



Newsletter

February 2019



Welcome

I'm sure we all thoroughly enjoyed the sunny days this month when the temperature in Canterbury rose as high as 19.5°C, unheard of for February, but the more sinister truth behind the figures could well be climate change-related. With the five warmest years ever recorded globally occurring in the last five years, more and more people are realising that our planet really is heating up. It is now pointless to waste time arguing about what is causing the rise in temperature; instead our political leaders need to address the problem more urgently in order to keep global warming below 2°C if international mayhem is to be prevented.

Proposed extension to the Wincheap park and ride

Many thanks to everyone who has sent objections to this plan via the council's website or written to the Kentish Gazette. So far about 450 comments have been received, of which only one, we believe, is in favour of the proposal (You can read the trustees' objection on the council's website by scrolling down through the comments; ours is the second one for 12th February). If you haven't sent in your comments it isn't too late, because the original deadline of 19th February has been extended for a short while. By clicking [here](#) and then clicking on the Documents tab, you can view all the available documents and comments that have already been submitted. It's useful to read a few of the comments, as they will give you an idea of the range of aspects that have been covered, and it's best to confine your own comments to those elements of the proposal that most upset you. Alternatively, click [here](#) to go straight to the page where you can type your comments online.

Submitting your comments to the council's website will help to maintain the pressure on the council and keep the issue in the public eye. Another way to help would be to write a letter to the Kentish Gazette (kentishgazette@thekmgroupp.co.uk). Don't forget to include your address or it won't stand a chance of being printed. Please also pass on details of the proposal to friends and groups that you are involved in: the more people who know about the scheme the better.

On 21st February the Gazette printed an article which was, in effect, the council's response to our objection, headlining it "Council 'agrees to disagree' over park and ride expansion". We felt it was a little disingenuous of the council to claim that "The principle of moving the park and ride to its proposed new location has already been agreed in the Local Plan and was tested thoroughly at the public examination....", as the Plan failed to indicate the extent of the expansion, that it would seriously affect a green corridor and an Area of High Landscape Value, or that it would go right down to the bank of the river Stour. The article ends with the council's threatening parting shot that ".....if the Wincheap expansion does not happen, the currently agreed alternative site is Faulkners Lane in Harbledown." However, as pointed out by one of our supporters in last week's Gazette (28th February), "....the proposed park and ride at Harbledown, after much campaigning, was withdrawn from the Local Plan in 2015", so Faulkners Lane very definitely is not a "currently agreed alternative". In the same issue the Gazette printed a letter from the Hambrook trustees, plus another one pointing out the danger of having a heavily-used public footpath running straight through the park and ride extension.

Finally, there is a long article in last week's Gazette, highlighting the suggestion by George Metcalfe, the Lib Dem councillor for Blean Forest, that the much-criticised multi-storey car park scheme for Station Road West be abandoned, and built instead on the site of the existing Wincheap park and ride.

So, a lot is happening, and with your help we can keep up the momentum.

What's happening on the Marshes?

There will be another Kentish Stour Countryside partnership work party on 7th March. If you would like to help with the management of the Marshes, with a chance to enjoy fresh air, physical exercise and good company, why not come along then? Meet the group at 10am at the entrance off Whitehall Road, close to the level crossing. Just bring old clothes, sturdy footwear, lunch and a flask. All will be most welcome.

We have the local branch of the Parkinson Society to thank for this smart new bench beside the cycle path. It is in fact just off Hambrook Marshes, on land belonging to the City Council, who paid for it to be installed.

The plans for brightening up the Wincheap subway seem at last to be reaching a finale, and we are hoping that the photos of Hambrook Marshes provided by trustees and members of the public will be adorning the walls of this presently dismal underpass in March or April.



Wildlife Report

It would be a deluded soul who described Hambrook as extensive woodland, yet I do sometimes hear a great spotted woodpecker drumming on one of the few mature trees on the old embankment; imagine my surprise, though, when on 17th there were two birds drumming at each other. Drumming appears to serve the same purpose as song, being a chance for male birds to demonstrate their vocal prowess to females or, in the case of the woodpeckers, perhaps to show off their physical strength through sheer volume. Either way, it is a sure sign that birds' thoughts or instincts are turning to breeding. Equally unlikely was a chiffchaff singing on 26th; this may have



been a bird that chose to overwinter locally rather than migrate down to the Mediterranean, but you still wouldn't expect to hear one just yet, and we can thank the incredibly warm weather of the second half of the month for such an abnormality. The same day I heard my first reed bunting (left) song of the year; these birds are usually absent all winter, only reappearing in spring, when one or two pairs may stay to breed. Still on the subject of spring nuptials, the three little egrets that were around the edge of Tonford Lake in January have now increased to four! Their behaviour suggests that they are two pairs; however, they are unlikely to breed locally as they normally nest colonially, typically within a heronry, so all four birds may soon disappear, perhaps to join the nearest heronry at Fordwich. The declining number of snipe around the wet areas is another sign that winter's grip is loosening.

The month saw a number of other interesting records: there is an old adage that goes along the lines of "A rook on its own is a crow, but a crow in a flock is a rook" – largely nonsense, I'm afraid. While it's true that rooks are highly gregarious and

rarely seen away from a parliament (the collective name for rooks, whose constant cawing makes for an unfavourable, though perhaps well-deserved, comparison with our MPs), the same cannot be said for crows (right). Unlike rooks, crows don't nest colonially, but it is quite usual to see them in pairs and small groups, while in winter they can gather in their hundreds along the coast. So, though I don't normally see many at Hambrook, it wasn't such an enormous surprise to briefly witness a flock of 26 in tall poplars at the edge of the marsh on 10th. What caused them to congregate there all of a sudden is a complete mystery to me, as was their equally abrupt dispersal. Another incident involving these black scavengers occurred just three days earlier when a pair of



them successfully saw off a buzzard. Although relatively large and fierce, a buzzard on the ground is no match for two determined dive-bombers, and the raptor, wisely deciding that discretion was the better part of valour, lumbered slowly into the air, followed by its tormentors.

Mute swans have been in short supply in recent months, so it was gratifying to receive a report of ten flying up the valley, and on 10th a greylag goose flew over, my first record for ten months. A greenfinch was my first record of a bird actually on Hambrook, as opposed to nearby or flying over, since July 2017.



Perhaps the most exciting record of the period came from a friend who sent me this photo of a heavily gnawed log that he found beside the river at Fordwich. The very strong chiselling could only have been the work of a beaver! Formerly native to Great Britain, in recent years a number of beavers have been deliberately let loose around the country; while this is illegal, it is really just returning to the wild a mammal that would still be present had it not been hunted to extinction in the UK during the 16th century. There have been a few reports of a beaver locally, so it is intriguing to think that one has been present

recently just a few miles downstream, perhaps passing through Hambrook on its way to Fordwich!

*Reed bunting and crow photos courtesy of Dave Smith;
Beaver log photo courtesy of Glen Sharman*

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