

Newsletter

June 2016



Welcome

A warm (yes, summer may have come) welcome to the third issue of the LHM newsletter, with updates on what's been happening on the marshes in the past month. The most exciting development has been the long-awaited installation of nine colourful information panels – please see the article below.

Recent developments

New information boards

After long delays, three large and six small information panels have now been installed on the marshes, bolted onto pre-existing metal posts and backing boards. Those boards had supported an earlier set of signs, produced by Kent Enterprise Trust, the previous owners, and so had become out of date. The new panels are colourful and informative, as you can see from the photos on the next page. They all sport the new Trust logo, which should become increasingly familiar, a web address, and even a QR code (the mysterious blue square of hieroglyphics in the bottom right-hand corner that smart phone owners can use to access the website directly). Three large boards at the principal entry points (by the railway bridge, the footbridge over the river to the park and ride, and by the Tonford Bridge) provide a general introduction to the site, with a map, photos and text, while six smaller panels focus on various themes: wildlife; flowers; what to see from the boardwalk; the

site's brief phase as a gravel quarry; a re-established willow bed; and the fascinating story of the Elham Valley railway line.

The photos below give a flavour of what they are like, but there is no substitute for getting out there and seeing them for yourself. We hope you find the new boards interesting and attractive.


We are most grateful to the Beerling Foundation, the Canterbury Members' Panel of the City Council, and Kent County Council (courtesy of Councillor Martin Vye) for funding the design and production of the boards.



Poppy Beerling of the Beerling Foundation is thanked by David Lewis on behalf of the LHM Trustees for the Foundation's financial support







Wild about flowers

Once common-place, flower-rich grasslands are now rare. That's mainly because of some major changes in farming during the 20th century.


Traditional methods, which wildlife of all kinds had adapted to, died out. Modern intensive agriculture swept aside the old ways and many habitats with them. Some meadows were ploughed up. Others were sprayed with herbicides and chemical fertilisers, drained and otherwise 'improved' to make them more productive.

Happily this trend is now being reversed. Today farmers receive grants to manage and create meadows. Here at Hambrook we aim to increase the diversity of wild flowers for pollinating insects.

Many different types of wild flowers grow here. Some are shown in these pictures. Look on our website for others.



Fleabane



Meadowsweet



Ragged robin



Teasel



For more information, go to www.lhmcio.org or search 'Love Hambrook'



The shared-use cycle/paths and all other Hambrook footpaths are **permissive paths** - none are designated as legal Rights of Way.

Final cattle grid filled in

The third cattle grid (by the footbridge over to the park and ride area of Wincheap) was removed this month. Essential in the past when the fields were unfenced, the grids were now just a hazard to visitors and created bottlenecks at busy times, so we can all breathe a collective sigh of relief that they've finally gone. The new fencing and gates are therefore our only line of defence against the cattle making a break for the bright lights of Canterbury.

Cattle movements

Our grazier has now moved his cattle to Tonford Field for a couple of months. As there is no public access to that area, the beasts should be relatively secure against marauding dogs, such as the one that badly injured a heifer in May (see last month's newsletter for details of this horrific incident). Only days afterwards a dog was seen chasing the cattle, its owner having apparently ignored all the notices about keeping animals on leads when in a field with the cows, and vainly trying to call it off. Fortunately, this particular dog's intentions seem to have been essentially playful, and no real harm was done, although it certainly frightened the poor animals.

Mowing

You may have wondered why one square patch of the open field near the park and ride bridge had been mown in the autumn and again this spring. This was because that section had become infested with creeping thistle last summer (the photo below gives you some idea of what it was like). Although thistles have considerable wildlife interest, their flowers being valued by many insects, the huge quantity of windblown seeds produced in late summer threatened to spread the plant across all our grazing land and, as thistles are avoided by cattle, the situation would just have deteriorated further.



Wildlife Report

June is a quiet month for birds; the once-handsome drake mallards look moth-eaten as they moult from their spring finery into drab browns, causing them to hide away, as if in shame; and many of



the birds fall silent as the early promise and hopes of a fresh spring give way to the more oppressive heat of summer. So it was cause for celebration to see a coot with a single small chick on a ditch, proving that the species had indeed nested on the marsh for the first time. Coot chicks (left) are singularly unlovely creatures for, although largely covered in black fluffy feathers which ought to make them cute and cuddly, their red heads are bald, their bulging eyes grotesquely prominent, like revolting, festering pustules. Fortunately, this phase doesn't last

long, but then, disappointingly, they moult into rather boring greyish plumage, as yet without the white shield that is emblazoned on the front of the adults' heads.

A spotted flycatcher (right) was present on the old railway embankment for at least a couple of days early in the month. This is the last of our common migrants to arrive, but June is exceptionally late and it apparently moved on. The few previous



records I have for Hambrook have all been in autumn, when birds would be drifting south, prior to their long haul through Europe and across the Sahara. Another unusual record was of a greenfinch (left) on 28th, the first for nearly a year, which is rather surprising considering how many visit nearby gardens in Canterbury. Finally, a coal tit passing along the old railway embankment was only my third record of this neat little bird, the other two sightings having been in 2015.

Thistles are not everybody's idea of a beautiful flower, and so the various species tend to get lumped together and dismissed as undesirable weeds (see page 4's article on mowing). Marsh thistle is a tall species that, appropriately enough, does grow on Hambrook Marshes, although its name is something of a misnomer, as it certainly doesn't have to have its feet in water, simply preferring heavier, clay soils that retain moisture for longer in summer. A close relative is the welted thistle, considerably less common, and more generally associated with the alkaline soils of the North Downs, but there are several clumps of it alongside the river at Hambrook, and it seems to be thriving this year, presumably due to the ground remaining damp in the cool spring we have just endured.



Welted thistle

Welted thistle clump



Westgate Parks Project

Anna Bell, the Westgate Parks' project officer, is organising an art exhibition in Westgate Gardens on Saturday 16th July. This should be well worth attending. Anna has done a huge amount to raise the profile of the Parks (comprising Westgate Gardens, Toddlers' Cove, Tannery Field and Bingley Island, so please support her on 16th if you can. See the poster on the next page for full details. She, too, has been busy installing fascinating new interpretative panels throughout her patch, and a fear-some beast to look out for is the newly-installed bull on Tannery Field.



Spotted flycatcher and greenfinch photos courtesy of Dave Smith



Art in the Park is an open air art exhibition in
Canterbury's beautiful Westgate Parks.

This free event open to the public will be a great day
out for all the family. Visitors to the parks will be
able to meet local artists showcasing their work in
the beautiful surroundings of the Westgate
Gardens.

The event starts at 10:00am and finishes at 3:00pm,
There will be a small charge for art and craft
activities for children. There will also be an exhibition
in the Canterbury Umbrella Centre on the day.

The event is organised by the Friends of Westgate Parks, if you would like any further
information regarding exhibiting please email : colettecolour@hotmail.co.uk

