



# Newsletter

May 2020



## Love Hambrook Marshes

### Welcome

#### **Help to care for Hambrook Marshes!**

We are looking for some help with maintaining both the Marshes and our website. In particular, we would like to recruit one or two people to act as Land Managers to look after the site on a day to day basis, as well as a Website Administrator to update and maintain our website. Successful applicants will join a small group of enthusiastic trustees in caring for this vitally important open space. If you are interested in helping, please email [love.hambrook.recruitment@gmail.com](mailto:love.hambrook.recruitment@gmail.com) for an application pack or to arrange an informal discussion. The deadline for applications is noon on 22<sup>nd</sup> June.

#### **Park and Ride proposal**

Major projects such as the proposed relocation of council offices and St George's Street improvements are now in doubt due to the impact of the lockdown. The planned extension of the park and ride onto the water meadow opposite Hambrook Marshes may also have to be scrapped or delayed, although part of the cost of the project is due to be met by the developer of the Thanington housing project, which may mean it is less threatened with axing. £10,600 has now been raised to match CPRE's costs for the initial phase of a judicial review, but we are waiting to find out what the future of the project is. Fallout from the pandemic could mean more people working from home long-term and increased use of internet shopping, both of which would reduce the demand for extra parking on the outskirts of Canterbury.

# What's happening on the Marshes?

## Park and Ride meadow mown

Serco's drastic flailing of the water meadow in early May caused widespread dismay and anger. The cutter was set so low that it scuffed the soil, totally destroying the developing grassland habitat and its associated invertebrate communities, raising suspicions about the council's motives for managing the site so intensively only once the site had been selected for the park and ride extension. Grasses and docks are now regrowing, so that the field no longer appears quite so massacred, but the worry remains that the meadow will be scalped again later in the season, setting back its fragile recovery.

## Litter and graffiti

While delighted to see so many people able to make use of the Marshes for salvaging their sanity during lockdown, we're less happy with the vastly increased amount of litter that is now being dumped. Despite numerous complaints to Serco about the overflowing bin at the footbridge to the Wincheap retail estate, the bin still isn't being emptied frequently enough. Of course, it's our visitors, not Serco, who generate the waste, and who should be far more responsible when disposing of their rubbish, taking it home or to another bin if the nearest one is full.



If you find the bin near the Wincheap footbridge overflowing, please email [help.canterbury@serco.com](mailto:help.canterbury@serco.com) to complain. Describe the location as "Bin on Great Stour Way at Hambrook Marshes by footbridge over the river to Wincheap". You will probably get a stock reply along the lines of "These bins are emptied as often as possible on a schedule; there is no capacity to put in additional collections at this time", but the drip-drip feed of complaints may eventually lead to a change of mind about schedules and priorities. Thank you. Another problem during the unprecedented hot weather has been a proliferation of disposable barbecue sets. Placed on the ground they scorch the grass, leaving very unsightly black marks, and, if placed in a bin, although not generating litter, the substantial aluminium base will simply go to landfill.

We are trying to keep on top of the recent spate of graffiti-spraying, and some of the prime sites have been painted over twice or even three times this month in a bid to keep the marshes infrastructure looking reasonably presentable.

## Watering the trees

In May we were only granted 5.9mm of rain, compared to a mean for the month of 50mm over the past 40 years, so the 18 trees we planted in March to help screen the A2 bridge were starting to struggle in the heat, not helped by a frost that damaged the delicate, unfurling birch leaves at a critical moment. Taller saplings can create a screening effect more quickly than tiny whips, but their bigger roots also suffer more trauma when transplanted. The problem with these bigger trees is that





their root system is out of balance with the portion that is above ground, meaning that even in a normal year they will struggle to pump up enough water to keep the tree healthy, an imbalance that is exacerbated in periods of drought. To help give the trees a better start, their main stems and branches were cut back to reduce the size of the canopy, but this was not enough to counter the impact of four hot and dry weeks. All have survived, but each one is currently being coaxed back to full health with 30 litres of water a week, so it's fortunate that the river is nearby. The photo on the previous page shows that, despite not having yet put on material growth, the trees are already beginning to screen the bridge, and we must be doing something right as the trees' chestnut stakes have burst into leaf! (the tree trunk is the weedy stem on the left of the photo).

### **Tonford Field sanctuary**

None of the paths on Hambrook are rights of way, but we are pleased to be able to allow the public onto the Marshes to enjoy the delights the area has to offer. However, we are also aiming to promote wildlife, and unfortunately untrammelled access by walkers and their dogs can cause significant disturbance to wintering snipe or breeding mallard and moorhen. So it was agreed some years ago that Tonford Field, which is immediately to the west of the A2 bridge, should act as a refuge for birds, and that we wouldn't provide any public access to it. Unfortunately, some dogwalkers do take their pets into the field, and recently a group of youths climbed over the fence with the express purpose of chasing the cattle. As there are no stiles or unlocked gates, it should be fairly obvious that there is no access, but it seems that a further disincentive is required, and we shall probably erect notices asking visitors to keep out.

### **Willow maze**

Now that all the willow has leafed up vigorously, the maze walls, which were rewoven in the winter by KSCP volunteers, are starting to look more maze-like, although the technique used means that all the dense growth is at the top of the walls, leaving their bases rather bare and, in places, minimal barriers to small children.



### **Erratum**

On page 4 of the annual report, which was circulated on 25<sup>th</sup> May, it should have said that the first arson attack on the boardwalk occurred on 14<sup>th</sup> February.

## **Wildlife Report**

It's been rather a quiet period, with no surprises. Sadly, we don't seem to have any reed warblers on Hambrook this year, and another lover of the same habitat, the reed bunting, hasn't been recorded since March, so it looks as though we have lost at least two of our formerly regular breeding species. However, at times two Cetti's warblers have been doing their best to fill that gap with their unbelievably loud song.

“Our” squirrel was back again on 26<sup>th</sup>, favouring the trees on the old railway embankment. Once starlings have hungry chicks to feed, they often become more gregarious, descending locust-like on pasture, and a flock of 23 was in Tonford field early in the month.

Three greylag geese (below right) flew upriver on 19<sup>th</sup>, probably to feed in fields around Chilham, and a week later six swifts (below left), now something of a rarity in Canterbury, were performing over the golden buttercup fields and river, twisting with effortless ease in their pursuit of aerial insects.



*Bird photos all courtesy of Dave Smith*

Registered charity no. 1156473