



Newsletter

September 2021



Welcome

One news item from last year that seems to be rising up the agenda concerns the impact on river life of a chemical used in flea treatment of pets. The key ingredient, a nerve agent called Fipronil, was found in 99% of samples taken from twenty rivers, and one particularly toxic breakdown product of the insecticide was at concentrations up to 38 times above the chronic toxicity limit. Fipronil belongs to the family of neonicotinoids, implicated in the decline of pollinating bees, and has been banned from use on farms since 2017. Highest concentrations were found downstream from water treatment plants, presumably in the waste water from dogs being washed at home, but it is also likely to be released into rivers when treated dogs go for a swim. Safer alternatives for flea treatment need to be adopted, and dog owners should be discouraged from routinely treating for fleas, even when not present, and not allowing their pets into water courses following treatment. Trustees now know that Fipronil was detected in the Stour in 2019, and are hoping to unearth more detail in the coming weeks.



What's happening on the Marshes?

Canterbury in Bloom award

This year, Love Hambrook Marshes (LHM) was invited by Canterbury Business Improvement District (BID) to join their entry to the Royal Horticultural Society's South and South East in Bloom competition. BID is very proud to announce that Canterbury has been awarded Gold for the sixth time. LHM trustee, Paul Roberts (far left, middle row), received a copy of the certificate on behalf of LHM at a ceremony in Tower House last month. On the face of it, entering Canterbury in Bloom may seem an odd choice for LHM, but the judges are looking for more than just colourful hanging baskets, and are actively rewarding entrants for their community involvement; having been bought by a local benefactor in 2014, and run since then by volunteers, Hambrook Marshes amply meets the community criterion.



Public Space Protection Order

Twenty green areas in the Canterbury district are about to gain added protection under new legislation aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour. Most are spaces owned by the city council, such as Westgate Parks and Duncan Down, but Hambrook Marshes will also be covered by the new Public Space Protection Order (PSPO). Officers will be authorised to issue on-the-spot fines of £100 for a range of offences, such as use of disposable barbecues, bringing in glass bottles, riding e-scooters, failure to control dogs, injuring wildlife and spraying graffiti. The order will remain in force for three years, after which an application can be made for it to be extended. It remains to be seen whether there are sufficient enforcement officers to give this order some bite; while not as rare as hens' teeth, police officers and PCSOs on Hambrook Marshes are an unusual sight.

BOAT to cross the Stour?

Just when you thought we were coming out of the covid tunnel, and petrol queues were shrinking, a new threat has appeared on the horizon. If you sometimes walk to the far western end of Hambrook Marshes you will be familiar with the wooden Tonford footbridge (a replacement for one washed away in the 1987 storm). From that bridge you can walk north-west along a tarmac path, over the level crossing and up Tonford Lane. What you may not



The ford viewed from Hassall Reach side. Access would be along the grassy strip sloping down to the river.

have realised is that adjoining the bridge is a ford, and that the level crossing once had full-sized gates and a cottage to house a gatekeeper. This evidence on the ground, together with a host of archival documents and maps, demonstrates that there used to be a thoroughfare across the Stour, making use of the ford. Indeed, the road on both sides of the river is called Tonford Lane, suggesting that the ford is an almost forgotten missing link in the local road network. But why is a route formerly used by haywains and other farm wagons suddenly of interest? The British Horse Society is proposing to submit an application to Kent County Council for that route's existence to be recognised, and for it therefore to be designated a Byway Open to All Traffic (BOAT). If successful, this would establish that horseriders with or without a carriage have a right to travel down Tonford Lane from Chartham Hatch, over the railway line, across the ford and on into Canterbury. This would oblige Network Rail to re-establish a crossing suitable for horses pulling a cart or carriage. However, additionally, it would mean that the route was open to mechanically-propelled vehicles; in practice, this would be any vehicle capable of getting across the ford, which would be motorbikes and four-wheel drive vehicles.

While not against horseriders being allowed to use that route, the trustees of Love Hambrook Marshes would strongly oppose any attempt to confirm these rights for mechanised vehicles. The Tonford ford would have been created hundreds of years ago, and was never intended for recreational use by noisy, polluting, dangerous vehicles. As it is, we have received a report of a four-wheel drive vehicle driving onto the ford and actually travelling some distance upstream, no doubt damaging the ecosystem of this fragile chalk stream as it went. The trustees will therefore be lobbying the parish and Canterbury councils, requesting them to apply to KCC (the body that would determine the validity of the BOAT) for restrictions that would ban motorised vehicles from using this route.

A practical consequence of any successful application for a BOAT is that the trustees would have to reinstate the kissing gate on the Great Stour Way to prevent horseriders, motorcyclists or 4WDs from gaining unauthorised access to the Great Stour Way. This tarmacked path is just about wide enough for walkers and cyclists to share, but would be totally inadequate for horseriders as well. Kissing gates aren't popular with cyclists, people on mobility scooters and parents with child buggies as, if they are to totally exclude horses and motorcyclists, they must also be difficult for those other users to negotiate.

We will keep you posted of any developments.

Other activity

A work party from the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership on 30th September repaired stiles and fencing, and pulled vegetation out of one of the ponds.



Stile hidden in vegetation



Vegetation cut back and stile renewed

An outbreak of tagging on the Great Stour Way was, hopefully, nipped in the bud, using a cordless drill with a wire brush attachment to remove the bulk of the paint. Unfortunately, the pitted surface of the tarmac meant that some of the paint still lurks in crevices, but the tags are certainly far less obvious now, which may deter future taggers to some extent.



Before wire-brushing



After wire-brushing

A contractor removed the last fragments of the boardwalk that were badly damaged in the third arson attack in February.

Wildlife Report

An overflying flock of 26 greylag geese (right) on 21st was my highest count for six years.

After a sad absence all summer, it was encouraging to see a kingfisher in late August and again on 13th September. At this time of year adults expel their young from the natal area, forcing them to search for suitable, but untenanted, stretches of river, so it is more than likely that this was a juvenile hoping to find a vacant spot in which to establish its own territory.



Our ring-necked parakeet's raucous calls were first heard on 11th August, but it is now recorded on every visit (more often heard than seen). You might think that a bright green bird would be easy to spot, but you'd be wrong. High up in the tall poplars on the old railway embankment, the bird blends in perfectly with the foliage, but Simon Pettman's perseverance was rewarded recently when he obtained this splendid photo (left) of the bird.

There is quite a smattering of wild rose at Hambrook, occasionally in the fields, but mainly on the old embankment. Roses are prone to being

attacked by the tiny gall wasp, *Diplolepis rosae*, which lays its eggs in leaf buds, inducing the host plant to envelop them in tissue which eventually becomes the rather striking robin's pincushion; when covered in dew it is a magical piece of natural architecture (right and below). This seems to have been a good year for the pincushion locally.



Another disease to be enjoying a purple patch is the bacterium that causes thistle chlorosis. Quite a few creeping thistles on the Marshes have been bleached by this attack after a

quiescent period when few white thistles were noted (right). This is a north American disease, first recorded in the UK in 2003 by Dr John Fletcher in Canterbury. The bacterium attacks the chloroplasts which are the plants' powerhouse, and give thistles their colour, and a plant that can't photosynthesise will soon die, so it is not so surprising that researchers have investigated the possibility of using the bacterium as a biological weapon to control thistles. Experience here would suggest that the disease never infects an entire population (though I've occasionally seen fields turned white with infected thistles), and that it would therefore not be a very effective form of biological control.

*Photo credits: Simon Pettman for ring-necked parakeet,
and Dave Smith for greylag geese*



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