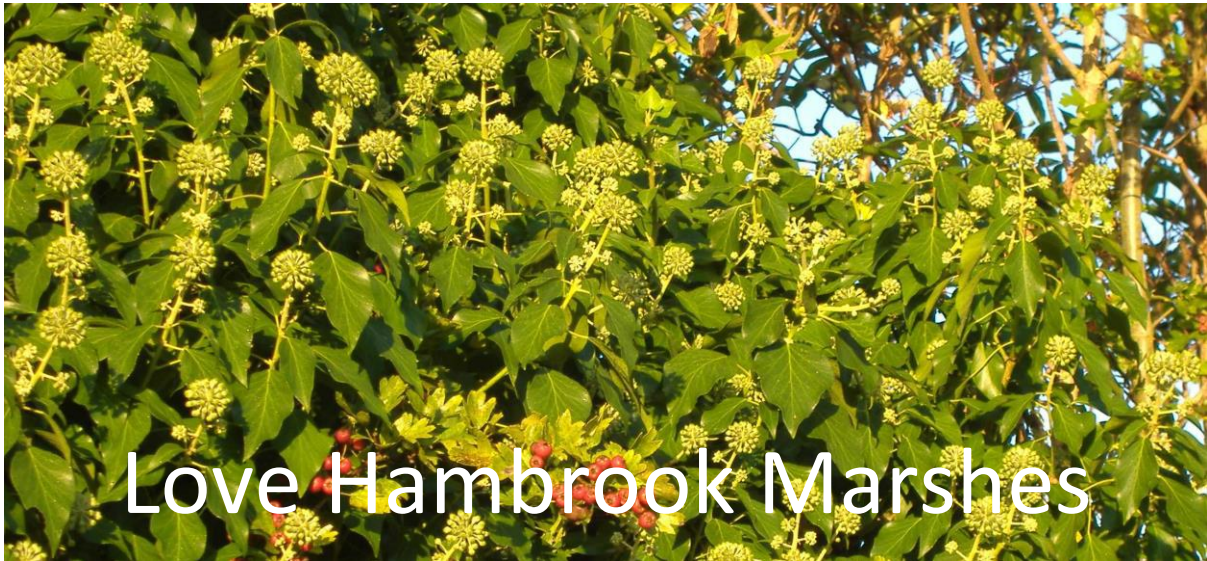


# Newsletter

September 2016



## Welcome

After such a prolonged drought the impact of the rainfall that finally came this month was limited: the ground is mainly still hard and uninviting to waterfowl. However, all that will no doubt change in the coming weeks.

Unfortunately, after a fairly long period without any serious vandalism, we have suffered two incidents this month (see section on vandalism on pages 2 and 3), both with cost implications for Love Hambrook Marshes.

## Recent Developments

### **Cattle moved**

During the month the cattle were moved from the south-western half of the marshes to the north-eastern section, the grazier being able to take advantage of the newly-installed fence and so stop the herd from careering over the small, central field that was mown for hay in August. As reported in the July newsletter, it was only with extreme difficulty that the grazier had managed to move the beasts in the opposite direction, before the new fence had been erected. Fencing is expensive, but this fairly short stretch should prove its worth in facilitating cattle movements from now on.

## Britain in Bloom award for Hambrook Marshes

You may recently have spotted news in the local press of an award for Hambrook under the “It's Your Neighbourhood” (IYN) scheme. IYN is a grassroots community gardening campaign organised by the Royal Horticultural Society. It forms part of *Britain in Bloom* and aims to 'help people to make lasting improvements to their local environment'. LHM participated for the first time this year.

So in early July two Trustees met Jo Shrimpton, a local organiser for IYN and lecturer at Hadlow College, to show her round the marshes. We explained what LHM does, the current challenges, and the successes we've had so far.

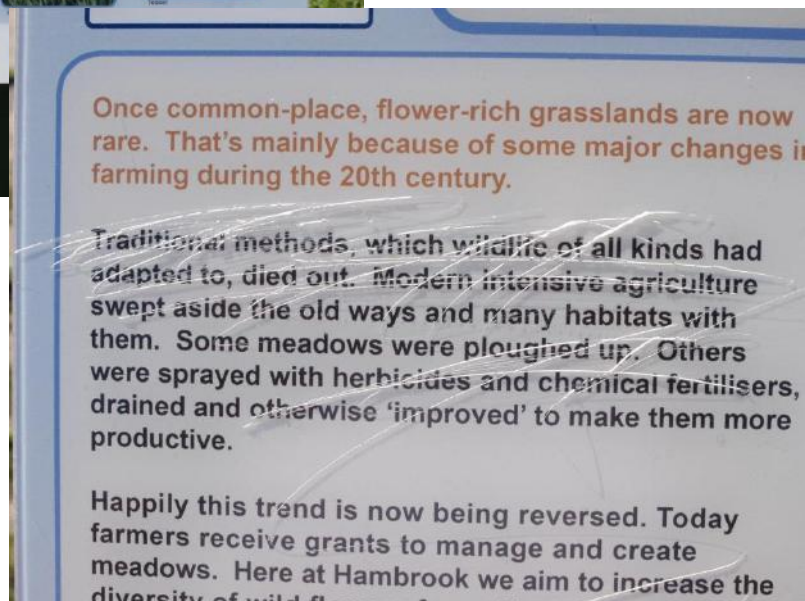
For some of the other categories entrants can be awarded an Olympian gold, silver or bronze, but in our section the scoring is “establishing”, “improving”, “advancing”, “thriving” and the highest accolade - “outstanding”. We are delighted to announce that we scored “thriving”, just one level below the gold standard. Our congratulations are extended to Canterbury in the “small city” category for retaining their Gold Award in 2016 for a second consecutive year, to Whitefriars for achieving Silver in the town centre category, and to the Friends of Kingsmead Meadow for being awarded “outstanding” in the same category (IYN) as Hambrook.

## Vandalism



Several of our lovely new information boards were gouged by a sharp instrument this month. On some the damage is fairly superficial, and not too much of a problem, but the “Wild about flowers” board has been attacked quite vigorously, making it difficult to read some of the text (see photos left and below). The scratches will quickly attract dirt

and algae, making the disfigurement even more obvious, and the text yet harder to read. Unfortunately, there is probably little that can be done to repair the boards, leaving us with an undesired choice – leave the signs as they are to deteriorate further, or pay for replacements in the knowledge that the same thing will, almost inevitably, happen again.





A second incident involved a car being reversed into the metal field gate off Whitehall Road; this entrance provides us with the only vehicular access to the Marshes. As you can see from the photo (left), the gate was flattened and had to be replaced promptly, as the cattle were due to be brought back to graze the middle and eastern fields later in the month.

Damage caused by this sort of mindless behaviour is expensive to rectify, so we would ask everyone enjoying the Marshes to act as our eyes and ears,

and report anything suspicious to the police and also inform the trustees at [lovehambrook@gmail.com](mailto:lovehambrook@gmail.com). In this instance a helpful resident heard rather than saw what happened and alerted us to the damage, but was unable to supply us with a car registration number though, as the vehicle was probably stolen, this would not have been of much use anyway.

## Work Parties

In the last newsletter I mentioned the opportunities for getting involved in work parties on the marshes. Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP), who organise these, have now provided us with dates for the rest of the year. All are on a Thursday, but it is possible that one of those dates will have to be changed, so please do get in touch with KSCP beforehand to confirm date, time and meeting place. You need to bring warm clothing, sturdy boots and gloves, plus that all-important lunch. The dates are:

October 27<sup>th</sup>  
November 17<sup>th</sup>  
December 8<sup>th</sup>

If you would like to get involved, please contact Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership on 03000 410900 or [kentishstour@kent.gov.uk](mailto:kentishstour@kent.gov.uk).

## Wildlife Report

It is still very dry on the marshes, so waterfowl are notable mainly for their absence, although a little grebe putting in an appearance on the river in its usual spot near the Canterbury East railway bridge on 23<sup>rd</sup> was considerably earlier than usual for this winter visitor. Another sign of fading summer was the passage of chiffchaffs (right), heading south into Europe and beyond. On 23<sup>rd</sup> at least 13 of these slim warblers were feeding frenetically in the scrub on the old railway embankment. This was also the



day that I heard my first meadow pipit of the winter flying over.

The great spotted woodpecker (below left) has been seen more frequently than usual this summer. Similarly, the green woodpecker (below right) was formerly mainly a late summer and winter visitor, but is now present periodically throughout the year. The green woodpecker is largely a bird of open countryside, feeding primarily on ants dug out from fields, and so is at home on the marshes, whereas the great spotted is essentially a woodland species and more out of place at Hambrook, though the trees on the old embankment seem to provide sufficient incentive for it to turn up from time to time.



Since my first winter's recording in 2012-13, the mistle thrush has become a much scarcer visitor to the marshes, so it was good to see one in the embankment scrub on 23<sup>rd</sup>. This is a larger, more upright version of the declining song thrush, greyer, with more rounded blotches on its breast and a more upright stance, giving it a slightly belligerent demeanour.



At this time of year, when most flowers have withered and died, leaving scarce pickings for autumnal insects to feed on, ivy is in full bloom, providing abundant nectar for hoverflies and bees. I'm not talking here about those rather poor woodland specimens that are starved of light and fail to flower down at our level in the wood, but the far more exuberant banks of ivy that can sometimes adorn hedges or old buildings. There is a nice patch of it (left) on the old railway embankment, which hosted an

array of insects during recent sunny weather, including this attractive hoverfly (right). Much maligned, quite wrongly, as a strangler of trees, ivy is in fact an absolutely invaluable source of food for those insects that are still on the wing at this time of year. On a good day the chorus of buzzing wings can be, if not exactly deafening, certainly impossible to miss.



Man-made structures are often worth inspecting for less usual plants in the countryside, and the Canterbury East railway bridge at the eastern end of the marshes is no exception. Growing out of the mortar are several delicate plants of black spleenwort (left),



against a bright silver background that is courtesy of our resident graffiti writers! This small fern's natural habitat is on calcareous rocks, but in Kent it is now more or less confined to the surfaces of ageing buildings and

bridges. Just beneath the spleenwort is a more unusual plant – hollyhock. Very familiar in cottage garden flowerbeds, it seldom hops over the wall in a bid for freedom, and it is uncertain whether this particular plant (right) is growing wild or was introduced to that spot, the latter explanation seeming a little unlikely. Note the same silver paint again!



*All bird photos are courtesy of Dave Smith*