

Newsletter

September 2025



Willows in the osier bed

Welcome

Data from the met office's UK Climate Projections for the south east of England suggest that by 2080 summers are likely to be up to 6C hotter and winters 4C milder than at present, and that rainfall could decline by 50% in summer and increase by 30% in winter. I haven't seen these figures before and the temperature predictions are certainly smashing through the target of 1.5C of global warming that the 2015 Paris agreement was aiming for as the upper limit. It is hard to see how Hambrook Marshes could survive in anything like its present ecological condition under this extreme scenario. An increase in winter rainfall would certainly help keep the marshes wetter, though potentially creating flooding problems for Canterbury, but progressively milder winter weather, if replicated in northern and eastern Europe, would lead to reduced numbers of wildfowl crossing the North Sea; why risk the hazardous migratory journey if conditions for survival in the countries where you have bred are so much more congenial? We have very little idea of how wetter, warmer winter soils will affect plants and invertebrates, but it is the prospect of markedly hotter and drier summers that is causing the greatest alarm. The ground will dry out earlier, and many native plants seem destined to become extinct due to an inability to cope with the harsher conditions. We have already seen the marshes become markedly drier in recent summers, with virtually no standing water to be found anywhere. Moisture-loving plants like meadow buttercup and purple loosestrife will suffer, and the scrub on the old railway embankment will likely suffer, being exposed to sun and wind, and rooted in a deep layer of permeable chalk. Low river flows will mean the water heats up faster, with reduced ability to dilute pollutants, all of which will affect breeding fish and invertebrates.

What's happening on the Marshes?

The beaver mural is up! The photos below show how a blank wall in the Riverside complex has been brightened.



Mock-up of the Riverside mural. The original wall proposed for this artwork had a huge window breaking up the picture, but it was finally moved to another site that presented something much more closely resembling a blank canvas.

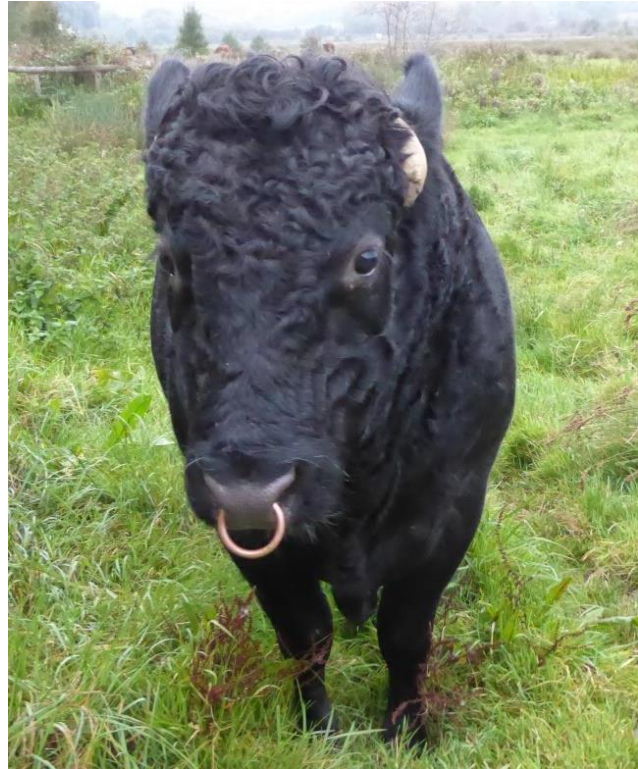


The mural, as it finally appeared, partly hidden by a crowd of supporters associated with the Riverfest week.

Our grazier did an excellent job of cutting, baling and removing hay from the hay field. In the long term this annual cut should lead to a more diverse flora, and in turn to a greater variety of invertebrate life.



The badly vandalised kissing gate has been replaced with a brand new one (left).



The bull that has taken up residence in Tonford Field with three heifers was semi-obliging in allowing me to take a photo of him. If anyone can come up with a suitable name for our curly-haired newcomer, please let us know. But no Bully McBullfaces please!

Wildlife Report

Three overflying black-headed gulls were my first since the end of February and, having lost their summery brown hoods, a sure sign that winter is on the way – if the abrupt drop in temperature wasn't enough of a warning. Another indicator was the continuing frenzied feeding of blackcaps, whitethroats and chiffchaffs in the dense embankment scrub as they prepared for their long and hazardous migration south.



With the exodus of summer migrants more or less out of the way, it is possible to look back at this year's results. One of the saddest observations is that I haven't seen a single house martin (left) over the Marshes for four summers now. The situation is only marginally better for swallows; none were seen in 2023 or 2024, and this year I have but a single record of a flock of six on the early date of 10th April. Abundant cattle dung in the damp grassland should produce ideal feeding conditions for both species, so the ecosystem appears to be

breaking down, as birds find overwintering conditions in Africa more exacting, and if they make it back to Britain they are faced with dwindling supplies of insects.

I recently heard that a shrill carder bee was seen on the Marshes last year. Named after its high-pitched buzzing, this rather nondescript, greyish bee (right) is one of our rarest bumblebees, occurring only in a few areas of southern England and Wales, and found mainly in flower-rich coastal areas. The north and east Kent coast, along with grassland bordering the Thames estuary, is one of its strongholds. The abdomen has straw-coloured bands, and the somewhat drab appearance is slightly enlivened by a pale orangey tail. As recently as early 20th century it was relatively common in Great Britain, but agricultural intensification appeared to have sounded its death knell. However, an increasing interest in insects, and concern for their decline, is leading to more farmers and conservationists establishing flower-rich meadows and field margins, and there are signs that the species is spreading once more.



Thanks to Dave Smith for the photo of house martin

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