

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 235

Summer 2024

Welcome to our Newsletter for Summer 2024

In the last newsletter I was hoping we'd look forward to brighter and sunnier days after a wet Spring, but they have been few and far between this Summer! Nevertheless, I hope everyone has got out and about and enjoyed the countryside and of course our own Meadows!

We held the first of our Botany Walks in May which attracted a few people despite the late publicity! Since then, the number attending has increased – see page 6 for details of the last two dates.

Also in the last few months our volunteer working group has been meeting on the second Saturday of the month to progress the tree planting and tree guard project. Other projects are in hand which will take us into the Autumn.

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

www.friendsofthemeadows.org

Enjoy the rest of the Summer, and look out for our next Newsletter due in October ahead of our AGM in November!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
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This edition's cover photo is a view of the Meadows from Elizabeth Crescent taken in 2016. Since then the unchecked encroachment of willow scrub makes for quite a different view!

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Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of
 May,
 And summer's lease hath all too short a
 date;
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance or nature's changing course
 untrimm'd;
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
 Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his
 shade,
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can
 see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to
 thee.*

This poem is part of the Fair Youth sequence. The "Fair Youth" is the unnamed young man addressed by the devoted poet and is handsome, self-centred, universally admired and much sought after.

Meadows Management

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer, gives a round up of works on the Meadows

Severn Trent

The works are finally concluding over the next month or so. The compound and associated infrastructure will gradually be removed and the site restored.

I will continue to liaise with Severn Trent to ensure the site is left in good condition.

Welsh Water

I continue to chase Welsh Water to get them to repair ground damage caused when repairing their most recent leak earlier in the year. They are also due to remove the fencing from the areas that surrounded their previous repairs. It is important that this is addressed as soon as possible whilst the ground is in relatively dry condition to avoid further ground damage.

The value of connectivity

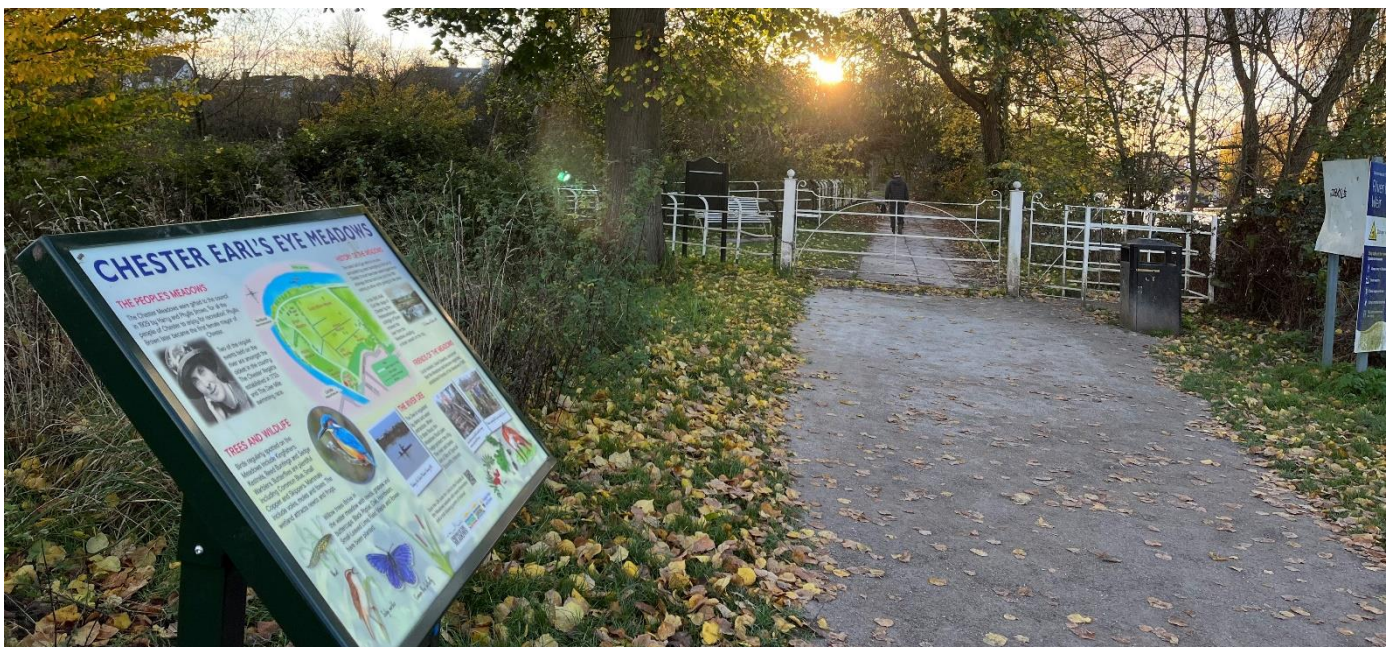
As part of the River Dee Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Local Wildlife Site with historic drainage system and ridge and furrow features, it's easy to forget that the Meadows (aka Earls Eye) is also an important part of a wider ecosystem.

As part of the River Dee floodplain, the site's mosaic of habitats are important for their high biodiversity and ecological value. As such they form a valuable part of the floodplain's wildlife corridor, a

feature that links adjacent areas of valuable habitat. These corridors enable species to move between them to feed, disperse and reproduce so ensuring a healthy and sustainable population going forward. This in turn, improves the overall health of the wider ecosystem.

So whilst you enjoy your walk please take time to consider the Meadow's essential role as a part of Cheshire's wider countryside. And it's all on Chester's doorstep!

- Steph



Balsam Bashing!

Julie Savory reports on a bit of bashing to help control this invasive riverside plant

On the 15th June a group of volunteers met on The Meadows to try and contain the spread of Himalyan Balsam.

On first sight this can look an attractive plant with its long stems and pink flowers in the summer months. As its name suggests, Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is from the Himalayas and was introduced here in 1839 as a garden plant but soon escaped and became widely naturalised along riverbanks and ditches, especially close to towns. It is fast-growing and spreads quickly,



invading wet habitat at the expense of other, native flowers. It is now an invasive weed of riverbanks and ditches and can reach a height of up to 3 metres smothering native plant species by outcompeting them for sunlight, space and nutrients.

The plant needs to be removed before it flowers in July and August when it will spread more seeds. It is a task that needs to be carried out every year just to contain the spread, as the seeds travel downstream from further upriver colonising ditches, streams and riverbanks.



This year a large patch of Himalyan Balsam was removed from the side of the ditch which runs along the south side of The Meadows.

A big **Thank you** to all the volunteers who came out to help our native plant species with a bit of 'balsam bashing'!

Botany Walks

So far, we have held three Botany Walks on the Meadows led by Martyn Stead.

There are two more walks which will take place on:

Wednesday 14th August

Wednesday 11th September

Meet from 6pm at Bottoms Lane Gate to commence at 6:30pm



A decent turnout for the Botany Walk on a cool and cloudy evening in July

AGM on Wednesday 6th November

This year's talk by Jim Holmes promises to be most interesting!

Jim Holmes is a British/Australian freelance documentary photographer now living in Chester, in the UK. He has spent 30 years specialising in documenting humanitarian work worldwide, and especially the issues, needs, solutions and outcomes of the development process.

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

The Deva Divas Triathlon event



This annual women's triathlon event took place on the Meadows on 14th July.

It's now a well-known, popular event which, in 2016, won the coveted British Triathlon "Event of the Year", Triathlon England Club Event of the Year and also North West Regional Race of the Year.

This year it again includes an Aquabike, which has become popular with Divas who are either injured and can't run, or who can't run due to medical reasons. Also going into the seventh year was the extremely popular Deva Divas Quadrathlon, which includes a 4k Kayak.

The triathlon course consists of a 750m open water swim in the River Dee, swimming downstream from the ferry pontoon opposite Sandy Lane, exiting via a pontoon ramp by the western gate.

Once out of the River Dee, Divas take their bikes from transition and make their way out onto Elizabeth Crescent. Once off Queens Park the 25K cycle route heads out to Eccleston, descending onto the old Wrexham Road and out to Rosset before turning at the Marford roundabout to return to the Chester Meadows.

Finally, off the bike and out of transition for the final discipline – a 5K flat off road run. The run goes through the meadows to the turnaround point before heading back to the transition areas. Two laps are completed before heading over the Finish line – with a big smile!



Both photos reproduced here courtesy of Chester Triathlon Club



April to July 2024

20th April 2024

The first Swallow of the spring swooping across the Meadows was a couple of weeks later than usual [Rob].

The first Swift of the spring arrived on time. Subsequent numbers remained low with only three to five birds flying above the Handbridge rooftops.

Two Grasshopper Warbler reeling on the Meadow (see photo)



Grasshopper warbler (20th April)

27th April 2024

A migrating female Redstart feeding in the field below Andrews Crescent.

Nearby a Lesser Whitethroat singing in the Hedgerow and above the Meadow a pair of displaying Lapwing.

Cetti's Warblers continue to increase in number & appear to be more visible as a consequence (see photo of Cetti's chilling out by the west end river entrance.)



Currant clearwing moth (2nd June)

28th April 2024

On neighbouring water company land two Sand Martin and two Swallow were feeding around the Horses.

1st May 2024

A migrating male Whinchat feeding in the centre of the Meadow. *Mark*

1st June 2024

A Water Rail was heard squealing from the Handbridge marsh.

Yellow-barred long-horned moths appeared to be everywhere with six in display flight by the west end river entrance and eight along Bottoms Lane track.

2nd June 2024

Two Currant Clearwing moth were attracted to a pheromone lure by the Handbridge allotments. As the name suggests the caterpillars feed within in the stems of currant bushes. (see photo previous page)

4th June 2024

A Lime Hawk moth was attracted to light in Cross Hey. (see photo below)



Lime hawk moth (4th June)

8th June 2024

A migrant Hummingbird Hawkmoth was observed feeding on Valerian flowers in Andrews Crescent. *Keith*

21st June 2024

A Lunar Hornet moth was attracted to a pheromone lure in a Cross Hey. Rarely seen even though LHMs are day flying moths but with the recent introduction of lures they are more widespread than first thought. The LHM caterpillars hatch from within the tree trunks of Willow. (See photo)

2nd July 2024

Another successful breeding season for the Sparrowhawk with a brood of four all fledging {see pic of juvenile}



Lunar hornet moth (21st June)

One of several similar 'mimic' species, known as Clearwings, this is one of the largest, and presents a fearsome sight to the uninitiated.

19th July 2024

With a break in the rain a fair amount of Small and Essex Skipper on the wing along with a Southern Hawker dragonfly flying up and down Bottoms Lane track.

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Sparrowhawk (2nd July)