



Newsletter

April 2019



Love Hambrook Marshes

Welcome

We all love seeing tiny ducklings on the river each spring, paddling frenetically in all directions in a bid not to be left behind..... Well, apparently not. A recent report on Facebook told of a youth taking potshots at the fluffy chicks with a sling in Westgate Gardens, which must leave all of us appalled. We may say that education is needed to prevent this sort of attitude towards wildlife taking root, but that leaves you wondering what sort of a world we live in where it is necessary to explain why it is wrong to enjoy doing that sort of thing. Thankfully, we haven't received any reports of similar activity on Hambrook, but I'm afraid that wherever you are there will be a tiny minority of dysfunctional young people seemingly taking pleasure out of inflicting pain on defenceless wildlife.

What's happening on the Marshes?

Just as it is a new breeding season for wildlife on the Marshes, so it is all change in the field of management. Our former mowing contractor chose not to renew his contract this season, but we have been fortunate to obtain an alternative person able and willing to carry out the sometimes fiddly mowing work alongside paths, although at the time of writing we haven't been able to finalise arrangements for someone to cut, bale and remove hay from our meadow in late summer. If any of you have a suitable contact we'd be delighted if you could get in touch. Another sign of spring was the arrival of the first 17 young cattle on 22nd.

Wildlife Report

Winter reluctantly slipped its grip, with the final six snipe on 6th and a last lingering redwing on 8th. The emphasis now for birds is very much on the exhausting task of nest-building, incubating and eventually rearing young. A pair of long-tailed tits (below) were busily constructing their domed nest in a quiet corner on 8th; “nest” is a rather inadequate word for this work of art – soft moss bound together with cobwebs, lined with as many as two thousand tiny feathers, and the outer surface decorated with a layer of lichen fragments. This makes for excellent camouflage when the nest is fastened in the fork of a tree, its outer layer merging almost imperceptibly into the rugged bark, but the birds often prefer to site their architectural gem in the middle of a dense but leafless bush, where it could hardly be more conspicuous if it had a flashing light above. Consequently, at this time of year it is a common sight to find ripped-up nests lying on the ground, a sure sign that a jay or magpie has watched the adults flying to and fro’ with nesting material, and has then moved in to steal the contents.



The great crested grebe saga continues; only one bird of the pair that had taken up residence on Tonford Lake is now to be seen, but that may well be a good sign, indicating that its mate is sitting tight on a nest hidden in the deep cover that rims the lake.

My first reed warbler was nearby on 15th, and a whitethroat (below) was present six days later. A Cetti’s warbler has also been singing explosively just off Hambrook, and we even had a

skylark trilling on 8th. A pair of bullfinches were present at both ends of the month, so must be nesting locally, but the three to four swans occasionally seen on the river may be non-breeders.

Only three flowering snake’s head fritillaries could be found in the boardwalk field this spring, but the exciting news was that a local resident whose garden backs onto the river in Thanington reported catching a glimpse of an otter in his torch beam when he went outside to shut up his chickens for the night. What with that and the beaver I reported on in February’s newsletter, the Stour is beginning to sound like a real river!



All bird photos courtesy of Dave Smith

The banner photo at the head of this newsletter was taken in late April, looking along Hambrook at dawn from the Tonford railway crossing. The top of Bell Harry tower is just visible on the horizon, poking above the A2 embankment, towards the left-hand edge.

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