



Newsletter

December 2025

Love Hambrook Marshes



Moonset over Hambrook Marshes 8.00am 3rd January 2026

Welcome

We may be in a cold snap right now, with the prospect of the worst that winter can hurl at us yet to come but, as someone who has no great love of these dark months, I now have the smug satisfaction of knowing that the days are growing steadily longer, albeit imperceptibly at present. The birds are beginning to notice the difference as well, their lives being largely governed by a biological clock that is, in its turn, governed by daylength. Since late November, song thrushes have been singing sporadically, and more regularly now, along with the cheerful “see-saw” of irrepressible great tits and the rather more beautiful song of the robin. Overall, our winters are definitely getting milder, but the sub-zero temperatures of early January served as a salutary reminder that there is a world of difference between climate change (the long-term trend in temperatures, rainfall, sunshine hours and so on) and weather (the day to day fluctuations in those meteorological measurements). One abnormally chilly winter or cool summer tells us nothing about decadal changes in weather patterns. It simply proves how unpredictable our weather is, something of which the British seem to be inordinately proud; indeed, what else would we buttoned-up natives have to talk to strangers about at the bus stop if our weather was unvarying?

What's happening on the Marshes?

December was a quiet month for land management, with no major projects undertaken.

Wildlife Report

Low numbers of wintering snipe (right) are a little worrying. Two years ago it was easy to blame this on the almost total lack of grazing in their main feeding area, which had led to the grass turning into a thick half-dead mat covering the ground and making it harder for the birds to probe into the underlying soft soil. This summer a great deal more grazing took place, and the cattle left the field in much better condition for the snipe arriving in October, but numbers remain stubbornly low, with as few as two on one visit. Between 2013 and 2022 counts of 30-58 were relatively common, but my highest December count was a mere seven. Is this to be the new norm?



There hasn't been much flooding yet this winter, so I had to make do with a single black-headed gull actually on the ground on 3rd, as opposed to flying over or nearby, and a single common gull on Tonford Lake ten days later – slim pickings indeed! Tufted duck (left) numbers on Tonford Lake have been similarly lacklustre, with a peak of just ten.

I won't go so far as to say that a buzzard has taken up residence on Hambrook, but I am seeing one more

frequently now. I was also encouraged to see a pair of stock doves on 3rd, raising hopes that they may breed here, as has happened in the past. Finally, a grey wagtail (right) seen on the river on 23rd proved to be my first record for 12 months, in contrast to just five years ago when this delightfully dainty bird was quite a regular feature of the river, gracing the banks with its elegant long tail and the male's strikingly sunny plumage.



Thanks to Dave Smith for permission to use his photos of snipe, tufted duck and grey wagtail