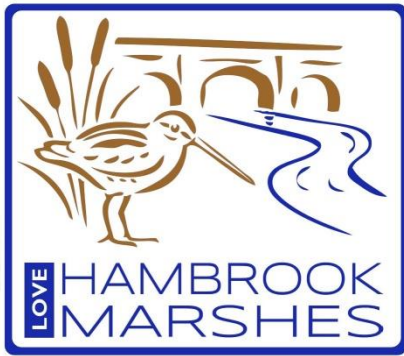




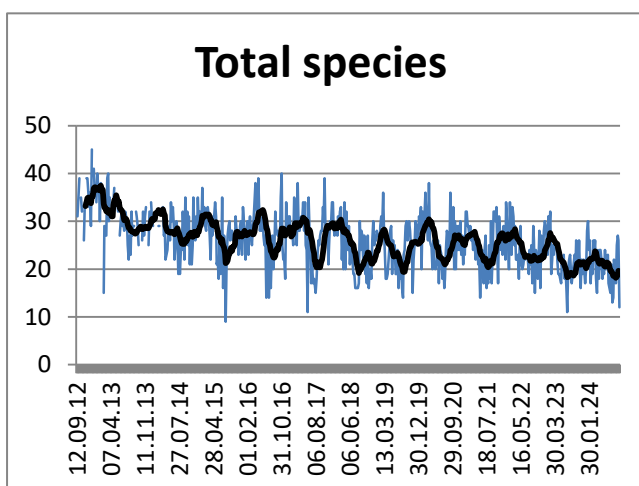
# Newsletter

November 2024



*Little grebe courtesy of Dave Smith*

## Welcome



black line is a smoothed curve that irons out the worst of the fluctuations, making it easier to see what the trend is. Climate, deterioration of the habitat, and external influences, such as declining national populations of a species, may all be implicated, but an average decline from 35 to 20 species per visit over a period of just ten years is extremely worrying.

30<sup>th</sup> November is Remembrance Day for Lost Species, an informal dedication created by artists and activists in 2011. It is designed to commemorate the human-caused extinction of animals and in so doing to draw attention to the plight of those we still share this planet with. I don't think it's possible to say that any species have actually gone extinct on Hambrook Marshes since 2014, but the graph opposite shows how the average number of species recorded on each weekly visit has declined fairly markedly in little more than ten years. The blue line represents actual counts, while the thick

## What's happening on the Marshes?

November was a fairly dry month, but the water table is near the surface now, and any moderately heavy rainfall, such as the 20mm that fell on 27<sup>th</sup>, is sufficient to tip the marshes into flooding mode, though on this occasion it was limited to a short stretch of very shallow water on the riverside path. Strong winds brought down most of the remaining tree foliage, along with a very small tree that was blown across the kissing gate at the Whitehall Road entrance. Fortunately, the grazier was able to get the last of the hay bales off before the ground became too soft, and he has also now taken all his cattle away for the winter.

Andy spent a day cutting and burning scrub on the old railway embankment, aided by a group of students from Canterbury College. We are very grateful for their continuing interest in Hambrook.

Little more than a minor annoyance, a strand of barbed wire was cut by an unknown individual, for reasons best known to himself.

## Wildlife Report

The wintry theme continued, with the first nine redwings present on 4<sup>th</sup>, the first little grebe of the winter on the river the same day, a skylark flying over on 10<sup>th</sup>, and a female stonechat on 10<sup>th</sup>, which was joined by a smart male on 28<sup>th</sup>. The common gull (right), belieing its name, is seldom seen at Hambrook, but three flew over one morning. Only a handful of common gulls breed in Kent, but it is a common winter visitor, around the coast, and also well inland, so it is a little surprising that so few are recorded on the Marshes. They look rather like smaller, friendlier versions of the herring gull, but with greenish, instead of pink, legs.



A pair of great crested grebes (left) appeared on Tonford Lake on my last two visits of the month, and in the past their presence has led me to surmise that they might breed, but I have been disappointed so many times that I will refrain now from any further mention of this possibility. To the best of my knowledge they have only bred once on the margins of that lake, an attempt that failed unfortunately.

A swan that had what looked to be a fairly superficial wound on one wing, perhaps from flying into a fence, was seen in the Boardwalk Field on 10<sup>th</sup>, struggling to find a way out on foot. It eventually managed to squeeze under a stile and then waddled down to the river, so I hope it hasn't suffered a substantial injury.

But the undoubted highlight of the month was a raven (right) that flew over the marsh on 22<sup>nd</sup>, my only previous record having been in February 2015. Much persecuted, this member of the crow family would once have been widespread across the UK, but became extinct in Kent around 1890, before recolonising the county from the west in 2009, following a reduction in shooting, trapping and poisoning. A small population is now established, particularly around the coast, where they nest on cliffs, but also inland, where they make use of quarries and even electricity pylons and buildings as nest sites. The bird was certainly well-known to Shakespeare, for whom it served as a metaphor of foreboding.



*Thanks to Dave Smith for the little grebe, common gull, raven and great crested grebe photos*

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