



Newsletter of the Friends of Avon Meadows

Newsletter No.14



Fig. 1 Sunset on a calm November evening. (R D E Stott)

Review of our progress

Wychavon Community Recognition Awards

The Friends of Avon Meadows was surprised and delighted to be awarded the Community Group Award 2013 under this scheme. It is always gratifying to discover that our efforts achieve recognition from the community in which we operate and to be chosen from among our peers in Wychavon District for this award is a particular honour. It gives recognition to the efforts of all those who attend work parties, survey wildlife, act on the committee and help in other ways, to you all many thanks!

HLF Project - Wetlands For All

As part of our objective to work with other local groups, some of the Committee visited the exciting new Tewkesbury Nature Reserve. It is hoped that work will start creating this Wetland before the end of 2013. (Access beside the link road roundabout at SO 900319) <http://www.tewkesburynaturereserve.co.uk/>



A **Skills Matrix** is being sent out with this Newsletter for you to fill in if you would like. The idea is to exploit the Wetland and its Friends to our mutual advantage. If you have skills you think might help the Wetland work or other interest other Friends please tick the box that fits your expertise. Conversely if you would like to find out something about the Wetland over

and above just walking around it then tick the box that interests you. Simply download the file (sent separately), enter your name and tick the appropriate boxes then eMail it back to Liz.

Wader Scrape

We recently have learned that we must get the Wetland surveyed for its suitability as a Crested Newt habitat before we can apply for formal planning permission. This survey can only take place in spring and early summer and therefore work excavating the scrape is unlikely to start before September 2014.

Site Management

The Beast (our reed cutting machine) has been put to good use. The reed beds have been divided into 10 parts of which it is planned to cut two each year and thus the whole reed bed over a 5-year period. By the time we got The Beast the autumn rains had arrived rather limiting the places we could get to without the machine bogging down.

Reed cutting is a very necessary exercise in order to pull out dead reed material from previous years to maintain the quality of the reed bed as a good habitat for wildlife.



Fig. 2 Reed cutting in progress. The reeds grow to over 9 feet tall so serious machinery is necessary! (L Etheridge)

Our normal source of supply for wood chip for the paths, WWT Tiddesley Wood, has run out for the present and so it was suggested we try reeds of which we have quite a lot cut at present! The consensus seems to be that reeds are not as good as wood chip but a good deal better than nothing.

Willow heron

Just before Christmas, a number of you turned up to help weave a large willow heron. It was a beautiful day, one of those crisp, sunny December days that reminds you winter isn't all about rain and wind. This elegant sculpture has had a weatherproof coating and sturdy legs attached and we're now waiting for water levels to drop so it can take its place on the edge of the main pool.



Fig. 3 Our Willow Heron under construction (L Etheridge)

Dog Fouling

The most frequent complaint from visitors to the Wetland is the matter of dog mess left on the paths. Please note that we welcome dogs onto the Wetland and WE ARE NOT ANTI-DOG!!! We are well aware that the majority of people take a little bag with them and clear up after their pet. Even so we all know that some people do not bother even though it is an offence and shows a lack of respect for the many other users of the Wetland. We are seeking the support of all dog owners to help us keep the Wetland paths poo-free! If mess is left it is volunteers who have to clear it up. We plan to introduce a series of measures to draw mess to people's attention. Please help us!

Local Nature Reserve

We are delighted to announce that the Avon Meadows Community Wetland is now listed as a Local Nature Reserve. This will allow us to apply for funding from a wider range of sponsors. We seem to be able to get funding for projects and equipment but supporting ongoing running and maintenance costs are proving more difficult. Donations from supporting members have proved to be very valuable for maintenance (see form at the end of this Newsletter!).

Events

Hedge-Laying Course

A hedge-laying course set up and will be led once more by Wade Muggleton from the Worcester Wildlife Centre. This will complete the hedge-laying begun on the previous course. The course will be run on 19 Feb 14 starting at 10h00 and finishing at 15h00. Please contact Liz if you would like to take part as places are limited.

Other courses and events in 2014

As part of the Wetlands for All Project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, there will be a range of events and training opportunities for you to take part in throughout the year. There will be a heritage and history workshop organised in the next couple of months, exploring the archives at The Hive in Worcester to find out more about Avon Meadows and its relationship with the river and the town of Pershore. We're hoping to use what we find out to create a teaching resource for local schools as well as a display of some of the archive materials to show how Avon Meadows has changed over the years. Dates are yet to be confirmed, if you are interested, please contact Liz for more information and to book a place.

If you would like to learn more about Avon Meadows and its wildlife, we currently have courses outlined for butterfly identification and monitoring, freshwater invertebrate identification, grasshopper and cricket identification and dragonfly and damselfly identification. Preliminary dates for these are included in the Diary Dates table below, but if you are interested in taking part in any of these, please let Liz know and she will keep you informed as the course dates become confirmed. Places will be limited to make sure everyone who attends gets the best possible experience and all courses will be run by local experts from Worcestershire Biological Record Centre

Recent Sightings

A **Common Stonechat** paid us a visit on 17 October and for a few days thereafter, it was our 94th species for 2013. This species is an uncommon migrant on the Wetland; the last one recorded was on 8 March 2012.

Most of those who have visited the Wetland recently will have noticed 4 (now 3) small white ducks that are extremely noisy. These are **Call Ducks** which is our smallest domesticated duck.

They were first bred about 400 years ago to act as decoys to bring in wild duck for hunting, hence their noisy nature. They were tethered in duck foraging areas and their calls lured wild

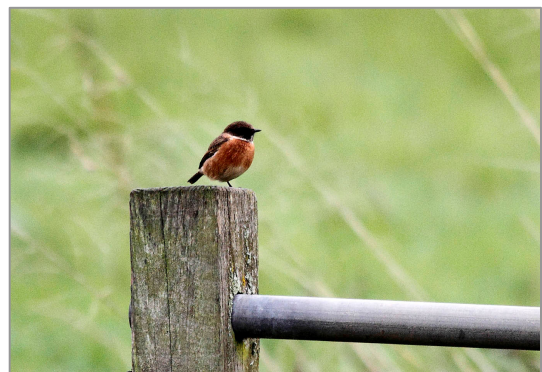


Fig. 4 Common Stonechat perched on one of the bridge posts. (R D E Stott)

ducks into range for hidden hunters. Those we have were presumably dumped with us by someone who could not stand their noise!

Both Glossy Ibis and Marsh Harrier have been seen nearby in November but neither was recorded on the Wetland. A **Water Rail** was recorded in early November calling from the reeds and has been recorded intermittently into January. On 16 Nov a **Cetti's Warbler** was heard from the reed bed just north of the boardwalk and has been recorded since several times, always on call. This species is on the northern edge of its European range but breeds in small numbers in reed beds at WWT Upton Warren Reserve but was only recorded for the first time on the Wetland on 27 Apr 2013. The first **Fieldfares** arrived on 19 Oct and resident **Mistle Thrushes** are to be seen quite often now.

Once again I have to record the death of a **Mute Swan** cygnet (unnumbered) which was found on 12 Dec. This time it seems that a Fox took it for food, understandable but sad.

Many of you will have noticed the clouds (murmurations) of **Common Starlings** over the reed beds at dusk. This is a habit of Starlings outside the breeding season and thousands of birds roost in reed beds each night. The flock slowly grows as small groups join it and the whole swoops over the reedbed for up to 20 mins before dropping rapidly down into the reeds themselves. On the Wetland we have seen counts as high as 4,000 birds. This winter the WWT Gwen Finch Reserve has held 10 times that number so there is room for us to expand.



Fig. 5 Starlings over the reed beds taken at 16h53 on 1 Dec. (R D E Stott)

Recently, with the meadows partially flooded, there have been flocks of up to 80 **Pied Wagtails** present. Also present are **Common Snipe** and **Meadow Pipits**, species which also like damp grassland.

Both **Migrant Hawker** and **Common Darter** dragonflies were seen flying as late as 10 November.

Flora & Fauna Surveys

Bird Survey

We run the bird survey on an annual basis so that for 2013 is complete. We did not add any new species to the list since the last Newsletter so the total count for 2013 remains at 94 species. This count came from 72 - 2½ hour visits during which time a total of 29,248 (up from 26,667 in 2012) birds were counted. Fourteen species were seen only once during the year of which just 3 were new for the Wetland. These were; **Great White Egret** on 27 Apr, **Common Grasshopper Warbler** on 11 Jul and a **Spotted Flycatcher** on 8 Aug. The fourth new species, **Cetti's Warbler** was not recorded on the regular survey (see above). As in 2012, only 7 species were seen on every visit to the Wetland and these were; **Mallard**, **Wood Pigeon**, **Blackbird**, **Blue Tit**, **Carriion Crow**, **Starling** and **House Sparrow**. Two species, Coot and Goldfinch which were on this list for 2012 were replaced by Starling and House Sparrow in 2013.

Moth Group

We managed one night moth trapping in early November when the weather was reasonable but saw no moths at all! We have learned from our experience and there will be no more Moth Group meetings until the spring (see Diary Dates below).

How you can help us

Work Parties - see Diary Dates below.

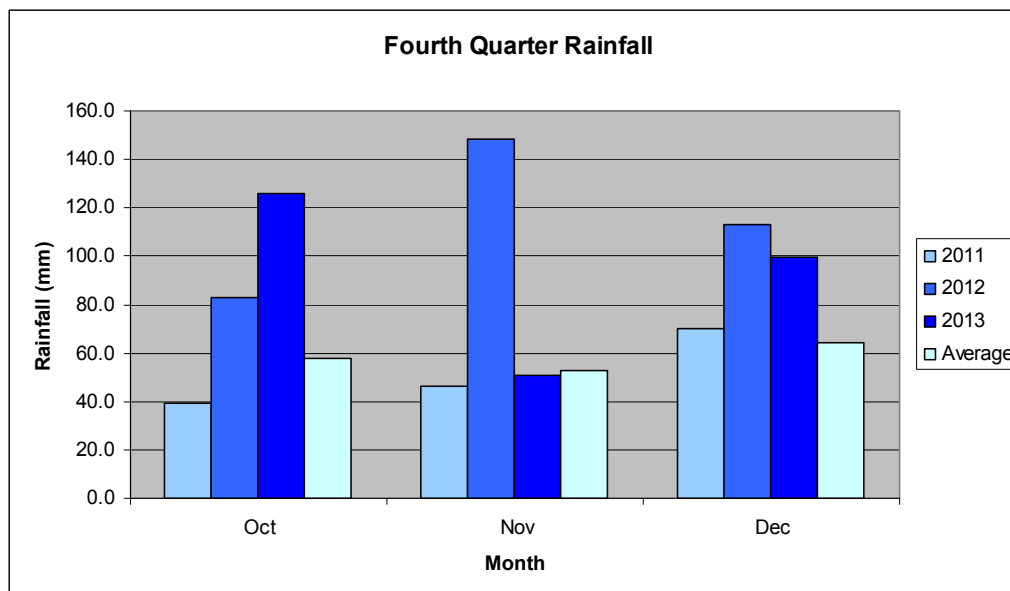
Interesting sightings - Take a picture. Send it to Liz, Bob or Richard with date, time and approximate location.

Join one of the training courses - see Diary Dates below

Newsletter - know anyone who would like one? Let Richard have their eMail address.

Skills Matrix - please fill it in and return it to Liz.

Water Levels



The tilting weir was lowered on 27 Oct to reduce the water level of about 16.0m to allow access for reed cutting. It was raised again on Boxing Day so that we can collect water for the drier times of year. Recent floods have raised the level to excess and the level over the Wetland has been as high as 16.5m.



Fig. 6 Floodwater overflowing the south bund in Jan 2014. (L Etheridge)

As the floods subside it allows us to assess if and where bunds need building up. Fig. 6 shows the bund that runs along the south side of the main pool which needs to be raised a little in one or two places.

Diary Dates

Activities for the next few months are set out below and we will be delighted to see you there at any or all of them!

Date	Activity	Date	Activity
Sat 18 Jan	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Sat 10 May	Work Party 10h00-13h00
Sat 1 Feb	Work Party 10h00-13h00	w/c 12 May	Spring wildlife walk with Worcestershire Recorders
Wed 19 Feb	Hedge Laying course 10h00-15h00	Fri 23 May	Moth Group 21h00-00h00
Wed 19 Feb	Committee Meeting	Sat 4 Jun	Work Party 10h00-13h00
Sat 1 Mar	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Sat 6 Jul	Work Party 10h00-13h00
Fri 28 Mar	Moth Group 19h00-22h00	w/c14 Jul	Butterfly identification and monitoring course
Sat 5 Apr	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Jul - tba	An introduction to freshwater invertebrates
Fri 11 Apr	Moth Group 20h00-23h00	Aug - tba	An introduction to Grasshoppers and Crickets
w/c 13 Apr	Geomorphology, landscape, river and natural processes walk	Aug - tba	An introduction to dragonflies and damselflies
Fri 25 Apr	Moth Group 20h30-23h30	Aug Bank Holiday	Plum Festival display and activities
Sat 3 May	All Day Bird Watch 05h00-21h00	w/c 8 Sep	Autumn wildlife walk with Worcestershire Recorders
Fri 9 May	Moth Group 21h00-00h00	w/c 6 Oct	Wetlands, how they function and how we impact on them.

Work parties are a valuable part of our activities on site and start at **10:00am** from the **Mayfield Road** car park. It is a good idea let Ken know if you can come (KenPomfret@btinternet.com) a few days before (in case there are last minute changes) but do not worry if you cannot, just turn up at the car park at the far end of Cherry Orchard at 10:00am on the appointed day.

Officers of the Committee

Chairman - Richard Stott richarddestott@gmail.com
 Treasurer - Bob Gillmor avon.meadows@btinternet.com
 Secretary - Val Wood val@wood20.plus.com

Website

Bob and Liz have made a number of improvements to the website and particularly there are some photographs of it in the really early days. We are working on the biological records page so please bear with us. Have a look and please let us know if you have any suggestions.

The web address: <http://www.avonmeadows.org.uk/>.

If you're a dab hand with websites, writing interesting words about wildlife, or think you could help us keep the website up to date, do get in touch with Liz Etheridge, Bob Gillmor or Richard

Stott, likewise if you have any wildlife sightings from the Meadows so that we can post them on the website.

Contacts

If you would like any more information about volunteering contact either an officer of the Committee directly by eMail or by telephone to;

Mr Jim Burgin, Wychavon District Council.

Tel: 01386 565366

eMail: jim.burgin@wychavon.gov.uk

Ms Liz Etheridge, Wetlands for All Project Officer

Tel: 01386 565366

eMail: liz.etheridge@wychavon.gov.uk

In spite of the rain, spring is round the corner so may I wish you all a very happy and interesting New Year on the Wetland.

Richard Stott

NOTE: If you would like to become a Supporting Member an application form is on the next page!

Please print off this form and return it, together with your cheque to:

Mr R J Gillmor
20 Loughmill Road
PERSHORE
Worcestershire, WR10 1QB



Supporting Friend Application/Renewal Form

New member ☐ Renewing member ☐

Family subscription £10 per annum ☐ Individual subscription £5 per annum ☐

FULL NAME: _____ TITLE (Mr, Mrs, Ms): _____

ADDRESS: _____

TOWN: _____ POST CODE: _____

eMail: _____

AMOUNT PAID: £ _____

Please make cheques payable to **Friends of Avon Meadows**

Please print off this form and return it, together with your cheque to:

Mr R J Gillmor
20 Loughmill Road
PERSHORE
Worcestershire
WR10 1QB