



Newsletter

May 2022



Flag iris

Welcome

The Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) was heavily involved in setting up Hambrook Marshes when the area was taken on by Kent Enterprise Trust in 2010, and still operates several volunteer days each year to carry out fence repairs, pond clearance, coppicing, and much more besides on behalf of Love Hambrook Marshes. An offshoot of KSCP is Our Stour, a three-year project focussing specifically on the river Stour, and they are organising a two-hour walk covering about 2½ miles on 15th August. This may sound a long way off, but bookings are already being taken at [Eventbrite](#), so confirm your place now. The walk will start at Toddler's Cove and go as far as the Tonford footbridge. There is no charge, but donations will be welcomed on the day. The trustees of Love Hambrook Marshes are keen to support this event, which will highlight our work on the Marshes, while showing the public the wealth of wildlife to be found in and along the river.

Just because Hambrook Marshes is managed for wildlife doesn't mean that it is cocooned from all the woes affecting so many birds, mammals, insects and plants in the country at large. See page 3 for a description of how the once-common cuckoo and swift have all but vanished from the upper Stour valley.

What's happening on the Marshes?

The cattle were expected back in April but, unfortunately, because they were due to be tested for TB soon, our grazier decided to keep them on his farm in order to avoid bringing them down to Hambrook, then having to round them up and take them back for testing. We very much hope that they will soon be out on the Marshes, as their presence is vital for the maintenance of a varied sward topped with a bounteous serving of cowpats that are home to so many invertebrates.

With a brief return of wet weather, vegetation growth became rampant, obliging us to cut back the nettles and scrub bordering the two flights of steps up onto the embankment.



Someone with a taste for regimentation placed, rather than dumped, five supermarket trolleys in a neat, straight line across the river beneath the A2 bridge, the legs all pointing skywards like so many stranded metal insects. The photo was posted on the Canterbury Grot Spots site, which may have been instrumental in getting all the trolleys removed relatively promptly.

The intact railway bridge taking trains in and out of Canterbury East station has long been covered in a whole range of graffiti. As this is just outside the Hambrook boundary, there

was nothing we could do about it, but early in the month the council's graffiti team painted over the whole lot in dark brown. Literally within days, all the pristine surfaces had been liberally besmirched (all three photos below). Undeterred, the team returned with fresh pots of brown paint, but already the graffiti are creeping back in, seeming to prove that there really is no cure for this pointless craze.

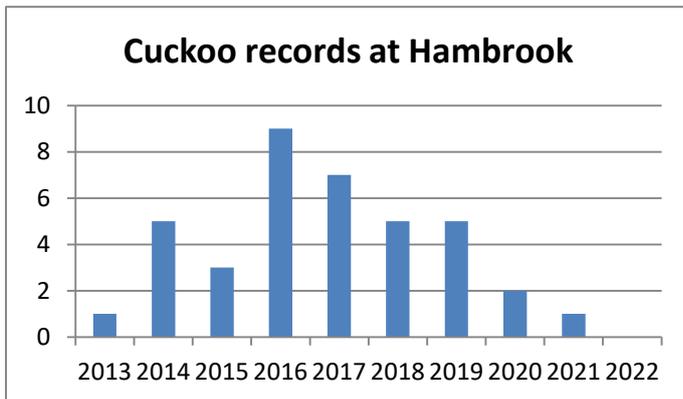


Wildlife Report

The last of the migrants are now in: a reed warbler was present on 9th, and the same day a garden warbler (right) appeared on the embankment, where he remained for the rest of the month, singing his introspective song. Many people have difficulty separating the song of garden warbler from its fairly close relative the blackcap, but to my mind the blackcap is exuberant and extrovert, with clear, spiky notes, whereas the garden warbler always seems to



be mumbling to itself, as if not really wanting to be heard, and the notes are much more muffled. A handful of swifts have returned to the city centre, and two were feeding over the marshes on 20th. However, this is a bird in big trouble, having declined nationally by 60% since 1994. In the UK it is estimated that the population is only around 60,000, whereas it is still doing relatively well in some European countries, with 600,000 in France, 1,000,000 in Portugal and a massive 12,000,000 in Spain. These countries still hold huge numbers of old, unimproved buildings that provide nest sites for swifts; this is no longer the case in the UK, and may account for at least part of the discrepancy between the countries on either side of the Channel.



Another bird in steep decline is the cuckoo. I have yet to hear one on Hambrook this year, and have encountered few elsewhere. An iconic symbol of spring that would have been familiar to anyone not living in the centre of a city fifty years ago, the cuckoo's status has slumped to that of a rarity to be sought out. The call of a cuckoo still thrills me, but the joy of hearing one is nowadays edged with anguish at the way humanity is reshaping the planet with a

new configuration that leaves no space for this wonderful species. Many of the records in the above graph are of birds heard from Hambrook, but which might be half a mile away, so it gives an overoptimistic view of the bird's abundance on the Marshes.

I have been recording a pair of great crested grebes on the Tonford lake from time to time this spring, initially harbouring hopes that they would breed, and when I started seeing just one I assumed that meant the female was tucked away on a nest somewhere. Unfortunately, recent sightings of the pair together, with no glimpse of any young, rather suggests that the breeding attempt has failed.

What I assume to be our lonely parakeet from last year put in a couple of brief appearances, but seems to have lost the affinity it once had for the place, and hasn't been seen or heard on my two most recent visits.



Even after ten years of monitoring the plants at Hambrook, I can still occasionally find a new species, and not necessarily a shrinking violet; the most recent addition to the list was laburnum, a tall shrub growing tangled up in other vegetation that would have rendered it invisible, had it not been for the fact that my eye was caught by exuberant cascades of yellow flowers (left), technically known as racemes. How could I have missed it for so long?

Photo credits: Dave Smith for garden warbler