



# Newsletter

November 2018



## Love Hambrook Marshes

### Welcome

Last month's banner photo heading this newsletter was of hawthorn berries, which I strongly associate with autumn. This month's photo is similar, but the cluster of red berries are on a holly twig, which can only mean Christmas! While hawthorn is fairly frequent on the old railway embankment, where the earlier photo was taken, there is just a single holly tree at Hambrook, at the far northern end of the same embankment. So, a timely prompt for me to wish you all a peaceful time as we approach the winter equinox.

### What's happening on the marshes?

The cattle were taken off the marshes for the winter, just before standing water appeared in some areas, particularly Tonford Field. With the wetter weather came our annual problem of paths disappearing under water, so we followed up last month's unblocking of a culvert by starting to clear out logs and vegetation from a back ditch, in the hope that less water would spill over the bank and

into the fields. There is still some way to go and, as mentioned in the last newsletter, this work may not ultimately prove to be the solution.

Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership volunteers spent two sessions this month cutting and burning scrub on the old embankment, the aim being to create more of a mosaic of grass and bushes. Thanks to the banks facing roughly east and west, the ground can heat up quite rapidly in the morning or afternoon, creating a suitable habitat for warmth-loving animals such as lizards (right) and slow worms.



Some months ago I put out a request for photos that might be used to brighten up the Wincheap underpass. We were able to submit an amazing 83 photos, from which a final eleven were chosen by a panel of judges. This project, which was spear-headed by Liberal Democrat councillor Nick Eden-Green, is now nearing fruition; work has begun on installing new tiling on the ramps leading down to the underpass proper, but a technical delay with the production of large prints has meant that it will be some time yet before the glory of Hambrook Marshes is on display.

## Wildlife Report

Winter's imprint is definitely here, with the number of tufted duck (right) on nearby Tonford Lake increasing to 26. An often overlooked sign of the changing seasons is the passage of



skylarks (left); at this time of year birds move into the south of the country from more northerly regions and also from the continent, feeding on farmland in flocks. One of the surprises for me at Hambrook has been the almost total lack of visible migration of skylarks along the Stour valley over the years, but this November there has been a trickle of birds following the line of the river downstream, with a maximum of 18 on 25<sup>th</sup>. Despite all these wintry portents, there were still occasional

shadows of summer to be glimpsed, such as a common darter dragonfly (right) on 1<sup>st</sup> and a late chiffchaff on 25<sup>th</sup>, though with milder winters more of these former migrants are dispensing with the long and hazardous trip down to the Mediterranean, instead preferring to take their chances here, hoping that a cold snap doesn't rob them of their rather meagre insect pickings.

With shallow water appearing in parts of the fields, mallard have started moving in from the



river, using their broad bills to sift out floating seeds from the water's surface. Waterlogging was also much to the liking of the snipe, whose numbers had swollen to 48 by the end of the month.

Other delights were a flock of 15 goldfinches (left) on 11<sup>th</sup> and a bullfinch on 25<sup>th</sup>. Numerous collective nouns have been devised for a wide range of bird species, many of them remarkably contrived: a "bellowing" of bullfinches is nothing short of nonsensical, as that is one of the quietest of species, its seldom-heard song barely audible above the rustling of leaves. By contrast, a "charm" of goldfinches is one of the loveliest descriptions of this most delightful of species.

*All bird photos courtesy of Dave Smith*

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