

Newsletter

November 2019



Welcome

Feeding the ducks

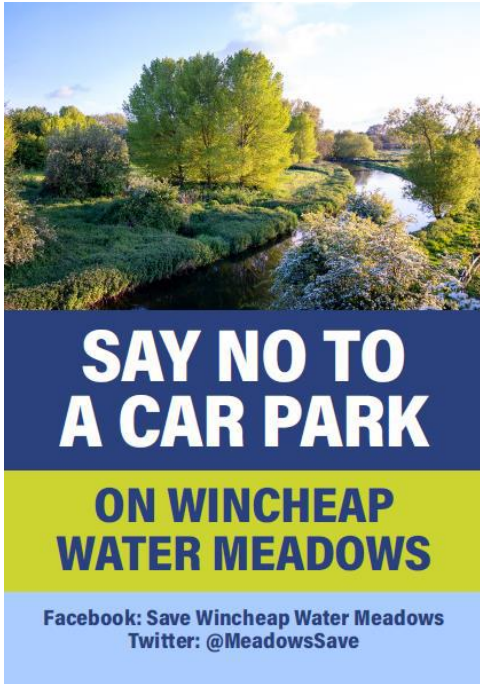
It isn't really an issue at Hambrook, but more a case of concern in the Westgate Gardens, where official notices went up in the summer asking visitors not to feed bread to the ducks. The RSPB's current stance on this vexed subject is as follows:

All types of bread are acceptable to birds, but ideally it should only be given as part of a varied diet. Bread can act as an empty filler. Although bread is not harmful to birds we suggest only feeding small amounts since its nutritional value is relatively low. A bird that is on a diet of predominantly, or only bread, can suffer from serious vitamin deficiencies. Additionally feeding bread to waterfowl can cause overcrowding, and throwing it into waterbodies can cause a build-up of uneaten soggy bread which can lead to greater algal growth affecting water quality.

Watching the mallards' lusty squabbling on the water, or in full flight (which requires a huge amount of energy), one doesn't get the impression that they are malnourished, and their regular upending in search of aquatic weed demonstrates that they are supplementing the white bread with a more natural diet.

What's happening on the Marshes?

Park and Ride latest



The countryside charity, CPRE Kent, has initiated a legal challenge against the Council's planning application to build a car park on the meadows. The Save Wincheap Water Meadows campaign has promised to raise £5000 by 6th January in support of CPRE's challenge. A crowd-funding page has been set up to raise this money. The link is: <https://www.crowdfunder.com/case/wincheap-water-meadows/> Please consider making a contribution.

There will be a busking event in town today (Sat 7th) in the High Street near the Methodist Church from 12.30pm to 2pm with Richard Navarro and Nicholas Thurston singing and playing. Leaflets will be given out asking people to support the legal appeal, write to councillors, sign the petition and put up posters.

An eye-catching window poster (left) is now available. If you can put some up at your house, place of work or in a shop, please arrange to collect them from one of these pick-up points:

Barton Ward:	Anna Peckham (St Augustine's Road area): amgpeckham@gmail.com
Westgate Towers area:	Richard Navarro-Pollott richardnavarro@live.co.uk
Dane John area:	Cllr Nick Eden-Green nick.eden-green@councillor.canterbury.gov.uk
Kingsmead:	Beverley Paton beverleypaton@jesararts.net
St Dunstan's:	Jan Pahl j.m.pahl@kent.ac.uk
St Michael's Road area:	Richard Norman richardnorman@gn.apc.org
St Stephen's Road area:	Sian Pettman spettman@gn.apc.org
Thanington:	Dave Hanna riversidebiker40@gmail.com
Wincheap:	Cllr Derek Maslin derek.maslin@councillor.canterbury.gov.uk or Pat Marsh patmarshis@gmail.com

A laminated version is also available for displaying outdoors.



Interestingly, after a very wet two months, culminating in nearly an inch of rain on 27th November, the river started to overflow its banks in places, and shallow-flooded the small area of wet woodland between the allotments and river. The council is committed to retaining the floodplain function of the area if the extension is built, so that it can continue to act as a reservoir that temporarily stores water that would otherwise go straight down into Canterbury, thereby increasing the risk of flood damage in the city.

The planning committee's decision to permit the extension of the Wincheap park and ride will probably be debated at the full council meeting on 8th January – we'll keep you posted.

Other activity



A windblown hawthorn on the old railway embankment was cleared away. Combatting graffiti is a never-ending battle: in the past, cheap black paint was sprayed over the offending tags, but the sprayed areas then contrasted quite markedly with the much paler colour of the weathered wood of posts and boards. We have therefore trialled a slightly different approach, using emulsion paint, which can be matched much more closely to the colour of the wood. The first photo (left) shows wooden boards, grey metal posts, black patches where graffiti have been sprayed out, and fresh red graffiti daubed on top of the black areas – altogether, a bit of an eyesore! The photo below shows the effect of painting over all the graffiti and black patches. The match is far from perfect – it needs to be a bit browner – and when wet the wood looks rather darker, contrasting too much with the paleness of the emulsion, but it's a start. Emulsion has the merits of being easy to apply, much cheaper than spray paint, and it's a simple matter to adjust the shade.



Following intervention by the council, it looks as though Serco has improved its performance in

collecting the sacks of litter that we bag up and put out for them to dispose of. When left uncollected for days, the sacks are liable to be attacked by foxes or gulls, leaving an awful mess in their wake. So, thank you to Canterbury Council, and let's hope that Serco can maintain this tighter schedule.

Wildlife Report

It has been a long time coming, but the seemingly relentless rain this autumn finally resulted in some more significant, albeit quite short-lived, flooding. 37 mallard were dabbling in the shallows of Tonford Field on 10th and 35 black-headed gulls were on the hay meadow on 28th (see banner photo at the head of this newsletter), but this small flock was put in the shade by no fewer than 250 on Whitehall Meadow (the small council-owned nature reserve between Hambrook Marshes and Toddlers Cove). Conditions also became more conducive to snipe, with numbers building up to 58, just two shy of my highest ever count. Are the wetter conditions to be thanked for my first heron record in three months, and for another little egret in what has been an extremely lean year for the species? Numbers of tufted ducks also built up to a healthy peak of 25 on neighbouring Tonford Lake, after languishing in the low teens and single figures in recent years. Some of the tufted ducks we see on the lakes in the Stour valley may well have bred in this country, but numbers are reinforced in winter by birds from northern Europe and, with milder winters becoming the norm

there, the imperative to migrate has been greatly reduced, so fewer birds are now making the journey across the North Sea.



After three weeks, and with numbers spiralling to the heady heights of twelve, the pheasant saga petered out, with no more seen since 10th. However, some species were around in higher numbers this month, with 48 starlings feeding on 5th, and 150 jackdaws noisily flying over as the light dwindled, presumably to a roost the other side of Canterbury (the photo, left, is part of a much bigger mixed flock of jackdaws and their larger cousins, rooks). A flock of 30 goldfinches was

flushed recently by a sparrowhawk. Sparrowhawks (right) specialise in hunting small to medium-sized birds (the male confines himself to prey the size of a finch or blackbird, while the larger, stronger female is perfectly at ease tackling wood pigeons), and adopt a variety of techniques for taking their prey. In woodland they can patiently wait, invisible against a tree trunk, for an unsuspecting bird to fly by, then grab it after a brief pursuit; or they can weave their way through the wood, hoping to take a bird by surprise. Neither of these approaches is an option in the open landscape of Hambrook Marshes, so these birds of prey have to assume a different style of hunting. Making best use of any available cover – a slight dip in ground level, or line of hawthorns – they adopt a sinister, ground-hugging technique, like a feathered Exocet missile.



There are still the odd chiffchaffs around, probably birds that are going to hunker down in the hope of a reasonably mild winter with sufficient invertebrate food to sustain them. But the biggest surprise was seeing a male stonechat (left) in Tonford Field, after an absence of nearly 21 months; although less colourful at this time of year, it was certainly enough to brighten my day. You can see from the photo that it looks like a relative of the robin, and even shares behavioural traits with it. While the gardener's friend is regularly depicted perching on spade handles on glittery Christmas cards, spying the freshly-turned soil below for food, the stonechat has taken this hunting technique to a higher level: its entire feeding strategy is based on perching a metre or so above open ground on any handy stem in rough pasture, surveying the area beneath for the least sign of life, then pouncing and returning to its original viewpoint or, if unsuccessful, flying on to a hopefully more productive one.

A grey squirrel reappeared once more in our scrap of woodland on the old railway embankment where, much to my own embarrassment, I discovered a new plant for the Hambrook list – a beech tree; admittedly, not much more than a large sapling, but even so.....

Banner photo at the head of this newsletter is of flooding across the riverside path on 29th October.

Sparrowhawk, jackdaw and stonechat photos courtesy of Dave Smith

Registered charity no. 1156473