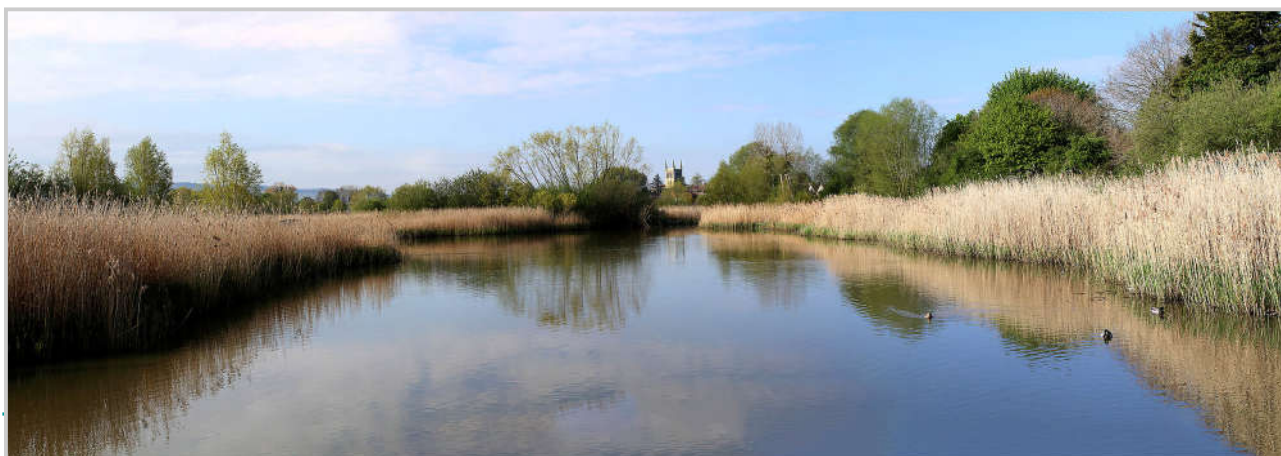




Newsletter of the Friends of Avon Meadows



Contrary to the previous panorama, this shot was taken in mid-morning on 29 April 2021 after 2 months of exceptionally low rainfall.

Photo: Richard Stott

Newsletter No: 43

April 2021

COVID-19 Precautions

As you all know, the regulations are slowly relaxing but please do not anticipate the loosening of the rules.

Progress on the Wetland

Little has happened in terms of site work since the last Newsletter. The ground had been very wet so the contractor could not bring heavy vehicles onto the meadows for fear of over compacting the soil.

Work parties could have started on 29 March but by that time we had lost the window of opportunity before the birds began to make preparations for breeding.

Volunteers: We need more volunteers, many of our volunteers have been on the books for 10 years or more and we need some young blood! If you would like to help please contact Ken Pomfret (kenpomfret@btinternet.com).

Event for Everyone: As part of the Evesham Rambling Clubs 2021 Walking Festival a guided walk through Avon Meadows has been arranged for **Saturday 3rd July at 2pm**. Please come along!

Misuse of Avon Meadows: There have been a number of instances of children and older boys riding motorbikes on Avon Meadows. The use of powered motorbikes or other vehicles (except mobility scooters) on Avon Meadows is illegal. It is a nature reserve not a speedway track and is there for all residents to enjoy in peace while respecting the wildlife. Every part of the meadows is precious (see Shoots to Roots article later). Please report to a Committee member if you see this happening, with a photograph if possible.

Member's Photographs



Following our recent wagtail theme, this is a nice male Grey Wagtail on the car park. In summer you can often see them along the culvert near ASDA. *Photo: Carl Fowle*

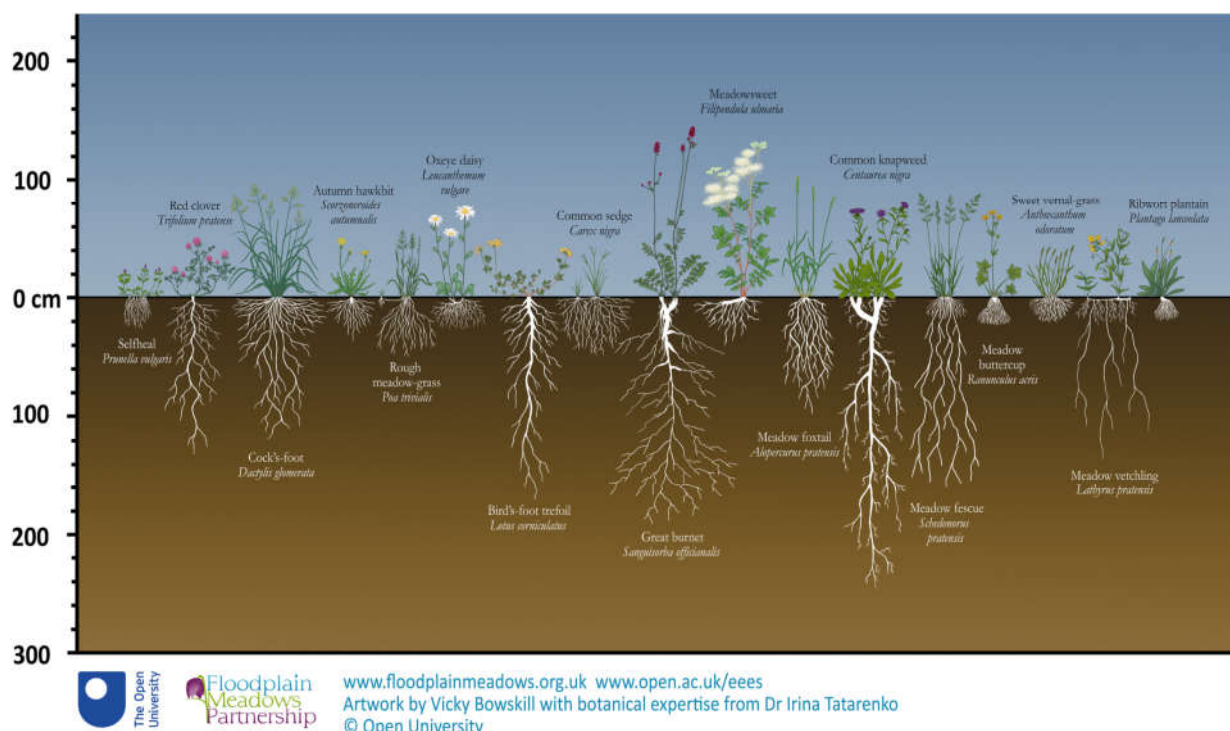
Funding

Higher Tier Stewardship Scheme which provides much of the funding for the maintenance work on Avon Meadows runs for several years yet.

However, some of you will have read about the new Environmental Land Management Scheme to be introduced to replace the HTSS. This scheme incentivises environmental 'goods'. We are pleased to report that Avon Meadows will be part of the pilot for this scheme which is run by DEFRA.

Shoots to Roots - Floodplain Meadows Partnership - by Ken Pomfret

From Shoots to Roots: revealing the above and below ground structure of meadow plants



As I am sure most of you know, a major element of the Meadows' Management Plan is the restoration of our grassland. The aim is to gradually improve the species richness of as much as possible turning it into real wildflower meadow. In order to do this as effectively as possible we needed to understand our meadows and their development. To this end we embarked a few years ago on a programme of soil analyses, hydrology monitoring and botanical surveys. We found that nutrient levels in the soils were generally high but our regime of annual hay-cuts followed aftermath grazing has succeeded in reducing this, especially the phosphate levels; helping to suppress the stronger grasses to the benefit of the wild flowers.

Turning to hydrology, different plant communities and indeed individual species all show preferences for drier or wetter conditions; generally expressed as the number of weeks per year the soil they find themselves in has a higher or lower water table. Weekly monitoring of the 10 dipwells we installed across the Meadow has allowed us to build a picture showing that roughly the eastern half of the parts of the South and North Meadows nearest the river and most of Middle Meadow have a good balance between wet and dry periods conducive to the really nice wildflower communities we would like to establish. As a result we know where green hay strewing and wildflower seed-mix spreading are best concentrated and these are bearing fruit.

In all this work we have been expertly guided and encouraged by the Floodplain Meadows Partnership. Recently the Partnership's Vicky Bowskill and Irina Tatarenko have produced a super paper: *From Shoots to Roots* revealing the above and below ground structure of meadow plants. We see

and delight in the leaves and flowers we observe above ground, often for short periods and not necessarily every year. What is underground is generally "out of sight and out of mind" but is key to understanding the workings of our plant communities. Vicky and Irina's paper graphically highlights the differences in root structures between a range of common wild-flower meadow species. Enjoy!

Botanical art is a tradition that dates back generations. A good field sketchbook was the mainstay of botanists before we all had a digital camera in our pockets. Even so, a sketch can still be helpful alongside a digital snap, because subtle features necessary for identification can be missed by a camera. And it can be hard to untangle a rambling plant in a species-rich setting like a floodplain meadow. But you can't easily photograph what's going on beneath the soil.

In times past, the illustrations of traveling botanists would have been the only way most people would have been able to see plants from beyond their own area. In more recent years, whilst we've become much more mobile as a population, botanical knowledge has declined, with many school children unable to name even common plants.

There are many good reference books for budding botanists to make use of, along with identification apps that are now pretty good, and accessible training courses from organisations like the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI). But that's just for the parts you can see. What about what's going on below ground? Many of us now know about the importance of our soils for food production, carbon storage and flood alleviation. And one of the most important things for soil health is having a range of plant

species with diverse root systems to create a well-structured and healthy soil.

Meadows are communities of perennial herbaceous plants. The variety of plants is driven by the various strategies of species, and the physical space-sharing occurs both above and below ground. Differences in plant height and spread, along with the size and shape of leaves ensures effective access to light for a wide variety of species. These aboveground parts are seasonal and short-lived, so the long life of meadow species (which can be 10-70 years) relies on their below ground organs. The unseen diversity in the spread of the *rhizomes* and *stolons*, along with the root depth and intensity of branching, allows efficient access to water and nutrients. Plant roots play a key role in the widespread storage of organic carbon in the soil. This rooting diversity also supports a complex community of soil microorganisms (bacteria and fungi) and invertebrates like earthworms, ants and nematodes which build the soil through their activities.

Understanding and appreciation of the complexity of meadows can be enhanced by visualisation of the community structure. The above ground parts of meadow plants have been well described and illustrated in botanical art and literature over the years. But information about below ground plant structures remains scarce, and good illustrations are rarer still.

To bring this subterranean world to life, the diagram of a floodplain meadow community has been created from a variety of visual and text materials and field observations. The artistic digital drawings by Vicky Bowskill have been guided by the extensive literature search and professional expertise of Dr Irina Tatarenko. Research into the changing *morphology* of roots throughout the lifecycle of plants has been carried out by groups of devoted botanists in the UK and Russia. This diagram presents a compilation of that research, sourced from the reference below.

Reference: Bowskill V. and Tatarenko I. (2021). *From Shoots to Roots: revealing the above and below ground structure of meadow plants*. Floodplain Meadows Partnership.

Glossary:

Morphology: Shape and structure.

Rhizome: Horizontal, underground root-like stem.

Stolon: A creeping stem that roots at its nodes so producing young plants along its length.

Useful Links

Meadow Arts - <https://www.meadowarts.org/>

Melanie Woodhead - <https://www.meadowarts.org/events/transform-your-photos-at-home>

NEW! ARTS PROJECT FOR ALL

Beauty and Utility - Avon Meadows Art Projects

By Melanie Woodhead

Hello! I am Melanie Woodhead an artist and educator based in Worcestershire. My work experiments with digital and alternative photographic practices and site-specific installations, exploring the entanglements of cultures and natures in transitional urban and green spaces. I am the second artist commissioned by Meadow Arts to create work and engage with the community for the Beauty and Utility project at Avon Meadows. Between March and May, I will be capturing the amazing biodiversity of these floodplain meadows during Spring to highlight their beauty and utility. I will also be co-creating with the community, exploring the commonalities and interdependence of the humans and non-humans sharing the space.

I have been making weekly visits to Avon Meadows since early March and it has been a real joy to document Spring unfolding. So far, I have been fortunate to see carpets of Lesser Celandines and Cuckooflowers emerging in the meadow. For me, photography is a meaningful way of noticing and connecting with the wonders of the natural world and a means of sharing this experience with a wider audience. Via weekly photo prompts through Meadow Arts social media, I have been encouraging people to participate and highlighting some key issues expressed by the Floodplains Meadow Partnership. These have included the beauty and utility of green spaces, floodplains as part of the nature-recovery network and their importance in slowing, storing and filtering the water off the land. I have been developing some of the images I have taken into transaquotypes which is a process involving the action of water on inkjet prints, causing colours to bleed and change. There is an activity sheet about creating your own transaquotypes on the Meadow Arts website (see Useful Links below).



Image by Melanie Woodhead

Originally, I proposed a site-specific installation using a series of cloches filled with botanical material, found objects and water to be clustered in suitable locations like dwellings. On reflection I have decided to use the cloches as photographic props that are not left on site as they may be subject to vandalism. I have developed my idea further by experimenting with botanical material and water in glass kilner jars, which I can also use in photos on location to reflect the slowing, storing and filtering properties of floodplain meadows.

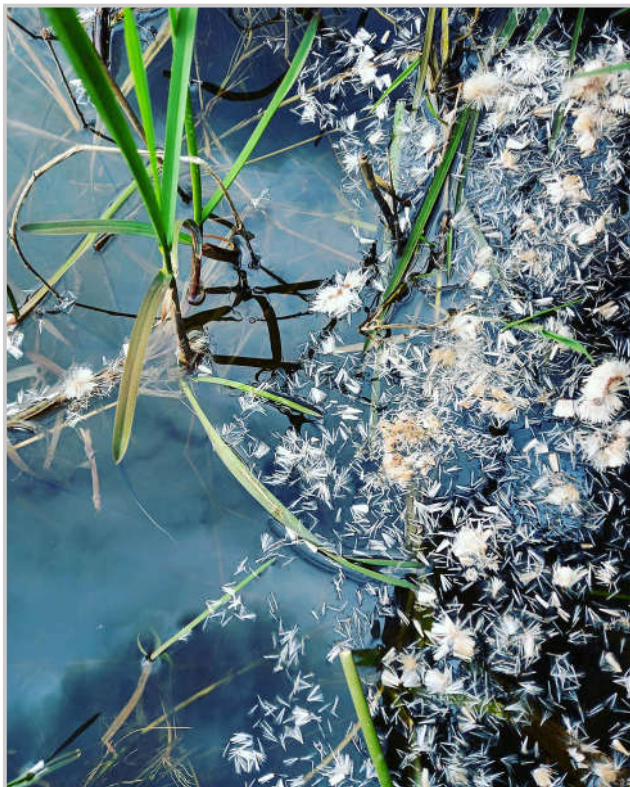


Image by Melanie Woodhead

I am excited to be co-creating with the Friends of Avon Meadows during two workshops over the second and third weekends in May. The first two-hour session will be at Avon Meadows at 11.00am on Saturday 8th May for a photography walk and talk to capture the biodiversity of the site in Spring. Experimenting with photographic approaches and prompts based on themes of beauty and utility, inspirational green spaces, interdependence and regeneration, the workshop is free, however, you will need a digital or mobile phone camera to participate. The second hour long session will take place the following weekend via Zoom to review the photos taken onsite and collaborate to produce digital postcards.

Please email me at melanie_woodhead@sky.com by 5pm on Wednesday 5th May to book your place.

I hope you can join me!!!



Image by Melanie Woodhead

Update on Andrew Howe's Avon Meadows Art Project

By Sue Comely

In the last newsletter we introduced the Meadow Arts project and the first artist, Andrew Howe. Andrew responded to the project's Beauty and Utility theme by making paper and dyes from natural materials found on the meadows and using them for his artwork, *The River's Breathing*, illustrating the role of the meadows in flood alleviation.

He also ran a workshop demonstration on Instagram, on the Meadow Arts Live TV channel, showing how to create eco prints using leaves and flowers and how to make dyes from berries, leaves etc. A week later he held a special workshop on Zoom for Friends who responded to the piece in the newsletter. It was an opportunity to find out more about his eco printing techniques and to share any art made.

It is hoped that *The River's Breathing* will go on show locally at Pershore Library, the Civic Centre and Number 8, when current restrictions are eased. In the meantime, anyone who would like to see photographs of the 3 panel mixed media relief with a design inspired by hydrographic charts can look at Andrew's March 11th blog. (No Time Like the Present at <https://andhowenow.wordpress.com>)

Surveys and Sightings

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

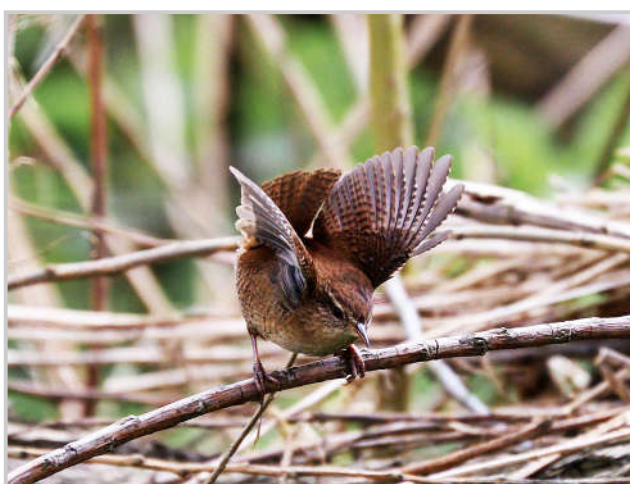
BIRDS

Weekly Bird Count

The average count over the last twelve weeks has been 47 species per week, boosted by migrants and summer visitors.

We have recorded 91 species and this year remains the third best year so far.

It has been an odd year with an unusually cold, dry April which the resident birds seem to have coped with. Summer visitor arrivals started unusually early and then seemed to stop and it is only in the last week that numbers are picking up. Ironically, it has turned cold again!



Wren displaying!

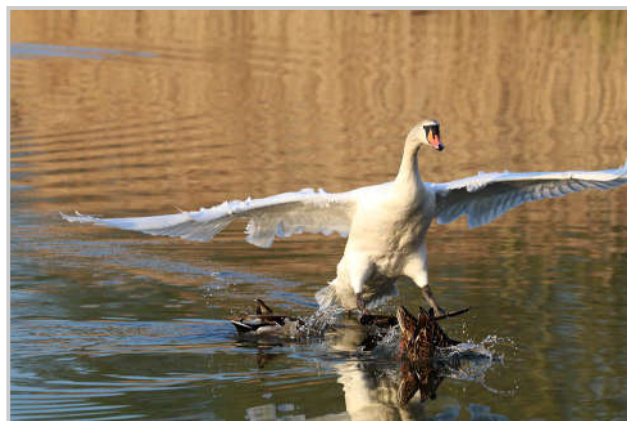
Photo: Caroline Goodman

Interesting or Unusual Species

As might be expected, nature is taking no notice of COVID-19! The winter visitors have all gone now, the last Redwing seen on 27 March. A Great White Egret flew over on 3 Feb and a Red Kite on the 27 Feb. The big excitement was a record of a **CORN BUNTING** on 8 March, new for Avon Meadows and our 132nd species of bird. As mentioned above the hirundines started arriving exceptionally early this spring, the first Sand Martin turning up on 3 March, 17 days earlier than the previous early arrival. This was followed by the first Swallows on 18 March and House Martins on 31 March.

Two Green Sandpipers spent a day on the scrape on 2 April, a Little Ringed Plover showed on 5 April, with a Yellow Wagtail flying over on the same day. A Common Whitethroat arrived on 6 April (a new early record) and a Jack Snipe was flushed on 10 April, a difficult bird to find on Avon Meadows. A Common Grasshopper Warbler arrived on 15 April but sadly did not stay.

20th April turned out to be a red letter day for birds starting with many Reed Warblers arriving, then a Little Ringed Plover on the scrape, then only our 3rd Common Redstart was recorded, a Little Egret flew over and in the



Ducks ducking as a Mute Swan comes in to land!

Photo: Caroline Goodman

late evening the first Cuckoo arrived from Africa. Early the following day, which was a bird count day, there were at least 4 Cuckoos chasing one another.

Breeding Birds

There are 2 active Mute Swan nests and a Canada Goose nesting on the scrape and a number of Linnets about leading to the hope that they might breed and there has been a pair of Tawny Owls calling most nights behind Cherry Orchard. The Water Rails have gone quiet which we take to mean they are nesting.

Judging by the amount of activity the Starlings are feeding young already.



A male Pied Wagtail.

Photo: Carl Fowle

Mammals

A pair of Roe Deer has been using the far side of the scrape to graze during the day. It is always surprising how these comparatively large mammals can be so unobtrusive and are not often noticed unless you are looking for them.

The Fox is alive and well and can be seen on the scrape from time to time. We can only hope it does not take the Canada Goose eggs.

Butterflies

In spite of the exceptionally cold weather this April there are butterflies to be seen on sunny days. Some were recorded earlier in the year than we had seen them before. They started with a Small Tortoiseshell on 18 February followed by a Peacock butterfly on 27 February and finally a Red Admiral on 21 March. What we are really waiting for is some really warm weather.

Fish

This week saw the first record in recent times of Eels on Avon Meadows. Two Elvers were photographed in one of the drainage channels.

Moths

We hope to start moth trapping again at the end of June once the COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed. Members of the moth group will be informed as a matter of course.

Let us know if you would like to become a member of the moth group

Other Insects

A Tawny Mining Bee was found and photographed on Avon Meadows on 12 April.

This is a new species for us bringing the total number of species recorded so far to 1,135.

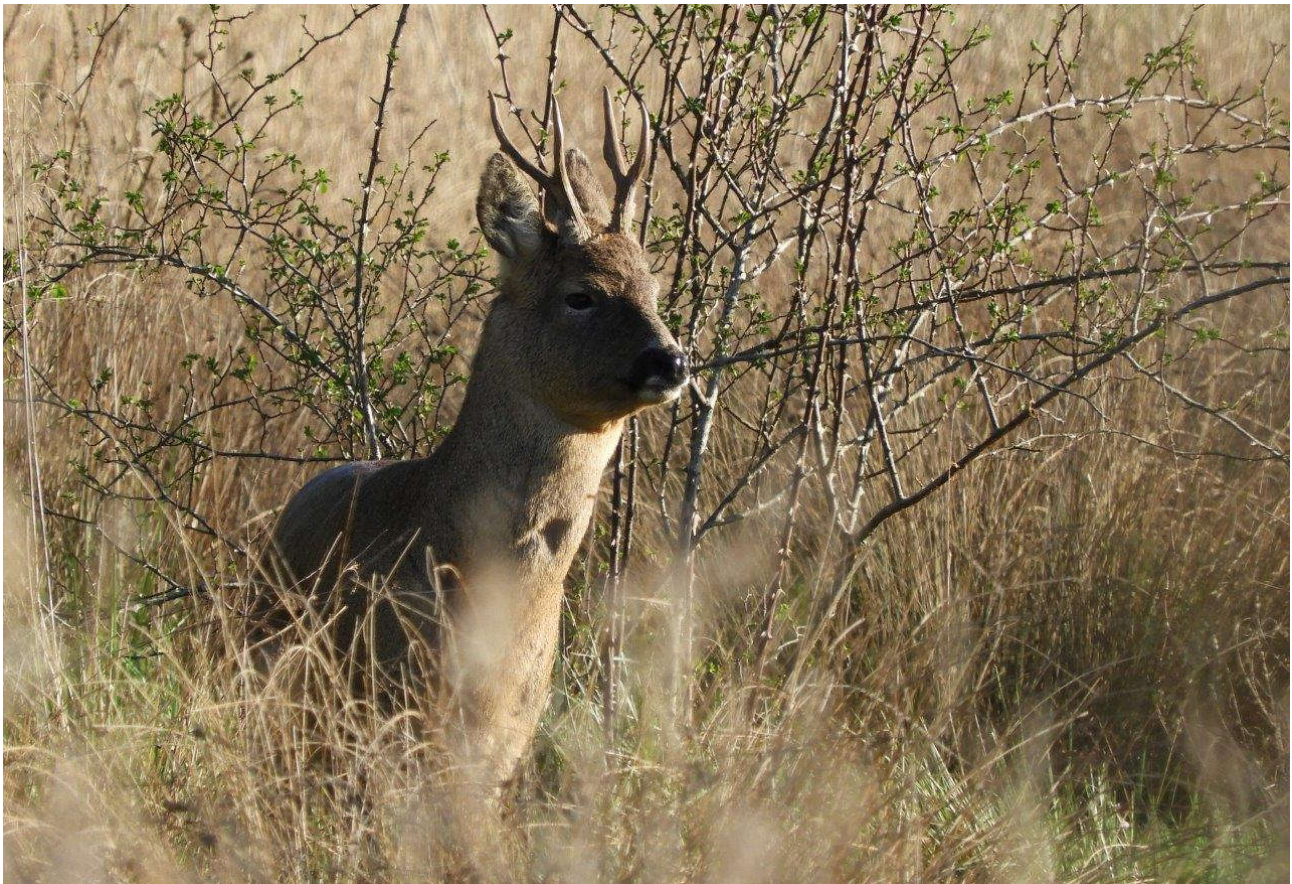
New Countryside Code

A new Countryside Code was introduced by the Government on 1 April 2021.

The main changes are:

- ◆ New advice for people to 'be nice, say hello, share the space' as well as 'enjoy your visit, have fun, make a memory'.
- ◆ A reminder not to feed livestock, horses or wild animals.
- ◆ To stay on marked footpaths, even if they are muddy, to protect crops and wildlife.
- ◆ Information on permissions to do certain outdoor activities, such as wild swimming.
- ◆ Clearer rules for dog walkers to take home dog poo and use their own bin if there are no public waste bins.
- ◆ A refreshed tone of voice, creating a guide for the public rather than a list of rules - recognising the significant health and wellbeing benefits of spending time in nature.
- ◆ New wording to make clear that the code applies to all our natural places, including parks and waterways, coast and countryside.

You can find the new Code at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-countryside-code>



Roe Deer buck beside the scrape.

Photo: Lloyd Evans

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**.

This is an important way of expanding our membership!

PLEASE NOTE!

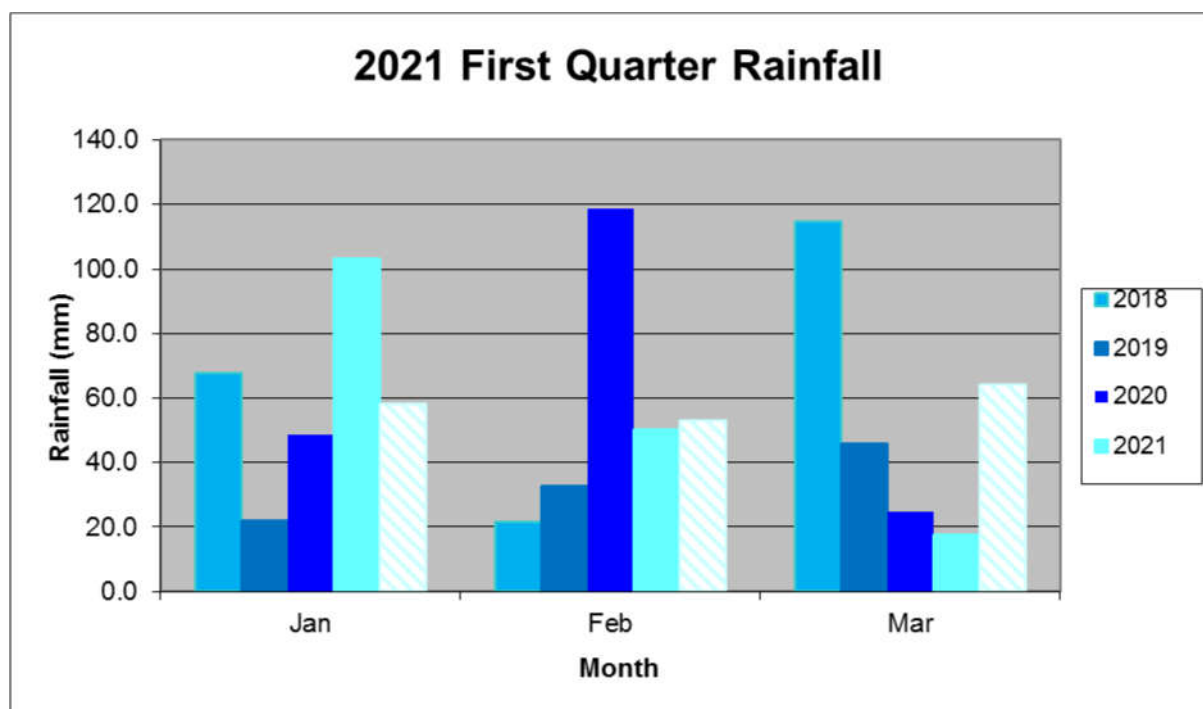
We are always on the lookout for new and interesting photographs to put in the Newsletter. 'A picture tells a thousand words' and they are an important part of it. We are trying to increase the number of photographers who provide photographs for the Newsletter.

We need 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 of the image.

Contact: richarddestott@gmail.com

Water Levels



In stark contrast to the previous quarter this one is dry—there has only been 24.2mm of rain since 22 February compared with an average of 89mm. This has resulted the water level in the scrape dropping rapidly. As I write in there is still water in the scrape but it is quite shallow.

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

Family subscription £10 per annum ☐ Individual subscription £5 per annum ☐
Life Membership subscription a single payment of £50 ☐

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.