



Newsletter of the Friends of Avon Meadows

Newsletter No.18



Fig. 1 Taken on 20 Jan 2015 showing the main pool at its lowest level (the tilting weir set as low as it will go) to allow access for reed cutting. It was a cold morning so there is a thin layer of ice on the pool. Note that the willow heron is still away being improved! (R D E Stott)

Review of our progress

Calling all photographers!

Do you have a photograph that captures the Spirit of the Wetlands? We will be launching a competition very shortly to showcase images that do just that. Watch this space and the website for more details and how to enter.

HLF Project

The Willow Heron has been taken away by its designers to have its legs improved; apparently its thick wooden legs didn't do it justice, so we're having some new, slender steel legs made instead. It will be replaced shortly while the water level is low.

Wader Scrape

The plastic boardwalk which forms the first part of the wheelchair access path is in place. The final part will be completed during the 1st Quarter at the same time as the wader scrape. The path will run from King George's car park to the Mayfield Road gate connecting to the boardwalk with proper access gates at each end.

Site Management

A further hedge-laying session took place in the autumn so that now the central hedge has been laid throughout its length leaving only mature trees standing.

Main pool level has been lowered so that we can get to the reeds to cut them. Work has started on Section F (see Fig.2) and work on Section D (see Fig.3) will follow.

Sheep

The sheep did a great job at eating the grass and so they could be taken off before Christmas. Their presence encouraged the Pied Wagtails into the wet meadows with as



Fig. 2 Reed cutting (Section F - see Fig.3 below). This is what The Beast can help us to achieve in one work party! (L Etheridge)

many as 29 being counted around the sheep in a single morning.

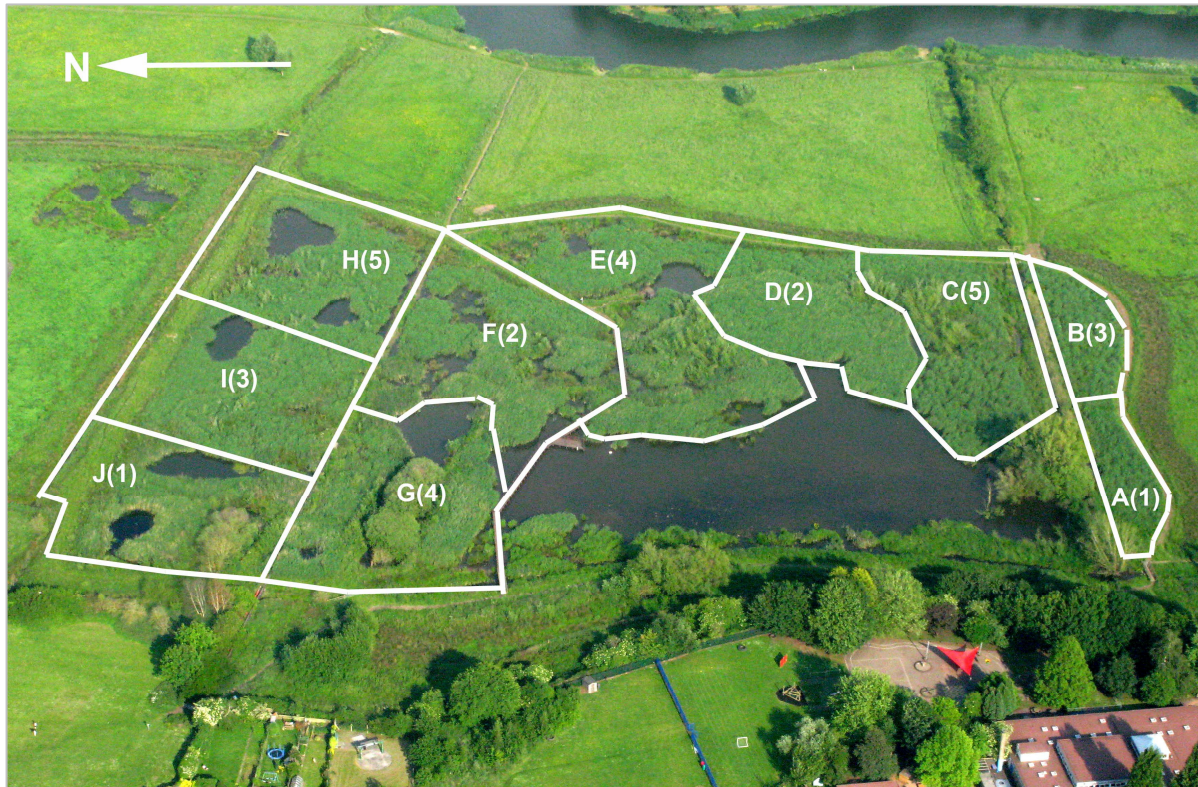


Fig. 3 The reed cutting plan superimposed on an aerial photograph. (C Reeves)

As can be seen from Fig.3 the reed beds around the main pool have been divided into 10 sections labelled A to J, two of which will be cut each year so that all reeds will be cut at least once every 5 years. No two adjacent sections will be cut in one year and the numbers in brackets show the planned sequence of cutting. Thus (1) indicates cut in 2014, (2) cutting in 2015 and so on, repeating every 5 years.

Dog Fouling

Regular visitors to the Wetland will have noticed that we have started marking dog mess with biodegradable paint. This will serve the dual purpose of pointing out to the inconsiderate few who fail to pick up their dog's mess that we do notice and to highlight the mess so that we are less likely to step in it!

Mink Control

Most of you will have seen the eMail circular seeking volunteers to check mink traps. Mink are not native to the UK and many were released from fur farms in the 70's by animal rights activists. The effect on the Wetland is that birds are killed from time to time and there is no chance that Water Vole will establish here. We plan to make an effort, before the main bird breeding season, to cull our mink population. We do this by catching them in humane traps and getting an expert to dispatch them. We will keep you all informed for progress through this Newsletter but we fear that this exercise may have to be repeated over several years.

Events

You will see from the Diary Dates below that a Bioblitz is planned for 22 May. A Bioblitz is an all-day event when a team of experts descend on Avon Meadows to see how many species of flora and fauna can be recorded in the day. This one is timed for the end of school term so everyone will be welcome, no matter how long you can stay for. It will be a great opportunity to

see Avon Meadows in all its glory and see what has been happening plus finding out about all the wildlife that has come to visit or stay. It will start with the dawn chorus and end with a moth count finishing at midnight. There will be more about this in the April Newsletter. As this event will count birds there will not be an All Day Birdwatch this year. Please put the date in your diaries and turn up for a look on the day.

Pershore River Festival

We're looking forward to the River Festival on Saturday July 18th and Avon Meadows will play a big part in the celebrations. As well as the usual guided wildlife walks around the meadows, we'll be looking to run some bush-craft style activities for young people and lots more. Watch this space for more details as the Festival takes shape.

Training activities

Following the successful training programme last year, we are offering all Friends the chance to take part in yet more introductory and improver courses in wildlife identification. Later this year, you can learn about bees, butterflies, grasshoppers, dragonflies, small mammals and wetland plants. Dates are being confirmed and will be published on the website and in future newsletters.

Recent Sightings

The Shoveler has returned from time to time last seen looking very smart in his breeding plumage. Ravens have been a common sight over the Wetlands this autumn and their honking call can be heard regularly. The wetter than average November has brought both Grey Heron and Mallard onto the water-logged meadows. The Starlings were back in November and their 'murmurations' comprising over 8,000 birds formed an impressive sight. They disappeared quite quickly in mid-December possibly because the weather has knocked the reeds down in places.

Many of you have asked why there seem to be fewer Mallards than usual. While there does not seem to be a specific answer a recently published Wetland Bird Survey report indicates that 2013 was the worst year on record for Mallard numbers so it seems likely that these low numbers have been carried forward to affect us.

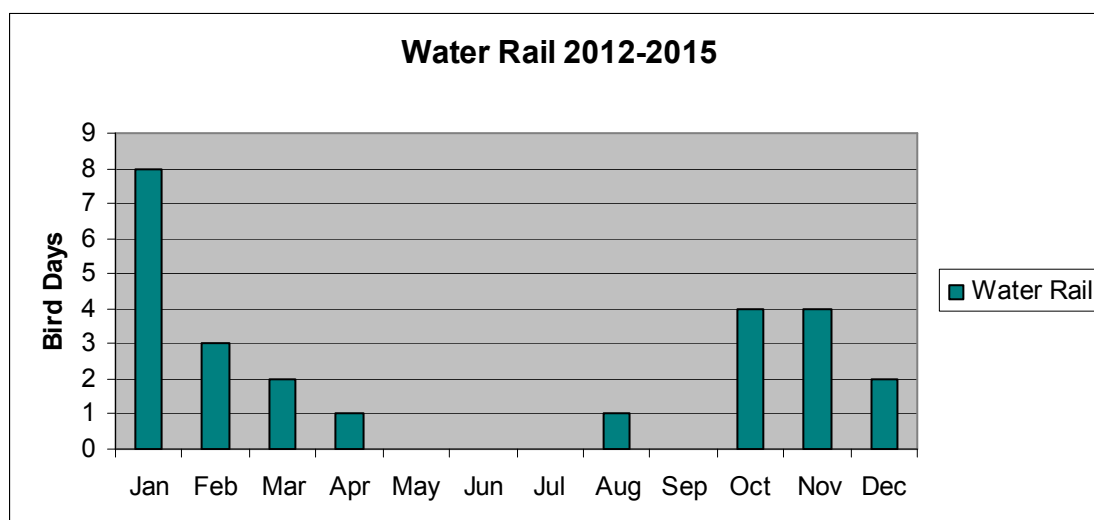
45 breeding species have been recorded as on or near to the Wetland. Of the 31 that breed regularly within the Wetland boundary 11 species are of conservation concern which indicates just how important our Wetland is to birds we would all think of as quite common.

Flora & Fauna Surveys

Bird Survey

Reviewing bird survey information for 2014, we logged an above average total of 79 birds in the year including 2 species new to the Wetland, a Eurasian Bittern and a Merlin. Over the year we averaged 35 species in a 2½ hour weekly survey and set a new record count of 47 species on 4 December.

2015 has started well and 55 species have been recorded to date. Good news is that Cetti's Warbler has returned. Other unusual sightings in 2015 include Lapwing and Common Gull and Bullfinch (not recorded at all last year). The big news this year is that a **Great Black-backed Gull** was recorded on 15 January which is a new species for the Wetland bringing our total species count to 115. This species is usually found around the coast and only occasionally travels inland. A pair of Common Stonechat has been present all winter adding some colour in dull weather.



A dead Water Rail was found in October which we thought would mean we would not find any more this winter. However this is not the case and one or more have been heard quite regularly with up to 3 individuals on one day in January. We have been looking into the exact status of the Water Rail on the Wetland for although it could breed here at present it seems to be a winter visitor with some passing through in autumn. How do we determine this? One way is to prepare a bar graph (above) in which we take the weekly survey data and score 1 for each bird seen in a single week. For example, if we record (see or hear) 2 Water Rails during each survey visit in one month of 4 weeks then a score of 8 (i.e. 2 birds x 4 days = 8 bird days) is added to the graph. As you can see advanced mathematics is not necessary for this exercise! The graph above comes from the survey data collected over the 4 years from 2012 since a Water Rail was first recorded. As you can see it shows a distinct winter bias. Nature is not neat and tidy so there are odd records for August and December. However this data will accumulate over the years and provides an ever clearer picture of Water Rail status.

Butterfly Survey Review

Kirstie has been doing Sterling work in surveying our butterflies over the last 4 years. Her work will start again on 1 April. The results over this period are shown in the table below.

Description	2014	2013	2012	2011
Total number of butterflies counted	680	1024	426	808
Total number of visits	26	26	24	26
Total species recorded	19	17	18	22
New species recorded	1	0	0	1

The only new species for 2014 was the Essex Skipper.

Dragonfly Survey Review

We have only got down to doing a proper dragonfly transect survey this year which Paul carries out every 2 weeks. In previous years we have not surveyed at regular intervals. The summary of the 2014 data is shown in the accompanying table.

Description	2014
Total number of dragonflies counted	1020
Total number of visits	11
Total species recorded	18
New species recorded	2

Two new species were recorded this year, Beautiful Demoiselle and Small Red-eyed Demoiselle. As with butterflies, the survey work will start again in April, weather permitting.

Moth Group Review

A small band of enthusiasts have turned our Moth Group into a really useful survey exercise. The total moth count for the Wetlands presently stands at 267 species. The moth group recorded 115 species itself of which 35 were new. The summary of the 2014 data is shown in the accompanying table. As with butterflies, the survey work will start again in April, weather permitting. Details will be circulated to the Moth Group which anyone can join. If you want to take part, even if only occasionally so please get in touch.

Description	2014
Total number of moths counted	717
Total number of visits	13
Total species recorded	115
New species recorded	35

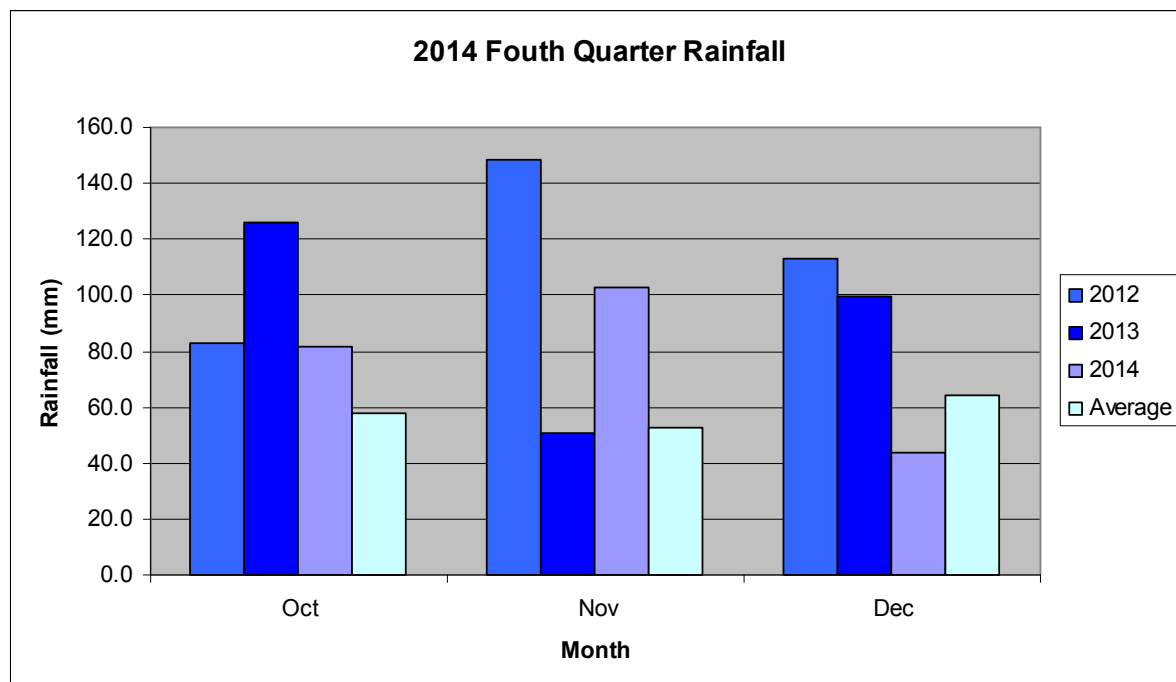
How you can help us

Work Parties - see Diary Dates below. There will be some extra mid-week work parties coming up in the next 6 weeks to tackle the reeds. We would be most grateful for the help of anyone who can make it over that period. Ken will be in touch by eMail once dates are set. These may be at quite short notice as the work is weather dependent.

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

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

Water Levels



The water level has been dropped deliberately to allow access into the reed beds for cutting so will not be affected by rainfall for the present. The higher than average rainfall means that the meadows are very wet now.

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
Wed 4 Feb	FoAM Committee Meeting 18h00-20h00	Sat 11 Apr	Work Party 10h00 to 13h00
Sat 14 Feb	Work Party 10h00 to 13h00	Sat 2 May	Work Party 10h00 to 13h00
Sat 14 Mar	Work Party 10h00 to 13h00	Fri 22 May	Avon Meadows Bioblitz 04h45 - 24h00

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
 Work Parties - Ken Pomfret KenPomfret@btinternet.com

Website

<http://www.avonmeadows.org.uk/>. We are working hard to keep the site up to date.
 Blog: <http://cootseyeview.blogspot.co.uk/>.

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

I hope you enjoy spring on the Wetland!

Richard Stott with thanks to Liz for her input.

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