- 🌻 **Wednesday September 11th**



All walks will be led by local botanist Martyn Stead.

There is no charge for the walk and it is not necessary to book in advance. So please come and join us to find out more about the diverse range of plants which can be found on The Meadows.

Meet at the Bottoms Lane entrance to The Meadows CH4 7AP from 6.00pm, ready to start walking at 6.30pm.

The walk will be a gentle stroll with frequent stops to identify plants and lasts approximately 90 minutes.



Tree planting on The Meadows

On Saturday 10th February, in the area between the water board mound and the ferry we planted three rowan trees, three hawthorn trees and one hazel tree.

We also sorted out a couple of metal tree guards which were either on their side or in the wrong place and put them to work protecting the newly planted trees.

A bit of litter picking was also done at the same time.



We got a lot done in two hours and it was great to have seven volunteers involved alongside three committee members.

Another session took place on 10th April, although it was very wet after the high tides and heavy rain!

We managed to do some work but decided to leave the remaining two tree guards which are more overgrown with vegetation until after the nesting season.

Many thanks to everyone involved!

We are planning further working parties on The Meadows to plant further trees and carry out other tasks to look after the area.

Please do get in touch via our website if you would like to be involved.

www.friendsofthemeadows.org





January 2024 to April 2024



Wild Garlic (7th April)

20th January 2024

A Redshank probed in mud on the side of the river by the Old Dee Bridge.

22nd January 2024

A Kingfisher was observed fishing frequently along Bottoms Lane track (mornings/evenings) throughout the winter. *Richard*

23rd January 2024

Above the river a Peregrine aggressively drove a Raven out of its territory before triumphantly returning to its perch on the Shot tower.

9th February 2024

A record count of 13 Goosander either side of the Old Dee Bridge.

An Otter was seen at dusk scampering across the Bottoms Lane track and on to the neighbouring marsh. A first for the Meadow! *Richard*

2nd March 2024

21 Snipe and one Jack Snipe were on the Handbridge marsh with not a single Snipe on the Meadow.

15th March 2024

The first Chiffchaffs of the Spring were singing on Bottoms Lane track and at the west end entrance to the Meadow.

16th March 2024

A singing Blackcap on Bottoms Lane track and also a male Stonechat singing on the Meadow.

7th April 2024

The first Sedge and Willow Warbler of the spring on the neighbouring Dukes land.

A pair of Goldcrest again on Bottoms Lane track (see pic below)



Goldcrest (7th April)

The clearance of Bramble on land below the Handbridge allotments allowed Wild Garlic to flower. Although a common woodland plant I can't recall ever seeing it on the meadow or surrounding land.

8th April 2024

The first Grasshopper Warbler of the spring heard reeling on the Meadow. Rob

13th April 2024

The first Common Whitethroat of the spring heard on the neighbouring Dukes Land.

Ten noisy Greylag Geese were on the flooded Meadow (see pic below) and a drake Mandarin duck flew up the river.

14th April 2024

The first Lesser Whitethroat of the spring in the hedgerow on the edge of Handbridge marsh and a plentiful emergence of Orange-tip butterflies across the whole site.

15th April 2024

The arrival of Reed Warbler on the Handbridge marsh brought the total Warbler species for the spring to eight. The unusual sight of three Shelduck flying around the Meadow before heading up the river.

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Two of the ten Greylag geese on the flooded Meadows (13th April)