



Newsletter of the Friends of Avon Meadows



After the drought, rain. Three inches of rain at the end of July freshened everything up.

Photo: Richard Stott

Newsletter No: 32

July 2018

Progress on the Wetland

Site Management

First and most importantly, I am surprised and delighted to report that Liz Etheridge has returned to take up a permanent post at Wychavon DC as Wildlife Sites Project Officer. We know really that it is because she was so sad to leave Avon Meadows!!! She will be looking after all the wildlife sites within Wychavon.

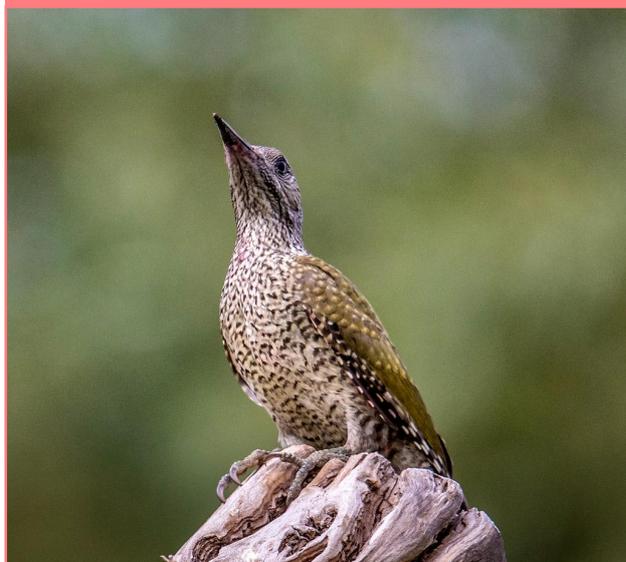
This year the haycut took place in two parts. First, in the South Meadow immediately after the Bioblitz as part of a scheme to prepare it for wild flower sowing, as has taken place in the Middle Meadow. The half of South Meadow nearer the river and part of the North Meadow have been scarified to reduce the vigour of the present grasses, (necessary to allow wild flowers to thrive) and green hay has been spread. Seed sowing will take place later in the year.

In the meantime the hay cut for all other meadows took place later once the new flowers had set seed. It is fair to say that our efforts on Middle Meadow have achieved a fair level of success and we have extensive areas of Yellow-rattle established amidst the grass. We plan to add Common Knapweed and Ox-eye Daisy to this. (see article, *Our Grassland*. p.4).

The duckweed has returned to the main pool this summer although there is not quite as much as last year.

Volunteer Work Parties continue on the first Saturday of each month. At this time of year work involves keeping the main paths clear, clearing litter and repairing damaged signs etc. and as all users of Avon Meadows realise it is really useful work which greatly improves the visitor experience.

Member's Photographs



Young Green Woodpecker photographed near the tilting weir in late July. It is this sort of evidence that shows us we have breeding Green Woodpeckers on or close to Avon Meadows. *Photo: Jeff Steady*

General Data Protection Regulations

Many thanks to all those who have taken the trouble to confirm that we can hold their personal data.

Our Privacy Policy is posted on the website. You may have your personal data removed at any time at your request.

Funding

We are delighted to have a number of nest boxes donated to us by the Severn Waste 'Welcome to our Future' scheme. This scheme has been very generous to us in the past and we are grateful for their support.

Surveys and Sightings

BIRDS

New Birds

Our 127th species for Avon Meadows flew across the reserve in early July, a **Nuthatch**. Nuthatches are woodland birds so quite common in places like Tiddesley Wood but do not normally use wetland habitats like Avon Meadows other than to fly across.

Weekly Bird Count

We have exceeded the monthly species count for every month this year. This is all credit to the observer team. Summer is not a good time for high counts but we have been averaging 46 species on Thursday mornings since the last newsletter.

Sadly the winter seems to have done for our Cetti's Warblers and Water Rails as there has been no sign of these species over the summer period.

However, our Mute Swans brought up 8 cygnets this year; although they have moved off now, they can still be seen occasionally on the river.

Resident species breeding on Avon Meadows comprise Pheasant, Moorhen, Coot, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Long-tailed Tit, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Magpie, Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, and Reed Bunting.

Summer visitors that come to us to breed include Cuckoo, Sedge and Reed Warblers (parasitized by Cuckoos!), Common Whitethroat, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Linnet.

A number of species have passed through this spring and summer. While there was water in the scrape (it finally dried up in early July) water birds came in including, Little Egret, Oystercatcher, Gadwall, Shelduck, Little Ringed Plover, Dunlin (first record since 14 Aug 2011), and Lapwing.

Other scarce species on Avon Meadows recorded over the last 3 months were; Red Kite, Hobby, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and a Barn Owl in the evening.

A surprise summer sighting was of a male Cuckoo passing through very late on 12 July. All our Cuckoos had left for West Africa at least 2 weeks earlier.

BUTTERFLIES

This season has been a typical one so far without particularly high counts and no new species. This in itself is interesting as clearly the butterflies are coping well with the exceptional weather conditions.

The photograph below shows one of the ways butterflies can adapt to prevailing conditions.



Small White butterflies 'puddling' on Avon Meadows. Butterflies do this, mostly in tropical countries, to extract liquids and minerals. It is unusual in the UK and presumably here to absorb water in the hot, dry weather we are having.
Photo: Richard Stott

DRAGONFLIES

Dragonflies have done rather well for although there have been an average number of species some of our counts have been very high, 111 Banded Demoiselles on 12 July for example (the count at the same time last year was 30) which led to a new maximum daily count.

MOTHS

Unlike butterflies and dragonflies which each have about 60 species on the British List, there are over 2500 moths so rather more scope for new species. At present we have recorded 373 species. We have held 7 Friday night moth trapping sessions this year recording 176 species of which 8 were new. Of these new species 4 were the larger macro-moths: Large Twin-spot Carpet, Shaded Broad-bar, Chocolate-tip and The Chestnut. We photograph some of these and put them up on Flickr where they can be found at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/144642480@N04/albums>.

Anyone interested is welcome to come along, dates are given in the Diary Dates table at the end.

FLOWERS

The botanists must not be forgotten and we have arranged a series of training events on grass identification for the real enthusiasts which is essential knowledge for the development of our meadows. As with moths there is a big list of British plants, nearly 2200 recognised at present, so we continue to find new species.

The present species total for Avon Meadows stands at 255. Nine new species have been recorded in 2018 which include; Musk-mallow *Malva moschata*, Hoary Mustard *Hirschfeldia incana*, Spotted Medick *Medicago arabica*, Broad-leaved Willowherb *Epilobium montanum*, Upright Hedge-parsley *Torilis japonica*, Prickly Sedge *Carex muricata* and Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*. None of these is particularly rare, just difficult to find on Avon Meadows.

Bioblitz 2018

The Bioblitz is an annual event when experts visit Avon Meadows to see how many different species can be recorded in a day. All living things are targets!

Although experts are key to the success of the day, we try to encourage people new to wildlife, particularly young people, to join in and find things. Even experts cannot look everywhere so young sharp eyes can be very useful.

Was it really chilly on 16 June? Well on Bioblitz day it was unseasonably cool, 13-15°C, overcast with a stiff SW wind!



Liz and friends looking for cold insects!

Photo: Sarah Fowle

The insects do not like this sort of weather so counts were down. We thus managed a rather modest 309 species. Many thanks to both the Friends and Worcestershire Recorders who helped achieve this total.

Not all doom and gloom though; we managed 29 new species and the botanists were the one group that managed to exceed last year's total with 130 species of plant. Overall this adds up to 1081 species found on Avon Meadows to date.

Most of the new species were plants or insects. One of our new bees has the rather delightful name of Impunctate Mini-mining Bee!



Micro-moth *Adela croesella* taken in daytime. Size does matter, look at the length of this male's antennae!



Cuckoos were a common sight during the early summer with up to two pairs present. The last adult was seen on 12 July.

Photo: Sarah Fowle



Expert advice for a biologist of the future!

Photo: Sarah Fowle

Events

Mammal Workshop

This event was cancelled in March due to flooded ground which prevented small mammals from dispersing. It will be rescheduled in the autumn. Watch the website!

Our Grassland

Ken Pomfret

HISTORY

Wildflower rich floodplain meadows were once widespread and much valued, being the most expensive type of land recorded in the Domesday book. They provided a summer hay crop to sustain cattle, sheep and horses through the winter together with grazing of the re-growth. As such the rural communities recognised the need to take great care of them. Indeed Shakespeare, who will have grown up amongst the meadows of his native Stratford, recognises the neglect caused by men going to war when, after the battle of Agincourt, the captured Duke of Burgundy laments:

*The even mead, that erst brought sweetly forth
The freckled cowslip, burnet and green clover,
Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank,
Conceives by idleness, and nothing teems
But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies, burs,
Losing both beauty and utility.*

Henry V, Act V, Scene II.

PRESENT

Sadly, notwithstanding their value, as much as 97% of these species rich floodplain meadows have been lost since 1930 with less than 1500ha now existing in the UK. This loss is largely due to agricultural intensification but also through urban development, gravel extraction and just plain neglect. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of organisations such as the Floodplain Meadows Partnership, Wildlife Trusts,

Natural England and of course landowners this trend has been halted and even reversed. In recognition of their value not only as an agricultural resource but also as flood storage, as carbon capture areas, as a nectar source for pollinators, as wildlife habitats and for their general beauty much emphasis is being placed on the restoration of these species rich grasslands.



Harrowing the North Meadow in preparation for strewing green hay.
Photo: Liz Etheridge



Harrowed meadow with green hay rich in knapweed seed strewn.
Photo: Liz Etheridge.

Avon Meadows is of course a floodplain meadow and within our 23ha site we have about 13ha of grassland; the rest being the wetland, scrub, paths and ditches. Although we have no detailed historical records, we know that annual summer hay cuts have been taken and, especially in the last few years, the re-growth has been grazed in autumn/winter usually by sheep.

Over the last 4 years we have instituted a monitoring regime to try to understand what we now have and perhaps more importantly what we might aspire to. Weekly monitoring of 10 dipwells throughout the site have given an understanding of the hydrology and annual soil analyses have shown a steadily decreasing nutrient level. Our botanical monitoring over these last four years has shown that we already have a reasonable level of species diversity, especially in the drier areas which paradoxically are those nearest the river. Here we find Yorkshire Fog, Rough Meadow Grass, Red Fescue, Meadow Barley, False Oat Grass, and Soft Brome amongst the grasses together with Meadow Buttercup, Meadow Vetchling and Cut-leaved Crane's-bill amongst the wild flowers. In the wetter areas the dominant grass is Creeping Bent and we find a nice selection of sedges including Hairy, Common, Brown, False Fox and Lesser Pond Sedges. We also find some nice rarities including Tubular Water Dropwort and Marsh Bedstraw.

FUTURE

Looking to the future, our Higher Tier Stewardship Agreement provides for a 10 year grassland restoration programme including a first 2 years' substantial capital expenditure. Last year this enabled us to spread green hay taken from beautiful Lazy Meadow in Hampton on our 1ha Middle Meadow. We supplemented this with 20kgs of seed mix harvested from two lovely wild flower meadows in Wiltshire.

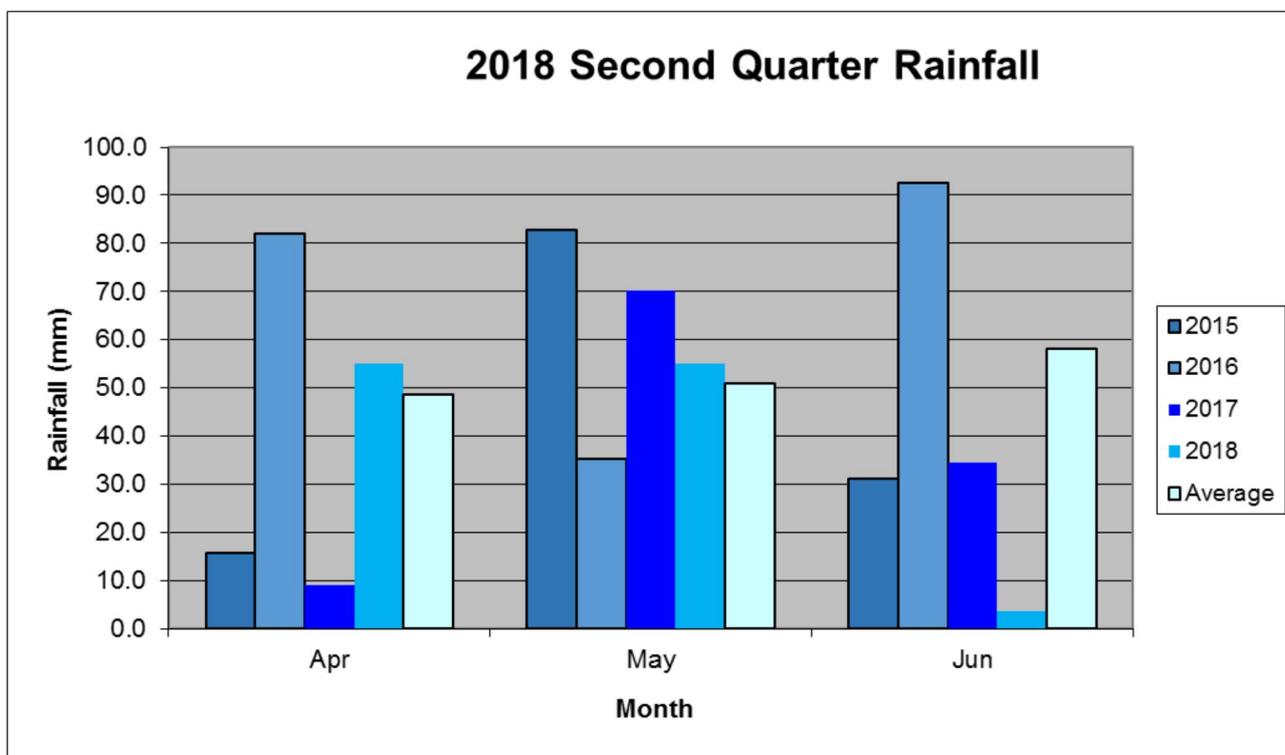
Already, after just one year, we have seen an increase in the finer grasses, especially Red Fescue and an abundant presence of Yellow Rattle. The latter is particularly important as its parasitic action helps to suppress the coarser grasses to the benefit of the wild flowers. Looking ahead we hope to see Oxeye Daisy, Knapweed and even

Great Burnet which were also present in the green hay and the seed mix.

This year with the encouragement of Natural England we are going much further, treating two areas of 2ha each, one in South Meadow and one in North Meadow. The procedure has been much more radical involving machine spreading of a total of 4 tons of green hay followed by power harrowing to create 60% or more of bare earth. The green hay is from a knapweed meadow in Huddington. Once again we will supplement this with a seed mix to maximise the chances for Yellow Rattle, Oxeye Daisy, Selfheal and Lady's Bedstraw.

So, watch this space but remember we need patience.

Water Levels



As all of us are very well aware we have been experiencing a hot, dry summer with daytime temperatures frequently exceeding 30°C and almost no rain. Fortunately we had 55mm (108% average) in May set the pools up well so that even the scrape, the shallowest of them all, did not completely dry up until early July. Until 27 July, June and July had contributed only 5.6mm (5% of average). Since then low pressure systems crossing the country have given us 32.4mm raising the July rainfall to 82% of average. While these weather conditions stress many of our resident species they also provide an opportunity to observe changes in behaviour and see which species thrive.

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 4 Aug 18	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Sat 6 Oct 18	Work Party 10h00-13h00
Tue 7 Aug 18	Committee Meeting 14h30-16h30	Tue 9 Oct 18	Committee Meeting 14h30-16h30
Fri 10 Aug 18	Moth Night* 20h45-00h15	Sat 3 Nov 18	Work Party 10h00-13h00
Fri 24 Aug 18	Moth Night* 20h15-23h45	Sat 1 Dec	Work Party 10h00-13h00
Sat 1 Sep 18	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Tue 11 Dec 18	Committee Meeting 14h30-16h30

* 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;

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.

