



Newsletter

April 2022



Love Hambrook Marshes

Grove of trees planted in February 2020 preparing for a new season's growth

Welcome

Lots of figures are bandied about concerning climate change and how it could be averted, and much is now being made of the value of tree planting. The UK tree cover is estimated to be 13% of the land area, which compares extremely unfavourably with the 37% to be found across the EU. The Climate Change Committee has advised that in order to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050 the national tree cover needs to rise to 19%, which equates to roughly 1.5 billion trees being planted. That's about 22 for every person in the UK! As you may have read in last month's newsletter, we made a small contribution to this effort in March, when we planted hundreds of willow cuttings as part of a programme to extend the area of our osier bed. I can't claim to have counted them, but if we assume that the number planted was 400, that is equivalent to just a quarter of one tree for every person recorded using the Marshes in our two-day survey last July! This perhaps gives an indication of the scale of the enterprise being considered nationally, but it also emphasises the importance of working at the individual level: if each of those visitors were to decide to plant just one tree, they would achieve three times as much as all our planting on Hambrook. People are so used to falling back on the excuse of "What good will my effort do?", perhaps forgetting that when multiplied up 65 million times it creates an astounding force for good.

What's happening on the Marshes?

The hundreds of willow cuttings established last month to create an extension to the existing osier bed are all sprouting nicely (right), with some shoots already over 3" long. With only 23mm of rain in the past eight weeks, compared to an expected 90mm, the ground is nowhere near as soggy as the willows would like, and it remains to be seen how they will fare through the summer months. The cut-down stems of the willow maze are also awakening, and the pattern of the maze should soon be picked out in lines of fresh green foliage.



We are recording increasing numbers of motorcyclists using the Great Stour Way (the tarmac path alongside the river), including a Deliveroo employee! We are keeping an eye on this, as there is concern that this trend will continue if no steps are taken to discourage it. If you see a motorcyclist on Hambrook, please get in touch, stating the date and time of the incident, whereabouts you saw him, and any other information that might help us to identify a repeat offender. Thank you for your support.

The Wincheap park and ride extension saga has taken an interesting new direction: it was reported in last week's Gazette that the council is now contemplating relocating both the New Dover Road and Wincheap park and rides. No details of where they would go to have been released, but if that were to happen it should once and for all nail the lid on the coffin of that particular threat to the Marshes. It would then be an easy matter for Highways England to approve the line of a Dover-bound off-slip from the A2. You may recall that the whole extension project collapsed because Highways England refused to sanction the layout of the slip-road, with its very tight turns, running through the car park, but without the constraints of a car park to navigate a way through, a much safer new road could be designed.

Wildlife Report



I recorded my last two snipe of the winter on 7th. Chiffchaffs and blackcaps have now been joined by whitethroats from their African winter quarters, and a willow warbler was singing close to the Marshes on 17th. Swallows and cuckoos are trickling into the county but I have yet to record either at Hambrook.

A pair of great crested grebes (left) were on Tonford Lake on 7th, and three weeks later one bird was still on view, raising hopes that its mate could be sitting on a nest out of sight. On 28th 45 starlings

were feeding in Tonford Field, a sure sign that their eggs have hatched, and that they now have a demanding family to cater for.

A distant parakeet was heard on the far side of the river on 7th, so perhaps the bird that haunted the Marshes for several months is still in the area. On three days this month I have heard a greenfinch at the edge of the Marshes; having suffered a serious decline caused by the protozoan disease, trichomonosis, over the past 17 years, there are now faint signs of a recovery.

White dead nettle (right) is fairly frequent alongside the Great Stour Way and doing well this year, but there is some dispute as to whether it is native. Verges tend to be disturbed habitats, impacted by vehicles running over them, items being dumped, pollution from herbicides, car oil and so on, plus the fertilising input from dog faeces. Consequently, verges are not suited to many plants that have evolved in former, more pristine, conditions, so it is perhaps to be expected that many of these undervalued strips are populated by plants from very different ecosystems, such as volcanic lava outflows.



The final snake's head fritillary count was 78 on 7th, a huge reduction from last year's 154, at a time when I was hoping for a further increase.



Five or six years ago I grew thirty marsh marigolds from Westgate Gardens seed, and planted them out on the Marshes. Initially only one of these thrived (left) in the bed of a ditch, but now a further three have come to the fore. One is in the hay meadow, but two were precariously poised on the steep slope of the Whitehall stream bank. I say "were" as gravity has proved irresistible to one of the plants, which has collapsed inelegantly into the stream, where it is slowly being washed down to an uncertain fate in the Stour. Marsh marigold is a

vigorous plant, sending up a generous succession of flowers for several months.

Photo credits: Dave Smith for great crested grebe