

AVON MEADOWS COMMUNITY WETLAND

Newsletter of the Friends of Avon Meadows

Newsletter No.3



Figure 1: Christmas Day looking east at -8°C . (R D E Stott)

Review of our progress

The weather and year-end festivities have precluded much work taking place with volunteers. Since the last Newsletter the wildlife has endured the coldest December for over a century and the Wetland has been frozen for extended periods.

It will soon be easier for anyone to check water level information as the Environment Agency has agreed to install 2 gauge boards, one beside the boardwalk and one beside the tilting weir. Work has already started on this and the gauge board supports are in position. The intention is that they will be installed such that the indicated levels relate to the ordnance datum so that this data can be compared with that collected elsewhere in the county. Once the boards are installed we will publish how the levels taken from the gauge boards relate to the actual water depth on the Wetland.

Wychavon District Council and Pershore Town Council have applied for Heritage Lottery funding. Further news of this in our next Newsletter.

It is excellent news that Bob Gillmor has successfully applied to the Chestnut Fund for a small grant for hand tools which now in our possession. A further application to Awards for All is proceeding well so watch this space!

Recent Sightings

The majority of water birds need open water to rest and feed on so the recent arctic conditions have meant that most have moved away to find deeper water. Black-headed Gulls, Coot and Moorhen were seen regularly on the ice. This does not mean that there is nothing of interest.

Two Water Rails have been seen although sadly there is only one now as two startled volunteers witnessed our resident Common Buzzard swooping down off its perch to take one. In the icy weather the other Water Rail could be seen with a couple of Moorhen just downstream of the tilting weir where there was a small patch of water clear of ice where two culverts from the housing estate feed into the channel.

A Stonechat has been seen occasionally and a Common Gull was found among the Black-headed Gulls. Redwings and Fieldfares are winter visitors from Scandinavia and are

present in reasonable numbers on the Wetland gorging themselves on berries in the hedges.

There has been at least one flock of Bohemian Waxwings around the town and to my certain knowledge there was a flock on Station Road. However no records of this species have been submitted for the Wetland itself. Waxwings are known as an irruption species and in harsh winters on the Continent large numbers can turn up in the UK to be found almost anywhere.

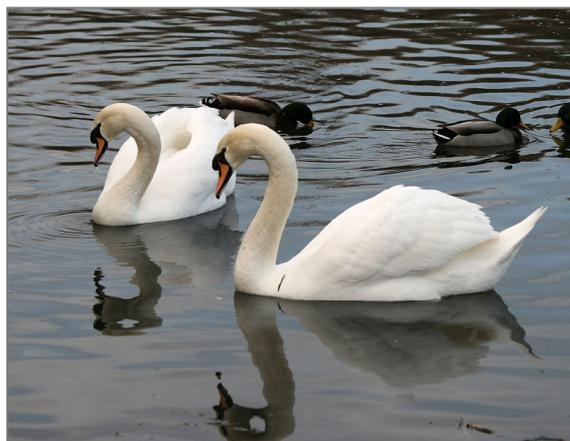


Figure 2: Mute Swans return to the Wetland
(R Grantham)

With the melting of the ice in January the wildfowl returned with a pair of Mute Swans present for most of the month together with one or two Tufted Duck. A new record for the Wetland at the end of January was 3 Gadwall near the tilting weir.

A Little Egret was seen on the meadows towards the end of January and from time to time Common Snipe have been flushed from similar habitat. On 9 February two Brambling and a male Siskin were seen in the hedge at the southern boundary of the wetland (next to the car park) indicating the start of our winter visitors moving north.

Our new Website

We have a website address and the site is at present under development. The web address is <http://avonmeadowspershore.org/>. There is comparatively little content on it at present so please bear with us. If anyone is interested in helping maintain the website we should be very interested to hear from you (training can be provided).

We anticipate providing directions for visitors, news of recent sightings, and up to 4 issues of the Newsletter (1 year) on it as a start.

Water Levels

Recent data indicates that the loss of level reduces to <1.0mm per day taking into account times when the water has been frozen over.

The rainfall over the period has been as follows (average figures are in brackets):

November	35.4 mm (36.7 mm)
December	42.9 mm (33.1 mm)
January	45.3 mm (37.6 mm)

For the first time since the Wetland has been operational the water level has reached the top of the tilting weir. The melt water from the recent snow helped to get us there.

Original Development of the Wetland

Local Wildlife Trusts are developing a series of wetland refuges along the Rivers Severn and Avon and our Wetland is part of this pattern. For example between Pershore and

Evesham, Countryside Stewardship schemes have been introduced at Lower Moor and Craycombe whereby land drainage is controlled to provide seasonally flooded land. Towards Tewkesbury, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has, the now well established, Gwen Finch Reserve and is working with the landowner to develop the new John Bennett Reserve both of which are near Burlingham.



(Courtesy Mrs Parker, Cherry Orchard)

The original concept for a Wetland was conceived by Wychavon District Council and the Environment Agency towards the end of 2007 and later Pershore Town Council was persuaded to join in. As part of the area is owned by Pershore Town Council and part by Wychavon District Council this joint approach allowed a total of 24 hectares to be allocated to the project.

The plan for the Avon Meadows Community Wetland was to return the land to its original state and to add some scrapes to provide permanent bodies of water to encourage breeding species as well as migrants. The design of the Wetland was undertaken by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and work began in 2008 with a budget of £100,000, the largest contribution coming from Natural England's Wetland Vision, to create a series of scrapes and a boardwalk, made of recycled plastic,



Figure 4: Bund formation, Nov 2008. *(V Wood)*

running through the middle to allow human access into the area.

Severn Trent Water put in a new drainage pipe beside the existing one which diverts surface water from the Cherry Orchard estate into the wetland. (Note that at times of extreme weather overspill water can run down the old pipe directly into the river to minimise the risk of flooding on the estate!) Thus the Wetland takes surface water from the Cherry Orchard Estate in part as a flood mitigation measure, in part to maintain water levels in the Wetland at drier times of year and in part to process it naturally before it enters the River Avon. Reed beds are remarkably efficient in removing contaminants from water.

Bunds have been designed so that the maximum water level within the Wetland is controlled by the tilting weir at the SW corner of the scrape area. Normally all open water will be retained within the bund system, outside the bund in the meadows, the water level will be seasonal. Of course when the River Avon floods everything will be inundated although as things have turned out there has been no flooding since the completion of the Wetland.

When flooding does occur we can look forward to a further diversification of the species present, particularly in plants and fish. Plant seeds get distributed at times of flood and fish get trapped as the water subsides after flooding.

How you can help us

We, the Committee, are always grateful for any help you can give as it is your Wetland as much as ours. We NEED your help!

1. We would like any suggestions you might have as to how we can improve your experience of the Wetlands. There has been no feedback from you on this one. Are we to assume that you are totally satisfied with the present position!?
2. As mentioned above, if anyone is interested in helping to maintain the Website we would be most interested to hear from you.
3. As the weather prevented the November work party taking place it is even more urgent to remove willow saplings before we are overrun with them. The scheduled Work Party days for 2011 are and we are looking forward to seeing you there.

Sat 5 March	Wed 3 August
Wed 6 April	Sat 3 September
Sat 7 May	Wed 5 October
Wed 1 June	Sat 12 November
Sat 2 July	Wed 7 December

Please let Ken know if you can come (kenPomfret@btinternet.com) a few days before.

4. Next year we are planning to carry out organised surveys for birds, butterflies, dragonflies and plants. I have had no responses for people interested in carrying out surveys. I am sure some of you are interested so please let me know if you are.

We have checklists available as Microsoft Excel files for Birds, Butterflies, Dragonflies and Plants. If anyone would like a copy please contact me. (richarddestott@gmail.com).

Officers of the Committee

Chairman - Richard Stott richarddestott@gmail.com
Treasurer - Bob Gillmor robert.gillmor@btinternet.com
Secretary - Val Wood valeriewood@uwclub.net

Website

<http://avonmeadowspershore.org/> (under development)

Contact

Either directly by eMail to an officer of the Committee or by telephone to;

Mr Jim Burgin on 01386 565366 at Wychavon District Council.

We wish you all a very happy 2011 enjoying the Wetland.

Richard Stott