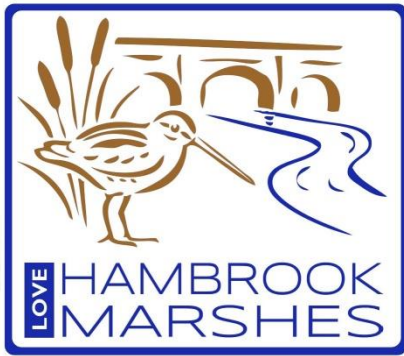




Newsletter

May 2024



Moorhen by Dave Smith

Welcome

This marks the end of the first month of Hambrook Marshes under new land management. As explained in the April newsletter, day-to-day management of the site has now been lifted from the shoulders of the trustees. It's very early days, but the transfer has gone extremely smoothly and Andy, the new land manager, has already set up a contract with a new grazier, fourteen of whose cattle are now grazing in Tonford Field. We look forward to working cooperatively with the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership for many years to come.

What's happening on the Marshes?

The first 14 young cattle arrived on the last day of the month, hopefully to be joined by some more a little later on. They are then due to remain on the Marshes until October, by which time they should have cleared the mat of vegetation in Tonford Field, which has been under-grazed for the past two years.

Wildlife Report

Of particular interest was the report of a beaver-chewed piece of wood close to the river, and not far from the picnic table, at the end of the month. This is the first sign, to our knowledge, of beavers having moved upstream from Canterbury, where they have created a certain amount of havoc. The chisel marks made by the rodent's large incisors are very distinctive (right), so there can be no doubting the report, although it is just conceivable that the wood was transported here from elsewhere. We look forward to seeing the results of their waterway engineering at Hambrook in the near future.



The sort of thing beavers get up to!!



The season followed its usual pattern, with the last of the arriving migrants, a garden warbler, singing from the old railway embankment through the month, and house sparrows busily collecting insects from close to the riverside path, while noisy starling families industriously scoured Tonford Field for grubs. Every year, people are surprised by the appearance of odd birds in their garden, which turn out to be young starlings in their dull, juvenile, unspotted, taupe plumage (left). It has been another disastrous season for cuckoos, and I have only heard one, which was relatively close to the Marshes.

Four years ago we planted a cluster of trees in the hay field, with the intention of allowing them to grow and help screen out the view of the A2 bridge. The trees are now starting to do their job (right), but what really surprised me was that a whitethroat has taken up territory and could be heard singing there on each weekly visit in May. I was amazed that a paltry 15 or so trees could constitute a suitable breeding habitat for this, admittedly small, warbler.



Southern marsh orchids have again been blooming in Whitehall Field, and this year I have counted ten in the main patch, compared to six last year.

Moorhen photo courtesy of Dave Smith

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