



# Newsletter

March 2023



*Snake's head fritillaries in the Boardwalk Field*

## Welcome

One of the joys of a stroll around Hambrook Marshes is that you can leave your worries behind and forget about the sorrows of the world for an hour or two. At least the tragedy of the war in Ukraine doesn't impinge on the Marshes. Well, I'm afraid you'd be wrong there, as we've just discovered when trying to order more fence posts. The wet soil on the marshes causes normal posts to rot within about four years, as we've found to our cost, so we've moved over to buying the more expensive Jakcured fencing that comes with a 25-year guarantee. Unfortunately, the suppliers get their timber from, you've guessed it, Ukraine, and currently can't source these treated posts. We truly live in an interconnected global market now.

# What's happening on the Marshes?

The Golden Arrow steam train chuffed its way past Hambrook Marshes on 4<sup>th</sup> March. I have to admit my total ignorance on the subject, as I had thought that Golden Arrow was the name of a specific steam engine. I have now been disabused by a rail enthusiast friend, who tells me that it referred to a continental service, and that any engines hauling the distinctive yellow and brown Pullman coaches to Dover for onward travel across Europe was entitled to have the golden arrow and name emblazoned on the front. The first picture is of the train at Wye station, while the second shows a similar but different engine pulling its coaches past Hambrook Marshes.

We have an agreement with Kent County Council and Canterbury City Council, whereby they are jointly responsible for maintaining the riverside path. While the city



council undertakes to maintain the footbridges, the county council's remit is to look after the path surface and associated infra-structure. During the month KCC has renewed all the wooden fencing leading up to the three footbridges (including the one over the Stour) to improve the safety of the approaches, where there are some fairly abrupt drops into the streams and river.

At the end of the month the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership carried out fencing repairs to the Boardwalk Field, in readiness for the return of the cattle in April.

## Wildlife Report

English weather! After the driest February in my 41 years of recording here, we were subjected to the wettest March in the same period! Consequently, the fields turned quite splashy again, and on 10<sup>th</sup> a flock of 32 black-headed and five herring gulls were feeding in the hay field, doubtless attracted by the numerous worms that would have been driven closer to the surface by the waterlogged conditions. The goosander that has been holidaying on the Stour was still present in the first half of the month, but is liable to be moving back to more northerly breeding haunts very soon, as it is indeed time to be welcoming in Spring. So it was no surprise to only find five snipe on 10<sup>th</sup>, and just four tufted duck on the Tonford Lake on 30<sup>th</sup>. The pair of great crested grebes are still cruising around the lake, so it's fingers crossed for a successful breeding season, which would be proved by the appearance of a small flotilla of stripy-necked chicks.



Two great spotted woodpeckers were drumming away on the old railway embankment one morning ; the male does most of this advertising, and can be distinguished by the red patch on the nape of his neck (left), but the female also drums occasionally. Looking high up into the trees with rain spattering onto my binoculars, and everything silhouetted against a dull sky did not bode well for a decent view, and I soon abandoned the task without determining the sex of the two birds. At the end of the month a singing reed bunting was a welcome sound, seven months after I last recorded one on the Marshes.

Snake's head fritillaries are raising their delightful little bonnets once more in the hay field and boardwalk field (see banner photo on page 1). The boardwalk population clings on desperately, with numbers likely to remain in single figures for the ninth year. In the hay field it is too early to say whether the population has stabilised or increased after last spring's decline. Some of the areas in which bulbs were planted in 2019 have been aggressively colonised by great willowherb, which doesn't bode well for the delicate-seeming fritillary's long-term chances.

*Photo credits: Stephen Brooks and Tim Flisher for the Golden Arrow pictures, and Dave Smith for the great spotted woodpecker.*

Registered charity no. 1156473