



Newsletter of the Friends of Avon Meadows



Just for a change, here is a picture of our scrape, freshly cleared by the volunteers and filled with water by the October rain. You can see that the access bridge on the left has been replaced after floating off in the floods.

Photo: Richard Stott

Newsletter No: 41

October 2020

COVID-19 Precautions

As far as we are concerned nothing much has changed since the last Newsletter! The virus is still very much with us and so please keep 2 metres away from other people is the main rule to follow. Keep well yourself and help others to do so.

Committee Changes

There have been some changes to the FoAM Committee recently. First, **Frank Round** is stepping down, having been an active Committee member since we started. Very many thanks to him for his input over the years.

Welcome to **Sue Comely** and **David Wilson**, both active volunteers who joined the Committee at the AGM.

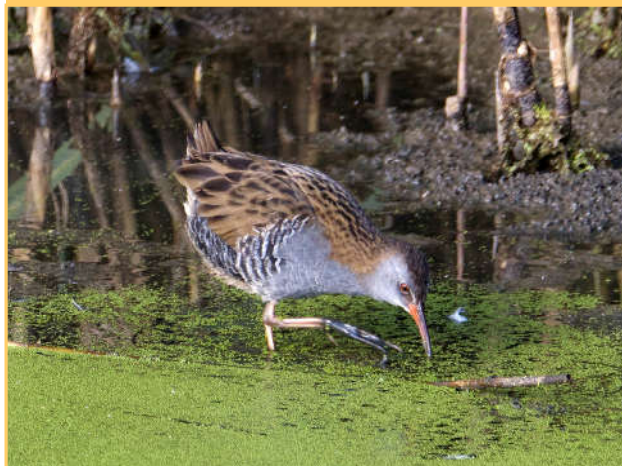
This year, exceptionally, the AGM was virtual and held over Zoom. The agenda was very short; approve the 2019 AGM minutes, approve the accounts and elect the officers and committee members. Everything was approved and everyone was re-elected subject to the changes mentioned above.

Progress on the Wetland

After careful consideration, work parties started again in September. We are proceeding with great care, restricting the parties to 6 people per group and cleaning hand tools before and after use. Social distancing is being maintained at all times.

This has allowed our volunteers to complete most of the clearance work on the scrape before the rains came! Thanks very much to those who worked so hard to achieve this.

Member's Photographs



A Water Rail picking its way along the margin of the main pool in late September while the water level was still very low.

Photo: Robert Edwards

After the heavy rain at the beginning of October the scrape filled with water for the first time since the end of May! Water birds are beginning to find it which is such a welcome sight.

Work clearing the dipping pond to restore it to its original size is complete. It was almost completely choked with reeds! The new dipping platform construction is well advanced.

Progress on the Wetland (continued)

Please note that the two footbridges in the North Meadow have been removed. This will mean that they will not be available for a short time so cutting the path that crosses them. They are to be replaced so please bear with us!

The bridge to the scrape has been replaced since it floated off its foundations during the winter floods.

The volunteer team has made good progress clearing the first of the two reed bed areas scheduled for clearance this winter.



The new pond dipping platform under construction on 27 October. Designed by Wychavon engineering department.

Photo: Richard Stott

Surveys and Sightings

NOTE: No Government guidelines have been breached in collecting the survey information.

BIRDS

In spite of all the health precautions we have been subjected to the birds have continued untroubled with interesting results.

Weekly Bird Count

The volunteers have been enthusiastically counting birds every Thursday with excellent results, an average count of 43 species over the period. Little Egrets have flown over, not alighting as the scrape was dry. A really early Common Snipe flew around the scrape but flew on as there was no water. A Red Kite flew over on 24 Sep, not unusual but always exciting to see. The first Stonechats appeared on 6 Oct but moved on after a couple of days.

Two of the Bird Group took part in the West Midlands All-day Count and recorded an excellent 55 species on a Saturday morning.

New for the year

On the afternoon of 15 August a **Tree Pipit** was seen flying over. They are summer visitors to Worcestershire but Avon Meadows is not their preferred habitat. This is a new species for Avon Meadows, our 131st.

Interesting or Unusual Species

There was a very significant passage of migrant birds heading south between 12-25 August. Most obviously Whinchats, with 5 present on 20 Aug and one or two on the



Feeding our Mute Swans with swan pellets (available from pet stores in Pershore) as part of our drive to encourage feeding the wildfowl with something besides bread!

Photo: Janet Stott ARPS

scrape either side of that date. First recorded in 2013, it has not been recorded every year and when it has been recorded there have only been 1 or 2 records each year.

The influx comprised mainly Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers with a few Garden Warblers and Blackcaps.

On the afternoon of 14 Aug a female/juvenile Common Redstart turned up, and on 19 Aug 2 Spotted Flycatchers were seen near the main gate. A male Red-crested Pochard in eclipse plumage was seen by one sharp observer on 3 Sep, and 12 Northern Pintail flew over on 8 Oct, in all cases these were only our second records. On 16 Oct, 4 Black-tailed Godwit flew over and Tawny Owls are heard from time to time.

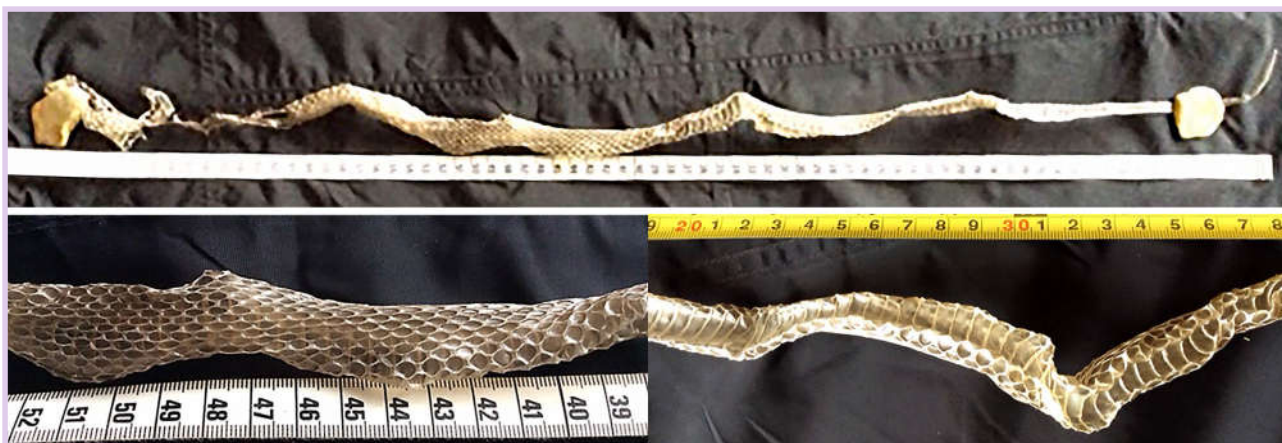
Breeding Species

As we reported last time, the Common Grasshopper Warbler was our most unusual breeding species, the last one was seen on 29 July. Cuckoos are always a welcome presence in summer and although it is very difficult to find their young, one was located this year. Cetti's Warbler and Water Rail both bred, confirmed by sightings of young birds.



A smart Common Stonechat (male). One of the early arrivals on Avon Meadows.

Photo: Lloyd Evans.



Upperside

Underside

The skin of a Grass Snake found on Avon Meadows in September. Male Grass Snakes shed their skins twice a year and females once, just before they lay their eggs in June/July. Most Grass Snakes in the UK grow to over 1 metre long, this skin was about 70cm so given the timing you would suspect that it was a young male. You do not often find shed snake skins even though we have a good population of Grass Snakes on Avon Meadows. *Photo: Sue Chandler*

Surveys and Sightings (continued)

Winter Arrivals

Most winter birds to arrive fly over Avon Meadows and head on south. Later small numbers can be seen around our area often feeding on the ground.

The first Meadow Pipits were seen on 3 Sep and by the end of the month numbers flying over had built up considerably.

Stonechat numbers vary and the birds are still very mobile but we believe that at least 2 pairs are present.

The first Fieldfares passed over on 13 Oct followed by Redwings on 14 Oct. Both these species can be seen frequently, flying over in loose flocks.

Work parties often turn up unusual species and this year's work on the scrape was no exception. On 17 Oct 2 Jack Snipe were flushed while carrying out clearance work. This is an extremely difficult species to see as they frequent dense growth around the edges of the scrape.

BUTTERFLIES

Coronavirus prevented us carrying out our normal transect survey this summer. However there were good numbers of



A Speckled Wood. *Photo: Lloyd Evans.*

butterflies present. Particularly notable were Small Coppers and later in the year Large, Small and Green-veined Whites. Our first Meadow Brown was seen on 28 May, a new early record for Avon Meadows.

The highlight of the butterfly year was the discovery of a **Purple Hairstreak** on Avon Meadows. This brings our butterfly count up to 25 species. The Purple Hairstreak is unusual for us as it is a species much associated with oak trees of which there are very few on Avon Meadows. We must assume it was just passing through although it was seen on 29th and 31st of August.

DRAGONFLIES

Dragonfly transects were carried out during the summer and the results were 'good in parts'. Only 12 species were recorded during the summer against a best year with 18. However, we had our highest daily count on 31 May of 226 insects (surely weather related) as against 203 last year.

The hot May made an impact on the emergence of dragonflies. We had 3 new early records; Red-eyed Damselfly on 8 May, Emperor Dragonfly on 31 May and a Scarce Chaser on 31 May.

There was one new late date and that was for a Broad-bodied Chaser on 6 August.

MOTHS

Our moth trapping was affected by Coronavirus too this year. Our strategy was to run just 2 traps with 1 person for each trap. This is the only way we could manage social distancing in the dark! Many thanks to Paul and John for holding the fort in these troubled times.

The weather was not always kind but they did do quite well. Over the 4 visits they managed there were 4 new species for Avon Meadows bringing our total moth count to 388 species.

New species were, 1 macro moth; The Antler *Cerepteryx graminis* and 3 micro moths; *Brachmia blandella*, *Pseudargyrotoza conwagena* and *Eucosma hohenwartiana*.

Other New Species

I am quite sure there are a large number of insects and spiders that occur regularly on Avon Meadows which have not been found and identified. Some of these come to the light of a moth trap, one such this year was new to Avon Meadows, the Green Sawfly (see below)..

Opportunistically a small red beetle, *Anthocomus rufus*, was photographed on 29 August was also a new record.



Green Sawfly, Rhodogaster scalaris (was viridis) caught in a moth trap on 8 September. It is a widespread species in the United Kingdom. Photo: Richard Stott



A Yellow Fieldcap fungus Bolbitis titubans photographed near the bird screen on 23 August. It is found across the USA and Europe wherever its preferred rich soil is available. It is much easier to identify when it first emerges, as shown here, as the bright yellow fades quite quickly. Photo: Paul Rhodes.



Anthocomus rufus, is a smart small beetle with a patchy distribution in the south of England photographed on 29 August. It is one of a group called soft-winged flower beetles. It is found mainly in East Anglia and the south east with isolated populations in the Midlands and South Wales. Photo: Lloyd Evans

PLEASE NOTE!

We are always on the lookout for new and interesting photographs to put in the Newsletter. 'A picture tells a thousand words' and they are an important part of it. We are trying to increase the number of photographers who provide photographs for the Newsletter.

You do not need expensive equipment, a number of the images in this issue were taken using a smart phone.

The requirements are that you send the original, unedited, picture file, that it is taken on Avon Meadows and it must be in focus.

Send the date, time and approximate location together with any notes or comments so that we can give context to the image.

Contact: richarddestott@gmail.com

How you can help us

Work Parties - Contact Ken Pomfret if you are able to help.

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

As ever the editor of this Newsletter is immensely grateful to all those who have contributed photographs to this issue. Without these it would be a dull affair!

Tales from far away!

This story is nothing to do with Avon Meadows but it was such an uplifting tale that I thought you would be interested to read it.

AMUR FALCON in NAGALAND

This article summarises a webinar talk, sponsored by Zeiss, given by an American bird watcher, Catherine Hamilton, covering a first visit to Nagaland in extreme NE India. Nagaland is situated in the Himalayan foothills and was only opened to foreign visitors in 2011.

Catherine was a member of a party of 5 from the USA who visited in October 2017 when, after 4-days travel, they arrived in the small village of Pangti in the Wokha District of Nagaland. The journey was much delayed by battles with officialdom and a number washed out roads following recent heavy rain.



The local tribespeople are related to the Tibetans who they resemble rather than the faces we might recognise Indian.

The Amur Falcon is small falcon about the size of a Kestrel and closely related to the European Red-footed Falcon. Each autumn it migrates from its summer breeding grounds in Siberia to its wintering grounds in Southern Africa. They follow a route which passes through Nagaland.



In 2000, a few kilometres from Pangti, the Doyang Reservoir was created providing electricity locally for the first time.

Then in 2012 bird watchers from India visited and reported unusual numbers of Amur Falcons (100,000's) passing through an area in Nagaland near the new reservoir. It was also reported that that the local people were trapping the birds in huge numbers to the point that the numbers reaching the African wintering grounds were decreasing.

Why were the falcons there? Their migration coincides with a NE wind follows the monsoon and there is about a 10-day window in October when they all pass through. It seems the presence of the reservoir allowed a prolific mayfly hatching at the time the birds pass through so that they can refuel by eating the insects in preparation for the long journey ahead. They make the longest water crossing of any bird of prey when they cross the Arabian Sea to southern Africa, covering 2,500 miles over water. Individuals have been GPS tracked flying non-stop for 3,500 miles!

The people of Pangti live a simple life eating what they can grow or hunt. When the falcons started to arrive they

thought it was a 'gift from god' and so were almost obliged to catch the birds. The reservoir had swamped their traditional fishing grounds. Fishing in the reservoir was possible but it involved fishing with nets and their nets frequently got snagged on submerged trees. Their traditional mammal hunting had been banned by the central government so bird trapping for food and sale at local markets was a useful substitute.

There had been no Western tourists in Pangti village before the time of this visit. They were delightful and friendly people and even made beds out of bamboo for their visitors' 4-day stay.

Even before COVID-19 visitors to remote peoples had to be concerned about introducing alien viruses which could seriously afflict people that had no natural resistance. So, the visitors brought and used handwash and took the sort of anti-viral precautions we are now only too familiar with.

After all the trials and tribulations of their journey as the party drove up towards Pangti they anxiously scanned the skies for falcons, they found just 4 Amur Falcons. This year the monsoon was late and they began to wonder if they were too early and the birds were still far away.

The following day they were up well before daybreak. They had been told that the roosting birds were very nervous so it was essential to get into position while it was still dark. At dawn on 28 October 2017 they arrived at the reservoir watchpoint driving over appalling roads for 1½ hours for the few kilometres to get there.

Catherine described how, as they sky lightened, her binocular view was full of thousand upon thousand of circling Amur Falcons, nothing else there except a few Jungle Crows. Even the trees were full of falcons. It was estimated that there were 40-50,000 birds present on that morning. (Catherine returned in 2018 when the monsoon was earlier and 200,000 falcons were counted in a morning.)

Bano Haralu, an Indian journalist who comes from Nagaland, having heard about the falcons, returned to her homeland in 2010 to start organising bird surveys. The first proper survey took place in 2012. The locals were trapping astonishing numbers of falcons; people each with 100's of birds hung on bamboo poles as they tramped back to the village.

Research scientists also wanted to trap some birds so that they could ring them to find out more about their movements. They managed just 30 in a week. Locals were much, much better at it! They were catching 12-15000 per day adding up to 120,000 - 140,000 each year. It is estimated that over a million falcons pass through Nagaland over a 10-day period.

Bano saw all this and went to the village children and explained about the falcons, that they are not their falcons, they are everybody's falcons and the birds need to make this long and dangerous journey as an important part of their life cycle. The tribes have a rich tradition in song, using songs as a means of passing down tribal history. The children sang about the falcons and the villagers began to think about what the songs meant.

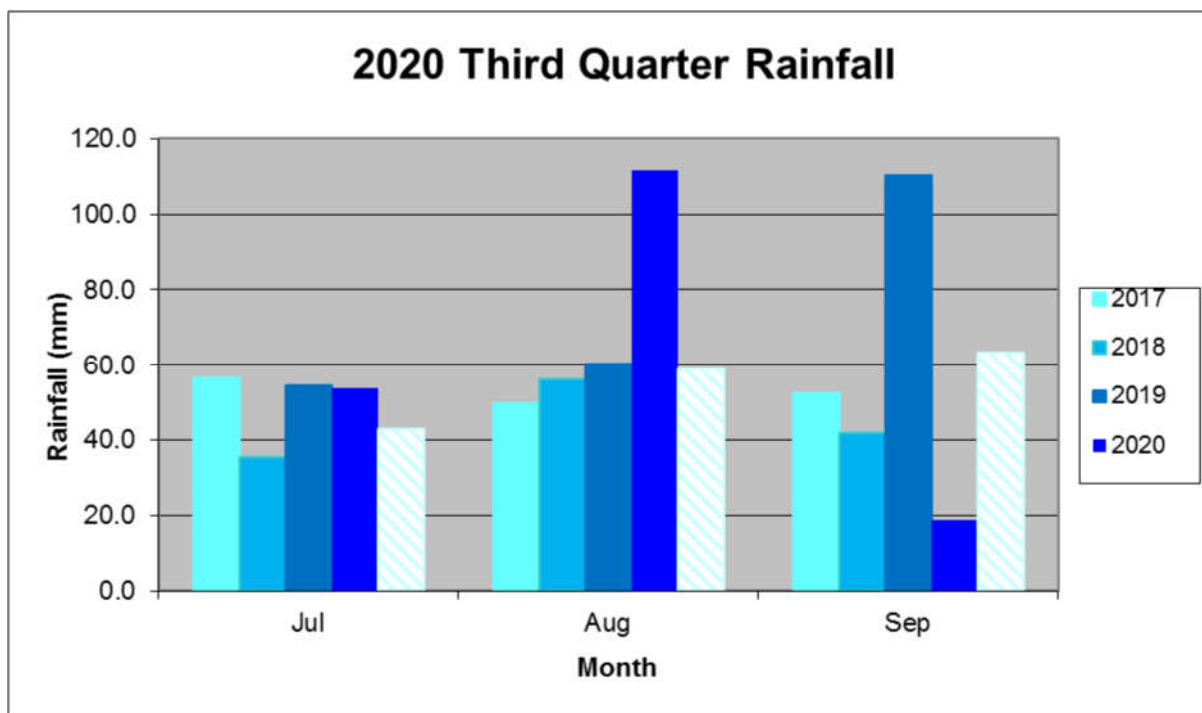
In 2013 the villagers met, as was their tradition, to discuss

falcon hunting and decided not to hunt but to study the birds and encourage visitors. Hardly any birds were trapped that year! Even the small boys with catapults stopped! Almost unbelievably by the winter of 2016 the African wintering population had completely recovered. No laws nor regulations, nor arresting local people just a simple understanding of nature.

If you would like to listen to the whole talk (it lasts 63 minutes) go to: <https://seekbeak.com/v/40zdelQejDR> and select Amur Falcon: Living on the Edge.

As Catherine and her friends left after a memorable 4 days one of the elders took her by the arm and said, **"We are a mountain people and are proud of our land. Please do not forget us."**

Water Levels



The water table, as measured in our dipwells, remained at least 90cm until the heavy rain at the beginning of October. Then we had all our October rainfall in 3 days which put water in the scrape too. Rainfall in October was over double the average!

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 would like to set up a standing order, please use the same details and again let us know by e-mail. We cannot currently handle direct debits.

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

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