



Newsletter of the Friends of Avon Meadows



Taken on a nice morning in mid-January 2020. The water level had been lowered to permit access for reed cutting near the tilting weir. Note that the two Coots in the foreground are walking on thin ice! *Photo: Richard Stott*

Newsletter No: 38

January 2020

Progress on the Wetland

UN COP25 conference



Councillor Linda Robinson was recently able to highlight Avon Meadows as a successful community project at the United Nations Climate Change COP25 conference held in Madrid. 25 projects were cited from Europe, 3 from the UK (Glasgow, Dundee and Pershore). It is always good to get more exposure and we are very grateful to Linda for putting us forward. Note that COP26 is to be held in Glasgow in November.

Officially a Local Nature Reserve

It has been agreed for some time that Avon Meadows be designated as a Local Nature Reserve this is now official. It seems that, the wheels of Natural England turn slowly!

To find us go to: <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx> then type 'Persnore, Worcestershire' in the search box on the top left of the 'Magic' page then select Designations > Land-Based Designations > Statutory > Local Nature Reserve and hit return. With luck you will get an OS Plan with our site shown in blue!"

Member's Photographs



Christmas morning with Mute Swans on Avon Meadows. Something more artistic! More artistically inclined members can get photographs shown too.

Photo: Janet Stott ARPS

Floods

There have been several flooding events over the last quarter which were more or less severe. As far as site management is concerned they have proved to be the governing factor!

The sheep arrived a little later than planned in order to avoid promised floods. Within a week of their arrival they were marooned by flood water on higher ground below Meadow Walk and had to be removed.

Reed cutting had stalled too as the water level before Christmas was too high to allow access. It is always amazing to discover how buoyant apparently solid wooden structures are and recent visitors to Avon Meadows will have noticed that one end of the boardwalk has been lifted and will need to be repositioned. More dramatically the access bridge onto the scrape has floated away in its entirety!

It was not all bad though as all the cut vegetation that was awaiting disposal on the scrape has been washed to the sides!



The scrape bridge floated away in the flood. The white arrow shows where it came from! Photo: Richard Stott

Christmas Birding Quiz 2019 SOLUTIONS

Not many people attempted the quiz although it was generally well received. We do have two winners though:

Over 12: John Boon - 48 correct

Under 12: William Sharp - 44 correct

EASY		MEDIUM	
1	Blue Tit & Robin	9	Great Crested Grebe
2	House Sparrow	10	Pochard
3	Kingfisher	11	Common Whitethroat
4	Wren	12	Common Snipe
5	Cuckoo	13	Stock Dove
6	Chaffinch	14	Treecreeper
7	Mallard	15	Sedge Warbler
8	Barn Owl	16	Gannet
9	Greenfinch	HARD	
10	Oystercatcher	1	Oriental Pied Hornbill
11	Buzzard	2	Lammergeier
12	Coot	3	Purple Heron
13	Cormorant	4	Black Kite
14	Grey Heron	5	Gadwall
15	Lapwing	6	Wallcreeper
16	Tufted Duck	7	Common Redstart
17	Moorhen	8	Garden Warbler
18	Mandarin Duck	9	Wood Sandpiper
MEDIUM		10	Spotted Dove
1	Stonechat	11	Straw-headed Bulbul
2	Curlew	12	Pin-striped Tit-Babbler
3	Short-eared Owl	13	Greenshank
4	Wheatear	14	Snowy-crowned Robin Chat
5	Great Black-backed Gull	15	White-crested Laughingthrush
6	Shag	16	Wrinkled Hornbill
7	Nuthatch	17	Northern Boobook
8	Reed Bunting		

Surveys and Sightings

BIRDS

Weekly Bird Count

High Thursday counts continued with best species totals ever for November and December; so we have managed the best ever monthly counts for the last 6 months of 2019.

In overall bird numbers 2019 was the third best (2013 was best) with a total of 22,068 birds counted! The total number of species for the year remained at 106, 4 less than last year; as our list gets bigger it is more difficult to find something new!

Looking back at 2019 we only saw 1 new species for the year, a Common Redstart back in April whereas in 2018 we had 4 new species. So far we have seen a total of 130 species on Avon Meadows since we started recording. There is still a lot for bird watchers to look out for!

The scrape has remained very wet throughout the period and has been used regularly by Canada Geese to roost overnight with the occasional Greylag Goose added in. It is pleasing to note that there have been several Cetti's Warblers and Water Rails present throughout the winter.

Interesting or Unusual Species

Two species, recorded only once since our records began have been seen this autumn, Woodcock and Jack Snipe. Both species are extremely secretive and only pass through Avon Meadows in small numbers so a certain amount of luck is necessary to find them! Over the period from mid-November to early December there were a lot of Common Snipe around and the Woodcock and Jack Snipe came along as part of the flock.

There have been occasional Blackcaps recorded taking advantage of the mild winter. Ringing recoveries have helped us to understand that most of the wintering Blackcaps come to the UK from Germany.

Common Gull numbers have been lower than expected whereas we have seen more Coal Tits than is usual.

Our Grassland – Progress Report

Ken Pomfret

Just a reminder that the country has lost over 97% of its floodplain meadows since the 1930's making Avon Meadows a relatively rare example of this extremely valuable grassland. In order to preserve, and indeed to enhance, our grassland we have established a management plan under our Higher Tier Stewardship agreement with Natural England which provides the funds to finance it. The first step prior to establishing the plan was to institute a monitoring programme aimed at understanding the various conditions existing within the Meadows. Different plant communities and even individual species require their own set of conditions in order to thrive. These conditions include soil acidity and nutrient levels, ambient temperatures and above all hydrology.

Hydrology

To grow plants need moisture and oxygen; the availability of both being influenced by the ground water level. If the ground is "wet" with the water level less than about 200mm from the surface the plant roots can obviously access moisture but there is little or no oxygen. Conversely, if the ground is "dry" with the water level more than about 450mm from the surface the roots will have plenty of oxygen but little or no moisture. Back in 2014 we installed 10 dipwells around the Meadows and Richard has been monitoring these weekly to check ground water levels. The data tells us that the Meadows are driest nearest the river getting progressively wetter as we move towards Meadow Walk in North Meadow and Cherry Orchard in South Meadow.

In terms of the plant communities present and perhaps more importantly desired, the drier areas of North and South Meadows nearest the river and the largest part of Middle Meadow south of the path over the pipeline are pretty much suited to a nice flower rich sward (MG4 in the National Vegetation Classification). However, such grassland would not be expected to thrive in the wetter areas of North and South Meadows.

Nutrient Levels

That nice MG4 grassland needs low nutrient levels to become established. High nutrients favour the stronger grasses which out-compete the finer species and wild flowers. We have been monitoring the nutrient levels again for the last few years with the initial values being very high. However,

our programme of annual hay cuts followed by aftermath grazing by sheep in the autumn has borne fruit with a dramatic reduction being achieved as can be seen in the table below. (Olsen P figures decreasing)

The Olsen P values we had in the summer of 2019 are certainly low enough for a MG4 community to thrive. Having said that, we don't know what effect the recent flooding with the attendant silt deposition will have had. If we had taken 3 steps forward, hopefully it will only be 1 step back.

Grassland Restoration Action and Progress

Based on the knowledge and understanding gained from the our monitoring with advice from the Floodplain Meadows Partnership and Natural England's stewardship advisor, we have undertaken the following restoration actions:

Summer of 2017: Light harrowing and strewing of green hay from Lazy Meadow in Hampton on 0.8 ha of Middle Meadow plus spreading of 20kg of wildflower meadow seed mix from Clattinger and North Cricklade Meadows in Wiltshire.

Summer 2018: Much more aggressive power harrowing of 2 ha each in the drier areas of both South and North Meadows followed by strewing of green hay from a nice meadow in Huddington again supplemented by spreading of the same seed mix as 2017.

Summer 2019: Our planned actions for the summer of 2019 were suspended due to the announced (but subsequently suspended) Wales and West gas pipeline re-routing project. We and Natural England felt it to be a waste of time and money to proceed if the Meadows were going to be "trashed". Now that it appears to be cancelled we will get back to work in 2020.

So what have been the results of all this work. Each year our trusty band of enthusiastic amateur botanists (Liz, Jean, Gwen, Andrew, Bob and Ken) ably educated and enthused by professional John Handley has carried out a formal survey of species present with the following conclusions:

Middle Meadow: 2 years on from the green hay and seed spreading the community has moved from an MG9 (OK but dominated by the courser grasses) to solidly MG4 with a substantial increase in the finer grasses and especially Red Fescue. Yellow Rattle has become abundant which is good news given its parasitic action against the courser grasses. Among the wild flowers Meadow Vetchling is prominent as is Cut-leaf Cranesbill, Creeping Cinquefoil and of course

Location	2015		2017		2018		2019	
	pH	Olsen P mg/l	pH	Olsen P mg/l	pH	Olsen P mg/l	pH	Olsen P mg/l
DW05 South Meadow	6.6	36.8	6.7	34.8	6.5	27	7.3	18.6
DW06 Middle Meadow	7.2	45.3	7.2	37.6	7.4	30	7.4	13.0
DW09 North Meadow	6.2	26.3	6.3	21.2	7.1	21	6.9	12.8

Meadow Buttercup with patches of mainly White Cover present. The only disappointment so far is the lack of Knapweed and Ox-eye Daisy. On the other hand, the light harrowing coupled with pulling by our volunteers and some spot-spraying has all but eliminated thistles, docks and hogweed in this area.

South Meadow: The drier 2 ha nearer the river worked on in summer of 2018 has responded amazingly well in just one year. Although we did not do a formal botanical survey here prior to 2019 we can see an abundance of the finer grasses including Red Fescue and Soft Brome. Yellow Rattle has become well established in large patches with lots of Meadow Vetchling and some Creeping Buttercup. A delightful surprise was the appearance of a few Knapweed and Ox-eye Daisy plants. The only downside is a proliferation of weeds - mostly Curled Dock and Creeping Thistle; perhaps due to the aggressive harrowing. Control actions are needed!

In the wetter areas towards the boardwalk path a really nice community has developed without any action. Creeping Bent predominates but there are very nice, extensive patches of various sedges together with smaller local patches of Tubular Water Dropwort and Marsh Bedstraw.

North Meadow: Pretty much similar to South Meadow in the 2ha area worked on in 2018 with good quantities of the Red Fescue and Soft Brome. Yellow Rattle present but perhaps not so abundant less quantity but greater variety of wild flowers which included Wild Carrot, Smooth Tare and again Knapweed and Ox-eye Daisy. Unfortunately, as in South Meadow there are far too many docks and thistles including here Prickly Sow Thistle. On the up-side, in July 2019 we planted half a dozen Great Burnett plug plants raised by Gwen which seem to be doing well

In the wetter area under Meadow Walk, despite there having been no work done, there has been a significant change in that in 2019 there was quite a presence of Meadow Foxtail compared to virtually none in 2015. An analysis of the moisture requirements of the whole community suggests that the cause of the increase in the Meadow Foxtail could be that the area has got drier and guess what - 2017 & 2018 were indeed relatively dry years according to our dipwell records. Just shows what nature can do!



Knapweed flower and Yellow-rattle seed pods in South Meadow, both resulting from the Meadow Restoration Project.

Photo: Liz Etheridge

Abbreviations

1. ha = Hectare - land area, approx. 2.5 acres.
2. pH is a measure of soil acidity.
3. Olsen P mg/l is a measure of the soil Phosphorus level.

Diary Dates

Date	Activity	Date	Activity
Sat 1 Feb 20	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Tue 10 Mar 20	Committee Meeting 14h30-16h30
Sat 8 Feb 20	Work Party 10h00-13h00	*Fri 27 Apr 20	Moth Night 20h15-23h45
Sat 15 Feb 20	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Sun 3 May 20	Tiddesley Wood Open Day
Sat 29 Feb 20	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Tue 12 May 20	Committee Meeting 14h30-16h30
Sat 7 Mar 20	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Wed 10 Jun 2020	AGM 18h30-20h00 (Council Chamber)

* Depends on the weather!

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 far end of Cherry Orchard at 10:00am on the day.

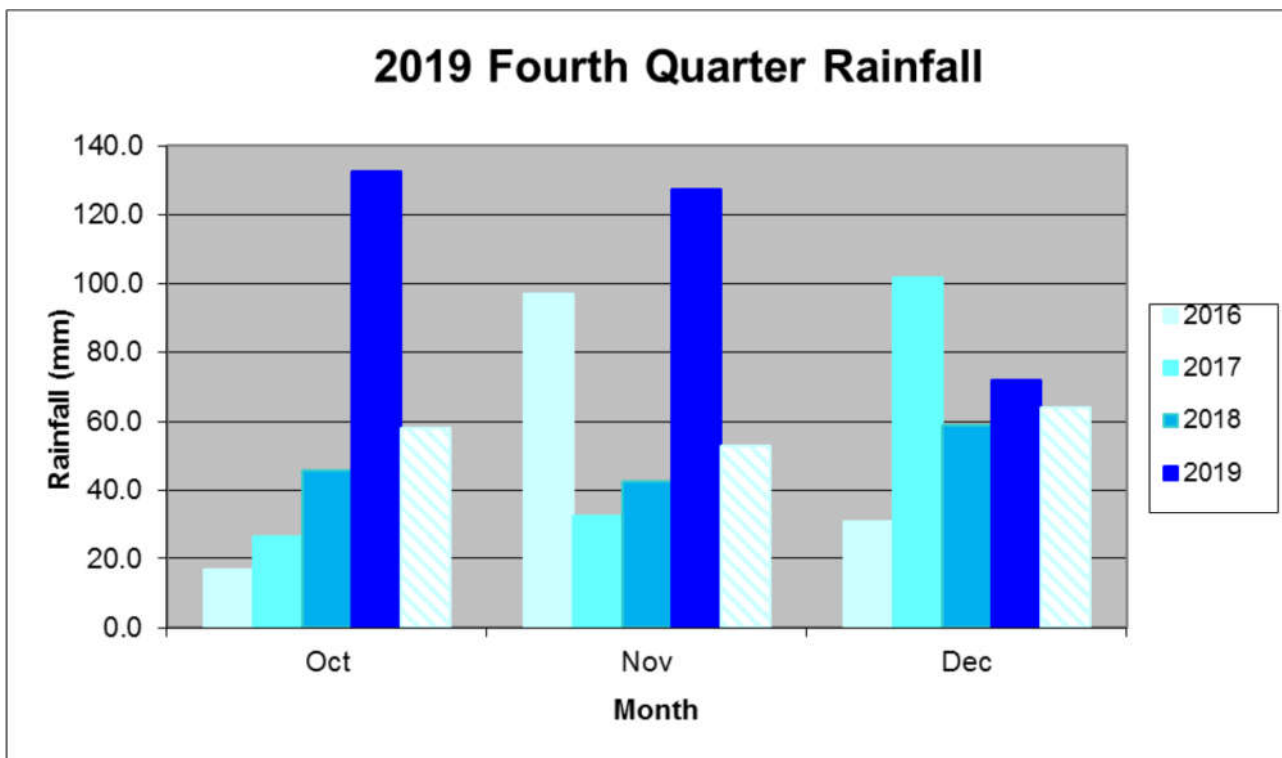
How you can help us

Work Parties - see Diary Dates above. 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.

Water Levels



As you can see, the rainfall in October and November was over double the average following on from a wet September which all resulted in the exceptionally wet conditions we are experiencing. In previous years it seems we get just one wet month not three! Even a small amount of rain now leads to waterlogged meadows and occasional flooded areas.

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!

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;

Ms Liz Etheridge, Wychavon District Council.
 Tel: 01386 565366
 eMail: liz.etheridge@wychavon.gov.uk



Pershore's Community Wetland and Local Nature Reserve
www.avonmeadows.org.uk

Membership Application/Renewal

If you wish to join or renew by online banking, please use the following details:

SORT CODE 77-68-78 (TSB Bank), ACCOUNT NUMBER 01118468 and QUOTE YOUR SURNAME AS THE PAYMENT REFERENCE. Then please e-mail membership@avonmeadows.org.uk with the details requested below.

If you wish to join or renew by cheque, please print and complete this form and send it together with your cheque, payable to The Friends of Avon Meadows to:

Mr. T.C. Hutton, 15 Green Close, Childswickham, Broadway WR12 7JJ

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

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

ADDRESS: _____

TOWN: _____ POSTCODE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

Charity Governance/Fundraising standards and Data Protection (including GDPR)

I am happy to receive information from The Friends of Avon Meadows:

by e-mail [] please tick ✓ by post [] please tick ✓

We will never pass your details to any third party organisations.

Or:

Please do not contact me [] if you tick this box we will delete you from our records.

