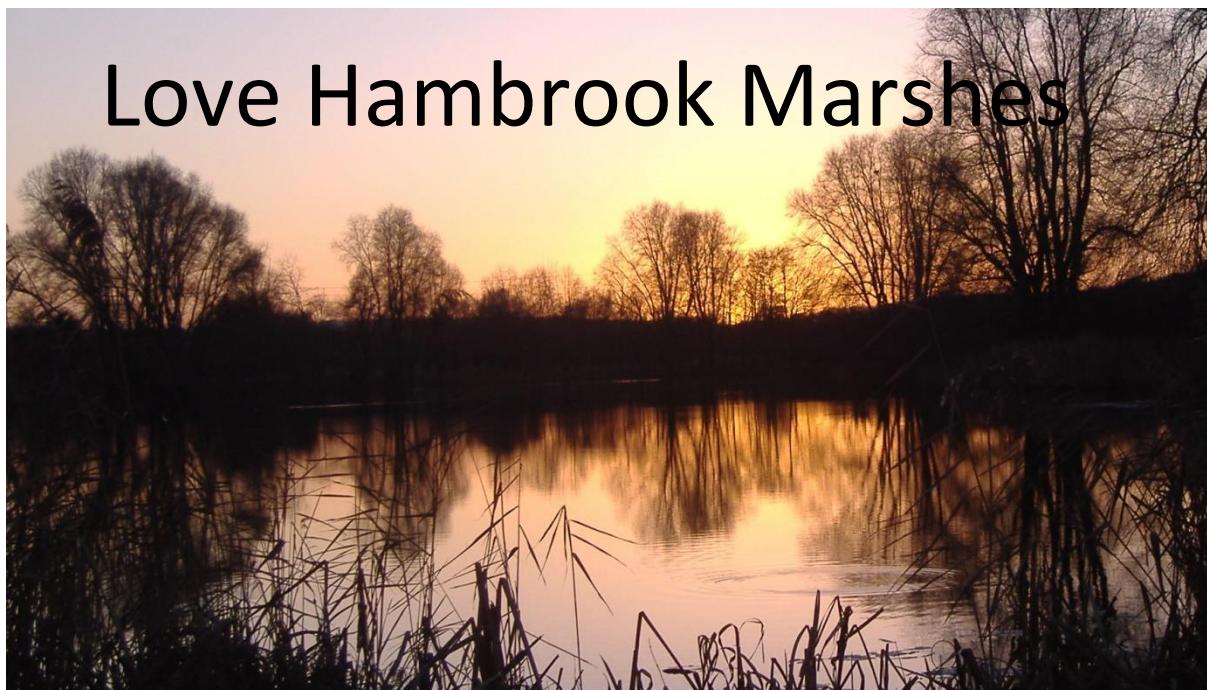


Newsletter

November 2025

Love Hambrook Marshes



Tonford Lake, adjoining Hambrook Marshes

Welcome

It never ceases to amaze me how popular Hambrook Marshes are. Most of my visits are early morning, usually at or soon after sunrise, but even then there is a steady succession of people – runners, joggers, dog-walkers, commuters and children walking or cycling to school. This is true, even on a cold, dank winter's morning, but in summer they are joined by locals and tourists anxious to enjoy the views and open air in a place that is conveniently close to the city. We should never under-estimate the value of the Marshes to the local community.

What's happening on the Marshes?

During the month Andy and his team of Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership volunteers cleared more scrub alongside the flights of steps onto the old embankment, and also cut and burnt scrub on the embankment slopes. There is a tricky balance to be maintained here, as those slopes are valued for their sunny, warm aspect for basking reptiles, but also for the dense, bushy habitat that provides

excellent feeding and nesting opportunities for a range of birds. The compromise is to fell some areas of scrub annually in a mosaic, so that each year the newly-cleared patches are good for reptiles but, given a year or two, they can re-coppice to once more form thickets for birds and other wildlife.

Wildlife Report

We are definitely into the winter period now, with more of the birds characteristic of this time of year putting in an appearance. After the first single snipe in late October, 15 were counted in November, and on 19th they were joined by a jack snipe. This is a secretive bird, very similar to the common snipe, but a little smaller (hence the diminutive term 'jack'), with a shorter bill and some fairly minor differences in plumage. Perhaps the most distinctive difference, on the rare occasion that a good view is had of it feeding, is the characteristic up and down bobbing action, which has been likened to a sewing machine! However, it is far more likely that your sighting is going to be of a



Jack snipe on left and common snipe on right. Note the much shorter bill of the jack snipe. There are a number of plumage differences, but the most obvious one here is the considerably greater width of the pale stripes running down the back of the jack snipe.

bird rising silently, almost from under your feet, before flying low and landing only a short distance away. That behaviour is, in itself, diagnostic, as its larger cousin is likely to be flushed when you are still some yards away, giving itself away with a warning "schlipp" call that is remarkably similar to the slooshing noise your wellie makes as you pull it out of the mud! Again, unlike the jack snipe, it generally gains height, and may fly to a completely different area, or at the very least well away from the disturbance. All the field guides emphasise the importance of plumage in identifying birds, but tend not to point out the behavioural traits, which may be equally diagnostic. Tufted duck numbers remain low, with no more than eight counted on Tonford Lake, but on 4th they were joined by a single great crested grebe, the first I had seen there since May. Another wintry indicator was the presence of 12 redwing on 19th; this migrant thrush seems to have been quite scarce so far, along with the fieldfare, presumably due to the mild conditions discouraging them from making the long trek from Scandinavia. Our wintering pair of stonechats are still present, but currently proving rather elusive. A reed bunting was seen at the end of October and again in early November; this was unusual, as it is a bird of spring and summer, though not necessarily breeding, and I hadn't previously seen one in autumn. Another rare occurrence was actually seeing a Cetti's warbler; this notoriously secretive bird normally skulks in dense vegetation, giving away its position with occasional explosive bursts of song, yet remaining invisible, but on 26th my luck turned, and I was given a privileged view of one in a single willow bush that afforded it little protection from my eager gaze (see photo at top of next page).



Other odds and ends included three pheasants one morning; a sparrowhawk, last seen in May; and a little egret that has also been absent since May suddenly becoming resident from late October. However, the highlight of the month was a stoat (below), a mammal that is on the Hambrook list, but which I had not managed to see there before. If it hadn't crossed the narrow path in front of me, I would never have noticed it in the tall grass.



Thanks to Dave Smith for the photos of common snipe and Cetti's warbler

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