



# Newsletter

October 2025



*The old railway embankment*

## Welcome

With five of the first nine months of the year experiencing rainfall well below the average, the much wetter October was welcome. It wasn't as if it rained daily, but 40mm on 23<sup>rd</sup> alone provided just under half of the total rainfall for an average October, and this is at a time when precipitation is increasing. In the thirty-year period 1941-70 mean October rainfall locally was 54mm, but during the period 1983-2024 it rose to 86mm, a whopping 59% increase, and mean annual rainfall between those two periods increased by a still significant 24%. One way in which trustees and Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) may be able to capitalise on these wetter winters would be to dig out lagoons and create bunds to hold back water during the months when there is a surfeit, which can drain down slowly in the summer months, keeping the marshes in a better condition for wildlife. The obvious area for this work is Tonford Field, at the south western end of the reserve, between the A2 viaduct and the footbridge over the Stour to Tonford Lane. This is the only part of the reserve with no public access, so it remains undisturbed, making it an ideal area for management with wildlife in mind. To this end, KSCP staff paid a visit to Tonford Field recently to assess its suitability for wetland management, and the hope is that, if we can get the funding, this is an exciting project that could be taken forward.

## What's happening on the Marshes?

The cattle were moved off for the winter. Andy and the KSCP volunteers did some valuable work clearing back bramble from path verges; some of the bramble bushes had become so overgrown that a fairly major cutting back was required, which inevitably means those stretches now look a bit raw, but they will quickly heal over next spring. The same can be said of the scrub that has been cut back on either side of the flights of steps leading onto the embankment, as the vegetation was encroaching badly, leaving visitors to walk up through a high-sided tunnel of vegetation, with no views down onto the river.

## Wildlife Report

A few more signs of winter cropped up this month, most notably the return of black-headed gulls, now in their white-headed winter plumage (right – a young bird that hasn't yet attained the blood-red bill, and still sporting a terminal black tail band), the first meadow pipit on 24<sup>th</sup>, the first snipe on 27<sup>th</sup>, and the first little grebe on 10<sup>th</sup>. It's a little worrying that I haven't seen a little grebe since then, but this may well be down to the unseasonably mild weather that we were enjoying in October. Also noteworthy were the first stonechat records of the autumn, initially with two pairs in Tonford Field, but on subsequent visits only a single pair could be found. They are



delightful, relatively confiding birds, the male still quite resplendent, even in his winter plumage, the female much drabber (photo on left shows the more soberly-plumaged female). Almost invariably staying fairly close together, the birds perch conspicuously on tall, dead stems, using them as viewing platforms, from which to espy the slightest insect movement in the grass below. A quick dart down to retrieve the prey item is followed by a return to the same lookout post or moving on to another vantage point a little way off, with a characteristically direct flight.

A reed bunting on 27<sup>th</sup> was most unexpected as, at Hambrook, this wetland bird is normally only present from late winter through to mid-summer. Conversely, the svelte little egret is a rarity here in the summer period, and two records this month were my first since May. The only other noteworthy records were of a pied wagtail on 12<sup>th</sup> (my first for nearly a year), ten house sparrows lurking largely unseen in a tiny bamboo thicket, and a delightful posse of twelve long-tailed tits.

*Thanks to Dave Smith for the photos of black-headed gull and stonechat*

Registered charity no. 1156473