



Newsletter

May 2026



Ox-eye daisies

Welcome

After dry weather from February through to May, coupled with the hot spell last month, the “Marshes” definitely weren’t living up to their name, and I was already beginning to fear a summer drought that would leave the reserve parched, and of little use to a specialised fauna and flora that have evolved over millions of years to thrive on land that is waterlogged in winter, and retains plentiful ground supplies through most of the summer. So it was with a real sense of relief that I recorded 49mm of rainfall in the first eleven days of June, 5mm more than the average rainfall for the entire month. Apart from anything else, the willow cuttings that were stuck in the ground in late winter to extend the area of our small osier bed, now have a better chance of survival.

What’s happening on the Marshes?

Andy and his KSCP volunteers carried out a number of tasks, including improving one stile by adding a second step to it.

Mike Sole is the KCC Lib Dem councillor for Canterbury South. He is holding a fund-raising concert in his garden this summer, and would like people to donate towards something for Hambrook. So we asked if he would be happy to support the creation of a log and bench circle for children to sit on when they visit the reserve in a Forest School group or similar, and we’re pleased to report that Andy has already installed the seating, which you can see in the photo on the next page. Note that all the logs have been dug deep into the ground to make them stable.



Forest School log circle and benches

Wildlife Report

Spring is slowly turning to summer, with a flock of up to 55 adult and juvenile starlings feeding in Tonford Field towards the end of the month, along with 12 house sparrows. Probably the last of the arriving migrants were two common sandpipers (below right) beside the river on the 3rd, and a lesser whitethroat (below left) on 10th. Common sandpipers don't nest down here in the south, but would



have been on their way north to Scotland or even beyond to Scandinavia; the lesser whitethroat, a cousin of the much more abundant common whitethroat, is a skulking bird that doesn't draw attention to itself unless it is producing its rattling, single-note song from the depths of a thicket. This is a bird I hadn't recorded since 2020, and doesn't breed at Hambrook.

The resident pair of mute swans looked as if they were still thinking of nesting on the river bank, but that hope seemed rather a forlorn one. Other odds and ends include two greylag geese on Tonford Lake on 3rd, a linnnet overhead on 10th, and up to nine tufted duck on Tonford Field, having possibly decided to spend summer here.

Three common buttercup species occur at Hambrook: the first is the all-too familiar creeping buttercup, bane of farmers and gardeners everywhere, who fruitlessly attempt to eradicate it from heavier, damp soils. Then there is the taller, far more elegant meadow buttercup, the species that is responsible for turning the Hambrook fields golden in May. Finally, the third species, bulbous buttercup, is largely overlooked and ignored by the general public. Intermediate in height between meadow buttercup and creeping buttercup, it is commoner on the chalk of the North Downs, but a good place to look for it at Hambrook is beside the path on the old embankment which, incidentally, was built by Victorian navvies out of pure chalk. Perhaps its most distinctive feature is the arrangement of the



sepals. These are the little leaflets, green in many species but yellow in buttercups, which can be seen immediately below the petals, forming a diminutive ruff. In the other buttercups, and indeed in most species, these would spread out roughly horizontally to form a star pattern. In bulbous buttercup, however, they are turned downwards, clasping the stem and pointing towards the ground. You can perhaps just about make out this arrangement in the photo above.



It was a particularly good flowering season for pale flax (left), which produced hundreds of delicate blooms in a corner of the Boardwalk Field. These failed to provide a real spectacle, though, thanks to their relatively small size, pale hue, and sparse flowering. I had previously only seen a sprinkling of these flowers there and, though native to England, the suspicion is that the original plants were sown by the previous owners, Kent Enterprise Trust, some 15 or 20 years ago.

Thanks to Dave Smith for permission to use his photos of common sandpiper and lesser whitethroat