



# Newsletter

July 2020



## Welcome

### **Park and Ride**

This sorry tale rumbles on, albeit in first gear during covid restrictions. The City Council applied to the Countryside Charity CPRE (Kent) for a further delay to the judicial review into the park and ride extension. This is due in part to Highways England still not having decided whether the proposed layout of the off-slip road through the existing park and ride area is acceptable. Numerous ramifications from the viral outbreak also mean that the council is now very short of money, and all major projects are currently on hold. As the council originally intended approving the plan at the end of last year, it does seem a trifle odd that this should have been contemplated before receiving approval from Highways England. CPRE have granted the council a six-month extension, expiring on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

Meanwhile, the meadow at the centre of the battle has been mown yet again, not so severely as on previous occasions, but destroying the fine spread of bird's foot trefoil that figured in last month's newsletter. The mower operator carefully manoeuvred his machine even closer to the pond than last time, so the thin sliver of semi-natural grassland flora that also featured in the June newsletter has been obliterated. In view of this blitzing of the carpet of flowering plants, now seems a supremely apposite moment to encourage the council to adopt a pollinator action plan which would ensure the survival of more bees in our district through the provision of a far greater number of flowery meadows, parks and road verges. Self-interest is involved, as we need bees to fertilise so many of our crops. See the article on page 2 and then sign the e-petition.

### **Award for Save Wincheap Water Meadow campaign group**

This campaign group has been working tirelessly for the past year to prevent the council's plans for a park and ride extension on the Wincheap Meadow from going ahead. This effort has now been recognised by St Mildred's Area Community Society bestowing a Good Coronavirus Award (environment category) for the group's work in "coordinating opposition to the plan to locate a park and ride on a beautiful area of floodplain, and keeping the campaign going despite the challenges of lockdown."

### **Park and ride and the local plan consultation**

We now have some breathing space, and an opportunity to look for other ways of keeping up the profile of the campaign to persuade the council to abandon its plan to extend the park and ride onto the Stour floodplain. One way in which you can do this is by responding to CCC's consultation on the revision of the Local Plan. You might wish to emphasise the need to protect the integrity of the Stour River Valley and to prioritise nature-based approaches to mitigate the impacts of climate change (such as floodplain protection and the creation of a Nature Recovery Network). You can submit your local plan comments at <https://news.canterbury.gov.uk/consultation-item?id=1&r=9>.

### **Pollinator Action Plan**



Please help our pollinators! Sign the e-Petition! Bees and other pollinators have suffered a massive decline in recent decades, but they are crucial for our environment and the pollination of our crops. We need to do much more to help them!

Please sign the e-Petition calling on Canterbury City Council to adopt a Bee Plan to help protect pollinators and their habitats. We have until 30<sup>th</sup> September to get as many signatures as possible. 3000 signatures will trigger a Council debate on the adoption of a Pollinator Action Plan. Please sign and share! Click [here](#) to get to the petition page, scroll down a short way to "Submitting an e-petition", then click on "Pollinator Action Plan" under the e-petitions heading. Or you can search for 'petitions' on [canterbury.gov.uk](http://canterbury.gov.uk)

## Canterbury Meadows Photographic Competition

Particularly topical, in view of the Pollinator Action Plan (above), the Canterbury Society has launched a photographic competition, inviting people to submit photos of the flora and pollinators of our local meadows. Where better to go for inspiration than Hambrook Marshes' very own hay meadow, which is the field containing the willow maze, opposite the footbridge from the Wincheap retail estate. Extended dry periods are playing havoc with the vegetation once again, but there are clovers, bluey-purple tufted vetch and other flowers on display, plus of course bees, hoverflies and beetles that are attracted to the flowers. There's a £30 prize to tempt you into activity, so good luck!

Click [here](#) to see the full entry rules and get a bit of background information.



# Photo Competition

## Meadows & Pollinators!

In celebration of National Meadows Day 2020, the Canterbury Society is holding a photo competition to showcase the landscape, the flowers and the pollinators of our local meadows!

The competition is open to people of all ages living in the Canterbury district. There will be two prizes of £30. One for children and young people under the age of 16 and the other for adults.



Submit your entries to [beverleypaton@canterburysociety.org.uk](mailto:beverleypaton@canterburysociety.org.uk)

Deadline for entries: Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> August  
To find out more: The Canterbury Society on Facebook or [www.canterburysociety.org.uk](http://www.canterburysociety.org.uk)

## What's happening on the Marshes?

### Restoration of the area destroyed by arson

The main focus of the month was in the boardwalk field for the completion of phase 1 of the restoration project following February's arson attack on the boardwalk. As reported in the last newsletter, contractors were engaged to remove all the damaged sections of melted boardwalk, which included digging up over a hundred "stumps", which was all that remained of the recycled plastic posts that formerly supported the boardwalk. A short section of the boardwalk was left untouched by the fire, and it was decided to retain this and create a water feature at its far end for visitors to enjoy. The contractors have now dug out a small pond, which immediately part-filled with water, an encouraging sign, with the seal of approval being given by a marsh frog that dived in just a couple of days after the work had been completed. All this work has been funded by donations generated by the April virtual concert on the marshes, and we are extremely grateful to Richard Navarro for organising this mammoth, well-received event. Thanks must also be extended to the 22 musicians, singers and artists for their performances of works, many of which were specific to Hambrook Marshes, and composed specially for the occasion.

Phase 2 of the project will take place next year, giving us this winter, when parts of the field are liable to be flooded or very squelchy, in which to work out the best dry route for a new pathway.

The series of photos on the next two pages gives an idea of the work involved so far.



Starting to dig out the pond



Dumping the spoil by the railway fence



Spoil heap before grading and flattening



The hole started filling up with water while the digger was still working on it!



In places the pond bank is steep, but elsewhere it has a gentle gradient where plants can colonise and to facilitate movement of newts and frogs in or out of the pond. This field was excavated for gravel in the 1970s and the yawning hole was then backfilled with spoil from the A2 Canterbury bypass work. Clearly visible is a pale band of chalk that was dumped in the quarry.



Much of the excavation has been completed, and the pond is visible in the background, along with the white “tidemark” where chalk was used to backfill Bretts’ quarry in the 1970s.



The end product shortly after digging ended. In winter the water level may overtop the pond banks. Aquatic vegetation of sedges, reedmace, water plantain and much more can be expected to colonise rapidly, and one management task will then be to periodically clear away some of the vegetation in order to maintain areas of open water. The succession from open water to dense vegetation can be seen clearly in the nearby pond that was formerly reached by a short spur from the main boardwalk.

### Other work during the month

Seven sections of tall riverbank vegetation, totalling 275m, were cut back so that visitors could enjoy views of the river from time to time. The nettles, hemlock water dropwort and various other tall plants provide valuable food and cover for a range of wildlife from invertebrates to birds, so we wouldn't want to remove this habitat wholesale. As you can see from the photo (right), some of the emergent vegetation has been retained, so the end result isn't too raw.

Litter collection is an ongoing task, worsened by the increased visitor numbers during lockdown. Inevitably, some of the rubbish ends up in the river, like this alcopops bottle, washed up against a moorhen nest (below).



One of the very decorative panels that form part of the picnic table setup has rotted at its base, and finally collapsed, or perhaps been pushed over (below). In view of its popularity, the decision has been taken to reinstall it, the work to be carried out by Steven Portchmouth, the artist who designed and created the original structure. Preliminary excavations found that, in

addition to much concrete, there were thick angle irons buried in the ground to provide support for the panels. The concrete will have to be broken up in order to remove these anchors before Steven can reinstall the work. Although he has agreed to do the work at a reduced rate, in view of the fact that the wood should have lasted much longer, this unexpected work will involve considerable extra cost, and we are grateful to Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership for providing £250 towards this.





Strong winds on 27<sup>th</sup> July brought down a massive trunk and limb of one of the imposing hybrid poplars on the old railway embankment (left). Ironically, this was one of two trees marked up for tree surgery this autumn, on account of the limb leaning so heavily across the embankment path. Strong summer winds are relatively unusual, but

have the potential to be more devastating, as the foliage provides much more resistance to the airflow, putting even greater pressure on the already stressed trunk, which was massively twisted and torn as it collapsed, but its angular branches prevented the upper limb from resting on the ground. The unstable nature of the torn joint means that the entire tree could settle down closer to the ground, so signs have been put up warning people not to attempt to clamber through the tangle of branches.

## Wildlife Report



Is it summer or autumn? A record count of 27 marbled white butterflies in the scrub field would suggest the former, but the first returning black-headed gull on 21<sup>st</sup> and a green sandpiper along the river on 27<sup>th</sup> would indicate the latter. Black-headed gulls are winter visitors here, abandoning the marsh in spring to breed in large colonies along the coast; green sandpipers (left), on the other hand, nest further north in Scandinavia, and failed breeders are already returning to their winter quarters in Africa. Along with many other species, swifts are in

steep decline nationally, so it was good to see a flock of 20 hunting over the Marshes on 5<sup>th</sup>, but they, too, would soon be thinking of departing for Africa, with the end of July being the cut-off date for regular sightings.

But before I could get too depressed by the thought of summer slipping through my fingers, it was lovely to see three young and very graceful grey wagtails daintily flitting over water crowfoot foliage lining the surface of the river, their steps so light that the crowfoot leaves barely registered the birds' presence. I had thought that a pair was nesting under or close to the A2 bridge, but failed to gain proof of this.

Yes, it is still summer; house sparrows are foraging for insects in the tall vegetation alongside the river, as they always do at this time of year, and there are still flowers in bloom if you know where to

look, despite a succession of droughts. I had thought that water speedwell (right and below) was confined to a ditch in Tonford field, so was delighted to find some extensive patches of it around the pond in the boardwalk field.



A red-letter day arrived on 18<sup>th</sup>, with a kingfisher whistling its way up the river by way of heralding my 102<sup>nd</sup> Hambrook bird species - a group of four crossbills (right) flying south west across the marsh which, to their eyes, must just seem like a conifer-free desert. This could well have been a family party adopting the species' somewhat nomadic habit of roaming the countryside in search of pine- and fir-woods where the cones are ripe enough for their seeds to be extracted with the birds' uniquely crossed mandibles.



*Green sandpiper photo courtesy of Dave Smith*

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