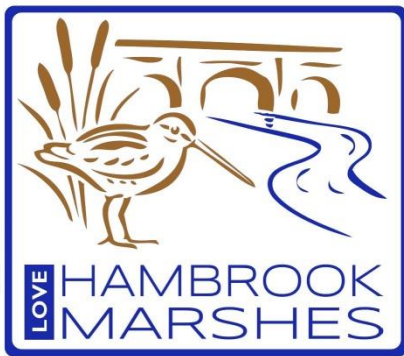




Newsletter

April 2025



Swallow by Dave Smith

Welcome

Resignation of our chairman, Jon Winder

We are very sorry to announce that the chair of Love Hambrook Marshes trustees, Jon Winder, has had to stand down due to family commitments. Jon became a trustee in January 2018, immediately proving his worth with his deep knowledge of funding systems and applying for grants. It therefore came as no great surprise that he should be unanimously voted in as chair when David Lewis resigned just two years later. Steering the charity with its twin objectives of keeping the Marshes open to all while at the same time managing it for wildlife was never going to be an easy task, but it was one that Jon dealt with admirably during a period of uncertainty about future funding post-Brexit. Most recently he ensured the smooth transfer of day-to-day responsibility for the site to the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership. Thank you for everything, Jon; we'll miss your practical wisdom.



What's happening on the Marshes?

Highlight of the month was the installation of a kestrel nestbox by the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership, and the photos below show successive stages in the procedure.



Four days later I was delighted to watch a male kestrel hunting over the field where the box now stood on its tall post. Any disappointment I may have felt at the bird failing to inspect the box was

tempered by the realisation that it now knew of this potential nest site's existence, leaving me hopeful for great things next year.

Our grazier brought on 24 cattle early in the month, five of them endearing little calves, bringing the valley back to its pastoral roots.

The three hibernacula that six members of Environment Agency staff had built on the embankment in March are looking much the worse for the lack of rain, with most of the turves now parched to straw. Since 26th February we have had a mere 27mm of rain when we could have expected 146mm; that's just 18% of the average rainfall for that period. While it is lovely to be able to bask in warm sunshine, the situation is beginning to look quite alarming, and farmers are already talking about crop losses and reduced harvests. Down on Hambrook, the fields are looking distinctly unmarshlike, and I fear for the survival of the hundreds of willow cuttings that were pushed into the ground last winter to extend the area of osier bed.

Wildlife Report



Twelve tufted duck on Tonford Lake on 10th were my only records of what is essentially a winter visitor to Hambrook, and the pair of great crested grebes also seem to have departed. Spring is on the way and drake mallard (left) are getting decidedly amorous. One mounted and mercilessly grabbed the neck of an uncooperative female who was shepherding her twelve ducklings until she finally relented and allowed him his five seconds of gratification. Satisfied, he jumped down and rejoined his "mate", who I only then realised had

been watching the proceedings from a distance. Quite what she thought of his behaviour we can only surmise.

I optimistically featured a swallow as the banner photo on page one, but a group of six of these so-called harbingers of spring on 10th are the only ones I have so far seen on the Marshes. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in south west Scotland where, on a recent visit to the Dumfries area, I found them to be plentiful, hawking over every field, and exploring farm buildings for potential nest sites. Similarly, the cuckoo (right) is very much a bird of memory now, with just a single record this year of a very distant



individual in the Chartham area. As recently as ten years ago I could expect to hear one or more birds on nearly every morning visit to the Marshes in late April and May. A willow warbler was singing just off the marshes on 26th, close to the Tonford railway crossing, so I was dismayed on my next visit to see that the abandoned orchard it haunted had been grubbed up. At least that other summer warbler, the whitethroat, reappeared on 19th.

Other sightings during the month included a buzzard on 19th, my first record since November last year, a pheasant that hadn't been heard crowing since March 2023, and a pair of bullfinches, the first since April 2024. Two greylag geese landed on the river briefly, and one morning a pair of jays (right) were inquisitively inspecting one of the new hibernacula that have been built as winter retreats for lizards and slow worms.



Thanks to Dave Smith for the swallow, mallard, cuckoo and jay photos

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