



Thin ice on the main pool on 19 Jan 2016. With the ice present the water no longer provides safe refuge from land animals so the birds are scarce. (Photo: Richard Stott)

Progress on the Wetland

HLF Project

This important project is coming to an end on 31 March after 3 years. During that time Liz has made herself very much a part of our community with her competence and good humour. I would like to thank her on behalf of us all for her tireless hard work in making the project such a success. Nobody could have done more.

We understand that the wheelchair access through the main gate at Mayfield Road is not fit for purpose. Arrangements are being made to put this right! We expect work to be complete by the end of February 2016.

Site Management

The sheep were removed from the site just before Christmas having done an excellent job in getting the grass down.

We have made a start on reed cutting but the wet weather has stalled progress. One possibility being investigated is hiring an amphibious machine for a couple of days to do the bulk of the work, irrespective of water levels.

Dog Fouling

This has become an increasing problem. The dog mess on the new wheelchair access path is so severe that wheelchair users are reluctant to use it! While thanking the vast majority of dog owners for picking up their pet's mess, steps are to be taken to discourage the few irresponsible owners who show no respect for other users of the paths. It is worth noting that all dogs must be micro chipped by law from April 2016.

Equipment Store

We are delighted to have received permission from Severn Trent Water to put an equipment store on their site which backs onto the Wetland but we cannot proceed until we have written confirmation of this. The good news is that we now have planning permission to install a 20 foot container on the site. We have applied for funding and should hear if we have been successful next month.

Murmurations of Starlings!



Starlings over Avon Meadows, January 2016. (see Murmurations below) (Photo: Liz Etheridge)

Funding Awards

ASDA Pershore Award

We are delighted to have been awarded a £200 community Grant by ASDA Pershore for our work on the Wetland and we thank them and ASDA customers who supported us.

Persimmon Homes Community Champions Grant

We are excited to have received a grant for £800 from Persimmon Homes for the construction of an artificial sand martin bank. We thank them very much indeed for this.

The bank takes the form of a series of nesting holes overlooking the main pool. This grant will allow us to buy the materials for this project and the Friends of Avon Meadows volunteers will construct it.

Willow Heron

Our willow heron suffered some damage when the storm 'Gertrude' came through. The water level in the main pool is quite high at present so we are very grateful to members of the South Worcestershire Lifeguards for rescuing it! It will be taken away to be repaired and strengthened.

Look at the News and Events page on the website for a picture!

Wader Scrape Access

The bridge onto the wader scrape is there for maintenance access only. Signs and a gate are to be installed shortly. The idea is to keep it undisturbed for wildlife which can be appreciated from the vantage point of the bird screen.

Website

We are in the process of updating and improving the website content and are interested in your views too! Have a look at it at <http://www.avonmeadows.org.uk/> This work will progress steadily though the year with the intention of making the website the first point of reference for people wanting up to date information on what is taking place on the Wetlands.

News about events and sightings will be appearing regularly and there have been a lot of interesting links added to relevant wildlife sites.

We are also developing an **Augmented Reality app** for the Wetland for those of you with smart phones which is very exciting. Watch this space for more information!

Wetland Events

Frog and Toad Identification

Peter Case of the Freshwater Habitats Trust has kindly agreed to run a short course on the identification of frogs and toads. Easy you might think, then you see a tiny something hopping across the path and you are not so sure! Then there is spawn and tadpoles...! Frogs and toads are abundant on the Wetland in spring and it is difficult not to come across them sooner or later. Peter will show you how to sort them out for sure. You will need to book your place on the course directly with Peter.

[Contact Peter Case at the Freshwater Habitats Trust on pcase@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk]

Small Mammal Identification

Liz is setting up a small mammal identification course which sounds very interesting. There are quite a lot of small mammals on the Wetland although we rarely see them except for the occasional little dead bodies. A series of humane traps will be baited and set out in suitable locations the evening before in preparation for the course. The course will run on the following morning, Thursday 31 March, starting at 08h00 and running until about 12h00 when the traps will all be checked and their inhabitants identified. It is important that you book your place as numbers will be limited.

[Please book with Liz on liz.etheridge@wychavon.gov.uk]

Surveys and Sightings

During the winter months it is birds that dominate the records made on the Wetland.

Birds

The table on the right provides list of species that are of conservation concern as UK breeding species. It is part of a much larger list for the whole of the UK but this table only includes species that regularly breed on or close to the Wetland. It is yet another indication of how important refuges like our Wetlands are for birds. Perhaps the most shocking feature of this list is how common we all regard many of the species listed. Yet over the last 25 years the breeding populations Red Listed species have reduced by 50% and Amber Listed species have reduced by 25%; very large reductions by any measure.

New Species

A pair of **Yellowhammers** was seen during a bird count on 17 Dec bringing the species count since we started monitoring to 117 species. Although a Red Listed species it does not appear on our table as they have not used the Wetland for breeding. It is one of a number of species that have declined because of changing farming practice. In the past they could rely on stubble fields for grain during the winter, now many farmers put down grain deliberately so that the Yellowhammers can survive.

Murmurations

The murmurations of **Common Starlings** took longer to arrive this year and did not make an appearance before Christmas Eve, a month later than in 2014. By early January the flock had built to approximately 12,000 birds congregating between 4:00pm and 5:00pm on most evenings before dropping down into the reeds to roost. The timing varied but mostly they went down between 30-45 minutes after sunset. Now they seem to have moved on and the last time the Starlings were seen murmuring was on 17 January. Occasionally marauders attached themselves to the Starling flock and both **Northern Sparrowhawk** and **Peregrine Falcon** have been seen following it in search of a quick meal! The difficulty for the predators is focusing on a single bird to take among the thousands!

RED
Breeding Species
Common Cuckoo
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Common Starling
House Sparrow
Common Linnet
AMBER
Breeding Species
Mute Swan
Mallard
Common Swift
Common Kestrel
Common Kingfisher
House Martin
Stock Dove
Dunnock
Reed Bunting

On 28 January there was the unusual sight of a murmuration of **Common Starlings** of ~5,000 birds swirling in the sky at 11h30 in the morning over towards Throckmorton!

Interesting Records

On a more cheerful note; **Common Snipe** reappeared on 5 Nov, up to four **Goldcrests** have been recorded and a pair of **Lesser Redpoll** visited for several days from 16 November. Two pairs of **Common Stonechat**, several **Cetti's Warblers** and up to three **Water Rails** have been present throughout.

The ploughed field just to the north of the Wetland brought in a sizeable flock of **Northern Lapwings**, or Peewits, during December.

The New Year got off to an excellent start with a **Common Kingfisher** seen over the main pool, 3 **Goldcrest** (3 Jan) and **Lesser Redpoll** (3 on 3 Jan, 1 on 13 Jan) reported. The first Thursday count of the New Year took place on 7 Jan during which a small party of 8 **Common Linnets** appeared over the scrape. The following day a male **Common Bullfinch** was photographed and two males and a female were seen at the end of the month. Our first 2016 record for **Common Teal** was made on 13 Jan. So far we are up to **58** species for 2016. From 21 Jan the **Reed Buntings** seem to have stopped skulking and are now fairly easy to find. On the same day two pairs of **Common Buzzards** were seen circling together. At the end of January a **Grey Wagtail** was present in the King George's carpark and we were greeted by the unusual sight of a flock of 31 **Skylarks** flying over.



Lesser Redpoll taken on in mid-November.
(Photo: Sarah Fowle)



A view from the bird watching screen taken in late December of our wader scrape filling up nicely with water. It will take a couple of years to develop fully but already quite a number of birds are using it regularly. (Photo: Richard Stott)

Roundup of Birds in 2015

Our bird count results came for the year from a total of 60 survey visits during which a total of 83 species was recorded.

Two species were missed on Thursdays; **Green Sandpiper** (recorded on a moth night!) and a **Peregrine Falcon**. Interestingly we had 13 species which were recorded on every visit, a new high count, which must indicate that more birds are becoming well established on the Wetland.

As our bird list increases it becomes harder and harder to discover new species but during 2015 we did find 3 new ones; a **Great Black-backed Gull** turned up around the flooded meadows early in the year. Single **Northern Wheatears** were recorded in spring and autumn; these are probably regular migrants through the Wetland but only in very small numbers and so not often recorded. Finally the pair of **Yellowhammers** referred to above.

Looking at breeding species that are of concern, our Starling and House Sparrow numbers are perhaps falling slightly. It is difficult to be sure of the numbers of these abundant birds as there always seems to be a lot about. This is a possible area for future study. For breeding species it is always a matter of safe nest sites and a good supply of food.

Other Species

A fungus, called a **Wood Blewit** was found beside the Avon Way in mid-December during a visit by the Broadway Natural History Society. Although not an uncommon species this is the first record for the Wetland. Fungi are a species group that is rather under-studied on the Wetland.

As a matter of interest it is worth noting that a total of **896** species of all sorts has been recorded on the Wetlands so far!

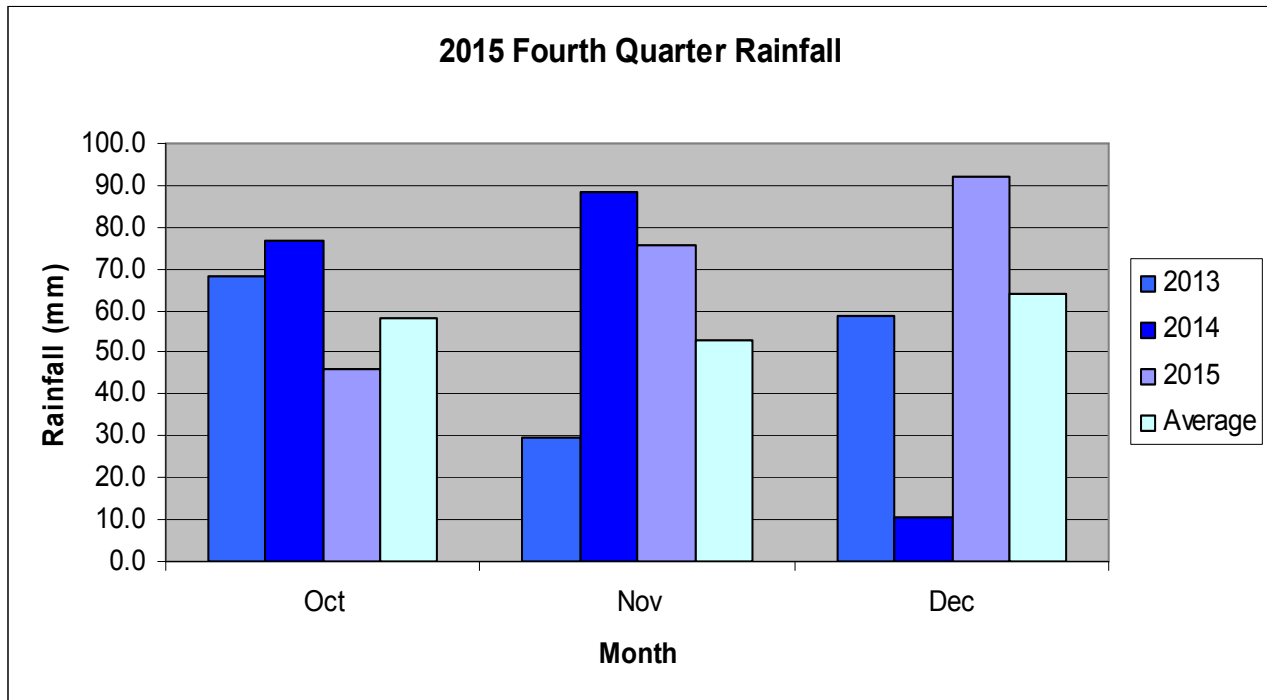
How you can help us

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 eMail address.

Water Levels



The 4th quarter was a little wetter than average but the main talking point has been the mild weather. This changed in January and we have had some cold nights. From a wildlife point of view there are plus's and minus's to freezing conditions.

Cold weather kills off many bugs and parasites that damage wildlife but it is a challenge for insect eating species like Cetti's Warbler and Common Kingfishers that need to find areas free from ice to catch fish..

Diary Dates

Date	Activity	Date	Activity
Thu 4 Feb	Bird Count 09h00-12h00 **	Tue 22 Mar	Frog & Toad ID Master class 10h00 †
Sat 6 Feb	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Thu 31 Mar	Small Mammal ID Workshop. 08h00-12h00 †
Thu 11 Feb	Committee Meeting 14h30-17h00	Sat 2 Apr	Work Party 10h00-13h00
Sat 5 Mar	Work Party 10h00-13h00	Fri 8 Apr	Moth Night 20h00-23h30 *

* Weather dependent!

** Takes place every Thursday at this time.

† Booking required. See **Events** section.

Work parties are a valuable part of our activities on site and start at **10:00am** from the **Mayfield Road** car park. It is a good idea 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 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.

Contacts

If you would like any more information about volunteering contact either an officer of the Committee directly by eMail or by telephone to:

Mr Jim Burgin, Wychavon District Council.
Tel: 01386 565366
eMail: jim.burgin@wychavon.gov.uk

Ms Liz Etheridge, Wetlands for All Project Officer
Tel: 01386 565366
eMail: liz.etheridge@wychavon.gov.uk

Please print off this form and return it, together with your cheque to:

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



Supporting Friend Application/Renewal Form

New member Renewing member

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

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

ADDRESS: _____

TOWN: _____ POST CODE: _____

eMail: _____

AMOUNT PAID: £_____

Please make cheques payable to **Friends of Avon Meadows**

Please print off this form and return it, together with your cheque to:

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

Alternatively you can transfer the funds electronically to the FoAM bank account:

Sort Code: 40-36-46

Account Number: 60018732

IMPORTANT! If you do electronically transfer money **please confirm by eMail** to avon.meadows@btinternet.com giving your name and the amount so that receipts can be cross checked.