



## Newsletter of the Friends of Avon Meadows



Almost spring temperature this morning (28 Jan). The pond weed has cleared from the main pool but remains in the side channels. On the left it shows the reed cutting in Area E is almost complete. *Photo: Richard Stott*

Newsletter No: 30

January 2018

### Progress on the Wetland

#### Site Management

The tilting weir has been lowered to lower the water level for reed cutting. This work is progressing well in areas E & G for this winter.

A contractor has cleared half of the brambles behind Cherry Orchard to promote fresh, vigorous growth. Once this regrowth is complete the remainder will be cut.

Several of the drainage ditches are to be cleared and re-profiled. This work requires a permit from the Environment Agency which has been much delayed so the work cannot take place until next autumn as there is too much water in the channels now and then it will be the breeding season!

Four islands on the scrape are to have gravel put on them in the hope that Little Ringed Plovers might breed with us. Preparations started in early December laying plastic membrane and coir matting (as per Upton Warren) on top of the islands as weed control. Pebbles are to be spread as soon as the contractor doing the ditch work returns to site.

20Kg wild flower seed was spread on the middle meadow on 1 December as the second stage of our programme for grassland improvement project to introduce appropriate wild flowers.

A number of you have commented on the unusual bloom of Common Duckweed on the main pool this summer. Students from Worcester University regularly monitor the quality of water entering the Wetland (from Cherry Orchard estate) and leaving to the river. This year exceptionally high concentrations of nitrates and phosphates have been recorded (reasons unknown). It is likely that a warm summer and high levels of nutrients have caused the excessive growth of duckweed. It is worth noting that the quality of water leaving the main pool over the tilting weir remains very good so the vegetation in the pool is doing its job in cleaning up the water!

### Members Photographs



Male Goldcrest on 11 Jan.

*Photo: Jeff Steady*

### General Data Protection Regulations

#### VERY IMPORTANT!

These new regulations come into force in May 2018; we need your written permission to hold your data. We only hold such data as is necessary for communication on FoAM business (newsletters, work parties etc.) Your contact information is never passed onto third parties or organisations. You may request its removal at any time.

A form has been sent out with this newsletter which I would be most grateful if **you would fill in and return** so that we fulfil the requirements of the regulations. If you do not do this we can no longer to send you your Newsletter!

## Surveys and Sightings

### BIRDS

#### Review of 2017

The year total has risen to 100 bird species when 2 Lesser Redpolls were recorded on 4 November and a Great Egret on 23 November, 3 Tufted Duck on 17 Dec and finally a Great Crested Grebe was seen on the river on 23 Dec. This is a new high annual species count for Avon Meadows.

There were four wholly new species in 2017 which were; Common Pochard on 19 January, European Golden Plover on 9 March, Sandwich Tern on 9 April and Garden Warbler on 11 May.

#### Weekly Bird Count - 2017

Small Starling murmurations involving <2000 birds took place on fine evenings in early October but generally they went directly down to roost in the reeds and did not provide any spectacle. Nothing from mid-November onwards!

In November flocks of Northern Lapwing and Eurasian Golden Plovers flew, 2 European Treecreepers were seen in willows beside Piddle Brook and a Peregrine Falcon flew over on 30th. A Barn Owl was seen hunting in the early evening on the 5th and a Tawny Owl has been calling before dawn.

By December winter was well underway; we saw several Coal Tits, a woodland species, a pristine male Blackcap and up to 3 Common Stonechats.

#### Weekly Bird Count - 2018

Until this year our highest January count was 57 species. January 2018 has exceeded this comfortably with a count of 67 species! To help us achieve this we needed some unusual birds to turn up which they certainly did. On 4th we recorded both Goosander and Great Black-backed Gull for only the 3rd time for each. The Goosander is a winter visitor to lakes in Worcestershire, generally larger bodies of water than we have at Avon Meadows. The Great Black-backed Gull is very much a coastal species which wanders inland in winter storms.

The following week there were both Wigeon and Shoveler on the scrape and two Yellowhammers. As with the Goosander the Wigeon and Shoveler generally prefer larger areas of water and the Wigeon in particular like to graze on undisturbed wet meadows. Yellowhammer numbers generally have reduced considerably in recent years owing to changes in farming practice resulting in no stubble with grain for them to feed on through the winter. Some concerned local farmers do put out grain for them throughout the winter which helps to keep the population going.

A week later, when we thought things could not get better, there was a Lesser Redpoll feeding on the remains of the Great Willowherb and a female Brambling last seen in 2013. Redpolls are birds of birch woodland which range more widely in winter which is when we tend to see them. The Brambling is a winter visitor to Britain and favours beechmast as a winter food. We only see them in one's and two's usually passing through and particularly when very cold winters in northern Europe give rise to larger numbers here.

#### Important Breeding Birds

By now you will be aware that Cetti's Warbler and Water Rail are important breeding species on Avon Meadows and species that have arrived with us since the creation of the reed beds.

A report for 2015 in a recent issue of the journal, British Birds, refers to these species as follows:

Water Rail: Becoming less scarce, 1353 breeding pairs in the UK. The breeding population is stable over the last 25 years.

Cetti's Warbler: Becoming less scarce. 1827 breeding pairs in the UK. Strong increase in breeding birds over the last 25 years (718%).

Little Ringed Plover: No breeding records on Avon Meadows so far although the work creating pebble covered islets on the scrape is being done to encourage them to breed with us. At present only 587 breeding pairs in the UK. The breeding population is stable over the last 25 years.

At first glance these numbers look quite large but when you think that they are collected from all over the country it does make one think we are lucky to have them.



A female Brambling photographed on 18 Jan 2018 in the Riverside Car Park which is a scarce winter visitor on Avon Meadows. Photo: Jeff Steady

#### BUTTERFLIES

We had a new late record for Red Admiral on 16 Nov and for Comma and Speckled Wood on 6 Oct. Our formal butterfly count starts again on 1 April 2018.

#### MAMMALS

A recently dead Water Shrew was found beside the main path on 23 Nov. The cause of death is not known. Water Shrews are scarce in Worcestershire so all records (even of dead ones!) are of interest.



One of the purchases we made from the Tesco *Bags of Help* fund was for a drone so that we can monitor what develops on the Wetland over time. In this way we can track changes that we make by way of maintenance and development as well as changes in flora. This is one of the first images taken and shows the impressive detail that these little devices can produce. This particular shot was taken looking north over the water scrape with the bird watching screen to the right.

*Photo: Bob Gillmor*

## Organisation

### Membership Categories

Now we are a registered charity we have to formalise our membership. First, and most importantly, this will not affect most members in that they can take part in activities organised by the Friends of Avon Meadows just as they have done in the past.

There will now be two classes of membership:

Full Members pay an annual subscription (£5 per person) and can vote at general meetings and take part in all activities.

We are very grateful to our Full Members for their subscriptions which contribute to the running cost of the machinery we use for managing and maintaining the Wetland.

Associate Members pay nothing but do not have voting rights but can take part in all activities.

### Volunteer Effort

Work party volunteer effort was up by 38% this year to 809 man hours!!! Thankyou very much indeed to all the volunteers who work so hard to manage our important habitats.

## Events

**Hedge Laying** - scheduled for Wed 14 Feb starting at 09h45. Contact Liz if you plan to come.

**Mammal Workshop** - the Worcestershire Mammal Group are planning to conduct a mammal survey over the weekend of 13-15 Apr. One day to set the traps, one day leave them and one day to see what used them.

**All Day Birdwatch** - scheduled for 28 Apr and will run from dawn until dusk. We have not run this for a couple of years but it was thought to be a good idea to run it again. You are all welcome to take part! The format us to divide the day up into hourly sessions, counting all the bird species you see walking around during that time and reporting back to our reception tent. From this we can see how the bird numbers vary during the day and perhaps break the one day record of 53 for species seen in Arpil 2012. Contact Richard if you plan to come.

More to come later in the year!

## Neonicotinoids

You may have read that Mr Gove is to fall in line with the EU Directive to ban the use of neonicotinoids. Recently these insecticides have been used to coat oilseed rape seeds so as the seeds develop in the ground the insecticide gets drawn up inside the plant thereby protecting it from insect attack.

There is a saying, "if it sounds too good to be true it probably is!" The keynote speaker at the recent Butterfly Conservation AGM was Professor Dave Goulson, an expert on bees and whose team has studied oilseed rape crops on a large number of farms in the UK. Perhaps the first thing to note is that neonicotinoids much more potent than DDT, a long-banned insecticide. Indeed if 1 gram of DDT would kill 1 bee then 1 gram of a neonicotinoid will kill 7000 bees!

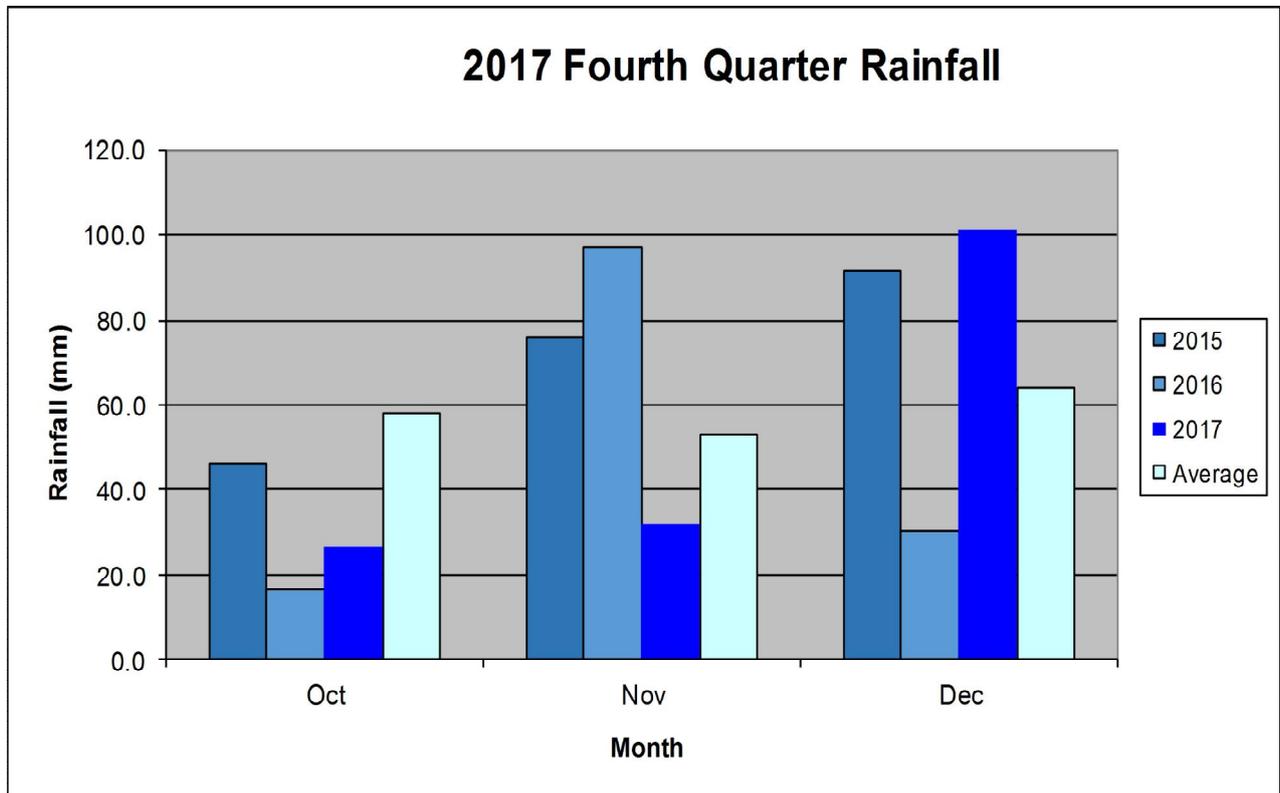
Professor Goulson's team studied how neonicotinoids were distributed in oilseed rape crops. They discovered that only

5% of the insecticide around each seed was taken up into the oilseed rape plant, 1% was lost as dust and the remaining 95% remained in the soil. Neonicotinoids break down very slowly in the soil and therefore through the action of rain and ground water are distributed to the surrounding area. This resulted in these insecticides being found, often in higher quantities than in the rape, in the pollen and nectar of wild flowers and hedgerows around the fields! No surprise then that bee populations are falling.

Although most sellers of bee-friendly plants have now stopped selling flowering plants grown with insecticides, it was quite likely that plants you bought recently to feed the bees in your garden would have nectar and pollen with enough insecticide in them to kill the bees!!!

We live in a very odd world.

## Water Levels



The early part of the quarter was quite dry and this weather persisted through to mid-December when the heavens opened and we even had snow which served to batter down the reeds. The melting snow raised water levels across the Wetland making the meadows water logged (Piddle Brook flooded the north meadow) and putting water into the scrape.

## How you can help us

Work Parties - see Diary Dates below. Please come along they, are good fun! Cheaper than a gym subscription!

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 name and eMail address.

## Diary Dates

Date	Activity	Date	Activity
Sat 3 Feb 18	Work Party 10h00-13h00	13-15 Apr 18	Worcs Mammal Group Workshop
Sat 10 Feb 18	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Sat 28 Apr 18	All-Day Birdwatch
Wed 14 Feb 18	Hedge Laying 09h45-15h00	Sun 6 May 18	Tiddesley Wood Open Day
Sat 17 Feb 18	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Fri 12 May 18	Moth Night*
Sat 24 Feb 18	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Tue 15 May 18	Committee Meeting 14h30-16h30
Tue 3 Mar 18	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Tue 6 June	<b>AGM</b> 18h30-20h30
Tue 13 Mar 18	Committee Meeting 14h30-16h30	Sat 16 Jun 18	10th Anniversary & Bioblitz 2018

\* Will be cancelled if raining. Work parties are a valuable part of our activities on site and start at **10:00am** from the **HQ** just inside the main gate. Without your help we cannot maintain the area properly. It is a good idea to 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.

## Administration

### Officers of the CIO 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/>. The site will be kept current, check here first to see what is happening!

Coots Eye View blog: <http://cootseyeview.blogspot.co.uk/> is another way of finding out what is going on.

The Website holds a number of other interesting and useful links which are worth exploring.

### 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

(note that Liz is only working part-time on Avon Meadows and so may not be always able to answer the telephone)

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

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



### Full Membership Application/Renewal Form

New member  Renewing member

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

**Note that completion of this form is taken to indicate your permission for the Friends of Avon Meadows to retain this information for the purpose of contacting you on FoAM matters. Its content will not be divulged to third parties without your permission.**

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

Alternatively you can transfer the funds electronically to **The Friends of Avon Meadows** bank account:

Sort Code: 77-68-78

Account Number: 01118468

**IMPORTANT!** If you do electronically transfer money **please confirm by eMail** to [avon.meadows@btinternet.com](mailto:avon.meadows@btinternet.com) giving your name and the amount so that receipts can be cross checked.