



Newsletter

April 2026



Welcome

The trustees always knew that becoming responsible for Hambrook Marshes, back in 2014, would not be without its problems. Our concerns in those early days revolved around litter but six years later would be diverted to rather more serious matters when, in February 2020, the boardwalk was systematically attacked by arsonists. With that much-loved landmark gone, it was felt that there wasn't a great deal more for mischief-makers or outright criminals to turn their attention to, but of course we were wrong! The latest annoying damage has been to the wooden post and rail fencing wings installed on either side of the two little bridges to prevent anyone falling off the path into one of the tiny streams. Amazingly, it seems that someone wanted that particular dimension timber for their own use so, instead of going to B&Q, they came down to the Marshes and helped themselves. My first thought that it was taken to form the basis for a campfire was shown to be incorrect, as there was no sign of a nearby fire, and the discovery that the rails had been unscrewed suggested that they had in effect been stolen to order. Andy, the warden, had wondered about affixing new rails with security screws, but then a few days later more rails were taken by the simple expedient of sawing them off the posts. Against that kind of theft there is really no protection, and there will always be a tiny minority of visitors who can't enjoy the Marshes for its wildlife, riverside views and sheer tranquillity.

What's happening on the Marshes?

The first cattle appeared on the Marshes and, rather charmingly, they were four small calves and their mums. More animals are expected shortly. A couple of campers made the boardwalk field their home for a while(right). More annoyingly, someone has removed numerous horizontal bars on wooden fencing (below) that was erected by the council a few years ago to protect visitors from relatively minor drops into ditches. Andy then secured the remaining rails with screws, only to have the culprit return with a saw! The danger



zones are no more hazardous than the riverbank itself, which is entirely unfenced, so we may well accept that it is impossible to make the fencing vandal-proof, and decide that we might as well remove it altogether.

Andy and his team of volunteers carried out a range of small jobs, such as building two new log piles on the embankment for wildlife to shelter in, creating a mini dead hedge on

one of the paths leading up onto the embankment, and removing some redundant fencing nearby. A narrow strip was mown on either side of the riverside path to discourage rank vegetation from flopping across the path.

Wildlife Report

The final tally for the snake's head fritillaries was 138, which is actually seven more than last year, but one of the four clumps appears to have died out, so the situation isn't really that encouraging, especially as I failed to find any at the original site in the boardwalk field.

A pair of mute swans (right) were taking a keen interest in an area of riverside vegetation as a potential nest site for a couple of weeks, but they seemed inexperienced and have apparently abandoned the effort and moved elsewhere.





My first whitethroat and blackcap were heard on 14th, and reed warbler (left) eleven days later. Chiffchaffs were well-established in March, and the other warbler that occurs regularly at Hambrook – the Cetti's warbler – was singing vigorously at several sites. Being resident here, the Cetti's is better placed to establish a territory, find a mate and choose a nest site before the other warblers have arrived from Africa. Starlings are further along the line and, as usual, the first few families appeared in Tonford Field at the end of the month.

The tufted ducks that regularly overwinter on Tonford Lake are generally moving on to breeding grounds elsewhere at this time, but the presence of nine on 25th suggests that one or more pairs are thinking of nesting locally.

Thanks to Dave Smith for permission to use his photos of mute swan and reed warbler

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