



# Newsletter

July 2019



## Welcome

It is saddening to have to report yet again that numerous information boards and other signage have been despoiled by the wanton spraying of tags. However, this disfigurement can, for the most part, be removed with graffiti wipes and elbow grease, whereas the ducklings recently killed by children catapulting stones at them can't be resurrected. I suspect there has always been a sadistic streak in many, if not most, children, but what seems different now is their brazen behaviour, acting in full view of passers-by and seemingly indifferent to authority. A resident who witnessed an incident was able to apprehend four remarkably young-looking children, who then submitted to an earful from the mother of one of them. The children were later spoken to by a police officer, though whether that will have made any impact is hard to know. Last Thursday's Gazette announced that two 11-year-old boys had been stopped by police in Godwin Road and had catapults confiscated, so where or when is it going to end?

## What's happening on the Marshes?

A further 160 metres of riverbank vegetation, in three sections, were cut to open up views of the river. Until a few years ago livestock was free to graze right down to the river bank, but the opening up of the riverside path to the public meant that this was no longer advisable; as a result, vegetation

right next to the river has been able to grow vigorously, screening views of the lovely chalk stream from our many visitors. The work that we are undertaking now is therefore simply an attempt to partially recreate a former landscape. However, the riverside vegetation of grasses, nettles, water



dropwort and purple loosestrife is a valuable habitat in its own right, so we wouldn't wish to clear the growth away from more than a small proportion of the total length of our river boundary.

Another simple bench was installed, this time positioned at a bend in the river so that you can look directly upstream while taking a well-earned rest. The only drawback is that it is immediately opposite where the council is proposing to site its extension to the Wincheap park and ride.

There will be Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership work parties on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> August and 26<sup>th</sup> September. 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.

## Wildlife Report



There was a peak count of 25 marbled whites (left) on 12<sup>th</sup>. Painted lady was also seen, and brown argus (below) was a new species. Despite its name, the brown argus is a member of the blue family, and an examination of the underwing immediately reveals a close similarity to common blue, with its complex patterning of black spots in white halos, and a necklace of orange squares decorating the wing margin.

Activity on the river included a lucky early-morning runner spotting an otter on 15<sup>th</sup>. Idly leaning over the Tonford bridge one sunny afternoon my attention was drawn to an off-white blob that was zigzagging through the water; for a second or two my mind was a blank, what could this be? - a moth trapped in the water's surface tension surely wouldn't weave left and right in such a uniform manner. Then it dawned on me; what I was looking at wasn't the whole animal, but just





the pale yellow patch at the side of a grass snake's head that was giving away its movements. A little grebe (left) on the river on 29<sup>th</sup> was of interest: normally strictly a winter visitor here, I had seen one on the same stretch of river in June last year, strengthening my suspicion that a pair may have attempted to nest at Hambrook.

A welcome, if brief, visitor on 29<sup>th</sup> was a green sandpiper (below). This wader breeds in northern Europe and Russia, but winters mainly in Africa,

India and south east Asia; each autumn some birds funnel through the UK on their passage south, and the occasional sandpipers call in at Hambrook. Its most distinctive features are a disyllabic flight note, and a white rump set against a darkish back. We don't seem to get much visible migration along the valley, so it is always pleasing to see a bird that is following the line of the river, even if it is a sign of the waning summer. Some birds, such as cuckoo, habitually turn back to the south in June or July, and the empty skies above Canterbury in early August are a reminder that the shrieking swifts have fled for another year, but many passage migrants seen at this season are likely to be failed breeders that see no point in remaining on their breeding grounds, deciding instead to return early to their winter quarters south of the equator.



Sixty starlings have again been present in the Tonford field; a green woodpecker was my first since December; and a couple of mute swans flying over on whistling wings were welcome after a three-months' absence. On 1<sup>st</sup> July the local swifts may already have been thinking about their imminent journey south so, before they departed, it was a joy for me to watch 13 of these acrobats swooping and circling, then suddenly diving down on half-closed wings to skim the surface of the river, either catching insects or taking a much-needed drink. Swifts famously only come to earth to nest, spending the rest of their lives in the air, where they sleep and mate – wraiths wedded to the limitless sky.

*Banner photo at the head of this newsletter is dawn over the Tonford footbridge*

*Little grebe and green sandpiper photos courtesy of Dave Smith  
Brown argus photo courtesy of Glynn Crocker*

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