



Newsletter

December 2018



Welcome

A Happy New Year to all our readers. The days are drawing out, snowdrops are flowering, song thrushes tuning up, and some precociously extrovert hazels are dangling their catkins (if you know where to look), so spring must be on its way! What could possibly go wrong, barring another Beast from the East, or perhaps a Blizzard coming Forth from the North?

What's happening on the marshes?

The main activity this month has been in the osier (willow) bed at the back of the marshes, near the entrance from Whitehall Road. Basket-weavers from Kent and Sussex turned up to make a start on harvesting the long, straight, one-year-old stems that had developed on trunks that were cut back last winter. This achieves one of our aims, namely keeping alive an ancient management tradition that has been practised on English wetlands for thousands of years. Unfortunately, annual cutting means that no usable habitat is created for birds – in spring the ground is bare



and just as the willows are starting to develop into an area of low scrub they are cut back to the ground once more. One solution would be for us to extend the osier bed, so that part of it could be managed on a longer rotation of two or more years, making it better for wildlife, while still leaving a sufficiently large area for the basket-weavers to clear every year.

Wildlife Report



Early in the month the wet conditions in some of the fields were looking very promising, with 55 mallard feeding in the shallows on 2nd and 52 snipe probing the mud on 16th, but unfortunately, although the ground is still fairly wet, it has failed to retain these numbers of birds, and the marshes have become fairly quiet. Seeing a little egret (left) twice was some recompense (I've only had three records since April) and a kingfisher on 16th was a bright spot, a rash of records in autumn having dried up recently.

The narrow strip of scrub that is the old Elham Valley railway embankment has a value out of all proportion to its size, and redwings (right) were to the fore there early in the month, with 15 feeding on hawthorn berries on 2nd and 55 there three days later.



Also encouraging was a sparrowhawk seen flying low over the marshes in the hope of taking a small bird by surprise – my first record since April. The only other birds of note were a bullfinch and tree creeper.

Little egret photo courtesy of David Lewis and redwing courtesy of Dave Smith

The photo fronting this newsletter is a detail of the splendid wildlife-encrusted picnic table beside the river, showing two pugnacious coots squaring up for battle.

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