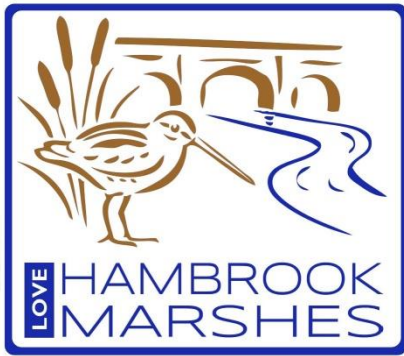
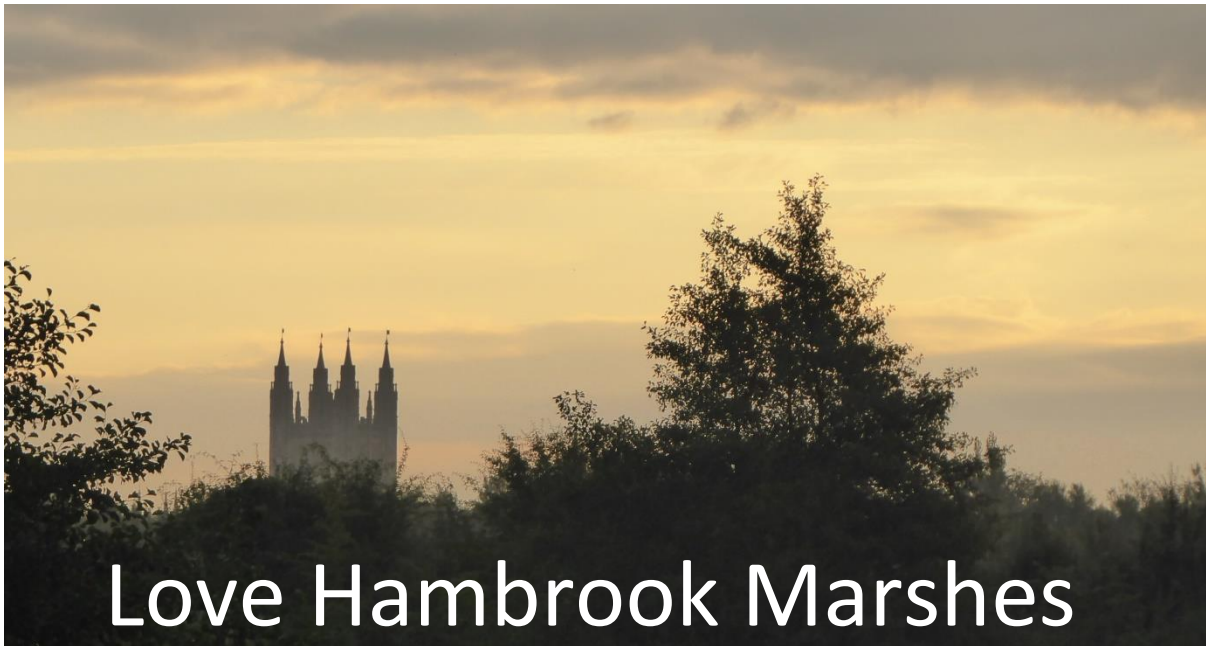




Newsletter

September 2024



Love Hambrook Marshes

A September dawn, with Bell Harry tower peeping above the scrub on the old railway embankment

Welcome

The second Great Stour Riverfest ran from Saturday 14th to Sunday 22nd September, and was judged to be even more successful than last year's inaugural event. Local people and visitors of all ages were welcome to participate, and the art competition winners displayed on page 2 show what a wealth of young talent there is in the city. Only one event was specifically aimed at Hambrook; this was an inter-faith walk from the Westgate Gardens to the Marshes, stopping at various points for readings from different faith and belief traditions celebrating our relations with water and rivers, and ending with a Statement of Commitment, in which everyone joined, to protect and cherish our rivers, lakes and seas.





Ava – winner in 4-7 years category



Lily – winner in the 8-11 year category



Gabrysia – winner in the 12-15 year category

It is estimated that about 1000 people visited the fair in the Gardens, attended a talk on the wildlife of the river, picked litter out of the river, river-dipped for invertebrate life, or participated in the thrills and spills of the duck race! The Riverfest even featured in a BBC news item.

The city council put in a tremendous effort last year to set up the Riverfest, following it up this year with magnificent organisation to make it an even greater success. But council officers have decided that now is the time to hand over the baton to the various volunteer groups and charities that provided much of the entertainment, and the hope is that, starting in 2025, the event will be largely managed by those helpers, though no doubt looking to the council for advice and support at times.



Inter-faith walk



Over 32 sacks of rubbish were picked out of the river, along with bulkier items such as sheets of corrugated plastic, a supermarket trolley, scooter, bike, wheel hub and..... a First or Second World War helmet (above right)!



What's happening on the Marshes?

We received a report of a bright yellow helicopter landing on the Marshes, close to the Whitehall Road entrance, at about 5pm on 7th September. No further details are available, but we would be most interested to know what was going on, so if anyone can shed some light on what happened that evening, please get in touch.

We now have a bit more detail about last month's rampaging cow. It was finally coaxed off the A2 by the grazier and colleagues, a volunteer and the police, and the rough spot where it jumped back over the fence into its field has been identified. The fence there is quite slack, and the whole stretch along the foot of the A2 embankment is rather dilapidated, so we are now getting quotes for renewing this 240-metre stretch of fencing.



Overgrown riverside path



Same view after trimming back rampant growth

Andy Craswell has been busy on a range of jobs. The wetter than usual summer led to much more luxuriant growth of vegetation, and in places the riverside path became quite narrow, but trimming back, as seen in the two photos above, made for a marked improvement. Other work included controlling vegetation on the steps leading up to the old railway embankment, repairs to gates, and taking away an abandoned tent and all its associated rubbish.



January 2020



May 2024

The above pair of photos show how strategic planting of a clump of trees in early 2020 is now bearing fruit and starting to screen the A2 bridge quite nicely. In the 2022 drought year much time was spent lugging buckets of water to all the trees to ensure they survived. One alder has since succumbed, but all the others are thriving.

Wildlife Report

If you walk past Tonford Field, you may notice a curious smattering of off-white plants (right), dotted around the field. Although looking decidedly ghostly, they are in fact nothing more than bog-standard creeping thistle, the bane of farmers everywhere, and quite abundant at Hambrook. Normally the leaves are quite a dark green, but these bleached individuals have been attacked by a bacterium that causes chlorosis – the breakdown of chlorophyll, the pigment that gives most plants their green coloration. Interestingly, this disease is a



newcomer to the UK, being a native of North America, and it was first identified over here as recently as 2003 by Dr John Fletcher, a resident of Canterbury! As creeping thistle is such a pest species, some interest has been shown in attempting to harness the bacterium in the service of man, as a plant deprived of its chlorophyll will eventually die, so this could become a form of biological control. Field trials may already have been carried out but, so far as I am aware, it is not yet being marketed commercially. This year there has been quite a bad outbreak of chlorosis, but there may now follow a number of years with minimal bacterial activity, during which time the thistle population will have a chance to recover.



A buzzard (left) on 4th and two Cetti's warblers (right) singing on the same day were the first I had heard for two months. This skulking bird epitomises the famed "little brown job", with virtually nothing by way of distinguishing features. Another surprise was a pied wagtail flying over as, remarkably, it was the first one I had recorded since



December last year. I have yet to see a single house martin on the Marshes this year, which is an appalling state of affairs, highlighting the very marked decline of this bird in southern England. However, Andy Craswell noted "hundreds" of these rather charming little birds over Tonford Field early in the month.



Thanks to Dave Smith for the buzzard, Cetti's warbler and pied wagtail photos

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