



Newsletter

February 2026



Early morning mist on the Marshes

Welcome

At this time of year the weather can change rapidly and offer surprises: cold, clammy mists are often a feature of early morning, but the sun is rapidly gathering strength, rising higher in the sky and for lengthening hours, and so gaining the power to banish mist by late morning. As the sun breaks through it transforms the landscape and its wildlife. Spring warmth encourages birds to sing more vigorously, and vegetation that has lain dormant for months suddenly springs into life, clothing the ground with fresh greens studded with colourful flowers. Hope wipes its sleepy eyes, leaving us to wonder if this year we will enjoy a mild spring and more traditional summer – not too wet, and not too hot.

What's happening on the Marshes?

Andy enlisted the help of more than twenty students from Canterbury College to push in hundreds of willow cuttings in the osier bed extension. By enlarging the area of willow, part can be retained for annual harvesting by our willow weavers, while the rest can be managed for wildlife, and allowed to grow on for several years before recutting.

Wildlife Report

It's entirely my fault for not keeping up with newsletter production, and February is beginning to seem rather a long time ago, but I will do my best to make the news sound relevant. It was a mild period, free of air frosts, and the most notable feature was the dampness, with rain on all but four days. Consequently, the fields were fairly waterlogged, though with surprisingly little standing water, but shallow flooding of stretches of the riverside path did deter most of those without wellies; cyclists and runners tended to splash their way through regardless. It was disappointing to see so few birds making use of the wet conditions, with highlights being 29 mallard on 8th and a pathetic two herring gulls on the hay field on 17th – the first I had seen on the ground this winter. 250 black-headed gulls (some starting to acquire their handsome, brown, summer hoods) flew over on 2nd, perhaps responding to the changing feeding opportunities locally as more areas became attractively soggy.



Only one snipe was seen all month, and tufted duck were scarce on Tonford Lake for much of the period, but with a peak of ten on 8th. Other wintering birds were also in short supply – 12 meadow pipits on 2nd were reduced to a single individual six days later. However, I did record 14 fieldfares (left) and nine redwings one morning, reminding me that winter hasn't yet released its grip, and the presence of at least seven greenfinches on 17th was probably an indication of opportunistic foraging rather than preparations for staking out spring territories.



A mistle thrush (above) in song on 8th was my first record since December 2024, and a reed bunting on 17th could also be viewed as a portent of milder spring days, while we can but hope that the buzzard on 25th may soon be settling in,

giving us exhilarating views of these rather majestic small eagles spiralling upwards on thermals in their courtship displays. Also of note was a little egret (above left) feeding in the river a couple of times.

Thanks to Dave Smith for permission to use his photos of fieldfare, little egret and mistle thrush