



# Newsletter

June 2020



## Welcome

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

We are still looking for some help with maintaining the Marshes, and would like to recruit one or two people to act as **Land Managers** to look after the site on a day to day basis. This involves working with contractors and our grazier, as well as carrying out minor repairs to gates and fencing. The successful applicant(s) will join a small group of enthusiastic trustees in caring for this vitally important open space. If interested, 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 31<sup>st</sup> July.

## What's happening on the Marshes?

### **Park and Ride**

A short piece in the Gazette this week (2<sup>nd</sup> July) unveils the council's plans for a local nature reserve on the land immediately downstream of the proposed park and ride extension. However, the £50,000 needed to create a flower-rich meadow, wet woodland, two new ponds and an artificial otter holt would have to come out of the park and ride budget; as the council is still awaiting approval from Highways England for the contorted route that the new off-slip road would have to

take through the park and ride, a project that has already been delayed by Covid-19, and the threat of a judicial review brought by CPRE Kent and the Save Wincheap Water Meadow campaign group, money for all this work will not be forthcoming yet awhile. If the extension is abandoned, the nature reserve plan will presumably be quietly dropped. The meadow where the park and ride extension is planned was scalped again to within a millimetre of its life last week. The mower had to leave a narrow strip around the pond uncut, and the photograph on the right



shows how much richer the field could be if it weren't managed so brutally, with a profusion of ox-eye daisies, knapweed, meadow pea and many other flowers on the left in stark contrast to the razed ground on the right. There is at least a rather nice sward of bird's foot trefoil (below) developing in a slightly damper area, though this view won't be enhanced by a covering of tarmac. The name "bird's foot" comes from the way the long seed pods fan out in an array, like the three forward-pointing toes of a small bird. It also has a rather charming old country name of bacon and eggs, as the flowers are bright yellow (egg yolk), but orangey-brown at their base (the bacon)!



## Elsewhere

Grass growth was suppressed by the prolonged drought, but path verges finally received a cut this month, and clippings were gathered up to use as a mulch around the large trees that had been planted earlier this year to help screen the A2 bridge over the river. A thick blanket of mulch kills off a lot of the vegetation underneath, whose roots would otherwise be in competition with the tree roots; additionally, the mulch helps to retain water in the soil in times of drought, and as it rots down valuable nutrients are released into the soil to speed up the tree's growth. Because it has been so dry this spring, we are now splashing 30 litres of water onto each tree every week, which is proving invaluable in coaxing them through this difficult period.

Despite the dry weather, growth of the willow in our little maze continued apace after its May trim, and further heavy cutting was need in June to keep it under control.

Breaking news – contractors started work on removing the remains of the boardwalk and pond-dipping platform on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. All the stumps of over a hundred plastic posts embedded four feet into the ground have so far been pulled out (right) and taken off-site (below left). The fire-damaged pond-dipping platform in the field corner has also been removed (below right). Following a break of a few days the contractors expect to return to dig out the pond that will become a feature at the end of the short section of boardwalk that the arsonists failed to reduce to ash and melted plastic. More details will follow in the next newsletter.



## Wildlife Report

The highlight for me was seeing 17 marbled white butterflies at the end of the month. Their headquarters is the scrubby field alongside the A2 embankment, but this year sightings have extended into some of the other fields, so it looks like being a good season for them. Despite their name, they aren't in fact related to the much-maligned "cabbage whites", but are grouped with the "browns", which includes meadow browns and gatekeepers. If you get a chance to see





the underwing of a marbled white (left), the arc of spots, not present on the white butterflies, is one indication of the marbled white's true affinities.

A lesser whitethroat was singing on 2<sup>nd</sup>, and a reed bunting on 10<sup>th</sup>, when a flock of 25 starlings (adults and young) were feeding among the cattle.

I have only heard cuckoos twice on the marshes this year, which was most disappointing, and then they were calling in the distance, but other people may have been more fortunate. However, seeing a kingfisher on 2<sup>nd</sup>, the first for over a month, did at least put a smile

on my face. It was also encouraging to see a mute swan on the river in the last fortnight. My records of Canada geese flying along the valley suggest that they put in extremely erratic appearances, and two mid-month were the first I had seen for over two years.

There is a nice little patch of pineapple weed (right) near the entrance from Whitehall Road. A humble, low-growing plant associated with heavily used areas on farmland, such as gateways, it doesn't get much attention from botanists, but I think it is quite an attractive little plant. The flowers do look vaguely like pineapples when viewed through half-closed eyes, but if you crush a piece in your fingers it really does smell of that fruit! It is a member of the daisy family, technically known as the Compositae, so named because each apparent



flowerhead is actually a composite arrangement of many tiny flowers. In most daisy species a few of these diminutive flowers each boast a single petal, forming a ring around the central head of petal-less flowers, so making it look like a fairly conventional flower, but in the pineapple weed those petals are absent, giving it a naked appearance.

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