

AVON MEADOWS COMMUNITY WETLAND

Newsletter of the Friends of Avon Meadows

Newsletter No.5



Fig. 1: The Wetland in early August 2011. This show the lowest level (15.63m) ever recorded and the level continues to fall. (R D E Stott)

Annual General Meeting

A good number of volunteers turned up to our AGM on Wednesday 25 May 2011 and were treated to a most interesting talk by John Tilt about Worcestershire Butterflies. John is the Chairman of the West Midlands Group of Butterfly Conservation. Key matters agreed at the meeting were;

1. Your Committee was elected for another year.
2. A new post of Membership Secretary was created and Janet Stott kindly agreed to take on this role.
3. Some funding is needed to cover minor administrative costs (postage, fuel, insurance, etc) and it was agreed that volunteers would be asked to make a voluntary donation of around £5 per annum (as you consider appropriate) to help to defray such expenses.

Review of our progress

Some work has been done removing willows from the central part of the Wetland however activities in this area had to be halted due to the advance of the bird breeding season. We will continue this work in the autumn. Work continues in putting woodchip down on the paths and this will be ongoing.

We have taken delivery of our brush cutter and I expect many of you will have noticed that some of the paths have had their verges trimmed. This work is being carried out sympathetically to maintain convenient access for visitors but not decimate too many plants on either side.



Fig. 2: The first pour of concrete for the tool shed with Clive, Richard and Ken. (R J Gillmor)

Cherry Orchard School has kindly agreed to allow us to erect our secure tool shed on their property. A major summer job for volunteers has been to put in a concrete base and erect our tool shed on it. At the same time we will also be extending the concrete abutments beside the tilting weir by about 1 meter each side as recommended by the Environment Agency. Very many thanks to Ken and his small band of helpers for carrying out this work.

Many of you will have notice that the Environment Agency has kindly erected gauge boards, one beside the tilting weir and one on the boardwalk. The figure "4" on the gauge board is level with the top of the tilting weir, which is 16.4m aod (above ordnance datum).

At the end of term several volunteers took parties of pupils from Cherry Orchard School around the Wetland. This was very well received in spite of inclement weather.

Avon Meadows – Access For All

The preparation of our final application for Heritage Lottery funding continues but there is little to report at present.

Flora & Fauna Surveys

Moth Night: This event was a huge success! It finally took place on the night of Monday 27 June. The night was overcast but dry with only a little wind. We had the help of 3 experts from the West Midlands Group of Butterfly Conservation and deployed 5 light traps around the main pool. The lights went on at 10:15pm and off at 3.30am! During that time we trapped 140 species of moth from a total of 1317! Sitting beside a

light trap is an exciting experience as not only were there interesting and attractive moths inside the trap but the surrounding foliage was crawling with them.

A formal report has been produced for the Worcestershire Recorders and Butterfly Conservation so that our records can be logged centrally. If anyone would like a copy (by eMail) then please contact me.

Bird Survey: The weekly bird survey continues with a target of around 30 species for each visit. At present the record for one 2 hour visit is 37 species. So far this year, 70 species have been recorded of which 26 are breeding species.



Fig. 3: A common species on the night, Elephant Hawk Moth *Deilephila elpenor*. (R D E Stott)



Fig. 4: A scarce species, Garden Tiger *Arctia caja*. (A Prior)

Butterfly Transect: Butterfly numbers have been low until the end of June. This is to be expected as early migrants and hibernating butterflies die off and we wait for those that breed on the Wetland to appear. Now a 1 hour transect walk can produce over 100 butterflies of up to 16 species. If the species count seems low it should be remembered that the UK butterfly list comprises only 59 regular species as compared with 2495 for moths.

Recent Sightings

Many of you will have seen that our Mute Swans have successfully raised 7 cygnets this year. Sadly after a period away from the Wetland they have returned with only 6 cygnets although the last one may be on the river.

Although the Common Kestrel has only made occasional visits this summer, a wandering Red Kite was seen over the Wetland in early June and a Eurasian Hobby has been seen on a number of occasions hawking dragonflies.

Common Swifts arrived with us around 11 May and soon thereafter a Skylark was recorded on a few occasions over the meadows. Now that our reedbeds have become established both Reed and Sedge Warblers have been heard chattering and we believe both are nesting in the reeds. Several Common Whitethroat have been recorded regularly along the section that looks over the Cherry Orchard gardens and these too are believed to be breeding. Linnets occasionally visit the Wetland but not sufficiently frequently to suggest breeding. Odd birds drop in from time to time and in early July a Black-tailed Godwit spent a morning on the exposed mud. Later in the month a Little Egret made several visits to the Wetland.

Dragonflies: The first species to appear were Banded Demoiselles soon followed by Emperor Dragonflies. More recently Black-tailed Skimmers, Large Red Damselflies and Brown Hawkers have been recorded.

Mammals: As I write, we have not been able to get hold of any mammal traps. However this has not meant that we have nothing to record. Thanks to Dave Jeynes Water and Common Shrews have been recorded and Field Voles too.

The most unusual sighting was that of an Otter, not strictly within the Wetland boundary but beside the River Avon but on the opposite bank in the middle of an afternoon in April! You can just pick it out in Fig.5. This is a splendid shot given the very short time available to get it.

One of our volunteers has a son who is an ecologist and he visited the Wetland during May with his bat detector and recorded two species of bat in the late evening, the Noctule and Daubenton's Bat. Both are large bats and the Daubenton's Bat is characterised by its habit of sweeping low over calm water to take insects from the surface.



Fig. 5: A very quick shot of an Otter opposite the Wetland on 22 April 2011. (N Baldwin)

A bat detector is an electronic device which allows you to measure the frequency of the bat's call. Each species uses a characteristic frequency to echolocate its prey and so once the frequency of a call is known the exact species can be looked up.

Snakes & Amphibians: Dave Jeynes reported both a Grass Snake and a Slow Worm beneath one of his pieces of corrugated iron in late July. This evidence would seem to confirm that both species breed on the Wetland. Numerous examples of young Common Toads and Common Frogs are to be found quite frequently in the wetter areas.

Flowers of Avon Meadows by The Duffer

There are 4 flowers to have a look at in May and June, 2 from the Pea family, 1 from the Docks and 1 Geranium. All can be found in areas of longer unmown grasses particularly at the edge of the meadows furthest from the river, with the Dock being very common but the others much less so.

CURLED DOCK *Rumex crispus*



This Dock is a very, very common plant but can be difficult to distinguish from the other Docks; they say its curled leaves are distinctive but I am not sure that helps me so a hand lens is needed to look at its tepals (flowers in layman's terms - see inset) which are distinctive to each species. In flower June to October.

CUT-LEAVED CRANE'S-BILL *Geranium dissectum*



A little gem hidden amongst the grass; tiny pinkish flowers and delicate cut to pieces leaves - well worth bending down for to get a better look. Flowers May to August.

MEADOW VETCHLING *Lathyrus pratensis*



The first of the two Peas. The Peas are a lovely family of plants including vetches, clovers, medicks and peas. All have the distinctive pea flower structure which immediately identifies the plant at least to its family.

This one is pure yellow with just 2 leaflets opposite each other unlike many other vetches which have multiple leaflets. Flowers May to August.

COMMON VETCH *Vicia sativa*



The second of our Peas; a nice clean bright purple colour and with the typical (for vetches) multiple leaflets for leaves. Flowers May to September.

Two more common flowers first seen in June

SILVERWEED *Potentilla anserina*



Despite its nice yellow flower this is a member of the Rose family; its name gives it away with its distinctive silvery foliage. It can be found in many of the areas of unmown grass and flowers June through to August.

PERENNIAL SOW THISTLE *Sonchus arvensis*



A statuesque tall plant and one of 3 common sow-thistles which are in turn members of the Daisy family. Can be identified by the yellow hairs all over the flower heads and stalks. Flowers July to October and is common beside the paths on the wetland.

Water Levels

The water level loss has settled down to its summer norm of around 7.0 mm per day. The rainfall over the period has been as follows (average figures are in brackets):

April	3.1 mm (32.4 mm) - update of last Newsletter.
May	52.2 mm (27.1 mm)
June	31.7 mm (35.8 mm)
July	27.2 mm (31.0 mm)

Water levels are now lower than they have ever been but most of the water birds that have young that are mobile and the river is close by so we should not be unduly concerned. Even now there is over 100mm water in front of the gauge board on the boardwalk. This year the lowest levels of 2010 arrived about one month earlier. The exposed mud can be an advantage as it will tempt waders to visit, for example, the Black-tailed Godwit referred to above.

How you can help us

First some news about how members have helped us!

Many thanks to Paul Jenkins for arranging a donation of £150 from a client who wanted him to nominate a charity - he nominated us!

We are very grateful to David & John Keen who, with their JCB, moved a large pile of woodchip onto the Wetland dumping it at locations close to where it is to be used.

On the subject of money, and as agreed at the AGM, if you would like to send us donations we would be most grateful to receive them. Please send your donation (cheques made out to 'Friends of Avon Meadows') of an amount you consider to be appropriate, when in doubt, £5 will be fine, to Bob Gillmor (see below).

Finally the summer is well on now; let us know if you have seen something interesting, bird, butterfly, plant, insect, etc. and sent us a photograph. We are maintaining checklists of each species group and at present we need your help to add new species. Even though our plant list was over 150 after last year's survey we are still adding to it!

If you know of anyone you think would be interested in receiving this Newsletter by eMail please let me know with their eMail address.

If you want to find out more about volunteering please contact Jim Burgin at Wychavon District Council (see below).

Diary Dates

The scheduled Work Party days for 2011 are and we are looking forward to seeing you there. Note that work parties always start at 10:00am.

Sat 3 September
Sat 1 October

Sat 12 November
Sat 3 December

Please let Ken know if you can come (kenPomfret@btinternet.com) a few days before but do not worry if you cannot, just turn up at the carpark at the far end of Cherry Orchard at 10:00am on the appointed day.

Officers of the Committee

Chairman - Richard Stott richarddestott@gmail.com

Treasurer - Bob Gillmor robert.gillmor@btinternet.com

Secretary - Val Wood valeriewood@uwclub.net

Website

<http://avonmeadowspershore.org/> (still under development)

Contact

Either directly by eMail to an officer of the Committee or by telephone to;

Mr Jim Burgin, Wychavon District Council.

Tel: 01386 565366

eMail: jim.burgin@wychavon.gov.uk

Donations to:

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

We hope that you are all having an enjoyable summer on the Wetland.

Richard Stott