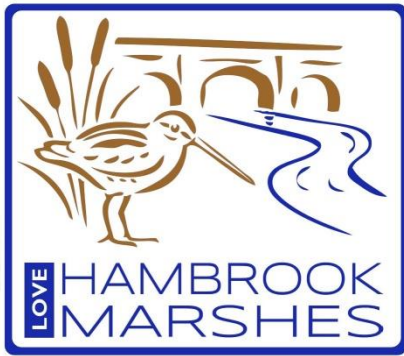




Newsletter

October 2024



Jay with acorn courtesy of Dave Smith

Welcome

Hambrook Marshes isn't well-endowed with trees, so it is no surprise that an archetypically woodland bird like the jay is not normally a frequent visitor. But at this time of year the situation is rather different, and for a few weeks it is not unusual to see jays there, typically in flight. So, what is going on? Dave Smith's wonderful photo at the head of this page gives a clue, as he has managed to capture in sharp detail a flying jay with an acorn in its beak, and its bulging throat suggests that several more nuts are being transported in its crop. The jay is sometimes referred to as a woodland creator, because during the autumn weeks it habitually collects acorns for burying in open areas, the intention being to retrieve them later in the winter when food becomes much scarcer. Crows in general are clever birds, and the jay, itself a member of the crow family, is no exception, but, despite its excellent spatial memory, it is unable to recall where every acorn was dug in, so leaving the way open for the seeds to germinate and potentially grow into mature trees. Oaks don't thrive on waterlogged soil, so I don't come across seedlings on the low-lying marsh itself, but a number are now getting established on the old railway embankment, all of which probably owe their existence to a jay's amnesia.

What's happening on the Marshes?

A hay crop was finally taken on the late date of 16th October (right), and it remains to be seen whether the grazier is able to take the bales off-site before the field gets too wet for a tractor to travel on it.

A start was also made on clearing scrub along the route of the new fenceline that is going to be installed at the foot of the A2 embankment, in order to avoid a repetition of the escaped cow that, alarmingly, ended up on the main road.



Wildlife Report

In the absence of any recent gales, there is still plenty of colour on the trees around the Marshes, and so, with generally mild conditions, it feels autumnal rather than wintry, but the birds are telling a slightly different story. With the exception of the occasional chiffchaff, all our summer migrants have now headed south, gradually to be replaced by overwintering species. So, a male stonechat was seen on 1st, while the first meadow pipit was



heard on 29th. Snipe (above) have also returned to Tonford Field, with 13 present there on 29th. With around 1100 pairs now nesting in the UK, little egrets (left) have become well-established as a breeding species, but none nest close to Hambrook, so most of my records are of wintering birds as, come spring, they will move away to breeding colonies. So, one bird on 1st October was the first since February, and a week later its larger cousin, a great white egret (next page), flew over, only my third Hambrook record.



The elegant and somewhat misnamed grey wagtail (left - the male has a bright yellow breast, base of tail and rump) breeds locally but not, apparently, on Hambrook Marshes, so it, too, is primarily a winter visitor, and one on 1st was my first record since February.

Finally, as described on page one, now is the best time to see jays on or over the Marshes, and I have had frequent sightings in the past two months.

Thanks to Dave Smith for the jay, snipe, little egret, great white egret and grey wagtail photos

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