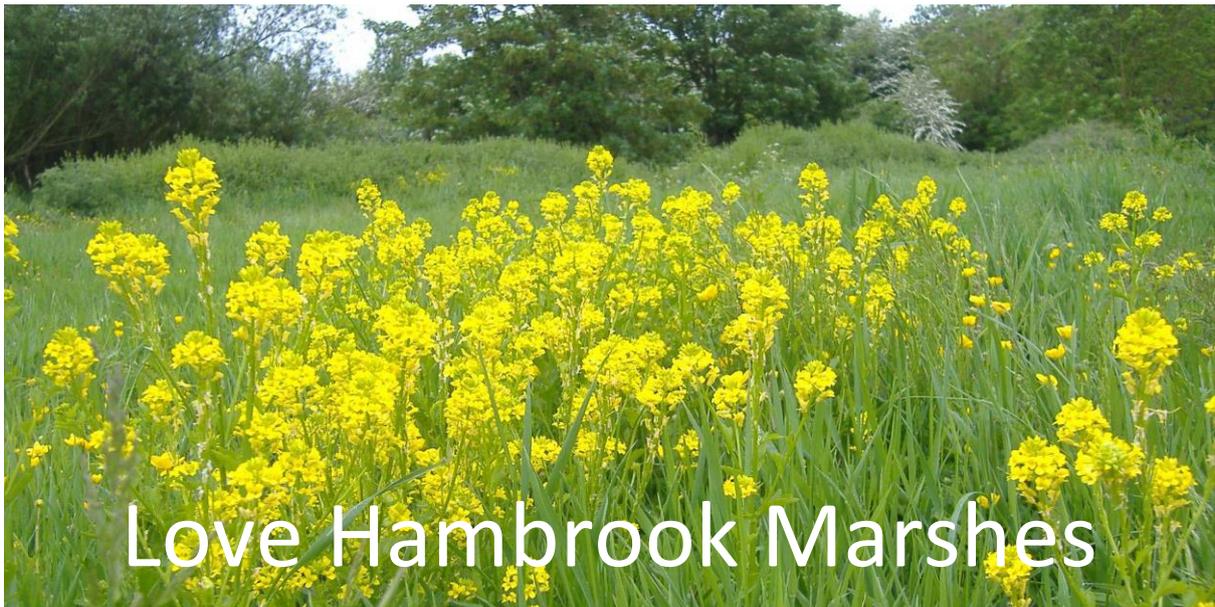


Newsletter

May 2019



Welcome

It's been a surprisingly quiet month, considering that spring should be when it all happens, with wildlife breeding like fury, but it has been another unsettled spring, with adverse winds delaying migration, and the weather blowing hot one day, cold the next. A rather bizarre highlight was the discovery of a spot beside the river where someone had set up a small vegetable patch (a pop-up allotment?) – read about it in “What’s happening on the Marshes?”, and I suppose the bird highlight was tracking down the nesting mandarin ducks for the third year (see Wildlife Report).

What’s happening on the Marshes?

A stile leading onto the old railway embankment had started to get a bit wobbly, so it was more or less rebuilt, and is now much sturdier. The flight of steps leading up to the embankment had largely disappeared beneath new growth, so much vegetation was cut back from the sides, and scraped off the path surface, making the stairway much safer to negotiate for anyone a little unsteady on their feet.

The arrival of a further 13 cattle during the month brought the number in the herd up to full strength, at thirty.

Most bizarre was the discovery of an illegal vegetable patch at the river's edge (see photo on right), where someone had cleared an area of nettles about 7 metres by two metres, and established a very healthy crop of oriental lettuce. Creating an allotment on the Marshes is obviously contrary to the trust's aims, so, unfortunately, we have had to clear away all the vegetables. We know who the culprit is (he has got up to the same tricks on nearby Bingley Island), so we are hoping that we can keep on top of this decidedly odd venture.



Wildlife Report

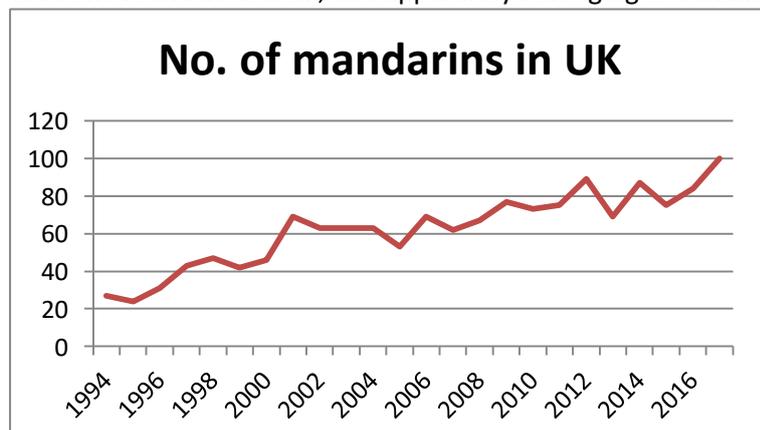


The last of the spring migrants were garden warbler and house martin on 14th, with cuckoo trailing in on 23rd. A pair of starlings nested in an old woodpecker hole in a poplar on the embankment, rearing a brood that could be heard from way off, noisily demanding to be fed; and flocks of up to 50 adult and juvenile starlings have been feeding in the fields all month. They were joined one morning by two jackdaws (left), the first I have seen for nearly twelve months.

Our very pale mandarin duck (right) has again reared a large family; nine ducklings were present on 23rd, a number that is expected to be whittled away by predators in the coming weeks. Interestingly, as the name suggests, this



is a species from the Far East which has become established in this country after escaping from wildfowl collections, but a 600,000-year-old bone found in Norfolk, and apparently belonging to a mandarin,



suggests that it may once have been native to England. The graph on the left shows that this exotic duck has been doing rather well in Britain in the past 25 years, particularly in the south, with an estimated 2300 pairs now present (please note that the scale on the left of the graph is just an index, with the number in 2017 being arbitrarily set at 100).

The only other bird of note was a sparrowhawk flying over on 23rd.



During one of our sunnier spells a small copper was seen (left); a small and rather scarce butterfly in our area, what it lacks in size is amply made up for by the sheer brilliance of its burnished upper wings – an absolute jewel of a butterfly.

A new species for the plant list was green alkanet, a member of the borage family. Examination of the flower (below right) shows a very close resemblance to forget-me-not, which is in the same family. Given that most plants are green, the name seems a trifle odd on

first encounter, but refers to the fact that it retains its leaves in winter, and so is evergreen. Though widely distributed in Britain, it is probably not native but one of many species that have leapt over garden walls to make the



countryside their home (there is a fine stand of it in front of Tower House in Westgate Gardens – photo on left), and is now to be found on many road verges.

Jackdaw photo courtesy of Dave Smith

The banner photo at the head of this newsletter is of common wintercress, a few plants of which grow near the riverbank, and are flowering now.

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