

Newsletter

December 2019



Welcome

The final decision on the fate of the park and ride extension has had to be set back yet again, this time because the council cannot rule on the proposal until the application for a judicial review has been heard. This is being contested by the council's lawyers, who also argue that the applicants' liability for legal costs should be raised from £10,000 to £35,000. CPRE's grounds for the judicial review are threefold:

1. Canterbury City Council's failure to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment.
2. Errors of law concerning the Habitat Regulations Assessment.
3. Failure to give adequate reasons for the Planning Committee decision.

The provisional date for the council's final decision on the extension planning application is now 20th February, to be confirmed nearer the time.

An eye-catching awareness-raising event was held in the High Street on 7th December (right), with lively music ably



provided by Richard Navarro, Nicholas Thurston, William Rowlandson and friends. Our MP, Rosie Duffield (far right!), who has been very supportive of the campaign, put in an appearance. Many leaflets were handed out, and 700 window posters have now been distributed, but there are still 300 in stock, so please get in touch if you would like to put one up or pass some on to friends.



What's happening on the Marshes?

The river inched over its banks in places on 22nd, and began pouring onto low points in the fields bordering the river (left). At such times, our culvert operates in reverse and, instead of draining the marshes, allows river water to be funnelled onto the land. However, within a few days the river was once more confined to its usual channel, and much of the surface water had also drained away.



Wildlife Report

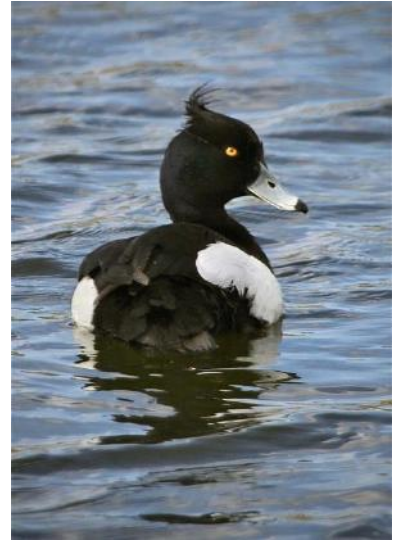


black-headed gulls and 44 herring gulls this month.

The main feature of the month has been the flooding of fairly extensive areas of the marshes. This in turn briefly attracted more birds, with 138 black-headed gulls recorded wading and paddling in the shallow water on 22nd, and 180 there the following day. The boardwalk pool merged into surrounding floods, with seven moorhens (left) skulking there on 30th. Disappointingly, very few mallard took advantage of the wet conditions, with no more than a handful seen, in contrast to Whitehall Meadow, just downstream from the Marshes, where there have been up to 73 mallard, 250

Despite there being a lively rookery beside the A28 in Thanington, I seldom see rooks at Hambrook, so three flying over this month made for an interesting record, as in the past birds would regularly commute between the rookery and feeding grounds to the east of Hambrook. This is all the stranger as back in 2012 and 2013 flocks of up to 100 not infrequently fed in Tonford field. I have a totally untested hypothesis that the loss of Hambrook rooks is related to the grazing livestock, as the birds' disappearance coincides with the switch from shaggy, long-horned Highland cattle, which were owned by a hobby farmer, to commercial breeds managed by a farmer who needs to make a profit.

Cattle are routinely dosed with antibiotics, most notably ivermectin, which have the side effect of making the cows' dung toxic to many invertebrates that choose to call cowpats their home. This has two consequences: there are fewer insects for birds to feed on, and the cowpats decompose much more slowly, because it is the invertebrates' feeding and tunnelling that helps break down the material. Magpies also forage amongst cowpats, but their decline has been far less marked, and 14 were present on 22nd. So, either magpies feed in a different way to rooks, which is quite possible, or my hypothesis is crumbling, which is also quite likely!



Snipe numbers in Tonford field peaked at 48 on 2nd and, coincidentally, on the same day there were also 48 tufted duck (above right) on Tonford lake, easily my highest ever count, which is at odds with the general decline in migratory wildfowl bothering to journey here from northern Europe in these milder winters.

I've seen catkins in full, dusty bloom and even primroses on a road bank, so perhaps I shouldn't have been so very surprised by the sight of a great spotted woodpecker (left) aggressively excavating a nesthole in a dead trunk on the railway embankment on 2nd. On mild, sunny days wildlife can be confused into behaving in unseasonal ways, but a spot of cold weather, or even another beast from the east, will soon serve to recalibrate their internal clocks.

Banner photo at the head of this newsletter is of flooding in Tonford field this month.

Moorhen, great spotted woodpecker and tufted duck photos courtesy of Dave Smith

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